

**LAWRENCE ALLOWAY IN ENGLAND: HIS CRITICISM IN CONTEXT**

by

**RICHARD GORDON LESLIE**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York**

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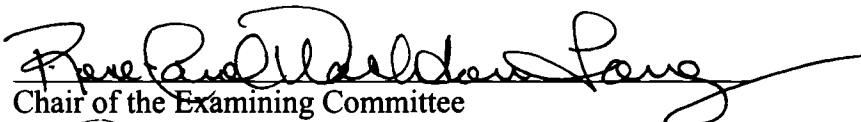
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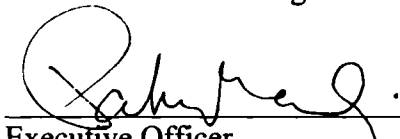
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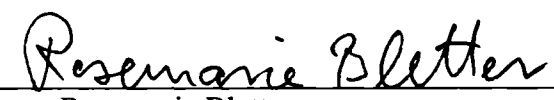
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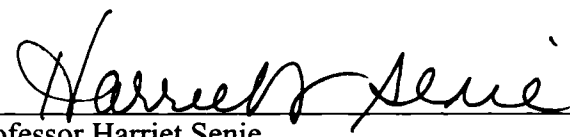
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## Abstract

### LAWRENCE ALLOWAY IN ENGLAND: HIS CRITICISM IN CONTEXT

by

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Advisor: Professor Rose-Carol Washton Long

The dissertation examines the criticism of Lawrence Alloway during his early years in London until his arrival in the USA in 1961 to develop an understanding of Alloway quite different from his association with the Pop Art movement in the USA by selectively contextualizing his critical position.

The first context examined is the new science of cybernetics applied to the human condition by Norbert Wiener in 1950. The dissertation aligns Alloway and his colleagues in the Independent Group (IG) with C.P. Snow's discourse between the humanities and science, and finds them exemplars of Snow's "new man" formed as a social consequence of World War II.

The second context is the emergence of the field of Cultural Studies from British cultural Marxism. By comparing Alloway's position to the Culturalism of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, the concepts of Alloway and the IG are established as well ahead of, and perhaps influential upon, the development of Cultural Studies.

The third context is Alloway's early biography and writings, from 1949 to 1955, to examine how his middle-class life shaped his vision of culture and the importance in his criticism of a topical approach.

The fourth contexts are the London Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) and the IG. The dissertation argues that the ICA was responsible for much of the IG's new understanding of culture. It details the importance of Dadaism and how Alloway and the IG incorporated issues of randomness and equivalence in criticism and visual form.

The fifth context is the complex concept of modernity in England through the conservative but modern concept of populism in the 1951 Festival of Britain, the "New Humanism" debated in architecture and design, and Bauhaus concepts. Alloway's writings on modern sculpture are also examined, as are, for the first time, Alloway's BBC broadcasts on popular movies.

The final contexts are the emerging abstract and second-generation Pop artists, and Alloway's relationship to the criticism of Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg. Alloway positioned his criticism as a synthesis of Greenberg and Rosenberg, a theory of criticism as a topical field intended to leverage cultural change.

## Acknowledgments

As an older student returned to graduate school in mid-career, I am most aware of the toll taken and the support provided within and outside the graduate experience. Effort on the scale necessary for a dissertation calls upon the commitments of those around you on many levels. My gratitude to all, mentioned or occasioned, is deep, and, wide.

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Finally I dedicate the dissertation to the living memories Amy and I have for Sprite, Puck and Little Bit whose love and warmth and character enriched so fully the last twenty years together. Thankfully, there are many more important things than dissertations: love and friendship are two of them.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1-2
A. General Issues of Method	2-5
B. Outline of the Dissertation	5-13
C. Review of Selected Literature	13-28
 Chapter 1. The Social Consequences of Science and Technologies	
A. Introduction	29-35
B. C.P. Snow and the Theory of Two Cultures	35-42
C. Weiner and Cybernetics	43-47
 Chapter 2. Considerations of Culture	
A. Introduction	48-49
B. British Cultural Marxism: The New Social History--“from the bottom to the top”	50-63
C. From Culture Debates to Cultural Studies in England	63-68
D. Culturalism: Hoggart, Williams and...Alloway?	68-75
E. Raymond Williams	75-93
 Chapter 3. Early Biography and Writings	
A. Introduction	94-95
B. Alloway’s Early Biography	96-106
C. Alloway’s Early Writings	106-110
C.1. Art as a Transformative Experience	111-114
C.2. The Emergence of Situational Topicality, and the Nature of the Critical Act	114-122
C.3 New Scientific World View	123-124
D. Early Contact with New York Criticism	125-128
 Chapter 4. The ICA and IG: Histories and Issues	
A. Introduction	129-132
B. An Historical Outline of the ICA and IG	132-136
C. Selected Relations between the ICA and IG	136-153
D. From Dada to Non-Aristotelianism: Randomness and Equivalence in the IG	154-165
E. The Application of Communication Theory: Tomorrow’s Tackboards Today	165-174
 Chapter 5. The Condition of Modernity in England	
A. Introduction: The Condition of Modernity	175-186
B. The Festival of Britain: a Complex Context of Modern and Populism	186-198

C. The Kind of Principles We Now Search For	198-210
D. The Bauhaus Revisited: the IG Recovery of Modernism...and beyond	210-227
E. Alloway and Sculpture	227-235
F. Alloway and Film	235-248
Chapter 6. Alloway at Large	
A. Introduction	249-251
B. A Place Called Pop	251-263
C. Alloway and Abstraction	263-274
D. Field theory of Criticism	274-284
Illustrations	285-294
Works Consulted	295-315

## List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Photocopy of two photographs of the exhibition *Growth and Form* held at the ICA in London, July, 1951. Source: David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 17. Original photographs in Richard Hamilton collection.

Figure 2. Photocopy of photograph by Nigel Henderson of the exhibition installation for *Parallel of Life and Art* at the ICA in London, September-October, 1953. Source: Martin Harrison, *Transition, the London Art Scene in the Fifties* (London: Merrill Publishers, 2002), 97.

Figure 3. Photocopy of two photographs (likely by Nigel Henderson) of the exhibition installation for *Parallel of Life and Art* at the ICA in London, September-October, 1953. Source: David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 127. Original photographs in Janet Henderson collection and the Nigel Henderson estate.

Figure 4. *Top*, A diagram of an idealized communication system hand-drawn by Group 12; *bottom*, the same system inscribed within the variables of experience. Source: Exhibition catalogue, *This Is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), n.p.

Figure 5. Chart of information arranged in grid fashion to allow flexibility in organizing multiple messages by Group 12 as part of their catalogue contribution to *This is Tomorrow*. Source: Exhibition catalogue, *This Is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), n.p.

Figure 6. Chart of information arranged in grid fashion to allow flexibility through variations in personal selection by Group 12 as part of their catalogue contribution to *This is Tomorrow*. Source: Exhibition catalogue, *This Is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), n.p.

Figure 7. Photocopy of a photograph of the “tackboard” designed by Group 12 for the exhibition *This is Tomorrow* at London’s Whitehall Gallery, 1956. Source: David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 146. Original photograph by Brian Shawcroft in the Geoffrey Holroyd collection.

Figure 8. Photocopy of photograph of the exhibition installation for *Place* at the London ICA in February 1959. Source: David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), 62-3.

Figure 9. Photocopy of two installation photographs by Peter Coviello of the exhibition *Situation*, 1960, at the RBA Galleries, London. *Top*, shows paintings by Harold Cohen, John Epstein and Gillian Ayres; *bottom*, shows Bernard Cohen's *Painting 96*, 1960. Source: David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), 80 and 82.

Figure 10. Photocopy of photograph by Robert Freeman of Lawrence Alloway with Sylvia Sleigh's *Portrait of the Situation Group*, 1961 (oil on linen, 122 x 183 cm; artist's collection). Pictured, *left to right (back row)*: Henry Mundy, Gwyther Irwin, William Turnbull, Peter Coviello; *(center row)* Gillian Ayres, John Plumb, Peter Stroud, Robyn Denny, Roger Coleman, Bernard Cohen; *(front row)* Gordon House, Lawrence Alloway. Source: David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), 76. Also see page 77.

## Introduction

The reputation of Lawrence Alloway as an art critic is generally well established and usually linked to the Pop Art movement in the USA. Born in London in 1926, he arrived in the New York area in 1961 and as a curator at the Guggenheim Museum (1962-66) demonstrated a range of criticism and history comfortable with abstraction, Pop, figuration, popular culture and technology<sup>1</sup> His steady stream of writing as an art critic, especially for *The Nation* (1968-81) and *Artforum* (a Contributing Editor, 1971-76) earned him not only the College Art Association Frank Jewett Mather Award for Criticism in 1971 but a reputation by the time of his death in January of 1990 as a “major critic of twentieth-century culture.”<sup>2</sup> It was not that he loved art less and culture more but that the two were inseparable for him. Further, it was his refusal to separate the two from a complex interweave of everyday experiences that placed him at the center of new types of art and a new form of criticism whose implications continue to unfold in the twenty-first century. The dissertation is an attempt to understand and articulate Alloway’s uniqueness which, despite its specific link to the Pop Art movement, seems to gain in relevance for those whom cultural criticism is a central concern and a challenge to the nature of art criticism. The roots to that unique development are in England, as the dissertation argues, where pre-war modern art and ideas met the alterations in postwar London culture. It was this complex context that shaped Alloway and many of the artists

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<sup>1</sup>The specifics of Alloway’s bibliography are introduced gradually throughout the dissertation rather than as a section on biography separated from themes and ideas.

<sup>2</sup>See his unsigned obituary “Lawrence Alloway,” in *The Nation* (January 29, 1990): 112.

around him, but it was also a history they reshaped in response. To that end his criticism, its context, sources, development, and implications, stand as a significant and influential marker whose full importance we are still learning and evaluating.

### **A. General Issues of Method**

This dissertation is a necessary part of that evaluative process because a sustained examination of the content of his work, the positions developed, and their historical importance does not exist. Needed is not only an examination of the nature of his criticism--what it is and how it functions--but also a contextual analysis because without reference to context neither the specifics of Alloway's criticism nor its historical position can be understood. The dissertation argues that lack of a contextual analysis has also blocked the construction of the general history of contemporary art criticism.

A contextual analysis is further justified as a general approach to the history of criticism and theory since the subject matter, art criticism, is by definition a shared history of ideas linked to broader patterns of thought. It always must negotiate methodological problems to establish historical parameters between the verifiable relationships to specific historical facts and the more idealist frames frequently used to consider general histories that we refer to with terms such as world-view (*Weltanschauung*) or the spirit of the time (*Zeitgeist*).<sup>3</sup> The cases for influence and

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<sup>3</sup>This author was influenced in his graduate studies by the early methodology of art history that linked the history of art to the history of ideas (*Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*) and the study of historical materialism established through the traditions of Western Marxism. Parts of the research and the dissertation text are marked by these biases and their related problems in methodology for the construction of history. Hopefully, a more objective case for their relevance to the historical moments also has been made.

reference often cannot be made by demonstrating a relation of cause and effect. In many cases, there are no known or provable links between Alloway's ideas and those of others. The burden of 'proof' becomes the weight of evidence established through parallels of proximity, whether purposeful or accidental, and by the similarities between the ideas. There are several important and specific reasons for this.

Alloway took a position on an unusually large number of issues in art history, criticism, culture, and numerous issues of general intellectual, and, purposefully, non-intellectual, fields. His criticism deals overtly with popular culture, the consequences of a culture of abundance, communication theory, general semiotics and signs, cybernetics, abstract and representational art, science--in its fact, theory, and fiction--topicality and the quotidian, anthropology, sociology, the role of the audience, history, and the nature of the critic and criticism. Then too, Alloway believed and operated according to a concept of criticism as something to be developed in continuum with the rest of the world and out of topical, meaning changing and relative, situations. The patterns of connection are immense even though the dissertation argues that within this wide-ranging address was both call and argument for a particular understanding and operation of both criticism and culture.

On the mundane level, Alloway infrequently referenced and even denied his sources. Such an attitude can be interpreted generally as a 'natural' extension of his synthetic approach or one of personal psychology, but it is also due to the historical circumstances. Many of his ideas developed out of a shared community in London that met and exchanged ideas openly from purposefully diverse sources. The model for their

process of inquiry and gathering information was a purposeful use of group thinking, with an emphasis on non-hierarchical approaches. There was scant factual record of those sessions, while summaries and commentaries came years later and provided mere outlines that made reference to general sets of ideas. Therefore it seems more appropriate in the dissertation to write of and through a methodology related to kinship more than the singularity of authorship; a structural anthropological approach that finds resonance in Alloway's own concept of criticism. In fact, several approaches are used, depending on the nature of the material available.

To note these methods and limitations is not to argue the lack of an historical basis for either Alloway or the dissertation. Anyone who knew Alloway was impressed by (and perhaps even feared) the clarity, range and historical basis for his criticism and comments. Like his early but elder colleague, Clement Greenberg, he insisted on the integrity of an historically bound argument. It was no accident that Alloway was a great admirer of Erwin Panofsky, both his typological approach and his factual use of cultural history. And while there may not always be direct causal connections made within this dissertation between Alloway's ideas and what are suggested for sources and links from what surrounded him, the investigation is most assuredly of the various and specific histories within which he lived rather than an interpretive overlay of a specific *a priori* point of view.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>This author argues, below, that several of the major texts which interpret Alloway suffer from *a priori* positions and the consequent exclusion of his historical circumstances. The most common of these is based on the division of Alloway's life into two separate parts due to his early development in London, followed by his life and activities in New York City. Such a biographical schism offers a temptation to

Consequently there are several major theses in the dissertation: to approach Alloway other than this would be to miss seeing the matrix and relevance of his position. The development of a structural grid to investigate Alloway is also a key to understanding the evolution and contribution of Alloway's criticism.

### **B. Outline of the Dissertation**

The general goal of the dissertation is to examine the development of the criticism of Lawrence Alloway within its cultural and intellectual contexts from England of the late 1940s through the 1950s and early 1960s. By not including Alloway's time in the USA the dissertation represents only the first half of the larger and necessary study. However, it is Alloway's London period that has not been systematically examined nor incorporated into the history of art criticism. Perhaps more importantly, the dissertation argues the period in London, and especially the intellectual environment in England, as formative and essential to understanding Alloway's later years in the USA as the "father" of Pop art, while also asserting that his days of figurative fatherhood may not be finished, as applies to the realm of cultural studies.

The first two chapters address Alloway's context in postwar London to demonstrate the ways his ideas relate to and separate from the larger patterns of post- and pre-war thought in Britain. Arguing context prior to the establishment of the specifics for Alloway does endanger coherence by assuming a master narrative not yet established for the reader. But general elements of Alloway's position are enlisted throughout the

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eliminate his broader historical context and to simplify the development of a complex and continuous if not fully unified discourse.

first two chapters to avoid irrelevant generalizations. The dissertation argues that the specifics of his life and writings presented in the later chapters are known and understood more fully once set within the broad contexts of science and cultural studies, the respective subjects of chapters one and two.

The first chapter argues science and its application to culture as one of the major shaping forces on Alloway. But the argument is not simply based on causality. Alloway, and those around him, resonated to and were among the first artists and critics in the postwar period to parallel general scientific principles newly formulated in the postwar history of ideas. Such generalizations are tricky affairs and the critical reader decides how successful the effort. But Alloway and his colleagues repeatedly referred to science and technology, although they did not always distinguish between the two. On the basis of Alloway's explicit testimony, the science of cybernetics and its founder Norbert Wiener have been singled out for attention. But it was Wiener's translation of the science of cybernetics into its social consequences in 1950 that seems to influence Alloway throughout his life.

There is no doubt that Alloway thought of science as the major postwar paradigm for cultural development. And for that reason--one far broader than simply the influence of science--the understanding of culture through science in the first chapter is first considered via C.P. Snow's well-known theory of two cultures as it was carried out in both lectures and popular fictional narratives. The dissertation argues that Alloway and his colleagues were part of Snow's supposedly fictional "new men" who now see and

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formulate in new ways the nature of postwar culture. Such considerations of science eventually create and merge with new understandings of art theory, design, architecture and criticism that form the new cultural context and challenges for Alloway and his colleagues. Many of the specific combinations of science with culture, art and theory are examined in other chapters.

The context of postwar culture also dominates the second chapter but now leads to a consideration of the British theories of culture, from the “culture and civilization” of Mathew Arnold and the Leavises to the “culturalism” of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, and the emerging field of Cultural Studies as eventually developed in the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (hereafter, the BCCCS, or the Birmingham School). The dissertation argues that Alloway’s legacy in the arena of cultural studies is equal to, or perhaps currently more important than, his art criticism. The basis for such a claim is partly historical: culture was a concept more central to Alloway than art, and, as indicated below in the survey of the literature, Alloway’s work and contributions have been more frequently cited of late in cultural studies than in art. In addition, the academic field of Cultural Studies was formed by British commentators and publishers working in England at the same time and with many of the same general concerns as Alloway and his colleagues. In fact, they knew of each other. The dissertation argues that the ideas towards contemporary postwar culture formulated and embodied in word and art forms by Alloway, and the artists of the Independent Group (hereafter, the IG) with whom he associated, were parallel to and frequently in advance of the founders

of cultural studies. It also demonstrates much of Alloway's thought may be considered in relation to a group of cultural Marxists from which the field of Cultural Studies emerged.

This is obviously a unique viewing point for Alloway's work but it does help explain why Alloway appears in cultural studies. There were specific developments within the history of British sociology and the emergence in the 1950s of cultural studies that precede, parallel, then emerge later in redefined patterns in the 1960s to shape much of the discourse in theories of culture in the 1980s and 1990s. The dissertation attempts to demonstrate from within this development the contact between Alloway's thought and selected British cultural critics in order to argue the generally unexamined context of sociology for not only Alloway but for the history of art criticism. An important albeit pedestrian sub-theme in this discussion is that artists offer ideas in visual form (visual information) but they enter into the history of ideas one-sidedly through those who write rather than with direct credit to visual artists, or visualization.

The remaining four chapters are directed specifically to historical and conceptual dynamics of the London art scene wherein Alloway defined his position. Sketching the picture is complicated by the amount of material involved and its overlap with many spheres of consideration. The methods and structure of the chapters range from chronological to thematic approaches as the material seems to dictate. The third chapter introduces aspects of Alloway's life and their relationship to his work. It offers for the first time a systematic examination of his early writings from 1949 through 1955-6, when the influence of his associates in the IG began to appear. The dissertation locates many of his mature ideas in criticism but specifically explores three. The first is that art was, and

remained for Alloway, a special category separate from popular culture, valued for its transformative abilities. Secondly, the importance and function of the critical act for Alloway is considered alongside the emergence in his early criticism of a core concept: the importance of what is termed, redundantly, situational topicality. Finally, there is a brief description of Alloway's first attempt to use scientific information in his art criticism, an early but important failure. The chapter concludes with an historical examination of his contact with the New York critics Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, and proposes the thesis that Alloway consciously created a third way between them. But the full discussion of the nature of this new type of criticism is postponed until chapter six.

The fourth chapter turns to the Institute for Contemporary Art (hereafter, the ICA), the center for contemporary art in London, and to the Independent Group (IG) to delineate its history and the fundamental ideas developed in relation to one another. The dissertation posits the ICA as an influential parent to the IG, despite the comments of the IG and most later commentators to the contrary. Although neither history has been fully written, the first half of the chapter develops a comparison of their ideas to demonstrate specific concepts they shared: the importance of culture over art; the nature of contemporary culture as broad and diverse, a fact that determined their understanding of the spirit or condition of modernism as one part of their larger concern for culture; the importance of inclusivity, frequently addressed in the context of anthropology and its conflation with the primitive and the modern. All these exerted a profound, shaping influence on the IG in the formation of its understanding of culture and art, and their response formation. Both the ICA and the IG agreed the nature of the postwar world was

a restless chaos, an understanding the ICA elders considered dangerous and to be defeated, while the younger generation not only accepted but converted chaos into an esthetic that embraced randomness and its consequence, equivalency. The second half of the chapter outlines that trajectory, with the IG combining sources and ideas from communication theory, science, semantics and Dadaism to establish differences from the parent organization. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the 1956 IG sponsored exhibition *This is Tomorrow* and Alloway's participation to demonstrate the ideas of the IG and suggest the reasons the ideas have a continued relevance today.

In the context of chapter four the dissertation addresses and carries into chapter five the issue of the "modern" and its variants, terms that carry greater concern and far more specific meaning in our own period than they did for the IG and the ICA. The concept of being modern was crucial for both the ICA and the IG. But chapter four argues that modernism held no one meaning for Herbert Read of the ICA and locates his modernism in a flexible concept of "the spirit of modernism," while chapter five does the same for Alloway in its first section. Both groups recognized--established purposeful strategies and orientations to perpetuate--the diversity of the modern condition and to enforce its character as plural. The IG did this with eyes wide open; the ICA with its eyes wide shut. The older modernists of the ICA were trapped between their desire for a pluralistic condition for culture and art, and their unwillingness to embrace and formulate it as anything more than a temporary state of affairs. They could never accept, as the IG wanted it, diversity as a continuous condition of upheaval and chaos. Therein lay the difference. The question then is not one of terminology but of what constituted the

elements of the condition of the contemporary world, a condition to which the word modern can be applied but in its broadest sense of present time and condition. This both simplifies and complicates the telling. The focus is no longer on the specific meaning of modern or an ideology termed modernism; however, when the term is understood as the present, then the influences and sources for meaning enlarge. As the dissertation argues throughout: the playing field for the IG was culture, with all attendant consequences. In so far as the arguments took place over specific ground, they structure the chapter. This is particularly true of chapter five.

Chapter five is oriented to a broad cultural context as the understanding of the modern condition as it existed in London in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Necessary decisions were made to include and exclude components, but guided by the comments of the IG members as to what was relevant. This is not always a straightforward affair since several of the embodiments of the modern cultural conditions are denied by the IG members as influential. For example, the 1951 Festival of Britain, unanimously disdained by the IG, is a summation of the modern condition in Britain. The dissertation argues against the judgments of many to emphasize the Festival as an important meeting of postwar populism, a concept of extreme relevance for the IG, and the modern. The third section outlines the important historical intersections for the IG of populism and modernism within the multiple, shifting and contentious debates over modern--or what it felt was the lack of modern--design and architecture. No section of a chapter can encompass the complexity of those debates, but an argument, as well as an outline, of current issues such as the New Humanism and the ideology of New Brutalism are

addressed through consideration of the changes the younger generation wanted to make in what they consistently called the “Modern Movement” in design and architecture. In the conclusion the dissertation locates in the expositions of Reyner Banham a purposeful argument for open-endedness rather than for any single defining set of characteristics for the modern. The dissertation argues that Banham and others considered the modern in the same manner as Alloway did criticism, i.e., as topical and situational. The fourth section continues this theme by outlining the importance the IG placed in the Bauhaus, or rather in its conception of Bauhaus ideas, and offers that they saw themselves as its heirs and renovators. The fifth section returns to Alloway specifically and a more traditional consideration of his relation to modernism, but offers a new perspective in that Alloway first confronted the issue of modernism outside the rarefied atmosphere of the IG through sculpture. The last section discusses for the first time Alloway as a film critic but through the larger frame of the nature of his criticism.

The sixth chapter addresses Alloway beyond the context of the IG, although distinctly shaped by his experiences within it. At the same time the chapter attempts to function as a summary of many of the issues developed in the previous chapters. This is an engagement of several topics, many with new understandings. The importance of abstraction for Alloway is expanded from his work with sculpture in chapter five to the painting of the new generation of artists from London’s art schools after WW II. The issue of abstraction proves very relevant to the nature of his criticism and the emergence of British Pop Art. Alloway’s opinions and the structure of both “pop” and “Pop” are also surprising when a distinction is made between the art history recorded and the art

theory developed by Alloway. Despite the limits of the dissertation to the London phase of Alloway's development, the knowledgeable reader will discover he had established much of his ideas about "pop" art well prior the development of the movement designated "Pop Art" and that his definition has little to do with art *per se* and is far more related to the arguments in the previous chapters that establish his orientation to the nature of culture. The last section of the chapter summarizes the hypothesis developed throughout the dissertation that Alloway developed a critical perspective that consciously fused formalist and sociological concerns to give us a new format for criticism, designated as a field theory of criticism.

### **C. Review of Selected Literature**

The literature regarding Lawrence Alloway has developed in several directions over time that highlight specific issues and inscribe a map of Alloway across several fields. That map in turn structures this dissertation in specific ways.

The first structural divide is the one between Alloway's work in England and the USA. Ironically, the publication of Alloway's ideas in American-based literature group themselves around his association with England. However, as expected, the concerns are of one issue; British Pop art, with little or no recourse to the breadth of his intellectual project in England. The separation between the British and American phases of Alloway remains of consequence and requires redress, while the early specific affiliation of Alloway with British Pop art presents serious historical and critical problems. The ultimate solution resides in a book-length study. What the dissertation offers is the claim and proof that the Alloway of the USA was, in very large part, the Alloway that

developed first in England and that Pop art had several meanings often anathema to the very traditions of fine art acclaimed by the publications that define it.

Typically, the early literature consists of the publication or republication of a few original essays and personal interviews, such as found in Lucy Lippard's 1966 anthology *Pop Art*.<sup>5</sup> Aside from the specific content of the essays there is little context or analysis of Alloway's interpretation and position provided in the texts. However, it is frequently the structure of the books which speak and argue for a particular approach to the historical phenomenon of Pop art, and such structures are of some concern to this dissertation. For instance, Lippard used five essays to establish the nature of Pop art and four of those are directed at various geographic locations: England, New York, California, Europe and Canada. British Pop was assigned to Alloway and his 1966 essay "The Development of British Pop" is perhaps his most famous and frequently cited essay, which by structural appearance in Lippard's early text established his expertise outside of New York after four years of working with American art as a curator at the Guggenheim Museum (1962-66). Lippard reserved the essay on New York Pop for herself. This exclusionary role seems purposeful and followed a pattern in the USA. When Peter Selz held his now famous symposium on Pop Art on 13 December 1962, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City four years prior to Lippard's book, Alloway was not one of the five panelists. This would seem hardly surprising given his recent arrival from London, but one panelist, Dore Ashton, recognized Alloway--with whom she argued in

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<sup>5</sup>For example, Alloway's essay "The Development of British Pop" for Lucy Lippard's anthology *Pop Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966), 27-67 was an extension of his 1962 "Pop Art Since 1947."

her presentation--as the first critic to discuss pop art and she had followed his position for some time.<sup>6</sup> In further demonstration, Ashton felt pop art failed to reach the complexity of contemporary life because it simply accepted rather than transformed reality. She felt the artists rejected metaphor.<sup>7</sup> This was doubly ironic in relation to Alloway and his absence because the core of his arguments was that popular culture was complicit with complexity and everyday life. Thus the literalness of pop art, its lack of metaphor, was, for Alloway, a strength rather than a weakness. But this position did not mean that Alloway ever abandoned his insistence on the transformative nature of art. These arguments were made in England years earlier and are developed below.

Three years after Lippard, John Russell and Suzi Gablik tried to establish the historical differences between London and the USA. They used a different and far more typical essay by Alloway ("The Long Front of Culture" of 1959), added two essays by fellow IG member John McHale ("The Fine Arts in the Mass Media" of 1959 and "The Plastic Parthenon" of 1967) and one by the American art historian Robert Rosenblum ("Pop Art and Non-Pop Art" of 1964) to introduce their 1969 *Pop Art Redefined*.<sup>8</sup> The content related to England because the book and exhibition were organized for the Arts

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<sup>6</sup>An edited version of the symposium was published in *Arts*, April 1963: 35-45. Citations used here are taken from its reprint, Peter Selz, et. al., "A Symposium on Pop Art," in Steven H. Madoff, *Pop Art. A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 65-81.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* Ashton concluded, typical of many critics of that time, that New York pop art was literal and not transformative, thus lacking criticality: it was "an art of capitulation." Leo Steinberg found it "transformative" but insufficiently so to qualify as "art." For him, as for many, the strong presentation of literal subject matter in pop art overpowered the critical potential of the formal properties. Henry Geldzahler, who accepted it as both art and transformative, was derided by Ashton and laughed at by the audience.

<sup>8</sup>John Russell and Suzi Gablik, eds., *Pop Art Redefined* (New York: Praeger, 1969).

Council of Great Britain at the Hayward Gallery in August of 1969. Thus the publication was for British consumption and their expressed desire “to achieve a reorientation of critical concern” was meant to juxtapose works from the two countries, Great Britain and the USA, in order “to emphasize the unsimilar cultural dynamic underlying each.”<sup>9</sup>

This was an admirable and overdue project and the essays by Alloway and McHale made clear their relationship in England to mass media. However, Russell and Gablik did not argue that case. Their essays argued that Pop art should be taken seriously since it had been rejected by most critics. To prove the point they wanted to demonstrate that American Pop art had “a more direct relation to Minimal and Hard-edged abstract art than is frequently admitted” and that “the boundary between Pop and abstract art is an illusory one.”<sup>10</sup> That is, the low (Pop art) was no longer “foolish” because they established a relation to the high culture of fine arts.<sup>11</sup> The latter point was perceptive in 1968/69, one put forth by Rosenblum in 1964,<sup>12</sup> and not one that is fully realized even today. In retrospect we recognize their need to legitimate an art movement rejected by so many by establishing a firmer relationship to the mainstreams of contemporary art. However, the essays by Alloway and McHale demonstrated quite different concerns from the US, and were of little historical and critical interest at that time. In short, the

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<sup>9</sup>Suzi Gablik, “Introduction,” in *Pop Art Redefined*, 9.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>11</sup>The need for this argument may seem questionable in the 1990s but the early history of Pop art was one of attack and rejection. Residues of this argument remain today.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Rosenblum, “Pop Art and Non-Pop Art,” *Art and Literature* 5 (Summer 1964) and reprinted in Russell and Gablik, 53-6. Alloway recognized the relationship between early abstract and the emerging figurative art prior to Russell and Gablik but he was not credited.

frame used by Russell and Gablik was American contemporary art and a formalist art criticism that was peripheral to the concerns of the British.

The dissertation engages Alloway's concepts and their derivation within the British context of the immediate postwar intellectual ferment and the art scene in London. More specifically, attention is focused on what may be considered Alloway's domains, most situated outside the art world: the theory of mass culture and the roles of mass media, science, and technology in reshaping the meaning of both art and criticism. In 1969, the date of Russell and Gablik's *Pop Art Redefined*, these concepts and their impact were either generally ignored or shunted into isolated rather than related histories of art, and the divides established in this early literature remain.

A prime example comes in Christin Mamiya's 1992 historically impoverished *Pop Art and Consumer Culture; American Super Market*.<sup>13</sup> The thesis of her book is "that the success of this (US) movement was due to the integral relationship between Pop art and American consumer culture, which reached its zenith in the 1960s."<sup>14</sup> Although the ground work to Mamiya's own point was established by the earlier concerns of Alloway and the IG through their attention to the mass media and advertising, Mamiya refers to Alloway only twice, and primarily as a young American critic of sufficient "entrepreneurial instinct" to cash in on the new art form in the US.<sup>15</sup> She does recognize

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<sup>13</sup>Christin Mamiya, *Pop Art and Consumer Culture; American Super Market* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 157.

that within the history of the British Pop movement of the 1950s the “International (*sic*) Group . . . was among the first to incorporate images from the postwar metropolitan environment” but this group quickly passed away compared to the success of Pop in the US, “due to the lack of a highly refined consumer culture to sustain the movement.”<sup>16</sup> Not only does Mamiya mistake the name of the Independent Group as the International Group, she has no historical knowledge of their and Alloway's alignment with popular culture in ways that would reinforce and contradict her thesis. For Mamiya Alloway is now miraculously reborn in the US shorn of his British lineage.

More recent developments in contemporary art history have kindled interest in both cultural studies and a type of art identified as "post-pop." Several of these texts have begun to recognize the important correlations between the socio-cultural studies in 1950s England and the Independent Group. They give a growing if piecemeal recognition to Alloway, and virtually to Alloway alone, but not without debate. One such site for debate was sponsored by several non-profit art centers in New York City in 1987 and 1988 under the title of “The Pop Project.” It led through a series of exhibitions to a book of essays, *Modern Dreams; The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop* designed to explore possible relationships between the British IG, the New York Pop artists, and types of art made in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>17</sup> Although the essays pointed to Alloway's and the IG's important role, the texts by a group of independent essayists did not lead to a systematic

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>17</sup>Edward Leffingwell, ed., *Modern Dreams; The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988).

investigation or conclusion. For example, Brian Wallis, in his essay, discussed Alloway's understanding of popular culture in England but not in relationship to art forms or the changing shape of criticism.<sup>18</sup> What the New York Pop Project affirmed was the importance afforded the IG and Alloway in reference to more contemporary debates. A closer examination of Alloway's earlier projects will clarify and broaden the connections between his ideas and the later American art histories of the 70s and 80s.

The same social and intellectual context that shaped Alloway's criticism also formed a new understanding of culture embedded in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England, beginning in the 1960s, after Alloway's departure from England. The BCCCS remains a school whose ideas are the basis for much of the intellectual framework in Cultural Studies programs today.<sup>19</sup> This dissertation will argue Alloway's leading position in the realm now identified by cultural studies. It is fitting that writers influenced by this model of culture and production, such as Simon Frith's *Art Into Pop* of 1987, are part of a growing body of literature in the field of Cultural Studies that retrospectively proclaim the importance of the IG and Alloway.<sup>20</sup> These connections have been overlooked in the art world.

Frith's book is ostensibly devoted to the history and criticism of rock music, a topic about which Alloway had nothing to say. Yet Alloway was cited directly four

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<sup>18</sup>Brian Wallis, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: The Independent Group and Popular Culture" in Leffingwell, 15-16.

<sup>19</sup>The British government closed the Centre as an academic program in the Fall of 2003 but its ideas continue to be referred to as a coherent and influential school of thought.

<sup>20</sup>Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987).

times,<sup>21</sup> more than many of the rock musicians, while the history of the IG was discussed at some length.<sup>22</sup> The answer as to why comes from two directions.

Frith is one of a small group of British cultural commentators whose intellectual orientation was shaped, directly or indirectly, by the work of the British sociologists in the Birmingham School.<sup>23</sup> And although the lack of a documented, specific history and the several changes in orientation of the school makes it difficult to generalize a single position, it is a well established and acknowledged fact that British Cultural Studies emerged with its current perspectives in the late 1960s and early 70s with what Douglas Kellner calls their “critical and multicultural perspectives.”<sup>24</sup> Scattered throughout these later writings and, in one way, unifying the work, are references to the IG, its visual artists and theoreticians, with Alloway prominent among them.<sup>25</sup> This emphasis is one

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 64, 104, 105, 107.

<sup>22</sup>E.g., Frith, 103-6.

<sup>23</sup>Frith did not study at the BCCCS but published in the Birmingham Centre’s publication series “Working Papers in Cultural Studies” in the 1970s and thanks many of its members in his acknowledgments to *Art Into Pop*. Among the cultural commentators who were part of, studied at, or were influenced by the BCCCS are: Iain Chambers, John Clarke, John Fiske, Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, Stuart Hall—who was the Director of the Centre in the 1970s—Dick Hebdige, Tony Jefferson, Angela McRobbie, Greil Marcus, Brian Roberts, Andrew Tolston, Paddy Whannel, and Paul Willis. They represent changing perspectives often at odds with the initial premises of the Centre. However, taken as a whole, they also constitute the center of contemporary British Cultural Studies, from the 1960s into the 1990s, and exert a profound influence on US studies.

<sup>24</sup>See Douglas Kellner, “British Cultural Studies and its Legacy” in his *Media Culture Culture Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1995), 31-43, for a brief overview. Kellner himself has been involved “in the problematic of British cultural studies” and influenced by the Birmingham positions since circa 1975; see his note 23, p. 51. Another overview of the BCCCS is offered in Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, eds., *The Subcultures Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1997), especially 83-9 and 175-180. But the Centre is best known through the publications of its members, above.

<sup>25</sup>There is also a case to be made that the new social importance given to subcultures by the BCCCS in the 1960s and 70s is derived from the sociological traditions established by the so-called “Chicago School,” the work of several generations of sociologists at the University of Chicago who advocated “a specific kind of urban micro-sociology which gave particular attention to the interaction of people’s perceptions of themselves with others’ views of them” between the end of the First World War

reason “The Pop Project” was organized in New York in the 1980s; i.e., there was a general recognition of a specific construction of a history of ideas that involved the IG and Alloway as a pivotal historical moment that functioned like Paul Klee’s angel of history for Walter Benjamin, looking backward and forward. To extend the implications of this line of intellectual history is to place Alloway and the nature of art criticism in the 1960s in line with sociology--a context not usually given or directly acknowledged in the history of contemporary art theory--and to establish a specific as opposed to a generalized historical connection between the fields of art criticism and cultural studies.

Two major texts in the 1990s dealt with the IG and Alloway. The exhibition catalogue *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, edited by David Robbins (hereafter cited as *Independent Group*), presented a great deal of useful, original material concerning the IG and its British sociological context of the 1950s.<sup>26</sup> The extensive material and its serious treatment by numerous authors, many from England, established a new and influential level of historical research now required for all those investigating the IG. Certainly their archival work has strengthened aspects of this dissertation project which stands in their debt. However, the sheer magnitude of

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and the 1960s. Most of the work is out of print, but for a very brief survey and sample essays, see *The Subcultures Reader*, Part 1, 11-82. Such an observation places the thinking of Alloway within a long line of specific, intellectual history in sociology, albeit with limited direct causal relations. However, it is difficult to envision the IG and Alloway’s emphasis on audience reception without a general frame in the history of ideas that argued for its importance. One effect of the Chicago and Birmingham Schools is to break down the monolithic concept of culture in favor of subcultures, or, diverse audiences rather than a mass audience. While this dissertation considers such issues a shift in the nature of criticism that is of major historical import, they are also used to characterize the “crisis” at the heart of contemporary criticism, as outlined by such commentators as Maurice Berger in his anthology *The Crisis in Criticism* (New York: The New Press, 1998), especially his introduction, 1-14.

<sup>26</sup>David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990).

documents from a large group has left behind the task of an overall assessment.

Concomitant with this was the lack of placement or interpretation of Alloway, although much use was made of his writings. Indeed, part of the subtitle for the exhibition and book, the “aesthetics of plenty,” belongs to and embodies a major contribution of Alloway. As this phrase and the generally understood history of the IG suggests, sociological perspectives and broad cultural contexts are the focus of the catalogue, and any consideration of the IG must now account for and dwell upon these issues. As a result, this dissertation is oriented toward the sociological and cultural contexts for the development and significance of Alloway’s concepts of criticism.

The second and more recent book dedicated to a study of the IG relies greatly upon the information and the approach of the 1990 catalogue.<sup>27</sup> The British Media Arts historian Anne Massey, in her 1995 book, *The Independent Group. Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-1959* (hereafter cited as *Modernism and Mass Culture*), constructed a case for Alloway’s participation in what she argued was a wrongful formulation of history, one she had designated as early as 1985 as the “myth of the Independent Group.”<sup>28</sup> Although Alloway was not her main topic, he was central to a

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<sup>27</sup>Unfortunately the author, Anne Massey, does not acknowledge the debt, even though she used direct quotations and issues from the 1990 catalogue. For her, the catalogue was simply one more example of the erroneous historical account of the IG.

<sup>28</sup>Anne Massey, *The Independent Group. Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-1959* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995). The book is an outgrowth of her doctoral thesis of 1985, *The Independent Group: Towards a Redefinition* and she was the most consistent academic researcher of the IG and ICA through a spate of articles in the mid-1980s. Of these, the two most important in terms of direct lineage seem to be: “The Independent Group: Towards a Redefinition” in *Burlington Magazine*, 129 (April 1987): 232-42, and the article co-authored with one of her major advisors, Dr. Penny Sparke, titled “The Myth of the Independent Group” in *Block 10*, 1985: 48-56. The latter is the basis for Massey’s chapter eight. It is also relevant that Sparke’s unpublished thesis, *Theory*

major portion of her work and her assertions must be engaged seriously due to her public position in the history of design. Moreover, Massey's is the only book to attempt to establish a central thesis and a singular historical position for Alloway within the IG. Although engagement with specific details of her analysis are scattered throughout the dissertation, claims made in her evaluations of the IG, their historiography, and about Alloway, must be answered in an introduction because they affect the orientation of this study.

Her concern was with the Independent Group as a whole. Her major aim was "to offer a new understanding of the history of the Independent Group," a history that until the writing of her book, she felt "has been assessed only within the broader history of Pop Art."<sup>29</sup> Her history claims a "fresh analysis" made in reference to "the meaning of modernism and mass culture in post-war Britain" rather than in comparison to modernism characterized, as she reads it, by the traditions of early twentieth century Europe.<sup>30</sup>

Her central thesis is that the IG admired modernism<sup>31</sup> and in "their enthusiastic approach to design, mass culture and consumption"<sup>32</sup> they proposed and carried out a re-

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*and Design in the Age of Pop*, Brighton Polytechnic, October, 1975, has a detailed analysis of Reyner Banham's approach to design used by Massey (see p. 123 and note 44). One of the central themes in Massey's text is to establish greater historical weight to Banham's theories and ideas. For full citations of Massey's other three articles, see the bibliography in her *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 153. Massey (and Sparke) use the word "myth," in their phrase the "myth of the Independent Group," as a synonym for fictional rather than its meaning within structuralism.

<sup>29</sup>Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 1.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. A quite different approach to the diversity of modernism in London is found in David Mellor's catalogue for the 1993 exhibition he curated at London's Barbican Art Gallery, *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (London: Phaidon, 1993) that not only demonstrates diversity but carries the concept of diversity through the author's various theses.

<sup>31</sup>"The overarching enthusiasm which led to the formation of the Independent Group was modernism." Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 33.

evaluation of modernism, but they did not wish to supersede it.<sup>33</sup> According to Massey, someone like Reyner Banham saw modernist design as beneficial and practical to the common, working class.<sup>34</sup> The IG established “a revisionist perspective on modernism” largely due to their inclusion of science, technology, and mass culture as appropriate to the new conditions of a postwar society.<sup>35</sup> It is this combination that leads to what Massey terms “the most important contribution which the Independent Group made to a revisionist understanding of cultural values,” the “Expendable Aesthetic,” to which she devoted an entire chapter.<sup>36</sup> This is an esthetic she attributed to Reyner Banham<sup>37</sup> although she also invoked in this same chapter the concept of the fine-art continuum, widely recognized as a major intellectual contribution by Alloway.<sup>38</sup> But Massey argued

<sup>32</sup>As stated on her “Acknowledgments” page. The statement refers to the inspiration provided by the IG for the 1993 establishment of the research Centre for Consumer Culture at the Southampton Institute where Massey is Dean of the Media Arts Faculty.

<sup>33</sup>As Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 128 observed.

<sup>34</sup>“Banham regarded modern design as serving the community, supplying new mechanical services like indoor toilets and decent heating.” Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 129.

<sup>35</sup>Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 54, 56, and 60.

<sup>36</sup>Chapter six is titled “The Expendable Aesthetic and America.” Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 72-94.

<sup>37</sup>Alloway confirmed this in his well-known 1966 essay “The Development of British Pop” in Lippard, 32. “Hollywood, Detroit, and Madison Avenue were, in terms of our interests, producing the best popular culture. Thus expendable art was proposed as no less serious than permanent art; an aesthetics of expendability (the word was, I think, introduced by Banham) aggressively countered idealist and absolutist art theories.”

<sup>38</sup>For example, see Alloway’s well quoted article “The Long Front of Culture” where he writes of the “aesthetics of plenty,” of living in a new set of cultural conditions marked by “an expendable multitude of signs,” and the required consequence of approaching fine and popular arts through a “continuum” rather than through a hierarchical pyramid. The article was originally published in *Cambridge Opinion*, No. 17, 1959, and reprinted in Russell and Gablik, 41-43.

against both Banham and Alloway; they got their own history wrong and she will correct them. She wrote:

the two views of the Group promulgated by Banham and Alloway are perfectly viable as personal reminiscences of events, but should not be accepted as historical fact at face value . . . . By early 1963 the Independent Group was established within the history of art as the instigator of British Pop Art . . . within the terms of Alloway's notion of the three generations of pop artists or of Banham's theory that the Independent Group instigated a working-class revolt . . . .<sup>39</sup>

Massey wants to assert Banham's independent importance but at the same time she consistently groups the thoughts of Banham and Alloway together in their construction of the "myth" of the IG in order to establish her thesis.<sup>40</sup> She argues historiographically that they did not defend or develop the distinct aesthetics of the IG, but rather consciously chose to align the history and thought of the IG with the development of Pop Art in England, some seven years after the official demise of the IG.<sup>41</sup> Massey argued that their ideas had "a far-reaching impact which remains largely unacknowledged" but not on British Pop art.<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately the central issue is not a "fresh" perspective in 1995 in regards to her thesis on Alloway, i.e., the differences between the IG and British Pop Art have long been acknowledged. Indeed Alloway is known to state in one of Massey's largely

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<sup>39</sup>Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 116.

<sup>40</sup>Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 109-127. Her chapter eight is titled "The Myth of the Independent Group: Historiography and Hagiography."

<sup>41</sup>Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 95 and 104.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

unacknowledged sources, the 1990 exhibition catalogue: “Pop artists emerged a few years after the IG and working a few years further on were unaware of any intellectual and verbal precedents at the IG.”<sup>43</sup> In the same essay Alloway dated the end of the IG to 1956 and the emergence of British Pop with the “Young Contemporaries” exhibition of 1961. However, Massey correctly recognizes that Alloway and the IG did make conscious efforts to revise modernism. The dissertation pursues this issue, although in different terms but it rejects Massey’s position that the IG and Alloway could not be considered progenitors of a postmodernist position, which the 1990 *Independent Group* catalogue suggests.<sup>44</sup> Although Massey’s final chapter places the ideas of the IG in relationship to modernism and post-modernism, she is insufficiently informed, as I argue throughout the dissertation, as to the histories of modernism, postmodernism, British sociology and the intellectual traditions of British Western Marxist thought. Nonetheless, her general sense of direction in this issue is one more confirmation of an emerging agreement across several fields.

Alloway’s criticism is the subject of three commentators. Carol Anne Mahsun, in *Pop Art and the Critics* (UMI Research Press, 1987) attempted a straightforward historical sequence for Alloway’s development of the concept of Pop art and to interpret his position and meaning. Unfortunately, she ignores Alloway’s British developments and

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<sup>43</sup>Lawrence Alloway, “The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty,” an essay written for the catalogue, *Independent Group*, 50.

<sup>44</sup>See the argument of David Robbins, “The Independent Group: Forerunner of Postmodernism?,” in *Independent Group*, 237-248.

the differences between Alloway's formulations in 1964 and 1972. Mahsun felt Alloway's model for Pop art was "wrongly formulated."<sup>45</sup> She argued for Umberto Eco's 1971 use of the linguistic trope or "transformation" as the most revealing approach to Pop art.<sup>46</sup>

Ironically, Alloway had placed American Pop art precisely into a sign system devoid of primary reference, while his discussions are peppered with the concept of transformation, beginning in England. A part of this dissertation explores Alloway's very personal use of art as a "sign system" within the broader context of the transformation of the methodology of iconography into structural typologies which intersect the application of semiotics and general theories of communication in both England and the USA.

The most perceptive and direct discussion on the criticism of Lawrence Alloway is also the briefest and comes in the five page introduction by Donald Kuspit to Alloway's collected essays in *Network: Art and the Complex Present* of 1984.<sup>47</sup> Kuspit, in collaboration with Alloway, chose only Alloway's criticism written in the USA but managed to extract and set out many of the major issues in perceptive and philosophical terms. This study acknowledges a profound debt to Kuspit's analysis and many of the issues investigated were first pointed to by him. Examples include Alloway's concern for an "aesthetic of reception," for the issue of topicality as his "touchstone," Alloway's development and use of new "horizons of expectation," the sense of the present as

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<sup>45</sup>Carol Anne Mahsun, in *Pop Art and the Critics* (UMI Research Press, 1987), 9.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 18-22, the section titled "Structural Definition of Pop Art."

<sup>47</sup>See Donald Kuspit's introduction as to Alloway's collected articles in *Network. Art and the Complex Present* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1984), xvii.

complex, and the general defense and explanation of a type of criticism with which Kuspit fundamentally disagrees.

The most sustained examination of Alloway is this author's Master's thesis, "The Criticism of Lawrence Alloway," which undertook a limited summary of the basic tenets of Alloway's criticism based on writings compiled in his anthologies which was neither a broad nor full consideration.<sup>48</sup> Missing from the thesis is the proposed subject of the dissertation, a contextual consideration of Alloway's criticism and an integrated view of his contributions to and position in the history of criticism and art history that he first shaped in Great Britain with important consequences for the future of several fields.

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<sup>48</sup>Richard Leslie, "The Criticism of Lawrence Alloway" (Master's thesis, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1994).

## **Chapter 1. The Social Consequences of Science & Technologies**

### **A. Introduction**

The ideas of Lawrence Alloway, his fundamental understanding of what constitutes the relationships between art, culture and criticism came of age in the particular context of London in the war years of the 1940s and the post-war experiences of the long British Conservative rule of the 1950s. His direct experiences after 1961 in the USA modified specifics of his art criticism but did not alter his fundamental understanding of art and culture developed in England. Attempts to discuss his intellectual development apart from his London context cannot provide an adequate representation of his ideas or account for his influence. A consideration of his work and context in England is one of the contributions the dissertation offers in opposition to studies that represent Alloway's position by examining essays written in the USA, or those essays written in England related only to the development of Pop Art in the USA, or only to the acceptance of popular culture.

There are numerous and important parallels between Alloway's concerns and the burgeoning sociological interests and recasting of the general London postwar culture. The trajectory of Alloway's understanding of art and the nature and function of criticism in post-war England was largely derived from the formation of post-war constellations around a revived capitalism and the consequent shifts in attitude to class structure, urbanization, the concerns of anthropology and sociology and from the consequences of scientific investigation in the 1930s and 40s. All are addressed to varying degrees in the following chapters. These broad concerns provided the basis for the diverse positions and

many of the specific reactions developed among a few older and, in greater number, younger British artists and writers of the 1950s and early 1960s. While Alloway is unique in his development and contributions, he remains intimately connected to a group of thinkers who actively embody broad, even global, patterns of thought and influences but embedded through local and unique understandings which reflect the cultural changes taking place in the Western world asymmetrically. Certainly the concept of culture was central and it was consciously understood as culture undergoing radical reformation. This was acceptance of change well beyond that inherent in avant-gardism, in large part because the art world was not his source for cultural change.

For Alloway, change was not only the new but the now established and permanent condition of culture, not simply a condition absorbed into aesthetics or art. Alloway eventually felt such a perspective was a major, historical and generational shift, and it should have distinct consequences for criticism. Such a realization uniquely enabled him to later recognize the importance of American Pop Art, an art form rejected by almost every American critic of an older generation, even by those--like Alloway and the IG--who took pride in their lack of advanced university credentials. Alloway saw through the eyes of his generation, accepted much of what he saw, and helped construct a new understanding of culture and a new type of criticism to match. In turn, this conviction--which he shared with others in the Independent Group--restructured the nature of art and its critical evaluation, and perhaps even the foundations of cultural criticism, as argued in chapter two.

The centrality of cultural and scientific change--the two were intertwined for Alloway and his colleagues--was intimately related to the war experience. Anyone widely read in the intellectual journals and newspapers of the time is struck by the strength and depth of the intellectual, ethical and moral recoil to the inhuman conduct demonstrated in World War II. Virtually all witnesses and voices were so greatly shocked by the capacity for monstrosity that humanity had demonstrated during the war that scientists and poets alike called for renewed efforts to reexamine and reestablish the nature of culture, and society. One can turn, for instance, to the London *World Review* as an embodiment of such changes and concerns.

Established in 1936, closed during the war, with a New Series beginning in March, 1949, it was "a monthly devoted to Literature and the Arts and all other aspects of our cultural interests," to cite its own banner. It's international and multidisciplinary orientation placed the issue of general culture at the center of its concerns. Its contributors were distinguished poets, secular and religious writers, philosophers, scientists and cultural commentators, which included critics; generally people of letters. Among the most frequent contributors to *World Review* was Herbert Read, the Director of the ICA.. Alloway also published a single review in April, 1950, thus was familiar with the publication.<sup>49</sup> The general editorial that introduced the first postwar series of *World*

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<sup>49</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "Symbolism in *The Third Man*," *World Review* 13 ( March 1950): 57-60. Thus Alloway was shepherded into the company of a particular group of an older generation of intellectuals whose concerns were general but specific and with which he was familiar. One can assume Read supported Alloway's article in *World Review* because he likely hired Alloway at this time to edit *Athene: Journal of the Society for Education in Art* (London). If so, this would be the earliest known point of contact between Read and Alloway. See my discussion of Alloway and *Athene* in chapter 5.B.

*Review* in March 1949 set terms found across the culture. The fullness of human nature had been revealed during the war and the general beliefs of the time

be it in Man or God or Freedom-(are) not enough to meet the needs of our time . . . . We are living in a time of crisis . . . established values in every sphere of human interest have been overthrown and rejected . . . we must arrive at a new culture, the building of a new tradition, and a radical structural change in our consciousness . . . .<sup>50</sup>

All admit the war created changes in fundamental ideas and procedures. Most remarkable were the numerous parallels in thought found in other London journals of this time. Strange bedmates was one consequence. Those who simply wanted a more humane world, a better culture, for reasons of basic morals, ethics or political conservatism were welded to those, such as neo-Marxists, who were beginning to understand culture as a terrain of political struggle. The issues and their related debates are found throughout the Western world and are coterminous with the postwar period. But the local patterns of each country are unique and postwar Britain was an extremely dynamic and important cauldron. The dissertation does not argue that Alloway or his peers always wrote in direct relation to the radical changes in society and the sciences, such as the rise of

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<sup>50</sup>“We are living in a time of crisis, not only because established values in every sphere of human interest have been overthrown and rejected but because the way has been opened to those who are bold and wise enough to follow and explore, for their own ends, the distortion of the European tradition. Out of this confusion two revolutions have emerged: one, a manifestation to revolutionize culture in the name of Power; the other, to revolutionize culture in the name of proletarian solidarity. Both misuse culture . . . are nothing but over-compensation for the loss of worth and significance of the individual person . . . . Before we can arrive at a new affirmation of man, therefore, we must arrive at a new culture, the building of a new tradition, and a radical structural change in our consciousness towards the acceptance of greater personal responsibility. Man cannot be explained in the light of religion or politics or economics. These must be explained in the light of man . . . . There can be no affirmation unless the ground has been fearlessly explored and its nature understood for what it is. This is a challenge that must be accepted and its truth absorbed . . . .” “Editorial,” *World Review* 1, no. 1 (March 1949):7.

This is an argument of many parts and it can be construed in many ways, not the least of which underscores a newly, if implicitly, politicized function for the redefinition of culture as neither Nazi-Fascist nor Communist. Alloway is argued as political in this sense.

socialism, the crisis of the British New Left or the post-nuclear debates in science and culture. But it does argue that their writings and contributions accepted, developed and cannot be understood, then or now, without the perspective of the dominant issues that influenced the reshaping of culture and anyone concerned at that time with the social configurations of a postwar era.

This chapter is given to a directed discussion of science and its social consequences, an arena of vast interest and influence for Alloway and the IG. It attempts to establish what in science engaged Alloway and it argues that a synthesis between science and culture was important to him. To do so the chapter mixes the fictional and the real rather than simply to outline the scientific and technological changes created through war. It uses the works of two major scientists, and both fact and fiction, in an attempt to establish the consequences of science and technology.

The work of C.P. Snow (1905-1980) is an embodiment of both the factual and the fictional but used here in a way that renders them equal. The thesis of “Two Cultures” by the British scientist and fiction writer has been accepted as a characterization of the immediate postwar culture and is often cited today as newly relevant in the digital age.<sup>51</sup> For he and many others, new and even terrible social consequences of the sciences were brought to a new prominence with the use of atomic weapons and their power to

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<sup>51</sup>Snow’s views were first published in “The Two Cultures,” *New Statesman & Nation* 52 (6 October 1956): 413–4. It was widely disseminated through his famous 1959 Rede Lecture at Cambridge (“The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution”) with continuation and wide discussion through Snow’s Godkin Lectures at Harvard in 1960. See Nora Calhoun Graves, *The Two Culture Theory in C.P. Snow’s Novels* (Hattiesburg: The University and College Press of Mississippi, 1971), 1. The position of Alloway and the IG predate these publications by several years but ran concurrent with his fiction.

annihilate the known world. Postwar civilization was now more emphatically than ever that of two cultures: science and the humanities. What were their relationships and consequences? Snow examined these issues in formal, academic commentaries but also through his string of fictional novels based on the realities of the postwar world. Thus his work is historically characteristic and both real and fictional in ways that reinforce one another. Yet it is the snapshot of his fictional art form that can at times provide the best and most accurate panorama, much the way the synthetic abilities of the painter were initially argued above the specificity of the photographer.<sup>52</sup> There is no direct evidence that Alloway read Snow, but one can argue a reasonable likelihood since Alloway was extremely interested in science, an avid reader and a literary critic.<sup>53</sup> However, it is neither a correlative nor a causal relation that is argued here. Rather Snow presents a psychological portrait of the time--through the life he lived and his fictional creations--more significant than any array of facts or citations from editorials.

The second locus is unquestionably real and causal. Norbert Wiener (1894-1964) and the field he created, cybernetics, were cited several times by Alloway as a major influence. But again it is not simple facticity or direct influence that are at issue. The facts

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<sup>52</sup>Alloway came to a similar conclusion. He argued in an early review of an exhibition by the Medical Artists Association of Britain that the idealism used by artists (draftspeople in this case) was superior to photography in conveying information. See his "Art and Information," *Art News & Review* 7, no. 9 (28 May 1955): 7.

<sup>53</sup>There is direct evidence that Alloway knew Snow's position by at least the time of Snow's 1959 lecture. Alloway's article titled "Monster Films" published in *Encounter* 14, no. 1 (January 1960): 70-2, was followed on pages 72-3 by a letter that was yet another reaction to Snow's position (See C.H. Waddington's letter headlined by the magazine as "Humanists and Scientists. A Last Comment on C.P. Snow.") Snow replied and remarked on the great controversy his position had generated in the next edition: "The 'Two Cultures' Controversy. Afterthoughts," *Encounter* 14, no. 2 (February 1960): 64-8. However, such historicizing misses the point; the dissertation assumes Alloway knew Snow's fictional work far earlier.

of Wiener's science derived from and lead to an environment of speculation: the factual becomes the historically fictional. Cybernetics was merely one response in science to a broader set of concerns, more a parallel than a causal relation to the IG esthetic and Alloway's development; i.e., cybernetics, though causal, was also symbolic of the concerns of the time.

### **B. C.P. Snow & the Theory of Two Cultures**

Any discussion of the nature of culture in England at this time needs to mention C.P. Snow, the most famous Western embodiment of "The Two Culture Theory," today commonly abbreviated to "two cultures." Historically Snow's characterization of the nature of contemporary culture, one apparently shared by many, was not causal for Alloway and the IG. They did not mention Snow. Indeed, in a pattern typical for this dissertation, the opposite is true: the position of Alloway and the IG apparently predates the publication of Snow's ideas by several years, or at least runs concurrent. But the dissertation argues the obvious: Snow was certainly known and he embodied issues of great importance to Alloway and the IG. Snow offered, in his fiction and his later lectures and their surrounding debates, an important position the IG addressed. Moreover, Snow openly developed his position through his many books of fiction beginning in 1935 that would not have escaped the notice of a bibliophile like Alloway who loved science and science fiction and their social consequences.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>The largest component of Snow's fiction is a series of eleven large novels, written between 1940 and 1970 and known collectively as "Strangers and Brothers." He was also editor of the popular science journal called *Discovery* from 1937-1940. See John de la Mothe, *C.P. Snow and the Struggle of Modernity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 14.

In a general sense Snow's position was typical of the prewar intellectuals who recognized the issues of modernism, its will to chaos and sense of estrangement,<sup>55</sup> and responded with a search for some grand synthesis.<sup>56</sup> Snow and others resisted the terms of chaos in modernism while at the same time they recognized, articulated and dealt with the terms and their consequences.<sup>57</sup> Thus they helped make available the nature of issues to younger generations who then developed their own solutions. The specific terms of

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<sup>55</sup>A useful survey of the concept of modernism, after WW I and in the 1930s and 40s UK, is provided by de la Mothe in his introduction, and chapters two and four. For him, the personality and attitude of Snow, born in 1905, was shaped by the post-WW I period he defines as modernity: "The period into which C.P. Snow was born was a decidedly modernist one of change, vitality, and contradiction that exerted a powerful and lasting influence on the development of Snow's individualist framework...his unique synthesis of political insights underpinned both his social hope for totality and his ultimate collapse under the weight of modernity into a disconnected 'darkening' vision reveal the extent to which Snow himself was trapped in the tensions that are modernity." *Ibid.*, 19. De la Mothe argues clearly the problem of modernity's restlessness against the corresponding search for totality. The dissertation argues below that Snow's general position in relation to modernism is parallel that of other intellectuals who came of age during the two world wars, such as Herbert Read, and was in contrast to the position of Alloway and the IG.

<sup>56</sup>Snow made few direct references to modernism but his position in literature is generally considered by literary critics to be strongly anti-modernist in its aggressive realism. Most, such as Terry Eagleton (see note 20, p. 193 in de la Mothe for Eagleton's personal letter of statement), consider Snow someone turned away from modernism. And Snow clearly attacked what he called "Experimental Modernism" in literature by which he meant a calcified avant-garde that was associated with prewar modernists such as the Bloomsbury Group, or "the Men of 1914" as he called them. (See de la Mothe, chapter four, especially pp. 86-7.) The IG and Alloway, as discussed throughout the dissertation, held a similar attitude and one can call them, as the dissertation argues, realists of a post-war era. Yet in so far as modernism is based on issues of psychological estrangement and alienation due to the social fragmentation created by the new urban world--or in Snow's fictional works, created by the new sciences--then few embody its consequences so well in their fictional work as did Snow. As de la Mothe argues (pp. 4-5), it is Snow's struggle against this alienation and exile through his "deeply embedded desire for totality that Snow must be considered a significant figure of modernity." Alloway's position becomes most interesting in relation to these perspectives. He accepts what Snow rejects, the fragmentation: he rejects what Snow desires, i.e., Alloway is adamantly opposed to totality as a generalizing concept. Thus he is a modernist by this understanding. But if one accepts Snow's struggles as an embodiment of modernity, as de la Mothe argues, then Alloway, by dint of his lack of struggle against such conditions is not a modernist. However, if one views Alloway as struggling against an older modernism (see chapter five, below), then he can be perceived as either/or: modernism revised or modernism rejected. However, as should be clear from observing the line of argument by de la Mothe, such alignments or judgments are as polemical as they are historical, and it is crucial that one specify the parameters used. See de la Mothe, chapter one. He characterizes his considerations (p. 14) as "critical hermeneutics" and not polemics.

