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**The Independent Group at the
Institute of Contemporary Arts:
Its Origins, Development and
Influences 1951-1961**



FRONTISPIECE : 17-18 DOVER STREET, LONDON W1. THE I.C.A. OCCUPIED THE FIRST FLOOR. (Photographed in 1984).

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Abstract of Ph D. thesis. University of Kent at Canterbury

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Without the help of many people, this work could not have been undertaken. I would like to acknowledge my debt to those people who generously gave their time and allowed me to interview them: Toni dal

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* * *

When I first planned this work, a notable University lecturer said to me during a telephone conversation, "You get a different story from each member of the Independent Group you talk to." This was true, and although it brought about problems of interpretation, it certainly is one reason why the Group is so interesting.

The differences of opinion, or the different emphases, or the outright contradictions, do make a balanced account of the Group difficult. But as Alison Smithson advised me: "...what is interesting is to put in all the versions... and then it becomes absolutely lucid later..." I have tried to do just that.

Introduction

In the early 1950s a number of young men and women who frequented the newly established Institute of Contemporary Arts in Dover Street, off Piccadilly, began meeting informally and irregularly to discuss a variety of topics of mutual interest. Early in 1952 these meetings became organised under the good auspices of the ICA, although independent of the official programme. These gatherings of painters, sculptors, architects, critics, and historians were attended by small numbers of people and were by invitation only. Furthermore, no minutes were taken and no records kept. By 1953 they had become known as the Independent Group, primarily because of their relation to the ICA, but when they emerged onto the platform at the Institute as part of the official programme - which they increasingly did in the middle and late 'fifties - they only twice announced themselves as the Independent Group.

When they met privately they discussed a variety of issues. Sometimes it was formally in regularised meetings, more often it was informally at spontaneous gatherings. The 'members' were never a particularly cohesive group, rather as one of their number, the artist Richard Hamilton, noted, a "...loose 'association of unlike spirits".¹ Consequently they proposed a range of sometimes diverse ideas, but always these would be reassessed, altered and generally examined quite rigorously. However, there was a common link, one issue that could be singled out as that which met with the strongest disapproval. This was the institutionalisation, as the Group saw it, of twentieth century art, and their reaction to this was a rejection of established values, especially those most readily associated with the pre-war Modern Movement. In this respect, the Group saw the ICA, and

¹ Richard Hamilton Collected Words 1953-82. London 1982, p.22.

particularly its Chairman, Herbert Read, as being somehow maleficent, and they hoped, in their optimistic way, that the Institute would not ensnare itself in art historical academicism. Therefore, the Group was always anti-establishment and anti-institutional, and the chief weapon in its armoury was iconoclasm. Eventually, some members of the Group - notably the critic Lawrence Alloway and the artist and theoretician John McHale - proposed an alternative aesthetic to that of Modernism, the seeds of which were to germinate in the fertile ground of the ICA during the 'fifties, and which were to blossom in the 'sixties as Pop Art in all its manifestations, from painting to architecture, fashion to industrial design.

The role of the ICA in enabling the Group to operate was absolutely crucial. Not only did the Institute allow it to meet at the Dover Street premises - both formally and informally - it encouraged such meetings and saw them as a positive aspect of its function, if not an official one. Furthermore, although the ICA did not make the Independent Group part of its established programme, the Institute eventually came to adopt a lot of what the Group had researched, chiefly because some of its members found their way into positions of responsibility within the Institute and were therefore able to propose ideas through more direct channels.

Although the ICA served as a base for the Group, there were also other bases - Peter Reyner Banham's Primrose Hill house on a Sunday morning, the flat shared by Frank and Magda Cordell and John McHale in Cleveland Square, the Café Mozart near the ICA itself, the French Pub in Dean Street, the nearby Café Torino, and the York Minster. In this way, the 'big' ideas came up very slowly, so slowly and so informally

"...that nobody noticed what was happening... it would be a

mistake to think about glamorous, decisive moments..."²

But there were aspects of the Independent Group which were more dramatic, if not exactly glamorous. When the Group appeared as part of the official ICA programme, for example, the meetings were often very far from the archetypal picture of polite English discussions:

"There were interruptions from the back of the hall... In England, everybody was terribly polite and the English art scene was terribly polite, and those evenings at the ICA were not polite at all. It really was a sparring match, and if anybody said anything stupid, you could be very sure that somebody would stand up there and take you apart. It was gladiatorial, and that was something one hadn't witnessed before. And I suppose that was part of the attraction too: a lot of sharp people getting up and saying what they thought..."³

Aggression was often a characteristic of some Independent Group members, especially when challenged on their views. But it was often aggression channelled through wit. Roger Hilton might throw a chair at Lawrence Alloway⁴ but Alloway used words in the normal cut and thrust of argument; and he used them like a finely honed sabre to slice through the opposition.

The Group thrived on such things. Richard Hamilton said what he remembered

² Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 25 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for the film Fathers of Pop, Arts Council, 1979, though not used in the film.

³ James Meller interviewed by the author, 12 March 1984

⁴ Mentioned in 'A History of the Institute of Contemporary Arts Compiled from its Archival Material 1946-1968', with an Introduction by John Sharkey. Unpublished manuscript. ICA Archives, p.56.

"...about the Independent Group was that it was a battleground of ideas. People shouting down other people, and not a coherent body of egg-heads thrashing out a new philosophy of art... Ideas were thrown into the melting pot; a lot of them were being kicked around and kicked out."⁵

On the other hand, the Group presented a callous and divisive visage to some observers. "The IG was a bunch of hustlers and thugs!" writes Richard Lannoy.⁶

An important aspect of the Independent Group was that some of its members were very conscious that they were making history. Muriel Wilson, who was introduced to the Group through meeting Peter Reyner Banham whilst he was studying at the Courtauld Institute of Art, was aware that she was watching history being made⁷. And Reyner Banham himself recalled that

"...we were all in a funny way conscious that something was going on... we knew we were the new wave..."⁸

Certainly the early 1950s seemed to some Group members as a period of opportunity, a period of excitement because things were apparently changing and there was something in the air. Critical of the established order, they were confident in their own abilities to make changes. It was a unique moment in time and the Independent Group were single-minded about seizing the opportunity. Their concerns were essentially aesthetic in character but, paradoxically, it was they who

⁵ Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 27 June 1976. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁶ Richard Lannoy. Letter to the author, 1 August 1982.

⁷ Muriel Wilson. Telephone conversation with the author, 1 March 1984.

⁸ Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with John McHale, Magda Cordell McHale and Mary Banham, 30 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

perhaps started the shift away in Britain from purely aesthetic concerns to the broader, and ultimately more fruitful, sociological/anthropological concerns of visual creation. The Group did not however, introduce a political overview; its terms of reference remained for the most part apolitical.

That the members considered themselves as "the new wave", the bridgehead to future developments in the visual arts, was no self-fulfilling prophecy. They worked hard at putting their point of view, and although they had no clearly defined programme, they exploited the prevailing climate of opportunity to advance their views. More cynical observers saw the Group as a vehicle for the self-advancement of its members, and though this process actually happened - to the undoubted pleasure of those members - one must be careful of such a limited view, since the Group existed for much more than this one end.

The people involved with the Independent Group were intelligent, articulate, witty, optimistic, and confident. However, like Janus, they presented two faces: some people found their ebullience a positive and desirable quality, and at the extreme, the Group's charisma was even considered to be awe-inspiring. On the other hand, their cliquishness had an almost opposite effect: some people found them uncomfortable to be with and "the most unrelaxing company."⁹ These two faces of the Independent Group are not incompatible with how the Group actually was. One of its appeals was its self-confidence, its propensity to be wholly committed to an area of study and to focus upon this with an approach which often involved drawing comparison and contrast from a whole range of seemingly disparate sources. The results were often enlightening and sometimes alarming. However, if this approach

⁹ Richard Lannoy, *op.cit.*

appealed to some observers, others found it unacceptable. There was criticism of the Group because of the apparent insignificance of its subject-matter, that in the rarified atmosphere created by the meeting of painters, sculptors, architects, photographers, critics, and historians, the subjects under discussion appeared to be not especially relevant and sometimes not especially informed.¹⁰ Such criticisms as these, together with accusations of eclecticism, shallow research, and the masquerade of expertise, might all be true. But the fact remains, the members of the Independent Group were the people who were discussing the issues, the ones making the inroads, posing the questions, and acting as the advance guard for the 'sixties.

¹⁰ These criticisms were made by a number of people, including Frank Cordell and Donald Holms. For the latter's opinions, see Appendix 1, p. 420 ff.

1.1951 and Before: the Establishment of the ICA

On the evening of 12 December 1950, the Earl of Harewood officially opened the Institute of Contemporary Arts in its new London premises at 17-18 Dover Street, just off Piccadilly. Once the home of Lady Hamilton, the first floor of this somewhat unimposing building had been used by the ICA since the middle of 1950; indeed an exhibition called James Joyce - his Life and Work was held there in June and July. But the official opening marked the beginning of a phase lasting some ten years during which time the course of British art would change and the effects would be evident in certain aspects of British society.

Of the cost of the Dover Street premises, the annual lease and the alterations was borne by subscriptions, the Arts Council and members of the ICA Management Committee, though there were a few gifts, such as some furniture, fabrics and carpets. Despite the alterations, which were undertaken by Jane Drew, the Dover Street building was not particularly suitable for the activities which came to take place there. Indeed, the designer and teacher Edward Wright called the rooms "...nondescript and more suitable to the garment trade than to lecturing and mounting exhibitions".¹ To provide extra hanging space for exhibitions, screens were installed but they had to be moved to make room for chairs each time there was an evening

¹Edward Wright. Unpublished manuscript 'The Anglo-French and the ICA' 16 February 1984, p.2. originally intended as notes for an exhibition catalogue.

activity. Probably for Jane Drew it was a case of the proverbial silk purse and sow's ear. Nevertheless, the ICA remained at Dover Street for eighteen years, after which it moved to its present location in Carlton House Terrace on the Mall.

This long stay was despite the fact that the Management Committee had been discussing the possibility of moving out of Lady Hamilton's ex-residence since 1953, only two years after they had moved in. But there was something about the crowded and over-used rooms which was intimate and homely and ultimately contributed to the success of the Institute.

What other factors made the Institute of Contemporary Arts what it was are not always so obvious. Its role was not especially well defined but this was not to its detriment, and its place in post-war British art is, both then and now in retrospect, very important. Indeed, it is essential to understand this if the role of the Independent Group is to be promoted. The intimate atmosphere of the ICA in the early 'fifties was essential to the germination of the Independent Group idea, as was the liberality of the Management Committee and the Director. In fact, the unique position of the ICA within the hierarchy of the British art scene was crucial to the invention and development of the Independent Group. In other words, to understand the role of the Independent Group, the why and how of its formation, it is necessary to understand the role of the ICA.

Unlike Athene, the goddess in mythology who sprang fully formed from the head of her father with a loud war cry, the ICA did not appear ready-made, so to speak. Nor was its parentage as clear cut as Athene's. For the ICA, Zeus and Hera might have been Surrealism and Constructivism but that would be too much of a simplification and

would ultimately serve to confuse the issues. At any rate, the war cry that issued forth from the child, albeit muffled by its very Englishness, was never as coherent as to ally it to one artistic tendency or another.

The birth of the ICA was a long and sometimes painful event. Its conception goes back to before the war, the actual fertilization of the idea taking place sometime in the late 'thirties. By this time, Surrealism had found its way to Britain. Its most obvious manifestation was the International Surrealist Exhibition opened by André Breton at the New Burlington Galleries in June 1936. It was only three years before that the major European Surrealists had featured in a British exhibition for the first time. Indeed, one review of Surrealist work at the Mayor Gallery in Cork Street declared,

"...works shown by Max Ernst, Francis Bacon and Paul Klee in what seems an intentional desire to outrage aesthetic conventions, can but be taken as practical jokes."²

The Mayor Gallery, along with the London Gallery and the Guggenheim Jeune Gallery - both also in Cork Street - were virtually the only galleries which showed Surrealist work before the war, although it would be misleading to think that they only exhibited works of Surrealism. The range was much wider, taking in, for example, the Unit One group - at the Mayor Gallery in April 1934 - and the more catholic Living Art in England exhibition of January/February 1939 at the London Gallery, which included work of

²P.G. Konody, Review of Mayor Gallery exhibition. The Observer 23 April 1933. Quoted in Charles Harrison, English Art and Modernism 1900-39, London, 1981, p.378, n.7.

Surrealists, Constructivists, Abstractionists and Independents. Indeed, these galleries were perhaps the most avant-garde in England and their role in the ICA project was central. The director of the London Gallery from 1937 and the editor of its journal, the London Bulletin, from 1938, was the Belgian Surrealist E.L.T. Mesens, who, after the war, was a member of the organising committee of the ICA. In the publication of London Bulletin, Mesens was assisted by the collector and painter Roland Penrose, who became a major propagandist of the ICA and its main driving force.

One other man later involved with the ICA was Herbert Read who, in the mid-'thirties had established himself as perhaps England's leading advocate of modern art. At this time he wrote for a number of journals, including that connected with the Abstract and Concrete exhibition of 1936, Axis. This was, according to its original title, a quarterly review of abstract painting and sculpture, and in its first issue Read had declared that Surrealism was a "literary pursuit" and that true innovation lay with "technical and emotional exploration of shapes left by the analysed object."³ As the decade progressed however, Read modified his opinions and was eventually defending Surrealism against the hostility of both the public and artists of other tendencies. In 1936, for instance, he wrote that Surrealism was

"...not just another amusing stunt. It is defiant - the desperate act of men too profoundly convinced by the rottenness of our civilisation to want to save a shred of its respectability."⁴

³ Axis, January 1935. Quoted in Harrison, ibid., p.277

⁴ Herbert Read. Catalogue introduction to the International Surrealist Exhibition, June 1936. Quoted in Harrison, ibid., p.312

Read's shift in position was indicative of British art in the 'thirties. It showed there was a rift between different artistic tendencies which necessitated any critic generally aligning himself with one side or another. The polarities of the tendencies themselves and the apparent uncompromising desire to be distinct from each other sometimes led to an artificial base. For example, Ben Nicholson is on record as saying "...that the motive for the publication of Circle was to 'do something' in the face of the success of the International Surrealist Exhibition..."⁵ Clearly, the publication of Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art had many positive motives but the implication that such a negative motive could be considered exemplifies the antagonisms within British art during the mid-'thirties.

These antagonisms were manifest in numerous ways, not least in Paul Nash's nickname for the abstract painters - 'Ben boys', a reference to Ben Nicholson. More seriously, as Charles Harrison has pointed out,

"The antipathy between the 'extreme' advocate of abstract art and the 'extreme' advocate of Surrealism was a distant expression of the antagonism between different political philosophies: as it were between a highly idealised form of socialism-plus-planning without class-consciousness, and a highly idealised form of anarchy-plus-psychiatry with class-consciousness."⁶

Some artists took a middle line. Henry Moore, for example, uninfluenced by any political affiliations, argued that the best art

⁵Harrison, ibid., p.377, n.53.

⁶Ibid., p.314

contained elements of both abstraction and Surrealism (presumably like his own) and was neither specifically one thing nor the other.

Moore had a point but the Surrealist group did seem to stir up a considerable amount of antagonism not only from the public, who rarely understood the motives and results of the group's endeavours, but also from other artists who did not share their sympathies. For example, in August 1936 the Surrealist group was invited to join the Artists' International Association. Though the Association and the Surrealists had certain politically left wing ideas in common, their visual interpretation of these was completely at odds. Many of the AIA members were becoming committed to a social realist approach which was inconsistent with the Surrealist philosophy. The relationship was greatly strained when the AIA's newsheet of January 1938 announced that Surrealism, along with expressionism, Futurism, and abstraction, was a bad influence, thus advancing the concept that the only good influence was achieved through realism. The Surrealists reacted by threatening to resign from the AIA and this in turn led to a debate in March 1938. The debate, essentially about what form art should take and what its content should be, was argued, with the help of a number of examples of paintings, to an inconclusive finish. Both factions claimed a victory, the realists attacking the Surrealists in the pages of the journal Left Review^{6A} and Herbert Read publishing a scathing piece in the London Bulletin: "No unprejudiced observer", he wrote,

"could describe the affair as anything but a rout.

Somewhere in Russia the body of the most competent and most convincing exponent of Socialist Realism was awaiting a so-called traitor's grave, perhaps for that reason the Realists avoided the political issue. But that is the only issue on which they have a

^{6A} Randall Swingler, 'What is the artist's Job?', Left Review, April 1938.

plausible cause; otherwise they are reduced to talking about the camera and Courbet. Actually, of course, our English Realists are not the tough guys they ought to be, but the effete and bastard offspring of the Bloomsbury School of Needlework."⁷

Against this backdrop, the concept of the ICA was formed. Many of those people originally involved in discussing the venture were associated with the Surrealist group - notably Penrose, Mesens and Read - but to think that the ICA grew exclusively from this faction would be misleading. In fact the whole pre-war cultural scene was by no means as straight-forward as believing that the various groupings existed independently of one another. True, the Surrealists and the realists were more often than not in disagreement, and there was friction between the abstractionists and the Surrealists, but generally the British avant-garde "...lacked the extreme complexity and sectarianism of Paris."⁸ The London Bulletin for example, was not exclusively a Surrealist organ but sometimes dealt with artists from other tendencies. The main London galleries exhibiting avant-garde work were not committed to one artistic direction or another but exhibited work from all factions and sometimes, as in the case of the London Gallery's Living Art in England show in 1939, displayed work from a number of different directions.

Of course, the link between the factions was that they all formed the British avant-garde and their collective stance against the attitudes of the cultural establishment was a fully-fledged battle compared to the skirmishes which took place within their own ranks.

⁷ H.R. 'Discussion between realists and Surrealists'. London Bulletin (London Gallery Bulletin). No.1, April 1938. Quoted in Anna Gruetzner, 'Some Early Activities of the Surrealist Group in England', Artscribe No.10, January 1978, p.4.

⁸ Dawn Ades Dada and Surrealism Reviewed. Hayward Gallery, London, 1978, p.351

The state of the British cultural establishment between the wars was, from a nationalistic point of view, very sorry. Throughout the 'twenties and 'thirties British art was considered inferior to its continental counterpart and this feeling was international. It was rare for British artists to exhibit in Paris, easy for French artists to show in London. Even after the war, this generally remained the case for some time and the minimal contribution made by the British to the modern movement was focused upon by many critics, including Toni del Renzio, who, writing about the exhibition 20th Century Form in 1953 said, "It is time it was stated categorically that it is harder for an Englishman to be an artist than for a richman to go to heaven."⁹ At the time del Renzio was a central figure in the Independent Group and his dismissal of much British art as a serious contributor to international modernism reflects one aspect of the Group's position.

It is not surprising that the British contribution was so poorly received. In the 'thirties there were very few examples of truly modern art to be seen in this country; the Tate Gallery did not show modern foreign work until 1926 and then it was an extremely poor collection. The injection of work from the Stoop Bequest in late 1933 helped somewhat, with examples of paintings by Cézanne, Braque, Van Gogh, Modigliani and some others, but it was generally the case that the British artist would not be exposed to anything really modern unless he went abroad. The first Picasso displayed in a public collection, for example, was at the Tate in April 1933 and this was a naturalistic flower picture of 1901. When an appeal was launched to buy Picasso's more abstract work Profile of 1927, it had to be abandoned at a total subscription sum of less than £7. However, the

⁹ Toni del Renzio. 'Is There a British Art?' Art News and Review. Vol. 5, No. 6., 18 April, 1953, p.2.

lack of official support for modernist art was most clearly manifest in an incident involving the Director and Keeper of the Tate, J.B. Manson, who, when called to view works by Arp, Duchamp, Brancusi and others held at customs, would not declare them as works of art. Thus the duty payable was prohibitive and Peggy Guggenheim, who had hoped to exhibit them in London, had to take them back to the United States.

Such a philistine act was worthy of the British cultural establishment's view of the modern movement. But there were those who furthered the cause of modernism, not least some of the London galleries. Freddy Mayor's gallery, which had reopened in 1933 after several years' closure, became the showroom of Unit One, an avant-garde group which was, as Tristram Hillier recalled, "...the spearhead, as it were, of contemporary European painting and sculpture which, at that time, had scarcely penetrated to England."¹⁰ Indeed, Geoffrey Grigson noted "...the Mayor Gallery is doing the job which should be carried out by the Tate."¹¹ Along with the London Gallery, which showed a variety of avant-garde work from Europe and Britain, including Constructive Art and Surrealist Objects and Poems, both in 1937, and Peggy Guggenheim's Jeune Gallery, which also advanced the cause of the avant-garde through a number of varied exhibitions, the Lefevre, Zwemmer, and New Burlington galleries also showed modernist work on an irregular basis. Through these exhibitions, through British avant-garde journals - Axis, Circle, London Bulletin - and through various French periodicals sold at Zwemmer's bookshop in Charing Cross Road, British artists became more aware of their continental contemporaries.

¹⁰ Tristram Hillier, Letter to Charles Harrison, 24 November 1966.

Quoted in Harrison, op.cit., p.242

¹¹ Geoffrey Grigson, The Bookman, October 1933. Quoted in Harrison, ibid., p.298.

The other important influence upon the British avant-garde was the arrival throughout the 'thirties of refugee artists from Europe. Many came as a direct result of the rise of Nazism in Germany and for some, like Mondrian and Moholy-Nagy, Britain was only a staging post, so to speak, on their way to the United States. The influence of those who did stay for a longer period - Kokoschka, Schwitters, Gabo, to mention a few - is difficult to assess but there is little doubt that some of their work proved an inspiration to certain British artists, although not, it would seem, as inspirational as it did to American artists in the 'forties and 'fifties.

By the end of the 'thirties the scene was changing. The Surrealist group, which had been unsystematically organised, found a certain coherence in its fight against both Hitler and Neville Chamberlain's appeasement. The Artists' International Association's Art for the People exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and the London Gallery's Living Art in England, both in 1939, showed different factions of the avant-garde in the same exhibition - a common front against the establishment, if not a particularly unified front. And in Cork Street, the three galleries which had a certain understanding between themselves - Mayor's, Guggenheim's, and the London - were hatching an enterprise which would come to fruition after the interruption of war.

The growing confidence of the British avant-garde led to a series of discussions centred around the Cork Street galleries and involving Peggy Guggenheim, Roland Penrose, Herbert Read and others. The plan seems to have been to establish a museum in London devoted to contemporary art, something along the lines of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Though the Tate Gallery touched upon this area, it was felt that a more vigorous and adventurous course should be taken.

Not only should this proposed museum exhibit contemporary art but it should provide a forum for artists to meet and discuss their work, rather as the cafés of Paris or the bars of New York provided such a forum. The venture took on the working title of Museum of Living Arts and it appears that Peggy Guggenheim's collection was initially to form the core of its acquisitions. Herbert Read's role was as advisor and it is possible that had the project actually been put into practice, he would have become its director. Indeed, it appears that the plans were so far advanced that actual premises somewhere in Soho had been settled upon.¹²

In 1939 Peggy Guggenheim left for Paris in order to purchase works of modern art from a list compiled by Read, Duchamp and Petra van Doesburg, possibly with the proposed London Museum in mind, but there she became active in sending European artists to the United States. With the outbreak of war in September she closed her London gallery. The war virtually stopped the artistic life of Europe and certainly completely ended the plans for London's Museum of Living Arts. By 1941 Miss Guggenheim was back in New York and the following year she opened a gallery/museum there called Art of this Century. This enterprise marked the final withdrawal of her interest in the London venture.

No one knew how little life in Britain would change with the end of the war. There might be no destruction by bombs but the wartime economy continued. For artists it was a barren time; as Joseph Rykwert commented: "we tend to forget now how deadening and philistine that mood was."¹³ Yet despite the hardships of a war-ravaged nation,

¹² Nigel Henderson interviewed by Dorothy Morland, 17 August 1976, p.1. ICA Archives.

¹³ Joseph Rykwert. Letter to the author. 11 May 1984.

there was, certainly before 1947, an air of optimism. The discussions which had taken place before the war concerning London's Museum of Living Arts were taken up again early in 1946. The name of the scheme changed; it was now the Museum of Modern Art and, perhaps due to immediate post-war optimism, the involvement was greater. Read was there, as were Penrose and Mesens, all of whom had been involved to some degree or another before 1939. But there were also a number of other influential figures who were eager to see the scheme take shape, amongst them Eric Gregory, the founder of the publishing firm Lund Humphries and director of the Burlington Magazine, the writer and critic Robert Melville, and Edward Clark, head of BBC music programmes.¹⁴

From the start, the organisers were agreed that the scheme should be independent of the Arts Council, the British Council and the Tate Gallery, and that one of its central functions would be to provide a forum for artists - an idea which had been fundamental before the war. Herbert Read wrote that the existing organisations did not provide

"...a foyer, a hearth around which the artist and his audience can join together in unanimity, in fellowship, in mutual understanding and inspiration."¹⁵

¹⁴ The others involved in the first post-war meeting on 30 January 1946 were Jacques Brunius, the French film-maker, J.M. Richards, editor of Architectural Review, the poet Geoffrey Grigson, G.M. Hoellering, who ran the Academy Cinema in Oxford Street, and the art critic Douglas Cooper, although he left the committee sometime during the year.

¹⁵ Quoted in 'A History of the Institute of Contemporary Arts Compiled from its Archival Material 1946-1968, with an introduction by John Sharkey'. Unpublished manuscript. ICA Archives, pp. 3-4.

The first meeting on 30 January 1946 was held at the offices of the London Gallery, now moved to Brook Street, with its director, Mesens, formally presenting the scheme. By May, the new title, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, had been adopted and Read, who had returned from the United States sometime that year, was adamant that the Institute should neither take on a permanent collection of works of art nor rely on the patronage of wealthy dilettentes, like the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In the climate of optimism, new members joined the committee¹⁶ until by the beginning of 1947, the total was seventeen. Frequent meetings were held at the London Gallery offices for the following two years as the scheme began to take shape. Targets were set: five hundred subscriptions at £100 each; premises for a theatre, library, concert hall and gallery were sought; financial backing from industry and committed individuals was envisaged; a programme was put forward to include exhibitions of art since 1918 and the visual implications of town planning, concerts of modern music and a film week devoted to Surrealism. The first year's expenditure was expected to be £20,000 and Read appealed for subscriptions as well as setting forth the aims of the Institute in a letter to The Times, printed on 26 June 1947. These aims had been formulated in committee meetings during the previous year and a half, and essentially they were three in number:

"The new Institute should be co-operative by bringing the different art forms together and attempt to establish a common ground for a progressive movement in art.

It should be experimental by exhibiting works of art, performing concerts and producing plays that more commercially minded concerns would ignore.

¹⁶ Frederic Ashton, Jack Beddington, Alex Comfort, Michel St. Denis, Ivo Jarosy, Peter Watson, and W.E. William.

And finally it should be creative by not confining itself to the ready-made in art but call on artists of all kinds in the search for new forms of expression."¹⁷

It is difficult to understand such euphoria at a time of such economic, social, and cultural deprivation, yet amid rationing and the national debt, amid the black market and the consumer goods marked 'export only' which the British shopper was not allowed to buy, there was an optimism which the release from war had brought and which the new Labour government sought desperately, but ultimately unsuccessfully, to exploit. It had become apparent to people during the war "that 'culture' was one of the things for which they were fighting"¹⁸ and this was given some substance in 1945 when the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts, originally organised in 1940, became the Arts Council. In 1947 the scheme for the Festival of Britain was announced and the cultural horizon looked positively rosy. To this, one must add the ICA. Early in 1948 a sympathetic and optimistic piece about the Institute was published in Vogue :

"It aspires to bring together in a grand synthesis the whole artistic urge of the day, and launch it, disciplined, co-ordinated, clear of its goal, conscious of its mission, upon a tremendous creative adventure ... One has to imagine a great building somewhere in London, large enough to house thousands of members. There would be galleries for exhibition of English and foreign paintings and sculpture; rooms where debates on all subjects touching the arts could be held; a theatre for presenting plays... a concert hall... a ballet stage... and a

¹⁷ A History of the Institute of Contemporary Arts ...op.cit, p.6.

¹⁸ Robert Hewison In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945 - 1960.
London, 1981, p.6.

cinema... In addition to these amenities, it would have a department concerned with inventing art forms suitable for broadcasting, an extensive library, some chamber where poets and philosophers could read their works to each other or to any person interested, a publishing department and a place where architects ... could be made aware of the other arts."¹⁹

At about the time Collis was, as G.K. Chesterton wrote, succumbing to "the noble temptation to see too much in everything",^{19A} the bubble of optimism was about to burst. The British economy finally gave way to the crisis which had threatened since the end of the war and the country's true position was suddenly and abruptly brought home. The ration remained at two pints of milk, two loaves of bread, one and a half ounces of cheese, and so on, per week. In fact, in March 1949 the meat ration was actually reduced from one shilling and six pence to eight pence. Concomitant with this was the threat that the Soviet Union might exploit the European weakness and in that same year, 1948, the Marshall Plan was born to aid a devastated Europe menaced, as the United States believed, by the spectre of Communism. The mood shifted from optimism to melancholy and "... the symbol of this mood is London," wrote Cyril Connolly,²⁰

"now the largest, saddest and dirtiest of great cities, with its miles of unpainted half-inhabited houses, its chopless chop houses, its beerless pubs, its once vivid quarters losing all personality, its squares bereft of elegance, its dandies in exile, its antiques in America, its shops full of junk, bunk and tomorrow, its crowds mooning around the stained green wicker of

¹⁹ Maurice Collis 'Art Patronage - Modern Style' Vogue Vol. 104 No.2, February 1948, p.97.

²⁰ Cyril Connolly, Editorial for Horizon . April 1947. Quoted in Hewison, op.cit., p.14.

^{19A} G.K.Chesterton. Robert Browning. London. 1903.

the cafeterias in their shabby raincoats, under a sky permanently dull and lowering like a metal dish."

The cultural backlash of the changing mood was succinctly put by T.S. Eliot:

"We can assert with some confidence that our own period is one of decline; that the standards of culture are lower than they were fifty years ago and that the evidences of this decline are visible in every department of human activity."²¹

The ICA did not escape this loss of optimism; when Read's previously mentioned letter appeared in The Times, George Bernard Shaw replied that hygiene was considerably more important to the nation than art and so the Institute should become a body engaged in public hygiene and not "studio small talk and fine art scholarship."²²

The problem of finding suitable premises remained a thorn in the side of the ICA's organising committee. In September 1947 a lengthy meeting was held which faced up to the disappointing response to membership as well as the criticism that the ICA was rapidly becoming a "hole in the wall affair". In an attempt to alleviate some of these problems, Herbert Read suggested collaborating with the Anglo-French Art Centre. Though this proposal was immediately rejected, since the autonomy of the ICA would be surrendered and perhaps never regained, Read's idea was certainly novel.

²¹ T.S. Eliot, Towards the Definition of Culture, London 1948.

Quoted in Hewison, ibid., pp. 4-5.

²² Noted in 'A History of the Institute of Contemporary Arts...' op.cit., p.8.

The Anglo-French centre was in the old St. John's Wood art school and was established as "... a combined cultural centre and 'free academy' in the style of the Academie de la Grande Chaumière in Montparnasse"²³ by Alfred Rozelaar Green. It attracted to it a number of important avant-garde figures such as Fernand Léger, Oscar Dominguez, André Lhote, and Tristan Tzara, who lectured there. Also there was a printmaking workshop and a painting studio. In the late 'forties the Anglo-French Centre provided something akin to a Parisian café environment and though it attracted some leading avant-garde figures as well as some of the younger British artists and critics, it was "... a ramshackle affair... which depended on Alf Green's very personal and knowledgeable but slightly scatty direction."²⁴ The people who went there in its halcyon days used the slogan 'Montparnasse in St. John's Wood' and Eduardo Paolozzi called it the "Anglo-Art French Centre". It was oriented to the European avant-garde, as witness its name and its visitors, even the British ones like Toni del Renzio, who remembers lecturing "... on Surrealism and related issues... [and] of some discussion about Trotsky and Breton."²⁵ Of all the European avant-garde manifestations, French Surrealism provided the major point of contact for many British artists. This movement was, after all, the latest in the procession of modern art movements and although its genesis was in the early 'twenties, its impact upon British art was not felt, as we have seen, until the middle and late 'thirties. Thus for many British artists, the war interrupted their appreciation and involvement in the most avant-garde of avant-garde movements and it is not surprising that many of them wished to pick up the threads when the war ended.

²³ Edward Wright, *op.cit.*, p.1.

²⁴ Joseph Rykwert, *op.cit.*,

²⁵ Toni del Renzio. Footnote added 19 March 1984 to transcription of interview with the author, 23 February 1984.

Even after the war, Paris existed as a magnet for the avant-garde and, as we shall see, attracted to it many British artists. For those who did not go to the French capital, and even for those who had returned, the Anglo-French and the emerging ICA provided focus for their interests. A number of people involved with the ICA venture had been connected with pre-war British Surrealism: Roland Penrose most directly but also Herbert Read, Jacques Brunius, E.L.T. Mesens, and Peter Watson. Penrose had been, to all intents and purposes, the leader of the pre-war Surrealist group in England which came out of the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition; Read had been one of its chief apologists, whilst Brunius was assistant director to Bunuel on L'age d'or and was now planning film scenarios based on the work of certain ignored English novelists - Sheridan Le Fanu, Arthur Machen, and so on. Mesens, whom Breton called "our silent friend", had been deeply involved with Surrealism in Belgium before the war and had collaborated with Magritte on the journal Oesophage; and Peter Watson was a collector and connoisseur who had taken Dali on his first trip to the United States and was very friendly with many avant-garde artists in Paris and London. All these men participated in the organisation of the ICA and by June 1948, with the exceptions of Mesens and Brunius, who sat on the Advisory Committee, were members of the newly elected Management Committee, formed after criticism that the ICA was drifting from its original aims and that the organising committee was too large and contained too much 'dead wood'.

Still without premises, the organising committee planned an exhibition which would give both some tangibility to the Institute as well as advertising it and possibly attracting more members. Forty Years of Modern Art opened in February 1948 in the basement of the Academy Cinema in Oxford Street, hired out to the ICA at £100 a week

by G.M. Hoellering, the manager of the cinema and a member of the Institute's Committee. It was "... put on in a rather ambiguous way," recalled Roland Penrose,

"because we wanted to integrate ourselves with some people. We were starting from blank and without prostituting ourselves we needed to find some allies. And I think we thought those allies were the people who had collected pictures of the sort we respected. We went around to all our friends and all the collectors we knew, some who weren't particularly our friends, and we got together a pretty good exhibition."²⁶

The show, safe enough in that it included all recognised painters - Kandinsky, Picasso, Miro, Ernst, Gris, Klee, and so on - received mixed reviews. The critic for the New York Times however, posed a more pertinent question than asking whether the show was good or bad:

"... will such displays antagonise and bewilder rather than attract the broad effective patronage which art [in London] so desperately needs?"²⁷

This was answered by public apathy. Although some 16,000 people saw the exhibition, the membership drive was disappointing. All in all, the show cost the ICA over £700.

Throughout 1948 the Institute continued to mount events - poetry readings by Dylan Thomas, T.S. Eliot, C.Day Lewis, W.H. Auden and others, lectures on modern architecture by Sigfried Giedion, music by

²⁶Quoted in 'A History of the Institute of Contemporary Arts...' op.cit., pp. 13-14

²⁷New York Times, 4 April 1948. Quoted in *ibid.*, p.15.

Berg, Stravinsky, and Dallapiccola - and at the end of the year Herbert Read announced the opening of another major exhibition, Forty Thousand Years of Modern Art, intended

"... to make a confrontation of modern and primitive art. We do not intend to show superficial comparisons but rather to point out and make clear to the public some of the sources of inspirations in the most important trends in painting and sculpture since the beginning of this century."²⁸

As with Forty Years of Modern Art, Forty Thousand Years of Modern Art was held in the Academy Cinema basement gallery and featured a number of important works, not least Picasso's Demoiselles d'Avignon, which could only be exhibited by knocking a hole in the gallery wall to get it in. Picasso's work had been shown publically in England immediately prior to the war when Penrose had arranged for Guernica to be exhibited in London, Oxford and Leeds; then Penrose had written:

"During the fortnight that the exhibition was open more than 12,000 entrances were registered. The misgivings of those who imagined that Picasso's work would mean nothing to the working classes have proved false."²⁹

But now, in the dreary London of 1948, the public seemed less enthusiastic and the old prejudices against modern art came through. Penrose recalled:

²⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.16

²⁹ Roland Penrose in London Bulletin, No.6, October 1938. Quoted in Greutzner, op.cit., p.25.

"... the idea for a poster [for the exhibition] was to put one of the Cycladic statues from the Ashmolean Museum in the exhibition next door to a great Giacometti nude, a tall thin figure which did have a considerable resemblance to it. The curators of the Ashmolean said they would rather see themselves dead than their beautiful Cycladic sculpture compared to a piece of modern nonsense."³⁰

Some people were more enthusiastic however, which boded well for the ICA. An impartial observer, Donald Holms, then working on the London development plan as a researcher, recalled, "...I was intrigued... to see such a panorama of pieces, all the way from the Paleolithic to rather odd looking works that were more contemporary to the time"³¹ and his interest led him to visit the ICA when the Dover Street premises opened. And Robert Melville, already associated with the Institute, writing in The Studio, claimed that Forty Thousand Years of Modern Art "... was the most brilliantly staged exhibition seen in London since the war."³²

During 1949 and early 1950 the number of activities organised by the ICA increased. Some were connected with the Forty Thousand Years... exhibition - the discussions in January and March 1949 on 'The Relation Between Primitive and Modern Art', for example. Others took in wider subjects: a forum on 'The Function of Art in Society' and 'The Industrial Designer and Public Taste'. In April 1950 a meeting was held to discuss 'The Functions and Aims of an Institute of

³⁰ Quoted in 'A History of the Institute of Contemporary Arts...' op.cit., p.17.

³¹ Donald Holms interviewed by the author. 9 June 1982.

³² Robert Melville 'Exhibitions of the Institute and Notes on New Premises at Dover Street' The Studio Vol. 141 April 1951, p.99.

Contemporary Arts', chaired by the editor of Architectural Review, J.M. Richards. Not long after this the premises at Dover Street were leased and then, at the end of the year, they were officially opened. "I remember it as being a very happy, effervescent evening." said the future director Dorothy Morland of that opening.

"Everybody was in good spirits and looking very nice... I was one of the modest helpers running around with glasses and trays and all that sort of thing. But I do remember Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson stalking in with two beautiful glass bricks full of coloured waters and dumping them down as much as to say, 'here they are, take them or leave them.' It was their idea of decorating the bar, and I think they had some coloured bottles too..."³³

Nigel Henderson had in fact introduced Paolozzi to Jane Drew whilst she was working on the conversion of 17-18 Dover Street, and she had asked Paolozzi if he would like to decorate the bar, an opportunity which, with Henderson's help, he jumped at. Henderson recalled,

"We found some sort of resins - setting resins - and we poured all kinds of marbles and sleeping tablets and I don't know what into the bottles... I seem to remember he [Paolozzi] did a kind of scarlet scheme around the bar, with spots - black spots."³⁴

Henderson's help in this enterprise was to assist Paolozzi in the making of the bottles at his ex-workshop in Bursem Street, Bethnal Green, which Paolozzi was then using. But in the longer term it was the bar itself which was to be more influential than any workshops.

³³Dorothy Morland 'A Memoir': Unpublished manuscript. ICA Archives.

³⁴Nigel Henderson interviewed by Dorothy Morland, op.cit., p.1.

Henderson succinctly wrote:

"I gave him a hand with the bar, which for people like myself, who like to drink alongside all that talk, became quite a meeting place. Probably an important incubator for the Independent Group."³⁵

Sometime in 1950 the Anglo-French Art Centre was forced to close. There were a number of reasons but chief amongst them seems to have been that "... the well-to-do neighbours objected to the noisy festivities which took place from time to time (as on the Quatorze Juillet)."³⁶ Some of the members and students met to see if they could find other premises but nothing materialised. It was about this time that the ICA opened and many of the people from the Anglo-French migrated there. The ICA provided

"... a meeting place for young artists, architects and writers who would not otherwise have had a place of contact, London having neither a cafe' life like that of Paris nor exhibition openings such as in New York."³⁷

Most important in this respect was the ICA bar, frequented a good deal in the early days, where, as Robert Melville neatly put it,

"... modern art, music and poetry can regularly be seen and heard and discussed with the artists, poets and composers who are creating it [and where the] membership is the nucleus of a well-informed public for the arts..."³⁸

³⁵ Nigel Henderson. Letter to the author. 20 February 1983.

³⁶ Edward Wright. *op.cit.*, p.1.

³⁷ Lawrence Alloway 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) *Pop Art*. London, 1966, p.29.

³⁸ Robert Melville, *op.cit.*, p.98

Perhaps one of the most important facts about the ICA was that it was the only place in London for those involved in contemporary arts to meet. A little later the Café Torino, on the corner of Old Compton Street and Dean Street, or the French pub in Soho, the Café Mozart or the York Minster became focus points, but the ICA remained paramount; it was the original. It is impossible for one who was never there to appreciate fully the atmosphere, but for many people it was a congenial and intimate place. Sandy Wilson recalled that

"...it was quite a good place to say, we'll meet in the evening, if we're going to do something; just meet in the bar. [There was] usually a good exhibition on and you'd bump into people like Peter Watson, who was... one of the organisers there - a very interesting man. And I suppose as a general result of the small talk, getting to know people, one got more and more involved, drawn into it."³⁹

And it did get the reputation of an 'in-place', whether this was nurtured by the membership or not. "Most people in our line of business," recalled Thomas Stevens, "who we knew who were aiming to do anything or be anybody, could be met there."⁴⁰

The friendliness, the intimacy and the hurly-burly - probably all heightened by the size of the premises - grew to be something desirable in the ICA. Without these qualities it is most unlikely that the spirit of the Institute would have been exploited. But these qualities did not appear without reason; the membership was in part responsible but without the programme of events the place would most

³⁹ Colin St. John Wilson interviewed by the author, 9 May 1983.

⁴⁰ Thomas Stevens interviewed by the author. 15 April 1983.

likely have become a disorganised and not very long-lived talking shop.

After Dover Street opened, there was a burst of activity; the number of lectures, discussions, readings, and so on, increased to three or four a week, and the variety was enormous. A visitor to the ICA in February 1951 for example, could see paintings by Matta Echaurren, attend lectures by J.P. Hodin on contemporary art, see a variety of films from The Childhood of Maxim Gorky to Looking at Sculpture (if they went to the French Institute in Queensbury Place, since the ICA did not have a cinema), listen to Ravel's L'Enfant et les Sortilèges, or readings from new poets, or attend a more informal evening of ballads and sketches by Selma Vaz Dias. And this was not the complete programme for the month. Such a wide variety of events required organisation which was not easy in the restrictive premises, and since 1949 the day to day running of the Institute had been placed in the hands of a Director. This was Ewan Phillips, though in 1951 he stepped down and Dorothy Morland took over. She was to remain the Director until 1968, when the ICA eventually moved its premises to Carlton House Terrace.

The programme of events for 1951 showed at once the strength and the dilemma of the ICA. On the one hand there was a desire to present the work of artists, composers, writers and so on, which would not normally be presented. Admirable though this was, it was a double-edged sword. It cut through the monopoly which the accepted artists had and opened the way for the less well known, but on the other hand, it cut the life line of the Institute because the less well known drew fewer people, and exhibitions - like that of Matta - were virtually ignored by the press. In fact, the only journal in the early 'fifties which regularly reviewed ICA events was Art News and

Review . In February 1951 for example, Lawrence Alloway wrote about the Matta exhibition and, in the same month, advertisements appeared for ICA membership.

The other problem which faced the ICA was its position in relation to the commercial galleries. Since patronage during the 1950s was somewhat limited, and the commercial galleries provided much of what patronage there was, the ICA appeared as some sort of rival to them. True, the galleries were not much interested in contemporary art but the pre-war British avant-garde had done a good job in publicising twentieth century developments. Immediately after the war the Victoria and Albert showed Picasso and Matisse, the Tate Braque and Rouault, and the Lefevre Gallery staged Bonnard and his French Contemporaries . Some of the smaller galleries supported British artists: Robert Adams, William Gear, Alan Davie, Rogér Hilton, and Peter Lanyon all exhibited on a number of occasions in the late 'forties and early 'fifties at Gimpel Fils, William Scott showed at the Hanover Gallery between 1953 and 1956, and Patrick Heron, Victor Pasmore and Bryan Winter exhibited regularly at the Redfern. As well as this, there was the more settled Penwith Society at St. Ives, established in 1949, which exhibited work by some of the older artists as well as Pasmore, Heron and Frost, whilst the British Council and the Arts Council began to show Scott, Gear and Hilton. Indeed, as the 'fifties progressed, the Arts Council and the British Council began deliberately to exclude "... representatives from the Royal Academy, Royal British Sculptors, Royal Watercolour Society, etc. [There was] a gradual emasculation of these various Royal societies after the war by the Arts/British Council's increasing promotion of avant-garde art..."⁴¹ This was a turn-around which in part challenged the role

⁴¹ Adrian Lewis 'British Avant Garde Painting 1945-1956. Part II' Artscribe No.35. July 1982, p.16, n.3.

of the ICA. But the Institute, with its permanent, if cramped, rooms, its congenial atmosphere, its enormously varied programme, and, above all, the enthusiasm of its staff, helpers and members, was more than able to hold its own in the face of growing competition for the limited audience. The

"...bias may have been slightly towards revolutionary surrealism, but [the ICA] always attempted catholicity" ⁴²

and it was this which gave it a head start over its competitors, who tended not to patronise anything which was not received opinion in some official quarter. ⁴³

One of the most interesting innovations made at the ICA was the open forum, where members could discuss topics of concern with a panel of prominent experts or interested parties. This was an activity which the galleries could not indulge in and during the late 'forties and early 'fifties, these meetings became very popular. They had begun in September 1949 with a discussion about 'Painting, Sculpture and the Architect'. By November the title had changed to 'Forum for Discussion'. In March 1950, with a forum called 'The Strange Case of Abstract Art', the critic and art historian David Sylvester first took part, and by the time the Dover Street premises were in use, the title had again changed to 'Public View', with the discussion centring around a particular exhibition. "The aim," Toni del Renzio remembered,

⁴²Michael Compton *Pop Art*. London, 1970, p.44.

⁴³This criticism was also levelled at the ICA by Joseph Rykwert, *op.cit.*, who also said the ICA "...was from the outset stuffy and bureaucratised, and found the ways of artists rather difficult to cope with."

"was to borrow two or three pictures from the exhibition in the evening and have them there... There would be, perhaps, some prepared speakers and then open to general discussion from the floor." ⁴⁴

David Sylvester, who was prominent on the ICA exhibitions sub-committee, became instrumental in organising 'Public View' and later, from January 1952, its successor, 'Points of View', a series of meetings which ranged from discussions on Surrealism and expressionism to one on American and British humour. At the first of the Points of View sessions, on the work of Francis Bacon, Sylvester remembered Herbert Read proclaim "It's not painting!" ⁴⁵, and this to Sylvester, who greatly admired the artist. Similarly, when Wilfredo Lam's work was discussed, Patrick Heron referred to it as "Old Black Joe's bogies." ⁴⁶ They were, after all, points of view, but Sylvester, del Renzio and others found comments like these hard to take since they smacked of a parochialism which, idealistically, the ICA should be above.

As well as such unacceptable opinions from within, there was the audience at the 'Public View' and 'Points of View' discussions, some of whom took up a great deal of time talking about very little. David Sylvester spoke about too much time being taken up by "stupid people" ⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Toni del Renzio interviewed by the author. 23 February 1984.

⁴⁵ David Sylvester in a telephone conversation with the author 6 August 1984. The 'Points of View' discussion, which took place on 15 January 1952, was about exhibitions currently being given by Balthus and Francis Bacon. The 'panel' consisted of Michael Ayrton, Colin McInnes, Robert Melville, Angus Wilson, and Herbert Read. David Sylvester was the chairman.

⁴⁶ Toni del Renzio 'Pioneers and Trendies' Art and Artists No. 209, February 1984. p.25. The discussion was held on 17 April 1952 with W.G.Archer, John Minton, Benedict Nicholson, Peter Watson and J.Z.Young.

⁴⁷ David Sylvester, op.cit.

and William Turnbull said it was like "amateur night" and a good deal of irritation was felt when interruptions were made.⁴⁸ In fact, Turnbull recalled one lady who attended ICA discussions "... who insisted on relating whatever was being discussed to the Bauhaus"⁴⁹

Thus, early in the ICA's life there was dissatisfaction with the direction sometimes taken by the programme and the open discussions seemed to highlight this. By mid-1952 this dissatisfaction had manifested itself in a splinter group of young men and women who were, not long after, to become known as the Independent Group. But before they emerged, mention must be made of the biggest national event of 1951: the Festival of Britain. Its influence, the reaction against it, and the opportunities it afforded, were to have a significant bearing upon events at the ICA.

The Festival of Britain was, despite the propaganda of Beaverbrook newspapers to the contrary and despite the gloomy weather, a popular success; "it did bring back colour and a little gaiety, in spite of economic troubles, re-armament and the Korean War."⁵⁰ It was also a national event and not, as Londoners seemed to think, strictly confined to the South Bank. Although it was geared towards Britain's achievements in science, technology and design, it was also the intention of the organisers that it should be a cultural event, so that some seventy painters and sculptors received commissions and the chances for designers were even greater. It was a mark of the austerity, however, that the only remuneration that the Arts Council

⁴⁸ William Turnbull. Notes from a conversation with the author. 23 February 1983.

⁴⁹ William Turnbull in conversation with Peter Karpinski. 7 March 1977. Noted in Peter Karpinski 'The Independent Group 1952-1955, and the Relationship of the Independent Group's Discussions to the Work of Hamilton, Paolozzi and Turnbull 1952-1957.' Unpublished BA. Dissertation. Leeds University, 1977. p.57. n.31.

⁵⁰ Robert Hewison, op.cit., p.55.

could offer to their commissioned painters - apart from the Kudos - was free canvas.

Throughout the country, though especially in London, there were Festival spin-offs, and the ICA was not to be bypassed. Two exhibitions were organised during the Festival period: the first, in July and August, was Growth and Form, in retrospect the most important of the two; the second, in August and September, was Ten Decades - A Review of British Taste 1851-1951, more obviously in keeping with the Festival theme and a much larger and more conventional show, containing some two hundred and fifty works. But Growth and Form took the headlines, bringing more praise and more controversy.

"This is an important exhibition", Peter Reyner Banham wrote, "an exciting one and a difficult one... All this is extremely interesting in its own right, but, as one die-hard aesthete was heard to enquire, 'What has it got to do with Art?'"⁵¹ What indeed? There were eighty-five exhibits in Growth and Form, some photographs, some cine film, some drawings, some models; they included atomic particle traces, crystal structures, chromosomes and cell divisions, marine larvae, skeletal structures, plant forms, and more, presented on a free-standing frame system as well as on the walls, ceiling and floor. The presentation intrigued one reviewer, who wrote of the opening night:

"London had an exhibition in the dark last night - at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Dover Street. Guests, at the opening of the exhibition called Growth and Form, saw shapes

⁵¹ Peter Reyner Banham 'The Shape of Everything' Art News and Review Vol.3, No.12, 14 July 1951, p.2.

and forms move on screens placed on the ceiling or on the floor. Projected on the ceiling was the drama of crystal formation; on another screen, sea urchin's eggs divided themselves. Drawings and photographs of leg muscles, hands, an octopus, a radish leaf, decorated the walls... Cocktails were served to guests in the dark".⁵²

The inspiration for the exhibition was D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's book On Growth and Form, first published in 1916 and reprinted in a new edition in 1942. This book had been widely consumed by the avant-garde between the wars and it helped to substantiate the notion "that there were fundamental proportions and rhythms inherent in all forms of life,"⁵³ a notion especially meaningful to the constructivists. The organiser of the exhibition, Richard Hamilton, had been introduced to the book by Nigel Henderson and, indirectly, by Eduardo Paolozzi. Apparently, Hamilton did not know the book. "I was very excited by it," he recalled.

"Since I was interested in exhibition design and was dabbling in the media and doing odd jobs for exhibitions commercially - I was making models and all sorts of things like that - I said quite casually to Nigel, 'We could make a great theme for an exhibition', and Nigel said, 'Why don't we do it?' and things followed from that."⁵⁴

The relationship between Hamilton, Henderson and Paolozzi, and their growing involvement with the ICA, is interesting not only for its own sake but also because it sheds light upon the future

⁵² Evening Standard, 11 July 1951.

⁵³ Charles Harrison, op.cit., p.282

⁵⁴ Richard Hamilton. Edited version of an interview with Dorothy Morland, ICA Archives. No date, p.1.

infrastructure of the Independent Group. Hamilton had been at the Royal Academy Schools before the war and for a short time afterward; in 1946 he was expelled for "not profiting from the instruction being given in the painting school" and after some military service, he applied to the Slade School. About this, he wrote: "William Coldstream interviewed me; he regarded my expulsion from the R.A. as an excellent recommendation and I was accepted."⁵⁵ At the Slade he met Nigel Henderson, who had been there since 1945. Henderson's background was to be a rich source of stimulus for Hamilton, for not only did he introduce him to D'Arcy Thompson's On Growth and Form but also to a variety of other things, not least photography and Surrealism, an interest in science, natural history and ethnological museums, and, through Roland Penrose, to Duchamp's Green Box.

Before the war, Henderson had been in the midst of a creative milieu that included Julian Bell and Duncan Grant, Basil Wright, W.H. Auden, Brecht, Dylan Thomas, the scientists J.D. Bernal and Norman Pirie, Max Ernst and Peggy Guggenheim, and a host of others. Much of this was through his mother who, amongst other things, managed the Guggenheim Jeune Gallery in Cork Street from its opening in 1938 until it folded the following year. After the war, spent flying in bombers, and then a nervous breakdown - which he saw as experiencing a "rebirth" - he enrolled at the Slade. "I found the Slade a joke," he recalled, "...kind of provincial arty... and fearfully out of whack with the atom-smashing world. There seemed to be a good deal of genteel posing and comfy bohemian twaddle."⁵⁶ But at the Slade he met Eduardo Paolozzi, who had been a student there since 1944, when the school was in Oxford, having been evacuated from London. This meeting

⁵⁵Richard Hamilton Collected Words 1953-1982 London 1982, p.10.

⁵⁶Nigel Henderson, Unpublished letter. Quoted in Nigel Henderson. Photographs, Collages, Paintings. Kettle's Yard Gallery, Cambridge, 1977. No page numbers.

and the subsequent friendship was to result in future collaborations fundamental to their own development and to the direction the Independent Group would take. "He was only twenty," wrote Henderson about meeting Paolozzi in 1945,

"and apart from minor concessions to art school artiness (big meerschaum pipe, abattoir boots, obligatory duffle coat) there was no arty presumption in the mind but a great appetite for knowledge and experience from whatever quarter it could be wrung. He seemed to understand with formidable clarity that art was not to be derived constantly from art in polite circles but re-sensed and fused from the enormous mass of material (whatever you could digest) from the specific informational cornucopias of our time. And he had a formidable digestive apparatus."⁵⁷

Paolozzi and Henderson spent much of their time at the Slade attending lectures in other parts of London University, going to the cinema and to museums; "they believed that art was not the exclusive preserve of museums and that visually exciting objects could also be seen in factories, hardware stores, and ethnographic collections."⁵⁸ In 1947 Paolozzi left for Paris furnished with letters of introduction to some of the leading Surrealists, arranged by Nigel Henderson's mother. Henderson himself visited Paolozzi there on a number of occasions but back at the Slade, Richard Hamilton now became his "gossiping companion."

Also at the Slade during this period was another artist who later

⁵⁷Nigel Henderson 'An extensive response to a questionnaire set by Christopher Mullen' 25 January 1982. Quoted in Heads Eye Wyn, Norwich School of Art Gallery. Norwich 1982. pp.26-7

⁵⁸Frank Whitford 'Inside the Outsider' in Eduardo Paolozzi. Sculpture, Drawings, Collages and Graphics, Arts Council 1976, p.9.

became a central figure in the Independent Group. William Turnbull arrived at the school in 1946; he remained there only a few months before he visited Paris, where he eventually settled in 1948 until late 1949. "At the Slade, the only people Turnbull could find with whom meaningful discussion was possible were Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi."⁵⁹ Both Paolozzi and Turnbull had left the Slade before Hamilton arrived, but their influence via Nigel Henderson and his own eminence and connections, were to shape Hamilton's development, combined, of course, with Hamilton's own creativity and strength of character.

To return to Growth and Form then, its origin must be considered in relation to the post-war period at the Slade. According to one source,

"...quite early in their friendship, Hamilton suggested to Henderson that they should do an exhibition together and asked him for ideas. Henderson suggested seed dispersal as a possible subject and Hamilton did some aquatints on the theme. Then Paolozzi wrote from Paris about how keen his American friends were on D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's book Growth and Form. Henderson and Hamilton looked it up and agreed that it would be a suitable project. Paolozzi was asked to join in, but left after a short time. Henderson went on working on it for a few more months, but it became clear that it was 'Hamilton's drop' and having introduced him to Roland Penrose who put the idea up the ICA Committee, Henderson left too."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Richard Morphet, 'Commentary' in William Turnbull, Sculpture and Painting, Tate Gallery, London 1973. p.22.

⁶⁰ Anne Seymore 'Notes Towards a Chronology Based on a Conversation with the Artist' in Nigel Henderson, Paintings, Collages and Photographs. Anthony d'Offay, London, 1977. No page numbers.

Henderson confessed that Paolozzi "didn't really take to Hamilton's cut and dried, chapter and verse, intellectualizations..."⁶¹ and that he "...became... cramped by his totally able and explicit mode which suited him and increasingly declared itself."⁶² Thus, by May 1951, when Hamilton estimated the show would cost £200, with a further £20 for a trip to Paris to gather some of the exhibits, he was probably working on his own. The ICA was willing to invest the money since Hamilton had managed to obtain photographic services from the Metal Box Company, projectors from Rank, and some film development from Gaumont, therefore cutting expenditure. He worked on the exhibition from 1949 until it opened in July 1951, helping to stage the James Joyce exhibition in mid-1950 as well, because, as he remembered, he "was regarded as a sort of exhibition installer"⁶³ at the ICA.

For Hamilton himself, the exhibition provided a number of benefits. Apart from the opportunity to indulge in exhibition work and the reputation to be gained from a good show, it allowed him to meet scientists:

"I made some very valuable contacts with people I enjoyed meeting, like Bernal and Joseph Needham and Waddington. I had a reason to go to people like Katherine Lonsdale at University College; she gave a lot of material... Just about all the greatest scientific brains in England were open to me..."⁶⁴

The relationship between science and the arts was a theme of the

⁶¹ Nigel Henderson. Notes written to Peter Karpinski in relation to his B.A. dissertation. Peter Karpinski, op.cit.

⁶² Nigel Henderson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 7 July 1976. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop 1979, though not used in the film.

⁶³ Richard Hamilton. ICA Archives, op.cit., p.2.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.2-3.

exhibition which the ICA took up later in its programme. When Dr. Jacob Bronowski lectured on 2 August 1951 on 'The Shapes of Science in the Arts' - in connection with the Growth and Form show - he stressed that scientists and artists were similar in that they both looked at the world and, in fact, the division between them was an artificial one, made in people's minds.

During the time he was preparing the show, Hamilton had begun to use some of the material he had collected in his paintings and prints. His work prior to 1951 "had deliberately refrained from representing life or particularising space. Particular System [an oil painting of 1951] introduces both...",⁶⁵ a sea-urchin and a cell-like organism, and space is implied by the non-representational marks made and the colour. Another work of the same year, Heteromorphism, has biological forms produced by different printing techniques, and this work appeared on the cover of the Growth and Form catalogue. Another print, Self Portrait, again of 1951, shows

"Hamilton's mouth [as] a sea-urchin, his ear as a shell, his tie a flat worm regenerating after section, and one side of his face is defined by a bull-sperm. The Archimbollesque principle points to the fact that in all Hamilton's self-portraits the artist becomes one with the substance of his current obsessions..."⁶⁶

It is highly probable that when Turnbull returned from Paris in late 1949 he was introduced to Hamilton by Henderson. At any rate, he designed the poster for Growth and Form, a choice not inconsistent with the theme of the exhibition because of the nature of Turnbull's own work, "a fundamental element [of which was] that it should reflect

⁶⁵Richard Morphet Richard Hamilton, Tate Gallery, London, 1970, p.22.

⁶⁶Ibid., p.23.

the world of natural form and appearance in a manner wholly free of preconceptions as to meaning."⁶⁷

With Hamilton organising the show, Turnbull producing the poster, an exhibition committee which included Bronowski, Read, Lancelot Law Whyte, Joseph Needham, and Professor C.H. Waddington, a book connected with the show - Aspects of Form - published by Lund Humphries, and the whole affair opened by Le Corbusier, the prestige of Growth and Form was posited. Corbusier himself seems to have genuinely appreciated the exhibition. In a speech given at the opening, he said:

"The exhibition has moved me very deeply, for I found in it a unity of thought which gave me great pleasure..."⁶⁸

On the whole, the press reviewed the show favourably:

"The great charm of the Growth and Form exhibition... was that the eye might enjoy itself without having to call in the intellect to help it make qualitative judgements, as it must when the critic or conscious gallery-goer is confronted by a room full of works of human art."⁶⁹

And Joseph Rykwert thought the exhibition "was one of the few really valuable things" which happened at the ICA.⁷⁰ But there were criticisms; Toni del Renzio, who was critical of the Festival of Britain because of its "resolute rejection of an international

⁶⁷ Richard Morphet, 1973, op.cit., p.24.

⁶⁸ Le Corbusier. Translation of speech given at the opening of Growth and Form 3 July 1951. ICA Archives.

⁶⁹ Architectural Review Vol.110 no.657, October 1951, pp.273-4.

⁷⁰ Joseph Rykwert, op.cit.

character",⁷¹ thought Growth and Form was "very much a piece of Festival scientitis with Knobs on."⁷² On 12 September, when a discussion on the exhibition was held at the ICA, del Renzio criticized the show for

"being a bit naive in its attitude... that a lot that was looked at with wide eyed amazement simply came out of the very language that was used."⁷³

This upset quite a few people, notably Rykwert and Roland Penrose. The criticism was taken up again by Toni del Renzio in the autumn of 1953 when the Parallel of Life and Art exhibition was about to be staged, the outcome being his resignation from the ICA's Exhibition Committee. By this time, the Independent Group was well established, with both del Renzio and Hamilton as central participators.

Criticisms such as that levelled by del Renzio at Hamilton's Growth and Form were not so much an indication of future rivalries or internal bickering within the Group, but more a healthy lack of unanimity amongst a "loose association of unlike spirits."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Toni del Renzio 1984 (Art and Artists) op.cit., p.25.

⁷² Toni del Renzio interviewed by Peter Karpinski. 1 December 1976, in Peter Karpinski, op.cit., p.iii.

⁷³ Toni del Renzio, 1984 Interview with the author, op.cit..

⁷⁴ Richard Hamilton, 1982, op.cit., p.22.

2. 1952: the Genesis of the Independent Group

In January 1952 a questionnaire was enclosed with the ICA Bulletin which asked members to give their opinions about the Institute. The Bulletin, a programme of events issued every month, was itself one of the reasons for the appearance of the questionnaire since criticisms had been levelled at the form and content of ICA activities. The Management Committee had been at pains to air these criticisms ever since they had begun to surface during the previous year in the open discussions. As we have seen, there was some dissatisfaction with the open discussions, primarily on the basis that when the audience was invited to contribute, they invariably drifted away from the argument. The answers received in response to the questionnaire proved inconclusive, as answers to such wide-ranging issues will nearly always prove to be, but there were criticisms made in a number of the received responses that there was no direction in the open discussions. Although anonymous, it is quite likely that these criticisms came from the younger contingent of ICA members, as developments in the immediate future would prove.

The younger membership of the ICA - that is, members in their late twenties and early thirties - were already becoming disenchanted with the direction in which the Institute was moving. It is possible to see this disenchantment as being brought about because of the generation gap between some of the membership and the organisers of the ICA, since the interests of these different generations were not always compatible. Thus, the way in which the Institute operated, its general aims and its drift - reflected in the programme of events planned by the organisers - did not always meet with the approval of the younger members.

In some ways this was a reflection of wider issues. In the same way that the pre-war avant-garde had been antagonistic towards the cultural establishment of its day, so this post-war generation felt a certain resentment towards what they regarded as the establishment. The view that the ICA was a sort of microcosm of a wider disapprobation of the cultural hierarchy and that the opinions and actions of the ICA Management were representative of this hierarchy, is an oversimplistic one, but it has a certain germ of truth.

For the younger members, the ICA offered a place - the only place in London - to meet and discuss, a place that was lively and informal. But a number felt that the existing programme did little to add to this atmosphere and that the Institute was developing an élitist snobbery which was not acceptable to them, just as the pre-war avant-garde attacked the same élitist snobbery of which they were now being accused.

But to make an analogy between the younger generation of 1950 and that of 1930 would be misleading; both were ready to battle against established and unquestioned artistic values, and both were vociferous in their criticism, but the 1950 generation had experienced a war, which some of the 1930 generation had not, and the aftermath of the war was to be a time when their missed opportunities could be taken. The architect Alison Smithson spoke of the frustrations felt by her generation:

"...we were all the lost generation together; that is, the generation immediately ahead of us were coming back from the war, back to their lives before the war. There was just no room, there was too great a backlog in all walks of life for any of us to be let in and we were all just the people queuing up; and

while we were queuing we talked together, and that was the only common ground, the fact that we were all queuing to get into life, as it were."¹

And Mary Banham expressed the feelings when opportunities did open up:

"That post-war period was an extraordinarily vigorous, euphoric period when our whole generation had not been allowed to do the things it had wanted to do. It had two effects. We were kept back from the roles we might have been playing and the professions we might have been training for, but it had the effect of crystallising what we wanted to do afterwards. So that we came to this together knowing very much what we wanted out of the time and the fact that we had been held back made us run while we were doing it. At tremendous speed."²

Those who were causing Alison Smithson's queues and not allowing the younger generation to do what it wanted to do, were symbolized in the minds of this generation by the ICA Management. "All the bright young things", as Richard Hamilton called himself and his associates, "who habituated the ICA clubroom and drank coffee in the lunch hour... regarded [the ICA] as a rather fuddy-duddy organisation."³

What probably perturbed the younger men and women most was the set position of the cultural establishment and this unified them in taking a position against it. "The thing that I remember most about

¹ Alison Smithson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 1976/77? Unedited tape recording for the Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop 1979, though not used in the film.

² Mary Banham in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, Magda Cordell and John McHale, 30 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, ibid., though not used in the film.

³ Richard Hamilton The Impact of American Pop Culture in the Fifties. A talk broadcast by the BBC for the Open University. No date.

the binding influence of my friends and colleagues," recalled Richard Hamilton,

"was a kind of resentment of the idea best expressed in little anecdotes like when Victor Pasmore came up before a conscientious objection tribunal in the later stages of the war, having been offered a commission and rejected that, saying he was a conscientious objector. And Kenneth Clark sent a letter saying 'Victor Pasmore is one of the six best artists in England'; and as soon as he said 'the six best artists' you immediately knew who the five previous ones were: there was Henry Moore, John Piper, Ben Nicholson... and you could tick them off on your fingers and get to Victor Pasmore. And the idea that there was an establishment of this kind that could be so precise about what English art was, was an anathema to me..."⁴

Of the ICA 'establishment', it was Herbert Read who came in for the greatest criticism from the younger members. Peter Reyner Banham wrote, "we were... incredulous of the whole 'innocent eye' view of the artist at work. This was pretty well dogma down at the ICA, because it was the view of Sir Herbert Read, the seemingly perpetual President."⁵ And Alison Smithson recalled being "...violently against him" because of what she called his "aesthetic nonsense".⁶ Lawrence Alloway, who became Assistant Director of the ICA, was equally critical:

"... the establishment was, I suppose, represented by Herbert Read at that time. And what bugged me about Herbert Read was his

⁴ Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham. Soundtrack from Arts Council, op.cit.

⁵ Peter Reyner Banham. Draft script for Arts Council, ibid., p.4.

⁶ Alison Smithson interviewed by the author, 22 November 1982.

idealism. He was committed to a very idealistic aesthetic in which high tasks were assumed to be proper for art and so much got neglected... It was kind of unfair of me to do it because he was always very nice and helpful to me but there was ingratitude there all the same... But there really wasn't much else to attack. What would one attack? R.H. Wilenski or something?...
... Herbert Read was really all there was." ⁷

Alloway's idea that there ought to be something to attack, was an attitude which certainly prevailed. The antagonism towards Read, and Penrose also, was not personal; rather it was putting into terms of individuals one of the dichotomies of the ICA: that here was an Institute founded to further the cause of contemporary art which was run by men who were no longer considered to be of the avant-garde. This state of affairs was brought about by the war which caused a hiatus in the progression of avant-garde ambitions. Thus, by the time the ICA was firmly ensconced in Dover Street it was, the younger generation believed, controlled by an 'old guard' whose ideas, concepts and values were rooted in a pre-war world.

The proposition that they "...wanted to see the old discourse on art resumed after the war" ⁸ has some justification, for one has only to scan the programme of those early years to find a sort of institutionalizing of pre-war avant-garde Surrealism; in 1951 for example, there was the screening of Un Chien Andalou, an exhibition devoted to Humphrey Jennings, a lecture by Paul Eluard, and a staging of Sartre's The Flies. It would be far too simplistic and quite misleading however, to say that the Institute's primary aim was a

⁷ Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 25 May 1977. Partly unedited tape recording and partly soundtrack from Arts Council, op.cit..

