

JVC resubmission:

Cecil Beaton, Richard Hamilton and the Queer, Transatlantic origins of Pop Art

Abstract

Significant aspects of American pop art are now understood as participating in the queer visual culture of New York in the 1960s. This article suggests something similar can be said of the British origins of pop art not only at the time of but also prior to the work of the Independent Group in post-war London. The interwar practices of collage of the celebrity photographer Cecil Beaton prefigured those of Richard Hamilton in that they displayed a distinctively British interpretation of male muscularity and female glamour in the United States. (Homo)eroticism in products of American popular culture such as advertising fascinated not simply Beaton but also a number of members of the Independent Group including Hamilton. The origins of pop art should, therefore, be situated in relation not only to American consumer culture but also to the ways in which that culture appeared, from certain British viewpoints, to be queerly intriguing.

Keywords: Cecil Beaton, consumerism, homosexuality, Independent Group, Pop Art, Richard Hamilton, United States of America.



Fig. 1. Richard Hamilton, *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?*, 1956, collage, 26 x 25 cm, Kunsthalle Tübingen, Sammlung Zundel, © 2010 VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

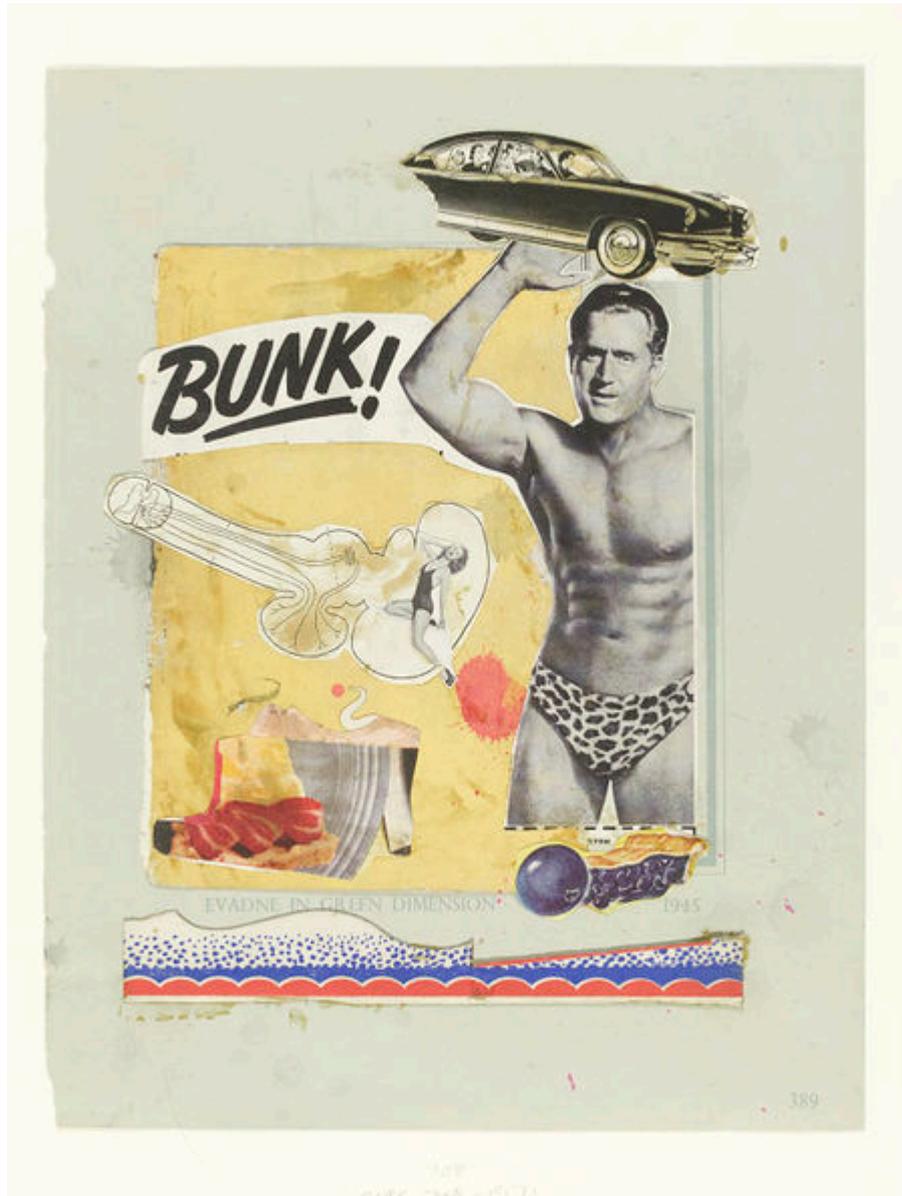


Fig. 2. Eduardo Paolozzi, *Collage (Evadne in Green Dimension)*, 1952, collage, 30 x 26 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, CIRC 708-1971.

