POP ART'S PHARMACIES: KITSCH, CONSUMERIST OBJECTS AND SIGNS, THE 'UNMENTIONABLE'

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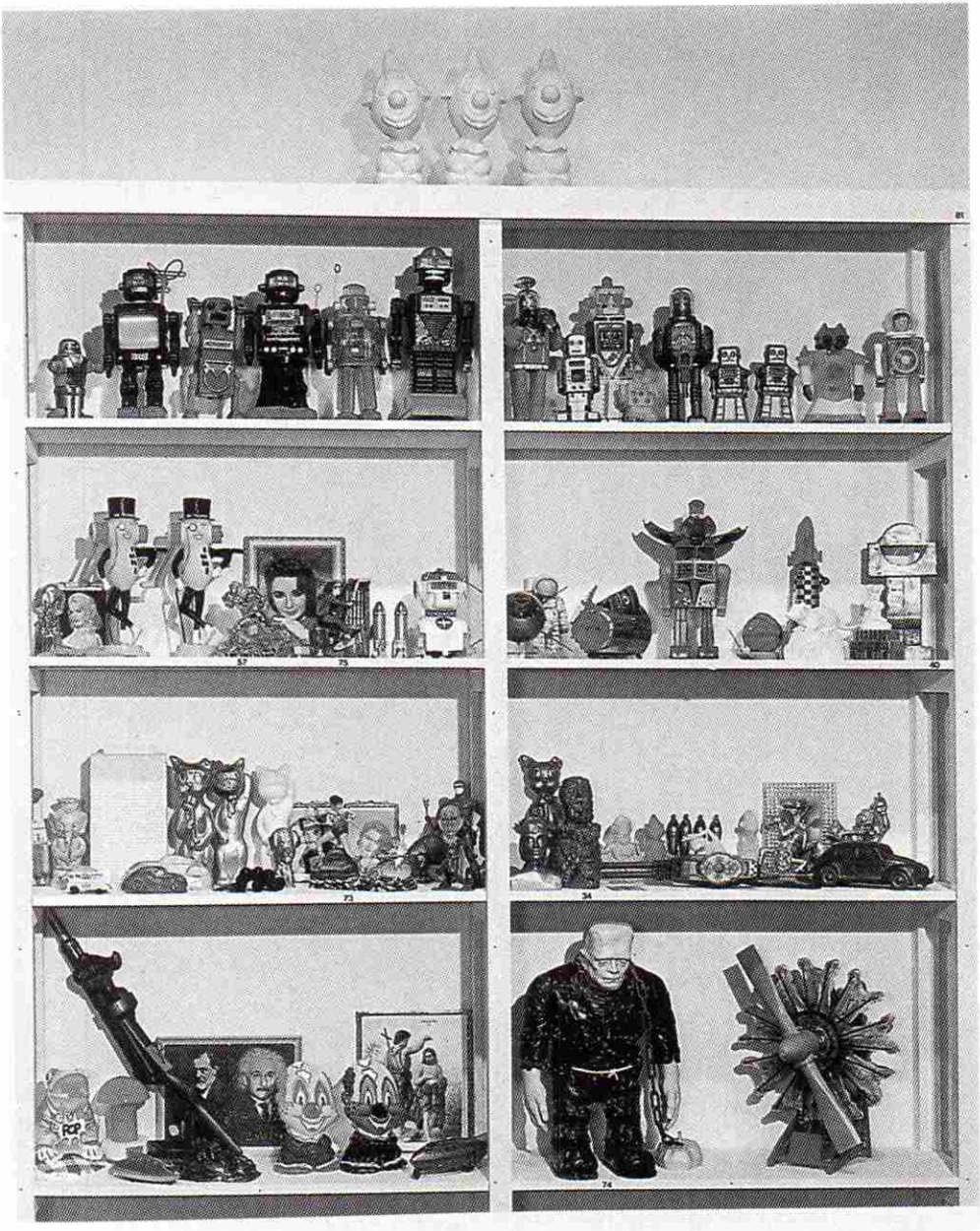
Poison and cure in one dose? Derrida stages the startling idea through the metaphor of the 'pharmakon' — something we are meant to grasp as neither just a debilitating drug nor only a health-restoring one but as both lethal and remedial. The antithetical terms play off against each other. But they stop short of blending into some 'higher third term' which simply subsumes them, gathers them under its wing. We face an 'undecidable' — a force shuttling between opposites, seeming to be both at once.[1]

We may take the 'pharmakon' as a rough and ready snapshot of Pop Art's gear-switching modes, its double-voicings, about-turns and shifting stances. Would it serve to bring the focus back onto Pop Art's more radical ambivalences against the rather overwhelming tendency to read it in terms of strict, reductive oppositions — as either truth-drug or the opiate of mass culture, as critical purge or kitsch palliative?

The dead-ends of an either/or approach, its steely divisions and separations, were unsettlingly dramatized and probed in Paolozzi's *Kitsch Cabinet* (plate 42, 1970) — an 'installation' in his 1971 Tate retrospective. On the one hand, it seemed little more than a jam-packed display of kitsch knick-knacks from his vast collection, the Krazy Kat Archive built up steadily since the 1940s. On the other, individual pieces in the Cabinet were marked out as different, singled out as 'artworks', inventoried as such in the catalogue.[2]

The 'dilemma' for the viewer was that it did not seem impossible to consider the pieces, indeed the whole Cabinet, in both these ways — dare one say, as kitsch and as fine art statement. In any event, as kitsch at odds with itself, as shot through with the sense of being both no more than itself and something besides itself, something expressed to the second power — the one citing and undercutting the other in an unending, convoluted play between the terms.

