Number 3 (September 1992). I am also grateful to Paul Edwards for permission to reprint parts of Chapter 4 which appeared, again in a different form, in *Volcanic Heaven: Essays on Wyndham Lewis's Painting and Writing*, ed. Paul Edwards, Black Sparrow Press, Santa Rosa, CA, 1996.

Introduction

THIS BOOK CONSIDERS the fortunes of English* painting in the decade and a half between 1914 and the end of the 1920s. It looks closely at a number of themes and painters of the period in the context of cultural reactions to modern life in England after the First World War. Whereas most histories of the 1920s have tended to see English art as marked by a tension between the native tradition and modernism, *The Modernity of English Art* eschews this comparative focus in favour of a cultural history. It is about a 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.

The book argues that during the First World War the aspiration of radical modernism in 1914 to achieve a critical description of modern experience became deeply problematic. As a result, in the years which followed the war the understanding of modernity through painting in England was subject to a struggle of competing definitions, the majority of which were marked by retreat, evasion, and concealment of modernity's impact. If that apparent identity hid a wide variety of different responses, from the complicit to the subversive, it nevertheless remained the case that direct registration of the modern seemed for over a decade to be all but impossible in English painting. 'Modernism' was redefined, dwindling into a formal idiom merely, or into a celebration of the sensuous immediacy of the world, and the versions of modern life which were promulgated in painting became largely uncritical. Any real engagement with modernity as experience took place in private languages or above all negatively, through evasive statements and subjects.

The six chapters of the book can be thought of as a series of excavations into this history. Once the structure and prehistory of the argument is established, the remainder of the text examines different responses to the

* This book is specifically about English art and the English experience of modernity. To call English art 'British' would imply that England fully defines the United Kingdom, which is not the case. 'English' and 'England' are therefore used throughout in preference to 'British' and 'Britain' except where I am genuinely referring to all the countries making up the United Kingdom.

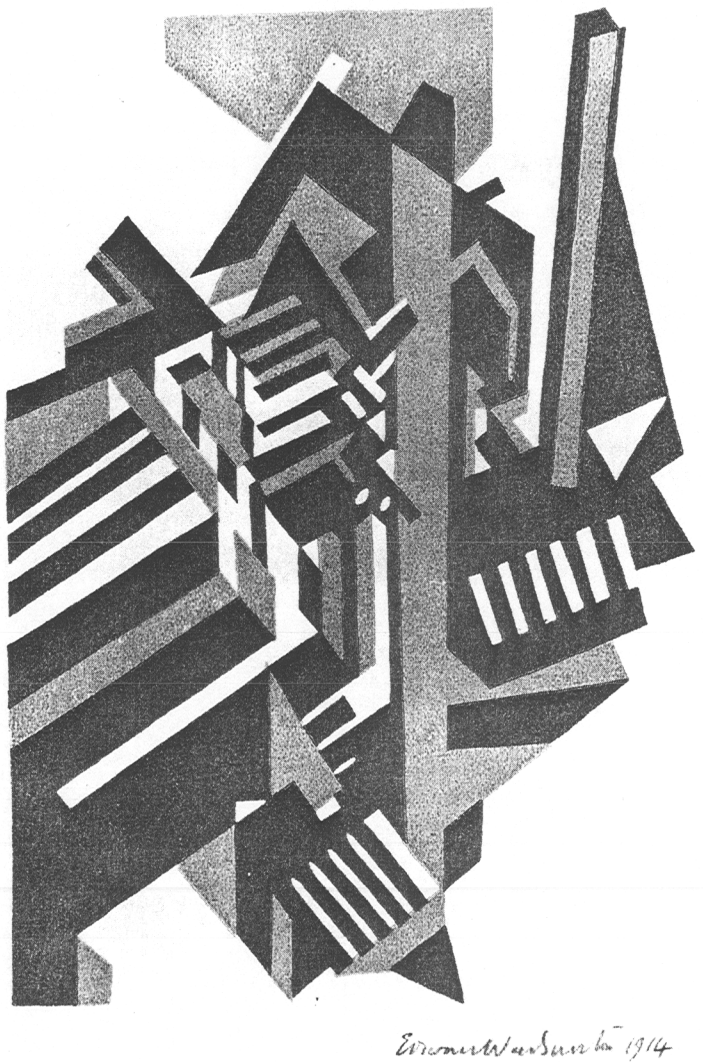
disavowal of modernity and the compromising of modernism which followed 1914. Because the book presents an interpretation of the circumstances in which painters and other artists worked rather than an exhaustive survey, I have not tried to discuss all the possible figures in post-war English art at length. My aim has been to establish a specific argument, and the introduction which follows sets out the rationale of the book and describes a number of central ways of thinking about modernism and modernity which I use throughout the text. It is intended to provide a conceptual framework within which the subsequent chapters explore in detail the reactions of selected painters to a general history.[1]

The problem of modernism

Let me start with some examples, two images by Edward Wadsworth from the period immediately before the outbreak of the First World War and the very end of the 1920s. Plate 1 shows Wadsworth's 1914 Vorticist woodcut 'Bradford: View of a Town'; plate 2 his tempera painting of 1928–29 *Wings of the Morning*. Wadsworth was an active member of the group of artists associated with Vorticism in 1914, and his works therefore have some claim to be considered representative of the most advanced English modernism of the early twentieth century. Yet, looking at these two images, we can hardly fail to see that although both are unmistakably 'modern' works – the first an innovative account of an industrial cityscape, the second a 'surreal' reading of its subject-matter – there is a marked difference between them as representations.[2] 'Bradford' is a formally experimental work, its interest lies in the new language with which modernism strove to realise the character of contemporary life, and its urban motif seems appropriate to those interests. The mechanisation of its visual language defines the pervasiveness of modernity, as if the whole of the world has been remade through the idioms and categories of industrialisation. It claims that this 'view of a town' is the only view possible within the terms which modernity enforces. But if, in making that claim, 'Bradford' is straightforward about its commitment to a description of modern experience, *Wings of the Morning* belies its modernity. It is, formally at least, a naturalistic painting. Only the subject-matter works to block the straightforward reading which that seems to imply. These marine artefacts, piled up into a kind of technical still life, seem to suggest a modernity of experience without addressing it directly. Instead of the contemporary technology which these forms suggest at first sight, we are presented with an assemblage of signs for national identity, the pre-twentieth century technology of a seagoing race. Where 'Bradford' declares its interests openly, those of *Wings of the Morning* are oblique, less frankly about contemporary experience.