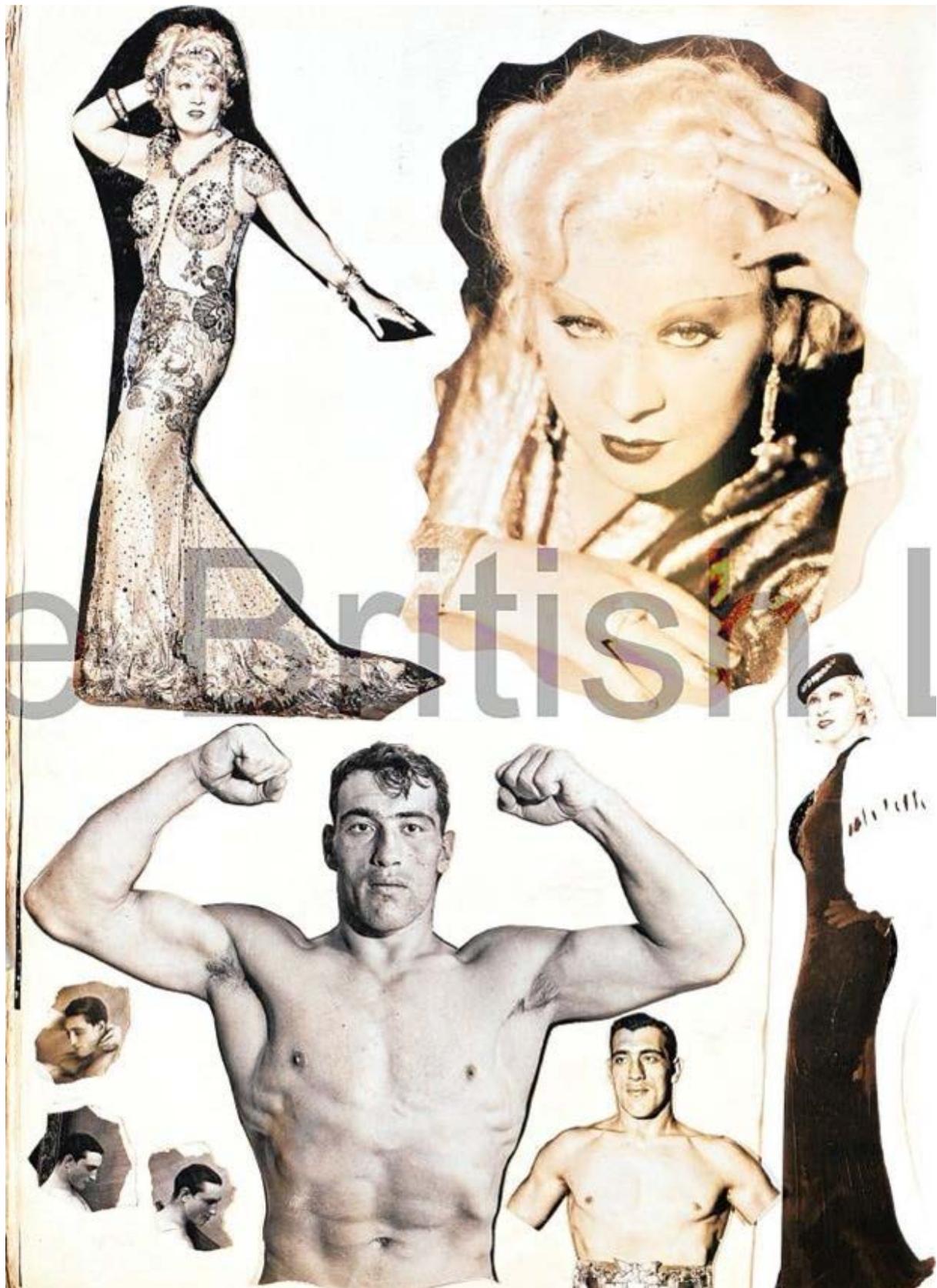


Fig. 4. Cecil Beaton, collage, c. 1936, Sotheby's Picture Archive, London.



Fig. 5. Cecil Beaton, 'New York Night Lights', in *Cecil Beaton's New York*, published 1938, 116-17.

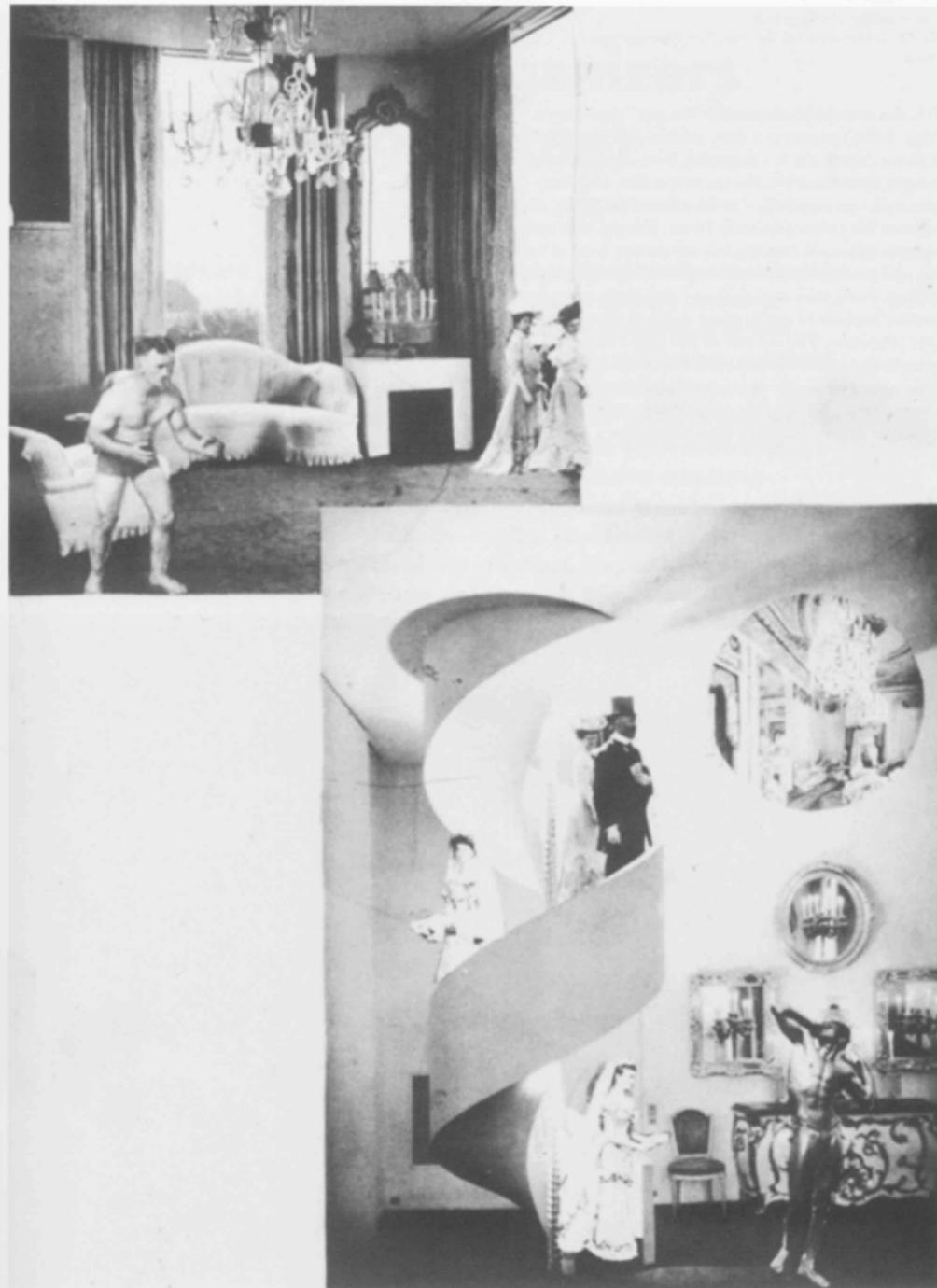


Fig. 6. Cecil Beaton, *Brides, Bodybuilders, and Ladies in Edwardian Dress, and a Gentleman in the Apartment of Monsieur Charles de Beistigui*, c.1939, collage in scrapbook, 42 x 31 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, PH.195-1977, X980 box A, 2006BC4971.



