

**A Transgression Too Far:  
Women Artists and the British Pop Art Movement**

Sue Tate

How are we to understand the paucity of women Pop artists? Early histories and commentaries simply ignore their absence but in the wake of the impact of feminist art theory, writers like Marco Livingstone and Steven Henry Madoff in the 1990s can no longer turn a blind eye. Livingstone comments that the “movement...remained essentially the preserve of male artists”<sup>1</sup> and Madoff that “the roster of artists...barely included mention of women”<sup>2</sup> but they are at a loss to understand it. For Livingstone it “cannot be explained simply as symptomatic of the general position of women in the visual arts, since the ratio of women to men is even smaller in Pop than in other movements of the period”; his only suggestion is that it might be a matter of women’s lack of the necessary “detachment.” Madoff, in what is little more than a slightly surprised aside, dismisses the question as an insoluble conundrum. Another solution has been to dismiss Pop as inevitably masculinist so the absence of women does not really matter. David McCarthy, for example, in Tate’s history of Pop (2000) struggling manfully [*sic*] with issues of gender, decides that

One way of explaining the gender bias in Pop is to focus on the age and interests of its practitioners. The concerns of the members—technology, science fiction, automobiles, advertising, pin-ups—were gender-specific in the post war years.<sup>3</sup>

This might well be the case, but it is a circular argument (the concerns were masculine because the artists were and vice versa) that ignores the differently gendered concerns of, for example, fashion, film fandom, pop music, interior design, and the wealth of advertising explicitly directed at women. Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, in their weighty 1990 overview of high/low culture, argue that “the story of the interplay between modern art and popular culture is one of the most important aspects of the history of our epoch”; and Pop Art was a major episode in that epoch-making story. Seen in this light the near absence of a female subjectivity, and the lack, until recently, of critical purchase

on or interest in the problem, is actually of very real concern. The abandonment of the whole arena to a monocular, male vision and the occlusion of women's affective experience of mass culture is symptomatic of a deep and damaging gender imbalance in our a culture that needs addressing.

In an attempt to do that I have brought a close gendered attention to the field of cultural production from which British Pop Art emerged, something that mainstream histories have signally failed to do. In the second half of the twentieth century the overt exclusions of women in the West from the institutions of art were over and there was what Elizabeth Wilson has termed a “deceptive harmony”<sup>4</sup> around assumptions about equality. However, an examination of key sites at the time, like the Royal College of Art, London, and the annual Young Contemporary art shows, exposes the gendered dynamics of discursive and institutional structures which had very real, material, and delimiting effects on the lives and work of emerging artists. I will argue that beyond the surface of the male Pop artists' performance of a notionally transgressive challenge to cultural hierarchies, which was in fact institutionally supported, the actual marginalization of women went unnoticed. I will contend that, in this deeply gendered terrain, by the very fact of practicing *as women*, they and their work were a transgression too far.

### **Gendering the Field: The Royal College of Art**

The Royal College of Art (RCA) was of central importance for the emergence of British Pop Art: a point of confluence, support, and mutual influence for almost all of the major figures, most of whom, as can be seen in figure 1 were either students or staff there. The pages of ARK, the RCA's highly influential student journal, provided a platform for debate between the earlier generation of the Independent Group—who included Lawrence Alloway, Reyner Banham, Richard Hamilton, and Eduardo Paolozzi—who became known as “the Fathers [sic] of Pop”<sup>5</sup> and the younger generation, David Hockney, Derek Boshier, Peter Phillips, Patrick Caulfield et al. Clearly then, an excellent focus of study; but before turning to issues specific to Pop it is salutary to remember (and to observe in the particular) the insidiously damaging effects of institutional sexism, endemic to twentieth-century education as feminist scholars have so eloquently shown,<sup>6</sup> that underpin the specific predicament of the woman Pop artist.

Before and during the second world war the RCA had been faltering, but it was revitalized by the dynamic Robin Darwin, a stalwart of the British male establishment<sup>7</sup> who was principal from 1948 to 1967, key years for Pop. Under his leadership a masculine ethos pervaded the college which, in casual asides, can also be seen as misogynist, for example, when he listed women's suffrage and divorce law reform as among the "results of questionable value" stemming from the Arts and Crafts movement. Darwin had served in the Camouflage Directorate during the war and made many appointments to the staff among the officers he had met there. The senior common room was likened to both a men's club<sup>8</sup> or, in Frayling's official history of the college, to an officers mess: "A famous College story...had it that a Guards' Officer stumbled into the Senior Common Room, thinking it was Knightsbridge Barracks, and only discovered his mistake when he tried to pay for lunch."<sup>9</sup> All the college documents referred to students as "he" and, apparently, when designs for the new building at Kensington Gore were drawn up, women's washrooms for the Senior Common Room were overlooked. Throughout the twenty year period from 1948 to 1968 the staffing was overwhelmingly male dominated; on average 90 percent of the staff were male, the proportion of women sometimes fell as low of 5 percent and never rose above 11 percent, and only 1 of the 10 professors was a woman, Madge Garland, who headed the School of Fashion. There were, thus, few female role models but there is plenty of anecdotal evidence of disparaging comments from male staff.<sup>10</sup> Women were better represented in the student body than among the staff but were still outnumbered three to one, taking only an average of 30 percent of the places.

There is no question that there was a direct correlation between kudos and gender at the RCA. This was borne out in 1963 when all diploma courses at the college were given prestigious degree status with the single exception of the School of Fashion, which had its female professor and all female staff. It seems there was disquiet right up to government levels, at the thought of such a "feminine" subject being so elevated. There was an outcry that reached the media and the decision was rescinded, but not before the gendered value system of the institution had been exposed.

Fine art, conversely, has long held high status in western culture and Darwin "wanted it to be the foremost department of the college,"<sup>11</sup> a sign of quality as he

marketed the college to the captains of industry. The staff of the School of Painting were all male until 1958,<sup>12</sup> when Mary Feddon and Sandra Blow were brought on, but, in the period under consideration, there were never more than two women at anyone time; in the School of Sculpture there was never more than one—Elizabeth Frink, who was appointed in 1960. It was notoriously difficult for women students to get a place in the School of Painting, where the nascent Pop artists were to be found, and consistently there were fewer female students there than in other parts of the college.<sup>13</sup> Both Blow and Feddon,<sup>14</sup> however, were convinced the women were at least as, if not more, talented than the men: an opinion born out by the statistics. If we look at the Firsts that were conferred: in three different years, half of the women got Firsts, but at no point do even one quarter of the men. In the ten years between 1956 and 1966, most relevant to Pop, women made up 29 percent of the student body, but achieved 44 percent of the Firsts. Demonstrably, by the college's own standards, women had to be better than men to get a place in the most highly regarded School of Painting.

It was a similar story among the staff: while very ordinary male students (with pass degrees) made it into the staff body, female appointees, if they did not have a male connection to the college,<sup>15</sup> had to be exceptional: Elizabeth Frink was described as “a rising star,” Sandra Blow as “a prodigious talent,” and Margaret Leischner came to the School of Textiles from working with Anni Albers at the Bauhaus. Individual women like these, and others like Mary Feddon, did receive encouragement, and were enormously pleased and grateful to be accepted and supported. But their success, which has to be seen as exceptional, masked the deeper workings of institutional sexism that went unremarked at the time. Jane Percival, a student at the college in the late fifties/early sixties, described it as “a funny time actually. Women painters like myself felt very alienated, the full feminist movement hadn't come in and we worked in isolated pools, mostly of depression.”<sup>16</sup> It is in the context of this very un-level playing field that the particular predicament of the woman artist in the dynamics of Pop must be understood.

Pauline Boty was one of the very few women artists to make a name for herself in Pop. Her mother had been forbidden, by Pauline's grandfather, to take up a place at the Slade School of Art and her sense of injustice reverberates through family mythology. Pauline, too, had to overcome her own father's initial opposition when she won a

scholarship to Wimbledon School of Art, and there were ongoing arguments about money. Once there, however, Boty flourished and, in her second year, made her way (after a short period in the painting school, which was still stuck in traditional figuration rendered in a brown palette) to the Stained Glass School led by the young, energetic Charles Carey. Carey's background<sup>17</sup> made him unusually open to working with, and respectful of, women artists, and two other ambitious, intelligent, and talented young women, Anna Lovell and Gillian Wise,<sup>18</sup> were also drawn to the radical approach he encouraged in their practice. Out of what now seems a miniscule cohort of five students, the three young women, outnumbering the men, are remembered for intellectualizing furiously, creating an atmosphere of passionate artistic debate. Boty also threw herself into the energy of the newly emerging youth culture and there are anecdotes of swapping clothes and makeup in the studio, of partying and dancing. Carey also had a direct link with the RCA and, through contacts with the likes of Peter Blake, was presciently open to a Pop sensibility. Setting stained glass projects for swimming pools and nightclubs rather than churches he encouraged the use of collage to "import immediate and contemporary imagery."<sup>19</sup> Influences were drawn from both the collages of Schwitters and Ernst and from the painterly avant-garde, and Carey was quite happy that Boty should do more collages, lithographs, and paintings than stained glass, which was not her real interest, and remembers her enthusiasm for popular culture manifesting in her work.

