Chapter 3

Lichtenstein's Borrowed Spots

A young brunette stares, horror-struck, at the glass she balances between her well-manicured fingertips (fig. 32). Black Ben Day dots, large and regularly spaced, bedeck the enormous, offending goblet. The heroine – we can read her despairing cry in the comic-book dialogue bubble floating above her head – wails: "SPOTS! AND DAVE'S BOSS IS COMING FOR DINNER! HOW WILL I COPE?!" Is this a frame from a romance comic book published in the 1950s? A painting from the early 1960s by Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein? No! It is a coupon from 1988 offering the consumer a savings of one dollar off the purchase price of Sunlight automatic dishwasher detergent.

In recent years, advertising firms have revived a period style derived from Lichtenstein's paintings of the 1960s that the industry itself refers to as a "Pop-art" or "cartoon" style.[1] This, however, has not been a new practice: The advertising industry has appropriated Pop art since the early 1960s when it frequently emulated Lichtenstein's comic-book style and his scenes of romance. Of course, to produce his paintings Lichtenstein, conversely, borrowed from a source in consumer culture: comic books with themes of war and romance published in the years following the Second World War.[2] To borrow, however, was not necessarily to reiterate blindly. Each appropriation participated in contestations about the relationship between high art and consumer culture, about standards of taste in art and advertising, and about the gender politics of representation.

Figure 32. Coupon for Sunlight automatic dishwasher detergent.

Lichtenstein's paintings of war and romance from the early 1960s locate gender at the heart of the relationship they establish between high art and consumer culture. On one level, the issue of gender in the war and romance paintings seems obvious, even openly acknowledged by the paintings themselves: the paintings foreground the gender conventions that distinguish the war comic books from the romance comic books. A comparison between the paintings and their sources demonstrates, however, that the paintings exaggerate the difference between the proper space, voice and affect of masculinity and femininity as they are expressed in the war and ro-

mance comic books. The paintings not only codify the gender roles in comic books, but they also draw attention to these roles as figured representations; that is, they highlight the manner in which gender differences are rhetorically constructed. This practice reestablishes a priority for high art over consumer culture by claiming for the paintings the ability to define both the gender roles and the processes of representation that are performed, ostensibly without self-consciousness, in comic books.

On another level, the gender politics of Lichtenstein's paintings derive from the heated critical debate that raged in the early 1960s about whether Lichtenstein parroted his comic-book sources or transformed them. Indignant critics accused Lichtenstein of "copying" his comic-book sources and thereby undermining the difference between high art and consumer culture. In turn, various other critics marshaled the stylistic differences between Lichtenstein's paintings and his comic-book sources to a defense of his paintings as art. In the process, this second group of critics granted Lichtenstein's paintings a distance from his sources on formalist grounds. More importantly, they implicitly coded this type of formalist detachment as masculine just at a moment when the masculinity of American high-art modernism was in crisis.

Nevertheless, the high-art authority of Lichtenstein's style was not stable; his style could be appropriated by different groups for different purposes. In several cases, the advertising industry borrowed Lichtenstein's comic-book style and romance themes for the purpose of selling consumer goods to female shoppers. These advertisements reclaimed Lichtenstein's style – and powers of transformation – for consumer culture. The advertisements did so, however, in a manner that did not challenge basic assumptions prevalent after the Second World War about the relationship between homemakers and consumer goods.

Love and War

Lichtenstein's reliance on comic books has, over the years, been amply documented: We know that Lichtenstein, instead of inventing his scenes, pirated his characters and dialogue from published

comic-book stories.[3] With few exceptions, Lichtenstein avoided identifiable comic-book superheroes such as Superman and Wonder Woman. He also steered clear of the controversial genres of crime and horror comic books believed by some in the 1950s to cause juvenile delinquency and subsequently regulated by the Comics Code Authority established in 1954.[4] Instead, he selected recognizable types and standard scenes from the growing number of war and romance comic books published for a burgeoning teenage market in the period after the Second World War. Although comic books directed toward a male audience greatly outnumbered those intended for both sexes or for a specifically female readership, Lichtenstein chose his examples about evenly – perhaps slightly favoring the romance comic books – from the two genres that divided the teenage audience by sex into two distinct halves. Moreover, despite the range of Lichtenstein's subject matter in the early and mid-1960s, journals, newspapers, and catalogues most often selected his war and romance comic-book paintings for inclusion in their pages; of all of Lichtenstein's paintings, *Drowning Girl* of 1963 was the most frequently reproduced, even gracing the cover of *Artforum* in June 1966.

The pleasure offered by the war and romance comic books to the teenage reader of the 1950s and early 1960s probably lay to a large extent in their predictability: the basic features of narrative development and conclusion – multiple crises leading to a happy ending – were already known and reconfirmed on each reading. Indeed, numerous writers on mass culture have pointed out that although many cultural critics have dismissed various popular texts for their formulaic narrative structures, these formulas are precisely what make the texts appealing to their readers.[5] As a crucial component of that predictability, the comic books provided the pleasure of creating and managing gender roles in a relatively unambiguous manner through their plots. Men fought and won battles, and women fell in love and married. The narrative structures of the comic books constructed, contained, and fulfilled the desires, anxieties, and satisfactions that in the United States of the 1950s constituted a normative view of masculinity and femininity.

Through the scenes that they depict, Lichtenstein's paintings

consistently establish an absolute difference between the gender roles in the war and romance comic books. Lichtenstein's war canvases of preponderantly young, clean-shaven men engaged in battle reiterate the way in which war comic books assign their young, action-oriented heroes to inhospitable spaces – treacherous jungles, deserts, oceans, and skies – marked as war zones by the presence of artillery, explosions, tanks, planes, and Nazi and Asian enemies. In this respect, paintings and comic books alike conform to Jane Tompkins's analysis of the western in that these images present male heroes battling other men far from the "civilizing" signs of women and domesticity.[6]

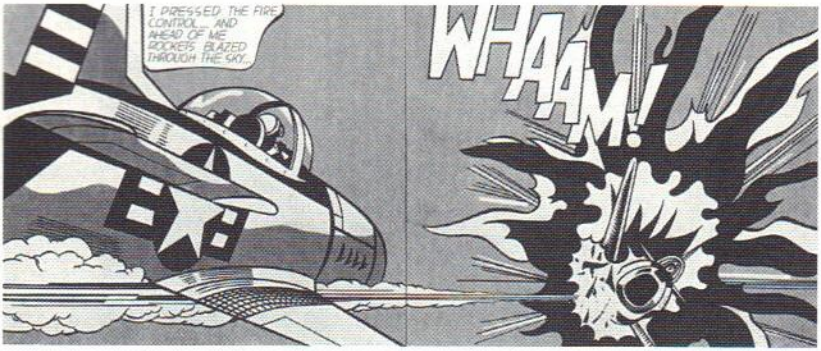
Lichtenstein's romance paintings, in contrast, almost always situate women in domestic settings. Here the paintings draw lines more narrowly than do the romance comic books, which position women not exclusively in the home, but also in offices, restaurants, and domesticated outdoor spaces such as beaches, backyards, and shopping districts. In the story from a comic book entitled *Secret Hearts* (fig. 33), from which Lichtenstein lifted the image for the painting *Hopeless* of 1963 (Plate IV), the heroine takes an active role outside the home – capably assisting a man with car repairs, for instance – and enjoys the authority of speaking to others in a first-person voice. Lichtenstein, however, avoided such public scenes and instead chose the final frame of the story, in which the heroine retreats to her bedroom to brood to herself in romantic despair.

Over and again, Lichtenstein, by selecting the tense, climactic moments in the narratives when the affects of masculinity and femininity are at their most extreme, polarizes gender roles in his paintings that are constructed less rigidly by the comic books. In the war paintings, soldiers prove their manhood by demonstrating control and determination in their actions. Such acts in the war comic books are the means through which greenhorns earn acceptance into the adult male ranks of hardened soldiers. Yet whereas comic books also portray scenes in which young G.I.s undergo various setbacks, Lichtenstein's war paintings virtually always depict pilots and soldiers only as they confront and defeat the enemy. *Whaam!* of 1963, for instance, presents a panel from the comic-book story *Star Jockey* in which a lone pilot, who has been mercilessly chased, at-

Figure 33. Tony Abruzzo, panel from "Run for Love!" *Secret Hearts* 83. Lettering by Ira Schnapp. Copyright © 1962 DC Comics. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

tacked, and disoriented by the enemy, finally turns his fighter jet around and bravely faces his pursuers in a climactic scene of gunfire and explosion. In *Whaam!*, the black-and-white helmet, its rounded shape and colors imitating the bucket seat and the glass bubble of the cockpit, transforms the male body into a sleek mechanical component indistinguishable from the plane itself – a military machine of the sort that Susan Jeffords has labeled the deferred male body (fig. 34).[7] Male body and technological weapon fuse to demonstrate their potency in a climactic scene of spectacular action.

With the single exception of *Scared Witless* of 1962, Lichtenstein's canvases avoid the numerous scenes in war comic books where the


I PRESSED THE FIRE CONTROL... AND AHEAD OF ME ROCKETS BLAZED THROUGH THE SKY.
WHAAM!


OKAY, HOT-SHOT, OKAY! I'M POURING!
VOOMP!

Figure 36. Russ Heath, panel from "Haunted Tank vs. Killer Tank": *G.I. Combat* 94. Lettering by Gaspar Saladino. Copyright © 1962 DC Comics. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Figure 34. (*facing page top*) Roy Lichtenstein, *Whaam*, 1963. Magna on canvas; two panels, overall 68 × 160″. The Trustees of the Tate Gallery, London. Photo courtesy of Leo Castelli. Copyright © Roy Lichtenstein.

Figure 35. (*facing page bottom*) Roy Lichtenstein, *O.K. Hot Shot*, 1963. Oil and magna on canvas; 80 × 68″. Collection of Mr. Remo Morone, Turin, Italy. Photo courtesy of Leo Castelli. Copyright © Roy Lichtenstein.

