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Bennett-Carpenter - The Divine Simulacrum of Andy Warhol - JCRT 1.3

The Divine Simulacrum of Andy Warhol: Baudrillard's Light on the Pope of Pop's "Religious Art"

a review of *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, Jane Daggett Dillenger. (New York: Continuum, 1998); 128 pages, \$39.95.

By Benjamin Bennett-Carpenter

From explicitly religious art to art that 'is, but isn't' 'religious,' from that which lies beyond art, such as objects of veneration, to a postmodern iconography of simulacra, Andy Warhol contributes significantly to the negotiation of twentieth, and now twenty-first, century culture in America and beyond.' His influence on contemporary art, religion and culture is recognized and will continue to increase as thinkers pursue questions about image and reality, representation, originality, visual culture, identity, and sexuality, not to mention technology, spirituality, business, and God.' Of Warhol's multiple contributions, several stand out in particular.' Warhol's explicitly religious art, especially brought to light in Jane Daggett Dillenger's recent publication, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, reveals a transformation of traditional religious images and themes into lively twentieth century religious art.' But beyond his explicitly religious works as highlighted by Daggett Dillenger's book, one can see that Warhol's entire *oeuvre* has 'religious' qualities, producing an art that 'is, but isn't,' religious.' Further, Warhol is significant for his part in what Jean Baudrillard calls the 'disappearance of art,' a kind of transfiguration of art into objects of veneration.' Finally, in line with Baudrillard's thought regarding the 'successive phases of the image' and the 'disappearance of God' into simulacra, Warhol produces images like that of Marilyn Monroe that no longer represent reality but offer a simulacra, a never-ending play of signs among signs stretching to infinity.

2. As early as 1964, Warhol received the tag of 'Saint Andy.'¹ This title, however, referred more to his immense popularity among the young Pop and independent film crowd, and to the authentically innocent fa'ade of Warhol's physical appearance than to religious devotion.' Not until his death did news of Warhol's relationship to the spiritual come to serious attention by the public.' John Richardson's eulogy of Warhol at his memorial mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in the spring of 1987 asked his audience to 'recall a side of [Warhol's] character that he hid from all but his closest friends: his spiritual side,' calling this spirituality 'the key to the artist's psyche.' ' He recalled Warhol's devoutly Catholic upbringing, his visits late in life to his local church, and his assistance to the homeless at a shelter.' 'To my certain knowledge,' said Richardson, ' he was responsible for at least one conversion,' and 'took considerable pride in financing a nephew's studies for the priesthood.' ' Richardson compared Warhol to a 'yurodstvo'one of those saintly simpletons who haunt Russian fiction and Slavic villages, such as Mikova in Ruthenia, whence the Warhols stemmed.' ' He argued that Warhol felt great compassion for the burn-outs at The Factory (Warhol's studio) and more than once saved them from self-destruction.' Finally, he noted that in the last few years of Warhol's life,

¹Philip Leider, 'Saint Andy,' *Artforum* 3, no. 5 (December 1964): 26-28; and Robert Rosenblum, 'Saint Andrew,' *Newsweek* 64, December 7, 1964, 100-104.' While referring to Andy Warhol as 'Andy' may suggest more intimacy or familiarity and 'Warhol' more distance, my somewhat arbitrary use of either one at various points has tried to keep with the way others refer to him: in this case, sometimes 'Andy' and more frequently 'Warhol.' ' Of course, Andy Warhol was originally 'Andrew Warhola.'

explicitly religious themes revealed themselves in his art work, more importantly in the *Last Supper* series that constituted the final show of his life.²

3. Following the eulogy came several articles regarding Warhol's relationship to religion, especially Robert Pincus-Witten's 1989 piece, 'Pre-Margins of Error, Saint Andy's Devotions.' In 1992, two important works on art and religion appeared that included discussions of Warhol: Paul Giles' *American Catholic Arts and Fictions* and Mark C. Taylor's *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion*.³ In the fall of 1996, the very first issue of the journal of *Religion and the Arts* was dedicated to Warhol. This issue featured an introduction by Reva Wolf, and articles by Zan Schuweiler Daab and Jane Daggett Dillenger.⁴ Up to this point, reported Wolf, most art critical works took no account of Warhol's relationship to Catholicism, nor how that relationship figured into his work. But, she continues, 'Warhol and Catholicism has now become a subject of intellectual inquiry.'⁵ In 1997, Raymond Herbenick published *Andy Warhol's Religious and Ethnic Roots: The Carpatho-Rusyn Influence on his Art*, primarily a review of a number of texts on Warhol read from the author's personal knowledge of Warhol's cultural heritage.⁶ Most recently, in 1998, Jane Daggett Dillenger's *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol* became available through Continuum, standing as the most prominent work to date on the subject of Warhol's relationship to religion. She begins retracing much of the important biographical material related to Warhol's religious upbringing. She then proceeds with her central task: presenting Warhol's explicitly religious art.'''
4. Daggett Dillenger reports that from an early age art and religion intermingled for Warhol. Baptized as a child at St. John Chrysostom Byzantine Catholic Church, Andy and his family regularly attended and had plenty of time to consider the elaborate iconostasis screen with its many devotional images. In contrast to Western Catholic churches where sculptures and paintings invite private devotion and cultivate an atmosphere for worship, Byzantine churches especially venerate 'the visual image, the religious icon, which engages the viewer, having a function equivalent to that of scripture.' Most of the rooms in the Warhola home had an icon; a replication of Leonardo's *Last Supper* and a crucifix were also to be found. Daggett Dillenger writes, 'Thus, Andy's earliest experience of art was religious art' unlike for many Protestants or those outside the churches whose experience of religious art may have been limited to museums, for Andy, art and religion were linked from a very early age.'⁷
5. Daggett Dillenger begins tracing Warhol's explicitly religious art with his *Cross* series (1981-1982), made for a show in Madrid called 'Guns, Knives, and Crosses.' With black background and various colors, the large but simple military-like crosses hover in rows as in

²John Richardson, 'Eulogy for Andy Warhol,' [1987] in *Andy Warhol: Heaven and Hell Are Just One Breath Away! Late Paintings and Related Works, 1984-1986*, essay by Charles Stucky, foreword by Vincent Fremont (New York: Gagosian Gallery and Rizzoli International Publications, 1992), 140. Richardson's eulogy is reprinted in its entirety in Jane Daggett Dillenger's *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 13-14.