Fig. 7, Richard Hamilton, *Cinemascope*, 1956, collage screen of the Group 2 exhibit, *This is Tomorrow* exhibition, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, © John Maltby / RIBA Library Photographs Collection (RIBA28317).



Fig. 8. Richard Hamilton, *Technicolor*, 1987, collage screen, photographed by the author when exhibited at Tate Modern, London, 2014, owned by Institut Valencià d'Art Modern.

I met my baby in Macy's in Gentlemen's Underwear
I met my baby in Macy's and that's where I learned to care
We looked at a cottage on the Mezzanine
With a toaster and an iron and a washing machine
I met my baby in Macy's in Gentlemen's Underwear.¹

The lyrics of 'I Met My Baby in Macy's' recorded by Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra in 1947 testify to the claims of mid-twentieth-century retail to be able to provide a man with everything he needed for a great relationship. It also testifies to the realisation that those claims were fake because his 'baby' does not return his love and he returns her to 'one of those clothing trees, between the men's cologne and the BVDs'. The woman is reduced to the status of a masculine accessory. But why is this feminine object to be found in the men's underwear department of Macy's store near the piles of Bradley, Voorhees and Day briefs? And is this 'baby' necessarily a woman at all? After all 'she' is put back onto a stand of men's clothing. The world of interwar American retail was seemingly designed to suit heterosexual individuals and couples who wished to bring up a family. However, there was always the possibility that individuals of different sexual tastes might shop for a selection of items which would acquire new and possibly subversive meanings through juxtaposition with one another. This article concerns the way in which such practices fed into the development of pop art.

Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing? has become famous as a source for pop. It was produced by Richard Hamilton (1922-2011) as part of his collaboration on the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition which was held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1956. The original collage, now in the Kunsthalle Tübingen, originally

appeared at this time only in black and white reproductions (fig. 1). It was not, in fact, until several years later that it began to be hailed as an art-work in its own right. Therefore, it is important to think about this work in its original role as a promotional image. A deeper understanding of this piece can be achieved by contextualising it within the visual culture not only of the time of its production but also of its sources of inspiration. In this article I will be looking at a selection of drawings and collages made by the celebrity photographer Cecil Beaton (1904-1980) which focus on many of the same images and reflect related interests in American consumer culture and queer forms of sexual desire. Many of these works were widely circulated in book publications and they may, thus, have provided direct inspiration for the work of Hamilton and his colleagues. However, even if that cannot be proved it will be argued that they provide evidence of a characteristically British, transatlantic viewpoint that combined irony and camp appreciation.

A key subject of the original collage was consumerism and the American aesthetics of plenty in contradistinction to the British rationing.² If not exactly a direct satire it problematized the truth claims of the supersaturated imagery of modernity.³ It was also about British dreams of the future. Looking back in 1987 in connection with a reprise of the exhibit which this collage was used to publicise Hamilton commented that ‘the cabinet of Dr. Voelcker was taking off, filled with brash ephemera, to other planets; a cultural spaceship going who knows where.’⁴ He was referring to the ‘group two’ section of the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition which he presented together with John Voelcker and John McHale. American popular culture in general and science fiction in particular provided key source materials for these members of the Independent Group that had formed at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, in 1952.⁵ These artists noticed American popular culture because it was, to them, foreign and exotic, rather than boringly mundane.⁶ It was in these circumstances that pop art began before it broke through in the United States in the 1960s.

The immediate inspiration for the piece appears to have derived from the work of fellow member of the Independent Group, Eduardo Paolozzi (1924-2005).⁷ When living in Paris after the war Paolozzi compiled his collage book *Psychological Atlas* having rediscovered the ‘relics of the pre-war Dada and Surrealist movement’: ‘the psychology Paolozzi surveys in his collage book is that of popular imagery: robots, animals, landscapes, bodybuilders, politicians, ethnographic images, industrial architecture, film stars, and the whole assortment of sensational or exotic material to be found in illustrated newspapers.’⁸ It was then in his *Bunk* collages (originally untitled works made in Paris and London between 1947 and 1952) that he moved to incorporate more images from American consumer culture. The word ‘pop’ first appeared in Paolozzi’s *I was a Rich Man’s Plaything* (1947), shown fired from a cut-out image of a gun.⁹ These early works were, it is important to stress, not made as public art, rather ‘it was a private language, something to be shown to friends who shared his enthusiasm for low-brow illustrations, for things like comics and soft porn.’¹⁰ He did, however, show many of these in a visual lecture that acted as one of the founding events of the Independent Group at the ICA, although ‘there is little indication that Paolozzi was acknowledged or that anyone [outside the group] realised the importance of the *Bunk* collages for at least another twenty years.’¹¹ It is notable that even today some of them are classified in contemporary collections as art, whilst others are filed under prints and drawings and yet others are kept in archives.

The name of these collages derives from the most well-known example from the set, dating from 1952, which was given the title *Evadne in Green Dimension* in 1972 (fig. 2). This references Paolozzi’s throwing away of the reproduction of a work with this title by Jack Bilbo whilst retaining the title and the rest of the page. The word ‘bunk(um)’ most likely references the American industrialist Henry Ford’s (in)famous dictum that ‘history is bunk’. Paolozzi’s collage features the bodybuilder Charles Atlas lifting up a car. This parallels *Just*

What Is It but in the earlier work the counter-part female pin-up is reduced in size and positioned in what appears to be a bladder adjacent to a diagrammatical and erect penis. It is as though the bodybuilder as sexualised object is just about to piss her out of the left side of the frame. But this, as I will go on to argue, is far from the only potentially queer aspect of the backstory to Hamilton's collage of 1956.

