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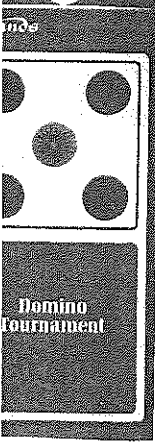
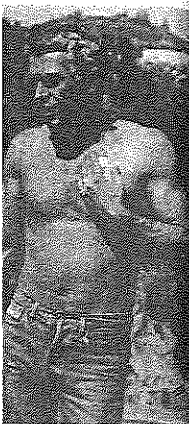
UP

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FEMALE

POP ART

DUMONT



ER UP O

by ANGELA STIEF

Do Not be Discouraged That we are Few. We Shall be Many Dorothy Iannone, 1962
With Love to the Everyday Miracle Sister Corita, 1967

In the wooden assemblage *The Wedding* (1962–1963, see p. 261), printed with lace doilies, by Marisol,¹ the only female artist who is more-or-less present in the canon of US Pop Art, a female personification of the Venezuelan artist is marrying her male counterpart in a black evening suit. The work is not meant to represent a reconciliation of the male and female contrasts in the self-portrait, nor yet a narcissistic self-reflection, but rather examines the stereotypical image of femininity, caught up in the coarse social grids of the sixties, which Marisol shrewishly sets in the figures deliberately reminiscent of folklore. Something similar is also true of Evelyne Axell's painting *Erotomobile* (1966, see pp. 16 f.): two identical naked women with portrait-like features of the Belgian artist, who reduced her name to the gender-unspecific Axell, are in contrast to the garish blue background, their heads framed by a signal-red car tire. In Evelyne Axell's piece, repetitive presentations of women and the self and the sensual-erotic charge in the female body suggest a challenge to fixed role models, which also attains a contemporary relevance or timelessness in Dorothy Iannone's queer body descriptions of a different, changeable construction of identity. The nine artists represented in the exhibition created works in the sixties that critically reflect current events and issues of gender in the style of Pop and helped to grant visibility to a presentation of women which had long been treated as politically incorrect. The different pictorial inventions can all be interpreted as early self-assertion strategies and an artistic inauguration of a slowly growing women's movement striving for gender equality. "Back to the Future" of the 1960s means participation of women in the economic boom, in politics, technological innovation, new materials, consumerism, and the star cult and wants to introduce the remarkable perspectives on their lives, their time and their art, developed within a masculine regime of seeing by such female artists as Evelyne Axell, Sister Corita, Christa Dichgans, Rosalyn Drexler, Jann Haworth, Dorothy Iannone, Kiki Kogelnik, Marisol, and Niki de Saint Phalle.

The title *POWER UP* refers back to Sister Corita's text of the same name (see pp. 56 ff.), which was based on the advertising slogan of an oil company ("to power up your car"); she issued it on Pellon in 1965 to support the struggle against

¹ One work by Marisol is the only piece by a woman artist in the Pop Art collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art.



poverty. Is *POWER UP – Female Pop Art* another exhibition of Pop Art from the sixties? One might well think that the success story of Pop Art in the past half-century and the glorification of its best-known male representatives suggest no need of yet another twist added to it. The canon of Pop Art has been defined by numerous collective and solo exhibitions, as well as by scholarly articles and the collection activities of museums. But the fact that to this day, in spite of all the intensive concerns with gender politics and emancipation movements, hardly any works by female artists of the sixties turn up in Pop compilations and that this tendency has never been corrected by art historians or by feminists is astonishing.² How could such highly significant oeuvres come to be ignored to such an extent? The responsibility is due to a mixture of socio-political and personal aspects of life: patriarchal

social structures, the stylization of Pop Art by feminist thinkers as sexist, the fixed attribution of the role of women to the home, an early death, like that of Evelyne Axell, famous life partners as in such cases as Dorothy Iannone (Dieter Roth) and Jann Haworth (Peter Blake), who overshadowed the work of the women, stylistic transformations in the women artists' later work, etc.

There are innumerable reasons for mechanisms of exclusion and for revising them. In some instances *timē* (or the right moment) is required for integration, for changes on the levels of subject matter or form always imply the incorporation of new artists into an already existing canon. The conformity and non-conformity of female artists with expectations relating to an art movement in regard to style, contents, and production techniques, however, nourish it and keep it alive. But we do not want to accept historiography and its one-sided focus on male Pop oeuvres without resistance; rather, the past should be read laterally from a different point of view and be re-evaluated retrospectively in the sense of contemporary enrichment. Selected female artists from the sixties (and there are many more of them) are granted recognition in *POWER UP* with the presentation of larger blocks of work, in order to counter a sociologically determined inattention or repression in years of a male monopoly on interpretation. "Back to the Future" is therefore the formula for lending the character of a stylistically diverse movement to the heterogeneous accumulation of individual oeuvres. The selected artistic positions are defined primarily through outstanding works and secondarily through gender, time of creation, and regional relevance. The loose collection of idiosyncratic works in *POWER UP – Female Pop Art* serves to form and strengthen a female voice, which was demanded by Evelyne Axell in *Le mur du son* (1966, see p. 76) and whose paralysis was made problematic by Kiki Kogelnik in *Tongue Operation* (1970, see p. 31). Indeed a loud voice is required to break through the mental encrustations that have hindered the works of these women from achieving a more prominent position in reception. But "Back to the Future" also refers to obvious or chance correlations between contemporary art and Pop Art, which result automatically when works like, for example, those of Isa Genzken and Marisol, Cosima von Bonin and Jann Haworth, Valie Export and Kiki Kogelnik, Jeff Koons and Christa Dichgans, Tracey Emin and Evelyne Axell, Sister Corita and Barbara Kruger are viewed next to each other.

² In the USA there has been a debate about female Pop Art for a few years now. In winter 2009, Sid Sachs organized the touring exhibition *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958–1968* for Philadelphia University, and Kalliopi Minioudaki recently completed a dissertation on Pop Art by women and the proto-feminism of the sixties at the Institute for Fine Arts of New York University.

The rise of Pop Art in the Anglo-American metropolises of London and New York at the end of the fifties and beginning of the sixties coincided with an economic boom, in which the broad masses developed an increasing pleasure in consumption and began to make use of the post-war achievements in technology, the media, and the economy. Mass culture and media culture—cinema, television, radio, and the advertising and music industries—boomed. "Pop" comes from "popular" and represented an unheard-of blend of innovation, euphoria, and broad popularity which struck the well-funded middle class like a secularized promise of salvation. This was also true of art. Flooded with new products and inventions and granted the lightness of a trouble-free existence, artists flirted with objects of everyday life. Those who carried the message lived in London: they included Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton, and other members of the Independent Group, who initiated the world of art into the mystery of common goods, which were brought together on the breeding ground of capitalism to form Pop Art. The art world was fascinated by the consumer aesthetics that were heating the economy.

This also found its way into their works. Not only products from supermarkets and display windows turned up in innumerable Pop Art works, but the abstract economic driving force was also symbolized in images of machines, cars, motorcycles, robots, and rockets: in Kiki Kogelnik's brightly painted *Bombs in Love* (1962, see p. 21), the form of the phallus or rocket oscillated between male body-part and high-tech invention and treated macho potency gestures with irony: "Are prosperity and male self-confidence the fruit of war?",³ asked Marshall McLuhan. This is also suggested by Sister Corita's serigraphic diptych *Moonflowers and Manflowers* (1969, see pp. 148 f.), in which she combined the word "manpower" with images of war injuries and a barren moonscape. Instead, the message of the Pop ladies harmonized with the widespread hippie ideology: make love not war. Often the leap in technical innovation was given sexual connotations, as in Richard Hamilton's famous *Hommage à Chrysler Corp.* of 1957, but also in Evelyne Axell's series of *Erotomobiles* or in Marisol's *The Car* (1964, see pp. 262 f.). "Has the car taken the burden of sex on itself in a more-and-more sexless world?"⁴—was another ironic and suggestive question of Marshall McLuhan: with this he referred to the prosthetic phallus of a society determined by the masculine, which was already suspected of being "oversexed and underfucked" in the early sixties. Roland Barthes even made religious comparisons and said "that cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals."⁵ Car tires, aircraft, and printing machines are substitutes that turned up in other works by Evelyne Axell, Kiki Kogelnik, Marisol, Rosalyn Drexler, and Niki de Saint Phalle, but it can be said with some certainty that the artistic emphasis on the world of objects and the technical inventions of the time played a much bigger role in the art of men.

Women were more critically concerned with the fetishist treatment of the body, the matrix-like manifestations of the female, as for example in the pin-up (cf. *Lindner Doll* by Jann Haworth, 1964, p. 211) and pop-cultural treatments of the woman as a consumer item—especially notable in Evelyne Axell, Kiki Kogelnik, Jann Haworth, Rosalyn Drexler, Marisol, and Dorothy Iannone. They counteracted the male clichés of woman such as Tom Wesselmann's deindividualized matrices of the female body, Mel Ramos' painterly merging of goods and lasciviously presented nudes to objects of lust, the sadomasochistically arranged sex companions of Allen Jones, and Roy Lichtenstein's lovesick "chicks." At the center of their works is the re-appropriation and subjective re-coding of the lost, reified female figure, the deconstruction of ideals of beauty in Haworth and Niki de Saint Phalle, and the construction of identity templates on the far side of images ventilated by the media and socially standardized codices in Dorothy Iannone's drawings of her love games with Dieter Roth. She shows an intimacy that lets the I and the you become permeable projection foils of the self and the other: as if no more than a matter of course, sexual submission (*I'm Your Slave*), domination, animal brutality, and a sexuality positively sublimated into the sacred (*Your Names are Love Father God*, 1970–1971, see p. 238) all co-exist. The oeuvres of these women in their individually specific

3 Marshall McLuhan: *Die mechanische Braut. Volkskultur des industriellen Menschen*, Amsterdam: Verlag der Kunst 1996 [The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man, 1951], p. 156.

