

From “Phantom Painting”

by Peter Weibel

But what had transformed society from a realm of *Dead Souls* (Nikolai Gogol's novel of 1842) into *The Dance of Death* (Strindberg's play of 1900)? What had triggered a crisis of middle-class consciousness in Europe, a crisis so elemental (as Hegel diagnosed it) that people saw their own reality as alien, eerie and uncanny? Freud published his work on *The Uncanny* in 1919. What were the unconscious structures of order that made the 19th-century subject feel buried alive? What did the dominating social powers of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie fear would tear apart their web of lies? Nina Auerbach rightly indicates in *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995) that Stoker's *Dracula* of 1897 is a compendium of fin-de-siècle fears and that even today vampires personify our fears: fears of homosexuality, social change, Communism, nuclear war, and the fear of life itself . . .

Warhol's multiplication of a motif (for example, the Coca-Cola bottle) not only references the industrial mass production of this bottle, but is equally an expression of the crisis of representation of painting, its fear of castration. Instead of painting one Coke bottle, he manufactures lots of bottles, or soup cans, with the aid of machine printing (silk screen). He duplicates the motif in the way that the snakes on Medusa's head are multiplied so as to hide the fact that the one decisive snake is missing. Warhol multiplies painting mechanically from fear of castration. He tries to escape from admitting that painting has lost its monopoly as an image medium. Like a consumer, he flees from the problem of painting precisely by multiplying it, as if panic stricken by fear of Medusa.

In a different way Reed also recognizes how the existence of painting is imperiled by machines and the media. He acknowledges the historical objectivity of this threat and gets to the root of it. He realizes that the identity of painting in the age of the media cannot be the same as it was formerly. And he realizes that the origin of the crisis of painting is in the birth of the machine in the industrial revolution for this has phantomized all subsequent historical systems of representation, transforming them into ghosts. Since then, painting has existed split in two and has lived because of this split. It lives on the 'post-modern' reflection of its history, and history lives on the present. Painting lives on the encounter with its doubles, media such as photography, film, video and the computer. It tends to encounter itself in the other, in the other media, fearing to be lost within them, and getting lost for that very reason. Reed takes another attitude. In order not to lose painting, he declares 'lack' and 'loss' as the starting point of his vampiric painting. In his painting, he takes up the master-servant dialectic between the original (painting) and the copy (media) just as he does the motif of the doppelgänger. So in Reed's painting, the Fantastic means admitting to the fact that painting must deal with the 'uncanny' nature of the machine and the media and the resultant phantomization of its own historical function.