The role of same-sex desire in the American pop art of the 1960s has increasingly been acknowledged, above all in relation to the work of Andy Warhol.¹² George Chauncey has explained how a proto-gay commercial culture that had flourished in interwar New York faced a less congenial cultural environment in the context of Cold War suspicion towards the supposed links between communists and homosexuals.¹³ Simon Watney has commented that some closeted homosexuals gave Warhol a cold shoulder in the 1950s because 'he was too "swishy", too much of a window dresser'.¹⁴ Warhol created unease at this time by his willingness to take up what was often posited as the feminised position of the consumer gaze, to look seriously at advertising, and think what he needed for the house. There was good reason to fear homophobic reactions to such an artistic agenda. Sara Doris has noted that 'the association of pop art and camp was studiously avoided in the art-critical press' prior to the (by no means entirely positive) comments of Susan Sontag in 1964 on camp, though there was much critical innuendo that suggests that its potential for queerness was recognised.¹⁵ Yet if the work of Warhol and his friends 'queered the idea of modern art', as Gavin Butt has argued, their ability to achieve this was based on the prior incorporation of related material into earlier British works of what might be termed 'proto-pop'.¹⁶

Lawrence Alloway, in effect, had already queered the birth of pop art for those in the know by writing in *The Listener* in 1962 that its story 'begins in London about 1949 with work by Francis Bacon'.¹⁷ He was referring to the show of Bacon's work at the Hanover Gallery and his argument was based primarily on the painter's use of photographs as source

material, something that was seen as remarkable at the time.¹⁸ Heavy hints about Bacon's sexual tastes were dropped by Sam Hunter in an article that appeared in the (American) *Magazine of Art* in January 1952.¹⁹ Paolozzi would also have been aware of Bacon's sexual tastes since he often went drinking with him in the post-war period after being impressed on first seeing his work in 1946.²⁰ In 1954 Bacon was to have a one-man show at the ICA at the time when Alloway was the assistant director. John McHale was credited with the hang of the show.²¹ This is not to say that Bacon produced pop art, but he did share interests in 'transparency, the erotic, the representation of movement, and the peopling of enclosed space' with members of the Independent Group.²² His work, like theirs, was influenced by popular media and surrealism (he had tried unsuccessfully to be included in the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936).²³ Thus, if Hamilton himself was essentially heterosexual he still worked in the context of those who were either homosexual or open to considering their artistic viewpoints.

However, the idea that some, at least, of Richard Hamilton's pop art is queer in itself has recently been proposed by Jonathan Katz. The core of his argument concerns a series of works which explore interlocking forms that blur the boundary between human and machine, penetrator and penetrated, Katz argues that *Just What Is It* also contains queer valences in so far as the figures referred to by Hamilton as 'Adam' and 'Eve' (the bodybuilder and the glamour model) are presented as artificially excessive performances of masculinity and femininity.²⁴ The result is that gender, and by implication, sexuality is denaturalised into an artificial performance and the culturally constructed nature of domestic life is revealed. Moreover, the bodies of both the man and the woman are presented as objects of desire in a landscape of fetishized consumer culture that blurs the boundaries between public self-presentation and private space.²⁵ The effect of this is to challenge the literal reading of men and women's bodies as naturally distinct and to present them in a continuum of objects open

to the gaze of the consumer of unspecified gender. But this, I will go on to argue, was not new in British visual culture but reflects engagement with practices of transatlantic viewing that were prominent in the interwar period.

Cecil Beaton's New York

Cecil Beaton was one of the greatest society photographers of the twentieth century. He came from middle-class British origins and was, in the language of his time, a flamboyant homosexual. His early work draws on art traditions, notably surrealism, that were themselves influenced by forms of popular visual culture, particularly those deriving from the United States. Beaton first visited New York in 1928 and went back regularly to work and socialise.²⁶ David Banash has argued that 'the technique of bringing together disparate images and texts into an abstract field is a staple of advertising that predates the avant-garde significantly.'²⁷ Montage as a photographic technique dates almost from the establishment of the medium in the mid-nineteenth century and practices of cut and paste were in widespread use in the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, it is important to appreciate that the aspect of pop art that involved cross-readings between European high art and American popular culture was present in a proportion of Dadaist work and interwar Continental collage. For instance the scrapbooks and collages of Beaton, as of Paolozzi, bear comparison with the 1934 scrapbook of German artist Hannah Höch which was filled with cut-outs from photographs representing what in her home country was referred to as 'Amerikanismus'.²⁸

Whilst the cut-up became a central practice of surrealism the overt homophobia of André Breton has resulted in this movement as being seen as something of a preserve of 'straight' men. However, this elides the role of Marcel Duchamp who was not homosexual

but who is now understood to have been in close contact with, and been heavily inspired by, the queer culture of New York and Paris in the first half of the twentieth century, as for instance can be seen by his creation of a drag alter ego, Rrose Sélavy.²⁹ John McHale was in the process of assembling the magazines and other materials from which some of the images in *Just What Is It* were cut when he met Duchamp at Yale.³⁰ The other images were from magazines owned by Magda and Frank Cordell and were cut out by Magda and Hamilton's wife, Terry O'Reilly. Hamilton was involved in thinking about the work of Duchamp through the 1950s, having been introduced in 1952 to the *Green Box* notes for the design and construction of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923). Indeed it has been suggested that he 'found his voice through Duchamp'.³¹ Paolozzi, when asked in an interview with Alvin Boyarsky in May 1984, where the use of collage in pop art had come from, replied that it had come straight from the surrealists.³² It is thus notable that strikingly similar image juxtapositions can be found in surrealist-influenced, interwar collages - some of which were published in best-selling books - made by Cecil Beaton.³³

At the time when Duchamp was disgusting the worthies of New York by presenting a urinal, evocative to those in the queer subculture of 'cottaging' (seeking sex in public toilets), as art, similarly transgressive values had found a prominent commercial niche in the pages of *American Vogue*. In particular, the work of Baron Adolph de Meyer, who worked at *Vogue* from 1913-22 and made abundant use of 'affective excess' (one might just as effectively say camp), collided European aristocratic decadence with American commercial amorality. The results were much admired by Beaton and inspired him when he began his work with the magazine.³⁴ What Christopher Reed has called the 'amusing style' of British *Vogue*, one that relished witty subversion of old gender norms as evidence of being bang up to date, was fostered by Dorothy Todd, a lesbian who was the magazine's editor from 1923-6.³⁵ It was quite in keeping with the tone of the publication that Beaton's first contribution featured

cross-dressed Cambridge undergraduates (himself included) putting on John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* in April 1924.³⁶ Amusing the style may have been, but its influence was considerable, since it propagated the notion that it was stylish to be seen as 'destabilising institutionally sanctioned hierarchies' to the extent that it has been read as having offered 'tutorials' in 'queer perception'.³⁷