Most fortuitously, Wimbledon School of Art provided Boty with an unusually positive experience, fostering her strongly voiced ambition and taste for popular culture and she graduated a well-educated, knowing, confident, and talented young woman, ready to take on the world. She went to the RCA in 1958, as mass culture concerns, developed in the Independent Group, were finding expression in the pages of ARK, but rather than developing her popular culture interests she lost confidence in her work and it was only once she left the college that she found her Pop voice. The institutional sexism of the RCA must be implicated: for example, the year she arrived only six of the sixty-three teaching staff were women, none in the schools of fine arts. It was received wisdom at the time, volunteered to me unasked by her brother, Arthur, decades after the event, that the School of Painting was too difficult for "a girl" to get into and he remembers his sister being advised, against her wishes, to apply for Stained Glass rather than risk

rejection.<sup>20</sup> Again the figures support his opinion: the year she enrolled in Stained Glass only eight of the thirty-six students in the School of Painting were women, but half of them got firsts, as opposed to one tenth of the successful male candidates. This decision, driven by the institutional sexism, left her outside the maelstrom (male storm?) of Pop energy that developed in the School of Painting.

### **Notional Transgression—“Son of Dada was accepted”**

Erupting onto the postwar British cultural scene, the Pop artists and their “fathers” (the Independent Group) saw themselves as attacking the citadel of high art and throwing down a challenge to the art establishment. Dick Hebdige describes the “mass culture” taste of the male, working-class practitioners as a “return of the repressed,” and quotes Reyner Banham describing their activities as “the revenge of the elementary school boys.” “Early Pop,” he argues, “drew its transgressive power from the friction generated in the clash between “official” and “unofficial” taste formations—a productive clash of opposing forces” [emphasis added], and cheerfully describes Pop’s mass cultural sources as “despised” and “a most soiled and damaged currency.”<sup>21</sup>

ARK, the RCA’s influential student magazine, had an important role in the development of a Pop at the college. Alex Seago, in his study of the emergence of postmodern sensibility at the RCA, identifies key issues in the late fifties that, promoting the ideas of the Independent Group and exploring popular culture, were “motivated by a *healthy, anarchic desire to challenge the status quo*” (emphasis added).<sup>22</sup> In a range of articles mass culture is greeted as a vigorous stimulant to what del Renzio characterizes as a “dull, timid” arts culture in Britain; *But today we collect ads* proclaims the title of the Smithsons’ statement<sup>23</sup> while Alloway, in his, argues for the eradication of the high/low divide, rejects the likes of Roger Fry and Herbert Read (Modernist stalwarts of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, or ICA) for their “irrelevance” and expresses open hostility to Basil Taylor, a grandee of the RCA.<sup>24</sup> Issue 24, flaunting its Dayglo colors, was described by its editor, Denis Postle, as “deliberately subversive.”<sup>25</sup> Issue 25 (1960) expressed the second generation’s break from intellectual Pop, carrying a spoof by Peter Blake of teen romance comics and had Brigitte Bardot both on the cover and pictured in a centerfold pullout. Seago argues that these issues of the magazine, with their low culture

bad taste and iconographic references, were designed to shake up “the stuffy and self satisfied attitudes of the RCA’s Senior Common room” who were, apparently, “incensed” and he recounts a number of anecdotes to attest to the “hostility” that was provoked.<sup>26</sup>

Both Livingstone and Seago make great play of the confrontational role of the young (male) artists at the RCA, knowingly slumming it with their gleeful use of the “despised” imagery of mass culture, and of the attacks and hostility endured as a result. Livingstone points out that Allen Jones was expelled, Phillips had to paint at home “since he had been berated by staff and threatened with expulsion,” and was then forced to go into the Television School for his third year. “Even Hockney, who was recognized as a star pupil, was threatened with expulsion.” Seago recounts how Bruce Lacey so hated the “constant carping” of staff he was driven into “exile,” to paint in the loft; Smith suffered from hostile criticism from staff; and William Green who, while still a student, used the “anti-good taste” icon of Errol Flynn as the key image of his much discussed show in 1959, found his work “constantly frowned upon.”

However, closer inspection reveals a rather different picture. Phillips was well represented in the officially supported Young Contemporaries exhibitions, which launched his successful career, and the convocation lists show that, actually, he did get a degree in Painting. Despite his “exile” Lacey was awarded a Silver Medal, a travelling scholarship and had the accounts of his travels published in *ARK*. Rather than expelling Hockney, the college in fact bent over backwards to give him a degree when he had willfully failed his General Studies dissertation. A subcommittee of the academic board was called that decided that “deviations” had occurred in all the dissertation marking and so it was to be set aside, and all students, including Hockney, to be adjudged as having passed in General Studies. Frayling describes this as “an amused and well-tempered way out of the dilemma.” In similar vein, Seago notes that while “Robin Darwin’s personal tastes were conservative...he played a leading role in encouraging students to adopt a pragmatic ‘American’ attitude”<sup>27</sup>—“American” being a euphemism for mass cultural.<sup>28</sup> It turns out that he took over the funding of *ARK* in order to relieve students of “tiresome administration” while leaving “editorial policy exclusively in the[ir] hands”<sup>29</sup> and Denis Postle (the “transgressive” editor) admitted that “a phone and an office and the freedom to do what you liked...was a considerable virtue.”<sup>30</sup>

When Larry Rivers was passing through London in 1961, Darwin invited him to visit the painting studios, an event which Hockney identifies as an important influence, seeing in Rivers's work "a kind of seminal Pop art."<sup>31</sup> Livingstone also acknowledges that the RCA provided a "common sense of purpose" in the mutual support and influence that flowed between the two generations of British Pop artists. Richard Hamilton, for example, then teaching in the School of Interior Design, visited the painting studio and handed out "some little prizes" which Hockney found "quite a boost for students; we felt, oh, it is all right what I'm doing, it *is* an interesting thing and I should do it" and "from that moment on the staff never said a word to me about my work being awful."<sup>32</sup> After recounting the hostility of various members of staff, Hockney also describes how the School of Painting became a lively magnet drawing in sympathetic practitioners; he remembers meeting Joe Tilson and Peter Blake and the productive interaction that took place between Fine Art and Graphics. And it was not long before Pop artists were taken on to the staff of the School of Painting: Blake from 1963 to 1968, Hockney in 1965, and all feature, with full acclaim, in the official history of the college. Clearly, in an institution that was so entirely male dominated, there was room for both mainstream and opposition.

These claims for transgression, subversion, and hostility seem to contradict the actual support given by the RCA but might be understood by drawing on Bourdieu's concept of the "*prise de position*" (position taking) within a "field of cultural production."<sup>33</sup> Bourdieu argues that a cultural field is structured by the distribution of available positions and that only certain positions are structurally possible. The field is shaped by a dynamic based on struggles between those positions, which can often be expressed in a "heretical" challenge to the existing doxa, which is, of course, the classic avant-garde gambit. Pop has been seen as the first of the neo-avant-gardes, which Peter Bürger argues "institutionalise the avant-garde as art" and when "the protest of the historical avant garde against art as an institution is accepted as art, the gesture of protest of the neo-avant garde becomes inauthentic."<sup>34</sup>

Even Hal Foster, who has taken Bürger to task for his dismissal of the so called neo-avant-garde as *inevitably* "inauthentic," admits that the effect of the practices of Rauschenberg and Kaprow in the 1950s leading on to Pop in the '60s, "is *less to*



*transform the institution of art than to transform the avant-garde into an institution* [emphasis in original].<sup>35</sup> In this context the usual “cycle of simple reproduction” posited by Bourdieu (“recognition of the ‘young’ by the ‘old’—prefaces, co-option, consecration etc.—and of the ‘old’ by the ‘young’—homage, celebration etc.”<sup>36</sup>) must be masked by a play of transgression and challenge to the existing doxa, validated by the experience of hostility from the establishment. In British Pop we repeatedly see this transgressive posturing, both at the time and as history is recounted, to maintain avant-garde identity and cultural meaning which enabled these young men to secure the neo-avant-garde position in the field that led to successful careers and canonicity.<sup>37</sup>

The Independent Group, for example, has been mythologized by its own practitioners (Alloway and Banham) and later in art history (Hebdige and Hughes<sup>38</sup>), as the transgressive and oppositional progenitor of Pop, aggressively challenging the “official” ICA.<sup>39</sup> Anne Massey and Penny Sparke (1985) have, however, most effectively exposed this as a myth, concluding that “In fact the Institute provided the Independent Group with opportunities to launch careers and an input of ideas and approaches to culture” and, to use a “the filial analogy, the Independent Group resembled a troublesome offspring struggling for identity in the shadow of its patient begetter.”<sup>40</sup> It was, however, a very successful “position taking”—the Independent Group has a well-established place in the canon and in art history as the “Fathers of Pop.”