⁸ Geoffrey Holroyd. Letter to the author, 23 April 1983.

resurrection of pre-war ideals; the founding fathers were much too generous and open-minded to impose such a restrictive dogma but for many of them, the pre-war world of the avant-garde had been formative and it was difficult, if not impossible, to tear away the layers of influence.

As far as many of the younger generation were concerned, it was this institutionalising process which irked them. Already, they believed, the ICA was becoming 'too establishment', slotting into a space created by the very people who, according to Richard Hamilton, could place Piper, Nicholson, Moore, et al. on a hierarchic scale. Of course, the title Institute smacked of this consignment to establishment values, and it was the institutionalising of contemporary art which chafed the most. Thus, when the younger members expressed dissatisfaction with the ICA programme of events, it was, in part, a manifestation of their desire to see the Institute less institutionalised. They felt, and probably with some justification, that the programme reflected the position of the 'old guard' and that as a result they were not being given a chance to establish their own position. In general, this was the genesis of the Independent Group.

For some time a group of the younger members had met in the ICA bar and talked. No doubt the conversation had often aired criticisms of the ICA as well as more positive extrapolations of their own ideas. Involved in these very informal get-togethers - one could hardly call them meetings - were Alison and Peter Smithson, Nigel Henderson, William Turnbull, Victor Pasmore, Eduardo Paolozzi and others. Usually the gathering was at lunchtime and Alison Smithson recalled that

"...everything was very funny and very witty, and I seem to remember the first few meetings that I went to, there was this tight group near the door, somehow sideways on, and there were a lot of grey men in the background."⁹

The 'grey men' was Alison Smithson's term for those people who she believed were not actively creative, not professional architects, painters, sculptors, designers. Amongst them was Toni del Renzio, and although he was involved in designing some of the exhibition catalogues for the ICA, he was at this time employed at the Institute as a part-time club managing consultant. After six months this title was withdrawn but he did remain as a part-time employee of the ICA. He was, as Thomas Stevens recalled, a "man you could rely on with his ear absolutely to the ground or to the keyhole for the merest breath of who's new in every single field of endeavour..."¹⁰ And Peter Smithson thought of him "...as one of the critical people... he'd read... articles on subjects that we'd never thought of that might influence the image-making world..."¹¹ Drawn into the gatherings, Toni del Renzio was an important link between the younger members and the ICA management.

It is impossible to determine when these informal get-togethers began; Alison Smithson thinks they started as early as the winter of 1951. Certainly they had been going on for some time before they were formalised; all the people involved in the early months of the more organised group meetings remember the informal beginnings. There was, of course, no need to formalise the initial meetings; as Peter

⁹ Alison Smithson 1976/77? op.cit.

¹⁰ Thomas Stevens interviewed by the author, 15 April 1983.

¹¹ Peter Smithson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 1976/77? Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

Smithson pointed out, Paolozzi's wife worked in the gallery (and presumably passed on messages about any meeting) and any way "...the model that we would be avoiding," he said, "was one with a president and a secretary who took notes and all that."¹² Alison Smithson thought that any organising would fall to whoever was running the bar.¹³ At any rate, the character of the gatherings began to change; Alison Smithson's 'grey men', a term now to include John McHale (who was "constantly taking notes") as well as Toni del Renzio and others, were viewed by Paolozzi, Henderson, and the Smithsons themselves as a sort of sub-group, and there developed "a lot of in-fighting". Apparently, Henderson and Paolozzi began good-humouredly to send-up this sub-group, particularly McHale, and both Turnbull and Pasmore thought this rather childish, Pasmore soon dropping out.¹⁴

Though there was little direction in these gatherings and much of the time appears to have been spent just talking, there were apparently times when a slightly more structured venture was undertaken. "I'm sure one attended all kinds of talks," Nigel Henderson remembered,

"Eduardo was into it all, and I was standing very close to him, and we did one or two Box and Cox acts; really somebody had to stand up and make a fool of themselves to get things going. I seem to remember an evening of scientific films, when Eduardo and Roland [Penrose] and I went to Guy's Hospital where there was a

¹² Peter Smithson interviewed by the author, 22 November 1982.

¹³ Alison Smithson, 1976/77?, op. cit..

¹⁴ See Appendix 1, p.429.

¹⁵ Nigel Henderson interviewed by Dorothy Morland 17 August 1976, p.1. ICA Archives. The "evening of technical films" probably occurred as a spin-off from the informal discussions at about this time, though later in the official ICA programme there was an evening session called 'The Pattern of Growth', devoted to film extracts and commented upon by Dr. Patrick Collard, Nigel Henderson, and Eduardo Paolozzi, 27 April 1954.

pathologist interested in the ICA. And one of us prompted the notion that it might be interesting to have an evening of technical films at which the scientist would talk about the meaning from his own narrow discipline and we would make comments on it from another viewpoint, trying to establish why we liked looking at technical films." ¹⁵

By early 1952 the criticisms by the younger members filtered through to the ICA Management. It may be that the questionnaire sent out in January was connected with this, but whatever the reason, a more significant gesture was made. The Director, Dorothy Morland, was approached by Richard Lannoy - who worked in the gallery and was "general factotum... the best gallery assistant we had..." ¹⁶ - with notification that people such as Paolozzi, Henderson, Hamilton, the Smithsons and Turnbull were becoming impatient with the ICA Management and that they felt the ICA was not fulfilling its role. They assisted with exhibitions and were generally helpful but believed it should be more of a two way thing. Furthermore, they felt some dissatisfaction because they thought the ICA did not provide an outlet for their ideas; the programme did not give them the opportunity to talk about their own interests and put forward their viewpoints. As one of these younger members, the architect Colin St. John Wilson remarked,

"... the younger group of people [wanted] to do their own thing and not only stage manage it but take credit for it in the way that people who are keen to establish themselves and make some kind of mark would be... I'm not aware that it was born out of any terrible rejection of the ideas of, let us say, Dorothy Morland or Roland, or any of that lot. It wasn't a sort of Salon

¹⁶ Dorothy Morland interviewed by the author, 26 May 1982.

des Réfusés. It was just that the next younger generation wanted to move more freely in their set within their own ideas." ¹⁷

It may be, as one chronicler asserted, that the ICA Management had lost touch with their younger membership,¹⁸ but it is difficult to believe that they were ever in touch with them in the first place. They were however, particularly generous in their reaction. Dorothy Morland raised the matter in a Management Committee meeting as a casual idea and, presumably, off the agenda since there is no record of it, that the 'group' should be allowed to use the gallery for any meetings they wished to convene. She recalled asking "that they [the younger members] should be allowed to let off steam. And [the Committee] wanted to know what sort of thing they would be doing." Mrs. Morland told the Committee that this 'group' "needed a space... an opportunity to get together to bring out their own more revolutionary, more experimental ideas than we were putting forward on our programme." ¹⁹

All this, of course, was not news to the Management Committee. They were well aware of a certain discontent within the ranks of the membership and there were members of the Committee who wished "to introduce into the ICA younger talent and to prevent the ICA becoming too atrophied," ²⁰ notably Peter Watson and Dorothy Morland herself. There was also a very positive aspect from the management's point of view; by allowing these younger members to meet independently of the organised programme, there might grow out of these meetings

¹⁷ Colin St. John Wilson interviewed by the author, 9 May 1983.

¹⁸ Frank Whitford 'Paolozzi and the Independent Group' in Eduardo Paolozzi. Tate Gallery, 1971, p.44.

¹⁹ Dorothy Morland in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 1976/77? Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

²⁰ Toni del Renzio in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham. Soundtrack for Arts Council, ibid.

interesting subjects which could then be presented to the wider ICA audience. As Toni del Renzio said,

"... we were - in the strict sense of the word - the ICA's avant-garde. We were the reconnaissance party out ahead, looking at whatever there was and saying: this is it, this is the thing."²¹

Perhaps this was not the original motive of the Management Committee but as these younger members formalised their meetings, as their interests and ideas became more tangibly expressed, the ICA did begin to absorb them into their official programme.

Once the decision had been made to allow this 'group' to meet semi-officially, as it were, Dorothy Morland, as the representative of the ICA Management Committee, asked Richard Lannoy if he would organise some meetings. He had originally brought to her attention the feelings of the 'group' and in many respects, was the ideal organiser. He worked at the ICA and so had direct contact with the organisation there, he was sympathetic to the general feelings of these younger members, and he was close to a number of them, particularly William Turnbull, whom he "certainly sounded out" on the idea of formalised meetings. "The idea", he wrote, "was probably more mine than anyone's, though I at once put it to Toni del Renzio to actually get on with it and get meetings arranged."²² It was, according to Nigel Henderson, del Renzio who was "pushed forward as a kind of chairman [by] those of us who were already involved with ICA."²³ But whoever played the more prominent role, and at this stage it

²¹ Toni del Renzio in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 27 June 1976. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

²² Richard Lannoy. Letter to the author, 1 August 1982.

²³ Nigel Henderson. Letter to the author, 20 February 1983.

appears to be Lannoy, there is no doubt that the formalisation of meetings drew together the most lively and interesting section of the ICA's membership, a fact bemoaned by David Sylvester who thought it was regrettable from the point of view that it took the best people out of the ICA audiences.²⁴

The ICA itself, after giving its consent, never intervened, and without doubt this Young Group, as it was called,²⁵ owes its existence to the magnanimity of the Institute. Without the neutral space which the ICA provided, it is unlikely that the Independent Group, as it came to be called, would ever have got off the ground. And all this was despite the fact some of these younger members were not actually members at all. John McHale thought it interesting and important that

"... many of us weren't even paying members... we sort of assumed that the space was for our own use... Oddly enough, the ICA was very, very good about it. They never interfered at all. It was assumed it was ours."²⁶

When Richard Lannoy and Toni del Renzio began seriously to consider organising meetings, one of their tasks was to decide on some sort of programme. "I remember particularly well Toni suggesting that we invite Freddy Ayer, the philosopher," recalled Lannoy, "and I said, 'Toni, young artists! What are you talking about?'" because by that

²⁴ David Sylvester. Telephone conversation with the author, 6 August 1984.

²⁵ Although Dorothy Morland denied calling them the Young Group, "because they weren't so very young, you know" (interview with the author, 26 May 1982), in conversations with Nigel Henderson (17 August 1976) and Richard Lannoy (no date), ICA Archives, she says they were called the Young Group "at that point".

²⁶ John McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 30 May 1977, Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

time Ayer must have been in his fifties." ²⁷ Apparently, another suggestion was for mannerists in painting.²⁸ At this time however, neither suggestion was taken up. The first meeting organised by Lannoy turned out to be a purely internal affair, with Eduardo Paolozzi projecting printed material through an epidiascope.

The other task for Lannoy and del Renzio was to draw up a list of those people who should be invited. About fifty notices of the impending meeting were sent out, although only about thirty-five people were present.²⁹ The list of those who attended - though it can neither be absolute about who was there nor complete because no record exists - is far more pluralistic than the Independent Group became. The process of formalisation and organisation of the Group was stepped up in 1953 and again in 1954, and the number of those who were invited to meetings diminished. But for the first session there appears to have been a comparatively large number in attendance. Some of them were central, Lannoy recalls them as an "in group who shoved it ahead," ³⁰ and in this were the architects Peter and Alison Smithson and the artists Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson. These four were confirmed friends; Peter Smithson, Paolozzi and Henderson all taught at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, which is where the Smithsons met Paolozzi and Henderson, and it was through this meeting and subsequent friendship that the two architects became involved with the ICA. Also at the Central was Victor Pasmore, who had dropped out of the meetings quite early on and whom Lannoy does not recall being present at his first organised meeting. William Turnbull and Richard Hamilton, both of whom belonged to Lannoy's "in-group", and Edward

²⁷ Richard Lannoy in conversation with Dorothy Morland. No date, p.26. ICA Archives.

²⁸ Recalled by Dorothy Morland, *ibid.*.

²⁹ Richard Lannoy, 1982, *op.cit.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*.

Wright, who came to the meeting, also taught there. Others Lannoy recalls being present were the architect James Stirling, Peter Reyner Banham, who was studying at the Courtauld Institute of Art, the architectural teachers, critics and writers Thomas Stevens and Theo Crosby, the painters Adrian Heath and Anthony Hill, and the critic Lawrence Alloway, as well as, of course, Toni del Renzio.³¹

The perplexity which surrounds this first meeting was engendered by Paolozzi's repetition of it on a number of later occasions, thus setting up a confusion in the memory as to when he first displayed his source material. But whatever the confusion, this first session organised by Lannoy is legendary. Certainly it exerted an enormous influence upon some of those who went along and in a number of ways set the tone for later meetings. As an event, its importance lay in its choice of subject-matter, its presentation of the material, and the subsequent influence it had upon the Group's development.

Although it took place as a sort of semi-formal session under the auspices of the ICA, and although Lannoy and del Renzio - employees of the ICA - helped to organise it, the gathering was totally independent of the official ICA programme and was put on for the benefit of an invited audience rather than an indiscriminate one.

³¹ This list is given by Richard Lannoy in *ibid.* To it he adds Richard Hamilton's wife Terry, Francis Morland, Nigel Walters, and "various exhibitors (later) in the This is Tomorrow exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery." It is very likely also that John McHale was invited and even the painter Magda Cordell. Joseph Rykwert, in a letter to the author 11 May 1984, says he went "along to the first two or three meetings", and the architect Colin St. John Wilson is quoted as being there (Frank Whitford, *op.cit.*, p.45), but in an interview with the author (9 May 1983) he said he "...didn't see that talk of Eduardo's". Dorothy Morland also recalls attending (Dorothy Morland 1982, *op.cit.*). It is extremely unlikely however, that Lawrence Alloway attended this first meeting. In a letter to the author (13 May 1983), he said that he first went to the ICA "... a little earlier than the Opposing Forces exhibition (January - March 1953)." The date of this first meeting, as we shall see, was probably April 1952.

Because of the absence of records, even the date of the meeting is in doubt. Peter Reyner Banham refers to the Group being "...officially set up by the ICA Management ... in April 1952";³² to some degree, this is corroborated by a memorandum issued by David Sylvester in May 1952 where he refers to "...Lannoy's late enterprise."³³ Lannoy organised three meetings; if they were in April and early May, then by 21 May (the date of Sylvester's memo) the 'enterprise' could well have been 'late'. Certainly, they were all held before Lannoy left for India, which was "...sometime in July 1952."³⁴ The venue for these meetings was the ICA gallery, with the epidiascope projecting onto a side wall next to the stage; the use of an upstairs room at the ICA for Group meetings came later.

Thus, here to one side of the gallery one evening early in 1952 there gathered some thirty-five people. They sat on chairs facing the wall upon which Eduardo Paolozzi projected images to a large scale through an epidiascope. The evening was not a particularly easy one for Paolozzi, nor was it an especially comfortable one for his friends. The smooth running of the display was not facilitated by the epidiascope itself:

"...it was frying the postcards and the tearouts... one could almost see the smoke and one could hear the heavy sighs of Eduardo as it was not going too well."³⁵

Paolozzi himself appeared nervous and somewhat aggressive; Henderson

³² Peter Reyner Banham. Draft script for Arts Council. op.cit., p.1.

³³ David Sylvester, Memorandum to the Managing Committee on the Organisation of a Members' Discussion Group 21 May 1952. ICA Archives.

³⁴ Richard Lannoy. Letter to the author 7 June 1983.

³⁵ Nigel Henderson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham. 7 July 1976. Soundtrack from Arts Council, op.cit.

remembers him as "intensely nervous as well as very able to control it."³⁶ The reaction of the audience did little to help his uneasiness, particularly remarks by Peter Reyner Banham, who apparently was sitting

"... in a rather prominent central position and probably front seat laughing a great deal, but not getting others to laugh with him so that the laughter [was] defensive, nervous and boorish, and that others found this irksome, especially Paolozzi."³⁷

Nigel Henderson recalled that

"Banham was very vociferous, rather lecturing really about Eduardo Paolozzi's 'show'. I thought it was largely because the visual wasn't introduced and argued (in a linear way) but shovelled, shrivelling in this white hot maw of the epidiascope. The main sound accompaniment that I remember was the heavy breathing and painful sighs of Paolozzi to whom, I imagine, the lateral nature of connectedness of the images seemed self-evident, but the lack of agreement in the air must have seemed antagonistic and at least viscous."³⁸

As well as Paolozzi's presentation, determined by the combination of the hot epidiascope, his own nervousness exacerbated by some of the audience, and his neutral comments such as "This is better, it's bigger,"³⁹ people who were present remember the material he showed.

³⁶ Nigel Henderson, *ibid.*

³⁷ Richard Lannoy, 1982, *op.cit.*

³⁸ Nigel Henderson. Notes written in relation to Peter Karpinski 'The Independent Group 1952-1955 and the Relationship of the Independent Group's Discussions to the Work of Hamilton, Paolozzi and Turnbull 1952-1957.' Unpublished BA dissertation. Leeds University 1977.

³⁹ John McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 30 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, *op.cit.*, though not used in the film.

Since much of it was used later in collages, no one remembers exactly what appeared on that night in 1952. Toni del Renzio was certain that

"... he just showed the rough material. Things as they were torn from magazines... the collages were produced later."⁴⁰

And Nigel Henderson, whose memory must have been more confused than others since he had seen most of the material prior to its showing anyway, said

"... they [the images] were such a mixture... some art, some showgirls, some advertisements, radio, television, detail circuitry... I daren't be specific."⁴¹

Two of Paolozzi's biographers⁴² are more specific however: sheets of U.S. Army aircraft insignia, drawings from the Disney cartoon Mother Goose Goes to Hollywood, robots, Cadillac cars, a gorilla holding a swooning damsel, jewellery advertisements and New York skyscrapers. Much of the material was unfamiliar in England; the grip of post-war austerity was only just beginning to weaken and some of the tear-outs Paolozzi showed - the cars and the food and the televisions - were from American magazines and cut right across the reality of English life. Freezers full of food were as much a novelty to the English as were Cadillacs or life without rationing.

Many of these images came from Paris where Paolozzi was working in the late 'forties. Having got to know a number of Americans

⁴⁰ Toni del Renzio interviewed by the author 17 March 1982.

⁴¹ Nigel Henderson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 7 July 1976. Soundtrack from Arts Council, op.cit.

⁴² Diane Kirkpatrick Eduardo Paolozzi, London, 1970, p.84 and Frank Whitford, op.cit., p.46.

studying there, he acquired from them magazines such as Life , Look and Esquire which they had received from the States. The pages were full of the glamorous and the fantastic; there was an orgiastic feeling about the food advertisements and a seductiveness about the cars. Drawn to these images, Paolozzi began to collect them and use them as source material.

It was no accident however, that Paolozzi was interested in this material. For a number of years he had looked for inspiration to non-art sources. Whilst at the Slade for example, he and Henderson spent a good deal of time going to lectures in other departments of the University and he was always as willing to visit the Natural History Museum or the cinema as he was the National Gallery. The inspiration to be drawn from any of these sources was equal, other than that the inspiration from science museums and cinemas often led to more unexpected results.

There was also the idea that art could be found anywhere: "...a wheel, a jet engine, a bit of machinery is beautiful," Paolozzi said,

"if one chooses to see it that way. It's even more beautiful if you can prove it, by incorporating it in your iconography. For instance, something like the jet engine is an exciting image if you're a sculptor. I think it can quite fairly sit in the mind as much an art image as an Assyrian wine jar." 43

Furthermore, the choice of a jet engine as an example was relevant. Paolozzi believed that contemporary objects, whatever they may be, often reflected contemporary sensibilities and though this notion was

43 Quoted in Frank Whitford, ibid., p.46.

not new, it was by no means an accepted one. Even Courbet had maintained that the painter should concern himself with his own time, but Paolozzi's direct ancestors in this were the Surrealists. In fact, there was something of the Surrealist aesthetic in Paolozzi's whole approach; juxtapositions of media, art, science and technology, of popular and élite arts were inherited from Surrealist juxtapositions of unrelated objects, just as some of the roots of Paolozzi's work - the found object and the collage - also belonged to Surrealism.

But for the audience which saw these images projected onto a wall at the ICA, the connection with Surrealism was relatively unimportant. On that particular evening their eyes were opened, as it were, to a number of possibilities. A few however, were already familiar with the images; Henderson had seen most, if not all, of the material before and Turnbull said that the 'show' "... wasn't such a revelation to me; I am sure it was to some."⁴⁴ In fact, Turnbull had also collected images whilst he was in Paris from a great range and variety of sources and had covered his studio walls with them. Nevertheless, both he and Henderson and, one suspects, a good many others in the audience that evening, were aware that the haphazard presentation of images was enormously important. For one thing, it "...randomized one's thinking and broke down the idea of logical thinking;"⁴⁵ for another, it presented imagery in a non-hierarchical way. No longer was one image to be considered more elevated or more eminent than another.

For Paolozzi himself, the images were often chosen because they

⁴⁴ William Turnbull. Notes from a conversation with the author 23 February 1983.

⁴⁵ Ibid..

evoked a number of responses since they invariably stood as symbols for a variety of quite unconnected things. The idea of what Lawrence Alloway called "multi-evocative imagery" was verbalized by Paolozzi in 1958:

"Symbols can be interpreted in different ways. The watch as a calculating machine or a jewel, a door as a panel or an art object, the skull as a symbol of death in the west, or symbol for moon in the east, camera as luxury or necessity."⁴⁶

Although apparently unconnected on a superficial level, Paolozzi was exploring the connections, what Alloway later called investigations into "... the flow of random forms and the emergence of connectivity within scatter."⁴⁷ This was as much an important 'take-off' point for later Independent Group concerns as it was for Paolozzi's own work.

The other aspect of the imagery which became influential within the Group was the use of mass media sources. For Paolozzi, this was not in itself especially important, other than that they reflected contemporary sensibilities. Like Turnbull, he drew inspiration from a whole range of non-art images of which those from the media or the popular arts were but a part. However, by 1954 the concerns of the Independent Group had become biased towards the study of mass communication and Paolozzi's epidiascope 'show' was looked upon as a forerunner of Pop Art itself. And to some degree it was. Lawrence Alloway believed Paolozzi provided

⁴⁶ Eduardo Paolozzi 'Notes from a Lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts' 1958 (30 April). First published in Uppercase No.1 1958. Reprinted as Appendix A in Diane Kirkpatrick, op.cit., p.120.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Alloway 'Popular Culture and Pop Art' Studio International, Vol. 178, No.193, July/August 1969, p.18.

"...a full statement of the ideas that were necessary for the development of Pop Art: a serious taste for popular culture, a belief in multi-evocative imagery, and a sense of the interplay of technology and man."

But, he added, this

"...does not mean that...Paolozzi's contribution to the development of English Pop Art in the 1950s exhausts the significance of his art."⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the use of magazine imagery, science fiction sources, cigarette cards, comics and so on made Paolozzi not only "...the progenitor of the interest in ready made images from both popular and esoteric sources"⁴⁹ but also, in the opinion of some, a progenitor of Pop Art.^{49A}

Although this first organised meeting had been carried out in a somewhat nervous, high-tension atmosphere, it had generated interest and, more importantly, brought together those elements of the younger membership who were critical of the ICA's role. The ICA management, apparently satisfied with the meeting, quickly organised two more. One was instigated by Lannoy himself. One day he had been talking to an American who had come into the ICA gallery. The man, whose name was Hoppe, was experimenting with light projected through mobiles and was willing to demonstrate this at the ICA. Lannoy saw an opportunity for another meeting of the Young Group. "Hoppe's light show was a very odd affair," he recalled.

⁴⁸ Lawrence Alloway 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) Pop Art, London, 1966, p.36.

⁴⁹ Toni del Renzio 'Style, Technique and Iconography' Art and Artists, Vol. 11, No.4, July 1976, p.35.

^{49A} Lawrence Alloway. 1966. Op. cit. p.28. for example.

"I think he was an American from some most unmetropolitan area... He was of slight build, rather bird-like, and the complete self-made American, exceedingly out of place, or rather, at odds with this intensely English bunch... [the] light show was rather short on effects, rather delicate, elusive, and low in technology. I seem to remember thinking his choice of music to go with these rather spectral and quivering projections of colour was very conventional."⁵⁰

This was the second of three meetings organised by Lannoy before July and was in all probability attended by only a few people. Certainly the third meeting was poorly attended, of that Lannoy is sure.⁵¹ This gathering was addressed by an aircraft designer. "The man was, if I remember correctly," wrote Lannoy,

"on the de Haviland staff... and gave a depressing picture of what it was like to be a small cog in an enormous complex machine of completely segmented, warren-like labour, with five hundred designers each doing one small thing. All I can remember of it was that this picture of the industrial design process was profoundly at variance with the aesthetic of pop culture, and that a recognition of this among the audience made them sit through it in strong silence."⁵²

The poor attendance raises the possibility of some sort of boycott. There is no specific confirmation of this, but two comments indicate something of the sort. One, contemporary, is the memorandum issued by David Sylvester on 21 May 1952 and mentioned earlier;^{52A} in this he is

⁵⁰ Richard Lannoy 1982, op.cit.

⁵¹ Richard Lannoy 1983, op.cit.

⁵² Richard Lannoy 1982, op.cit.

^{52A} See p. 69.

hoping to gain approval for the organisation of a discussion group and in doing so is critical of previous groups:

"... I know that young artists and art students are not at all disposed to meet together in solemn debate. There are exceptions, but these are mainly aggressive monomaniacs and megalomaniacs of the kind who prevented the success of Lannoy's late enterprise."⁵³

This would suggest some kind of sabotage of these organised meetings. A possible correlation with this is the comment made by Alison Smithson about a meeting early in the life of the Group and, significantly, a meeting about aeronautics:

"...we organised one meeting with that aeronautics chap and Banham, McHale and that lot boycotted that because they reckoned that that was their preserve to know about aerodynamics and so on. There was a lot of in-fighting going on."⁵⁴

It might be purely coincidental that the meeting the Smithsons remember being "boycotted" and the meeting organised by Lannoy which was poorly attended, were both connected to aircraft. However, it might be the same meeting.

Certainly Lannoy's role ended with this third session. He was preparing to go to India and for this reason, as well as the possible boycott, the end of an organised discussion group of younger ICA members was hastened.

⁵³ David Sylvester 1952, op.cit.

⁵⁴ Alison Smithson 1982, op.cit.

By May, when David Sylvester issued his previously mentioned memorandum, there were clearly moves afoot to implement suggestions for other discussion groups; the management seemed keen to broaden the base of the Institute, whether to feed off the ideas of these groups, allow them to operate as a sort of safety valve, or to encourage them as legitimately helping to fulfil the purpose of the ICA.

At the annual general meeting in September, a number of discussion groups were mooted - a painters' group and an architects' group appeared as a result - but by this time, the Young Group was already operating under a new and more active leadership at the direction of Peter Reyner Banham.

When Lannoy left for India, Toni del Renzio acted as a convener. He wrote,

"I cannot remember much of my time of convening the Independent Group, except that I am sure it was not yet called the Independent Group."⁵⁵

This period seems to have been almost a reversion to the type of informal gathering held before Lannoy's more organised sessions. At any rate, it did not last long. A month after Lannoy left, Peter Reyner Banham took over as convener of the Group and it quickly came to be a more cohesive organisation with certain common interests. Banham's ascendancy marked a watershed. Not least during this period, the name Independent Group was adopted, the venue of an upstairs room at the ICA was settled, and a general common direction in the discussions was discernable.

⁵⁵ Toni del Renzio. Letter to the author 9 May 1982.

The name of Independent Group seems to have been used from the end of 1952 onwards, probably being invented about the time that Peter Reyner Banham began to co-ordinate the meetings. Certainly up to July, when Lannoy left the ICA, the Group was not called by this name. There is an uncertainty about the derivation of the name and after its invention it would seem that its use simply spread and became common coinage. But its origin is a mystery. The most likely explanation is given by the ICA's Director, Dorothy Morland:

"Well, it just happened that I think I named it the Independent Group, because I had to put something down in the diary so that it was booked and I thought that they were independent. So that's how it went. But they're not entirely in agreement with that."⁵⁶

Certainly the name was suitable. Richard Hamilton referred to the Group as wanting "...to remain independent of any allegiance to the ICA, which is the reason for [it] being called the Independent Group",⁵⁷ and on another occasion he remarked:

"I understand that the title Independent Group came from the idea of rejecting the mother image of the ICA. That it was a resentment of the ICA actually bringing these people together at all, and so we said, alright, we'll be together but we want to be independent of the ICA."⁵⁸

The Independent Group was first officially mentioned in the ICA Bulletin for May 1953⁵⁹ but it had been operating under Banham since

⁵⁶ Dorothy Morland 1982, *op.cit.*

⁵⁷ Richard Hamilton. BBC/Open University. *op.cit.*

⁵⁸ Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham.

Soundtrack from Arts Council, *op.cit.*

⁵⁹ ICA Bulletin No.33 May 1953: "8.15 p.m. Meeting: The Works of Le Corbusier. Colour slides of his buildings 1924-52, presented by the Independent Group. Introduced by Peter Reyner Banham."

August of the previous year in upstairs rooms at the ICA. It is possible, as Frank Whitford claims, that the rooms were "...originally rented for the Unknown Political Prisoner Competition."⁶⁰ Whatever their use, the upstairs rooms - or room, since only one appears to have been used for meetings - was an important factor in the development of the Group. It provided a private space away from the more public ICA gallery and bar, where the members had previously met, and this gave them the sense of autonomy which they desired. However, the in-fighting and the evolution of sub-groups within the Group came to the surface when the upstairs room became available. Alison Smithson recalled,

"...there were some meetings held upstairs - right up in the offices - which Paolozzi tipped us off were being organised because he thought they were becoming a faction. I remember we went upstairs with him."⁶¹

It had always been the case that the Group was exclusive. Even when it met in the gallery, those involved were few in number. Now that the venue was separate from that of the general ICA membership, the exclusiveness was more acutely emphasised. Some people who had been on the fringes of the gallery and bar meetings did not make the journey upstairs. Joseph Rykwert, who "...did go along to the first two or three meetings," found that they "...seemed to get ever longer and more tedious" and that the talk about "...the wonders of consumerism and the joys of technology and the kind of visual omnivorosity and undiscrimination" was not helpful to him.⁶² A

⁶⁰ Frank Whitford, *op.cit.*, p.44. The competition was announced early in 1952. Separate rooms inside the ICA building were used as a centre for sifting through the competition entries. See Richard Calvacoressi 'Public Sculpture in the 1950s' in British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century. Whitechapel Art Gallery 1981. p.138.

⁶¹ Alison Smithson 1982, *op.cit.*.

⁶² Joseph Rykwert, *op.cit.*

combination of voluntary abstention and enforced exclusion pared down the numbers. The exclusion of some was considered an absolute necessity:

"It couldn't possibly be open too widely to the membership because then the people that mattered in it would have dropped out."⁶³

Members of the ICA Management were excluded, with the exception of Dorothy Morland who, when time permitted, went along. "You were our guardian angel in those days," Banham later told her.⁶⁴

Other people who did not receive an invitation to join the Group discussions included Alan Bowness, Ronald Alley and David Sylvester, presumably because they were considered to be too much a part of the cultural establishment. David Sylvester certainly felt hurt and somewhat saddened by this.⁶⁵ Of course, some of the exclusion was inevitable. Toni del Renzio made this point:

"It was simply that as it grew up, there were these people who understood each other and that it became extremely difficult for anybody to enter into it. You imagine some eighteen to twenty people who had been meeting fairly regularly and also informally and who were seeing a lot of each other and had got a running debate-discussion of ideas going on. If you walked into the middle of that, you wouldn't know what the hell they were talking about. So that while there was... this sense of being this

⁶³ Toni del Renzio interviewed by Dorothy Morland (no date), p.2. ICA Archives

⁶⁴ Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with Dorothy Morland 1976/77? Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁶⁵ David Sylvester, 1984, op.cit.

exclusive group because this gave you something to hang on to, some status which you were being denied elsewhere, I think that it was kept exclusive also because it was very hard for anybody else to get in, even if they wanted to."⁶⁶

The numbers of any particular Independent Group session always fluctuated. There was a central core, which included Banham, del Renzio, Hamilton, McHale and some others, but there were fringe members, as it were, drawn in on the odd occasion through their friendship with people from this central core. Edward Wright, who taught at the Central with some of the others, was one; Thomas Stevens, who knew a number of the architects, was another. Both Wright and Stevens now deny being 'members' of the Group, and their position is perfectly understandable, since there was no such thing as 'membership'. In their minds, the occasional attendance did not warrant such formal terminology. Even for the people of what I have called the central core, the concept of membership was too punctilious. But it was something of a 'having one's cake and eating it' situation; exclusiveness was necessary because it focused discussion but membership was undesirable because it smacked of permanence and formality.

The position of Nigel Henderson in the Group is particularly interesting. He had been teaching creative photography at the Central since 1951 and so had a close friendship with Peter Smithson and Paolozzi who were already teaching there, and an acquaintance with Hamilton, Turnbull and Edward Wright, who took up teaching posts in 1952. "It was a good club there," Henderson recalled.⁶⁷ The contacts

⁶⁶ Toni del Renzio interviewed by Peter Karpinski, 1 December 1976, in Peter Karpinski, *op.cit.*, p.xiv.

⁶⁷ Nigel Henderson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 1976. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, *op.cit.*, though not used in the film.

formed at the school were carried on at the ICA and Henderson was drawn into the Independent Group. His position was never really circumscribed; unlike most of the others associated with the Group, his pre-war experiences pre-empted many of the Group's concerns and the ideas developed in discussion were not especially new and exciting for him. In 1935, for example, he had heard Professor J.D.Bernal talk about colonizing space with stations housing between twenty and thirty thousand people, and of his speculations about the possible future shape of man,

"...the human body surgically transformed into a brain suspended in cerebral spinal fluid contained within a metal cylinder and serviced by machines. Bernal's vision based on his phenomenal knowledge of the sciences must have made the Independent Group's image of the Robot look positively Aga/Belling."⁶⁸

He also had contacts with popular music through Ronnie Scott, with Dada through Duchamp, and a healthy, investigative and open-minded approach to science, literature and sociology. His contact with this last discipline was his wife Judith who had been running a course in Bethnal Green since 1945 called 'Discover Your Neighbour', designed to introduce professional people

"...to the idea that a given community is an organic unity whose attitudes reflect the historical evolution of that community."⁶⁹

Thus, Independent Group interests in the sciences, manifestations of popular culture, in certain aspects of Dada, and in a sociologically-based approach, were bread and butter to Henderson's

⁶⁸ Chris Mullen 'A Journey Round Nigel Henderson' in Heads Eye Wyn. Norwich School of Art Gallery, Norwich, 1982, p.28.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.39, n.43.

already established interests. He was, however, like his associates in the Group, concerned that the ICA represented a "...somewhat already ossified situation," that Herbert Read's presence seemed to be "...brooding over everything... He seemed to menace in some way the situation," and so the Independent Group was for him

"...another kind of start and a way of meeting other people who were actively at work and trying to find out their own sort of directions where something might, and could, and sometimes did rub off."⁷⁰

Lannoy described Henderson as "laconic...perceptive, acute, deeply held in reserve";⁷¹ Alison Smithson said he was

"...absolutely incredible. He was the original image finder... He had the most fantastic eye. To walk along the street with Nigel... was fantastic. Not only was it much funnier than Morcombe and Wise but Nigel was finding stuff - in the gutter, in an area; bits of wire... [He might say], 'Look at that door compared with that door.' The whole thing became something quite different, and he would play with the information, he could immediately say, 'Isn't that one like this or this one like that' - the whole thing was at this very clever Bloomsbury level."

And Peter Smithson confirmed this:

"...a walk with Nigel is to see the inanimate as animate, and this wierd business of opening... other people's eyes to see - to

⁷⁰ Nigel Henderson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁷¹ Richard Lannoy, 1982, op.cit.

have an affection between objects and people..."⁷²

The influence of Henderson was enormous; on the Smithsons certainly - Nigel Henderson's vision "...made us look differently, and at least twice, at every old door, boot or rusty nail"⁷³ - but also upon the Group. He later protested about the extent of this influence:

"I was certainly not a central member of the group. If I had some value it was because of my unusual experience of the world of art before the war."⁷⁴

And again:

"I would have thought I was one of the least influential and influenced members of the Independent Group."⁷⁵

In 1952 the Hendersons moved from Bethnal Green, where they had been living since 1945, to Landermere Quay in Essex. From this point on, Nigel Henderson had little or nothing to do with the Independent Group as such, although he kept in contact with Paolozzi (who

⁷² Peter and Alison Smithson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁷³ Alison and Peter Smithson. The Shift, London, 1982, p.9.

⁷⁴ Nigel Henderson, Letter to the author, 10 February 1983.

⁷⁵ Nigel Henderson, Letter to Peter Karpinski, 22 January 1977.

Although Henderson's influence upon the Group is clear, if not actually measurable, the influence of the Group upon him is doubtful. In a letter to the author, ibid., he wrote: "The Independent Group was not very important to me personally... my undoubted good fortune in meeting so many people in both Science and Art from which I'd already formed the notion that Art was not constantly regenerated from Art but mainly re-synthesized by those with sufficient appetite and need out of the specifics of the uniquely here and now. The Independent Group was a re-assertion of those open propositions by and with new younger (just) people to try and bring one's attention and awareness back into that arena after a shattering war. I don't think that was its function for others..."

eventually moved to Landermere) and the Smithsons. Before he left, he arranged for the scientist Norman Pirie to talk to the Group, the title of the lecture being 'Are Proteins Unique?' The ICA Annual Report for 1952-53 lists this event as having taken place after August 1952, when Banham became convener, though there is some conflict here because Henderson does not remember Banham being so important within the Group.⁷⁶ It does not matter greatly about the date or organisation of this meeting. What is more important is that many Independent Group concerns were directly related to Henderson's interests and even his influence. "Nobbling Pirie", as he called it,⁷⁷ was one example of the general concern with science and technology. In 1977 he wrote:

"I just really felt in agreement with a proposition I assume we [the Independent Group] held in common (although I think not actually stated?) that Art didn't evolve from Art but was somehow re-stated from the specifics of any Time-Cut; that Life is more than Art; that Science and Technology are as great an imaginative hunting ground potentially as Art, etc., etc. ... In this sort of way, the Independent Group dotted a few I's and set up some sort of bridgehead perhaps. I had already begun to feel that for me personally my quite early interest in Science - particularly Biology (I was no good) and my good fortune in meeting Bernal quite often, and my later flying experiences had begun to merge into a kind of landscape sign."⁷⁸

Science and technology were the initial "hunting ground" of the Independent Group, and especially technology. Under Banham's influence, the Group 'investigated' technology and its images.

⁷⁶ Report of Annual General Meeting of the ICA, 7 September 1953. ICA Archives. Henderson's comment about Banham is in Notes to Karpinski, op.cit.

⁷⁷ Nigel Henderson, Notes to Karpinski, ibid.

⁷⁸ Nigel Henderson (Letter to Karpinski) 1977, op.cit.

Influential at the time amongst many of those who attended Group meetings were three books connected to the technological theme: Moholy-Nagy's Vision in Motion, Ozenfant's Foundations of Modern Art, and Sigfried Giedion's Mechanization Takes Command. Lawrence Alloway recalled liking the books because of "...their acceptance of science and the city" and he knew they "...rang a bell with other people in their twenties."⁷⁹ Much of their appeal came from a fascination for technology, largely borne out of the barren and austere situation in Britain.

The post-war economy was slow to respond to the possibilities of technological experimentation - the Festival of Britain had proved this - and it was especially so in the area of consumer goods. Thus, without a home-based technology to draw upon, the Independent Group turned to the United States.

This was not at all surprising. In the first place they saw American technology as being superior to British, which in some areas it undoubtedly was. In the second, American technology invited interpretation on the level of symbols and meanings. And in the third place, American culture had been the staple diet of many of them during the war.

Intrinsically linked with their 'better' technology, their consumerism and their romantic outlook, was the American propensity for advertising and through this all that consumerism could offer was at the turn of a page. For the British generally there was an understandable "...love for comfort at a time of austerity. The design of a packet of Jello was bound to look beautiful to anyone

⁷⁹ Lawrence Alloway 'Pop Art since 1949' The Listener Vol.68, No.1761, 27 December 1962, p.1085.

who still had to shop with a ration book for unbranded goods."⁸⁰ For the Independent Group, America provided

"... the model for any fully urban city, of any industrialised society; we see in America simply what's happening and what's available and what's about to be available to anybody who is living in the twentieth century city. It's not an exotic... it's everybody's right."⁸¹

The United States, and especially the products of its mass communications (themselves a series of technological inventions), were to become a particular concern of the Independent Group, especially during and after 1954 when Alloway and John McHale directed its interests. Such a concern developed out of the first phase initiated by Banham - the interest in technology - as well as from the work of Paolozzi and the interests of Peter and Alison Smithson.

Paolozzi's epidiastroscope 'show' had presented popular imagery, a good deal of it American, as a serious source material. As well as being popular imagery, much of it was concerned with technology, whether on the domestic level - a refrigerator or a car - or an industrial or 'high' science level - printed circuitry or space rockets. For the Smithsons, this sort of material helped them to consider "...the likely impact on arrival in Europe of the objects illustrated in American magazines"⁸² and so they collected the advertisements. "I'd been exposed to American magazines during the war," Alison Smithson said,

⁸⁰ Frank Whitford 'Who is This Pop? The Early Development of a Style' in Pop Art in England. Beginnings of a New Figuration 1947-1963. Kunstverein in Hamburg, 1976, p.18.

⁸¹ Lawrence Alloway in 'Artists as Consumers - The Splendid Bargain'. Transcript of a discussion between Lawrence Alloway, Eduardo Paolozzi, Basil Taylor, and Richard Hamilton. Broadcast on 11 March 1960 on the BBC Third Programme for the series Art - Anti-Art.

⁸² Alison and Peter Smithson, The Shift, op.cit., p.9.

"because my Grandmother and my Great Aunt were sent Ladies Home Journal and the Companion all through the war... Therefore, I was fully aware of all this material long before one had finished school." ⁸³

Technology and media, popular imagery, magazine tear-outs, science, sociology, and esoteric tomes, such as Korzybski's writings on non-Aristotelian systems, were the raw materials of Independent Group 'research' for the next three years. As for 1952, in November the ICA Management Committee agreed to encourage the Group after "...a recent successful meeting organised by them." ⁸⁴ Certainly in that month, Peter Floud, organiser of the exhibition Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts at the Victoria and Albert Museum, came to talk to the Group and Toni del Renzio had some disagreements with him. ⁸⁵ It is possible that the talk by Jasia S. Shapiro on helicopter design took place about this time and also Professor Ayer talking on the 'Principle of Verification'. ⁸⁶

Although there was a fairly wide range of subjects, the ones which recurred the most were science and technology, and it is

⁸³ Alison Smithson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁸⁴ ICA Management Committee minutes, 12 November 1952. ICA Archives.

⁸⁵ See Appendix 1, pp. 408-9.

⁸⁶ The talk on helicopters is mentioned in a number of texts and it is very likely that Banham organised it. In conversation with John McHale and others for Arts Council, op.cit., he said, "...I would have simply written to experts or technicians out of the blue saying would they come, like Jasia Shapiro, the helicopter man..." Though the attendance at this meeting is not known, neither del Renzio nor Alloway went along, although the latter was certainly invited. The talk by A.J. Ayer is mentioned by del Renzio, who says he arranged it (Toni del Renzio 1982, op.cit.); it is mentioned by Hamilton, who said, "We felt that we had put A.J. Ayer through the wringer in our discussion..." (Richard Hamilton, BBC/Open University, op.cit.); and it is mentioned by Christopher Finch in Image as Language - Aspects of British Art 1950-1968, Harmondsworth 1969, p.21: "(Reyner Banham) called in guest lecturers to talk on subjects ranging from logical positivism (A.J. Ayer) to helicopter engineering." The ICA AGM report, 1953, op.cit., calls the talk the 'Principle of Verification'. However, in a letter to the author, 11 May 1983, Peter Reyner Banham stated that there was "No lecture by A.J. Ayer."

important to understand that the Group saw both areas as inherently good, rather than as threatening or simply bad. The pro-science/technology stance was established from the beginning and remained until the Group's demise in the mid-'fifties. The position, as John McHale suggested, was one of having no fears; it was, he said, "...sort of logical because of having come out of World War Two..."⁸⁷ Peter Reyner Banham tempered this slightly:

"We were all into technology in those days. Not as simply techno-optimists - we were too close to Hiroshima for that, but we were all hugely impressed by the wonder and horror of technology and queued for hours to see films like La Vie Commence Demain, the first of the future shock documentaries."⁸⁸

During 1952, the programme of events at the ICA remained various and the Institute continued to prosper, culturally if not financially. Dorothy Morland's energetic directorship headed a hard-working team which put on twelve exhibitions during the year and three or four other events every week. The impact of the Independent Group upon this programme was not felt until the following year, but many of those who attended Independent Group meetings were directly involved with ICA events.

The first exhibition of the year, Young Sculptors, which held its private view on 3 January, included works by Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull. Then, on 5 June, the exhibition Tomorrow's Furniture opened. This was organised by Toni del Renzio at the suggestion of his friend and ICA luminary Peter Watson. The Art News and Review called the show "...a small but significant exhibition,"⁸⁹

⁸⁷John McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁸⁸Peter Reyner Banham. Draft script for Arts Council, ibid., p.2.

⁸⁹William Johnstone 'Tomorrow's Furniture' Art News and Review, Vol.4. No.10, 14 June 1952, p.5.

though, other comments were more critical. Toni del Renzio wrote in the catalogue:

"The pieces of furniture that are being shown, have all been projected by the designers, in the main, independent of any considerations of what is thought to be saleable. In other words, the prototype pieces of furniture shown are the result of the designer's considered and serious attempts to solve problems by the use of materials, techniques and conceptions which make concessions only to functional requirements..."⁹⁰

Among the exhibitors was James Stirling, an irregular visitor to Independent Group sessions.

In October, and then again in December, Toni del Renzio was involved in the Young Painters exhibition and a Max Ernst show respectively. Alongside him on the selection committee of the Young Painters was David Sylvester, who had not been invited to the Independent Group meetings but whose own 'Points of View' meetings, as part of the official ICA programme, had influenced the format of Group sessions. And in the Young Painters exhibition itself, Richard Hamilton showed four works. One critic misinterpreted the imagery - derived from the Growth and Form exhibition - as far more prosaic objects than cell organisms and sea urchins.

"Richard Hamilton is almost abstract. He works on white grounds with the slightest use of ochres and greys, the only recognisable form used being a potato or an egg stuck with thorns or pins."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Toni del Renzio 'Introduction' Tomorrow's Furniture ICA 1952.

⁹¹ 'Eight Young Painters' Yorkshire Observer 5 November 1952.

As well as the exhibitions, Independent Group attenders participated in a few other ICA events: del Renzio in a discussion on the Young Sculptors show and the work of Barbara Hepworth and F.E. McWilliam; Turnbull in a discussion on Giacometti. Throughout the year, Richard Hamilton had been assisting with a number of the exhibitions, though not actually on the ICA payroll, and during the following year he designed a system of suspended panels which gave more hanging space but which made evening activities more difficult. He explained:

"A problem... was not having much hanging space, because one wall was taken up entirely with window, and the other wall consisted almost entirely of entrance door and entrance to the club room... So I devised a scheme of hanging panels, a whole lot of screens which could be hung from suspension wires across the ceiling... Now while that gave us a lot of additional hanging space, it interrupted the evening activities, so every evening when something happened, virtually all the panels in the exhibition had to be taken down." 92

The lack of space at the ICA was always a problem and not all the activities could take place there. Films, for example, were shown at the French Institute in Queensbury Place, though in October 1952, Peter Smithson was consulted about the possibility of sound proofing for a cinema at the Dover Street premises. Like a number of those who attended Independent Group gatherings, Peter Smithson had a career outside and separate from the ICA. He and his wife had recently opened their own architectural offices and between 1950 and 1954 were working on the design and building of a secondary school at Hunstanton

92 Richard Hamilton. Edited version of an interview with Dorothy Morland, ICA Archives, No date, p.1.

in Norfolk. Both Paolozzi and Turnbull were fairly well established sculptors, Turnbull having had two one-man shows at the Hanover Gallery in 1950 and 1952, and Paolozzi in 1952 being chosen to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale. Richard Hamilton, though not by any means established as a painter, had organised Growth and Form and helped with other ICA exhibitions, as well as showing his own work in some. Apart from this, as we have seen, a number of them had part-time teaching jobs. Of those who were not artists or architects, Banham had been contributing fairly regularly to Art News and Review since early 1951, as had Alloway, who also sent pieces to Art News in New York (though he was not, as yet, involved with the Independent Group circle.) Although it seemed that some of the Independent Group were forever busy working at this and that, it was not generally the case. "Most of us," recalled John McHale,

"for one reason or another, were relatively at leisure - a euphemism - we weren't too busy. That was terribly important... you had time to talk."⁹³

Without this time for discussion, the Group would never have got going or kept up its momentum; Toni del Renzio noted

"...the unorganised comings together at lunch times were important. A lot of important discussions took place then."⁹⁴

Those who were more heavily involved in work, like the Smithsons, tended to attend Group sessions less frequently; those who were less involved, like McHale, were nearly always present and so could push their ideas more often and consequently more forcefully.

⁹³ John McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁹⁴ Toni del Renzio, ICA Archives, op.cit., p.2.

During the early 'fifties there was a shift in emphasis at the ICA which coincided and complemented Independent Group activities. When the ICA was established, its founders looked to Europe for their inspiration in the arts and wistfully to the United States for their exemplar - the Museum of Modern Art. Roland Penrose had stored works from his collection there during the war and so had good connections with New York, but as a Surrealist, his taste in art was European, and essentially French. At any rate, when the ICA venture was launched, the avant-garde was still a European manifestation, even if many of its members resided in the States. However, by the early 'fifties, the tendency was for younger artists, architects and critics to look across the Atlantic as well as across the Channel. In short, American influences increased. This was reinforced generally by the Marshall Plan and at the ICA specifically, by the appointment in April 1951 of Anthony Kloman as Director of Planning. Kloman brought to the ICA a more American bias. For example, between July 1951 and May 1952 there was a lecture by his brother-in-law, Philip Johnson, on 'Modern Architecture', another by Thomas Hess on 'New Abstract Painters in America', an exhibition of photographs from Life magazine, an exhibition of drawings by Saul Steinberg, and a talk on American and British humour. He also introduced an annual money-raising scheme called Picture Fair, an idea which he took from a similar scheme run at the Witney Museum of Art in New York.

"Paintings, prints and drawings were donated freely by artists and collectors... Depending upon the number of art works available, tickets were sold at a fixed price... so that everyone who bought one was sure of a work. Depending upon the luck of the draw, the first few tickets out of the hat allowed the winners a choice of works by really well-known artists. It was

not unknown for some happy people to have a Picasso or a Henry Moore for... a small sum of money..."⁹⁵

Perhaps Kloman's most famous, and ultimately notorious, enterprise was the sculpture competition for a Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner. It was announced in 1952 and eventually won by Reg Butler the following year. But it has become notorious because of its apparent political motives. There was certainly a larger element of American propaganda involved in establishing the competition and the prize money, anonymously donated, was rumoured to have come from CIA sources.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the theme of the competition was emotive, and made especially so when the Mayor of Berlin pressed for the winning entry to be built

"... on a prominent site in West Berlin overlooking the Eastern sector, in answer to the monolithic war memorial in Treptow Park which the Russians had recently erected to their soldiers killed whilst capturing the city in 1945."⁹⁷

With Kloman initiating American and American-backed events, and with money coming to the ICA from American sources - the Institute received £1,000 for staging the Unknown Political Prisoner Competition, as well as various donations such as that from Mrs. Stroop Austin, the American cultural attaché in 1954 - United States' influence became stronger, all in "...an attempt to ameliorate the image of American culture in Britain."⁹⁸ And intrinsically

⁹⁵ John Sharkey A History of the Institute of Contemporary Arts compiled from its Archival Material 1946-1968. Unpublished manuscript. ICA Archives, pp.58-9.

⁹⁶ See Anne Massey 'Cold War Culture and the ICA', Art and Artists No.213

⁹⁷ Richard Calvacoressi, op.cit., p.138

⁹⁸ Anne Massey, op.cit., p.17.

connected with this, either by coincidence or design or simply the shifting of emphasis of political, economic, and cultural importance from Europe to America, was the Independent Group predilection for things trans-Atlantic.

3.1953:the Development of the Independent Group and its Contribution to the ICA

Twelve maquettes for the Unknown Political Prisoner competition were displayed under the auspices of the ICA at the New Burlington Gallery in January 1953. They were the winning twelve from the British entries, and later, in March, they were included in the one hundred and forty finalists from fifty-four different countries exhibited at the Tate. The details of this competition are fascinating. That it was secretly financed, and possibly from CIA funds, has already been mentioned, but also that the ICA's Director of Planning, Anthony Kloman

"...was particularly anxious to persuade the Queen and other members of the Royal Family to attend the opening at the Tate and did everything he could to conceal the role of the U.S. by portraying the competition as a purely British initiative."¹

The day after the Tate exhibition opened, Reg Butler's winning maquette was badly damaged by a Hungarian refugee, Lazlo Szilvassy, which served further to confuse the political interpretations.

As a result of the competition, the debate on the virtues of realism and abstraction in art was once more opened up, as well as the problem of contemporary art and its powers of communication, since Butler's sculpture was severely criticised for not communicating. As far as the ICA was concerned, the Unknown Political Prisoner had generated both good and bad publicity. Since the Institute's name had fronted the sponsorship, it took the praise and the criticism. It also took the money - £1,000 for organising the competition.

¹Richard Calvacoressi, 'Public Sculpture in the 1950s' in British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century, Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1981, p.138.

More important in the long term was another exhibition held at the beginning of 1953, this time at the Dover Street gallery. It was called Opposing Forces and included the work of the Europeans Henri Michaux, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Georges Mathieu, Jaroslav Serpan, and the Americans Alfonso Ossorio, Sam Francis, and Jackson Pollock. The show opened in late January and closed in early March. Prior to this, little American work had been shown in England (Symbolic Realism in American Painting during July-August 1950 at the ICA was an exception) because the Board of Trade had made importation of art works from the United States very difficult. But in 1953 the restrictions were lifted.

The exhibition was instigated by Peter Watson, the collector and connoisseur and member of the ICA's Management Committee. In 1950, he and Toni del Renzio had seen Pollock's work in the Venice Biennale, and a little later they had seen the paintings of Mathieu and Riopelle in an Arts council exhibition. Then, in April 1951, Michel Tapie had organised the show Vehemences Confrontées at the Galerie Dausset in Paris. When Watson visited Paris a little later, he met Tapie and the painter Mathieu. Toni del Renzio was introduced to the Tapie exhibition through a review in the magazine Spazio. Now the idea for a similar show at the ICA began to be considered. Toni del Renzio wrote,

"We knew we could never find an adequate translation of the Tapie title but we were also well aware of the thesis of Rosenberg and so we arrived at calling the exhibition Opposing Forces ." ²

² Toni del Renzio 'Pioneers and Trendies' Art and Artists No.209, February 1984, p.28. The 'thesis of Rosenberg' to which del Renzio refers is the essay 'The American Action Painters', Art News, December 1952.

Watson seems to have put up most of the money for the show, which eventually made a loss of about £70. But the gains transcended the financial. Apart from the highly original work of the other exhibitors, it was the work of Jackson Pollock which proved to have the most lasting influence. It was the first time his work had been shown in Britain and the ICA hung a huge, unstretched canvas over an entire wall of the gallery. Many reactions to the exhibition were adverse and hostile; Patrick Heron, for example, "...sneered at all this stuff, saying 'You can't take this seriously as painting?'..."³, though soon afterwards he did produce a couple of tachiste-influenced paintings. But the context of Pollock's influence was much wider upon the Independent Group. Toni del Renzio pointed out that,

"The attitudes engendered by this painting were not in any way limited to considerations of painting but spread into many of the other issues discussed both within and without the Independent Group."⁴

In retrospect, the most important concept to arise from discussions about the Opposing Forces exhibition centred on the notion of 'all-overness', or 'afocalism', or 'randomness', depending upon who you listened to. On 30 January an informal discussion was held at the ICA in connection with the show and it seems that at this, 'all-overness', as del Renzio termed it, was debated. The concept - called 'afocalism' by David Sylvester and 'randomness' by Lawrence Alloway - meant, according to del Renzio, that a work of art was

³ Toni del Renzio interviewed by Peter Karpinski, 1 December 1976, p.vii., in Peter Karpinski 'The Independent Group 1952-1955 and the Relationship of the Independent Group's Discussions to the Work of Hamilton, Paolozzi and Turnbull 1952-1957.' Unpublished B.A. Dissertation, Leeds University, 1977.

⁴ Toni del Renzio, 1984, Op.cit., p.28.

"...organised other than around a central point of focus which had characterised most Western painting hitherto. Works were to be read piecemeal and might possess several focal points or none, and generally had an all-over quality. It was even suggested that a work could be conceived as extending in any direction beyond its edge. At one discussion, I was forced to point out that this was not tenable for most of the works we admired and that statistical counts testified to the fact that the overwhelming majority of Jackson Pollock's drips began and ended within the area of the canvas. However, Banham related that Philip Johnson worked in a room with a large Pollock hanging in it which he could never see at one place, and he linked this to a Miesian aesthetic much regarded by architects at the time."⁵

The significance of 'all-overness' was later to become apparent in Independent Group discussions since not only did they adopt an attitude to information which was 'afocal' but they also embraced an approach which was non-hierarchical, in itself an interpretation of 'all-overness'. This leap from the concept of 'all-overness' as a manifestation of painting, to 'all-overness' as a sort of guiding principle for the Group as they discussed information and games theory, interpretations of culture, the relationship of science and technology to the arts, and so on, was made gradually over the months following the Opposing Forces exhibition. From a critical point of view, the Group might have been "...ranging along the wilder shores of the smaller journals in a variety of disciplines to pick up the most recent thing, which was then somehow or other to be translated into art terms,"⁶ but they made connections which often opened up new possibilities. However, in January 1953, the concept of

⁵ Toni del Renzio, ibid.

⁶ Donald Holms interviewed by the author, 9 June 1982.

'all-overness' was still confined to painting.

When Toni del Renzio had seen Pollock's work in Venice, he had found it difficult to come to terms with. Subsequently he read Harold Rosenberg's 'The American Action Painters' in Art News. He also owned a copy of Portfolio which contained Hans Namuth photographs showing Pollock at work. By the time of the exhibition, his understanding was far deeper and the possibilities inherent in Pollock's approach were slowly being discovered. These discoveries were often made during discussions, many of which took place, as they always had, in that area of the Dover Street premises containing the bar and known as the Members' Club Room. These meetings were always very informal and it was the informality which allowed ideas to be aired before they were expressed at the more formal Group sessions.

At a time when the war in Korea was reaching an end, McCarthyism was a very clear memory, when the threat of the atomic bomb hung over the world and the Cold War was a matter of fact rather than conjecture, the Independent Group remained peculiarly apolitical. Toni del Renzio noted,

"I think we tended to prefer a Labour government to a Conservative government and things of that sort. I don't know anybody at that time in the Independent Group who was actively involved in political protest and I don't really remember anybody within that Group... who took part in any of the CND demonstrations because that would have been about the limit of political activity by members of the Independent Group."⁷

Toni del Renzio believed Lawrence Alloway, who had been drawn into the

⁷ Toni del Renzio, 1976, op.cit., pp. xii-xiii.

Independent Group milieu at about the time of the Opposing Forces show, "...was probably the only one who had no political reservations (about admiring the culture of the United States but having left wing sympathies)." ⁸ Certainly Alloway was critical of a less than whole-hearted support of any cause, as witness his feelings about Richard Hamilton and CND. After 1958, Hamilton did take part in CND demonstrations with his wife Terry. Roger Coleman recalled that they

"...used to go on Aldermaston marches. Well, they used to drive and leave the car... Lawrence was very contemptuous of that. He was contemptuous of them going on it and he was contemptuous of them not going on it properly."

But as Coleman also stated, "You would only have to talk to Richard for a little while to realise he was involved..." ⁹ His involvement was never manifest in his art until the early 'sixties with Portrait of Hugh Gaitskell as a Famous Monster of Filmland ¹⁰ and a little

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Roger Coleman interviewed by the author, 18 April 1983.

¹⁰ Hamilton's political convictions were clearly expressed in this work, as was the influence of his wife. In an unpublished typescript (1964), quoted in Richard Morphet Richard Hamilton, Tate Gallery. 1970, p.49, he wrote: "In putting to myself the question 'What angers you most now?' I found that the answer was Hugh Gaitskell. Perhaps it isn't easy to understand, with so much time intervening, how Hugh Gaitskell could emerge as the prime subject of my disapproval, for my political inclination is to the left, radical, non-party, if vociferous and demonstrative. Gaitskell, at the conception of the painting... had been for seven years [leading] opposition to Tory government. [He] seemed to me to dilute constructive opposition to policies that were leading us steadily to perdition but most importantly I regarded him, personally, as the main obstacle to adoption by the Labour Party of a reasonable nuclear policy at a time when the will of a majority within the Labour movement in Britain had been expressed in condemnation for our continuing nuclear attachment. Gaitskell's role was all the more sinister because he was leader of the left - because he was powerfully placed to fight his left and because he did so from moral conviction and not for political or economic expediency..."

I began, with the help of my wife, to collect press photographs of Gaitskell... my wife died in a car accident late in '62; three months later Gaitskell died. We were told what a great man he had been... The painting...was a subject that my wife felt deeply about
/cont'd...

later with the condemnation of illiberal incidents such as the arrest of Robert Fraser and Mick Jagger in Swinging London and the shooting of university students by the National Guard in Kent State. But by this time - the early 'sixties - evidence of the political conviction of the Independent Group and of associated artists was more common.

In 1953 however, political conviction was rare. If Alloway was apolitical, he asserted that most of the artists he knew felt much the same and considered a political stance as being "...old-fashioned and held in bad faith."¹¹ For most of the Independent Group, the polarisation of left and right as represented by the Soviet Union and the United States, was seen in terms of themselves on the one hand, and John Berger and his support of realist art on the other. "We were fairly critical of the then Marxist position," said Toni del Renzio, "but then that was because we were inclined to see Berger and Marxism as identical and we certainly didn't want much truck with Berger."¹² And again:

"we were put off by any precise Marxian notions... largely by the cloying sentimentality and clodhopper aesthetic of Berger who appeared to have appropriated sole claim to Marxist art criticism. Certainly I felt that Marxism had little to offer any more and drifted away. Moreover, throughout Europe, the various Communist Parties which were closely associated with aesthetic notions hardly progressed from what was seen by us as discredited

cont'd.

and, in a way, she had generated it; for her, political philosophy was something to be acted upon, so there were good reasons for suppressing any squeamishness that Gaitskell's death might have occasioned..."

¹¹ Lawrence Alloway 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) Pop Art. London, 1966, p.40.

¹² Toni del Renzio interviewed by the author, 17 March 1982.

social realism."¹³

This was the crux of the matter. For the Independent Group, Communist art was reactionary, American was progressive.

For a few of the Group, this created a conflict of interest between their political leanings and their aesthetic ones. This dichotomy only proved to be a problem for some members after the event, so to speak, but it was a problem for one or two at the time. Notably there was Terry Hamilton, who was strongly committed to nuclear disarmament. Banham called her "...the conscience of the Group... She enjoyed all the American stuff," he said,

"but she still had the deeply ingrained left-wing attitude and I think it hurt her sometimes having to praise American [products] because they were so well done, while hating what was going on in America, not just the Korean War but the Eisenhower period...it was very tough to be a leftie who liked pop..."¹⁴

Later, Banham himself was at pains to point out the political dilemma of being left wing and of admiring the art and products of the most capitalist of capitalist societies. But in 1953, this issue washed over many of the Group, with the possible exception of Terry and Richard Hamilton, though any left wing sympathy they had was always tempered by an admiration for American technology.

The ICA itself strove to remain outside any political affiliation, despite Anthony Kloman's connections with the United

¹³ Toni del Renzio, 1984, op.cit., p.27.

¹⁴ Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with John McHale, Magda Cordell McHale and Mary Banham, 30 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for the Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop 1979, though not used in the film.

States and the near scandal brought upon the Institute by the Burgess and Maclean affair.¹⁵ But as the decade progressed, the ICA did become, as one of its memoranda stated, "... the Gateway to Europe for American culture."¹⁶ This was in part engendered by the Independent Group who advanced the cause of American culture, though not, as we have seen, on the basis of any political philosophies. Rather, they admired American culture on aesthetic grounds and on the grounds that it was more vigorous than European culture, especially Eastern European.

This may well have been true but it is important to note that for many of the Group, their formative years had been steeped in the very culture they were now promoting. The social and cultural background of Independent Group members was not all as straightforwardly British as might be assumed. When describing the Group, Banham called the members (and presumably himself) "...a rough lot," though Richard Hamilton tempered this with

"...a mixed lot rather than a rough lot. Because of the war, we all came into this situation - a similar kind of experience but from different experiences..."¹⁷

The war was a great leveller, but even before the war, the environment of many of the Group was that of popular culture and leaned heavily upon America. In 1963, Banham spoke about his own pre-war background:

¹⁵ Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean were members of the ICA, a fact revealed to Donald Seaman of the Daily Express when he interviewed W.H. Auden, also a member of the ICA. This news made headlines in virtually every British newspaper on 11 June 1951.

¹⁶ ICA Memorandum 'American Culture and the Institute of Contemporary Arts', 1957, ICA Archives. Quoted in Anne Massey, 'Cold War Culture and the ICA', Art and Artists, No.213, June 1984, p.17.

¹⁷ Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 26 June 1976. Soundtrack from Arts Council, op.cit.

"Thinking back, the cultural background against which I grew up was a very curious one indeed, if one is to believe the sort of things in Hoggart. The area had a certain amount of 'real' culture with a capital C, like the local Philharmonic Society, which could never even play Beethoven right, an occasional concert by someone like Muriel Brunskill, and the local operatic society in The Mikado. This was the capital C culture background against which I grew up, and which really meant nothing to any of us. The live culture, the culture in which we were involved, was American pulps; things like Mechanix Illustrated and the comic books (we were all great Betty Boop fans), and the penny pictures on Saturday mornings; I knew the entire Chaplin canon back to front and most of the early Buster Keaton's, not through having seen them at the National Film Theatre under 'cultural' circumstances with perfect air-conditioning, but at 1d. and 2d. a whack, in a converted garage (practically next to Newton Street Primary School, which was the rest of my cultural background, not to mention the speedway...)"¹⁸

For Alloway, the environment of mass media and its own brand of popular culture was the familiar one of his youth. In 1957 he wrote:

"we grew up with the mass media. Unlike our parents and teachers we did not experience the impact of the movies, the radio, the illustrated magazines. The mass media were established as a natural environment by the time we could see them."¹⁹

¹⁸Peter Reyner Banham 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist' Terry Hamilton Memorial Lecture given on 11 November 1963 at the ICA. Originally published in Living Arts No.3 1964. This quotation is taken from Reyner Banham Design by Choice (edited by Penny Sparke), London 1981, p.84.

¹⁹Lawrence Alloway 'Personal Statement' Ark No.19 1957, p.28.

Others in the Group had similar experiences: William Turnbull worked as an illustrator for mass circulation magazines - notably detective and love stories - in the Dundee firm of D.C. Thompson between 1939 and 1941; Paolozzi was brought up

"...on luridly vulgar novelettes and a rich diet of American films consumed in Leith's picture houses (programme changed three times a week). He acquired more history from cigarette cards than from books. His art appreciation began not in the National Gallery of Scotland but with comic books, and the dialogue of Westerns and gangster movies was more familiar to him than the imagery of Shakespeare, Milton or Burns."²⁰

However, it was the war which brought things together. As Richard Hamilton pointed out,

"We had all arrived where we were in the Independent Group through the experience of the war from very different upbringings and experiences. Mine at EMI - four years of rubbing up against technicians, interested in audio, looking forward to the post-war era."²¹

Furthermore, the experience of American culture was at first-hand during the war: "Remember... we were living under an army of occupation in Southern England," said Laurie Fricker, assistant to the Director at the ICA in 1961, "and our culture came at second-hand from the movies and first-hand from the G.I.'s."²²

²⁰ Frank Whitford 'Inside the Outsider' in Eduardo Paolozzi, Sculpture Drawings, Collages and Graphics Arts Council 1976, p.8.

²¹ Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

²² Laurie Fricker interviewed by the author, 14 March 1983.

If there was no political motivation in the Group, neither was there a class-consciousness. In "...knocking the fine arts and its hierarchical feel, and going for mass media, popular culture..." there might have been "...a latent expression of class interest..." John McHale speculated, but he could not recall any specific class consciously motivated stance the Group made. "That was a period I think, in Britain at any rate, that was characterized by a certain diminution - just for the moment seemingly - in the sort of class struggle. I don't recall it was expressed at any time."²³ That the Group was, to use Hamilton's term "a mixed lot", testifies to this. The backgrounds of Nigel Henderson - his connection with the Bloomsbury set - and Colin St. John Wilson - the son of a bishop - were quite different from that of Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull - sons of an ice cream salesman and a shipyard engineer respectively.