³Reva Wolf, 'Introduction: A Radio and a Crucifix,' *Religion and the Arts* 1:1 (Fall 1996): 11; noting Robert Pincus-Witten, 'Pre-entry: Margins of Error; Saint Andy's Devotions,' *Arts Magazine* 63, no. 10, Summer 1989, 58-9; Paul Giles, *American Catholic Arts and Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴*Religion and the Arts* 1:1 (Fall 1996).

⁵Wolf, 12, 14.

⁶Raymond M. Herbenick, *Andy Warhol's Religious and Ethnic Roots: The Carpatho-Rusyn Influence on his Art* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).

⁷Daggett Dillenger, 19. See also page 116. For an excellent account of the book, see Eleanor Heartney's review 'Andy's Icons,' *Art in America*, June 1999, 35-36.

a cemetery.⁸ She points to his *Eggs* (1982), a colorful collection of egg shapes recalling the Byzantine practice of painting eggs at Easter time.⁹ The series entitled *Details of Renaissance Paintings* (1984-1985) includes overt religious material as in the reworking of Leonardo's *The Annunciation*, Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Duca Federico* and *Saint Apollonia*, Paolo Uccello's *St. George and the Dragon*, and Raphael's *The Sistine Madonna*.¹⁰ Warhol drew with pencil on paper a work entitled *Modern Madonna* (ca. 1980-1981), 'a twentieth century version of the Madonna Lactans, or the Mother with the nursing Christ child.'¹¹ Closing her comments on Warhol's 'first religious paintings,' she turns to his *Shadows* series (1978) which 'unfold on walls, creating a nighttime world, a shifting kaleidoscope of brilliant, life-full color set against black shadows of final darkness.' They invoke 'the Sublime' with 'the grandeur of conception and the delicacy of the abstract expressionist's most profound' spiritual works such as '[Barnett] Newman's *Stations of the Cross* and Mark Rothko's paintings for the Rothko Chapel in Houston, and Cleve Gray's fourteen *Threnody* paintings in Purchase, New York.'¹²

6. Daggett Dillenberger notes Warhol's new employment of *momento mori* 'remember that you must die'¹³ in the *Death and Disaster* series and the *Skull* paintings.' She tells us, 'Between 1962 and 1967 Warhol did silkscreen paintings of suicides, car crashes, the atomic bomb, the electric chair, race riots, and death by poisoning and by earthquake.' These paintings range from the gruesome *Car Crash* paintings to the *Electric Chair* series, which is a meditation on mortality and death.¹⁴ *Suicide* (1963), 'elegiac, or meditative, in mood' is based on a photograph from *Life* magazine in which a twenty-three year old woman has jumped from the observation deck of the Empire State building and lies on the indented roof of a car.' Initially somewhat abstract, the image of the woman emerges as a tranquil 'sleeping beauty' in which a tragedy is 'metamorphized' by the repeated frames into a meditative and disturbing *momento mori*.¹⁵ The electric chair paintings (1963, 1965, 1967) show the execution chamber at Sing Sing penitentiary in New York, the last executions taking place there in 1963 when Warhol began the series.' The image shows an empty room except for the electric chair and a small sign in the background that reads 'Silence.' Warhol's use of light and the encroachment of darkness in the repeated frames suggest 'a meditation of death.' And, in the later single frame images such as *Big Electric Chair* (1967), 'the chair is transformed from a grotesque instrument of death into a numinous object, suggesting transcendence, much as the cross, which was used for a particularly cruel kind of execution, is seen in Christian art as a symbol pointing to salvation.'¹⁶ Finally, Daggett Dillenberger notes Warhol's *Skull* paintings, reminiscent of the seventeenth-century *vanitas* portraits in which the figure is juxtaposed by a skull, reminding the viewer of 'the transience of life and the certainty of death.'¹⁷

⁸Daggett Dillenberger, 44-47.

⁹Ibid, 48-49.

¹⁰Ibid, 48, 50-59.

¹¹Ibid, 58, 54.

¹²Ibid, 58, 60-63.' Daggett Dillenberger adds, 'When one studies *Shadows*, the eschatological question of mortality and the end of time arises.' For the artist Julian Schnabel, 'these paintings hover as the shadow of life's edge.'

¹³Ibid, 67.

¹⁴Ibid, 66.

¹⁵Ibid, 67-68.' Daggett Dillenberger goes on to say, 'As Walter Hopps said, there are a 'range, power and empathy underlying Warhol's transformation of the commonplace catastrophes in the *Death and Disaster* series,' and he added, 'one can sense in this art an underlying compassion that transcends Warhol's public affect of studied neutrality.'

¹⁶Ibid, 67, 69-71.

¹⁷Ibid, 71-77.' She cites Warhol saying, 'Few people have seen my films or paintings, but perhaps those few will become more aware of living by being made to think about themselves.' People need to be made aware of the need to work at learning how to live because life is so quick and sometimes it goes away too quickly.'