The Young Contemporaries exhibitions offer a wonderful demonstration of father/son support played out as a neo-avant-garde position taking by the second generation of Pop. The Young Contemporaries were annual exhibitions of aspiring British student work, founded in 1949 by the RCA Professor of Painting (Carel Weight) with the intention of facilitating student careers and in which RCA students were disproportionately well represented. For Livingstone the shows provided “a central episode” in the development of British Pop; it was at the 1961 show, attracting much media attention, that “Pop emerged as a coherent movement in this country.”<sup>41</sup> They were also crucial to a career in Pop: for all the British Pop artists, with the single exception of Blake, the shows were the first crucial rung on the career ladder, leading to other noncommercial sites (ICA, the John Moores exhibitions in Liverpool) and then into the burgeoning nexus of private galleries in sixties London.<sup>42</sup> Hockney stated emphatically:

“That's when I began selling pictures.”<sup>43</sup> Pop artists start to emerge as early as 1954 (Joe Tilson), in 1960 a critical mass gathers (Boshier, Hockney, Phillips, Caulfield, Jones, and Kitaj—all RCA students) and Alloway, the leader of the Independent Group (a Father of Pop) wrote the catalogue. 1962 is seen as *the* Pop year where what were to become iconic images of British Pop were shown for the first time and it was, according to Frayling, the high-water mark of the Young Contemporaries themselves.

The Young Contemporaries had full institutional backing, the selection committees were drawn from the great and good of Modernism (John Nash, John Piper, Henry Moore, L.S. Lowery) and from the teaching establishment (mostly from the RCA, Spear, Weight, Dobson, and also Sir William Coldstream). Yet the rhetoric of the shows, expressed in the very title, was of the youth, newness, the contemporary, offering a raw, combative challenge to the staid and polite establishment. In the catalogues the artists are described as “a very gallant fleet of privateers, each hoisting sail...under a new flag,” an image echoed in Hebdige’s description of them as “Young Turks,” a “gang of low born pirates.” In 1960 the show is claimed as a “proving ground for young and virile ideas”; Alloway, organizing the 1961 show, was described by Kitaj as “ballsy” and “leaving a trail of blood whatever else he did.” And in 1962 the catalogue throws down a (neo) avant-garde, Oedipal challenge:

The Young Contemporaries is a continual reminder to student-painters that the firing line is a stone’s throw away, just as it is also a reminder to older campaigners that they have got to die one day.

One catalogue claims the right to consecrate “the painters of the future” and in the 1962 catalogue the work, characterized as “unique,” “spontaneous,” and “unprecedented” (i.e., an avant-garde break from the past) was also placed in the context “of that solid fabric of modern English painting.”

How quickly and easily the notionally transgressive is brought inside the fold. The field was institutionally structured, with the overt support of the “old campaigners,” to encourage, celebrate and distribute radical “new, “young” work which could be absorbed into the “solid fabric of British art” through the “cycle of simple reproduction.” As Foster quotes Hamilton saying of Pop “A new generation of Dadaists has emerged today, but *Son* [sic] of Dada is accepted.”<sup>44</sup>

**...and what of the daughters?**

But what of the daughters at this site, so crucial for the career trajectories of British Pop artists? The infrastructure of the Young Contemporaries was at least as male dominated as the rest of the RCA, if not more so. For example, from 1949 to 1966 only 5 out of 133 places on the Selection Committees were occupied by women (four percent: Prunella Clough three times and Bridget Riley twice). However, there were women on the student committees and, in the earlier years, RCA women students from the School of Painting were shown more or less in proportion to their representation in the student body:<sup>45</sup> in 1959 RCA women actually did better at the Young Contemporaries than in the School of Painting: 37 percent of the work exhibited, only 26 percent of the student body. But a striking fact to emerge from a gendered study of the statistics is that *the emergence of Pop at the Young Contemporaries correlates exactly with the disappearance of RCA women*: in just three years the number of works by the women plummets from 37 percent in 1959 to zero in 1962. In 1960, when the catalogue declared the show was for “virile” ideas, the percentage drops from 37 percent to 11 percent; in 1961, when the “ballsy” Alloway was in charge and Pop found coherent expression, a mere 2 percent of the work was by RCA women and in 1962, *the Pop year*, no RCA women were selected at all, there were no women on either Selection or Student Committees and, with stunning irony, Phillips showed *For Men Only*, featuring Bardot, Monroe, and a row of anonymous, gyrating, bikini clad, women.

So clearly, as Livingstone pointed out, the absence of women from Pop is not just a matter of the general position of women in the arts at the time, nor at the RCA in particular: attention must be given to the gendered values of Pop and their effect on the positions available in the cultural field.

Pop, often seen as the first postmodern movement, straddled what Huysen has characterized as “the great divide” between (low) mass culture and (high art) Modernism.<sup>46</sup> Both the children of the Industrial Revolution, Huysen sees them as caught in a “compulsive *pas de deux*” and the core features of Modernist aesthetic<sup>47</sup> not as the heroic autonomous acts of the myth, but as “*warding off*” gestures to defend the citadel of high art from the products and inauthentic experiences of industrial

modernization. Crucially for the current debate, he demonstrates that the dynamic of the “Great Divide” is essentially gendered with “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other.”<sup>48</sup> Hysterical, engulfing, destabilizing and out of control, the (feminine) masses were seen as a direct, political threat to “civilization” and “culture.” The projection of male fears of “engulfing femininity” on to the metropolitan masses was conflated with the perceived need to achieve cultural autonomy from inferior mass culture. Thus, Huyssen argues, “the gendering of an inferior mass culture as feminine goes hand in hand with the emergence of a male mystique in Modernism (especially in painting).”<sup>49</sup>

At a time when highbrow, formalist Greenbergian certainties were dominant, there was a risk that Pop, with its use of the trivial feminine mass culture, might be excluded altogether from the citadel of high art. Although very quickly commercially successful, the critics were slower to give approval: Max Kozloff, for example, in 1962 wrote of Pop in terms of “despicable” and “delinquent” barbarians invading the galleries.<sup>50</sup> Clement Greenberg himself was to argue that since Pop Art “repudiated the difference between high and less than high art” it could not advance art on a formal level and was therefore trivial and of no importance or interest.<sup>51</sup> It is interesting, however, to observe the early literature of Pop scrambling to make the work fit a formalist model: Lucy Lippard arguing for “Pop’s formal validity,”<sup>52</sup> Finch that Philip’s work should be seen as “a totally self contained plastic event”<sup>53</sup> and John Russell and Suzi Gablik that their “primary concern...has been to assert the stylistic affinities of Pop Art with certain contemporary abstract art.”<sup>54</sup>

The Pop artists themselves can also be seen to perform “*warding off gestures*” against being engulfed by their gendered source material. One such gesture might be the (over?) insistence in the Young Contemporaries catalogues on virility, ballsiness, and masculine bravado (one show is compared to the excitement of a one night stand). The performance of a “cool detachment” was another such gesture the importance of which is stressed in all the literature of Pop; Livingstone sees it an “essential” characteristic and, tellingly, the lack of detachment is the only reason he could come up with to explain the paucity of women Pop artists. “Detachment” gave the artist distance to act upon, rather be subsumed by, Pop’s mass cultural sources: Mahsun<sup>55</sup> offers the metaphor of “him” [sic] working at the end of a fulcrum so “he” can act upon that source material in a detached

and effective manner: a fastidious gesture in dealing with “soiled” material.<sup>56</sup> In Pop Goes the Easel, 1962, Ken Russell’s iconic film on British Pop for the BBC Monitor series, Boshier sits, with furrowed brow, defended by a book on his lap, glancing up at his work or popular culture sources (“the artists thinks” to borrow the title of Livingstone’s chapter on the RCA). Phillips performs the cool dude in shades, but in his scenes there is always an anonymous girl between him and mass culture—slightly disdainfully, he looks through a movie magazine for pictorial sources then flings it to a girl who, lying on a bed, devours it avidly.