Cecil Beaton, like Höch and Paolozzi, was an ardent creator of scrapbooks. Two main sets of these survive; one held at the Victorian and Albert Museum, London, which consists substantially of press-cuttings concerning his own career, and another held in the Cecil Beaton Studio Archives at Sothebys, London, which includes vast numbers of photographic montages.³⁸ Beaton also created collages as items for public perusal, as in 1937 when *Cecil Beaton's Scrapbook* was published to a fanfare of publicity on both sides of the Atlantic. The popular excitement about this book was largely down to his inclusion of sensational articles concerning the private lives of film-stars that he had photographed and these were widely syndicated in the press. Beaton's enthusiasm for living and working in the United States in the 1930s may have been fostered by the greater financial rewards available there, but also by the increasingly conservative tone of British periodicals. Magazines for women became notably less flamboyant and those few that were aimed at men courted the pink reader in the most mildly 'amusing' of ways. *Men Only*, for instance, on the one hand tried to stress its straight credentials whilst, on the other, featuring the occasional slightly racy cartoon of the young pansy about town.³⁹

The 1937 *Scrapbook* includes a drawing by Beaton, *New York Impressions* (fig. 3), the original of which is now in the National Portrait Gallery in London and which bears direct comparison with *Just What Is It*. The photographic materials from which it was constructed can be seen pasted into one of the Sothebys volumes (fig. 4). In the midst of a cloud of references to jazz, brand names and consumer luxuries, the posing figures of an underwear

model (wearing Bradley, Voorhees and Day underwear as sold at Macy's department store), a heavily muscled prize-fighter and Mae West, in pretty much the pose of Hamilton's 'Eve', embody the fleshly delights of New York.⁴⁰ What is being evoked here is a dream world in which 'every imaginable appetite can be satisfied instantly', with the application, of course, of sufficient funds.⁴¹ That this is not simply a celebration of conventional gender values is apparent from the fact that neither the figure of the wrestler nor of Mae West was, by any means, a typical embodiment of American domesticity. If Mae West's stage role was to function as a 'sultry odalisque', her act was honed within the queer culture of the 1920s as can be seen from her plays *The Drag* (1927) and *The Pleasure Man* (1928). The latter work queers the connections between the jazz performance of Al Jolson and fellatio with such lines as 'Oh, I get down on my knees – and sing a couple of Mammy songs ... you see I'm a character imperson-eater'.⁴² Not only does Hamilton similarly pair a muscled man and a female glamour pin-up but he also implies the artificiality of such performances. For example, impersonation and supplication is on offer at the theatre across the dark street in Hamilton's 1956 collage. The link between the black-face jazz-singer and the camp homosexual as performers for the entertainment of the straights was, moreover, recognised by John Richardson who was one of the first critics to draw attention, as early as 1966, to the links between, as he put it, 'Dada, camp and the mode called Pop'.⁴³

In addition to possessing a queer eye for gendered performance, Beaton also took a related interest in fashion and consumer culture. American retail culture from the time of World War One had been taking not merely the dollars of the male consumer but, tacitly, of the queer one.⁴⁴ Coded references began to appear in marketing in the form of advertisements that 'exemplify the workings of the open secret in ways that attract attention and suggest daring sophistication by allusions to the taboo, without affirming – or even explicitly acknowledging – homosexuality.'⁴⁵ Of particular prominence was the work of J. C.

Leyendecker whose artwork for the Klosed Krotch Kenosha in 1914 featured in the first national print advertisements for men's underwear in the United States.⁴⁶ In his creation of the famous 'Arrow Collar' man he was simply painting his life-partner Charles A. Beach.⁴⁷ Carole Turbin has pointed out that shirts, to which stiff collars were attached, were treated as undergarments in the nineteenth-century. The soft, integral, Arrow Collar was more comfortable but for that very reason was considered by some to be unmanly. Leyendecker's imagery, by contrast, advanced an image of comfort and ease as an attribute of modern manliness as embodied by the 'white collar' worker.⁴⁸ Such men displayed their masculinity through the forms of their muscular bodies and were, thus, unafraid to appear in what their forefathers would have thought of as indecorous states of undress.

Many of the other brands included in Beaton's drawing were directly involved in these processes. John Wanamaker was a pioneer of retailing and marketing techniques and, in particular, brought in the selling of underwear piled up on tables.⁴⁹ Coded homoeroticism was used by Bradley, Voorhees and Day to sell their BVD brand of underwear as when, in 1929 the Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller, who went on to play Tarzan, was hired by the company to model the BVD brand of swimsuits.⁵⁰ This actor was also, it should also be noted, the subject of a particularly smouldering set of images by Beaton taken on the film-set in 1932. The use of overt sex appeal to sell men's garments was much more prominent in the United States than it was in Britain. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that the world of American consumer culture was eroticised by a proportion of British homosexuals, as Dennis Houlsworth recounted in relation to Y-fronts in the Brighton oral history project 'Daring Hearts': 'I thought [they] were ever so outrageous. I'd seen them advertised in American magazines, because they came over from America. Apart from that all you had was horrible flannel things.'⁵¹ He was speaking with reference to the years after World War Two, but there had, in fact, been a limited degree of tacit appeals to the queer consumer of men's

underwear in Britain in the 1930. The style by which this was conveyed in British advertising relied, however, more on camp inflection than overt eroticism.⁵²

Although *New York Impressions* is a drawing with only minor elements of collage its composition has clearly been the result of thinking with the forms and results of montage. This technique offers the opportunity to use strategic juxtaposition to change the meaning of individual components of the image. The effect of this is that in both this drawing and *Just What Is It* the muscled man in his underwear becomes an object of the desiring and consuming gaze. Moreover, the specific homoeroticism of Beaton's presentation of New York (despite the depiction of a woman in the scene, albeit a woman who was well known as an impersonator of a man impersonating a woman) is clear by comparing this drawing with the photographic spread *New York Night Lights* that appeared in another book, *Cecil Beaton's New York* of 1938 (fig. 5).⁵³ In this spread our gaze is, in fact, directed away from the lights into the darkness of the city's streets where men stand in pairs looking at the bodies of other men. Two figures consider advertisements for a boxing match and two sailors, their arms lightly touching, stare at a nude, male sculpture that is part of a fountain. This latter work is Paul Manship's *Prometheus* (1934) which was installed in the Rockefeller Center in Manhattan but its juxtaposition in this spread leaves the viewer assuming that it is placed somewhere out in a park. That there was something specifically homosexual about this presentation of the city is implied by the fact that Charles Henri Ford, whose name appears in *New York Impressions*, was thanked by Beaton for 'his enthusiasm on sightseeing expeditions'.⁵⁴ Ford, co-author of the scandalous, queer novel, *The Young and Evil* (1933), was one of the most controversial creative figures in New York at this time.⁵⁵ It is in this context that we can understand the sexual significance of Beaton's statement that the city could provide 'everything a bride could desire'.⁵⁶ The darkened streets of the city in *Just*

What is It, therefore, imply possibilities of sexual fulfilment even beyond those available in Hamilton's excessive domestic interior.