7. Daggett Dillenberger turns our attention back to Warhol's explicitly religious art while continuing to cite his religious allegory through Pop symbols.' In her penultimate chapter 'Leonardo's *Last Supper* Transformed,' Daggett Dillenberger notes the symbolism of Warhol's *Last Supper* (*Wise Potato Chips*) (1986) in which the traditional supper 'scene is set before us, but our attention is riveted by the huge, brilliant blue-and-black 'Wise Potato Chips logo [that] is an abstracted head of an owl, compressed into a circular design.' She notes the 'play on the word 'wise' and the significance of the owl 'as a symbol of wisdom.'¹⁸ In Warhol's *The Last Supper* (*The Big C*) (ca. 1985), we observe scenes from the *Last Supper* superimposed by images of motorcycles, a large price tag, the Wise owl, and the words 'THE BIG C,' among other things.' Besides Warhol's explicit reference to cancer, Daggett Dillenberger points out that 'the Christ is another *Big C*.'¹⁹ *The Last Supper* (*Dove*) (1986) presents the complete supper scene with a large price tag, the GE (General Electric) logo, and the word 'Dove' as well as the Dove soap logo.' 'Significantly, the dove [logo] levitates above the head of Jesus,' as in the scriptural account of Christ's baptism, "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon [Jesus] in bodily form like a dove' (Luke 3:21-22)." The GE logo, "we bring good things to light' can be seen as a metaphor for creation, when God separated light and darkness and found his creation to be 'good.'" Thus we find the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' of particular significance in the Byzantine Catholic Church: 'GE as a symbol for the creator, the dove for the Holy Spirit, and Jesus here delineated at the Last Supper.'²⁰ Finally, among others, Daggett Dillenberger looks to Warhol's *Ten Punching Bags*, a collaborative piece with Jean-Michel Basquiat that suggests the flagellation of Christ; and *Christ 112 Times*, a yellow-on-black image of Christ repeated one hundred and twelve times, like 'a visual chant.'²¹
8. The last and most obvious of Warhol's explicitly religious art is the *Last Supper* series shown in Milan, the final show of his life.' Warhol exhibited twenty large silkscreens reworking Leonardo's famous painting in the gallery at the Palazzo delle Stelline across the piazza from Santa Maria delle Grazie where Leonardo's late-fifteenth century masterpiece is to be found.'²² The French art critic Pierre Restany,

who was at the opening with Warhol, told how this 'series appeared as an extension of the now-inaccessible message of Leonardo's famous masterpiece: a sort of replay and reactualization of the original fresco, an act which took on all its symbolic value on the white walls of the Palazzo delle Stelline,' which was a defunct convent that had been made into a gallery situated fifty meters from the Leonardo *Last Supper*'. Restany continued, 'Andy' seemed penetrated by the importance of the moment.' He greatly surprised me when he said to me: 'Pierre, do you think the Italians will see the respect I have for Leonardo?' 'Consciously or not, Warhol seemed to me to have acted there as a curator of a masterpiece of Christian culture, of maintaining a tradition he was a part of.'²³

9. Daggett Dillenberger rightly notes that 'there is a moment of shock' when one first sees Warhol's pink *Last Supper*.' Not only is there the shock of seeing 'two replicas of Leonardo's

¹⁸Daggett Dillenberger, 85-86.

¹⁹Ibid, 88, 90-92.

²⁰Ibid, 92-93.

²¹Ibid, 95-99.

²²Ibid, 101.

²³Ibid, 101-102.' Citing Jay Shriver, interview with Daggett Dillenberger, October 30, 1995, at his studio, New York.

original mural set side by side,' but also the 'startling' scene of 'pink-pinkness.'²⁴ No less provocative are the red *Last Supper* with its alternating, upside-down images, *The Camouflage Last Supper* with its crawling army camouflage veiling the surface, and *Sixty Last Suppers* with its black and white Leonardo image repeated vertically six times and horizontally ten times.' All are huge, running about 78-116 inches by 306-400 inches, and impress a new vision of Leonardo's work upon the viewer.²⁵ Daggett Dillenberger says, 'Andy Warhol took the cheapened and distorted copies, and with the alchemy of an artist, he transformed Leonardo's *Last Supper*, recreating it again and again in ever new variations.' Warhol gave the vulgarized and secularized image a new seeing.'²⁶ He 'infused Leonardo's familiar image, which had become a cliché, with new spiritual resonance.'²⁷

10. Simply put, Warhol transformed religious art.' How can one see an image of Christ in the same way after seeing Warhol's *Christ 112 Times*? How can one see the *Last Supper* in the same way after viewing it in pink, red, yellow, camouflage, upside-down, repeated twice or sixty times, or interspersed with images from commercial art such as in *The Last Supper (Dove)*? How can one think of religious art in the same way after *Ten Punching Bags*, in which the image of Christ from Warhol's *Last Supper* appears on punching bags overlaid with Basquiat's 'graffiti-like scrawlings'?
11. But as we look further, Warhol's contribution lies not only in his explicitly religious art but in his entire *oeuvre*. Warhol's images from popular American culture take on an iconographic quality, his use of repetition a liturgical feel, transforming the every-day and banal into objects of veneration.

The 'Religious' Art of Andy Warhol

12. Warhol's transformation of religious art is not limited to his explicitly religious art, but also to that which 'is, but isn't' religious.' Warhol can be seen as ritual artist, one who uses serial repetition like a secular liturgy.' He paints the 'religious' icons of contemporary culture, the 'saints' of twentieth century American pop culture, using a communal art-making process reminiscent of early Eastern icon painters.' In his Factory, like a medieval monastery, he turns cultural junk into 'high' art, the banal into objects of devotion.
13. Warhol's art continues in a tradition not entirely unlike the early Eastern Christian world of icon painting.' Christian iconography, like Warhol's Pop images, originated from the culture at-large.' Christian icons descended 'from Greek Hellenistic and Roman portraits of gods, emperors, state officials, writers, philosophers, or, in private homes, ancestors.'²⁸ Warhol of course did numerous such portraits in his time such as *Gold Jackie Kennedy* (1964), *'65 Liz Taylor* (1965), *Dennis Hopper* (1971), *Mao* (1972), his deceased mother *Julia Warhola* (1974), *Mick Jagger* (1975), *The American Indian (Russell Means)* (1976), *Portrait of an American Lady* (1977), *Man Ray* (1978), *Truman Capote* (1979), *Lana Turner* (1985), and *Lenin* (1986), to name just a few.²⁹ Early Christian iconography included not only individual figures, but also

²⁴Ibid, 103-105.

