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JACK GOLDSTEIN : TOWARDS A DEFINITION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter :	Page
I A Shared Sensibility	1
II An Examination of the Work of Jack Goldstein	7
III Towards a Conclusion	27

Jack Goldstein : Manifesto	33
: Interview	34

BIBLIOGRAPHY	36
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
No. I <u>THE JUMP</u> by Jack Goldstein	13
No. II <u>M.G.M. Logo</u> by Jack Goldstein	14 & 16
No. III <u>SHANE</u> by Jack Goldstein <u>CAR CRASH</u> by Andy Warhol	18
No. IV <u>THE JUMP</u> by Jack Goldstein	22
No. V <u>UNTITLED</u> by Jack Goldstein <u>WHAAM</u> by Roy Lichtenstein	29
No. VI <u>UNTITLED</u> by Jack Goldstein <u>DRAWING</u> by Albert Speer	31

CHAPTER IA SHARED SENSIBILITY

"The prevailing ideology was still a woozy 'New Age' quitism. There seemed little real connection between what was going on in the art world and what was going on elsewhere. Art was caught up in a narcissistic system, self regarding, self enclosed and irredeemably boring.

While art was stagnating in New York, there were plenty of other things to look at and think about. The city itself was nearing bankruptcy, its physical structure rapidly deteriorating - one highway had collapsed, the bridges were declared in danger, the subways were more and more likely to breakdown. In poor parts of town, buildings were being abandoned by their owners, while in others real estate speculation was rampant. The most arresting images were being presented by the propaganda industries - the mass-media of television movies, and advertising, with their devastating mixtures of news, nostalgia and special effects. And the most interesting places to hang out were the few bars and clubs associated with a new speedy, psychotic music which came to be called Punk".¹

The above piece was extracted from an article written by Thomas Lawson for ZG magazine assessing the work of a group of young New York artists between 1975-81. I have quoted this extensively from the article because I think it aptly describes an atmosphere from which was born an attitude towards art making that was to radically alter the face of Modern Art. The artists I am referring to are now quite familiar. Jack Goldstein, Robert Longo, Sherrie Levine, Troy Brauntuch, Cindy Sherman and Richard Prince.

It was Douglas Crimp, a New York art critic who was the first to recognise and articulate the break with former art practises that this work represented. In 1977, he organised an exhibition entitled 'Pictures' in 'Artists Space' in New York. The title of the exhibition was decided on by Crimp because he believed it articulated, not only a common point of departure for all of these artists, but also because it conveyed the important ambiguities inherent in that work. These artists are, for the most part, picture users rather than picture makers. Implicit in the concept 'picture' is that it is a picture of, it denotes representation, of copy, of type. Also 'picture' in its verb form, can refer to a mental process, to picture, to visualise.

The work of these artists involves the appropriation of images from the mass culture (television, advertising, film) isolating, enlarging, repeating and juxtaposing these fragments in order to uncover meanings that are said to reside in these images but do not. But in the processes involved in acting out that obsession, other kinds of meanings are uncovered.

As is typical of what has now become known as post-modernism this work does not address itself to or respect the integrity of any particular medium. Instead it makes use of photography, film, video, performance, audio records, as well as the more traditional modes of painting, drawing and relief sculpture. Representation has returned in this work not in the familiar guise of realism, which seeks to resemble a prior existence, but as a function in itself. This work seeks to analyse the way our understanding of the world is conditioned by our representations of it.

The break which this work enacted with previous modern art practises seemed to reflect an aspiration towards a new level of involvement and relevance within the culture which as Thomas Lawson has pointed out, art of the preceding decade had increasingly failed to do.

Thomas Lawson is an artist and writer who has become widely known as one of the chief exponents and theoreticians of this movement. Along with writing articles for many of the mainstream art magazines he was founder of 'Real Life Magazine' which was conceived of as a clearing house for ideas and associated concerns of the artists mentioned. Much of this centred around an attitude towards the mass-media which provided a basis for their work. This attitude is based on a belief that the mass-media is manipulative, that it conceals and misrepresents meaning, and that in its increasingly hysterical need to stimulate (inform and entertain) the public, that the resultant image and information over-load has had the effect of neutralising difference, discrimination and analysis creating a type of sensory anaesthesia. The most inconsequential events are turned into spectacles, while major economic and political events appear as staged and fictionalised as beauty contests and game shows. We are constantly fed the notion that a free society remains free so long as it allows an exchange of informed opinion, but the evaluation that are offered remain one-dimensional and inconclusive. Explanations are left partial, central issues sidestepped, uninteresting details are glossed over, so that in the end meaning is further mystified.

Confronted by this collapse of meaning Lawson advocates a strategy which is used to different effect by all these artists: "dialectical re-duplication"² that is turning the means of the mass-media against themselves by re-appropriating their images, styles and conventions of representation. Irony, aesthetic distance, ambiguity and contradictions are deliberately cultivated to reveal the transparency of the stereotypes imposed on us by the media and to delay the process of assimilation.

It is at this point that I would like to introduce another strategy which parallels and in many ways converges in intent and practice with the one above. Punk came about at the same time as a response to similar conditions of stagnation and irrelevance.

Punk was the most extreme, wilful and contrived of all the post-war youth subcultures. By appropriating the rhetoric of crisis and decay (mass-unemployment, race riots, economic collapse) which the mass-media had made so much of during that period and re-presenting it in the form of metaphors for degeneracy and disorder (torn t-shirts, bondage paraphernalia, terrorist/guerilla outfits) punk succeeded in staying ahead of media packaging and thus hindered rapid assimilation.

Punk came to the conclusion that the 60's superstar (genius) was an artificial media myth, generated by the music business as a marketing device, and, as such that this myth and the 'superstars' position was a tenuous one as he not only failed to perceive his position realistically, but he had increasingly disengaged himself through his lyrics and lifestyle from the mundane concerns of everyday life of the adolescent audience. The punk aesthetic, formulated as it was within this widening gap between artist and audience, could be read as an attempt to expose the implicit contradictions and irrelevance inherent in such a stance. The most explicit item of propaganda inspired by this was, produced in the punk fanzine 'sniffin' glue', which contained a diagram showing three finger positions on the neck of guitar over the caption: 'Heres's one chord, here's two more, now form your own band'.

It could be argued that both Goldstein and Longo by having their work executed by assistants, are cultivating perhaps the same derision for the myth of the creative artistic genius.

Dick Hebride (1979) has pointed out that all subcultures represent 'symbolic challenges to a symbolic order'³. Herbride likens the members of individual subcultures to the 'bricoleur'⁴ who appropriates commodities (swastika, safety pin, school tie) from the culture at large isolating and juxtaposing these signs with others in order to create a individual style but in the process of doing this a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation is

enacted opening up a space for new and covertly oppositional meanings. And here can be seen the most direct link between the activities of the artists I have mentioned and those of the punk movement which represented the most wilfully extreme and chaotic manifestation of this practice. Not only did punk borrow from the 'dominant culture' but it proceeded to re-present elements from the whole history of post-war youth rock culture with complete abandon creating a chaotic cacophony of visual puns and ironies.

What seemed to underlie the activities of this generation was a penchant for plagerism, anything could be appropriated and re-used at will. Nothing was sacred. An ironic acceptance of the ever-present images and commodities of capitalist consumerist society seemed to be the most obvious shared characteristic.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER 1

- ¹Thomas Lawson
"We must embrace our joys and sorrows"
ZG No. 3 (1981) p.17.
- ²Frederic Jameson
"The Politics of Consumption" (essay)
The Anti-Aesthetic (1983)
- ³Dick Hebride
Subculture : The meaning of Style. p.92
- ⁴ibid p. 102
- ⁵ibid p.76

CHAPTER II

AN EXAMINATION OF THE WORK OF JACK GOLDSTEIN

Chapter I concentrates on the activities of a group of New York artists who all share an interest in representation, an interest manifesting itself in a variety of diverse media. I hope to have shown and discussed the most salient features of this and thus enabled a very general insight into the aesthetic and intellectual concerns involved therein. In order to allow a more focussed examination into the complexities of this work I have decided to select the works of one of these artists: Jack Goldstein.

In discussing the work of Jack Goldstein I hope not only to examine the intellectual and aesthetic characteristics which inform and structure the individual pieces, but also to provide cultural parallels and historical background where I believe necessary.

To begin with I will briefly summarise the significant features of Goldstein's work, features which will be subsequently expanded on in relation to individual pieces. Goldstein's work involves the selection and re-presentation of particular images from the mass-media (film). But in the process of this selection he subverts the standard signifying function of these 'pictures' by isolating them from their narrative sequences, from their captions, with the hope of providing the possibility of readings that the culture which produces these 'pictures' seeks to exclude. In order to achieve this Goldstein makes use of the whole range of media including film, performance, photography, painting and audio recording. But not only are Goldstein's 'pictures' 'found images'¹ but the paintings are executed by assistants using the standardised techniques of commercial airbrushing and his performances are performed by

professional actors. Goldstein explains this:

"Because my work is a reflection of a culture, it's not about ownership, so I don't have to fight for it. It doesn't belong to me, it never did, it just passes through me".²

Unlike the use of 'found images' in earlier modernist art (in Rauschenberg, for example) the presentation of 'pictures' in this work is less involved with formal transformations than with the process that Douglas Crimp has called 'temporal'.³ Crimp considers the principal characteristic of this work is its preoccupation with time. Not only does it involve time spent (in production) but it is also about time, the time of reading, the time of remembering and about those emotions which are essentially 'temporal': longing, expectation, anxiety, reverie, dread.'

Therefore it could be said that Goldstein's 'pictures' and this includes his performances, paintings and his film and sound installations require not only the presence of the spectator to become activated but, are specifically concerned with the 'registration of presence as a means towards establishing meaning'.⁴

In order to obtain a clearer understanding of this one must look at and examine the structure of the individual pieces. And one of the clearest and most obvious examples of it is to be found in Goldstein's use of sound effects in his installation work.

Goldstein collects sound effects. He made a series of records (and the records are just as much images) in the mid-70's which were intended both as independent works and in some cases as soundtracks for performances and installations. The sound effects he uses come from standard sound effect libraries and the behaviouristic connotations are the principal ingredients from which both film and television serial soundtracks are generated. These records are made by splicing together fragments, sometimes no longer than a few seconds, which are either isolated or slightly extended by

repetition and parallel his use of stock film footage to make films. Echoing the cut-up technique of William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, Goldstein evokes the breakdown of the systems that formally at least gave a feel of order to our experience of reality.

Of his record of a man drowning Goldstein has said "They didn't have a record of a man drowning in the library, so I took the record of somebody choking and the sound of somebody splashing in water and put them together".⁵ This taste for the artificial, verges on mockery, although Goldstein only suggests the lie, the spectator completes it.

For the sound installation train/plane presented at the P.S.I. in 1981 he used recordings of two sounds one of which seemed to be a train approaching and then going away, the other, that of an overhead aeroplane. The room was dark, empty and the source of sound hidden.