Thus, the concerns of the Independent Group with science and technology, with American painting and American popular culture, were not motivated by either a political or a class stance, but rather by the fact that many of them had spent both their pre-war and wartime lives in an environment where one or more of these things played an important part. There was also of course, a freshness and vitality in technology and in America which appealed to their youthful spirit. When Paolozzi was in Paris in 1947 for instance, he was drawn to American magazines rather than European ones. William Turnbull drew from magazines sent to him from the States rather than from British magazines. Similarly, Alison Smithson was sent magazines from the States during the war, though for her and Peter Smithson, they were used to give "a fair picture of the technical future because in terms

²³John McHale in conversation with Julian Cooper, 19 November 1977, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

of domestic machines... since the 1880's America has always pioneered them." ²⁴

The other important aspect of technology and consumerism, and almost exclusively that from America at this time, was that it sharply contrasted with what was going on in Britain. As I have previously pointed out, America provided an image of a society desirable because of those material benefits, but made more desirable because those material benefits were not available in Britain. If there was absolutely no opportunity for them to become available, then they might not have had the same mesmeristic appeal, but they tantalized by their very propinquity during this post-war period. "If one wasn't alive then it's very difficult to remember the actual material poverty of the time," Peter Smithson recalled.

"And I think the collection of ads, and things like fridge ads, were actually also food pictures; you know, you had a package of food inside a white box. The ad itself became a luxury object... one collected them because of a long period of being without things..." ²⁵

Whilst Peter Reyner Banham was convening the Group, the general themes remained those of science and technology and, through his own influence, architecture. In the most formal Independent Group sessions, Banham himself spoke about the 'Machine Aesthetic', a talk which possibly formed the basis of his Architectural Review piece in April 1955 ²⁶ and Toni del Renzio spoke on 'Pioneers of the Modern Movement'. These events took place sometime between August 1952 and

²⁴Peter Smithson interviewed by the author, 22 November 1983.

²⁵Peter Smithson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 1976/77? for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

²⁶Reyner Banham 'Machine Aesthetic' Architectural Review Vol.117, No.700 April 1955, pp.225-8.

September 1953. The ICA Annual Report for 7 September 1953 also lists the Independent Group as having reported on "...the Derbyshire Group and their zone development scheme" as well as carrying out "...a study... of the ICA space and accommodation requirements."²⁷ In this early period, Richard Hamilton also remembers a talk by two crystallographers²⁸ and Colin St. John Wilson recalls Banham talking about Futurism.²⁹ As to Michael Compton's assertion that there was a lecture on the form of the DNA molecule³⁰, this is refuted by Banham, who also ended the generally held notion that the Group had formal discussions on such subjects as cybernetics and nuclear biology.³¹ These areas might have been touched upon in later years or even informally during 1953, but they were not considered by the Group as a whole and, in 1953, exerted no discernable influence upon Group thinking or the work of any particular individual.

Overall, the concern was for technology. "Our preoccupation was with the social implications of that technology," said John McHale,

"...we weren't hung up on the technology but we were hung up on what the technology means to people... we thought it meant lots of things. On the one hand, positively, we saw that the technology expanded the human range. The possibility for increased numbers of choices for human beings, increased social mobility, the increase in physical mobility. A good deal of increase through the media themselves - through photography, television, movies, microscopes and telescopes, if you like. A great increase in psychic mobility, and we thought that was

²⁷ Report of Annual General Meeting of the ICA, 7 September 1953. ICA Archives

²⁸ Richard Hamilton The Impact of American Pop Culture in the Fifties. A talk broadcast by the BBC for the Open University. No date.

²⁹ Colin St. John Wilson interviewed by the author, 9 May 1983.

³⁰ Michael Compton Pop Art. London, 1970, p.44.

³¹ Peter Reyner Banham. Letter to the author, 11 May 1983.

terribly important. There was a feeling here of expansion actually, of what people were capable of feeling, of what people were capable of doing... it expanded one's range rather than contracted it."³²

Almost a generation after the Group stopped meeting, Reyner Banham was at pains to point out that the members

"... were not just simple technological optimists. Technology was horrors as well as wonders. We had seen too many napalm bodies being dragged out of foxholes in newsreels from Korea; we were too close to Hiroshima."³³

But others were more critical of the Independent Group's position and genuinely believed they accepted technology without questioning its more negative role. "The strength [of the Independent Group]," wrote Toni del Renzio,

"was the recognition of the role of technology in modern society which could not leave art unchanged... [but] the weakness was an almost unquestioning acceptance of technological advance."³⁴

And Frank Cordell put the point more bluntly:

"...I think the Independent Group were romantics... romantics in that they had this glorious view of technology, genuflecting before it."³⁵

³² John McHale, op.cit.

³³ Peter Reyner Banham. Soundtrack from Arts Council, op.cit.

³⁴ Toni del Renzio 'Pop', Art and Artists Vol.11, No.5, August 1976, p.17.

³⁵ Frank Cordell in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham. 7 July 1976, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

The Group was certainly an easy target for such criticism. The members were fascinated by technology, by its images and by its language. They felt that the technological environment was moving so fast that they had to keep up with it. It set the pace, and their images and the language they used to describe and define it had to keep in step. So they invented language to do this. "Topicality", said John McHale, "was important in and of itself."³⁶ But the language of topicality was interpreted by critics as jargon, and even as taking over from the predominant interest in the visual. "The preoccupation with images," said Donald Holms,

"seems to have given way to a dismissal of things visual altogether in this growing preoccupation with various forms of sort of in-jargon of the currently fashionable emergent disciplines."³⁷

The emergence of Peter Reyner Banham as the Group's convener and the focusing of interest, though not exclusively, upon technology, contributed to a shift in the Group's social structure which took place during 1953. It was a gradual shift but a significant one. Before Richard Lannoy's meetings, the Group had met informally at the ICA. The central members, if this loose association might be termed so formally at this stage, were Paolozzi, Hamilton, the Smithsons, Turnbull and del Renzio, with people such as Joseph Rykwert, Sam Stevens, Edward Wright, John McHale, and so on, on the fringes. The apparent boycott of the aircraft designer's talk noted by Alison Smithson and mentioned earlier, could be significant because it marked the emergence of a sort of splinter group, central to which appears to have been Banham, McHale and Hamilton. At any rate, the lack of

³⁶John McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 30 May 1977, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

³⁷Donald Holms, op.cit.

interest generated by Lannoy's two final gatherings - Hoppe's light show and the talk by the aircraft designer - probably convinced some of those who attended that formal meetings did little to further their interests, and probably convinced others that more formal meetings were desirable, but on a different set of subjects and with a different system of organisation. Thus, four months after Lannoy departed for India, Peter Reyner Banham came to be regarded, by the ICA at any rate, as the "...secretary of the Independent Group",³⁸ although his role as general organiser of the formal gatherings had been established in August 1952, only a month after Lannoy's departure.

With this shift in the organisational arrangements, there was a shift in the social structure of the Group. Banham, who had previously been on the fringes, now became central, as did McHale. Henderson and Paolozzi had moved to Landermere Quay in Essex during 1952, and although Paolozzi spent some of his time in London and his wife, Freda, continued to work at the ICA (until the end of 1954), their withdrawal from the Group was significant not only for its own sake but because it probably prompted the gradual withdrawal of the Smithsons, since they were all great friends. At any rate, from mid-1952, they were working on an embryonic exhibition which would mature in September the following year, and this would also account for their gradual retraction.

William Turnbull, "an absolute steady at every meeting",³⁹ still attended the Banham-organised sessions. He was very friendly with Lawrence Alloway, who became involved with the Group early in 1953, and it may well have been Turnbull who introduced Alloway to the

³⁸This title was used in the ICA Management Committee Meeting minutes for 12 November 1953. ICA Archives.

³⁹Alison Smithson interviewed by the author, 22 November 1983.

Group, since Banham first heard of Alloway through him. Turnbull, it seems, was essential to the Group. Toni del Renzio remembered Independent Group sessions "...when it seemed that Turnbull animated the evening with what he had to say..."⁴⁰ And Banham, who clearly saw the Independent Group as two distinct 'generations' - the early Lannoy and pre-Lannoy 'generation' and his own and later 'generation' - said he thought "...Bill Turnbull could bridge them [the 'generations'] because he had this marvellous visual/verbal facility."⁴¹

Although Richard Hamilton took a teaching post at the University of Newcastle in 1953, he commuted from and to London, enabling him to remain in contact with the Independent Group. Together with the long vacations, this meant Hamilton had not withdrawn but in fact became a more regular attender.

Also remaining central was Toni del Renzio, who was introducing aspects of some emergent disciplines such as games and information theory. "I collected all the books that had come out on the theory of games... they were going the rounds of the Independent Group and somebody never returned them..."⁴²

It is not possible actually to list those who attended Group gatherings; as William Turnbull said, "There were many people involved - not just Banham, Hamilton, McHale and so on."⁴³ The fringes of the Independent Group contained a variety of people, including Mary Banham and Terry Hamilton, Frank Cordell - a musician who became involved at about this time- together with his wife, the painter Magda Cordell.

⁴⁰Toni del Renzio (Karpinski interview) 1976, op.cit., p.xxvii

⁴¹Peter Reyner Banham 30 May 1977, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁴²Toni del Renzio, 1982, op.cit.

⁴³William Turnbull. Notes from a conversation with the author. 23 February 1983.

Sam Stevens, Edward Wright and Theo Crosby were also on the periphery.

There was also a grouping of architects, based not so much on the ICA but more on Banham's house in Primrose Hill and the French Pub in Dean Street, meeting on Sunday mornings and Saturday lunch times respectively. The latter gatherings included Toni del Renzio, Colin St. John Wilson, James Stirling, Alan Colquhoun, and, from 1954, the structural engineer Frank Newby. Colquhoun called these meetings "...entirely spontaneous and informal [and] exclusively social."⁴⁴ He had little or no contact with the Independent Group as such, though Newby and Stirling were on the periphery, and del Renzio and Wilson were important to the Group.

The meetings at Banham's house however, were more influential, although Frank Whitford's comment that "All [Independent Group] business was conducted at Banham's house on Primrose Hill over coffee on Sunday mornings"⁴⁵ is a little too cut and dried. Not all business was conducted there, and the phrase 'to conduct business' is a little too formal anyway for what actually went on. And not everyone who came to these informal Sunday morning gatherings was involved with the Independent Group. For example, Donald and Ann Holms remember going along after meeting Banham at the ICA; they lived not too far away in Belsize Avenue.⁴⁶ Alan Colquhoun also went there. None of them were Group attenders. But there is no doubt that these coffee morning sessions became essential to the development of the Group. Colin St. John Wilson lived close in Oppidans Road and he was often present, as were John McHale, Magda Cordell and Frank Cordell, who all lived not too far away in Cleveland Square, Bayswater.

⁴⁴Alan Colquhoun. Letter to the author, 7 January 1983.

⁴⁵Frank Whitford 'Paolozzi and the Independent Group' in Eduardo Paolozzi, Tate Gallery, 1971, p.44.

⁴⁶Donald Holms. Letter to the author, 19 September 1983.

Richard and Terry Hamilton also went along, as did Toni del Renzio and the Smithsons on a number of occasions, and James Stirling, who lived close to Sandy Wilson. The significance of these gatherings was to be recognised when the Group convened at the ICA. The running discussions, the cross-fertilization of ideas, the arguments, misunderstandings and personal dislikes, the themes, ideas and concepts were all brought out in the informal surroundings of Primrose Hill and then formalized at the ICA. The whole thing was constantly moving, changing and developing, and without this situation, the Independent Group would never have gone anywhere.

Nor was it as clear cut as this. Though the meetings at Banham's house kept the tenor of the Group running, there was input from the French Pub meetings, even if these were "spontaneous and informal" and were almost exclusively attended by architects. Furthermore, there were other places where people met whose ideas were passed on into the Independent Group. There was another 'group' at the York Minster, which included Sam Stevens, Stirling, Colquhoun and Colin Rowe, and this provided input into the Independent Group, even if it was a little more distanced from it.

It was as though there was a network of small 'groups' gathering at different times in different places. Some people 'belonged' only to one 'group' but others 'belonged' to a number of 'groups' and acted as the communication lines between them. Toni del Renzio, for instance, went to Banham's Sunday morning sessions, met in the French Pub at Saturday lunchtimes, in the ICA bar during the week, and at the Café Torino in Soho with Edward Wright, Germano Facetti, Peter de Francia, and others. Sandy Wilson did a similar round. The fact that many of them used to see each other anyway because they lived in the

same area, made contact even easier.⁴⁷ Toni del Renzio summed it up:

"In some ways, the Independent Group crystallised for two or three years, in a more or less formal grouping [at the ICA], something that was underway already elsewhere."⁴⁸

And John McHale reiterated this:

"...the Group was a kind of movable scene which took place in a whole series of well-defined locales... you went to different sorts of people. We all really talked to each other. So the meetings [ie. the more formal meetings at the ICA] were always a kind of culmination..."⁴⁹

At the end of April, Dorothy Morland suggested to the ICA Management Committee to co-opt a member of the Independent Group. This was brought about by Herbert Read's absence in the United States and Mrs. Morland no doubt saw an opportunity to involve the Group in the ICA's official activities. In the Management Committee meeting, she described the Independent Group as "...a lively and intelligent body of young people" and believed that "...they would be encouraged if they could be given a measure of responsibility for the ICA's activities." Although David Sylvester's name was put forward as a possible replacement for Read, the Director won the day and held out for an Independent Group member.⁵⁰ By June, Dorothy Morland reported to the Committee "... that in response to the Managing Committee's

⁴⁷There were two areas of London where many of the Group lived: the Swiss Cottage/Hampstead area, with Banham, Colin St. John Wilson, William Turnbull, and so on, and the Chelsea area, where Toni del Renzio, Paolozzi, and the Smithsons lived.

⁴⁸Toni del Renzio 1984, op.cit., p.27.

⁴⁹John McHale, 30 May 1977. op.cit.

⁵⁰ICA Management Committee Meeting minutes, 29 April 1953. ICA Archives.

invitation, the Independent Group had nominated Mr. Peter Reyner-Banham [sic] for consideration." Roland Penrose registered his approval and the rest of the committee followed suit.⁵¹ Banham took up his appointment in July 1953.

Already at the June meeting of the Committee, Dorothy Morland had read out a proposal from the Independent Group for a series of lectures entitled 'Problems of Aesthetics', to be given as part of the official ICA programme. The suggested titles and lecturers were approved by the Management Committee "...on condition that the series were announced as sponsored by the Independent Group."⁵² Banham offered to attend every lecture - declining a fee for doing so - and Robert Melville agreed to act as chairman for the series. Thus, in the ICA Bulletin for September 1953, the series was advertised:

"The ICA feels that the time has come to supplement its normal programme of specialist lectures with a course of study for serious students on 'The Aesthetic Problems of Contemporary Art'. It is therefore proposed to launch a pilot course of nine seminars in the coming Winter season, beginning on the 15th October and continuing at about fortnightly intervals on Thursday evenings at 8.15 p.m....

The seminars, which are intended to form a loosely connected whole, will be under the chairmanship of Mr. Robert Melville... it will be necessary to limit the number of places for this course to 100, and preference in allocation will be given to members of the ICA, art students and bona fide students; fee (students) £1. Others £1-7/6."⁵³

⁵¹ ICA Management Committee Meeting minutes, 24 June 1953. ICA Archives.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ ICA Bulletin No.36, September 1953.

Although the name of the Independent Group did not appear in this advanced notice of the seminars, as the Management Committee had originally requested, the Group was deeply involved in the planning and execution.

Some of the seminars included in the series had been run for a selected audience during Independent Group sessions, others were heard for the first time by an ICA audience. But whichever, there is little doubt that the 'Aesthetic Problems of Contemporary Art' series was the first important manifestation of the Independent Group as a sort of 'inner research department' of the ICA. But that "...the Independent Group... was set up within the Institute for the purpose of holding exploratory meetings to find ideas and new speakers for the public programme" is simply not the case; it simply sometimes functioned in this way.⁵⁴

The origins of the 'Aesthetic Problems' series probably go back to the Opposing Forces exhibition, though their roots go back much further. The concepts advanced at the time of Opposing Forces, and which were discussed earlier in this work, in all probability strengthened the Independent Group belief that twentieth century art was being academicized and that this set limits which hindered its interpretation, especially of something such as Pollock's action painting. Indeed, Alloway was to write,

"The collapse of old-hat aesthetics was hastened for me by the discovery of Action Painting which showed that art was possible without the usual elaborate conventions."⁵⁵

⁵⁴Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.31. Peter Reyner Banham said (in conversation with John McHale for Arts Council, op.cit., 30 May 1977) that the Independent Group did not consciously preview ICA material. "It was done for the Independent Group and then someone said, 'Why don't we re-run it for a wider public...'"

⁵⁵Lawrence Alloway 1957 op.cit., p.28

Generally, the Independent Group was iconoclastic and often deliberately set out to question existing procedures, but with twentieth century art they believed that criticism and interpretation were fairly rapidly being institutionalized and academicized, and this offered them a genuine issue to exploit. Indeed, after Toni del Renzio's talk on 'Non-Formal Painting', Banham made the point during his summing up by referring "... to attitudes to the academic, and... specifically called [del Renzio] anti-academic."⁵⁶

The position of the Independent Group on this issue of established values is very important because it was one of the few things which bound the Group together. "If any one thing," Toni del Renzio wrote,

"could be said to be a unifying principle of the Independent Group, it was a rejection of the very institutionalization of modernism [the Group] most admired in New York... Our objections were primarily concerned with a certain academicizing 'purism' which sometimes separated art from life and spoke about 'harmony' while already we recognised in Rosenberg something of the view we took of art."⁵⁷

The attitudes which engendered this institutionalization of twentieth century art came from the art establishment, which the Independent Group believed to be partly represented by a certain section of the ICA, and notably by Herbert Read. His book Art Now was 'retitled' by del Renzio and Banham, 'Not Art, Not Now' as a rather pointed joke about his attitude. "We didn't approve of this whole Read aesthetic,"

⁵⁶Toni del Renzio. Footnote added 19 March 1984 to a transcription of an interview with the author, 23 February 1984. Toni del Renzio's talk took place on 10 December 1953 and was specifically about action painting. Banham's comments might have been made during the same session but he did give a summing up talk on 25 February 1954.

⁵⁷Toni del Renzio (Art and Artists) 1984 op.cit., p.27

Toni del Renzio said,

"...we could see already that Read was part of the establishment; he was the permitted eccentricity of the establishment; and this we didn't want."⁵⁸

And John McHale reiterated the point:

"One was conscious of a strong set of intellectual snobbery connected with art itself. We were at some pains, probably, to try and destroy those. That would be the anti-establishment part of it... I think one was conscious that there was such a thing as an art establishment...But we... were convinced that with regard to the establishment we were, in a sense, the new establishment. Though young and apparently rasping up against the older establishment, there was a feeling amongst some members of the Group, in effect rather than negating history, they were writing themselves into history..."⁵⁹

Thus, the 'Aesthetic Problems in Contemporary Art' series can be interpreted as this "writing...into history" of which McHale speaks, with the underlying intention of attacking the established interpretations by offering new ones. The programme of seminars⁶⁰

⁵⁸Toni del Renzio in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 27 June 1976. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁵⁹John McHale 1977, op.cit.

⁶⁰The series consisted of the following seminars: 'The Impact of Technology' - Mr. Reyner Banham (15 October 1953); 'New Sources of Form' - Mr. Richard Hamilton (29 October 1953); 'New Concepts of Space' - Mr. Fello Atkinson and Mr. William Turnbull (12 November 1953); 'Proportion and Symmetry' - Mr. Colin St. John Wilson (26 November 1953); 'Non-Formal Painting' - Mr. Toni del Renzio (10 December 1953); 'Problems of Perception' - Dr. Johannes Breugelmann (14 January 1954); 'The Human Image' - Mr. Lawrence Alloway (28 January 1954); 'Mythology and Psychology' - Mr. Robert Melville (11 February 1954); 'Summing Up - Art in the Fifties' - Mr. Reyner Banham (25 February 1954).

began with Banham on 'The Impact of Technology', wholly in keeping with Independent Group concerns during 1952. He attacked the Platonic assumptions of the International style during the 'thirties, relating them to earlier nineteenth century aesthetics and then proposed that a new aesthetic in keeping with the technological age was infinitely more relevant. William Turnbull's talk, on 'New Concepts of Space', was about how space affects different works of art and how it is used differently in different places at different times.⁶¹ Whilst Toni del Renzio spoke about action painting in a talk called 'Non-Formal Painting', probably the first time this subject had been publically discussed in Britain. Colin St. John Wilson's 'Proportion and Symmetry' was, by his own account, a far more dour affair.⁶²

Of the eight lecturers who contributed to the seminars, all but three were regular Independent Group attenders. Of the three, Dr. Breugelmann had no contact with the Group and Fello Atkinson's contribution was part of Turnbull's lecture. But Robert Melville, the third of the non-Independent Group participators, held a rather special place. He was, Banham recalled, "...in many ways... the spiritual father of the Independent Group..." and Toni del Renzio said he had a lot more to do with the Group "...than he's been given credit for."⁶³ Certainly Melville is confirmed as one of the only established critics with whom the Independent Group had sympathy and from whom they received sympathy. Apparently, he never wanted to be a member of the Group and, according to Banham "...always claimed he didn't have the first idea what [they] were talking about but I think

⁶¹William Turnbull's talk had no formal notes, just headings (Notes from a conversation with the author, 23 February 1983) and "...as far as I can remember... was given once only at the public lecture." (Letter from William Turnbull to Adrian Lewis, 6 July 1982, quoted in Adrian Lewis 'British Avant-Garde Painting 1945-1956. Part III: Artscribe No.36, August 1982, p.23, n.37.

⁶²See Appendix 1, p. 460.

⁶³Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with Toni del Renzio, Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

he really did."⁶⁴ However, his role was crucial. He was a member of the ICA Advisory Committee and his support of the 'Aesthetic Problems' series contributed to its success.⁶⁵

Whereas 1952 had seen the Independent Group meeting in closed session and contributing little to the ICA, 1953 found it participating in the official ICA programme. As well as the 'Aesthetic Problems' series, Independent Group attenders were involved in some of the ICA exhibitions and the discussions which were a spin off from them.

On 22 April, an exhibition of Le Corbusier's paintings, drawings, sculpture and tapestry opened at the Dover Street gallery. Largely organised by Colin St. John Wilson, with a catalogue designed by Toni del Renzio, the show prompted two discussions at the ICA the following month, one specifically about the exhibition, involving Banham, St. John Wilson, Leslie Martin, Victor Pasmore, and Wells Coates, and the other a presentation by the Independent Group of slides of Le Corbusier's work.⁶⁶ The day before this presentation, Le

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The attendance at the 'Aesthetic Problems' seminars was so good that the Institute declared the course fully booked by the time of Toni del Renzio's talk in December. It is most unlikely, as Frank Whitford (1971, op.cit., pp.44-5) suggests, that the 'Aesthetic Problems' series was instigated by the ICA Management to counter criticism of Independent Group exclusivity, though Richard Hamilton (The Impact of American Pop Culture in the Fifties. A talk broadcast by the BBC for the Open University. No date) also suggests this. Whitford also states that the seminars "...marked the first public appearance of the Independent Group" (p.45), which is not true, since its first public appearance was at the ICA on 13 May for a meeting called 'The Works of Le Corbusier', five months before the first 'Aesthetic Problems' seminar. Furthermore, he asserts that "Lawrence Alloway, John McHale and Frank and Magda Cordell were all recruited from the audience during the seminars." (p.45). This is highly unlikely since Alloway gave a lecture in the series, John McHale's presence at earlier Independent Group sessions was noted by Alison Smithson (see Appendix 1, p.428) and Magda Cordell wrote that she "...was friendly with most of the members of the Independent Group so naturally... became part of it." (see Appendix 2, p.483).

⁶⁶ This was the first public manifestation of the Group mentioned in the previous footnote. The details in the ICA Bulletin are given on p. 79, n.59 of this work.

Corbusier arrived in London for a one day stop-over. Colin St. John Wilson certainly met him then⁶⁷ and it is likely that other members of the Independent Group also did, since such a meeting had been suggested by Dorothy Morland to the Management Committee in April.

Other ICA events in which Independent Group members participated during 1953 included the discussion in June on the exhibition of Henry Moore drawings, which involved Robert Melville, David Sylvester, Toni del Renzio and Lawrence Alloway. There was also a talk by Alloway on 'British Painting in the Fifties', in connection with the Eleven British Painters exhibition held in July. His name had been suggested to Dorothy Morland by Peter Reyner Banham as "...the best person to talk about the painters,"⁶⁸ and it marks Alloway's gradual emergence onto the ICA scene during the year. Paolozzi, Edward Wright and others exhibited in the Painting into Textiles during October and November; Hamilton and Paolozzi showed work in the Collectors Items from Artists' Studios in August, which Banham called "...one of the most interesting of the Summer shows... [containing] work in progress from several worth-while younger artists..."⁶⁹; and on 24 November, there was a symposium on Paul Klee's Pedagogical Sketchbook which had recently been published. This latter event, in connection with the exhibition of Klee's drawings in the ICA gallery, once more brought out into the open some marked differences between the generations, represented by William Coldstream, Quentin Bell and H.S. Williamson as the 'establishment' and Alloway and Victor Pasmore as the 'new guard'. Banham chronicled the symposium in the April 1954 issue of Encounter and noted:

⁶⁷Colin St. John Wilson in conversation with the author, 9 May 1983.

⁶⁸Letter from Dorothy Morland to Lawrence Alloway, 12 June 1953. ICA Archives.

⁶⁹Peter Reyner Banham 'ICA Dover Street. Collectors Items from Artists' Studios'. Art News and Review. Vol.5. No.15 22 August 1953, p.4.

"The symposium was a revealing affair, for it indicated the particular grounds on which the younger generation base their admiration of Klee, and the manner in which these differed from the grounds of an older generation of admirers. The difference was also shown in a subsequent ICA function (17 December 1953 Debate on the Motion: That the late works of Paul Klee represent a decline in his powers), in which it appeared that the younger artists can accept Paul Klee's later (that is, painterly and right-handed) work on a parity with his early, graphic, and left-handed art of the 1920s, while many of their elders cannot. Yet, in the symposium, it was the young who could accept the Pedagogical Sketchbook even though it was published first in 1925, and is essentially a summation of his artistic experience of that period."⁷⁰

This underlined the Independent Group message inherent in the 'Aesthetic Problems' seminars; that interpretation of twentieth century art was becoming too institutionalised and required fresh interpretation.

The two largest exhibitions to be held during the year to some degree presented the dichotomy of the ICA's generation gap. The first ran from 5 March to 19 April and took up so much gallery space that most of the evening activities for that period had to be held outside the ICA at other venues. This was Wonder and Horror of the Human Head: An Anthology, organised by Roland Penrose with the assistance of Miss Lavinia Stainton and Toni del Renzio, the show being designed by Richard and Terry Hamilton, and one section being organised by Penrose's wife, the photographer Lee Miller. The exhibition,

⁷⁰Peter Reyner Banham 'Klee's Pedagogical Sketchbook' Encounter April 1954, p.53.

depicting the human head in a wide variety of interpretations, and called by Banham "...the most important [ICA] exhibition since Growth and Form ..." ⁷¹ , had a distinctly surrealist flavour. This was not surprising since Penrose was its guiding force, but it did show the penchant of the ICA's older generation, despite Hamilton's involvement and his "skilful display of extremely heterogeneous material..." ⁷² The importance which the ICA attached to the exhibition was shown by the virtual closure of the gallery to all other events, as well as the two evening activities associated with the show, ⁷³ but both it and its related events were to be overshadowed by a later exhibition which had its opening on 10 September and closed on 18 October, and this was Parallel of Life and Art .

This exhibition is often regarded as a manifestation of the Independent Group and although to some extent this interpretation is true, the show itself was devised and organised quite separately from the Group. Nigel Henderson recalled that it was Eduardo Paolozzi's "suggestion to do a show" ⁷⁴ and he brought Alison and Peter Smithson to visit him in Bethnal Green. "Some kind of empathy occurred", said Henderson.

"We took to seeing each other and the idea was proposed... that we might do some kind of exhibition together; that is to say, we might ferret about for some common ground, some basic stand where we felt a certain mutuality. And we agreed to meet, I

⁷¹ Peter Reyner Banham 'The Head' Art News and Review, Vol.5, No.4, 21 March 1953, p.5.

⁷² Robert Melville 'Exhibitions' The Architectural Review. Vol.113, No.677, May 1953, p.339

⁷³ Lawrence Alloway gave an illustrated lecture on 'The Human Head in Modern Art' on 26 March and there was a discussion about the show on 8 April, which involved Penrose, Melville, Eric Newton and others.

⁷⁴ Anne Seymore 'Notes Towards a Chronology Based on a Conversation with the Artist' in Nigel Henderson. Paintings, Collages and Photographs, Anthony d'Offay, London, 1977. No page numbers.

think it was once a week...and the general idea was that we should keep in touch and that we should throw material that any of us cared for into the pool for general discussion, acclaim or rejection, and build up a sort of pool of imagery and maybe a spin-off of ideas to see what happened... the thing built up over...six months, a year..."⁷⁵

As early as April 1952, the Management Committee discussed a proposal by Alison and Peter Smithson for an exhibition, and by January of the following year, the question of financial support for the show was discussed:

"Mr. Penrose reported that Messrs. Paolozzi, Henderson and Smithson, together with one or two friends, had been working on an exhibition and had asked whether the ICA would like to show it in the autumn. Miss Jane Drew had seen some of the material, and thought it interesting, though rather incoherent. In order to produce the exhibition, a minimum advance of £100 would be needed to cover expenses... The organisers of the exhibition thought that they could raise £50 from Miss Drew and Mr. Ove Arup, and had asked if the ICA would provide the rest. It was agreed that the advice of Mr. Arup should be sought."⁷⁶

Later in the month, the Management Committee met again:

"Mr. Gregory reported that he had seen Mr. Ove Arup and Mr. Jenkins; the latter was hopeful of being able to raise a fairly substantial guarantee. He had himself contributed £25 and Mr.

⁷⁵Nigel Henderson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 7 July 1976 for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.
⁷⁶ICA Management Committee Meeting minutes 14 January 1953. ICA Archives.

Denys Lasdun would do the same. There was at present space available in the exhibition programme during September. Mr. Gregory would be seeing those concerned again, and it was agreed that the exhibition would be seriously considered if there was the prospect of a £200 guarantee being provided to cover costs."⁷⁷

Ronald Jenkins worked with Ove Arup and had been the Smithsons' engineer on their recently designed Hunstanton School, and during 1952 the Smithsons also worked on re-designing his office in Charlotte Street. According to Henderson, when Jenkins came in on the projected exhibition, the Smithsons, Paolozzi, and Henderson himself were extremely pleased, seeing it as "...an act of confidence and belief. We thought it a very generous step for him to take."⁷⁸ It certainly helped financially and made it easier to allay the ICA's fears of losing a vast sum of money, especially since Wonder and Horror of the Human Head only lost £22 and had set something of a precedent.

The images of Parallel of Life and Art were of great variety. Banham called them "extraordinary", but Henderson refuted this:

"...it was nothing extraordinary to me; I don't think we used any extraordinary imagery. It was all around. Quite a lot of it was from known art, some of it was from geology, micro-biology...stuff which we now regard as quite commonplace."⁷⁹

Arranged in the catalogue under eighteen headings - such as anatomy, art, landscape, stress, medicine, nature, etc. - there were 122 exhibits all reproduced as large photographs - number 14, 'Radiograph

⁷⁷ICA Management Committee Meeting minutes. 28 January 1953. ICA Archives.

⁷⁸Nigel Henderson, 1976, op.cit.

⁷⁹Ibid..

of a Jeep', 72. 'Sea Urchin', 118. 'Interplanetary War - Walter Bloch, age 8', 199. 'Section of a thrombosed pulmonary artery', 42. 'Japanese Writing', 51. 'In a 1910 Gymnasium', and so on.

Photography had been decided upon since this would give the wide variety of images some sort of uniformity, and in choosing photographs, the exhibition rather emphasised the idea of this medium. In a contemporary review, Banham commented about the medium:

"The veracity of the camera is proverbial, but nearly all proverbs take a one-sided view of life. Truth may be stranger than fiction, but many of the camera's statements are stranger than truth itself. We tend to forget that every photograph is an artefact, a document recording forever a momentary construction based upon reality. Instantaneous, it mocks the monumental; timeless, it monumentalises the grotesque. In the strange photographic record of a ladies' gymnasium in 1910, the camera's unwinking eye...perpetuates an anthology of poses... But in perpetuating what can have been no more than an ludicrous and uncomfortable moment and presenting it to us with a surface texture which, after countless processes of reproduction and re-reproduction, has become an autonomous entity on its own, this odd greying photograph functions almost as a symbol, an image, a work of art in its own right. It has so little, now, to do with the recording of any conceivable reality that it is hardly rendered any less, or more probable by being turned upside down. This extraordinary image is a photographic document of an event remote both in time and probability and is one of a hundred such images of the visually inaccessible or improbable which have been assembled for the exhibition

Parallel of Life and Art..."⁸⁰

If the content of the show was unusual, then its display was also out of the ordinary. The photographs were mounted on panels, plugged with brass eyelets at the corners and hung from the walls and ceiling, most either horizontally or vertically, but some at an angle. One reviewer commented, "A final word of warning - take your stilts; for some reason the greater part of the exhibition has been hung above head level."⁸¹ Nigel Henderson explained:

"We were probably hanging the material for about two or three days, and were trying to get it into a kind of spider's web above the heads of the people, because the room had to be used for lectures during the exhibition... we strung up an awful lot of wire and hooks..."⁸²

Although the ICA had been generous in its support of the exhibition and Roland Penrose and Herbert Read had been enthusiastic about it, the organisers were concerned that the show should not be too closely associated with the ICA establishment. "We didn't want Read to open it," said Nigel Henderson,

"because he seemed automatically to be doing everything, and I think we had some fairly bumptious ideas. We wanted André Malraux, and somehow it was asking too much and we didn't have a second string. Ultimately I was asked to invite Sir Francis Meynell, who most unwillingly agreed. He was getting a little

⁸⁰ PRB (Peter Reyner Banham) 'Photograph' The Architectural Review Vol.114, No.682 October 1953, p.259.

⁸¹ Astragal. Notes and Topics 'Steam Photography' The Architects' Journal Vol.118 No.3056 24 September 1953, p.367.

⁸² Nigel Henderson interviewed by Dorothy Morland 17 August 1976, p.2. ICA Archives.

old for controversy, I think, and this looked controversial. It was visual stuff, not quite his line. He agreed from sheer friendliness...that didn't come off because he turned over his car on the morning he was coming up to open the exhibition - so guess who opened it: Herbert Read."⁸³

In general, the show received a bad press. It was accused of being concerned with images of violence (which it was not) and of being obscure in its imagery. Even the catalogue, which Henderson and Paolozzi had had printed by a non-specialist firm in an attempt "to make use of other people's unconscious skills and not to fall into the hands of designers",⁸⁴ was criticised for attempting to be different just for the sake of being different. The concertina format had in fact, been used "...so that a student or somebody working in a drawing office who might like the material for a while, could just open it up and pin it on a board..."⁸⁵

But a few critics were perceptive enough to recognise some of the parallels. Bryan Robertson of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, writing in Art News and Review, called the show "beautiful and rewarding..." and went on to say,

"The exhibition... leaves the spectator with the feeling that the barriers between the artist, the scientist, and the technician are dissolving in a singularly potent way."⁸⁶

Certainly, the 'environmental' display of the images assisted the spectator to set up relationships as he or she moved between the

⁸³ Ibid., p.3.

⁸⁴ Anne Seymore, op.cit.

⁸⁵ Nigel Henderson 1976, op.cit., p.3.

⁸⁶ Bryan Robertson 'Parallel of Life and Art' Art News and Review. Vol.5. No.17 19 September 1953.

suspended panels. Also, the relationship was non-hierarchical, since images from all manner of sources were juxtaposed. The eye moved from a photograph of a disintegrating mirror, to patterns in Grimsby mud, to a picture of Jackson Pollock working in his studio. There was no demand on the spectator to see one image as more 'worthy' than another, of one image being Art and another not. In fact, Art with a capital A was set off against art with a small a: Picasso's Bather of 1923 was given the same status as a drawing by an eight year old; a photograph of the United Nations building was set next to one of an Eskimo settlement. The astute observer did make connections though, whether they were intended or not:

"...a head carved in porous whalebone by an Eskimo and the section of a plant stem from Thornton's Vegetable Anatomy ... [have] no connection whatsoever except their community of outline and surface texture... in photographic reproduction. They come from societies and technologies almost unimaginably different, and yet to the camera-eyed western man the visual equivalence is unmistakable and perfectly convincing.

This was an analogy of pure chance, but about others one may not be so dogmatic. Any equivalence between a painting by Jackson Pollock and the surface of a guillemot's egg is certainly unconscious and probably coincidental, but we could never clear our minds of the suspicion that the visual education of Mr. Pollock cannot have been utterly innocent of pictures of bird's eggs - he is, after all, a camera-eyed western artist."⁶⁷

The juxtapositions of such varied images were undoubtedly one aspect of the show which excited some of the visitors. As a student, the architect Ron Herron visited the ICA and thought the exhibition

⁶⁷Peter Reyner Banham 1953, op.cit., p.260

"...was most extraordinary because it was primarily photographic and with apparently no sequence; it jumped around like anything. But it had just amazing images; things that one had never thought of looking at in that sort of way...and the juxtaposition of all these images. And I was just knocked out by it."⁸⁸

Such juxtapositions were related to Paolozzi's epidiastroscope show of the previous year and his later collages, whilst the notion inherent in the exhibition that scientific and artistic information were aspects of a single whole, was also one of Paolozzi's chief concerns. Indeed, Paolozzi and his fellow organisers were at pains to point out the scientific/technological environment in which the artist worked:

"Technical inventions such as the photographic enlarger, serial photography and the high speed flash have given us new tools with which to expand our field of vision beyond the limits imposed on previous generations. Their products feed our newspapers, our periodicals, and our films, being continually before our eyes; thus we have become familiar with material and aspects of material hitherto inaccessible. Today the painter, for example, may find beneath the microscope a visual world that excites his senses far more than does the ordinary world of streets, trees and faces. But his work will necessarily seem obscure to the observer who does not take into account the impact on him of these new visual discoveries."⁸⁹

Two weeks after the exhibition opened, Paolozzi, Peter Smithson, Donald Holms, and David Sylvester were locked in discussion at the

⁸⁸ Ron Heron interviewed by the author, 10 January 1983.

⁸⁹ Unpublished manuscript in the collection of Nigel Henderson. Quoted in Diane Kirkpatrick Eduardo Paolozzi, London 1970, p.19.

ICA. This was 'Points of View' on the Parallel of Life and Art exhibition and it took place on 24 September. Five weeks later, the Parallel of Life and Art photographs were hung at the Architectural Association which was then, as Charles Jencks called it, "the temple of reverent Miesolatry"⁹⁰, and a debate on the implications of the exhibition was held there on 2 December. Introducing this debate, Peter Smithson began: "We are not going to talk about proportion and symmetry"⁹¹ and, according to Banham, declared war "on the inherent academicism of the neo-Palladians."⁹² Indeed, Banham was later to see Parallel of Life and Art as "one of the crucial stages in the demolition of the intellectual prestige of abstract art in Britain..."⁹³ and the first manifestation of the New Brutalism, though the exhibition preceded the coining of the term.

If Parallel of Life and Art helped establish the ethic and aesthetic of New Brutalism, this was only one of its influences. Banham maintained that its relation to the Independent Group was as input rather than output, and that its imagery was all-inclusive.⁹⁴ In this latter respect, the show reinforced Independent Group beliefs, as well as the more personally held beliefs of Paolozzi, the Smithsons and Henderson. Indeed, Henderson's large collage of 1954 called Atlas, was to some degree influenced by the exhibition. And no doubt, the individual images themselves continued to exert some sort of sway over those visitors to the ICA who bought the large, mounted photographs when they went on sale in June 1954.

⁹⁰ Charles Jencks Modern Movements in Architecture Harmondsworth 1973, p.252

⁹¹ Peter Reyner Banham 'The New Brutalism' Architectural Review Vol.118 No.708 December 1955 p.361.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Peter Reyner Banham The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic. London, 1966, p.61

⁹⁴ Peter Reyner Banham. Draft script for Arts Council, op.cit., p.6.

Although the exhibition undoubtedly gave the Independent Group some impetus and provided material for a good deal of discussion, there was some criticism of it from within the Group. William Turnbull "...said that at the time he did not think much of Parallel of Life and Art . He disliked the inclusion of old-fashioned photographs and would have preferred more modern photographic material instead."⁹⁵ Toni del Renzio, who was a member of the ICA's exhibitions sub-committee and had been involved in writing and designing catalogues for a number of exhibitions during the year, prepared an introduction for the Parallel of Life and Art catalogue. This not only made some comparisons and contrasts between Parallel of Life and Art and the earlier Growth and Form exhibition, but also resurrected his criticisms of Growth and Form and apparently included a quotation from A.N. Whitehead which, Banham argued, "...was liable to make the organisers of the exhibition look ridiculous."⁹⁶ The criticism was based upon the idea that perception was purposeful and not passive, and del Renzio believed Growth and Form did not consider the creativity of the human eye, whereas Parallel of Life and Art , with its technological aspect, did. Toni del Renzio showed the draft introduction to Ian McCallum at Architectural Review , where it was also seen by Banham, who was working there as an assistant editor. Apparently feeling that the criticism of Growth and Form was either unfair or unnecessary, or both, Banham reported the matter to the ICA Management Committee on 18 August. Roland Penrose asked Toni del Renzio to make some changes in the piece and then Paolozzi, Henderson and the Smithsons decided that they did not want the introduction at all. Toni del Renzio wrote to Penrose on 2 September:

⁹⁵William Turnbull in conversation with Peter Karpinski 7 March 1977, in Peter Karpinski, op.cit., p.10.

⁹⁶ICA Management Committee Meeting minutes. 18 August 1953. ICA Archives.

"After the unfortunate happenings of the last few days, I find that the mutual trust essential to any collaboration no longer exists. I therefore propose to put an end to the embarrassment in which we share by tendering my resignation from the ICA Exhibitions Committee. It is with regret...that I have come to this decision. I sincerely hope that you will understand that I am doing what I consider to be honest and frank..."⁹⁷

Penrose replied,

"I write at once before having had the opportunity to show your letter to the other members of the Exhibition Committee to say that I am very sorry to hear of your decision. Personally, I do not feel that anything of sufficient importance to warrant your resignation has happened. There are bound to be differences of opinion from time to time and I am disappointed to find that the opposition shown to a part of your preface should have weighed so heavily with you..."⁹⁸

Upon Toni del Renzio's resignation from the exhibitions committee, Penrose quickly wrote to Lawrence Alloway, who replied on 22 September,

"Thank you for your letter of 17th September, inviting me to join the ICA's exhibition sub-committee; I feel very flattered that you should ask me and I accept with pleasure."⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Letter from Toni del Renzio to Roland Penrose, 2 September 1953. ICA Archives.

⁹⁸ Rough draft of a letter from Roland Penrose to Toni del Renzio. No date. ICA Archives. Toni del Renzio did not receive this reply from Penrose, and since no typed version exists, it is likely that the letter was never sent.

⁹⁹ Letter from Lawrence Alloway to Roland Penrose 22 September 1953. ICA Archives.

Alloway's gradual entry into the ICA during early and mid-1953 was now complete, and his position on the exhibitions committee, and later as Assistant Director, was to be a major contribution to his influence upon the Institute and upon the Independent Group.

**4. 1954: Focusing Interests -
the 'Fine Art/Pop Art' Continuum**

During 1954, discussion within the Independent Group focused on a more coherent philosophy. Some of the previous concerns - 'all-overness', 'afocalism', a non-hierarchical view of art - were incorporated into Lawrence Alloway's concept of a 'fine art/pop art continuum.' This use of previous Independent Group 'material', integrated with the personal interests of Alloway and John McHale in popular culture, was to give the Group a certain coherence of ideas which it had previously lacked. However, this was a gradual and almost imperceptible change. To those outside the Group, it appeared to function as it had for the previous months by feeding the ICA with new and lively topics for its official programme.

The series of seminars 'Aesthetic Problems of Contemporary Art' ran on into 1954, closing with Banham on 'Art in the Fifties' on 25 April. Later in the year, beginning on 28 October, a similar series called 'Books and the Modern Movement' was inaugurated by Lawrence Alloway talking about Art Now by Herbert Read.¹ The series, following closely on the heels of the well attended 'Aesthetic Problems' seminars, was yet another manifestation of Independent Group concern to combat the institutionalisation and, as the Group saw it, subsequent ossification of contemporary art. The ICA Bulletin in October announced:

¹ The first seminar was to have been held on 14 October with Toni del Renzio on Towards a New Architecture by Le Corbusier, but this was cancelled due to del Renzio's illness and was eventually held on 2 December. The full programme was: Art Now by Herbert Read - Lawrence Alloway (28 October 1954); Picasso by Gertrude Stein - Robert Melville (11 November 1954); The Meaning of Modern Sculpture by R.H.Wilenski - Reg Butler (25 November 1954); Towards a New Architecture by Le Corbusier - Toni del Renzio (2 December 1954); Pioneers of the Modern Movement by Nicholas Pevsner - Robert Furneaux Jordan (9 December 1954); Vision and Design by Roger Fry - Peter Reyner Banham (16 December 1954).

"During the seminars on Aesthetic Problems, it became apparent that English thinking on contemporary art is largely conditioned by the opinions of a few authors as expressed in a handful of books. These works of criticism and theory were not those which normally come up for discussion at the ICA, but certain semi-popular texts which have exercised a formative influence on a great number of persons by virtue of their wide distribution and easy availability through the public library system. They are, as often as not, the first books on contemporary art which many people read, and though the precise contexts may have been forgotten, their precepts remain as almost unquestioned guides to aesthetic judgement. Most of them were written, or became available in English, during the early nineteen thirties, and were very specifically expressions of their period, but what is their value now? The seminar 'Books and the Modern Movement' will take six typical and influential books which have put certain fundamental ideas, or sympathetic groupings of ideas, before the English public, and try to assess their validity, in terms of present trends in aesthetics, and their value in the study of contemporary art in its current manifestations..."²

Banham, who was chairman for the series, seems to have been its instigator. He first mentioned a working plan of the idea at a Management Committee meeting on 4 March, and then on 25 March he submitted two draft suggestions, one for 'Books and the Modern Movement' and the second a course of lectures by himself on the documents of contemporary art - Futurist Manifestos, Bauhaus books, and so on. The second idea was rejected as being too specialist for the ICA; the first idea was adopted.³

² ICA Bulletin No.48, October 1954.

³ ICA Management Committee meeting minutes. 25 March 1954. ICA Archives.

As with the 'Aesthetic Problems' seminars, 'Books and the Modern Movement' attempted to introduce a re-examination of accepted values, but now struck at the very heart of established opinion, as it were, by discussing the very books which contributed most to these values. The seminars appear to have been lively and provocative. Toni del Renzio's talk on Vers une architecture promoted the idea that one should not be too concerned with what Le Corbusier wrote but more with what he built, and one would learn from that. In fact, he regarded Vers une architecture "...as a cobbled up lot of scarcely changed Beaux Arts principles...and in some ways not a particularly good book."⁴ And Robert Melville, talking about Gertrude Stein's Picasso, said, "Gertrude Stein was a nasty old woman and I'm glad she's dead."⁵

In such ways, the Independent Group and what might be called its 'fellow-travellers' - Robert Melville in particular - were attempting to shake the establishment by the scruff of its metaphorical neck. Slipping in and out of the ICA programme, the Group skirmished with the cultural hierarchy and in the best tradition of guerrilla warfare, never allowed a pitched battle to take place. But when their terrain was attacked from without, they rallied behind their erstwhile protagonists to form a unified front. Thus it was when Wyndham Lewis's book The Demon of Progress in the Arts appeared in November 1954.

Lewis's book was an attack upon extremism in the visual arts and argued that art should not be seen to progress in the way that science and technology are seen to progress. Specifically he attacked the ICA as humouring extremism in art. In the ICA's December Bulletin some

⁴ Toni del Renzio interviewed by the author 23 February 1984.

⁵ Toni del Renzio interviewed by the author 17 March 1982.

facts about ICA funds which Lewis had claimed, were positively disclaimed. These included the funding of the Unknown Political Prisoner competition, which Lewis had said was paid for by the ICA, but which the ICA said was funded "...by an anonymous donor who was not English [and] administered by an American director from a separate office."⁶ In its general attack upon the ICA, The Demon of Progress in the Arts was counter-attacked by some members of the Independent Group. "I remember... one day I was up for my coffee or lunch [at the ICA]." recalled Donald Holms.

"They'd just read of this book. I suppose just the first reviews had appeared; perhaps one of them had got hold of a copy. But it might have been Toni [del Renzio] himself, because he was very angry and was saying, 'Here is this attack on our dear Herbert Read and this man [Lewis] should be sued'; they really were in that sort of frame of mind..."⁷

When threatened from without, the Independent Group rallied behind Read and the Institute, for although they criticised the Institute's general direction and Read's aesthetic philosophy, they were at least allowed to make these criticisms within the walls of the ICA and with the consent of Read himself.

Banham's period as convener of the Independent Group ended sometime during 1954. He was working at the Architectural Review as an assistant editor, as well as sitting on the ICA Management Committee and writing his doctoral thesis at the Courtauld Institute of Art, a thesis which would eventually be published as Theory and Design in the First Machine Age. The pressures were too great and

⁶ ICA Bulletin No.50, December 1954. See p. 95 of the present work.

⁷ Donald Holms interviewed by the author, 9 June 1982.

organising the formal Independent Group meetings was one of the responsibilities which he had to jettison. Apparently the ICA Management, and specifically Dorothy Morland, thought the Independent Group venture worth continuing since it was she who prompted its resumption after the hiatus caused by Banham's withdrawal as convener, asking John McHale and Lawrence Alloway to organise a new series of meetings. John McHale recalled:

"We [Alloway and McHale] came along and attended the end part of the original Independent Group...And we found there was a kind of enquiry going on - it was historical in one sense, but it was interested, in part, in demolishing history. It was...very iconoclastic; one was very happy with that so we sort of went on attending. Then came the moment when Banham didn't have the time to convene the Group. Dorothy simply mentioned it to me over coffee one day and said, 'Look, why don't you sort of take on convening the Group', and I said, 'I'd like to discuss it with Lawrence and we'll get back to you.' I talked with him very briefly and he said, 'Fine. Why don't we?' [it was] very casual."⁸

Alloway and McHale had known each other for some time, first meeting when McHale attended a class Alloway was giving in art history. McHale found him to have a "...razor-sharp" mind and an "...enormous critical intelligence...which, though acquainted thoroughly with the tradition in which he was concerned as an art historian, [was] interested in a much wider set of phenomenon."⁹ They had certain things in common, not least an interest in the popular

⁸ John McHale interviewed by Peter Reyner Banham, 30 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for the Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop, 1979, though not used in the film.

⁹ Ibid.

arts, and so they agreed to organise a new series of Independent Group meetings provided it could be geared towards their own interests. Dorothy Morland acquiesced and the Independent Group entered a new phase.

For Alloway, popular arts offered an area of study which was relatively fresh, an area which was, as he said, "...understudied at the time." Being interested in it anyway was a bonus. Furthermore, the choice of theme was in keeping with the general Independent Group attitude: to take the popular arts seriously, said Alloway, "was a gesture of contempt towards established fine art values - and I think the contempt bit had quite a large aspect..."¹⁰ Thus, Alloway and McHale consciously used the Group for discussing popular culture and this theme was not brought about by mutual discussion. The individual sessions, however, were instigated, as Toni del Renzio suggested,¹¹ by general discussion of what the membership wanted to do. But this would not have been a problem. This new phase of the Independent Group was different from the previous one, which had been a larger affair and though generally concerned with technology, covered a wide range of subjects and was attended by people with a wide variety of often opposing attitudes. The Alloway/McHale organised sessions were far more intimate and the interest in popular culture was confined to what McHale called "...a very small network [which was] constantly in touch [and] ideas interacted and fed back... and interpenetrated that network."¹² Thus, the familiarity of the Group members, both inside and outside the ICA, their on-going conversations, and their general interest in similar things, made it easy to choose subjects for discussion. And the whole situation was very casual, a point

¹⁰ Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 25 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

¹¹ See Appendix 1, p. 410.

¹² John McHale, op.cit.

emphasised by John McHale:

"'What are we going to talk about?' we might say around coffee. Even though we were the conveners... 'Richard [Hamilton's] stuff at the last show has got some interesting bits in it'... 'Okay, we'll do that'. What did that mean? It simply meant that somebody organised the projector, one of us who happened to be there - we were in there very often, having coffee, having a drink - in and out of the ICA two or three times a week."¹³

For those outside, the Group presented an even more élitist image than it had previously and the effect was often unnerving. "They did give a feeling of being a little...supercilious and the feeling that they were going a bit further than anybody else was going in their ideas," recalled Dorothy Morland.¹⁴ But as John McHale admitted, members of the Group were aware of this:

"I think by virtue of the way the Group itself coalesced and ran, it had a lot of arrogance, a lot of snobbery in itself. But that is not negative. It was a small, cohesive, quarrelsome, abrasive Group, conscious also of the fact that if people came in from the outside, either they sank or swam. Because it was a difficult Group in that sense, to stay afloat in unless you were on your toes, engaged in the kind of almost daily dialogues that members of the Group had; it was sort of difficult to keep track of what was going on for one thing - you weren't inside. So it had its own kind of snobbery."¹⁵

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Dorothy Morland interviewed by the author, 26 May 1982.

¹⁵John McHale interviewed by Julian Cooper, 19 November 1977, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

The new conveners focused upon a more sociological approach to popular culture which offered less restrictive interpretation and therefore a wide base for their discussions. The theme chosen by Alloway and McHale however, was not completely new. Before this, Independent Group members had been concerned with the popular arts in relation to the mass media. As we have seen, many of them grew up with a popular culture manufactured by the media of mass communication, and it was often American. Probably this had an influence upon the Group's later interests. Paolozzi was drawn to the images of popular culture when he was in Paris, as was William Turnbull. But both of them belong to the earlier phase of the Independent Group - before Alloway and McHale took over - and their interest was far more catholic than to be restricted by any one overriding concern. Though Paolozzi's source material contained much that was directly derived from the popular art created by films, magazines, advertising, and so on, there was also a good deal of it which related to the sciences, to biology and botany, and to technology. Similarly, Turnbull was "...stimulated by the immediacy and vitality of popular imagery in the media, which was visible in abundance on the walls of his living space."¹⁶ But these images were by no means restricted to popular culture. Modigliani and a Greek Kouros figure co-existed on a wall or a pin-board with a space rocket, a scene from the film Rashomon and an advertisement from Life magazine. This egalitarian attitude towards imagery - "it's all information" or "it's all the same"¹⁷ - characterised both Turnbull's and Paolozzi's source material as well as the content of Parallel of Life and Art and of Independent Group discussions. However, this is not meant to be interpreted as a criticism. An egalitarian approach

¹⁶Richard Morphet William Turnbull. Sculpture and Painting. Tate Gallery. 1973, p.48

¹⁷See Charles Jencks Modern Movements in Architecture. Harmondsworth 1973, p.270

did not deny the use of choice; on the contrary, considered choice became a more important activity since the increased range of possible visual material required a more demanding selection, often based upon criteria for which there was no precedent. This egalitarian approach also typified the Independent Group under the guidance of Alloway and McHale, although the particular attention paid to the mass media and the popular culture engendered by it, gave this phase of Independent Group activity a more structured feeling.

There is no doubt, if the testimony of Alloway and McHale is to be believed, that they consciously switched the Independent Group discussions to suit their own interests. In 1973 Alloway noted that

"Previously [the Independent Group] had been tending to deal with aspects of technology and architecture more, but it was McHale and myself who swung it over to pop culture. And it was easy to do since everyone was predisposed to the subject anyway."¹⁸

And in answer to the question, "Did you consciously use the Group as a vehicle for discussing popular culture?" he simply replied, "Yes."¹⁹ McHale's recollection corroborates Alloway's: "...we came back with the notion of restructuring [the Independent Group programme] on the lines of the sociology of pop."²⁰

Although the Independent Group programme appeared to become more directed by the "men of a different turn of mind to the founding fathers"²¹, as Banham called Alloway and McHale, it would be grossly

¹⁸ James Reinish, 'An interview with Lawrence Alloway' Studio International Vol. 186, No.958, September 1973, p.62.

¹⁹ Lawrence Alloway. Letter to the author, 13 May 1983.

²⁰ John McHale, 30 May 1977, op.cit.

²¹ Peter Reyner Banham. Draft script for Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop, 1979, p.3.

misleading to suppose that the Group became a vehicle for the exclusive promotion of the study of popular culture. Neither those who organised the meetings nor those who attended were quite so dogmatic. John McHale was at pains to point out that the Independent Group's position was never fixed and although there was a "sort of title for the series" he and Alloway convened, they "weren't even fixed on that...it was never a kind of 'either - or' fixed position; it was always 'sort of'."²² But Toni del Renzio did think "...that there was a consciousness on the part of some people of seeing a purely pop thing."²³ The architect Geoffrey Holroyd was also aware of this. Having recently returned from the United States, he noted "an instant sense of connection with people like Lawrence Alloway and John McHale" but saw the Independent Group "focussing on its own search for a new model of popular life to replace the pre-war ideal!" This "pre-war ideal" was

"a proportioned body in green space, sun, light and air and glass; a da Vinci figure."

The Independent Group, Holroyd observed, wanted to charge this into a "pop cultural consumer."²⁴

Despite such observations of a mildly critical nature, and despite the protestations that the Group gatherings were never as fixed as always to be concerned with popular culture, there is, in retrospect, a certain truth in the belief that Alloway and McHale were their own best propagandists. Since the reputation of the Independent Group has come to rest on its relation to British Pop Art, the 'investigations' which took place during the period of Alloway and

²²John McHale, 30 May 1977, op.cit.

²³Toni del Renzio, 1984, op.cit.

²⁴Geoffrey Holroyd. Letter to the author, 23 April 1983.

McHale's convenership are regarded as crucial in this respect. Peter Reyner Banham made the point:

"As far as the world's view of what happened is concerned, the importance of the Independent Group is that it made British Pop Art. And I think historically it may still turn out to be true, that that is what it was all about. But in the process of saying that may be the ultimate historical judgement, as always happens with historical judgements, something like ninety-five per cent of the Independent Group's activity goes in the discard bin."²⁵

This interpretation must be analysed later; for the present, it is germane to quote Alloway on the relationship between the first phase of the Independent Group (which perhaps included a large proportion of Banham's discarded material) to the second phase (which apparently focused on popular culture and apparently was more influential):

"...I think the first phase of the Independent Group continued to be influential because our liking for pop was very much linked to a pro-technology attitude."²⁶

And again, in response to the question "Do you see the Independent Group being concerned with more issues than just popular culture?" he replied, "Art and technology was the other theme, I suppose. Pop culture is compatible with that."²⁷ Thus, whilst ready to state clearly the prominence of popular culture as an Independent Group theme,

²⁵Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with Richard Hamilton and Toni del Renzio, 27 June 1976, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

²⁶Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham. Soundtrack for Arts Council, op.cit.

²⁷Lawrence Alloway, 1983, op.cit.

Alloway was also ready to acknowledge the influential role of technology as an earlier theme, although he was never directly involved with this phase of the Group.²⁸

During the discussions which took place in 1954, Lawrence Alloway coined the term 'fine art/pop art continuum'. This was a useful term in describing a non-hierarchical attitude to 'élite' culture, that of the mass media, and everything in between. It was useful because by definition the word continuum meant a sameness, a continuation, and Alloway's position in regard to the popular arts and the fine arts was lateral and not élitist, and therefore pyramidal. Alloway explained:

"...Unique oil paintings and highly personal poems as well as mass distributed films and group-aimed magazines can be placed within a continuum rather than frozen in layers in a pyramid... Acceptance of the media on some such basis...is related to modern arrangements of knowledge in non-hierarchic forms."²⁹

This concept had had an importance in some of the earliest Independent Group discussions, but now Alloway not only christened it but defined it well enough for others to build upon, as it were. Richard Hamilton was clearly indebted to Alloway's verbalisation of the non-hierarchic view:

"Lawrence had been propounding an aesthetic theory at the ICA with which I felt in complete accord. His idea was of a 'fine/pop art continuum'; it was a linear rather than pyramidal

²⁸In *ibid.* Alloway states that he "...became involved with the Independent Group when McHale and I convened it, though I knew some of the members."

²⁹Lawrence Alloway 'The Long Front of Culture', Cambridge Opinion No.17, 1959, p.25.

concept. Instead of Picasso sitting on top of an ever-widening heap of inferior activity, with Elvis Presley and Henry Hathaway somewhere below him, all art is equal - there was no hierarchy of value. Elvis was to one side of a long line while Picasso was strung out on the other side."³⁰

However, Hamilton's interpretation of the continuum was not to meet with Alloway's approval, as we shall see later. In fact, Alloway's theory was not universally accepted within the Independent Group, despite the fact that it had been strongly hinted at in the Parallel of Life and Art exhibition and in the Group's general approach to art, science and technology, information and communication. Toni del Renzio recalled that the inexactness of some members of the Independent Group in their employment of terminology annoyed him.

"I used to lose my patience with the continual misuse of the term 'continuum' to describe our being surrounded by advertising and the media, only to be met by cynical smiles and incomprehension when I explained the mathematical sense of the term."³¹

But there is little doubt that the term, however del Renzio felt about its misuse, was enormously important in giving a lot of Independent Group activity some theoretical base.

The concept of the continuum was essentially an expansionist aesthetic since it widened acceptance of hitherto degraded visual material, and this had the effect of upsetting established ideas.

³⁰Richard Hamilton Collected Words 1953-1982, London 1982, p.31.

³¹Toni del Renzio 'Pioneers and Trendies', Art and Artists, No.209, February 1984, p.27.

Undoubtedly it was designed to do so and in this respect, Alloway was continuing the Group's predilection for iconoclasm but perhaps in a more specific way than had previously been attempted. The earlier Independent Group meetings had taken a wider, possibly more catholic view. The discussions ranged from Art Nouveau to philosophy, helicopter design to Le Corbusier; and this approach was mirrored in Parallel of Life and Art, Paolozzi's tear-outs, and the images pinned on the walls of Turnbull's studio. With Alloway and McHale, this all-embracing 'programme' was focused. Although they continued to discuss a variety of aspects of visual communication, they tended to keep these within the sphere of mass communication and popular culture.

The 'fine art/pop art continuum' was perhaps the most important concept to come out of the Independent Group. No one single thought held the members together but a non-hierarchic view of communication in its widest interpretation came close. That all forms of communication co-existed "...without damage to the senses of the spectator or to the standards of society"³² was paramount in Independent Group thinking. And the concept was more attractive because it was recognised to be developable. Once Alloway had verbalised the idea, given it a name, defined it and, one could argue, packaged and sold it, like the symbolic Madison Avenue man he so admired, the product caught the imagination and stimulated the intellect. Variations of it appeared; some of them were merely inferior copies but others pushed the idea a little further, developed it a little more in one direction or another.

Central to Alloway's concept was the belief that fine art was no

³²Lawrence Alloway 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) Pop Art, London 1966, p.38.

more special than any other activity within the visual arts, no more special than design or advertising or film making. They were all "part of the general field of visual communication." In 1957 he wrote:

"All kinds of messages are transmitted to every kind of audience along a multitude of channels. Art is one part of the field; another is advertising."³³

He called this a "permissive approach to culture"³⁴ and undoubtedly meant an approach with freedom, whereas his critics - and they were numerous - probably used the word 'permissive' with captious overtones.

Alloway was quite clear why he adopted such an approach:

"I think there are two problems common to many people of my age (I was born in 1926) who are interested in the visual arts.

(1) we grew up with the mass media. Unlike our parents and teachers we did not experience the impact of the movies, the radio, the illustrated magazines. The mass media were established as a natural environment by the time we could see them.

(2) 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

³³Lawrence Alloway 'Personal Statement', Ark No.19. 1957, p.28

³⁴Lawrence Alloway, 1959, op.cit.

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'... The popular arts reached, soon after the war, a new level of skill and imagination. Berenson, Fry, Read and the others gave me no guidance on how to read, how to see, the mass media. Images of home, the family, and fashion, in the glossy magazines; narratives of action and patterns of behaviour in the pulps; the co-ordination of both these images and these narratives in the movies. My sense of connection with the mass media overcame the lingering prestige of aestheticism and fine art snobbism."³⁵

When Alloway used the term 'pop art' in the early 'fifties, he was referring to the popular arts created by the media of mass communication. But there was often confusion in the meaning of the term, a failure in some of the Independent Group rhetoric to be specific about just what 'pop art' was. Some fifteen years later, Alloway attempted a definition:

"Popular culture can be defined as the sum of the arts designed for simultaneous consumption by a numerically large audience... Popular culture originates in urban centres and is distributed on the basis of mass production... The consumption of popular culture is basically a social experience, providing information derived from and contributing to our statistically normal roles in society. It is a network of messages and objects that we

³⁵ Lawrence Alloway, 1959, op.cit.

share with others."³⁶

However, during the early 'fifties this definition was not so thoroughly defined, as witness the Independent Group attitude towards the 1951 exhibition Black Eyes and Lemonade .

This show was held during the Festival of Britain at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. It had been arranged by Barbara Jones under the auspices of the Society for Education in the Arts and the Arts Council, and it contained examples of British popular and traditional art. Originally it was intended to show rather traditional examples of popular art - lace, Staffordshire pottery, canal barge painting, and so on - but Barbara Jones had different ideas:

"I think the Society [for Education in the Arts] originally had in its mind more tradition and smocking and Staffordshire dogs than were in mine. We brought the whole popular art scene right up to date..."³⁷

By including comic postcards, beer labels, a tiled fireplace in the shape of an airdale dog, posters for Start-Rite shoes, and a talking lemon which extolled the virtues of Idris lemon squash, the exhibition transcended the limits of folk art ["hand-crafted by the same group by which it will be consumed"³⁸] and, in its widest definition, included numerous examples of popular art. However, Alloway later called Black Eyes and Lemonade an exhibition of "...folk art and working-class objets d'art" and said that it showed an interest in the

³⁶Lawrence Alloway 'Popular Culture and Pop Art' Studio International Vol.178, No.913, July/August 1969, p.17.

³⁷Barbara Jones 'Popular Arts' in M.Banham and B.Hillier (editors) A Tonic to the Nation. The Festival of Britain 1951. London, 1976, p.131.

³⁸Lawrence Alloway, 1969, op.cit., p.17.

"bizarre and amusing."³⁹ Thus, in Alloway's comments, we have more insight into his use of the term 'pop art' and its ultimate use by the Independent Group. Essentially, the Group viewed popular art of the type displayed at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1951 as rather naive, both in essence and in presentation; pop art, in their terms, was produced by a comparatively intellectual minority for distribution to the majority. Even when the original material was naive, it was groomed and moulded by this sophisticated group to appear far less ingenuous. The Independent Group was aware of this process and of the difference between it and the popular culture of the Idris talking lemon or seaside postcards. Some of them even made the distinction by calling the former 'pop art' and the latter 'popular art', but this by no means achieved standard usage, although later, when they began to write about the discussions, terms had to be defined. Richard Hamilton, writing in 1960, made the distinction:

"The mass arts, or pop arts, are not the popular arts in the old sense of art arising from the masses. They stem from a professional group with a highly developed cultural sensibility."⁴⁰

One of the differences between popular culture and pop culture was - and still is - the degree to which technology was employed. There is a correlation between the Independent Group's interest in technology and the period of the early 'fifties during which the Group functioned. "The period after World War II," wrote Alloway,

"was Edenic for the consumer of popular art (pop culture); technical improvements in colour photography in magazines,

³⁹Lawrence Alloway, 1966, op.cit., p.200, n.8.

⁴⁰Richard Hamilton 'Persuading Image' Design No.134, February 1960, p.31.

expansion of scale in the big screens of the cinema, and the successful addition of new media (long-playing records and television)." ⁴¹

The earlier phase of the Independent Group - with its general interest in technology - provided material for the later phase - the interest in communications and pop culture - to feed off. There was no connection between Jasia Shapiro's talk on helicopter design and Alloway's interest in Hollywood movies other than they both exhibited the use of modern technology, albeit for different ends. But within the concept of the continuum there was no reason why an artist should not be interested in helicopters and Hollywood just as much as in Holbein and Hokusai.

If Alloway and McHale consciously shifted the Independent Group 'programme' to focus upon pop art and mass communication, they just as consciously made that 'programme' biased towards the United States as opposed to Europe. In general, members of the Independent Group had always had a preference for things American, in part because they considered them superior, in part because they considered there was no comparable alternative. Toni del Renzio recalled that the Independent Group possessed

"...a vernacular urban culture [of] mass-produced and largely exotic elements, imports from America, movies, science fiction in the form of pulp magazines, Pop music (this was pre-Beatle era), advertising largely as it appeared in American magazines rather than the home produced variety, Detroit car design rather than anything European, office equipment by IBM rather than by Olivetti, Time and Newsweek . A further factor was the

⁴¹Lawrence Alloway, 1969, op.cit., p.17.

extraordinary prestige and success in our eyes of New York's Museum of Modern Art, contrasted with the outsider and poverty-stricken role of the ICA in London. For some time, then, the United States was the promised land of social opportunism... Most alternatives to this attitude then available to us were largely unacceptable; pathological anti-Americanism linked the more vulgar and dogmatic versions of marxism current among the leftish groups or to an equally narrow and inflexible so-called European aesthetic tradition based on the 'School of Paris'. The attitude to America and to American arts, both mass-produced and fine, was then a key to a position of recalcitrance with regard to the established canons and this was sufficient in most cases to override any reservations about American politics, witch hunts, and the Bomb. American capitalism was seen to deliver the goods."⁴²

Del Renzio's view was of the Independent Group looking positively to the United States and its products, finding little in Europe and its products. The social and cultural background of the Independent Group members had much to do with this. That many had grown up with the American mass media was enormously important.⁴³ Not only was it familiar to them (so familiar that when McHale first went to the States in 1955 he recalled the feeling of re-entering an environment ⁴⁴) but the message conveyed in the media was of the United States being intrinsically superior to Europe. Whether this was true or not, the Independent Group believed in the superiority of American technology and pop culture. Even Eduardo Paolozzi, whose art

⁴²Toni del Renzio 'Style, Technique and Iconography' Art and Artists, Vol.11, No.4 July 1976, p.36

⁴³For the political leanings of the Independent Group and the social and cultural background of the members, see p.102ff. of the present work.