²⁵Ibid, 107-114, 116-119.

²⁶Ibid, 102.

²⁷Ibid, 120.

²⁸W. Eugene Kleinbaur, 'Icon,' *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), 448.

²⁹See *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989).

formats that included circular shapes, diptychs, and triptychs.³⁰ Warhol's images including two or more frames are well known, and he also made use of the circular format in such as *Gold Marilyn* (1962), *Head of Marilyn Monroe* (1962), and *Round Jackie* (1964).³¹ All of these circular 'icons' are noticeably painted in gold, the Eastern icon painting tradition's typical color for eternity.

14. Warhol also exemplifies the Eastern Christian process of communal art-making, where a team of artists work anonymously together for the final product.' 'Early icons were made by artists (whose names are almost never recorded) or were *archeirpoietai*, images not made by human hands.' This 'not made by human hands' included not only the idea that images were created by 'hands other than those of ordinary mortals,' but also could be 'said to be *mechanical*, although miraculous, impressions of the original.'³² Images of identical design sometimes had 'irregular execution' which was often caused by the fact that there was 'a team of craftsmen' working on them.³³ Of course Warhol's mechanical process has been widely noted by art critics and the viewing public.' The irregularity of his repeated images of the same original is something that a viewer notices upon even the slightest of careful observation and is something that Warhol himself liked and thought of as 'part of the art.' Such an identification of Warhol's non-personal,³⁴ 'art-by-committee'³⁵ process whereby he makes use of a team of assistants, signals his continuity with the tradition in Eastern Catholic icon production.³⁶ Paul Giles compares Warhol to a medieval artist, 'an anonymous servant of his ecclesiastical patrons, dutifully celebrating an impersonal and not a personal vision.'³⁷ Even with his *Diaries* Warhol did not work alone, collaborating with Pat Hackett who took notes based off telephone conversations with Warhol recounting his daily activities and thoughts.³⁸ Warhol, his Factory like a medieval monastery,³⁹ produced images with a team of devoted artists' Warhol himself serving as 'a passive agent, an accidental tool or instrumentality, through which the divine becomes expressed in a sacred art work.'⁴⁰
15. In 'Pre-entry: Margins of Error, Saint Andy's Devotions,' Robert Pincus-Witten further describes the 'religious' art of Warhol.' He highlights 'the connection drawn between Hollywood mythology and church hagiography' in Warhol's work.⁴¹ From his image of Marilyn Monroe

³⁰Kleinbaur, 448.

³¹*Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, 212, 242.

³²Kleinbaur, 448 [emphasis mine]. Zan Schuweiler-Daab adds to this picture: 'In the style of Byzantine icons, [Warhol's] paintings lack depth and have hard contours that flatten the image.' In 'For Heaven's Sake,' 25.'

³³John Wilkenson, 'Iconography,' *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), 449.

³⁴Paul Giles, *American Catholic Arts and Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 281.' Giles writes, 'The whole notion of 'personal' art, like 'personal' feelings, is abandoned; Warhol represents the Catholic rejection of romanticism at its most extreme.'

³⁵John Updike, 'Fast art: the sweatless creations of Andy Warhol,' *The New Republic* vol. 200, no. 13, March 27, 1989 [database on-line]; available from Lexis-Nexis.' Quoting Ruppert Jasen Smith.

³⁶Schuweiler-Daab, 'For Heaven's Sake,' 25.' See also Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 7, 16-17.

³⁷Giles, 281.' Michele Cone writes that Warhol's work was 'hardly touched by the artist's hand, probably not even his own concepts.' In 'Warhol's Risk: Voyeurism or Exposure?' *Arts Magazine* 63, no. 10, Summer 1989, 53.

³⁸Pat Hackett, 'Introduction,' in *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, ed. Pat Hackett (New York: Warner Books, 1989), xviii.

³⁹Victor Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol* (New York: Bantam, 1989), 341.

⁴⁰Raymond M. Herbenick, *Andy Warhol's Religious and Ethnic Roots: The Carpatho-Rusyn Influence on his Art* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 5.' Noting Paul Robert Magocsi, 'Andy Warhol,' *Carpatho-Rusyn American*, III, 2 (Summer 1980).

⁴¹Robert Pincus-Witten, 'Pre-entry: Margins of Error; Saint Andy's Devotions,' *Arts Magazine* 63, no. 10, Summer 1989, 56.

to his *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* series, 'Warhol, before all others, sees a signification, often liturgical, behind these grandiose facades, these shimmering westworks.'⁴² Pincus-Witten writes,

In Marilyn, Liz, Jackie, Warhol seeks an imagery that codes a private meaning placed at the service of a sacerdotal rite, one at odds with what these glossies might otherwise conjure in the public mind.' To Warhol, like all ritual artists, image is both representation and actuality, image become icon. 'Marilyn, Liz, Jackie supplant the hagiographics, the holy pictures of Andy's Pittsburgh boyhood.' Warhol's stars revert to an imagery of saints and intercessors now done up in Hollywood drag; his paintings celebrate a contemporary cult of movies and celebrity.' Warhol's icons are kind to sacred relic, embodiments through their very imagining, their very packaging, of the star's power and grace, however soiled during send-up, during ascension.⁴³