I use the term 'seemed to be' because if you listen to the recording closely it is very difficult to decipher exactly what is happening. The sound of the train especially teases, it inspires a narrative, yet refuses to describe it clearly. Your mind lets this happen precisely because Goldstein establishes, but at the same time mocks, your hope of coherence. By their very nature these aural clues precipitate a narrative while very subtly evading it.

Goldstein has succeeded in invading the inner space of the collective unconscious and creating confusion and uncertainty. Another piece, the 'Bomb' record, uses the sound of bombs dropping continuously from a plane on one side, while on the other side the pitch of the screams has been reversed giving the impression of what you hear from the ground. The infinite space between, is paradoxically reinforced by the thinness of the record. A similar logic was explored with the record of an ocean liner. The ocean

liner was heard first from inside its hull, and then from outside at a distance across the sea. A record which seems much more theatrical than the others uses the sound of a man making cowboy whoops which is subsequently joined by the sound of a horse being ridden through water. What the sounds originally were, of course, doesn't really matter, rather, it is the sense that the spectator will's upon them that counts. However one wishes to take this work, it is certainly disconcerting even threatening, evoking as it does an uncertainty in the very systems by which we order our everyday experiences. By isolating the spectator in the dark empty spaces of his installations, Goldstein's filtered aural fragments, force the spectator to visualise images which depend upon and bring up the question of the connotations these pre-programmed images have already imprinted onto the mass unconscious perception.

Goldstein has said about this area of his work with media that "my involvement with media was all about setting up an artificial reality based upon an artificial reality to begin with. I could use it in a very introverted way: I could close my door and play these records, have a girl sobbing, an aeroplane dropping bombs, a cowboy on a horse going through water. I could create an artificial world based upon my mind and not based upon a physical confrontation with that world. Art, until very recently, has always dealt with facticity, something that was very real, something that was experienced. What I'm dealing with is much more like a dream reality or an artificial reality, a reality that you can control because it's not based upon physical contact".⁶ Similar sentiments have been voiced by Andy Warhol: "I don't want to get too involved in other peoples lives I don't want to get too close I don't like to touch things that's why my work is so distant from myself."⁷

It is no accident that an interest in representation should accompany an interest in memory and dream for these psychic mechanisms always express themselves through images. And the images

conjured up in reverie and dream represent our repressed desires. In a culture that cynically manipulates our desires with ever greater sophistication, the full expression of these desires remains taboo, and we're caught even more firmly in that vicious cycle first analytically described by Freud in 'Civilization and its Discontents'. An ironic acceptance of this state of affairs, I think, permeates Goldstein's work.

In 1978 Jack Goldstein presented the performance of 'Two Fencers' at the Salée Patina in Geneva, Switzerland. Douglas Crimp describes this performance thus: "During the first part of the event the audience watched two men in fencing gear duelling on a stage before them. The controlled theatrical effects of their presentation - dim red spotlighting, 50-feet from the audience, recorded music like that of a Hollywood swash-buckler gave them the appearance of a remote, spectral image. Their presentation had the quality of representation, proving that kind of sensation we experience as "deja-vu". During the second part of the performance after one fencer had appeared to kill the other, the lights went down but the music continued to play at a lower volume for seven minutes, sitting in the dark, the audience is left to remember the image of fencing, but since the performance itself had the character of a mnemonic image, the second part seemed to suggest a re-remembering The staged duel was free free of specific reference. It was, not somehow, these particular fencers in this particular place, rather it was simply fencing, duelling, fighting".⁸

So in this performance Goldstein represents the spectre of the staged competition, specifically the mediated ritual conflict that is the sports/quizz show commonly seen on television. For sport represents the presentation structuring and resolution of conflict in a way that signifies many of the tensions in everyday life. Of course real-life conflict is rarely so cleanly resolved, but sport provides these absent satisfactions by exploiting and formalising

uncertainty, and then resolving it. The staged competition is about winning, it celebrates achievement, personal satisfaction for the participants and the spectators and cultural acclaim through a victory over a defeated opponent.

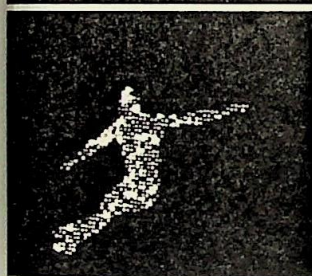
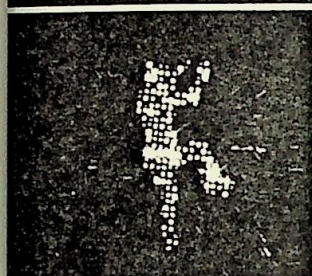
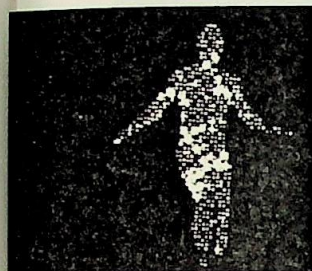
More importantly though, this performance attempts to explore the psychological mechanism which is memory. Goldstein has succeeded in making visible the paradoxical mechanism through which memory functions, the image is forgotten, replaced. (Roget's Thesarus gives a child's definition of memory as "the thing I forget with").⁹

This performance differs considerably from other performance work in that it did not involve the artist himself performing the work, instead - two professional fencers were employed. Perhaps to reinforce the fact that his performances too are just 'pictures', 'found images' which he re-stages. The extra-ordinary presence of this work is accomplished through absence, through it's unbridgeable distance from the original.

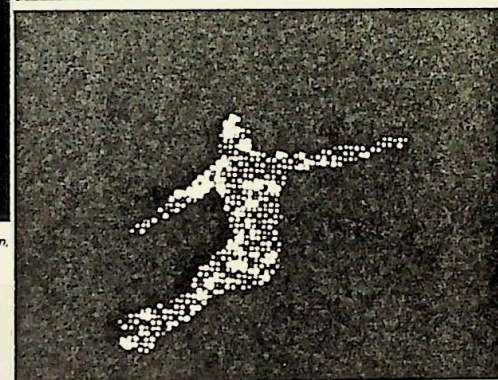
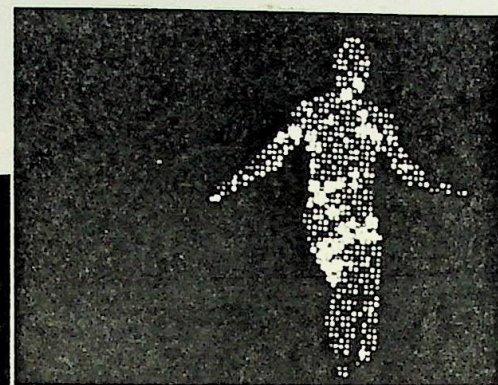
"A man committed suicide by performing a triple somersault out of a tenth storey window - a triple somersault, so that he controlled the timing of his death rather than it just being a straight fall. He controlled the space between where he jumped off and the ground".¹⁰

Jack Goldstein.

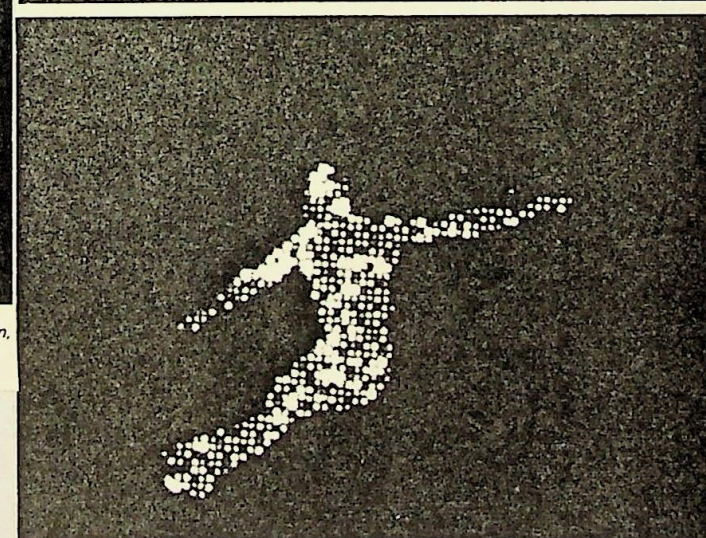
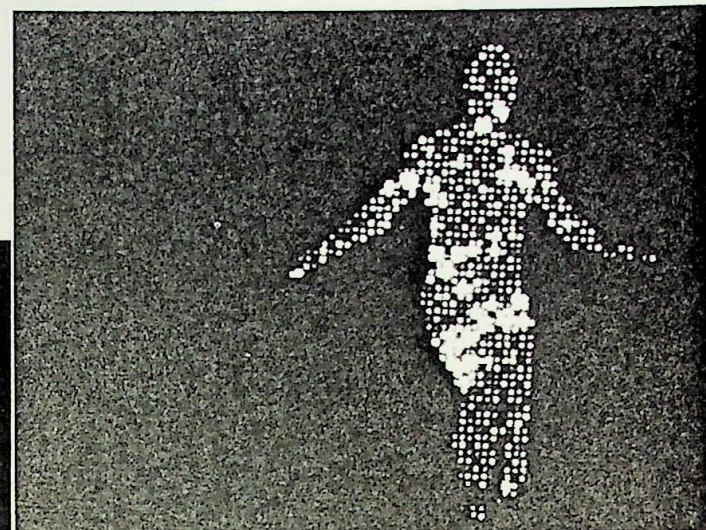
For his film called "The Jump" (Pl. 1) Goldstein used stock-super 8 footage of a dive from a high board. This footage was submitted to various technical processes mainly rotoscoping and colour filtering. It should be noted that the process of rotoscoping involves both a tracing and an effacement of the filmed image. The resultant footage was reshot in animation through a special effects lense. The remaining image is a sparkling red silhouette against a blank, black background. The figure leaps, somersaults, plunges and disintegrates. The camera pursues the figure, framing it very tightly, until it explodes like fireworks into the centre of the