⁴⁴John McHale in conversation with Julian Cooper. Soundtrack to the film The Fathers of Pop, Arts Council, 1979

grew from the tradition of European Surrealism, defended the quality of American media in relation to its British counterpart:

"The New Yorker is much more exciting than Punch magazine, or... an American industrial design magazine is one thousand times superior to an English Design magazine."⁴⁵

For post-war England, still in the grip of economic austerity, the United States offered a society of opportunity and possibility. The image presented by the mass media reinforced this view and the Independent Group was as interested in the image - the effect of the media's message - as it was in why the image existed - a socio-political analysis of the message. Thus, Toni del Renzio could later speak of the Group - and especially Alloway and McHale - having

"...a sort of mythic vision of [America] and this mythic vision was concocted out of documentary evidence...so that there would be the equation of science fiction images of what was becoming apparent to serious work in America on how rockets would be sent to the Moon, and how the men would be clothed and protected... hints of science fiction and...what American football players looked like. [The Group] would get a composite image formed like that."⁴⁶

The consumption of American magazines was a most important influence. Although he had resigned from the ICA's exhibitions

⁴⁵Eduardo Paolozzi in 'Artists as Consumers - The Splendid Bargain'. Transcript of a discussion between Lawrence Alloway, Eduardo Paolozzi, Basil Taylor and Richard Hamilton. Broadcast 11 March 1960 on the BBC Third Programme for the series Art - Anti-Art.

⁴⁶Toni del Renzio interviewed by Peter Karpinski, 1 December 1976, in Peter Karpinski 'The Independent Group 1952-1955 and the Relationship of the Independent Group's Discussions to the Work of Hamilton, Paolozzi and Turnbull 1952-1957.' Unpublished BA dissertation. Leeds University, 1977, p.vi.

committee immediately before the Parallel of Life and Art show, Toni del Renzio was still very much part of the ICA and the Independent Group scene. He had secured a job with Newnes and Pearsons magazine group and therefore had access to the latest international journals, including the American Life, Look, Saturday Evening Post, Transformation, Fortune and so on. This was one important source for some of the Independent Group. Others were magazines received from the States by Alison Smithson during the war, Paolozzi picking up journals from ex-G.I.'s in Paris, Group members probably getting magazines from Soho newsagents, and, in 1956, John McHale bringing a trunk full of magazines and comics from America.

Another important and influential aspect of American culture which interested the Independent Group, was the Hollywood movie. Even the name 'movie' took on a certain significance. Anything labelled as a film was fine art and it was usually European. A movie was a product of pop culture and was nearly always American. And in their iconoclastic way, some members of the Group were far more eager to see a 'B' movie than they were to see the main feature. Banham later recalled that Alloway was derided "...as the man who liked bad films,"⁴⁷ and Toni del Renzio was critical that in all the time he knew Lawrence Alloway, he did not think

"...he ever once considered going to a foreign language film. I don't believe he ever said anything other than movie for a film. I even think he held Sweet Smell of Success somehow to be less of a film because of Sandy MacKendrick's past at Ealing and despite the presence of Burt Lancaster and Tony Curtis."

⁴⁷Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with Lawrence Alloway. Soundtrack to Arts Council, op.cit.

Critical observers considered Alloway to be totally blinkered in a belief that everything American was good "...and if there was a choice between an American and a European product, the American was automatically superior."⁴⁸ Certainly with regard to the cinema, Alloway did believe this. His great cinema-going 'pals' at this time were William Turnbull, Eduardo Paolozzi, and John McHale. Turnbull had been a member of cine clubs when he lived in Paris after the war and back in England in the early and mid 'fifties, he remembered going to the cinema with Alloway on numerous occasions.⁴⁹ Of Paolozzi, Alloway said that at this time part of his source material was "...science fiction movie stills. He and I," Alloway remembered,

"used to go quite a lot to the London Pavilion in Piccadilly which in those days was showing Universal International horror films...so he was kind of someone who had this itchy creativity on a continuous basis, always being bombarded by mass media imagery. And the example of seeing this happen to someone, I think sort of relaxed me and made it easier for me to go to the lecture at the Tate Gallery in the afternoon and go to the London Pavilion as soon as I could get out of there in the evening."⁵⁰

Testimony of both Alloway's and McHale's pre-Independent Group visits to the cinema was given by Magda Cordell, who recalled that

"...Alloway would go to the movies way before the Independent Group with John; with a flashlight, they would make notes and

⁴⁸ Toni del Renzio (*Art and Artists*) 1984, *op.cit.*, p.26.

⁴⁹ William Turnbull. Notes from a conversation with the author. 23 February 1983.

⁵⁰ Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham. Soundtrack for Arts Council, *op.cit.* At this time, Alloway was employed to lecture at the Tate Gallery.

they would see a set of movies which they had already seen before but they had already categorized, analysed, and sort of put them together in certain groups. Then they would go doing their research, reconfirming it, checking it, and seeing whether that was right and adding to it."⁵¹

Alloway held the conviction that the 'B' movie was an unjustifiably maligned form of popular culture and yet was one which was particularly valuable to study. The qualitative concepts of bad and good were no longer pertinent to such a study since the aim of the investigation was interpretation. Generally, the Independent Group were both aware and receptive to this approach. Peter Smithson, for example, regarded

"...the interpretation of films...as a guage of the popular culture... like... studying the development of bone tools in archaeology - you're measuring it by something you find by the thousand."⁵²

The approach was undoubtedly sociological, and Alloway later related to the wider spectrum what he and his colleagues were doing at the ICA:

"After World War II the critical study of pop culture developed in ways that surpassed in sophistication and complexity earlier discussions of the mass media... The new research was done by American sociologists who treated mass communications objectively, as data with a measurable effect upon our lives. There may be an analogy here with the post-war move among

⁵¹ Magda Cordell McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 30 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit.

⁵² Peter Smithson interviewed by the author, 22 November 1982.

historians away from heroes and dominant figures to the study of crowds. Previously the past had been discussed in terms of generals' decisions, monarchs' reigns and mistresses' fortunes, with the rest of the world serving as an anonymous backing... The democratization of history (like the sociological study of mass communications) leads to an increase of complexity in the material to be studied, making it bulge inconveniently beyond the classical scope of inquiry.

In the post-war period an uncoordinated but consistent view of art developed, more in line with history and sociology than with traditional art criticism and aesthetics. In London and New York artists then in their twenties or early thirties revealed a new sensitivity to the presence of images from mass communications... It follows that works [of art] demonstrating such principles would involve a change in our concept of artistic unity; art as a rendezvous of objects and images from disparate sources, rather than as an inevitably aligned set-up... As popular culture became conspicuous after World War II, as history and sociology studied the neglected mass of the past and the neglected messages of the present, art was being changed too... It was recognised in London for what it was ten years ago, a move towards an anthropological view of our own society. Anthropologists define culture as all of a society. This is a drastic foreshortening of a very complex issue in anthropology but to those of us brought up on narrow and reductive theories of art, anthropology offered a formulation about art as more than a treasury of precious items... Younger artists in London and New York did not view pop culture as relaxation, but as an on-going part of their lives. They felt no pressure to give up the culture they had grown up in (comics, pop music, movies). Their art was not the consequence of

renunciation but of incorporation." ⁵³

Alloway, writing eight years after the emergence of Pop Art as a manifestation of fine art, fifteen years after he and McHale took over the organisation of the Independent Group, had the benefit of hindsight and the work of Roy Lichtenstein, Oyvind Fahlstrom, Richard Hamilton and other artists to draw upon. In 1954, the anthropological and sociological approaches were only being tentatively employed and how they affected or were a direct influence upon the production of the artist was not especially clear. Nevertheless, within the Independent Group, discussions of a sociological and anthropological kind were taking place and, in retrospect, one could see these were relentlessly eroding the traditional foundations of artistic stimulus.

Although it was never actually stated as such, the Group all realised that art need not necessarily derive from those sources which had always fuelled it, but could draw upon all aspects of one's experience. Thus, it was not anomalous for a group of painters, sculptors, critics and so on, to discuss, for example, the sociological implications inherent in a Hollywood gangster movie or a Superman comic. After all, this was as much a part of their life as the hedgerows of Suffolk or the water's edge at St. Ives, and more part of their lives than the Sistine Chapel ceiling or the Luxembourg Palace. However, discussion of pop culture by no means prevented discussion of Constable or Wallis, Michelangelo or Rubens. It was all part of the continuum and it helped to shape the way they thought, what sort of art they produced, and the way they produced it. It was not unusual, for example, for the Group to discuss something which appeared to have no direct bearing upon the production of art, architecture or criticism but on the surface had purely socio-

⁵³ Lawrence Alloway, 1969, op.cit., pp.17-18

political implications. John McHale remembered "...looking at and discussing a set of films: the weapon cycle in Westerns - Colt 45 , Broken Lance , Winchester 73 ." About this he said,

"It is not entirely irrelevant... that when you examine the scenarios of those closely, and the action, they're being produced in America and going on at the same time as the Korean War. The debate internally within that war was... should or should not atomic weapons be used? And indeed, you get a lot of that dialogue imported into the film... here was a set of images being circulated in the society, being watched by millions of people, and they carried part of the contemporary debate which was sort of racking the world at the time, translated into a set of other symbols about a vanished tradition..."⁵⁴

Though quite clearly concerned with the interpretation of symbols within the very specific genre of the Hollywood western, there is no reason whatsoever why this should not have provided McHale with as rich a source of inspiration for his creative output as, say, Classical mythology, Freudian dream interpretation, African tribal masks, or anything else.

In much the same way, Richard Hamilton could view the film Kiss Me Deadly in 1955 and see in it a Duchampian irony whereas others would only see the sort of gratuitous violence which also pervaded the Mickey Spillane novels from which the film came. In other words, the film might superficially be nothing more than a not-so-well-made Hollywood detective movie but by accepting it within the 'fine art/pop art continuum', Hamilton could relate it to an attitude he associated

⁵⁴John McHale, 30 May 1977, op.cit.

with Marcel Duchamp, a "...peculiar stance of not really taking yourself seriously."⁵⁵

More directly, Paolozzi's sculptures and collages of the mid-1950s and later, explore "...the integration of the human figure and the machine", a theme which related to his "interest in science fiction, in which the robot as an iconographical figure has been a staple element."⁵⁶ Although these works contain many other influences - Giacometti and Dubuffet, forms derived from the products of technology and forms derived from junk - the visits to the London Pavilion with Lawrence Alloway made their mark in a very direct way upon Paolozzi's work. And like Alloway, Paolozzi was clear about his position in relation to the myriad influences upon him. Echoing the theme of Independent Group discussion, he said,

"...that there were other valid considerations about art beside the aesthetic ones and that these were basically in kind sociological, almost anthropological... Because you simply can't spend the rest of your life moving shapes and colours around, really."⁵⁷

If moving shapes and colours around was the Independent Group's idea of traditional artistic production, they were quite clear that the aesthetic criteria applied to this sort of activity had to be radically modified if the products of pop culture were to be

⁵⁵ Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham. Soundtrack to Arts Council, op.cit., 1979.

⁵⁶ Robin Spencer in Eduardo Paolozzi. Recurring Themes, Edinburgh, 1984, p.88. Paolozzi's sculpture of this period was also influenced by horror movies. One of these was 'The Mummy's Hand', where Boris Karloff played the monster. Paolozzi admitted this influence to Alloway. See BBC, 'Artists as Consumers. The Splendid Bargain', op.cit.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Timothy Hyman 'Paolozzi: Barbarian and Mandarin', Artscribe No.8, September 1977, p.34

considered as part of one's stimulus. The mass media, they argued, produces a culture which is unlike previous models. Writing in 1959, John McHale explained:

"Mass production on a phenomenal scale, oriented to mass preference, not élite direction, and the multiplicity of new communicating channels, are producing a culture which bears as little relation to earlier cultural forms as the Atlas rocket does to a wheeled cart."

He goes on to say that,

"Any previous traditional standpoint is obviously of limited value in engaging with a phenomenon of such recent growth as the mass media."⁵⁸

And supporting, and extending this view, Toni del Renzio wrote,

"...not only was it an error to apply the standards of conventional aesthetics to manufactured objects, it was equally mistaken to refuse the application to the fine arts of the notions to patently ruling the real practice of the mass media. The arts and the media were one informational totality... the discussion of aesthetics in the mid-twentieth century demanded reference to films, to advertising, to television, to comics and to the glossies, to science fiction and to pulp magazines, just as much as to painting and sculpture. The men in the advertising agencies and in the media were no less and no differently artists!"⁵⁹

⁵⁸ John McHale 'The Fine Arts in the Mass Media', Cambridge Opinion No.17, 1959, pp.29 and 32.

⁵⁹ Toni del Renzio, Typescript for a catalogue introduction to an exhibition in Germany of Richard Hamilton's work. 1978, pp.4-5.

If the Independent Group was "...not restricted to the traditional circuit of the fine arts but [examined] a very broad range of experiences," as Lawrence Alloway stated,⁶⁰ within that broad range, the Group certainly focused upon specific areas. It was necessary to take samples, as it were, in order to study and interpret, and it was often the case that the chosen area was one in which a member of the Group had some knowledge or was particularly interested. For instance, at one meeting Toni del Renzio, who had experience working in magazine publication, recalled:

"We spent a whole evening discussing a particular Coca Cola double spread from Life because of the fact that it had clearly to have been produced... from several different photographs because at that time nobody had a camera that would take that with the depth of focus and field of focus..."⁶¹

It was Toni del Renzio also, who probably introduced an interest in games theory and information theory which "...became very much a part of ICA/Independent Group interests."⁶² And through reading science fiction, notably Philip K. Dick's story Solar Lottery, Alloway was introduced to the subject of games theory.⁶³

Science fiction itself was of particular interest to some of the Group members. It embodied a technological aspect which might in some way propose future possibilities, it was a product of popular culture and had not yet been elevated to a loftier position within the established cultural pyramid, and it was invariably American. Alloway

⁶⁰ Lawrence Alloway. Soundtrack for Arts Council, op.cit.

⁶¹ Toni del Renzio, 1982, op.cit.

⁶² Ibid. Although Toni del Renzio was probably interested in these areas as early as 1953, they were not formally discussed by the Independent Group until 1955.

⁶³ Toni del Renzio (Karpinski interview) 1976, op.cit.

read a lot of science fiction and saw many science fiction films. Some people were critical of such an interest because it smacked of a sophisticated person meddling in unsophisticated matters. Donald Holm's recalled one incident which, in part, summed up for him a rather immature aspect of Lawrence Alloway's character:

"Alloway was constantly on about science fiction... I remember there was an aged creature from Central Europe who always used to turn up in rather old fashioned clothes. Perhaps a refugee from Vienna or something of the sort, who would persist in asking long, rambling questions in a sort of broken English at least - and I remember Alloway steaming, and [she] might still have been within hearing, 'I could have dealt with her by using my blaster!' He seemed to me to be living an adolescent fantasy in these works of science fiction."⁶⁴

But other observers were more sympathetic to Alloway's interest:

"I think Lawrence... wanted to be able to talk about art works [by] referring to different things than traditional reference and using a different language. He was very, very good at that. He used to take Scientific American - that was a key magazine - and he'd read something in there and assimilate it very quickly and then use a concept as an illustration of something..."⁶⁵

The fact that Alloway read Scientific American as well as A.E. van Vogt's The Weapon Makers, Art News as well as Superman comics, only supported his argument for a 'fine art/pop art continuum'. The

⁶⁴ Donald Holms, op.cit.

⁶⁵ Roger Coleman interviewed by the author, 18 April 1983.

constants in his selection were that they were all forms of communication/information and they were all American.

The Independent Group preference for things American was not especially universal; Edward Wright wrote,

"One might say the general consensus was that theirs was a minority cult, a new élitism of the domestic appliance, insofar as the motors and gadgets they admired were pretty scarce in England at that time..."⁶⁶

And "... from the time of Sigfried Giedion's book Mechanization Takes Command , or even earlier, the styling of U.S. commercial products had been specifically regarded as 'bad design'..."⁶⁷ Furthermore, to admire openly such products was to take an anti-traditional stance, have in some way progressive attitudes, and also not allow one's political views influence over aesthetic judgements.

Criticism of the Independent Group's Americanisation was led in the mid-'fifties by Basil Taylor, who accused the Group of being "...bastards of two cultures... [not] exactly American and... [not] exactly British."⁶⁸ He believed that the Group's interest in the material of American popular culture was simply an interest in that which was up-to-the-minute, rather than in the more serious and wider view. In other words, he thought some members of the Group had latched on to things both popular and American because it was in some way fashionable or trendy to do so. But the Group refuted this. Both

⁶⁶ Edward Wright. Unpublished manuscript The Anglo-French and the ICA, 16 February, 1984, p.2. Originally intended as notes for an exhibition catalogue.

⁶⁷ Reyner Banham The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic, London, 1966, p.63.

⁶⁸ BBC "Artists as Consumers: The Splendid Bargain", op.cit.

McHale and Alloway were clear about the role of American pop culture in relation to the European scene; they both saw their interest as being a process of selection. "I suppose what we were engaged in," said McHale,

"was trying to seize on those aspects which might be relevant in part to a European culture which was itself under stress. Under the stress of taking over some of those qualities which were partially foreign to it, which were more in their political, cultural and economic base, American rather than European."⁶⁹

Alloway said that he thought Basil Taylor's criticism was wrong because the Independent Group were not simply trying to be American but acknowledged

"...the fact that we were urbanized and industrialized, and America was just offering us lessons in the handling of industrial culture which Europe at that time was deficient in."⁷⁰

Furthermore, Alloway was especially clear about why England should be in the vanguard of this sort of investigation:

"We are (a) far enough away from Madison Avenue and Hollywood not to feel threatened (as American intellectuals often do) and (b) near enough (owing to language similarity and consumption rates) to have no ideological block against the content of U.S. pop art. In Paris, on the contrary, acceptance of American movies and Mad is subject to both a Surrealist filter and a

⁶⁹John McHale (19 November 1977), op.cit.

⁷⁰Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 25 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

language barrier. The result is that French intellectuals judge U.S. pop by a canon of strangeness and eroticism which is sheer fantasy. Luckily England is not subject to this exotic view: the balance of distance and access is just right for U.S. pop to be real but not common, vivid but not wierd."⁷¹

Despite such valid statements, despite the reasoned arguments, and despite both Alloway's and Banham's riposte to Taylor: "I see no more reason for you criticising me for being American than my reason for criticising you for being Italian [Renaissance]"⁷², it was often difficult for people at the ICA to see Alloway's Americanism as anything more than a desire to be fashionable. This was partly because of his outward appearance. Laurie Fricker recalled:

"Lawrence... looked like a 'prepie'. He had khaki drills, ...buttoned down pockets, buttoned down collars, ...a pocket with a pen in it and one of those low belts ...and he'd come up and say, 'Lawrence Alloway. Hi.'"

And he incorporated certain Americanisms in his vocabulary:

"When I saw him in Chelsea [New York] just two years ago, there was less American in his voice, having lived in America now for about fifteen, twenty years, than ever there was when he lived in London and got it from 'B' movies at the London Pavilion..."⁷³

For those who were unaware of his serious approach to American pop culture, the exterior often appeared to be superficial. Richard

⁷¹ Lawrence Alloway 'Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media', Art News and Review, 27 February - 12 March 1960, p.3.

⁷² Laurie Fricker interviewed by the author, 14 March 1983.

⁷³ Ibid.

Lannoy remembered an almost childlike incident which exemplified Alloway's love affair with America:

"I remember somebody had been on a visit to America, I forget now who it was, and Alloway was in the gallery [of the ICA] when this person returned and walked into the room and said, 'Lawrence, I've got something for you', and brought out of his portfolio a bow-tie wrapped in cellophane which he had bought in New York, and Alloway letting out a shriek of delight and saying, 'Oh, how beautiful'... and unwrapping it and trying it on."⁷⁴

During 1954, the Independent Group's public face was seen only occasionally at the ICA. Although Banham had departed as organiser for the Group, he still regularly attended meetings and the Sunday morning coffee sessions at his house continued. But there was a hiatus between his departure and the inauguration of Alloway and McHale as conveners. This 'taking-over' process was so informal that it is impossible to discover just when it took place. At any rate, the 'Books and the Modern Movement' series had been arranged by the time it happened and the Group had also held a meeting which was open to the general ICA audience on Le Corbusier's book The Modulor. This took place on 18 March and the ICA Bulletin announced the event as

"Expository dialogues between Reyner Banham and William Howell, architect on the system in use. Sam Stevens on the mathematical aspects of the theory. Lawrence Alloway on the Modular as a concept of man."⁷⁵

⁷⁴Richard Lannoy in conversation with Dorothy Morland. No date, pp.27-28. ICA Archives

⁷⁵ICA Bulletin No.42, March 1954. ICA Archives.

Some flavour of the evening was given in the 'Astragal' column of The Architect's Journal :

"...The meeting was packed and lively. While arguments were proceeding, a full-size figure of Charley, the Modular Man, surveyed the house from the back of the platform. It was a bit of a shock to hear him described, by a speaker sitting directly below his upraised head, as 'a muscle-bound pin-head in a soft trilby', but very diverting to hear another platform speaker, Lawrence Alloway, compare him not only with the familiar isotype figure, but also with Superman and space-pilot. This was not well received by some sections of the house, who were not there to have the micky taken out of their demi-god, and there were some barbed exchanges between platform and floor."⁷⁶

Prior to this open meeting, the Group had apparently held a closed meeting on the work of Buckminster Fuller⁷⁷, a man whose work and ideas were to figure more prominently at the ICA towards the end of the decade but about whom, at this time, there had been little discussion. Since both these meetings were essentially architectural, it would be sensible to assume that Banham was still convener for the Group at this moment in time.

Other events in 1954 to which Independent Group members contributed were Toni del Renzio's and Lawrence Alloway's dialogue on Western movies entitled 'Ambush at the Frontier', the evening of extracts from scientific films, organised by Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi and Dr. Patrick Collard, mentioned earlier⁷⁸, and Peter

⁷⁶ Astragal, 'Charley Parley', The Architects' Journal. Vol.119, No.3082, 25 March 1954, p.357.

⁷⁷ According to the ICA Annual General Meeting Report, 24 July 1954, ICA Archives.

⁷⁸ See p.62, n.15.

Reyner Banham on 'Drawing as Communication-Triumphs and Obscurities of Mechanical Draughtsmanship', held on 24 June. Banham received three guineas for this talk and Dorothy Morland thanked him for taking such a small fee.⁷⁹ For 'Ambush at the Frontier', Dorothy Morland wrote to Toni del Renzio that it had been an entertaining evening⁸⁰, and at the ICA Annual General Meeting later in the month, Magda Cordell also praised the content as "interesting", though was critical of the ICA's failure to advertise it "in the usual way" in the New Statesman.⁸¹ The inspiration for 'Ambush at the Frontier' came from an article by Robert Warshow in the Partisan Review. Toni del Renzio said he

"...took the view that the Western was a valid film genre to be differentiated from gangster films, musicals and what have you while Lawrence Alloway argued for similarities and for 'pop' movies as transcending genres. He was backed by McHale who spluttered when I challenged him how it came about that we could have a dialogue on the Western if there was no such differentiated category of film..."⁸²

'Ambush at the Frontier' was a manifestation of the general Independent Group interest in a wider set of stimuli and specifically the interest in popular culture, as was Alloway's talk called 'Science Fiction' on 19 January and the discussion about 'Fashion and Dress Design' on 9 March, in which Toni del Renzio took part. But it would be very misleading to think that the Group members confined themselves to such topics. In May, Alloway took part in a debate about André Malraux's The Voices of Silence and in August he contributed to the debate 'What is Sunday Painting?', held in connection with the current

⁷⁹Letter from Dorothy Morland to Peter Reyner Banham, 2 July 1954, ICA Archives. The usual fee at this period was five guineas.

⁸⁰Letter from Dorothy Morland to Toni del Renzio, 2 July 1954, ICA Archives. The Lecture was held on 1 July.

⁸¹Notes of ICA Annual General Meeting. 24 July 1954, p.4. ICA Archives

⁸²Toni del Renzio. Letter to the author, 9 May 1982.

ICA exhibition. Similarly, Paolozzi joined the Jazz sub-committee in January, Banham reported on the Milan Triennale, and Nigel Henderson's photo-images were exhibited in the members' room. But the most significant development during 1954 as far as the Independent Group and its relation to the ICA was concerned, was the increasing involvement of Lawrence Alloway in the affairs of both. As well as becoming convener of the Group and contributing to many ICA evening events, he also organised two exhibitions during the year. The first was Victor Pasmore: Paintings and Constructions 1944 - 1954, which ran concurrently with Henderson's exhibition in April and May. The second was Collages and Objects, which opened on 13 October and closed five and a half weeks later on 20 November. Designed by John McHale, this exhibition included work by Picasso, Braque, Dali, Magritte and other important figures in twentieth century European art, as well as work by contemporary British artists, notably Turnbull, Henderson, Paolozzi and McHale himself. One well-informed reviewer saw in the show something of the Independent Group predilection for attacking the traditional and the established:

"The paste-ups are displayed on or behind sheets of square grid reinforcing, hung on what appears to be a lavatory chain, and grounded in hollow breeze blocks. This might sound a bit clever-clever, or an attempt to take the rise out of exhibitions generally, but it goes very well with the exhibits, which are a bit rough and rusty themselves and were (one darkly suspects) an attempt to take the rise out of the fine arts."⁸³

The exhibits of Paolozzi and Henderson were mainly collaged heads, Turnbull's were hands, but McHale exhibited some works called

⁸³Astragal 'Up the Collage!' The Architects' Journal. Vol.120, No.3112, 21 October 1954, p.485

Transistor where scrambled letters and words were arranged so as to appear to pass through a set of lines - the transistor - and come out as a reasonably coherent message. McHale also exhibited two collage books, which were "chained to a lectern like a mediaeval bible. Historical joke..."⁸⁴ Paolozzi exhibited a collage book called Psychological Atlas and dated 1949, which was significant because it was the first time his source material had been shown in public.

In retrospect, 1954 can be interpreted as a prelude to the Independent Group activity of the following year. During 1955 McHale and Alloway got down to more serious organisation and a series of closed meetings was held which built on existing Independent Group concerns as well as introducing new ones. The undercurrents of this surge of activity in 1955 and the general tendencies it was going to follow, could have been detected by the astute observer in July 1954 at the ICA members' Annual General Meeting:

"Mr. Richard Hamilton suggested that discussions should be held about the films released to local cinemas, as these had an enormous influence, and were amongst the most significant things in film today... Mrs. Richard Hamilton asked whether a policy decision had been taken in the film section: were the ICA to stick to 'Caligari and all that' (Film Society fare) or would discussions be held on the commercial cinema. [Later] a member asked whether there was any possibility of exchanging art magazines with America..."⁸⁵

American popular culture and American fine art: the concept of the 'fine art/pop art continuum' was gaining momentum in Dover Street.

⁸⁴Peter Reyner Banham. Draft script for Arts Council, op.cit., p.6.

⁸⁵Notes of ICA Annual General Meeting, op.cit., pp.3 and 5

5. 1955: Formal Meetings and the Concept of 'Multiple Connectivity'

During 1955, Lawrence Alloway and John McHale organised nine formal meetings of the Independent Group. Although not as formal as the official ICA meetings, they were considerably more organised than the gatherings at Banham's house on Sundays or in the ICA bar during the week. The first of these meetings was held on 11 February, the last on 15 July; they were not planned as a series but came about through the suggestions of the Independent Group membership during the first half of the year. Attendance was by invitation only and the number of people at any one meeting never exceeded more than twenty-two, dropping to as low as fourteen on some occasions. Although there was no theme which linked the meetings together, only two were specifically concerned with fine art, whilst the others looked at areas of design and mass communications. But all advanced the concept of 'multiple connectivity' - that the study of art should not be restricted to traditional approaches but should draw upon a more universal set of sources and therefore provide a more original set of solutions.

The first of these meetings was held on 11 February and centred on Richard Hamilton's exhibition of paintings at the Hanover Gallery. The spontaneous organisation of this gathering has already been described¹, and the attendance of only fourteen perhaps reflects the almost offhand way in which it was arranged. A summary of the event reads:

"Paintings by Richard Hamilton. Discussion centred round the use of the photographically defined new reality (with a stress on popular serial imagery) in a fine art context; its legitimacy

¹ See p. 146.

and effectiveness in relation to paintings as individual gestures."²

Richard Hamilton had been teaching at the University of Newcastle since 1953 and commuting weekly from London. He had worked intensively for two years on his paintings in the hope of being able to give up teaching and become a full-time artist. In late 1954 he approached the Hanover, which he considered to be one of the best galleries in London, and was given an exhibition at the beginning of 1955. "The only trouble", he wrote, "was the lack of success, almost nothing was sold in spite of a moderately favourable press reception. I found myself commuting to Newcastle for eleven more years."³

Hamilton's work of this time was a development from his Growth and Form inspired paintings of 1951. Through 1952 and 1953 he began to use a succession of perspective viewpoints superimposed over one another. In d'Orientation, an oil painting of 1952, the structure of the work is based upon a perspective system of three viewpoints held in a golden section. The imagery of Growth and Form still appears, this time a section of a jellyfish, though the interest is not so much in the object itself but in the contrast of the natural form with the device of the perspective system.

Towards the end of 1953 and into 1954, his interest in a system of superimposition became more obviously concerned with the examination of movement. He had studied the sequential photographs of

² The information about these nine meetings - the dates, summaries, attendance and main speakers - was supplied by Peter and Alison Smithson in a typewritten document whose source is unknown but which was discovered in their "Magic Box", December 1982. It was apparently written after 15 July (the date of the final meeting). Any further reference to this source will be noted as Smithson Document.

³ Richard Hamilton Collected Words 1953 - 1982, London 1982, p.18.

Eadweard Muybridge and his interest in Futurist devices had led him to superimpose the separate images of movement more in the manner of Étienne-Jules Marey than of Muybridge. Having initially used the sequential photographic images of the nineteenth century American photographer, by 1955 Hamilton had begun to draw upon his own experiences and, consciously or not, to use Independent Group interests. Thus, the painting Transition IIII depicts a moving car seen by someone on a moving train. The inspiration no doubt came from Hamilton's experience of commuting from London to Newcastle and back again and the theme - a car and a train - was related to the Independent Group interest in technology. Stylistically, the painting has little to connect it with the imagery promoted by the Group; it might have a certain expressive quality if it were not for the diagrammatic references of straight lines (forming a golden section) and a carefully painted arrow which gives, by association, a suggestion of movement to the largely horizontal marks made by the brush.

In another painting of about this time, Hamilton took a more traditional subject - the female nude - and depicted it from three different viewpoints, each drawn separately and then superimposed one on the other. The method of production was highly complex and, one would imagine, carefully planned. Thus, the element of subjective interpretation was minimised, the expressive and emotional feelings almost completely subordinated to a calculated approach which stressed the intellectual requirements of the artists and, in the context of the continuing discussions within the Independent Group, a mental attitude not far removed from that which designs a car or an advertisement.

In a review of Hamilton's Hanover Gallery exhibition, Lawrence

Alloway noted the concern with motion in the paintings was "...not very familiar in England" and that "...Hamilton's painting is influenced by the cinema: for example, Transition IIII recalls the train and car chases of Hollywood..."⁴ The review was not especially critical of the paintings, but when the Independent Group met on 11 February, Alloway adopted a stance which, in view of his promotion of the 'fine art/pop art continuum', seemed inconsistent. Whether or not Hamilton's ideas and imagery derived from the medium of film - the representation of movement in a Hollywood car/train chase - on that evening, Alloway complained that Hamilton was putting material from popular art into fine art and that this was not proper. It is more likely that Hamilton's use of Hollywood imagery was only a secondary source since the initial inspiration for the Transition paintings seemed to come from his experience of the London-Newcastle train journey. Another source was his reading of James Jerome Gibson's The Perception of the Visual World which, ironically, Alloway had introduced to him.⁵

Nevertheless, the meeting seems to have centred on Hamilton's use and interpretation of popular imagery. Peter Reyner Banham certainly recalled this aspect of the evening. Writing a review of Mario Amaya's book Pop as Art - ten years after the meeting - he said:

"The historians are after pop art - which greatly diverts me as the only historian who was even remotely concerned with the original conception of the pop movement ten years ago.

The occasion was an inquest among the members of the

⁴Lawrence Alloway 'Re-vision' Art News and Review, Vol.6 No.26, 22 January 1955, p.5.

⁵Adrian Lewis 'British Avant-Garde Painting, Part III', Artscribe No.36, August 1982, p.25, n.54.

Independent Group of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, on Richard Hamilton's first one-man show at the Hanover Gallery. A couple of the pictures in that show dealt schematically with views of and from moving vehicles. Lawrence Alloway, philosophical hair-splitter in ordinary to the group, regarded this as the transgression of a distinction that he had invented the previous year: that views of and from moving vehicles ('through that ever-loving windscreen', as he put it) belonged to the iconography of the pop arts (meaning the movies) whereas Hamilton's painting, cool and meticulous, obviously belonged to the fine arts."⁶

If Hamilton only used the movies as a secondary source material (and it is likely at this stage that this was so), he appears to have recorded no objection to Alloway's criticism of his work on the basis of mixing popular imagery with fine art practice. Indeed, Alloway recalled that Terry Hamilton defended her husband's work not by claiming its autonomy from the movie image but by relating the paintings to the movie convention of depicting vehicles moving along together in the same shot rather, than as Alloway was arguing, being shown in motion independent of one another. "I remember being defeated roundly by Terry Hamilton on [that] point," said Alloway. "I felt crushed..."⁷

From whatever source the images derived, Hamilton was certainly interested in that aspect which involved the machine. Since his appointment at Newcastle, he had been collecting images of machines which extended and adapted man's own functions, particularly those

⁶ Reyner Banham 'Pop and the Body Critical', New Society 16 December 1965.

⁷ Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 24 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for the Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop. 1979, thought not used in the film.

which related to movement through space and time. Early in 1954, Hamilton was planning an exhibition of this material and suggested that the ICA might show it. At this time, its title was the cumbersome and almost scientific Human Motion in Relation to Adaptive Appliances.⁸ By July, Hamilton had come up against the perennial stumbling block of money. Lawrence Gowing had written to the ICA from Newcastle saying that the cost of the exhibition was likely to be high and that it was not at all certain that the University would foot the bill. The ICA, ever vigilant of its limited funds, was careful not to commit itself to holding the exhibition, especially when E.C. Gregory said that he had seen the material and believed it would attract only a small audience. Roland Penrose however, voiced an opinion that it was the sort of show the ICA should put on although, he added, there should be no risk of losing money on it.⁹

Evidently, Hamilton was persuasive enough to convince Newcastle University that the show was worth putting on, and it opened at the Hatton Gallery in May 1955 under the new title Man, Machine and Motion. There was a hope that it might travel to a number of towns in the British Isles but in the event it only got as far as the ICA, where it opened on 6 July and closed at the end of the month.

The two hundred and twenty-three exhibits depicted "...the mechanical conquest of time and space, ranging from Renaissance drawings through photographs of the pioneers of aviation and the automobile, to the controlled fantasy of space-fiction illustrations." There was a link between the show and Hamilton's previous ICA exhibition Growth and Form :

⁸ ICA Management Committee minutes, 12 March 1954. ICA Archives.

⁹ ICA Management Committee minutes, 6 July 1954. ICA Archives.

" Growth and Form dealt with the visible evidence of organic structure in Nature; Man, Machine and Motion deals with the pictorial record of the structures which man has created to extend his powers of locomotion, and to explore regions of nature previously denied to him."¹⁰

A further link between the two shows was the system of exhibition which Hamilton employed. For Growth and Form he had juxtaposed diagrams, models and photographs, some of them mounted on a grid-like frame. For Man, Machine and Motion he used a similar combination of diagrams and photographs, and mounted them on 'Formica' sheets fixed to a number of steel frames, thus giving the exhibition a semi-architectural quality. This modular arrangement had its own abstract quality which Victor Pasmore, recently appointed as Head of Painting at Newcastle University, saw and "...commented that 'it would have been very good if it hadn't been for all those photographs.'" ¹¹ Two years later, such a show was arranged by Hamilton, Pasmore and Lawrence Alloway, and was called An Exhibit. But in 1955, the photographic image was indispensable to Hamilton's creative output, both in exhibition design and in his paintings and prints.

In Growth and Form, the photograph had been used to show those things which were invisible to the eye other than through a microscope; in Man, Machine and Motion, as Peter Reyner Banham wrote, the photograph was "preferred since [it] is more or less coeval with mechanised transport and belongs to the same technological environment..." ¹² Almost spurred on by the photographic image, or perhaps consciously wanting to emphasise it, Hamilton's selection of

¹⁰ Man, Machine and Motion. Press Release, 23 June 1955. ICA Archives.

¹¹ Richard Hamilton, op.cit., p.20

¹² Peter Reyner Banham, 'Man, Machine and Motion' Architectural Review. Vol.118, No.703, July 1955, p.52.

exhibits was largely restricted to the 'Modern Era': "... the preference for photography," wrote Banham,

"and the insistence on the recognisable and visible presence of man, sets definite limits on the material shown. There are very few images from the pre-photographic era, but the oldest known photograph of a self-propelled vehicle is included, Boydell's steam tractor of 1857, and this date marks the effective beginning of this picture history of transport. Present-day tendencies toward saloon bodies and pressure cabins have tended to make travellers and explorers invisible to the photographer, and for this reason the coverage tends to narrow towards the fifties, leaving the show broadest, thickest and richest in the period 1890 - 1920."¹³

The use of technology (the camera) to portray technology (the machines of motion) was clearly one of the themes of Man, Machine and Motion and on one level, the exhibition presented a kind of technological history, which was supported in the catalogue by Banham's technical notes. On another level, the exhibits, notably the photographic ones, showed the relationship of man and machine and led the viewer to make visual interpretations and analogies. Banham, perceptive as ever, noted:

"The camera's power to capture gesture differentiates the functions of the members of Bonhours' tandem-pacing team with merciless accuracy - the steersman alert with eager crouch and forward glance, Bonhours himself on the following bicycle in a concentrated and business-like stoop, while the second man on the tandem, whose function is to solely create the aerodynamic

¹³ Ibid.

disturbance which will tow Bonhours along, sits rigidly to attention, impassive and blank-faced. Fifty years later, a trick of the focal plane shutter keeps Ken Wharton, the active protagonist, full-bodied and reduces the passive spectators to minimal pinheads, figures from a Giacometti sculpture."¹⁴

The man, machine and motion relationship was further emphasised by Hamilton and Lawrence Gowing in their catalogue preface where they introduced another level of interpretation - that of myth and fantasy:

"The relation between man and machine is a kind of union. The two act together like a single creature. The ancient union of horse and rider, fused into a composite creature with an unruly character of its own, always potentially anarchic and fearsome, never entirely predictable, was symbolised in the myth of the centaur. The new union of man and machine possesses as positive a composite character and liberates a deeper, more fearsome human impulse. This new affiliation, evoking much that is heroic and much that is terrible, is with us, not only in the sky, but in every street where a boy joins magically with his motor-bicycle, his face whipped by the wind and stiffened by a passion for which we have no name. Like the machinery of motion, it is with us for all foreseeable time. It creates, as we watch, its own myth. The myth, the poetry, is needed; man has no other means of assimilating disruptive experience to the balanced fabric of thought and feeling."¹⁵

Lawrence Alloway, who had been asked to write a text for the catalogue but who "...failed to come up with a usable formulation", saw the show

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 52-3

¹⁵ Preface to Man, Machine and Motion. ICA 1955.

"...as fantasy rooted in human fact",¹⁶ as did Hamilton himself, who confessed that over the period of planning the exhibition he "...began to experience... the unexpected thing about technology and means of transportation that they... have become objects of fantasy..."¹⁷

The apparent but superficial objectivity of the photographs and their systematic arrangement was an aspect of the show which Toni del Renzio made much of in his article 'Neutral Technology - Loaded Ideology', published in Art News and Review in July. "A warm attachment to the mythogenetic photograph disturbs the non-committal record that is the ideal of the exhibition," he wrote. But its apparent objectivity, its seemingly "uncommitted description" was to del Renzio,

"...like an elderly spinster got up in the latest youthful fashion, but the frowsy petticoat of inner-directed morality shows beneath the hemline and the gashed make-up is just too crude to hide her real face."¹⁸

Toni del Renzio saw Man, Machine and Motion as a manifestation "...of a number of problems gnawing at what we want to say about art and the substitutes for art..." He recognised that the

"...search for a substitute for art is headed for territories where confusion can still lurk unrecognised, can still trip the unwary and can still beset with equivocation the attempt to find a language to talk about art,"¹⁹

¹⁶Lawrence Alloway, 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) Pop Art. London, 1966, p.36

¹⁷Richard Hamilton in conversation with Andrew Forge. Unpublished transcript from a BBC Third Programme broadcast, recorded 3 November 1964. First broadcast in full, 5 April 1965.

¹⁸Toni del Renzio, 'Neutral Technology - Loaded Ideology', Art News and Review Vol. 7, No.13, 23 July 1955, p.3.

¹⁹Ibid.

and he later maintained that because the exhibition attempted such an arduous task, it was a watershed not only for Hamilton's career but also for the Independent Group.

Toni del Renzio believed that the exhibition went some way towards generally interpreting some of what had been discussed by the Independent Group over the previous two years. Central to both the discussions and Man, Machine and Motion itself was Alloway's notion of the 'fine art/pop art continuum' and also, at about the time of Hamilton's exhibition, Peter Reyner Banham's observations on expendability. The "search for a substitute for art" and the subsequent "attempt to find a language to talk about art" had led the Independent Group into a study of popular culture as being intrinsically no different from any other aspect of culture, on the grounds that it all belonged to an informational totality. This was seen by Alloway as the continuum but by del Renzio as a much less ordered state, and simply called by him 'other'. This term came from Michel Tapie's book Un Art autre, published in 1952. For Tapie, the term was the 'informal' art of Pollock, Dubuffet, Riopelle and others, but the Independent Group defined the work of these painters as 'all-over' or 'afocal' and reserved the term 'other' as a surrogate for the term 'fine art/pop art continuum'. Toni del Renzio disliked the term 'continuum' anyway²⁰ and he used the phrase that art was 'other' generally to describe the fact that the concept of what art was had changed - that it was something 'other' than what it had been before.²¹

²⁰See p. 152.

²¹See John A. Walker, Glossary of Art, Architecture and Design since 1945 London 1973, p.31. Indeed, Banham coined the phrase 'other architecture' during 1955, which not only referred to an architecture which was at odds with traditional practice but one which also went as far as solving problems without resorting to any established forms of building.

In this way, Man, Machine and Motion promoted the idea of a false division between fine arts and design arts, high art and popular art, and the idea that it was all part of information communication. Also implicit in it was the notion of expendability.

This idea apparently arose out of the common practice of the Independent Group members to display images on their walls and pin boards. These images were soon discarded because there was a kind of rivalry between the members to have the most recent and exciting images.²²

²²Noted by Peter Reyner Banham in a lecture given at York Art Gallery, 2 June 1976, in connection with the exhibition Pop Art in England. Beginnings of a New Figuration 1947-1963. This lecture was attended by Peter Karpinski who refers to it in his unpublished B.A. Dissertation 'The Independent Group 1952-1955 and the Relationship of the Independent Group's Discussions to the work of Hamilton, Paolozzi and Turnbull 1952-1957'. Leeds University, 1977, p.36.

The term 'image' had been used by the Independent Group ever since the meetings began in 1952. Alloway defined its meaning as "...a powerful word... used to describe evocative visual material from any source, with or without the status of art". (Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.33).

Later, he expanded the definition:

"it was the licence to put any kind of visual material together... instead of saying good or bad, one said image, and one could do whatever one wanted with it." (Lawrence Alloway 1977, op.cit.,)

For Toni del Renzio, the word had a slightly different connotation:

"I think we meant image as something which was not simply an organisation in itself but which was something which also had reference beyond it. And we made this difference between image and sign - perhaps wrongly... Sign was the thing which came out of the producer, this was the natural gesture, whereas image was that thing which had the references beyond what the mark was."

(Toni del Renzio in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 27 June 1976 for Arts Council, op.cit.).

Nigel Henderson preferred the term 'multi-evocative image', and he

credits David Sylvester with its invention (Notes by Nigel Henderson

to Karpinski Dissertation, op.cit.). For yet other definitions of

the word see Peter Reyner Banham 'The New Brutalism', Architectural

Review Vol. 118, No.708, December 1955, p.358; and John McHale 'The

Expendable Ikon', Architectural Design Vol.29, No.2, February 1959,

p.82.

cont'd.

This process of throwing away the unwanted or out-dated images had the advantage of making the Group members more selective about their choice of material and also not to become inundated by it. However, they were well aware that although much of it was transient, and was clearly designed to be so, these images were often the end product of a great effort. In this respect, the images should not be dismissed as inferior to fine art, for it could be argued that the energy, intellect and general endeavour which went into their production was as great as that which went into the production of a painting or a sculpture.

The prevailing attitude to such images was that they were inferior to fine art because they were commercial, ephemeral and expendable but the Independent Group was eager to point out that this was not necessarily the case. Although primarily concerned with the media, the aesthetics of expendability, Toni del Renzio argued, "...were not limited to that sphere but invaded the whole practice of the arts in general. Consequently art could never be pure."²³ He quoted Picasso, who had drawn images in the sand and waited for the tide to wash them away, or the drawings he had made with a torch in the dark - "so-called high art which in its way was just as expendable."²⁴ Indeed, Toni del Renzio pushed the ideas of

cont'd.

Another word much used at the time, and also interpreted in a number of ways, was 'document'. Toni del Renzio said he thought 'document' simply meant a picture torn from a magazine which you then used in some way (Toni del Renzio, 1976, op.cit.), whereas Alloway thought the word was a surrogate for the term 'classic':

"If a document is assured to have a basis in data, and if the thing existed as data on something we were interested in, we took it on that basis. It's... instead of saying 'a classic'." (Lawrence Alloway, 1977, op.cit.) Both definitions seem rather vague and this must have been reflected in some of the Independent Group discussions at the time.

²³Toni del Renzio 'Pioneers and Trendies', Art and Artists No.209 February 1984, p.27.

²⁴Toni del Renzio interview with Peter Karpinski 1 December 1976, p.XX, in Peter Karpinski, op.cit.

expendability as far as they might go: "...any work has got a duration," he said,

"It might be centuries, it may be minutes... neither of these things are very important... what mattered was that the thing was done and was seen and gone and yet remained in everybody's experience..."²⁵

Banham himself, never took the concept so far. That expendability should replace ever-lasting beauty, that it should, as Alloway wrote, "...aggressively counter idealist and absolutist art theories,"²⁶ was very much within the parameters which Banham set for the concept. All this was in the iconoclastic tradition of the Independent Group, but Banham's interest was specifically in design and in architecture. In 1963, he spoke about the possibility of expendable architecture:

"... the new President of the AA [Architectural Association] is already on record against expendability on a fairly well-taken, purely mechanical point, that if you make a building which will stand twelve months of English weather it will need to have sufficiently high safety factors to stand for twenty cycles of the English seasons. (I'm surprised he put the figure as low as twenty.) But... expendability is difficult to take because you're dealing with a body of men who, for good reasons or ill, are traditionally involved with the erection of long term permanent structures."

He went on to say that it would be difficult to create a truly pop -

²⁵Toni del Renzio (Arts Council) 1976, op.cit.

²⁶Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.32.

and by definition, expendable - architecture "...because in the end architects are still committed to some kind of hieratic culture in which command comes from the few experts at the top and not from the mass of consumers at the bottom."²⁷

The connection between expendability and the technological environment was clearly made by the Independent Group. John McHale, writing in 1967, pointed out the essential connection:

"The vast range of our personal and household objects may... when worn out, lost or destroyed, be replaced by others exactly similar. Also, and importantly, when worn out symbolically, ie. no longer fashionable, they may be replaced by another item, of identical function but more topical form. Swift obsolescence whilst indefensible, or impossible, in earlier scarcity economies, is a natural corollary of technological culture."²⁸

This essentially sociological approach to expendability taken by Banham, McHale and Alloway, was not the approach taken by other Independent Group members. Alloway maintained that the "...purpose [of studying expendability] was to handle the ephemeral popular arts which were no longer... different in kind from the art called 'fine',"²⁹ but this was completely at odds with the view taken by William Turnbull. For him, the fine arts were continually being revitalised by folk and popular art (which had retained properties excluded by

²⁷Peter Reyner Banham 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist.' Terry Hamilton Memorial Lecture given on 11 November 1963 at the ICA. Originally published in Living Arts No.3 1964. This quotation is taken from Reyner Banham Design by Choice (edited by Penny Sparke), London, 1981, p.87.

²⁸John McHale 'The Plastic Parthenon'. Originally published in Dotzero Magazine, Spring 1967. This quotation is from John Russell and Suzi Gablik Pop Art Redefined, London, 1969, p.49.

²⁹Lawrence Alloway 'Popular Culture and Pop Art', Studio International Vol. 178, No.913. July/August 1969, p.18.

fine art as it became more and more refined), and the purpose of the Independent Group was "...to discover what could be reintroduced to the fine arts from the new visual situation of contemporary popular culture; and conversely, what was irrelevant to the creation of new art and therefore expendable."³⁰

For the Smithsons, the throw-away object was by no means limited to the idea of mass production. Although they collected, for example, advertisements, the expendable object was not the exclusive province of technology and the media, as it appeared to be for Alloway, Banham and McHale. "What were the throw-away objects?" Alison and Peter Smithson wrote.

"The very first (and second?) Winter's ephemera, 1949 (1950?), had been Rayograms: of their one-off nature, different compositions of a scatter of Christmas fragments... bits of shrub to represent fir trees, glitter and stencilled letters (a set of stencils bought in Italy, August 1949) floating down through the photographic print like snow... Naturally this ephemera is out of style/phase with the graphic design of the period in which it happened, for the themes explored are personal; like underground streams which will feed our architecture maybe years later. In this sense they are genuine ephemera, something in the air and drifting by to be caught, looked at and released into other work."³¹

If there was confusion within the Independent Group over certain

³⁰ Peter Karpinski, op.cit., p.37. This observation was made by William Turnbull in a conversation with Peter Karpinski on 7 March 1977.

³¹ Alison and Peter Smithson The Shift, London, 1982, p.10. The reference to Rayograms is probably meant to be Rayographs, i.e. objects placed upon photo-sensitized paper and then exposed to light.

terms - 'image' and 'document' are two examples - the interpretation put on the notion of expendability caused a dislocation amongst the members. The Smithsons and Turnbull, and perhaps even Paolozzi and del Renzio, were not as focused on the mass media as McHale, Alloway and Hamilton were, and Banham, taking up his interest in design, was close to them. The architect Geoffrey Holroyd, who had been part of the Independent Group coterie since his return from the States in 1954, was convinced that the interest in expendability was a diversion "...and eventually broke up the Independent Group circle". This interest, he argued, "...blocked out from view in London the events I witnessed in 1952 in Chicago and 1953 LA," and made the Group blind to American developments in architecture and design because it focused almost exclusively upon the American popular arts.³²

The second of the Independent Group evenings organised by McHale and Alloway - the first being about Richard Hamilton's Hanover Gallery exhibition - was Peter Reyner Banham's lecture 'Borax, or the Thousand Horse-Power Mink', held on 4 March. As an abstract for the talk, Banham wrote:

"Borax equals, in this context, current automobile styling. Its theme (vide Plymouth ads) is Metal in Motion, expressed by an iconography which refers to eg. Sports and racing cars, aviation, science fiction; all relevant to [the] theme of transportation, but all exotic to the American automobile. Auxillary iconographies postulate brutalism, oral symbols and sex, emphasising that Borax is popular art, as well as an universal style (in US not in Europe) and sex - iconography establishes the automobile's Dream-rating - on the frontier of the dream that money can only just buy."³³

³² Geoffrey Holroyd. Letter to the author 23 April 1983.

³³ Smithson Document.

Although only eighteen people attended, this talk was to be particularly influential, not least upon Richard Hamilton who later adopted the imagery suggested by Banham into his paintings.³⁴ More immediately however, Banham put forward a number of ideas about expendability, popular art and design which clarified his, and other Independent Group members', concepts. This talk was later given as part of the ICA's official programme on 7 July and re-titled 'Metal in Motion'. Its content was only slightly different from the original given to the Independent Group. One observer wrote of the July lecture:

"The Banham thesis, that automobile styling must be judged as popular art was supported by side-elevations of popular film stars, science fiction illustrations, corset advertisements, and a good deal of erudition about market research - as well as a certain amount of sniping at the architectural profession and at CoID [Council of Industrial Design]. A great deal of it was entirely convincing, but only, as he himself insisted, if one is prepared to judge Borax and Chrome by their own standards - which most people, one suspects, would be loathe to do. On the other hand, his insistence that one should not judge things, which are not fine art, by fine art standards, seems reasonable enough, and made at least one member of the audience realise how often in the past he has been guilty as damning as slick or superficial some piece of design which could not, in its terms of reference, last long enough to become fine art anyhow."³⁵

This thesis - that the aesthetics of consumer goods are those of the popular arts and not the fine arts - led Banham to propose a

³⁴ See p. 296 ff.

³⁵ Astragal 'Metal in Motion' The Architects' Journal Vol.122, No.3150. 14 July 1955, p.37

methodological framework for discussing the popular arts. In an article originally written in 1955 but not published until 1960,³⁶ he emphasised that content and not form was the initial starting point for any analysis. He compared a Bugatti Royale Type 41 of 1931 with a Buick V-8 of 1955. Jean Bugatti, Banham noted, had been an art student of the same generation as the pioneers of abstract art. Thus, his Royale Type 41 could be described in terms of such painting:

"...a rectangular silhouette with a neutral, unvaried handicraft surface, compartmented into forms that answer closely the Platonic ideals of the circle and the square."

The Buick, on the other hand, had no such pretensions to fine art:

"...a great variety of surface materials, none of them handwrought, in complex, curving, three dimensional forms composed into a block with an irregular and asymmetrical silhouette."

Like the difference, said Banham, "between a Mondriaan painting and a Jackson Pollock."³⁷ But this substitution of one fine art aesthetic for another merely prolonged Banham's essential argument that the Bugatti was designed with a fine art aesthetic, the Buick with a popular art aesthetic.

Banham argued that the Buick was a product of popular art both visually and in its essential concept. The "...glitter, a sense of bulk, a sense of three-dimensionality, a deliberate exposure of

³⁶Peter Reyner Banham 'Machine Aesthetic. Industrial Design and Popular Art', Industrial Design, March 1960, pp.45-7 and 61-5. Reprinted in Reyner Banham, op.cit. 1981. pp.90-3 and re-titled 'A Throw-Away Aesthetic'.

³⁷Ibid. (1981) p.91

technical means..." made the American product visually quite different from the Bugatti's "fine art reticence". "If one opens the Bugatti hood," Banham noted,

"and finds that motor covered with oil, one's aesthetic displeasure at seeing a work of fine art disfigured would be deepened by the difficulty of repair work when the ailing component proves to be hidden away inside the block 'for the sake of beauty'. In similar circumstances, the Buick would probably be far less disfigured by an oil leak, and its display of components makes for much easier repairs, so that visual gratification is reinforced by the quality of the motor as an object of use."³⁸

Thus, as well as the observation that the Buick's design is one in which the technical and aesthetic qualities are closely linked - whereas the Bugatti emphasises the aesthetics - there is the strong hint that both the technology and the aestheticism of the American product

"...have the same useful life, and that when the product is technically outmoded it will be so aesthetically. It will not linger, as the Bugatti, making forlorn claims to a perennial monument of abstract art... products (like the Buick)... designed specifically for transitory beauty according to an expendable aesthetic... will not fall into ridicule, but into a calculated oblivion where they can no longer embarrass their designers. It is the Bugatti that becomes ridiculous as an object of use, by making aesthetic claims that persist long after its functional utility is exhausted."³⁹

³⁸Ibid. pp.91-2

³⁹Ibid. pp.92-3

Having established that "the aesthetics of consumer goods are those of the popular arts", that "...criticism of popular arts depends on an analysis of content, an appreciation of superficial rather than abstract qualities,"⁴⁰ Banham argued that the product could now be understood through its symbolism and the consumer's recognition of such symbols.

When recalling Banham's lecture, Lawrence Alloway titled it 'Detroit and Sex Symbolism'⁴¹, thus emphasising one aspect of the talk. The symbolism of the automobile - its relation to aircraft, to rocket ships, to the female body - captured the imagination of the Independent Group. In 1977, when recording footage for his film The Fathers of Pop, Banham stood next to, and lovingly stroked, an American automobile of the mid-'fifties, eulogising:

"...we could hardly fail to be impressed by the sheer size of the thing, which in those days of austerity was a kind of affrontery. At the same time, we could hardly help being amused by the claims to aristocratic good breeding of this heraldry on the front... or the implications of supernatural speed given by the moderne angel; impressed by the sense of jet power, or is it sex, in these chromium bulges... Certainly we were impressed by the sheer sculptural skill with which this cascade of chromium round the front is managed... and the vast cinemascope windscreen in front of the driver, and all the science fiction imagery in front of him on either side of the steering wheel."⁴²

Banham's researches into automobile design and the subsequent analysis of the car in terms of content, styling, symbolism and

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.93

⁴¹ Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.32

⁴² Peter Reyner Banham. Soundtrack for Arts Council, op.cit.

consumer acceptability, opened up Independent Group discussions to wider issues of the aesthetics of expendability, the role of technology, and the whole area of the relationship between fine art and popular art. Nevertheless, some members of the Independent Group - always an heterogeneous collection of people and rarely in accord with each other - were untouched by Banham's revelations: "I [would] spend a whole evening talking about Buicks and other General Motors products", recalled Banham,

"...and going through the sexual symbolism and all the iconography of speed and power and so forth, and John Voelcker [an architect] said, 'Yes, it's all perfectly true... General Motors trucks have this marvellously straightforward functional quality,' and it was as if I'd been talking to somebody from another planet because he'd not picked up on anything. He'd made a complete architect's approach to it... and was still looking, as the Smithsons were, for things with the aesthetics of the jeep... the idea of the square, functional box on wheels..."⁴³

Despite such misinterpretations, the notions of expendability and of the aesthetics of consumer goods being the aesthetics of popular culture remained live issues for the Independent Group. In March the ICA's Director, Dorothy Morland, informed the Group that the Italian critic Gillo Dorfles was coming to London, and on 1 July he and Peter Reyner Banham discussed 'Aesthetics and Italian Product Design' before an invited Independent Group audience.

"Dorfles represented topical Italian ideas about the complex

⁴³Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with John McHale, Magda Cordell-McHale, and Mary Banham, 30 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

relation [of] industrial design to traditional aesthetics. He proposed an external standard of taste by which both objects of fine art and objects of good 'non-art' could be judged."⁴⁴

Attended by twenty people, this was the eighth and penultimate of the organised Independent Group meetings during 1955.

In its desire to discover a new awareness, the Independent Group looked to 'emergent disciplines' in the hope that these might afford a fresh insight into more general questions. There was criticism of this by some of those outside the Group (and even some within it) on the basis that the references being used were not fully understood; and one ICA member, Donald Holms - called "an intelligent reactionary" by Banham - believed

"...there was a bit of cargo cultury at the ICA, both with respect to new emergent disciplines and to things North American. They seemed to me to see possibilities only over in those regions beyond the rainbow, as it were."⁴⁵

Of the 'emergent disciplines', information, games and communication theory were important. Toni del Renzio had probably first shown an interest in these areas. Certainly he had collected and read books on the subjects, from John von Neumann's Theory of Games to the writings of Claude Shannon and even Richard Bevan

⁴⁴Smithson Document.

⁴⁵Donald Holms interviewed by the author 9 June 1982. Mr. and Mrs. Holms also lucidly explained about the cargo cult: "During the Second World War when American forces were in the Pacific, occasionally a plane would crash on a remote island... Bits of the aeroplane became, for the tribe (on the island), cult objects and became representative of some kind of great technological mastery in the sky. Some day this person or these persons would return." Mrs. Holms added, "The point about mentioning cargo cult was that the tribe made wooden replicas of aeroplanes believing they were capturing the essence of the aeroplane in the sky."

Braithewaite's The Theory of Games as a Tool for the Moral Philosopher. This almost fringe interest became a more central issue when E.W. Meyer - known as 'Bingo' Meyer - talked to the Group on 8 March. At the time, he was working for the National Coal Board on the development of particle counters, amongst other things. Although he was a friend of Banham, it was apparently John McHale who asked him to speak to the Independent Group, but only after he had persuaded Meyer to be less technical in his presentation. "Each time you asked him a question," McHale recalled, "he simply gave you a string of mathematical symbols."⁴⁶ Despite the persuasion, the talk he gave to the Group was still too specialist for most of the twenty-two people who attended. Called 'Probability and Information Theory and Their Application to the Visual Arts', Meyer's abstract for the lecture read:

"The statistical model devised by Shannon and others to explain the particular case of the transmission of information in an electrical communication network has proved eminently successful, but its induction to the visual arts would appear difficult because of the hyperspherival dimensionality of the transmitter, - medium - receiver complex."⁴⁷

In an attempt to make the ideas more easily understood, McHale made five sets of diagrams: "We had a standard Shannon diagram," he recalled, "then we had an example of coding all laid out, we had the statistical possibilities..."

"Do you think anybody understood the translated version?" Banham asked him. "I think it helped", replied McHale. But he still recalled

⁴⁶John McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 30 May 1977 for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁴⁷Smithson document.

Banham sitting at the back of the room saying, "Come on, Bingo. It doesn't make a ... bit of sense." He also recalled reading the books on information theory but not necessarily understanding it all.⁴⁸

Another area of concern for the Independent Group in 1955 was that of non-Aristotelian logic. The key figure here was Dr. Alfred Korzybski, whose book Science and Sanity, published in 1933, laid out the structures of what he called General Semantics. Simply, this was a surrogate term for non-Aristotelian, non-Newtonian or non-Euclidean systems; it was based on the idea that meaning can only be comprehended when allowances have been made for the nervous and perception systems of the human being through which the meaning is filtered. Therefore, because of the limitations of the nervous system, the complete truth can never be perceived.

On 29 April, the Group held a meeting called 'Dadaists as non-Aristotelians', for which the main speakers were John McHale, Anthony Hill, Donald Holms and Toni del Renzio. Only fourteen people attended this discussion, which was explained as:

"The post-war dada revival has contradicted history of the movement. Dada as anti-absolutist and multi-valued, like advertising layouts, movies, etc. An attempt was made to connect dada with non-Aristotelian logic of provisional possibilities."⁴⁹

It is unlikely that many of those present had read Science and

⁴⁸ John McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, op.cit.

⁴⁹ Smithsonian Document. Anthony Hill's interest in Korzybski probably came through his knowledge of Charles Biederman's work. Biederman had attended lectures by Korzybski in 1938 and was greatly influenced by him. See Stephen Bann (editor) The Tradition of Constructivism, London 1974, p.224.

Sanity or even dipped into it; it is a long and difficult volume. But the other source for non-Aristotelian concepts was the science fiction novel by A.E. van Vogt, The World of Null-A, and its sequel The Players of Null-A, both of which had been inspired by Korzybski's book. Lawrence Alloway certainly acquired his knowledge of non-Aristotelian logic from van Vogt, and was eager to claim that he consciously got the notion from the slightly disreputable source of science fiction.⁵⁰ Of the meeting, he later wrote,

"...dissatisfaction with existing accounts of Dada (as destructive, nihilistic, illogical, protesting) led the Independent Group to try another account..."⁵¹

Toni del Renzio, never totally committed to General Semantics, and somewhat scornful of John McHale going "overboard on Korzybski", said that

"...The notion was that Dada had represented probably... the most significant attempt at a profound break with traditional aesthetics and with the notion of traditional art. And in a way, in the sort of metaphysics of the thing, that only non-art could be art, was something that appealed to the Independent Group."⁵²

Equating Dada with Korzybski's ideas was part of the Independent Group's approach of 'multiple connectivity'. The disparate images of Parallel of Life and Art, the discussions on the principle of verification and helicopter design, Paolozzi's epidiascope images, lectures on information theory and Italian design, and now the

⁵⁰ Lawrence Alloway 1977, op.cit.

⁵¹ Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.202, n.32.

⁵² Toni del Renzio interviewed by the author. 23 February 1984.

equation of the concept of Null-A with a Central European art (or anti-art) manifestation, all exhibited the Group's anti-traditional approach. The iconoclasm of the Group, its desire to break down established categories and hierarchies, had the effect of radically levelling distinctions and insisted

"...on the possibility of anything if not everything. (Everything is not possible, but anything is.) Within this opening of possibilities is another important discovery: the relation between form and content is mostly conventional and therefore always open to dislocation."⁵³

Thus, Richard Hamilton could propose that

"...the ideas of non-Aristotelian logic and the notion that you couldn't say that something was either good or bad, led to the possibility of the inclusion into paintings of figurative matter which wouldn't have been conceivable without that fundamental notion of non-Aristotelian thinking."⁵⁴

What might have been more obvious concerns for a group of

⁵³ Charles Jencks Modern Movements in Architecture, Harmondsworth, 1973, p.270.

⁵⁴ Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 27 June 1976 for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film. In contrast to the received view of Independent Group meetings, John McHale recalled that although "...people have the notion that it was all terribly intellectual; it wasn't so... a lot of it was very bloody-minded stuff". And Banham recalls James Stirling's contribution to the 'Dadaists as non-Aristotelians' evening: "Jim went to America to do his office practice. For that reason, he had actually seen works by Max Ernst and other Dadaists which were in the Museum of Modern Art. So while we, distant intellectuals, were discussing this picture and saying that there's this little hinged gate which opens and shuts and thus breaks the picture plane and destroys, etc., etc., ... Jim with his usual down-to-earth blunt approach, said, 'No, it isn't. It just flaps to and fro and makes a bloody noise". Which I would call good Independent Group internal criticism." (Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with John McHale, op.cit.)

artists, architects and critics, rather than non-Aristotelian logic and information theory, were discussions about advertising and about fashion and fashion magazines. On 15 April and again on 27 May, the Independent Group held discussions about advertising. At the first the main speakers were Peter Smithson, Eduardo Paolozzi, John McHale and Lawrence Alloway. Twenty-two people attended this meeting which was described as "A random, introspective survey of American advertisements with reference to the interplay of technology and social symbolism..." For the second meeting the main speakers were Paolozzi, McHale and Alloway again, with Peter Smithson's place being taken by Toni del Renzio. Only sixteen people attended this discussion, which made an "intensive, multi-layered analysis of one advertisement as an exemplar of descriptive method with 'performance as referent'."⁵⁵ In 1977, Banham and McHale recalled the sort of discussion which typified such evenings: "I remember particularly a 'Lucky Strike' ad," recalled Banham,

"with a hand holding the packet out. I remember Lawrence going on at great length about training in consumer skills, how to handle the pack, how to make the cigarettes pop up when you hit the bottom of the pack, how the other person should respond to the offer of the pack. All this with a background of a horse farm or something like that."

And McHale continued,

"And you ask the question, why? Why is he or she in the open air - constantly? Or why in this particular kind of interior?... Is it wholly explicit of what is being presented to us or are there other layers of meaning that we might be missing?..."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Smithson Document.

⁵⁶ John McHale and Peter Reyner Banham in conversation, op.cit.

Although many of the Independent Group were interested in advertising, the architects Alison and Peter Smithson were particularly aware of its powerful influence. The walls of their house in Limerston Street, Chelsea, were adorned with the products of the ad men. Richard Hamilton recalled first seeing one of the sources for his paintings there⁵⁷ and in 1956 the Smithsons wrote an article for the Royal College of Art journal Ark, called 'But Today We Collect Ads'. In it they argued that

"...ads are packed with information - data of a way of life and a standard of living which they are simultaneously inventing and documenting. Ads which do not try to sell you the product except as a natural accessory of a way of life. They are good 'images' and their technical virtuosity is almost magical. Many have involved as much effort for one page as goes into the building of a coffee bar. And this transient thing is making a bigger contribution to our visual climate than any of the traditional fine arts."⁵⁸

Awareness of the power of advertising to influence cultural and social change was something which all the members of the Independent Group shared, but the 'study' of advertising was different for each member. Peter Smithson believed

"...that each person in the Independent Group was studying it [advertising] for his own reasons. One emerged from it, as one went into it, with more information, with one's lines established."

⁵⁷Richard Hamilton, 'An Exposition of \$he' Architectural Design, Vol.32 no.10 October 1962 p.486

⁵⁸Alison and Peter Smithson, 'But Today We Collect Ads', Ark no.18. November 1956, p.49.

And critical of some of the 'study', he remarked:

"...those who used the information directly - 'isn't that a handsome picture or a handsome layout which I could parody for a fine art picture' - I really think that is a completely meaningless activity."⁵⁹

The general Independent Group concern with the media of mass communication was taken up again on 24 June when Toni del Renzio spoke on 'Fashion and Fashion Magazines'.