These changes in Wadsworth's painting are exemplary of more general

shifts in English art and culture between the beginning of the First World War and the end of the 1920s.[3] Wadsworth's apparent renunciation of an engaged modernist idiom and subject-matter in favour of a patriotic, maritime, nationalism seems to stand for a more widespread erosion of modern experience in post-war painting. If we understand modernism to mean an art of innovation with an explicit interest in the formal character of its practice and with a self-consciously radical public stance, then

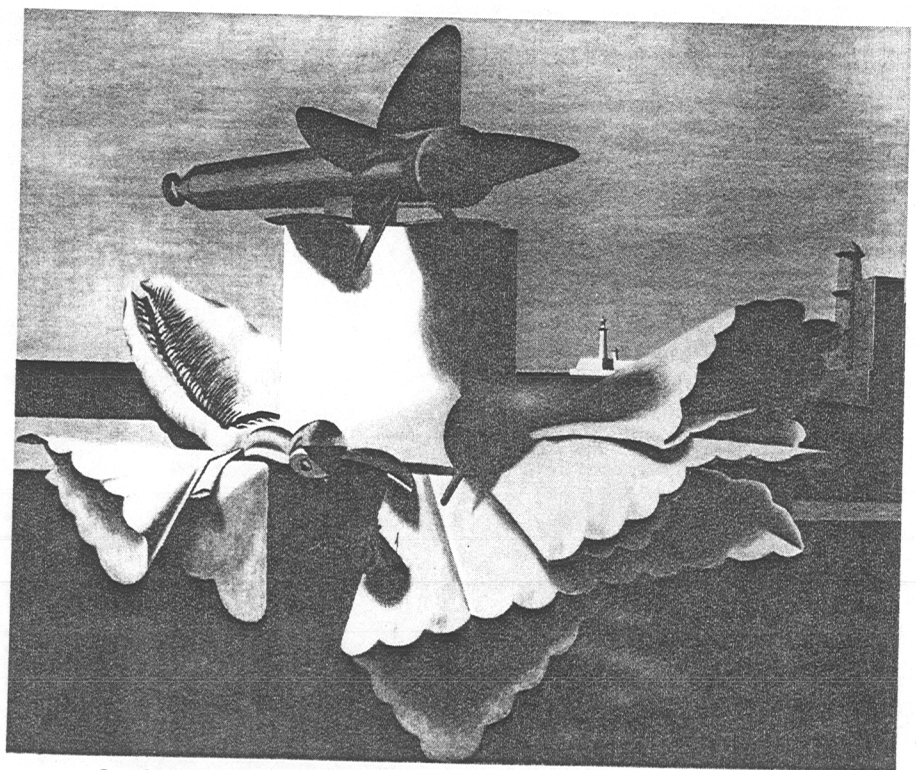


1 Edward Wadsworth, 'Bradford: View of a Town', 1914

Wadsworth has ceased to be a modernist by 1929. And in this he is typical of English painters of the period.

The problem for historians of English art has been how to account for such changes. Why did English art after 1914 all but abandon the elaborated modernist idiom of the Vorticists and content itself with an adaptive 'modernism' which made use of some of the formal experimentation of radical art, but renounced its ambitions to oppositionism, to critique, to *direct* address and evaluation of the conditions of modernity? Why, when during the 1920s the impact of modernity as a social process was arguably more intimately present in the lives of individuals than ever before – and when it seemed to be so to contemporaries – is modernism in any form recognisable within the terms staked out on the continent of Europe hardly apparent until the very end of the decade? If modernism is the necessary expression of, or the response to, the experience of modernity, then surely England had more than enough of that commodity to justify a prolonged and vigorous modernist life?

In much recent literature attempts to resolve this problem have tended to produce arguments for English art as perennially outside the main-



2 Edward Wadsworth, *Wings of the Morning*, 1928–29

stream ambitions of radical modernism in continental Europe and North America. For Frances Spalding in her 1986 survey *British Art Since 1900*, the 'concern with modernism' and its 'linear evolutionary development' has encouraged historians to 'banish into temporary obscurity' much which displays the true 'richness and diversity' of twentieth-century English art. In place of a certainly rather rickety modernist lineage Spalding wishes to put a recognition of the repeated return in England 'to personal convictions or native traditions.'[4] In other words we can ignore the problem; it is just that English art displays a quirky (or if you prefer, a robustly individualistic) relationship to aesthetic production elsewhere. Why is not explained. The catalogue to the Royal Academy's 1987 exhibition 'British Art in the 20th Century,' subtitled 'The Modern Movement' tried to resolve the difficulty in a more helpful way. But seeing 'the modern' in English art as a dialogue between the native tradition and foreign influences is feasible only if one is defining modernism purely formally as 'the thread of development that leads from Cubism towards Abstraction.'[5] It is unsustainable or misleading once modernism is recognised as about the creation of a language with which to assess modernity rather than simply a history of formal development. Even Charles Harrison in *English Art and Modernism, 1900–1939* is explicitly concerned not 'to offer any radical revision of the history as it has been received.' He therefore finds himself almost inevitably summing up the twenties as 'an unpromising decade,' except for the heralds of the return to advanced modernism in the thirties – Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, and Christopher Wood. Harrison's version of the central concerns of the twenties – 'clear formal structure at the expense of anecdote'; 'vitality in pictorial form' accompanied by representation; and 'the gradual naturalization of continental influence in the context of still-life and landscape' felt 'appropriate to an English painter' – are all themes calculated to assert the difference of the English domestic tradition from continental modernism. All were established in the twenties and all have subsequently been extended to form the basis of received judgement.[6]

My contention is that the only way in which the problem of English modernism in this period can be resolved is to move beyond the concern with stylistic distinctions or a radical polarisation of modernism and other practices, and to work at the ways in which all artistic production is implicated within modernity.[7] An explanation is not going to come either from a strictly stylistic reading, or from attempts to polarise the argument and insist (*pace* Spalding) on either modernist or non-modernist art as the *real* art of the twenties. A better way to begin to answer the question of how English practice and its connection to modernism can be properly discriminated is to consider the character of the relationship between modernism in painting and the modernity of English culture. This must be the point of attention if we are to understand the complex

history of modernism and its relationship to modern experience in these years.

Modernism

At the moment when modernism appeared on the European scene in the early years of the twentieth century, the persistent justification advanced by its practitioners was that the new conditions of existence demanded new visual languages. Modernism in its earliest twentieth-century forms set out to create a visual medium which could serve as an instrument of enquiry through which modernity could be investigated and assessed. Its potential was to act as a medium of assessment of its culture, not merely to replay the terms of modernity itself as celebration or regret. But the success of modernist practice in realising that potential is itself a problem.[8]

This may be because modernism is inherently unstable as a critical instrument, too implicated in the values of modernity to allow sufficient distance to be sustained for critique to become meaningful before it is hijacked and reincorporated back into the established systems of the culture. This possibility is examined in an important collection of essays from a conference on 'Modernism and Modernity' held in Vancouver in 1981 in which Serge Guilbaut, Thomas Crow and others built up an account of modernism opposed to formalist interpretations, in part through an explicit dialogue with Clement Greenberg, who was also a contributor to the event.[9]

Greenberg's main thesis, the '"classic" exposition' of modernism as style which for a long time dominated discussion, is well known.[10] For Greenberg modernism in the visual arts is marked by a process of investigation into the nature of the visual medium itself, with the aim of establishing the types of enquiry and experience that are unique to that medium. In painting, which is the focus of Greenberg's interest, this investigation is said to lead to an acknowledgement of 'the ineluctable flatness of the support.'[11] Modernist painters sought to exploit the constraints of pigment and the two-dimensional bounded canvas to reveal the fundamental possibilities unique to painting as a practice, a focus sufficiently narrow to allow a clear canon of achievement to be discerned beginning with Manet and persisting into the 1950s and beyond. But this narrowness of focus is a cultural phenomenon, deriving from the mechanisms of the wider history of which it is a part, and making of modernism, which expresses that history most accurately, 'the authentic art of our time.'[12] Modernism in Greenberg's account is a sort of laboratory for the pursuit of a pure, autotelic art which will be able to spin a cultural pertinence from a preoccupation with its own formal constitution. There is no doubt that Greenberg's emphasis on formalism and the autonomy of practice is itself a legitimate modernist position. It is one of the sources from which formalist readings

of English modernism, with their attendant difficulties, ultimately derive. It represents one strand in modernism's thinking about its own status, but it omits another focus of modernism which is arguably more important and which carries great explanatory power. It is this second focus which engages the contributors to *Modernism and Modernity*.

