Blurring Boundaries: Pop Art, Fluxus, and their Effects

4

By the late 1950s consumerism and mass culture (film, television, advertising) were all-pervasive. For Modernism's advocate Clement Greenberg this was profoundly negative, amounting to an onslaught of 'kitsch'. As explained earlier, he believed that, to retain their integrity, the arts had to protect themselves against the debased variants on their accomplishments that advanced capitalism generated for the masses.

It is significant, however, that when he wrote 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' in 1939, Greenberg's elitist opposition of 'formal culture' to 'kitsch' was motivated by the spectre of totalitarian uses of mass propaganda in Germany and Russia and the suppression of avant-gardes. In an important essay Thomas Crow argues that Greenberg appreciated that the emergence of the avant-garde had necessarily been tied to the birth of mass culture in the nineteenth century and that, although he chose to privilege the former, he saw them as mutually defining. Following the logic of this, Crow establishes that the avant-garde had always sought a 'necessary brokerage' between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms, borrowing images from popular culture and relocating them both to reinvigorate its own idioms and to forge alliances with other subcultures, often with different class loyalties.[1] In the US, Rauschenberg and Johns had used mass-produced imagery in ways that destabilized Greenberg's Modernism and, on occasions, signalled illicit gay affiliations. However, they did not theorize their position *vis-à-vis* 'high' and 'low' forms. By contrast, the London-based Independent Group (IG) had, as early as 1952–3, established the criteria for what became a fully fledged 'Pop' aesthetic, openly embracing 'kitsch'.

'Pop' culture and mechanical reproduction: the Independent Group

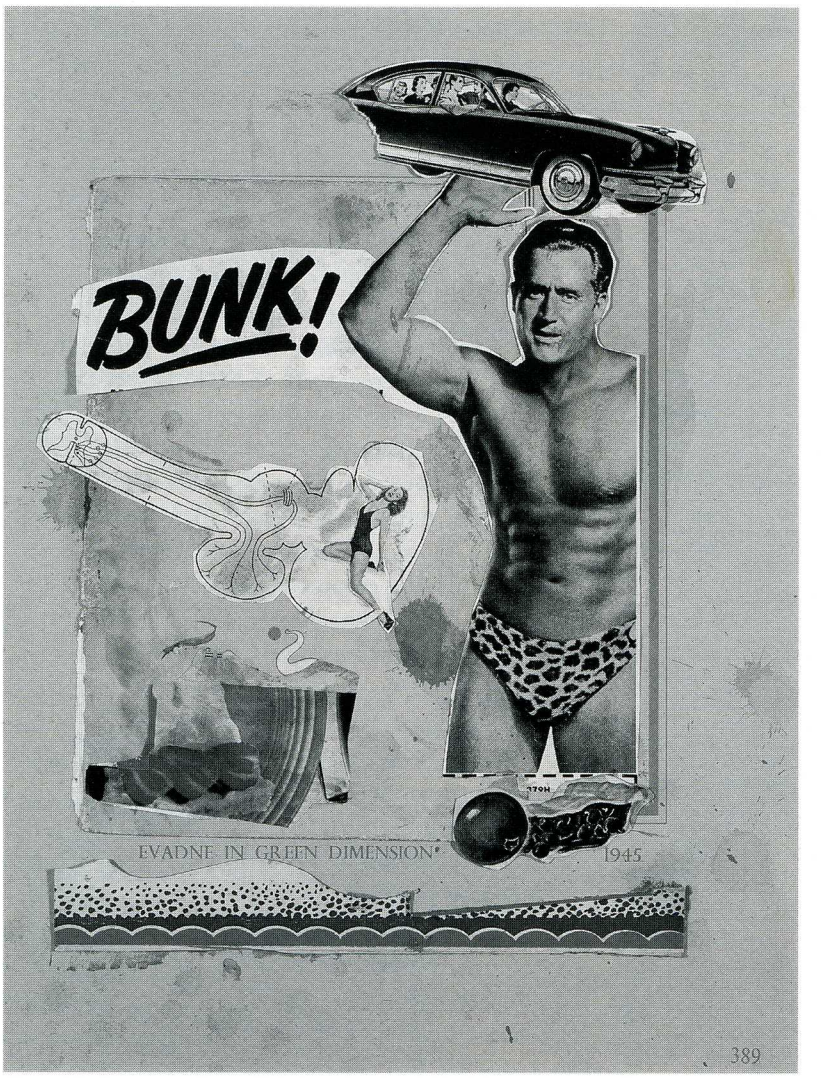
The IG came together in London through the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts). Founded in 1946 by British advocates of Surrealism such as Roland Penrose and Herbert Read, this institution was identified with mainland European experimentation as opposed to the Neo-Romantic and realist currents in 1950s British art. The IG

Detail of 55

45 Eduardo Paolozzi
*Evadne in Green Dimension, c.*1952
In this collage elements such as Charles Atlas and the diagrammatized penis were pasted over a female 'art' pin-up (the 'Evadne in Green Dimension' of the work's title), as though allegorizing the artist's arousal.

constituted a loose alliance of artists, architects, photographers, and art and design historians who, with the ICA's encouragement, organized a highly eclectic programme of lectures in 1952–5 on topics such as helicopter design, science fiction, car styling, advertising, and recent scientific and philosophical thought.