With warding-off gestures in place the young male artists could regale in their use of the “transgressive power” of mass cultural imagery: Peter Phillips at the time clearly relishing the dystopian mode as he listed his subject matter: “vice, lust, dirt, sex, speed, violence, noise, petrol, drugs.”<sup>57</sup> In doing so they threw down a notional challenge to Greenbergian doxa that allowed them to seize a neo-avant-garde position in the safe space provided by the RCA and the discourse of *ARK*. A photograph by Geoff Reeve of Hockney and Boshier in a studio at the RCA in 1961 (fig. 3) gives a flavor of the challenge: acting out a confrontational stance (the Hitler moustaches of their brushes a deliberate wind up when memories of the war were still raw) there is also humor and an awareness that the challenge of the posture is not too real or dangerous.

But within this deeply gendered dynamic, what position might women take? With such a small footing in the postwar art world, so recently gained, women urgently needed to be assimilated into the institution, accepted on the same terms as men and could not afford to play the neo-avant-garde card. Where the male narrative is of heroically overcoming adversity, women at the RCA, both students and staff, stress the support and acceptance that the institution gave them.<sup>58</sup> At a time when the paradigm of the artists was so thoroughly entrenched as male (as feminist scholars have effectively exposed<sup>59</sup>) women did not wish to draw attention to their (gender) difference. Elizabeth Frink and Bridget Riley, highly talented artists who did flourish at the RCA, might be seen as operating, as “surrogate men”: both go to lengths to stress the gender neutrality of art and to avoid association with the feminine,<sup>60</sup> Riley (in)famously claiming that feminism (“a naïve concept” that would, of course, draw attention to one’s gender) was needed “like a hole in the head.”<sup>61</sup> Given the structuring of the field at the time, this claiming of gender

neutrality should be seen as a strategically effective *prise de position* that gave visibility to the undoubted talent of these artists and secured them a place in the canon of British Modernism.<sup>62</sup> The nature of their work, Riley's hard-edged abstraction and Frink's "universal" and masculine iconography and forms, facilitated that position taking but the gendered dynamics of Pop's source material were far more problematic. Needing acceptance as artists in the citadel of high art, and without a feminist discourse that would give purchase on the issues, most women wanted to escape association with low mass culture, the feminine and the domestic and simply turned away. In numerous interviews I have conducted they said they were not interested in or did not wish to think about mass cultural imagery.<sup>63</sup> The field was left, almost exclusively, to male definitions and concerns.

Jann Haworth and Pauline Boty were pioneering exceptions who did offer a differently gendered take on popular culture, but it is noteworthy that neither trained in the RCA School of Painting that was otherwise such a fertile seedbed for the movement. Why should they be exceptions and how did they fare?

Growing up in California, spending time on movie lots with her father, a production designer, Jann Haworth had an easy familiarity with mass culture. She had strong female role models in her family and a breezy American competitiveness, and she saw herself as confidently well positioned to take on the British art scene. She came to Europe in 1961 to engage in a "very intense lapping up of museums, theatre, film, concerts in France, London, and Edinburgh"<sup>64</sup> (one should not be misled into thinking she was in any way a naïve practitioner) and to accept a place at the Slade School of Art, reputed for nurturing female talent.<sup>65</sup> Tess Jaray, a student in the sixties and latterly head of post graduate painting, is adamant that Sir William Coldstream, head of the school at the time, was a positive influence for women, in clear contradistinction to Robin Darwin at the RCA. Certainly, in the fifties and sixties, Slade women did much better than RCA women at the Young Contemporaries. Although Haworth did not find Coldstream particularly supportive, she did greatly value Harold Cohen as a tutor at the Slade: "an enfant terrible...(who) treated gender as absent...challenged you and respected your arguments."<sup>66</sup>

Excited by its “transgressive” nontraditional qualities and totally independently of Claus Oldenburg, Haworth was making sculpture in fabric. Yet when she submitted a fabric dog and flowers for the Young Contemporaries in 1963 they were rejected. Fortuitously Cohen was on the Painting selection committee that year; unable to influence the Sculpture committee, he did get a large, hard edged painting of a typewriter by her accepted. Haworth is unequivocal that this was “my road to fortune. Charterhouse School bought the painting and the ICA selected me among the group for the Four Young Painters that year. That was directly from the Young Contemporaries show.”<sup>67</sup> This exposure led, in turn, to a solo with Robert Frazer in 1966. There is no question about talent here, but, in terms of institutional visibility, what if Cohen hadn’t been on the selection committee that year? In 1961 alone Alloway turned away 1,250 pieces of work and one is forced to wonder how many other women, without that support, were among the rejected and thus pushed into cultural obscurity. It seems most improbable that, at a time when they were doing well in the institutions, women artists should suddenly lose the ambition to submit.

Haworth used fabric because it “served the purpose of my ideas” and was

very much female and something I had the edge on, that I had the knowledge, it was absolutely conscious.... I wanted to get into existence to account for what I was and what my interests were.

She also understood the gendered problematics of the time: “you had to be as good as the men and I loved competing with them.... The razor edge was accepting a certain femininity in the work but without being declarative about it.” To maintain the necessary “cool” and “firmness of intention,” she was “very aware of having to keep the work tough and not frilly-girly...keeping away from lace, away from pretty-pretty stuff.” But, even with these precautions taken, the work was rejected. It was, of course, Oldenburg’s wife who actually made his cloth sculptures, but under his [*sic*] name they registered as transgressive, fitting the field of play. When the artist was a pretty young woman, the work may have been too disturbing to the delicate gendered balance of the neo-avant-garde gambit for the selection committee of the Young Contemporaries; it was, perhaps, the wrong kind of transgression.

Haworth was of the opinion, rather like Frink and Riley, that “being a woman was a fact you hoped would be ignored” and, looking back, is aware of the strategic decisions she made in her self-presentation. She struggled with her enthusiastic, voluble American nature to maintain the expected “cool” and soon learnt that “Your clothing did have to be quite intellectual at that time, wearing black clothes, you did have to have a good armour on.” She remembers desperately desiring a really pretty, raspberry pink dress with ruffles, spotted in Harrod’s window, but never being able to bring herself to wear it: it just “wasn’t possible.” In photographs with her work she takes deliberately unprovocative, often unsmiling, poses, usually in trousers,<sup>68</sup> on one of the few occasions she wears a dress it is to “disguise pregnancy as long as possible” (an undeniable indicator of being female). In these ways, but at a cost of an exhausting suppression of aspects of herself,<sup>69</sup> Haworth found a way to negotiate the gendered dynamics of the field of Pop and, after the fortuitous intervention of Cohen, she successfully maintained cultural visibility in the sixties to produce ovarial works in cloth that can now be seen as playing the gender line: *Surfer* and *Cowboy* (objects of female desire), the crazily oversized, *Charm Bracelet* (reworked to wonderful ironic effect in recent years) or *Mae West* at her dressing table mirror, whose 3D form, positioned as reflection, plays with subject/object positions and the pleasures of identification for the female “fan.”

Boty exhibited at the Young Contemporaries in 1957, when still at Wimbledon, showing alongside other rising talents (Robyn Denny, Richard Smith, and Bridget Riley) and again in 1959—the year when RCA women performed particularly well. Charles Carey remembers that her “sensitivity to and enthusiasm for popular culture began to manifest itself in her years at Wimbledon,”<sup>70</sup> but, sidelined in the School of Stained Glass, she was outside the fertile Pop environment of the School of Painting with no encouragement for her popular culture concerns. “Her heart wasn’t in stained glass, her heart was in painting, collage, illustration, film” Jim Donovan, her boyfriend at the time recounts.<sup>71</sup> Other friends recall that she focussed on the painting and collage that she did at home,<sup>72</sup> but suffered serious crises of confidence, becoming very reticent about showing that work to anyone. There were no “little prizes” from Hamilton for her, to give reassurance that what she was doing was alright and to appease the hostility of other staff. Despite her lack of real interest, she had work accepted for a prestigious Arts Council



exhibition of stained glass, where it was shown alongside leading figures in the medium,<sup>73</sup> evidence of both talent and ambition. And she was developing her Pop Art ideas: titles of collages exhibited shortly after leaving the RCA reference core Pop concerns: *Is It a Bird, Is It a Plane* (Superman comics), *Target for Twisters* (popular dancing), *No Triffids* (science fiction).<sup>74</sup> However, she is noticeable by her absence from the 1960 and 1961 Young Contemporaries exhibitions where Pop emerged. Did she lack the confidence to submit work that went against the existing doxa? Or did she submit and meet rejection? Boty's collages were redolent of a female sensibility: roses symbolize female sexual desire, finely manicured female hands appear more than once and she made frequent use of lace in early work (in designs for Genet's *The Balcony* she uses it to protofeminist effect) But, as Haworth recognized, lace was signifier of femininity and, for a show that was keen to stress its virility, this material and iconography might have been unwelcome.