The central idea investigated by a number of the most useful essays in the Vancouver volume is that of modernist 'negation,' the possibility, which I have already broached, that modernist art is significant because its engagement with the systems of developed capitalism might mount an oppositional and critically evaluative account of its society against the dominant discourses. Serge Guilbaut sees a 'critical/subversive stance' as 'the keystone of any modernist procedure' and the 'living, critical core' of modernism.[13] Modernism replays in its texts and artefacts the materials and procedures of lived existence 'while putting that life on stage.' Its ambitions are apocalyptic; 'it [makes] an effort to shape new conditions of existence, as well as new conditions of artistic production.' Thus 'in theory, at least, modernism operates as an art of combat, employed by an avant-garde which [is] often tied, albeit ambiguously, to the idea of revolution.'[14]

This way of understanding modernism's function can lead to discriminations between different categories of modernist practice. According to Peter Bürger, whose reading of modernism's potential in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* is closely related to that offered by the Vancouver papers, a taxonomy of modernism can be drawn up tracing the unfolding of responses within the 'institution' of art to the advent of bourgeois society with its primarily commercial, secular and materialist orientation.[15] Whereas, in the pre-modern period, art could claim a clear, religious, function within society and hence an audience and source of patronage, commercialisation and secularisation marginalised its role. Artists responded by increasingly asserting art's autonomy and self-sufficiency, a process which finds its climax by 1900 in 'aestheticism,' the programmatic divorce of the explicit aims and concerns of art from society. This separation of art from 'the praxis of life'[16] which is the ideological basis of 'modernism,' understood as a self-reflexive, autonomous and formalist practice, is the subject also of 'avant-garde' protest, and Bürger makes a distinction between modernism and the avant-garde the focus of his argument. Avant-garde art in this sense responds to the severance of art from society and its consequent lack of impact by asserting a return of art to life. According to Bürger, 'the European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is ... art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men.'[17] 'Avant-gardism' is therefore the self-criticism of 'modernism,' defined as the end-point of the historical construction of art as a separate sphere within bourgeois society. Its characteristics are those directed to

bringing 'back art into touch with life,' as Wyndham Lewis expressed it[18] – self-consciously shocking or rebarbative presentation or subject-matter, direct address to an expanded and largely unwilling audience, a concern with social meaning, and the formal deformation and reconstitution of the language – visual or otherwise – in which the public discourse of society is conducted. Avant-garde art seeks to recapture the conventionalised and deadened languages of the everyday as they are constituted under bourgeois society, and to define them anew for its citizens. It is thus an art which explicitly aims at a social engagement and relevance through a repudiation and critique of its society.

This attractive vision of avant-garde modernism as a vigorously oppositional art which diagnoses and dramatises the conditions of life under capitalism is undercut in the Vancouver volume by a further assessment. Despite its ambitions, such modernism has tended to serve only as confirmation of, and further material for, the dominant systems of modern society. This argument is most fully explored by Thomas Crow, whose long essay on 'Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts' traces the dialectic between celebration and negation which marks modernism's relationship with the hegemony of capitalist society, and dissects the dissemination of its value systems through the vast network of 'kitsch' popular culture. Crow describes the way in which modernist painting continually tends to sink into a non-critical perpetuation of social norms, symbolised by its often complacent preoccupation with its own autonomy as practice. For Crow, each seizure of the materials of existence by avant-garde art has been reincorporated (sometimes with extraordinary swiftness) into the mechanisms of dominance through which that society is structured, so that, at its worst, 'the avant-garde serves as a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry.'[19] Because it is uniquely placed to mediate high and low culture, modernism can reinvigorate cultural pleasure for an elite audience, selecting aspects of live practice from subcultures 'which retain some vivid life in an increasingly administered and rationalised society,' and replaying them, refined and packaged, to its 'self-conscious audience.'[20] But the process does not end there. The legitimations of modernism are repackaged in their turn and returned to the sphere of popular consumption as 'evacuated cultural goods' to serve the promulgation of consumption that modern capitalism demands. Crow concludes that 'as long as this cycle remains in place, modernist negation becomes, paradoxically, an instrument of cultural domination'[21]:

> Mass culture, which is just another way of saying culture under developed capitalism, displays both moments of negation and an ultimately overwhelming recuperative inertia. Modernism exists in the tension between these two opposed movements. The avant-garde, the bearer of modernism, has been successful when it has found for itself a social location where this tension is visible and can be acted on.[22]

Modernism's relationship to its culture, so often the rhetorical centrepiece of its social practice, is ambivalent; its promise of critique frequently subsiding into the normalisation of style. But the promise it offers is the exploitation of those moments of 'tension' when the mechanics of modernity can be opened up to reveal the ideologies within, and when the experience of lives enacted under its rule can be shown plainly to its citizens in a language cleansed of the self-serving discourses of established society.

It is important to be clear. In advancing these ideas I am not holding to an ideal of a 'good' modernism as a 'negative,' oppositional practice, against which anything different is to be judged as inadequate, nor do I intend to berate an artist like Wyndham Lewis for not fully living up to the abstract categories of theory. 'Negation' and the idea of a radical avant-garde are useful concepts to think with, and provide a useful way of organising the material, but the point is to be able to describe the history of English art after 1914 more subtly than before and with greater insight and discrimination. My argument is that we can use definitions of the most radical variety of modernist art and of modernism as a stylistic category in order to think productively about the continuum of 'modernist' and other art in England, and to discriminate within it, not to prescribe an art that should have existed but did not. Above all, we can identify *types* of relationship – explicit, withdrawn, evasive, direct – to the experience of modernity. We can begin to see how these diagnoses of modernism might work by making some discriminations within the body of art produced in England. The categories I propose here are not intended to be understood as hard and fast divisions. Their purpose is to provide a language in which discriminations can be articulated within a complex spectrum of practice.