The IG's academic latitude was underpinned by a radical belief that 'culture' should connote not the heights of artistic excellence but rather a plurality of social practices. They therefore identified themselves with capitalism's cultural consumers. The main critic in the group, Lawrence Alloway, argued against humanist-led values of uniqueness in favour of a 'long front of culture' characterized by a continuum of artefacts from oil paintings to 'mass-distributed film and group-orientated magazines'.[2] This openness to culture at large informed the first



46 Independent Group
Parallel of Life and Art, photograph of exhibition installation, ICA, London, September–October 1953
In this early Independent Group exhibition photographs of varying sizes were attached to the gallery walls. Others were suspended by wires from the ceiling. Analogies were set up between various structures deriving from technology, science, art, and the natural world. Revisiting the spirit of the 'New Vision' photography of the 1930s, which had been associated pre-eminently with the Bauhaus teacher László Moholy Nagy, the exhibition helped broaden attitudes towards visual culture in Britain.

IG usages of the term 'Pop' around 1955. (Alloway was to move to America in 1961 and to champion a more narrowly painting-based 'Pop Art', as discussed shortly, but it is important to appreciate the sociologically inclined origins of the term.)

The IG's breadth of reference was dramatized in two early events. The first, now accorded an originary mythic status, was a Surrealistic epidiascope lecture delivered in 1952 by the Scottish-born sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi which galvanized colleagues with its flood of heterogeneous imagery from pulp and commercial sources. The materials shown, a set of collages with the generic title 'Bunk' [**45**], were not even considered 'art' by Paolozzi until 1972 when they were incorporated into silkscreen designs. The second event was the exhibition 'Parallel of Life and Art', the beginning of an important sequence conceived by IG members, installed at the ICA in 1953 by Paolozzi in collaboration with the architects Alison and Peter Smithson and the photographer Nigel Henderson. This consisted of dramatic non-hierarchical juxtapositions of photographs from sources as diverse as photo-journalism and microscopy [**46**]. Although Fine Art images were included (Pollock, Dubuffet, Klee), they were clearly reproductions, submitted to a form of cultural levelling by means of a common grainy texture.

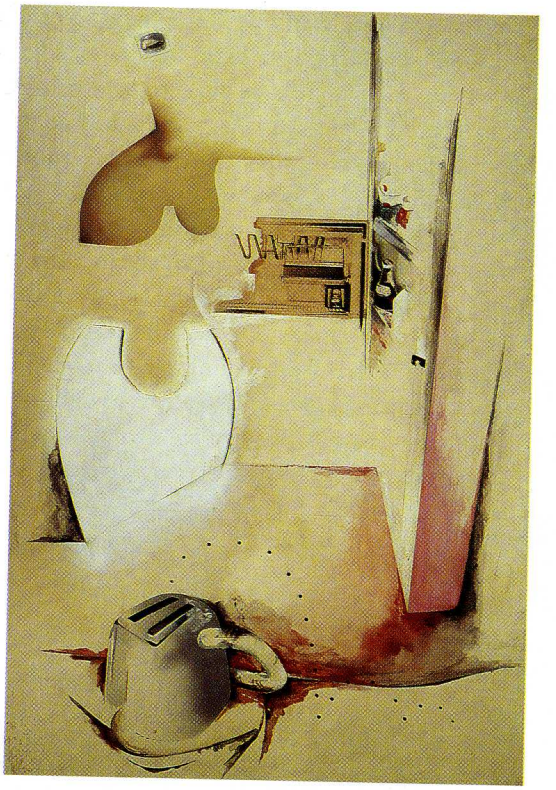
This exhibition subordinated the authentic artistic gesture to the principle of reproducibility. It therefore dramatically expanded art's

parameters while fuelling the destabilizing of authorial agency noted in the last chapter. The IG's immediate inspirations were books such as Amedée Ozenfant's *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928) or Siegfried Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command* (1947) which were prized for their photographic juxtapositions of art and technology rather than their modernist rhetoric. However, the IG's acknowlegement of photography's ubiquity brought them close to the conclusions of the Marxist critic Walter Benjamin, who, in the 1930s, had analysed photography's societal role in undermining authorial 'origins'. In his seminal essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Benjamin argued that the 'auras' art objects once possessed by virtue of their specific locations or 'cult value' had 'withered away' in mass society at the hands of reproductive technologies. (He also believed that, in substituting 'a plurality of copies for a unique existence', mechanical reproduction created the conditions for a politicized (socialistic) art for the masses.)[3]

The IG were not alone in recognizing that the visual sphere had been colonized by technology; Rauschenberg was simultaneously presenting traditionally 'artistic' imagery (brushstrokes, reproductions of artworks) as part of a continuum of culturally produced signs, although he did not commit himself solely to photographic imagery until the early 1960s [**60**]. Steinberg's critical interpretation of Rauschenberg, discussed earlier, bore similarities with Benjamin in suggesting that whereas works of art had once seemed to be 'natural' analogues for human experience, Rauschenberg's 'flatbed' pictures declared themselves to be synthetic 'cultural' constructs. That Steinberg characterized this shift as 'post -Modernist' marks a significant historical moment, with far-reaching consequences, as will be seen. In the case of the IG, a proto-postmodern attitude underpinned their departure not only from the humanism of ICA elders such as Herbert Read but from contemporary British painters who were also reliant on photography, such as Francis Bacon. From the 1960s onwards artists who saw photography as indexed to shifts in the cultural functioning of images would increasingly question humanist/individualist positions.