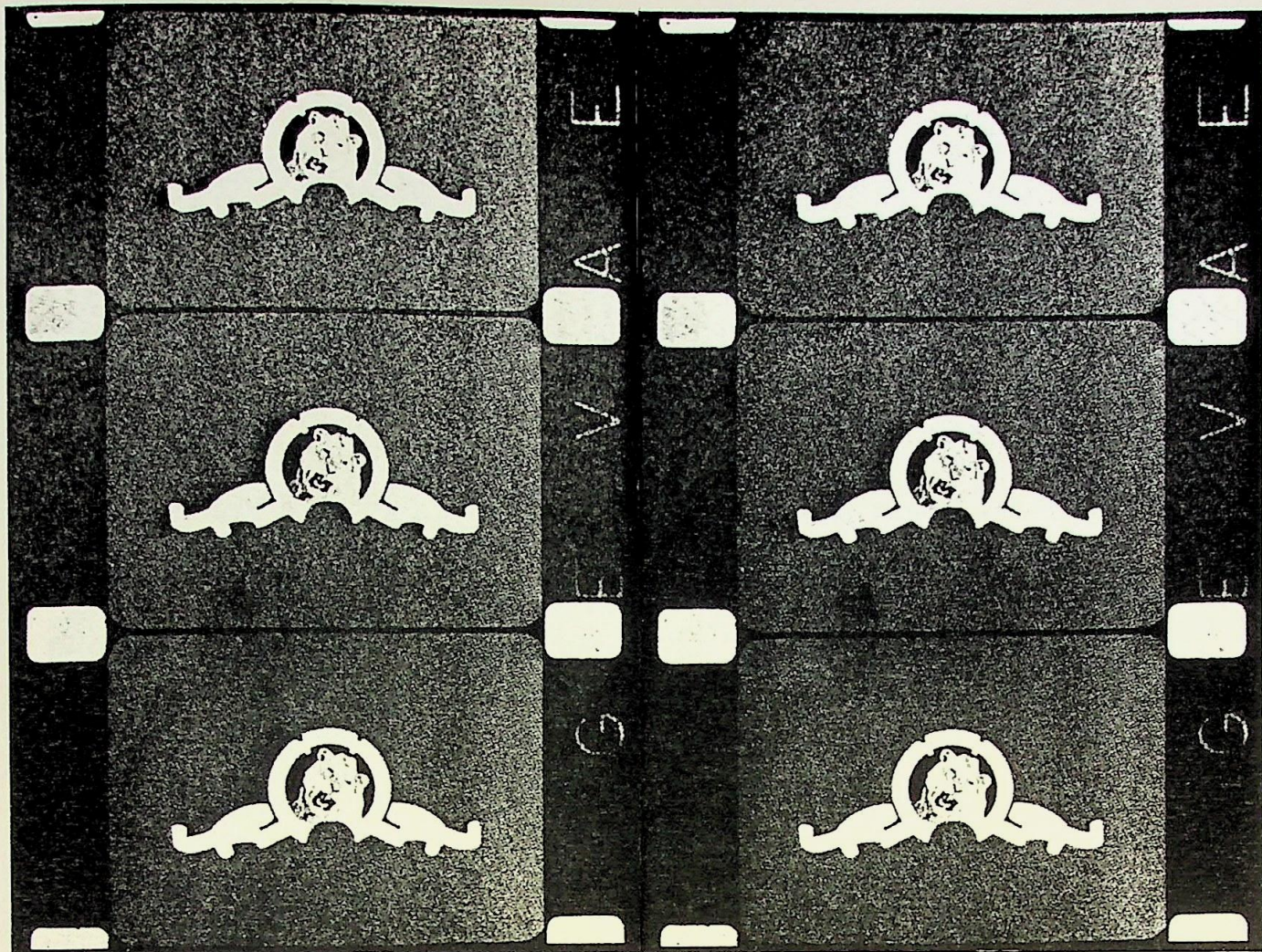
Jack Goldstein, *The Jump*, 1978. 16mm animated film, color.



Jack Goldstein, *The Jump*, 1978. 16mm animated film, color.

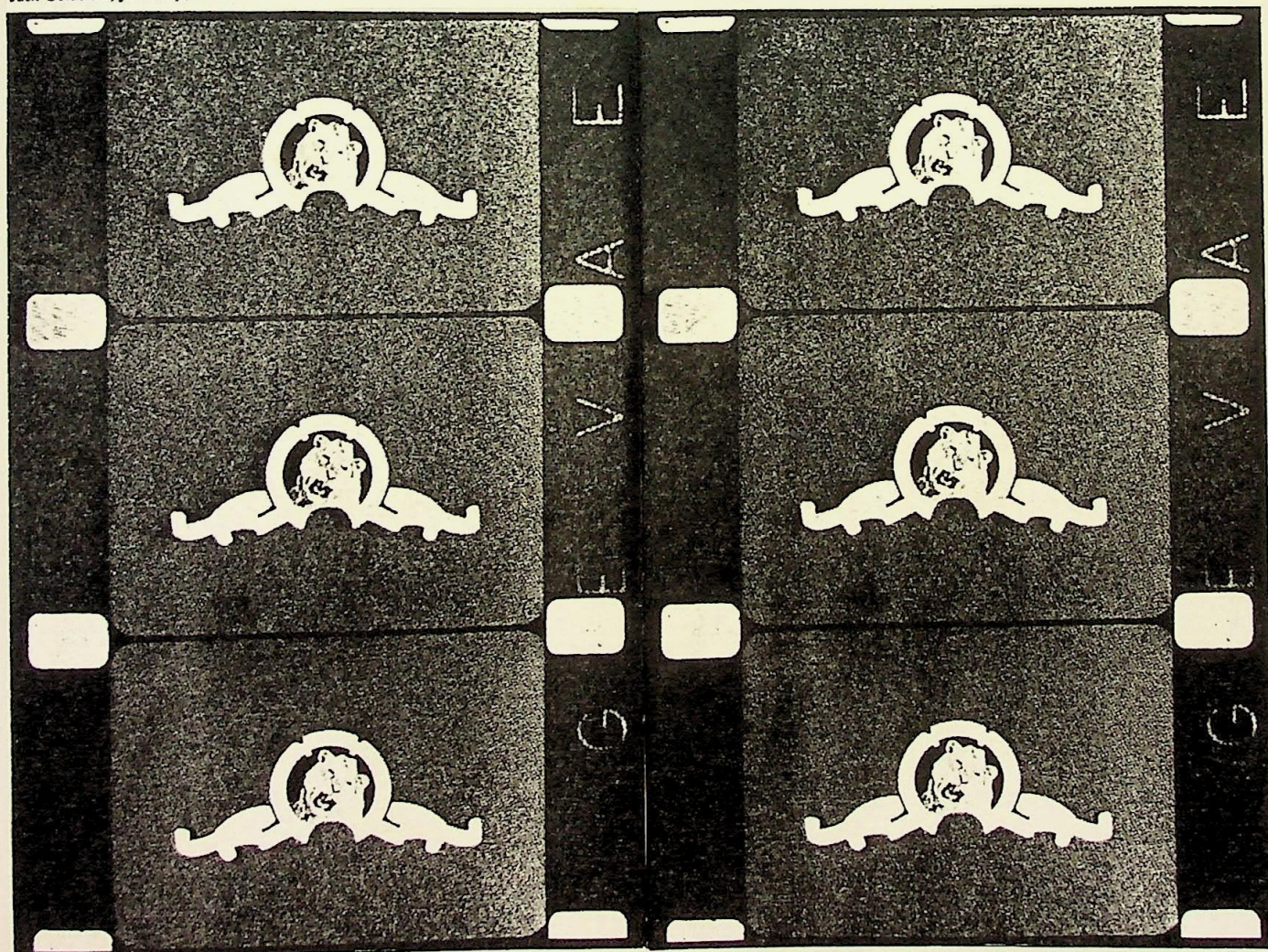


Jack Goldstein, *The Jump*, 1978. 16mm animated film, color.



