The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty

Edited by David Robbins

Exhibition Organized by
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College
Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley

Introduction by
Jacquelynn Baas

Chronology by
Graham Whitham

Essays by
Lawrence Alloway
Theo Crosby
Barry Curtis
Diane Kirkpatrick
David Mellor
David Robbins
Denise Scott Brown
Alison and Peter Smithson
David Thistlwood

Retrospective Statements by
Lawrence Alloway
Mary Banham
Richard Hamilton
Geoffrey Holroyd
Magda Cordell McHale
Dorothy Morland
Eduardo Paolozzi
Toni del Ranzio
Alison and Peter Smithson
James Stirling
William Turnbull
Colin St. John Wilson

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England
This publication accompanies the exhibition,
The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty

February 1–April 11, 1990
Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

May 16–September 16, 1990
Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM), Centro Julio Gonzalez, Valencia

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

February 6–April 21, 1991
University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley

June 8–August 18, 1991
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire

Organized by the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire;
the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles;
the University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley.

Organizing committee for the catalogue and exhibition: Jacquelynn Baas (Director, UAM, Berkeley), Mary Jane Jacob, James Lingwood (Adjunct Curator, ICA, London), David Robbins, Timothy Rub (Assistant Director, HMA, Hanover), Elizabeth Smith (Associate Curator, MOCA, Los Angeles), and Graham Whitham.

Edited by David Robbins with Barbara Anderson, Brenda Gilchrist, and Sheila Schwartz
Designed by Lorraine Wild, Los Angeles
Typeset in Clarinda and Joanna by Continental Typographics, Chatsworth, California
Printed by Donahue Printing Co., Inc., Los Angeles

Copyright © 1990 The Regents of The University of California.
'"Richard Hamilton retrospective statement"', Copyright © Richard Hamilton;
'"Learning from Brutalism"', Copyright © 1990, Denise Scott Brown.

The Independent Group is made possible by generous grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, Federal Agencies. Support for this project was also provided by David Hockney and by The British Council.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
p. cm.
Exhibition organized by the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College... [et al.] held between February 1, 1990 and August 16, 1991 at various locations.
Includes bibliographical references.
N6766.5.A55153 1990
709'.41'074—dc20 89-43668 CIP
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Foreword and acknowledgments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Introduction by Jacquelynn Baas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Chronology by Graham Whitham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>The Independent Group and the Aesthetics of Plenty by Lawrence Alloway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modernist Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Ads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Works in This Exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magda Cordell by Jacquelynn Baas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard Hamilton by Graham Whitham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nigel Henderson by James Lingwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John McHale by Jacquelynn Baas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eduardo Paolozzi by David Robbins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alison and Peter Smithson by David Robbins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Turnbull by Graham Whitham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Night Thoughts of a Faded Utopia by Theo Crosby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td>The “As Found” and the “Found” by Alison and Peter Smithson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>203</td>
<td>Learning from Brutalism by Denise Scott Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207</td>
<td>The Artists of the IG: Backgrounds and Continuities by Diane Kirkpatrick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>213</td>
<td>The Independent Group and Art Education in Britain 1950-1965 by David Thistlewood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>221</td>
<td>From Ivory Tower to Control Tower by Barry Curtis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>229</td>
<td>A “Glorious Techniculture” in Nineteen-Fifties Britain: The Many Cultural Contexts of the Independent Group by David Mellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>237</td>
<td>The Independent Group: Forerunners of Postmodernism? by David Robbins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>247</td>
<td>Appendix: An Account of the 1955 IG Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>249</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A 'Glorious Techniculture' in Nineteen-Fifties Britain: The Many Cultural Contexts of the Independent Group

by David Mellor

In the middle 1950s, the Independent Group was the standard-bearer of a burgeoning, spectacular, technicist culture. To recover the full density of that moment entails a patient remapping of the textual sites of the period, beyond the simplicities of received political and social histories. This essay, then, will trace the registers, surfaces, and texts which were the cultural ground for Eduardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson, and Richard Hamilton from 1952 until the close of the fifties. It will be within the turbulent spaces of resistance and complicity with these discourses – the discourse of atomic catastrophe, the multitude of attitudes about consumption, the new regimes of commercial spectatorship, the mental regions of aviation and space as technicist legends – that we discover the authorising texts of Paolozzi, Hamilton, and Henderson. Once an intertextual frame is placed around the various positions and productions of these artists, the structuring relationship with the encompassing culture becomes apparent.

A voracious consumption of products and signs had commenced in the early and middle years of the decade, once the Conservative government accelerated policies of military-industrial growth and consumer economy. This economic “takeoff” for a limitless expansion was enshrined in the period cult of the renovated, electrified New Elizabethan Age. The prosperous economic underpinning of the era runs directly counter to recent simplistic representations of British culture and the Independent Group, such as that by Thomas Lawson.1 Mistaking received historical myths, Lawson presents a culture which had lost its confidence. “Control of the future seemed no longer so certain . . . A nearly senile Churchill was returned [1952], ushering in a decade of cultural expansion and decline . . .” The “ruling elite,” Lawson declares, had a “reluctance to modernize anything.”2 An opposite reading is possible and necessary. The “super-priority” rearmament program, first initiated to cope with Britain’s role in the Korean War, transformed the “technoscope,” the universe of electronic and aerospace technologies already well advanced by World War II, while from 1952 onward consumer demand entailed a definite period of forced economic expansion and social modernisation; so much so that by 1960 many sectors of British industry – for example, communications, construction, and food processing – had been rationalised and were in a state of seemingly boundless growth. That the styles of political power might masquerade as archaic is unarguably the case, since they were as ambivalent as that meeting of the monarchic, adventuring past and the nuclear, space-exploring future which was the essential component of the New Elizabethan mythology.