<sup>57</sup>"His creative, cognitive, and political framework tried through an articulate realism, to find a comforting (or comfortable) totality in an otherwise estranging modernism." de la Mothe, 187.

contemporary, if not modern, culture that fascinated Snow were of central concern to Alloway: human values and relations against the powerful background-made-foreground of science and technology. For Snow it was science and its issues that redefined the understanding of ourselves; was embodiment and, to some extent, promotion of the new world condition everyone faced through science and technology. In Snow's work science was one of modernism's sources for authoritative imagery,<sup>58</sup> as it was for Alloway and the IG. Verification of the central impact of science came, certainly for Snow and one can suggest the same for the artists at the IG, through the continued development of atomic weapons and the "new men" who understood and shepherded them through their command of science.<sup>59</sup> A biographer of Snow calls him simply "a storyteller for the atomic age."<sup>60</sup>

The two culture theory of Snow resulted from the meeting of the humanities and sciences as embedded in his own life.<sup>61</sup> The meeting of the two fields led him to conclude, according to Graves, the existence of a "gulf of mutual incomprehension" and a lack of understanding, especially between younger and older generations.<sup>62</sup> Two cultures is the

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<sup>58</sup>Mothe's point, p. 12. His analysis is one of the first to recognize what most literary reviewers of Snow ignore: "the central importance of science" in his fictional works; that science was one of modernism's "sources for authoritative imagery."

<sup>59</sup>See for example C.P. Snow's novel by the same name, *The New Men* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954) and discussed below.

<sup>60</sup>de la Mothe, 15. The phrase is taken from a review by Snow ("Storytellers for the Atomic Age") published in the *New York Times Book Review* (30 January, 1955).

<sup>61</sup>See de la Mothe, 13 and 187.

<sup>62</sup>As cited in Graves, 2 and note 10. The use of the word "young" to designate the new was common at this time and used frequently in the London art scene as well. See below.

belief in the barriers between the realms of the arts and sciences.<sup>63</sup> Snow argued that the process of their divorce had been slow and cumulative throughout the 20th century as the intellectual life of the whole western society increasingly split into two polar camps to the impoverishment of both cultures.<sup>64</sup>

The scientific culture was, to use his later work to define it, “cumulative, incorporative, collective, consensual, so designed that it must progress through time.” The non-scientific or humanistic culture, according to Graves, was “non-cumulative, non-incorporative, unable to abandon its past but also unable to embody it,” each blinded by training or lack of training with “no place where the cultures meet.”<sup>65</sup> What solution existed to the dilemma lay in reorienting education to expose people to both disciplines in order to narrow the cultural gap. The interchange was made more urgent because Snow, among many, felt the rise and disquietude of British youth in the 1950s. The interchange would not integrate the two cultures to Snow’s mind, but it would allow them to communicate with, understand, and respect each other. One such example lay in his 1954 novel *The New Men*, a synopsis of which also demonstrates the less direct but equally viable pathways for the transmission of ideas.

The two protagonists in *The New Men* were brothers who represented the twin seats of Snow’s own personality and power. The younger was a scientist, racing against the Americans to develop the new atomic bomb at the close of WW II. The elder was the

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<sup>63</sup>de la Mothe, 12.

<sup>64</sup>Graves, 2.

<sup>65</sup>Graves, 2-3 and 5.

thoughtful narrator, a statesman and technical advisor with access to Whitehall. Despite the fact that the elder held governmental power and had associations with the past, it was the new young culture of scientists who were able to understand much that was alien to the older generation. By this Snow meant not simply the technicalities of science but that the hopes developed among the older generation were now an impediment to this new world. The new men “had learned more deeply than their seniors to give nothing away . . . seemed able to throw those hopes away, and accept secrets, spying, the persistence of the scientific drive, the closed mind, the two world-sides, persecution, as facts of life.”<sup>66</sup> That is, the new young scientific men were, as Snow felt himself to be, realists and not idealists. The new young ones were colder-hearted, less concerned with the people around them. Yet this was not condemned but understood by Snow; the two brothers could speak more deeply the less intimacy they shared.<sup>67</sup> It was the young ones who saw the existentialism of the situation without despair:

it was jet-clear that, despite its emollients and its joys, individual life was tragic: a man was ineluctably alone, and it was a short way to the grave. But, believing that with stoical acceptance (they) saw no reason why social life should also be tragic: social life lay within one’s power, as human loneliness and death did not, and

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<sup>66</sup>Snow, *The New Men*, 254-5. It is interesting to understand this new attitude as both cynicism and not-cynicism. A cynical attitude can produce rejection of past solutions as irrelevant; at the same time it accepts the new conditions as flat facts without extraneous, although nonetheless an embedded sense of, pessimism. Applied to something like Pop art, this attitude helps explain the double-sided nature of the dead pan attitude that Alloway later locates. This can also be understood as realism but quite a different type of realism, one not understood without the broader context of culture that redefines it. Alloway will go on to defend and argue realism later in the US; in England he will argue its equivalency to abstraction, as outlined below in several chapters.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 303. It is very simple to locate the rejection of humanist values in this scheme. It is less easy to understand it, as did Snow and the IG, as a basis for new intimacy.

it was the most contemptible of the false-profound to confuse the two.<sup>68</sup>

The reasons for these realizations were, expectedly, the war and the bomb:

you could not compromise. If you accepted the bomb, the burnings alive, the secrets, the fighting point of power, you must take the consequences . . . . You were living in a power equilibrium, and you must not pretend; the relics of liberal humanism had no place there.<sup>69</sup>

Alloway and the IG will argue the same against humanism and on behalf of a reformulation.<sup>70</sup>

For Snow's new men the bomb (-ing) that leveled cities also leveled social relations and the human relation to the future. Past relationships and values became a sad joke. After the first atomic bomb in August of 1945, Snow had a commentator summarize the new realism.

The chief virtue of this promising new age, and perhaps the only one so far as I can tell it, is that from here on we needn't pretend to be any better than anyone else. For hundreds of years we've told ourselves in the West . . . that, even if we did not live up to those exalted ethical standards, we did a great deal better than anyone else. Well, anyone who says that today isn't a fool, because no one could be so foolish. He isn't a liar, because no one could tell such lies. He's just a singer of comic songs.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 301.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 300.

<sup>70</sup>See the discussion in chapter 5.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 184.

Such sentiments in prose were an easy source for and specific embodiment of the attitude of Alloway and the IG, nor can it be said to be the only time they could locate their philosophies in popular and fictive rather than academic sources. Neither the IG nor Alloway, despite his clarity of prose, could have writ their own general realizations more poignantly than found in the pages of such “fiction” by C.P. Snow. The IG and Alloway emphatically accepted the importance of science, and the ways it had redefined, and could continue to redefine, human values and relations as well as the physical environment. Indeed the IG not only accepted but favored science and technology as a culture over the culture of the non-scientific, especially if the other culture was defined by humanism. Doubtless for them science was to be as it was for Snow’s modernism, the authoritative provider of imagery for the second half of the century.

They wanted, at minimum, what Snow desired; the two cultures to communicate. But they were not as tepid in their enthusiasm for what could be accomplished in and by the relationship. Much of their art, production and thought were enthusiastically directed to these issues, as outlined below. Snow’s understanding of culture was exactly parallel to their own, in terms they used. As Snow wrote in later clarification:

At one pole, the scientific culture is a culture, not only in an intellectual but also in an anthropological sense. That is, its members need not . . . completely understand each other . . . but there are common attitudes, common standards and patterns of behaviour, common approaches and assumptions . . . without thinking about it, they (all scientists) respond alike. That is what culture means.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Snow in *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 9-10, as cited in Graves, 8. I use the comment toward a different end here, to note this dissertations use of “anthropological”

Yet fundamental differences lay between this younger generation of scientists and Snow. Despite his ability to locate the realism in the younger generation with which the IG could identify, Snow was also the elder narrator in *The New Men*, reconciled with his generational desire for totality. Thus he ultimately rejected that part of the contemporary experience that was chaotic and fragmented. Ten years later in 1964 Snow abandoned his efforts toward integration in a letter to Prime Minister Harold Wilson: "I can no longer believe that individual human people can have a decisive effect."<sup>73</sup> The elder moderns like Snow knew the terms of modern culture, and for those now disturbed by the way in which the chaos of war reinforced the fragmentation of modernism, dedicated themselves to working against it by reactivating prewar models, even while recognizing, as did Snow, that it was now an irrelevant model. We will see, below, the same response by older modernists in art. Similarly, Alloway and the IG also knew the terms of early modernism, now reinforced and altered by this atomic-age modernism, but in contrast accepted changes, and put them to work. Chapters four and five return to the issues and problems of multiple meanings of modernism in more specific detail, but it remains a touchstone throughout.

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to mean a shared sense of common patterns that constitute the meaning of culture and prefigure the importance of this concept for the IG as discussed in other chapters.

<sup>73</sup>C.P. Sow in an unpublished letter to the Prime Minister, dated 24 October 1964; cited in de la Mothe, 188 and note 1.

### C. Wiener and Cybernetics

Contrary to the case with C.P. Snow, Alloway made specific references to his admiration and debt to Norbert Wiener (1894-1964), then professor of mathematics at M.I.T., who named and initiated in 1948 the research field known as Cybernetics.<sup>74</sup> It was Wiener's lay version of his more technical 1948 book called *Cybernetics*, that Alloway cited by name for several years: *The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society* (1950; revised 1954).<sup>75</sup> Today the field is known most generally to lay people as the study of feedback loops that "govern" systems between people and machines, ultimately as "machines that think." But then, as now, the field is more fully a branch of the "theory of messages" and a field Wiener saw as a logical extension of the scientific and philosophic consequences of accepting two theories. The first was "probabilistic theory," meaning not simply the principle of uncertainty but the introduction of statistics into physics as a consequence of accepting physics as a field of probability rather than factual certainty.<sup>76</sup> Secondly, he accepted the concept of entropy defined as the measure of probabilities which increase as the universe grows older, therefore more complex. For Wiener entropy is disintegration, the loss of organization and distinction, and is a natural

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<sup>74</sup>Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics, or, Control and Communication in Animals and Machines* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1948).

<sup>75</sup>For examples of Alloway's citations, see his *Topics in American Art Since 1945* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), 65 and 200. Wiener's 1948 text is virtually unreadable to any but a specialist: the lay version is eminently accessible and quite different in its concern for society.

<sup>76</sup>See especially the introduction and the first chapter ("Cybernetics in History") in Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1950; reprint Avon Books, 1967). The long-term historical radicality of cybernetics is that it used the tools of electrical systems to study biological and social systems to initiate the consideration of such "systems in purely abstract logical or computational terms." See Stephen Wolfram, *A New Kind of Science* (Wolfram Media, Inc., 2002), 1004, and discussed below.

and inherent process. “Order” is defined as the “least probable” state, while “chaos” is the “most probable” state--with a crucial caveat.

But while the universe as a whole . . . tends to run down, there are local enclaves whose direction seems opposed to that of the universe at large and in which there is limited and temporary tendency for organization to increase. Life finds its home in some of these enclaves.<sup>77</sup>

More than a scientific paradigm, cybernetics was a self-acknowledged shift in and broadening of paradigms, one with immense consequences.<sup>78</sup> For Wiener, cybernetics was a complex field that dealt with--to use his own list--“not only the study of language but the study of messages as a means of controlling machinery and society, the development of computing machines,” reflections on psychology and the nervous system and “a tentative new theory of scientific method.”<sup>79</sup> This “complex of terms” provided linkage between different subjects of modern scientific activity because there were new conditions in science and society defined as “complexity”--the word Alloway used to characterize the modern world and whose acceptance by him and the IG set in motion the development of new ways of incorporating this change in their social and material conditions. Thus there was support in cybernetics as applied by Wiener for changes in world view, with specific social and cultural consequences that directly, and perhaps

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<sup>77</sup>Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings* , 20-1.

<sup>78</sup>One can argue that the best known, if contentious, statement of this shift is found in the 1962 book by the physicist and historian of science, Thomas S. Kuhn (1922-1996), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. See Edward Rothstein’s analysis, “Coming to Blows Over How Much Validity Science Has,” *The New York Times*, 21 July 2001, B1 and B11.

<sup>79</sup>Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings* , 23.

causally, relate to Alloway's position. Certainly Alloway never tired, after 1955, of utilizing complexity as claim and criteria.

The IG accepted and responded in specific ways to many of the issues discussed in depth by Wiener: the increase in complexity, communication theory, chaos—a fact of nature which Wiener wanted to resist—dynamic systems, the interchangeability between machines and people. Many of the details of these connections are discussed in chapter four but a few points made by Wiener helps us understand the depth of the relationship between contemporary scientific theory and Alloway and the IG.

Wiener introduced them to terms and conditions we take for granted today but were then new and explanatory. Wiener argued throughout his thesis that humans and machines were equivalent, that they used the same language (“cybernetics”) in “complex actions.” Such new terms as input, output, memory, feedback and monitors not only described human actions but what machines needed if they were to “react effectively to a ‘varied external environment.’” In so doing people and machines operated as dynamical systems whose actions and, more importantly, reactions, offset natural disorganization “to produce a temporary and local reversal of the normal direction of entropy.”<sup>80</sup> Messages, as “a form of pattern and organization,”<sup>81</sup> were the basis for communication theory and worked not only to temporarily counter entropy but were also needed by human beings to function effectively as social beings in their own time. And when Wiener

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 34-6.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 31.

describes his contingent view of the world where communication is at the center, it is like listening to Alloway outline his own later philosophy of criticism.

The process of receiving and of using information is the process of our adjusting to the contingencies of the outer environment, and of our living effectively within that environment. The needs and the complexity of modern life make greater demands on this process of information than ever before . . . .<sup>82</sup>

Wiener was interested in the anomalies presented in random dynamic systems and wrote, based on the modern history of science, what today we accept without thought but at that time must have seemed a clarion call to the younger generation. The Newtonian world view with its description of “a universe in which everything happened precisely according to law” could not be verified and no longer dominated science. Wiener’s 1950 introduction described the work of others who preceded and shaped his own rejection of Newtonian physics whereby “the same physical laws apply to a variety of systems starting from a variety of positions.”<sup>83</sup> Instead, the new basis for physics is “contingency,” an orientation appropriate for the new “probabilistic world” that takes into account “a large number of similar universes” rather than arguing one over the other: “to consider not one world, but all the worlds which are possible answers to a limited set of questions concerning our environment.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 14-21.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

The core of this new world view is strongly resonant within the IG, their art, projects and events, and the philosophic nature and specifics of Alloway's criticism. The parallels are, to use the overworked phrase, uncanny, and provide an intellectual basis in the sciences for arguing that the response of Alloway and the IG to new contemporary cultural conditions--rather than to the conditions of art and art theory--established the basis for a different type of "modernism" in response to the various modernisms that surrounded them in the art world. And later discussion of the specific principles in Alloway's criticism will demonstrate the uncanny parallels with Wiener's conditions for a new world view.

## **Chapter 2. Considerations of Culture**

### **A. Introduction**

The second major postwar constellation around which Alloway and the IG built their position, as argued in the dissertation, is the concept of culture. More central than science to their considerations and broader in scope, it too was in a great state of flux and debate. The historical framework for culture was political and involves both the Conservative postwar government of Britain and the far more volatile and amorphous mix surrounding the emergent formation of the British New Left. It also involves the alignment of sociologists who initiated what became the academic field of Cultural Studies, a field which remains active today and dispersed across the globe from its original center in England. The irony is that Alloway and the IG were not professed leftists, more frequently characterizing themselves as apolitical rather than as specifically aligned anywhere on the political spectrum. But culture was central to their concerns and links them to a politics of culture.

This chapter constructs the argument that Alloway and the IG either contributed to the shape of cultural studies at the point of its emergence, an effect perhaps realized later, or, they simply presaged cultural studies in visual form at a time when the British sociologists and theorists most concerned with culture occupied a more conservative position. In either case, the dissertation argues that Alloway and the IG are best considered within the context of the study of culture. That the intellectuals engaged in the formation of the field of Cultural Studies emerged from the political left in conscious dialogue with more conservative predecessors binds politics and the study of culture. By

articulating the positions of Alloway and the IG within this context the chapter as a whole constitutes an argument for the recognition and acceptance of visual form rather than written form as an integral, if unrecognized, part of the history of ideas--a history that has yet to be written.

Section B examines the general development of an amorphous but emergent and important group of leftist intellectuals who constitute a position we could call cultural Marxism. Section C conducts a similar outline of theories of culture but from the more conservative perspective of Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) and his followers in the 1940s and 50s who form a tradition known as "culture and civilization." These two contradictory trends come together in the thinking of two sociologists most prominent in the emergence of British Cultural Studies; Richard Hoggart (1918) and Raymond Williams (1921-1988) outlined in sections D and E. Taken together they form a counter to the tradition of "culture and civilization," later known as culturalism and used as the foundation of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies (BCCCS) in the early 1960s. Specific aspects of Alloway's criticism are here aligned with specific positions held by the theorists of cultural studies. Again, as in chapter one, there is no specific causality argued, although here too Alloway knew of these thinkers and in many ways was in advance of or directly parallel to many of their positions; this is especially true with Raymond Williams.

**B. British Cultural Marxism: The New Social History—  
“from the bottom to the top.”<sup>85</sup>**

After its victory in 1945 the Labour Party instituted programs to socially re-engineer British society on many levels. Part of this was owed to a citizen-based consensus for social equality in light of the great leveling effect of war and the blitz. The strength of this consensus propelled the Conservatives, after their slim victory over Labour in 1951, to follow through in the 1950s with many of Labour’s programs. It was this general context--a conscious attempt to lessen the differences of the class system--that constructed a grid for a general history of social and cultural ideas. Higher taxes, one consequence, were used as social leveler. Another consequence was the unprecedented level of social services, also known as the development of the “Welfare State,” for which Britain became the modern model. Another was a “cultural socialism” where the arts were subsidized to a much greater degree than in the past, with variable taxes and exemptions to encourage arts on the local level.<sup>86</sup>

More specifically during the 1940s there developed a dialogue among disparate and unique constituencies based on leftist ideas whose results were of vast influence. Not the least of these consequences was the development of a group of scholars and a set of considerations that solidified into a cultural Marxism we consider today as typical of

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<sup>85</sup>The phrase belongs to Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 12.

<sup>86</sup>See Arthur Marwick, *Culture in Britain since 1945* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1991), chapter 1 passim.

Western or critical Marxism.<sup>87</sup> As Marxists were joined by liberal progressives within the Popular Front a dialogue emerged that owed in large part to international Western Marxist developments in the postwar era, but also to liberal doctrines in combination with specific British traditions of empiricism as demonstrated in the cross-over between leftism, historians and writers. Dennis Dworkin, among others, argues that in England it was the mixture of these elements that was more important than any singular program of pure or organized Marxism.<sup>88</sup> One consequence of this odd grouping was that culture became an issue of major importance to a broad spectrum of otherwise demarcated intellectual domains, from scientists to sociologists to artists and art critics.

Another consequence of this amalgam was the creation of the basis for the development of the field of British Cultural Studies in the late 1950s. The ideas in cultural studies, derived from leftist concerns, demonstrated a significant number of parallels to the concerns of Alloway. But their and Alloway's ideas owe first--as does much Western art theory and criticism--to the development of the leftist ideas of Marxists, historians, and liberal-progressive scholars in confrontation with postwar concerns. Taken together they show the broad interconnections to Alloway's ideas but also eventually underscore the opposite; his unique position in history, art history and art criticism.

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<sup>87</sup>See Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Duke University Press: Durham, North Carolina, 1997), the source for much of this outline. His term for neo-marxism is unorthodox or critical Marxism; this form of Marxism is also known as Western Marxism and the three terms are used by many as equivalent. Perry Anderson defined it as the "marxist theory that developed in Western Europe, after the defeat of the proletarian rebellions in the West and the isolation of the Russian Revolution in the East in the early 1920s." And although composed of distinct schools, there is a "structural unity" to "Western Marxism", beyond the diversity of its individual thinkers." Quotations taken from the synopsis page of Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976; Verso, 1979).

<sup>88</sup>Dworkin, "Introduction."

Does this mean Alloway was a leftist or overtly political? No. If anything he was a liberal rather than a socialist and had no obvious commitment to an overt political agenda. His membership in the leftist Artists International Association (AIA) in 1949 seems to imply the opposite.<sup>89</sup> But his membership lasted only a year, to judge by the dues books, and his only known statement in this context was overtly apolitical, separating art from politics.<sup>90</sup> However, an historical review of leftist theory tells us in what way Alloway's position may be read as political. The beliefs that generated and are embedded in Alloway's art criticism belong to a general conviction reemerging after WW II of the cultural as political. This position developed first as a general, and later became a

<sup>89</sup> Alloway was an active member of the Artists International Association (AIA), as were major figures in the art world such as Herbert Read, Frederick Antal, Francis Klingender, several of the artists who join the IG, and such contemporary London art critics as David Sylvester and John Berger. Even John Coplans, the South African who later moved to California to begin *Artforum*, was active in the AIA, an organization founded in 1933 during the Depression as a left-wing extension of the ideas of Russian socialism. It remained an art organization dedicated to political aims until December 1953 when the phrase "political activity" in its "Aims and Objectives" was replaced by: "To work for the co-operation of artists for intellectual freedom, economic security and the promotion of peace and international understanding." (Lynda Morris and Robert Radford, *AIA. The Story of the Artists International Association, 1933-1953* [Oxford: The Museum of Modern Art, 1983], 91). However, the AIA had dropped much of its "directly political and social themes" by 1949, a period of crisis for the AIA at a time when the British Press had grown suspicious of Russia's ability to manipulate "western intellectuals who were sympathetic to Communism to create peace campaigns in the West" (*Ibid.*, 82-3). My gratitude to Prof. Harriet Senie of City College, who called my attention to and provided a copy of the exhibition catalogue *AIA*.

<sup>90</sup> Morris and Radford record Alloway's activity through the AIA archives twice, in 1949 (p. 83) and 1958 (p. 93). This author's research at the London Tate Gallery Archives showed Alloway's membership recorded in the handwritten dues book for the AIA paid only for the year of 1949. Despite the reputation of the AIA as a leftist organization, until they deleted their political clause in 1953, Alloway's only record within the AIA supports his assertive apoliticism rather than an overtly politicized position. As a member of the 1949 Exhibitions Committee, he was one of several authors for this statement: "We would like to stress that the (AIA) gallery has been and will continue to be completely independent of political policies or controversies within the AIA. The gallery has **NO POLITICAL BASIS WHATSOEVER**". (Original capitals and boldface.) See Morris and Radford, 83, top. This author was unable to locate further record of Alloway in the AIA at the Tate despite the Morris and Radford reference (p. 93) to his letter of 1958 to Diana Uhlman (a member of the AIA exhibition committee) complaining against the AIA decision to omit "American painters you were offered" for the foreign section of their 25th Anniversary exhibition. John Coplans was by this time part of the AIA and apparently active in obtaining foreign artists for their 1958 exhibition. The AIA dues book showed Coplans a member for two years, 1958 and 1959. My thanks to the staff at the Tate Gallery Archive for their professionalism and their many courtesies in person and cyberspace.

position of special, interest to students and studies of mass culture from the 1930s onward, then cultural studies of the 1950s, media studies of the 60s, feminist philosophies of the 70s, and an art world of the 1980s and 90s convinced by poststructural and Lacanian theory that representation is, or was, the relevant realm of the political.<sup>91</sup> This is one reason why Alloway has continued to be invoked as relevant in the 1990s and why at least an outline of the intersection between the political and the cultural is needed.

It is a curious fact that in England the Communist Party (CP) was and remained very small, not particularly revolutionary, nor certain of itself. One would never know Karl Marx had spent 30 years living and working in England. Yet it was pervasive, if piecemeal, in its influence, likely because it had to negotiate with other agendas, thus communicate across a broad spectrum. Once established in 1920 the party more or less had to follow the United Front propagated by Moscow and presented itself as the Left Wing of the Labour Party.<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately the Labour Party, begun as the worker's party when officially formed in 1900, ranged in position from staunchly anti-Marxist to lukewarm socialist. Conversely, the CP always, and typically, considered Labour reformers a liberal sell-out of the working class. Marxist historian David McLellan's

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<sup>91</sup>See for example Kate Linker's argument against the "realpolitik" of 1970s feminists as passé and, under the influence exerted by Lacanian theory among intellectuals in the 1980s art world, her naming the field of representation as the main arena of cultural politics. Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum, 1984), 330-41. Originally published in *Parachute*, no. 32, Fall 1983.

<sup>92</sup>There were earlier Marxist organizations. See David McLellan's brief but trustworthy synopsis in *Marxism After Marx, an Introduction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 307-11. My brief discussion is based on his work. David Dworkin, whose discussion this dissertation also follows and is cited above, appears to follow much of McLellan's outline.

characterization of the early Labour Party of the 1890s could be applied today and certainly after 1945 when Labour briefly returned to postwar power, prior its banishment by the conservative Tory politics of the 1950s. Labour, McLellan wrote, “avoided ideas of revolution and class confrontation and embodied a more ethical, non-conformist approach to socialism.”<sup>93</sup>

Even during the international radicality of the 1930s the CP made little headway although its power reportedly exceeded its small size due to its connections to the British trade unions. But in general, both of the two dominant traditions of the left in Britain--the reformist social democracy of Labour and the CP Marxist-Leninist line--failed to address the new problems of postwar capitalism and social restructure. Rather it was the wide range of progressive British intellectuals who had formed the British version of the international Popular Front during the 1930s and early 40s that saw and used, if not Communist then, Western Marxist ideas as the way to oppose Fascism prior to WW II. After WW II the same broad coalition used generalized Marxist-leftist ideology in an attempt to address the postwar changes and eventually to oppose or renegotiate Marxism, as Russia was recast from world war ally to cold war enemy. By 1956 the first

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<sup>93</sup>However, as the worker’s party, Labour was supposed to be socialist and its anti-Marxist position made it unique among worker’s parties affiliated with the Second International (McLellan, 307). Today under Tony Blair there is no such pretense or alignment by Labour as encoded in their claim to a central-left position.

or early British New Left emerged from within this same milieu due to the schisms and inabilities of both Labour and the CP.<sup>94</sup>

Neither Labour nor the CP were adequate to the new conditions and a “cultural Marxism” developed as the oppositional response to the British Conservative political victories and the shifts demanded by postwar economies and culture in a search for new and relevant social models.<sup>95</sup> Thus the CPs job was relegated to tugging Labour leftward

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<sup>94</sup>Michael Kinny, *The First New Left. British Intellectuals after Stalin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), 4. The beginning of the British New Left is traditionally dated to the shock and British response to the invasion of Hungary by Russia in 1956.

<sup>95</sup>Although the names and contributions of this group of intellectuals has long been recognized, attempts to group them under one term is relatively new and problematic due to their diversity. Nor are the scholars from this period, many of whom remain alive and working as their own historiographers, without their own agendas, thus producing different versions of relations. The most famous example is that of the accounts and consequent conflicting histories of the British New Left as defined by Perry Anderson versus his predecessors at the *New Left Review* (NLR), Stuart Hall (the editor who resigned in 1961), and the NLR gadfly E.P. Thompson. That this argument continues, see Hall’s analysis of Anderson’s objections in his 1983 essay “The Problem of Ideology. Marxism without Guarantees,” republished in *Stuart Hall. Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 25-46, especially 26. Indeed, the role and position of Hall in the early formation of Cultural Studies is a debated issue.

Michael Kinney—who with Dworkin acknowledges a debt to Stuart Hall—followed the work of historians in the 1980s to establish this group as the early version of the British New Left from 1956 to 1962. Dworkin designated a more diverse category of “cultural Marxists” who arose from Marxist historians and scholars of literature.

At stake is the retrospective historicizing of this period as a leftist intellectual cauldron for much of what follows in British intellectual history, but especially for the development of cultural studies; i.e., Dworkin, et al., want to stress the political heritage for cultural studies. Implicitly or explicitly this helps vitiate the charge against Cultural Studies as merely cultural. Thus we have such curious and convoluted formations as, for instance, Anderson’s New Left characterization of Raymond Williams, generally acknowledged as one of the founding figures of Cultural Studies and a Western Marxist, whose position is discussed below: “the most distinguished socialist thinker” from the Western working class, whose work closely corresponds to “the pattern of Western Marxism” but is not “that of a Marxist” although his work will necessarily have to “be part of any future revolutionary culture.” (Anderson, 105, note 14.) The specific details and orientation of this period are likely to be contested for some time.

The dissertation generally follows Dworkin’s lead by using “cultural Marxists” as the designation to include a range from committed Marxists to liberal writers on culture, even though each camp takes offense at the other as ineffective. That is, the dissertation attempts to utilize a broad perspective and currently favors the argument that, yes, there was a unique, almost undefinable, period of synthesis in England in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s that has no single name although composed of and/or derived from the Popular Front, a period of great influence and within which the critical thinking of the young Alloway can best be understood. Generally the term New Left is used here to mean post-1962 leftism under Perry Anderson’s take-over of the NLR and his dismissal of socialist humanism and prior claims for an existent British revolutionary tradition. Anderson favored the French Revolution as the model and in England wanted more “theoretical rigor” over the older Left’s “sentimental populism.” (See Dworkin’s synopsis in chapter 3, 79-124, especially after p. 112. Dworkin, p. 75, considers the New Left

while more traditional areas of British intellectual life--history, literature and economics<sup>96</sup>-  
-made use of, intermixed with, and, in turn, developed contributions to, Marxist theory.

As Dennis Dworkin summarized the development in England of the 1940s and 50s:

I view British cultural Marxism in terms of constructive but by no means harmonious dialogue and debate between, and within, the disciplines of history and cultural studies . . . this cultural Marxist tradition . . . must be seen in the context of the crisis of the British Left, a crisis virtually coterminous with the postwar era.<sup>97</sup>

The political was to be reconceived in terms of culture. To do so the cultural Marxists were able to call upon an established legacy of Marxist discussions of culture that already fused the political with the cultural, although not in ways adequate to

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in decline by 1962-3 because it owed its impetus to the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament, which was crippled by the 1963 Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.)

The phrase(s) "early" or "first" New Left refers to the period argued by Kinney, 1956-1962, roughly synonymous with but more restrictive than Dworkin's cultural Marxists. In this way Kinney, like Dworkin, works to offset what he acknowledges are interpretations hostile to the intellectual contributions of the early New Left; i.e., they were too moralistic, too populist and empirical, yet also hampered by the Marxism of its ex-communist participants and/or insufficiently Marxist, i.e., too idealistic and eclectic. (See Kinney, 3.) In short, I suggest that their readings of the early New Left also encode an attempt to counter Perry Anderson's post-62 dismissal of it as ineffectual. Specifically, their readings would also serve to clear the air around Stuart Hall, a founder of cultural studies, and to vitiate the charges against it as lacking in economic and social praxis. Generally they accept and argue Hall and the early or first New Left as populist and Anderson as the intellectual theoretician operating at a remove from social realities. This view neatly connects the early New Left to the working class cultural studies orientation of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams.

I favor Dworkin's "cultural Marxism," over Marwick's "cultural socialism" or "society of consensus," because the phrase acknowledges a distinct pattern and conscious use of Marxist theory and traditions and a greater diversity of participants (Marwick's cultural socialists), albeit with less rigorous application of Marxist ideas; i.e., Western Marxism remained a pervasive influence of varying degrees.

<sup>96</sup>McLellan, 308. Dworkin, who many years later seems to follow McLellan's judgments and divisions, develops, as will this dissertation, the Marxist historians and selected bits of literary theory while ignoring Marxist economics. However, the latter may also hold many parallels since Leftist British economic theory from 1960 onward seems to concentrate on issues of circulation and exchange rather than production. Much the same could be said of Alloway's criticism thus offering another parallel in the history of ideas. See Piero Sraffa (1898-1983), himself a friend of Gramsci and considered a "closet Marxian," whose book, begun in the 1920s, *The Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (1960), played such a major role in reformulating economic theory at Cambridge and elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>97</sup>Dworkin, 3.

postwar and British realizations and needs. Perhaps the best known were the ideas established by the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, a think-tank of German intellectuals who from a Marxist viewpoint systematically confronted the failures in the 1930s of Social Democratic reforms and the doctrines of Moscow-oriented Communism, described by them as “vulgar Marxism” for their over reliance on economic substructure and its ossified relation to the cultural superstructure.<sup>98</sup> To balance the positivist strain within both capitalism and vulgar Marxism they attempted to recover and apply the philosophic dimension in Marxist thought achieved in the 1920s by such Marxist theoreticians as Karl Korsch and Georg Lukács and thus were primogenitors in reshaping Marxism into Western Marxism, leaving a legacy still used today.<sup>99</sup> A generalized comparison of their ideas with those of British cultural Marxists from this period seems consequential.<sup>100</sup>

The Frankfurt School, and Marxists in general, faced the failure of revolutionary movements to counter capitalism and the failures of both an economic analysis and a

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<sup>98</sup>See McLellan’s discussion of the Frankfurt School, 258-279. The influence of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is crucial to this mix--both for Perry Anderson’s New Left and for cultural studies--but that influence comes later, around 1962-63, after Alloway had left the country. However, since the case made by this dissertation is on behalf of the influence of a generalized history of ideas, a case for parallels between the nature of Alloway’s criticism and Gramscian ideas could (but will not here) be made; e.g. Alloway’s criticism as a type designed to counter the hegemony of idealist criticism.

<sup>99</sup>McLellan argues, pp. 258-9, that due to the disillusionment of the Frankfurt School in the 1920s with both the West and the Soviet Union, the school members attempted to regain a greater philosophical dimension for a Marxism they considered too oriented to economic analysis. They wanted to allow Marxist thought to concentrate on the “cultural superstructure of bourgeois society” (259). They turned to the ideas of the Council Communists of the 1920s such as Karl Korsch and especially to the early work of Georg Lukács, prior his move to Moscow in 1929 and a more doctrinaire Stalinism. Also see McLellan, 157-164 for the changes in Lukács thought.

<sup>100</sup>The following summary generally follows that of Dworkin’s comparisons, 4-7.

proletarian vanguardism. They, and later the British, advocated a revolution against Marx's *Capital*--against the simplistic belief that the laws of Marxist economics guaranteed the collapse of capitalism and the triumph of proletarianism. Both turn to other specific yet different sources and both shared a recognition that culture played a critical role in securing the masses' acquiescence to the dominant ideology and the status quo. Thus both emphasized the cultural and ideological dimensions of social life, stressing the autonomy of culture and ideology within the social domain. They both accepted and argued culture as political terrain, and, although it was the Frankfurt School that held this line more, both attempted to grasp society as a "totality." This meant not only a shift in attention from the economic substructure to the cultural superstructure, but a conviction that the relationship between the two was far more complex. Neither group liked the USA. Frankfurt School intellectuals considered advanced capitalism the equal of fascism and the British cultural Marxists, while less vociferous, disliked it for a wide range of capitalist related reasons.<sup>101</sup> For instance, E.P. Thompson felt the USA was responsible for the Cold War as a purposeful strategy to stymie development of socialist alternatives.

The differences were no less consequential. The upper-middle class Jewish intellectuals in Frankfurt rejected Lenin's concept of a vanguard party because it suppressed dissent but they felt the workers could never realize revolutionary consciousness on their own behalf. They felt that critical thought itself was a form of

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<sup>101</sup>In a famous aphorism Max Horkheimer stated: "He who does not wish to speak of capitalism should also be silent about Fascism." Max Horkheimer, "Die Juden und Europe," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 8 (1939), 115. Herbert Marcuse felt that liberalism and "the total authoritarian state" developed from the same social order. See his *Negations* (London, 1968), 19. Both examples are cited by McLellan, 265.

revolutionary practice, thus they were “radical intellectuals” with no overt qualms about not being workers; they thought intellect was revolutionary and felt no need to join the workers or to work within radical movements. As McLellan points out, their “work” was to clarify the opposing forces at work in society to raise the (class) consciousness of the exploited as a weapon in the struggle for emancipation.<sup>102</sup> But they never formed a significant relationship with the political organizations of the working class.

In contrast, the British have had a long, well-recognized intellectual tradition of empiricism and opposition to theory, thus the Frankfurt School’s turn to recover the Hegelianism of early Marx as an alternative to economism was antithetical to their impulses. Their “work” was not philosophical in nature but historical, and it was fascinated with the problem of the relation between working-class and radical movements. They seemed to feel their intellectual work contributed somehow to both these movements but the British refused to remain aloof from working-class politics and continued to struggle with the relation between theory and practice. British intellectuals, unlike the Frankfurt School members, have always worked within the context of movements, or, developed their theory in direct relation to their working-class roots, either as personal experience or from empirical study. One example over time is that of the well-known Marxist historian E.P. Thompson, who not only fought in World War II but left Cambridge in 1947 to help the People’s Youth of Yugoslavia build a 150-mile railroad. Shaped by the ideals of and hope for a socialist culture framed by the Popular

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<sup>102</sup>McLellan, 259-260.

Front, he worked for 30 years in the disarmament movement to help end a Cold War whose polarity he felt was designed, in large part by the USA, to freeze out all other possible developments. The Marxist British historians remained historical in nature; their sense of “totality” differed from the Frankfurt School in the sense that it was biased to a neo-romantic and operant British experience of the working class. The work of Raymond Williams and his North Country renaissance comes to mind as examples, which will be discussed later.<sup>103</sup>

Of all the differences with the Frankfurt Marxists, the most significant was the British attitude toward modern culture. The Frankfurt School, as is well known although much debated, held the tendency to see contemporary culture as the debased mass entertainment of the culture industry, one that encouraged the masses to think as passive consumers; a culture that undermined individual autonomy and independence of judgment and induced acceptance rather than critical resistance to dominant social relations.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>Michael Saler, in his book *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England, Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) discusses the broad strain of modernism in England of the 1920s and 30s as linked to the early Arts and Crafts traditions, and continued through the attitudes and instrumentations of “medieval modernists” such as Herbert Read (who founded the ICA and is cited by the IG as the enemy) and Frank Pick, who as head of the London Underground “sought to integrate modern art with modern life” (Salser, ix). Saler argues that medieval modernism ends in 1945 (chapter six). The dissertation takes up the underlying precepts in chapter five with the intersection of populism and modernism, and argues their influence on, as well as its difference from, Alloway.

<sup>104</sup>The arguments here are well beyond the confines of the dissertation. Suffice it to say that this author does not accept the many gross generalizations used by many later commentators to summarize the position of the Frankfurt School regarding the nature of people and culture, i.e., despite an overemphasis by them on the homogeneity created by the culture industry, Adorno’s arguments remain perhaps the most important analysis and theory of individuality in the twentieth-century. But they did reject popular culture as an arm of capitalist industry, and equated capitalism with fascism via use of mass mediation. Alloway and the IG would be anathema to their position, because they lacked a sufficiently critical attitude towards the social consequences of capital. In fact, as argued below, Alloway represents a critique of their “theory” of mass culture.

Perhaps the most obvious and best-known statement of the Frankfurt School came in the chapter “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in the book by Max Horkheimer and Theodor

For the British cultural Marxists, beginning roughly 20 years later and more directly involved in culture mediated by capital, modern culture was more complicated, even contradictory, lurching forward but nevertheless moving as a long continuum.<sup>105</sup> Certainly the early development of cultural studies in the mid-to-late 1950s had a generally, although not completely, sympathetic view typical of the English postwar landscape that wanted to understand mass cultural consumption from the consumers point of view rather than from the producers.<sup>106</sup> It was an attitude that without their direct class experience might otherwise be dismissed as unduly optimistic or merely a retrograde conservatism, a kind of residual prewar humanism or idealism.

The conditions of postwar economic recovery set a major and pervasive tone difficult to gauge in hindsight. But generally, as cultural studies observed that people's response was frequently creative and varied, they were able to regard popular culture in a potentially subversive relationship to its consumers, a platform upon which they

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W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1982). The book was originally published in German in 1944, written during WW II, begun in Germany and finished during their so-called exile in the USA.

<sup>105</sup> As outlined in chapter five with the 1951 Festival of Britain, much of the fusion between Tory government, capital industries and art were understood and accepted in postwar England as necessary for economic competition and recovery.

<sup>106</sup> Even today the old polarity of modern versus populist or romantic is often used to describe the conditions of 1950s England. Chapters four and five attempt to reinscribe some sense of the complex relationships that existed at that time and how Alloway's ideas relate to that complexity. The same distinctions can be and are used to argue differences between the early roots and later attitudes in the field of cultural studies, i.e., the early proponents such as Hoggart and Williams maintained closer ties to an authentic, and thus romantic, view of British folk culture. Due to this they are seen today as conservative despite their radicality in their own time. (See the discussions in this chapter.) Eventually the dissertation argues that it is the far more open acceptance by Alloway and the IG of the capitalist mediated world of mass communications and culture that precedes, and perhaps intersects and shapes, its later acceptance by cultural studies.

eventually developed their theory of subcultures as active agents of social change.<sup>107</sup> The Marxists historians held approximately the same attitudes as the cultural Marxists, although they stressed class struggle more than cultural values, and their study of past periods implied that the struggle was an ongoing process, lending credence to the contemporary moment as part of a holistic and continuing cultural struggle.

Why did such a distinct pattern develop in Britain? As mentioned, many but not all the cultural intellectuals came from the working class; the most famous of which were Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, two figures claimed by sociology, by the field of Cultural Studies as their founders, and although not pure Marxists, certainly significant in their contributions to Leftist thinking. The postwar support for advanced education also helped this idea. Many were educated at advanced institutions whose class standing prior to the war would have prevented their entrance. Another force was the tradition of workers education that mixed after the war with the renewed adult education program, notably the “Workers’ Educational Association” (W.E.A.), allowing for a unique interchange between workers and intellectuals. More specifically, a commentator such as Dworkin regards four of the books central to Leftist thought and Cultural Studies as direct products of such a worker-intellectual interchange: Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy*, E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*, and both Raymond

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<sup>107</sup>For an outline of the early Chicago School, Birmingham and later British development of subculture theory see, for example, the anthology Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, eds., *The Subcultures Reader*. However, the Birmingham School (BCCCS) does not adopt and redefine subculture theory until the 1970s. The dissertation points out that it is Alloway and the IG that argue for a positive interpretation of the consumer as an active agent rather than a passive recipient. Therein lay the core of their contribution to the critique of the theory of mass culture.

Williams' *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*.<sup>108</sup> Finally, there was a British tradition of unity in place throughout their Imperial period well before the war but now resurgent and applied to the common people who had recently soldiered through to victory together. In short, a postwar Britain had a nationalism combined with a weak but consensual socialism that well exceeded that of the USA in scope, producing unique postwar alignments.

With that, the stage is set to turn to more specific developments in the field we now call Cultural Studies as it emerges in relation to the general context of cultural Marxism. The purpose is to align much of the interest and developments of the IG, and specifically Alloway's critical concerns, with the concept of culture developed from isolated debates into the formation of a field. The considerations below are also an attempt to argue for at least an historical alignment of their particular art theory and criticism with cultural studies and eventually as in advance of the developments in cultural studies.

### **C. From Culture Debates to Cultural Studies in England**

The development of cultural theory in England centers on the evaluation of popular or mass culture and provides an important context and set of interrelations for

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<sup>108</sup>See Dworkin, 6 passim. He also dates the beginnings of a new feminist history to these influences. As has been frequently observed, all three intellectuals come from working-class backgrounds and all taught in the British adult education institutions. Stuart Hall (birthdate given only as "early 1930s" in Jamaica) is a fourth figure sometimes considered as a "founding father" of Cultural Studies but his early writings came a bit later and there remains controversy about its historical significance. (For instance, Stanley Aronowitz excludes him: see his "Between Criticism and Ethnography; Raymond Williams and the Intervention of Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 320-39, especially 320. Thus Hall is excluded from consideration here. However, today, based on his many contributions, he is considered the most prominent and shaping voice in Cultural Studies.

Alloway and the IG. As the previous section established the emergence of a British cultural Marxism, this section briefly outlines the mainstream of British cultural theory emergent from the conservative views of Matthew Arnold and his followers in 1950s England. Both the liberal and conservative traditions--neither of which held a positive attitude toward the emerging and new concept of popular commercial culture--meet in the thinking of Richard Hoggart (1918) and Raymond Williams (1921-1988) to produce the framework for the field of British Cultural Studies. After a basic introduction using Arnold, separate sections are devoted to Hoggart and Williams, the point of which is to tie Alloway more clearly to the context of cultural studies and criticism.

It is generally recognized that the modern concept of a popular or populist culture developed in the nineteenth century as a consequence of the realignments required by urbanization and the Industrial Revolution.<sup>109</sup> Of course the concept of culture has always been plural and related to differences in class and empowerment but the alignment of classes was now strongly tied to the modern European urban centers where industry and wealth were situated. Thus the concept of a modern, popular culture marks a greater and more formalized break from past cultural relationships because the divisions in class were welded to the economic means of production, while at the same time the middle and lower or working classes gained in scope and purchase power.<sup>110</sup> The alignment of capital

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<sup>109</sup>For an abbreviated history of popular culture and the argument for popular culture as a long-standing rather than a modern phenomenon (the "Classicists" versus the "Modernists" debate), see, for example, Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause, "An Introduction to the Study of Popular Culture: What is this Stuff that Dreams are Made Of," in their *Popular Culture, an Introductory Text* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992), 1-35.

<sup>110</sup>See R.J. Morris, *Class and Class Consciousness in the Industrial Revolution 1780-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 22.

and culture is the obvious reason so many cultural theorists came from the ranks of the Marxists, as outlined above. But more generally one can properly speak of a new and important cultural space with important consequences for understanding culture. This cluster of “cultural space” is nebulous in its specific outlines as demonstrated by the many variations used today for popular culture: mass culture, low culture, working class culture, middle-brow culture, kitsch, folk culture, and even the more recent use of media culture.<sup>111</sup> Each term brings a different inflection to the meaning and eventually to speak of popular culture, as Alloway used in “pop culture,” requires a more refined examination. But the initial attitude, if not understanding, to popular culture was established in England by Matthew Arnold, whose view held sway from the mid-nineteenth century into the 1950s in England--and in much of the US debates over mass culture--through his own voice and his revival in the works of Frank Raymond (F.R.) Leavis (1895-1978) and Queenie Dorothy (Q.D.) Leavis (1900?-1982).<sup>112</sup> All are considered conservative in their evaluation of culture but they were far more than simple foils for the later Left: they set paradigms for participation and reaction. Alloway

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<sup>111</sup> Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause, “An Introduction to the Study of Popular Culture: What is this Stuff that Dreams are Made Of,” in *Popular Culture, an Introductory Text* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992): 1-35. For the use of media culture as a designated term see Kellner, *Media Culture*.

<sup>112</sup>See Arnold’s own lengthy introduction and Ian Gregor’s introduction to Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy, an Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith & Elder & Co., 1869; Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1971), and the brief discussion of the Leavises, below.

certainly knew of Arnold and the Leavises, as did anyone concerned with culture, although he did not refer to them directly.<sup>113</sup>

Arnold's best-known and oft-cited definition of culture as "the best that has been thought and said in the world" has made him the favored flagellate of counter-hegemonic arguments everywhere.<sup>114</sup> But his mid-nineteenth century realization that no one class retained the power in the modern world to establish a cultural order led him to emphasize the very power of culture. Thus the general concept of "culture and civilization" became the social arbiter, the guarantee of authority against anarchy in a democratic society, hence the title of his famous 1869 essay *Culture and Anarchy*.

Arnold's central thesis, that culture was to be an internalized process that ultimately led us to perfection and state-led order, came at a time of fundamental shifts in class structure and was repeated by the Leavises from the 1930s onward.<sup>115</sup> In this sense

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<sup>113</sup>A central problem in working with Alloway is his tendency to address ideas and arguments without naming the source or outlining his opposition in such a way as to be immediately recognizable. Thus the burden is on the reader to be informed of the nature of current debates and a certain amount of surmise is needed. Arnold's position was that of the leading cultural critic in England and his understanding of culture has been a staple element in the history of criticism. The personality and ideas of the acerbic Cambridge don F.R. Leavis were well-established by the 1920s and he gave a "sharp, tense, aggressive and venomous lecture at the ICA" in 1953 chaired by Herbert Read, with whom he stridently argued. The description and brief record of the lecture is reported in James King, *The Last Modern, a Life of Herbert Read* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 272 and note 29. Alloway, the Assistant Director of the ICA at that time, would have been present but the reputation of the Leavises would have made Alloway aware of them well prior the lecture-debate.

<sup>114</sup>Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 5: "The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all that matters which most concern us, the best of which has been thought and said in the world; . . . ."

<sup>115</sup>Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 6: "And the culture we recommend is, above all, an inward operation." Ian Gregor's introduction to *Culture and Anarchy*, especially xxi-xxii and note 11, gives this evaluation: "Arnold's influence on modern literary criticism in England has been immense. It has been felt mainly through the work of F.R. Leavis and the journal, *Scrutiny*, which he founded and helped to edit throughout its career from 1932 to 1952 . . . . The influence is not confined to their respective practices as critics. There is a direct connection between Arnold's work as a propagandist for 'culture' and the way in which the study of English literature, chiefly because of Leavis and *Scrutiny*, has come to be seen in

the Leavises simply updated Arnold as they perpetuated the understanding of popular culture as a threatening symptom of cultural decline. However, they were more specific than Arnold in enumerating the elements of popular culture and, through the process of emphasizing mass culture, established the basis for the study of popular culture into the 1950s, albeit in negative terms.<sup>116</sup>

The Leavises' analysis of mass culture as leisure entertainments arose more from a moral judgment that accepted them as signs of the loss of the British organic culture and the relationships established prior to but lost through the advent of the Industrial Revolution. In short, theirs is a very romantic critique of industrialized society. Their reading of popular culture created the nature of the field against which Alloway and the IG reacted in the 1950s. In that sense Alloway was Arnold's and the Leavises' worst nightmare because Alloway not only eventually embraced popular culture but American forms. Even in the nineteenth-century Arnold had feared and warned against Britain becoming too much like the USA--*Americanized* he wrote--known for its democratic leveling processes as outlined at the time through Alexis de Tocqueville's (1805-1859) *Democracy in America* of 1835.<sup>117</sup> This means that the later argument against the inherent

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schools and universities as a repository for traditional values in the face of dehumanizing social pressures." This places the consideration of culture within literature and traditional values.

<sup>116</sup>The Leavises established their position on popular culture in the 1930s through three texts: *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* by F.R. Leavis; *Fiction and the Reading Public* by F.R. and Q.D. Leavis; *Culture and Environment* by F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson.

<sup>117</sup>*Democracy in America* was published in two volumes in French in 1835 and translated into English in four volumes 1835-40; the revised edition of two volumes came, significantly, in 1945. Arnold wrote several times of the dangers of becoming Americanized and outlined the arguments raging in his time period for and against the United States and the danger of parallel developments in England in his *Culture and Anarchy*, 13 passim. The irony here is that Alloway among all the young Brits was self-identified as American, and by his detractors as too Americanized, thus Arnold's nightmare.

relativism of Alloway's (or any) anti-idealist criticism, i.e., that it levels the hierarchies of value, must be seen as part of a long standing argument that is at heart a political argument over the consequences of the democratization of cultural values. It also doubles the irony: Alloway was known and criticized in England for his Americanisms.

At the same time the interests of Alloway and cultural studies were shaped by Arnold and the Leavises through the importance they gave to popular culture and its power. As Tony Bennett summarized:

Even as late as the mid-fifties . . . 'Leavisism' [provided] the only developed intellectual terrain on which it was possible to engage with the study of popular culture. Historically, of course, the work produced by the 'Leavisites' was of seminal importance, constituting the first attempt to apply to popular forms techniques of literary analysis previously reserved for 'serious' works . . . . Perhaps more importantly, the general impact of 'Leavisism' - at least as scathing in its criticisms of established 'high' and 'middle-brow' culture as of popular forms - tended to unsettle the prevailing canons of aesthetic judgment and evaluation with, in the long term, quite radical and often unforeseen consequences.<sup>118</sup>

#### **D. Culturalism: Hoggart, Williams and . . . Alloway?**

A new attitude, today called "culturalism," developed in response to theories of "culture and civilization" by Arnold and the Leavises. Two of the central figures in its formation were Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, both considered founders of the

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<sup>118</sup>Tony Bennett, "Popular culture: themes and issues" in *Popular Culture U203* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982), 5-6. The citation was used by John Storey in a summation on Leavisism in his *An introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1993), 33.

field of Cultural Studies and both known to Alloway and the IG. But the major work of both came at a time when Alloway had already stated his own ideas, so they cannot be argued as specifically causal. There is no doubt that Alloway had access to and could see himself in relation to their ideas since they published in several of the same magazines and journals, such as *Encounter*, *The Listener* and *World Review*.<sup>119</sup> However, since Williams and Hoggart had roots in sociology and Marxist or Leftist theory, showed a greater interest in economic policies and issues of cultural production, and voiced their studies of culture through more academic channels, they are considered as the emergence of Cultural Studies. Hoggart went on to establish the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS) in 1964 (conceived in 1962), while Williams' work derived from and was a major influence on British sociology and the formation of the New Left, as discussed in the previous section.<sup>120</sup> No such markers heralded Alloway or the IG. Further, the known reactions of members of the IG--especially those of Alloway and Reyner Banham--apparently viewed the work of these early culturalists as *retardataire* in comparison to their own positions.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>For example in the January, 1960 issue of *Encounter* Alloway's article "Monster Films" is preceded in the same issue by Hoggart's "The Uses of Television." The contrast in content makes a telling point. See *Encounter* 14.1 (January 1960), 70-72 for Alloway and 38-45 for Hoggart.

<sup>120</sup>See Hoggart's own memories of the process reported in *Birmingham Magazine* at [http://www.publications.bham.ac.uk/birmingham\\_magazine/b\\_magazine1996-99/pg14\\_98.htm](http://www.publications.bham.ac.uk/birmingham_magazine/b_magazine1996-99/pg14_98.htm); accessed 26 November 2002. He came to the University of Birmingham as a professor of modern English literature in 1962 but reportedly conceived of the center during his interview. Sir Allen Lane of Penguin Books, who republished his 1957 *Uses of Literacy* in 1958, guaranteed Hoggart's BCCCS 3000 pounds per annum.

<sup>121</sup>The discussion of this relationship is best situated in chapters four and five, which are given to the specific developments of the IG in London.

Culturalism is a retrospective term for the response of a few cultural critics in England to the Arnold-Leavis tradition of “culture and civilization.” John Storey summarized the relation between Leavisism and culturalism this way:

the Leavisites opened up in Britain an educational space for the study of popular culture. Hoggart and Williams occupy this space in ways that challenge many of the basic assumptions of Leavisism, whilst also sharing some of these assumptions. It is this contradictory nature—looking back to the ‘culture and civilization’ tradition, whilst at the same time moving forward to culturalism and the foundations of the cultural studies approach to popular culture—which has led *The Uses of Literacy*, *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution* to be called both texts of the ‘break’ and examples of ‘left-Leavisism.’<sup>122</sup>

According to Storey, culturalism is a term coined by one of the former directors of the BCCCS, Richard Johnson, to designate the shared points between the three social theorists: the Marxist E.P Thompson, Hoggart and Williams.<sup>123</sup> The latter two reacted to Leavisism--they broke with it but are called left-Leavisist by some--whereas Thompson reacted against mechanistic and economistic Marxism. All three, according to Storey, “insist that by analyzing the culture of a society--the textual forms and documented

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<sup>122</sup>Storey, 43. His third chapter (pp. 43-68) outlines culturalism from Hoggart to its institutionalization at the BCCCS. Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) is considered by all the first development in the new studies; however, it is the work of Raymond Williams in his *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* in 1958 and especially in his book *The Long Revolution* in 1961 “that did much to provide the radical revision necessary to lay the basis for a non-Leavisite study of popular culture.” Storey, 57.

<sup>123</sup>Storey, 43-4. Thompson’s text is *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966). Thompson maintained a different understanding of “culturalism” and emphatically rejected it as a term appropriate to his work. For a Marxist oriented analysis like that of Thompson’s, culturalism’s concentration on the particulars of human life does not give proper attention to the ultimately determining role of underlying economic structures. See Storey, 59-60. Storey also included among the founding texts of culturalism the studies of Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel because their text *The Popular Arts* (1964) has a classic left-Leavisite focus on popular culture, and Hall becomes a later Director of the BCCCS. Storey (p. 43) cites Hall’s opinion that “within cultural studies in Britain, ‘culturalism’ has been the most vigorous, indigenous strand.” The BCCCS later rejects “culturalism” as inadequate.

practices of a culture--it is possible to reconstitute the patterned behaviour and constellations of ideas shared by the men and women who produce and consume the cultural texts and practices of that society. It is a perspective which stresses 'human agency,' the active production of culture, rather than its passive consumption."<sup>124</sup> More than this, "culturalism is a methodology which stresses culture (human agency, human values, human experience) as of crucial importance for a full sociological and historical understanding of a given social formation."<sup>125</sup> Thus culturalists will "study cultural texts and practices in order to reconstitute or reconstruct the experiences, values, etc. - the 'structure of feeling' - of particular groups or classes or whole societies, in order to better understand the lives of those who lived the culture."<sup>126</sup> Simon During, in his *Cultural Studies Reader* understands culturalism as seeing "how particular individuals and communities can actively create new meanings from signs and cultural products . . . ."<sup>127</sup> What emerged is what is now known as "the cultural studies approach to popular

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<sup>124</sup>Storey, 44. This is Storey's more generalized understanding. Stuart Hall has used the term differently, to describe the dominant early paradigm in British Cultural Studies and as the one used at the beginning of the BCCCS. However, he also later argued against the culturalist paradigm as providing insufficient human agency of consequence in early Cultural Studies and made adjustments in the direction of the field. See Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: two paradigms," in *Media. Culture and Society* 2 (1980): 57-72.

<sup>125</sup>Storey, 60.

<sup>126</sup>Storey, 67. The use of "structure of feeling" is a reference to the well-known quotation from Raymond Williams' chapter on the "Analysis of Culture" in his book *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 48.

<sup>127</sup>*The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 7.

culture.”<sup>128</sup> It developed attention to the specifics of individual practices in order to offset a tendency to reduce cultural practices to generalized issues of economics.<sup>129</sup>

Hoggart’s 1957 *The Uses of Literacy* was innovative and influential in the credit he gave working-class people and the new attention to the particulars of working-class experiences. Both issues were contrary to Arnold and the Leavises. However, these considerations are made within a larger frame that sounds very much like a continuation of their more conservative approach. Hoggart pitted the traditional British working-class culture and its entertainment, outlined in the first half of his book, against the imposition of mass culture by capitalism as developed in the second part of the book, with chapters given to the “newer mass art.” He favored the working-class culture’s more traditional entertainment, whose roots he shared, but he condemned the mass arts. On the other hand, the working-class culture he celebrated was not the idealized shared culture of Elizabethan England, resurrected and idealized by the Leavises. Hoggart celebrated the contemporary, and repeatedly argued this distinction with the Leavises, although they are not named in his book. For example, contrary to the vilification of contemporary advertising by the Leavises, Hoggart found the “new sophisticated style . . . truly modern.” Yet these changes were for him ones of technique, which meant “the newer terms are less wholesome than the older.”<sup>130</sup> Hoggart used Arnold’s warnings of

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<sup>128</sup>Storey, 67.

<sup>129</sup>Jennifer Daryl Slack, “The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies” in *Stuart Hall. Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, 116.

<sup>130</sup>Richard Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy. Changing Patterns in English Mass Culture* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957; Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 18. (page citations refer to later edition).

“indifferentism,” when we give ourselves up to the modern flux and flow with warnings against the substitution of quantity for quality.<sup>131</sup> Such judgments mark the differences not simply between Hoggart and the later developments at the BCCCS but more significantly the differences with his contemporary, Lawrence Alloway, who accepted the new terms that Hoggart rejected and made them integral to his basic understanding of culture and a critical method.

Like Hoggart, and as with Williams below, Alloway and other members of the IG thought of themselves as members of the working class, thus operating from within it, with similar values, but, as consumers as well as producers. Yet unlike Storey’s characterization of the culturalists, there was less contradiction, less looking back by the IG, while at the same time they could, and did, argue their own social relevance in the postwar 50s through their interests in urbanism, design and consumption.<sup>132</sup> Thus they also saw themselves as embodiments of the “structure of feeling” of the working class, but since they were artists and designers--or commentators associated with creators--rather than academics and sociologists, they were to create and embody it on an individual level rather than study it. Their fuller and far less critical embrace of the consequences of quantity (“abundance”) arising from mass production places them in partial relation to, but also quite different from, the culturalists. In many of these important aspects, they were in advance of culturalist ideas.

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<sup>131</sup>Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, 161.

<sup>132</sup>However, Alloway, and other members of the IG, were not immune to the influence of the British national revival of arts and design in the late 1940s and early 50s. They felt the call but had different answers, as outlined in chapter five, of a populist modernism.

Obviously the IG and Alloway felt the products of mass culture were significant and worth study in and of themselves,<sup>133</sup> a position that cultural studies condemned in 1958. And although Cultural Studies and the 1990s variant, Visual Culture, will eventually accept the IG premise of the significance of the mass arts, they will always maintain the critical components first embedded by the cultural Marxists of which they are a part, and remain at a distance from mass culture in order to maintain a critical framework.<sup>134</sup> Alloway will argue that this distance has collapsed, much the way Walter Benjamin argued the collapse of critical distance as the new consequence of film and technology in 1936.<sup>135</sup>

The understanding of a proactive audience, or as Alloway and the IG recognized earlier than the culturalists, a “consumer” of culture, is something Alloway and the IG had already developed in practice and in written theory by this time.<sup>136</sup> They desired, accepted, argued and embedded an understanding of culture that is sociological through its interactivity with the audience. Although they were not sociologists, thus not especially motivated to develop a methodology to allow the reconstitution of the values of others,

<sup>133</sup>Many of the IG studies are documented in chapters four and five.