I will begin by proposing a distinction between modernism and the modernist avant-garde along the lines advanced by Bürger. I think we can usefully see avant-gardism of Bürger's type – the negating, radical avant-garde – as lying at the furthest end of the modernist spectrum. The first category into which we might sort the art produced in England between 1914 and 1930 is therefore an avant-garde, radical, modernism characterised in some way by an explicitly social engagement and a negation of the terms of modernity itself. It is this category which is most difficult to fill in the history of English art in the period. I will propose the Vorticists in 1914 and particularly Wyndham Lewis as the most credible candidates for this position, although I shall show that even Lewis fails to fit it convincingly, despite his self-image as the lone defender of an avant-garde tradition in England. The advantage of the concept of 'negation' and Bürger's thesis is that they allow us to see the emptiness of this first category in England, but also to appreciate that works which, at a formal level, may

have a great deal in common with those in the first category may also have substantial dissimilarities at the level of engagement.

The second category would then be a less aggressive modernism, which makes use of some of the formal elements and technical devices of extremism but which is not oppositional, engaged or 'avant-garde' in the first sense. This is the category that contains almost all the well-known practitioners of English art in the period – Paul Nash, the ex-Vorticists after 1914–15 like Wadsworth and Roberts; ex-radicals of other types like Nevinson, Bomberg or Epstein; the English Post-Impressionists of Bloomsbury; and artists of the younger generation like Christopher Wood who first began to work seriously in the 1920s, as well as the rising stars who were to become significant in the thirties like Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, and (for most of the twenties) Ben Nicholson. We can accept in this category that some artists have modernist characteristics without worrying about accommodating them completely to the social features of continental modernism. They are Bürger's 'modernists' rather than his 'avant-garde'; their practice has more in common with a modernism of style than of critique.

The third category defines work which sustains the concerns of earlier avatars of modernism. Although it was largely disinclined to embrace innovations on the continent after Post-Impressionism at the latest, English Impressionism continued to advance its tradition and to flourish and exercise influence. Artists like Walter Sickert, John Lavery, Philip Wilson Steer and John Singer Sargent (for instance) were all active into the 1920s and in many cases beyond. Following on from this, the fourth and final category is closely associated with the third. It comprises work which is primarily pre-avant-garde in its concerns and orientation. This is potentially a very wide class – it would include, for instance, most amateur or otherwise non-professional art – but it can be narrowed down to the public and widely disseminated production of the Royal Academy, a neglected subject of study in this period.[23] During the twenties Royal Academy work became increasingly identical with work in category three, as English Impressionists rose to established positions and achieved an established audience.

The relationship of English art practice in the period to modernism may therefore be rethought as a continuum of relationships to critical modernism. The unwillingness or inability of English art to achieve a critical modernism after 1914 does not mean that modernity ceased to be an issue. What it does suggest is that the understandings of modernity that English practice advances are linked to the particularly fraught relationship with its own modernity displayed by English culture. Like the culture as a whole, English art proved unable to derive an idiom of investigation and critique of the conditions of its own existence from the available languages. Instead it referred modernity to a series of evasive formulations which are

nonetheless historically significant as signs of that very inability to speak clearly. I am arguing that all the varied types of artistic practice I have listed took place under the rule of modernity. If they do not respond to those conditions within a critical modernist mode, then modernity is still registered within their subject-matter and constitution and in ways which are revealing of the deferral of confrontation common to the culture generally. But if this claim is to mean anything, I need to describe how I think the connection between painting and its culture might operate. It will help to do this if I draw out first of all the implications for modernism of modernity's extended history as a cultural condition.

Modernity

Historians of modern art have frequently seen a connection between the appearance of modernism and the complex of social processes called modernity.[24] But there are distinctions to be made between the two which suggest that the relationship is far from clear-cut. Although there are competing interpretations of modernity in the literature, it is possible to identify a number of central concepts on which there is general agreement. These define a schematic understanding of related but largely autonomous processes of change which have been operating since the sixteenth century – initially in the west, but latterly across the globe. These processes, which together make up the events of modernisation, mark the differentiation of modern society from the traditional social formations they replace. The most important include: the emergence of a secularised world-view geared to civil society which supersedes the religious viewpoint of traditional societies; the rise of reason and rationality as the only legitimate forms of intellectual investigation; the establishment of a capitalist exchange economy and of secular forms of political power tied to the new idea of the nation-state; and the reconfiguration of social and gender roles into new class formations and patriarchal relations between the sexes. The commitment to a materialist interpretation of value and meaning was extended to become a claim, which dominated western culture for three centuries, for the universal value of rationality in categorising and manipulating the material and psychological worlds. The consequences of rationality – intended and otherwise – were profound and far-reaching. They were expressed variously in the expansionist confidence of the European imperial adventure, the transferral of ascesis from religious to civil cultivation of the self, and the subjugation of nature through technology in the processes of industrialisation.

These prime characteristics of modernity tend towards separatism and disaggregation. The areas of public and private activity in the life-world, economic, cultural, political and gendered, are differentiated and assume the status of separate spheres or domains, each of which has its own

rigorous delimitation of procedure or authority. Under this separation the public or external world, the world of history, comes to seem irrelevant to the personal, and public events to seem remote from the individual life. History assumes a disconnected and hallucinatory aspect for its citizens, whose lives are understood increasingly as occurring within the discrete boundaries of individualised, inner experience.[25]

It is important to note, however, that because modernity is the outcome of a number of separate but interlocking processes, it is misleading to try to pin down one fixed set of characteristics to define it: there is no one homogeneous experience of modernity, nor one critical moment when it is at its most typical or paradigmatic. The same characteristics of modernity which tend towards atomisation also tend towards uniformity and concentration of resources. Mass production and mass culture, the erasure of cultural difference under economic pressure, and the rise of the crowd as the symptom of a loss of experiential and political reality, are all examples of the contrary process. Modernity can take on different, if related, forms in different societies and at different moments, so that it is also a dynamic environment, the central feature of which is change, the constant reformulation and restructuring of the world under the sign of 'progress' or 'development.'

Within this complex of processes certain moments are granted particular significance in the literature on modernity: the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the inception of social and political change; the eighteenth-century Enlightenment for the most powerful intellectual conceptualisation of modernity – the idea of the 'liberation' of human society from irrationality through reason; the industrialisation of the west, accelerating through the nineteenth century and bringing with it a train of social reformulations such as urbanisation and new gender and class roles; and the mid- and late twentieth century for the development of post-modernism and – perhaps – the arrival of the end of modernity as the lived circumstance of our lives.