"Fashion is one of the popular arts peculiar to the age of technology. If its changes are not as rapid and as thorough as some mass media communications would indicate, nonetheless its changes contribute and correspond to the changing conceptual image of woman. Audrey Hepburn is a typical symbol caught in the rival co-operative coding processes of the cinema and the other mass media - other - directed antagonistic co-operation."⁶⁰

Toni del Renzio's interest in the fashion world had in part been motivated by the job working in magazine production which he had taken after resigning from the ICA's exhibitions sub-committee in September 1953.⁶¹ Many of the magazines which his publishers handled were connected with fashion.

Like almost all the Independent Group talks and discussions organised by Alloway and McHale during 1955, Toni del Renzio's took a sociological view. For example, when the talk was published - in a modified form - he wrote:

⁵⁹Peter Smithson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 1976/77? for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁶⁰Smithson Document.

⁶¹See p. 136 ff.

"...woman is a bi-ped, with two arms, shoulders, hips, something of a waist, and since July of 1954 her two breasts are rounded and suspended somewhere about eight inches below her shoulders. She also works. The United States, always in the lead of statistical revolutions, has close on twenty millions of this sort of woman. The European countries are not far behind. These women are the fashion market of the world... The dominating conceptual image of woman, the most in accord with the necessities of a technological age, is that of the woman who works. A large part in defining this image is played by the new fashion magazines. In the past, the woman who set fashion could idle in the courturier's salon and by the exercise of their taste... affix an imprimatur of success upon a style. Women who work do not have this time and, yet, in the struggle for living, require just as much to be fashionably dressed..."⁶²

Like Banham's 'Borax' talk, del Renzio's 'Fashion and Fashion Magazines' was later staged as part of the ICA's official programme - on 25 October as the first in a series called 'Mass Communications'. This was an important aspect of the ICA's programme towards the end of 1955 and into 1956 because it marked a certain influence of Independent Group 'subject-matter' as well as the more prominent role played by Lawrence Alloway in the ICA's programme. Alloway, who chaired all but one of the 'Mass Communication' lectures, wrote in the ICA's October Bulletin:

"A characteristic of post-war culture is the impact of the mass media. The impact has been felt before... But these revolutions in communications seem not to have achieved their full effect

⁶²Toni del Renzio 'After a Fashion' ICA Publication II, 1958. First published in The Ambassador No.10, 1956.

until confirmed by the new medium of television and by the popularity of the comic strips. In addition, the general increase in the imagination and efficiency of the popular arts has been recognised.

The popular arts are a fruitful area for objective audience research. Such research has always produced remarkable information about the way people perceive and interpret the symbols of advertisements and the movies, for example. This knowledge has important implications in a wider field than is yet realised; it may ultimately effect the traditional aesthetics of the fine arts. Because of the quantity of books, magazines, movies, ads, television and sound programmes which are available, there has been a great increase in our symbol-creating capacity. The tendency of intellectuals has been to oppose the process: Lewis Mumford, for example, believes that our senses are blunted by exposure to this flood of symbols. However, it may be that a system of meaning and a kind of aesthetic is implicit in the symbols of mass communications."⁶³

The role of the Independent Group in the official ICA programme had increased gradually from its first manifestation in May 1953, through the 'Aesthetic Problems' seminars and so on, until the actual Independent Group lectures - like Banham's and del Renzio's - were re-run to the wider membership. This situation was noticeably intensified after July, when Lawrence Alloway was appointed Assistant Director of the ICA.⁶⁴ Dorothy Morland wrote of his appointment:

"It was a great blow to me when Roland [Penrose] went to Paris for the British Council, but we had high hopes of Lawrence

⁶³ ICA Bulletin No.60, October 1955.

⁶⁴ This was announced in ICA Bulletin No.57, July 1955. Alloway's title was changed to Deputy Director in November 1956.

Alloway... At the beginning I found him an exciting person to work with as he was full of new ideas and was very much in touch with the younger groups of artists and writers... He had a stimulating, sharp, clear mind, but he was extremely ambitious as most young men are. Sadly, in the end, I found that his ruthlessness and cynicism did not make for teamwork... However, he undoubtedly brought a new element into the ICA... some of his... interests were mass communication, science fiction and Americana. Subjects of that kind which we had not touched on up till then, and which were very much in the minds of the younger generation of art students and students of all sorts really and most importantly of the Independent Group."⁶⁵

Alloway certainly drew extreme comments. The painter Rodrigo Moynihan called him "...a hard white fist of ambition"⁶⁶ and Peter Reyner Banham wrote about him in December 1957:

"... The man Alloway is a phenomenon; sawed-off, dapper (in the Charing X mode) with his ginger nut cropped close to the bone, a wit like a slasher's razor, and a conversational range from Martin (K) and Lewis (D), the well-known abstractionists, to Martin (D) and Lewis (J), the celebrated comics. Out of a whole generation of junior pundits raised in that nursery of promise, Art News and Review, he is not merely the most likely to succeed, but has. The job at the ICA might have been made for him - he certainly made for it, like a man sighting a well in the desert..."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Dorothy Morland, 'A Memoir'. Unpublished manuscript, ICA Archives, no date, pp. V-VI

⁶⁶ Quoted by Richard Lannoy in a conversation with Dorothy Morland. No date. ICA Archives, p.27.

⁶⁷ Peter Reyner Banham, 'Alloway and After', The Architects' Journal, Vol.126, No.3278, 26 December 1957, p.491

But there is no doubt Alloway was also regarded as an important critic - William Turnbull thought he was one of the most important/influential critics around⁶⁸ - and the job at the ICA meant that he could not only indulge his interests but also flex his critical muscles, so to speak, at the expense of ICA audiences and even his colleagues. Donald Holms thought of him as aggressive⁶⁹, whilst Banham remembered that he was "...frightened of Alloway's tongue. He kept me on the spot..."⁷⁰ And Laurie Fricker, who worked with Alloway during 1960, recalled one incident which encapsulated his acid wit:

"I used to have to put out...chairs [at the ICA for evening meetings]... if you filled the place [with chairs] you'd only get twenty people there, if you put out twenty chairs the place would be full. And I said to Lawrence... 'Can you tell me how many people you think might be coming tonight, Lawrence?' and he turned to me and he said, 'You mean it isn't enough just to give a lecture.'"⁷¹

Lawrence Alloway's presence at the ICA had noticeably increased during 1955. He had spoken at a discussion on 'Horror Comics' on 20 January, and then at a discussion on the current ICA exhibition of Francis Bacon's work, on 10 February. He had chaired four film seminars on Hollywood movies early in the year, where such people as Carl Foreman and Karel Reisz had spoken. As well as this, he had spoken about the Daily Express Young Artists' Exhibition, the ICA's Giacometti exhibition, and chaired a discussion on Jean Dubuffet. And all this before he became Assistant Director in July. After July, he was chairman for the mass communication discussions, for Banham's

⁶⁸ William Turnbull in conversation with the author, 23 February 1983.

⁶⁹ Donald Holms, *op.cit.*.

⁷⁰ Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with John McHale, *op.cit.*

⁷¹ Laurie Fricker interviewed by the author, 14 March 1983.

'Metal in Motion' lecture, for a discussion on 'The Art of Wyndham Lewis', and he selected poems for an evening of readings in December.

In some respects, Alloway's appointment marked a watershed in the existence of the Independent Group. Banham was already on the Management Committee of the ICA; now Alloway, as Assistant Director, was there. Colin St. John Wilson, an irregular Independent Group attender, was on the exhibitions sub-committee, as Toni del Renzio had been, and Eduardo Paolozzi's wife had only just left the ICA staff.⁷² All in all, the Independent Group was becoming more and more part of the ICA institution. But it was not a simple immersion into the existing ICA programme; the more the Independent Group became involved, the more the ICA would vacillate between its established stance and a new one proposed by the Group. Added to this was the increased activity of other Independent Group members in ICA events. Hamilton's Man, Machine and Motion exhibition has already been mentioned, as have Banham's and del Renzio's re-runs of Independent Group lectures, but John McHale's involvement in discussions on Léger, on Giedion's book Walter Gropius, and his involvement in the organisation of the Francis Bacon exhibition and participation in the Young Sculptors show, where he exhibited four works, was significant.⁷³ So too was the abortive exhibition of science fiction,⁷⁴ Paolozzi's Work in Progress in the Members' Room during May and June, and the evening discussion on 'Le Corbusier at Ronchamp' in

⁷² Freda Paolozzi had worked in the ICA gallery since about 1952 and had left, presumably to look after her newly born daughter, towards the end of 1954.

⁷³ McHale received some favourable criticism at the time. For his part in the discussion on Giedion's book, he was reported to have "...delivered a scholarly little piece on the origins and ultimate fate of Bauhaus educational ideas..." (Astragal, The Architects' Journal Vol.121 No.3126, 27 January 1955, p.117.) and his sculptures in the ICA August exhibition were described as "...grid and pinboard constructions... calm, rectangular and bright, like survivors from an age of innocence before the atomic anxiety set in." (Astragal, The Architects' Journal Vol.122, No.3156, 25 August 1955, p.243.)

⁷⁴ Planned for February 1955, the exhibition never came to fruition.

October, in which Peter Smithson and James Stirling took part.

The Independent Group itself continued to meet throughout the year, both formally and informally. The last formal meeting was a lecture by Frank Cordell called 'Gold Pan Alley', held on 15 July and attended by fourteen people. Cordell was married to the Hungarian-born painter Magda Cordell, and they were both attenders at Independent Group meetings. They lived in Cleveland Square, Bayswater, with John McHale in a menage à trois situation. Frank Cordell had been conductor of RAF Middle East Command Orchestra during the war and since 1947 had worked as a musical composer-arranger-conductor for the BBC and then EMI. Banham called him a man whose

"...reputation... verges on the legendary. Musicians skip prior engagements to perform on his sessions, disc-jockeys urge you to listen to the arrangement and forget what vocalist it is supposed to support..."⁷⁵

Certainly Cordell was of some stature and was, according to Banham, revered by the Group since he was actually involved in making popular culture. But he himself was critical:

"...when I was involved in the pop music situation, I thought what I was doing was so terrible. What I always remember... were various academic gentlemen... listening to Elvis Presley singing Heartbreak Hotel or Don't Step on my Blue Suede Shoes and all digging it like mad to keep up with the trend... and I thought... what a load of rubbish..."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Peter Reyner Banham, 'Top Pop Boffin', The Architects' Journal, Vol. 127, No.3286, 20 February 1958, pp.269-71

⁷⁶ Frank Cordell in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 7 July 1976, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

Cordell's talk to the Independent Group was about the popular song from sociological and cultural viewpoints. The synopsis of the talk speaks of the popular song as an interaction between technology and mass communication.

"Millions of pounds are spent annually by music, radio and recording industries in producing and selling this product and its pervasive power is such that hardly any group of individuals in the western world can remain untouched by its manifestations. A study of commercial music in its producer-consumer relationships provides a revealing index of certain cultural and sociological emphases in the contemporary situation."⁷⁷

'Gold Pan Alley' was probably one of the last organised Independent Group meetings. There were of course, many informal meetings both before and after it, and one must not think the Group's activities during 1955 were restricted to the nine formal sessions. For example, at some point Norbert Weiner's book Cybernetics was discussed, Richard Hamilton talked about domestic appliance design, Alloway about the depiction of violence in the cinema, and possibly Marshall McLuhan's book The Mechanical Bride came in for some appraisal. These events may have been particularly informal, they may conceivably have taken place earlier than 1955, or, as is more likely, later. But that they did take place is recorded in a number of sources.⁷⁸ Certainly at the beginning of the year, the Independent

⁷⁷Smithson Document. This synopsis is almost word for word the opening paragraph of 'Gold Pan Alley', Ark No.19. 1957, pp.20-1, a shortened version of the original lecture.

⁷⁸It is most likely that Cybernetics was discussed informally and probably later than 1955. Roger Coleman mentions it in an interview with the author, 18 April 1983, and he did not become involved with the ICA until 1957. Richard Hamilton mentioned talking about "appliance design/domestic appliances" in The Impact of American Pop Culture in the Fifties, a talk broadcast by the BBC for the Open University, no date, though this again may have been later (his ICA cont'd...

Group was prepared to air its views about the role of the ICA. The Management Committee minutes for 3 February record:

"Mrs. Morland said that the Independent Group had suggested it might produce a paper as a basis for discussion at the meeting on whether the ICA was fulfilling its function, etc. The meeting would be a difficult one to open, and perhaps this unofficial angle might be best. After some discussion, Mr. Banham was asked whether he would speak to the members of the Independent Group about this. Sir Herbert Read said it was most important that those who had been most critical of the ICA should state their criticisms at this meeting. Mrs. Morland said she was beginning to be afraid that they would not come, and that the meeting might therefore prove a failure."⁷⁹

Dorothy Morland's fears were justified; no such meeting appears to have taken place.

Towards the end of the year, or even into 1956, the Independent Group held two more meetings. At one, William Turnbull spoke about his course at the Central School of Art and Crafts, and at the other, the architect Ralph Erskine discussed his architecture in Sweden.⁸⁰

cont'd..

lecture on 7 July 1959 called 'The Design Image of the Fifties', for example). In the same source (BBC/OU), Hamilton also mentions Alloway talking about violence in the cinema. Discussion of McLuhan by the Independent Group is disputed. Many secondary sources mention that he was, but primary sources tend to deny any specific discussions of The Mechanical Bride. Peter Karpinski, op.cit., pp.28-9, says that Hamilton thought it was "a powerful book" and Alloway and McHale were "very impressed" by it. This is recorded in C. Williams, 'Richard Hamilton - The Artist as Medium'. Unpublished BA Dissertation, Leeds University. 1974, p.90. Also in Karpinski's interview with Toni del Renzio (Peter Karpinski, op.cit., p.iv), del Renzio states that "McLuhan's The Mechanical Bride had been seen".

⁷⁹ ICA Management Committee Meeting minutes, 3 February, 1955. ICA Archives.

⁸⁰ ICA Annual General Report, 19 September 1956. ICA Archives.

Generally however, meetings stopped being held at about this time.

Lawrence Alloway recalled that because

"...we all knew one another's ideas so well... one of the last meetings turned into a family party with everybody going to the cinema instead."⁸¹

But there was no such formal ending to the Group; as William Turnbull asked, "When does a thing finish?"⁸² Some of the meetings were so informal anyway that there was little to distinguish them from simply a gathering of friends in the ICA bar, and these gatherings continued. Furthermore, the ICA programme was becoming so imbued with Independent Group concepts that the line between Independent Group and ICA was becoming increasingly impossible to draw. That the ICA was using Independent Group topics in its programme was perhaps a contributing factor to the closing down of the Group. As a ginger group within the Institute, its presence no longer seemed to be essential.

Banham dates the end of the Group at Spring 1955: "[We] just stopped holding meetings and faded away. We had said and done what we wanted to say and do..."⁸³ This reason may be true but other, more prosaic reasons existed. Alloway's position as the ICA's Assistant Director probably limited the time and energy he could give to the Independent Group, and Banham himself was deep into writing his thesis at the Courtauld Institute. Paolozzi and Henderson, all but withdrawn anyway, completely withdrew during 1955; Paolozzi had a new daughter and a new job teaching sculpture at St. Martin's School of Art, and he and Henderson set up 'Hammer Prints' to produce and market designs for textiles, wallpapers and ceramics. Alison Smithson was finding that

⁸¹ Lawrence Alloway, 1966, op.cit., p.32.

⁸² William Turnbull, op.cit.

⁸³ Peter Reyner Banham. Draft script for Arts Council, op.cit., p.7.

going to Independent Group meetings was becoming more and more inconvenient - the simple but often insoluble problem of finding a baby-sitter was one reason. And towards the end of 1955, John McHale received a scholarship to study in the Department of Design at Yale University; he did not return from the United States until the middle of 1956.

Throughout both the formal and informal Independent Group gatherings during 1955, one general concern typified the Group's approach. This was what Alloway called the use of "multiple connectivity" to produce "a pragmatic, sociologically-based aesthetic"⁸⁴ which was not confined to the traditional art sphere. To use non-Aristotelian logic in re-defining Dada was but one example of this approach; Banham's researches into cars and Alloway's into movies were other examples.⁸⁵ "We were really taking seriously," said Alloway

"in a non-patronising way, all the things which intellectuals appeared to patronise. And that provided a good, workable basis for later developments..."

But the disadvantage, Alloway argued, was that

"...we had no single verbalisable aesthetic criterion which our

⁸⁴Lawrence Alloway, 1977. Soundtrack to Arts council, op.cit.

⁸⁵The use of 'experts' by the Independent Group - eg. Cordell on music, Meyer on information theory - was important to some members. Banham admitted that he "got something" from listening to Cordell. But Lawrence Alloway said that he got more "...from reading sociology books, American sociologists; analysis of factories and executive patterns and so forth." (Lawrence Alloway 1977, op.cit.) The 'experts' themselves found the Independent Group interesting. Cordell certainly found this but he was also critical: "To me, [the Independent Group] was a very stimulating thing because it obviously exposed me to areas of knowledge and so on which I was not hitherto aware... But in moving amongst all these people, I found that they were incredibly eclectic and were all borrowing." (Frank Cordell, 1976, op.cit.)

opponents had, because they'd had longer - generations to work out the vocabulary for formal innovation and formal structure."

However, he continued,

"We were trying to deal with iconography and topicality on a broader base than the traditional humanists. So although we were vulnerable to that accusation, I think in fact we were more innovative and more speculative."⁸⁶

⁸⁶Lawrence Alloway 1977 (Soundtrack). op.cit.

**6.1956:Theory into Practice -
This is Tomorrow**

1956 was a crucial year. Robert Conquest's anthology New Lines - which included key poetry of what had been labelled the Movement - was published; John Osborne's Look Back in Anger opened at the Royal Court; Colin Wilson's The Outsider was published; at the National Film Theatre there was the first performance of the Free Cinema; Alison and Peter Smithson showed their House of the Future at the Ideal Home Exhibition; the Tate Gallery staged the influential Modern Art in the United States; and the exhibition This is Tomorrow opened at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. And all this was virtually unaffected by political events in Suez and in Hungary.

At the ICA, it was business as usual. The revolution in the ICA's programme which the Independent Group had initiated, was gaining impetus. Lawrence Alloway's 'Mass Communication' lectures continued, and the first in a series of five lectures on 'Aspects of Communication' began in January with Professor J.Z. Young talking about the 'Meaning and Purpose of Communication'.¹ Other related events appeared during the year, such as a demonstration of 'Film as an Instrument of Communication' on 12 April and Alloway himself discussing 'Freud and the Arts' with G.S. Fraser and Adrian Stokes on 12 June. But there was also a discernable trend towards the exhibition and discussion of abstract art, especially that from America.

1955 had seen an exhibition of Mark Tobey's work during May and June, of Magda Cordell's Monotypes and Collages - deeply influenced

¹ This series was not particularly biased to mass media, but dealt with the following areas: 'Communication and the Notions of Correct English', 'Communication Through Painting', 'Poetry and the Machine: Some Communicative Problems' and 'Communication Problems in Industry'.

by abstract expressionism - in July, and at the end of the year, Patrick Heron talking about the 'Content of Abstract Art'. But 1956 saw a marked increase in the exhibition and discussion at the ICA of this type of art.

Alloway's interests were by no means limited to the mass media; he was deeply interested in and knowledgeable about abstract art. In 1954 he had published Nine Abstract Artists, a book with an introduction by himself, reproductions of work and statements by the artists.² This volume dealt with British abstractionists and Alloway continued the promotion of this aspect of painting at the ICA during 1956. In May, Peter Stroud spoke on 'Current Trends in Non-Figurative Art' and Alloway himself lectured on the work of Alan Davie. There was also an example of European abstraction in the form of Georges Mathieu, who exhibited his work at the ICA during July and August and who lectured there on the subject 'Only the Really New Can be Truly Traditional' on 25 July.³ But Alloway's chief interest was in

² The artists represented in Alloway's book were William Scott, Roger Hilton, Terry Frost, Adrian Heath, Anthony Hill, Victor Pasmore, Mary and Kenneth Martin, and Robert Adams.

³ Toni del Renzio was involved in the Mathieu exhibition, notably by writing the catalogue notes. An amusing incident involving Georges Mathieu, Toni del Renzio and others, was related by Colin St. John Wilson in an interview with the author, 9 May 1983:

"I remember an occasion in which Toni del Renzio, who was very much the champion of action painting, l'art brut and so on, organised a possibility for Mathieu to do one of his paintings in a mews somewhere in Chelsea, or Kensington, Knightsbridge, or somewhere like that. And I was privileged to go along and watch this strange, freaky painter dashing backwards and forwards like a sort of Bengal Lancer, flashing away at this painting. And Toni recording every move: 11.05 purple blob... 12.07 yellow S-shaped slash between south-west and south-east, or something. And suddenly, silently but remorselessly, a rather old Rolls-Royce sided into the mews and one of those ladies got out looking like an Osbert Lancaster cartoon, sort of Maudie Littlehampton, the sort who have those kind of shooting boots with flaps coming down over the laces, and tweed skirt and a hat. And she said, 'What on earth is going on here. Get this nonsense out of here!' And you have never seen anybody move so fast as Georges Mathieu, the gallant lancer; [he] was out of that place like a flash of lightening. It was very, very funny. Total capitulation of the great scene; the painting, the painter, the timing watch and everything disappeared in a flash."

American abstraction; events during the year revealed this.

On 26 April Professor Meyer Schapiro talked at the ICA on 'Recent Abstract Painting in America'; a week before, Alloway had chaired a discussion on the 'Toys and Films of Charles Eames'. In October, paintings by John Hultberg were shown, an exhibition for which Alloway wrote the catalogue notes. Jackson Pollock was discussed by Alloway, Victor Willing and others in November, and in December the art historian Frank John Roos lectured on 'Contemporary American Painting'. This trend at the ICA, undoubtedly initiated and promoted by Alloway, continued into the early 'sixties.

Quite independently, the Tate Gallery's Modern Art in the United States opened in January 1956. Alloway admonished both Herbert Read and Peter Reyner Banham, the former for failing to *interpret satisfactorily* American abstract expressionism, and the latter for limiting his references when describing the paintings to Michael Tapie and Clement Greenberg, and not discussing the "key article by Harold Rosenberg and the quantity and insight and inside information in Thomas B. Hess' scattered articles in Art News ..." Alloway went on to discuss the meaning of 'action painting' as explained by Rosenberg, as well as to pay tribute to the ICA for showing such paintings before anyone else in London.⁴

The Tate Gallery exhibition was enormously important. It showed, in quantity, the range (and size) of American painting to a British public woefully ill-informed on the matter. Generally, the show had positive effects; it confirmed for artists like Bryan Wynter

⁴ Lawrence Alloway, 'Introduction to Action', Architectural Design Volume 26, No.1, January 1956, p.30. The ICA exhibitions to which he referred were Opposing Forces, Roberto Matta, Mark Tobey and Jean Dubuffet.

and Patrick Heron the trend towards abstract expressionism which they had seen in the Mark Tobey and Opposing Forces exhibitions at the ICA. Indeed, abstract expressionism swept almost all before it, but not quite all. There was dissention. John Berger, champion of social realism, wrote about Modern Art in the United States :

"These works, in their creation and appeal, are a full expression of the suicidal despair of those who are completely trapped within their own dead subjectivity."⁵

Concurrent with the Tate Gallery exhibition was Magda Cordell's show at the Hanover Gallery. Her paintings, described by Patrick Heron as "dripping, splashed black and white canvases",⁶ were directly influenced by American and European examples of abstract expressionism although, as Robert Melville noted, they tended to be romanticized and be illustrative of

"...her vitality by making the area to be painted with the outline of a blown-up nude or by arranging unnecessary explosions in outer space... thereby centering the interest in a conventional European manner"⁷

- and lacking, presumably, the American quality of 'all-overness'. Perhaps in the euphoria which surrounded the Tate Gallery exhibition, but perhaps out of genuine admiration for Magda Cordell's canvases, the Hanover show received some encouraging reviews. "She manages to exploit... limited subject-matter," one review noted,

⁵ John Berger quoted in Robert Hewison, In Anger. Culture in the Cold War 1945-60, London 1981, p.189

⁶ Quoted in Adrian Lewis, 'British Avant-Garde Painting 1945-56 Part II', Artscribe No.35, July 1982, p.27.

⁷ Robert Melville, Architectoral Review. Vol.120, No.712, May 1956, p.268. Quoted in Adrian Lewis, op.cit., p.27, n.78

"with verve and skill, and a considerable delicacy of line and colour... Accidental effects are seized upon and exploited to provide subsidiary images, a very dangerous process and one liable to disintegrate the picture, but when controlled and organised produces an image of disturbing power."⁸

Alloway wrote the catalogue notes for Magda Cordell's exhibition. "The text included a word list," he later recalled,

"suggested by the paintings which stressed connotations of a science-fiction nature: 'solar, delta, galactic, amorphous, fused, far out, viscous, skinned, visceral, variable, flux, nebular, irridescence, hyper-space, free-fall, random, circulation, capacious, homeomorphism, variegated, reticular, entanglement, multiform, swimming pool, contraterrene'. The words derive not from technical or sociological science-fiction, as represented at the time by Astounding Science Fiction, but from the organic and exotic stories of Theodore Sturgeon and Galaxy Science Fiction. However roughly, I was struggling in my art criticism to draw references from popular culture rather than from traditional sources."⁹

This was true, especially of science fiction imagery. In September 1956, Alloway wrote an article called 'The Robot and the Arts' for Art News and Review¹⁰, which showed him trying to make the pop art - fine art links.

Magda Cordell herself visited the United States during the last

⁸ 'Magda Cordell' Architectural Design, Vol.26, No.1. January 1956, p.30.

⁹ Lawrence Alloway, 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) Pop Art, London, 1966, p.34.

¹⁰ Art News and Review, Vol.8, No.16, 1 September 1956, pp.1 and 6.

two weeks of January and all of February, therefore seeing more abstract expressionist painting at first hand than she had previously seen. She went to visit John McHale who was at Yale University¹¹ and the fruits of the trip were to be particularly important when This is Tomorrow appeared at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. Indeed, the organisation of this exhibition was already under way and had been since the end of 1954. When Magda Cordell returned from the States, she brought back material supplied by John McHale to be used in the exhibition.

Back at the ICA, the programme was not all media and communications and action painting. The more traditional fare continued, such as work by Picasso, lectures on Cubism, on Antonio Gaudi and on realist painting, 'fifties poetry, music by Stravinsky and Janacek, and drama by Brecht and Ionesco. But the Independent Group, now defunct as far as organised meetings were concerned, continued to exert a profound influence. The members were still very much in evidence and they were still talking to each other, expanding their ideas, proposing new concepts, and cultivating the critical vocabulary they had developed in the first years of the decade.

Richard Hamilton and Peter Reyner Banham each contributed lectures during 1956, collectively entitled 'Revaluation'. Hamilton, together with Colin St. John Wilson and Anthony Hill, spoke about Marcel Duchamp on 19 June and Banham about Futurism on 21 February. Duchamp had been an important influence for Hamilton ever since Nigel Henderson had shown him a copy of The Green Box. "Nigel Henderson took me to Roland Penrose's house in Hampstead," Hamilton recalled.

"...we went in there and Nigel said, 'You must see an

¹¹ See p.261 and Appendix 2, p. 484.

extraordinary publication of Marcel Duchamp called The Green Box .' And he fished it out of Roland's shelves and showed it to me there."¹²

By 1956 Hamilton's interest in Duchamp had resurfaced after Colin St. John Wilson and Anthony Hill had also expressed an interest in him. "We were all beginning to think of Duchamp as a seminal figure," said Hamilton,

"and somebody proposed that we should have a seminar on (him)... We would speak from the platform and there would be a discussion [but] before doing so I thought it would be wise to find out what this enigmatic publication that I'd seen at Roland's was about, because it was in French. So I set to work with an art historian called George Knox in Newcastle, who spoke French, and in our lunch hour over the period of a month or so we translated the whole of this document, with George Knox knowing what the words meant in French and me being able to more or less figure out what the likely translation was, given a number of alternatives. So we produced a fairly reasonable translation of the whole thing and then I went to the ICA armed with a slide which I made showing a layout of The Large Glass that appeared in The Green Box , and this was I think, rather a successful evening."¹³

The evening was certainly important for Hamilton; it led to his typographic version of The Green Box , begun in 1957 and published three years later, and the reconstruction of The Large Glass in 1966. It also gave him the impetus to approach art in a much more

¹² Richard Hamilton. Edited version of an interview with Dorothy Morland. ICA Archives. No date, p.5.

¹³ Ibid.

iconoclastic way: "There's one way to be influenced by Duchamp and that's to be iconoclastic..." he wrote in 1977¹⁴, and that approach was also indicative of the Independent Group.

Banham's reevaluation of Futurism grew directly from his Ph.D. thesis research; Theory and Design in the First Machine Age made much of Futurism and its influences. In the ICA Bulletin for February, Banham wrote:

"Few of the major components of the modern movement have been so badly treated in the standard literature as Futurism. As far as the Anglo-Saxon literature is concerned this is primarily due to the Paris-wise orientation of puritan critics from Wyndham Lewis to Sigfried Giedion and secondarily due to the pinkish political linkage of the Anglo-American avant-garde in the thirties. Now that these orientations have been broken, Futurism begins to emerge as one of the prime formative influences on twentieth century art and architecture."¹⁵

One discussion in which Banham was not involved during 1956 was an evening devoted to 'The New Brutalism' on 28 March. This is surprising since it was Banham who had promoted the term during the previous year through various articles, notably 'The New Brutalism' in Architectural Review for December 1955. New Brutalism cannot be traced back to the Independent Group, although Banham included amongst its chief disciples Alison and Peter Smithson, Eduardo Paolozzi and Magda Cordell, all attenders at Independent Group meetings. Rather, it belongs to Banham and almost exclusively to what might be called his extra-Independent Group activities. At the meeting on 28 March,

¹⁴ Quoted in Richard Hamilton, Collected Words 1953-1982, London 1982, p.238.

¹⁵ ICA Bulletin No.64, February 1956.

Toni del Renzio recalled that the evening

"...was enlivened by some exchanges initiated by me to the fact that engineers' mathematics were somewhat naive and that a more sophisticated understanding of the mathematical sense of structure was needed to understand architecture like that associated with the Smithsons"¹⁶

More significant than the lectures and exhibitions at the ICA as far as the erstwhile Independent Group was concerned, was the resignation of Banham from the Management Committee. He wrote to Dorothy Morland on 18 June explaining that the pressure of doing his Ph.D. research was too great for him to even attend committee meetings and that he should therefore make way for somebody else who could attend.¹⁷ He had in fact resigned the previous month (the formal letter was not written until later) because on 29 May, the architect and former Independent Group member Colin St. John Wilson joined the ICA's Management Committee. He had served on the exhibitions sub-committee for a number of years and was well qualified to move up and take his place alongside Herbert Read, E.C. Gregory, Leonie Cohn, M.G. Bendon and Roland Penrose. However, Colin St. John Wilson remained on the Committee for less than seven months; he resigned on 14 December, presumably because of pressure from architectural work, and therefore his influence cannot have been as great as that of his immediate predecessor.

As well as the lectures and exhibitions already mentioned, the shifts in the ICA's hierarchy, and the general trend towards a wider ranging programme initiated by Lawrence Alloway, 1956 also saw other

¹⁶Toni del Renzio. Letter to the author 9 May 1982.

¹⁷Peter Reyner Banham. Letter to Dorothy Morland 18 June 1956. ICA Archives.

events at the ICA which involved ex-Independent Group members. At the beginning of the year, Eduardo Paolozzi was awarded \$1,000 from the William and Norma Copley Foundation, and later - in September - he appeared in the members' room with a small exhibition called An Experiment with Child Art. In that same month, presumably to follow the Paolozzi show, Toni del Renzio planned an exhibition of fashion photography, but that never came off. Richard Lannoy, ex-employee of the Institute and in one sense, founder of the Independent Group, published a book on India early in the year, there was a discussion on 'The Open Plan versus the Cellular Interior', which involved Peter Smithson, and John McHale held an exhibition during November and December of collages which were made from material he had brought back from the United States.¹⁸ But the key events involving Independent Group members during 1956 took place away from the ICA. The first was in the unlikely setting of the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, and the second was at the Whitechapel Art Gallery.

It is hard to believe that the House of the Future (HOF) which Alison and Peter Smithson designed for the March 1956 Ideal Home Exhibition was not directly influenced by what had gone on at Independent Group discussions during the preceding years. Peter Reyner Banham certainly believed that the house was related to the Independent Group researches¹⁹. But the Smithsons themselves

¹⁸ This exhibition is discussed on pp.263-4. This was the first exhibition in the newly established library space which came into existence because the ICA offices transferred to the third floor of 69-70 Piccadilly, on the corner of Piccadilly and Dover Street. This newly acquired space enabled the Institute to hold small exhibitions as well as provide an area for members to talk without disturbing any lecture which might be taking place in the gallery. It opened on 25 October.

¹⁹ Peter Reyner Banham 'Things to Come', Design No.90, June 1956, p.28, where Banham asks, "...how far was the exhibit as a whole in touch with the mass market?" and then answers, "In some ways admirably... and the Smithsons are probably better placed than anyone to do this, for they have been involved in recent studies at the Institute of Contemporary Arts into the way in which advertising reflects and creates popular aesthetic standards."

maintained that the influence was not as direct and obvious as it might first appear, and that other influences - equally as powerful - were at play: "I don't think the Independent Group had any influence on [the 'House of the Future'] ", Peter Smithson said, "...because we arrived at all that prognostication by... [putting] a fixed forward projection, which I think was twenty-five years ...we merely said that if such and such is available in America in small numbers, it will be generally available at a certain period..."²⁰ Alison Smithson reiterated the point when Banham asked her if the HOF would have been arrived at irrespective of the Independent Group discussions. "Yes", she said, "irrespective of the talk in the Independent Group, because we were personally looking at tear sheets of American magazines, personally briefing ourselves..."²¹ The Smithsons were clearly eager to assert the autonomy of their architecture.

When McHale and Alloway took over the convenership of the Independent Group, and perhaps even before this, the Smithsons had begun to withdraw from the Group. The demands of work and the changes in domestic circumstance with young children growing up, contributed to their gradual departure. Thus, by 1956 when HOF appeared, the suggestion that it related directly to Independent Group studies was something of an anathema to them. Their stance was that it grew from their own studies, their own projections into the future; the panels of the HOF derived as much from the motor car industry as they did from "...looking at things like armadillos in the Natural History Museum"²² ; the fittings came from their future projections on American magazine advertisements; the flowing form, the use of plastic, the attempt to be tasteful and not vulgar in the selection of

²⁰ Peter Smithson interviewed by the author 22 November 1982.

²¹ Alison Smithson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 1976/77?

Unedited tape recording for the Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop 1979, though not used in the film.

²² Ibid.

American products (to avoid "...the gross...the sort of glitter...the sheer vulgarity of it..."), were things which the Smithsons "...were able to do... but haven't actually been able to do again simply because one's never been given a programme that was... so obviously suitable as that."²³

Despite the architects' protestations, Banham always maintained that HOF was probably "...the first true product of all the pop art studies that had been going on for so long."²⁴ Perhaps his view of HOF was essentially correct, but the Smithsons themselves always thought it too obvious, too direct and too simple an interpretation. Nevertheless, it does have an appeal - albeit superficially - because it fits neatly into the progression of ideas posited by the Independent Group.

In 1979, Banham referred to "...how Cadillac it was. A house designed like a car meant to be marketed like a car, but still a house, still architecture."²⁵ He also noted

"...there was a background of close observation of automotive technology... its parts and options already installed and already designed in - like a car - and with a system of panelled construction, again which is difficult not to relate to automotive technology."²⁶

Earlier, in 1966, he had written a similar description:

"The level of technical equipment was clearly intended to

²³ Alison Smithson interviewed by the author, 22 November 1982.

²⁴ Peter Reyner Banham. Tape recorded lecture 1977? for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

²⁵ Peter Reyner Banham. Soundtrack for Arts Council, op.cit., 1979.

²⁶ Peter Reyner Banham. 1977? op.cit.

surpass even the vision vouchsafed by the American advertisements they [the Smithsons] had been collecting... The proposed form of structure represents a different kind of raid into U.S. industrial design however: the double plastic shell was conceived as the equivalent of the panelling of a car body. Thus, no single panel was interchangeable with any other in the same house, only with its twin in another house. This situation, long since accepted in the construction of industrially produced shells (such as car bodies, aircraft fuselages, etc.) of course runs exactly counter to ideas current in architectural circles on prefabrication..."²⁷

However, at the time of HOF, Banham's review in Design does not mention the analogy with the automobile at all. Nor does the contemporary report in The Architects' Journal, or even John McHale's article in Ark of the following year. All these reports stressed the modernity of the house and how accurately it might prophesy the house of 1980 - the projected date of HOF. Banham wrote:

"...the architects envisaged their own possibilities with a house structure of material which could exist tomorrow - moulded resin-bonded plaster - but which will not exist commercially until there is a big enough market in factory built houses to amortise the high cost of plant."

At about the same time, The Architects' Journal reported,

"The construction of the house, which is designed to be one of a back-to-back group of terrace houses, is unusual. It is moulded

²⁷Peter Reyner Banham. The New Brutalism, London, 1966, p.63.

²⁸Peter Reyner Banham, 1956, op.cit., p.25.

in plastic - impregnated plaster - a kind of skin structure built up in units each comprising the floor, wall and ceiling as a continuous surface. A flexible joint between each unit allows for thermal movement and provides a structural break for reducing noise..."²⁹

And John McHale, writing early in 1957 for the Royal College of Art journal, makes it clear that the primary aim of HOF was the projection of architecture into the future:

"This was no attempt to compress towards an ideal, whether structural or functional, but a pragmatic endeavour to extrapolate, with acceptance of human variables in living requirements, the standard dwelling in twenty-five years' time."³⁰

That the immediate response to the house did not pick up the analogy with the automobile does not negate the possibility that HOF was designed like a car, nor does it diminish Banham's argument for the same. But the fact remains that the Smithsons saw little relation between their creation and the latest designs to come out of Detroit, or indeed, saw no relation between HOF and the Independent Group. Banham could never accept this. With the hindsight of Pop Art and Archigram, some historians might agree with him, but the more critical might argue that his view of HOF is taken because it easily conforms to the interpretation of the Independent Group as a forerunner of Pop Art.

Banham claimed that HOF possibly had "...a stronger claim than anything at This is Tomorrow to have been the first true product of

²⁹'Forward to Back-to-Back Housing', The Architects' Journal, Vol.123, No.3183, 1 March 1956, p.236.

³⁰John McHale 'Technology and the Home', Ark No.19, 1957, p.25.

all the pop studies..."³¹ He may have been right, but the prevarication over HOF's position in relation to later developments rather enervates its role as an influential precursor of Pop Art manifestations in the early 'sixties. There is, however, no such dispute over at least one of the exhibits in This is Tomorrow. The environment created by John Voelcker, Richard Hamilton and John McHale (with the invariably unmentioned help of Frank and Magda Cordell and Terry Hamilton) is almost universally regarded as a direct forerunner of Pop. But This is Tomorrow was not just the Voelcker/Hamilton/McHale exhibit, nor did the Whitechapel Art Gallery turn itself over exclusively to members of the Independent Group.

Much of the mythology surrounding This is Tomorrow derives from the interpretation that it influenced certain later figurative developments in fine art. This view may well have some credence but it is a limited interpretation and as such diminishes the understanding of the exhibition.

This is Tomorrow (the initial letters of the title forming the unfortunate acronym TIT, by which most of the participants always knew the show) opened on 8 August 1956. It was an exhibition of twelve groups, each consisting of two, three or four architects and artists, a total of thirty-seven people. The initial idea, which was to promote the integration of the arts, came from the Groupe Espace. This association of artists had been founded in Paris in 1951 with not only the unifying concept that art was "simply one aspect of space", as the name of the group suggests, but also that art was "a social and not an individualistic" activity.³²

³¹ Peter Reyner Banham 1977?, op.cit.

³² Phaidon Dictionary of Twentieth Century Art, p.148.

Stylistically, the Groupe Espace was constructivist and the initial suggestion for British artists to organise an exhibition was made by the Franco-British painter Paule Vezelay. She was the British representative of the Groupe Espace and in this capacity had contacted the architect Leslie Martin, who had connections with constructivist artists, having been joint editor with Naum Gabo and Ben Nicholson of the constructivist anthology Circle before the war. The idea of the integration of the arts which Paule Vezelay was now proposing as the theme of the exhibition, had concerned Circle itself. Articles on painting, sculpture, architecture and other areas such as art education, typography, and even choreography appeared in the journal, so the idea of a show which brought together various artistic disciplines appealed to Martin.

Towards the end of 1954 a meeting of those interested in participating in such an exhibition was held. Amongst them were Victor Pasmore, Roger Hilton, Robert Adams, Theo Crosby, Colin St. John Wilson³³ and Paule Vezelay herself. Some details of the proposed show were revealed at this gathering. Colin St. John Wilson recalled that the exhibition

"...was going to take the form of mounting paintings and photographs of architecture and odd tiles and fabrics and God knows what all..."

and that the general consensus of those present was that

"...we can do something a bit more forthcoming than that."³⁴

³³ Colin St. John Wilson, op.cit.. Colin St. John Wilson worked with Leslie Martin in the Housing Division of the Architects' Department at the LCC and Martin had nominated him as his representative for the organisation of the exhibition since he was unable to attend such meetings owing to pressure of work.

³⁴ Colin St. John Wilson, op.cit.

It was apparently at this point that the Groupe Espace extricated itself from the proceedings and, according to Colin St. John Wilson, Paule Vezelay "...sort of excommunicated us on the spot."³⁵

At this juncture Theo Crosby took over the organisation of the exhibition. He was an editor of Architectural Design and had been on the fringes of the Independent Group but had never become too involved in their activities. However, he knew all the members and was sympathetic to their various positions.

Probably early in 1955 a meeting of those interested in the exhibition was held at Adrian Heath's flat in Charlotte Street. Here the basic organisation of the show was thrashed out, not quite literally but almost, because criticisms were aired and factions appeared amongst those who attended. There were two general groups, one comprising of people once associated with the Independent Group and the other of constructivists who had been called in at the original gathering arranged by Paule Vezelay. But the antagonisms were not exclusively between these factions. For example, Colin St. John Wilson remembers Roger Hilton

"...being fairly aggressive about the presence of Lawrence Alloway and Peter Banham. He said, 'What the hell do we want these bloody word men here for? Throw them out. We just want the people who do things in here'."

And he also remembers the tenor of the meeting as being like

"...a right old mob of prima donnas... everybody had to show off

³⁵ Ibid.

more than everybody else when they came into the room."³⁶

At this meeting and subsequent ones early in 1955, the arrangements for the exhibition were made. Those people not directly associated with the constructivist faction were called Group X by Theo Crosby³⁷, as if to give some credence to their autonomy; and in the main, they were to stay separate from the constructivists when the final groupings were made.

Crosby's idea, probably from the start, was of collaboration between painters, sculptors, and architects, thus directly connected to the original Groupe Espace idea, but certainly a development since the Groupe Espace had apparently envisaged a 'total' exhibition where everyone participated in one great partnership. Crosby planned an exhibition comprising of a number of groups, each ideally consisting of a painter, sculptor and architect, and each creating its own exhibition within a given area inside the gallery. From the start, the nature of this idea was environmental in the sense that it was obligatory for the group to design an exhibit through which the visitor could pass in order to reach the exhibits of the other groups. Furthermore, the involvement of an architect with each group virtually ensured an environmental approach. This initial idea was proposed to Bryan Robertson, Director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, who welcomed and encouraged the exhibition.

The exhibition did not open until 8 August 1956, although the planning of it took almost two years. In the early correspondence between Crosby and Bryan Robertson, the show was still known as the 'Groupe Espace exhibition', though by mid-1955 it was simply known as

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷John McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 30 May 1977. Unedited tape recording for the Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop, 1979, though not used in the film.

'the exhibition', and later still the title This is Tomorrow was adopted.

As early as March 1955, the groups had begun to be formed. Peter Reyner Banham wrote to Robertson on the 30th:

"There has been quite a lot of progress of various sorts, most of the groups now exist, in some form, and most have some idea of what they want to do. There is a co-ordinator, Sandy Wilson, and Erno Goldfinger will work with him to ensure fair play..."³⁸

The final comment about fair play was especially pertinent because it highlighted the difficulties already developing between the ex-Independent Group members and the constructivists. Banham went on to say that Colin St. John Wilson's role was somewhat invidious since he was

"...a member of one of the more determined groups, or rather heads a group of groups with similar aims... and other groups are afraid they may find themselves pushed into corners by a large body of unanimous Abstractionists."

Banham then added that he was now "bowing out"³⁹. Despite this final comment, Robertson was still corresponding with him later in the year and although Banham was not involved with any of the groups, he did contribute a piece to the catalogue.

Although Robertson corresponded with Banham, it was his communication with the exhibition's co-ordinator, Theo Crosby, which

³⁸Peter Reyner Banham. Letter to Bryan Robertson, 30 March 1955. Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives.

³⁹Ibid.

was more important. Crosby had apparently explained the aims of the show and also submitted a list of exhibitors. In May 1955, Robertson wrote that it was his desire to hold an exhibition "...which will attempt to show painting, sculpture and architecture in integrated relationship." He went on to say that he did not want to impose his own taste upon such an exhibition but he was "...not at all keen in exhibiting sculpture by Sarah Jackson." He believed that the list of painters should be enlarged and improved, that the sculptor Bernard Meadows should be represented, and "...above all," he said,

"I feel very strongly that Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and either Martin, Fry or Drew should be asked to collaborate together to produce something for the exhibition."⁴⁰

Robertson's position was made absolutely clear in the following paragraph of the letter:

"...artists of their [Nicholson's and Hepworth's] generation are very often forgotten together with the part they have played in the 1920s and 1930s in making a new kind of art possible in this country - and many younger artists, barely out of the art school, seem to think that they have originated everything themselves. From the point of view of courtesy, seniority, and historical perspective, I feel that there should be a contribution from the Hepworth-Nicholson faction together with work by an architect of approximately their generation."⁴¹

Crosby resisted. "With regard to your suggestion that Nicholson and Hepworth be included," he wrote,

⁴⁰ Bryan Robertson. Letter to Theo Crosby 23 May 1955. Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives.

⁴¹ Ibid.

"it was generally felt that it would be difficult for them to attend the discussions which are really the point of the collaboration. It was stressed that the exhibition will not be a collection of miscellaneous art works."⁴²

One feels from reading this reply that Crosby was not eager to invite Hepworth or Nicholson or anyone else from their generation⁴³ ; from the start TIT was conceived in the minds of Crosby and of the ex-Independent Group members as a show of younger artists. Bryan Robertson continued to press for the inclusion of a St. Ives faction. On 10 June he wrote that Nicholson and Hepworth were very mobile and could easily travel to London for meetings.⁴⁴ Crosby apparently ignored this; it seems as though he was determined to keep the original concept of the exhibition.

The various exhibiting groups for TIT were established quite early in the planning, although they had changed a little by the time the exhibition opened.⁴⁵ Colin St. John Wilson made a floor plan of the gallery and each group was either allotted or chose its exhibiting area. A budget was given to each group with which to buy materials; the amount of this budget varies according to the source of

⁴²Theo Crosby. Letter to Bryan Robertson 8 June 1955. Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives.

⁴³Although Kenneth and Mary Martin were of that generation, they had been involved from the beginning when the Groupe Espace suggested the exhibition.

⁴⁴Bryan Robertson. Letter to Theo Crosby 10 June 1955. Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives.

⁴⁵The final groups were: 1) Theo Crosby, Germano Facetti, Edward Wright, William Turnbull. 2) Richard Hamilton, John Voelcker, John McHale. 3) James Hull, J.D.H. Catleugh, Leslie Thornton. 4) Anthony Jackson, Sarah Jackson, Emilio Scanavino. 5) John Ernest, Anthony Hill, Denis Williams. 6) Eduardo Paolozzi, Peter Smithson, Alison Smithson, Nigel Henderson. 7) Helen Phillips, Victor Pasmore, Erno Goldfinger. 8) James Stirling, Michael Pine, Richard Matthews. 9) Mary Martin, Kenneth Martin, John Weeks. 10) Colin St. John Wilson, Frank Newby, Peter Carter, Robert Adams. 11) Adrian Heath, John Weeks. 12) Toni del Renzio, Geoffrey Holroyd, Lawrence Alloway.

information, but the Whitechapel Archives record forty pounds.⁴⁶

Although Theo Crosby co-ordinated the show, more than a month before it opened, an information committee had been established at the ICA with Lawrence Alloway at its head. The first press release from this committee announced: "Robot opens exhibition on design in the future."⁴⁷ This referred to the unusual opening of the show at 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday 8 August by a model of Robbie the Robot, 'star' of the current MGM film Forbidden Planet. Richard Hamilton had borrowed the model - a two-dimensional version of it existed in his TIT exhibit - with a demonstrator inside working the robot and reading a speech written by Alloway. "Unfortunately, the speech I wrote was too long", recalled Alloway,

"and Robbie's great domed head steamed up, dimming his banks of flashing lights, as the man inside sweated it out."⁴⁸

Peter Reyner Banham, writing at the time, was more cynical:

"'This is the first time a robot has opened an art exhibition', enunciated Robby [sic], star of The Forbidden Planet [sic]. 'Formerly, people were used.' The innovation made no difference to the sherry-snatchers in the middle of the gallery, who continued to talk and laugh just as loudly, and rudely, as if people were still being used."⁴⁹

⁴⁶Nigel Henderson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 7 July 1976, soundtrack for Arts Council, op.cit., quotes £50, whilst John McHale (Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film) quotes "about £30".

⁴⁷Press Release for This is Tomorrow. No date. Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives.

⁴⁸Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.201, n.23.

⁴⁹Peter Reyner Banham, 'Not Quite Architecture. Not Quite Painting or Sculpture Either', The Architects' Journal Vol.124 No.3207, 16 August 1956, p.217.

The presence of Robbie the Robot certainly drew attention to TIT. It was all part of Alloway's thorough publicity job which included coverage by the press, Independent television, cinema newsreels, and the art and architecture journals, as well as a forty minute programme devoted to the exhibition on BBC radio.

In the press releases issued by Alloway, one can discern the important issues for him by the emphasis he put upon particular aspects of the show. In one, he stresses the collaboration of artists and architects "...to show what Tomorrow may be like."⁵⁰ In a later release, he makes this the primary issue by discussing the growth of specialisation since the Renaissance, and goes on to say that TIT "...tries to make a beginning [for collaboration]."⁵¹ In another release, the emphasis is upon the youth of the exhibitors:

"...the collaborators who have pooled their resources are mostly in their early thirties, rising talents on the threshold of their creative maturity, with international reputations just in the making, or about to be made."⁵²

Alloway's entry in the TIT catalogue, 'Design as a Human Activity', reiterates some of the points made in the press releases and succinctly analyses the philosophy behind the show. Stressing the idea of collaboration in the arts, he makes the point that TIT opposes specialisation but that there is no ideal universal approach, rather an "antagonistic co-operation". Although the twelve exhibits may collectively aim to propose future possibilities, he says, they exist as different solutions which "are allowed to compete as well as to

⁵⁰ Press release for This is Tomorrow. No date. Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives.

⁵¹ Press release, *ibid.*

⁵² Press release, *ibid.*

complement each other." Quoting from Huizinga's Homo Ludens ⁵³, that art language is different from ordinary speech in that it uses symbols, images, figures and so on, Alloway says that remaining within the confines of such a language can be limiting and narrow. TIT cuts across this and exposes the spectator to a wide range of space effects, signs, materials, and so on. Indeed, he lays emphasis upon the role of the spectator: "As he circulates," Alloway says,

"the visitor will have to adjust to the character of each exhibit... 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."⁵⁴

In one respect, some of the aims of TIT were not justified by the exhibits. Without doubt, the show's overriding concern was with fine art and, by definition, this made it exclusive. But one aspect of the show - for some of the exhibitors at any rate - was a wider and more populist approach which might have a universal appeal. Alloway's catalogue introduction hints at this and his press releases state it more clearly:

"This is Tomorrow ... believes that modern art can reach a wide public if it is handled without too much solemnity."

And again:

"... the doors of the Ivory Tower are open wide."⁵⁵

⁵³A copy of Johan Huizinga's Homo Ludens was lent to Alloway by Geoffrey Holroyd. Holroyd had just returned from the United States and used the book to show Alloway "the new position on philosophy as a tool to view art". (Geoffrey Holroyd. Letter to the author, 23 April 1983.)

⁵⁴Lawrence Alloway, 'Design as a Human Activity', This is Tomorrow. Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956.

⁵⁵Press releases for This is Tomorrow. No dates. Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives.

But the press had doubts about the success of this aim, as contemporary reviews indicate. The Manchester Guardian was dismayed that "...so many [of the ideas in the exhibition] are merely ideas for an exhibition"⁵⁶ and the journal Architecture and Building attacked what the reviewers thought were fallacious claims to universal appeal:

"...we see from the Press release that the "doors of the ivory tower are wide open"... This... surely suggests that the exhibition should have been understandable to the 'ordinary man', though it must have been quite incomprehensible to him."

And critical of Alloway's catalogue entry, these reviewers continued:

"In all seriousness, this obscurity in expression makes ordinary people really angry and does not help them understand the artists' ideas."⁵⁷

On 8 August when the press questioned Alloway about the exhibition at its opening, he was more succinct in his answers, and he did not make an issue of the exhibition's aim to appeal to the 'ordinary man'. To the Daily Mail he said that the show was designed "to shock people out of their regimentation",⁵⁸ and to the Yorkshire Observer's question about the meaning of a three foot high bottle of Guinness in group 2's exhibit, he said that "it was to make people see the usual in an unusual way."⁵⁹

Of the contemporary reviews, it was that in The Times which

⁵⁶Stephen Bone, 'Collaboration of Painter, Sculptor and Architect. Ideas on Display on the Whitechapel Art Gallery', Manchester Guardian, 10 August 1956.

⁵⁷John Stillman and John Eastwick-Field, 'This was Yesterday' Architecture and Building, September 1956, p.328.

⁵⁸Daily Mail, 9 August 1956.

⁵⁹Yorkshire Observer, 9 August 1956.

recognised an important aspect of TIT:

"There is no over-all unanimity in the exhibition. However, two distinct tendencies are revealed both by the exhibits and the contributions which each group has made to a sumptuous catalogue. On the one hand a number of collaborations have brought sculpture and architecture together in genuine synthesis. These works aspire to an ideal style, a conscious purity of form... Against these formally coherent and discreet works of art are to be set a number of exhibits whose purpose is the exact opposite. The interest of their designers, if one interprets them correctly, centres on the relationship between onlooker and the world at large rather than between him and the qualities of a work of art. The work is significant as symbol, not as form..."⁶⁰

Theo Crosby, whilst stressing the grand aim of the show - the collaboration of artists and architects - also noted that

"The exhibition falls into two parts: sections which ultimately derive from the constructivists and those who take their cue from the other movements of the twenties, dadaism and surrealism."⁶¹

In fact, the catalogue introductions championed these two tendencies: Alloway's 'Design as a Human Activity' emphasising the spectator's reaction to the communication of symbols and messages of each group's exhibit, and David Lewis's 'The Constructive Idea' promoting the artist-architect collaboration with the historical precedents of

⁶⁰ 'Architect and Artist. Ideal Realized', The Times 9 August 1956.

⁶¹ Theo Crosby, 'This is Tomorrow', Architectural Design, Vol.26, No.10, October 1956, p.334.

suprematism, constructivism, the Bauhaus and de Stijl.

The other catalogue introduction was by Peter Reyner Banham. Typographically laid out as a poem, it endorsed the show's principal aim by quoting names and concepts, interweaving them and postulating the grand notion of collaboration between the arts:

"authoritarian hegelian metaphysical
dream of gesamtkunstwerk great union of
all disciplines total art...
in art nouveau
van der velde architect and needleman proclaims
equality of all the arts...
cult object
 AEG
culture hero
 walter gropius...
who put
coloured plane on coloured post
 painter? architect?
coloured post on coloured plane
 architect? sculptor?
coloured plane on coloured plane
 sculptor? painter?...
master your context and the rest
symbols and channels shall be added unto
 you
cult object
 you
culture hero
 you

end product

you."⁶²

This piece sided with neither one tendency nor the other but brought out the historical tradition of artistic collaboration as well as advancing the idea of the interconnection of symbols, communication and environment.

In terms of attendance, TIT was extremely successful. "In one week," the Hackney Gazette reported, "nearly 5,000 people saw the exhibition, and in one day 100 copies of the catalogue were sold."⁶³ The coverage given to the show by the press had certainly paid off - proof of the power of advertising as much as the quality of the exhibition, one suspects. In a progress report issued by the Whitechapel Gallery, Lawrence Alloway recorded that the show was

"breaking all records... Attendance has been up to a thousand a day. The expensive catalogue (it costs five shillings) has been reprinted. Only one other exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery has drawn comparable crowds and that was the JMW Turner exhibition in 1951. There is an unwritten law in the art world which states that August exhibitions will not succeed because they are out of season. But attendance at This is Tomorrow proves that if the exhibition is good enough, people will come."

The expensive catalogue, spiral bound and running to about one hundred pages, was the work of Edward Wright. Designed to give each

⁶² Peter Reyner Banham, 'Marriage of Two minds', This is Tomorrow, op.cit.

⁶³ Hackney Gazette, 29 August, 1956.

⁶⁴ Progress Report. No date. Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives.

of the twelve groups space for a diagram of their exhibit, a picture of themselves, a 'manifesto', and one other image of their choice, it was an integral part of the whole show. Although some of the groups did not adhere to this format, the catalogue's exciting integration of image and type mirrored the integration of painting, sculpture and architecture to be found in some of the exhibits.

Indeed, the use of lettering was an important part of group 1's exhibit in which Edward Wright himself participated. With Theo Crosby, the graphic designer Germano Facetti, and William Turnbull, group 1's environment formed the entrance to the whole show. As with many of the exhibits, part of group 1's was built at the homes and studios of the participants and then erected at the gallery. Wright remembers making a construction of coloured perspex at his home in Thurloe Square, Kensington, and by using masking tape and printing ink, making designs of large arrows and letters on it. The essential aim of group 1's exhibit was stated in the catalogue and also in Architectural Design's review of the show:

"The group was concerned with presenting symbolically the world of tomorrow; the space deck roof symbolises the mechanical environment and its structural principles reflect those of the leaf skeleton which is used on one of the panels to symbolise the natural order. All the panels (blockboard, perspex and glass) are industrial products and are covered with photostats. Within this mechanical environment the sculpture represents the irrational element of chance. This approach to the problem of integration was that of antagonistic collaboration - a set of images and an object were placed in a context and left to fight it out."⁶⁵

⁶⁵Theo Crosby (Architectural Design) 1956, op.cit., p.334.

Antagonistic co-operation was a good description; William Turnbull's sculpture - a totemic object probably made in 1955 or 1956 - was used as a panacea for the architectural affliction of considering itself the dominant art. "I've made a sculpture, now put a building around it", Turnbull said, feeling this was a justifiable response to the attitude of certain architects to sculpture.⁶⁶ And group 1's catalogue entry also makes this point: "Sculpture is not architectural stage property."⁶⁷

Apart from the better-known exhibits of groups 2 and 6 - which are discussed below - groups 8, 10 and 12, along with group 1, did not strictly follow a constructivist approach. All the other groups were either purely constructivist or displayed some sympathy with those principles.⁶⁸ And of those groups, none of the members were connected with the Independent Group; conversely ex-Independent Group members made up some of the participants of groups 1, 2, 6, 8, 10 and 12.

In group 8 were James Stirling, Michael Pine and Richard Matthews. Their exhibit was a papier maché object derived from a study of soap bubbles - photographs of which were also shown, together with photographs of the main work during its development. This

⁶⁶William Turnbull. Conversation with the author, 23 February 1983.

⁶⁷This is Tomorrow, op.cit. 1956

⁶⁸Group 3 (James Hull, JDH. Catleugh and Leslie Thornton) was a folding screen decorated with murals - by Hull and Catleugh - and a metal and plaster sculpture by Thornton; group 4 (Anthony and Sarah Jackson and Emilio Scanavino) contained Sarah Jackson's flaring metal sculpture; group 5 (John Ernest, Anthony Hill and Denis Williams) evoked the constructivist work of c. 1913-23, with replicas and translations of Malevich and Mondrian paintings, and Gabo sculptures; group 7 (Helen Phillips, Victor Pasmore and Erno Goldfinger) produced a 16 foot square space containing a Pasmore relief and a Helen Phillips' sculpture; group 9 (Kenneth and Mary Martin and John Weeks), an equilateral triangular space with intersecting white walls which, like the Kenneth Martin mobile and the Mary Martin wall strips inside, suggested tranquility and purity as well as dynamic spatial relationships; group 11 (Adrian Heath and John Weeks), a wall of concrete blocks which projected and recessed giving it both the quality of architecture and abstract sculpture.

object, standing some six feet high, had an organic quality which related to exhibits in the earlier Growth and Form exhibition, but its genesis was a development through a series of stages rather than a direct representation of any natural phenomenon. Colin St. John Wilson thought that James Stirling - the one member of group 8 who was in any way connected to the Independent Group - had little to do with the exhibit. "His heart simply wasn't in it," he said.⁶⁹ Indeed, Stirling's contribution to the catalogue, although indicating his awareness of certain Independent Group ideas, can be interpreted as a manifesto for the autonomy of the architect as well as a radical development of Walter Gropius's statement that the arts should "be brought together under the wing of a great architecture". Stirling wrote,

"...architecture, one of the practical arts, has, along with the popular arts, deflated the position of painters, sculptors - the fine arts [and]... If the fine arts cannot recover the vitality of the research artists of the 20s... then the artist must become a consultant..."⁷⁰

This statement rather conflicted with the basic tenet of TIT.

On the other hand, group 10's exhibit was described as "the nearest in result to the original aims of the exhibition." It was a passageway "skillfully modulated with cubes, cylinders, and cones [leading] to a vertical eye catcher of concave polished aluminium sheets".⁷¹ At the opening ceremony, Robbie the Robot walked through the exhibit, emphasising its environmental nature, as well as its size. The fact that no individual pieces of work were included - that

⁶⁹ Colin St. John Wilson, *op.cit.*

⁷⁰ This is Tomorrow, *op.cit.*

⁷¹ Theo Crosby (Architectural Design) *op.cit.*, p.336.

the exhibit was an integral unit - said much for the collaboration of Colin St. John Wilson, Frank Newby, Peter Carter and Robert Adams. Their stated aim, "...to explore the ground that is common to architecture and sculpture... [leading] to a more integrated human environment..."⁷² was vindicated by the work. Colin St. John Wilson recalled that Roger Hilton was originally included in their group but the final team certainly worked well together. "Peter [Carter] and I," Wilson remembered,

"worked very closely with Robert Adams. He produced [a] sort of relief maquette... which we very, very closely followed. It was tremendous fun."⁷³

Muriel Wilson also recalls working on the exhibit⁷⁴, whilst Frank Newby recalls that the exhibit

"was made in my studio in Maida Vale [and that] the main fun was the contact between the various contributors."⁷⁵

Of all the exhibits, that developed by group 12 probably came closest to putting into practice Independent Group ideas. Although Geoffrey Holroyd, Toni del Renzio and Lawrence Alloway explored "the modern visual continuum according to each individual's decision"⁷⁶, a verbal/visual diagram of the 'multiple connectivity' of the 'fine art/pop art continuum', the exhibit, wrote Geoffrey Holroyd,

"was a version of Eames's House of Cards toy-imagery added to a

⁷² This is Tomorrow, op.cit.

⁷³ Colin St. John Wilson, op.cit.

⁷⁴ Muriel Wilson. Telephone conversation with the author, 1 March 1984.

⁷⁵ Frank Newby. Letter to the author, 17 January 1983.

⁷⁶ This is Tomorrow, op.cit.

component structural system. There was a tackboard side, tear outs from magazines, changing during the display, and a colour-coded panel side showing how to organise the imagery by breaking it down into a landscape of coloured headwords, reading across into the tackboard thicket of examples."⁷⁷

Toni del Renzio, who joined Holroyd and Alloway after many of the initial decisions had been made, and who was responsible for the catalogue design for group 12, saw the exhibit as a formalisation of an artist's tackboard:

"...we all had tackboards in our homes or our work spaces where we constantly pinned things up, removed things, and they were always in odd juxtapositions and we were making this relationship and contrast between them. This seemed to be something quite fundamental to Independent Group notions... [we were] making a principle out of something which was not all that new. Artists had always done it but we believed it was a technique..."⁷⁸

For Alloway, the aim of the exhibit was similar:

"...it was an effort to make legible this theory of the 'fine art/pop art continuum'... it was an effort to make a classification of images without resorting to traditional aesthetic criteria."

And then he added,

"I don't think it worked, but that was what it was."⁷⁹

⁷⁷Geoffrey Holroyd. Letter to the author, 23 April 1983.

⁷⁸Toni del Renzio interviewed by the author, 17 March 1982.

⁷⁹Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 25 May 1977, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

The most outstanding exhibits in TIT, and the most written about, were those by groups 2 and 6. Group 6 was made up of the same people who had organised Parallel of Life and Art at the ICA in 1953, Peter and Alison Smithson, Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson. But their TIT display was quite different from anything in the previous show. Interpreted variously as the Smithsons' "slow exit from the Pop movement"⁸⁰, "the New Brutalists at their most submissive to traditional values,"⁸¹ and "a strange, moving and very, very fine art experience,"⁸² the 'Patio and Pavilion', as it was called in the catalogue, was

"...a kind of celebration of garden shed civilisation or garden shed aesthetics. A back yard full of tatty old family miracles, but enclosed by a sand garden... in which were inexplicably and unexplainably laid out things - objects, images, shards of real and imaginary civilisation dredged up from the subconscious of Eduardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson and... the Smithsons themselves."⁸³

In the catalogue, the group explained

"Patio and Pavilion represents the fundamental necessities of the human habitat in a series of symbols. The first necessity is for a piece of the world - the patio. The second necessity is for an enclosed space - the pavilion. These two spaces are furnished with symbols for all human needs. The head for man himself - his brain and his machines. The tree image - for

⁸⁰Charles Jencks, Modern Movements in Architecture, Harmondsworth, 1973, p.278.

⁸¹Peter Reyner Banham, 'This is Tomorrow' Architectural Review Vol. 120, No.716, September 1956, p.187.

⁸²Peter Reyner Banham. Tape recorded lecture 1977? for Arts Council, op.cit.

⁸³Ibid.

nature. The rocks and natural objects for stability and the decoration of man-made space..."⁸⁴

Whatever the interpretation of the 'Patio and Pavilion', it bore little obvious relation to anything that had gone on in the Independent Group. Peter Smithson believed that it was one of the best things they had ever done⁸⁵, and regarded the exhibit

"...as a celebration of friendship... it seemed to me that we chose the people who we were fond of, and that fondness includes the images that they were able to make..."⁸⁶

The ideas for the imagery of the exhibit were not difficult to trace - Paolozzi's penchant for discarded objects, Henderson's back yard to his house in Bethnal Green, of which the exhibit was a kind of parody, the Smithsons' ideas about signs of occupancy and territory. But the ideas for the exhibit were not developed by each individual but came from the continuing discussions the group held. Furthermore, the nature of the exhibit was to a large extent determined by the cost and availability of materials. Some of these materials were expensive and fortunately were lent for the exhibition, notably sheets of aluminium-faced plywood, which formed the side walls around the patio and which had a kind of dulled mirror surface giving a misty quality to the objects they reflected. Also, there were the large sheets of photographic paper (two 8 x 4 feet, the other approximately 5 x 4 feet) used by Nigel Henderson for collages. The two larger works were laid on the floor, the smaller work - Head of a Man - resided in the pavilion. Head of a Man was later bought by Colin St. John Wilson

⁸⁴This is Tomorrow, op.cit.

⁸⁵Peter Smithson 1982, op.cit.

⁸⁶Peter Smithson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 1976/77? for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

who, in 1975, presented it to the Tate Gallery.

Group 6's 'Patio and Pavilion' caused a great deal of controversy and extremes of opinion. One contemporary review said that: "... the visual character of this stand gives... inspiration for the future..."⁸⁷ In retrospect, the architect Ron Herron, who visited the show, thought that the exhibit was important⁸⁸, though Lawrence Alloway thought that it "was curiously innocuous".⁸⁹

However the 'Patio and Pavilion' is viewed, it stands as a contrast to group 2's exhibit which, it is generally regarded, proved to be the most immediately prophetic piece in the show. For many later chroniclers, the McHale, Hamilton, Voelcker environment typified TIT. But in fact, it was the exception; its concern with optical illusions and with pop culture set it apart from all the other exhibits. "Our section of the exhibition," wrote Richard Hamilton,

"was in two parts; divided by John Voelcker's ingenious structure which not only provided several closed spaces but two interestingly different adjacent spaces within the rectangular area which housed it. To the left was a narrow corridor of constant width and to the right a large wedge-shaped area which opened up to the main hall and the other exhibitors. This division was useful in that it allowed for a distinction to be made between the two fields of concern that we had listed as requiring representation: Imagery and Perception. The closed spaces of the structure held aspects of both."⁹⁰

The narrow corridor consisted of walls and floor decorated with

⁸⁷ John Stillman, op.cit., p.332.

⁸⁸ Ron Herron interviewed by the author 10 January 1983.

⁸⁹ Lawrence Alloway. Soundtrack of Arts Council, op.cit.