Snow White, Bugs Bunny, Batman — figurines from the ever-expanding archive of consumerist objects, bric-a-brac of the amusement industry — are surmounted on a mirrored bathroom wall cabinet by Paolozzi. He entitles the readymade *Three American Heroes* (plate 43, 1971) — not unlikely a tongue-in-cheek comment on 'kitsch war memorials and monuments'. But the innocent Disney figures also speak



42 E. Paolozzi, *Kitsch Cabinet*, 1970 (1971 Tate Gallery retrospective installation)(photo: Tate Gallery)

as an image of earnest, all-American patriotism. At any rate, an icon of harmless Disneyland fun and fantasy and its flip side, which in the period often meant the grim realities of American power in Vietnam.

If the Disneyland characters seem inviting, endearingly familiar, even irresistible, we also seem to hold back from them. The more we are carried away by the sense of easygoing fun they signal, the larger seem to loom prickly hints about the war-machine. The more we give in to the piece's pleasurable, comforting sentimentality, its call to lose ourselves in its heart-warming, cloying sweetness, the more we stand apart, uncomfortable and unable to shake off its chilling references to aggressive military action. Kitsch and antidote administered together?

Paolozzi's *Kitsch Cabinet* 'pharmakon' is not unrelated to two other classic 'pharmacies' of the readymade. A commercial print of a landscape, left 'untouched' except for being 'touched up' with two daubs of red and green paint referring to the chemist-shop logo, gives us Duchamp's *Pharmacie* (1914)[3] — a play on 'daltonisme', the condition named after the nineteenth-century chemist's inability to distinguish between red and green?

If the print's cheap ordinariness is preserved, it is only to inscribe another realm of associations over it. We focus on one at the expense of the other. So with the cabinet shelves of potion bottles and apothecary jars in Cornell's *Untitled* (1952, 36.2, 33.7 × 13.3 cm, Muriel Kallis Newman Collection) from his 'Pharmacies series'. Their look of old-world, shop-soiled goods switch into 'enigmatic signs', counters in another semantic chain.

In both instances, Levi-Strauss's celebrated definition of the readymade as 'semantic fission' seems not inappropriate.[4] The emphasis falls on splitting — on prising open a gap between established orders of meaning, signs, things. If the Paolozzi pieces go along with this they also tend to short-circuit the relay, to elide its codes — a strategy he describes as the 'interfered with readymade syndrome'.

It does not rule out the possibility, as seen with his *Kitsch Cabinet*, that changes to the found object might be quite ostentatiously minimal, noticeable only because they seem so negligible. The 'syndrome' alerts us to the readymade as a crop of apparently disparate, contradictory signs, symptoms, clues. We would fail to make sense of them by trying to decipher them one by one, in some linear sequence. They demand to be read concurrently, falling into place together, in one go.

Three American Heroes and other *Kitsch Cabinet* pieces stand at the syndrome's extreme limits, somewhat apart from related works such as *Vietnam Boots* (plate 44, 1971) which seem more in single register. With the latter, we tend to skip over the pair of boots' 'kitsch element' to attend to its composed meaning — the pun on impedimenta, the idea of the encumbrances of feet and travelling gear, a weight which bears one down — the burden and drag of war. The everyday object turns into symbol for a 'higher' programmatic message and its rhetoric.

With the *Kitsch Cabinet* 'undecidables', as in some speeded-up, random fashion, we oscillate between images of dazzling, fearful weaponry, innocous cuddly toys, thrilling, death-dealing war gadgetry and hardware, children's games, military adventures, 'sugar pink and candy floss' and 'death and destruction in the skies'. Everything has the air of being both entertainingly funny and deadly serious, lighthearted and pointed — a double-edged tongue, no less striking in Paolozzi's 'literary readymade' *Why we are in Vietnam* (1969),[5] as soothing as it is searing,

as lulling as it is provoking.

The opposed terms cut across one another. None manages to get the better of the other. It would be limiting therefore to see the undecidables simply as 'ironic readymades'.[6] No sooner are the kitsch elements 'mastered and framed' by a self-reflexive, ironic gaze than they elude its grip, doggedly reasserting their 'kitsch quality'. A radical indeterminacy prevails — we never quite find our feet with regard to which element serves and manipulates the other.

In the 1970s, the *Kitsch Cabinet* 'undecidables' might have seemed controversial, easy to shrug off as a devil-may-care extravaganza at Pop Art's tail-end. But what was consigned to its fringes came to be played centre stage with a vengeance towards the 1990s — signposted by Koons and Steinbach. With Koons' *Pink Panther* (1988, porcelain, edition of 3, 104 × 52 × 48.3 cm) or *Ushering in Banality* (plate 45, 1988) the 'kitsch lookalike' stands in as 'art object' — flaunting a 'kitsch quality' crafted to excess even as it insists on being looked at as if it were the latter.