We can name the functional mentality which managed the fifties epoch of technological innovation and inaugurated a British society of the spectacle: it was Tory Futurism. This renovating style of power was disseminated and diffused through the body of British culture, multiplying a utopian technicism to be enjoyed by sovereign consumers – by the British people, who were joined at this moment with the peoples of the United States and the British Commonwealth of Nations into a new polity. A conflicted ambivalence marked the relationship of Hamilton, Henderson, and Paolozzi to this enveloping discourse of social modernisation, experienced within the constraints of a British culture that was Conservative in its politics and equally conservative in its psychology. On the one hand, there was a celebration of the F-02, an experimental British military aircraft which gained the world’s air speed record in 1956 – by incorporating it as part of the W E LOVE slogans one of the walls of This Is Tomorrow (“... 1, 152 M.P.H.”); on the other hand, the rapid development of air- and rocket-borne thermonuclear weaponry by the reconstituted Grand Alliance of the West seemed to Richard Hamilton to be “leading us steadily to perdition.”3 Contrasting, conflicting fantasies of catastrophe or cornucopia, of loss or compensation, structure their pictorial works and make manifest their negotiation of the acute tensions – spectacular, deterrent, and military-industrial – of this moment of social modernisation. Perhaps these thematics are most legible in the contrast between the pavilions of the Smithson/Henderson/ Paolozzi team and the Hamilton/ McHale/Voelcker team at TTT. It is manifest in the tension between the semi­domestic figures of the former group’s post-apocalyptic shed, and the “fun house” of the latter, with its emphasis on stimuli and pleasures – death and a carnival moment within and against high British culture.

The Independent Group developed a patriarchal model of modernism, which meant that belatedness and loss were inscribed as the unsettling, paradoxical obverse of This Is Tomorrow. “The show is pervaded by nostalgia, like those current writings about jazz,” wrote Basil Taylor in the Spectator, referring to the revival and citation of the signs of heroic modernism within the exhibition and aligning it with the revivalist “Trad” jazz boom.4 A sense of the belated can be identified here, that is, of having arrived at a late moment in the narrative of the fathers of modernism. But it was something that might be overcome by simulating, by mimicking through photography, the postures and scenes of the authentic cultural heroism of a Europe that was being contemporaneously excavated by Reyner Banham in his studies with Nikolaus Pevsner. Basil Taylor, looking upon the estranged photograph by Nigel Henderson of the Smithson/Henderson/Paolozzi team, suspected that “one of the portrait group photographs . . . seems to emulate those photographic documents of the beginning of the Modern Movement . . . .” The exhibition is typical of the historical bias of our post-war period.”5 Thus would other “groups” stand for their publicity photographs in archaic, circa 1910 poses: art college satellites or “Trad” bands like The Temperance Seven, which had emerged in 1955 (or, seven years later, the Beatles).

The portentous Edwardian face of Lord Kitchener, traditional icon of the British martial spirit, appears and reappears in Nigel Henderson’s collages (a link, perhaps, with the British Surrealist practice of Humphrey Jennings, who figuratively abused Kitchener’s face in his 1936 montage, The Mask and the Misère). Twenty years later, Henderson’s photomontage of a glaring Kitchener sat in Paolozzi’s studio. From this image we might reconstruct a fascination with the order of the past, the Law incarnate, the fathers of the era of military-industrial modernisation and modernism. Such neo-Edwardianism was, of course, a salient part of British culture at all levels: in Jimmy Porter’s grudging admiration in John Osborne’s important play Look Back in Anger (1956); in the delinquent “Teddy Boys,” with their Edwardian-revival dress, over whom a moral panic developed in the late spring of 1955; in Genevieve
(1953), the popular colour film centered around vintage cars, directed by Henry Cornelius; or, finally, in the political persona which, beginning in 1957, Harold Macmillan cultivated as prime minister. The Edwardian resonances of vulgarity and cultural confidence were acute for the diagnosticians of the fifties. Kenneth Allsop acknowledged a parallel belatedness to that which Harold Macmillan cultivated as prime minister. The Edwardian resonances had “an inner confidence that we shall never know.” For the IG the same structures of assimilation to a confident, mythical, media-celebrated cultural paradigm (whether contemporary American or heroic European modernist) seems to have been operative and was a partial defense for these “latecomers” of vulgarity and cultural confidence were acute for the diagnosticians of 1957. The IG’s identification with the sublimity of paternal power found its object in the distanced fetish of photographed technology. It was the pathos of half-century old photographs of men and aeroplanes which had possessed IG members in his 1958 survey of the “dissentient,” the “delinks” – the literary Angry Young Men – in The Angry Decade. For him and for the dissentients there was an “intense nostalgic longing for the security and innocence” of the moment before 1914, which he admits to be a risible myth, yet had “an inner confidence that we shall never know.” For the IG the same structures of assimilation to a confident, mythical, media-celebrated cultural paradigm (whether contemporary American or heroic European modernist) seems to have been operative and was a partial defense for these “latecomers” against “the anxiety of influence.”

