

LUCY CURZON

## Patronizing Gender: Women, Cultural Identity and State Support of the Visual Arts in Postwar Britain, 1945–1981<sup>1</sup>

Overriding all of this is the fact that “culture” is no longer considered as the prerogative of the few. There is a growing disinclination to define culture in elitist terms: a new recognition of the diversity of cultural values, artefacts and forms, even within the same country. This may be seen as part of the trend of the twentieth century to define mankind as including all men, each with the right both to create and to participate, to give as well as to receive.<sup>2</sup>

THE 1978 HAYWARD Gallery Annual Exhibition ostensibly marked a rupture of this historic correlation of masculinity and culture. The first retrospective both to be funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain *and* organized entirely by women, it exhibited primarily the work of female artists in an overtly political attempt to prove both the calibre and diversity of women’s talent. The

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<sup>2</sup>Working paper prepared by the Secretariat, *Cultural Rights as Human Rights* (Paris: UNESCO, 1970) 10.

unprecedented nature of the exhibit was not, however, founded simply upon its unorthodox content and organization; its explicitly partisan character challenged received definitions of 'art,' arts patronage, and art production in Britain. Modernist ideas of the solitary or independently creative artist producing personal rather than political works were undermined not only by the collectivity of feminist participation in the exhibition, but also by its mantra: 'the personal is political.'

This rejection of a previously accepted dichotomy between private experience and public life, solidarity among women artists, and feminism's disbelief in social or cultural neutrality contradicted the underlying philosophy of the Arts Council and the established credos of aesthetics and art production. Yet although critical reception of the show did, in part, recognize this challenge, its feminist content, *avant-gardism*, and often sexual explicitness more frequently categorized the Hayward Annual as a curiosity than a genuine artistic revolt. Described by commentators as "Ladies' night at the Hayward Gallery" or "More argument than art," the exhibit was reduced to a circus-like spectacle of oddity or nonsense. One critic tellingly concluded: "Last year the gimmick to draw the crowds was fame and particularly [David] Hockney. This year it is women."<sup>3</sup>

The Hayward Annual served to demonstrate the persistence of 'culture' as a notion identified with civilization, enlightenment, and, in particular, masculinity. The characterization of women artists and their work as "gimmick" or, implicitly, as exterior to 'real art' and 'talent' is an established convention of modern art history. Discussed comprehensively in the works of feminist art historians such as Griselda Pollock, Lisa Tickner, or Linda Nochlin, the disregard for or trivialization of women artists is most often the result of a conflation between ideas of 'women' and notions of creative deficit, dearth of originality, or want of aptitude.<sup>4</sup> As Germaine Greer has argued: "Any work by a woman, however trifling, is as

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<sup>3</sup>*The Spectator* 9 September 1978.

<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988); Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); and Lisa Tickner, "Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism," in *Visual Culture*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (London: UP of New England, 1992).

astonishing as a pearl in the head of a toad. It is not part of the natural order.”<sup>5</sup> This delineation of women’s faculties as inferior—or unnatural—corresponds to an historical understanding of female talent in contradistinction to that of men. Owing to an entrenched perception of genius as an inherently masculine quality, women’s production of art has been traditionally shadowed or belittled by male talent. “The supernatural powers of the artist as imitator, his control of strong, possibly dangerous powers,” suggests Linda Nochlin, “have functioned historically to set him off from others as a godlike creator, who creates Being out of nothing.”<sup>6</sup> Exemplified by the virile ethos of vorticism, futurism, or abstract expressionism, activities associated with active cultural output or edification have customarily assumed parity between intelligence or efficacy and notions of “manliness.”<sup>7</sup> Masculinity has subsequently been positioned as a dominant force or space of contention in studies of twentieth-century visual culture. Analyses of modern art have exposed a textual language of masculine ability, but also implied its unnatural opposite—feminine vacuousness. As feminist analyses and ‘new art’ histories have argued, the idea of the ‘artist-as-male’ and concepts of female passivity are engrained in the canonical works of modern art. In particular, the spectacle of women’s bodies reproduced by such paintings as Eduoard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) indicate an historical perception of woman as the bearer rather than producer of culture.<sup>8</sup> To be viewed or posed, but rarely to initiate artistic designs, the history of modern art production has placed women more frequently as aesthetic ciphers than actual artists.

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<sup>5</sup>Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (New York: Farrar Straus, 1979) 4.

<sup>6</sup>Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power* 155.

<sup>7</sup>See, for instance, Tickner, “Men’s Work?”

<sup>8</sup>It has been argued that Manet’s portrait of a reclining prostitute—often considered a seminal work of modern art for its lack of traditional literary, anecdotal, or moralistic content—is emblematic of women’s objectification by western art. For discussion of the relevance of *Olympia* to modern art see T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984); and Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” in *Vision and Difference* (1988) and *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888–1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

The masculine bias is especially evident when placed in historical context. Social constraints of the period, particularly the inability of women to participate as individuals in metropolitan society or—as unenfranchised beings—to adopt the paradigmatic outlook of the autonomous modernist, indicate the uniquely male character of the late nineteenth-century cosmopolitan setting. As Janet Wolff suggests, the culture of modernity was essentially “about transformations in the public world and its associated consciousness .... And these are areas from which women were excluded, or in which they were practically invisible.”<sup>9</sup> The works of art produced in these conditions followed similar masculine inclinations. Modernist rhetoric generated the image of an independent male artist-*flâneur*, as described by Charles Baudelaire in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863): cosmopolitan but separate from everyday life, his work was self-referential, rigorously experimental, and the product of a purely individual consciousness. Within this artistic economy woman was the target of an inevitably sexualized male glance: “the source of the liveliest and even ... of the most lasting delights; the being towards whom, on behalf of whom [men’s] efforts are directed; that being as terrible and incommunicable as the Deity ... but above all, *through whom*, artists and poets create their most exquisite jewels.”<sup>10</sup> In this position of passivity, women were necessarily the objects and inspiration for art rather than its creators. Indeed, as Griselda Pollock suggests in an analysis of *Olympia*, the explicitly voyeuristic nature of the modern artist’s perspective and women’s inability to participate in the public sphere inevitably precluded a ‘female’ gaze.<sup>11</sup>

The masculinity of the modern artist or, more specifically, modernism as a male phenomenon can also be examined in relation to ideas of authority. Although understood primarily in the context of aesthetics, modern art or literary forms can likewise be perceived as an “historical force whose discursive formation [requires] the active repudiation of other discourses threatening its

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<sup>9</sup>Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) 34.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964) 29–30. My emphasis.

<sup>11</sup>Pollock, *Vision and Difference* 53–55.

bid for cultural hegemony."<sup>12</sup> Modernist initiative, suggests Victor Li, is a form of entrepreneurial "opportunism" or a means to impose order in an otherwise disordered world. "Looked at in this way," Li argues, "the modernist response can be seen as an investment in crisis," which serves to illuminate the problems of modernity and, in turn, stimulate "vigilance, intervention and reparation" (262–63). As a vantage from which to assert individual identities against the homogeneous backdrop of twentieth-century industrial society and, equally, from which to highlight and understand—and consequently impose order upon—rapid social and structural change, the modernist perspective became an authoritative zenith of contemporary art. Yet the sovereignty of this viewpoint inevitably characterized it as a masculine phenomenon. Historically positioned within the 'active' sex, the male artist owed his authority in part to the conventions of gender.

The understanding of modernism as not merely a style or artistic philosophy, but also as a response to the conditions of modernity—to urban life, and its overwhelming clutter, confusion, and obloquy—allows its application to the study of postwar British society and culture. The end of the Second World War, the literal destruction of British cities, and the re-invention of the nation as a welfare state left Britain a country characterized by despair and relief, novelty and confusion. To artists and authors, the outlook which modernist ideas offered—authority over change, yet autonomy from 'sameness'—represented a release from the perceived conformity of socialism, and equally, control over the transformations which war had wrought upon the nation.

The cartography of postwar culture likewise accommodates an examination of the relationship between masculinity and modern aesthetics. Through the 1950s and 1960s, masculine heroism and a corresponding degradation of femininity characterized much of literary and artistic life. Exemplified by Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* (1956) and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1958), the male protagonists of these works set a precedent through their attempts to project a specific type of character upon fifties society. The postwar 'hero' of British culture was "rude, crude and clumsy,

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<sup>12</sup>Victor Li, "Policing the City: Modernism, Autonomy and Authority," *Criticism* 34 (1992): 261.