An 'exposition' on this double-stance, Steinbach's *Related and Different* (plate 46, 1986) places the everyday commodity — trainers, wine glasses, pots, pans, lava lamps — on a 'pedestal/shelf' where it might be looked at both as itself and as something aspiring to the condition of the art object. The pedestal/shelf demarcates an ambiguous space where the object teeters between the worlds of art and its everyday, 'kitsch' other. Rendered an 'indeterminate sign' it sits on the fence, at once 'related' to and part of both sides of the divide even as it is 'different', apart from either.[7] A borderline object, boundaried without boundaries, it belongs to both genres and to neither — to a 'genre débordé'?[8]

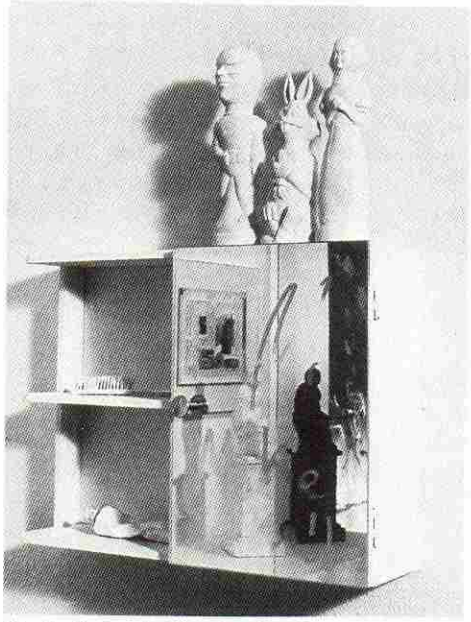
The Pop Art 'indeterminate' refuses to relinquish its flagrantly non-fine art look — to fashion it into 'higher' expression or to treat it as fodder for such ends. It thus holds up the possibility of being read exclusively as fine art object. At any rate, delays it indefinitely by blatantly parading its commonplace, kitsch identity, making a spectacle of it.

In dragging its feet over which genre it belongs to, in deferring decision about its identity, it seems at one with the high Modernist readymade and its 'hesitations'. Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915–23, glass, 2.7 m high, Philadelphia Museum of Art) — subtitled a 'delay in Glass' — signposts such a 'holding back'. It seeks to put off for as long as possible the idea of being taken as traditional fine art statement — staving it off, postponing it by every non-painterly ruse it is able to muster.[9]

However, his 'snapshot inscribing' of the found object as a readymade does point to something like the unveiling of a 'heightened, more conceptual experience'. It involves a 'stripping bare' of the bride-object's mundaneness — even if he makes this a deliberately fumbled and fraught affair. It is not unlike the Joycean 'linguistic readymade', the epiphany: a vulgar phrase, a foul-mouthed expression evokes a split-second illumination — uncovering an exhilarating sense of absolute possibilities.

Hamilton's *Epiphany* (1964) may hint at such a revelation by recalling its Duchampian/Joycean pretexts. But it also puts it off 'until further notice'. The badge's risqué colloquialism, 'Slip It To Me', its brash, exciting colour, mix of 'seedy joke shop tone' and sentimentality, are calculated to engage our attention for its own sake.[10]

Showing themselves off as scandalously bare, brute, 'unsublimated' commodities, Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* might be seen as the mirror-opposite of Duchamp's



43 E. Paolozzi, *Three American Heroes*, 1971, rubber, wood, plaster, mirror. Private Collection, New York (photo: John Webb)

44 E. Paolozzi, *Vietnam Boots*, 1971, painted aluminium, 34 × 21 × 29 cm. E. Keinholz, Berlin (photo: John Webb)

45 J. Koons, *Ushering in Banality*, polychromed wood, 97 × 157 × 76 cm (photo: Parkett)

'reciprocal readymade' — a Rembrandt 'desublimated and used' as an ironing board. The one genre is courted only to keep the other at bay. Each cites and cancels the other — the drift of Hamilton's *Still Life-Study* (1965, 20.5 × 20.5 cm) and *Toaster* (1966–7, reconstructed 1969, chromed steel and perspex on colour photo), indeed, of Raysse's 'Nouveau Réaliste' items or Brecht's 'Fluxus pieces', often seen as wayward exercises at Pop Art's margins.

The Pop Art objects we have mapped might be called 'imponderables' — 'light weight' items which recoil from 'gravity' of theme or 'weighty' meaning in their conspicuous display of 'kitsch commodity mundaneness'. But they do not altogether shake off a certain 'ponderousness'. For they labour the point about the 'condition of art' — make heavy weather of what should or should not count as art in a world where everyday commodities become aestheticized, increasingly take on the glamour and aura associated with fine art objects, just as the latter become not unlike workaday commodities.

As 'chameleon objects', the imponderables' weight and worth are notoriously difficult to estimate and fix. In this, they encapsulate some of Pop Art's essential concerns — how to determine artistic value and non-value, its currencies and standards, the uncertainties of appraisal itself. They dramatize Pop Art's inverting and involuting force — its drive towards turning the authorities of taste, value and sensibility inside out, displacing them.

If they make room for every category of artistic value and non-value, none is unequivocally endorsed or rejected. Mass culture, kitsch and fine art elements speak about themselves, even against themselves and one another. Value suggests itself as transitive — shifting, volatile relationships between terms rather than a fixed, inert thing. The viewer is drawn into wrestling with a value-making activity with no finale. No sooner is an evaluation arrived at than it is subject to revision, put in brackets. The tricky business of comparing and contrasting values, discriminating between them, starts up afresh.

Eco's view, therefore, that 'in Pop Art kitsch is redeemed and elevated into a new state of esthetic dignity' seems less apt for the imponderables, however persuasive for other pieces.[11] The notion of the 'phoney' reclaimed for 'authentic' expression fights shy of the fact that whatever else they might aspire to, the *Kitsch Cabinet* objects stand their ground as 'irredeemably kitsch'. Try as we may to spirit this away — as a vehicle of critique, as ironic gloss, as camp taste, as fine art in disguise — it springs back to challenge us by adamantly remaining what it is.

