

## ***Chapter 2: Old and New in Modernist Art***

Mr. Thomas T. Baxter presents what appears to be a figure of Christ teaching a dickey-bird to chew worms. This work is labelled "St. Francis" (D'Asise). I cannot concede his background but the face is remarkable; it is painted with very great skill, and *the frenetic modernist who rushes by the picture merely because of the demoded subject-matter* will miss one of the best pieces of detail in the exhibition.

(Ezra Pound, writing as B. H. Dias, in *The New Age* for January 17, 1918--22.12.235, emphasis added)

Among the many kinds of artists, it may be that there are some who are hybrid. Some, that is to say, bore deeper and deeper into the stuff of their own art; others are always making raids into the lands of others. *Sickert, it may be, is among the hybrids, the raiders. . . . But . . . he is probably the best painter now living in England.*

(Virginia Woolf, writing in 1933, *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, 201-202, emphasis added)

In 1918, we find Ezra Pound worrying about "the frenetic modernist" who will miss something of great beauty because its subject matter, which Pound himself has mocked, is

"demoded." And, as late as 1933, we find Virginia Woolf, reporting on a conversation in "Bloomsbury" about Walter Sickert, in which a consensus is reached that this derivative painter, whose work is often naturalistic in its content, and might well have been associated by Woolf with her despised Edwardians, is the best that England has to offer. I begin with these texts as a way of pointing to a certain complexity or paradoxy in the way that professed Modernists viewed Modernism in the visual arts, involving the notions of Old and New, in relation to Realism and Abstraction in painting, drawing, and sculpture.

In pursuit of this paradoxy, I intend to travel back in time and eavesdrop on a conversation about Old and New that took place in the pages of *The New Age*, a weekly magazine devoted to politics, literature, and the arts, edited by A. R. Orage in London from 1907 to 1922. As the title of this journal proclaimed, it aspired to be the proper voice for a new age, helping that age to find its way, and, among other things, directing artists, writers, and their audiences toward an adequate response to the conditions of modernity and the events of the time--a time that saw a transition from the last vestiges of the Victorian world--preserved for a decade in Edwardian Britain--give way to something new, signified by the accession of George V after the death of Edward VII in 1910, and by the horrendous war that broke out in 1914 leaving a different world behind when it ended in 1918. This was the period, then, in which writers and artists were trying to define a Modernist aesthetic practice that would be an adequate response to the new conditions of life, the conditions of Modernity. These conditions included increasing industrialization and urbanization, the growing power of materialistic capitalism which generated labor unrest, the rise of new media of communications, and the struggle of women for equality and independence.

Should the conditions of Modernity be accepted or resisted? And how should this changed world be represented in literature and art? Should the past be utterly rejected? Or should it be mined, selectively, for inspiration. Was the New to be a continuation of the Old--and, if so, which parts of the Old could serve as points of departure? Or should the New be based on a rejection of the Old--and, if so, which parts should be singled out as most offensive? In the five years leading up to the outbreak of war in 1914, the visual arts played a central role in discussions of Modernism, leading the way, to some extent, for the other arts. Writers were already borrowing terms like Impressionism from the visual arts to describe their work. The debates over Old and New in visual art that took place during this crucial period set the tone and established many of the terms that have been used since that time in discussions of Modernism. For these reasons I propose to look into the debates about visual art as they played out in the crucial pages of *The New Age* in the first years of Georgian England, paying particular attention to the paradox surrounding the terms Old and New, along with such variations as Modern and Contemporary, and such descriptive terms as Realistic and Abstract. (The images from the magazine included here are drastically reduced from their original folio size, and are offered for reference rather than study. I urge all concerned to examine the originals in the digital edition of *The New Age*, available on line from the Modernist Journals Project at <[www.modjourn.brown.edu](http://www.modjourn.brown.edu)>.)

The debate over a proper visual art for the Modern world began in the pages of *The New Age* some months before the famous "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" show organized by Roger Fry at the end of the year 1910. It was started by Huntley Carter, who was doing both art and drama criticism for the magazine at that time. Carter organized an Art Supplement for the issue of April 7, 1910, in which artists and critics joined to discuss "all that concerns the welfare

and prospects of art." Among the artists who contributed to this Supplement were Walter Sickert, who continued to write about art for the magazine for many years, William Shackleton, a symbolist painter, and Cecil French, an associate of Shackleton--but the most interesting contribution came from a critic and historian of art, then living in Paris: Victor Reynolds. Reynolds argued that

people still continue to talk of neo-impressionism and of newer movements in impressionism, quite regardless of the fact that the fundamental principle of impressionism (at the best of times never one of very vital aesthetic import) has already been exemplified and developed to its extreme limits, and that as a force or a starting point for anything new it is as dead as the Pharaohs. Deader, indeed. Nothing is more hopeless than a moribund tradition, while on the other hand the oldest, most primitive sources, such as Egyptian art itself (partly because they survive only in a condition so fragmentary as to preclude any possibility of direct imitation), have ever been the seeding ground and the hope of future progress.

(NA 6.23supp:7)

This is the note a radical Modernism, sounded half a year before "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" opened. And Reynolds went on to note that critics had sneered at Picasso's work in a recent Salon, comparing it to Aztec art. His defense of Picasso is the first full appreciation of this artist to appear in English:

In him one sees an almost isolated instance of the power to react against the current tradition, and one of the very few men in modern France whose work can in any real sense be called progressive. I believe that at a very early age he was producing work in the manner of the Spanish classics like Velasquez and Goya. After he came to Paris, however (he is a native of Barcelona), his work took a wholly different aspect. In the collection of Mr. Leo Stein there are several exquisite studies of heads painted in a bluish monochrome on millboard, strange and delicate as Lionardo, and with something of that master's use of line. These are, however, still the work of a transition stage. Such also is the painting of a girl in a blue dress, with its curious ritualistic or religious air, which seems to suggest a profound influence of Piero della Francesca, or possibly Puvis de Chavannes. There is a nobility about this painting which he hardly seems to have recaptured in any later effort. To these succeed a number of the strangest decorations, in which all element of representation is thrown overboard, and an attempt made to express emotion of form by the use of an extremely large and simple curve. I believe that these were actually produced under a combined influence of Ingres and of negro carving; they are, in fact, like "Aztec decorations" or the statues from Easter Island.

(8)

Reynolds went on to discuss Matisse, whom he thought less interesting, as being too close to Gauguin, and, finally, the sculptures of Aristide Maillol,

whose exquisite little bronze, "Coureur Cycliste," was perhaps the dominant feature of an exhibition of singular interest from a sculptural point of view. The power to react

immediately against the force of such a personality as that of Auguste Rodin alone argues an extraordinary vitality of talent. The work of this latest of French masters shows the influence of Egyptian or very early Greek work. Austere, unimpassioned, exquisitely simple, it is as far removed in feeling from that of Rodin as is the latter in his turn from the bronze or marble twaddle which chokes his masterpieces in the Gallery of the Luxembourg.

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For Reynolds, Impressionism is the Old, that which must be rejected by a clean break, and the New is to be achieved by a linkage with an earlier Old, Egyptian, very early Greek, or Primitive. Already, in April 1910, the definitions of Old and New are complicated, and these complications will deepen over the next few years. But Reynolds had, as it were, set certain oppositions in stone, and these would recur in various ways in the years to come. For Roger Fry and his Bloomsbury friends, we should note, Impressionism was very much alive and could be continued, as it was in the Post-Impressionist works of Fry himself, Duncan Grant, and Vanessa Bell. Thus we have two modes of the New, one breaking with Impressionism in a radical way, and another attempting to extend it.

Moreover, in addition to these two modes of the New, we have two attitudes toward the Old and the New, embodied in the writing of two critics, Huntly Carter, who initiated the discussion to which Reynolds contributed so tellingly, and Anthony Ludovici, who replaced Carter in 1912 as the major art critic of *The New Age*, and reversed the evaluative polarity of Old and New. After April 1910, Carter continued to review exhibitions at home and abroad, constantly searching for works that would express the New Spirit of Modernity, producing

several books on theatre with the words "New Spirit" in their titles, and ultimately editing an anthology of essays on spiritualism itself, which, upon investigation turns out to be a recurring element of Modernism, from the Symbolists to Gauguin and Kandinsky. Carter was sympathetic to the work of the Rhythmistes, who gathered around the short-lived little magazine *Rhythm*, edited by John Middleton Murry, with the Fauve, John Duncan Fergusson handling the art. The Rhythmistes included a number of artists who later joined the Vorticists. The magazine, which operated from 1911 to 1913, printed art by Picasso and Gaudier-Brzeska, among others. Carter was quick to note the power of the designs being made for the stage in Europe, especially the work of Bakst for the Russian Ballet. But he stopped doing art criticism for *The New Age* in 1912, being replaced by Anthony Ludovici, whose contribution to the debate over Old and New proved foundational for a certain conservative strain of Modernist critical discourse.