I will argue, however, that the core problematic for Boty was her refusal to relinquish either her serious intention as an artist or her overt performance, as sexual woman, of a Pop identity. "Sexual woman *as* artist" was a deeply transgressive *prise de position*, so theoretically it should register as an avant-garde gambit. However, it was not that such a position was difficult to occupy, but rather, within the particular gendered dynamics of the cultural field of Pop, it was not a position that was structurally possible. Collapsing the binary oppositions (woman/artist, mass culture/high art) that shaped the field, it was a transgression too far.

A voluptuous and beautiful woman she played consciously with her image; at her first college, she had acquired the sobriquet of the Wimbledon Bardot and various anecdotes attest to her enjoyment of enacting what was, for the times, an outrageously up-front sexuality. However, she also articulated to friends both her ambition as an artist and her belief that "women should be more than sex symbols",<sup>75</sup> as Carey's wife, Jennifer, put it she was "re-establishing what it was to be a woman." Arriving at the RCA, Boty engaged enthusiastically with student life and the "swinging" London scene in general and is well remembered for her looks (the sexy, vivacious, beautiful, trendy girl) but failed to register for her ideas or the challenge she offered to male stereotypes. She was the secretary for the Anti Ugly Action, a student group that conducted inventive

demonstrations against the aesthetic timidity and blandness of postwar British architecture, but, unlike the male spokespersons, who were allowed to articulate the theory behind the demonstrations, and despite her objection, she is only discussed, in the press, for her looks.<sup>76</sup> She is well remembered, anecdotally, for her appearances in college reviews: sashaying down the stage as Marilyn Monroe crooning “I want to be loved by you” or singing “My armpits are charm pits.” The latter is particularly recalled because at the time it was, apparently, considered really shocking to mention your armpits.<sup>77</sup> However, at least in part because she was isolated as a woman in this kind of performance, it was not a transgression that registered: while the outrageous dress and antics of *The Temperance Seven* or *The Alberts* have been discussed in serious analyses of postwar British culture, Boty’s armpits get no further than the memories and anecdotes of friends.

She was very well read and intellectually engaged—friends were impressed that she had really *read* Proust, who appears in her collages. A knowledgeable supporter of the film club, with a caustic and knowing wit (later to find expression in monologues she delivered on the radio program *Public Ear*) and she had a clever, satirical article and several poems printed in the unofficial student *Newsheet*, which, unlike *ARK*, was not financially supported (the RCA archive does not even hold copies). However, when she appears, three times, in the pages of *ARK*, it is always as “bearer of meaning not maker of meaning” to borrow a phrase from Laura Mulvey: twice her photograph is used in adverts and then, illustrating an article on “wacky” young people,<sup>78</sup> as a laughing beauty, bearing a striking resemblance to contemporary images of Marilyn Monroe.

Being subsumed into mass culture in this way was of a piece with the gendering of *ARK*’s personnel and ideas. On the key issues that dealt with popular culture, the editors and all staff were male; the writers, all male, maintain a critical distance and assume a male readership while in their texts women in general, fashion models and “girlfriends” in particular, stand for, or represent, mass culture which is consistently referred to in the feminine.<sup>79</sup> Bardot’s image on the cover and centerfold pullout in Issue 25 was deliberately used as a statement of belligerent anti-intellectualism, part of the position taking of the younger generation of Pop artists, distinguishing themselves from the previous generation of the Independent Group. Art director Terry Green remembers

“There was a very posey thing around at the time which has to do with artists being intellectuals. We didn’t like that. That’s why we put Brigitte Bardot on the cover.”<sup>80</sup> Jim Donovan recounted to me a highly telling anecdote. Basil Taylor<sup>81</sup> had offered him the editorship of *ARK*, and while considering it Boty came up with a number of excellent ideas for features (including involving the “Beyond the Fringe” comedians, who were yet to hit the London stage). But, on receiving a travel scholarship, he turned it down and suggested to Taylor that Boty be offered the editorship instead:

He almost snorted, saying something like “but she’s just a pretty girl student.”...Taylor didn’t even consider the idea for one moment. I forget his actual words, but what he effectively said was that being a gorgeous young girl automatically disqualified her, it was just not possible.<sup>82</sup>

It would seem that these young men could march under the banner of Bardot’s sexualized body in mock challenge to their actually benign Fathers, but Boty could not register in the field as a challenging privateer; as a “gorgeous girl” she was “automatically disqualified” from the “position taking” game.

The young men’s use of popular culture sources was seen as “natural” and “intuitive” and is still written about in this manner, informing, for example, McCarthy’s struggle with the iconography quoted in the introduction. The quintessentially gendered and sexist nature of Pop in the “boys club” of the RCA is captured in a eulogy to Peter Blake’s teaching by Ian Drury

[Peter] is the master of wonderful seriousness and he guided my mates and me through Walthamstow and the RCA with large amounts of encouragement...I once showed [him] a flash-harry collage of 100 pairs of naked bosoms snipped from Jean, Nugget, Monsieur and Playboy magazines and he correctly identified every tit either from memory or from print colour.<sup>83</sup>

The account is expressed with self-consciously, transgressive glee (the deliberately working class, male vocabulary—‘mates,’ “tits”—expressing his virile “otherness” to the staid, impotent, establishment doxa) and is conscientiously recorded in Christopher Frayling’s official history of the college: once again consecrating willful transgression. One wonders how the female students at the time felt about the dialogue on “tits” being

conducted in the studio; certainly there was no discursive awareness of, nor staff support for, a woman's take on the iconography of mass culture. Furthermore, in the sixties a gender reversal of the Drury tale: Pauline Boty showing Mary Feddon a "flash-Mary collage of a hundred penises snipped from porn magazines" which Feddon could "correctly identify" is not only unthinkable it is also actually impossible as the equivalent of *Jean*, *Nugget*, *Monsieur*, and *Playboy* for a female audience just did not exist. The particular neo-avant-garde position typified by the belligerently sexualized stance taken by Drury was simply not available to a woman.

### **Into the wider world**

Yet, once she had left the RCA, Boty did go on to find visual form, as an artist within the tropes and representations of mass culture, for an autonomous female sexual pleasure and desire, which can be seen in works like *Red Maneuver*, 1962 (fig. 6), *5-4-3-2-1*, 1963 (fig. 7), and *With Love to Jean Paul Belmondo*, 1962 (fig. 8). She had different mass cultural concerns from the men and articulated a female subjectivity: giving expression to the empathetic pleasures of female fandom in paintings like *The Only Blonde in the World*, 1963 (fig. 9), and *My Coloring Book*, 1963 (fig. 10), and using the visual language of mass culture to explore a gendered politics, in for example, *Countdown to Violence*, 1964 (fig. 11) and a politics of gender in her designs for Genet's *The Balcony* (1960/62) and the painting *Portrait of Derek Marlowe with Unknown Ladies*, 1962/3 (fig. 12).<sup>84</sup>

Once again it was Boty's fortuitous connection with Carey that reboosted her confidence and gave her visibility as an artist. In 1961 he invited her to exhibit at the A.I.A. gallery with three other artists, including Peter Blake,<sup>85</sup> where she showed a number of collages with Pop themes. She was then included in other important group shows (notably *New Approaches to the Figure* at the Jeffress Gallery in 1962) and, in 1963, had a solo show at the Grabowski Gallery where she was in full Pop voice.

In 1962 Boty was the fourth artist<sup>86</sup> in Ken Russell's *Pop Goes the Easel*<sup>87</sup> however, unlike the "detached" men, she is subsumed within mass cultural references: acting out a weird horror movie scenario and miming to "On the Good Ship Lollipop" in top hat and tails (fig. 13). There is good evidence that she was actively involved in

developing these scenes in what can now, in a postmodern context, be seen as a knowing performance of constructed female identities. But she was given no opportunity in the film to discuss her work seriously (Russell chose not to use her contributions to his pre-production interview where, among other things, she discusses the Freudian implications of her imagery) so the truly transgressive collapse of binaries is avoided.