The semiotic switch entangles us in seeing the *Kitsch Cabinet* items both as everyday objects and as signs which comment on themselves, as 'zero-degree objects' and 'objects raised to the second degree' as 'object language and metalanguage'[12] — as 'naive' objects and as 'knowing' signs.[13] In any event, a shuttle between the planes. We grapple with colliding, clashing orders of object, taste, sign-system. It is at odds with the one-way exchange implied in a 'redemptive aesthetics' in which Pop Art is seen to recuperate the signs, myths, objects of consumer culture for a higher truth, to cash in the 'kitsch token' for the real thing.

The 'redemptive interpretation' has tended to hold sway in the 'transformation controversy' over whether or not Pop Art recreates its consumerist sources into true art statement.[14] Its either/or framework was defined by the period's formidable 'jargon of authenticity', inflected in a variety of local forms: in Britain,

Leavisite criteria of the primacy of unsullied, lived experience; in the United States, a cult of pure expressivity with Abstract Expressionism's ascendancy;[15] in Europe, the predominance of existentialist, phenomenological perspectives and the quest for the authentic.[16]

Whether 'authenticity' was meant in philosophical 'Heideggerian' terms or in political 'Marcusian' terms, it entailed a reading of Pop Art either as a transvaluation of 'kitsch values' or as utterly tainted by them.[17] Two rather incidental remarks on Pop Art illustrate the pressure. So keen is Habermas to fit Pop Art into a radical cultural politics, to claim it as a force which redeems consumerism's 'artificial rubbish and trivia' that he describes it as 'critique even if at its lowest level' — as if despite itself![18] The opposite anxiety, that it is nothing but kitsch, is perhaps summed up in the remark about Peter Blake as 'the fairy painter whose ability as an artist is as concrete as his garden gnomes'.[19]

If the early, Marcusian reception of Pop Art in Germany tended to see it as a drive towards a sphere of values which transcends the status quo,[20] in England much the same critical perspective came to opposite conclusions.[21] Does it highlight Pop Art's 'undecidable' element, which resists totalizing in a grand dialectical scheme? At any rate, we seem to be returned to its double-coding — unashamedly at one with kitsch and at odds with it.

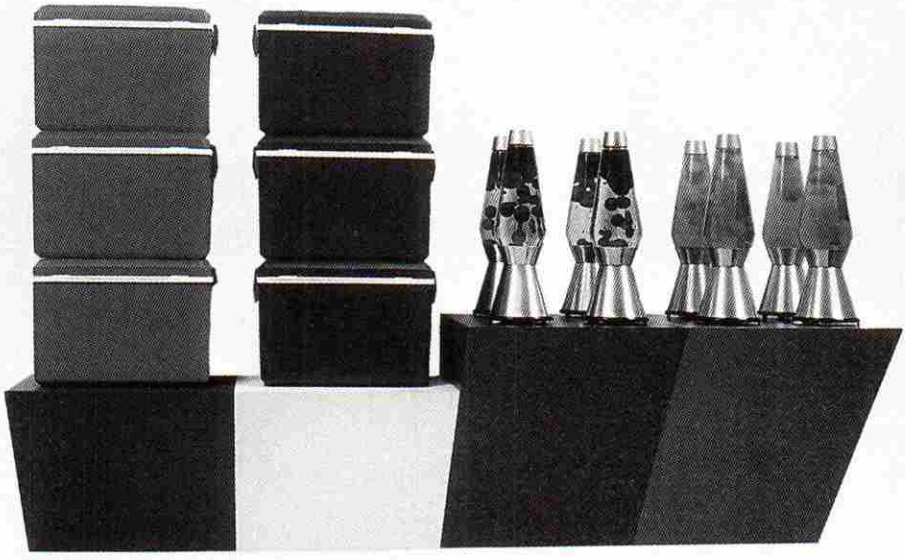
Against the habit-forming drug of art, Duchamp prescribed the antidote of the readymade which, he warned, could itself be addictive.[22] In this tightrope walk, the critique of kitsch passes over into the critique of art itself and back again.[23] 'Pop Art undecidables' trigger a searching, open-ended review of artistic values, definitions of art and object, orders of taste and pleasure — the bane of art working its way through as something of a medicinal?

ESTHER'S NOSE JOB

Tongue-tied and loose tongued? Pop Art's images and signs speak volumes even as it passes them over to us without comment, with lips sealed. The word 'Art' emblazoned across the canvas in Lichtenstein's *Art* (plate 47, 1962), holds forth without pause about art's condition as advertising, as commodity, as sign standing in for the 'real thing'. At the same time, it seems to protest too much; it falls silent as redundant lettering, as blank, transparent sign. It drives towards a semantic fullness and emptiness in the same breath.