4 Ibid., p. 113.

5 Roland Barthes: *Mythologies*, London: Cape 1972, orig. 1957, p. 88–90, 88.

subjectivity embody an emancipatory avant-garde position in the long journey towards female liberation. The artists establish that the personal is political, frequently make their own bodies the site for carrying out gender-specific role-plays, and show new ways out of the blind alley of the post-war patriarchal society. The representational works of Jann Haworth and Marisol, which stereometricate, conceal, protect, and desexualize bodies, are in clear contrast to the body- and lust-focused works of Dorothy Iannone, Evelyne Axell, and Kiki Kogelnik and manifest protofeminist traits. Kiki Kogelnik's *Untitled (Swing)* (1969–1970, see p. 192) and *Needle Work* (1969–1970, see p. 83), for example, which show close-ups of vaginas, are rebellious pornographic statements indicating social treatments of the female body and its reduction to the genitals. These drawings are among the most controversial of Kogelnik—it is hard to understand why in 1969 feminism did not take an interest in them and that this artist's work remained relatively unnoticed.

Evelyne Axell's sensual cosmos of exclusive femininity is fitted out with erotic silhouettes of women, who take undemanding pleasure in themselves. Cult status has been achieved by the small-scale painting *Ice Cream* (1964, see p. 47), which shows a close-up of a beautiful, red-haired woman pleasurably licking ice cream from a cone with her eyes closed and her lips slightly open. The ambiguity of this work can be understood even without remembering the soft-porn series *Lemon Popsicle*. Axell teases by letting the viewer's perception oscillate between the real content of the presentation and its easily decoded latency. As in advertising, she has charged art with erotic fantasies. Her work revolves around sensual charms, imagination, projections, and the male gaze, which she incorporated into her realm of the feminine. The latter became a stimulus for Axell's self-determined sexuality; using art-historical references to pictures like Gustave Courbet's *L'origine du monde*, nudes, and odalisque images, she stylized herself into an actively enjoying and fearlessly generous woman. "No longer the dialectical but rather the ecstatic is what is called for," said Jean Baudrillard in the eighties after complaining for years about the loss of reality in the cosmos of simulation.

A surplus of lamentation and criticism cedes to the concept of (over-)affirmation: in the oeuvres of Dorothy Iannone and Evelyne Axell—as the beautiful, orgiastic self-forgetfulness of the latter's *L'Amazone* (1969, see p. 41) shows—the focus is mainly on female pleasure in life and love. Both artists use female sexuality as a strategy of self-affirmation, which goes beyond the fun and lightness of intimate experience in art and discovers a public arsenal of provocation in politicizing the private sphere: Iannone's *Story of Bern (or) Showing Colors* (1970, see pp. 244 ff.) is the picture story of a scandal in the form of a book describing her exclusion from an exhibition in the Kunsthalle Bern under Harald Szeemann in 1969. The reason: the artist had protested against the censorship of her works showing ecstatic love-play and uncovered genitals by means of black coverings.

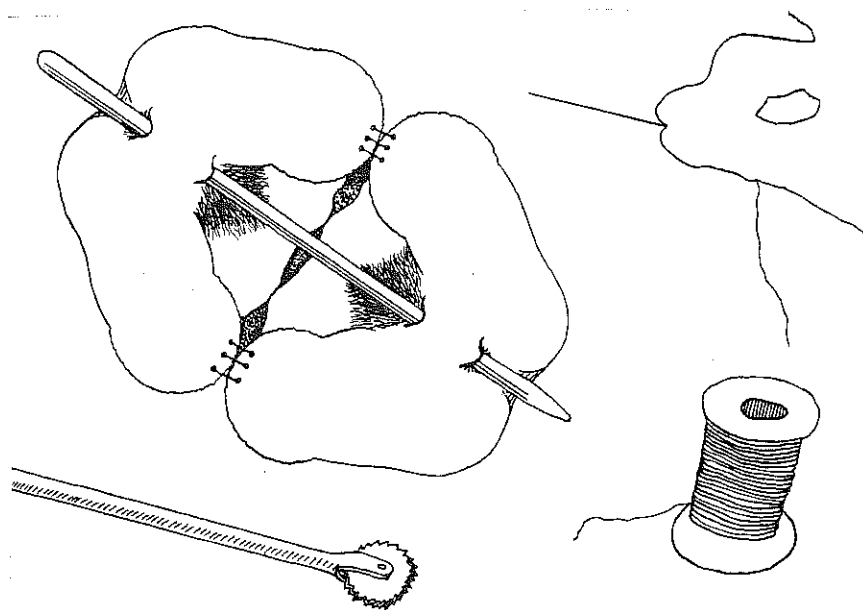
HIGH & LOW

Pop Art was originally a concept that referred not primarily to art objects but to popular culture. In 1957 Richard Hamilton defined it like this: "Popular (designed for a mass audience), transient (short-term solution), expendable (easily forgotten), low cost, mass produced, young (aimed at youth), witty, sexy, gimmicky, glamorous, big business."⁶ He went on to sketch the paradoxical situation of the visual arts by also defining it as "antiartistic" because of its "approbation of mass culture."⁷

Somewhat later, with reference to art history, a suitable term was sought for a kind of art from ateliers and galleries that came about as a reaction to the fascination with modern reality. New Réalisme, Commonism, and Neo-Dada were the first suggestions, until finally Lawrence Alloway fixed on the use of Pop Art for the art world in 1962. It was a transformation of concepts: from "pop art"—originally the abbreviated form of pop articles—came something artistic. This intellectual annexation also reflected the process of appropriation that was to be realized at times in the new art.

⁶ Richard Hamilton: "Letter to Peter and Alison Smith," January 16, 1957, in: *Collected Words 1953–1982*, London: Thames & Hudson 1982, p. 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.





Niki de Saint Phalle, *Femme éclatée ou Accouchement du taureau*, 1963

Especially in the USA the first Pop exhibitions of Leo Castelli (1958) and in the Sidney Janis Gallery (1962)⁸ in New York, in which Marisol and Niki de Saint Phalle took part, hugely outnumbered by male artists such as Warhol, Wesselmann, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Indiana, Blake, Christo, Tinguely, Fahström, and Rayssé, caused more excitement than in Europe. North America had been accustomed to abstraction by Abstract Expressionism and the art critics Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, who had been propagating non-illusionist art since the 1930s. The new Pop Art challenged the emotional gestures of the Action Painters and the metaphysical exaggerations and abstract geometric configurations of color-field painting. High Art with its formulae of pathos, theories of exaltation, and expressive gesturing was shattered by this confrontation with Low Art and its closeness to daily life. The metaphysical sublimity of the older art had to make way for the superficial shine of the here and now. The defeat of High Art, the explosive relationship of art and consumer goods, of non-art that looked like art and art that did not especially want to be art, formed the core of the Pop movement and an accompanying iconographic concretism or material idealism⁹, which did not stop at the female body. In this way, however, women artists also acquired the opportunity to take as themes the life sphere of women, which was often bound to the personal and the emotional, biographic experience, and a bonding with everyday courses of events.

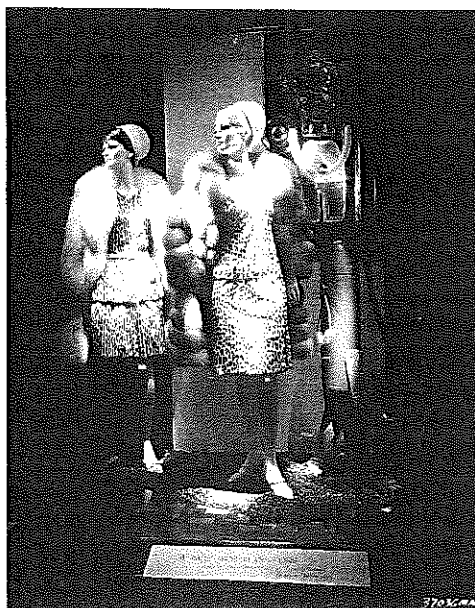
Significantly, the exhibition in the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, which rang in the Pop age in 1953, was called *Parallel of Life and Art*. The Pop Artists were interested in an object-oriented everyday world and took up positions in a neo-Dadaist, baroque, realist tradition which was rooted in the beginnings of the twentieth century and the classical avant-garde's attempts to unify art and life and had reached a climax in Duchamp's ready-mades. The medium that prepared Pop Art was the assemblage art of Nouveau Réalisme. The works of Marisol, Rosalyn Drexler, and Niki de Saint Phalle already comprised props from contemporary everyday life and found objects in the late fifties. Niki de Saint Phalle's typical assemblages, which she painted over or shot at with paint in her *tirs*, reveal dolls, children's toys, revolvers, madonnas, tools, and household utensils such as sieves or a mop. She arranged these objects into a relief-style background for prioritized representations such as brides, disjointed or birth-giving women as in the case of *Femme éclatée* (1963, see p. 84), or portraits of statesmen, as in *Kennedy – Kroutchev*. Niki de Saint Phalle's aggression was not directed against an attitude that celebrated the object, but was pain relief—in art she found a remedy for coping with the past. In her work the object took the place of personal experiences of abuse and evoked a past (criminal) time and the home as a (crime) scene. Childhood catastrophe was the psychological impulse for a kind of art that was to go on for a lifetime being concerned with emancipation from traumata and the deformed female body that did not conform with the current ideal of beauty: "In 1961 I started to shoot at my works, and this made it possible for me to express the aggression I felt. I shot because I liked seeing the canvas bleed and die. That was a moment of truth and I shuddered with passion, for I was shooting at my work."¹⁰ An almost animistic transfer experience, where the emotions that constituted the subject were aroused and acted out in the actionist shooting performance.