[boasted] his political apathy, his suspicion of all causes, and he [was] out to do nobody any good but himself."<sup>13</sup> His heroism likewise characterized by a self-serving attitude and a resolutely critical approach to all he saw as "phoney, pretentious or conformist," the fifties male rejected all that was weak or "unmanly."<sup>14</sup> Femininity—and implicitly women—were therefore positioned as the antagonists of modernist bravado. As Janet Wolff has argued: "[The] rebellions of the 1950s were not hospitable to women. The cultures of rebellion (youth cultures, the Beats, the 'white negro') were male, sexist and most often sexually reactionary."<sup>15</sup> In her survey of women artists, Whitney Chadwick equally suggests that the development of a gendered language in artmaking, which opposed "an art of heroic individual struggle to the weakened (i.e. 'feminized') culture of postwar Europe," was responsible for positioning women "outside an emerging model of subjectivity understood in terms of male agency articulated through the figure of the male individual."<sup>16</sup> The Independent Group (IG)—a forerunner of British 'pop'—was similarly described by critic-member Lawrence Alloway, who asserted that "the IG possessed a male chauvinist streak more to be tolerated in the 1950s in Great Britain than elsewhere: the women in the group were without exception wives and girl friends."<sup>17</sup>

This exclusionary stance has been obviously problematic for women in the arts; the prejudices of the British art world have marginalized female artists through much of the postwar period. The biases of modern art production, however, were made particularly manifest in women's relationship with art patronage and,

<sup>13</sup>Lynne Segal, "Look Back in Anger: Men in the Fifties," in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman and Jonathon Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988) 68.

<sup>14</sup>Segal, "Look Back in Anger" 68.

<sup>15</sup>Janet Wolff, *Resident Alien: Feminist Cultural Criticism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995) 142.

<sup>16</sup>Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996) 320.

<sup>17</sup>Lawrence Alloway, "The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty," in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. David Robbins (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990) 50.

more specifically, with the Arts Council of Great Britain. A 1975 demonstration outside the Council's main London venue, the Hayward Gallery, attempted to boycott a British retrospective of sculpture which included only four women among forty exhibitors and, more generally, to articulate female artists' grave dissatisfaction with their constant oversight by official patrons. The protest illustrated the degree of antipathy felt by women towards a larger history of discrimination in the sphere of publicly funded exhibitions. A tradition of rejection, perceived lack of worth, or dearth of popular appeal has allowed women's art to remain unshown and unpatronized in Britain through much of this century.<sup>18</sup> It can be argued that the Arts Council—an official body formed in 1945 to disseminate and sponsor 'culture' throughout Britain—did very little to challenge these perceptions, or, more fundamentally, to usurp the masculine tradition of the visual arts. From its inception, a distinctly 'male' ethos pervaded Council rhetoric. In an initial release outlining the policy and objectives of the organization, the Council's first Chairman, John Maynard Keynes, projected a 'masculine' vision of art production through his description of the artist:

The artist walks where the breath of the spirit blows him. He cannot be told his direction, he does not know it himself. But he leads the rest of us into fresh pastures and teaches us to love and to enjoy what we often begin by rejecting, enlarging our sensibility and purifying our instincts. The task of an official body is not to teach or to censor, but to give courage, confidence and opportunity.<sup>19</sup>

This portrait offers an evident connection between the nascent perceptions of the Arts Council and the autonomy, purified con-

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<sup>18</sup>Between 1910 and 1986, the Tate Gallery held 214 one-person shows: only eight were the work of women artists. By the late 1980s, the National Gallery possessed only twelve works by women artists in its collection of 2010 paintings. The Hayward Gallery itself had never presented a major retrospective of a woman artist, either alive or dead, national or international, until September 1992 when a show of Bridget Riley's work was held. *Women Artists Slide Library Journal* 20 (December/January 1988): 9.

<sup>19</sup>John Maynard Keynes, "The Arts Council: Its Policy and Hopes," *The Listener* 12 July 1945: 31–32.

sciousness, *avant-gardism* and—most importantly—the plainly sexed character of the artist. Keynes' use of "he" provides a signpost to the larger aesthetic and theoretical biases of British arts patronage. Whether intentional or not, this sexualization of cultural policy—if only in the most superficial sense—indicates a proliferation of modernist sensibilities, and, as my subsequent argument will suggest, the false idolization of masculinity as a creative force.

Perhaps best exemplifying this uneven relationship between gender and official arts patronage were various debates which evolved as a result of the Second Hayward Annual. Although not directly the consequence of artists' demonstrations in 1975, the Council agreed in 1976 that five women would compose the selection committee of this survey exhibition which came to be known as HA II. Artists Tess Jaray, Liliane Lijn, Kim Lim, Rita Donagh and Gillian Wise Ciobotaru were appointed to organize those works which would compose the show.<sup>20</sup> Opened on 23 August 1978, this event was intended to "bring to the attention of the public the quality of the work of women artists in Britain in the context of a mixed show."<sup>21</sup> Maintaining the principle of an 'annual'—a review of all types of art, by any type of artist (both sexes)—Jaray, Lijn, Lim, Wise Ciobotaru and Donagh made the Hayward an exhibition of not only female artists, but of "undershown and underrated artists' of all ages and stylistic persuasions, ... [yet] giving special attention to women" (2). Consequently, their selection process was not guided by notions of an exclusively female event, but merely by the conviction that "aesthetic quality had suffered from the previously 'exclusive' bias towards male artists" (2). They therefore adjusted the historical prejudice of art exhibitions and selected more women than men as participants. Including Wise Ciobotaru, Jaray, Lijn, and Donagh themselves, sixteen women and seven men were named to the show. Ranging in age from their twenties to their

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<sup>20</sup>This action, however, was not articulated as an amendment for past discrimination but rather was the result of Lijn's unsuccessful previous bid to the Arts Council for a grant to defray the cost of organizing a survey exhibition of British women's art.

<sup>21</sup>Lucy Lippard, "The Anatomy of an Annual" in *Hayward Annual 78* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978) 1.



fifties, five worked outside of London and fourteen of the twenty-three had no gallery affiliation.<sup>22</sup>

Although the Hayward Annual of 1978 very publicly marked an entry of women into official culture, feminist art critics nonetheless expressed concern at both the artists chosen and the intentions of the Arts Council. In her analysis of the exhibition, Griselda Pollock discusses a fear of tokenism. She suggests HA II was organized not out of the Council's desire to deal with feminist issues in a comprehensive manner, but rather to cope with the immediate pressure of Lijn, Jaray, Lim and Wise Ciobotaru "in [the Council's] hope to wipe their consciences clean with a one-off token gesture."<sup>23</sup> The yet nascent place of women's art but the unprecedented degree of women's activism in the British art world had prompted a paradoxical response—confusion *and* loathing—and, consequently, the creation of an exhibition intended to be a temporary measure rather than a definite commitment to end discrimination in state patronage. Pollock suggests, however, that the actions of the selection committee equally jeopardized the political aims of the show. The principal point of departure for the organizers was to contest prejudice in exhibition practices: to amend the biases of the art establishment through a show of little known or unknown women artists instead of famous men. Yet of the sixteen women included, eight held one-woman shows in major galleries in the four years leading up to HA II, eight had received grants or bursaries, and ten taught in London art schools. Thus the majority of the women were already (relatively) 'established' artists. As Pollock concludes: "One is tempted to ask whether the Hayward Show was a real step towards the rectification of wrongs, or a strategy to enable some women to get more firmly lodged in the establishment, to use Lucy Lippard's phrase—to get a larger slice of a rotten pie."

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<sup>22</sup>Exhibiting artists were: Susan Beere, Sandra Blow, Pamela Burns, Marc Chaimowicz, Gillian Wise Ciobotaru, Stephen Cox, Susan Derges, Rita Donagh, Julia Farrer, Elisabeth Frink, Steve Fulonger, Susan Hiller, Alexis Hunter, Tess Jaray, Edwina Leapman, Liliane Lijn, Mary Kelly, Leopalder Maler, Adrian Morris, Deanna Petherbridge, Terry Pope, Michael Sandle, and Wendy Taylor.

