

## Double Take

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**Defamiliarization and estrangement have been absorbed into contemporary architectural discourse by way of current philosophies calling for a return to the domain of real things. Estrangement is the quality attributed to aesthetics that elongates, intensifies, or exaggerates the initial moment of engagement with an art form. Defamiliarization involves design techniques that allow the familiar to enter into multiple and heterogeneous relations. In these terms, the real is not conceived as stable or concrete, but is in fact inherently unstable or uncertain. This revival of realism curiously provokes a second glance at Andy Warhol's contributions to twentieth century art through a contemporary lens. This paper outline these ideas and catalogs the work that emerged from a series of design studios that were conducted at Kent State University, Amherst College, and Savannah College of Art and Design from 2015 – 2017.**

The return to realism is associated with our fundamental reliance on the digital interface that has irreparably change our primary modes of perception and any direct connection to the real. Media misperceptions were premeditated for post-modern criticality intended to subvert the real. These “critical exposures all deploy a degree of abstraction, which is believe to work free from the prejudices of realistic illusion.” During the following period of initial engagements with digital design, critical deployments and questions of realism were largely abandoned for the spectacle of the digital generated image. Now that computer-assisted observation has become completely embedded within our cultural and disciplinary consciousness, the relationship between perception and the real has become estranged. Other emerging voices are calling for a new aesthetic that requires “broader and deeper reflections on how computation has change the way we see and relate to the world.” In other words, our reality has been augmented by the allusions of digital representation.

A similar intellectual and aesthetic shift in the works of Andy Warhol is evident from changing attitudes towards the commodification of art. Commodities as a mental concept erase all heterogeneity and qualitative difference among things - if everything has a dollar value, how is one thing different from anything else. Warhol exploits this idea in his early work by appropriating everyday objects to challenge the value and status of post-war elite art forms that favored highly expressive and abstract compositions. Although these works including the Marilyn prints, Campbell's soup cans, and Brillo boxes raise questions about authorship and autonomy, the objects

and icons themselves remain largely unchanged. Architectural contingencies (geometry, mechanical production, nature, etc.) have similarly become the commodities of the building arts, undermining architecture's value and distinctiveness by erasing its unique features and dissolving its conceptual boundaries. Commodities, in this way, negate the aesthetic experience and neutralize architecture's reception.

Warhol's later and lesser-known works are usually characterized as a continuation or refinement of the critical exposures presented in his early and iconic work. Warhol's self-portraits in drag Polaroid series, for example, is self-referential by again invoking the image of Marilyn Monroe. These images are also historically indexical as they “recall Man Ray's photographs of Marcel Duchamp disguised as his female alter ego, Rose Sélavy.” The use of the Polaroid photographic technology further challenges artistic authority by means of its speed and ease of reproduction. Additionally, these portraits advance earlier interests in constructing identity and artifice for the purposes of subverting the real.

Commodities-as-objects, on the other hand, are highly seductive and exceptionally alluring. Levi Bryan reminds us that commodities can capture us in the entire system of capital exploitation (Marx), manage our desires, and function as markers of status, class, and identity (Baudrillard). Using this filter, an alternative understanding of Warhol's Polaroid photographs is possible. For example, his Polaroid still lifes, involving the piling of diverse commercial products, acknowledge our urge to accumulate and curate the variety of everyday things that surround us. His Perfume Bottles and Brillo Boxes and Other Products display objects like treasures on a table, calling attention to their differences including all of their various material peculiarities.

Furthermore, Warhol's series of self-portraits in drag acknowledge our cultural desire for greater diversification. These portraits more radically suggest that diverse qualities are expressed simultaneously within the object itself. Andy Warhol is not trying to disguise himself as Marilyn Monroe (one is not erased in favor of the other). Instead, Andy Warhol and Marilyn Monroe exist as a strange and heterogeneous mixture of both male and female traits. These photographs seem unusual because the tension between the appropriated icon and its qualities provokes an experience of momentary confusion that requires a second glance to grasp its significance.



Figure 1: Andy Warhol, Perfume Bottles (Halston Campaign), 1979. Polaroid Photograph 4 x 3.25 inches; 1.2 x 8.3 cm. From: The Kasmin Gallery, New York, [https://www.kasmingallery.com/exhibitions/2008-10-29\\_andy-warhol](https://www.kasmingallery.com/exhibitions/2008-10-29_andy-warhol) (accessed November 14, 2018).

