A Clear Vision

How Bloomsbury Helped to Shape an Anglo-American Formalist Orthodoxy between 1910 and 1936

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Abstract

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I argue that a contemplative strain of aesthetic theory, indebted to the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, informed a version of modernism propagated by Bloomsbury before the First World War. When Roger Fry’s Schopenhauerian construct, Post-Impressionism, was transmitted to America, it appealed to a new audience for modernist art. Recreating an Anglo-American dialogue from texts spanning the period between Fry’s Manet and the Post-Impressionists exhibition in 1910 and Alfred Barr Jr.’s Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition in 1936, I demonstrate how its key features bypassed a pre-existent modernist practice already established among New York’s bohemian set and were taken up instead by an urban intelligentsia who adapted them to the culturally-mainstream terms of American progressivism. Here, I suggest, they entered an Anglo-conformist narrative of modernist art. The ‘clear vision’ in question is that of the Schopenhauerian genius, a figure who sees through the clamour of wilful existence to a realm of universal and eternal ideas. His clarity in the midst of turmoil models a myth of art that transcends material interests. We discover this figure’s analogue in the spirit of Bloomsbury who, ever insistent upon candour and clarity of expression, conveyed the complexities of continental European avant-garde practice to an otherwise sceptical English audience; hence Bloomsbury’s prominence in the debate.

The Anglo-American hypothesis I present accounts for a discontinuity between America’s institutionalised modernism and the European avant-garde heritage to which it lays claim. It is not incompatible with modernist accounts of Franco-American continuity, but it challenges them on the constitution of the orthodoxy. Appealing to the evidence of contemporary literature, I submit that an English contribution to institutional modernism has been neglected and propose that its rehabilitation would resolve an inconsistency in the Franco-American paradigm.

David Maddock
Dr Matthew Potter, the first of my three supervisors, took me on as a ‘cold caller’ with a few ideas about English formalism and modernist art historiography. Giving generously of his time, he helped me to assemble a coherent line of enquiry; this at a time when it was far from certain whether my initial enquiries would come to anything. On his departure to Northumbria University, eight months or so into the programme, he introduced me to Professor Douglas Tallack and Dr Simon Richards who, between them, agreed to take over his role. Professor Tallack’s help with the American dimension of this thesis proved invaluable. In an ideal world, I might have taxed his knowledge of American modernism more assiduously before he retired in summer 2013. That said, I have to acknowledge the value of his detailed feedback and unstinting encouragement during an all-too-brief tenure. He did much to shape the kind of argument I now offer. It is Dr Richards, however, to whom I am most indebted. Having fielded my preliminary visit to the Department back in May 2010, he supervised all but the first few months of research. His guidance, both challenging and supportive in equal measure, directed me to the metaphysical dimension of my topic; a contribution that was offered with an accompanying caution against the risk of entanglement in some pretty abstruse sources. I have endeavoured to heed his advice and, indeed, more generally to maintain the kind of critical detachment upon which he was always insistent. Whether or not I do him justice is not for me to say but I am immensely grateful to him nevertheless, as I am to his former-colleagues, for their generous support over the lengthy duration of a part-time doctoral degree. If to lose two supervisors looks like carelessness, it was my good fortune to have benefitted from the combined insight of three.
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Introduction

The origins of Anglo-American aesthetic modernism, as we might think of it, lie in a body of theory disseminated by Roger Fry and Clive Bell with the support of the Bloomsbury group. The formalist methodology it espouses separates forms in works of art from their referents, thereby detaching appearance from other sources of meaning, and valuing it above them. A rudimentary version of Bloomsbury’s formalism first came to public attention in the English-speaking world when Fry used formalist language to explain developments in recent European painting to be seen in his Post-Impressionist exhibitions in 1910 and 1912. When news of these events was transmitted to America, a sizeable public was introduced to the new art in terms of ‘Post-Impressionism’, an intentionally vague label devised by Fry to emphasise certain art practices which, he argued, had come to supersede Impressionism. America’s equivalent exhibition, the International Exhibition of Modern Art in 1913, better known as the Armory Show, was prompted, in part, by demands in the press for an American Post-Impressionist exhibition.¹

The term quickly gained currency across the Anglophone world and by the 1920s it had acquired a canonical status.² A more recent tendency to contract the hyphenated ‘Post-Impressionism’ endows its new variant, ‘Postimpressionism’, with the credence that attaches to other so-called ‘movements’ of the modern era such as Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism, even though the artists so-designated never formed the cohesive social networks that might constitute a movement.³ Nevertheless, as Anna Gruetzner Robins observes, once the idea of Post-Impressionism became embedded in the discourse of modern art, it had untold effect on twentieth-century museum cultures and academic art

³ Ibid.
history.\textsuperscript{4} It could be argued, she adds, that Alfred Barr himself had been inspired, indirectly at least, by the groups of artists Fry had brought together.\textsuperscript{5} This, in a sense, is what I set out to do, but the claim I make looks beyond Post-Impressionism to a more protracted cultural dialogue between the two English-speaking peoples and I address the intellectual and cultural determinants of their discourse rather than the commercial ones which were, I think, to the forefront of her mind at the time.

My thesis draws upon a series of texts published on either side of the Atlantic during the period between Fry’s \textit{Manet and the Post-Impressionists} exhibition in 1910 and Barr’s \textit{Cubism and Abstract Art} exhibition in 1936: the former, because it occasioned the introduction of aesthetic formalism to English-speaking publics here and abroad; the latter, because it marks the institutionalisation of what I maintain is a later version of that formalism in America. Although I am primarily concerned with the twenty-six year span between the two exhibitions, I will also refer to texts published to either side of it because we can locate the premises of Bloomsbury’s formalism in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Idealist philosophy and, having done so, trace their legacy to Barr’s intellectual heritage in the High Modernism of the post-Second World War years.

This expansive field finds its historical points of reference in five exhibitions marking the evolution of what, arguably, constitutes an Anglo-American formalist orthodoxy. The first of them, \textit{Manet and the Post-Impressionists}, opened to the public at the Grafton Galleries in Mayfair, London, on the 8\textsuperscript{th} November 1910 and closed on the 15\textsuperscript{th} January 1911. Conceived as an exhibition of works by the now-deceased forefathers of a new tendency in French painting, together with those of its more recent proponents, it featured over 250 works of art, most prominent among them being nine paintings by Edouard Manet, twenty-one by Paul Cézanne, and at least forty-two paintings and works on paper and at least twenty-nine by Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh respectively.\textsuperscript{6} It was followed up by \textit{The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition} which opened at the Grafton Galleries on the 5\textsuperscript{th}

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\textsuperscript{4} Ibid, pp. 93 & 94. Gruetzner Robins makes this point in a paper delivered at the conference titled ‘The Rise of the London Art Market’ which she co-organised with Victoria Walsh at Tate Britain, 8\textsuperscript{th} & 9\textsuperscript{th} February 2007. She observes that the ‘competing and interdependent cultures of Post-Impressionism and commerce’ had yet to be studied.

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, p. 94.

\textsuperscript{6} See Anna Gruetzner Robins, ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists: a Checklist of the Exhibits’, \textit{Burlington Magazine}, Vol. 152, No. 1293, Manet and the Post-Impressionists: A Centenary issue, (December 2010), pp. 782 – 793. As she makes clear, most of over 250 original exhibits have now been identified although a few questions remain.
October 1912 and closed on the 31st January 1913. Modelled, in part, on Cologne’s recent Sonderbund exhibition of 1912, which had itself reiterated the prominence given to Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, this event served to affirm the place of English painters among a Europe-wide ‘Post-Impressionist’ movement. It featured around 257 works by English, French, and Russian exponents of the new movement, all of whom, with the notable exception of Cézanne, were still alive. Cézanne’s posthumous reputation served to endorse the achievements of the others. The exhibition was temporarily suspended on the 31st December to allow for a re-hang following the requisition of several paintings, mainly by Matisse and Picasso, for the Armory Show in New York, the third exhibition to which I refer.\(^7\)

An altogether larger event than its English precursors, the Armory Show was organised by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, a group convened in December 1911 for the purpose of countering a perceived stranglehold over American art exerted by the National Design Academy and the leading commercial galleries. Initially, the intention had been to showcase the achievements of progressive American artists, but the remit changed under the aegis of Arthur B. Davies, the Society’s president, who, taking inspiration from both the Sonderbund and The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, redirected the committee’s focus to the achievements of the European avant-garde. The Armory Show opened at the 69th Regiment Armory building on Lexington Avenue on the 17th February and closed on the 15th March 1913. It then travelled to the Art Institute of Chicago where it opened to the public between the 24th March and the 16th April, before it moving on to the Copley Society in Boston, where, between the 28th April and the 19th May, visitors saw a reduced version of the show, depleted of its American contingent, because of a lack of space at the venue.\(^8\)

These three exhibitions were commercial ventures: the remaining two, hosted by New York’s Museum of Modern Art, were not. The First Loan Exhibition: Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh opened at the institution’s original premises comprising six rooms on the twelfth floor of the Heckscher Building on 730 Fifth Avenue. Consisting of thirty-five works by Cézanne, twenty-one by Gauguin, seventeen by Seurat, and twenty-eight by Van Gogh, it


was open to the public between the 7th November and the 7th December 1929. The institution’s next retrospective of European modernism was to be the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition of 1936, a multidisciplinary event that would not only chart the formation of modernist art but establish a canon that would pervade museum and art historical practice for the remainder of the century. The exhibition’s full title was *Cubism and Abstract Art: Painting, Sculpture, Constructions, Photography, Architecture, Industrial Art, Theater, Films, Posters, Typography*. The 386 listed works, representing each of the disciplines, occupied all four floors of the townhouse property then occupying the Museum’s 11 West Fifty-third street premises.

Such temporal markers of the Anglo-American modernist discourse are reinforced by a series of reproductions which serve either documentary purposes or illustrative ones. The portraits by Fry, Langdon Coburn, and Weber record historical encounters between the protagonists in discourse. [Figures 1 – 5] Similarly, Barr’s poster for the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition, documents a mode of explanation that accompanied a historical event. [Figure 6] The remaining reproductions illustrate works of art to which various protagonists appealed. [Figures 7 – 25]

The substance of my claim is that, during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, Bloomsbury contributed to a modernist discourse in America which culminated in the formalist modernist orthodoxy asserted by New York’s Museum of Modern Art when it opened on the 7th November 1929. I argue that, in the absence of continental Europe’s avant-garde tradition, a cerebral variant of aesthetic modernism was implanted in London and New York at the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth-century. Its belated arrival in these otherwise culturally advanced English-speaking cities was heralded by three prominent exhibitions of recent European art: the Post-Impressionist exhibitions and the *Armory Show*. They familiarised their aesthetically conservative

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10 Goodyear, *The Museum of Modern Art*. According to Goodyear, the precise number was 30 388, p. 155.

11 See Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). I refer to an avant-garde tradition comprising the socially oppositional groups of the type that Bürger describes.

audiences with ‘English’ interpretations of the new art.\textsuperscript{13} If we take modernism to constitute both modern art and its attendant theories and explanations, Anglo-American modernism is first and foremost an artefact of theorists and critics because it derives its terms of reference from an Anglo-American commentary on continental European art practices.\textsuperscript{14} However, because it also gives rise to its own modernist practices, it might be interpreted as a metadiscourse on continental European art; a shadow play, so to speak, subject to English and American cultural norms. In either case, Anglo-American modernism may be seen to address continental European art, but is itself predicated on the cultural traditions of the Anglophone world. I will argue that a version of this phenomenon contributed significantly to the codification of a formalist modernist orthodoxy in America during the 1930s.

Stated in such theoretical terms, the thesis begs an obvious question as to the absence of an ‘Anglo-American’ concept from the received body of modernist art literature. In reply, I will argue that nationality, the prerequisite for any Anglo-American construct, is precluded from modernist epistemologies that are predicated on the autonomy of art from political, ideological, and other material determinants. We will return to this point presently, suffice it for the moment that we note various conceptions of ‘Anglo-America’ in a comparatively recent art historical literature which derives from the reconstructive processes that follow in the wake of modernism’s deconstruction. Janet Wolff’s argument in AngloModern is a case in point.\textsuperscript{15} She hazards the possibility that there might be a ‘series of texts and styles, a shared aesthetic, a range of responses to modern life’ peculiar to an experience of modernity among the English-speaking cultures of Britain and the United States.\textsuperscript{16} In his review of her book, David Peters Corbett acknowledges a ‘niggling feeling of connections in need of explanation’.\textsuperscript{17} He was later instrumental in organising York University’s Anglo-American: Artistic Exchange between Britain and the United States

\textsuperscript{13} I use of the term ‘English’ rather than ‘British’ to denote a particular cultural tradition within the United Kingdom. My use of the term ‘Anglophone’, and occasionally ‘Anglo-Saxon’, denotes a cultural identity associated with the English-speaking peoples. It is material to my argument that the latter do not necessarily owe their allegiance to the former.

\textsuperscript{14} See, for example, Johanna Drucker, Theorizing Modernism Visual Art and the Critical Tradition, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). As Drucker argues, in the Anglophone world, modernist discourse, to a significant degree, has been conducted through the written word.


\textsuperscript{16} Wolff, AngloModern, p. 161.

conference convened in 2009 to examine the concept.\textsuperscript{18} The event was followed up in 2012 by an anthology of essays, which enlarged upon the ambiguities and ambivalences of various trans-Atlantic visual discourses between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{19} Such forays into the issue of Anglo-American exchange seemed to invite further investigation at a time when I was preparing my research topic on English formalism.

The Anglo-American question was not unbidden at that time since it pertained to established academic interests in cultural exchange \textit{per se}, a field which was, and arguably remains, closely aligned to those of cultural and post-colonial studies and the plethora of disciplines that address or arise from the phenomenon of globalisation. International exchanges of various kinds within ethnic ‘diasporas’—for want of a less loaded term to describe population dispersal—have been cited as the prelude to the contemporary global order.\textsuperscript{20} Art history’s debut in this field doubtlessly owes something to the globalist agenda but it was driven too from within the discipline by a broad swathe of revisionist interests at play since the 1970s. Disparate as they may have seemed, they did, at least, converge upon such points of mutual interest as social and ethnic identity, both of which, I maintain, are correlatives of national identity. Together, they returned the principle of nationality to art historical discourse with renewed insistence after formalist modernist historiography had dispensed with it. Once we have examined the logic of its elimination from the earlier narrative we will go on to assess the terms of its re-admittance to a recent literature of English and American modernisms in their respective national contexts. Here, we will note the presence of a related body of literature which draws our attention to ‘transnational’ cultural exchanges: exchanges that transcend national boundaries. Take, for example, Grace Brockington’s anthology, \textit{Internationalism and the Arts in Britain and Europe at the Fin-de-

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{18} Anglo-American: Artistic Exchange between Britain and the United States, [conference], York University, 23\textsuperscript{rd} – 25\textsuperscript{th} July 2009.
\textsuperscript{20} Gary Magee & Andrew Thompson, \textit{Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capitalism in the British World, c1850 – 1914}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). In the Introduction, they state: ‘The interplay between the cultural and economic dynamics of globalisation today is a subject of growing interest. In exploring the relationship between empire and globalisation in the past we, too, seek to integrate these two dimensions. Until recently, the humanities appeared to have turned away from “economy” and towards “culture”. … Although imperial power has long been recognised as crucial to the mobilisation and distribution of material resources, there is a growing consciousness of how economics, like any other form of human activity, is culturally influenced. We therefore need a merging of cultural and economic histories – a recognition of culture as the matrix in which economic life occurs’, p. 5.
\end{footnotesize}
Siècle, published in 2009, in which the contributors appear to suggest that the reinstated model of the national school is itself inadequate given the internationalist dimension of the early modernist discourse.  

Admittedly, the sources of Anglo-American internationalism, in the context of this thesis, were rather localised and short-lived for they lay in the conversations of so-called ‘Bloomsbury’, a collective entity which is conceived both socially and intellectually. It should be added that, if mere conversation seems too ephemeral for historical hypothecation, we must recognise too that its reciprocity was Bloomsbury’s métier, its intellectual life-blood; together with letter-writing, conversation’s epistolary equivalent. We are obliged to engage with the conversational corpus, though, through its more tangible manifestation in the form of published text and, occasionally, unpublished archival material.  

In the social sense, ‘Bloomsbury’ denotes a circle of like-minded friends of similar social provenance while, intellectually, it is conceived as the manifestation of a cultural milieu. The two, of course, need not exclude one another. According to Duncan Grant, social ‘Bloomsbury’ came into being with Thoby Stephen’s Thursday Evenings in 46 Gordon Square and their continuation after his untimely death in 1906, when the remaining Stephen siblings moved to 29 Fitzroy Square. Both residences lie within the vicinity of Bloomsbury Square, the locality of London to which the group’s name refers. Intellectually, we look to Raymond Williams’ analysis of the group’s social identity in his essay of 1980, ‘Bloomsbury: A Class Fraction’.  

He reminds us that the nucleus of the group came together in 1899 at Trinity College, Cambridge, where Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Saxon Sydney-Turner, Thoby Stephen, and Leonard Woolf met as undergraduates. Of the original clique, it was the latter three who were elected to the Cambridge Conversazione Society—the ‘Apostles’—the elite circle of intellects among whom G. E. Moore, the Trinity College ethicist, held sway and the talk was of Plato, Aristotle, and Bishop Berkeley. Andrew McNeillie speaks of their Neo-Kantian argot

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and of Moore’s own Kantianism. In an important sense, Bloomsbury’s aesthetic ideals derive from Moore’s Kantian argument in *Principia Ethica*, published in 1903, that beauty’s value lies not so much in its existence as in that which attaches to one’s consciousness of it. It is partly this ethical proposition and partly the preoccupation with a reality that lies behind appearances that differentiates ‘Bloomsbury’s aesthetic’ from its aestheticist antecedents.

By the time Clive and Vanessa Bell introduced Roger Fry to Bloomsbury in 1910, he had established a reputation in his own right as a Renaissance scholar. Fry, nevertheless, appears to have accepted Moore’s ethical proposition and he also drew upon Kantian aesthetic principles as we will see in Chapter 4, but, given his role in promoting the Post-Impressionist ideal after the exhibitions of 1910 and 1912, we might assume his pre-eminence in matters aesthetic. Therefore the loosely-adhering body of thought and values that I ascribe to the ‘Bloomsbury’s aesthetic’ would be indebted to Fry primarily although we should not discount the ethical foundation laid by Moore and, indeed, the influence of others to whom we now come.

That being said, Fry’s aesthetic genealogy is not easily charted. Timothy Costelloe helps by drawing our attention to aspects of his formalism that are reminiscent of Anthony, Third Earl of Shaftsbury, Archibald Alison, Alexander Gerard, Walter Pater, Leo Tolstoy, and, in a roundabout way, George Santayana. To these we might add the various proponents of a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mode of psycho-physiological enquiry whom Adrianne Rubin highlights in Roger Fry’s ‘Difficult and Uncertain Science’. Among them are such well-known figures as William James and Sigmund Freud but also lesser-known ones such as Wilfred Trotter, Denman Ross, Oskar Pfister, Edward Glover, and Karin Strachey, each of whom Fry had read and whose phenomenological approach to aesthetics seemed to appeal to his empirical turn of mind. Fry’s own membership of the Apostles,

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30 Ibid, p. 10; also see Harvey, Formalism’s First Affair, pp. 224 – 295.
Rubin tells us, brought him into contact with J. E. McTaggart, the Hegelian philosopher to-be. His attention to the phenomenological aspects of perception can be traced to conversations in such company about reality and phenomena, a distinction that is central to Idealist philosophy.\textsuperscript{31} Rubin goes on to mention S. P. Rosenbaum’s observation that the formalist aesthetics of Fry and Bell can be traced back to Kant’s \textit{Critique of Judgement} which differentiated between disinterested aesthetic experience and the exigencies of practical and pure reason.\textsuperscript{32} Insofar that this is so, Fry’s Kantianism is never entirely transparent as Elizabeth Prettejohn points out in \textit{Beauty and Art 1750 – 2000}.\textsuperscript{33} She argues that his concept of aesthetic experience is contingent upon specific qualities of particular objects. However, her point according to Rubin, is not only predicated on a value system that derives from Kant but one that projects the consummation of modernist art in total abstraction.\textsuperscript{34} While I agree that the Bloomsbury aesthetic contributes to a High Modernist system which finds important points of reference in Kant, it is erroneous, in my opinion, to presume that both English and American formalist traditions are coterminous or, indeed, that they necessarily anticipate the ‘total abstraction’ associated with aspects of High Modernism. This is a key point concerning the extent of Bloomsbury’s influence as we will see in Chapter 11.

The informative presence of a coherent aesthetic philosophy is a given, nevertheless, since it accounts for the homogeneity of an orthodox practice capable of co-ordinating a claim upon the heritage of Europe’s heterogeneous avant-garde. I began to consider the possibility of such a principle within English cultural circles having read Virginia Woolf’s biography of Fry.\textsuperscript{35} She relates that, once he had attained a double first in the Natural Sciences, and with it, the cherished prospect of a teaching fellowship, Fry mysteriously abandoned his long-held academic ambitions and, instead, became a painter. His damascene moment coincided with Edward Carpenter’s visit to King’s College in 1886 at the behest of Fry’s fellow-students, Goldsworthy Lowes-Dickinson and Charles Robert Ashbee. Fry’s friendship with Carpenter is traced by Woolf to July 1911 when Carpenter visited him at Durbins, the family home in Guildford. It is a period that encompasses Fry’s formative years as a painter, a critic, and a Renaissance scholar, his tenure with New York’s

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{34} Rubin, \textit{Roger Fry’s ‘Difficult and Uncertain Science’}, p. 230.
Metropolitan Museum, and the period of notoriety when, as England’s leading protagonist on behalf of modern art, he championed the cause of Post-Impressionism. Carpenter, Adrianne Rubin tells us, addressed Fry in a letter in 1894 about a question of sensation and perception in relation to an unspecified text by McTaggart. In the absence of McTaggart’s original statement, the point is lost to us, but the fact that it was raised at all tells us something about the metaphysical slant of their dialogue. Carpenter, too, we realise was party to the Idealist conversation. Informed by nineteenth-century metaphysical thinking, his two books on the arts, Angels’ Wings of 1898 and Art of Creation of 1905, drew upon the contributions of various Transcendental Idealist philosophers, among whom Arthur Schopenhauer was prominent. He, in particular, seemed to merit closer attention since much of Bloomsbury’s aesthetic literature reproduces the idea of a unified field of experience, a key construct in Schopenhauerian aesthetics as well.

Therefore, taking my cue from Carpenter, I examined the Bloomsbury aesthetic in the light of a Schopenhauerian concept of transcendence in much the same enquiring spirit as had, unbeknown to me, two other research students: Irina Stotland who, in 2005, submitted a masters dissertation titled Roger Fry’s Concept of Authenticity; and Melissa J. Williams, whose doctoral thesis titled Life Stand Still was submitted in 2013. We will return to Stotland presently in the context of Maurice Denis’ Schopenhauerianism. Williams’ contribution, on the other hand, drew attention to Woolf’s grasp of Schopenhauerian philosophy obtained indirectly through her father, Leslie Stephen, and his connection with the Apostles, and the ‘countless literary predecessors who openly acknowledged their indebtedness to Die Welt’. Quoting Ralph Goodale’s Schopenhauer and Pessimism in Nineteenth-Century English Literature, Williams tells us that, in general, the English author might not have given Schopenhauer much thought before 1876 but by 1879, ‘every person alive to the developments of the day’, was likely to have known of him. She also refers us

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39 Williams, Life Stand Still, The Abstract.
40 Ibid, p. 2
to Penelope Lefew-Blake’s argument that Schopenhauer became the cornerstone of Bloomsbury’s aesthetics having entered the conversation by way of Moore and Fry.\(^{41}\)

Citing H. R. Rookmaaker’s *Synthetist Art Theories* of 1959, Stotland informs us that the German Idealist tradition was also prominent, contemporaneously, among the late-nineteenth-century French literary circles, and that Schopenhauer, in particular, was influential within the Symbolist movement from whence Denis drew his inspiration.\(^{42}\) Schopenhauer is really a philosopher of art, according to Rookmaaker, who links German idealistic philosophy with late-nineteenth-century literary tradition.\(^{43}\) If, in accrediting Fry’s Schopenhauerianism to Denis’ influence, Stotland overlooks an ‘apostolic’ English tradition, she reinforces the notion that a contemplative tradition indebted to Schopenhauer had been established among literary circles on either side of the channel at the *fin-de-siècle*.

Thus, once I have established the methodological rationale for an Anglo-American reading of the modernist orthodoxy in Chapter 1, I will go on to discuss the parallels between Schopenhauer and Fry in Chapter 2, when I introduce the aesthetic principles of an Anglo-American critical discourse. I present Carpenter as the purveyor of a *fin-de-siècle* mysticism that was prevalent on either side of the Atlantic. He, like other proponents of the theory of evolutionary consciousness, is shown to have mediated a mystical aesthetic derived, in important ways, from Schopenhauer. I then examine parallels between Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory and an argument about heightened perception in Carpenter’s speculations on human creativity before I indicate how this phenomenon is adapted to the pre-War art theory of Fry and Weber. As we will see, the bohemian sensibility that suffuses much of the conversation is suppressed in Fry’s appeal to the middle-class reader. In Chapter 3, I address the correlative of the contemplative aesthetic in the person of Schopenhauer’s clear-sited genius. His qualities and characteristics are compared with those of Carpenter’s ‘enlightened soul’. I then demonstrate how the heritage of both can be found in the romantic personae created by Fry and Weber in the person of the artist. They yield the luminary figure who is destined for modernist apotheosis.

\(^{41}\) Ibid, p.9
\(^{42}\) Stotland, *Roger Fry’s Concept of Authenticity*, pp. 15 & 16.

In Chapter 4, I will argue that the Schopenhauerian aesthetic shaped English middle-class sensibilities through the impact of Fry’s exhibition, *Manet and the Post-Impressionist* and the ensuing debates. Bloomsbury’s Schopenhauerian explanations are shown to have familiarised a middle-class public with formalist explanations of recent innovations in French painting and, in so doing, to have convinced many that the values encapsulated in so-called ‘Post-Impressionism’ were compatible with their own cultural aspirations. In Chapter 5, I discuss the transmission of Post-Impressionism to Progressive Era America through the auspices of an Anglo-conformist press. 44 Loosely adhering ideas, I argue, were gradually firmed up and then reconfigured in books by Henry Rankin Poore, Arthur Jerome Eddy, and Willard Huntington Wright, in such a way as to conform to the truisms of progressivist principle. Published after the *Armory Show* but before America’s entry to the First World War, we might regard this modified version of Post-Impressionism as the cultural product of Anglo-conformist America.

In Chapter 6, we examine Bell’s contribution to the Anglo-American discourse. I demonstrate how a mode of argument devised by G. E. Moore in relation to certain ethical verities was co-opted by Bell to the problematic concept of Significant Form. As we will see, Schopenhauer’s explanation of sublime experience is adapted to a pseudo-religious claim on behalf of artistic form. Such hyperbolae, for all their inherent fallacy, are shown, in Chapter 7, to have informed an impassioned middlebrow debate in England and America. In Chapter 8, I demonstrate how, despite refutation— or because of it, perhaps— aspects of Bell’s theory were reconfigured to a middlebrow discourse propagated by Katherine Dreier, Paul Rosenberg, Sheldon Cheney, and Albert C. Barnes, thereby initiating an Anglo-American formalist tradition.

Fry’s contribution to the Anglo-American conversation re-emerged during the mid-1920s as we will see in Chapter 9. Here, I discuss his defence of the aesthetic concept in reply to I. A. Richards’ critique of unscientific methodology. The presence of an attenuated Schopenhauerianism of the 'spiritual' value of form, mediated by Santayana among others,

44 For the purposes of this thesis, ‘Anglo-conformity’ denotes the once-dominant cultural paradigm in American society. As I will explain presently, it was challenged during the period in question and displaced by one of cultural pluralism. The ‘Anglo’ prefix denotes an Anglo-Saxon cultural identity.
is examined in relation to Fry’s notion of ‘plasticity’. It leads us, in Chapter 10, to an examination of his exposition of ‘late Cézanne’, a seminal text in that it can be shown to have anticipated Barr’s idea of anti-naturalistic stylistic progress. Treated as a formalist apologue illustrating the path to cultural enlightenment, passages from Fry’s Cézanne myth are juxtaposed with Barr’s account of the transition from representational art to abstract; an innovation from so-called ‘Analytical’ to ‘Synthetic Cubism’.

Concluding these interpretations of the contemporary literature, I consider the extent Bloomsbury’s shaping influence in Chapter 11 and assess it in the light of pre-existent Anglophone sympathies as well as the changing cultural paradigm in America which might well have circumscribed its reach. The effect of other determinants, extraneous to the Anglo-American formalist discourse, is weighed in relation to the magnitude of any claim. Put simply, the Anglo-American thesis asks that we consider an extension to the received narrative of Franco-American continuity. The suggestion is that a body of aesthetic theory emanating from the English *haute-bohème* was spurned by Bloomsbury’s American confreres who were busy by then generating mythologies of their own. The English account was taken up, however, by a sympathetic urban middle-class, possessed of an ideological inclination to institutionalise the new art, and gifted with the means to do so. Some twenty years after its inception, I argue, Anglo-American formalism was assimilated into an overarching myth declared ‘orthodox’ by the Museum of Modern Art.
1

An Anglo-American Thesis

In the absence of an Anglo-American concept from the received literature of modernism in the visual arts, I will preface the argument by asking why, if the idea of Anglo-America might have anything to offer us, it is not already extant; and, indeed, why the idea might help us now. As we will see, an unreconstructed formalist methodology, which was predicated on a transcendent notion of culture, precludes matters of national identity from formalist modernist discourse. However, once the comparatively recent process of historical revisionism had challenged certain problematic assumptions embedded within its methodology, a number of neglected modernist practices were recovered to scholarly attention. The Anglo-American concept becomes helpful now, I will argue, because, in the wake of this revisionism, it alerts us to a variety of localised and distinctive modernisms in the Anglophone world and, in so doing, clears the way for further investigation into cultural exchanges that occurred between populations of English provenance at a time of mass migration and improved communication.

There is a caveat though: relations between England and America during the period in question were often complex and, in many ways, ambivalent; more so because America was undergoing a socio-cultural transition which called into question the cultural allegiances of its immigrant populations. Early twentieth-century Anglo-conformity in some sections of American society ensured a sympathetic hearing for English aesthetic theory but, elsewhere, ambivalence towards Anglo-Saxon values mitigated against its wider acceptance. In the bohemian quarters of New York, for example, English theory subsisted alongside other competing theories from continental Europe. America’s Anglo-conformist press, I will suggest, played an important role in transmitting English narratives of modern art to the increasingly influential professional middle-classes; hence Bloomsbury’s favourable reception among a culturally-mainstream constituency of American society. There is evidence to suggest that it was this Anglo-American milieu that reconfigured English theory to the terms of an American cultural discourse and that it was from this wellspring that a youthful Alfred Barr Jr. drew when he formulated the terms of a cohesive methodological orthodoxy for the newly inaugurated Museum of Modern Art. Concluding the chapter, I will
argue that the Anglo-American thesis accounts for the concentration of cultural power in the hands of a culturally-progressive but socially-conservative professional intelligentsia in America. The thesis, we remember, is that a strain of English aesthetic theory significantly shaped an American modernist discourse culminating in the Museum of Modern Art’s formalist orthodoxy of the 1930s and that of its High Modernist scion after the Second World War.

The mainstream metaphor

Clement Greenberg, we recall, invokes the Kantian principle of immanent criticism to explain why, in modern times, the arts withdrew to their respective fields of competence. Insofar that the process entails an elimination of all pre-modern accretions from the arts, Greenbergian High Modernism purports to reconfigure them in their essential forms, as ‘pure’ practices. High Modernist painting eschews all interests that immanent critique reveals to be extraneous to the art of painting. The value he famously ascribes to the ‘ineluctable flatness’ of the painted surface is but one manifestation of what amounts to a tactical retreat from all that is inessential to painterly practice. Greenberg’s rigorous reductionism underpins High Modernism’s claim to exclusive universality. ‘There is no such thing as aberration in art’, he declares in ‘“American-Type” Painting’, ‘there is only the good and the bad, the realised and the unrealised’. The same binary exclusivity engenders the familiar motif of linear progress which supposes that the arts, in their purity, are aesthetically autonomous of everyday interests and imperatives. Greenberg’s spatial metaphors—‘mainstream’, ‘marginality’, ‘centrality’, and ‘provincialism’—are emblematic of the rarefied practices and continuities he ascribes to modernism. The ‘mainstream’, for example, is suggestive of a modality which is clear, centripetal, and undeviating in its course. ‘Whatever else it ends up’, Greenberg says of modernism, ‘it will never stop being intelligible in terms of the continuity of art’.

It is a tenet of Greenbergian formalist modernism—one born of the mainstream metaphor—that the ‘School of New York’ supersedes a culturally exhausted ‘School of Paris’ in the aftermath of the Second World War. Although, in reality, the aesthetic dominance of High Modernism was neither as absolute nor as exclusive as some of its more fervent protagonists would have us believe, its prestige was such that Greenberg could claim in 1955, and with some credence, that the Parisian avant-garde had first ‘given serious attention, then respect’ to recent American painting, before going on to ‘emulate it’.\(^{49}\) Advances in American art were portrayed as the continuation of the Parisian tradition, the essence of this claim being subject to the mainstream metaphor of progress. A transition of continuity rather than contiguity is envisaged and therefore it is not that French tradition \textit{per se} is superseded by an American one, but rather that a supranational tradition of the mainstream is wrested from Paris by New York. Nationality, we infer, is merely incidental to Greenberg’s construction of Franco-American continuity. It represents the historical context of the modernist mainstream, and nothing more besides. The Anglo-American construct is therefore incompatible with High Modernist epistemology, not because formalist modernism is already predicated on a Franco-American continuity, but rather because the universality of the High Modernist claim precludes the particularities that denote nationality.

\textbf{Modernity and modernisms}

The recovery of ‘Englishness’ to modernist discourse is but one of many outcomes arising from the extensive revisionism between the 1980s and early 2000s. Charles Harrison’s \textit{English Art and Modernism 1900 – 1939}, published in 1981, initiated debate about modern art in an English context and its revised edition, published in 1994, consolidated the issues arising.\(^{50}\) In the first edition, Harrison predicates his thesis—that English art of the early twentieth-century merits serious recognition as a legitimate expression of modern, if not ‘modernist’, art—on a distinction he draws between ‘modernism’ and the merely ‘modern’. The former refers to a coherent position derived from a theory or critique that purports to be consistent. The latter designates works of art which can be shown to conform to a set of

\(^{49}\) Greenberg, “American-Type” Painting’, p.218.

ideas and interests that are either contested or are contestable as modern.\textsuperscript{51} Intending, we presume, to locate modern English art practices within a contestably ‘modern’ field of ideas and interests, he sought to secure twentieth-century English art’s credential on a different, if equally valid, footing to that of a supranational modernism. We might thus recognise a modern English art as an equally authentic expression of its times.

An elegant survey, \textit{English Art and Modernism} is nevertheless a problematic account because, as Harrison himself acknowledged, his methodology was uneven.\textsuperscript{52} He reasoned, in mitigation, that the topic’s very incoherence demands methodological adaption, a telling argument in that it betrays an assumption about modernism’s coherence. As he observes elsewhere, the coherence of ideas and interests we designate as ‘modern’ is a critical issue for any history of modern art.\textsuperscript{53} One might ask, by the same token, however, whether such ‘coherence’ is merely ‘mainstream’ by another name. If so, English art is, by definition, incompatible with both ‘modernism’ and its variously defined ‘modern’ permutations, because of its ‘English’ prefix. In the event, Harrison felt that the ‘persistent resistance and retrenchment’ of English art during the inter-War years could not be compared with the uncompromising modernism emanating from continental Europe.\textsuperscript{54} Unable to reconcile the equivocations of English art with a coherence he attributes to ‘mainstream modernism’, he consigns the genre to ‘provincial’ ignominy.\textsuperscript{55}

For all the inevitability of his verdict, however, Harrison’s curious aside in the preface to the first edition anticipates the direction that subsequent revisionism would take. Noting a ‘sort of social-historical vividness’ of practices, movements, theories, and works of art during the period, he remarks that there is a need for a study which is not subject to the

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. In the preface to the second edition, Harrison refers to the ‘hegemonic and homogenizing representation of the modern tradition’ using a capitalised ‘Modernism’. We must assume that he has in mind an English assimilation of the values and perspectives of this widely recognised construct. He goes on to explain that he and his generation of art historians had endeavoured, during the 1970s, to recover a sense of an (uncapitalised) modern as a contestable value, from the (capitalised) Modernism, p. ix.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. In the first edition, he concedes: ‘The application of a historical materialist critique to the English art of the 1920s, for instance, might seem eccentric insofar as it would not be rooted in any antecedent discussion; in consideration of the art of the mid-thirties, however, some understanding of the terms of such a critique has seemed appropriate …’ p. 8.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, second edition, p. xi.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, p. viii.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. Harrison states: ‘By the time of the First World War, the idea of a modern movement had become an international preoccupation, but for the first three decades of the century at least there was to be no English contribution to this movement which a foreign observer would have regarded as central. To look for specifically English forms of modern art …is to examine the development of modernism within a provincial world’, p. viii.
‘traditional closures on art historical writing’.\(^{56}\) It is unclear as to whether he had a social history of art in mind or something altogether more innovative.\(^{57}\) Be that as it may, it was on a methodological level that David Peters Corbett’s *The Modernity of English Art: 1914 – 1930*, published in 1997, re-engaged with the ‘retrenched’ modernism of the interwar years.\(^{58}\) Here, Peters Corbett advocates an interpretation of English art which affords recognition to the conditions of the modernity under which it was produced. His refusal to accept as dichotomous the polarities between twentieth-century art practices—the supposed dichotomy which had foreclosed Harrison’s thesis—serves to open up early twentieth-century English art to a different kind of investigation based upon the relation of all art to the specific conditions of its modernity. Where Harrison had allowed for some kind of dispensation which could restore our appreciation of English art in the modern setting, Peters Corbett posits an account of the ‘struggle in English painting to address the experience of a modern culture at a time when such an ambition had become in important ways unacceptable’.\(^{59}\) That same year, Peters Corbett, together with Lara Perry, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell, convened the *Rethinking Englishness: English Art 1880 – 1940* conference at York University.\(^{60}\) The agenda reiterated Harrison’s appeal for a study unencumbered by art history’s closures. It yielded two further publications which, between them, moved the discussion on: *English Art 1860 – 1914: Modern Artists and Identity*, published in 2000, and *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and National Past 1880 – 1940*, published in 2002.\(^{61}\) The former sets out a number of discrete enquiries that had arisen in the conference revolving around representations of nationalism, gender, landscape, nature and the city, and aesthetic and other identities.\(^{62}\) The latter focusses on the remaining ones: namely, aspects of nationalism, modernisation, and the urban and rural relationship.\(^{63}\)


\(^{57}\) Charles Harrison, ‘“Englishness” and “Modernism” Revisited’, *Modernity/Modernity*, 6.1 (1999), pp. 75 – 90. Invited to address the *Rethinking Englishness: English Art 1880 – 1940* conference at York University, Harrison distanced himself from that admonition, (p. 75).


\(^{60}\) *Rethinking Englishness: English Art 1880 – 1940*, [conference], York University, 1997.


\(^{63}\) Ibid, n. 14, p. 214.
English painting is thus construed geographically in terms of the localised discourses which determine its production.

The innovation was refined by Lisa Tickner’s application of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of the cultural field to English historiography, initially in her contribution to English Art 1860–1914 and then in her monograph, Modern Life and Modern Subjects, also published in 2000. In doing so, she emphasised the power relations governing the interplay between the participants engaged in the relatively autonomous aesthetic field of early twentieth-century English art. In Modern Life and Modern Subjects, Tickner takes as her point of departure Gilbert Ramsay’s survey of English modernist practices just before the First World War, the Twentieth Century Art: A Review of the Modern Movements exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1914. She also reiterates Harrison’s call for a history that eschews the traditional closures, developing the idea of localised inflections upon the field such as immigration, urban geographies, sexual violence, mass entertainment, popular newspapers, modern dancing, and feminist politics and maternal ambivalence, each of which had determined the course of the local modernisms she investigated. Seeking to draw out the social resonances within the five strands of modern painting represented in Ramsay’s exhibition of 1914, Tickner refers to the ‘ecologies’ of modernism, a useful analogy, I think, for the cultural transmissions to come.

We see then, from these historiographical revisions, the terms on which a principle of nationality has been readmitted to the literature of English modern art. ‘Englishness’ is construed as a pattern of localised discourses which, if we accept Tickner’s argument, are subject to the underlying principles of the cultural field. The ‘English’ label assembles these multifarious practices, styles, movements, iconographies, and interests, and presents them as socially-determined forms of representation. Harrison, who died in 2009, might have questioned the coherence of the resulting historiography, not to mention the merit of some

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65 See Lisa Tickner, ‘English Modernism in the Cultural Field’ in Corbett and Perry, op. cit. The author elaborates upon the web of relations between the parties who determine the outcome of a work of art. pp. 13-30; also Tickner, Modern Life and Modern Subjects. Here, she refers to the fields of symbolic, cultural, and economic power, observing that they are unequally distributed among the classes and that, although they are not reducible to one another, they may be mutually convertible under certain conditions, n. 20, pp. 301 & 302.
66 Tickner, Modern Life and Modern Subjects. Tickner states: ‘Both the heterogeneity and what has been called the “ecology” of modernism have been largely purged from the history of the period, often with the blessing of modernists themselves. Art of any consequence is thought to have emancipated itself into introverted (laboratory, problem-solving) or transcendent and metaphysical ones. These were significant ambitions within a messier, more critical, and arguably more interesting spectrum of modernist practice, p. xiii.'
of the practices it admits to its revised canon, but, by the same token, we recognise that it serves to draw the full gamut of artistic responses to modernity into the orbit of art historical investigation and registers their significance within localised conditions where vested interests and power relations are at play.

We see parallels to this English historiography in its American counterpart where, again, new narratives of twentieth-century art are seen to question the received wisdom. In particular, the ‘provincialism’ of early American modernism is contested in such accounts as Abraham Davidson’s *Early American Modernist Painting 1910 – 1935*, Wanda Corn’s *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity 1915 – 1935*, and Barbara Haskell’s *The American Century: Art and Culture 1900 – 1950*. The latter accompanied the first instalment of the Whitney Museum’s two-part *American Century* exhibition of 1999, one of three millennial exhibitions in New York’s major museums, each of which adopted revisionist stances. The remaining two were the Guggenheim Museum’s *1900: Art at the Crossroads* exhibition and the Museum of Modern Art’s three-part MoMA 2000 exhibition, featuring as its first instalment, *Modern Starts (1880 – 1920)*. In these instances, American revisionism reclaims the modernity of discourses that a once-dominant formalist narrative had marginalised, much as had its English counterpart. Both historiographies reflect upon the wider tendency and dispel universalist claims by acknowledging the complex historical patterns of localised responses to an unstable and fast-changing modern world. Take, for example, Michael Leja’s *Looking Askance* which brings to light the culture of hoax and deception that conditioned urban audiences during the first two decades of the twentieth-century; and Rebecca Zurier’s *Picturing the City* which examines the response of the Ashcan School painters to the changing codes of urban life, commercial culture, and social conduct brought about by an influx of new classes of immigrants and working women in

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metropolitan life.\textsuperscript{70} Take also Marilyn Kushner’s and Kimberly Orcutt’s \textit{The Armory Show at 100} which extricates the Armory story from Milton Brown’s grand narrative of America’s cultural awakening and reinterprets events in the light of the social, cultural, and technological convulsions that attended a moment of unprecedented economic transformation, especially in New York, the ‘provisional’ city.\textsuperscript{71} The list could go on, but for the purposes of this argument, we need only accept that recent American historiography, like its English counterpart, constitutes a pattern of localised discourses arising from the uncertain flux of modern life.

\textbf{Anglo-conformity in America}

Is it unreasonable to suppose that such localised discourses in one nation might be reproduced in others ‘transnationally’ by the émigré extensions of a parent community? Magee and Thompson tell us, in \textit{Empire and Globalisation}, their study of transnational commerce in the pre-First World War Anglophone world, that cultural identities often survived migration.\textsuperscript{72} Nineteenth-century émigrés of all social provenances tended to maintain links with their communities of origin, and increasingly so as the century progressed, bringing with it improvements to travel and other forms of communication. A concomitant sense of Anglo-Saxon cultural identity—if not necessarily of English or British identity—was pronounced in the colonies and dominions from the mid-nineteenth-century to the early twentieth. In America, however, Anglo-conformity was both a more complex phenomenon and a more ambivalent one.\textsuperscript{73} More complex, because the cultural identity of naturalised Americans of English descent differed from that of the American establishment, descendants of the old settler families, who had retained their sense of cultural affinity with


\textsuperscript{71} Kushner and Orcutt, \textit{The Armory Show at 100}.

\textsuperscript{72} Magee & Thompson, \textit{Empire and Globalisation}. In Chapter 3, ‘Overseas Migration’, they observe: ‘The transnational networks of exchange and participation ... were grounded upon a perception that emigrants from Britain shared a common identity based on their place of origin and the cultural and linguistic traits associated with it’, p. 107.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. As they point out, a number of prominent personalities of the age conceived of a ‘Greater Britain’ comprising a wider English-speaking union rather than a more narrowly defined imperial union of peoples. Not all politicians and businessmen, however, were so receptive to the idea of an Anglo-Saxon brotherhood, p. 108.
other English-speaking peoples despite their forebears’ break with Britain in 1776.\textsuperscript{74} It was more ambivalent because these naturalised Americans, unlike their ‘old stock’ superiors, had felt obliged to disavow British cultural identity during the mid-nineteenth-century as an expression of patriotic allegiance.\textsuperscript{75} Although pressure to do so relented towards the end of the century, America had by then witnessed a considerable dilution of its English demography as a result of migrations first from Ireland, then Germany, and latterly from other central, eastern and southern European nations.

Coincidentally with demographic decline—rather than as a direct consequence of it—America’s Anglo-conformist cultural paradigm was challenged and eventually supplanted by a pluralist one.\textsuperscript{76} According to Horace Kallen’s argument in ‘Democracy Versus the Melting Pot’, published in 1915, the descendants of America’s signatories to the Declaration of Independence had reformulated their forebears’ declaration of ‘natural rights’ against the ‘divine right’ enunciated by their British rulers.\textsuperscript{77} Whereas their ancestors had once asserted the ‘inalienable rights’ of mankind by declaring to their social superiors ‘all men equal’, now the descendants conserved their rights against the demands of their social inferiors by, effectively, declaring ‘all men unequal’. The ‘melting pot’ metaphor is thus opposed to the democratic ends it purports to serve, since, according to Kallen, the immigrant populations were being melded to the ‘old-stock’ interests of an Anglo-conformist Establishment.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{74} Digby Baltzell, The Protestant Establishment Revisited, (New Brunswick; London: Transaction Publishers, 1991). Baltzell charts an establishment genealogy from the old settler families who colonised the eastern seaboard in the seventeenth century. In chapter 13, ‘Cultural Pluralism in Modern America’, he represents their social decline through three successive paradigms of American assimilation, namely, ‘Anglo-conformity’, ‘the melting pot’ and ‘cultural pluralism’. Elsewhere, as we will see, the melting pot paradigm is equated, by proponents of cultural pluralism, with Anglo-Saxon values and privileges.

\textsuperscript{75} Magee & Thompson, Empire and Globalisation. The American Civil War (1861 – 1865) intensified the process of Americanisation according to Magee and Thompson, as British immigrants felt pressure to emphasise their loyalty to the Union. More than ever, they were the ‘invisible immigrants’, p. 109.

\textsuperscript{76} Baltzell, The Protestant Establishment Revisited. The author attributes the decline in the Anglo-Saxon Establishment’s capacity to ‘carry authority’ in American society to their exclusion of emerging elites, especially from the Jewish population. As this occurred, according to Baltzell, the Establishment mutated into a social caste – that is a social minority with negligible efficacy in the shaping of society. He identifies the Wall Street Crash as the point at which the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Establishment began to relinquish its leadership, a process completed during the Second World War.


\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. Kallen argues: ‘Across the water, in England, certain powers had laid claim to the acknowledgement of their traditional superiority to the colonialists in America. Whereupon the colonialists, through their representatives, the signatories to the Declaration, replied that they were quite as good as their traditional betters, and that no one should take from them certain possessions which were theirs. Today the descendants
Pluralist sensibilities were provoked when America joined the War on 6th April 1917 on the side of Britain and the Allies. Leftist opposition to the Establishment rallied to Randolph Bourne when he chided America’s intelligentsia in general, and John Dewey, his former mentor, in particular, for capitulating to the war-lobby in the vain hope of prosecuting hostilities to democratic ends. ‘Our intellectuals have failed us as value-creators, even as value emphasizers’ he declares in ‘Twilight of Idols’.79 Despairing of his fellow intellectuals’ abnegation, Bourne appeals, instead, to those unaccountable ‘malcontents’ who spurned the technical preoccupation into which the intelligentsia had now lapsed. They are ‘quite through with professional critics and classicists’; they ‘take institutions very lightly’; they are ‘of the American tribe of talent who used either to go immediately to Europe, or starved submissively at home’.80

The language lends a certain weight, I suggest, to the notion of a disenfranchised enclave, antagonised by, and increasingly averse to, Anglo-conformist values, and the idea that it might have spurned English cultural constructs, while its nemesis, a middle-class professional intelligentsia, attuned to institutional imperatives, willingly drew upon the same constructs as it formulated a body of modernist opinion. If such generalisations seem diffuse, so too are the demands they make of us since we need only suppose that an institutionally-minded American public was receptive to English cultural opinion while its counter-cultural antagonists were less so. The Anglo-American milieu is realised in these broadly-defined alignments. We address them where the contours are most clearly defined: that is to say, at its source in ‘Bloomsbury’, although, admittedly, even here, socio-cultural identities may seem somewhat indeterminate for, as we have seen, ‘Bloomsbury’, in the context of this thesis, merely denotes a circle of like-minded friends and a cultural milieu.