16. Understanding the Factory as 'church,' Warhol works a 'transubstantiation' of sorts, in which Marilyn becomes 'Hodegetria,' the gold surface 'an intangible space derived from the golden ineffability of the Byzantine mosaic.'⁴⁴ Here Warhol is an artist of ritual, creating liturgical meaning through a secular and Pop cultural iconography.
17. In Paul Giles' *American Catholic Arts and Fictions*, the chapter entitled 'The Allure of Iconography: Andy Warhol and Robert Mapplethorpe,' we get further insight into Warhol's 'religious' art.' Giles states that 'perhaps more clearly than that of any other artist, the iconography of Warhol pursues the implications of a Catholic spirit in modern American film and photography.'⁴⁵ Warhol's 'Catholic sensibility' could never entirely buy into the American dream, even while praising all its conventional accoutrements.' He 'looks at Monroe and Presley through a pair of quizzical metaphysical spectacles that acknowledge how these American icons are like Catholic saints, but in the end really aren't.'⁴⁶ In works such as *Gold Marilyn Monroe* or *The Last Supper*, Warhol 'reworks the Catholic icons of high art into a form of postmodernist aesthetic kitsch.'⁴⁷ His other images from popular culture such as the famous *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962) 'replicate themselves ad infinitum into a universality that aspires to replicate the universal structures of Catholicism.'⁴⁸ Citing Pincus-Witten: ' "Through the ritual of art, Warhol proclaims their glory through a mass of detail, monotonously intoning their holy names even unto the heavenly infinity inherent in the grid or serial format.' The same thing, over and over again, in whatever the direction, stretching away, infinitely.'⁴⁹ We can see here

⁴²Ibid, 56, 58.

⁴³Ibid, 58.

⁴⁴Ibid, 58, 59.' See also Zan Schuweiler-Daab, 'For Heaven's Sake: Warhol's Art As Religious Allegory,' *Religion and the Arts* 1:1 (Fall 1996): 25.

⁴⁵Giles, 278.

⁴⁶Ibid, 279.' Giles goes on, 'His works aggrandize American popular culture but also ironically detach themselves from their own (supposedly celebratory) premises.' This is the sense of uneasiness that we find in many American Catholic fictions, a residual jokey quality that ensures the audience does not know whether to take the text at face value or not.' It is what the Jesuit critic William F. Lynch called an 'ironic imagination,' which works to 'de-absolutize' worldly objects by implying that they possess only a provisional quality in the light of higher truths,' 279-280.

⁴⁷Ibid, 280.

⁴⁸Ibid, 281.

⁴⁹Ibid, 281.' Citing Pincus-Witten, 58.' Giles earlier comments, 'None of this is necessarily conscious or intentional in Warhol's work of course, but intentional fallacies should not concern us unnecessarily here.' Warhol's place within a cultural tradition [that is, American Catholic] signifies more than any formulations he may have made about his own art,' 280.'

how Warhol's work had a 'religious' quality even beyond the explicitly religious, an art that 'is, but isn't' religious art.

18. Further, we can see Warhol's transformation of the ordinary and banal into a 'high' art to be venerated as a kind of 'religious' transformation.' Arthur Danto in *After the End of Art* argues that Warhol, and Pop art in general, 'transfigured the things or kinds of things that meant most to people,' that is (as Danto's first book on art is entitled) 'the transfiguration of the commonplace,' raising the ordinary 'to the status of high art.'⁵⁰ Pop art 'was so exciting because it was transfigurative.' With Marilyn Monroe, for example, many had treated her as one would a great stage or opera star, but 'Warhol transfigured her into an icon by setting her beautiful face on a field of gold paint.' Danto notes that 'transfiguration is a religious concept,' a concept that 'means the adoration of the ordinary, as, in its original appearance, in the Gospel of Saint Matthew it meant adoring a man as a god.'⁵¹ He is particularly interested in Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964), a replication of Brillo soap boxes that is more or less indecipherable from the 'original' which one would find at the grocery store.⁵² By celebrating the most ordinary and banal things of our mundane lives 'corn flakes, canned soup, soap pads, movie stars, comics' Warhol, 'by the process of transfiguration' gave them an almost transcendental air.⁵³ Beyond the religious in the sense that we saw with Daggett Dillenger, Warhol's entire body of work signals this 'is, but isn't' religious quality.

The Disappearance (Transfiguration) of Art

19. Warhol is also significant for the way in which he enacts what Jean Baudrillard calls the 'disappearance of art,' or put another way 'art's transfiguration.' Baudrillard argues that art has been hyperrealized, gone beyond its own limitations, and left no essence for itself, nothing but a void.' Warhol goes the farthest in pushing art to its extreme, even beyond its own finality.' Borrowing from Walter Benjamin, Baudrillard says Warhol opens a way for a 'primary ritualism' in which his art becomes fetish.' A fetish-object, as a valueless object, not only has no value but also is beyond all criteria of value.' In this way, Warhol's work in its irreligious and profane forms takes on perhaps its most important 'religious value.' His images transfigure art beyond distinctions of the religious and profane, and beyond normal categories of judgement.
20. The disappearance of art can be described as art's hyperrealization of itself.' Baudrillard says, 'The more art tries to realize itself, the more it hyperrealizes itself to find its own empty essence.' In this case, Baudrillard gives the example of Marcel Duchamp's 'unexpected exhibition of a wine rack in an art gallery.'⁵⁴ Baudrillard writes,

[Duchamp] extracted the bottle rack from the real world', displaced it on another level to confer on it an undefinable hyperreality.' A paradoxical acting-out, putting

⁵⁰ Arthur C. Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art And The Pale Of History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 129.' Danto notes that *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* is 'a title I appropriated from a fictional title in a novel by the Catholic novelist Muriel Spark.'

⁵¹ Ibid, 128-129.

⁵² Ibid, 124-125.' One can find the reference to the Brillo boxes at various places throughout Danto's writings on Warhol and on art more generally.

⁵³ Ibid, 130.