'The aesthetics of plenty': Pop Art in Britain

If the IG implicitly accepted Benjamin's cultural prognosis they hardly followed his political agenda. With the exception of Henderson, they belonged to the first working-class generation of artists, and were commercially or technically trained rather than grammar-school-educated. Nevertheless, whilst the British writer Richard Hoggart argued for a reaffirmation of vernacular British working-class culture in the face of 'decadent' Americanization in his 1957 book *The Uses of Literacy*, the IG openly celebrated Americana, avoiding political side-



47 Richard Hamilton
$he, 1958–61
Hamilton's housewife muse is conjured from a winking eye (the small plastic object attached at the top left), a shape in shallow relief suggestive of an apron, and a sinister toaster-cum-vacuum-cleaner, its functioning obligingly indicated with dots (an allusion to both advertising conventions and Marcel Duchamp's early mechanistic paintings). She hovers next to a fridge whose contents are schematically represented. Glamorous denizens of the kitchen such as Betty Furness, the 'Lady from Westinghouse', were television celebrities in the US.

taking. In Alloway's terms, they endorsed an 'aesthetics of plenty' at a time when Britain was attuned to scarcity; postwar rationing was not lifted until 1954 and packaging on goods was uncommon. In this dour climate it is understandable that they looked to the consumerist diversity of a post-Depression culture. Broadly speaking they welcomed the shift in power from the state to the marketplace, but it was unclear at times where their sympathies lay. For instance, in 1960 the artist Richard Hamilton argued controversially that the mass audience should be 'designed' for products by the media rather than the other way round.[4] However, whilst the IG's advocacy of American-led consumerism separated them from the wary Europeans discussed in Chapter 3, they did not lack irony.

In this respect Duchamp was again a formative influence, on both Hamilton and Paolozzi. Although Hamilton admiringly mimicked the 'presentation techniques' of design stylists in images such as *Hers is a Lush Situation* (1958), in which elements of a Cadillac advertisement fuse with painterly allusions to female anatomy, a key resource was Duchamp's more sinister vision of woman/machine conflations in the *Large Glass* [**18**]. Hamilton was later to make a replica of the shattered original, but his *$he* of 1958–61 [**47**] inherits not only its diagrammatic organization from the *Glass* but also its ambivalence to socially

constructed femininity. *$he*'s fragmentary images evoke the American housewife of the period. Hamilton asserted that his aim was to update 'art's woman', who was 'as close to us as a smell in the drain ... remote from the cool woman image outside fine art'.[5] His targets were de Kooning or Dubuffet [**9**] but his 'cool' aproned alternative is far from 'liberated': the toaster suggests routine mechanical copulation, and there is blood on her shiny floor. In certain of Paolozzi's collages male sexuality is interrogated [**45**]. Brawn triumphs over machine as Charles Atlas holds a car aloft. The car in turn connotes Henry Ford, whose verdict on history, recalling Paolozzi's generic title for such collages, was that it was 'bunk'. Ultimately male sexuality, as linked to technological 'progress', appears to be debunked.

This wavering between affirmation and parodic foreboding is further dramatized by an exhibition normally thought to epitomize IG ideas concerning interdisciplinarity between areas of art practice—'This is Tomorrow' of 1956, consisting of 12 'pavilions' set up in the Whitechapel Gallery by artists/designers. Strictly speaking, it was not an IG manifestation, since several pavilions involved contributions by artists/designers working in Constructivist or abstract modes. However, two pavilions clearly expressed the polarities in IG attitudes. The first of these was designed by Hamilton in collaboration with John McHale and John Voelcker. It assaulted the senses, anticipating the environmental 'Happenings' shortly to emerge in America. Outside the pavilion a 16-foot 'Robbie the Robot' (from the film *Forbidden Planet*) was juxtaposed with an image of Marilyn Monroe. Inside, spongy floors emitting strawberry-scented air-freshener, a jukebox, and a reproduction of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (then the best-selling postcard at London's National Gallery) vied for attention. This celebratory side of Hamilton incidentally informed his famous collage, *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (1956), a cornucopia of consumer dreams crammed into a living room, which was reproduced in the catalogue of the exhibition. The word 'pop', wittily incorporated into the collage on a lollipop held by Charles Atlas over his 'bulge', momentarily connoted sensual gratification. (Hamilton wrote a famous letter to the Smithsons enumerating the qualities possessed by popular art such as sex, expendability, and glamour.[6] It is ironic perhaps that his subsequent output as a 'Pop' artist would often be allusive and intellectualized.)

