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TRINITY COLLEGE

FINE ART EDUCATION IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE INFLUENCE OF MODERNISM ON THE CURRICULUM OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN, 1975-1988

BY

PETER O' NEILL

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SEPTEMBER 2001

VOLUME I

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. To these people I am forever indebted. For her constant support, understanding and encouragement I must first thank Vivienne. Without her this work would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their support. To my brother Lorcan, in particular, I owe special thanks for his assistance, unfailing support, and forbearance. I would also like to thank the many members of the Dublin art world who gave freely of their time in discussing the recent history of the National College of Art and Design. I would like to thank the staff in the library at Trinity College Dublin, and particularly those in the Lecky Library, who were always helpful, accommodating and friendly. I would like to thank the staff in the library at the National College of Art and Design for their help, and in particular Edward Murphy, the librarian of the college. Special thanks must also go to Lea Benson, archivist at the National Council for Educational Awards. I am particularly indebted to Campbell Bruce for his generosity in providing time, information, and documentation. To my Professor, Valentine Rice, I owe a particular debt. For his support, encouragement, stimulation, and inspiration I am forever grateful. I thank him for his patience, for his understanding, for his advice and for his support throughout my time at Trinity College Dublin.

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ABSTRACT

FINE ART EDUCATION IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE INFLUENCE OF MODERNISM ON THE CURRICULUM OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN,1975-1988

In 1975 a major change was brought about in the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at The National College of Art and Design in Dublin. The introduction of this curriculum followed a period of unrest at the college. This unrest was a direct consequence of major social changes that had taken place in Ireland throughout the 1960s. These changes saw Ireland shed the isolationist political philosophy of the new state that had followed independence and adopt a new outward looking philosophy. The principal effect of this change at the college in Dublin in the 1960s was a rebellion by students against what they perceived, in the light of the above changes, as an outmoded curriculum. The values of the curriculum that students rejected were rooted in the neo-classical curricula of the eighteenth century academies of art and the nationalist political ideology of post-independent Ireland. The values that students espoused were those of modernism. Following the student rebellion a new structure was introduced at the school of art in Dublin. This structure was modeled on the system of art education that had been developed in Britain in the 1960s in the context of the rapid expansion of the British education system at that time. Fine art education in Britain as it developed at this time owed much to the reformative aspect of developments that took place in British society and education after the Second World War and in particular to the influence of the so-called Coldstream Report of 1960.

This study sets out to establish what lay behind the new curriculum that was introduced in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988, the year in which the current course document was written. In order to do this the origins of the system that was introduced in Britain after 1960 are looked at. This involves an examination of certain developments that took place in art education in Britain in the nineteenth century, when the foundations of the innovations that took place in the period after the Second World War were laid down. These developments include the development of the Schools of Design under William Dyce and the Schools of Art under Henry Cole. Other relevant developments that took place in the nineteenth century are also examined, including the development of the arts and crafts aesthetic and a functionalist aesthetic, both of which influenced the subsequent development of art and design education at third level in Britain. Other

advances that took place in fine art education during the nineteenth century are also examined. These include the development of an aesthetic at the Slade School of Art in London that focussed on the analysis of form through the use of drawing. The development of tertiary level fine art education in Britain throughout the twentieth century is then examined, with particular reference to the period after the Second World War when the so-called Basic Design system of art education was developed. The principles that underpinned fine art education as it developed in Britain throughout the 1960s and 1970s having been established, the impact of this system on the art schools is examined. This is done through the use of available documentation.

The author goes on to give a brief overview of the development of fine art education at the school of art in Dublin from its foundation in the eighteenth century to the late twentieth century. Using course documents and other relevant documentation the author then analyses the curriculum that was introduced at the school of art in Dublin in 1975 in order to establish the principles, ideas, and forces that lay behind this curriculum and to establish its objectives. The author then goes on to examine the impact of this curriculum on students.

Difficulties that arose as a consequence of a clash between staff and students who espoused the new curriculum at the college in Dublin and staff and students who rejected it are then examined. This is done through the use of interviews with students and staff who attended the college between 1975 and 1988. The author goes on to draw parallels between the curriculum that was introduced at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin and the curricula that were developed in British art schools in the post-Coldstream era. The response of students to both systems is compared and the influence of the curriculum on the work of contemporary Irish artists is then examined.

The author establishes that there are strong similarities between the system of fine art education that was developed in Britain after the Second World War, and in particular after the publication of the Coldstream Report of 1960, and the curriculum that was introduced in the Fine Art faculty at The National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975. The author also establishes that the conflict that took place in the Fine Art faculty at the college in Dublin between 1975 and 1988 was more than a conflict between two different sets of aesthetic value systems: the neo-classical system and the modernist system. The author points out that the conflict between these two systems was largely a struggle for hegemony in a complex situation that had many facets, at a time when the nationalist state was going through a major crisis, both politically and economically – the conflict in the North of Ireland were at its height between 1975 and 1988. The author concludes by pointing out that the two opposing value systems within the Fine Art faculty, the neo-classical and the modernist, which in many ways were related and which both had their origins in the Enlightenment, were struggling for hegemony at a time when the shared tenets of both the neo-classical system and of the modernist system of art education – the existence of fundamental truths - were being challenged by the advent of post-modernism.

PART I

FINE ART EDUCATION IN BRITAIN

INTRODUCTION

The Neo-Classical Tradition in Art Education

During the Renaissance artists and craftsmen were trained in the workshop and the guild. According to Peter Burke, the rigorous thirteen years of apprenticeship undertaken by potential craftsmen and described by the Florentine painter and writer Cennino Cennini (1370-1440) in *Il Libro dell' Arte*, which was the most important source concerning artistic practice in the late middle ages, is probably an exaggeration. In making this statement Burke points out that the thirteenth-century statutes of the painters' guild in Venice, which remained in force during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, laid down that a craftsman had to be an apprentice for five to seven years and a journeyman for two to three years, before being allowed to 'graduate', to make a 'masterpiece' and become a master, with the right to open his own shop. In other words, it could take anything from seven to ten years to train as an artist/craftsman. Although Burke also suggests that this may be more the ideal than the reality, he makes it clear that the system of training artists during the Renaissance was rigorous, and that the duration of this training was considerable.[1]

At the core of the workshop system of training was the master-apprentice relationship. This was a close relationship, according to Burke, and this closeness was of great consequence in the education of craftsmen. This is illustrated by the fact that

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[1] Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1972), 43-53.

apprentices often formed part of the extended family of their master, living in his house, getting their food and clothes from him, and sometimes even taking his name. The master-apprenticeship relationship of the workshops, having been replaced by the academies of art in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was to be revived by reformers in the nineteenth century. Though not reinstated along the lines of the Renaissance model this relationship was nevertheless to have a significant role to play in British and Irish tertiary art education in the twentieth century.

The demise of the workshop system of training for artists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries coincided with the rise of the academies of art, and the rise of the academies of art coincided with the Enlightenment. The type of teaching available at the academies was therefore underpinned by the values of the Enlightenment. As the historian of the Enlightenment Peter Gay has said, "The age of the Enlightenment was an age of Academies".[2] The success of this new system of training is illustrated by the rapid increase in the number of academies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By 1800 there were over one hundred academies of art flourishing throughout Europe. The curricula at these academies were founded on the assumption that the essentials of the fine arts of painting, drawing, and sculpture could be understood rationally. It was also assumed that they could be reduced to logical precepts, and it was these that formed the core of the curriculum. An example of such a precept was the notion of the golden section. The golden section was based on the proportion 8:13, which was said, because of its mathematical properties, to posses inherent aesthetic value. It was much studied during the Renaissance and in the eighteenth century.

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[2] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 9.

The rise of the academies of art during the late Renaissance and their establishment as the principal place of training for artists was co-incidental with the rise in the status of the artist. It is no accident that the first proper academy of art was founded by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), the artist, biographer, and art historian, as he is noted for giving widespread currency to the idea of the artist as godlike in his book *Lives of the Painters*.[3] Vasari was influenced in his thinking by Marsiglio Ficino (1433-1499), the Humanist philosopher, whose translations and commentaries generated the Florentine Platonist Revival.[4] Ficino's contribution to Renaissance thinking was the interpretation of Christianity according to Neoplatonic doctrine. Ficino was widely respected and hugely influential in his day, and he gave the artist an especially exalted position in society by raising the status of man's achievements:

> Since man has understood the order of the celestial spheres - from whence they are moved, where and in what measure they proceed, what they produce - who can deny that he is nearly of the same genius as the author of the spheres and that he could, in a certain sense, make the heavens if he could obtain the instruments and the celestial matter?[5]

It is noteworthy that in improving the status of the artist Ficino focused on the importance of the artist as a manipulator of materials. In stating that "man is God over

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[4] Peter Burke, *The Renaissance,* Studies in European History (London: Macmillan, 1987), 13 -15.

[5] Marsiglio Ficino, *Opera 1*, Basileae 1576, 296; quoted in Jean Gimpel, *Against Art and Artists* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), 37.

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A necessary concomitant of the improvement in the status of the artist was closer association between the artist and the ruling authority. This further necessitated not only the elimination of the control that the Guilds exerted, but also the creation of substitute structures to replace them. The academies fulfilled the latter role. Vasari's academy was associated with Cosimo de Medici, the first representative of modern absolutism and embryonic capitalism,[7] and the *Academie Royale de la Peinture et Sculpture* was founded in 1648 with the patronage of Louis XIV.[8] The founding of the French Academy involved much intrigue, and makes a good case study of the struggle for power between the old and new systems.[9]

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[6] Ibid., 37.

[7] Burke, *Renaissance Italy*, 3-21.

[8] Sjoerd Hannema, *Fads, Fakes and Fantasies: The Crisis in the Art Schools and the Crisis in Art* (London: Macdonald, 1970), 26.

[9] For a very good and brief account of this particular conflict, see Thomas B. Hess and John Ashberry, ed., *Academic Art* (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1968), 27-39. It is interesting to speculate that the substitution of the academies, which were under royal patronage, for the guilds, which had special 'liberties', represented a retrograde step on the road to the development of the type of liberal bourgeois society that was to develop in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that the development of an avant-garde in the nineteenth century was a reaction to this. The symbiotic relationship between the avant-garde, which grew out of Romanticism, and the bourgeois that Peter Gay explores in *Pleasure Wars* is interesting in this context. The avant-garde was to have a significant influence on third level art education in Britain and Ireland in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century.

Though defined in different ways during the Renaissance and in the eighteenth century, Neo-classicism was the dominant style of art throughout Europe at the time of the founding of the academies. It was thus, not surprisingly, the style favoured by the academy. The curriculum, which varied little from academy to academy, is worth describing, chiefly because of its similarity with the curriculum of the National College of Art in Dublin until the 1970s.[10]

At the academies, where the pencil was the principle tool, all students were put through the same routines. Students began by copying from line engravings of ears, eyes, and noses, which were taken from the work of approved masters such as Raphael, Michelangelo and Poussin. After these had been mastered students progressed to executing limbs. In order to master the depiction of light and shade students went on to draw from plaster casts of simple objects, for example, a bunch of grapes or a sphere. Having completed this stage, students then went on to copy casts from the antique, and finally, when they showed proficiency, they were allowed to enter the life class. In the life class the professors set a pose which would be held for a number of days. This whole process was backed up by lectures in anatomy and perspective.[11]

The type of teaching available at the various academies of art throughout Europe at this time is described in a letter written to the parents of the German painter Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869) by the Director of the Vienna Academy. This letter was written in order to reassure Overbeck's parents of the solid training their son would receive while attending the academy. The letter was written shortly after Overbeck arrived at the academy.

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[10] See appendix 4.

[11] Hannema, *Fads, Fakes and Fantasies*, 28,

INTRODUCTION

The Neo-Classical Tradition in Art Education

During the Renaissance artists and craftsmen were trained in the workshop and the guild. According to Peter Burke, the rigorous thirteen years of apprenticeship undertaken by potential craftsmen and described by the Florentine painter and writer Cennino Cennini (1370-1440) in *Il Libro dell' Arte*, which was the most important source concerning artistic practice in the late middle ages, is probably an exaggeration. In making this statement Burke points out that the thirteenth-century statutes of the painters' guild in Venice, which remained in force during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, laid down that a craftsman had to be an apprentice for five to seven years and a journeyman for two to three years, before being allowed to 'graduate', to make a 'masterpiece' and become a master, with the right to open his own shop. In other words, it could take anything from seven to ten years to train as an artist/craftsman. Although Burke also suggests that this may be more the ideal than the reality, he makes it clear that the system of training artists during the Renaissance was rigorous, and that the duration of this training was considerable.[1]

At the core of the workshop system of training was the master-apprentice relationship. This was a close relationship, according to Burke, and this closeness was of great consequence in the education of craftsmen. This is illustrated by the fact that

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[1] Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1972), 43-53.

apprentices often formed part of the extended family of their master, living in his house, getting their food and clothes from him, and sometimes even taking his name. The master-apprenticeship relationship of the workshops, having been replaced by the academies of art in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was to be revived by reformers in the nineteenth century. Though not reinstated along the lines of the Renaissance model this relationship was nevertheless to have a significant role to play in British and Irish tertiary art education in the twentieth century.

The demise of the workshop system of training for artists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries coincided with the rise of the academies of art, and the rise of the academies of art coincided with the Enlightenment. The type of teaching available at the academies was therefore underpinned by the values of the Enlightenment. As the historian of the Enlightenment Peter Gay has said, "The age of the Enlightenment was an age of Academies".[2] The success of this new system of training is illustrated by the rapid increase in the number of academies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By 1800 there were over one hundred academies of art flourishing throughout Europe. The curricula at these academies were founded on the assumption that the essentials of the fine arts of painting, drawing, and sculpture could be understood rationally. It was also assumed that they could be reduced to logical precepts, and it was these that formed the core of the curriculum. An example of such a precept was the notion of the golden section. The golden section was based on the proportion 8:13, which was said, because of its mathematical properties, to posses inherent aesthetic value. It was much studied during the Renaissance and in the eighteenth century.

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[2] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 9.

The rise of the academies of art during the late Renaissance and their establishment as the principal place of training for artists was co-incidental with the rise in the status of the artist. It is no accident that the first proper academy of art was founded by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), the artist, biographer, and art historian, as he is noted for giving widespread currency to the idea of the artist as godlike in his book *Lives of the Painters*.[3] Vasari was influenced in his thinking by Marsiglio Ficino (1433-1499), the Humanist philosopher, whose translations and commentaries generated the Florentine Platonist Revival.[4] Ficino's contribution to Renaissance thinking was the interpretation of Christianity according to Neoplatonic doctrine. Ficino was widely respected and hugely influential in his day, and he gave the artist an especially exalted position in society by raising the status of man's achievements:

> Since man has understood the order of the celestial spheres - from whence they are moved, where and in what measure they proceed, what they produce - who can deny that he is nearly of the same genius as the author of the spheres and that he could, in a certain sense, make the heavens if he could obtain the instruments and the celestial matter?[5]

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The type of teaching available at the various academies of art throughout Europe at this time is described in a letter written to the parents of the German painter Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869) by the Director of the Vienna Academy. This letter was written in order to reassure Overbeck's parents of the solid training their son would receive while attending the academy. The letter was written shortly after Overbeck arrived at the academy.

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[10] See appendix 4.

[11] Hannema, *Fads, Fakes and Fantasies*, 28.

> He is at liberty to visit me in my studio as often as he likes and to show me his work if he cares to know my opinion about it. From the studies which he had brought with him, I saw however that he had up to now no opportunity to study from actual painterly or academic drawings. Of these there are a great number here, and from these he must first exercise his hand and become fluent in the mechanism of the various kinds of drawing, before he can proceed with painting and the more difficult parts of it. These preliminary studies may well take several years, and will indicate the definite direction which his art is taking, and from which one can judge the degree of ability of a pupil. I have given him a place in the department of elementary historical drawing, where one works the whole day from the best academic drawings. In the morning from six to eight he draws from nature in the rooms with antique statues, skeletons and later from the large anatomical statue, the work of our Professor of Sculpture and Artistic Anatomy Martin Fischer, with which all our pupils begin in order to become thoroughly familiar with the inner construction of the human figure. By this method they become knowledgeable draughtsmen if they have talent, and will not be led astray by dark fantasies of mere untaught sentiment and look with disdain on this after all easy scientific knowledge, which is so necessary for the performance of the arts. Steady application and the example of so many other students will help him to step higher and higher. I shall look at his work from time to time and be glad to give him a helping hand if he will accept my counsels. But I have to tell you that to make corrections in the public lessons is the business of the professors in our academies. To teach the application of one's draughtsmanship to painting, once it has been learnt in these lessons, is the function of the director of this school. Thus I get a closer look at the students after they have passed their first lessons.[12]

The neo-classical system that is described in the above letter dominated the fine art curriculum in British art schools until the 1950s and that of the National College of Art in Dublin until the early 1970s. The similarities with the neo-classical curriculum in Dublin are striking. The transition between the old neo-classical system and the system that followed it at the National College of Art was both dramatic and arduous, and in the end it necessitated government intervention; it also involved much intrigue. The dominance of the neo-classical system at the National College of Art ended with the passing of the *National College of Art and Design Act* in 1971.

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[12] Keith Andrews, *The Nazarenes: A Brotherhood of German Painters in Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 5.

The overall objective of the present study is to examine the development of fine art education in Britain since the eighteenth century and to locate developments in fine art education at the art school in Dublin in this context. The particular objective of this study is to establish what lay behind the new curriculum that came into being after 1971 at the National College of Art and Design, when the changeover from the neo-classical system to a new Modernist inspired curriculum took place, and to establish the effectiveness of this curriculum.

The Influence of the Romantic Movement and Modernism on Art Education

The Royal Academy was founded in 1768, and until the latter half of the nineteenth century the Royal Academy Schools were the most prestigious art schools in Great Britain. The motive in founding the academy was threefold: to establish an outlet to sell members work, to uphold canons of good taste, and to put in place a sound system of training for artists. The overall aim of the academy was to found a national school of art. It had the further and more broadly based aim of encouraging appreciation of art in the public, and it served, until the opening of the National Gallery in 1824, as a repository for examples of great art. The favoured style at the Royal Academy was the Grand Manner, this was the noble and flattering style of portrait and history painting popular in the eighteenth century. Sir Joshua Reynolds, Britain's most famous exponent of the Grand Manner, was appointed first president of the Academy.[13]

At the Royal Academy, and in common with other European academies, it was believed that antique art represented the apotheosis of art. It was also believed that

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[13] Thomas B. Hess and John Ashberry, *The Academy: Five Centuries of Grandeur and Misery, from the Carracci to Mao Tse-Tung,* Art News Annual (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 39-47.

ideal Platonic forms, which lay hidden from reality, could be accessed through the study of sculpture that had survived from the Greco-Roman period. It was for this reason that students at all European academies, and often in trade schools and technical schools, had to pursue a rigorous course in drawing from the antique before they were allowed to draw from the live model. The theory was, of course, that the students, in constantly drawing ideal forms, would learn, intuitively at least, to reproduce these forms in their own work. It would also help to prevent the students from slavishly copying the imperfections of the real human form when they worked from the nude.[14] The curriculum at the Royal Academy, therefore, was constructed around the study of neo-classical precedents - the antique - and the figure, and both of these would remain at the centre of the debate about fine art education as it developed over the next two hundred years. Notwithstanding this fact, by the mid nineteenth century - a time of radical change in the fine arts - the Royal Academy, like other such academies throughout Europe, had become conservative and resistant to change.[15] This resistance to change combined with the narrow and restricted curriculum of the National System - the state supported system of art education whose focus was trade and manufactures, and which was made up of dozens of art schools throughout Britain - led to demands for change in tertiary art education. The last years of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century were, as a consequence of these demands, a time of innovation in tertiary art education in Britain. The changes that were brought about at this time had direct consequences for the curriculum at the

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[14] Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality, and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 17.

[15] Stuart Macdonald, *History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), 62. This work will be hereafter referred to as *Art Education*; *The Athenaeum,* no 1740, (2 March 1861): 298; idem, no. 1804, (24 May 1862): 694; idem, no. 1814, (2 August 1862): 148.

Metropolitan School of Art, subsequently renamed the National College of Art and later the National College of Art and Design, in Dublin.

The dominance of the neo-classical system was first challenged in the eighteenth century when artists, under the influence of the Romantic Movement, asserted their independence from the conventions of society; as Nikolaus Pevsner points out, artists had already, during the Renaissance, denounced the relation of art to craft.[16]

In Germany the growing belief that art had nothing to do with taste and theory, the legacy of Vasari, but was a matter of the unteachable creative force of genius, had developed as ideas generated by the Enlightenment evolved. The belief that art was about taste and theory had been given widespread currency in Germany by the art historian Johann Winckelmann (1717-1768). Winckelmann, who had established the primacy of Classical Greek art over Roman art in eighteenth century aesthetics, had advised artists in the heart of the Enlightenment to "dip their brush in intellect".[17] The most vociferous of the younger German artists, the neo-classical painter Asmus Jacob Carstens (1754-1798), in distancing himself from Winckelmann's influence and in pointing to a new direction which he believed artists must take, declared that rather than looking to intellect and ancient Greek models, "The artist must create from within himself".[18] Carstens, who had received a state stipend from the Prussian government to study in Rome for two years - the dream of all aspirant artists in the eighteenth century – refused, when his time was up, to return to the Berlin Academy where he had worked, and therefore to whom he owed allegiance, before he went to Rome. In refusing to return, Carstens famously sent a letter to the Prussian minister

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[16] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 204.