<sup>134</sup>Professor Rosemary Bletter of the City University Graduate Center has pointed out, in conversation with this author, that many of the texts devoted to Visual Culture as a field remain focused on theory and either refuse or limit their discussion with popular or mass culture.

<sup>135</sup>There are various parts of Alloway’s ideas that suggest knowledge of Walter Benjamin’s 1936 essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” (variously reprinted) but there is no specific evidence that he knew it. The earliest currently known reference to Benjamin comes in his essay “Allan Kaprow, Two Views,” (ca. 1966-1969) in his anthology *Topics* (1975), 195-200.

<sup>136</sup>See Alloway’s “L’intervention du spectateur,” *Aujourd’hui: art et architecture*, no. 5 (November 1955): 24-6, on McHale’s constructions as viewer-participative. The dissertation returns to the development of participative space by Alloway and the IG as one of their major contributions through various manifestations, especially exhibition design.

they certainly focused on reconstituting their own experiences, values and “structures of feeling” excluded in models that utilized idealized classes and formations of culture. But Alloway and the IG took one other important step not taken by any cultural theorists who were their contemporaries--they not only accepted but embraced much, although not all, of mass media, then integrated that acceptance into a cultural perspective. It is not simply that Alloway should be seen as related to the development of the culturalist position, but the ways he advanced the new orientation in relation to his group of intellectuals, the artists and critics of London and especially the IG.<sup>137</sup>

### **E. Raymond Williams**

There is far greater kinship between Alloway and Raymond Williams, who like Hoggart favored the values of a romanticized British working-class, but also accepted and used contemporary mass culture, especially films. This is significant because the historical claim made today within cultural studies is that it was the work of Williams in his *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* in 1958 and especially in his 1961 book *The Long Revolution* “that did much to provide the radical revision necessary to lay the basis for a non-Leavisite study of popular culture.”<sup>138</sup> Reading the conclusion to *Culture and Society* or the first part to *The Long Revolution* is like reading an extended statement by Alloway on the nature of culture. The parallels are myriad. An outline of a few of Williams’ early

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<sup>137</sup>As Dick Hebdige noted, after crediting Alloway’s ideas: “However it should not be forgotten that Alloway had taken his cue from the artists, not vice versa.” Dick Hebdige, “Fabulous Confusion! Pop Before Pop!,” in *Visual Culture*, ed. Chris Jenks (London: Routledge, 1995), 104.

<sup>138</sup>Storey, 57.

ideas clarifies the relatively unexplored relationship between art criticism and cultural studies, a history that is suggested here but remains to be written.

Williams realized and examined changes in the concept of culture to develop what he felt modern times demanded, “a new general theory of culture.”<sup>139</sup> His “discovery” was that the idea of culture, tracing it as a “keyword,” was a modern concept come into English thinking with but not limited by the Industrial Revolution. This new understanding was of an “expanding culture” that is both changing and common, specialized and diverse, but now to be considered as “a whole way of life.”<sup>140</sup> Williams considered such contradictions as normative operations, thus his analysis allows for them, but his conclusions are generally dialectic.<sup>141</sup> He was sufficiently clear-minded in his 1958 analysis that his “Foreword” to *Culture and Society* named his future project in ways that not only spelled out the specific course for sociology against the Leavisite traditions but seemed a broad summary, both as a retrospection and future prescription, of the concepts developed by that time within the IG. He wrote:

to examine the idea of an expanding culture, and its  
detailed processes. For we live in an expanding culture,  
yet we spend much of our time regretting the fact, rather

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<sup>139</sup>Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus; New York: Harper and Row, 1958), x. Several of his major positions were developed earlier through his joint founding and editorship of the review *Politics and Letters*, 1946-48, with Clifford Collins and Wolf Mankowitz (see *Culture and Society*, ix) and, with his joint publication in 1954 with Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama Limited, 1954). It seems to this reader that *The Long Revolution* of 1961 is an elaboration on his concepts developed by 1958 via more specific attention to the use of popular culture. Lionel Trilling felt that Arnold’s title *Culture and Society* meant culture or anarchy. Trilling’s comment is from his book-length analysis, *Matthew Arnold* (New York, 1939), 252 and brought to attention by Gregor, xxxi.

<sup>140</sup>See Williams’ “Introduction” to *Culture and Society*.

<sup>141</sup>As he reiterates in *The Long Revolution*, 351: “real contradictions, (which) cannot be argued away but need long and difficult effort for any solution.”

than seeking to understand its nature and conditions. I think a good deal of factual revision of our received cultural history is necessary and urgent . . . (and) in the special field of criticism, we may be able to extend our methods of analysis, in relation to the re-definitions of creative activity and communication which various kinds of investigations are making possible.<sup>142</sup>

The theory of culture “as a theory of relations between elements in a whole way of life” was at the center of Williams thought throughout his life, and marks his radical departure from not only Arnold and Leavis but from Hoggart as well. It means that he accepted an expanded range of lived experience by ordinary people in daily interaction with conditions that changed over time as his core understanding of the modern sense of culture. This is a form of culture that Williams argued (and desired) as truly democratic.

The history of the idea of culture is a record of our reactions, in thought and feeling, to the changed conditions of our common life . . . . The idea of culture describes our common inquiry, but our conclusions are diverse, as our starting points were diverse. The word, culture, cannot be automatically pressed into service as any kind of social or personal directive. Its emergence, in its modern meanings . . . indicates (it) is a process, not a conclusion. The arguments which can be grouped under its heading do not point to any inevitable action or affiliation. They define, in a common field, approaches and conclusions. It is left to us which, if any, we shall take up . . . .<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>*Culture and Society*, x. The deleted section of this quotation marked by the ellipsis also names the differences between Williams concerns as a social reformer and the Independent Group: “I think a good deal of factual revision of our received cultural history is necessary and urgent in such matters as literacy, educational levels, and the press. We also need detailed studies of the social and economic problems of our current expansion, as means towards an adequate common policy. Finally, in the special field of criticism . . . .”

<sup>143</sup>*Culture and Society*, 295 passim.

He condemned the concept of culture as idealized rather than ordinary or particular, and common; as singular rather than diverse; as abstract rather than lived. These were the consequences of culture set in motion by concepts such as industry and democracy: the “long revolution” he introduced in 1958 and expounded in 1961 book form.

The forces which have changed and are still changing our world are indeed industry and democracy. Understanding of this change, the long revolution, lies at a level of meaning which it is not easy to reach. We can in retrospect see the dominative mood as one of the mainsprings . . . .<sup>144</sup>

Yet the pluralism argued here is not his focus; culture is shared because it is social. Its process and our understanding remains dialectic because we are in charge; we “take up” whatever understanding we wish, which means our statements are not objective observations on the nature of reality but rather are audience constructions. Williams seemed to argue that the function of analysis--or as I later argue, the function of criticism for Alloway--is to prevent “dominative moods.” Pluralism, a culture now organized by the forces of industry and technology, and an interventionist audience all parallel Alloway’s concerns.

Williams presented and argued his belief through a dialectic concept of masses. The mere concept of “mass culture” is not only a matter of our level of expectation but a

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<sup>144</sup>*Culture and Society*, 335-6. The informed reader can here begin to see the underlying Marxism of Williams. Under all of Williams cultural theory is the twin reality established by capitalism; material gains at the expense of human spirit. He acknowledged and accepted it but as nothing other than a temporary state, and at times made direct (as well as implicit) critiques of the situation. Many of his comments can only be understood in this light.

self-fulfilling prophecy: “if we believe in the existence of the masses” then democracy will be “mass-rule.”<sup>145</sup> Williams is emphatic in 1958. “There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses . . . . In practice, we mass them, interpret them, according to some convenient formula . . . . Yet it is the formula, not the mass, which it is our real business to examine.”<sup>146</sup> It is not that the concept of masses does not exist, but rather it exists as a consequence of our purpose. We can adopt the qualities of the mob if our purpose is manipulation; then the “convenient formula will be that of the masses.”<sup>147</sup> But, for Williams, reference to mass and masses are not measurements of our society; “they are, rather, symptoms of a basic failure in communication.”<sup>148</sup> This is virtually the same argument Alloway makes, and it is a thesis upon which he built new definitions of culture and criticism.

One way to demonstrate such important issues in a manner relevant to the evaluation of Alloway is briefly to extend consideration into Williams’ amplifications of his ideas in his 1961 book *The Long Revolution*. Here, he discussed the ways the long revolution, one initiated by democracy and industry and favored by Williams, was limited and opposed by various groups or issues that aimed to conserve the status quo. One of these conserving concepts was the “massification of society.” Yet, he does not condemn the concept of mass culture as engineered; rather Williams conducts in 1961 what is

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<sup>145</sup>*Culture and Society*, 298. An entire section discusses mass and masses.

<sup>146</sup>*Culture and Society*, 300.

<sup>147</sup>*Culture and Society*, 303.

<sup>148</sup>*Culture and Society*, 315.

known today as the critique of the concept of mass culture. “What the Americans call the ‘massification’ of society can only happen, however hard the new élites may work, if a majority of the people whom they regard as ‘the masses’ accept this version of themselves.”<sup>149</sup> People, argued Williams, did not accept the stereotyped representations of themselves, on television for example, “as an adequate description of their own feelings.”<sup>150</sup> We see ourselves, at this point in a history hard won, as individuals, and it is individual effort that creates social progress.

He maintained a faith in people as active agents, which is at the heart of a critique of mass culture theory. Thus the process of labeling, such as the use of “mass,” becomes “a skillful stabilization of achieved expectations” that does not reflect the feelings of the people but of the created “other” than oneself. There is an easy solution to avoid having others, the powerful elite and their allies within capitalism, create this expectation of “massification” for you: “The point is always to frame new expectations, in terms of a continuing version of what life could be.”<sup>151</sup> This in 1961 by Williams is a clear statement of Alloway’s function of criticism, as argued below; to constantly re-establish the horizon of expectation, a conclusion Alloway reached about criticism with the same justification used by Williams--the nature of modern culture and the new forms required to match it. As Williams observed in words that sound like Alloway’s analysis and acceptance: “The

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<sup>149</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 349-50 and 352. The other two groups that opposed the long revolution were the “privileged groups” and their allies within the working class that identified with the current order.

<sup>150</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 351.

<sup>151</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 350-1.

long effort to communicate new patterns must continue . . . (because) the patterns of real communication in a society are always changing . . . .”<sup>152</sup>

The position of a mass culture critique can be argued as implicitly political via Williams’ observation in 1958: “To rid oneself of the illusion of the objective existence of ‘the masses’, and to move towards a more actual and more active conception of human beings and relationships, is in fact to realize a new freedom.”<sup>153</sup> Does this mean that Williams was as enthusiastic as Alloway in his acceptance of mass culture? No. Did Alloway have a conscious political program for social change in mind? No again. However, seen from this perspective, his arguments for change as a natural state (“topicality”) certainly become more socially political than he would know or admit. There are no direct appeals in Alloway to democracy or freedom, but he argues for acceptance of their consequences; thus they are implicit in all his writings.

In *The Long Revolution* Williams set out his objections to the idea that a great deal of “popular culture” was bad. First he observed that the wholesale condemnation of forms of popular entertainment were more often “a way of asserting social distinction” to demonstrate the inferiority of “the masses and the young,” but neither did he want to avoid “the problem of bad culture.” He accepted football, jazz, gardening and homemaking as important cultural forms but wanted to pass to the important question.

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<sup>152</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 352.

<sup>153</sup>*Culture and Society*, 335. It is generally recognized that a motivation for Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School was the freedom to realize a full, free and individual life unfettered by the demands of capitalist formations.

Can we also agree, though, that the horror-film, the rape-novel, the Sunday strip-paper and the latest Tin Pan drool are not exactly in the same world and that the nice magazine romance, the manly adventure story . . . and the pretty, clever television advertisement are not in it either? The argument against these things, and the immense profits gained by their calculated dissemination, cannot afford to be confused by the collateral point that a good living culture is various and changing, that the need for sport and entertainment is as real as the need for art, and that the public display of 'taste', as a form of social distinction is merely vulgar.<sup>154</sup>

For Williams capitalism sponsored these bad forms to the elimination of the more authentic forms. Although more accepting than Hoggart, here Williams shares Hoggart's general limit as to what constitutes culturalism. Not especially optimistic, he argued that society must try to solve the problem by supporting "artists who are seriously trying to create new forms or do significant work in traditional forms."<sup>155</sup>

Williams repeatedly used the same concept as Alloway did to describe culture as multiplicity: "field." In his foreword to *Culture and Society*, after listing the large number of words that are new or changed in meaning during the modern period, Williams elaborated the nature of the "field": "The field which these changes cover is again a field of general change, introducing many elements which we now point to as distinctively

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<sup>154</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 336-7.

<sup>155</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 337. Barry Curtis, in "From Ivory Tower to Control Tower" in *Independent Group*, 221, finds in the conclusion to *The Long Revolution* an argument by Williams for the function of the critic: "The task of the cultural critic is to distinguish 'good art and argument from bad' and to resist the commercial vitiation of cultural standards." Although the quotation attributed to Williams by Curtis ("good art and argument from bad") does not seem to appear in quite this form, the general sense of Curtis' point seems valid. However, Williams' defense of certain types of commercial cultural forms argues for greater nuance in stating his position.

modern in situation and feeling. It is the relations within this general pattern of change which it will be my particular task to describe.”<sup>156</sup>

Alloway will redefine criticism as a process directed to and shaped by a field of change moving easily from abstraction to realism in a way that Williams’ outline helps us to understand. Like Williams, Alloway sought the new and old patterns and their relationships within fields of change. Williams constantly reminded the reader of the new modern condition of culture as complexity: In a simple formula also argued and applied by Alloway, increased diversity meant complexity. In Williams words: “the general tendency of modern development has been to bring many more levels of culture within the general context of literacy than was ever previously the case.”<sup>157</sup> The word which more than any other comprises these complex patterns of changes and relations in the modern world is “culture, with all its complexity of idea and reference.”<sup>158</sup> The longevity and centrality of the issue for Alloway is testified to by the title of his anthology of essays written between 1971 and 1983: *Network: Art and the Complex Present* (1984). For both commentators the nature of modern culture is inscribed within complexity, with patterns of change as its measurement as well as its salvation.

Williams accepted and used the new sciences of mass-communication and information theory. His discussions were frequently in terms of transmission, signal and reception, the same as used earlier by Alloway. Williams and Alloway saw earlier than

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<sup>156</sup>*Culture and Society*, xv.

<sup>157</sup>*Culture and Society*, 309.

<sup>158</sup>*Culture and Society*, xv.

most what is obvious today: Mass-communication is merely the by-product of the new technical means of mass communication.<sup>159</sup> As the means of transmission increased (“multiple transmission”), so too did the audience. Both Williams and Alloway attempted to develop analyses that responded to the new cultural conditions of technology and communication theory, and, more for Alloway than Williams, the development of science. However, the ultimate issue is not technology for Williams. The new techniques may condition the transmission but the reception and response depend on other factors, such as “the whole circumstances of the common life.” For Williams, this related to the project of art because he felt that modern culture was historically situated at the third phase of art, where existed “a deliberate effort towards the reintegration of art with the common life of society; an effort which centered around the word ‘communication’.”<sup>160</sup>

Alloway used the term anthropological to characterize his approach to culture--an approach accepted and implemented by many members of the IG--to designate an approach that treated all aspects of postwar culture as equal, from pot shards to fine arts. The alignment of an anthropological perspective with the acceptance of a horizontal, as opposed to a vertical and hierarchical, view of culture is obvious to those aware of this side of the 1950s intersection of anthropology and semiotic theory.<sup>161</sup> But a brief look at

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<sup>159</sup>*Culture and Society*, 300.

<sup>160</sup>*Culture and Society*, 296.

<sup>161</sup>The relevance of anthropology for the 1950s and 60s has not been missed by commentators. As Brian Wallis summarized Alloway’s position: “. . . diverse forms of representation were—along with the ‘fine arts’—part of what Alloway called the ‘fine art/pop art continuum.’ This referred to a linear, rather than a pyramidal or hieratic conception of images. Asserting the cultural necessity for both high art and popular art, and encouraging a more ‘anthropological’ understanding of cultural representations, this theory proposed an equal status among such forms while acknowledging their differences.” Brian Wallis,

Williams' use of the term modifies the understanding in several important ways and points us in a direction that may be used to later inform the discussion of the apparent contradictions in Alloway's relation to Pop art (as popular culture) and to Abstract Expressionism or color-field painting, developed in chapter six. The key term to cultural analysis for Williams--and as later delineated for the criticism of Alloway--is pattern; pattern within culture. But a bit of explanation is needed to make this point.

It is not as simple as stating that Williams also accepted an anthropological view or that Alloway did, while Williams retained a hierarchy of values for cultural forms. Williams also used the term anthropology but it is a consequence of and secondary to his primary term, "social organization." Williams argued there are three general categories in the definition of culture. The "ideal" definition of culture accepts universal values and the aim of human perfection. The second, a "documentary" category of culture is the documentation of active details, with the caveat that documentation is itself a critical activity of wide-ranging biases. Third is the "social definition of culture in which culture is a description of a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. The analysis

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"Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: The Independent Group and Popular Culture," 15. John Storey, 157, in his only mention of Alloway, argues him as the first theorist of the movement in Britain towards Pop art which "rejects Arnold's definition of culture as 'the best that has been thought and said'; preferring instead Williams' anthropological definition of culture as a 'whole way of life.'" However, Storey, a cultural historian, used the word Pop to mean pop art and not popular culture as it was used by Alloway and the IG in England. Yet there is some justification to the confusion as Banham and Alloway, by the mid-1950s, refer to Pop Architecture and Pop Art in England without qualifying the term, as discussed in chapters five and six.

of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture . . . .”<sup>162</sup>

Alloway and the IG clearly opposed the first, culture as a set of universal ideals. One could easily conclude that the second category, the documentary definition of culture, was closer to Alloway and the concept of equality between all artifacts as implied by a predisposition to anthropology. But Williams argued that it was the “concept of ‘social character’ (that) is similar to the anthropological concept of a ‘pattern of culture’.”<sup>163</sup> And it is pattern that is the key word for Williams, as it was for Alloway.<sup>164</sup> General cultural analysis concerns itself with patterns because for Williams they show the “common element,” allow us to recover what Eric Fromm calls the “social character” or what Ruth Benedict calls--in the expression Williams cited frequently and favored--the “pattern of culture.”<sup>165</sup> And these patterns of culture best show “in the arts of a period.” Later Williams clarified what he meant in his use of Ruth Benedict: “A ‘pattern of

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<sup>162</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 41 passim.

<sup>163</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 80.

<sup>164</sup>Williams, in *The Long Revolution*, 46-7: “Cultural history must be more than a sum of the particular histories, for it is with the relations between them, the particular forms of the whole organization, that it is especially concerned. I would then define the theory of culture as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life. The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships . . . A key-word, in such an analysis, is pattern; it is with the discovery of patterns . . . that general cultural analysis is concerned.” *The Long Revolution*, 46-7.

<sup>165</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 47. The use of Ruth Benedict and the search for the patterns of culture becomes a bit ironic in the context of Alloway if one considers the development of Pop art and Abstract Expressionism as oppositional rather than an evolution of related issues. Stephen Polcari established the relationship between Ruth Benedict and the significance of anthropological universals during the 1930s and 1940s in his *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*: (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 4-5, 29, 36-38.

culture', like a 'social character', is a selective response to experience, a learned system of feeling and acting, in a particular society."<sup>166</sup>

Several major issues derive from this rather detailed but important discussion in relation to Alloway. If there is an implicit correlation between Alloway and Williams' understandings, then the understanding of anthropology for Williams and--later to be detailed--for Alloway, is not simply an acceptance of cultural artifacts as in an archeological excavation, as defined by Williams' second, documentarian concept of culture. The analysis begins that way, empirically, but an anthropological analysis can now also be seen as a search for a "pattern of culture," i.e., a structural analysis whose material elements include the feelings of a period.

Much remains to be said of Alloway's attention to patterns, but Stephen Polcari has already pointed to the relation between the universal mythic content sought in Abstract Expressionism of the 1940s and the earlier anthropological search of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead for universal patterns.<sup>167</sup> The analysis of Williams and later

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<sup>166</sup>*The Long Revolution*, 81. Williams, the cultural Marxist, cites Benedict the anthropologist to protect the concept of individuality: Identifying the pattern does not eradicate the individual because Williams believes the rapport between the two "is so close that it is not possible to discuss patterns of culture without considering specifically their relation to individual psychology." Nor does the use of pattern eliminate those who dissent from it; i.e., it need not function as a metanarrative. (No source is given for the Benedict quotation.) The use and understanding of Williams' core concept of patterns and conventions is likewise a crucial issue for Alloway, as it is for other members of the IG. Richard Hamilton used the biological forms and patterns of D'Arcy Thompson, while Peter and Alison Smithson predicated much of their urban theory on patterns of motion and vision, as discussed in chapter five.

<sup>167</sup>Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern*, *ibid.* Also from Rita Barnard, *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance: Kenneth Fearing, Nathaniel West, and Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 157: "The Depression decade was a time when cultural anthropology rose to greater prominence. The important and popular work of Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Robert Redfield laid down what George Marcus and Michael Fischer have termed the 'ethnographic paradigm' of their discipline. . . ." Ruth Benedict published her *Patterns of Culture* in 1934.

of Alloway suggests a variation on the same issue. This provides a basis to understand Alloway's conversion of the "field" from the formal analysis of art to one of sociological properties and his own form of "the long revolution"--which he calls, famously and prior to Williams, the "long front of culture"--that links the concerns of Abstract Expressionism to Pop art and art to contemporary culture rather than approaching their interrelationships in the terms of avant-gardist ruptures or breaks accepted by much of art history. What Alloway and the IG intended by their use of the word anthropology to describe their new esthetic is closer to what is meant by the word sociology, and with Alloway, as for Williams, what was meant by cultural patterns. The difference is that Williams made the "social character" of the patterns his primary concern.

Finally Williams and Alloway are among a small but important group of social commentators that initiated a new attitude toward film. Alloway's perspectives are discussed in chapter six but a few words regarding Williams position are appropriate. Williams was among the first to use popular Hollywood films immediately after WW II as a teaching device for the mass education of adults returning from war and in 1954 he co-published a book with Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film*.<sup>168</sup> The aim of the book in two essays was to break the alignment of film theory with realism in order to realign the analysis of film with traditions of drama. It was a political project in the sense of breaking the hold of realism over the masses by identifying the conventions used to create a feeling

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<sup>168</sup>Each authored an essay in their *Preface to Film*: Williams "Film and its Dramatic Tradition," 1-55; Orrom, "Film and its Dramatic Techniques," 57-122.

of reality accepted by viewers.<sup>169</sup> As Orrom stated: “what I intend to examine is whether this idea of ‘reality’, and the conventions it requires, can ever fully utilize the possibilities of the film medium for dramatic purposes . . . . Even such a distinguished critic as T.S. Eliot falls into the trap of thereby believing that the essence of the film is ‘realism’ because it can reproduce scenes of actuality so easily.”<sup>170</sup> Orrom argues consideration of technology and the physical methods of film making as elements of drama.

Williams concentrated on an analysis of dramatic conventions in film to clarify how the conventions function. The conventions, or structural patterns, participated in the traditions of life<sup>171</sup> and he saw his understanding as a counter to the false interpretation of forms created as only non-conventional established by the Romantic Movement.<sup>172</sup>

Williams, like Alloway, was engaged in the ordinary, and movies use a set of dramatic devices that rely on both ordinary convention and experimentation. Films are a mix of the conservative, i.e., the old and repetitious, with the novel or new, especially through

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<sup>169</sup>In this sense it parallels the analysis of film by the Marxist film critic Siegfried Kracauer. For example, see his analysis of the way in which Nazi films, such as “Triumph of the Will,” attempted to restitch and transform reality by use of documentary film techniques in his book *From Caligari to Hitler, a Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 297 passim. Other parallels exist here between Williams and Kracauer, such as in Williams’ section on “Screen Dramaturgy” and the basic conviction that historical periods were embedded in basic patterns of feeling, a conviction that led Kracauer to concern himself “with the psychological pattern of a people at a particular time (p. 8).” However, despite Kracauer’s assertions that his book was “not concerned with some national character pattern allegedly elevated above history” (p. 8), his analyses of German films became teleological, placed in the service of his ultimate goal, to understand “Hitler’s ascent and ascendancy” (p. 11). There is no direct indication Alloway knew Kracauer’s work but there are important parallels and differences between them. For instance, Alloway’s emphasis on popular culture and the priority he assigned to popular film are preceded by Kracauer’s arguments in the introduction to his 1947 text. Yet, in contrast to Kracauer’s efforts to reveal the way in which reality was fused with fiction, Alloway was interested in and celebrated the creation of seamlessness through technical means. See the discussion of Alloway’s analysis of popular film in 5.F.

<sup>170</sup>Williams and Orrom, 60 and 61.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 16.

technological changes. This nuanced reading of how history works has tremendous implications, and parallels Alloway's understandings and use of patterns and their changes.

But for Williams conventions were also something deeper; a way in which form inscribed not simply changes of style but united with changes in life and culture. The nature of conventions was a vital part of a "structure of feeling." As the structure of feeling changed, the older means seemed hollow and new means or conventions came into existence. When changes "in the whole conception of a human being" occur, conventions change.<sup>173</sup> This argument ties conventions to a kind of populist unconscious but within material experience. For Williams the conventions are organized according to materialist principles in relation to the less materialistic changes in public feelings: a synthesis between materialism and the *Zeitgeist*, with art the best place to see it. As Williams summarized: "All changes in the methods of an art like the drama are related, essentially, to changes in man's radical structure of feeling."<sup>174</sup> This attempt to reconcile the abstract with the concrete is at least as old as Marx's attempt to present a material inversion of Hegel's transcendental view of history.<sup>175</sup> More importantly, it warns art history and art criticism in general not to dismiss style or structure as somehow torn from and ignorant of

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 22. Williams articulated his case more convincingly than is simply asserted in this synopsis.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>175</sup> Williams developed his "cultural materialism" in relation to this tradition of Leftist concerns. For instance, see H. Gustav Klaus, "Cultural Materialism: A Summary of Principles" in *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education, Letters*, ed. John Morgan and Peter Preston (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 88-104. A discussion of Alloway in relation to these issues would prove interesting in a longer discussion of Williams.

the social or the psychological. Issues of structure and pattern are tied to the social through feelings, even if they are learned systems, as Williams argues.

For Alloway, issues of conventions, their formation and their participation with life, are pivotal in his approach to film and popular culture and his attitude toward realism. Paralleling Williams and the Western Marxist tradition, forms for Alloway are popular for the same reasons Williams argues. Alloway sees iconographical studies as patterns of culture solidified, and extremely interesting for both their similitude and their deviations from the norm. Form is a kind of cultural barometer; to observe one is to observe the other. And Alloway will argue as Williams, that both core and flux are within these conventions, but he also links the use of conventions to Erwin Panofsky's tradition of iconography as an important and universal analytic tool.

Once again there is a limit to the parallel here with Williams who favors a psychological sense of realism over external conventions of form.<sup>176</sup> Williams distinguished between art forms that do and do not establish such resonances. Thus in Hollywood films, such as *The Third Man*, a British and American Academy Award winner in 1949 and 1950 that Alloway reviewed for its iconographical symbolism in 1950, it was important for Williams that people see the construction of reality as a set of external forms bereft of the necessary psychological realism.<sup>177</sup> The purpose of critical analysis for Williams was to reveal what "can be" but not merely through a judgment on

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<sup>176</sup>Williams and Orrom, 30-1.

<sup>177</sup>Williams and Orrom, 37-40.

the poverty of the popular. There was something deeper for Williams and separate from popular conventions: art. “The structure of feeling . . . lies deeply embedded in our lives; it cannot be merely extracted and summarized; it is perhaps only in art—and this is the importance of art—that it can be realized, and communicated, as a whole experience.”<sup>178</sup>

Surprisingly, Alloway shared this reverence for art in his early criticism and later maintained it as a domain separate from popular culture all his life. But art was never a vehicle more important than other vehicles, a special or only place where one can view or sense a whole life experience, as it was for Williams. For Alloway it was a different domain but not especially more an embodiment of unconscious structure of feeling or more useful as a cultural barometer. And, of course, the major difference one “feels” is that Alloway enjoyed the films for their conventions at the same time he analyzed them. The same was not true of Williams. Alloway liked pleasure and his writings embodied that feeling.

In framing Williams, the point is not simply the significant number of parallels between him and Alloway. Rather, it is the weight of evidence established here that is important historically for several reasons. One reason is the growing awareness of Alloway’s relation to cultural studies. Another is the attempt to clarify Alloway’s understanding of culture, of criticism, and its function as part of the cultural debates of 1950s London. Williams often speaks directly to basic aspects that Alloway assumes the consequences of but does not voice, such as democracy, capitalism and individual

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 54-5.

freedom. Ultimately such a discussion unframes Alloway as an art critic--as it unframes the nature of art criticism--to someone who saw himself not only as a cultural critic oriented toward sociology (i.e., anthropology) but also someone who evolved a specific understanding of cultural analysis, thus a specific cultural agenda for criticism. These issues have long been accepted as the proper context for Williams in the field of cultural studies in large part because he operated openly and declaredly as a sociologist and cultural critic unconfined by a limitation to art. Hopefully, this abbreviated synopsis has demonstrated that neither was Alloway simply confined by art, just as the art of the 1950s was not confined by art. The re-frame ultimately moves beyond Alloway to the repositioning of art criticism itself, the necessity of which is made clear by those who constantly reduce the history of art criticism to Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried and Harold Rosenberg.

### Chapter 3. Alloway's Early Biography and Writings

#### A. Introduction

Alloway developed his critical position on art by negotiating his biography, interests and learning through engagement with the general and the specific intellectual culture of London, an “art scene” far broader in range, more complex and sophisticated than is generally recognized.<sup>179</sup> His genius was, of course, individual, in that he helped create conditions more than simply reflect them.<sup>180</sup> But it was the multiple spheres within London that established his early and unique formulation of cultural criticism more than his contact with the art and thinking of the New York art world. Further, his position on the issues of art in New York in the late 1950s, and his role in shaping them after his move there in 1961, were formed on the basis of his experiences in London, where Alloway came of age in the contemporary cultural environment of post-war England of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

This chapter investigates Alloway's early life and his writings, starting in 1949 and which have generally not been examined in relationship to his criticism, and ending in 1955, the point where he served as discussion leader within the IG and stepped on to the international stage of art criticism. Part one explores his biography as it relates to his early

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<sup>179</sup>For an opposite but typical US assessment of the London art scene in the 1950s, see the review of the Philadelphia exhibition *An Unnerving Romanticism: The Art of Sylvia Sleigh and Lawrence Alloway* by Richard Kalina, “Portrait of a Marriage,” *Art in America* (December 2001): 107.

<sup>180</sup>A number of commentators have discussed Alloway with this author as “opportunistic” to express their belief that Alloway reached out to whatever position seemed empowered. The dissertation accepts that judgment but not in the negative sense intended. Rather, Alloway negotiates this apparent opportunism into a type of critical approach, one frequently employed even today, and by using it he established a number of important principles that remain relevant to contemporary critical thought.

personal life, activities and experiences. There is a surprising correlation between these events and his orientation to criticism, a fact he reflects upon in his later writings.

However, certain elements of the early Alloway differ from what most know of the later Alloway. He is more conservative and art historical with only a few indications of some of the issues that later become important, such as science, communication theory and feminism. But several issues emerge that contribute substantially to understanding what criticism meant for Alloway.

The second part of chapter three concentrates on locating, naming and developing these key concepts in his early writings that are important for the general nature of criticism: his requirement that art be a transformative experience; his development of the importance of context and topicality; the nature, importance and function of the act of criticism in relation to the field of criticism. And finally, Alloway's first contacts with New York critics are outlined, although the ultimate consequences of that contact for his critical position is left to the final chapter. Thus chapter three, while attempting to provide a linear biographical outline also engages a number of issues that give shape to his criticism. Later chapters will, in part, double back on sections of Alloway's life to highlight issues that require greater attention.

## B. Alloway's Early Biography<sup>181</sup>

Alloway was born in 1926 to a middle-class family in the suburbs of London. His father owned a bookstore at the time but lost it in the Depression and turned to wholesaling journals and periodicals for a commercial firm in the fields of medicine, art and psychology. Alloway was a child sick with tuberculosis that collapsed one lung, and his mother apparently quit her job to attend him. His physical restrictions meant he read a great deal and, to his self-reported joy, spent memorable hours at the cinema watching (mostly) Hollywood films. Books and cinema remained life-long passions. Beginning in his youth and throughout his life he wrote--and conceived of himself--as a poet. His first publications came as a book-reviewer, while the literary tradition of "men-of-letters" influenced the nature of his criticism. For his other passion Alloway eventually developed as a film critic. His ill-health also meant he never served in the war and did not benefit from the postwar education packages for service men. The latter had important consequences.

Since education in Britain was generally tied to class, Alloway did not receive a formal university education but became an autodidact. This was immensely important, as

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<sup>181</sup>The sources for biographical information here are various and not always in agreement. The general outlines of Alloway's life are known from his own brief biography, found among his papers, and from several discussions with Sylvia Sleigh, his wife and widow, held by telephone and in person during the winter of 1990. I wish to acknowledge the introduction to Ms. Sleigh through Mel Pekarsky, and the open kindness of Ms. Sleigh in giving me access to Lawrence Alloway's papers as well as her personal recollections and opinions. Some of this information is cited in the one-page biography in the 1990 exhibition catalogue, edited by David Robbins, *The Independent Group*, 163. Two recent essays in the exhibition catalogue *An Unnerving Romanticism: The Art of Sylvia Sleigh and Lawrence Alloway* (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Art Alliance, 2001) were very useful, if selective, in their coverage: Anne Massey and Amy Ingrid Schlegel, "Life in the UK: The Creative Partnership of Sylvia Sleigh and Lawrence Alloway," 14-20, and Sylvia Sleigh, "How Lawrence Became an Art Critic," 21-2. Schlegel should receive recognition for bringing Alloway's heretofore ignored trait of romanticism to attention. In

both the lack of a certain type of education and the refusal to relinquish a personal, experiential sense of class-oriented learning, were frequently credited by him, and members of the IG, as major influences on the formation of his attitudes and of those around him. He observed:

it's not much training. I had four years of evening class at London University. I think in a way it helped. It may have helped me *not* to seal off earlier areas of interest. I always *loved* science fiction when I was a kid, and since I didn't go through college or university, I wasn't under pressure to drop my sort of equivalent of high school culture. Whereas if you go to university, you're under strong pressure to *break* with all that 'foolishness' . . . and start on Brecht or something. I sort of read in a random fashion as I was interested, and I discovered at some point in my twenties that I hadn't given up a lot of those early interests. *And* I found that a lot of people I began to meet in London around that time like Eduardo Paolozzi, or Reyner Banham, or Richard Hamilton. . . a lot of us were less educated formally. I just added art to the interests I had already.<sup>182</sup>

Education was for Alloway closely related to what was available in the culture and ultimately opposed to a more traditional and class oriented education he identified broadly as a classicizing humanist process. Years later he summarized issues he had stated in his early years:

in practice (John) McHale and I unconditionally rejected infiltration or dominion by any established forms of university culture . . . . University culture is rationally keyed to the ruling class in concept and style; it is very different

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support of the insight of Schlegel's exhibition thesis, it was a trait not obviously visible until examined through the lens of his relationship to Sleight.

<sup>182</sup>James Reinish, "An Interview with Lawrence Alloway," *Studio International* 186 (September 1973): 62, columns 1 and 2. Alloway here names as "others" prominent members of the IG.

from Saloon Bar Britain with its appetite for the Royals . . . Thus none of the main agents of the IG had been formed through traditional British university lore. McHale's and my taste genuinely resembled that of a vernacular society; in fact ours was a vernacular culture . . . not distanced by irony or condescension: and there was no irony in our liking . . . . Most universities . . . censor and judge vernacular culture, the culture with which one grows up . . . . This is a form of the ongoing distinction between high and low style. Thus the IG assumption of a fine art/pop art continuum was both radical and cohesive.<sup>183</sup>

When asked whether it was someone or something which brought about the later emergence of American Pop art as a movement, Alloway responded with a combination of his early attitudes toward education, history and culture, and spoke of the frame he used for much of his criticism; that of generations and their historically determined taste cultures.<sup>184</sup>

I think it was *something*. Because what happened was a bunch of people born in the twenties, who had grown up with the mass media and had been that much separated from the classicizing, humanistic processes of higher education, just naturally took the mass media as subject matter . . . . A lot of convergences of that kind, which can't be accidental, occurred. The timing's too good and it happens too often. It means the climate has reached a certain point, and there are only a few logical ways to go . . . not in any mystical sense . . . that history is pushing us in a certain way . . . .<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty," 51. The essay is undated but seems to have been written for the 1990 exhibition, the year of Alloway's death. John McHale was an artist, friend to and co-convenor with Alloway of the 1955 sessions of the IG. Alloway's criteria of university education very neatly reassigns the position of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, who despite their ties to the working class were university educated and employed.

<sup>184</sup>I avoid the word *zeitgeist* because Alloway rejected such idealisms and was closer to an historical materialism such as found in Raymond Williams and the British Marxist historians. His following statement makes some of this apparent. His concern with class was consistent throughout his life but he openly spoke of it in reference to England rather than the USA.

<sup>185</sup>Reinisch, 63 (column 3) and 64 (column 1). Reinisch was asking implicitly whether Alloway's

Alloway believed that history works through both the parameters of generation and the materialism of a vernacular culture available for those not blocked from access by the idealism of a humanized education.<sup>186</sup> Thus individuals are important but also historically bracketed in their choices in concrete ways: a philosophy of historical materialism, and a concept of culture produced in relationship to a working-class mentality. The issue of class in art always confronts traditional issues in art criticism, such as greatness and the hierarchy of meaning. Class for Alloway is at the center of a complex of issues to which he frequently returned.<sup>187</sup> His statements also tell of his alignment with the anti-Hegelian

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sense of history was that governed by individuals or by generalized forces. Alloway's vision was more towards the latter: this is likely one of the reasons he is more interested in history than in individuals or the concept of "great" artists. As he said in the same 1973 interview, p. 63: "I think good and bad is mainly a lot of shit . . ." But neither was history composed of undefined spiritual forces: the forces were of materialist taste and culture. His negotiation is between pre-determining forces and individualism. Fashion, as he maintains in 1973 and in his work within the IG, is one such material manifestation. Alloway was interested in cultural patterns: i.e., the "few logical ways to go . . ." These were given expression by Raymond Williams as the "structure of feeling" as outlined in chapter two.

<sup>186</sup> Alloway assigns taste cultures to generations throughout his life. For example, commenting on the split in tastes between younger and older artists at a symposium between Klee's early and late works: ". . . the younger artists and critics liked it late. The age of a work of contemporary art relates to the age of the consumer apparently." See Lawrence Alloway, "A Decline in Klee?," *Art News & Review* 5, no. 25 (9 January 1954): 4. Alloway used "consumer" rather than viewer as early as 1954.

<sup>187</sup> Alloway's (and the IG's) claims of working class origin and orientation is rejected by Anne Massey while many other observers accept the claims of the IG as working-class. What is undeniable is that they identified with and chose their values from the working-class. The issue of class becomes important because of the obvious distinctions made between themselves and the university-trained upper-class but also for the distinctions made within the working class, as remarked under the discussions with Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams. The IG idea of class is uniquely urban rather than simply blue-collar and no one disputes their close and conscious association of the IG with urbanism. Alloway's unabashed urbanism is in counterdistinction to the concept of British working-class and their "popular arts" that concerned Hoggart and Williams. The irony seems to be that both groups felt they were speaking on behalf of the authentic "Everyman," to use Williams' term. Thus there are two historically distinct bases for and understandings of British "popular arts," which was also a concept of great interest to a number of British writers in the early 1950s. (See, for instance, the works cited in the select bibliography of Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*.) Perhaps the best known, most often cited example of Hoggart's warnings against the culture of interest to Alloway and the IG comes in his chapter eight (p. 203) of *The Uses of Literacy* dedicated to the "New Mass Art" as he described in negative terms the "juke-box boys" who nightly read the "new-style popular journals" and "spend their evenings listening in harshly-lighted milk-bars to the 'nickelodeon'." Sociologists knew and feared the coming of the youth culture embraced by Alloway, a culture he was a bit too old to fully live.

traditions of a materialist history, the type advocated and practiced in the Marxist tradition of critical theory; the point where working-class interest and Marxist theory automatically intersect. Especially noteworthy in his comments was the centrality of culture to his thinking, and his recognition of a “vernacular culture” as opposed to a simple formulation of the poles of high and low cultures. These positions parallel but also move beyond the socialist populism of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, who consider the “mass-arts,” what today we might call popular arts or media culture, as conservative.<sup>188</sup>

Alloway’s first experience with criticism came with his earliest publications during 1944-6 as a book reviewer for the London *Sunday Times*, by the age of 18.<sup>189</sup> The reviews seem to have been brief, offering a few lines at one newspaper column width per book, and frequently unsigned.<sup>190</sup> At this point they yield no insights into his tastes or attitudes beyond testifying to his knowledge of and orientation to literature, a relation he maintained all his life. His position as a reviewer of literature links him to a long tradition of literary critics but he disdained one tradition of “men of letters,” such as Joshua Reynolds, Roger Fry, and especially Herbert Read, all of whom Alloway discussed

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<sup>188</sup>“The popular Press, for all its purported ‘progressiveness and independence’, is one of the greatest conserving forces in public life today: its nature requires it to promote both conservatism and conformity.” Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 196.

<sup>189</sup>James Reinish: “Were you writing art criticism in London?” Lawrence Alloway: “Yes, sure. I started when I was at school as a book reviewer for the London *Sunday Times*, and art criticism started, I guess, when I was nineteen or twenty.” Reinish, 62 (column 2). As noted below, Alloway’s publication of visual art reviews began in 1949, at about age 23, although it is also clear he had considered art and developed positions well prior 1949.

<sup>190</sup>This author was able to read the several reviews Alloway retained from the *Times* pasted into a small blue notebook among his personal papers, only some of which were dated. At the time of consultation, in the early 1990s, his papers were held by Sylvia Sleight and were uncatalogued.

negatively for their classicizing theories of art that led to distance and closure.<sup>191</sup> On the other hand, Alloway is clear in identifying himself with the literary tradition of selective writers, such as Denis Diderot, and poet-critics who directly reviewed art, such as Charles Baudelaire and Guillaume Apollinaire.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "The Uses and Limits of Art Criticism," of 1973 in *Topics in American Art Since 1945*, 254. But his condemnation of this tradition came much earlier than 1973. In his "Personal Statement," *Ark*, 19 (Spring 1957): 28, he tied his generational view of history as an anti-aesthetic to these men of letters. "We were born too late to be adopted into the system of taste that gave aesthetic certainty to our parents and teachers. Roger Fry and Herbert Read (the two critics that the libraries were full of ten years ago) were not my culture heroes. As I saw the works of art that they had written about I found the works remained obstinately outside the systems to which they had been consigned. Significant form, design, vision, order, composition, etc., were seen as high level abstractions, floating above the pictures like ill-fitting haloes. The effect of all these redundant terms was to make the work of art disappear in an excess of 'aesthetic distance.'" Although Read was a figure particularly rejected by Alloway and the IG, the dissertation argues in several places that Read presented them with much of their general orientation. To pretend, as Alloway does here, that Fry and Read held the same position in criticism was, to be kind, self-serving rather than an accurate analysis.

<sup>192</sup>See Lawrence Alloway, "The Uses and Limits of Art Criticism," 255. But Alloway kept abreast of literary studies and at times drew upon them for parallels, and likely as sources for his criticism. See his note on the correlation between the scrutiny given to realism in painting in the early 1950s and similar concerns in novels ("new criticism"): Lawrence Alloway, "Realism, Ruins and Frenchmen," *Art News* (Summer 1954): 33, 68-70, especially 69. Interestingly enough it was Herbert Read who called for the end of the formalist criticism of Roger Fry, his own mentor, and its replacement by "interpretive criticism" that accepted art as a symbolic language. For Read it was the great writers who were the best interpretive critics: he named Diderot, Hazlitt, Ruskin, Baudelaire, Fromentin, Pater, and the poets Apollinaire and Breton as the "true critics." See Herbert Read, "Farewell to Formalism," *Art News* 51, no. 4 (June, July, August 1952): 36-9, published a year before Alloway wrote for the magazine. Read also argued here that "different types of art demand different critical approaches." Alloway seems to accept much of this with the important rejection of the role of symbolism as Read saw it. Symbolism for Read, a personal friend to Carl Jung and eventual head of the Bollingen Foundation, operated in a realm of absolute idealism that functioned as refuge for the tragic (meaning post-war) conditions of modern man, a refuge Alloway firmly rejected. Alloway and the "new men" around him already had internalized their sense of the tragic in a manner quite different and without need of refuge, as argued in the first chapter. This may be the reason that Alloway accepted the symbolic through the 'flatter,' less emotionally charged positions of iconography and as signs. This is an important proviso lest Alloway's use of the term symbol be misunderstood. For example, when he argues in 1957 (Lawrence Alloway, "Personal Statement," 28) for "an effort to see art in terms of human use rather than in terms of philosophical problems. The new role of the spectator or consumer, free to move in a society defined by symbols, is what I want to write about." The word symbol as used by Alloway is closer to the concept of artifact or sign and quite distinct from Read's psychoanalytic understanding. Alloway's concern for "human use" as a critical issue evokes his reading of Norbert Wiener's 1950 *The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society*.

In 1943 Alloway tried to take a course in English literature at London University but dropped it for an art history course held in the evenings at the National Gallery.<sup>193</sup> Sponsored by London University, its successful completion meant the gain of a certificate that could be used toward a degree or for work as a lecturer. And obtaining work and money was always an issue for Alloway. The course teacher, Charles Johnson, apparently took a liking to Alloway and several other members of the class, such as the future art critic and antagonist of Alloway, David Sylvester, and the painter Sylvia Sleigh, who married Alloway in 1954 after an eleven year secret affair.<sup>194</sup> According to Sleigh, by the time of the 1943 class the 17 year-old Alloway “was already interested in art and made the rounds of the galleries quite regularly, often taking notes.”<sup>195</sup> Johnson apparently recommended Alloway as an art lecturer and part-time jobs came his way, although the Tate and National Gallery did not hire him until later.<sup>196</sup> By 1948 he was an Assistant Lecturer at the London National Gallery (1948-1954), a Lecturer by 1949 for the Arts Council of Great Britain (1949-1957), and in the 1950s a Lecturer at the Tate Gallery (1952-5) and the Courtauld Institute of Art (1952-5).

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<sup>193</sup>Reportedly Alloway joined an advanced class in literature too late to catch up, making art his second choice of study. Alloway reportedly attended the London University evening program for four years.

<sup>194</sup>Sleigh, born in 1916, trained as a painter at the Brighton Art School, 1934-1937, and had married fellow painter Michael Greenwood in 1941. They separated after 1945 with Sleigh living in East Sussex, and eventually with Alloway in London. Greenwood lived in Cambridge and Sleigh divorced him the year of her marriage to Alloway, 1954.

<sup>195</sup>Sleigh, 21.

<sup>196</sup>Failures were integral to part-time work. For instance, he reportedly was recommended as a writer to the current events journal *New Statesman* in 1948 but rejected. Massey and Schlegel, 15, say his rejection was due to lack of formal education. There were other rejections as well: Birmingham City Art Gallery, Leeds City Art Gallery, the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery.

His training and work as a public lecturer for lay audiences may be the reason he identified his art criticism in 1973 with the tradition of Denis Diderot's "original inclusive form of discussion"<sup>197</sup> of "rambling, associative pieces, open to almost random stimuli."<sup>198</sup> Thus his understanding of criticism seems to parallel his experiences in the public galleries, where he reacted, as he later said of Diderot, "to the works with a mind well stocked with prior ideas, some of them habitual, some of them fresh."<sup>199</sup> The style fit the form. Diderot's criticism was not only open and inclusive, relative to its time period, it was what Alloway identified as a "discursive form" that combined into a "walking-thinking-writing form" as a "topographic act" that occurred not only in front of actual works but with subject matter and values that derived from art work of the "present."<sup>200</sup> Thus his work as public lecturer may be suggested as an integral and shaping force for his criticism's eventual concern for topicality and his understanding of criticism as a discourse.

Experiences with public collections also acquainted him with the traditional arts and art history, its historical periodization and its tools of style and iconography. This

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<sup>197</sup> Alloway, "Uses and Limits of Art Criticism," 255.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 252. Charles Baudelaire was discussed as following Diderot's model but different in his "enlargement of esthetics to include global culture." Ibid., 253. It may seem strange that Alloway identified Diderot with the democratization of art (below) since Diderot wrote for the royalty of Europe but Alloway wanted to establish a different lineage undiscovered by "other commentators." Thus in a passage that sounds as written under the influence of Norbert Wiener, Baudelaire's global perspective for Alloway was a consequence of a "situation of postclassical abundance" derived from a world culture now "opened up by the communications system of the nineteenth century." Ibid., 253.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. Alloway cited John Perreault's criticism in *The Village Voice*, 1967-1974, as an inheritor of the walking-thinking-writing form passed down through Baudelaire's "Salons." Max Kozloff, in a personal conversation with this author (October, 2001) identified Perreault and others as "a kind of *l'école d'Alloway*."

shows in his first year of art reviews and his life-time use of an historical frame for his critical perspective. His wide and detailed command of traditional art history is evident everywhere in this time period, ranging from the early Italian Renaissance to contemporary Italian art and the current School of Paris.<sup>201</sup> He referred to traditional art historians, such as Bernard Berenson and Erwin Panofsky, but no single type of art historical practice is identifiable. However, in his retrospective reflection of 1973, the practices of art history and criticism share common elements. For instance, both critics and art historians “rethink and refeel the art of the past in fresh ways . . . effected [*sic*] as we all are by the changing assumptions of our time.”<sup>202</sup> Both art criticism and art history are a “memorializing mode,” but with historians more so, while critics were more “topographical.”<sup>203</sup> Despite these questions of degree and his own use of an art historical framework, art critics have a special domain separate from art historians--“the present.” Critics with too much of a “retroactive focus” were not doing their job; not facing the complexities of the “present.”<sup>204</sup> Thus a curious tension arises in Alloway between the historical and the present, despite his open advocacy of *presentness*. Not a contradiction

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<sup>201</sup>For example, see Alloway, “Lorenzo Il Magnifico e le Arti,” *Art News & Review* 1, no. 14 (13 August 1949): 5, or his book review “*The Florentine Portrait* by Jean Alazard,” *Art News & Review* 1, no. 15 (27 August 1949): 6 in comparison to one of several examples of his coverage of contemporary Italian art: “A Letter from Italy,” *Art News & Review* 1, no. 15 (27 August 1949): 3. Alloway and Sleigh visited Italy the summer of 1949, to judge from her review of the Bellini exhibit in Venice at this same time in *Art News & Review* 1, no. 14 (13 August 1949): 2.

<sup>202</sup>Alloway, “Uses and Limits of Art Criticism,” 251.

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup>*Ibid.* Yet by 1950 he was correcting art historians in their assignment of artists to the appropriate art historical categories. For example, he felt that Hogarth, a favorite of his for reasons of class tastes, should be assigned to the Baroque rather than the Rococo. See his review “The March to Finchley,” *Art News & Review* 2, no. 1 (11 February 1950): 3.

but an important separation by degrees, each one lighting the other, even if, in practice, such separations would not always be apparent.<sup>205</sup> As later argued, Alloway develops a critical practice of “leverage,” using one field to motivate a change of perspective in another field--in this case, the fields of past and present.

This brief consideration of his early biography, prior to his work at the ICA and read in relation to some of his later claims for his own development, demonstrates a surprisingly large group of attitudes and issues relevant to the characterization of his criticism. His poor health and perhaps the bookselling of his father, led to early contact and life-long love of literature and the cinema, especially Hollywood films, and, likely, his autodidacticism. The ramifications of his lack of a formal program of college education was especially formative through his refusal to ignore those aspects of adolescent interests associated more with the working or middle urban class than with the classicizing, humanist training of college-educated norms.<sup>206</sup> Indeed there was a purposeful backlash. In opposition, he and others soon would articulate a “vernacular culture” with which they identify, a choice that Alloway argues was due to the pressure of historical processes--for those open to them--which act to form a generalized and

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<sup>205</sup> Alloway’s eventual solution, as outlined in the 1973 Reinish interview (p. 63, col. 2), was, as argued above, to reject art history when it is used “to set out an absolute chronicle of events and to fix the research in a certain way” because in contemporary situations, with events and the observer changing constantly “. . . you can’t have that kind of fixity . . . . So I use the term short-term art history. One tries, in an empirical sort of way, some of the sense of history which a historian dealing with a settled part of the world does (sic), but applies it to the present events. It’s kind of a provisional, tentative, as-I-see-it-at-the-present-moment history.” This attitude seems true in his early writings as well.

<sup>206</sup> There are obvious limits to such claims of direct causality. For example, Reyner Banham, Alloway’s colleague in ideas at the IG, earned his doctorate at the Courtauld in the early 1950s. He directed the IG sessions and pioneered many ideas, discussed below, while fetishizing the same working and

shared material culture of taste. He had an early and aggressive love of art and art history, touring galleries at an early age, and he later identified his intellectual justification through Diderot for synthesizing criticism and discussion into an open discourse between the pre-formed concepts of the historical and patterned speaker and the topical challenges of the present. We know he eventually viewed criticism as an inclusive and topical discourse that forms a “topographic act,” and eventually uses one field to leverage another.

The process of cross-reading historical moments is informative but it also gives an erroneous picture of the young Alloway prior his experiences with the IG and the ICA.<sup>207</sup> It is history filtered through his post-IG reminiscences.<sup>208</sup> If one concentrates directly on his early writings bereft of his later voice, what type of young critic and criticism emerges?

### C. Alloway’s Early Writings

Charles Johnson, the teacher who recommended Alloway as a lecturer also recommended him as a writer to Richard Gainesborough, the owner and editor of *Art News & Review*, the weekly London tabloid.<sup>209</sup> Alloway was published in the second and

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middle class constructs. However, there were reports of IG members mocking Banham for his pursuit of an advanced academic degree.

<sup>207</sup>For example, in his 1973 essay on “The Uses and Limits of Criticism” he argued the distinction between art criticism and art history as the issue of the “present.” But in the 1950 review of Hogarth (and elsewhere) he concentrates on the correct art historical category. Or, for example, in Alloway’s retrospections there is no mention of Diderot until the 1970s nor of the IG by name until 1960. See the next note and Anne Massey’s argument.

<sup>208</sup>Even their consciousness of the importance of the IG can be argued as a late realization. Anne Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain*, 108-27, argues that the importance of the IG was a “myth” consciously constructed well after the fact. She provides a valuable historiography using Alloway and Banham in her chapter nine.

<sup>209</sup>Sleigh, 22.

third issues with book reviews and by the sixth issue (23 April 1949) placed his first two art reviews: a brief review of early De Chirico and a lead page on George Stubbs.<sup>210</sup> The book reviews on art and artists from his first year for *Art News & Review* showcase his talents in art history and criticism at the age of 23 as very knowledgeable, extremely assured, and critical. Published or not, he had been in training through his private readings and public presentations. Biography continues to be a forming factor, but his early art criticism forms a sufficient base for direct study and has not been examined.

By the end of 1949 Alloway published 20 pieces--six reviews of art books and 14 exhibition reviews--at least three of which were given to women artists. He was extremely well-informed in both contemporary and traditional art, very comfortable describing art in formal and historical terms, and, in making judgments whose basis he frequently explained. However, the critic that emerges from the early reviews is different. He did not relate to art as cultural artifact or as part of a visual communication system. His early orientation in the direction of a visual or popular culture was limited to his concern for popular films, published as early as 1950 in his second year of professional writing in a journal outside the fine arts.<sup>211</sup> Aside from a remarkable, early reference to the viewer as

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<sup>210</sup> Lawrence Alloway, "George Stubbs at Hutchinson House" and "The Early Chirico" at The London Gallery, *Art News & Reviews* 1, no. 6 (23 April 1949): 2 and 5. Alloway's full name appeared for the first time with the Stubbs review, which ran almost a full page with a picture.

<sup>211</sup> Alloway, "Symbolism in *The Third Man*." The only other early exception was a review in admiration of Max Ernst where in the midst of a thick use of art historical terms, Alloway observed that Ernst's imagination should have earned him an invitation from his Arizona home to Hollywood to design the costume for the "malevolent, self-propagating vegetable" in the sci-fi movie "The Thing" (1951). Humorous? Yes. But likely an honest comment from one who was toying with the relationship between sci-fi films and serious art by 1951 and was unafraid to publicly and informally relate them early in his career. See "Max Ernst" at the ICA, *Art News & Review* 4, no. 24 (27 December 1952): 4.

a consumer,<sup>212</sup> there is little else in his early writing to mark his later overt dedication to popular culture.

Most of the early criticism, at least on its surface, addressed traditional concerns and embodied traditional points-of-view. In the discussion of his biography, above, we learned that Alloway knew and used literature, literary criticism and traditional art historical tools such as periodization, style and iconography. These concerns remained with him and are easily lost sight of in the older Alloway. Yet within his use of more traditional tools Alloway developed variations that are important, and easily overlooked. Formalism is one such example.

He used a strong formalist approach apparent everywhere in his attention to techniques and description, but qualifications are necessary to clarify his use of it and to understand his later relationship to the formalist position of Greenberg. For instance, Alloway's own use of formal analysis could be construed as in contradiction to his later 1957 statement opposing the formalist criticism of Fry and Read, cited above.<sup>213</sup> However, it is neither a contradiction nor a radical change but illuminates an important distinction in his attitude toward form as a tool of analysis.

Alloway was neither pro-formalism nor anti-formalism. He was aware through the writings of Read by 1952 of the limits of "formalism" as an entire critical system. He

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<sup>212</sup>See Alloway, "A Decline in Klee?," 4, where he used "consumer" rather than viewer, as noted above.

<sup>213</sup>Alloway, "Personal Statement," 28. As discussed, any implication of Read as a formalist is erroneous. Alloway lumped them together because they were both concerned with using what Alloway thought of--and Read did argue--as universal systems which because it was a pre-established system could not deal with the distinctiveness of the art.

considered form an essential, material aspect of art and making, but he opposed the critical use of form when it was considered an abstract quality, as a criterion idealized above the materiality and subject matter of the individual work.<sup>214</sup> He retained an early, and one could argue typically British, distaste for abstract qualities and systems of judgments when they seemed to supersede the work. Yet he placed constraints on the other side as well: He reacted against stylistic virtuosity for its own sake. He wanted a match between form and ideas in his early criticism,<sup>215</sup> as Diderot had desired. Thus even within traditional issues not generally associated with Alloway, such as the use of formalism--and one can argue the same for his use of an art historical frame or of iconography--we see important distinctions that remain a part of his concept of criticism. As a critic he will always utilize formal properties and historical contexts but as a “kind of provisional, tentative, as I-see-it-at-the-present-moment” sense rather than using it to establish a “kind of fixity.”<sup>216</sup>

To extend this process of locating distinctions within his use of traditional perspectives: He frequently accepted a materialist sense of history constructed along the lines of a “world picture” as he phrased it in 1951.<sup>217</sup> For example, he not only used the

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<sup>214</sup>The obvious implication, one addressed in chapters four and six, is that Alloway could not follow Greenberg, despite the fact that many, including Alloway himself, have claimed or implied such a situation.

<sup>215</sup>See his comments on Max Ernst in “Max Ernst, Sonja Sekula and Sean Crampton” at the London Gallery, *Art News & Review* 2, no. 4 (25 March 1950): 5 and the review of Raul Ubac discussed below.

<sup>216</sup>See the citations from the 1973 Reinish interview, p. 63 ( col. 2), above.

<sup>217</sup>See his extremely interesting review, “Matta” at the ICA, *Art News & Review* 2, no. 26 (27 January 1951): 3, discussed below. In this review, and many others, he framed his critical approach to the

typicality of a period to discuss artists by 1952<sup>218</sup> but frequently took the “long” view, identifying and using historical and categorical patterns much like a sociologist or cultural historian.<sup>219</sup> This included his use of the developments and patterns of style and iconography. Thus art historical tools, such as iconography, were also seen as sociological patterns, an important position argued with Raymond Williams in the second chapter, and certainly relevant to Alloway’s project of criticism. In another instance, by at least 1954 he approached history, ideas, and tastes through the concept of generations that form specific (and dated) taste cultures.<sup>220</sup>

Other important, if not radical, criteria also develop in the early writings: his opposition to reductive arguments; his support for plural causes and the value placed on “becoming” rather than stasis. More obviously radical for his formulation of a different type of criticism are his use of situational criteria by which to evaluate meaning, and, on occasion, the use of these criteria to leverage the entire field under discussion. These issues are sufficiently important to warrant greater discussion in the following subsections.

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artist and works based on what he perceived as the materialist structures of the world that impact the particular historical moment. In this case it is the developments in the sciences.

<sup>218</sup>Examples abound; for example in his review of Jack Ward as “An English Rubeniste” at Roland, Browne, and Delbanco, *Art News & Review* 4, no. 4 (22 March 1952): 6.

<sup>219</sup>Eventually Alloway defined his sense of sociology by equating it with patterns and coalitions of like-minded people. This means that these “temporary coalitions of people” are the materialist manifestation of broad but dated patterns. See Reinish, 63 (col. 2).

<sup>220</sup>See Alloway, “A Decline in Klee?”

### C.1. Art as a Transformative Experience

Alloway's early criticism emphasized the liberation of the imagination, and here he located his early concept of critical success in art: the development of a unique, personal vision. Thus he could find in the work of the seventy year old British Baron Braun, despite his sentimental amateurism, an imagination that awakened to produce some works that are "enigmatic" and "truly visionary." The reward: "a handful of illusive, distinctly personal, works" or a single painting that has a "frightening hallucination of cosmic space."<sup>221</sup> In the gouaches of the Surrealist photographer Raul Ubac, Alloway located the successful emergence of the "mysterious, luminous images" that develop "automatically" as an unconscious by-product of technique from one who is "not defeated by his own masterful technique."<sup>222</sup> In 1953 the measure of Graham Sutherland's success was his "haunting sense of the disquieting presence informing natural forms . . . the obstinate recurrence of metaphoric shapes testifies to the intensity of his obsession."<sup>223</sup> But more was required by Alloway for successful art than romantic imagination or haunting moods and automatic or obsessive processes.