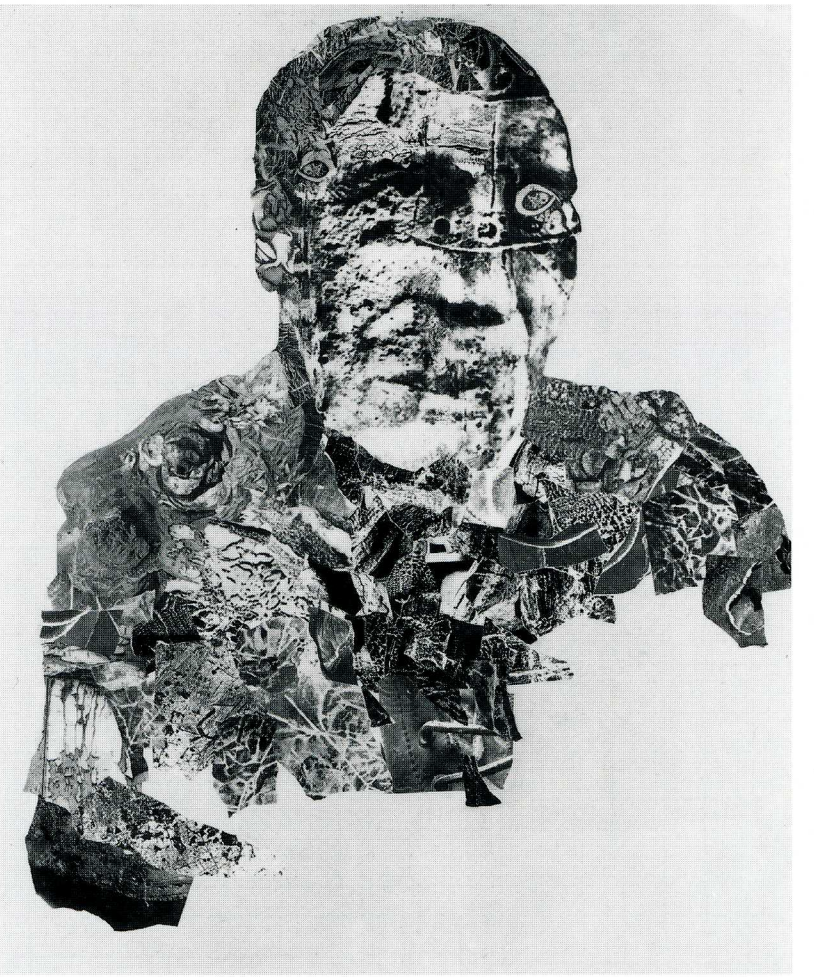
By contrast, the second distinctive IG pavilion in 'This is Tomorrow', by Paolozzi, Henderson, and the Smithsons, was a poignantly desolate affair. It consisted of a rudimentary living-space-cum-garden-shed, far removed from Hamilton's dream-home, presided over by an extraordinary photo-collage by Henderson conforming to his interest in a human image 'stressed' by photographic manipulations (and linked stylistically to Paolozzi's ravaged-looking

48 Nigel Henderson
Head of a Man, 1956
Henderson is rarely accorded much status in accounts of postwar art but he was a formative influence on members of London's Independent Group, especially Paolozzi and Hamilton. In the late 1940s and 1950s he photographed shop fronts and café windows around Bethnal Green, East London, working as a cultural anthropologist. Traumatized by his war experiences, he developed a mode of collage using fragments of photographs distorted by darkroom manipulations. *Head of a Man*, a one-off masterpiece, is an icon of postwar human pessimism.

'Brutalist' sculpture of the period) [**48**]. The floor was ironically spread with tokens of family life—a rusted bicycle, a battered trumpet—whilst littered stones and clay tiles reminded Rayner Banham, the design historian of the IG, of excavations after a nuclear holocaust.

The disparity between the pavilions points up two ways of reading the IG. Dick Hebdige sees them as devoted to a democratizing 'politics of pleasure' and thereby (to recall Crow) signalling subcultural affinities with those who regularly consume culture rather than loftily contemplate it. Alternatively, the art historian David Alan Mellor points out that in many ways the IG's iconography of robots and science fiction was complicit with the 'Tory Futurism' of the period.[7] A Conservative government had been returned to power in Britain in 1951, and by the late 1950s their propaganda of 'The Leisure State' was inextricably bound up with bright images of a technological future, backed up by a nuclear arms programme. The flip side of popular pleasures, it seemed, was catastrophe.

48 Nigel Henderson
Head of a Man, 1956
Henderson is rarely accorded much status in accounts of postwar art but he was a formative influence on members of London's Independent Group, especially Paolozzi and Hamilton. In the late 1940s and 1950s he photographed shop fronts and café windows around Bethnal Green, East London, working as a cultural anthropologist. Traumatized by his war experiences, he developed a mode of collage using fragments of photographs distorted by darkroom manipulations. *Head of a Man*, a one-off masterpiece, is an icon of postwar human pessimism.