⁹⁰ Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit.

optical illusions derived from Bauhaus sources, notably Josef Albers, and from Marcel Duchamp's Rotoreliefs. The latter were enlarged from discs which John McHale acquired from Duchamp when he met him in the States early in 1956. The large wedge-shaped area contained a montage of imagery from popular and fine art sources, some of it much larger than life size. Thus the theme of the exhibit was

"...how do our eyes perceive things and... what do we perceive at the moment."⁹¹

The exhibit exploited a variety of multi-media techniques, arresting not only the eyes of the spectator but also his ears and his sense of touch. Inside the structure there were two projectors, their beams of light crossing; part of the floor was made of layers of wire mesh so the spectator sprang up and down; another part was made of five inch thick rubber; and to assail the ears of the spectator, there was a juke box playing the latest rock music. Thus, one of the essential elements of the exhibit was the participation of the spectator. But it was the imagery which most visitors remembered. The optical illusions of the corridor have, to a large extent, been forgotten. Although they might now be considered as being prophetic of the later Op Art manifestation, the imagery used by group 2 was more immediately digested by the public and was, in retrospect, curiously predictive of the images of Pop Art. The montage of film stars, the giant bottle of Guinness, the juke box itself, were later all to be found in Pop Art paintings, as well as in the advertising and general visual environment of the 'sixties. But the side panel of the wedge-shaped area with its large images of Marilyn Monroe, skirt being blown high from the air of a subway pavement grill in The Seven

⁹¹ Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 27 June 1976 for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

Year Itch , and Robbie the Robot carrying a curvaceous woman in his mechanical arms, was most memorable. The image of the robot was about seventeen feet high, in itself an unforgettable experience, and was chosen for its contemporary appeal, since the film from which it came - Forbidden Planet - was then showing at the cinemas.⁹² The image of Monroe was considered to be more lasting, a much used and very popular image, and, one suspects, an image which the exhibitors simply liked for reasons ranging from its Americaness to the shape of the film star's legs.

In a similar way, the other image on that panel - a reproduction of Van Gogh's Sunflowers - was chosen. When selecting popular imagery for the exhibit, Terry Hamilton apparently suggested showing the most popular fine art reproduction. After telephoning the National Gallery and discovering that the Van Gogh was their biggest selling postcard, the group bought a copy, framed it, and hung it next to Marilyn, Robbie, and his blonde victim.⁹³ Thus, in a strange paradox, fine art (in reproduction) could stand next to popular art and be interpreted in the same terms - its popularity. At the same time, comparison between the mass produced image and the highly individual one was inevitably - if often unconsciously - made by the spectator on the basis that one was a painting (which it wasn't - it was a reproduction) and the other was a reproduction from celluloid (which it was, although it was painted, thus strictly making it more of a painting than the postcard.)

⁹² Forbidden Planet received a lot of attention from ex-Independent Group members. McHale was impressed by the transformation of Shakespeare's The Tempest (upon which the film was based) into the realms of science fiction, whereas Alloway found the analogy "too marked... a little over-literate and a little affected, compared to my favourite science fiction films which tended to be tougher." However, he liked the 'finish' of the film - achieved because it was an expensively made work, unlike most science fiction movies of the period. (Lawrence Alloway 1977, op.cit.)

⁹³ John McHale 1977, op.cit.

The overall effect of group 2's exhibit was, as Richard Hamilton described, like "...a kind of fun house of all the multifarious intrusion of the mass media into our lives."⁹⁴ Indeed, the idea of a fun house had been one of the original concepts which John McHale proposed after an early TIT meeting. Having discussed it first with Alloway and then Banham, he suggested it to Richard Hamilton, who in turn introduced John Voelcker into the group. McHale's original idea was for some sort of inhabitable Moebius strip - a quite impossible notion which Voelcker developed, eventually coming up with the structure which appeared in the show.

The position of this structure within the gallery was also important. The group secured a site near to the entrance and so visitors had to pass through the exhibit (after first passing through group 1's exhibit) in order to see the remainder of the show. Group 1's piece ("...very well designed [but people] had almost become accustomed to that"⁹⁵) did not have the range of sensory stimuli which typified group 2's: the juke box playing, the large images, the textured floors. As a result, it was group 2's exhibit which tended to colour the visitors' opinions about TIT; indeed, as Banham pointed out,

"People who drifted in off the street simply took in [group 2] and drifted out again because beyond that everything was static, calm, art gallery sort of stuff with no visible action of any sort."⁹⁶

The building of the structure was done partly at Hamilton's

⁹⁴Richard Hamilton The Impact of American Pop Culture in the Fifties.

A talk broadcast by the BBC for the Open University. No date.

⁹⁵John McHale, 1977, op.cit.

⁹⁶Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with John McHale, 1977, op.cit.

studio and partly in the Whitechapel itself. The tenor of Independent Group meetings carried on into the building operations and the co-operation was often very antagonistic. Hamilton spoke of it being "more like a civil war"⁹⁷ than a co-operation. Colin St. John Wilson recalled that he was witness to "...marvellous flights of temperament" between Richard and Terry Hamilton and John McHale and Magda Cordell,⁹⁸ and Alison Smithson remembered Magda Cordell having a "...flaming row with Hamilton".⁹⁹ Much of this hostility stemmed from John McHale's absence in the United States at the end of 1955 and the beginning of 1956.

Plans for the exhibit had been discussed and the group set before he left on the Yale scholarship, but as the exhibition drew nearer, his absence caused a number of problems. Hamilton wrote that he "...returned to London to make himself available for work two weeks before the show was due to open... too late to add creatively to the few acrimonious contributions which arrived by post,"¹⁰⁰ Magda Cordell however, remembers that John McHale arrived back

"...some weeks before the exhibit opened because we had to paint and install the structures of the total exhibit together with the Hamiltons. In fact, I recollect many days painting with Terry Hamilton some of the 'corridor' flats [the optical illusions] at the Hamiltons' studio garden as they had a lot of space..."¹⁰¹

During McHale's stay in the States, he sent back instructions and ideas to Richard Hamilton, via Magda Cordell. One such idea read:

⁹⁷Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit., p.22.

⁹⁸Colin St. John Wilson, op.cit.

⁹⁹Alison Smithson, 1982, op.cit.

¹⁰⁰Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit., p.22.

¹⁰¹Magda Cordell McHale. Letter to the author 5 July 1983.

"T [meaning TIT] Images. Grand collage. Cinemascope poster with all popular myth figures, eg. Marilyn, western, SF, in one grand, great image."

Another, written under the three sections 'Check', 'Try Out', and 'Ideas', says:

"Old waxwork, rain machine, doll squeakers, noise makers, etc. [under 'Check']. Shadow lighting, mirror fragments [under 'Try Out']. Room full of balloons; upside-down room with old models. Floor of net; loose gravel floor; floor of loose rocks; pond with stepping stones; room with way-out BEMs [Bug Eyed Monsters]. Section using MMM [Man, Machine and Motion] material, some BEMs, black lights, cyclorama effects, material from Forbidden Planet or Thresholds of Space, etc. [under 'Ideas']."¹⁰²

When Magda Cordell returned from visiting McHale at the beginning of 1956, she brought with her some material to be used in the exhibit, notably magazines, as well as a sketch idea for a poster,¹⁰³ and when McHale himself returned, he brought a lot more material. Some of it was used directly in the TIT Exhibit - the optical illusions for example, were copied from material he had seen in the Yale University Library. But there was not time to include much of the material. An important source for later work, and an inspiration for some of his ex-Independent Group colleagues, were a large number of American magazines. "I remember the day when he arrived back from

¹⁰²Read by Magda Cordell McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 30 May 1977 for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

¹⁰³"Each group was asked, to save expense in providing posters, to design and print thirty posters." (Architectural Design Vol.26, No.9, September 1956, p.304.)

America," said Magda Cordell.

"It was a kind of holiday almost. We were sitting at Cleveland Square on a Sunday unpacking all the stuff he'd brought with him, which was nothing else but fifty million magazines - second hand, of course - with all the fantastic images which he then implemented into his work."¹⁰⁴

This work was collage, shown at the ICA in an exhibition in the library during November and December of 1956. Eleven pieces were displayed, with titles such as Puffhead, Maphead and Flexible Head. Alloway wrote in the catalogue:

"The collages are slowly assembled out of files of material torn from... magazines, images which reveal the new scale of a resemblance and strangeness created by modern photography. McHale has been particularly fascinated by close-ups of food, the visions of popular appetite, chocolate landscape cake, salad sculpture, solid gold chicken. McHale's consumer consists of symbols of the food he reads about and eats and related matter..."¹⁰⁵

To some, the material McHale brought back was of little value. Toni del Renzio said that the American magazine material was not particularly new to him¹⁰⁶, and Colin St. John Wilson thought Hamilton's work was more meaningful.¹⁰⁷ Some reviews of the collage exhibition were also critical. One noted that the food heads had "considerable impact..." but continued,

¹⁰⁴ Magda Cordell McHale. Soundtrack from Arts Council, *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence Alloway. Introduction to John McHale - Collages 27 November - 15 December 1956. ICA Library.

¹⁰⁶ Toni del Renzio 1982, *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁷ Colin St. John Wilson, *op.cit.*

"Heads, however, are easy to do in this well-tried technique, and it will be interesting to see if McHale can push the process a little further."¹⁰⁸

To others however, the American material was a revelation. "The trunkfull of American domestic market magazines," wrote Richard Morphet in relation to Richard Hamilton's development, "...was a big stimulus in the sense of a confirmation or expansion of existing curiosity, to Hamilton and others."¹⁰⁹

The scarcity of this sort of material in England and its direct use in the creation of works of art, did have an influence within the Independent Group circle and was later to extend to other groups of people.

Apart from John McHale, Terry Hamilton and Magda Cordell, the other creators of the group 2 exhibit were Frank Cordell and Richard Hamilton. Frank Cordell provided some of the material - gramophone motors to propel the Duchamp discs, film projectors, and large posters from film companies. His contacts in the film and music industry proved to be very valuable.

Hamilton's contribution was more creative. Like McHale, he began with a list from which the images were drawn and selected:

"Imagery - journalism, cinema, advertising, television, styling, sex symbolism, randomisation, audience participation, photographic image, multiple image, mechanical conversion of imagery, diagram, coding, technical drawing. Perception -

¹⁰⁸ 'An exhibition of John McHale's recent collages at the ICA', Architectural Design Vol.27, No.1, January 1957, p.28.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Morphet in Richard Hamilton, Tate Gallery 1970, p.29.

colour, tactile, light, sound, perspective inversion, psychological shock, memory, visual illusions." ¹¹⁰

No doubt many of the decisions about the choice of images, their position, scale, and so on, were taken by him, since he was on the site for a good deal of the time, whilst McHale was not. In retrospect however, Hamilton's most important contribution was a small collage which was reproduced in the catalogue and also reproduced by silk screen as one of the posters for TIT. This work, called Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?, was a very minor part of the exhibition but it later assumed great importance because it was interpreted as a forerunner of Pop Art.

In itself, the work was probably not that influential. The people who were to become regarded as Pop artists did not see the work until their own styles had become established, and those who did see it at the time could either not assimilate it to any fine art development or were critical of its use of popular art in a fine art context. Nevertheless, the collage has taken on an iconic value and thus achieved an art historical importance.

Hamilton recalled that he was the victim of the available material - which was John McHale's supply of American magazines mentioned above. Thus, to some extent, he set himself limits to the imagery used. Most surprising however, is the fact that he was not solely responsible in the choice of the images but was helped by his wife Terry and by Magda Cordell. He began with a list of interests:

"Man, woman, humanity, history, food, newspapers, cinema, T.V., telephone, comics (picture information), words (textual

¹¹⁰ Richard Hamilton 1982. op.cit., p.22

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.24.

information), tape recording (aural information), cars, domestic appliances, space."¹¹

Each interest was to be symbolised in the work and he asked Terry Hamilton and Magda Cordell to cut out of the magazines a selection of images from which he would ultimately choose one to fit into the perspective room scheme he had already pasted down. This room scheme, an amalgamation from magazines such as House Beautiful and Homes and Gardens, looked a little like the Cordell/McHale sitting room at Cleveland Square.¹² The images were chosen for their suitability as well as their ability to integrate into the room perspective. The man and woman, for instance, were chosen because of their anonymity - symbols of male and female - and this is why they are semi-nude, since clothes would associate them with particular types. The sexiness, Hamilton said, "was an appreciated additional ingredient".

Asking his helpers for an image of history, of a newspaper, or a tape recorder, Hamilton completed the work in "...six or eight hours, working under tremendous pressure". As for the word 'Pop', which appears on a lollipop in the hand of the muscle man, and to which considerable significance has been attached by later Pop Art historians, Hamilton said:

"...a few odd bits of paper were accumulating around me - possible usable material and among them was this lollipop which happened to have the word 'Pop' on it - it came from... an American comic... and the reason it would have been put aside [was that] it wasn't on my list as something I had to do but since it was knocking around, I was able to find a use for it. And it appears in the hand simply because the scale of that bit

¹² Magda Cordell 1983, op.cit.

of material could only be incorporated if used in that way."¹³

In itself, TIT was not especially successful. Integration of art and architecture was successful in only a few of the exhibits; for the most part, the abstract environments had little subsequent impact, and Alison Smithson thought that Theo Crosby "...got quite an eye-opener that somehow it wasn't the quality he had intended; it wasn't just the [lack of] money, it was the quality of ideas."¹⁴

The importance of TIT was, of course, different for each exhibiting group, if not for each exhibitor. But for the Independent Group it was, to some extent, a visual manifestation of a number of the ideas they had discussed during the previous years. Alloway might think that his group's piece "was not one of the notable achievements of This is Tomorrow"¹⁵, but to put ideas of communication and information theory into some kind of visual format could be interpreted as the Independent Group attempting to practice what it preached. On the other hand, group 6 showed the distancing of Paolozzi, Henderson and the Smithsons from the later Independent Group concern of American popular culture, whilst group 2 successfully combined popular art images into a fine art context, as did Hamilton's collage, Just what is it...?

Significantly, TIT came at a time for the ex-members of the Independent Group which coincided with their assessment of what had taken place since 1952. "For myself", wrote Hamilton,

"it was not so much a question of finding art forms but an

¹³ Richard Hamilton 1976, op.cit.

¹⁴ Alison Smithson, 1982, op.cit.

¹⁵ Lawrence Alloway 1977, op.cit.

examination of values." 116

In this respect, the principal value was that art was now, to use Toni del Renzio's term, 'other', that it was fashioned within the 'fine art/pop art continuum', and that its influences and influence were many and various. It was a product of 'multiple connectivity' and as such was a product of its age, the age of electronic communication, of the urban environment, of what McLuhan was later to call the global village. Like the information networks they so admired, the ex-Independent Group members began to transmit their message, at first through TIT and then to the Royal College of Art, Cambridge University, and the London art galleries, creating the climate for later, radical developments.

116 Richard Hamilton 1982 op.cit., p.31.

**7.1957-8: Outlets for Independent
Group Ideas - Ark and the
Paintings of Richard Hamilton**

Although This is Tomorrow in part functioned as the most tangible manifestation of Independent Group concepts to date, its limitations as an art exhibition - displayed for only one month, seen and then dismantled - minimised the potential impact. It certainly remained in the minds and imaginations of many of those who visited it, but its role as a transmitter of Independent Group ideas was restricted. Absolutely necessary parallels to the Whitechapel show were the quantity of published writing produced by ex-members of the Group and the visual manifestations of some of its ideas. This latter development belonged almost exclusively to Richard Hamilton, whose paintings were made as a direct result of Independent Group discussions and of TIT. The ICA programme continued to be increasingly dominated by ex-members of the Group, and the published writing, which had been appearing for a number of years in various art and architecture journals, found a new and influential outlet through the Royal College of Art magazine Ark.

Late in 1956, Alison and Peter Smithson wrote a short article for Ark. This was at the request of its new editor Roger Coleman, who had asked the Smithsons to write something but had not specified what. ("...when you're not paying anybody any money," said Coleman, "you can't say... I would really like some definitive piece about the nature of cast iron, or something."¹) The Smithsons' article, which appeared in the first issue of Ark edited by Coleman - Ark No.18, November 1956 - is, in one respect, a summary of their attitude as architects towards the popular arts and specifically advertising. This had been established by their own observations and researches which were in turn reinforced by discussion in the Independent Group.

¹ Roger Coleman interviewed by the author 18 April 1983.

"Traditionally the fine arts depend on the popular arts for their vitality", the article opens, "and the popular arts depend on the fine arts for their respectability." It closes:

"Ordinary life is receiving powerful impulses from a new source. Where thirty years ago architects found in the field of the popular arts, techniques and formal stimuli, today we are being edged out of our traditional role by the new phenomenon of the popular arts - advertising.

Mass production advertising is establishing our whole pattern of life - principles, morals, aims, aspirations, and standard of living. We must somehow get the measure of this intervention if we are to match its powerful and exciting impulses with our own."²

The Smithson article was an important manifesto of Independent Group concerns, as well as enlightening the reader about their approach to architecture. In its widest interpretation, 'But Today We Collect Ads' encompassed the concepts inherent in the House of the Future and those of TIT's 'Patio and Pavilion'. Visually, these two exhibits were quite different, and the article in Ark also seems to stand apart from them. But the underlying concepts of territory and space, the relation to the environment of the popular arts, and the sociological and even anthropological considerations inherent in their creation, make the two exhibits and the article part of the same family, so to speak. That they were all produced by the Smithsons in such a short period of time³ adds weight to the supposition that they were not produced in isolation from each other but all firmly belonged

² Alison and Peter Smithson, 'But Today We Collect Ads', Ark No.18 November 1956, pp.49-50.

³ The House of the Future was exhibited in March 1956, the 'Patio and Pavilion' was shown between 9 August - 9 September 1956, and the article appeared in Ark in November 1956.

within the Smithson canon of the period.

When Roger Coleman wrote to the Smithsons to ask them for a contribution to Ark, he did not personally know them but had

"...always rather admired them... I thought they were the kind of people who ought to be given a chance to say something."⁴

No doubt he had seen their TIT exhibit and had possibly read some of their pieces in journals such as Architectural Design, to which they had been contributing since 1954. At any rate, they represented the younger, more radical element in British art which Coleman was seeking.

The Royal College of Art's magazine had for many years, according to Peter Reyner Banham, been "...dead on its feet"⁵ ; it was characterised by articles on canal barge painting and recollections of the Auvergne, and was very much a student magazine. Furthermore, it was parochial: "...it was a professional magazine," said Coleman,

"to give the graphic designer... a chance to lay out a real magazine. And I think they discovered that they wanted some material for it, so they appointed an editor as well..."⁶

John Hodges did some re-shaping of the magazine, creating a less student-oriented publication. In Ark No.16, Banham wrote a piece on

⁴ Roger Coleman, op.cit.

⁵ Peter Reyner Banham, 'Department of Visual Uproar', New Statesman, Vol.65, No.1677, 3 May 1963, p.687. Although in Banham's terms this was the case, issues of Ark prior to 1956 contained a hint of things to come, such as Len Deighton's 'Impressions of New York' in Ark No.13, March 1955, pp.33-5.

⁶ Roger Coleman, op.cit.

motorcycles and in Ark No.17, published in the Summer of 1956, Hodges included an article by Lawrence Alloway entitled 'Technology and Sex in Science Fiction. A Note on Cover Art'. Also in that issue were some photographs by Nigel Henderson, a piece on jazz, another on theatre in the round, and Lorenza Mazetti writing about her film for the 'Free Cinema' programme. But all in all, the material Hodges chose to include was rather heterogeneous and it was not until Roger Coleman became editor that the choice of articles took on any homogeneity.

Coleman came to Ark, as all the editors did, because he was appointed. Given a paid fourth year at the Royal College to edit the magazine - probably on the basis of the thesis he had written in his third year⁷ - he consciously set out to change the content of the publication, to avoid the parochial, craft-oriented pieces which had previously characterised Ark. "A lot of it," he said,

"was to do anything to keep out the people from the weaving department who... wanted to do some article on the decoration of barges which we were desperately trying to avoid."⁸

But his motivation was not principally negative. Rather like the members of the Independent Group, Coleman's background had been that of popular and not élite culture; one of the most significant things that happened "...when I was a student," he said,

⁷ This thesis "...was about abstract art...it was about the sort of two poles - kind of constructivist and Ivon Hitchens kind of... because I knew Hitchens, or I got to know him through Basil Taylor, Librarian at the Royal College. And the other thing, I'd always wanted to do something about Pasmore... at Leicester [ie. when Coleman was at Leicester College of Art prior to going to the RCA] he was everybody's hero..." (Roger Coleman, *ibid.*)

⁸ *Ibid.*

"was that Lucky Jim was published. And Jim Dixon would have been exactly my age, and there were certain aspects to him that felt very true. There were lots and lots of people, in say 1948, like me - I mean I was the first member of our family to have a secondary [ie. higher] education, like lots of people - and so it was all new and there was no marvellous school where you had a background of culture; the only culture, such as it was, I took to art school at that time was the movies, which I adored, [and] a bit of jazz... and it wasn't until I met people who had done Latin... and things that I later, as it were, taught myself... In that sense, I suppose it's inevitable... one doesn't have the courage to deal with your own stuff. [But] like Jim Dixon seemed to think, it was kind of phoney to take on something he hadn't learnt..."⁹

Together with this sort of background was the interest of some Royal College students, though to a lesser extent Coleman himself, in American abstract painting. Richard Smith and Robyn Denny were particularly committed to this type of large scale painting and along with Peter Blake, whose interests were in more figurative art, they frequently visited Coleman in the Ark office. This office

"was in the same building as the Junior Common Room. But next door was the table tennis/games room and the music room... and Dick [Smith] and Peter [Blake] used to play table tennis a great deal and then they would come in and stick their feet up on the desk and talk for hours."¹⁰

As well as the article by the Smithsons, Ark No.18 also carried

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

a piece called 'The Constructivist Idea and Architecture' by Anthony Hill and an interpretation of action painting by Robert Melville, an historian and critic much admired by Roger Coleman. With these were other articles, one by Ivon Hitchens - perhaps coming from Coleman's third year thesis - another by the RCA's Librarian, Basil Taylor, and a piece by Bernard Myers called 'The Inclined Plane: an Essay on Form and Flight'. This article came out of an affinity which both Coleman and Myers had for the cinema. Whilst discussing a minor trend in American movies concerned with aeroplanes, particularly military aircraft of Strategic Air Command, both men found a fascination in the forms these machines took and Coleman suggested Myers should write an article about this. Thus, unlike the majority of pieces in previous issue of Ark, the content of Ark 18 ranged from the fine arts through the popular arts (both Coleman and Richard Smith contributed short articles on Hollywood movies) to, in its widest sense, industrial design. As Coleman said,

"...anything, as long as it was made of aluminium... and went fast, then it was okay and would get in [the magazine]".¹¹

Thus, even before Roger Coleman was aware of the Independent Group and its interests, even before he was involved with the ICA, his editorship was directing Ark towards areas which had hitherto been the almost exclusive province of the Group. But this is not particularly surprising; the situation had conspired to make it so. Coleman's background led him to the kinds of interests which concerned Paolozzi, Banham, Alloway, Hamilton, McHale and the rest; he visited the ICA to see its exhibitions; he was receptive to American culture, initially via its popular arts and later its painting; and he was of the generation whose youth had been spent under what was like an army of

¹¹ Ibid.

occupation - the American G.I.'s - and whose material values had been determined by rationing, the general shortage of commodities, and the desire for as rapid a return as possible to material prosperity.

If Ark 18 pointed in the direction of the Independent Group, the next issue was very much a promotion of the Group's ideas. By the time this issue appeared in March 1957, Coleman's connection with the ICA and ex-Independent Group members was firmly established. In January 1957, it was proposed by the ICA Management Committee that he be invited to become a member of the exhibitions sub-committee. The invitation was formally offered on 8 February by Lawrence Alloway and three days later Coleman accepted.¹² He was to remain on this committee until May 1962 when he resigned and Robyn Denny took his place.

Coleman's first issue of Ark had impressed Alloway; here was a journal which was promoting an aesthetic position not dissimilar to that promoted by the Independent Group, and almost certainly Alloway saw the possibilities of Ark as a means of reaching the younger, student generation with such ideas. As far as the ICA was concerned, Coleman offered a similar advantage: a person who was in direct contact with younger artists and could therefore help the ICA fulfil one of its primary functions of promoting the work of such men and women.

In certain respects, the Royal College itself was something of an anachronism - rather insular and conservative. The staff, Coleman recalled, "just weren't interested in anything enough to be hostile to it."¹³ But elements of the student body did not feel creatively

¹² ICA Management Committee Meetings minutes, 7 January and 11 February, 1957. ICA Archives.

¹³ Roger Coleman, op.cit.

inhibited by this. The strength of the influence of American abstract painting and the growing importance of the environment of popular culture - made more palpable by the articles in Ark - was important and led artists such as Peter Blake and Richard Smith away from the direct influence of their teachers. Visits to the ICA only served to reinforce their belief that their painting should follow this course. And this was supported by Ark No.19.

Lawrence Alloway's contribution to Ark 19, entitled 'Personal Statement', was perhaps the most important article in the whole issue as far as stating the post-1954 Independent Group stance was concerned. Writing about the impact of the popular arts, he scathingly remarked:

"The popular arts reached, soon after the war, a new level of skill and imagination. Berenson, Fry, Read and the others gave me no guidance on how to read, how to see, the mass media. Images of home, the family, and fashion in the glossy magazines; narratives of action and patterns of behaviour in the pulps; the co-ordination of both these images and these narratives in the movies. My sense of connection with the mass media overcame the lingering prestige of aestheticism and fine art snobbism."

The piece went on to promote the concept of the 'fine art/pop art continuum' and, by implication, the idea of 'multiple connectivity', but neither of these terms were used. Alloway did defend - by attacking - those who were critical of his American bias:

"I have been accused (by Basil Taylor among others) of being Americanized and, since I am English, thus becoming a decadent islander, half-way between two cultures. I doubt that I have

lost more by my taste for the American mass media (which are better than anyone else's) than have those older writers who look to the Mediterranean as the 'cradle of civilisation'."¹⁴

This criticism (of being too biased towards American culture) was especially pertinent in relation to Ark. Ironically, Basil Taylor worked at the Royal College, contributed an article to the previous issue of the journal, and had a friendly relationship with Coleman, but his attitude was very much at odds with Alloway and the general tenor of the journal.

As well as articles by Alloway, McHale, Frank Cordell, and Edward Wright, Ark 19 also included Bernard Myers and Gordon Moore extolling the virtues of the United States in 'Americana' and Alan Fletcher's 'Letter from America. First Impressions of New York'. Thus, Ark stood for an interest upon which, Taylor believed, too much importance was being placed. In 1960 he said that the interest in all things American was the "...latest form of the English romance... the English yearning for another place or another culture."¹⁵ He may well have been right, but Alloway insisted that America merely presented a picture of what Britain could achieve in the future, and the technology to which the artist must look was that of communications. Even in the 'fifties, Alloway stressed, the popular arts were at the heart of what was happening in Britain. And Hamilton spoke about the "inevitability of the USA" and that he and the Independent Group accepted this and looked "...ahead to that model with pleasure."¹⁶

¹⁴Lawrence Alloway, 'Personal Statement', Ark No.19, 1957, p.28.

¹⁵Basil Taylor in 'Artists as Consumers - the Splendid Bargain'. Transcript of a discussion between Lawrence Alloway, Eduardo Paolozzi, Basil Taylor and Richard Hamilton. Broadcast on 11 March 1960 on the BBC Third Programme for the series Art - Anti-Art .

¹⁶Lawrence Alloway and Richard Hamilton in *ibid*.

The American model was that of rapid technological progress, and John McHale's piece in Ark 19 - 'Technology and the Home' - emphasised this opinion. In keeping with Independent Group emphasis, the McHale article noted the sociological effects of technology. It opened:

"Technological changes in the home have accelerated in the post-war years, keeping pace in this with the home extensions - like the auto, the Espresso cafe, the Wimpey bar, the movies - and even the pub. Such changes, obviously, have accompanying shifts in living patterns with the family as well as the larger social unit. In making structures to house domestic functions, architects and engineers would presumably 'build in' such observable changes in habits due to technical progress, eg. increased mobility, leisure, etc."¹⁷

Using the Smithsons' House of the Future, Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion and Witchita houses of 1927 and 1947 respectively, and General Motors/Frigidaire's Kitchen of Tomorrow of 1956, McHale explored the notion that technological advancement in the home - of which the kitchen displays the most obvious expression - has had the effect of emphasising the role of the woman as housewife:

"...cleaning and preparation drudgery [is] cut through technical aid, detergents, use of plastics, etc., the housewife's role, far from diminishing, has become more focal and public with the integration of kitchen and dining room as home centre..."

The man, he argued, took a more important role in some household tasks:

¹⁷ John McHale, 'Technology and the Home', Ark No.19, 1957, p.25.

"...as reflected in the ads, for instance, the barbecue meal, a recent fashion, seems made by men only, while the women relax."¹⁸

The general impact of technology, McHale noted, was changing the role of the home to a situation which used to exist when family units were a more homogenous and stable entity: "The increased circulation of mass communication devices have restored the importance of the home as a social centre," wrote McHale. He then followed this by using the Smithsons' HOF as the functional and symbolic prototype of such an attitude because it was "closed to the outside, open in the centre" and therefore seemed the "most accurately in key with this [general idea]".¹⁹

The McHale and Alloway articles are interesting because they not only promote Independent Group concerns - technology and popular culture and their relation to fine art and design - but also the approach is as much a sociological one as it is an aesthetic one. Critics could argue that neither McHale nor Alloway - nor any other members of the Group - were sociologists, but this does not invalidate their observations. The approach does support, however, the Independent Group technique of 'multiple connectivity', a technique which tended to frustrate the notion of specialisation. And the Group members were careful not to set themselves up as experts or specialists. McHale's 'Technology and the Home' for instance, closes with a suggestion that what he has said should point the way to more detailed studies; they saw themselves as the avant-garde which opened up possibilities for others in all fields of endeavour to follow.

Many of the partitions raised between particular areas of study

¹⁸ Ibid., p.26.

¹⁹ Ibid..

seemed unnecessarily contrived to many of the Independent Group members and this was in part why the work of Buckminster Fuller appealed to some of them, since he was able "...to overcome... the barriers between cultures, between generations, and between specialists."²⁰ The other lure of Fuller was, of course, his nationality and his overriding interest in technology and its possible uses. Of the Independent Group members, it was John McHale who was most interested in Buckminster Fuller. Even before he had gone to the States in 1955, the Independent Group had discussed Fuller²¹, but McHale's sojourn at Yale must have put him closer to the American both physically and mentally. Indeed, on 6 June 1958, Fuller gave a lecture at the ICA entitled 'Man Plus'. Chaired by Peter Reyner Banham, this talk was no doubt attended by many of the ex-members of the Independent Group, though not all. Some were critical of Fuller; Toni del Renzio, for instance, referred at one point to Buckminster Fuller's "technological fascism".²²

John McHale went on to write a good deal about Fuller. Having published a piece in Architectural Review in July 1956, he followed this with two long pieces in Architectural Design in 1960 and 1961, and a book published in the United States in 1962. His relationship with Buckminster Fuller, as a disciple as well as a biographer, became very important. But in 1957, almost ten months after he had returned from his scholarship at Yale, he published a short but profusely illustrated article in Architectural Review which was not solely

²⁰ James Meller, 'Introductory Note', The Buckminster Fuller Reader, Harmondsworth, 1972, p.12.

²¹ See p.175.

²² Toni del Renzio interviewed by Peter Karpinski, 1 December 1976, p.xxii in Peter Karpinski, 'The Independent Group 1952-1955 and the Relationship of the Independent Group's Discussions to the Work of Hamilton, Paolozzi and Turnbull 1952-1957.' Unpublished BA. Dissertation, Leeds University, 1977.

devoted to his cynosure.²³ This piece illustrated how American technology was

"tied up with popular dreams 'that money can only just buy' to produce a consumer's style that was equally high in expendability and hot imagery."²⁴

Using Eames' 1949 Case Study House, Fuller's International Trade Fair's Geodesic Pavilion of 1956, and Bruce Goff's 1957 Bavinger House, McHale made the case for the dream house, with the addition of Mad magazine's contribution - the ground plan of Fountains Abbey. Other dreams were also explored through the sleek curves of styling which were found in many consumer products ranging from the hunting rifle to the executive desk, the Chrysler car to the structure in which you parked it - the multi-storey car park.

The technique of 'touchability' or 'multiple connectivity' used by McHale in his 'Marginalia' also typified the content of Ark 19. Besides those articles already noted, there were pieces entitled 'Designing for Television' and 'Traditional and Modern Design Methods', as well as a shortened version of 'Gold Pan Alley', the talk delivered to the Independent Group by Frank Cordell during 1955. Coleman himself wrote an article about the power of images to promote consumer dreams, using specific examples from Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. The piece was clearly in keeping with Independent Group thought. It began:

"A large part of the function of the modern urbanized human is

²³ John McHale 'Marginalia', Architectural Review, Vol.121, No.724, May 1957, pp.291-2.

²⁴ Charles Jencks, Modern Movements in Architecture, Harmondsworth 1973, p.280.

to be communicated to. Saturation by information-bearing matter - visual, audible (and soon, no doubt - tangible, in the Huxley sense) is one of the delights or hazards of modern life, depending on which way one looks at it. The vast number of magazines, pictorial newspapers, advertisements, and, in a rather specialised sense, the cinema and television, deposit a plethora of images, pregnant with meaning and bursting with information, into, as the 3D ads have it, our laps. Images of any kind have a directness that is denied to words. Words at the very least require a modicum of intellectual effort for their understanding; images are 'understood' in passing..."

Later in the article Coleman elaborated upon the concept of the 'fine art/pop art continuum':

"...fashion, painting, sculpture, technology, and so on, are all products of the same cultural climate. The same idea-climate affects the painter, the fashion photographer, and the technologist alike, but it is often left to the more popular arts like the cinema and fashion to register the changes of, and even within, that climate. The public can be up-to-date just for the looking."²⁵

Similar notions were offered by Edward Wright in his piece for the same issue of Ark, 'Chad, Kilroy, the Cannibal's Footprint, and the Mona Lisa', but his article was essentially about the symbolic value of images.

In 1957 Wright was teaching typography at the Royal College, having previously taught at the Central School of Art and then worked

²⁵ Roger Coleman, 'Dream Worlds Assorted', Ark No.19, 1957, p.30

in a London advertising agency. He had been on the fringes of the Independent Group and his participation in This is Tomorrow had put him into close contact with ideas about the 'fine art/pop art continuum'. Three members of TIT's group 1, Wright himself, Theo Crosby, and William Turnbull, together with Geoffrey Holroyd, who had participated in group 12, planned an exhibition called Signs and Symbols which, according to Turnbull

"was like a crossword of cross-references of images. It was to show how they'd developed through time and in various places."²⁶

The exhibition never came to fruition; it was proposed to the ICA Management Committee who considered it too similar to Parallel of Life and Art - although "it was quite a different proposition."²⁷ The Edward Wright Ark 19 article was originally written in connection with this abortive show. Although the exhibition never came about, its general concepts were interesting because they related to not only possibilities opened up by the Independent Group but also developments in the United States which, if not exactly parallel, were coming to similar conclusions. Geoffrey Holroyd wrote:

"We produced written outlines at Turnbull's suggestion, and presented and discussed them at a meeting at Theo's. It was to be a development of TIT panel and tackboard [group 12], like a tunnel... over the ICA exhibition space - a 'crossword puzzle' where the grid lines would be a steel space frame, curved like a vault springing from the floor. Colored panels (like Eames' collapsable giant constructor-display kit The Toy) would

²⁶William Turnbull in conversation with the author, 23 February 1983.

Turnbull noted that the sub-title for the exhibition was 'An attempt to place art in the general framework of communications research'.

²⁷Ibid.

continue the headword color-coding idea (of TIT group 12); images were mounted in clusters and groupings. This we could not semantically disentangle at the time."²⁸

In America, the significance of signs and symbols came later in the 1960s and was "...derived from a different lineage," which was, Holroyd pointed out, "connected to Mannerism and the Ideal, and an American Classicism"²⁹ to be found in the architecture of Robert Venturi and Charles Moore, and supported by the critical writings of Vincent Scully. The application of a symbols model to the interpretation of architecture gave a radical alternative to the structural model more usually employed. It opened up new possibilities of design, a pluralistic style which was not as restrictive as its predecessor. In the widest interpretation, there was the classical aesthetic (typified in the United States in the 'sixties by the architecture of Venturi and Moore) and an aesthetic more closely associated with Arts and Crafts (out of which the work of Charles Eames developed). For Geoffrey Holroyd, who saw the American development in these terms, and who himself attempted to follow the second course, the events in London were "a diversion". The emphasis upon the role of the popular arts in the 'fine art/pop art continuum', the interpretation of art and architecture using the concept of 'multiple connectivity' - which frequently employed popular culture as a comparative example - and the importance attached to the concept of expendability as an aesthetic criterion, were, for Holroyd, investigations moving at a tangent to the central and more productive issues of the mid-twentieth century.³⁰

Roger Coleman's final issue of Ark - No.20, Autumn 1957 -

²⁸ Geoffrey Holroyd. Letter to the author 23 April 1983.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

appeared in November and once more contained an assortment of articles - a piece by Georges Mathieu, a pseudo-intellectual article about the origins of cricket, comments on design, drawings by Peter Blake. But once more the issue contained Independent Group articles. Toni del Renzio's 'Shoes, Hair and Coffee' - of design in shoe shops, coffee bars and hair stylists, where design itself

"...operates in a communications network where new responses are casually and easily learned. This process inserts itself into the continuum of popular culture as a new but acceptable expression."³¹

Lawrence Alloway wrote about television situation comedy shows in 'Communications Comedy and the Small World', and Coleman's 'One of the Family' was about the "...family [sat] in semi-darkness... in a continuous process of etiolation, their eyes riveted to a few square inches of animated light"³² : the television set. Also in the issue was Richard Smith's 'Man and He Man', a piece based upon a dialogue he and Coleman gave at the ICA on 7 February called 'Man About Mid-Century.' About male fashion in the 'fifties, the article referred to the interrelationship of popular culture, notably music and the movies, with the world of marketed fashion.

The influence of Coleman's three issues of Ark is impossible to evaluate with any degree of accuracy. One assumes students at the RCA read the journal, as people at the ICA must have; Ron Herron, who was working as an architect for the GLC, was

"...absorbing like mad [articles] from AD [Architectural Design]

³¹ Toni del Renzio 'Shoes, Hair and Coffee', Ark No.20, 1957, p.30.

³² Roger Coleman, 'One of the Family', Ark No.20, 1957, p.40.

and Ark... One of my friend's brothers was in the same year as Cohen and Richard Smith..."³³

But it is misleading to see Ark in isolation from other things which posited a similar aesthetic stance. One cannot divorce the RCA's journal from some of the painting which was being done there, nor even from events at the ICA.

A number of students at the Royal College were becoming increasingly aware of the possibilities of using material from popular culture in their painting. This, of course, was not new; one only has to think of Stuart Davies and Gerald Murphy, Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp. But some RCA students were beginning to use the material in a more direct and substantial way. As early as 1953, for example, Joe Tilson, then still a student at the Royal College, made lithographs of Calypso singers which incorporated names and addresses of the clubs in which they worked.³⁴ But the artist who worked most consistently with material from popular culture was Peter Blake. Children Reading Comics of 1954 pre-dates Roy Lichtenstein's use of the comic as subject-matter by some six years; Litter, of the following year, prophetically includes a Captain Marvel comic and other printed ephemera. Such work by Blake however, is in one way difficult to compare with work of the later Pop Artists. Children Reading Comics is primarily based upon family snapshots of Blake himself and his sister when children, and Litter relates more to Schwitters than to Lichtenstein. Blake's use of popular imagery comes from personal involvement and was centered upon the folk cultures of the receivers (and creators) of this material. Thus, the images in On

³³ Ron Herron interviewed by the author 10 January 1983. Michael Chalk was a student at the Royal College of Art, Martyn Chalk was Herron's friend and later collaborator in the Archigram group.

³⁴ Michael Compton Pop Art, London, 1970, p.49.

the Balcony for example, were gleaned from the complete range of the 'fine art/pop art continuum' but each image was personal to Blake's own history and culture. The circus/fairground pictures of 1955-58 - Siriol, She-Devil of Naked Madness; Cherie, Only Bearded Tattooed Lady, and so on - belong to a culture far removed from the sophistication of Buick and Boeing. Even Blake's so-called Pop Art works of the early 'sixties had a lack of 'gloss' finish which set them apart from works by Peter Phillips or James Rosenquist and made them closer to Blackpool's Golden Mile than to Los Angeles' Sunset Strip.

Blake's use of pop material was quite different from that of a number of his contemporaries at the RCA. Many were interested in the more sophisticated, planned and premeditated pop - the glossy ads and the Hollywood movies - and the skilful manipulation of images. They were also interested in American painting: the colour fields of Rothko and Barnett Newman, the 'all-over' canvases of Pollock. Thus, Richard Smith was painting abstract canvases in the early 'sixties with titles such as Soft Pack, Revlon, and Flip Top. "Current technology, gossip column hearts and flowers, Eastman colour features, have no direct pin-pointable relation to my work of the moment," said Smith in 1959, "but they are not alien worlds."³⁵ Whereas Blake appeared not to be directly influenced by the Independent Group or Ark or the mass media, Smith did betray an influence. His paintings may not overtly display the technology and 'finish' of Madison Avenue products, but a love of their contemporariness and their vitality motivated his painting. This same desire probably led him to make more frequent visits to the Ark offices when Coleman became editor and then led him to the ICA, which he first visited in late 1956 to see the exhibition of John

³⁵ Quoted in Lawrence Alloway 'Pop Art since 1949', The Listener Vol.68, No.1761, 27 December 1962, p.1086.

McHale's collages. Like many of the students who visited Dover Street, Smith found that he was

"...conscious of it as more of a social scene. And people were kind of cracking jokes which... I had no possibility of entering in. Everybody seemed to have known each other for so long."³⁶

But Richard Smith was clear about one of the underlying influences upon his painting:

"...it was more an attitude rather than a work of art that one was admiring... in my own case, I kind of came to it very directly through the Independent Group... my interests coincided quite exactly with the Independent Group things."³⁷

Despite such a positive statement, Smith had earlier, in 1964, declared the Independent Group "...to be too sociologically inclined"³⁸ and thus hinted at a divorce of his work from any Group influence. But his connections with Coleman and Ark, with the ICA itself, and directly with ex-Independent Group members, his own admission of the deep impression made upon him by groups 2 and 6 at This is Tomorrow³⁹, and the unequivocal evidence of his work, do make him the issue of a marriage between the Independent Group and American abstract painting. Toni del Renzio noted:

³⁶ Richard Smith in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham. Soundtrack for the Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop, 1979. Dorothy Morland recalled students coming to the ICA: "They would come in and sit there quietly but didn't contribute anything." (Dorothy Morland interviewed by the author, 26 May 1982).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lucy Lippard 'Richard Smith: Conversations with the Artist', Art International Vol.8, No.9, 1964. Quoted in Lawrence Alloway 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) Pop Art, London 1966, p.41.

³⁹ Mario Amaya Pop as Art. A survey of the New Super-Realism. London, 1965, p.138.

"If Richard Smith obtained anything at all from the Independent Group it was surely the identity of form and content, the simultaneity of symbolic functions and the persistence of information value. Thus, Smith arrives with a much more sophisticated theory of art in its relation to history."⁴⁰

The influence of Ark must not be overstated. Clearly it reinforced Richard Smith's existing interests in movies, advertisements, and American painting, but how much it influenced Peter Blake, Robyn Denny, Bernard Cohen or William Green, is difficult to assess. One suspects very little. What it did do however, was to introduce directly into the Royal College of Art a climate, a pervading attitude, even an ethos, which had hitherto only been hinted at. The articles by McHale, Alloway, Cordell, del Renzio, and so on were coherent enough to create such a climate. Reinforced by events at the ICA, by articles published in other journals by ex-Independent Group members, and by exhibitions such as TIT and the House of the Future, Ark formed part of a matrix of Independent Group ideas. And it was an important part because it reached out to a new, younger generation, but just how far it reached is impossible to measure. A much more tangible influence of Independent Group notions appeared from Richard Hamilton's studio.

After This is Tomorrow, Hamilton was eager to follow up the success of group 2's exhibit. He hoped to organise another exhibition which would do this, much in the way that William Turnbull planned the Signs and Symbols show, conceived in part as a follow up to TIT's group 12 exhibit. Although Turnbull's exhibition was abortive, it did get as far as establishing a group of interested people (Theo Crosby,

⁴⁰Toni del Renzio 'Pop', Art and Artists Vol.11, No.5, August 1976, p.17.

Geoffrey Holroyd, and Edward Wright) and committing some of the ideas to paper. Hamilton's plans for an exhibition did not get as far as this. Early in January 1957, he spoke with Peter and Alison Smithson about "...a show which could develop the valuable experience gained by the participants at the Whitechapel."⁴¹ In retrospect, it seems somewhat incongruous that he should choose the Smithsons to mention this to, or that they should choose him. Their TIT exhibits were in many ways quite opposite in both their conception and execution. But Hamilton may still have felt some affinity with them, possibly because of their mutual interest in American advertising. As it turned out, they each used this material in quite opposite ways. The Smithsons employed the ads in a covert way, a subtle and indirect influence which pervaded their work and never obviously made its presence felt. Hamilton, on the other hand, wanted to use the material of popular culture in a far more overt way. To this effect, he wrote to the Smithsons on 16 January 1957, suggesting the possibility of collaboration and what general form of exhibition he had in mind. It is worth quoting this letter in full since as well as becoming a key document in the history of Pop Art, it clearly shows Hamilton's connections with the Independent Group in a number of its manifestations. It is also important to note that the references to Pop Art in the letter are no more than an abbreviation for popular art (meaning specifically that of the mass media) and do not in any way testify to the possibility of Hamilton having any precognition about events in 1961.

"Dear Peter and Alison,

I have been thinking about our conversation of the other evening and thought that it might be a good idea to get something on paper, as much to sort it out for myself as to put

⁴¹ Richard Hamilton. Collected Words 1953-1982, London 1982, p.28.

a point of view to you.

There have been a number of manifestations in the post-war years in London which I would select as important and which have a bearing on what I take to be an objective:

Parallel of Life and Art (investigation into an imagery of general value).

Man, Machine and Motion (investigation into a particular technological imagery).

Reyner Banham's research on automobile styling.

Ad image research (Paolozzi, Smithson, McHale).

Independent Group discussion on Pop Art - Fine Art relationship.

House of the Future (conversion of Pop Art attitudes in industrial design to scale of domestic architecture).

This is Tomorrow. Group 2 presentation of Pop Art and perception material attempted impersonal material. Group 6 presentation of human needs in terms of a strong personal idiom.

Looking at this list it is clear that the Pop Art/Technology background emerges as the important feature.

The disadvantage (as well as the great virtue) of the TIT show was its incoherence and obscurity of language.

My view is that another show should be as highly disciplined and unified in conception as this one was chaotic. Is it possible that the participants could relinquish their existing personal solutions and try to bring about some new formal conception complying with a strict, mutually agreed programme?

Suppose we were to start with the objective of providing a unique solution to the specific requirements of a domestic environment, eg. some kind of shelter, some kind of equipment, some kind of art. This solution could then be formulated and rated on the basis of compliance with a table of characteristics of Pop Art.

Pop Art is: Popular (designed for a mass audience)

Transient (short term solution)

Expendable (easily forgotten)

Low Cost

Mass Produced

Young (aimed at youth)

Witty

Sexy

Gimmicky

Glamorous

Big Business

This is just a beginning. Perhaps the first part of our task is the analysis of Pop Art and the production of a table. I find I am not yet sure about the 'sincerity' of Pop Art. It is not a characteristic of all but it is of some - at least a pseudo-sincerity is. Maybe we have to subdivide Pop Art into its various categories and decide into which category each of the subdivisions of our project fits. What do you think?"⁴²

Whatever the Smithsons thought, they did not reply to Hamilton's letter. With hindsight, it is odd that Hamilton should ever have approached them on the matter of another - and joint - exhibition. Perhaps memories of Parallel of Life and Art made him optimistic about their desire to follow up certain aspects of TIT; perhaps 'But Today We Collect Ads' in Ark 18 persuaded him that their aims were similar to his own; or perhaps he simply misinterpreted what they said to him when they met in January and discussed the possibility of a future exhibition. If the Smithsons did actually receive the letter, they were probably of the opinion that Hamilton's suggestions used popular art too obviously. "It's used too literally and too directly," Alison

⁴² Quoted in ibid., p.28.

Smithson said later,

"he [Hamilton] isn't using it for food... he isn't digesting the message; the stuff has to be fully digested before it's used... Whereas with Paolozzi, the whole thing is digested and a lot of chewing and so on goes in on it, and when it appears, it's an absolute staggering surprise."

And Peter Smithson echoed his wife's opinion:

"I think we were actually fundamentally anti-pop... those who used the information directly - isn't that a handsome picture or a handsome layout which I could parody for a fine art picture - I really think that is a completely meaningless activity."⁴³

Hamilton was not especially dismayed by the absence of an answer from Alison and Peter Smithson. Unable to interest them in the possibilities of using the experiences and investigations of Independent Group discussions, of TIT, Man, Machine and Motion, and so on, for the purpose of creating an exhibition, he planned a programme for his own work, the immediate outcome of which was a painting called Hommage à Chrysler Corp. In this and subsequent paintings of the late 'fifties and early 'sixties, Hamilton claimed that he "...opened up the medium of fine art in a very clean kind of way. Also it opened up subject-matter."⁴⁴ Using the list of pop art criteria he had made, he asked himself whether any of these were incompatible with fine art. He concluded,

⁴³Alison and Peter Smithson in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 1976/77? for Arts Council op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁴⁴Richard Hamilton, The Impact of American Pop Culture in the Fifties. A talk broadcast by the BBC for the Open University. No date.

"Rubens was big business, Boucher's paintings are sexy, Hogarth and Duchamp are witty..."

and so on. But he

"...could not think of an artist of the past who meant to make expendable art..."⁴⁵

Making a comparison, he said,

"...when Elvis Presley produced a record, you didn't get the feeling he was making it for next year, he was making it for this week and it didn't really matter very much when it sold the first four million whether the thing was ever heard again. And I thought, this is something that the fine artist cannot stomach, he cannot enter the creative process of making a work of art with an understanding that it's not going to last until next year or for very much longer than that. He has to approach it with the idea that it has some qualities which are enduring."⁴⁶

These beliefs which Hamilton came to adopt during 1957 were the direct result of what had been going on both inside and outside the Independent Group for the previous four years.

The material for the production of fine art did not suggest itself until more general concepts were thrashed out by the Group. Notably, there was Alloway's 'fine art/pop art continuum', which Hamilton interpreted in a far more liberal way than Alloway himself had meant. Hamilton understood the idea of a linear rather than

⁴⁵ Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit., p.29.

⁴⁶ Richard Hamilton (BBC/OU) op.cit..

pyramidal structure for culture - that fine art was to one end of the line, popular art to the other. But what he failed to understand was that "...to pull things out from one point along the continuum and drop them in at another..."⁴⁷ was not acceptable to Lawrence Alloway. And yet, in a lot of his critical writing of the time, Alloway was constantly referring to examples from one end of the continuum in order to draw parallels with examples from the other end. "However roughly," he recalled, "I was struggling in my art criticism to draw references from popular culture rather than from traditional sources."⁴⁸ This was the notion of 'multiple connectivity' which Alloway employed to great effect in his fine art criticism but which he was careful not to use indiscriminantly. On the other hand, Alloway believed that Hamilton was mixing and confusing his sources; using references from popular art to create fine art was a "fine/pop soup alternative"⁴⁹ and not to be found on Alloway's bill of fare. But for Hamilton, this was the result of a logical progression through the 'fine art/pop art continuum' and the concept of 'multiple connectivity', and his interpretation was further reinforced by the Independent Group meeting called 'Dadaists as Non-Aristotelians'. He saw the argument about "...the ideas of non-Aristotelian logic and the notion that you couldn't say that something was either good or bad," as "a liberating concept [and] a very respectable base for rejection and iconoclasm..."⁵⁰

Thus, out of these general and interrelated concepts, Hamilton slowly began to conceive of a form of painting which, as far as he was concerned, interpreted them.

If this was the theory behind Hamilton's painting of the late

⁴⁷Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit., p.31.

⁴⁸Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.34.

⁴⁹Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit., p.31.

⁵⁰Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 27 June 1976 for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

'fifties, the iconography came from more direct sources which were not as open to ideological criticism. He was seriously interested in the design and advertising of consumer products - and not interested simply because it might become source material for his paintings. Encouraged and motivated by Independent Group discussions, he consciously set out to research and analyse this contemporary phenomenon, but by 1957, finding himself influenced by the concepts of the 'fine art/pop art continuum', 'multiple connectivity' and non-Aristotelian logic in a way which has been described above, he shifted his 'research' interest to a much more tangible base - that of painting. The success of his TIT exhibit and, one supposes, the disappointment of not being able to extend this success with the help of the Smithsons, probably contributed greatly to his production of paintings during these years. Already he had the exhibition Man, Machine and Motion to draw upon - a rich source of iconography - and this theme of transport was greatly reinforced by Peter Reyner Banham's 'Borax, or the Thousand Horse-Power Mink' talk to the Independent Group in March 1955. The various threads began to be pulled together. The liberating concepts of non-Aristotelian logic - that anything was possible - the technique of 'multiple connectivity', used by Alloway in his writing, the 'fine art/pop art continuum' and its egalitarian attitude towards culture, the interest in consumer products, especially the automobile, the specific concern for things American, the general concern for things technological, the earlier influences of his job as a jig and tool draughtsman, of paintings such as Transition, of the exhibition Man, Machine and Motion. And to all this, there came the influence of Marcel Duchamp, who had used the image of the machine and the female figure, and fused them, first in paintings and then in The Large Glass, which used materials hitherto considered to be either impracticable or not suitable for the production of fine art.

The connection between Hamilton's painting Hommage à Chrysler Corp and these many influences was, in some cases, very direct. The use of the girl-car relationship had been hinted at by Banham in his commentary to Man, Machine and Motion in 1955:

"The source of the stylists' and ad men's precision and sensitivity is the continuous testing of the public response to 'dream-car' projects which dramatise improvements and developments which could be built into production models. As presented to the public the dream-car has much in common with the concept of 'dream-boat' (eg. the strapless photographer's model behind (exhibit number 60) - a vessel of almost-realistic desire."⁵¹

The female model was an almost essential part of the ad man's armoury, especially when selling cars, and this led Hamilton - with the support of Duchamp as an influential antecedent - to incorporate and fuse both themes into his work. In 1958 he published a commentary upon Hommage à Chrysler Corp in which he wrote:

"Pieces are taken from Chrysler's Plymouth and Imperial ads; there is some General Motors Material and bit of Pontiac. The total effect of Bug-Eyed Monster was encouraged in a patronising sort of way.

The sex-symbol is, as so often happens in the ads, engaged in a display of affection for the vehicle. She is constructed from two main elements - the Exquisite Form bra diagram and Voluptua's lips..."⁵²

⁵¹ Peter Reyner Banham. Catalogue notes to Man, Machine and Motion. ICA, 1955.

⁵² Richard Hamilton, 'Hommage à Chrysler Corp', Architectural Design Vol.28, No.3, March 1958, p.120. Exquisite Form was a "corsetry 'cont'd....

On this level, Hommage à Chrysler Corp is a compendium of references. The iconography derived from a number of sources which were plucked from different places along the 'fine art/pop art continuum': American automobile ads, a television show, "a token suggestion of Mondrian and Saarinen"⁵³ in the setting, the black bar at the top of the painting is the motif which was used in the same position on the catalogue pages of Man, Machine and Motion, and Hamilton's earlier work - the floating lips and horizontal floorboards appear in his Re-Nude of 1954.

And the references themselves are loaded with further meaning: the copy in the advertisement for the Exquisite Form bra reads like the copy for a car advertisement, using phrases such as "smooth suspension". Even the title is referential in its associations with Parisian Cubism of earlier in the century and the American automobile of the 'fifties.

On another level, the painting is an anthology of styles. For example, there are a number of different representations of chrome: a careful, anonymous application of paint which refers to the high-finish photographs and drawings of the automobile ads themselves; a painterly application with evidence of brushwork which refers to the simple fact that one is looking at a painting; silver foil stuck onto the panel, an extension of media beyond paint. There are the diagrammatic references: the spiral of the bra's cup, the plus symbol, some dotted lines; there are the painterly marks around the headlamp

cont'd...

manufacturing company went to use engineering technology in their advertisements", and Voluptua was the "star of an American late night TV show, intended to send tired business men amiably off to sleep, in which performers, cameramen and technical crew all wore pyjamas". (Richard Hamilton, 'Urbane Image' Living Arts No.2, 1963 pp.44-59.)

⁵³ Richard Hamilton 1958, ibid.

housing, perhaps referring to abstract expressionist painting; there is the collaged section, a photograph which looks like a headlamp but is in fact a jet intake. In this last detail is the irony that a photograph - which in theory should represent the object more clearly than the artist's brush can render it - is the most ambiguous and least clear part of the picture.

Hommage à Chrysler Corp was the first of Hamilton's so-called Pop paintings - a term applied after 1961 when the phenomenon of Pop Art was recognised. During the years following 1957 he continued to work in a similar mode. In 1958 he painted Hers is a Lush Situation, the following year She, and in 1961 Pin Up. Essentially, these works were extension of and developments from the assumption initially made in Hommage, that "...there is almost nothing that has to be excluded from the possibility of fine art."⁵⁴ Assured of this, Hamilton felt he could use

"photographic techniques...language...overt sexuality and nasty sexuality, commercialism, all those aspects of contemporary life could be pictured or used as things without the feeling that you were doing something alien to fine art."⁵⁵

As with Hommage, Hers is a Lush Situation took the themes of girl and car, this time in an exterior setting - a traffic jam in New York - and fused them into a multi-referential image with multi-media techniques. The reflection in the car windscreen is of the United Nations building - collaged onto the picture; lips hang in space [as in Hommage] - this time they belong to Sophia Loren; and

⁵⁴ Richard Hamilton (BBC/OU), op.cit.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

"shallow relief was applied to convey something of the pressed steel quality of automobile bodies; it was sprayed and sanded to a car finish."⁵⁶

The idea of using relief came from an etching made by Hamilton as a preliminary study for the painting, where a hole was cut in the plate to produce a raised embossed area on the print. A number of such preliminaries were made, some were drawings, some prints, but all based upon the initial inspiration for the painting, a review of the 1957 Buick in the American magazine Industrial Design which said; "The driver sits at the dead calm center of all this motion: hers is a lush situation." As with Hommage, Hamilton's painting began with the title⁵⁷, but for the basic concept and execution of Hers is a Lush Situation, he remained very close to the text from Industrial Design. In 1968 he recalled:

"I thought of elaborate complex movements and a dead calm centre in the middle of the painting and I used the formal language that this critic... was concerned with - car styling... and built up within my mind a picture of an elaborate complexity of cars all impinging on one another in a street..."⁵⁸

Toni del Renzio suggested other sources for Lush Situation: the fragmentary image of the UN building might have come

"...from the memory of the composite illustration of the Rockefeller Center in Giedion's Space, Time and Architecture, a

⁵⁶Richard Hamilton 1982 op.cit., p.32.

⁵⁷Unpublished pre-edited transcript of a conversation between Richard Hamilton, Christopher Finch and James Scott for Arts Council/Maya Film Productions film (1969) on Hamilton's work, 1968. Quoted by Richard Morphet in Richard Hamilton, Tate Gallery, 1970, p.32.

⁵⁸Ibid., p.35.

book known in some detail to members of the Independent Group";

and Hamilton's view of New York, which he had not yet visited, derived

"...probably from the movies of which there had been a spate during the fifties, like On the Waterfront, Sweet Smell of Success, Marty, all shot on location..."⁵⁹

In 1963 Hamilton published a text which was evocative of his paintings from Hommage à Chrysler Corp of 1957 to Aah! of 1962. About Hers is a Lush Situation he commented:

"In slots between towering glass slabs writhes a sea of jostling metal, fabulously wrought like rocket and space probe, like lipstick sliding out of lacquered brass sleeve, like waffle, like Jello passing UNO, NYC, NY, USA (point a), Sophia floats urbanely on waves of triple-dipped, infra-red - baked pressed steel. To her rear is left the stain of a prolonged breathy fart, the compounded exhaust of 300 brake horses."⁶⁰

In 1958 Hamilton began work on the third of his so-called Pop paintings. Unlike the previous two, the title came after some of the images had been selected and therefore did not provide the initial impetus. At one point the work was to be called Women in the Home,⁶¹

⁵⁹ Toni del Renzio, Text for a catalogue to a Richard Hamilton exhibition held in Germany, 1978, pp.11-12.

⁶⁰ Richard Hamilton, 1963, op.cit.

⁶¹ "In an old Marx Brothers film (and this is the only memory I have of it) Groucho utters the phrase 'Women in the Home' - and the words have such power that he is overcome, he breaks the plot to deliver a long monologue directed straight at the camera. Sentiment is poured towards the audience and is puddled along with devastating leers and innuendoes. This vague recollection of Groucho was revived when I first began to consider the frequency with which advertising men are faced with the problem of projecting the w.i.t.h. image." (Richard Hamilton 'An Exposition of \$he'). Architectural Design. Vol 32, No.10, October 1962, p.485.

but in its final state the picture was called \$he. Hamilton painted it on and off for about three years, always adding, changing and rejecting images from a variety of sources. One of the principal inspirations for much of the imagery was a lecture he delivered at the ICA on 7 July 1959 called 'The Design Image of the 'Fifties'. A shortened version of this was later published in Design, where the editor commented that

"Richard Hamilton used illustrations from the pages of American magazines to show how an image of the 'fabulous 'fifties' was being created by American designers, advertisers and industrialists to instil in the consumer 'a desire for possession'." ⁶²

In \$he Hamilton shifted his interest from girl-car iconography to woman-kitchen iconography, therefore sharing some common ground with John McHale's contribution to Ark 19, 'Technology and the Home'. Lawrence Alloway described the images as the meshed

"codes of fine and the messages of pop art... Toaster confronts refrigerator, sex-dress becomes apron, and a nipple looms in the kitchen: hot or cold? The latest sociological and fantastic content of ads and girlie photographs are stressed by Hamilton in his ironic and polished treatment." ⁶³

As with Hommage à Chrysler Corp, Hamilton published an account of the origins and production of the painting, again in Architectural Design but this time in far more detail and with the benefit of reproductions

⁶² Introduction to Richard Hamilton 'Persuading Image' Design No.134, February 1960, p.28.

⁶³ Lawrence Alloway 'Artists as Consumers' Image No.3, 1961, pp.14-19. Quoted in Richard Morphet 1970, op.cit., p.37.

of the advertising source material.

"My woman may seem exotic but, thanks to mass reproduction and wide distribution, she has become domesticated. She owes much to...an Esquire photograph of 'starlet' (?) Vikky Dougan in a dress concocted by her publicist Milton Weiss. Miss Dougan specialises in modelling backless dresses and bathing costumes. The only pin-up I can remember making a greater impact in art circles was Brigitte Bardot spread piecemeal through Reveille (Oct. 1957) - the gimmick of make-your-own-lifesize-BB gave it an understandable edge. I first saw Miss Dougan decorating a wall in the Smithsons' home. I gained my copy from a student's pinboard in the Interior Design Department at the Royal College. Lawrence Alloway gave me the data on her - the photograph had impressed him sufficiently to regard it as a fileworthy document."⁶⁴

Other imagery in she included a Frigidaire refrigerator, a Westinghouse vacuum cleaner, and a General Electric toaster. Again, Hamilton used a variety of paint applications and media; some areas were in shallow relief, "1/8 inch ply sanded down at the lower edge to merge into the panel",⁶⁵ some paint areas were brushed on quite freely, others carefully ("lovingly") air brushed; some details were collaged.

Richard Hamilton's paintings of the late 'fifties were clearly a result of many diverse influences, but chiefly those influences came out of the Independent Group sphere. He claimed that the works were not

⁶⁴ Richard Hamilton 1962, op.cit., p.485.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

"...a sardonic comment on society [but]... a search for what is epic in everyday objects and everyday attitudes."⁶⁶

He also defended his use of popular imagery in a fine art context:

"Contemporary art reacts slowly to the contemporary stylistic scene. How many major works of art have appeared in the twentieth century in which an automobile figures at all? How many feature vacuum cleaners? Not only the mainspring of our twentieth century economy but its most prolific image-maker the automobile industry is well with us, its attitude to form colouring our lives profusely. It adopts its symbols from many fields and contributes to the stylistic language of all consumer goods. It is presented to us by the ad-man in a rounded picture of urban living: a dream world, but the dream is deep and true - the collective desire of a culture translated into an image of fulfilment. Can it be assimilated into the fine art consciousness?"⁶⁷

For Hamilton the question was rhetorical, but for some of his colleagues an affirmative answer was not as easily arrived at. Hamilton recalled:

"The outright rude question put to Lawrence Alloway on the staircase at the ICA one evening 'what do you think of my new paintings?' provoked the even more outright answer 'I think they're stupid'."⁶⁸

Alloway believed that popular and fine art should not be mixed; that

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit., p.31.

in using popular art imagery in such a direct way, Hamilton was aestheticizing it and "bringing it back to a concentrated traditional meaning of art". Furthermore, although he found the iconography interesting, Alloway believed that the finished pictures were "a form of super graphics and as such not tremendously engaging to an art critic".⁶⁹ Hamilton himself believed that Alloway "couldn't accept this fusing of pop material with fine art... I think that the reason this occurred," he said,

"is that what I was doing was short-circuiting his clean, linear structure [the 'fine art/pop art continuum']. If you bring the ends together, make a short circuit, then you're fusing the whole system."⁷⁰

Others were also critical of Hamilton's work at the time; Toni del Renzio claimed that works of fine art could not be made out of pop art material⁷¹; Thomas Stevens said that to "take something out of popular culture and put it on a pedestal and to retain its popularity" was virtually impossible. He called Hamilton's pictures "pastiche" but tempered his remarks with the observation that popular art was "a very real resource" which was "undoubtedly...quite correct" to use.⁷² Indeed, of all the ex-members of the Independent Group, only Banham was sympathetic towards Hamilton's work.

In 1957 Hamilton went to teach in the Interior Design Department at the Royal College of Art. Much has been made of his presence there

⁶⁹ Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 25 May 1977, for Arts Council, op.cit.. Part of the quotation is soundtrack of the film, part from unedited tape recording and not used in the film.

⁷⁰ Richard Hamilton 1976, op.cit.

⁷¹ Toni del Renzio mentions this in an interview with the author, 17 March 1982 (see Appendix 1, p.408), and in an interview with Peter Karpinski, 1976, op.cit.

⁷² Thomas Stevens interviewed by the author 15 April 1983.

in relation to later developments in painting. Alloway remarked that

"it was the chief source of the second phase of Pop Art [ie. 1957-61 - the painting of Richard Smith, Robyn Denny, and even Peter Blake]." ⁷³

But, as will be made clear later, his influence upon painting being done at the RCA was minimal ; his presence in the Interior Design Department was far more relevant. In 1958 he contributed one of five interior designs to the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition. His Gallery for a Collector of Brutalist and Tachist Art was simple, elegant, with maximum space for the works of art (a Paolozzi sculpture and paintings by Yves Klein and Sam Francis). In Hamilton's original sketch for the room there was also a large window which enabled "a streamlined car to be appreciated on equal terms with the works of art". ⁷⁴ The furniture in the room was, according to Banham,

"the work of that great fashion maker, Harley Earl, chief stylist of General Motors, and would not have been known to this designer of this room had they not been published in the popular magazine Look..." ⁷⁵

Over six months before the Ideal Home exhibit, Hamilton had been involved with another environmental show at the ICA. An Exhibit came about as a result of Hamilton's earlier Man, Machine and Motion. The photographs for this latter exhibition had been mounted on panels of a standard module size which were capable of endless and variable disposition. Victor Pasmore, who was teaching with Hamilton at

⁷³Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., pp. 41-3.

⁷⁴Richard Morphet, 1970, op.cit., p.34.

⁷⁵Peter Reyner Banham 'Ideal Interiors' Architectural Review Vol.123, No.734, March 1958, p.208.

Newcastle University and had seen Man, Machine and Motion, commented upon the interesting arrangement of panels. Out of this grew An Exhibit. The Man, Machine and Motion panels, transformed into thin acrylic panels with varying degrees of transparency - and minus photographs - were suspended at different heights, thus making a pure abstract/environmental exhibition. Lawrence Alloway was brought in and the exhibition came to be conceived as a game; in the catalogue he wrote:

"...an Exhibit is not out to provide an ideal decor for abstract art... The visitor is asked to look neither for separate works of art nor for symbols but to inhabit... a real environment... It is a game, a maze, a ceremony completed by the participation of the visitors. Which routes will they take, will they move through narrow or wide spaces, where will they decide to stop and assess the whole? An Exhibit is a test and an entertainment: are you maze bright or maze dim?"⁷⁶

Of An Exhibit, Dorothy Morland recalled "an honourable failure" and "very difficult... to mount... all these panels and things had to be put away every night".⁷⁷ Although The Times noted that it "...instructs while it amuses"⁷⁸, the press was generally critical; Stephen Bone, writing in the Manchester Guardian, was especially acrimonious:

"[It is] an idea that lacks novelty, badly carried out by persons with little talent for translating their intentions into reality..."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ An Exhibit. ICA 13-24 August 1957.

⁷⁷ Dorothy Morland, op.cit.

⁷⁸ The Times 14 August 1957.

⁷⁹ Stephen Bone 'All a Matter of Environment', Manchester Guardian 15
'cont'd....

