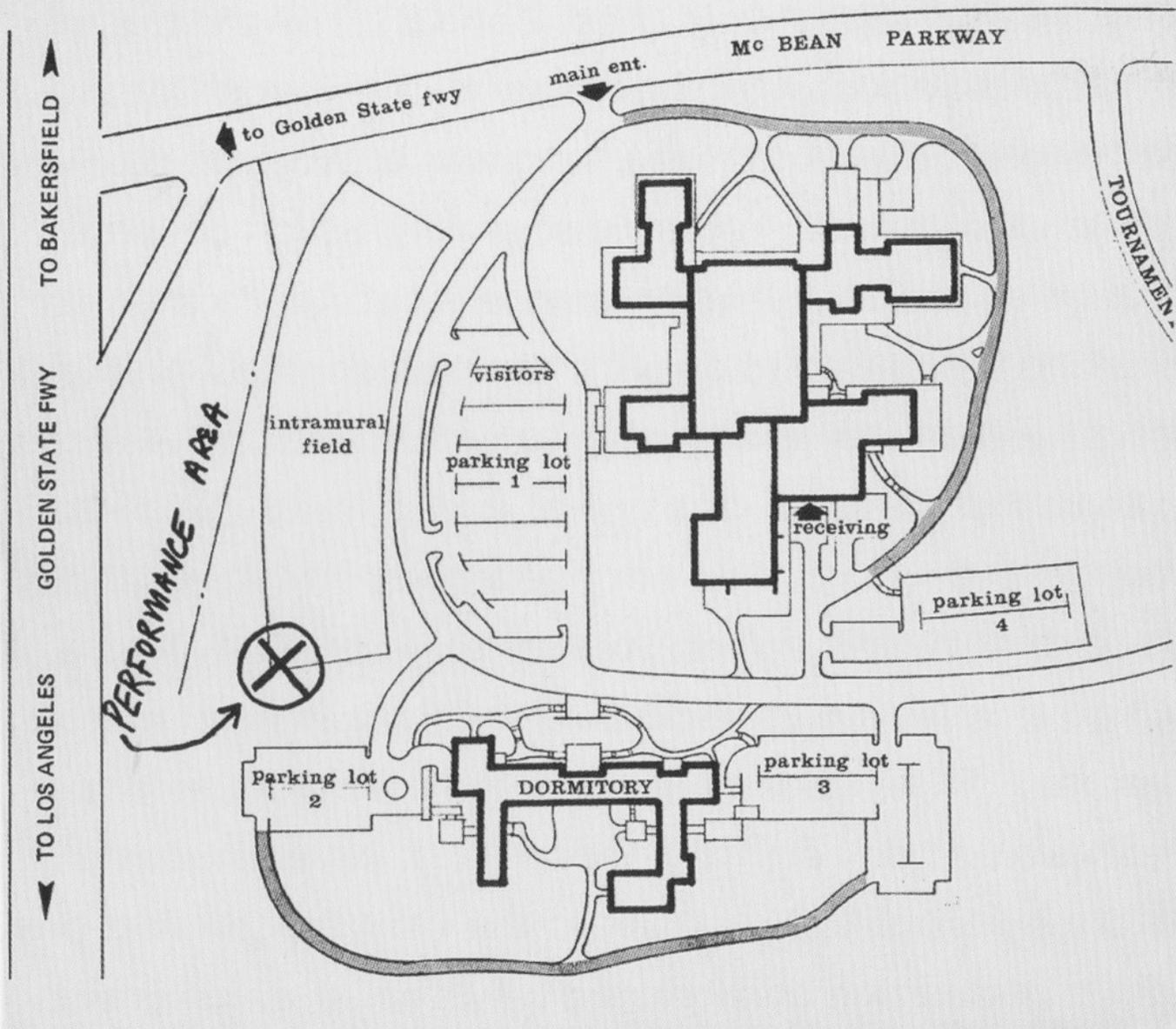


JACK GOLDSTEIN PERFORMANCE JUNE 9 8 PM

GALLERY A-402
HOURS 12-5 PM TUES-FRI
California Institute of the Arts
24700 McBean Parkway
Valencia California 91355



An artist who used to disappear

About concealing artistic subjectivity in the art of Jack Goldstein

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On 9 June 1972, Jack Goldstein, then a student of the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles, carried out on the university campus an action of his burial while alive, in which he was kept up all night in a wooden coffin buried underground. A tube was led from the inside of the coffin above the earth's surface to enable the artist to breathe, and an electric cable with a sensor was connected to his chest. The other end of the cable, also led outside, was ended with a red signal lamp blinking to the rhythm of a heartbeat. The event was announced by a leaflet entitled *Jack Goldstein Performance June 9, 8 PM*, presenting the campus plan with the performance location marked [Fig. 1]. In the same year, the artist carried out several similar activities in which he or other performers took part, and the heartbeat was announced by a red lamp or its sound was amplified by means of a microphone and loudspeaker¹.

By arranging his own death, the artist put himself to an extreme test and crossed the line of irrevocability and finality of this experience. What seems more important, however, is that in retrospect, the funeral performance proved to be one of many examples of reflection on the key and constantly recurring theme of absence in his artistic career. The absence of the artistic subject, its disappearance, dissolving in space, fading in the shadows, escaping from the light, being outside a certain structure, stage, outside the artistic work, outside the artistic discourse, drifting in a vacuum – these are the threads

1. Poster for J. Goldstein's performance at California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, 9 June 1972. Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein



¹ A. Dumbadze, *Of Passivity and Agency: Jack Goldstein*, [in:] *Jack Goldstein x 10.000* [exh. cat.], Ed. Ph. Kaiser, 24 June - 9 September 2012, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California, Munich 2012, pp. 22, 23. See also R. Hertz, *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia*, Ojai 2003, p. 124.



² In the present text I will focus on the artist's performances, films and paintings.

³ As C. Owens (*Back to the Studio*, "Art in America" 1982, No. 1, pp. 100-101) wrote, the hybrid combination of media was the guiding principle in Baldessari's studio, according to which "a painter can use a photographic darkroom, a photographer can use a colour video, a designer can create a performance". See also A. Dumbadze, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17; Ch. Knight, *A Situation Where Art Might Happen: John Baldessari on CalArts*, "East of Borneo" 19 November 2011, <http://eastofborneo.org/articles/a-situation-where-art-might-happen-john-baldessari-on-calarts> (access date: 25.10.2019).