Niki de Saint Phalle's and Dorothy Iannone's work techniques are fundamentally different from the attempts at anonymity and the extinction of the artistic creative spirit as practiced by Andy Warhol, for example. These female artists processed autobiographical experiences, setting their own femininity at the center of their productions, and by using metaphors of death, as Kiki Kogelnik did in *Skull* (1970, see p. 25) and Jann Haworth in *Calendula's Cloak* (1967, see p. 205), they mourned the coolness of the true-to-life focus on surfaces. Mechanical means of production, as used by Andy Warhol and Sister Corita and thematized by Rosalyn Drexler, clearly demonstrated a rejection of the expressive gesture of artistic genius, which manifested itself as an emphasis on graphic quality in Pop Art. Cut-outs, for Kiki Kogelnik, Dorothy Iannone and Evelyne Axell a central art form, formally resemble papercut silhouettes and collages and, in their emphasis on contour and surface, corresponded to the stylistic requirements of Pop. They were the appropriate

8 The title of the show presenting 54 artists was *International Exhibition of the New Realists*.

9 Cf. Hartmut Böhme: *Fetischismus und Kultur. Eine andere Theorie der Moderne*, Reinbek: Rowohlt Verlag 2006, p. 460.

10 Niki de Saint Phalle in a letter to Pontus Hultén, in: *Niki de Saint Phalle*, exhibition catalogue, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris 1993.



medium for combining reduced physicality, abstraction, and quotation. In Kiki Kogelnik's series *Women's Lib* and her *Hangings*, scissors, a traditional female tool for sewing, were used as an aggressive artistic arsenal: "When I peeled off a figure I had the feeling that I did not possess this person but the form, and that I could now do whatever I liked with that form. In some cases I then cut them up into individual body-parts or opened up the body. I had the feeling that that was now something I had in my power."¹¹

The new mythologies of everyday life, to which Roland Barthes devoted a book in 1957 and about which he said that people stood to them not in a relationship of truth but in one of use,¹² were stylized in the advertising of goods in metropolitan display windows into fetishist objects of desire. Spread out, neatly draped,

and tastefully arranged, they promised immediate wish fulfillment and pleasurable entertainment. Claes Oldenburg's shop *The Store* of 1961 on the Lower East Side of New York was, as he said himself, a "supertexture supercollage" and imitated the flourishing consumer culture with self-formed foods, such as pieces of cake, meat, clothes, and shoes—all made of muslin covered with plaster. Art dressed as goods and business deals. Oldenburg's commentary on the capitalist commercial principle of enticement, purchase, and consumption blocked the promise of pleasure with its dysfunctional objects. Desire turned to frustration, and finally art became sublimation. The state of tension between art and commerce thus shifted to the site of presentation, and the shift of context had the purpose of critically querying the content. Other artists also used the display window as an exhibition venue: in 1962 Peter Blake designed *The Shop* in London, and the Austrian Kiki Kogelnik, who emigrated to New York in 1961, built up her first installation with shop models and sculptures like *Lover Boy*, *Space Angel*, *Bomb*, and *Space Ship* in the displays of the luxury department store of Bergdorf Goodman on Fifth Avenue (see ill. above). Kogelnik's objects played with space travel metaphors and confronted technical innovations and visions of outer space with household items such as baking trays, vacuum cleaner hoses, and hair curlers.

In the public presentation of fragments of domesticity, high-tech met low-tech and macrocosm came upon microcosm. The display window conjunction of goods, art, figures, and machines was a rejection of the exclusivity of High Art, turning everything into a meta-scenario of consumption and translating Kiki Kogelnik's artificiality requirement for art by using the new material of plastic: "Plastic ... is a household substance. It is the first magic substance which consents to be prosaic. Plastic is wholly swallowed up in the fact of being used: ultimately, objects will be invented for the sole pleasure of using them. The hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one replaces them all: the whole world can be plasticized, and even life itself, we are told, they are beginning to make plastic aortas,"¹³ wrote Barthes, thus touching a nerve of the times, where the fear of losing what is alive and the promising dreams of the future of artificiality rubbed against each other.

Plastic was also one of Evelyne Axell's favorite materials, and for an entire year she experimented with Clartex, a material manufactured in Brussels (see *La mouche*, 1967, p. 77), Dorothy Iannone plasticized her book *List IV* (1968, see pp. 236 f.), and for Christa Dichgans the synthetic toy worlds of her son were the starting point for imitations in paint. Her paintings in acrylics with piles of toys, clothes,

11 Kiki Kogelnik in: Helga Ripper: *Kiki Kogelnik – Schere statt Pinsel*, ORF film in the series *ARTgenossen*, 1994, 30 min.

12 Cf. Roland Barthes, op. cit.

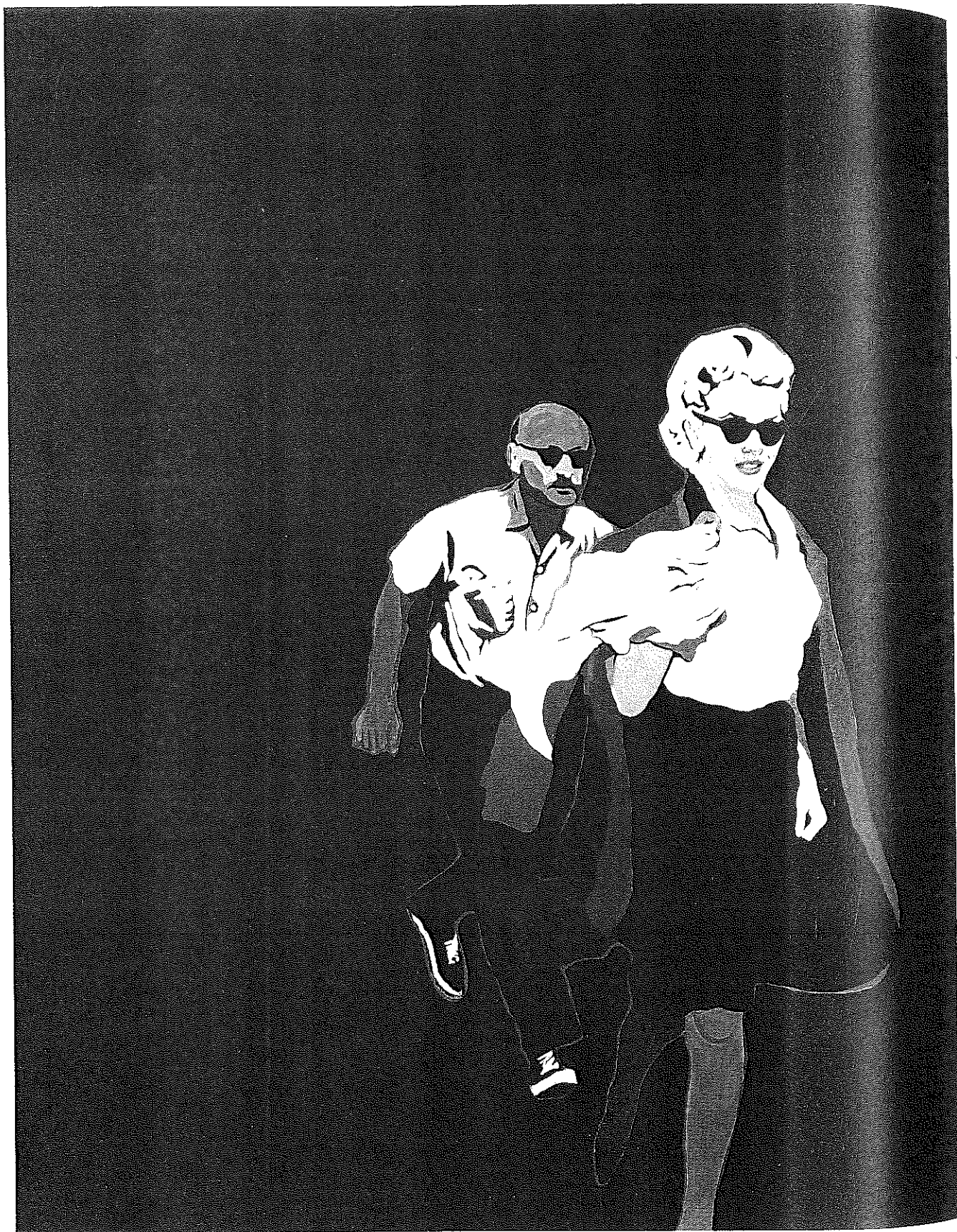
13 Roland Barthes, op. cit., pp. 97–99, 98 f.