Ludovici, the son and grandson of painters named Albert Ludovici, was born in England in 1882 and studied abroad, where he discovered the works of Nietzsche. For a time he acted as a private secretary to Auguste Rodin, after which he returned to England. His name first appeared in the pages of *The New Age* in advertisements for lectures on Nietzsche, whom he translated into English and discussed in a book which was favorably reviewed in the pages of the magazine. He began writing for *The New Age* with a review of a translation of a biography of Nietzsche in 1911, writing his first column as an art critic in July of 1912. He used the occasion to make an invidious distinction between the Old and the New in favor of the Old, and he maintained that position rigorously for several years, until he had a head-on collision with T. E. Hulme in the pages of the magazine. Ludovici's Old was virtually feudal, and he looked in art for representations of Greatness, often muttering about portraits of people who were not worthy

of being painted. He was the sort of conservative who took race and class seriously, mixing Nietzschean notions with a more traditional Royalism that we may find also in T. S. Eliot.

Ludovici's debut as an art critic for *The New Age* was a review of a show in Cologne, Germany. In this review he began by making a historical claim of a large order, to the effect that a unified Catholic European sensibility had been broken by the Reformation, leaving European culture a prey to various sorts of later fragmentation. In Ludovici's hands, this distinction was used as a weapon against most of the varieties of Modernism in the arts. We can pick up his argument as he shifts from religion to art in the Cologne review:

So it was with art. Once it had been divorced from the traditional law that it was the voice of a certain kind of life expressing its view of all life, there was no end to the chaos and the muddle that resulted. There may not have been five hundred sects, as in Protestantism; but there were certainly a hundred. For who doubts that the Impressionists, the Neo-Impressionists, the Post-Impressionists, the Futurists, the Cubists, the Synthesists, the Pointillistes, and their ancestors the Transcriptists, Naturalists, Pre-Raphaelites, etc., are anything else than the Puritanical Baptists, Anabaptists, Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists, Plymouth Brethren, Quakers, Unitarians, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists of a Grand Rebellion in art? He who doubts this wants guidance. He who denies it wants enlightenment.

(NA11.13:307)

For a time, as he continued to review exhibitions of new artworks, Ludovici abandoned the restrictive Cavalier/Roundhead distinction and settled into a Nietzschean vocabulary which



was more flexible and useful for him, in which the key binary opposition was Sick/Healthy. The culture was sick, he was certain, which made it virtually impossible for art to be healthy. Knowing this, he promised to be gentle with the younger generation of artists, but he continued to hope for an artistic superman to arrive and offer leadership to lesser beings. And he also indicated that he would deal with the really sick, such as the Futurists, as a surgeon deals with cancer or a gardener with blight. With the Rhythmists and other younger artists, however, he would be kinder, blaming their failings on the Mediocrity of Modernity itself. And he sent up a cry for a strong leader: "Oh, why is there not someone strong enough, trust-inspiring enough, to be able to say to them all, with some hope of being listened to : 'Put down your palettes and follow me!' " (NA11.25:596).

Ludovici was critical of art that he called "mere transcription," and impatient with Mediocrity. He was looking for a master painter who would produce masterpieces and help to cure the sickness of the age. But, as he observed when reviewing the second Post-Impressionist show in November 1912, "This is the heyday of the mediocre person. Let him profit while he may from the confusion and doubt that prevail about him. But do not let him try to convince us that his work is anything more than the pot-boiler paramount" (NA12.3:67). Ludovici was fond of the High/Low distinction, but he did not align High with New--quite the contrary. He was a Modernist who despised Modernity, which for him took the form of "Capitalist Industrialism," as he called it in a piece on the White Slave traffic, which was the current subject of a bill in Parliament. In the same issue of *The New Age* as Ludovici's review of the Post-Impressionists, Muriel Wells had a short piece in which she imagined a Futurist Superman as a kind of robotic Frankenstein's monster, devouring Marinetti and waiting to greet the rest of the Futurists, hungrily. Ludovici no doubt approved, though he thought the Futurists were far from being

supermen. What he was certain of, however, was that artists had not resisted Modernity sufficiently. As he put it, "Artists have been on the side of modernity for over a century; one or two exceptions apart, they have even believed that modernity was right. How could they help but suffer in the end for this treacherous alliance with the enemy of taste?" (NA12.4:89).

The precise nature of Ludovici's conservatism emerges clearly in a review he wrote in August of 1913:

At the Doré Gallery there is an interesting show the proper title of which is the "Post-Impressionist Poster Exhibition." It is interesting and sad at the same time, because it shows how utterly the last possible opponent of this age and all its vulgarity has become enslaved to the very power which it ought to have done its utmost to undermine and to overthrow. The despotism of the last hundred and fifty years, if such there has been, has consisted of the uncontested supremacy of uncontrolled industry and commerce. This despotism has been one of vulgarity, the unscrupulous spurning of all that constituted flourishing and desirable life, the deliberate flouting of all that made for desirable humanity, the tasteless abuse of power in bad taste. The last really vigorous attempt to arrest the movement of uncontrolled industry and commerce was made two hundred and fifty years ago, when Charles the First died for the "liberty of the people," as opposed to the "liberty" of their oppressors. Since then it has met with no formidable foe. It was able to do its worst in the nineteenth century, and the present age is its creation.

(NA13.18:521)

This is a Royalism scarcely heard of in modern England--until the American T. S. Eliot came along and proclaimed himself a Royalist some years after this. The Cavalier/Roundhead opposition that Ludovici invoked when he entered the pages of *The New Age* as an art critic, was no mere metaphor, but a fundamental part of this critic's belief system. A profound hatred of Modernity turns out to be a powerful element in some versions of Modernism, which meant, for certain critics and artists, that Modernity could not be seen as beautiful or represented in a favorable light. This is why Ludovici was so disturbed by this exhibition of posters in which art explicitly served commerce--disturbed not because the works were so bad but because some of them were so good--and why he cited Huysmans, who had praised the posters of Jules Cheret as superior to much of the work in the salon--and, finally, why he felt melancholy even as he praised some of the advertising posters at this exhibition. These betrayers of art in the service of commerce should not have done it so well, and with so much gusto. But they did, and Ludovici acknowledged this and praised much of their work in this exhibition.

Some months later, in the course of an omnibus review of works at a number of galleries, Ludovici offered some observations that take us deeper into his understanding of the relationship between the state of society or culture and the state of art:

The graphic arts, to my mind, are dependent arts. When an age is animated by a great spirit, the graphic arts will be great by expressing the spirit of that age; when an age is animated by a pusillanimous spirit, or by none at all, they too will be poor in spirit or utterly devoid of it. The graphic artist does not create a state of affairs, or an order of existence, a scheme of life. A far greater artist does that, and he is the poet--or artist--legislator. It is the exuberant joy of the graphic artist over the order that the artist-

legislator creates, and over the spirit that animates it, which impels the graphic artist to his work.

(NA14.5:152)

This is a revealing--and a bit frightening--statement, because the "poet--or artist--legislator" strongly suggests the way that a figure like Hitler would be perceived just two decades after Ludovici was writing. What Walter Benjamin would describe as the fascist aestheticization of politics is anticipated here and justified as providing an order sadly lacking in Modernity. Ludovici's thinking shows us why we need to understand fascism as a form of Modernism--as yet another critical response to what were perceived as the evils of Modernity. If we really wish to understand what led Ezra Pound, for example, down the path toward treason, this is the place to start. For Pound, of course, was writing for *The New Age* at this time, almost every week. I am not suggesting that he learned his fascism from Ludovici, but that Ludovici's writing allows us to see into the attitudes that led Pound in the direction that he took. Pound's hatred of what he called "usura," is not far from Ludovici's hatred of "commerce and industry." And the wish for a strong "poet--or artist--legislator" to restore order to a chaotic world was a common theme among the Modernists as well as among the ordinary people who would welcome their Führer when he arrived.