Warhol's iconic work is grounded in realism through the appropriation and de-contextualization of everyday objects. Although this work raises questions about authorship and autonomy, the objects themselves remain largely unchanged. Warhol's later and lesser-known works (particularly his Polaroid photographs) continue to rely on simulation and repetition; however, these works begin to produce a strange tension (or uncertainty) by expressing multiple material states simultaneously. The fascination with everyday objects and the recurrent theme of art-as-commodity in the work of Andy Warhol was the significant starting point for a number of subsequent design studios that explored these ideas.

To address the Warhol influence and corresponding issues of realism, the studio project explored the dynamic relationship between physical context and the cultural landscape. In this respect, the project site was important to the studio investigation. Students designed a new art gallery in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as an addition to the existing Andy Warhol Museum. Sited near the north shore of the Allegheny River, the museum and addition operate as symbolic entry to the city and create an unprecedented public address to underscore Andy Warhol's unique contribution to the arts community and emphasize the prominence of this particular site. The conceptualization of the cultural landscape and transformation of



Figure 2: Andy Warhol, Self-Portrait in Drag (Platinum Pageboy Wig), 1981. The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. From: Art Blart <https://artblart.com/tag/museum-fur-kunst-und-gewerbe/> (accessed November 14, 2018).

physical context were essential to the formal, material, and representational considerations of the project.

This studio was conducted several times at three different academic institutions. Each time the project's relationship to the site and ground was modified. The initial investigations involved designing an object building on a site adjacent to the Warhol Museum. Other studios developed a roof object, utilizing the top of the Warhol Museum as the site. The final and most complex instance involved designing two objects on their own site: (1) the building object, an exhibition facility for temporary exhibits or prominent and emerging contemporary artists and (2) the ground object, an education facility for visiting artists in residence and community learning initiatives. Both objects were stacked vertically, one becoming the site of the other.

The art gallery appears to be a simple design problem; however, as a project, it requires continuous reflection about aesthetics and fulfilling the design experience by investigating formal, spatial, programmatic, and tectonic opportunities informed by historical and contemporary precedents in art and architecture. The studio examined architectural precedents, including the work of Herzog and de Meuron and Jean Nouvel, where roofs of existing buildings become the ground for new