'Brutalist' sculpture of the period) [**48**]. The floor was ironically spread with tokens of family life—a rusted bicycle, a battered trumpet—whilst littered stones and clay tiles reminded Rayner Banham, the design historian of the IG, of excavations after a nuclear holocaust.

The disparity between the pavilions points up two ways of reading the IG. Dick Hebdige sees them as devoted to a democratizing 'politics of pleasure' and thereby (to recall Crow) signalling subcultural affinities with those who regularly consume culture rather than loftily contemplate it. Alternatively, the art historian David Alan Mellor points out that in many ways the IG's iconography of robots and science fiction was complicit with the 'Tory Futurism' of the period.[7] A Conservative government had been returned to power in Britain in 1951, and by the late 1950s their propaganda of 'The Leisure State' was inextricably bound up with bright images of a technological future, backed up by a nuclear arms programme. The flip side of popular pleasures, it seemed, was catastrophe.

Hamilton taught at London's Royal College of Art in the late 1950s, where Peter Blake and Richard Smith produced figure-based and abstract 'Pop' variants respectively. In 1961 Royal College products such as David Hockney, Derek Boshier, Patrick Caulfield, and the older, American-born R.B. Kitaj came to prominence at the 'Young Contemporaries' exhibition. Hockney, brought up in working-class Bradford, exemplified the freedoms of expanded educational provision as well as the growing affluence of the early 1960s. Unconcerned with the semiotic analyses of IG forebears, he imported their ethic of surface style into his painting, but kept to personal or domestic themes. Paintings of 1960–2, in a *faux naïf* style deriving from Dubuffet, dealt openly with his homosexuality at a time when it was criminalized in Britain. Like Hamilton, he looked to America, moving to California

49 David Hockney
Sunbather, 1966
Hockney was originally attracted to Los Angeles by John Rechy's homoerotic novel, *City of Night* (1963). Hockney subsequently celebrated its homosexual subculture in images of naked men emerging from, or basking next to, swimming pools. At a submerged level the eerie stillness of these images may communicate some unease with the good life. Frank Perry's 1971 film *The Swimmer* examined the despair underlying aspects of California's sunny swimming-pool culture.

in 1963, but his libidinal liberation went hand in hand with fey stylizations which could appear vacuous, as in the tourist-brochure eroticism of *Sunbather* (1966) [**49**]. Lawrence Alloway was to set such tendencies in British Pop against the superior 'density' and 'rigour' of New York's burgeoning Pop aesthetic.[8] Whilst Caulfield's work later stood up to the formal resolution of American art, Hockney's feyness was part of a 'camp' discourse set in motion by Johns and Rauschenberg (and subsequently Warhol) to deflate a 'hard' masculinist Modernism via the domestic or decorative. His ubiquitously reproduced *A Bigger Splash* (1967) wittily ups the stakes in the attack on the Abstract Expressionist mark, lamely asserting a northern English 'virility'.

Hockney's sexual openness was at one with the experimental lifestyles of 1960s youth culture in Britain. The birth control pill, invented in 1952, radically affected sexual morality, although sexist attitudes prevailed among men, to be countered by the rise of feminism. (The American feminist Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* of 1963 and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* of 1970 were highly influential publications.) Allen Jones notoriously explored sexual fetishism in a Pop idiom (e.g. *Girl Table*, 1969) whilst Pauline Boty, a recently rediscovered female Pop artist, parodied 'permissiveness' in *It's a Man's World II* (1965–6), with its painted fragments from soft-porn magazines.

When Harold Wilson's Labour government came to power in late 1964 the mythology of 'Swinging London' was born. In this climate 'high' and 'low' cultural forms increasingly cross-fertilized, as symbolized by the cover of the 1967 LP record *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* by the Beatles. Designed by Peter Blake, in collaboration with his first wife Jann Haworth, it fuses the nostalgia for British folk culture (fairgrounds, circuses, etc.) of his early Pop paintings with the druggy countercultural iconography of the period. If, in 1962, the

Art education in Britain

The Independent Group, and the exhibitions associated with them, were important exemplars for British art education. The two stylistic impulses showcased in the 'This is Tomorrow' exhibition—its Pop and abstract/Constructivist sides—eventually converged in the development of new notions of art-school training. Bauhaus-derived ideas of 'basic design' (emphasizing analytic investigations of visual stuctures and materials) were fused with an openness to photography and mass-media imagery. The 1944 Education Act had extended art training to talented working-class students, initiating a massively expanded professionalization of the visual arts. In the mid-1950s Richard Hamilton, working alongside his Constructivist-oriented colleague Victor Pasmore at King's College Durham (later the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne), set up a pioneering one-year 'Foundation Course', followed by Tom Hudson and Harry Thubron at Leeds College of Art. This quickly became standard practice in art colleges. IG attitudes to culture also helped broaden higher education conceptions of art history, paving the way for 'cultural studies' programmes in British polytechnics in the late 1970s.

