The Simplest Surrealist Act

Valerie Solanas and the (Re)Assertion of Avantgarde Priorities

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After the ambulance had rushed a near mortally wounded Andy Warhol from the Factory to a hospital on 3 June 1968, a small brown paper bag remained on a table close to where he had been talking on the phone when Valerie Solanas shot him. An incongruous and foreign object, the bag contained three items: a pistol, Valerie Solanas’s address book, and a woman’s sanitary napkin. Solanas had placed the bag on the table as she was departing from the scene of chaos created by her violent act. In a small but not insignificant way, its discordant contents echoed a sense of incongruity that had been hovering about Solanas for some time. Having already been thrown out of the Factory earlier that afternoon by Paul Morrissey (the coproducer of Warhol’s films), Solanas waited for Warhol outside. When he arrived, she accompanied Warhol back into the Factory where she shot him. Though it was a hot summer day, Solanas had donned a turtleneck sweater and a trench coat, reminiscent of Hollywood spy movies; rather uncharacteristically, she was also wearing makeup. The makeup, the trench coat, and the mysterious paper bag, all served, as Laura Winkiel rightly asserts, as “props to stage the assassination” (1999:72)—even though, I would add, the sheer actual violence of Solanas’s act served as a harsh reminder that the assassination was not merely staged.

Somewhere between the props and the pistol shots, Solanas constructed a mode of performance that absolutely defied the conventions of mainstream theatre and tore at the very conceptual fabric of the avantgarde. In this respect, the seemingly insignificant paper bag left on the table at Warhol’s Factory has a major part to play not only in establishing Solanas’s act as a calculated aesthetic performance but also as a performance that, like the sanitary napkin among its contents, transgressed decorum by calling attention to basic feminine experiences that were publicly taboo and tacitly elided within avantgarde circles.¹

It is hard to overstate how far afield such a conceptualization of Solanas’s assault on Warhol is from the accepted interpretations of her actions, interpretations that by and large are based upon Warhol’s own reduction of Solanas’s act to a mere attempt to use him as a trampoline to fame. “Being famous isn’t all that important,” Warhol subsequently claimed in The Philosophy of Andy Warhol. “If I weren’t famous, I wouldn’t have been shot for being Andy

¹In the context of the avantgarde, the sanitary napkin could be seen as a symbol of the subversion of traditional gender roles and the reclamation of female identity.

Warhol” (1975:78). At the time of the shooting, this clarification—subordinating Solanas as it did to Warhol and his agenda—was quickly picked up by the mainstream media, which was only too happy to depict Solanas as a product of Warhol himself, that is, as an expected outcome of what they considered to be the morally suspect world that Warhol encouraged. While the fleeting sensationalism of that event and the moral drumroll against Warhol have come and gone, Warhol’s account of Solanas’s actions has endured even in projects implicitly aimed at finally giving Solanas her due. I propose an assessment of Solanas that understands her shooting of Warhol as the pivotal gesture in a radically subversive project aimed at recalibrating the trajectory of the American avantgarde.

1. Actress Valerie Solanas, left, is shown at the police station where she was booked on 4 June 1968 on charges of felonious assault and possession of a deadly weapon. (Courtesy of AP/Wide World Photos)
The appearance in 1996 of Mary Harron’s film *I Shot Andy Warhol* was one of those ambiguous moments that all too frequently accompany long histories of neglect. Evincing the almost incomprehensible power of the cinema, the film arguably did more to give Valerie Solanas’s name a lasting place in the cultural imaginary than did her actual attempt to kill Warhol. In this respect, a subtle irony shadows the tag line printed on the poster advertising the film. That line claims “You only get one shot at fame”—despite the fact that the film has given Solanas a second and rhetorically more powerful shot at what the poster portrays as a one-time opportunity. As many will recognize, the line also plays upon Warhol’s well-known promise that in the future everyone will enjoy 15 minutes of fame (Warhol and König 1968:n.p.). Even though the film trumps this promise by actually giving Solanas 103 infinitely repeatable minutes in celluloid, the riff on Warhol is more than merely a witty slogan for marketing an independent film. The play on Warhol’s promise, like the title of the film itself, frames Solanas in a position subordinate to Warhol and Warholian aesthetics. This act of subordination, which is wholly consistent with the media’s portrayal of Solanas some 30 years ago, arguably culminates in the visual imagery of the poster itself, which is a modified reproduction of Warhol’s 1964 silkscreen of Elvis Presley absurdly cast by Hollywood in the role of a gunfighter, pistol drawn and ready for action. In the advertisement for Harron’s film, Elvis’s head is missing and is supplanted by an image of Lily Taylor, the actor who plays Solanas in the film (plate 2).

The ambiguities of Harron’s film crystallize in this constructed image. Even though, at one level, beheading Elvis makes good on Solanas’s call for a “Society for Cutting Up Men” (SCUM), the subsequent, constructed representation of Solanas as a pistol-toting cowboy necessitates cutting up or beheading Solanas (Taylor) as well and arguably makes fun of as much as it makes good on the radical program that Solanas proposes in her *SCUM Manifesto* ([1967] 1997). More importantly, the constructed image of the poster, relying as it does on Warhol’s silkscreen of Elvis, presents Solanas as a figure completely and literally subsumed not just within a Warholian frame but within the aesthetic contours of Warhol’s own fascination with stardom. In this respect, the film makes a case for a reassessment of Solanas, which it simultaneously undermines because it privileges Warhol’s own interpretation of Solanas’s attempted murder as a perverse gesture at cashing in on his promise of fame. For all the attention that the film cultivates on Solanas’s behalf, it thus uncritically perpetuates a narrative of fame-mongering that significantly underestimates what I argue is Solanas’s importance in the cultural history of American experimental performance.