The Anglo-American cultural milieu

Appearances can be deceptive, however, for, as Raymond Williams points out, friendship groups are susceptible to sociological analysis. The friends of Thoby Stephen, who...
frequented his ‘Thursday Evenings’ before the First World War, were rooted in the same clearly defined class sector. A fusion of the professional upper-middle classes and minor aristocracy, this highly-educated social elite had come to dominate much of the administrative and professional life of England by the beginning of the twentieth-century. Noel Annan, their class biographer, describes them as the ‘Whig cousinhood which moulds the country’s culture’. Bloomsbury, itself, was symptomatic of a fracture within the class sector at the turn of the century. Different in bearing from their parents’ generation, their class consciousness—at least, that of the men—was forged in the major public schools and reformed universities. The fraction’s younger generation, according to Williams, enacted certain social adaptions on behalf of the ruling classes as a whole which ultimately ensured their continuing viability during a time of rapid social change. In this sense, Bloomsbury constitutes something of a social anachronism: a stabilising and therefore a socially-conservative intelligentsia. Like many of their social peers, members of the Bloomsbury group repudiated the kind of collective theories espoused by their more radical continental counterparts because, above all, they subscribed to an ideal of civilised individualism. Indeed, it is as individuals in their respective fields that their achievements are generally recognised, even if, paradoxically, they are credited with changing the spectrum of middle-class cultural life in England. Any success in garnering suburban middle-class support may well have owed something to their abhorrence of ideology, but, paradoxically, the ramifications of their influence on English cultural life were deeply ideological. The point is, as Williams reminds us, that we need to consider what Bloomsbury amounted to collectively, socially and culturally, as distinct from the achievements of its individual members. Take, for example, Kenneth Clark’s claim on behalf of Fry in his introduction to Fry’s Last Lectures. Accrediting Fry with single-handedly changing English suburban taste,

83 Williams, ‘The Bloomsbury Fraction’. As Williams observes, Bloomsbury had no general position, but why did it need one? It had Morgan and Virginia for literature, Roger and Clive and Vanessa and Duncan for art, Leonard for politics, Maynard for economics. Didn’t these cover the proper interests of all civilised people? By the 1920s, James Strachey, and Adrian and Karin Stephens moved into psychoanalysis and, by means of the Hogarth Press, added Sigmund for sex, p. 166.
84 Williams, ‘The Bloomsbury Fraction’, p. 151.
85 Roger Fry, Last Lectures, in Kenneth Clark (ed.), Last Lectures, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939). Clark states: ‘Though [Fry] had never been as widely read as Ruskin, his influence on taste and the theory of art had spread to quarters where his name was barely known. A large, confused section of the
the texts we will examine suggest that Fry was indebted to his articulate friends in Bloomsbury for their considerable support, both practical and moral, during the turbulent months of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*. They, in turn, were galvanised by press hostility to the Post-Impressionist exhibitions when they rallied to his cause. Despite protestations to the contrary, Williams shows us that Bloomsbury owned a collective identity.

What then could be more localised or more ideological than ‘Bloomsbury’ at that particular historical moment? The Anglo-American hypothesis posits a place for Bloomsbury in an American cultural discourse that encompassed the gamut of modernist opinion. We may count Fry’s former mentor, Edward Carpenter, among its disparate cast, together with Carpenter’s Canadian protégé, Richard Maurice Bucke. Carpenter was read by members of the Stieglitz circle including the painter, Max Weber. In 1909 Weber, a cosmopolitan figure in his own right, returned from an extended residency in Paris where he had mixed with Picasso, Delaunay, Matisse, Rousseau and other members of the Parisian avant-garde. He was brought to Fry’s attention by the photographer, Alvin Langdon Coburn, a one-time member of the Stieglitz group, who emigrated to England in 1912. Coburn petitioned Fry to show Weber’s work in the Grafton Group’s exhibition of 1913. By then, painting in a hybridised version of the Cubist style—drawing both upon Anglo-American and Parisian theories—Weber was exhibited by Fry alongside English exponents of the so-called ‘Post-Impressionist’ style, together with Wassily Kandinsky, the only other foreign artist present.

On its transmission to Progressive Era America, shortly after Weber’s return, Post-Impressionism was embraced by the Anglo-conformist press but there is evidence to suggest that enthusiasm for the new movement was less than universal. Among New York’s bohemian milieu, it was pitted against other formalist codas such as ‘Cosmism’, a variant that Dr. John Weichsel, then a member of the Stieglitz circle, had sought to promote

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86 William James, ‘The New Spiritual America’, *Current Literature* 46, (February, 1909), p. 180. Carpenter is cited as one of the luminaries who would usher in a new spiritual age: ‘Emerson was one of the prophets of the “New America”, and Walt Whitman wrote its psalms. Among those who had sensed its coming have been the friends of Whitman, Richard Maurice Bucke and Edward Carpenter’, (p.180).
through articles in *Camera Work*. It derived from Wilhelm Worriinger’s as-yet untranslated doctoral thesis, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, later published as *Abstraction and Empathy*. Weichsel, a German- and Swiss-educated Polish immigrant, had familiarised himself with the text before emigrating to New York. T. E. Hulme, Fry’s most acute English critic, was also familiar with Worriinger. His interpretation of Worriinger—he claimed to have arrived at Worriinger’s conclusions independently—found expression in the Vorticist aesthetic. In January 1917 the Vorticists exhibited to little acclaim at the Penguin Club in New York. During these years, Post-Impressionism’s survival, as a cultural construct, was by no means assured. Indeed, Worriinger’s *Abstraction and Empathy* has been cited as ‘the intellectual catalyst of Anglo-British Modernism as well as the theoretical forerunner of twentieth-century formalism’. The evidence I will advance, however, suggests that Bloomsbury’s formalism, a version which is not directly indebted to Worriinger, had quite as much bearing on the forthcoming orthodoxy, for, at some point during the second decade of the century, modern art in America slipped its bohemian moorings and entered the bracing world of professional middle-class culture. A proliferation of new galleries, dealerships, and artist’s groups during the third decade attests to the cultural shift Henry F. May memorably describes as ‘the struggle between the creeds of Greenwich Village and the Saturday Evening Post’. By then, the simultaneous presence in New York of Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, and Constructivism as competing styles, gave rise to a diffuse debate about the nature of modern art. Bloomsbury’s formalism survived, as I

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91 Susan Noyes Platt, *Modernism in the 1920s: Interpretations of Modern Art in New York from Expressionism to Constructivism*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985). See Noyes Platt’s discussion of the burgeoning world of institutions, dealerships and arts groups in Chapter 1. ‘Institutions and Dealers’, pp. 5 - 34; May, *The End of American Innocence*. May writes of a dividing line in American culture at the end of the First World War: ‘...for this reason, partly, the post-war decade fascinates the present generation. Current romantic accounts make the twenties a period of hectic gaiety and financial irresponsibility, which it was. Slightly more searching inquiries emphasize the desperate seriousness of the expatriate intellectuals, the paradoxical fervent complacency of business, the struggle between the creeds of Greenwich Village and the Saturday Evening Post’, p. x.
93 Platt, *Modernism in the 1920s*, p. 2
will show, by means of its adaption to new cultural norms together with the reassertion of its core principles. The Anglo-American discourse successfully mediated continental Europe’s confusing and sometimes incomprehensible modernist art to the new urban professional audience. It did so by means of a familiar critical language – the ‘clear vision’ to which I allude in the dissertation title - and by its affirmation of liberally progressive values. Its appeal, I will argue, was as much emotional as intellectual: both middlebrow and highbrow. Thus, even though Bell’s concept of significant Form, the central thesis in his popular book Art, was shown to be fallacious, it was nevertheless retained in part in Sheldon Cheney’s influential Primer of Modern Art, published in 1924.\textsuperscript{94} Greenberg himself confessed that Cheney’s introduction to modernist art had guided him in his youth.\textsuperscript{95} Fry, on the other hand, accessed the scholarly during the 1920s. Having jettisoned certain metaphysical assumptions that I. A. Richards’ had shown to be untenable, his revised formalism, articulated in terms of ‘plasticity’, withstood academic scrutiny.\textsuperscript{96} Indeed, Fry was at his most abstract in two texts published around the time he met Alfred Barr Jr., the future Director of the Museum of Modern Art. They were Transformations, a compendium of theoretical and speculative essays, published in 1926, and the Cézanne monograph of 1927.\textsuperscript{97} Each anticipates key components of Barr’s early formalism.

Such was the lie of the land when, on the 7\textsuperscript{th} November 1929, some nine days after the Wall Street Crash, New York’s Museum of Modern Art opened. Culturally, its inauguration signalled the consolidation of certain internationalist interests espoused by a number of like-minded collectors and patrons of modernist art from the upper echelons of American corporate society. Abby Rockefeller, accompanied by Lillie P. Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan, all society women, steered the project through from inception to the point of realisation. Rockefeller then turned to the philanthropic transport and film magnate, A. Conger Goodyear, to take on the presidency of the new institution. Goodyear recruited other members of this internationally-minded corporate elite including Paul J. Sachs, professor of Art History at Harvard and a one-time partner in Goldman-Sachs. It was he who

\textsuperscript{94} C. J. Ducasse, ‘Art: “Significant Form”’, Nation, (3\textsuperscript{rd} February, 1926), p. 121; Sheldon Cheney, A Primer in Modern Art, (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924).
\textsuperscript{96} I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trubner, 1924).
recommended Alfred Barr Jr., a Harvard doctoral student whom he had been supervising, for the directorship of the Museum.

**Summary**

Recent interest in international exchange has drawn attention to ‘transnational’ cultural discourses generated within ethnic diasporas; that is to say, cultural exchanges that transcend national boundaries. Driven, in part, by the global agenda, it also reflects a revisionist initiative to reclaim for scholarly investigation those localised practices once marginalised by an all-pervasive formalist modernist historiography. Hence, the proposition that localised discourses in a parent community may be reproduced in its émigré extensions.

Our investigation of America’s assimilation of English cultural theory must, however, recognise the complexities of Anglo-identity in America during this period. Descendants of the old settler families embraced their Anglo-Saxon heritage while naturalised Americans of English decent had felt pressure, during the nineteenth-century, to disavow loyalty to England as an expression of American allegiance. Coincidentally, if not as a direct result of mass migration from continental Europe during the late nineteenth-century, America’s Anglo-conformist cultural paradigm was challenged and, after the First World War, it gave way to a pluralist paradigm. The conditions governing the reception of Bloomsbury’s ‘English’ aesthetic theory changed accordingly.

The Anglo-American hypothesis posits Bloomsbury’s shaping influence on a modernist discourse in America. A culturally-progressive but socially-conservative theoretical discourse, rooted in the aesthetic theories of Bloomsbury, mediated continental European avant-garde art to new, literate, middle-class publics in England and America. On transmission to America, Bloomsbury’s ‘English’ theory bypassed a pre-existent modernist discourse centred on New York’s bohemian quarter but it was taken up by an Anglo-conformist American public elsewhere. Reconfigured to the terms of a mainstream progressivist cultural discourse, the Anglo-American aesthetic formalism, to which it gave rise, was perpetuated by a corporate intelligentsia with an inclination and the wherewithal to institutionalise modernist art.
When Alfred Barr Jr. took up the Directorship of the Museum of Modern Art, the presence of an Anglo-American formalist tradition, compatible with scientific method, and familiar to many, proved propitious, given the institutional imperatives he faced and the pressures to secure public support. Adapting aspects of Anglo-American formalism to the institution’s methodological requirements, he guaranteed the tradition’s continuity in a formalist orthodoxy destined to shape institutional modernist culture in America before the outbreak of the Second World War.

In the next chapter, I will suggest how we may locate the premises of Anglo-American formalism in an aesthetic discourse that was prevalent on either side of the Atlantic at the turn of the century. We will examine its definitive characteristics in Arthur Schopenhauer’s theory of art and then trace its aesthetic heritage in the explanations of two English theorists and one American. We broach the Anglo-American tradition through its most elementary principle: that is to say, disinterest.
The Contemplative Aesthetic

Disinterest is the first principle of Kantian aesthetic philosophy. Kant’s use of the term draws upon a British etymology devised by Anthony, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, in the context of a polemic against Hobbesian religious and ethical instrumentalism. Here, it denotes the love of God and pursuit of virtue as ends in themselves. Kant’s notion of disinterest is informed by Shaftsbury’s in the sense that the object of one’s contemplation transcends the interests of the subject. Schopenhauer derives his own distinctive notion of disinterest by emphasising the ‘will-less’ aspect of contemplation in his critique of the Kantian noumenon, or, as Schopenhauer preferred to call it, the ‘thing in-itself’. I will argue that a Schopenhauerian aesthetic, founded on the suspension of one’s will, constitutes the philosophical basis of an English formalist tradition, and that, as such, it imparts a distinctive colouration to an aesthetic formalism which is articulated by Bloomsbury.

The claim is substantiated by tracing the Schopenhauerian tradition through the theoretical writing of three early modernists, two of whom are English, and, the third, an American of Russian descent. Assembled in a different context by Linda Dalrymple Henderson, the American historian of early modernist mysticism, she highlights their respective roles in fin-de-siècle esotericism in the arts. I re-cast them, not as the purveyors of mystical thought per se, but as exponents of Schopenhauerian aesthetic theory, and thus emphasise their place in an unfolding interplay of English and American ideas, essentially romantic in conception. Roger Fry and the American painter, Max Weber, two of the protagonists, were later linked by Sarah MacDougall, curator of the Ben Uri Gallery’s exhibition in 2014, Max Weber: an American Cubist in Paris and London 1905 – 1915. They are, undeniably, minor players on modernism’s international stage, and the third,

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Edward Carpenter, is, frankly, obscure. Yet, they play out significant roles in the Anglo-American discourse by disseminating among their Anglophone readerships the idea of one’s quasi-mystical relationship with the cosmos. Of the three, Carpenter is the lynchpin. Neglected now, he was briefly a figure of international repute when, at the turn of the twentieth-century, he began to attract attention as an exponent of the simple life. In America he became a noted source on monism, a belief in the unity of mind and spirit, and on the theory of evolutionary consciousness. Henderson tells us that Carpenter and his Canadian protégé, Richard Maurice Bucke, were enthusiastically read by members the Stieglitz group. He was also known to Leo Tolstoy, Peter Kropotkin, Kazimir Malevich, and, through his links with P. D. Ouspensky, the mystic and philosopher, other members of the Russian avant-garde.

Carpenter met Fry in July 1886 during the latter’s final year at King’s College, Cambridge. Fry’s full length portrait, dated 1894, documents a friendship that can be traced up to July 1911.101 [Figure 1] Carpenter was known to Max Weber through Alvin Langdon Coburn, the photographer and one-time member of the Stieglitz group. These links, too, are visually documented in Coburn’s ‘Men of Mark’ series, a collection of photographic portraits of eminent cultural figures. It includes Coburn’s portrait of Carpenter in 1905 and Weber in 1911. Similarly, Weber’s reciprocal portrait of Coburn, also in 1911, documents the friendship. [Figures 2 - 5] Coburn emigrated to England in 1912, where he negotiated with Fry for Weber’s inclusion in the Grafton Group exhibition of 1913. There, Weber was shown alongside Kandinsky, the only other foreign artist in an exhibition that featured English Post-Impressionist painters associated with Bloomsbury.

Henderson’s account of the curious aesthetic and philosophical alliances at play in pre-First World War cubism touches upon the fault-lines of, what I argue to be, a nascent Anglo-American modernist tradition. She observes:

Apollinaire shared an interest in the theme of infinity with Weber and Ouspensky, but the issues of a monist blending of spirit and matter and the evolution of consciousness are not generally apparent in Cubist literature. In contrast to Weber, who returned from Paris in 1908 to an America where monism was a major philosophical issue, Apollinaire and the Cubists developed their theories in a milieu dominated by a more clearly dualistic idealism. As a result, even though Cubist paintings retain elements from nature and are never totally abstract, the Cubist

101 Spalding, Roger Fry, p. 146.
artist emphasizes the gap between Kantian phenomena and noumena and in the words of Gleizes and Metzinger, “rejects the natural image as soon as he has made use of it”. Instead of identifying with objects in nature, as Carpenter’s extrovertive mysticism encouraged Weber to do, Du Cubisme’s authors asserted, “There is nothing real outside ourselves, there is nothing real except the coincidence of a sensation and an individual mental direction.”

She continues:

In reality the Cubists differed from Weber and Ouspensky on the subject of evolving consciousness just as they did on monism. Their reliance on the geometrical fourth dimension of Poincaré distanced them from the Russians and from Weber and the Americans who, like Ouspensky, were reading Carpenter and Bucke.  

In these two passages, she notes—significantly with regard to the Anglo-American hypothesis—that Weber, the American of Russian descent, and P. D. Ouspensky, the Russian, both of whom had read Carpenter, subscribed to monism and the idea of evolving consciousness, unlike the Parisian cubists, who relied on Poincaré’s geometrical notion of a so-called ‘fourth dimension’. Also, she notes that the cubist’s espousal of a dualistic idealism, compatible with the Kantian notion of noumena and phenomena, permitted them to dispense with the ‘natural image’ once they had utilised it, whereas Weber was encouraged by Carpenter to identify—monistically, we presume—with ‘objects in nature’. In these remarks about the metaphysical-cum-mystical alliances of pre-War modernist art lies the substance of my argument; namely, that an Anglo-American strain of formalism can be traced to the pre-First World War debates. It takes the form of a theoretical tradition derived, via Bloomsbury, from Schopenhauer. Before I go on to discuss its manifestation in the theoretical writings of Carpenter, Fry, and Weber, I will outline its salient features in Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory.

**Disinterest and the Schopenhauerian Will**

There is one irreducible reality in the otherwise meaningless flux of the cosmos, according to Schopenhauer: it is the will to be. Capitalised in its abstract form, the Will is most fully

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realised in civilised man and then at successively lower levels descending via women, children, ‘uncivilised brutes’, to sentient animals, living organisms, inanimate life forms, and so on, down to inert matter, the nadir of all states of being. Every living organism is driven by the Will in an unremitting and ultimately futile struggle for perpetuation. It yields neither progress nor change to the essential conditions of existence. For civilised man alone, however, because he is capable of abstract thought, there is hope of temporary remittance by means of the ascetic renunciation of the will or through the refuge to be found in ideas. Schopenhauer conceives of these ideas in Platonic terms.

Ideas offer sanctuary from the struggle for existence because they are not subject to the ‘principle of sufficient reason’—a Kantian term adopted and modified by Schopenhauer to explain the state-of-being of all phenomena, the things one experiences and knows only by virtue of the senses. Described by Schopenhauer as ‘adequate objectifications of will’, ideas are knowable representations of the will and therefore occupy an intermediary place in his schema between the Will’s reality and the illusory world of phenomena. Phenomena, it should be added, have an illusory existence because his Platonism dictates that material things belong to the perceptual realm where their state-of-being is subject to causality in time and space. They are therefore mere approximations of their eternal Platonic archetypes. Utilising Plato’s vivid analogy, Schopenhauer describes phenomena as the flickering shadows cast by cave dwellers on rough-hewn walls by the light of their fire. Their shackled prisoners, having never directly seen a living being, mistake the uneven shadows for the reality of people. Like the dwellers who cast the shadows, ideas are the true forms underlying their phenomena; they can only ever be known in their real state, as archetypes of the distorted shapes, should the prisoner escape his dank world and see them by the clear light of day.

Schopenhauer accepts Kant’s argument that the intellect is subject to the principle of sufficient reason because it is conditioned by circumstances. He infers from Kant, though, that it is ill-equipped to engage with the realm of Platonic ideas because, in the presence of absolutes and timeless values, its calculating logic is nullified. However if one might suspend the normal functions of intellect, he reasons, and see through the illusory world of phenomena to the Platonic source of all things, in such a way as to perceive them innocently, divested of all usefulness, instrumentation, or other investment, one might then transcend the clamour of the will and discover the tranquillity to be found in a realm of
Platonic ideas. The Schopenhauerian concept of disinterest is realised in this abstracted state of mind; one that it premised on the difference between ideas and their reality: ‘objectifications of the will’, and the source of their reality as ‘things in-themselves’.

It is this distinction, I argue, between the principles of Kantian and Schopenhauerian disinterest that underlies the philosophical position of the Anglo-American formalist tradition. Although Weber was doubtlessly unaware of the metaphysical propositions supporting his faltering attempts to reconcile a monist aesthetic with the cubist practices he had learnt in Paris, they reflect, I will argue, an attempt to reconcile two distinct and different philosophical propositions. More prosaically, we might imagine the practical implications of Schopenhauer’s contemplative aesthetic among the pre-War educated readerships whose material circumstances permitted occasional access to works of art and a little leisure to reflect on them. With this contemplative mode of experience in mind, we address the aesthetic implications of the Schopenhauerian dichotomy between ideas and will, elaborated as it is in the third book of the first volume of The World as Will and Idea. As one would expect of an aesthetic theory pre-dating abstraction in the plastic arts, it is predicated on a representational form of art, for Schopenhauer argues that the artist’s vision draws us into a realisation of the ‘inner reality’ of things.

**The idea and the thing in-itself: aesthetic implications**

As the ‘adequate objectivity of the thing in-itself’, the idea conveys the will in the form of thought. However, because ordinary thought is subject to the principle of sufficient reason, it is unable to apprehend Platonic ideas, and therefore we have no direct access to the noumenal reality that underlies phenomena. The thing in-itself—if we are to use Schopenhauer’s preferred terminology—can only be known indirectly by means of one’s senses and the intellectual inference ones derives from the evidence they provide. At best then, one’s knowledge is delimited to the reasonable inferences one draws from the data of sensuous experience alone. We might surmise, therefore, that one’s knowledge of any given thing is curtailed, its ultimate reality being destined to remain a mystery.

Schopenhauer, however, argues against Kant that, since the Will constitutes the ultimate reality, one’s knowledge may extend to an intuitive sense of the thing in-itself. We may therefore instinctively grasp a higher reality if one’s powers of perception are somehow diverted from their normal task of interpreting sensory data for instrumental purposes. He states:

Since [in the light of Kant], as individuals, we have no other knowledge than that which is subject to the principle of sufficient reason, and this form of knowledge excludes the Ideas, it is certain that if it is possible for us to raise ourselves from the knowledge of particular things to that of the Ideas, this can only happen by an alteration taking place in the subject which is analogous and corresponds to the great change of the whole nature of the object, and by virtue of which the subject, so far as it knows an Idea, is no more individual.104

Should we ‘raise ourselves from the knowledge of particular things...’ our relationship to phenomena changes fundamentally, to the extent that ‘one is no more individual’. Our capacity for apprehending pure Platonic ideas relies on us divesting ourselves of wilful intent and adopting, instead, a ‘self-less’ stance towards the object of our contemplation. Once the normal function of the intellect is suspended, we may contemplate the thing on a purely Platonic level, but, in doing so, we relinquish our normal state of self-conscious awareness.

Schopenhauer likens this heightened state of awareness to the instinctive knowledge we have of our own bodies. Aware as one is of one’s own body simultaneously as a phenomenon capable of functioning in time and space, and as an extension of one’s will, one’s knowledge can be integrated at least, if not complete. At a superficial level, it is subject to the principle of sufficient reason because one recognises one’s own body as an object in time and space. Yet, at that same time, one also possesses a profound knowledge of one’s body as an extension of one’s will, because it responds instantaneously to the mind and, indeed, over time, it adapts physiologically to the will’s habitual demands. One therefore also knows one’s body intuitively as a thing in-itself; a manifestation of the will. Such intuitive knowledge, according to Schopenhauer, gives one access to the ‘inner reality’ of the body as an object. It follows, he argues—and, here, he asks the reader to ‘suspend his

104 Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, p. 236.
surprise for a while’—that other phenomena are accessible to intuitive knowledge as well, for he states:

For the individual finds his body as an object among objects, to all of which it is related and connected according to the principle of sufficient reason. Thus all investigations of these relations and connections lead back to his body, and consequently to his will.¹⁰⁵

We will return to this proposition in Chapter 3, when we examine contemplative knowledge in relation to genius. For the present, however, we consider only the artistic implications of the Schopenhauerian dichotomy between the idea and the thing in-itself.

Schopenhauer’s concept of intuitive knowledge permits the will to be known, albeit in varying degrees of clarity. The Platonic idea, as the ‘adequate objectivity of the thing in-itself’, veils the will within it: the more complete, or ‘adequate’, the idea, the more lightly concealed is its wilful reality. Hence, the promise that we can ‘raise ourselves from the knowledge of particular things to that of the Ideas’. One’s access to such an elevated field of knowledge is incompatible with Kant, because he conceives of one’s knowledge in relation to time, space, and causality. The Kantian aesthetic leaves no space for the contemplative experience we find in Schopenhauer.

Dalrymple Henderson, we recall, observed that Apollinaire and the Cubists had developed their theories in a milieu dominated by a dualistic idealism. She notes that ‘the Cubist artist emphasizes the gap between Kantian phenomena and noumena’ and that, in the words of Du Cubisme, ‘... there is nothing real outside ourselves, there is nothing real except the coincidence of a sensation and an individual mental direction.’¹⁰⁶ Conversely, Weber, who, as I will demonstrate, subscribes to Carpenter’s interpretation of Schopenhauer, ‘identifies with objects in nature’. Schopenhauerian aesthetics are predicated on such acts of perception. They constitute a mode of ‘artistic vision’, I suggest, that characterise the Anglo-American tradition of aesthetic formalism. According to Dalrymple Henderson, Weber ‘identif[ied] with objects in nature as Carpenter’s extrovertive mysticism encouraged [him] to do’. Contemplation is rewarded with its moment of epiphany. Schopenhauer describes just such a moment of realisation:

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 236
But what kind of knowledge is concerned with that which is outside and independent of all relations, that which alone is really essential to the world, the true content of its phenomena, that which is subject to no change, and therefore is known with equal truth for all time, in a word, the ideas, which are the direct and adequate objectivity of the thing in-itself, the will? We answer, Art, the work of genius. It repeats and reproduces the eternal ideas grasped through pure contemplation, the essential and abiding in all the phenomena of the world.\textsuperscript{107}

We conclude that works of art recreate the essential qualities of the idea. The will is thereby objectified through the work of art: ‘But what kind of knowledge is concerned with that which is outside and independent of all relations ... in a word, the Ideas, which are the direct and adequate objectivity of the thing in-itself, the Will...’ Schopenhauer concludes his exposition with an assertion that art ‘repeats’ or ‘reproduces’ eternal ideas which give adequate form to the ineffable will. As we move on to discuss his aesthetic legacy in Carpenter, Fry, and Weber, we will see that, for all the terminological variety, Schopenhauer’s essential proposition remains constant. Art is construed as a source of consolation in a fretful world.

We now seek out Schopenhauer’s presence in the aesthetics of the two Englishmen, Carpenter and Fry. As we recall, their friendship encompassed Fry’s professionally-formative years as an artist, an art historian, and a critic of modern art. During this period, Carpenter published twice on the arts: Angels’ Wings: A Series of Essays on Art and its Relation to Life, in 1889, and The Art of Creation: Essays on the Self and Its Powers, in 1904.\textsuperscript{108} It is the latter that reproduces Schopenhauer most comprehensively, although, as we will see, there is a significant Schopenhauerian component in the former. A second edition of The Art of Creation, published in 1906, preceded Fry’s first foray into aesthetic theory, ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’, by little over three years.\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{Detachment: Carpenter and Fry}

Carpenter’s precondition for creativity is ‘cosmic consciousness’, a state of mind whereby one’s true place in the cosmos is recognised. Like Schopenhauer, he reiterates the

\textsuperscript{107} Schopenhauer, \textit{The World as Will and Idea}, p. 246.
admonition of the Vedic sage, Uddalaka, to his son, Svetaketu: ‘Tat Tvam Asi’, ‘Thou art that’. An affirmation of one’s place in nature, it enunciates the ‘great Self’ in all things. ‘Matter’ and ‘self’, the polarities of intellectual knowledge, Carpenter reminds us, are merely phenomenal, illusory manifestations of the ‘world-soul’, or will. Insofar that an aesthetic position can be inferred from his treatise on creativity, *The Art of Creation*, it accentuates the pattern of self-renunciation we find in Schopenhauer. Like Schopenhauer, he posits the ineffable reality concealed within the ephemeral forms of nature and, indeed, he commends Schopenhauer for recognising art’s capacity to raise one out of oneself:

Schopenhauer, who has written well on Art and Music, says that Art and the sense of Beauty give us the most real knowledge of things, because then we see the object as the “realisation of an Idea” (i.e. as a form, according to him, of the world-soul); and the beholder (who has the same world-soul within himself) “becomes the clear mirror of the subject and the object,” and “the distinction of the subject and object vanishes.” And everyone, whether he agrees with Schopenhauer or not, must have felt in poetry, music, and art generally, and in all cases where the sense of Beauty is deeply roused, that strange impression of passing into another world of consciousness, where meanings pour in and illuminate the soul, and the “distinction between subject and object” vanishes.111

In the presence of beauty, one finds solace in a form spiritual of enlightenment: ‘meanings pour in and illuminate the soul’. Aesthetic experience is thus analogous to, if not identical to, cosmic consciousness. The passage continues. ‘Tribulations’—Carpenter’s language is overwrought at times—that accompany self-conscious thought fall away and one recognises the meaning of things as extensions of the same will that inhabits us: ‘The object suddenly is seen, is felt, to be one with the self’.112 Want is dissipated as one begins to perceive things as extensions of oneself: ‘The brain is stilled….the quiet sense of his own identity with the self of other things…no room for separate self-thoughts or emotions…All life is changed….113 And, like Schopenhauer, for whom the contemplation of ideas affords respite, so too, Carpenter finds relief from life’s sorrows in the state of cosmic consciousness: ‘When ... the man has sounded the depths of grief and pain ... one day ...the third form of Consciousness

111 Ibid, p.59
113 Ibid, p. 216.
dawns or flashes upon him – that which has been called Cosmic, or universal, Consciousness.\textsuperscript{114}

The tenor of Fry’s language may be different, but the contemplative subtext remains recognisable. Carpenter’s sorrowful world of the will is mitigated to Fry’s brisk modern life of wearisome distraction and pressing commitments. Yet Fry is also subject to life’s impulses, foremost among them, as Schopenhauer recognised, being the will to live: ‘...the processes of natural selection have ... brought about the instinctive reaction (of) ...flight from danger’.\textsuperscript{115} Fry’s tone, nonetheless, is decidedly suburban. No sense here of ‘sound[ing] the depths of grief and pain’. One is merely interested or disinterested. Fry’s Schopenhauerianism never descends to the abject misery we find in Carpenter. The human condition is one of hurried indifference and the will’s imperatives are manifested in the busy instrumentalism of one’s ordinary outlook:

The needs of our actual life are so imperative, that the sense of vision becomes highly specialised in their service. With an admirable economy we learn to see only so much as is needful for our purposes; each object or person; that done, they go into an entry in our mental catalogue and are no more really seen. In actual life the normal person really only reads the labels as it were on the objects around him and troubles no further.\textsuperscript{116}

Whereas Schopenhauer accredits civilised man alone with the capacity for abstract thought, Fry attributes that same capacity to all who are capable of reflection. Referring to it as the ‘secondary life’ of the imagination, he describes it as an abstracted mode of consciousness that facilitates the disinterested perception. In one’s imaginative life, the link between perception and active response is broken: ‘If ... we see a runaway horse and cart, we do not have to think either of getting out of the way or heroically interposing ourselves’.\textsuperscript{117} Instead, one plays over the experience in the mind and focuses one’s whole consciousness upon the perceptual and emotional aspects of it. The imaginative life thus enables one to perceive the environment with greater clarity and to feel purer emotion which, in turn, gives rise to a different kind of perception that is subject to a different set of values. Therefore, like Carpenter and Schopenhauer, Fry acknowledges the higher level of consciousness to which

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, pp. 24 & 25.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, p. 18.
the arts pertain. It corresponds both to the Schopenhauerian state of repose when one rises above the principle of sufficient reason, and to Carpenter’s state of cosmic consciousness, when the ‘terrible disruptions of life and society’ are transcended because the imaginative life, too, owns a transcendent quality. Like other forms of detachment, the imagination ‘presents a life freed from the binding necessities of our actual existence’.\(^{118}\) Objects, divested of function and purpose, are seen in a new light: ‘... the greater clearness of [imaginative] perception, and the greater purity and freedom of its emotion’. Likewise, Carpenter, sees things anew: ‘Objects turn round upon themselves with an exceedingly innocent air, but are visibly not the same’. The artistic object, Fry explains, must appeal to ‘that disinterested intensity of contemplation, which we have found to be the effect of cutting off the responsive action’.\(^{119}\) It is in the intensification of experience that Schopenhauerian notions of the aesthetic lie.

As Carpenter second edition of *The Art of Creation* was published and Fry wrote ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’, Max Weber was in Paris absorbing the influence of Apollinaire, Picasso, Delaunay, Metzinger, and Rousseau. On his return to New York in January 1909, he began to frequent the 291 Gallery, where he exhibited in 1909. The following year, he published two articles in *Camera Work*, ‘The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View’ and ‘Chinese Dolls and Modern Colorists’.

**A state of awareness: Weber**

Given the complexities of his cosmopolitanism, it is hardly surprising that Weber’s theoretical writings should have been a little muddled but a Schopenhauerianism of sorts can be disentangled from them. The premise of his first published excursus into modernist theory, ‘The Fourth Dimension from a Plastic Point of View’, suggests he was quick to absorb the basic tenets on his return to America. Take these sentences, for example:

The ideal is thus embodied in, and revealed through the real. Matter is the beginning of existence; and life or being creates or causes the ideal.\(^{121}\)

\(^{118}\) Ibid, p. 21.
\(^{119}\) Ibid, p.29.
The juxtaposition of trigger-words in the first sentence alerts us: ‘the ideal … revealed … through the real’. Can we infer the presence of a higher reality concealed within phenomena? Arguably, the observation amounts to a rudimentary paraphrase of Schopenhauer. The next clause is problematic. Weber takes ‘matter’, rather than the will, to be ‘… the beginning of existence’ and from here we proceed to those awkward ambiguities: ‘life or being’, ‘creates or causes’. Yet, for all Weber’s uncertainty, we discern the two levels of experience; one pertaining to phenomena and another to ideals.

In 1914, the year after his exhibition with the Grafton Group in London, when Weber delivered a series of lectures to the Clarence H. White School of Photography, his Schopenhauerianism became more pronounced. The text of the lectures was published in 1916 under the title, *Essays on Art*. In the first chapter, ‘Quality’, one notes the same kind of empathetic relationship between the contemplating subject and the object of contemplation described by Schopenhauer:

One of the most spiritual and significant phases of quality is intimacy. It is a state of awareness, of knowledge, of the presence of things outside of ourselves; we mean here, inanimate things.

‘Quality’, which it would seem is synonymous with authenticity, is identified with ‘intimacy’, one’s awareness of ‘things outside of ourselves’. It follows that ‘intimacy’ with ‘things’ is born of ‘a state of awareness, of knowledge’. We need not labour the Schopenhauerian point here, suffice it that we note a significant diversion from the empathy between the artist and his motif. It is a point that eludes Fry, but is known to Carpenter; one that concerns a mystical relationship between the artist and the materiality of the work of art. This theme re-enters the Anglo-American formalist discourse during the 1920s and subsequently becomes a tenet of the new orthodoxy: the significance of the medium. Weber describes the link thus: ‘Anything that has been shaped or constructed possesses a part of the life of the maker of that thing. It is that of his life that makes the existence of that thing possible’. The relationship between the subject and the object of knowledge, and between mind and matter, once emphasised by Carpenter, is developed by Weber in terms of the correspondence between ‘the maker’ and the material he uses. He develops the spiritual aspect of the point:

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The maker lives in the things he makes. Even his tool becomes warm in his hand and palpitates with his very pulse. ...For matter is of more worth when it is embodied with the spirit of the maker.

Much as Carpenter had progressed from his point about a relationship between the knowing subject and the object of his knowledge, to a mystical assertion that ‘the Subject and Object are the same’ and that ‘the whole Creation is Self-revealment’, so too, Weber states that there is a spiritual union between ‘the maker’ and the universe. It is epitomised in the work of art:

For matter is of more worth when it is embodied with the spirit of the maker. A work binds its maker to the universe. Though the maker ceases to be, the work he has created keeps on pulsating and rhymes his personality on on [sic] into infinity.

The mystical theme is developed in Weber’s second chapter, ‘Spiritual Tactility’, which opens with a declaration about the factors determining perception: ‘The highest development of perception and of sensitiveness, will spring from the most tender, interlacing, blending or correspondence ...’124 Like Carpenter before him, Weber identifies perception with hereditary principles: ‘...the instinctive or hereditary may be said to be that contribution to one’s senses derived from parents in prior contact with the objective world ...’125 We will presently come to Carpenter’s similar notion of ‘race consciousness’ in the context of a discussion about the peculiarly Anglo-American construction of genius, in Chapter 3.

In ‘Art Purpose’, the final chapter of *Essays on Art*, Weber contrasts the ferment of war with art’s transcendent possibilities: ‘Has not the best of human energy and of life been wasted on war, and on theft? Art affords us this contrast... Greed and war change the geographical boundaries of countries, but spirit is measureless, boundless, universal.126 His language echoes Carpenter’s evocation of the redemptive moment when ‘the terrible disruptions of life’ fall away. What clearer metaphor of the Schopenhauerian dichotomy?

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125 Ibid, p.18.
126 Ibid, p. 76.
Summary

Anglo-American formalism is identified with a tradition derived from the aesthetic theory of Arthur Schopenhauer, itself an offshoot of his philosophy of the Will. Prevalent among cultural circles in fin-de-siècle London and New York, it posits a relationship of empathy with the cosmos based on a metaphysical proposition concerning the essential unity of mind and matter. As we observed, theories and criticism derived from Schopenhauerian aesthetics may be distinguished from other forms of theory and criticism such as those, derived from Kant, which informed the practices of much of the Parisian avant-garde before the First World War, on the grounds that they ascribe transcendent meaning to the phenomena that surround us and offer the hope of repose to those who contemplate the higher reality concealed within them.

Kant’s first principle of aesthetic judgement, disinterest, is differently construed by Schopenhauer. Questioning the Kantian prohibition governing the extent of knowledge, Schopenhauer argues that the noumenon, the thing in-itself, can be known intuitively much as one knows one’s own body from within. Should one rise above the insatiable demands of the will, Schopenhauer argues, and contemplate phenomena in such a way as to suspend all thought of utility, one might see past their imperfection to the (Platonic) ideal within. Transcending the principle of sufficient reason, ideal form is the ‘adequate objectification’ of the thing in-itself, a direct manifestation of the Will. The more adequate—or complete—the idea, the more lightly concealed is the will within it. Therefore, one directly encounters the ineffable will in the presence of ideas and its noisy clamour gives way to repose.

The Schopenhauerian aesthetic is premised on the gap between the (Platonic) idea and the will. Art, according to Schopenhauer, gives form to ideas and is therefore the means of their replication. We noted the promise that this thesis might offer to the early modernist public with a little time for leisure and access to works of art. Addressing just such an educated public among his readership at the turn of the century, Carpenter accentuates the mystical dimension of Schopenhauer by associating creativity with self-denial. His esoteric language emphasises that the consolations of denial are to be found in cosmic consciousness. That is to say, on the realisation of one’s mystical union with a higher reality, variously described by Carpenter as ‘the great Self’ or the will, one enters into a state of
heightened awareness and can realise the higher reality of phenomena, as extensions of oneself.

Befriended by Carpenter during his formative years, Fry transcribed his mentor’s Schopenhauerianism to an intelligible idiom for an urban middle-class readership that was curious about recent changes in the world of art. The malign imperatives of the will are diminished to the urgencies of a busy lifestyle; and the heightened perception afforded by disinterested contemplation becomes the perceptual clarity experienced through one’s capacity for a secondary life of the imagination, reflection. The imaginative life thus disengages the harassed middle-class citizen from the pressing necessities of day to day life.

Insofar that we can speak of conceptual ‘fault-lines’ separating the Anglo-American aesthetic from other philosophies of art, Weber straddles them in his early expositions of the new art. We noted that his account of the so-called ‘fourth dimension’ in Camera Work is suffused with monist Schopenhauerian thinking and that, following his liaison with Fry and the Grafton Group in 1913, it became still more pronounced. Weber’s mystical language, however, resembles Carpenter, whom he had read. Like Carpenter, he ascribes a mystical significance to the artist’s material medium, anticipating Fry’s belated interest in materiality some ten years later. We conclude that the Schopenhauerian aesthetic may well have served different ends in this pre-War manifestation of Anglo-American discourse but its essential thesis is predicated on one’s contemplative relation to the phenomenal world.

Having identified the definitive features of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic and then traced its legacy in the writing of three pre-First World War adherents, we now proceed the contemplative aesthetic’s romantic corollary in the person of the contemplative genius. A compelling myth, and in many ways the antithesis of the real, historical Anglo-American intellectuals who propagate the discourse, this figure symbolises creative agency in an aesthetic transaction.
3

The Genius as Artist and Modern Master

We shift our attention shifts now from the object of contemplation to the contemplating subject. I will argue in this chapter that the Schopenhauerian genius constitutes an Anglo-American trope, not only because of the visionary qualities that have accrued to it, but also because it models a social context for the artist’s place in society. Drawing on texts we examined in the last chapter, I will demonstrate how the artist-genius, a compelling myth of nineteenth-century romantic provenance, is pressed into twentieth-century service as a historiographical device linking the modernist artist with past tradition and thereby éconfinning a legitimacy of sorts on the Anglo-American practices ascribed to him. We will see that genius assumes a peculiarly Anglo-American complexion in the person of the ‘Modern Master’, the primary protagonist in modernist historiography and a fitting modern counterpart to the ‘Old Master’ of western tradition.

We begin by examining the defining characteristics of Schopenhauer’s genius and then, breaking with chronology, for reasons that I will come to, we will trace his presence in Fry’s idea of the artist in ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’. Here, in the guise of the bohemian poseur, we encounter a modern, if somewhat diminished, incarnation of the genius-figure. Fry’s homage to Cézanne, a theme that emerges a little later, yields a more enduring type however. Compelled to relinquish the metaphysical-cum-mystical components of his early aesthetic theory in response to I. A. Richards’ scientific-absolutist critique, Fry’s reassertion of Cézanne’s significance in the monograph of 1927 did much to establish the painter’s persona as the prototypical artist of modern times. His representations of the artist in general, and Cézanne in particular, takes an avowedly romantic turn despite Fry’s renunciation, elsewhere, of irrational themes. I will make the case that, during the late-1920s and 1930s, at a time when university-educated arts professionals—Alfred Barr Jr. among them—systematically eliminated metaphysical and mystical narratives from the institutional discourse, Fry’s interpretation of Cézanne reinforced a counter-narrative of genius in its modern guise. The Cézannesque Modern Master emerges as a purveyor of transcendent truth, an anachronistic presence, but nonetheless a potent one, in an increasingly corporate world of institutionalised modernism. Socially-oppositional as this
figure may be, he is not incompatible with institutional requirements, for, once the artist is divested of the interests and allegiances that might have motivated his real, historic personage, the figural version becomes the diminished creature of formalist discourse, a symbol of agency in Alfred Barr’s genealogical chart of modernist styles. [Figure 6]

We will assess Fry’s version of the Schopenhauerian genius in relation the early modernist institutional narrative, and then turn to Carpenter and Weber because, although the majority of their texts precede Fry’s, the contributions they offer pertain to the High Modernist artist, a figure that post-dates Fry’s Cézanne. Finally, having discussed the Schopenhauerian foundations of early twentieth-century theories expounded by Fry, Carpenter, and Weber, I will conclude the chapter by examining the artist’s presence in the period of our primary focus, namely, the years intervening Fry’s *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* exhibition in 1910 and Barr’s *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition in 1936.

Treating the Schopenhauerian theme as sign of Bloomsbury’s presence in the discourse, I will draw out the affinities between this tradition and the emergent orthodoxy. We begin with an overview of Schopenhauer’s archetype.

**The Schopenhauerian genius**

Schopenhauerian disinterest has its corollary in the suspension of wilful interest: only then, when the will is held in abeyance, can the contemplating subject apprehend the eternal forms of ideal beauty. Most of us may attain moments of such clarity—for how else, Schopenhauer asks, could we appreciate art—but a certain kind of person, the all-seeing genius, is adept at diverting his mind away from its customary service to the will and in so doing, he perceives the eternal idea more clearly and more continuously than the rest of us. The most objective of people, a ‘pure knowing subject’, possessed of a ‘clear vision of the world’, he surpasses us by virtue of his single-minded devotion to the idea. Yet, perversely, this very disposition engenders sociopathic failings in him because, in a habitual state of abstraction, he becomes indifferent to the norms of social convention. Unkempt, guileless, and given to unguarded candour, he neglects the social graces and, falling easy prey to those who would exploit his maladaptive tendencies, incurs the disapproval of others.127

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127 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*. Schopenhauer states: ‘...genius is the faculty of continuing the state of pure perception, of losing oneself in perception, and of enlisting in this service the knowledge which originally existed only for the service of the will; that is to say, genius is the power of leaving one’s own
Only his freedom from delusion, Schopenhauer ventures, distinguishes the outward signs of his condition from madness.\textsuperscript{128}

Like Plato’s lucid priestess, Diotima of Mantinea, who acquaints Socrates with the mysteries of ideal love, Schopenhauer’s genius enlightens us with his supreme insight.\textsuperscript{129}

True to prophetic type, he declaims his truths from the margins of society, an apt image of genius in relation to the corporate America of the newly-inaugurated Museum of Modern Art. Schopenhauer’s construction of genius, it should be appreciated, precludes scientific and mathematical accomplishment, those prized attainments in modern technological society, because their calculating means reflect the priorities of the will. In the Schopenhauerian scheme, scientific method serves the interests of the will. The science in question, however, is not an orderly field of enquiry, as we are accustomed to think of it, but a ‘mighty storm, that rushes along without beginning and without aim’.\textsuperscript{130} Genius, by contrast, is ‘like the silent sunbeam ... [which] pierces through the storm quite unaffected by it’. It ‘pauses at this particular thing; time stops; the relations vanish for it; only the essential, the Idea, is its object’. The turmoil of the one emphasises the tranquillity of the other. The scientist, driven by the insatiable demands of the will, can never attain his ever-receding goal, while the genius simply lifts the object of his contemplation from the torrent. Spurning intellect, subject as it is to sufficient reason, the genius is unconscious of his motives, relying instead on instinct to guide him. He finds the idea, the universal, in the particular thing—the ‘half-uttered speech of nature’—and, having perfected its form through the work of art, proclaims ‘“That is what you wanted to say!”’.\textsuperscript{131} Thus, finding eternal ideas in phenomena as they present themselves, the (pre-abstract) artist secures his motif from the commonplace things that lie to hand. Accordingly, we will see how Fry’s quintessential artist, middle-aged Cézanne, discovers the gamut of human experience in the paraphernalia of his own studio anticipating, as he does so, modernism’s Modern Master who finds his wherewithal, too, amongst the detritus of his immediate environment. It is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid. In his comparison of genius and madness, Schopenhauer intimates that his ‘diligent search in lunatic asylums’ leads him to the conclusion that the main symptom of madness is the disrupted faculty of memory; the tendency to live in the present, p. 254.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Schopenhauer, \textit{The World as Will and Idea}, p. 246.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Schopenhauer, \textit{The World as Will and Idea}, p.292.
\end{itemize}
here that the artist reproduces the eternal idea seen in nature and, ‘omitting all disturbing accidents’, draws out the higher reality that we can all perceive in nature with varying degrees of clarity.\textsuperscript{132} Although imperfect in his replication of the Platonic ideas that the objects represent, the artist can ‘construct the whole out of the little that comes into his own actual apperception’ with the aid of a little imagination.\textsuperscript{133}

Dedicating himself to the communication of the idea, the genius is frustrated by the deficiency of his vision. He is never fully aware of his intentions because he relies on instinct. The inarticulate Max Weber, a painter first and foremost, conforms to type. He struggles to express his ideas, yet he is compelled to try. Feeling his way with words, proffering approximations, searching for the apposite idiom, he strives to encapsulate what is, in the event, a mere intuition, the vague adumbration of an idea. Even Carpenter and Fry, so at ease with the language of their respective readerships and dextrous in its use, become uncharacteristically mute in the presence of art’s inexpressible source. Language, the medium of intellect, fails them, subject as it is to the limitations of sufficient reason. In the presence of transcendent experience, intellect falls short. ‘Like the mule at the edge of the glacier’, as Carpenter puts it, ‘there is a point where ... it has to be left behind. We cannot \textit{prove} the ultimate constitution of things’.\textsuperscript{134} Likewise, Fry finds himself at a loss when confronted with Significant Form, Post-Impressionism’s definitive quality: ‘Any attempt I might make to explain this would probably land me in the depths of mysticism. On the edge of that gulf I stop’.\textsuperscript{135}

As we address their respective interpretations of the Schopenhauerian genius, it will make for clarity of argument if we broach them in reverse chronological order because Carpenter’s account emphasises the genius-figure’s evolved consciousness, a quality that is more fully realised in late modernism, whereas Fry’s artist-genius has relevance to early modernism. His construction of the Schopenhauerian genius lays the foundations, I will argue, for Barr’s aesthetically autonomous artist while Carpenter’s contemplative counterpart, in touch with his ‘race consciousness’ and attuned to the cosmic realities of his

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, p. 259.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, p. 248.
\textsuperscript{134} Carpenter, \textit{The Art of Creation}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{135} Fry, \textit{Vision and Design}, p. 302
existence, prefigures late modernism’s version of the Modern Master in all his unfettered creativity.