The IG’s identification with the sublimity of paternal power found its object in the distanced fetish of photographed technology. It was the pathos of half-century old photographs of men and aeroplanes which had engaged Richard Hamilton in his Man, Machine and Motion exhibition of 1955. “There is something fabulous in this aspect of modern history, the men are acclaimed heroes,” he wrote in the catalogue together with Lawrence Gow. But the aspect of a fetishistic archaism of technology, viewing the spidery wing webs of circa 1910 from the year 1955, had its counterpart in the patriarchal world of contemporary British aerospace. Here the most advanced “supersonic” jets were being produced by tribal companies presided over by the likes of Lord Brabazon of Tara, Sir Thomas Sopwith, and Sir Sidney Camm – the elderly veterans of the first, heroic age of powered flight who were still, spectacularly, in the public gaze. For example, Lord Brabazon, age eighty, tobogganed down the Cresta Run as a publicity stunt in the early fifties. This sort of fetishistic archaism was also present in the film Genevieve. But the sublime power of science and technology was not the prerogative of the IG’s fathers. The protagonists of the IG were often drawn from skilled working- or lower-middle-class technical cadres; they were ex-servicemen or industrially trained “professionals” who territorialized their status by setting themselves in opposition to the ubiquitous upper-middle-class British artist and his milieu. In line with this assertion of a “tough-minded” technicist persona, Reyner Banham was described as an “aero-engine mechanic turned art-historian.” The career patterns of Banham, Henderson (an ex-RAF Bomber Command pilot), and Hamilton were symptomatic of the social restructuring of a modernizing Britain. “New groupings of skilled and scientific workers complicated the traditional picture of British society. Polarisation between workers and management was dissolving in the subtle hierarchies of a world based upon status symbols as measured by consumer goods – badges of the new affluence.” Hamilton’s career is an emblem of this process: the accession to power of the skilled, socially mobile consumer (albeit in the sector of high culture) and the manipulation of the signs of affluence. Crucially, he was a carrier of its systems of publicity and representation and a paragon of the new technicist culture. His biography spells it out. At fourteen, in 1936, Hamilton was working in the advertising department of an electrical engineering firm; from 1937 he worked in the display department of an advertising studio, then trained as an engineering draughtsman. Between 1942 and 1945, he was a jig and tool draughtsman with the giant electronics company, BME. This kind of technical milieu – a world of engineers and technocrats – was the basis of Nevil Shute’s best selling post-war novels. It was certainly not the muscular heroics of heavy industry embraced in the fantasy narratives of labour for Social Realists in the thirties or by the neo-Romantic artists of the forties, but instead a projection of something mathematic and cerebral. In a way, this situates the elective affinity of Hamilton and Henderson to their most preferred imaginary father, the draughtsman Marcel Duchamp.

The polemical advocacy of a scientific techno-culture over and against an established traditional culture was a standard frame of reference in the mid-fifties. C. P. Snow’s “Two Cultures” argument, published in the
autumn of 1956, enunciated the same discourse. The patriarchal motif of confidence, "frontier qualities," and normative, heterosexual affiliations were brought to the fore. The traditional culture, which of course is mainly literary, is behaving like a state whose power is rapidly declining," Snow declared, "whereas the scientific culture is expansive, not restrictive, confident at the roots." Here was the re-emergence of a historical narrative of long duration — to be exact, the late Victorian and Edwardian discourse of crisis around national efficiency and industrial modernisation. But at this juncture, it was the successful advent of a technocratic New Elizabethan culture which was the project at issue within a cultural crisis that erupted in 1956 in concert with another — the scandal of mass culture. The diverse concerns of the 1G and Trr, in all their specificities, might, in this perspective, be mapped over positions within a programme of Tory Futurist national renewal. The general terms of that programme are manifest in schemes circulated by figures such as Sir Edward Hulton, with his moralisation of a consumer technocracy by his press empire, in publications such as Picture Post in the mid-fifties, and in the schooling of the male children of New Elizabethan Britain through the comic The Eagle from 1950 on. A set of discourses preparing an already economically and industrially expansive Britain for mutation into a complex, scientific state "on the threshold of space" would, in order to rediscipline the body for new skills and acustom it to new consumer pleasures and terrors, entail a corresponding devaluation of traditional "established" cultural values.

With this overlay, the 1G and British proto-Pop might cease to be perceived as essentially transgressive (except in terms of surface effects) in relation to the thrust of British culture, as it has previously been presented by Dick Hebdige. The resistance on the part of the New Brutalist (Paolozzi/Henderson/Smithson) group to complicity with versions of consumer "sovereignty" and the disciplinary powers of industrial modernisation becomes distinct and conspicuous, with their Trr pavilion as locus. Any unitary view of Trr or the 1G is, therefore, untenable: in the contrast of their pavilion and its ruination of surfaces with the Hamilton/McHale/Voelcker "fun house," there is a fissuring of projected intents and cultural destinations. The architectural historian Kenneth Frampton has epitomised the situation: "This is the moment [1956] in which the incipient consumerism of the so-called Open Society confronts the Brutalist spirit of resistance." The consensus vision of a new tomorrow for Britain was shaped in authoritative statements by individuals such as Sir Harry Pilkinson, president of the British Federation of Industrialists, in Hulton’s Picture Post: "We are undergoing a new industrial revolution... [with] peaceful atomic power, electronics, marvelous new machines, automatic processes on a new scale." This was the Tory Futurist precondition for the sanctioned utopia of "The Leisure State." In the foreground, along with the exponential growth of atomic power and a booming electronics industry, was automation, and its universal sign and anthropomorphic personification was the robot. It had been a part of high and low culture iconography from the period of interwar modernism and social modernisation — a puppet, a mannequin of the "modern" which melodramatised automatic functioning and regulation of production. Through 1955 and 1956 the robot was remobilised in the press and on TV as a sign of the imminent arrival of automated industrial processes. In 1956 the Conservative government’s new Department of Scientific and Industrial Research established a research council with wide-ranging powers. Their report, Automation, published the same year, gained immense publicity as a forecast of what was being dubbed, in the title of Pollock and Weber’s current book, The Revolution of the Robots.