Jack Goldstein, film loop, 1975

Jack Goldstein, film loop, 1975



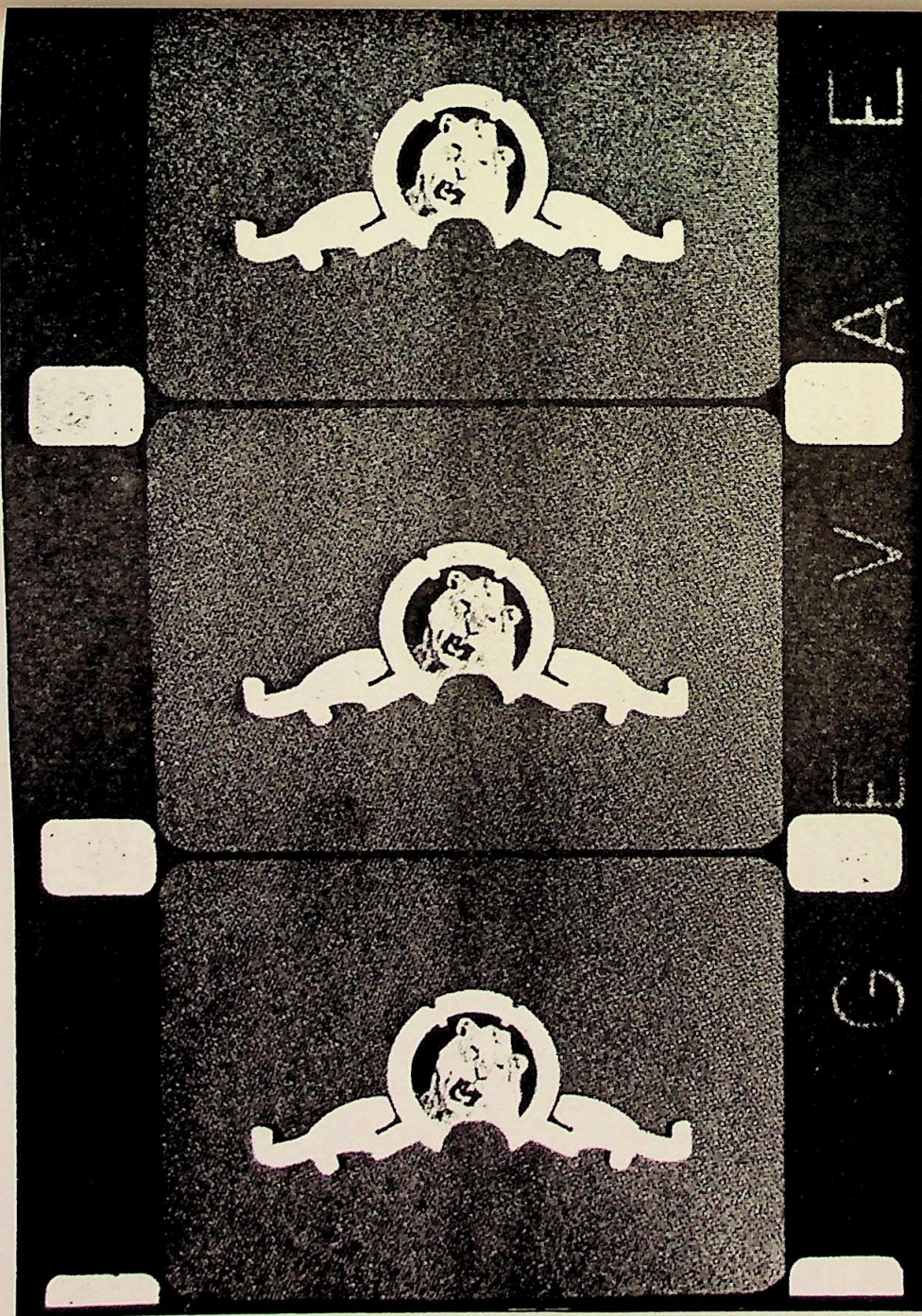
Jack Goldstein, film loop, 1975

Jack Goldstein, film loop, 1975

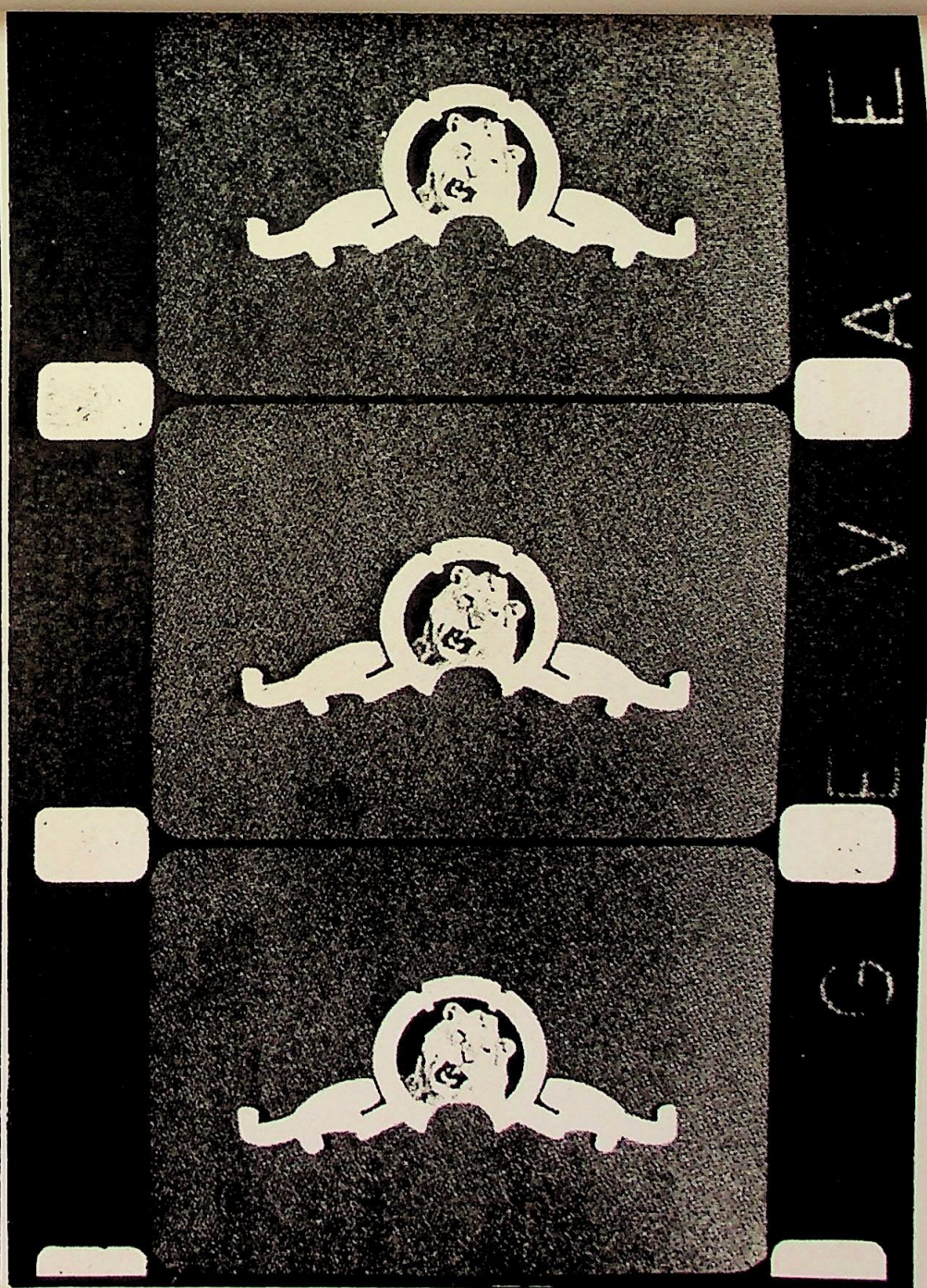
frame and disappears. This happens very quickly after which there is a pause and it happens again. The structural principal informing this film, as in most of Goldstein's work, is that of repetition. The film is shown as a loop so that this repetition is potentially endless. What you are struck by, is a feeling of expectation, anticipation, a feeling which is never quite satisfied. You wait for each dive, knowing more or less when it will come, yet each time it startles you, and each time it disappears before it can be comprehended, as if it existed on the threshold that allowed signification. By erasing the surrounding context of the diver, Goldstein isolates and heightens its presence only to deprive it of any specificity.

The processes employed by Goldstein to arrive at the image he eventually presents us with - involving as they do extravagant, obsessive manipulations - record a futile attempt to make the image render up the secrets that our culture has told us all images possess. Above all this film incessantly reiterates frustration with an image that can arouse desire but not fulfill it.

When Metro Goldwyn Mayer, the most powerful Hollywood conglomerate of its time came up with the idea of a roaring lion for their trademark, they created a metaphor for the medium of cinema itself. The medium roars. The senses are saturated. Seeing and hearing fuse with the image and sound flow that is film. By its very nature film is a high definition, high intensity medium and as such requires little or no participation by the spectator. As such it exists on the threshold of the hypnotic hold, its repetitive magic flickering demanding total submission. This is reinforced through the plot which engulfs the spectator in a role of identification and involvement with the narrative relations depicted. Of course the M.G.M. logo exists on the border of cinema as an announcement that something is about to happen. Its function is to command attention, to silence the auditorium.



Jack Goldstein, film loop, 1975



Jack Goldstein, film loop, 1975

The roaring lion as a corporate stamp of identity becomes a powerful symbol of 'media imperialism',¹¹ threatening total absorption in the collectivised spectacle that is cinema.

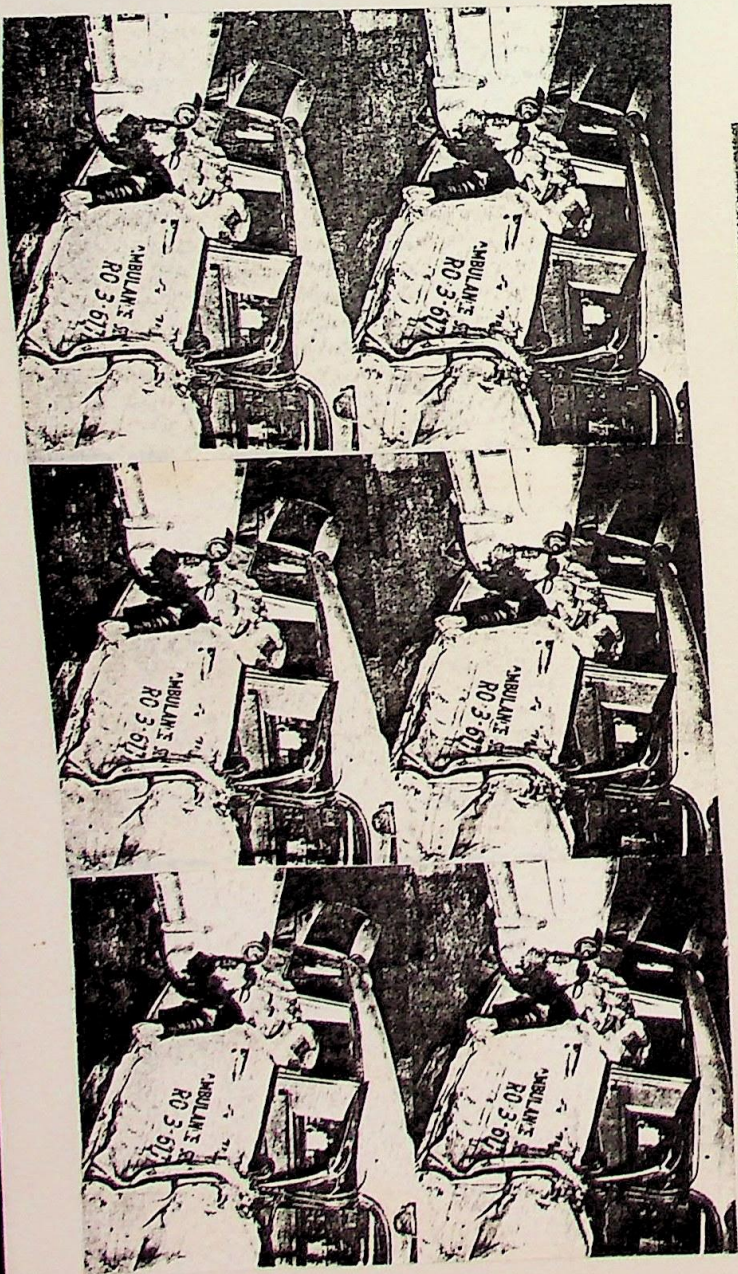
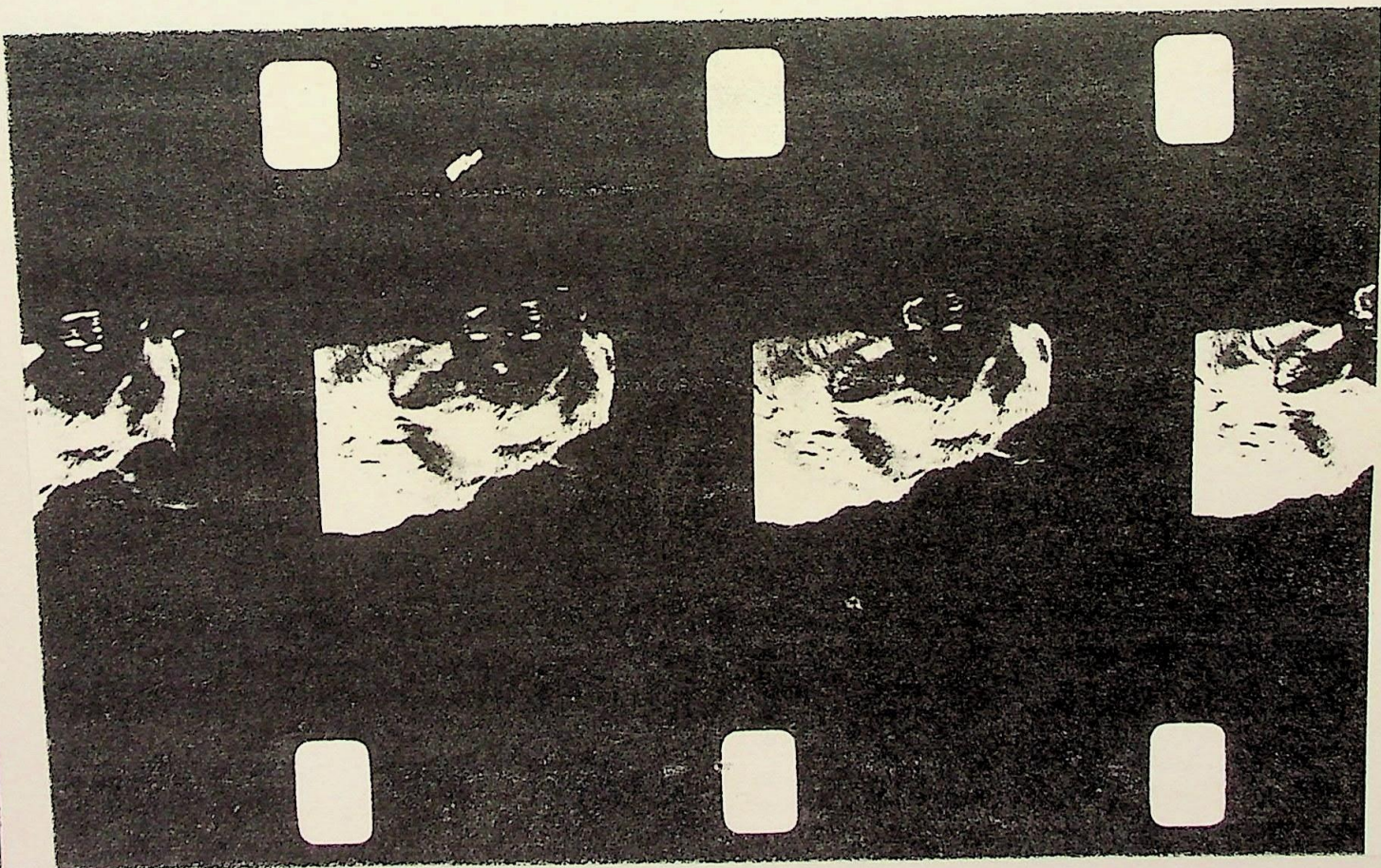
In 1975, Jack Goldstein re-presented the M.G.M. logo as a film loop (16mm/colour with sound) (Pl. 2) suspending the roaring lion in a neverending trap of repetition. The effect is shattering. Isolated from its original context it induces a terror in the spectator that was before only subliminally manipulated. What Goldstein has succeeded in doing is eliciting a blockage in the system of representation, he has created a 'mechanism of semantic disorder'.¹²