**Half idiot, half divine: the English artist**

Fry concerns himself with matters aesthetic, of course, in ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’ but the artist figure that emerges from the text bears a striking resemblance to its Schopenhauerian forebear. Less forbidding perhaps, but like him in other ways, he tries to discern timeless and universal truths on behalf of us all: ‘...we feel that he has revealed something which was latent in us all the time, but which we never realised...’ 136 Moreover, there is a Schopenhauerian relationship between him and his audience, for Fry urges us, his readers, that it is essential to our aesthetic appreciation of a work of art that we should be conscious of the artist’s intentions since we form a ‘special tie’ with the man who evokes such profound emotions.

By 1917, ten years on, Fry had given more thought to the matter of the artist’s place within society. By then, Cézanne had come to embody Fry’s ideal for, in a review of Ambroise Vollard’s biography of the painter, he describes him as the ‘artist in its purist, most unmitigated form’. 137 He begins with an exposition of the anachronistic position the artist occupies in modern industrial society: ‘...it is paradoxical that artists ...should be remembered with reverence ...when statesmen, lawyers, and soldiers are forgotten’. 138 We might wonder, incidentally, whether Fry has Cézanne’s nineteenth-century France in mind or his own twentieth-century England. Be that as it may, the point is that the artist, a timeless figure, bequeaths a memento to posterity whereas the temporal achievements of others are destined for obscurity. The paradox concerns the artist’s position in society. There is a cost to his privileged status: it is a life on society’s margins. The idea of Cézanne’s reclusive years in Provence chimes fortuitously with the Schopenhauerian construct. We note, too, the significance of a social order comprising statesmen, soldiers, and lawyers. It contextualises the seclusion of Cézanne. In Fry’s version of the myth, the artist-figure, though timeless, is highly compatible with modern times.

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137 Ibid, p. 256.
138 Ibid.
Schopenhauer’s isolated genius might have endured the reproof of others but the plight of Fry’s artist is less severe, for he inhabits a largely indifferent society where most people are heedless to his predicament and some are sympathetic even. ‘Society would be sensibly more bored’ Fry opines, ‘if the artist died out altogether’. This is the amenable habitat offered by civilised society, where the reproach known to Schopenhauer’s sociopathic victim is unlikely to arise. Here, Fry’s artist may become the object of bourgeois curiosity and even grudging admiration: ‘...a strange species, half idiot, half divine ... equally strange in his outrageous egoism and his superb devotion to an idea’. Hardly the forbidding genius of Schopenhauerian aesthetics, he is a rarefied individualist living out his role on the fringes of respectable society; tolerated at least, maybe even celebrated. While his more conformist acquaintances, the denizens of suburbia perhaps, are perpetually ‘squeezed and moulded and polished...’ by the society they uphold, Fry’s artist is resolutely ‘ineducable’ and ‘irreclaimably individual’. In short, he is the English bohemian, an inversion of his bourgeois counterpart; a fanciful projection of Fry’s liberally-minded, upper-middle-class imagination. Bloomsbury’s entourage of self-consciously outré painters and writers might pale in the presence of Schopenhauer’s forbidding genius, but they pass muster, at least on Fry’s terms, as incorrigible individualists.

It should be appreciated that Fry’s Cézanne narrative, having evolved over some seventeen years, models a compelling prototype for the romantic artist in a technological society.139 Genius, constituted thus, might lend itself to Barr’s systematic methodology of the 1920s and 1930s. In a roundabout way, Bloomsbury’s haute-bohème links nineteenth-century romanticism with Barr’s aesthetically autonomous modern artist. The latter, it transpires, is a vapid abstraction of the historical reality, disengaged as he is from all the troubling disfigurements ascribed to sufficient reason. Barr’s version of the idiom, however, merges easily with Fry’s Schopenhauerian artist, detached from the ‘meanings and implications of appearances’ but ‘passionately’ motivated by forms.140 Just as Schopenhauer’s genius finds a ‘representative of the whole’ in the ‘particular thing’, so too, Fry’s artist finds meaning in unlikely effects: ‘Objects of the most despised periods, or

139 Fry’s first musings on the topic of Cézanne is to be found in the preface to his translation of Maurice Denis’ account, published in two parts by the Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs in 1910. The monograph, Cézanne: A Study of His Development, published in 1927, represents his final word on the artist.
140 Fry, Vision and Design, p. 56.
objects saturated for the ordinary man with the most vulgar and repulsive associations, may be grist to his mill’. In much the same way that Schopenhauer’s genius devises ‘the whole out of the little that comes into his own actual apperception’, so too, Fry’s artist perceives ‘new and intriguing rhythms’ in the most mundane things. In Chapter 10, we will see how, by process of ‘synthesis’, Cézanne elicits the unity that underlies nature’s haphazard forms. Like his modernist successor, he ‘eagerly accepts the most ordinary situation, the arrangements of objects which result from everyday life’ because he is at ease in their presence. The studio is for him a place of sanctuary, as, in later times, it becomes for the Modern Master the locus of creative expression. Though ‘utterly commonplace and insignificant’, Cézanne imbues the clutter of his studio with ‘a kind of dramatic significance’. Fruit dishes, baskets of vegetables and apples spilt on the kitchen table, in Cézanne’s hands, ‘leave upon us the impression of grave events ... They are, so to speak, dramas deprived of all dramatic incident’. They give rise to the ‘grave’, ‘powerful’ and ‘massive emotions’, analogous to tragic, menacing, noble, or lyrical states of mind.

Herein we discover an English antecedent for those ersatz artists who people Barr’s narratives and, indeed, for the Modern Masters themselves as they go about their vocations in the seclusion of ramshackle studios and workshops. They, in turn, lead us back to Carpenter’s version of the Schopenhauerian genius; a mythologised figure oblivious to his surroundings, but who, in this case, draws upon the resources of his own unconscious mind.

**Race consciousness and the unconscious mind**

On our return to Carpenter, it is actually a point of divergence that concerns us for, unlike Schopenhauer’s clear-sighted genius, his contemplative protagonist is conditioned by ‘race consciousness’, a state of mind that anticipates two of modernism’s more profound insights: the primitive aesthetic and the creative resource of the unconscious mind. If the conceptual tools for a theory of the unconscious mind had been available to Schopenhauer, he too might have foreseen a primitive aesthetic. Likewise, the fallacies that beset Carpenter’s argument are all too obvious to us now, but we recognise that his thinking models an intellectual foundation for significant aspects of Anglo-American modernist formalism.

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141 Ibid, p. 53.
142 Ibid.
Platonic ideals, Carpenter argues, such as beauty, truth, justice, and courage, are encoded differently within the collective memories of each race, having been determined according to the Lamarckian principle of adaption to conditions. One is affiliated to one’s race consciousness at birth, he argues. Like other inherited race attributes, both mental and physical, it has been acquired over centuries in response to the environmental conditions. It follows, Carpenter continues, that one’s perception of ideals is subject to the collective principle of race consciousness which, in turn, exerts a powerful influence over artistic vision.

In Anglo-American modernist discourse, such an argument might sustain judgements of ‘authenticity’ and ‘appropriateness’. Moreover, modernist theorists cite the collective memory as a source of artistic imagery, albeit one that, in Carpenter’s nineteenth-century purview, mediates pre-existent Platonic ideas. Should we dispense with Carpenter’s Platonism, however, we come to the unconscious mind itself as the repository of ideas. Race-archetypes aside, Carpenter seems to anticipate the Jungian principle evoked by Abstract Expressionists in the 1940s. Such promising, if misdirected, speculation is echoed by Weber in Essays on Art, where, under the title ‘Quality’, he refers to the place of heredity in the creative process: ‘That which makes for individual art is in a whole people, but it is he who can best reveal and voice that which would otherwise lie dormant in a people who is the artist.’ This comes in the context of the artist’s search for a higher reality: ‘What in nature is hidden, art must reveal and make significant’. The same Schopenhauerian refrain is elaborated in his chapter titled ‘Revelation’ where the artist ‘... addresses himself to nature in deep reverence, in silence and isolation, that he hears response’. ‘Art’, we are reminded, ‘is not mere representation, it is and should be

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144 Carpenter, The Art of Creation. Carpenter argues: ‘In more organic Nature we recognise Life, Sensitiveness, Selfness, Affection; and in our fellow-man ideas of Courage, Justice, Beauty, and so forth. Everywhere in Creation we see ideas working which answer more or less to those within ourselves; and it is this answering of one to the other, of the outer to the inner, which forms the very ground of all Science and Art, and the joy we feel in Truth and Beauty’. Enlarging upon the principle of heredity, he continues: ‘In the language of modern Science, using the term ‘Heredity’ to cover much the same ground as ‘the genius of the race-god’, we should say that while the ideas (say of melody and of flight in the case of birds) are the vivifying impulses of any class of creatures, the particular forms (as of songs and of wings) are a matter of slowly growing heredity and the tradition of the race’, pp. 116 & 107.
145 Ibid, Carpenter observes: ‘But in Race too, as well as in the individual, these ideas are working; and, in fact, it is through the Race largely that they gradually gain their form and expression’, p. 116.
147 Ibid, p.47.
interpretation—revelation’. Its forms release one from life’s troubled condition:
‘Revelation... is a spiritual awakening ...It relieves one of doubt ...It brings breathless joy...’
The form is familiar: we know the rest.

Having discussed the role of the artist in relation to Schopenhauerian aesthetic philosophy, we now proceed to the Anglo-American modernist discourse where we can ascertain how far Schopenhauer anticipates the formalist orthodoxy of the 1930s.

**How Schopenhauer anticipates Anglo-American formalism**

The assertion of an aesthetic orthodoxy by the Museum of Modern Art was hardly a new phenomenon. One is apt to forget that by 1818, when Schopenhauer published the *The World as Will and Idea*, Europe’s academies of art were modelling their practices on the pedagogical orthodoxy of Paris’ Académie des Beaux-Arts. The teaching programme was, in part, predicated on Plato; not the imitative practices which had drawn his condescension, but on the pursuit of ideal form. On one level, Schopenhauer’s own Platonism, amounts to a critique of this methodology, based as it was on the replication of a classical principle of the idea, because his concept of artistic genius derives from the idea of an unmediated vision of the ideal. On another level, though, Schopenhauer’s Platonism offers us, the audience, a supposedly timeless and universal criterion by which to assess the merit of a work of art in relation to nature, the source of its inspiration. The prospect of relying on one’s innate resource might have held a certain attraction for the sympathetic early modernist audience, eager to comprehend the new art but believing themselves ill-qualified to do so.

Schopenhauer presents a means of access, for when the genius ‘lends us his eyes’ through the work of art, we apprehend phenomena and events as representatives of their Platonic species and, seeing them with the clear sightedness of his disinterested vision, we perceive the world in its true and eternal form. One recognises these ideas to be objectifications of the will, albeit imperfectly realised. Schopenhauer prompts us to gauge the authenticity of the artist’s interpretation because we, too, can experience forms on the two levels at which

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148 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*. Schopenhauer’s critique of academic pedagogy is implicit, I suggest, in his discussion of the proper object of Art, for he states: ‘In its powerful originality it is only derived from life itself, from nature, from the world, and that only by the true genius, or by him whose momentary inspiration reaches the point of genius. Genuine and immortal works of art spring only from such direct apprehension’. He continues: ‘... imitators, mannerists, *imitatores, servum pecus*, start, in art, from the concept; they observe what pleases and affects us in true works of art; understand it clearly, fix it in a concept, and thus abstractly, and then imitate it, openly or disguisedly, with dexterity and intentionally’, p. 308.
art operates: the world of impermanent phenomena and the realm of ideas that underpin them. Schopenhauer’s critique of the academies’ preoccupation with idealised forms and technical conventions centres on their failure to recognise art’s sole function, namely, that it should divert one’s perception to the thing in-itself, if only partially realised.

Alluding to the conventional hierarchy of subject genres, Schopenhauer argues that a history painting depicting ministers of state deliberating the fate of nations over a map might seem outwardly to be more significance than a Dutch low-genre painting of boors wrangling over cards or dice in an ale-house, but the ‘inner significance’ of each is comparable. Both, in their different ways, represent the same intrinsic idea of rival parties settling their conflicting interests. It is the ‘inner significance’ of the work of art, Schopenhauer maintains, that matters most. Just as it makes no difference to the inner significance of a chess game whether it is played with gold pieces or wooden ones, so too, he argues, the genius’s prowess in depicting the ‘outer significance’ of the idea—people, places, things and events—is incidental to his vision of the inner meaning of his subject matter. The two levels of signification coexist independently of one another, he explains: ‘They are both completely independent of each other; they may appear together, but they each may appear alone’.

Schopenhauer’s construction resembles Anglo-American modernism’s form and content duality, insofar that it also posits two levels of significance in a painting: form, upon which primary significance is conferred for reasons I will come to; and content, which is assigned a secondary role because it pertains to the contingent world of particularities. Like Schopenhauer’s construction of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ significance residing together in a single work of art, so too, form and content may coexist independently of one another as Fry reasons in his defence of so-called ‘pure art values’ in Transformations of 1926. Here, in reply to I. A. Richards’ contention that form and content ‘cooperate’ in such a way that the work of art is fundamentally no different from any other artefact in ordinary life, Fry cites, as evidence to the contrary, a succession of pictures that demonstrate, to an increasing degree, the independence of form from content. The comparisons culminate in Poussin’s Achilles discovered by Ulysses among the daughters of Lycomedon, which, according to Fry,

\[149\] Ibid, p. 302.
\[150\] Ibid, p. 246.
\[151\] Fry, Transformations, pp. 10 – 21.
conveys only insipid (psychological) content, for all the complexity of its forms. ‘So far’, Fry muses as he describes the painting’s spatial configuration, ‘our interests have been purely plastic. What the picture is about has not even suggested itself. ... But at whatever stage we do this we are not likely to get much for our pains. The delight of the daughters in the trinkets which they are examining is expressed in gestures of such conventional elegance that they remind me of the desolating effect of some early Victorian children’s stories ...’

[Figure 7] These paintings, Fry argues, constitute a body of empirical evidence that two readings can coexist independently of one another, much as Schopenhauer had argued before him in relation to the inner and outer significance of imagery.

The dichotomy we attribute to Anglo-American modernism, between transcendent form and contingent content, can be inferred from Schopenhauer in terms of the way art conceals the thing in-itself, the direct manifestation of the will. If we are to understand its relevance in relation to Anglo-American formalism, we need to address the double-sided relationship Schopenhauer poses between art and the idea, and the idea and the will. With regard to the former, art and the idea, we have seen that the ‘inner significance’ of paintings depicting diplomats and carousing boors concerns imagery that gives form to the idea of conflict. With regard to the latter, the idea and the will, we might reason that the idea of conflict presupposes the presence of the will and that, therefore, the will is encoded—veiled—within the idea of conflict. We should, however, appreciate a secondary dimension to the relation between will and idea; one that is particularly pertinent to Anglo-American tradition. Schopenhauer argues that ideas are mediated through matter, ‘...the common substratum of all particular phenomena of the Ideas’. In this sense, matter links the world of phenomena to the realm of ideas. The point is simpler than it might first seem. In this context, matter is merely the artist’s medium. Schopenhauer goes on to explain that, because each medium—each material—is subject to its own Platonic archetype, it has a will of its own. Again, the point is simpler than it might seem. In the workaday language of artists and craftsmen alike, their medium has ‘a life of its own’. The will of the material opposes the artist’s will and it is therefore resistant to the imposition of his will—another simple truism known to every artist or craftsman who has ever ‘worked’ his medium. It is from this Schopenhauerian observation that we infer a key principle of Anglo-American

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formalism; that is to say, the significance of the medium in itself. It underpins the mystique we ascribe to the work of art because, in Schopenhauerian terms, the material’s will fuses with that of the artist. As we will see in Chapter 7, George Santayana arrives at a similar position in *The Sense of Beauty*. He does so more or less when Carpenter expounds a related idea concerning the unity of the knowing subject and the object of his knowledge. Weber, too, expresses compatible sentiments when he observes: ‘Anything that has been shaped or constructed possesses a part of the life of the maker of that thing. ...For matter is of more worth when it is embodied with the spirit of the maker’. We will return to this Schopenhauerian theme in Chapter 7, in the context of Sheldon Cheney’s critique of Significant Form, and again in Chapter 9, when we examine Fry’s thoughts on the significance of the painted surface. In the meantime, however, we proceed to the implications of a material principle on Anglo-American tradition.

It follows from the reciprocity of the artist and medium construct that the extent to which matter resists the artist’s will, determines the fidelity of the artefact to his idea. The objectification of the will is measured accordingly. Schopenhauer thus posits a hierarchy of the arts according to the integrity with which their materials objectify the will. He cites music at its apex because it is least compromised by material constraint. Architecture, on the other hand, is the most compromised art form since its essence resides in the architect’s success in coaxing his unyielding materials to conform to his idea. Manifested in the ‘base will’ of cohesion, rigidity, hardness, and so on, they tend towards the gravity-induced heap on the ground notwithstanding the contrary ‘will’ of some materials to rigidity. Objectification of the architect’s will is achieved by means of ‘digressions’ enforced on him by his ‘demanding’ materials. To realise his idea, he is obliged to use such gravity-defying devices as columns, arches, and domes. Once completed, the building embodies the thing in-itself only insofar that, as a self-sufficient expediency, it accommodates the impositions of ‘base’ materials—‘those lowest grades of the objectivity of the will’—to the architect’s idea.

At this point, we might consider the Schopenhauerian thesis from the perspective of the early modernist theorists we have discussed. Given the epistemological shift that would have rendered early twentieth-century avant-garde practices unintelligible to Schopenhauer, I suggest that the characteristics he had attributed to each of the arts in turn

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might have seemed to them to be too specific. Why, they might have asked, should one not apply Schopenhauer’s musical or architectural speculations to the art of painting?

Christopher Reed reminds us that Fry did indeed explore this opposition in ‘The Double Nature of Painting’, a lecture delivered in Brussels in 1933 and belated published in 1969. Arguably, however, well before then, Schopenhauer’s architectural motif informed his explanation of Cézanne’s late Bathers series. Vexed by the painter’s departure from nature, Fry supposes that ‘late Cézanne’ devised an ‘architectural’ solution to a pictorial problem, having been thwarted by the resistance of his painterly medium to the complexities of an arrangement of nudes disporting themselves in the landscape. It entailed an artistic contrivance whereby rigid, crystalline forms respond to the ‘material’ problem of ‘plasticity’, as we will see in Chapter 10. Rather than denying the ‘will’ of his medium through technical mastery, as contemporaneous Salonists were apt to do, Cézanne’s rough-hewn technique makes a virtue of his material means. Such an emphasis on the work of art’s facture, the artist’s handling or brushwork, is, I suggest, one of the Schopenhauerian traits that is transmitted to the Anglo-American explanatory tradition. We, as audience, are invited to partake in the artist’s authentic impulse through an appreciation of their presence in the qualities of the paint on the canvas.

We recognise, too, a rationale for modernist orthodoxy’s so-called ‘functional aesthetic’ in Schopenhauer’s architectural theme, insofar that the pleasure one derives from a building reflects our appreciation of the function of its structural components. Schopenhauer states: ‘The form of each part must not be determined arbitrarily, but by its end, and its relation to the whole’. Architecture’s beauty thus resides in the balance and ordering of components in such a way as to realise a harmonious resolution to the building’s conflicting tendencies—or ‘wills’. Functional features such as the frieze, rafters, roof, and dome ‘are entirely determined by their immediate end, and explain themselves from it’. Non-functional embellishments, such as the twisted column, distract from this true source of aesthetic pleasure because they deflect attention away from the primary end of the work of art, which is, of course, the objectification of the will. The Schopenhauerian aesthetic

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thus precludes all elements that are extraneous to the manifestation of the will, art’s *raison d’être*.

By the same token, Schopenhauer confers highest status on the art forms which convey the idea with greatest clarity, and thereby objectify the will at its highest levels. Music stands alone in this respect, as we have seen, but the highest art thereafter is poetry, because the poet’s evocative ‘material’, language, recreates the idea with most precision. By contrast, the plastic arts—conceived, as representational, by Schopenhauer—are hindered by their inarticulacy in the presence of worldly phenomena. However, should we step aside from the immediate logic of Schopenhauer’s argument and, like the early modernists perhaps, ask the question, should the plastic arts renounce the phenomenal world altogether and relinquish their reliance on sensory data, might they then dispense with ideas and so encounter the will directly? This, indeed, is the basis of music’s special standing, for, according to Schopenhauer, it directs one to the will itself without recourse to ideas.\(^{159}\)

The suggestion that other arts might do likewise is hardly original. Walter Pater’s aphorism concerning all arts’ aspiration to the condition of music is well known.\(^{160}\) Carpenter, himself, had contemplated an art of abstraction in *Angels’ Wings*, as early as 1898. In the event, he dismisses Whistler’s speculation that ‘the consummation of painting’ will be reached when ‘there is a public which will make no demand for definite subjects, [and becomes] content with tones and harmonious combinations of colour’; yet he also ponders whether, ‘painting ...can express emotion to some extent directly, like music’.\(^{161}\) In Chapter 5, we will see this Schopenhauerian idea re-emerge in Arthur Jerome Eddy’s explanation of recent abstract art. It is, I suggest, the correlative to his material theme. Taken together, they anticipate Anglo-American formalism’s transcendent form and contingent content duality. The architectural idiom prefigures a new relationship between the modernist artist and his medium, for once the quest for verisimilitude was abandoned, the relation between knowing subject and the object of knowledge changed fundamentally. Technical mastery of the medium, akin to the suppression of the will of the material, is to no

\(^{159}\) Ibid, p. 336


\(^{161}\) Carpenter, *Angels’ Wings*, p. 73.
avail now that Schopenhauer determines that the purpose of art should be the revelation of the ineffable will. The musical form reminds the early modernist audience that the encounter transcends all perceptual phenomena.

**Summary**

The gift of clarity, according to Schopenhauer, is the preserve of the few rather than the many. We recall that civilised men, those with a capacity for abstract thought, may find respite from the rapacious demands of the will when they withdraw to the realm of Platonic ideas. In this state of mind, they are receptive to works of art, the tangible expression of ideas. Assuming that the literate early modernist publics addressed by Carpenter, Fry, and Weber were also capable of abstract thought, they might have emulated the contemplative practice of the genius, a state of mind that permits one to rise above the demands of everyday existence and appreciate art on a transcendent level. As we saw, Schopenhauer’s construction of the contemplative subject confers special recognition on the minority who surpass the rest of us in their dedication to the ideal and who, by dint of superior insight, perform a service to civilised society enlightening us to the higher realities of our existence. I argue that this figure, the Schopenhauerian genius, models the identity of the Anglo-American artist in two ways: firstly, in the visionary role he enacts on the margins of society much as the modern artist who follows in his wake; and, secondly, in the immaterial reward he confers on those who partake of his vision. Herein lies the principle of an institutional practice.

Schopenhauer’s rarefied genius is domesticated by Fry. Rooted in the genteel world of English bohemia, Fry’s construction of the artist is nevertheless endowed with a romantic persona like his austere predecessor when Cézanne is identified by Fry as the quintessential modern painter. The Cézanne myth contributed, I suggest, to a romantic counter-narrative of genius when an emergent institutional practice began to eliminate mystical and metaphysical constructs from its narrative. A reconstructed version of the romantic trope was reconciled with institutional requirements, nevertheless, in the person of the Modern Master, the chief protagonist of modernist historiography. We noted two extensions of this Modern Master myth, namely, the significance accorded to the artist’s medium, and the value ascribed to the unconscious mind as a source of collective experience. Both were
present, if inchoate, in the writing of Carpenter and Weber, each of whom advance their own versions of the genius myth.

An argument can be made, as we have seen, for the Schopenhauerian precedent to Anglo-American formalist orthodoxy. Schopenhauer’s critique of academic pedagogy constitutes a point of departure. It revolves around academicism’s preoccupation with superficial form and artistic technique at the expense of art’s transcendent prerogative. This critique became a familiar refrain among modernist circles as we will see in Chapter 4. It arises from Schopenhauer’s distinction between the work of art’s inner and outer meaning, an insight that prefigures modernism’s form and content duality. Just as it is incidental to a game of chess whether it is played with gold pieces or wooden ones, so too, the inner meaning of a work of art transcends the outer one. Herein, the privilege that formalist aesthetics confers on transcendent form over contingent content is anticipated. This is not to say that materiality is irrelevant, for we recall that the work of art’s capacity to manifest the will relies on both the artist’s subject matter and the medium he has used. Just as the presence of the will is encoded within the idea of the conflicting interests played out by statesmen and ale-house boors alike, so too, it is manifested in the materiality of the artist’s medium because it records the mark imposed by his will. In this respect, Schopenhauer’s hierarchy of the arts might be reconsidered in the light of subsequent developments. He could not have foreseen the innovative forms of modernism which would render his hierarchy obsolete. I argue that Schopenhauer’s illustration of the architect coaxing his resistant materials towards the fulfilment of an idea assumes new and unintended significance in the light of modernism’s renunciation of technical mastery. By the same token, his depiction of the musician drawing us into the presence of the will without recourse to ideas, anticipates an interpretive tradition culminating in non-referential art.

Taken as a whole, the Schopenhauerian hierarchy is predicated on the manifestation of the will and therefore it depreciates all elements that detract from art’s primary purpose, a stricture which, I suggest, anticipates Anglo-American formalism’s predilection for reductive, pared-down forms.

The Anglo-American hypothesis thus finds an aesthetic heritage in a contemplative tradition that was prevalent at the end of the nineteenth-century. Noel Annan tells us that liberal England’s intellectual aristocracy were no connoisseurs of the visual arts. When Bloomsbury and its social peers discovered the aesthetic pleasures of art at the behest of
such figures as G. E. Moore, Schopenhauer’s philosophy of the arts was prevalent among literary and musical circles. Its transcendent aesthetic might well have resonated as they encountered the new art emanating from Paris. It is, indeed, this proposition that we bear in mind as we examine the foundation of an Anglo-American formalist discourse. The arguments begin, portentously enough, on Guy Fawkes Night, Saturday 5th November 1910, when the Grafton Galleries opened its doors to the press.
We need look no further for Schopenhauer’s legacy than so-called ‘Post-Impressionism’, Fry’s catchall term for recent developments in French art. Coined shortly after publication of ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’, it labelled certain loosely-defined qualities among what was, to all intents and purposes, a hurriedly assembled draft of works available to him. Pointedly omitting the Impressionists from his round up, Fry juxtaposed nine paintings by Edouard Manet against others by Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin primarily, but also works by Seurat, Picasso, Matisse, and a number of artists associated with Fauvism. I will argue in this chapter that, for all the arbitrariness of Post-Impressionism’s inception, the term came to represent a peculiarly Anglo-American proposition about art. If, to begin with, it was the practical corollary of Fry’s aesthetic theory, I will show how, once it entered the public domain, Post-Impressionism was reshaped by a critical and theoretical debate dominated in England before the First World War by the Bloomsbury group and its wider entourage. On transmission to America, this English construct was taken up by an Anglo-conformist intelligentsia bypassing, as it did so, a pre-existent modernist discourse centred on New York’s bohemian quarter. In the next chapter, I will explain how certain socially-progressive principles embedded within the Post-Impressionist construct were reconfigured to America’s progressivist discourse and thereby secured its place within an Anglo-conformist narrative of modern art. I will go on to demonstrate how it informed American accounts of modernist art during the 1920s before its eventual assimilation to the formalist orthodoxy of the 1930s.

Desmond MacCarthy, the exhibition secretary of Manet and the Post-Impressionists, recollected the tenuous circumstances surrounding the event’s inception in the transcript of

162 Roger Fry, ‘The Post-Impressionists - 2’, Nation, Vol. 3, (3rd December 1910), pp. 402 & 403, in J. B. Bullen (ed.), The Post-Impressionists in England, (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 129 – 134. Fry later confessed that the works in the exhibition were inadequate to exemplify the movement. He states: ‘And first let me admit ... that the collection is far from being perfect as an expression of this movement in art’. He went on to acknowledge the deficiency particularly in relation to Matisse and Picasso and to explain the practical difficulties in obtaining works, (p. 129).
a broadcast titled ‘The Art-Quake of 1910’. He confided that the exhibition had been intended merely as a stop-gap to fill a space in the Grafton’s end-of-season programme. Fry’s scope had been curtailed by the commercial machinations of the Parisian dealers on whom he relied. Gruetzner Robins cites Huntley Carter’s aside in a review of the 1911 Salon des Indépendants for the New Age, that ‘the bad and indifferent and ancient things’ in the Grafton Galleries had been the standing joke of Paris. The quality of the works listed, she adds, creates an impression to the contrary. Having assembled them, Fry had had difficulty devising a title that would adequately encompass their diversity because, although ‘expressionism’, his preferred term, might have underscored the differences he sought to emphasise between these paintings and the Impressionist ones that preceded them, the suggestion was turned down by the exhibition’s publicist. ‘Post-Impressionism’, a weak and somewhat nebulous alternative, passed muster because, as MacCarthy recalls, ‘at any rate [they]… came after the Impressionists’.

Vacuous as the designation may have been, Post-Impressionism assumed an air of validity when Fry, together with his supporters, defended the exhibition against hostile criticism in the press. Thus, somehow and at some point between the press launch on 5th November 1910 and exhibition’s closure on 15th January 1911, the ill-defined stylistic tendencies ascribed to Post-Impressionism coalesced into the semblance of a coherent movement in the minds of an English public, and Post-Impressionism thereby accrued the trappings of a modernist practice. The exhibition’s successor, The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in 1912 featured English, Russian, and French ‘Post-Impressionists’, each group exemplifying national traits. The discursive origins of this reification can be traced to the moment when Fry consigned his brainchild to the public domain.

A retrogressive movement

*Manet and the Post-Impressionists* occasioned the English-speaking world’s first *en masse* encounter with French avant-garde practice. Such scant information as there was seemed to corroborate Fry’s Post-Impressionist thesis. The most immediate source, MacCarthy’s catalogue, had been written from notes supplied by Fry in the first place. Beyond that, as Bullen reminds us, critics and journalists tended to consult two principle sources, both of which Fry knew intimately. One was Julius Meier-Graefe’s double volume on stylistic innovations in French painting, *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*. The other was Maurice Denis’ essay on Cézanne which had been translated by Fry himself and published in two instalments in the *Burlington* at the beginning of 1910.

Meier-Graefe’s account of recent developments in continental European art had itself informed Post-Impressionism’s art historical concept. Although his ‘moderns’ are not entirely congruent with Fry’s ‘Post-Impressionists’, the premise of their innovation is not dissimilar, for he cites as his protagonists Toulouse Lautrec, Vuillard, Bonnard, Denis, Munch, Beardsley and other artists who had ‘struggled for style’ during the 1890s in the wake of Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin. The context for change is also similar. Meier-Graefe presents recent innovation predominantly in terms of nineteenth century French tradition and, more specifically, the reaction against the modest achievements of the Impressionists. He refers to Cézanne and Van Gogh as ‘expressionists’, so as to emphasise the subjective qualities that differentiate their work from that of the Impressionists. Fry, too, had favoured the term, and for the same reason, although, as we know, his use of it for the title of the exhibition had been overruled. Furthermore, Meier-Graefe anticipates the status Fry ascribes to Manet as a leading light among the younger artists. According to him, Manet ‘set forth the general programme’. The new art, he explains, ‘was to be decoration

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168 Meier-Graefe, *Modern Art*, Vol. I. Although a supporter of Impressionism, Meier-Graefe had been less than fulsome in his praise of it. He states: ‘The Impressionists have given us back normal vision. It is not their genius so much as their healthiness that raises them above the abstract significance of every purely artistic activity of our times’. Impressionism was, he continues, ‘...but moderately endowed with nobility of feeling and moral sense’, p. 305.
pure and simple’. Fry, likewise, argues, through MacCarthy’s preface, that Manet’s frontal lighting led to a ‘simplification of planes’ akin to ‘simple linear designs’ and ‘hitherto unknown oppositions of colour’. Both observe the significance of these decorative qualities on Manet’s shallow picture space and simplification of form in which it results.

Much as Meier-Graefe bequeathed an art historical schema to Fry, so too, as Richard Shiff has demonstrated, Denis furnished a contemporary context for the contemplative genius. In his identification of Cézanne with ‘Synthetism’, a style allied to ‘Symbolism’, the twentieth-century flowering of romanticism in literature and the arts, Shiff explains that Denis was informed by an innovative field of enquiry into the physiology of perception and the relationship between mind and matter, subject and object. He notes the bearing of Schopenhauer’s axiom, ‘the world is my representation’, on empirical (proto-psychological) enquiry in this field. Variousely described as ‘physiology psychique’, ‘psychophysiologie’, and ‘psychophysique’, such explorations problematised the distinction between subjective and objective truth. Denis’s theoretical sources were complex and multifarious. The philosopher, Émile Littré, for example, in ‘De Quelques Points de Physiologie Psychique’ of 1860, argued that the impression in itself constitutes an elemental experience which engenders the distinction between subject and object; and the critic, Hippolyte Taine, in De L’Intelligence of 1880, conflates the notion of subject and object in the concept of conscious experience since it arises from these two mutually dependent manifestations of reality.

Writing in 1874, the philosopher, Charles Lévêque, maintained that Schopenhauer implied

170 See Desmond MacCarthy, ‘The Post-Impressionists’, in Bullen, Post-Impressionists in England, pp. 94 – 99. MacCarthy observes: ‘Instead of accepting the convention of light and shade falling upon objects from the side, he chose what seemed an impossibly difficult method of painting, that of representing them with light falling full upon them. This led to a very great change in the method of modelling, and to simplification of planes in the pictures which resulted in something closely akin to simple linear designs’, (p. 97); Meier-Graefe states: ‘... Manet’s doctrine was the recognition of painting as flat decoration; the ruthless suppression of all those elements used by the old masters to seduce the eye by plastic illusion; and the deliberate insistence on all the pictorial elements in their stead’, p. 264.
172 For an elaboration of the links between Symbolism and the romantic tradition see Frank Kermode, Romantic Image, (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1957); Richard Shiff, Cézanne and the End of Impressionism, pp. 27 & 28.
173 Shiff, Cézanne and the End of Impressionism, p. 27
174 Ibid., p.26
the inseparability of the objective world from the perceiving mind and therefore, to discover
a more fundamental reality, one had to abandon the distinction between the knowing
subject and the object of knowledge, and to seek instead the ‘most immediate perception’,
a moment when subject and object fuse, and a union between the individual and the
universal is realised. In ‘L’impressionisme’ of 1883, Jules Laforgue, an admirer of
Schopenhauer, identified these moments with genius. Denis, himself, in his ‘Préface de la IX
Exposition des Peintres Impressionistes et Symbolistes’ of 1895, would consider the ensuing
synthesis of subject and object to be the ideal condition of art.

According to Denis, Synthetism was not a mystical movement to begin with, having
been pioneered by painters of still life and landscape. However, it assumes a
correspondence between external forms and subjective states and, it is in this respect, as a
style which addresses one’s subjective encounter with temporal phenomena, that Fry’s
romanticism is realised. Cézanne’s ‘synthesis’, as Denis calls it, is manifested in the
repainted surfaces, scored away with the palette knife, the *pentimenti* revealing former
revisions, and the *impasto* attesting to the reconciliation between a ‘struggle for style’ and a
‘passion for nature’. Denis characterises ‘synthesis’ as the ‘eternal struggle of the saint and
the genius’. It is an ‘eternal struggle’ envisaged within a modern context though, for Denis
tells us that Cézanne is as ‘complex as his epoch’; he resolves his conflicts through this
method. The image was not lost on Fry, we might suppose, as he too emphasised the
modernity of this new tendency in French painting in the preface to his translation, and
suggested that it reflects a new state of consciousness.

So it is that ‘synthesism’, a term applied by ‘learned criticism’ to the artists
represented in *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, came to express ‘a quality underlying
their diversity’. According to MacCarthy, indebted to Fry’s notes, it accounted for the Post-
Impressionists’ repudiation of verisimilitude. Tilting at academicism, he avers that it is only

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179 Fry (trans.), Cézanne – I. Fry states: Anyone who has had the opportunity of observing modern French art
cannot fail to be struck by the new tendencies that have become manifest in the last few years. A new
ambition, a new conception of the purpose and methods of painting, are gradually emerging; a new hope too,
and a new courage to attempt in painting that direct expression of imagined states of consciousness which has
for long been relegated to music and poetry, p. 207.
in the nineteenth-century that the ‘close imitation of nature’ has been proclaimed as a ‘dogma’. Impressionists, too, are chided because their preoccupation with ‘the appearance of things’ hindered them from conveying their ‘real significance’. ‘The “treeness” of the tree was not rendered at all’.\(^{180}\) We recognise, perhaps, the Schopenhauerianism at play in MacCarthy’s account, as the Post-Impressionists, by contrast, are applauded for seeking the essence of the motif – the thing in-itself, we presume. As a one-time member of the Cambridge Apostles, he too was party to their Kantian argot.\(^{181}\) Thus, in MacCarthy’s vivid prose, the disconcerting simplifications shock those of us who do not recall that ‘…a good rocking horse often had more of the true horse about it than an instantaneous photograph of a Derby winner’.\(^{182}\) Cézanne is extolled for guiding younger artists out of the ‘cul de sac’ into which naturalism had led them.\(^{183}\) He does so, as Denis had earlier explained, through the process of simplification. It had led Van Gogh to search nature for ‘every object …which made [the scene] appeal strangely to him’.\(^{184}\) MacCarthy, it would seem, attributes the genius’ capacity for disinterested contemplation to Van Gogh. Gauguin, on the other hand, brings modern painting back to the ‘characteristic of primitive art’ through his extreme simplifications, a construction that calls to mind Denis’ notion of primitivism. The savant Puvis de Chauvanne, in his thrall to facture, falls into the academic error of opposing ‘nature’ to ‘style’, unlike the gauche Cézanne, or Gauguin in his savagery, who chance upon the image they ‘find’ in their search for nature’s primordial impression.\(^{185}\) Matisse, the only other artist mentioned in the preface, pushes ‘their ideas further and further’.\(^{186}\) His own ‘search’ for harmonies of line and rhythm might deprive the figure of its natural appearance, and even augur a return to barbaric art, but ‘there comes a point’ MacCarthy urges us, his

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\(^{180}\) Desmond MacCarthy, ‘Kant and Post-Impressionism’, *Eye Witness*, (10\(^{th}\) October, 1912), in Bullen, *Post-Impressionists in England*, pp. 374 – 377. MacCarthy suggests that Fry’s recourse to Kant was a matter of expediency. ‘Posterity’, he observes, ‘rates Kant a great deal higher as a philosopher than it does Schopenhauer’. He continues, ‘But for all that, Schopenhauer’s theories have had much more influence upon artists, poets, and musicians, insofar as they have attempted to formulate aesthetic theories of their own’. He adds: ‘...The interesting thing is that Mr. Fry, wishing to prepare the public for what they will see, and to state the aesthetic case for these painters, falls back on Kant’s definition of the proper object of aesthetic emotion’, (pp. 374 & 375).


\(^{182}\) Ibid, p. 97.

\(^{183}\) Ibid, p. 98.

\(^{184}\) Ibid, p. 98.

\(^{185}\) Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Post-Impressionism*, pp. 164 & 165

readers, ‘when the accumulations of an increasing skill in mere representation begin to
destroy the expressiveness of the design’.187

Having reminded his readers that the Impressionists had overcome their detractors,
MacCarthy concludes with a warning. The ‘movement’, he declares, had spread beyond
France to Germany, Belgium, Russia, Holland, and Sweden. Now it counted the English-
speaking peoples among its adherents – ‘Americans, Englishmen, and Scotchmen’.188 The
intimation is clear: while for now the conformist might secure the specious acclaim of ‘a
large section of the public’, the visionary grows uneasy. Renouncing acclaim and contending
with his own self-consciousness, he begins to aim at ‘synthesis’ in design, which is to say
that he ‘rebels’ against nature, the ‘mistress of the masters’.189 It is at this ‘retrogressive’
moment that the Post-Impressionist painter, a recognisably Schopenhauerian figure, is
pitted against the Establishment of the day.

Anglo-American dissemination

When, on Saturday 5th November, the Grafton Galleries opened its doors to the press, Fry
effectively relinquished control over Post-Impressionism. Coverage was prolific. At least
forty English publications passed comment during the exhibition and in its immediate
aftermath.190 To begin with, English reaction, as S. K. Tillyard shows us, divided along party
lines; conservative publications were broadly hostile while liberal one tended to be
sympathetic.191 The former had indeed been quick to portray Post-Impressionism as an
attack upon the hard-won values of civilisation. Robert Ross, the art critic of the Morning
Post, for example, apprised visitors to Manet and the Post-Impressionists, on the day that it
opened to the public, of a ‘widespread plot to destroy the whole fabric of European
painting’.192 Other conservative critics elaborated similar warnings.193

188 Ibid.
191 Ibid.
American reaction took its cue from English opinion was at its most polarised during the first month or so when reporting was at its most intense. However, if the prospect of impending barbarism alarmed conservative London, New York, home to the huddled masses, failed to register the threat. Domestic commentators, suspecting overstatement, were generally dismissive of the apocalyptic language. Royal Cortissoz, the New York Daily Tribune’s art critic, is a case in point. His reaction was not untypical when he allayed readers’ concerns about London’s ‘teacup tempest’. He merely took Fry to task for affording the painter ‘too broad a license’. Critical inconsistencies among Fry’s supporters leant weight to American scepticism. His colleague at the Burlington and a member of the exhibition’s organising committee, C. J. Holmes, emphasised, in his short book, Notes on the Post-Impressionist Painters, published in December 1910, the value of Post-Impressionist works of art both individually as experiments and collectively as a manifestation of the kind of iconoclastic process that was necessary from time to time to revitalise the visual arts. In diverting attention from Fry’s wider cultural thesis, Holmes exacerbated American confusion. Heedless of England’s ‘old world’ sensibilities, his explanation seemed eminently sensible to some Americans. John Quinn, for example, later to be legal advisor to the Armory Show, had read the book by April 1911 and had been sufficiently impressed to forward copies to the Sun journalists, James Gibbons Huneker and Frederick James Gregg. Gregg, who would later write the foreword to the Armory Show catalogue, described Holmes’ book as ‘sane and to the point’.

Inevitably, the version of Post-Impressionism that entered the American cultural conversation over the succeeding months was somewhat ambiguous as we gather from an article published in the New York Times by James Huneker in 1912. Appearing in November, just as The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition opened in London, his piece casts light on Post-Impressionism’s problematic status in American debate shortly before the Armory Show changed the cultural landscape. Describing that year’s Salon d’Automne in
Paris, Huneker recounts that, ‘... a week ago I attended the tenth exhibition of all these young and mature Independents. Cubists, Futurists, Post-Impressionists, and other wild animals from the remotest jungles of Darkest Art.’ Listed alongside other more authentic specimens of ‘Darkest Art’, Post-Impressionism is accorded the same status as Cubism and Futurism even though Huneker, a sophisticated critic with first-hand experience of the European avant-garde, was well aware of its fictive provenance, for he recollects: ‘... so-called Post-Impressionists – unhappy title! – scandalised and amused all London’.199

**Bloomsbury’s cause**

As Christopher Reed observes, Fry clearly identified mainstream opinions about art as the ideology of a ruling class he was anxious to challenge.200 To this end, Post-Impressionism served to enact a rapprochement between the conflicting ideals of bohemianism and middle-class culture. Such an unlikely alliance is played out in a tableau conjured by Desmond MacCarthy for the *Eye Witness* in an article titled ‘Kant and Post-Impressionism’.201 Published, like Huneker’s article, during the first week of *The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, MacCarthy recollects the bewilderment of his visitors at the first Post-Impressionist exhibition some two years earlier. “But why, why, WHY,” shouts the exasperated spectator, “do they falsify or simplify the forms till they are absolutely unrecognisable ...” at which point, Mr. Fry and Mr. Bell come to the rescue. MacCarthy imagines their reply: ‘Before you dash your umbrella through that canvas, answer me one question, what quality is it in a picture or statue that ought to give you pleasure?’ The indignant spectator is then coaxed to his aesthetic enlightenment. No longer for him the sentimentality of Sir Luke Fildes’ painting, *The Doctor*, because the aesthetic merit of a picture does not depend on the moving ideas it evokes.202 [Figure 8] The ‘sly’ suggestion,

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199 Ibid.
202 Ibid. MacCarthy used Fildes’ painting to explain the idea of free, or disinterested, beauty. He imagines the condescending explanation offered by Fry and Bell when called upon to reason with a disgruntled viewer: ‘You know you despise as sentimental and deplorably un-aesthetic those people who enjoy a picture because the subject interests them; who admire, say, Sir Luke Fildes’ picture of *The Doctor*, because they feel sorry for the poor parents, and the doctor looks a kind man who will sit by the little one’s side all night till the crisis is past. You despise such people’s opinions of art, don’t you? You are sure that the aesthetic merit of a picture does not depend principally on the moving ideas which its subject is capable of calling up—in fact, that its aesthetic merit is independent of those ideas?’ p. 375
one that reconciles this honest bourgeois with Bloomsbury’s party line, is that he misses the quality of representation so much because he is preoccupied with the wrong thing: namely, the ideas conveyed through representation rather than the ‘actual plastic beauty’ of lines, masses, and colours. The less a picture imitates natural forms the more likely we are to derive purely aesthetic pleasure from it. We twig the self-parody in MacCarthy’s anecdote, as he confesses his own disappointment that there is so little ‘secondary’ beauty to alleviate the ‘free or disinterested’ beauty—the Kantian beauty—so evident among Fry’s ‘classic’ French paintings. MacCarthy’s complaint is identical to that of the honest bourgeois but, unlike him, he realises that, for all the aesthetic emotion ‘classic’ French paintings arouse, he still craves the ‘secondary’ beauty bound up in the idea of ‘human qualities’. Post-Impressionism is becoming too austere for him.

There is a social point to the vignette. Notwithstanding the avuncular manner, one’s reading of Fry should be guarded. His personality, according to Leonard Woolf, was ‘more full of contradictions even than that of most human beings’. An uncompromising sense of public duty and responsibility was offset by a surprisingly ruthlessness streak. Therefore, when, on looking back on events, Fry professed himself perplexed by the hostility of the ‘cultured public’ in the aftermath of Manet and the Post-Impressionists and surmised that it was motivated by self-regard, we need not necessarily take him at his word. In ‘Retrospect’, the final chapter of Vision and Design, published in 1920, he observes: ‘... to speak glibly of Tang and Ming, of Amico di Sandro and Baldovinetti, gave them a social standing and a distinctive cachet’. He continues: ‘It was felt that one could only appreciate Amico di Sandro when one had acquired a considerable mass of erudition and given a great deal of time and attention, but to admire a Matisse required only a certain sensibility’. Then, barbing the point, he adds: ‘One could feel fairly sure that one's maid could not rival one in the former case, but might by sheer haphazard gift of Providence surpass one in the second’.

On reflection, to oppose the ‘social standing’ and ‘erudition’ of a ‘cultured public’ with the immediacy of instinctual genius might seem to be a shrewd stratagem. Consider the reckoning: how would late-Victorian subject-painting and its pale twentieth-century patrimony fare against the challenge of the romantic genius? Is this figure compatible with

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204 Fry, Vision and Design, p. 291.
middle-class ideals? Might certain parallels be sustained between the humdrum realities of middle-class individualism and the altogether more heroic individualism of this other-worldly figure? In short, could the romantic ideal be reconciled with the middle-class imagination? I will argue that, to some degree, Post-Impressionism met certain ideological aspirations of the English middle-classes.

Bloomsbury, Raymond Williams reminds us, was not without its social conscience. Hence Fry’s point about the maid. Indeed, the group identified with the working classes as a matter of moral obligation. Williams goes on to argue, however, that Bloomsbury also modelled an ideal of civilised individualism that shaped middle-class ideology after the First World War. In this sense, it held sway over middle-class cultural sensibilities despite its avowed disdain for middle-class values. As we noted earlier, Kenneth Clarke famously accredited Fry with the single-handed transformation of English taste; that is to say, the taste of the English suburban middle-classes, as we gather on further reading:

A large, confused section of the public, dimly desiring to appreciate works of art, had begun to prefer coloured reproductions of Cézanne and Van Gogh to the meagre, respectable etchings which had furnished houses of a preceding generation.

When aesthetically-conservative Anglophone publics, on either side of the Atlantic, encountered avant-garde works of art from continental European, the moment was experienced in terms of Post-Impressionism, a construct that determines both the meaning the new art and the terms of its reception. Thus, on first sight of a Cézanne, MacCarthy’s honest bourgeois, whether he be an Englishman or an American, need not have been perplexed by the paucity of its subject matter. Post-Impressionism informed him that subject matter is beside the point in a work of art. If, instead, he should approach it with a little reverence, and contemplate the painting’s forms, he might find within them a source of repose. Moreover, Post-Impressionism seemed to promise that, in so doing, he might partake in the spiritual affairs of modern times.

We speculate again. By linking recent innovation in contemporary art with the tradition of the Old Masters and, indeed, with that of their ‘primitive’ Italian forebears, Fry lays claim to one of the mainstays of European civilisation; and he does so on the basis of

206 Clark, Last Lectures, p. ix.
‘sensibility’ alone.\textsuperscript{207} The provocation to vested interest is self-evident and the response, inevitable.\textsuperscript{208} I suggest that Fry’s construction of Post-Impressionism serves partly to discredit the interests of the ‘cultured public’, and partly to promote a rival proposition about art.