[17] Moshe Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art 1: From Winkelmann to Beaudelaire* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 63.

[18] Andrews, *The Nazarenes*, 3.

who had supported him, saying that his talent did not belong to the Berlin Academy but to mankind. Henceforth freedom of expression rather than imitation was to be the guiding principle for progressive artists. The development of this new philosophy, which was based on individual freedom, had a significant effect on the history of art and an equally significant effect on art education.[19] From now on progressive artists would look on the academy as a malign and stifling influence rather than a liberating one. Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), the great German painter of the Romantic Movement, summarised the type of teaching demanded by progressive artists when he said: "Let everyone have his manner and his way of expressing himself, and help the student with your advice, instead of laying down the law".[20]

As this statement encapsulates the demands of progressive artists of the Romantic era, so it describes the type of teaching available to most fine art students in Britain and Ireland today. It could be said, therefore, that just as Carsten's demand and Friedrich's comment signify the start of an era of change in art education, the advent of the so-called 'Basic Design' system of art education in Britain in the 1950s, which is looked at in Chapter 5 and which was based on self expression, marks the end of that era and the final realisation of the demands of the artists of the Romantic Movement.[21] In short, the principal change that has taken place in art education, in the period under discussion, has been from the traditional, skill based, and narrow curriculum of the academies, which was inspired by neo-classicism, to that of a more loosely structured system based on self-expression.

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[19] Hannema, *Fads, Fakes and Fantasies*, 19.

[20] Quoted in Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 205.

[21] Basic Design was the name given to a method of teaching art, which was developed in Britain after the Second World War, and which was hugely influential in the post-war era. Basic Design was developed for use at tertiary level. It will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

As the type of tertiary level art education that first became manifest in the Basic Design system marked the final realisation of the demands of the artists of the Romantic Movement for an educational system based on freedom of expression, it also marked, because it focused on the formal elements of art, the maturation of the idea of the artist as a manipulator of materials, as introduced by Ficino in the fifteenth century. Furthermore, by advocating the disinterested expression of the artist and by focusing exclusively on form rather than content, the Basic Design system marked itself out as an educational response to the aesthetic of modernism, which was the predominant artistic style of the twentieth century.

Tertiary art education in Ireland, despite political independence, has always been influenced by developments in Britain. Consequently this study starts by charting the development of tertiary art education in Britain from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the 1980s. This involves an examination of the developments in modern art and aesthetics that brought about the radical break with the old neo-classical system and which led to the development of the Basic Design system in Britain. The development of what is today called the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, but which, since 1821, has variously been called, in chronological order, the Royal Dublin Society Schools of Drawing, the Dublin School of Design, the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, and the National College of Art, is then sketched in outline from its foundation in the eighteenth century until the late 1960s. The demise of the neo-classical system at the National College of Art and Design and the advent of the new system that replaced it will then be looked at in order to describe the changeover and to establish the objectives, and the structure, of the new curriculum. This will be done by the study of the relevant documentation and by interviews with staff and students who were in the college at that time. Professor John Turpin has written the definitive study of the school of art in Dublin, which covers its entire

history.[22] The present study differs from Professor Turpin's work in that it takes an in-depth look at the Fine Art curriculum in the period after 1975, when the old neo-classical curriculum was replaced. This work examines the forces that lay behind this new curriculum and the influence that this curriculum had on students.

The cut off point of this study is 1988. The reason for choosing this year as the cut off point is twofold. Firstly, it represents the limit of Professor Campbell Bruce's tenure as head of the Faculty of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design. Campbell Bruce, who had come to the college in 1974 from England and who retired in 1987, was entirely responsible for the introduction of the course that replaced the neo-classical curriculum at the college. The second reason for choosing 1988 as the cut of point for this study is that the course document for 1988, which is the current course document, represents the culmination of curricular developments in the Fine Art Faculty after 1971. This new curriculum introduced a more modern ethos - which was of course the ethos of modernism - into the faculty of Fine Art. This ethos continues today.

Twenty-two people were interviewed formally and at length for the present study. All of these people have been involved with the National College of Art and Design, either as teachers, as students, or both, over the last forty years. Fourteen of these interviews are reproduced in the appendices that appear in Volume II of this work. The course in the Fine Art faculty at the college in Dublin throughout the period under discussion left a lasting impression on students who took it. Indeed, the writer found a high level of emotional response in many of the people with whom the recent history of the college was discussed. As well as those interviewed formally, the author

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[22] John Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century: A History of the National College of Art and Design* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995)

discussed the subject of this study at length but informally with a further seventeen people who had studied or taught at the college between 1960 and 1988.

Of those interviewed formally, thirteen had taught at the National College of Art or, after 1971, the renamed National College of Art and Design. Of this number seventeen had studied at the college. One studied at the Art Students League in New York in the 1940s. One studied at the Royal College of Art in London in the 1940s. One studied at the Bath Academy of Art in the early 1970s. And two of those interviewed had no formal art school education. Fifteen of those interviewed formally are high profile artists who are based in Ireland, and ten of those interviewed were students between 1971 and 1987.

CHAPTER 1

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FINE ART EDUCATION IN BRITAIN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

1.1 Introduction

The basic program at the academies of art throughout Europe, following the establishment of the supremacy of classical Greek art by Johann Winckelmann, as already shown, involved the study of original pieces of classical art or copies, followed by study of the living human form. There were variations on this model. In England, for example, the nude was not approached as directly as it was in France. At the Royal Academy, and before they were allowed into the life class, students followed a carefully graded course that involved copying engravings and antique casts. There was also instruction in anatomy and proportion. This instruction was given through lectures and with the aid of drawing manuals.

For the student attending the Royal Academy Schools instruction came from three sources: the Keepers, the Visitors, and the Professors.

The Keeper was the headmaster of the schools. The duties of the Keeper were laid down in the *Instrument of the Foundation of the Royal Academy*.

> His business shall be to keep the Royal Academy, with the Models, Casts, Books, and other moveables belonging thereto; to attend regularly the Schools of Design, during the sittings of the students, to preserve order among them, and to give them such advice and instruction as they shall

> require; he shall have the immediate direction of all the servants of the Academy, shall regulate all things relating to the Schools, and with the assistance of the Visitors, provide the living Models etc.[1]

The Keeper had authority in the Plaster Academy, also known as the School of Casts or the Antique School.

The Visitor had authority in the School of the Living Model or the Life School. At the Royal Academy Schools a succession of nine Visitors, who were elected from amongst the Academicians, taught in rotation for nine months of the year. This contrasted with the French system where students were taught under one master. The role of Visitors, like that of the Keeper, was laid down in the *Instrument of the Foundation of the Royal Academy*.

> Visitors . . . shall be painters of History, able Sculptors, or other persons properly qualified; their business shall be, to attend the Schools by rotation, each a month, to set the figures, to examine the performances of the Students, to advise and instruct them, to endeavour to form their taste, and turn their attention towards that branch of the arts for which they shall seem to have the aptest disposition.[2]

The teaching functions of the Keeper and of the Visitors were discreet.

The Professors formed the third branch of the teaching structure at the Royal Academy Schools. There were two types of Professor, honorary and teaching. The first need not concern us, as they had no duties, they were selected to embellish the public image of the Academy. The teaching Professors, who do concern us, were those of Anatomy, Architecture, Painting, and Perspective. The requirement of each Professor was six public lectures annually. These lectures were advertised in the press. The primary intention of the lectures was to teach the Academy students, but

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[1] H. Cliff Morgan, "The Schools of the Royal Academy," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 21 (1973): 89.

[2] Ibid., 90.

anybody else could attend. The lecturer might reasonably have expected his fellow Academicians, collectors, connoisseurs, and critics to be there. These lectures were considered to be important events and would have been reported on in the press.

H. Cliff Morgan, in his essay 'The Schools of the Royal Academy", states that the occasion of the lectures was social and hierarchical. There would be chairs in the front for guests and Academicians, benches behind for Associates, and then the benches for students. He points out that emphasis on this hierarchical display continued throughout the nineteenth century. He also points out that these lectures were not vital to the curriculum.[3]

The standard of teaching at the Royal Academy Schools varied depending on the teacher. Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), who was later Art Superintendent at the London Normal School of Design and at the Schools of Art, was a student at the Royal Academy Schools when J.M.W. Turner was a Visitor. Redgrave recalled Turner's teaching thus: "Turners conversation, his lectures, and his advice were at all times enigmatical [sic] . . . from want of verbal power. Rare advise it was if you could unriddle it, but so mysteriously given or expressed that it was hard to comprehend".[4]

According to James Hamilton, the author of a biography of Turner, Turner was a laconic presence in the schools. "'Humph!' or 'What's that for?' he might say to a student, poking him in the side and pointing at his drawing, or pulling his thumb and fingernail down over the students drawing, the more firmly to define the correct line of the figure".[5] Turner's approach to teaching bears a striking resemblance to the teaching style of Sean Keating, as recalled by former students of Keating, at the National College of Art in Dublin one hundred and fifty years later.

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[3] Ibid., 88-103

[4] James Hamilton, *Turner: A Life* (London: Sceptre,1997), 151.

[5] Ibid., 151.

When Turner was elected Professor of Perspective in December 1807 he was expected to give an annual series of six lectures on perspective, each lasting about half to three quarters of an hour to whomsoever might turn up. It was 1811 before he got around to giving his first series of lectures. In the event, according to Hamilton, the lectures were not very good, and while receiving praise they were also criticised. Turner, who did not have literary ability, was not a good speaker and his lectures were brief, they took about half an hour each.[6] John Constable (1776-1837), by contrast with Turner, was considered one of the best teachers at the schools, as were William Mulready (1786-1863) and William Etty (1787-1849). Other well-known artists who taught at the Royal Academy Schools included Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), James Barry (1741-1806), and David Wilkie (1785-1841).

When the Royal Academy was set up four male models were employed. In 1795 a female model was added, who was employed "three nights a week, every other week".[7] There was a decline in the use of the female model by 1832 when she was working only one week in four, an indication, according to some commentators, of moral rectitude. William Etty, the most conspicuous painter of the nude during the early Victorian period, and a painter whose pictures were often attacked for their alleged indecency, persuaded the Council of the college to extend this to two weeks in four in the same year. Generally speaking, in the early Victorian period male models sat for two hours, maintaining a single pose aided by a staff or rope suspended from the ceiling – a practice continued at the National College of Art in Dublin under Keating. Female models also posed for two hours, but, unlike their male counterparts,

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[6] Ibid., 130-132 and 151.

[7] Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 18.

they were granted a rest period and were arranged in poses based on antique prototypes.[8]

Young artists who aspired to enter the academy had to enrol for a term as a probationer. During this probationary period these young artists had to satisfy the members of the Academy Council that they could draw satisfactorily from the plaster casts of antique sculpture that were kept in the Academy. When J.M.W. Turner applied to enter the Academy in 1789, the last intake of students under the presidency of Sir Joshua Reynolds, each student submitted just one drawing.[9]

In the second half of the eighteenth century dissatisfaction with the system of art education provided by the academies began to manifest itself in a number of German states. In 1771 Johann Georg Sulzer, in his book *Theory of the Fine Arts*, stated that the colleges of art were called "Academies of Painting, although not mainly painting but chiefly drawing is being taught".[10] According to the art historian Keith Andrews, students were forced to copy Greek and Roman plaster casts which were often only faint echoes of the originals, an exercise, according to Andrews, that deteriorated into soulless fabrications, but was encouraged as a healthy and necessary discipline. The painter William Heinse (1746-1803), writing in 1780, made the following exclamation: "The devil take their unfelt, stone dead, Greek exercises. Let Signor Abbate Winckelmann delight in these."[11] And Ludwig Richter, a student at the Vienna Academy in 1826, described the state of affairs at the Academy in the first years of the new century thus:

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[8] Ibid., 18.

[9] Hamilton, *Turner*, 21.

[10] Keith Andrews, *The Nazarenes: A Brotherhood of German Painters in Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 2.

[11] Ibid., 2.

> Drawing at the academy after originals, and later from plaster casts was even then done very mechanically. Eyes and hands were exercised, although I did not know what the actual point of it all was. One just studied contours and endeavoured to obtain pretty hatchings. That the true object of all this was to gain the most thorough knowledge of the human body and a fine susceptibility to the beauty of its forms, and that therefore the strictest and most exact reproduction was called for, was clear neither to me nor probably to the majority of the students. It was more a mechanical copying, and the antique as well as the model were reduced by the professors to conventional forms. . . . Every speciality was taught by a different professor, so that, for instance, landscape drawing and landscape painting in oils were taught separately, and one learnt the rendering of foliage not from nature's own examples but from paper leaves carefully serrated and folded by the professor according to the 'spike oak manner' or the 'rounded lime tree manner'. . . .However, amongst the older and more gifted students a new spirit made itself felt, which was opposed to the usual teaching methods.[12]

The overriding concern of young artists like Asmus Jacob Carstens, and, later, Richter and the German painter Friedrich Overbeck, was that the teaching of the academies deprived them of all means of self expression. As Overbeck, the leading member of the group of artists known as the Nazarenes, remarked on one occasion: "If only one day I can become an Overbeck".[13]

1.2 The Nazarenes

The first significant challenge to the teaching of the academics came from a group of artists working in southern Germany in the early nineteenth century. The Brotherhood of Saint Luke or The Nazarenes, as they were more commonly known, was founded in 1809 in Vienna.[14] The group's more popular name derives from the biblical dress and hairstyles of its members, who were heavily influenced by the ideas of the Romantic Movement. Essentially, artists of the Romantic Movement placed

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[12] Ibid., 6.

[13] Ibid., 7.

[14] Thomas B. Hess and John Ashberry, *The Academy: Five Centuries of Grandeur and Misery, from the Carracci to Mao Tse-Tung,* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 47-57.

value on the emotions, on feelings, on individual experience, and on nature. Though Romanticism had grown out of the Enlightenment and involved a rational dimension, it also involved a dimension that opposed the rationalism of the Enlightenment and that rejected the order of the neo-classical style.[15] The neo-classical style, as already stated, placed emphasis on the recreation of the forms of ancient Greece and Rome. Vauvenargues, a protégé of Voltaire, who was widely admired for his aphorisms, encapsulated this new spirit, and pointed to a new direction for artists to take when he said, "Reason misleads us more often than nature".[16]

The artists of the Romantic Movement did not just reject an artistic style, however, they rejected primarily the old systems of power, the church and state, and, by association, culture, or at least the cultural styles and structures that supported the church and state. Hence emerged their rejection of the academies.[17] The Nazarenes, in rejecting old values and in looking for new artistic sources and structures, found these sources and structures in a romanticised recreation of the medieval era, which they put into practice in an old medieval monastery in Rome.[18]

The influence of the Romantic Movement on art and on art education continues right up to the present day. It is evident in the philosophy which states that to appreciate a piece of art one must suspend all rational and intellectual activity and one

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[15] Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art 3: Rococo, Classicism and Romanticism* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1962), 1-54 and 92-94; see also Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 9-48.

[16] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Science of Freedom* (London: W.W. Norton and Co. 1969), 191.

[17] Kerry Freedman, "Structure and Transformation in Art Education: the Enlightenment Project and the Institutionalisation of Nature," in *Histories of Art and Design Education: Cole to Coldstream*, ed. David Thistlewood, (Harlow: Longman in association with the National Society for Education in Art and Design, 1992), 70-71.

[18] The monastery that the brotherhood occupied was the Monastery of Saint Isidoro, an Irish Franciscan Church and College founded in the sixteenth century. See, Rev. H. Quinn, "St. Isidoros Church and College of Irish Franciscans", Vatican (1949).

must rely solely on feelings and intuition, this approach applies equally to the viewer and to the maker of the work of art. This idea, which was widespread among art educators in Britain and Ireland in the epochal 1960s and 1970s, has its origins in the philosophy of the German thinker, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant's aesthetic ideas addressed philosophical problems that were raised by the perceived gap between the phenomenal world and the metaphysical world - or the actual and the ideal world - that had been exposed during the Enlightenment. Kant held that judgements of taste were subjective, and that the beauty of a work of art was experienced solely in the feelings and mind of the observer. For Kant pure feeling embodied the beautiful, which in turn led to the pleasure of thought. As Kant saw it, neither the power of a work of art nor the truth that lies behind a work of art were evident in the characteristics perceived in the art object. Neither could they be intellectualised or understood rationally; rather, they could be accessed in man's mind only through thought stimulated by feelings.[19] The work of the English artist William Blake (1757-1827) exemplifies the spirit of this new philosophy.

At the risk of oversimplification, it could be said that as a result of the Romantic Movement feelings rather than intellect became the focus for progressive artists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Germany this idea gained currency rapidly in many art schools. This situation was similar in France, where by the mid-nineteenth century the priority of inspiration, emotion, and subjective judgement over tradition, rules, and skill had become official. The system used in the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, by contrast with a skill based system, taught the young student to work subjectively, by eye, from the live model - students did not universally accept this

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[19] Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory* (London: Longmans, 1968), 113-130.

system.[20] It would not be until the beginning of the twentieth century that this idea manifested itself in the curricula of art schools in Britain. Once established, however, it became the foundation stone upon which developments in art education in the twentieth century would be built.

1.2.1 *The Revival of the Master-Apprentice Relationship*

The Nazarenes, whose membership included Friedrich Overbeck, (1789-1869) Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867), Franz Pforr (1788-1812), and Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, (1794-1872) considered that art should serve a religious or moral purpose, and, arising from this belief, they advocated a return to the spirituality and workshop practices of the Middle Ages. In the training of painters, sculptors, and draughtsmen, and in opposition to the system employed by the academies, which was based on academic routine, they advocated an apprenticeship system based on fatherly care.[21] In educational terms the Nazarenes were quite successful, as many of them went on to take up teaching positions in the art academies of Germany, where their ideas gained widespread currency and influence. This was particularly the case in Munich, where their influence is evident in the constitution of the newly organised academy, which stated the following: "The teacher shall not suffer any uniform mechanism, but leave

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[20] In 1849 the young sculptor Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, the greatest of French Romantic sculptors, reluctantly left his teacher Francois Rude, who used a very technical and skills based system for educating his students, to study under Francisque Duret, a less inspired teacher. By moving to Duret, who worked in the Romantically inspired tradition favoured by the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Carpeaux enhanced his chances of success in the art world of mid-nineteenth century France. In presaging the predicament of many art students since, Carpeaux said in a letter to a friend: "Mr. Rude, . . . claims that sculpture - and I think he is right - can be done well only by mathematical aids: that is, using compasses, rulers, plumblines, etc. . . . Finally he turns his students into practitioners, while at the Ecole, everything is done by eye. The Institute prefers to say that the arts in general exist more in emotions than in measurements . . .. I think what they say is very pretentious, but still I have to listen to them, and to talk and do as they do. And since there is a great difference between these two methods and one cannot serve two masters at once, I said to myself: let's make a choice, the Ecole is a question of my future and my existence. . . ." (Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art* [London: Faber and Faber, 1984], 9).

[21] Nikolas Pevsner, *Academies of Art* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 210.

to the pupil as much freedom as possible to show his particular talent and the special qualities of his manner of looking at objects and imitating them".[22]

The focus on the individual talent of the student and on the special qualities of his work led to the Nazarenes' particular contribution to art education, which was the revival of the master-apprentice relationship. This took the form, in early nineteenth century German art schools, of master classes. This was similar to the system that had developed in France in the studio of Jacques Louis David (1748-1825), who was, ironically, the most important painter of the Neo-classical Movement. In David's studio, instead of studying by routine from casts of antique statues, students worked from the model with the guidance and advice of the master.[23] This style of teaching would become the most popular among avant-garde artists in the nineteenth century, and ultimately it would lead to a greater focus on realism and to the style of teaching initiated by William Orpen at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art just before the First World War. This style would continue to have a dominant influence on the neo-classical curriculum at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, subsequently the National College of Art, until the early 1970s.[24] It would also be evident in the so-called 'tutorial system' that was introduced as part of the new curriculum that replaced the old neo-classically inspired curriculum after 1975.

Though the Nazarenes never became a major force in the history of art they did reflect a significant trend of the early nineteenth century. This was the spiritually inclined reaction against the Enlightenment that can be seen in the philosophy,

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[22] Quoted in ibid., 211. The influence of the Nazarenes on the Munich Academy was a consequence of the patronage of King Ludwig I of Bavaria, who, as a young man, had visited them in Rome, where he admired their work. When Ludwig acceded to the throne he became a major patron of the arts.