⁵⁴ Jean Baudrillard, 'Fatal Strategies,' in *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 187.

an end to the bottle rack as a real object, to art as the invention of another scene and to the artist as the protagonist of another world.' To all aesthetic idealization Duchamp opposes a violent desublimation of art and of the real by their instantaneous short-circuit.' Extrematization of the two forms: the bottle rack, ex-inscribed from its context, from its idea, from its function, becomes more real than real (hyperreal), and more art than art (it enters into the transaesthetics of banality, of insignificance, of nullity, where today the pure and indifferent form of art is to be seen).⁵⁵

21. This is precisely what Warhol does with, among other works, his *Brillo Box*. Warhol's *Brillo Box* reproduces a box of soap pads in which, as with Duchamp's wine rack, one can not tell any real difference.' Warhol short-circuits the distinction of art and the real, pushing them both beyond their limits into the territory of the other.' In Baudrillard's terms the *Brillo Box* is 'more real than real' and 'more art than art.' Art goes beyond itself 'without an object' and 'spirals in on itself,' practicing 'the magic of disappearance.'⁵⁶ Baudrillard says art has become 'an infinite proliferation of signs' that is beyond judgements of value.' Everything has become aesthetic and 'when everything is aesthetic, nothing is either beautiful or ugly any longer and art itself disappears.'⁵⁷ He argues that 'the only benefit gained from Andy Warhol's Campbell soup can (and this benefit is immense), is to nullify the question of beauty and ugliness.'⁵⁸ When everything, even the most ordinary, the most banal, the most insignificant, can become an object for display in a museum or gallery, then art as we have known it has disappeared.' We can no longer judge what is or is not art, or what is or is not beautiful.' 'We are no longer in the beautiful or in the ugly but in the impossibility to judge; we are condemned to indifference.'⁵⁹ Warhol is 'the emblematic figure' of 'the transvestites of aesthetics,' writes Baudrillard.' 'When Warhol said, 'all art works are beautiful, I don't have to choose'all the contemporary works are equal,' he took the position of the agnostic.' Thus Warhol could say that art is everywhere, henceforth it does not exist any longer.' Baudrillard argues that 'we are all agnostics when it comes to art; we no longer have any aesthetic convictions, we do not profess any aesthetic doctrine or we profess them all.'⁶⁰
22. Beyond the indifference, however, there perhaps emerges something that is 'more beautiful than beautiful and uglier than ugly.' Baudrillard explains that

contemporary painting cultivates not only ugliness (which is still an aesthetic value), but the uglier than the ugly (the 'bad,' the 'worse,' the 'kitsch'), an ugliness elevated to the second power because it is liberated from its relationship to its contrary and

⁵⁵Baudrillard, 'Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality,' in *Jean Baudrillard, Art and Artefact*, ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg (London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), 21.

⁵⁶Baudrillard, 'Fatal Strategies,' 187-188.' A quite literal example of the disappearance of art is to be found at Warhol's famous opening in the early 1960's in which the crowd had become 'so dense and excited' that the gallery director had to take down all the paintings.' Thus, an art opening without any art!' Of course, as Danto points out, Warhol himself was also the art.' He says, 'The artist later murmured at the wry irony of an exhibition without paintings, but it was, strictly speaking, not an exhibition without art, for he had, already, become one with his image, and in the definitive catalogue of his work, his life must be registered as an item.' I agree with Danto but, in line with Baudrillard, suggest that this is not 'art' as we have known it to be, that art that has been radically altered.' Warhol himself becomes an art beyond the art.' See Arthur C. Danto, 'Who Was Andy Warhol?' *Artnews* 86, May 1987, 128.

⁵⁷Baudrillard, 'Transpolitics, Transexuality, Transaesthetics,' in *Jean Baudrillard: The Disappearance of Art and Politics*, ed. William Stearns and William Chaloupka (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 9-10.

⁵⁸Ibid, 13.

⁵⁹Ibid, 12, 14.

⁶⁰Ibid, 19.

henceforth susceptible to redouble itself.' Thus, freed from the 'true' Mondrian, you are free to produce a Mondrian more Mondrian than Mondrian himself.' Freed from the genuine 'Naifs painters,' one can paint more 'naifs' than the *naifs*, etc'. Liberated from the real, you can create things more real than the real/hyperreal.⁶¹

23. Warhol stands as 'a precursor of a perfect and universal hybridization of art, of a new aesthetics after all aesthetics have disappeared.'⁶² Take for example his 'novel' called *A: a novel* which was made up of hours and hours of tape recorded conversations involving Warhol and several friends, typed out by some drop-ins at the Factory.' Warhol tells us, 'I'd wanted to do a 'bad book,' just the way I'd done 'bad movies' and 'bad art,' because when you do something exactly wrong, you always turn up something.'⁶³ Warhol's book is worse than poor, more bad than bad, or as he says, 'exactly wrong.' Another example, among many, of Warhol's work that goes *beyond*, is his wallpaper cows.' He reports how these came about:

I asked Ivan [Karp] for ideas too, and at a certain point he said, "Why don't you paint some cows, they're so wonderfully pastoral and such a durable image in the history of the arts.'" (Ivan talked like this.) I don't know how 'pastoral' he expected me to make them but when he saw the huge cow heads/bright pink on a bright yellow background that I was going to have made into rolls of wallpaper, he was shocked.' But after a moment he exploded with: 'They're *super*-pastoral!' They're ridiculous!' They're blazing bright and vulgar!" I mean, he loved those cows, and for my next show we papered all the walls in the gallery with them.⁶⁴

24. The bright wall-papered cows are 'pastoral' to its most extreme, beyond pastoral, transcending distinctions of beautiful and ugly they are so bad they're good.' Warhol dismisses Karp's concern for how things fit into art history because for Warhol art as such has come to its end.' The beautiful has incorporated the ugly into itself and vice-versa for something that is an art beyond art.
25. Baudrillard argues that art has disappeared 'as a specific activity,' giving way to a fetishist ideology.' He suggests that this may lead 'either to a reversion of art into technique and pure artisanal quality' or toward a 'primary ritualism, where everything will end up as universal kitsch, exactly as religious art in its time ended up as Saint-Sulpicien kitsch.'⁶⁵ Warhol prefigures both these options for art.' For Warhol 'the crisis of art is over,'⁶⁶ and he already employs a kind of retroversion of Walter Benjamin's first stage of the genealogy of

⁶¹Ibid, 14.' This final quote has it as 'more real than the' real hyperreal,' perhaps a misprint and one which I have adjusted accordingly above.' Either way, my adjustment fits soundly with Baudrillard's thought.

⁶²Ibid, 19.