⁴ With the passage of time, thanks to later exhibitions, other prominent figures of American art were among the artists included in The Pictures Generation. In the retrospective exhibition "The Pictures Generation 1974-1984" organised at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2009 (curated by D. Eklund), apart from five protagonists of 1977, works by J. Baldessari, B. Kruger, L. Lawler, Th. Lawson, M. Mullican, R. Prince, D. Salle, C. Sherman, J. Welling and M. Zwack were presented; but Ph. Smith was missing. *Pictures Generation 1974-1984: April 21 - August 2, 2009*, "The Met", <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2009/pictures-generation> (access date: 25.10.2019).

appearing in the works he realised in the form of sculptural installations, sound recordings on vinyl discs, performance, written aphorisms, as well as in the medium of film and painting². In the case of films and paintings, Goldstein additionally emphasized his absence by withdrawing from his own work and entrusting it to hired technicians or artists.

In my text, I would like to reflect on how the absence of an artistic subject makes itself visible depending on the medium in which the artist worked and, consequently, on the meaning of the disappearance gesture present in his work. It will be important for my reflections to refer to selected trends in American art of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as to the discourse defining the artistic practices of that time, revising concepts such as representation, authorship, identity or originality, in which Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, among others, played a key role. I will also present the position of art criticism sympathising with the trends initiated by the artists (mostly graduates of the legendary California Institute of The Arts) who created the Pictures Generation circle to which Goldstein belonged. I will refer to texts published in the second half of the 1970s and 1980s in American art magazines by such critics as Douglas Crimp, Thomas Lawson, Craig Owens and Hal Foster. I will also explain the technical aspects of Goldstein's films and paintings, which result from his decision to withdraw from artistic subjectivity.

Critical pictures

Born in Canada, Jack Goldstein (1945-2003) belonged to the generation of artists debuting in the 1970s, associated with the Post-Studio at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), run by John Baldessari. Within the Post-Studio, Baldessari promoted ideas that border on conceptualism, minimalism and pop-art. Encouraging students to deepen their knowledge of art history, he also fuelled their distrust of traditional artistic hierarchies and the modernist myth of originality. Baldessari's classes were famous for their lack of structure, constant conversations and conceptual reflection. In the studio, the practice of combining artistic disciplines was preferred to the modernist idea of the specificity of the medium³. A generational group of young artists to which Goldstein belonged became famous in the late 1970s as The Pictures Generation. Its legend was built up by the collective exhibition "Pictures", organised in 1977 in New York's Artists Space gallery. Apart from Goldstein, there were four artists participating in the exhibition: Troy Brauntuch, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith⁴. The originator of the exhibition, as well as the author of an essay to the catalogue of the same title was an already mentioned art critic and historian, Crimp.

Both the exhibition and the accompanying text have over time acquired the status of a legend, representing not only the trend of

American art of the 1970s and 1980s, but also the artistic strategies born then, which are still present in art today. It is primarily the so-called appropriation and subversion, which were the main tools for critical analysis of the cultural codes of late capitalism and the mechanisms of creating meanings and exercising control over society by means of producing images-goods. Both the artists whose works were presented at the 1977 Crimp's exhibition and those who were included in The Pictures Generation after some time used quotations, photographic reproductions or painterly paraphrases and often placed familiar or recognizable images in a new, unexpected context. The artists used trivial motifs often present in contemporary visual culture, challenged their commonly accepted meaning, manipulated memory and association mechanisms, thanks to which certain images are perceived as significant structures⁵.

The concept that has become the hallmark of The Pictures Generation, which assumed that we understand and experience reality not directly, but through the media and the representations they produce, was obviously not an original idea, as it can be found in the work of Robert Rauschenberg and pop-art artists. The question asked some time ago by a critic and curator at the Whitney Museum, Scott Rothkopf – whether the way the artists of The Pictures Generation have studied the nature of representation and meaning formation in culture is fundamentally different from how Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Ed Ruscha or even Baldessari did it previously, remains therefore an open question⁶.

The art of The Pictures Generation embodied not only the criticism of various centres of power and institutional control, showing the empty interiors of representations and their susceptibility to various semantic manipulations, but was also an expression of opposition to the routine of artistic modernism, whose late emanation was neo-expressionism of the 1980s. One of the main proponents of a critical approach to neo-expressionism was beforementioned Lawson, an artist and art critic associated with The Pictures Generation. In his essays written at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, he argued that the performing arts, which grew out of weariness with minimalism and its geometric arrangements, did not have to be narrative, anecdotal and overflowing with “narcissistic exhibitionism” like the work of the neo-expressionists⁷. Lawson has severely criticised the works of American and European neo-expressionist artists such as Julian Schnabel, Jonathan Borofsky, Luciano Castelli, Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Rainer Fetting, and Salomé. Calling them “the last, decadent song of modernism”, he claimed that the references to the tradition of expressionism present in these works are only a pastiche of historicism, and that their authors operated with generalizing mythologies, so – as a result – succumbed to sentimentalism⁸.



⁵ In an essay accompanying the 1977 exhibition **D. Crimp** (*Pictures: An Exhibition of the Work of Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo and Philip Smith* [exh. cat.], Artists Space, New York 1977; reprint: *Pictures*, “X-tra” 2005, No. 1) analysed the films *The Jump* (completed a few months after the exhibition, in 1978) and *Shane* (1975) by J. Goldstein, his performance *Two Fencers* (1976) and a set of photographs *The Pull* (1976); the photographic diptych *Golden Distance* by T. Brauntuch (1976) and his series *1 2 3* (1977) made in the screen printing technique; the set of 36 drawings by Sh. Levine, *Sons and Lovers* (1977); a slide projection by Ph. Smith, *Relinquish Control* and his drawings (*Watch I, Watch II, Spins* [I am not able to determine the dates of creation of these works]); and the installation by R. Longo *Seven Seals for Missouri Breaks* (1976) and his film *Artful Dodger* (1976).

⁶ **S. Rothkopf**, *Hit or Myth*, “Artforum” 2001, No. 2, p. 134. **Th. Lawson** (*Interference on the Line*, [in:] **B. Blinderman**, **Th. Lawson**, **S. Morgan**, *Contemporary Perspectives 1984* [exh. cat.], 5 October – 25 November 1984, Center Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg [Pennsylvania] 1984; reprint in: **idem**, *Mining for Gold: Selected Writings (1979–1996)*, Ed. **L. Bovier**, **F. Stroun**, Zürich 2004, p. 77) mentioned Rauschenberg's art as well as J. Johns' art as a pioneering one in the field of examining representation codes. It is also worth adding that in his famous essay from 1972, **L. Steinberg** (*Other Criteria*, [in:] *Other Criteria, Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, Chicago-London 2007, p. 91) pointed out that one of the elements of the breakthrough in art made by Rauschenberg's screen-printed works was the concept of an image conceived precisely as an image of an image in which the representation did not come from reality, but only from the area of other representations.