In the same article, responding to a request to explain what he liked in the work of Augustus John, Ludovici revealed another problematic aspect of the Modernist conundrum. " Shall I tell you why I like John? Because in the chaos of this abominable age, he not only seeks out the finest and healthiest type of man or woman, but seems to find joy only in the expression of that type" (NA14.5:153). There was a serious danger lurking here is in that notion of "the

finest and healthiest type of man or woman." A debate about eugenics was raging in *The New Age* and other journals at the time, and it is easy for us to see how the notion of an ideal type of human being would contribute to a politics of racial types. Ludovici himself finally produced a tendentious book called *The Jews and the Jews in England*, in 1938, in which he attempted to distinguish his own position from that of the Nazis, and to make a sophisticated case for what amounts to racism without a "pure" concept of race. Ludovici's book is now available on line, courtesy of the White Supremacist pages of Kevin Strom. My point here, however, is simply that the notion of ideal types of humans--and types that were less than ideal--was very much alive in Ludovici's writing and in the culture around him. Which, of course, makes it ironic that many of Augustus John's favorite subjects were Gypsies, whom the Nazis were going to lump with the Jews as inferior types to be eliminated in the name of Aryan purity.

Ludovici's next column was a fateful one. After wandering through some exhibitions, complaining about the mingling of mediocre artists with their betters, he came to a show of Jacob Epstein's work and wrote this notice of it:

At the Twenty-one Gallery Jacob Epstein is exhibiting--both sculpture and drawings. To understand what I think of Jacob Epstein is not difficult. When the plastic arts can no longer interpret the external world in the terms of a great order or scheme of life, owing to the fact that all great schemes or orders are dead, they exalt the idiosyncrasy or individual angle of the isolated ego. But the only two factors in common between a plastic work of art and the people to whom it is supposed to appeal, have always been these : ( 1 ) the portion of the external world selected ; and ( 2 ) the terms of the great order or scheme of life, shared by all, and revealed in the interpretation. Now, when the minor

and non-value-creating ego is as isolated as he is today, the second factor falls out altogether, and leaves only the first. When, therefore, the first ceases to be pure transcriptism, the art has no interest whatsoever, save for cranks and people who have some reason of their own in abetting or supporting purposeless individualism à outrance. To these, the particular angle of vision of a minor personality has some value--to me it has none.

(NA14.7:245-15)

For Ludovici, Epstein was merely an example of "purposeless individualism" at work, in a world that lacked any "great order or scheme of life." This paragraph, as it happened, provoked a powerful reply from another critic whose view of Modernity could also be called conservative: T. E. Hulme. In the very next issue of *The New Age*, Hulme wrote an article called "Mr. Epstein and the Critics," in which he savaged a number of critics who had written about Epstein's show, and also tried to explain just what Epstein was doing. In the course of this he expressed a view of modernity that is not so different from the one frequently expressed by Anthony Ludovici:

I do think that there is a certain general state of mind which has lasted from the Renaissance till now, with what is, in reality, very little variation. It is impossible to characterise it here, but it is perhaps enough to say that, taking at first the form of the "humanities," it has in its degeneracy taken the form of a belief in "Progress" and the rest of it. It was in its way a fairly consistent system, but is probably at the present moment breaking up. In this state of break-up, I think that it is quite natural for individuals here and there to hold a philosophy and to be moved by emotions which would have been

unnatural in the period itself. To illustrate big things by small ones I feel, myself, a repugnance towards the *Weltanschauung* (as distinct from the technical part) of all philosophy since the Renaissance. In comparison with what I can vaguely call the religious attitude, it seems to me to be trivial. I am moved by Byzantine mosaic, not because it is quaint or exotic, but because it expresses an attitude I agree with. But the fate of the people who hold these views is to be found incomprehensible by the “progressives ” and to be labelled reactionary; that is, while we arrive at such a *Weltanschauung* quite naturally, we are thought to be imitating the past.

(NA14.8:251)

Hulme appeared to hold many of the values held by Ludovici. In particular, he was critical of the notion of progress and nostalgic for the kind of Christian belief that animated Byzantine iconic mosaics. But here is what he said when he came to Ludovici's writing on Epstein, which he saved for last in his discussion of the critics:

I come now to the stupidest criticism of all, that of Mr. Ludovici. It would probably occur to anyone who read Mr. Ludovici's article that he was a charlatan, but I think it worth while confirming this impression by further evidence. His activities are not confined to art. I remember coming across his name some years ago as the author of a very comical little book on Nietzsche, which was sent me for review.

I shall devote some space to him here then, not because I consider him of the slightest importance, but because I consider it a duty, a very pleasant duty and one very much neglected. in this country, to expose charlatans when one sees them

(NA14.8:252)

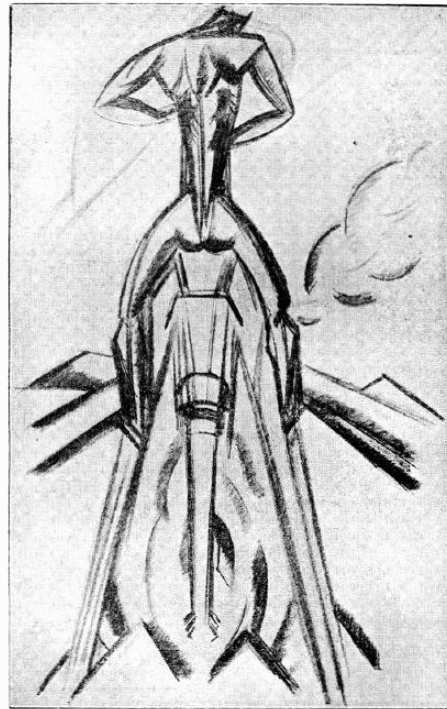
After a longish paragraph of critical abuse on the subject of Ludovici's understanding of Nietzsche, Hulme turned again to Ludovici on Epstein:

To deal definitely then with his criticism. He dismissed Mr. Epstein with the general principle "Great art can only appear when the artist is animated by the spirit of some great order or scheme of life." I agree with this. Experience confirms it. We find that the more serious kind of art that one likes sprang out of organic societies like the Indian, Egyptian, and Byzantine. The modern obviously imposes too great a strain on an artist, the double burden of not only expressing something, but of finding something in himself to be expressed. The more organic society effects an economy in this. Moreover, you might go so far as to say that the imposition of definite forms does not confine the artist but rather has the effect of intensifying the individuality of his work (of Egyptian portraits). I agree then with his general principle: we all agree. It is one of those obvious platitudes which all educated people take for granted, in conversation and in print. It seems almost too comic for belief, but I begin to suspect from Mr. Ludovici's continued use of the word "I" in connection with this principle, that he is under the extraordinary hallucination that the principle is a personal discovery of his own. Really, Mr. Ludo, you musn't teach your grandmother to suck eggs in this way.

(NA14.8:252)



This entire article is remarkable for its abusive, bantering tone, which included a threat of physical violence, and for the ad hoministic intensity of the critique Hulme generated. For our purposes, however, what is important is the agreement on the general principle that living in an "organic" society is a great advantage that Modern artists do not enjoy. Having admitted that, however, Hulme went on: "Admitting then, as I do, that the principle is true, I fail to see how it enables Mr. Ludovici to dismiss Mr. Epstein in the way he does, on a priori grounds. The same general principle would enable us to dismiss every artist since the Renaissance. Take two very definite examples, Michelangelo and Blake, neither of whom expressed any general 'scheme of life' imposed on them by society, but "exalted the individual angle of vision of minor personalities" (NA14.8:253). And Hulme went on to show how badly, in his view, Ludovici had gone wrong in looking at particular paintings by various artists, with particular emphasis on Augustus John. But the last word in this issue was given to Epstein himself, whose drawing, *The Rock-Drill*, appeared on the final page of the issue.



THE ROCK-DRILL.

By EPSTEIN.