German Marxist Adorno, in line with Greenbergian Modernism, could assert 'politics has migrated into autonomous art',[9] some forms of art had blithely migrated into the sphere of mass-produced pleasure.

'The gap between art and life': Happenings, Fluxus, and anti-art

British assaults on high/low cultural distinctions were paralleled in America during 1958–64 by attempts to close what Rauschenberg once described as the 'gap' between art and life. These took the form of experimental 'Happenings' and Fluxus manifestations, pledged to artistic interdisciplinarity in defiance of conventional painting and sculpture. As further extensions of a performance genre dating back to the Black Mountain 'happening' of 1952 (see Chapter 2) and thence to Dada, both were committed to Cage's 'decentring' of the artist's ego, favouring 'live' artist–audience interaction as opposed to the aesthetic closure of Greenberg's aesthetics. Future adherents attended Cage's unorthodox classes on music at the New School for Social Research, New York, in 1958–9. They included Allan Kaprow, the ideologue of 'Happenings', and George Brecht and Dick Higgins, who were to throw in their lot with a further devotee of avant-garde music, the Lithuanian-born George Maciunas, the future promoter of Fluxus events.

Whilst they shared a desire to reconfigure artist–audience relations through disorienting transgressions of media boundaries, the tendencies differed fundamentally. 'Happenings' such as Kaprow's seminal *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) were put on in New York by visually trained artists whose experimentalism was tied to the promotional concerns of specific venues, notably the Judson Memorial Church, with its pioneering *rapprochement* between religion and modern art, and the Reuben Gallery, where *18 Happenings* took place. 'Happenings' therefore took the form of complex sensory environments, bordering on theatre in terms of vestigial narrative content and the use of 'props', but soliciting spectator participation. Jim Dine's *Car Crash*, a response

50 Jim Dine
The Car Crash, 1960, 'Happening'
In a darkened room, Dine, acting the part of 'car' in a silver-sprayed cap and raincoat, swerved to avoid 'hits' from the raking 'headlights' attached to fellow performers. The lights went on and off amid clatterings and amplified collision noises, while a girl on a stepladder recited disjointed phrases. Dine later unrolled paper towels, emblazoned with the word 'help', from a washing-machine wringer, distributing them among the audience.

51 Shigeko Kubota
Vagina Painting, 4 July 1965
Retrospectively this performance reads as a proto-feminist riposte to Yves Klein's usurpation of the female 'trace' of five years earlier [**40**]. Kubota's Japanese compatriot Yoko Ono performed another Fluxus event dealing with culturally determined gender imbalances entitled *Cut Piece* (1964). Ono's audience was invited to cut away portions of her clothing in a disturbing mix of vulnerability and self-abuse.

to a spate of car accidents in which friends had died, reactivated trauma via a barrage of poetically allusive actions, images, and sounds [**50**].

Such activities represented an extension of Rauschenberg's 'Combines' (Rauschenberg himself was involved in performances, often in league with Merce Cunningham's dance company, during this period) wedded to a reinterpretation of Pollock (see the end of Chapter 1). By contrast, typical Fluxus performances such as Emmett Williams's *Counting Song* (1962), in which he simply counted the audience, were predicated on the itinerant performance patterns of musicians or poets. They usually dispensed with fussy 'staging' and centred on rudimentary experiences, recalling Cage's advocacy of silence. Fluxus also inherited his mysticism. The term, as elaborated in Maciunas's 'Manifesto' of 1963, recalls the Greek philosopher Heraclitus in endorsing the principle of flux: 'Act of flowing: a continuous moving on or passing by … a continuous succession of changes.' George Brecht thus devised sparse, open-ended 'event scores' courting elementary or indeterminate processes; *Three Aqueous Events* of 1961 consisted of three words: ice, water, steam.

Alternatively, Fluxus events could be behaviourally or socially challenging. In 1962, in a concert in Wiesbaden, West Germany, the Korean-born Nam June Paik performed *Zen for Head*, an interpretation of a 'composition' by the experimental musician La Monte Young which involved him drawing a line on a strip of paper placed on the floor using his head and necktie dipped in ink and tomato juice. Three years later Shigeko Kubota, one of several female participants in Fluxus, translated this event's bloody connotations into female flows with her

52 Willem de Ridder
European Mail-Order House/Fluxshop, 1964–5 (as reconstructed in 1984 by Jon Hendricks)

This is an installation which closely follows a promotional photographic montage for de Ridder's distribution company. The location recorded in the original montage was actually the artist's living-room in his home in Amsterdam with his friend Dorothy Meijer posing. Among the Fluxus products on view, the Japanese-born Ay-O's *Finger Box Set*, in the open briefcase at centre right, demonstrates the further permutations of Duchamp's *Boîte* [**17**].

Vagina Painting, implicitly counterposing the body's productivity to the intellectualism symbolized by Paik's use of his head, although she in fact employed a brush attached to her underwear [**51**].