Figure 37. Tony Abruzzo, panel from "Run for Love!" *Secret Hearts* 83. Lettering by Ira Schnapp. Copyright © 1962 DC Comics. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

faces of the greenhorns express anxiety and fear. These pictures portray instead the likes of the pilot from *O.K. Hot Shot* of 1963, who contorts his finely chiseled face into a grimace of focused fury as he attacks the enemy (fig. 35); Lichtenstein even eliminated from this countenance the droplets of sweat that suggest panic and fear in the

Figure 38. Roy Lichtenstein, *Drowning Girl*, 1963. Oil on canvas; 68 × 68″. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Philip Johnson Fund and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bagley Wright. Photo courtesy Leo Castelli. Copyright © Roy Lichtenstein.

painting's comic-book source (fig. 36).[8] Expressions of grim determination and anger in Lichtenstein's war paintings manifest the resolution of fighters to emerge victorious from battle.

If Lichtenstein's soldiers enjoy moments of success, the women in Lichtenstein's romance paintings are caught in the throes of anguish. Almost all of the young, middle-class blondes and brunettes in Lichtenstein's paintings – their status indicated by stylish hairdos, manicured fingernails, and trim dresses ornamented with a few tasteful jewels – pucker their pert mouths and wrinkle their eye-

brows and upturned noses into grimaces of tension and anxiety. In the romance comic books, frames featuring close-up views of overwrought female faces occasionally interrupt extended narratives that uniformly culminate in the fulfillment of love. Among Lichtenstein's paintings, however, only a few scenes of resolution, in which men offer tokens of commitment in the form of a kiss or an engagement ring, interrupt a virtually consistent collection of women in crisis. Yet even in Lichtenstein's *Engagement Ring* of 1961, a possible marriage proposal between a well-heeled young couple appears to cause anxiety rather than pleasure.

These canvases of overwrought emotion frequently eliminate from the comic-book sources parts of text, incidental characters, and features of the setting in such a way as to highlight the tense, anxious female face alone while dispensing with narrative context or resolution. Whereas a frame from the story *Run for Love* of 1962 (fig. 37) includes a hero hanging onto an overturned boat, a cliff that gives a sense of distance to the shoreline, and text that fills out the story, Lichtenstein's *Drowning Girl* of 1963 zooms in on the isolated head of the heroine (fig. 38). Surrounded only by the waves and foam of the sea, the woman closes her eyes, while tears run down her cheeks; she appears to drown as much in her emotional sorrow as in the threatening waters. *Hopeless* (Plate IV), which reiterates quite closely the tear-drenched face of a young heroine, does include the complete text from the comic-book source (fig. 33). Yet Lichtenstein's painting omits the window curtain in the background and instead fills almost the entire frame with the heroine's tear-streaked face. With the thought bubble narrowed, centered, and lowered next to the head, the heroine's words are more closely associated with her emotional expression; Lichtenstein's stylistic alterations accentuate the feminine affect of debilitating emotion. Femininity in the comic books, according to these paintings, consists of the display of inner emotional turmoil; facial expressions serve as the traces of the effects of actions that have taken place elsewhere, and testify transparently to the heroines' personal responses to romantic crises.

Women only manifest the same level of self-control as the soldiers in the war paintings in a handful of paintings of homemakers

with household merchandise. In *Refrigerator* of 1962, originally titled *Women Cleaning*,[9] an efficient homemaker glows with happiness as she invites the viewer to admire the gleaming shelves of her refrigerator. In other paintings such as *Spray* of 1962, *Sponge* of 1962, and *Step on Can with Leg* of 1961, manicured hands and high-heeled shoes effortlessly operate various household products and appliances. These paintings parrot images from contemporary advertisements that promoted labor-saving devices by promising more ease and efficiency in household work and greater cleanliness of the home; this type of advertisement actually dated to the 1920s when housework was first turned into a profession compatible with middle-class status.[10] Lichtenstein's paintings reconstruct a homemaking sphere in which women consume household merchandise rationally and manage immaculate and well-ordered interiors; in *Refrigerator*, the homemaker's labor generates a happy face and hardly disturbs the woman's well-groomed appearance. Lichtenstein's women, in short, attain self-control and emotional stability in an orderly homemaking world devoid of men.

The war and romance paintings accentuate the difference between masculinity and femininity through the relationships they establish between image and text in the two types of scenes. For the war paintings, Lichtenstein did not copy the abundant musings and conflicting emotions that in the comic books fill the thought bubbles of young and scared greenhorns. Rather, the paintings deliver concise, decisive, and action-oriented commands or assertions – the type of text reserved for taciturn veterans and battle scenes in the comic books. The text in *O.K. Hot Shot*, "OKAY, HOT-SHOT, OKAY! I'M POURING!," is even more abbreviated than its source because it retains only one of the original three phrases from the comic-book frame.[11] The titles of Lichtenstein's paintings accentuate the close-clipped language of the heroes by repeating the terse statements and explosive sounds in the images: *Tex*, *Torpedo Los*, *Blam*, *Takka Takka*. When occasional thought bubbles appear in the war paintings, the words, rather than opening up an arena of internal rumination, direct the viewer back toward other soldiers or battle scenes. In *Bratatat* of 1963, the thought bubble reads: "THIS HOT-SHOT JET OUTFIT I'M IN WILL TREAT ME LIKE A VET PILOT WHEN I RETURN FROM MY NO.1

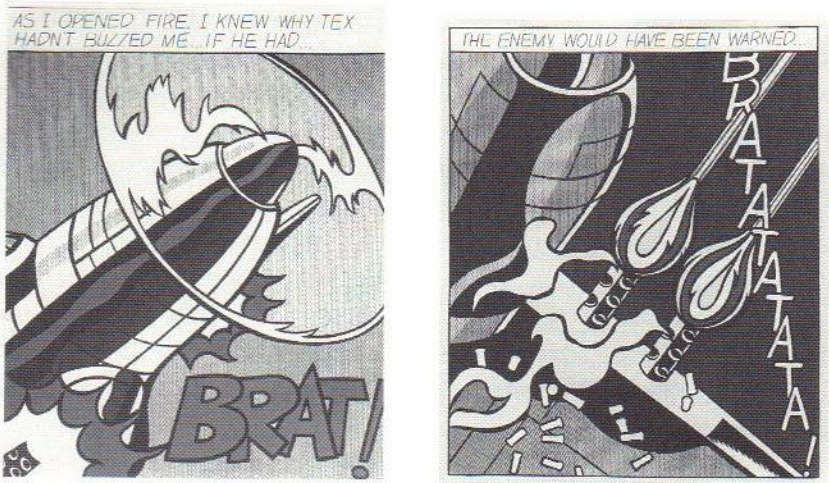


Figure 39. Roy Lichtenstein, *As I Opened Fire . . .*, 1964. Magna on canvas; three panels, each 68 × 56". Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Photo courtesy Leo Castelli. Copyright © Roy Lichtenstein.

WINGDING WITH A REPORT OF – TARGET DESTROYED!" In Lichtenstein's paintings, the laconic heroes prefer action to words.

The sparse language in the war paintings often grants the fighting men authoritative and wide-ranging knowledge about the world they inhabit. Wendy Steiner has noted that the text in Lichtenstein's war pictures, although usually referring to external action, does not always describe the specific scene shown in the paintings. Rather, the first-person declarative statements or narrative captions often call attention to an activity that takes place outside of the frame. In *As I Opened Fire* of 1964, for instance, a sequence of three panels takes a progressively closer view of machine gun barrels attached to the wing of an airplane at the same time as the words introduce the bigger picture of tactics involved in the battle (fig. 39): "AS I OPENED FIRE, I KNEW WHY TEX HADN'T BUZZED ME. . . . IF HE HAD . . . THE ENEMY WOULD HAVE BEEN WARNED . . . THAT MY SHIP WAS BELOW THEM. . . . " The hero's words turn him into an omniscient narrator, and the captions thus play a role quite similar to that of the voice-over in films. Kaja Silverman has argued that the voice-over in cinema serves as a disembodied authority: "On other occasions, as in many traditional docu-

mentaries, the voice-over seems separated from the fiction by an absolute partition . . . it becomes a 'voice on high' . . . a voice which speaks from a position of superior knowledge, and which superimposes itself 'on top' of the diegesis. To the degree that the voice-over preserves its integrity, it also becomes an exclusively male voice."[12] The captions in *As I Opened Fire*, though phrased in a first-person voice that locates the speaker in the action, suggest in this same manner a consciousness that grasps the entirety of the battle; the conflation of first-person and narrative voices has the effect of attributing to fighting men omniscient knowledge of their situations.

The dialogue bubbles of the romance paintings contain anguished internal thoughts rather than external directives. They expose the romantic desires and anxieties – words of empathy, hurt pride, frustration, and despair – that seem to overwhelm the heroines. In the romance paintings, the emotionally fraught words do not grant the women linguistic mastery nor control over their circumstances. Often, in fact, they emphasize the heroine's lack of resolution: the repetition and the ellipsis in the caption "IT'S . . . IT'S NOT AN ENGAGEMENT RING, IS IT?" from *Engagement Ring* of 1961 and

the doubling of the letter "M" in the phrase "M-MAYBE HE BECAME ILL AND COULDN'T LEAVE THE STUDIO!" from *M-Maybe* of 1965 exaggerate the heroines' hesitations. The unresolved emotional thoughts of Lichtenstein's heroines place them in a state of suspension. Moreover, titles such as *Drowning Girl*, *Crying Girl*, *Sleeping Girl*, and *Blonde Waiting* often describe ongoing passive states.[13] Whereas the romance paintings repeatedly deny the heroine the capacity to act that signifies masculinity in the war paintings, the comic-book sources of Lichtenstein's paintings are seldom so unremitting. The heroine on whom Lichtenstein modeled *Hopeless*, for instance, earlier in her comic-book story assumes the upper hand when she declares with exasperation to her male companion with automotive difficulties: "START IT! GO AHEAD . . . START IT!"

