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INTRODUCTION

When the phrase Pop Art was coined for the first time in the mid-fifties by Lawrence Alloway, it did not occur to him that it would be soon ascribed to an artistic movement influenced by mass-produced urban culture. Initially, as the critic recalls, the phrase was not even connected with aesthetics but referred to the products of the mass media. However, over the course of time, it was adopted by an informal grouping of artists affiliated to the Institute of Contemporary Art,[1] who by degrees revalued the standards of visual arts. Consequently, the fine arts "became one of the possible forms of communication in an expanding framework that also included the mass arts" (Alloway 1997: 9). In this light, the definition of art was stretched as it became "separated from its supposed function as a symbol of eternity, as an enemy of time, and accepted as a product of time and place" (2004: 36). In other words, aesthetics was no longer isolated from life, the whole culture becoming a source of inspiration for the artists. As a result, ephemeral values were soon substituted for timeless qualities thanks to exposure to continually changing means, materials and methods.

Roland Barthes asserts that "the god of Pop Art says to the artist: Burn what you have worshipped, worship what you have burned" (Barthes 1997: 370). In this connection, Pop Art emerged as an antithetical force to the values represented by the categorical certainties of high modernism. While rejecting the former distinctions between popular and high culture, Pop Art concentrated on "images from mass culture, previously regarded as vulgar, unworthy of an aesthetic consecration" (1997: 370). Pop Art abandoned the existing canon, often integrating itself with the iconography taken directly from the commonplace. This sharp reversal of artistic tendencies was in line with a new sensitivity towards images and objects from disparate sources. The interest was in, *inter alia*, the mass produced urban culture, namely films, advertising, pop music, fashion. In this process, the elimination of antagonisms towards low culture played a significant role and the distinction between "high" and "low" culture

[1] The Institute of Contemporary Art was a meeting point for artists, architects and writers, who discussed the transformations of post-war popular culture (Alloway 1997: 17).

appeared to be less meaningful. Hence Pop artists observed the constantly changing pictures and traced this interrelation between art and mass-produced commodities, playing with an anti-museum and anti-academy stance.

A crucial role was undertaken by the visual arts in the repudiation of the traditional divisions, and it is Pop Art that constitutes the primary concern of this book, as here was the terrain on which the socio-cultural transformations of the analyzed period can be most readily found. Moreover, this study attempts to capture how Pop Art responded to the multiplicity of social practices that blurred strict discipline boundaries, extending infinitely without apparent direction. Thus the focus is also on the cultural theory that diagnosed and evaluated this interdisciplinarity.

The book aims to go beyond the mere examination and explanation of similarities and differences among the individual artists. It seeks to uncover some possibly neglected aspects in the majority of the critical works on Pop Art. Here, Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, in which Pop Art is seen as a pivotal movement that initiated the push towards the postmodern in the context of cultural politics of the 1960s (1988: xi), is both an inspiration and methodological guide. Pop Art, interpreted dialectically as both an affirmative and a critical art, was based on the premise that there was a noticeable shift from the preceding period's sensibility and discourse formations. The fundamental changes caused the breach of distinctions between elite and mass culture realms, which was understood by Andreas Huyssen as the rejection of the Great Divide.[2] These transformations, which generated the new aesthetics, have challenged a relentless hostility towards mass culture, redefining the former terrains of the fine arts. In fact, Pop Art became a gesture against that old notion of art dominated by the following markers: no touching, no trespassing, the museum as temple, the artist as prophet, the work as relic and cult object (1988: 179). From this perspective, the correspondence between British Pop Art and postmodernism will be considered and investigated.

As the debates on the meaning of the postmodern condition continue, my prime issue in this study is to emphasize the complexity of this term and its subsequent directions in relation to cultural discourse. This book focuses on the claim that postmodernity is concerned mostly with the production and distribution of public attention that were accelerated by the advancement of mass media culture in the 1940s and 1950s. This

[2] According to Andreas Huyssen, the Great Divide insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture (1988: viii).

coincides, as Fredric Jameson suggested, with the new economic order that followed the Second World War and was an outcome of the Marshall Plan's reconstructive policies in Europe. Thus the focus on the politics of the period is not accidental in this book, as the fifties stimulated the economic progress and development of a consumer society that furthered a new culture of affluence, additionally dissolving old social and cultural limitations. At this point, it is worth highlighting that while theorizing Pop Art and postmodernism, a set of cultural terms will be used to emphasize the interconnection between aesthetics and socio-cultural processes. Thus the study refers to a number of cultural theorists and philosophers associated with postmodern discourse, namely Fredric Jameson, Mike Featherstone, Zygmunt Bauman, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault, who sought ways of utilizing the enormous theoretical legacy by tracing common motifs and points of convergence among different theories. It is worth emphasizing that they often draw from other disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, political science, economy, aesthetics and literary studies, bringing a pluralistic dimension to their theoretical analyses. As the book recognizes the importance of integrating theory with critical practice, it follows and contributes to this line of criticism, described by John Rajchman as "a hybrid field of social theory, literary criticism, cultural studies and philosophy" (49).