<sup>23</sup>Griselda Pollock, "Feminism, Femininity and the Hayward Annual Exhibition 1978," in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970–1985*, ed. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker (London: Pandora, 1987) 167.

The contentions of HA II are representative of the more general territory of feminist art history and cultural analysis. As a facet of the 'new art' histories of the 1970s,<sup>24</sup> feminist criticism has challenged established conventions of art historical method. Through its discovery of forgotten female artists or the use of gender as an analytic category, feminist scholarship has attempted to demonstrate the fallibility of sex as a qualifier of merit and to open rifts in modern perceptions of womanhood.<sup>25</sup> But this expansion of territory has frequently marginalized feminist pursuits. Scrutiny of a traditionally paramount aspect of art production—the notion of the pure, independent artistic voice—has cultivated sharp friction between feminism and more mainstream aesthetic studies. Rather than positioning the artist as an autonomous being whose work embodies a personal expression or experience (as conventional art history does), gender analyses frequently situate works of art as complex orders of inter-connected and socially produced meanings. As a system of signification, visual art operates within culturally and historically produced codes and conventions, and therefore depicts not merely the intimate feelings of the artist, but also those of the society of which he or she is a part. Such perspectives, however, have not only undermined the methodology of traditional art history, they have also created conflict within the feminist movement. Although such studies have proliferated in British analyses of women's painting or sculpture, the belief that this position menaces the idea of women's cultural activity as a form of liberating self-expression or a means to gain access to the opportunities

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<sup>24</sup>These types of analysis were marked by an extension of research beyond the parameters of art itself. Whereas conventional approaches to the study of art concentrate upon style, attributions, dating, or the meaning of pictures as created by form, colour or perspective, the new art history investigates the social production of art using psychoanalytical, marxist, feminist, or socio-political theories.

<sup>25</sup>See Carol Maver, *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (Durham: Duke UP, 1995); Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1981); Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Janet M.C. Burns, "Looking as Women: The Paintings of Suzanne Valadon, Paula Modersohn-Becker, and Frida Kahlo," *Atlantis* 18 (1992): 25-46; and Teresa Grimes, Judith Collins and Oriana Baddeley, *Five Women Painters* (Oxford: Lennard Publishing, 1989).

enjoyed by men has introduced contention between artists and, more broadly, with feminism itself.<sup>26</sup>

Although the Hayward Annual and the history of gender and art production have opened these territories for investigation, extensive or critical engagement between feminism and cultural policy has been minimal.<sup>27</sup> Revolving primarily around issues concerning high politics or welfarism, rather than sexuality, studies of the Arts Council have principally examined the influence of state control upon the arts, the relationship of capitalism to culture, or the beneficial aspects of arts appreciation upon the wider population. The arguments of commentators such as Raymond Williams, who suggested that the “arm’s length policy” by which the Council operates was necessarily a function of elite tastes, are indicative of this connection.<sup>28</sup> Justin Lewis has likewise argued that cultural policy, as the instrument of wealth, has allowed the arts to be determined by affluence and therefore incompatible with popular or common culture.<sup>29</sup> Inclusive of work by Janet Minihan, Nicholas M. Pearson, and John Pick, the scope of analysis on arts patronage and the Arts Council of Great Britain is generally limited to issues of class.<sup>30</sup>

Yet how official systems of patronage propagate ideas of ‘women’ and the ways in which these representations have restricted women’s access to a preconceived notion of ‘culture’ require further investigation. In the remainder of this paper, therefore, gender and arts subsidy are examined as interrelated phenomena. The notions of ‘art’ and ‘artist’ determined by official cul-

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<sup>26</sup>See, for instance, Rosa Lee, “Resisting Amnesia: Feminism, Painting and Postmodernism,” *Feminist Review* 26 (July 1987): 5–28.

<sup>27</sup>See Griselda Pollock, “Feminism, Femininity and the Hayward Annual Exhibition 1978,” in *Framing Feminism* 165–80; and Robert Hutchinson, *The Politics of the Arts Council* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1982) Chapter 2.

<sup>28</sup>Raymond Williams, “The Arts Council,” *Political Quarterly* 50 (1978): 157–71.

<sup>29</sup>Justin Lewis, *Art, Culture and Enterprise: The Politics of Art and the Cultural Industries* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>30</sup>Janet Minihan, *The Nationalisation of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977); Nicholas M. Pearson, *The State and the Visual Arts* (Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1982); John Pick with Razak Ajala and Malcolm Hey Anderton, *The Arts in a State: A Study of Government Arts Policy from Ancient Greece to the Present* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1988).

ture are here positioned as concepts which are specifically 'gendered' as the consequence of prevailing modernist aesthetics in postwar Britain. The canonization of modernism as a paradigm of aesthetic understanding in the 1940s and the widespread adoption of its methods established an especial comprehension of artistic activity after 1945. Subsequently embraced by postwar planners, the gender biases of modern art were engrained in the cultural statutes of contemporary Britain.

In presenting an analysis of the Arts Council, however, I do not purport to be offering an essay in art history, nor a comprehensive examination of modernism. I offer instead an investigation of how patronage systems create ideas of artistry and artmaking, and equally, how these concepts interact with notions of national culture. As a cultural history, this paper details various theoretical ideas associated with official arts policy in Britain and the development of a particular patronage practice in the postwar period. In the sections which follow, a brief outline of the history and philosophy of the Arts Council opens the way for an analysis of its discursive (re)creation of a particular definition of 'femininity' in the arts after 1945. The place of women artists and their art in the discourse of modernism and the development of modern art aesthetics in postwar Britain is here examined as a particular resistance to the forces which shaped twentieth-century culture as a peculiarly male phenomenon.

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Formally established by Royal Charter in 1946, the Arts Council was instituted to facilitate the diffusion of 'culture' in Great Britain. As the offspring of the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA)—a morale-raising organization which sought to maintain aspects of civilized life, including opera and theatre, during the Second World War—the Arts Council continued a similar program through the postwar period. With the objective of developing "a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively, and in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public ... to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts and to advise and co-operate with government departments, local authorities and other bodies on matters con-

cerned directly or indirectly with these objects," the Council fostered the growth of culture through the promotion of music, visual art, and other means after 1945.<sup>31</sup>

The work of the Council was intended, in part, to amend social inequalities and improve overall public welfare through its widespread dissemination of those cultural forms previously accessible only to an elite. Yet in this endeavour to bring culture to the majority, the Arts Council simultaneously addressed the historic association of the arts with ideas of civilization and national identity. Exemplified by its role in the 1951 Festival of Britain—for which an exhibition of paintings was organized to illustrate the achievements of British art—the Council encouraged popular recognition of not only 'the best' of culture, but also the belief that such feats were the products of a highly refined society. The work of British artists became, in this context, a symbol of wider national taste and intelligence. As both an aspect of social welfare *and* identity it can thus be argued that the arts were used to invest the public imagination with a notion of Britons as both enlightened and discerning, and—especially—a community united by these qualities.

In turn, this cultivation of mutual ideas of refinement, art, and nation is suggestive of an attempt to instil the belief of cultural cohesion in a state otherwise divided by sectional interests. The seeming reluctance, for example, of the Arts Council to support aesthetics engaged with or depicting the often unrelenting nature of British society—exemplified by its minimal interaction with social realism in the fifties—implies an aversion to comprehend an abundance of postwar tensions. This disinclination, not surprisingly, included resistance towards feminism. Continuing pre- and interwar campaigns to dissolve sexual barriers through equal pay, reproductive rights, or equal educational opportunity, feminists presented a challenge to the idea of a genuinely common or national identity from the 1940s onward. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), socialism, feminist literature, or female workers brought to public view issues regarding abortion and birth control, the contentious nature of housework and motherhood, or women's relation to pacificism, and hence illuminated the sexual

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<sup>31</sup>Charter of Incorporation (1946).

hierarchies and social boundaries of contemporary Britain. With regard to the participation of women in art production, the scarcity of support which the Arts Council manifested for feminist artists or art inspired by ideas of women's experience indicated an ostensible unwillingness to explore the reality of a fragmented society and, in consequence, the Council's inability to include particular ideas of 'woman' in British culture.