The women in Lichtenstein's romance paintings, in any case, are turned inward and confined by their internal voices.[14] Steiner has noted a close relationship between the women's words and their facial expressions in these paintings: "It is striking that verbal text and pictorial image seem so mutually reinforcing in the panels lifted from comicbook romances. There, titles seem precisely correlated with images, bubbles contain words consonant with their speakers' facial expressions, and words actually constitute whole panels with pictures matched against them, image to text."[15] Steiner's insight applies to many of Lichtenstein's romance paintings, such as *Hopeless*, in which the despairing words reinforce the heroine's state of helplessness captured by her tear-streaked face. In some of the romance paintings, however, words do not neatly correlate with the images. Yet even when the text points to other actors and includes other voices, it does not allow the heroine omniscient knowledge or mastery over her actions. In the serial picture *Eddie Diptych* of 1962, the implied actions of an unseen Eddie unleash the depicted woman's flow of words and emotional conflict (fig. 40). Even though a man provokes the crisis, Lichtenstein depicts only women in the right side of the diptych: a troubled heroine flanked by a concerned mother with furrowed brow. The left panel, entirely devoted to text, formulates an internal dialogue within the heroine between the authoritative voice of reason belonging to "Mom and Dad" and her own voice of emotional excess: "I TRIED TO REASON IT OUT! I TRIED TO

Figure 40. Roy Lichtenstein, *Eddie Diptych*, 1962. Oil on canvas; two panels, overall 44 × 52″. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sonnabend. Photo courtesy of Leo Castelli. Copyright © Roy Lictenstein.

SEE THINGS FROM MOM AND DAD'S VIEWPOINT! I TRIED NOT TO THINK OF EDDIE, SO MY MIND WOULD BE CLEAR AND COMMON SENSE COULD TAKE OVER! BUT EDDIE KEPT COMING BACK. . . . " Her words form a heteroglossic text with at least two competing voices. As such her speech is multiple and confused; it denies her the single controlling consciousness attributed to men in the war paintings.

In accentuating the characteristics that distinguish femininity and masculinity in the comic books, Lichtenstein's paintings call attention to the artifice of these gender conventions. The comic-book panels themselves contain their gender conventions within a signifying system of naturalism achieved through a detailed rendering of the characters and their settings. For example, the source for

Hopeless includes a frilly green window curtain that situates the heroine in a recognizable site – the domestic interior – and establishes the distance between her head and the back wall (fig. 33). Small hatch marks, which articulate the creases in the heroine's shirt and bedspread, describe the weight of a three-dimensional figure in space, while highlights on her hair indicate a single and consistent source of light. Dispensing with such naturalistic details, Lichtenstein's painting *Hopeless* instead lays stress on the artifice of the scene by flattening out the space – replacing the green window curtain and orange wall with a solid red-and-black background – and radically simplifying and stylizing the heroine's face and costume. The painting transforms the woman's hair from brunette to an unnatural shade of yellow streaked with broad jet-black lines. These same black lines turn the creases in her shirt and bedspread into abstract linear patterns that no longer function well as naturalistic shading. Likewise, the black outline draws attention to the teardrops first and foremost as highly stylized shapes.

Lichtenstein's transformations foreground the role of the representational medium itself in formulating the conventions of femininity and masculinity. This is most obviously the case in his manipulation of Ben Day dots. On the comic-book page, the tiny, regularly spaced Ben Day dots, used to color and shade areas of the image, are individually too small to discern easily. In the painting *Hopeless*, however, the dots have grown to such a remarkable size that they visibly mottle the heroine's flesh. The painting does not treat the medium as a transparent window onto the heroine's internal emotional state, but rather emphasizes the role of the Ben Day dots, stylized lines, and bold colors in formulating her posture of despair. In short, the painting both focuses on the heroine's display of romantic anguish and presents it as a figured representation.

Lichtenstein's paintings thus incorporate sources from consumer culture while asserting authoritative knowledge about them. His paintings draw attention to the conventions of gender that the war and romance comic books naturalize through narrative structure and seemingly realistic rendering. The paintings distill gender roles by exaggerating the difference between feminine emotion and masculine action and simultaneously emphasizing the representational

practices through which comic books define gender – practices apparently ignored by the comic books themselves. Exaggeration, stylization, and emphatic artifice of form and color transform statements of romantic anguish and masculine bravado into humorous and hyperbolic expressions of gender stereotypes. The paintings thereby offer their viewers the opportunity to perceive and to parody the conventions of representation and gender that the readers of comic books ostensibly accept as natural.

Criticism and the Crisis in Masculinity

In analyzing the treatment of gender in Lichtenstein's paintings, the discussion of the differences between Lichtenstein's war and romance paintings and their comic-book sources participates in a longstanding critical practice that has devoted itself to demonstrating how Lichtenstein transformed his sources. When this practice began in the early 1960s, critics, writing for the major art journals and a number of popular news magazines, were mounting a defense of Lichtenstein against charges that he simply copied his consumer-culture sources; this practice culminated in a spate of articles in the mid-1960s. To reclaim Lichtenstein's paintings as high art, critics insisted that his works transformed their sources and addressed strictly formalist issues. Indeed, these critics defended Lichtenstein's paintings on the formalist grounds staked out by Clement Greenberg's analysis of Color-Field painting and Post-Painterly Abstraction. The formalist defense of Lichtenstein itself raises a second issue of gender, for Greenberg and other critics who adopted a formalist language of control and detachment to praise abstract art in the late 1950s and early 1960s implicitly provided such painting with masculine authority. Those critics who appropriated formalism as a means of defending Lichtenstein's paintings consequently presented him and his art as constituting a new form of masculinity.

The success of the formalist defense of Lichtenstein makes it difficult today to re-create the vehemence of the original debate among critics, because during the intervening thirty years Lichtenstein's paintings have hung comfortably in many modern art museums and have been juxtaposed to their comic-book sources in numerous

publications and exhibitions devoted to differentiating between them.[16] However, critics who in the early 1960s argued that Lichtenstein's paintings qualified as formalist art wrote with a remarkably defensive tone.

In 1966, Ellen Johnson penned one of the more forceful and lengthy justifications of Lichtenstein's comic-book paintings in an article entitled "The Image Duplicators – Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg and Warhol." The article, at the head of which appeared reproductions of Lichtenstein's *I Know How You Must Feel, Brad* of 1963 and of its comic-book source, opened by situating Pop art within a tradition of modern artworks, originating with Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* of 1863, that appropriated and altered other images. Ultimately, what mattered, according to Johnson, was less the source chosen than the way in which the artist manipulated it. More specifically, in the case of Lichtenstein, she focused on how he cropped the forms, redesigned the composition, and altered the colors of his sources. For instance, Johnson enumerated the stylistic differences between *I Know How You Must Feel, Brad* and its source:

> Eliminating inessentials, he dispenses with finger-nails and forearm muscle indications, cuts the number of lines through out and more tellingly states and varies their curved or angular character. He changes the colours and gives them more force . . . he intensifies the range and contrast of values; makes the flabby landscape background into a jagged, expressive pattern; transforms the vague rocket-like shape on the left into a neat vertical column . . . and realigns the whole into a quiet, steady vertical–horizontal–pyramidal structure.

Johnson offered these formal transformations as evidence of an individual signature style: "All of these second-hand pictures are unmistakably Lichtensteins."

Lichtenstein's stylistic manipulation of his sources, according to Johnson, could, secondarily, serve to undercut comic-book conventions. "The subject of Lichtenstein's painting is not so much the subject of the selected comic or advertisement as it is the style in which those images are presented. . . . It is about comics, their conventions, style, artifice and sentimentality. . . . A man of Lichten-

stein's sensitivity and sophisticated humour could not be other than amused by the pretentious seriousness of comic romances." In discussing Lichtenstein's paintings, writers such as Johnson applied the terms parody, satire, and irony interchangeably to mean more or less the same thing: a critical evaluation of the original source. As Johnson saw it, Lichtenstein's paintings subverted the style of comic-book romances by simultaneously incorporating and exaggerating the "mannered drawing" of their sources: "The slick black contours in *I Know How You Must Feel, Brad* wittily parody the crazy 'grace' of the pointed fingers, narrow wrist, swelling hips and breast and the flowing blond hair of the comic."

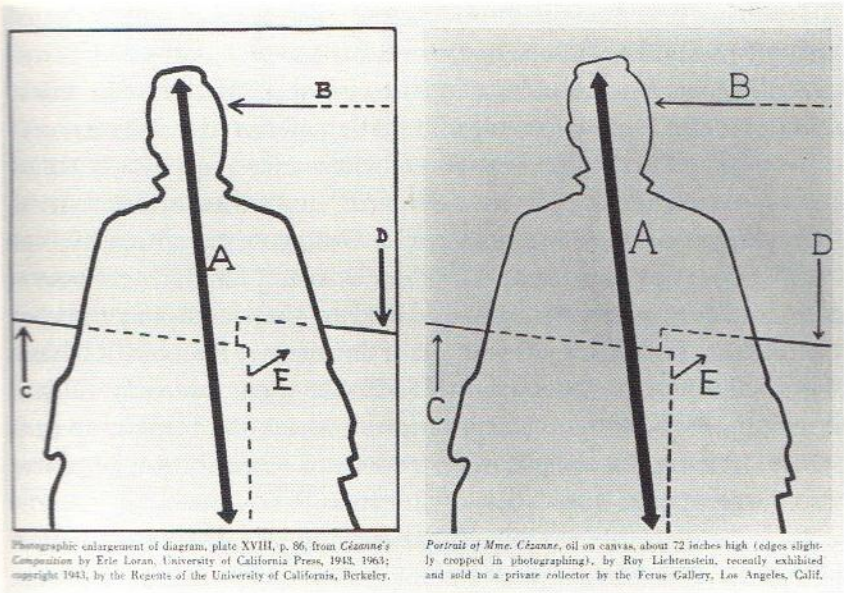
Overall, however, Johnson placed less emphasis on the parodic aspects of Lichtenstein's paintings than on their stylistic transformations of the comic-book sources: "Mockery is, I think, a peripheral factor in Lichtenstein's choice of subject matter."[17] Other critics even claimed that the paintings succeeded as art only when they overcame the parodic impulse altogether. Aline Saarinen wrote of Lichtenstein: "When he is at his best, he transforms the comic strips and mindless clichés of American-girl images a step beyond supercaricature or satire into concentrated works of art."[18] The apparent distrust these critics expressed about parody was perhaps a result of the threat parody seemed to pose to the seriousness of modern art. Dorothy Seiberling asked of Lichtenstein in the pages of *Life*: "He leaves the viewer wondering if his paintings are only parodies, ironic gestures, or if they will outlast their shock and give a new shape to art?"[19] Her question voiced a longstanding modernist preconception that parody was a practice inherently without originality and lasting significance.[20] The assumption that parody lacked sobriety and consequence seemed to underpin the critical evaluations of Lichtenstein's paintings that emphatically pointed to their formal qualities over and above their parodic aspects.