(NA14.8:256)

In the course of his article, Hulme had said some things about this drawing, but noted that it was one that the public and the critics had in general understood. He felt it important, therefore, to explain what was happening in some of the things that they hadn't understood, and to try to say why this should be so. In this explanation lies the germ of his fuller defense of Modernist experimentation in the arts. He is talking about an image called *Generation* in which this subject is represented in a modern way:

If a traditional symbol had been used they would have been quite prepared to admire it. They cannot understand that the genius and sincerity of an artist lies in extracting afresh, from outside reality, a new means of expression. It seems curious that the people who in poetry abominate cliché and know that Nature, as it were, presses in on the poet to be

used as metaphor, cannot understand the same thing when it occurs plastically. They seem unable to understand that an artist who has something to say will continually “extract” from reality new methods of expression, and that these being personally felt will inevitably lack prettiness and will differ from traditional clichés.

(NA14.8:252)

Thus ended the year 1913, with the opening of the last phase of the great debate we have been examining. The debate continued, with Hulme and Ludovici as the main antagonists, along with their supporters and detractors, but it also brought others into the argument. In particular, Walter Sickert returned with images, and his fellow painter, Charles Ginner entered the fray with a manifesto on behalf of "Neo-Realism," which, along with Ludovici's reply to Hulme, were all in the first issue of *The New Age* in 1914. Ginner's article on "Neo-Realism" was the first piece on art in the pages of the issue that appeared on New Year's day. Here is how his article began:

All great painters by direct intercourse with Nature have extracted from her facts which others have not observed before, and interpreted them by methods which are personal and expressive of themselves--this is the great tradition of Realism. It can be traced in Europe down from Van Eyck and the early French primitives of the Ecole d'Avignon. It is carried through the dark period of the Poussins and Lebruns by Les Frères le Nain ; in the eighteenth century by Chardin; in the nineteenth by Courbet and the Impressionists, and unbroken to this day by Cézanne and Van Gogh. Realism has produced the “Pieta” of the Ecole d'Avignon, the “Flemish Merchant and Lady” of Van Eyck, the old man and child

of Ghirlandajo at the Louvre, “La Parabole des Aveugles” of Breughel (Le Vieux), the “Repos de Paysans” of Les Frères le Nain. Greco, Rembrandt, Millet, Courbet, Cézanne—all the great painters of the world have known that great art can only be created out of continued intercourse with nature.

(NA14.9:271)

Ginner went on to elaborate his theory, pointing out that the great enemy of what he called "realism" was "academicism," and he accused most of the Post-Impressionist followers of Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh of just that, with Matisse being the most guilty party among them. He also criticized Naturalism as another academic version of Realism--nature seen with "a dull and common eye," with "no personal vision, no individual temperament to express, no power of research" (NA14.9:272). Neo-Realism, for Ginner, was made up of nature plus the personality of the artist:

Neo-Realism must be a deliberate and objective transposition of the object (man, woman, tree, apple, light, shade, movement, etc.) under observation, which has for certain specific reasons appealed to the artist's ideal or mood, for self-expression. When the artist is carried away by an intense desire to interpret an object or an agglomeration of objects, the only sure means at his disposal to find and express that unknown quantity in the object which raised his desire, mood, or ideal, and which united his inner self with the aforesaid unknown quantity, is a deliberate research, concise study and transposition. It is only this intimate relation between the artist and the object which can produce original and great work. Away from this we fall into unoriginal and monotonous Formula.

(NA14.9:272)

Ginner claimed the Impressionists for Realism and argued that the Neo-Realists were their proper heirs, rather than the Post-Impressionists who had merely made an academic formula out of what was alive in Impressionism, just as the Royal Academy had allowed Realism to degenerate into a formulaic Naturalism. Ginner's piece was immediately followed in the pages of the magazine by Walter Sickert's *Portrait of Enid Bagnold*. This was the first of fourteen in a series edited by Sickert for *The New Age*, called "Modern Drawing.":



(NA14.9:273)

The Neo-Realist label described Sickert fairly well, though, as we shall see, he was not comfortable with it. This crucial issue of the magazine also contained Ludovici's reply to

Hulme. He called the piece "An Open Letter to My Friends," but in it he replied to Hulme. He objected to Hulme's tactics--as who might not-- and he noted that Hulme did not seem to disagree with his principles, but only to point out that they were not original and to argue with their application to Epstein's work. He observed, however, that "the controversy is an important one. These questions need open discussion" (NA14.9:279). His way of justifying his case against Epstein, however was a bit peculiar. He accused Epstein of being a disciple of the Futurists and then said, "I have listened to Marinetti," as if that explained his dismissal of Epstein as a "minor personality."

Finally, in the same issue, the cartoonist known as Tom Titt (Jan Junosza de Rosciszewski), offered, instead of his usual caricature, a piece of Pseudo-Neo-Realist art, called *Charing Cross Road: 11 PM:*



(NA14.9:288)

Meanwhile, of course, the controversy over Epstein's work raged on in the Letters column of the magazine, with supporters and detractors of all concerned expressing themselves vigorously. The conclusion of a letter from Wyndham Lewis is one of the most interesting of these contributions. The subject in the following paragraph is, of course, Anthony Ludovici:

He is obviously a fool it is worth no one's while to notice. But he suddenly threatens to engulf the entire superficies of one of the only good papers in the country with his gibberish, wildly and vacantly inflated, like some queer insect, in terror when attacked. May I use this occasion, as a great admirer of THE NEW AGE, to hope that for those "most sensitive men" (Nietzsche) some less ridiculous go-between may be found. His dismal shoddy rubbish is not even amusingly ridiculous. It is the grimest pig-wash vouchsafed at present to a public fed on husks.

(NA14.10:319)

What we may learn from this, beyond Lewis's amusing opinion, is that British artists and critics were paying attention to what was going on in these pages. At this point both Hulme and Ludovici began contributing columns on Art to the magazine, sometimes in the same issues. Asked by Orage himself, writing as R. H. C., to explain the social basis of his judgments, Ludovici replied by saying that it was "aristocratic," and that he wanted "superior men" to lead in "an aristocratic order of society". He also inveighed against what he called "the lie of equality, the lie of the rights of the individual conscience, and the lie of the rights of individual expression" (NA14.11:345-346).

In the same issue's Letters column Ludovici tried to deal with Wyndham Lewis by calling him a "Futurist," as he had Epstein. This must certainly have had the virtue of annoying Lewis, but it was not a strong defense of Ludovici's own position. Earlier in that issue Hulme had begun what was announced as a series of articles on "Modern Art," which he described as an attempt "to define the characteristics of a new constructive geometric art which seems to me to be emerging at the present moment," giving special attention to the problem of the word "new" (NA14.11:341:

I am afraid that my use of the word "new" here will arouse a certain prejudice in the minds of the kind of people that I am anxious to convince. I may say then that I use the word with no enthusiasm. I want to convince those people who regard the feeble romanticism which is always wriggling and vibrating to the stimulus of the word "new," with a certain amount of disgust, that the art which they incline to condemn as decadent is in reality the new order for which they are looking. It seems to me to be the genuine expression of abhorrence of slop and romanticism which has quite mistakenly sought refuge in the conception of a classical revival. By temperament I should adopt the classical attitude myself. My assertion then that a "new" art is being formed is not due to any desire on my part to perceive something "new," but is forced on me almost against my inclination by an honest observation of the facts themselves.

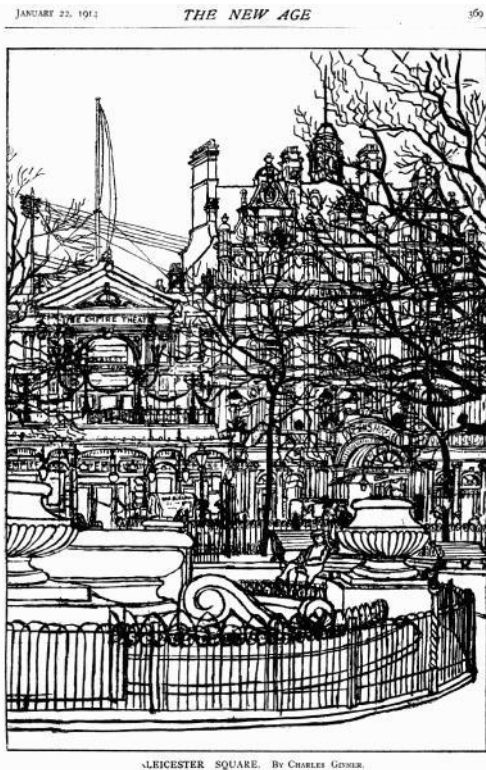
(NA14.11:341)

If Hulme and Ludovici could have met to discuss the issue of Epstein in a way less fraught with personality and prejudice, these words might have helped that discussion along.