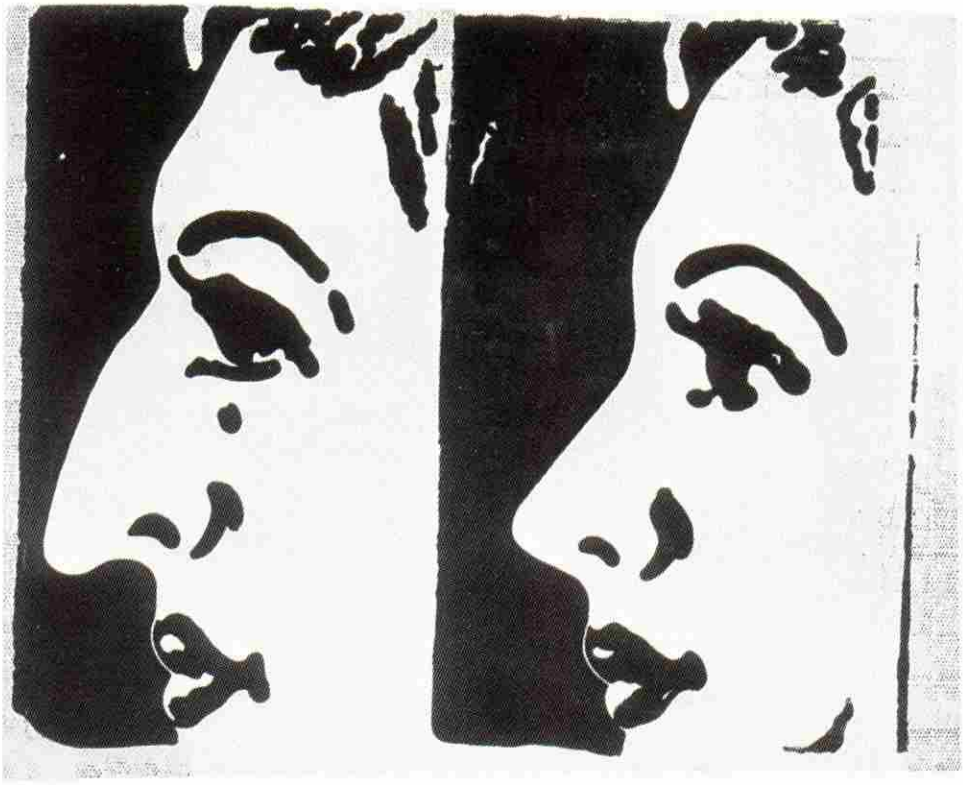
If the textures and tensions of this double-movement were sensed by critical responses to Pop Art from the outset,[24] the tendency has been to treat it either as talkative or as tacturn sign. Either as a flood of meanings, associations, connotations about the world-text of consumerism — as programmatic sign. Or as a drying up of meanings in favour of an abstractive, pictorial syntax at play with its own forms — as formalist sign.[25]

Our reading shuttles between these poles with Warhol's *Before and After* (plate 48, 1960).[24] The raw, grainy state of the advertising image is mimicked in a 'minimal transformation' which hovers between artwork and source. But it is inescapably about 'transformation' — re-designing the profile, bringing the nose in line with the norms of good looks and facial loveliness.



46 H. Steinbach, *Related and Different*, 1986, mixed media (trainers/wine glasses) (photo: Parkett)

47 R. Lichtenstein, *Art*, 1962, oil, 91.2 × 162.2 cm. G. Lolsley Collection (photo: Leo Castelli)



48 A. Warhol, *Before and After*, 1960, polymer, 137.2 × 177.8 cm. Andy Warhol Estate (photo: Museum of Modern Art, New York)

It would be difficult not to relate it to the chapter in Pynchon's novel *V* (1960), which narrates Ester's desire to swap her aquiline for a retroussé, her Jewish nose for an all-American Irish.[26] A downward-plunging, hook nose for an upturned snub — two sides of the same coin, yet the one pictured as ideal and sought after. A metaphor for identity, ethnicity, conformity — the paradox of increased personal choice in a consumer culture which simply serves the pressure to standardize, to look like everyone else?

Soon enough these connotations seem too insistent, too forceful and inundating. In an ebbing turn, the image pares down to little more than a formal essay on visual idiom and its grammar — so cool and cuttingly impersonal that we even hesitate to relate it to Warhol's early painting on a related theme, *The Broad Gave Me My Face, But I Can Pick My Own Nose* (*c.* 1948, 62.2 × 76.2 cm, P. Warhola Family Collection) let alone the 'private vanities' of his own nose job.[27]

Critique of the 'vanities' or complicity? Do Pop Art signs simply replay the scene of consumerist desire or prise open a critical gap in it — are they 'naked or clothed' repetitions of it?[28] Hamilton's *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* draws us into a world of overspilling consumerist abundance, its promise of blissful gratification and well-being. We are borne along

by the suggestive surfaces and textures, the glamorous look of things, glowing bodies.

But not without a pang of awareness that the interior might be half-styled as a Vanitas, an allegory of the five senses — a 'cautionary tale' of acquisitiveness, exhibitionism, surfeit. The collage composition suddenly seems both quite askew and too perfect to ring true. The seductive spell breaks — is it after all no more than an advertisement telling us that 'ordinary cleaners only reach this far'? But the scene's allure, its pleasures and thrills quickly close in. We are borne away again.

The double-movement prefigures Pop Art's classic strategies: everything seems to be endorsed and everything questioned in the same turn. We sense it in Wesselmann's interiors, both inviting and unnerving in their luxurious excess. 'Eat, Hug, Err, Love, Die' — in Indiana's realm of the vanities the didactic, brisk moralizing force is not easily untangled from an accepting, affirming play. Lichtenstein feels for, even with, the consumerist representations he otherwise targets for parody.[29]

A two-sided strategy — Pop Art stands apart from the more single-minded, confrontational thrust of the satirical mode. If the latter typically arraigns and castigates its object in the name of truth and morality, it seems to do so from some position 'above and outside' its target. With the apparently all-enveloping consumerist setting in which Pop Art is forged, it is not easy to imagine where such an 'outside' standpoint might be.[30]

The mode thus appears as a force from the 'inside' — from within the very consumerist myths and representations it turns inside out. As such it seems as credulous, as ready to take things at face value, as it seems querying and doubting. Against satire's 'head on' strictures, its forms of address seem roundabout, yielding. It lets us get under the skin of things, gives us time to make up our minds, to answer back, to feel we have a say — elements it shares with the 'persuasion techniques' of a worldly-wise advertising? A force, dare we say, as colluding as it is corroding.