and domestic articles mock the decorative arrangements of classical still life and transfer the baroque concept of *vanitas* in a cool aesthetics of surfaces to the empty object shells of capitalism. Many works, such as *Plastikwolke* (1969, see p. 117) and *Plastikherz* (1970, see p. 107) show inflatable plastic objects that are transformed into the two dimensions of painting and allude to the illusionist character of art since antiquity. Dichgans's *Inflatables* are hollow: the blow-up valves are set off threateningly against the monochromatic backgrounds and make it dramatically clear that the rounded images of emotional regression might collapse any minute. Living in Berlin, this artist made use of domestic elements from the nursery, the kitchen, and the wardrobe and combined seemingly infantile kitsch with analytical clarity. The naively cloying motifs recall the red-painted lips in the pictures of Pop artists and the stereotypical smiles of women in advertising. One also remembers the comic worlds of Lichtenstein and the toy collections of such artists as Paolozzi, as well as Kiki Kogelnik's approaches, whose articulation of infantile impulses in art makes an interesting counterpart to the affirmative features of Pop Art. Dichgans, who makes use of the classically female, i.e. domestic field, did not—like Richard Hamilton or, later, Martha Rosler—move the entire interior into the viewer's field of vision, interrupting it with collage-like, frequently violent manifestations of the external world, but rather lets the eyes of the viewer get slowly stuck to the treaciness of individual ingredients, as a sweet melts on the tongue. Christa Dichgans' arsenal of artistic tools is a blend of repeated motifs, material transformation, and exaggerated objectivity, which precisely captures domestic reality and alienates it surreally. Similarly affirmative ideas also became the starting point for the gigantomania of Jeff Koons, several decades younger, who drove the moment of illusion to the uttermost extreme, for example in his series of sculptures called *Celebration*. Koons polished surfaces to high gloss on heavy tons of stainless steel, such as in the instance of the light-looking *Balloondog*, which is several meters high. As he says himself, he wants to effect a "visual opulence" that holds up the mirror in 'an eye-catching way and in the spirit of an annual fair to a society that has grown used to luxury. Dichgans' works from the end of the seventies, such as *Der Jüngste Tag* (Doomsday, 1976, see ill. p. 115) and *Geld und Untergang* (1977), while further developing graphic and hyper-realistic qualities characteristic of the artist's work, show piles of weapons and military equipment sprawling to the horizon and frequently mixed with the subjects of earlier pictures. The visual violence that can already be found in the pictures of the sixties finally became manifest in the works' bipolar motific layout. Consequently, the pictures of Christa Dichgans, which without a doubt represent a missing link in the historiography of art, can be described as paradoxical battlefields of the achievements of civilization.

Important for the appearance of Pop Art was the use of a rhetoric of persuasion and the stylization of its works into visible, indeed conspicuous insignia with a recognition value of the kind familiar from logo culture. Because of their bright colors the works of Dichgans, Haworth, and Iannone had the effect of signals. Luminous paint was particularly preferred by Axell, Sister Corita, and Kogelnik. With repetition, enlargement, and colors painted as monochromatic surfaces, Pop Art tried to appeal to a wide public. The idea of formal maximization, which has been inscribed in art history as a glorifying monumentalization, emerged in Pop Art in the form of Oldenburg's gigantic cheeseburgers, clothes pins, and lipsticks, as well as in the white, golden and silver *Charm Bracelets* of Jann Haworth (1960s, see pp. 208 f.). The over-dimensional accessories have lost the woman to be bejewelled as their point of reference, becoming "soft sculptures" without material value, replacements for a love of objects now exposed to ridicule. Similar to the way Low Art questioned High Art technically, in terms of material and with regard to its claims to originality, Haworth disavowed aspects of decorum and the preciousness of luxury items and turned her art into a Pop fetish of traditionally female handcraft. Her works go further than those of Koons and Oldenburg, whose signal quality is a reminder of brands and branding, by communicating a feminine authorship through the materials of the works and putting it in the foreground of reception.

MEDIATED REALITY

In addition to everyday objects, the manipulative aesthetics of art directors and designers and the creation of icons in advertising, television, and film became important parameters for the Pop artists' appropriation, imitation, and reflection:



Rosalyn Drexler, *Marilyn Pursued by Death*, 1963

"I remember at that time I was very excited about billboards, I guess it was the whole era of pop art,"¹⁴ said Sister Corita. The British art critic Lawrence Alloway, who emigrated to the USA, used a quotation from Søren Kierkegaard as an epigraph for the first chapter, "Definition," of his publication *American Pop Art*: "Ours is the age of advertisement and publicity."¹⁵ One of the important identity markers of Pop Art was its response to the mediated world and its design techniques, to public zones of representation, cinema screens, billboards, and magazines. The methods of the image industry, whose intention was to persuade the public to buy, ranged from seduction and manipulation through illusion to misuse. The free market supplied what the people wanted. And the new range of offers hit the longings of society with almost clairvoyant accuracy. Loud-mouthed sales-talk was the music of a world that had fallen into raging ecstasy through modernization, and it matched the superficial, lightweight and easy-to-satisfy wishes provoked by the religion of capitalism: "One can behold in capitalism a religion, that is to say, capitalism essentially serves to satisfy the same worries, anguish, and disquiet formerly answered by so-called religion. Within it everything only has meaning in direct relation to the cult: it knows no special dogma, no theology."¹⁶ The culture industry had been the object of criticism since its beginnings, especially from theoreticians in the tradition of Marxism. The climax was Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (*Dialektik der Aufklärung*), which was read with enthusiasm by students in the sixties. In 1967 appeared *The Society of the Spectacle* (*La Société du spectacle*) by Guy Debord, who refined consumer criticism with aesthetic and anarchic ideas.

The machinery of wish fulfillment or the "mechanical bride", as Marshall McLuhan had already called it in the fifties, was, however, also a response to a human need for new myths and the easier and cheaper availability of goods and media communications. The Pop artists flirted with popular culture, thus sounding out its potential for provocation. Richard Hamilton even gave it top priority and called on his colleagues to recover their lost domination over image production: "It is the Playboy 'Playmate of the month' pull-out pin-up which provides us with the closest contemporary equivalent of the odalisque in painting. Automobile body stylists have absorbed the symbolism of the space age more successfully than any artist. Social comment is left to TV and comic strip. Epic has become synonymous with a certain kind of film and the heroic archetype is now buried deep in movie lore. If the artist is not to lose much of his ancient purpose he may have to plunder the popular arts to recover the imagery which is his rightful inheritance."¹⁷

So this is the stuff that fed the dreams of artists in the sixties. Rosalyn Drexler wove gender stereotypes, spread by the media and cliché-filled, into filmic epigrams on canvas and paper by means of appropriation, deletion, and quotation. By organizing the picture space in a way reminiscent of film stills, she painted over her collages of fragments from trashy novels and the gutter press and reflected their immanent kitsch or hotness, which formed a melodramatic complement to the coolness of contemporary lifestyles. She took up narratives from the media world, soppy with emotion, stories of love and violence, and retold them in visual dramas, such as *Marilyn Pursued by Death* (1963, see p. 88). In her series *Men and Machines* (see pp. 177 ff.), Drexler waxed ironic about technological male fantasies and the new mass-media means of reproduction, from which she also distanced herself with her technique of collage and painting. In other works she reframed the strong sex as gangsters from the world of the Mafia, achieving a nonchalance by means of media shifts—from reality to film and from film to artwork—as manifested in *Al Capone Combs his Hair* (1964, see p. 131). Drexler's themes are ideology-critical commentaries on templates of male behavior. Her works oscillate between hotness and coolness, hysteria and emotional regression or control—a tension typical of Pop Art. Drexler distinguished herself from male Pop Art by embarking on meta-reflections on her emotional state and making them available for analysis by over-painting them and using strict formal composition techniques.

14 Sister Corita in: Julie Ault: *Come Alive! The Spirited Art of Sister Corita*, London: Four Corners Books 2006, p. 31.

15 Lawrence Alloway: *American Pop Art*, in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1974, p. 3.

16 Walter Benjamin: "Kapitalismus als Religion," in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1991, p. 100 f.; "Capitalism as Religion," <http://www.scribd.com/doc/16201730/Walter-Benjamin-Capitalism-as-Religion> (Oct 15, 2010).

17 Richard Hamilton, op. cit., p. 42.

In one of her main works, *King Kong*, Niki de Saint Phalle turned to the contemporary cinema, which brought the huge monster back to life in episodes produced by the Japanese Tohu Studios in 1962 and 1967. *King Kong* fit only too well into the imaginary worlds of the French artist, who reacted to her early childhood experiences by taking them out on dominant male figures and "superego symbols" of the patriarchal system such as altars (*Autels*, see p. 28) or *Heads of State* (1963, see pp. 92 f.) and shot at facial sculptures of politicians like Castro, Kennedy, Khrushchev, Lincoln, de Gaulle, and Washington. To be able to act out her defensive attitude to the "male principle" she found sure target symbols from religion, politics, and popular culture. In her late work Niki de Saint Phalle created a protected cosmos of female innocence, in which her earlier resistance had been transformed into trashy-naïve and unworldly forms of alienation.