Whatever the publicized motivations of Solanas’s act, somewhere seething beneath the glitzy media spectacle of taking a potshot at perhaps the most popular icon of pop art culture, a much more significant historical narrative transpired. This story has never really been told, perhaps because its telling positions a deadly act of violence within an unsettling liminoid sphere of cultural legitimacy that is potentially as seductive as it is dangerous. The narrative only really emerges when the moments of terror that Solanas brought to Warhol’s Factory are situated within the context of the radically changing landscape of American avantgarde practice in the late 1960s. The foundation of that narrative thus lies not in a depiction of Solanas’s act of violence as a perverse shot at fame or publicity, but rather in the recognition of that act as a carefully orchestrated and radically disturbing aesthetic performance—so disturbing in fact that Robert Rauschenberg, upon hearing of the back-to-back shootings of
2. The poster for Mary Harron’s 1996 film I Shot Andy Warhol superimposes actress Lili Taylor’s head over Warhol’s famous silkscreen of Elvis Presley (1964). (Poster courtesy of Metro Goldwyn Mayer)
Andy Warhol and Robert Kennedy, reportedly “fell to the floor, sobbing,” asking in dismay whether guns were the new medium of artistic and political expression (Warhol and Hackett 1980:276). For Solanas, guns had clearly become both, and, in this respect, her conscious and deliberate theatricalization of a radical and violent enactment of what Janet Lyon has called her “anarcho-libertarian” political agenda—complimented as it was by her use of the manifesto as a literary form—situated her within a long-standing anarchist tradition of avantgarde practice (Lyon 1999:174). In fact, the uniting of radical art and radical politics was, by the 1960s, such a familiar trope of the avantgarde that the greatest irony in accusing Solanas of wounding Warhol in order to take a shot at fame is the way that such accusations have consistently denied Solanas the attention she deserves as the orchestrator and agent of perhaps the most deeply provocative and profoundly subversive moment of American avantgarde performance in the 1960s.

At one level, acknowledging this denial is the first step toward correcting the neglect. But the larger issue in that corrective pivots on a recognition that Solanas’s act of violence is as antagonistic toward the prevailing standards and histories of the avantgarde as it is hostile toward the patriarchal bourgeois mores of American society as a whole. Indeed, the two are linked in their reinforcement of a notion of patriarchal privilege that Solanas sought at every turn to disrupt—as is subtly indicated by the seemingly indecorous contents of her strategically placed brown paper bag. Consequently, any recognition of Solanas’s significance within the history of the American avantgarde simultaneously introduces an acerbic, hostile, and irreconcilable element into that history, an element that is consciously defiant and deliberately incorrigible and that seeks neither an acknowledgment according to established aesthetic standards nor a place within the accepted narratives of American avantgarde history. On the contrary, Solanas’s act implicitly aimed at subverting the underlying assumptions and standards upon which that history depends. Parallel to the attitude that SCUM maintains in its relation with the body politic, Solanas’s assault on Warhol sought, as a transgressive performative act, “to destroy the system, not to attain certain rights within it” (Solanas [1967] 1997:43). Solanas’s significance as a figure within the avantgarde is thus inseparable from her overtly hostile outlaw status within its culture. It is from this position, which Solanas herself describes as necessarily “criminal,” that she fashioned a conception of performance which, in its combination of revolutionary anticapitalist and antipatriarchal sentiment, not only mapped out a radically new course for the traditional political priorities of the avantgarde but also initiated a militant critique of the underlying assumptions of the American avantgarde itself (43).

Warhol’s role in that critique is not merely that of an unfortunate victim. Solanas punctuated her vision with bullets that were calibrated with political and artistic ambiguity. In a world where anything could be art—a world Warhol helped to create—Solanas’s gun menacingly fired the unanswerable questions: Is this art? Is this revolutionary politics? Is this the new medium? The significance of that moment hinges upon the recognition that, though intimately related to her manifesto, Solanas’s act of violence was the real testing ground for the cutting edge of American avantgarde performance. Some sense of the underlying dynamics of that cutting edge can be garnered from the model that Stephen Foster proposes for conceptualizing what he terms “event-based arts.” Foster maintains that the function of “event-based arts” is to challenge dominant artistic traditions by “largely abandoning historically sanctioned aesthetics” and by consciously embracing as art activities that which by prevailing standards would be judged to be “nonart” (1988:5). There is perhaps no better description of the provocation wrought by Solanas’s assault on Warhol even though the sanctioned aesthetics
that Solanas abandoned in shooting Warhol were arguably a product of the very anti-art traditions that Foster addresses in his essay. Nevertheless, Solanas’s act owed much of its significance to the fact that, in trying to kill Warhol, she exposed the unspoken criteria functioning beneath the then prevalent notion that art no longer had definitive criteria. At a time when the distinction between art and nonart was largely considered to be no longer viable, she thereby proved that the distinction between art and nonart was very much alive in the celebrated anti-art agenda of pop art culture. As an event, indeed as a performance, the shooting of Warhol thus placed Solanas directly within the radical anti-art traditions of the avantgarde even as her act profoundly tested those traditions.

The Margins of the Manifesto: SCUM and the Critique of the Avantgarde

On a theoretical level, this immanent critique of the anti-art traditions of the avantgarde was already present in the manifesto to which Solanas referred reporters when they inquired about her motivations for shooting Warhol. “I have a lot of very involved reasons,” she told the reporters. “Read my manifesto and it will tell you what I am” (in Bockris 1989:233). Although Solanas’s SCUM Manifesto certainly contains passages that advocate a “selective and discriminate” use of violent destruction and which speak of “SCUM [...] coolly, furtively stalk[ing] its prey and quietly [...] moving in for the kill,” there is no clear indication in Solanas’s ambiguous statement to reporters that the contents of the manifesto would explain the specifics of her action, at least not in the sense of providing a script for those actions (Solanas [1967] 1997:43).

In emphasizing the avantgarde dynamic in the relation between Solanas’s manifesto and her shooting of Warhol, the point is not to take issue with the feminist reading of Solanas’s significance per se. That reading has its own value, and, more importantly, is indispensable to understanding the manner in which Solanas ultimately revitalized the otherwise seemingly exhausted aesthetics of the historical avantgarde. But Solanas’s feminist concerns derive much of their force from the avantgarde context that generated them and that scholars have generally overlooked. While on the one hand examining Solanas’s feminist concerns within that context has the potential to completely redefine, indeed to finally establish, Solanas’s significance in the history of the American avantgarde, it also necessitates a substantial revision of the reception that her work has received. That revision begins with a fundamental realignment of the respective cultural values that critics have given to her manifesto and to her act of violence, and with a leveling of the significance attributed to each. For the avantgarde dimensions in Solanas’s activities are located in the dynamic between the text she produced (the manifesto) and the performance she enacted (the shooting of Warhol), a dynamic which arguably corresponds to the theatrical avantgarde’s reconceptualization of text and performance as a radical juxtaposition of two equally weighted, autonomous art forms. But what her comments do suggest is that the manifesto establishes an identity (“it will tell you what I am”) and thus serves as a kind of credential. In this respect, the referral to the manifesto, especially when one considers its hyperbolic rhetoric, positions Solanas among the likes of avantgardists Filippo Marinetti, Tristan Tzara, and André Breton. At the same time, the force of that rhetoric, which in its militant—at times absurdly gargantuan—embraces of a “misandrous tradition,” goes toe-to-toe against a long history of misogyny that the historical avantgarde uncritically absorbed from the very bourgeois Western culture whose values it ostensibly opposed (Koch 1991:130). The SCUM Manifesto thus usurps the mantle of the
avantgarde by skillfully inverting and thereby exposing its historically unacknowledged, gendered tropes.