Fluxus had no fixed aesthetic agenda. It was precariously held together by Maciunas's organizational zeal. Whereas 'Happenings' constituted a 'local' phenomenon, responding to New York's in-house art debates, Maciunas had international ambitions for Fluxus. Having come up with the logo while assisting with a publication of La Monte Young's scores and running his AG Gallery in New York in 1960–1, he moved to Wiesbaden in West Germany to work as a designer for an American airforce base, quickly rallying like-minded talents to his cause. The first event to take place under the Fluxus banner, the 'Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik', therefore occurred in Wiesbaden in September 1962, when Paik performed the action described above. This was followed by a number of densely packed festivals throughout Europe. The resultant international co-minglings, recalling the structural dynamics of the European-American Dada alliances of 1916–23 and providing a model for Conceptualism to follow slightly later, led to the establishment of various outposts centred on charismatic practitioners/publicists (e.g. Ben Vautier in Nice, Willem de Ridder in Amsterdam, Wolf Vostell in Cologne). In autumn 1963 Maciunas's return to New York shifted the emphasis back to America. By the end of 1964, however, the network's fragile unity was ruptured when Maciunas supported Henry Flynt's picketing of a New York concert by the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen on the grounds that, as 'Serious Culture', it was fundamentally imperialistic.

Flynt's passionate conviction that 'Serious Culture' was predicated on forms of cultural exclusion was bound up with his sympathies for America's Civil Rights movement, dedicated to raising public awareness of the oppression of black Americans, and brought to a head with the march on Washington headed by Martin Luther King in August 1963. Flynt and Macunias's activist responses to social inequality were further exemplified in a *Fluxus Policy Newsletter* of the previous year in which Maciunas had advocated civil disruption.[10] However, such hard-line approaches alienated Fluxus members such as Brecht who saw the movement as consciousness-changing rather than interventionist, whilst Kaprow, from the 'Happenings' camp, deemed them 'irresponsible'.[11] Although Fluxus nominally continued into the 1970s, it now became factionalized. Its oppositional tendencies nevertheless introduced a powerful note of anti-(art)institutional negativity into the 1960s (a legacy once more from Dada). Whilst destruction was the subject of formative Fluxus events (for instance Paik's notorious *One for Violin Solo* (1961) in which, having slowly raised the said instrument overhead, he slammed it down with full force), iconoclasm surprisingly had a distinct flowering in Britain.


FLUXUS
cc Valise
eTRangle
KEINE KUN
PAS D'AR
NO ART
EUROPEAN
dICE
POSTBOX 2045
AMSTERDAM HOLLAND

The anti-art mood in Britain was to be memorialized by an enigmatic suitcase, a distant relation to Duchamp's *Boîte-en-Valise*. Produced by John Latham, an assemblage artist who achieved brief international success early in the 1960s with his sprayed book ensembles, it contained the physical remains, and the documented consequences, of a strange ritual entitled 'Still and Chew'. Latham's students from St Martin's School of Art in London were invited to his home in August 1966 to communally chew up the pages of Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture* (1961), borrowed from the college library. The resultant pulp was then 'brewed' and bottled before being returned to the library, after which, unsurprisingly, Latham lost his job. Anti-social or not, the gesture clearly made a point, not least in relation to the Modernist aesthetics then embodied at St Martin's in the works of Anthony Caro's successors (see Chapter 5). *Art and Culture* contained essays by Greenberg such as 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' which, as explained earlier, endorsed aesthetic exclusivity. By parodically testing it against bodily needs, Latham encapsulated a generational shift towards inclusiveness.

An ally of Latham, the German-born Jewish immigrant Gustav Metzger, followed this up a month later with his 'Destruction in Art Symposium', attracting nearly one hundred international iconoclasts to London, many with Fluxus links. However, histories have tended to ignore British iconoclasm in favour of a single orgy of destruction, Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York*. This massive agglomeration of comically auto-destructive machinery, set up in the sculpture garden of MOMA in March 1960 as the French New Realist's dramatic *entrée* into New York's 'Happenings' scene, consumed itself in flames before being extinguished by the city's fire brigade. However, compared with subsequent Fluxus gestures and their British counterparts, it now appears overblown and socially detached.

If Fluxus advocated anti-art, it also, paradoxically, commodified itself. Its acolytes patented a remarkable variety of multiple-edition objects which Maciunas, a one-man cottage industry, then manufactured, issuing exhaustive price lists filled with quirky typefaces. On offer were small boxes such as *Water Yam* (1963) containing Brecht's 'event scores', or *Flux Clippings* (1966), containing Ken Friedman's toenail/bunion clippings. Alternatively Robert Watts's sheets of 'Flux-stamps' (1963) subverted the official postage system, as well as functioning as covert propaganda. In 1964 Maciunas set up a 'Fluxshop' in his Canal Street loft in Manhattan. Although spectacularly unsuccessful, it spawned European offshoots such as Willem de Ridder's *European Mail-Order House/Fluxshop*. An installation based on a photograph advertising this [**52**], complete with a female 'commodity', shows the quantity of 'Fluxkits' and 'Fluxus Year Boxes' that came to be produced. All in all, such ventures amounted to a Marxist recognition that the