But the robot had not returned as threat, as the ominous unheimlich sign of dehumanisation; instead, it now connoted consumption — it was a homely, heimlich, domesticated sign for automation. It was given a consumer gloss by Leonard Bertin, science correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, in his book Atom Harvest (1955): "Many of us have seen examples of this already. Many of us have gas or electric stoves... that are controlled by thermostats. ... We may have seen fruit canning carried out by extensions of the same principle." The populist cartoonist "Giles" of the Daily Express repeatedly returned to the image of the robot through May and June 1956. Harold Macmillan, as chancellor, introduced the British public to Ernie, a genial robot who in June 1957 chose bond numbers for an immense, automated public lottery, the Premium Bond.

It was into this field of representations that Robbie the Robot came, along with the science-fiction film Forbidden Planet, which opened in London in the middle of June 1956, and it was from here that he would be appropriated by Hamilton for Trr. In the film, he was predictably amiable and domestic, producing and synthesising food and drink, although in the publicity at the Whitechapel Gallery, Robbie appeared as a castrating threat and rival, carrying off the blonde starlet. Robbie’s significance for Trr’s narrative lay in his public currency, his recognition factor as a highly condensed, embodied, electronically speaking fragment of the popular iconography of automation. Modernisation as incarnation of the Law, and that Word made electronic. The speaking (and writing) voice possessed by cybernetics had primacy. Already, in the year before Robbie’s arrival, the specialist jargon of cybernetics — which the 1G and Allaway in particular wished, scientifically, to annex as a lexicon of technicism — had in fact become common journalistic property, popularising terms such as “feedback” in an effort to accustom general readers to the imminent onset of "Leisure Unlimited." Robbie’s arrival was the arrival of the future, the sf metaphor for the jettison, the apocalyptic advent of tomorrow, manifested and located in the very title of the Trr exhibition. The exploration of space provided a scenography for the imaginary tomorrow. In the Festival of Britain Guide of 1951, a spread of two advertisements juxtaposed respective destinations, two projects of “Englishness” — one pointing to the past and “tradition,” the other to the future. On the left page was a photograph of a pastoral scene, an avenue of beech trees, captioned “This tradition of a thing well made...”; it was an advertisement for the Bass/Worthington brewery conglomerate. The right-hand page showed a colour reproduction of one of the American artist Chesley Bonestall’s “Exploration of Space” series, an utterly alien scene, with the planet Saturn seen from “an outer moon,” advertising Sperry navigational equipment: “These instruments will, no doubt, make possible the spanning of the Universe and the navigation of outer space.” Here, at the beginning of the fifties, the familiar, pastoral scenography was defined against an alien scenography. By the mid-fifties this opposition was dissolved and the alien
future was reterritorialised (as we noticed with Robbie and BEM) to a seemingly domesticated terrain. Much science fiction was intimate chamber work, such as the hugely successful BBC radio series "Journey into Space" (1954), broadcast to family circles. It was the terrain of the Helen press' Eagle comic hero, Dan Dare, who successfully imposed a British Commonwealth of Nations-United Nations-Western Alliance policy on the recalcitrant colonials of Venus, with the aid of RAF Air Marshal-type patriarch, Sir Hubert Guest, and whose spacecraft were mocked-up for the Eagle's team of graphic artists out of household vacuum cleaner casings.

Inside the Hamilton/McCale/Voelcker pavilion was the cabin of a spaceship, with a BEM (Bug Eyed Monster) on the exterior. The illusion was not to alien otherness so much as to the disorienting stimuli of the good humoured, populist, crafted world of the British fairground - the imaginary locale of so many of Peter Blake's contemporary pop paintings and an area exempt from rationalised modernisation. One foot, then, was uneasily still in the frame of that urban folkishness surveyed in the thirties by Humphrey Jennings and Humphrey Spender for the Mass Observation project - an organisation Nigel Henderson was associated with in the late forties in Bethnal Green. The other, though, was edging toward a scientific play of disciplining the body according to the languages of marketing. This latter tendency was emblazoned across the front of the pavilion, where the screened and blown-up head of Tito was beset by behauioural stimuli in the form of fragments of advertising discourse bequelling his five senses, through ad-debased Klee-like arrows. In the Tito blowup, the body (or rather the head) is a field crisscrossed by apparently capricious marketing versions of those "routinised rhythms of the industrial organisation of social reproduction." Tito's head becomes a zone for the suddenly visible, distracting and interrogating new disciplinary powers that are welcomed as pleasures. From side to side of this human head under siege, the spectator reads an astounding coded version of the reterritorialised body of the consumer which figuratively rivals Zygmunt Bauman's Foucaultian analysis of the consumer body of nearly thirty years later: "[The body] must be made fit to absorb an ever growing number of sensations the commodities offer or promise ... Its capacity as a 'receptacle of sensations' is the training target, it is the condition sine qua non of consumerism that the body becomes richer and life is fuller depending on the ubiquity of the training."

Alloway, along with Hamilton, emerges as most persistent in his emphasis on the schooling, training, and drilling function of popular culture as a means of easing the spectator into modernised patterns of existence in the world. In his essay "The Long Front of Culture" (1959) he announces this, disavows it, represses it, but finally is enraptured with the lesson-making capacity of Hollywood films - "lessons in the acquisition of objects." Parallel to C. P. Snow's argument concerning the impotence of the literary humanist, established culture in the face of scientific advance, Alloway portrays the humanist intellectual as incompetent to act as "taste giver and opinion leader" because of the "failure to handle technology." The torch has been passed to the mass media: "the media... whether dealing with war or the home, Mars or the suburbs, are an inventory of pop technology... a treasury of orientation, a manual of one's occupancy of the twentieth century." Mars and the suburbs were adjacent in this discourse of accommodation. SF was hailed by Alloway, in 1956, for its operational capacity to "orient its readers in a technological and fast moving culture." As he described the SF magazines that were putting into circulation the elements of this new regime of technological rationality and consumer diversity, he was also disclosing the tactics and wished-for goal of some of the IG members: "the currency of such symbols, drawn easily from a wide range of social and technical sciences, is an index of the acceptance of technological change by the public in the United States."