Hulme proclaimed himself a Classicist who was opposed to the fetishization of the New that he associated with "feeble romanticism." But something genuinely New was happening in the arts, he insisted, which was being mistaken for decadence by people who shared his own values. It was his Classicism and detestation of "slop and romanticism," he implied, that should lend weight to his argument for "the new constructive geometric art." And here, at last, we come to the final stage of this long argument over the New and the Old, and the question of what Modernism in the arts really may be. Walter Sickert joined in this debate with a letter in the next issue, in which he took issue with Hulme on the quality of Roger Fry's painting, giving us his own views of some other modernists in passing. Sickert thought Fry the artist was superior to Fry the critic and Fry the impresario: "We must look at his canvases unbiased by the recklessness of his career as an impresario and the obscurantism of his criticism. As a critic he would have us take seriously Monsieur Picasso's tedious invention of the puzzle-conundrum-without-an-answer and the empty sillinesses of Monsieur Matisse. Himself has remained throughout a highly gifted and progressing painter on sane and normal lines. I do not profess to be able to explain this obvious incongruity, but there it is, staring us in the face, and it seems useless to deny it" (NA14.12:382).

Sickert's position was crystal clear. And he continued his visual argument with the series of drawings he edited for the magazine, which included *Leicester Square* by the author of the defense of "Neo-Realism" that we have already encountered, Charles Ginner. Tom Titt, the cartoonist, responded on the back page of the magazine with another parody of the work of the streetmen, called *New Oxford Street and Holborn*:



(NA14.12:369)



(NA14.12:384)

Among other things, this exchange of drawings and criticisms should help us gain perspective on Mrs. Dalloway's trip down Bond Street in the novel that bears her name and the short sketch that preceded it in Virginia Woolf's oeuvre, "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street." Woolf, too, was finding beauty in the streets of what Sickert called, in the title of one painting, *Londra Benedetta* (*Blessed London*). And, like her close friend Roger Fry and her sister Vanessa, Virginia Woolf never adopted the extreme or geometric modernism of Joyce or Stein but remained something of a Post-Impressionist to the end. Which is just one more reason why we need to see the literature and art of Modernism in a way that does not exclude everything that is not extreme or abstract.

Finally, in the same issue, *The New Age's* other cartoonist, Will Dyson, weighed in with his own attack on Modernist Geometricism, with a cartoon called *Progress*, in which a "Post-

Elliptical Rhomboidist" denigrates a fellow artist as painting in the "old-fashioned manner of last Thursday":



(NA14.12:376)

Dyson's cartoon attacked both the linking of Modernism to a progress gone mad in the pursuit of innovation, and the geometrizing of art in particular. On the visual side, this is perhaps the most extraordinary issue of this extraordinary magazine, with Ginner's drawing, Sickert's letter, and the two cartoons: one parodying Neo-Realism and the other parodying Cubism, Futurism, and Hulme's defense of "the new constructive geometric art" as Post-Elliptical-Rhomboidism.

This issue was followed by one with a typical Sickert scene and another parodic cartoon by Tom Titt:



(NA14.13:401)

As is so often the case in Sickert's work, *The Music Lesson* seems to be about a personal relationship that has reached some sort of crisis. The pupil is not playing and has turned away from the teacher, who is looking away from her. Is her shadowed face blushing? His art has a narrative quality without being merely illustrative or anecdotal. Sickert's puzzles are not geometrical but emotional, having more to do with what is represented and less with how it is represented. And this is the crux of the debate between what we should perhaps think of as the Radical Modernists and the Conservative Modernists, or Geometrists and Neo-Realists.

On the back page of that issue Tom Titt offered another cityscape, this one getting rather geometrical in its drawing and a touch Futuristic in the rendering of its street signs: *St. Paul's Churchyard*, and he followed that in the next issue with a caricature of Ludovici himself:



(NA14.13:416)



(NA14.14:448)

The Futurist parody and the Ludovici cartoon demonstrate, if demonstration were needed, that the cartoonists were indeed paying attention to the artistic debate around them.

In the next issue T. E. Hulme began to develop his ideas about modern art in a more systematic way, offering three theses which he planned to illustrate in various ways:

1. There are two kinds of art, geometrical or abstract, and vital and realistic art, which differ absolutely in kind from the other. They are not modifications of one and the same art, but pursue different aims and are created to satisfy a different desire of the mind.

2. Each of these arts springs from, and corresponds to a certain general attitude towards the world. You get long periods of time in which only one of these arts and its

corresponding mental attitude prevails. The naturalistic art of Greece and the Renaissance corresponded to a certain rational humanistic attitude towards the universe, and the geometrical has always gone with a different attitude of greater intensity than this.

3. The re-emergence of geometrical art at the present day may be the precursor of the re-emergence of the corresponding general attitude towards the world, and so of the final break up of the Renaissance.

(NA14.15:467)

This is, without a doubt, the most important statement on modern art made by Hulme anywhere. For our purposes it is crucial, because it makes a distinction between Old and New which manages to be both apparently even-handed and yet invidious. Hulme divides all visual art into two modes, the geometrical and the real, or the abstract and the vital, with no necessary hierarchy putting one above the other--except that in every age one will be more suited to the spirit of the age itself, though he doesn't use that too Hegelian locution but merely refers to "a general attitude." He also loads the dice a bit by insisting that the geometrical has always had a "greater intensity" than the realistic. More important than this, however, is his claim that a major cultural shift may at last be taking place, so that the cultural presuppositions that have supported realistic art since the Renaissance may at last be yielding to something different, which will support Geometrical art. Thus the artists who are reaching in that direction are attempting to help move the entire culture in this New direction, which is a healthy direction, because the humanistic impulse that drove the Renaissance is now exhausted if not sick. In this way, a New/Abstract/Healthy mode of art is opposed to an Old/Concrete/Sick mode. Clement Greenberg would not object to these combinations, presumably, but Ludovici and Lukács would

combine the binaries in another way. The paradox of Modernist critical discourse is rooted in the alignment of the New with different combinations of the other features, and in the different relations of the elements in each binary to one another, as in the different possible relations between Old and New.

This formulation linked Hulme's claims with those made several years earlier by Huntly Carter about a "New Spirit" in art, though Hulme insisted on the Geometrical as the carrier of this spirit in a way that Carter never did. And it ought to have aligned him with Anthony Ludovici, except that Ludovici could not see Abstract art as anything more than technical fiddling. But Ludovici was quarreling with the editor of the magazine about Nietzsche, which was a dangerous thing to do, and losing his place as the journal's major spokesman on visual art. Walter Sickert, on the other hand, was a genuine representative of the realistic side of Hulme's distinction, both in his own work and in his attitude toward the abstract tendency in art. In Hulme's terms, however, if I am interpreting him correctly, Sickert was a genuine voice of the Old, which properly continued, though threatened by the "precursor[s]" of the New spirit or "attitude." As Hulme made his case, then, the new Geometrists should be given some allowance as precursors rather than masters of the New, and appreciated for the same reason--because they were both anticipating and bringing about a desirable change in Modernity itself. And Neo-Realists like Sickert should be tolerated as honest practitioners of a dying mode of art.

In the course of this long crucial essay, which should be read in its entirety, Hulme tackled Charles Ginner's position on Neo-Realism and brought the argument down to different responses to the work of Cézanne. For Ginner, Cézanne was a realist. For Hulme, there were in Cézanne's work the "elements which quite naturally develop into Cubism later" (NA14.15:468).

Finally, Hulme extended the argument with Ginner to a disagreement about the artist's relation to "nature." Hulme's reasoning was straightforward and powerful:

I admit that the artist cannot work without contact with, and continual research into nature, but one must make a distinction between this and the conclusion drawn from it that the work of art itself must be an interpretation of nature. The artist obviously cannot spin things out of his head, he cannot work from imagination in that sense. The whole thing springs from misconception of the nature of artistic imagination. Two statements are confused : (1) that the source of imagination must be nature, and (2) the consequence illegitimately drawn from this, that the resulting work must be realistic, and based on natural forms. One can give an analogy in ordinary thought. The reasoning activity is quite different in character from any succession of images drawn from the senses, but yet thought itself would be impossible without this sensual stimulus.