53 Claes Oldenburg
The Store, 1961
A grotto filled with misshapen, paint-dripped travesties of goods, Oldenburg's *Store* was a temple to vulgarity. In it he re-created the merchandise he passed in New York's Lower East Side on his way to his own premises : erotic underwear, slices of pie or cake from delicatessens. One key creation, visible at the back of this photograph showing the artist posing with his produce, was the 'Bride Mannekin', a sardonic response to shop-window models in bridal outfits.

dynamics of commodity circulation needed to be addressed if art's finance-based institutions were to be challenged. Ironically, of course, much Fluxus 'mass-production' was pledged not to profit-making but to the elimination of artistic 'auras', to reprise Walter Benjamin's terms.

A telling corollary to this aspect of Fluxus can be found by returning to 'Happenings'. In 1960–2, Claes Oldenburg, a Yale-educated artist with wealthy Swedish origins, made New York's impoverished Lower East Side the site of a kind of self-analysis. He constructed an environment, *The Street* (1960), which, in its Reuben Gallery showing, consisted of shards of stiffened cardboard and burlap hanging from the ceiling, evoking urban detritus. This then became the location for a 'Happening' titled *Snapshots from the City*: a sequence of vignettes, briefly illuminated, in which he enacted psycho-dramas, identifying with city bums. Oldenburg next created an *alter ego* for himself, a metamorphic transvestite character whose name, Ray Gun, came to evoke Oldenburg's repressed phallic desires for a further creation, 'The Street Chick'. These characters, allegorizing Oldenburg's longing for class mobility, appeared in performances of the 'Ray Gun Theater', itself an offshoot of an attempt to infiltrate Lower East Side life in the form of the 'Ray Gun Manufacturing Company', otherwise known as *The Store*, with premises at 107 East Second Street.

This in effect became Oldenburg's challenge to capitalist modes of art distribution. In its back room he produced a profusion of roughly

54 Roy Lichtenstein
Big Painting VI, 1965
Whilst clearly representing a critique of free expression, Lichtenstein's 'brushstrokes', like most of his other Pop works, had an exact comic-book source. They initially derived from a strip entitled 'The Painting' published in Charlton Comics' *Strange Suspense Stories* no. 22 of October 1964. Elements of this strip were originally incorporated, in a redesigned format, in Lichtenstein's *Brushstrokes* of the same year.

crafted plaster sculptures, approximating to consumer desirables such as clothing or food, splashily painted *à la* Abstract Expressionism. These were then sold by the artist at the front at prices not far above those of their real-life equivalents [**53**]. In a familiar tale of assimilation, rather than selling to baffled locals, they attracted shrewd buyers such as MOMA and the offer to move the *Store* up-town to Richard Bellamy's Green Gallery, whose advance payment soaked up Oldenburg's net losses on the project. By the mid-1960s Oldenburg's work was also undeniably up-town, the epitome of Pop chic. His homages to consumer fantasies such as the kapok-filled hamburgers with their Magrittean enlargements of scale were kitted out first in canvas 'ghost' versions, then in sexy vinyl. Reminders of a harder New York, such as the *Soft Drainpipes* of 1967, obeying a libidinal logic, went flaccid. And the prices naturally escalated.

Pop Art in America: Lichtenstein and Warhol

Fluxus's r*approchement* between aesthetic and everyday experience went hand in hand with attempts to circumvent the workings of the market. By contrast, American Pop's contemporaneous merging of elite and mass culture was underwritten by the business acumen of dealers riding a booming economy. The movement emerged suddenly in 1962 when

55 Andy Warhol
Cow Wallpaper, 1966
Warhol's 'wallpaper' initially decorated a room at Leo Castelli's New York gallery in April, 1966. Another room was devoted to his floating *Silver Clouds* (helium-filled silver pillows).

critics such as Gene Swenson, attuned to an iconography of urban signage by Johns and Rauschenberg, seized on Lawrence Alloway's earlier 'Pop' coinage to characterize paintings in a spate of exhibitions by James Rosenquist, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol. The movement was not so much self-generated as market-created by dealers such as the Italian-born Leo Castelli. Its birth was also accompanied by the phenomenon of instantaneous accreditation by museums, Alloway's 'Six Painters and the Object' at the Guggenheim Museum in 1963 being particularly prescient. By 1964, whilst the careers of individual participants flourished, the movement as such was over. Heralded by mass-circulation magazines such as *Time* and *Life*, it had generated a new media-led hunger for artistic novelty.

Turning to the art itself, New York Pop stepped up Johns's and Rauschenberg's critique of Abstract Expressionism's bombast through a cool impersonality. Rauschenberg's early 1960s silkscreen paintings [**60**] appear convoluted alongside the colourful, emblematic images of Lichtenstein and Warhol. Borrowing the compositional clarity of contemporaneous abstraction [**65**], they employed single images, ready designed from pre-existing commercial sources, in enlarged or