The research behind this book is based on two interpretative directions that influenced and marked aesthetic and cultural debates. Each represents a separate layer of the theoretical framework that allows a defining postmodern discourse. On the one hand, the first approach employs the claim that postmodernism is continuous with modernism thanks to the assimilation and transformation of the selected elements borrowed from the avant-garde tradition, particularly referring to the legacy of Dadaism, Surrealism and Futurism and their impulses to merge art and life. In contrast, the second direction focuses on the assertion that there was a radical rupture with modernism and a complete revaluation and questioning of our commitment to cultural progress. In other words, "the move from the modern to the postmodern is to embrace scepticism about what our culture stands for and strives for" (Sim vii). Arguably, the postmodern thought undermined authoritarian imperatives in culture, destabilizing the notion of truth. Since postmodernism is imbued with the constant voices of dissent, it declares its difference from the previous tradition of modernism and at the same time accentuates the attitude which it shares with its predecessor (Spencer 161). Thus this book, taking into account the ambiguity and complexity of the postmodern discourse, aims

to prove that postmodernism is "both the definite end and overcoming of modernism and also modernism under new management" (161).[3]

At this point, it must be observed that a body of criticism on British Pop Art is limited when compared to numerous publications written on its American counterpart.[4] This is particularly evident in the number of critical and monograph works that confine British Pop Art predominately to the activities of the Independent Group, tracing the origins of this artistic tendency. Anne Massey's study *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain 1945–1959*, which belongs to this publication trend, gives insight into the history of the group, offering an analysis of the new visual culture with reference to the meaning of mass culture and modernism. Though Massey's book maps changing trends in the artistic productions of the group, it does not declare a particular dedication to the relation that exists between Pop Art and postmodern aesthetics. In fact, the last chapter of the publication denies this correlation with postmodern art, asserting that "the key points of postmodernity – a general loss of authority, fragmentation, surface as opposed to essential meaning, feminist or black perspectives, are simply nowhere to be found in the work of the IG" (136). This book refutes Massey's arguments, claiming that her understanding of the concept of postmodern art is a gross generalization based on the limited markers that define the dynamism and complexity of the term "postmodernism". There is no denying the fact that both fragmentation and the decline of the legislator are to be found in the late works of the IG's members presented in my book.[5] As it will be shown in Chapter one, these tendencies enabled artists to rewrite closed art systems so that they became as heterogeneous as other cultural texts and possibilities, thereby revaluating modernism, and often superseding it.

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[3] The attitude of citing, parodying, pastiching, recycling the past characterizes the postmodern discourse. Based on the constant allusions to history, postmodernism questions the universalism, elitism and the idea of progress.

[4] Sylvia Harrison's publication *Pop Art and the Origins of Postmodernism* appears to highlight this assertion, as this is the only critical work that sees the link between Pop and postmodern discourse. However, the author gives insight into American Pop, completely ignoring the role of its British counterpart. Additionally, Harrison's work has rather a theoretical dimension as it is constructed around the ideas of particular critics, broadly categorized as either sociological or philosophical, to demonstrate the body of thought associated with postmodernism.

[5] It is worth emphasizing that the Independent Group, which consisted among others of Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, analysed by me in the second chapter, met officially only between 1952 and 1955.

Along with the publications and catalogues devoted to British Pop Art, exhibitions organized in the last decade were a major inspiration for this study. One can observe a revival of interest in Pop Art in the last few years, signalled by the three retrospective Pop Art exhibitions. The first was organized in Modena (*British Pop Art 1956–1972*) in 2004. The second exhibition took place in the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2007 (*Pop Art Portraits*). And *Swinging London* was housed in the Museum of Art in Łódź, also in 2007, and presented Grabowski's collection. Even though the leading themes of the exhibitions differed, the works aptly illustrated the artistic atmosphere of Pop, thereby unveiling its formal and thematic concerns. Additionally, an interview and my correspondence with Derek Boshier, who consented to my using this material for the purpose of research, enrich the third chapter of the book.

The study does not intend to present a complete picture of British Pop Art. It offers an analysis of selected artists and works that I consider most pertinent to the problems discussed in the book. In this respect, the scope of the research is narrowed down to the problems related to mass culture and the mass media's impact on the representation processes. In discussing the concept of postmodernism, I have selected works that exemplify the artistic strategies that led to the aesthetic break. It is worth noting that the majority of publications on British Pop Art, excluding the publications on particular artists and exhibition catalogues, concentrate on selected Pop Art works, providing general interpretations of the subject matter.

By focusing on thematic relations, the book departs from the strict chronological presentation of the works discussed. The two analytical chapters concerned with Pop visualization present separate stages of Pop Art development, albeit closely linked as they both refer to issues of representation. Hence the works are selected to highlight similar and distinctive features of these two thematically and iconographically different periods of British Pop Art. Most importantly, each of the Pop artists presented in the publication uses what he or she needs of "the new visual reality to form a part of his or her own stylistic, moral or political purpose" (Sillars 260). Since in both cases the examination of postmodern aesthetics constituted a critical basis for defining the main thesis of the study, that diversity, lack of central legislator and interdisciplinary focus in British Pop Art conforms to the main notions of postmodern aesthetics.

The first chapter serves as an introduction to the socio-cultural context of the period analysed, situating it in the postmodern perspective. Hence it is devoted to the discussion of a number of methodological and theoretical assumptions that embrace the major concepts related to postmodernity. First of all, this part presents the complexity and ambiguity surrounding

the subject of the postmodern condition and introduces some of the socio-cultural terminology used throughout this study. Moreover, it explains its modes of understanding and theoretical approach. Thus, inspired by Jean-François Lyotard's views on the post-industrial condition and the commercialization of scientific knowledge, the geopolitical dimension of Great Britain is examined to determine factors that accelerated economic, and consequently cultural, progress. Moreover, British imperial ideology is reflected to indicate the changes of the international position of the country now weakened by post-colonial processes. Most importantly, the major part of the chapter concerns sociological insights that help to uncover the cultural anxiety caused by the affluence generated by consumer culture. In this manner, the book surveys the materialistic euphoria that brought about the changes visible in the formation of new classless social groups and the possibilities offered to those formerly excluded from the dominant discourse. As a result, this problem is developed into a discussion of the relation between youth empowerment and mass culture, reflecting on the role of the mass media industry that spurred the major cultural processes in the fifties. Finally, this part of the study gives an account of alternative forms of cultural and social expressions that emerged in the sixties as an opposition to the mainstream culture of the fifties. I shall demonstrate that various countercultural movements and subcultures, which were not unified and integrated, to a large extent permeated and transformed the conventional values and modes of established society. It was the first time in this century that anti-imperialist protest came to dominate the overall political agenda of the nation; the global domination of capital was challenged from within on a more serious scale than ever before.