⁷ **Th. Lawson**, *The Uses of Representation: Making Some Distinctions*, [in:] **idem**, *Mining...*, pp. 19–21. (originally: “Flash Art” 1979, No. 88/89).

⁸ **Idem**, *Last Exit: Painting*, [in:] *Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Ed. **T. R. Myers**, London – Cambridge (Massachusetts) 2011, pp. 30–31 (originally: “Artforum” 1981, No. 2).



⁹ **D. Crimp**, *Controlling Pictures*, [in:] *Jack Goldstein x...*, p. 47. Crimp was also critical of treating painting in terms of transcendent art as a carrier of universal existential content, which he considered anachronism. His malicious remarks on this subject were directed, among others, at the prominent American critic B. Rose, who was involved in the promotion of neo-expressionism at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, through the exhibition "American Painting. The Eighties" in the Grey Art Gallery in New York in 1979 (*idem*, *The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism*, "October" 1980, No. of Winter, p. 96). See also *idem*, *The End of Painting*, [in:] *Painting...* (originally: "October" 1981, No. of Spring).

¹⁰ **Th. Crow**, *Disappearing Act: Art In and Out of Pomona*, [in:] *It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles, 1969-1973*, Ed. **R. McGrew**, **G. Phillips**, Claremont [California] 2011, p. 36; quoted after: **A. Dumbadze**, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹¹ See **B. Fong**, *Obsessing over Disappearances Makes for an Eerily Serene Scene in Fort Worth*, "Paper City", 25 July 2019, <http://www.papercitymag.com/arts/disappearing-california-modern-art-museum-fort-worth-leaves-impression> (access date: 25.10.2019). It is worth mentioning, by the way, that in The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth last year (2019) there was an exhibition built around the thread of disappearance in the works of Goldstein, Burden and B. J. Ader, entitled "Disappearing - California, c. 1970": Bas Jan Adler, Chris Burden, Jack Goldstein" (curator: Ph. Kaiser).

¹² **Ch. Burden**, *Untitled Statement (1975)*, [in:] *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, Ed. **K. Stiles**, **P. Selz**, Berkeley 1996, p. 768.

¹³ See **Ph. Kaiser**, *Why Not Use It? Painting and Its Burden*, [in:] *Jack Goldstein x...*, p. 125.

¹⁴ See **A. Dumbadze**, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ See *ibidem*, p. 23.

A similar approach to neo-expressionism was manifested by Crimp. However, if Lawson's criticism of this trend resulted from his aversion to minimalism, Crimp's criticism grew out of his conviction that the very medium of painting is anachronistic and incapable of competing with the stylistic diversity of contemporary art, unless it contains elements critical of the specificity of this discipline. Even before recognising the phenomenon of The Pictures Generation, Crimp found this critical reflection in the work of artists described as post-formalists, who have given their painting activities a conceptual character, such as Mel Bochner, Daniel Buren, Robert Mangold and Brice Marden⁹.

Escape from the light

Goldstein's performance in 1972 was in line with the interests of the conceptual environment of Los Angeles, which the art critic and historian Thomas E. Crow described as "an act of erasing oneself or concealing one's artistic subjectivity"¹⁰. The dominant figure in this milieu was Chris Burden, who in the 1970s carried out activities of a similar nature. While the 1971 action, consisting in disappearing without a trace for three days¹¹, is quite anecdotal because it is impossible to document it, the performance carried out the same year at the University of California in Irvine, in which the artist stayed for five days in a 60 × 60 × 90 cm¹² school locker, can be regarded as a direct inspiration for the funeral works of Goldstein¹³.

We cannot overlook in this context either the figure of the Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader, who has been associated with the Californian scene since the mid-1960s, and whose latest work, regardless of the intentions of his creator, which we do not know, can be regarded as the most radical example of an act of disappearance. Goldstein knew Ader, so it is hard not to take into account the importance that the mystery of performance *In Search of The Miraculous* might have had in shaping his artistic concepts. In 1976, as part of this venture, Ader set off on a lonely cruise across the Atlantic in a single-handed sailing boat. After a few months the empty boat was found – the sailor never¹⁴.

Goldstein's subsequent performances from the first half of the 1970s and the films he started to make at that time referred with extraordinary consistency to the disappearance of identity and subjectivity. In this spirit, *A Spotlight* (1972), one of his first film works, was realised [Fig. 2]. In the film Goldstein runs around a small area of the studio, trying to escape from the moving beam of light catching on him. He performs various manoeuvres and evasions, he also changes speed, all in vain, however, because he does not manage to escape from the light that controls him¹⁵. This, as in the case of *A Street at Night*, is a disturbing image of the dialectic link between agency and passivity, in which the subject, despite their activity, is unable to escape their destiny. In this eight-minute, black-and-white film,



2. Still from J. Goldstein's *A Spotlight*, 1972, 16 mm film, black and white, sound, 10'42".
Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein

the main character is the light, consistently present throughout the artist's work, playing at least a double role here. On the one hand, it is a tool of control mechanism, limiting the subject's freedom and destroying their sense of identity. On the other hand, the beam of light is a trace that clearly reveals here its troublesome and ambiguous ontological status, which Jacques Derrida described years ago in relation to his literary texts. As Derrida wrote, the essence of traces is to be simultaneously a testimony both of presence and absence, "repetition and erasure". If, therefore, "a trace is the erasure of oneself, one's own presence [and] is constituted by the threat or fear of its irrevocable disappearance, the disappearance of one's own disappearing"¹⁶, then a beam of light following the performer is simultaneously finding him and annihilating him, signalling his existence and pushing him into darkness.

 ¹⁶ J. Derrida, *Freud i scena pisma*, [in:] *idem, Pismo i różnica*, Transl. K. Kłosiński, Warszawa 2004, p. 394, 400. This ontologically ambiguous function of light as a trace in Goldstein's work (which will be discussed later in the text) was interestingly analysed by J. Fisher (*Jack Goldstein: The Trace of Absence*, "Artforum" 1983, Vol. 22, No. 3).

3. Still from J. Goldstein's *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*, 1975, 16 mm film, colour, sound, 3'. Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein



Continuous postponement

An essential element of Goldstein's later films, including probably the most famous ones, such as *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*, *Shane* (both 1975) and *The Jump* (1978) was repetition, which served to control and manipulate the semantic potential of the image. In the technical layer of the films the following things are important: firstly, they were made by professional technicians according to the artist's instructions, and secondly, they were conceived from the beginning as autonomous film works. So they were neither recorded on film tape nor, with the exception of *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*, popular among experimental found footage film-makers. Using rented, professional equipment, Goldstein operated with means of expression typical for the film medium, such as zooming in, penetrating or separating the main motif on a dark background¹⁷. All films are also short; they last from several dozen seconds to several minutes. As the artist himself emphasised, the short duration of the films meant that the viewer did not manage to get bored with the image that remained very clearly present in their memory after the screening. It was a form of controlling associations or forcing mnemonic associations, but also, by identifying the image of an object presented in the film with the memory of that object, it was a kind of visualization of thoughts¹⁸.