Referring to Graham Sutherland but speaking of his own critical criteria, Alloway argued that when Sutherland looked like Max Ernst or André Masson his work was a

<sup>221</sup> Lawrence Alloway, "Baron Braun and Peter Rose Pulham," *Art News & Review* 1, no. 21 (19 November 1949): 4.

<sup>222</sup> Lawrence Alloway, "Raul Ubac" at the Hanover Gallery, *Art News & Review* 1, no. 26 (28 January 1950): 6. Ubac, for Alloway, belongs to a newly emerging group of "non-geometrical abstractionists" who work away from both linear geometric abstraction and the earlier biomorphic abstraction of the Surrealist esthetic.

<sup>223</sup> Lawrence Alloway, "Sutherland and Moore," *Art News & Review* 5, no. 9 (30 May 1953): 4 and 7.

dead monument: “Once a disquieting sense of metamorphosis and possession works in terms of someone else’s vision it can produce only a monument.”<sup>224</sup> However, the same strategy works equivocally and he found a quantity of work by Sutherland to be successful: “his own monument, in another sense.”<sup>225</sup> For Alloway, the vision must be one’s own no matter the imaginative processes. This individualism and the themes of metamorphosis and obsession repeat in the early criticism: both qualities were criteria for success.

Here too we read Alloway’s preference for the synthesis of form and technique such that neither one dominates but together they create some more mysterious and symbolic subject matter, as with Ubac or Max Ernst. Again, Alloway wrote of his admiration for the artist’s transformative powers of “primitive energy.”<sup>226</sup> In another instance, the art of children under twelve were the best in an exhibition because “in their art the radical transformation of everyday scenes is charged with surprise and lyricism.”<sup>227</sup> Even the “imaginary voyages” of Baudelaire were invoked in an early review

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<sup>224</sup>Ibid.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid.

<sup>226</sup>Alloway, “Raul Ubac,” 6, and “Max Ernst, Sonja Sekula and Sean Crampton,” 5.

<sup>227</sup>Lawrence Alloway, “Children’s Art” at Royal Institute Galleries, *Art News & Review* 2, no. 17 (23 September 1950): 4-5. He compared the work of a five year old to the prize-winning adolescents to argue “we are aware of the great loss of confidence and vitality that seems inseparable from growing up.” Alloway, Herbert Read, and John McHale, among others, were active in and wrote of matters in art education at this time. They all agreed that formal education stifled personal creativity. See the discussion of these three, below, and their work for *Athene. Journal of the Society for Education in Art*, the official journal for the Society for Education which Alloway briefly edited under Read’s directorship. The primitivizing mode of avant-garde art had long fetishized the art of children, an aesthetic that Alloway and Read seem to have shared.

to delineate what was authentic for Alloway.<sup>228</sup> Later, in 1955, he considered the criticism of his colleague David Sylvester totally wrong because he used the word “attack” rather than “metamorphosis” with the art of Germaine Richier. For Alloway only “metaphoric form” could open up the possibilities of being human.<sup>229</sup> Art should be something personal, deep, transformative and meaningful for Alloway in this early period. And contrary to later claims by commentators, Alloway never relinquished a categorical distinction held for art. Art for Alloway will eventually be seen as an equal portion along a continuum of consideration, but it does not become the same as other modalities such as popular culture. To collapse the two is to misunderstand Alloway’s position.

Inverse to the criteria for successful art as a personal and transformative experience, failures were derivative works based on the obviousness of their quotations. They were works that had not been transformed. Or they failed because of their inability to integrate style and content due to either a lack of inspiration or through simple incompetence. In his early period he used the term “fashionable” as a negative; it did not mean to be of one’s own time in the Baudelairean sense, nor part of culture in a broad sense.<sup>230</sup> One could be derivative in fusing known traditions but successful in Alloway’s

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<sup>228</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “Rolf Durig” at the Redfern Gallery, *Art News & Review* 2, no. 1 (11 February 1950): 4.

<sup>229</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “Conflated Kingdoms,” *Art News & Review* 7, no. 19 (15 October 1955): 5.

<sup>230</sup> See for example, Lawrence Alloway, “Magdalena Radulescu,” *Art News & Reviews* 1, no. 23 (17 December 1949): 2. She, a contemporary “Roumanian” painter, the former wife of Massimo Campigli, was condemned as fashionable for her trivial motifs and a superficial design sense.

terms only if the fusion produced a “personal manner.”<sup>231</sup> Alfredo Lam was successful because he used what he learned typical of the School of Paris but “employed . . . on unique, personal material.”<sup>232</sup> Ruszkowski’s art failed because his “double tendency” between expressionism and the decorative could not be resolved; success comes in those works when he is one or the other, and Alloway did not care which.<sup>233</sup>

Alloway later and famously would argue to consider mass media in a continuum with fine art, but his early writings tell us why this later position should never be construed as an argument to collapse distinctions between the two. Alloway’s critical orientation was always based on making distinctions, an issue the next section demonstrates as it details two important characteristics of his mature criticism developed within his early writings.

### **C.2. The Emergence of Situational Topicality, and the Nature of the Critical Act**

The most important issue that emerges from Alloway’s early writings central to his critical method is the importance of what might be called the context of the situation,

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<sup>231</sup>See Lawrence Alloway, “Henry Walton” at Blairman’s Gallery, *Art News & Review* 2, no. 13 (9 July 1950): 4. The collection of the 18th century painter belonged to Sir Osbert Sitwell, the poet, critic and husband to Edith Sitwell, who in 1953 provided a year’s support for Alloway to write poetry. The Sitwells visited and were much known in New York City. A photo in the Gothic Book Mart and Gallery on West 47th Street, in New York City shows a 1948 party for the Sitwells attended by W.H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop, Delmore Schwartz, Stephen Spender, Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal and others. See *The New York Times*, 24 July 2001, sec. E, p. 1.

<sup>232</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “Totems” at ICA, *Art News & Review* 4, no. 6 (19 April 1952): 5.

<sup>233</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “The Backward Glance” at Roland, Browse, and Delbanco, *Art News & Review* 4, no. 2 (23 February 1952): 4. No first name was provided for Ruszkowski.

or, as he terms it later, the “topical.”<sup>234</sup> Locating the topical is itself a critical act of establishing difference, and one of supreme importance for Alloway’s contribution to the nature of criticism. But for him the critical act was also of broader function. For Alloway, both situational topicality (here used as a term of purposeful redundancy) and the function of the act of criticism work together, and they are best considered as concepts together.

Alloway asked of criticism what he asked art historians to do with Hogarth: locate the terms that are appropriate for the situation. The terms could be the art, or the art history, or the creative processes of the artist. In the early criticism he does not yet situate the work to the culture at hand as his context. He will do so later as he comes to his conclusions regarding the nature of contemporary culture. But in the early writings he searched for what he considered the leading or the most appropriate characteristic of the art under consideration. Nor would he totally abandon this orientation after he leaves England.

In Alloway’s hands, criticism is a process openly co-active between the critic and the art--defined by its history or categorical position within history, its technique or media, its narrative or style, its creativity or lack--which are customary art historical considerations. The early Alloway could be characterized as an art historical critic rather

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<sup>234</sup>He used the word “topical”(meaning contextual) in his January 1951 review of Matta in a descriptive manner but the concept became an important part of his own understanding of criticism only slowly. Wider readings from this period in London show the word was in common use.

than one who met his own, later criteria of addressing the challenges of the present.<sup>235</sup> But he took the first step in relocating the critic's position as apart from the art--he emphatically rejected the concept of critical distance very early--to a criticism from *within* the art context, a context that later will be culture more than art.

Examples of his use of situational criteria abound in the critical approaches used in his early writings. While formalism and iconographical analysis are frequently used, they are mediated as early as 1950 by the situation. For instance, since it is the celebrity of the sitter that determines entrance to the National Portrait Gallery Alloway turns away from his early general concern for formalism to favor exterior context: “. . . we shall take into account the sitters as well as the artists, for to consider these works from a purely aesthetic standpoint is to ignore their reason for being . . . .”<sup>236</sup> Elsewhere he finds the work of Kurt Schwitters of “curious identity” because Alloway understood the double-bind nature of Schwitters work: it was made within Dada/Merz from trash but was qualitatively of “good design;” it used abstract fragments but the sources remained literal and recognizable.<sup>237</sup> Thus the context he located for evaluation comes from multiple and different sources: historical, aesthetic, formal and critical. Other examples demonstrate the

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<sup>235</sup>He used formalist criteria when it seemed appropriate, as pointed out above, but, again, this seems more the art historical tool of style, which he always considered important, more than “formalism” as the critical position that he positioned himself against.

<sup>236</sup>Lawrence Alloway, “Recent Acquisitions of the National Portrait Gallery,” *Art News & Review* 2, no. 6 (22 April 1950): 4.

<sup>237</sup>Lawrence Alloway, “Kurt Schwitters, Rolanda Polonsky and Stella Snead” at The London Gallery, *Art News & Review* 2, no. 7 (6 May 1950): 4.

importance Alloway set in locating a proper pivot point for critical consideration, even if he disliked the context.

On more than one occasion he expresses his antipathy for “romanticism” but he could also find it a laudable quality because of the overriding importance of the situation. For example, he found the American painter Charles Mussett “best in those pictures where his neo-Romanticism touches the sweet, retarded community of American boyish charmers.”<sup>238</sup> And the “creepy . . . nasty . . . imagery” of British artist Graham Sutherland “establishes a sort of vitality simply by playing on our average repugnance . . . . This is certainly a part of his romanticism, but it is also related to the general problem of renewing the artist’s contract with his audience.”<sup>239</sup> Thus he linked the value of romanticism to its most practical function, public communication through drama. Alloway’s commitment to situational criticism superseded his personal values and ideology.

The breadth of Alloway’s method dislodges the use of any singular set of concerns to dominate the critical process. Such diverse criteria can easily be interpreted as a young critic experimenting to find their way, just as it can be used to argue the lack of a point of view. But with Alloway diversity was the method. Criticism practiced in this way opens the reading for viewer, art and critic. The function of the critical act is to locate a significant, topical context. But topicality is not simply any or all things within a situation, but rather what is most important as determined by the critic or informed

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<sup>238</sup>Lawrence Alloway, “Shock,” *Art News & Review* 7, no. 12 (9 July 1955): 4.

viewer at that time. The critical act therefore is not only dynamical from one situation to another, rather than absolute in its criteria, it is deconstructive within each situation. His critical system turns out to be relational rather than idealistic.

Alloway established his clear opposition to reductive arguments in this early period. For example, Kenneth Clark was wrong in Alloway's opinion to argue that Graham Sutherland was influenced only by English Romantic art. Rather, there was no single cause: "To harp on (Sutherland's) Englishness distorts his work by suppressing the cosmopolitan idiom in which his vision is communicated."<sup>240</sup> Thus Alloway's choice of context moved Sutherland out of the past criteria and into a broader, more current context.

Typically here and throughout his early period, Alloway did not lay out a grand vision, preferring to work ad hoc and locally. He refrained from pushing his local arguments into generalizations about what criticism should be. Generalizations, by nature, foreclosed and forestalled. The goal of criticism should be to identify various criteria for the evaluation of significance, or to demonstrate how one concept or issue could have different functions. One example came in his 1954 analysis of an exhibition of Bantu art by a Christian Society working in Africa. The exhibition showed a breadth of vision he found praiseworthy in Westerners. But it was also a vision marred not simply by their "strong Christian bias" but because it had become dogmatic and uncritical. They had explained African art, according to Alloway, through their ideology of Christianity rather than through that of Africa and the Bantu. Thus the same "cultural relativism" that

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<sup>239</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "Charm," *Art News & Review* 7, no. 12 (9 July 1955): 7.

functioned positively in the Christian Society's open appreciation for African art also became "oppressive dogma" when applied uncritically as a "stock-response."<sup>241</sup> Alloway understood the dangers of relativism and the function of critical theory by demonstrating that the same position could have both progressive and regressive aspects.<sup>242</sup>

Although present only sporadically in this early period we see the Alloway of critical theory emerging in function if not always in clear statement. Reviewing Fernand Leger in 1954, Alloway argued the critic's job was to rid us of the "red-herrings" by investigating them, and countering the basis for the many accepted clichés that are used to inscribe meaning.<sup>243</sup> Critical thinking (the critical act) opens us up to the possibility of multiple causes and relationships, otherwise criticism suffers from the inability to make distinctions. Thus Alloway felt that the book by John Bauer, of the Brooklyn Museum, tried to erroneously assign a single theme--realism--to the development of American art.<sup>244</sup> For Alloway, Bauer's uncritical attitude produced relativism rather than distinctions. Bauer was wrong: US Cubists were not as "legitimate" or "equal to" those who influenced them. Simply "because an artist in Paris, Texas has been influenced by a

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<sup>240</sup> Alloway, "Sutherland and Moore."

<sup>241</sup> "This liberal relativism becomes an oppressive dogma, however, when it is a stock-response overlaying attitudes and imagery once native to the converted society." See Lawrence Alloway, "After the Missionaries. R.W.S. Galleries," *Art News & Review* 6, no. 9 (29 May 1954): 9.

<sup>242</sup> In reviews such as these Alloway does become more fully deconstructive. But this is not always his position.

<sup>243</sup> Lawrence Alloway, "The Hand of Leger," *Art News & Review* 6, no. 23 (11 December 1954): 5.

<sup>244</sup> Lawrence Alloway, "New York, New York—or Paris, Texas," *Art News & Review* 6, no. 15 (21 August 1954): 3. Bauer's book was *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art*.

big man in Paris, France the two artists are not necessarily equal.”<sup>245</sup> Alloway was making a value judgment of hierarchy but it was not based on the concept of good and bad art, but rather on distinctions. Alloway argued that Pollock, de Kooning and the early New York School, contrary to Bauer, differed from older forms of abstractionists and expressionists and he believed the critic’s job was to distinguish such differences. Vague and uncritical thinking, like Bauer’s, led to relativism. Alloway believed that critical thinking, with its ability to discriminate, led to openness rather than to a sense of closure that is usually associated with analytic processes and projects.

Conversely, those whom Alloway found wanting were those who did not qualify their words and thoughts as he felt they should. The reader feels the precision of Alloway’s critical thinking and both reader and discourse are frequently repositioned by it, but one also feels the process is “his” sense of truth.<sup>246</sup> At one point, years later an exasperated critic and life-long London colleague, David Sylvester wrote to the press in complaint: “Sir—I’ve grown accustomed by now to being told by Lawrence Alloway what I ought not to have written, but I don’t take so readily to his telling me what I ought to have written...”<sup>247</sup> Not to deny Alloway’s authoritarianism but there was also more to it: his was a system of thought, a specific way of thinking critically.

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<sup>245</sup>Ibid.

<sup>246</sup>Even those who find Alloway’s reviews “interesting” come under his fire because they do not measure up to his concept of criticality. See, for instance, his response to R.O. Dunlop in “Letter to the Editor,” *Art News & Review* 6, no. 24 (24 December 1954): 11.

<sup>247</sup>David Sylvester, “To the Editor of *Art News and Review*.” *Art News and Review* 12, no. 8 (7-21 May 1960): 3. The letter was written in reference to Alloway’s review “Dr. No’s Bacon,” *Art News and Review* 12, no. 6 (9 April 1960): 4, which included a critique of Sylvester’s and Robert Melville’s exhibition catalogue essays and likened their analysis of Francis Bacon to a monologue by Doctor No in the first James Bond film of the same title.

Alloway began early to demonstrate his interest in using a critical perspective-- defined as providing differentiations--not only to open a closed situation but to provide a fulcrum for change. In a few early cases, and more consciously in his later criticism, Alloway's local comments were purposefully directed to a larger frame. In a 1953 review of British sculpture he identified a move away from Surrealist biomorphism "towards more direct versions of the human image" but only in certain forms and situations.<sup>248</sup> For him, Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull were headed in the right direction while Henry Moore's transformation of Cubism had become "stale now."<sup>249</sup> Thus the aim was to identify not only the local change but to identify within that domain what was new in order to leverage the development of a larger field. This is more than the typical avant-gardist sense of newness for its own sake, and it is integral to the new type of criticism developed by Alloway.

Another example of far-reaching importance came in 1952 as Alloway began to identify with and cultivate a group of abstract artists who worked constructively to move "away from the painterly, expressionistic character of much recent abstraction" not because he expressed a belief in their art so much as he supported their struggle to reach the public against prevailing trends.<sup>250</sup> Thus the changes they were making leveraged the

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<sup>248</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "Heffer Gallery, Cambridge," *Art News & Review* 5, no. 19 (17 October 1953): 4.

<sup>249</sup>*Ibid.* Ironically Turnbull was not even in this exhibit.

<sup>250</sup>Lawrence Alloway, Untitled review: "An exhibition of abstract art at 22 Fitzroy Street . . . ," *Art News & Review* 4, no. 13 (26 July 1952): 4. Alloway had singled out Pasmore for his "courage and integrity" earlier that year in his "Pasmore's Constructions" at Redfern Gallery," *Art News & Review* 4, no. 8 (17 May 1952): 5. Aside from Pasmore in the July 1952 exhibition are Adrian Heath, Robert Adams, Anthony Hill, and Kenneth Martin. These artists constitute the core of his first major independent

field from what seemed to be a more-or-less typical avant-garde position; its newness and difference. But contrary to such an assumption, he also refuted the claims of Victor Pasmore, whom he identified as the leader of the group, that this was a new aesthetic. For Alloway at this time, Pasmore's work was a "return" to the attitudes of the "classicizing abstract art of the thirties . . . an attempt to restore the continuity of European concrete art interrupted by the war."<sup>251</sup> Thus neither the art nor Alloway's argument are traditionally avant-gardist because they identify with a return to traditional positions, in spite of Pasmore's claims of difference or avant-garde newness. The art and Alloway's critical support stem simply from its difference from the prevailing tendencies of "recent abstraction" even if the direction used was backward rather than forward looking.

Important for Alloway and his criticism was the position of the art relative to the entire field, no matter how either are defined, and the art's inherent ability to leverage change in that field. The job of criticism was to identify and use that fulcrum of difference. Eventually Alloway will refine his position with this group of artists and exhibit them in his 1954 curatorial debut at the ICA, as *Nine Abstract Artists*. But prior to 1955, he introduced the reader to what would be his central understanding of the critical act: to identify difference and use the differential to leverage the field under consideration.

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exhibition *Nine Abstract Artists* of 1954, discussed fully in chapter six. Interestingly, a reference in 1952 to an excess in abstract painting could only mean the US Abstract Expressionists, whose time in history Alloway soon argues is at an end.

<sup>251</sup>Pasmore dropped a successful career as a figural painter to move toward abstract art as early as 1947 and became a spokesperson for abstraction in his essay "The Artist Speaks," *Art News & Review* 3, no. 2 (4 February 1951): 3, where he claimed a new type of abstraction; not one derived from nature but from within, like music. Obviously Alloway was correct in his critique of Pasmore as connected to prior modernist abstract traditions. Also note the use of "concrete" for abstract in 1952.

### C.3. New Scientific World View

Perhaps the most interesting review by the young Alloway was also his least successful and most ambiguous. In January 1951 with the work of the Chilean Surrealist Matta at the ICA, Alloway made his first attempt to discuss art work within the frame of the new sciences which had altered the “world-picture” from a rigid and hierarchical structure to one that has “become ambiguous, intricate, elastic.”<sup>252</sup> He argued that the new concept in science of “continuous creation” may be the physicist’s equivalent to the continuous creativity of the unconscious through automatism.<sup>253</sup> From this he asserted more than concluded that Matta “is a painter of non-Euclidean space.” Matta’s “brilliant, experimental works” refused distinctions between “cosmic and microcosmic configurations” while confusing “galaxy and viscera.”

This is the first and most direct evidence, coming at a remarkably early date, of Alloway’s interest in and acceptance of a world view shifted by the sciences. All in all it was an interesting, experimental, and intellectually foggy attempt that called down the wrath of several readers who found Alloway’s criticisms and terminology “pretentious and esoteric nonsense . . . meaningless irrelevancy . . . employ(ing) arbitrary terms . . .

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<sup>252</sup>Alloway, “Matta,” 3.

<sup>253</sup>The phrase “continuous creation” is an unexplained reference to the steady-state hypothesis of astronomer Fred Hoyle, a British mathematician and astronomer. He was the foremost proponent of the steady-state theory that holds both that the universe is expanding and that matter is being continuously created to keep the mean density of matter in space constant. One assumes it was the latter point that provided Alloway’s suggested connection to automatism. But the most significant issue is the most obvious: Alloway’s knowledge, no matter how superficial, and use of the work of a British astronomer in an art review. There is the possibility that Alloway was either influenced by or seeking in science an alternative explanation for Herbert Read’s assertion of a primitive, creative, unconscious spontaneity he believed all art and artists possessed. See the discussion in chapter four of Read’s 1949 essay “Primitive Art, Modern Art,” *World Review* 4 (January 1949): 34-9.

oracular gibberish . . . tired old clichés . . .” with the “inability to consider the paintings themselves . . . incapable of talking anything but critical cant of the worst kind.”<sup>254</sup>

Alloway’s response was relatively mild: he clarified some of his references.

The experiment failed in the moment: nothing of this sort followed in the months ahead. But it was a fledgling flight; here was the Alloway in 1951 that read Norbert Wiener of 1950 (along with John Campbell’s pulp science fiction publication *Astounding Stories*) momentarily arced across future skies.<sup>255</sup> However, it will take the application of science and technology of the artists associated with the IG, especially through their exhibitions from 1951 to 1953, to return Alloway to these concerns and help him clarify his vision of the function of criticism in the new scientific and technologic world order.<sup>256</sup>

The Matta review is one piece in a series that reveals Alloway as someone who experimented with new intellectual territories and had a specific orientation to science. The dissertation will suggest that it is his observation of similar interests by the members of the IG that embolden Alloway in his later work to develop such connections more concretely.

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<sup>254</sup>Letters on the Matta review with a reply by Alloway were published as “A Critic and his Critics,” *Art News & Review* 3, no. 2 (4 February 1951): 2.

<sup>255</sup>Perhaps Alloway was also trying to gain the attention of the ICA while reviewing their exhibition of Matta, where Herbert Read, who hired Alloway as editor of *Athene* in 1950, was also the board president of the ICA, the hottest venue in London. More than one commentator has remarked on the professional determination of Alloway in London. See David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London*, 11, who wrote that by 1956 Alloway “was the most determined and abrasive art critic in London.”

<sup>256</sup>The clearest manifestations of the influence of science and technology that would ally Alloway’s world view according to scientific precepts were the series of exhibitions mounted by the IG, including *Growth and Form* (3 July-31 August, 1951) organized by Richard Hamilton prior to the formation of the IG. The effects of science and technology were also central to the discussion groups that preceded, then followed, the official convention of the IG in the summer of 1952 by Reyner Banham, as well as in the eclectic lecture series at the ICA, much of it generated by members of the IG.

#### D. Early Contact with New York Criticism

The end of Alloway's early period included his contact with American critics, especially Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg, and Thomas Hess, the editor of *Art News*. Alloway, like many others in the UK, was familiar with their writings and ideas through American journals and several publications in British journals. Although Alloway most frequently cited the work of Rosenberg in this period, he turned to Greenberg more frequently after his 1958 visit to the USA, and eventually, the dissertation argues, attempted a synthesis of their positions into his own, unique type of criticism.<sup>257</sup> Among the three, it was Greenberg who had a specific biographical relation to the British Isles, although only an indirect relation to Alloway in his early development.

Greenberg visited England in 1939 and returned numerous times from the 1950s through the 1970s.<sup>258</sup> His first post-war trip came in the summer of 1954, a year after the ICA exhibited the American Abstract Expressionists for the first time in a show titled "Opposing Forces." The American works had a strong impact on London art and on Alloway's concepts but not until later, in the second half of the 1950s and early 1960s. But apparently there was no direct contact between Alloway and Greenberg during the

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<sup>257</sup>See the summary argument in chapter 6, section D.

<sup>258</sup>Greenberg's relation to the British Isles can be traced through *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986-1993). A summary and personal interpretation are found in John A. Walker, "A Vexed Trans-Atlantic Relationship: Greenberg and the British" in *Art Criticism* 16, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 44-61. Walker retired in 1999 as a Reader in Art and Design History at Middlesex University. However, a biographical entry tells us that although eventually considered a part of the London avant-garde, thus privy in a general sense to its news and conversations, he was in art school at the Birmingham College of Art 1956-1960, in Paris at school 1961-3, and in London as an abstract painter beginning only in 1964, several years after Alloway's departure. See *British Art in the 20th Century. The Modern Movement*, ed. Susan Compton (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1986), 448.

1954 visit although Alloway had become the British correspondent for the New York art magazine *Art News* in 1953, a post he held into 1957. In fact, Greenberg chose in 1954 someone other than Alloway to visit and befriend: the Cornwall-based painter-critic Patrick Heron, who had written for the British weekly *The New Statesman* from 1947-1950 and published in many of the same journals as Alloway.<sup>259</sup>

A meeting between Greenberg and Alloway does not seem to have occurred until Alloway's trip to the United States around May (perhaps later) in 1958, two to three months after Alloway had criticized Greenberg's 1939 attack on popular culture ("Avant Garde and Kitsch") and used the phrase "Pop Art" for the first time in his now famous 1958 article "The Arts and Mass Culture."<sup>260</sup> Although the exact dates and particulars of Alloway's first visit to the USA are not always clear, he visited several cities, many artists, gallery and museum officials, Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg.<sup>261</sup> What changes

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<sup>259</sup>Heron's collected works are available in *Painter as Critic. Patrick Heron: Selected Writings*, ed. Mel Gooding (London: Tate Publishing 1998). The British historian of art and theory Charles Harrison considers Heron's critical position, one he calls "Traditional Modern," to be the opposite of Alloway. But Harrison used Alloway's somewhat later public alignment with issues of popular culture and mass communication to make the case. Charles Harrison, "Critical Theories and the Practice of Art," in *British Art in the 20th Century. The Modern Movement*, 53-61, especially 59.

<sup>260</sup>Greenberg published his famous attack as "Avant Garde and Kitsch" in 1939. It was republished in the British cultural journal *Horizon* in April, 1940, which also published his "The present prospects of American painting and sculpture" in October 1947. Alloway's quite belated response to the 1939 article was "The Arts and the Mass Media," *Architectural Design* 28, no. 2 (February 1958): 84-5.

<sup>261</sup>Several sources, including his own biographical sheet, report Alloway's 1958 award of a Foreign Leader Grant by the US State Department to travel to the US. He likely received the grant through his connections with the American Embassy and his friendship with Stefan Munsing, its cultural attaché (Massey/Schlegel, 19). Sleigh, "How Lawrence Became an Art Critic," 22, reported that Alloway often borrowed paintings from the embassy for use in exhibitions at the ICA and that it may have been Munsing who introduced him to Clement Greenberg during one of his frequent visits to London: "We often had lunch or dinner together" reported Sleigh, but without citing dates. This opens the possibility that Greenberg could have met with Alloway as early as 1954. Alloway's 1958 trip came as early as April, perhaps later, and lasted at least five weeks, perhaps longer. (See Massey/Schlegel, 19. There seem to be discrepancies in dates that run from April into July.) He reportedly visited Washington, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles (as reported in "An Unnerving Romanticism," 40). He met many figures in the art world but specifically mentioned were Clement Greenberg, Lee Krasner, Harold

were wrought as a consequence are best left for the discussion of Alloway's later developments in chapter six. But at least one knowledgeable, albeit recent, commentator, John Walker, is very clear in his opinion: after chatting with Greenberg for several evenings in New York in 1958 "Alloway appears to have switched his allegiance from Rosenberg's theories to Greenberg's because he returned to London convinced that Abstract Expressionism was an art of control and order, not one of accident and chance."<sup>262</sup> Walker's claims point to the need to address Alloway's problematic relation to these two American critics, who dominated the interpretive framework for US art.<sup>263</sup>

Despite what were apparent, even radical, differences between them in 1958, Greenberg met with Alloway during his July 1959 London trip. Alloway had been promoted from Assistant to Deputy Director of the ICA (1957-9), and Greenberg reportedly showed him slides of some stained, color-field paintings. The next year Greenberg helped arrange the shipment of works by Morris Louis, an artist he was strongly promoting, to Alloway and the ICA for Louis' first London exhibition in May 1960.<sup>264</sup> And although there is nothing currently of record to verify it, it is probable that Greenberg later arranged Alloway's first job in the US, to teach at Bennington College in

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Rosenberg, Adolph Gottlieb, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Betty Parsons, Mark Rothko, William Rubin, and Jasper Johns. Alloway reported on his experiences in publication for *The Listener*, *Architectural Review*, and *Art News & Review*. In a much later interview (1986) Alloway contradicted these reports in part by denying he ever met Still: "I never met Clyfford Still though I made a couple of efforts." See Lawrence Alloway, "Field Notes: An Interview," in (and with) Michael Auping, ed., *Abstract Expressionism, the Critical Developments* (New York: Abrams, 1987), 128.

<sup>262</sup>Walker, 52.

<sup>263</sup>See chapter 6.D of the dissertation.

<sup>264</sup>Walker, 47-8.

Vermont. Greenberg was so well known at Bennington that it was called “Clemsville” and much of the staff, many of whom Greenberg arranged to hire, were called “The Green Mountain Boys.”<sup>265</sup>

Alloway made no mention of Greenberg until around 1958 (see 6.D) but in 1954 he wrote glowingly in support of Harold Rosenberg’s interpretation of Abstract Expressionism as Action Painting, a reading despised by Greenberg.<sup>266</sup> But there is nothing in Alloway’s writings during this early period to clearly stamp him as a critic under the direct influence or even using the ideas of Greenberg or Rosenberg to any formative degree, although he clearly had read them and knew their positions. That changes after 1955, when he more consciously explores the position of each critic and begins to develop his own position.

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<sup>265</sup>Walker, 53-4. Also see Florence Rubinfeld, *Clement Greenberg: A Life* (New York: Scriber 1998).

<sup>266</sup>Alloway referred to Harold Rosenberg’s article “Parable for American Painters,” that appeared in *Art News* 52, no. 9 (January 1954): 60-3, 74-6: “Rosenberg in this and other articles has defined action painting more successfully . . . than Michel Tapié in *Un art autre*.” It may be significant that Alloway did not say Rosenberg’s interpretation was better than Greenberg’s theory of modernism. See Alloway, “New York, New York—or Paris, Texas,” 3. Alloway referred to Rosenberg’s concept of action painting several times after this, directly and, likely, indirectly. See 6.D for a discussion.

## **Chapter 4. The ICA and IG: Histories and Issues**

### **A. Introduction**

The general historical circumstances and guiding issues of the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) and the Independent Group (IG) are structured in this chapter with an emphasis on Alloway's relationship to them. First the chapter provides a general historical outline of the two groups as separate but intertwined histories. Comprehensive histories of the ICA and the IG do not exist but there is sufficient reliable information to develop an accurate outline. After basic facts are established, the historical outline continues through a direct comparison of their ideas to develop the argument that the relation between the ICA and the IG was closer than the IG members felt, remembered or accepted. Notwithstanding very real differences between them, the ICA was not a polarized enemy of the IG, but an influential parent organization in relationship to which the IG emerged. Thus the dissertation also attempts to distill important and specific issues shared between them to lessen the mythology of opposition as frequently found in the comments of IG members. From this perspective, for example, Herbert Read's concept of the modern is surprisingly close, rather than antithetical, to that of Alloway and the IG.<sup>267</sup> Close identities also emerge between the two for foundational issues. They shared an understanding of the importance of culture, of which art is simply one part. They shared convictions on the nature of that culture; diverse, plural, inclusive, and, in its current state, chaotic. So too they shared at least one vehicle used to understand the

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<sup>267</sup>A full discussion of Alloway's understanding of "modern" is reserved for chapter 5. Read is discussed in this chapter.

equivalencies in culture: anthropology. At the same time, a comparative examination produces clear differences between them, especially in the embrace by the IG of the exigencies of the postwar world--on which they base much of their aesthetic--distinct from the ICA's condemnation of the chaotic as a necessary but temporary state.<sup>268</sup>

However, it is the IG that is the focus and the group with which Alloway most strongly identified despite his official positions at the ICA as the Assistant Director from mid-1955, then Deputy Director from 1956 until September of 1960. The focus in the second half of the chapter is on selective topics central to the IG with the caveat that the IG existed more as a place of intersection between artists and intellectuals whose lives and ideas also developed outside and through other venues. The view is that of several snapshots taken from complex lives and momentarily cross-referenced through the IG, which was a loose association of people without specific membership or fully stated agenda. Thus there are brief discussions of the work of a variety of IG "members," although the word membership may be too strong an inference in respect to them: the collage and exhibition designs of Eduardo Paolozzi, John McHale and Richard Hamilton; the concepts of architecture and urbanism of the critic and historian Reyner Banham and the architects Alison and Peter Smithson; the photographs and concept of urban anthropology of Nigel Henderson.

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<sup>268</sup>The word aesthetic is used in the modern sense to mean a grouping of ideas that define or embody ideas regarding the nature of art. The word ideology carries the same meaning, as does the phrase art theory and the three are used interchangeably.

The specific interchanges within the IG confederation may never be fully known, but nevertheless there was a shared set of ideas, an aesthetic associated with the IG and Alloway. Many of the specifics of the IG aesthetic are discussed more extensively in the next chapter, but the concepts of randomness and equivalence are developed here to unite their concern with what may first appear as disparate ideas, such as communication theory, chaos, Dadaism, the Bauhaus, General Semantics and an orientation called non-Aristotelianism. Generally taken, the dissertation argues in the second half of the chapter that the core of the IG aesthetic was its integration and use of randomness in the formation of an ideology whose concern centers on culture more than art. The understanding of cybernetics established in the first chapter, with its issues of randomness, chaos and equivalence, is re-presented here in terms investigated and used by the IG. For instance, the IG located cultural parallels for the scientific issues not only in the biologist D'Arcy Thompson (1860-1948) but in science fiction, in the General Semantics or non-Aristotelianism named and developed by Alfred Korzybski (1879-1950), and, not least, in the Dadaist principles they adopted as a counter-weight to what they perceived, perhaps wrongly, as a bias towards Surrealism by the older members of the ICA.

The last section of this chapter uses the well-known 1956 IG sponsored exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* as a demonstration of the general ideas of the IG with specific attention to Alloway's contribution as an application of communication theory. His visual embodiment of the consequences of his concept of a modern visual continuum-theory given visual form--returns us to the discussion of culture and the Birmingham

School first established in chapter two, now with the suggestion that visual art can contribute to the history of ideas. Specifically, Alloway and the artists of the IG publicly embodied and displayed in visual form the arguments later developed in British Cultural Studies.

### **B. An Historical Outline of the ICA and IG**

Roland Penrose, one of the founders of the ICA, recalled that it was originally conceived in discussions prompted by the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition in London as an attempt initiated prior to World War II to found a London equivalent to New York's Museum of Modern Art.<sup>269</sup> Thus the desire for modernism via the need to support and institutionalize "modern art," however the term might be defined, was, and remained, central to their concerns. When discussions reconvened after WW II in January 1946 between Penrose, E.L.T. Mesens and Herbert Read, it was as an Organizing Committee for such a museum. At some point the "Museum of Modern Art" title was changed to the Institute of Contemporary, rather than "Modern," Art, and the idea of a holding or permanent collection abandoned. Thus, symbolically and, as we will see, ideologically, emphasis shifted not only toward the contemporary more than the modern, but to the assumption implicit within the term: that one constructs the contemporary understood as a progressive, if as yet unarticulated, future. The ICA began in 1947 with

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<sup>269</sup> According to Penrose, the ICA began with the impetus supplied by the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries in London, itself derived from an English group formed in support of Surrealism and whose members included Penrose and Read. Mesens was a Belgian Surrealist, friend of René Magritte, and ran the London Gallery on Cork Street. See Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 20, for her report of a personal conversation with Penrose of 29 September 1983 on the founding of the ICA.

the publication of a policy statement.<sup>270</sup> The first official exhibition was *Forty Years of Modern Art: 1907-1947* and opened on 9 February 1948 at the Academy Cinema since no physical facilities existed.<sup>271</sup> The London ICA remains in operation today.

A group or subgroup identity coalesced at the ICA through a series of presentations and lectures begun formally in April, 1952, under the temporary leadership of Richard Lannoy.<sup>272</sup> By this time Richard Hamilton, Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull had been included in several ICA exhibitions as representatives of “young” British artists. Hamilton was also hired to design several of the ICA exhibitions, likely due to his background in jig and tool design,<sup>273</sup> and in July of 1951 he proposed, organized and installed the exhibition *Growth and Form* at the ICA based on D’Arcy Thompson’s book (fig. 1). In July, 1952 Toni del Renzio, the ICA part-time club

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<sup>270</sup> The first public announcement came in a letter to *The Times* (London) from Herbert Read on 26 June 1947, outlining its aims and asking for interested parties to send for copies of their Statement of Policy.

<sup>271</sup> See Graham Whitham’s “Chronology” in *Independent Group*, 12 passim., and Massey’s discussions, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, chapter 2.

<sup>272</sup> Richard Lannoy, the ICA gallery assistant, organized three meetings at the ICA in April for an invited audience of about 50 people, that were likely outgrowths of prior informal discussions as well as a proposal to the ICA Management Committee by younger members in late 1951 for lectures of their own. The first of these meetings included the by now famous use of an epidiascope, which could project only part of a page at a time, to present Eduardo Paolozzi’s collage scrapbooks that he had been collecting since his time in Paris in 1947. The group reportedly saw a mish-mash of science fiction magazine covers, military images, car ads and animated film clips. The most cited quote from Paolozzi was that “all human experience is just one big collage.” Many date the beginning of the IG to this night. See “Eduardo Paolozzi,” in *Independent Group*, 94, and Timothy Hyman, “Paolozzi: Barbarian and Mandarin,” *Artscribe* 8 (September 1977): 34-38. During his two years in Paris, 1947-9, Paolozzi was exposed directly to the Surrealists, Dubuffet, and to Dada collections, including Duchamp’s collage wall. Ironically, Reyner Banham, by this time a member of the editorial staff for *Architectural Review*, was not invited but reportedly crashed the 1951 presentations. Alloway was not in attendance at the early meetings and what he knew of them, or exactly when he participated, is currently undocumented. For a fuller historiography of the Independent Group, see the chronology by Graham Whitham in *Independent Group*, 12-48, Diane Kirkpatrick, “The Artists of the IG: Backgrounds and Continuities” in *Independent Group*, 207-11 and Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, chapters two and three.

<sup>273</sup> Nigel Henderson had introduced Hamilton to the ICA and Paolozzi.

management consultant, convened the group, by then designated as the “Young Group,” in Richard Lannoy’s absence. Reyner Banham convened the group again in August, 1952, but as the “Young Independent Group” whose notice was written into the ICA minutes as the “Independent Group.”<sup>274</sup> With Banham the group assumed a concrete identity and regular lectures and discussions began, although it is not always clear as to who sponsored what. In 1952 Banham was appointed to the ICA Management Committee as the representative of the IG (a position he held until May 1956) and in 1953 he initiated the noted IG series of lectures and discussions focused on issues of concern to the younger members, “Aesthetic Problems of Contemporary Art.”<sup>275</sup> Within this period Alloway began to appear and contribute to the informal discussions in late 1952, then formally lecturing at the ICA in March, 1953.<sup>276</sup> In September of 1953 he was appointed to the ICA Exhibitions Committee after the resignation of del Renzio.

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<sup>274</sup>See the chronology by Graham Whitham, *Independent Group*, 18-19. The change from young to simply independent group seems to have been a casual act of abbreviation by Dorothy Morland, then Director of the ICA. However, the concept of “young artists” was everywhere in the postwar London art world and the word “young” was specifically used for an annual British based art exhibition separate from the ICA and the IG. But even here there were differences in what it meant to be young with many of the so-called “young” publicly acknowledged as war veterans. Alloway’s peers at the IG were generally those who had served in the war or were of that age. Thus by the late 1950s and early 1960s Alloway and the IG members were older than the emerging artists he identified as the first postwar British avant-garde (chapter six). To be young in 1950s London, and one suspects the same as true elsewhere, was problematic for the slightly older postwar generation and not a term of simple understanding, especially with the emergence of the first historical working and immigrant class youth culture that identified with rock-and-roll, gangs, and urbanism.

<sup>275</sup>Whitham’s chronology in *Independent Group*, 12-48 is the best composite for this period and contains what is known of the lecture series topics and speakers. It is the source for this outline and much of the dissertation is stronger because of his work. Only fragments of the content of the IG meetings remain.

<sup>276</sup>Alloway is recorded as one of several speakers on an exhibition of Barbara Hepworth’s sculpture during a regular “Points of View” discussion at the ICA on 11 November 1952. The title of Alloway’s lecture of 26 March 1953 is reported as “The Human Head in Modern Art,” likely designed to correspond with the ICA exhibition *Wonder and Horror of the Human Head: an Anthology* (March-April, 1953), designed by Richard and Terry Hamilton with help from Toni del Renzio. Alloway lectured frequently in 1953. See Whitham’s “Chronology,” 22-3.

Banham stopped heading the discussions sometime in 1954, although he continued as the IG representative to the ICA Board. Dorothy Morland, then Director of the ICA, reportedly asked John McHale and Lawrence Alloway in either late 1954 or early 1955 to reconvene the IG sessions. The two directed what is now known as the second (and last) set of IG official meetings or lecture series: “closed meetings” around nine different topics (or sub-topics since advertising had two sessions devoted to it) from 11 February to 15 July, 1955, for the general purpose “of investigating the relationship of the fine arts to popular culture.”<sup>277</sup> In the middle of the second series in July 1955 Alloway became the Assistant Director at the ICA and the Deputy Director in November 1956 until his resignation in September of 1960. He maintained his position on the Exhibitions Committee until March, 1961 and by September was teaching at Bennington College in Vermont. He maintained contact and occasional activities in London into at least 1963.

As with its beginning, no one is quite certain when the IG ended. Its formal meetings ended in late 1955 with the conclusion of the second lecture and discussion series led by McHale and Alloway. However, much of its agenda was incorporated into the ICA while the activities of its members, including Alloway, continued to be distributed across other venues and projects in London. By 1957 Alloway was directing

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<sup>277</sup>One of the key documents from this period is the only known surviving record of IG discussions reportedly in the form of a mimeograph typescript, likely by John McHale, two copies of which are in the archives of Magda Cordell McHale and the estate records of Alison and Peter Smithson. The documents were reprinted in an appendix in *Independent Group*, 248-9. The mimeograph provides an introduction, from which the quote was taken (*Independent Group*, 248), a list of the topics, dates, speakers, number attending (never more than 22 at any session) and a brief summary of the content of each topic session. The IG sessions in 1955 were restricted to members and separate from the many public sessions led by Alloway and IG members at the ICA. The restricted sessions were, according to McHale’s typescript “a trial ground for new ideas. From these closed meetings public lectures were subsequently developed.”

the ICA attention to American art under the influence of US exhibitions in London and through his contacts with the US art scene. His work as the British correspondent for the New York based *Art News* ended this year, replaced by his work as a Contributing Editor for *Art International* until 1961. By 1959 he was at the center of emerging activity by a yet younger generation of artists, mostly large scale abstract field painters, some of whom joined the ICA and exhibited in conjunction with former IG members.<sup>278</sup> Thus the shift by Alloway to the US was more a gradual merger than a radical change and he continued the development of many of the issues developed in London after his move to the USA, just as he continued to publish in England on British matters while living in the USA. Certainly much of the perception of Alloway as merely a proselytizer for US art came from this later period, although the dissertation argues Alloway had the problems and position of contemporary British art equally fixed before him.<sup>279</sup> Other developments within the IG did not survive the transition in whole, but constitute what we today consider the IG aesthetic as discussed throughout this and the ensuing chapters.

### **C. Selected Relationships between the ICA and the IG**

The ICA opened with a decidedly broad perspective based as much on the concept of culture as on art. This position, far more than any bias towards one art form or movement, was crucial for the formation of the ideas of the IG and Alloway. The ICA breadth of orientation was demonstrated in several ways. First, the ICA was no longer to

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<sup>278</sup>They are discussed in chapter six.

<sup>279</sup>See the discussions and arguments in chapters five and six.

be a museum with a permanent collection but an institute. It was to be a meeting place for the presentation, discussion and evaluation of all that was current and important in contemporary culture, far exceeding any aesthetic devoted solely to the visual arts or to one aesthetic over another. In this sense the bar and lounge area (yet to be built in 1947) would become as important as the official lectures.<sup>280</sup> The Independent Group formed and functioned as part of this informal context.<sup>281</sup> Secondly, the ICA demonstrated its commitment to discussion and evaluation by means of what it exhibited, how it was exhibited, the media accepted, and the lectures and discussion programs presented. That eventually these would be insufficient for some of the younger members who formed the IG and went on to sponsor their own particular topics should not occlude the role of the rather nurturing ICA parent. In many ways the ICA was the Winnecottian good enough parent rather than the Oedipal father.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup>See the several testimonies to this effect by IG members recorded in Whitham, *Chronology*, 14.

<sup>281</sup>Many IG members later recalled that the informal meetings and discussions at the bar or at the homes of friends were an integral part of their development. See for instance the Smithson's, "Retrospective Comments" in *Independent Group*, 194, and Nigel Henderson's later testimony in a letter reproduced in *Independent Group*, 14.

<sup>282</sup>The IG members felt quite the opposite. As James King, a biographer of Herbert Read, summarized: "Read . . . was the object of belligerent resentment by a group of young artists and critics (Eduardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson, William Turnbull, Toni del Renzio, Richard Hamilton, Reyner Banham and later, Lawrence Alloway) who, in Oedipal fashion, wanted to overthrow his patriarchal authority. Alloway later recalled: 'There was nobody much else to attack . . . Herbert was really all there was.'" See King, *The Last Modern, A Life of Herbert Read*, 269 and 333. King's reported source of the Alloway citation is a manuscript of a 25 May 1977 interview with Reyner Banham identified as MS ICA 22 held by the ICA. This author was unable to locate this and other reported manuscripts held by the ICA. A telephone conversation with the ICA in March 2001 in London reported the transfer of all manuscripts related to the history of the ICA to the Tate Gallery Archive but many such manuscripts referenced in various sources were not among those papers held at the archive as ICA papers.

From the outset the ICA included and considered art from an international perspective,<sup>283</sup> from many time periods, and included many genres of “art.” A 1949 announcement of its new theater opening advertised it “as a centre for the theatrical, musical, social and visual arts,” and “a social centre” that would “show exhibitions of painting, sculpture and photography as well as presenting plays, films, puppet shows and ‘topical cabaret.’”<sup>284</sup> Ewan Phillips, then Director of the ICA, publicly outlined two objectives soon after the December 12th, 1950 opening of the ICA permanent quarters on Dover Street.<sup>285</sup> First, the ICA was to provide a venue for the new and unusual art forms whose lack of commercial credibility would prevent it being seen or heard. This is a theme that Alloway pursues throughout his career.<sup>286</sup> Secondly, the ICA was “to promote co-operation between the various branches of the arts . . . by providing a meeting-place where musicians, sculptors, painters, architects, writers and workers in the field of radio, theatre, film and ballet can meet each other and members of the public in a congenial

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<sup>283</sup>For example, a news account in 1949 tells of a group of contemporary Egyptian artists presenting their views on art at the ICA. “Institute of Contemporary Arts,” *Art News & Review* 1, no. 20 (5 November 1949): 5.

<sup>284</sup>“A New Centre,” *Art News & Review* 1, no. 17 (24 September 1949): 3. The use of the word topical at this early date does not seem to directly relate to Alloway’s later use of the word to designate his type of criticism, as outlined below. It does testify to the historical currency of the word. No author was cited for the commercial announcement.

<sup>285</sup>Ewan Phillips, “The Institute of Contemporary Arts,” *Art News & Review* 2, no. 23 (16 December 1950): 3. The full page spread featured the reproduction of a painted portrait of Herbert Read as Chairman by Patrick Heron.

<sup>286</sup>Alloway used precisely this reasoning, following that of the artists, to characterize the London art scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The lack of venues for contemporary London art was a major rationale for his 1960 exhibition and the formation of the group titled *Situation*. See his review “Size Wise,” *Art News and Review* 12, no. 17 (10-24 September 1960): 2. It was also a minor theme in his earlier review of Roger Coleman’s exhibition titled *Place*. See Lawrence Alloway, “Making a Scene,” *Art News & Review* 11, no. 18 (26 September 1959): 2, 3.

atmosphere, and discuss their common problems.”<sup>287</sup> Thus the ICA considered not only all the arts but the need for art to be part of a broad-based cultural and social discourse, a perspective that Alloway and the IG most certainly shared. Alloway and the IG will extend this into their own aesthetic as something more extreme than the ICA envisioned, but Read and the ICA pointed the way.

The ICA sense of modern art was oriented by the older founders who came of age in the first half of the century through their direct experiences with the modern art movements developed among the European continental avant-garde between world wars. Their supposed and reported bias--particularly that of Penrose and Mesens--was towards Surrealism, and its influence among the founders has been used to characterize the overall aesthetic of the ICA as Surrealist.<sup>288</sup> However, that characterization is insufficient, although not wrong.<sup>289</sup> Many of the exhibitions did focus on Surrealism and Surrealists

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<sup>287</sup>Phillips, “The Institute of Contemporary Arts.”

<sup>288</sup>For reasons outlined above in 4.B. Also see Massey’s claims, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, chapter two. Eduardo Paolozzi, in his retrospective comments for *Independent Group*, 192, recounts that the London Gallery, owned jointly by Penrose with two others and managed by Mesens, “was operated ideologically for the promotion in England of living Surrealist artists.” A general review of the writings of the British critics David Sylvester and Patrick Heron, both younger than Read’s generation but slightly older than and working concurrent with Alloway and both of whom shared Alloway’s animosity but certainly not his opinions, provides support for an acceptance of modern art as generally oriented to either or both Cubism and Surrealism, with Constructivism emerging as a third position. As early as 1945 Heron characterized the previous ten years as the “surrealist decade” while he generally preferred Cubism, although as a critic he was open, by his testimony, to whatever he considered vital. For example, see Patrick Heron’s review of Ben Nicholson’s 1945 exhibition for *The New English Weekly*, 18 October 1945, reprinted as “Ben Nicholson,” in Mel Gooding, ed., *Painter as Critic. Patrick Heron: Selected Writings* (London: Tate Publishing, 1998), 1-3, especially 2. For David Sylvester, see his anthology, *About Modern Art, Critical Essay 1948-1997* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997). Chapter five will develop a more complex picture of the conditions of modernism.

<sup>289</sup>Not least among the reasons is the generally unnoticed fact that a strong case can be made for Herbert Read’s opposition to Surrealism since he wrote repeatedly of his reservations. For example: “I believe from the beginning an exclusive devotion to a theory of aesthetic automatism was a mistake...it involves a surrender of intellectual freedom...(and) is not essentially artistic at all, but, if you like, scientific. Art...always involves an original act of creation--the invention of an objective reality which previously had no existence...art is in the pattern, which is personal intuition of the artists.” Read felt

but from the perspective of the history of Alloway and the IG, the conscious ICA decision to emphasize a broad-based approach to culture seems more important than any reported commitment to Surrealism. The commitment to breadth and the contemporary was likely shared among the ICA board, but also was likely the influence of Read, who was the major British spokesperson with an international following for English and European modernism and someone whose philosophy of art was based on the acceptance of the universality of the creative impulses within the human spirit. More specifically, Read was a proponent of what a major biographer calls the “profuse strains” of modernism, meaning two things. The historical trajectory or movement of modern art had, for Read, produced many subdivisions, and, that Read was not committed to any one of them, aside from what he refers to as the spirit of modernism. As we later see with Alloway so too for Read: there was no one meaning to modernism for him.<sup>290</sup>

Confirmation of Read’s understandings of the “modern” are readily abundant in his writings, despite their vast range. Indeed, it is the scope of his concerns that is first

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Surrealism was the simple projection of some pre-established internal symbol or image. It is his understanding of art defined on such a fundamental level as “personal creativity” that lay at the heart of Read’s position and concerns. For the quotations, see Herbert Read, “Art in Europe at the end of the Second World War,” published in his anthology *The Philosophy of Modern Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 44-57, especially 53. The essays are almost impossible to date but in Read’s “Preface” to the original edition of 1951 he tells the reader they were written over the last fifteen years, thus ca. 1935-50.

<sup>290</sup>See James King, *The Last Modern. A Life of Herbert Read*, passim but especially chapter six and page 77. Read is a far more complex figure than Penrose and Mesens and virtually every biographer and commentator refers to his breadth and inconsistencies, spread over his 103 books. His friend and fellow anarchist, George Woodcock, argued that Read lacked the fear of contradiction because Read saw contradiction as normal, and the center of art as the complexity and variability of the “creative act.” George Woodcock, *Herbert Read: The Stream and the Source* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 12-13. The dipolar is a frequently used paradigm by Read and virtually all commentators see Read as oriented to two poles although they give the poles different names, as did Read himself: reason and romanticism, anarchy and order, formlessness and form, or in terms of art movements, cubism and surrealism. See, for example, the introduction to David Thistlewood, *Herbert Read. Formlessness and Form. An Introduction to his Aesthetics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

testament to his broad characterization of modern art. The essays are consistently filled with knowledgeable references to virtually all the movements and hundreds of artists from the first half of the century, once calling them a “thousand forces” and “many streams” that resulted from art’s inward turn around 1900, a turn he called, after its philosophical designation, “Subjectivism.”<sup>291</sup> But that diversity was not what he meant by modern: it was not as simple as the plurality of many modernisms. Nor was Read happy over the diverse strains he found in the modern, feeling that art through its inwardness and diversity had become separated from society. Writing almost prophetically of the project adopted by Alloway and the IG: “It does not seem that the contradiction which exists between the aristocratic function of art and the democratic structure of modern society can ever be resolved.”<sup>292</sup> More specifically, and in a situation that called upon him in 1944 to summarize the past and the future of the postwar culture, he characterized the “modern scene” in ways extremely revealing.<sup>293</sup> It is, typically for Read, more a philosophical than an art historical argument but one whose details show heretofore

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<sup>291</sup>See his essay “The Modern Epoch in Art,” in his *The Philosophy of Modern Art*, 17-43, especially 42-43. This essay seems dated at least after 1940 by reason of content.

<sup>292</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>293</sup>Read wrote both prologue and epilogue for an anthology of twenty essays by noted scholars, each of whom summarized their fields, and generally affirmed the future in *This Changing World. A series of contributions by some of our leading thinkers, to cast light upon the pattern of the modern world*, ed. J.R.M. Brunwell (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1944). The subtitle clearly states the intention of the book, while the forward by the editor (pp. 1-2) sounded themes of consistent concern: i.e., “modern life” was specialized and marked by a “modern speed” of change, rendering a commonsensical understanding moot. He argued that only the “younger generation,” a phrase used several times, could comprehend it sufficiently to write it. However, most of the writers were not among the younger generation but were field specialists who had come of age between the wars or closer to WW I, Read prominent among them.

undiscovered parallels with Alloway and the IG, while also rendering their differences apparent.

Both of Read's essays for the 1944 anthology, *This Changing World*, establish an argument written against the horrors and disappointments of World War II, now closing but still raging.<sup>294</sup> Thus Read reminds readers that upheaval is "the general character of the modern scene" and so has it ever been, with intervals of peace and stability "brief and uneasy....all that we mean by culture has shown the same restlessness."<sup>295</sup> Despite his assessment that "man" is worse off than he was 500 years ago, the essential message is affirmative. We are, for Read, to find comfort in this knowledge of cycles in this time of chaos: "The essence of life is change, and change implies a continuous alteration of dissolution and renewal, of growth and decay, of joy and suffering."<sup>296</sup> And there is comfort for Read, especially during the upheaval of a world war, in the knowledge that we are all part of a continuing process of renewal. But "change is not necessarily a uniform process"<sup>297</sup> and "in no sphere of human life is this organic interplay of decay and renewal so evident as in the plastic arts."<sup>298</sup> Stability will return because he, and the other essayists, see an emerging pattern: "science is gradually establishing a firm ground of

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<sup>294</sup>The titles and subtitles are informative. The *Prologue* is titled "Threshold of a New Age. Renaissance or Decadence? Is there some common factor behind the contemporary manifestations of thought and life?," pp. 7-14. The *Epilogue* is titled "Philosophy of Change. Conclusion: Change is the essence of vital civilisation," pp. 263-268.

<sup>295</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 7.

<sup>296</sup>*Ibid.*, 14

<sup>297</sup>Read, *Epilogue*, 266.

<sup>298</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 11.

absolute knowledge, and that on this ground philosophy is building an equally firm structure of thought. I believe the bewildering changes we have seen in art represent an extension of human sensibility, a deeper intuition of the form and significance of the objective world.”<sup>299</sup> Thus change is acceptable but only because it precedes stability. Read is after smaller game than pluralism.

The saving grace in the arts for Read rests not in forms and movements but rather in “the individuals in whom the spirit of modernism is embodied...When the cloud of war has passed, they will re-emerge eager to rebuild the shattered world.”<sup>300</sup> And typical of Read, the “modernists” are all of the modern movements--he specifically names Surrealism, Constructivism, and functional architecture--because what is important is that “Art remains.”<sup>301</sup> Therefore we are at the doorstep of a new period, the “threshold of a new age” as his *Prologue* title proclaims. And Read argues this new age has a general name begun around 1800. “What we call the modern movement in the arts...(is) that process of renewal which began only one hundred and fifty years ago (and) is still active. It began with the poetry of Wadsworth and Shelly, the paintings of Constable and Turner, the architecture of the Forth Bridge and the Crystal Palace, the philosophy of Hegel and the economics of Marx...the vital movements of renewal which began with the French Revolution and the Romantic Movement are by no means played out.”<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>299</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 8.

<sup>300</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 12.

<sup>301</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 14. Alloway argues a similar position in 1981, that after all is said and done, art is the issue. His position is discussed in the introduction to chapter five.

<sup>302</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 11.

Thus we see two important issues that are also embedded in the IG and Alloway, whose details are argued in chapter five: that modernism is more a spirit than a specific manifestation, and the nature of the world is restless change. However within the IG acceptance and embrace of change, their differences from Read's understanding begin to clearly emerge. Chaos is the enemy for Read, to be avoided through discipline; otherwise anarchy results.<sup>303</sup> While he argues for change as natural and organic what he really wants is to have change reach its zenith and stabilize in the moment exempt from change, the idealism of art. "The great work of art, whether it be a temple or a poem, a piece of sculpture or a system of philosophy, is exempt from change. It is irrefragable and eternal, towering in its beauty, exquisite in its strength."<sup>304</sup> And here we see the fundamental difference from the IG: not only does it reject the need for a stabilized moment, and oppose all that is idealized, eternal, and permanent, it also embraces chaos and randomness, the very conditions Read sees as a necessary prelude. For the IG, change and even chaos are not a prelude but a necessary and consistent requisite process in, not as prelude to, the condition of modernity.<sup>305</sup>

Yet the difference is also more subtle. Read argues that the stabile moments are necessary for integration to occur, but that we must all agree in order for that to occur. He

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<sup>303</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 8.

<sup>304</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 14. It does not bother Read that he also argues the need to have art understood and function in the overall social structure as "an irrational activity" in order to counterbalance the instrumentalism he sees in the sciences, which, due to war have set the agenda. See *Epilogue*, 264. One assumes that for Read the necessary irrationality of art is to be seen as a smaller subset, where the larger cycles of history, inclusive of world wars, should not remain irrational and unintegrated forever.

<sup>305</sup>The affirmative relation of the IG members to chaos is argued extensively in the next section of this chapter.

feels that our period is culturally inferior to the Gothic because we lack “a unity of aesthetic expression.”<sup>306</sup> The IG will also construct a program for integration, socially and artistically, but not at the expense of agreement: they will refuse to limit their noise ratio, their individual voices, to attain that integration because they, unlike Read, are not willing to pay that price. There are several other issues supported in these essays by Read that prove to be important points of difference with Alloway and the IG. For example, Read warns against art associating itself too much with “the market-place” as he retains suspicions of capitalism.<sup>307</sup> He also warns against too great a reliance on technology and science: “for machines do not progress without the intervention of a creative or inventive mind.”<sup>308</sup> The IG embraces both the machine and the market-place.

It follows that the IG’s inclusivist attitude towards cultural artifacts can be considered in affirmative relation rather than opposition to the positions exercised by the ICA. It also suggests that the synthetic view of art and culture prescribed within the ICA policies from its beginning and embodied through its exhibitions likely encouraged Alloway and the IC to accept an open relation between the fine arts and the cultural artifacts of the world, an important position later and most famously designated by Alloway as a “continuum” between the fine arts and the popular culture. Integral to these understandings for modernism is the profound interest by first the ICA, then the IG, in anthropology.

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<sup>306</sup>Read, *Epilogue*, 266.

<sup>307</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 12.

The ICA interest in anthropology is found early, in their second exhibition (December, 1948) titled *Forty Thousand Years of Modern Art*.<sup>309</sup> It was a clever and strategic elaboration of their first exhibition (February, 1948) *Forty Years of Modern Art*. A comparative consideration of both, an act they intended for their London audience via the titles and their function as inaugural exhibitions, demonstrates the breadth of their understanding of modernism and its relationship to primitivism. The first exhibition openly advertised the goal of the ICA as the continuation of the development of the “Modern Movement.”<sup>310</sup> It featured mostly European modernist art drawn from the collections of its members, but also included the first future member of the IG, Eduardo Paolozzi, along with several other young, contemporary British artists such as Lucien Freud and Robert Colquhoun. Their inclusion followed a debate and commitment by the older ICA members to include new British art from the onset. Read’s introduction invokes the phrase “Modern Movement” in art, which he defined in terms of the European 20th-century tradition, but one not restricted to art objects *per se*: “This

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<sup>308</sup>Read, *Prologue*, 10.