As an outcome of the film, and with some inevitability given her good looks, she was offered acting jobs in TV and theater and began to appear in the popular press as a “starlet” (one of the very available positions in the cultural field for attractive young women). She continued to use her flamboyant enactment of a sexual, mass cultural persona as a deliberately radical, libertarian and knowingly transgressive act:<sup>88</sup> posing naked and as “dolly bird” for top photographers Lewis Morley and Michael Ward but always *with* her work: the woman is the artist. However, the only time the photographs were published was in *Tit Bits* and *Men Only* (soft-porn magazines), where the picture editor sliced off the paintings, leaving only the sexy girl for male delectation. Her attempt to crash high/low boundaries (sexual woman/serious artist), in both Russell’s film and the photographs, was illegible, a transgression too far, and was excised.<sup>89</sup>

Pulled towards the deprived side of the gendered, mass culture/high art binary, her standing as an artist was undermined. In 1963 she married Clive Goodwin “because he accepted me intellectually, which men find very difficult,” she told Nell Dunn in a long interview.<sup>90</sup> Their flat in the Cromwell Road became a gathering place for left wing intellectuals from the theater and the arts who indeed, as Roddy Maude-Roxby pointed out, were so taken by “Pauline’s glamorous image” that, “delighted with *her*, they did not notice the work.” If she spoke out forcibly his memory was that “people were taken aback”<sup>91</sup> and, according to Roger Smith, if she had have initiated a discussion of her work, it would have been “rather as if Marilyn Monroe had said she had written a book.” Thus, in his autobiography Christopher Logue, found that while he wanted to write about her, he had nothing to say about the paintings. Perceived by others, socially, as vivacious and fun, Boty told Nell Dunn that she found herself “very much inclined to play a role” and suppressed her intelligence because it was “difficult for lots of men to accept.” Roger Mayne, the photographer, noticed this commenting that “She was a bit quiet about [her work] and didn’t talk much concerning it or her aims.”<sup>92</sup> Effectively she was silenced as

an intelligent and generative artist and experienced bouts of intense depression: a painful contrast to the opinionated, talkative, ambitious 16 year old at the Wimbledon School of Art.

Equally the radicality of her expression of a female subjectivity just did not resonate in the arts discourse of the time. For example, there was simply no comment on her transgressive declaration of “O For A Fu.....” in the painting *5-4-3-2-1*, 1963, although a year later, when Kenneth Tynan said “fuck” on television questions were actually asked in the House of Commons. Likewise, *It's a Man's World II*, 1965–66 (fig. 14), a large, striking work with the pubic hair of a standing woman transgressively placed at the very center of the composition, received no critical attention at all when exhibited in 1965 and is remembered in none of the interviews I have conducted with the circle that frequented her flat where it hung. Yet David Alan Mellor has described it as “one of the most important paintings produced in London in the decade (and most prophetic for the course of feminist art).”<sup>93</sup>

She continued to paint, even through her final illness: producing *BUM*, 1966, a wonderfully colorful piece, used in Tynan's notorious review show *Oh! Calcutta!* But after her untimely death, from cancer in 1966 aged only 28, no one organized an exhibition of her work and she was quickly forgotten as an artist, absent already from *Pop Art* at the Hayward Gallery in 1969, in which Jann Haworth is well represented. For nearly three decades none of her work was exhibited.

Haworth had successfully conducted a demanding negotiation of the gendered dynamics of the field but when she married Peter Blake and had two daughters by him, she faced different difficulties as a woman and an artist. The huge pressure of social (and Blake's) expectations and the imperatives of the literal, biological female body (impossible now to side step) left her struggling to balance her art practice with childcare and domestic duties that were in no way shared. It was a struggle made particularly difficult as the couple had moved out of London to work within the Brotherhood [sic] of Ruralists—meeting Blake's artistic interests but not hers (‘I didn't fit’). Later, the fallout from the acrimonious break up of the marriage left her marginalized on the London arts scene, Blake's influence in the male dominated infrastructure being greater than hers. She found herself without a gallery to represent her and her contribution to the iconic

*Sergeant Pepper* album cover for the Beatles ignored, royalties denied. She turned her attention to other concerns (children, education, illustration<sup>94</sup>) and, for two decades, while Blake, Hockney et al. maintained ever higher artistic profiles, she did not exhibit.

As Pop entered the histories and retrospectives there was an ongoing patterning of marginalization. An early example might be David Bailey's *Goodbye Baby and Goodnight: A Saraband for the Sixties*, 1969, that aimed to capture "that swinging, gifted generation." While Hockney's work is pictured and discussed at some length next to his portrait, Boty and Haworth are pictured with no text, so denied a place as makers of meaning: Haworth appears as a grinning girl, hugging a clutch of Betjeman dolls, Boty is a mirror image of pop performer, Marianne Faithfull. Two decades later in his 1990 summation of Pop, Livingstone notes Haworth's "feminine perspective" in her "choice of subject matter and especially her use of procedures associated with "women's work" to place her at the "periphery of mainstream Pop" because of the "handcrafted," "folksie" look of some of the work.<sup>95</sup> He acknowledges Boty's importance as one of the few women artists but is unable to articulate what her contribution might be, ignoring the significant works she was able to complete, he disingenuously dismisses her on the grounds that "her fatal illness prevented the possibility of any real development at the most crucial point of her career." Haworth and Boty were both excluded from the Royal Academy of Art's "definitive" exhibition of Pop Art in London in 1991 where out of 202 Pop works only one was by a woman.<sup>96</sup> Neither were to be exhibited till 1993.

### **Conclusion**

Pop Art in Britain was created largely by very young men both as a direct reflection of their viewpoint on culture and as a rebellion against the art establishment

—1991 RCA *Pop Art* Exhibition catalogue

The young male Pop artists, relishing the pleasures of rebellion and their view of popular culture, were able to make use of the dynamics of Pop's field of cultural production, shaped round the gendered tension between (female) mass culture and (male) Modernism, to throw down a notionally transgressive challenge to the establishment and occupy a neo-avant-garde position. For women, as emergent artists in the late fifties and early sixties, this was risky terrain. Inevitably differently positioned both in relation to the

masculine paradigm of “the artist” (within which they were in need of acceptance) and in relation to Pop’s always/already mediated, “despised,” and gendered source material, most of those who maintained cultural visibility (and are therefore available to be asked), simply turned away. For the isolated few who did enter the field to offer the expression of a female viewpoint, it indeed proved treacherous territory. As long as that different cultural positioning is ignored, the marginalization and then exclusion of women from Pop Art cannot be understood, as indeed Livingstone and Madoff in the 1990s failed to do.

It has been salutary, in a close scrutiny of the specific circumstances of British Pop Art, to see the material effects of these cultural dynamics worked out in the warp and weft of the lived experience of particular artists, their work and careers. Institutional sexism, endemic at the time, can be recognized in the particular circumstances of the RCA that left Pauline Boty outside the center of Pop activity and support: the prestigious School of Painting. Neo-avant-garde *posturing*, making use of the “transgressive” power of feminine mass culture, can be seen in the pages of *ARK* and the catalogues of the Young Contemporaries, both of which were, in fact, fully supported by a benign progenitor. The apparently challenging practitioners were soon absorbed into a filial/paternal continuity: given prizes, the opportunity to exhibit, teaching posts and recognition in the official history of the college.

Beyond the surface of this flamboyant posturing, mythologized in subsequent histories, it was quite shocking to discover the silenced and total disappearance of RCA women from the Young Contemporaries, in direct correlation with the emergence of Pop. Certainly talented and ambitious, both Boty and Haworth had also had fortuitous circumstances in their education outside the RCA (Slade and Wimbledon) and support from male tutors at crucial moments. We just do not know how many women without that fortuity and/or support never gained visibility at all.

Haworth found a way to negotiate the territory only to be later marginalized and excluded; Boty, in attempting to collapse the binary opposition between sexual, pop culture woman and serious artist, threatened the very structuring of the field and her performance of identity and the significance of her exploration of a female subjectivity within Pop could not register: a transgression too far.



More recently, postmodern thinking has reconfigured the relationship between high and low culture, which, together with the impact of feminist understandings, has reshaped the field of cultural production within which Pop can be received and understood.<sup>97</sup> New positions in the field open up and are, at last, available to women Pop artists and their work. Finally able to articulate a differently gendered “viewpoint on culture” the radicality and innovation of Boty’s oeuvre becomes visible, Haworth has been able to make a highly successful return to fine art<sup>98</sup> and this exhibition of women Pop artists, forty years after the event, becomes possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Marco Livingstone, Pop Art: A Continuing History (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Henry Madoff, ed., Pop Art: A Critical History (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), xvii.

<sup>3</sup> David McCarthy, Movements in Modern Art: Pop Art (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2000), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, Half Way to Paradise (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980), 3.

<sup>5</sup> The title, which has stuck, was first bestowed by Reyner Banham's 1979 documentary on the Group.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Dale Spender, Invisible Women: The Schooling Scandal (London: Writers and Readers, 1982); and Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah, eds., Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education (London: Women's Press, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> The great grandson of Charles Darwin and great-great-grandson of Josiah Wedgewood, Darwin was educated at Eton and Frayling. His official history of the RCA makes some play of the fact that it was by pulling of strings in the old-boy network (the "Darwin clan") that he got the position of principal in the first place.