[23] For an interesting exploration of the aspect of artistic practice that developed around the master-apprentice - or more accurately perhaps the father-son - relationship; see Thomas Crowe, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (London: Yale University Press, 1995).

[24] John Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century: A History of the National College of Art and Design* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995), 220.

literature, architecture, and music of the day - the development of the avant-garde in the nineteenth century owes a lot to this aspect of the Romantic Movement.[25] An interesting parallel can be drawn between the idealistic, utopian, and didactic tendencies of the Nazarenes at this time, and similar tendencies in the Modernist Movement in the early twentieth century. These tendencies are particularly noticeable in the ideas of Walter Gropius (1883-1969), who had a pivotal influence on art education through his founding of the Bauhaus School of Art in Germany in 1919.[26] It is interesting to note that both the ideas of the Nazarenes and those of the Bauhaus were developed in the context of war and major social and political upheaval. In the case of the former, it was the autocracy and wars of the Napoleonic era - the Nazarenes left Vienna because it was occupied by French troops – and, in the case of the Bauhaus, it was the social and political upheaval of the First World War and the Weimar Republic.

In the early nineteenth century, as in the early twentieth century, advances in British art and design were heavily influenced by developments taking place in Germany. As a result of this influence the ideas of the Nazarenes made their way to

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[25] Peter Gay suggests that though it is true that towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century artists in all genres increasingly made society itself, and bourgeois philistinism in particular, the target of their scorn, and that though it is also true that during the Victorian era "painters, composers, and the rest formed avant-gardes to fight lively and implacable pleasure wars in which they confronted the dominant, hopelessly conventional middle class with all the energy at their command", that this is largely a modernist myth which serves to conceal a much more complex set of cultural interactions. (Peter Gay, *Pleasure Wars, The Bourgeois Experience Victoria to Freud* Volume V [London: Harper Collins, 1998], 25-26) This caricature of a society divided culturally between two adversarial poles continued into the twentieth century and continues to inform perceptions of society, and in particular the relationship between art and society, today. This caricature, often reduced to a simplistic polarisation, was to find fertile ground in the Fine Art Faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in the 1970s. It served primarily in that more recent context to obfuscate a very complex set of relationships, and ultimately it served only to frustrate dialogue, communication, and development. See Chapters 12-16.

[26] Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 338.

Britain where their principal manifestation was the Pre-Raphaelite Movement.[27] This influence is also evident in the writings of John Ruskin (1819-1900), the influential Victorian aesthete and champion of Pre-Raphaelitism, whose guiding principle for artists, "truth to nature",[28] can be found in the ideas of the Nazarenes, whose first principle was "truth in nature and religion."[29] The most influential disciple of the Nazarenes in Britain was William Dyce (1806-1864), the Pre-Raphaelite painter, designer, and educator. Dyce, as Director of the Normal School of Design, had an important role to play in the development of art education in Britain in the nineteenth century.

1.3 The Normal School of Design

The dominance of the Royal Academy as an educational institution in Great Britain was challenged for the first time in 1837 by the founding of the Normal School of Design, sometimes called the Government Schools of Design (the word normal is derived from the French *normale*, as in *ecole normale*).[30] The Normal School of Design was the name given to the first national system of art education in Britain. Though based in London, branches were opened in many provincial centres including Dublin, where the old Royal Dublin Society Schools were taken over.[31] The first teachers in Britain to be salaried out of public funds worked for this system.

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[27] John Steegman, *Victorian Taste, A Study in the Arts and Architecture from 1830 to 1870* (London: Nelson, 1970), 27-48.

[28] Kenneth Clarke, *Ruskin Today* (Harmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 133-134.

[29] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 206.

[30] Quentin Bell states that the term School of Design may also have arisen as a result of confusion over a French term: *Ecoles de Dessin*, which were actually schools of drawing. (Quentin Bell, *The Schools of Design*, [London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1963]), 68.

[31] John Turpin, "The School of Design in Victorian Dublin," *Journal of Design History* 2 (1989): 250.

By contrast with the noble ideas that inspired the founding of the Royal Academy, the motivation behind the setting up of the Normal School of Design was purely commercial. The impetus was the threat to British industry caused by the import, on a large scale, of cheap European goods, and of French goods in particular; French design was universally accepted as the best in Europe in the early nineteenth century. The Schools of Design were not set up as schools of fine art.

In the early years of the nineteenth century it was generally agreed by those concerned about design for manufacture that, in order to compete with other European countries, but particularly with the French, instead of fighting wars, the standard of British design should be improved.[32] A Parliamentary Committee, which had been set up, among other reasons, to investigate the problems facing British design and British art and design education, proposed that the best way to do this was to educate the people in the arts, and to instil in them an understanding of the principles of design.[33] This was to apply particularly to the artisan classes.[34] As a consequence of the work of this committee, the Normal School of Design was set up to put into effect the above objectives.

After a disorganised beginning, the Normal School of Design came to maturity in 1838 with the appointment of William Dyce as director. Dyce had travelled widely in Europe at the behest of the Council of the Normal School of Design, and he had studied the state schools of France, Prussia, and Bavaria. While in Bavaria, Dyce had

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[32] The lesson of Sir Andrew Freeport, who had said, "True Power is to be got [not by arms but by] Arts and Industry" seems finally to have been learned. Freeport was a fictitious capitalist commentator who featured in the Spectator magazine and, according to Peter Gay, he was the popular voice of the Enlightenment in eighteenth century Britain, (Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Science of Freedom* [London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977], 35)

[33] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 51-63.

[34] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 247.

been particularly impressed by the educational ideas of the Nazarenes. Dyce was already familiar with the work of the Nazarenes; while studying in Rome in 1825, he had become an intimate friend of the group. Between 1825 and 1848 Bavaria went through a particularly fruitful period in artistic and cultural terms. This was primarily due to the enthusiastic patronage of the arts by King Ludwig the First, who was considered by many at that time to be a liberal and enlightened ruler. As already stated, Ludwig, as a young man, had, like Dyce, met with the Nazarenes while visiting Rome, where he had been inspired by their ideas. Ludwig, who was well known and admired in Britain for his patronage of the arts, was deposed during the rebellion of 1848.

Interestingly, in relation to the scientific aspect of subsequent developments in tertiary art education in Britain, Dyce saw himself as a scientist. As such, he felt particularly inclined towards the system of design education which he had found in Bavaria and which was based on scientific principles. In Bavaria, education for design started in primary school where the students drew simple outlines. Drawing was continued throughout secondary school education where more complex forms were studied sequentially, until, finally, the students destined to become designers went to the polytechnic where the particular type of design in which they wanted to specialise was taught. The type of course taught in the polytechnic depended on local industries. In the Augsburg polytechnic, for instance, the emphasis was on calico printing. In Nuremberg it was on metal casting and in Munich it was on stained glass, metalwork, and woodcarving.[35]

Dyce's radical approach to art education is illustrated by the following quotation, which is taken from a document that was written before he became involved with the

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[35] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 80; Bell, *Schools of Design*, 85.

Schools of Design. This document describes the type of school that Dyce would have liked to see set up in Scotland, his place of birth, in order to bring improvement to the arts and manufactures of Scotland.

> The great principle, then, of the system of instruction which we humbly propose for the adoption of the Board is this: that the masters should occupy the same position in their Academy that the ancient painters did formerly in schools; and they should possess the same superintending and directing power over the pupils; that they should be allowed to use the same discretion in directing the various talents of the young men into channels likely to prove advantageous to themselves, and the general interests of art; and thus, that the institution should be enabled not only to hold out the advantage of a complete education in art, but become a source from whence the manufacturing classes should have it at all times in their power to obtain pure and excellent designs for their various purposes, as well as designers thoroughly instructed in its true principles.
>
> It is extremely necessary, that, during the progressive studies of the pupils, distinct reference should be had to their ultimate employments in life; in the *first* place, to prevent the inclination to a rambling, desultory and unprofitable course of study, which any indefinite feeling on this point would be apt to engender; and, in the *second* to guard against an ambition, extremely foolish in very many cases, of ranking among the students of fine art, which complete access to the means of study too often gives rise to. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that education for the liberal arts of design is only a higher degree of that which is required for the industrial, and not anything essentially different.[36]

Though he subscribed to the aesthetic values of the Nazarenes, which focussed on linear purity – precise linear description - and truth to nature, Dyce took the view that ornamental art was quite different from 'High Art', and consequently that it required a different sort of teaching. Dyce believed that where the painter looked to nature, the ornamentalist looked to the grammar of ornament.[37] Dyce's approach to education, which is illustrated by the above quotation, and which contrasted starkly with what was happening at the Royal Academy Schools, involved greater pedagogical rigour, a more clearly defined and sequential course, and a more involved and accountable role

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[36] Bell. *Schools of Design*, 81-82.

[37] Ibid., 88.

for the masters. Despite this view, and although the use of the figure was rejected at the Schools of Design before 1838[38], Dyce, who, as stated above, shared with the Nazarenes a preoccupation with linear purity, did not completely exclude the use of the figure in education at the Schools of Design. This was largely as a result of competition from a private school run by Benjamin Hayden, a vociferous critic of the Schools of Design.[39] At Dyce's suggestion the figure was accepted as part of the course for its role in ornamentation. In 1838 the Council of the Schools of Design passed a resolution which determined that "the human figure, for the purposes of ornament, be taught in the school".[40] The use of the figure was circumscribed, however, and the figure was only to be utilised when it had a specific relevance to the particular needs of students, and after students had undergone a preliminary course of ornamental drawing.

The French system of art education, which the Council of the Normal School of Design rejected, was built around drawing from life and, as shown earlier, took a more fine art-based approach to design education than the German system. The school with the highest reputation in Europe at this time was the *Academie des Beaux-Arts de Lyons*.[41] This academy had six departments: painting, sculpture, architecture, ornament, engraving, and botany. The latter category was included because plant forms were widely used in neo-classical decorative art and consequently in nineteenth century design. In ironwork and plasterwork, for instance, plant forms were ubiquitous.

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[38] Ibid., 71-75.

[39] Ibid., 85.

[40] Smith, *Nude*, 18.

[41] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 46-49.

The importance of botany in the curricula of art schools was to expand as the nineteenth century progressed, chiefly as a result of the development of an organicist aesthetic at this time. This aesthetic had its roots in the ideas of the German philosopher and writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)[42], and was to be embodied in the Art Nouveau Movement in the closing years of the nineteenth century;[43] a movement which, significantly, owed a lot to developments in British art schools.[44] Interestingly, this aesthetic still had currency in tertiary art education in Britain as late as 1946, as illustrated by the recommendation of a Ministry of Education Report of that year that a Greenhouse was a useful part of the provision of art schools.[45]

The role of the figure was to remain a bone of contention at the Schools of Design throughout their existence. Charles Heath Wilson, who succeeded Dyce as director in 1843, and who took a narrower view of the role of his schools than Dyce, was particularly intent on keeping fine art out of the schools. Heath Wilson vehemently believed that the study of the figure was only of relevance in the study of fine art, and, thus, that the study of fine art was emphatically not the domain of the Schools of Design. According to Heath Wilson, "The tendency to become artists, so observable when the figure is taught, is partly to be attributed to example; for this reason, no

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[42] Goethe held that great art must stimulate and carry on the blind creative force in nature. He also held that art should concentrate on what is individually characteristic rather than generic type. In doing this he denied the polar opposition of the gothic and the classical, and he prepared the ground for theories of art history that did not take their lead from the cyclical model of rise, maturity, and decay proposed by Vasari. Arising out of his beliefs Goethe wrote an influential essay in 1772 in which he argued that the gothic was as worthy of respect as the architecture of any other period. Goethe's writings facilitated the development of the Gothic revival. (Eric Fernie ed., *Art History and its Methods: A Critical Anthology* [London: Phaidon, 1995], 77-84)

[43] Lawrence J. Starzyk, "The Non-Poietic Foundations of Victorian Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 26 (Summer 1986): 218-224.

[44] Stuart Macdonald, "Newberry and the Four: A School for Europe," in Stuart Macdonald, *Histories of Art and Design Education; Cole to Coldstream*, (Harlow: Longman in association with the National Society for Art and Design, 1992), 91.

[45] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Pamphlet No. 6*, 1946, 56.

persons studying to become artists, as distinguished from ornamentalists, will be admitted to the Schools of Design".[46] The historian of the Schools of Design, Quentin Bell, summarises the approach of the Schools of Design to the figure thus: "The young ornamentalist should be trained . . . not by being encouraged to look at the human figure or at any other natural form, but by a study of the grammar of ornament."[47] The stance of Heath Wilson against the figure was not universally accepted at the Schools of Design, and it met with some opposition. It led, for instance, to a dispute with one particular teacher, J. R. Herbert, who ran a very popular life class at the school. This dispute resulted in Herbert's resignation and his replacement by John Horsley, a teacher who harboured a particular dislike of the nude. The problematic situation of the figure at the Schools of Design was ameliorated somewhat in 1846 when Richard Redgrave, the painter, and Alfred Stephens, the sculptor, both teachers at the schools, succeeded in influencing the Council to ordain that all students should draw from the living model. Some members of the Council viewed this as a retrograde manoeuvre, as they felt that the teaching of drawing from the life would raise the students' aspirations beyond design to fine art. Despite the efforts of Redgrave and Stephens, the issue of the figure continued to cause controversy at the schools and had not been resolved by the time the Schools of Design were reorganised and renamed as the Schools of Art in the 1850s.[48]

1.3.1 *The Curriculum at The Normal School of Design*

The curriculum that Dyce developed for the Schools of Design comprised seven sequential stages or classes. Students started by copying simple outlines for a

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[46] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 150.

[47] Ibid., 88.

[48] Smith, *Nude*, 19.

probationary period of three months. They then progressed to the second stage, where they learned how to shade by copying diagrams of cubes, cylinders, spheres, and cones. The third class consisted of modelling from casts of ornament, fruit, flowers, and shells. Drawing from the round, in class four, comprised drawing from casts of ornament, and natural forms. Class five involved making coloured drawings from coloured drawings, and from fruit and flowers, in elementary colours. The sixth class consisted of copying elementary outlines of the human figure from the flat, and then from plaster casts; drawing from the flat meant drawing from drawings. The final class involved instruction in the history, principles, and practice of ornamental design; it also involved the study of oil painting, tempera, fresco, encaustic and wax painting, and of the various branches of decorative art. Drawing from the live model, as already stated, was allowed only if knowledge of the figure was necessary for the particular craft the student was pursuing, and under Dyce's successor, Heath Wilson, was only admitted at the seventh stage of the course.[49]

In summary, the curriculum at the Normal School of Design, which was based on the German system, adopted a scientific methodology. It involved a step by step approach to art education, in which students drew from copies of stylistic precedents of increasing complexity. By contrast, the French system was based on the idea that drawing in itself, and drawing from life in particular, was intrinsic to all art and design education, and that the life class should form the foundation stone on which all art and design education courses were built.

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[49] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 82.

1.3.2 *The Demise of The Normal School of Design*

It can be seen from the list of classes outlined above that the Normal School of Design taught a very limited curriculum. This was one of the principal reasons for the failure of the schools. Dyce had originally hoped that the schools would be an actual workshop that would train ornamentalists in specific skills, and that would supply patterns to manufacturers.[50] Given this objective, the schools could not possibly teach all the many skills necessary to support industry. The great variety of manufactured goods produced in Britain at this time made this objective impossible. Hence the focus of the curriculum on general principles of design and on drawing, and in particular on drawing from precedents. Specialisation, as happened in Bavaria, which would seem to have been the obvious solution to this problem, seems not to have been considered by the Council of the Schools. It was because of the lack of support for specialisation in the Schools of Design, for instance, that the School of Design at Manchester, which was set up to encourage the calico printing industry there, was a total failure as a School of Design.[51] This situation led to one of the most serious problems for the training of students, which was that the courses provided by the Normal School of Design lacked any practical experience with actual materials. This, according to the historian Stuart Macdonald, was a feature of most nineteenth century art and design education.[52]

Another reason for the failure of the Schools of Design, and one that was bound up with the above problem, was that the Council of the Schools was excessively authoritarian. The Council ran twenty-four Schools of Design, scattered throughout Britain and Ireland, from its base at Somerset House, the headquarters of the School

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[50] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 81.

[51] Ibid., 112-115.

[52] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 8.

workers. These workers did not want competition from young people trained at the Schools of Design. The attitude of manufacturers to the schools, then, had a seriously detrimental effect on the aspiration of the schools to improve the quality of British design.

Another significant problem facing the principals of the individual Schools of Design was that the schools tended not to be frequented by aspirant designers or craftsmen from the artisan or lower middle classes, but by middle class students seeking a fine art and drawing-based curriculum. Many of these students viewed the schools as a stepping stone to the Royal Academy Schools. Others saw them as finishing schools that embodied values of refinement, sophistication and cultivation. And some saw them merely as a civilised way of passing the time. At the School of Design in York, for instance, the following situation was noted:

> There are at least seven ladies on the books of the school who certainly ought not to be there. The wife of the highest resident church dignitary in York, three daughters of another high and well beneficed dignitary, and three daughters of the principal physician of the place, are of a class whose claims to the benefit of the Government School could hardly be sustained on any pretence."[54]

The School of Design in Manchester, having failed the calico printing industry there, developed a similar profile to that of the School of Design at York, and became a very successful drawing academy. Ambrose Poynter, who was inspector of the Branch Schools from 1845 until 1848 admitted that " the provincial Schools are in fact mere Drawing Schools and have no pretension to be called Schools of Design."[55]

In general, though there was a slight difference between London and the provinces, middle class female students inundated the Schools of Design, and working class

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[54] Ibid., 126.

[55] Ibid., 127.

female students did not. According to Quentin Bell, the reason that working class girls did not attend the classes that were designed for them was that their fathers and husbands, obeying popular sentiment, discouraged them from seeking to enter schools where they might learn to do men's work. In the case of middle class women students the situation was different. Many of these women were from well off professional families who had come on hard times, and consequently these women had become entirely dependent on their own exertions.[56] The following quotation from Quentin Bell gives an interesting insight into the situation of middle class women at the Schools of Design.

> Women were a distraction, not only because they came from a class which the Schools were not supposed to serve, but also because they used the Schools as a convenient place in which to find husbands.
>
> 'The female classes,' says Mr. Stuart, were a problem from the start. 'Though there are many pupils in this class who exhibit considerable talent for drawing, yet there is far less seriousness of study. This I suspect is mainly attributable to the impossibility of tracing any legitimate channel of direct usefulness for the education.' The women were a most unfortunate distraction to the other sex. 'The females have been so far advanced in mental power and influence as to have been lost to the service by matrimonial engagements obtained with exceeding rapidity. To avoid these losses, plainer candidates were selected for training, but they, too, have obtained preference as wives to a perplexing extent.' (Cecil Stuart, "A Short History of the [Manchester] College [of Art]", in programme of the Regional College of Art Centenary Diploma Day 1953, p.21)[57]

Contrary to their *raison d'être*, therefore, and more significantly to their *modus operandi*, the Schools of Design were in great demand as institutions for the teaching of fine art. This demand was a reflection of the changing self-image of the middle classes in early nineteenth century Britain, of their growing power, and of their need to create tangible signs of their hegemony. Quentin Bell points out that at Manchester, as at other towns, wealthy businessmen, who might otherwise have supported a

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[56] Ibid., 137.

[57] Ibid., 135.

School of Design, felt that it was more beneficial to the image and dignity of their cities to have a school of fine art. The School of Design at York was opened in 1842 solely for reasons of prestige. William Etty, by his power as a member of the Council of the Schools of Design, was responsible for the opening of this school - York was Etty's home town - even though York was not an industrial town, a prerequisite for a town to acquire a School of Design.

Another problem for the Schools of Design - and one that Henry Cole would try to solve at the Schools of Art - was caused by the fact that, as the Schools of Design aspired to teach ornamental design to a high level, the curriculum was too advanced for the potential students. These students had no basic training in art and design before they entered the schools.