Hamilton and Gowing's 1955 eulogy of sublime technology in the air, underwater, on land, and in interplanetary space in Men Machine, and Motion was qualified by an invocation of catastrophe. It is as though some Mazeppa-like (or James Deenan) figure of energy and destruction counter-signing for man and man, as机器, had intruded itself into their argument. In the sculpture of Eduardo Paolozzi during the second half of the fifties and in the entire oeuvre of Henderson in this decade, we may find this important countervailing force of the apocalyptic sublime, the ruination of the utopian disciplines of technicism, at the very moment of their apogee. The New Elizabethan project banked on Britain taking the lead in the new field of aerospace, a notion which in 1952-53 appeared to be vindicated with the inauguration of the world's first regular jet passenger service, the BOAC De Haviland Comet. Its prestige in civilian jet flight was as enormous as the first glimpse of the RAF's Delta-winged jet bombers and fighters at the Society of British Aircraft Constructors Farnborough Air Display in September 1952. But in a hubris of high technology, first the De Haviland DH 110 "disintegrated" at Farnborough, and between late 1953 and early 1954 three Comets similarly broke up in flight due to metal fatigue. "Stress" - the fatalism of machines, the nemesis of technology - operated as a strong metaphor in early fifties British culture. Henderson's anamorphic photographs of dismantled, blackened, shattered pieces of human culture - boxes, machine parts, or the body itself - were described by him as "stressed": "stretching or distorting the printing paper." The disintegrative metaphor was loose, like a virus in the culture. Nevill Shute, in his novel No Highway (1948), had prophesied such stress disasters (the book is the great ancestor of the aircraft disaster genre in novels).

In this "imagination of disaster" that was active in Britain during the fifties, there is a repressed element - the atomic future. It is absent, too, from the art historical accounts of Henderson and from the existing critical readings of Paolozzi. But this contemporary cultural metaphor is legible in their New Brutalist works, in the scarred evidence of detritus following the release of hideous energy, the motif of the apocalyptic sublime. Henderson's photoganted bottle recollects the lacerated glass of Hiroshima, while bearing analogy to the irradiated "squashed... litter of small objects" which Sir William Penney, the chief of Britain's nuclear weapons program, collected from the aftermath of Operation Hovac (the detonation of Britain's first A-Bomb, October 1952). For domestic readers and viewers, Operation Hovac was represented as being essentially in alignment with the New Elizabethan agenda: "It would seem that Britain has taken the world's lead in atomic weapons... a blast which revises Britain's place in the hierarchy of nations."

There was a common denominator for Henderson and Penney in the impacted indexical sign of energy released to a smoky violence upon the discarded, abject object. Penney was perceived at the time as a D-I-Y, a Do-It-
Yourself scientist, a kind of nuclear biolore with a "genius for improvisation" — he constructed measurement devices to record the load of an atomic blast from odds and ends of old pipes, tin cans, and oil drums. Just so appeared the abject, lost wax metal agglomerates of Paolozzi, such as Krooked (1956) and the St. Sebastian series of 1957-59. These desolate figures may be read as Paolozzi's mobilisation of the grotesque and abject as Brutalist visual strategies. These are the apocalyptic sublime burn-outs of fusion, a scarring and vapourising of the pristine surfaces of the electronic and mechanical cores of consoling consumer objects — those things which Hamilton was currently displaying in Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing? (1956).

The Brutalist grotesque, in resisting pristine commodification, took as its point of departure an aforism "news" often drawn from media superimpositions. At the end of 1955, Reyner Banham theorised New Brutalism around a definition of "the image." It was something sensible and excessive to and devaluation of the coded frames of the aesthetic world — particularly the liberal humanism evident in such architecture as the then current neo-Palladianism — dissolving them in favour of the gross material fragment of manufacture or the directly indexical mass-media sign.

The brute factuality of Francis Bacon's news photo-based indexical paintings were at this moment praised in Brutalist parlance by Robert Melville, a critic linked to the IG, when he admired Bacon's exhibition at the Beaux-Arts Gallery late in 1953 for its "uninhibited conduct," specifying "the take it or leave it "newsprint" technique." There were regular contacts between Paolozzi and Bacon at this time, centred upon their shared interest in a grotesque shaping of news and magazine photos. But Bacon's appearance in this context again raises the wider, generic issues of abjection and horror as modes of representation within British Culture at this time. There are Brutalist traces in the news reports of the "Angries" — of, for example, Colin Wilson the young author, who was an instant media success in the spring of 1956 with his novel The Outsider. The following year he was assailed by newspaper articles that drew attention to his sordid habit of living in squalor, Bacon-like, with "a shelf of books including volumes of forensic medicine containing some lurid coloured pictures of cadavers."41

The macabre had now returned in the genres of popular culture that the IG members were drawn to, especially horror-SF films of the mid-fifties. Again the "super-priority" was that Britain should lead with modernised products. In June 1955 the Hulton film commentator Robert Muller wrote an article entitled "Why People Enjoy Horror Films": "Britain has lagged behind America in satisfying the demand for horror films. Now comes a British 'X' film worth the old 't' certificate." The film in question was The Quatermass Experiment produced by Hammer (that same indexical, Brutalist name adopted by Henderson and Paolozzi for their printmaking company the year before). The ruling assumption of the film rested on catastrophic mutation: a British space scientist, returning from the first manned orbit of the earth, has come into contact with spores which devolve him back to a primeval plant form. The transformation is gradual and disgusting, as a leathery fungal being — with leaves for hands, but still man-shaped — makes his way through London. This abjection of the modernised rationality embodied in the scientist, this downfall into a set apart accretion of the organic, has a powerful analogic link with the inhabitant of the Henderson/Paolozzi/Smithson shied in the Tt pavilion the following year. Henderson described his grotesque, Brutalist photo-collage Head of Man (cat. no. 33) as a "head worker": "The face was heavily textured to underline the association with hide or bark and the busts/shoulders were adumbrated with bits of photographic leaf or stone to further this association with nature." It was a new macabre pastoral, a landscape of the body like the diverse superimpositions of brute nature which had been in formation since Parallel of Life and Art, the 1953 exhibition by Henderson, Paolozzi and the Smithsons. Here, at This is Tomorrow, the macabre pastoral appears as the shattering and dispersal back into nature of that orthopedic unity found in the whole, immaculate, commodified body that was revaluated by Hamilton in his representation of the man and woman inhabiting Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?