There is one further important moment: the period from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries has been seen as the time when the pace of change became more pronounced, and when artistic modernism emerged as the cultural expression of that intensification. The point of departure for this reading is Baudelaire's anatomy of the new conditions of life, in which modernity, famously conceived as 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent,' is seen to reside in the characteristic forms and experiences of the modern city.[26] Drawing on this tradition, Stuart Hall sketches the development of the processes of modernisation since the sixteenth century, but reserves a particular importance for this period as the quintessential moment of modernity: 'essential to the idea of modernity is the belief that everything is destined to be speeded up, dissolved, displaced, transformed, reshaped. It is the shift – materially and culturally – into this new conception of social life which is the real transition to modernity.'[27]

And Marshall Berman, in his book *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, presents a vivid, impressionistic account of modernity as a 'body of experience' which 'pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish,' so that 'to be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, "all that is solid melts into air."'[28]

Berman's argument is a particularly vigorous example of the general position taken up by many studies which seek to identify the link between modernism and modernity. According to this reading, the intensification of the pace of change and the transformative capacities of modernity gave rise to a growing realisation of modernity's dual potential, which placed the Enlightenment inheritance of positive belief in progress in conjunction with another, and darker, acknowledgement of the negative consequences of that trajectory. In a famous passage towards the end of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which he traces the contributions to capitalism of the secularisation of religious discipline of the self, Max Weber speaks of the erosion of meaning that the divorce of self-denial from religious faith brings with it, of the disenchantment which accompanies the irreducible competition of meanings where there is no final supernatural arbiter of value, and of the reduction of rationality and the instrumental world-view to a totally administered world, the 'iron cage' of the efficient bureaucratisation of individual freedom.[29] Weber sets these negative consequences of modernity against the positive gains it brings, but asserts that the quest for freedom has brought its opposite with it; that modernity with its promise of liberation from the irrationality of the world also has a powerful negative dynamic. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the most influential distillation of this reading, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that modernity needs to be grasped dialectically. It cannot be adequately understood either as wholly liberating or wholly negative. Rather, the view of the world enshrined in the Enlightenment project of liberation 'already contains the seed' of the massive irruptions of irrationality which mark twentieth-century history.[30] The involvement of disenchantment as well as improvement in modernity, the 'self-destruction of the Enlightenment,' has to be acknowledged.[31]

This way of thinking about modernity is clearly reflected in the characteristics which art historians and literary critics like Berman have identified in modernist works, and it has some claim to be considered the standard interpretation.[32] These range across a wide spectrum from 'discontinuity' and 'the problem of relating past and present,'[33] via an ironic response to 'the rift between self and world,'[34] to a resistance to the democratisation of society.[35] All try to register the replaying of the dislocation of modernity within the texts and artefacts of modernism. It is the perception of modernity as 'an originally emancipatory impulse which is now running amok' that impels the rise of cultural modernism in the twentieth

century and which forms the basis of much of modernism's critique of modern experience.[36]

We are thus faced on the one hand with a definition of modernity which extends its chronology back into the early modern period, and on the other, with a tendency to identify the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as modernity's most characteristic manifestation, and the moment when it gave rise to its clearest cultural expression in modernism. It seems to me that this raises certain possibilities. Although there are plenty of attempts to read a developmental or evolutionary history of the arts back towards the origins of modernity in order to provide modernism with a lineage, it is obvious that cultural modernism in the formal sense does not occur throughout modernity's reign, whatever connections exist at other levels. The clear implication of the sociological argument for modernity's diverse and prolonged existence is that modernity can be registered in cultural forms that are not modernist.[37] When modernism, as a set of formal preoccupations, can be related to only one moment in an extended history of modernity, then any claims it may have to serve as the ultimate and inevitable expression of that history must come into doubt. This is particularly so when modernity is acknowledged as a shifting and dynamic process which may display varying characteristics at different times and in different places. The emphasis is as much on 'contradiction and contingency' in the history of modernity as on uniformity and necessity.[38] As Malcolm Bradbury says, there is no reason to believe 'the thesis that modernist style and sensibility are inevitable in our age.'[39]

I am not arguing that there is no connection between modernism and modernity, but rather that the connection cannot be as inclusive as is often assumed. I am pointing out that modernism is only one among a diversity of possible responses and that modernity is not, finally, dependent on modernism for its realisation in the cultural sphere. What is relevant to the art of a period like the 1920s in England is not so much the productions of modern*ism* as the constitution of modern*ity* under which all art was produced.[40] Even non-modernist works arise as part of a culture in which modernity is the prime determinant of experience. The conclusion I draw from this is that we can read the history of English art during these years, not as a series of events which only more or less match up to a narrowly defined formal modernism, but as a series of interventions which are part of modernity, even if only a minority are 'modernist' in this sense. This means that it is possible to attend to the range of art produced in a culture at any particular moment, and to see it as defined by its relationship to the understandings of modernity in the culture. Even art which makes no claims to modern experience replays an understanding of that experience, if only negatively, through its refusal or evasion. In the next section I set out a mechanism for understanding this link between modernity and artistic practice in more detail.

Modernism and cultural theory

The idea of culture has had an extensive airing during its present, prolonged, reign at the centre of intellectual debate and practice in many areas of the social sciences and humanities.[41] Although it is another one of those words which are famously difficult to tie down to one meaning – 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language,' according to Raymond Williams – in contemporary academic usage 'culture' indicates a particular view of social practice and its relation to meaning.[42] Drawing on intellectual antecedents which range from nineteenth-century anthropology to the *Annales* school of French social historians,[43] and from the writings of Michel Foucault to those of Clifford Geertz, current interpretations of the social matrix see culture as naming the ways in which meanings are attributed and understood within the social system. Culture is the institution, communication and contestation of meanings through the signifying practices that make up everyday life and which are shared in common within a society or grouping. The presence of Foucault looms large in formulations like this, and the idea of discourse as 'a coherent pattern of statements across a range of archives and sites that sets the terms for ... both truth and power in any field of knowledge,' has proved to be highly influential in thinking through the relationship between social structure and cultural practice.[44] The important consequence for my purposes here is that this definition implicates culture in the formation of social processes, and does not relegate it to a reflective or purely expressive role.

Even the most 'material' of social practices – economic, political, interactive – are imbued with and shaped by the significance which they derive from the discourse or discourses in which they are set; indeed, it is the inscription of discourses within material practices which allows meaning to be realised. Cultural meanings are actively constitutive of social life. This position has been staked out not only by Foucault, but in a number of separate sociological readings of the relationship between structure and agency; in Anthony Giddens's identification of the 'recursive' nature of social life,[45] or in Pierre Bourdieu's weaving together of the social world and the knowledge of the actors within it.[46] Roger Chartier has summarised the thrust of this type of argument by noting that 'the relationship thus established is not one of dependence of the mental structures on their material determinations. The representations of the social world themselves are the constituents of social reality.'[47] Things really happened in history to real individuals, but they understood those events through the vocabularies which culture and discourse made available to them, and that process of making sense was as real as the events themselves. To the extent to which cultural practices such as the production of art and literature are involved in the negotiation of signification within society, they can be understood as

contributors to the formation of that society and its self-understanding, rather than as mirrors of events that occur there at some supposedly more material level. In this sense there is little profit to be had from a wholesale abandonment of the study of high cultural artefacts, since they, as much as any others, are implicated within the network of significations of society.[48] High cultural productions are among the ways in which the culture *thinks* the nature of its modernity – 'a way of storing knowledge' about the conditions of existence, in T. J. Clark's phrase – and also a *part* of that modernity.[49] By the same token, there is nothing to be gained by confining discussion to works to which we attribute high aesthetic value. The logic of the cultural model I am arguing for is to see the entirety of production within the field of 'fine art' as legitimate material for historical analysis.