An Exhibit seemed both stylistically and conceptually different from Hamilton's paintings of 1957-58. Based almost exclusively upon figurative imagery, the paintings explored and exploited the relationships between fine art and pop art, whereas An Exhibit was totally abstract in its conception and execution. To reconcile these apparently opposing directions in Hamilton's work is difficult; that he began to use panels measuring four feet by two feet eight inches, or of similar proportions, for his paintings, and that these corresponded to the size of panels in An Exhibit, is a superficial connection. There was a direct link with Man, Machine and Motion since the display system was similar, but Pasmore's influence was important and the absence of imagery was a conspicuous departure from what seemed to be the logical, linear progression in Hamilton's work. This trend was to develop as Hamilton became more involved in teaching and the course he taught at King's College, University of Durham (at Newcastle-upon-Tyne) explored the possibilities of line, shape, colour, texture, and so on, in an abstract rather than figurative way. This was the genesis of basic design, an approach in art education initiated by Hamilton, Pasmore, Tom Hudson and Harry Thubron in the mid-'fifties and early 'sixties, and which manifested itself at the ICA in 1959 with an exhibition called The Developing Process. Despite the abstract base for such work (both An Exhibit and student work from the course at Newcastle) the essential concepts behind it and also behind paintings such as Hommage à Chrysler Corp, Hers is a Lush Situation and \$he, are the same. "There is a vast body of popular culture," Hamilton noted,

"reflected in the cinema, in advertising, in newspapers and pulp

August 1957. An Exhibit was first shown at the Hatton Gallery in Newcastle in June 1957; in August it went to the ICA. A second show - called Exhibit 2 - was mounted at the Hatton Gallery in 1959, where the arrangement of the panels was somewhat different and small abstract strips were added to them.

literature, which is at least as worthy of respect, in the education of artists and designers, as are the traditions of academic discipline."⁸⁰

Hamilton saw basic design as a valuable approach but he was wary of the limitations of its abstract bias. "Basic form studies are lamentably unrewarding for the student," he wrote,

"unless he is provided, provoked, fed with ideas and stimulated into an awareness of the validity of his own solutions. But perhaps the major obstacle to successful adoption of basic design as an art school discipline is the danger of its acceptance by students as a stylistic formula... it seems to be imperative to bridge the gap between the disciplines of the life room [ie. figurative] and the rigours of basic design [ie. abstract]."⁸¹

An Exhibit was one of a number of events at the ICA which marked the continuing presence and influence of ex-Independent Group members. Their involvement in the official ICA programme had increased dramatically since they stopped meeting as a group in 1955, and the years 1957 and 1958 saw this trend continue. Pivotal to this was Lawrence Alloway who, as Assistant Director, played a major role in the choice of events at the ICA. His continuing interest in American art was reflected in two exhibitions during these years, one in November 1957 called Eight American Artists, which included Morris Graves and Mark Tobey, and the other in March - April 1958 called Some Paintings from the E.J. Power Collection, an exhibition which was far more representative of abstract expressionism, including the work of

⁸⁰ Quoted in A Continuing Process, ICA 1981, p.8.

⁸¹ Richard Hamilton 'About Art Teaching, Basically', Motif No.8, Winter 1961, p.17.

de Kooning, Still, Kline, Pollock, and Rothko, as well as the Europeans Tapies and Dubuffet. Connected with these exhibitions were lectures about recent American art,⁶² the most interesting being Lawrence Alloway's 'Art in America Today' given on 8 July 1958, which was delivered upon his return from the States. Alloway had spent three months in America financed by a 'Leader's and Specialist's' grant given on the recommendation of the Cultural Affairs office of the United States' Embassy in London. Alloway had cultivated a relationship between the ICA and the American Embassy, and in March 1957, this was reinforced by the arrival of Stephan P. Munsing as the Embassy's Cultural Affairs Officer. Munsing was eager to promote Anglo-American cultural activities and he probably had a hand in the organisation of the two exhibitions of American art mentioned above. He was certainly active at the ICA during 1958, taking part in a discussion on Kandinsky with Toni del Renzio on 21 January and acting as chairman for 'The Impact of American Art on Europe' discussion and Alloway's lecture 'Art in America Today'.

When Munsing arrived early in 1957, he was given support by the librarian at the Embassy, Margarete Haferd. She was, according to Munsing, "...of tremendous help and supportive to my program... [having] been in London before I arrived..."⁶³ Indeed, the library at the U.S. Embassy was a primary source of reference for anyone who wanted to make use of it, and a number of ex-Independent Group members

⁶² These were 'Contemporary American Art' by Kenneth Callahan on 19 November 1957, 'The Impact of American Art in Europe' with Bryan Robertson, Sir William Coldstream, Richard Smith, and William Turnbull on 17 April 1958, John Alford's 'Abstract Expressionist Painting and the Humanist' on 14 October 1958, and Alloway's 'Art in America Today' mentioned above. As well as these lectures, other events related to American art took place: there was Buckminster Fuller's lecture on 6 June 1958, an evening of Charles Eames films on 4 July 1958, and a screening of Hans Namuth's film of Jackson Pollock, followed by a discussion led by David Sylvester on 6 November 1958.

⁶³ Stefan P. Munsing. Letter to the author 4 September 1984.

did. James Meller, who became the ICA's Assistant Director in 1962 but who was a regular visitor to the ICA in the late 'fifties, said that one

"...could see a lot of the magazines [in the library - which were not available elsewhere]... at that stage it was a bit like an ordinary public library - we could just go in and order magazines and books and records as well."⁶⁴

Although American art made an important contribution to the ICA's programme, as it had since the mid-'fifties, there was evidence during 1957-58 that British artists had at last begun to assimilate some of the American trends into their own work. In January 1957, the ICA staged the exhibition Statements: A Review of British Abstract Art in 1956. It included many of the important abstract painters and sculptors of the time - Barbara Hepworth, Bryan Wynter, Patrick Heron, Roger Hilton, Adrian Heath, William Gear, and many others. Of the Independent Group circle, Magda Cordell exhibited one oil painting⁶⁵ but, strangely, neither Paolozzi nor Turnbull were represented. Of her painting, Cordell wrote in the catalogue:

"The painting begins with opening the cans of colour, and ends when it has decided to. In between is - Indian country - unpredictable, lots of ambushes, landslides, eruptions and long quiet planes - a time journey, whose compass is paint - and it's always late! The finished work is a cluttered log and carries the prints of aliens, meteorites and galactic dust."⁶⁶

⁶⁴James Meller interviewed by the author, 12 March 1984.

⁶⁵Xanadu 40 x 50 inches, listed as costing £95.

⁶⁶Statements: A Review of British Abstract Art in 1956. ICA, 16 January - 16 February 1957.

The references to the western and science fiction genres were typical of Independent Group rhetoric.

Later in the year, William Turnbull held an exhibition at the ICA⁶⁷, with a catalogue written by Alloway and designed by Toni del Renzio, and in January 1958, Richard Smith, William Green, Peter Blake, John Barnicoat and Peter Coviello exhibited as Five Young Painters.⁶⁸ This latter show was arranged in a hurry to replace an exhibition which had to be postponed, and Robert Melville praised Roger Coleman's organisation:

"I think Coleman is the only man who could have brought this group of painters together, for it proved to be a further demonstration of the kind of relaxed transience which turned Ark under his editorship into the gayest and most intelligent art magazine published here since the war."⁶⁹

In November 1958, John McHale, E.L.T. Mesens and Gwyther Irwin exhibited as Three Collagists. McHale wrote of his work:

"These images are in the nature of ikons. They attempt to define an approximate human image in terms of an iconography derived, often literally, from the context of the mass media. The extended environs of the movie, television, the picture magazine, and the glossy ad, reflects the current human situation - both as symbol and for real.

Man's relation to the communicating device - the microphone, the TV screen - provides a fresh source of

⁶⁷The exhibition was opened on 24 August 1957 by Roland Penrose and was subtitled New Sculptures and Paintings.

⁶⁸9 January - 8 February 1958.

⁶⁹Robert Melville 'Paintings', Architectural Review Vol.123, No.735, April 1958, p.278.

significant gesture."⁹⁰

Outside the ICA, Lawrence Alloway and Toni del Renzio arranged a more comprehensive review of British abstract art than Statements had been. This was called Dimensions. British Abstract Art 1948-57 and was held at the O'Hana Gallery, just around the corner from the ICA in Carlos Place. As in Statements, many British abstractionists were represented. In his catalogue introduction, Alloway noted two major groupings amongst the artists: geometric and painterly trends which he said were

"a convenient, not an absolute, arrangement and against it must be set connections between the headings and sub-divisions within each group."⁹¹

For the Independent Group, its five principal visual artists were all represented: Magda Cordell by an abstract expressionist painting called Skin, of 1956, Hamilton by d'Orientation of 1952, McHale by an aluminium and wood sculpture called Fragment of a Screen, Paolozzi by two collages of 1951, and Turnbull by two paintings and a sculpture.

The mass communications lectures which Alloway had initiated in 1956, continued throughout 1957. Dwight MacDonald spoke on 'The Theory of Mass Culture' in May, there was a talk on the conventions of the political thriller in September, and Alloway contributed to 'Folklore and the Second Industrial Revolution' in November. Other Independent Group inspired interests also manifested themselves in the ICA programme: Dr. S. Vajada spoke on 'The Theory of Games', Richard Huelsenbeck gave a lecture entitled 'Dada in Our Time', Tomas

⁹⁰Statement by John McHale in Three Collagists ICA, 1958.

⁹¹Lawrence Alloway. Catalogue introduction to Dimensions. British Abstract Art 1948-57, O'Hana Gallery, 1957.

Maldonado analysed the 'Pedagogical Impact of Automation', there was a selection of films from the American Ford Company dealing with contemporary technology, and Rupert Crawshay Williams spoke about Alfred Korzybski and General Semantics.

Ex-members of the Independent Group were also very much in evidence in this programme. As Assistant Director, Alloway acted as a participator in a number of events, ranging from a discussion about packaging to one about Lyn Chadwick's sculpture⁹², and on 21 October 1958 he delivered a lecture which examined the uses of monsters in the mass media called 'Monster Engineering'. Other lectures were given by Toni del Renzio, Eduardo Paolozzi, Peter Reyner Banham and Edward Wright⁹³ and a number of people either directly connected with the

⁹²An event which was widely publicised at the time and which Lawrence Alloway organised, was the screening on 21 May 1957 of Guy Debord's film Hurlements en faveur de Sade made in 1952. Dorothy Morland recalled: "It was a very, very funny evening in retrospect, but rather alarming at the time. I thought that Lawrence and I were going to be lynched at one point. People were so angry at finding that there was nothing on the film except black and white, but we warned them that they would come at their own risk, and there was no need for people to come to the second performance because the first audience stayed on to tell them not to come and put them off. But that didn't deter them." (Dorothy Morland 'A Memoir'. Unpublished Manuscript. ICA Archives.) The Daily Express for 22 May reported: "People turned up to see Hurlements en faveur de Sade at the ICA, a 90 minute blank film show. Lawrence Alloway (deputy director) said, 'This is an intellectual joke. Everyone paid their money and turned up expecting to see a bit of sex in the film. They expected to be shocked, to have something to go home and talk about. Well, haven't we succeeded?'"

⁹³Toni del Renzio delivered a lecture on 5 March 1957 called 'The Strategy of Fashion: Paris, Rome, Hollywood'. The ICA Bulletin (No.74) for March noted, "...he uses the Theory of Games to dissect the sharpened rivalries brought by new trends. What strategies, what precise 'mixture of anticipation and perversion' will capture the woman of Organisation Man?"

Eduardo Paolozzi's talk was called 'Image-Making God-Breaking' and was given on 30 April 1958. In a somewhat different version, it appeared as 'Notes from a Lecture at the ICA' in Uppercase No.1 1958, and was reprinted as Appendix A in Diane Kirkpatrick Eduardo Paolozzi, London, 1970.

Banham's lecture, delivered on 17 December 1957, was called 'The Trapeze and the Human Pyramid'. The ICA Bulletin (No.82) for December explained: "Now that anti-academic critics have kicked away the traditional 'ladder of taste' what image will serve to symbolise the social stratification of aesthetic preferences in literature, cont'd. ...

Independent Group or on the periphery of it, took part in ICA discussions.⁹⁴

The increased involvement in official ICA activities and the termination of closed meetings were indications of the Independent Group's dissipation as a cohesive unit during 1957 and 1958. An indication of the gradual but ultimately inevitable break-up of the Group, was the magazine Number. Planned by Lawrence Alloway and Roger Coleman during 1958, it was to be a collection of artists' texts and was scheduled to appear in the summer of 1959, which it never did. Difficulties in organisation and breakdowns in communication left it as a series of typescripts which never found their way into print. Had it appeared, Number might have proved to be an extremely

cont'd...

the arts, entertainment, and design? In particular, how are we to evaluate the confused middle stratum where men at the extremities of the two main circus acts of contemporary culture find themselves face to face, but opposite ways up? [The] lecture... will examine the newly emerged condition of middle taste as an arena of competition between 'top' and 'Pop', and examine some of the social consequences of skilled aesthetic technicians (musicians, graphic designers, writers, etc.) being able to choose between two masters, instead of being at the mercy of Establishment taste."

On 6 June 1957, Edward Wright spoke on 'Painter's Task and Painter's Play', a piece he was soon to have published in The Arts, Artists and Thinkers, edited by John Todd, London 1957. The article is reprinted in Edward Wright, Graphic Work and Painting. Arts Council 1985, pp.64-8.

⁹⁴Richard Smith's and Roger Coleman's participation in 'Man About Mid-Century' on 7 February 1957 has been mentioned above. Coleman also took part in a discussion about the work of Karel Appel on 18 April 1957. Toni del Renzio discussed 'The Importance of Wols' with David Sylvester on 27 June 1957, 'Kandinsky' with Stefan Munsing, Alan Bowness and others on 21 January 1958, and 'The Role of the Art Director' on 20 May 1958, where "...a number of magazine and ad agency people [were brought together] and [it] opened the eyes of some of the Independent Group members present to what the world was really like." (Toni del Renzio. Letter to the author, 9 May 1982).

James Stirling discussed the work of Pier Luigi Nervi with Frank Newby on 20 March 1958, and visited and discussed his low cost flats at Ham Common near Richmond, Surrey on 7 October 1958. Peter Smithson was involved in a discussion on 'Planning Control' on 23 July 1957 and then chaired Ian McCallum's talk on 'American Crystal Palaces' on 16 December 1958. On 16 October 1958, Edward Wright, together with E.H.Gombrich, Jacques Brunius and John Hayward, took part in a discussion on an exhibition of photographs by Brassai showing in the ICA gallery and called The Writing on the Wall.

valuable record of many Independent Group ideas.

But one of the most important factors, and that which ended the Independent Group, was the inexorable advance in the careers of the Group's members which saw them enter different spheres of the cultural establishment and adopt new roles. For example, Paolozzi, who had never been that close to the Group since its early years, was gaining an international reputation as a sculptor. His exhibition at the Hanover Gallery in November-December 1958, his joint show with Nigel Henderson the year before, and his inclusion as one of seven sculptors at the Guggenheim Museum in New York early in 1958, was clearly separating him from the comparatively parochial activities at the ICA. And in a minor but revealing incident, when Peter Reyner Banham gave a lecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects⁹⁵, Peter Smithson commented,

"I feel it is slightly like a dream to hear Mr. Banham lecturing at the RIBA and myself speaking at the RIBA - rather like finding Jelly-Roll Morton in the Library of Congress. If it is not a dream, if it is real, perhaps it indicates the new situation."⁹⁶

Peter Smithson did not say whether the new situation was one in which ex-members of the Independent Group found themselves (ie. inside the doors of the Establishment upon which they had turned their backs for so long) or was one in which the Establishment found itself (ie. having to accept changing values in part brought about by the Independent Group).

⁹⁵'Futurism and Modern Architecture', delivered on 8 January 1957.

⁹⁶The comment was made in a discussion after Banham's lecture. RIBA Journal, Vol.64, No.4. February 1957, p.137.

In an interview, Thomas Stevens pointed out that

"English culture... presents a very curious impression if you're trying to make an impression on it. That is, of something which doesn't react hostilely or even negatively but simply receives you like an enormous mass of damp cotton wool..."⁹⁷

Perhaps the Independent Group had already begun to be enveloped by this phenomenon, but if this was so, the members were not going to be suffocated by it without some resistance.

Late in 1957 Roger Coleman became Assistant Editor of Design magazine and, by his own admission "...certainly brought Independent Group views there [although] got castigated for them."⁹⁸ Coleman secured the job on Design through the merit of his editorship of Ark, but his role on the magazine was viewed as subversive by the existing establishment there. "When I got the job," he recalled,

"...Reyner Banham wrote an article about me for Architects' Journal which was suppressed by the architectural press... because it implied I had been put inside to throw bombs into the lavatory or something. I saw the article; Peter Banham showed me the proofs of it..."⁹⁹

Coleman's presence at Design served as another outlet for Independent Group concepts, in the way that Ark had been and Architectural Design was becoming. However, the influence was not as marked; Coleman was far more restricted working for the Design Council

⁹⁷ Thomas Stevens interviewed by the author, 15 April 1983.

⁹⁸ Roger Coleman interviewed by the author, 18 April 1983.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

than he had been when selecting articles for Ark. During his period as Assistant Editor, three articles by Lawrence Alloway and one by Richard Hamilton appeared.¹⁰⁰ A comparative analysis with Architectural Design over a similar period reveals that ex-members of the Independent Group were far more in evidence in that journal. However, the overall picture was of Independent Group notions being communicated beyond the limits of the ICA and this trend continued into the new decade.

¹⁰⁰Lawrence Alloway 'Symbols Wanting' Design No.113, May 1958, pp.23-27; 'Reaction to Atomics', Design No.122, February 1959, pp.42-45; 'Atomic Abstract', Design No.132, December 1959, pp.42-43; Richard Hamilton 'Persuading Image', Design No.134, February 1960, pp.28-32.

**8.1959 - 61 : Further Limits of Independent
Group Influence - Architectural Design ,
the Cambridge Connection
and Pop Art**

1960 is sometimes seen as a watershed in British culture, marking some significant change. This view sees the 'fifties pervaded by austerity and gloom, with the 'sixties symbolising the optimistic and rosy future. Obviously, the issues are not as simple as this, but there was a feeling at the time that the 'sixties offered a new beginning, as it were, and as far as the Independent Group was concerned, this was certainly the case. The early 'sixties saw the final demise of the Group and the dispersal of its members away from the ICA. It also saw the emergence of a new and younger avant-garde which owed some debt to the Group itself.

The years when the 'fifties became the 'sixties were especially significant for the ICA. From 1959, the Management Committee was determined to find new premises, although these did not materialise until 1968. Thus, the crowded accommodation at Dover Street continued to serve as an intimate if not exactly ideal venue for a variety of activities which took on a noticeably wider spectrum. In part, this was due to the ever increasing role played by ex-Independent Group members in the official ICA programme. The Group's concern for interdisciplinary discussion - that fundamental principles from one discipline could make clear meanings in other disciplines - inevitably led to a wide range of interests within the Independent Group coterie. The diversity of these interests was discernible in Lawrence Alloway's fascination with cinema, science fiction, and abstract painting, in Peter Reyner Banham's attraction to architecture and automobile styling, in Hamilton's concern for advertising, design of consumer products, and fine art, in Toni del Renzio's enthusiasm for magazines, fashion, and action painting. All this spilled over into the ICA programme and the Group members discussed with some authority an

extensive but interconnected range of topics. For example, between 1959 and 1961, Richard Hamilton spoke at the ICA on his exhibition with Alloway and Victor Pasmore in 1959, and later in the year on another ICA exhibition called Place; he also lectured on new technology in the cinema, Marcel Duchamp's Green Box, and the design of domestic appliances. He contributed articles to Design magazine¹, spoke at a National Union of Teachers' Conference called Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility², published a typographic version of The Green Box, and continued to produce paintings, drawings, and prints. And all this activity - its multiplicity and diversity - was the rule rather than the exception for ex-Independent Group members.

Thus, during the pivotal years of the late 'fifties and early 'sixties, the ideas of the men and women who had met as the Independent Group were publicised significantly more than they had been in previous years. The audiences at the ICA were aware of the presence of such as Banham, Alloway, and McHale³; Roger Coleman, who was also prominent in ICA activities during these years, had

¹ 'Persuading Image' Design No.134. February 1960, pp.28-32. 'FOB + 10'. Design No.149, May 1961, p.42.

² Published as Art and Design - a lecture in Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility. Report of NUT conference 26-28 October 1960, pp.135-155. A transcript of a discussion is also produced. The lecture is reprinted in Richard Hamilton Collected Words 1953-82. London 1982, pp.151-6. Hamilton also had two other articles about art education published in 1961: 'About Art Teaching, Basically', Motif No.8 Winter 1961, pp.17-23, 'First Year Studies at Newcastle' Times Educational Supplement May 1961.

³ Although many of the visitors to the ICA knew Banham, Alloway, McHale and others by their own names, they did not know them by their collective name of the Independent Group. There was also some criticism of them. Donald Holms (in an interview with the author 9 June 1982) recalled: "I remember on one occasion... when some... rather obscure topic was being explored and I said to a man sitting next to me when it was over, 'They seem to me to be like primitive necromancers. They seem to believe that by making certain marks, they are somehow able to change the external world.' 'Yes', he said, 'I quite agree. I am a doctor and it's exactly what I was thinking. They think they're doing magic.'" Donald Holms also remembered a member of the ICA audience who had just attended an evening arranged by the Independent Group, throwing "his arms in the air and [saying], 'How can one satirise that which satirises itself.'"

transmitted many ideas into the Royal College of Art via Ark, and now he was working on Design magazine, this too became another outlet. As one decade changed into the next, the channels through which Independent Group concepts were transmitted also changed. The ICA of course, remained central. But with Coleman leaving the Royal College, this no longer became such an important receiver. However, students from the Architectural Association began to frequent the ICA, probably drawn to it by Banham and Thomas Stevens, and the School of Architecture at Cambridge University also had links. But outside the ICA the most obvious manifestation of Independent Group notions was the articles which appeared in the monthly publication Architectural Design.

Since 1953 Theo Crosby had been Technical Editor on the magazine and had been on the fringe of the Independent Group, being particularly friendly with the Smithsons and Edward Wright. In 1956 he was the figure most prominent in the organisation of This is Tomorrow and this had brought him into direct contact with the ex-members of the Independent Group. Although essentially a designer, Crosby was very interested in art and so under his influence Architectural Design came to encompass a wider range of interests than its title implied. As well as including short reviews of current art exhibitions, Crosby also went to a great deal of trouble to make the covers for each issue visually interesting, designing some himself and having Edward Wright design others. Furthermore, Architectural Design had reviewed all the important public manifestations of Independent Group activity since 1953 - Parallel of Life and Art, Man, Machine and Motion, Magda Cordell's Hanover Gallery exhibition, Turnbull's and McHale's shows at the ICA, and An Exhibit. But as far as the communication of Independent Group ideas was concerned, the articles published in the magazine between 1958 and 1962 were

influential. Indeed, Richard Hamilton noted that,

"it was an odd phenomenon of the 'fifties in London that the most adventurous minds were those young architects who found an outlet through Theo Crosby when he edited Architectural Design. He also persuaded several painters and sculptors among the Independent Group to gain access to an audience through print that was denied them by the galleries."⁴

Hamilton himself was much indebted to Crosby. In March 1958, Architectural Design published Hommage à Chrysler Corp - a specially drawn version of the painting accompanied by Hamilton's commentary upon it. In November 1961 'Statement on Glorious Techniculture' appeared, a painting which graced the International Union of Architects' Congress on the South Bank.⁵ And in October 1962, Architectural Design published a definitive list (both verbal and visual) of his source material for the painting \$he.⁶ Thus, some of his paintings were presented to the public through the magazine, rather than through the more normal channel of the gallery. Indeed, Hamilton's paintings were not shown (apart from Glorious Techniculture at the IUA Congress) until 1964, when he had an exhibition at the Hanover Gallery.

Some of the background to Hamilton's work was the discussion which took place in the Independent Group, thus his paintings and his commentaries upon them published by Theo Crosby in Architectural Design can be seen as translations of Group concepts. But they were not only translated; they were also transformed. The images (verbal

⁴ Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit., p.7.

⁵ Theo Crosby was very much involved in the IUA Congress. See pp.364-67.

⁶ Richard Hamilton 'An Exposition of '\$he'' Architectural Design Vol.32, No.10, October 1962, pp.485-6.

and visual) were at least one step removed from the original ideas. And, as we have seen, some members of the Independent Group - notably Alloway and del Renzio - were critical of how Hamilton was using the material of popular culture for the production of fine art. Thus, from their point of view, Hamilton's interpretations of Independent Group concerns were not especially valid.

Probably more immediately influential upon a wider audience than Hamilton's contributions in Architectural Design were those of Alloway and McHale. During the late 'fifties and early 'sixties they wrote articles which dealt with issues central to Independent Group thinking and discussion. Alloway himself had been writing for Architectural Design since 1956 on a variety of fine art topics: the work of Paolozzi and Turnbull, of Kenneth and Mary Martin, hard edge painting from the United States, the work of Georges Mathieu, and so on. However, 'The Arts and the Mass Media', published in February 1958, set out to define the distinction between fine art and pop art of the mass media, as well as stress the role of the latter. "Stylistically, technically, and iconographically," wrote Alloway,

"the mass arts are anti-academic. Topicality and rapid rate of change are not academic in any usual sense of the word, which means a system that is static, rigid, self-perpetuating. Sensitiveness to the variables of our life and economy enable the mass arts to accompany the changes in our life far more closely than the fine arts which are a repository of time-binding values."⁷

Pointing out the important role of technology in pop art, the

⁷ Lawrence Alloway 'The Arts and the Mass Media', Architectural Design Vol.28, No.2, February 1958, p.84.

"repetitive and overlapping structure of modern entertainment" and the changing definition of culture, Alloway concluded with a statement which summed up his concept of the 'fine art/pop art continuum':

"Our definition of culture is being stretched beyond the fine art limits imposed on it by Renaissance theory, and refers now, increasingly, to the whole complex of human activities. Within this definition, rejection of the mass produced arts is not, as critics think, a defence of culture, but an attack on it. The new role for the academic is keeper of the flame; the new role for the fine arts is to be one of the possible forms of communication in an expanding framework that also includes the mass arts."⁸

In January 1959 Alloway promoted another of the Independent Group tenets through the pages of Architectural Design, that "the American city is the model of maximised industrialisation, towards which most of the world is heading..."⁹ In 'City Notes', he drew upon his recent experiences in the United States¹⁰ where he "...went to a dozen cities" and where "the American city, more than most European cities at present, is geared to the communications systems of modern technology."¹¹ Once more, Alloway stressed the central role of popular culture:

"It is absurd to print a photograph of Piccadilly Circus and caption it 'Architectural Squalor' as Erno Goldfinger and E.J. Carter did in an old Penguin book on the County of London Plan. In fact, the lights of the Circus are the best night-sight in

⁸ Ibid., p.85.

⁹ Lawrence Alloway 'City Notes' Architectural Design Vol.29, No.1. January 1959, p.34.

¹⁰ See p. 311.

¹¹ Lawrence Alloway 1959, op.cit., p.34.

London, though inferior to American displays. Related to the neon spectacle are other aspects of the popular environment. The drug stores with dense displays of small bright packages, arrayed in systems to throw the categorist. The L.P. environment at airports, restaurants, bars, and hotel lounges... Popular art in the city is a function of the whole city and not only of its architects." ¹²

The theme of popular culture was taken up by John McHale in his contribution in Architectural Design - 'The Expendable Ikon' - published in two parts in the February and March issues. He argued that the recent period

"...of mass production of identical, replaceable products for astronomical numbers of consumers [was] culturally a period of enormous expansion and exploration; the whole range of the sensory spectrum has been extended - man can see more, hear more, travel faster - experience more than ever before. His environment extensions - movie, TV, picture magazine, bring to his awareness an unprecedented scope of visual experience.

Such accelerated changes in the human condition require an array of symbolic images of man which will match up to the requirements of constant change, fleeting impressions and a high rate of obsolescence. A replaceable, expendable series of ikons." ¹³

The McHale articles are crammed with verbal and visual explanations: 'Out of Frankenstein by IBM' ("...the instability of man's awareness of his own form... the compression of the man and machine ikon into...

¹² Ibid., pp.34-5.

¹³ John McHale 'The Expendable Ikon I' Architectural Design Vol.29, No.2, February 1959, p.82.

the mechano-morph"¹⁴); 'the girl with the most' (Marilyn Monroe's iconography - "the parted lips, the ambivalently naive speech and the 'indescribable' walk... The emphasis on 'vital statistic' as numerical sex index rating..."¹⁵); 'the star ikon' ("The importance attached to 'reliques', like the autographed picture, the lock of hair, the competition for Presley jeans, etc..."¹⁶). Both pieces are visually and verbally stimulating, and give some insight into the nature of Independent Group discussions. Furthermore, although McHale refers to the writing of Marshall McLuhan (which he criticizes as having "strong moral overtones [which] render many conclusions outmoded"), he also refers to "...the scholarly and detailed researches in ikonography by Alloway and Banham",¹⁷ thus promoting the role of the Independent Group in this type of research, and perhaps advancing the reputation of his friends and associates.

As well as these two important articles, McHale also contributed pieces to Architectural Design on Josef Albers, with whom he had studied in 1954-55, and on Buckminster Fuller. The latter two on Fuller were long and informative articles published in the March 1960 and July 1961 issues of the journal. The editor, Monica Pidgeon, was instrumental in promoting Fuller to the British audience and the pieces provided McHale with a starting point for a project which would last some ten years and take him to Southern Illinois University.

Architectural Design also received contributions from a number of people who were connected with the Independent Group although not strictly central to it. The Smithsons wrote regularly for the journal; Geoffrey Holroyd, Frank Newby, Richard Lannoy, Colin St. John

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ John McHale 'The Expendable Ikon 2' Architectural Design Vol.29, No.3, March, 1959, p.116.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John McHale, February 1959, op.cit., pp.82-3.

Wilson, and Toni del Renzio all contributed pieces. Conspicuous by his absence was Peter Reyner Banham, but his regular contributions to The Architectural Review, The Architects' Journal, and other publications, probably excluded him from the pages of Monica Pidgeon's and Theo Crosby's periodical.

Despite the important role of Architectural Design, the ICA remained the central platform for Independent Group manifestations. Although they had stopped meeting as a group, the ex-members continued to exchange ideas on a less formal basis, and Alloway's position on the ICA staff inevitably led to these ideas finding their way into the ICA programme.

Of the exhibitions which involved ex-Independent Group members or through which Independent Group ideas were advanced, held between 1959 and 1961, The Developing Process was a display of "...work in progress towards a new foundation of Art teaching as developed at Newcastle and Leeds College of Art." This was held in April-May 1959 and was organised by Pasmore, Tom Hudson and Richard Hamilton.¹⁸ In September Robyn Denny, Ralph Rumney and Richard Smith organised an exhibition called Place which was stage-managed by Roger Coleman and about which he said: "It was a kind of off-shoot of a thing that Victor [Pasmore] and Richard [Hamilton] did - Exhibit."¹⁹ In the catalogue Coleman identified three areas of influence upon the paintings exhibited: the mass media, American painting and space, and the game environment. The latter was similar to An Exhibit and Alloway's question "...are you maze-bright or maze-dim?", since the paintings were suspended in space and the spectator had to weave his way through them. The influence of American painting was identified

¹⁸ The Developing Process ICA 1959. See pp.309-10.

¹⁹ Roger Coleman interviewed by the author 18 April 1983.

by Coleman as "the use of the big canvas". He then identified the influence of the mass media as

"...a significant development in post war art in this country... [which] can be seen, for instance, in the allusions to science fiction and monster lore in the sculpture of Paolozzi, in McHale's ikons of consumption and in Blake's collages of pop heroes. In the work of the three painters of Place on the other hand, the influence of the mass media is present but not generally detectable without the aid of outside cues... The mass media for Denny, Rumney and Smith is not a source of imagery, as it is for Blake, but a source of ideas that act as stimuli and as orientation in a cultural continuum."²⁰

Like An Exhibit before it, Place received some criticism in the press. Roger Coleman recalled:

"It was reviewed by Eric Newton in The Observer who called it the silliest exhibition he'd ever seen. Unfortunately, he called it Peace (a misprint). So I wrote to the editor and said, 'I don't mind your art critic calling it the silliest exhibition he's ever seen but he might get the name right. And I said, 'Unfortunately it gives it political overtones which the exhibition doesn't have. So if it's silly, it's silly purely for aesthetic reasons'."²¹

Following Place, Theo Crosby, John Latham and Peter Blake staged Sculpture, Objects and Libraries in January 1960, and in March of the following year, Nigel Henderson held an exhibition which received a

²⁰ Roger Coleman Guide to Place ICA 1959.

²¹ Roger Coleman 1983, op.cit.

disappointing response and lost the ICA about £200 but spurred Henderson himself into new areas of work, notably painting. Interspersed with these exhibitions were a number of others which displayed the continuing variety of the ICA's programme, but there were four exhibitions of work by American painters held between 1959 and 1961 which showed the continuing influence of Alloway and his connections with Stefan Munsing at the American Embassy.²²

Most of these exhibitions were also discussed during evenings at the ICA: Alloway spoke about Gottlieb; Coleman about hard edge painting and Morris Louis; Hamilton and Pasmore talked about Exhibit, Coleman, Hamilton and Rumney about Place; there was a symposium on The Developing Process, and Colin St. John Wilson put questions to Nigel Henderson about his work. At the beginning of 1959 Banham spoke about the current Le Corbusier exhibition at the Building Centre in Store Street, and Roger Coleman, Toni del Renzio and Peter Smithson discussed the Young Contemporaries show held at the RBA Galleries in Suffolk Street. There was also a growing interest in the role of Italian design, about which Banham spoke on 22 January 1959. This lecture was probably critical of some recent trends in Italian design since in April of the same year, Banham's article in Architectural Review called 'Neoliberalty - the Italian Retreat from Modern

²² These were Adolph Gottlieb. Paintings 1944-59 (opened on 3 June 1959), West Coast Hard Edge (opened 23 March 1960), Morris Louis (opened 17 May 1960) and Paintings by Marsden Hartley (opened 14 June 1961 at the U.S. Embassy). Laurie Fricker noted Alloway's attitude to the American artists and to the artistic establishment: "...When Lawrence put on the Morris Louis show, nobody came; it lost us [the ICA] a fortune. And Lawrence didn't give a fig about that; he wanted to be the person who was responsible for making Morris Louis's name in London, which, of course, he did - and many other people too. He was always using the ICA to put the artistic establishment to rights... so that the ICA was always an irritant to the system. And he was very critical when we were hard up and we had the John Moores' show, and he just said, 'The ICA used to start things.'" (Laurie Fricker interviewed by the author 14 March 1983. The exhibition of Prizewinners of the John Moores Liverpool show of 1961 was held at the ICA between 29 March - 28 April 1962.)

Architecture', interpreted the revival of certain Art Nouveau tendencies as (paraphrasing Marinetti on Ruskin),

"like a man who has attained full physical maturity, yet wants to sleep in his cot again, to be suckled again by his decrepit nurse in order to regain the nonchalance of his childhood. Even by the purely local standards of Milan and Turin," Banham concluded, "...Neoliberty is infantile regression."²³

Toni del Renzio, who had acted as chairman for the ICA lecture in January, joined the discussion on Neo-liberty with his article for Architectural Design in September 1960, where he attributed the style to a much wider range of activities than just architecture and noted it was

"not... just a re-creation, a lifeless and uninteresting repetition of past achievements [and that] the rediscovery of art nouveau is one of the outstanding cultural phenomena of our time."²⁴

Such healthy discussion over this issue proved that the spirit of inquiry which typified Independent Group meetings in the early and mid 'fifties was alive and well and still relished by ex-members.

Other topics which related to Independent Group concerns and involved ex-Independent Group members were a critical appraisal of British art magazines in January 1959, Toni del Renzio and Roger Coleman on 'Minority Pop' in May, Banham and others discussing the

²³Peter Reyner Banham 'Neoliberty - The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture' Architectural Review, Vol.125, No.747, April 1959, p.235.

²⁴Toni del Renzio 'Neo-Liberty' Architectural Design Vol.30 No.9 September 1960, p.375.

Tate Gallery's exhibition of Romantic Art in July, McHale, Peter Smithson and others on design in neon called 'City Lights' in March 1960, and Dr. W. Ross Ashby talking about 'Art and Communication Theory' in April.

Of 'Minority Pop', which was held on 28 May 1959, the ICA Bulletin announced:

"It is now time to refine our definition of mass media. Toni del Renzio and Roger Coleman (with audio-visual aids) will differentiate the taste and status of a special group within the mass."²⁵

Later, Toni del Renzio called this evening meeting an attempt

"to identify what we thought to be a new social grouping, class even, to which we probably felt we belonged or were on the way to belonging, the new professionals in the media, advertising and the like."²⁶

Toni del Renzio's contribution to the evening began with a socio/political view of this phenomenon:

"Culture is perhaps not the simple superstructure that Marxism has implied. Certainly it has been studied objectively other than by reference to a class structure ordered in society by the division of labour. At the same time, through the studies of social anthropology and by the disciplines of both semantics and information theory, culture is seen not to be unitary and

²⁵ ICA Bulletin No.98, May 1959.

²⁶ Toni del Renzio 'Pioneers and Trendies' Art and Artists No.209 February 1984, p.26.

monolithic... No society has developed into two clear-cut classes struggling for the possession of the means of production and distribution. But, on the contrary, the professionalism and specialisation of both labour and management have led to a multiplicity of classes into which the old alignments of a working and an owning class persist as a psychological inability to adapt to the changed conditions."

Relating popular culture to this general observation, that

"it is massively monolithic, not a simple majority, but a segmented structure, a complex conglomeration of minorities that inter-relate in changing patterns of varying duration...",

del Renzio cited the "newly arrived professionals" of popular culture contrasted with

"rock 'n roll [and] its connotations with amateurism, particularly scruffy skiffle groups in scruffy cellars, and the emergence of 'naturals' with no special skills with whom the emotionally unstable teenagers can identify..."²⁷

Similarly, Roger Coleman remembered the evening as identifying

"...the reaction to sort of Elvis Presley and Tommy Steele and... rough necks coming in from the street with a broom and a tea-chest... because it seemed to us then that pop... had split into two, into something which was really pop - which everybody out there suddenly saw had this great energy - and then there

²⁷ Toni del Renzio. Unpublished text of contribution to 'Minority Pop', ICA, 28 May 1959.

was this other thing which was left which they didn't want any part of, which at the furthest extreme would be Dave Brubeck or perhaps the Modern Jazz Quartet... and at the other perhaps Doris Day or something. [The evening] was just a presentation with no commentary at all - a succession of images and sounds. And then we had two intervals. One was Toni reading a piece, and I did a piece on Sinatra."²⁸

'Minority Pop', in both content and presentation, was very much a continuation of Independent Group preoccupations.

Towards the end of 1959, the ICA initiated a number of lectures collectively called 'The 50s'. The first was on 8 October with Lawrence Alloway posing the question 'What Happened to the Avant-Garde?', and continued on 15 October with Peter Smithson talking about 'The Revolution in Architectural Thinking Since 1950'. Peter Reyner Banham discussed 'The Last Days of Design' and the ICA Bulletin summarised the theme of this contribution:

"In 1950 all seemed set for the realisation of the dream of universal good design that had been part of progressive aspirations in Britain since the early 30s. The CoID [Council of Industrial Design] was in being; the FoB [Festival of Britain] was in preparation. But by 1955 it was clear that a design-conscious mass-public, and some sections of the 'opinion-forming classes', wanted no part of the Good Design dream. Dr. Banham will chronicle both the statistical development of public taste and the movements of intellectual opinion that combined to make the 50s 'the last days of good design'."²⁹

²⁸ Roger Coleman, 1983, op.cit.

²⁹ ICA Bulletin No.102, November/December 1959.

Of the other nine talks in the series, one was Roger Coleman on 'The Top Tens of the Fifties', "...a look at jazz and pop music... with emphasis on trends, audiences and popularity,"³⁰ and another was Richard Hamilton's 'Glorious Technicolour, Breathtaking Cinemascope and Stereophonic Sound', "...about technological entertainments industries and adult play equipment".³¹ Although by no means a series completely dominated by ex-Independent Group members,³² the 50s did offer a platform for some of them to indulge their interests and put forward ideas that had first been aired in Independent Group meetings. There was also a good deal of interrelation of themes and ideas: Banham's 'The Last Days of Design' was connected to Hamilton's earlier and pre-50s series talk 'The Design Image of the 50s'³³ and were both connected to 'Glorious Technicolour...' and John Christopher Jones's contribution to the series, 'Information and Methods in the Industrial Arts.'

During 1960 some of the original members of the Independent Group were more obviously making a gradual exit from the ICA milieu in which they had been involved for so long. With the completion of

³⁰ Ibid.. This talk was scheduled for 1 December but due to Coleman being ill, was actually given on 9 February 1960.

³¹ ICA Bulletin No.103, January/February 1960. The talk was given on 21 January 1960 and its text reprinted in Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit. pp.113-131.

³² The other talks in the series were A. Alvarez, 'Poetry in the 50s' (17 November 1959); Ian Hamilton, 'Music in the 50s' (15 December 1959); the Reverend Peter Hammond, 'The Liturgical Movement' (7 January 1960); a symposium on the novel, attended by Olivia Manning and others (14 January 1960), John Christopher Jones, 'Information and Methods in the Industrial Arts' (26 January 1960); Alan Pryce Jones, 'The Theatre in the 50s' (24 March 1960); Richard Wollheim, 'Philosophy in the 50s' (10 May 1960), 'A Dream Revolved' (19 May 1960).

³³ This talk has already been mentioned on p.303. The ICA Bulletin (No.100) for July 1959, summarises it: "In the fifties, consumer goods have acquired new significance as status symbols - in many cases their image value exceeds any claim they may have to functional fitness. With the developments of motivational research, techniques which probe the consumers' unspoken desires, there has been simultaneous probing of the designer's consciousness and also his conscience. The course of these changing attitudes to design problems will be traced and an assessment made of the designer's role in mid-century society."

Banham's Ph.D. at the Courtauld Institute and its publication as Theory and Design in the First Machine Age, he was making the transition from the critical avant-garde days of the Independent Group in the early 'fifties to the more secure and accepted position of established architecture/design critic/historian whose work was cited in the bibliographies of fellow historians and of students throughout the world. The ICA marked the publication of Banham's book with a discussion involving Erno Goldfinger, Denis Lasdun, Colin St. John Wilson, Peter Smithson, and Sir John Summerson on 13 October. In August Lawrence Alloway resigned as Assistant Director, though by this time his position had been retitled. The ICA Bulletin reported:

"We regret to announce that Lawrence Alloway is leaving his post as Programme Director. The valuable influence that he has had on our activities since he joined the staff in 1955 is well known to members and we are glad to say that Mr. Alloway will continue to be a member of the Exhibitions Committee."³⁴

By March 1961 Alloway had also resigned from this committee - he had been its chairman since 1955 - and a year later Dorothy Morland appointed a new Director's Assistant - Laurie Fricker. By this time Alloway had secured himself the post of Curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City, which he took up in July 1962.

Even before Alloway had resigned as Programme Director, he had promoted Robert Freeman as his natural successor. Freeman was an English graduate from Cambridge who, according to Laurie Fricker,

"...was very keen to get in to the ICA... and he was an understudy to Lawrence [but] he didn't seem to me he had any

³⁴ ICA Bulletin No.106, August/September 1960.

ideas at all [although] he'd got all the jargon, he'd got the clothes, he'd got the appearance..."³⁵

Freeman first appeared at the ICA on 19 January 1960 in a discussion on the current issue of Cambridge Opinion which he had edited. This particular issue of one of the University journals was the culmination of a number of links ex-Independent Group members had made with Cambridge over the previous years. In 1956 Colin St. John Wilson went to teach at the School of Architecture in Scroope Terrace and partly as a result of this a number of ex-Independent Group members were invited to lecture to the undergraduates. Alloway, Paolozzi, Banham, and Hamilton all spoke at Cambridge. In February 1959, Paolozzi, McHale, and Magda Cordell held an exhibition at the Cambridge Union. Lawrence Alloway wrote in the catalogue:

"Paolozzi, Cordell, and McHale are symbol makers... rather than picture makers. They coin an image of man both topical and enduring... Paolozzi's figures peppered with mechanisms, are all male. Cordell's transparent anatomies are like the object of the cult of the female. McHale's are all like consumers, defined by what they use. All three treat the human subject in terms of a class. None of their figures wear dog tags. Their status is like that of cogent generalisations, about man, about woman, about society."³⁶

If one of the links between the Independent Group and Cambridge was that some Group members went to work, lecture, and exhibit at the University, then the other link was that some of the undergraduates frequently visited the ICA. One of the architecture students, James

³⁵ Laurie Fricker interviewed by the author 14 March 1983.

³⁶ Lawrence Alloway 'Commentary' Class of '59 The Union, Cambridge, 7-19 February 1959.

Meller, had visited the ICA in 1957 before going to Cambridge but once there he found that the city and the University were "awfully provincial... There were lively things going on," he recalled,

"and I think that Cambridge seemed to be completely remote from any of that... we spent most of the time in Cambridge during the week [but]... we were constantly backwards and forwards [to London at weekends]." ³⁷

In May 1958 Meller, together with four other students from the School of Architecture, held an exhibition of paintings in "a neat low-ceilinged room in Scroope Terrace [which was] a brilliant Kaleidoscope of colours..." ³⁸ The exhibition had grown out of drawing lessons run for architecture students on Saturday mornings by Christopher Cornford. "He encouraged us a lot to do things," said Meller,

"...And I think we finally decided to have an exhibition... the real surprise was that it seemed to [attract]... a lot of interest because it was unlike university art exhibitions, which were very much part of the mainstream... we were very surprised that people came and reviewed it." ³⁹

Robert Freeman reviewed the first of four Cambridge exhibitions in the University newspaper Varsity, and then in February 1960 the students - known as the Scroope Group - were given a show at the New Vision Centre Gallery in London. By this time the Group membership had changed somewhat. Two of the original five members - Mathias and

³⁷ James Meller interviewed by the author 12 March 1984.

³⁸ Robert Freeman 'Five Freshmen' Varsity May 1958

³⁹ James Meller, op.cit.

Mangoldes - had dropped out and Ray Wilson had joined James Meller, Gus Coral and Tim Wallis. Wilson's father - Frank Avray-Wilson - had helped found the New Vision Centre along with Denis Bowen and Halima Nalecz, and so the Scroope Group exhibition there came about not only through the success of the Cambridge exhibitions but also because of this family link. The major difference between the Cambridge exhibitions and the one in London was that the latter contained what the exhibitors called 'source material'. The entrance to the gallery was covered in ephemeral images, many of them from popular culture, and this was meant to be an indication of the source material for the paintings themselves. But as in the work of Richard Smith, the paintings did not obviously betray this influence other than in the titles. Ray Wilson's paintings all had top twenty song titles - Oh Carol, for example; others drew their titles from jazz and technology - Mingus and Sabrejet. Only in the posters and some collaged elements in the catalogue was the ephemeral material used directly. Like Smith and even Denny, the paintings themselves came more from an interest and appreciation of American abstract expressionism. This influence was reinforced by a certain knowledge of what was still going on at the ICA through people like McHale, Alloway, and Hamilton, as well as contact with the Royal College of Art and the work of Smith, Denny, and Peter Blake.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Stylistic comparisons between the work of the Scroope Group and some of the RCA students of the late 'fifties are not especially enlightening, but a comparison of the interpretation of particular influences is informative. Both 'groups' produced work which was abstract, comparatively large in size, and used colour as a primary element - all stylistic traits of American abstract expressionist and hard edge painting. Both artists like Robyn Denny and Richard Smith payed homage to the influence of popular culture in the titles of some of their works; for example, Denny's Gully Foyle, 1961, is named after a hero from an Alfred Bester science fiction novel and Smith's McCall's refers to the magazine of that name. The same homage via the titling was paid by the Scroope Group. This is significant because the work began to appear at about the same time, artists from both institutions - the RCA and Cambridge University - frequented the ICA and had contact with ex-members of the Independent Group, Smith and Denny initially through Coleman, cont'd....

Robert Freeman contributed a comment to the catalogue of the Scroope Group's London exhibition which emphasised that they were motivated by the urban environment of "galactic streams of commuters, juke-boxes, mass media and pin tables" as opposed to the "sleepy provincialism of Cambridge" where only

"sometimes a dynamic can be found as in a double-decker channelling its way through the narrow streets like a technological dinosaur."⁴¹

At the time he wrote this, the issue of Cambridge Opinion which he edited had appeared and was being discussed at the ICA. In some ways, this particular issue - number 17 - was a culmination of the many connections between Cambridge and the Independent Group/ICA which had gradually increased from 1956 onwards. In another sense, it was a reassertion of some important Independent Group concepts through yet another channel of communication. In this respect, Freeman's role was similar to that which Coleman had played with Ark three years earlier.

Cambridge Opinion No.17 appeared at the end of 1959. Its editorial, written by Freeman, was entitled 'Living with the 60s' and set the tone for the whole issue as forward-looking rather than backward-looking. This was certainly true in relation to the subject-matter - technology, media, communications, urban entertainment, and

cont'd...

Meller, Wallis, Coral and Wilson initially through Colin St. John Wilson and then Robert Freeman. The link with Peter Blake is tenuous. When reviewing the New Vision Centre exhibition, Alloway noted that "George [Gus] Coral presents polished silver panels, projecting off the wall at different depths. Peter Blake says they are influenced by Peter Blake's gold pictures [seen at Cambridge - in the exhibition Six From Now] but Coral's surface is hard and resistant, very different from Blake's fragile wafers." (Lawrence Alloway 'Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media' Art News and Review Vol.12, No.3, 27 February - 12 March, 1960, p.12.)

⁴¹ Robert Freeman 'Comment', Catalogue/folder of Scroope Group, New Vision Centre Gallery, February 1960.

so on, but it was not true in terms of ideas since a good deal of what Cambridge Opinion No.17 contained was regurgitated and repackaged from earlier Independent Group discussions and articles. Nevertheless, it was reaching a new, if, again, small audience.

Setting the tone of the magazine, Freeman eulogised about the "hypnotic impact of a popular iconography which filters into a widening range of experiences" and warned that adaptation to the new environment of media and popular culture cannot be achieved

"...if we still adhere to the antiquated aesthetics based on formal harmony, fine materials, universals, etc., etc.... We need," he added, "...the kind of mental agility that will appreciate an elastic variety of ads, films, jazz, science fiction and pop music... What must be realised is that... advances and their USE tomorrow depend on how fully we UNDERSTAND today... Our present need is to create a living environment that is both vital and co-ordinated. This will not be achieved by imposing the concept of the medieval village on our urban spreads, by keeping television out of politics, by holding up the canons of fine art to pop culture or by preserving our universities in exclusive isolation."⁴²

In support of these proposals, Freeman included articles by Peter Reyner Banham, James Meller, Colin Cherry, John McHale, and Lawrence Alloway. Of these pieces, the two most significant were Alloway's 'Long Front of Culture' and McHale's 'The Fine Arts in the Mass Media'. In the former, Alloway restated the concept of the 'fine art/pop art continuum':

⁴² Robert Freeman 'Living with the 60s' Cambridge Opinion No.17 1959, pp.7-8.

"The abundance of twentieth century communications is an embarrassment to the traditionally educated custodian of culture. The aesthetics of plenty oppose a very strong tradition which dramatizes the arts as the possession of an élite... Acceptance of the mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is... unique oil paintings and highly personal poems as well as mass-distributed films and group-aimed magazines can be placed within a continuum rather than frozen in layers in a pyramid."

He then went on to elaborate upon a number of other related ideas:

"One function of the mass media is to act as a guide to life defined in terms of possessions and relationships... for example, the heroine's way of life in a story in a woman's magazine is compatible with consumption of the goods advertised around her story."

And again:

"We speak for convenience about a mass audience but it is a fiction. The audience today is numerically dense but highly diversified... Fear of the Amorphous Audience is fed by the word 'mass'. In fact, audiences are specialised by age, sex, hobby, occupation, mobility, contacts, etc."⁴³

McHale's piece reinforced some of the notions expressed in Alloway's article:

"The élite of the earlier vertical society has, in the sense of representing and directing cultural preferences, become simply

⁴³ Lawrence Alloway 'The Long Front of Culture', Cambridge Opinion No.17, 1959, p.25.

one of a plurality of élites. These relate, and overlap, horizontally - fashion, sport, entertainment, politics, etc. - and are as diverse, and relatively powered, as their audiences and in-groups can be numbered. The apex of the pyramid has become one node in a mesh of interrelated networks spread over the communications system."⁴⁴

McHale then went on to give examples of how the mass media has employed the fine arts in its systems of communication, and closes by stating that the "transmission, employment and transformation" of fine art by the mass media

"need imply no erosion of function or 'vulgarisation' of content. It is merely part of the live process of cultural diffusion which, like many other aspects of societal interaction in our period, now occurs in a variety of unprecedented ways."⁴⁵

At about the time he was writing for Cambridge Opinion, Alloway reviewed the Scroope Group's London exhibition and used it as an opportunity to summarise and explain the "ways in which artists have handled pop culture during the 50s."⁴⁶ He proposed "four categories for a preliminary sorting." The first was

"pop as source material... Bacon used images from newspapers and magazines... Paolozzi has acknowledged the influence on his

⁴⁴John McHale 'The Fine Arts in the Mass Media', Cambridge Opinion No.17, 1959, p.29.

⁴⁵John McHale, ibid., p.32. Some of the more interesting examples of the media's use of fine art quoted by McHale included the contemporary advertising slogan 'I dreamt I was the Venus de Milo in my Maiden-Form bra', and the "calculated co-operation between the BBC and the Council of Industrial Design" when "around mid-1956 a fire was written into the script of The Grove Family television series so that the 'family' could refurbish their home - through the Design Centre."

⁴⁶Lawrence Alloway 1960, op.cit., p.3.

beat-up human image of The Mummy's Hand and the Frankenstein Monster... Richard Hamilton's Hommage à Chrysler Corp.... John McHale and Magda Cordell took L'Art brut and connected it with the mass media... Images of consumers, androids and monsters took over from the social aliens of Dubuffet's collection."

The second,

"pop as history of ideas... the bombardment of the mass media is the man-made analogue of the 'sensory bombardment' of our senses at all times... Media is a fund of known allusions [therefore] shared names and attitudes, shapes and colours [have] a common ground between artists and audience... Richard Smith is the painter who has been most successful in melding abstract painting with his response to lyrical moments in the mass media (as in Salem, for example, where they burn cigarettes not witches...)"

Third,

"pop and presentation... the world we live in is so well covered by communications that we have learned to experience space and time in a new way... The development of the media of mass communications has multiplied the speed, number and intensity of... contacts, and artists now in their thirties and twenties have never known a world which was not small in this way."

And last,

"pop as polemic and affiliation. To refer to bems [bug-Eyed Monsters] instead of chimeras, to quote Asimov instead of Plato, separates one from Berenson, Fry, Rey, Read."⁴⁷

In this piece, Alloway also comments upon the lack of progress made in the study of popular art since the Independent Group and criticises the RCA's subsidence, as he sees it, from

⁴⁷ Ibid.

"the rigour and intelligence of Roger Coleman's Ark... into pop as a fund of novelties and funny faces, a compound of the bizarre and the cute."⁴⁸

These observations constitute the essential beliefs behind Alloway's convictions about the use of pop material. However, they were to be swamped to some extent by the emergence after 1961 of Pop Art, represented by such painters as Peter Phillips, Derek Boshier and Allen Jones.

Robert Freeman's role in the dissemination of Independent Group motivated ideas had been limited to Cambridge Opinion and articles in other journals⁴⁹ until the beginning of 1961 when he appeared at the ICA in a series of lectures collectively titled 'Image of Tomorrow': "The past ten years can be related to wide discussions on the problems of designing an environment," the ICA Bulletin announced.

"1951 saw the 'futuristic' tendency of the Festival of Britain, 1956 the stimulating and revealing grouping of ideas in This is Tomorrow. These and other activities brought together, or showed sympathy towards people outside the art disciplines, ranging from sociologists to engineers, scientists, ad men, designers and architects. This was a situation rarely if ever

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Robert Freeman contributed articles to a number of magazines during this period. A notable one was 'The Ecology of Cambridge' Lady Clare, Vol.45, June 1960, pp.6-13, where part of his discussion is about "the disparity that exists between the static form of education and the constantly changing form of society [being] a problem that concerns not only the pedagogues, but industrialists and politicians alike". (p.7). In part, his arguments are supported by quotes from Tomas Maldonado's 'Pedagogical Impact of Automation' (a lecture delivered at the ICA on 12 April 1957) and Lawrence Alloway's 'The Long Front of Culture' in Cambridge Opinion No.17. Later Freeman became involved in photography and film, working on Ann Jellicoe's The Knack and producing the sleeve design for the Beatle's second L.P.

achieved before. Perhaps environment would no longer be created out of unrelated chunks of individual concepts. With this in mind the present series aim to discuss the tomorrows of yesterday as well as presenting visually aspects of today's tomorrow." ⁵⁰

Laurie Fricker thought that

"Freeman wanted to re-do the Independent Group... and he just sort of winkled these people out to do a repeat performance." ⁵¹

It may not have been as premeditated as this but it was true that some of the lectures were closely connected to earlier Independent Group concerns. The first, delivered on 19 January was Freeman himself on 'Urban X-Ray' - "the audio-visuals of Urban infra-structure and the surface detail: the organisation and styling of design." ⁵² Then, on 2 February, Roger Coleman on 'Slogans and People', "a look at the relationships between the theories of industrial design and the uses people make of it." ⁵³ On the 9th Alloway's 'On a Planet With You' (the title being a paraphrase of the title of an Esther Williams movie On an Island With You):

"Tomorrow as Sociology, Science Fiction from Moon Dome 1 to Okie Cities, with notes on Galactic Gothic, Venus as Walden, psycho-history and the exploding metropolis." ⁵⁴

John McHale followed on the 16th with 'The Plastic Parthenon' ⁵⁵ and

⁵⁰ ICA Bulletin No.109, January/February 1961.

⁵¹ Laurie Fricker, op.cit..

⁵² ICA Bulletin No.109, op.cit.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ McHale's talk was about "...a planetary culture whose relation to
cont'd....

John Christopher Jones on the 21st with 'Automation and Logical Design'.⁵⁶ On 28 February Freeman chaired a symposium on the series at which Alloway, Peter Smithson, John Christopher Jones, McHale and Coleman all commented.

In some ways, Cambridge Opinion No.17 and the ICA series 'Image of Tomorrow' was a re-run of Independent Group ideas; Alloway certainly believed that "under [Freeman's] editorship [of Cambridge Opinion] the art and technology preoccupation of the Independent Group was continued."⁵⁷ The years 1960-61 saw a number of manifestations intended to regenerate Independent Group ideas. As well as Cambridge Opinion there was the abortive journal Number⁵⁸, and the group 'Talk', cited by Lawrence Alloway as a footnote to his article 'Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media' in Art News and Review and enlarged upon in his essay 'The Development of British Pop': "'Talk', held at the ICA in 1960, was intended as a painter's version of the Independent Group. It was too big and got bogged down in spectator passivity."⁵⁹

In 1963 Peter Reyner Banham noted that there had been "some

cont'd...

earlier forms is as Vostok or Gemini [is] to a wheeled cart... [how the] media virtually extend our physical environment, providing a constant stream of moving, fleeting images of the world for our daily appraisal... the expansion of swift global transportation... provides common cultural artifacts which engender... shared attitudes in their requirements and use." A revised version of the lecture was printed in Dotzero Magazine Spring 1967, and reprinted in John Russell and Suzi Gablik Pop Art Redefined, London 1969, pp.47-53.

⁵⁶Roger Coleman 1983, op.cit., recalls: "...It was about industrial design. John Christopher Jones was extraordinary... he was one of the pioneers of what is ergonomics... I introduced him to the ICA..." Jones went on to teach at Manchester University and at the Open University. His best known written work is Design Methods, Chichester, 1970.

⁵⁷Lawrence Alloway 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) Pop Art, London 1966, p.202, n.36.

⁵⁸See pp.316-7.

⁵⁹Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.201, n.20.

rather necrophilic revivalist meetings of the Independent Group" called by the Smithsons and Paolozzi to "clear their names of being responsible for the present pop art movement in England."⁶⁰ The reasons for such a renaissance of the Group are best discussed later⁶¹, but at present it is interesting to note that although neither the Smithsons nor Colin St. John Wilson (whom Banham also associated with calling a meeting "to clear their names of responsibility for the Pop Art movement"⁶²) recall the reasons, they do recall a meeting. Alison Smithson remembers Dorothy Morland

"had a group of people in the back room once... to talk about it [the Independent Group] - presumably ten years after or something."

And Peter Smithson vaguely recalls that "somebody organised a meeting; I thought it was Eduardo."⁶³ Similarly, William Turnbull remembers a reconvening of the Independent Group in the early 'sixties, but ascribes it to Banham.⁶⁴

Whatever the reasons and whoever was involved, there seems to have been at least one more meeting of the Independent Group held some years after it had stopped gathering on a regular basis. There was no revival however; both the ex-members and the times had moved on.

If one accepts Lawrence Alloway's interpretation of the Independent Group and its influence, one follows a clear development of

⁶⁰ Peter Reyner Banham 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist', Living Arts No.3, April 1964, pp.91-7. The text was taken from Banham's Terry Hamilton Memorial Lecture delivered on 11 November 1963 at the ICA.

⁶¹ See pp.386-7.

⁶² Peter Reyner Banham. Letter to the author 11 May 1983.

⁶³ Alison and Peter Smithson interviewed by the author 22 November 1982.

⁶⁴ William Turnbull in conversation with the author 23 February 1983.

ideas from the ICA to the Royal College of Art, initially through Ark and the paintings of Richard Smith, then through Peter Phillips, Allen Jones, Ron Kitaj, David Hockney and Derek Boshier - the so-called Pop artists of 1961. Richard Smith's generation - which included Robyn Denny, Peter Blake, Roger Coleman and the Cambridge Scroope Group - was certainly the direct descendant of the Independent Group. Smith considered himself "second generation Independent [sic]"⁶⁵ and his presence at the ICA and involvement with Ark tends to confirm this. Through his reference material - songs, packaging, magazines - and certainly through the titles of his paintings - Smith's work was connected to the products of the mass media, on which some Independent Group discussion had centred. Alloway also linked Denny and the Cambridge Group to this trend, though he found Peter Blake's work - which was figurative - difficult to reconcile into the general shift, as he identified it, towards abstraction.

Certainly, the influence of American abstract painting was evident during these years and a key figure in this, and one who influenced RCA students, was William Turnbull. An

"obsessive cinema-goer, the sweeping breadth of the cinemascope screen did affect his paintings, as a phenomenon in itself rather than in the way it mediated imagery (he was particularly impressed by those moments when the wide screen filled with a single field of one colour)."⁶⁶

In 1960 he helped to organise the Situation exhibition at the RBA Galleries, where the requirements of abstraction and of being at least

⁶⁵ Lucy Lippard 'Richard Smith: Conversations with the Artist', Art International, Vol.8, No.9, 1964.

⁶⁶ Richard Morphet 'Commentary' William Turnbull. Sculpture and Painting, Tate Gallery, 1973, p.48.

thirty square feet in size were adhered to. Originally stimulated by the practical difficulties of selling such large works through dealers, Situation was organised by the artists themselves and was the most complete manifestation of large scale abstract painting so far seen in Britain.

But for those artists stimulated by popular culture and the mass media, the trend to abstraction was not total. The example of Peter Blake has already been mentioned, and Richard Hamilton continued painting images which were directly inspired by such sources. Although he was still teaching on the basic course at Newcastle, and in the Interior Design Department at the RCA until 1961, and although An Exhibit had been an exhibition using no figurative elements, his paintings continued in the direction initiated by Hommage à Chrysler Corp. The major work of this period was Pin-Up, completed in 1961. "Girlie pictures were the source of Pin-Up," he wrote,

"not only the sophisticated and often exquisite photographs in Playboy magazine, but also the most vulgar and unattractive to be found in such pulp equivalents as Beauty Parade."⁶⁷

With the arrival in the early 'sixties of Archigram and Pop Art, the linear development which Alloway promoted in a number of articles and essays reached completion. His three phases of development - the Independent Group (1952-5), the abstract work at the RCA (1957-60), and the figurative work at the RCA (1961), are a neat package. The appearance of Phillips, Jones, Hockney, et al., at the 1961 Young Contemporaries, and the concurrent manifestation of Archigram, seemed to be the fruit of the seeds sown by the Independent Group almost ten

⁶⁷ Richard Hamilton. Paintings, etc... 1956-64. Hanover Gallery, London, 1964.

years earlier. But it was not as straightforward as this. The complexities of the interpretation of popular art material by the fine artist and Alloway's attitude towards these different interpretations are issues which will be dealt with later. Now it is necessary to refer to the appearance of Archigram and Pop Art, and consider how far these manifestations were related to the Independent Group.

In 1960 a group of young men, some of them recently graduated architectural students, some of them already practising architects, formed Archigram. The following year they issued a "broadsheet [which] amounted to an architectural telegram... of all the current issues jammed together in one information-studded image."⁶⁸ There were nine of these 'broadsheets' published between 1961 and 1970 dealing with such issues as expendability and change (Archigram 2). 'Beyond Architecture' (Archigram 7), 'So We Have No Buildings Here' (Archigram 8). One of the original six founders of Archigram, Warren Chalk, noted:

"We are in pursuit of a new idea, a new vernacular, something to stand alongside the space capsules, computers and throwaway packages of an atomic electronic age... We are not trying to make houses like cars, cities like oil refineries... this analogous imagery will eventually be digested into a creative system... it has become necessary to extend ourselves into such disciplines in order to discover our appropriate language to the present day situation."⁶⁹

Archigram, originally being Peter Cock, Warren Chalk, Ron

⁶⁸ Charles Jencks Modern Movements in Architecture. Harmondsworth 1973, p.282.

⁶⁹ Warren Chalk 'Architecture as Consumer Product', The Japan Architect, Vol.165, 1970, p.37. Quoted in William J.R. Curtis Modern Architecture since 1900, Oxford 1982, p.325.

Herron, Mike Webb, Dennis Crompton and David Greene, had some obvious connections with Independent Group concerns of previous years. One critic noted that Archigram

"...was brash, exuberant... From Pop culture it borrowed its graphics, its vulgarity and its love of the ephemeral..."⁷⁰

Another summarised its interests and major achievements: Archigram was fascinated

"...with such things as 'clip-on' technology, the throwaway environment, space capsules and mass-consumer imagery. As early as 1959, Mike Webb had designed a project for a Furniture Manufacturers Association Building in the form of pods and capsules plugged flexibly into a frame; and in 1961 his Sin Centre for Leicester Square envisaged a giant cybernetic pleasure machine aping computer reels and comic-book space ships. Robot fascination reached a peak in Ron Herron's Walking Cities project of 1964, in which colossal spider-shaped cities on legs were shown clambering over the water towards Manhattan. Then in 1964 Peter Cook drew together most of the group's themes in a huge but ever-changing megastructure: the Plug-In City. This contained no buildings in the traditional sense but 'frameworks' into which standardised components could be slotted. Functions were not fulfilled by forms any longer, but by mechanical and electronic 'services'."⁷¹

The tenor of Archigram was very much in favour of consumerism, expendability, ephemerality:

⁷⁰ Peter Blundell Jones in Contemporary Architects. Muriel Emanuel (editor), London 1980, p.359.

⁷¹ William J.R. Curtis op.cit., pp.324-5.

"The city was seen not as architecture (hardware), but as people in their 'situations' (software)... in this sense 'the house, the whole city and the frozen pea pack are all the same'. Not only are they expendable, but they are all products which interact with man on the same level, the situation."⁷²

It was also against the 'heroicism', love of nature, and high idealism of much previous architecture. And the presentation of its ideas - both visually and verbally - reflected these positive and negative aspects. "It's all the same," wrote Archigram's David Greene.

"The joint between God-nodes and you, eat-nodes and you, is the same. Theoretically one node could service the lot. There's no need to move. Cool it baby! Be comfortable. Godburgers, sexburgers, hamburgers. The node just plugged into a giant needery. You sit there and need - we do the rest. Green stamps given."⁷³

When the first Archigram broadsheet appeared in 1961, it was discernible as a response to a climate of thought which accepted the philosophy and iconography of popular culture as equally important as any other strata of culture, a concept which the Independent Group had helped to establish. But in the specific case of Archigram, the connection with the Independent Group was more concrete. A number of the architects who founded Archigram frequented the ICA and were directly influenced by some of the Independent Group inspired events there. Ron Herron, for example, visited Parallel of Life and Art and was "knocked out by it", as he "was later by the Whitechapel This is

⁷² Charles Jencks, op.cit., p.288.

⁷³ David Greene in Archigram 8, 1968. Quoted in Charles Jencks, ibid., p.297.