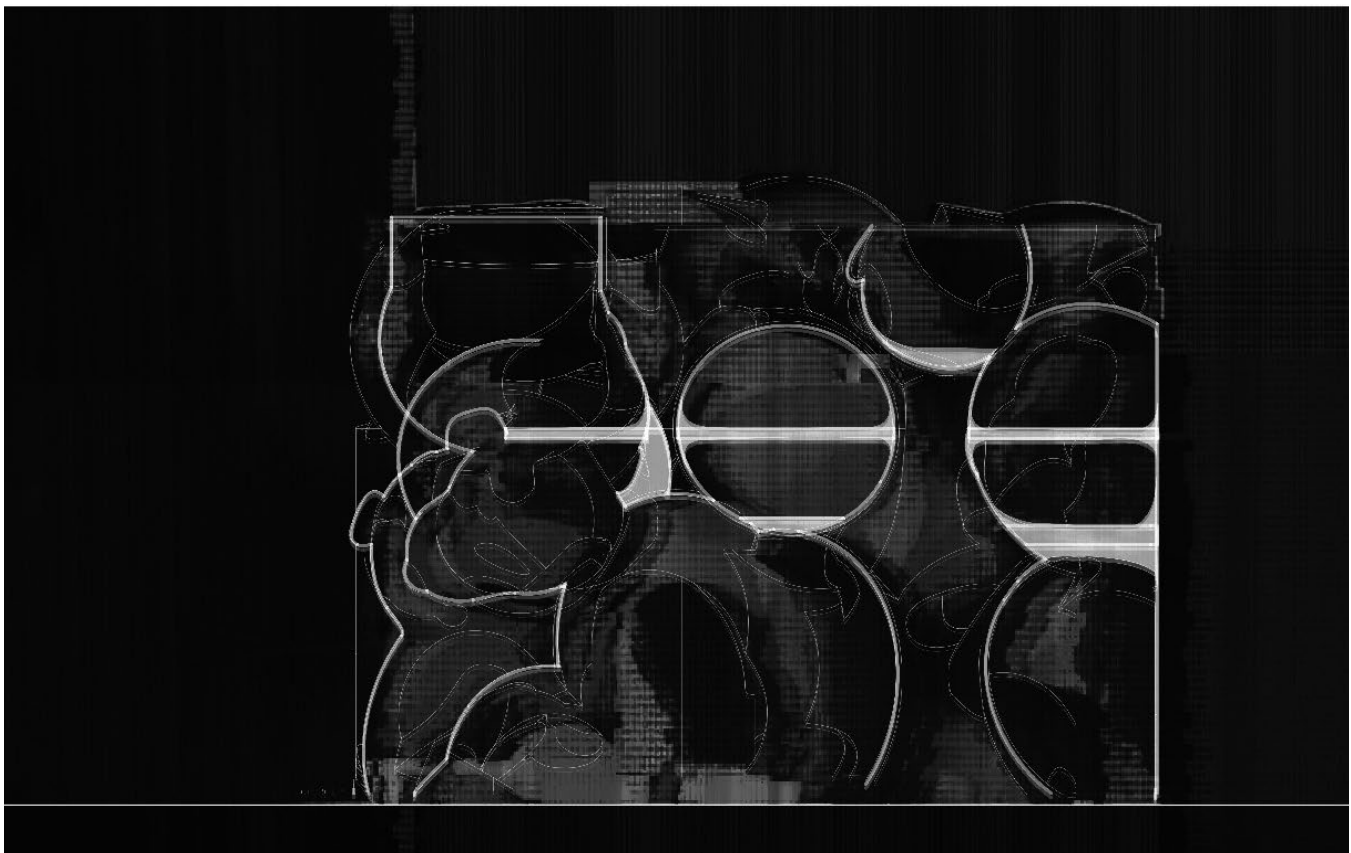


Figure 3: Clayton O'Dell, Piggy Banks, Building Section and Physical Model, Kent State University, 2017. Images courtesy the author.



buildings additions. Concurrently, the studio researched contemporary artists, including Charlotte Kingsnorth and Jolan van der Wiel, whose experimental furniture exhibit an incompatibility between mass, frame, surface, and detail.

The intention was not to surrender architecture's autonomy through the appropriation of Warhol's work, but rather to recognize Warhol's alignment with contemporary mass culture and acceptance of subjects traditionally considered taboo. As previous described, the studio studied Warhol's iconic works, which exemplify ideas about appropriation and representation, but was more interested in his later and lesser-known works, which exhibit tensions between multiple discrete objects and diverse qualities within the same object. Other associations between art and architecture that were considered included a shared dedication to experimental design and the ability to question customary enclosure, prescribed aesthetics, and modes of representation.

The primary task of the studio was to transform everyday objects, not through appropriation or abstraction, but rather through estrangement and defamiliarization. In other words, the studio questioned and transformed literal objecthood by making the familiar unfamiliar and the everyday strange and

unusual. Like Warhol, the studio design process was similarly diverse. Physical modeling and digital manipulation was essential to the development of a complete architectural project. First, students constructed physical models using everyday objects rather than conventional model-making materials. These models were then translated digitally using various softwares to computationally adjust their formal, spatial, tectonic, and material qualities.

Everyday objects were selected by each student, not only for their appeal to mass culture, but also for qualities that helped to develop ideas about massing, ground, interior organization, and detail. The physical models generated from these objects were not simply appropriated or simulation; instead, they were piled together or pulled apart and in either case reassembled as a distinct new object with a more diverse, but less apprehensible set of relations. Over the course of the studios, students were innovative and imaginative with respect to their selection of objects including ready-made construction materials, children's toys, housewares, various recyclable containers, inflatables flotation devices, vintage electronics, etc.

The accumulation of these objects to build the model was particularly challenging, each having their own unique geometry

