

The Pictures Generation, and even The Situationists before them, analyzed readymade images around us to uncover the subtextual manipulation that went into their creation. These pioneering artists used appropriative strategies to give us a chance to consider what else could they possibly mean? What was being sold to us? What was presented as fact, but on closer inspection was some form of power move by those with more control who knew how influential peer pressure was? The avant-garde wanted to provocatively decode and recode mass media to subvert the spectacle that possibly “alienated” us. One can say Freudo-Marxist ideology was a tool for this complex methodology, using an ironic wry distance and a distaste for the given mythos of Modernism.

But what happens when that Post-Modern subversion becomes the given mythos? The prevalent analytical attitude towards images can become too cynical, predictable, and academic. A newer generation may become tired of never trusting their mysterious interiority and the exterior world that effects them so deeply. Young people may want a return to the spiritual, ineffable magic, traditions, and sincerity. They want to feel that there is something larger than them, which they can only intuit miraculously. Irony becomes Post-Irony. Maybe they become more comfortable not knowing exactly what an image or statement means, or even not care. 6-7 Bruh. Google AI Mode told me that over 1 trillion images exist on the internet, which only represents 6% of the roughly 15 trillion photos that have been taken throughout human history.

This acceleration of the Image, and with that, our mind-world, does drastically effect our attention spans and meaning-mechanisms for creating purpose out of the daily onslaught of brain rot slop. Yet to only see negativity from this is a pessimistic and dreary misstep. We are connecting through shares and likes. We are capturing endless moments we find beautiful. Yes, dare I say beautiful. We are finding and seeking each other with images, chosen by us, personally. The Image may always be a spectacle, but it is ours to love and make our own.

- Debbi Bienstock, 2025