Such resistance to the crux of sexual difference was not an entirely novel phenomenon. The British film industry, largely controlled by the Foreign Office and Ministry of Information during the Second World War, produced a genre of films after 1939 which attempted to sublimate the polarities of gender for the sake of national unity. As Antonia Lant, Gillian Swanson, and Christine Gledhill argue in their histories of wartime film, the maintenance of morale on the homefront often required the cultivation of ideas of 'men' and 'women' which could uphold the notion of Britain as a unified nation. According to Lant, "[The] axis of sexual difference, that foundational structure of visual and narrative categories by which screen men and women are kept distinct yet coupled, became attenuated, less visible, in British wartime cinema."<sup>32</sup> Feature films on the theme of war, for example, frequently depicted male and female roles which veiled gender contrasts through their dramatization of men and women as partners in national defence rather than as sexual adversaries. Movies such as *Love Story* (1944), the tale of a newly-wed couple, accented not the hardships of marriage between a young soldier and his wife, or individual desires, but promoted an acceptance of "emotional loss, separation, and uncertainty about the future while still demanding ... [a] commitment to 'living through'" (39). This purposive creation of a cinema endeavouring to meld the disparities of British society was equally evident in filmic attempts to transcend the boundaries of class. The encouragement of national unity through the propagation of themes common to all Britons—regardless of social or cultural background—was intended to foster concord on the homefront. Films such as *Millions Like Us* (1943)—a story of wartime factory production—encouraged a notion of shared situation not only

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<sup>32</sup>Antonia Lant, *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 6–7.

through its title, but also by an articulation of subjects which all audiences could associate with their individual lives. Ideas of home, loss, death, and work had the ability to evoke meaning within the general population and thus (optimistically) inspire both cooperation and perseverance on a national scale.

It can be argued that this attenuation of differences exemplified by wartime cinema was maintained through the postwar period by state policies toward culture. The difficulties of reconstruction, the onset of austerity, British loss of world position, and financial dependence upon the United States—coupled with changes effected by welfare politics, an increased presence of the working classes, and the nationalization of major industries and institutions—not only caused social upheaval but also altered historical perceptions of national identity. Formerly inspired by a wealth of imperial history, the government faced, in 1945, the challenges of a nation largely overcome by weariness and political apathy, and disillusioned by the dubious rewards of its victory. Culture, in this context, assumed a substantive role. The reconstruction of national faith required a dilution of social ills and the cultivation of a unified image of Britain and Britons; in essence, a revaluation and assertion of the cultural identity of ‘Britishness.’ As Lant argues, in periods of crisis, national character indeed becomes malleable: “[It is] not a natural, timeless essence, but an intermittent, combinatory historical product” (31). ‘Britain’ could thus be moulded to fit the shape of postwar rehabilitation.

The Arts Council positioned culture in a similar context. Although the policy objectives of its mandate were often vague,<sup>33</sup> it was nonetheless understood that a common interest in painting, theatre, or music could restore a harmonious national life. Continuing the traditions of wartime CEMA, John Maynard Keynes asserted in a 1945 BBC broadcast:

The re-building of our community and of our common life must proceed in due proportion between one thing and another. We must not limit our provision too exclu-

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<sup>33</sup>See, for instance, F.F. Ridely, “Tradition, Change and Crisis in Great Britain,” in *The Patron State: Government and the Arts in Europe, North America and Japan*, ed. M.C. Cummings and R.S. Katz (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) 225–53.

sively to shelter and comfort to cover us when we are asleep and allow us no convenient place of congregation and enjoyment when we are awake .... We look forward to the time when the theatre and the concert-hall and the gallery will be a living element in everyone's upbringing.<sup>34</sup>

This diffusion of resources and support for the institutionalization of culture in British life indicates the desire to establish a national community of and for the arts. As Keynes asserted: "The purpose of the Arts Council of Great Britain is to create an environment, to breed a spirit, to cultivate an opinion, to offer a stimulus to such purpose that the artist and the public can each sustain and live on the other in that nation which has occasionally existed at the great ages of communal civilised life" (32). Yet this hoped for reciprocity between audience and artist was not only intended to establish social affinity; it was designed as a peculiarly British phenomenon. Keynes' declaration of "Death to Hollywood" and his hope that "every part of Merry England be merry" in its own cultural endeavours, suggests an association between culture and national consciousness (32). An aspect of "being British," it was implied, involved the recognition of not only high calibre arts (rather than those mass-produced in the United States) but also those which were situated in a specific geographic or sentimental context.

This affirmation of collective edification or common cultural interest, however, also implies the attempt not merely to formulate a mutual idea of Britain or Britishness, but likewise to evoke shared notions of intelligence, civility, and anti-philistinism. The Council attempted to play a fundamental role in the development of national and human character through its dedication to the provision of exemplary arts. In his Romanes Lecture of June 1958, Edward Ettingdene (Lord) Bridges argued: "[It] is the duty of the state to provide something of the best in each of the arts as an example or inspiration to the whole country."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Keynes, "The Arts Council: Its Policy and Hopes" 32.

<sup>35</sup>Edward Ettingdene (Lord) Bridges, *The State and the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) 16. Bridges was a trustee of the Pilgrim Trust and the Chair of the Royal Fine Art Commission.



The Labour Government's 1965 White Paper, *A Policy for the Arts*, was perhaps the most explicit statement on the role of the arts in British society. Claiming the need for a new "social as well as artistic climate,"<sup>36</sup> this document most clearly articulated the objective of culture in national life:

In any civilised community the arts and associated amenities, serious or comic, light or demanding, must occupy a central place. Their enjoyment should not be regarded as something remote from everyday life. The promotion and appreciation of high standards in architecture, in industrial design, in town planning and the preservation of the beauty of the countryside are all part of it. Beginning in the schools, and reaching out in every corner of the nation's life, in city and village, at home, at work, at play, there is an immense amount that could be done to improve the quality of contemporary life. (paragraph 14)

Emphasising the duty of government to serve the needs of the population, *A Policy for the Arts* compared cultural provision to other welfare services, and implied that participation in and enjoyment of artistic life was essential to social well-being and, fundamentally, to healthy living: "Only yesterday it was a fight for a free health service. The day before it was the struggle to win education for all .... Today a searching reappraisal of the whole situation in relation to cultural standards and opportunities is in progress" (paragraphs 98–99). Equally, such a diffusion of the arts was intended to bridge the culture gap. Attempting to traverse the divide between "what have come to be called the 'higher' forms of entertainment and the traditional sources—the brass band, the amateur concert party, the entertainer, the music hall and pop group," *A Policy for the Arts* both illuminated and challenged cultural hierarchies (paragraph 71).

Continuing through the 1980s, this attempt to instil the arts with an ethos of universal access was allied with endeavours to reinforce a notion of cultural identity founded upon ideas of cultivation, acumen, and taste. As Stuart Hall argues, however, identity

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<sup>36</sup>Cmnd. 2601, *A Policy for the Arts* paragraph 6.

takes many forms and is thus “not as transparent or unproblematic as we think.”<sup>37</sup> Hall suggests that there are at least two different ways of conceiving this phenomenon: “The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of the idea of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (211). In this context, cultural identities reflect common historical experiences and offer the idea of “one people” as a stable frame of meaning “beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history” (211). Yet there is a second meaning of “cultural identity” which qualifies the first. This other position acknowledges that, despite similarities, there are also critical points of difference which constitute particular notions of “being.” In his discussion of identities in Caribbean cinema, Hall argues that this second definition underlies the first:

We cannot speak for long, with any exactness, about “one experience, one identity”, without acknowledging its other side—the differences and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean’s uniqueness. Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being”. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (212–13)

Cultural identity, in this context, is not a stable essence or phenomenon which exists outside of history. It is not, as Hall asserts, “a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return” (213). Nonetheless, it is *something*: “Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic,

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<sup>37</sup>Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996) 210.

transcendental ‘law of history’” (213). This second form of “being” is therefore a shifting presence within the spaces of historical narrative.

These two components of identity—sameness and difference—exist as tandem discourses. Hall argues that while the people of a particular community might be joined by general similarities—such as heritage, sex, or skin colour—they are equally divided by the specificity of individual backgrounds or experience, hence dissimilarity is present always amid similarity. “Identities” are concepts which are never finished or fixed, but which keep “on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings” (215). They are composed from the infinite postponement or arbitrary “breaks” and “stops” in the language or discourse that forms them. National or cultural identity is thus understood as a *position* extant within the spaces between similarity and contrast. In short, who or what people are is defined by a stable, overriding history and, equally, an undercurrent of ‘difference.’ As Frantz Fanon suggests in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “a national culture is not folk-lore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover a people’s true nature. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people keeps itself in existence.”<sup>38</sup> Cultural definitions are therefore, as Hall also implies, tangential and evanescent.