<sup>309</sup>The second exhibition, *Forty Thousand Years of Modern Art. A Comparison of Primitive and Modern* opened in December, 1948, at the Academy Cinema in Oxford Street, with an undated checklist published by the ICA.

<sup>310</sup>The first exhibition, *Forty Years of Modern Art: 1907-1947. A selection from British Collections* opened in February, 1948, at the Academy Cinema in Oxford Street. The quote comes from Herbert Read’s introduction, unpaginated. There was no checklist of works or artists, although a work by Ben Nicholson was illustrated. Read argued the founding vision for the ICA to become the “national art centre” to function as the “nucleus of all the local art centres” and to project to “national consciousness” the best regional British work but at the same time to act “as an exchange for the creative art of all contemporary nations.” Read argued that “the Modern Movement came into being without the aid of any institutes, without public support of any kind” and that should change. Organized support was historically necessary to sustain all great “epochs of art” and democratic societies lack such a mechanism. He felt the ICA was to be unique in its attention to present and future art and culture, rather than retrospective; they were placing themselves along a different, more interventionist path than they felt a museum would construct.

exhibition celebrates the Modern Movement in art, which may be said to have begun forty years ago with the first cubist paintings of Picasso—with the poetry of Apollinaire and the music of Stravinsky.”<sup>311</sup> He stated the general purpose of the ICA was to sustain “the impetus of the Modern Movement” by providing what democratic capitalist countries do not: a “national art centre” that is not a museum but a “hearth . . . an adult play-centre, a workshop where work is joy, a source of vitality and experiment.” An untitled, brief statement followed Read’s introduction, initialed by “R.M.,” that attacked formalism as an approach to art and argued that it is the “artist’s vision,” defined as “poetic inventiveness” that is foremost. Thus the ICA consciously refused to set definitive parameters for, or a specific definition of modern or contemporary, words they rarely used and, when used at all, more as general modifiers than as nouns; nor did they distinguish between art and culture, arguing for a synthesis. However, the “Modern Movement” was capitalized and recognized as based on a prior, broadly defined artistic or poetic vision whose specific, future understandings and forms were to be negotiated over time; Read’s “spirit of modernity.”

The second exhibition, *Forty Thousand Years of Modern Art*, was a fuller visual statement of their philosophy.<sup>312</sup> Here Read (and the Organizing Committee of the ICA) openly embodied, but did not write about, the concept of the universality of art and directly engaged the issue of the “primitive,” a recurring theme at the ICA and a word

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<sup>311</sup>Read, *Forty Years of Modern Art: 1907-1947*. Read is oblivious to the contrast with his 1944 argument for modernism as beginning concurrently with Romanticism.

<sup>312</sup>Whereas the first catalogue had essays but no list of works, the second catalogue had no essays but a list of the 179 works.

synonymous, for them and eventually for the IG, with anthropology and ethnology--and, perhaps more importantly, synonymous with Read's vision of the "Modern" and the conditions of contemporary culture. Although no essay accompanied the exhibition checklist, Read wrote a lengthy review of the second ICA exhibition a few months after its closing.<sup>313</sup> In it he stated what anyone who followed Read's thought would know of his position: that art had "not changed since it made its first appearance in prehistoric times" because art deals with fundamental polarities, especially naturalism and abstraction.<sup>314</sup> Read argued for commonality between the modern and primitive vis-à-vis the Freudian unconscious. He argued that realization of such commonalities by modern artists led those within the early Modern Movement to elevate the value of ethnological material and gave "the modern artist a new mode of expression . . . in accordance with his emotional or spiritual needs." Several months after his review of the exhibition Read wrote a review of books that included the work of Margaret Mead, the anthropologist he considered "the wisest and most learned of her profession," in which he identified her work in Pacific Island cultures (as well as the work of the medievalist historian

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<sup>313</sup>Herbert Read, "Primitive Art, Modern Art," *World Review* 4 (June 1949): 34-9 from which the following quotations are taken. Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 25, refers to an unpublished transcript of a press conference for the exhibit in the ICA archives which this author has not consulted.

<sup>314</sup>That Read argued that both these poles existed and interpenetrated at this time in history raises the question of how much Alloway's very similar attitude, discussed below, owes to Read. However, overall, Read favored modernist abstraction over realism as the correct historical position to occupy.

Christopher Dawson) as not distant but contemporary, “talking about the life of our own society, its problems and aspirations.”<sup>315</sup>

Read’s conflation of the primitive, anthropology and the modern was not new but he does argue that mankind had returned “to a ‘primitive’ state of mind.” For Read this meant taking refuge in abstraction. As he argued in 1952: “. . . all that is essentially modern in contemporary art is beyond realism . . .” because “the tragic conditions of modern life” have driven modern man to “. . . seek his ideal in some abstract harmony or in some symbol rising unaided from the depth of his unconscious.”<sup>316</sup> The reason why the contemporary postwar world was correlate to the primitive for Read was because modern life has instilled “in man a longing for the serenity of some absolute such as existed a thousand years ago.”<sup>317</sup>

Read also recognized this had implications for the nature of criticism: “different types of art demand different critical approaches,” especially symbolic approaches, because Surrealism had moved for Read the location of art. Therefore Read argued the need for an “interpretive criticism” that “takes the work of art as a symbol to be interpreted, rather than an object to be dissected.” So too would the IG be sympathetic to Read’s assertions that modern artists are not verbal philosophers but do express

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<sup>315</sup>Herbert Read, “The Price of Culture,” *World Review* (April 1950): 44-8. Alloway published a book review in the same issue, thus was fully aware of Read’s thinking; indeed his writing may have been recommended by Read, who knew him by this time.

<sup>316</sup>See Read, “Farewell to Formalism,” especially 39 for these quotations. His position is a reversal to his argument against Surrealism as merely the projection of an interior image. Read emphasizes the “pole,” in this case consciousness or unconsciousness, that seems relevant to the moment.

<sup>317</sup>*Ibid.*

themselves “in concrete symbols in works of art that are the objective correlates of his inner emotional tensions.”<sup>318</sup> This summarizes the future attitude of many IG members but does not account for their radical use of the concept of anthropology..

Ironically, it was an anthropologist of that time who objected to Read’s argument and the thesis for the second ICA exhibition. A review of the ICA symposium that followed the exhibition, titled “Discussion on Primitive Art,” reported that the anthropologist Dr. R. Leach opposed Read, arguing that we cannot know the feelings or unconscious mind of primitive man, and of our inability to generalize about their “spontaneity.” Leach argued that the primitive artist was a craftsman who used conscious symbolism that was representational and bound by traditions rather than universalism.<sup>319</sup> The IG also opposed Read’s tendency to universalize, favoring, as did the anthropologist, the specific and the iconographic as their basis for the anthropological rather than creative spontaneity. But there seems little doubt that the important IG view of the contemporary world as one filled with cultural artifacts is related to the ICA emphasis on the primitive with its underpinnings of anthropology: now become an anthropology of the present through artifacts rather than postwar emotional horror. More specifically, Alloway’s acceptance of a fine-art continuum can be related to such a perspective.

The IG developed an aesthetic it identified as “anthropological” but it was an acceptance of the artifacts of contemporary culture--a type of postwar urban

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<sup>318</sup>Read, “Primitive Art, Modern Art,” 35. See Alloway’s argument for “concrete art” in 1954, in chapter six.

primitivism--tied to social conditions of postwar London and the spirit of the working class through social theory, particularly developed by those IG members devoted to design and architecture. Thus the IG developed what we would call today a sociological perspective, as Alloway later argued from hindsight, that had direct ties to the ICA anthropological perspective:

Well, broadly . . . what I think we did, is we sketched out a pragmatic, sociology-based aesthetic, an aesthetic . . . applicable to a very broad range of experiences: you [Banham] with cars, me with movies, Frank Cordell with pop music . . . . And that provided a good, workable basis for later development, I think.<sup>320</sup>

The ICA also accepted Bauhaus inspired principles that argued the location of art within the everyday functional world, with attention to issues of design and architecture but they ignored issues of urbanism.<sup>321</sup> The IG followed and from the outset included a far greater emphasis on design, architecture and urban theory than the ICA, but felt they were closer to what they eventually argued as a recovery of the basic ideas of the Bauhaus.<sup>322</sup> Urbanism was central for the IG but remained unmentioned within the

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<sup>319</sup>See Gigi Richter, "Art or Anthropology?," *Art News & Review* 1, no. 1 (12 February 1949): 3. Read answers the critique of the anthropologists in "Primitive Art, Modern Art," by reasserting his position through use of greater historical detail.

<sup>320</sup>Alloway from the soundtrack of the 1979 British Arts Council film *Fathers of Pop* and cited in *Independent Group*, 48. For many years prior to this Alloway referred to such a perspective as anthropological rather than sociological.

<sup>321</sup>Read was personal friends with the Bauhaus members who moved to England in the 1930s and his 1934 text *Art and Industry* is generally acknowledged as an adaptation of several central Bauhaus ideas. One could meet at one of Read's house parties in the mid-to-late 1930s such Bauhaus figures as Walter Gropius, László Moholy-Nagy, and Naum Gabo. Also in England at this time were Eric Mendelsohn, Marcel Breuer, and by 1938, Piet Mondrian, all of whom knew and/or worked with Read. See King, *The Last Modern, A Life of Herbert Read*, 139 passim.

<sup>322</sup>A closer inspection of the relation between the IG and their vision of the Bauhaus is developed in chapter five, section D, with an examination of architectural and design history. In this instance the

ICA.<sup>323</sup> The IG saw itself as updating the Bauhaus for what they, especially Reyner Banham, felt were differences in a new postwar era. Thus both organizations accepted and rejected specific and different aspects of the Bauhaus but lived in the same general house.

The ICA understanding of culture was broad based and integrated into a vision of what constituted art, as outlined above, but with an important proviso: it chose high art forms. Literature was accepted and exhibited, but it was James Joyce and not the science-fiction, detective novels or glossy photojournal magazines the IG loved and used.<sup>324</sup> Film was accepted but it was experimental film, the “cinema” and not the Hollywood “movies” as Alloway wanted it.<sup>325</sup> The exception to this was the ICA intermittent series of anthropological films. Thus the ICA can be characterized as elitist from two different perspectives. The popular press of its day did so due to the ICA purposeful dedication to experimental art. Yet the IG, and later historical commentaries also saw the ICA as elitist in contrast to their own relatively more populist attitude and their own sources within consumer culture for images and issues. But Alloway never lost sight or

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Bauhaus is introduced in the section devoted to comparative histories as one of several instances of shared interest between the ICA and IG but to also indicate important differences. In fact, the IG is not concerned with the early or original Bauhaus; they will typically, argue their own version.

<sup>323</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, as architects, and Reyner Banham, an historian of design and architecture, led the concerns for urban theory in the IG.

<sup>324</sup> The third ICA exhibition was *James Joyce: His Life and Work*, in June 1950, with the exhibit designed by Richard Hamilton, one of the first and core members of the IG.

<sup>325</sup> The experimental film-maker Jacques Brunius and G.M. Hoellering, the director of the Academy Cinema in Oxford Street, were part of the ICA convenors in 1946. Alloway helped change this by at least 1954 when he and Toni del Renzio presented a discussion on the Hollywood Western film at the ICA on 1 July 1954. This initiated a path that will culminate with Alloway’s series of American action films for the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1969.

understanding of art as something apart and different from popular or populist culture.

Thus the relations between the ICA and the IG were issues of degree and sources rather than a simple polarized difference of elite versus populist, or, high art and low culture, or, as Alloway wanted the frame, their universality versus his specificity.

The core programs of the ICA also became the core vehicles and manifestations of the IG: exhibitions, lectures and discussions. And because the ICA was openly and consistently dedicated to the art and perspective of its younger members, the future members of the IG began as members, often employees, of the ICA, and used its credibility, spaces and (partially) budgets to showcase their ideas and interests along side the “official” programs of the “older members.” Eventually the IG programs were so integrated to the ICA that where and when the IG began and ended is not always clear, nor was there a membership roll separate from the ICA. There is no definitive list of IG membership. Nor were those active in the IG by any means limited to the activities of the IG. Most had established their professions prior to joining the ICA and after the formation of the IG, in mid-1952, and continued to maintain active lives outside the orbit of either the ICA or IG. In a way the IG was a group that was not a group; more, it was an *ad hoc* space for discussion extracted from but intimately connected to the fullness of their times, lives and interests. The IG described in this way could stand in a mirror relation to Alloway’s understanding of criticism: a dynamic and emergent space for discourse. And the IG was simply one coalescence in what was a small but dynamically emergent art world in London.

#### **D. From Dada to Non-Aristotelianism: Randomness and Equivalence in the IG**

The most common reasons given for the IG's turn to Dada are, first, as a reaction against the Surrealist aesthetic they felt the ICA elders favored, and, unlike Surrealism, the absence of a Dada movement within England.<sup>326</sup> But the reasoning and consequences were more complex, pervasive and, for Alloway, of fundamental importance. Dada became their general art historical signifier for numerous and important concepts at the center of the IG aesthetic, much but not all of which seemed interchangeable, such as randomness, what was called Non-Aristotelianism, equivalence, and chaos.<sup>327</sup> When Alloway wrote his well-known praise, "Dada 1956," the reasons given were many.<sup>328</sup> Typical of the general appeal of Dada, he liked its avant-garde properties, i.e., its intense individualism, its power to question assumptions, especially those regarding the nature of art, and its tactics of irony and double takes. But more importantly, he found in Dada confirmation for their own program; thus he praised Dada's acceptance and use of multiple values and randomness not so much in art as in life. Dada was a bridge of specific issues into the life world so important to the IG. Alloway quoted Tristan Tzara's writing from 1953 (source unidentified) to demonstrate it was not art but preconceptions that were to be destroyed.

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<sup>326</sup>Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 232-242, refers to the influence of Dada but emphasizes Surrealism. Others have deferred to the same position, with Massey as the source. See Wallis, "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow: The Independent Group and Popular Culture."

<sup>327</sup>The IG session of 15 April 1955 was called "Dadaists as Non-Aristotelians. See *Independent Group*, 249, for a reprint of John McHale's (attributed to) original brief notes on the IG sessions.

<sup>328</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "Dada 1956," originally published in *Architectural Design* 26 (November 1956): 374, and reprinted in *Independent Group*, 164. More of this article and specific citations by the IG on the influence and use of Dada follow.

And Alloway read Dada as the IG read it: appropriate for the new conditions of the postwar world. He wrote: "It effectively consigns art to the tangled channels of everyday communications. A work of art may be made of bus tickets or it may look like an advertisement. It may be an ad."<sup>329</sup>

It is the IG interpretation and acceptance of this chaotic and random web of everyday situations that various members seemed to most utilize and imbed in their own aesthetics. Not that Dada was specifically causal since other sources argued, for them, the same issues. As observed earlier, science contributed a parallel, especially through the work of Norbert Wiener whose development of cybernetics was an attempt to reason with physical conditions known much earlier in the century but now empirically acknowledged and formulated as chaotic. Too, the conditions of a post-WW II world had opened the door, as it had after WW I, to the realization of the irrationality of human conduct arrived at through supposedly rational and even scientific means. But Dada was another confirmation, this time in the art world, of their own postwar realizations and program. Many of the issues developed in this section not only serve to separate the IG from the ideas of the ICA but are never located far from their concept of Dadaism.

The IG incorporated a view of Dada's randomness everywhere in their work as art technique, process and value, but more importantly as an embodiment of a social as well as an artistic empiricism. Nigel Henderson's street photographs in the East End of London embodied the principle of the moving random crowds that Poe and Baudelaire

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<sup>329</sup>Ibid.

used a century earlier but now connected to the ethnographic studies on the streets of the working poor by Judith Henderson, a social anthropologist married to Nigel.<sup>330</sup> London's East End had become a site for a postwar redevelopment program to support increased population and a postwar social program because it was more heavily bombed in World War II. Redevelopment broke up the traditional neighborhood through rehousing and speculative development which replaced the tradition of the extended family network with the privatized nuclear family.<sup>331</sup> Thus Henderson documented a new, fragmented social condition that served as an aid to the urban philosophies of the architects Alison and Peter Smithson.

What the Smithsons found in the streets, what they will call the "as found" in acknowledgment of Dadaism, were the social and physical conditions of London's East End working class whose realities became central to their own social and architectural theory.<sup>332</sup> The Smithson's adoption of randomness as integral to their plans for mass

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<sup>330</sup>There is little bibliography on Henderson, who despite a one-person exhibition at the ICA in 1961, retired from London and into teaching in 1952. He died in 1984. See the essay by Anne Seymour in *Nigel Henderson: Paintings, Collages and Photographs*, exhibition catalogue (London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1977) and Christopher Mullen, "A Journey around Nigel Henderson," and "Facing up to it," in *Heads Eye Wyn: Nigel Henderson*, exhibition catalogue (Norwich, England: Norwich School of Art Gallery, 1982). His mother, Wyn Henderson, managed Peggy Guggenheim's London gallery for the year it was open, 1938-9, and Nigel played an active early role as friend and guide to Hamilton, Paolozzi and Turnbull. Judith Henderson graduated from Cambridge with a degree in anthropology prior to her 1943 wedding to Nigel and she was active in studying the working class of Bethnal Green. See Mullen, "A Journey around Nigel Henderson." There is an unverified report of her as a student at Bryn Mawr with Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. She was the daughter of Adrian and Karen Stephen which made her the niece of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell with access to the Bloomsbury milieu.

<sup>331</sup>For a description of Bethnal Green as a working class neighborhood through the 1950s and its change in the 1960s into the high rises of the Council flats, see Peter Willmont, *Adolescent Boys of East London* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 8 passim.

<sup>332</sup>See their essay "The 'As Found' and the 'Found'," in *Independent Group, 200-202*, apparently written for the 1990 exhibition catalogue. They discuss the use of what they found in everyday life (their "as found") as the basis for their creation of their "random aesthetic" and its sources in Marcel Duchamp's found objects, and its development in the 1940s work of Jean Dubuffet and Jackson Pollock. These sources

housing in Bethnal Green was not simply a matter of technique or avant-garde rebellion but the incorporation of randomness into a complete sociological theory of urban planning and architectural theory where it was synonymous with equivalency in the urban environment. The earlier Smithson studies for the *Golden Lane* housing units proposed a more complex and mobile set of relations within the building that echo the social realities of the neighborhood.<sup>333</sup> The decks were conceived as streets that link the community, as in the “primitive” cultures they illustrated in their own writings, with conscious and positive considerations for the randomness of daily perambulatory interaction. The Smithsons introduced into architectural thinking the concept of mixed-use street decks.<sup>334</sup> Their key concepts of "identity" and "association" were modeled directly from their open-ended and random experiences in the streets: i.e., the accidental and unorganized was a newly given social value. What they inculcated were concepts of mobility and randomness into the generic order of modernist architecture.<sup>335</sup>

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and lineage--Duchamp, Dubuffet, Pollock--seem to be a generally accepted reading of history and randomness by other IG members.

<sup>333</sup>See their sketches and notes for the Golden Lane housing project in their *Ordinariness and Light: Urban Theories 1952-1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1970), gathered under the original manuscript title of "Urban Reidentification" and *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1973).

<sup>334</sup>David Robbins, "Alison and Peter Smithson," *Independent Group*, 109. The Smithsons made this claim in various publications.

<sup>335</sup>There is an interesting correlate between this work in the East End and the later interest and studies by the sociologists who were part of early British cultural studies. For a seminal article on working class life in East London see P. Cohen, "Subcultural Conflict and Working Class Community," in *Working Papers in Cultural Studies 2*, Spring, University of Birmingham, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1972. The use of subculture as an analytical tool in sociology appears to be developed in this context and goes on to provide a central thesis for the work of the Birmingham School. See Michael Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture. The Sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain and Canada* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1985), 1-29.

Richard Hamilton's extensive use of randomness rested with his fascinations with the Dadaist philosophy and work of Marcel Duchamp, ideas introduced to him by Nigel Henderson.<sup>336</sup> His readings of the biologist D'Arcy W. Thompson's *On Growth and Form* gave him a scientific basis for the rejection of universality and acceptance of the concepts of irregularity and an approach to form that regarded it not as static but, as Thompson wrote, a dynamical record of forces exerted upon form.<sup>337</sup> Thompson's raillery against contemporary zoologists and morphologists blinded by the universalizing systems of Aristotle and Hegel gave Hamilton and the IG another scientific verification for their arguments against the universalist and utopian theories of early European modernists and supported, if not engendered, their theory of non-hierarchical thinking.

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<sup>336</sup>Nigel Henderson . . . introduced me to two masterworks that charged my batteries for the coming years . . . d'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's great book on morphology . . . (and) Marcel Duchamp's Green Box . . . Growth and form seemed an ideal subject for . . . exhibition design. By the turn of the century the 'exhibition' was beginning to be understood as a form in its own right with unique properties." Richard Hamilton on his "Schooling" in *Collected Words, 1953-1982* (New York: Thames & Hudson, n.d.), 10. The *Growth and Form* exhibition became the ICA's contribution to the 1951 national Festival of Britain.

<sup>337</sup>D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson (1860-1948), *On Growth and Form* (Cambridge University Press, 1917, 1942, 1948; reprint New York: Dover Publishing Inc., 1992). The first edition was written during WW I (1916) and rewritten during WW II (1941). It is difficult to summarize 1100 pages of scientific argument but Thompson's desires were to account for more dynamical forces and to demonstrate that form can be explained by "the operation of physical forces or mathematical laws." Most zoologists and morphologists accepted and used the philosophical argument of "final cause" derived from Aristotle and Hegel rather than "efficient or physical cause" because, according to Thompson, they mistakenly believed that form derived from purpose and not accident: "natural history deals with ephemeral and accidental, not eternal nor universal things" (3-4). But as with Wiener, while it may have been irregularities that inspired him, at heart he was a structuralist in his desire to formulate a rational science of mathematical typologies to deal with them. In that sense he remained typical of C.P. Snow's older generation, not the new man. Assertions that the development of IG non-Aristotelianism has its source here are suggestive (see Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, chpt. 3) but in spite of Thompson's "theory of discontinuity" (1092-95) he asserted that change occurs within types and not through types; i.e. change is rare, versus "Darwin's conception of endless small variations." In more likelihood Alloway's own explanation of sources for non-Aristotelian thinking as derived from Alfred Korzybski's *General Semantics*, below, is closer to the mark, but does not tell us the effect on his thinking through Hamilton's exhibition and conversion of Thompson's scientific paradigm into art and design. It is likely that the radicality of the IG exhibition programs had a broad based impact within London's circles of intelligentsia that can only be suggested. Banham's essays make reference to the debates caused within the art and design press. Thus the exhibition needs to be considered another manifestation of the history of ideas in visual form made available to intellectual apprehension.

Hamilton proposed his first exhibition for the ICA in 1951 on the basis of Thompson's book and the exhibition likely played a role initiating events that led to the formation of the IG, as well as reinforcing Alloway's move towards empiricism and science. However, Hamilton also knew of Alfred Korzybski's *General Semantics*, remarked on it, and discussed the liberating effect of non-Aristotelian thinking in his range of sources, especially the reintroduction of the figure in a period of abstract art.<sup>338</sup> Such sources made figuration and abstraction equal rather than proprietary concerns.<sup>339</sup>

Paolozzi's and McHale's use of collage as "superimpositions" in seemingly random order can easily be seen in direct historical relation to earlier use of collage and photomontage. Further, their concerns for similar isolated and juxtaposed images in advertising, both as photographs and as design, can be read in relation to both Dada and the procedures of commercial culture.<sup>340</sup> McHale's notes from his summary of the July

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<sup>338</sup>Hamilton made these references in the 1979 British Arts Council film, *Fathers of Pop* where he referred to the British realization that American Universities taught General Semantics. One consequence for Hamilton was that the importance of one thing over another no longer mattered. Thus figuration or abstraction was unimportant since both were equal. This is a position that Alloway also adopts. The parallel to Korzybski and semantics in general is that the sign is not the thing itself but is equal to it. Thus we live in a world where signs are equal components of reality, a position adopted by many postmodernists. The citation is in Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, 88-9. Korzybski and his book are extensively discussed later in this section.

<sup>339</sup>For a case in point of the equivalency between abstract and pop art in England see Alloway's review, "Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media," in *Art News and Review* (27 February-12 March, 1960): 3, 12, and discussed in chapter six.

<sup>340</sup>See for instance the explanations offered by John McHale, "The Fine Arts in the Mass Media," originally published in the *Cambridge Opinion*, 17, 1959, with excerpts reprinted in *Independent Group*, 183. Eduardo Paolozzi, who embraced Dada, wrote extensively of his debt to commercial culture. See his "Notes from a Lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1958," originally published in *Uppercase No. 1*, 1958 and reprinted in *Independent Group*, 183.

1955 IG session on “Dadaism as Non-Aristotelianism” read, in part: “Dada as...multi-valued, like advertising layout.”<sup>341</sup> Thus it was a link known to, if not shared, by all.

The prime early and influential example is the design and installation of the 1953 exhibition, *Parallel of Life and Art*, created by four artists with central connections to the IG--Paolozzi, Henderson, and the Smithsons.<sup>342</sup> The exhibition consisted of roughly one-hundred enlarged photographs and photo-reprints of images--there seem to have been no objects--of mostly common things taken from art, science and nature (figs. 2, 3).<sup>343</sup> As a statement pointed out, photographs *per se* allow an artist to extend their field of vision beyond the limits of prior generations.<sup>344</sup> The panels were hung not only on walls but stacked against them, and most uniquely, mounted on panels that dropped from the ceiling in a barrage of what seems, from the exhibition photos, in no discernible order or relation; i.e. chaotic. As the Smithson’s wrote in their preparatory notes: “These images cannot be so arranged as to form a consecutive statement. Instead they will establish the intricate series of cross relationships between different fields of art and technics.

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<sup>341</sup>See *Independent Group*, 249, for John McHale’s notes on the session.

<sup>342</sup>Held at the ICA in September and October, 1953. Reyner Banham argues in 1955 that this exhibition by these four artists provided the locus for the New Brutalist movement, the implications of which are discussed in chapter five in relation to the Bauhaus. See Reyner Banham’s essay “The New Brutalism” originally appearing in *The Architectural Review* 118 (December 1955): 354-361, and reprinted in Reyner Banham, *A Critic Writes. Essays by Reyner Banham* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 7-15, as used here. The Smithson’s always argued that the exhibition had no relation to the concerns of the IG. Most observers, obviously including Banham, disagree.

<sup>343</sup>Banham gives over a section of his New Brutalism essay to the meaning of image within their aesthetic, and to a discussion of the importance of this exhibition. An image is “something” visually valuable that “affects the emotions” but not on the traditional basis of beauty. An image, for Banham, is generally used as an embodiment of anti-art or anti-aesthetic and comes close to but differs from Michel Tapié’s concept of *Un Art Autre*. But he does not explain. Banham, “The New Brutalism,” 12.

<sup>344</sup>The “Statement of Purpose” is reprinted in Diane Kirkpatrick, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (London, 1970), 19, and drawn to my attention by Graham Whitham, “Exhibitions,” in *Independent Group*, 125 and note 11. The statement was not published with the exhibit.

Touching off a wide range of association and offering fruitful analogies.”<sup>345</sup> The accordion-shaped fold-out cardboard throw-away catalogue listed the images in 18 categories that bore no relation to one another, nor any relation between the images. Clearly randomness and equivalency--the denial of one image valued over another, whether the category used be art or nature or calligraphy or stress structure--was central to their and the IG aesthetic. The four artists wanted the informed viewer to know their new vision was indebted to the Bauhaus, especially the newly modified post-Bauhaus concepts of Moholy-Nagy, when the Director of the Institute of Design in Chicago.<sup>346</sup> At the same time they wanted all to know theirs was a different vision, modified by their far more chaotic or Dada vision of the world; one that related to, at least, the Smithson’s desire to architecturally encode or allow for the random connections in the everyday life as variously outlined above.

Their acceptance of randomness and the concept of equivalency was also linked to the IG’s adoption of non-Aristotelian or non-hierarchical thinking. Alloway and the IG identified the ultimate source in Alfred Korzybski's *General Semantics* and the more likely and less detailed source in Van Vogt’s 1948 science fiction story of *The World of Null-A*. Alfred Korzybski's *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* of 1933, was an 800 page tome devoted to what was

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<sup>345</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, “Addendum: Texts Documenting the Development of *Parallel of Life and Art*,” reprinted in *Independent Group*, 129. The note appear to be from the Smithson’s but I was not able to locate a source or current location for the document.

<sup>346</sup>Developed in chapter five, section D.

called General Semantics, or non-Aristotelianism.<sup>347</sup> The assumption of General Semantics is that all experience is influenced by every detail of the physical, psychological, and rational makeup of the perceiver. In order to understand anything, one must take into account the effect of our personal filters upon our perception of the world. This means that everything must be considered with equal attention and as of equal importance. This is a variation on the formulation of the principle of complexity as seen in Wiener, thus also parallel to Alloway's form of criticism. The result of such complexity and attention to contingency is not only a non-linear process of thought, but results in a view of the world as non-hierarchical. Herein lay the central components of the IG esthetic but it is a group of ideas they also bring into relation with the history of art as well as science, particularly through Dadaism, and in a distinctly non-linear manner.

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<sup>347</sup> A much briefer version and the one used by this author is Alfred Korzybski's *General Semantics Seminar. Transcription of Notes from Lectures in General Semantics Given at Olivet College* (Lakeville, Conn.: Institute of General Semantics, 1937). Korzybski founded the Institute of General Semantics (IGS) in 1938 in Chicago (and in Connecticut from 1946-1985) whose principles were taught as part of university curriculums in the USA in the late 1940s and 1950s. The IGS remains in existence today (consult <http://www.general-semantics.org/>; Internet) as does its offshoot, the International Society for General Semantics (ISGS) founded by S.I. Hayakawa in 1948 in California (consult [www.generalsemantics.org](http://www.generalsemantics.org/); Internet). Also see Neil Postman's essay in praise of the semanticist, "Alfred Korzybski," in his *Conscientious Objections. Stirring Up Trouble about Language, Technology, and Education* (New York: Knopf, 1988; Vantage Books, 1992), 136-46. Postman, a social critic of popular culture, served as editor for *ETC: The Journal of General Semantics* from 1976 to 1986 in direct contact with the thoughts of Korzybski.

The assumption today is that neither Alloway nor the IG really read Korzybski, thus he was only generally influential through the science fiction of A.E. Van Vogt, a fact that Alloway confirms. However, there is much in Korzybski that precedes many of the ideas of Alloway, as the semanticist was publishing in the 1930s. A closer reading should be undertaken. For instance, there was a lecture at the ICA on June 23, 1958 by Robert C. Williams on Korzybski's *Science and Sanity*. (See the ICA chronology in *Independent Group*, 41.) Also, such postmodern concepts as "the word is not the thing," "the map is not the territory," that no one possesses all the necessary knowledge in a world defined as "And-Also" rather than "Either-Or" are all found in Korzybski and the Institute writings (consult <http://www.general-semantics.org/>Internet). Indeed Aristotelian thinking means, for General Semantics, a "two-valued logic" while the non-Aristotelian thinking they promote is meant to be a "multivalued logic," i.e., thinking that is not closed but open to a wider range of information and never final. This is the crux of Alloway's topicality and his argument, developed in chapters three and four, against previous types of criticisms. Alloway retained this more generalized use of "semantics" rather than a "semiotic sense," as has dominated art theory in the 1980s and 90s.

Alloway and the IG members had access to Korzybski's general ideas through the science fiction world of A.E. van Vogt who published his science fiction novel *The World of Null-A* in bound form in 1948, after it first appeared in three parts in *Astounding Stories* magazine in 1945.<sup>348</sup> Van Vogt gave direct credit to Korzybski and cited him in his chapter headings for his story of a man with two brains trained in the new way, the non-linear, non- or null-(A)Aristotelian world. The name of the hero, Gilbert Gosseyn, was pronounced Gilbert Go-Sane.<sup>349</sup> The implication was that one goes or becomes sane through their ability to deal with and integrate to a non-hierarchical world: the same linkage of non-linear science and sanity heralded in Korzybski's title. Such a position reflects the fundamental part of a Dada aesthetic that protested the linear thinking of rationalized insanity leading to World War I, manifested once again after World War II, in what was for the young members of the IG an equally radical position; it sits at the core

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<sup>348</sup>In Alloway's 1966 "The Development of British Pop," in Lippard's *Pop Art*, note 32, p. 202 we read: "Various other references to science fiction can be found in the literature of English art of the 1950s, such as this by (Richard) Hamilton: 'Scale drifts, that echo Van Vogt's pendulum swings of time; fulcrums of visual fixity that Penn engages with the twist of a knurled knob' ("Urbane Image," *Living Arts*, no. 2, London, 1963). Van Vogt: science-fiction writer given to elaborate play with time and space puzzles. One IG meeting during the Pop run was on 'Dada as Non-Aristotelian Logic'; dissatisfaction with existing accounts of Dada (as destructive, nihilistic, illogical, protesting) led the IG to try another account, and we used for approach the term derived from Korzybski, via Van Vogt's novel, *The World of Null-A*."

Alloway's appreciation of contemporary science fiction was sufficiently keen as to distinguish different kinds, remarking on the "technical or sociological science fiction" of *Astounding Science Fiction* versus "the more organic and exotic stories of Theodore Sturgeon and *Galaxy Science Fiction*" ("The Development of British Pop," 34). Alloway published several articles on contemporary science fiction and he lectured on science fiction on January 19, 1954, at the ICA. A letter of gratitude was sent by Dorothy Morland, then the Director of the ICA, to Arthur C. Clarke, then the Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society, to thank him for chairing the session on Alloway's science-fiction lecture. (London: Tate Gallery Archives: ICA file : 955.1.7.5, pp. 10 and 11.)

<sup>349</sup>These points were made by van Vogt, as well as the specific debt to Alfred Korzybski acknowledged, in his introduction to the 1970 revised edition. *The World of Null-A* was the first hard-bound science fiction novel published by a major publisher after World War II, following its 1945 serial publication in the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*. See Alfred Elton Van Vogt, *The World of Null-A* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948; revised 1970). Van Vogt, a self-trained Canadian writer, published his first science fiction in 1939 and in his own time was considered the equal of such currently recognized giants in the field as Robert Heinlein. It was common practice for van Vogt to use contemporary ideas,

of Alloway's mature criticism, developed by Snow's young "new men" who happened to be artists rather than scientists.

Non-Aristotelianism not only protested against the universalizing and utopic visions of the ICA but neatly integrated with many of the IG concerns, and especially with Alloway's increased concern with overlapping fields. It supported his concept of a level field of visual communication within which each medium must be equally considered, the new cultural field of the spectator and the choices they could now make within these fields. Even the artist was now a consumer. On April 15, 1955, the Independent Group held a discussion session by the title of "Dadaists as Non-Aristotelians" and made the connections clear in their notes from the session: "Dadaists as Non-Aristotelians. The postwar dada revival has contradicted history (sic) of the movement. Dada as anti-absolutist and multi-valued, like advertising layouts, movies, etc. An attempt was made to connect dada with the Non-Aristotelian logic of provisional probabilities."<sup>350</sup>

Writing in 1956 Alloway identified his own period with its indifference to "categorized thinking" as "more congenial to dada than the period between the wars" and identified the "acceptance of the multiple value of life" as the great achievement of Dada.<sup>351</sup> He also made the link to Jackson Pollock's occasional gestures, such as cigarette butts dropped in the painting as "dada." Years later he recalled that his attraction for

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such as General Semantics, as background and shaping forces in his science fiction.

<sup>350</sup>John McHale's (attributed to) original brief notes on the IG sessions of 1955 for 1 July 1955, reprinted in *Independent Group*, 249.

Pollock's paintings were based on their "disorder"<sup>352</sup> but here in 1956 he cited the Dadaist Tristan Tzara from 1918 on the consequence of Dada for art criticism. For Alloway, Tzara argued that art after Dada was no longer objectively the same, therefore "criticism is useless, it exists only subjectively, for each man separately, without the slightest character of universality . . . How can one expect to put order into the chaos that constitutes that infinite and shapeless variation: man?" Alloway argued that it was Dada that accepted the multiple values of life through "its indifference to strict, exclusive categorical thinking."<sup>353</sup>

#### **E. The Application of Communication Theory: Tomorrow's Tackboards Today**

The interest of the IG and especially Alloway in communication theory was outlined in the discussion of cybernetics and implemented in a variety of ways.<sup>354</sup> Communication theory was already in wide-spread use by Alloway, Banham and others by at least 1955.<sup>355</sup> Its most prescient and important application for Alloway came

<sup>351</sup>Alloway, "Dada 1956."

<sup>352</sup>Alloway's comments were recorded in a video interview with Reyner Banham, May 25, 1977, by Julian Cooper and Richard Lannoy, for the film *Father's of Pop*. Video at ICA Archives, London. R. Banham held a similar recognition of the importance of randomness in Pollock's painting as part of the New Brutalism aesthetic. See his essay, "The New Brutalism," 9, 12 and 14.

<sup>353</sup>Alloway, "Dada, 1956."

<sup>354</sup>Others such as Toni del Renzio, with degrees in mathematics and philosophy, also pursued these avenues, especially in their application to the constructive role of the perceiver, or consumer. See the outline in *Independent Group*, 178. Del Renzio was one of Alloway's partners in the design of their section (Group 12) of the exhibit *This is Tomorrow*, and had been an early leader in the ICA Exhibitions Committee and the IG discussion programs. The IG interpretations of the logic of Dada as "multi-valued" were likely initiated by him.

<sup>355</sup>See for instance Reyner Banham's essay "Industrial Design and Popular Art," published first as "Industrial Design arte popolare," in *Civiltà Macchine*, November 1955, with an English version in *Industrial Design*, March 1960, excerpts of which were republished in *Independent Group*, 174-5. He argued a combination of communication theory, aesthetic theory, consumption and semiotics. David

through his visual contribution to the IG August 1956 exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* (TIT) held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London's East End. Aside from his heavy promotion of the exhibition, which included his suggested appearance of Robbie the Robot borrowed by Richard Hamilton from the current London film opening of the science-fiction movie *Forbidden Planet*, Alloway partnered with Geoffrey Holroyd, an architect not a part of the IG, and Toni del Renzio to construct section 12 of the exhibition. All sections of the exhibition were by teams, designated as "Groups" followed by a number, as a conscious comment on the new nature of creativity: design by teams rather than the romantic model of creative individuals. As Alloway so brutally but wonderfully phrased it in his introductory essay to the catalogue: "it would be realistic to replace the ideal picture of collaboration (derived from a rosy fiction of the middle ages) by the notion of antagonistic cooperation."<sup>356</sup>

The first of the three catalogue introductions was by Alloway and titled "Design as a Human Activity." The second introduction, "Marriage of Two Minds" by Banham recalls Van Vogt's hero of null-A and C.P. Snow's lament over the need for reconciliation

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Mellor observed that such cybernetic based terms as "feedback" used in communication theory had become part of "common journalistic property" in the public domain by mid-1955. See Mellor, "A 'Glorious Technicuture' in Nineteen-Fifties Britain: The Many Cultural Contexts of the Independent Group," 231 and note 27. The contact between the IG and persons and texts specifically related to communication theory argue for more specific issues. The relation between the IG and semioticians, at least one of whom spoke at the ICA (the Italian historian Gillo Dorfles), also needs further investigation. For brief mention of the IG discussion between Banham and Dorfles see John McHale's original brief notes on the IG sessions of 1955 for 1 July 1955, reprinted in *Independent Group*, 249.

<sup>356</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "Introduction 1. Design as a Human Activity," *This Is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), n.p. but page one of two.

between the humanities and the sciences.<sup>357</sup> The third, an untitled essay by David Lewis praises the integrative efforts of Mondrian, the Bauhaus, and Le Corbusier, then argues for something beyond: “Some of us, in our generation, recognize the need to move towards a wider and fundamentally different kind of inclusiveness - an integration closer in spirit to the aim of Mondrian and of the Bauhaus but bearing the stamp of the new generation . . . bearing the character of the present . . . (an) environment in which the community itself may be encouraged to enact the participation of all its different specialisations, in co-operative unity and in the social interest.”<sup>358</sup> Alloway’s essay says the same but is characteristically far more direct by naming the proposed synthesis of early modernism a failure: the claims of “early modern art . . . the ideal of symbiotic art and architecture has not been achieved.”<sup>359</sup>

The contribution of Group 12 to the future of tomorrow was to present “collaboration between architect and artist as part of a general human activity rather than

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<sup>357</sup>Reyner Banham, “Introduction 2.” *This Is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), n.p.

<sup>358</sup>David Lewis’s essay, “Introduction 3,” *This Is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), n.p., gives a specific history of the “modern movement” from painters (Malevich and Mondrian) to movements (Suprematism, Constructivism, de Stijl), sculptors (Pevsner, Gabo and Max Bill), artists (Moholy-Nagy), and architect-designers (Gropius, Le Corbusier) to argue their promise of integration: “the simultaneous development of this underlying idea in many countries...we can see how close in their spirit” they are.

<sup>359</sup>Alloway, “Introduction 1. Design as a Human Activity.” Alloway uses an open-ended understanding of modern or early modern art, a point developed in chapter five, in that he defines it within the context of its use. Here, it means the promise of the integration of art and architecture. “Early modern art is full of theories concerning the integration of all the arts, with realisation of the ideals scheduled for another time. But yesterday’s tomorrow is not today - and the ideal of symbiotic art architecture (sic) has not been achieved.” However, Alloway argues in this essay against the grand synthesis when it means subordination to one overriding aesthetic; “the variety and complexity of this exhibition is not accidental.”

as the reconciliation of specialised aesthetic systems.”<sup>360</sup> The artist, art, architect and architecture were considered as part of an inclusivist project of “human activities . . . without dividing them into compartments.” The means for this process was “communications research,” as they wrote in their catalogue section: “Seeing art and architecture in the general framework of communications.” What communication meant was footnoted on the first page: “All communication depends of the transmission of signs.” The note was directed to two simple hand-drawn diagrams on the next page.

At the top of the page was a drawn diagram of a simple and idealized “communication system” as a linear signal to be sent from a source and encoder to a decoder and destination (fig. 4).<sup>361</sup> The bottom diagram showed the same system but now encircled by two ovals labeled “field of experience” that overlap in a small section around the “signal” (fig. 4). The brief text commented that “an efficient communication system” requires that the “accumulated experience must be similar in the encoder and decoder” and warned against those experiences or “learned responses” that “become stereotyped and stale in time and need to be revised.”

These few words and two diagrams contain the short-hand formulation of Alloway’s theories of art and criticism. All forms (art or otherwise) for Alloway, were to be considered within the general field of communication rather than as separate aesthetics. Communication was his focus rather than other criteria traditionally separated out for use

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<sup>360</sup>The quotations and references in this paragraph are from the Group 12 section of the catalogue, unpaginated.

<sup>361</sup>One cannot help but think of the work done by the British with code systems during the war just outside London. Alan Turing, among others, worked there.

in art. And communication occurs within these shared and similar portions of individual fields of experience, understood by Alloway as human activity. The danger for Alloway in such shared human fields of communication was unthinking, stereotypical responses, which needed constant revision.

Unstated but visually apparent was the more sophisticated argument that sender and receiver must share experiences to communicate but must also be able to allow differences. In visual fact, the overlap of the two ovals--supposedly the domain of shared experience--was very small compared to the rest of the field of individual and separate experiences. Alloway and his group were grappling with the problem of sameness and difference, a discourse most commonly located today within subculture theory and specifically within domains of race and gender.<sup>362</sup> For Alloway the fields of experience were not simply a situation of shared sameness but a visual measurement of the increase in complexity.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>362</sup>The same fundamental issue was the central concern of the Smithsons as expressed in their preparatory documents, cited above (“**Addendum: Texts Documenting the Development of *Parallel of Life and Art***,” printed in *Independent Group*, 129) for the 1953 exhibition *Parallel of Life and Art*: to “retain the clarity and finiteness of the whole but to give the parts their own internal disciplines and complexities.”

<sup>363</sup>The diagrams were reproductions of Claude Shannon’s source-destination formula for information decoding. But even these were criticized one year earlier, in 1955, by at least one information expert known to the ICA/IG, Colin Cherry, as insufficient for the complexities of communication events. See Robbins’ informed discussion in “The Independent Group: Forerunners of Postmodernism?,” 239. It seems likely the IG members were not aware of the specialized critique by Cherry. Nor could they be aware that Claude Shannon was not only the “inventor of information theory” who examined “variations” within uniform codes but the person whose idea that all information could be rendered equally in code set historical development on the path to the computer. The issues of equality and variation here are more than serendipitous. For Shannon’s purposes, meaning and information are different concepts. As he argued in his now classic paper *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*: “The fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point. Frequently the messages have meaning; that is they refer to or are correlated according to some system with certain physical or conceptual entities. These semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem.” Note that Shannon uses the word “semantic” as a substitute for the

The third and fourth of the six pages in the catalogue given to Group 12 contain an interrelated series of printed grids, a chart suggesting how “to organize this multiplicity of messages” that came from a “variety of channels” since they felt that by “its use the visual arts can be set in new relationships, free of the learned responses . . .” (figs. 5, 6). A viewer could select from any of eight vertical columns a series of variables that ranged from physical objects, to operations (fig. 5), to the practical variables of cost, space, versatility, etc. (fig. 6), as a way to dissociate and reassociate constituent elements of problem solving. Related to this project, Group 12 constructed what they called a “stand” made of struts, pegs, panels and a tackboard (fig. 7). It was conceived of as a “structural system” to carry a “sample of images of various methods of communication.” The brief catalogue entry clearly argues that the overall stand was itself a “channel to facilitate the use of more channels.”<sup>364</sup> It also placed the “tackboard” physically and conceptually at the heart of the project: “The stand is intended as a lesson in ‘how to read a tackboard’, a tackboard being a convenient method of organising the modern visual continuum according to each individual’s decision.”<sup>365</sup>

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word “meaning.” This is precisely how Alloway uses the term in his later conversion of the semantic field of color field painting into meaning, as argued in chapter six. For a cursory but thoughtful discussion of Shannon see Hubert Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can’t Do. A Critique of Artificial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 74, 165, 166. In a way Alloway steps into the opening Shannon described, i.e., he postulates the semantic aspects of communication.

My thanks to Jonathan Lipkin, Professor of Digital Media at Ramapo College in New Jersey for discussions on Claude Shannon, Theodor (Ted) Nelson and the development of hypertext.

<sup>364</sup>The quotations are taken from the fifth page of the section given to Group 12. Years later Alloway outlined the specific physical contributions for the construction of their “stand,” whose restricted physical parameters were made necessary because none of the other teams gave up space for them. Lawrence Alloway, “The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty,” in *Independent Group*, 53.

<sup>365</sup>One is also reminded of the use of the “tackboard” years later by John Berger, an active art critic in London at this time, in his 1972 video series for the BBC, the predecessor for his book, *Ways of*

Although no complete pictures or detailed descriptions apparently survive, David Robbins, who interviewed many of the artists in the IG in preparation for the traveling exhibition *The Independent Group*, records that the structure held photo images on one side and on the other, a tackboard whose images were to be changed daily. He summarized its purpose: “the chief aim was to emphasize the spectator’s involvement in the construction of the urban world. In effect, this exhibit extended the IG member’s use of tackboards to everyman.”<sup>366</sup>

Aside from confirming the role of communication theory and its extension into the multivalent fields of cultural activity within which all arts are but a part, the exhibition project confirmed at least two other aspects. One was summarized by David Robbins:

Although we have no details of the discussions of communications theory among the theoreticians of the IG, the ‘tackboard’ exhibit that Alloway, Holyrod, and del Renzio constructed for TIT should be seen as an important first step in the application of semiotic perspectives to Anglo-American thinking about the urban environment.<sup>367</sup>

The second aspect confirmed by the exhibition project is the extension of communication theory to establish a new and participatory relationship with the spectator/viewer/consumer. A new relation between the spectator and the work was established where the “signals” meet and are shared, a point like Alloway’s continuous

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*Seeing*, to demonstrate the same points made by Group 12. Thus Berger’s ideas as a committed neo-marxist using Walter Benjamin’s “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” are directly parallel this cultural critique by Alloway, et al, and reinforce the claims for such connections and parallels made in chapter two. A question occurs whether the future members of the BCCCS also saw the exhibition and tackboard and understood its implications. If so, then Alloway and his colleagues in the IG could be seen as a direct influence; they were well in advance of BCCCS thinking.

<sup>366</sup>Robbins, “The Independent Group: Forerunners of Postmodernism?,” 239.

field, one that is coterminous and participatory. This was a major contribution by the IG, and Alloway outlined his argument for active viewer participation in several places, mostly in fragments but certainly explicitly by 1955 in his description of John McHale's constructions as viewer-participative.<sup>368</sup>

This was also the arena where Alloway and the artists of the IG preceded the arguments later developed in British Cultural Studies for the new, interactive (participatory) and positive position they attribute to the spectators of the new culturescape. It also suggests that the sources for the Birmingham School of sociology may have been located also in the art of late-1950s London in addition to the credit they generally ascribe only to the community-based philosophy of the neo-Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Simply summarized and reinforced: the ideas given physical, visual form in the art of the IG, and in particular, the open-ended understanding of art as part of all human activities by Alloway and their tackboard, presented in public exhibition at a major venue for modern art (Whitechapel Gallery) in London was witnessed by many. But whether literally seen or not, the artists and critics of the IG were several steps ahead of British social theorists. And Alloway and the IG knew they were ahead of others in their development and application of theory. He wrote retrospectively in 1966 in opposition to the founder of the BCCCS:

The pleasurable filling of a role in urban life (instead of protesting or looking for more favorable circumstances)

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<sup>367</sup>Ibid.

<sup>368</sup>See Alloway, "L'intervention du spectateur," *Aujourd'hui: art et architecture*, no. 5 (November 1955): 24-26.

separated London artists from the working-class bias of  
Richard Hoggart . . . .<sup>369</sup>

In his introductory essay to the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition Alloway wrote that the British young artists had established this exhibition, the largest devoted to design since 1937, as an alternative to the joint exhibition originally planned with the Paris-based artists: “The English artists and architects would not submit to the dogmatic ideas of synthesis held by *la group espace* (sic) . . . the variety and complexity of this exhibition is not accidental but part of the present design situation in England.” By allowing “different channels” the twelve groups competed “without submitting to the idea of a synthesis.” The messages purposefully drew upon the spectator in new and different ways. The spectator, by purposeful intent and design of the IG, could no longer “rely on the learned responses called up by” normative experiences but now has to adjust as they circulate in an exhibit that Alloway paralleled to the experiences of the street.<sup>370</sup> His last sentence in his introduction reads: “This is a reminder of the responsibility of the spectator in the reception and interpretation of the many messages in the communications network of the whole exhibition.”<sup>371</sup> It demonstrates that Alloway and the IG were struggling not only with a new model of audience participation in the formation of meaning, but with the core problem of difference within sameness in art exhibitions from 1953 to 1956 in the context

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<sup>369</sup> Alloway, “The Development of British Pop,” 40. There is some evidence, as yet unexamined, of an exchange of letters and articles between the two groups.

<sup>370</sup> Alloway makes no direct mention of the ideas of the Hendersons or the Smithsons, as argued above, but the street metaphor was shared by most in the IG. As he summarized in 1966: “The total effect of the cramped gallery of TIT made even the most reticent and pure exhibits participate in a drama of competing elements, analogous to the street outside.” Alloway, “The Development of British Pop,” 39.

<sup>371</sup> Alloway, unpaginated and untitled introduction to the exhibition catalogue *This is Tomorrow*.

of information theory, concepts crucial to the later development of Cultural Studies, and eventually to Visual Culture.



## Chapter 5. The Condition of Modernity in England

### A. Introduction: The Condition of Modernity

The reaction formations in postwar London resulted from and grouped around a root cause; the conditions of their contemporary postwar period. The phrase *condition of modernity*, taken from a later discussion by Alloway, conveys the sense of the project.<sup>372</sup> He and the IG were very engaged with the need for a different shape and theory, for culture more than art, to correspond to the new postwar situation. But they were not especially concerned to engage the words modern or modernism, despite the fact that they and others, such as Herbert Read, wrote easily and often of the Modern Movement. Yet, the IG context was necessarily permeated by the historical conditions of modernism at a point of transition, expressed under diverse names, such as contemporary, new, young and avant-garde. The central argument in this chapter is that the IG sensibility, one that can be associated with modernism, emerged out of the various issues of the time. But there are several reasons a broad approach is required. The ICA, under the influence of Herbert Read, developed a pluralistic approach to modernism as a progressive spirit that manifested itself in a variety of forms and movements. The previous chapter argued the IG as heir to this attitude with the provision of proof assigned to this chapter. Alloway infrequently used the term “modern” but at the same time he was in thrall to the concept of the complexity of his own time period. For Alloway, the function of criticism was to

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<sup>372</sup>The phrase “the condition of modernity” is taken from Alloway’s article titled “Necessary and Unnecessary Words,” in his anthology *Network: Art and the Complex Present*, 236. The article was his contribution to the symposium titled “The Idea of the Post-Modern: Who Is Teaching It?,” held at the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, in 1981 with Donald Kuspit, Martha Rosler, and Jan van der Marck.

constantly reweave the tapestry of the complex present, without reducing it to the singularity of one word or concept.

Alloway summarized his position on the concept and use of modernism in a 1981 symposium dedicated to postmodernism, but generally consonant with his understanding and use, or purposeful non-use, in his London years.<sup>373</sup> He argued in 1981 that *Modernism and Post-Modernism* were words he generally avoided.<sup>374</sup> Typically his reasoning was based on the way a system created meaning, in this case a system of specific terminology, rather than arguing on the basis of his tastes or prioritized specifics of art history or art theory. The word *modern*, he argued throughout the article, had several meanings and referents, and all but one were “exclusionary tactics” that attempted “to confer priority or dominance upon a chosen style.”<sup>375</sup> So too with the word *Modernism*, which in 1981 was associated not only with Clement Greenberg, but generally with a formulation of the modern that Alloway found “given to a conservative formal aesthetic.”<sup>376</sup> When the word *Modernism* solidified to cover a specific period, it identified a specific notion in Alloway’s mind: “the first wave of the avant-garde, starting early in the 20th century, weakening in the twenties and thirties with neo-Classicism, and

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<sup>373</sup>Ibid., 233-238. In this article Alloway italicized and frequently capitalized the words *modern*, *modernism* and *post-modernism*; he did not do the same for the word *avant-garde*. His tactics are followed for this discussion only.

<sup>374</sup>Ibid., 236. “My resistance to the term *Post-Modernism* is not based on an attachment to the values of *Modernism*, a word I usually deal around.”

<sup>375</sup>Ibid., 233. This did not preclude specific understandings of the term or category; for example, the “International style, from Mies van der Rohe to Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill is *Modern*.”

<sup>376</sup>Ibid., 234. The others were Michael Fried, William Rubin, Barbara Rose, Kenworth Moffet and Walter Darby Bannard.

finished off by World War II. . . .” When the word was used to include writers and musicians from the same period he called it “Interdisciplinary Modernism.”<sup>377</sup> These were, he argued, common understandings current in 1981, but the problem with such common understandings for Alloway was

All these terms assume an evolutionary view of history, in which movements and generations displace one another relentlessly. . . the parade of Modern movements followed one another. Futurism and Surrealism, for example, confidently dismissed their predecessors. Such wholesale disposal mechanisms are of course a brutal fiction, calling on the logic of succession and a belief in progress. . . .<sup>378</sup>

Alloway argued two important objections to these brutal fictions, positions the dissertation argues were developed earlier in England in relation to communication theory. In his view any term used in summation, such as modernism, was reductive and, by definition, of fixed meaning, often using past ideas to designate the present. He believed their use reduced the number of connections one could make between present art and anything else, past or present. The succession of terms was, he argued, an adversarial way of fixing meaning, with one term requiring the other term; a process he found counterproductive to his own critical project.<sup>379</sup> It froze history and constructed an historical lie. Alloway argued that no one can know the fullness of history at any one point, least of all in the present: “Historical self-interpretation by participants sets up premature

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<sup>377</sup>Ibid., 234. Alloway’s list of Picasso, Joyce, Stravinsky, et. al., is very similar to the list given by Herbert Read as the “Modern Movement” in his unpaginated essay for the first ICA exhibition in 1948, *Forty Years of Modern Art: 1907-1947*, discussed in chapter four.

<sup>378</sup>Ibid., 235.

<sup>379</sup>Ibid., 236.

boundaries and inflationary values. . . . The flow of ideas, including their revision and change” was “impeded by the premature codification of periods.”<sup>380</sup> Thus the term *Post-Modernism* was not needed, even when it was intended to offset a too-restrictive sense of *Modernism*, because for Alloway

The real condition of modernity, as it emerged in opposition to established taste, is of freedom and diversity, not as a particular set of stylistic properties. It denoted a standard of individual authenticity and, growing out of this, **cultural equality**. The avant-garde painting of Munich, African tribal art, Bavarian peasant art, and child art are characteristically equalized in *The Blaue Reiter Almanac* for instance, originally published in 1912. Though delayed in implementation, the idea of modernity in this form may not be as exhausted as those who take their cue from Greenberg must assume.<sup>381</sup>

Such views toward the conditions of modernity by Alloway are found at least by 1956 in his essay for the exhibition catalogue for *This is Tomorrow*.<sup>382</sup> There he recognized that the past modern promise of an integration between the arts and architecture had not developed, and he rejected the idea of a grand synthesis in favor of an amalgam that preserved “variety and complexity.” The best example was in the combined but deliberately unsynthesized works of the twelve groups in the exhibition, and the challenges their individuality presented to the viewer.<sup>383</sup> Confirmation that others held a

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<sup>380</sup>Ibid., 236 and 237.

<sup>381</sup>Ibid., 236. The boldface is added to “cultural equality” since this seems to be the real point in Alloway: the acceptance of equality in culture although manifested in art. It also allows us to reinterpret his concept of a continuum between fine arts and popular arts in the way he intended it in England, as a subset in art of his larger concern for cultural equality.

<sup>382</sup>Introduced and discussed in chapter four, section E, from which this summary draws.

<sup>383</sup>Alloway, “Introduction 1. Design as a Human Activity,” unpaginated.

similar view came through the “antagonistic cooperation,” as Alloway phrased it, that established the exhibition, and in the third introductory essay. David Lewis, an individual outside the IG, praised past prewar efforts at integration by the “modern movement” but recognized the “new generation” wanted their own version, one that returned them to what they felt to be the original spirit of the modern enterprise. This meant a unity developed through the cooperation of “different specialisations:” a different kind of inclusiveness, as he argued.<sup>384</sup> Perhaps most significantly, Banham’s essay for the exhibition, used no form of the word modern. He argued through the oblique structure of a prose poem to move “beyond art” by placing individual differences at the center of concerns in their exhibition designed to allow art, architecture, and design to coexist in varying relationships.<sup>385</sup>

This chapter follows the logic of Alloway’s own concept of modernism as diversity, to the point, at times, of considering issues that Alloway and the IG opposed. When issues and events, such as the 1951 Festival of Britain, have a logical and historical

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<sup>384</sup>David Lewis, titled only as “Introduction 3” and unpaginated, introduced and discussed in chapter 4, section E. Lewis also provided a fairly exacting list of members of the interwar modern movement, cited in 4.E. Clearly Lewis spoke for many when he noted the desire of the IG (and artists beyond the IG who also participated in *This is Tomorrow*) to return more closely to the integrative efforts of Mondrian, the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier. That conscious program to recover an earlier spirit of the Bauhaus, yet in their own manner, is developed in this chapter, section D, although fewer minds today would accept his list as sharing an aesthetic or common ideology.

<sup>385</sup>Reyner Banham, “Introduction 2. Marriage of Two Minds,” in three pages, unpaginated. Throughout his life Banham argued for modernism as a nonconformist spirit, a “beyond art” in his many arguments for and with the “Modern Movement.” See, for example, his essay “Modern Monuments” originally published in *New Society* 78, no. 1246 (14 November 1986), 12-14 and reprinted in his anthology *A Critic Writes*, 261-4. As Peter Hall, noted architectural contractor, argued in the *Foreword* (xiii-xiv) to Banham’s anthology, the critic remained an “unrepentant chronicler and worshiper of the modern movement” because he continued to believe that technology was “a liberating and beneficial force” and that engineering, Banham’s own early professional field, retained the capacity to do good deeds.” Banham recognized in the essay that fewer people would share his view in the mid-1980s

correlation to the ideas of the IG, their objections are assumed to be more self-acclaims than an accurate assessment of their context and sources. Many of the events and issues did and did not use the terms modern or modernism, but all were directed at the condition of modernity. Perhaps the most striking example was where Alloway, or more frequently Reyner Banham in his many discussions of design and architecture, did use the word modern. In these cases they frequently bracketed the term as the “Modern Movement” in reference to their understanding of a type of modernism, variously defined, that developed between the world wars which they associated with an older generation, one they generally opposed, or wanted to revise.<sup>386</sup> Chapter four outlined a number of these issues in relation to Herbert Read and the ICA, but the contexts developed in this chapter move well beyond the orbit of the ICA. Although important, neither the ICA nor traditional historical concerns, such as abstract art in relation to figuration, or Dada versus

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<sup>386</sup>The phrase *Modern Movement* was common in the 1940s and 50s but has passed from use. See Lewis’s list of modernists (and Banham’s list for that matter, cited above) who shared a “spirit” in his essay discussed above. Despite the IG differences with the Modern Movement, they frequently expressed an admiration for the modern project. But the less adulatory view among the IG is also celebrated. In Charles Jencks’ 1973 book on modern architecture he uses the phrase only twice in his 400 plus pages, and refers the reader in his index entry on the Modern Movement to “see also Modern Architecture.” Significantly his opening page has this understanding: “when one hears an historian say ‘The Modern Movement’, one knows what to expect next: some all-embracing theory, one or two lines of architectural development, something called ‘the true style of our century’, and a single melodrama with heroes and villains who perform their expected roles according to the historian’s loaded script.” Of some interest for the discussion in this chapter, Jenck’s main example of this simplification was Nikolaus Pevsner, the teacher of Reyner Banham. Jencks’ understanding of “Modern Architecture” sounds like an application of Alloway’s arguments and Banham’s opinions: i.e., although there are times of designated consensus, there is also plurality, which is the first victim of such consensus. What is wanted, argues Jencks, is “live plurality” not dead ideology. It is no accident that Jenck’s position is an embodiment of the IG ideas; he studied with Banham for his Ph.D. in Architecture from London University. Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1973), 11-12. Conflations occurred even within the supporters of the Modern Movement. When Patrick Heron, a London critic and colleague of Alloway with decidedly different views, wrote his obituary for Ben Nicholson in March of 1982, he placed the artist, and the other St. Ives artists whom he much admired (Moore and Hepworth) as among both the “international Modern Movement” and the “international avant-garde since the 1930s.” The obituary was written for *Art Monthly* and reprinted as “Ben Nicholson O.M. 1894-1982,” in Heron’s, *Painter as Critic*, 180-2.