As John Mepham (1972) has written:

"Distinctions and identities may be so deeply embedded in our discourse and thought about the world whether this be because of their role in our practical lives, or because they are cognitively powerful and are an important aspect of the way in which we appear to make sense of our experience, that the theoretical challenge to them can be quite startling".¹³

Thus by the simple act of repetition, Goldstein has violated an authorised code (the M.G.M. logo) exposing meanings that which before were hidden by the momentum of our cultural conditioning.

Goldstein's use of the image differs considerably from that of other American artists in that it lays emphasis on the consumer rather than the producer of the image. And, as I hope to have shown, Goldstein's use of repetition operates considerably different to that say of Warhol, (Pl. 3) who's silk screen paintings containing repeated symmetrical images of car-crashes, suicides, electric chairs and race-riots tend to emphasise the indifference induced by mass-reproduction of and continual exposure to these images. On the other hand Goldstein and Warhol are similar in that they both perpetuate a casual indifference towards the culture by actively



distancing themselves from any sort of moralising rhetoric. This I believe gives an edge to their work which is both provocative and disturbing, and tends to hinder the process of assimilation.

At this point it can be seen that Goldstein seems to choose images which evoke an ambiguous response, which is further reinforced by the fragmentary nature of these images. Goldstein isolates the image at a point where it becomes apparent that its domination is total. And nowhere is this domination more apparent than in the sheer size and power of the cinematic image. In fact it could be said that Goldstein's work to some extent provides a critique of the cinematic experience and even aspires to the same level of falsity that this experience represents. David Salle has commented on this:

"There is in Goldstein's work almost a sense of allegiance to the conventions of commercial presentation, which becomes ironic because of his intention to locate a source of control over his imagistic environment. The obvious paradox lies in aligning one's art with the presentational modes which are used culturally to control and limit our sense of self, when one's goal is to distance or liberate oneself from that control and to establish a greater level of control".¹⁴

Bearing in mind these contradictions I would like to move on now and look at some of Goldstein's paintings. In particular a group of paintings executed in the late 70's, variously entitled 'the Jump' 'the Pull' and 'Spaceman' which all employ the motif of a tiny figure floating in a large field of pure colour. The space in these paintings is very like the space in Abstract Expressionist painting and here perhaps is a clue which will enable a means towards approaching an interpretation of these paintings.

It was during the turbulent period of the cold war that a group of artists were emerging who were later to become known as the "New York School" or Abstract Expressionists. According to Townsend Hoopes, who served in both the Truman and Johnson administrations, though the seeds were sown during the Truman administration, it was under the Eisenhower administration that the Cold War was "pervasively institutionalised in the United States". He described the Cold War's chief manifestations as "----- a strident moralism, a self-righteous and often apocalyptic rhetoric, a determined effort to ring the Soviet Union and China with anti-Communist military alliances, a dramatic proliferation of American overseas military bases, and a rising flow of American military equipment for foreign armies accompanied by American officers and men to provide training and advice. The posture of imperative, total confrontation, thus came to full development during the Eisenhower period."¹⁵

Abstract Expressionism emerged as the existential revolt/last stand of the isolated artistic 'self' in a world of endless consumerist diversion and fragmentation. The work produced was totally abstract, yet it intended to express a 'subject', namely, anxiety. Abstract Expressionism proposed a radical subjectivity which plunged the spectator into him/herself providing a dramatic spectacle of the artist's 'self' in relation to the spectator public. The irony is that at the same time that Abstract Expressionism was evolving it's oversized abstractly subjective painting, advertising forms also made a shift towards the oversized billboard, use of the colour photograph, the cinemascope wide screen and the picture magazine (Life, Look)formats which plunged the spectator inside the giant images. Like the viewers of an abstract Expressionist painting, the viewers of these new publicity formats inserts him/herself into a psychologically ambiguous space the absence of objectively signifying meaning thus allows the unconscious 'self' to project a personal meaning.

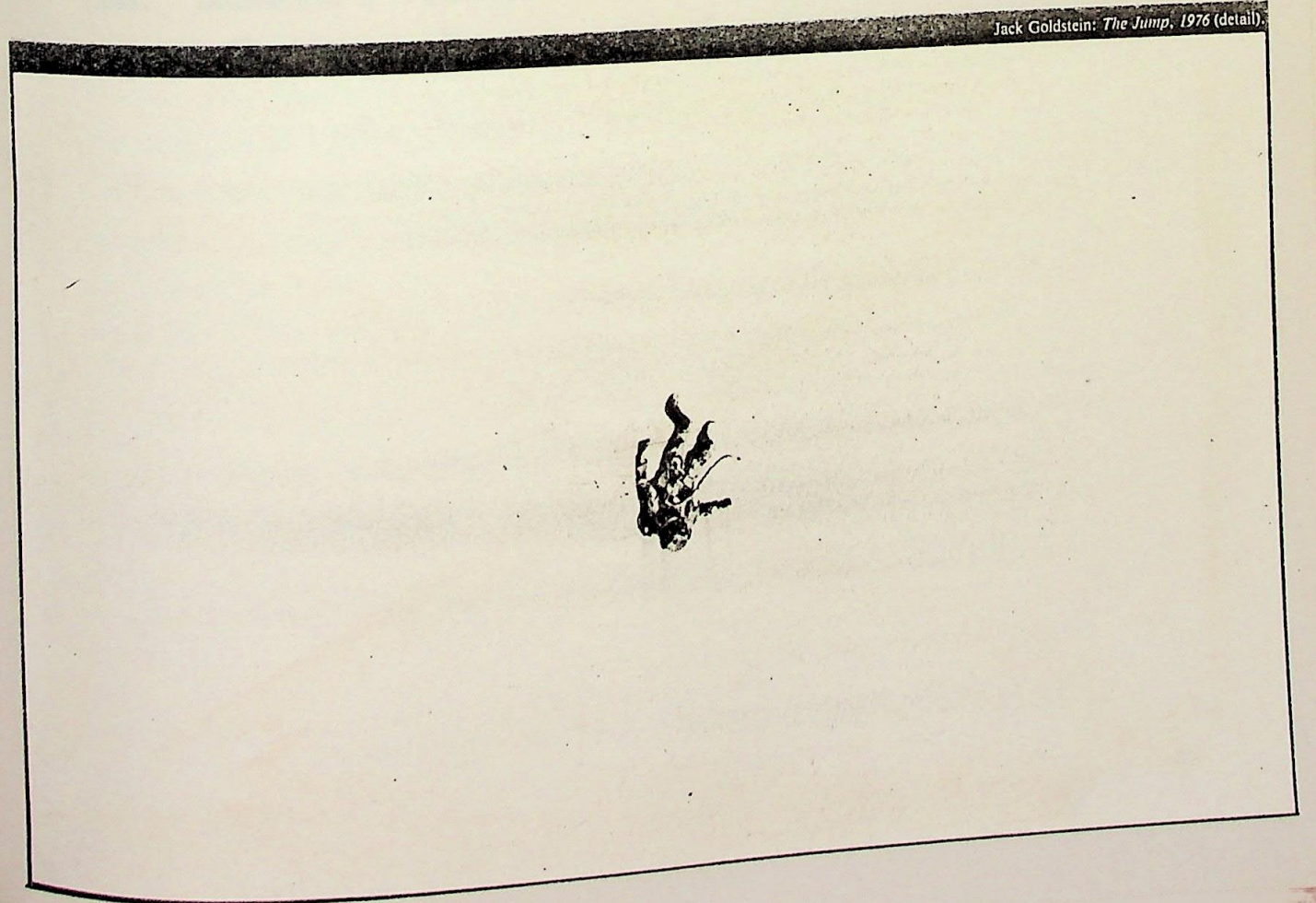
"To understand why a particular art movement becomes successful under a given set of historical circumstances requires an examination of the specifics of patronage and the ideological needs of the powerful".¹⁶

Eva Crockett.

Serge Guillbaut¹⁷ in a brilliant study of this period maintains that the international success of the Abstract Expressionists was not due solely to the aesthetic and stylistic innovations achieved by this work, but also even more to its ideological resonance. Central to this ideology were individuality, freedom and the willingness to take risks. The fact that this ideology coincided fairly closely with the 'new liberalism' set forth by Arthur Schlesinger jr. in 'The Vital Core', an ideology that came to dominate American political life during the 'Cold War' and that unlike ideologies of the conservative 'right' and communist 'left', not only made room for 'Avant Garde' dissidence, but accorded to such dissidence a position of paramount importance. Because of this Abstract Expressionism was able to package the virtues of liberal society and lay down a challenge to its enemies. It had become a symbol of the difference between a free society and a totalitarian one.