Using Stuart Hall’s model, it can be suggested that two dynamics exist within the culture of arts patronage in twentieth-century Britain. From the 1940s, fragmentary and cohesive forces operated concurrently as the Arts Council attempted to instil a concept of cultural identity. The cultivation of ‘community’ through the inculcation of certain ideas of ‘the arts’ suggests a perceived necessity to sustain a particular meaning of ‘Britain,’ and equally, a need to counteract contrary opinion. In this context, it can be argued that the endeavours of the Council to promote national cultural activity were demonstrative of an attempt to nourish social congruity, but also to offset those forces which threatened to dissolve the often superficial consensus of the early postwar period.

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<sup>38</sup>Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 233.

The need to maintain a notion of unity became critical as pre- and interwar social tensions threatened to impose more steadfast divisions in British society after 1945. For example, although equal sacrifice during war, insurance schemes, improved urban planning, and public enthusiasm for welfarism outwardly assuaged the psychological and physical confines of class, sectional interests nonetheless prevailed. Sexual boundaries also threatened upheaval. Despite wartime work which promoted women's freedom in the public sphere, the return of most female workers to the domestic realm occurred after 1945. Yet new ways of comprehending 'woman' challenged this recovery of traditional patterns. Women's war work, the partial maintenance of women in employments conventionally reserved for men, or postwar demands for equal pay questioned established understandings of femininity as a 'passive' phenomenon and, equally, the role of women in society.<sup>39</sup>

Attempts to comprehend and control such differences were evident in the work of the Arts Council. Positioning itself as an agency of response—dedicated to answering the initiatives of others rather than soliciting a clientele—the Council offered support for culture, as opposed to the definition of its parameters. This formula was generally followed by all Council departments, with the exception of visual art. For music, opera, or theatre, a very high proportion of expenditure was used in the form of grants and guarantees to other 'independent' organizations. In the Art Department, however, approximately half of all available monies were spent on activities directly controlled or organized by the department itself. This immediate involvement suggests the inclination and freedom of Council 'experts' to determine which forms of visual art received acclaim and, in consequence, entered the canon of British aesthetics.

As an example of this control, the Arts Council was responsible for the administration of the National Touring Exhibition Service. Because few provincial galleries and museums in Britain had experience of contemporary art or the necessary financial resources to fund such exhibits, the Council offered assistance to towns and cities throughout the country by its mobilization of travelling art

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<sup>39</sup>See Birmingham Feminist History Group, "Feminism as Femininity in the Nineteen-Fifties?" *Feminist Review* 3 (1979): 48–65.

shows. Yet although this service proved useful for public edification, it also vested the Art Department with the authority to delineate the nature of art through its controlled distribution: in general the travelling shows featured “established works from the European and American modernist canon. There were a few historic, ethnic and craft exhibitions, but on the whole the programme reflected a clearly delineated western fine art aesthetic.”<sup>40</sup> Expert judgement, therefore, determined the types of art which were viewed and, through such direction, necessarily ordained the ways in which art was understood.

It can be argued that this aspect of dominion within the Arts Council allowed the cultivation of ideas peculiar to a specific aesthetic: modernism. Notions of modernity and its corresponding ideas of social or cultural progress have played a significant role in the delineation of postwar British identity. Yet as James Vernon and Martin Wiener have suggested, it was a halting acceptance of modern change which characterized twentieth-century attitudes.<sup>41</sup> When formerly sound social markers, such as class structure, were upset by the effects of austerity, affluence, or the foundation of the welfare state after 1945, the necessity of safeguarding previously fixed limits became essential to the fabric of British society. Within the realm of art and art production, the aesthetics of modernity can be understood, as discussed above, in the context of an effort to impose order upon the disorder of modern urban life. For example, in a seeming effort to exact control, many artists of the forties and fifties employed forms associated with twentieth-century technological progress which confronted (and thereby monopolized) culture with its own images. Painters such as Prunella Clough created modernist imagery through their use of industrial iconography, while Ben Nicholson ostensibly conveyed the homogeneous nature of forties Britain through his use of geometric abstraction. Yet the resulting forms not only utilized the language of postwar

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<sup>40</sup>Colin Crigg, “The Arts Council: A Question of Values,” MA thesis, The City University, London, 1992, 99.

<sup>41</sup>James Vernon, “‘The Mirage of Modernity’: A Report on the ‘Moments of Modernity? Reconstructing Britain, 1945–64’ Conference Held at the University of Portsmouth, 9–10 July 1996,” *Social History* 22 (1997); and Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit: 1850–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981).

society to convey pictorially notions of the twentieth-century, but also to guard against the infringement of 'otherness.'

At the core of modernist theory was the reduction of visual art to an essence or fundamental framework that would serve to safeguard elite genres from the commonplace *kitsch* of mass culture. The upsurge of 'low' or popular forms after the war confronted 'high' art with the possibility of fragmentation or 'pollution' by lesser media. Hal Foster implies that late/high modernist art and criticism can indeed be characterized as types of policing, in which critical analysis and art production were a form of "highly ethical, rigorously logical enterprise that set out to expunge impurity and contradiction."<sup>42</sup> Clement Greenberg similarly argued: "[The] avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point."<sup>43</sup> This emphasis upon purity in visual culture—"art for art's sake," or the creation of art as an exercise of formal qualities—permitted the properties of colour, line or form to eclipse representations of personal experience or commonplace reality. However, it can also be argued that high modernism endeavoured to convey a notion of harmony. The reduction of art to its basic or purest form implies an effort to represent a unified whole. Without (emotional or otherwise) impurities, works such as those by Piet Mondrian or Jackson Pollock communicate an ostensible degree of 'totality' through their aesthetic simplicity. The seemingly paradoxical notion of wholeness through minimalism became, therefore, an apt apogee of high modern art.

In his 1945 BBC broadcast on the origins and objectives of the Arts Council, Keynes intimated ideas similar to those posited by modernist criticism—the purity or unchanging essence of artistic forms. Keynes' belief in the absolute autonomy of the artist and the role of the Arts Council as an agency whose purpose was to cultivate an audience—but not to censor opinion—demonstrates an affinity to the idea of artmaking as a discrete concept unaffected

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<sup>42</sup>Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1985) 13.

<sup>43</sup>Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961) 5.

by social dynamics. His characterization, for example, of the artist as an unfettered visionary—"one who walks where the breath of the spirit blows him"—and the belief that works of art were "of [their] nature, individual and free, undisciplined, unregimented, uncontrolled" suggest a modernist conviction of independence from external reality.<sup>44</sup> These notions, however, similarly imply a type of unity or unified perspective. Creativity as a 'pure' phenomenon, unaffected by outside influences, assumes a harmonious vision of not only the act of art production, but also of art itself. In this context, artistic activity and art appreciation become an unfragmented and unadulterated activity, or one which occupies a "realm of pure feeling outside of social context and ideological analysis."<sup>45</sup>

These beliefs, however, did not accord with the reality of postwar culture in Britain. Modernist notions of the artist as an asocial being and works of art produced as distinct from social occurrences were confronted by the culture of congestion, of urban sprawl, and, in particular, of mass entertainment. The effects of total war produced a society whose values were in flux and whose cultural products seemingly foreshadowed an unpromising future. Mass entertainment and popular arts threatened modernist formalism, while visual art itself moved away from painterly excellence and aesthetic detachment to critical investigations of everyday life. Such artists as John Bratby, Jack Smith, and other members of the social realist Kitchen Sink School, for example, chose to engage with the politics of common living rather than the distanced perspective of late modernism. This positivistic examination of domesticity, provincial and working-class scenarios, or the general hardships of postwar existence placed their work in a context outside prevailing paradigms of high art. Similar to the film or dramatized versions of Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* (1958), Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1959) and *Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1962), and John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1959), the Kitchen Sink School articulated the 'real life' of Britain in the 1950s.

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<sup>44</sup>Keynes, "The Arts Council: Its Policy and Hopes" 31.