Representatives of the media parallel universe of the sixties, such as politicians, actors, musicians, and other superstars, of the kind that were known to the public only as clichés from sensational reports and gossip columns, can be seen in large numbers in *POWER UP*. Dorothy Iannone's *People* are cut-outs of such celebrities as the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Greta Garbo, John Lennon, and Buster Keaton, who inhabit the exhibition along with Marilyn Monroe, Mae West, Marianne Faithfull aka Morgan Le Faythfull, the Kennedys, and worthies of the New York art scene, who are to be found in Kiki Kogelnik's cut-outs and *Hangings*. Current affairs were condensed into glittering personalities with a glamour factor to make modern "eternal values"—stars as secular representatives of the numinous. It is noticeable that female artists took a smaller part in constructing the bigger-than-life superstars and often preferred anti-heroes in the form of comic, misanthropic or criminal figures such as Charlie Chaplin, W. C. Fields, or Al Capone. Jann Haworth, who, in contrast to the youth and beauty cult of the sixties also presented old people (see *Old Lady II*, 1967, p. 206), designed, together with her husband of that time, Peter Blake—her co-authorship is largely forgotten—the cover of the Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967, see p. 214), which brought about a revolution in pop music in 1967 and achieved iconic status as one of the most important group portraits of the time.¹⁸

APPROPRIATION

"The sign language is almost infinitely rich ... Up and down the highways (good symbols too) we see words like *Cold, clear, well-water, The best to you each morning, Have a happy day, Sunkist, Del Monte's catsup makes meatballs sing* that read almost like contemporary translations of the psalms for us to be singing on our way. The game is endless, which makes it a good symbol of eternity which will be a great endless game."¹⁹ The short-lived messages presented on over-dimensional projection surfaces in the public arena were the stuff Sister Corita forged her visions from. Her material no longer came from a self-referential cosmos of inwardness, a fixed core of identity manifested in art, but played off the profane against the sublime and arose from the dialogue between the artist and her surroundings. This paradigm switch, which came to full flower in the twentieth century as a debate with the artistic environment and was also to play an important role in the context of Pop Art, as well as that of currents like Minimal Art, Land Art, and Conceptual Art, was most strongly present, interestingly and surprisingly, in the work of a nun, whose commitment met resistance and who finally left her order in 1968. The openness with which Sister Corita encountered her surroundings speaks not only for her seismographic sensitivity, but also for a mental and spiritual ability to appropriate existing and found things: "We lift the common stuff—groceries and signs about groceries—out of the everyday and give it a place in our celebration."²⁰ She uncoupled the advertising messages from the goods they advertised and articulated their visual poetry as well as their life-serving aspects. The source materials she used encompassed advertising slogans, poems, and cuttings from newspapers and magazines.

18 Cf. Walter Grasskamp: *Das Cover von Sgt. Pepper. Eine Momentaufnahme der Popkultur*, Berlin: Wagenbach 2004.

19 Sister Corita in: Julie Ault, op. cit., p. 23.

20 Ibid., p. 36.

Extremely advanced in terms of graphic art and printed in neon colors, her serigraphs, which were also valued highly by designers such as Ray and Charles Eames, expressed motivational urgings, worldly wisdoms, amusing and enlivening one-liners, aphorisms, and political statements and conveyed a powerful community feeling. Under the motto *With Love to the Everyday Miracle* (1967, see p. 172), Sister Corita re-mystified the anonymous advertising messages and placed the human being and its needs at the center of her work with students at the Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles: "I think there was a great exchange between us. First of all, we saw the same things, because we usually went to exhibits together ... I think we probably, from working so close together, had a very similar way of looking at things and probably similar tastes ... I think it was really a mutual kind of influence ..." ²¹ Together they mounted processions, demonstrated against the Vietnam War, and went on trips to learn how to see. Sister Corita's democratic and social attitude could be seen both in the performance of the serigraphs and in the way the art-works, which are still reasonable in price, were distributed. Works like *The Cry That will be Heard* (1969, see p. 163) and *Stop the Bombing* (1967, see p. 168) demonstrate her deeply human perspectives and the political stand that made it possible for her to fight for minorities and against poverty and racism and to oppose war.

²¹ Ibid., p. 28.

**OTHER (S')
POP: THE
RETURN OF
THE
REPPRESSED
OF TWO DIS-
COURSES**

by KALLIOTI MINIUDAKI

Drexler...never was Pop...Drexler's works are always, first and foremost, paintings.

Thomas Sokolowski¹

There was no space for women in Pop...no room for the voicing of a different, "truly" female, subjectivity...

Martha Rosler²

Marginalized in the histories of Pop and repressed in the subconscious of feminist art history, the female producers of Pop repeatedly missed the train of its canon as well as the rescue-wagons of feminist rediscovery.³ Their stories and critical reception confirm known gender prejudices faced by women artists throughout the twentieth century. Their omission from art history, however, is a symptom of both Pop's critical (mis)construction and the eruption of feminism in the arts, which rendered them the repressed of both Pop's and feminist art's discourse for more than twenty-five years.

When not totally dismissed, women Pop artists were displaced in Pop Art's margins as insufficiently Pop, first by the critics who tailored its criteria as an Anglo-American movement upon the work of a handful of male artists in the mid-sixties, and then by its revisers. The complicity of feminism in their neglect is at least historically and discursively justifiable. It remains surprising, however, since the first feminist critics who corrected the biases of art history through its additive revision knew many of the artists whom they forgot, dooming their work to an invisibility that outlasted the resurgence of the feminist attitudes that some of it had presaged. Feminism justly made the critique of the pornographic sexism of Pop Art and pop culture an urgent priority. But the way second-wave feminist critics and art historians kept apart the popness and the proto-feminism of certain artists such as Marjorie Strider, Marisol, and Niki de Saint Phalle—whether absolving them of their Pop past by repressing it in their writings to legitimize their feminism or defining the latter as counter-Pop—tellingly reveals how problematic the female Pop artist became for feminists, even after the early imperative exposure of Pop's misogyny. Indeed, for a great part of its ongoing history, feminist art history rendered critique the only subversive position—other than abstinence—women artists could occupy in relation to pop culture and art, making the female Pop artist an invisible taboo due to a *de facto* complicity with the sexism of pop culture. It is from the feminist ashes of Pop, symbolically marked by Valerie Solanas' shooting of Warhol, that feminist Neo-Pop critics and/or lovers of pop culture (such as Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, Candice Breitz, etc.) emerged as motherless post-modernists, while Martha Rosler's critical engagement with Pop was being reframed, and perhaps self-edited, as feminist anti-Pop. Moreover, dogmatic attitudes to issues such as women's representations of women's bodies and pleasure further blinded feminist art historians to radical manifestations of Pop that were predicated upon women artists' empowering embrace of women's images in pop culture, making feminist Pop a long-lasting oxymoron and its neglect a regrettable feminist mistake that we have only recently begun to correct from a third-wave feminist point of view.

1 Thomas Sokolowski: *Intimate Emotions: Rosalyn Drexler*, New York: Grey Art Gallery, NYU 1986, unpag.

2 Martha Rosler: "The Figure of the Artist. The Figure of the Woman," in: *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings 1975-2001*, New York: The MIT Press in association with the ICP 2004, pp. 99-100.

3 This essay is a summary conflation of "Pop Proto-Feminisms: Beyond the Paradox of the Woman Pop Artist," in: Sid Sachs and Kalliope Minioudaki (eds.): *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968*, Philadelphia, PA: University of the Arts 2010, pp. 92-143, and the paper that I presented at the symposium that accompanied the above exhibition, on February 5, 2010. For a more thorough analysis of my feminist views of the work of Evelyne Axell, Pauline Boty, Rosalyn Drexler, and Jann Haworth see Minioudaki: *Women in Pop: Difference and Marginality*, PhD dissertation, Institute of Fine Arts, NYU 2009, and "Pop's Ladies and Bad Girls: Axell, Boty and Drexler," in: *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 30, no. 3, Winter 2007/8, pp. 402-431.

Pop was never a movement with a preconceived and homogeneous identity. Originating from radical—pictorial or object-based—returns to reality after the reign of self-expressive abstraction, it blossomed in centers and peripheries of the postwar art-world, often marked by an iconographic and structural fascination with the “mediated semblance”⁴ of post-industrial consumerist society, while variously conditioned by the distinct sociopolitical and cultural circumstances of the contexts that fostered it. Whether seen as the last realist art of modern life, the first meta-language of its imagistic face, or a transitional hybrid of both, its development does not fit the contours of its homogenizing definition in the sixties as the art of commercial subject matter and mechanical reproduction, or of its gradual reduction into a style of impersonal coolness that became identified with the poststructuralist depletion of Pop’s surfaces of any depth.