There is one further way in which the 1956 collage appears to reflect Beaton's queer and camp interests. The portrait of a man in nineteenth-century dress stands out amidst the signs of modernity on the back wall of the room in *Just What Is It*. This provides a similar stylistic jolt, albeit one delivered with considerably more subtlety, to that found in Beaton's collage, *Brides, Bodybuilders, and Ladies in Edwardian Dress, and a Gentleman in the Apartment of Monsieur Charles de Beistigui* (c.1939) (fig. 6). This was included in set of photographs purchased by the Victoria and Albert Museum and was clearly intended as an art-work in itself. The apartment had originally been designed by Le Corbusier who had once talked of the 'abominable little perversion' of ornate decoration. The flamboyant, unmarried and sexually indeterminate De Beistigui then perversely filled it with baroque furniture. Beaton, in his reproduction, added a selection of Edwardians, a wrestler and a posing body-builder.⁵⁷

By juxtaposing very over-dressed outdated figures with very under-dressed contemporary counterparts Beaton made both of these states seem queerly excessive.⁵⁸ Feminine presence, in this imaginative construct, constructs an alibi of supposed heterosexuality that in turn allows the secret enjoyment of homoeroticism. Yet masculine display is also effeminised in this collage by its material-culture context. The same imaginative process can be seen at work in the writings that accompanied his photographs of movie stars in works such as his *Scrapbook*: for instance we hear that Gary Cooper 'with agate eyes, huge shoulders, hairy chest, flat cardboard flanks' was soon found with 'greasepaint covering his Adam's apple'.⁵⁹ We learn that where once he had been a naïve, young boy getting up early to work in the cattle ranches 'maybe he now lies late in the large bed of apricot pink crushed velvet.' The camp aesthetic here was the same as that displayed

in Beaton's *faux* memoir *My Royal Past* (1939) in which he photographed a selection of his friends cross-dressed. The homosexual art-collector, Peter Watson, with whom Beaton had long been infatuated, said of this volume that 'it is fact a masterstroke even to see the book with its sinister undercurrents of sex, perversions, crass stupidities and general dirt, beaming severely from Maggs Bookshop in Berkeley Square.'⁶⁰ Watson was also to play a key post-war role as the patron of a number of homosexual artists including Francis Bacon. He also supported Toni del Renzo who, together with Paolozzi's wife Freda, put on the *Tomorrow's Furniture* exhibition at the ICA in 1952.⁶¹

A further underlying, subversive implication was not simply that yesterday's fashions were campy and amusing but so too were those of tomorrow. Richard Hornsey has argued in connection with Hamilton's *Just What Is It* that 'now irrevocably infiltrated by the dynamics of consumerism, the contemporary home has become the setting for a much queerer – and profoundly urban – mode of domestic performance.'⁶² This may have been so in New York but the images arranged by Hamilton were items, just as they were pictures of items, that were 'not readily available in London'.⁶³ American muscle had been alien and spectacular to food-rationed Brits. In war-time the USA had signified not simply foreign prosperity but also erotic potential as in the phrase used of American GIs in Britain, 'overpaid, oversexed and over here'. Thus, in the recollections of Quentin Crisp the bodies of US soldiers 'bulged through every straining khaki fibre toward our feverish hands... Never in the history of sex was so much offered to so many by so few.'⁶⁴ The muscled male as the man of the future was prominently promoted by American science-fiction periodicals of the time such *Astounding Science Fiction* (founded in 1930 as *Astounding Stories*) which provided source material for some of Paolozzi's bunk collages.⁶⁵

The possession and depiction of heroic muscularity was, it can be argued, a practice that always involved a degree of sexualisation. For example, one could pay to touch the body

of Eugene Sandow who, from being a circus strongman, moved in 1897 to open his Institute for Physical Culture in London. If his public message was one of manly development through the cultivation of health and strength this did not stop photographs of him circulating as items of erotica. A variety of interwar bodybuilding publications on both sides of the Atlantic catered, if tacitly, to a minority market of queer men. But, around 1950, a new phenomenon appeared in the USA: the physique magazine that overtly presented men as objects of aesthetic appreciation.⁶⁶ The most famous of these was *Physique Pictorial*, but there were a number of others such *Adonis* and *Tomorrow's Man*, which often employed poses derived from classical Greek art so as to disguise erotic intent.⁶⁷ These magazines, apart from functioning as soft porn, can be understood as providing homosexuals with examples of masculine deportment or, more subversively, of ways in which to appear both queer and masculine.⁶⁸ The magazine collections from which the images were cut must have contained at least one of these 'physique' magazines because the bodybuilder in the resulting collage has been identified as Irwin Koszewski posed in a 1954 edition of *Tomorrow's Man* as 'the cream of the crop'.⁶⁹

The 1950s were a time when, as Simon Ofield has commented in his discussion of the ambiguous scene of sex and/or wrestling that is shown in Francis Bacon's *Two Figures* (1953), 'the compartments of masculinity and the sites of representation, interpretation and encounter had just begun to be identified with a recognisable community of men with shared social, sexual, commercial and aesthetic interests.'⁷⁰ But it was in a similar context and with similar homoerotic intent that Beaton had already used collage to reinscribe the meanings of images of wrestlers and bodybuilders in the 1930s. He also juxtaposed hyper-masculinity with over-the-top femininity and so evoked the notion of gender performativity by hunks and divas alike.⁷¹ The result was a depiction of the fashionable, urban body as 'fancy dress, as drag, as melodrama'.⁷² These visual practices also involved the queer appreciation of the

female film-star, in this case Mae West, via the phenomenon of diva-worship. Thus, as with his sometime passion for Greta Garbo it was not quite clear whether Beaton wanted to possess the diva, or take her place.⁷³ To be tomorrow's man in such a world was, by implication, to be queer. Whilst the legal situation meant that Beaton had to live partly in the closet he was able to hint at his sexual tastes through the use of bricolages of images.⁷⁴ However, it is important to stress that just as I have presented Beaton's work as a contextual case-study which helps us to understand Hamilton's 1956 collage, so this earlier set of materials can itself be situated within the wider visual culture of its times. Beaton did not invent the queer, eroticised viewing of the muscular male nor pioneer camp performativity.⁷⁵ However, he did exaggerate latent, queer qualities in contemporary American popular culture in a number of his works in ways which prefigure the many of the themes and preoccupations of Hamilton's collage of 1956.