With the Situationist 'détournement', the consumerist sign is pirated, re-routed, turned on its head, made to speak against itself.[31] In Pop Art, it seems to speak for and against itself in the same turn. But does the strategy survive the media-concocted intensities of a post-1970s consumerist culture with its systemic capacity to take over any representation, however oppositional, to 'de-tour' and re-project it for its own ends? A Gauloise ad mimics Lichtenstein's cool style meticulously — Pop Art caught in its own trap.[32]

As we look back from the 1990s, Pop Art strategy seems to be largely tied to a particular phase of consumerist culture out of which we now appear to be passing — that of 'sheer spectacle'.[33] At any rate, a phase when it still seemed possible for the Pop Art gaze to read and cross-check the order of 'brute objects, things and goods' against the order in which they are staged as 'commodity spectacle' — styled and pictured in terms of advertising myths and fantasies. Its gaze could wander and shift between 'objects' and how they are dramatized and displayed in the consumerist space — as images and signs meant to create, excite, spin out needs, wants and appetites in a 'drugstore' theatre of desire.[34]

We watch Pop Art watching this theatre, this staging of the 'commonplace object' as 'aphrodisiacal commodity'. We see the Independent Group looking at the way the 'motor car' is styled in advertising idiom and imagery, in Banham's

words, as 'vehicle of desire';[35] designed as 'amorous object' as Barthes puts it;[36] as the 'mechanical bride object', the 'Love-Goddess Assembly Line', according to McLuhan.[37] We watch its gaze scan commodity styling to see how woman's bodyline and motor car chasis coalesce, how the woman/automobile association is constructed as 'dreamboat' — metaphor for an object of transporting delight.[38]

It is this kind of advertorial picturing and styling of the motor car as 'orgasm in chrome'[39] which Hamilton plays off in *Hommage à Chrysler Corp* (1957) against the Bride/automobile image he lifts from Duchamp's *Large Glass*. The Bride's 'intense desire for orgasm', the 'splendid vibrations of her climax', are depicted as the spreading 'orgasmic cloud' image in the upper part of the *Large Glass*.[40] Hamilton reworks the image across *Hommage*.[41] If the smudgy, smeary passages of paintwork mimic and decode fine art and demotic modes of representation, they also evoke the fleshy, erotic world of the Bride's and Bachelors' search for satisfaction. Duchamp's reflections on the orgasmic cycle — promise, fulfilment, frustration — are set off against the way commodity styling dramatizes much the same through the 'desirable look of things'.

This 'readable relationship' between the order of the object and the order of its styling as commodity sign — a readability of orders on which Pop Art strategy is premised — seems to become less clear by the 1980s. In the swirling, saturation effect of the media communication circuit, they seem to telescope more and more into each other. The everyday object, consumerist jargon, advertising idiom, metalanguage, Pop Art commentary — all appear to mix and flatten into a seamless flow of images, as if they were all of the same order.[42]

For a snapshot of the tendency we need only glance at how fashion advertising mimics and appropriates something like Hamilton's cool decodings of the woman/automobile imagery and its devices for constructing femininity. The *Vogue* automobile/woman image (plate 49) seems to take over the field of his insights on styling, symbol and stereotyping — rephrasing them into a knowing, tongue-in-cheek fashion statement. Where does Pop Art metalanguage end or a disarmingly self-reflexive fashion idiom with a vengeance begin?

As the orders of consumerist representation close in on Pop Art by the 1990s, our attention shifts to another of its modes — its focus on waste, trash, fecal matter, 'the excremental' — precisely what consumerism, as a vast digestive, gustatory system, keeps quiet about, finds too disgusting to mention openly.

THE 'UNMENTIONABLE'

Yet where there is consumption, there must be excretion. For consumerism, however, the spotlight remains on the former. It banishes the 'excremental' from sight for fear it might disrupt its seductive spell. If the spoilsport is brought back into the arena of representation at all it is in the guise of something glamorous, eroticized, titillating — as part of the consumerist theatre of desire.

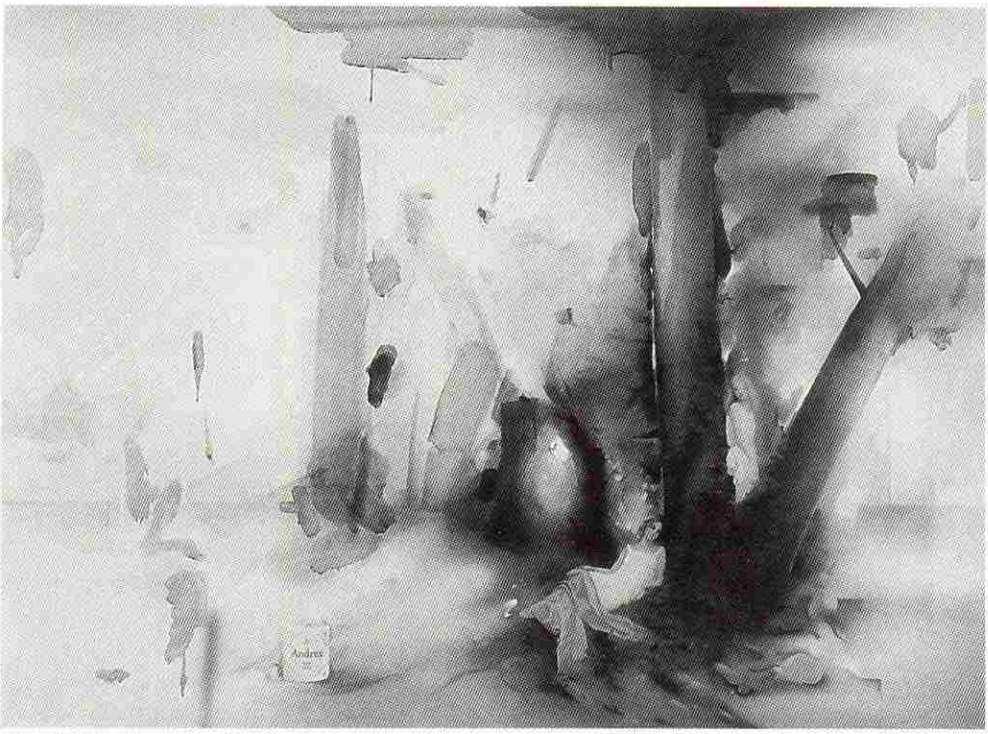
At Pop Art's margins, Arman's 'Nouveau Réalisme' installation *Le Plein* (1960) and his *Poubelles* series (1960–71) present consumerism with its other face by putting on display collections of decomposing refuse, trash and junk as if they were data on consumption habits of social groups and classes. From Paolozzi's early