<sup>45</sup>Crigg, "The Arts Council: A Question of Values" 81.

It can be argued that the cultural establishment responded to this threat through an imposition of aesthetic boundaries. In its effort to maintain an ethos of unity, the Arts Council advertised its support of (outwardly) 'disengaged' or asocial art forms. Perhaps most conspicuous in this endeavour was its promotion of abstract expressionism. The product of 1930s and 1940s America, abstract expressionist art evolved as anti-communist persecutions forced artists away from the left-influenced aesthetics of social realism and into the detached realm of abstraction. Clement Greenberg aptly declared in 1946: "Some day it will have to be told how anti-Stalinism which started out more or less as Trotskyism turned into art for art's sake, thereby clearing the way, heroically, for what was to come."<sup>46</sup> The rise of pure formalism—the investigation of pictorial values over subject-matter—thus reduced the content of art from visual 'reality' to 'essence.' Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, both the American government and art institutions in America invested substantial resources into the promotion of this new avant-garde. In 1956, the Arts Council joined with the Museum of Modern Art, New York, to organize a "Modern Art in the United States" exhibition at the Tate Gallery. As the first large-scale showing of abstract expressionism in Britain, it had a significant impact upon the British art scene. Patrick Heron, the painter, revealed: "I was instantly elated by the size, energy, originality and inventive daring of many of the paintings."<sup>47</sup> This cementing of British aesthetics within a conventional modernist paradigm characterized much of official cultural activity through the fifties. Prior to the American exhibition, the Council organized "Sixty Paintings for '51" as part of the Festival of Britain. Highlighting British talent for national and world perusal, the show amounted to a roll-call for great British modernists including Heron, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Robert Colquhoun, Peter Lanyon, Roy de Maistre, John Piper, William Roberts, Rodrigo Moynihan, Ben Nicholson, Prunella Clough, Ivon Hitchens, Matthew Smith, and Ceri Richards. In 1954/55, the Arts Council arranged exhibitions of cubist and surrealist paintings, as well as Stanley Spencer, Paul Klee, Edouard Manet, and Victor Pasmore. Vincent Van Gogh, Alberto Giacometti, and Spencer Gore

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<sup>46</sup>Cited in Crigg, "The Arts Council: A Question of Values" 95.

<sup>47</sup>Cited in Crigg, "The Arts Council: A Question of Values" 96.



were highlighted in 1955/56; while in 1956/57 a number of equally important shows were held, including an exhibition lent by the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris entitled "Autour du Cubism," and retrospectives of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, as well as the Nabis and the Fauves.<sup>48</sup>

## 3

This affinity to modernism is suggestive of contravening activity. As an aesthetic inspiring 'wholeness,' modern art can be understood as the symbolic product of an undivided culture or, equally, of a culture attempting to obfuscate its differences. It can thus be argued that the allure of modernist work to the Arts Council was its ability to establish a consonant ethos of 'Britain.' As Colin Crigg argues, cohesion was indeed fundamental to arts patronage: "The Arts Council structure, patterns of discrimination and forms of action, demonstrate the ... imperative to maintain a continuum of values against the threat of infinite fragmentation, arbitrariness and perpetual revolution."<sup>49</sup> This imposition of aesthetic boundaries, however, had critical gender implications. Through the fifties, sixties, and seventies, art which implied or illustrated the fragmented nature of British society received little ostensible support, and feminist art—or that which depicted a culture of difference—was allowed to exist as a marginal or unrecognized entity. Women in general faced an unsympathetic patron state. The small number of female Council members, women who received artist's bursaries, or were participants in exhibitions sponsored by the Arts Council

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<sup>48</sup>See *Annual Report and Accounts of the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1950/51–1959/60*. It is, of course, difficult to gauge who participated in group exhibitions. Many of the exhibition titles, however, are indicative of the type of art involved. The period 1949/50, for example, included: "French Paintings of the Nineteenth Century," "Italian Influence on English Painting in the Eighteenth Century," "Folk Art of Poland," and "A Selection of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition of 1949." In particular, the latter was indicative of Council preferences: the Royal Academy was well-known as a showcase of apolitical, mediocre, and generally second-rate art. Official arts patronage thus veered away from the divisive, the controversial, and the socially engaged.

<sup>49</sup>Crigg, "The Arts Council: A Question of Values" 100.

was demonstrative of an aesthetic and structural discrimination within British cultural institutions. In this context, the attention paid by feminism to sexual divisions represented a challenge to established parameters of art and art production. A heretofore male and autonomous culture, the officially patronized arts were threatened by 'difference' and thus reluctant to comprehend particular notions of femininity.

Despite the presence of two women on its founding committee, the Arts Council was largely male in composition.<sup>50</sup> Barbara Ayrton Gould and Thelma Cazalet Keir were named to the organization in 1945, and were replaced by successive female members throughout the postwar period. Yet at the height of the Women's Liberation Movement—and representative of the Council's entire history—there were not more than five women (of up to twenty members) on the Council at any one time. On the Visual Arts Panel (and including its subcommittees when applicable), the highest proportion of female members was sixteen per cent in 1980/81, when women made up four of twenty-one individuals on the committee. On the Council's administrative staff, Mary Glasgow was appointed first Secretary-General and maintained that post from 1946 to 1951. Mary Allen, the next female to occupy this position, was appointed in 1994. The first woman Deputy Secretary-General, Margaret Hyde, was named in 1991. Joanna Drew became the first female Visual Arts Director in 1975.<sup>51</sup>

These structural designations were, superficially, reinforced by discursive ones. *A Policy for the Arts*, the 1965 White Paper of the Labour Government, articulated a language of exclusivity through its delineation of the artist as an ostensibly male character. Employing masculine pronouns throughout its text, this document seem-

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<sup>50</sup>In total, the Arts Council was composed of a chair, vice-chair, luminaries of the arts world and various heads of panels making up a body of not more than twenty people. Beyond the immediate twenty-member council, but under its jurisdiction, were advisory panels—those for visual art, drama, music, art films, photography, and literature. Each offered advice on matters concerning applications for support—including the artistic ability of the applicant, their originality and intelligence—and responded to the chair of the panel, who, in turn, reported to the Council.

<sup>51</sup>See *Annual Report and Accounts of the Arts Council of Great Britain*, "Council," "Staff" and "Arts Panel" 1945/46–1980/81.

ingly characterizes a sexed figure: "At present the young artist, having finished *his* schooling, has still to gain experience and has difficulty in obtaining employment .... By far the most valuable help that can be given to the living artist is to provide *him* with a larger and more appreciative public."<sup>52</sup> It is not, perhaps, surprising that the language of the Arts Council and arts patronage dealt with 'he' not 'she' or spoke of 'men' not 'women'—in its then contemporary use, 'he' was a signifier for both sexes. Yet despite the obviously anachronistic potential of such an analysis, this language can be employed as a signpost which perhaps suggests an unconscious affirmation of the arts and the artist as male domains; the masculine pronouns of Council documents are a convenient—if only trivial—indicator that arts policy was permeated by a specifically gendered ideology. Not merely utilizing 'he' as a generic designation, it can be argued that the decision-making of the Arts Council reflected a theoretically informed notion of the male artist. For example, in his discussion of "ethical" funding practices, Lord Goodman (Chairman of the Arts Council, 1965–72) utilized a rhetoric of masculine superiority to declare the support of 'men' a national duty: "If you have a poet, he may be the most obscure poet and he may attract only a few hundred people to his readership, but he may be a man who is well worthy of support, and it would be wrong for a civilized country not to support him."<sup>53</sup> Aspects of modernist individuality and the creative process—historically defined male phenomena—were equally suggested as masculine. Lord Bridges declared: "The artist's inspiration is something individual to himself .... The impatience or intolerance which an artist sometimes shows on the views of others, springs from the fact that so often he feels that his critics do not understand what he is trying to do, and base their judgements of his work on a point of view quite alien to his own thought."<sup>54</sup> Yet it was not simply autonomy and individuality which arts patronage defined in the context of masculinity. When Goodman delineated the parameters of Council support, he did so using the language of the male breadwinner: "What

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<sup>52</sup>*A Policy for the Arts* paragraphs 83 and 88. My emphasis.

<sup>53</sup>Arnold (Lord) Goodman, *Not for the Record: Selected Speeches and Writings* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1972) 135.