(NA14.15:469)

In the early phases of this debate, Walter Sickert had argued that drawing was a kind of language, in which lines were like words. Huntly Carter had also spoken of art as a language in the pages of the magazine, as had Victor Reynolds. Hulme, in comparing visual art to thought, was making a similar distinction (and following David Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas, we might note) between perceptions and conceptions--between what the senses perceive and what the mind conceives. But Sickert would not follow his notion of drawing as a language to the point of allowing concepts as much power in the production of art as Hulme would give them--and that made all the difference in their positions.



Sickert's series of "Modern Drawings" calmly continued in the next issue with a powerful landscape drawing by Fred Richards of the Temple of the Sybil at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli:



(NA14.16:497)

Sickert himself remained as silent as any Sybil, and Ludovici continued arguing with his Editor about Nietzsche, before taking on Darwin as well. But Sickert returned with a drawing of his own and a review of Clive Bell's new book, *Art*, in the next issue. The drawing was called *Reconciliation*, but Sickert could not reconcile himself to Bell's view of Cézanne, though he liked other aspects of the book:

Nor is the value of the book as an illuminant to thought on painting, henceforth impossible to ignore, sensibly lowered by the fact that it is written round a movement

which is no movement or that the prophet has got hold of the wrong end of the wrong Messiah. I can see poor Cézanne's face at a "Cubist" exhibition! Never was a serious artist more shamelessly exploited than was Cézanne when his respectable name was made to cover the impudent theories of Matisse and Picasso, who, talented themselves, have invented an academic formula which is the salvation of all arrivistes without talent.

(NA14.18:569)

Sickert conceded, at least, that Picasso and Matisse were "talented themselves," and confined himself to attacking the "academic formula" they invented, which was exploited by "arrivistes without talent." This was not exactly a reconciliation with the views of Hulme, but here is Sickert's drawing that bore that title:



(NA14.18:561)

Others were far from reconciled, and the Letters column of *The New Age* continued to receive "refutations" of Hulme's views.

Sickert himself returned to the debate in the next issue, with a gently argued piece on the way artists work. The following passage is especially interesting:

We all know that picture of Moritz von Schwind, of the little German girl in plaits who throws open the casement of her bedroom to greet the sounds and scents of morning. The everlasting matutinal is enshrined in it once for all and for ever. No educated person can think of morning without thinking of that picture by Schwind, and Schwind wasn't labelled an anything-ist, but just a painter. His work required no treatise, and no abstrusely reasoned justifications. I once had the folly, in speaking to Monsieur Degas, to use the expression "a genius," of a painter of our acquaintance. "C'est pas un genie, he said, "c'est un peintre."

(NA14.20:631)

Von Schwind's *Morgenstunde*, which depends too much on its color to hold its own here, can easily be found on the web, where it is still popular as a poster. It shows a young woman, from the back, as she looks out a window at the mountains, with her unmade bed next to her. She is barefoot and on tiptoe, in the morning of her life, which she is rising to meet.. What Sickert admired in this image, I believe, was a kind of universal experience, a picture in which the artist captured a moment from an ordinary life that resonated with the feelings of many spectators and represented it with technical skill--a realistic treatment of a romantic moment, with the just

abandoned bed as important as the distant mountains. And he was asking, implicitly, whether the new geometric art advocated by T. E. Hulme, could match this.

We can find Hulme's answer, in the same issue of the magazine, in the first of a new series he edited, which he called "Contemporary Drawings":



(NA14.20:625)

Here was the new geometrical art with a vengeance, and Hulme could argue that it captured powerfully a universal experience. The image is *A Dancer* by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. If one were going to defend the New geometrical art, this was a very strong card to play--an image that

captures the movement, grace, and power of dancing in a way that traditional realism could not. In these two images we have instances of the Old and the New, chosen by their advocates. And the choices are very revealing. Sickert's choice speaks to bourgeois life and bourgeois values, with a comfortable room and a window opening on a romantic mountain scene. The girl stands on her toes to greet the morning, and the viewers are asked to share in or recall such moments in their own lives. This is rather different from Sickert's own work, which tends toward scenes of stress and trouble that open fissures in the bourgeois world. Sickert himself, is more modern than von Schwind. But Hulme's choice is of a scene from the world of art itself, or the bohemia in which much of Modern art was rooted. The dancer could be Isadora Duncan, or Loie Fuller, or even Nina Hamnett in a studio. The technique is aggressively Modernist, to be sure, but so is the subject matter. It is not, however, the subject matter of the consumers of art but that of the producers.

Hulme's offering says, "This is the New, deal with it." Sickert's says, "This was the Old, let the New try to equal it in interest." With Ludovici out of the way, Sickert and Hulme then joined in the most crucial phase of the debate over Modernism in visual art. Hulme himself returned to the debate with what was now the third in a series of articles called "Modern Art." In this article he reviewed a show of The London Group, which, as he explained, was "formed by the amalgamation of the Camden Town Group and the Cubists" (NA14.21:661). This alliance between the Neo-Realists and the Cubists is itself a perfect example of the paradox of Modernism, though it did not last for long after this show. The most important part of Hulme's review, however, comes in his discussion of Cubism :

It is possible, I think, to give an account of this movement, which will exhibit it as an understandable and coherent whole, closely allied to the general tendency of the period, and thus containing possibilities of development. But this has now generated, a second movement based simply on the idea that abstract form, i.e., form without any representative content, can be an adequate means of expression. In this, instead of hard, structural work like Picasso's you get the much more scattered use of abstractions of artists like Kandinsky. It seems, judging by its development up to now, to be only a more or less amusing by-product of the first. Lacking the controlling sensibility, the feeling for mechanical structure, which makes use of abstractions a necessity, it seems rather dilettante. It so happens, however, that all explanations of the new movement as yet given, have been explanations of this second tendency only. In this way the real importance of the main tendency has been veiled.

(NA14.21:661)

Here, Hulme confronted the movement that became Abstract Expressionism, in the nascent form of some works by Kandinsky, and argued that it was the wrong direction for the New, and, furthermore, that it was distracting attention from the other, Older New, the Geometrical or Structural Abstraction, such as that of Picasso, which was Cubism proper. Hulme, that is, shared with the defenders of the Old a sense that art needs a connection to the Real, and he felt that pure abstraction loses that necessary connection. He also felt that Kandinsky's path was the way of the dilettante, and he went on to argue that the other kind of grounded abstraction from the Real aligned Cubism with the great movements of earlier art that preceded the Renaissance, adding that now, after drawing upon the primitive and archaic, the

New Geometric art was starting to represent its own world more directly, drawing upon machines and mechanical objects for much of its material. He saw this as a healthy move, whereas he was suspicious of the Romanticism implied by Kandinsky's work.

British Vorticism was taking shape in these arguments of Hulme's, just as a nascent Imagism was learning from his poetry and his literary criticism. His career, like that of Gaudier-Brzeska, was ended by the War a short time after these essays. One would give a good deal to see where those two young men might have gone in the art and thought after the war. Hulme ended this important essay by conceding that much of the work in the show he was reviewing was imperfect and experimental, admitting that only Jacob Epstein had gone beyond that stage. In the next issue Hulme explained just what he meant to do in the series of Contemporary Drawings he had begun with *A Dancer*:

This series will include drawings by David Bomberg. Jacob Epstein, F. Etchells, Gaudier-Brzeska, C. F. Hamilton, P. Wyndham Lewis, C. R. W. Nevinson, Roberts, and E. Wadsworth. Most of them are members of the London Group, which is now holding an exhibition in the Goupil Gallery. Some of the drawings. are Cubist, some are not. Perhaps the only quality they possess in common is that they are all abstract in character. The series includes everyone in England who is doing interesting work of this character. In view of the amount of capable work continually being produced it is difficult to realise that the only part of this which is important that which is preparing the art of the next generation, may be the work of a relatively quite small group of artists. . . . Appended to each drawing will be a short note for the benefit of those who are baffled by the abstract character of the work. For this the editor, and not the artist, is alone responsible. You

have before you a movement about which there is no crystallised opinion, and consequently have the fun of making your own judgments about the work. You will have, moreover, the advantage of comparing these drawings with the not very exhilarating work of the more traditional school --with those, shall I say, in the series Mr. Sickert is editing ?