49 *Vogue*, 'Automobile Woman', Italy, 1989 (photo: Thierry Mugler)

'metamorphoses of rubbish'[43] through to Pop Art's tail-end — Tony Cragg, Bill Woodrow, Gilbert and George's scatological imagery — something of the unease about consumerist 'excess' and its all-too-blinding splendour seems to be signposted, a focus on its litter, scrapheaps, its throwaway culture.

Soft Pink Landscape (plate 50, 1971–2) belongs to a group of works in which Hamilton elaborates the 'excremental theme'.[44] It centres on how Andrex toilet roll advertisements deal with 'the unmentionable'. It parodies their roundabout way of referring to basic bodily functions and needs, of never quite spelling them out — for the sake of discretion, delicacy, decency? At any rate, it looks at how they displace as mundane a commodity as toilet tissue onto a plane of romantic reverie, making it part of a suggestive fantasy.

Hamilton plays this off against how classic landscapes and still lifes represent the 'unspeakable'. He has in mind something not unlike Watteau's 'magical ambiguities' — a façade of genteel rituals of courting and refined lovemaking behind which lurk fierce passions and lusts, hints of decay and death. In *Soft Pink Landscape* we come down with a bump from our flights of fancy as we discover the idyllic scene might have much more to do with rituals of



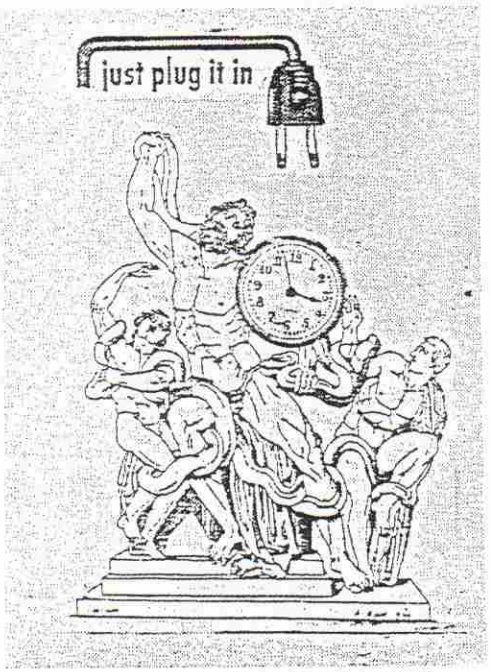
50 R. Hamilton, *Soft Blue Landscape*, 1976–80, oil on canvas, 122 × 162.5 cm. Private Collection (photo: R. Hamilton)

defecation than we bargained for. The toilet roll, like lumps of excreta and turds in his still-life series, serves as a 'memento mori' — a stark reminder of the brute corporeal, the body's inescapable functions and frailties, 'its vanities'.

A vision of the world as 'glamour and shit', in Hamilton's phrase, against consumerist representations of it as all glamour? The rather down-to-earth lavatorial humour, its kitsch sense, has a serious edge. For in defiling the sentimental, hothouse qualities of the genre, Hamilton recalls Swift's demystifying strategies. In one of the latter's more notorious poems, the young lover is shattered to discover that the woman he has elevated into an 'idol of feminine beauty and purity' is indeed a flesh and blood person, that, in fact, 'Celia shits'.[45]