By resigning from his own execution and relying on the Hollywood film-makers¹⁹, Goldstein renounced his own authorial involvement and subjectivity, which could have violated the cool and distant character of the work, but above all revealed the existence of the subject as its source²⁰. At stake, therefore, was to obtain an image that was perfectly impersonal and free of affect.



¹⁷ In one of the interviews, the artist admitted that the advantage of living near Hollywood was that he had access to the same equipment as, for example, S. Spielberg, except that Spielberg could rent it for two months and he could rent it for one hour at the most (see R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, p. 247).

¹⁸ See D. Crimp, *Controlling...*, p. 51.

¹⁹ See R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

²⁰ See J. Fisher, *Jack Goldstein: Fire/Body/Light*, [in:] *eadem*, *Vampire in the Text: Narratives of Contemporary Art*, London 2003, p. 52.

This strategy was then repeated by the artist in relation to his paintings, which he started to realise in 1979. We will discuss it later in the text.

In the three-minute *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*, we see, against a bright red background, the sign of a Hollywood film studio, that is the head of a roaring lion, inscribed in a stylized emblem made of film tape [Fig. 3]. The sequence is looped, the lion roars several times, tilting its head in a characteristic way, “announcing a constantly postponed film that will never really start”²¹. The looped headline announces nothing, or rather announces absence – a lack of the narrative structure that viewers usually expect. Instead, there is only a sign which, according to the principles of the simulation era announced by Jean Baudrillard, substitutes reality²². The reference in the relationship between the sign and reality is not so much abolished any more, but announced in a false, unfulfilled promise of a show that does not happen. If, in traditional terms, the representation came, as Baudrillard wrote, from the equivalence of reality and sign, then the roaring lion of M-G-M is a sign that “can no longer be exchanged for what is real, but is exchanging itself for itself in an uninterrupted cycle without references or boundaries”²³.

On the other hand, the film *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer* does not have to be seen as a barren repetition, but as a mechanism that perpetuates a certain excitement about the experience of cinema as such. According to Walter Benjamin, the processes of technical reproduction in contemporary culture, including, above all, cinema, have destroyed the aura of works of art, which owed their uniqueness and unrepeatability to belonging to the sphere of ritual. However, cinema has created the phenomenon of a new, specific aura, which is not threatened, as in the case of traditional art, by the process of reproduction and duplication, but which is precisely the result of this process, and which is based on the commodity nature of images produced by the film industry²⁴. The new aura created by technical reproduction brings out the allure and charm of what is inaccessible and spectral – both near and far. If we take this point of view, then the Hollywood label’s mark in Goldstein’s film would also embody this new cinematic aura; a ritual that creates an image, which makes us feel excited about its very presence, not the content it carries.

Off-frame control

The aestheticisation of politics, which Benjamin derived from the fascism that targeted war rhetoric at the masses, has created a sentimental spectacle of national unity, offering the audience of newsreels and party rallies an idealised image of itself as a powerful community to ultimately bring it under total control²⁵. As Lawson wrote, in contemporary corporate capitalism, we are dealing with a modified version of this authoritarian spectacle, which is to the same extent



²¹ Ph. Kaiser, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

²² J. Baudrillard, *Precesja symulaków*, [in:] *idem*, *Symulakry i symulacja*, Transl. S. Królak, Warszawa 2005, p. 7.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²⁴ W. Benjamin, *Dzieło sztuki w dobie reprodukcji technicznej*, Transl. J. Sikorski, [in:] *idem*, *Twórca jako wytwórca*, selection H. Orłowski, introd. J. Kmita, Poznań 1975, p. 82. See also P. Mościcki, *Odrodzenie aury z ducha fotogenii*, “Teksty Drugie” 2016, No. 2, p. 96.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 93–94, p. 105, note 31.