The problems that beset the Normal School of Design came to a head after the Great Exhibition of 1851, which exposed British design to comparison with superior European design on a broad and massive scale, and in an immediate and direct way. As a result of the comparison with European manufactured goods at the Great Exhibition of 1851, it was generally accepted by those concerned with the quality of British design that the Normal School of Design had failed in its twin objectives as Dyce had envisioned them: "To teach the art of designing ornament both in respect of its general principles and its specific application to manufacturers". There were two principal reasons for this failure. Firstly, the curriculum was inadequate for the training of designers as it was too narrowly defined; as a consequence of this, there was no liaison with local industry, and artisans were, in practice, excluded from the schools by the absence of structures to encourage their attendance. Secondly, as the members of the public who flocked to the Schools of Design wanted to study fine art, there was no public demand for a design-based curriculum. Despite the need for change and flexibility in the curriculum, and the need for freedom to develop fine art

courses, the governing Council's continued insistence on conformity and a homogenous curriculum led to increasing tension between the principals of the schools, on the one hand, and the governing Council in London on the other. The resulting squabbles, between the demands of the principals and students, and the demands of the Council, drew public attention to the sorry state of the schools.[58]

By 1852 the opposition of the staff at the Schools of Design to the restrictions on their freedom that was caused by the centralised and rigidly controlled curriculum, combined with the groundswell of public opinion, necessitated the abolition of the Schools of Design and the creation of a new system.[59] Much of the opposition to the Schools of Design had been stirred up by Henry Cole, who was one of the organisers of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Cole, a professional civil servant, had set up a magazine called *The Journal of Design* in 1849 as a means of necessary criticism of design and its training in Britain; it was also a way of furthering his own prospects in the area.[60]

The ultimate responsibility for the failure of the Normal School of Design lies with the Council in London, whose demand that the regional schools should conform rigidly to its limited curriculum, which was rooted in early Victorian values, was the main reason for this failure. The reason for this demand for conformity was the inflexibility of the Council's ideas about art education in the face of major social and economic change, and, in particular, in the face of developments which were taking place in British industry in the 1830s and 1840s. The inflexibility of the Council was caused by two overriding concerns. The first concern was the protection of the dominant position of the Royal Academy as a centre for fine art education; all of the

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[58] Ibid., 154-173.

[59] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 151-152.

[60] Swift, "Birmingham Art School," 10.

artist members of the Council were Royal Academicians. Quentin Bell states that "It was generally believed in radical circles that the Council was completely under the control of the Academy".[61] The second concern was the maintenance of the stratified social structure of early Victorian Britain. This manifested itself in the belief of the Council that if artisans were taught either high art or from the live model, as they were in France, they might be tempted, as Stuart Macdonald said, "to pursue that which is more accredited and honoured."[62] In other words they might aspire to become fine artists. Social prejudice, according to Quentin Bell, was at the root of this problem. William Bell Scott, the head of the School of Design at Newcastle upon Tyne, pointed out in 1845 "that the manufacturers of the locality wanted no art, and resented their workmen being taught, as by that means they became ambitious and conceited."[63] It must be remembered that this was a time of great social strife as well as political and economic development.[64] It was, therefore, in the eyes of the members of the Council of the Schools of Design, in the interest of maintaining social harmony that the curriculum at the Schools of Design be restricted to modelling and the drawing of ornament.

1.4 Sir Henry Cole's National System: The South Kensington System

The new system that replaced the Normal School of Design was called the National System of Art Education. The headquarters of this new system was in South

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[61] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 66.

[62] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 71.

[63] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 124.

[64] Eric J. Evans, *The Great Reform Act of 1832* (London: Routledge, 1983), 37-56.

Kensington, and consequently it became known as the South Kensington System. True to the bureaucratic principles of Victorian Britain it was put under the control of the bureaucrat Henry Cole who, as has already been shown, was instrumental in getting rid of the Normal School of Design. Under the reorganisation of the Schools of Design a new department of the Board of Trade had been created in order to run the schools. This department was called the Department of Practical Art. In order to avoid the divisiveness and conflict that had contributed to the failure of the schools, and which were rooted in the vested interests of the various members of the Council that ran the Schools of Design, it was decided that this new department would be ruled by one permanent whole time official who was directly responsible to the Board of Trade. Cole, who had suggested this system, became head of the new Department of Practical Art, with Richard Redgrave as his assistant and head of the London School; the Department of Practical Art became the Department of Science and Art in 1853. In 1852 the Schools of Design were renamed Schools of Art, and under Cole the new system expanded rapidly, producing many new schools.[65] By 1864 there were ninety Schools of Art teaching 16,000 students.

The National System, or the South Kensington System, which Cole introduced in 1852, consisted of three elements: the National Course of Instruction, the National Competition, and the National Graded Examinations in Art. The first was the course which students pursued; the second was a system of merit based on the awarding of medals; the third was a system of examinations for aspirant teachers.[66]

Henry Cole, as a professional civil servant, was adept at using connections and political influence to bring practical improvements to areas which he identified as

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[65] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 254.

[66] Ibid., 188.

inefficient and wasteful in the structure of Victorian society. He was, for example, instrumental in the introduction of a uniform penny post and a uniform railway gauge to Britain, and his final achievement, before he became involved in art education, was the creation of the Public Records Office. Coming from this background, the inefficiencies of the Normal School of Design were an irresistible challenge to Cole. Cole was not just a bureaucrat. He had practical experience in design and manufacturing, and, what was more important in Victorian Britain, the ear of Prince Albert, who had a very keen interest in the arts and in British design.[67] Cole's interest in the Schools of Art was purely commercial. His overall objective in setting up his system was, as it had been for Dyce, to improve the standard of British manufactured goods, and ultimately to improve British competitiveness in the market place. Having observed closely the causes for the decline of the Schools of Design, Cole set out to create a system of art education that would succeed where the Normal School of Design had failed. For this reason Cole's system was more broadly based than that of Dyce. Where Dyce had set out to train artisans from a narrow curriculum, Cole set out to train everyone, from artisans to ladies and gentlemen, from a wider curriculum.[68] Cole had observed that one of the key causes of the failure of the Schools of Design was the low level of taste in the British population as a whole. Quentin Bell described this problem succinctly when he said, "The manufacturer was obliged to please the

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[67] Prince Albert had more than a keen interest in the arts, he favoured a particular style. Not surprisingly, the prince preferred a high degree of finish in the German manner, which he tried to induce. He attempted, for instance, to persuade Landseer to adopt such a finish. The Prince exerted his greatest influence as president of a royal commission that was set up to look into the commissioning of murals depicting the history of England for the new Houses of Parliament; the old Houses of Parliament had been destroyed by fire in 1834. The first commissions went, not surprisingly given their styles, to William Dyce and Daniel Maclise (1801-1870). (David Piper, *The Genius of British Painting* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975], 251-252). It is interesting to note that, as well as the prince favouring his style of working, Dyce had been recommended to the commission by Cornelius, the Nazarene painter. (Bell, *Schools of Design*, 87.)

[68] Clive Ashwin, *Art Education: Documents and Policies 1768-1975* (London: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1975), 43.

public and the designer was obliged to please the manufacturer".[69] Cole's aspiration to provide an education for all classes of society was an attempt to break this closed circle. Thus, as Quentin Bell put it, "It was necessary that the schools should serve, not only the artisan, but also his employer and his public".[70]

Henry Cole's educational ideas manifested his utilitarian philosophy, and, as with Dyce, were inspired by the German educational system. The vast didactic schemes being undertaken in Munich in the 1840s, under the patronage of Ludwig I of Bavaria, were seen by many in Britain as the fruit of a deep understanding of the purpose of art as a moral and educational force, and of the ways in which this role could be realised.[71] Inspired by the example of Munich, Cole believed that British design could best be improved if there was a concerted effort to raise the artistic standards of the people of Great Britain as a whole. He felt that if this could be achieved the standard of design of British goods would automatically improve. Firstly, because the purchasers of goods, having improved their own standards, would demand higher standards of the manufacturers of goods, and, secondly, because his new educational system would train designers and artisans who would work in industry.[72]

The idea of raising the standard of British design by raising the standard of taste of the population as a whole was foremost in Cole's mind when he helped organise the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Great Exhibition in turn led to the setting up of the Museum of Ornamental Art in South Kensington as a permanent display of examples of the best design which mankind had produced. It was also hoped that the museum

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[69] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 242.

[70] Ibid., 242.

[71] William Vaughan, *German Romanticism and English Art* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), 48-49 and 63-65.

[72] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 177.

would act as a stimulus to the production of better quality design in Britain, and that it would have a beneficial effect, both moral and practical, on the populace. This museum became a model for other such museums throughout Europe. It was later renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in honour of the patrons of the Great Exhibition.[73]

The idea of raising standards of taste through education, as a solution to the problem of the competitiveness of British goods in the marketplace, would become a common feature of British Government reports over the next one hundred years, and it would lie behind many of the changes brought about in the curricula of art schools until the 1960s.[74]

Cole aimed to teach drawing to as many people as possible from as broad a cross-section of society as possible. With this objective in mind he created a centrally controlled system with a homogenous curriculum. Drawing was to be central to this program, but unlike in France, it was not based on drawing from life, but on drawing from precedents. Quentin Bell states that "Geometry and the copying of ornamental forms replaced the figure as the basis of instruction [at the Schools of Art] . . . The student was set to copying geometrical figures or approved examples with no other aim save the attainment of perfect accuracy."[75] In commenting on the division of labour between the Royal Academy and the National System, Alison Smith, the author of *The Victorian Nude*, has said that it was felt at this time that "just as the artist has to be prepared for the studio, so it was expedient to train the designer for the

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[73] Ibid., 256.

[74] Paul A.C. Sproll, "Matters of Taste and Matters of Commerce: British Government Intervention in Art Education in 1835." *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research* 35 (Winter 1994): 105-113.

[75] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 257.

factory".[76] To initiate his program at the earliest possible stage of education Cole included drawing on the curriculum of elementary schools – this was to become the main business of South Kensington[77]. To improve the standard of design among tradesmen he included classes for artisans. To satisfy the needs of dilettantes he included classes for ladies and gentlemen, and finally, as teachers would be needed to make his system work, the new National System also trained art teachers for all levels of education.

1.4.1 *The Curriculum of The South Kensington System*

Henry Cole's National System came into being in 1852, and its curriculum dominated art education at tertiary level in Britain until the First World War. This curriculum was standardised throughout the country, with minor variations in some schools. It constituted a rigid method of instruction based on twenty-three stages, comprising in total over fifty separate parts, most of which involved copying from drawings or reproductions of antique sculpture. Though some of the elementary stages were compulsory, students did not have to pass through all stages to complete the course. Advancement within this system depended on the completion of successive stages, which in turn depended on the career objectives of the student. Teachers, for example, had to pass specified sections in order to qualify to teach those sections. Cole's system was very thorough and very logical; stages 1-10 consisted of drawing, stages 11-17 consisted of painting, stages 18-21 consisted of modelling, and stages 22 and 23 comprised elementary and advanced design. Each stage was very detailed and led into the next stage. For example, stage one was entitled "Linear Drawing with

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[76] Smith, *Nude*, 19.

[77] Ibid., 260.

Instruments" and comprised the following components: 1) Linear geometry, 2) Mechanical drawing of architectural details, and 3) Linear perspective. The completion of this stage led to Stage Two, which was entitled "Freehand Outline of Rigid Forms from the Flat Copy", and so on.[78]

1.4.2 *The Use of the Figure in The South Kensington System*

Under Cole's directorship, as already stated, the teaching of the figure was virtually abandoned at South Kensington, and the copying of geometrical forms was accepted as the valid basis for instruction. As a consequence of this attitude within the National System, as already shown, only a minority of students studied the figure from life, and these were generally either private fee paying students who aspired to be artists, or artisans who needed to study the figure for their particular trade.[79] The Royal Academy had no such restrictions. Despite this fact, the South Kensington System was perceived by some as posing a threat to the Royal Academy Schools, as the Normal Schools of Design had done. It was noted by an anonymous author, writing in the *Athenaeum* in 1861, for instance, that a marked decline in numbers of students attending the Royal Academy Schools had been caused by the "Numerous schools [of art] established by the government"[80]. Apart from the fact that the schools of the South Kensington System were more accessible to students than the Royal Academy Schools the decline in the numbers of students attending the Royal Academy Schools may have had more to do with the general attitude to the nude in Victorian Britain than with the proliferation of Cole's Schools of Art, which had their own problems in relation to the use of the nude.

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[78] For a full list of the subjects on the curriculum of the National Course of Instruction see appendix 1.

[79] Swift, "Birmingham Art School," 11.

[80] *The Athenaeum*, no. 1740 (2 March 1861): 298.

Allison Smith states, in relation to the restriction on the use of the figure in British art education in the nineteenth century, that the main concern of officials appears to have been about exposing the unclothed figure to the lower social classes. She points out that, in making a case against the use of the figure in the Schools of Art, the Revd. T.T. Jackson argued, in 1856, that artisans should be taught to see and appreciate according to the strict principles of the school syllabus; i.e., a design syllabus. Indifference to the education of the lower classes would, he said, "open the way for that debasing sensuality, and those other vulgar entertainments in which men seek a refuge from apathy".[81] Ralph Wornham, who lectured on the history of art in relation to ornament at the government schools, also approved of the study of ornament for its own sake, distinguishing between English historicism and the French system, where "the human figure is the engrossing object of study".[82] Cole himself was not unsympathetic to the figure but had to contend with the morality of the day. Throughout the nineteenth century, English society was sharply divided between those who demanded change, and those who resisted change, and this situation slowed progress, not alone in art education but in British society as a whole. This situation was noted by those in power. Edward Niall, for example, the MP for Bradford, expressed his deep frustration at this aspect of British society in the House of Commons during the debate on the Elementary Education Bill of 1870. Niall stated that the very constitution of English society made it difficult to propose anything on the question involving mental, intellectual, or religious progress without exciting on the one hand or the other deep feeling and deep prejudice.[83]

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[81] Smith, *Nude*, 19.

[82] Ibid., 20.

[83] *The Times* (London), 22 June 1870. Quoted in Francis R. Phillips, *Creating an Education System for England and Wales.* Welsh Studies Vol. 8 (Lanpeter: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1992), 19.

Despite all of the opposition to the figure during the 1850s, there was such a demand for life classes that a compromise had to be reached within the National System. As a result of this compromise, it had been agreed by the end of the 1850s that, when there were sufficient numbers of students who could draw and paint the figure from casts and the nude figure had thus become desirable, classes could be organised with the written approval of the local committees that governed the schools. Instead of encouraging the development of the life class, however, this turned out to be a serious impediment. Life classes were not published in official lists of curricular activities, and in 1863 only one in eight schools held life classes. Of those schools that returned a circular of questions issued by a select committee in 1864 only ten confirmed that they ran a life class.[84]

The objection to the figure was not universal in Britain, and it was a commonly held belief that French art education was superior to British art education precisely because of the use of the figure, and not just for aspiring artists. In contrasting the work of British and French artists which was displayed at the International Exhibition of 1862 that was held in London, a contemporary review said the following:

> With us [in Britain] a good draughtsman is not by any means a common personage. In France the reverse rule obtains, a result, we believe, due to the unintelligent plodding or our own pupils at the antique, or, still worse, from what is called "the flat", heartless representations of unreal things, in stiff, stern outlines that are enough to daunt the spirits and blunt the powers of observation in any luckless student. In France . . . the antique is put before the student, but not eternally. . . . After a short probation . . . using both [antique and life] together the student [devotes] himself entirely to the life. . . . His work therefore looks intelligent . . . it is ever expressive and full of the verve of life. An English student, not trained in this sensible manner, . . . does not enjoy the representation of nature; his figures are disjointed or "put together", their actions inexpressive, vague and incomplete. This is an old complaint; but now that we are spending so much money and looking so anxiously to the return in artistic power amongst our artists and artisans, it behoves those in authority to see that the dull, plodding blunder is not

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[84] Smith, *Nude*, 20.

> persisted in. You may teach a man forever, but you cannot make him learn unless you rouse his interest and intelligent zest for his task.[85]

1.4.3 *An Evaluation of The South Kensington System*

Ten years after Cole's South Kensington System was introduced, Anthony Trollop, after a tour of the United States in 1861, railed against French design which he claimed was ubiquitous in America, and in particular in its hotels. In complaining about French design Trollop stated that in his opinion Britain was going the way of America in following French taste, a move that he felt would be detrimental to the development of British design.[86] Trollop expressed the belief that many people in Britain, apart from himself, shared his fear. A year later, reinforcing the view that British design was loosing out to foreign competition, despite South Kensington's efforts, an anonymous reviewer of Christopher Dresser's *The Art of Decorative Design,* writing in *The Athenaeum,* stated:

> Our ribbons, our carpets, our crockery, our silks, almost every woven fabric that admits of ornamentation, has now to compete with the productions of continental schools. Not only are foreign designers trained in older established schools but the people themselves are wiser and more accomplished judges of the subject than our people.[87]

The failure of Cole's Schools of Art in educating designers is alluded to by the same author, where he states that Dresser's book would be an advantage to British designers precisely because it would help them to understand the principles of decorative design, and to decide what is good or bad in decorative art. The Schools of Art were clearly not fulfilling this role. The author of the above review goes on to make an explicit criticism of Cole's system where he states that, despite the "goodly

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[85] *The Athenaeum*, no. 1804 (24 May 1862): 694.

[86] Ibid., 687.

[87] *The Athenaeum*, no. 1815 (9 August 1862): 183.

sum per annum" that was spent on the training of designers at the Schools of Art, the ability to decide what was good or bad in decorative art was "as yet almost denied to our own decorative artisans."[88] This is damning evidence, especially when it is taken into account that the Athenaeum had been a consistent supporter of Cole in his criticism of the Schools of Design.

Despite the fact that classes were provided for artisans, they did not attend the new Schools of Art in the numbers hoped for by Cole; classes for artisans were abandoned at the Schools of Art in 1864. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, there was no mechanism to enable artisans to take time off work to attend courses. Secondly, there was no financial support to enable artisans to attend courses in their spare time. The absence of a structure to encourage the attendance of artisans is a reflection of the providentialism of the time, and exposes a problematic aspect of the laissez-faire philosophy to which many Liberals in the mid-nineteenth century, of which Cole was one, subscribed. The problem lay in the belief that if a structure was in place - in this case art schools open to all, and museums and galleries full of examples of good design - the hoped for outcome would be automatic. It would, therefore, be unnecessary to force change as the population at large, and artisans in particular, would automatically gravitate towards the structures that were in place. It is likely that Cole's attitude was a particular consequence of the deterministic philosophy of that time as exemplified in the fatalistic ideas of John Stewart Mill, who was a personal friend of Cole and whose ideas Cole shared.

For whatever reason, artisans did not attend the Schools of Art, and British design lost out. Cole's *laissez faire* system was clearly not working. It would not be until the 1880s that artisans would find their way back into the National System, and then it

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[88] Ibid., 183.

would be as a consequence of a change in Government legislation.[89] This change will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The South Kensington System, despite its organised structure, also failed in its stated objective of teaching drawing skills to a large percentage of the population. The reasons for this failure were twofold: the rigidity and inflexibility of the curriculum, and the circumscribed idea of drawing that pervaded the South Kensington System. Because of the unnecessary complexity of the curriculum only a minority of students ever reached Stage ten, not to speak of Stage twenty-three, and most students did not complete the course. Even if students did complete the course, only seven out of a total of fifty-nine exercises involved working from natural objects, these included modelling, painting, and drawing exercises. Only two exercises involved drawing the human figure from life. Another exercise involved painting from the life model, and one exercise involved modelling from life. Because of the minimum role which drawing from life played on the curriculum, the artwork that resulted from those exercises tended to be very tight and wooden, and the drawings, though produced by different students, tended to look identical. As students were restricted by having to work according to the curriculum in a methodical way, there was not enough freedom for them to develop their strengths or to focus on their particular interests.[90]

The National Competition was partly to blame for this situation. This was a system of merit that ran parallel to the course work aspect of the curriculum - The National Course of Instruction. The National Competition was a nationally based system that centred on the annual awarding of medals in each of the twenty-three stages. The National Competition tended to distort the curriculum as it encouraged students to

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[89] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 176.

[90] Ibid., 188.

concentrate all their energies on winning medals. This had the effect of narrowing the skill base. Medals were awarded for the best examples of particular exercises, in other words for conformity to the very strict curriculum. This resulted in the development of a particular style of art, or a South Kensington look, which had very little artistic or educational value. The introduction of payment by results in 1863 made this situation worse, because it forced teachers to encourage students to conform. As a consequence of this, many students spent long hours, and even months, on single drawings. In short, and often to their detriment, the pursuit of medals became the sole objective of many students.[91]

Another problem for Cole's system was the ubiquitous practice among British manufacturers of imitating foreign designs. This situation encouraged the habit of copying different styles from different eras as an educational methodology at the Schools of Art. Despite the fact that imitation had been rejected as a source of inspiration by the mid-nineteenth century in the minds of progressive designers, the aesthetic underpinning Cole's system remained the same throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. By mid-century imitation as a source of inspiration had been replaced by a new principle which asserted that good design had its roots of necessity in organic forms. (See Chapter 3) The *Athenaeum* made this quite clear: "Undoubtedly the study of vegetable and arboreal forms is best calculated to furnish materials for a system of decorative design, . . . on this point it cannot be too positively laid down as a verifiable law of taste and art, that mere imitation is not ornamentation".[92] Cole's system ignored this change in taste to its own detriment.

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[91] George Moore, *Modern Painting*, (London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co. Ltd., 1893), 66.

[92] *The Athenaeum*, no. 1815, (August 9, 1862): 184.