What had begun as 'radical' artistic innovation had been assimilated and had now become the 'New American Art' which the media were quick to sell to the rest of the world as yet more evidence of the superiority of the 'American Way of Life'. Radical art had become nationalistic propaganda with suggested funding by the C.I.A. at home and abroad.

It is ironic that an art which categorically refused to participate in political discourse and rejected content completely for a purer, transcendental form of expression which accentuated individuality, was coopted by liberalism which viewed this individuality as an excellent weapon with which to combat authoritarianism.



'Art and War use cold reason to immobilise imagination'

Jack Goldstein

An acknowledgement of these two ironies informs the group of paintings I have mentioned earlier by Jack Goldstein. The space in these paintings is very like the space in Abstract Expressionist paintings particularly the later large colour field paintings of Barnett Newman. In effect it could be said that Goldstein's paintings are literal interpretations of that work, representational rather than abstract.

"The Abstract Expressionist's used the canvas as a reference to a celestial space; painting a picture of outerspace theatrically embodies that connection".

Jack Goldstein.¹⁸

For Barnett Newman a field of pure colour was a way to awaken the senses to the sublime. Newman wanted people to be totally absorbed in the wall of pure colour. But no matter how big he made his paintings, he always complained that people tried to stand back from them. Goldstein's 'Spaceman' (Pl. 4) consists of an image of a spaceman floating in the huge void of a Newmanlike pure colour field. The scale of the spaceman encourages, indeed demands that the spectator comes close up, is pulled into the space of the canvas, thus overcoming the temptation to stand back and distance himself. Unlike Newman's pure unmediated voids, Goldstein's paintings by their very nature precipitate a narrative, perhaps the individual loss in the space of the media void.

"Art is not about wanting control over your subjective. Art is more about the futility of being conscious of your body in a world that makes body out-of-synch."

Jack Goldstein.¹⁹

Taking into account what has already been said about the fate of Abstract Expressionism, an art which expressed such infinite freedom for the artist, perhaps Goldstein reflects upon the irredeemable loss of that freedom, the umbilical cord has been finally cut through. This ironic metaphor thus justifies the attitudes that the pursuit of the new, which was such an important part of Modernism, has now become meaningless.

"The result of expression only determines the limits of self".
Jack Goldstein.²⁰

FOOTNOTESCHAPTER II

¹Frederic Jameson

"The Politics of Consumption" (essay)

The Anti-Aesthetic (1983)

²Michael Newman

Interview with Jack Goldstein

ZG No. 3 (1981) p.18

³Douglas Crimp

'Pictures

October No. 8, p. 76

⁴Rosalind Krauss

'Notes on the Index : Seventies Art in America'

October No. 3 and No. 4.

⁵Michael Newman

Interview with Jack Goldstein

ZG No. 3 (1981) p. 18.

⁶ibid

⁷Michael Compton

Pop Art : Movements of Modern Art. p. 163

⁸Douglas Crimp

'Pictures'

October 8. p.78.

⁹Roget's Thesaurus. p.191

¹⁰Michael Newman
Interview p. 18

¹¹Jermy Tunstall
The Media are American
London : Constable, 1977, p.38.

¹²Dick Hebridge
Subculture : The meaning of style. p.90

¹³John Mepham
The Struactualist Sciences and Philosophy
London : Cape, 1972, p.46.

¹⁴Thomas Lawson
'We must embrace our joys and sorrows'
ZG No. 3, p. 17.

¹⁵Walter Bowart
Operation Mind Control
Glasgow : Fontana, 1978, p. 138.

¹⁶Serge Guillbaut
How New York stole the idea of Modern Art'
Chicago and London : University of Chicago Press, 1983, 9.24

¹⁷Documenta 7/Kassel
catalogue 1982, p. 134

¹⁸ibid

¹⁹ibid

²⁰ibid

CHAPTER III

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

"Art made from media captures the spectacle which a 'self-destructive' civilization makes of itself." Jack Goldstein.¹

There is about Goldstein's work an air of impending doom an air of structural collapse. And a recent theme of his images is that of war and destruction. For the most part these images are enlargements of preexistent photographs which are translated and executed onto large canvases by assistants using the relatively standardised technique of commercial airbrushing. These images are spectacular representations of representation's of bomb-ravaged skylines. As in his earlier paintings the space in these paintings refers to the space in Abstract Expressionist paintings but also even more importantly to the cinema screen. Unlike the earlier paintings, though, these images insist that the spectator stand back, inducing, the kind of voyeuristic relationship one has with the cinematic image. And in fact aspire towards the same 'prismatic theatricality'² that is peculiar to the cinematic image.

In glorifying and spectacularising war the accusation of fascism, once leveled against the Futurists has been repeated. And here perhaps is a clue which will allow a means of interpreting this engrossing body of paintings. Filippo Marinetti proclaimed in one of his manifestoes that: "War is beautiful because it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the dream of metalization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow

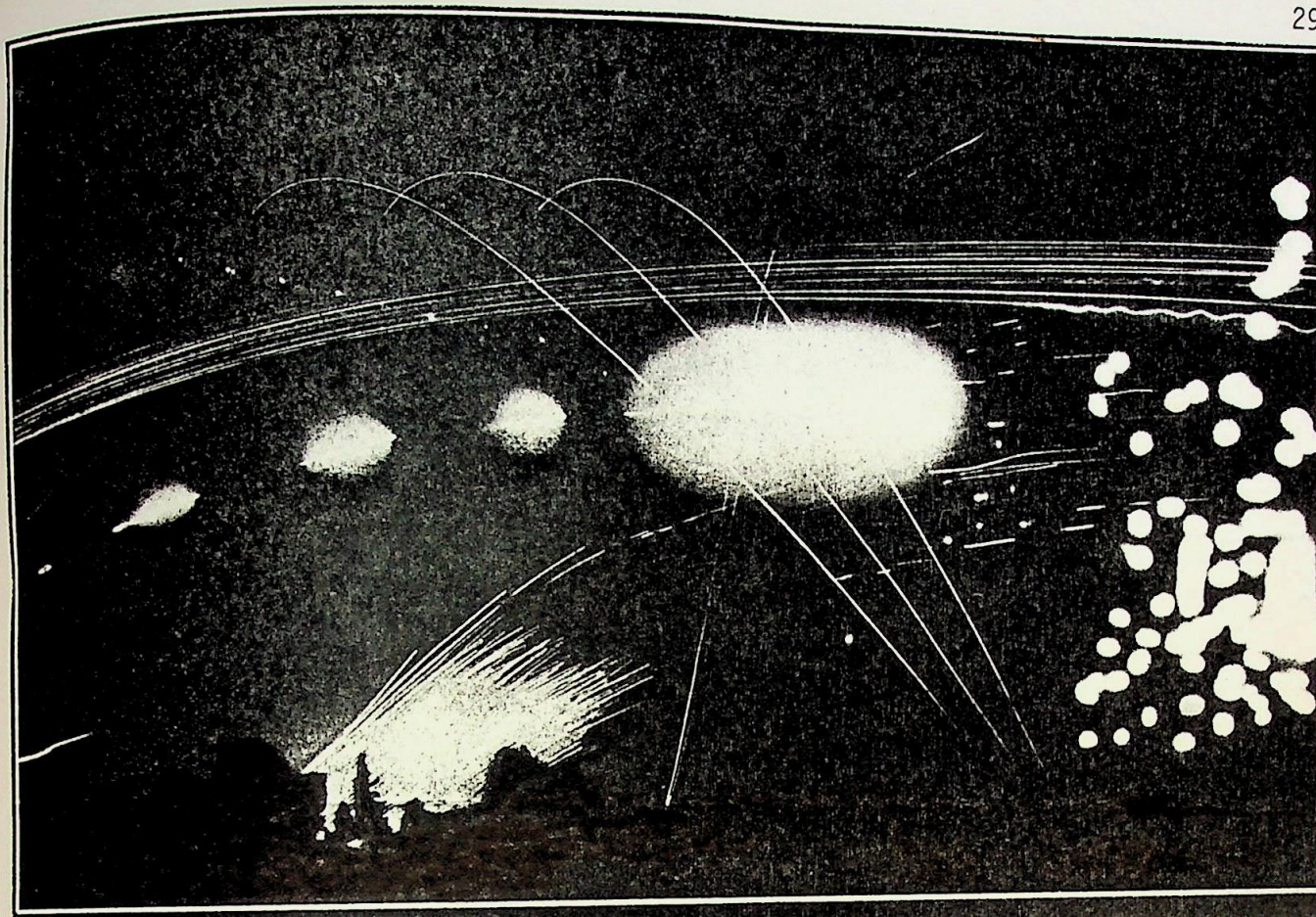
with the fiery orchids of machine guns. War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease fire, the scents and the stench of putrefaction into a symphony. War is beautiful because it creates new architecture, like that of the big tanks, the geometrical formation flights, the smoke spirals from burning villages, and many others poets and artists of futurism!..... remember these principals of an aesthetics of war so that your struggle for a new literature and a new graphic artmay be illuminated by them!³

Walter Benjihman interprets this as a sign that Mankind's "self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience it's own distruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order".⁴

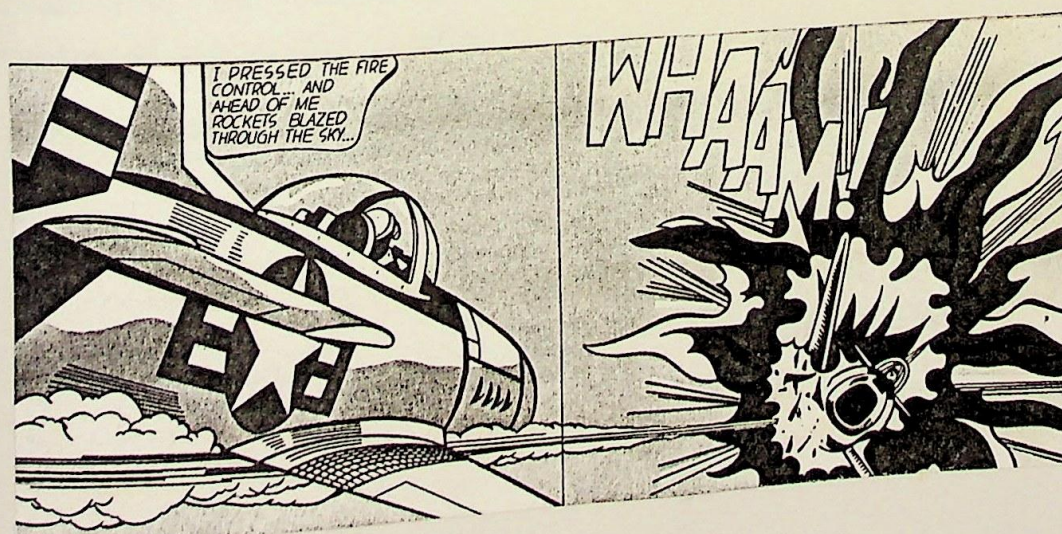
Many of the above aesthetic preoccupations it could be said also inform the more recent paintings of Jack Goldstein. Each of these paintings depict dramatic light effects against blank black/blue backgrounds. Identifiable silhouettes of aircraft, landscape or architecture provide the only contextual clues against which these streaks of light can be read. Although lacking in any specific historical data the imagery is familiar to anyone with even minimal exposure to newsreel footage of World War II. However, Goldstein's technical transformations of these images tends to obscure the types of activities described, alternating as they do between firebombs and fireworks.