This strategy is nowhere more immediately evident than in what is probably the most famous but oddly the least discussed aspect of Solanas’s work: the acronym included in the title of her *SCUM Manifesto*. At its more literal level, “SCUM” alludes to the desirably low social status that, according to Solanas, women are relegated to in patriarchal society. In this regard, her title represents one of the first instances of an individual or a group publicly embracing and appropriating an offensive characterization for a political agenda running directly counter to its derogatory implications. SCUM thereby subverts an accepted linguistic order as a titular point of departure for a group of women actively and radically engaged in subverting the social order that represses them. Conjoined as the acronym is with the proclamation of “resolute oppositionality” and of participation in a “struggle against oppressive forces” that, according to Janet Lyon, is implicit anytime someone chooses to identify his or her work as a manifesto, the composite title of the *SCUM Manifesto* signals a critical trajectory of overlapping voices from the margins (Lyon 1999). While initially it may be helpful to conceptualize this trajectory as emanating from a position comparable to the notion of “double marginality” that Susan Suleiman has used to characterize French experimental writings by women, there is, in Solanas’s work, a fundamental and uncompromisingly irreconcilable antagonism between the cultural margins occupied by the avantgarde and the cultural margins occupied by women (1990:14). Speaking from the latter indicts the former. This antagonism—once again, so subtly but insistently suggested by the contents of the paper bag left at the shooting—is in many respects paradigmatic of a cultivated radical dissonance that reverberates not only through the title of Solanas’s manifesto and through the manifesto’s content, but also through the critical position that Solanas ultimately assumes in relation to Warholian aesthetics. Indeed, that antagonistic dissonance becomes the crux of a radically subversive and startlingly fresh avantgarde aesthetic. From the perspective of avantgarde historiography, the aesthetic echoes the dynamic, decentered tensions of collage. It recoils in critical dissonance as a consciously disharmonious and disruptively nonassimilable element within the dominant system of avantgarde aesthetics of its time.

This antagonistic dissonance seethes beneath the surface of the manifesto’s title, always threatening destructive retribution for the indignities suffered by women who are treated as the social dregs both within the ranks of the avantgarde and within society at large. “SCUM” is, after all is said and done, an acronym for the “Society for Cutting Up Men.” Thus at the same time that the title subverts and appropriates a derogatory characterization of women, SCUM’s acronymic function implicitly threatens a graphically violent response to the violence that historically has been perpetuated against women. While rhetorically the notion of “cutting up men” may strike directly at male anxieties about disembowelment, there is a more subtle allusion in Solanas’s acronymic title. It recalls perhaps the most innovative aesthetic strategy of subversion historically employed by the avantgarde, namely the subversive cutting up, recontextualization, and radical juxtapositions that are the basic techniques of collage itself. Inasmuch as this allusion identifies the cutting up of men with a tradition of experimental art, the manifesto, in its implicit embrace of collage aesthetics, rhetorically positions itself as a hostile usurper and unassimilable agent, commandeering an avantgarde aesthetic strategy that it employs to disrupt the avantgarde itself. The manifesto, once again, thus positions itself not as a petition for recognition within the existing traditions of the avantgarde but
rather as a countervailing point of critical tension in a radical juxtaposition of irreconcilable, mutually exclusive aesthetic agendas.

Moving from the title into a closer consideration of the manifesto’s content, one quickly discovers how crucial within Solanas’s work the collage strategy of radical juxtaposition is to her retooling of the basic tropes of avantgarde expression. The most important example of this strategy is Solanas’s juxtaposition and equation of capitalism and patriarchy—an equation that a decade later Hélène Cixous would repeat in her own manifesto, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” and would describe as “volcanic,” “subversive,” and capable of “shatter[ing] the framework of institutions, [...] blow[ing] up the law [...] and of] break[ing] up the ‘truth’ with laughter” ([1975] 1986:316). Peppered with statements echoing the anticapitalist sentiments that have long been a mainstay of the revolutionary avantgarde, Solanas’s manifesto curries these same statements with assertions that fundamentally link a genuine revolutionary anticapitalism with nothing short of the complete destruction of patriarchal privilege. To eliminate either one necessitates the elimination of the other. The “total elimination of the money-work system” will liberate women, Solanas argues, because it will finally strip men of “the only power they have over psychologically independent females” ([1967] 1997:7, 21).

Two precedents set the context for the critical significance of Solanas’s equation of capitalism and patriarchy. Both come from within the established ranks of the avantgarde. The first can be traced back a half a century to Berlin dada and to the work of Raoul Hausmann, and the second comes directly from Warhol himself. Just as Solanas’s subtle embrace of collage aesthetics usurps an avantgarde strategy that it employs to disrupt the avantgarde itself, so too does the link which she establishes between capitalism and patriarchy echo sentiments that Hausmann promoted in avantgarde circles in Berlin and that Solanas some 50 years later turned against the avantgarde aesthetics of pop art culture. Not only did Hausmann’s writings for the journal Die Erde express a fervent anticapitalism that was grounded in anarchist and communist logic, but his essay “Weltrevolution” from 1919, like Solanas’s later manifesto, specifically linked that anticapitalist sentiment to “the creation of a feminine society.” Indeed, the essay argued that “the restructuring of bourgeois society into communism” absolutely necessitated “opposition to the masculine model of a patriarchal family” (in Lavin 1993:26). While this strategy of equating capitalism and patriarchy has very obvious concerns with the structures and organization of society at large, in the hands of Solanas it assumed a very pointed if somewhat coded critique of the direction that the American avantgarde had taken under the influence of Warhol.