Williams argues that Bloomsbury, together with the class sector from which it broke, effected a transformation—he uses the word ‘mutation’—among the English ruling classes. In the light of his cultural-materialist critique, Post-Impressionism might signify as one among many socially-hegemonic processes that secured middle-class allegiance to a reformed ruling elite proclaiming itself capable and enlightened. This narrative posits a link between Bloomsbury and the middle-classes who appear to have subscribed the idea of ‘Post-Impressionism’.

\textbf{Post-Impressionism salvaged}

We might then reconsider the case for Post-Impressionism. In 1980, Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock made the case for jettisoning the ‘Post-Impressionist’ label forthwith, highlighting the historical inconsistencies it harboured.\textsuperscript{209} Convincing as their argument then was, the more recent internationalist perspective awakens us to the construct’s historical place within an Anglo-American discourse where it retains value in elucidating the complex transactions in early-twentieth-century modernist debate. That is to say one in which ‘Post-Impressionism’ might represent a discursive entity shaped through the processes of cultural argument. It serves a purpose now, if only to designate a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[207] See Roger Fry, ‘The Grafton Gallery – I’, \emph{Nation}, 19\textsuperscript{th} November 1910 in Bullen, \emph{Post-Impressionists in England}, pp. 120 – 124. Writing for the \emph{Nation} two weeks after \emph{Manet and the Post-Impressionists} had opened, Fry emphasises the formal superiority of Raphael’s predecessors: ‘... I believe that it is not difficult to show that the group of painters whose work is on show at the Grafton Gallery are in reality the most traditional of any group of artists. That they are in revolt against the photographic vision of the nineteenth-century, and even against the tempered realism of the last four hundred years, I freely admit. They represent indeed, the latest, and, I believe, the most successful, attempt to go behind the too elaborate pictorial apparatus which the Renaissance established in painting. In short, they are true pre-Raphaelites’, (pp. 120 – 121).
\item[208] Dunlop, \emph{The Shock of the New}. Writing to Goldsworthy Dickinson on concluding his selection of paintings in Paris, Fry revealed that he was aware how provocative the exhibition would be. He states: ‘The show will be a great affair. I am preparing for a huge campaign of outraged British Philistinism’, p. 135.
\end{footnotes}
contested body of art historical literature that was particularly influential in the Anglophone world.

In so far that Bloomsbury’s version of Post-Impressionism can be differentiated, we differentiate it from its Anglo-American heir. In this context, I think that we can salvage such legitimacy as is left to ‘Post-Impressionism’ after the revisionist critique of the early 1980s all but scuppered its art historical viability. Scant as its structural remnants may seem, a version of ‘Post-Impressionism’ is worth saving because it serves to highlight the presence of Bloomsbury in the Anglo-American modernist discourse. Contrary to Orton and Pollock, I propose that the Post-Impressionist label retains value on two counts: firstly, because Post-Impressionism denotes the vehicle for Bloomsbury’s formalist aesthetics; and secondly, because its discursive fortunes are relevant to an internationalist historiography. Thus defined, ‘Post-Impressionism’ stands for a coherent proposition about art that was transmitted from England to America.

**Summary**

*Manet and the Post-Impressionists* confronted the English public with recent developments in French art. Writing the catalogue preface from notes provided by Fry, Desmond MacCarthy, the exhibition secretary, presented so-called ‘Post-Impressionism’ as a retrogressive movement which had spread across Europe and now counted ‘Americans, Englishmen, and Scotchmen’ among its adherents. Suggesting that its distinctive qualities, manifested in two stylistic tendencies, ‘synthesism’ and ‘primitivism’, were indicative of a new sensibility, MacCarthy created the impression that the ‘New Movement’ was symptomatic of wider cultural change.

Fry’s Schopenhauerian aesthetic thus entered English cultural discourse on the strength of certain ill-defined stylistic tendencies attributed to recent practices among the French avant-garde. The supposed movement’s leading protagonists, Manet, Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, had been cited recently as pioneers of a formally innovative tradition in French nineteenth-century painting by Julius Meier-Graefe in *Modern Art*. Fry assigned similar roles to each of them but, drawing upon the romantic imagery Maurice Denis had used in his recent account of the life of Cézanne, he generalised the painter’s
attributes in relation to the practices of the late-nineteenth-century French avant-garde as a whole and thereby endowed ‘Post-Impressionism’ with an air of romantic authenticity. As we noted, the construct yielded its own reified practice. The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition featured the work of English, Russian, and French ‘groups’ of Post-Impressionists.

I have argued that Post-Impressionism’s romantic construction represented a challenge to certain interests vested in established practices including art historical scholarship. The exhibition provoked immediate protest from conservative critics which, in turn, drew rebuttals from Fry’s liberally-minded supporters. American press coverage of Manet and the Post-Impressionists was at its most intense during the first month of the exhibition when English debate was at its most polarised. Misunderstanding the nuance and sceptical of the claims, American commentators tended to frame their discussion in terms of stylistic innovation alone, a misapprehension reinforced by C. J. Holmes’ account, Notes on the Post-Impressionist Painters.

Looking back on events, some ten years later, Fry surmised that the hostility of a ‘cultured public’ in England was motivated by self-regard. Linking Post-Impressionism with the art of Amico di Sandro, Baldovinetti, and the Old Masters in ‘Retrospect’ the final chapter of Vision and Design, we see that the animosities provoked by Post-Impressionism correspond to a disjunction within the ruling classes as an emergent social elite began to assert its cultural presence before the First World War. I suggested that the acculturation of Post-Impressionism was largely indebted to the literary idiom of the press, for somehow, Fry’s Schopenhauerian theory was transcribed to the language of art criticism and, then, by way of reportage and editorial, to informed opinion. Such was its polemical significance that the art critical position merged with the group’s social critique. The debates provoked by Manet and the Post-Impressionists therefore amounted to something more than taste alone: they reflected the cultural values at stake during a social transition which lead to the transformation of English middle-class cultural life after the First World War. In this climate, certain qualities identified with French avant-garde art coalesced into the characteristics of a cultural movement. A reified Post-Impressionist style of painting together with its supporting critical practice followed suit. Given Post-Impressionism’s problematic historical construction, I propose that we might usefully salvage the term in the context of an Anglo-American cultural discourse. ‘Post-Impressionism’ might thus retain value by denoting Bloomsbury’s contribution to an Anglo-American formalist historiography. We now examine
the transmission of Post-Impressionism, thus defined, to progressivist America where, I argue, it was assimilated to an American literature of modernist art.
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Talk of ‘Post-Impressionism’

Whatever else ‘progressivism’ might denote, the groups, individuals, and activities assembled under its rubric speak of America’s emergence as a modern state between 1890 and 1920. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the Post-Impressionist concept entered an American modernist narrative by tracing its adaption to the principles of progressivism through a series of accounts published before America entered the First World War in April 1917. I will conclude the chapter with an assessment of its assimilation to the Museum of Modern Art’s institutional narrative, signalled as it was by the inaugural exhibition in November 1929, *Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh*. The intervening decade, the 1920s, will be addressed later in relation to Clive Bell’s interpretation of Post-Impressionism and the influence it exerted on a middle-brow discourse of form. It is Post-Impressionism’s foothold in American cultural debate that we examine first.

Indeed, its reception was conditioned, I suggest, by the progressivist assumptions of a self-consciously modern professional middle-class which may or may not have cared about the primacy of aesthetic form, but which was swayed by intelligible explanations of modernity in the cultural sphere. We might assume that the press was pivotal in its acculturation given the conventions of editorial line whereby self-selecting readerships encounter the unfamiliar on reassuringly familiar terms. In an Anglo-conformist press that reported on English cultural affairs, it was generally the arts, and, to a lesser extent, the society correspondents who marshalled the facts and aligned them with their readers’ cultural allegiances, having divested Post-Impressionism of Bloomsbury’s cultural polemicism, and, to varying degrees, reconfigured it to their readers’ cultural sympathies. As I will argue, an Anglo-American version of Post-Impressionism thereby came to reconcile America’s professional middle-classes with an expurgated interpretation of European avant-garde art. The expedient held good until the *Armory Show* served to correct some of its more salient anomalies.

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We begin by examining a divergence of art critical opinion as American commentators grappled with conflicting English accounts of Post-Impressionism in the aftermath of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*. The ambivalence of some, I suggest, was reinforced by two English accounts, C. J. Holmes aforementioned *Notes on the Post-Impressionist Painters* and Charles Lewis Hind’s *The Post-Impressionists*, which diverted attention from Bloomsbury’s cultural thesis and thereby lent weight to a lesser claim concerning stylistic innovations analogous to technical innovations in other spheres of modern practice. We then turn to three American accounts of Post-Impressionism in books published after the *Armory Show*, each of which is shown to align the movement with progressivist values of one sort or another. They are Henry Rankin Poore’s *The New Tendency in Modern Art*, Arthur Jerome Eddy’s *Cubists and Post-Impressionists*, and Willard Huntington Wright’s *Modern Painting*. We will conclude with an appraisal of Post-Impressionism’s methodological legacy to the Museum of Modern Art.

**Support and ambivalence**

Art historical re-evaluation of the *Armory Show* had, according to the American academic, Carol Nathanson, writing in 1985, eclipsed the impact made by London’s first Post-Impressionist exhibition in the American press. In redressing the neglect of Alfred Stieglitz and his circle, she argues that scholarship had failed to register the significance of calls in the press for an ‘American Post-Impressionist show’. It might be added that the press had been curiously contrary in its coverage: captivated, on the one hand, by modern art at the Grafton Galleries in Mayfair, London: circumspect, on the other, towards modern art at the 291 Galleries in Greenwich Village, New York. Of course, the 291’s small size might have mitigated against its impact, as Barbara Haskell suggests but then, as Casey Nelson Blake observes elsewhere, the ‘[Greenwich] Villagers saw plenty of art there … and the new

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art from Europe especially provoked heated discussions’. In any case, by 1910, when reviews of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* began to appear in the American press, Stieglitz had established a reputation as one of the nation’s leading authorities on modernist art. While the Grafton Galleries exhibited so-called ‘Post-Impressionists’, his 291 Galleries exhibited the American Cubist painter, Max Weber. Moreover, they had recently shown lithographs by Manet, Renoir, and Toulouse Lautrec, watercolours by Cézanne, drawings by Matisse and Rodin, and both drawings and paintings by Rousseau. Yet, it seemed to Stieglitz that it was ‘Post-Impressionism’, the cultural import from England, which had captured the American imagination. Interviewed in December 1911 by Baldwin Macy, on behalf of the *Chicago Evening Post*, he complains: ‘... all this talk of “post-impressionism” ... has come about within the last year. And now people talk of it and critics write of it who have seen nothing at all’.

Blake tells us that New York’s immigrant population, many living in the vicinity of Greenwich Village, became the objects of fascination for middle-class intellectuals. Referring to Randolph Bourne’s noted essay of 1916, ‘Trans-National America’, he draws together a cast of internationally-minded protagonists who, between them, account for such inconsonant contributions to the discourse as the Yiddish theatre on the Lower East Side and the *Armory Show* itself. While it is feasible, perhaps, on one level to juxtapose the ‘stammering artists, intellectuals, and political activists’ assembled in Mabel Dodge’s sitting room with the *Armory Show’s* socially-astute organising committee, as representatives of a trans-national ‘conversational community’, it stretches credulity to suppose them equal participants in discourse. At least, that is one conclusion one might draw from Horace Kallen’s observation about cultural identity among America’s émigré communities and the stratifications both within and between them. If we accept Kallen’s analysis, ‘Anglo-conformity’ represented America’s core cultural identity when he published ‘Democracy Versus the Melting Pot’ in 1915. The bohemianism of Stieglitz and his circle might, we suppose, coexist uneasily alongside a mainstream Anglo-conformist society not only...

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because the group cultivated a self-consciously outré social identity, but also because it comprised a preponderance of naturalised or first-generation Americans. Stieglitz, himself, we recall, was a first generation American of German descent. Standing aloof from mainstream society, we note the sense of estrangement as he tells Macy about enquiries he had received from other American institutions:

It is interesting to reflect that in the last few months I’ve received over one hundred letters from art institutions all over the country asking about the Matisse and other exhibits and the possibility of arranging others for them of what they with the rest of the world are calling post-impressionism.218

The phrase, ‘... they with the rest of the world’ speaks of his sentiment towards institutional America and the society that would accommodate Post-Impressionism. We might suppose, by extension, that various broadly-defined cultural alignments played a significant role in America’s reception of Post-Impressionism. Whilst contributors to Camera Work, the Photo-Secession Galleries’ publication, affected to ignore Post-Impressionism, the term was, for a while, more or less synonymous in with modernist art per se in America’s Anglo-conformist press.219 Its arts correspondents referred their readers, without irony, to Max Weber’s show at the 291 Galleries. Royal Cortissoz, for example, encouraged ‘inquisitive souls’, who were wondering what all the ‘fuss’ was about at the Grafton Galleries, to visit the Weber exhibition.220 A sympathetic review of Weber by Byron Stephenson for the New York Evening Post observed that ‘Max Weber’s pictures are said to be a good example of what a Post-Impressionism exhibition should be’.221 Elizabeth Luther Carey, the New York Times columnist, reversed the sentiment by suggesting that exhibition-goers at the Grafton Gallery might be enlightened by a visit to Weber’s exhibition.222 We might suppose then that an

219 In the immediate aftermath of Manet and the Post-Impressionists, Camera Work’s contributors rarely refer to Post-Impressionism although there is frequent reference to it in press reviews of the Galleries’ own exhibitions which the publication routinely reprinted.
222 Elizabeth Luther Carey, New York Times ‘The Exhibitions at the 291’. Reprinted Criticism of the Picasso Exhibition’, Camera Work, No. 36. (1910 – 11), pp. 51 & 52. Carey observes: ‘Visitors to the Grafton Galleries during the recent Post-Impressionist exhibition and readers of the London newspapers will certainly be interested to see what impression such an artist as Max Weber, who is now showing his work at the Photo-Secession Galleries, makes on America’. (p. 51).
emergent modernist practice in Greenwich Village had been subsumed, to all intents and purposes, within an amorphous Post-Impressionist modernism.

Religion and disease

Even when the Armory Show opened on the 17th February 1913, some five weeks after The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition had closed, ‘Post-Impressionism’ hardly constituted a fixed entity. Such consensus as there was revolved around a loosely-adhering body of opinion promulgated by various protagonists who, unwittingly or otherwise, presented the movement’s American adherents with more than a little latitude for interpretation. C. J. Holmes is a case in point. Emphasising the experimental and iconoclastic aspects of styles described as ‘Post-Impressionist’, his account might well have appealed to certain progressivist instincts. Charles Lewis Hind whose book, The Post-Impressionists, first published in England in 1911, is another.223 He begins by emphasising the ‘significance’ of objects and situations much as MacCarthy had in his catalogue preface, but he goes on to suggest that the highly personal manipulation of paint characterising Post-Impressionist works of art might be better described as ‘expressionism’.224 At one time, of course, Fry had thought much the same thing but, by 1912, when Hind’s book was published in America, the English debate had moved on. Hind’s observation was now decidedly at odds with Fry’s detached Kantian formalism, a version which promoted the ‘classic’ qualities of French Post-Impressionism.225 Fry’s appeal to the classicism of the French painters in The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition was made in the context of an argument about the nature of civilisation and its perpetuity in modern times. Animosities had been running high since the first Post-Impressionist exhibition when conservative critics had levelled charges of barbarity. C. J. Weld-Blundell, of the Times, for example, having deplored the ‘abandonment

223 Hind, The Post-Impressionists. Hind states: ‘A man who expresses himself sincerely can extract beauty from anything. There is a beauty of significance lurking within ugliness. For ugliness does not really exist. We see what we bring’. Developing the discussion, he continues: ‘Obviously Expressionism is a better term than Post Impressionism, that avenue of freedom, opening out, inviting the pilgrim who is casting off the burdens of mere representation ...Post Impressionism or Expressionism seeks synthesis in the soul of man, and in the substance of things’, pp. 2 & 3.
224 See Shiff, Cézanne and the End of Impressionism, pp. 155 – 161. Shiff explains Fry’s disavowal of ‘expressionism’ in terms of a long-standing symbolist distinction concerning temperamental detachment and the artist’s ability to ‘express emotions which the objects themselves evoked’. In the context of this discussion, expressionism is hardly incompatible with the detachment premising Kantian notions of ‘free beauty’.
of what Goethe had called the “culture conquests” of the past, was one of a number of conservatives who had claimed the cultural high ground shortly after *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* opened. By the time Hind’s book appeared in America, Fry and his supporters were contesting the cultural claim. Now that Fry had raised the stakes, Hind’s modest assertion on behalf of stylistic integrity and progress would have detracted from the cultural argument even if, in America, it resonated in relation to the progressives’ repudiation of complacency in nineteenth-century tradition. According to Nathanson, Hind’s book was taken as the final word on modernist art by many Americans. However, apart from diverting attention from Fry’s argument, Hind’s account seems also to have confused American readerships as the satirical observations of Temple Scott, a regular contributor to the *Century*, the *Forum*, and the *New York Tribune*, suggests. In an unpublished essay, ‘The Faubourg-Saint-Bronnex’, Michael Weaver, alias Max Weber, explains to ‘Lifter’, Arthur Hoeber, a conservative painter and critic who had consulted him about the new art, that ‘he’d find all that Post-Impressionism was not’ in Hind’s book since it ‘was full of statements that might mean anything and everything’. Still, he adds, it had been useful, because ‘it had given him the names of the artists—fellows he had never heard of in his life’. In other words, Hind’s cast of characters, give or take a few unknowns, may have been familiar, but his Post-Impressionist plot was anything but.

Elsewhere, Hind’s account was merged with Bloomsbury’s narrative yielding a hybrid variant that imputed English cultural arguments to an American artworld. Take, for example, an anonymous review in *Current Literature*. The writer observes:

> To mention the words ‘Post-Impressionism’ nowadays among artists is almost invariably to invite heated debate. Some regard the new cult as a religion; others brand it as a disease.

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226 C. J. Weld-Blundell, ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists’, *Times*, 7th November 1910, p. 12; also, for an overview of the civilisation debate, see Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism 1900 – 1920*, pp. 81 - 175

227 Nathanson, ‘The American Reaction to London’s First Grafton Show’. Nathanson argues that while other works about late-nineteenth-century developments in French art had been sympathetically received, Hind’s text ‘was welcomed by many Americans as the definitive word on modernism’. She elaborates in a footnote: ‘...with the possible exception of Meier-Graefe’s *Modern Art* and Caffin’s *The Story of French Painting*, Hind’s text, along with Fry’s published lectures, provided the most supportive discussion of the modernists’ aims. Further, both had appeared in conjunction with a controversial and highly-publicized exhibition, thus inviting more widespread notice’, pp. 5 & 9.


Post-Impressionism, the reviewer would have us believe, precipitated the same kind of rancour in America as it had in London, where charges of mania and disease had been levelled. Exaggerations doubtlessly abound in such accounts but evidence suggests that reaction to the Post-Impressionist exhibitions somehow modelled aspects of the public debate generated by the *Armory Show*. Initial reactions were not unlike some seen in London and the more permanent critical positions had an air of familiarity. Royal Cortissoz, for example, now sensing a more immediate threat perhaps, decried the ‘foolish terrorists’ who would ‘turn the world upside down’, while Kenyon Cox berated European artists—particularly Matisse—for their ‘extreme and savage form of ... individualism’. An editorial in the *New York Times* lamented a ‘general movement, discernible all over the world, to disrupt and degrade, if not destroy, not only art, but literature and society, too’.²³⁰ Stieglitz, Anne McCauley tells us, remained a marginal figure despite his knowledge of the latest trends. Arthur B. Davies had consulted him and later nominated him one of the twelve honorary vice-presidents, but his role was never more than an honorary one. ²³¹

**Progressivist rhetoric: ideas of progress so rapid and radical**

The term, ‘Post-Impressionism’, was conspicuously absent the *Armory Show’s* official publicity. Arguably, its place was secured in serious discourse only after the *Armory Show* when Post-Impressionism featured prominently in three American accounts of modernist art. The first of them, Henry Rankin Poore’s book, *The New Tendency in Art: Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Futurism*, published in 1913, opens with this declaration: ‘Art’s complaisancy has been shocked.’²³² The author go on to explain that the new art is analogous to upheavals in medicine, theology, music and jurisprudence. His sympathies for this ‘new tendency’ extend only so far though, for he confides his misgivings about its parallels with the new philosophy of ‘primitivology’ and ‘intuitive creation’. Such primitive sensibilities, he maintains, can only be valid when they are contained—subject to the ‘right

organisation by which they are produced’. Modern art, he explains, should entail a
transaction between two parties, the artist and the audience, both of whom are under the
obligations of fair exchange. ‘The greatest part of this multiform effort’, Poore observes, ‘is
expressed in various inventions seeking some different mode than is natural to the direct,
unaffected, normal estate of manhood’. There is no reason, he seems to imply why the
modernist transaction should not be subject to the principles of logic, rationalism, and
reasonableness.

The ‘direct, unaffected, normal estate of manhood’, we are told, derives from the values of
the classical humanist tradition. Poore reminds his readers that the Anglo-Saxon people lay
claim to a higher destiny than that which might ‘stimulate the brain of the Romance
nations’, and he contends that ‘the superior race’ is entitled to ‘indulge and even patronize
[its point of view] in very much the same spirit as the Romans of the Coliseum’. He then,
juxtaposes lengthy apologias on behalf of the new art by Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Charles Caffin,
and Charles Hind, against equally lengthy refutations of it by Royal Cortissoz, and Kenyon
Cox. These, he invites us, his Anglo-Saxon readers, to examine and to reach our own
conclusions, assured that, in doing so, we exercise the prerogative of the clear-headed
Anglo-Saxon temperament. The arts in America and England, he explains, have been little
influenced by manifestations of the new ‘Primitivolatory’ and ‘Savageopathy’ simply
because the Anglo-Saxon people are not compelled by inner necessity.

Destined for obscurity in culturally-pluralist America, Poore’s contribution testifies to
the links between Anglo-conformity, Post-Impressionism, and the language of American
progressivism. The connection between the latter two was reinforced the following year in
explanation of the new art. Daniel Catton Rich, the American art historian, would later
observe that Eddy’s popular acclaim owed much to his repudiation of literary convention.
The ‘modern substantive style’ of yellow-page journalism is substituted for the ‘boresome

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Chapter 1 by quoting Bergson: ‘Evolution is not only a movement forward; in many cases we observe a
marking of time and still more often a deviation or a turning back’, p. 3.

234 Poore, *The New Tendency in Art*, p. 34.

appeals as a necessity but rather as a point of view which we may indulge…’, p. 50.

236 Ibid, p. 49.
style of Mr Henry James’ with its ‘endless’ qualifications, adjectives, and adverbs. Neither the artist nor the ‘sophisticated dilettante’ is addressed, but only ‘Eddy’s friends, the doctors, the merchants, of Chicago’.238

A Chicago lawyer and collector of contemporary art, Eddy coaxes the lay-reader to an appreciation of the affinities that Cubism and Post-Impressionism share with the spirit of the new corporate age. The Cubists are cited as exponents of the new freedoms sweeping through society: ‘For the first time in the history of painting, painters are systematically claiming the same independence [as poets], the same right to express themselves freely in each canvas...’239 As Patricia Hills explains, his mantras, ‘liberation’ and ‘freedom’, reiterate the progressivist values framed in an earlier book titled The New Competition.240 Here, Eddy advocates the economic freedoms that Woodrow Wilson’s ‘New Freedom’ measures enacted after the 1912 election, such as lowered tariffs, the establishment of the Federal Reserve System, and curbs on monopolies. According to him, the new art was analogous to other expressions of liberalism sweeping America:

...breaking out in unexpected places and while they may seem to be different ideas when expressed in music, painting, sculpture, poetry, architecture, from those expressed in science, religion, politics, social reform, and business generally, they are not; they are all fundamentally the same, namely they are the ideas of progress so rapid and radical that it may be revolutionary and in a measure destructive.241

The spirit of the new art, born of ‘ideas of progress so rapid and radical’, he explains, is epitomised in the unfettered self: ‘The keynote of the modern movement in art is expressions of self; that is, the expression of one’s inner self as distinguished from the representation of the outer world’.242 Like Poore before him, he links Post-Impressionism

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238 Daniel Catton Rich, The Arthur Jerome Eddy Collection of Modern Paintings and Sculpture, (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1931), retrieved from Malcolm Gee (ed.), Art Criticism Since 1900, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993). Catton Rich observes: ‘All the way through, the layman sits side by side with the author. Eddy does not write for the artist or the sophisticated dilettante. He is slowly, clearly explaining to his friends the doctors, the merchants, of Chicago just what these fauves and wilden are about...That is why Cubists and Post-Impressionism has had an overwhelming success and why it has done much to break down prejudices towards new art forms’, n. 14, p. 161.
239 Eddy, Cubists and Post-Impressionists, p. 104.
241 Ibid, p. 64.
242 Ibid, p. 112.
with progressivism’s repudiation of vested interest in all its manifestations and, in doing so, he emphasises the freedom it represents. The highest art is a ‘pure’ one, which is to say that it is unimpeded by rules and traditions. Only then might it grow steadily, logically, and naturally like the growth of a tree.⁴³ Art’s natural direction would be towards ‘pure’ abstraction through the use of the formal elements: ‘The use of line and color freely to produce pure line harmonies and pure colour harmonies with no reference to objects is...a far higher art—a more abstract art’.⁴⁴ As Hills observes, Post-Impressionism and Cubism are, as far as Eddy is concerned, the logical extensions of progressivism in the sphere of culture.

Although the term ‘Post-Impressionism’ appears only once in Huntington Wright’s book, Modern Painting: its Tendency and Meaning of 1915, it transpires that both modern painting’s ‘tendency’ and ‘meaning’ derive from it. Post-Impressionism, he declares, ‘stood for the new vitality in art, for the contemporary animating spirit’.⁴⁵ His use of the past tense implies that modern painting, ‘the new vitality in art’, supersedes Post-Impressionism, but that both are manifestations of art’s ‘animating spirit’. In contrast to Eddy, but like Fry and Bell, ‘the ablest and most discerning defenders of modernist art in England’, Wright conceives of Post-Impressionism as a renewal of old artistic verities. His immediate theoretical source is Bell, whose own book, Art, had been published in America shortly before.⁴⁶ Wright paraphrases Bell’s text when he explains that painting ‘provoke[s] deep aesthetic feeling’, adding that, ‘almost any art can arouse pleasing sentiments [but] only great art can give us intellectual rapture’.⁴⁷ Like Bell, he reserves his opprobrium for nineteenth-century academicism because it neglects art’s obligation to create form. ‘I have weighed the painting of the last century’, he loftily declares, ‘and have judged it solely by its ability or inability to call forth a profound aesthetic emotion’.⁴⁸ Nineteenth-century tradition is duly found to be wanting and it is censured for abnegation prerogative. ‘Small wonder’, he observes, ‘that modern art has become a copious fountain-head of abuse and laughter; for modern art tends toward the elimination of all those accretions so beloved by

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⁴³ Ibid, p. 121.
⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 146.
⁴⁵ Wright, Modern Painting, p. 234.
⁴⁶ Clive Bell’s book, Art, was published in American in 1913 by F. A. Stokes, New York.
⁴⁷ Wright, Modern Painting, p. 10.
⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 10.
the general literature, drama, sentiment, symbolism, anecdote, prettiness and photographic realism’. Bell had already listed the symptoms of nineteenth-century decline, ‘... drama, sentiment, symbolism, anecdote, prettiness and photographic realism’, and it is Bell’s prognosis, the descent into trivia, that Wright repeats.

Wright, however, is no mere replicate. In his narrative, Bell’s critique encounters the language of progressivist reform. Thus, while modern painting’s ‘meaning’ may entail aesthetic emotion, its ‘tendency’ brings about ‘... the elimination of all those accretions so beloved ...’, which it to say that modern art eliminates everything superfluous to artistic practice. The parallels with Greenberg’s reductionism cannot be missed. Like him, Wright was a vociferous champion of American cultural aspiration. A former editor of the Smart Set, a New York society magazine, he had frequented the 291 Gallery and befriended Stieglitz. Yet, for all his critical acuity, not to say chauvinism, he elected to cite Bell, then a little-known English critic, whose recent book, Art, though well received in America, nevertheless addressed an English cultural discourse.

We return to the question of Anglo-conformity in pre-War American cultural discourse. Wright’s critique of Kandinsky acquires new significance in the light of an Anglo-conformist narrative. At a time when Stieglitz and his circle were switching their collective attention from cubism to Kandinsky, Wright professed himself sceptical of the painter’s ‘decadent’ tendency to ‘spiritualise’ form. Relations were cordial at that time; there was no reason to draw attention to differences with the Stieglitz circle. Yet, he did so, explaining that, in an age when art is ‘arraigned before the tribunal of biology, physiology, and psychology’, Kandinsky’s ‘spiritual impressions’, ‘internal harmonies’, ‘psychic effects’, and ‘soul vibrations’ would remain incomprehensible to anyone who was not a ‘soul mate’— temperamentally at one with him. Like Henry Poore, Wright could not countenance Kandinsky’s mysticism because it was steeped in an unverifiable mode of experience, and

250 Clive Bell, Art, 1914, in J. B. Bullen (ed.), Art: The Classic Manifesto on Art, Society, and Aesthetics, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Explaining the shortcomings of nineteenth-century subject painting, Bell describes William Powell Frith’s painting, The Railway Station thus: ‘But certain though it is that Frith’s masterpiece, or engravings of it, have provided thousands with half-hours of curious and fanciful pleasure, it is not less certain that no one has experienced before it one half-second of aesthetic rapture—and this although the picture contains several pretty passages of colour, and is by no means badly painted. "Paddington Station" is not a work of art; it is an interesting and amusing document. In it line and colour are used to recount anecdotes, suggest ideas, and indicate the manners and customs of an age: they are not used to provoke aesthetic emotion’, p. 18.
251 Wright, Modern Painting, p. 308.
was therefore ‘decadent’. Nevertheless, Wright’s overtures to Stieglitz and his circle in the Anderson Gallery’s *Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters* in 1916 foreshadow pattern of cultural integration more fully realised by the Museum of Modern Art during the 1930s.\(^{252}\)

**An institutional narrative**

Alfred Barr Jr reconciled the Post-Impressionist narrative with Julius Meier-Graefe’s account of a nineteenth-century stylistic innovation, when, in 1929, the Museum of Modern Art effectively pronounced that modernism’s threshold lay in the art of Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, and Van Gogh. In his foreword to the exhibition catalogue, Barr describes the four painters as ‘pioneers who founded new traditions and … rediscovered old ones’.\(^{253}\) Identified with ‘Ingres, Constable, Delacroix, Corot, Daumier, Courbet, Manet, Renoir … Toulouse-Lautrec’, the ‘pre-eminent men’ of nineteenth-century painting, we recognise them as Meier-Graefe’s leading protagonists. Then, although Barr demurs from the cultural sensitivities associated with ‘Post-Impressionism’, we note that all four have one thing in common: ‘Impressionism as a point of departure’. So far as Bloomsbury was concerned, incidentally, Seurat’s reputation, had been rehabilitated in Fry’s anthology, *Transformations*, published in 1926. To Barr’s mind, these four painters, like MacCarthy’s ‘Post-Impressionists’, eschew the problems that had ‘seduced’ artists since late medieval times: ‘the “realistic” imitation of nature … the appearance, structure, and movement of the human body, making painted forms seem round by sculpturesque modelling in light and shade, giving the illusion of space …’ Also, like their Post-Impressionist predecessors, they refused to be distracted by the ‘problem’ of ‘outdoor lighting’ which had led Impressionism into an ‘unbalanced, eccentric … relation to the great “central” tradition of European

\(^{252}\) See Alfred Stieglitz to Paul Haviland April 19\(^{th}\) 1916, Stieglitz Papers, Yale University. Wright was the leading organiser of the influential *Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters* held in 1916 at the Anderson Gallery in New York. Intended as a corrective to the perceived under-representation of American artists in the Armory Show, Wright appointed an organising committee that included Joseph Stieglitz (who had been conspicuously absent from the Armory’s committee), and Dr John Weichsel, president of the Peoples Art Guild and a supporter of the Stieglitz circle, as well as Dr Christian Brinton, critic and author of *Modern Artists*, and W.H. de B. Nelson, painter and editor of *International Studio*. The composition of the committee reflects Wright’s overtures toward the Stieglitz circle, the leading American modernist formation of the day and one in which, significantly, artists and writers of German and Central European descent predominated.

painting’. All four ‘had come out of the Impressionist blind-alley’ like the younger generation whom, according to MacCarthy, Cézanne had guided out of the cul-de-sac into which naturalism had led them.

Barr’s protagonists pioneer a new relationship with the past, much as Bloomsbury’s Post-Impressionists had before them. That is to say, a past based on form which, ‘extends far beyond this 19th century European group to almost every preceding period and almost every exotic culture’. Gauguin, like his Post-Impressionist alter-ego, was a flawed romantic—‘pathetically genuine’—who liberated painting from the imitation of nature although, Barr, adds, that ‘whoever looks at his work as mere decoration or experiment in “form” sadly misconstrues the intention of the painter’. Van Gogh, much like his Post-Impressionist avatar, is ‘... the seer, the mystic, apprehending, making visible the inner life of things’. When, according to Barr, the influence of Gauguin and Van Gogh began to wane around 1910, Derain, Friesz, Picasso, and Braque came to terms with Cézanne. If Gauguin and Van Gogh had dominated the avant-garde between 1900 and 1905, Cézanne’s retrospective at the Salon d’Automne in 1907 heralded the ascent of the cubists: ‘... had not Cézanne remarked that the fundamental forms in nature were the sphere, the cone and the cylinder? The earliest phase of cubism is but a step beyond such Cézannes as the Boy with a Skull and Gardanne’. Seurat’s art, by contrast, is not construed in Post-Impressionist terms, but it is a formalist construct, relying for its effect on ‘a very simple and purely formal aesthetic’. It depends on ‘relations between tones ..., colors, and lines, and on the harmony of these three elements’.

We note the place of Barr’s luminaries, ‘Post-Impressionists’ in all but name, at the head of a European tradition of form. The true guardians of Europe’s ‘central tradition’, both the older and exotic traditions, Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, and Van Gogh stand on the threshold of a scientific and technologically-adept modernity, gauche, awkward, and in every way fitted for their allotted roles as the precursors of a formalist modernism.

255 Ibid, p. 16.
256 Ibid, p. 22.
257 Ibid, p. 23.
Summary

Prolific coverage of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* in the Anglo-conformist press attests to the exhibition’s notoriety among a culturally-informed public in America. English debate was at its most polarised during the first month or so when the exhibition attracted greatest American attention, yet much of the reportage was oblivious to the cultural nuance of English discourse. Dismissive of conservative alarm, American commentators tended to question the technical merits of Post-Impressionism and its pertinence to modern times. Royal Cortissoz, for example, allayed his readers’ concerns about England’s ‘teacup tempest’, but took Fry to task for allowing painters ‘too broad a licence’.

We noted that Alfred Stieglitz’s socially-oppositional circle remained aloof. When interviewed by the *Chicago Evening Post*’s correspondent in December 1911, he complained that American art institutions and the public had only recently taken interest in what they now called ‘post-impressionism’. Modernist groups comprising a preponderance of naturalised and first generation Americans, like the Stieglitz circle, may have been less receptive to Post-Impressionism.

Conflicting English interpretations of Post-Impressionism’s significance bemused some Americans. Temple Scott’s satirical vignette, ‘Fifth Avenue and the Boulevard Saint-Michel’, suggests, in the wake of Holmes’ book, *Notes on the Post-Impressionists*, that his grasp of the historical realities was tenuous. As its protagonist, Michael Weaver, alias Max Weber, observes, the account was ‘full of statements that might mean anything and everything’ but, at least, it had given him the names of fellows he had never heard of in his life. The favourable reception of Hind’s book, *The Post-Impressionists*, in 1912, indicates that, by then, many Americans were inclined to link Post-Impressionism with stylistic integrity and progress rather than cultural renewal which was, as I argued in Chapter 4, was promoted by Bloomsbury.

Confusion abated after the *Armory Show* when three books on modern art identified Post-Impressionism with various progressivist values. Henry Rankin Poore’s *The New Tendency in Art* likened innovations in the new art to contemporaneous upheavals in medicine, theology, music and jurisprudence. He juxtaposed three apologia on behalf of Post-Impressionism with two conservative critiques and invited his readers to exercise the prerogative of the clear-headed Anglo-Saxon temperament by deciding for themselves. By
contrast, Arthur Jerome Eddy, in *Cubists and Post-Impressionists*, enthused, as if to his friends, the merchants and doctors of Chicago, about Post-Impressionism’s affinities with the new corporate spirit of progressivist America. Willard Huntington Wright’s account, *Modern Painting*, drew upon Clive Bell’s recent book, *Art*, to locate modern painting’s meaning, if not necessarily its tendency, within a Post-Impressionist aesthetic framework. His ambivalence towards Kandinsky’s mysticism echoes Poore’s misgivings about the validity of irrational experience in works of art. Together they reflect, I suggest, the inherent empiricism of Anglo-American critical values.

I concluded the chapter by highlighting the Post-Impressionist concepts and constructs subsumed in the Museum of Modern Art’s first loan exhibition. Much as Wright had attempted to integrate Anglo-American interests with the wider cultural aspirations in the *Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters* in 1916, Barr drew upon Meier-Graefe’s thesis of nineteenth-century continuity culminating in the early twentieth-century ‘struggle for style’. However, the Museum’s inaugural exhibition, *Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, Van Gogh*, presents a conception of modernism that is founded on the innovations of these painters who, to paraphrase MacCarthy’s claim on behalf of Cézanne, ‘had come out of the Impressionist blind-alley.’ Seurat’s reputation, we noted, had been restored recently by Fry. The qualities that Barr attributed to Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Cézanne echoes those which MacCarthy had cited in the catalogue to *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*. Like the Post-Impressionists, they call upon old and exotic traditions alike in their rediscovery of Europe’s ‘central tradition’ and are thereby positioned on the threshold of cultural modernity, linking past achievement with a formalist modern future.

Having argued that Post-Impressionism embodies a link between a peculiarly English interpretation of Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory and Bloomsbury’s version of aesthetic modernism, and having then traced its assimilation to English and then American cultural discourse, we will now follow its trajectory through an untutored, middlebrow conversation about form. During much of the second decade and the first half of the third, Clive Bell’s theory of form conveyed Bloomsbury’s aesthetic to the book-reading publics of England and America, and did much thereby to shape an Anglo-American formalist identity.
Bell’s Manifesto of Form

Shortly after *The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, the London publishing house, Chatto and Windus, approached Roger Fry with a view to a monograph on the so-called ‘new movement’. As he was by then preoccupied with events in support of the Post-Impressionist cause, he passed the commission to Clive Bell who managed to persuade the publishers that he could adapt the text of a work-in-progress titled *The New Renaissance* to their requirements. The script was duly delivered in November 1913 and published soon afterwards in London and New York under the all-encompassing title of *Art*. I will argue that Bell’s book had unforeseen consequences in Anglo-American cultural debate because, in his appeal to the middle-classes of England, he unintentionally reached beyond them to a literary-minded American public who would, in turn, introduce elements of his thesis into an influential middlebrow conversation on modernist art. Bell’s account was destined thereby to shape a formalist discourse in America which, by the end of the 1920s, would provide Alfred Barr Jr. with a key tenet of his modernist credo: the sublimity of form.

Hardly the customary format of the modernist manifesto, *Art’s* success in securing the attention and convictions of a middle-class public owes much to its innocuous form as a book. The literary appeal of a book is to a leisured public that is versed in extended argument and its promise of erudition—whether or not delivered—attracts the attention of serious reviewers who disseminate its text in the public arena. It is this cultural mechanism, one denied to the more ephemeral tract form, which propelled Bell’s manifesto to prominence among the English and American middle-classes. Moreover, its modest literary merits were flattered by a few sympathetic reviewers who observed that *Art* was the first English language book since John Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* to set out a complete theory of the visual arts, a comparison that was not entirely unjustified since the challenge of each

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258 Bell, *Art*. Bullen reveals in his introduction that the commission came to Bell by way of Fry, p. xxvii; also see Clive Bell, *Civilisation*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928). In his dedication of *Civilisation* to Virginia Woolf, Bell mentions that the text of *Art* was based on an extract taken from his unfinished work, *The New Renaissance*, p. vi.
was directed at the status quo and both called for reasonable reform founded on universal principles and timeless values.  

In this chapter, I will explain how Bell’s account transforms Fry’s aesthetic speculation into a coherent theory of art. The central thesis of his argument, that all art shares a common property, Significant Form, serves to integrate Post-Impressionism into a neglected tradition of pure form; an idea which is, in itself, predicated on art’s supposed capacity to rouse deep emotion in the viewer—‘ecstasy’, as Bell put it. Bell’s history of Significant Form thus constitutes a context for Post-Impressionism and it not only posits a formalist future, but one that is subject to a particular kind of formalism imbued with a spiritual valency. Indeed, Bell’s formalism has the air of dogma about it as D. H. Lawrence observed when he described it ‘almost [as] Calvinism come to art’. Bell would have been amused but not affronted. ‘Art and Religion’, he declares, ‘are means to similar states of mind’. His modernist work of art exists on two planes: the one, as a material entity in time and space, and, the other, as a formal entity imbued with transcendent meaning.

Once we have seen how Bell’s theory of Significant Form served to direct English middle-class taste away from its late-Victorian preferences and towards a new Post-Impressionist aesthetic, we will move on, in the next chapter, to examine the American response to Bell’s thesis. Here, accounts of the late-1910s and 1920s adapted Significant Form to the terms of an internationalist narrative that emphasised the modernity of continental European avant-garde art while divesting it of subversive content. In so doing,

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259 See the Athenaeum (21st February 1914), The Fine Arts. The reviewer states: ‘It is the first book, since Ruskin began to publish ‘Modern Painters’ in 1843, that could even conceivably convince a serious-minded person of good judgement that Art is something more than an agreeable ornamentation and seasoning of life’, (p. 280); also see Roger Fry, ‘A New Theory of Art’, Nation, 1914, in Bullen Post-Impressionism in England, pp. 487 – 491. Fry states: ‘[Art] is in a way a complete vindication of Ruskin’s muddle-headed but prophetic intimation of the truth’, (p. 491); also see William Nicholson, The Bookman, (April 1914), pp 38 & 48. The Nicholson states: ‘Mr Bell...writes with all the positive dogmatism of Ruskin and with much of the apostolic fervour. He has the charm and literary grace which makes Ruskin appear so convincing even when he is most perverse. The book is an attempt to develop a complete theory of visual art...’ (p. 38).

260 Edward D. McDonald (ed.), ‘Looking at Pictures’, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence, (London: Heinemann, 1936). Lawrence likens the new movement to Primitive Methodism: ‘The impressionists brought the world at length ... into the delicious oneness of light. ... No sooner had this paean gone up than the post-impressionists ... gave the game away. ... They felt a little guilty about it, so they took on new notes of effrontery, defiant as any Primitive Methodists, which, indeed, they are: the Primitive Methodists of art criticism. ... They discovered once more that the aesthetic experience was an ecstasy granted only to the chosen few, the elect, among whom, said critics were, of course, the arch elect. This was outdoing Ruskin. It was almost Calvin come to art’, p. 565.

261 Bell, Art, pp. 92 & 93.
various American versions of Bell’s theory were promoted against rival interpretations of the new art.

One of the more enduring features of their Anglo-American content is the dichotomy they posit between form and meaning. Predicated on one’s detachment from everyday interests, these versions of formalism confer a spiritual significance on the contemplation of a notionally ‘pure’ form. It is in this respect that they can be described as ‘Schopenhauerian’, for they all agree that form is, in one way or another, a conduit to transcendent experience even though they understand ‘transcendence’ in different ways. Significant Form, I will argue, models an Anglo-American mode of interpretation. It alludes to a higher level of meaning within the quantifiable parameters of bourgeois experience, much as the Byzantine icons, so admired by Bell, opened ordinary human experience in late Antiquity to the possibilities of eternity. We start the chapter by examining Bell’s text in its most material terms however, as a middle-class manifesto, before we go on to explore the visionary possibilities Bell offers.

‘Art’ as a manifesto

Art is not the impartial explanation that it purports to be. As J. B. Bullen rightly observes, the text is a manifesto first and foremost.262 It may be devoid of the genre’s fanatical undertow, but its persuasive devices are not dissimilar: the presumption of complicity, the call to action, the presentation of ideas as if they were unprecedented and the corresponding concealment of their true sources: these are all characteristic of Bell’s written style. However, unlike many exemplars of the idiom, Bell does not declaim. Rather, he takes his reader to be biddable and reasons with them in a conversational tone. Appealing to the evidence of shared experience, he coaxes and gently cajoles the reader towards reasonable conclusions, anticipating their objections as he proceeds: ‘At this point it may be objected that … It will be said that … It must be replied that …’ and so on.263

Bell’s culturally-progressive credentials were affirmed by early reviews appearing in the Nation and the Athenæum, both socially-liberal periodicals with English and American

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circulation. The former, written by Fry himself, and published in March 1914, ensured a sympathetic hearing. Although not whole-hearted in his endorsement, Fry emphasised the ‘brilliance’ of Bell’s critique, likening it to Ruskin’s, but with the clarity of a sound mind: ‘It is in its way a complete vindication of Ruskin’s muddle-headed but prophetic intimation of the truth’. Lest Bell’s impetuosity should offend readers’ sensibilities, Fry forestalls any antagonism by applauding Bell’s good-natured carelessness in the presence of staid conformity: ‘Mr Bell hits out freely all round, and trails his coat as he goes along, but in so gay a spirit that one thinks that none of his victims, Academicians, artists, critics, experts, men of science, or even the general public, will bear him a grudge even if they take up the challenge’. Which spoilsport would begrudge him his youthful ebullience in such a light? Thus exonerated of fanaticism, Bell is commended to the intrepid reader for his ‘aesthetical joy-ride’ punctuated by ‘sharp turns and shattering jolts for the cultured’. A more sober review in the Athenæum is similarly supportive: ‘[Art] has a malignant ingenuity which will put most painters, art critics, art-historians, archæologists, and connoisseurs beside themselves’. Nevertheless, the serious reader is persuaded to endure provocation in the interests of a transformative allocution: ‘Whatever else this remarkable book may do, it should make the reader ... feel uneasy. ...it will set him wondering whether there is something in works of art which ... he has hardly ever or but faintly noticed – something which ... might make him revise all his judgements about visual art’. Recommended in such exacting terms, the appeal is made to the cultural aspirations of a liberally progressive public.

Given the criticism Art incurred, we are apt to forget that Bell’s book was, in essence, a hurriedly drafted reduplication of The New Renaissance. Rhetoric frequently overreaches argument, but at least some of the inconsistencies, having been highlighted as such in debate, were reformulated to other ends by protagonists in the wider cultural discourse. The process of reassignment in itself concerns our examination of the discourse. We will therefore examine the problematic aspects of Bell’s thesis in relation to the milieu that shaped an Anglo-American formalist orthodoxy. We broach Bell tangentially, as it were, through the milieu. Aldous Huxley’s first novel, Crome Yellow, published in 1921, recrates

265 Ibid, p. 487.
the dilatory atmosphere of Bloomsbury at leisure immediately before the outbreak of War when Bell was drafting his script.\textsuperscript{266} We extrapolate what we may from two brief passages.

**Significance and form**

Events revolve around Denis Stone, who, like Bell, is given to composing poetry and is currently engaged on his *magnum opus*, a literary work about the nature of art. The setting of Huxley’s country house tale, Crome House, is a thinly disguised depiction of Philip and Lady Ottoline Morrell’s Garsington Manor, where he and Bell, as conscientious objectors, had recently avoided conscription by undertaking agricultural labour. A summer house-party is underway as the lovelorn Denis is reproached by Priscilla—alias Ottoline Morrell—for his lack of faith:

‘Such a pity you don’t believe these things, Denis, such a pity’ ... ‘And then there’s the next world and all the spirits and one’s Aura, and Mrs Eddy and saying you’re not ill, and the Christian Mysteries and Mrs Besant. It’s all splendid. One’s never dull for a moment...’\textsuperscript{267}

Later, Dennis explains his theory of art to Anne, Priscilla’s daughter, and the object of his desire:

‘Beauty, pleasure, art, women - I have to invent an excuse, a justification for everything that’s delightful. Otherwise I can’t enjoy it with an easy conscience. I make up a little story about beauty and pretend that it has something to do with truth and goodness. I have to say that art is the process by which one reconstructs the divine reality out of chaos. Pleasure is one of the mystical roads to union with the infinite - the ecstasies of drinking, dancing, love-making’.\textsuperscript{268}

Like the fictional Denis, Bell attributes cosmic significance to form, not because the premises of his theory require that he should do so, but because he harbours an ulterior purpose, disguised as a belief that art is, in some way, analogous to religious experience. As we will see, Bell’s metaphysical hypothesis is not presupposed by his aesthetic hypothesis—it is merely an adjunct. It confers cosmic significance, arbitrarily, upon the pleasures of art.\textsuperscript{269}

When speaking of art’s spiritual affinities, Bell declares:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid, p. 9.
\item Ibid, p. 25.
\item Bell, *Art*. Bell asks: ‘What is the significance of anything as an end in itself? What is that which is left when we have stripped a thing of all its associations, of all its significance as means? What is left to provoke our
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Art affects the lives of men; it moves to ecstasy, thus giving colour and moment to what might otherwise be a rather grey and trivial affair. That it is a means to a state of exultation is unanimously agreed, and that it comes from the spiritual depths of man’s nature is hardly contested. Art is, in fact, a necessity to and a product of the spiritual life.