"A Futuristic vision sees the display in destruction - a burning building is not too different than the 4th of July as celebration." Jack Goldstein.⁵

Therefore, it could be said, that Goldstein's choice of catastrophic images is of a very special kind, images who's actual horror is mitigated by the beauty of their forms. Like the truly traumatic image, Goldstein's images are concerned with a "suspension of language, a blocking of meaning",⁶ trapping the gaze at a critical



Jack Goldstein: *Untitled*, 1981. Metro Pictures



moment when they turn into spectacle. Spectacle's hypnotic allure lies in its ability to manipulate the contradictory predispositions of mastery of and submission to 'reality'. Confronted by a Goldstein painting the spectator becomes like the characters in George Bernard Shaw's 'Heartbreak House' who praised the sound of bombs overhead for their similarity to Beethoven's music.

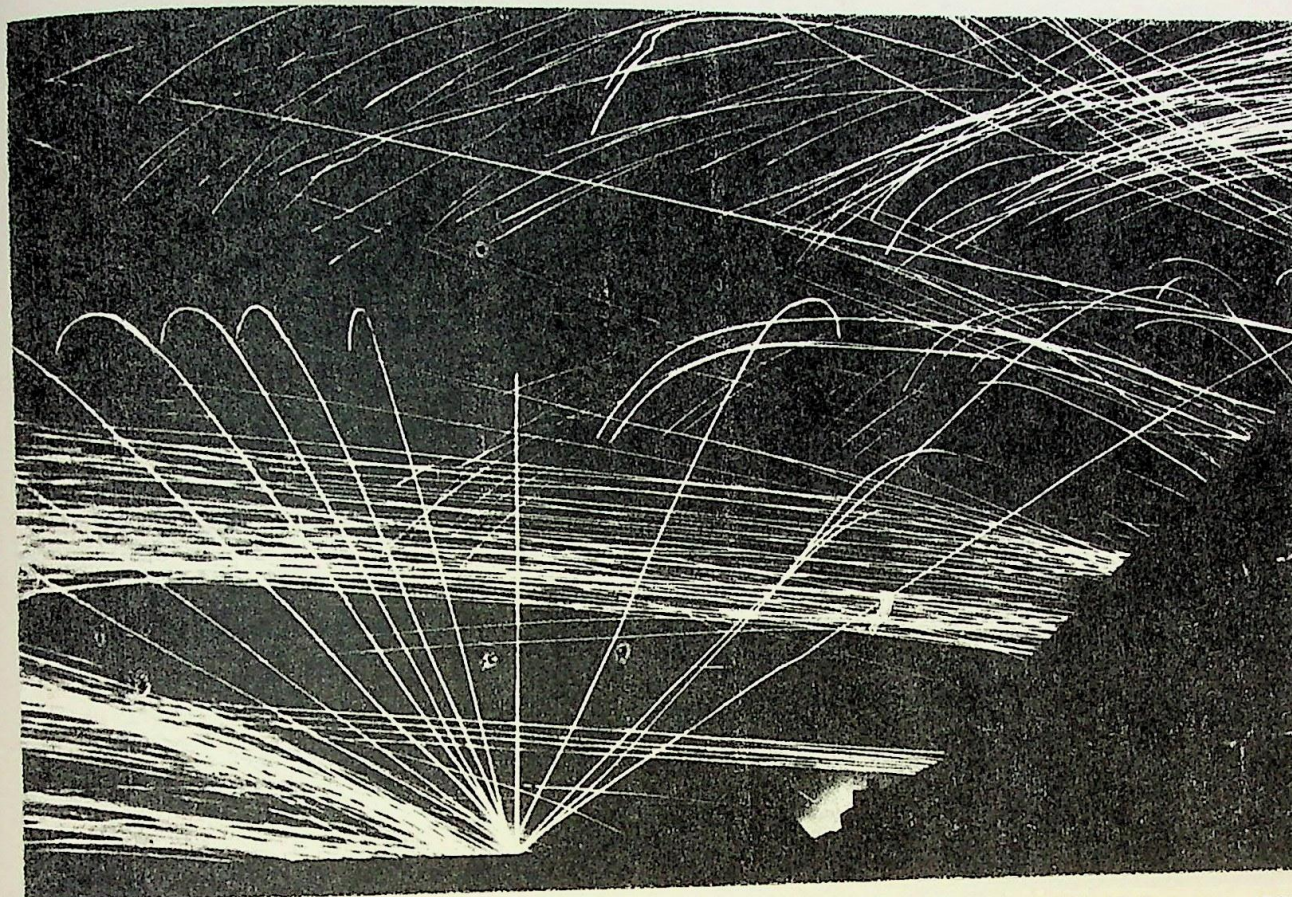
"An explosive is beauty before its consequences".

Jack Goldstein.⁷

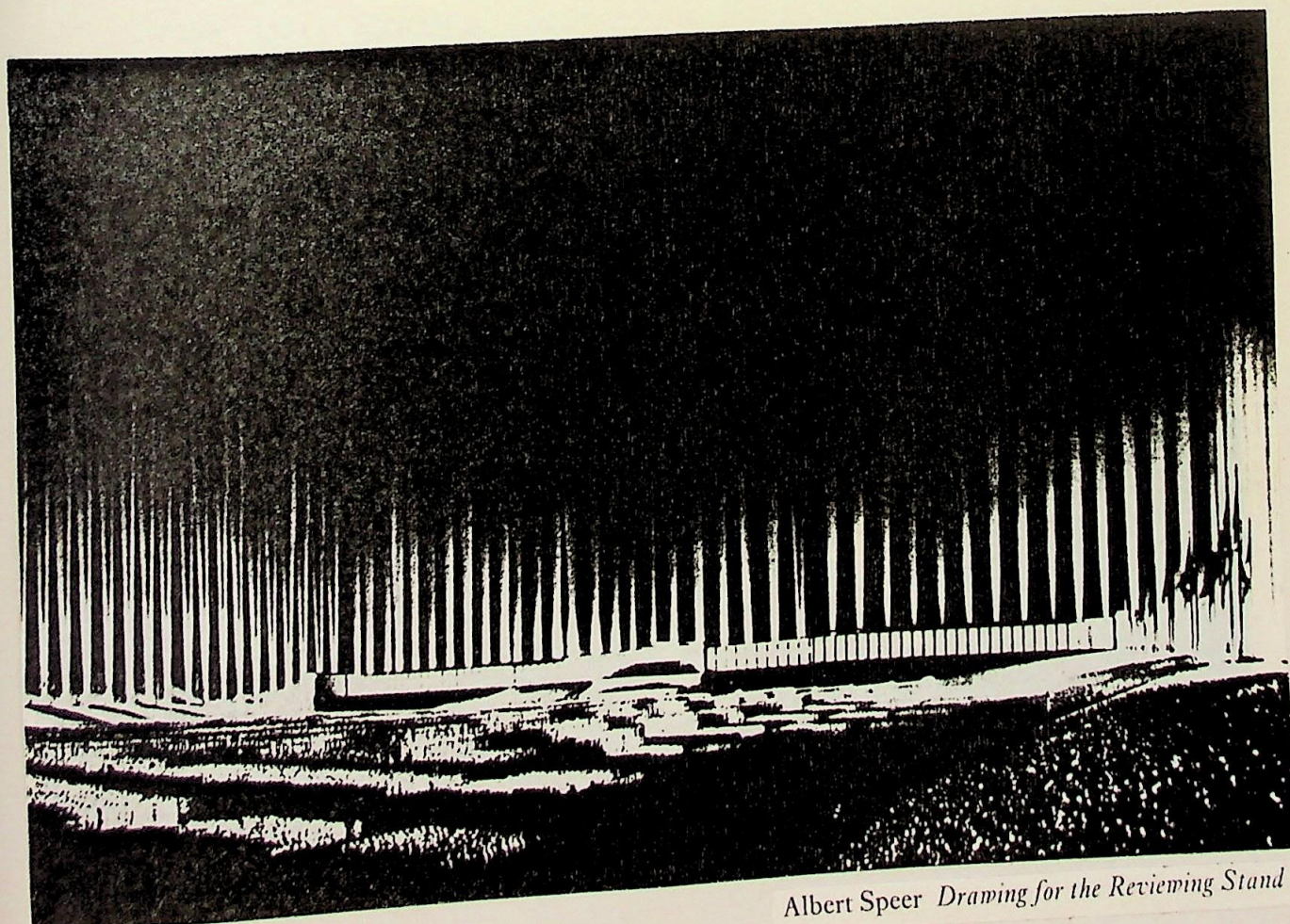
A parallel could be drawn here to the comic war paintings of Roy Lichtenstein. Think of 'Whaam!' (Pl. 5) a painting which freezes the decisive moment of conflict between two jet fighters, making use of an emblematic style of representation which precludes any sense of the horror of it's content. Lichtenstein's method of reworking such imagery pushes it even further towards the decorative. This is an example of what Raymond Williams has called the 'culture of distance'⁸: the spectator is distanced, protected from the reality of war by the sterile style of representation. Lichtenstein makes this distinction so obvious that the painting begins to acquire a critical edge. Of course Goldstein's paintings are much more subtle much more seductive and by refusing to define the activity involved clearly he guarantees the attention of the spectator while encouraging the projection of whatever personnel or collective phantasies are evoked by them.

"I take the position that whatever I think and feel is how a lot of people think and feel, so it's my own private world but really there is no private world - we all suffer from the same angst so it's not any more me than it is you."

Jack Goldstein.⁹



Untitled/ Goldstein , 1981
Acrylic on canvas/
213,5 x 335,5 cm



Albert Speer *Drawing for the Reviewing Stand*

Therefore what is most important about these paintings and indeed the film loops and audio records is the registration of that moment of exchange between the spectator and the work. By duplicating certain routine media manipulations (reproduction, standardisation, selective emphasis of particular features, repetition) Goldstein emphasises the power of these images to intentionally or unintentionally effect our knowledge of and our perceptual and emotional responses to the subjects these images represent. But imitating the methods and language of media in order to expose a largely invisible cultural conditioning is also a way of affirming it and submitting one-self to it. So Goldstein's struggle for control within a media culture fluctuates between domination and submission, the contradictory desires which the media image solicits, and which David Salle refers to as "the twin desires of rebellion and fatalism".¹⁰

Goldstein's work continues to be controversial, refusing as it does to offer any resolutions, and his vision of the world is a hideously limited one, but it's also savagely accurate.