Chapter 2 scrutinizes Pop Art aesthetics and its dependence on the mechanisms of mass culture. At this point, the book presents a detailed discussion of mass culture and situates it in a broader historical and cultural context, pointing to its contribution to the processes of aestheticization of everyday life. In effect, I will examine these mechanisms in relation to postmodernism to gain a clearer idea of the mass processes within society. What distinguishes this work from similar critical analyses is the emphasis on the affinity between British Pop Art and the postmodern tradition. In this respect, postmodern theory becomes a set of critical tools required to grasp and analyse the changing nature of artistic productions which succumbed to the logic of the production process and market. Postmodern aesthetics will be contrasted with the tendencies and norms of modernist art, thereby clarifying Pop Art's correspondence to the postmodern tradition and its scepticism regarding

norms and authority. Also, the transgressive nature of Pop visualization and its techniques are explored in this part of the study, implying a deconstruction of traditional techniques and regional vernaculars. This book focuses on anti-aesthetic and interdisciplinary aspects of Pop Art forms from different visual traditions to highlight the lack of separation of the high and low, the spiritual and material, the theoretical and practical. Additionally, the analysis emphasizes that the transformation of artistic productions was possible owing to the combination of different channels of communication borrowed from mass culture.

For the purpose of this chapter, I selected works by the artists associated with the Independent Group, namely Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, who set down visual standards for the younger artists presented in this study. Though Peter Blake did not belong to the IG, one subchapter concerns his artistic career, which largely conforms to the artistic practices of Hamilton and Paolozzi. A careful examination of these works reveals that discontinuity, ambiguity, pluralism, deconstruction and irony are embedded in mass-culture iconography, which is why the chapter proposes that the artists' works were influenced by the aesthetics of plenty and the commercial idioms that flooded everyday life.

In Chapter 3, the discussion focuses on the dissolution of public space and time produced by the excess of information and communication technologies. At this stage, the book traces the impact of the mass media on the second phase of British Pop Art. It also tackles the advance in technological means that furthered the processes of commercialization, simultaneously indicating changes within the visual space. In this manner, the existing system of communication was translated into a fine art context. This section investigates the new order of experience created by mass communication which became the mediator of experience, the experience itself and finally the reality (Baudrillard 1986: 128). The other pivotal feature of this chapter is the decline of the author's dominium and the empowerment of the viewers' role. As representations are often based on the material that already exists and is only pre-coded for us, it is therefore not reality that provides the content of the work of art, "but rather a secondary reality – the portrait of the mass idol as *cliché* image that appears millions of times in the mass media and that sinks into the consciousness of a mass audience" (Huyssen 1988: 146). Thus this part of the study explores Pop Art works which consist of recycled and serial elements, and documents their closeness to the image world of the mass media. The chapter also contains references to film productions from the sixties that reflect the functions of a London mediascape largely transformed by mass communication.

In contrast to the second chapter, the research concentrates on artworks made between 1960 and 1968. Emphasis is put on a new generation of artists from the Royal College of Art who dominated the artistic stage under the name Young Contemporaries. This chapter discusses works by Peter Phillips, Derek Boshier, Pauline Boty, Colin Self and David Hockney. Even though the works in this section in a reflexive fashion display altering and individual trends and tendencies in the approach towards the impact of mass media on the commonplace, they all trace a secondary reality, challenging the traditional concepts of beauty, creativity, originality and autonomy. The works combine different conventions, modes and discourses into a material which is subjected later to reinvention. In the process, the synergy between technologically produced forms and artistic means of expression enables the Pop artist to be a part of the repetitive culture. In such conditions, the Pop artist exposed to the varied mediascape is able to assert with Claes Oldenburg that "I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips, and is heavy and coarse and blunt […] as life itself" (745).

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS POSTMODERNITY: BRITAIN IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS, 1956–1968

> Within two years, the credit squeeze ended, skyscrapers rushed up, supermarkets spread over cities, newspapers became fatter or died, commercial TV began making millions, shops, airlines, even coal and banks had to fight for their lives. After the big sleep many people welcomed any novelty; any piece of Americanization seemed an enterprising change, and any thrusting tycoon, however irresponsible, was regarded as a phenomenon. Only now is Britain becoming visually aware of living in a state of perpetual and perilous change. (Hewison 4)

Introduction: British Culture and Postmodernity

After the economic effort of war production, within a few years post-war Britain started to change. A new economic expansion exerted a tremendous impact on cultural life, ultimately bringing the transformations of the formerly established order. This was a direct result of the improvement of material conditions and lifestyles that shaped socio-economic factors in the new age of affluence in the mid-fifties.[1] Soon celebration of post-war prosperity was widespread, marking the country as an "affluent and acquisitive society" (Donnelly 24). The stimulation of progress and welfare became a shared governing assumption that brought a profound transformation of the cultural and social sphere, dominated