<sup>54</sup>Bridges, *The State and the Arts* 3–4.

we can do is to ensure that the artist lives in tolerable conditions and is reasonably free from the threat and the sting of poverty, from the fear that, through following an artistic vocation, he will have to go without food and will be unable to educate his children."<sup>55</sup> The artist, it is suggested, was not merely a non-gendered or universal 'he,' but an expressly male genius, worker, and provider.

The ideas propounded by the Arts Council coincide with historical concepts of masculinity.<sup>56</sup> In his article on manliness and working-class artisans in the Victorian era, Keith McClelland suggests that specific notions of autonomy and esteem—akin to those described by the Council—were inherently masculine. McClelland argues that the class, familial, and professional respectability of male workers was dependent upon concepts of freedom and self-sufficiency which in turn defined ideas of manliness. The "worthy" artisan was described as an individual who was "free to sell his labour-power; that ... could maintain himself without recourse to charity; that ... would have some degree of freedom in the regulation of the trade .... In these aspects a man's independence was vital to the defence of his 'property in his labour'."<sup>57</sup> Most important to this definition of masculinity, however, was the artisan's duty to his family. As McClelland asserts: "It was not so much the ability to maintain himself as to be able to maintain himself and his dependants, something which entailed a collective as well as individual moral responsibility to do this on behalf of all members of the trade" (82). This echo of Goodman's breadwinner and the ethical rhetoric of Council patronage suggests that the mid-twentieth-century notion of 'artist' was founded upon an established tradition of male craftsmanship, responsibility, and, in particular, exclusivity.

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<sup>55</sup>Goodman, *Not for the Record* 136.

<sup>56</sup>See Keith McClelland, "Rational and Respectable Men: Gender, the Working Class, and Citizenship in Britain, 1850–1867" and Anna Clark, "Manhood, Womanhood, and the Politics of Class in Britain," in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, ed. Laura L. Frader and Sonya Rose (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996) 280–93 and 263–79.

<sup>57</sup>Keith McClelland, "Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850–80," in *Manful Assertions*, ed. John Tosh and Michael Roper (London: Routledge, 1981) 82.

These concepts are equally apparent in ideas of the citizen. Determined by notions of morality, acumen, and autonomy, the idea of citizenship in the Victorian era was innately masculine. In her article on radical working-class movements of the nineteenth century, Sally Alexander posits that particular understandings of the enfranchised individual could only be male. The Chartist notion of citizen, for example, was predicated upon ideas of property-holding and the integrity of labour—both of which represented activities or concepts associated with the public sphere, the traditional domain of men—and, in turn, upon the assumption that these aspects of civil life required safeguarding through suffrage. Yet as Alexander suggests, the franchise was equally crucial to the protection of workers' homes, children, and wives from the insecurities of non-domestic life. In essence, the drive for enfranchisement was propelled by notions of male duty and masculine activity:

Whatever their intentions, the Chartists by deleting women, the factory reformers by submitting to the principle of the protection of women and every working class custom, insofar as it refused an equal status to women within the class, placed women in a different relationship to the state than men. Women fell under the protection of their fathers, husbands or men and were denied independent political subjectivity.<sup>58</sup>

It can thus be suggested that the ideas of subjecthood offered by the Arts Council were similar to historical definitions of masculinity. In other words, the idea of the artist—as one in possession of labour and autonomy, a symbol of civilization, and a familial provider—coincides with the language used to describe particular historical figures which have been traditionally positioned as male. The seemingly generic use of 'man' in Council documents can be understood, in this way, as not merely an unconscious masculinism, but a deliberately sexed rhetoric. Male pronouns are incontrovertibly value-laden; a 'he,' regardless of claims to universality, is never merely a 'he.'

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<sup>58</sup>Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History," *History Workshop Journal* 17 (1984): 146.

This male emphasis has likely determined the representation of women in the arts. For example, upon the retirement of Jennie Lee, Minister for the Arts, in 1970, the then Chairman of the Council eulogized her departure with a rhetoric largely informed by gender stereotypes. Lord Goodman initially declared: "In a short appreciation it is not possible to dwell in detail with the major activities of the Lee era. Mistakes there were; uncertainties there were, but they did not derive from vacillation of policy or feebleness of purpose .... But the one view—unalterably held by the Arts Council—is that we have had a Minister of rare quality."<sup>59</sup> After this enthusiastic introduction, however, Goodman questioned Lee's intelligence: "[She] is not a great intellectual and she claimed no profound knowledge of the arts" (140). Lee was nonetheless described as a "friend" to cultural endeavours, an individual who did her utmost to promote their improvement. Goodman concluded:

She was tireless in visiting artistic activities large and small throughout the country. Her handsome face and winning accents became known everywhere, but her shopping list—as she called her unfulfilled programme—was endless except in the sight of eternity. (140)

This description of Lee implies woman's traditional place in society. "No great intellectual" but a caring, selfless person who adopted a missionary zeal in the practice of her work, Lee is described in conventional feminine terms. In this context, she is ascribed 'motherly' characteristics—munificence, dedication, and philanthropical instinct—while her work is simplified to a "shopping list." Her efforts as Minister for the Arts, moreover, are seemingly more regarded for Lee's "winning accents" and "handsome face" than the cultural progress which they effected. Despite Lee's founding of the Open University and her responsibility for the creation of *A Policy for the Arts*, it was nonetheless imagined that she was not the active, responsible, or breadwinner figure suggested by Council rhetoric. Goodman's statements instead imply that her role was in part that of a figurehead and therefore incidental to cultural development.

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<sup>59</sup>Goodman, *Not for the Record* 140.

This categorization of women as tangential to official culture was likewise apparent in the activities of the Arts Council through the seventies. From 1945, relatively few women were granted exhibitions of their work or were supported through bursaries and grants. Between 1963/64 and 1980/81, for example, fifteen female artists were featured in shows bearing their name. Approximately two hundred men earned the same distinction. Although women might have played a substantial role in group exhibitions during this period, the prestige that accompanied a solo showing suggests that women were not considered an influential presence in the British art world. Moreover, the comparative lack of women artists who received financial support from the Arts Council is similarly indicative of women's glancing status in British cultural institutions. Between 1966/67 and 1980/81, the percentage of bursaries awarded women artists ranged from zero to thirty-three, while the average was approximately sixteen.<sup>60</sup> Although it is not known how many female applicants were initially judged, the almost equal number of male and female students in British art schools through the seventies indicates the potential level of discrimination.<sup>61</sup>

The parameters of support offered by the Arts Council, however, were not entirely prohibitive. Although relatively few women received the honour of exhibition or support by official patronage, they nonetheless achieved acclaim. From the fifties through the seventies, the works of Gwen John, Bridget Riley, Prunella Clough, Agnes Martin, Barbara Hepworth, Lee Krasner, Vanessa Bell, Käthe Kollwitz, Lucie Rie, and Sonia Delaunay were exhibited in Council-organized events, while many more contemporary artists were offered support through financial means. Yet this type of patronage was ambiguous. From the Council's perspective, the women who earned recognition through exhibition could be considered unthreatening to male-defined aesthetic values. Riley, for instance, was commended for the masculinity of her forms. In her 1971 Hayward Gallery exhibition she was described in the language of the active and energetic male *flâneur*:

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<sup>60</sup>See *Annual Report and Accounts of the Arts Council of Great Britain*, "Awards to Artists" 1966/67–1980/81.

<sup>61</sup>See, for instance, Parker and Pollock, "Fifteen Years of Feminist Action," in *Framing Feminism* 8.