Surrealism or Constructivism, convey the full range of issues that engaged the formation of the IG understanding of modernity. However, enough elements can be outlined to clarify the sources for and influences on Alloway via the British government, the British middle-class to which the IG claimed an important kinship, the ICA and the IG, each with its own yet overlapping agendas.

The condition of modernity--i.e., what it meant to be of one's own time<sup>387</sup>--was the core concern of both the ICA and the IG, as outlined throughout the dissertation, but it was of equal concern to others, such as architects and designers, who held a wide range of attitudes, not to mention patronage, in postwar reconstruction. The same was true of institutions considered less progressive than the ICA, such as the British Arts Council and British industrial interests focused on developing an export market for a country still staggering under postwar rationing and a serious concern for the development of capital at the January, 1951 end of the Marshall Plan.<sup>388</sup> In a book written to characterize the culture of architecture and design from 1943 to 1968, the architectural historian Joan Ockman summarized this period in architecture as "the interregnum," the end of the modern period defined by rationalist thought and functionalism, one now reconciled with

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<sup>387</sup> Alloway used a simple Random House Dictionary definition in 1981. "The word *modern* means "of or pertaining to present and recent time: not ancient or remote." And he wondered in print the legitimacy of using the term to refer to anything "that is no longer new" in the way that someone like Greenberg or his followers used it. Alloway, "Necessary and Unnecessary Words," 233.

<sup>388</sup> In September 1946 the Council of Industrial Design (CoID) sponsored the exhibition *Britain Can Make It* at the Victoria and Albert Museum. So many of the exhibits were labeled only for export rather than local consumption, which was discouraged by Labour government policy, that the press labeled the show "Britain Can't Have It." (Reported and contextualized in *Independent Group*, 13.) However, Britain's recovery from rationing, completed by about 1954, was relatively rapid and remarkable given the extent of their war damage.

“more humanistic concerns.”<sup>389</sup> Thus, she argued, there was the expected middle-class call for a populist style in a postwar period of rehabilitation that was of comfort more than innovation.<sup>390</sup> Ockman’s analysis contains the claim that postwar populism reshaped modernity through necessary social alliances based on postwar needs for housing, humanism and what Ockman calls a war-catalyzed “second industrial revolution” with its array of new materials and orientation toward technology as an ideology.<sup>391</sup> revisions of “prewar doctrine” as she phrases it.<sup>392</sup> Such issues were of special relevance to Reyner Banham and the IG membership for whom prewar ideas, especially those of the “Modern Movement,” which included the Bauhaus, or what they considered Bauhaus-derived ideas, were central. This chapter develops the concept of a populist form of modernism through the rise of a new humanism because they both constituted a major portion of the intellectual, emotional and social climate of the IG in the 1950s. To argue, as did the IG, their rejection of these contexts is to deny the normal operation of historical forces and reduce history to simple and polar terms that Alloway’s own argument for the complexity of the present would reject.

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<sup>389</sup>Joan Ockman, *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968, a Documentary Anthology* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 13. Ockman also makes clear that the general pattern at this time was for a “postwar reevaluation” of the “received version of modernism by the 1950s.” This challenge of the “modernist establishment” included the new basis for design argued by the Smithsons. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>390</sup>*Ibid.* Also see Massey’s discussion of the “Welfare State Culture,” in *Modernism and Mass Culture*, chapter I. The romanticized image of England as continuing heir to a rustic village culture remained a powerful component in the construction of a national identity following WW II. The same forces were at work within the progressive cultural concepts of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart as demonstrated in the second chapter. The dissertation argues that neither Alloway nor the IG were immune to such forces, despite their protestations.

<sup>391</sup>Ockman, *Architecture Culture*, 14.

<sup>392</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

Issues of abstraction were well established in England in the 1930s and 40s through the prewar British engagements with European Constructivism--Naum Gabo lived in England and worked with British artists<sup>393</sup>--and through the sculpture of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth and the paintings of Ben Nicholson. Victor Pasmore read and disseminated the basic ideas of the American Constructivist Charles Biederman.<sup>394</sup> Alloway's vehicles for his first forays into the issues of the modern context in visual art were primarily in sculpture and design, during a period when the American concerns for abstraction were vested in painting.<sup>395</sup> In testimony, Alloway organized his first group exhibition in 1954<sup>396</sup> and his first truly international article (hence international prominence) for the New York based *Art News* on the basis of the new generation of British sculptors and their relationship to the older British modernist sculpture. The few times when "painting" was an issue in the mid-1950s, Alloway championed the elder painter turned Constructivist, Victor Pasmore. Thus sculpture and constructivist principles in painting were more important than the isolated issue of abstraction *per se* in

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<sup>393</sup>Naum Gabo came to England as part of the exodus of intellectuals from Germany prior to WW II and in 1937 co-edited the Constructivist book *Circle* with Ben Nicholson and J.L. Martin.

<sup>394</sup>The painter Victor Pasmore, whose conversion in 1947-8 to more severe abstract, formalist principles through constructions--a conversion admired and remarked upon by Alloway--cited and passed the influence of Biederman's book *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge* (1948).

<sup>395</sup>Alloway eventually argued a case for British painting but in 1959 and 1960, when the impact of American abstract painting emerged among young British painters. This development, outside the parameters of the IG, is discussed in chapter six.

<sup>396</sup>See his introductory essay to *Nine Abstract Artists, their work and theory*. Robert Adams, Terry Frost, Adrian Heath, Anthony Hill, Roger Hilton, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin, Victor Pasmore, William Scott (London: Alec Tiranti Ltd., 1954).

painting.<sup>397</sup> It was British sculpture that led the field of modern concerns in art, largely due to the international attention garnered by the British sculpture at the 1952 Venice Biennale.

This chapter addresses the diversity of the moments argued as modern, or the need to be modern, not only by historically recounting more conservative issues such as the 1951 Festival of Britain, the emergence of populism and the new humanism, and reasserting Alloway's neglected relation to sculpture. It also develops the relationship of the IG to the overlooked importance of the Bauhaus. Their concept of the Bauhaus was frequently referenced by many members of the IG as of extreme importance to them and a specific argument was developed centered on their understanding of the Dessau Bauhaus and what they felt were its basic principles lost during the 1930s and 40s. They were not alone in this, despite their claims. Rather, they were part of a larger postwar reevaluation of principles known in design and architecture as functionalism, and counter-defined as a new empiricism, which was associated with the humanization of design and architecture. Both functionalism and new empiricism were defined in the literature of that time as parts or modifications of the modern movement, and as markers in a debate over the limits of current outlines of the modern movement.<sup>398</sup>

The dissertation points to the historically stated forces of postwar populism and humanism as shaping forces in the IG understanding and critique of the Bauhaus

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<sup>397</sup>Few recognize the crucial role of sculpture in the development of British modernism. Massey ignores it in favor of painting. One can also make similar cases for the importance of architecture, design and even science and engineering over painting, certainly for members of the IG.

<sup>398</sup>Supporting material and arguments are provided in 5.D.

principles. But once again, it is not a simple situation of polarities. The Bauhaus had no one meaning to the IG in an historical sense. For example, all had specific interest in the work of László Moholy-Nagy and Sigfried Giedion, named specifically by Alloway as two of the seminal influences on the IG revisions of modern culture. But at the same time they realized that both Giedion and Moholy-Nagy presented positions that were different from their understanding of the Bauhaus of the 1920s.<sup>399</sup> Indeed, it was because the IG interpreted these two as more reactant to the changes in the postwar period rather than perpetuating interwar ideas that they found them of interest. Nor was it the case that Reyner Banham simply critiqued Nikolaus Pevsner's collapse of the Bauhaus aesthetic into one unified style of the "modern," although such limits were of concern to an IG aesthetic that argued complexity and plurality.<sup>400</sup> In fact, by the early 1950s Pevsner's understanding of the modern had also shifted to what was considered by both he and Banham as a postwar humanized version of the modern aesthetic. One reaction to this

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<sup>399</sup>Significantly, Moholy-Nagy did not appear in Nikolaus Pevsner's history of the movement, not even in the late revised edition of 1960. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design. From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (first published as *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* by Faber & Faber, London, 1936; revised in London: Penguin Books, 1960). Nor would one discover the importance of Moholy-Nagy to Banham based on the posthumous anthology of Banham's writings, *A Critic Writes*, where Moholy-Nagy is cited but twice in articles and is grouped as part of a broad rather than a specific history. This is wrong: Banham claims Moholy-Nagy as seminal to himself and the others. For a demonstration of the depth of the IG historical knowledge on the Bauhaus, and the recognition that the British knowledge of the Bauhaus developed through second-hand sources, mostly books, see Reyner Banham's discussion in his article "The Bauhaus Gospel," *The Listener*, 80, no. 2661 (26 September 1968): 390-2. A lengthier consideration of Moholy-Nagy is in sections 5.C and 5.D.

<sup>400</sup>See Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 38-9 passim. The specifics are argued and Banham's position developed in section 5.D.

was the formation by Banham and the Smithsons of the New Brutalism aesthetic which held a specific relationship to the IG that requires examination.<sup>401</sup>

### **B. The Festival of Britain: a Complex Context of Modern and Populism**

The 1951 Festival of Britain was intended as Britain's major postwar statement of national modernism and a return to plenitude; a postwar showcase on several levels.<sup>402</sup> It was supported not only by the government, its agencies, and industry, but by most of the modernist art establishment in England--especially Herbert Read at the ICA who had been appointed to the Arts Council Art Committee in 1947. It was the centennial of the great 1851 exhibition held in Joseph Paxton's *Crystal Palace*. Both centennials were dedicated to declaring Britain's prominence in technology and stressed an aesthetics of plenty provided by the industrial revolution in 1851 and a 1951 war industry now rebuilt and attempting to redesign and relocate itself in relation to postwar international competition. It therefore also served as a vehicle for a summary of early postwar British art and design and the location for the meeting of modernism and populism. As the author of the prologue for the 1976 survey of the Festival wrote, it was "the single gigantic event which

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<sup>401</sup>See Banham's essay, "The New Brutalism," in *A Critic Writes*, 7-15.

<sup>402</sup>The sources used for the 1951 festival are a later but very useful commentary; *A Tonic to the Nation. The Festival of Britain, 1951*, ed. Mary Banham and Bevis Hillier (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), and the original 1951 promotional booklet, *Design in the Festival: Illustrated Review of British Goods* published by the London Council of Industrial Design. Both publications contain many photographs of the designs showcased in the exhibition and written summaries of the state of each area of design in Britain by reliable observers. Other references include a brief passage in Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture, a Critical History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 263, and part of the first chapter in Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*.

crystallized a whole era.”<sup>403</sup> It also profoundly affected the ideas of the IG and Alloway, despite their expressed opposition to it.

Located on the South Bank of the Thames River for most of 1951, written accounts and line drawings of the architecture of the Festival describe a shining glass, steel and concrete new visage for the postwar world. The two best known architectural symbols were the abstract, geometric volumes of the *Skylon* by Philip Powell and John Hidalgo Moya, and the *Dome of Discovery* by Ralph Tubbs. But the actual products, similar to the 1851 designs within Paxton’s 1851 glass and iron cage, were hybrid mixtures; part modernist in design and part national nostalgia for a British past seemingly lost to war. However, most interpretations ignore the concept of hybridicity, to condemn the Festival simply as a statement of conservative nationalism.

Ann Massey interprets it as a conservative and xenophobic throwback by the Ministry of Culture to construct a fictionalized national identity based on the myth of Britain’s rural past.<sup>404</sup> She cites several publications from this time period to demonstrate the suspicions held for a prewar modernism as elitist and unrelated to the masses, while favoring traditional British rural crafts and ways of life.<sup>405</sup> However, her description makes clear that Festival design also wrestled with the issue of modernism, although this is not a term she uses. The same opinions appeared earlier in the 1976 retrospective

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<sup>403</sup>Roy Strong, “Prologue: Utopia Limited,” *Tonic to the Nation*, 6. Strong argues the parallel to the 1851 exhibition as a “red herring” with the real antecedents the Renaissance and Baroque festivals.

<sup>404</sup>See Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, chapter one.

<sup>405</sup>One such citation was Barbara Jones, author of *The Unsophisticated Arts*; see the discussion below in relation to Alloway.

analysis of the Festival. For example, the introductory essay by Roy Strong argued that the Festival was an official gloss created by the government to ignore the differences and privations of the British people in order to present a patriotic vision of indivisibility through common ideals, harmony, and “universal prosperity.”<sup>406</sup> It was, he writes, a “*ville imaginaire* . . . a flight of surrealist fantasy as the life style of the new technological age . . . the outward expression of the idea of the Welfare State.”<sup>407</sup> But he admitted that such a visage had “important repercussions” through its creation of the “Festival Style,” a phrase used and accepted by many other commentators. The Festival Style was, for him and others, “a classless style for the masses,” more a “style of decoration” created by reducing “Victorian and Edwardian decoration and excrescences.”<sup>408</sup> More specifically, William Feaver, in a long and sarcastic essay, characterized the Festival Style as “Braced legs, indoor plants, colour-rinse concrete, lily-of-the-valley splays of light bulbs, canework, aluminum lattices, Cotswold-type walling with picture windows, flying staircases, blond wood . . . all these became the Festival Style.” They were enshrined in memory: “the South Bank remained the popularly accepted idea of ‘modern’ for a whole generation . . . its futurism ensured its survival as a feast of modernity for some years.”<sup>409</sup> As Feaver pointed out, there were art works at the Festival by many of the British modernists: Ben Nicholson, Graham Sutherland, Henry Moore, Jacob Epstein, Barbara

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<sup>406</sup>Strong, “Prologue: Utopia Limited,” 8.

<sup>407</sup>*Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>408</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup>William Feaver, “Festival Star,” *Tonic to the Nation*, 54.

Hepworth, with Reg Butler and Eduardo Paolozzi from the younger generation. Victor Pasmore, who had recently “developed a decisive and increasingly constructivist abstraction” was well represented with a large wall mural and a painting that “emerged as key Festival motifs.”<sup>410</sup>

For one of the Festival’s most vociferous critics, Reyner Banham, there was no Festival Style “in the sense of ‘an idiom of design’,” and no later influences.<sup>411</sup> For Banham, it was derivative, a reproduction of familiar aspects of the “Modern Movement” known since 1943.<sup>412</sup> Its failure was in substituting a “change of fashion” for real fundamental change.<sup>413</sup> And yet Banham closely argued the Festival as an embodiment of the “Modern Movement,” even if the Movement was “a particular stylistic package that was about exhausted.”<sup>414</sup> Banham felt it brought the British into rough but comparative alignment with other aspects of the Modern Movement that could be seen in Italy or the USA of this time period. Indeed, all the members of the “international Modern Movement” visiting England that summer as part of the CIAM meeting, including its secretary Siegfried Giedion, approved of the Festival in private conversations with Banham.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>410</sup>Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>411</sup>Banham, “The Style. ‘Flimsy...Effeminate?’” in *Tonic to the Nation*, 191-8.

<sup>412</sup>Ibid., 195.

<sup>413</sup>Ibid. Banham’s critique is, surprisingly, the historical blindness of the avant-garde in the sense that only the progressive is allowed.

<sup>414</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>415</sup>Ibid., 192-193.

Banham, wrote approximately the same opinion in 1961 as part of a survey on industrial design, arguing that the “great hopes” for the Festival were a “failure” since the impact of the “Festival Style” was practically negligible in the field of design.<sup>416</sup> Yet he argued that “the Festival played a vital role in setting before the public an image of a brighter, smarter and more colorful world of design.” The net effect was to promote, although not improve, a “more sophisticated” public taste. He extended this thought in 1976 by pointing out that the Festival established “one of the most essential foundations” for the generation of the “late Swinging Sixties” in showing “them the way if not the style.”<sup>417</sup> However, Banham would not agree with his conclusion as it regards to the IG: every mention of a member of the IG or someone associated with the “younger generation”--from the Smithsons, to Richard Hamilton, to James Stirling--were argued by Banham as exempt from and in counter-reaction against the Festival.

The Festival was a synthesis of European modernist ideas with references to Britain’s more rural traditions. The modernist tradition here meant the adoption and adaptation of general abstract principles that used volumetric forms and rectilinear grids or structural lines with planographic forms and concrete.<sup>418</sup> In contrast, the rural or postwar national tradition was generally defined through references to the British Arts

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<sup>416</sup>Reyner Banham, “Design by Choice,” originally published in *The Architectural Review* 130 (July 1961), 43–48 and reprinted in *A Critic Writes*, 67–78; quotations from 72–3.

<sup>417</sup>Banham, “The Style. ‘Flimsy...Effeminate’?,” 196. What this indicates is that Banham saw the Festival establish a context for the Pop Art culture of the 1960s.

<sup>418</sup>See, for one of many examples, Banham’s discussion in “Revenge of the Picturesque: English Architectural Polemics, 1945–1965,” from John Summerson, ed., *Concerning Architecture. Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing Presented to Nikolaus Pevsner* (London: Penguin Press, 1968), 265–273.

and Crafts tradition, the same tradition that earlier influenced the structure and attitude of the Bauhaus prior to WW II.<sup>419</sup>

What made the situation more complex was that neither aesthetic excluded the other and to judge from the color illustrations in the Festival catalogues for furniture, housewares, television and industrial equipment, etc., a full range of forms were exhibited. Nor did the Festival essays argue for craft, or on behalf of some *retarditaire* sense of “Englishness” and against modernist art.<sup>420</sup> The opposite was often true. For example, the writer on fabrics in the Festival bulletin bemoaned their recent conservative swing “away from architectural and abstract influences” and asked where were the equals of “wallpaper designs comparable with the pioneer fabrics designed more than ten years ago by Ben Nicholson, . . . and others?”<sup>421</sup>

Taken together, as its critics attest, in form and intent, and excluding the extremes, the exhibition was an influential meeting grounds of the Modern Movement and the postwar populist impulse. This is not to deny that the contents of the Festival, judged from an avant-garde position, were conservative, and certainly by their own public intent, nationalistic; nor to deny that the IG felt the Festival to be retrograde. Denise Scott

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<sup>419</sup>The linkage between the Arts and Crafts tradition of England and the Bauhaus was well known by the IG members. See Reyner Banham’s discussion of Hermann Muthesius and the *Deutscher Werkbund* in his *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, 69-80.

<sup>420</sup>Some indication of the cultural schizophrenia in 1951 is provided by the Leftist artists organization, the AIA (Artists International Association). It used “Abstract Art” for their major exhibition for the year of the Festival of Britain, while their main contribution to the Festival were 16 lithographs on “English Scenes” which sold rather well. See *AIA. The Story of the Artists International Association, 1933-1953*, 85, bottom.

<sup>421</sup>Antony Hunt, “More patterns and colour in the home” in *Design in the Festival: Illustrated Review of British Goods*, 24. Hunt was Editor of *House and Garden*.

Brown later observed that the conservative “New Humanism” of the Festival set the IG toward what they saw as an oppositional and far more radicalized vision.<sup>422</sup> But such local rhetoric served the immediate needs of the artists to distinguish themselves more than to understand the overall historical situation. The entire IG was strongly aligned with “a” (rather than “the”) populist critique of prewar modernism, opposed to its elitism and distance from the realities of working class people with whom they identified. Time and again the professional and life experiences of the IG members directed them back to consciously develop a hybrid aesthetics.

As outlined in chapter four, Peter and Alison Smithson were the best known young architects in London by 1951 and connected to the development of New Brutalism and a critique of CIAM. Nigel Henderson was a photographer of working class districts in London and his wife, Judith Henderson, was an urban anthropologist. Connecting them was a social consciousness that centered on the acceptance of London’s working class they felt had been failed by a utopic modernism and academics whose idealism removed them from the quotidian. Even much of the work of IG artists such as Eduardo Paolozzi and John McHale was predicated on IG theories of urbanism and technology as undergirded by concerns for class and the everydayness of life in the streets. The

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<sup>422</sup>The architect Denise Scott Brown who studied in London with the Smithson's observed in 1988: "The full etiology of this (New Brutalism) movement has yet to be established. Has anyone tried to gauge, for example, to what extent the IG's aesthetic ideas were developed in opposition to the heated aesthetic and the 'New Humanism' of the Festival of Britain? The "New Brutalism"--even its name--certainly was." D. S. Brown, "Learning from Brutalism," an account written in the Spring, 1988, and published in *Independent Group*, 203-6. Such polarized views dominated later evaluations of the meaning of the Festival but in its own historical context there was less polarity and more hybridicity. Such a case is made here for the relation of the Festival to Alloway and the IG in general. The issue of New Humanism is discussed in 5.C.

Smithsons designed for people and their functional everydayness within a modernist context; this despite the fact that they all, especially Alloway, saw themselves as vociferously opposed to the “New Humanism” espoused by, but not limited to, the Festival.

Alloway’s eventual concern for “popular culture” and populist positions cannot be accounted for by the polarized readings found in most later interpretations of the Festival of Britain as simply anti-modernist.<sup>423</sup> Nor did he demonstrate such populist sympathies in his early writings on art; they seemed to develop only after the Festival of Britain and his extended contact with the ICA and the IG. But the argument here is that Alloway was predisposed to a populist position and his contact with the Festival was likely a powerful shaping force. It was certainly more central to Alloway’s life and concerns than has been recognized or argued until now. Certainly more so than he would admit.

During the Festival year Alloway was the editor for *Athene: Journal of the Society for Education in Art*, a position likely appointed by Herbert Read.<sup>424</sup> The Society presented an exhibition for the 1951 Festival Year “Black Eyes and Lemonade,” curated by Barbara Jones: “the first comprehensive exhibition of British Popular and Traditional

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<sup>423</sup>It seems that each member or sub-group of the IG maintained their own understanding of the “popular arts.” Alloway’s (and others, like McHale) eventually concentrated more on what we call today the media arts.

<sup>424</sup>Since Herbert Read was the President of the Society it is likely he hired Alloway. If so, it is the first record of an official relation between them. Alloway perhaps assumed editorship in November, 1950 with vol. 5, no. 1, although no staff names appear. Freda Lattrel, the previous editor, was last listed in Vol. 4, no. 4, when they wrote of a lack of funds. In 5:1--apparently the only issue published in 1950--Sylvia Sleight published a book review. By 5:2, May 1951, Alloway was cited as Editor, and remained listed for issues 5:3 (August 1951), 5:4 (May 1952) and 6:1 (November 1952.).

Art to be shown in this country” as Alloway observed.<sup>425</sup> Under his leadership *Athene* also published a special edition dedicated to the popular arts, apparently their only issue in 1951. Jones, already the author of a 1951 book titled *The Unpopular Arts* (published by The Architectural Press), wrote a four page discussion for *Athene* titled “Popular Art” that developed positions not unlike several of those expressed later by Alloway.<sup>426</sup>

Jones pitted the distance of the fine arts against the “popular or vernacular arts” that “surround us overwhelmingly all day and everywhere, undocumented and uncatalogued” as “virgin ground.” She wrote of the pre-machine past and the post-machine multiplicity and its impact. She noted the ability of reproduction in an age of fashion, singling out the ubiquity of Mickey Mouse. She contrasted her criterion for an art form being popular--“I know what I like”--as an instinct educated out of the observer but “with luck and hard work” as reconvertible to its original impulse. She argued that “education weakens” our natural instincts. In the realm of decoration there was, she argued, no distinction between hand and machine made: manufactured goods by “a good vernacularist” can be made into “a work of art.” Since the nineteenth century there had been examples of cooperation between the two modes of production, but now for Jones “no special virtue resides in either.” Hers was a populist message quite different from and in excess of the defenders of popular arts such as Richard Hoggart or Raymond Williams and toward whose principles Alloway and the IG would soon move.

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<sup>425</sup>“Editorial Note” in *Athene* 5, no. 3 (August 1951): 45.

<sup>426</sup>Barbara Jones, “Popular Art” in *Athene* 5, no. 3 (August 1951): 45-8, and the source for the following quotations.

Alloway shortly published an implicit agreement with Jones, arguing that to favor the hand over the machine “is to be guilty of a sentimental, anti-mechanistic bias,” a mistake William Morris made in resisting the machine “instead of attempting to humanize and improve its products.”<sup>427</sup> Alloway’s friend and co-convenor with him for the later IG discussion groups, John McHale, argued something akin to this in the same issue of *Athene* with Jones: while McHale opposed “kitsch” he argued that the artificial division between art and craft should be abandoned.<sup>428</sup> Jones went further and the parallels with the IG are apparent: the “future of popular arts clearly lies more with the machine than with the hand.” She also asserted that to appreciate the popular arts means to “close our art-gallery eyes and ears and open quite other ones . . . .” For instance, the theme of “Horror” common in popular arts, from broadsheets to film, achieved a liveliness “that never animates academy sculpture.” She felt that the popular arts did not function under the same qualitative conditions as fine art, but that people, through the exercise of judgments and demands, could change that.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>427</sup>L. Alloway, “From Trajan’s Column Down,” *Athene* 6, no. 1 (November 1952): 30.

<sup>428</sup>John McHale, “The Problems of Adolescent Art,” *Athene* 5, no. 2 (May 1951): 35-36. One assumes Alloway commissioned McHale for the article. But it should also be pointed out, given the reported animosity of the IG toward Herbert Read, that the position of McHale, as well those of Jones and Alloway, bear strong influence from Herbert Read’s work as an art educator, and put forth in his book *Education Through Art*, a text McHale recommended in this essay.

<sup>429</sup>The latter comment by Jones brings Alloway’s distinctions to mind between art and not-art, and his desire to retain a sense of quality. The issues surfaced here. In “The Problems of Adolescent Art,” McHale argued against “the artificial distinction between art and craft” but also against “free progressive teaching” of children to simply express themselves because it does not offer “any rational generally accepted theory and consequently coherent method for practical application in the field” and results in kitsch. At the same time but elsewhere, Alloway argued that “there is no absolute standard of taste” but that a Cellini ewer is not the same as an industrial object. He argued for a difference between art and mass production, and one should be able to recognize it. See his book review of John Steegman’s *Consort of Taste* in *Athene* 5, no. 2 (May 1951): 42-3.

Virtually all these positions are ones fundamental to Alloway, many later adopted. They also reinforce the concept of the Festival of Britain not simply as a conservative backlash against contemporary or modern issues, but as an attempt to fuse the two. However, about 38 years later Alloway implicitly denied any such relation by polarizing the positions: he characterized Jones' position as 19th century versus his and the IGs as 20th century. Under the topic of "Popular Culture" he wrote around 1989:

This was not a neutral subject in England at the time. The term could be used to refer to either the mass media or the fairground/carnival, the twentieth century or the nineteenth. The nineteenth century was well represented by Barbara Jones with her exhibition "Black Eyes and Lemonade" and her book, *The Unsophisticated Arts* (both 1951). The date may have seemed like a victory in the year of the Festival of Britain, but the IG, as McHale and I convened it in the mid-fifties, stressed the present environment in terms of advertising, Detroit cars, fashion, Hollywood movies, and science fiction. The fact these topics entered British cultural discussion when they did seems in large part due to the activity of the IG at the ICA in 1954-55 . . . ours was a vernacular culture. The magazine material in McHale's collages is what he liked, not distanced by irony or condescension; and there was no irony to our liking the rapid sequence of widescreen Big Studio *movies*, a term preferred by the IG to 'film' or 'cinema.'<sup>430</sup>

For Alloway the vernacular or popular culture for the 20th century was the advent of what Douglas Kellner later called media culture.<sup>431</sup> The dissertation contends Alloway's position was an update of Jones and although different in subject it was not in conflict with her underlying premises as outlined. Indeed Jones, as cited, even accepted

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<sup>430</sup> Alloway, "The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty," 50.

<sup>431</sup> Kellner, *Media Culture*. However, Kellner, a Marxist historian, retained a critical attitude towards capitalism; thus the mass media remained a top-down ideological construction for him.

Mickey Mouse as she argued against the distance instilled by education between the viewer and the post-machine multiplicity of the contemporary world, and, for the lack of distinction between the vernacular and the fine arts while recognizing their conditions were not the same. She therefore formulated the nucleus of what Alloway later and more famously designated not only the “esthetics of plenty” but also the “fine-art popular art continuum.” However, the difference was also more than a matter of swapping subjects such as knitting for comics; Alloway saw and more clearly dealt with the full implications of these positions than did Jones, and, within the IG, related them specifically to mass production.

What emerged in 1951 was a blend, a new populist-modernist style and attitude which was a modification of the Modern Movement. But this variation of the modern was often conjoined with an orientation designated the New Humanism.<sup>432</sup> The younger architects and designers, members of the IG, saw the Festival, the popularization of the modern and the New Humanism as a retreat from modernism but without realizing what they shared with it. This is not to dismiss difference but to realign elements of the history of ideas. The fact that the editors of *Architectural Review* and most of the modernist art establishment in England supported the Festival of Britain only served to identify and thus separate the older modernist generation from the self-image (if not the full reality) of a different modernism constructed by the IG. Then too the IG made clear distinctions between their class, education and especially their separation from an older humanist

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<sup>432</sup>See the discussion in 5.C.

tradition. However it is the fusion of this populist modernism with an argued humanist tradition that is more interesting and more historically accurate for Alloway and the IG than a reactionary reading.

### **C. The Kind of Principles We Now Search For<sup>433</sup>**

The project of reevaluation continues, using the historical record to arrange an understanding of the historical context different from the claims of the participants. In this case it argues against the supposed rejection of the concept of humanism by the IG. The first section discusses the issue in relation to Banham, architecture, and design. The second focuses on Alloway but the theme remains the same: They openly condemned humanism but accepted it as a guide in search for new and related principles.

Banham argued that the central debate throughout the 1950s was over the meaning of “Modern Architecture,” a phrase he conflated with “Modern Movement.”<sup>434</sup> The complexity of the arguments was demonstrated by the large number of terms used in the 1940s and 50s as additions to or modifications of the “Modern Movement” in architecture and design. When the arguments are approached summarily, in broad but useful parameters, the participants and the commentators agree on two precepts.

There was a generalized aesthetic established between the wars followed by agreement in some quarters that the postwar conditions called for modifications, but with

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<sup>433</sup>The phrase comes from Banham’s discussion of the relation between Humanism and the New Brutalism. See his “The New Brutalism,” 13.

<sup>434</sup>Banham, “Revenge of the Picturesque,” 265. Ockman’s argument for this period as an “interregnum” in modernism, established in section 5.A, supports Banham’s claim; i.e., a period of changes and claims.

no single name or precept attached to the postwar modifications. The inter- or prewar approach was most frequently designated as the Modern Movement and characterized variously as: functionalism (seen as an offshoot of earlier rationalism), geometric, Miesian, classical European (meaning Le Corbusier) or the more contemporary term, New or Neo-Palladianism.<sup>435</sup> With the 1949 publication of Rudolf Wittkower's influential *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, the modifications also engaged an association with Renaissance ideals of abstract geometry, issues already embedded from the abstract geometry of the Modern Movement, but now argued as a Humanism.

The concept of humanism provided a cross-over to the second major precept, the emergence of a postwar populism and the new importance of the consumer as an individual rather than simply part of a mass. Humanism too was argued under a variety of terms: the New Empiricism, Scandinavian, Englishness, the Picturesque and the New Humanism. It was the complex interplay of humanism and a geometric abstract approach associated with rationalism, that led Ockman to observe that the "historical context for (the) humanism-antihumanism debate" during this period was "vexed."<sup>436</sup>

Taken together the two precepts testify to the important qualitative shift taking place in postwar modern design and architecture. It was not a polite engagement. Banham called it, retrospectively, a "combat" which he polarized as between an "architectural Establishment" of middle-aged modernists and "a new generation of battle-hardened and

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<sup>435</sup>See Joan Ockman, "New Empiricism and the New Humanism," and Reyner Banham's "Revenge of the Picturesque" for the diversity and the arguments, not always clear or compatible, over terminology.

<sup>436</sup>Ockman, "New Empiricism and the New Humanism," 19.

unusually mature students” who felt their sense of modernism learned prior the war was now sold out, too greatly modified, by their modernist teachers, such as Pevsner, and the changes (“variations”) in the style of Le Corbusier during the 1950s.<sup>437</sup> The specific complaints were many and they form dynamic forces that shaped the IG aesthetic in a positive rather than a merely reactionary manner. The choice of focus on humanism, in its general understanding as pursuit of a more “humane” or “humanized” form of architecture,<sup>438</sup> seems to come closest to what has been argued as the populist aspect of the IG concerns.

A “New Humanism” was declared a national project in England in several ways and it was not an issue ignored by the IG. One such embodiment of the spirit of a new, postwar humanism was the Festival of Britain, and as Denise Scott Brown asserted retrospectively, the IG generally felt the same about this New Humanism as the Festival of Britain and rejected it as antithetical to their new and progressive position. But the dissertation argues the acceptance of the challenge of the New Humanism by segments of the IG to guide the formation of their own version.

New Humanism, as a term and a project, derived in large part from the publication and debates in architecture surrounding Rudolf Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, published in 1949 and reviewed by both Kenneth Clark and Reyner Banham.<sup>439</sup> While Clark praised it for ending an older interpretation of Renaissance

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<sup>437</sup>Banham, “Revenge of the Picturesque,” 265.

<sup>438</sup>As Ockman defined it, “New Empiricism and the New Humanism,” 19.

architecture based on aesthetics, Banham preferred to discuss its "evils" as well as its "goods." In one way, Clark was right. Wittkower's reading was a modern reading because it was more empirical. Wittkower argued for the ways in which the concept of humanism was lodged within mathematical proportions. But he also argued the consequence of such classical mathematics on behalf of an understanding of humanism that was abstract and idealized. As Banham summarized it in 1955, it was "a body of architectural theory in which function and form were significantly linked by the objective laws governing the Cosmos (as Alberti and Palladio understood them)."<sup>440</sup> It was this latter aspect of overriding abstract laws that Alloway and the IG opposed, and went on to identify with issues of class and education. But it was not simply that the IG denied Humanist principles: quite the opposite. They simply denied the abstract qualities as universals. Banham's position on Wittkower demonstrates this clearly. He always affirmed the importance of Wittkower, but, typically, he made important distinctions. For example, after admitting that the Smithson's denied Wittkower's principles but were truly "as excited" and influenced "by them as anyone else," he noted that its publication precipitated a major debate on the proper uses of history. For Banham "The question became: Humanist principles to be followed? or Humanist principles as an example of the kind of principles to look for?"<sup>441</sup> While the first option spawned, in Banham's opinion, "Routine-Palladians" as an alternative to "Routine-Functionalists," the Brutalists

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<sup>439</sup>Both reviews were published in *The Architectural Review* 118 (September 1955).

<sup>440</sup>Banham, "The New Brutalism," 7-15, especially 13, and "Revenge of the Picturesque," 267.

<sup>441</sup>Ibid.

(meaning Banham and the Smithsons, but by implication also Paolozzi and the Hendersons) sheared off in pursuit of the latter question: to search for new principles that could embody the human as an unidealized centerpiece. Thus Banham argued that the exhibition by them, *Parallel of Life and Art*, was an exercise in looking for the kinds of principles at the heart of Renaissance Humanism but obviously in different form.<sup>442</sup> The argument for humanism also gained strength and complexity from another source more specifically directed to modernism and nearer the heart of Banham.

The modernist movement received its pedigree in 1936 with Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design* that traced the roots of the Bauhaus back to the Englishness of William Morris. In 1948 the book was reissued in expanded form by the New York Museum of Modern Art, which carried a great weight in England. The 1936 version had argued for a stringent modernism aligned with a more overt Bauhaus tradition.<sup>443</sup> Those demands met the postwar social reconstruction programs of the Attlee Labour Government which had given legislative impetus to an extensive building program from 1945 to 1955 with much of it carried out in what was termed "Contemporary Style." That style was a variation of the importation from Sweden of a populist style that typified their welfare state program called in England The New Empiricism.<sup>444</sup> With

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<sup>442</sup>Ibid., 13-14. The "Routine-Functionalists" are Banham's characterization of those who mindlessly followed Bauhaus principles rather than interpreting them according to new historical and social conditions. "Routine-Palladians" were the new classicists who were also opposed to the new picturesque emerging as a new, hybrid formation of the Modern Movement, as discussed in the text, below.

<sup>443</sup>For a survey of Pevsner and the changes within English architectural theory of the 1950s see Frampton, 262-3, from which several of the historical facts of this discussion were taken.

<sup>444</sup>The influx of modern architecture and design into England from Scandinavia was known as "The New Empiricism," a name given it by the London-based *Architectural Review* in June 1947 and

British postwar concern for the populace, the addition of what was called "people's detailing" and local variations to the modernist canon was accepted not only by the left-wing architects of the London County Council, for whom many architects worked, but supported in the 1950s by the editors of *The Architectural Review*, the same Nikolaus Pevsner and J.M. Richards; the latter one of the organizing members of the ICA in 1946. In the 1950s they settled for a less rigorous approach than Pevsner's earlier form of modernism, with the conjunction argued by Pevsner himself in the 1955 Reith Lectures as "The Englishness of English Art" (later published by Penguin) to assert a picturesque informality as the essence of British culture. Such ideas put forward a humanized version of the Modern Movement.<sup>445</sup> It came to be propagated under the title of "The New Humanism" by an editorial in *The Architectural Review*.<sup>446</sup> This neatly dovetailed with the historical theme of humanism by Wittkower for the Renaissance, and accepted by the New Brutalists as a mission that needed new solutions, as Banham's open-ended question gave statement: what kind of principles does humanism guide us to look for?

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developed in that magazine within a two-year frame. See "The New Empiricism. Sweden's New Style," in *Architectural Review* 101 (September 1947): 199-204, and the group of articles under the generic title "The New Empiricism" in volume 103 (September 1948): 9-22. The 1948 articles are often cited erroneously as published in January. The general argument of the articles was towards identifying in Sweden the current search for "a new and revitalizing creed which will enable them to escape from that sterility to which a too doctrinaire and puritanical adherence to functionalism finally leads." Functionalism was identified in 1948 with the influence of Corbusier and "the so-called international style" between 1930 and 1940. See "The New Empiricism: The antecedents and origins of Sweden's latest style," by Eric de Mare, *Architectural Review* 103 (January 1948): 9.

<sup>445</sup>Frampton, 262; also Ockman, "New Empiricism and the New Humanism," 19.

<sup>446</sup>"The William Morris revival or People's Detailing . . . was occasionally dignified by the grandiose title of 'The New Humanism', which itself was a reworking of a title invented (by *The Architectural Review*) for the Swedish retreat from Modern Architecture: The New Empiricism." Reyner Banham, cited by Frampton, 263. The source for Banham is unspecified by Frampton but it seems an accurate summation of Banham's points made in "The New Brutalism," 8, and "Revenge of the Picturesque," especially 266-8. Banham was mocking the "grandiose title of 'The New Humanism'" but at the same time admitted to its influence. See Banham's "The New Brutalism," 7-15.

However, neither the New Brutalists nor the IG accepted the New Humanism as espoused by the editors of *Architectural Review* or by Wittkower. The latter's abstractions were too much, while the former came under Banham's scorn because he interpreted The New Empiricism as the basis for New Humanism and both as a flight from modernism to the picturesque. Pevsner's sin was greatest since he and Richards, the two "great oracles" of prewar modernism for Banham "threw principle to the wind" and "espoused the most debased English habits of compromise and sentimentality" to celebrate "British suburbia," precisely what their original modernism was designed to eliminate. According to Banham, Pevsner reread his own earlier version of the Modern Movement to locate, thus defend, the picturesque, eventually arguing it a native quality of the English.<sup>447</sup> Banham identified himself and his colleagues as part of the younger generation "anti-Picturesque" faction.<sup>448</sup> But Banham also felt that many others who reacted against this change, architects he supported and identified with, such as James Stirling and James Gowan, later became picturesque, albeit of a type developed through more appealing criteria such as asymmetries and adjustments dictated by topology.<sup>449</sup> That is, theirs was a compromise more along the lines of New Brutalism. The other alternative reaction, the increased classicism of the New Palladians, such as Colin Rowe,

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<sup>447</sup>It seems Pevsner was also affected by--or at least was parallel to--the rustic postwar vision that England developed of itself, and, for many, was embedded into the national consciousness through the Festival of Britain. Pevsner's Reith lectures "The Englishness of English Art," were first broadcast on the BBC in October and November of 1955, then revised and published in book form under the same title in London, 1956.

<sup>448</sup>Banham, "Revenge of the Picturesque," 265.

<sup>449</sup>*Ibid.*, 270 and 272-3.

exerted little effect or staying power according to Banham, and, represented a humanism quite different from his own reaction.<sup>450</sup> Thus there was another schism in the reportedly anti-humanist wing. However, as the dissertation argues, Banham was merely opposed to types of humanism not in accordance with his own, and, not, as he claims at various times, opposed to the entire project. The same will prove true of Alloway.

What was the solution for Banham? The Smithsons, who accepted the geometry of the Modern Movement but began reacting by 1953 against proportional symmetry--to Banham's mind a keystone to the Modern Movement and wrong due to its imposition of an idealizing system.<sup>451</sup> The Smithsons and this new approach were, according to Banham, influenced not by the Renaissance based geometries espoused by Wittkower, although they could not hide their debt to him, but now adjusted through 20th Century science, such as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and concepts of open-endedness and topology rather than geometry. They read, he argued, Carl Popper's book *The Open Society*, "as implying the downfall of all closed and determinate systems such as Plato's politics--or classical architecture based on elementary geometry."<sup>452</sup> What then was the

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<sup>450</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>451</sup>Ibid., 270 and 273.

<sup>452</sup>Ibid., 270. Notable, in light of Alloway and the IG, is Banham's observation in a footnote that regrettably Popper was the only hard-bound reference for their position; other sources included *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Discovery* magazines, talks at the ICA, and BBC radio lectures from the Third Programme. Popper's famous book, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, written during WW II in defense of liberal democracy and against utopian thinking was first published in London in 1945 (two volumes). The parallels with Banham, the IG aesthetic and Alloway are intriguing in the sense that both react to the war in thoughts about the shape of the postwar world, both opposed broad philosophical systems for their totalitarian consequences and both advocate a piecemeal approach on the conviction that one builds through the exercise of individual judgment accrued over time. Considering Popper as a possible influence or parallel also places the IG within a political realm usually not considered. Banham's reference to Plato's politics is a clear reference to Popper's critique, now equated with architecture. Then too Popper was very concerned with the scientific breakthroughs in indeterminacy, as were the IG.

solution, since the Smithsons 1951 Hunstanton School Project was considered Miesian?<sup>453</sup> What were the principles of humanism looked for?

Banham indicated that his answer to the question of humanism was partly factual, but more the case of a process than a finalization. He argued in his *New Brutalist* aesthetic on behalf of answers that are topical and topological; that is, related to the exigencies of the situation or, the site. For example, architects should accept asymmetry when the site called for it, even though the solution could be picturesque.<sup>454</sup> One should accept the “disorderly” aspects of the Modern Movement and rely on advancing technologies and the sciences.<sup>455</sup> He accepted functionalism redefined by the Smithsons as arriving at layouts and planning through study and recognition of circulation patterns rather than through the classicist overlay of geometric grids.<sup>456</sup> Banham could provide lists by 1955 of what constituted the New Humanism in terms of architectural details, with the conclusion that it was “‘William Morris Revival’, now happily defunct.” But Banham also argued that New Brutalism could and had been equally defined by descriptive labels, when it was, for Banham, more truly a “programme” and not simply

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<sup>453</sup>Ockman used the building to argue the Smithsons were not simply Miesian but New Palladianists prior their 1953 conversion to the “realistic rigor” of New Brutalism. See Ockman, “New Empiricism and the New Humanism,” 20. Banham argued it in 1955 as fundamental to the New Brutalist program, as outlined below.

<sup>454</sup>See his acceptance of the picturesqueness of James Stirling and James Gowan in “Revenge of the Picturesque,” 272.

<sup>455</sup>*Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>456</sup>*Ibid.*, 270. Banham reported that the Smithsons, in an oral presentation at the London Architectural Association in December 1953, used circulation patterns to explain the architectural backgrounds painted by Poussin, and the layouts of sacred Greek sites: now seen as “organized by function and circulation, and not by any mathematical system.”

physical characteristics.<sup>457</sup> Thus Banham in his seminal article to characterize The New Brutalism argues that it necessarily “eludes precise description, while remaining a living force.”<sup>458</sup> The new humanist principle that Banham recognized as needed to be found, remains, the dissertation argues, the search, and in a purposeful and fundamental sense, unresolved. But it is a search with parameters: one conditioned by the acceptance of Banham’s general terms for modernism--new technologies and the logics he found and admired in the older Modern Movement, in combination with the IG open-ended approach as a condition of the complex present.

According to Banham, both Pevsner and the early modernists were authentic attempts to come to grips with the influence of the machine age, although misguided.<sup>459</sup> He felt this was something earlier modernism had attempted to embody but failed.<sup>460</sup> As Alloway remarked in an earlier 1952 review: any revival form based solely on nostalgia that “does not come to terms with that essential monster, the machine” fails due to its ties to a misguided and historically displaced Renaissance humanism.<sup>461</sup> Banham felt the

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<sup>457</sup>See Banham, “The New Brutalism,” 9-11. Anyone familiar with Morris realizes his too was a “programme” by Banham’s standards. Not to deny the self-serving aspect to Banham’s definitions, his reference was to the revival rather than to the source.

<sup>458</sup>Ibid., 9. For a more schismatic reading of Banham, as doomed to a life of separation between ethics (the social) and aesthetics, see Noah Chasin, “Ethics and Aesthetics: New Brutalism, Team 10, and Architectural Change in the 1950s,” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, The Graduate Center, 2002), especially 83-104.

<sup>459</sup>Banham’s *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, first published in 1960, was the outgrowth of his dissertation written for Pevsner at London’s Courtauld Institute of Art in 1952. For Banham’s position, and expression of gratitude to Pevsner, see the introduction to the second edition, 1981, the MIT Press.

<sup>460</sup>For the misguided results of the earlier machine aesthetic of the 1930s, see Banham’s arguments in his 1958 essay “Machine Aesthetes” reprinted in *A Critic Writes*, 26-28.

<sup>461</sup>Alloway, “From Trajan’s Column Down,” a review of a book on handwriting. By the time of the three introductory essays to the 1956 exhibition, *This Is Tomorrow*, as outlined in the dissertation

“White Architecture of the 1930s” did design for the first Machine Age, but that it was “a special pleading of basic functional-rationalist doctrine” and its proposed “propositions” of the machine age were “fakery.”<sup>462</sup> What Banham wanted for the machine age in the 1950s was “a more viable integration of design with practicalities of machine age existence.” These were achievable only when one abandoned “stylistic prejudices,” i.e., set solutions, and replaced them “by the concept of ‘the style for the job,’” i.e., topical solutions.<sup>463</sup>

The IG, forming in 1952, felt there was a second machine age, defined by the ubiquity of the machine, thus a period in need of a reformulated response. At the same time they attacked both the reformulated Renaissance basis of formations of modernism as an inadequate humanizing principle, as well as the revisions based on a backward looking humanism defined by the more traditional components of the picturesque. They supported the populist aspect of postwar modernism but opposed those aspects they felt were the reason for missing the populist mark--its wrongly embodied humanism.

Alloway’s personal opposition to “Humanism” was clear at an earlier date, although he meant specifically the Renaissance form of humanism as abstract principles. Although Alloway repeated his attacks on humanism several times he did not always qualify it as “Humanism” with a capital letter, or as Renaissance Humanism, thus leading

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notes to Chapter four, each of the three writers argued along these lines: the failure of early modernist synthesis of architecture, art and life and the need to follow the lead of Bauhaus principles or spirit but directed to the character of the present time.

<sup>462</sup>Banham, “Machine Aesthetes,” 7. It was originally published in *New Statesman* 55 (16 August 1958): 192-3.

<sup>463</sup>Banham, “Machine Aesthetes,” 8.

the reader to wrongly assume he was opposed to the very concept of humanism rather than seeing his position as one in favor of recasting its principles into an urban populist form. By as early as May, 1951, Alloway characterized the aesthetic of this century as non-classical and anti-humanist and in danger of being overwritten by “post-Renaissance terminology.”<sup>464</sup> Although this is slim evidence for a wholly developed position by Alloway in 1951, it was made prior to his direct relation to the ICA, the IG, or Banham. It was in this argument that Alloway first signaled, by implication, his need to later accept some form of populism to counter the abstract form of humanism. By at least 1957 Alloway’s position on humanism became condemnatory:

There is no doubt that the humanist acted in the past as taste-giver, opinion leader, and expected to continue to do so. However, his role is now clearly limited to swaying other humanists and not to steering society. One reason for the failure of the humanists to keep their grip on public values (as they did in the nineteenth century through university and Parliament) is their failure to handle technology, which is both transforming our environment and, through its product the mass media, our ideas about the world and about ourselves.<sup>465</sup>

The dissertation argues that the historical record, when read through the broad context of debates, demonstrates that the IG had its own form of humanism, a

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<sup>464</sup>The terms were used to characterize the contributions of H.A. Groenewegen-Frankfort in Alloway’s book review of her *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the representational Art of the ancient Near East* written for *Athene* 5, no. 2 (May 1951): 37-38. Alloway was the editor of *Athene*. Wittkower’s text was widely known by this time and Alloway’s phrasing likely refers to Wittkower’s argument.

<sup>465</sup>Alloway, “The Long Front of Culture.”

philosophy that formulated the importance of people as participating and unregulated individuals. The concept of a people for the IG was in contrast to and purposefully derived from the concept of masses that frightened earlier “elitist” thinkers who preferred to keep people at a remove. In this way the IG preceded Raymond Williams’ refusal to accept the classification of masses for individuals at the same time the IG accepted the issue of increased numbers in a mass society; Alloway’s issue of plenitude. There was no escape from the postwar concept of the people in 1950s Britain, even though it was inflected by different sources. The populist aspect of Alloway derives from the same general impulse driving the concerns of the Festival of Britain, Pevsner’s Englishness and what Alloway celebrated as a self-imagined member of the working-class. However, the concern shared by the IG was for people defined variously as consumers consuming, as spectators participating, as bodies moving in and through space, as urban street figures in motion. Thus the relationships are closer than previously recognized: here argued as a pervasive populism as an integrated, if complex, condition of modernity, of which there is more to say.

#### **D. The Bauhaus Revisited: the IG Recovery of Modernism . . . and beyond**

Reyner Banham characterized the 1950s as filled with shifts and arguments about the Modern Movement, which he accepted as equivalent to Modern Architecture.<sup>466</sup> This “combat,” according to Banham, was between an older British modernist Establishment, best personified by his teacher Pevsner, and a younger generation whose prewar

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<sup>466</sup>See section 5.C.

modernist training was contradicted by their teacher's shift to a more humanized, defined as a picturesque, version of the Modern Movement.<sup>467</sup> The younger generation's anti-picturesque reaction was especially directed, in varying waves, at Pevsner, as Banham tells us, due to Pevsner's leading role in formulating a history of the Modern Movement, one he had argued since 1936 as coming to fruition in the Bauhaus. Pevsner argued that in the prewar period, the "new style" was the one "genuine and legitimate style of our century" beginning with William Morris and fully synthesized in the work and theory of Walter Gropius. Pevsner described the style as a single "historical unit" from its beginning to end. That end was initiated in 1919 when Gropius opened the Bauhaus and explored the "immense, untried possibilities of machine art."<sup>468</sup>

The younger generation felt the "community spirit" of Gropius' Bauhaus had been abandoned. Therefore the undercurrent of the 1950s for those involved within the orbit of the IG and elsewhere, one that included the development of The New Brutalism, was a recovery project. The IG admiration for the Bauhaus was based upon, in large part, their attempt to address the machine. Banham reflected that it was their "impression that the Bauhaus was somehow first in recognizing the new technological world."<sup>469</sup> For Banham and his colleagues, Pevsner's picturesqueness had gone too far in the wrong direction and new answers were needed. But several major problems remained.

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<sup>467</sup>See Banham and Ockman, and the discussion in 5.C.

<sup>468</sup>Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 38-9.

<sup>469</sup>Banham, "The Bauhaus Gospel," especially 390. It is notable that the Bauhaus emphasis on the machine to which Banham refers was not present from the beginning but developed around 1922-23. See, for example, Gropius, Walter, "The Viability of the Bauhaus Idea" [dated 3 February 1922] in Hans

For one, the IG had no direct experiences with the Bauhaus. Despite the presence in England of the major figures of the International Style and the Bauhaus during the 1930s, they had departed in the 1930s. Banham wrote, retrospectively in 1968: “The Bauhaus tradition, the supposed Bauhaus system, is something that the English discovered in books. They had to: the living presence of the Bauhaus people here lasted little over three years.”<sup>470</sup> Those books “came from secondary writings by non-Bauhaus authors” such as Richards, Pevsner and Giedion. The reissue of the 1938 Bauhaus exhibition catalogue from the New York Museum of Modern Art acquainted them with “first-hand sources.” Even the Bauhaus itself, Banham argued, was reduced to the “gospel books” published in the Bauhaus series of books.

Of all these books, Banham recounts his experience with the one that made the Bauhaus lessons most clear to him; his June 1939 discovery of Daphne Hoffman’s translation of Moholy-Nagy’s *Von Material zu Architektur* into *The New Vision*.

It was a stunning encounter. From Moholy’s text and compellingly gritty illustrations we learned a whole new way of looking at modern art. We learned . . . that modern art and design were an integral part of modern industrial civilisation, and tend to the ultimate condition of a mechanical architecture framing a measured, but infinite, continuum of three-dimensional space, and that a school called the Bauhaus had been the head and front of the tendency.<sup>471</sup>

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Wingler, *The Bauhaus. Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago* [1962], edited by Joseph Stein and translated by Wolfgang Jabs and Basil Gilbert. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976, 51-52.

<sup>470</sup>Banham, “The Bauhaus Gospel,” 390.

<sup>471</sup>Ibid.

Thus for Banham, and to judge from the evidence of the exhibition designs, the IG in general, the basis of return to Bauhaus ideas was fundamentally associated with Moholy-Nagy more than with any other figure, although others, such as Paul Klee were greatly admired and apparently discussed.

The problem in England, for Banham and others, came in the degradation of the Bauhaus tradition through a British school system that applied the Bauhaus preliminary course as “eternally and universally true.” For art schools, it was their “sure sign” they had “gone Modern.”<sup>472</sup> However, the programs did not contain, according to Banham, the flexibility that Gropius had desired and “by the middle Fifties it was too late to argue.”<sup>473</sup>

Banham described his own trajectory as one of evolving doubt: “The belief that pre-1928 Bauhaus ideas were inherently relevant to a culture based on machine technology, and represented the historically necessary way to design in the 20th century, became more and more improbable as I proceeded with my own historical researches.”<sup>474</sup> He began to understand what he first called the gospel books of the Bauhaus eventually as little more than “progress reports” directed to the 1920s. He realized that to continue to use them as if relevant to 1950s Britain went against the lessons of the Bauhaus: “their courses had been in a state of continuous development” and their students had

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<sup>472</sup>Ibid.

<sup>473</sup>Ibid.

<sup>474</sup>Ibid., 391.

immediately moved beyond the lessons.<sup>475</sup> Banham realized it was process more than any single object or exercise that was the key. In testimony he recounted that Moholy-Nagy did not teach; he invited you to live and work with him.<sup>476</sup> He realized that Bauhaus objects were irrelevant 30 years later but the principles of process lived on: the “theory” he called it. From this Banham concluded the nature of his own work should be “to devise solutions, not necessarily design objects.”<sup>477</sup> Banham was neither alone in his analysis nor, despite his lack of precise dates for his epiphanies, did he summarize in 1968 more than what the IG knew and theorized in the 1950s.

John McHale, the close friend of Alloway and his co-convenor of the last series of IG discussions, nicely summarized many of the piecemeal thoughts expressed by the IG when he argued in 1955 that Bauhaus ideas were both outmoded and yet relevant.<sup>478</sup> The fault lay, he wrote, in their followers, where many schools used scraps of Bauhaus technique and converted what were their progressive “anti-academic qualities . . . to academic ends.”<sup>479</sup> Certain Bauhaus elements, according to McHale, such as Giedion’s

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<sup>475</sup>Ibid.

<sup>476</sup>Ibid.

<sup>477</sup>Ibid., 392.

<sup>478</sup>John McHale, “Gropius and the Bauhaus,” originally published in *Art* (London) (3 March 1955) with excerpts republished in *Independent Group*, 182 from which these quotations were taken. The essay was generated to address Giedion’s new book *Walter Gropius—Work and Teamwork*, thus accounting for McHale’s view of the Bauhaus seen through Giedion. However, no one statement and no one person is able to stand for all the individual variations of the ideas held. Specifically, while McHale dismissed the relevancy of Giedion, Alloway later identified him as one of the IG sources for modernism. In addition to the dangers of comparing positions held and remembered 35 years apart, most of the IG did not always make clear distinctions.

<sup>479</sup>McHale, “Gropius and the Bauhaus,” 182.

claim that they wanted to “bring the repetitive work of the machine into harmony with the eternal laws of the nature of material,” were by McHale’s estimate “pretty useless now.”<sup>480</sup> The position and role of the machine had changed for the IG. For the Bauhaus the machine had been “an extension of the hand tool” but was “now much more the autonomous machine” and thus required rethinking. The cultural conditions had also changed, and McHale openly quoted his friend Alloway to summate that change: “a fine art/popular art continuum now exists.”<sup>481</sup> This was the first time Alloway’s now-famous phrase was published, thus we assume its currency by Alloway in 1955, likely within the IG second round of discussions led by he and McHale.

McHale argued that due to the changed historical circumstances that certain ideas of the Bauhaus now seemed more significant than others. Important were their methods of approach to problem solving, their anti-traditionalism, their stress on communication as developed through collective thought and work, and, “the general preference for both/and rather than either/or.”<sup>482</sup> Interestingly, McHale attributed the inclusivist attitude to the Bauhaus, as the place that attempted to bring together all art forms. Acknowledging this relationship places Alloway’s famous formulation of a “fine art/popular art continuum” into the context of the Bauhaus synthesis of art, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a fact that Alloway acknowledged while he also argued his differences.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> For Gropius and many of the modernist architects of the first half of the twentieth century, the concept of architecture and design as a way to restitch the fragmented condition of the modern world held

In a 1958 essay, “Machine Aesthetes,” Banham provided a clear overview of not only the problem but also explained how the New Brutalism attempted to create a hybrid approach to the Modernist movement of the 1930s that had become perverted.<sup>484</sup> He explained that those who thought the Brutalists “old fashioned” for their use of brick or their admiration for chrome-work on Detroit cars, or “Pollock, Paolozzi and Volkswagens” never understood either brutalism or the “white architecture of the Thirties.” It was the Brutalists who accepted and embodied the “full moralistic, functional and rationalistic rigour . . . uncompromising truth to materials, structure and function” of the Thirties in ways the Thirties “did not”: i.e., the Brutalists accepted the theory of the Thirties but not the mythology of the “smooth and plain” reinforced concrete forms that became associated with the Machine Age “by aesthetic fumbletrumpets who were forever galloping into print with ill-drawn analogies between machinery and abstract art.”<sup>485</sup> Banham warned against thinking that because the Brutalists have “rejected the machine aesthetic . . . they have rejected technological culture.”<sup>486</sup> Instead he felt they abandoned the mythology of the Thirties and opened the way for a more viable integration of design

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almost messianic faith. For example, David Batchelor has Gropius argue that “architecture would, if rooted in ‘objective knowledge of optical facts’, become a total work of art, the new *Gesamtkunstwerk* that would ‘rise one day towards heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith’.” See David Batchelor, chapter one, in Briony Fer, David Batchelor, Paul Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism. Art between the Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 29. The Gropius quotations were taken from W. Gropius, “Manifesto,” as cited in the exhibition catalogue *Bauhaus* (London: Royal Academy of Art, 1968), 13. See Alloway’s reference to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in his untitled essay for the exhibition catalogue *This is Tomorrow*.

<sup>484</sup>Originally published in *New Statesman* 55 (16 August 1958): 192-3 and reprinted in Banham, *A Critic Writes*, 26-9, the source used here.

<sup>485</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>486</sup>*Ibid.*

with practicalities of machine age existence.<sup>487</sup> Banham accepted the challenge of the second machine age, now more a ‘technological age,’ much as the Bauhaus-inspired modern movement accepted the challenges of the first machine age. But Banham and the others were out to revise it by returning to basic concepts that allowed them to integrate whatever new conditions arose.<sup>488</sup>

Banham also argued the case, as McHale had done, in detailed fashion for selected elements he considered progressive and regressive within the Bauhaus tradition in his 1960 book.<sup>489</sup> He considered that “rationalist platitudes” had been used by later generations to justify, thus hide, the “irrational mechanistic urges” of the original Bauhaus, by which he meant that the followers hid the expressionist elements in Bauhaus design. As Banham eulogized, “what romantic dreams of pristine crystalline splendours, cathedrals of light and color, are imprisoned in the snug and inexpressive towers of glass that form our current downtown scenes. For these are the true ‘ghosts in the machine’ of the Twentieth Century . . . .”<sup>490</sup>

Thus the IG had in mind some part of a recovery project when it began to accept and apply their constructions of randomness in application to rationalist designs despite

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<sup>487</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>488</sup>Also see the arguments in 5.C.

<sup>489</sup>See Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, 284 and the first chapter. There is no particular attempt here to historicize this argument. Banham had been outlining this position throughout the 1950s in his essays and likely in advance of McHale. It was likely Banham who set the early tone and direction of the IG as first official discussion leader and brought architecture, urban planning and industrial design to the forefront of IG modernism in contrast to the ICA.