Critics such as Johnson who stressed the way Lichtenstein composed his comic-book images developed their argument through formal analysis of his paintings. Initially, in the early 1960s, such critics concluded that Lichtenstein's formalist transformations encouraged viewers either to consider the aesthetic potential of commercial illustration or to focus their attention on aspects of the

everyday environment they usually took for granted;[21] but by the mid-1960s, most critics pointed to Lichtenstein's formalist transformations as evidence that he was really an abstract artist after all. Thus, some critics claimed that the viewer could ignore the comic-book imagery altogether. John Rublowsky wrote: "In order to divorce himself as decisively as possible from the subject matter of his paintings, Lichtenstein works on the canvas from various angles. He turns the painting upside down, on its side, diagonally, and studies the reversed image in a mirror. In this way, he is able to treat the over-all composition of his visual elements as an abstract problem in space delineation and form."[22] An "over-all composition," the use of imagery that – as Leo Steinberg put it – was "known and seen to be flat,"[23] sources treated as formal elements; by singling out such attributes, critics treated Lichtenstein's paintings as abstractions concerned with strictly formal issues.

Critics in the 1960s essentially praised Lichtenstein for having achieved the modernist ideal of formalist detachment in which the controlling gaze is directed toward but never seduced by consumer culture. Huyssen has discussed modernist writers who, since the nineteenth century, have subsumed the world of mass culture, figured as feminine, to their ironic and detached aesthetic control. As an example, he singles out Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*: "Woman (Madame Bovary) is positioned as reader of inferior literature – subjective, emotional and passive – while man (Flaubert) emerges as writer of genuine, authentic literature – objective, ironic, and in control of his aesthetic means."[24] As we have seen in Chapter 2, American intellectuals and critics of the 1950s likewise associated consumer culture with female consumers and concluded that its formulaic nature absorbed and pacified its audience. Thus, to distinguish Lichtenstein's paintings from their comic-book sources was implicitly to defend the masculinist definition of the cool and controlled creator against the feminine threat of absorption by consumer culture.

The constant need to assert that Lichtenstein transformed his sources nevertheless reveals that Lichtenstein's position as a modernist painter was in doubt and was not secure. The painter and art professor Erle Loran launched what was probably the most notorious attack against Lichtenstein's paintings; it came in the form of



Photographic enlargement of diagram, plate XVIII, p. 86, from *Cézanne's Composition* by Erle Loran, University of California Press, 1943, 1963; copyright 1943, by the Regents of the University of California, Berkeley.

Portrait of Mme. Cézanne, oil on canvas, about 72 inches high (edges slightly cropped in photographing), by Roy Lichtenstein, recently exhibited and sold to a private collector by the Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, Calif.

Figure 41. Comparison of diagram in Erle Loran's book *Cézanne's Composition* with Roy Lichtenstein's *Portrait of Mme. Cézanne*. From *ArtNews* 62 (September 1963).

an article entitled "Pop Artists or Copy Cats?" published in *Art News* in September 1963.[25] Loran criticized Lichtenstein's reproductive technique, suggesting that Lichtenstein had produced *Portrait of Mme. Cézanne* of 1962 by projecting a slide of a diagram from Loran's own book *Cézanne's Composition* and drawing around the outlines.[26] Against this visual evidence, Loran juxtaposed a collection of citations from a long list of art historians, dealers, curators, and critics such as Lawrence Alloway, Henry Geldzahler, Ivan Karp, Robert Rosenblum, Aline B. Saarinen, and Leo Steinberg who praised Lichtenstein for the way he transformed and manipulated his sources. Dripping with irony, Loran left it to his readers to choose: "The reader need only look at the illustrations [of Loran's diagram and Lichtenstein's painting] to appreciate the 'changes' that take place in the black outlines Lichtenstein has copied from my modest diagram."[27] And indeed the diagram and the painting, reproduced side-by-side and at approximately the same size in the pages of *Art News*, appeared remarkably similar (fig. 41).

Loran's article became a touchstone for defenders and critics of Lichtenstein alike. Letters to the editors about Loran's article appeared in *Art News* and subsequent reviewers of the artist often referred to it. Lichtenstein himself participated in the debate about his work in several interviews when he was asked specifically about Loran's accusations. In "What is Pop Art" published in *Art News* in November 1963, G. R. Swenson asked: "Antagonistic critics say that Pop Art does not transform its models. Does it?" Lichtenstein asserted: "Transformation is a strange word to use. It implies that art transforms. It doesn't, it just plain forms. . . . The comics have shapes but there has been no effort to make them intensely unified. The purpose is different, one intends to depict and I intend to unify."[28] Lichtenstein consistently stressed his attention to form and visual unity in his comic-book paintings.

In spite of Lichtenstein's efforts to influence the critical interpretation of his images, Max Kozloff published the lengthiest elaboration of Loran's critique in *The Nation* in November 1963. "The present avant-garde," Kozloff wrote, "has subverted not only 'action' painting, but also the ethic of most twentieth-century art, as formulated in its structural and expressive aspects by Cézanne. The particular path chosen by this avant-garde . . . is to deny that art is a metamorphosis of experience, and to affirm that it is a copy of artifacts." Lichtenstein failed to employ the artistic techniques that, by Kozloff's standards, signaled the individual transformation of experience. To copy images in a hard-edge style that erased evidence of the artist's hand was, the argument ran, to undercut the principle of originality. Lichtenstein's practice of copying machine-made sources led Kozloff to conclude: "Behind the borrowing propensities of such new American painting as Lichtenstein's . . . lies a rejection of the deepest values of modern art."[29]

Writing about this period with the hindsight of some twenty years, the artist and critic Mary Kelly has argued: "In the 1960s, when the 'avant-garde' expelled gesture, denied expression, contested the notion of an essential creativity, the spectator was called upon to sustain a certain loss; the presence (or rather, presentified absence) of the artistic subject."[30] The gendered underpinnings of "presence" in modernist aesthetic discourse have only recently been

teased out by poststructuralist and feminist criticism. Craig Owens, in differentiating between the modern and postmodern, has explained that in the modern era, "the representational systems of the West admit only one vision – that of the constitutive male subject – or, rather, they posit the subject of representation as absolutely centered, unitary, masculine."[31] In other words, the absence of gesture in the 1960s marked the loss of a centered, unitary, and masculine presence.

In the end, the critical debate about whether or not Lichtenstein altered his sources constituted two sides of the same modernist coin. Both factions not only maintained that a difference must and did exist between high art and consumer culture, but they also both granted priority to the former by opposing an autographic style – whether expressionistic or cool – to copying. For writers such as Loran and Kozloff, the rejection of all that they recognized as constituting high-art standards reduced Lichtenstein's paintings to copying. Other critics overcame this objection and repositioned Lichtenstein as a member of the modernist canon by attributing to him formalist concerns. Both sides of the debate affirmed the importance of transformation as a sign of modernism, which they privileged over copying and consumer culture.

The critical debate about Lichtenstein did more than reinforce old dichotomies, however. Beliefs about the way in which an artist transformed were in turmoil in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as doubts arose about whether Abstract-Expressionist painting in fact embodied a heroic performance of masculine transformation. The critical defense of Lichtenstein's Pop-art paintings not only presented them as exemplifying a new type of formalist transformation, but also implicitly offered them as an alternative form of masculinity. The nature of the alternative supplied by Lichtenstein paintings only becomes clear in light of the crisis in masculinity – artistic and societal – in which it participated.

The rejection of gesture by Lichtenstein – indeed by virtually all Pop artists – repudiated the conjunction formulated in one tradition of Abstract-Expressionist criticism between the stroke of paint and anxious, brooding, angst-ridden masculinity. Abstract Expressionism had stood – and as Kozloff's comments indicate, still stood

for some critics in the early 1960s – as the hallmark of a modernist practice in which the evidence of the artist's hand in the form of the gestural stroke of paint manifested his transformative presence. The Abstract-Expressionist brush stroke, in the critical discourse initiated by Hans Namuth's photographs of Jackson Pollock at work and Harold Rosenberg's writings on Abstract Expressionism, ostensibly recorded the individual expression of the creative artist (fig. 42).[32] Rosenberg's writings, which argued that Abstract Expressionism was inseparable from the artist's biography and psychological state of mind, had a powerful impact on much of the criticism published in the 1950s and 1960s about Pollock and gave rise to an autobiographical account of Pollock's paintings. Pollock himself contributed to this reading of his work. B. H. Friedman wrote of Pollock in 1955: "When this article was discussed, Pollock said that he didn't want any direct quotes or revelations of his private life. He said he'd stand on his painting. . . . He's never going to write an autobiography. He's painted it."[33]

The critical interpretation of Pollock's paintings depended in part on popular accounts of his turbulent life. The press secured Pollock's reputation as a tortured and inspired creator, particularly after his premature death in 1956. For instance, *Life* magazine, which first paid tribute to Pollock in 1949, published an article on the artist by Dorothy Seiberling in 1959 that described Pollock as a brooding, restless, and reckless rebel who worked on his art with focused fury.[34] Such texts participated in constructing popular memory about Pollock as a tortured creator, living on the edge of society.