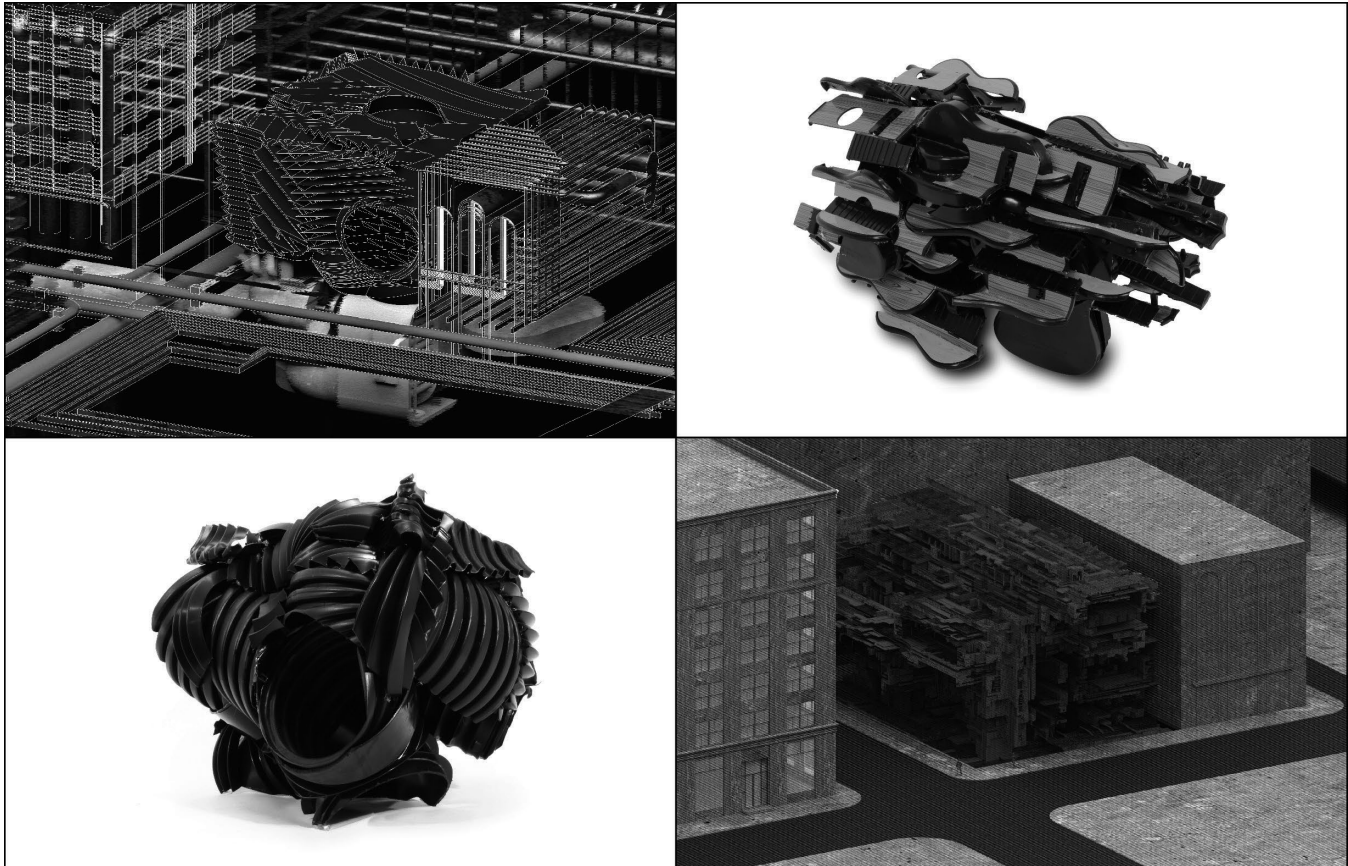


Figure 3: Joshua Myers, Drain Pipes, Aerial View and Physical Model, Kent State University, 2017 (left). Benjamin Cyvas, Guitars, Aerial View and Physical Model, Kent State University, 2017 (right). Images courtesy the authors.