[1] Directly after the Second World War Britain would struggle to cope with economic problems. With the beginning of the fifties, Britain, as Dominic Sandbrook noted, still was "the most conservative and un-dynamic society in the advanced world" (2005: 47). Given the financial assistance from the USA's European Recovery Program (unofficially known as the Marshall Plan), Great Britain became reliant on American foreign policies, which stimulated the British economy while foisting on it new sets of unequivocal relations.

now by innovations and new patterns of consumption evident in a wide range of fields and activities in the mid-fifties. The dynamic consumption accelerated the cultural productions, which were themselves largely dependent on economic wealth. As Mark Donnelly has asserted, "never before had the products of culture industries been consumed on such a scale, never before had cultural entrepreneurs been faced with such favourable market opportunities" (28). This inevitably signalled a new era for the country. Its politics of traditional culture and society somehow evaporated, contributing to a transvaluation of values in a Nietzschean sense.[2]

In this light, post-World War II late capitalism led to the constant expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which, arguably, everything in social life became cultural (Jameson 85–87). If there is an interdependence between cultural productions and economic development, the values of culture are established by the production process and the market. From this perspective, the book defines British culture of the late fifties and sixties as an emergent and continual renewal which is not "a series of artefacts or frozen symbols but rather a process" (Jenks 2003: 157) that over the course of time contributed to the circulation of cultural means. Since the culture generated by constant technological innovations and economic strategies was no longer a fixed and closed system but a set of complementary relations, it designated polysemy, "the many voices within a culture waiting to be heard all with an equivalence and a right, ranging from the oppressed to, simply, the previously unspoken" (2003: 141). Moreover, it rejected the high/low culture dichotomy, re-establishing the condition for various cultural stratifications.[3] This approach towards social life modified the rigid frames imposed by the traditional means of cultural production, pointing to the importance of the commonplace in the construction of the concept of

[2] The philosopher suggests the collapse of the centre and consequently the decentralization of values. In contrast to the concepts of solidarity, integration, community and unification, Nietzsche recommends dispersion. In the light of the deconstruction of order and metaphysical projects, Nietzsche was rediscovered as a philosopher of postmodern thought (Jenks 2003: 139).

[3] These were the attributes that were ascribed to cultural studies formulation by Stuart Hall, a scholar of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) established in 1964. The main aim of the centre was to analyse the dispersal of British culture into conflicting class divisions and cultural expressions formerly not related with one another. Therefore, as Chris Jenks asserts, "cultural studies operate with an expanded concept of culture that cannot be viewed as a unifying principle, a source of shared understanding or a mechanism for legitimating the social bond" (2003: 158).

Britishness in the fifties. Inevitably, this character of the period resulted in the further amalgamation of previously alien spheres of life. In doing so, culture was viewed at all levels, namely via "inception, mediation and reception, or production, distribution and consumption" (2003: 158). In fact, soon the dominance of popular culture signs and media images governed and shaped all forms of social relationship. As the analysis of cultural productions involves the study of the relationships between "elements in a whole way of life" (Williams 1983: 63), this book will trace Pop Art in the context of the social and cultural transformations that embraced it.

In view of the gradual transformations, British culture underwent the collapse of central authority that would constitute absolute and universal values. With the decentralization of values, the socio-cultural discourse gave way and was no longer a homogenous entity. These conditions can be directly associated with what Fredric Jameson considered a postmodern condition, "in which competing intentions, definitions, and effects, diverse social and intellectual tendencies and lines of force converge and clash" (137). At this point, the clarification between the terms postmodernity and postmodernism is needed. While postmodernity refers to a social and philosophical period or condition, postmodernism is used to indicate cultural practices which acknowledge their implication in capitalism (Hutcheon 26).[4] In other words, this book asserts that postmodernity is the socio-economic and philosophical grounding for postmodernism.[5] Therefore, to speak of postmodernity is to suggest "an epochal shift or break from modernity involving the emergence of a new social totality with its own distinct organizing principles" (Featherstone 2007: 3). Also, Fredric Jameson understands postmodernism as a cultural logic or cultural dominant, which contributes to the transformations of cultural spheres. In fact, Great Britain put the emphasis on the new forms of technology that formed a post-industrial society based on a powerful reliance on media, consumer and multinational processes. This contributed to the effect that the reproductive social order blurred the distinction between the real and appearances. In this manner, the media became central to the postmodern sensibility that transformed the conceptualization of the relationship

[4] According to Mike Featherstone, the term "postmodernism" became popular in the 1960s when it was used by young artists, critics and writers such as Rauschenberg, Cage, Burroughs, Hassan and Sontag to refer to exhausted high modernism which was rejected because of its institutionalization in the museum and the academy (2007: 7).

[5] In this book the term "postmodernism" is understood as the emergent culture of postmodernity, whereas modernism is the culture of modernity.

between culture, economy and society, which must be investigated in terms of intersocietal, intrasocietal and multimodal processes.

This chapter identifies the main perspectives of the postmodern shift of British society that was initiated in the mid fifties and continued in the sixties.[6] From this perspective, the study follows the periodization of postmodernity suggested by Fredric Jameson to emphasize the relation of the culture with the political and economical state. For him, postmodernity is tied up with the third stage of capitalism,[7] that of the consumer society in the post-World War II era. As Jameson asserts, "this new moment of capitalism can be dated from the post-war boom in the late 1940s and 1950s" (3). Subsequently, the economic order was followed by the transitional period of the 1960s that brought about "neo-colonialism, the Green Revolution, computerization and electronic information" (3). This approach accounts for the emergence of post-industrial or consumer society, the society of media or the spectacle that finally resulted in the sustainable development of postmodern culture.