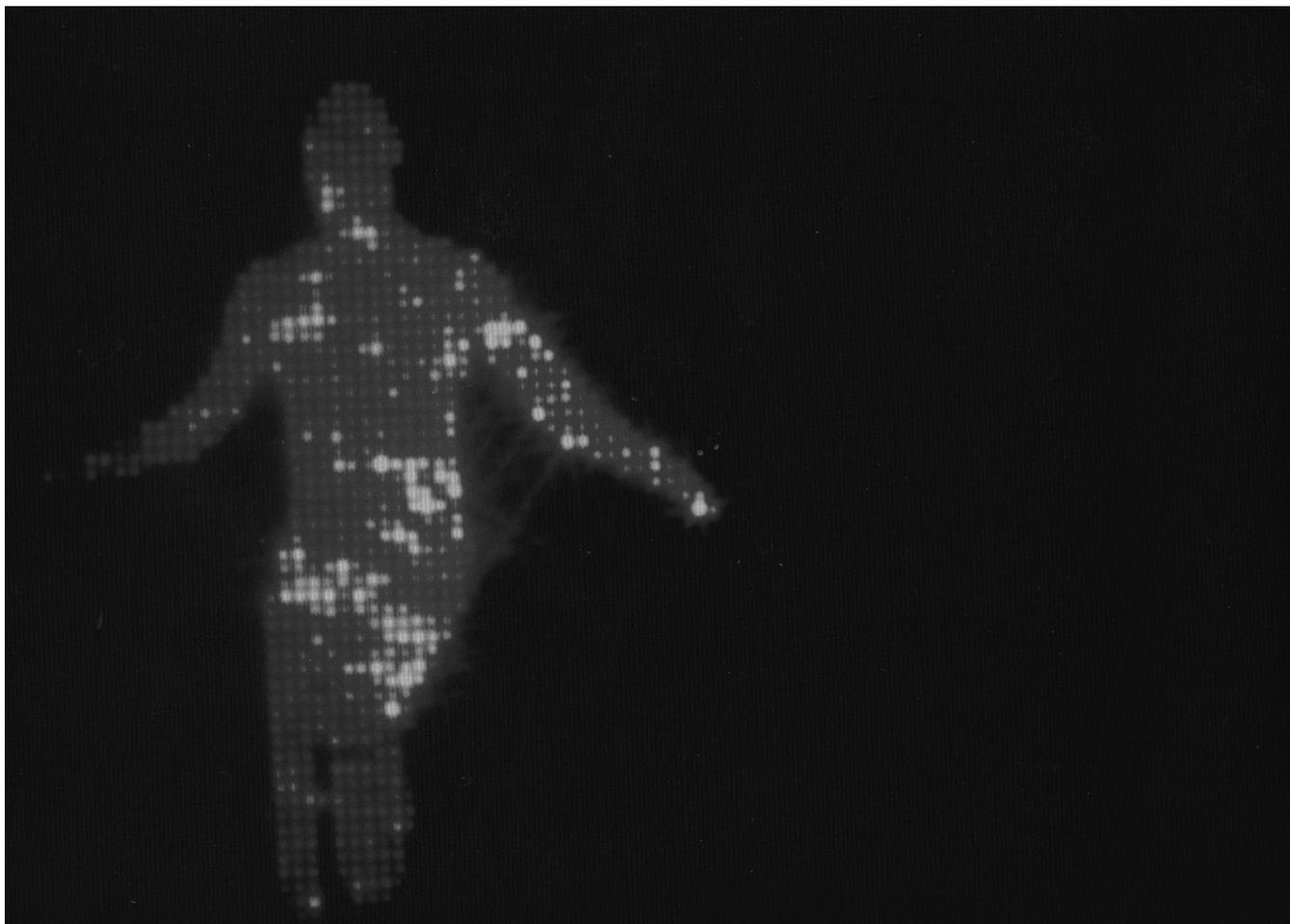


4. Still from J. Goldstein's *Shane*, 1975, 16 mm, colour, sound, 3'. Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein



²⁶ T. Lawson, *Switching Channels*, [in:] *Mining...*, pp. 48-49 (originally: "Flash Art" 1981, no. of March/April).

a tool for supporting power, although it uses a different aesthetics. It is a spectacle of satisfying consumer desires, creating the illusion of choice, but in fact it is an element of control over the recipient and increasing their alienation²⁶. This cynical mechanism of manipulation is reconstructed by *Shane* and *The Jump*, and it seems that if the former evokes the spectacle in its strictly political, authoritarian version, the latter recreates its consumer version, but discretely points out a connection between them. In *Shane*, a less than three-minute film, we see a German shepherd dog filling the frame, whose strikingly lit figure contrasts with a black background [Fig. 4]. Throughout the film, the dog looks ahead, slightly above the camera lens, barking at regular intervals at the command of the trainer outside the frame. The film consists of several static shots, taken from the same spot, connected by the diffusion effect. *Shane* reflects the property of an authoritarian performance, consisting in the aestheticisation of an invisible force, which subordinates its participants and specta-



5. Still from J. Goldstein's *The Jump*, 1978, 16 mm film, colour, silent, 26". Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein

tors. The contrasting lighting and colour enhancement used in the post-production process²⁷ created a striking image of an animal under total control operating from outside the frame. The animal obediently realizes the trained scheme and nothing in this cold, static and perfectly realized picture suggests that it could break out of the scheme. "If it is a dog, I want to turn it into a prop, into an object. If it becomes a prop or an object, then I can control it", Goldstein confessed in an interview with Morgan Fisher in 1977²⁸. He acquired this control in his films thanks to the commitment of professional film-makers, technical perfectionism but, importantly, also thanks to his withdrawal from the field of vision²⁹.

The Jump, Goldstein's last film, is an example of changes in his aesthetics, which brought him closer and closer to painting [Fig. 5]. It is a silent, rotoscopic animation lasting less than 30 seconds, using a fragment of film material, depicting a sportsman jumping from a trampoline to a pool³⁰. Goldstein processed the material in a com-



²⁷ See R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

²⁸ M. Fisher, *Talking with Jack Goldstein*, "LAICA Journal" 1977, No. of April/May, p. 43; quoted after: D. Crimp, *Controlling...*, p. 52).

²⁹ See D. Crimp, *Controlling...*, p. 52.

³⁰ See J. Welling, *Jack Goldstein's Studio*, [in:] *Jack Goldstein x...*, p. 101.



6. J. Goldstein, *Untitled*, 1981, acrylic on canvas, 213,4 × 335,3 cm; Collection of M. Bucksbaum and R. Learsy.
Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein



³¹ H. Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Seattle [Washington] 1985, p. 83.

plicated manual way obtaining a slow-down image of the jumper's silhouette shining with a red glow against a black background. The film consists of three sequences in which the figure emerges from the background, rotates as a result of stunts and then disappears in deep black. By processing the source material Goldstein created an image of a spectral figure whose acrobatic rotation against a dark background is an uncertain balance between presence and absence. The spectator witnessed a spectacle of appearing and disappearing of a spectacular image woven from light points. As Foster wrote, referring, among other examples, to Guy Debord's analyses, while the typical representation is based on our belief in realism, the performance characteristic of consumer culture uses our fascination with what is hyper-realistic; what is "perfect" images that make us surrender to illusion and control. The mechanism of control consists in the fact that the spectacle, causing a loss of sense of reality, at the same time provides fetishist images that deny this loss, or compensate for it³¹.

That is why, according to Foster, our fascination with the spectacle outweighs our fascination with goods in consumer circulation. What is more, in the spectacle, "even alienation turns into an image intended



fig. 7 J. Goldstein, *Untitled*, 1981, acrylic on canvas, 210,2 × 330,2 cm; Collection of Joan and Fred Nicholas. Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein

for consumption by the alienated subject”³². The element mentioned above, which discreetly points to a kinship between the capitalist spectacle and its authoritarian, political predecessor, is that Goldstein used in *The Jump* a fragment of *The Olympics*, a propaganda film by Leni Riefenstahl (1938), commemorating the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin³³. As Philipp Kaiser wrote, Goldstein was not so much fascinated by the direct use of a Nazi material, but rather by the power of image in the mass media of national socialism. “I was interested in the spectacle [...]”, said the artist. “The Third Reich was a pure spectacle. [The Nazis] certainly understood the media, didn’t they?”³⁴.

Back to the studio

In 1979 Goldstein began a painting period of his artistic career. He did not return to performances, and the only film he made at that time was the unfinished *Under Water Sea Fantasy* (1983), consisting of colourful sequences of underwater ocean life³⁵. A certain ambivalence is present in Goldstein’s paintings, which characterised the paintings of artists from The Pictures Generation. Their critical at-