<sup>8</sup> See Frances Spalding, Dance Till the Stars Come Down, A Biography of John Minton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Frayling, The Royal College of Art: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Art and Design (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1987), 30.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Nicola Wood, student contemporary of Pauline Boty's who graduated with a first and went on to a lifetime career in design and fine art, remembers the professor of textiles, Roger Nicholson, assuring her that "It's pointless teaching women, they go off and get married and have children" (interview with author, June 24, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> As Carol Weight confided to his biographer R.V. Weight, Carel Weight: A Haunted Imagination (Devon, UK: David and Charles, 1994), 45.

<sup>12</sup> Moynihan's gloomy Group Portrait of them painted in 1951 is reminiscent of Johann Zoffany's of the founders of the Royal Academy in 1772 used by feminist scholars to point up the male domination of the institutions of art.

<sup>13</sup> In 1957, the year Boty applied, 22 percent versus 39 percent overall.

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<sup>14</sup> Correspondence with the author, 3.09.94 and 8.09.94

<sup>15</sup> In many cases a male connection to the College seemed to be necessary: both Janey Ironside, Professor of Fashion from 1956, and Mary Feddon were married to camouflage officers, which was how Darwin had met them. Feddon's husband, Julian Trevelyan, taught in the Department of Engraving from 1955, three years before her appointment. Lady Casson, who had a teaching post in the 1950s and '60s, was the wife of the professor of her school, Sir Hugh Casson. Mrs. Mahoney, and Jean Bratby were both older than their husbands but followed them onto the staff. Similarly, Sandra Lousada's father was part of the college hierarchy. Even the "outstanding" Sandra Blow also had the advantage that her mentor, Ruskin Spear, had been teaching in the RCA Painting School since 1948. None of this is to denigrate the talents and abilities of these women. For example, Mary Feddon rated her own entry in the 1956 Who's Who in Art, had exhibited quite widely and had been chair of the Women's International Art Club, before her appointment at the RCA. But it forces one to consider whether without the male connection, they would have been in a position to display those talents and to ponder on how much female talent was excluded and silenced through lack of such access.

<sup>16</sup> Sabine Durrant, "The Darling of her Generation," The Independent on Sunday, 7 March 1993, 13–15.

<sup>17</sup> For example, he studied with Germaine Richier at the Anglo-French Art School in London and his wife, Jennifer Carey, was an artist in her own right.

<sup>18</sup> Wise was to become a key figure in British Constructivism.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with the author, February 1, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Nicola Wood also had her career misdirected by the gendered assumptions of the education system. Now a very successful hyper-realist painter in Beverly Hills, using a Pop iconography of fast cars, Marilyn Monroe, and other Hollywood icons, she had, she told me, "always wanted to be a fine artist." But on her National Diploma course at Southport College she had, as a girl, been "automatically put into Fashion," which, in due course, led to a place in the RCA School of Textiles. She graduated from Textiles with a First, won a Fulbright Scholarship to New York, and went on to a lifetime of continuous employment in design. She had a successful career as a textile and graphic designer, but

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was only able to return to her real passion, painting, in 1981. Interview with the author, June 24, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Dick Hebdige, “In Poor Taste: Notes on Pop” (1989) in Hiding in the Light (London: Routledge, 1988), 128, 117.

<sup>22</sup> Alex Seago, Burning the Box of Beautiful Things (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 157. Key issues were nos. 18, 19, and 20, between November 1956 and autumn 1957, edited by Roger Coleman; and Issues 24 and 25, edited by Denis Postle, 1960/61.

<sup>23</sup> ARK, no. 18, 48.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “Statement,” ARK, no. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Seago, Burning the Box, 157.

<sup>26</sup> Seago, Burning the Box, 157.

<sup>27</sup> Seago, Burning the Box, 148.

<sup>28</sup> See Dick Hebdige, “Towards a Cartography of Taste 1935–1962,” in Hiding in the Light, 45–76.

<sup>29</sup> Seago, Burning the Box, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Seago, Burning the Box, 131.

<sup>31</sup> Nikos Stangos, ed., David Hockney by David Hockney (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976; reprint 1984), 42.

<sup>32</sup> Stangos, David Hockney, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, The Field Of Cultural Production (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), 53.

<sup>35</sup> Hal Foster, “What’s So Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?” October 70 (Autumn 1994), 22.

<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu, Field Of Cultural Production 34.

<sup>37</sup> In her examination of the “avant-garde gambit” in the nineteenth century, Avant-Garde Gambits 1888–1893 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), this is the overall argument of the book – not a particular page ref. Griselda Pollock argues that the masculinist, Eurocentric avant-garde has always been less heroic and more a matter of posturing than

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conventional accounts admit and we certainly see a continuation of that male tradition in the Pop context, inevitably further problematizing the position of women.

<sup>38</sup> Hebdige, “In Poor Taste”; and Robert Hughes, Shock of the New, BBC 1980.

<sup>39</sup> Dorothy Morland, secretary at the ICA, remembers (see David Robbins, ed. The Independent Group: Post War Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990] p. 191 that right from the beginning “they were absolutely clear that they wanted to be independent (so far as I recall, that is how the name arose) from the main ICA activities, from the members whom they did not want dropping in.” She also recalls that even when appointed as assistant director “Alloway created a more divisive feeling within the ICA. He was very hostile to Herbert Read and Roland Penrose, to the ICA hierarchy.” She points out that there was no real need for the Independent Group’s insistence on independence. When closed meetings were requested “The Management Committee agreed after a short discussion. Perhaps there was some surprise that the idea had arisen and that this group...felt the need for its activities to be private. The Committee was very open, very tolerant.” Massey and Sparke also point out that taking more from Modernism than mass culture, the IG had much in common with other initiatives conducted at the ICA at the time and that individual members of the Independent Group were integral to the ICA organization, serving on committees and holding significant posts, a fact usually overlooked in accounts of it.

<sup>40</sup> Anne Massey and Penny Sparke, “The Myth of the Independent Group,” Block, 10 (1985), 54.

<sup>41</sup> Livingstone, Pop Art, 93.

<sup>42</sup> In its very first catalogue (1949; the catalogues were published by the Arts Council of Great Britain) Phillip Hendry, another establishment figure (the director of the National Gallery at the time), states quite openly the difficulties in forging a career as an artist, and hopes that the Young Contemporaries will be part of the solution: “Between learning the art and earning a living there is a long lean spell. Until he [sic] can sell, the artist finds it very hard to show. Until he [sic] has shown, and more than once, he [sic] does not sell.”

<sup>43</sup> Stangos, David Hockney, 42.

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<sup>44</sup> Hamilton, “For the Honest Art, Try Pop,” Gazette, no. 1, 1961. Foster comments “in this text of Pop ‘affirmation’ Hamilton seems to welcome the shift from the transgressive-value of the avant-garde object to the spectacle-value of the neo-avant-garde celebrity” (Foster, “What’s So Neo?, 13, n18).

<sup>45</sup> For example, in 1957 half the student committee and 21 percent of both the RCA Painting School and of the RCA contingent in the show were women.

<sup>46</sup> Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

<sup>47</sup> The “autonomy” of the art work, the privileging of form over content, the validation of the expression of the individual over the Zeitgeist, the pseudo-scientific characterization of “experimentation,” etc.

<sup>48</sup> From the nineteenth century, he cogently argues, “aesthetic discourse...consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities.” Huyssen, After the Great Divide, 47.

<sup>49</sup> Huyssen, After the Great Divide, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Max Kozloff, “Pop Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarians,” Art International, March, 1962, 35–36 (reprinted in Madoff, Pop Art: A Critical History, 32).

<sup>51</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the 60s,” The John Power Lecture in Contemporary Art, delivered at the University of Sydney, May 17, 1968. Published by Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 1969.

<sup>52</sup> Lucy Lippard, Pop Art (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), 9.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Finch, Image as Language: Aspects of British Art 1950–1968 (London: Penguin, 1969), 90.

<sup>54</sup> Russell and Gablik in the catalogue for the exhibition *Pop Art*, at the Hayward Gallery, London, in, 1969, Pop Art Redefined (Harmondsworth: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 10. In the same vein Melville makes almost laughably disingenuous claims when he asks he reader to see Allen Jones’s Chair (a naked woman in bondage gear serving as a chair) as “pure sculptural invention.” Robert Melville, “English Pop Art,” in Figurative Art Since 1945, ed. J.P. Hodin (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 190.

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<sup>55</sup> Carol Anne Mahsun, Pop Art and the Critics (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1981). Pop Art: The Critical Dialogue (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989).