"The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old order is dying and the new cannot be born; in the interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear".

Antonio Gramsci/Sherrie Levine.¹¹

Jack Goldstein

New York/USA

Media is sensational.

Light is the gesture of progress; a far-off view of a city at night gives a reading of the pulse of man.

Painting from a photograph produces a clean 'negative' of art without expression.

An explosive is beauty before its consequences.

Art and War use cold reason to immobilize imagination.

Art is not about wanting control over your subjective.
Art is more about the futility of being conscious of your body in a world that makes body out-of-synch.

Technology does everything for us so that we no longer have to function in terms of experience. We function in terms of esthetics.

Sky is the meeting ground for what art and world desire.
Technology is as abstract as Expressionism.

Tapping on danger zones realizes the distance in escape and attraction.

A Futuristic vision sees the display in destruction - a burning building is not too different than the 4th of July as celebration.

The horizon line double-exposed can be read formally, as a silhouette, but technically it is the documentation of an event: earthquake, war, etc.

Dangerous objects are glamorous places to be.

Expression resides in energy: concentrated, controlled. A bomb is a detonation of expression under control.

The Abstract Expressionists used the canvas as a reference to a celestial space; painting a picture of outer-space theatrically embodies that connection.

Art made from media captures the spectacle which a 'self-destructive civilization' makes of itself.

Art should be a trailer for the future.

Painting has been reduced to a word or indicator for art object: painting means like movie screen.

Opticality, in art based on media, actuates content.

Presentation is all about attitude.

A black and white picture gets you to think in black and white. The viewing time for contemplating esthetics is interrupted by the fact that the picture was taken and the question of why it was taken.

Sensibility is defined by the degree of restraint that is put into a work.

Technology is as detached, impartial, cold, and ruthless as time.

The result of expression only determines the limits of 'self'.

Spontaneity is a metaphor for risk.

A close-up of what can only be seen from a distance is as close as we can come to a true abstraction.

Sky is to the 20th Century what landscape was to the 19th Century.

The by-products of culture symbolize our position in the world. The details of living prevent us from seeing symbolically.

Paintings are like movie-sets that showcase special effects as edited from a world narrative.

Media is what you re-present when you're representing everyone.

Michael Newman talks to Jack Goldstein

Jack Goldstein: *Untitled*, 1981. Metro Pictures

MN: You have had your records, films and, most recently, paintings fabricated for you. You make a distinction between 'medium' and 'media'. What, exactly, do you mean by that distinction?

JG: I use the language of the media, the language that is given to me, that communicates to me. I think of my films as being like commercials — 3 minute shorts. It's not a question of thinking about it in formal terms, because the language is basically given to you: you make a film based upon motion pictures or the kind of commercials you see, you make a record based on sound effects. You don't question those things. And maybe that's the split with a lot of earlier work in that it's not formalistic: it's based on the language of the culture that you live in. You're passive to it, you accept the fact that it manipulates and controls you and you in turn manipulate and control the audience that is tuned into your work by using the same processes that the culture utilizes. It's to do with liking the culture and not wanting to extricate yourself from it in any way.

MN: So your work perpetuates the values of the culture. You don't feel critical?

JG: No.

MN: Then do you use your work to highlight aspects of the culture?

JG: There's a double edge to that, right. It's a little like saying: Is Warhol decadent? Is his work vulgar, narcissistic, perpetuating those things? Or is he pointing out that the culture is decadent and narcissistic? It's not a moral issue: are you for it or against it? There is that ambiguity within the work.

MN: Let's look at the kind of images that you use in your paintings: military airplanes, fires, bombings. There's a sense of power, destruction, apocalypse.

JG: Spectacle.

MN: The space in your painting reminded me of the space in Abstract Expressionist painting. But then you're putting within that space, images of power and destruction which suggest something about its origin, which is concealed in the apocalyptic abstraction of a painter like Jackson Pollock, but is foregrounded by the sorts of images which you put in that space.

JG: I totally agree. I can look at Pollock, Rothko and Newman now and I think of myself as a literal interpretation of that work — a representational and not an abstract interpretation. The Europeans dealt with a very practical kind of space whereas the Americans dealt with a metaphysical space: it was theatrical, above the physical, transcendental.

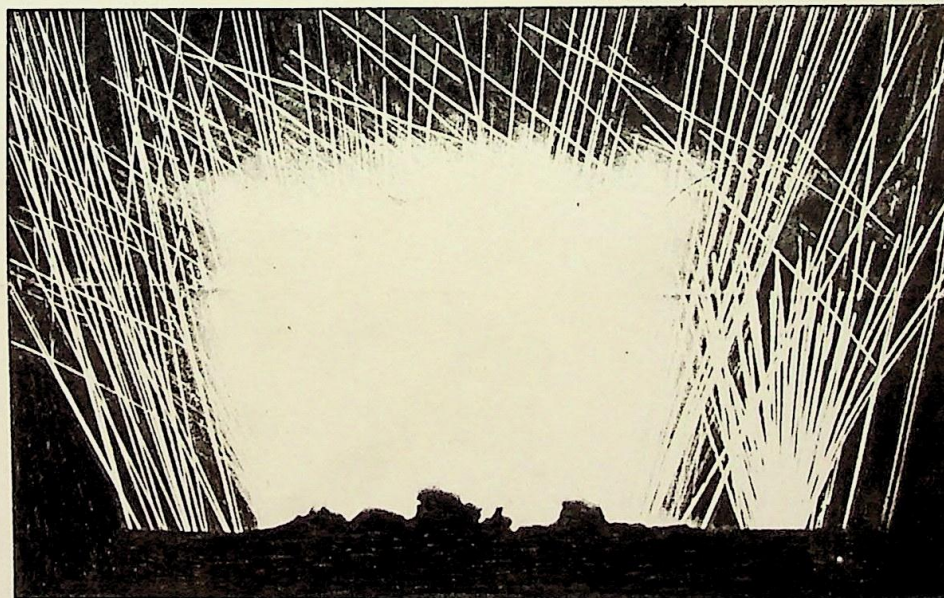
MN: The theatricality of your work is a Hollywood theatricality.

JG: If I'm going to shoot a film of you, you put on makeup, we control the lighting, the background, we control everything that takes place inside of that frame. So it's highly manipulative. Early on I started to do some performances and because I didn't want to deal with an audience, moving into film was a way to eliminate that element. I could set up a situation, manipulate it and control it and not have to worry about the audience because I could resort to editing. Which is what media, once again, is all about: something that's highly edited. But the editing is not revealed to you, you don't reveal the tracings; there's no erasure, you don't see it, and that's very important to me. Unfortunately real life is about leaving traces and seeing those marks.

MN: Your work doesn't reveal your own hand because you get somebody else to make it for you. It has nothing to do with authenticity.

JG: Right. I don't understand those terms authenticity, creativity, expressionistic.

MN: Authenticity implies that you are the source, so you have a responsibility for every gesture that you make. Whereas what you are arguing, it seems to me, is that your role is a very limited one, almost disappears altogether because there are so many givens from the culture and the language is determined before you even start.



JG: Yes, that's right. Whether you agree with it or not, it makes sense. Media does that to you. Media makes you feel inferior, it's so technological. It's like advertising.

MN: Advertising is to sell products. If your work uses the same means of control and manipulation what, then, is it instrumental towards?

JG: That's complicated. My involvement with media was all about setting up my own artificial reality based upon an artificial reality to begin with. I could use it in a very introverted way: I could close my door and play these records, have a girl sobbing, an airplane dropping bombs, a cowboy on a horse going through water. I could create an artificial world based upon my mind and not based upon a physical confrontation with the world. Art, until very recently, has always dealt with facticity, something that was very real, something that was experienced. What I'm dealing with is much more like a dream reality or an artificial reality, a reality that you can control because it's not based upon physical contact. Like watching TV: I can get involved with that visually, vicariously, because I'm not going to suffer the consequences. The Vietnam war was a dinner war on TV that you got to see at 6 o'clock every night. And in the next war, we're going to have anchormen in all the places where the action is and we are going to see it right away. They are going to frame it for us, show us the angles that we should see. I saw the attempted assassination of Reagan backwards and forwards, in slow motion and fast motion, in colour and black and white, in single frame and from every conceivable angle.

MN: So the world itself becomes art, it becomes a spectacle.

JG: Exactly. Rauschenberg and Johns talked about that, and so did Kaprow and Warhol: where's the line between life and art? It's also a time of passivity now. It's a time in which you don't have to fight for anything any more like in the '60s and '70s, have causes, the bitterness, the anguish, the right and the wrong, the left and the right and the middle and all that garbage. It's not about all that, and it's not about ownership. Getting back to that word 'authenticity' once again; authenticity implies ownership. When you start to think about it, the other side is really more dangerous than what I'm talking

about. Because my work is the reflection of a culture; it's not about ownership so I don't have to fight for it. It doesn't belong to me; it never did, it just passes through me. I take the position that whatever I think and feel is how a lot of people think and feel: so it's my own private world but, really, there is no private world — we all suffer from the same angst so it's not any more me than it is you.

MN: The subjects that you use in your work seem to suggest that you're very concerned with death.

JG: Have you heard the record of the man drowning? A six minute drown. They didn't have a record of a man drowning in the library, so I took the record of somebody choking and the sound of somebody splashing in the water and put them together.

MN: Are you afraid of dying.

JG: I'm not afraid of death, I'm afraid of dying: long, arduous, prolonged, painful.

MN: Is that an anxiety in the work?

JG: Yes. I also think it's an anxiety in the culture. Everything is so arbitrary. That's what's so interesting about technology: it's trying to obviate, to do away with that which is arbitrary, to control every aspect of every single moment so that you have ultimate control over everything... When you talk about control and manipulation, obviously you're talking about the conscious element of us because the unconscious is chaotic. Maybe my preoccupation with death is because it is that which is unpredictable, which we can't control. We can control everything else but we can't control death. There was an aphorism that I wrote years ago: it was something to the effect that a man committed suicide by performing a triple somersault out of a tenth story window — a triple somersault, so he controlled the timing of his death rather than it just being a straight fall. He controlled the space between where he jumped off and the ground.

MN: And that fascinates you?

JG: Being in control of death.

MN: Is that related to your parachutist?

JG: Yes, it's not a free fall.

FOOTNOTESCHAPTER III

¹Documenta 7/Kassel
catalogue 1982 p. 134

²Metrope Lolis
ZG No. 9, p. 8

³Walter Benjihman
Illuminations
London : Fontana, 1973 p.243

⁴ibid p. 244

⁵Documenta 7/Kassel
catalogue p. 134

⁶Metrope Lolis
ZG No. 9, p. 8

⁷Documenta 7/Kassel
p. 134

⁸Raymond Williams
Culture and Society, Penguin (1961) p. 73.

⁹Documenta 7/Kassel
p.134

¹⁰Metrope Lolis

¹¹Documenta 7/Kassel
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