We note his hyperbole: ‘ecstasy’, ‘a grey and trivial affair’, ‘exultation’, and ‘spiritual depths’. The intensity of one’s experience of art, we gather, is of a different order to ordinary experiences. Therefore, he reasons, it is subject to a different emotion. ‘All sensitive people agree’, he urges us, ‘... there is a peculiar emotion provoked by works of art’. Bell calls it, Aesthetic Emotion:

The starting point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion. The objects that provoke this emotion are called works of art...This emotion is called the Aesthetic Emotion.

All works of art—Santa Sofia, a Sung dynasty bowl, the paintings of Cézanne—induce Aesthetic Emotion, irrespective of their genre and origin. It follows that objects which purport to be works of art, but fail to induce Aesthetic Emotion, cannot be deemed to be art at all. For example, William Frith’s painting, *Paddington Station*, does not induce Aesthetic Emotion according to Bell, and, therefore, cannot be deemed to be a genuine work of art. [Figure 9]. Although Frith’s painting depicts a profusion of everyday events—the arrest of a criminal, the newly-weds taking their leave, the foreign couple solicited by a hansom cab driver for a tip, the departing boarders with their doting mother—for all the emotions depicted, it fails to induce Aesthetic Emotion in the viewer because it lacks the specific configuration of forms which elicit such a response. Significant Form, as Bell calls it, constitutes an arrangement of lines, forms, and colours by the artist in such a way as to stir Aesthetic Emotion. Aesthetic Emotion and Significant Form are therefore predicated upon one another.

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emotions? What but that which philosophers used to call ‘the thing in itself’ and now call ‘ultimate reality’? pp. 53 & 54.

270 Ibid, p. 75.
274 Ibid. Bell states: ‘These moving combinations and arrangements I have called, for the sake of convenience and for a reason that will appear later, Significant Form’, p. 11.
G. E. Moore: the non-natural property

Bell’s tautological reasoning merits a moment’s attention for much of his formalist theory hangs upon its implications. His tendency to assert points of an aesthetic nature replicates a model of argument employed by G. E. Moore in support of ethical propositions. Certain ethical points, according to Moore, defy analysis or demonstration because they are too simple to sustain reason. He argues, in *Principia Ethica*, that there is a class of ethical judgement, to which ‘goodness’ belongs, which can only be known intuitively because it is not empirical. It must therefore be grasped directly, without recourse to inference from the natural world. Moore describes such properties as ‘non-natural’, and exemplifies them in the intrinsic property of ‘yellowness’ which cannot be inferred or verbally defined, yet one recognises the colour yellow when one sees it. Bell adapts this model of argument to his theory of form in support of an aesthetic proposition which, he maintains, ‘all sensitive people agree on’. Arguing that Significant Form is also non-natural property of works of art, Bell adapts Moore’s mode of argument to a point of aesthetic judgement. In the absence of fixed norms, the authentic encounter with genuine art can only occur through an intuitive apprehension of Significant Form; a mode of judgment which is analogous to one’s grasp of all other non-natural properties.

We come to one of its more nuanced implications now. This concerns the question of abstraction and the extent to which it is implied by Significant Form. In addressing this point, we might gauge how far Bell foresees the abstract future envisaged by Alfred Barr. Let us counterpose two seemingly contradictory remarks about representation. Firstly: ‘To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing’. And, secondly: ‘Representation

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276 Moore, *Principia Ethica*. Moore establishes this point in Chapter 1, ‘The Subject Matter of Ethics’ where he reasons that: ‘... if by definition be meant the analysis of an object of thought, only complex objects can be defined’, p. 7.

277 Bell, *Art*. He states: ‘The moralist inquires whether art is either good in itself or a means to good. Before answering, we will ask what he means by the word “good,” not because it is in the least doubtful, but to make him think. In fact, Mr. G. E. Moore has shown pretty conclusively in his *Principia Ethica* that by “good” everyone means just good. We all know quite well what we mean though we cannot define it. “Good” can no more be defined than “Red”: no quality can be defined. Nevertheless we know perfectly well what we mean when we say that a thing is “good” or “red.” This is so obviously true that its statement has greatly disconcerted, not to say enraged, the orthodox philosophers’, p. 107.

278 Ibid, p. 27.
is not of necessity baneful, and highly realistic forms may be extremely significant’.\(^{279}\) We conclude that although representation is not essential to form’s capacity to move us, neither is it inimical. Abstraction is therefore countenanced by Bell but it is not advocated as a substitute for representation. The misuse of representation, however, may disguise inadequacies in the quality of form he tells us.\(^{280}\) We duly recall that, for all the verisimilitude of Frith’s celebrated painting, its forms failed to induce Aesthetic Emotion because they lacked ‘significance’. Yet, elsewhere, Bell concedes that representational forms may have a cognitive value because they serve to make works of art more intelligible for the viewer who struggles to perceive them.\(^{281}\) In either case, representation amounts to a compromise since it is either a sign of the artist’s ‘feebleness’, or it is a concession to the viewer’s incapacity. ‘Every sacrifice made to representation is something stolen from art’, he declares.\(^{282}\) Can we infer from these remarks that Bell’s formalism tends towards abstraction? The answer is, on balance, that we probably can, but the reply cannot be offered with very much conviction for if one argues the point in reverse, so to speak, one is no clearer. To do so would entail the question as to whether, on abandoning representation by devising forms that are entirely without representational quality, might one then arrive at ‘significance’ as if by default. For in the absence of representation, nothing can compromise the significance of forms. We might equally conclude that Bell’s concession to those who, like Desmond MacCarthy, crave a little ‘secondary beauty’ in their art, holds sway. Frustratingly, he concludes his aesthetic hypothesis without further explanation of this problematic question. ‘For aesthetics’, he declares, ‘it suffices that [forms] do move us’, and that, in essence, is the extent of his aesthetic theory.\(^{283}\)

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279 Ibid, p. 27 & 28.
280 Ibid. Bell states: ‘Very often, however, representation is a sign of weakness in an artist. A painter too feeble to create forms that provoke more than a little aesthetic emotion will try to eke that little out by suggesting the emotions of life’, p. 28.
281 Ibid. Here Bell states: ‘Nevertheless, when an artist makes an intricate design it is tempting, and indeed reasonable, for him to wish to provide a clue; and to do so he has only to work into his design some familiar object, a tree or figure, and the business is done…Shall he not give a hint as to the nature of his organisation, and ease the way for our Aesthetic Emotions?…Enter by the back-door representation in the quality of a clue to the nature of design’, p. 224.
282 Ibid, p. 44.
283 Ibid, p. 49.
The metaphysical hypothesis

Anticipating his reader’s dissatisfaction, however, Bell asks: ‘Why ... certain arrangements and combinations of form move us so strangely?’ Given his argument about the irreducible nature of Significant Form, the assertion that ‘forms move us’ should be enough, but it would make for pretty scant theory to leave it thus. Like Denis Stone, Huxley’s protagonist, Bell feels obliged to offer a metaphysical addendum, if only to make something more impressive of his theory. The metaphysical hypothesis might be summarised as follows. There are two kinds of form: one which is typified in naturally-occurring beauty such as flowers and butterfly wings; and another, epitomised in Significant Form, which conveys to us the Aesthetic Emotion of its creator. We appreciate, here, incidentally, how close Bell comes to Fry, and we also note a significant point of divergence. Both versions leave their legacy to Anglo-American formalist theory as we will see. In ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’, Fry had drawn a similar distinction between naturally occurring beauty and the beauty of works of art. We are conscious, he argues, of the artist’s purposeful intent when we look at works of art. Bell, by contrast, maintains that one’s experience of art is confined to the emotional response induced by Significant Form. The artist’s intent is therefore irrelevant. Having thus delimited the artist’s relationship with his work of art, Bell moves on to consider his relationship with nature, art’s primary source of inspiration. Here, he speculates that the artist’s heightened sensitivity enables him to derive Aesthetic Emotion directly from nature, the disconcerting inference being that nature is itself subject to the same ordering principle as the work of art because Aesthetic Emotion presupposes an ordering of forms. We perhaps detect a vestige of Schopenhauer now, remembering that

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284 Ibid.
285 Ibid. Bell puts it in these terms: ‘For aesthetics it suffices that they do move us; to all further inquisition of the tedious and stupid it can be replied that, however queer these things may be, they are no queerer than anything else in this incredibly queer universe. But to those for whom my theory seems to open a vista of possibilities I willingly offer, for what they are worth, my fancies’, p. 49.
287 Bell, Art. He states: ‘In pure aesthetics we have only to consider our emotion and its object: for the purposes of aesthetics we have no right, neither is there any necessity, to pry behind the object into the state of mind of him who made it’, p. 11.
288 Bell, Art. Bell proposes that inspiration may come from other sources: ‘Some artists come at [ultimate reality] through the appearance of things, some by recollection of appearance, and some by sheer force of imagination’, p. 59.
289 Ducasse, Significant Form. Ducasse, as we will see later, mockingly interposes the idea of a creator-deity, pp. 121 & 122.
the Will was common to all natural phenomena. Bell, however, develops the idea by recounting the story of an artist whom, he tells us, attempts to express ‘a passionate apprehension of form’. When artists—and, occasionally, ‘ordinary people’—view their surroundings, he continues, they are capable of perceiving them as pure forms in certain relations to one another, as for example, when one admires the pattern of fields and cottages in the landscape. On such occasions, one feels Aesthetic Emotion for ‘pure formal combination[s] of lines and colours’. These, according to Bell, are the artist’s ‘moments of inspiration’. For naturally occurring objects—beautiful or otherwise—when seen through the artist’s eyes are divested of all ‘casual and adventitious interests’, ‘commerce with human beings’, and ‘significance as a means’. In the absence of an object’s everyday significance as a means to other ends, one encounters its reality as a ‘thing’: a ‘thing in itself’ devoid of all purpose; what philosophers call its ‘ultimate reality’.

We now arrive at the link between ultimate reality, so-construed, and the noumenal reality of the Schopenhauerian thing in-itself. Bell introduces us to the Schopenhauerian concept of ‘significant form’ although he omits to mention the true source of a concept that was destined to become synonymous with his name. Schopenhauer had referred to nature’s ‘significant forms’ in the context of a discussion about aesthetic experience. Contrasting the pleasant ‘significant and distinct’ forms which ‘bend themselves’ to one’s contemplation with different ‘significant forms’ that are demanding of one’s immediate attention because of the imminent threat they represent yet, nevertheless, inspiring one’s contemplation as well. Schopenhauer argues that it is the latter, a source of sublime experience, that is aesthetically superior. Put more simply, we may be equally entranced by a flower and a storm at sea, but it is the latter, the source of sublime experience, that is more intense and therefore aesthetically superior. For Schopenhauer, the sublime experience is more intense

290 Bell, Art. P. 53.
291 Ibid, pp. 51 & 52.
292 Ibid, pp. 53 & 54.
293 Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea. He states: ‘As long as that which raises us from the knowledge of mere relations subject to the will, to aesthetic contemplation, and thereby exalts us to the position of the subject of knowledge free from will, is this fittingness of nature, this significance and distinctness of its forms, on account of which the Ideas individualised in them readily present themselves to us; so long is it merely beauty that affects us and the sense of the beautiful that is excited’, p. 267.
because diverts the will’s impulse away from self-preservation to detached contemplation.\(^{294}\)

Bell recognises Schopenhauer’s distinction but, attributing the lesser aesthetic of beauty to his opponents’ position, he claims the superior sublime aesthetic on behalf of Post-Impressionism. Thus, a simple coal scuttle might inspires the true artist’s, the Post-Impressionist artist’s, ‘passion’. \(^{295}\) By contrast, even a storm at sea is reduced to ‘prettiness’ by his inauthentic counterpart. Bell ascribes only the heightened responses of sublime experience to Significant Form. \(^{296}\)

In other respects, Bell’s version of Significant Form retains much of its Schopenhauerian patrimony although, as we will see in Chapter 7, with regard to the critique of the American academic, C. J. Ducasse, there is a fundamental difference between them. In the meantime, we need only recognise the parallels between Bell’s concept of the thing in-itself and its Schopenhauerian forerunner and the similarities between Bell’s idea of ‘pure’ form and Schopenhauer’s Platonic concept of ‘Ideal’ form. We note, too, the similarities between form and its transcendent quality, for Bell supposes that Significant Form stands before ‘ultimate reality’ much as Schopenhauer describes the Platonic Ideal as the adequate objectification of the will. \(^{297}\)

We briefly return now to the dichotomy in Bell’s formalism. As we recall, it concerns the dual existence of the work of art, both as material object and manifestation of the ‘ultimate reality’. Construed as Significant Form, the work of art is rendered ‘pure’, free, in

\(^{294}\) Ibid. He continues: ‘But if these very objects whose Significant Forms invite us to pure contemplation, have a hostile relation to the human will in general … if they are opposed to it, so that it is menaced by the irresistible predominance of their power, or sinks into insignificance before their immeasurable greatness … but, although perceiving and recognising it … forcibly detaches himself from his will and its relations, and … quietly contemplates those very objects that are so terrible to the will … so that he lingers gladly over its contemplation … in that case he is filled with the sense of the sublime, he is in the state of spiritual exaltation …’ p. 267.

\(^{295}\) Bell, ‘The English Group’, 1912, in Bullen, Post-Impressionists in England, pp. 349 – 351. Having asserted that a coal-scuttle can be contemplated emotionally, Bell uses the term, ‘Significant Form’ for the first time in his essay for The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition. Their pictures, he observes, are ‘passionate attempts to express profound emotions … manifestations of a spiritual revolution which proclaims art a religion …’, (p. 350).

\(^{296}\) Bell, Art. Bell was apt to trivialise the achievements of Academicians and Victorian subject painters by describing them as ‘pretty’. This, for example, is his description of Frith’s Paddington Station: ‘… although the picture contains several pretty passages of colour, and is by no means badly painted. “Paddington Station” is not a work of art; it is an interesting and amusing document’, pp. 17 & 18.

\(^{297}\) Ibid. He asks: ‘What is the significance of anything as an end in itself? What is that which is left when we have stripped a thing of all its associations, of all its significance as a means? What is left to provoke our emotion? What but that which philosophers used to call “the thing in itself” and now call “ultimate reality”? pp. 53 & 54.
Schopenhauerian terms, from the impositions of the will. In the modern context, Bell envisages that the contemplation of art diverts one from: ‘... the world of human business and passion’. Bell’s Schopenhauerianism is such that it only requires his reader to suspend an inclination towards material self-interest in the presence of the work of art. We might suppose, too, that Bell’s pliability held its attractions for he only insists upon the verity of his aesthetic hypothesis; his (equally) tendentious metaphysical hypothesis is there for the taking. Like the fictional Denis in Huxley’s novel, Bell is less than resolute about his metaphysical claim that, in an otherwise incomprehensible universe, sensitive people need only agree that forms do move us. The hard-pressed modern subject is thereby offered solace in the presence of art while he is absolved of dogmatic religion’s obligations. Bell offers his readers art in lieu of religion.

Summary

Invited by Chatto and Windus to explain the ‘new movement’ to an uninitiated public, Bell identified Post-Impressionism with a once-dormant tradition of vital form. Like Fry and MacCarthy before him, he called for renewal founded on universal principles and timeless values. Assuming his reader to be biddable and conversant with the canon of Western art, he pitched his argument to an educated public. Art’s popularity reflected the benefits of exposure reserved for literary publications. It attracted the attention of serious reviewers, some of whom – including Fry - drew parallels with Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, the last English book to offer a complete theory of the visual arts. Yet, although Bell’s text is devoid of the radical undertow that characterised the early modernist manifestos, it is not the impartial account that it purports to be. To all intents and purposes, it is an extended manifesto on behalf of Bloomsbury. Commissioned in the immediate aftermath of *The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, its text contests values and ideas espoused by the

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298 Ibid. He states: ‘Whatever the world of aesthetic contemplation may be, it is not the world of human business and passion; in it the chatter and tumult of material existence is unheard, or heard only as the echo of some more ultimate harmony’, pp. 70 & 71.
299 Ibid. He states: ‘That is the metaphysical hypothesis. Are we to swallow it whole, accept a part of it, or reject it altogether? Each must decide for himself. I insist only on the rightness of my aesthetic hypothesis’, p. 70.
300 Bell, ‘The English Group’, in Bullen, *Post-Impressionists in England*. Having compared the English contingent at *The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* with their French counterparts, Bell concludes his contribution to the catalogue by declaring: All are manifestations of a spiritual revolution which proclaims art as a religion, and forbids its degradation to a trade’, p. 351.
English art establishment. As we will see, it also withheld recognition from rival opinions within the English modernist movement.

Like Fry, Bell drew upon Schopenhauerian theory, albeit crudely, as he replicated elements of the Schopenhauerian sublime. All genuine art, he proclaimed, adheres to the universal principle of Significant Form, an arrangement of formal elements that rouse Aesthetic Emotion. Reasoning in the manner of G. E. Moore, he maintained that Significant Form defies empirical analysis because, like other phenomena that are too simple to sustain inference from natural principle, it could only be grasped directly. Thus, one recognises Significance when one feels the Emotion it elicits: provided, that is, one is ‘sensitive’ to its formal configurations in the first place. We note that although Bell’s argument obviates the requisite for prior knowledge and therefore that it seems to democratise the experience of art, the logic of its construction removes art’s authentic experience from the attainable sphere and relocates it within an unattainable sphere whereby none but the elect, the ‘sensitive’ few who intuit the presence of Significant Form can know the work of art on an authentic level. In this schema, the connoisseur supersedes the scholar. However, such is the collusive tenor of Bell’s language in Art, that his reader is encouraged to count himself among their number. Thus, sensibilities flattered, he suspends the cares of modern life to contemplate the mysteries of ‘ultimate reality’, revealed as they are through pure form, and realises the ‘extraordinary exaltation and complete detachment from the concerns of life’. Significant Form thus elicits a quasi-religious mode of experience whereby the material art object is imbued with transcendent qualities. Rendered ‘pure’, form becomes a repository for the sensibilities of a modern art-going public and form acquires new meaning as the conduit to transcendent knowledge.

During the 1920s, Bell’s construct, linking the artefact’s formal qualities to transcendent meaning, became one of the continuities running through a decade that seemed chaotic in many ways. We will see in Chapter 7 that Significant Form’s conceptual difficulties proved little hindrance to an American middlebrow audience for art. However, we first address the English and American critiques that rendered Significant Form intelligible to a lay-public before we go on to examine its assimilation to an American narrative of art in its modern context: dynamic, progressive, and ordered. It was this

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301 Bell, Art, p. 68.
process, as we will see, that reconfigured Significant Form to the institutional requirements of the Museum of Modern Art.
An Ancient Deity: Significant Form

If, as Nathanson observed, art historical re-evaluation of the Armory Show had diverted attention from Stieglitz and his circle, it also consolidated a more exclusively formalist historiography in America. The very term ‘historiography’, in the context of American modernist discourse, came largely to refer to a lineage of mutually conversant texts embodying formalist positions. Until comparatively recently, it was more or less indistinguishable from the principles of modernism itself. Such a formalism—and there were others, as we have seen—was inherently Anglo-American for, as George Wallace, an American research student, argued in his doctoral thesis on American historiography, the writings of Fry and Bell served as starting points for discussions of modernism in America during the 1910s and 1920s, and, along with those of Huntington Wright, invested modernism with a formalist meaning by linking art with an aesthetic emotion elicited through form. 302 Wallace observes, correctly in my opinion, that the same corpus engendered a formalist historiography in which the 1920s and 1930s came to represent an ‘intermezzo’, a period of indeterminacy, between two key moments of American modernism: its arrival in the form of the Armory Show and its maturation in the ascent of the New York School. 303

Bell’s critical stature in American discourse during these years should not be overstated, but neither should we discount his appeal to a literary-minded public who subscribed to his thesis. Madge Jennison, for example, the co-founder of ‘The Sunwise Turn’, a progressive New York bookshop and gallery, dedicated her memoirs to ‘Mr Clive Bell, who, though I have never seen him, and he has never heard my name, founded this bookshop because he wrote a book’. 304 Her enthusiasm was not untypical it would seem. The American version of *Art* went through five editions having remained in print until

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303 Ibid, p. 28.
1924. Moreover, Bell began publishing in American journals in the 1920s although his readership was largely unaware of the prejudicial social slant some of his writing had in English cultural debate. Those Americans who first encountered Significant Form directly through the book, or from earlier drafts of the text which appeared in periodicals with American distribution, may well have missed the polemical significance it held in English discourse as we may infer from our examination of an early review of the book that appeared in the *New York Times* in September 1914. Without that edge, Significant Form amounted to little more than an innocuous, if fashionable, term of critical approval. In America, during the 1910s, Bell’s claim on behalf of Significant Form was accepted more or less uncritically as we will see. Such scant consideration as there was—Huntington Wright’s being a case in point—tended to take Bell’s claims as a given. Even in scholarly circles, at the beginning of the 1920s, after English critique had exposed the fallacy of his metaphysical hypothesis, American usage of the term, Significant Form, and its correlative, Aesthetic Emotion, did not fall away as abruptly as one might imagine. We will briefly examine Mary Mullen’s equivocations in *An Approach to Art*, her book of 1923, about the relevance of Aesthetic Emotion to the wider cultural conversation.\(^\text{306}\)

I will argue, in this chapter, that Significant Form’s demise in America was protracted and complex. Pilloried by the American *cognoscenti* during the 1920s, any residual mystique left to it lost its allure during the early years of the decade. Yet the term survived in the literature. We therefore look to new meanings vested in the idea of Significant Form as it was adapted to the terms of American discourse. In this respect, Wallace’s dissertation on Sheldon Cheney’s contribution to American modernist historiography is particularly helpful. Highlighting Cheney’s deviation from a formalist lineage connecting Fry, Bell, and Huntington Wright to Barr and Greenberg, Wallace emphasises the critic’s attention to a neglected theme running through the early modernist discourse in America: the cultural totality of modernity. According to Wallace, this important bifurcation was overlooked by formalist historians in their unremitting attention to the ontological purity of the medium, even though its regenerative principle was a prominent theme during the inter-War years. Cheney’s contribution to it posited the emancipation of the individual, the so-called

\(^{305}\) Worldcat.org. [Accessed on 14.06.2016].

\(^{306}\) Mary Mullen, *An Approach to Art*, (Merion: The Barnes Foundation, 1923).
‘Average Citizen’, through a process of ‘spiritual re-education’. Wallace cites Lewis Mumford, Harold Stearns, and Waldo Franks as fellow protagonists, along with James Oppenheim, Randolph Bourne, and Paul Rosenfeld, who, like Franks, were all sometime editors of the *Seven Arts* journal. Their tradition of modernity in its redemptive totality differed from the formalist one in that it had a visionary dimension which proved to be eminently compatible with a modern iconography as we will see in the imagery evoked by Katherine Dreier’s *Western Art and the New Era* of 1923 and Paul Rosenfeld’s *Port of New York* of 1924. We will note its presence too in Cheney’s *A Primer of Modern Art* of 1924, where, I suggest, the new iconography encountered, and was to some degree reconciled with, the Anglo-American tradition of form. Wallace attributes Cheney’s deviation from the formalist tradition to his predilection for modern German art, and its promotion of ‘expressive’ values. It is at this point of divergence from Anglo-American formalism, a tradition that lays claim to the supposed ‘classical’ virtues of French art, that we find certain affinities with George Santanaya’s understanding of ‘expression’ in *The Sense of Beauty*. We will consider how Cheney reconciles the formalist tradition with a modern iconography by recourse to Santayana. There is, after all, a pronounced Schopenhauerian tendency to the aesthetics of Santayana as we will see. I will indicate how Cheney’s theory of ‘expressive form’ serves to reconcile these divergent modernist tendencies.

Thus, having entered American cultural discourse as a term of fashionable approval or an *ad hoc* explanatory device, Significant Form was adapted by Cheney, in the guise of ‘expressive form’, to a different end whereby it deflected attention from the unsettling particularities of European avant-garde art and redirected it towards a socially-integrating experience of an avowedly American modernity. We begin by examining the terms on which Significant Form entered American discourse.

**American reaction**

To begin with, American critical reaction was sparse. One of the few reviews of Bell’s *Art* to be published, an anonymous piece in the *New York Times* which appeared on 15th

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September 1914, merits attention because it tells us something about Anglo-American cultural relations and the extent Bloomsbury’s cultural reach at the time. The article begins with a sympathetic review of Kandinsky’s book, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*. Noting the painter’s verbosity however, the reviewer quotes Michael Sadler, Kandinsky’s English translator, in the hope that he might elucidate the artist’s perplexing ideas. In doing so, certain assumptions that the reviewer makes about the readership become evident. Referring to Sadler, the he recounts:

He says that Kandinsky is ‘painting music’. That is, he has broken down the barrier between painting and music, has isolated the pure emotion we call Aesthetic Emotion.

Evidently, the *New York Times*’ readers are assumed to be conversant with the idea of an affinity between painting and music; and that the two forms appeal to a common emotion; and that, at least, figuratively speaking, their formal characteristics may be transcended; and that the emotion they evoke is known as Aesthetic Emotion; and that Kandinsky’s theory of art is compatible with the idea of Aesthetic Emotion; and, moreover, that it might well be more readily understood by the readers in terms of Aesthetic Emotion. The impression that this readership is already conversant with this formalist coda is reinforced when the reviewer turns to Bell’s book, *Art*, and commends the ‘educated modern critic’ for his recognition of the artist’s ‘passion for Significant Form’. Applauding Bell, this ‘educated modern critic’, he continues:

He has passed far by that stupid stumbling block of the subject in art. He has passed that question of likeness. He has arrived at an artistic standpoint.

Unaware that Bell himself is the author of Significant Form, he extols him for ‘arriv[ing] at an artistic standpoint’. We must assume, of course, that it is Bell’s version of Significant Form that the writer has in mind in mind, rather than its Schopenhauerian precursor, since it elicits ‘passion’, the sublime emotion and, in any case, appears in the context of Aesthetic Emotion.

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What can we reliably infer from this relatively obscure book review? I suggest that we may safely assume that Bell’s theory of Significant Form had arrived in America well before the book’s release in New York by F. A. Stokes, and that a culturally-informed American readership was conversant with the concept and some of its wider implications for the arts. We may also assume that, among this readership, Significant Form was a term of general approbation and that it stood for a ‘modern educated’ position on modern art and its supposed relationship to representational tradition. We also learn that the reviewer takes Significant Form as a given, and is unaware of the conceptual problems it raises or of its polemical significance in English debate. Furthermore, he knows little or nothing of Bell and, since he makes no reference to Post-Impressionism in his review, we assume that he is either unaware of the social circles in England—later to be known as Bloomsbury—that connect Significant Form to Post-Impressionism, or he sees no immediate relevance in the connection. We will now examine the critiques of Significant Form in England and America respectively, to see how they shaped the modernist discourse of the 1920s.

The English critique: flowers, butterfly wings, gems

Before Significant Form was so-named, some of the elements of the idea can be detected in the various apologia Bell wrote on behalf of Post-Impressionism immediately after Manet and the Post-Impressionists. We find, for example, the underlying metaphysical assumption of his as-yet incomplete theory in three book reviews that appeared in the Athenæum in 1911, a publication with American distribution. Writing at a time when he was also at work on The New Renaissance, but before the idea of Art had been raised, he argues that Post-Impressionism reflects a link between form and meaning. It was necessary to establish this simple premise then, in the immediate aftermath of Manet and the Post-Impressionists, because he sought to defend Post-Impressionism against conservative charges of incompetence, chicanery, and barbarity, by asserting the aesthetic superiority of its simple forms. He did so by arguing that the new movement represented the continuity of a tradition of ‘vital’ art, comprising simple forms with profound meaning, as opposed, we

assume, to the meretricious ones favoured by his adversaries. In the _Athenæum_ reviews, Bell defends the pattern-like simplicity of Post-Impressionist paintings on the grounds that they convey deep meanings. Discussing C. Lewis Hind’s book, _The Post-Impressionists_, for example, he states:

> For Mr. Hind realizes, dimly perhaps, that there is something great behind these Post-Impressionist pictures. ... Unless we mistake, it is a sense of the spiritual significance of the universe ...

The phrase, ‘spiritual significance of the universe’, encapsulates the link between form and meaning. It is the basis of form’s significance, and it foreshadows Bell’s metaphysical hypothesis. Indeed, it is this idea that underpins the earliest American understanding of Significant Form.

Bell first referred to Significant Form _per se_ in an essay titled ‘The English Group’, his contribution to the catalogue of _The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition_ in 1912. Early American interpretations of Significant Form would follow suit. We observed, in the _New York Times_’ review, that Significant Form designates a position that purports to be modern and is opposed to the values of verisimilitude and subject matter. This impression is entirely compatible with Bell’s statement in ‘The English Group’. The _New York Times_ reviewer, as we saw, was oblivious to the polemical dimension of Significant Form because the appearance of common purpose held firm while was Bell was writing _Art_ until the so-called ‘Ideal Home Rumpus’ in October 1913, when internal rivalries came to the fore and the book’s script was more or less complete. Aware of the dissent during the latter stages of the writing process, Bell nevertheless presents his thesis in _Art_ as an apologia on behalf of Post-Impressionism and claims, disingenuously, as we now know, that ‘... after all it is sensible to call the group of vital artists who immediately follow the Impressionists by that name [Post-Impressionists] …’

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312 Bell, _Athenæum_, (8th July 1911), p. 51.
313 Bell, ‘The English Group’.
315 Bell, _Art_. Bell states: ‘That movement is still young. But I think it would be safe to say that already it has produced as much good art as its predecessor. Cézanne, of course, created far greater things than any Impressionist painter; and Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse, Rousseau, Picasso, de Vlaminck, Derain, Herbin, Marchand, Marquet, Bonnard, Duncan Grant, Maillol, Lewis, Kandinsky, Brancusi, von Anrep, Roger Fry, Friesz, Goncharova, L’Hôte, are Rolands for the Olivers of any other artistic period. They are not all great artists, but they all are artists. ... the Post-Impressionists (for after all it is sensible to call the group of vital artists who immediately follow the Impressionists by that name) have raised the average again’, pp. 200 & 201.
At the beginning of that year, in January 1913, he had expounded the idea of Significant Form in an extract from the book’s script, titled ‘Aesthetics and Post-Impressionism’. Incorporated into the book as its second chapter, this text was first published in the *Burlington Magazine*, another periodical with American distribution. Here, Bell argues, again disingenuously, that Post-Impressionism simply amounts to an expression of a timeless imperative: ‘the first commandment of art—Thou shalt create form’. American readers would, quite reasonably, equate Post-Impressionism with an all-encompassing tradition of ‘form’; but, by the time *Art* was published, it is, unequivocally, a Post-Impressionist interpretation of ‘form’, defined as form with cosmic significance, that elicits Aesthetic Emotion.

Notwithstanding Bell’s confiding tone, *Art*’s text is highly nuanced. Although he affects to challenge the representational values of the academic establishment, he implicitly lays claim to the tradition of ‘form’, the object of English factional rivalry. In ‘The Debt to Cézanne’, the eleventh chapter of *Art*, he reinforces the Post-Impressionist claim to supremacy among the English modernist movement by listing a number of continental European painters, whom he intersperses with the names of English painters, supporters of Bloomsbury, and, presumably having penned this section before the ‘Ideal Home Rumpus’, Wyndham Lewis.

The *Athenæum*’s and Burlington’s unwary American subscribers, versed in Bell’s narrative of Significant Form, but oblivious to its polemical tenor, might well have taken Bell at his word. His elisions were not exposed by sympathetic reviews in the *Athenæum* and the *Nation*, neither of which cede recognition to rival parties within an increasingly fractious English modernist movement. In the *Athenæum*, for example, Bell’s formalism is encapsulated thus:

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316 Clive Bell, ‘Post-Impressionism and Aesthetics’, *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 118, (January 1913), pp. 226 – 230. Bell’s theory of Significant Form would have come to the attention of the publication’s American readership through this article; see Flaminia Gennari Santori, ‘Holmes, Fry, Jaccaci’ and the “Art in America” Section of the Burlington Magazine 1905 – 10’, *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 145, No 1200, Centenary Issue, (March 2003), pp. 153 – 163. Santori describes the new publication’s policies for developing an American readership base and the lack of information about the publication’s American clientele. By 1913, a small American readership consisting of collectors, academics, and other arts professional may be assumed to have characterised the American readership. The idea of Significant Form would have been known in such circles before Bell’s book *Art* was published in 1914.
The point round which controversy must turn is whether imitative representation is really as valueless as Mr. Bell thinks... The hinge of the theory, then, is the exaltation of the formal elements as theoretically irrelevant and pernicious in practice.\textsuperscript{317}

Fry, writing for the \textit{Nation}, hails Bell for sweeping aside the ‘mouldy snobbism’ of culture’s ‘pious hierophants’; little sense here of Significant Form’s contested status within the English modern movement. Although Fry’s review did much to pre-empt hostile criticism, English critics were not slow to expose Bell’s inconsistencies. T. E. Hulme, for example, writing for the \textit{New Age}, questioned the premise of aesthetic emotion from a psychological point of view:

\begin{quote}
The theory is that we contemplate ‘form’ for its own sake—that is, it produces a particular emotion different from ordinary everyday emotions—a specific ‘aesthetic’ emotion.\textsuperscript{318}
\end{quote}

He continues:

\begin{quote}
If form has no dramatic or human interest, then it is obviously stupid for a human to be interested in it.
\end{quote}

The argument held good in relation to Significant Form but it had been anticipated by Fry, who had already proposed the existence of other emotions that might be deemed ‘accessory’, if not ‘fundamental’ or ‘essential’, to the arts. Referring to Bell’s metaphysical hypothesis, Fry suggests that his hyperbole might reflect the heightened experience of those who find art ‘so intimately and conclusively satisfying to their spiritual nature, that for them to have it interfered with by any other considerations, by the intrusion of any human emotion...is to miss the greatest value of art’.\textsuperscript{319} Fry goes on to argue that the ecstatic emotion Bell associates with ‘aesthetic experience’, and which leads artists to create Significant Form, might be better thought of more prosaically, as a fusion of the artist’s aesthetic concerns with their response to the functional or technical properties of the medium. He asks:

\begin{quote}
Why must the potter who is to make a superbly beautiful pot not think only of its Significant Form, but think first and most passionately about its functions as a pot? ...
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{318} T. E. Hulme, ‘Modern Art IV—Mr David Bomberg’s Show’, \textit{New Age}, XIV, (9\textsuperscript{th} July 1914), pp. 230 – 232. Hulme argument continues thus: ‘If this were a true account of the matter, it would be incomprehensible to the layman... And he would be right. If form has no dramatic or human interest, then it is obviously stupid for a human to be interested in it. But the theory is erroneous. There is no such thing as a specifically ‘aesthetic’ emotion, a peculiar kind of emotion produced by ‘form’ alone, only of interest to aesthetes’, p. 231.

\textsuperscript{319} Fry, \textit{A New Theory of Art}, p. 490.
And is it not just the fusion of this something with form that makes the difference between the finest pattern-making and real design?  

The debate was reignited later in that decade when an article by Bell, first published by the *New Statesman* in 1914, attempting to clarify the idea of Significant Form, reappeared in *Pot Boilers* in 1918. It elicited a caustic aside from D. S. MacColl who, in a piece directed against an article by Fry on drawing, accused Bell, in passing, of ascribing ‘significance’ to ‘meaningless’ forms. Bell retorted that he had only ever called form significant to distinguish it from the ‘insignificant beauty’ of flowers, butterfly wings, gems, and such like. The former differs from the latter, because the emotion it provokes is expressed by painters, potters, sculptors, architects, textile-makers, whereas naturally-occurring beauty cannot express anything. In reply, MacColl rehearsed Hulme’s argument about forms, pointing out that, as Bell had now come to use the word ‘significant’ in an adjectival sense, he was obliged to cast around for some recondite meaning for the word. This, according to MacColl, he found in his metaphysical hypothesis which ascribed meaning to ‘pure’ forms as ‘ends in themselves’. The fallacy of this position, as MacColl points out, is that an end-in-itself cannot, by definition, signify something else.

We now turn to a divergent debate in America. Although, to begin with, it resembled its English counterpart, the conclusions to which it would lead had a very particular ramification for the orthodoxy to follow. In time, as I will argue, the remnants of Significant Form would be salvaged and reassembled in the service of an institutional practice, thereby foreshadowing the institutional formalism of the following decade.

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320 Ibid.
322 D. S. MacColl, *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 34, No. 194, (May, 1919), pp. 203 – 206. MacColl referred to articles by Fry on modern drawing in *The Burlington Magazine* of December 1918 and February 1919. He states: ‘I am aware that someone has launched the phrase, designing in depth”, to describe and excuse the uncommonly poor designs in the flat among recent work; and the parrots of the press frequently repeat this incantation, just as they repeat Mr. Clive Bell’s “Significant Form”. Mr. Bell sets out to be absurd, or, in any case, succeeds in saying the precise opposite of what he may be presumed to have intended, namely, “insignificant” or “meaningless” form’, p. 204.
323 Bell, ‘Significant Form’, p. 257.
Critique in America: ‘backward and forward, as well as from side to side’

Willard Huntington Wright likens Significant Form, in *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning*, to a dimension of art that eludes the untutored public’s concern with ‘conventionally painted details’. As if in some recondite allusion to Edwin Abbott Abbott’s satirical novel, *Flatland*, Huntington Wright argues that the two-dimensional surfaces he ascribes to Significant Form concern a more profound reality than the one evoked by mere fidelity to detail. Significant Form ‘must move in depth—backward and forward, as well as from side to side’. Then, alluding, perhaps, to Bell’s metaphysical hypothesis, he adds that ‘it must imply an infinity of depth’. Elsewhere Huntington Wright reinforces the link between art and Aesthetic Emotion in the minds of his American readership: ‘...I have weighed the painting of the last century, and have judged it solely by its ability or inability to call forth a profound Aesthetic Emotion. Only great art can give us intellectual rapture’.

Wright’s proposition is unusual in the sense that American critical reaction to Significant Form was sparse during the second decade. For much of that period, the term subsisted as an art critical given, albeit a terminological inexactitude alluding to some ill-defined quality of form. Its slipshod usage prompted Bell himself to concede, in an article for the *New Republic*, an American periodical, published in September 1920, that there was now little consensus as to the precise definition of Significant Form. A minority, the cognoscenti, he ventured, were agreed on ‘one or two points’, namely, that the ‘literary and anecdotal’ content of works of art is ‘mere surplusage’; and that any reference the work of art makes to life must be to ‘that fundamental experience which is the common heritage of mankind’.

By now, in 1920, English versions of Significant Form had been moderated in response to extended critique. Bell stood by his aesthetic hypothesis but he was less inclined to defend the metaphysical one. Yet, this hostage to fortune, for all the ridicule it incurred, prompted a dialogue concerning significance and form; one that would shape subsequent Anglo-American formalist orthodoxy, as I will argue. Even during the 1920s it would seem, Bell’s erstwhile romanticism maintained its hold on the imagination of

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327 Ibid, p. 10.
middlebrow America, albeit tenuously, if a satirical piece by Paul Edlington, the English editor of the New York periodical, *International Studio*, is to be gauged. In a satirical glossary of contemporary jargon in the August 1925 edition, he pokes fun at the pretentiousness of it all:

Form: An ancient deity whose empire, however, only reached its widest sway in the year 1920, which saw the publication of Mr Clive Bell’s *Art*. True, He bore a brand-new name, having been hailed by Mr Bell by the title of Significant, but neither Mr Bell, nor any of his followers were at all clear as to the meaning of this new distinction. Having prostrated themselves before the altar of an Unknown God, they merely hoped that the addition of a still more ineffable and, by the same token, indefinable, title, would render his throne for all time unassailable.\footnote{Guy Edlington, ‘Art and Other Things: The Complete Dictionary of Modern Art Terms’, *International Studio*, (August 1925), p. 377.}

The intimation is, of course, that Bell’s specious religion still duped the gullible. The mysterious quality hailed as ‘significance’ defies definition because its source resides in the ineffable realm of deity. The apogee of the cult, 1920, perhaps alludes to the date of publication of Bell’s article in the *New Republic*.

As we have noted, Significant Form’s metaphysical claim fell by the wayside during the 1920s although its dualistic thesis proved to be more enduring. I will discuss its reconfiguration to the terms of the American discourse and consider how it thereby continued to inform an Anglo-American theory of modernist art. In its new incarnation, meaningful form of one sort or another was destined to attract the attention of Alfred Barr Jr. who would draw upon middlebrow sources when he codified the Museum of Modern Art’s formalist orthodoxy.

**A modernist iconography**

Insofar that American bohemia had ever assented to Post-Impressionism, it contested Bloomsbury’s construction of it. Paul Rosenfeld cites Post-Impressionism in the ‘battle’ of Stieglitz’s Photo-Secession Gallery in 1908—some two years before Fry had concocted the term—to emancipate art and photography from the demands of representation. In his account, Post-Impressionism subserves the cause of the Stieglitz group, against London, fashion, and even of Fry himself: ‘Hence, while London and fashion and Roger Fry ignored Post-Impressionistic art, ‘291’ began forcing upon New York the European and American
experimenters in colour and clay’. As an artistic tendency—for Rosenfeld accepts ‘Post-Impressionism’ in the adjectival sense alone—it pre-exists Fry’s exhibition of 1910, and finds its true heritage in Greenwich Village as early as 1908. Post-Impressionistic painting is thereby appropriated by him to a narrative of American modernism. Significant Form entered American cultural discourse on much the same terms, deflecting attention, as it did, from the subversive content of European avant-garde art and then redirecting it towards an affirmative, socially-integrating experience of modernity. Once relieved of its problematic metaphysical connotation, Significant Form bequeathed to a middlebrow modernist discourse of the 1920s an idea of form with transcendent meaning.

According to Sheldon Cheney, writing in 1924, Significant Form ‘afforded a multitude of people a handy label for something they had before mentioned gropingly and even bashfully’. Devoid of rational explanation, it survived much of the third decade on the strength of an argument about artistic form’s transcendent qualities. We find evidence of Bell’s tautological thinking even among informed theorists at this time. Mary Mullen, for example, a representative of the Barnes Foundation, argues in her book of 1923, An Approach to Art, that the notion of Aesthetic Emotion retains some value because there was no other term to describe the feelings that art engendered. An argument devised in the knowledge of the wider critique maintains the flawed premise on which Significant Form relies. Conflicting cultural interests precluded meaningful intellectual dialogue. By the third decade, tensions began to surface. Take, for example, Katherine Dreier’s Western Art and

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330 Rosenfeld, Port of New York, p. 256.
331 Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art, p. 39.
332 Mullen, An Approach to Art. Mullen fudges the issue. She states: ‘In the foregoing discussion the word ‘emotional’ has been used as descriptive of aesthetic feeling, principally to conform to popular terminology. ... besides a certain quality of feeling-tone seems to be inherent in both pure emotion and the aesthetic experience’. Later, appearing to accept the idea that there is a uniquely aesthetic experience, she hedges her bets nevertheless. She argues: ‘It must be remembered however, that traditional psychology has confined the meaning of the word ‘emotion’ to the distinctive feelings which accompany primary instincts like fear, love ... Hence, while we cannot speak of Aesthetic Emotion in the same sense as we correctly we correctly say the ‘emotion of fear’, there seems to be sufficient justification to employ the word ‘emotional’ as indicative of a certain quality which makes aesthetic feeling something distinctive in itself, and yet distinct from pure emotion. It is in that relation only that relation only that art may be termed an ‘expression of emotion’, or aesthetic experience spoken of as emotional feeling’. Mullen thus offers her readers the possibility of a distinctive ‘aesthetic feeling’, but denies them Aesthetic Emotion, because ‘traditional psychology’ finds no evidence for it. Feeling is admitted: emotion is not’, p. 25.
333 Alfred Stieglitz, Stieglitz to Paul Haviland, Stieglitz Papers, Yale University, (April 19th 1916). Huntington Wright’s troubled collaboration with Stieglitz and Dr. John Weichsel over the Forum of American Painters exhibition at the Anderson Gallery in 1916, is a case in point. The event had been intended as a corrective to the perceived under-representation of American artists in the Armory Show, and the composition of the organising committee was an expression of Huntington Wright’s overtures toward the Stieglitz circle. Stieglitz
the New Era, of 1923. Though not a member of the Stieglitz circle, this second generation American of German descent was nevertheless a leading figure among New York’s *haute-bohème*. A Theosophist by conviction, Dreier cites the literal-mindedness and cerebral nature of the Anglo-Saxon people as to why they could not experience modernist art on an authentic, sensuous level. She confides to her readers that, ‘it is the subject ... which confuses so many of the Anglo-Saxon people, whose chief reaction is always through the mind instead of through the senses, as all reactions should be’. Yet, paradoxically, Dreier constructs her ‘new era’ thesis on the foundation of Post-Impressionism. Indeed, her understanding of Post-Impressionism closely resembles Bell’s in relation to the importance that both confer on the primitive spirit of the new art. Like Bell, she conceives of Post-Impressionism as a cultural high point in an art historical cycle—or ‘chain’—of primitivist achievements followed by periods of prolonged decline.

Dreier, however, parts company with Bell over an epistemological point. As we noted earlier, in relation to Fry, Significant Form implies the autonomy of the work of art in itself, once the artist has finished with it. Fry, by contrast, emphasises the artist’s intention as revealed through the work of art. Dreier, in contrast to both Fry and Bell, privileges the artist’s vision. As she puts it, ‘Art...is chiefly an expression of the soul, through which it must speak through feeling...’ It is incumbent upon the viewer to see beyond form, past its ‘vicissitudes’ to the ‘spiritual essence’ that form conveys. ‘The modern artist,’ Dreier tells us, ‘is abundant with life and he must express life as he sees it today...’ Bell’s artist is also motivated by vision, but, unlike Dreier’s ‘modern artist’, whose forms reveal the soul, his idea of form is as an end in-itself. We note the sentiments at play: Dreier’s bohemian sensibility is affronted by that the commodification of art as she intimates in the anecdote she approvingly recounts about Stieglitz withholding a sale from a client whom he deemed to be unworthy. These sentiments manifest themselves in significant ways. Bell’s ideal

had written appreciatively about Huntington Wright’s *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* and relations between the two had been cordial for some time. With immediate hindsight, though, Stieglitz recognised that his invitation as ‘a very clever tactical move’ by Wright.

335 Ibid, pp. 124 & 125.
336 Ibid, p. 73.
337 Bell, Bell states: ‘... the artist and the saint do what they have to do, not making a living, but in obedience to some mysterious necessity. They do not produce to live—they live to produce’, p. 261.
338 Dreier, *Western Art and the New Era*. Dreier describes the event thus: ‘This mental attitude towards art which overemphasizes the craftsmanship in art is one of the greatest tragedies of our modern American life, for it took art from its rightful place as an inherent part of life, as a stimulus for the finer qualities, and turned
artist, working in the seclusion required of the Schopenhauerian genius, is envisioned by an ‘ultimate reality’ that is mediated through ‘pure’ form. By contrast, Dreier’s modern painter is motivated by a vision of community. ‘We will recognise’, she explains, ‘that art is an expression of the spiritual life of a community’. Her ideal corresponds with the wider bohemian one; the regenerative totality described by George Wallace. Max Weber, for instance, a former member of the Stieglitz circle, proclaims his subscription to a similar ideal: ‘That which makes for individual art is in a whole people’. The same ideal is replicated in Paul Rosenfeld’s allegory of American modernism in *Port of New York*, published in 1924. As he indicates in the Preface, the fourteen American moderns of whom he writes, are linked by a common dream, ‘...variations of a single feeling’. Like Dreier and Weber, the vision amounts to an idyll of modern times. According to Rosenfeld, it was realised sometime around 1920, when a ‘miracle ... set life thrilling and rhythmning through the place of New York’. America’s cultural awakening is evoked; a time of ‘... men on American land ... coming into relationship with one another and with the places in which they dwell’. The once-forbidding confines of New York City, an avowedly modern space, are now admitted to the modernist’s iconography. Cultural relations between the Old World and the New change fundamentally. Steam packets plying the shipping lanes had once descended from one plane to another on their approach to the port of New York. But a ‘mysterious translation’ had taken place. ‘Now’, he observes, ‘the steamers no longer descend from one plane to another when they come into New York harbor’. Dreier’s version of the idyll embraces modernity too, as she lays claim to the era’s industrial and technological spaces. Bell, by contrast, is circumspect about the prospect of modernity: ‘...trains and steam-boats have made everything move faster: the mistake lies in being quite
so positive that this is a blessing’. Willard Huntington Wright, a proponent of Anglo-American formalism during the second decade, extols American cultural achievement, but his vision is confined to the sphere of artistic form; modernity’s trappings and spaces are incidental to modernism’s forms. American cultural achievement finds its fullest expression in the forms of Synchromism, the apogee of American modernist painting.

**Summary**

Significant Form’s arrival in America preceded the publication of Bell’s book *Art*, having been introduced, piecemeal, through a number of texts published in the *Athenæum* and the *Burlington*, both of which were periodicals with Anglo-American distribution. Given the furore, English critique of Significant Form awaited publication of Bell’s book when the full import of his general theory of art would come to light. Meanwhile, in America, an informed readership, having encountered Significant Form in the absence of serious confutation, and unaware of its polemical significance in English debate, confined such tentative criticism as it proffered to an elaboration of Bell’s, as yet, untested assertions. Huntington Wright’s remarks in *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* are a case in point. Otherwise, in America, Significant Form was taken as a given; a touchstone of modernist authenticity as *The New York Times*’ review of *Art* attests.