⁶³Warhol and Hackett, *Popism*, 287.' He goes on to say, 'The reviews for *a* weren't all that good.' (My favorite bad review described the book as 'a bacchanalian coffee klatsch.')

⁶⁴Ibid, 17-18.

⁶⁵Baudrillard, 'Objects, Images, and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Illusion,' in Jean Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, 17.' He also writes, 'the artists of the Renaissance believed that they were making religious pictures while in fact they were creating artworks,' and then asks, 'Are our modern artists, who believe they are producing artworks, not doing something completely different?' Could it be that the objects they produce are something completely different from art?" His answer is 'fetish-objects'"objects that are literally superstitious in the sense that they no longer assume the sublime nature of art nor a belief in art.'" Baudrillard says, 'Warhol is the first to introduce [such] fetishism.'" Of course we should not forget Duchamp!

⁶⁶Ibid.

the work of art as ‘ritual object.’⁶⁷ He turns banal objects into fetish-objects, and ‘a fetish, as we know, is an object that has no value in itself’ or rather, it has so much value that it can no longer be exchanged.’⁶⁸ A fetish takes value to an extreme and transcends it; it is an ‘absolute object,’ an ‘object whose value is zero, whose quality is indifferent.’⁶⁹ Warhol is the one that ‘goes the farthest with the ritualized disappearance of art.’ He acts to ‘the utmost’ to the point of self-negation ‘the ecstasy of negative value, which is also the ecstasy of negative representation.’ Warhol ‘goes the farthest with the ritualized, negative transparency of art, its utter indifference to its own authenticity.’⁷⁰ By a sort of ritual art, Warhol transfigures objects of popular culture into cult objects, objects beyond normal criteria of value.’ Here Warhol’s work takes on yet another ‘religious value,’ as an ‘art’ that transcends judgements of good and bad, of beauty and ugliness, and transforms the opposition of the high and the low, the sacred and the profane, into an iconography of postmodernist kitsch.

Divine Simulacrum

1. It is the reflection of a basic reality.
 2. It masks and perverts a basic reality.
 3. It masks the _absence_ of a basic reality.
 4. It bears no relation to reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum. [⁷⁵]
-
1. Does the image of Marilyn reflect a real Marilyn?
 2. Does the image of Marilyn mask and pervert a real Marilyn?
 3. Does the image of Marilyn mask the *absence* of a real Marilyn?
 4. Does the image of Marilyn bear no relation to a real Marilyn at all? ‘Is it its own pure simulacrum?’
-
3. Warhol’s ‘original’ silkscreen image of Marilyn
 4. The cropped publicity photograph of Marilyn used by Warhol
 5. Marilyn ‘herself’ at the photo shoot

-
26. Finally we note Warhol’s contribution to religion, art, and culture in terms of his production of images that move beyond representation in favor of simulacra.’ In light of Baudrillard’s outline of the ‘successive phases of the image’ and his spin on the Iconoclast debates, Warhol’s ‘iconography’ such as that of Marilyn Monroe emerges as the most fully imagined ‘reality’ in postmodern culture—‘pure,’ ‘unconditional simulacrum.’

⁶⁷Baudrillard, ‘On Seduction,’ in *Selected Writings*, 164.’ See also Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books; Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1977).

⁶⁸Baudrillard, ‘Absolute Merchandise,’ trans. David Britt, in *Andy Warhol: Paintings 1960-1986*, ed. Martin Schwander (Stuttgart: Hatje, 1995), 19.

⁶⁹Ibid, 18.

⁷⁰Ibid, 20.

27. In Baudrillard's perhaps most important writing, "The Precession of Simulacra"⁷¹ he discusses 'the simulacrum of divinity' asking, 'What becomes of divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra?' 'When divinity reveals itself in images, multiple images, an alteration of some kind takes place.' 'Does it remain the supreme authority, simply incarnated in images as a visible theology?' 'Or does something else happen, something more dislodging and drastic?' When divinity is revealed in icons, 'is it volatilized into simulacra which alone deploy their pomp and power of fascination' the visible machinery of icons being substituted for the pure and intelligible Idea of God?' 'Is God, as Idea, lost in his own iconography?' Baudrillard says this is the very issue that frightened the Iconoclasts in the debate of their day.
28. [The Iconoclasts'] rage to destroy images rose precisely because they sensed this omnipotence of simulacra, this facility they have of erasing God from the consciousness of people, and the overwhelming, destructive truth which they suggest: that ultimately there has never been any God; that only simulacra exist; indeed that God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum.
29. If the Iconoclasts were able to believe that icons simply 'occulted or masked the Platonic idea of God, there would have been no reason to destroy them.' 'Rather their profound fear and 'metaphysical despair came from the idea that the images concealed nothing at all, and that in fact they were not images, such as the original model would have made them, but actually perfect simulacra forever radiant with their own fascination.' 'But, for the Iconoclasts then and even now, 'this death of the divine referential has to be exorcised at all cost.'⁷²
30. The Iconoclasts, writes Baudrillard, rather than 'despising and denying images' as they are accused, 'were in fact the ones that accorded them their actual worth, unlike the iconolaters, who saw them only [as] reflections and were content to venerate God at one remove.' 'On the other hand, however, the contrary can also be said: 'namely, that the iconolaters possessed the most modern and adventurous minds, since, underneath the idea of the apparition of God in the mirror of images, they already enacted his death and disappearance in the epiphany of his representations.' 'Perhaps they already knew this, that images 'no longer represented anything, and that they were purely a game.' 'But this is no *mere* game; rather 'this was precisely the greatest game.' 'They perhaps knew also, suggests Baudrillard, how 'dangerous' it is to 'unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them.'⁷³ 'Images have the power to murder: to be 'murderers of the real; murderers of their own model as the Byzantine icons could murder the divine identity.' 'He writes,

To this murderous capacity is opposed the dialectical capacity of representations as a visible and intelligible mediation of the real.' All of Western faith 'was engaged in this wager on representations: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange' God, of course.' But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest to his

⁷¹Here I am using the version of this essay in Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulation,' in *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). See also 'The Precession of Simulacra' in *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

⁷²Ibid, 169.' Elsewhere Baudrillard writes: 'Iconoclasts were under the illusion that by destroying appearances God's truth would shine forth.' Since there was no truth to God, which perhaps they secretly knew, their failure resulted from the same premise as the idolaters of images: *we can only live with the idea of an altered truth.*' This is the only way to live in truth. 'The alternative is unbearable (precisely because *truth does not exist*). We must not wish to destroy appearances (the seduction of images);' 'On Seduction,' in *Selected Writings*, 153-154.