The social transformations, which had a postmodern character, played a decisive role in the expansion of cultural life and ultimately the aestheticization of the commonplace. First of all, the focus here is on the prominence of the gradual development of the culture of consumption premised on the expansion of capitalist commodity production, which by degrees led to the advance of mass culture in Great Britain. Thus the year 1956 was the starting point from which the research is conducted, to illustrate an endless cross-referencing of the variety of spheres and fields of British reality. Furthermore, this part of the book gives insight into social and political factors that accelerated the economic and consequently cultural progress. Tied to the post-war economic prosperity and to the advent of the youth culture of the sixties, the chapter implies the complexity and flexibility of the term "postmodernism". Hence the analysis takes into account the geopolitical situation of the nation, the emergence of new social groups, the pivotal role of the mass media that ultimately contributed to the erosion of distinctions between politics and art and between high and popular culture. Secondly, the chapter shows

[6] "Postmodern shift" indicates the post-industrial changes within the social and cultural surfaces in which production was gradually replaced by reproductive processes.

[7] While referring to the classification proposed by Ernest Mandel in which he divided capitalism into three distinct periods which coincide with three stages of technological development, Jameson proceeds to match these stages of capitalism with three stages of cultural production, the first stage with realism, the second with modernism and the current third one with our present day postmodernism.

how formerly unrelated worlds and social activities are no longer limited to specific groups, implying that social identity "exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations" (Foucault 1972: 207). By considering the influence of technologization of society in the media, design and advertising, the book identifies new cultural intermediaries acting against the traditional distinction between high and mass culture, forming the new front of culture. At the same time, the chapter shows that the mass media expanded the formal and material arsenal for imaginative practices and have opened up new modes of publicity that have already enacted a different, alternative engagement with technology. What is more, the sixties are analysed from the perspective of "cultural revolution," which furthered youthful rebellion, sexual freedom, social mobility, exploration of the eastern religions, new spirituality, limitless possibilities and artistic innovations, thereby contributing to the construction of postmodern identities.

Additionally, in this context, London will be presented as the locus of social and cultural transformations, meditating on various conceptual drifts that were against the canonical forms of social and cultural signification. However, an exhaustive account of Swinging London is not presented here. Indeed, it is purposely selective. The capital, which was the main cultural centre, became a space where diverse social, artistic and intellectual tendencies formed and clashed, "soaking up influences from the provinces and abroad and morphing them into an exotic motif of hedonism, modernity and affluent liberation" (Donnelly 91). Ultimately, the socio-cultural analysis presented here will serve to demonstrate a set of theoretical concepts and terminology useful also for defining artistic and aesthetic practices in the subsequent chapters of the book.

The Loss of the Grand Narratives; the Collapse of the British Empire

The year 1956 was a decisive point in the history of the United Kingdom. As Dominic Sandbrook noted, "the very landscape and people of Britain in 1956 bore witness to the immense social and economic changes the country had undergone since the early eighteenth century" (2005: 32). But what is more important, there is no denying the fact that the political events of this period dramatically changed the geopolitical directions of the former Empire. It was primarily the Suez crisis of 1956

that brought about fundamental social and cultural transformations.[8] Even though the involvement of the country in the Suez crisis was meant to revive the international and political position of the country, it led to the final decline of British imperial power, emphasizing its heavy dependence on America.[9] In fact, the symbol of British colonialism eventually dispersed. This subsequently furthered decolonization of other areas of the Empire, confirming Britain's decline on the world stage. Inevitably, as Sandbrook emphasizes, "British imperial power had been ebbing for decades. Suez simply demonstrated it, powerfully and incontrovertibly to the entire world. Now Britain was reduced from a first-class to a third-class power" (2005: 27). Being in the shadow of America, Britain became tremendously reliant on major foreign policy decisions taken in Washington. This only spread further the Americanization of British social and cultural life in the fifties.

In this manner, the position of the country signalled the erosion of the former ideology and mission to spread civilization and justice throughout the developing world. The Enlightenment spirit associated with rationalism and modernization faded away, leaving Britain on the verge of a humiliating climb-down. Consequently, as Mark Donnelly points out, a European imperialism was replaced by "a new form of US-imposed colonialism forwarding an emphasis on the needs of consumption" (2).

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[8] There is a huge debate on the beginnings and chronology of the period called the sixties. For Robert Hewison, the period lasted from 1960 to 1975; David Mellor asserted that it was 1962–1973. Arthur Marwick proposed a long sixties from 1958 to 1974, "which he divided into three periods: 'First Stirrings' from 1958 to 1963; the 'High Sixties' of 1964–9; and 'Catching Up' from 1969 to 1974" (Sandbrook 2005: XXIV). My book refers to the chronology suggested by Dominic Sandbrook in his large publication devoted to the sixties *Never Had It So Good,* which proposes 1956 as the starting point of the sixties in Britain. The author claims that Marwick's classification refers to an international phenomenon of "cultural revolution" rather than a specific British experience. My publication concentrates on 1956 as it is also the key moment for British Pop Art, which brought a crucial exhibition *This is Tomorrow,* analysed in the second chapter of this book.

[9] Great Britain gained the Suez Canal in 1882. For the next seventy years Egypt belonged to Britain, becoming the essential trade centre of the Empire. Egypt remained a British possession in all but name until the end of the Second World War. Finally, the revolutionary government led by Nasser took power in 1952, British troops were forced to withdraw and the Suez canal was subsequently nationalized. The new British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, decided to intervene militarily with French and Israeli assistance without the consent of the USA which finally ended in a complete fiasco, wounding national pride for years (Sandbrook 2005: 2–15).