When, towards the end of the second decade, this uncontested Anglo-American version of Significant Form encountered its mitigated English counterpart, sources suggest that confusion set in as to the nature of form’s significance. Problematised by now, Bell’s article for the *New Republic* in 1920 reveals that he had more or less abandoned his metaphysical hypothesis. Yet, discussions in Mary Mullen’s *The Experience of Art* of 1923 and Sheldon Cheney’s *A Primer of Modern Art* of 1924 speak of its irrational hold on the middlebrow imagination and Paul Edlington’s fun at Bell’s expense in *International Studio* in 1925 reveals the pervasiveness of a link between form and transcendent meaning.
I concluded the chapter by suggesting that, when this strain of Anglo-American aesthetic theory encountered the modernist vision promulgated by Katherine Dreier and Paul Rosenfeld, representatives of America’s bohemian tradition, differences between the two explanatory traditions reflected divergent cultural allegiances rather than any profound theoretical positions. Having eventually assented to a version of Post-Impressionism, the denizens of American bohemia offered, in return, a modern and avowedly American vision of modernity. For Dreier, Post-Impressionism signified epochal change, the ‘natural swing of the pendulum’ towards the ‘expression of an inner urge’ among artists at the end of the nineteenth-century. It was the ‘first conscious note of the dynamic in art’, the first step towards modern art, we infer. Rosenfeld cites Post-Impressionism in relation to the ‘battle’ of Stieglitz’s Photo-Secession Gallery in 1908—some two years before Fry devised the term—to emancipate art and photography from the demands of representation. ‘Post-Impressionistic’ art, in his account, represents Stieglitz’s cause against London, fashion, and even of Fry himself: ‘Hence, while London and fashion and Roger Fry ignored Post-Impressionistic art, ‘291’ began forcing upon New York the European and American experimenters in colour and clay’. Conceived as an artistic tendency, it pre-exists Fry’s exhibition of 1910, and finds its true heritage in Greenwich Village as early as 1908. ‘Post-Impressionistic’ painting is thereby co-opted to his own narrative of American modernism.

Post-Impressionism’s adaption to an American historiography anticipates the construction we find in the formalist orthodoxy to come. Significant Form, on the other hand, became obsolete during the early 1920s but its components would be given a new lease of life by Sheldon Cheney when he reconciled them to the vision of modern America in his explanation modernist art to ‘the interested but often puzzled Progressive Citizen’.

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349 Ibid, p. 63.
Systematised Significance

In her survey of American art critical practices during the 1920s, Susan Noyes Platt observes: ‘Since few texts offered authoritative opinions, individual predilections and beliefs became of major importance. No defining institution arbitrated the outstanding accomplishments of modern art, only a myriad of small galleries and groups. The result was an outpouring of opinion and impassioned interpretation ...’\(^{352}\) In this chapter, I will argue, to the contrary, that the continuities to be found in Anglo-American accounts of modernist art amount to a form of coherence and that the discourse they generated represents an intellectual prelude to the methodological orthodoxy of the 1930s. My suggestion is that a theoretical tendency, loosely adhering to Bell’s theory of Significant Form, began to coalesce, and that it came to shape the methodologies of an emergent institutional culture during the 1920s. At a time, when arts institutions were beginning to recruit university-educated professionals, the new practice adopted formalist methodologies that would later be taken up by the Museum of Modern Art.\(^{353}\) As Russell Lynes observes in *Good Old Modern*, a number of pioneering collections stand out, because ‘they are part of the backdrop against which MoMA made its appearance’.\(^{354}\) Most famous and least visible among them was the Barnes Institute at Merion, a suburb of Philadelphia. I will demonstrate how, under the direction of its notoriously cantankerous founder, Albert C. Barnes, it modelled a formalist methodology predicated on the principle of Significant Form even though Barnes himself was scathing towards Bell, ‘a clever London newspaper seller’. There are clear links, nevertheless, between their concepts of form, especially primitive form. Moreover, we see how Barnes’

\(^{352}\) Noyes Platt, *Modernism in the 1920s*. Writing at a time when accounts of the 1920s reproduced formalist values and therefore focussed on the formalist tradition, Noyes Platt emphasised the heterogeneity of practice during the decade. She observes: ‘Since few texts offered authoritative opinions, individual predilections and beliefs became of major importance. No defining institution arbitrated the outstanding accomplishments of modern art, only a myriad of small galleries and groups. The result was an outpouring of opinion and impassioned interpretation ...’ p. 2.


reconstruction of form, modelled Alfred Barr’s account of Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, a seminal narrative of formalist orthodoxy. For all Barnes’ antagonism, the institutional continuities between Merion and the Museum of Modern Art were palpable. Indeed, according to Lynes, Goodyear, the Museum’s first President, proposed—somewhat unrealistically—that the Museum should borrow works from the Barnes collection for its inaugural exhibition in 1929. That was never to be, of course, but the point is the prevalence during the 1920s of formalist art historical and methodological continuities and the degree of compatibility they had with the Museum of Modern Art’s orthodoxy in the 1930s.

Significant Form was destined to undergo a process of deconstruction, as intimated in the last chapter, before certain components could be salvaged and then reintegrated into an Anglo-American strain of formalist theory. As we examine some of the critical texts documenting this process, we break with chronological order because one text in particular, an illuminating exposition of American objections to Significant Form, lies out of sequence with the others. In 1926, C. J. Ducasse, Professor of Philosophy at Brown University, published a succinct critique of Significant Form—but not Aesthetic Emotion, we note—in the *Nation*. It appeared a couple of years after Sheldon Cheney reconfigured the construct in his popular and influential book, *A Primer of Modern Art*. We begin with the demise of Bell’s metaphysical claim.

**Abracadabra: Significant Form encounters scientific method**

Taking Bell’s tautological reasoning to task, Ducasse systematically dismantles the construct. He demonstrates that Significant Form simply amounts to a proper name for an old problem as to ‘what quality is shared by all objects that provoke our Aesthetic Emotions’. In order to avoid the appearance of meaning in the words ‘significant’ and ‘form’, he jests, why not give Significant Form an honest name—‘Shall we say “Abracadabra”?’ Elsewhere, Ducasse notes that Significant Form serves to distinguish between the emotion induced by natural beauty and that of art. Questioning Bell’s distinction, he refers to Bell’s suggestion that the artist, and occasionally, ordinary people too, derive Aesthetic Emotion from natural beauty. Bell, he recollects, had distinguished between aesthetic beauty and the

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357 C. J. Ducasse, Significant Form, pp. 121 & 122.
beauty of women on the grounds that the latter is, strictly speaking, sexual allure. The significance of Significant Form might therefore be described more aptly, Ducasse suggests, as Abracadabra’s sublimation:

... salvation from the slough of impurity in which we thus find ourselves wallowing unawares would seem to lie in the possibility of making artists of ourselves, for Mr Bell admits that artists at least are moved aesthetically by nature; that is, what in it arrests their gaze is not the foulness which beauty is but the pure sublimity of Abracadabra.

Bell’s proposition that forms should move us because they express the emotion of their creator, raises a metaphysical question and, with it, he ventures, the hope of explanation. But, alas, ‘the guileless bohemian mouse’ is enticed further into Bell’s cruel trap by the fragrant promise of ‘intellectual cheese’. If one is moved by art which conveys something that the artist felt, how is it that the same emotion can, in turn, be provoked in artists by nature, which cannot express anything, but just is? Recognising the Schopenhauerianism at play in Bell’s thinking—‘Schopenhauer in strict incognito’—Ducasse alights on Bell’s conflation of the ‘end in-itself’ and ‘ultimate reality’. It permits a ‘devilishly subtle transition’: ‘End in-Itself, Thing in-itself, Ultimate Reality!’ Repeating MacColl’s objection, he asks how an end in-itself could possibly signify something else. Significant Form, he concludes, is nothing other than a clever catchphrase to stave off a real aesthetic problem concerning the nature of forms that constitute beauty. We note that Ducasse asserts the link between form and sublimation. The new science begins to encroach upon formalist methodology.

**Sheldon Cheney’s contribution**

The formalist conversation edged closer to a scientific principle of transcendence in Cheney’s *A Primer of Modern Art* of 1924, but, ill-equipped as he was to develop the theme, he merely conjectured a psychological explanation for form’s ecstasies. ‘Until the aesthetcian and psycho-analysts have dug deeper’, he muses, ‘we are only sure that the form problem is much more closely bound up with the artist’s emotion than it is with objective nature’. 358 We might discern the relativism of George Santayana in this pronouncement but his presence is more immediate in the reconciliation Cheney effects

358 Cheney, *A Primer of Modern Art*, p. 44.
between Anglo-American formalist theories and the visionary tradition to which George Wallace referred and exemplified in Dreier and Rosenfeld, a feat signified in the substitution of ‘expressive form’ for Significant Form. 359 ‘Expression’, in this context, denotes communication of some sort or another; ‘expressive form’ might therefore promise more to Cheney’s reader, the ‘interested but often puzzled Progressive Citizen’ than its esoteric predecessor, ‘significance’. Quite apart from the physicality that it implies in terms of a palpable form of emotion, it also carries the suggestion of a material medium whereby expression is transmitted, and it is in this respect that Santayana’s heritage is most redolent. Yet Bell’s legacy remains resolutely in place, for Cheney is unequivocal in his declaration: ‘The core of any absolute statement of modern art theory is in the inclusion of one word “form”’. 360

The reconciliation is accomplished thus: whereas Bell had been adamant that the sole concern of the artist is the creation of form, Cheney, by contrast, proposes that other factors accessory to form may be required to construct a theory of modernist art, provided the primacy of its form is maintained. 361 Illustrating his point with John Marin’s Lower Manhattan, a small charcoal and watercolour drawing of the steel structure of Brooklyn Bridge and its built environs made in 1920, he reiterates Bell’s argument about the difference between natural and artistic beauty: ‘The sensations arising from contemplation of a landscape or a butterfly or a flower are related to a different order of experience …’, and so on. 362 [Figure 10] The inference is that Bell’s argument about naturally occurring beauty is anomalous in the modern technological environment because Manhattan’s landscape, being man-made, is already ordered. In New York’s urban environment, the artist is no longer able to create order out of nature’s chaos.

Cheney duly acknowledges Bell’s ‘elementary treatise’, as he refers to it, but argues, albeit inaccurately, that Significant Form concerns the visual arts alone. 363 To remedy the problem, he draws upon Santayana who emphasises the significance of ‘expression’ in the work of art. Following Santayana’s lead, Cheney proposes that we recognise a wider

361 Bell, Art. Bell states: ‘Post-Impressionism is nothing but the reassertion of the first commandment of art—Thou shalt create form. By this assertion it shakes hands across the ages with the Byzantine primitives and with every vital movement that has struggled into existence since the arts began’. pp. 22 & 23.
362 Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art, p. 38.
stimulus to Aesthetic Emotion; namely ‘expressive form’ which, he contends, is more adequately conceived to describe the source of Aesthetic Emotion in modern works of art: ‘... as near as blundering words can identify it, [it] is the quality characterising each particular work of art, the quality evoking Aesthetic Emotion in the spectator ...’ The concept of ‘expressive form’ reflects the aims of modernist artists because, he argues, it addresses three elements of modernist creativity rather than the two which Bell had recognised. They consist of the objective element of nature; the artist’s subjective emotion; and, the materials and methods used by the artist. The latter, we note, is absent from Bell’s rubric but it is addressed in Santayana’s The Sense of Beauty. All three elements are, as we have seen, familiar motifs in Schopenhauерian aesthetic theory. The objective element of expressive form concerns ‘some deeper significance’ of the object, an ‘absolute quality ... with universal emotional significance’. The subjective element concerns the ‘special sensitiveness’ that enables the artist to ‘divine’ the inner essence of his motif. So far, Cheney’s theory conforms to Bell’s Schopenhauерianism; but the third element of expressive form concerns materiality, an aspect of art that Bell overlooks. Like Santayana and Schopenhauuer before him, Cheney speaks of matter in terms of the architect’s endeavours to address the ‘fundamental problems of building in modern materials’ in relation to ‘the heaviness of stone or metal and its resistance to the tool’. Extending this idea to the artist’s materials, he reasons that they too are imbued with expressive form. He passes over the question as to how, precisely, ‘expression’ might manifest itself in ‘form’.

364 Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art, p. 39.
365 Santayana, The Sense of Beauty. Santayana argues that one’s sense of beauty is determined by four factors: (i) The Nature of Beauty, whereby perceptions of beauty reflect value judgements; (ii) The Materials of Beauty, whereby one’s experience is determined by one’s sensory response to things; (iii) Form, whereby one’s pleasure is elicited by certain combinations of form; (iv) Expression, whereby the object of contemplation elicits pleasure because of the associations it acquires.
367 Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art, p. 43.
368 Santayana, The Sense of Beauty Being. Santayana states: ‘Architecture, for instance, has all its forms suggested by practical demands. Use requires our buildings to assume certain determinate forms; the mechanical properties of our materials, the exigency of shelter, light, accessibility, economy, and convenience, dictate the arrangements of our buildings’, p. 161.
369 Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art. Cheney maintains: ‘It would be wholly futile in inquire, in a Primer, whether the important point in creation is reached in the artist’s emotional process or in his vitalising of the form-quality in paint or stone’, pp. 43 & 44.
and goes on to assert that the tendency of modernist art is towards an abstract means of ‘expression’:

The art of today lies rather in the direction of a more abstract means, of stark expression, not with symbols or illusory veils or pretty excursions, but with emotional reality intensified and crystallized in formal expression.  

Significant Form is thus reconfigured by Cheney as a quality of form that is mediated, or ‘crystallized’, as he puts it, by means of ‘expression’. Materiality is integrated into his theory in terms of the artist’s medium. We perhaps recognise Cheney’s acknowledgment of the ‘Average Man’ in this concession. In place of Significant Form’s metaphysical mystery, he is offered the concrete realities of ‘expressive form’. Elsewhere, he reflects that there is a ‘...return to more intimate media...' which include steel, concrete, and glass for the architect. The characteristic of art that is ‘most indisputably and completely modern’, Cheney declares, is ‘intensity’, an indefinable quality which encompasses both modern technological accomplishment and the modernist forms that ‘express’ it. Expressive form thus privileges entity of the work of art itself in the sense that its being is ‘intensified’ by the possibilities afforded by modernity:

Buildings are built higher than ever before ... Paintings find new sensation values in purer colour ... dramatists ... pile up emotional climaxes ... Music jazzes up. Poetry seeks intense palpitating imagery ... Directness piling up, intensification become the order of the day.

The materiality implied by expressive form enables Cheney’s reader to conceive of the artefact before him as an intensified extension of his own modern environment because it too is an ordered reality consisting of materials. Cheney’s allegiance to the idea of Significant Form, however, is such that his modernist theory precludes an art of modern subject matter alone. Airships, automobiles, dynamos, and Brooklyn Bridges may evince artistic values but, as subjects for representation, they are ‘merely novel’. Echoing Bell’s criticism of the Futurists, he argues that their ‘force lines’ have little to do with ‘a formal significance’. His modern iconography is thus shown to be predicated upon ‘formal

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370 Ibid, p. 49.
374 Ibid, p. 64.
significance’ rather than modern imagery. In this sense, he sides with Bell and Huntington Wright rather than Dreier and Rosenfeld.

We noted earlier that Cheney divests form of its metaphysical significance but, because he retains the idea of Aesthetic Emotion, he has to account for form’s emotive quality. Having asserted the materiality of form though, it is a difficult to square that circle. Grappling with the conundrum, Cheney becomes less convincing: ‘... it is the business of modern art to get at the deeper reality that lies beyond realism’. His language becomes esoteric: ‘It is here that the rediscovery of “form” is matched by a life-quality that is of today’.\(^{375}\) Thus, in place of Bell’s injunction to create form and his speculation as to the ‘ultimate reality’ that might be concealed within the form once created, Cheney charges the modern artist to ‘get at the deeper reality’ and he proffers the idea that a ‘life-quality’ might be ‘matched’ by form. This hardly resolves Bell’s form dichotomy. The question remains: in the absence of metaphysical significance, what is it that triggers one’s peculiar response to form in the work of art? It is at this point that Cheney proposes the psychological solution to which I referred earlier: ‘Until the aesthetician and psycho-analysts have dug deeper …’

Evasive as it is, we recognise that Cheney’s *Primer in Modern Art* documents and, indeed, contributes to, Anglo-American formalism’s transition away from metaphysics, and towards psychological modes of explanation. Cheney resorts to the same kind of esoteric language that we find in Bell’s metaphysical hypothesis, but the tautological reasoning that scuppered Significant Form in the late 1910s is gradually discarded. In place of metaphysical ‘significance’, form’s significance is construed in psychological terms.

We now proceed to another facet of the 1920s modernist discourse as I explain how the pharmaceuticals magnate, Albert C. Barnes, applied Significant Form to an analytical methodology pioneered at the recently inaugurated Barnes Foundation. An avowed misanthropist, Barnes scorned Bell and Barr in equal measure but, as I will argue, he embodies a link between Significant Form and the Museum of Modern Art having formulated a didactic methodology that anticipated those of the Museum in the 1930s. Furthermore, his concept of formalist influence anticipated Barr’s own interpretation as it is exemplified in his seminal account of Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*.

\(^{375}\) Ibid, p. 68.
Significant Form as institutional practice: guidance as to what to look for

Barnes book, *The Art in Painting*, offers the reader ‘an experiment in the adaption to plastic art of the principles of scientific method’. Published in 1925, it appeared in the same year as Edlington’s satire on the ‘cult of form’. Contrary to Edlington though, Barnes contends that the study of form is conducive to clarity of meaning because it lends itself to empirical analysis. His claim is to present an objective method of aesthetic evaluation comprising ‘observation of the facts, reflection upon them, and the testing of the conclusions by their success in application’. When scientific method is brought to bear on the study of art, he argues, it supplants the ‘sentimentality’ and ‘antiquarianism’ of established educational practice with an objectivity that comes from direct contact with the paintings themselves. This innovative approach had, he proclaims, yielded encouraging results at Pennsylvania and Columbia Universities and in numerous galleries including the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum.

Inevitably, Bell falls foul of Barnes’ scientism, having been lampooned as the errant founder of the cult of form. Yet the similarities between their respective formalisms are compelling. To begin with, both subscribe to a recognisably Schopenhauerian ontology of art: art as a source of aesthetic pleasure which temporarily alleviates life’s mundanity. Both agree that its pleasures are induced by configurations of form which invite one’s contemplation. Occasionally Barnes speaks of them as ‘significant’, although more often as ‘plastic form’. Indeed, his description of plastic form closely resembles Bell’s understanding of Significant Form, in that plasticity is ascribed an ordering, a ‘unification’ as Barnes puts it, of minor forms consisting of colour, line, and space whereby they enter into relation with one another. Like Bell, he supposes that we share the artist’s ability to perceive form in our surroundings. On such occasions, he explains, one’s attention is drawn

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376 Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, p. 11.
377 Ibid. Barnes acknowledges the confusion: ‘... writers on art have used the word “form” with so many meanings that the utmost confusion and ambiguity exist’, p. 37.
378 Ibid. See the Preface.
379 Ibid. Barnes describes Bell thus: ‘A clever London newspaper-writer, Mr Clive Bell, surrounded the cubists’ doctrine with a quasi-scientific set of high-sounding but meaningless statements in a book that served its propagandic purpose in good journalistic fashion. Mr Bell’s successful coup in thus giving currency to counterfeit art was a circus performance which the late P.T. Barnum would have respected’, p. 309.
380 Ibid. Barnes describes his method in terms of the identification of significant form. He states: ‘The present method is an attempt to supplant both the popular and the academic error by giving some intimation of how to look for the plastic or “significant” form, and the criteria by which to judge it when it is found’, p. 355.
to ‘a distinctness in its part’s and coherence as a whole’ which rouses a ‘vague, undistinguishable sense of exhilaration, languor, lachrymosity, ineffability, or what not’. It is the role of the artist to draw out the true character of anything but, insofar that we are able to find what is ‘significant in the world’, we too make impromptu artists of ourselves. Again, the parallels with Bell, and Schopenhauer before him, are evident.

According to Barnes, ‘we ask of a work of Art that it reveal to us what is profound, what significant qualities in objects and situations have power to move us aesthetically’. He contends that one is able to differentiate between the authentic traditions of artistic ‘form’ and lesser traditions of painting which amount merely to manifestations of the transient values of their age; hence the title of his book, the art in painting. Once again, we note the similarities with Bell who differentiates between genuine works of art which are predicated on Significant Form and spurious ones which rely on other means for their effect. Barnes’ tradition of plastic form links the achievements of the old masters with those of the modernists much as Bell’s tradition of Significant Form links the Byzantine ‘primitives’ to the Post-Impressionists and Cézanne. Although Barnes does not subscribe to Bell’s cyclical historiography comprising primitive peaks of artistic accomplishment followed by protracted ‘slopes’ of decadent decline, it is his contention that a genuine art of plastic form, like science, is subject to the evolutionary principle. The leading modernist painters of the day are the most advanced exponents of that tradition because their simple, unadorned designs enable one to discern form in its primitive state. The two historical concepts are thus predicated teleologically on the idea of a progressive realisation of ‘pure’ form. Moreover, we note that they both equate form to a ‘primitivism’ of sorts, and that the anticipation of formal innovation is a primary characteristic of each.

If, however, we are to appreciate the limits of Bell’s unacknowledged influence on Barnes, we must recognise the teleological gulf that separates them. Bell’s metaphysical hypothesis, an idealist construction that is reminiscent of Schopenhauer, affirms one’s detachment from the phenomena of daily preoccupation because such things amount merely to the illusory manifestations of the ‘ultimate reality’. By contrast, Barnes’

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383 Ibid. Referring to the connoisseur’s appreciation of Cézanne’s compositional design, Barnes states: ‘We learn to see design at its best by seeing it in a more primitive form, and when we have seen it at its best, we learn to make the necessary discount when irrelevancies obscure it’, p. 359.
philosophical pragmatism demands his intervention in an ordering of phenomena to some greater good. The point of art which is, as Bell would have it, to facilitate transcendent experience, would be inadmissible to Barnes specifically because of its detachment from what he believes to be the legitimate imperatives of ordinary life. These teleological ends are incompatible. Barnes, we note, is impelled to offer his reader ‘some intimation of how to look for plastic or “Significant Form”’: Bell, we suppose, would consider him ridiculous for attempting to do so. How, he might respond, could anyone, apart from the aesthetic elect, hope to grasp metaphysical significance? After all, Significant Form defies demonstration. Barnes, in turn, might berate Bell for his chicanery: ‘… “Significant Form” is never defined or analysed, so that at the end of what amounts to an indefinite series of “don’ts” his reader is left totally at a loss for guidance as to what to look for’. Indeed, in the absence of ‘guidance’, we might wonder whether we are abandoned, bereft of art’s authentic experience. Bell and Barnes differ on this point. In the Anglo-American discourse of the 1920s, we must appreciate that Bloomsbury’s Idealist heritage yields to the pragmatism that inflects American aesthetic theory. It is emblematic of a philosophical fault-line. As Rosenfeld describes the trans-Atlantic experience, one plane descends to another.

Citing John Dewey, his methodological mentor, to the effect that intelligence requires the application of ‘definite ideas’ to the interpretation of experience, Barnes attempts to identify the features of form that induce aesthetic experience: ‘… plastic form is the synthesis of the plastic elements or means—color, light, line, space—in a rhythmic, unified whole’. It expresses the painter’s vision of some object or situation in which human values are realised …’386 The italic emphasis is Barnes’. In contrast to Bell, who maintains that one need bring nothing of life’s ideas, affairs, and emotions to appreciate the work of art, Barnes registers ‘human values’ in ‘some object or situation’. We recollect Santayana’s thesis about one’s four-fold experience of beauty. Recognition is afforded by Barnes, like Bell, to the artist’s vision, but, unlike Bell, it is also conferred upon his capacity for ‘profound’ vision—‘having something to say’. Bell might retort that one’s recognition of ‘something to say’ augurs a return to the rhetorical values Post-Impressionism had sought

384 Bell, Art. Bell states: ‘…any system of aesthetics which pretends to be based on some objective truth is so palpably ridiculous as not to be worth discussing’, p. 8.
to dispel. As we will see, however, the ‘human values’ implied by ‘having something to say’ permit the reinstatement of taste, an aspect of aesthetic pleasure hitherto curtailed by Bell’s insistence on an undifferentiated response to form in works of art. There are further implications too. Barnes argues that, because there is little point in repeating the same thing, the originality of the artist’s statement is also of value. Bell, conversely, had prized the artist’s fidelity to vision over originality. Barnes continues: if originality is to amount to something more than novelty, it must be balanced by breadth of vision; that is the artist’s ability to fuse traditions in such a way as to create new forms. There is no corresponding concept of influence in Bell.387 Barnes argues that the artist’s powers of perception together with his ability to realise them in plastic form are of value but, lest one should reward meretricious display, the overarching value of ‘plastic unity’ dictates that the parts of the design should subserve the artist’s vision as a whole. Plastic form thus entails ‘human values’ in relation to ‘some object or situation’ and therefore registers a more nuanced aesthetic experience than Significant Form admits.

### Charged forms and funded experience

Citing Laurence Buermeyer, the Foundation’s one-time Associate Director of Education, Barnes suggests that forms may be ‘charged’ with aesthetic feeling but, so as not to attribute aesthetic value to them arbitrarily, he conjectures that aesthetic emotions, like other emotions, are, at least, in part, generalised. Thus, rather than responding to the colour, dimension, solidity, movement, rhythm, and so on, in the work of art, Barnes argues that our response is complex. Citing Buermeyer again, he suggests that such ‘feelings travel far afield’, subsisting independently of the forms that prompted them. A generalised experience of form such as the realisation of a sense of space, of externality, of colourfulness, of mobility, and so on, might engender a diffused array of emotions:

> All particular things have these qualities; hence what serves, so to speak, as a paradigm of the visible essence of all things may hold in solution the emotions which individual things provoke in a more highly specialised form.388

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387 Clive Bell, *Art*. In Bell’s opinion, stylistic influence amounted to the ‘aping’ of art’s superficial qualities in one another’s work, a justifiable means of sustaining the vigour of creativity. The ‘essential’ quality, as opposed to imitable ones, was of course Significant Form. Although Bell did not happily subscribe to the idea of ‘styles’ at all, he conceded that there could be an aggregation of sensibilities which resulted in a similarity of forms, referred to as ‘…“Movements”, “Forces”, “Tendencies”, “Influences”, “The Spirit of the Age”…’ p. 217.

Barnes then reasons that one’s response to such generalised qualities of form is conditioned by life’s experiences—the mass of ‘funded experience’ as he describes it. He omits to illustrate the point, but we might suppose, for example, that he envisages the contrasting responses of town- and country-dwellers to the prospect of open space, given their different experiences of it. One’s response to form in the work of art, likewise, is subject to an ‘apperceptive mass’ conditioned by past experience. Bell’s link between form and emotion is thereby retained by Barnes, we note. In essence, Barnes’ proposition merely serves to substantiate a commonplace formalist assertion that ‘the matter of representation is clearly separable from that of plastic qualities’; but by drawing attention to the preconceptions that condition one’s response to the work of art—‘funded experience’—Barnes emphasises the autonomies of form that are at play in aesthetic experience.

We return now to the wider Anglo-American discourse. The partial autonomy that Barnes ascribes to form anticipates characteristics of the Museum of Modern Art’s formalist historiography. As well as sanctioning a formalist school of art historical scholarship, it permits the kind of construction that Barnes places upon Picasso’s interest in African carvings in 1907. Some eleven years later, in the catalogue of the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition of 1936, Alfred Barr Jr. would confer special significance on Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, a painting completed in 1907. Though absent from the exhibition, Barr describes it as the transitional work that heralded cubist abstraction.

I submit that Barnes’ text constitutes an Anglo-American context for Barr’s interpretation of *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*. Having adapted Significant Form to his own ends, we might ask to what extent Significant Form itself anticipates Barr’s claim. Predicated as it is on a transcendental notion of aesthetic detachment, Significant Form transcends the particularities of ethnicity. This assumption might have troubled Carpenter whom, we recall,

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389 Ibid. He argues: ‘When we cannot find in a picture representation of any particular object, what it represents may be the qualities which all particular objects share, such as color, extensity, solidity, movement, rhythm, etc. All particular things have these qualities; hence, what serves, so to speak, as a paradigm of the visible essence of all things may hold in solution the emotions which individual things provoke in a more specialised form … feelings travel far afield from the objects that excited them originally, and it is therefore a mistake to suppose that a feeling has no object that served it as stimulus originally. In each instance, we draw upon a general fund of experience, that is, upon our apperceptive mass’, p. 52.

accommodated a principle of race consciousness to his aesthetic, but Bell’s notion of ‘primitivism’ knows neither temporal nor spatial variance. Cézanne is as much a ‘primitive’ as the Byzantine masters, for both create ‘significance’ in their ordering of form.\footnote{Bell, \textit{Art.} Bell muses: ‘Is Cézanne the beginning of a slope, a portent, or merely the crest of a movement? The oracles are dumb. This alone seems to me sure: since the Byzantine primitives set their mosaics at Ravenna no artist in Europe has created forms of greater significance unless it be Cézanne’, p. 130.} In this respect, Significant Form constitutes a point of departure for both Barnes’ understanding of the influence of African art on early modernism and Barr’s. Yet Bell has little concept of stylistic influence, having emphasised the artist’s direct and unmediated contemplation of ‘nature’. Barnes’ construction of ‘plastic form’ however, accords partial autonomy to ‘aesthetically charged’ forms, as we have seen. Formal innovations may occur when the artist with ‘something to say’ adapts forms, rather than ‘nature’, to his own expressive ends. Picasso’s transition to cubism, according to Barnes, is facilitated by his adaption of African forms to the spatial ‘distortions’ of Cézanne. Cubism, he explains, ‘... is an effort to bring this three-dimensional solidity into clear relief by abstracting and showing only a certain number of the planes’.\footnote{Ibid. Barnes argues: ‘The roots of cubism can best be seen by an examination of the distortions in Cézanne’s work, where a single element or aspect of an object is often exaggerated out of all proportion to the other elements. This distortion represents an imaginative analysis or dissociation of an object into its plastic elements and their recombination into a new form differing in appearance from the original object, but representing a more adequate embodiment of its plastic qualities. All painting which makes any pretence to artistic significance involves some measure of this selection and emphasis. This principle is precisely the principle of cubism, with the difference that in cubism, as in any other contemporary painting, it is carried much further’, p. 319.} Accordingly, Picasso carries Cézanne’s plastic ‘distortions’ to a higher degree having first absorbed the plastic values of African carving.\footnote{Ibid. He compares Picasso unfavourably with Cézanne, Renoir, and Matisse: ‘Psychologically considered, Picasso’s art represents rather a great natural sensitiveness and fertility than a reflective, resolute and well-directed search for an individual aesthetic conception. In men like Cézanne, Renoir or Matisse, it is possible to see a constant struggle for a form which will express all that the artist has to say. This sense of a deeply purposeful effort towards a style adequate to carry a profoundly personal and original vision is absent in Picasso’, pp. 320 & 325.}

Writing in the mid-1920s, at a time when Picasso had adopted his linear ‘Ingresque’ manner, Barnes confesses his reservations about him.\footnote{Ibid.} He notes the ‘illustrative’ qualities of the ‘Blue’ and Rose’ periods and the ‘decided retrogression’ of his recent Ingres-like manner. Picasso’s earlier cubist phase, by contrast, registers distortion that is ‘consistent with the imaginative purpose of art ...’ According to Barnes, Picasso carries Cézanne’s plastic ‘distortions’ to a higher degree having first absorbed the plastic values of African carving. His work in 1907 was ‘only fragmentary and transitional’ but it marks his stylistic transition from...
the ‘suave, curved lines’ of the ‘Blue’ and ‘Rose’ periods to the ‘sharp’, ‘heavy’, ‘block-like’
angularity of his cubist style. Barnes observes: ‘These new shapes and colors are the
distinctive mark of Picasso’s form at that period and constituted the point of departure for
cubism’. Assimilation of ‘negro sculpture’, according to Barnes, accounts for Picasso’s
‘increased technical resources, in generalised form’, which facilitates later work, namely
cubism, in which ‘the sculptural forms are more fully assimilated in terms proper to
painting’. 395 This Anglo-American account, I suggest, prefigures Barr’s own account of
‘increased technical resource’ at the disposal of ‘artistic vision’.

Summary

Having retained a certain currency during the American modernist discourse of the 1920s, a
depleted version of Significant Form began its decline when it was exposed to the empirical
critique of scientific method. Convincingly articulated by C. J. Ducasse in an article for the
Nation in 1926, Significant Form is shown to attribute an intense emotional response to
some unspecifiable configuration of forms on the strength of an assertion about the
‘ultimate reality’ concealed within it. Bell is cast as the clever charlatan when Ducasse
dismisses Significant Form as hokum in the guise of an answer to a legitimate question
concerning the quality common to objects that provoke Aesthetic Emotion. What arrests
the artist’s gaze, and thereby elicits Aesthetic Emotion, according to Ducasse, is not the
‘foulness which beauty is’, but the artist’s sublimation of it.

A similar psychological reading had been aired some two years earlier by Sheldon
Cheney in A Primer of Modern Art. Cheney maintains that unless further dialogue between
the aesthetician and the psycho-analyst should suggest otherwise, one must assume that
the ‘form problem’ is more closely connected with the artist’s emotion than the objective
realities of nature. Nevertheless, the word ‘form’ should, he insists, lie at the heart of any
theory of modernist art, even though Significant Form, the most immediate instance of its
usage, was inadequately conceived to address the preoccupations of the modern urban
artist. Cheney therefore adapts aspects of George Santayana’s theory of beauty to his own
concept of expressive form, a reconfiguration of Significant Form that affords recognition to
what he deems to be the three primary concerns of modernist art, namely: the objective

element of nature; the artist’s subjective emotion; and, the materials and methods used by
the artist. We observed that the emphasis Cheney places on form’s tangible presence might
accord with the sympathies of his reader, the ‘Average Man’. It is in this sense that Cheney
engages with an American idea of modernity, for he reconciles the two strands of modernist
theory identified in the last chapter: an Anglo-American formalism and the bohemian vision.
According to Cheney, the definitive characteristic of any modernist work of art is its
‘intensity’. Not to be confused with the ‘novelties’ of Futurist iconography such as ‘force
lines’, intensity reflects the artist’s response, both emotional and technical, to the
conditions of modernity; higher buildings, purer colours, the palpitating imagery of poets,
and so on. Echoing Rosenfeld’s evocation of New York’s ‘miracle’ and Dreier’s image of
‘brilliant metal surfaces, and powerful steel engines’, Cheney ventures that ‘… it is the
business of modern art to get at the deeper reality that lies beyond realism’. Modern
materials and the emotions provoked by modernity synthesise in the authentic expression
in modernist forms. A book of modest pretention, A Primer of Modern Art nevertheless
anticipates certain institutional priorities of the 1930s by divesting form of its metaphysical
associations. The emphasis Cheney places on the tangible physicality of the artefact
prepares the modernist ground for an institutional remit that would extend as far as
architecture and ‘machine art’.

The institutional thesis assumes a different complexion in Albert Barnes’ book of
1925, The Art in Painting. Significant Form still constitutes a point of departure, in that
Barnes’ preferred term for the configurations of form that induce pleasure, ‘plastic form’, is
interchangeable with ‘significant form’. The latter remains uncapitalised in Barnes’ text.
There are important points of divergence though, chiefly stemming from the imperatives
implicit in Barnes philosophical pragmatism. Indebted to Santayana’s theory of beauty,
‘plasticity’ – or ‘significant form’ - registers the significance of ‘human values’ in ‘some
object or situation’ and, it permits a differentiated response to the work of art. Once
diminished by the binary construction of Significant Form, Barnes’ nuanced formalism
reinstates a principle of taste in all its complexity. Also, adopting Laurence Buermeyer’s

396 I refer to Modern Architecture: International Exhibition, [exhibition], Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell
Hitchcock (curators), Museum of Modern Art, 9th February – 23rd March 1932 and Machine Art, [exhibition],
Philip Johnson (curator), 5th March – 29th April 1934.
notion of ‘charged forms’, he surmises that forms may acquire a partial autonomy derived from ‘funded experience’ of the viewer, which is to say, the associations they evoke. As we saw, Buermeyer’s insight recognises that artists may adapt artistic forms, as well as natural forms, to their own expressive ends. We concluded with an examination of the qualities that Barnes’ thesis ascribed to Picasso’s use of ‘sculptural forms’ in *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* and noted the parallels between his appraisal of the painting and Barr’s seminal account some eleven years later.

Contrary to depictions of art critical idiosyncrasy in America during the 1920s, I submit that an internationalist reading of certain contemporary texts suggests that a pattern of conformity may be discerned and I suggest that it constitutes an intellectual prelude to the impending formalist modernist orthodoxy. Having now traced Bell’s influence on the middlebrow discourse of form in America we turn our attention back to England to examine contemporaneous developments when Fry re-entered the conversation. The publication of *Vision and Design*, his collected essays, published in 1920, marks the point at which his influence on American thought resumes. We will examine a period when, faced with the methodological critique of I. A. Richards, he adopts the most abstract stance of his career. Significantly, for our Anglo-American hypothesis, these years coincide with Barr’s ascent in America and they encompass the time of their brief meeting in 1927.
Fry’s Interpretation of Plasticity

As the priorities of scientific method impinged on art critical practice during the 1920s, Fry’s use of the term ‘significant form’—never capitalised—gave way to ‘plasticity’, an alternative designation which was unencumbered by the former’s metaphysical connotation. The precise meaning of the word, however, was never conclusively defined by Fry, even when occasion seemed to demand that it should be, for in 1928 he omitted to mention it in his contribution to Logan Pearsall Smith’s glossary of art-related language, *Needed Words*. Therefore, our understanding of ‘plasticity’ has to be extrapolated from a corpus of art critical writing dating back to 1899, when Fry used it for the first time in his monograph on Bellini. Berel Lang, having done just that, concludes that ‘plasticity’ came to imply both artistic intervention and materiality. She suggests that the phrase ‘expressive quality of form’ comes as close as we get to a definition. Notwithstanding Fry’s disavowal of the concept of ‘expression’ after the Post-Impressionist exhibitions, the idea of manipulated form certainly comes close to similar notions of plasticity devised by Cheney and Barnes during the mid-1920s, and we are reminded that, like them, Fry had been familiar with Santayana having been introduced to *The Sense of Beauty* by Denman Ross of Harvard University. The trajectories of English and American formalism converge over such phenomenological points during the 1920s as we will see when we examine the revisions Fry made in response to I. A. Richards’ critique of aesthetic experience.

Adrianne Rubin reminds us of another Anglo-American point of intersection, in that ‘plasticity’s’ conceptual origins can be traced to Bernard Berenson’s notion of an ‘ideated space’ that engenders the ‘tactile values’ characterising the Florentine School in *The Central Italian Painters*, of 1897. Rubin supports Frances Spalding’s argument that Fry’s notion of

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400 Expression, according to Santayana, is one of the four components determining the nature of beauty, the other three being: the nature of beauty, the materials of beauty, and form itself.
401 Rubin, Roger Fry’s ‘Difficult and Uncertain Science’, p. 103.
plasticity descends directly from Berenson’s ‘tactile values’ and she goes on to link ‘plasticity’ with the notion of ‘relations between compositional structures’, a theme that she identifies with Fry’s argument in a lecture delivered in 1921 and titled ‘Architectural Heresies of a Painter’.\textsuperscript{402} In this architectural context, Fry defines the ‘plastic idea’ as ‘such a construction of three-dimensional shapes as satisfies the contemplation of their relations to one another and to the whole combination’.\textsuperscript{403} We will recall Fry’s use of the architectural motif in ‘The Double Nature of Painting’, which I mentioned in Chapter 3 in the context of a discussion about Schopenhauer’s legacy to modernist aesthetics. Rubin, by contrast, examines the meaning that ‘relation’ in itself garners in the context of contemporaneous explanations of Gestalt theory. We will assess this contribution as we consider Fry’s speculative thoughts on ‘psychological volumes’, a spatial metaphor borrowed from the French literary critic, Charles Mauron, and used in reply to I. A. Richards’ questions about the relation of form to content in the arts.

We begin this chapter, though, with a discussion of the romantic qualities that differentiate Fry’s formalism from others and we will see how they foreshadow important aspects of modernist formalist orthodoxy. It is therefore on a point divergence, rather than convergence, that we broach the subject of ‘plasticity’; one that concerns Fry’s understanding of the artist’s relation to the work of art. I will argue that he differs from Bell over this point. We will examine how Fry’s romantic concept of the artist informs the modification he makes to his aesthetic theory in \textit{Transformations} of 1926, in response to I. A. Richards’ critique of aesthetic experience in \textit{Principles of Literary Criticism} of 1924. Fry’s adaption of ‘psychological volumes’ to an explanatory expedient concerning the relationship between form and a psychologically-conceived ‘content’ enables him to retain a romantic construction comprising four domains of formalist interest: the motif, the artist, artistic form itself, and the audience who come to perceive it.

That said, if we are to maintain the historical balance of this discussion, it is worth bearing in mind Christopher Read’s admonition about one’s reading of Fry from a contemporary vantage point. He reminds us that Fry’s critical texts during this period tended to parallel essays on Parisian modernism and he cautions against scholarly attempts

\textsuperscript{402} Roger Fry, ‘Architectural Heresies of a Painter’, [lecture] Royal Institute of British Architects, (20\textsuperscript{th} May 1921).

\textsuperscript{403} Ibid, p. 104.
to infer a ‘tidy philosophic model’ from the odd word and phrase lifted from the text since they miss the practical exigencies governing Fry’s original usage of terms such as ‘plastic’ and ‘classic’, another ill-defined word in his critical lexicon. Far from signalling a coherent theory, Read tells us that it speaks of Fry’s haphazard attempts to counter conservative and often xenophobic criticism by utilising a critical language which had a claim to a richer historical pedigree. \footnote{Reed, \textit{A Roger Fry Reader}, p. 117.} Fry, I realise, was never guilty of ‘tidy philosophy’ but it behoves us to ensure that any inference we make from his texts derives from the coherent arguments therein rather than the connotatio of his terminology. I will therefore conclude the chapter with a discussion of his exposition of the significance of the work of art’s materiality, an account which reconfigures the metaphysical thinking of both Schopenhauer and Santayana to a point of contemporary interest.

Having outlined these modifications to Fry’s aesthetic theory and briefly indicated how they might anticipate aspects of the formalist orthodoxy to come, I will proceed, in the next chapter, to trace the parallels between Fry’s monograph, \textit{Cézanne: A Study of His Development}, and certain passages to be found in Barr’s catalogue for the \textit{Cubism and Abstract Art} exhibition in which he explains the key moments of change that brought about modern art. We begin, though, with Fry’s romanticism.

\textbf{The consciousness of purpose}

Fry’s Schopenhauerianism, I have argued, is such that he conceived the arts to be a source of solace, giving rise to a contemplative mode of experience only fully realised in the seclusion of one’s imaginative life. This, indeed, is how they elevate one above the mundane preoccupations of everyday existence. Described as ‘spiritual’ by Fry, they pertain to ‘certain capacities of human nature, the exercise of which is in itself good and desirable’ \footnote{Fry, \textit{Vision and Design}, pp. 21 & 22.} in itself. In this sense, the arts resemble religion which, according to Fry, is also an affair of the imagination. The formalist component of his early aesthetic may therefore be outlined in this way: the work of art is principally adapted to ‘that disinterested intensity of contemplation’ which is experienced in moments of tranquillity when the necessity for responsive action is suspended. \footnote{Ibid, p. 29.} The sensuous qualities required by the imaginative life
are order and variety; order to alleviate confusion of the senses; variety to stimulate their interest. The emotional needs of the imaginative life require the purposeful intervention of the artist who deploys the ‘emotional’ elements of design, namely: line, which records gesture and thereby conveys the artist’s feeling directly; mass, which alludes to one’s instinctive understanding of physical mass; space, which relates to one’s sense of scale; light and shade, which determine one’s feelings towards an object; colour, which has direct emotional effect; and plane which may have emotional effect if it is impending over one or leaning away. Their emotional effect derives from the essential conditions of one’s physical existence. We note the physiological link between forms on the one hand and the artist and his audience on the other. This integrated relationship between the parties underlies Fry’s romanticism and differentiates his formalism from that of Bell.

Fry’s early formalism, as presented in ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’, is premised on the nineteenth-century dichotomy between the fine arts and the applied and decorative arts. In this context, the fine arts are conceived as representational. However, both disciplines are susceptible to formal analysis although the fine arts, being representational, are subject to different values because, he reasons, they meet the perceptual and emotional needs of the life of the imagination in different ways and on a different level from the applied arts. What the fine arts sacrifice in terms of sensuous beauty, they gain by rousing the emotions. ‘There is no excuse’, Fry maintains, ‘for a china pot being ugly [but] there is every reason why Rembrandt’s and Degas’ pictures should be, from the purely sensual point of view, supremely and magnificently ugly’. The one source of aesthetic emotion, a lesser form, ‘charms the senses’ as it addresses one’s perceptual needs; the other, a more profound form, arising from the purposeful imposition of order and variety, such as the type we find in the ‘ugliness’ of Rembrandt’s and Degas’ paintings, appeals to our ‘supersensual’ capacity, one that comprises both emotional and sensual aspects of the imagination.

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407 Ibid. Fry states: ‘The perception of purposeful order and variety in an object gives us the feeling which we express by saying that it is beautiful, but when by means of sensations our emotions are aroused we demand purposeful order and variety in them also, and if this can only be brought about by the sacrifice of sensuous beauty we will willingly overlook its absence’, p. 30. Later, he adds: ‘The moment representation is introduced forms have an entirely new set of values’, p. 32.


409 Ibid. He states: ‘When these emotions are aroused in a way that satisfies fully the needs of the imaginative life we approve and delight in the sensations through which we enjoy that heightened experience because they possess purposeful order and variety in relation to those emotions’, p. 31.
Emotion, in this sense, owns the visceral quality that both Ruskinian tradition and Aestheticism had forfeited. Edward Carpenter, who had corresponded with Fry, identifies it with the primordial conditions of life. Fry, too, observes that a transcendent form of emotion, ‘cosmic emotion’, is an important source of influence upon the arts: ‘...those feelings to which the name of the cosmic emotion has been somewhat unhappily given...since they seem to belong to certain very deep springs in our nature, do become of great importance to the arts’. Cosmic or otherwise, it constitutes the rationale for a close relationship—a transcendent relationship—between the artist and his fellow creatures based on a shared appreciation of the higher reality that lies behind appearances. This is a key construct in Fry’s aesthetic in that it assigns a romantic role to the artist as visionary. It is worth quoting Fry at length in relation to this point. He states:

But in our reaction to a work of art there is something more – there is the consciousness of purpose, the consciousness of a peculiar relation of sympathy with the man who made this thing in order to arouse precisely the sensations we experience. ...We find that he has expressed something that was latent in us all the time, but which we never realised, that he has revealed us to ourselves in revealing himself. And this recognition of purpose is, I believe, an essential part of the aesthetic judgement proper.

Is it plausible, we might ask, with Schopenhauer in mind, that Fry alludes to the noumenal reality concealed within natural phenomena and to the artist’s capacity to intuit ‘the thing in-itself’? The intimation seems to be that a sense of order and variety which the artist seeks in nature, is often there for the finding: ‘many things in nature, such as flowers, possess these two qualities of order and variety in a high degree’. Fry, however, distinguishes between naturally-occurring beauty and artistic beauty on the basis of the artist’s sense of purpose being manifested in the latter; it is the source of our ‘peculiar relation of sympathy

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410 Edward Carpenter, The Art of Creation. He observes: ‘And it seems also to be the ground and foundation of Life. ...It is sufficient to see that on the very lowest rung of the ladder of life, and at a point where it is difficult to distinguish its laws from those of chemistry, such words as we are forced to use—words like Attraction, Repulsion, Affinity—have a double meaning, covering both material and mental, external and internal, affections. Even the word Motion itself passes easily into E-motion. And modern psychology and physiology have made it abundantly clear that every feeling and emotion in the mind means motion of some kind in the tissues or fluids of the body. Some of our highest and most complex emotions take the form of attraction and repulsion, and in our dimmest sensations, almost below the level of consciousness, we can detect the same’, p. 1 & 2.

411 Fry, Vision and Design, p. 27.


413 Ibid, p. 29.
with the man who made this thing’. The audience, according to Fry, feel a special tie with the artist because he has revealed a transcendent truth to them, ‘something latent in us all the time’; and it is revealed to us, the audience, as the artist reveals himself. A four-way relationship is thereby established. It comprises the natural phenomena from whence the artist selects his motif; the artist, himself, who perceives the form concealed in nature and which manifests the higher reality; the work of art that reproduces that form; and the audience who apprehend form once it is revealed to them through the work of art.

Writing in 1982, at a time when Greenbergian formalist criticism had lost much of its immediacy, D. W. Curtin helpfully distinguished between, what he described as Fry’s ‘mixed formalism’ and the ‘pure formalism’ of Clement Greenberg.414 ‘Pure formalism’ ascribes a formal property to the work of art which is independent of one’s efforts to perceive it. Fry’s formalism is mixed—that is to say, romantically-conceived—because it supposes a relationship between the work of art’s formal arrangement, the artist who arranges the forms, the audience that apprehends the arrangement, and the motif to which the arrangement alludes. Such considerations, according to the ‘purely’ formalist position signify only as the temporal context of art’s creation and reception. Extending Curtin’s analogy, albeit to breaking point, we might recognise that Bell’s notion of Significant Form, for all its conceptual difficulties, posits a ‘pure’ formal property that is independent of one’s efforts to perceive it, for we recall Bell’s argument about naturally-occurring phenomena such as the colour red, which exists independently of one’s efforts to perceive it. Bell’s reasoning is simple, not to say simplistic: blindness to Significant Form merely affirms one’s insensitivity to form just as an inability to see the colour red affirms one’s colour blindness.