Before he became involved in the Schools of Art, Cole had observed, in criticising the Schools of Design, that one of the chief impediments to their success was the indebtedness of the various schools. In 1849 a Select Committee that was set up to consider the constitution and management of the Schools of Design noted that almost all of the provincial schools were in debt. Cole thus set out to make the South Kensington System self-financing, and consequently every effort was made to encourage the fee-paying student. One unforeseen result of this was that the curriculum evolved in a direction that encouraged the predominance of fine art over design and the education of the middle classes over the artisan classes. The reason for this was that the middle classes, as was the case with the Normal Schools of Design and as was to happen in the 1960s, came in large numbers to the Schools of Art hoping to become fine artists or teachers, or just hoping to learn something about art. At Bristol, for example, the income from middle-class 'dabblers' was twenty times that from artisans.[93] As it was middle class money that sustained the system, naturally it evolved to suit the needs of the middle classes. As a result of this, by the turn of the century the South Kensington System was training mostly teachers and, in the opinion of many, mediocre fine artists.[94]

Rather than raising standards of industrial design throughout the country, then, as Cole had hoped, his new system became a structure for producing teachers and fine artists whose educational objective was the production of drawings and paintings of a standard sufficiently high to win medals. This standard was defined by the system and by people who had been through the system, and, as a consequence, the National System was very efficient, but in a bureaucratic sense and in a purely mechanical

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[93] Derek Hanson, "The Art Masters," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 19 (1971): 42.

[94] Stuart Macdonald, "Articidal Tendencies," in *Histories of Art and Design Education: Cole to Coldstream*, ed. David Thistlewood (Harlow: Longman in association with the National Society for Education in Art and Design, 1992), 15.

way. Had there been a nationally agreed style of art with clearly identifiable objectives this system might have had some value; however, the opposite was the case. This was a time of growing individualism and proliferating artistic styles, and, as a result of this, the South Kensington System became increasingly anachronistic as the nineteenth century drew to a close. The South Kensington System was homogenous because strenuous efforts were made to make it so. In the early stages, for example, masters who worked in the system but who had not been trained within the system were removed and replaced by others that were. This happened with much acrimony at The Dublin Metropolitan School of Art.[95]

The South Kensington System, while efficient in its own terms, was a self-supporting system that was cut off from any contact with the real world of art and design, let alone with commerce or industry. This lack of engagement with contemporary developments created an opening that allowed for the development of an alternative private system of art education in Victorian Britain. It is important to note, particularly in the context of fine art education, that the period when the South Kensington System was at its height witnessed across Europe a number of important and influential developments in the arts. These developments manifested themselves in various movements including Realism and the Barbizon School, the Aesthetic Movement, Impressionism, and the Art-Nouveau Movement.

The quality of the artwork produced by the South Kensington System is summed up by the novelist, playwright, and friend of Manet, George Moore (1852-1933), who, as a young man, was a student of the system, of which he had the following to say:

> Our admiration was generally directed to those who had spent the longest time on their drawings. After three months' work a student began to be noticed; at the end of four he became an important personage. I remember

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[95] Turpin, "School of Design in Victorian Dublin," 248; It is interesting to note in this context that Ford Maddox Brown, one of the greatest of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, applied to Cole for employment at the Schools of Art and was refused. (Bell, *Schools of Design*, 259)

> one who had contrived to spend six months on his drawing. . . . The poor drawing had neither character nor consistency; it looked like nothing under the sun, except a drawing done at Kensington - a flat foolish thing, but very soft and smooth.[96]

Henry Cole's system had some success in that it trained large numbers of teachers, who did increase the public's understanding and knowledge of art. This was clearly a good thing. Cole's system, however, like that of Dyce, failed to address adequately the problems facing design education and, despite its popularity with the middle classes, it also proved inadequate as a system for teaching fine art; Ruskin described the National Course of Instruction as "the dregs of corrupted knowledge which modern art teaching, centralised by Kensington, produces."[97] As a consequence of this, and as a consequence of the low status of the Royal Academy Schools at this time among aspirant fine artists, private schools took over as the favoured place of training for artists. The teaching of design was to remain problematic and unresolved within the state system of art education until the 1950s.

The South Kensington System was a centralised system, and it taught a curriculum which was compartmentalised, inflexible, and monotonous. Because this curriculum was based on a rigid schema the artwork it produced was, predictably, dull and dry. The South Kensington System changed only in small ways over its lifetime. The homogeneity of this system was first weakened by the Education Act of 1889, which gave Local Education Authorities greater control over education. The South Kensington System was finally abolished in 1913 to make way for a system which

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[96] Moore, *Modern Painting*, 66. As he had something similar to say about the Academie Julian in Paris, supposedly the home of liberal art education in Europe, this statement may say as much about Moore as about the South Kensington System. According to Moore, "That great studio of Julian's is a sphinx, and all the poor folk that go there for artistic education are devoured. After two years they all paint and draw alike, every one; that vile execution - they call it execution - *la Pate le peinture au premier coup*" (John O'Grady, *The Life of Sarah Purser* [Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996], 29)

[97] Roy Haslam, "Looking, Drawing and Learning with John Ruskin at the Working Men's College." *Journal of Art and Design Education* 7 (1988): 76.

was designed to simplify the curriculum, to give local education committees more control over education, and to give more prominence to design.

Quentin Bell summarised the situation of the Schools of Art at the end of the nineteenth century thus:

> British industry may have profited by the schools but, in the first fifty years of their existence, they produced few great designers and still fewer painters. The 'High Art' of the provincial schools, of which by the end of the century there were more than three hundred, amounted to very little more than the dabbling of fee paying amateurs. The attempt to link art and craft fell into other hands.[98]

The teaching of fine art within the Royal Academy Schools and the National System was inadequate to cope with developments in the wider art world during the second half of the nineteenth century. As a consequence of this situation it was left to independent art schools to fulfil this role.

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[98] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 258.

CHAPTER 2

FINE ART EDUCATION IN BRITAIN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: INDEPENDENT ART SCHOOLS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FORMALIST AESTHETIC

2.1 Introduction

As befitting a utilitarian system, Henry Cole's South Kensington System was more liberal than Dyce's Normal School of Design. This aspect of the South Kensington System reflected a change from the more rigidly stratified, and politically volatile, type of society that Dyce inhabited to the more confident and financially secure society of Cole. John Steegman, the historian of Victorian taste, summarised the differences between these two systems when he said, "The eighteen forties had regarded the exhibition of works of art as a means of moral improvement, the eighteen fifties regarded it as a means of commercial advancement".[1] Though it may simplify, this quotation raises two very important issues, both of which affected the development of art education in Victorian Britain: morality and commercialism. They were not necessarily discrete.

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[1] John Steegman, *Victorian Taste, A Study in the Arts and Architecture from 1830-1870* (London: Nelson, 1970), 256.

2.2 The Moral Issue

2.2.1 *Mimesis*

Firstly, let us consider the moral issue. Echoing Joshua Reynolds, it was John Ruskin's opinion that great paintings could be made only out of noble subjects, and crucially, for Ruskin, by people who had the correct state of mind; "You must have the right moral state first, or you cannot have the art."[2] Ruskin demanded that art should not only reflect nature accurately but should also reflect a moral truth.[3] For Ruskin art was necessarily mimetic, because, in reflecting the world through man's eyes, it reflected God.[4] According to Ruskin, "The greatest thing a human being ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way";[5] hence his objection to the National Course of Instruction and its graded lessons based on copying drawings and plaster casts. By and large art of the early Victorian era

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[2] John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art* (London: George Allen, 1890), 43-44 and 80.

[3] Steegman, *Victorian Taste*, 261.

[4] That the eye had a moral aspect, which is implicit in Ruskin's belief that the moral condition of art lay in mimesis, was a strongly held belief in Marsilio Ficino's Italy. Quattrocento Italian aesthetics, however, by absolute contrast with Ruskin's mimesis, held that the moral aspect of art was analogical. Transparent perspective drawing illustrates this aesthetic most effectively, as exemplified by the well-known perspective drawing of a chalice by Uccello in the Uffizi. In comparing this type of drawing with Renaissance texts Michael Baxandall quotes from Celso Maffei's *On the Sensible delights of Heaven*, published in 1504, which states that in heaven "Vision . . . will not be impeded by distance or by the interposition of solid bodies". Baxandall gives the further example of Bartholomew Rimbertinus who said that "An intervening object does not impede the vision of the blessed . . . If Christ, even though himself in heaven after his Ascension, saw his dear mother still on earth and at prayer in her chamber, clearly distance and the interposition of a wall does not hinder their vision. The same is true when an object's face is turned away from the viewer so that an opaque body intervenes . . . Christ could see the face of his mother when she was prostrate on the ground . . . as if he were looking directly at her face. It is clear that the blessed can see the front of an object from the back, the face through the back of the head." (Michael Baxandall *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972], 103-108) There is an obvious and very interesting similarity between this aesthetic and that of Cubism. It is of no little significance, especially in relation to his opposition to the aesthetic of the new - and as he saw it, English - regime at the National College of Art and Design after 1975, that Domhnall O'Murchadha, the Professor of Sculpture at the college between 1969 and 1981, had an impressive knowledge of Renaissance history and aesthetics.

[5] Quoted in Harold Osborne ed., *The Oxford Companion to Art* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), 1026.

reflected either this new principle, the older tradition of the picturesque with which it was opposed and which Ruskin, after an initial infatuation, aspired to supplant,[6] or genre subjects. Ruskin's maxim "truth to nature" owes much to Wordsworth, who had dispensed with predetermined categories of the sublime and the beautiful, and who exhorted travellers to his beloved lake district to observe and feel, chiefly from nature herself.[7] Wordsworth maintained that the traveller in picturesque locations must rid himself of artificial ways of seeing such as the picturesque. He must cleanse himself as it were, just as the poet must rid himself of artificial ways of speaking - this exhortation had echoes in the post-Second World War epoch in British art education when art students were repeatedly told to stop seeing the world through art glasses and to see it afresh. While faithful apprehension was the first part of this process for Wordsworth, feeling was of even greater importance. Robert Hewison points out that, according to Wordsworth,

> Feeling was the proper subject for poetry, and here of course Wordsworth's was the example. Through the feelings, the traveller might do more than enjoy the sight of a pretty view. He might feel a sense of emotional identification between himself and his surroundings and become aware of the nature-spirit informing all things as Wordsworth himself had done . . ..
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> Thus the traveller, if he opened his heart to natural scenery, could experience an emotional communion between himself and nature that was, according to the strictness of his religious orthodoxy, an awareness of the benevolence of God, or a more mystical and pantheistic sense of identity between man and his surroundings.[8]

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[6] The influence of the picturesque on British taste continued, at least on a popular level, well into the reign of Queen Victoria. This is evident in drawing and painting manuals from that time. According to Francina Irwin, one particular manual, entitled *A Series of Practical Instructions in Landscape Painting in Water Colours [sic]*, which was published in 1827 and which was dedicated to the mother of the future Queen Victoria, used the language of the eighteenth century picturesque movement, and held up as models the Dutch seventeenth century landscape masters, along with Claude Lorraine and Salvator Rosa. Irwin adds, interestingly, "It is perhaps significant in this context that Queen Victoria added no paintings by Turner to the Royal Collection during her reign." (Francina Irwin, "Amusement or Instruction? Watercolour Manuals and the Woman Amateur", in *Women In the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995], 157-158)

[7] Robert Hewison, *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 16.

[8] Ibid., 17.

Hewison points out that as feeling had an important role to play in Wordsworth's aesthetic so it had in Ruskin's.

Hewison also points out that Ruskin's stance on the morality of art has its origins in eighteenth century ideas of universal order. Universal order was believed to be an expression of the divine will.[9] Ruskin's stance might also, perhaps, reflect his reaction to the relatively unstable nature of early Victorian society, both politically and intellectually. Early Victorian society was a society torn between tradition and religious orthodoxy on one hand, and scientific, political, and philosophical developments on the other. Ruskin's personality was also quite unstable. It is interesting to note in this context that, as Hewison states, Ruskin's demand that art have a morally improving effect on man has its origins in his strict evangelical upbringing, the second fundamental of which states, according to Hewison, that man is essentially wicked and corrupt.[10] This stance contrasts with the more optimistic ideas of the Romantic poets who shared with Rousseau the belief that man was naturally good, a belief that was badly shaken by the French revolution.[11] Ruskin, whose belief in moral truths underpinned his thinking on art, believed that these moral truths had an improving effect on man: "Fine art [has] . . . but three functions: the enforcing of the religious sentiments of men, the perfecting their ethical state, and the doing them material service".[12] Hence arose the perceived need in the Victorian era among certain sectors of society to expose people to the works of nature and art in museums and galleries, and hence also arose the need to teach art to as many people

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[9] Ibid., 59.

[10] Ibid., 24.

[11] Ibid., 24.

[12] John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art* (London: George Allen, 1890), 80.

as possible. This need, it must be stressed, was more than an aesthetic or moral imperative. There was a practical urgency to this objective in the early nineteenth century that has been obscured by time, and which had its roots in the social and political instability caused by the French Revolution.

The French Revolution had contradictory effects on the Romantic Movement. On the one hand, revolutionary and Napoleonic political values were seen as restricting freedom, both political and personal. Thus the power of liberty as a Romantic value was enhanced, especially in the German states - as stated already, the particular stimulus that drove the Nazarenes to Rome was the occupation of Vienna by Napoleon's troops. On the other hand, the idea of political freedom for all, in the French manner, raised the spectre for many in Great Britain of social chaos and anarchy emanating from the lower orders. This spectre may have reinforced the development of a stratified and class based social structure within Victorian society throughout the nineteenth century, which brought with it a consequent effect on taste. Alison Smith observes that in the 1840s and 1850s there was a scarcity of nudes in public exhibitions, which, she claims, reflected a conflict within British Society about sexuality and the nude. This conflict, Smith suggests, reflected a widely held belief that the lower orders were dangerous and vulnerable to manipulation and incitement, and that they were not in control of their passions, unlike the middle classes. This belief was a direct consequence of the French Revolution, according to Smith, who points out that French art was considered dangerously sensuous, and that the collapse of the French Second Empire was blamed by many in Britain on the belief that the art produced under the Second Empire licensed the moral degeneracy that precipitated a national crisis.[13] Therefore, in the context of controlling the lower orders, there

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[13] Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 171.

developed in Britain at this time a perceived need to restrict the exposure of the lower orders to the nude and the sensuous in art, as this might excite seditious passions.

A similar attitude prevailed in relation to the issue of women artists. After its inception in 1768, despite the fact that the artists Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser had been founder members, women were not allowed to attend the Royal Academy Schools. In 1859 thirty-eight women signed a petition requesting the privilege to study from the antique at the Academy Schools. This petition was to no avail. Despite this situation, between 1861 and 1863 twelve women were admitted to the Royal Academy when Laura Herford, a student from Sass's Academy, was unwittingly awarded a place in the schools, after signing her probationary drawings with only one initial.[14] These students were, however, forbidden from studying from the naked model. Despite this advance the issue of women students was still contentious, and in 1863 the Academy voted to ban the admission of women altogether on the specious grounds of lack of space. In March 1867 the ban on women attending the Royal Academy was lifted. The situation of women went back to what it had been before March 1867 when the new ruling was revoked completely in May of that year. The attitude of many in Victorian Britain to the issue of women entering art education at this time is evident in the following quotation from an anonymous writer in the *Athenaeum*, which, revealingly, was a liberal Journal:

> The last and most astonishing innovation is the entry of lady students [to the Royal Academy] - a matter that requires careful watching lest the Antique School become a mere place of flirtation and gossip. . . . Without such vigilance the schools with the female pupils, would soon become as notorious for idleness and flirting as the National Gallery at South Kensington.[15]

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[14] Ibid., 43.

[15] *The Athenaeum*, no. 1740 (2 March 1861): 298.

As a consequence of this situation, women who aspired to become artists took private classes or went abroad. The middle decades of the nineteenth century, despite the intransigence of the Royal Academy, saw a steady amelioration of female art education with a rise in the number of schools where women could study. The demand for art education by female students was thus a major reason for the success of independent art schools. As a consequence of this situation, by the end of the century, and despite the difficulties involved, the contentious issue of women art students had been resolved and women had gained right of access to the life class.[16]

The nature of the preoccupation of early Victorian society, and therefore of Victorian art, with morality changed as the century advanced. This was partly in response to the greater social and political stability of middle and late Victorian society, but it was also in response to concomitant developments in science and technology. Consequent on a growing preoccupation with science in Victorian Britain, a particular concept that had its origins in Goethe's ideas became explicit in the mainstream of British art and design at this time. This idea, which would have lasting effect, was the idea that art was analogous to science and that the creative process was analogous to biological processes. In short, it was the belief that there was an organic relationship between art and society. It is important to note here that this was the era of Darwin.

The revival of interest in the work of Leonardo Da Vinci that took place in late Victorian times is interesting in this context. Given the development of an organicist aesthetic at this time, it is curious to note that Leonardo, amongst other things, was interested in establishing a link between the mechanism of the human body and the mechanism of the earth. According to Martin Kemp, the author of *Leonardo Da*

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[16] Sara M. Dodd, "Art Education for Women in the 1860s", in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 197-198.

Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man, the *Mona Lisa* provides an example of the relationship between the microcosm that is the human body and the macrocosm that is the earth:

> The processes of living nature are not only mirrored by anatomical implication within the lady's body, but are more obviously echoed in the surface details of her figure and garments, which are animated by myriad motions of ripple and flow. The delicate cascades of her hair beautifully correspond to the movement of water, as Leonardo himself was delighted to observe: "Note the motion of the surface of the water which conforms to that of the hair." . . . The little rivulets of drapery falling from her gathered neckline underscore this analogy, as do the spiral folds of the veil across her left breast.[17]

It is a fascinating coincidence that in his studies of natural forms Leonardo identified many of the mechanisms and principles that point explicitly to the evolution of the earth's surface and implicitly to the evolution of living things. Stephen J. Gould suggests that Leonardo did not develop these ideas because he was necessarily a genius ahead of his time, but because of his opposition to various Neoplatonic theories of the earth's origins that were current in his day. The revival of interest in Leonardo in the second part of the nineteenth century is thus not surprising. This era was preoccupied with scientific analysis and discovery, with the idea of individual genius and achievement, and with the idea that art and science had similar objectives. According to Richard Turner, the seminal work on Leonardo in the nineteenth century was an essay by Walter Pater that was first published in 1869. Turner states "The essays extraordinary prose paints an unsettling portrait of Leonardo as an apostle of the modern condition. Yet there is no new fact or science in the presentation, only a rare persuasiveness that continues to hold sway well into our century"[18]

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[17] Quoted in Stephen J. Gould, *Leonardo's Mountain of Clams and the Diet of Worms*, (London: Vintage, 1998), 33.

[18] Richard Turner, *Inventing Leonardo* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 100.

Ruskin's desire to observe nature closely led to his supporting an analytical and scientific approach to the study of nature on the part of artists; he did not, it is important to point out, support an organicist aesthetic.[19] Nevertheless, the development of an organicist aesthetic can be seen in one sense as an extension of Ruskin's thinking, as this new aesthetic concept continued to give to art a moral context in that man, as the creator, was seen as a conduit for the expression of a deeper reality that was rooted in a natural order.[20] This deeper reality reflected the fundamental laws of nature and therefore the hand of God. It also reflected truths made visible in nature and art, which were not visible in the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

2.2.2 *Expression*

Just as the idea that art was analogous to organic processes can be seen to tie in with Ruskin's ideas, it can also be seen as an attack on the ideas of Ruskin. The reason for this was that it threatened Ruskin's idea of art as mimetic; the function of the artist was no longer to record. A corollary of an organicist aesthetic is the idea that the relationship between the artist and the world is one of interaction in a reflexive way; that is, the moral truths that underpin art were not necessarily accessed by the exact imitation of nature, however morally upstanding the symbolism of the artwork

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[19] Hewison, *Ruskin*, 18-21.

[20] This idea developed as a consequence of the Enlightenment. It reflects the change in thinking that took place in the late eighteenth century when, for many artists, the aesthetic values of the Romantic Movement replaced those of the neo-classical system. Until the Enlightenment there were absolute cannons of taste which, as already shown, man could access by studying classical artefacts. Subsequent to the Romantic Movement and the development of Kant's ideas, it was believed by many that aesthetic values could be found in man himself. This new development made it incumbent on man to discover within himself his own sense of aesthetic values. The attainment of this ideal, it was hoped, would lead to the improvement of society. Hence emerged the successful installation of a broadly based art education system from primary level to tertiary level in many of the German states in the early nineteenth century. Hence also emerged the need to create such a system in Britain. (Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966], 191-205).

might be. Rather, they can be accessed only by artwork that arises out of the creative response of the artist to the visual stimulus of nature. The type of artwork produced in this way arises more as a consequence of the development of individual and personal aesthetic values than by the development of practical skills, which are used to illustrate shared moral or aesthetic values. This approach ties in with Kant's ideas. Kant established aesthetics, according to Arnold Hauser, as the basic discipline and organ of metaphysics.[21] Hauser states that as, in Kant's view, experience was the creation of the knowing subject and that the work of art was impenetrable by the reason and not to be deigned in logical terms, Kant was in a position to say nothing about the constitution of the object in itself but a great deal about the spontaneity of the subject. According to Hauser, Kant transformed knowledge, which had been understood by the whole of classical antiquity and the middle ages as an image of reality, into a function of the reason. Following on from Kant's conclusion that judgements of taste were not cognitive and therefore must be subjective, the German art theorist Konrad Fiedler (1841-1875) rejected aesthetic feeling as a scientific foundation of any art theory. As a consequence of the fact that a theory resting upon aesthetic feelings and individual likes or dislikes cannot be scientific, Fiedler stated that the objective criterion of aesthetic judgement had to be found in the origin of works of art. Out of this thinking Fiedler developed his theory of artistic form.