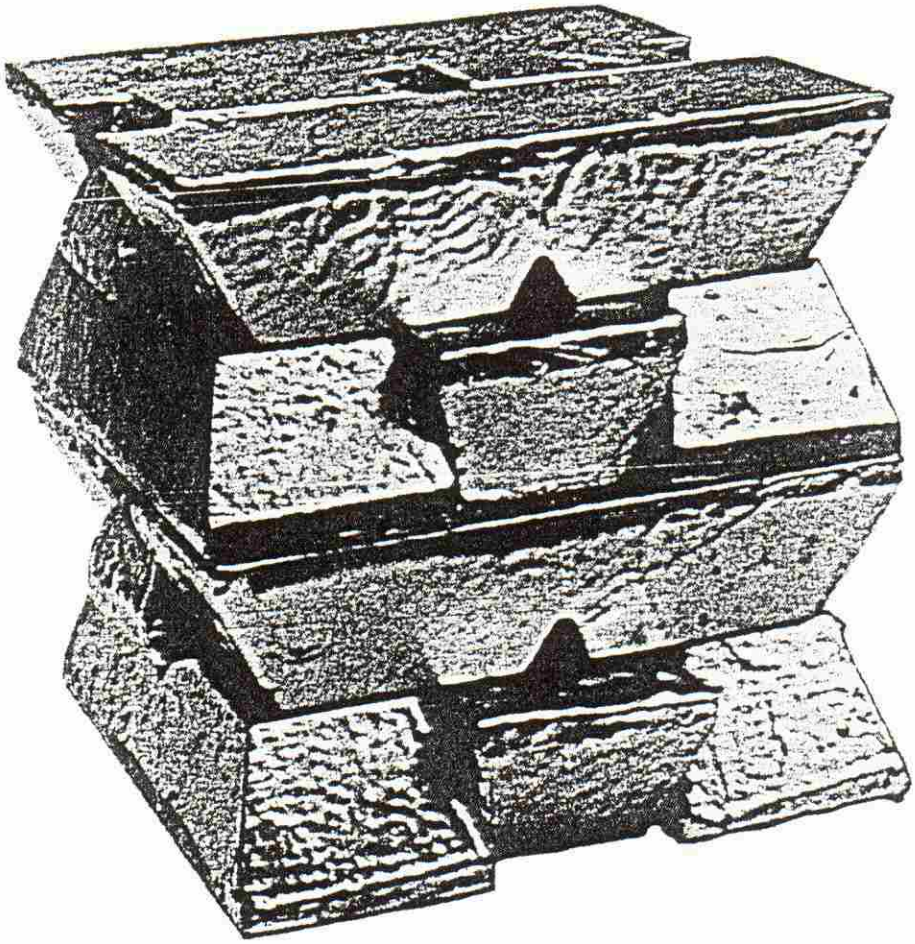
It is perhaps not without significance that Martin Amis's updated version of the Swift episode[46] appears around the time *Soft Pink Landscape* was made. It, too, brings a young man's rather sanitized, deodorized fantasies of romance, love and 'femininity', as pictured in advertisements, face to face with devastating evidence of his girlfriend's natural body functions. The Swift and Amis texts place for us Pop Art's focus on the excremental as a metaphor of resistance: the 'unspeakable' speaks out bluntly against the evasions and artificialities of high culture and plastic mass culture alike, against their 'bogus splendour' — but not without a sense of fun and daring in exploring the taboo and transgressing it.

Fuller's attack on Pop Art's focus on 'the unmentionable' as 'anality' thus seems off the mark, if not rather puritanical.[47] We may recall that Joyce has Leopold



51 E. Paolozzi, *Laocoon, Just Plug It In*, 1963, collage (photo: University of St Andrews)

52 Rembrandt, *Satire of a Critic*, 1644, pen bistre. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



53 E. Paolozzi, *100% F*Art*, 1970, aluminium painted gold, 2 × 10 × 4 cm (photo: Tate Gallery)

Bloom go to considerable lengths in *Ulysses* to peer up the bottoms of the Grecian sculptures in the National Museum to see if they do have 'orifices of excretion', 'the holy of holies'.[48] The vulgarity of the image is part of the point — a striking comment on the icy aloofness of Classical high culture from earthly needs and appetites, on 'the stone cold and pure Olympian world where the gods eat only electric light'?

The comment seems to be echoed in Paolozzi's collage *Laocoon: Just Plug It In* (plate 51, 1963). The image of the Classical icon about to be electrified into motion as a kitsch toy — a mocking of the uncompromising, purist modernism Greenberg championed in his Laöcoon essay against which Paolozzi's 'Pop Art Laocoons' sought a mixing of high art and popular forms and idioms? Perhaps the 'anality' of his Laöcoon anagram — Kakafon Kakkaoon laka oon Electrik Lafs[49] — captures this element of kitsch's irreverent laughter against high culture's seclusions and solemnities.

However, the excremental as a figure of critique is in itself not unique to Pop Art. In Rembrandt's *Satire of a Critic* (plate 52, 1964), for example, we are left in little doubt as to the object of ridicule. A critic with large asses ears poking out through his hat gazes into a mirror as he holds forth. A member of the otherwise enwrapt audience, looks out towards the viewer and, as if winking at us, drops his pants and relieves himself — a rude, critical gesture against criticism's vanities.

But with Pop Art the tendency is to drive the critique to a point from which art itself does not escape. Perhaps this is best summed up by Paolozzi's multiple *100% F* Art* (plate 53, 1970). It simulates a stack of gold bars arranged in a fashion we would imagine to find them in storage in a mint or reserve bank vault. The artwork is shown up as literally nothing more than its financial equivalent, its worth in money terms, as 'filthy lucre' — as a sham, a sign for everything but itself. Fine Art, flatulence, inflation — assaying and evaluating — stamped with the 'excremental gold seal', the piece gleefully debunks the system of art-making, criticism and appreciation as so much 'hot air' even as it participates in it.

What the 'art world proper' flings out, its left overs, 'the excremental' world of mass culture, in Eco's phrase, gathers together under the blanket sign 'kitsch'.[50] With Pop Art it knocks on the door of the art world which has expelled it as 'improper excess', demands to be included even as it stands apart by insisting on being no more than itself. The stance mirrors the 'pharmakon' Adorno describes: Kitsch is not the 'dregs and dross of art but a poisonous substance mixed in with it. How to discharge it is the difficult task today. . . . Kitsch may even be the true progress of art.'[51] A snapshot of Pop Art in all its ambivalence?

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NOTES

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