Warhol had his beginnings in commercial art, and as has often been noted he never really left those beginnings behind. Sally Banes, for example, after observing that in the early ’60s “commercial art was considered by some [to be] the first truly democratic, widely accessible American art,” emphasizes that “Andy Warhol, above all, asserted the commercial connection as something to exploit, not as something to apologize for” (1993:94–95). The irony of this assertion, as Banes implicitly suggests later on, is that for all its supposedly democratic potential, the “commercial connection” embraced by Warhol often led pop artists like Warhol himself “to adopt uncritically—even at times salute—the dominant culture’s representations of women both as a consumer and as a sexual object to be consumed” (219). That this uncritical embrace of sexist commercialism had patriarchal underpinnings, especially within the avantgarde activities of figures like Warhol, was acknowledged, however inadvertently, by Warhol himself when he cited “the paternal signifiers lurking in both ‘pop’ and ‘dada’” and when he then stated that “dada must have
something to do with pop—it’s so funny, the names are really synonyms” (in Moon 1996:84, 85).

Even though in common parlance the names “pop” and “dada” both affectionately refer to the father, Berlin Dada had set a political precedent that was very much at odds with Warhol’s embrace of commercialism and, more importantly, that Solanas later appropriated in a full-scale critique of the avantgarde. Certainly, dada had its own patriarchal baggage and perhaps this is why in Solanas’s manifesto there is no clear embrace of her dada predecessors, but even this moment of ambivalence is but one example in a whole series of critical inversions that cleverly position Solanas firmly within the anti-traditions of the avantgarde. As Lora Rempel has noted, the avantgarde has always had an ambivalent relation to its predecessors: “The act of symbolically killing one’s aesthetic parents has been, historically and historiographically, an important initiation rite for entrance into the ranks of the artistic avantgarde—an expected impudence” (1994:155). While Solanas’s manifesto may implicitly have taken a critical snipe at dada, her gunshot at pop explicitly took “the symbolic killing of one’s aesthetic parents” to a shockingly new and unexpected level of impudence.

The shot was an unparalleled act in the history of the avantgarde, one that cut not just through the rhetorical posturing of the Futurists but also through André Breton’s surrealist bravado.

This double-edged strategy of forging a critique of the avantgarde by subversively appropriating its tropes is perhaps the most consistent pattern in Solanas’s activities. While her militant anticapitalism positions her antithetically to the commercialism of pop avantgarde figures like Warhol and thereby aligns her with a revolutionary agenda frequently associated with the historical avantgarde, her antipatriarchal convictions strike at the foundations of the historical avantgarde itself, forwarding its evolution by means of an immanent critique. That immanent critique is embedded both in her manifesto and in her act of violence. On the one hand, the anticapitalist sentiments of the manifesto are accompanied by an embrace of crucial dimensions from Marinetti’s 1909 “Founding Manifesto of Futurism,” such as, “the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness,” and “the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers”; on the other hand, Solanas’s unabashed contempt for men radically inverts the futurists’ openly expressed “scorn for woman” ([1909] 1973:21–22). Furthermore, in shooting Andy Warhol, Solanas subversively pushed the hyperbolic militant rhetoric of the avantgarde manifesto to its logical conclusion. The shot was an unparalleled act in the history of the avantgarde, one that cut not just through the rhetorical posturing of the futurists but also through André Breton’s surrealist bravado. Indeed, the shot finally called the bluff on Breton’s 1924 assertion that “the simplest surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd” (1972:125).

In 1968, that crowd happened to be the fashionable one at Warhol’s Factory, and in ripping through the crowd with an array of bullets, Solanas not only lived up to the rhetorical call of her manifesto to cut up men, she unleashed a violent aesthetic process that turned Warhol’s body into a kind of
Permanent collage. In this respect, Solanas’s manifesto has to be seen as providing a context for a profoundly subversive interpretation of the historical avantgarde’s longstanding fascination with collage. However grotesque, the physically disfiguring effect that her attack had on Warhol was thus without question the quintessential act of appropriating and then turning the tropes of the avantgarde against itself—both with regard to the radical juxtapositions of collage aesthetics and with regard to the hyperbolic rhetoric of the avantgarde manifesto. In the process of that violently subversive act of critical inversion, Solanas’s own manifesto occupies an ambiguous status. First of all, it lays the theoretical foundation for the critique of the avantgarde, which was implicit in Solanas’s assault on Warhol. But at the same time, it served—as like the brown paper bag later would—as a prop in a series of performances leading up to and ultimately defining the shooting itself as an avantgarde performance. Indeed, as a performance, Solanas’s violent encounter with Warhol was arguably as much an enacted critique of Warholian aesthetics and their reaffirmation of patriarchal culture as it was a crystallization of the confrontational performative tactics that Solanas had already employed in selling her manifesto.

Print As Props: The Presence and Absence of Text in Solanas’s Performative Practices

To a great extent, the theoretical complexities of Solanas’s act of violence have less to do with the actual content of the SCUM Manifesto than they do with the role that the manifesto played as a physical, material object in Solanas’s activities prior to the shooting, activities that clearly constitute their own brand of experimental street theatre. Indeed, the avantgarde dimensions of Solanas’s act of violence are, in this regard, not only closely associated with the SCUM Manifesto as a physical text but also with the drama Up Your Ass (1967), which Solanas penned in the years directly prior to her shooting of Warhol. Oddly enough, the significance of these two texts has to do with the ominous presence of the former and the troubling disappearance of the latter. But in both respects, each of the two pieces facilitated an important critical variation on the radical reconceptualization of performance that accompanied the historical avantgarde’s rejection of the classic privileging of text over performance in mainstream bourgeois theatre.

With regard to the manifesto, that reconceptualization pivots largely on the expansive redefinition of performance that accompanied the avantgarde’s antagonistic disavowal of literary masterpieces and of the highbrow culture that valued them. While the makeshift quality of Solanas’s 1967 self-published SCUM Manifesto—she sold mimeographed copies on the street at $2.00 a copy for men and $1.00 for women—certainly coincides with the avantgarde’s traditional hostility toward the established institutions of official literary culture, the political agitation built into Solanas’s street-level distribution of the manifesto arguably functioned as a guerrilla theatre performance that took direct aim at the patriarchal underpinnings of a literary culture that she described as having been “created by men” and endorsed by male critics ([1967] 1997:25). But the more important issue here is the manner in which the assumptions governing Solanas’s provocative street theatre tactics for distributing her manifesto extended the avantgarde’s broad redefinition of performance to include the structural foundations of bourgeois culture as well. With regard to questions of gender, those tactics were based upon the assumption that literary culture was by no means uniquely a creation by men. Solanas argues throughout her manifesto that the dominant notions of gender are largely such a creation as well, and the guerrilla theatre tactics she employed in distributing her mani-
Up Your Ass
an excerpt from the play by Valerie Solanas

BONGI: That’s a slick little maxim—while the hand’s rocking the cradle it won’t be rocking the boat.