Thus the upcoming years saw an increasing rise in living standards and the spread of material culture. The idea of imperial pride was substituted by an economic progress that filled the existing gap, determining the new conditions of British reality re-contextualized by consumer ideology.

It is worth highlighting here that British imperialism provided a powerful discourse legitimizing Britain as a modernized country. The imperial project invoked the concept of a modernity "solidly grounded on historical foundations rather than adrift, without direction, in the present" (Daunton and Rieger 12). The continuum of history and ideology had to be preserved since "colonial initiatives invested British culture with a sense of purpose as the country pursued its "civilizing mission' in all corners of the globe" (13).[10] In this context, this type of politics allowed the country to legitimize its power and authority, setting itself as a model for all nations in a rapidly changing world: egalitarian, self-governing, enterprising and adaptable. In order to sustain its international status, Great Britain was attached to a "narrative knowledge" that enabled the country to justify and explain its discoveries and future aims.[11] The concentration was on the grand narratives of modernity, understood by Lyotard as higher forms of the metanarratives, which controlled the discourse of the imperial project, proving its validity and final objectives. In such order, the universal, common goals constituted the basis for the advancement of humanity. To illustrate this process, Lyotard asserts two types of grand-narratives, namely the speculative and the emancipatory. While the speculative narrative focuses on the legitimization of the progress of knowledge that stimulates the human life, the latter "is the basis of freedom from oppression, and the developments in knowledge are valued for they set humanity free from suffering" (Malpas 27). Hence, "knowledge is no longer the subject, but it is in the service of the subject" (Lyotard 36). In other words, these tendencies were inextricably linked

[10] It is particularly accentuated in an emblematic poem by Rudyard Kipling "The White Man's Burden," (1899) that advocates colonialist ideology, asserting that the beneficiaries of colonialism are not the colonial powers but the colonized. The white man's burden becomes for Kipling a form of mission colonizers had to perform to "serve their captives' needs".

[11] Lyotard proposes two types of discourse in relation to knowledge: scientific knowledge and narrative knowledge. Scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge (7). For Lyotard, narratives are the stories that communities tell themselves to explain their present existence, their history and ambitions for the future (Malpas 21).

with the concept of modernity embedded in the process of change, development of ideas, technology and history. On the whole, imperialism furthered the sense of cultural stability that characterized British debates about modernity.

The decline of the British imperial project resulted in the end of grand narratives that constituted the core of the country's values. As during the Second World War Britain no longer provided a desirable model to which the "civilizing mission" and colonized societies should appeal and aspire, the imperial project was increasingly losing one of its long-standing sources of legitimization. Accelerated by the rapid development of science and technology, Britain had to grapple with the loss of credibility towards the superior principles of the grand narrative. Thus British international status was gradually challenged, leaving the kingdom uncertain about traditional ideas of progress and humanism. Consequently, the status of knowledge also radically changed. As Lyotard asserts, with the upheaval of post-industrial society "knowledge was no longer organized towards the fulfillment of universal human goals. Instead, postmodern knowledge is valued in terms of its efficiency and profitability in a market-driven global economy" (37). In such conditions, the end of authoritarianism and universality, which became dominant features of postmodernity, was observed.[12] Soon the ideology and the symbol of imperial power were replaced by the concept of consumption continuum. In fact, according to Lyotard, "in matters of social justice and scientific truth alike, the legitimation of power was based on its optimizing the system's performance – efficiency" (XXIV). Divided into several networks of separate areas of inquiry, knowledge was heavily involved in the expansion of consumer culture. As Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger summarize:

> The postwar period witnessed central and planned state intervention on an unprecedented scale, thereby profoundly changing the relationship between state and society. In other words, the tensions that had already strained various established narratives of British modernity in the interwar years erupted fully after 1945 and led to significant re-negotiations of the semantics of the modern in the United Kingdom. In the transformed postwar world, the established stories of British modernity emphasizing historical continuity lost their earlier persuasion. (15)

[12] Also Ernest Mandel in *Late Capitalism* highlights in his periodization of the capitalist development that it was specifically the 1940s that initiated postmodernity owing to "the multinational capitalism and electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses" (Easthope 19).

The Nation De-totalized: Towards Heterogeneous Society

If in the postmodern condition there is no place for totalization and universality that would embrace claims of knowledge and truth belonging to grand narrative, there is also the disintegration of history as a continuous, linear sequence of events. This decline of the status of authority and validity is accompanied by the loss of the sense of "the other". Formerly excluded and perceived as alien or exotic, now the subordinate discourses became a part of the social and cultural construction (Featherstone 2007: 125). With the reference to the concept of postmodernity, there is a cultural declassification and deconstruction of the "power relations and symbolic hierarchies in which the chains of interdependencies between nations and cultures are lengthened and more densely interwoven" (2007: 126). In fact, in Britain this resulted in the integration and acceptance of local and vernacular differences that within years contributed to the construction of a heterogeneous, multicultural society.