(NA14.22:688)

Walter Sickert himself had a letter in that issue, but it was on a different topic--the death of his friend Spencer Gore of pneumonia at the age of 36, and the announcement that a show of his works was being planned. We should note that, though Gore, as an artist, was definitely on the Sickert side of this dispute, Wyndham Lewis included two of his works in the first issue of *Blast* when it came out in June of that year, along with a number of examples of the Geometric style more typical of Vorticist art--another instance of the paradox of Modernism.

In the next issue Sickert had a memorial piece on Gore, which he called "A Perfect Modern," and used as a way of continuing the debate. He also included *Ethel*, a drawing by his student Mary Godwin, in his series of Modern Drawings:





(NA14.23:721)

Godwin's drawing appears in the Table of Contents as "Ethel: A Modern Drawing," and Sickert's praise of Gore is called "A Perfect Modern." Clearly, at the center of this dispute was the issue of what works of visual art had the right to be called "Modern," and both the New Representational art and the New Geometrical art were laying claim to that title. In our critical practice, we all too often award that disputed title to the Geometrical, erasing from view contemporary works in a more traditional style, and the result is an impoverished Modernism, a Modernism with its paradox concealed.

In the next issue, Hulme countered with the third in his series of Contemporary Drawings, *A Study*, by William Roberts. Beneath the drawing Hulme's note appeared:



STUDY BY W. RODRIGES.

(NA14.24:753)

This drawing contains four figures. I could point out the position of these figures in more detail, but I think such detailed indication misleading. No artist can create abstract form spontaneously; it is always generated, or, at least, suggested, by the consideration of some outside concrete shapes. But such shapes are only interesting if you want to explain the psychology of the process of composition in the artist's mind. The interest of the drawing itself depends on the forms it contains. The fact that such forms were suggested by human figures is of no importance.

In this note, Hulme seems to deny the importance of content altogether, which is taking abstraction a step farther than he had in the past, if I have read him rightly. Such a step intensified the break between the two modes of art being practiced at that time and embodied in his series of drawings and that of Sickert.

In the same issue, Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Indian art historian or philosopher of art, had a long review of Clive Bell's book, *Art*, which had been published recently. It was an interesting and appreciative review of some length. For our purposes, however, the most interesting part is a short discussion of the contemporary situation, in which Coomaraswamy quotes Bell and seems to endorse his view, which is quite the opposite of that developed by Hulme:

After the Post-Impressionists come the Futurists, Cubists, and the like. These are disposed of as a mere perversion of the main forward tendency, and they are condemned, as artists, because, "like the Royal Academicians, they use form, not to provoke aesthetic emotions, but to convey information and ideas--they aim at representing in line and colour the chaos of the mind at a particular moment." The Post-Impressionist tendency, on the other hand, is capable of endless development.

(NA14.24:763)

For Bell (and apparently for Coomaraswamy) Post-Impressionism could claim the future, because it could be developed endlessly, whereas the new geometric or abstract sorts of art were stuck in "the chaos of the mind at a particular moment." Bell's claim supported the kind of painting his wife was doing, of course, in contrast to that of the Cubists, and it could easily be extended to support the writing his wife's sister would do, in contrast to that of Joyce, for example, who was very interested in the mental chaos of ordinary life. Neither Joyce nor Virginia Woolf, of course, actually presented such life chaotically, though Joyce's writing may well have seemed more chaotic initially. In 1914, however, Woolf had not written much, and

Joyce's *Dubliners* was just finally getting published after a decade of difficulties. We are still some distance in time from the major works of these writers. Visual art, and the debates around it, were some distance ahead of verbal art at this moment, which makes these debates especially important for students of literary Modernism. The terminology of these debates about visual art, of course, will not transfer neatly into discussions of literary works, but literary critics may learn from them even so. It makes sense to see the later Joyce and much of Gertrude Stein in terms of a geometrical or abstract deconstruction and reconstruction of human life, and, at the same time, to see Woolf as, for the most part, developing a Post-Impressionistic form of literary narrative, which follows from the Impressionism of Conrad and Ford. What does not make sense, however, is to call one of these modes of textuality Modern and the other not.

In the next issue of *The New Age*, Sickert had a piece on "Drawing from the Cast," and what turned out to be the last in his series of Modern Drawings appeared: *The Doctor*, by Sickert's pupil, associate, and life-long friend, Sylvia Gosse, the daughter of the Victorian man of letters, Edmund Gosse:



(NA14.25:785)

Sickert soon continued the debate with a response to Charles Ginner's piece on Neo-Realism from several issues back, arguing that both parts of that term were not useful. It is not good for artists to call themselves "New," he said, because that judgment should be left to posterity. And it is also a mistake to claim the name of "Realist," because the whole business of labels should be left to those "who have little else wherewith to cover their nakedness" (NA.14.26:819). For most purposes, however, the term Neo-Realist describes the work of Sickert and the artists in his series better than any other critical term--especially if we understand Neo-Realism as pointing to an adaptation of impressionist of technique to an interior world in the double sense of situating characters in intimate spaces and in situations that suggest their inner lives. We may need this concept to understand many of the verbal Modernists as well. What turned out to be the last two items in Hulme's series of Contemporary Drawings also appeared in

that issue. The most interesting of these, in my opinion is a Cubist portrait by Nevinson, who was about to weigh in on the critical side of this debate as well:



THE CHAUFFEUR. By C. R. W. NEVINSON.

(C. R. W. Nevinson, *The Chauffeur*, NA14.26:814)

In the next issue of *The New Age* the editor mischievously printed a translation of Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto," followed immediately on the same page by a judicious review of a show of the work of H. H. La Thangue, a founder of the New English Art Club, written by Walter Sickert, who calmly went on in his way, praising the art and artists that he liked, essentially those who had learned from the Impressionists and had avoided misinterpreting Cézanne and plunging into the blind-alley of Futurism etc. In *The New Age* for June 18, 1914, C. R. W. Nevinson responded to all this by printing a lecture he had given at the Doré Gallery called "Vital English Art." The lecture was, among other things, a defense of Futurism.

Nevinson made a number of points that are important for our purposes. One of the had to do with the relationship of Modern art to Primitive art.

The superb simplicity and intensity of the Primitives cannot be obtained by imitating their forms or technique nor is it possible for an artist living to-day, travelling by tube, by 'bus, by taxi, surrounded by steel construction hoardings, petrol vapour and speed, how is it possible for that artist to have the same emotions, thoughts or feelings as an Egyptian, early Italian, or Byzantine. It is obviously impossible. So art must and always has represented the spirit of its age.

That is why the Futurists claim to be the real Primitives, the Primitives of a new and modern sensibility ; and it is that which makes their work so vital, so intense, though extremely complex.

In Europe there are roughly three modern schools that in England are continually being confused with each other. They all have one thing in common : they have abandoned representation of concrete forms or colours for interpretation by means of abstract forms and colours, the Cubists, such as Picasso, Metzenger, Léger, Gleizes, Etchells, the Expressionists, such as Kandinsky, Wyndham-Lewis, Wadsworth, etc., or Vorticists as I believe the latter now like to be called, and the Futurists.

(NA15.7:160)

Sickert had charged the Futurist painters with following the dictates of a literary man, Marinetti. Nevinson answered that charge by joining with Marinetti and taking responsibility, as an artist, for explaining the vitality of the three schools of properly Modern art: Cubism, Expressionism (Vorticism), and Futurism. Nevinson's argument, which is crucial for our

concerns, was based on the distinction between two forms of representation, Concrete and Abstract, and two objects of representation, natural and mental. For him, only those modes of art that tended toward abstraction were properly Modern. Pointing out that music does not imitate natural sounds but represents emotions powerfully, he argued that representational painting was inferior to abstraction, which could present mental states more directly:

So in painting, by means of contrasts of abstract colour, form, lines, planes and dimensions that don't in the least imitate or represent natural forms, it is possible to create emotions infinitely more stimulating than those created by contemplating nature.

Now this is the whole justification of all arts. Therefore representation in painting or sculpture is absurd.

This had already been felt by Blake and Turner in England, by Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin abroad, absolutely realised by Picasso and Kandinsky, but in the case of the two latter they seek form or colour for its own sake and are so able to produce an abstract emotion, and this is a very important movement, and the three paintings by Kandinsky at the Allied Artists are to my mind three of the finest modern pictures I have seen.