The idea I am advancing is that culture is the imbrication of the particular act in the systems of meaning and truth that are in circulation within society as a whole, and this allows the observation that modernism is not the sole type of art within modernity to be thought through in a useful way. Once we are prepared to see modernity as a changing complex of processes which take on a particular colouring in certain places and at certain times, then the way is open to shift attention from the suspect history of modernism in England to an interpretative description of its place within a more generously drawn historical situation. The implicated character of aesthetic practice in culture means that even work which is not modernist, or which is modernist but not 'avant-garde,' takes part in the negotiation and constitution of modernity, in the construction and contestation of 'regimes of truth' about the conditions of existence. For a historical investigation such as this one into a period of English culture when modernity was rampant and overt or radical modernism disavowed, this is a vital insight. It means that we can understand the whole corpus of activity in English painting as engaged in a public definition of the modernity of its culture. In the nature of that practice, a great part of what was produced deprecated or played down the significance of this experience. The historical issue becomes one of the competition of meaning which this situation produced.

In *The Modernity of English Art* the central theme around which this work is done is that of the fortunes of modernism as a public practice and a public discourse about the culture's modernity. In England, the distance between Wadsworth's work in 1914 and in 1928 describes the difficulties of evolving and sustaining a credible diagnosis of modernity through modernist painting in this country. English modernism as an independent tool of knowledge collapses or at least comes under a crippling strain in the post-war decade, so that the idea of modern painting itself becomes fragmented, split into a number of competing definitions – stylistic, critical, hedonistic – in such a way that there emerges a competition of modernisms, each of which takes up a discernible position relative to modernity, but many of which support and sustain uncritical readings of that condition. This is a lesson both about the power of cultural forms and about the processes of negotiation which such situations impose on individuals and artistic practice. English art after 1918 faces the potential of diagnosis only with acute difficulty.

In a 1918 paper on 'Science as a Vocation' Max Weber makes a distinction between the public and private realms as defining categories of modern experience:

> The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world.' Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations. It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental.[50]

In a world in which the limits of experience are articulated through rationalisation and are inimical to alternative values, the public spaces in which value is articulated in the culture are hard to penetrate or capture for different readings of modernity. Weber's point is not that accounts of experience which do not conform to the dominating ideologies of the public sphere are reduced to the point of silence. He conceives of 'intimate' art in this sense as a feasible arena of endeavour. The problem is deeper, certainly in the English context. Art itself is a public language, and the limits of what can be said and represented are defined by the limits of the public realm. In English art after 1918, critical or evaluative accounts of modernity were constrained, as they were in other areas of the culture. The thematics of the private experience of modernity, its intimate pressure on private lives, was compelled to remain largely at the level of the private. There was no established space for its exploration at the level of public debate through the medium of painting.

In the twenties this crippling of modernism as a public language came about as part of a broader sense within the culture that modernity was suspect, something to be evaded or denied. In August 1925, Stanley Baldwin, then Prime Minister, gave a speech at Bewdley in Worcestershire called 'My Native Town.' It is a short piece, and it ends with an evocation of the river Severn, which flows through Bewdley, as a symbol of reconciliation in an age of disruption and violence:

> I think Severn can teach us something to-day. Rising on the slopes of Plinlimmon, she has flowed from and through Wales into England ... For centuries she served as a boundary and dividing line, respected by Rome and by the Celt; yet the time came when she was no longer a dividing line, but the proof of union and friendship; and while long years ago she poured her waters through country full of strife and fighting, she now waters peaceful meadows and passes through peaceful towns, with dismantled castles. It may well be that, just as she has seen strife in this country turn

> to peace, so again to-day, in an age when the clouds are heavy and charged with electricity, she may once more see the storm pass. But she reminds us that these things change and are effaced like the eddies on her stream; and as of old, her deep waters will flow on through Bewdley, carrying their peace to the dwellers on Severnside, and their healing message into the heart of England.[51]

The sentiments here, of peace, unity, and resolution, are clear enough. The 'deep waters' of history calm and reconcile the transient foam of conflict; but they do so at the cost of any language whatsoever which addresses the actual conditions of that conflict. What is lost in Baldwin's metaphor is the ability to speak modernity, to clarify and evaluate the meaning of contemporary experience of cultural conflict in a language which addresses it directly. 'My Native Town' is well mannered, well intentioned, and infinitely distant from the problems to which it refers; and it is entirely typical of Baldwin's speechifying as a public discourse.[52]

In *The Modernity of English Art* I trace the modes in which the registration of modernity under these circumstances took place in English painting from the advent of Vorticism in 1914, via the impact of the war, to the end of the 1920s. I connect the 'historically curiously rootless' character of the twenties 'in contrast with the art of the pre-war and war years' noted by Charles Harrison, to the problems of coming to terms with modernity in a situation where modernism was highly suspect.[53] The sense of a separation of art from the concerns of the wider culture, often conceptualised as 'retrenchment,' is intimately bound up with painting's equivocal relationship to the processes of modernity that were both continuing to demand expression and yet nearly impossible to address directly.[54]

The great promise of modernism in 1914, that painting could provide a public language for the evaluation of the conditions of modernity, seemed briefly credible. Vorticism as a 'movement' sought to scrutinise and define the nature and consequences of modernisation on English life, and the Vorticists lived out – in social, sexual, and professional spheres – the complexity of that process. Or tried to. If the ideal which this embodies was never fully realised, it was nonetheless compelling for that. In chapter 1, on 'radical modernism,' I argue that even at its supposed high point in 1914, modernism was always a compromised formulation in England. Its promise of a radical public language with which to evaluate and comprehend modernity depended on a shaky anchorage in the shifting sands of English culture. Once the war had begun to enforce a reformulation of priorities, modernism could not withstand the consequent changes, and rapidly ceased to be allowable as an idiom or set of concerns. Following on from this, chapter 2 reviews the pressure of modernity across the culture in the twenties, and connects the general difficulty in formulating a language of diagnosis and attention with which

to engage the experience of that situation to the revision of modernist practice which came to dominate the fine arts during the same years. The consignment of modernism to a function of design and the influence of Bloomsbury theorists and painters form the central themes in the discussion.

Chapters 3 and 4 concentrate on the response to this situation by individual artists. Chapter 3 considers the response of Paul Nash, a younger artist who had been attracted by Vorticism, but who had not taken part in the events of 1914. Nash negotiates the pressure of modernity as a theme, and modernism as a critical practice, in his works of the twenties and early thirties, but in an oblique manner which registers the difficulties of articulating these issues in post-war English culture. Chapter 4 looks at the abandonment of painting and the turn to a written justification of his marginalisation evident in the work of Wyndham Lewis during the twenties. In this, Lewis is taken as the limit case of the consequences of the reformulation of cultural opportunity for the rebels of 1914, the example of a radical modernist whose radicalism dwindles in the twenties into a purely textual world where the project to return art to life can be pursued in fantasy outside the public realm. Chapter 5 looks at modes of nostalgia in the art of the twenties, both in the revisionist writings of the Sitwells, and as symptoms of the struggle to reconstitute a viable radical practice by ex-rebels of 1914 like C. R. W. Nevinson and Wadsworth. Chapter 6 looks at the presence of modernity in academic artists and in artists whose work carries forward an earlier modernism in the form of English Impressionism. Even under the most extreme conditions of stylistic denial, modernity continually surfaces as a theme and condition of production. This chapter also provides a concluding survey of the main arguments of the book by drawing attention once again to the theme of the contestation of understanding.