GINGER: There’re plenty of male hands around to do whatever boat-rocking’s necessary.

BONGI: I’ve met quite a few hairy old male hands in my day, and it’s not the boat they’re grabbling for.

CAT: Why should it be? It’s a man’s world.

BONGI: Only by default.

GINGER: Default or not, I think it’s marvelous.

CAT: Sure, in a man’s world you broads have the ultimate weapon—sex.

BONGI: Then how come we’ve never had a sexy president?

CAT: (to BONGI) Why don’t you run for president?

BONGI: Nah, I like to think big.

GINGER: Personally, I’d hate to see a woman president.

CAT: Why? Women’re just as good as men in every way.

BONGI: I’ve had just about enough of your insults.

GINGER: Well, whether they are or not, we’ll never have one. Never! We never have... (“So there” voice) ...and we never will. Will we, Russell?

RUSSELL: It’s unthinkable.

BONGI: Maybe being president wouldn’t be such a bad idea: I could eliminate the money system, and let the machines do all the work.

CAT: Thanks for the warning. I’ll be sure to not vote for you. Sure, I’d like to not need bread—I don’t want to have to combine marriage and a career—but the broads gotta need it. You know the S in the dollar sign? That stands for sex.

GINGER: Actually, there’s something to be said for Bongi’s system; men need leisure time.

CAT: What’ll I do with all that leisure? Lay around with a big hard-on?

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festo were arguably calculated to shock passersby into an awareness of their own performance of gender. Just as the makeshift quality of Solanas’s manifesto chafed against the male-dominated institutions of official literary culture, her direct street-level confrontations (openly penalizing men an extra dollar because of their sex) agitated not only against male economic privilege but more generally against the unacknowledged quotidian performance of socially constructed gender roles that perpetuated a patriarchal culture that was tacitly endorsed by the avantgarde.

Generally speaking, Solanas was a marginal figure in the mid-1960s milieu of Greenwich Village. Yet her provocative guerrilla theatre tactics, accentu-
GINGER: It’s a sin to tie men down to jobs. Men’re the hunters...
CAT: Yeah, I been doing a lot of that.
GINGER: ...the adventurers; they should be free to go off and invent and explore, soar off into the unknown.
RUSSELL: And leave the kids with the women? Corrode my son with femininity? Never! When mothers aren’t competing they’re mothering; you gotta keep a close watch on them. I want my son to be the best of all possible men.
BONGI: You mean a half-assed woman.
RUSSELL: When he grows up I want to be able to point to him and say: “There goes my son—the man.” I want to live in a masculine culture.
BONGI: That’s a contradiction in terms.
RUSSELL: I want a strong, virile environment.
BONGI: Why don’t you hang out at the YMCA gym?
CAT: The battle of the sexes—it’s been raging on for centuries.
BONGI: I know how we could eliminate it.
CAT: How?
BONGI: Have you ever heard of sex determination?
RUSSELL: Never! Never! That’s not natural. There’ll always be two sexes.
BONGI: Men’re totally unreasonable; they can’t see why they should be eliminated.
RUSSELL: No! The two-sex system must be right; it’s survived hundreds of thousands of years.
BONGI: So has disease.
RUSSELL: You can’t just determine us away. We won’t allow it; we’ll unite; we’ll fight.
BONGI: You may as well resign yourself: eventually the expression “female of the species” ’ll be a redundancy.
RUSSELL: You don’t know what a female is, you desexed monstrosity.
BONGI: Quite the contrary, I’m so female I’m subversive.

ated as they were by the wildly polemical rhetoric of the *SCUM Manifesto*, were incendiary enough to give Solanas some local notoriety. This notoriety landed her an interview with the *Village Voice*—even though the interview was not published until after she shot Warhol. More importantly, her provocative behavior also caught the attention of Ultra Violet, who was one of Warhol’s actresses and who, by reading excerpts to Warhol from Solanas’s manifesto, unknowingly set in motion a chain of events that nearly cost Warhol his life. In this respect, the manifesto served the additional function of introducing Solanas to Warhol’s circle where she was emboldened to directly approach him about producing *Up Your Ass*, a satirical play she had written in
1966 and ’67. Though Warhol accepted the manuscript, he apparently was never really interested in producing the play, and the manuscript was lost, not to be found or produced for another 30 years.” Critics have questioned the literary merits of this play, which, much in the vein of Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* (1896), is admittedly rather adolescent and contrived. Based on a plot about a woman who “is a man-hating hustler and panhandler” and who, somewhat more successfully than Solanas, actually ends up killing a man, the play is perhaps better understood as a provocation than as a work of dramatic literature (Baer 1997:48–49). Indeed, assessing its “literary merits” would seem to fly in the face of Solanas’s own arguments that the criteria for assessing literature always already have as their first objective the reaffirmation of standards derived from work produced by male artists and male critics (1967:25). An actual assessment of the merits of *Up Your Ass*, if one were to follow Solanas’s argument to its logical conclusion, would thus first of all necessitate a complete feminist deconstruction of “the entire system” of literary history (43).

Solanas’s was an ugly act exposing an ugly history, and what the shooting of Warhol left in its wake was an aporia in avantgarde history: a moment when the historical narrative was, like Warhol’s body itself, no longer seamless and when, in a conceptual fashion reminiscent of collage aesthetics, the incongruous juxtaposition of irreconcilable trajectories in the avantgarde were exposed.