Catastrophe was, then, widely held as the other grand assumption, the obverse face of the prosperity and technist modernisation of the New Elizabethan universe; it was the other of the future, the potential realisation of the theory of nuclear deterrence, which was established between 1954 and 1958. (There was, of course, also the grotesque racial other of the usurping colonial subject — the loathsome, "feetly" Colonel Nasser, whose monstrousness was represented in the British media in the summer of 1956 as part of the prelude to the Suez crisis.) The anamorphic form of film technology and spectatorship, Cinemascope, which was introduced in 1953, was continually cited in Tt in distended — "stressed" — formats, and frames and in WE LOVE affirmations. But its all-inclusiveness, its awe-inspiring positioning of the viewer, linked it to the imaginary structures of sublime, apocalyptic spectacle. Film entertainment was catastrophised. A hysterical 1954 Picture Post article entitled "Has Hollywood Gone Mad?" captures the mood: "Is it yet another coincidence that the ages revived by Cinemascope tremble on the brink of oblivion; that the futuristic horrors of the Science Fiction film are either caused or ended by the Atom Bomb? The common denominator of both types of film is the feeling of life lived on the edge of doom."42

The grotesqueries of modern technology might also be less apocalyptic and more eccentric in significance, yet still remain a locus for phantastic identification and cathexis. Paolozzi's screenprint Automobile Head (1954; cat. no. 65) showed a monumental head, figuratively self-inscribed by its component parts — a display of motor car chassis and engine parts, carburetors, and dynamos, partly within the head's outline and partly breaking beyond it. This bristling exposure of (metaphoric) mechanical insides resembles that eccentric monster of the SBAC Farnborough Display of 1954, the Rolls Royce "Flying Bedstead," which was a paradigm of Brutalist design, exposing all its motors, pipes, circuitry and parts on a crude, bedstead-like rig which took off vertically. Bizarre technico-eccentricity was a paradigm of the Goon Show mentality of levitating, cumbersome Imperial machinery. But eccentricity aside, Paolozzi's body is permeable to technicism and crammed with products, the promised prizes, which dissolve into a simulation of organic patterning. The head bursting with motor cars was Archimboldo rewritten for the age of con-
sumer affluence, where the body is the site for the absorption of commodi-
ties. Automobile Head is a Brutalist counterpart to the head of Tito on the TT
pavilion entrance. Both depict the sovereign consumer's head; ironically, that
former seat of noble rationality is now "trained into a capacity to will and
absorb more marketable goods." Yet, transforming Automobile Head is the
saving grace of the figural. For the body is redefined by the Brutalists within
the 1950s as textured by the flows of technicism, which are themselves mutated
into an anti-functionalist organic condition. A constructed product - a house,
for example - eludes, in Brutalist theory, Le Corbusier's machinist dictum.
Thad E. Harding, in his essay "Embodiment" for the February 1955 Archi-
tectural Review, challenges Corbusier: "No, the house is not a machine for liv-
ing in, but an organ for living through."41

The gendered, phenomenal body spreads and moves, bounded by
machinist metaphors of specular engagement, by photomechanical informa-
tion and entertainment. In Richard Hamilton's paintings and drawings of the
mid-fifties re Nude (1954), may be read as caught in a tissue of such vectors,
where the issues of sexuality, enmeshed in new forms of promotional represen-
tation, might be glimpsed. Hamilton has perpetually narrated himself as
an enriched child of the twentieth-century mass media. He remembers a visit,
at age eight, to the first talkie, The Singing Fool, which he later incorporated
as a scene beyond that island room of commodities in Just what is it . . . ?
(1956). His citation of The Jazz Singer as a paradigm of new technological
modes implicates the incremental changes in entertainment technologies
which compose, construct, and border upon the world of just what is it . . . ?
In the early and mid-fifties, "some film men [said] 3-D will revolutionise pro-
duction as the talkies did in 1929."55 3-D entertainment offered a utopia of
plenty and volume and fullness in space to the spectator.

To Hamilton such new technologies were a point of deep libidinal
investment, as he admitted in 1960: "We must all have found that contact
with the fantasy world is made all the more memorable when the bridge is
a newly experienced technological marvel . . . 56 3-D, arriving in London in
March 1953 with the colonial melodrama Bwana Devil, held the promise of
a more complete specular identification. But it was the advent of the Cine-
scope process - through the anamorphic "squeezing" and (Henderson-like)
"stressing" of the framed picture - which actually effected the illusion more
successfully, when it came to London at the close of 1955. "An acceptable
true 3-D was one of the failed objectives of the fifties," wrote Hamilton.56
This was, to be sure, generally true of cinematic experiments, but still 3-D
photography was an immensely successful novelty, a "newly experienced
technological marvel," widely circulating at the most popular magazine and
pulp publishing level in 1953. Its gaze was an aggressive, erotic one, with
female pin-ups predominating: nightclub dancers kicking and shocking the
eye57 and wrestling girls as well as "art photography" nudes. Hamilton is
silent on the topic of still 3-D as a commercial regime of sight, but re Nude,
which he presented in terms of concerns with spectatorship mobility and the
passage of time, might also be read as an appropriation of this form. The
nude is, in the bureaucratic signifier of the title, the object of technicist inves-
tigation; it is, in the pun, renewed, renovated. It could be read as a version of
the most recent form of renovating the nude body: the multiple, purple con-
tours registering the body could be detached from their Cézannesque cita-
tion and relocated among the photomechanical purple, pink and green
laminations of body edges which define "glamour girls" in Picture Post photo-
stories like "Two Girls in 3-D."58