Many high-art critics found the same fierce passion in his drip paintings. Robert Rosenblum, for instance, commented about *Number 1, 1948*: "we are almost physically lost in this boundless web of inexhaustible energy."[35] Ultimately, however, these critical accounts of Pollock highlighted the transformative force of the artist: Pollock translated his self during the act of painting into "meaning." Frank O'Hara said of Pollock: "In considering his work as a whole one finds the ego totally absorbed in the work. . . . This is not automatism or self-expression, but insight."[36] In the criticism on Abstract Expressionism, the gestural stroke of paint indexed the transformative power and personal vision of the individual artist,

and in Pollock's case most obviously "embodied" male presence as aggressive and tragic.

No Pop-art canvas repudiated gesture as a sign of authentic masculinity more decisively than Lichtenstein's series of "drip" paintings from 1965. These canvases depicted enormous dripping Abstract-Expressionist brushstrokes rendered, with obvious irony, in Lichtenstein's comic-book technique of Ben Day dots and crisp impersonal lines. In *Little Big Painting* of 1965, five broad overlapping strokes of red, white, and yellow sweep across the surface of the canvas (fig. 43). The direction and curve of each of the brushstrokes may at first suggest the thrust and movement of a painter's hand, and the splatters forming off the edge of the two white swatches in the foreground might similarly testify to the spontaneity of paint application. Yet this impression of a spontaneous outburst of energy is undercut by the firm, consistent, black outlines of the brushstrokes, the clean surface of the canvas, and the mechanical blue Ben Day dots of the background. And once we remind ourselves of the scale of these brushstrokes on Lichtenstein's large canvas – rather than their more manageable size in the photographic reproduction – the possibility that any artist laid down those strokes with the quick passage of a single brush becomes patently absurd. The cool machine appearance of Lichtenstein's style reconfigures the bravura of Abstract Expressionism in such a way as to draw attention to the processes of representation in Abstract Expressionism, much in the same manner as Lichtenstein's style made visible the processes of representation of the comic-book medium. *Little Big Painting* discredits the meaning of the gesture, and does so in a humorous way. Critics writing about the brushstroke paintings in the 1960s invariably read them as parodic or ironic: "They are paintings of brushstrokes which could also be bandages, ribbons or scarves: the drips and spatters relate as well to tears from a comic-strip heroine's eyes. . . . The gestures 'reproduced' are broad, unsightly, absurd."[37] The painting stripped the brushstroke of its claim to the authenticity, individuality, and tragedy that constituted male presence in Abstract Expressionism.

Lichtenstein's persona likewise countered the popular mythology about Pollock. Whereas Pollock had acquired a reputation in the

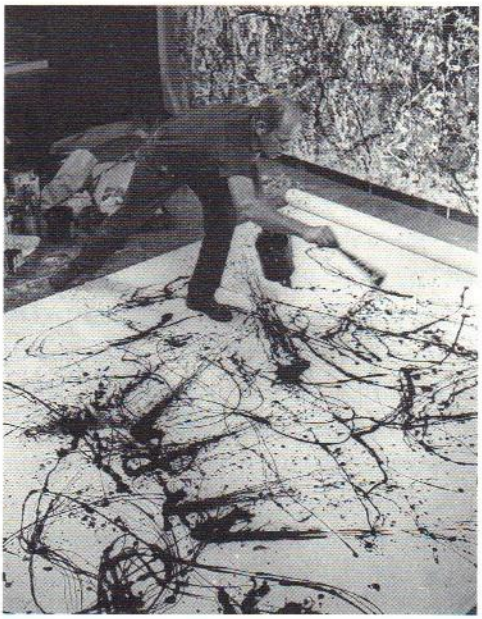


Figure 42. Hans Namuth, *Jackson Pollock*, 1950. Photograph by Hans Namuth. Collection Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona. Copyright © 1991 Hans Namuth Estate.

press as the ferocious outsider, the working-class rebel, and the lonesome cowboy, Lichtenstein emerged in journalistic reviews of his work as the boyish, college-educated, professional artist. Described as a youthful, "pixie-faced" man, Lichtenstein combined a clean-cut appearance with academic credentials, including a master's degree in fine arts from Ohio State University.[38] Far from instinctual, Lichtenstein was reputed in the press to be an intellectual artist, not easily perturbed. Aline Saarinen wrote in the pages of *Vogue* in 1963: "Roy Lichtenstein, at thirty-nine, is a cool, neat, slight man, with pale-blue eyes, pale sandy hair, a rather linear smile, and a face that seems as angular as Dick Tracy's. He gives the immediate impression of being cerebral rather than intuitive, and so is his art."[39] Lichtenstein's sense of order and self-control manifested itself in the photographs of his spacious, clean-swept, well-lit workplace with canvases neatly stacked against the walls; in contrast, photographs of the severely constricted studio space of Jackson Pollock revealed an un-

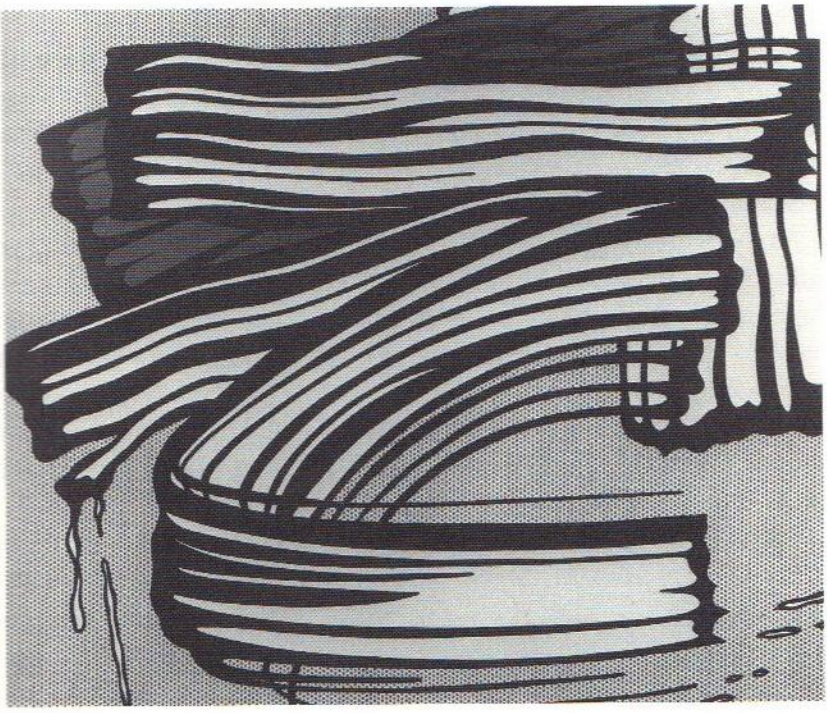


Figure 43. Roy Lichtenstein, *Little Big Painting*, 1965. Oil and synthetic polymer on canvas; 68 × 80″. Collection Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase, with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Photograph copyright © 1995: Whitney Museum of American Art.

ruly array of canvases, open cans of paint, stools, and brushes of various sizes covering every inch of the floor and walls. And if photographs of Pollock painting in his studio publicized the serious-looking artist performing a private choreography around the canvas and painting in a direct and unmediated fashion, Lichtenstein assumed the role of the careful craftsman. He cheerfully displayed the tools with which he measured his forms, the screens with which he painted his Ben Day dots, and the media sources that he imitated.

Perhaps most significantly, Lichtenstein, in critical accounts, assumed the role of the family man. John Rublowsky began his chapter on Lichtenstein in his book *Pop Art* of 1965 with the sentence: "Roy Lichtenstein has two sons, for whom he painted a Mickey

Mouse canvas late in 1960." Numerous photographs in Rublowsky's book pictured Lichtenstein as the dutiful father, hugging his sons, putting them to bed, and taking them to school without the assistance of a woman (fig. 44).[40] Lichtenstein, in short, played not the part of the isolated rebel, but rather that of the white-collar professional and father.

The alternative form of masculinity that Lichtenstein and his art provided came on the heels of a crisis in the direction and future of Abstract Expressionism.[41] A number of critics and artists began in the late 1950s to bemoan the way that the gesture school of Abstract Expressionism had spawned an academy of second-rate Action painters. Condemning such artists as passive and formulaic, these writers implicitly framed the demise of Abstract Expressionism as a crisis of masculinity.