Until that fundamental restructuring of literary history occurs, the real significance of Solanas’s drama has to be located with the radical unscripted performance occasioned by the drama’s disappearance. For if any one event technically prompted the shooting of Andy Warhol, then it was the misplacing of Solanas’s manuscript among the boxes of lighting equipment and film paraphernalia in Warhol’s Factory. Solanas tried desperately to recover the play until it became obvious that it had been carelessly misplaced and could not be found. Ironically, this act of careless disregard harbored an amazing, culturally symbolic cachet—and not merely because the loss of a play about a woman shooting a man led to the aestheticized event of Solanas actually shooting Warhol. In its relation to the shooting, the misplacing of Solanas’s drama counts as one of those truly peculiar moments in history that serendipitously offers an allegorical parallel to the cultural struggle for which it provides a context. For just as seminal gestures of avantgarde performance can be found in a liberating casual disregard of dramatic texts (as was done, for example, with The Performance Group’s adaptation of *The Bacchae in Dionysus in ’69* [1968]), so too did the careless handling of *Up Your Ass* promote a violent improvisational vanguard performance related to but so fundamentally distinct from the dramatic text to which it was tied that it demands an assessment on its own terms, an assessment that literally pivots on a distinction between acting and performance. Such was, in a nutshell, the history of the rise of avantgarde performance as an art form in its own right, and such was also the pretext that fashioned the aesthetic context of Solanas’s assault on the ruling figure of pop art culture.

This distinction between acting and performance is more than a serendipitous consequence of the loss of Solanas’s drama. The confrontational guerrilla theatre tactics that she employed not only in the distribution of her manifesto but also in the attack on Warhol erased the artificial boundaries that bourgeois
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theatre erected to separate actors and audience. Certainly Solanas was not the first to erase these boundaries, but it is worth noting, in passing, that this gesture crucially distinguishes the shooting of Warhol from what Kathy O’Dell characterizes as “arguably the best-known example of performance art—Chris Burden’s 1971 performance Shoot” (1998:1). Performed three years after the shooting of Warhol, Burden’s Shoot shocked its audience, which watched in dismay when Burden allowed a marksman to shoot him in the arm from a distance of 10 feet. Ironically, this performance piece, which critics have praised for exposing the voyeuristic fascinations of the audience, reinstated as its point of departure the very notion of the audience (as distinct from the performer) which it set out to challenge and which Solanas’s direct engagement radically rejected altogether. Whereas Burden’s later piece implicitly and retrospectively asked the audience why it did not intervene, Solanas assumed the responsibility for intervention herself and thus simultaneously acted to bring about a radical change of theatrical practice and a revolutionary shift in social politics, and to create a common forum for both.

Warhol’s Body, Legacy, and the Seams of Avantgarde History

When Solanas emerged from the elevator at Warhol’s Factory, pulled a pistol and started firing at Warhol, she did more than cut up his body with bullets. Her violence reasserted radical politics as a central priority of avantgarde practice, and while it is true that experimental performance groups like the Living Theatre also sought to unite art and politics in their performances, Solanas’s act was unique in its deeply disturbing ability to push the paradigms of experimental avantgarde performance beyond their limits while simultaneously critically indicting the very position into which avantgarde culture would and did inevitably recoil in abhorrence in response to her action. Given the violence of Solanas’s own act, it may at first be difficult to perceive that the tenor of this indictment involved a brazen gesture of appropriation which, by means of a laconic inversion, pulled the veil on the violent and barbarous proclivities buried in the very bourgeois attitudes that were offended by her action—attitudes that historically have assumed a posture of cultural and moral rectitude even as they tacitly have condoned countless direct and indirect acts of violence against women, minorities, and the economically disadvantaged. In this respect, the shooting of Warhol pivoted on what implicitly amounts to a deadly serious interpretation of Walter Benjamin’s assertion that “there is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (1969:256, translation corrected). As a document of culture, Solanas’s act differs from other cultural documents primarily in its candor about its own barbarity and in its use of that barbarity to expose the barbarity seething beneath the surface of the avantgarde culture that was appalled by her action. Solanas’s was an ugly act exposing an ugly history, and what the shooting of Warhol left in its wake was an aporia in avantgarde history: a moment when the historical narrative was, like Warhol’s body itself, no longer seamless and when, in a conceptual fashion reminiscent of collage aesthetics, the incongruous juxtaposition of irreconcilable trajectories in the avantgarde were exposed.

The scarring of Warhol’s belly, both by Solanas’s bullets and by the surgical hands that pieced him back together, quickly became the focus of intense cultural and artistic fascination, serving in many respects as a counterbalance to the artistic fetishization of the female body in contemporary works by artists such as Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni. Solanas’s “work” thus became the source of a second wave of other works, beginning with Robert Avedon’s two famous photographic portraits of Warhol in late 1968. The first is of Warhol facing the camera, leather jacket pulled back and T-shirt pulled up as
if to expose his scars to Doubting Thomas. The second photograph is of the torso itself, defamiliarized by the cutting and stitching that were necessary to save Warhol’s life. These photos were followed by Alice Neel’s 1970 portrait of Warhol in which she, more than any other artist, seemed to understand the radical, antipatriarchal sentiments that Solanas had carved into pop culture. Neel painted an older, feminized Warhol sitting half-naked on an unfinished sofa, his scars prominently displayed at the center of the portrait.

As examples of the absorption of Warhol’s refigured body into the iconography of American culture, the works of Avedon and Neel (especially Neel’s depiction of Warhol as an old, scarred woman with sagging breasts) are symptomatic of the more general, radically violent, and collage-like recontextualization that Solanas enacted on Warhol as a cultural figure. Solanas’s act ultimately removed Warhol from his earlier celebratory and politically disengaged embrace of popular culture and relocated him into a politically polarized context. In as much as the transformation of Warhol into a political figure was the work of Solanas herself, that relocation represents perhaps the single most important counterbalance to the cultural narratives which, in their accounts of Solanas’s assault on Warhol, would pull her into the Warholian center and view her through the lens of Warhol’s pop culture aesthetic.

At a conceptual level, the relocation of Warhol into a politically charged context amounted to a reorientation of avantgarde priorities that has largely gone unaddressed either in historical accounts of Solanas, of Warhol, or of the avantgarde more generally. More than mere oversight, Solanas’s exclusion from the accepted histories that plot the evolution of the avantgarde arguably underscores how unruly, radically subversive, and disruptive a figure Solanas is, especially to the history of the American avantgarde. Recognizing Solanas’s assault on Warhol as the most radical of performative gestures is simultaneously to recognize that the shooting of Warhol necessitates a new historiography of the avantgarde. What I have attempted here is the beginning of an historiography aimed not so much at including Solanas as it is at accounting for her subversive incompatibility with the history of the avantgarde as it has been written. Indeed, much of the significance of Solanas’s act lies precisely in the forceful way her violence, as an aesthetically extreme form of avantgarde performance, simultaneously revolts against exclusion from avantgarde history even as the transgressiveness of that violence consciously asserts a kind of fundamental disruptive incompatibility with the history from which it has been excluded.