⁷³Ibid.

existence?’ Then the whole system becomes weightless; it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum: not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.⁷⁴

31. God disappears into simulacrum.’ He ‘dies’ or is ‘murdered’ in the sense that the real is overcome by the hyperreal.
32. This signals the end of representation and the emergence of simulation.’ Simply stated, ‘Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent,’ adding that ‘even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom.’’ On the other hand, ‘simulation starts from the Utopia of this principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of sign as value*, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference.’’ While ‘representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum.’’ Baudrillard’s ‘successive phases of the image’ then are the following:
33. This marks a decisive turning point: ‘The transition from signs which dissimulate something to signs which dissimulate that there is nothing.’’ The former ‘implies a theology of truth and secrecy (to which the notion of ideology still belongs),’ while the latter ‘inaugurates an age of simulacra and simulation, in which there is no longer any God to recognize his own, nor any last judgment to separate truth from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance.’⁷⁵
34. If we apply Baudrillard’s ‘phases of the image’ to Warhol’s images, the issue at hand emerges more completely.’ Take for example Warhol’s images of Marilyn Monroe.’ In this case we may ask:’
35. [if !supportLists]Does the image of Marilyn reflect a real Marilyn?
36. [if !supportLists]Does the image of Marilyn mask and pervert a real Marilyn?
37. [if !supportLists]Does the image of Marilyn mask the *absence* of a real Marilyn?
38. [if !supportLists]Does the image of Marilyn bear no relation to a real Marilyn at all?’Is it its own pure simulacrum?’
39. Already we see the problem with representation here: How can we say that the sign and the real correspond?’ How can we say that Warhol’s image of Marilyn references the real Marilyn?’ Even if we could say that the image masks or denatures the real Marilyn, how do we identify ‘the real Marilyn’?’ Even if we were to attempt a sort of genealogy of the image, tracing it back to its original reality, we face a problem.’ A genealogy, working backwards, might be the following:
40. Warhol’s “original” silkscreen image of Marilyn
41. The cropped publicity photograph of Marilyn used by Warhol
42. Marilyn “herself” at the photo shoot

⁷⁴Baudrillard, ‘Simulacra and Simulations,’ 170.

⁷⁵Ibid, 170-171.

43. But, as we consider further, we recognize that even the 'real' Marilyn at the photo shoot was posing and on some sort of set.' Then we also recall that 'Marilyn Monroe' is itself a stage name for her 'original' name, Norma Jeane.' Even at this point in the genealogy, do we now accept that we have found the 'real' Marilyn?' Is Norma Jeane necessarily more real than Warhol's *Marilyn*? One could argue that Warhol's *Marilyn* is 'more real' than the (imaginary) image of Norma Jeane at home out of the public eye.
44. Warhol's *Marilyn* overextends and undermines the distinction between reality and image.' *Marilyn* 'bears no relation to reality.' Beyond the reality/image distinction, Warhol's *Marilyn* exists as 'its own pure simulacrum.' Just as in Baudrillard's recounting of Borges' fable where the territory and the map are caught up into simulacra, image and reality now find their only 'reality' as the hyperreal.' The 'sovereign difference' between the two disappears and now *Marilyn* exists as one sign among many, a sign pointing to and reflecting other signs in never-ending play.' Warhol's *Marilyn* is just one example of what he does in most of his work; in Baudrillard's terms: producing 'pure' simulacra.'
45. Warhol 'himself' is another prime example of this.' For Baudrillard, he is a simulacrum, a sign among signs, testifying to the disappearance of the divine referential or to any profound reality, an indication of the void which exists beyond his iconography, leaving only a 'pure,' 'divine' simulacrum behind.
46. When Baudrillard suggests 'the critic of religion and of its official manifestation misses the fact that religion is in practice far more realized in many other forms'irreligious, profane, political or cultural'where it is less easily recognizable as such,'⁷⁶ we now immediately think of Warhol.' The contribution of the 'pope of Pop' lies not only in what can be deemed explicitly religious art as Daggett Dillenger has shown us in *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, but by that which goes beyond the conventional definitions of religion and art to a 'religious art' that is perhaps more religious than religious and more art than art.' Warhol's icons are, as Baudrillard puts it, the 'new objects beyond aesthetics, transaesthetic'fetish-objects without signification, without illusion, without aura, without value'.a pure visual product'.Unconditional simulacrum.'⁷⁷

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⁷⁶Baudrillard, 'Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality,' 20.'

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Notes

She also notes that the day after Warhol's death, a Swiss art journal which was supposed to receive some prints based on typical Swiss images like cuckoo clocks, the Matterhorn, and Toblerone chocolates instead received a 'package from the Factory [that] contained a photo edition of 120 numbered and signed copies of four stitched-together photographs of skeletons!' "" Later, after his discussion of Robert Mapplethorpe, Giles writes, 'Holding that the religious significance of any given work is more important than what its creator happened to believe' what, after all did Leonardo or Raphael 'believe'? 'the Roman church has never been shy about requisitioning artist's work for its own ideological uses.' The Collection of Modern Religious Art in the Vatican Museums currently boasts the unorthodox paintings by John Sloan (*Indian Religious Dance*), Graham Sutherland, and Francis Bacon, as well as ceramics by Picasso.' One wonders how long it will be before Warhol and Mapplethorpe find their way into this elevated company,' 294-295. * * *

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