William Rubin first gave written form to this crisis in his two-part article, "The New York School – Then and Now," of 1958.[42] A certain nostalgia haunts Rubin's argument, for the late Pollock emerges as a masculine benchmark against which Rubin measures the inadequacy of many contemporary artists. Pollock, according to Rubin, painted with the single-minded drive and force of a soldier and an athlete: "The immense canvases became fields of battle into which Pollock flung himself, attacking the canvas with a violence and athleticism that constituted the birth of 'Action' painting."[43] Rubin feared that the day of such vigorous painting practice had come to an end; he believed that Abstract Expressionism was in decline. As he wrote in a slightly later article, "Younger American Painters," of 1960: "Action painting may not be dead, but as a vital and pioneering adventure it is dying at the very moment when it is being almost universally imitated by beginners and weaker painters."[44]

One of the ways in which Rubin conceived of the decline from great to second-rate Abstract Expressionism was as a passage from male to female artists. "But for the most part the painters under forty today have tended to be relatively conservative," he argued in "The New York School"; "and few have sustained the kind of adventurousness and vitality we see in the older men. . . . Curiously, the strongest second-generation advocates of athletic art have been women."[45] In lamenting the demise of Abstract Expressionism,

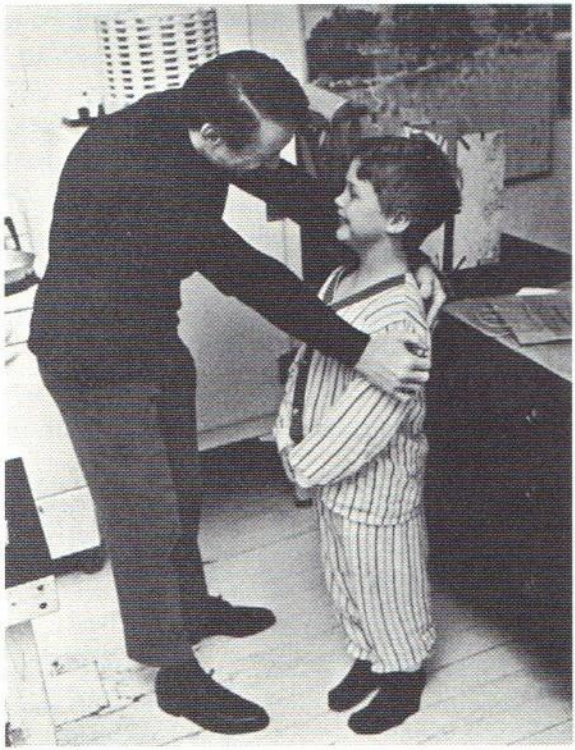


Figure 44. Kenneth Heyman, *Roy Lichtenstein and his son Mitchell*. From John Rublowsky, *Pop Art*. Photo by Kenneth Heyman. Copyright © 1965 by John Rublowsky and Kenneth Heyman. Copyright renewed. Reprinted by permission of Basic Books, a division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

Rubin made explicit the gender change in the artists: when "women" took over from "older men" the vitality of Abstract Expressionism suffered a marked loss. Rubin dismissed recent art with a number of labels, including "formulaic," "decorative," "conservative," and "passive." "Though first-rate action painters still abound," he wrote, "I have sensed in the last few years a trend away from the dynamic Abstract-Expressionism of painters like Pollock and De Kooning towards a more passive, detached, and meditative art of sensations."[46]

"Passivity" was a loaded word in the late 1950s, used by many social scientists, psychologists, and cultural critics in the United States to characterize a purportedly widespread crisis of masculinity.[47] In the United States after the Second World War, numerous articles appeared in the popular press analyzing the way in which American men had been emasculated at the hands of their mothers and wives; in 1966, Myron Brenton's *The American Male*, which enjoyed three printings, capped off this journalistic leitmotif.[48] These texts, adopting the pseudo-technical language of social scientists and psychologists studying the middle-class home and workplace, fretted over the fate of the infamous "man in the grey flannel suit," the potentially compliant "organization man" of modern corporate America.

In the 1940s, the plight of the American man went by the name of "Momism," a term coined and popularized by the writer and social critic Philip Wylie and the psychiatrist Edward Strecker, who both attributed the purported infantilism of men to a cult of mother worship.[49] Later in the 1950s, in a series of articles on both the "American Man" and the "American Woman," the wives of white-collar professionals began to bear the blame for unseating the male from his throne. These articles shared the conviction that American society had achieved equality of the sexes, but that such equality actually favored women. Amaury de Reincourt went so far as to claim in 1957 that the American woman had achieved a position of "unchallengeable supremacy." Many others agreed with de Reincourt's assessment, arguing that wives outnumbered and outlived their husbands, and, moreover, that they foisted new and extraordinary domestic, economic, and sexual demands on their husbands. Finally, women controlled the purse strings of not only the home but also the nation.

Such female dominance had apparently drained men of their vital forces. A woman's "feminine instinct for security, social respectability and comfort," maintained de Reincourt, "stifle[d] the rather uncomfortable but necessary masculine instinct for risk and creative originality."[50] Pursuing this logic, J. Robert Moskin argued in 1958 that the organization man was plagued by "fatigue," "passivity," "anxiety," and "impotency."[51] In 1959, Diana Trilling sum-

marized the accusations against the American woman in the pages of *Look*:

> For some years now, the American woman has been under persistent attack as the cause of the major ills of modern American life. She is blamed for the marked decline in masculine self-esteem and for the nervous tension that seems to characterize both men and women. The instability of the modern home, the rise in juvenile delinquency and male homosexuality, even the alarming incidence of heart disease among American men – all of these are blamed on the American woman's distortion of her traditional female role.

Allocating responsibility, Trilling also implicated men in this state of affairs: "But the modern man seems incapable of the traditional assertions of masculinity. . . . He often retreats into passivity."[52] Trilling perpetuated an image of the ideal male as forthright and active even as she regretted his demise.

According to these authors, equality of the sexes not only meant the dominance of women, it also decisively blurred traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity. "The housework-participating fathers," as J. Robert Moskin dubbed him, was "no longer the masculine, strong-minded men who pioneered the continent and built America's greatness." Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in an article entitled "The Crisis of American Masculinity" published in *Esquire* in 1958, summarized the common wisdom of the day when he pointed out that the conflict between traditional and new sex roles caused men to feel a debilitating level of anxiety:

> Today men are more and more conscious of maleness not as a fact but as a problem. The way by which American men affirm their masculinity are uncertain and obscure. There are multiplying signs, indeed, that something has gone badly wrong with the American male's conception of himself. On the most superficial level, the roles of male and female are increasingly merged in the American household. The American man is found as never before as a substitute for wife and mother – changing diapers, washing dishes, cooking meals

> and performing a whole series of what once were considered female duties.[53]

Even Brenton, who in his book urged men to get out of the "masculinity trap" and embrace new definitions of manliness based on the ideal of the nurturing husband and father, posited a previous set of gender relations based on strictly polarized roles and behaviors, and attributed anxiety about masculinity to the demise of this system.

Lichtenstein's comic-book paintings from the early 1960s negotiated and managed the crisis in gender roles. Humorously drawing attention to gender stereotypes and polarized behavior, Lichtenstein's images, like many texts about masculinity in the 1950s and 1960s, simultaneously reinscribed these divisions as the norm.[54] At the same time, Lichtenstein's persona as the white-collar professional and affable father recalled the description of the typical middle-class man, of the potentially emasculated American male. Yet Lichtenstein's performance in the role of the cool and disciplined artist could also allay fears that his domestic responsibilities or profession effeminized him. The cerebral and detached artist could be seen to reinfuse the normative male with a cool, masculine veneer. Likewise, his paintings, defended in formalist terms that abandoned some of the precepts of Abstract Expressionism, could demonstrate the masculine control that the professional artist exerted over his medium.

In retrospect, we can see that Clement Greenberg's formalist criticism of the late 1950s and early 1960s pointed in the direction for the "remasculinization" of American modernism.[55] Over and against the fierceness of Pollock's drip paintings and the perceived passivity of the second generation of Action painters, Greenberg promoted artists who exerted detached control over their medium. "The essence of modernism," he wrote in his article "Modernist Painting" in 1960, "lies in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it, but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence."[56] Although initially an advocate of Pollock, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, Greenberg treated Abstract Expressionism of the ges-

tural variety as a mannerism and redirected his critical support to the Color-Field artists. In particular, he championed Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman, and those he considered their heirs, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski, whose art he christened "Post Painterly Abstraction." Greenberg specifically stressed that the integrity of these artists manifested itself in their commitment to the purity of the medium and the advancement of the avant-garde tradition toward flatness.

One of the artists from Greenberg's new stable of champions emerged through critical writings by Greenberg and others at the beginning of the 1960s as the embodiment of a new form of masculinity: Barnett Newman.[57] The prophet Newman – he was cast as Moses and Elijah in the catalogue for his one-man exhibition at the New York gallery of French and Company in March 1959 – offered, according to Greenberg writing in the catalogue for the exhibition, a "noble" example of the "splendor" of recent American painting.[58] Greenberg praised Newman's art for its restraint and discretion, while delivering an implicit criticism of the bravado of gesture painting: "His art is all statement, all content; and fullness of content can be attained only through an execution that calls the least possible attention to itself. We are not offered the dexterity of a hand."

The gender connotations of such language were so self-evident as to require hardly any articulation at all. Explicit formulations appeared, perhaps, only at moments of sarcastic taunting. Hubert Crehan offered a scathing review of Newman's heroization of masculinity:

> Newman believes in a masculine environment, and he gets this idea across in his paintings. . . . His paintings seem to me the apogee of the spirit of this he-man cult. The most ambitious painting, 96 by 214½ inches, titled *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* (which can be translated *Heroic Man Erect*) is a red mural with white studs. . . . It is a proud and inflexible archaic male sensibility that Newman expresses, lifted from the Old Testament. But we live in another world, really, one certainly that is in need of the phallic charge. . . . [59]

Crehan acknowledged the current crisis of masculinity, only raising doubts over whether Newman was too much of a man for his own era. Newman, furious at the implied critique, fired off a vitriolic response to *Art News*. In so doing, he nevertheless endorsed Crehan's basic assessment of Color-Field painting as an art of pronounced masculinity: "It takes only one real man to create a work of art."[60] Newman's blatant endorsements of masculinity often took the form of distinguishing the men from the boys and defending men from the threat of women. For instance, when justifying the location of his studio in the Wall Street neighborhood in *Newsweek*, he stated: "I really like it down here. It's a very masculine atmosphere. There isn't anybody walking dogs, and you don't trip over fur coats."[61]

The masculine connotations of the formalist language selected to praise the abstractions of Newman and the younger artists Noland and Louis become clear when that language is compared to the terms with which critics described Helen Frankenthaler's paintings. These paintings carried a certain importance at the time; Louis credited them with serving as the "bridge between Pollock and what was possible."[62] In the late 1950s, however, critics who categorized Frankenthaler's work with Abstract Expressionism typically found her brushstrokes "loose," "nervous," and "idiosyncratic," and her colors "thin," "pale," and "sensitive."[63] In 1960, for instance, the sculptor Donald Judd, who wrote criticism for *Arts* between 1959 and 1965, compared Frankenthaler's "soft" brevity of strokes, "lambent" stains, and "allusive" quality unfavorably to Pollock's "cool," "tough," and "rigor."[64] Critic James Schuyler explicitly gendered her style in relation to Abstract Expressionism: "Part of Miss Frankenthaler's special courage was in going against the think-tough and paint-tough grain of New York School abstract painting . . . but she has relied upon a sensibility altogether feminine."[65] And E. C. Goossen stated decisively: "Frankenthaler's painting is manifestly that of a woman. . . . Without Pollock's painting hers is unthinkable. What she took from him was masculine; the almost hard-edged, linear splashes of duco enamel. What she made with it was distinctly feminine."[66] In the early 1960s, even as critics detected changes in her paintings that brought them closer in line with the

economy and control of the abstract canvases by Newman, Noland, and Louis, they tended to find her style lacking. Judd, for instance, concluded in 1963 that "Frankenthaler's softness is fine but it would be more profound if it were also hard."[67] Schuyler and Judd, joining other critics of the period in positioning Frankenthaler's painting as the feminine exemplar of Color-Field painting, judged her painting practice less "profound" than Post-Painterly Abstraction and less "tough" than Abstract Expressionism.