(NA15.7:160)

In this passage, Nevinson distinguished himself from Hulme, who did not like Kandinsky's work, as we have seen, and he began to lay down the creed that we will come to know as Abstract Expressionism a bit later on in the Modernist period. Nevinson's lecture was detailed and eloquent, his main thrust being that art should be a tonic not a drug, and that Futurism was



capturing the spirit of Modernity better than any other form of art, though he praised no other artist as highly as he did Kandinsky. This tack of Nevinson's, as it turned out, annoyed Wyndham Lewis, opening a fissure on the Abstract side of Modernism.

In the same issue Nevinson's lecture was parodied by one of the *New Age* regulars, writing as Charles Brookfarmer. Sickert, in an article on "The Thickest Painters in London," also reacted to the Marinetti/Nevinson performance at the Doré, noting that these Futurists had "repealed" the Old Masters, and contemporaries like Gilman and Ginner, and saying that he expected them to be repealed themselves in the next week, a sentiment anticipated in Will Dyson's cartoon about the Post-Elliptical Rhomboidist, and echoed in many places, including, as we shall see in Chapter 6, the fiction of Dornford Yates. And, finally, in July, T. E. Hulme returned to the debate with a long review of a show of David Bomberg's art, in which Hulme tried to explain how abstract art was generated. It is a judicious review, rather than a piece of puffery, and concluded with the following paragraph:

To sum up, then--in my notice of the London Group I said that I thought Mr. Bomberg was an artist of remarkable ability. This show certainly confirms that impression. It also adds something. It convinces me that his work has always been personal and independent--much more independent than that of most Cubists--and never reminiscent. If I am to qualify this, I should add that, as yet, his use of form satisfies a too purely sensuous or intellectual interest. It is not often used to intensify a more general emotion. I do not feel, then, the same absolute certainty about his work that I do about Epstein's. In Mr. Epstein's work the abstractions have been got at gradually, and always intensify, as abstractions, the general feeling of the whole work. But then Mr. Epstein is in a class by

himself. I think that in this merely intellectual use of abstraction Mr. Bomberg is achieving exactly what he sets out to achieve. But at the same time it is quite legitimate for me to point out why I prefer another use of abstraction. In any case, I think he will develop remarkably, and he is probably by this kind of work acquiring an intimate knowledge of form, which he will utilise in a different way later.

(NA15.10:232)

Hulme is discriminating here between different sorts of abstraction and praising Epstein over Bomberg because his work intensifies a "more general emotion." We are back to what Sickert praised in von Schwind's *Morgenstunde*, and what we found in Gaudier-Brzeska's *Dancer*.

There is something in the subjectivity of Expressionism that makes Hulme wary, as he was wary of Kandinsky as well. Those who favored Abstraction as the best mode for Modern art were by no means entirely agreed about what Abstraction should be accomplishing. Hulme's Classicism led him to be suspicious of individualism and subjectivity as Romantic. On the literary side of Modernism, the Imagists, Ezra Pound, and, finally, T. S. Eliot would all share this suspicion.

In the epigraph to this chapter, I have quoted Ezra Pound, writing as B. H. Dias, pointing out the existence of such a figure as "the frenetic modernist " who will miss great drawing because the subject matter and style are not à la mode. Pound himself, of course, had a serious investment in the Old, and much of his work and T. S. Eliot's could be characterized as Neo-Realist, digging into the fissures of the modern psyche. By this time, of course, the first issue of the Vorticist journal *Blast* had appeared in late June of 1914, and this heated controversy in *The New Age* subsided. The guns of August were only a few weeks away, and the conflict of nations superceded the conflict of artists and critics. It is a good moment to stop this long chronicle and

see what it has revealed about the paradoxy of Modernism. One thing we have certainly seen is that neither Old nor New were simple terms with single meanings, but complex signifiers with sub-meanings within them that contributed to their paradoxical roles in discussions of Modernism. In that short period of five years that we have been considering (1910 through 1914, with emphasis on 1913-1914), virtually everyone who addressed the issue of Old and New art agreed that a major cultural change had occurred.

Virginia Woolf, of course, made the definitive statement about this change with her famously hyperbolical statement that "on or about December, 1910, human character changed" ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" 96). Even so, for all those who felt that some break with the past was necessary, there was still the crucial choice of what part of the Old one was abandoning. It is one thing to break with Alma Tadema, and another to break with Monet. Moreover, as we have seen in the discussions of Cézanne, he could be continued in more than one direction, and he himself could be seen as continuing the Impressionist line or breaking with it. There were Cubists, and Picasso is one of them, who were quite ambivalent about Modernity, reacting to it with horror in some artworks and embracing it in others. And most of the Fauves, of course, fled the modern city, following Gauguin, and seeking "luxe, calme, et volupté." But the point is not to get every bird in the right pigeonhole, but to point out the complexity of the Modernist aviary. If our goal is to understand Modernism and its relation to Modernity, we shall need to consider the shadings and variations within and among the categories--the shifts, the ambiguities, the tensions within the work, of individual artists and even within single works of art and literature. Joyce's *Ulysses*, to take a single obvious case has elements of Neo-Realism and Abstraction, of Naturalism and Surrealism in its construction--and these are part of the book's strength, not weaknesses or confusions. And we will find Modernity itself represented with bitterness and

fondness by an author who once tried to franchise a chain of cinemas in Ireland, to be called the Volta Theatres.

If we consider the work of the cartoonists we have seen in this chronicle, for example, we will find urban Modernity embraced but represented in a traditional style by Tom Titt, in *Charingcross Road*, but with a satiric or parodic intent. His London is not blessed. And in *St. Paul's Churchyard* he gave us images that echoed or parodied the Cubist style of Nevinson and Bomberg but seemed to accept and enjoy the communicative frenzy of Modernity. And Will Dyson used a style that was less traditional to parody the whole contemporary rage for newness in *Progress*. Even the cartoons are not easily categorized, and they, too, are a part of modernism in the arts. They may be "Low," but they are clearly engaged in a dialogue with the "High," and we need to hear the entire dialogue if we are to understand Modernism.

There are two more conclusions I wish to draw from this probe into the formation of Modernism in the visual arts before concluding. One has to do with the assumptions about Modernity made by the apologists for the more radical forms of Modernist art. Every one of these critics agreed that Modernism was justified by a cultural break that was occurring in their world. And many of them hoped and believed that a New Order was coming to replace the disorder that was Modernity. The New geometrical art was to be supported by a New unified culture, that would be equivalent to the Egyptian or the Byzantine in stability and profundity. This longing for a New Order was responsible for the welcome given to totalitarianism by certain artists, critics, and philosophers. But the New Order turned out to be both disastrous and short-lived. And the move toward a New Geometrical art turned into abstract expressionism and played itself out, after producing some powerful and original work. Moreover, the political New Order, whether Fascist, Nazi, or Stalinist, hated the art that was supposed to be representing its

values and called for something more representational. The artists, in their turn, hated the New Order, though it took many of them some time to see through Stalinism, and some writers, like Pound, never abandoned their original receptive attitude toward fascism.

My second conclusion has to do with the art we have been considering. I find, personally, that the images which stay with me from this collection come from both sides of the opposition between Representational and Abstract. I remember Gaudier-Brzeska's *Dancer*, Epstein's *Rock-Drill*, and Nevinson's *Chauffer*, but I have trouble recalling most of the other images from Hulme's sequence of Contemporary Drawings. And I remember Ginner's *Leicester Square*, and Fred Richards's *Temple of the Sybil*, along with some of Sickert's own work. But I refuse to choose between von Schwind's *Die Morgenstunde* and Gaudier's *A Dancer*. I admire both of these works and want each of them in my memory hoard. I also remember the cartoons by Tom Titt and Will Dyson. I want them there too. And so, I am arguing, should you. The Neo-Realist tradition, which might have seemed eclipsed by the New Geometricists, was in fact continued by the *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists in Germany and is still alive and well today in the work of painters like Lucien Freud and David Hockney, different as they are. As Post-Modernists, which we are now, whether we like it or not, we must sort out what Modernism was and what it should mean to us. In the chapters that follow, I shall take up some specific instances that I hope may serve as examples of the kind of sorting and sifting we should be doing.