> It ought to be realised that anything deserving the name of a work of art cannot possibly originate otherwise than in the process of giving it form. It must be insisted that the hand does not carry out something that has been ready formed by the mind, but that the work of the hand is only a further stage on one indivisible process. There is indeed an invisible preparation of it in the mind, but it cannot go further toward that higher stage of completion except through actual physical manipulation.[22]

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[21] Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art, Vol. 2: Renaissance, Manerism, Baroque*. (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1951), 608.

[22] John Alsberg, *Modern Art and Its Enigma: Art Theories from 1800-1950 Based Upon the Writings of this Periods Artists and Philosophers* (London: Widenfeld and Nicholson, 1983), 21.

Fiedler's ideas accord with the aesthetic of "fitness for purpose" that developed in response to advances in the area of design in the nineteenth century. (See Chapter 3) According to Fiedler, art does not start from abstract thought in order to arrive at form; rather, it climes up from the formless to the formed and in this process is found its entire meaning. Fiedler's aesthetic fitted neatly into developing organicist ideas and particularly the ideas of the Aesthetic Movement, and it presented an alternative for artists to both the neo-classical tradition and to the nineteenth century French realist tradition.[23] Hence arose, in the late Victorian era, a proliferation of conservative art side by side with a proliferation of innovative art. This reading would explain the popularity of the highly finished and mimetic artwork of Sir Laurence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912), Sir Edward Poynter (1836-1919), and Frederic, Lord Leighton (1830-1896), which was based on Greek and Roman myths, legends, and history, as an attempt to retain the old aesthetic in the face of the moral insecurity implicit in the new aesthetic. It would also help to explain the attraction of the more extreme artists of the Aesthetic Movement, like J. A. M. Whistler (1834-1903), to those who saw an inevitably progressive and scientific aspect to art and to history.[24]

The situation of the fine arts, then, in the late Victorian era, was one of polarisation between mimetic, moralistic, and didactic art on the one hand, and a more innovative and challenging form based art on the other. The one attempting to retain the old

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[23] Ibid., 21-22; Charles Harrison, Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 694-702.

[24] The Aesthetic Movement asserted the doctrine that art was self-sufficient and autonomous. It also asserted the doctrine that art serve no ulterior purpose and should not be judged by non-aesthetic standards, whether moral, political, or religious. This aesthetic is summed up in the phrase 'art for arts sake'. The Arts and Crafts Movement reacted against this aesthetic, and Ruskin in particular threw his weight against an art that was out of touch with common life. It was also criticised by Tolstoy in *What is Art?* Clive Bell took this aesthetic to an extreme. The idea of 'art for art's sake' was an ubiquitous aspect of twentieth century aesthetics, as illustrated by the comment of the formalist American artist of the post-war period Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967) "Art is art and everything else is everything else." (Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," Studio International 178 [October 1969]: 134.)

aesthetic in the face of the moral insecurity implicit in the new aesthetic, and the other trying to break new ground and to be progressive. The artwork produced at this time reflected various combinations of both. It is interesting to note in passing that Leighton, who was a member of the Aesthetic Movement, had studied under Edward Van Steinle who was a pupil of Nazarene painter Overbeck. Van Steinle was sometimes called the last Nazarene.[25]

As already pointed out, the idea that there was an organic and progressive aspect to artistic practice had widespread currency throughout the nineteenth century. This would have been re-enforced in Britain by Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species*, the publication of which had a direct influence on artistic practice. Notwithstanding the positive aspects of an organicist aesthetic for many Victorians some felt that the position of man in the universe was threatened by such an idea, because it involved a threat to man's understanding of God. Lawrence Starzyk identifies the origin of this situation in the following quotation:

> Two consequences of enormous import for aesthetics in the nineteenth century result from Carlyle's announcement in 1830 that God has well nigh vanished from the universe: 1) no eternal, transcendent 'fac-simile' exists by which the artisan can pattern his work; 2) imitation, consequently, becomes an untenable critical orientation because the root metaphor underlying it - making - is seriously discredited.[26]

The veracity of the idea that man's secure and dominant position in the world was threatened by the new aesthetic is supported by the hostile public reaction to the publication of Darwin's *The Descent of Man*; this book located man firmly in the evolving natural world. By contrast, the evolution of the natural world independently of man, which Darwin had presented in *The Origin of Species*, attracted little negative

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[25] Keith Andrews, *The Nazarenes: A Brotherhood of German Painters in Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 69.

[26] Lawrence J. Starzyk, "The Non-Poietic Foundations of Victorian Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 26 (Summer 1986): 218.

public reaction. Ruskin summarised the position of many in Victorian Britain when he said: " If only the geologists would let me alone, I could do very well, but these dreadful hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses.[27]

Since the Victorian era art has reflected the problematic relationship of man's location in the natural world, without the security of the ideal of an unchallenged neo-classical world and its concomitant metaphysical world. Organicist theories of art represent man's efforts to locate himself within a new paradigm. This situation would underpin developments in fine art education in the final years of the nineteenth century and for most of the twentieth century. It is discernible in the work of many British and German thinkers, artists, and designers of the Victorian era, and appears with varying degrees of significance in the work of many of the most influential thinkers in art and design in Britain and Europe over the next one hundred years.[28] A very interesting example of such work is the work of the architect and designer Charles F. Voysey (1852-1941), which was transitional between the Victorian era and the modernist era.[29] Organicist concepts also underpinned the thinking of Herbert Read, whose ideas were pervasive in British art and art education at all levels throughout most of the twentieth century.[30] In relation to the present study it is important to note that organicist ideas had a significant influence on the development

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[27] Hewison, *Ruskin*, 122.

[28] The work of the German art historian Paul Frankl is interesting in this context. Frankl, working with the idealist Hegelian model of history applied to the history of art and with Plato's idea that ideal forms take their shape from models in the spiritual sphere, proposed that style developed through time as an organism subject to ideas which transcend human activity. (Eric Fernie ed., *Art History and its Methods: A Critical Anthology* [London: Phaidon, 1995], 15)

[29] David Gebhard, *Charles F. Voysey* (Los Angeles: Hennessy and Ingalls Inc., 1975), 7.

[30] Charles Harrison and Allen Lane, *English Art and Modernism* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981), 16.

of tertiary level art education in Britain in the 1950s where they manifested themselves in the Basic Design system.[31]

2.3 The Commercial Issue

Let us now consider the commercial issue. The influence of the Enlightenment on social and political structures, in combination with advances in science and technology, helped to create a culture of individualism and commercialism in the late Victorian era. The passing of a copyright act in 1862 encouraged this development.[32] This culture had a significant influence on developments in art and design education at this time. The reason for this was that it created a demand for more freely structured art classes than those available at the Royal Academy Schools or the schools of the National System, which would allow for the development of individual talent for those who aspired to be artists, and which would lead to commercial success for those who aspired to be commercially successful artists.

On a purely technical level, two important developments promoted this new culture: the development of lithography at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the invention of the durable steel plate in 1820. These developments led to the mass production and widespread dissemination of prints of popular paintings.[33] The paintings of Sir Edwin Landseer (1803-1873), for example, were particularly popular

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[31] David Thistlewood, "Organic Art and the Popularisation of a Scientific Philosophy," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 22 (Autumn 1982): 311-321.

[32] *The Athenaeum*, no. 1814 (August 2 1862), 146.

[33] Peter Watson, *From Manet to Manhattan: The Rise of the Modern Art Market* (London: Vintage 1992), 67. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century there was a coincidental proliferation of instruction manuals for amateur artists. This both reflected and fed into a new-found interest in art as a civilised pastime at this time. This, in turn, created employment and generated income for artists as diverse as George Moreland and Edwin Landseer; Queen Victoria employed Landseer for a time as an art teacher. The invention of new methods of printing facilitated the production of more sophisticated instruction manuals, which made the dissemination of images and therefore style easier, this clearly had

in reproduction; both Landseer's father and brother were engravers. These technical developments, in conjunction with the huge influx of old master paintings to Great Britain from Europe as a result of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, created a vigorous market for paintings and particularly for reproductions, and they had a significant influence on early Victorian taste.[34] The influence of old master art on British art began to decline after a journal called the *Art Union,* which was launched in 1839, initiated a campaign for the patronage of contemporary British artists and against the collecting of old masters, whose provenance, the *Art Union* stressed, was often dubious. The *Art Union,* which was, later, renamed the *Art Journal,* was the first major British periodical devoted exclusively to the fine arts.[35] All of these developments led to the inundation of the national system with middle-class students wishing to study fine art after 1837. These same developments had the effect of actively excluding artisans from the educational structures that had been put in place to educate them. It was shown in Chapter 1 how this happened at the Schools of Design and at the Schools of Art. It is interesting to note that this also happened at the Mechanics' Institutes, which had been set up in 1824 specifically for the education of the poor.[36] By the 1850s the poor were attending Mechanic's Institutes only in small numbers, having been replaced by the middle classes.[37] There were a small number of exceptions to this situation, but generally speaking by 1850 the Mechanics'

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an influence on taste. It also helped amateur artists and, indeed, professional artists to develop skills. (Irwin, "Amusement or Instruction", 149-166).

[34] Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1980), 39.

[35] Smith, *Nude*, 69.

[36] Quentin Bell, *The Schools of Design* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1963), 48-49.

[37] J. W. Hudson, *The History of Adult Education* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1851), 96-102.

Institutes had, according to one commentator, "deteriorated into a string of middle-class clubs."[38]

If we look for causes for the above changes it is worth noting that in identifying a new taste for social pleasures in Victorian Britain, Peter Bailey suggests, in *Leisure and Class in Victorian Britain*, that relaxation became easier with the easing of political pressures. He points out that the *Saturday Review*, a contemporary paper, interpreted the taste for such pleasures as a reaction from the intellectual and political crises of the Great Reform Bill, the Tractarian Movement, and the fight for free trade.[39] Bailey goes on to state that in the years around the mid-century the Victorians entered a new leisure world. The *Ten Hours Act* and the Great Exhibition of 1851 were, according to Bailey, "both in their various ways the concrete and symbolic pivots of this change."[40] Bailey points out that it was the middle classes that were the most substantial beneficiaries of the new bounty.

The middle classes thus became the dominant group in Britain during the Victorian era and developments in Victorian Britain reflected this fact. The Victorian middle classes, according to Bailey, developed new sporting activities in various clubs, societies, and groups, for example, and these new structures were of benefit in physical, social, economic, political, and moral terms. The middle classes saw themselves as polarised with a profligate aristocracy, and, as the nineteenth century advanced, at odds with - even threatened by - a strident working class, particularly in the wake of Chartism and the revolutions of 1848. The new entrepreneurs of the middle classes expressed their hegemony through, among other things, art patronage.

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[38] B. Stephens, "The Victorian Art Schools and Technical Education: A Case Study, 1850-1889," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 2 (December 1969): 14.

[39] Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1978), 58.

[40] Ibid., 56.

This affected taste in that the values of this new class were different from the values of the aristocratic patrons that were being replaced.[41] According to Alison Smith, it was through the rhetoric of moral values such as those of the dignity of work, respectability, and individual initiative that the middle classes constructed a coherent class identity and consolidated its position and influence. This change heralded the demise of history painting and a growing interest in domestic images by living British artists, which, it was felt by many, best expressed the artistic excellence and moral life of the nation.[42] This led to a proliferation of sentimental art in the Victorian era.

This situation was reinforced by Ruskin's influence - his writings were hugely popular in Victorian Britain - and by the availability of inexpensive popular prints. On a more exalted level, there was a proliferation of technically sophisticated and mildly erotic art for the new rich, which was reminiscent of the Poesie of Titian.[43] The work of Lawrence Alma Tadema and Frederic Leighton represent the summit of achievement of this type of painting. This type of work, which had its origins in the neo-classical tradition, had developed in the early Victorian era in the work of William Etty (1787-1849) and the popular Irish born artist William Mulready (1786-1863). It reached a summit of achievement in the work of Lawrence Alma Tadema, Frederic Leighton, and other artists of the Aesthetic Movement. This type of work was vigorously opposed by Ruskin, and, interestingly, purchased in quantity by Prince Albert and Queen Victoria.[44] In France the Emperor Napoleon III had similar taste to

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[41] For a detailed analysis of the demise of the British aristocracy see David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Yale University Press, 1990)

[42] Smith, *Nude*, 68.

[43] The "Poesie" of Titian were a series of seven erotic mythological subjects that he painted between 1550 and 1552. Unlike the robust engagement with the formal aspects of painting in the work of Titian, however, the principal artistic quality of this work was the manual dexterity of the artists and the highly finished surfaces of the paintings.

[44] David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 26.

Albert and Victoria; he was the purchaser, for instance, of Cabanal's famous slick and titillating *Birth of Venus*.[45] Victorian artists from early on were well aware of the popularity and marketability of this type of work. William Mulready stated candidly that female beauty and innocence in a painting would be much talked about. He advocated that this type of painting be covertly exciting, and added that a painting approaching a more sensual existence would sell more easily than one that was not so.[46]

By the end of the nineteenth century the bourgeois had become the dominant and most powerful group in British society and, as Peter Gay points out in *Pleasure Wars*, though only ten per cent of the population of Britain, they had a disproportionately large influence on the efflorescence of the arts at that time. Significantly, however, he also points out that it was the moneyed middle classes that supported new radical movements in the arts. Gay suggests that the middle class was not hopelessly conventional and that the avant-garde yearned for respectability as much as those they delighted to attack. Thus, the middle classes, who supported new developments and new movements in the art world, also supported new developments in art education at the end of the nineteenth century, and this accounts for the success of independent art schools. Allison Smith points out that the late Victorian period witnessed an increase in the number of schools opening in London and the provinces for life study. In 1885, according to Smith, the *Fortnightly Review* reported that since 1878, a total of 871 new art classes (exclusive of art schools) had been established. Smith goes on to state that between 1864 and 1878 the number of students studying the figure increased from 15,000 to 27,000.

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[45] Peter Gay, *Pleasure Wars: The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, Volume V (London: Harper Collins, 1998), 128.

[46] Ibid., 109.

2.4 Independent Art Schools

Despite being a powerful force in the culture of the nineteenth century, the Romantic Movement had little negative effect on the status of the academies in Britain or on the continent in the eyes of the art-buying public. The reason for the popularity of the academies among the art buying public was that, as the nineteenth century progressed, the neo-classical tradition of the academies became more secure by association with the arbiters of power, and consequently more entrenched as the official arbiter of taste. The Royal Academy in London reached a peak of popularity in the last years of the nineteenth century. This popularity was largely the result of public nostalgia for a mythical pre-industrial golden age of lost elegance and leisure, as exemplified in the hugely popular neo-classical subject matter of the painters Frederic Leighton, Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Edward Poynter, and the beautifully sensuous and luxurious paintings of John Singer Seargent. It has been suggested that this nostalgia was partly a compensatory reaction to the ugliness of the industrial landscape of Victorian Britain, and that it was a reflection of the fact that the prosperous Victorians liked to see their own lives flatteringly mirrored in the comparison with ancient Greece and Rome.[47] George Bernard Shaw, in expressing his perplexity at this situation, stated the following: "One wonders this sordid century could have such dreams and realise them in art."[48]

Despite its popularity with the art buying public, and although, in response to developments in the wider art world, it allowed minor changes in the curriculum at the Royal Academy Schools, throughout the nineteenth century the Royal Academy remained conservative and resistant to change. According to Allison Smith, the Royal

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[47] Treuherz, *Victorian Painting*, 170-171.

[48] Francis Spalding, *Magnificent Dreams: Burne-Jones and the Late Victorians* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1978), 33.

Academy refused to admit change into its curriculum lest it be seen to concede to market forces, and because it feared to give the public what it wanted fearing the deleterious effect of a mass audience on national taste. While the Royal Academy Schools continued to adhere to traditional values, a new system of art education was evolving in Britain in response to a number of different factors. These factors included developments in art history, changing aesthetic sensibilities, and a demand, emanating from a section of the middle classes, for a more radical type of art education, and not one that was dedicated solely to the training of teachers or artisans, or to the slavish imitation of classical models. The new aesthetic of the mid-nineteenth century, which paralleled the neo-classical tradition, was that of the realist masters. This aesthetic was exemplified in the work of the East Anglian School in Great Britain, and in the School of Fountainbleau and the work of the Impressionists in France.[49] By contrast with this new and dynamic aesthetic, the preoccupation of the academies with neo-classical ideals was quickly outmoded in the eyes of young artists who saw themselves as radical and progressive. In Britain the new aesthetic of realism was given positive weight by the changes taking place in British society in the second half of the nineteenth century. These changes included scientific and political developments, increasing affluence and security as the century advanced, and an ever-increasing audience for art. This new aesthetic led to a demand for a response in the area of art education that would reflect contemporary developments. This change had happened early in the nineteenth century in France where the *atelier*[50] system of art schools had developed out of the older master and apprentice system of the

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[49] Treuherz, *Victorian Painting*, 105-108.

[50] The *Atelier libre* was a studio, open freely but not free, which provided a nude model but no tuition or control. The most famous was the *Atelier Julian*, which opened in Paris in 1860, though strictly speaking this was not an *Atelier libre* since it provided a teacher. The *Atelier* were more liberal than the official *Ecole des Beaux Arts* and many famous nineteenth century French artists attended them. Sometimes the *Atelier* were called *Academies*.

Renaissance, and of which David's studio was the modern model.[51] In Britain, however, it was slower to develop, despite the influence of the Nazarenes.

In the first half of the nineteenth century the Royal Academy in London and the various European Academies had been the principal training ground for British painters and sculptors. By the end of the century this was no longer the case, and private art schools had taken on a significant role in art education. This is not to say that the official status of the academies had diminished. It is to say that, in the eyes of the more bohemian artists of the rapidly developing avant-garde, the academies were no longer the favoured place of study. The success of French art education, particularly in relation to its use of the figure, did inspire much criticism of the Royal Academy Schools in the art press.[52] In 1885, for instance, the *Art Journal* summed up the achievement of the Royal Academy in London in the following way:

> As an educational institute it has little or nothing to teach; and its students, as soon as it has passed the curriculum it imposes on them, make haste to betake themselves to France, to learn, not only how to paint and draw, but to forget as much as they can of the practice and theory acquired in its schools. In Paris they are taught to see and to represent; no painter warns them back from the unholy and unnecessary study of the nude.[53]

The French *Atelier*, on which the new private schools in Britain were based, were the most popular in Europe, and, as the above quotation makes clear, British and American students flocked to attend them. By stark contrast with the Royal Academy Schools and the schools of the South Kensington system, both of which had failed to exploit the need for a new curriculum, the *Atelier* in France and the private schools in Britain provided just two things which the student needed: a live model from which to

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[51] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 226.

[52] See *The Athenaeum* no. 1804 (May 1862) to no. 1827 (November 1862) for an interesting debate on this issue.

[53] Smith, *Nude*, 191.

work, and criticism and advice by a professional artist. As the A*telie*r and private schools were not vocational they had the added advantage of being free of a constraining curriculum and of the restrictions imposed by coursework. The atmosphere was, therefore, more carefree, and consequently it suited the spirit of the art students, which was informed by the bohemian spirit of the art world in the late nineteenth century.[54]

In Dublin, interestingly, in the absence of a private art school, the Royal Hibernian Academy took on the role of such a school. At the beginning of the twentieth century, and in stark contrast with the Metropolitan School of Art, which, as part of the South Kensington System, was regarded as dull, the Royal Hibernian Academy was noted for its free and bohemian atmosphere.[55] As shown above, the life class was a key issue in attracting British students to the atelier in France. It was also a key issue in the development of independent art schools in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century.

2.5 The Life Class

The Normal School of Design, as has been shown, was set up to train artisans and designers, but not fine artists. In pursuit of this aim, and as figure drawing was the domain of fine artists, the Council of the Schools of Design had prohibited drawing from the human figure.[56] As a result of this restriction, attendance at Somerset House, the headquarters of the Normal School of Design, was very low. As a direct

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[54] Stuart Macdonald, *History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), 284.

[55] John Turpin, "The South Kensington System and the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art 1877-1900," *Dublin Historical Record* 36 (1983): 50.