<sup>490</sup>Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, 12. Despite the historical goals of the book, it was a summary of his ideas developed within the 1950s, and a polemic.

the impression given by later claims of Alloway that they rejected the Bauhaus as if it were some single and categorical entity.<sup>491</sup> The prime example of the IG vision and revision of the Bauhaus came through the New Brutalist aesthetic in art, design and architecture that was formed in the early 1950s, according to Reyner Banham, within the group of four artists with connections to the IG; Paolozzi, Henderson, and the Smithsons.<sup>492</sup> Banham defined New Brutalism in varying phases but made clear that its core was the aesthetic established by the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier, although now fused and altered. Although Banham was concerned with architectural history he asserted that the 1953 exhibition, *Parallel of Art and Life*, created by the above four artists, should be “regarded as a *locus classicus* of the (New Brutalist) movement.”<sup>493</sup> For Banham the “aformalism” eventually developed in New Brutalism was present because the exhibition design and installation of the *Parallel of Life and Art* allowed these artists “to define their

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<sup>491</sup> Writing in ca. 1989 Alloway claimed “The IG had no consciousness of itself as an avant-garde, but it was opposed instinctively for instance to the inheritance of the Bauhaus, especially the constructive Morse code of a fundamental point-line-plane.” What has not been emphasized before is his (and Banham’s) qualification: it was the perverted inheritance of the Bauhaus and not the Bauhaus to which they objected. Thus the key word in Alloway’s recollection is not Bauhaus but inheritance. Without realizing this, one is apt to overread the importance of Dada, making it a polar rather than a balancing influence. See Alloway’s “The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty,” 51. The dissertation rejects Alloway’s later claim that the IG did not possess a self-consciousness of themselves as taking purposeful, progressive, alternative positions in relation to those around them: such self-consciousness was the very center impulse to the IG and their meetings and programs.

<sup>492</sup> See Banham, “The New Brutalism,” 7-15.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Banham never refers to the IG. It is of some interest that Banham discusses the “non-architectural” forms of New Brutalism as the art of Dubuffet, Jackson Pollock, Appel, Alberto Burri, and in England, Magda Cordell, Paolozzi, and Henderson. The subtitle of the exhibition, usually omitted, was “An Exhibition of Landscape, Science and Art.” It was held at the ICA from 10 September to 18 October 1953.

relationship to the visual world in terms of something other than geometry” and allowed formality to be discarded.<sup>494</sup>

The message was received in other places, beyond the confines of the IG although not beyond its general orbit. E. Maxwell Fry was one of the best known members in England of what Russell Hitchcock called the “Second Generation” of architectural modernists.<sup>495</sup> He was a partner of Walter Gropius during his 1934-1937 years in England, and his firm, formed with his wife Jane Drew, worked with Le Corbusier and together were responsible for most of the downtown buildings at Chandigarh.<sup>496</sup> In an article on Gropius for the March 1955 *Architectural Review*, with which he was associated,<sup>497</sup> Fry stressed the sacrifices made by Gropius to implement his one overriding concern, for which “he invented the Bauhaus:” to lead the struggle “to assert human values in place of materialism.”<sup>498</sup> Fry argued that given Gropius’ powerful belief in and use of teamwork, he would agree that artists should play a more important role in cooperation with architects, to come at a time when, Fry believed, the need was never “more necessary.” The surprise was the one artist he picked: “Men like Eduardo Paolozzi

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<sup>494</sup>Ibid., 15. Also see the discussion in 4.D.

<sup>495</sup>See Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971) chapter 23, and especially pages 516, 522, and 524.

<sup>496</sup>See Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture, the Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1966), 550.

<sup>497</sup>According to Banham, Fry was much admired, even followed, by the younger anti-picturesque forces. But neither was he fully trusted due to his close association with *Architectural Review*, which ran articles by the New Brutalists, but was edited by Richards and Pevsner. See Banham, “Revenge of the Picturesque,” 269.

<sup>498</sup>E. Maxwell Fry, “Walter Gropius,” *Architectural Review*, vol. 117 (March 1955): 155-8, especially 157, the source for all the quotations.

should be in on the sketch stage of our important office buildings, even if they come, as a priest went to a battle, to save our consciences.”

Alloway also argued his relationship to the Bauhaus, but implicitly, usually without mentioning it by name, but on occasion using the phrase “early modern” as a code. An important example was his essay for the 1956 exhibition *This is Tomorrow*.<sup>499</sup> The exhibition was devoted to the possibilities of collaboration between architects, sculptors, and painters with the recognition that the “traditional opponent of the purity of art” was “the Gesamtkunstwerk [sic], the totalwork,” a concept he saw as central to a Bauhaus aesthetic. For Alloway, it was a desirable aesthetic and a driving force behind this exhibition and the IG projects, outlined in his first sentences of the essay. But it was an aesthetic that had failed to be implemented and not a failed aesthetic. As Alloway wrote: “Early modern art is full of theories concerning the integration of all the arts, with realisation of the ideals scheduled for another time. But yesterday’s tomorrow is not today - and the ideal of symbiotic art architecture [sic] has not been achieved.” The exhibition, the IG aesthetic, and Alloway’s criticism were designed to avoid submitting to the idea of a synthesis; parts should not be submerged into some greater whole but should remain distinct as they were brought together. The tackboard by Alloway and Group 12 made that clear. The board or grid provided the wholistic structure, but within it were variables that could be rearranged by participants.<sup>500</sup> The same was true for the

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<sup>499</sup> Alloway, “Design as a Human Activity,” n.p. Also see the discussion of the exhibition in chapter 4.E.

<sup>500</sup> See the discussion in 4.E.

exhibition; it was designed, as a whole, to allow difference and its consequent noise ratio (chaotic conditions). It was exhibition design as analogue to the social conditions of multi-channelled communications: “here different channels” were “allowed to compete as well as to complement each other, just as, it was suggested, the members of antagonistic cooperative groups compete.”<sup>501</sup>

What Alloway saw here was the viewer, the new man exposed to the multi-channelled reality that Van Vogt sketched out for his science fiction protagonist Gilbert Gosseyn. As Alloway said, the viewer was “exposed to space effects, play with signs . . . many-channelled activity” and simply had “to adjust.”<sup>502</sup> This was a statement of the nature of the non-Aristotelian individual necessary to face the differences in a postwar world. Thus we have not only a recovery project for modernism, but a bit of the Bauhaus messianic tone as well. But individual noise will not synthesize into an international style.

In his 1966 essay on British Pop Art, Alloway cited three influential books for the IG in this process, two of which were strongly associated with the Bauhaus in England: Amedée Ozenfant’s *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928), Siegfried Giedion’s *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York, 1948) and László Moholy-Nagy’s *Vision in Motion* (Chicago, 1947).<sup>503</sup> Significantly, the latter two were written in the USA and incorporated the American experience to modify previously published principles and

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<sup>501</sup> Alloway, “Design as a Human Activity,” n.p.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Alloway, “The Development of British Pop.” I acknowledge the lead of David Robbins, “Modernist Sources” in *Independent Group*, 55 in directing me to a consideration of the three modernist texts.

ideas, a point not lost on Alloway, McHale and Banham. However, Alloway asserted that it was not their texts, “which carried too many slogans about a ‘modern spirit’ and the ‘integration of the arts’,” but their illustrations.

It was the visual abundance of these books that was influential, illustrations that ranged freely across sources in art and science, mingling new experiments and antique survivals. I know what I liked about these books, and other people in their twenties felt the same, was their acceptance of the science and the city, not on a utopian basis, but in terms of fact condensed in vivid imagery.<sup>504</sup>

It is relatively easy to find support for Alloway’s comment in the disjunctions between Ozenfant’s ideas and his illustrations. The French author clearly defended art in a manner similar to Herbert Read: as a universal and permanent concept. However his illustrations juxtaposed images from automobiles and machine parts to examples of modern and primitive art and science.<sup>505</sup> Such differences between images and text were not the case with Giedion and Moholy-Nagy. In fact, the general content of the Giedion and Moholy-Nagy texts neatly cement several of the points made in this dissertation and perhaps in some cases were direct source, or at least supporting, material for Alloway.

Siegfried Giedion’s *Mechanization Takes Command* offered a visual culture with its concentration on advertising images that ranged from agriculture machinery to the

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<sup>504</sup>Ibid., 32-33. The issues of facticity and science among Alloway’s concerns are notable. Banham repeated Alloway’s claim for the influence of the visual illustrations as more important than the texts in his 1968 “The Bauhaus Gospel,” 390.

<sup>505</sup>Amedée Ozenfant’s *Foundations of Modern Art*, trans. John Rodker (New York, 1952), 336. Robbins, *Independent Group*, 55, pointed out Paolozzi’s admission of the influence of the range and admixture of Ozenfant’s illustrations on his own work. See Eduardo Paolozzi, “Primitive Art: Paris and London,” *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl*, exhibition catalogue (London: British Museum, 1985), 10.

development of American household appliances, images of the type that were used in abundance in IG collages.<sup>506</sup> But the images supported the contentions of the text. Farm machinery represented the interface between technology and nature and both inspired and supported the thinking and art work of Richard Hamilton.<sup>507</sup> Contemporary ads demonstrated not only the new importance of the industrial designer in this new culture but more importantly Giedion's contention that the reconciliation of art and science occurred in American mass production rather than in art in such a way that mass production and not art produced something like the unity of thought and feeling long needed within modernism.<sup>508</sup> Of special note for Alloway, Giedion claimed that the influence on contemporary culture exerted by the industrial designer was "comparable only to that of the cinema."<sup>509</sup> Thus Giedion offered a solution to C. P. Snow's antithesis

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<sup>506</sup>John McHale reportedly returned from his year of study at Yale with Josef Albers not with Bauhaus lessons but with a trunkload of American glossy magazines that became the source material for many of the IG members. McHale used them for a series of collage paintings developed from 1956 to 1958. But his interest in collage, adverts and communication theory was already in place. "He wished to visualize how raw data (represented by torn bits of colored paper, newspapers and magazines) might be organized by a human or mechanical brain into discrete messages. The collage books that he produced in 1954 synthesized the themes of mass culture, information processing, and viewer participation." One was shown at the 1954 ICA exhibition *Collages and Objects*. In 1953, McHale had created a series of collages he called *Transistors*, after their invention in 1948, that testified to his interests in combining science, technology and communication theory "which provided a visual equivalent for the processing of information." See Jacquelynn Baas, "John McHale," in *Independent Group*, 87-88.

<sup>507</sup>Hamilton wrote: "Siegfried Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command* became a primary source book immediately after its publication in 1948. It was particularly significant for me in that it complemented (d'arcy Thompson's book on morphology) *On Growth and Form*, which deals with the natural world in just the wide-ranging manner of Giedion's perception of technological form and process. Agricultural machinery was seen by Giedion to be at a crucial interface, the boundary at which technology meets nature." See Hamilton, *Collected Words: 1953-1982*, 12. Both Giedion and Moholy-Nagy provided the basis for Hamilton's explorations of motion and perception in the paintings at his July, 1955 *Man, Machine and Motion* exhibition at the ICA.

<sup>508</sup>See Giedion's discussion, *Mechanization Takes Comman*, pp. 101-115, of relationships between the scientific recording of motion studies of human work processes and those representations in art.

<sup>509</sup>Giedion, "The Industrial Designer," in *Mechanization Takes Comman*, 610. His use of "cinema" referred not to art films but popular movies.

between the two cultures of science and the humanities in terms not of art but of everyday developments in commercial cultural representations. The IG members agreed and Giedion provided intellectual support in his text and arguments as well as in his images, and, he likely reinforced Alloway's fascination with the movies.

László Moholy-Nagy's *Vision in Motion* pointed out that photography was the primary medium for consumer culture through its use in ads and that the Dada photomontage, and collage strategies in general, with their juxtaposition and superimpositions were examples of this new technological "vision in motion"--the thesis of a "new vision" at the core of his beliefs and writings.<sup>510</sup> It was "photographic vision" that was the hallmark of the modern world.<sup>511</sup> The "photographic vision" was also the best demonstration, for Moholy-Nagy, of the tie between the avant-garde and the mass media.<sup>512</sup>

Virtually the entire IG could be argued as under the direction, if not the full character, of Moholy-Nagy's new vision as he saw it embedded in the photograph. His

<sup>510</sup>See for example Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, 170-187, 206-7, 208 and passim, and the discussions in chapter four on the relationships between photography and commercial culture by McHale and Paolozzi, and the use of photography in the IG exhibition *The Parallel of Life and Art*. Moholy-Nagy argued, p. 208, vision in motion as "the logical culmination of photography" as vision and separate identity becomes sequential. He credited the Dadaists with the first photomontage and related it to the "cubist collages" on p. 212. Further there was value judgment and not simply historical procession: "The dadaists in exhibiting the brutally torn and roughly-cut photographs, showed they held in contempt historic 'beauty' with its illusionistic connotations. Theirs was a 'counter war', an emotional pandemonium . . . against the imperialism of the first world war and the social shortcomings of their epoch" reminiscent "of the first futuristic, *bruitistic* symphonies which combined noise and hubbub into a thundering orchestration." He noted (p. 208) that the photomontage later became more rational but retained its ability to develop "bizarre relationships."

<sup>511</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>512</sup>He argued this connection between the avant-garde and mass media throughout his book. For examples, Ibid., 13, 15, 35, 49, 54, 55, 247-8, 273 (IV), 350. His extended discussion of photographic vision is on pp. 206-8.

new vision supported the IG's extensive use of photographs in their own work and their exhibition designs.<sup>513</sup> Photographs were able to carry the modern displaced vision in motion across the culturescape, where everything could be examined as part of what Alloway will famously dub the "field of visual communication" in which art must simply take its place.<sup>514</sup> Particularly interesting to the IG were the various types of visions facilitated by advances in science, of which they were already aware but outlined by Moholy-Nagy, such as microphotographs and x-rays. The most obvious signal of intention was the IG choice for the cover of the exhibition catalogue for *Parallel of Life and Art*, a 1941 x-ray photograph of a man shaving, because it was an image taken from Moholy-Nagy's 1947 edition of his new book *Vision in Motion*.<sup>515</sup> As Moholy-Nagy stated in the *Foreword*, his book was an update of his earlier Bauhaus-based text to reflect his experiences in Chicago and to present "a more general view of the interrelatedness of art and life." Thus Moholy-Nagy's vision also provides the impulse for the title for the IG exhibition "Parallel of Life and Art," certainly its primary theme.

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<sup>513</sup>As argued in the dissertation discussion of *The Parallel of Life and Art* in chapter four.

<sup>514</sup>Alloway wrote: "art can now be sited within a general field of visual communications. It is now necessary to make a new set of connections between art and the spectator, more accurate and extensive than the currently run-down state of traditional aesthetics allow . . . ." Alloway, "Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media," published as a review of the Cambridge Group show of "pop art" at the New Vision Centre, London, in *Art News and Review* (27 February-12 March 1960): 3, 12. The full impact of this is discussed in chapter six.

<sup>515</sup>Paolozzi, Henderson and the Smithson's reappropriated Moholy-Nagy's originally appropriated x-ray photograph of a man shaving, taken from the Westinghouse Research Laboratories: "Man shaving (x-ray photograph)" by L.F. Ehrke and Dr. C.M. Slack of the Westinghouse Research Laboratories, Bloomfield, New Jersey, 1941 in László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago, 1947; Paul Theobald and Company, 1969), p. 253, fig. 349.

And when we examine the context for Moholy-Nagy's use of the photograph we learn that its use by the IG members embodied a manifesto of sameness and yet also difference.

Layout was a crucial art form for Moholy-Nagy, and in his foreword he advised the reader that the text and photos for *Vision in Motion* were aligned even where the photo was not directly mentioned. The text closest to this particular illustration is a section titled "photographic practice"--the central focus to the 1953 exhibition--with a discussion that can be read in two ways. Here Moholy-Nagy discussed the daily experience (through mirrors and reflections) and the technical processes (in film) of "superimpositions" as both the "changing aspects of vision" and as "a blending of independent elements or events into a coherent whole" while recognizing "they can be applied as a new visual language."<sup>516</sup>

Knowing the complexity of the exhibition layout, chaotic by virtually any standard, plan or none, the four artists clearly established a new vision inspired by, but one different from Moholy-Nagy's vision. A quick examination of the documents for the development of the *Parallel of Art and Life* exhibition confirms the purposefulness of this strategy. The Smithsonian's argued the exhibition as a demonstration of a "new movement" to pick up where the "first great creative period of modern architecture finished in 1929"--meaning the end of the early Bauhaus inspired Modern Movement<sup>517</sup>--for "the second

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<sup>516</sup>Ibid., 252.

<sup>517</sup>The argument over the end of the authentic Bauhaus for the IG, the period that established the principles they admired, is made by Banham in the discussion of his 1968 "The Bauhaus Gospels." The conflation by the IG of the early principles and the use of Moholy-Nagy in his later, US-based formation, was not a contradiction. They saw Moholy-Nagy and Giedion in much the way they saw themselves; as continuing the early Bauhaus principle the IG and New Brutalism coveted, that of continuing to react to contemporary issues and changes in culture especially those technological in nature.

great creative period beginning now"--meaning, of course, themselves and their colleagues.

As they wrote:

Both periods are characterised by simultaneous parallel developments in architecture - engineering - painting - sculpture: the attitudes, theorems, images, of each, finding unsought consonance in the others. In the '20s a work of art was a finite composition of simple elements: elements which have no separate identity but exist only in relation to the whole. The problem of the '50s is to retain the clarity and finiteness of the whole but to give the parts their own internal disciplines and complexities. The second great creative period should be proclaimed by an exhibition in which the juxtapositions of phenomena from our various fields would make obvious the existence of a new attitude.<sup>518</sup>

#### **E. Alloway and Sculpture**

Sculpture, not painting was the vehicle Alloway used to first speak at the ICA in 1952, and by 1953-4, it was the basis for his first article in the international art press and his first major exhibition.<sup>519</sup> The IG supported sculpture, along with New Brutalist architecture of the 1950s, as a major vehicle for their own versions of modernism. Reyner Banham, the architectural historian in the midst of his defense of New Brutalist architecture, argued that what he called a movement in sculpture of "no name"--meaning the work of his colleagues within the IG--occupied a more radical position than Brutalist architecture.<sup>520</sup> One of the contributions of the dissertation is to recall attention to the

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<sup>518</sup>From "Addendum: Texts Documenting the Development of *Parallel of Life and Art*, by Alison and Peter Smithson." The original document is reproduced in *Independent Group*, 129.

<sup>519</sup>Anne Massey built her historical context for modernism on painting with little mention of sculpture. See Massey, *Modernism and Mass Culture*, chapter 1.

historical and ideational importance of sculpture in this context. Much of Alloway's position on sculpture and the pivotal role it played will be outlined here.

The 1944 essay by the London art critic E.H. Ramsden for *This Changing World* was an effort to summarize British art.<sup>521</sup> The article barely mentioned the contemporary scene but argued through the photographs. The sculpture of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth and the painting of Ben Nicholson were illustrated with, therefore equal to, the works of the European modern tradition, from Monet and Cézanne to Braque. The British three, often called the St. Ives School due to their location on the British coast, were generally acknowledged as the leading international artists of the time. The well-established art critic and painter also working in St. Ives, Patrick Heron, argued in 1945 that Ben Nicholson was by "general consent the name pre-eminently associated in England to-day with the Abstract in painting."<sup>522</sup> In the Spring of 1950 he argued, typically, that "Henry Moore the sculptor is an artist of greater stature than any sculptor or painter in France who is younger than Braque and Picasso."<sup>523</sup> The second best figure

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<sup>520</sup>Banham, "Machine Aesthetes," 26-8: "that junior revolutionary movement in sculpture that has no name" whose aims were "'to kick Henry Moore in the teeth' (I quote), and they have resolutely rejected the aesthetic of pure form and direct carving that has hung like a millstone around the neck of English sculptors since Wilenski first propounded it. The young sculptors have rejected both the forms and the theory of the Thirties; the Brutalists have rejected only the forms . . ." Banham dates the emergence of this sculptural movement--one he attached to European *l'art brut*, whether or not he names it--in England to the Paolozzi-Turnbull exhibition at the Hanover Gallery in 1950. This means he follows Alloway who had supported Turnbull and Paolozzi years earlier; see the discussion in chapter three and Alloway's October, 1953 review, "Heffer Gallery, Cambridge," 4.

<sup>521</sup>E.H. Ramsden, "New Trends in Painting and Sculpture. Modern art forms considered in relation to the past and to the future," in *This Changing World*, 194- 202, with illustrations.

<sup>522</sup>Patrick Heron, "Ben Nicholson," originally published in "The New English Weekly," 18 October 1945, and reprinted in *Painter as Critic*, 1-3; see p. 1.

<sup>523</sup>Patrick Heron, "Contemporary British Sculpture," originally published in a pamphlet for national distribution by the Central Office of Information for the British Council, n.d., and reprinted (and dated) in *Painter as Critic*, 50-53; see p. 50.

in contemporary British sculpture he asserted was Barbara Hepworth, who happened to be married to “the most eminent British exponent of the abstract in painting, Ben Nicholson.”<sup>524</sup>

Although Alloway was generally respectful of the elder modernists, he also developed an argument, likely derived from the younger artists around him and whose voices he used, that positioned the elder artists in the interwar period and irrelevant to his own period. Alloway wrote a review of Barbara Hepworth’s retrospective and, in the same article, compared her to Reg Butler, a member of this new generation.<sup>525</sup> Alloway found her best work in the period 1939 to 1946, because the means and process were synthesized with content. He meant specifically that she had successfully combined the more graceful parts of Naum Gabo’s Constructivism with the poetics of Arp. But when Hepworth’s work entered what Alloway considered his own domain, the postwar period, he felt her technique no longer matched her recent move to figuration: it was too massive and the new work he considered “pompous.” Alloway’s final judgment should be no surprise: “There is an ‘onwards and upwards with the arts’ idealism which is very heavy to those who can not share her absolutes.” Alloway and the IG members had established a general condemnation of the interwar modernist generation, in whom they felt abstraction equaled absolutes, an inappropriate idea for the postwar period of instability.

Conversely, in the same article he argued that Butler’s recent move closer to human figuration not only moved him away from his earlier Surrealist personages but to

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<sup>524</sup>Ibid., 52. These judgments were shared by many.

“a human image not burdened by idealism like Hepworth’s.” He argued Butler’s figures were affected by new commitments to the study of the human figure in motion, concerns for the interplay of sculpture into the spectator’s space, and, for the relationship between the human figure and the machine. Only Alloway would dare compare a sculptor’s human figures to “the plucked poultry on the production line in (Siegfried) Giedion’s *Mechanization Takes Command* and find it positive in its embodiment of a human-machine relationship.<sup>526</sup> Most significant and surprising was that Alloway, a supposed enemy of humanism, now praised in Butler “a humanist image of great force.” Alloway (and Banham and the IG) never abandoned humanism: he (and they) wanted it stripped of false, prewar modernist idealist absolutes that he found embodied in the work of artists such as Hepworth. Alloway also found most praiseworthy in Butler his concern for audience participation. This was exactly what he complimented in IG artists such as McHale and should be understood as part of his commitment to negotiate with populist concerns, as well as one of the characteristics he demanded of postwar art.

One source for the new importance of sculpture was the 1951 Festival of Britain. Generally, the Festival promoted sculpture as a modern concern as it positioned pieces throughout the year in the public squares of post-blitz London. In a specific sense, the established modernists--Moore, Hepworth, Nicholson and Epstein--were exhibited

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<sup>525</sup> Alloway. “Art News from London,” *Art News* 53.3 (May 1954): 45.

<sup>526</sup> For example, see Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, photograph numbers 68, 121, 127. The development of the production line in the USA, in opposition to the European model, and the resulting struggle between the concepts of animal and man as machines, are central to Giedion’s book. The images of the dead and plucked chickens are memorable.

throughout the Festival year. But so were the new, younger generation, with several of them, but not all, connected to the IG: Reg Butler, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Lynn Chadwick. But it was Herbert Read who set the direction. One year later, as one of the judges for the 1952 Venice Biennale, Read joined these sculptors with five other relatively unknowns to surround Moore as the best of England: William Turnbull, Kenneth Armitage, Robert Adams, Geoffrey Clarke and Bernard Meadows. International attention came to these sculptors from Alfred Barr, Director of New York's Museum of Modern Art, via his reported remarks published in a British newspaper: "it seemed to many foreigners the most distinguished national showing of the Biennale."<sup>527</sup> Thus their topicality was set by 1952 and Alloway took up their case.

This group became the core that Alloway championed in his first international article in the *American Art News* in 1953, where he was advertised by the magazine as "closely connected with the new movements in British sculpture" which were "attracting international attention . . ."<sup>528</sup> A year later, 1954, Alloway addressed several of the sculptors with abstract painters for his major statement on abstract art at which time he made public his emerging split with the ideas of Herbert Read.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>527</sup>Barr's remarks on the British pavilion at the Venice Biennale were reported as coming from the *Manchester Guardian*, 3 September 1952 by Richard Cork, "The Emancipation of Modern British Sculpture," *British Art in the Twentieth Century. The Modern Movement*, ed. Susan Compton (Prestel-Verlag: Munich, 1986), 40.

<sup>528</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "Britain's New Iron Age," *Art News* 52, no. 4 (June-July-August 1953): 18-20, 68-70. He was introduced in the Table of Contents.

<sup>529</sup>Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists*. Alloway seems not to have made the selection of the artists for the exhibition but generally supported their number as among the best in the field. The exhibition and Alloway's position on abstraction and his split with Read are discussed in chapter six.

Read not only named the general field of younger artists emerging after the war to which Alloway will add and subtract, he also characterized the field when he wrote the 1952 Venice catalogue essay. In an often cited passage, Read invoked parts of T.S. Elliot's verbal imagery from *The Wasteland* to characterize what to his mind the postwar sculptors represented: "images of flight, of ragged claws, 'scuttling across the floors of silent seas,' of excoriated flesh, frustrated sex, the geometry of fear."<sup>530</sup> In short, Read interpreted them through his own position as an elder modernist: the human condition, outlined above, as a fearful consequence of the decimation of the war. Yet Read was no fool. He also recognized that these were not artists in retreat to the Platonic abstractions. Thus for him the decimation in the works was a new reading, but this was certainly not the interpretation of Alloway or the IG.

When Alloway laid out his position in his first major article for an international art journal in the summer of 1953,<sup>531</sup> he identified the group as a new, postwar generation.<sup>532</sup> He set them against and independent of the preceding generation of sculptors, naming Moore and Hepworth as representatives of the 1930s aesthetic. He did not call the

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<sup>530</sup>Reprinted by Richard Cork in "Aspects of Sculpture in the Fifties," *British Art in the Twentieth Century. The Modern Movement*, 300. One of Cork's arguments in the catalogue essays is against Read's characterization of the sculpture as either anxious or geometric as inadequate. Cork believed in the truth of the mundane in their lack of heroics, quite the opposite of Read's interpretation.

<sup>531</sup>Alloway, "Britain's New Iron Age." He outlined the individual development of eight sculptors: Butler, Chadwick, Paolozzi, Turnbull, Clarke, Armitage, Pasmore and Adams. Two women mentioned at the beginning of the article (Sarah Jackson and Rosemary Young) are not mentioned again. All quotations in this section are from this article unless otherwise noted.

<sup>532</sup>The exception was Victor Pasmore, born in 1908, whose post-1947-8 painted constructions Alloway had begun to champion in 1952. In 1951 Pasmore quit painting to "devote himself to constructions partly for moral reasons. He decided that the twentieth century is 'more than any other a mechanized age' and the artist needs to come to terms with the machine, not in (Reg) Butler's romantic manner, but as the modern architect has, by employing the new materials that are now available." *Ibid.*, 70.

younger generation modernists but for him they represented a new modernism that partly defined itself in opposition to the early modernists. Alloway characterized the 1930s aesthetic by using a BBC interview between Hepworth and Butler, born ten years apart, where Butler argued what Alloway curiously defined throughout the article as a new moral position or “moral ethic” now attributed to the younger artists.

Butler, thus Alloway, argued that the 1930s “prewar generation” preferred stone- and wood-carving, natural materials, and qualities such as time and weather in the “belief that the sculptor’s technique” was “bound passively to the nature of his materials,” and a “monumental” sense of solid form. In contrast, the new generation used new materials, or old materials in new ways, with direct references to other media, such as drawing and painting. And although he did not argue a sameness for the group, they did have “points of contact” in such areas as the demonumentalizing of form--frequently as open form--a return of the human figure, and often, a sense of nervousness and tension. In the case of William Turnbull these qualities signaled “the intellectual’s sense of crisis.” He was a sculptor, by Alloway’s reading, whose grasp of a sense of motion encoded a “continual pointless roaming” in his open-ended, kinetic mobiles. The tension that Alloway found in much (but not all) of this work seemed to accept Herbert Read’s emphasis in the 1952 Venice Biennale catalogue. But neither descriptive nor even psychological characteristics were enough for Alloway.

Rephrasing Butler, Alloway found in the “integrity” of Turnbull’s solutions to formal problems the possibility of “a renewed humanist canon for sculpture.” In 1953 this was a new sense of humanism rather than the Renaissance concept the IG rejected.

Alloway fused characterizations of art and process into a “moral drive” attributed to Turnbull and others different from the older modernists. For example, Reg Butler, in his changes of media and technique presented to Alloway’s mind a moral position in relation to Hepworth--hence as an alternative to earlier modernism--because the historical and cultural grounds of the postwar present had shifted. Butler’s argument in the BBC interview was that carving sculpture was “suitable for a leisured class” but was “inadequate to modern needs.” By Alloway’s report, Butler and the others were no longer confident in the “pastoral continuity implicit in slow, steady chipping” and “the resultant solidity typical of prewar sculpture.” This for Alloway was the wrong “moral ethic.” The young sculptors felt that the new materials expressed more appropriately “the tension and fugitiveness of the twentieth century.” For Alloway even the “autonomy” of image that Butler spoke of was not the formalist autonomy of “a constructivist self-sufficiency but a subjective vitality.” The same was true for Paolozzi, whose “rickety, uncentered, unaccented forms” and “proliferating and tireless shapes” were, at their best, “electric with vitality.”

Alloway used a formalist approach in his analysis here in his 1953 article, typically found in his early writing, but elaborated it into something more. The formalism of materials, technique and style were fused to an ethical imperative he located at the heart of the new post-1947 humanist concern for the machine.

The one artist from the older generation that Alloway (and many others) embraced was Victor Pasmore. Born in 1908, Pasmore had abandoned figurative painting for painted constructions in 1947-8 for what Alloway characterized as “the most austere kind of

Bauhaus formalism.” In 1951 Pasmore left painting for sculpture. He was, according to the artists and Alloway, at the center of a group devoted to “concrete art.”<sup>533</sup> Pasmore was, for Alloway and the IG, the only one who “found new possibilities” in the “Constructivist esthetic.” Alloway found Pasmore’s reasons for switching to construction also “partly moral” because his style more directly corresponded with the postwar period, which Alloway (and the IG) felt was “more than any other a mechanized age.” Alloway wrote: the artist “needs to come to terms with the machine, not in Butler’s romantic manner, but as the modern architect has, by employing the new materials that are now available.” Such an analysis of Pasmore could have been written by Banham or virtually any member of the IG, and demonstrates through a consideration of sculpture and design rather than painting how they viewed the *Zeitgeist* of their own period.

#### **F. Alloway and Film**

One of the puzzles in Alloway is that despite the concrete ways in which popular culture shaped virtually every aspect of his criticism, he wrote little about the actual forms of popular culture, aside from the occasional essay on science fiction. The one exception was his life-long passion, popular films. They were a personal pleasure for him,<sup>534</sup> a pleasure he understood as aligned with the populace and the popular and in direct communication with his insistence on a new understanding for art. It is ironic that

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<sup>533</sup> Alloway continued the use of the word “concrete” in his 1954 catalogue essay on *Nine Abstract Artists*, discussed in chapter six.

<sup>534</sup>Reinish, 64.

these commentaries have been generally ignored.<sup>535</sup> Films remained his one touchstone to popular culture while he was working as an art critic and they helped clarify the nature of the critical field. Several of his first articles were devoted to popular film; he organized and led at least four public sessions on popular films at the ICA, and he served as a film reviewer for the BBC radio broadcast, the Third Programme.<sup>536</sup> As late as 1971 he published a catalogue, *Violent America: The Movies 1946-1964*, for a film series in book form sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art that most informed readers would consider his major contribution.<sup>537</sup> An examination of that essay does present a developed argument for a new type of film criticism by Alloway, which one might think evolved from his love of American movies in the USA. But every point in that essay, and more, was developed within Alloway's lectures, publications and radio broadcasts for the BBC while in England. Some of the material is recoverable, some is not, but there is sufficient amount to present an important summary of Alloway's position on film. Many of these issues he discussed were similar to the core concerns that shaped his art criticism. However, his film criticism also contains new issues, sources and qualifiers.

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<sup>535</sup>This part of Alloway's life has been overlooked, but as Max Kozloff observed, "He played such an important role in film and no one has paid attention." (Personal conversation with this author in early September, 2001.)

<sup>536</sup>The articles are referenced, selectively, below. There is no record of the content for the ICA lecture and discussion sessions. The BBC scripts are an original contribution of the dissertation. It was an accident of research that this author discovered Alloway's regular work for the BBC and the existence of numerous microfilm copies of his scripts. And more in truth, it was Mike Websell, the Document Researcher at the BBC Written Archives in Reading, England who in March, 2001, casually asked me if I wanted to see all of them! About 13 such scripts exist devoted to film; there are a number of others on books, artists and general art issues. More time needs be spent with them.

<sup>537</sup>Alloway, *Violent America: The Movies 1946-1964*. Published by the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1971, it originated from a film series at the MoMA carried out by Alloway from April 24 to June 6, 1969, as "The American Action Movie: 1946-1964."

His film criticism had a clarity and degree of development, even aggression against the established field, that is sharper than that in his art criticism. Alloway moved to consider art and popular culture as equal fields and to collapse the distances between them, but in his film reviews the issues of popular culture provided pivotal, usable differences.

Within the brief reviews, usually dedicated to a single film, Alloway made constant and direct arguments with the field of film criticism in order to position his own point of view.<sup>538</sup> Most consistent was his attack on older, established, “academic” thus “conservative” critics because they and their approach to film were removed from the experience of the everyday world, precisely the domain of the film audience.<sup>539</sup> He called these unnamed “critics” disengaged and distant, explaining that their criticism was from outside and not inside the field. This parallels his position on art criticism as one that should collapse critical distance and operate from the inside. Yet it is only in the film reviews that he develops fully the several important consequences for this repositioning of the critic.

Operating from the outside for Alloway meant the traditional critics were biased in their criteria, importing it from other fields, such as art films, rather than deriving it

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<sup>538</sup>The sources for the following citations are photocopies in the possession of this author made from the microfiche of the typed and hand-corrected scripts for Alloway’s broadcasts. The scripts, not all of them wholly readable at this time, average about three typed, unnumbered pages and are each devoted to one or two films. They are available at the BBC Written Archives in Reading, England.

<sup>539</sup>See for example his review of the *House of Bamboo* from a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast “House of Bamboo,” in the series *Comment* (No. 5), for the Third Programme, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. at this time unknown, British Broadcasting Corporation, 20 October 1955.

from within. They were ignorant through their refusal to learn the history and thus the conventions of the medium, a crucial omission for the consideration of film because of the conventional nature of popular film. The linchpin of traditional criticism, the necessity of distance to see more clearly via objective and/or rational consideration, was considered by Alloway a liability and wrong headed, marshaling criteria from outside the topical frame<sup>540</sup> and depriving the film critic of a necessary criteria, the primitive sense of wonderment.<sup>541</sup>

What Alloway wanted and considered his was a criticism from within the domain of popular films.<sup>542</sup> He believed that criticism from within was more “sociological,” thus more real and socially useful.<sup>543</sup> The function of criticism from the inside position was to recognize the conventions, then to know their history, their demands, and criteria, and to be able to see the changes in the patterns, their causes and their consequences.<sup>544</sup> He personally believed in “wonder,” much as he did in his early art reviews, but now a sense of wonder was to be an active component in criticism.<sup>545</sup> Otherwise the “primitive

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<sup>540</sup>Ibid., “House of Bamboo.”

<sup>541</sup>From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast “The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad,” in the series *Comment* (No. 86), for the Third Programme, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. D.S. Carne-Ross, British Broadcasting Corporation, 8 January 1959.

<sup>542</sup>Alloway, “House of Bamboo.”

<sup>543</sup>From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast “On the Bowery,” in the series *Comment* (No. 28), for the Third Programme, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. D.S. Carne-Ross, British Broadcasting Corporation, 20 September 1956. However, at times he took an opposite approach. In his analysis of monster films he argued that critics who used film criticism as “sociological explanations” for the condition of society failed to see the larger historical picture. In the case of monsters, he argued there had always been a taste for them. See his article “Monster Films,” *Encounter*, 14:1 (January 1960), 70-2.

<sup>544</sup>Alloway, “The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad.”

<sup>545</sup>Ibid.

patterns of entertainment” that persisted in movies would be missed by the critic.<sup>546</sup> In recognizing such changes the critic promoted change as a positive aspect; only “conservative critics” resisted changes and wanted “folk characters.”<sup>547</sup> If critics saw populist forms as bereft of change then they reinforced the lack of change, or status quo of their perceptions. Thus the progressive critic Alloway had in mind promoted progress through the perspective of the audience as the insider.

Prior to Raymond Williams, Alloway gave unprecedented weight of consideration to the popular audience. Not only is their viewpoint of vital importance to the critic but their increasing levels of sophistication as consumers of popular culture exerted demand for changes in conventions.<sup>548</sup> Contrary to Williams’ critique of naturalism,<sup>549</sup> Alloway appeared to defend it (or realism) as a positive quality in many films. It is what the audiences demanded and not because he was committed to naturalism as a personal aesthetic.<sup>550</sup> Similarly, Alloway considered the visual integration of the film into a seamless reality or “visual flow” as a positive element, a criteria for success because it

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<sup>546</sup>See Alloway’s article “From Mickey to Magoo,” *The Living Cinema*, 1, 3 (Summer 1957), 146-151, especially 146-7.

<sup>547</sup>From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast “Warlock,” in the series *Comment* (No. 18), for the Third Programme, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. D.S. Carne-Ross, British Broadcasting Corporation, 30 April, 1959.

<sup>548</sup>Alloway, “House of Bamboo.”

<sup>549</sup>See chapter two.

<sup>550</sup>From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast “Forbidden Planet,” in the series *Comment* (No. 24), for the Third Programme, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. D.S. Carne-Ross, British Broadcasting Corporation, 12 July 1956.

added to the illusion of the real.<sup>551</sup> Technology would not be estranging since one of its two important functions was to engross the senses more thoroughly than existing techniques, with greater space, richer color, fuller detail and more realistic conviction.<sup>552</sup> The promotion and continuation of fantasy was also an important and sociologically real element; both reality and fantasy were fed by improved technology.<sup>553</sup>

For Alloway fantasy was an element of reality and in dialogue with the elements of the sociological world of human interaction and common life. To recognize and articulate this could change the basis for one's critical perspective and conclusions. As he remarked: "Social as well as aesthetic factors contribute to the form of Snow White."<sup>554</sup> He believed film, similar to art and popular culture, contained a demonstrable continuum between elements of everyday life, art and entertainment.<sup>555</sup> Both should address the same problems and issues in society.<sup>556</sup> Thus the major issue in the twentieth century would be the same for fine art, architecture, and popular films: configuring of the consequences and changes required by the expansion of twentieth century communications, particularly those involving conversion of private to public spaces and moments.<sup>557</sup> A different example, directed to the same point of the continuum, comes in

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<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> Alloway, "The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad."

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

<sup>554</sup> Alloway, "From Mickey to Magoo." 147.

<sup>555</sup> Alloway, "Forbidden Planet."

<sup>556</sup> Alloway, "On the Bowery."

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

his argument about the style of Walt Disney's cartoons as best understood from the point of view of the teenage audience, and, for using the sources within comic book style rather than criticizing the animations for their cartoonish, unrealistic forms.<sup>558</sup> Snow White, he argued, as an animated film character, was rendered in style and proportion much like the young women in the comic books read by young women, and he strongly felt the critic should explore the audience's context.

Alloway did not allow critical distinctions to collapse. It was the ability to see on both levels, of commonality (or continuum) and difference, that allowed him a unique vision. For instance, in the same analysis of Disney cartoons, while he praised the seamless interaction between cartoon characters and actual Latin dancers in the Disney film *Saludos Amigos*, he remarked that the physical structure was "additive," i.e., drawing placed into real-time film footage; the aesthetic, while seamless, was, at the same time, disruptive and could "antagonise those lovers of formal unity."<sup>559</sup>

Perhaps nothing was so seminal to Alloway's analysis of film as the use of iconography as a critical tool, one he felt he added to the history of film criticism. He wrote:

the movies are a formulaic art-form, and they employ platitudes. The movies make up a body of stock-lines, repeated situations, and familiar characters. once you possess the formula, its repetitions and shifts from one film to another are subtle and expressive. And, if you think that an art form based on stock lines, repeated

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<sup>558</sup>Alloway, "From Mickey to Magoo."

<sup>559</sup>Ibid., 147.

situations, and familiar characters sounds terribly boring, let me remind you it is the method of Homer.<sup>560</sup>

Alloway was one of the few to treat the genre of popular films seriously, historically, and personally. Knowledge of these formulas came from appreciative participation which increased the pleasure of the genre.

Alloway recognized that conventions also changed and only by knowing them could the critic and the audience recognize change and difference.<sup>561</sup> He was very interested in articulating new changes within established genres and at the same time adding to the history of conventions within the genre. For example, Alloway found it insufficient to identify the 1959 film *Al Capone* simply as a gangster movie, a form developed in the 1930s. He argued that the older form was “archetype-dominated,” but a new postwar typology within the gangster-cycle had evolved: the “syndicate-movies” which were more “topical and flexible.” He concluded that the new subcategory, concerned with gangster executives (“crime as business”), was part of a broader continuum because it followed the postwar interests of “pop art” (popular culture).<sup>562</sup>

Generally these changes favored increased complexity as the natural consequence of increasingly sophisticated audiences. But other factors in the culture could exert pressure for change. One example was memorable. Alloway argued a social change in the

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<sup>560</sup>From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast “Le Trou” broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation, 20 January 1961.

<sup>561</sup>The call for knowledge of the conventions of popular movies was more relevant in the mid-fifties because serious attention to them was new.

<sup>562</sup>From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast “Al Capone,” in the series *Comment* (No. 14), for the Third Programme, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. D.S. Carne-Ross, British Broadcasting Corporation, 2 April 1959.

1940s responsible for a change in the conventions of Western films in the 1950s.<sup>563</sup> In a review of the 1959 movie *Warlock*, Alloway identified a new type of Western emerging in the 1950s in response to the demands by the 1940s Indian Rights movement for “cultural depth.” In the new movie form the old absolute values of good and bad were now mottled, with unexpected patterns emerging from “a new complexity.” He argued that the change in conventions changed the criteria for a qualitative judgment for the critic and the audience. The “good” Westerns of the 1950s were due to more realistic violence, while the reasoning provided in the films for murder was “more painful and more complex” with flawed and mutually dependent relationships and motives. Change and complexity became signifiers of quality for Alloway through an interdependent process initiated by social change manifested in the art form.

Alloway’s name for conventional patterns was iconography; his terms for change were topicality and technology. In pop literature one of the functions of topicality was “to provide commentary on topical events, a fantasy that keeps pace with the headlines.”<sup>564</sup> Change within popular culture was a process of taking traditional plots and surrounding them with “fresh particulars.”<sup>565</sup> One ignored topicality at their peril, or the wrath of Alloway’s mood. In some cases the neglect of topicality simply allowed the film

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<sup>563</sup> Alloway, “Warlock.”

<sup>564</sup> From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast book review of Ian Fleming’s *Thunderball*, in the series *Comment* (No. 13), for the Third Programme, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. unknown at this time, 30 March 1961.

<sup>565</sup> Alloway, *Thunderball*.

(or book) to join the conventional modes, in which its entire action could be located.<sup>566</sup> However, in many cases, the lack of topicality meant the movie was not good. Alloway attacked John Ford's 1959 movie *The Horse Soldiers* because he did not "give a damn about topicality, the be-all and end-all of the best rival directors of Westerns, with their historical analogies and modern psychology linking the 60s and 70s of the last century, with the 50s of this." He called Ford "nostalgic and conservative," using stock, pre-Freudian characters to keep the movie simple rather than complex, employing "kid-stuff strategy."<sup>567</sup> The same was true for visual art, especially populist art. Alloway faulted Saul Steinberg in his new book of drawings:

Now as Steinberg loses the edge of topicality, as his comments no longer work by virtue of timeliness, he gets less interesting. It's as if all his fine art contacts had taken over and persuaded him that topicality was no longer necessary to him—like his friends the artists, he too could rise above dates and fashions and field work. An artist of course doesn't need the continual intake of current expendable information in the way that a journalist or a cartoonist does. But without high topicality the content, the values, of Steinberg have become trite. His ambiguity is freezing into nostalgic habit . . . .<sup>568</sup>

The key to topicality for Alloway was the quantity and use of the "expendable information." Such information was the product of the central issue in the twentieth

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<sup>566</sup>Alloway, "Le Trou."

<sup>567</sup>From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast "The Horse Soldiers," in the series *Comment* (No. 50), for the Third Programme, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. Unknown at this time, Broadcasting Corporation, 10 December 1959.

<sup>568</sup>From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast book review of Saul Steinberg's book, in the series *Comment* (No. 17), for the Third Programme, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. unknown at this time, Broadcasting Corporation, 27 April 1961.

century, the vast changes in the twentieth century communications systems. That system was driven by technology whose enrichment of the sensual aspects of film allowed old conventions to be revitalized and newly available to audiences. Conversely, shock-tactics and new experiences of old wonders introduced new techniques by appealing to the primitive sense of wonder which almost everybody, except the film critic, possessed.<sup>569</sup> Alloway knew that technical changes assigned new problems, solutions, forms and moods in film. Technological change was dramatic but it was also necessary in order to retain audience and convey information through complexity<sup>570</sup>--"like opera."<sup>571</sup>

Alloway found the current state of film criticism "conservative" and deplorable, meaning "Film criticism is at the stage of art criticism in the 19th century before Morelli, before connoisseurship made possible the systematic study of personal styles."<sup>572</sup> It seems that Alloway was aware of the contemporary developments and arguments in film theory, especially in Paris where the concern with the idea of "authorship," known as the *auteur* school of film criticism, emerged in the early 1950s in the pages of the new journal *Cahiers du cinéma*.<sup>573</sup> Despite the fact that Alloway credited many evils to the fascination by traditional film critics with the concept of singular creative genius, he found

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<sup>569</sup> Alloway, "The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad."

<sup>570</sup> Alloway, "House of Bamboo."

<sup>571</sup> From a photocopy made in March 2000 from the microfiche for the radio broadcast review, Narr. and Writ. Lawrence Alloway, Dir. unknown at this time, Broadcasting Corporation, 15 December 1960, whose topic was the nature of film criticism as practiced in the undergraduate *Oxford Opinion*, whose "spontaneous and unhackneyed interest in movies" had been attacked by staff-writers for the British Film Institute.

<sup>572</sup> Alloway, *Oxford Opinion*.

the accumulation of objective knowledge based on serious study of popular films a sign of the maturation of the field.<sup>574</sup> That is, the styles of director's now could be compared more empirically and less subjectively.<sup>575</sup> Alloway's support for greater knowledge of the directors fits this development. But this was insufficient as an approach for Alloway in a media of conventions. He saw himself developing a new position. Both the old conservative literary approach and the new school style approach were "equally neglectful of the iconography of the movies." Alloway felt "a study of the recurrence of popular themes and the transformation of images and heroes" was needed because, as he explained: "A large part of the meaning of pop movies lives in their use of current iconographical forms, and to put the whole burden of meaning onto the individual director is to simplify matters too much."<sup>576</sup>

Alloway did not mention film critics by name or schools of criticism<sup>3</sup> but the one consistent source in articles and in the 1971 summary USA publication, *Violent America*, was Erwin Panofsky. Turning to the 1971 publication as a summary platform for ideas developed in England, he cited Panofsky's 1934 now classic "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures."<sup>577</sup> Alloway had a number of specific correlations with Panofsky, and

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<sup>573</sup>See chapter three in David Brodwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), especially 49 passim.

<sup>574</sup>Alloway, *Oxford Opinion*.

<sup>575</sup>Alloway, *Oxford Opinion*.

<sup>576</sup>Alloway, *Oxford Opinion*.

<sup>577</sup>Erwin Panofsky's "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures" was originally published in the *Bulletin of the Department of Art and Archaeology*, Princeton University, 1934; revised in 1947; republished variously. See *Film Theory and Criticis Introductory Readings*, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 151-169.

his use of iconography as a tool corresponds generally to the Panofskian methodology.<sup>578</sup>

Among the primary agreements between the two were: 1) the physicality of film-- the direct participation it has in reality--even when it is fictional; 2) the use of conventional or set characters and plots to convey meaning; 3) the belief in a dynamic relation between production and consumption. Other important points of contact between Alloway and Panofsky were the identification of film sources as folkloric, the important dynamic between audience and product, the priority assigned to audience gratification and delight, and the relations between high and low art and audiences.<sup>579</sup>

But in 1934 Panofsky did not apply iconography to his own analysis of films except simplistically. Alloway argued, implicitly through his structure, he could correct what Panofsky omitted and make an original contribution to film theory. Curiously Alloway used iconography, defined by Panofsky as "subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form,"<sup>580</sup> and not iconology. In England, and again in the USA, Alloway used iconography to place things in historical patterns and into their set

<sup>578</sup> Alloway's use of iconography relies on Panofsky but does not seem to be drawn specifically from this essay. Nor does he specifically follow Panofsky into iconology. In his art criticism, Alloway's use of iconography was a convenient and art historical weapon against the formalism Alloway disliked, much the way its use by Erwin Panofsky offset the art historical formalism of Heinrich Wölfflin. The advantages of iconography for Alloway were several: it focused on subject matter, concerned itself with the recognition and analysis of patterns and provided a traditional tool to bridge into cultural concerns even though Alloway's understanding of culture was constructed to conflict with Panofsky's general exclusion of popular art from his approach with the exception of film. However, Alloway applied the study of iconography more in his consideration of film, both in England and later in the USA, than in his art criticism.

<sup>579</sup> There were also a great number of specific differences but much of this is due to the different time periods, 1934/47 and 1971. For instance, Panofsky focused on asserting the primacy of the visual components, films as transformations of "moving pictures" and not transpositions from the stage. By 1971 Alloway wanted to replace an over-emphasis on the visual aspects, the domain of traditional critics, with more sociological concerns.

<sup>580</sup> Panofsky quoted by Alloway in *Violent America*, 41 and note 72.

pieces:<sup>581</sup> it was, to him, synonymous with conventions or repeating patterns of culture.<sup>582</sup> Alloway declared his project was not only to revitalize British film criticism but specifically to correct current oversights through his understanding and application of an iconographic method.

David Laing observed that Alloway's defense of popular films in 1971--and by implication Laing believed, Alloway's defense of the popular arts in general--had a relation to an older "pre-1970 populism of the New Left" such as found in the pre-1970 London *Screen* film magazine. Their developing theory of cinema was a defense of the mass-appeal Hollywood film as worthy of critical interest in the face of condemnations from conservative and progressive opinions alike.<sup>583</sup> Laing's interest in a Marxist theory of art did not identify Alloway as Marxist, but it indexed Alloway's thought and historical position in film more to an intellectual tradition and interest emerging from a generalized political-cultural perspective, i.e., the "cultural Marxism" argued in the first part of chapter two and earlier than Laing acknowledged.

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<sup>581</sup> Alloway, "On the Bowery."

<sup>582</sup> As discussed in chapter two.

<sup>583</sup> David Laing, *The Marxist Theory of Art. An Introductory Survey* (Sussex, Great Britain: The Harvester Press, 1978; Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), 138. Laing is the only historian currently known to consider Alloway as a film critic. His discussion is brief.

## **Chapter 6. Alloway at Large**

### **A. Introduction**

Despite the identification of Alloway with Pop Art and popular culture, the experience of abstract art exerted one of the strongest formative influences on his critical position and became a locus for the synthesis he brought forward of art and criticism. Although his experience with abstraction is usually characterized, even by Alloway, through his contact with American Abstract Expressionism in England, the dissertation argues that it was his relation to British abstract art, in sculpture and painting starting around 1953-54 and culminating around 1960-61, that was formative. His ultimate understanding of abstraction emerged from a mixture of his experience with the “Modern Movement” around 1953-54, then modified by his own interpretations and experiences within the IG by about 1956. By 1960, it changed again, now advanced more than modified by his experiences with the art world outside the ICA/IG with a group of young abstract artists that he unabashedly called the first postwar British avant-garde because they chose to grapple with the main modernist current of the postwar abstract art of New York rather than Paris.

Although Alloway was most associated with abstraction at this time, he developed the argument that figuration and abstraction were equal, and, the wrong way to categorize art. This argument was in addition to his more famous argument for the need of a continuum between pop (popular) culture and fine art based on his experiences with popular culture and the figurative art of the IG. The new argument developed in relationship to the British abstract artists of 1959-60, whose ideas he helped shape. No

name was attached to the abstractionists, by their design, but they are often designated by the titles of the exhibitions, *Place*, and, *Situation*, which announced them in London but are little known outside the local histories. Complicating the picture was a second group of young painters, this time mostly figurative but also centered at the Royal College of Art, who showcased in the 1961 annual London exhibition of “Young Contemporaries” and eventually became known as “the” British Pop artists. Alloway worked with both groups but his relationship to the young British figurative painters is less clear and direct than his relation to the slightly earlier abstract painters. Despite this ambiguous relationship he designated and later denigrated the figurative painters as the third phase of British Pop Art at the same time he argued that we dispense with such categorizations.

The chapter inverts the chronological sequence to Alloway’s development of ideas to provide the reader an overview of the groups of artists and their interrelationships. In his first attempt to structure the history of Pop Art in 1962, Alloway interpreted and aligned the relationships of the IG, the abstract artists of 1959 and 1960, and the figurative artists emerging in 1960 into one axis. He collapsed traditional distinctions between abstraction and figuration, and between fine art and popular culture, to negotiate a new history based on a continuum but not at the expense of differences. Their discussion precedes the details of Alloway’s confrontation with abstraction, argued here as a keystone. That confrontation began in 1954 and continued with the artists of *Place* and *Situation*.

But the experiences within the figuration of the IG and abstraction outside the IG led Alloway to Pop Art only in part and secondarily, as he accepted the temporary and

topical history the artists provided. Indeed, the dissertation argues that Pop Art for Alloway was not so much an art movement, the way it is apprehended today, but a temporary, historically positioned, place of discourse: in Alloway's thinking and words, a polemic rather than an art movement. Its meaning differed for Alloway, depending on whether it was considered within art history or within art theory and criticism.

A second argument is made in the final section of the chapter that Alloway's larger concern lay in developing a concept of criticism in response to the various sources and types of art around him: the use of popular culture, figuration, topicality, and abstract painting under the influence of but different from USA Abstract Expressionism. The dissertation summarizes the case for Alloway's synthesis of abstract color field painting and culture into what the dissertation calls a "field theory" of criticism. It also argues that Alloway developed his new type of criticism as a conscious, albeit indirectly stated, third term or position that differed from but utilized aspects of the two US critics of greatest concern and value to him, Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg.

### **B. A Place Called "Pop"**

Alloway is most often connected with the term and eventually the art movements in England and the USA known as Pop Art. His relation to the New York Pop Art movement is important but lay outside the domain of this dissertation except for his later reflections from the USA on British developments. It was not until he moved to the USA in 1961 that he began to construct, in published form, an overview of Pop art. The two arenas and histories were quite different, as Alloway took care to articulate, and much of

it has been reported and discussed in the literature.<sup>584</sup> The dissertation focus is on the issues specific to Alloway's critical system in order to offer an original contribution as to what Alloway meant by the use of the term within his art theory and criticism, rather than as a term within art history. The distinction is important.

The dissertation has framed the importance for Alloway and the IG of several issues concerning "pop" as popular culture: everyday life, issues of populism, their culturalism or critique of the theory of mass culture, the influences of postwar technologies among the masses, and the ways in which elements in mass, urban, commercial culture were used as paradigms. It is the latter that Alloway intended when he used the term pop art in England; i.e., not "popular culture" as understood by Hoggart and Williams but mass, urban industrial and commercial culture.<sup>585</sup> This is still not a widely understood fact today. Further, the phrase presents some difficulty in the broader context of the historical moment because--and this is not commonly known--the word

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<sup>584</sup>Some of the important literature was outlined in the introduction to the dissertation, such as Carol Mahsun's *Pop Art and the Critics* (1987). A useful anthology of critical writings is Steven Henry Madoff, *Pop Art, a Critical History*. Several exhibitions and catalogues place Pop Art in an international perspective. The 1991 exhibition at the London Royal Academy of Arts produced *Pop Art, an International Perspective*, ed. Marco Livingstone (New York: Rizzoli, 1991). Livingstone broadened his discussion of Pop Art into the 1980s with his *Pop Art, a Continuing History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000). Two exhibition catalogues devoted to American Pop Art have an overlapping perspective that offer insights into the relationship with England: Sidra Stitch, *Made in the USA, an Americanization in Modern Art, the '50s & '60s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and *Hand-Painted Pop. American Art in Transition, 1955-62*, ed. Russell Ferguson (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993). There has been very recent attention to the cross-influences between the USA and England. See *Pop Art: U.S./U.K. Connections, 1956-1966* (Houston, Texas: The Menil Foundation, 2001). Very useful due to its breadth and focus on little-known aspects of the London art scene in the 1960s is the catalogue for the 1993 exhibition held at the London Barbican Art Gallery, by David Mellor *The Sixties Art Scene in London*.

<sup>585</sup>Chapters two and five made the fundamental but often overlooked point that there were two types of popular art in the early 1950s to remind us that Alloway's references were, as he clearly stated, not simply to popular arts but the "newer mass-art" that Hoggart and Williams reject; thus reference to media or commercial mass images and artifacts. These he argued were consumed along with fine art: "For me, however, the consumption of popular art (industrialized, mass produced) overlaps with my consumption of fine art (unique, luxurious)." See Alloway, "Personal Statement," 28.

pop was in fairly wide currency in the culture when Alloway and the IG first applied it in the context of the fine arts in 1958.<sup>586</sup> Chapter five argued that what was accepted by the IG and Alloway as “pop” was a fusion of their concern for people as specific members of a population with different taste cultures produced by mass media as a populist culture, yet bereft of capitalism as a stigma in a postwar recovery period.<sup>587</sup> Yet we are also confronted historically with a fine art form of Pop Art that arose in England during Alloway’s time.

In August of 1962 the British art historian and critic Edward Lucie-Smith wrote of the amazing and rapid success of the “‘Pop’ Revolution,” using the term “pop” many times in relation to such artists as Peter Phillips, David Hockney, Derek Boshier and Allen Jones.<sup>588</sup> They were members of Alloway’s third-phase and generally taken today as the emergence of British Pop art in 1961. Ironically, they were not artists Alloway

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<sup>586</sup> Alloway is traditionally credited with the term by the mid-1950s, but apparently first published it in a fine art context in his essay “The Arts and the Mass Media,” *Architectural Design* 28 (February 1958). Alloway does change his claim on the term. He argues in 1962 he originated the term. See “Pop Art: The Words,” 119. But he also recognized in 1966 that he was credited with the term but modestly defers claims of origination to point out the general context for its development: “In any case, somewhere between the winter of 1954-55 and 1957 the phrase acquired currency in conversation, in connection with the shared work and discussion among members of the Independent Group.” And he cites them by name. See Alloway, “The Development of British Pop,” in Lippard, *Pop Art*, 27. Despite the credit Alloway gives the IG members in 1966, he omits that pop was a term used in the culture at large, commonly in the form of pop music, a field John McHale was especially close to and discussed within the IG. The dissertation has pointed out that the concepts and issues of popular culture, popular arts and populism defined in relation to modernism, humanism and the mass media were prevalent since at least the 1951 Festival of Britain, when Alloway was writing on the topic for *Athene*. And it has argued against Alloway’s remembered and simplified dichotomies to point out his position as an active interrelation between populist modernism and commercial pop.

<sup>587</sup>There remained a deep suspicion of capitalism among the older British modernists.

<sup>588</sup>Edward Lucie-Smith, “Going ‘Pop,’” *The Listener* (London) 68 (30 August 1962): 324. For a survey of this group, what Alloway argues as the third-phase of British Pop Art, most of whom studied at the London Royal College of Art, see Marco Livingstone, “The Artist Thinks, the Royal College of Art, 1959-1963,” in his *Pop Art, a Continuing History*, 93-113.

reviewed or with whom he associated, a fact which places Alloway in a problematic relation to the very art history he is credited with naming. One year later Alloway laid out his survey of British Pop Art, a genealogy he modified in 1966, and eventually applied in yet another modified form to US Pop Art. Therefore it is worth looking closely at the beginning of the paradigm.<sup>589</sup>

In the 1962 article “Pop Art Since 1949,” Alloway was clearly out to take possession of the phrase “pop art” away from those who were using it as a popular slogan. He never argued that he or the IG were the source for the term. Rather, he argued its ownership by establishing its lineage through his grouping of ideas and individuals. In the process he also used the term in two ways. “Pop art” at times took on the meaning as established above, i.e. popular mass culture. But Alloway also clearly referred to fine art that used the imagery of commercial culture but was not commercial culture itself; i.e., here it takes on its normative meaning, one still used today, in art history. The difference in meaning relies on context and Alloway, apparently unconsciously, oscillates between the two in his discussion.<sup>590</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> Alloway established his genealogy for British Pop Art piecemeal, as the dissertation has demonstrated. But he first lays out his overview in a BBC radio broadcast made in his first year as the curator at the Guggenheim Museum: “‘Pop Art’ Since 1949,” on 8 November, 1962 and reprinted in *The Listener* (London), 68, no. 1961 (27 December 1962), 1085-7. He repeated it in a modified form in his essay “The Development of British Pop,” in Lippard, *Pop Art*, and it forms the basis for his well-known genealogy of American Pop Art presented in his catalogue for the 1974 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, *American Pop Art* (New York: Collier Books, 1974). All three versions need eventually to be compared, as there are differences, but it is enough for the dissertation to establish that Alloway’s format and general historical understanding for Pop Art was established in England but calls upon his experiences in the USA.