In the early 1960s, various critics adopted Greenberg's formalist machinery, wielded by him in support of Post-Painterly Abstraction, to champion instead Lichtenstein and other Pop artists. Although Greenberg himself demonstrated little enthusiasm for Pop art,[68] other critics celebrated Pop art as a regenerating force for American modernism. The first critical responses to Lichtenstein specifically located his work in relationship to the crisis in American modernism. Robert Rosenblum, for instance, was quite explicit in situating Lichtenstein over and against an effeminized second-generation Abstract Expressionism:

> To be sure, some recent painters have succeeded against these enormous odds in producing work of extremely high quality and originality (Stella, Louis, and Noland, among them); but in general, most abstract painting of the later 1950's and early 1960's has begun to look increasingly stale and effete. . . . A newer and more adventurous path has rejected still more definitively this dominating father image by espousing, both in style and in frame of reference, exactly what most of the masterful older generation had excluded. . . . The sheer quantity of these artists amounts virtually to a revolution or, at the very least, a revolt, among whose major manifestoes are the paintings of Roy Lichtenstein.[69]

As late as 1965, Lippard, who listed Lichtenstein as one of five "hard-core" Pop artists in New York, wrote: "These artists do not see themselves as destroyers of Art, but as the donors of a much-needed transfusion to counteract the effects of a rarified Abstract Expressionist atmosphere."

The five "hard-core" Pop artists, according to Lippard, infused the art world with a dose of detached cool by depicting new commercial objects using clean surfaces and clearly defined shapes that derived from the Color-Field branch of Abstract Expressionism. Lippard linked Pop art with Color-Field painting much in the way that Greenberg had situated Color-Field art as the precedent for Post-Painterly Abstraction. Lippard wrote, "While the older painters were generally repelled by the rise of Pop, the 'cool' strain of Abstract Expressionism – Rothko, Still, and especially Barnett Newman – had become the main force in the new abstraction; aspects of this style seemed equally applicable to the depiction of anonymous objects with no history and no evocative impedimenta." Lippard was explicit in associating Lichtenstein with Post-Painterly Abstraction: "Roy Lichtenstein has been most closely associated with the 'new' or 'cool' abstraction. . . . Lichtenstein shares with 'post-painterly abstraction' his enlarged scale, broad flat forms on colour fields, carefully depersonalized line, reductive composition, and expanded forms that seem to exist beyond the framing edge."[70]

Lippard was not alone in positioning Lichtenstein as the link between Post-Painterly Abstraction and Pop art. In their articles from the mid-1960s, Barbara Rose and Irving Sandler characterized a new aesthetic sensibility of the 1960s that rejected the emotionalism and romanticism of Abstract Expressionism, and investigated with an attitude of detached control many of the same pictorial problems as Newman and Rothko.[71] Rose and Sandler claimed that Pop artists, sharing the impassive attitude of Post-Painterly Abstraction, also addressed the flatness of the picture plane by choosing two-dimensional, nonillusionistic motifs and by defining their shapes with clear, hard-edge contours. "Hence," Sandler concluded, "Lichtenstein's blown-up comic-strips are closer to Noland's or Kelly's abstract images than to any other figure paintings."[72] Likewise, Rose asserted that of all the Pop artists, Lichtenstein's compositions had the most in common with recent abstract painting.[73] These critics adapted Greenberg's formalist principles to build a case for the masculine control and detachment of Lichtenstein's painting practice.[74]

The new form of artistic masculinity attributed to Pop art by the

likes of Lippard, Sandler, and Rose authorized, rather than disowned, Lichtenstein's engagement with consumer culture. The archetypal Abstract Expressionist could only express his masculinity and his powers of transformation within the realm of pure art – the cowboy Pollock roamed the range of unadulterated expression rather than that of modern commercial society. Lichtenstein, on the other hand, could be seen to adopt the themes and even the technical devices of consumer culture and yet, by transforming them with his cool intellect, reaffirm the privileges of high art and the masculinity of the artist. The new hard-edge aesthetic allowed for the representation *within* the picture itself of the superiority of masculine high art over feminized consumer culture: The comic book appeared, but so did the sophisticated transformation of it at the hand of Lichtenstein.

Likewise, Lichtenstein's persona could embody a form of masculinity that was not weakened by its contact with the domestic sphere. Lichtenstein-the-father portrayed in Rublowsky's book asserted the same transformative powers as a parent that he exerted as an artist; he "made" Mickey Mouse for his sons, after all, he did not have Mickey Mouse forced upon him. In an age that feared the emasculating potential of women, Lichtenstein emerged as an artist who mastered domestic responsibilities in a home, moreover, freed from the presence of women.

The art and persona of Lichtenstein thus together came to figure a form of masculinity that finessed many of the threats perceived in the late 1950s and early 1960s to men and to high art. The artist, it would seem, could assert his powers of cool and detached transformation, even when – especially when – enmeshed with the feminized affairs of domesticity and consumer culture.

Advertising with Pop

Lichtenstein may have lifted images from comic books, and critics may have praised him for his cool and disciplined transformation of these sources into high art. Consumer culture, however, exercised its revenge: Commercial artists working in the mass media appropriated Lichtenstein's comic-book style for advertisements geared for

an audience of female consumers. The advertising industry thereby claimed the artist's detached formalist transformation of comic books for itself. Nevertheless, these advertisements maintained a hierarchical distinction between high art and consumer culture congruent with the hierarchy between those spheres articulated by Lichtenstein's paintings and the critical debate generated by them. Moreover, the advertisements, like the paintings, coded the power to transform, and to engage in parody, as masculine. They differed from the paintings, however, in their use of transformation and parody to produce cultural distinctions of class and gender among consumers rather than between consumers and those who imagined themselves above the forces of commerce.

Pop-art advertisements first appeared in abundance between 1964 and 1966 in home and service magazines for women of the middle and upper-middle class, as well as in publications for an educated audience of both sexes.[75] Although trade journals coined the generic label "Pop art" to refer to these ad campaigns, most such advertisements were inspired by Lichtenstein's paintings. Lichtenstein-type romance themes promoted food as well as fashion; and his colossal Ben Day dots covered advertisements for clothing and skin products and the sound effects from his war paintings demonstrated the gusto of various household goods. Since the mid-1960s, the advertising industry has continued periodically to revive Lichtenstein's comic-book style, most recently in both the print and television media.

A full-page promotion for Brazilian Coffee, one of the first examples of an advertisement inspired by Lichtenstein's romance paintings, appeared in the pages of the *New York Times Magazine* on June 28, 1964 (Plate V). Though the young couple featured in the advertisement could have been plucked from the final frame of a romance comic book rather than from the sort of melodramatic scenes of crisis and irresolution favored by Lichtenstein, the blissful faces and saccharin dialogue fill the frame as do the characters and text in Lichtenstein's Pop-art paintings. The dark-haired hero, holding a cup of coffee to his mouth, breaks into a smile and croons: "SAY, BUTTON-NOSE THIS ICED COFFEE SURE HAS THAT RICH, FULL BODIED FLAVOR WE FELLOWS GO FOR!" The young blonde gazes happily into the dis-

tance and thinks: "OOH, I'M THE HAPPIEST WIFE ALIVE. AS SOON AS JIM FINISHES KISSING ME I MUST PHONE MOM. SHE WAS A PEACH TO TELL ME TO MAKE ICED COFFEE WITH A PURE ALL BRAZILIAN BRAND!" Like the men and women in Lichtenstein's paintings, the hero in this advertisement speaks authoritatively, while romantic thoughts absorb the heroine. The firm black line, the bold red background, the bright yellow of the heroine's hair, and the large red Ben Day dots recognizably derive from Lichtenstein's romance paintings. Consequently, the advertisement, like Lichtenstein's paintings, parodies – with a distanced, doubled voice – the couple's affect of pleasure and draws attention to it as a figured representation.

The Brazilian Coffee advertisement offered the "highbrow" homemaker and consumer the possibility of distinguishing herself from the merely "middlebrow" characters featured in this domestic encounter through her recognition of the references to Lichtenstein's comic-book paintings. References to high-art paintings – for by 1964, Lichtenstein's paintings had acquired that status – assumed that the viewer had a cultural capital obtained, for example, from reading the art criticism regularly included within the pages of the *New York Times*. Indeed, only one month before the Brazilian Coffee advertisement appeared, the *New York Times Magazine* published a lengthy article by John Canaday on Pop art's success among critics and collectors entitled "Pop Art Sells On and On – Why?"[76] The advertisement invited the viewer to locate herself among the group of critics and collectors who applauded Pop art, and thus reconfirm her membership within a specific group of the culturally literate readership of the *New York Times*.