Dialogue with I. A. Richards

Fry, as we will see, abandoned his metaphysical thesis when prompted to do so by I. A. Richards, but he defended the principle of aesthetic experience, and with it, the romantic assumptions upon which his formalist aesthetic rested. The accommodation he made with Richards, I will argue, set up an important principle upon which the forthcoming orthodoxy draws. It concerns the nature of formalist abstraction.

Richards’ critique of aesthetic experience, in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, derived from his quest to rationalise the criteria of literary merit. Modern aesthetics, he argues, is founded on Kant’s misconceived alignment of matters of beauty with the mind’s capacity for feeling. The effect of the *Critique of Judgement* is to annex aesthetics to the field of Idealist philosophy. Beauty, having been consigned to the domain of judgement, leads to calamitous distortions when it is brought into its hapless correspondence with feeling. Although such attempts had been generally abandoned by then, Richards argues, vestiges of it were still to be found in the continuing currency of ‘emotion’ in contemporary criticism and the prevalence of the phrase ‘aesthetic emotion’. The idea of the aesthetic state arises in lieu of ‘feeling’ as the normal mode of response to beauty. Its contemplative construction occurs by default, as it were, following the more convincing categorisation of the intellect and morality as functions of logic and reason respectively. Richards rejects the resulting construct on scientific grounds:

All modern aesthetics rests upon an assumption which has been strangely little discussed, the assumption that there is a distinct kind of mental activity present in what are called aesthetic experiences. ...Thus arises the phantom problem of the aesthetic mode or aesthetic state ...

The argument runs along these lines: ‘When we look at a picture, or read a poem, or listen to music, we are not doing something quite unlike what we were doing on our way to the Gallery or when we dressed in the morning. ...our activity is not of a fundamentally different kind’. Dismissing Clive Bell’s idea that the presence of aesthetic emotion differentiates the aesthetic experience from all others, he states unequivocally: ‘...psychology has no place for such an entity’. In so doing, he echoes Fry’s own misgivings about Bell for he goes on to link the aesthetic emotion with unhelpful mystical states of mind:

Art envisaged as a mystical, ineffable virtue is a close relative of the ‘aesthetic mood’, and may easily be pernicious in its effects, through the habits of mind which, as an idea, it fosters, and to which, as a mystery it appeals.

As we will see, Fry came to accommodate Richards’ objection by reconfiguring aesthetic experience in terms of such psychologically-induced states of mind as ‘aesthetic attitude’,

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415 Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 11.
416 Ibid, p. 15.
417 Ibid, p. 11.
‘aesthetic reaction’ or ‘aesthetic state’. The revised terminology indicates a shift of emphasis away from form and towards one’s perception of form which occurs through specific states of mind. Fry’s concession to Richards is set out in the opening paragraphs of ‘Some Questions in Esthetics’, the first chapter of Transformations, where he prefaces his reply by accepting that no state of mind—the aesthetic state included—is beyond analysis and by agreeing that aesthetic discussion should ‘do away with metaphysical entities and absolutes’. The nineteenth-century idea of a ‘cosmic’ emotion is relinquished in the process, as are the mystical possibilities that flow from it. However, the Schopenhauerian construct of genius, as one who disseminates transcendent truth, is retained by Fry, albeit in a modified version.

Confronting Richardson on his own literary terms, in Transformations, Fry points out the particular problem that representation constitutes in the graphic arts, in relation to contemplative states of mind. He argues: ‘...a special disposition of the mind, may seem plausible with regard to our experience of certain peculiarly abstract musical constructions or even of certain kinds of architecture. It becomes far less plausible the moment representation of actual forms comes in...’ The point brings us to the issue of the perceptual—as opposed to the emotional—aspect of the imaginative life: the one entailing variety within order. This subsidiary theme in Fry’s early formalism, that the imaginative life requires order and variety, comes to the fore when Fry disassociates his aesthetic argument from the emotional criteria that are peculiar to representation.

Aesthetic experience as reaction to relation

Fry’s rebuttal of Richards entailed the reassertion of an old, if secondary, aspect of his aesthetic theory concerning order and variety as the stimulus of the senses, together with a statement outlining his more recent position derived from psychological enquiry. As Adrianne Rubin observes, the views outlined in ‘Some Questions in Esthetics’ correspond to two areas of contemporary interest to Gestalt theorists who had explored a similar conundrum in their quest to understand visual perception. Having started to doubt his former convictions expressed in ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’, which, as Richard Shiff explains,

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418 Fry, Transformations, p. 3.
reproduced aspects of French late nineteenth-century psycho-physiological and symbolist discourse, Fry began to downplay his emphasis of the primacy of sensory data in perception.\textsuperscript{420} The process of transition ran its course during the 1910s, as he began to postulate the necessity of the relations constituting a ‘plastic unity’ to elicit the aesthetic reaction. The new position was aired as early as 1919, in an article for the Athenæum titled ‘Art and Science’.\textsuperscript{421}

Fry thereby dissociated aesthetic experience from (visual) sensation and the representational factors to which Richards had objected since one’s reaction to a ‘relation’ obviates the need for a specifically aesthetic faculty or state of mind. It merely supposes that one is in possession of such mental faculties or aptitudes that might be required to recognise a constant pattern of response or a mental disposition at moments described as aesthetic. Countering Richards’ critique, Fry asserts:

Now the crucial fact which appears to me to arise from a number of these experiences which are the subject of our enquiry is that in all cases our reaction to works of art is a reaction to a relation and not to sensations or objects or persons or events.\textsuperscript{422}

Having revised his position on the qualities of form, he was now able to compare the intensified experience described as an aesthetic state of mind with other states of mind elicited by abstract mental applications such as the one required for pure mathematics. It is on this basis that Fry mounted his rebuttal of Richards’ argument about the art gallery and the journey to get there. Contrary to Richards, he contends that the diffuse experiences one has \textit{en route} to the gallery, when one is preoccupied with the practicalities of getting there, are quite different from the intense one, once one has arrived at the gallery. As he puts it, ‘...we are employing our faculties in a manner so distinct from that in which we employed them on the way there, that it is no exaggeration to say we are doing a quite different thing’.\textsuperscript{423}

Developing the idea of abstract relations, Fry submits that the plastic arts are susceptible to the same kind of critique as the literary arts and music because they too are


\textsuperscript{421} Roger Fry, ‘Art and Science’, Athenæum, (6\textsuperscript{th} June 1919), pp. 434 & 435.

\textsuperscript{422} Fry, \textit{Transformations}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{423} Ibid, p. 6.
based on dynamic structures of articulated forms. Dissociating such forms from those of a tangible world of reality, he characterises them as ‘psychological volumes’, a spatial motif borrowed from Charles Mauron, the French literary critic, whose text, *The Nature of Beauty*, Fry was currently translating. Fry states:

> The idea of volumes here implies, of course, any kind of spatial construction which may further contain other volumes seen in plastic relief within it. Volumes are for the plastic artist the material in which and through which he works. M. Mauron suggests that we should, for literature, transpose the idea of volumes from the domain of space to the domain of the spirit and conceive the literary artist as creating ‘psychological volumes’.  

Mauron’s spatial metaphor enables him to counterpose a formalism of abstract relations, free from representational complications, against Richards’ allusive formalism set out in his chapter ‘Poetry for the Sake of Poetry’ in which he proposes a poetic structure that evokes a sense of the real world and yet one that is free of the constraints of imitation: ‘...a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous’. The concept of ‘psychological volumes’ frees Fry from the constraints of imitation too since it constitutes a formalist schema which offers itself for aesthetic appreciation while maintaining autonomy from the real world. In revising his balance between form and the motif which inspires it, Fry relinquishes a commitment that he had made to representation in *Retrospect*:

> [Clive Bell] also declared that representation of nature was entirely irrelevant to this and that a picture might be completely non-representative. This last view seemed to me always to go too far since any, even the slightest suggestion, of the third dimension in a picture must be due to some element of representation.  

Much hangs upon the nature of the ‘psychological volumes’ but, by reversing Mauron’s spatial analogy in *Transformations* and applying it to the literary arts, Fry addresses to some extent the question of experience in the arts. Rubin tells us that Mauron would come to liken Fry’s sense of mission to that of a chemist trying to isolate an element. He was unaware, perhaps, of Fry’s dialogue with Richards but Mauron’s metaphor enabled him to

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engage directly with Richards’ critique of artistic imagination, a key construct in Fry’s concept of the art. It was framed around the literary form of Tragedy.

According to Richards, Tragedy represented an easily analysed example of a particular kind of imagination described by Coleridge as the capacity to reconcile conflicting experiences or senses: ‘that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination...reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities’. Richards contends that the Tragic form, in its reconciliation of pity, ‘the impulse to approach’, and terror, ‘the impulse to flee’, offers a clear instance of the resolution of discordant impulses which leads to catharsis, ‘...that sense of release of repose in the midst of stress, of balance and composure...’ The cathartic effect of a restored sense of balance and composure, according to Richards, is wrongly attributed to the aesthetic state:

...a certain similarity can be observed in all these cases of supremely fine and complete organisation. It is this similarity which has led to the legends of the ‘aesthetic state’, the ‘aesthetic emotion’ and the single quality of Beauty...

Fry counters by recalling the harrowing film footage he had seen of a real-life rescue at sea. Dramatic Tragedy, he maintains, could not possibly match the pity and terror evoked by traumatic events in real life. If purging the senses through intense emotion was the primary purpose of drama, the Tragic form could never match its contemporary incarnation then to be seen in cinemas. But the true essence of Tragedy, Fry continues, lies not in the intensity of the events it describes but in ‘the vivid sense of the inevitability of their unfolding, the significance of the curve of crescendo and diminuendo which their sequence describes’. Representations of real life, the ‘myriad subsidiary evocations which ... give fullness and density to the whole organic unity’, merely add to the complex of emotions evoked by the work of art, but it is essentially the spatial and voluminous configurations of form articulated within a rhythmical and harmonious whole that elicit aesthetic emotion. These relations are the essence of the work of art. Fry thus minimises the significance of emotion in the reception of the work of art, emphasising instead the importance of our apprehension

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of the sequencing and articulation of its elements. Our response to art is now construed to be primarily perceptual rather than emotional, but, notwithstanding its supposed autonomy, we recognise too that forms allude to another reality as is evident in the language of spiritual experience that Fry retains.

Fry’s identification of Mauron’s ‘psychological volumes’ with ‘the domain of the spirit’ suggests that his concept of the spiritual by now encompassed psychological constructs too. The inference we draw is that matter and spirit were no longer opposed in Fry’s thinking; the idea of the unconscious mind’s mysteriousness blurs a once-clear demarcation. As Fry concludes his argument in defence of aesthetic experience, there is a lack of clarity as to whether the source of artistic inspiration is psychological or metaphysical. The case Fry makes for a ‘spiritual’ value of form, conceived in terms of ‘plasticity’, is clouded in rhetorical ambiguity.

**Matter and the impress of the spirit**

According to Fry, Richards assumes an old view of the arts whereby content is imparted through representation rather than form.\(^{432}\) Now, he argues, works of art project the artist’s interests through both psychological content and plastic form. To illustrate the point, he cites Rembrandt’s painting, *Boy at his Lessons*, of 1655. [Figure 11] The ‘complete realism’ of the painting, he observes, is evoked by the ‘vivid sense and resistance’ of the battered desk which is ‘...situated so absolutely in the picture space and plays so emphatically its part in the whole plastic scheme.’\(^{433}\) The desk’s compelling verisimilitude is beside the point though because its value resides in the plastic contribution that it makes to the ‘spiritual unity’ of the painting as a whole. The interests of verisimilitude may jeopardise the work of art’s ‘spiritual unity’ because ‘...the moment anything in [the picture] ceases to serve towards the edification of the whole plastic volume, the moment it depends on reference to something outside the picture, it becomes descriptive of some other reality, and becomes part of an actual, and not a spiritual reality’.\(^{434}\) The old convention is evident in the abstracted expression of the boy, puzzled or bored by his lessons, which is handled with a technical

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\(^{432}\) Ibid. He states: ‘The old view, still put forward by Mr. Richards, was that the representational elements correspond to the subject, and the plastic elements to the form’, p. 10.

\(^{433}\) Ibid, p. 40.

\(^{434}\) Ibid, p. 42.
mastery of subtle and complex painterly problems; but ‘what is of even more interest for our present enquiry’, he urges the reader, is the plasticity of the scratched and battered desk:

...it is handled with such a vivid sense of its density and resistance, it is situated so absolutely in the picture space and plays so emphatically its part in the whole plastic scheme, it reveals so intimately the mysterious play of light upon matter that it becomes the vehicle of a strangely exalted state, the medium through which we share Rembrandt’s deep contemplative mood. It is miraculous that matter can take so exactly the impress of the spirit as this pigment does.435

We are exhorted to see the ‘the impress of the spirit’ on ‘matter’, to share Rembrandt’s deep contemplative mood, and to sense his psychological disposition, his ‘strangely exalted state’. We ponder Rembrandt’s state of mind through the medium of the dense, resistant pigment that bears the impress of Rembrandt’s spirit. Psychology and metaphysics meet. The work of art, the artist, the audience, and the boy, Titus, are encompassed within the idea ‘plasticity’, a term now revised to accommodate the scientism of Richards’ critique.

Summary

Circumspect about Significant Form’s mystical connotation, Fry’s own use of the term declined during the 1920s in favour of ‘plasticity’, an alternative with the cachet of international currency and the benefit, as Fry might have seen it, of imprecision. The modern critic’s internationalist remit demanded that one’s terminology should be unconstrained by English provincialism while Fry was predisposed anyway to possibilities afforded by a little terminological latitude. ‘Plasticity’ was a fluid concept and Fry can be difficult to pin down. Berel Lang, who surveyed his use of the term in different contexts, concludes that the conjunction of feeling and form, the idea that matter, the artist’s medium, should become suffused with the feeling that the artist brings to it, lies at the heart of ‘plasticity’ in Fry’s critical writing. She proposes that the phrase ‘expressive quality of form’ comes as close as any to a definition. Be that as it may, we note parallels between Fry’s understanding of form’s ‘expressive’ qualities during the 1920s, and comparable concepts devised Cheney and Barnes in America at about the same time. We recall too that each of them had, at one time or another, read the American aesthetician, George

435 Ibid, pp. 40 & 41.
Santayana, who had reformulated a Schopenhauerian concept of ‘expression’ along the lines we find replicated in their respective theories.

I argued that Fry’s early formalism, having derived from a dialogue between Ruskin and Aestheticism, comprised a romantic component based on the link between the artist, as seer, and his audience. The four-fold relationship he poses between form in the work of art, the audience that perceives it, the artist who creates it, and the motif that inspires it, is a consistent feature of his romanticism. Contrasting Fry’s ‘mixed formalism’, as D. W. Curtin describes it, with the ‘pure formalism’ of Greenberg, a version that might equally apply to Significant Form, he demonstrates the difference between a ‘mixed’ formalism that relies upon one’s perception of form within the work of art and a ‘pure’ formalism whereby form is deemed to exist as a property of the work of art, independent of one’s efforts to perceive it. Fry’s ‘mixed formalism’ anticipates the forthcoming construction of the Modern Master as I will argue in the next chapter.

A consistent feature of Fry’s formalist theory, his romantic construct survived a profound revision that entailed his abandonment of nineteenth-century metaphysical suppositions in response to I. A. Richards’ critique of the aesthetic concept in Principles of Literary Criticism published in 1924. Fry’s reply to Richards, set out in Transformations, of 1926, proposes that aesthetic experience is, in essence, a response to the idea of ‘relation’, an argument that obviates the requirement for an aesthetic mental faculty. Fry thereby addresses Richards’ scientifically-conceived objection. Elaborating his argument in the terms of ‘psychological volumes’, a spatial metaphor that Fry borrows from the French literary critic, Charles Mauron, the balance of his ‘mixed formalism’ shifts away from the motif and towards form itself emphasising the abstract qualities of the work of art in the process. The abstract principle of this realignment is strengthened by Fry’s recourse to the literary form of Tragedy, in reply to Richards’ argument about the form’s imaginative qualities, to illustrate the relationship between form and content when the abstract priorities of dynamic structure and articulation are maintained.

Fry concludes ‘Some Questions in Esthetics’, the first chapter of Transformations, by arguing that Richards was outmoded in his assumption that the content in works of art is conveyed by representation alone. Plastic form itself, he submits, is imbued with psychological content, a proposition that is reminiscent of Barnes’ account of semi-autonomous ‘charged forms’ imbued with meaning by one’s reservoir of ‘funded
experience’. Referring to Rembrandt’s painting, *Boy at His Lessons*, of 1655, Fry contrasts the masterful handling of the child’s face with the back of the battered desk, a passage of painting that evinces the ‘impress’ of Rembrandt’s spirit. Both areas of the painting, he argues, contribute to the ‘spiritual unity’ of the whole and thereby transmit the painting’s psychological ‘content’.

Having charted the realignment in Fry’s formalism towards the principle of abstraction, I will discuss the bearing that his revision had on his critical practice by examining Fry’s account of Cézanne in the influential monograph of 1927, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*. It was during this year that he met Alfred Barr Jr. I will demonstrate the parallels that exist between Fry’s formalist thinking at this stage of his career and Barr’s influential explanations of the seminal change that brought about a formalist era of modernism.
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Parallel Narratives: Fry’s Cézanne and Barr’s Picasso

Beyond the methodological immediacies of their dialogue, Fry’s encounter with I. A. Richards signals an underlying shift in Anglo-American critical values. In 1926, when he published Transformations, Fry had felt it necessary to disavow ‘metaphysical entities and absolutes’ before going on to redefine aesthetic experience in terms of one’s psychological affinities with the concept of ‘relation’ and the continuities that stem from it. 436 We noted, in the last chapter, that he was familiar by then with recent innovations in Gestalt theory, yet, for all the scientism attributed to his new position, Fry retained the romantic component of his formalism. It is evident in his use of the term, ‘plasticity’, a modernist construct in widespread international usage, but one which he reconciled to the four domains of his romantically-conceived formalist schema, namely: the motif, the artist, artistic form itself, and the audience who come to perceive it. It engendered a dichotomous critical language pertaining to both psychological experience and spiritual value and it is for this reason that we can look beyond recent psychological readings of his aesthetic theory to a more complex interpretation entailing his residual romanticism. Despite its inherent disjunctures, I will argue that Fry’s ‘mixed formalism’ proved to be compatible with an emergent institutional culture in America. Its concrete expression in the monograph, Cézanne: A Study of His Development, may be seen to have modelled an art historical context for American formalism’s transition away from representation and towards abstraction.

Fry’s close identification with Cézanne was analysed in Formalism’s First Affair: What Roger Fry Made of Paul Cézanne, a doctoral thesis submitted in 2002 by an American research student, Benjamin Harvey. 437 He charts the tragic arc of Cézanne’s development as

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436 Fry, Vision and Design. Pondering the nature and source of aesthetic emotion in ‘Retrospect’, Fry confesses his uncertainty. Reminiscing on his article on Giotto for Monthly Review in 1901, he concedes: ‘My emotion about the dramatic idea seemed to heighten my emotion about the plastic design. But at present I should be inclined to say that this fusion of two sets of emotion was only apparent and was due to my imperfect analysis of my own mental state. Probably at this point we must hand over the question to the experimental psychologist’, p. 301.

it proceeds from the ‘romanticism’ of his ‘youth’, to the ‘classicism’ of his prolonged ‘maturity’, and finally to the problematic reversions of his ‘old age’.\[^{438}\] In the manner of the tragic form, Fry’s account is shown to identify the culmination of Cézanne’s achievement with his middle years. His misgivings about the painter’s return, in the late *Bathers* series, to the inner vision of his youth, constitutes a waywardness of sorts although Fry is reluctant to characterise it as decline.

Asking to what extent today’s ‘Cézanne’ is Fry’s creation, Harvey suggests that the acquisition in 1925 of the painter’s self-portrait of 1881 by the National Collection, marked his institutional acceptance in England.\[^{439}\] Fry’s research for the monograph had been underway by then and its publication in 1927 occurred at a propitious moment as far as the institutional processes of Anglo-American modernism were concerned.\[^{440}\] Alfred Barr Jr. met Fry in London in August 1927, during his second tour of Europe. By then, he had started teaching his modernism course at Wellesley College, and was in England having taken unpaid leave to further his research of the European avant-garde. Financially supported by Paul Sachs, his doctoral supervisor at Harvard and soon-to-be patron at the Museum of Modern Art, it was during this tour that he compiled material for a series of lectures on European modernism to be delivered at Wellesley College in spring 1929, when he briefly resumed his teaching career. In 1936, he cited those lectures as the intellectual source of the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition.\[^{441}\] I will argue that Fry’s narrative presented Barr with an apologue, a moral fable, explicating the renunciation of representational values, at a time when he needed to distance the Museum of Modern Art from the representational styles favoured by an American art-going public but also to court its sympathies.

Barr had read Fry’s *Vision and Design* during his graduate year at Princeton in 1922-1923 and acclaimed him ‘the most brilliant English Art Critic supporting the modern aesthetic attitude’, adding, grudgingly, ‘ma non troppo’, ‘but not too much’.\[^{442}\] When they met in 1927, *Vision and Design* had been in print for seven years, *Transformations*, for one

\[^{438}\] Harvey, *Formalism’s First Affair*, pp. 194 – 207.
\[^{439}\] Harvey, *Formalism’s First Affair*, p. 297.
\[^{442}\] Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr*, p. 100.
year, and the publication of *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* was either recent or imminent. Fry’s preface is dated August 1927, the month of their meeting. In the context of an ongoing Anglo-American formalist discourse, Barr’s knowledge of Fry takes on new significance. Take, for example, the cursory observations of his most recent biographer, Sybil Gordon Kantor, in *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*. Referring to the Museum of Modern Art’s inaugural exhibition of 1929, *Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh*, she notes that:

Barr had met Fry in London and he followed Fry’s formalist point of view expressed that year in *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*. Fry’s empirical analysis ... expressed a habit that would rule Barr’s life and career.

Continuing the theme, she adds:

Barr almost reluctantly implies that the artist’s paintings, in the end, have a transcendent effect’.

I will discuss Fry’s influence on Barr, not so much in relation to the Museum’s first loan exhibition as to the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition of 1936 when the institution presented its first coherently formalist account of modern art’s inception. As we have seen, this interpretation of modernist art is rooted in Anglo-American formalist modernism’s Post-Impressionist forebears.

We break with Harvey’s thesis concerning Fry’s Freudianism because his erstwhile romanticism offers, what I believe to be, a more pertinent insight to the influence he had on Barr. We therefore begin with Fry’s understanding of ‘synthesis’, an essentially romantic concept which links artistic form to the motif by way of Cézanne’s unique sensibility. I will suggest how it models a value ascribed to the modernist painting’s flat surface before going on to explore the similarities between the ‘plasticity’ of Cézanne’s mature works and modernist notions of style. We will consider the extent to which ‘plastic unity’ presages certain precepts of High Modernist compositional design before concluding the chapter with a discussion of the parallels between Fry’s account of Cézanne’s stylistic innovation and Barr’s explanation of the seminal moments in Picasso’s career.

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443 Barr arrived in England in July 1927 and stayed for two months. The Preface to Fry’s monograph is dated August 1927.
445 Ibid.
Cézanne’s synthesis

Fry was still baffled by the figure of Cézanne when he wrote ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’, yet he attributes romantic qualities to his own artist-ideal which are not dissimilar from those Denis had seen in the painter. Indeed, within a year, he had come round to Denis’ estimation of him for, in the preface to his Burlington translation of Denis’ account of Cézanne, Fry describes him as the ‘great and original genius’ of the new movement. Denis had portrayed Cézanne as the quintessential romantic: ‘...shy, independent, solitary ... exclusively occupied with his art ... always restless and usually ill-satisfied with himself’, a depiction which Fry accepted and then accentuated in his review of Ambroise Vollard’s monograph on Cézanne for the Burlington, some seven years later. Vollard’s version of the myth presented Cézanne as the modern-day romantic, estranged from society yet the object of bourgeois fascination. This version was, as Gruetzner Robins points out, a commercially-inspired fiction. Yet it was from Vollard’s permutation of the myth, as much as Denis’, that Fry drew when he brought certain characteristics of the painter into correspondence with his own newly-revised formalist aesthetic. The resulting figure, an accreted persona comprising aspects of various Cézannian myths, projects a composite idea of Cézanne into a contemporary setting, where, as a romantic artist of our times, he is impelled to mediate ‘spiritual’ values to a contemporary bourgeoisie. It is now a well-worn commonplace to observe that Fry remade Cézanne in his own compensating image, but also one which is not without truth, for the inarticulacy of Fry’s Cézanne, set against his own alacrity, is construed as a virtue, a sign of profound feeling that can only find expression

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447 Denis, ‘Cézanne’. L’Occident. Denis attributes a similar visionary quality to Cézanne to the one with which Fry imbues his artist figure in ‘An Essay in Aesthetics’ when he identifies him with Synthetism, a movement that implies a reconciliation of ‘subjective states’ and ‘external forms’ through the work of art itself. He states: ‘Syntheticism ... implied the belief in a correspondence between external forms and subjective states. Instead of evoking our moods by means of the subject represented, it was the work of art itself which was to transmit the initial sensation and perpetuate emotions. Every work of art is a transposition, an emotional equivalent, a caricature of a sensation received, or, more generally, of a psychological fact’, p. 275.


450 Fry, Vision and Design, p. 256.
through plastic form. Fry applauds Cézanne’s lack of eloquence: ‘...the conviction behind each brushstroke has to be won from nature at every step, and he will do nothing except at the dictation of a conviction which arises within him as the result of contemplation’. Likewise, Cézanne’s faltering method is celebrated for its ‘honesty’; it is the antithesis of Fry’s accomplished facility. Quoting Joachim Gasquet’s apocryphal recollection of a conversation with the painter, Fry chose, in his lectures of 1927, to emphasise Cézanne’s detachment. ‘Art is a parallel to nature’ Cézanne supposedly told Gasquet, ‘... the artist is parallel to nature. So long as his will does not intervene—that is the point. All his will should be but a silence. Then at last all the landscape will inscribe itself on his sensitive plate. To fix it on the canvas, to exteriorise it’. Herein lies the Schopenhauerian genius in modern guise.

‘Synthesis’, a nineteenth-century mode of expression, it should be realised, conflates two prevalent interpretations of Cézanne, each culled from Denis: Cézanne, the Impressionist recorder of visual sensation; and, Cézanne, the Symbolist purveyor of psychic order. It denotes simultaneously both spontaneity and reflection. Richard Shiff points out that Fry’s version of the myth dispenses with the former and emphasises the latter. Thus, the Post-Impressionist Cézanne, in his abstracted frame of mind, when, as ‘idiot’, all relations of ‘self’ and ‘outside world’ are held in abeyance, and the ‘strangely exalted state’ descends, searches nature for those ‘emotional elements’ that ‘... will be combined appropriately with the demands of the imaginative life ... to give us first of all order and variety in the sensuous plane’. The synthetic image is never instantaneously revealed but rather it is ‘stalked’ from various viewpoints and with great precaution; it is stated, adjusted, and re-stated in an endless process of painstaking modification lest premature definition should deprive it of its amplitude. Cézanne’s *pentimenti*, the layered revisions, documenting his search for relationships of form, accumulate. For Cézanne, Fry observes, true synthesis is asymptotic: the formal relations in the motif are never conclusively
captured and therefore Cézanne can only ever abandon his paintings. Yet, synthesis yields a finished painting even if the canvas ground remains exposed because completion is attained on the realisation of ‘plastic unity’. He explains:

The touches of colour are often spaced out upon it. And yet if we view the canvas from the proper distance the effect of plastic continuity is complete... The picture plane, with all the gaps in the colour, is completely finished.\textsuperscript{456}

\textbf{Plasticity and relation}

Fry identifies ‘plasticity’ with the ‘mature’ and ‘late’ phases of Cézanne’s career, the former beginning in the 1880s and the latter in the 1900s respectively, periods founded on definable permutations of his ‘mixed’ formalist coda. Completed in 1882, the still-life, \textit{Compotier}, heralds the onset of Cézanne’s maturity.\textsuperscript{457} [Figure 12] The ‘mature Cézanne’, he tells us, ‘renounces’ the values of real life in his ‘devotion’ to the life of the imagination. Disillusioned, discouraged and having abandoned youthful ambition, he dedicates himself to the ‘desperate search’, ‘almost prophetic’ in its significance, for ‘the reality hidden beneath the veil of appearance’. Although the painter’s sensual energies persist, his technique has become more circumspect. In contrast to the ‘Baroque’ manner of his youth, he now adopts the small brush; his attention fully absorbed by the motif, he is less conscious of handling. Abandoning himself to his quest for form, Cézanne ‘leaves his hand to manage, as best it could’. His analysis of coloured surfaces leads him to ‘...a long research for an ultimate synthesis which unveils itself little by little from the contemplation of things seen’.\textsuperscript{458} The painterly surface accretes gradually as successive ‘attacks’ leave their traces visible, accumulations of small parallel, rectilinear brushstrokes which slant from right to left as they descend creating a surface of extreme richness and density. Like Rembrandt’s \textit{Boy at His Lessons}, matter itself becomes ‘eloquent’ for it speaks of the impulse which informs the painter in his abandonment. ‘Material quality’ corresponds to content: ‘...nothing is inert, the material is permeated and, as it were, polarised by the idea, so that every particle becomes resonant’.\textsuperscript{459}

\textsuperscript{456} Ibid, p. 77. \\
\textsuperscript{457} Ibid, p. 39. \\
\textsuperscript{458} Ibid, p. 43. \\
\textsuperscript{459} Ibid, p. 44.
Turning to matters of design, Fry observes the ‘simple and logical relations’ of form and volume in *Compotier* seem inevitable: ‘...one has the impression that each of these objects is infallibly in its place, and that its place was ordained for it from the beginning of all things, so majestically and serenely does it repose there.’ Spheres are ‘repeated again and again’; ‘simple and logical relations of form are evident in the ...continually repeated upright lines and the frequently repeated but identical forms of the leaves on the wallpaper...’ The rhythmical articulation of spatial interval is such that ‘one suspects a strange complicity between these objects...’, and, in the corresponding articulation of volumes, ‘each form seems to have a surprising amplitude, to permit our apprehending it with an ease which surprises us, and yet they admit a free circulation in the surrounding space’. ‘One divines...’, he continues, ‘that the forms are held together by some strict harmonic principle almost like the canon in Greek architecture, and that it is this that gives its extraordinary repose and equilibrium to the whole design’.

‘Plastic design’ is realised in the coherent logic of articulated harmonies and the rhythmical interplay of lines, shapes, forms and deformations. The word ‘deformation’, also borrowed from Denis, signifies the emotional quality of synthesis. In *Compotier*, the deformation of circles of the glass and the compotier resolve themselves into oblongs with rounded ends demonstrating the primacy of Cézanne’s ‘harmonic sense’ at the expense of perceptual fidelity to the motif. He ‘deprives the oval of its elegance and thinness and gives it the same character of gravity and amplitude that the spheres possess’. His inelegant deformations differ from the ‘fashionable’ vogue for deformation in painting now because they serve the imagination’s emotional needs rather than its perceptual ones. It reflects ‘imaginative and harmonic necessity’ alone, and it is the emotional necessity, Fry implies, which gives rise to an internal logic of plastic design sufficient in its integrity to permit notions of ‘consummate design’ and, indeed, of ‘troubling incongruity’, for he admits: ‘I cannot see the necessity of the shadow cast by the half-opened drawer in the kitchen table...It seems to check the horizontal and slightly diagonal movements of the napkin-folds and to lessen their suavity’.

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460 Ibid, p. 47.
461 Ibid.
463 Ibid, pp. 48 & 49
464 Ibid, p. 49.
Cézanne’s implicit audience, grasp the ‘vivid sense of inevitability’ conveyed by the, ‘crescendo and diminuendo which their sequence describes’.

In that the painterly process of ‘synthesis’ presupposes a motif, an object of intense scrutiny, it is emblematic of a new formal dynamic in the works of Cézanne’s maturity and old age; one that anticipates the significance of the modernist surface. Emancipated from nature, Cézanne’s motif endows the encrusted surface with a plastic reality of its own. As Fry observes: ‘...his pigment attains a peculiar density and resistance and an enamel or lacquer-like hardness and brilliance of surface’. The end-product of ‘synthesis’, the painting’s plastic surface is ‘the result of his incessant repetitions and revisions of the form’. It becomes the repository of authentic artistic experience, a precursor to Barr’s modernist surface, the new ‘invented’ reality of synthetic cubism’s textured surface; and of Greenberg’s ineluctably flat surface, incontestable, drained of all illusory space. In this sense, we might weigh Christopher Reed’s assertion that there is ‘a profound disjuncture between Fry’s 1910s formalism and the 1940s – 60s formalism associated with Clement Greenberg, which are so often assumed to be contiguous’. Reed substantiates his point in relation to Fry’s essays of 1911, ‘An English Sculptor’ and ‘Plastic Design’. In the light of a later explanation of ‘plasticity’, one articulated in Transformations and the Cézanne monograph, we might reasonably equate ‘plastic unity’ with the exploratory process of ‘synthesis’ and its realisation by means of matter, the artist’s medium. ‘Plasticity’ in this sense sanctions spatial relationships and, indeed, volumes deformed in three-dimensional space, but they are realised in what is, admittedly, the problematic dimension of ‘psychological volumes’.

Plasticity, in this context, anticipates modernism’s renunciation of the illusory third dimension as we have seen, and a later variant of it, realised through Cézanne’s watercolour technique, foresees modernism’s lateral encroachment beyond the picture frame as well. It is a point that Adrianne Rubin misses in her emphasis of the implications of ‘plasticity’ for volume and, by extension, depth, in her discussion of Fry’s legacy to Greenberg. In painterly terms, the idea of ‘relation’ implies a spatially flat and expansive sequencing of

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466 Reed, A Roger Fry Reader, p. 122.
forms akin to High Modernism’s ‘all-over’ painting. Noting the significance of Cézanne’s picture plane when he used watercolour, Fry observes:

In water-colour we never can lose the sense of the material, which is a wash upon the paper. The colour may stand for a plane in the picture space, but it is only, as it were, by a tacit convention with the spectator that it does so. It never denies its actual existence on the surface of the paper.  

According to Fry, Cézanne’s watercolour technique leads to ‘a new synthesis’ when it informs his (oil) painting technique. Characterised by ‘hatched strokes more loosely spaced’, a ‘thinner impasto’, a ‘looser and freer handwriting of the brush’, and a reluctance to obliterate the canvas ground, it permits Cézanne greater freedom to convey emotion by noting only the visual incidents—‘part of the contour of a mountain’...‘the relief of a wall’... ‘part of the trunk of a tree’... ‘a mass of foliage’—that are most significant to the structure.

In his late works they would become the ‘directing phrases of the total plasticity’. Likened to crystal forms radiating out from their nuclei during the process of crystallization, the ‘new synthesis’ implies the expansive mode of painting envisaged by Greenberg in ‘Modernist Painting’ as he discusses modernism’s critique of arbitrary convention.

The liberties of this approach afford Cézanne ‘the play of his feeling’, and enables him to arrive at his ‘new synthesis’ with fewer corrections and adjustments as we see in his Portrait of Mme Cézanne of 1890. [Figure 13] Here, Hortense, Cézanne’s wife, is depicted in the ‘bold symmetry’ of a frontal view and centrally placed in the picture plane. There is no attempt to alleviate the rigidity of the pose she had instinctively adopted by rearrangement of her head, arms or torso; the rectangularity of the chair back is accepted as it is too.

Cézanne, Fry observes, has corrected the awkwardness of his wife’s pose through painterly deformation: ‘Everywhere this symmetry is modified by deformations’. He describes the

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469 Fry, Cézanne, p. 64.

470 Greenberg, ‘Modernist Painting’ in O’Brien, The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 4. Greenberg states: ‘The making of pictures has been controlled, since it first began, by all the norms I have mentioned. The Paleolithic painter or engraver could disregard the norm of the frame and treat the surface in a literally sculptural way only because he made images rather than pictures, and worked on a support—a rock wall, a bone, a horn, or a stone—whose limits and surface were arbitrarily given by nature. But the making of pictures means, among other things, the deliberate creating or choosing of a flat surface, and the deliberate circumscribing and limiting of it. This deliberateness is precisely what Modernist painting harps on: the fact, that is, that the limiting conditions of art are altogether human conditions’, p. 92. Greenberg goes on to observe: ‘...other cardinal norms of the art of painting had begun, with the onset of Modernism, to undergo a revision... the norm of the picture’s enclosing shape, or frame, was loosened, then tightened, then loosened once again, and isolated, and then tightened once more, by successive generations of Modernist painters’, p. 89.
transformation of his wife into plastic design: ‘the actual woman’ becomes ‘the data of
nature’, a plastic unity as self-sufficient as music. 471

The spiritual significance of plastic form is reasserted: ‘It belongs to a world of
spiritual values incommensurate but parallel with the actual world’. Indeed, in his landscape
of 1895, La Route du Chateau Noir Fry argues that the work of art is finally emancipated
from the motif which gave rise to it [Figure 14]:

Here the ‘crystallization’ of the forms is complete... Not only has Cézanne’s notion of
plasticity and of plastic continuity here attained its plenitude, but the artist controls
it with perfect freedom. If we compare it to the works of the early maturity...we see
how far Cézanne has developed in this direction, how much more he feels at ease
before the ‘motive’, how much sooner he dominates and controls it’. 472

Cézanne is now able to ‘trust’ the inclinations of his ‘sensibility’ and the ‘acquired science’ of
his technique. It allows him to modulate his chosen chromatic key almost as a musician
does. He ‘...has realised his early dream of a picture not only controlled but inspired by the
necessities of the spirit, a picture which owes nothing to the data of actual vision...' 473

‘Late Cézanne’, a period beginning at the turn of the century, is marked by the
painter’s return to the ‘romantic exuberance’ of his early youth, a new impetuosity and
exaltation of colour. Like Rembrandt in old age, his preoccupation is now with plastic rather
than psychological values. The new freedom to manipulate plastic form, flows from the
emancipation of plastic design from the motif that inspired it. In his final phase, Cézanne
breaks up volumes, denying the unity of objects and allowing planes to move freely in space.
In terms that anticipate Barr’s explanations of cubism, Fry states: ‘We get, in fact, a kind of
abstract system of plastic rhythms, from which we can no doubt build up the separate
volumes for ourselves, but in which these are not clearly enforced on us’. 474 Spatial and
structural ambiguities are accommodated within an ‘abstract system of plastic rhythms’.
Referring to an unnamed landscape of this period, Fry describes such ambiguities:

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471 Fry, Cézanne. Fry states: ‘The transposition of all the data of nature into values of plastic colour is here
complete. The result is as far from the scene it describes as music. There is no inducement to the mind to
retrace the steps the artist has taken and to reconstruct from his image the actual woman posing in her salon.
Though all comes by the interpretation of actual visual sensations, though the desire to remain absolutely loyal
to them was an obsession with Cézanne, the word realism seems as impertinent as idealism would be in
reference to such a creation’, p. 69.

472 Ibid, p. 76.

473 Ibid, p. 77.

474 Ibid, p. 78.
The landscape...gives an idea of the disintegration of volumes of which I have spoken. It is quite true that in nature such a scene gives an effect of confused interweft, but in earlier days Cézanne would not have accepted it as a motive or would have established certain definitely articulated masses. Here the flux of small movements is continuous and unbroken... But this is illusory, for there will be found to emerge from this a far more definite and coherent plastic construction than theirs. It is no mere impression of a natural effect, but a re-creation which has a similar dazzling multiplicity and innovation'.

Owing nothing to actual vision, Cézanne’s late work, Fry maintains, is inspired by the necessities of the spirit; it conforms to an inner logic of formal relations derived from emotional expression. The ‘necessities of the spirit’ are mediated by Cézanne through both form and the materiality of the painting to a projected audience who are enabled to share his state of mind.

We now turn to the parallels between Fry’s narrative of Cézanne’s stylistic development and Barr’s account of cubist abstraction in the catalogue of the Museum of Modern Art’s *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition of 1936. We recall that Barr mentions in the Preface that, conceptually, the exhibition evolved from the series of lectures he delivered at Wellesley College in the spring of 1929 following his second European tour; an event which occasioned the meeting with Fry.

**Fry and Barr: narratives of stylistic transition**

Intentional or otherwise, Barr’s misreading of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler’s Kantian explanation of the characteristics in pre-First World War cubism in *Der Weg zum Kubismus* of 1920 represents a key moment in what he characterises as the ‘impulse towards abstract art’. His principle of abstraction, as David Cottington points out, was informed by the ‘analytical—synthetic’ paradigm he adapted from Kahnweiler who, in turn, had adapted a neo-Kantian interpretive framework, prevalent before the First World War, to elaborate perceptual and conceptual aspects of the cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque at that
time. It was Barr who conceived of ‘analysis’ and ‘synthesis’ as the characteristics of two consecutive phases of cubist abstraction, a construction that is absent from Kahnweiler’s interpretation. I submit, however, that we find a rationale for Barr’s sequential construction in Fry’s narrative of stylistic progress during Cézanne’s ‘mature’ and ‘late’ years.

As Cottington reminds us, it was Barr who, by mapping the genealogy of styles culminating in abstraction, capitalised these terms to re-designate them as style labels demarcating consecutive stages of cubist evolution—‘Analytical Cubism’ and ‘Synthetic Cubism’—thereby nullifying Kahnweiler’s philosophical ascriptions. In constructing his narrative of stylistic evolution, Barr assembled the works, identified their stylistic devices, and assigned them to a chronology whereby ‘the apogee of Analytical Cubism’ in 1912 is shown to be succeeded the following year by the ‘transition to Synthetic Cubism’. 477

Barr himself, acknowledges affinities between Analytical Cubism and Cézanne’s style, citing certain technical characteristics that Fry had attributed to the styles of Cézanne’s maturity and old age. In the Cubism and Abstract Art catalogue, he states:

> In spite of the abstract character of Analytical Cubism it remained throughout closely linked to the modified Impressionism of Cézanne. ...there is ...a fundamental resemblance in the relations between line and tone, between light and dark, and between the passages, the merging of planes with space by leaving one edge unpainted or light in tone. 478

If we compare his representation of the transition from Analytical Cubism to Synthetic Cubism we note how closely it resembles Fry’s narrative of Cézanne’s stylistic development in maturity and old age. Barr describes the abstraction process through the stylistic changes seen in a series of five heads by Picasso. The Head of a Woman of 1908 is ‘systematically broken down into facets like a cut diamond, but the form is still sculptural...’ 479 [Figure 15] In the Portrait of Braque of 1909, Picasso ‘begins to break up the “crystallized” form; the facets begin to slip, causing further deformation’. [Figure 16] The Poet of 1911, ‘marks a third stage of disintegration’, leading to Arlésienne of 1912, in which the head ‘is made up of flat, overlapping, transparent planes, almost rectangular in shape’. [Figures 17 and 18] The fifth stage is represented by the Head of a Young Woman of 1913, which ‘marks the end of “Analytical” Cubism and the beginning of “Synthetic” Cubism. [Figure 19] Barr summarises

477 Ibid, p. 29.
478 Ibid, p. 42.
479 Ibid, pp. 31 & 41.
the transition thus: ‘The progression moves from three-dimensional, modelled, recognisable images to two-dimensional, flat, linear form, so abstract as to seem nearer geometry than representation’.

We, in turn, compare Barr’s account with Fry’s narrative of plastic design in Cézanne’s development. For example, the faceting of *Head of a Woman* of 1908, corresponds loosely to Cézanne’s *La Femme a la Cafetiere* of 1887, in which a ‘...perfect continuity of plastic sequences...contributes to the perfectly lucid organization and the clear articulation of the volumes...’[^480] [Figure 20] The facets and deformations in *Portrait of Braque* of 1909, are reminiscent of the ‘symmetry modified by deformations’ and the ‘general play of slight variations’, the ‘refraction’ and the ‘impalpable play of the surface’ in the *Portrait of Mme Cézanne* of 1887.[^481] [Figure 21] The flat, overlapping planes of *Arlésienne* of 1912, compare with the ‘strict parallelism to the picture plane’ and the ‘constant variation of the movements of planes within the main volumes’ of *The Card Players* of 1893. [Figure 22] Although Barr offers no description of the 1913 *Head of a Young Woman*, we might suppose that it conforms to Fry’s descriptions of the ‘*a priori* creation of a design...’ in which the late *Bathers* series become ‘almost geometric abstractions’.[^482] [Figure 23]

In the final stages of transition, the comparisons become more tenuous but are still discernable. Cézanne’s late work, the *Bathers*, for example, is differentiated by two qualities: ‘...handling and ...colour harmony’.[^483] For Barr, likewise, identifies two qualities that differentiate Synthetic Cubism: ‘Texture: collage (paper-pasting)’ and ‘The renaissance of color’.[^484] The ‘new impetuosity of rhythm’ and, ‘new exaltation in colour’ of Cézanne’s old age on the one hand, and Braque’s ‘complication’ of ‘Analytical Cubism’s Cézanne-Impressionist tradition ...of technical modesty’, on the other, each concern a renewed interest in the ambiguities afforded by space and volume and the possibilities of colour. Cézanne’s exuberance shows itself in his ‘... tendency to break up the volumes...to allow planes to move freely in space...a kind of abstract system of plastic rhythms’ while Braque’s simulated wood grains and marble effects produce ‘variety of forms and surfaces’. Both

[^480]: Fry, *Cézanne*, p. 67.
[^481]: Ibid, p. 68.
[^482]: Ibid, pp. 81 & 82.
[^483]: Ibid, p. 84.
[^484]: Ibid, p. 78.
transitions entail an elaboration of the picture plane. Moreover, both Fry and Barr conceive of the new surface in relation to a new ‘reality’. Braque’s collage technique, whereby ‘actual fragments of the natural world’ are incorporated into the work of art, is construed as ‘an emphasis not upon the reality of the represented objects but upon the reality of the painted surface’. 485 Fry says of Cézanne that the paintings of his old age ‘re-create natural effect. He observes the ‘landscape of a pool overhung with foliage’ constitutes ‘...no mere impression of natural effect, but a re-creation...’486 It is at this point, however, that the parallels begin to break down.

**The limits of the discourse**

If, as I suggested, the modernist surface came to gauge the authenticity of the modernist work, it should be appreciated that its significance is variously conceived. Fry’s notion of ‘pure plastic unity’ and Barr’s idea of Synthetic Cubist abstraction register dissimilar qualities. In *Compotier*, for example, Fry declares that ‘matter itself has become eloquent...nothing is inert, the material is permeated and, as it were, polarised by the idea, so that every particle becomes resonant’.487 Barr’s claim is more prosaic. He argues that the inclusion of texture amounts to a ‘complete repudiation of the convention that a painter was honor-bound to achieve the reproduction of a texture by means of paint rather than by the short cut of applying the texture itself to his canvas’.488 The one retains a sense of the artist’s presence while the other merely records his interpretation of the motif. Rhetoric aside, their language indicates an important divergence with profound implications for artists and institutional modernism alike. Fry argues in *Transformations* that the ‘transmutation of visual values of natural objects into plastic and spatial values is the great problem of most modern artists, since the majority of them take some actual coup d’œil as their point of departure for plastic construction’. ‘Transmutation’, as Fry explains elsewhere, denotes a spiritual transformation: ‘The process of incorporating any given visual datum in a spiritual whole is what I endeavour to describe by the words interpretation or transmutation’.489 By contrast, Barr emphasises that ‘... the reality of the painted surface’ in

485 Ibid.
486 Ibid, p. 80.
487 Ibid, p. 43.
488 Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, p. 78.
Synthetic Cubism is predicated on an empirical property of the work of art which is independent of our efforts to perceive it. It signifies a stance that is objective, verifiable, and otherwise compatible with the priorities of scientific method. The point is not that Barr should have eliminated the spiritual value Fry ascribed to art, but rather that, in his theory, it is subsumed within a mystique ascribed to the form of particular artists.

Both Cézanne and Picasso feature prominently in Barr’s account of the break with representational tradition. Together with ‘Negro sculpture’, Cézanne is cited as the most important source of influence upon Picasso and Braque at the outset of Analytical Cubism in 1908. Although Barr identifies him with the rationalistic tradition that yields ‘geometrical abstraction’, he first links him with Maurice Denis, ‘a follower of Gauguin’, and presents him in the context of a ‘synthetic’ reaction against the rationalism of Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism by Gauguin and the ‘Synthetist group’. In so doing, he acknowledges the painter’s affinity for the ‘...intuitive, conceptual or expressionist attitude’ which is opposed by Barr to a ‘scientific, rational esthetic’ arising from analysis. The ‘analytical procedure’ of the Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists, Barr explains, was challenged by the Synthetists with their ‘synthetic method’. Like Renoir and the Impressionists, Cézanne, had ‘...chang[ed] for the sake of greater expression the colors of nature and distort[ed] its forms’, much as Gauguin and the Synthetists had done. The Synthetists, though not Cézanne himself, are associated by Barr with ‘deformations’, the term Fry had adopted from Denis and used in relation to the plasticity of mature and late Cézanne. As I will show, Barr later uses it to describe the treatment of form in Analytical Cubism. We see in Barr’s discussion of Cézanne, that he is associated with an irrational principle in art although all reference to spiritual or mystical interpretations of Cézanne’s work to be found in Fry’s text and that of Denis before him, are expunged from Barr’s narrative.