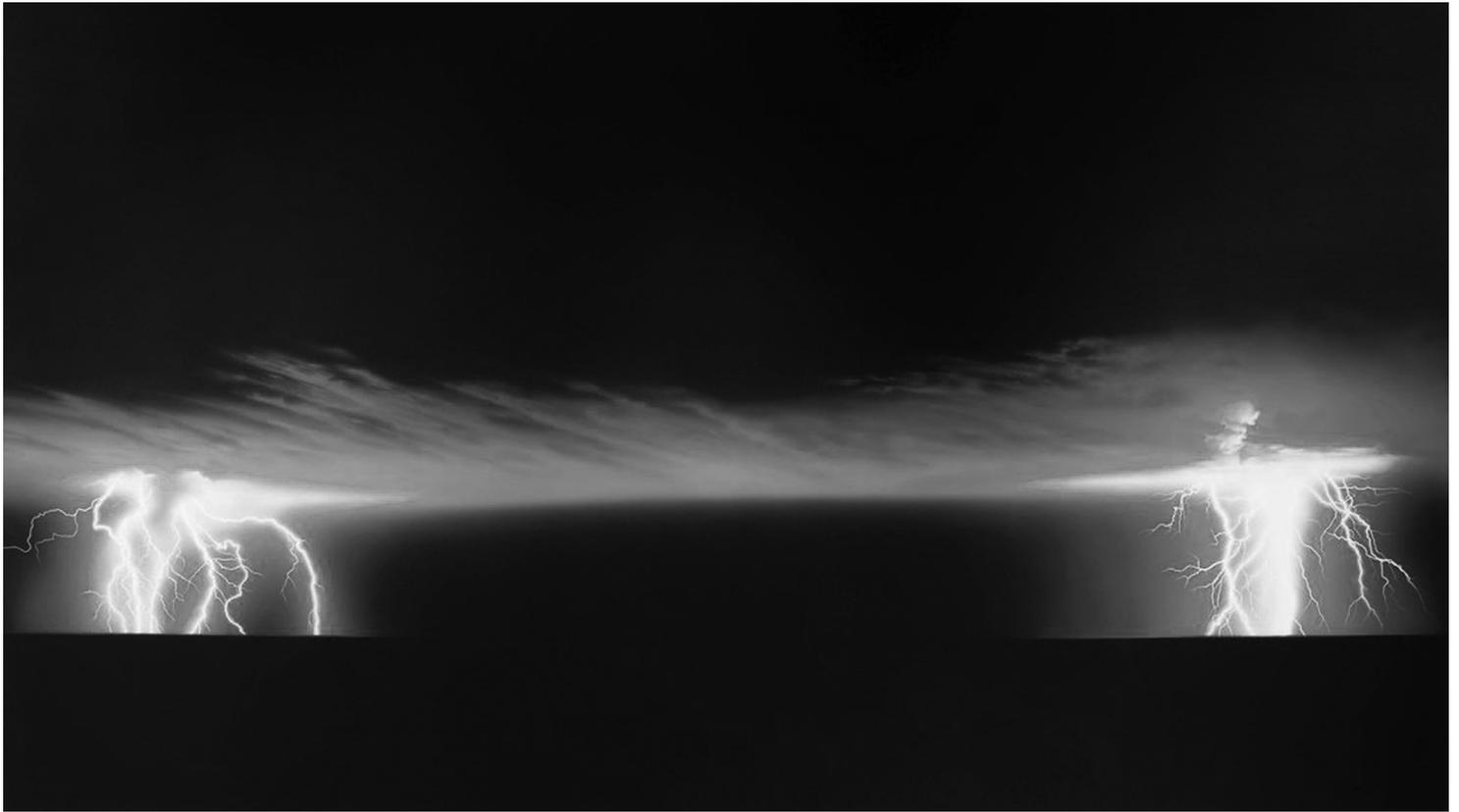


³² *Ibidem*, p. 83. The words of R. Longo, an artist from The Pictures Generation circle, seem significant in this context: “My first exhibition was made with Jack. He has presented his new work at the time – an unusual looped film *The Jump*. I watched this film every day for three weeks and never became bored with it. I was hypnotised. I see it all the time: a figure shining in red and gold, rotating in infinite stunts, in non-space, out of time and place” (quoted after: R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, p. 202).

³³ See Ph. Kaiser, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

³⁴ *Ibidem*; see also R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

³⁵ Since the end of the 1980s, Goldstein was involved also, and later exclusively, in writing autobiographical aphorisms and computer designing typographic layouts, which were a mixture of quotations from literature, advertising slogans, single words and phraseological associations collected later in two volumes: *Totems: Selected Writings 1988–90*, and *Selected Writings 1993–2000*. See J. Kelsey, *Word Processor: On the Writings of Jack Goldstein*, [in:] *Jack Goldstein x...*; see also R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, p. 238.



8. J. Goldstein, *Untitled*, 1983, acrylic on canvas, 213,4 × 273,7 cm; private collection. Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein



³⁶ See H. Foster, *Powrót Realnego. Awangarda u schyłku XX wieku*, Transl. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Kraków 2010 (especially the chapter *Sztuka cynicznego rozumu*); see also T. Lawson, *Uses...*; *idem*, *Last Exit...*

³⁷ See T. Lawson, *A Fatal Attraction*, [in:] *Mining...*, pp. 70–73.