Many of the paintings dealt with in these chapters are not modernist in any sense recognisable within the definitions of critical practice I offered above. Nonetheless, they all show signs of their constitution under the regime of modernity, and a thematics of modern experience is discernible in them all. Beyond that, there is a distinction to be made between works which attempt or court a critical negation or diagnosis of the conditions of experience under modernity, and those in which modernity is replayed or refigured in a passive or mimetic spirit. The history of the twenties in England is largely a history of the disavowal of critical modernism and the return of modernity in other and less focused guises. For English culture as a whole in the 1920s there is a complex hesitancy about relations to modernity, and the art production of the decade registers the problematic of the perception of modernity under the new post-war conditions. This is as true of non-modernist as of modernist art, and so what follows is not an attempt to proselytise on behalf of either modernism or non-modernism;

nor – to burlesque my own argument – is it an attempt to make Alfred Munnings out to be a closet Vorticist. The book offers its history not through polemics about modernism or the native tradition, but through a fresh perspective which seeks to investigate the relationship between modernity and the art which painters made.

Notes

1 Whereas over the last few years there has been a noticeable growth of interest in post-First World War art and culture in continental Europe, the art of the British Isles in the period between the end of the Great War and the reappearance of modernism as a significant force towards the end of the 1920s remains a neglected subject. On the continental history see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting,' *October*, 16, Spring (1981), pp. 39–68; Christopher Green, *Cubism and its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916–1928*, New Haven and London, 1987; Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925*, London, 1989; Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Léger, de Chirico and the New Classicism, 1910–1930*, exhib. cat., Tate Gallery, London, 1990; Briony Fer, David Batchelor, and Paul Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars*, New Haven and London, 1993. As this book was in its final draft Romy Golan's *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars*, New Haven and London, 1995, also appeared to reinforce this strand of scholarship.

2 I am not suggesting that Wadsworth necessarily thought of himself as a surrealist, but that, as Jeremy Lewison has noted, his works of this period have surrealist qualities in their presentation of decontextualised and 'metamorphic' objects. See Jeremy Lewison, 'The Marine Still Lifes and Later Nautical Paintings,' in *A Genius of Industrial England: Edward Wadsworth, 1889–1949* ed. Jeremy Lewison, exhib. cat., Bradford, 1990, p. 70.

3 It was not until the 1950s that modernism began to become accepted as an orthodoxy in British painting, and even then it was subject to challenge from an alternative tradition which thought of itself in a different way.

4 Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900*, London, 1986, p. 7.

5 The most concise summary of the exhibition's point of view is the 'Exhibition Gallery Guide,' 'British Art in the Twentieth Century: The Modern Movement,' London, 1987, Andrew Causey, 'The Modern in British Art,' *Art and Design*, '20th Century British Art' issue (February 1987), p. 49. Andrew Causey was the Chairman of the Selection Committee for the RA show. The recent desire to articulate postmodernism against its predecessor has brought into prominence definitions of modernism which focus on its thematic concerns: with memory and duration (See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London and New York, 1991), with 'some grand narrative' (Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester, 1984, p. xxiii), or with 'a changed consciousness of time' (Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project,' in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, London and Sydney, 1985, p. 5). Other studies have added to, or expanded, this emphasis, particularly by stressing the modernist commitment to innovation and self-differentiation from the art of the past and by drawing attention to its dependence on the rhetoric of the group. For a survey of work on modernism which is also a contribution to the debate, see Francis Frascina, 'Modernist Studies: The Class of '84,' *Art History*, 8:4 (1985), pp. 515–30.

6 Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism, 1900–1939*, London and Bloomington, Indiana, 1981, pp. 6, 203. The result is that Harrison rules himself out of a revisionist consideration of modernism in the decade.

7 Notwithstanding the continuing relevance of formalist definitions of modernism, the broad direction in which current scholarship is heading is to attempt to read the formal properties and the explicit preoccupations of high cultural modernism within a newly established historical framework. This willingness to replace modernism within the processes of its culture is as much a feature of Christopher Green's investigation of 'a field of forces where different but interrelated conflicts can be observed and in which clearly distinct stances (including Modernism) achieve periods of hegemony' (Green, *Cubism and its Enemies*, p. 4), as of the culturalist literary criticism of Richard Sheppard ('The Problematics of European Modernism,' in *Theorizing Modernism: Essays in Critical Theory*, ed. Steve Giles, London and New York, 1993) or Frederic Jameson. See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca, NY, 1981, and Sanford Schwartz, *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot and Early Twentieth Century Thought*, Princeton, NJ, 1985, whose methodology Sheppard cites with approval. For an interesting and relevant attempt to read English culture in the inter-war period, see Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith, *Cinema, Literature and Society: Elite and Mass Culture in Interwar Britain*, Beckenham, 1987.

8 On the general question of the relationship between modernity and modernism see Steve Giles, 'Afterword: Avant-Garde, Modernism, Modernity: A Theoretical Overview,' in *Theorizing Modernism: Essays in Critical Theory*.

9 See Greenberg's contribution, 'To Cope with Decadence,' T. J. Clark's 'More on the Differences Between Comrade Greenberg and Ourselves,' and the 'Discussion' sessions reported at the end of each paper and at the end of the volume as 'General Panel Discussion,' in *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1983, pp. 161–94; 265–77.

10 Harrison, *English Art and Modernism*, p. 349, note 11.

11 Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting,' in *Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Oxford, 1992, p. 756.

12 Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting,' p. 760.

13 Buchloh, Guilbaut and Solkin, eds, *Modernism and Modernity*, pp. xi, xiii.

14 *Ibid.*, p. xii.

15 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, Manchester and Minneapolis, 1984, p. 49.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Wyndham Lewis, 'Dean Swift with a Brush: The Tyroist Explains his Art,' *Daily Express*, 11 April 1921.

19 Buchloh, Guilbaut, and Solkins, eds, *Modernism and Modernity*, p. 253.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*, p. 255.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 256.

23 See, however, Theo Cowdell, 'The Role of the Royal Academy in English Art, 1918–1930,' 2 vols, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1980.

24 For a recent and subtle example of this see the essays in Francis Frascina *et al.*, *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New Haven and London, 1993. As this implies, the art historical tradition has focused predominantly on the French experience.

25 See on this point David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin*, Cambridge and Oxford, 1985, p. 247, and his *Simmel and Since: Essays on Georg Simmel's Social Theory*, London, 1992, pp. 66–7.

26 Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life,' in his *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* trans. Jonathan Mayne, Oxford, 1964, p. 13.