It is in light of both the affinities and discrepancies of women’s Pop for or from received notions of it that their various degrees of popness—derived from the aggregate effects of iconography, style, and mode of production—open Pop to redefinition. In the case of figurative painters—such as Evelyn Axell, Pauline Boty, Rosalyn Drexler, Marjorie Strider, Idelle Weber, etc.—the rehabilitation of others’ popness seems predicated upon the overcoming of the superficial obstacles inherited by fixed Pop criteria: the use of the brush instead of reproductive techniques or the representation of figure instead of the commercial object. But closer study of their iconography and mode of production also confirms accepted characteristics of Pop, the most prominent being the media and commercial sources of their iconography and the photographic inflection of the “mediated semblance” that characterizes its look. Boty’s Pop, for instance, is underscored by the same collage sensibility and affective fascination with pop culture that distinguishes most British Pop. Misconceived as counter-Pop for its “hot,” dramatic content and colors, as well as use of paint, Drexler’s *noir* vision of the American dream underscoring her de-contextualization of cinematic clichés of love and violence is underlaid by the “death of affect”⁵ that characterizes canonic manifestations of American Pop’s “coolness.” This is due to the indirect inflection of Drexler’s “*faux* paintedness” by the actual materials and structures of mechanical reproduction—her repetition of photographically copied cut-outs with and within paint—and by the media’s taste for death that underlies her voyeuristic lust for violence.⁶

Confirming, however, known Pop characteristics denied to marginalized bodies of works by women artists retrospectively fits them in a *de facto* masculinist canon, while unjustly constructing a “hard-core” canon of women Pop artists. Identifying new criteria toward an all-encompassing redefinition of Pop also compromises Pop’s constitutive heterogeneity as revealed by women’s Pop(s). Yet the dissonant intersection of women artists with Pop Art in the sixties can drastically challenge its understanding. In a sense, it is the constructive un-defining of Pop that, in light of the work of the women who engaged in dialogue with it, can also foreground important aspects of this manifold return to reality.

Such an aspect is Pop’s abstract face. In light of abstract paintings that referenced pop culture through color, shape, size, or title, Lawrence Alloway distinguished British Pop’s abstract, or “environmental,” shift in the early sixties as its most genuine stage. Such a category never caught on for similar developments in American Pop, yet it is supported by the abstract responses to the mediascape and the urban landscape of the ur-metropolis, New York, by two expatriates living in it: the Greek sculptor Chryssa and

4 Coined by Hal Foster (in: Mark Francis (ed.): *Pop*, London: Phaidon 2005, p. 18) the term “mediated semblance” evokes the convergence of the painterly and the photographic typical in much Pop.

5 Ibid.

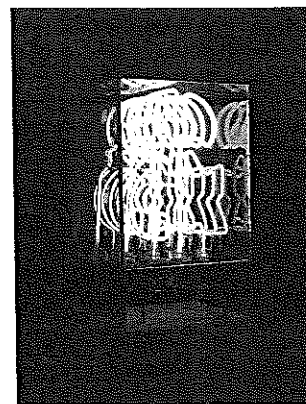
6 See my discussion of Drexler’s and Warhol’s media taste for violence and its relation to Weegee’s voyeurism in *Women in Pop*, pp. 139–142.

the Swedish painter Barbro Östlinn. The realist foundations and hard-edge look of Östlinn's abstract response to New York's changing—under Manhattan's postwar renewal—architectural face are inflected by the photographic. Her abstract compositions derive from photographs of facades of Manhattan buildings and greatly complement her contribution to Pop as the skillful transcriber in paint of her husband's (Öyvind Fahlström's) collage compositions.⁷ By contrast, Chryssa's relation to Pop has been associated with the "machine aesthetics"⁸ she introduced to the realm of sculpture with her use of neon in the early sixties and with her monumental homages to the illuminated Mecca of the postwar mediascape, New York's Times Square. The Pop quality of her signature neon sculpture (see ill. 1) lies indeed in its evocation of urban signs and environments, its repetitive structure, and the use of neon as an industrial material and a spectacular medium of mass communication used in electric billboards. But her intersection with Pop had already begun with sculptures whose iconography (such as letters) and structure evoked urban signage and canvases that marred abstraction with the typographic face of New York's mediascape. Rendering her into a neglected Pop foremother, it is Chryssa's newspaper prints and paintings that evince her early work's relation to Pop—whether consisting of identical excerpts of newspaper ads, such as for car tires, or textual fragments transferred onto canvas by stamping—both amounting to a grid of all-over abstraction synthesized from iconic or textual fragments from New York's print media. They point not only to her own use of media imagery appropriation, but reveal that Chryssa preceded Warhol in using repetitive stamping for the production of serially and quasi-mechanically copied imagery that signifies the genesis of New York Pop.

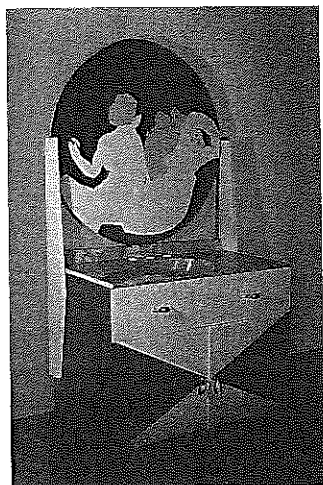
If the work of Chryssa and Östlinn undermines the monopoly of figurative Pop, that of the female protagonists of Latin American Pop challenges the static imagism of its Anglo-American prototypes and problematizes the role of influence in the formation of Pop outside its main centers.

With its idiosyncratic—both iconographic and stylistic—reliance on reproduction, the Pop of the Colombian Beatriz González came as close as Latin Pop ever did to the media look of canonic Pop, though it is hardly derivative. A late-comer to Pop, in 1965 González began appropriating images from newspapers, ads, popular lithographs, etc. with a simplified language of flat colors and shapes. Later she turned to masterpieces of Western art, known in Colombia only through reproductions, framing her irreverent quotations from often-religious art—painted in enamel on metal sheets—with signifiers of low-class "bad" taste and upper-middle-class pretension: signature Colombian cheap metal furniture (painted to look like marble or wood) and antiquated wooden furniture favored by Bogotá's upper-middle class at the beginning of the twentieth century (see ill. 2). Deskill painting through "the impoverished language" of Colombian pop culture—evoking, for instance, Colombian commercial lithography and painting—González invaded high art and radically

conjured national identity, rather than a media-globalized mass culture, through "the materiality of proletarian culture."⁹ With a Pop-looking language accessible to the insiders of the Colombian society, she made caustic commentaries about it and unmasked the classed role of taste, and gender,



ill. 1
Chryssa, *Amperсанд III*,
1965



ill. 2
Beatriz González,
The Turkish Bath
or *The Artifice of*
Marble, 1974

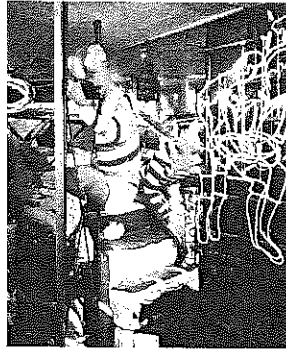
⁷ Östlinn's work has been in depth studied by Annika Öhrner. See especially *Barbro Östlinn and New York*, Stockholm: Makadam 2010.

⁸ Wayne Andersen: *American Sculpture in Process: 1930–1970*, Boston: New York Graphic Society 1975, p. 201.

⁹ As analyzed by Mercedes Trelles-Hernández in: *The Contested Object: Pop Art in Latin America 1964–1974*, PhD dissertation, Harvard University 2002, on which I largely draw for this cursory discussion of Latin American women Pop artists.

within it. For by capitalizing on the "joys of the underdevelopment,"¹⁰ she fashioned a local Pop vernacular which resisted the American cultural imperialism of the sixties and the imperative of Colombian art's modernization, while suiting the distinct relation Colombian society had to both consumerism and mechanical reproduction.

Originally called "the art of things," Argentinian Pop derived from both early American assemblage and Nouveau Realism under Argentinian art's internationalization. It also had origins in the rebellious materiality of

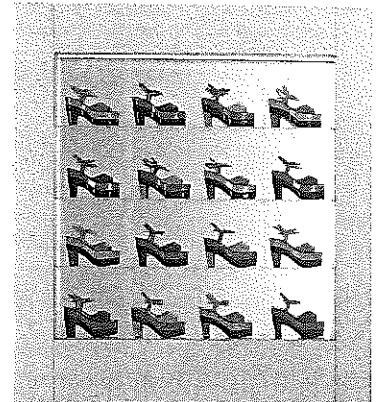


ill. 3
Marta Minujín,
El Batacazo, 1965

the indigenous Informel object that left an indelible imprint on Dalila Puzzovio's and Marta Minujín's early work¹¹: discarded orthopedic casts and signature mattresses, respectively. Alone, embedded in multimedia environments, or used in rather conceptual happenings, both artists' objects cast the Pop object in a new, radical light. Exemplary are, for instance, the inflatable plastic Virna Lisi and football players and the neon signs that crowded Minujín's multisensorial and multimedia evocations of urban life: her fun-houses *El Batacazo* (1965, see ill. 3) and *La Menesunda* (1965). Less known are the colorful platform shoes (see ill. 4) that Puzzovio exhibited in 1967 both as artworks, in a minimalist display in the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, and as commodities, in

the store window of the famous shoemaker that had manufactured them, allowing such hybrid objects to be provocatively worn in bourgeois neighborhoods of Buenos Aires. For it is as "transgressive commodities" that the objects of Puzzovio's and Minujín's participatory art fought art's commodification and challenged the autonomy of the artwork and upper-class taste, while still evoking the world of fashion, commerce, and urban reality in a Pop manner¹²—despite their superficial iconographic similarity with international Pop's commercial objects and media imagery. As such, their work illuminates both the radical forms Pop took in Argentina in response to the multimedia radicality of early Pop's return to reality, the political specificities of Argentinian society, and the originality of its ex-centric inflection.