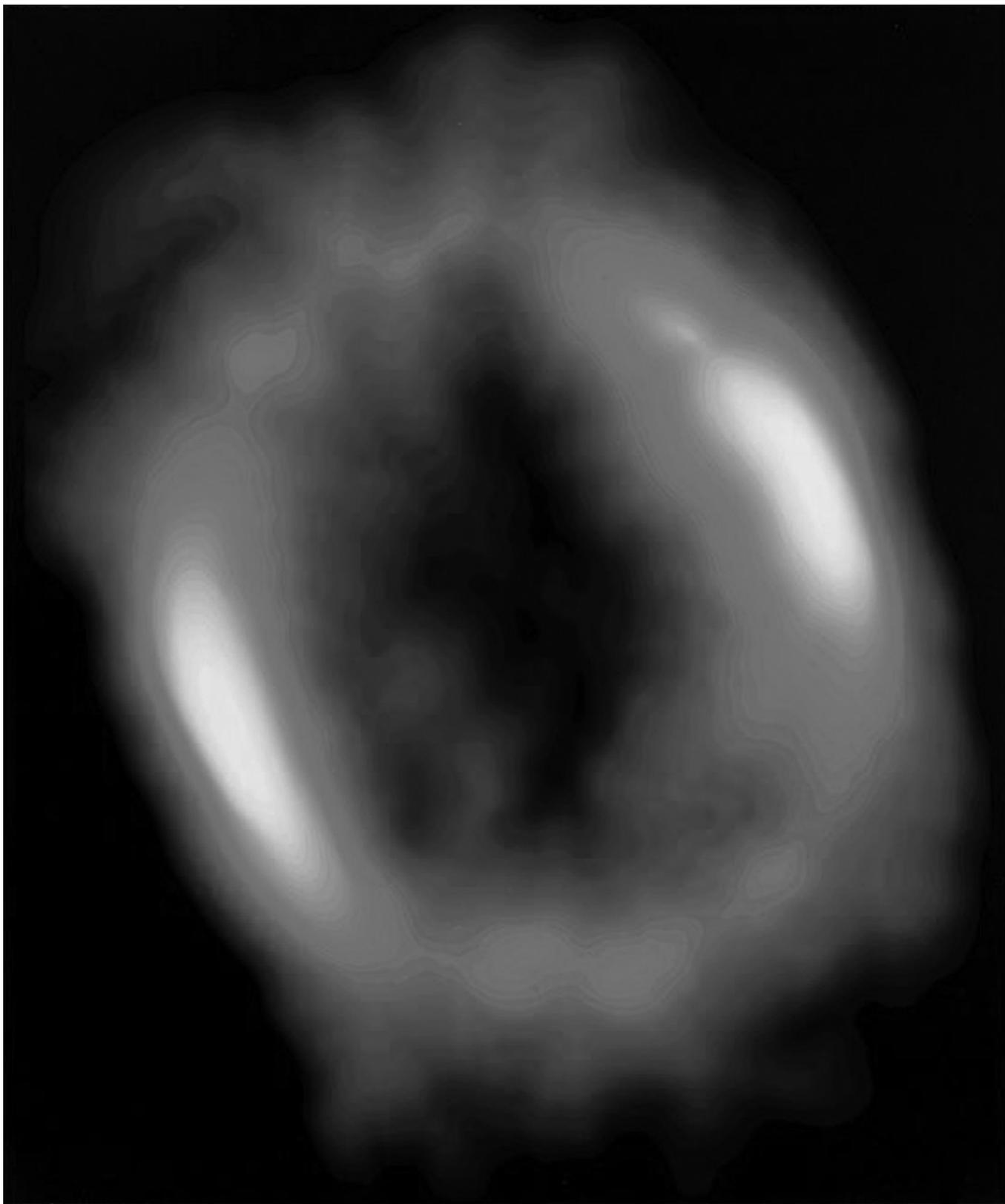
titude towards the neo-expressionist artistic subjectivism based on modernist ideas gave birth to art which, on the one hand, explored the mechanisms of manipulation of meanings and the authoritarian control in the capitalist system of consumption, but, on the other hand, submitted to them subtly and reproduced them in an ironic way. This shaky attitude between criticism and complicity has been underlined in the texts by American critics associated with the magazine “October”, such as Foster and Lawson (the latter belonged to The Pictures Generation)³⁶. Lawson has captured very well the way this attitude has developed, writing that art cannot exist without the institutions that it criticises and whose legitimacy it undermines. No matter with what force it exposes the mechanisms of the system, it is gradually absorbed by it and its critical interventions turn into irony or a joke at most. In this way, the radical gesture is appropriated by culture and reduced to an exclusively aesthetic level³⁷.

This description perfectly matches Goldstein’s paintings. They have been realised in an impersonal, technically perfect way and – as in the case of films – by hired artists. They were also based on existing, found photographs. All these elements confirm that the key



9. J. Goldstein, *Untitled*, 1983, acrylic on canvas, 213,4 × 365,8 cm; Collection of B. Z. and M. Schwartz, New York. Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein

to their creation were the assumptions present in the artist's earlier work: criticism of representation and authorship, reflection on the phenomenon of experience mediated by contemporary media, crisis of artistic identity and subjectivity. On the other hand, however, the same elements related to the perfection of production, combined with the attractiveness of the topics undertaken, as the night views of cities illuminated by the feast of lights (being in fact the views of cities bombed during World War II) [Figs. 6–7], volcanic eruptions, lightning strikes cutting through the night sky [Figs. 8–9] or radiotelescopic images of galaxies and distant cosmic objects [Fig. 10] gave Goldstein's painting features of an attractive spectacle, captivating and enchanting the viewer with its scale and cool elegance. This ambivalence inherent in the very essence of Goldstein's painting project is also intensified by the accounts of the economic reasons why he and other Californian conceptualist artists, such as David Salle for example, began to paint. In the late 1970s, Goldstein, observing the crisis of alternative art spaces and at the same time the financial success of painters such as before-mentioned Schnabel, among others, realised that only galleries promoting painting could provide



— 10. J. Goldstein, *Untitled*, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 213 × 182 cm; S. L. Simpson Collection, Toronto.
Photo: courtesy © The Estate of Jack Goldstein

him with a profit³⁸. Owens clearly pointed out the benefits that Goldstein had gained from his turn to painting. “After almost a decade of relative anonymity when he was a performer and film-maker, he is now achieving a certain degree of recognition as a painter”, wrote the critic in his essay in 1981 analysing the “return to the studio” of many graduates of Baldessari’s Post-Studio³⁹.

With no trace

It seems that Goldstein found the most convincing way to show his disappearance in the painting. Having decided to entrust the production of paintings to his assistants, he took on the role of a behind-the-scenes producer. He did not treat painting as a medium exceptional in any way in comparison with others; when asked in one of the interviews why he started to paint, he replied that painting is “just another method of production, another mode of representation, another construction”⁴⁰. The technical perfection of Goldstein’s paintings was based primarily on imitating the objective nature of photography, which we attribute to documentary and scientific photographs. Many of the paintings, including those based on reporter’s photographs of Dresden and Moscow bombed during World War II (in the latter case, a photograph of the bombed Kremlin from 1941 by American war photographer Margaret Bourke-White⁴¹) were made in black and white (*Untitled* works from 1981). The lack of any painting gesture, material trace of workmanship, such as accidental layers of paint or visible brush strokes, was ensured by the use of an airbrush, painting tapes and stencils, which made it easier to precisely draw lines (for example, beams of light)⁴². The airbrush was, as Goldstein admitted, a tool to keep an appropriate distance from the canvas; unlike a brush, it does not leave traces – the author’s marks on the surface. This anonymity was also ensured by the way the paintings were signed, where the name Jack Goldstein appeared on their face, but the inscription was written using a stencil⁴³.

The essence of many Goldstein’s paintings, especially those based on wartime reportage photographs, but also on later representations modelled on radio-telescopic photographs of galaxies (*Untitled* works, 1988) was that they pulled the source image out of its discursive context and, as a result, freed it from the meanings that had previously accompanied it in the cultural circulation. On a very similar basis, this mechanism was also present in films such as *Metro-Goldwyn Mayer* and *The Jump*. As a result, in pictures such as *Untitled* from 1981, based on photographs from the World War II, by significantly increasing the initial image and consequently focusing the viewer’s attention on flashes and spectacular light trajectories, the war disaster turned into a carnival. This transformation can be seen as a symptom of the artistic identity crisis characteristic of Goldstein; after all, in the carnival, as Jean Fisher wrote, one’s identity usually



³⁸ See R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, p. 160; Ph. Kaiser, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

³⁹ C. Owens, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁴⁰ Ch. Dercorn, *An Interview with Jack Goldstein 1985*, [in:] *Jack Goldstein* [exh. cat.], Ed. S. Gaensheimer, K. Görner, 3 October 2009 – 10 January 2010, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Köln 2009, p. 169.