[56] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 81.

consequence of this the painter Benjamin Hayden (1786-1846) set up a rival institution in 1838 that included a life class on the curriculum.[57] Hayden's classes were inundated with students, many of them artisans, eager to study the figure. The continuing success of Hayden's classes eventually forced the Normal School of Design to include life-drawing classes on the curriculum in 1846; albeit, as already shown, in a limited way. Attendance subsequently increased. Despite this success, however, the curriculum was not constructed around the life class, and drawing from the figure, as has already been pointed out, was restricted to those who needed some knowledge of the figure for the particular craft they were studying.

The intransigence of the Normal School of Design in refusing to respond to demands for the inclusion of a life class on the curriculum is illustrated by an incident involving the Manchester School of Art. In 1843 the Manchester School of Art, as shown in the last chapter, had come under the control of William Dyce. Prior to this it had been an independent school, and the life class had formed a central part of its curriculum. Dyce, as director of the Normal School of Design, abolished the life class in Manchester and substituted, instead, a class for drawing casts of ornament, and a small collection of ornaments in plaster was purchased for this purpose. In reaction to this change the senior students of the school set up a life class in a studio outside the school. Subsequently these students formed a society around this class called the "Roman Bricks", which was so popular that it lasted for twenty-two years before it disbanded.[58]

When the Royal Dublin Society Schools were taken over by the Normal School of Design the greatest stumbling block to negotiations was the issue of the figure. In the

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[57] Bell, *Schools of Design*, 86.

[58] Ibid., 114.

case of the Dublin school, Dyce lost the battle and the life class continued to be a fundamental part of the curriculum.[59] A measure of the seriousness with which the use of the live model was still considered in mid-Victorian Britain is illustrated by the fact that questions were raised in Parliament, and that a heated debate took place in the *Art Journal* - the main forum for public debate in the Victorian art world, as a consequence of a report that the school of the Hibernian Academy in Dublin had allowed students who were not enrolled in the life class to enter the room while a life class was in progress.[60]

The diminished status of figure drawing and of the life class in the curricula of the National System and the Royal Academy Schools caused the standing of both institutions to be diminished in the eyes of progressive artists in mid to late Victorian Britain. It was also the principal cause of the change that took place in the structure of fine art education around the turn of the twentieth century, and it was a significant factor in bringing success to the private art schools.[61]

Prior to the nineteenth century the nude did not exist as a tradition in British art, landscape and portraiture were the dominant genres, with the occasional allegorical picture. The strife-ridden career and tormented life of the painter Benjamin Hayden, who was, because of his interest in history painting, one of the few British painters who used the nude in his work, illustrates the difficulty British society had in accepting the use of the nude in art.[62] History painting presented problems in Britain

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[59] Turpin, "School of Design in Victorian Dublin," 248.

[60] Smith, *Nude*, 30-32.

[61] Interest in the study of the human figure was actually declining at the Royal Academy in mid-century. In 1861, for example, a fall in attendance at the Royal Academy schools was attributed to the fact that the study of the human figure was no longer considered as important as it had been in the earlier part of the century. (Smith, *Nude,* 102-103)

[62] Ibid., 13-14.

because of its association with republican France, but also because of the influence of the reformation. According to Luke Gibbons, the painter James Barry (1741-1806), in commenting on the negative influence of Protestantism and Nonconformism on British art, stated the following: "In place of the sweep of narrative painting, pictorial styles had degenerated into portraits or ourselves, of our horses, our dogs, and country seats."[63] The American critic James Jackson Jarves writing from Florence in 1874 made the following observation:

> The most cogent opposition to the nude in Art is born of religious scruples. Since the Reformation everything of this nature has been put under ban because of its connection with an anathematised paganism or papal idolatry. Thus it has been brought about that the purest principles, loftiest ideas, and noblest types of art, have become associated in the minds of the now dominant Protestant nations with impiety and indelicacy, to the absolute hindrance of the re-development of a pure and beneficial use of the nude in Art.[64]

Following the inception of the Royal Academy the depiction of reality in British art had been subordinated to the picturesque or the neo-classical model. However, as a consequence of a desire for greater realism in art, which had been expressed by progressive artists towards the end of the eighteenth century, the study of anatomy had been given a role in art education. Turner, for example, had posed the model alongside an appropriate cast, such as the Venus De Medici. The private school that was founded by Benjamin Hayden in 1815, reversed current academic discipline by asking students to study the theory and practice of anatomy before they were permitted to draw from the antique. During the 1830s William Etty, William Mulready and David Wilkie (1785-1841) began to experiment with more empirical approaches to life study; these artists worked directly from the model, both in their

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[63] Luke Gibbons, "'A Shadowy Narrator': History, Art and Romantic Nationalism in Ireland 1750-1850." in *Ideology and the Historians*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1991), 99-128.

[64] Smith, *Nude*, 13.

own studios and in the Academy life class where they taught, and they tried to reconcile what they had learned from the antique with what they observed from the living model. Constable, who taught at the Royal Academy in the 1830s, and who, like his contemporary Wordsworth, dispensed with conventions in order to pursue a more realistic and truthful style, as well as using poses based on old master compositions, taught students to paint directly from the figure.[65] By the 1860s there were a number of venues where students could draw from the life model for longer periods than the Royal Academy allowed, and under one instructor. William Etty used privately hired models at the Living Model Academy, which he established in Soho Square in 1830, and William Mulready hired models for an independent life class he helped set up in Kensington. Despite these developments, the use of the figure proved problematic in British art education in the early nineteenth century. The problems confronting the use of the figure in British art education were eventually ameliorated by time and by the development of more liberal attitudes as Victorian society advanced, but these developments were slow. The study of anatomy, for instance, had become problematic by the 1850s, as the gap between truths revealed by science and truths revealed by the antique became a major one of contention. A measure of the reactionary nature of the times is given by the fact that in 1860 Lord Haddo moved in the House of Commons that the government grant be withdrawn from a state funded school of art because it employed the living model. Haddo's motion was defeated.

Throughout the nineteenth century, as shown earlier, the censure of the nude in art was reinforced by the influence of Ruskin's moralistic aesthetic, which focussed on a search for truth. It might be suggested that this preoccupation with absolute truth, and the search for this truth, fed into the development of a form based approach to art in

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[65] Ibid., 22.

Britain. This search for truth, as suggested above, had its roots in the Reformation and in Protestantism, and was a recurring aspect of the development of art in Britain and Germany throughout the nineteenth century. Keith Andrews states that

> The Pre-Raphaelites seemed superficially to pursue the same aims as the Nazarenes . . .. Both groups held that art had strayed from the path of truth and sincerity ever since Raphael, when a false idealism had led to the ruin of artistic integrity. Both thought that the era before Raphael held the key to a revival of contemporary art. In this revival the Germans were fighting against Rationalism and a vapid Classicism, propagated mainly by the academies: the English against tastelessness and lack of significant content in the parades of monkeys and dogs by Landseer and the "keepsake" prettiness that delighted the general public.[66]

The development of the Aesthetic Movement in the late nineteenth century can be seen as a reaction against the censorious aspect of Ruskin's aesthetic ideas, and developments in British art at this time reflect the complex interrelationship between these opposing positions. The influence of both Ruskin and the Aesthetic Movement can be seen in the development of a new form based approach to art education at the Slade School of Art. It might be argued that the aestheticist aspect of the Slade curriculum reflected the non-moral market, and that this development led to a search for a new moral foundation for art, which, ultimately, was manifested in modernism.

The opening of the Grosvener Gallery in 1877 – the Slade School of Art had opened in 1871 - was a manifestation of the pressing need for change in the British art world. The motivation in opening this gallery, which showed sumptuous and sensuous work that was flagrantly Renaissance and notably pagan in inspiration, was dissatisfaction with the Royal Academy. Fortunately for the gallery it opened just when the Aesthetic Movement was at its height. The gallery had cost £150,000 to build and was opened amidst much fanfare. During the two months prior to the opening, leading newspapers and periodicals had printed announcements, carefully

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[66] Andrews, *The Nazarenes*, 78-79 and 86.

worded to suggest that the gallery would challenge the supremacy of the Royal Academy.[67] The Grosvener closed in 1890, but by then, through its fashionable success, the Aesthetic Movement and the work of the late Pre-Raphaelitie style, notably that of Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) and his followers, had been given a fillip which helped consolidate the new aesthetic and prepare the ground for future developments.

The development of a new curriculum at the Slade School of Art at this time (see below), which was of seminal importance for the future development of fine art education in Great Britain, owed much to the Aesthetic Movement, and the development of the Aesthetic Movement owed much to the controversial issue of the nude.

2.5.1 *The Nude*

The situation of the nude in British art education underwent a significant change in the 1860s. The immediate catalyst was the confrontation between insular British conventions of representation and powerful continental trends, which occurred at the International Exhibitions that were staged in 1855, 1862, and 1867.[68] By 1862, according to Alison Smith, international exhibitions had become an important site of competition between European nations, reaffirming on a cultural level ideological differences and rivalries. By contrast with the work of French artists, these exhibitions drew attention to the inferiority of English artists when it came to painting the nude. In Britain an awareness of French technical skill focussed attention on the English system of art education, and in particular on the poor standard of draughtsmanship

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[67] Spalding, *Magnificent Dreams*, 7-22.

[68] Smith, *Nude*, 101.

achieved at the Royal Academy Schools.[69] Following the 1855 *Exposition Universalle* a group of English artists attracted by what they saw at this exhibition sought training at the *ateliers* of Paris. These included Frederic Leighton, Edward Poynter, and J. A. M. Whistler. All of these artists became important influences in art education in Britain in the 1870s and 1880s.

At the French *atelier* artists studied under a permanent teacher rather than under a succession of instructors or 'Visitors', as was the case at the Royal Academy Schools. Drawing from the antique figured less significantly at the *atelier* and students worked incessantly from the model. In England students were not permitted to draw from the living model until they had spent three years assiduously drawing from casts in the Antique School.

According to Alison Smith, a fall in attendance figures at the Royal Academy Schools in 1861 gave rise to anxieties that standards were declining because the study of the human figure was no longer considered as important as it used to be. In 1863, in response to criticism in the press, the government appointed a commission to assess the teaching and administration of the Royal Academy with a view to bringing it under tighter state control. Smith states that from the evidence of this committee it is clear that life drawing was a matter of contention. She goes on to point out that a lack of interest in the antique was noted by this commission, which was put down by the painter William Mulready to Britain's exclusion from the French neo-classical revival that took place at the beginning of the century. This exclusion had happened as a result of the Napoleonic wars. Mulready suggested, according to Allison Smith, that this cultural isolation led to native painters forsaking idealism in art in order to meet

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[69] Ibid., 102.

the parochial tastes of a new class of patron.[70] The painters William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) and George Frederic Watts (1817-1904) - who were not members of the Academy - in giving evidence to the committee, were critical of the fact that students did not study from the life sufficiently and suggested that a combination of life study and antique study be used. As a result of this suggestion the Academy ordained that antique casts be placed in the Life School and the Painting School.[71]

This was a token gesture, according to Alison Smith, who goes on to state that academicians such as Charles Eastlake and Charles Landseer criticised the "centralising" tendency of French art, which, it was claimed, led to a French School style. This situation, they believed, contrasted with the "individualising" temperament of English art. These academicians didn't seem to realise that three years drawing from the antique at the Royal Academy Schools or the rigidity of the curriculum at the South Kensington System might not also lead to a common style.

Though many in England admired French art, English critics of the French system were concerned about the impropriety of the French nude. Notwithstanding this concern, it was obvious to all with an interest in the subject that French draughtsmanship and overall handling of form was superior to that in Britain. In this context the exhibition of *La Source*, a nude painting by J.A.D. Ingres (1780-1867), at the International Exhibition of 1862, which was held in London, was a revelation. This painting was both large scale and, crucially, chaste. Significantly, according to Allison Smith, "Ingres' pure abstract treatment of form was judged an ideal corrective both to the sensuality displayed by many French nudes, and to the indiscriminate realism that was seen to inflict so much of contemporary English painting. The

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[70] Ibid., 103.

[71] Ibid., 103.

exhibition of *La Source* was a key moment in the development of British art, according to Smith, as it marked a shift away from the explicitly moral or didactic to the aesthetic. This shift was particularly significant in the context of the role of the nude in British painting because it ushered in an aestheticist view of the nude. Revealingly, the Athenaeum praised "the cold chastity of M. Ingres' picture", and went on to say that "every student will delight in its solid execution, and admire without stint the pure and simple serenity of her face".[72] The change in outlook towards the nude that was brought about by Ingres' painting is ironic given the earlier fear of the seditious nature of French art. It is also revealing of a change in attitude in Britain towards the French in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a consequence of the high praise that Ingres' painting received in the press, purely aesthetic considerations were sanctioned as a legitimate focus for artists in late Victorian Britain.

The reaction among British artists to the work of Ingres was swift, and, according to Allison Smith, immediately after the 1862 exhibition there appeared in the circle around Frederic Watts and Frederic Leighton a fashion for draped classicism of a very stylish nature.[73] Leighton's *Venus Disrobing from the Bath*, which was inspired directly by Ingres' painting, was a key painting in this respect, and helped to bring about the acceptance of the nude as a legitimate subject in British art. Alison Smith notes that, after the exhibition of *La Source*, the nude was justified in British art in terms of form, self reference, and internal considerations; that is, in aesthetic concepts understood by artists, connoisseurs, and people of taste. This new development in British art led to the Aesthetic Movement.

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[72] The Athenaeum, no. 1804 (24 May 1862) 694.

[73] Smith, *Nude*, 104.

Smith goes on to point out that, despite its acceptance in some quarters, and because it opposed Reynolds' belief that art should appeal to the intellect and Ruskin's belief in the interdependence of art and morality, this new movement in British art came up against some opposition. As a consequence, conservative critics maligned aestheticism as the importation of lax French morals into British high culture. It is more true to say that aestheticism was marked by a non-moral stance than that it reflected lax French morals. In 1869, according to Alison Smith, one English critic, Sidney Colvin, reasoned that

> the overall aim of art was the representation of bodily beauty unfettered by moral constraints; that it was erroneous to equate great art with a good society, for some of the most corrupt regimes had produced works of genius. In proclaiming the supremacy of beauty in art, Colvin argued that true beauty was intransitive, neither arousing nor capable of quickening desire. Furthermore, the appreciation of beauty involved only the high senses, seeing and hearing: 'These senses are unexclusive: they are intellectual; they are unselfish or disinterested . . ..The objects of ethical emotion only pass into objects of aesthetic emotion by removal to distance, where they can do no good.'[74]

Artists were quick to respond to this new non-moral approach to art. According to Smith, Frederic Watts attempted to abolish narrative in favour of subjects that impinged directly on the senses. And Watts and other artists who supported aestheticism claimed universality for art, rising it above distractions between past and present, English and foreign, painting and sculpture. According to Smith, the nude was an ideal vehicle for such universality, and by muting the narrative and moral dimensions of classical mythology, it was possible to present the female nude as an embodiment of universal beauty. The nude was thus a paradigmatic metaphor for the artist's power to create perfect form. Form was now fully accepted as a legitimate if

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[74] Ibid., 113-114.

not the prime concern of artists. Leighton, presciently, declared that he valued classical form as a vehicle of "abstract form".[75]

It might be suggested, here, that the development of a powerful bourgeois with an attendant aesthetic that buttressed its hegemony in Victorian society stimulated some artists and patrons to look elsewhere than the commercially driven culture of late Victorian society for what would be seen as more permanent durable and absolute values.[76] It might also be suggested that this development was a contributory factor in the rejection of a subject-based aesthetic in favour of a more abstract aesthetic based on form by many progressive artists at the turn of the century. It might even be suggested that the highly finished art of many of the Royal Academicians, of which Alma-Tadema and Leighton are the principal examples, contributed to the loss of popularity which the Academy suffered at this time among artists who favoured the more dynamic and challenging aspect of the new French aesthetic that was founded on a search for truth.[77]

The critical response, according to Allison Smith, to the new aesthetic in British art that was heralded by the exhibition of *La Source* was interesting. One critic, Joseph Atkinson, writing in the *Saturday Review*, stated that aestheticism represented a new school of painters who rejected Pre-Raphaelite elaboration and naturalism. This new school, he argued, taught breadth and generalisation, idealism and imagination. Another critic, Sidney Colvin, declared that "pictorial art addresses itself directly to the sense of sight" he went on, according to Smith, "beauty should be the more

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[75] Ibid., 116.

[76] According to Peter Gay, Emile Zola made the point that Gerome, that favourite among academic artists, paints a picture so that this picture can be reproduced through photography or engraving and sell thousands of copies. Here the subject is everything, the painting is nothing; the reproduction is worth more than the work itself. (Gay, *Pleasure Wars*, 72)

[77] Julian Treuherz, *Victorian Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 206-207.

paramount aim of the pictorial artist".[78] Smith states that "In establishing their case these critics harnessed Reynolds' principle of generic form with Romantic ideas of subjectivity and individuality: the artists personal expression of beauty being of prime importance."[79]

The values of the Romantic Movement, and, in particular, the notion of individual talent, expression, and genius were echoed and reinforced by the Aesthetic Movement and given full reign in modernism. Advocates of the nude, according to Smith, argued for an aristocracy of taste based on the cultivation of aesthetics above material wealth. A mystique was established around the Aesthetic School, which, Smith states, "emphasised a work's unsaleability in order to enhance its aesthetic value among a select elite who maintained less interest in commercial value than artistic genius."[80]

After a retrospective exhibition of the work of Ingres in 1867 at the *Exposition Universalle* line began to take precedence over other aspects of fine art practice. As a consequence of this, some artists, like Leighton for example, throughout the 1860s, began to focus on line. This new focus created problems for Leighton. According to Alison Smith, it was said of Leighton that his career was a continuous struggle to prevent the sensuous qualities in his art from masking the virtues of form. This struggle points to difficulties, which arose out of the preoccupation of progressive artists with form, and which led to new issues and questions being raised in debate about different aspects of form. Colour and line were key subjects in this debate. Whistler, significantly, given his influence on the Slade School of Art, came down on the side of line, and stated that drawing was masculine and colour feminine. Smith states the following: "According to this distinction drawing was masculine in that it

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[78] Smith, *Nude*, 112.

[79] Ibid., 112.

[80] Ibid., 144.

controlled formal and spatial relationships, signalling intellectual distance and rationalism. Colour, by contrast, was 'feminine' in that it was considered alluring and sensuous, connoting subjectivity, undisciplined emotion."[81] This is a significant distinction, as line and drawing were to be dominant aspects of fine art education in both Britain and Ireland for the next one hundred years.

The Aesthetic Movement had some small effect on Royal Academy teaching. In 1867, according to Smith, as a consequence of criticism of the teaching system maintained at the school, the Academy Council authorised the sculptor Richard Westmacott to inaugurate a class allowing students to draw the model in conjunction with the antique.

2.5.2 *Summary*

The problem of the nude in British art throughout the Victorian era was a direct consequence of the issue of morality in Victorian society, and paintings of the nude in Victorian society reflected this fact. There were two sides to the argument. On one side were those who advocated a complete ban on the use of the nude because it led to moral depravity, on the other side were those who distinguished between the role of the nude as sensual pleasure and the use of the nude in high artistic pleasure. The use of the nude in the latter sense required a high level of artistic taste. Therefore, the study and appreciation of the nude in art was seen by some as exclusively in the domain of those of high culture. Hence the problems that the nude faced in the state system. Hence also the importance placed on the nude by the Aesthetic Movement.

Despite the fact that the issue of the nude was contentious in Victorian society and that its role in art education was particularly controversial, it is clear that there was

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[81] Ibid., 125.

great demand among art students for fine art classes built around the life class. It is also clear that the frustration of this desire led to the growth in the importance and prestige of independent art schools in late Victorian society. Initially these private schools served three purposes: (1) preparation for the Royal Academy, which in mid-century was still seen by many as the most prestigious art school in Britain; (2) the production of drawing masters for the Victorian middle classes; and (3) the education of amateurs. By the end of the nineteenth century a significant number of these schools had become important schools in their own right and were no longer seen as stepping stones to the Royal Academy or to a career as a drawing master. Schools which developed reputations at this time included Sass's School of Art, later called Cary's, which was founded in the 1840s; at Sass's male students worked from the nude model and female students from the draped figure in a separate class. Leigh's School of Art[82] was founded in 1845 and is still in existence today as Heatherly's.[83] Other schools founded at this time include the Saint John's Wood School of Art, and the Byam Shaw and Vicat Cole School of Art. Two of the most famous schools set up at this time were the Hornsey School of Art, and the Slade School of Art. For a short period in 1968 Hornsey was to become famous in the context of the student rebellions of that year. The Slade, however, was to become more famous than any other private art school in Britain. This was a consequence of its innovative curriculum, which was built exclusively around the life class.

