

Take and Eat Wonder Bread and Del Monte Tomatoes:

Corita Kent, Pop Forms, and Vatican II Affects

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Pop-artist and former nun Corita Kent positioned herself at the intersection of two profound institutional transformations of the 1960s - the Pop Art movement and Vatican II (1962-1965). “In 1962,” says art historian Susan Dackerman, “at the nearby Ferus Gallery, a then practically unknown artist named Andy Warhol showed his soup-can paintings for the first time, and Kent saw them.” The same year, coincidentally, the Second Vatican Council opened its first session. While pop artists artistically inspired Kent, the Council’s potential to move the church beyond its walls into solidarity with poor and oppressed invigorated her faith and activism. Kent uniquely saw in the pop artists’ forms creative ways to translate the Church’s attempts to engage the world in new ways. Her creative entanglement of pop art and religion seemingly positioned her as an outlier in both. Kent purposively chose an unlikely form to translate her hope and faith in Vatican II. Rather than using the contemplative potential of abstract expressionism, she used pop art – a form widely considered to be cool, detached, machine-like, and *disaffective*. But in the hands of Kent it carried religious meaning and affects.

If affects are divorced from reading for specific form, Eugenie Brinkema warns, affect theory will stand for the “same model of vague shuddering of intensity.” Brinkema, in *The Forms of the Affects*, argues for the necessity of affect theorists to read for the

particular forms of affects in order to make significant ethical, political, aesthetic critical revelations for lives “enacted in the definite particular.” Within affect-art and affect-aesthetics conversations, theorists often turn toward either cinema (Brinkema and Shaviro) or embodied arts (Massumi and Manning) where they focus on art as movement, forces, intensities, and bodily sensations in the forms of dance, performance, relational, and interactive arts. But rather than looking for affects in art forms where bodies and movement are central, I read for pop art’s indecent cool detachment and lack of overt bodily sensation. Kent intriguingly found pop art’s flat repetitive banality a useful form to translate her religious affects. Her work, along with a Foucault-Deleuzian interpretation of Warhol’s art, offers new insights for understanding the forms of anti-hierarchical vernacular religious affects suggested by Vatican II.