<sup>56</sup> This detached stance also distinguished Pop from Abstract Expressionism. Defining your new movement in contradistinction to the preceding one is a recognized art historical strategy. Where Abstract Expressionism demanded an intense, emotional, ego-driven commitment, claims were made for the mechanical, unemotional anonymity of the Pop work, the abdication of the artistic ego. Warhol ('I am a machine') working in his Factory provided the paradigm example. Women, so newly arrived on the scene, were not overburdened by artistic ego that they needed to abdicate.

<sup>57</sup> Scene, no. 9, November 8, 1962, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Feddon stressed "Both staff and students accepted me on equal terms with the male staff." Sandra Blow, while acknowledging "There was prejudice in general as in all walks of life," also made of point of being liked by the men who "throughout my career have been supportive." Olwyn Bowey, a student in the Painting School at the RCA in the late fifties, remembers "the then Professor of Painting (Carel Weight) was very supportive of the many women students." Correspondence with the author.

<sup>59</sup> For example, Pollock, Duncan, and Betterton.

<sup>60</sup> Frink argued (in an interview with Anne Brown for Radio 4 Six Women, produced in Birmingham by Liz Jenson, broadcast 1993) that "the arts is one of quite a lot of things I'd say that women and men are totally equal in what they do, because you're either a good painter or a bad painter, a good sculptor or a bad sculptor, it doesn't have anything to do with what sex you are, I reckon." In response to Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists" (in Thomas Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker, eds., Art and Sexual Politics [New York: Macmillan, 1973]), Riley characterizes the artist as psychologically hermaphrodite and distances herself from the feminine: "I have never been conscious of my own femininity, as such, while in the studio." Although she accepts that "for the artist who is also a woman...society presents particular circumstantial problems," she sees these as "on the wane," no worse than the difficulties male artists have endured.



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<sup>61</sup> Nochlin, “Why,” 82. “Women’s Liberation, when applied to artists seems to me to be a naive concept.... At this point in time, artists who happen to be women need this particular form of hysteria like they need a hole in the head.”

<sup>62</sup> In contrast, Mary Feddon did allow herself to be seen as female: in the 1950s she was chair of the Women’s International Art Club and was happy to publicly acknowledge the influence of her husband, Julian Trevelyan. Her iconography, although very similar to that of, for example, Matisse, as been deprivileged as “domestic,” belonging to the female realm and it is only relatively recently that her work has been recognized, valued and thus accepted/assimilated into the fabric of British art.

<sup>63</sup> In letters to or conversations with the author, I was told: Olwyn Bowey, “The Pop Art scene poses some questions, we just didn’t seem interested in the impact of advertising” (September 1994). Haworth: “I wasn’t so interested in advertising.... I never was drawn to advertising.... I don’t know it was hard one to think about” (August 1994). Feddon: “women were not much involved in the Pop movement or activities” (September 1994). Jaray: “I didn’t really want to work with media images. It wasn’t what I had an interest in doing” (October 1994).

<sup>64</sup> Email to the author, February 2009.

<sup>65</sup> The Slade has an unusually strong list of female alumni including Gwen John (of the generation referred to as the “Sladey Ladies”) and Paula Rego (student there 1952–56).

<sup>66</sup> E-mail to author, February 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with the author, August 24, 1994 (and following quotes in this section).

<sup>68</sup> Even with all these defenses in place, she was conflated with her work, as mass culture, for example, in an article in *The Times* (London) in February 1967, where she, not just her work, is described as a “fairy tale figure” from the “never never land of Hollywood.”

<sup>69</sup> She reflects, “it took me years until the emotional aspect of art started to come through.”

<sup>70</sup> Interview with the author, February 2, 1996.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with the author, March 5, 1997.

<sup>72</sup> Author’s interview January 3, 1997, with Gerald Nason, Boty’s fellow student in stained glass.

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<sup>73</sup> Patrick Reyntiens, John Piper, Keith New.

<sup>74</sup> Referring to the 1951 science fiction novel Day of the Triffids by John Wyndham.

<sup>75</sup> Author's interview with Beryl Cotton, Boty's fellow student at Wimbledon.

<sup>76</sup> For example, the newspaper headline above a "charming" photograph: "Of All Things She is Secretary of the Anti Ugliers."

<sup>77</sup> Author's interviews with Natalie Gibson (August 5, 2009) and Derek Boshier (January 5, 1996).

<sup>78</sup> Issues of ARK, no. 24, 1959 (ad for The London Press Exchange); ARK, no. 28, 1961 (ad for Rowney); and ARK, no. 33, 1962, photograph by Geoff Reeves, illustrating It's Magic.

<sup>79</sup> For example, Roger Coleman, "Dream Worlds Assorted," ARK, no. 19, 30; Toni del Renzio, "Shoes, Hair, and Coffee," ARK, no. 20, 28.

<sup>80</sup> Seago, Burning the Box, 135.

<sup>81</sup> Basil Taylor, lecturer at the RCA from the early 1950s, first Librarian of the College then founder of the School of General Studies, and "cultural guru at the time" (Seago, Burning the Box, 158) had considerable influence in the choice of editor and thus other team members. It was through the compulsory lectures that he inaugurated that the first links between the Independent Group and the RCA were made, a connection he continued to encourage.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with the author, March 5, 1997.

<sup>83</sup> Frayling, The Royal College of Art, 166.

<sup>84</sup> For a reading of these works see Sue Tate, "Re-occupying the Erotic Body: The Paintings and 'Performance' of Pauline Boty, British Pop Artist (1938–66)," in Sexual Politics of Desire and Belonging, ed. Nick Rumens and Alejandro Cervantes-Carson (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 205-227; and Sue Tate, "Forward Via a Female Past": Pauline Boty and the Historiographical promise of the Woman Pop Artist," in Feminism Reframed, Reflections on Art and Difference, ed. A. M. Kokoli (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2008), 177–205.

<sup>85</sup> The other two being Geoffrey Reeve and Christine Porter—a rare if not unique example gender parity in an exhibition of that era.

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<sup>86</sup> With Derek Boshier, Peter Blake and Peter Phillips.

<sup>87</sup> As a defining text for British Pop the film has maintained, for Boty, a form of historiographical presence over the decades when her work was not exhibited.

<sup>88</sup> Its “knowingness” proved by the protofeminist monologues she delivered on Public Ear. See my “Re-occupying the Erotic Body”; and “Forward Via a Female Past.”

<sup>89</sup> Similarly, when both Boty and Haworth are pictured in David Bailey’s Goodbye Baby and Goodnight: A Saraband for the Sixties, published in 1969, that aimed to capture “that swinging, gifted generation,” neither of their images are accompanied by text. Where Hockney’s work is discussed and pictured, they are denied their place as makers of meaning: Haworth appears as a grinning girl, hugging a clutch of Betjeman dolls, Boty is a mirror image of mass cultural performer, Marianne Faithful.

<sup>90</sup> Nell Dunn, Talking to Women (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1965), chapter 1, on Pauline Boty.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with the author, September 3, 1998. He wanted it noted that this was not intended as a criticism; he didn’t dislike the work, but didn’t connect with it.

<sup>92</sup> Letter to the author, August 25, 1995.

<sup>93</sup> David Mellor, The Sixties Art Scene in London (London: Phaidon/Barbican, 1993), 136.

<sup>94</sup> Among other things she started and ran the Looking Glass School (1977–83), published books 13 books with her partner Richard and designed covers for the Arden Shakespeare series.

<sup>95</sup> Whiting, in A Taste for Pop, 195, demonstrates how women artists have been placed on the margins in order to define a male center to Pop: “without a feminine Pop, there could not have been a masculine Pop in opposition; without the soft periphery, there could be no hard core.”

<sup>96</sup> My Lover by Nikki de Saint Phalle, who gained cultural visibility through her tir pictures where, “transgressively,” she literally shot her work with a gun, thus maintaining “distance” and conforming (in that work) quite closely to the necessary masculine, aggressive tropes.

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<sup>97</sup> Soon after the 1991 RA exhibition of Pop, Livingstone was to relinquish his insistence on “detachment” and more recently has made amends to Haworth—writing a catalogue essay for a solo exhibition at the Mayor Gallery, London, 2006, in which he now sees her use of cloth as “her very distinct contribution,” “turning disadvantage on its head.” However, it is still rather disturbing that this cerebral and intellectually strong woman is seen in terms of “simple and innocent activities,” “pure sensuality,” “a girlishness and love of prettiness,” suggesting the ongoing play of gendered values.

<sup>98</sup> Her vibrant solo show in Paris in 2008 displayed a splendid and ongoing development of her use of fabric and popular culture iconography.