27 Stuart Hall, 'Introduction,' in *Formations of Modernity* ed., Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, Cambridge, 1992, p. 15. The sociological tradition of investigation of modernity which this derives from would include Simmel and, latterly, Richard Sennett; see George Simmel, 'The Stranger' and 'The Metropolis and Mental Life,' in *The Sociology of George Simmel*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff, New York, 1950, and Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, Cambridge, 1974 and *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*, London, 1990. See also the comments in Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity,' *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2: 3 (1985), p. 38. See also Peter Osborne 'Modernity is a Qualitative, not a Chronological, Category,' *New Left Review*, 192 (1992).

28 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, London, 1983, p. 15. See Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution,' *New Left Review*, 144 (1984), in part a critique of Berman's book, and Berman's reply in the same issue, 'The Signs in the Street: A Response to Perry Anderson.'

29 See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–05), London, 1971, pp. 181–3.

30 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), trans. John Cumming, London, 1979, pp. xiii. They argue for the necessity of enduring the paradoxes and potential violence of modernity, rather than for repudiating it and its project entirely. It is not a prescription for a postmodern understanding of modernity, but for a reformulation and novel engagement with its challenges which arises from the project of modernity itself. Modernism – despite its many utopian moments – sought to diagnose and explicate modernity from within its processes, not to prise itself free of that condition. Habermas's attempt to rescue 'the project of modernity' from its postmodern critics and to reassert its contemporary relevance and explanatory force confirms this reading. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge, 1987 and 'Modernity: An Incomplete Project,' *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Foster, pp. 3–15.

31 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xiii.

32 Frank Kermode attempted a 'discrimination of modernisms' in 'The Modern,' in *Modern Essays*, London, 1971. See also his *Continuities* (London, 1968) and *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford, 1968).

33 Munroe K. Spears, *Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth Century Poetry*, Oxford, 1970, p. 34.

34 Alan Wilde, *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination*, Baltimore and London, 1981, p. 3.

35 See, for instance, Tom Gibbons, 'Modernism and Reactionary Politics,' *Journal of Modern Literature*, 3:5 (1973), pp. 1140–57.

36 Richard Sheppard, 'The Problematics of European Modernism,' *Theorizing Modernism: Essays in Critical Theory*, ed. Giles, p. 8.

37 This has similarities with Georg Lukács's argument in his critical evaluation of modernism; see his *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander, London, 1963.

38 See Hall, 'Introduction,' *Formations of Modernity*, pp. 10–11.

39 Malcolm Bradbury, 'Modernism,' in *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, ed. Roger Fowler, London, 1973, p. 117. This possibility was enshrined within literary discussions of modernism as early as the 1960s, when Stephen Spender in *The Struggle of the Modern* (London, 1963) sought to make a distinction between 'modern' and contemporary' writers. See also Raymond Williams, 'When was Modernism?' in *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, ed. Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris, London, 1992, pp. 24–5.

40 Janet Wolff's critique of orthodox readings of modernism and modernity as implicitly gendered is one illustration of this. See above note 27.

41 See, for instance, Chris Jenks, *Culture*, London 1993, and Robert Bocock, 'The Cultural Formations of Modern Society,' in *Formations of Modernity* ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, for two recent attempts to summarise and explain current uses of the concept.

42 Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, London, 1983, p. 87.

43 See Lynn Hunt, 'Introduction: History, Culture, and Text,' in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt, Berkeley, 1989.

44 Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France*, Manchester and New York, 1990, p. 3.

45 See Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge, 1984.

46 See Pierre Bourdieu, 'Conclusion: Classes and Classifications,' in his *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* trans. Richard Nice, London, 1986.

47 Roger Chartier, 'Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories,' in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, ed. Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan, Ithaca, NY and London, 1982, pp. 40–1.

48 On this see the arguments by Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature*, pp. 4–5, and Christopher Green, *Cubism and Enemies*, p. 301, note 16, and more generally Anthony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies*, London, 1991.

49 T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, London, 1990, p. 147. I have found Clark's discussion of Impressionism from this perspective important in thinking about the issues of modernity in post-war England.

50 Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, London 1970, p. 155. I am indebted to the discussion of this passage by Douglas Tallack, in his *Twentieth-Century America: The Intellectual and Cultural Context*, London and New York, 1991, p. 21, where it was drawn to my attention.

51 Stanley Baldwin, *On England and Other Addresses*, London, 1926, p. 13. For the literature on modernity and English culture see especially Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis,' in his *English Questions*, London, 1992; Robert Colls and Philip Dodds, eds, *Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880–1920*; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983; E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English,' in his *The Poverty of Theory*, London, 1978. Most recently see Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea, eds, *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, London, 1996, which appeared while this book was in the press.

52 See Bill Schwartz, 'The Language of Constitutionalism: Baldwinite Conservatism,' *Formations of Nature and People*, London, 1984, pp. 1–18.

53 Harrison, *English Art and Modernism*, p. 167.

54 While this book was in the press, Janet Wolff's study of Mark Gertler, 'The Failure of a Hard Sponge: Class, Ethnicity and the Art of Mark Gertler' appeared in a special issue of *New Formations*, 28 (Spring 1996), on 'Conservative Modernity.' Wolff's essay marks an important contribution to the re-evaluation of English art and modernity in the early twentieth century.

Chapter 1

Radical modernism, 1914–18

'I MIGHT HAVE BEEN at the head of a social revolution [in 1914] instead of merely being the prophet of a new fashion in art,' wrote Wyndham Lewis in his first, revisionist, autobiography, *Blasting and Bombardiering*.[1] Lewis's irony was palpable in 1937, but in the months before the outbreak of war Lewis and the modernists really might have been forgiven for imagining themselves permanently anchored within the practices of English culture. Radical art became a fashionable enthusiasm, artists were fêted and lionised, and their work seemed to attract an interest which implied a secure future within the options open to English artists. As it turned out, that imagined future was chimerical. The hold which modernism had on its audience as an expression of their modernity proved extremely fragile and susceptible to challenge, and enthusiasm for its account of the contemporary crumbled away under the impact of the First World War. That process was made easier because of the ambiguous relationships between the Vorticists' English modernism, socially acceptable iconoclasm, and a radically oppositional account of modernity which would qualify as 'avant-garde' in Peter Bürger's sense. Lewis's powerful self-presentation of the radical artist and his overt declaration of a critical reading of modernity go some way towards hiding the fact that his success in 1914 was not based on those grounds, but was the result of complicity with the fashionable assessment of modernism as an entertainment and novelty. Moreover, the detail of Lewis's oppositional reading of modernity and the role of art practice as a critical tool in effect reinforces that complicity. Lewis's aesthetics and painting contain important elements which locate art at such a distance from social reality that he proves to be arguing for an autonomous and independent art, rather than for engagement and opposition. The appearance of a critical avant-garde in 1914 represented by Lewis and Vorticism is in important ways an illusion, a fact that was to have a considerable impact on the health and vigour of British modernism as an engagement with modernity over the subsequent decades.