When Barr discusses Cézanne’s relation to cubism, he explains that the artist’s influence was disseminated only gradually: ‘...so complex and subtle was his style that they were only gradually to assimilate its meaning. To begin with, the cubists admired the angular forms in his choice of subject matter and, above all, they studied his late work, in

492 Ibid.
which ‘...he abandons the perspective of deep space and the emphatic modelling of solid forms for a compact composition in which the planes of foreground and background are fused into an angular active curtain of colour’. 494

Barr returns to the theme of geometric form and angularity when he discusses the influence of Cézanne on Braque and Picasso at the Salon d’Automne exhibitions in 1905 and 1906 and the retrospective of 1907. 495 In Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon of 1907, The Dancer of 1907 – 08, and Braque’s Nude of 1908, Cézanne’s influence is, according to Barr, once again apparent in the angularity which unites figures and backgrounds, and the reduction of spatial depth. However, mirroring Fry’s account of the emancipation of plastic form from the motif, Barr observes that ‘these are comparatively crude adaptations of Cézanne’s method’. In his comparison of Braque’s Seaport of 1908 with Cézanne’s Pines and Rocks of c 1895 – 1900, it is Braque’s emulation of ‘late Cézanne’s’ painting technique that is taken to signify progress [Figures 24 and 25]:

In both paintings the surfaces of the natural forms are reduced to angular planes or facets, depth is almost eliminated and frequently the foreground and background forms are fused by means of passages – the breaking of a contour so that the form seems to merge with space’. 496

It is this later response to Cézanne, a more adept one, that suggests Barr’s assimilation of the idea of plasticity, for we can see that it is particularly Braque’s adoption of Cézanne’s device of ‘passage’ that signifies innovation here; it is the only innovation upon angularity and compacted space of earlier assimilations. ‘Passage’ bears a resemblance to Fry’s idea of ‘relation’ that he elaborates in Transformations, for both ‘passage’ and the articulation that ‘relation’ implies are discussed in the context of discrete sequences of unified form and the merging of pictorial planes. The words connote the self-referential qualities of formal integration and flatness that later become the bywords of Greenbergian formalism: formal integration because they imply the articulation of discrete sequences of form across the picture plane; and flatness, because it is the inevitable outcome of the ‘fusion of background and foreground’ to which Barr refers and the ‘interplay of planes’ of which Fry speaks. The significance of ‘passage’ to the High Modernist aesthetic is explained by Barr’s successor at

494 Ibid.
496 Ibid, p. 31.
the Museum of Modern Art, William Rubin, in his catalogue essay, *Cézannism and the Beginnings of Cubism*, for the Museum’s *Cézanne: The Late Work* exhibition of 1977. In this particular context though, Barr’s usage serves only to describe the painterly method that Fry had ascribed to Cézanne as he painstakingly seeks articulations in nature: ‘the relief of a wall, elsewhere part of the trunk of a tree or a general movement of a mass of foliage’, and so on. Barr thus presents an interpretation of Cézanne’s influence on Analytical Cubism which is highly consonant with Fry’s account of Cézanne’s plasticity, albeit without the spiritual dimension.

**Summary**

Fry’s response to I. A. Richard’s critique of the aesthetic principle led him to review the balance he had maintained between the modalities of his formalist theory, namely: artistic form, the audience, the artist, and the motif. Defining aesthetic experience in terms of one’s psychological affinity with the concept of ‘relation’, he shifted the emphasis away from the motif and towards an interpretation of form which, as ‘pure plasticity’, became emancipated. His aesthetic theory during the mid-1920s was never more abstract in its implications as a consequence. Yet Fry also retained the role he had assigned to the artist as the purveyor of ‘spiritual’ truth to society. The meaning of ‘content’, now psychologically construed, is thereby conveyed through the ‘pure plastic unity’ of plastic forms realised through matter, the artist’s material medium. The painterly surface itself becomes a source of meaning because it physically retains the ‘spiritual impress’ of the artist. We noted, in passing, that Fry thus anticipated Greenbergian modernism’s critique of illusory space and the lateral constraint of the picture frame.

Set out as theory in ‘Some Questions in Esthetics’, the first chapter of *Transformations*, Fry’s revised formalism was incorporated into his monograph *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* which was published the following year in 1927. I suggest that Fry’s interpretation of Cézanne constitutes a paradigm of stylistic progress in a modern context and thus provided Barr with a model for his own account of stylistic innovation. More or less at the time of the book’s publication, Barr made his second visit to Europe,

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498 Fry, *Cézanne*, p. 64.
having delivered a course on modern art at Wellesley College. During this tour, he compiled
material for a series of lectures on European modernist art which would be delivered at
Wellesley College in spring 1929, shortly before his appointment to the Museum of Modern
Art. In the preface of the catalogue for the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition of 1936, he
cited the 1929 lecture series as his intellectual point of departure.

*Cubism and Abstract Art* presents Barr’s thesis that certain changes in cubist practice
precipitated a conceptual break with representational tradition that would lead ultimately
to abstraction. A supposed transition between ‘Analytical Cubism’ to ‘Synthetic Cubism’,
stylistic entities Barr himself had devised, constitutes the moment in question. Derived from
his simplistic interpretation of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler’s Kantian exposition of the
perceptual and conceptual qualities to be found in pre-First World War cubist paintings by
Picasso and Braque, Barr identified and then ascribed certain stylistic devices to as
‘Analytical’ and ‘Synthetic Cubism’ before assigning them, accordingly to his genealogy of
modernist styles.

Kahnweiler’s philosophical ascription was nullified in this process but, in the context
of an Anglo-American formalist discourse, Barr’s designation takes on new significance since
it replicates an account of stylistic change which, equally, is conceived in terms of
progression towards non-representational values. We noted the parallels between Fry’s
narrative of plasticity realised through such qualities as lucid organization, symmetry
modified by deformations, movements of planes, and Barr’s description of stylistic evolution
in five portraits painted by Picasso between 1908 and 1913. I concluded with a comparison
between Fry’s description of the ‘pure plastic unity’ Cézanne’s late *Bathers* and Barr’s
explanation of the ‘reality’ of Synthetic Cubism’s textured surface. As we saw, the two
narratives diverge over the question of the significance of the picture surface. Fry’s ‘mixed’
formalism was, we suppose, anathema to an institutional modernism predicated on
scientific method. However, the qualities of plastic form that Fry ascribes to ‘mature’ and
‘late’ Cézanne are attributed by Barr and William Rubin, his successor at the Museum of
Modern Art, to the transitional works of Picasso and Braque whereby the continuities of
‘passage’ resemble the ‘plastic continuities’ of form in Cézanne’s paintings.
The Extent of the Claim

We now address the two-fold claim implicit in the title of this thesis: firstly that Bloomsbury helped to shape a theoretical discourse during the period in question; and, secondly, that such a discourse culminated in what may be characterised as an Anglo-American formalist orthodoxy. The claim is neither absolute nor exclusive insofar that the literary evidence we have encountered only supports either proposition up to a point. Guided by the summaries of each chapter, we might reasonably conclude from that a body of aesthetic theory, founded on a philosophical argument about the transcendent qualities of form, and linked to a progressivist social critique, did indeed inform an American debate about modernist art. Aesthetic constructs, concepts, and values constituting a relatively coherent body of aesthetic theory are shown to have had some sort of continuity in what I characterise as an Anglo-American interpretation of modernist art and there is evidence of further continuity to suggest that significant aspects of that interpretation were propagated by the Museum of Modern Art during the 1930s. Such a proposition might also account for the divergence between a disparate continental European avant-garde movement and a relatively coherent American modernism which laid claim to much of its intellectual heritage but was itself derived from the Anglo-American tradition which Bloomsbury helped to perpetuate.

The written texts constituting my evidence base signify on two levels: firstly as documentary records of articulate knowledge at the time of their publication; and, secondly, as discursive interventions in their own right, capable of challenging and redirecting received opinion. Comparisons between them reveal the continuities and discontinuities that might constitute discourse. As we have seen, a body of art critical literature generated between the two exhibitions, *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* in 1910 and *Cubism and Abstract Art* in 1936, presented various interpretations of modernist art, congruous or otherwise, and positions were duly stated, contested, discarded, marginalised or defended, adapted, and then restated. The extent of Bloomsbury’s influence on this discourse—what it shaped and how much it did so—is ascertained through an analysis of Bloomsbury’s aesthetic theory subsumed within the train of Anglo-American thought.
That said, the extent of any claim has to reflect Bloomsbury’s modest profile in American cultural affairs. Christopher Reed, reminds us that, apart from those individuals who knew of Fry’s socially outré circle of upper-middle-class friends in connection with the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions, very few Americans had actually heard of Bloomsbury until the 1920s. When, after the First World War, a sense of Bloomsbury’s collective identity, such as it was, began to impinge on the American cultural discourse, it was due largely to the accomplishments of the group’s writers. Lytton Strachey became known, as did Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, Bertrand Russell, and such peripheral figures as E. M. Forster, David ‘Bunny’ Garnett, and Julian Bell. Fry was recognised for his writing and remembered, by some, from the days of his tenure at the Metropolitan Museum. Clive Bell, became better known, having started to write for American periodicals during the 1920s. It was not until the late-1960s, however, that Americans took note of Bloomsbury’s artists, and only because American collectors discovered Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Dora Carrington, and Fry, in his capacity as a painter, through their appreciation of the writers.499 By then, ironically, a formalist modernist artworld would have considered Bloomsbury ‘provincial’, a modernist outpost informed by a rudimentary—some would have said, muddled—formalist theory even though, historically, as I have argued, Bloomsbury helped to determine the methodological vantage point from which they passed judgement.

Anglo-identity and the contemplative aesthetic

My claim on behalf of Bloomsbury, expressed in Chapter 1, does not conform easily to the transnational model of cultural transmission. The reality of Bloomsbury’s contribution to modernist orthodoxy was more complex than any process of cultural correspondence between kindred peoples might suggest. As we observed, the premise for transnational exchange in this context, Anglo-identity, was a contested phenomenon in America during the period in question. When news of so-called ‘Post-Impressionism’, Bloomsbury’s interpretation of the Schopenhauerian aesthetic, was transmitted to America, some Americans accepted the concept as a given while others did not. Stieglitz, one of America’s

leading proponents of modernist art, dismissed the idea Post-Impressionism, in his interview with Baldwin Macy for the Chicago Evening Post. Likewise, contributors to Camera Work seemed indifferent to it. Yet, there is evidence in the New York Times, the New York Daily Tribune, the New York Evening Post, and the New Republic to suggest that a different public adopted it. If the response to editorial line is anything to go by, Post-Impressionism divided American opinion and, given the cultural alignment of these various publications, I suggested that it divided those Americans who would countenance an English cultural import from others who would not, on point of cultural principle.

Having thus raised the question of cultural identity, I deferred to those simple, but, hopefully not simplistic, metonymies on which my argument relies: ‘Anglo-conformist America’, ‘pluralist America’, ‘American bohemia’, and so on. An unavoidable expediency in support of a broadly-conceived argument, they stave off a sociological complexity that lies beyond the scope of this thesis, suffice it, for our immediate purposes of establishing an Anglo-American hypothesis, that we recognise, in certain texts, such as Horace Kallen’s influential essay, ‘Democracy versus the Melting-Pot’, published in 1915, an indication of the socio-ethnic allegiances in American society that might account for an uneven response to English cultural imports. I conjectured that the social disjunctures to which such texts allude, determined both the extent and the nature of Bloomsbury’s influence.

As the first wave of modern mass-migration ran its course, American social structure changed profoundly. Predicated primarily on ethnic identity rather than economic status, naturalised Americans of the first-, second-, and third-generation retained their ethnic loyalties. Impoverished Italian-Americans would thus feel closer to wealthy Italian-Americans than they would feel to impoverished Americans of different national provenance. It might therefore seem rather less perverse that a body of aesthetic theory generated by Bloomsbury, a group of English haute bohème dilettanti, should have been declined by their American bohemian confreres in Greenwich Village, but that it was readily taken up by a middle-class American public which subscribed to the prevailing Anglo-conformist cultural paradigm. The opinion-formers among this populous, the ‘urban professional intelligentsia’, the organic intellectuals, as Antonio Gramsci would have described them, at the forefront of corporate America’s salary-men, were acquainted with institutional life and aware of its imperatives. Unwieldy as such generalisations undoubtedly are, they enable us to counterpose an English body of aesthetic theory, couched in socially-
progressive terms, against an American public that was socially-progressive in bearing and ideologically inclined towards an ideal of progress in all domains of public life. Presiding over the many questions this juxtaposition inevitably raises, there is a cultural caveat. It concerns the declining fortunes of Anglo-conformity vis-à-vis cultural pluralism. Things were changing in the cultural arena as we have seen and, although the tipping point need not concern us unduly in the context of the wider argument, it is worth noting a correspondence between American responses to Bloomsbury and the changing cultural paradigm.

In 1915, when Horace Kallen wrote ‘Democracy Versus the Melting Pot’, he believed that the spirit of Anglo-conformity was still strong, for he observes:

The ancient hatred for England is completely gone. ...More and more public emphasis has been placed upon the unity of the English and American stock, the common interests of the "Anglo-Saxon" nations, and of "Anglo-Saxon" civilization, the unity of the political, literary, and social tradition. If all that is not ethnic nationality returned to consciousness, what is it? 500

We remember Randolph Bourne’s challenge to the intelligentsia of the day, still subordinate to the Anglo-conformist principle some two years later, when, in 1917, on the cusp of America’s entry into War, he appeals to the ‘malcontents’, who ‘take institutions very lightly …’, that ‘American tribe of talent who used to go ... immediately to Europe or starved submissively at home’.501 We imagine the ‘tribe’, now self-aware, if not yet vying for cultural supremacy. Not long before Bourne’s protest, when cultural allegiances to Anglo-conformity or pluralism had yet to declare themselves, Max Weber, who was himself a first generation American of Russian-Jewish descent, went to Europe. We imagine him, steeped in the values of the avant-garde, still in his twenties, having returned to New York in 1909, after an extended residency in Paris. He too might have recognised a cultural disjuncture, when, with memories of Paris still fresh, he began to associate with the Stieglitz group. Here, according to Linda Dalrymple Henderson, he was familiarised with the writings of Richard Maurice Bucke and Edward Carpenter, as we noted in Chapter 2. Dalrymple Henderson tells us that he encountered monism, a major philosophical issue in America but not in Paris, where the intellectual milieu was dominated by a Kantian dualism that emphasises the separateness of phenomena and noumena. On his return, Weber changed. He was no longer like the

500 Kallen, ‘Democracy versus the Melting-Pot’, p. 11.
Parisian cubist painter who, according to Gleizes and Metzinger ‘rejects the natural image as soon as he has made use of it’. Rather, he had come to identify with objects in nature much as Carpenter’s mysticism encouraged him to do. Weber and the Americans who were reading Carpenter and Bucke had become distanced from the Parisians who relied on Poincaré’s notion of the geometrical fourth dimension. Thus, when Weber wrote about art, he brought to bear a monist vision that was alien to Gleizes and Metzinger, and the Parisian cubists of Puteaux and Montmartre. For example, in his anthology of published lectures, *Essays on Art*, he emphasised his monist relationship with the motif.\(^502\) We noted, in Chapter 2, that it entails a contemplative mode of vision that transcends one’s normal acquisitive instincts.\(^503\)

Weber’s convoluted explanations suggest that he attempted to reconcile disparate elements of each tradition when he set out to formulate a theory of modernist art; at least, one that would serve his workaday requirements as a cubist painter who, having been directly inspired by the Parisian avant-garde, was now finding his way in the markedly different milieu of Greenwich Village. Fry’s version of the theory, on the other hand, submits Carpenter’s monist theories of creativity which are, in many ways, reminiscent of the Schopenhauerian aesthetic, to the humanist values and mores of the Bloomsbury group. Schopenhauer’s proto-modernist austerity is thereby accommodated to the norms of English suburban middle-class life. This ameliorated version of the Schopenhauerian aesthetic, one which continued to evolve over the period we examine, constitutes ‘Bloomsbury’s formalism’ as I style it and, by extension, the ‘Anglo’ component of Anglo-American formalism.

We return to the question of extent. Even though Bloomsbury was barely known in pre-First World War America, we might presume that its reach was facilitated by such informal social-cum-professional networks among the English-speaking protagonists of discourse and the pre-existent cultural affinities they shared. Regardless of their stylistic differences and literary competences, Fry and Weber were, I argued, guided by compatible aesthetic ideals. Indeed, when they corresponded concerning the Grafton Group exhibition

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\(^{502}\) Max Weber, *Essays on Art*. He states, for example: ‘For matter is of more worth when it is embodied with the spirit of the maker. A work binds its maker to the universe. Though the maker ceases to be, the work he has created keeps on pulsating and rhymes his personality ...’ p. 7.

\(^{503}\) Ibid. Weber states: ‘Often it occurs to me that objects of quality wait for us; and when once we succeed in knowing it intimately, the object is more and we are more because of each other...’ p. 7.
at the Alpine Club Gallery in 1913, they seemed to recognise their intellectual affinities. According to Anna Gruetznner Robins, Fry professed himself ‘delighted’ with Weber’s work, when Alvin Langdon Coburn had shown him a sample, adding that it was ‘the most interesting new stuff he had seen in some time’.\textsuperscript{504} Weber, in turn, had described Fry as ‘undoubtedly the greatest art critic of the time of modern art’ and he had had plans to move to London where he believed he would be with like-minded artists.\textsuperscript{505} There seems to have been a genuine meeting of minds because Fry agreed to exhibit Weber, together with Kandinsky, another adherent to monism, alongside English painters who had been represented at \textit{The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition} in 1912.

\textbf{Post-Impressionism and the discourse of form}

It is, perhaps, only in this sense, of an affinity among progressivist artists in the Anglophone world, that Post-Impressionism retains any historical value. For all its art historical vacuity, the Post-Impressionist label is of historiographical value in relation to an Anglo-American discourse when it is understood in terms of a peculiarly Anglophone proposition about modernist art. Ostensibly, a non-committal label intended to denote only the new art’s position in relation to Impressionism, the fact is that ‘Post-Impressionism’ encapsulates Bloomsbury’s formalist interpretation of comparatively recent Parisian avant-garde practices; and it does so in a way that proved to be as challenging to the academic art establishment as the art that it describes.\textsuperscript{506} The suggestion that Post-Impressionism might signify something more besides - an epochal moment - was not lost on American progressives who co-opted the term to a narrative of modernity in the cultural sphere. We noted, Patricia Hills’ argument that the language associated with, and the values attributed to, Post-Impressionism reproduced a Progressive Era rhetoric of liberty and free enterprise.\textsuperscript{507}

\textsuperscript{506} Fry, \textit{Vision and Design}. We recollect Fry’s point about the hostility of the ‘cultured’ public in ‘Retrospect’. He states: ‘One could feel fairly sure that one’s maid could not rival one in the former case, but might by sheer haphazard gift of Providence surpass one in the second’, p. 291.
\textsuperscript{507} Hills, pp. 143 – 163.
Substantiated in the writing of Henry Poore, A. J. Eddy, and Willard Huntington Wright as we saw in Chapter 5, the significance of this link lies in the suggestion that various accounts of Post-Impressionism, having entered the American cultural debate by way of an Anglo-conformist press, were then assimilated to a wider progressivist narrative about innovation in all fields of public discourse. It is but a short step from this supposition to another one: namely, that Post-Impressionism should then have been taken up by the aforementioned ‘professional urban intelligentsia’, who would, in time, subject Bloomsbury’s wayward logic to the disciplines of scientific method. In a sense, this scenario constitutes the essence of my Anglo-American thesis. An Anglo-American formalist aesthetic, having been reconfigured through the processes of public debate, was rendered viable for institutional requirements by the end of the 1920s. The point about the contributions of C. J. Holmes and Charles Lewis Hind is that their misconceived explanations of Post-Impressionism reinforced a narrow and scientistic interpretation to which many Americans may have been predisposed anyway. Holmes emphasised experimental aspects of Post-Impressionism, presenting them as some kind of iconoclastic paroxysm that was both inevitable and desirable for the reawakening of the arts from time to time. Hind’s ‘expressionist’ interpretation focussed on artistic integrity and stylistic experimentation. If neither constituted much of a challenge to the establishment order, both would have chimed with progressivist cultural thinking at the time.

Bloomsbury’s own explanations of Post-Impressionism were popularised on both sides of the Atlantic when Clive Bell’s book, Art, was published in 1914. My suggestion is that the book’s unforeseen impact on an influential middlebrow discourse of form, owes much to the egalitarian tenor of Bell’s argument together with his rhetorical gifts. Equating Post-Impressionism with Significant Form, the ‘new movement’ was located by Bell at the head of an artistic ‘slope’ in an unhistorical cycle of primitive renewal and decadent decline. Post-Impressionism’s vital form is thereby contrasted to the debased forms of the supposedly dissipated nineteenth-century tradition that preceded it, an account that correlates – albeit unwittingly – with American progressivists’ narrative of renewal in the presence of Plutocratic excess.

Recognising, perhaps, a different kind of progressivism at play in Bell’s anti-establishment stance, some, but not all, American progressives adapted his formalism to the wider cultural discourse. The central thesis of his account, Significant Form, may well have
arrived piece-meal in America before the book’s publication, in which case, the American version would have been more vehement than its English counterpart having escaped the moderating effect of the critique on publication. We observed that of the few American reviews published, one that appeared in the *New York Times* in November 1914, noted Bell’s awareness of Significant Form and indicated that it denoted a ‘modern’ position in relation to subject matter and verisimilitude: the modern position was, of course, predicated on a dichotomy of form and content that far exceeded Fry’s neo-romantic suppositions. In relation to this point, I précised D. W. Curtin’s argument about ‘mixed’ and ‘pure formalism’, indicating the extent to which his characterisation of Greenberg’s formalism might also apply Bell’s problematic concept of Significant Form. It was this unmitigated version of the concept, I argue, which found its way into the American discourse, for Bell’s construction of Significant Form was reproduced when, shortly after *Art’s* publication, Willard Huntington Wright conveyed the gist of his metaphysical claim in his influential book of 1915, *Modern Art: Its Tendency and Meaning*. We examined this text in Chapter 4.

When, after the First World War, America’s first serious critique of Significant Form eventually materialised, New York was, by then, ‘thrilling and rhythmning’ according to Rosenfeld. Could it be that Significant Form’s belated scrutiny reflects an underlying cultural shift in American society at this time? The relevance is that, having entered the culturally-mainstream conversation, Bloomsbury’s influence was curtailed just as Anglo-identity fell into discredit. Bell’s problematic metaphysical hypothesis, having survived well into the 1920s, was eventually dispatched by C. J. Ducasse as he demonstrated the fallacy of collapsing ‘ends in-themselves’ into Schopenhauerian ‘things in-themselves’. No lingering mystique could survive that indictment.

**Bloomsbury’s cultural reach during the 1920s**

It is not just that Significant Form’s critique was belated, but rather that the moment itself might signify something, for at some point, the Anglo-conformist paradigm was supplanted by a pluralist one. We might discern from our texts that the tenor of American art critical

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509 C. J. Ducasse, ‘Significant Form’, p. 122.
writing changed as well. Deference towards the English position gave way to scepticism. This is not to say that Bloomsbury’s theory was abandoned or shunned forthwith, but rather that some of the intellectual ground was ceded in response to sustained critique. In particular instances, English cultural constructs were ‘Americanised’, hence the ‘Anglo-American’ discourse as I describe it. We noted, for example, in Chapter 7, that, after initial ambivalence towards Post-Impressionism among New York’s bohemian set, an American version of Post-Impressionism emerged and was promulgated by Rosenfeld and Dreier, each of them vociferous adherents to the pluralist cause. Their interpretations of it reconciled, in one way or another, the Anglo-conformist notion of stylistic change in continental European avant-garde art and the bohemian vision of American modernity. The process yielded an Anglo-American version of Post-Impressionism that served to align developments in late-nineteenth-century European art with the forthcoming formalist modernist orthodoxy. The Museum of Modern Art’s First Loan Exhibition in 1929, *Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, and Seurat*, signals the institutionalisation of this construct. It was reinforced by the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition through the prominence accorded to these artists as the precursors of an abstract modernism, and it was consolidated in 1956 when the Museum of Modern Art published John Rewald’s book, *Post-Impressionism: From Van Gogh to Gauguin*, the title of which unambiguously proclaims Post-Impressionism’s place in the post-War modernist orthodoxy.

Significant Form, as we have seen, did not withstand the concerted critique of the 1920s. Deprived of intellectual credence, proponents of the form and significance thesis could no longer sustain their appeal to art’s ‘mystique’. At least, not on the basis of Bell’s metaphysical hypothesis. I have argued, though, that Significant Form’s ‘spirit’ lived on in a modernist orthodoxy of form. As I suggested in Chapter 7, the Anglo-American formalist aesthetic which supplanted it during the 1920s retained Bell’s emphasis on the primacy of form having reconfigured Significant Form to the values of a modern technological America. Sheldon Cheney’s notion of ‘expressive form’ addressed the metaphysical problem by interposing an aesthetic code of modern materials and an as-yet ill-defined psychological source of inspiration. It anticipated aspects of the primitivism institutionalised by the Museum of Modern Art and of its ‘machine aesthetic’. Do such formalist manifestations negate the tradition of Significant Form? And, if so, can one sustain the claim on behalf of Bell’s influence? As we saw in Chapter 7, Bell would never have countenanced Dreier’s
vision of electricity, dynamos, and powerful steel engines, but, by the same token, it is questionable as to whether the urban and mechanistic iconography sanctioned by the Museum’s modernist orthodoxy could, itself, sustain a formalist aesthetic without a prior concept of form’s significance – however that significance might be construed. After all, art is art and machinery is machinery as any of the customs officials, who impounded Brancusi’s sculpture before the Armory Show, could have told us.

If Cheney is to be credited with adapting Significant Form to the American vision, Albert Barnes should be acknowledged for reconciling it with an emergent institutional culture of the 1920s with Significant Form. As we saw in Chapter 8, he modified the concept in such a way that semi-autonomous ‘charged forms’ might elicit aesthetic emotion in the viewer through the mental associations of ‘funded experience’. His insistence upon the work of art having ‘something to say’ salvages an intellectual connoisseurship from the immediacy of one’s instinctive response – as Bell would have it – to Significant Form and thus restores the prospect of a scholarly interpretation of modern art where Bell had permitted only an emotional reaction to form. Barnes’ modification effectively rehabilitated the cerebral experience of art and, with it, the prospects of an academic institutional dimension to modernism. Having linked a reconfigured version of Significant Form with a scientifically-conceived formalist methodology, the Barnes Foundation at Merion prepared the intellectual ground for the Museum of Modern Art’s institutional prerogatives. The emotional autonomy Barnes ascribed to ‘charged forms’ anticipates the Museum’s doctrine of stylistic influence as we saw in relation to the Anglo-American interpretation of Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon as the stylistic progeny of Cézanne’s painterly manner in old age and the primitive forms of African wood carving. Moreover, Barnes’ adaption of Bell permits a concept of artistic styles begetting styles in conditions that are autonomous from life’s daily circumstances. Barr’s paradigm of stylistic influence is thereby anticipated by Barnes, but the premise of formal autonomy, on which Barnes’ concept of stylist influence is predicated, is Bell’s.

Again, we ask whether, in Bell’s absence, there might have been an unhistorical concept of stylistic influence at all. Bell, himself, was ambivalent on matters of style. As Significant Form transcends the particularities of style or movement, works of art are
adjudged by the quality of ‘rightness’ and comparisons are made thereby. Barr’s concept of style can be inferred from this position I suggest, and, indeed, its teleological implication, whereby modernist styles are shown to anticipate a future of geometrical and non-geometrical abstraction, corresponds to Bell’s notion of art historical ‘slopes’. [Figure 6]

Both conceptions of art history posit purposeful continuities of formal change, each entailing an element of progress or regress. Bell thus represents a convincing antecedent to Barr’s formalist historiography although one should concede that there were others. Consider, for example, those theories of stylistic change expounded by Heinrich Wölfflin, Jacob Burckhardt, or Wilhelm Worringer. In Bell’s absence, such alternative models of stylistic evolution might well have served. The question is, however, whether they would have engaged the middlebrow imagination with the same immediacy as Bell’s model. In the event, Bell’s account reached the cultural-mainstream where the mass of opinion lay. It was this consensus that Barr sought to, or rather, had to cultivate. He was under considerable pressure, we are reminded by Gordon Sybil Kantor, the most recent biographer, to secure public opinion during the first decade of his tenure.

The paradox of aesthetic detachment: cultural engagement

Before Barr’s tours of Europe and Russia in 1927–28 and Europe in 1932–33 occasioned his direct encounters with the continental European avant-garde, he had acquired sufficient knowledge of its practices from an ad hoc array of secondary sources to deliver an undergraduate course on modernism at Wellesley College. They including Vanity Fair, the Dial, the New Yorker, the New Masses and other ‘little magazines’, together with the writings of Bernard Berenson, Roger Fry, and Clive Bell. Disparate as they may seem, we

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510 Clive Bell, Art. As Significant Form transcends the particularities of style or movements, the quality of ‘rightness’ should be evident in all artworks included in Bell’s canon. ‘One may be aware, when breezing through a room’, he explains, ‘that a picture on the wall has a sort of ‘rightness’ about it which is a characteristic of Significant Form’. Although he never refers to stylistic influence, he observes that, during the ‘slopes’ following peaks of ‘primitive’ achievement, individual geniuses rose above the mediocrity of their times as they ‘wrestled with the coils of convention and created significant form’. He cites Cimabue, Giotto, Poussin, Claude, El Greco, Chardin, Ingres and Renoir among their number. Comparing the ‘rightness’ of design of Cimabue’s ‘Virgin and Child’ altar pieces in the Academia, with Giotto’s in the same place—but, frustratingly, omitting to elucidate the difference—Bell maintains that although Giotto was the greater artist. Cimabue ‘forced’ his design to dominate other preoccupations. Giotto, by contrast, was inclined to forget the primacy of form because ‘he is so dreadfully obsessed by the idea of the humanity of the mother and child...that he has insisted on it to the detriment of his art’, pp. 26, 40, & 147.

511 Kantor, Barr. See Chapter 6, ‘Modernism Takes its Turn in America’.

512 Ibid, pp. 33, 98–101, and see Chapter 4 ‘The Little Magazine and Modernism at Harvard’.
recognise their significance as sources of Anglophone interpretations of European art. Barr was steeped in its terms. Therefore, despite his direct encounter with members of the European avant-garde, his understanding of it was subject to Anglo-American preconceptions; ironically so, given the temporal disengagement of an aesthetic premised on contemplative detachment. Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, Anglo-American formalism’s very detachment from political affairs endowed it with what might have seemed to him to be the legitimacy of ideological neutrality when, during the 1930s, modernism proved all too susceptible to the predations of political left and right. For, at a time when Barr was demarcating the Museum of Modern Art’s modernist purview through a series of six programmatic exhibitions, Anglo-American formalism accorded him the conceptual clarity that he sought, precisely because its construction purported to transcend ideological interests.

The Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition, the fifth of these exhibitions, encapsulated Barr’s Anglo-American formalist theory of modernist art. Knowing, at first hand, the entangled allegiances and machinations at play within the European avant-garde, Barr chose to explain the movement to his American public in Anglo-American terms, knowing that they were already versed in its discursive language. A notionally coherent genealogy of form that the exhibition posits might equally have been inferred by anyone familiar with Cheney or Barnes, for example. It betokens the clear-sighted vision of the Schopenhauerian genius. Using this by now conventional trope, Barr bids the Museum-goer to see through the intrigues of the European avant-garde to a higher reality manifested in ‘pure’ artistic form. If Barr’s thesis seems simplistic to us now, we might accept, at least, that it submits European modernist practices to a well-rehearsed Anglo-American account that served certain institutional imperatives – the Museum’s continued viability not least among them.

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513 Barr, Cubism and Abstract Art. Barr prefaces the account with reproductions of two posters for the Pressa exhibition in Cologne 1928. One, intended for the ‘Anglo-American’ public, is in the realistic style common to what he describes as the ‘mediocre travel posters the world over’. The other, intended for the German public, is ‘highly abstract’, having been influenced by ‘Russian Suprematism’. In 1928, he explains, Americans were thought to be accustomed to an ‘over-crowded and banally realistic style whereas the German public was quite used to an abstract style. He adds, ‘Today times have changed. The style of the abstract poster, which is now beginning to interest our American advertisers, is now discouraged in Germany’, p. 10.
Christopher Grunenberg reminds us of the ideological significance of this construction to its historic moment. It constitutes a modernist variant whereby European modernist art is shown to presage an abstract future. The *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition proffers a heterogeneous array of European modernist practices to the homogenising principle of the formalist orthodoxy that is to follow. Barr’s construct was later conscripted to the narratives of Franco-American continuity promulgated by Greenberg, among others, whereby the ‘School of New York’ is shown to supersede the ‘School of Paris’. They, in turn, project a seamless continuity of formal progress from Montmartre’s dilapidated studios to Manhattan’s mid-town real estate. Europe’s multiplicity of modernisms thus become the antecedents of a unifying formalist orthodoxy. As various revisionist historians have pointed out, Serge Guilbaut foremost among them, the construction proved eminently compatible with later ideological claims to liberty and progress in the service of a wider cultural hegemony after the Second World War.

David Cottington tells us that, during Barr’s second tour to Europe – the first in 1924 was not directed to modernist art – he had been impressed by the vitality and range of abstract and representational art in Germany and Russia. His sympathies deepened during the third tour in 1932 – 33, this time at the behest of the Museum of Modern Art. On this occasion, Barr experienced Nazi-inspired intolerance towards avant-garde art during a prolonged stay in Stuttgart. It alerted him, Cottington tells us, to the political significance of rejecting abstraction in favour of traditional realism. Barr’s attitude towards realism changed at this point. Hitherto, he had accorded equal prominence to both forms of art in the Museum’s programme of exhibitions. Given the domestic popularity of American Scene Painting and Social Realism in the mid-1930s – both representational styles – it might have seemed propitious to promote European avant-garde realism in the interests of reconciling popular taste with the Museum’s internationalist remit. Neither the Museum’s future nor Barr’s reputation were entirely secure at this time, we should

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518 Ibid, p. 182.
519 Ibid.
appreciate. Yet, in the event, Barr declared his allegiance to ‘pure design’ – a synonym for abstraction – thereby nailing his colours to the ideological mast and risking popular disapprobation. The decision signals the exhibition’s political stance.

**Abstraction as enlightenment**

Cottington goes on to discuss the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition in the light of Barr’s recent experiences. He reflects that the event occasioned an exposition of continental European modernist art which is unsurpassed in its influence upon Anglo-American scholarly and critical understanding. It is worth adding, I suggest, that much of the exhibition’s import lies in the Anglo-American theoretic discourse that preceded it. From this perspective, we recognise its significance not so much as a point of departure in Anglo-American aesthetics, but as cultural marker signalling the moment when a pre-existent Anglo-American formalist interpretation of modernist art was elevated to its orthodox status. Barr accomplished this feat through an implicit claim upon continental European practices on behalf of the Museum; one that was couched in Anglo-American critical language and predicated on the twin virtues of purity and progress. The link he posited between European modernist styles and an unspecified abstract future drew together disparate manifestations of avant-garde practice on the pretext of their formal affinities, and relocated them within a spurious chronology of style, undefiled, as it were, by extraneous interests. He thereby established a formalist antecedent to an as yet unspecified abstract future; and did so on Anglo-American terms. The pivotal point in Barr’s narrative is the moment when the ‘flat, overlapping, transparent planes’ of ‘Analytical Cubism’ are supplanted by ‘Synthetic Cubism’s’ ‘two-dimensional, flat, linear form, so abstract as to seem nearer geometry than representation’. At this unhistorical juncture, cubism’s logic yields the premises for the abstract art that is to follow. Cottington, as we saw, cites Barr’s misapprehension of Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler’s Kantian explanation of an ‘analytic – synthetic’ paradigm in the pre-First World War cubist painting of Picasso and Braque. He explains how Barr’s emphasis of ‘the reality of the painted surface’ that characterises

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522 Ibid, p. 185.
‘Synthetic Cubism’, anticipates Greenberg’s construction of the surface’s significance in his essay of 1958, *The Pasted Paper Revolution*. As Cottington observes, Barr’s ‘precise and detailed chronologies located the ‘apogee of Analytical Cubism’ in 1912, and the transition to ‘Synthetic Cubism’ in the following year. This, he adds, is a further significant departure from Kahnweiler’s model.\(^{523}\) The point is sound, of course, but, in Chapter 10, I questioned the assumption that Barr was merely simplistic in his application of Kahnweiler’s ‘analytic – synthetic’ paradigm, arguing that we might look beyond his uncomplicated characterisation of style, simply expressed for the benefit of a lay-audience, to his schema of stylistic transition. If we consider Barr’s temporary estrangement from representational art in 1933 in the light of the Anglo-American intellectual heritage I ascribe to him, we encounter a rather different scenario; one which has implications for the Museum’s formalism more generally. We find a more meaningful paradigm of transition in Fry’s theoretical revisions of the mid-1920s. They arise from his response to I. A. Richards’ critique of aesthetic experience in the *Principles of Literary Criticism* of 1924 and the accommodation Fry comes to with Richards in *Transformations* of 1926. In this text, and its immediate successor, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* of 1927, I submit that we may identify a compelling precedent for Barr’s thesis of stylistic progress in *Cubism and Abstract Art*.

Barr, we recall, had met Fry in London in 1927. It is not unlikely that he would have been familiar with Fry’s recent aesthetic revisions and, perhaps, his even more recent interpretation of Cézanne. We noted, in Chapter 10, that the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition was, intellectually-speaking, a product of Barr’s second European visit in 1927–28, the one that occasioned his meeting with Fry. I have argued that, after this tour, he drew upon a familiar Anglo-American explanatory model when he prepared notes for a series of lectures on European modern art to be delivered at Wellesley College in spring 1929. It was these notes, according to the catalogue preface, that informed the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition’s intellectual thesis. We might therefore recognise that, on one level, the exhibition embodies Barr’s Anglo-American interpretation of the complex developments in European modernist art since the *fin-de-siècle* and that, in keeping with its emphasis upon form, it depicts a supposed impulse towards abstraction. On another level though, we should appreciate the ideological tenor of the exhibition. Barr’s third European tour, the one

\(^{523}\) Ibid.
that provoked his reaction against representational art, informed the exhibition’s ideologically-liberal stance against totalitarianism.

In this context, the motif of stylistic progress represents an ideological proposition. Barr’s American audience in 1936 was encouraged to interpret stylistic progress as an emblem of ‘pure’ expression – beholden to no one – and to envisage it within the parameters of an unregulated libertarian society. Such a context, we appreciate, is a historical abstraction; it existed neither in Europe nor America. I suggest that we should conceive of this progressive ideal in the socially-liberal terms that Barr did in 1936: that is of stylistic progress as liberalising enlightenment rather than mere formal innovation. I argued, in Chapter 10, that we find such an evolutionary principle in Fry’s description of Cézanne’s stylistic transition from his so-called ‘maturity’ to ‘old age’. It is an account of ‘...a long research for an ultimate synthesis which unveils itself little by little from the contemplation of things seen’. The significance of this transition is not one of change alone, but of ‘spiritual’ enlightenment.

Suggesting that Fry’s narrative of ‘synthesis’ prefigures Barr’s narrative of the transition to Synthetic Cubism, I juxtaposed passages by each of them: Fry’s account of five paintings by Cézanne illustrating the transition to ‘ultimate synthesis’ against Barr’s account of five paintings by Picasso illustrating the transition to Synthetic Cubism. My proposition is that Barr interpreted Picasso’s Head of a Young Woman of 1913 much as, some nine years earlier, Fry had interpreted Cézanne’s Bathers of 1906. Both emphasise the flat, geometrical quality of the forms and the materiality of the painted surface as ends in a search for ‘pure design’. Fry’s narrative of form can thus be seen to prefigure Barr’s explanation of Synthetic Cubism. We may recognise that a key construct in the emergent formalist orthodoxy of stylistic progress is thereby anticipated by Fry. Importantly though, Barr refrains from the spiritual language that Fry uses to describe ‘synthesis’ in Cézanne’s late paintings, as we noted in Chapter 10. Fry’s use of spiritual hyperbolae, I have argued, is no mere literary affectation; denoting the suspension of material interests, it reflects the Schopenhauerian construction of ‘plasticity’, and, as such, it represents a primary characteristic of his formalism. Fry’s appeal to the ineffable quality of form lies at the heart of what I describe as

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524 Fry, Cézanne, p. 43.
'Bloomsbury’s aesthetic theory’. We might, then, take the ‘spiritual’ ascription of form as sign of Bloomsbury’s presence – or otherwise – in the new formalist orthodoxy.
Conclusion

The dual proposition that Bloomsbury helped to shape a formalist orthodoxy and that it may be characterised as Anglo-American orthodoxy, has been explored in this thesis through an interpretation of the body of literature documenting a sustained response in America to components of Bloomsbury’s aesthetic theory. The more arguable point concerning the extent of its influence should be measured, firstly, against Bloomsbury’s modest profile in American cultural debate, and, secondly, in relation to other determinants of that orthodoxy. We will come to them presently. To begin with, I concede that there was scant awareness of Bloomsbury as a group until the 1920s and, even then, it was primarily the writers, as individuals, who attracted American attention. In defence, I submit that Bloomsbury’s aesthetic theory was imbued with the values of the class fraction, as Raymond Williams characterised it, to which they belonged and which had broken from an important professional upper-middle-class sector of English society. The latter, a social stratum in its own right and the seat of a liberally-minded social elite, came to dominate English professional and cultural life during the early twentieth-century. Given the long-established social ties between the upper echelons of the two Anglophone societies, I propose that, although little was known of Bloomsbury as a collective entity, it exerted a disproportionate sway over American cultural affairs because of a pre-existent cultural affinity.

To begin with, at least, Bloomsbury’s influence was boosted by the propensity of many Americans to follow an English lead in cultural matters. Hence, the ready acceptance of the various Post-Impressionist concepts propagated by an Anglo-conformist press which reported on *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*. Texts we have examined indicate that Post-Impressionism, Bloomsbury’s cultural construct, was taken as a given in some quarters but also that it was spurned elsewhere. Stieglitz, a first generation American of German descent, distanced himself from the concept, as did other contributors to *Camera Work*, many of whom were first or second generation Americans.

Therefore I conjectured that Bloomsbury’s reach might have been determined by socio-ethnic factors at a time of mass immigration. Citing Horace Kallen’s protest against the Anglo-Saxon cultural bias of America’s ruling elite in ‘Democracy Versus the Melting Pot’, and Randolph Bourne’s appeal in ‘Twilight of Idols’ to the malcontents, the disenfranchised populous who used (before the War) to go to Europe, I proposed certain socio-ethnic
generalisations in lieu of detailed sociological analysis. Allotting roles to various, broadly-defined protagonists in discourse - Anglo-conformists, pluralists, bohemians, urban intelligentsia, and so on – I considered how such parties might have aligned themselves in relation to the texts examined. In an important sense, ‘Bloomsbury’ itself, is preeminent among them.

Arguing that the contemplative Schopenhauerian aesthetic identified with Bloomsbury’s formalist theory might also be linked with an Anglo-identity in American cultural discourse, I attempted to recreate an intellectual dialogue between Schopenhauer, Carpenter, Fry, and Weber. We observed that, before socio-ethnic allegiances had been declared in pre-War America, Weber, a first generation American of Russian descent, subscribed to a contemplative aesthetic that resembled Fry’s in certain ways but was markedly different from the dualistic Kantian aesthetic he had come across among the Parisian avant-garde. Exhibiting eleven paintings in London with so-called ‘English Post-Impressionists’ of the Grafton Group at the Alpine Club Gallery in 1913, he felt himself to be in common cause with Fry who reciprocated, in turn, with generous praise, having been introduced to Weber’s work by the photographer and one-time member of the Stieglitz circle, Alvin Langdon Coburn.

By the 1920s, American critical writing became less deferential towards Bloomsbury and the group’s intellectual authority declined accordingly. Proponents of Post-Impressionism were obliged to cede intellectual ground in response to a more rigorous American critique. The construct survived, as we saw, but only after it had been ‘Americanised’, which is to say that it was reconciled with an American interpretation of cultural modernity. Barr, himself, though reluctant to utilise such a tendentious term as ‘Post-Impressionism’, would nevertheless employ an American version of the concept to designate the European sources of a formalist modernism destined for an abstract future. That, at least, is one inference we may draw from his chart of modernist styles. [Figure 6] Having thus been admitted to the Museum of Modern Art’s narrative of formalist modernism, Post-Impressionism acquired the trappings of historical reality as it was assimilated to the Museum’s formalist historiography epitomised in John Rewald’s *Post-Impressionism: From van Gogh to Gauguin*. The historical paucity of its Anglo-American narrative was all too obvious to the revisionists of the early 1980s who pressed for its elimination from art historical discourse. I argue now that, in the light of renewed
awareness of the significance of international cultural exchange in the early modernist discourse, the Post-Impressionist label assumes new significance in relation to Bloomsbury’s contribution to an Anglo-American formalist modernist historiography.

As far as the nomenclature goes, Significant Form fared less well than Post-Impressionism in 1920s America but elements of the construct were reconfigured in an influential formalist discourse and thereby came to shape important aspects of the ensuing orthodoxy. Having survived until the 1920s on the rather tenuous grounds art’s ineffable mystique, it could not withstand the more rigorous scientific critiques exemplified by the New Criticism. I. A. Richards, as we saw, gave Significant Form short shrift. The best defence Bell could muster – not a bad one given Richards’ own absolutism - was the ad hominem argument to the effect that, since sensitive people were agreed on the matter, Richards’ psychology must be incapable of aesthetic experience. In a sense, Significant Form’s demise cleared the way for a scientifically-conceived re-engagement with notions of ‘form’ and ‘significance’. The elimination of its problematic metaphysical dimension prompted Sheldon Cheney to reintroduce George Santayana to American aesthetic discourse. Cheney’s substitute for Significant Form, ‘expressive form’, draws upon Santayana by recognising the significance of the artist’s materials and the creative function of the unconscious mind. Albert Barnes, too, despite his professed disdain for Bell, reconfigured significant form – never capitalised by Barnes – in such a way that semi-autonomous ‘charged forms’ are ascribed a transcendence of sorts in that they release the ‘funded mass’ of personal experience. As we saw, Barnes’ methodology readmits the intellect to one’s reading of the work of art’s content, and thereby connects Significant Form with the Museum of Modern Art’s scholarly purview. Consequently, Bell’s problematic concept may be seen to have carried the formalist discourse some of the way towards the formalist orthodoxy of the 1930s. We must look partly to American theorists of the 1920s and partly to Fry for the rest.

525 Thomas M. McLaughlin, ‘Clive Bell’s Aesthetic: Tradition and Significant Form’, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 35, No. 4, (Summer 1977), pp. 433 – 443. McLaughlin points out that, although Richards’ argument about art producing a ‘finer organisation’ of emotions seems more satisfying than Bell’s, he offers no compelling reason for rejecting Bell’s assertion about a singular Aesthetic Emotion. Bell answers Richards’ criticism, he notes, by suggesting that Richards could not encompass aesthetic experience in his psychology, an ad hominem argument in response to Richards’ scientific absolutism. (p. 435).
From the Anglo-American perspective, the discursive interventions of Katherine Dreier, Paul Rosenfeld, Paul Edlington, C. J. Ducasse, Sheldon Cheney, Mary Mullen, Laurence Buermeyer, and Albert Barnes, among others, look less like the manifestations of the cultural free-for-all to which Noyes Platt referred, and rather more like reactions to an Anglo-American cultural undertow.\textsuperscript{526} Regardless of their disavowals of English cultural values, I propose that we treat their contributions as manifestations of ‘Americanisation’, a process which, in this case, effected the cultural assimilation of components of Bloomsbury’s aesthetic theory. Few of the protagonists in this debate, as Noyes Platt observes, had direct experience of the European avant-garde but all were versed, to some degree or another, in an American cultural discourse based, in part, on English interpretations of the new art. Assimilation in itself hardly constitutes orthodoxy however; for that we must look to Barr, and, more particularly, to the early years of his tenure when he codified the Museum’s orthodoxy.

The machinations of this period beg a different kind of question about the extent of Bloomsbury’s influence; one that brings us to my second caveat. It concerns determinants that are extraneous to the Anglo-American discourse. Having indicated the continuities which link a pre-existent Anglo-American formalist discourse to the subsequent orthodoxy and having discussed the parallels between Fry’s account of anti-naturalistic stylistic progress in Cézanne’s old age and Barr’s account of stylist progression in cubist painting, we come to the end of Bloomsbury’s aesthetic influence. Its extent coincides with the point when ‘near-abstraction’, as Barr put it, is supplanted by ‘pure abstraction’ for, as we recall, his teleology of modernist styles culminates in ‘geometrical abstract art’ and ‘non-geometrical abstract art’.\textsuperscript{527} [Figure 6] The transition to pure abstraction constitutes an addendum to the Anglo-American thesis; it is not a logical extension of the aesthetic. As Fry might have explained, the contemplative aesthetic presupposes the presence of a motif whereby form is emancipated from nature, the object of contemplation. Bell, as we saw in Chapter 6, was less than categorical in his views on abstraction. Therefore, having reached the metaphysical culmination of Bloomsbury’s Schopenhauerian aesthetic, at the threshold where ‘plastic unity’ is attained, or Significant Form is created, a place at which the artist

\textsuperscript{526} Noyes Platt, \textit{Modernism in the 1920s}, p. 2.

and audience alike realise the repose to be found in the contemplation of ‘pure’ form, we have gone as far as the aesthetic will take us.

From here on one must look elsewhere for the impulse towards ‘pure abstraction’ and Cottington is again helpful in this respect.\(^{528}\) He reminds us that during Barr’s third tour to Europe in 1932–33, the one conducted after his fact-finding visit of 1927–28, when his personal experience of totalitarian coercion alerted him to the political ramifications of spurning abstraction in favour of representational art, his position and sympathies shifted, ideologically, towards abstraction. This initiative, he tells us, was part of another dynamic, one that would harness abstraction to ideological ends and preserve it from contamination by commercial culture. At this ideological point, the suspension of the will ceases and the principle of sufficient reason resumes its rule.

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