In this advertisement, however, the panache of high art served to underwrite conventional gender roles associated after Second World War with the middle class. The scene in the Brazilian Coffee advertisement positioned the potential purchaser of coffee as female by setting up a correspondence between her activity as a consumer and the heroine's. It also promised her a share of the heroine's romantic and domestic bliss if she purchased this brand of coffee. The title printed below the image was in fact "Happiness." The Brazilian Coffee advertisement thereby reiterated a set of gender-based assumptions about fulfillment through consumption widely associ-

ated, as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, by the advertising industry after the Second World War specifically with the middle-class female. Serving as one of the primary means through which desire is elicited for the female viewer, much advertising in the twentieth century has invited women to take pleasure in the display of commodities and of other women as spectacles. In advertisements designed after the Second World War, Michael Renov has suggested, "the predominant strain of address to the postwar woman was toward unmitigated consumption but within a restrictive, domesticated sphere."[77]

The advertisement for Brazilian Coffee, while positioning the viewer as both middle-class homemaker and member of the high-art literati, nevertheless threw her cultural authority into doubt. Was this advertisement, after all, a copy of a specific painting by Lichtenstein or was it only a general allusion to Lichtenstein's comic-book style? The confusion emerged – or rather, was produced – in the small print below the colorful picture. The caption, which implied that the advertisement reproduced an artwork hanging in a private collection, read: "*Happiness* from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Attardi, Old Bridge, New Jersey. For reprints ($1.00) write Pop Art Forever, 210 East 50th St., N.Y." Industry insiders who subscribed to the advertising trade journal *Advertising Age* could resolve the confusion, for they could read in that periodical's pages that "Mr. Attardi, the collector, is art director with the institute's agency, Handman & Sklar, and also the artist creating the ad itself. The Pop Art Forever address is that of the agency."[78] For the reader of the *New York Times Magazine*, however, the status of the advertisement as artwork remained uncertain. The advertising executive, normatively male, held the key to distinguishing consumer culture from high art; the consumer viewing the advertisement, normatively female, did not.

The Brazilian Coffee advertisement thereby denied the female consumer precisely the skill that art criticism assigned to informed viewers of Lichtenstein's paintings on the look out for signs of artistic transformation: the ability to distinguish high-art paintings from consumer-cultural artifacts. Art critics asked viewers of Lichten-

stein's paintings to recognize the artist's detached pose and his formalist transformations of his consumer cultural-sources. This form of masculine detachment and discipline was the unstated norm over and against which the advertisement for Brazilian Coffee formulated the attribute of female consumer vision. Curiously, then, the Brazilian advertisement reiterated the same gendered hierarchy of detached high-art transformation over feminized consumerism as had the post-Greenbergian critics of the early 1960s. Where the advertisement parted ways with the art critics was in positioning Lichtenstein's paintings as the object rather than the subject of transformation, and in granting the advertising executive – literally a connoisseur of consumer-cultural practices – the capacity to appreciate the difference between high art and the double-voiced utterance of its consumer-cultural parody.

While most advertisements derived from Lichtenstein's comic-book paintings similarly attribute the powers of transformation to the admen who made them, a "Pop-art" style television commercial recently produced by the agency BBDO for Sunlight dishwasher detergent exceptionally assigns precisely those skills to the homemaker: It positions the female consumer as a member of the cultural literati capable not only of enjoying the references to Pop art, but also of troping other cultural representations. Aired on the major networks during prime time, the Sunlight commercial – with visible Ben Day dots and a tear-streaked female face – parroted Lichtenstein's painting technique and his scenes of romantic melodrama. The commercial, set in a recognizably suburban kitchen of the 1950s, opens with a young blonde homemaker sobbing as her husband storms out the door. The source of her distress takes the form of a wine glass covered with huge, menacing, black Ben Day dots resembling dishwasher spots. Violin strings play in the background, as neighbor Marge enters and asks (we both hear her voice and read the words in a dialogue bubble): "WHAT'S WRONG SALLY???" Sally cries, "DARN DISHWASHER SPOTS MARGE. THEY'RE DRIVING BUD AWAY." Marge recommends Sunlight, and the next day the young husband bursts through the kitchen door, flexing his muscles as he declares: "SALLY YOUR GLASSES ARE BEAUTIFUL. I'LL NEVER STRAY AGAIN." The scene

culminates with the proverbial kiss. And yet, as a parting shot, the young blonde's thought bubble and a voice-over ponder the question: "WHO WRITES THIS STUFF??"

The Sunlight commercial permits the female homemaker and consumer to distance herself from the scenario through her ability to trope its representation of domesticity. The commercial, in fact, distances the viewer in two ways: It ascribes middle-class domesticity with the past, and it engages in a heavy-handed parody of that way of life. The 1950s kitchen set historicizes the scene, while a variety of motifs – including the comic-book style, violin strings, Sally's high-pitched voice and her flowing tears – poke fun at the suburban home, at gender roles strictly divided, and at domestic crisis. Sally's closing question even introduces a self-conscious and ironic commentary on the script. "It's the commercial acknowledging to itself that it's a joke," said Tony La Monte, an advertising executive from BBDO.[79] In fact, Sally, by ending the scene with a marked note of self-irony, allows the viewer, through identification with her, the last laugh about her predicament.

The homemaker's powers of transformation hardly end here. The commercial, in its most iconoclastic gesture, grants the female consumer the capacity to trope Pop art. Specifically, it gives her back the dot. In the comic book, minute Ben Day dots served as the iconic rendition of a certain hue in the real world, without calling attention to their representational function. In Lichtenstein's romance paintings, the now enlarged Ben Day dots not only make visible that representational function; viewed by his critics who saw such dots as the sign of Lichtenstein's transformation of his sources, they also became an index of the artist's prowess as a formalist. In the Sunlight commercial, large black Ben Day dots appear on the object of domestic consternation, the glass goblet; they play the role of the water spots from hell. In essence, the commercial turns Lichtenstein's dot back on itself, reclaiming his high-art index as the icon of something in the realm of concern of the typical housewife. The housewife, moreover, can take action against these offending spots: With an appropriate purchase, she can simply wipe them out.

Yet the Sunlight commercial failed to transfer the powers of transformation to the female consumer. It managed, in fact, to offend a

crucial segment of Sunlight's market: the professional homemaker. BBDO, in trying to reach a broad demographic group of women – working women as well as homemakers in the age range of 25 to 54 – did not take into account the important differences within that audience. Many of what BBDO executives called "professional homemakers from the Midwest" wrote letters criticizing the advertisement. These viewers did not take lightly a situation uncannily similar to domestic crises many of them had experienced themselves. They recognized the element of parody in the commercial, to be sure, yet they read that parody as being directed against Sally, not potentially placed in her hands. Their identification with the middle-class homemaker apparently outweighed any desire to define themselves as viewers with sufficient ironic distance from conventional gender roles and Lichtenstein's comic-book style to trope them both. In short, many women who viewed this commercial were still heavily invested in the domestic values BBDO thought it could safely refigure and parody. They refused the pose of distance and detachment created for the viewer by the commercial – precisely the pose that empowered viewers of Lichtenstein's paintings as members of a high-art elite.[80]

A second version of the Sunlight commercial produced by BBDO in response to complaints against the first, had the effect of reassigning the production of distance and parody to men. This later commercial continued to credit the homemaker with the powers of transformation, yet it inverted gender roles to position a young professional male in charge of the household – and in charge of cultural troping. A postmodern urban apartment forms the setting for the melodrama, while a 1980s "new man" faces the crisis of the spots. Roger's guest Rhonda, a young woman clad in a business suit, stands up, waving a wine glass covered with Ben Day dots in her hand, and announces, "ROGER IT'S OFF. I COULD NEVER MARRY YOU." After she storms off, muscle-bound Rex, replacing neighbor Marge, counsels Roger in a deeply resonant voice: "WE MODERN GUYS USE SUNLIGHT." The next week Rhonda sweeps into Roger's apartment and praises the beauty of his glasses. Flashing an engagement ring she coyly adds: "I HEAR WEDDING BELLS." They kiss, while Roger's thought bubble reads, "IT'S HARD BEING A MAN THESE DAYS."

The new version of the commercial posits a young professional man as the culturally literate consumer who can parody 1980s gender roles and Pop art. The "new man," while domestic, possesses ironic distance from his role. Offering yet another version of the "new man," Rex, bursting with health and flexing his muscles, assumes the role of the homemaker without forgoing conventional notions of masculinity. Yet he, unlike Roger, possesses no ironic distance from his role. Rex, one might say, is a Jackson Pollock – type "new man," whereas Roger embodies a Roy Lichtenstein variety. The commercial privileges this Lichtensteinesque Roger over and against both Rex and Rhonda by ascribing to him the skills to appropriate, transform, and parody representation.

The final version of the Sunlight commercial singles out a young professional male much in the same way as the Brazilian Coffee advertisement authorized the advertising executive as the culturally elite. In the end, both advertisement and commercial adopted a technology of vision developed within the realm of high art to reproduce conventional class and gender divisions and established cultural hierarchies within consumer culture. Or, more precisely, these advertisements positioned a new set of actors, admen and "new men" equipped with a knowledge of the conventions of Pop painting, as a new sort of high-art elite, privileged in relation to other consumers considered incapable of their sophisticated manipulations. Just as the refiguration of Lichtenstein as a cool and detached artist by the likes of Lippard and Sandler extended the privileges of high art and masculinity into the realms of consumer culture and domesticity, the advertising industry's appropriation of a "Pop-art" style reproduced these same structures of privilege within the world of consumer culture.

In the process of passing from comic books to Pop art to advertisements, the imagery and techniques we now associate with the name of Lichtenstein generated much careful consideration and much heated debate among artists, art critics, and advertising executives; crossing and recrossing the border line between consumer culture and high art like this could potentially constitute a major cultural transgression. And yet, in the end, these passages affirmed

more than they transgressed. High art – whether in the hands of artists or admen – appropriates, transforms, and tropes representation; consumer culture does not. Men appropriate, transform, and trope; women do not. Ultimately, much more than just spots were borrowed up and down the cultural scale.