Just What Was It that Made American Homes so Different, So Appealing?

The United States was widely imagined in twentieth-century Europe as a place of youthful, masculine energy.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the queer appeal of post-war American culture was, according to the artist and film-director Derek Jarman, apparent to many of the British post-war generation. Writing in this first volume of his autobiographical writings, *Dancing Ledge* (1991) he commented that 'growing up in the 1950s we dreamed the American dream. England was grey and sober. The war had entrenched all the virtues – Sobriety and Thrift.... Over the Atlantic lay the land of cockaigne: they had fridges and cars, TVs and supermarkets. All bigger and better than ours... Hamilton... realised the dream with the cunning of an ad-man and invented Pop.'⁷⁷ Jarman referenced the impact that was made on him as an art

student by Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is It* by reproducing it in his own book. It is easy to understand that the presence of a handsome, male bodybuilder and a tackily camp 'glamour' girl in Hamilton's work may have inspired Jarman to appropriate this collage and incorporate it into his own queer narrative. But it is also clear that the United States represented opportunity, including sexual opportunity, for several generations of British homosexuals who both admired and patronised its culture.⁷⁸ *Just What Is It* can, therefore, be read as being a work that engaged with consumerism and the body by drawing on themes that had preoccupied various men who sought sex with men since the earlier twentieth century. But was that simply an inadvertent result of the collage's complex process of construction? I would argue that it was not.

When Hamilton reworked this piece in 1993-4 he can be argued to have produced a more overtly queer version of the collage through the replacement of the male bodybuilder with a female one and his inclusion on one wall of *AIDS*, an artwork produced in 1988 by the Canadian Artists, General Idea.⁷⁹ Moreover, something similar took place when he produced a reworked version of the *Cinemascope* mural that was also included in the 1956 exhibition (fig. 7 and fig. 8). In, *Technicolor*, the later version produced for the opening of the Clocktower Gallery in New York in 1987 as part of the exhibition *This is Tomorrow Today: The Independent Group and British Pop*, Hamilton partially replaced his earlier landscape of Hollywood divas with a giant image of Kirk Douglas kissing another man, and of Moses holding the tablets of the law (a reference to Christian condemnation of gay sex in an age of panic concerning HIV).⁸⁰ Seen in this light the single, silhouetted figure of a man in the top-left-hand corner of the 1956 piece takes us back to the world of Beaton's *New York Night Lights*.

Therefore, what Hamilton presents in *Just What Is It* can indeed be viewed as 'a parody of an idealized, presumptively heterosexual, pair of inhabitants – one from a

“beekcake,” the other a “cheesecake” magazine.’⁸¹ But this was not a work that simply mocked its subjects even as it appears to ‘communicate the slightly arch, detached, possibly even ironic perspective of the knowing consumer.’⁸² The post-war United Kingdom was to become a place in which the market was increasingly to position the male body as a site of consumer desire. Hamilton appears to have shared an interest with many British homosexuals of the time in American men’s underwear as can be seen from such works as *Towards a Definitive Statement on the Coming Trends in Men’s Wear and Accessories - Adonis in Y-Fronts* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1962-3). To some critics such preoccupations merely show that Hamilton was interested in critiquing commercial culture in some general sense.⁸³ To others his main concern was to reveal linkages between consumption and its abject twin excretion (and thus with anality) such as appear in later pieces including *Soft Pink Landscape* (Tate, 1980), a work that was inspired by marketing strategies for toilet tissue.⁸⁴ The implication of Jonathan Katz’s revisionist work, however, is that Hamilton was also interested in anal eroticism such that when he produced *Epiphany* (1964), which reads ‘slip it to me’, the artist ‘actually meant it’ as a same-sex come-on.⁸⁵ Whichever view you prefer it is clear that the question of the queer antecedents of pop art bears further examination through a wider exploration of British and American visual culture. After all, if Beaton’s *New York Impressions* (fig. 3) appeared as a book illustration rather than as a piece of art it is important to remember that, as I stressed in my introduction, *Just What Is It* was produced as a promotional image for the 1956 exhibition’s posters and its catalogue. It was not exhibited as a work of art until 1964, the year that the pivotal US exhibition, *The American Supermarket*, was held at Paul Bianchini’s Upper East Side gallery and Richard Hamilton had his epiphany.

Why then has the queerness of Hamilton’s collage gone widely unrecognised? I would suggest that two reasons are particularly significant. The first relates to the use of homoeroticism in American consumer marketing. Leyendecker, as has already been

indicated, was able, in the words of Richard Martin, to link ‘consumerist craving’ to ‘erotic passion’ in a ‘non-exclusionary’ way. In other words, his idealised male figures are deliberately left open to both heterosexual and homosexual appreciation at a time when masculine physiques were widely assumed by the former group to confirm sexual ‘normality’.⁸⁶ This meant that the potential for queer readings of such imagery, which I have argued came to be appreciated by Hamilton, could easily be missed by others who had limited conceptions of what homosexuality was or could be.⁸⁷ Indeed it may be that even Hamilton had not been fully cognisant until the sixties of the implications of his earlier work. The second reason relates to the operation of snobbery and homophobia within the art establishment. It was precisely the innovation of pop to bring kitsch, vulgarity and camp back into the scope of what could be valued as art. As Ryan Linkof has argued, ‘in making use of elements of low culture, Beaton was out of step with many of his contemporaries who more rigidly adhered to modernist artistic principles.’⁸⁸ It was that aspect of homosexual sensibility of the mid-twentieth century that relished the ironic viewing of popular culture, including that of the working-class male, that has been seen, in this article, as prefiguring the ethics and aesthetics of pop.⁸⁹ *Just What Is It* shared many of the same perspectives and, for this reason, should be understood as standing in a line of development from earlier visual culture and as a queer statement in its own right.

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¹ Dorsey, undated.

² Alloway, 'The Independent Group', 52 and Curtis, 'Tomorrow', 27.

³ Hornsey, *The Spiv*, 248.

⁴ Hamilton, 'Retrospective', 188.

⁵ Whitham, 'Science Fiction', 62.

⁶ Alloway, 'The Development', 28.

⁷ Foster, 'Notes', 49 and Robbins, *The Independent Group*, 1990.

⁸ Stonard, 'Eduardo Paolozzi's', 51.

⁹ Hebdige, 'Fabulous Confusion!', 104.

¹⁰ Myers, 'The Future', 68.

¹¹ Stonard, 'The "Bunk"', 244.

¹² Doyle, Flatley and Muñoz, *Pop Out*; Butt, *Between You*, 106-135 and Glick, *Materializing*, 133-160.