That incompatibility was multiplied on numerous fronts and was perhaps most immediately exemplified in Solanas’s unsuccessful attempt to reorient her arraignment before the Manhattan Criminal Court into a discussion not of whether she was legally culpable for shooting Warhol but rather whether her actions were morally justified. Asked whether she had a lawyer, Solanas demanded the right to defend herself, and when she told Judge David Getzoff, “this is going to stay in my own competent hands. I was right in what I did! I have nothing to regret!” Getzoff “struck her comments from the court record” and committed her to Bellevue for psychiatric observation. Solanas ultimately spent a year in Ward Island Hospital before finally receiving a three-year sentence for “reckless assault with intent to harm” (in Baer 1997:54). There is some debate about whether Solanas was in and out of mental hospitals over the next 20 years, but she never abandoned the sense that her actions were justified. Indeed, in a 1977 interview with the Village Voice, Solanas, speaking about her unsuccessful attempt to kill Warhol, emphatically maintained that she adhered to “an absolute moral standard,” that the shooting was “a moral act,” and that she considered “it immoral that […] she missed” (56). Shortly after the interview, she disappeared until the late 1980s when Ultra Violet located her in San Francisco. Six months later, in the spring of 1988, she died of emphysema and pneumonia at age 52.
Beyond the Brillo Box. Arthur Danto argues in

Oddly, this subordination of Solanas to a kind of publicity mongering is as true of those

Winkiel actually argues that the sanitary pad symbolized castration, which strikes me as

Even a quick perusal of Solanas’s thought that anything

Arthur Danto argues in Beyond the Brillo Box that, “Warhol’s thought that anything

Even when something is a work of art just by looking at it, for there is no particular way that

Rather than viewing Solanas’s manifesto and her act of violence on an even par, feminist

To some extent, Deem’s article attempts a revision of that view of Solanas. The only problem is that Deem’s recovery of Solanas coincides with a gesture that subtly pushes her to the margins. It is not a matter of coincidence that Deem’s article bears the title “From Bobbitt to SCUM” rather than “From Bobbitt to Solanas.” As the title of her article suggests, Deem erases Solanas and Solanas’s assault on Warhol, rhetorically sweeping both beneath a discussion that characterizes the SCUM Manifesto as a feminist variation of Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of a “minor literature” (1996:524). A similar shift from Solanas to the manifesto dominates Marcie Frank’s “Popping Off Warhol”—except that Frank is a little more open about her preferences. She specifically advocates a separation of Solanas’s shooting of Warhol from discussion of the SCUM Manifesto. “An amazing piece of writing,” Frank notes, “the SCUM Manifesto deserves attention less as an explanation for why Solanas shot Warhol than as an angry, urgent cry for the reevaluation of gender identity” (1996:214). At one level, Frank’s article differs from Deem’s in that it offers a rather pointed critique of the patronizing handling of Solanas that Deem’s article continues. Frank is, for example, quite critical of Atkinson and Kennedy (the members of NOW who publicly rallied to Solanas’s defense in June 1968) and especially of their attempts “to recu-
perate [...] Solanas as a feminist hero” by characterizing her as a figure comparable to Jean Genet, a characterization that Solanas herself emphatically rejected (221).

6. The term “misogynist” appears to be Koch’s own, and in the context of his usage he clearly sees it as the opposite of the “misogynist” tradition that Solanas was combating.

7. This aspect of Solanas’s manifesto makes it a precursor to the rhetorical strategies later developed by groups like Queer Nation.

8. Suleiman also argues:

   In a system in which the marginal, the avant-garde, the subversive, all that disturbs and “undoes the whole” is endowed with positive value, a woman artist who can identify those concepts with her own practice and metaphorically with her own femininity can find in them a source of strength and self-legitimation. Perhaps no one has done this more successfully than Hélène Cixous. Her famous essay, “Le Rire de la Méduse” (The Laugh of the Medusa, 1975) is the closest thing to an avant-garde manifesto written from an explicitly feminist perspective. (1990:17)

   Obviously, Suleiman, whose book is primarily concerned with French literature, was unaware of Solanas’s manifesto, which predates Cixous’s “Le Rire de la Méduse” by almost a decade.

9. In this respect, Solanas’s SCUM Manifesto is typical of what Janet Lyon has noted as the historical connection between violence and the manifesto as a genre:

   Linked with the form’s passion for truth-telling is its stagng of fervid, even violent rage. David Graham Burnett has offered the thesis that the “manifesto” derives etymologically from a Latin composite of manus and fectus, or “hostile hand” [...] and this translation acknowledges the nascent fury embodied in the form. (1999:14)

10. What is also amazing about the political agenda that Solanas pursues is its avoidance of troubling hierarchical political structures. While it is true, as Lyon argues, that the manifesto “participates in an anarcho-libertarian tradition according to which individual liberation is linked to the overthrow of capitalism,” the political activism of that anarcho-libertarian tradition amounts to a radical juxtaposition of autonomous elements, coincidently working in concert—its own type of collage (1999:174). Indeed, Solanas’s political conceptions echo the manner in which collage aesthetic runs counter to systematic thought:

   Like the anarchism promoted in the post-situationist strain of sixties radicalism—itself a mixture of direct action and theatrical improvisation—Solanas’s salutary lawlessness bespeaks more a faith in anti-institutional spontaneous intervention than a belief in any kind of careful engagement with systematic critiques of capitalism. (174)

11. Although Cixous was probably unaware of Solanas’s manifesto at the time, her “The Laugh of the Medusa” echoes Solanas’s equation of capitalism with patriarchal society when she argues that the repression of women has its own dialectical role in the enlightenment of women, enabling them “to see more closely the inanity of ‘propriety,’ the reductive stinginess of the masculine-conjugal subjective economy, which she doubly resists” ([1975] 1986:317).

12. As those who are familiar with the history of Berlin Dada already know, Hausmann had trouble practicing what he preached. Despite his famous ongoing affair with Hanna Höch, he was never willing to give up his own rather bourgeois marriage. More to the point, though he and Höch both were interested in the “mechanical [...] and proletarian [...] connotations associated with photomontage,” his support of Höch’s participation in Berlin Dadaist’s activities evaporated as soon as she no longer wanted to be his lover (Boswell and Makela 1996:n.p.).