<sup>590</sup> This author does not believe he was fully aware of his shift in use between his critical and historical use of the phrase. For him “The term refers to the use of popular art sources by fine artists: movie stills, science fiction, advertisements, games boards (sic), heroes of the mass culture.” But to then give an historical development of this process establishes “pop art” as a category in art history. Certainly that was the point of his article, a way of claiming the term by establishing its history rather than simply

He argued that “pop art” in London was not new. It began in 1949 with the use of photographs, from films and from the history of photography, as a source for the paintings of Francis Bacon.<sup>591</sup> However, the focus by Alloway was not on the use of “popular art sources by fine artists” because, he stated, the approach preceded Bacon. For Alloway popular imagery and culture were simply the manifestation of a more central shift in cultural conditions, the “visual explosion of the twentieth century and its abundance of vivid imagery.”<sup>592</sup> And yet his first purpose in the 1962 article was to provide the provisional history to make it an art historical situation. The history he established, used and passed on to others, with modifications, became the frame to bracket Pop art over the next several decades.

His division of Pop into three phases was the historical core of this seminal article and he repeated variations of it applied to Britain and the USA over the years. Although he designated the members of the IG as the first phase (1951-1957) he never mentioned the IG as a group.<sup>593</sup> He felt that the link between “pop art”--meaning now its use as a

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proclaiming its currency. Perhaps too, Alloway’s removal to the USA played a role. However, the dissertation argues that despite the importance of the cascade effect this history will have, the history of pop art as art history is not the important issue here. Alloway, “‘Pop Art’ Since 1949,” 1085.

<sup>591</sup>All quotes unless otherwise attributed are from the 1962 “‘Pop Art’ since 1949” published in *The Listener*, 1085-7.

<sup>592</sup>Alloway, “‘Pop Art’ Since 1949,” 1085.

<sup>593</sup>Ann Massey, in *Modernism and Mass Culture*, chapter 8, has argued that Banham and more so Alloway waited until late to refer to the IG as the source for Pop art, creating a mythic and non-existent relationship. Banham referred to the IG by name in several footnotes to an article published only in Italy and in Italian; “Industrial Design e arte popolare,” in *Civiltà delle Macchine*, November 1955. Massey therefore argued that Banham did not contribute to the myth of the IG as having a relationship to Pop Art because Banham’s article was published only in Italy in Italian. This overlooks its republication in an English version in *Industrial Design*, March 1960, excerpts of which were republished in *Independent Group*, 174-5. In the English version Banham used and capitalized the phrase “Pop Art.” Alloway’s 1960 art review “Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media” has a brief postscript that contains what seems to be his only direct and published contemporary British reference to the IG aesthetic, he noted that “no

term in art history, and not simply a cognate for popular culture--and technology was crucial for the difference between artists like Bacon, who quoted it, and those like Hamilton and Paolozzi, who used it. One way to restate this, and there is more than one way, is that Alloway's argument for the collapse of critical distance marked the beginning of Pop art as an art historical category. His longest, most strenuous argument in the article was that the reader realize how close and important this imagery was to the artists and critics. Hamilton's pop imagery was not "sardonic," while Alloway and Paolozzi, here portrayed as long-standing movie-going friends, felt that sci-fi movies, such as *Tarantula*, were important for their content and for the collapse of the aesthetic distance so loved by Roger Fry and Herbert Read.<sup>594</sup> At one time he used the word "epic" for popular culture. He also named the ICA exhibitions program as the cauldron that delivered the message of "visual explosion" to London.

The second-phase (1957) encompassed the abstract painters<sup>595</sup> and Alloway inscribed their historical (and intentional) mission statement as preserving "pop art" (i.e., popular mass culture) because it was the "common experience" basis for communication between the two phases of artist generations or groups. But as "the effort . . . to align

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significant differences have yet emerged in the definition of pop art's role in the environment . . .," it still rests "on the original unrevised hunches and research of the IG." Although Alloway gives extensive and specific attention to the members of the IG in his 1962 "'Pop Art' since 1949," he did not invoke the name of the group. He argued their overlap with the second phase (1086) and the weakness of the third phase because they lacked knowledge of the first phase (1087). By 1966, in his expansion of the essay for Lippard's *Pop Art* anthology, the IG was prominent in name and a designated influence on the second-phase (pp. 41-2). Late in life, Alloway's essay "The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty," for the 1990 *IG* catalogue (p. 50) denied the connections: "The IG is often associated with British Pop Art, but I doubt there is a link beyond the fact the IG argued for an aesthetic of plenty."

<sup>594</sup> Alloway, "'Pop Art' Since 1949," 1085.

abstract painting with pop art” (i.e., popular mass culture) proceeded, Alloway believed the references should be less legible and obvious, such as through their use of formal qualities rather than figurative iconography. They shifted attention from what Alloway characterized as the intimacy of the first-phase (the IG) to “spectator participation” of the second-phase by creating “an analogue of the man-made environment that we all participate in” by means of scale and bright color. These are what connected abstract painting to “the sensuous world of leisure.”<sup>596</sup> Most remarkable for Alloway were the four young Cambridge artists who in 1960 “staged an exhibition in London” whose work mixed “throw-away, pin-up material . . . equally with their own abstract art. Thus they situated their art within the communications soaked world we all share.”<sup>597</sup> Taken together, the second-phase represented art as one of a battery of messages in the world today, not as an act in relation to the absolute.<sup>598</sup>

The third-phase originated with the RCA students at the 1961 “Young Contemporaries” exhibition. Alloway is reported to have played a role in the formation of their identity, but if so then the irony is he helped define a phase he singled out for

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<sup>595</sup>The abstract artists, their concepts, and Alloway’s relation to them, are discussed in section 5.C, “Alloway and Abstraction.”

<sup>596</sup>The synthesis of abstract painted fields and the sociological concerns of the mass-culture environment are argued as the crux of Alloway’s field theory of criticism in section 6.D.

<sup>597</sup>Alloway, “Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media,” 3 and 12. This was a review of the Cambridge Group show of “pop art” at the New Vision Centre, London, February 1960. Their art was the most visually obvious example of a hybrid between abstraction and figuration using pop culture imagery, but the images and materials were not painted but real objects collaged to their paintings. The third-phase most frequently painted their figures and materials.

<sup>598</sup>Alloway, “Pop Art Since 1949,” 1086.

criticism in his 1962 essay.<sup>599</sup> The third-phase art was a return to figuration which in Alloway's opinion linked them to the first phase via a broader pattern evident throughout the 1950s. He argued that figurative art or imagery was part of a general 50s revival of interest in iconography as a means of expression. He subsumed not only Pop art, as an art historical movement, but all figurative art as "iconographical art" and argued it parallel and in equal abundance with abstract art, despite the fact that "everybody likes . . . to think of postwar art as overwhelmingly abstract."<sup>600</sup>

Pop art is, perhaps, part of a general revival of interest in iconography, in figurative imagery as a means of expression. Iconography, the study of visual meanings in art, has been very influential through the 'fifties until now. It was a favorite word of Paolozzi's and I used to use iconographical methods in my art criticism as a way of writing about art while getting away from over-refined formal analysis. By means of iconography, too, one could discover shared themes between advertisements and art, movies and sculpture, science fiction and constructivism.<sup>601</sup>

This is a clear example of Alloway's criticism at work. He switched the relationship to a broader pattern and used this to leverage several event horizons.<sup>602</sup> Now

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<sup>599</sup>Marco Livingstone reports, without sources or confirmation, that Alloway, who was a juror for the 1961 exhibition, suggested to these third phase artists that they hang their similar works together in the same room to create a greater impact. See Livingstone, "The Artist Thinks, The Royal College of Art, 1959-63," in his *Pop Art, a Continuing History*, 93.

<sup>600</sup>Alloway, "Pop Art Since 1949," 1087.

<sup>601</sup>Ibid.

<sup>602</sup>As early as 1954, in his catalogue essay on abstraction and discussed in detail in section 6.C, Alloway posed new, broader ways to consider polarized terminology and situations. It is a trait he continues throughout his criticism because seeking such alternatives was a primary function of the critical process for him.

the figuration of new art is linked to the tradition of iconography, and, a coequivalence is established rather than a polarization between abstract and figurative art.

Yet the same concern for figuration that linked the third phase artists to the broader iconographical patterns of the 1950s and to the first (IG) phase of Pop also separated them and as their failing in Alloway's eyes. Like the first phase, the third drew on sources from popular culture (i.e., "pop art" used now to mean popular culture) but unlike the first phase, they used many sources rather than one or two. Alloway found the younger artists unable to marshal these sources together: they could not "translate their awkward arrays of different kinds of signs into one coherent format." He felt they were unable to bring together "diverse sources into a unified pictorial structure . . . ." However, Alloway avoided criticising individuals to place the blame in 1962 on the broader historical traditions. American pop artists were better than the third-phase British because they had greater formal structure. American Abstract Expressionist painting had provided the US artists with a strong understanding of formal rigor which they did not abandon even though they had moved away from abstraction. He added: "England, not supplying any standard of comparable rigour, has, in a way, let these artists down."<sup>603</sup>

For Alloway, the third-phase also failed because it did not realize the difference between fine art and popular culture which the first two phases understood. For a critic like Alloway, committed to density and difference, this was not permitted. Alloway believed the younger artists of the third phase did not understand that the first two

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<sup>603</sup>Alloway, "Pop Art Since 1949," 1087.

phases turned to popular culture as a common way to communicate and to expand the audience for fine art. The use of “pop art” (meaning popular culture) by the first two phases was necessary in 1950s England “to reduce the idealism and snobbery of English aesthetics and art criticism.” In contrast, Alloway felt the younger artists were immature teenagers for using popular culture to separate themselves rather than to reach accord or toward an audience. For Alloway, they were too “happy in the playground of the opened-out situation.” He wrote: “Pop artists lack a grasp of the history their art belongs to, as well as a sense of the internal rigour necessary to art. Instead of contributing to the expanded communications system, which is nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, they are coasting along and relaxing. Pop art in England has become a game for those who want to tell themselves that they ‘think young’.”<sup>604</sup> He felt their amateur third-phase program would result in a rambling and discursive kind of art that needed firmer formal control. They had benefited from the environmental openness of some of the Situation painters but were “content with negligent and permissive control.”<sup>605</sup>

Alloway’s 1962 arguments served to disassociate himself from the group in England that became internationally best-known as Pop artists. He also indicated that by 1962 the movement was over, precisely at the time when he began to use the term “pop art” as an art historical movement rather than as a reference to sources within popular culture. For Alloway, art required, among other things, discipline. Professional (rather than amateur) artists needed to recognize and respond to the changing historical

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<sup>604</sup>Ibid.

conditions of what was important even if they were not totally responsible for their errors in intention and practice. His arguments in favor of diversity as the condition of modern art avoided the problem of relativism that diversity implies, by requiring art to open out into established fields and traditional criteria: as in maintaining a “unified pictorial structure.” He accepted figuration and abstraction as equal, but he was not committed to either mode. Rather, he was committed to using one format or tradition to overturn the field, and to keep it in a state of diversity. As closely as he worked with specific artists and art, he was concerned with field dynamics that were intended to move the reader beyond the specific topical issues. One consequence to Alloway’s critical position in 1962 was to make “pop art” a place, one among many, in a field that was a larger, critical project.

By 1960 Alloway was using the phrase “pop art” before Pop Art as we now know it existed.<sup>606</sup> He meant the phrase to refer to popular culture as defined by the media, and by media he meant the “common ground between artist and audience” in an age where the critical distance traditionally demanded by a fine art aesthetic was replaced by the CinemaScope close-up. We now existed in new conditions, “an aesthetics of the enlarged threshold” as he phrased it.<sup>607</sup> Thus the concept of media, for Alloway, referred less to the specific methods, iconography or use of the mass-media than it did to a meeting ground, a place where artist, culture, art and spectator meet. The specifics of the

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<sup>605</sup>Ibid.

<sup>606</sup>Alloway, “Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media,” 3 and 12.

<sup>607</sup>Ibid., 3.

historical situation were secondary to the meeting itself. And this is the larger project in criticism that Alloway had in mind. In an article devoted to defining Pop Art, Pop Art was not his fundamental focus. He emphasized in 1962:

The real condition of modern art is diversity, and theories or arguments that nominate one tendency over the others impoverish our culture. In historical terms, pop art is part of this iconographical line which runs alongside, coexists with, abstract art . . . My point is that pop art is an episode, a thread, in a general tradition of iconographical art which has exploded since the late nineteenth century, when the riches of visual material, in many styles, were first recognized.<sup>608</sup>

For example, in the earlier 1960 review of abstract art he found it perfectly natural that the young abstract artists at a Cambridge exhibition would use references in their titles and their catalogue statements to “pop art” because the concept of “pop art” was a location, a site for discourse between the pervasive contemporary conditions of the lived world and art.<sup>609</sup> Pop art was, in his words by 1960, “a polemic.”<sup>610</sup> He did not believe that the discourse with “pop art” would or should last forever since it was a position in the evolving history of ideas and not a movement. He argued that it was “unsatisfactory to rely on pop as history (sic) of ideas for too long, though it works as a provisional framework.”<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Alloway, “Pop Art Since 1949,” 1087. Here too “pop art” is an art historical term.

<sup>609</sup> Alloway, “Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media,” 3

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, where he devoted an entire section to Pop art as a polemic.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus Alloway's most famous contribution, "pop art," was nothing more than an historical moment with which to leverage the field of art rather than an enduring art movement *per se*.<sup>612</sup> The "field" was more important than the art and those in England who later were hurt by Alloway's apparent abandonment of them to the US never understood this point.<sup>613</sup> For Alloway, his criticism led to a methodology, one that took precedence over historical particulars. Unlike the idealists that he and his colleagues disdained, there was no ultimate aim or goal for this process, not even a synthesis, only process. The critical process not only used topical historical moments, it insisted on topicality and that criticism move on, forcing history into a dynamical relationship. Whether this was good or bad depended on the needs of the perceiver.

### C. Alloway and Abstraction

Alloway's path to consideration of figuration was through his early contact with abstract art in Britain. He first addressed abstract art extensively in his catalogue essay for the 1954 exhibition, *Nine Abstract Artists, their work and theory*, that combined painters

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<sup>612</sup>This was not a phenomenon confined only to his British criticism. Later in the US, Alloway will also turn away from American Pop artists, such as Andy Warhol, because they had become clichéd; i.e., his art was no longer useful for leveraging the field. My thanks to Donald Kuspit for pointing out the Warhol reference in a personal conversation in NYC in the Spring of 2000. We can see this phenomenon in England when in a 1960 review Alloway finds the existential humanist paintings of Francis Bacon "corny" because they are seen by 1960s eyes far from his period of authenticity in the 1940s. See Alloway, "Dr. No's Bacon," 4. By this standard, the audience and their changed perspective are legitimate, fashionable arbiters.

<sup>613</sup>From an audio taped interview of Peter Blake by Marco Livingstone titled "Pop Art and its Legacy," recorded at the ICA on 10 October, 1990. The tape is on deposit at the British Audio Archives: tape number c95/626.

and sculptors.<sup>614</sup> He did so again in his work with the abstract art of the young artists who became the second-phase of Pop art in their exhibitions from 1959 to 1961.

The first lines of his 1954 essay constructed an argument against the meaning given to “British non-figurative art” established prior to WW II which he felt had remained in place. The attack was based on Herbert Read’s twenty-year-old 1934 defense of the first British group devoted to abstract art, Unit One,<sup>615</sup> as representing “the modern movement in English architecture, painting and sculpture.”<sup>616</sup> Alloway had two objections. Their meaning of abstraction was, in Alloway’s words, “the platonic drift of (an) abstract aesthetic” they considered a “Universal.” Secondly, the geometric means of Unit One were “the means to a high world,” or “transcendental” as Read argued it.<sup>617</sup> Alloway objected because these terms equated abstraction with the pursuit of absolute universals which not only moved art away from the world but, for Alloway, destroyed

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<sup>614</sup>Alloway curated his first show in 1953, 16 still-life paintings by Sylvia Sleight at the Kensington Art Gallery. In 1954, his first year as the Assistant Director at the ICA he curated or was associated with three shows, all on abstract art. Two were at the ICA; one on the work of Victor Pasmore, another on collages. Alloway does not seem to have curated the 1954 broad survey of young, British abstract artists at the Tiranti Gallery but it was a summation of artists Alloway supported with issues he developed in the early 1950s through his individual reviews in *Art News and Review*. His essay, untitled and 16 pages with numerous endnotes, was intended as a major statement.

<sup>615</sup>Unit One formed in 1933 by British artists to establish a common front in defense of “modern art” in large part because modern art, in its basic and polarized meaning as abstraction or the general use of abstraction as defined against academic figuration, was established in Paris but practiced by few in England. They wanted commonality but also to “establish some international status for English art” as Charles Harrison, an historian of early British modernism outlined it. Unit One included such artists as Hepworth, Moore, Nicholson and Nash, as well as the architects Wells Coates and Colin Lucas and tended to concentrate on issues of design and structure. It was likely Nicholson’s strong aversion to figurative work and emphasis on structure that kept the group restricted to abstraction. However, abstract figuration was found everywhere in their work, especially but not only in Moore. (See Charles Harrison’s chapter, “The Early Thirties: Unit One,” in his *English Art and Modernism, 1900-1939* [London: Allen Lane, 1981], 231-253; especially 233, 239-40.) Alloway’s source was their single book of statements and photographs edited with an introductory essay by Herbert Read in 1934, *Unit 1: The Modern Movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture* published by Cassells.

<sup>616</sup>Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists*, 1.

the possibility of "non-figurative theory."<sup>618</sup> In other words, the older abstractionists were framed in an either-or situation of abstraction or figuration, and Alloway wanted an alternate theory for the general field of abstraction. He argued for a different understanding of abstraction on behalf of the new generation of abstract artists after 1945.

This abstract-absolute tie-up, on the contrary, seems to me unsatisfactory. I propose to use *abstract* meaning to *draw out of* or *away from*. Figure paintings and landscapes will be said to have been abstracted from figures and landscapes. The word *concrete* will be used for works of art in which a process of abstraction is not perceptible--that is, for paintings without external reference . . . (whereas) the term *non-figurative* . . . is used here as an inclusive term for the whole field.<sup>619</sup>

A response came from the critic Pierre Rouve for whom Alloway had committed two traditional sins. First, Alloway had simply confused things with his addition of a third term, "concrete," that did not open the situation to an easy intellectual digestion.<sup>620</sup> Yet Rouve felt Alloway made people think seriously about non-representational art: "And God knows that such theoretical speculation is badly needed in the present state of affairs in what may be called the eve of abstract academicism." Rouve also found Alloway's critical approach purely formalistic, "the echo of an outlived aesthetical approach - self-centred, circumscribed within the rigid limits of pure visuality, unconcerned with the human background and the social resonance of the work." He

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<sup>617</sup>Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists*, 10.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 1, note 1.

<sup>620</sup> Pierre Rouve, "Abstract Art—Is It Human?," *Art News and Review* 6, no. 24 (24 December 1954): 10 and the source for these citations.

admitted that Alloway was confronted with two quite different types of work: painterly abstraction and those concerned with “pure form,” each group with contradictory statements in the catalogue, thus a “Tower of Babel” in itself, but babel to which Rouve felt Alloway contributed.<sup>621</sup>

This author understands Alloway’s essay differently, as an attempt to establish a third term in order to open rather than foreclose the position of abstraction; i.e., to open a dipolar position (“tie-up” wrote Alloway) between the painterly and the constructive. Alloway established terms that inscribed the historical problem and the claims for abstraction he had seen develop in the writings of the artists, especially in the St. Ives school of Moore and Hepworth with its love of landscape and literature.<sup>622</sup> Writing against that development of English art as relevant after 1945, his terms were an attempt to cut away the notions of prewar romantic abstractionists from the purer abstractionists, and in that sense his was, as Rouve stated, an old argument. But Alloway wanted to define a new postwar generation of abstract artists because in the fifties “none of the pre-

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<sup>621</sup>Three of the artists were identified by Alloway as “painterly” and worked closely with the “irrational” qualities of “expression.” But six of them constituted “Pasmore’s group,” as Alloway designated them, because they were motivated by Victor Pasmore’s 1947-8 change from figuration to abstraction and by 1951 his painted constructions under the influence of Charles Biederman. This diversity was why Alloway used a third term.

<sup>622</sup>Alloway’s concluding paragraph, p. 16, on “British non-figuration since the war,” by which he meant the postwar group of this exhibit, mentioned no names but everyone knew to whom he referred: “On the whole British non-figurative art stands apart from the prevailing British style which continues to be a form of nature-romanticism.” Earlier (p. 12) he observed: “In St. Ives they combine non-figurative theory with the practice of abstraction [author’s note: i.e., drawing out of nature] because the landscape is so nice nobody can bring themselves to leave it out of their art.”

war British artists” were “important for non-figurative art.”<sup>623</sup> They had become “romantics, or like Nicholson and Hepworth, at last tired of their thirtyish purity.”<sup>624</sup>

Alloway favored the purists in the 1954 group. Six of the nine among his abstractionists--”Pasmore’s group”--were most admired by him because they related most directly to the original prewar aesthetic established in 1937 by the combination of the European “refugees”--he named Gropius, Breuer, Moholy-Nagy, Gabo, and Mondrian--who had worked in conjunction with a few of the British artists (here unnamed) that eventually formed around the publication of the *Circle*, the anthology in England that marks the exhibitions and rise of the British Constructivist movement.<sup>625</sup> While Alloway argued against the relevance of the very British artists who showed with the *Circle* in the thirties, Nicholson and Hepworth, he counter-argued that the “*Circle* (and what it stands for)” was “significant in relation to post-war British art.” What made the “*Circle* (and what it stands for)” relevant to the postwar abstract movement, in Alloway’s opinion, was because of “the Bauhaus ideal of ‘cultural unity’ that underlay the book, the expression of the need for a total form-sense, not just a painting sense.”<sup>626</sup> The artists of

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<sup>623</sup> Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists*, 2-3. The phrase non-figurative means for Alloway in this essay the entire field and range of abstract art.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art*, eds. J.L. Martin, Ben Nicholson, Naum Gabo (London, 1937). See Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900-1937*, Chapter 10 and particularly 285-288 for background and a synopsis. Although the voice of Naum Gabo dominated the theory of the *Circle*, Harrison points out that a great deal of the art did not fit under Gabo’s understanding of the Constructive Idea and this was its undoing, almost immediately. Alloway typically chooses not to discuss or name the Constructivist movement or give a synopsis of his understanding of the *Circle* beyond his own local argument. He does use the word constructivist in lower case letters. He is not interested in defining the term but in arguing his specific case.

<sup>626</sup> Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists*, 2.

Pasmore's group were closest to these ideas, because they made forms that were painted, which represented to Alloway a turning back to purer, Bauhaus-inspired (by Alloway's estimation) sources in the midst of the elders who, except for Pasmore, had taken leave of those principles.<sup>627</sup>

Alloway's argument was practical to the time and the event horizon; the use of older terms to establish a critical act was typical of Alloway's form of critical enquiry. It was also a more nuanced argument than Rouve recognized because it embodied a fundamental paradigm shift, with far reaching consequences for Alloway's criticism and for the history of British postwar art. Alloway wanted the word "abstraction" to refer to the world rather than to the pursuit of idealist absolutes. This contradicts Rouve's criticism. In the simplest sense Alloway argued that figuration was abstract art by way of its process. He argued that the normal process of creation involved abstracting from the world, and therefore the process often retained an iconic dimension. To use a later and important phrase Alloway first introduced here in 1954, abstraction could mean either full figuration or the retention of "residual signs" of figuration and reality.<sup>628</sup> He reserved the term "concrete" for works of pure abstraction ("without external reference"), be they geometric or gestural.<sup>629</sup> No longer were the terms simply geometric versus gestural or painterly.

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<sup>627</sup>This is an argument the reader may remember voiced by Banham in the mid-1950s regarding New Brutalism and its return to the original impulse of the IG version of the Bauhaus.

<sup>628</sup>For the parallel in concepts see Alloway's article twenty years later "Residual Sign Systems in Abstract Expressionism," originally published in *Artforum* 13, no. 3, 1973, and republished in Alloway, *Network*, 63-72.

<sup>629</sup>See Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists*, footnote one.

The consequences of Alloway's points were several. It left no unique position for the concept of abstraction. No longer a category, abstraction was a process of creation and more-or-less replaced with the generic term "non-figurative."<sup>630</sup> Nor was abstraction necessarily and distinctly set apart from representation; the demarcation was made unclear, purposively so, because the art was diverse, and, it was important to Alloway to preserve the complexity of the situation.<sup>631</sup> In his terms, the process of abstraction could result in figuration, or, in abstraction; i.e., in concreteness, by dint of a lack of references. Taken together the entire field of discussion was "non-figurative." Not only were "residual presences rather than clear signs"<sup>632</sup> what remained from varying degrees of abstraction, as in William Scott's "near-concretion," but, according to Alloway, signs tended "to become interchangeable by their translation into the physical terms of paint and canvas."<sup>633</sup> This meant that by 1954 Alloway was moving towards horizontal placements by inflecting the act of creation rather than understanding abstraction as a polarized relation to the results in terms of what was represented. Alloway established

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<sup>630</sup> Alloway noted there was no perfect solution for terminology and neither was he consistent in developing the logic of his new terms. For example, "non-figurative" did not simply replace "abstract" because non-figurative included both "concrete" art, which has no references to the outside world, and work in which one can observe "signs" left from the process of abstracting. Where the line fell between this and "figurative" work was not made clear. Nor did he leave a frame to understand pre-1945 "abstract" art which he admitted did not all aim at "universals;" indeed, he drew upon much of it in formulating his own position.

<sup>631</sup> As Alloway had it, well prior the deconstructivists: "Definitions depend on a consciousness of similarities in differences and differences in similarities." *Nine Abstract Artists*, 10. And such "differences" were present even in the 1950s art world where many "consider non-figurative art to be basically the same as figurative art." *Ibid.*, 5. The wavering line allows Alloway to automatically understand the issues of abstraction imbedded in US Pop art well prior other critics. It also is a hallmark of his developing understanding of the function of criticism.

<sup>632</sup> Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists*, 3.

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

his concept of a continuum within the context of abstract visual art in 1954 and this linchpin concept for Alloway's criticism came prior his sustained work with popular culture.<sup>634</sup>

Alloway engaged British abstract art a second time in 1959-1960 with the emergence of the younger generation of artists, many from London's Royal College of Art (RCA), and well after his exposure to US Abstract Expressionism and his trip to the USA. Alloway's 1962 history of British Pop generally identified them as the second-phase of that movement from circa 1957 to 1961, abstract in style but with the purpose to reconcile abstraction with popular culture (i.e., "pop art").<sup>635</sup> Unlike the IG, the second-phase links with popular culture were indirect, thus they--and Alloway included himself as one of them to indicate his close tie--attempted to reference their large scale abstract paintings to CinemaScope, a big screen development introduced in 1954 that "gave a polemical point of reference to discussions of art in terms of intimacy and 'spectator participation.'" He also related their "environmental scale" to billboards.

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<sup>634</sup>Alloway, "Pop Art: The Words," 120. This is not a Hegelian synthesis; there is no transcendence. It is a conjunction or overlapping areas that retains characteristics of both domains, even when those characteristics are apparently at odds with one another. This seems to be in 1954 the source for Alloway's discussion not only of the British abstractionists of 1954 and 1959, but the later New York Pop Art/Phase Two of 1961-64. More specifically it created a "third term" now situated "between abstract art and realism." It means that Alloway will not situate US Pop Art between two polar categories, just as in Britain he avoided the traditional polarities in abstract art of either painterliness or pure abstraction. Based on the perspective developed by Alloway, British abstract art (and later US Abstract Expressionism) and US Pop have characteristics of both fields; not "either-or" but "and-also" as John McHale had written it. The complexity of experience can now function within a formalist frame shared through the overlap of issues. Another consequence would be Alloway's ability in the US art world of the 1960s to recognize the parallels between the so-called second generation American Abstract Expressionists, Pop Art, and Systemic Painting.

<sup>635</sup>The basis for discussion and the source for the quotations in this section is Alloway's 1962 "Pop Art Since 1949." The reader is also referred to the outline of British Pop extracted from the article and provided in 6.B. However, Alloway addressed this group earlier and through the exhibitions in 1959 and 1960 of *Place and Situation*. He inflected different perspectives in each case.

Therefore their sense of abstraction--Alloway dropped the term "concrete" from 1954 but not the idea of painting as object--large scale, and, brilliant colors referenced the man-made environment indirectly rather than through the direct references to popular culture developed by the IG in phase-one.<sup>636</sup> Alloway's new assumption was that our idea of nature changed under bombardment by the mass media, and, in response, the artist's goal should be "to create an analogue of the man-made environment that we all participate in, by means of a non-verbal but highly topical imagery." Alloway argued that the younger abstract artists situated their work "within the communications-soaked world" in which we live.<sup>637</sup>

The second-phase did not continue as a strong force in history but through his understanding the young abstract artists as part of the urban world of mass communication, Alloway aligned their abstract fields with the figurative work of the IG. At the same time, their references to the communication system, what Alloway felt to be the crucial new condition of the postwar world, also served to differentiate the British abstractionists from the American abstract color-field painters.<sup>638</sup> No one spoke of American abstract painting in such terms. In many ways the referents of the young British artists were a sophisticated use of the ideas of Alloway and the IG and the group was eventually referred to in their own time as "Alloway's team" despite their

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<sup>636</sup>Ibid., 1086.

<sup>637</sup>Ibid.

<sup>638</sup>Ibid.

diversity.<sup>639</sup> Thus Alloway did not simply describe a development in art history and theory, he helped create it.

The earliest direct expression of ideas for this group came not from Alloway, but from a student at the RCA who became his colleague and a major organizing force during this period, Roger Coleman.<sup>640</sup> Coleman, along with other RCA students that Alloway identified as the second-phase of British Pop Art, reportedly began to frequent the ICA around 1957 at a time when Richard Hamilton was teaching at the RCA part-time. Coleman joined the ICA Exhibitions Committee in early 1957 (until May 1962) and apparently went on to become a confidant of Alloway.<sup>641</sup> Coleman helped organize and construct the February 1959 ICA exhibition titled *Place*, for which he wrote the catalogue text.<sup>642</sup> Coleman's essay acknowledged the debt of the young painters to IG members,

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<sup>639</sup>The *Situation* group of 1960 and '61 was attacked as "Alloway's team," meaning they were outside the establishment, but they refused to accept any single identity. The phrase and its meaning were reported to David Mellor in a 1991 interview with Bernard Cohen for Mellor's book *The Sixties Art Scene in London*, 77. Alloway argued it both ways; he was close to them but argued their individuality over and against any group identity. The dissertation argues his thoughts are everywhere evident among this group in 1959 and '60 despite the lack of direct testimony as to his influence. Bernard Cohen, cited by Mellor, was, along with his older brother Harold, a painter and teacher in London who exhibited in the 1960 and 1961 *Situation* exhibitions, discussed in section 6.D, therefore privy to the specific context.

<sup>640</sup>Coleman was not mentioned in the 1962 "Pop Art Since 1949" but introduced and strongly praised in Alloway's 1966 version of the essay ("The Development of British Pop Art") in Lippard, *Pop Art*. For Alloway both Coleman and Peter Blake held the central contact among the second-phase artists with the "IG-influenced Pop Art channels." Coleman's strongest praise from Alloway came however for his work as editor of the RCA magazine *Ark*, in 1956 and 1957, in which Alloway was praised and published. That is, Alloway had an open conduit to this group since the mid-fifties.

<sup>641</sup>See the Whitham chronology in *Independent Group*, 39. Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London*, 77, discussed the "resolute self-fashioning" shared by Alloway and Coleman in their purchase of "snappy gray Dacron suits from the US."

<sup>642</sup>*Place* was an exhibition of the paintings by Robyn Denny and Richard Smith from the RCA, and Ralph Rumney, who was the only London member and a founding member in 1957 of the *Internationale Situationniste (SI)*. Apparently Rumney had been in conversation since 1957 with Alloway regarding game theory, what today we know as the concept of the *Situationniste d rive*, and urban environment. (The best and virtually only known discussion of this exhibition, aside from Alloway's 1959 review, is in Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London*, 59, 62-3, 64-5, 72-3, and 78. Mellor's description and images of works and installation were crucial to this discussion. See Alloway's review, "Making a

and declared that the experience of the urban, mass-mediated environment was central in the artist's attempt to fuse "The Mass Media," with "American Painting and Space," with "The Game Environment."<sup>643</sup>

The catalogue essay made clear that *Place* was an "environment" rather than an exhibition.<sup>644</sup> Coleman's description of the exhibition paid open homage to artists of the IG--Paolozzi and McHale were mentioned but neither the IG nor Alloway by name--and the influence of mass media. Coleman argued the 1959 use of the mass media was not literal, but a source of ideas and a stimulus to orient the artists towards a "cultural continuum." He also argued that spectator participation was of equal importance, and although it was a concept influenced by the British experience of the scale of the US Abstract Expressionists, Coleman emphasized that both participation and its source in "the environment of the mass media" were "an exclusively British development."

Based on photographs of the abstract paintings and the installation (fig. 8), the works appear as large (roughly six to seven feet square), fully abstract, color-field paintings.<sup>645</sup> They apparently stood on the floor, forcing a confrontation with the viewer's vision and body through their large scale at the level of both painting and objects, i.e., a lived, bodily experience with concrete objects that were also paintings. As painting

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Scene," 2 and 3. Alloway argued this art, concept and experience as specifically British, not Parisian or New York.

<sup>643</sup>He did not mention the IG as a group but specific artists. His text discussions were arranged under the three headings stated here.

<sup>644</sup>Mellor, 72-3, reprinted the catalogue essays. Coleman's declaration of the exhibition as an environment occurred at least 11 times in his brief essay.

<sup>645</sup>Mellor reproduced several photographs of the exhibition and Coleman's essay referred to a standard size of seven by six feet.

they referenced the tradition of US color-field paintings, but as objects--their consciously designed double assignment--they were to invoke references to the mass media, especially CinemaScope, and the urban maze of a city street, a looking out into the environment not unlike the architectural ideas of the Smithsonian's "as found" aesthetic, but here with a conscious overlay of a game structure onto the choices the spectator makes in assembling fragmented experience. The randomness and confrontational participation seemed intended as a parallel to what we today know as the *Situationiste dérive*, with the spectator drifting and constructing their experience as they moved through the urban psychogeography, and therefore likely the result of Ralph Rumney's collaborative input in conjunction with Alloway and Coleman.<sup>646</sup> This fusion of mass media and American abstract field painting is the key to understanding Alloway's criticism.

#### **D. The Field Theory of Art, Culture and Criticism**

Alloway developed a new type of criticism and critical approach based on the concept of a field rather than on the concepts of tastes and quality, artist and intention, or specific style and content of the work. The designation "field theory" is offered as a catch-all to indicate an approach to art that sites the physicality of the work in relation to cultural and sociological perspectives.<sup>647</sup> The phrase derives from the historical and

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<sup>646</sup>Alloway, "Making a Scene," 3, rejected Rumney's claims in this exhibition for the influence of "Situationism" by arguing "other roots spread fairly wide" but admitted the ideas were parallel. That ties Alloway parallel to, if not under the direct influence of, Continental Situationism. Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London*, 80, takes the side of Situationism. Mellor also asserted, p. 64, without documentation, that Rumney initiated in 1957 an ongoing discussion with Alloway at the ICA for an exhibition project that would "examine choice, feedback and the environment of a circumscribed urban place."

<sup>647</sup>The concept of "field" in relation to Alloway was first used, as far as this author knows, by Donald Kuspit briefly in his preface to Alloway's anthology *Network*, p. xiv: "Every art for Alloway presupposes a conception of a field, on the basis of which it develops its own actuality. Indeed, part of its

polemical components that Alloway used to assemble his critical approach. Among the sources were the fields of cybernetics and communications, and Alloway's experiences within the ICA and the IG which understood culture as the central issue and the acceptance of art as one artifact among many others. Influential was Alloway's early exposure to and use of Harold Rosenberg's concept of painting as a dynamic field created and embodied through the artistic processes of the artist. Next was his understanding of Clement Greenberg's argument of painting as a reduced, autonomous object. Then there was Alloway's own love of the field paintings of the American Abstract Expressionists, and, in 1959 and 1960, his championing of a unique British form of painting premised on the concepts of abstraction, objecthood and sociological environments.

Every chapter of the dissertation contains some reference to the concept and importance of thinking in terms of fields rather than thinking in terms of discrete objects.<sup>648</sup> A general consideration of the sciences in the 20th century demonstrated a basic shift in consideration from singularities to relational thinking. The discussion of cybernetics, particularly as understood in its 1950 form as encompassing human activity, provided one of several bases in science to consider a viewpoint of social life as a system or field of dynamical relationships inscribed as one of signals and feedbacks. The same relational viewpoints existed in the emergence of cultural studies where Raymond Williams' "the long revolution" was preceded by Alloway's "long front of culture." This

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value rests in its conception of communication, and communication within the field of communication." Kuspit concentrated on the field of communication as the source.

<sup>648</sup>Due to the summary nature of the argument, there is some repetition of points previously made in the dissertation.

was a different viewpoint than much recent art criticism or art history provides through its emphasis on the ruptures of avant-gardism. Patterns of culture rather than breaks between cultures were shown as concerns in anthropology of the 1940s and Western Marxism of the 1950s and 60s. It was significant that Raymond Williams and Lawrence Alloway repeatedly used the same concept of field to describe their new understanding of the multiplicity of culture. And it is worth repeating Williams' understanding of "field" from the forward to his *Culture and Society*: "The field which these changes cover is again a field of general change, introducing many elements which we now point to as distinctively modern in situation and feeling. It is the relations within this general pattern of change which it will be my particular task to describe."<sup>649</sup>

The 1953 exhibition *Parallel of Life and Art* demonstrated the emphatic insistence of the IG on a field of vision and visuality as dispersed and random with each image equal in value. This was art situated within a general field of visual communication. By the time of the 1956 exhibition *This is Tomorrow*, groups of artists had developed sophisticated accountings of culture as a field of variables which called upon themselves and the audience, i.e., everyone, to live a life of adjustments, not unlike the experience of life on the urban streets. Alloway's 1956 tackboard solidified a new and participatory relationship with the viewer as a continuous field, albeit one filled with variable signals and choices. By 1960 Alloway, as an art critic, consciously signaled the need for an overhaul by arguing that it was "now necessary to make a new set of connections

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<sup>649</sup>*Culture and Society*, xv.

between art and the spectator, more accurate and extensive than the currently run-down state of traditional aesthetics allow . . . .”<sup>650</sup> Banham and the Smithsons demonstrated not simply how such realizations were shared but also how sophisticated their understanding of the project was. By 1952 the architects were able to contrast their project to that of the earlier 20th century: “The problem of the ‘50s” was “to retain the clarity and finiteness of the whole but to give the parts their own internal disciplines and complexities.”<sup>651</sup>

Alloway’s concerns as a critic to address this field dynamic in specific form seemed to come to fruition around 1959-1960 through, but certainly not limited to, the large scale abstract field paintings of the British painters from *Place* and *Situation*, themselves under the impact for the first time from the large scale paintings of the US Abstract Expressionists. However in both specific cases it was not Alloway but Coleman who moved the arguments forward. Under the direct influence of Alloway, Coleman argued that the painters in the 1959 *Place* exhibition fused the mass media with American painting and space, and provided a game environment, which meant they constructed the exhibition as an interactive experience for the viewer; an equivalent to their confrontations negotiated in a daily urban experience.<sup>652</sup> In so doing they saw themselves as uniquely British since the American Abstract Expressionists were making no such claims for their

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<sup>650</sup>“Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media,” 3.

<sup>651</sup>From “Addendum: Texts Documenting the Development of *Parallel of Life and Art*, by Alison and Peter Smithson.” The original document is reproduced in *Independent Group*, 129.

<sup>652</sup>As outlined in 6.C.

color fields. Their desire and their ability to embody and articulate a critical position separate from the Americans and unique to themselves--Coleman acknowledged his debt to former members of the IG--demonstrated how informed and self-conscious they were about the process.

Alloway and Coleman extended many of the 1959 concepts through their position as background organizers and foreground critics for the exhibition *Situation, An Exhibition of British Art* held in London's RBA Galleries in August of 1960.<sup>653</sup> To judge from the installation photographs (fig. 9), the exhibition was a gathering of large scale abstract paintings and far less a maze-like environment than in 1959. Although the paintings were hung low they did not sit directly on the floor.<sup>654</sup> The works shared flat fields of color, simple rather than complex images that would function emblematically, and a large, "environmental" scale whose purpose was to confront the spectator to develop a new concept of space and relationship with them. But Alloway defined the word *Situation* (the "situation in London") not in terms of the sociologic relation of the works to culture, but as the function of the exhibition to open up "channels" of communication with the public and the gallery system which had shunned the large scale work.<sup>655</sup> Thus his review

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<sup>653</sup>Coleman's text for the exhibition is reprinted in Mellor, 90-91. Alloway's review of it was "Size Wise," in *Art News & Review* 7, no. 17 (September 10 - 24, 1960), 2; also reprinted in Mellor, 91. The group spawned several other exhibitions of the same name into 1963 and Sylvia Sleigh painted a group portrait of the "Situation Group" in 1961 (fig. 10) despite the fact that a central organizing theme was the lack of a group identity. Sylvia Sleigh's *Portrait of the Situation Group*, 1961 (oil on linen, 122 x 183 cm; artist's collection) is also illustrated in *An Unnerving Romanticism*, 26 and in Mellor, 76 and 77. Although the *Situation* exhibition remains little known and was reportedly poorly attended in its time, Mellor argued (p. 75) it was one of the very few exhibitions in the 20th century "to have profoundly reshaped the direction and expectations of art in Britain."

<sup>654</sup>Mellor's text and illustrations on *Situation* are found on pp. 54-8, 64-5, 75-94, 82, 170.

<sup>655</sup>Alloway, "Size Wise."

was dedicated to arguing the lack of professionalism, meaning recognition, in the London art world.<sup>656</sup> It was left to Coleman to carry the message, as he had in the 1959 catalogue essay. However, Alloway felt the *Situation* group marked the emergence of a new British avant-garde, the first time since WW II that British artists had forcefully “located themselves in the tradition of modern art” because they had studied American art which he considered “the mainstream of modern art that used to go through Paris.”<sup>657</sup>

Coleman argued, similar to 1959, that their environmental aesthetic now contained the spectator and provided a record of “painting as an event,” an idea he admitted was inspired by Rosenberg’s concept of action painting.<sup>658</sup> But he pointed out they were not gestural in Rosenberg’s sense of American gesture painters. The works and the process were events, not the same as arenas, because they were directly executed and contained an “ethical commitment” implicit in the act of painting.<sup>659</sup> He argued their purpose as radically different from a formalist intention: they were meant to destabilize vision--“a kind of stable/unstable surface”--that made them perceptually complex; i.e., he used Alloway’s terms for his conclusion. Coleman argued that only “a superficial

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<sup>656</sup>This led to the famous London *Sunday Times* letter of June 1963 signed by 12 artists, who included the new young generation members of this group such as Robyn Denny and Peter Blake, with several former IG members such as Paolozzi, Hamilton and Turnbull. The letter blamed the “amateur painter” and the “dilettante critic”--David Sylvester by name--that maintained a “club atmosphere” that prevented modern British art from moving forward into recognition and vanguardism. See Mellor, 91, for a reprint of the letter. The implication was that professionals would understand not only that art was serious business but support the new emerging art scene.

<sup>657</sup>Alloway, “Size Wise.”

<sup>658</sup>Coleman’s catalogue essay in Mellor, 90-91, from which these quotations were taken.

<sup>659</sup>Despite Coleman’s claims such “values” did not remove them from the orbit of Rosenberg’s considerations, but he went on to argue them as an effort “to make the work of art a real object; something existing in its own right . . . .” Ibid.

interpretation” of these “formal paintings” would judge them, as the critic John Russell had, as “simply geometric.”<sup>660</sup> Most of the paintings were committed to an equality between parts that meant the collapse of figure-ground relationships. His remarks affirm Greenberg’s major criteria for modernist painting, flatness, but were also in defiance of the instantaneous opticality and self-contained autonomy Greenberg demanded.<sup>661</sup> Coleman claimed the works were more complex through their referentiality to the lived world: they had a rather high “index of associations” that lay outside the overt physicality of the works. That Coleman also seemed engaged in a polemic that negotiated between Rosenberg and Greenberg is supported by turning to Alloway’s commentaries.

Despite Alloway’s direct engagement in the formulations of the IG aesthetic, he did not immediately argue or define his melding of field painting with a sociological concept of the field in reviews of the 1959 and ‘60 exhibitions. He argued the melding elsewhere, in relation to other events, and waited later to make his case. His immediate 1960 review neither reiterated nor endorsed Coleman’s terms but developed issues of

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<sup>660</sup>Coleman, in Mellor, 91.

<sup>661</sup>Coleman did not mention Greenberg by name, only Rosenberg, but Alloway certainly knew of Greenberg’s ideas since Greenberg’s essays were published in England by at least 1940. However, Alloway’s references to Greenberg did not begin until 1957-8 when he cited, twice, Greenberg’s 1955 essay “American Type Painting” and its argument for the reduction of “expendable conventions” as modernism’s quest to rid itself of past traditions. See Alloway’s 1957-58 series of six articles on postwar painting for *Art News and Review*: “Background to Action,” but especially #4, “The Shifted Center,” in *Art News and Review* (7 December 1957), 1, 2. For a summary statement of Greenberg’s concepts for modern art see his essay “Modernist Painting,” *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965; but first broadcast on Voice of America and produced as a pamphlet in 1960 with its first popular publication in 1961. See J. O’Brian, *Greenberg*, vol. 4, p. 93.). It is considered to be a summation of his earlier ideas. See, for example, T.J. Clark, “Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art,” in Francis Francina, ed., *Pollock and After, the Critical Debates* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 47-64.

professionalism and commercial acceptance of the paintings.<sup>662</sup> A year later, in an article intended to correct erroneous interpretations of the 1960 *Situation* exhibition, he again failed to endorse Coleman's sociological terms.<sup>663</sup> However, in his discussion of their concerns for the primacy of surfaces, their "flattish space" and large scale, he cited Clement Greenberg as the first to defend such traditions. But he also argued that it was not the purity of the formal elements which interested them.<sup>664</sup> Finally, in a 1962 summary of the new conditions of British art, Alloway argued *Situation* as the beginning of change and invoked the arguments he had used elsewhere in the art world, and through Coleman in the *Place* and *Situation* essays: the art was its own object, participating in the real world environment, confronting and enveloping the spectator in the same manner as the popular arts of cinema and advertising.<sup>665</sup> He also developed an argument why the intimacy of "Action Painting" was retained by the artists but the concept was inadequate because its terms confined the artists too much to the "creative act" and issues of process.<sup>666</sup> He never mentioned Harold Rosenberg by name but his intent was clear. The

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<sup>662</sup>Alloway, "Size Wise."

<sup>663</sup>Alloway, "Situation in Retrospect," *Architectural Design* 31: 2 (February 1961): 82-83. Alloway pointed out that the show was poorly attended and badly misunderstood. He reiterated his part as a member of the Planning Committee, and the central reason for the exhibition as the lack of adequate representation of young artists with large, mostly abstract, paintings in London's professional galleries. He argued that although abstract and geometric, the works were more flexible, ambiguous in color and form, and improvisational than past geometric art.

<sup>664</sup>*Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>665</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "Illusion and Environment in Recent British art," for *Art International* 6:1 (February 1962): 38-41.

<sup>666</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

British artists had accepted parts of Rosenberg but their outside references to the environment went beyond what Alloway felt Rosenberg's concept could contain.

Alloway had begun a systematic refutation of Greenberg and Rosenberg in other contexts by this time. In a 1959 analysis of American Abstract Expressionism for *Art International*, Alloway used the words of artists to refute both Greenberg and Rosenberg.<sup>667</sup> Alloway acknowledged that Greenberg's concept of a flat planar surface was an important component of traditional modern concerns, but he also placed against it Robert Motherwell's argument to accept the flat void of the canvas as a repository for poetic desire.<sup>668</sup> Alloway's past use of Rosenberg's "Action Painting" was also discarded. He cited Jack Tworokov as consciously combating Rosenberg through the painter's insistence on the impossibility of approaching any canvas without preconceptions.<sup>669</sup> Alloway's message by 1959 was that external references trumped the act and fact of painting and he was engaged in a different approach.

The operation of the field (as originally defined by formalist fields of color) was developed into a sociological entity embedded in the paintings through their formal equality between parts that reflected the unstable viewing environment of the contemporary world that the IG used in their exhibition displays. This is quite different from reading formal equivalence as the collapse of a figure-ground relation into the optical surface of a work, as Greenberg understood it. Alloway argued that the flatness of British

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<sup>667</sup> Alloway, "The New American Painting," *Art International* 3:3-4 (1959): 21-27.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

abstract postwar painters derived not from a stylistic criteria and understanding for painting, but came from the IG aesthetic, first in anthropological, then in sociological terms that referenced equivalency of objects in the world.<sup>670</sup> The painters used their formalist simplicity and directness to create complexity, derived from the postwar world whose new clutter and multivalent signals were at the center of the IG aesthetic and Alloway's use of communication theory. It was the scale that Alloway described as art's response to the development, not of a landscape aesthetic as too British and romantic but, of Cinemascope. With it came the collapse of critical distance but not for the sake of a sublime absorption of the spectator into a field of abstract color, but because the field and absorption existed in the everyday experience of the media culture. As Alloway later opined of this 1960 painting: "An awareness of the world as something that contains both the work of art and the spectator (rather than the romantic notion of the work of art itself as a world) is at the core of the recent developments in London."<sup>671</sup> Encoded in these works, their intention, theory and critical reception, was a conceptual awareness marked by the very titles of the exhibitions--*Place* and *Situation*--that are uniquely British in their hybrid nature and use of the concrete experience of abstraction to mark the place and

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<sup>670</sup>For an application of this concept to a wider context see Alloway, "Junk Culture," in *Architectural Design* 31:3 (March 1961): 122-3. Although most of the artists considered were American, with a Italian and Britisher thrown in, Alloway argued on behalf of the acceptance of objects used by artists from "junk culture" as realism, urban, anti-idealist, democratic and participatory with the environment. His acceptance of the new conditions of art in England as the sociological condition of an expanded field developed his vision and allowed him to defend this "most far-out and *un*popular art form."

<sup>671</sup>Alloway, "Illusion and Environment in Recent British Art," 41. Also see his "Situation in Retrospect."

situation of the urban postwar experience. They were based on Alloway's summation of his British experiences into a field theory of art, culture and criticism.

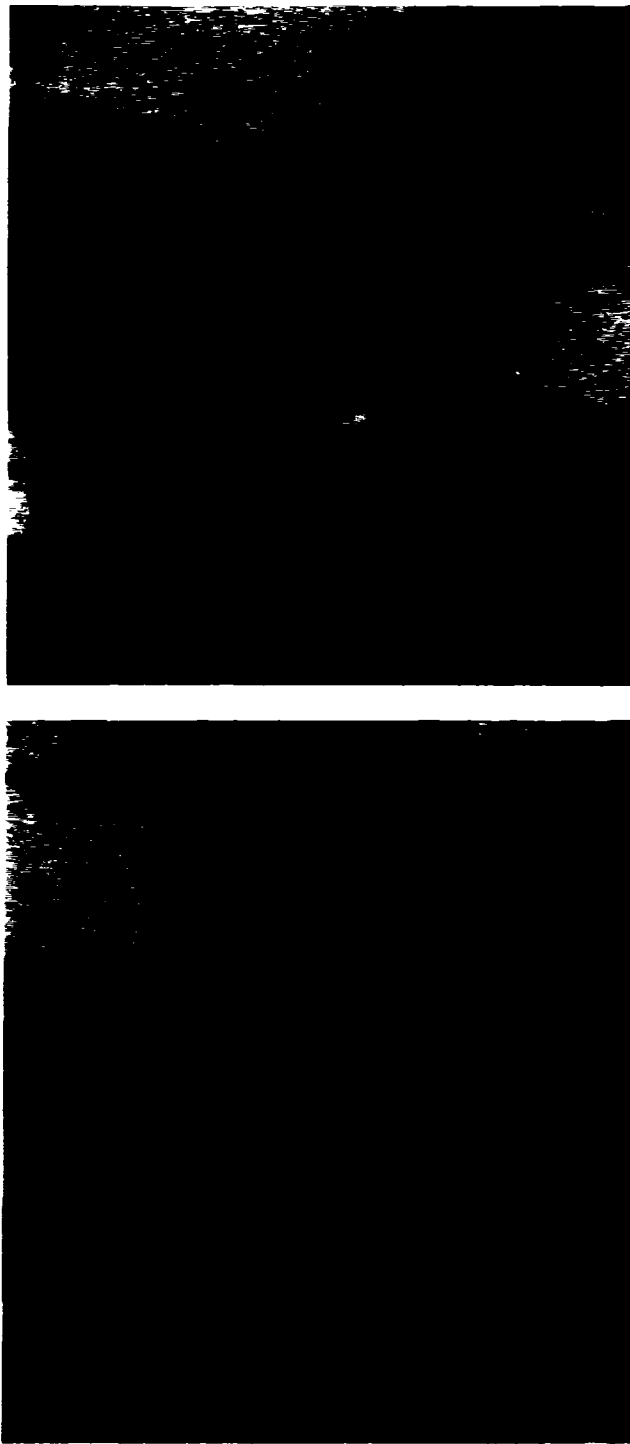


Figure 1. Photocopy of two photographs of the exhibition *Growth and Form* held at the ICA in London, July, 1951. Source: David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 17. Original photographs in Richard Hamilton collection.



Figure 2. Photocopy of photograph by Nigel Henderson of the exhibition installation for *Parallel of Life and Art* at the ICA in London, September-October, 1953. Source: Martin Harrison, *Transition, the London Art Scene in the Fifties* (London: Merrill Publishers, 2002), 97.



Figure 3. Photocopy of two photographs (likely by Nigel Henderson) of the exhibition installation for *Parallel of Life and Art* at the ICA in London, September-October, 1953. Source: David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 127. Original photographs in Janet Henderson collection and the Nigel Henderson estate.

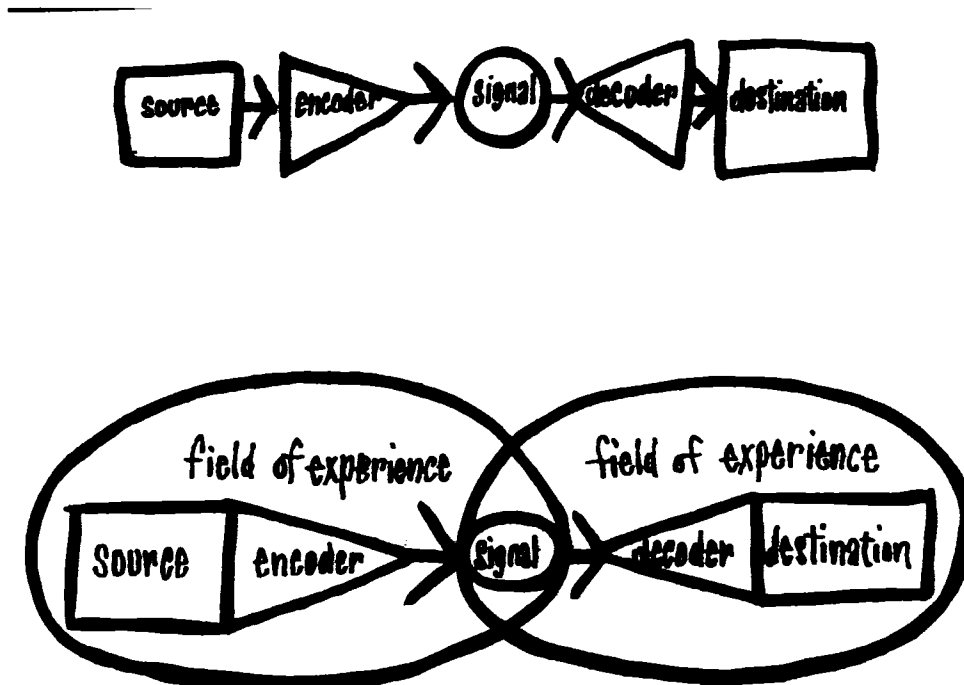


Figure 4. *Top*, A diagram of an idealized communication system hand-drawn by Group 12; *bottom*, the same system inscribed within the variables of experience. Source: Exhibition catalogue, *This Is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), n.p.

PHYSICAL OBJECTS	ARRANGED IN OR ON	OPERATED OR PRODUCED BY
marks	sand	stick
marks	slate	stick
marks inscriptions	stone clay	stylus chisel
marks	paper	pen pencil
letters	paper	typewriter and fingers
letters	paper books	printing press hands motor
coloured painting	cave canvas	paints and brushes
photos	film prints	camera
gestures	space	body
fingers	hands	body
pebbles	slab	hands
tallies notches	stick	knife
beads	rods in frame abacus	hands
counter wheels etc	desk calc machines	hands motor
punched tape cards	punch card machine	motor and input instructions
magnetic surfaces wire tape discs	machinery	motor and input instructions

Figure 5. Chart of information arranged in grid fashion to allow flexibility in organizing multiple messages by Group 12 as part of their catalogue contribution to *This is Tomorrow*. Source: Exhibition catalogue, *This Is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), n.p.





Figure 7. Photocopy of a photograph of the “tackboard” designed by Group 12 for the exhibition *This is Tomorrow* at London’s Whitehall Gallery, 1956. Source: David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 146. Original photograph by Brian Shawcroft in the Geoffrey Holroyd collection.



Figure 8. Photocopy of photograph of the exhibition installation for *Place* at the London ICA in February 1959. Source: David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), 62-3.



Figure 9. Photocopy of two installation photographs by Peter Coviello of the exhibition *Situation*, 1960, at the RBA Galleries, London. *Top*, shows paintings by Harold Cohen, John Epstein and Gillian Ayres; *bottom*, shows Bernard Cohen's *Painting 96*, 1960. Source: David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), 80 and 82.



Figure 10. Photocopy of photograph by Robert Freeman of Lawrence Alloway with Sylvia Sleigh's *Portrait of the Situation Group*, 1961 (oil on linen, 122 x 183 cm; artist's collection). Pictured, *left to right (back row)*: Henry Mundy, Gwyther Irwin, William Turnbull, Peter Coviello; (*center row*) Gillian Ayres, John Plumb, Peter Stroud, Robyn Denny, Roger Coleman, Bernard Cohen; (*front row*) Gordon House, Lawrence Alloway. Source: David Mellor, *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993), 76. Also see page 77.

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London: Tate Gallery Archives: Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) file : 955.1.7.5, pp. 10 and 11.

A letter of gratitude was sent by Dorothy Morland, then the Director of the ICA, to Arthur C. Clarke, then the Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society, to thank him for chairing the session on Alloway's science-fiction lecture, on 19 January, 1954 at the ICA.

London: Tate Gallery Archives

James King. *The Last Modern, A Life of Herbert Read*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 269 and 333 cited as source of an Alloway citation a manuscript of a 25 May 1977 interview with Reyner Banham identified as MS ICA 22 held by the ICA. This author was unable to locate this and other reported manuscripts held by the ICA. A telephone conversation with the ICA in March 2001 in London reported the transfer of all manuscripts related to the history of the ICA to the Tate Gallery Archive but many such manuscripts referenced in various sources were not among those papers held at the archive as ICA papers.

Reading, England: BBC Written Archives

Unpublished microfiche copies of typescripts for on-air broadcasts by Lawrence Alloway for the British Broadcasting System. What follows is the basic information for the copies made and used for the dissertation. All photocopies were made from microfiche in March 2001. Most but not all are legible and printable. This is not a full account of all scripts by Alloway available at the archive. More typescripts likely remain because they are filed by the names of the BBC broadcast series. However, not all series designations are consistent and several are numbered in new and revised series.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast "House of Bamboo," in the series *Comment* (No. 5), for the Third Programme. Narrated and written by Lawrence Alloway. Director at this time unknown. British Broadcasting Corporation, 20 October 1955.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast "The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad," in the series *Comment* (No. 86), for the Third Programme. Narrated and written by Lawrence Alloway. Directed by D.S. Carne-Ross. British Broadcasting Corporation, 8 January 1959.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast "On the Bowery," in the series *Comment* (No. 28), for the Third Programme. Narrated and written by Lawrence Alloway. Directed by D.S. Carne-Ross. British Broadcasting Corporation, 20 September 1956.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast "Warlock," in the series *Comment* (No. 18), for the Third Programme. Narrated and written by Lawrence Alloway. Directed by D.S. Carne-Ross. British Broadcasting Corporation, 30 April, 1959.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast "Forbidden Planet," in the series *Comment* (No. 24), for the Third Programme. Narrated and written by Lawrence Alloway. Directed by D.S. Carne-Ross. British Broadcasting Corporation, 12 July 1956.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast "Le Trou" broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation, 20 January 1961. No further information known at this time.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast "Al Capone," in the series *Comment* (No. 14), for the Third Programme. Narrated and written by Lawrence Alloway. Directed by D.S. Carne-Ross. British Broadcasting Corporation, 2 April 1959.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast book review of Ian Fleming's *Thunderball*, in the series *Comment* (No. 13), for the Third Programme. Narrated and written by Lawrence Alloway. Director is unknown at this time. British Broadcasting Corporation, 30 March 1961.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast "The Horse Soldiers," in the series *Comment* (No. 50), for the Third Programme. Narrated and written by Lawrence Alloway. Director is unknown at this time. British Broadcasting Corporation, 10 December 1959.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast book review of Saul Steinberg's book [unnamed due to illegibility of first page] in the series *Comment* (No. 17), for the Third Programme. Narrated and written by Lawrence Alloway. Director is unknown at this time. British Broadcasting Corporation, 27 April 1961.

Microfiche for the radio broadcast review whose topic was the nature of film criticism as practiced in the undergraduate *Oxford Opinion*. Narrated and Written by Lawrence Alloway. Director is unknown at this time. British Broadcasting Corporation, 15 December 1960.

#### **Audio Sources**

The soundtrack of the 1977 (also dated 1979) British Arts Council film *Fathers of Pop* by Julian Cooper and Richard Lannoy. Video at ICA Archives, London.