Like the way in which a man may be released, through analysis, after being inhibited from being fully himself or sure to his inherent personality by the interference of an enforced rule, thrust on him by the suppositions of society, so Riley is intent upon laying bare with absolute accuracy the fundamental energies to be found in the convergence or divergence of lines, or opposed masses; the expansion or contraction of parallel bands of colour and their parallel or diagonal subdivision .... All these preoccupations are freed from outside, extraneous demands of a descriptive or emblematic kind.<sup>62</sup>

Her abstract figures betrayed little pictorial association with an idea of woman, while her androgynous appearance and often Taylorist approach to art production equally situated her as a male figure. Yet this encroachment upon the territory of manliness was not regarded as a challenge. In 1968, Riley represented Britain at the Venice Biennale and won the International Prize. It can be argued that this acceptance was the result of a perceived conformity with the aesthetic establishment. Because Riley's modernism was not viewed as an open affront to the Council, but rather could be seen as accordant with the implicitly masculine foundations upon which the culture of arts patronage was modelled, she was not recognized as a threat to established opinion. She seemingly affirmed this perception with her own belief that the polarities of sexuality were inconsequential to the creation of art: "I have never been conscious of my own femininity, as such, while in the studio. Nor do I believe that male artists are aware of an exclusive masculinity while they are at work."<sup>63</sup> The artist was, as Riley perceived, an hermaphroditic entity who produced art as the result of a seemingly sexual relationship with his or her work-medium. She therefore concluded that Women's Liberation, when applied to artists, was a "naïve" and "hysterical" concept which women needed "like they need[ed] a hole in the head" (83).

<sup>62</sup>Cited in *Bridget Riley: Paintings and Drawings 1951–71* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1971) 8.

<sup>63</sup>Bridget Riley, "The Hermaphrodite," in *Art and Sexual Politics: Women's Liberation, Women Artists, and Art History*, ed. Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker (New York: Collier Books, 1973) 83.



Clough was similarly positioned. In his description of her industrial landscapes, John Berger asserted: "One feels that her sketches must be blueprints, that she controls her pigments, brushes and canvases with as workmanlike a finesse as one would need to drive the tools and trade-tackle that supply her subjects." This masculine formalist quality of her work seemingly granted Clough modern status in the British art world; her visionary, *flâneuristic* capacities fostered praise: "Her interest in machines is fully human because she never defies them and is intelligent about their function. She finds in them, even when deserted, evidence of human ingenuity—as, in a different way, a Romantic poet might infer drama from a plucked rose."<sup>64</sup> The male qualities applied to Clough were equally utilized—to different degrees—in the historical positioning of artists such as John, Bell, Krasner, Hepworth, and Delaunay. The work of Gwen John was often authenticated by the artist's status as the sister of Augustus John and her association with the predominantly male impressionist movement; Sonia Delaunay and Vanessa Bell were placed in similar contexts through their relationships with partners Robert Delaunay and Duncan Grant or Clive Bell, and their association with male-defined post-impressionism; married to Jackson Pollock and her work often confused for his, Lenore Krasner became the more masculine 'Lee' or simply 'L.K.'; while Barbara Hepworth's marriage to Ben Nicholson and her apprenticeship with Henry Moore made her work genuine to conventional opinion. Each of these women, from the Council's perspective, was endorsed by a relationship to masculinity or men. Although not all British artists, the contribution of their work to perceived notions of femininity in Britain strengthened the gender-biases of state patronage. From the vantage of official patrons, they could be viewed as undissenting from a desired image, and therefore they seemingly maintained a stable aspect of cultural identity.

Figures such as Lucie Rie could also be perceived as unthreatening; yet not because of their complicity with masculine values, but due to a presumed image of conventional femininity. Rie, a potter, was inscribed with the traits of domesticity despite the modernist nature of her artmaking. Her work customarily associated with the lower form of 'craft' rather than 'art,' she was often

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<sup>70</sup>*The New Statesman and Nation: The Week-end Review* 18 April 1953.

positioned as a master of home design as opposed to an artist. A 1967 review of her work declared:

She is individual in porcelain of delicate linear pattern and clear-cut shape and stoneware treated with great resource of glaze. Her work has a refinement of style which ... is without "nostalgic undertones of folk art", not rustic but metropolitan, and in an idiom well calculated to assort harmoniously to a modern interior.<sup>65</sup>

A second exhibition of her work in 1981 continued this pattern of criticism. Victor Margrie, Director of the Crafts Council, posited: "I cannot recall thinking of Lucie Rie as an artist, rather as a designer of considerable sensitivity and taste who made fine pots."<sup>66</sup> Janet Leach, herself a potter, went further in her characterization of Rie as a non-artist by her description of Rie's workplace: "The masculine concept of digging clay, [and] chopping wood ... as essential parts of the making process has been answered by her .... To me, [Rie] is a 'no-shovel' potter. I have observed, many times, that the studio workshop requirements of the craftswoman are often different from those of the craftsman .... The male potter usually likes the feeling of 'going to work', whereas Lucie has integrated her studio and her home in a feminine manner."<sup>67</sup> Rie's art was thus implicitly labelled domestic labour rather than 'work' both because it was not performed by a man and, equally, because it occurred within her house. In this way, her pottery was not viewed as a challenge to established concepts since she was considered neither an artist nor a worker. To official patronage, she was seen to have little connection to the idea of art and consequently was perceived as tangential to conventional aesthetic definitions, modes of art production, and the culture of which they were a part.

The women supported by the Arts Council through grants or bursaries were greater in number than those represented through exhibitions. Many feminist artists—including Mary Kelly and Gillian

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<sup>65</sup>*The Times* 31 July 1967.

<sup>66</sup>Cited in *Lucie Rie: A Survey of her Life and Work*, ed. John Huston (London: Crafts Council, 1981) 8.

<sup>67</sup>Cited in *Lucie Rie: A Survey of her Life and Work* 30.

Wise Ciobotaru—were in fact awarded monies through the seventies in order to continue their artistic projects. Despite this presence, however, the funds which the Council offered were negligible. In comparison to the professional arts—such as opera—the amounts which painters, sculptors, or media artists received were trivial.<sup>68</sup> In his 1974 study of visual artists' incomes and expenditures, Robert Hutchinson ascertained that the average amount of bursaries received scarcely covered the costs of studio and exhibition space, supplies, or daily subsistence. Those who participated in Hutchinson's survey vacillated between the opinion that "any money [was] an incentive and the more people who [were] given an incentive the better" and the belief that small awards were "meaningless."<sup>69</sup> Both answers, however, revealed the general paucity of such grants. It was unlikely, therefore, that the support which they offered to women artists could sustain a substantial intervention in the British art world.

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The gender boundaries imposed by the Arts Council allowed those artists who were perceived as conforming to established paradigms of aesthetics and art production, or those who were believed far removed from entrenched notions of art, to become the beneficiaries of British patronage. Figures such as Bell and Hepworth, and John or Rie, were understood as posing little challenge to defined artistic parameters through their perceived complicity with them, or the supposed status of their art as 'craft' and 'domestic work'—essentially 'non-art'—and therefore their position as exiles with little influence upon notions of culture or civilization. The idea of the artist-as-male and a coherent concept of cultural identity were thus theoretically maintained through the Council's support of a particular ideology of art creation. Driven by notions of exclusivity, the idea of Britain as a congruous entity was upheld through the

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<sup>68</sup>See Artists Now, *Patronage of the Creative Artist* (London, 1973).

<sup>69</sup>Robert Hutchinson, *Survey of Visual Artists—Their Incomes and Expenditures and Attitudes to Arts Council Support*, Arts Council Research Bulletin 4 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975) 8.

promotion of a specifically gendered notion of artistry and the consequent reluctance of arts patronage to comprehend particular definitions of woman. Witnessed by Bridget Riley's implied need to distance herself from a certain idea of femininity—that associated with feminist aesthetics—specific images of gender were positioned as incompatible with Arts Council support. Thus, although intended to act as a palliative to social division or disparity, post-war culture could not—ironically—embrace the cleavages of sexuality.

The effects of modernist ideology upon the convictions of official culture led to the perpetuation of genius as a masculine characteristic and also reinforced masculinity as a defining criterion within the wider identity of Britishness. By positioning the artist as a male figure, and equally, understanding art as a benchmark of civilization, state patronage declared masculinity an essential component of cultural membership. More broadly, through its association of 'being male' with 'being British,' the Arts Council reinforced notions of 'citizenship'—political, social, or cultural—with men. Yet the glancing status which studies of policy on the arts, and their interaction with gender, have received indicate that art and visual culture have not yet established themselves as tandem—or even incisive—aspects of cultural history. Despite the work of feminist critics, such as Griselda Pollock or Janet Wolff, the examination of women's intervention in fine art, art exhibition, and art politics as a facet of wider historical and societal import has not yet occurred to a level commensurate with their actual presence. As a means to document the operation of discursive and structural discrimination against women, however, arts policy and ideas of women's art have been critical areas of engagement and departure.