13. If, as Lyon argues, “SCUM is the vengeful, victorious daughter of the avant-garde manifestoes of Apollinaire, Tzara, Marinetti, Debord,” the list of patriarchal figures against whom Solanas rebels has to be extended to include Warhol, who, named the “Pope of Pop” by the mass media, was thus the quintessential father figure and ironically buried Solanas in a bit part in his 1967 film I, a Man (Lyon 1999:175).

14. As Laurence Senelick has noted, Breton was certainly not the only one to associate the
use of a gun with avantgarde activity. Senelick cites two other memorable instances. “Huelsenbeck,” he notes, “claimed that he and plants in the audience exchanged blank gunfire at his dada lectures,” and:

Jacque Vaché, one of Jarry’s fondest admirers (Jarry had been notorious for random fusillades at home and in cafés), came to the opening night of Apollinaire’s Les Mamelles de Tirésias brandishing a revolver and threatening to fire into the audience. The gunshot that had so often marked the climax of nineteenth-century drama crossed the footlights to become part of an exchange between the public and the spectacle. (2000:28)

As Senelick notes, these violent antics, which continued to escalate as the 20th century progressed, were typical of the avantgarde: “Willed self-annihilation is built into the avantgarde program, and in the process the individual human being is first reduced to sheer body and then becomes sacrificed to the machine” (29).

Interestingly enough, Solanas’s assault on Warhol’s body finds a striking parallel in the attitude that the theatrical avantgarde took toward classical texts in the 1960s. Some sense of that attitude is conveyed in Erika Fischer-Lichte’s article “The Avant-Garde and the Antitextual Gesture,” where she characterizes the avantgarde’s ambivalent relations to classical texts as a form of Sparagmos:

This manner of dealing with classical text was taken up again in the sixties and seventies by Grotowski, Schechner, Zadek, Peymann, and others. What happened in each of these instances can perhaps be described as Sparagmos: tearing apart and incorporation of textual bodies in which we symbolize our cultural traditions, indeed in which we see our culture embodied. With Sparagmos, which in such productions was realized, the textual body supplanted the totem, that is, the sacrificial victim. The process unfolded exactly like a Greek sacrificial meal. [...] In the performance, the cultural tradition incorporated in and handed down by the text was thus questioned and examined for validity by the performers and audience on—or rather through—their own bodies. (2000:90)

It is in this interview that Solanas tells Robert Marmorstein that SCUM stands for the “Society for Cutting Up Men” (1968:9). Her manifesto also attracted the interest of Maurice Girodias from Olympia Press, the publisher of Nabokov’s Lolita (1955) and Miller’s Tropic of Cancer (1934). Girodias even paid Solanas an advance to make a novel out of the manifesto (Baer 1997:49).

As it turns out, the manuscript was not thrown away as many have speculated. Indeed, 30 years after the shooting the manuscript turned up in the Andy Warhol Museum at a showing about Solanas and the shooting. George Coates saw the manuscript and decided to produce it. His production had its premiere in San Francisco in January 2000. As Judith Coburn notes in her review of the Coates production:

Coates discovered Up Your Ass in a small Solanas show Pittsburgh’s Andy Warhol Museum had put up to mark the 30th anniversary of the shooting. Turns out the copy Warhol lost had been buried under lighting equipment in a silver trunk owned by photographer Billy Name, famous for covering the original Factory with aluminum foil. (2000)

In Performance: A Critical Introduction, Marvin Carlson notes that Yves Klein attempted to blur the female body with the act of painting in his Anthropometries of the Blue Period (1960) which:

presented nude models covered with blue paint pressing against a canvas like living brushes. In Milan the following year, Piero Manzoni went further still, converting living bodies into “authentic works of art” by signing them as if they were paintings. (1999:96)

The interesting subtext to the exposed scars in Avedon’s photographs goes well beyond an affirmation of Warhol’s “resurrection” after having been pronounced clinically dead in the emergency room. Shortly before the shooting, Warhol had created a scandal and was even facing lawsuits because he had sent an imposter to a series of universities where he was paid to give lectures. Solanas’s “marking” of Warhol’s body immediately became a
kind of signature of authenticity, identifying the “real” and “true” Warhol at a time when the authenticity of his person was a major artistic and legal issue. Avedon’s photographic reproduction of Warhol as well as Alice Neel’s 1970 portrait of him thus carry an historic, ironic undercurrent in that as works of art they openly play with, while simultaneously abandoning, direct claims to authenticity. At one level, they are reproductions and ultimately a subtle affirmation of Solanas’s work as a work of art. At another level, they also suggest, as reproductions, that if the object of the universities in contracting Warhol to lecture on art was to convey an understanding of the mechanisms of art, then Warhol had arguably fulfilled his obligation precisely because he sent a reproduction. The imposter-as-imposter was a lesson in art—not to mention the fact that he was, by Warhol’s own admission, more eloquent on the subject of art than Warhol himself could ever be.

20. Victor Bockris speaks about the politically polarizing effect of Solanas’s assault on Warhol and specifically how the act politicized Warhol himself:

As had happened so often in his life, the shooting polarized feelings about Andy Warhol. At one extreme were those from whom he had now attained a Christlike martyrdom. At the very least, having been attacked for “political” reasons, he must now be viewed as a political artist. At the other pole were the feminist revolutionaries. One group calling itself the “Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers” brought out a pamphlet entitled “Valerie Lives,” in which Solanas was described as a “chick with balls” and her victim as a “plastic fascist.” (1989:236)

21. Although it is tempting to characterize the polarizing aesthetics accompanying Solanas’s attack on Warhol as an example of the volatility of neo-avantgarde rivalries, i.e., as one neo-avantgarde aesthetic aggressively competing with another, or even to describe Solanas’s activities as a good example in the realm of performance of what Hal Foster describes in the graphic arts as first- and second-wave neo-avantgarde aesthetics, to do so basically reduces the terms “historical avantgarde” and “neo-avantgarde” to mere linear temporal signifiers—something akin to “pre-” and “post-”war experimental art (1998). As problematic as the terms “historical avantgarde” and “neo-avantgarde” may ultimately prove to be on a more general scale, with regard to Solanas and Warhol they are indicative of distinct if not mutually exclusive conceptualizations of aesthetics, politics, and history. To casually place Solanas within the temporal designations of the neo-avantgarde is to endorse a conception of history and aesthetics that Solanas’s act of violence radically subverts.

22. This information is based on Freddie Baer’s biographical sketch (1997:44–56).

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