It is worth noting that this reconsideration of connections between the dominant power and the subordinate soon after the decline of the empire was followed by the influx of immigrants from the former colonies, exerting a tremendous impact on national culture and society, ultimately furthering the multicultural process. However, as Dominic Sandbrook points out, one should remember that "Britain had a long experience of receiving foreign newcomers, whether European, Jewish, Indian or Chinese" (2005: 309).[13] A country that had established its reputation and wealth on seaborne trade faced a constant influx of immigrants from all over the world. However, with gradual decolonialization, the nature of immigration changed. According to Sandbrook, "this process was to make Britain, like the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia, a postcolonial nation in which nationality was conferred not by ethnic or racial identity but by common citizenship offered under the terms of the 1948 British National Act in which all the Crown subjects were entitled to British citizenship" (2005: 347). Indeed, the background did not matter as

[13] Needless to say, Britain as an official four nation state observed the interdependence of cultures, despite a significant dominance of the English over the Scots, the Welsh and the Northern Irish, mainly of historical, economic, political and cultural nature. Britain engaged in a number of dialogues that formed new representations of Britishness.

the revival of the British economy encouraged immigrants to meet the demands of economic progress of a country shattered by the war.[14]

Along with the sustained influx of newcomers, new antagonisms emerged. The groups of immigrants were divided by lines of ethnic background, class, age, gender and religion. [15] Distinct identities had to coexist together, in the course of time evoking the atmosphere of a changing world which rejected the ideas of unified social structures. Each group was using its own *petite narrative*, displacing traditional forms of culture and pointing to the heterogeneity of the social structure. Replaced by the multiplicity of fragmented and interrupted discourses, [16] culture "exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before" (Lyotard 15). In this manner, the rejection of the concept of totality, necessity of diversity and new dialogues and privileging of the local and vernacular define the postmodern condition. This mixture of native traditions and cosmopolitan borrowings prove that ethnocentric culture is no longer a normative and universal category. Yet, a dispersed Britain of the late fifties initially conveyed a disconcerting impression, as described in the following passage by the sociologist Sheila Patterson:

> As I turned off the main shopping street, I was immediately overcome with a sense of strangeness, even of shock. The street was a fairly typical South London side-street, grubby and narrow, lined with cheap cafes, shabby pubs and flashy clothing-shops. But what struck one so forcibly was that there were coloured men and women wherever I looked, shopping, strolling, or gossiping on the sunny street-corners with an animation that most Londoners lost long ago […] I experienced a profound reaction of something unexpected and alien. (Sandbrook 2005: 320)

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[14] The demand for manual workers in British industry was extremely high in the fifties, contributing to the constant influx of immigrants. As Sandbrook points out, the introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in the early sixties resulted in strong controls on immigrants. The Act favoured educated and skilled workers, changing the dimension of the new wave of immigration (2005: 314–315).

[15] The sixties in America accentuated the importance of the civil rights movements, which exerted an impact on British life. This aspect will be explored in a further subchapter of the book.

[16] Discourse understood for the purpose of cultural studies proposed by Wojciech Kalaga as a "specific and identifiable body of texts and signifying practices together with signification systems (including axiological and ideological systems) implicit in them. The axis of discourse may cut across time or across diverse realms of social and cultural organization" (63).

The absence of authoritative statements which proclaimed the end of the existence of the ultimate truth was also accentuated in Western art, commencing with the art of the mid-fifties. The wide range of themes that more often than not crossed aesthetic boundaries, the end of a dominant style, fascination with what was formerly perceived as kitsch and bad art, the end of political and missionary visions of art, are the direct results of suspicion about any grand narrative. Indeed, this was a space where new vernacular forms emerged and transformed previously accepted cultural productions. This combined with the liquidation of the distinction between high and popular discourse, which was accelerated by the spread of mass culture, and resulted in a dialogical relation of wide-ranging cultural forms. Furthermore, the blurring of divergent individual forms was highly pronounced, often dating back to Dada and Surreal works that cross the barriers of works of art. If the culture is multimodal, attitudes in art become more flexible, mobile and open to explore unknown territories, thereby leading to visual pluralism. Needless to say, all these aspects will constitute the basis for my analysis of the works of British Pop Art in the following chapters devoted to the visual culture and postmodern aesthetics. The emphasis will be placed, as Robert Hewison aptly summarizes, "on a new, democratic model of culture – the long front – which broke down the old hierarchies of taste, admitted fresh cultural forms like rock music, and constructed a new collage culture from the fragments of the old" (xv).

Consumer Society and Postmodernism

> What [the people] see is all the gleaming evidence of a society which is out on spree: a Stock Exchange behaving more like a Casino than ever, extravagant parties and expensive cars; refrigerators, washing machines and gadgets piling up in the kitchen. Luxuries become necessities, necessities being forgotten. (Sandbrook 2005: 96)

According to Fredric Jameson, "a postmodern culture is also implicitly to affirm some radical structural differences between what is sometimes called consumer society and earlier moments of the capitalism from which it emerged" (21). Seen from the perspective of the logic of late capitalism, the post-World War II era, consumer culture was generated by the mass consumption and circulation of a "surfeit of signs and images" that marked the traditional cultural spheres of artistic production. In fact, this tendency functioned both ways, contributing also to the expansion of artistic images into the commonplace that formed the urban spaces, promoting the visions of abundance. For Mike Featherstone, this process produced new

territories of consumption and expanding services such as leisure spaces (shopping centres, holiday resorts, theme parks) (2007: xvii). On the other hand, Jean Baudrillard extends consumption from goods not only to services, but also to virtually everything else. In his view, "anything can become a consumer object". As a result, "consumption is laying hold of the whole of life" (1998: 15). For him, consumer culture is effectively the postmodern culture, a depthless culture in which all values have become transvalued and art has substituted reality. What this communicates is the idea that consumption has been extended to all of culture; we are witnessing the commodification of the public sphere. At this point it is worth noting that it was culture that played the pivotal role in the reproduction of consumer goods, spurring the development of multiple competing centres of cultural taste and reducing the significance of hierarchies in cultural production. Indeed, the economic position of the country initiated broader social and cultural changes evident in various areas from the late fifties onwards. They spread outwards from the realm of art history into political theory and on to the pages of youth culture magazines, record sleeves and the fashion spreads of *Vogue*.