⁴¹ Ph. Kaiser, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁴² See M. Connor, *Jack Goldstein, Glitch Artist? An Interview with Lorne Lanning*, “Rhizome”, 21 May 2013, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/may/21/jack-goldstein-glitch-artist> (access date: 25.10.2019).

⁴³ See Ch. Dercorn, *op. cit.*, p. 173.



⁴⁴ J. Fisher, *Jack Goldstein...*, p. 63.

⁴⁵ See Ch. Dercorn, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁴⁶ In the American artistic community, Goldstein was not alone in his interest in French post-structuralism, which was particularly intense in the 1980s. A separate question, however, is how profoundly and thoroughly it was understood, both by himself and by other artists. See R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, pp. 222–223; Ph. Kaiser, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁴⁷ R. Barthes, *Śmierć autora*, Transl. M.P. Markowski, "Teksty Drugie" 1999, No. 1/2, p. 250.

⁴⁸ M. Foucault, *Kim jest autor?*, Transl. M. P. Markowski, [in:] *Szaleństwo i literatura. Powiedziane, napisane*, Ed. T. Ko-mendant, afterword M. P. Markowski, Warszawa 1999, pp. 207–209.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 201.

⁵⁰ R. Barthes, *op. cit.*, pp. 247, 250.

⁵¹ Ch. Dercorn, *op. cit.*, pp. 169, 173.

hides behind a mask, disguise⁴⁴. But according to Goldstein, the historical narrative, which he uses in his paintings, is also in danger of disappearance (oblivion). In the era of photographic documentation and reportage, only the fact of becoming a representation subjected to the processes of reproduction can preserve it, because only what is reproduced today is real⁴⁵.

Goldstein's artistic practice, in which he sought methods to question authorship and erase the author's character from the work, clearly corresponds to the discourse of French post-structuralism, especially the famous reflections of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault from the late 1960s on the status of the author in literature⁴⁶. According to Barthes, the author's place is taken by the reader, who not so much decodes a single sense of the text as follows the language itself, where the subject and identity are lost in the "multi-dimensional space in which different ways of writing meet and argue"⁴⁷. Foucault also questioned the belief in the unity of the work and its creator, pointing out that it routinely made the meaning, status and value of statements dependent on questions about its author, a date, place and circumstances of its creation, which was fostered by the regulations of the publishing market and the establishment of copyright that emerged at the threshold of modernity⁴⁸. As Foucault wrote, today's thinking on literature is no longer even about giving up references to the author, but about "giving a new status to this author's absence". Literature liberated from the author's individuality has become "a field of play of signs subordinate not so much to a certain content as to the signifying elements themselves"; and in experimental writing, which exceeds its own rules, it is "about opening a space in which the writing subject constantly disappears"⁴⁹.

Goldstein referred the post-structuralist optics presenting literature as a "sphere of neutrality" and the "tissue of quotations from infinitely many corners of culture"⁵⁰ very literally to his own work, using the appropriation method. Admitting that he was closer to literature than to visual arts, he argued that just as you don't have to create words because they already exist, so you don't have to create pictures because they already exist. A picture, like a word, does not belong to anyone; since we are born in a particular culture, we use our mother tongue without feeling that we own it, so born in a particular culture, we use the pictures it has produced. "I was born in a culture that has nothing to do with me, it was before me and will be here when I will leave. It is completely impersonal" – said in 1985 interviewed by Chris Dercorn⁵¹.

Last disappearance

The work of Jack Goldstein, who has consistently questioned the possibility of preserving identity and subjectivity in contemporary culture, is not only an excellent example of the direction taken by the

artists of The Pictures Generation in the 1970s. It seems to be paradigmatic for the whole epoch, whose birth was observed by Goldstein at the beginning of his career, and whose continuation is guaranteed by the current direction of technological development. It is an epoch which, by depriving people of their personal experience, subordinated them to the spectacle of seductive images; simulacra that conceal under their impressive visual layer the fact that there is no content or meaning behind them. But the essence of this culture is also the ability to absorb all voices of warning and gestures of opposition. Goldstein, who compulsively produced his paintings in the 1980s, was perfectly aware of this phenomenon and deliberately gave in to it, wanting to achieve a financial success of the proportions enjoyed by his friend Salle in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but also by the most famous creators of neo-expressionism, so negatively assessed by him, such as Schnabel⁵². Whereas Goldstein's "trademark" – The Pictures Generation – also symbolises a certain caesura in the history of painting, another turning point, after Rauschenberg's art and the pop art revolution, in its 100-year history of defending its own autonomy and specificity. Contemporary painting owes a lot to this turning point, creating conceptual hybrids, questioning not only the logic of representation and the possibility of creating meanings, but also the foundations of its own medium.

In the early 1990s, Jack Goldstein, an artist who was constantly hiding himself in his artistic practice, really disappeared. At that time he cut himself off from the artistic circles, broke off contacts with friends and stopped taking part in exhibitions. Struggling with the drug problem, he lived for a decade in a trailer in the suburb of Los Angeles. In 2003 he committed suicide⁵³.



⁵² See R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 115–117, 160.

⁵³ See A. Dumbadze, *op. cit.*, p. 12; see also R. Hertz, *op. cit.*, pp. 153, 225–243.

Słowa kluczowe

Jack Goldstein, sztuka amerykańska, autorstwo, znikanie, temat artystyczny, reprezentacja

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Jack Goldstein, American art, authorship, disappearance, artistic subject, representation

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Summary

FILIP PRĘGOWSKI (Nicolaus Copernicus University) / An artist who used to disappear. About concealing artistic subjectivity in the art of Jack Goldstein

The article presents the work of an American artist, a graduate of the California Institute of the Arts who made his debut in the early 1970s and a representative of the Pictures Generation group, Jack Goldstein (1945–2003). Goldstein's works, realised by various media, such as performance, film and painting, are characterised by the gesture of disappearance, withdrawal from or concealment of artistic subjectivity, present in various ways. The text reflects on the significance of this gesture in the context of selected trends in American art of the 1970s and 1980s, and in relation to the discourse defining the artistic practices of that time, reviewing such notions as representation, authorship, identity or originality, and whose key figures included Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Goldstein's work was also presented against the background of artistic criticism sympathising with the trends initiated by the circle of The Pictures Generation, in which the most influential voices were those of Douglas Crimp, Thomas Lawson, Craig Owens and Hal Foster. The text also presents the technical aspects of Goldstein's films and paintings in the context of a phenomenon that is particularly important for understanding the essence of mass culture, namely the spectacle.