Henderson, Hamilton, and Paolozzi traded in such spectacular,
hyperbolic versions of the gendered and "sexualised" commercial body, par-
ticularly those with American sources - the polar types of pinup and muscle
man. Charles Atlas, the Big Brother of the male body, proliferates through
Henderson's early photo-collages and appears in Paolozzi's "seminal" Pop
montage Bunk! (cat. no. 59). Here Atlas, a paternal ego-ideal, swells up his
muscular body, like the crude medical diagram of the erect penis collaged
next to him. This is a literally phallocentric representation, supporting a
shrunken female pin-up and U.S. consumer products (motor car, cherry
pies). Potency is the thematic, maintained against all the cuts and sectionings
running through the picture, which is metaphorically "seminal" indeed, in
the gouts and drops of glue. They secure the paper-carrying Charles Atlas,
overlaying and overwhelming another picture whose caption and border can be
seen: a generic British "art photography" pinup titled "Evacline in Green
Dimension." This occupation of the place of the generic British body is
important, yet all importance, all swelling is deflated in the scornful riposte
of the lettering, "BUNK!!" and identification with an (Americanised) paternal
power is momentarily punctured and broken.

The translation of this phantasmic American body into a British cul-
tural frame was, as has been noted by Dick Hebdidge, a component part of
the scandal and phobias around "Americanisation" in the period.59 Paolozzi
in particular chose to represent the unconstrained, wild body of American
provenance - a dancing, grimacing, enraptured body, in its postures other
than received British social configurations of pose and decorum. This was
often a body subjected to the catastrophes of technology, a body in violent
display: facial flesh distended in wind-tunnel photographs or a stripper-
dancer juxtaposed with a crashing US Navy jet.60 Such bodies can be seen in
the photographs Paolozzi culled from magazines like U.S. Camera Annual and
presented in his epidiascope lecture to the IG in 1951, which has since
attained the mythical status of a foundational moment, as an origin of Pop Art.
The aggressive combinatory topoi of pin-ups and advanced technology was
the concern of Alloway in his 1956 essay, for the assumed male gaze, "Tech-
nology and Sex in Science Fiction." In this he foregrounded the Ziegfeld-
Irving Klaw 3-D costumes of the female pinups as behaviourally "orienting"
deVICES which would have "a social function, that of entertaining our erotic
appetites." These were shock stimuli, convulsive remedsies for a culture
which some in the IG reckoned to be suffering from "a poverty of desire"61 and
which was in the course of a phantasmatic forced modernisation by the IG.

In the mid-fifties there were other instances of modernist art being
enrolled by the developing commercial structures of consumer entertain-
ment to ratify the multiplying versions of the feminine coded as pin-up. The
sculptor Reg Butler, an "engineer of emotional stress" and the prime focus
of the geometric-expressionist "Geometry of Fear" style, made a Brutalist tro-
phy for a magazine beauty contest early in 1955.62 Perhaps the very term Bru-
talism, like the male aggressiveness of the "Angies," needs unsettling and
contextual amplification in the regions of sexuality, gender, and representa-
tion. We might then see how notions of sexuality and representation in the
1950s - an age of a seemingly reintegrated ideal of (American) maleness - were still marked and scored in Britain along the lines of a spectacular "brutality" and grotesquerie. We might look, for example, at Raymond Durgnat's observation on the British cinema of the mid-fifties: "Maleness and brutality revive together. The year before Look Back in Anger, Hammer movies began to penetrate the American market." Here Durgnat appears to be establishing a British counter to American masculinity through the post-genital brutality of Hammer and the "Angries." "The promotion of new imaginary models of the gendered body, formed in the productivity and obliterations of this emergent moment of technicism, were central to the project of those IG members we are discussing.

If male protagonists like Paolozzi, McHale and Henderson had colonised representations of the ruined yet still technicised head, a male locus of instrumental rationality under siege, then a more otherly, choric and semiotic - and specifically female - representation of the body was being constructed by Magda Cordell from within the IG. Her large, untitled polymer paintings from 1957 to the end of the decade have ambitious European affiliations and dwell between the ragged red canvases of Tapiés, the Spanish tachiste, and Dubuffet's shuffling organic heaps of the human. But what is exceptional about them lies in their aspect of female signs; that is, they act as signs for an internal and - crucially - maternal body, unrepresented elsewhere in British art of this moment. They resemble Munch's undulating and sickly accoutums of women and otherness, but shorn of his misogyny and fears. However, a new fear - a new hysteria - is present here: the paintings radiate another sickness in their red womb/x-ray connotations. Here is the hellish terror of "atomic dust," of the cancerous glows vented at the heart of the nuclear pile, as at Windscale in Northumbria in 1958. These tumours swell and wither on the painted ground of an imaginary body which resists over-coding by consumption. In Magda Cordell's pictures, woman is threatened both as ground and as body, on the plane of organic existence.