Returning to more familiar modes of Pop production, I will close this indicative reference to other(s') Pop(s) with the collages of Chryssa Romanos.¹³ Beginning as an abstract painter in Greece, Romanos rediscovered herself as a political Pop collagist in Paris in 1964, while involved with the intersecting circles of Parisian Pop (Nouveau Réalisme and Mec Art). Turning to what Pierre Restany called the "sociological reality," yet through a surfeit of print media rather than the everyday objects of "urban folklore" favored by this architect of Nouveau Réalisme, Romanos launched a staunch critique of societal injustice, industrialization, and the society of spectacle. In several of these collages Romanos explicitly criticized consumerism, exposing its inextricability with vital engines of capitalism, such as war. In her *Reportage* series she unmasks the fallacies of capitalist democracy and the industries that supported its domestic myths in the years of decolonization struggles and the Vietnam War—by mimicking the symbiosis of advertising and photojournalism in print media while sarcastically miscaptioning scenes of famine or war, for instance, with alluring advertising messages and unfit captions. In the various versions of the *Luna Parc* (1965, see ill. 5) series—structured as a vicious shooting gallery—the consumerist cornucopia of the



ill. 4
Dalila Puzzovio,
Daliala doble
plataforma,
1967–1997

10 Beatriz González cited in: Carolina Ponce de León: "Beatriz González: The Extended History of Colombia," in: *Beatriz González: What an Honor to be with you at this Historic Moment*, New York: El Museo del Barrio 1998.

11 According to Trelles-Hernández: *The Contested Object: Pop Art in Latin America*.

12 Ibid.

13 See Anna Kafetsi: *Chryssa Romanos*, Athens: Exandas 1994.



American Dream, which is being promised as a reward for the winning shooter by means of the consumer goods that are culled from all sorts of print mass media and pasted around the targets, is predicated upon the extinction of humanity, whether by its shooting or its rendering into mass. This is at least suggested by the anthropocentric collages that constitute the targets. Abutting antipop as experienced in Rosler's photomontaged juxtapositions, with their inten-

tionally assumed anti-consumerist agenda and media critique, Romanos' political Pop collages suggest that the long-debated political dimension of Pop took the form not only of a reflection of the face of a historico-politically turbulent era—marked by civil rights struggles and the Vietnam War, for instance—or of a latent societal critique, but of an explicit critique of the society of the spectacle using its own means. Though such a stance was rooted in Romanos' communist past and French Pop's ambiguous relationship to American culture during the Cold War, it is indeed a side of Pop that moderates its identity as an uncritical celebration of mass and consumer culture.

POP PROTO-FEMINISM(S)

The greatest revelation of women Pop artists' rediscovery, however, is the feminist thrust that underlies the work of several of them. Not only did women artists manage to voice female subjectivity through Pop, but they did it in a variety of both critical and self-empowering ways that can be hailed as feminist. Indeed the ways in which certain women Pop artists experimented with new materials or knowingly embraced the pleasures of pop culture to express feminist concerns—including pop culture's critique and the celebration of female sexuality—amount to a variety of intuitively formed feminist strategies that, preceding their development under the influence of feminism in the arts, render their contributions to Pop radically proto-feminist and comprise an invaluable pluralist chapter of feminist art's pre-history.

The most uncontroversially proto-feminist manifestations in Pop can be identified with the use of materials and techniques that patriarchy has inferiorized as feminine, and which radically prefigured various brands of feminist art's programmatic salvation of "women's culture." We cannot yet be certain of the motives of Dorothy Grebenak, who chose rug hooking as her novel means to appropriate images from mass culture, such as dollar bills, comic books, or packages of consumer products (see ill. 6). Conversely, Niki de Saint Phalle paved the way for her rediscovery as a female sculptor with a deliberate substitution of the commercial bric-a-brac of everyday life with feminine materials (such as fabric cut-outs and wool yarns) that aided her transformation of the new-realist assemblage into a feminist practice by capitalizing on the feminine skill of decoration and the femininity of ornament itself to bejewel the skins of her early *Nanas*. Unlike de Saint Phalle's evocative matching of her celebration of the female body with the femininity of her mode of production, Joyce Wieland and Jann Haworth employed quilting to honor the neglected work of women. Influenced by Claes Oldenburg, Wieland used fabric and plastic to quilt the pop subjects she was already exploring in painting, producing, for instance, wall hangings (see ill. 7) that translated film strips through a feminine language of pocketing and stuffing. Slightly prior to Oldenburg, Haworth invented soft Pop sculpture—polemically conceived as "ladies anti-art" in



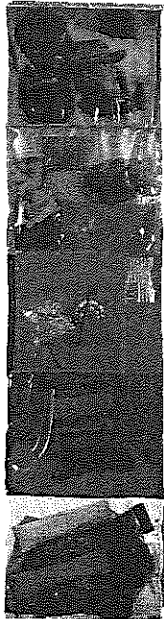
the male-dominated art world of early-sixties London—as a form of feminist figurative collage: a three-dimensional patchwork ensuing from her deliberate grafting together of the acquired feminine sculptural imagination of dressmaking and a great variety of motifs, materials, and techniques derived from various feminine traditions (ranging from doll- to quilt-making) with that of cinematic prop-making.

In other cases, the proto-feminism of women Pop artists lies in the diverse ways in which—humorously, autobiographically, ambiguously, critically, strategically, or affirmatively—they employed pop culture, whether exposing its trappings for women or transvaluating them for their own empowerment, without relinquishing the pleasures of its consumption.

It is the opposition displayed by Drexler's disaffective repetition of pop culture's clichés and Boty's affective loans from it that best captures the discrepancy of equally proto-feminist consummations of women artists' fascination with pop culture. Due to the anti-melodramatic ambiguity with which she "respoke" found scenarios of love as violence, Drexler's cinematic couples repeat clichés of pop romance in a way that foregrounds women's right to desire (through her "bad girl" heroines) while critically exposing the patriarchal scenarios of the desiring woman's ominous fate in pop culture and life (by awakening "feminist laughter"). Deeply aware, too, of pop culture's patriarchal trappings—such as romance plots—for women,¹⁴ Boty transvaluated them for her feminist self-empowerment through Pop. Affectively embracing pop culture as did her male Pop colleagues in London, she strategically cast the female Pop artist as an active fan, using her fandom's objects to advocate with proto-feminist conviction issues that "mattered" to her—such as female desire and sexuality—as a young woman fully participant in the revolutionary feast of the "Pill"-era Swinging London.

Perhaps the most controversial object, for feminism, of the strategically fanzine "stargazing"¹⁵ which Boty used to redeem the pleasures of pop culture for women is Pop's favorite star, Marilyn Monroe.

Not only has female stardom been shown by feminists as the media's opium that dupes women into their prescribed roles in patriarchal society through passive admiration, but, still widely seen as the dumb blonde bombshell of American glamour, Monroe hardly qualified as a thinking woman's object of admiration (unlike other favorites Brigitte Bardot and Monica Vitti). Not coincidentally, others' Pop proto-feminism was predicated upon the critique of media's role in the construction of such beauty ideals and stardom or of feminine beauty in general. This is widely evidenced, as by Rosler's early series of private photocollages, *Body Beautiful*, or *Beauty Knows No Pain* (1966–1972); Drexler's lament of the media death of Monroe's private self; the castigation of fashion and beauty trappings by Yayoi Kusama's infestation of their tools and accouterments with macaroni, plastic flowers, dots, and phalluses (see ill. 8) and her performative parodies of beauty rituals; or by the celebration of anti-Monroe beauties, such as Mae West, by Haworth. Yet Boty, who in one of her collages dared to celebrate lace bras and hair-coloring products as allies of women confident in their sexuality, repeatedly depicted Monroe with shameless admiration of her beauty, glamour, and sex appeal. Having modeled herself interchangeably upon Bardot and Monroe, she celebrated Monroe in paint as a liberating model of sexual empowerment rather than a casualty of Hollywood spectacle—a harbinger of the liberating change that the sexy fashions and girls of swinging London promised for the "unsure of her sexuality" English female.¹⁶



ill. 7
Joyce Wieland,
Stuffed Movie, 1966

¹⁴ As proven by her witty monologues as presenter of the radio program *The Public Ear*.

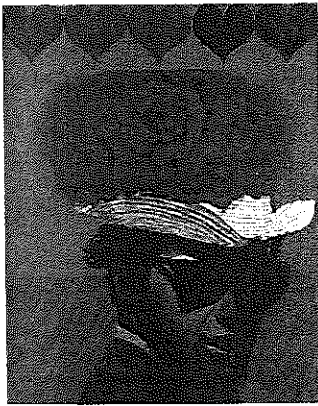
¹⁵ With "stargazing" I refer here to Jackie Stacey's (*Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, London and New York: Routledge 1994) feminist redemption of postwar British women's identification with Hollywood stars as a form of active fandom. For a further theorization of Boty's feminist stargazing see Minioudaki: *Women in Pop*, pp. 219–233.