Tomorrow..."⁷⁴ Indeed, Herron's use of collage in his architectural drawings

"...wasn't through Dada; I only became aware of it immediately I'd seen the Hamilton's. And his Just What is it... is a great favourite of mine."⁷⁵

Other important connections also existed: Peter Smithson taught Peter Cook at the Architectural Association School between 1958 and 1960; Warren Chalk's brother, Michael, was at the Royal College of Art in the same year as Richard Smith, and the issues of Ark which Roger Coleman edited were circulated around the future Archigram architects. Ron Herron recalled,

"The Smithsons wrote that lovely piece... 'But Today, We Collect Ads'... We were absorbing like mad from AD and Ark."⁷⁶

The other important influence upon Archigram was Buckminster Fuller. Here too, via John McHale, there were connections with the Independent Group. His book about Fuller appeared in 1962, about the time that Archigram was beginning to make an impact, although he had written authoritative pieces on Fuller for Architectural Design in 1960 and 1961. Indeed, when Banham wrote about Archigram and other similar groups' journals (Polygon, Clip-kit, Megascope), he noted their "constant preoccupation... with far-out figures like Buckminster Fuller..."⁷⁷ Banham himself also played a key role in Archigram's development. When the fourth Archigram broadsheet appeared in 1964,

⁷⁴ Ron Herron interviewed by the author 10 January 1983.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Peter Reyner Banham 'Zoom Wave Hits Architecture' New Society 3 March 1966. Reprinted in Penny Sparke (editor) Design by Choice London, 1981, p.64.

Peter Cook, who lived opposite Banham in Aberdare Gardens, Hampstead, gave him a number of copies. Banham was ready to leave for the States on a two year Graham Foundation Scholarship and took Archigram 4 with him, thus helping to spread their concepts to a bigger audience.⁷⁸

In its early years, Archigram's most efficacious publicity was the exhibition held at the ICA called The Living City. "Our belief in the City as a unique organism underlies the whole project," wrote Peter Cook. He also paid homage to the debt that he and his colleagues owed to This is Tomorrow:

"...it was clear that the architects [of TIT] had not only moved well away from the white-walled classic-modern of Mars, but had also rid themselves of the morality of 'people's architecture' and were free to enjoy indulging in an art show. Here too were the signs of the positive influences upon the hip architecture - culture of the fifties: Brutalism and Americana."⁷⁹

Indeed, James Meller, who was the ICA's Assistant Director when The Living City exhibition was being held,⁸⁰ recalled,

"...there were curious overlaps... This is Tomorrow, which was the same time and same people and so on as the Independent Group... in 'sixty-two or whatever it was, the Archigram people appeared and they did that Living City. But for me anyway, that almost began to feel like This is Tomorrow revisited..."⁸¹

That Archigram was to some degree influenced by the Independent

⁷⁸ This is related by Ron Herron, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Peter Cook. 'Introduction to The Living City', Living Arts, No.2, 1963, p.71.

⁸⁰ The exhibition was held in June 1963.

⁸¹ James Meller, *op.cit.*

Group is certain. The connections with Peter Smithson, the ICA, Ark, Banham, and so on, are too numerous. Furthermore, the architects of Archigram would willingly admit this influence. But the contemporary manifestation of Pop Art is more difficult to link with earlier events at the ICA.

Pop Art was originally the name given to paintings by a number of artists who exhibited in the 1961 Young Contemporaries show. The painters were "for a while sufficiently cohesive to be regarded as a 'movement' in a real sense,"⁶² and this conception of them was reinforced by their appearance in the 1961 John Moores' Liverpool exhibition, the 1962 Image in Revolt at the Grabowski Gallery, the 1963 Paris Biennale of Young Artists and the film Pop Goes the Easel, made by Ken Russell in February 1962 and screened by the BBC on 25 March.

In the 1961 Young Contemporaries exhibition, works such as David Hockney's First Tea Painting and Doll Boy, Allen Jones' The Artist Thinking About Fire, Ron Kitaj's The Bells of Hell Go Ting-a-Ling-a-Ling, and Peter Phillips' Bingo, typified the early phase of British Pop Art: figurative and in part derived from popular culture and mass media. This exhibition was run by two of the so-called Pop artists - Peter Phillips was president of the exhibition, Allen Jones its secretary; and the jury which helped select the works included two ex-members of the Independent Group, William Turnbull and Lawrence Alloway. Indeed, Alloway suggested to the Royal College students that they exhibit as a group shortly before the exhibition opened,⁶³

⁶² Michael Compton Pop Art, London 1970, p.52.

⁶³ Noted by Marco Livingstone 'Young Contemporaries at the RCA 1959-62. Derek Boshier, David Hockney, Allen Jones, R.B.Kitaj, Peter Phillips'. Unpublished MA Report. Courtauld Institute of Art. May 1976.

presumably since their work had similarities in subject-matter and general style. Indeed, Alloway wrote in the catalogue:

"A group, seen here for the first time, is of artists (mainly at the Royal College) who connect their art with the city. They do so, not by painting factory chimneys or queues (a reference to an earlier college group, called by David Sylvester the Kitchen Sink School), but by using typical products and objects, including the technique of graffiti and imagery of mass communications. For these artists the creative act is nourished on the urban environment they have always lived in. The impact of popular art is present, but checked by puzzles and paradoxes about the play of signs at different levels of signification in their work, which combines real objects, same-size representation, sketchy notation, and writing."⁸⁴

Since Alloway was present at the 1961 Young Contemporaries, since Turnbull was also there, and since the Royal College of Art had earlier been influenced by Independent Group ideas via Ark, it would seem that connections could be made between the work of Phillips, Boshier, Jones, et al., and the Independent Group. Indeed, this is often the case⁸⁵, but unlike Archigram, the Pop artists did not have specific links with the Group and later went out of their way to deny

⁸⁴ Lawrence Alloway in Young Contemporaries 1961. RBA Galleries, London, 8-25 February 1961. Quoted in Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.53.

⁸⁵ Most accounts of Pop Art follow on from Alloway's 1966 essay 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) Pop Art, London, 1966, which is itself based upon earlier articles. This is the account of Pop which, simply, runs from the Independent Group, through Smith and Blake at the RCA and the Scroope Group, to the 1961 Young Contemporaries. Nearly all references to the Independent Group and Pop Art take this line, eg. Peter and Linda Murray The Penguin Dictionary of Art and Artists, Harmondsworth, 1984 (reprint), p.326; The Phaidon Dictionary of Twentieth Century Art. Oxford 1973, pp.303-4, and many others. A more detailed discussion of this interpretation is to be found on pp.391-97.

any direct influence.

It is hard to believe that the 1961 Young Contemporaries were not influenced by the Independent Group, but without doubt, they were not. This is despite Alloway's presence at the exhibition and despite both Richard Hamilton and Edward Wright teaching at the Royal College at the time. That the Independent Group were the fathers of Pop is a slightly different proposition which is discussed later; direct links are the concern here.

Hamilton had been teaching in the RCA's Interior Design Department since 1957, Edward Wright began as a tutor in the Graphic Design Department the previous year. Neither had any influence upon the later Pop artists. In fact, the testimony of the Pop artists as to their lack of knowledge of the Independent Group and its members is substantial. David Hockney recalled meeting Hamilton:

"The students used to organise what they called sketch clubs: they'd put up one or two paintings and they'd get somebody from outside, an artist, to come in and talk about the work. And I remember Richard Hamilton was invited. Nobody knew much about him although he was actually teaching in the College, in the School of interior design. Nobody knew his work much. We knew it later but not then. He came and talked about the pictures, and they gave out little prizes of two or three pounds. He gave a prize to Ron [Kitaj] and a prize to me..."⁸⁶

Similarly, Allen Jones noted that he remembered having heard Hamilton's name in connection with Duchamp's Green Box but

⁸⁶David Hockney David Hockney by David Hockney, London 1976, pp.42-3.

"at that time I couldn't work out whether the name Hamilton was the same as Donald Hamilton Fraser who was also teaching and painting. I just didn't know who was who."⁶⁷

Peter Phillips also had only "vaguely heard of" Hamilton; "I never knew him," he recalled,

"I met Hamilton I think in 1962. He wasn't around London from what I can remember. I didn't even know of him."⁶⁸

In 1954, whilst he was still at school and writing a thesis, Phillips did meet Alloway; he met him again in 1959 at the Young Contemporaries of that year (an event discussed at the ICA by Coleman, del Renzio and Peter Smithson on 10 March 1959) but on neither occasion, nor at the 1961 Young Contemporaries, were Alloway's activities discussed. "One never really talked with him about things he'd done," recalled Phillips.⁶⁹

If the Pop artists did not know the members of the Independent Group, neither did they know of their activities. Group discussions had usually been to an invited audience, thus excluding the possibility of any direct influence other than upon the inner circle of the Independent Group, as it were. At any rate, when the Group was meeting - 1952-55 - the so-called Pop artists were still at or had only just left secondary school. Even when the Independent Group ideas found their way into the ICA programme during later years, it is highly unlikely any of the younger men attended: Phillips was in Birmingham until 1959, Hockney in Bradford, Boshier in Portsmouth, and

⁶⁷ Allen Jones interviewed by Marco Livingstone 15 March 1976, in Marco Livingstone, op.cit., p.A24.

⁶⁸ Peter Phillips interviewed by Marco Livingstone 4 March 1976, in Marco Livingstone, op.cit., p.A7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.A8.

Kitaj in the U.S. Army. Only Allen Jones was in London during the crucial period when Independent Group activity was at its height of influence in the ICA programme, and he was not aware of this. In 1965 he commented:

"... [the ICA] was just a little beacon in the blackness and wasn't known outside a very small community. It wasn't enough to generate the kind of response that would create its own critical self-awareness and out of that, critics... I was unaware that this [activity at the ICA] was going on..."⁹⁰

Furthermore, none of the Pop artists saw This is Tomorrow. Phillips "did not even know it existed",⁹¹ Jones simply did not remember the show.⁹² Even if they had seen it, its influence would have been limited since only the Hamilton-McHale-Voelcker exhibit used pop materials in a direct way; and even those who did see it and were later influenced, such as Archigram's Ron Herron,

"found it difficult to put into... architectural terms [his own concern], so it was easier to handle even the Smithsons' patio and shed and the Paolozzi things than the McHale things."⁹³

Perhaps the one area where Independent Group ideas might have filtered through to the younger Pop Art generation was via Ark, but this too is not the case. Phillips only remembers seeing something by Alloway in Ark, Jones remembers the magazine but not in relation to specific articles.⁹⁴ By the time the Pop artists-to-be entered the

⁹⁰ Bruce Glaser 'Three British Artists in New York', Studio International, Vol.170 No.871 November 1965, p.180.

⁹¹ Marco Livingstone, op.cit., p.A7.

⁹² Ibid., p.A24.

⁹³ Ron Herron, op.cit.

⁹⁴ Marco Livingstone op.cit., pp.A8 and A23. Derek Boshier however, cont'd...

RCA in 1959, the Coleman edited issues of Ark were a thing of the past. Coleman himself is sure that they did not see copies of the magazine and were not very interested in later issues either. "I can see they weren't very interested in reading..." he said.⁹⁵ And Laurie Fricker, who was the ICA's assistant to the Director at the time of Jones, Hockney, Boshier, Phillips and Kitaj's rise to success, stated that

"they didn't know a damn thing about the Independent Group... The only person whom they might have had anything to do with at all was Peter Blake."⁹⁶

However, even the influence of Blake is questionable; Peter Phillips, for example, did not see Blake's work until he exhibited at the Portal Gallery in 1960. He remembered,

"I think I went to see this and it was interesting... but at the time of the initial development [of Pop Art] we had never heard of Peter Blake, and by that time, one's commitment is already made."⁹⁷

"In England everybody claims autonomy," Lawrence Alloway wrote, "at least retrospectively even when it shrinks their work from representativeness to foible."⁹⁸ This may be the case, but it is also

cont'd.

remembers reading a copy of Ark 18 when he arrived at the RCA, since old copies were being sold off (Marco Livingstone, *ibid.*, p.A43). An example of the source material used by the RCA students is given by Boshier in his interview with Marco Livingstone, where he notes the influence of such books as Vance Packard's The Hidden Persuaders and The Status Seekers, Galbraith's The Affluent Society, McLuhan's The Mechanical Bride, and Boorstin's The Image.

⁹⁵ Roger Coleman 1983, *op.cit.*

⁹⁶ Laurie Fricker, *op.cit.*

⁹⁷ Marco Livingstone, *op.cit.*, pp.A7-A8.

⁹⁸ Lawrence Alloway. Letter to the author 13 May 1983.

true that even if the Pop artists were autonomous of Independent Group influence, some ex-members of the Group have, later, claimed influence. Alloway's interpretation of the development of Pop Art is certainly meant to show how the Independent Group influenced the Pop artists, even to mentioning Hamilton's presence as a teacher at the Royal College. He does however, also stress the important influence of Ron Kitaj.⁹⁹ Toni del Renzio also claimed Group influence upon Pop Art and noted that Group members lectured at the RCA.¹⁰⁰ And Peter Reyner Banham's film The Fathers of Pop strongly hints at an influence:

"This free form approach was something the Independent Group passed on to the next generation, to the young Pop painters at the Royal College of Art and their mouthpiece, the magazine Ark. They made us the fathers of Pop by asking us to write for the magazine, the first people to take us seriously. We shouldn't claim too much influence however, because they were an incredibly talented lot."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹"Both Paolozzi and Hamilton, incidentally, had short-term teaching jobs at the Royal College of Art, which was the chief source of the second phase of Pop Art." Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., pp.41-3. Hamilton did teach at the College but, as we have seen, he had little or no influence. Paolozzi did not teach at the College until 1968. Alloway credits Hamilton and Paolozzi as "the influence upon Phillips, Jones, Boshier and maybe earlier Hockney." (Lawrence Alloway 1983, op.cit.)

¹⁰⁰Toni del Renzio mentions this in 'Style, Technique and Iconography', Art and Artists, Vol.11, No.4, July 1976, p.35. He also mentioned it in an interview with the author on 23 February 1984: "...Alloway was there. I can't remember who else. There were several things of that sort that occurred in various ways. We would have been talking about what was still regarded as newish which would have been action painting and variants of that sort of painterly abstraction... It may even have been before [Coleman was doing Ark]... We may have gone again when Dick Smith and Peter Blake were there. But they were already a new wave in the Royal College; I think we'd gone earlier... We'd also taken part in one or two discussions at the Courtauld with students; and at the Slade or some place like that in which Slade students and Courtauld students were meeting and discussing... these were in the early and mid-'fifties... my memory of those things was that we were there talking very much about what was happening in painting."

¹⁰¹Peter Reyner Banham on Soundtrack for the Arts Council film Fathers of Pop 1979.

Banham's interpretation, albeit simplified for the film, jumps a generation at the Royal College; it amalgamates the Smith/Denny/Blake generation with the Hockney/Boshier/Phillips/Jones generation, and assigns to Ark the influential role as the principal communicator of Independent Group ideas.

An assessment of these interpretations of the role of the Independent Group in relation to Pop Art is essential in determining the importance of the Group. This assessment will be carried out but for the present it is only necessary to indicate that although direct links between the Independent Group and the Pop artists are difficult to make, the more general influences of creating a climate in which such a phenomenon as Pop Art could develop, and altering perceptions about fine and popular art, can certainly be ascribed to the Group.

Although it was completely autonomous of the ICA and although it was six years after the Independent Group had stopped holding meetings, the International Union of Architects Congress (held during the Summer of 1961), provided an opportunity for a number of architects, artists, sculptors, designers and manufacturers - amongst them ex-members of the Independent Group - to work together. The major theme of the Congress was the influence of materials and techniques on architecture, and it manifested itself as two temporary buildings consisting of exhibition areas, offices, and entrance hall. The buildings were constructed on London's South Bank, next to the Festival Hall, and consisted of a 240 x 48 ft. rectangle of two courtyards and two covered areas. In charge of the organisation of the Congress was Theo Crosby - the man who had organised This is Tomorrow and whose influence had made Architectural Design such an important transmitter of Independent Group ideas. "I had stumbled on the job," he wrote,

"and through the generosity of Sir Robert Matthews it grew into two temporary buildings on the site of the 1951 Festival's Dome of Discovery. It was an opportunity to put some Art in Architecture theory into practice."¹⁰²

In some respects, the concept of the IUA Congress was connected to Independent Group concerns, notably the fusing of art and architecture - breaking down barriers between disciplines - and the idea of the building as a piece of expendable architecture. At the time, Crosby wrote:

"The exhibition building demonstrates the plight of the architect in an increasingly mechanised building industry. He becomes a manipulator of prefabricated parts; his building is a collage of bits and pieces and he shows his inventiveness by taking some parts from technologies not strictly his own - in this case, scaffolding and polythene.

The relation of works of art to the architecture follows the same collage principle. The courts at the ends of the buildings... for spaces to house a collection... the west court was, in collaboration with Lawrence Alloway, given to three 'situationist' painters: Peter Stroud, Bernard Cohen and John Plumb. They worked very closely together, materials being provided by Cape Building Products Ltd.. Sculptures by Eduardo Paolozzi, William Turnbull and Theo Crosby were placed in the court... The artists (in the east court) were chosen for their ideological affinities to the subject of the adjacent exhibition: The Architecture of Technology. Each treats the relation of Man/Machine in a different way: Richard Hamilton as

¹⁰²Theo Crosby 'The Painter as Designer' in Edward Wright. Graphic Work and Painting Arts Council 1985 p.50.

a complex of visual and mechanical allusions, John McHale as a formal puzzle..."¹⁰³

As well as the artists mentioned by Crosby, there were others like Anthony Hill, Gillian Wise, Mary and Kenneth Martin, Robert Adams and Anthony Caro. Also contributing were Edward Wright, who designed the typography - including a 'word wall', 240 feet long by 12 feet high - and Frank Newby, who acted as the engineer for the aluminium roof structure.

Architecturally, the building was described as "a temporary structure of some significance" although "it leaked like a sieve during the torrential downpours of that summer..."¹⁰⁴ In relation to the Independent Group, it provided an opportunity for some of the ex-members to exhibit work together in "a much tighter collaboration"¹⁰⁵ than This is Tomorrow had been, although the work at the IUA Congress displayed far less innovation than shown in TIT. Perhaps the IUA did not provide as good an opportunity, perhaps its parameters were too confining, or perhaps the ex-members of the Independent Group were no longer able to supply such meaningful contributions, were no longer the avant-garde.

Whatever the case, at the conference on 'The Integration of the Arts' held at the IUA building on 20 July, Lawrence Alloway lost none of his old trenchant invective. Laurie Fricker recalled:

"...Lawrence had already decided exactly how that debate was

¹⁰³Theo Crosby 'International Union of Architects Congress Building. South Bank, London. Architectural Design Vol.31 No.11 November 1961, p.486.

¹⁰⁴Dennis Sharp A Visual History of Twentieth Century Architecture, London 1972, p.247.

¹⁰⁵Theo Crosby 1985, op.cit., p.50.

going to go. He didn't like Maxwell Fry [or] Alan Bowness... it was when one of the patrons... Tony Dennison, Managing Director of Cape Building Asbestos... said he thought that it had been a wonderful opportunity for artists to mess about with materials... Lawrence lashed at him and said, 'It would seem that every man is an island unto himself, as long as it's made of Cape Building Asbestos'... And [later] I passed him a note saying, do you think you ought to offer a vote of thanks to anybody, and he said, 'I think Alan Bowness has already done that three times.'"¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶Laurie Fricker, op.cit.

9. 1962 and Beyond - Myths Created and Myths Modified

By 1962, if not before, the Independent Group was history. Although it had stopped holding meetings in 1955, its influence upon the ICA programme, upon Ark, Architectural Design, upon the approach of the Scroope Group, Archigram and even, in a less direct way, the Pop artists, was such that its importance was greater then than it had been when it actually existed. The attempts to 're-convene' the Group in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties perhaps indicate this. Furthermore, until about 1962, most of those people who had been associated with the Independent Group were very much in evidence at the ICA. But during the early 'sixties they frequented the ICA less, or they moved away completely. Lawrence Alloway, as mentioned before, took up the post as Curator of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in July 1962. This was important because it marked a definite shift in the ICA's course. Alloway had been particularly influential in organising the programme, often including events which were directly related to Independent Group concerns of previous years, and so his departure signalled the end of an era in the ICA's history. During the seven years he had been Assistant Director, his influence could be detected in the programme's overt preference for the modern, the technological, and the American. After he left, these subjects appeared with less frequency.

The withdrawal of the Independent Group from the ICA can also be charted in the changing careers of its other members and associates. John McHale left for the United States in 1962 to establish a programme on 'World Resources Inventory for Human Trends and Needs' at Carbondale's Southern Illinois University with Buckminster Fuller. Peter Reyner Banham's Theory and Design in the First Machine Age was published in 1960 and in 1964 he went to the States on a scholarship

for two years, later moving permanently to the State University of New York at Buffalo. Roger Coleman resigned from the ICA's exhibitions committee in May 1962, and was replaced by Robyn Denny. And by January 1963 Toni del Renzio had moved to Paris. The architects of the Group - Alison and Peter Smithson, Colin St. John Wilson, and even James Stirling who might be included - were all successfully running their own offices by the early 'sixties. The Smithson for example, were working on a number of projects, including the Economist Building in St. James' which they began in 1960; Colin St. John Wilson was working with Leslie Martin and in 1962 built Harvey Court for Caius College, Cambridge; Stirling had begun work on his Engineering Building at Leicester University in 1959. Of the painters and sculptors, Henderson had withdrawn from the ICA milieu some years before; the financial and critical disappointment of his 1960 ICA exhibition was followed by "a depressed period though he continued to do quite a substantial amount of work."¹ Eduardo Paolozzi's international reputation was growing quickly. He won the David E. Bright Foundation award at the 30th Venice Biennale for the Best Sculptor under forty-five in 1960; he began a period of teaching at the Stättliche Hochschule für bildende Kunst, Hamburg in the same year; and in 1961 he won the Watson F. Blair prize at the 64th Annual American Exhibition in Chicago. Like Paolozzi, William Turnbull was exhibiting fairly regularly and gaining a reputation which gradually led him away from the ICA. He was still teaching at the Central School of Arts and Crafts² but he had a number of one man exhibitions, two at the Molton Gallery, London in 1960 and 1961, and then in 1963, his sculpture was shown in New York and Detroit. Richard Hamilton still continued to teach in the Fine Art department

¹ Anne Seymour 'Notes Towards a Chronology Based on a Conversation with the Artist' in Nigel Henderson. Paintings, Collages, and Photographs. Anthony d'Offay, London 1977. No page numbers.

² Until 1961, and then from 1964.

at the University of Newcastle, and was teaching at the Royal College until 1961. He too was gaining a reputation which was eventually to draw him away from the ICA; in 1960 he received the William and Norma Copley Foundation award for painting, and in the same year his typographic version of Duchamp's Green Box was published. However, it was not until his 1964 exhibition at the Hanover Gallery³ that he established his reputation as a painter.

In late 1962 Terry Hamilton was killed in a car accident. The event was sadly symbolic of the end of Independent Group activity. Although Terry Hamilton like the other women connected with the Group - Magda Cordell and Mary Banham - had not taken a central role, she was an important contributor. Donald Holms recalled that at ICA meetings

"...she always would sit in the audience with [Richard Hamilton] if he was not speaking... or she would sit alone in the audience if he was among one of the speakers. But she was just totally charming..."⁴

In an obituary in the ICA Bulletin, Peter Reyner Banham wrote of her:

"Long service in the fighting front row at ICA discussions must be one of Terry Hamilton's more obvious memorials; to that battle-group of hecklers, tactical titterers, conspicuous note-passers, and hip humourists, she contributed also a capacity for shrewd and persistent needling that would finally wring out protestations, admissions and recantations that shed real light

³ Held between 20 October and 20 November 1964. In the exhibition were his collage Just what is it...?, Hommage à Chrysler Corp, Hers is a Lush Situation, \$he, Pin Up, Glorious Techniculture, and other post 1961 works.

⁴ Donald Holms interviewed by the author, 9 June 1982.

on the subject under examination. To this she brought the same stabbing relish and hundred percent commitment that she also gave at various times to Pop Art and Nuclear Disarmament, to the friendship of men as different as Benn Levy and Tomas Maldonado, to Richard Hamilton's exhibits and projects, and to persuading other people to commit themselves as deeply as herself. For some time to come the ICA activities will be haunted by a cavity the shape of a real sharp girl, and the echo of a 22-carat stereo laugh."⁵

Without Alloway, McHale, and del Renzio, without Terry Hamilton, Paolozzi, and the Smithsons, the ICA programme began to change. During 1962, of those associated with the Independent Group, Hamilton appeared at official ICA evenings only five times, Banham twice, and McHale and Turnbull once. The following year, Richard Hamilton appeared on the ICA stage only twice, Paolozzi and Banham once. Other ex-members of the Group were not involved in ICA activities during these and later years - this in sharp contrast to their exposure during the 'fifties.

After he left for Illinois, John McHale had a retrospective exhibition of his work, together with paintings by Magda Cordell, in September 1962, and the removal of Alloway's influence was marked by only two American exhibitions during 1962 and 1963.⁶ Both Larry Rivers and Marshall McLuhan spoke at the ICA in May 1962 and June 1963 respectively, and the young British Pop artists were much in evidence with talks and exhibitions, but generally the type of events which the Independent Group had sponsored were becoming noticeably fewer.

⁵ ICA Bulletin No.122, December 1962.

⁶ These were The Impact of American Sculpture, which opened on 13 December 1962, and The Popular Image of the United States, which opened on 23 October 1963.

Indeed, ex-members of the Independent Group had moved on, and with them their themes and interests and ideas. However, with the demise of the Independent Group, it did not simply pass into history but rather, was made into history. The process of historicising and mythicising the Group began almost immediately.

On 11 November 1963 Peter Reyner Banham delivered the first Terry Hamilton Memorial Lecture at the ICA. Entitled 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist', this lecture sought to reconcile the enjoyment of popular culture (notably American) with left-wing political principles. In doing this Banham described his own upbringing in Norfolk:

"...the working class is where I come from... [and] the cultural background against which I grew up was a very curious one indeed... The live culture, the culture in which we were involved, was American pulps, things like Mechanix Illustrated and comic books... and the penny pictures on Saturday mornings..."⁷

Then he proposed that because his cultural background was essentially American pop, this might be at odds with his "left-oriented, even protest-oriented" political doctrine, and he defined Terry Hamilton, and by inference the Independent Group, as

"...people whose lightweight culture was American in derivation, and yet, in spite of that, were and are, of the left, of the protesting sections of the public. It gives us," Banham continued, "a curious set of divided loyalties. We dig Pop which

⁷ Peter Reyner Banham 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist', Living Arts No.3 April 1964, pp.91-7. Reprinted in Penny Sparke (editor) Design by Choice. London 1981, p.84.

is acceptance-culture, capitalistic, and yet in our formal politics, if I may use the phrase, most of us belong very firmly on the other side. I remember John McHale saying to Magda Cordell once, 'If we go on voting Labour like this we shall destroy our own livelihood'... That's the way this particular split of loyalties struck many people."⁸

Banham went on to describe how popular culture could be enjoyed without repudiating any left-wing political beliefs, and he concluded:

"Pop is now so basic to the way we live and the world we live in, that to be with it, to dig the Pop scene, does not commit anyone to Left or Right, nor to protest or acceptance of the society we live in. It has become the common language, musical, visual and (increasingly) literary, by which members of the mechanised urban culture of the westernised countries can communicate with one another in the most direct, lively and meaningful manner."⁹

Banham's lecture was to provide future historians and critics with an interpretation of the Independent Group which has remained unquestioned until recently.¹⁰ But this interpretation, which assumes the Independent Group took a specific position partly as a consequence of their social background, is not as all-embracing as Banham would have us believe. By inference, he sets the Independent Group as working class in origin. For Paolozzi, Turnbull, Hamilton, and Banham himself, this might be the case, but it must be qualified by the fact that when the Group began meeting in 1952, Banham was

⁸ Ibid., p.85.

⁹ Ibid., p.89.

¹⁰ See Anne Massey and Penny Sparke 'The Myth of the Independent Group'. Blok No.10, 1985, pp. 48-56.

about to begin research for a Ph.D. and Turnbull, Hamilton and Paolozzi had all attended the Slade School of Art - hardly a working class establishment. A look at the background of the other members of the Group shows that their origins were not working class. The Smithsons had both attended the University of Durham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, to study architecture; Nigel Henderson attended Stowe School, his father was the son of Lord Faringdon, his mother worked for John Rodker, Nancy Cunard and later, Peggy Guggenheim. Edward Wright's father was a diplomat with the Ecuadorian Legation, Colin St. John Wilson's father was the Bishop of Chelmsford and Lawrence Alloway's father owned his own bookshop. Thus, when Banham proposed that the Independent Group "...were mostly elementary schoolboys and a fairly rough lot"¹¹, Richard Hamilton qualified this with a more realistic assessment of the Group as "a very mixed lot."¹² And when asked whether the Independent Group was partly concerned with a class struggle, John McHale was genuinely surprised by the suggestion: "I don't know in what way," he answered,

"I could never discern that because it never came up in discussions particularly."¹³

Banham also asserted that the Independent Group was "left-orientated, even protest-orientated" but, as we have already seen, the actual political motivation amongst Group members was limited. Only Richard and Terry Hamilton involved themselves in any active political

¹¹ Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with Richard Hamilton 27 June 1976. Unedited tape recording for Arts Council film The Fathers of Pop. 1979, though not used in the film. Alloway also appears to have taken the line that the Independent Group was from working class origins. In the soundtrack of Arts Council, ibid., he says to Banham: "...you must have been Dr. Banham around that time but the rest of us had little education; we were all non-university people."

¹² Richard Hamilton in soundtrack to Arts Council, ibid.

¹³ John McHale in conversation with Julian Cooper 19 November 1979, for Arts Council, ibid., though not used in the film.

stance."¹⁴ Toni del Renzio recalls:

"...on some occasion or other, making a criticism of Harold Macmillan [to the Group, and] it fell flat. It didn't even get... any reaction."¹⁵

Even the basic tenet of Banham's Terry Hamilton Memorial Lecture - the compatibility of American pop with left wing politics - was an issue which apparently did not touch some members of the Independent Group. Magda Cordell and John McHale thought that this issue might have become important in retrospect but that it was never discussed during the Independent Group's existence. However, both Peter Reyner Banham and Mary Banham recalled it being an important issue at their house in Primrose Hill on more than one occasion, and felt that Terry Hamilton in particular had a certain compunction about liking things which came directly from the capitalist system of which she did not approve.¹⁶ And of course, it was enough of an issue for Banham to make it the subject of the 1963 lecture.

With Archigram and the RCA students and the arrival of Lichtenstein, Warhol, Wesselmann and the other American Pop artists on the British art scene, the whole issue of Pop (meaning fine art) and pop (meaning popular art) came into question. Banham was at pains to point out in his 1963 ICA lecture that there was some reaction in the art and architecture world to the Pop movement:

"It's interesting to see how many architects who at one time were with the Pop scene, have in their various ways resigned or

¹⁴ The political leanings of the Group have been discussed on p.102 ff..

¹⁵ Toni del Renzio interviewed by the author 17 March 1982.

¹⁶ Conversation between Peter Reyner Banham, Mary Banham, John McHale and Magda Cordell McHale, 30 May 1977, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

withdrawn from it."

And again,

"...people like Sir Hugh Casson, for instance, who were very keen and with it when Pop was new and jolly fun are pulling back rather cautiously now because they feel they've opened up Pandora's Box and are not quite sure what's coming out."

And also,

"I think David Hockney's hair-do's were enough of a shock to make the Royal College of Art terrified that Pop might spread to industrial design and areas like that where it would cease to be jolly fun again."¹⁷

The Independent Group's interest in popular art might have been stimulated by the experiences of their formative years, and their politics might have been to the left, but these issues are open to dispute. Less contentious however, is the observation that the Group took popular culture seriously and did not think of it as just "new and jolly fun". In this sense, they were culturally left wing; and here was the importance of the Independent Group. By accepting the products of popular art and of technology as being as intrinsically valuable as the products of fine art, the Independent Group challenged the existing stance of the cultural establishment. Thus, it is not surprising that with their beliefs challenged, the establishment struck back. Basil Taylor, for instance, criticised Independent Group manifestations as "sophisticated meddling with unsophisticated tastes"¹⁸ and the Group themselves as "bastards of two cultures; that is... influenced by Americans and [losing their] birthright and... sinking

¹⁷ Peter Reyner Banham 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist' in Penny Sparke (editor), op.cit., p.88.

¹⁸ Quoted in Peter Reyner Banham 'Who Is This 'Pop'?' Motif No.10, Winter 1962, p.13.

in the Atlantic somewhere." ¹⁹ But the Group argued that popular culture was not at all unsophisticated and that America offered the best example of this.

From the point of view of existing standards, the Group was iconoclastic in that they destroyed - symbolically - the pyramid of taste which put fine art at the apex, popular art at the base. However, from another point of view, the Independent Group members extended the range of art by stretching this pyramid into a line where fine and popular art co-existed at different points - the 'fine art/pop art continuum' - and so they were icon-builders. Furthermore, they were also iconologists, for they studied the images and interpreted the symbolism. Indeed, their study of the symbolism of popular culture - most clearly understood in their discussions on advertising, car styling and the movies - led them to believe that the consumer, like themselves, was capable of understanding the products of technology and popular culture. In this, they echoed the beliefs of the American sociologist David Riesman, whose book The Lonely Crowd was published in 1950 and was known to some Independent Group members. Like him, many of the Group had an idealised view of technology, especially the mass media, which they saw as a reflection of what people desired, rather than influencing people to desire something they did not really want. The argument, such as it was, went something like this: the manufacturer uses market research to gauge what the consumer wants and then uses the mass media to market the product, which is therefore a fulfilment of consumer desires. To this was added the concept that increased automation created both more and better products, and increased leisure time created increased spending power. Such economics in the unemployment haunted 1980s is fiction,

¹⁹ Quoted by Lawrence Alloway in 'Artists As Consumers - The Splendid Bargain' in the series Art - Anti-Art BBC. Third Programme. Recorded 16 February 1960, broadcast 11 March 1960.

but in the optimistic and economically expanding 1950s, there was a positive logic in Riesman's ideas. Not all the Independent Group were as infatuated with such notions as Banham and Alloway sometimes appear to have been, and even Banham and Alloway themselves were not simplistic enough to believe that this explanation was the only one, though they thought that in time it could be. They were certainly convinced in the role of the consumer as one who was 'knowing' in the way that they thought they were.²⁰

Underlying this whole idea was the desire of some members of the Independent Group to replace the pre-war ideal - the Paris Moderne - with a new model based on the signs, symbols and images of consumerism. In Britain this was a radical step, since modernism itself had only a foothold, the so-called Contemporary Style being preferred in the immediate post-war years, and this attitude was boosted by the Festival of Britain. Thus, the Independent Group were well ahead of the mainstream of modern artists and designers in challenging the established beliefs. Le Corbusier's proposals for permanent standards in Vers une architecture, and his declaration that the International Style could accommodate changes in materials and construction was directly challenged by the Independent Group. "The Group's major objection to Le Corbusier's theory of design," Anne Massey wrote,

"was that no Platonic, universal criterion of taste could exist, particularly at a time of rapidly changing technology and an even faster rate of change in style and fashion."²¹

²⁰ These ideas and the connection with Riesman are made by Anne Massey in 'The Independent Group as Design Theorists' in From Spitfire to Microchip, London 1985, pp.54-7

²¹ Ibid., p.55.

Thus, the Group proposed an ever-changing aesthetic which was based upon the mass market and technology, part of which included the concept of expendability. In this respect, they saw themselves as pioneers. By advancing pop art within a continuum of all artistic manifestation, and thus giving it an equal status, they hoped to change the universalist abstraction of Modernism.

Expendability and rapid change were concepts which the Independent Group gleaned from popular culture. Richard Hamilton noted this in a lecture given in 1960:

"...in car design there are so few areas where increased efficiency of operation would encourage the high obsolescence rate necessary to keep production resources operating that artificial stimulators for rapid turnover have been found. The main method for promoting change is body styling, so the automobile coach-building industry uses the technique of haute couture. The same attitude is to be found in the major appliance industries now; some small engineering advances occur in refrigerator design, but the main effort at promoting regular change is made in restyling the box at regular intervals to stimulate the idea in prospective purchasers that the fridge they have at home is out-of-date and they themselves will be out-of-date if they do not change it."

Having proposed such explanations for change, he launched a scathing attack on those who did not accept proposed change but clung to existing values:

"This is the situation that has come about and it has occurred in the face of many doom prophecies from some very eminent

diagnosticians of cultural ills. In the design world the warnings have recurred since the early days of the Industrial Revolution, but it seems to me that the philosophers and designers who laid the basis for the machine age aesthetic need, today, to have their tenets questioned. They may have been wrong, at least when they reached such extremes as in this comparatively recent quotation from Lewis Mumford's Art and Technics: 'Once we have advanced the right form for a type-object, it should keep that form for the next generation, or for the next thousand years. Indeed, we should be ready to accept further variations only when some radical change in the conditions of life has come about - changes have nothing to do with the self-indulgent caprices of men or the pressures of the market... the ideal goal for machine production is that of static perfection, a world of immobile platonic forms, as it were a world of crystalline fixity, rather than continual change or flux.'

Hamilton called this quotation a "cold expression of the death-wish."²² Mumford's attitude was indeed extreme, but it rather summed up what the Independent Group was against. Not only did such a stance seem out-dated, it was without vitality and completely divorced from the reality of mid-twentieth century life.

Mumford clearly stood for the entrenched ideas of the establishment, the values which originated in the pre-war world of Mondrian and Corbusier and Bugatti, where a universal, unchanging ideal was the ultimate objective of the artist. Only Surrealism had

²² Richard Hamilton 'Art and Design - a lecture in Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility'. Report of NUT conference 26-28 October 1960, pp.135-155. Reprinted in Richard Hamilton Collected Words 1953-82 London 1982. pp.152-3.

proposed a different, almost opposite approach and it was seen as an anathema to the pure forms of Modernism. The ICA, which was born out of the Surrealist old guard, lived precariously in a culture suffering from a dementia praecox which yearned for both a return to the Arts and Crafts philosophies of Morris and to be ingratiated into the mainstream of European Modernism, a situation exemplified by the work of Gordon Russell and the Council of Industrial Design. Early events at the ICA reflected this peculiar and complex situation: the exhibitions 40 Years of Modern Art and 40,000 Years of Modern Art, and the forum 'The Strange Case of Abstract Art'²³ were designed to introduce the British public to the complex developments in painting and sculpture; the forum on 'The Industrial Designer and Public Taste'²⁴ had a similar aim, though related to the dilemma of design. Thus, when the ICA became established in the early 'fifties, it drew to it a cosmopolitan audience, some of whom were steeped in the tradition of European Modernism, stemming mainly from the Bauhaus, others in Surrealism and its psychological, often heterodox approach, others in an optimistic, nationalistic approach rooted in the arts and crafts but exemplified by the parochial Contemporary Style. However, the majority who came to the ICA had no one clearly directed belief; rather they displayed a pot pourri of ideas and philosophies. The ICA itself was, in some respects, pledged to promote a return to the pre-war discourse - its founders, by their very presence, influenced the early ICA programme in this way. But Penrose, Watson, Read, Mesens, Gregory, and so on, were generally liberal and far-sighted enough to recognise that the post-war situation was different from the pre-war one. Hence they allowed, and even encouraged, such manifestations as the Independent Group. However, as Toni del Renzio

²³ Held in March 1950, and attended by Victor Pasmore, Barbara Hepworth, Reg Butler, and others.

²⁴ Held in February 1950, and attended by Ernest Race, Misha Black, Derek Barrow, and others.

pointed out, the formation of the Independent Group was "an attempt to institutionalise" a group who were critical of what they thought was the ICA's often backward-looking programme.²⁵ Furthermore, by allowing such people as the Smithsons, Paolozzi, Hamilton, Turnbull, and so on to express their ideas freely, the ICA was being truly contemporary (since these people, as del Renzio noted, were "the contemporaries"). And anyway, del Renzio continued, the ICA did not envisage "that these people were ever going to have any power."²⁶

When the Independent Group began to formulate a set of interrelated ideas which challenged the Modernist aesthetic, the ICA was willing enough to give it an airing in the 'Aesthetic Problems of Contemporary Art' series. So successful was this, that it was quickly followed by 'Books and the Modern Movement'. Together these series set out different interpretations of Modernism than had previously been attempted, as did Banham's articles in the architectural press, and later his Theory and Design in the First Machine Age. But as of 1954, when the 'Books and the Modern Movement' series took place, the Independent Group had only criticised existing interpretations of Modernism and attempted a reinterpretation. It had not proposed a cohesive alternative aesthetic. That came with the arrival of Lawrence Alloway and John McHale. The 'fine art/pop art continuum' was the model, 'multiple connectivity' the method, and the Independent Group made from this a consistent and developable set of ideas which challenged existing views and standards. By dipping into apparently obscure backwaters of research - Korzybski's non-Aristotelian logic and science fiction - by studying areas which were not traditionally connected with the arts - helicopter design and crystallography - by taking seriously those arts closely connected with popular culture and

²⁵ Toni del Renzio, 1982, *op.cit.*

²⁶ Toni del Renzio in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 7 July 1976, for Arts Council, *op.cit.*, though not used in the film.

mass media - movies, advertising, popular music, fashion, automobile styling - and by concerning themselves with emergent disciplines which would have an important influence upon civilisation - information theory, sociology, and electronic communications - the Group built up a consistent and contemporary aesthetic which was almost totally at odds with the Modernist aesthetic of pre-war Europe.

The challenge which the Independent Group presented to the more traditional and establishment ideas of art, caused not a little criticism of their position. Basil Taylor's reaction to the Group's predilection for things American has already been noted. But even people closer to the Group were critical. Although he was convinced that "a new art was beginning", the architect Geoffrey Holroyd was certain that the

"new commercialism of slick design and smart advertising could not be set against the history of Western art as if it were a form of avant-garde progress - heroically achieved in the face of hostile Establishment critics, Purists and Aristotelians."²⁷

Frank Cordell was critical: "...in moving amongst all these people", he said,

"I found that they were incredibly eclectic and that they were all borrowing... there were very few who made new statements to my mind."²⁸

Donald and Ann Holms, regular visitors to the ICA in the early 'fifties and privy to some Independent Group discussions, noted that

²⁷ Geoffrey Holroyd. Letter to the author 23 April 1983.

²⁸ Frank Cordell in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 7 July 1976, for Arts Council op.cit., though not used in the film.

"...there was a bit of cargo culture at the ICA, both with respect to new emergent disciplines and to things North American... There was... a marked lack of real understanding of some of the content of these emergent disciplines..."²⁹

And Edward Wright was sceptical about advertising and mistrusted the United States "because of experiences in Ecuador."³⁰

Even with the 'inner circle', as it were, of the Group itself, there was discord. By the time Alloway and McHale came to convene the Group in 1954 or early 1955, some of the original nucleus were playing a less prominent role. Alison and Peter Smithson, Eduardo Paolozzi, William Turnbull, and Nigel Henderson had all withdrawn to one degree or another during the previous year. They had been, with others, the instigators of the Group, meeting in the ICA gallery before Lannoy was brought in to formalise the sessions. When Banham convened the Group after Lannoy's departure for India, this nucleus lost some of its kudos and Banham's own interests in architecture and technology were promoted. And when Alloway and McHale convened the Group, the latter noted:

"We were a bit unhappy... about the architectural influence because it simply didn't interest us at the time,"³¹

and so they changed the emphasis to what they were interested in - popular culture and mass media. Thus, a handful of the original members, notably Alison and Peter Smithson, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Nigel Henderson, were distanced to some extent by the shift in content

²⁹ Donald and Ann Holms interviewed by the author 9 June 1982.

³⁰ Edward Wright in conversation with the author 15 October 1983.

³¹ John McHale in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham 30 May 1977, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

of Group discussions between 1952 and 1955. Although they attended some of the later Group sessions, their appearances were more and more limited than they had been in the early days. Therefore, Alison Smithson could admit that

"...we had quite close contact with Alloway but he knew what to talk to us about and what not to talk to us about,"

and she confessed that

"He never... ever mentioned science fiction or films. I'd no idea he was interested in film."³²

Perhaps Richard Hamilton was not so sure what to talk to the Smithsons about. His previously quoted letter written to them after This is Tomorrow was sent to an unreceptive audience. In fact, the position of the Smithsons in relation to the Independent Group is problematic, and only partially resolved by their apparent intransigence, according to Banham, to take any credit for fathering Pop Art.³³ With Paolozzi and Colin St. John Wilson, whom Banham also says called revivalist Independent Group meetings³⁴, the Smithsons' relation to an Independent Group which challenged existing values with the serious study of pop culture, and thus laid the foundations for the Pop movement in art, architecture and design in the 1960s, is tenuous to say the least. Their relation to an Independent Group which to some extent challenged Modernism by drawing upon the environment of popular

³² Alison Smithson interviewed by the author 22 November 1982.

³³ "...the Smithsons and Eduardo Paolozzi and people like that, have been calling rather necrophilic revivalist meetings of the Independent Group to try and clear their names of being responsible for the present Pop Art movement in England." Peter Reyner Banham 'The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist' in Penny Sparke (editor) op.cit., p.88.

³⁴ Peter Reyner Banham. Letter to the author 11 May 1983.

culture, and attempted to nudge British culture and attitudes out of the 'thirties and into the 'fifties without completely jettisoning everything that had been learnt from the past, is more easily accepted.

If some people at the ICA were critical of the content of Independent Group ideas and the legitimacy of their parentage, they were equally critical of the presentation of the material. Richard Lannoy remembered the Group as "...just about the most unrelaxing company I've ever kept", and their attitude being particularly

"contemptuous of anyone not in the know, and the know was oriented to the nascent pop element within American culture."³⁵

And on another occasion, Lannoy recalled that Alloway, McHale and Magda Cordell "were quite scary to be with."³⁶ Certainly, the aggressive nature of some Independent Group members was offensive.

"They were aggressive with members of the general audience or the general membership if they were challenged about some of the extremer views they held," said Donald Holms.³⁷

Even James Meller, who was Colin St. John Wilson's brother in law and consequently quite friendly with many of them, recalled evening meetings at the ICA:

It really was a sparring match, and if anybody said anything stupid, you could be very sure that somebody would stand up

³⁵ Richard Lannoy. Letter to the author 1 August 1983.

³⁶ Richard Lannoy in conversation with Dorothy Morland. No date, p.29, ICA Archives.

³⁷ Donald Holms, op.cit.

there and take you apart. It was gladiatorial..."³⁸

Laurie Fricker, the ICA's Assistant to the Director in 1961, noted that the concept of expendability was sometimes taken too far:

"I think I wrote somewhere at the time... 'I'm entirely in favour of the Kleenex aesthetic until it's extended to human relationships'... it seemed that [for some Independent Group members] everything was there to be sucked out, even including people's personality; if that gave you your own identity which furthered your own career."³⁹

The other aspect of the presentation and the material which irritated some people was the air of expertise adopted by some members of the Group. Even they themselves recognised this was role playing.⁴⁰ "They put on intellectual airs," recalled Lannoy.⁴¹ And Donald Holms complained,

"I suppose one of the things that galls me... I felt that through the work I'd done at the L.C.C., through the work I did at BACIE [British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education], and through the work I was doing as a real live radio producer in... the old North American Service - that I was very much in touch with the modern world and that I was making my own form of contribution to it and I was in association with

³⁸ James Meller interviewed by the author 12 March 1984.

³⁹ Laurie Fricker interviewed by the author 14 March 1983.

⁴⁰ Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with John McHale 1977, *op.cit.*: "McHale: We had to move into role playing... The Independent Group in many senses was a stage for role playing which didn't exist anywhere else in our kind of society and it reflected the external changes that were going on.

Banham: Where we could all masquerade as experts.

McHale: Precisely. And as intellectuals. Even more delightful."

⁴¹ Richard Lannoy 1982, *op.cit.*

other contributors. And here in this rather rarified atmosphere of the ICA were people who would ignore all that seemed to me to be of importance that was going on currently because they had hold of the truth about the emergent future. And much of what they were discussing seemed to have little relevance, I thought." ⁴²

However the Independent Group was criticised, whatever the criticism of obscure and trivial material, of forceful and aggressive presentation, of a paramount desire to build careers at any expense, the Group did propose an alternative aesthetic to the established view of Modernism. Whether this was beneficial or not is a question best left to the cultural historian of the 'sixties, but in view of the Pop Art trend in art and design during this decade, it is relevant for this study to discover the extent of influence the Independent Group had.

The Group did have some influence; such direct descendants as Roger Coleman and Richard Smith, James Meller and Ron Herron have already been noted. But the degree of influence is open to much debate. Anyway, to measure the influence of ideas with only the least accuracy is a problem, and one which is further confounded by the Independent Group's relative obscurity, its limited audience, and its general lack of cohesion in advancing an unequivocal theory.

However, for Lawrence Alloway, the question of Independent Group influence presented no difficulty. His opinion that Pop Art descended from the Independent Group via Ark at the RCA, was formulated in print in 1962, when his article 'Pop Art Since 1949' was published in The

⁴² Donald Holms, op.cit.

Listener,⁴³ but at this stage he had not recognised the distinction between Pop Art (meaning a manifestation of fine art) and pop art (meaning popular art of the mass media). By 1966 however, he acknowledged the difference in meaning and his essay 'The Development of British Pop', which appeared in print that year⁴⁴, clearly indicated this and reasserted his belief in the important role played by the Independent Group. It is from this source that most interpretations of Pop Art and of the Independent Group derive. Even if one accepts Alloway's interpretation as a personal view, it is highly suspect since the evidence does not always conform to his version. As has already been noted, such connections Alloway made between the RCA and ex-members of the Independent Group are inaccurate: Eduardo Paolozzi did not teach at the Royal College before 1968, and in 1961 when they exhibited at the Young Contemporaries, the Pop artists did not know Richard Hamilton's work, although he was teaching at the College. Furthermore, the Pop artists knew little of Ark, of Richard Smith's painting, or even Peter Blake's.

In 1976 Richard Hamilton posed the question: "If there hadn't been this phenomenon called Pop Art, would we even be interested in the existence of the Independent Group?"⁴⁵ Superficially this may be a key issue, but in fact it rather obscures the true achievements of the Independent Group, and helps to establish a limited and therefore distorted view of the Group's influence and importance.

In order to untangle the mythological network which criss-crosses any account of the Independent Group, it is necessary to

⁴³ Lawrence Alloway 'Pop Art Since 1949' The Listener Vol.68 No.1761, 27 December 1962, pp.1085-7.

⁴⁴ Lawrence Alloway 'The Development of British Pop' in Lucy Lippard (editor) Pop Art, London 1966, pp.27-67.

⁴⁵ Richard Hamilton in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 27 June 1976, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

return to the beginning of the myth-making process. Then, hopefully, the Group's true achievement can be established, which is in fact more significant than simply a progenitor of a comparatively short-lived manifestation of fine art.

The actual name Independent Group first publically appeared in the ICA Bulletin for May 1953, when Peter Reyner Banham introduced an official ICA meeting on the work of Le Corbusier. The entry in the Bulletin noted that this evening meeting was "presented by the Independent Group".⁴⁶ The Group's title appeared again in the ICA Bulletin for March 1954, when a discussion on Corbusier's Modular took place.⁴⁷ Apart from mention in reports of ICA Annual General Meetings between 1954 and 1956, the name Independent Group was never published in print. Even with the ICA series 'Aesthetic Problems in Contemporary Art' and 'Books and the Modern Movement', even with the ICA lectures/discussions which were obviously concocted by Independent Group members - Alloway's and del Renzio's 'Ambush at the Frontier' or Banham's 'Metal in Motion'⁴⁸ for example - the name Independent Group did not appear. After a period of a few years, the name (or at least the initials IG) were used by Alloway in his 1960 article 'Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media'.⁴⁹ They were only used however, in a footnote and later Alloway confessed that

"This footnote was never intended for public enlightenment... it was more like a code message to forty or fifty readers."⁵⁰

In a BBC Third Programme broadcast held at the same time as Alloway's

⁴⁶ See p.79, n.59; p.124, n.65; Appendix 3, p.494.

⁴⁷ See pp. 174-5.

⁴⁸ See pp.175-6 and p.197ff. respectively.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Alloway 'Abstract Art and the Mass Media'. Art News and Review 27 February - 12 March 1960, pp.3 and 12.

⁵⁰ Lawrence Alloway 1966, op.cit., p.201, n.20.

Art News and Review piece appeared, the researches of the Independent Group were discussed by Hamilton, Paolozzi, Basil Taylor and Alloway himself, and here the name Independent Group was used by Hamilton.⁵¹ After the manifestation of Pop Art at the 1961 Young Contemporaries, Alloway was still not immediately using the name Independent Group; his article in The Listener⁵² proposed the idea of three phases of Pop Art - at the ICA and at the RCA between 1957-60 and then 1961 onwards - but does not mention the Group as such. In fact, it was Banham who first began to popularise the name. In 1962 he wrote about the Independent Group as

"the boys... whose activities around 1953-55 are at the bottom of all conscious Pop-art activities in Fine-Art circles."⁵³

In the same article, Banham also made the connection between the Group and the Royal College by noting (incorrectly) that

"...there is a direct line from the Independent Group to Peter Blake and the Royal College."⁵⁴

A year later he expanded the RCA/Independent Group connection by saying that Alloway

"made the connection between the ICA studies in Pop iconography and the young painters at the RCA."⁵⁵

⁵¹ 'Artists as Consumers - The Splendid Bargain', op.cit.

⁵² Lawrence Alloway 1962, op.cit.

⁵³ Peter Reyner Banham 1962, op.cit., p.13.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Peter Reyner Banham, 'Department of Visual Uproar' New Statesman, Vol.65, No.1677, 3 May 1963, p.687. He also mentions Roger Coleman as the editor of Ark in 1955, which is incorrect. Coleman edited three issues of Ark between November 1956 and July 1957.

This was recorded before Alloway himself addressed such a proposition in print; although Alloway's piece for The Listener in December 1962 defined the three stages of Pop Art - the second of which was the RCA/Ark/Smith stage - he mentioned neither the Royal College, Ark nor Roger Coleman. Not until his 1966 essay 'The Development of British Pop' did he make these things public.

Therefore, the situation was that even at the time of its existence, the Independent Group did not promote itself as a group; it's promotion came later, initially - and tentatively - by Alloway and then, more overtly, by Banham. Finally, Alloway's 1966 essay publicised the Group most completely. In all these instances, the Group was seen primarily as the forerunner of the Pop Art movement, and chronologically, the appearance of the Group's name in print occurred after the appearance of British Pop Art between 1961 and 1963. It is not meant to be wholly cynical to suggest that if Pop Art had not appeared, some ex-members might not have promoted the Group's importance.

If Alloway's 1966 essay is the principal source of knowledge about the Independent Group, then Banham's 1979 film for the Arts Council, Fathers of Pop, merely restates and reinforces it. Fathers of Pop revealed an 'accepted' line as much as by what it omitted as by what it contained. The 'accepted' line is Alloway's interpretation of development through stages, and to ensure the continuity of the ICA - RCA - Young Contemporaries connection, Banham was forced to consider Ark, Smith, Hockney, Boshier, Blake, Kitaj, Phillips and Jones as an homogenous group, not separated by time, age, or influence. That of these artists only Richard Smith appeared in the film is significant. Furthermore, some ex-members of the Independent Group who interpreted the study of popular culture in a more general and less direct way,

and who did not agree that the Independent Group's principal and most lasting influence was Pop Art, were omitted from the film. William Turnbull was not asked to take part, and even as late as 1983 was unaware that the film existed.⁵⁶ Alison and Peter Smithson were interviewed by Banham but their contribution was not included and they did not see the film until November 1982.⁵⁷ Eduardo Paolozzi apparently refused to take part in the film at all.

"As far as the world's view of what happened is concerned," said Banham in 1976,

"the importance of the Independent Group is that it made British Pop Art. And I think historically it may still turn out to be true, that that is what it was all about."⁵⁸

To some extent Banham is correct; but there is much evidence to suggest that some ex-members of the Group adopted this interpretation in order to write themselves into history. Perhaps this opinion is too cynical; perhaps they were genuinely convinced of such a direct line of influence. Whatever the case, the significance of the Independent Group seems to be far greater than this simplistic view allows. In his summary of the Group's relevance, Banham continued:

⁵⁶ When the author mentioned the film to William Turnbull on 23 February 1983, the artist was unaware of its existence. Subsequently he read Banham's revised draft script and commented, "There is little I could have contributed to this interpretation of the Independent Group as I have never seen myself as a Father of Pop." (Letter to the author 3 March 1983.)

⁵⁷ Alison and Peter Smithson recalled the interview they gave for the film, since it was conducted at Dorothy Morland's house. Dorothy Morland's contribution was used. The architects saw the film on 22 November 1982 in the company of the author at the Arts Council offices in Piccadilly.

⁵⁸ Peter Reyner Banham in conversation with Richard Hamilton and Toni del Renzio, 27 June 1976, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

"...in the process of saying [that the Independent Group made British Pop Art] and accepting that may be the ultimate historical judgement... something like ninety-five per cent of the Independent Group's activity goes in the discard bin. All the conversations about problems of art history, all the conversations on philosophical topics such as... the Norman Pirie thing called 'Are Protein's Unique?'... What I could never make up my mind about is whether Norman Pirie on 'Are Proteins Unique?' contributed or didn't contribute anything of consequence to the rise of British Pop Art. And now I'm really flummoxed to know whether there's a connection..."⁵⁹

It is possible Banham's perplexity comes from his assumption that the Group was responsible for Pop Art, and so unless the links are direct and obvious, they appear impossible to make. Perhaps if he took a wider view that the Independent Group helped to change the consciousness of what art is, then Pirie's lecture and almost everything else the Group did could be assimilated into a meaningful understanding of its role.

As a manifestation of fine art, Pop Art established an aesthetic which had hitherto been almost unthinkable, except, that is, by the Independent Group and its immediate coterie. The introduction of popular art imagery into painting was not new, but it was not openly accepted and it was a concerted challenge to established practice, something which the Pop artists certainly proposed it should be. Including grafitti, or images of toothpaste tubes, pinball machines, or motorcycles, of references to Pop music or Soho striptease clubs, was very much against the trends in painting in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties. Such a situation as this manifested itself at the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

1961 Young Contemporaries and subsequent exhibitions, but it did not appear unheralded. For anyone who cared to look closely enough, the ideas of the Independent Group were slowly and almost imperceptibly changing attitudes. The iconoclasm upon which the Group thrived was initially directed at those aspects of European Modernism which it found most intolerable - the idea of an ultimate, universal perfection, of a cultural hierarchy which paid little attention to popular cultural life, and a scale of taste which judged durability higher than expendability and pure abstract form higher than the figurative image. Thus, the research laboratory which the Independent Group became, where the members learnt from each other - and actually wanted to learn - where Norman Pirie could talk about proteins, Banham about automobile design and Toni del Renzio about fashion. And all were considered equally important, equally valid, equally, as Nigel Henderson wrote,

"as great an imaginative hunting ground potentially as art (itself)"⁶⁰

Of course, the Group stood for certain things and rejected others; its critics would argue vehemently, and often did, that Independent Group subject-matter was irrelevant, shallow, pseudo-intellectual, that it had little value when ranged against the weight of the Modern Movement, let alone the weightier tradition of Western art since the Renaissance. But these were young men and women eager to make their mark and eager to lead Britain away from the parochial mannerism which had been induced like some anachronous child out of the womb of pre-war Modernism. To this end, the Group proposed an aesthetic stance which was almost completely at odds with existing standards in the fine arts. In this way they prepared the ground for Pop Art, a

⁶⁰ Nigel Henderson. Letter to Peter Karpinski, 22 January 1977.

point which even the Pop artists were to concede⁶¹, and from that point of view, and not in any direct way, the Group was the father of Pop.

It would be fatuous to claim that what went on in the Independent Group was largely responsible for the change in cultural consciousness which took place in the 'sixties. But there can be little doubt that the Group played an important role in establishing some of the ground rules for this change. The major stumbling block to this proposition however, is the Independent Group's insularity, its limited channels of communication, and its small audience. But as with most significant events such as this, it is often the case that a small, élite group comes to influence the majority over a period of time. In the fine arts, the examples of Picasso and Braque and their invention of Cubism is a paradigm of such an influence, as is the small circle of writers and artists who were drawn to André Breton's Surrealist movement in the 1920's. In both cases, small, insular, exclusive groups quite quickly came to influence not only fellow artists but the overall consciousness of whole sections of society.⁶² It is often the case that what these exclusive groups chose to promote was related to other interests in other areas, and therefore some

⁶¹ Allen Jones said, "...it's true that they [The Independent Group] would have been around, and that maybe the ground was prepared unconsciously or consciously, for the kind of welter of appreciation that the likes of myself received at the time." (Marco Livingstone 'Young Contemporaries at the Royal College of Art 1959-62. Derek Boshier, David Hockney, Allen Jones, R.B.Kitaj and Peter Phillips.' MA Report, Courtauld Institute of Art. May 1976, p.A24.) Peter Phillips said, "There were beginnings... in the mid 1950s with some of Lawrence Alloway's programmes at the ICA." Bruce Glaser 'Three British Artists in New York', Studio International, Vol.170, No.871, November 1965, p.180.

⁶² According to Laurie Fricker, op.cit., Banham used this argument in 1961: "...Banham stood up at the [Royal] Institute of British Architects and said, 'The Italian Renaissance which you're all going on about was invented by the number of people it takes to accommodate the front row of this lecture theatre. You could get them [on] the top deck of a London bus. And, you know, why do you say nothing can happen in the present?'"

cross-reference was made. This is not unusual for few, if any, ideas are born in a vacuum. Thus, the publication of articles in French journals on relativity and the fourth dimension by Gaston de Pawlowski, Hermann Minkowski, and others coincided with the development of Cubism; French translations of works by Sigmund Freud appeared in the early 1920s, concurrent with Breton's condemnation of Dada and his promotion of Surrealism. In the early 'fifties, the United States, with its material benefits, offered a vision of the future to a ration-conscious Britain with a post-war hangover. Furthermore, some of the most exciting cultural manifestations came from the States - jazz music, movies and later, abstract expressionist painting. Within this context, the Independent Group was not the only section which saw America as the archetype of a modern society. A whole generation of British intellectuals was attracted by this idea. George Melly noted:

"Alloway and the little group at the ICA may have analysed that interest, but everywhere there were small groups and individuals who understood instinctively that there was something in [American pop culture]." ⁶³

Thus, somewhat obscure articles on the fourth dimension contributed to Picasso's development of Cubism, French translations of Freud to Breton's invention of Surrealism, and a fascination in the seductiveness of American pop culture to the aesthetic stance taken by the Independent Group.

In the same way that these things influenced development, they also received the results of their influence. In this sense, if a

⁶³ George Melly Revolt into Style. The Pop Arts in Britain, Harmondworth, 1972, pp.16-17.

general interest in American popular culture existed upon which the Independent Group fed, the results of the Group having digested this were reintroduced into the matrix. Therefore, what the Group proposed was new, but not totally, since it had been initially partly influenced by the cultural environment into which it was now being introduced. It must follow that such a reintroduction of material in a different and more advanced form would permeate its influence more quickly than if the material was totally fresh. This argument accounts for the Independent Group's influence. From another point of view, it was as though British culture was ready for what the Group had to say and so quickly accepted it. It was not, as George Melly maintains,

"...like a native tribe who are duped by a missionary with foreknowledge of an eclipse thinking that he has actually brought it about."⁶⁴

This presupposes that the tribe had no knowledge of such a thing as an eclipse (that British society had no knowledge of American pop culture) and that the missionary wanted the natives to believe that he alone was responsible for the event (that the Independent Group took personal credit for the growing importance of an interest in pop culture and were totally responsible for the manifestation of Pop Art). The promotion of the Group by Banham and Alloway in the early and mid 1960s might argue against this, particularly when such a promotion did not occur before the manifestation of Pop Art. In the light of this, the Group could be seen to be claiming direct influence. However, there is something of a distortion, since this interpretation only came from two members and, furthermore, it is an interpretation and divorces what influence the Group actually had in

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.15.

the 'fifties from what influence it was supposed to have had in the 'sixties.

If one accepts the supposition that the Independent Group was "a loose association of unlike spirits"⁶⁵, or "a loose alliance of individual talents"⁶⁶ - and these are more correct interpretations than the title Independent Group might immediately imply - then there is no such thing as a manifestation of Group ideology, only manifestations of individual or sub-group ideology, which might be influenced by what went on in the Group as a whole. In this way, one is better able to understand the Group's own position, its often mercurial concepts and its apparently nebulous influence. Had the Group been a closely knit organisation, then it might be possible to trace its effects upon the RCA and the Pop artists with more certainty. But there was little unity within the Independent Group; for instance, Alison and Peter Smithson's philosophy and work often seems to be quite at odds with that of someone such as John McHale; Peter Reyner Banham's views sometimes appear in opposition to those of Lawrence Alloway. Therefore, such apparent manifestations of Independent Group concepts as the exhibition Parallel of Life and Art, part of the This is Tomorrow show, and ICA lectures such as those on Corbusier's Modulor or on mass communications, are just as much a manifestation of individual interpretations of Independent Group concepts as McHale's collages, Hamilton's paintings, or Alloway's articles. The result of this is a miscellany of renderings of Group notions. Consequently, the Smithsons, Paolozzi, Henderson exhibit at This is Tomorrow was as much a manifestation of Independent Group ideas as the McHale, Hamilton, Voelcker exhibit, and each one was equally a personal statement; Hamilton's Man, Machine and Motion

⁶⁵ Richard Hamilton 1982, op.cit., p.22.

⁶⁶ George Melly, op.cit., p.129.

exhibition was his own creation but at the same time displayed the influence of Independent Group discussion; Alison and Peter Smithson's House of the Future can be interpreted in a similar way.

Following this idea through, it is therefore impossible to assess the influence of the Group as a group. The direct lines between it and Pop Art are, at best, superficial: Group 2's TIT exhibit might have used similar imagery to that employed by Peter Phillips six or seven years later, but Group 2's exhibit was not only a small part of Independent Group output and an equally small part of McHale, Hamilton and Voelcker's output, it was also not seen by Phillips. It certainly contributed to the creation of a cultural climate however, which allowed Phillips' work to be conceived and accepted. But the Smithson, Paolozzi, Henderson exhibit, whose imagery was quite different but whose broad ideology was similar, was just as much a part of this creation. Thus, no one aspect of the Independent Group can be said to have proven to be more influential upon later developments than another, but because the Group generally held some common beliefs, all that they said and did contributed, if not equally then in varying degrees, to change pervading attitudes.

* * * * *

"I don't think what happened in the 'sixties," said William Turnbull,

"could have happened the way it did without the ICA in the 'fifties. Art in the 'fifties took English art away from much of its parochialism - it laid the foundations for the RCA students' attitude to popular culture, I would have thought. The 'fifties broke down attitudes for a lot that developed in

the 'sixties."⁶⁷

The concepts proposed by the Independent Group were crucial to this cultural shift about which Turnbull talks and have already been stated in this work. Some of them, such as the Group's opinion of the precepts of the Modern Movement and the proposed alternative, have been discussed above. But it seems essential to state finally some general ideas postulated by the Group which, in the light of this whole work, may seem tautological but, I believe, necessary to bring into focus the Group's achievements.

When Eduardo Paolozzi said that the Independent Group attempted a

"kind of redefinition of a new kind of person",⁶⁸

he was referring symbolically to Western European man as

"a pop cultural consumer" and not "a proportioned body in green space, sun, light and air, and glass; a da Vinci figure,"⁶⁹

as defined by the masters of the pre-war Modern Movement. This new kind of person would empathise with the

"situation that everything is eclectic, there is no culture, it is what we receive, what we decide, what we choose, and it's our responsibility to choose."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ William Turnbull in conversation with the author, 23 February 1983.

⁶⁸ Eduardo Paolozzi in 'Artists as Consumers - The Splendid Bargain', op.cit..

⁶⁹ Geoffrey Holroyd, op.cit.

⁷⁰ Roger Coleman interviewed by the author 18 April 1983.

This "new kind of person" was aware that understanding his position meant a situation of "cross-barriers, cross-specialisations";⁷¹ it meant there was not

"...a single aesthetic by which one filtered out and arrived at the world's great works"⁷² ;

it meant that

"...the art experience was not necessarily superior to some other visual experience."⁷³

At its most indiscriminating, this attitude proposed

"the notion that you couldn't say that something was either good or bad"⁷⁴ ;

at its most positive it

"sketched out a pragmatic, sociologically-based aesthetic... which wasn't restricted to the traditional circuit of the fine arts"⁷⁵

and which was replete with developable ideas. Indeed, so capable of development were the ideas of the Independent Group, that the RCA's

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Lawrence Alloway in conversation with Peter Reyner Banham, 25 May 1977, for Arts Council, op.cit., though not used in the film.

⁷³ Toni del Renzio interviewed by Peter Karpinski in Peter Karpinski, 'The Independent Group 1952-55 and the Relationship of the Independent Group's Discussions to the Work of Hamilton, Paolozzi and Turnbull 1952-57', Unpublished BA Dissertation, Leeds University, 1977, p.x.

⁷⁴ Richard Hamilton, 1976, op.cit.

⁷⁵ Lawrence Alloway. Soundtrack to Fathers of Pop, op.cit.

1961 Young Contemporaries could be seen to be unconsciously elaborating upon them and, in a wider context, the Pop Art movement which pervaded not only fine art but architecture and design, was built upon foundations laid by the Group.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Despite the almost prophetic discussions of the Independent Group and its admonitions to the cultural establishment, when Pop Art began to reach aspects of the culture other than fine art in the mid 'sixties, the establishment not only saw it as a threat but as an unresolvable problem. "They [the Design Council] got knocked sideways in the 'sixties with what... the Director called, very pertinently, the 'challenge of Pop'. The 'challenge of Pop' was very, very difficult for the Design Council because the rules were all knocked sideways; there were no rules anymore." Fiona McCarthy in Designs on Britain. BBC TV Broadcast, 10 September 1985.