

Nicola Tyson, "Culture Clubbing," *Art in America*, May 2012, p. 75.

## Art in America

### CULTURE CLUBBING

BY NICOLA TYSON

## BACKSTORY



From left to right: unknown man, Nicola Tyson, George O'Dowd (later to be known as Boy George), London, 1978. Photographer unknown. Courtesy Nicola Tyson.

This photo was taken in Billy's club on Meard Street, in London's Soho, one Tuesday evening in fall 1978. Billy's was just a sleazy disco the rest of the week, but in September, the musicians Rusty Egan and Steve Strange began hosting Bowie Night every Tuesday. Punk had sadly gone mainstream, and we teenagers were looking for something exciting to replace it. I was 18 and had just enrolled at Chelsea College of Art, and George was 17. We had been showing up underage at the punk gigs at clubs and pubs and thrilling after-hours hangouts such as Louise, a members-only lesbian club also

Tyson's archive of Bowie Night photos will be the subject of an exhibition at White Columns, New York, in November.

AS TOLD TO BRIAN BOUCHER.

in Soho. The Sex Pistols boozed at the bar while couples shared the tiny dance floor with the likes of Siouxsie Sioux and the rest of the impossibly cool Bromley Contingent.

Roxy Music and David Bowie had influenced the flamboyant aspects of the London punk scene, and at Bowie Night, it was anything goes—a shameless orgy of gratuitous dress-up and freakish glamour, all set to a euphoric electronic soundtrack of music by Sylvester, Grace Jones, Kraftwerk and The Normal. We were dubbed the New Romantics.

Previously it had been uncool to court photographers—to be a poseur—but now it became the whole point. I amassed an archive of photos from Bowie Nights, because being adept with a camera (still an awkward and cumbersome technology at the time), I took snaps of my fellow clubbers and sold them the pics the

following Tuesday for beer money. The scene spawned a slew of pop stars, including Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet and Bananarama. Boy George, as he became known, was in those days a mischievous character with a very caustic wit—which you most surely didn't want to find yourself the butt of—and he always pocketed his photos without paying!

By December the press had caught on to New Romanticism, and Bowie Night moved on to other venues, eventually settling amid a media frenzy at Blitz Club in Covent Garden—where Mick Jagger was famously denied entry for not looking cool enough and Boy George went on to superstardom with Culture Club.

There wasn't all the sex and drugs you might think. We were too young and broke. Drug taking hadn't yet started big time, and it was all about putting clothes on, not taking them off! ○