Harold Macmillan's words "never had it so good," uttered in 1957, echo the economic condition of the country in the late fifties. The economic boom of the mid-fifties transformed the daily life of the majority of British citizens, dissolving the old economic class divisions and former antagonisms. With increased mass-production, soaring stock market values, better financial conditions resulting from the low unemployment rate and more advanced services and technologies, Great Britain soon restored its pre-war stability. Nevertheless, as John Seed emphasizes, people were no longer divided into poor and rich, but "now it was a matter of the haves, and have-mores" (22). In consumer culture, the previously unprivileged were given a voice and purchasing power. In time, luxuries defined the social affairs that predominantly focused on material goods.[17] Consumer durables such as televisions, cars and refrigerators became symbols of this new prosperity.[18] In consequence, this eradication of the former social order contributed to the consolidation of the working classes,

[17] At this point, it is worth noting that this obsession with the material goods was aptly illustrated in British Pop Art works that often refer to this subject, emphasizing the strong criticism towards the material values of the society of the fifties. This point will be explored in the second chapter of the book.

[18] The new consumer goods soon became the inspiration for Pop artists, who more often than not desired to evoke, in a rather critical way, this fascination with materialism. The second chapter contains analysis of the works that refer to the consumption and status of durables present in the late fifties.

which had been strengthened during the war (Marwick 1996: 123). Even though it was often only an economic equality, this empowerment of the working-class was essential for the national and cultural renewal that eventually initiated new forms of entertainment. This exerted a tremendous effect on the gradual shift away from the division into high and low culture, and eventually the spread of mass culture that soon dominated cultural discourse in the British Isles.

But there was also a visible disappointment of the young, directed at the Establishment, which echoed the strong opposition towards the British power structure and its traditional conventions and attitudes. As Arthur Marwick emphasizes, "ostensibly the attack was on 'the old school tie' and 'the old boy network' more than on the distribution of power as such" (1998: 56). The Angry Young Men accurately exemplified this discontent with the way the society functioned.[19] Unlike the Oxbridge-educated elite, they were graduates of provincial universities of lower middle-class background who wanted a social change which would not be masked by the promise of economic progress. In retrospect, referring to Dominic Sandbrook, the Angry Young Men indicated the pivotal role of the media in social and cultural constructions in the late fifties. Osborne, Wilson and Amis barely knew one another and wrote very different kinds of things (2005: 191–92). In this manner, mass culture absorbed the works of the artists, producing a myth of the movement that became a valuable source for the press. Robert Hewison observes that "The Angry Young Men did assist in the replacement of predominate upper-class by a lower-middle class technocratic one. The elements of the older mandarin values lingered on, but the new men were described classless" (279). All in all, the emergent *déclassé* and alienated young generation initiated the interest in youth culture, which with the onset of the sixties became a separate socio-cultural category.

[19] The Angry Young Men became a catchphrase overused by the media while referring to a number of British playwrights and novelists from the mid-fifties, whose political views were rather anarchic, and who described various forms of social alienation, being close to realistic writing (Drabble 31). Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger,* was a key text that carried the main tendencies expressed by the authors. The play itself became in 1956 a kind of "event," having made use of the media interest that to a large extent promoted the text (Sandbrook 2005: 193).

Youth Culture and Economic Empowerment

> Where American official culture at the end of the fifties had effectively damped down the expressive impulses of young people, England had embraced them as a way of emerging from decades, maybe centuries, of slumber. It let them grow, coalesce, strut. London was where youth culture finally cemented its hold on all forms of expression, and made itself loudly and exuberantly known. (Levy 7)

The rapid acceleration of consumption in the late fifties must be analysed from the perspective of the cult of youth, which aptly illustrated the fundamentally changing social order. It is worth noting that youth in the post-war years became a topic for an extensive social and political debate on the material conditions and technological progress of the country. Investment in the young generation was a priority for subsequent governments as it helped to sustain the continual growth and prosperity of the British economy. For John Davis, "England was beginning to lag behind the other nations, thus jeopardizing its position in the world" (108). For this reason, "an educational emergency" programme was undertaken to provide enough places in higher education and to reform the entire system of education. This particularly concerned technical and artistic subjects[20] that at that time met the pressures and prospects of the modern world. The state supported the education of teenagers from various social classes, introducing systems of grants to emphasize equality irrespective of one's social background. This was particularly pronounced in the number of art colleges founded in the fifties, promoting creative industries among working-class or lower-middle-class students. As George Melly points out, the art colleges were often "the refuge of the bright but unacademic, the talented, the non-conformist, the lazy, the inventive and the indecisive" (146). Moreover, it was at art and design schools that the major artistic trends were established, often beyond the official recognition of the academy. The aesthetics proposed by students of different social backgrounds oscillated between continuity and discontinuity of traditional means of expression. To emphasize their disapproval of formal tendencies, young artists favoured a cross-referencing between forms "and notably between pop music and art, between aesthetics and commerce, between commitment and the need to make a living" (McRobbie 21).

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[20] As Davis emphasizes, there was also an increase in the number of advanced places in technical colleges, and the colleges of advanced technology (108). Everything was done to sustain the technical development of the country.