Hamilton, on the other hand, succeeded in relocating that over-coded masculine or feminine body to the territories of the commodity. Janice Warnop has observed the essential scenario of Just what is it ... ? in the British advertisements of the time: "Femininity is 'penetrated' in this double sense by masculinity [which] constructs femininity in its own image, for itself ... and is contained within the capitalist commodity form. Finally the relation between femininity and masculinity takes the fetishistic form of a relation between commodities." 46 The interior room of Just what is it ... ? carries the trace of the many graphic and illustrative representations that itemised consumer durables within the home and that were in common-place media circulation. Photomontage sets of domestic interiors, for example, were commissioned by Sir Edward Hulton for Picture Post in April 1956. Married couples were shown lodged in surreal domestic spaces, surrounded by aggregates of vacuum cleaners and electronic appliances that appear slightly out of perspectival killer. The article's title, "Are We Enjoying Too Much of Tomorrow Today?" 47 makes explicit a journalistically prurient variant on the trite slogan. Once again the future has impacted amid the anxious pleasures of the present. The scene of consumption is spread before the reader, legislated by a Tory Futurism which, under the chancellorship of R. A. Butler, loosened credit and installment plan, Hire Purchase (H.P.) controls in the decisive budgets of 1953-54. "H.P. is a social safety valve amid rising material plenty," the caption runs, "a potent stimulus of the mass consumption needed for mass production."

But catastrophe enters. The article goes on to imagine a change in circumstances, with the removal of easy credit and the subsequent deprivation of the tabulated consumer durables from each household. A hypothetical "Mr. C." is foregrounded: "a graduate teacher, 28, married but without (yet) a child. He has (above) a home, furniture, a radio, T.V. If you imagine Mr. C left only with what he's paid for, retaining only the T.V. set, you have (below) a melancholy and absurd situation." The aftermath of this small apocalypse for the consumer is melancholic: the consumer slips into a barren site, the screening walls of his house are gone and all around Mr. C and his wife is dreary, grey, broken earth - a raw, inchoate Brutalist metaphor with an awkwardly perspectivised table holding a set. The zone of the domestic is left unheimlich once more. But as Hamilton's Just what is it ... ? suggests, it was already an uncanny place in the society of the spectacle, "where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images" 48: a place of commodity fetishism. 49

On this figurative site of fetishism, where do we locate Hamilton as subject-artist? There is no paternal struggle here; and issues and differences of gender in Just what is it ... ? are probably a deflection, a feint away from the flattened stereometries of the selection of commodities. Looking again, we may discover Hamilton at the moment of ambiguously subsuming himself into such a commodity. On the table in front of the television set, a large tin of ham is sitting: its social connotation in post-ratification Britain was still that of a special treat, a sign of relative affluence for the lower middle classes, and of course it directed the consumer back to American origins, to cornucopia and satiation. For Hamilton, we might think, it is a product which enables him, as Hamilton, to be transformed by self-inscription into a commercial label, a brand marked "HAMILTON." This was a masquerade he would perform again. 64 Here is the modernist gesture of self-inscription at the dawn of the epoch of consumerism. Thus Hamilton is sealed up in a circuit of commodification, the "splendid bargain" role he was to announce in 1960 of the artist-as-consumer. Yet here, in 1956, the artist is already written into the scene as product and self-consumer.

2. Ibid., pp. 20, 21.
5. Ibid.
7. Ibid., pp. 39, 52.
9. Harold Bloom has set out the various defence mechanisms deployed by "late-coming" poets within the narrative sequence of English literature in The Anxiety of Influence (New York, 1973).


13. All the memoirs of IG participants adamantly make a point of this antipathy to the prevailing styles of art behaviour. Notice that the word "amateur" is twice stigmatised in the WE HATE section of TTT.


17. Ibid.


19. The title of one of the many SF films seen in Britain in the mid-fifties.


24. The British electronics industry, which had employed ninety-eight thousand in 1943-44— with Hamilton counted among them—employed one hundred ninety thousand in 1955.


27. See, for example, Jytte Robertson, "Leisure Unlimited," Picture Post, 2 April 1955, pp. 15-18.


30. Ibid., p. 40.


32. Ibid., p. 33.


34. In their introduction to Man, Machine and Motion, Hamilton and Gowing suggest that the union of man and machine "liberates a deeper, more fantastic human impulse" than even the mythic contours "viking ... much that is terrible." See Hamilton, Collected Words, p. 19.


40. Bertin, Atom Harvest, p. 147.


43. See Alloway, The Angry Decade, for a long account of the media rise and fall of Colin Wilson.


45. Here, as at earlier points in this essay, use of the word "object" refers to and is indelibly connected to the conceptually structured set out in Julie Kristeva, Powers of Horror (New York, 1982).


47. See, for example, Ronald Searle's shift from the domesic comic genre to the comic domestic caricature of Nasser in Punch: in the summer of 1956.


49. E.g., Goon Show no. 140, broadcast 27 December 1955, "The Mighty Wurz brain," in which a giant Wurz brain is "driven" across the Sahara to the "Hotel des Wurz" [sic] and then goes on to win the world's land speed record; a narrative rich in the absurdities of post-imperial parody, racism, and technicism.


52. E.g., Hamilton's versions of Maybrick and also the cut-away film melodrama basis for the Tramission work.


56. Hamilton, Collected Words, p. 120.

57. Picture Post, 27 June 1953, p. 32. See also Fried, Realism, Writing, Disfiguration, pp. 64-65, on the rendering of representations of the body through violent optical distortions.


60. See Saulcreative Windsurfing Test (1956) and Yours Till the Boys Come Home (1955), illustrated in this catalogue, nos. 55 and 56.


62. This phrase, used to diagnose what was lacking in the British, was first attributed to Ernest Bevin, the British foreign secretary (1941-51).


68. See Lowson, "Bunk," p. 25, for this characterisation.

69. See the front cover of his Tate Gallery retrospective exhibition in 1969, which doubles as abstract illustration and as monograph title, since the flat German-designed toast is brandnamed "hamilton."