¹⁶ As Boty put it in *Englishwomen*, recording for *The Public Ear* transmitted on February 9, 1964.

With the images of stars as delicious images of women for women, Boty thus intervened in Pop's infatuation with female stars, substituting male artists' erotic look at sexy bodies with the female fan's desire for identification with them as models of transgressive—for the period—femininities, in effect redeeming the pleasures of cinematic spectatorship, film fandom, and pop culture for her female audience while speaking of what mattered to her as a young woman of the sixties who progressively linked fashion with sexuality.

It is the redemption of the erotic pleasures of women's consumption of pop culture and the celebration of women's right to erotic pleasure per se that distinguish the proto-feminist drive of several of the women of Pop, whether they adapted or reinvented Pop vernaculars to speak of female desire(s).

Intuitively discovering the politics of the personal from the heart of Pop, Dorothy Iannone and de Saint Phalle, for instance, twisted Pop's fascination with comics to autobiographically, and often pornographically, speak of female desire. Usurping, undermining, or sabotaging the scopophilia of the male gaze, turning theirs on either male or female bodies, it is Axell and Boty who systematically promulgated female desire. Boty variously interwove her defense of female pleasure with her celebration of pop culture, especially by devising a corporeal language that daringly hints at female orgasm, as with the labial and hairy petals of the rose that frame the famous presenter of a pop TV show in *5-4-3-2-1* (1963). By identifying "beautiful boys" with the objects of her Pop fandom—whether movie stars, such as Jean-Paul Belmondo (see ill. 9), or intellectual friends eroticized by her painting and personal symbolism as in a fan's album—she recast the female fan as a desiring young woman, foregrounding the eroticism of the female gaze involved in pop culture's objectification of male stars and celebrating female desire through her own. Conversely, Axell focused on inanimate staples of



ill. 9
Pauline Boty, *With
Love to Jean-Paul
Belmondo*, 1962

Pop to advocate the empowering potential of consumption for women: automobiles and ice cream, erotically coupled with female body parts. Concocting radically proto-feminist female fantasies of erotic consumption, she turned consumption into a near-pornographically empowering means to celebrate active female desire and pleasure, both of which she strategically diversified to include autoeroticism and homoeroticism.¹⁷

It is the variety of women Pop artists' representations of the female body that captures the differences underpinning their proto-feminist sexual politics. Some strategically abstained from its imaging, in defiance of pop culture's and art's "pornokitsch"¹⁸ objectification of the female body—the Pop nude and pin-up. And while some used it to expose the sexism of representation, others re-imag(in)ed it in equally subversive ways.

Feminist parody underlies the disruptive eruption of nudity in Marisol's masquerades of middle- and upper-class femininity, concocted by incongruous juxtapositions of various systems of representation and accessories of femininity, crowned with casts of her face; bodily details, such as casts of buttocks and falsies, undermine the classed propriety or the seriousness of socialization rituals and the beauty of her heroines. Laughter also underlies Marjorie Strider's 3-D exaggerations: the protruding buttocks and breasts of her bikini pin-ups that parody the fixations of male fantasy



ill. 8
Yayoi Kusama,
Driving Image, 1967

17 Cf. *Women in Pop*, pp. 441–444 for a discussion of Axell's strategic "for women" (homo- and auto-)erotics.

18 Linda Nochlin: *Representing Women*, New York: Thames and Hudson 1999, pp. 16–33.



ill. 10
Marjorie Strider,
Green Triptych, 1963

and sexual fetishism by absurdly highlighting them (see ill. 10).

With her "grannies" Haworth radically foregrounded the "obscene" aged female body in a proto-feminist gesture comparable only with de Saint Phalle's celebration of the maternal sexual body through the grotesqueness of her liberating and joyful *Nanas*. While Haworth avoided what could have been the most literal *Playboy* pin-up by a female Pop artist—a bunny commissioned for Hugh Hefner's birthday—by dropping the commission and turning the already begun

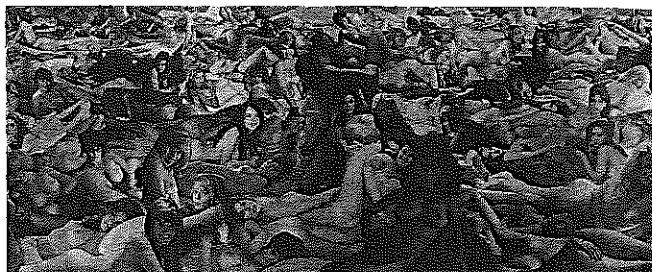
pin-up into a working girl of mixed race, Rosler photocolled a whole harem (see ill. 11) of them to critique women's representation in pop culture through the excessive reiteration of pop staples that cater to male fantasy.

In contrast, Axell and Boty embraced the feminist potential of the pin-up as pop culture's genre of the sexually aware and in-control woman. Boty repeated the pin-up from a "mobile" point of view that allowed her either to look at pop culture's sexualized woman as a proto-feminist young woman, that is, celebrating its empowering propagation of female sexuality—as with the portrait of Christine Keeler—or to expose the pin-up as a site of patriarchal oppression by repeating men's view of it—as in *Tom's Dream* (1963) and *It's a Man's World II* (1964–1965). Axell used the pin-up, as much as her signature Pop style, to systematically update the nude for proto-feminist Pop erotica. The pin-up, often in its most pornographic

manifestations (flashing its vagina to the viewer, self-pleasuring itself, or embedded in homoerotic sex scenes) indeed aided her to imbue with a distinctly Pop character the nude gallery through which she advocated an erotic art for women. It is in

light of this radical reframing of the pin-up that we can relate Axell and Boty to an intergenerational series of artists whose pro-sex and pro-pop-culture attitudes meet in their radical adoption of the pin-up as a cipher of active female sexuality and range from early-twentieth-century burlesque performers to the fin-de-siècle "bad girls."¹⁹

Yet, it is their "bad girl" performativity, as manifested by the ways in which they posed with or in their work, that, as an early form of "radical narcissism"²⁰—that is, a strategic reiteration of feminine posing that defends the embodied subjectivity of the (female) artist—enabled them to knowingly tackle the problem of "woman-as-image"²¹ without relinquishing the pleasures of pop culture and of their bodies. Boty often modeled with her work in photographic portraits that feature her nude with her paintings or mimicking the sexy poses of the figures depicted in them (see ill. 12). Complemented by her nude self-portraits as artist, Axell's radical narcissism took place mostly within her work: she bestowed her nudes with a self-portraying element that abuts upon inverse masquerade and based the poses of some of her pin-ups on pornographic poses fashioned by herself for her



ill. 11
Martha Rosler,
Hothouse or Harem,
from the series:
Body Beautiful,
Beauty Knows,
No Pain,
1966–1972

19 For the feminist potential of the pin-up see Maria Elena Buszek: *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture*, Durham and London: Duke University Press 2006.

20 According to Amelia Jones: "The Rhetoric of the Pose: Hannah Wilke and the Radical Narcissism of Feminist Body Art," in: *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1998, pp. 151–197.

21 Abigail Solomon-Godeau: "The Woman Who Never Was: Photography and First-Wave Feminist Art," in: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia Butler, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2007, p. 339.

own or her husband's lens. Having experienced pop culture's objectification of women as actresses, models, and beautiful women, Axell and Boty performatively appropriated the positioning of women as images. By fashioning stereotypically feminine or exaggeratedly sexy poses, they subverted the sexist staples of Pop Art by parodically mimicking them. But by grafting their artistic agency to women's immanent image position, they engaged in a strategically narcissistic subversion of woman's object position in both high and pop culture to claim both their minds and bodies. Complementing their depiction of the sexualized female body in p/Pop a/Art by performatively enacting it, Axell and Boty thus deconstructed the naturalness of femininity through the exposure of its performativity and the innately parodic nature of their mimics, and reinforced their belief in the erotic female body as a radical instrument of women's sexual pleasure and liberation. Incarnating Pop's "bad girls," they claimed women's right to look at the female body, represent it, and image its pleasures both as an empowering intervention in Pop and for their own pleasure.

Cursory as this sampling of proto-feminist interventions in Pop has been, it captures, I hope, the irreducible variety of these artists' strategic attitudes toward issues important for feminism, such as pop culture and female sexuality and the often-conflicting sexual politics that underlies them. It is this remarkable diversity that renders Pop's proto-feminists foremothers not simply of feminist art, but of the plurality of art feminism itself—of the many feminisms in the art that third-wave feminism has finally reconciled, rejecting past prescriptive views of correct feminist aesthetics and politics. For only in such light are we permitted to finally see as equally feminist (for instance) Rosler's critique and Boty's embrace of media constructions of beauty ideals—that is, the proto-feminist critique of representation and the body politics of pleasure that co-existed in the context of Pop.



ill. 12
Michael Ward,
Pauline Boty in
front of
Tom's Dream,
1963

ill. 11
Martha Rosler,
Orchouse or Harem,
from the series:
Body Beautiful,
Beauty Knows
No Pain,
1966–1972