¹³ Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

¹⁴ Watney, 'Queer Andy', 25 and, see also, Loftin, 'Unacceptable Mannerisms', 587.

¹⁵ Doris, *Pop Art*, 151-52; Thomas, 'Pop Art', 989; Richardson, 'Dada' and Sontag, 'Notes on Camp'.

¹⁶ Butt, 'How New York'.

¹⁷ Alloway, "'Pop Art'", 1085.

¹⁸ Hammer, 'The Independent Group', 70.

¹⁹ Hunter, 'Francis Bacon', 11 and 15.

²⁰ Spencer, *Eduardo Paolozzi*, 16.

²¹ Hammer, 'The Independent Group', 75.

²² Morphet, 'Introduction', 14.

²³ Cowling, *Surrealism*, 83-84, no. 4.

²⁴ Katz, 'Dada's Mama', 142.

²⁵ Katz, 'Dada's Mama', 340.

²⁶ Albrecht, *Cecil Beaton*, 13.

²⁷ Banash, 'From Advertisting', para 25.

²⁸ Johnson, 'Souvenirs'.

²⁹ Harvey, 'Where's Duchamp', 84 and Franklin, 'Object Choice'.

³⁰ Massey, *Out of the Ivory*, 59.

³¹ Schimmel, 'Introduction', 17.

³² Paolozzi, quoted in Spencer, *Eduardo Paolozzi*, 315.

³³ Gibson, 'Schiaparelli', 54; Pepper, *Beaton Portraits*, 12; Francis, 'Cecil Beaton's', 99-100 and Walker, *So Exotic*, 149-51.

³⁴ Brown, 'De Meyer', 254.

³⁵ Reed, 'Design', 396.

³⁶ Reed, 'Design', 401, n. 38.

³⁷ Reed, 'A *Vogue*', 59 and 'Design', 378. See also Cohen, "'Frock Consciousness'", 161.

³⁸ Danziger, *Beaton*, reprints an impressive selection of these materials but the plates section of this volume is largely unpaginated and references to specific scrapbooks are not given. The originals are held at the Sotheby's Picture Archive in London but, due to their fragile nature, were not open for public consultation at the time of writing (personal communication with Katherine Marshall, Sothebys).

³⁹ Bengry, 'Courting'.

⁴⁰ Beaton, *Cecil Beaton's Scrapbook*, 65.

⁴¹ Smith, 'Richard Hamilton's', 31.

⁴² Quoted and discussed in Reay, *New York Hustlers*, 148.

⁴³ Richardson, 'Dada'.

⁴⁴ Bronski, *A Queer History*, 140.

⁴⁵ Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 145; see also, Branchik, 'Pansies', and Lears, *Fables*.

⁴⁶ Cole, *The Story*, 65.

⁴⁷ Cutler and Cutler, *J. C. Leyendecker*, 14 and Joffe, *A Hint*, 39-51.

⁴⁸ Turbin, 'Fashioning the American Man', 471, 482 and 488.

⁴⁹ Bradley, 'John Wanamaker's', 27.

⁵⁰ Joffe, *A Hint*, 61-72.

⁵¹ Dennis, *Daring Hearts*, 52.

⁵² Jobling, *Man Appeal*, 127.

⁵³ Beaton, *Cecil Beaton's New York*, 16-17.

⁵⁴ Beaton, *Cecil Beaton's New York*, vii.

⁵⁵ Howard, 'The Life and Times', 100.

⁵⁶ Beaton, *Cecil Beaton's New York*, 133.

⁵⁷ Lord and Meyer, *Art and Queer Culture*, 96.

⁵⁸ Ellenzweig, 'Picturing', 66 and Tamagne, *A History*, 252.

⁵⁹ Beaton, *Cecil Beaton's Scrapbook*, 34.

⁶⁰ Clark and Dronfield, *Queer Saint*, 45-49 and letter of Peter Watson to Beaton, 12 December 1939, quoted in Vickers, *Cecil Beaton*, 231.

⁶¹ Massey, *Out of the Ivory*, 46-47.

⁶² Hornsey, *The Spiv*, 248.

⁶³ Massay, *Out of the Ivory*, 58.

⁶⁴ Crisp, *The Naked*, 152 (first edition 1968).

⁶⁵ Stonard, 'The "Bunk"', 243, fig. 32. For an example see Campbell, 'In Times', 138 with Curcio, *Chrysler*, 624 and 658, and Sherman, 'Alexander'.

⁶⁶ Lahti, 'Dressing', 191 and Bronski, *A Queer History*, 137, 145 and 150.

⁶⁷ Bronski, *A Queer History*, 150 and Massengil, *Quaintance*, 128-29 and 164. See also Richlin, 'Eros Underground', and Wyke, 'Herculean Muscle!'

⁶⁸ Loftin, 'Unacceptable Mannerisms', 585.

⁶⁹ Stonard, 'Pop in the Age of Boom', 618-19 and fig. 28.

⁷⁰ Ofield, 'Wrestling', 130.

⁷¹ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 178-86.

⁷² Snaith, 'Tom's Men', 83.

⁷³ Farmer, 'The Fabulous Sublimity'.

⁷⁴ Albrecht, *Cecil Beaton*, 16.

⁷⁵ For other photographers see Brady, 'Ambiguous exposures'.

⁷⁶ Hearn and Melechi, 'The Transatlantic Gaze', 220.

⁷⁷ Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, p. 60 (first edition 1984).

⁷⁸ Linkof, 'Shooting Charles Henri Ford', para. 14.

⁷⁹ Hamilton, *Painting*, 17. Hamilton revisited his 1956 work many times, see Manchester, 'Richard Hamilton'.

⁸⁰ Leffingwell, 'Introduction', and email communications with Hannah Dewar, Tate Gallery, London, 8 May 2014 and Teresa Millet, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, 24 February 2015.

⁸¹ Butt, "'America'", 34.

⁸² Philo and Campbell, 'Biff! Bang! Pow!', 286.

⁸³ Maharaj, "'A Liquid'", 41-43.

⁸⁴ Maharaj, 'Pop Art's Pharmacies', 345.

⁸⁵ Katz, 'Dada's Mama', 353.

⁸⁶ Martin, 'J. C. Leyendecker', 467.

⁸⁷ Turbin, 'Fashioning the American Man', 480.

⁸⁸ Linkof, 'Shooting Charles Henri Ford', footnote 14.

⁸⁹ Linkof, 'Shooting Charles Henri Ford', para. 6.