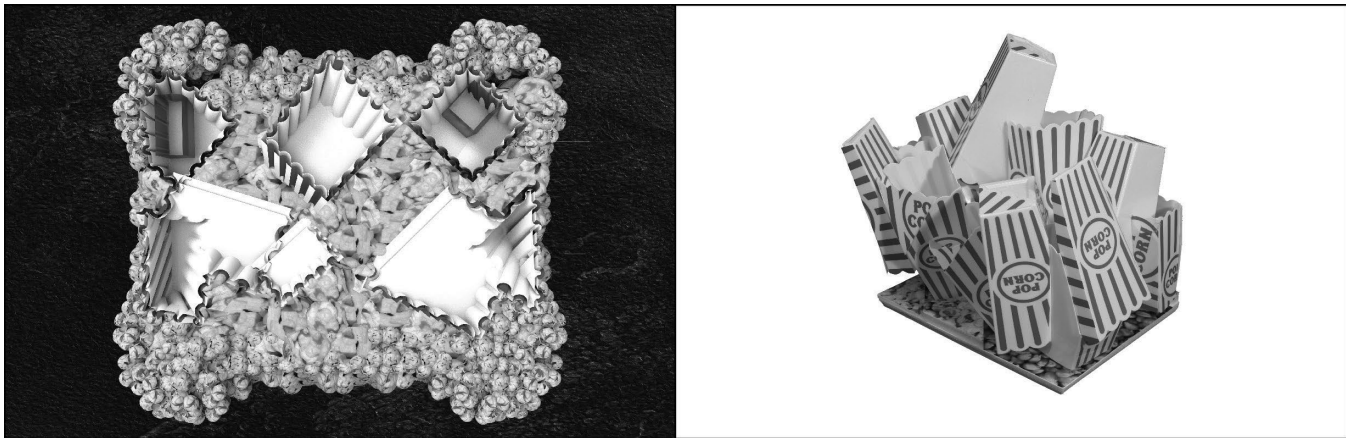


Figure 5: Emily Rickenbacker, Popcorn, Floor Plan and Physical Model, Kent State University, 2017. Images courtesy the author.

and materiality. Rather than formal collage (difference) or continuous variation (sameness), the model masses rely on the obliqueness between components, where uniformity and variation can exist simultaneously. Additionally, the selected objects in many cases were cut, reoriented, and pasted back together to tease-out hidden qualities and exaggerate the simultaneity of part and whole.

These models and objects were then translated digital to create a credible stage for architecture. This undertaking did not involve the use of digital scanning technology. This tends to complicate the form with high-density polygon geometry, making further manipulation extremely difficult. Instead, students manually constructed their selected objects using mostly NURBS geometry and employed various Boolean strategies of accumulation to develop the building mass and interior configuration of space. Some models were translated more literally, while other became more conceptual depending on specific project polemics.

The studios used various combinations of these defamiliarization techniques, involving the piling of commercial products and mixing of their manifold characteristics, attempting to elicit an estranged architectural reception. Having conducted the studio several times, commonalities began to emerge between the projects. Given the playful nature of the studio, project were loosely grouped into game and toy categories.

“Jigsaw Puzzles” used irregular cut and paste strategies, where the careful articulation of the seams becomes the driver of formal-spatial configuration. For example, corrugated drainpipes were “(pinking) sheared” and “zippered” to reveal the figural and graphic zigzag qualities of the object. “Makeovers” manipulated objects in a way that was counterintuitive to the original formal-material logic. The treatment of articulation was more superficial or cosmetic in nature, using two-dimensional graphics to obscure the three-dimensionality of the mass. For example, inflatable pool toys suggest ideas about volume

and spatial expansion, but instead were “shrink-wrapped” to create spatial compression between the container and contained. “Extreme Makeovers” resulted when these procedures became much more invasive, augmenting or distorting their architectural postures and facial expressions. “Erector Sets” challenged the status of the discipline’s proprietary devices. In these projects domes, arches, and oculi were fashioned from household plungers and the “splintering” and “bundling” of plastic toy guitars exaggerated the structural and material properties of lintels and beams. Finally, “Dodgems” were literal mashups of similar objects. In one project, the disassembly and compaction of baby-doll parts confronted established anthropomorphic conventions like scale and proportion. In another, a purple plastic piggy bank was “(pork) chopped” then “herded” to create an alternative “farm-to-table” massing strategy.

A double take is a delayed reaction to something surprising or significant after an initial failure to notice anything unusual. The title of the studio not only references Warhol’s iterative multimedia process, but also challenges architecture to elicit a similar reception of estrangement at the initial moment of its engagement. The broader cultural misinterpretation of Warhol’s work parallels the way in which the studio addresses contemporary architecture and its representations. With the digital landscape becoming increasingly inhabitable, the mundanity of the physical landscape becomes more speculative. The subversive allusion to the reality of objects, largely occupying both of these grounds, becomes the territory of fertile architectural production.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Kutan Ayata and Michael Young, *The Estranged Object*, (Graham Foundation, 2015), 29-30.
2. Ibid.
3. Ellie Abrons and Adam Fure, “Postdigital Materiality,” *Lineament: Material, Representation and the Physical Figure in Architectural Production*, August (2017), 185.
4. Ted Mann, “Andy Warhol: Self-Portrait in Drag,” Guggenheim Online Collection, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/15490>.
5. Levi Bryant, “The Material Unconscious,” *Larval Subjects* (blog), August 12, 2015, <https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2015/08/12/the-material-unconscious/>.
6. Other work from the studios can be view at <https://isomorphism-jeanjaminet.com/>.