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[82] Leigh's, interestingly, was founded after a group of students were expelled from the Government School of Design in London for wanting to draw from the live model. At Leigh's students were encouraged to draw from the model rather than laboriously copy casts. Classes were less expensive than Sass's, and the lack of a formal system encouraged individuality. It is telling that this school included among its students Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Holman Hunt, and J. E. Millais, three of the greatest English painters of the nineteenth century. (Smith, *Nude*, 21)

[83] John B. Yeats, the father of W.B. Yeats and Jack Yeats, attended Heatherly's in 1857 after he gave up law in Ireland to pursue a precarious career as a bohemian artist. In 1872 he left Heatherly's and

2.6 The Slade School of Art

The Slade School of Art was founded in London in 1868. It was named after Felix Slade, 1790-1868, an English art collector and philanthropist, who endowed chairs of fine art at the University of London, where the Slade School was located, and at Oxford and Cambridge. The latter professorships involved the giving of lectures for the general audience only; John Ruskin was the first Slade Professor at Oxford. The Slade School of Art opened in 1871 as an institution giving practical instruction in painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts. It had three advantages over other art schools for aspirant artists: it was free from the restrictions and regulations of Cole's state system, it was on a sounder financial footing than the other private schools, and it had the additional status of being part of a university. As a result of these advantages it attracted the best teachers and the wealthier and more ambitious upper middle class students. Almost all of the most important English painters in the early years of the twentieth century had studied at the Slade. Among these were Augustus John (1878-1961), Sir William Rothenstein 1872-1945, and William Orpen (1878-1931), who were all renowned for their draughtsmanship. John, who was hugely influential in the early years of the twentieth century, was a noted bohemian. Orpen, a close friend of John, was a famous society painter, and Rothenstein was a noted portrait painter. All three had a role to play in art education. John and Orpen opened the Chelsea School of Art, Orpen taught at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art where his influence was felt until the 1960s, and Rothenstein taught as principal at the Royal College of Art from 1920 until 1935 where he exercised a huge influence. Vanessa Bell (1879-1978) and Duncan Grant (1885-1978), who were members of the Bloomsbury set, were also graduates of the Slade. A later generation of graduates included Paul Nash

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went to the Slade to study under Poynter. (William M. Murphy, *Prodigal Father: The Life of John Butler Yeats*, [London: Cornell University Press, 1978], 85)

(1889-1987), Ben Nicholson (1894-1982), and William Coldstream (1908-1987), all of whom were to have a significant influence on the development of art education in the 1950s and 1960s.[84]

2.6.1 *The Development of a New Curriculum at the Slade*

By contrast with the Royal Academy Schools and the Schools of Art of the National System, the very high reputation which the Slade came to enjoy by the turn of the century was based on a curriculum which was constructed around the life class. Edward Poynter (1836-1919), who had studied in Italy and in Paris at the studio of Charles Gleyere (1808-1874), in his inaugural lecture as the first Slade Professor of Fine Art stated: "The constant study from the life model is the only means we have of arriving at a comprehension of the beauty in nature, and of avoiding its ugliness and deformity, which I take to be the whole end and aim of study".[85] Thus, the curriculum at the Slade was built on an aesthetic that was based on drawing, and which had its origins in the Aesthetic Movement. The Aesthetic Movement, as already stated, rejected the mimetic and the didactic roles of art, and instead placed emphasis on the intrinsic worth of formal values such as colour, line, tone, and pattern. The two key aspects of the Aesthetic Movement were, firstly, that the essence of painting was its physical form and, secondly, that art was superior to nature.[86] The aesthetic which developed at the Slade, and which had grown out of this movement, was based on the idea that the function of drawing was the delineation of form. This aesthetic held that "The representation of form still remains the one and only power of drawing . . .

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[84] Lynda Morris, ed., *Henry Tonks and the Art of Picture Drawing* (Norwich: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1985), 7.

[85] Simon Watney, *English Post-Impressionism* (London: Studio Vista/Eastview Editions Inc, 1980), 18.

[86] Treuherz, *Victorian Painting*, 131-143.

drawing . . . has nothing to recommend it except that which it expresses, which is form. And if it does not excel in this it falls flat".[87]

This quotation illustrates the underlying concept behind the curriculum at the Slade. This concept, which was founded on the belief that drawing was fundamental to all fine art, would have significance for the development of twentieth century art in general and for the development of tertiary art education in Ireland in particular. The principle on which teaching at the Slade was built, and which was a consequence of this concept, stated that drawing is the representation and expression of form by the study of contours. Contours, according to this principle, do not just represent the outline of a figure, but are abstracted from within the figure and represent the fundamental forms of nature. The important thing to note about this principle is that, in line with the ideas of the Aesthetic Movement, it shifts the focus of study from the subject of the particular piece of art to the formal elements of the artwork. This development at the Slade was the start of a movement in British art that would see the study of the formal elements of art come to be the principal preoccupation of avant-garde artists.[88] This preoccupation, as already stated, had its origins in French aesthetics, and it reflects a process, illustrated most strikingly by Cezanne and continued by Picasso, which tried to reduce the visible world to basic formal structures. It also echoes the idea of the ancient Greeks that form was more fundamental than matter, and that ultimately there were ideal or universal forms of which real forms were mere instances or reflections or, to use Plato's analogy, shadows. The American artist and gallery owner John Fothergill, a former student of the Slade and friend of John Rothenstein, in an essay entitled "The Principles of

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[87] Macdonald, *Art and Design Education*, 278.

[88] Watney, *Post-Impressionism*, 17-23.

Teaching Drawing at the Slade School", summarised the overall philosophy of the Slade when he said, "Good drawing reduces the chaos of ideas in nature to one intelligible manner of seeing."[89]

The idea of an aesthetic based on the abstract qualities of line was not new to British art. In the late eighteenth century both the sculptor John Flaxman and the engraver William Blake developed such an aesthetic. In the mid-nineteenth century a linear aesthetic achieved popular acclimation in Britain when the greatest achievement of the Nazarenes, according to Keith Andrews, the Bible illustrations of Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794-1872), which were drawings of great simplicity, sincerity, fervour, and moral force, were published there in 1860. Schnorr von Carolsfeld was also an important educator and became very influential in German art education subsequent to his appointment as head of the Dresden Academy in 1846.[90]

In England Flaxman's ideas were to influence the Slade indirectly. This influence came through France where the focus on the aesthetic possibilities of linear description had been developed to a particularly high level of sophistication in the work of the J. A. D. Ingres. Ingres, whose ideas were directly influenced by Flaxman, though primarily concerned with neo-classicism, had, through his focus on line, opened up new creative possibilities for artists.[91] Notwithstanding the influence of *La Source* on British art and on the Aesthetic Movement in particular, Ingres' ideas were to reach the Slade through the influence of the French painter and engraver Alphonse Legros (1837-1911), who taught at the Slade from 1876 until 1892. It is interesting to note in this context that Cezanne, the father of modernism and therefore formalism,

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[89] Quoted in Morris, *Henry Tonks*, 35.

[90] Andrews, *Nazarenes*, 65-66.

[91] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 279.

was influenced to such an extent by Ingres that he signed some of his earliest paintings, which were executed about 1860, with the name Ingres.[92] It is noteworthy that Ingres had been exposed to the work of the Nazarenes while in Rome. Indeed Cornelius had a very high opinion of Ingres, and Ingres had a very high opinion of Overbeck. In the present context it is significant that some French writers even acclaimed Ingres as the first Pre-Raphaelite.[93]

Stuart Macdonald, in *The History and Philosophy of Art Education*, states that the great contribution of the Slade concept of drawing, which was formed by Henry Tonks (1862-1937) and by his predecessors was 'intelligent' drawing. Tonks, who taught at the Slade from 1892 until 1930, was the only fine art teacher whose influence on British art was greater than that of Rothenstein (see Chapter 4). At the Slade, according to McDonald, "Drawing was given positive intellectual direction towards a search for a knowledge of form, and the slavish outlining, shading, plumbing and measuring of the South Kensington System was superseded".[94]

The success of the Slade and its curriculum at the turn of the century represents the point at which modern French influences superseded German influences in British art education at tertiary level. This is not to say that there was a clean break with German influences, as the connections between German, French and British art and ideas were complex and deep, especially in the twenty years prior to the First World War. In the area of design German influence was to remain very strong, and especially during and after the First World War (see Chapter 3).

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[92] Lorenz Eitner, *An Outline of 19th Century European Painting: From David Through Cezanne*, (New York: Harper and Rowe Publishers, 1987), 422.

[93] Andrews, *Nazarenes*, 73.

[94] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 279.

The early years of the Slade, and in particular the tenure of Alphonse Legros, represent the point at which a preoccupation with form entered the bloodstream of modern British art education. Under French influence, as already shown, the focus of the fine arts in Britain moved away from Ruskin's concern with content and with his explicitly moralistic interpretation of art, and moved towards the more formalist and abstract aesthetic of the twentieth century. This change, merits closer examination; firstly, because it would have a major influence on tertiary level art education in Ireland for most of the twentieth century, and, secondly, because it would lead to the development of the Basic Design system of art education in the 1950s.

2.6.2 *The Role of Form in the Curriculum at the Slade*

John Ruskin, as already shown, was the most influential art critic of his time and his ideas enjoyed widespread influence in Victorian Britain. Though his aesthetic ideas are summarised in the maxim "truth to nature", Ruskin was against a merely sensuous response to materials and subject on the part of artists. He demanded of artists a moral and spiritual response to beauty. The function of the artist in society, according to Ruskin, was to present realistic images in a moral or spiritual context, which would reflect man's wonder and delight before the visual creation of God.[95] In later years Ruskin's concept of the moral context of art broadened to include economic and social issues, and it was in this sense that the spiritual ideas of Ruskin and the socialist ideas of the designer William Morris (see Chapter 3) converged.[96]

The moralistic and very Victorian preoccupations of Ruskin and Morris contrasted sharply with the ideas of the American painter, James Abbot MacNeill Whistler

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[95] Treuherz, *Victorian Painting*, 71-73.

[96] Kenneth Clarke, *Ruskin Today* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 269.

(1834-1903).[97] Whistler, who had lived in Paris for many years and who was a close friend of many of the most important modern French painters, was responsible for bringing French ideas about art to Britain when he moved there in 1859. His demands for the autonomy of the art object and his preoccupation with the technical aspects of modern French painting provided younger artists with a refreshing break from the older aesthetic of Ruskin. It was Whistler who, in 1863, brought Alphonse Legros to Britain.

When he arrived in Britain, Legros set himself up as a teacher of drawing and etching, and his first official appointment was at the National Art Training School, the principal school of the South Kensington System. In 1876 he became Professor of Etching at the Slade School of Art, where he immediately made a great impact. Legros was a master draughtsman, and he was the first to make drawing the preoccupation of the Slade. According to William Rothenstein, who was taught by Legros, students at the Slade "did draw at a time when everywhere else in England students were rubbing and tickling their paper with stump, chalk, charcoal and india rubber". Rothenstein went on to state that "Legros was a disciple of Mantegna, Raphael, and Rembrandt, of Ingres and Delacroix, of Poussin and Claude. He taught us to draw freely with the point, to build up our drawings by observing the broad planes of the model".[98] Legros, who brought with him to England the anti-bourgeois spirit of Flaubert and the French avant-garde, encouraged the independence of the Slade by discouraging his students from exhibiting at the Royal Academy. It is worth reminding the reader that the Grosvener Gallery, which was opened as a venue for the

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[97] Ruskin's ideas had been adopted eagerly in the United States by a group called the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art. The work of this group, whose influence was negligible, was, true to the principles of the Pre-Raphaelites, realistic and painstakingly detailed. (Arthur C. Danto, *The State of the Art* [New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1987], 85-89)

[98] Robert Speaight, *William Rothenstein: The Portrait of an Artist in His Time* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962), 17.

exhibition of art work which was associated with the Aesthetic Movement and which self consciously set itself up in opposition to the Royal Academy, opened its doors in 1877.

Whistler had a very high profile as an artist in Victorian society, and, though not a teacher, he exerted great influence on late Victorian taste. Whistler was bohemian and eccentric, and he rejected everything that Ruskin stood for. He particularly rejected the view that art had a moral or ethical role in society. He complained that people had developed the habit of looking, not at pictures but through pictures, "At some human fact that shall or shall not, from a social point of view, better their mental or moral state."[99] Whistler's ideas are summed up in his statement that:

> Art should be independent of all claptrap - should stand alone and appeal to the artistic sense of eye and ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it and that is why I insist on calling my works 'arrangements' and 'harmonies'.[100]

The celebrated court case between Ruskin and Whistler, which took place in 1877, illustrates the significance of the difference between them and marks a watershed in the development of art in Victorian Britain. This case was fought over Ruskin's remark that Whistler had thrown a pot of paint in the public's face when he exhibited *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, one of his more abstract paintings.[101] Whistler won the case but was awarded only a farthing in damages. He went bankrupt as a result. Oscar Wilde expressed the same idea as Whistler when he said in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that there were no moral or immoral books only well written or badly written books.

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[99] Quoted in Peter Fuller, "Fine Arts," in *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*, ed. Boris Ford, Vol. 4: *The Late Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 174.

[100] Quoted in Harrison and Lane, *English Art and Modernism*, 16.

[101] Treuherz, *Victorian Taste*, 150-151.

The development of a purely formalist aesthetic in Britain in the early years of the twentieth century owes much to Whistler's preoccupation with the abstract forms of his paintings, and with the preoccupation of the Slade with the abstract qualities of drawing. Henry Tonks, who taught as an assistant professor at the Slade from 1892 until 1918 and as Slade Professor from 1918 until 1930, was one of the chief instigators of this aesthetic. Interestingly, in relation to his highly developed skills as a draughtsman, Tonks was a professional surgeon before he became involved in teaching art. In his work as an educator, and in line with the ideas of the Aesthetic Movement, the French Impressionists, Whistler, and the New English Arts Club, Tonks rejected the moral, anecdotal, and narrative aspect of British art of the Victorian era.[102] Notably he rejected the explicitly didactic aspects of art, and consequently he rejected the sense of social responsibility that had been engendered by Morris and Ruskin.[103] More importantly, he removed the complacent and indulgent aspect of much late Victorian art, and he looked instead at the technical and formal aspects of art in order to focus on a more scientific and vigorous pursuit of truth. As Simon Watney says "the student [at the Slade was] not to be satisfied merely with the detail of effect, but neither [was] he or she to be over concerned with subject matter, since art itself, the conventions of drawing and painting, are the prime concern . . . The Slade has never been known for its social realism."[104] The style and popularity of

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[102] The New English Arts Club was founded in 1886 in protest against the dullness of the Royal Academy and in order to promote the relationship between British and French artists. Among its members were George Moore, Henry Tonks, James McNeill Whistler, William Rothenstein, and William Orpen. Interestingly, in relation to the pre-eminence of the principle of truth to nature in the ideas of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, its aim was summarised by one member as "[the] vivid and simple study of nature" (Harold Osborne, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Art* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 406)

[103] This aspect of art would be revived in the Euston Road school in the 1930s, ironically, by William Coldstream (1908-1987), who was a graduate of the Slade and a Slade Professor of Fine Art.

[104] Watney, *Post-Impressionism*, 18.

the drawings of Augustus John are sufficient illustration of the success of this aesthetic in the early years of the twentieth century.

In line with this scientific approach to art and with the thinking of the philosopher George E. Moore, who was a close personal friend, Tonks approached the fine arts analytically. Moore (1873-1958), who was a professor of logic at Cambridge, fostered the "emotive theory of value", which stated that judgements of value were essentially expressions of personal feeling, and that things could not be valued by virtue of anything but their intrinsic properties.[105] Moore was known for the extreme simplicity and directness of his philosophy. Tonks' ideas on art, as expressed in his writings, show the influence of Moore quite clearly.[106] In line with Moor's approach to thinking, Tonks divided the fine arts into two discreet areas, form and colour, the Slade did not deal with sculpture. According to Tonks,

> Objects are made visible to us by the light which illuminates them; they are visible as regards their form, and as regards their colour. Drawing is the art of representing the forms of objects upon a flat surface, as they appear from one point of view. Drawing is concerned with form alone, and not with colour.[107]

Tonks believed that drawing must focus on the representation of contour, on the use of light and shade, or on a combination of both. Drawing, for Tonks, was based on seeing discrete aspects of observed objects as separate; for instance, contour was seen separately from light and shade, and whether the artist chose to focus on contour or on light and shade, or indeed both, drawing involved close, accurate, and analytical

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[105] Thomas Kiernan, *Who's Who in the History of Philosophy*, (London: Vision Press Ltd., 1966), 121.

[106] Morris, *Henry Tonks*, 29.

[107] Quoted in Ibid., 30. It is interesting to note here that in his final discourse Reynolds had argued against an excessive absorption with colour. It is also interesting to note that Leighton believed that colour should be subordinate to design and that the sensual elements of art should be controlled by the intellectual rigour of line. (Smith, *Nude*, 88) The idea that line has pre-eminence in art goes back to Kant, see (Lorenz Eitner, *Neo-classicism and Romanticism 1750-1850* [London: Prentice-Hall, 1970], 99.)

observation. As observation had to be as precise as possible, vertical and horizontal reference was an important part of this process.[108] Hence emerged the use of plumb lines[109] by some artists who worked, and indeed work, in the Slade tradition. Euan Uglow (1932-2000) is the most widely known exponent of this style working in Britain in recent years. The present writer recalls another such artist, who worked as a visiting lecturer at the National College of Art and Design in the 1970s, setting up plumb lines and reference points for students, who were then set to work on one very precise and accurate pencil drawing for a two week period.

As the Slade took an analytical approach to drawing, so it took an analytical approach to painting, which was broken down to its elementary components. Tonks stated that "The apparent colours of objects differ in degree, and intensity; and their place, as in the range from light to dark, as in the range from warm to cold colours, must be borne in mind for guidance in searching for colour".[110]

John Fothergill separated art into three elements - colour, form and the spiritual element. The later, he said, was dictated by the artist's character; colour was not the domain of drawing, and that left form as the only issue of concern for draughtsmen.[111] Fothergill also shows the influence of G. E. Moore when he says that it is research into, and not judgement on, the forms in nature that enables the draughtsman to represent forms that give rise to an emotion. And Fothergill takes a step back to William Morris' interest in materials, of which more in Chapter 3, and forward to the

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[108] Smith, *Nude*, 30.

[109] A plumb line, a ball of lead attached to a string, is used to find the perpendicular. In drawing, plumb lines are suspended near the posed model to establish an unvarying and absolute reference point from which all measurements are taken. They are used when the artist seeks visual precision and accuracy.

[110] Quoted in Morris, *Henry Tonks*, 32.

[111] Ibid., 32.

modernist principle, 'Form Follows Function', when he said that true style was the expression of a clear understanding of the raw material from which the artist makes his creation.[112]

From the above it can be seen that the Slade, by 1907, had developed an aesthetic which fully accepted that the properties of materials themselves were a vital part of the creative process, and that emotion was also a part of that process. When this idea came into contact with Post-Impressionism as a result of two exhibitions which were held in London, one in 1910 and the other in 1912, a whole new world of creative possibilities would be opened up for artists. These exhibitions, which have since become famous as a watershed in British art, had been organised by Roger Fry, who was a member of the Bloomsbury set and a vigorous supporter of the new formalist aesthetics. It is no accident that, when the first Post-Impressionist art was shown in London, it was noted that the students at the Slade were particularly influenced by the work; to such an extent, in fact, that a rift was created between some of the more radical students and the staff. Tonks in particular did not like this influence. He had not realised how revolutionary his ideas about art actually were.[113]

Subsequent to the Post-Impressionist exhibitions of 1910 and 1912 the curriculum at the Slade continued to focus on ideas developed before the turn of the century. Even today, as already mentioned, the Slade style of measured drawing and careful analysis can be seen in the work of many British artists. The representational work of the young Irish artist, John Long, for instance, who exhibits at the annual Royal Hibernian Academy Exhibition, is an example of such work and of the enduring

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[112] Ibid., 33.

[113] Harrison and Lane, *English Art and Modernism*, 64-65.

nature of this style.[114] The form based analytical and abstract work of the Irish artist Felim Egan is another example of a particular style of art that is associated with the Slade tradition. Both of these artists attended the Slade.

The development of the Slade aesthetic was a particular manifestation of the influences and forces that brought about a preoccupation with form in British art in the early twentieth century. The Slade tradition fed into an explosion of creativity and development during and immediately after the First World War in British art, which led to the development of a movement in British art during the inter-war years that focussed on the formal aspects of art. Though confined to a small number of artists, this form-based movement in British art flourished. Developments that took place in this movement throughout the inter-war years had a significant and far-reaching influence on the development of British art, especially in the post-Second World War epoch. This influence would be particularly noticeable in the Basic Design system of art education as it developed in the 1950s and 1960s (see Chapter 5).

British formalist art influenced Irish art throughout the inter-war period. It had, however, a greater influence on the development of Irish art in the 1960s and 1970s and, in combination with the influence of the Basic Design system, on the development of Irish art education at tertiary level in the 1970s and 1980s. It is necessary, therefore, to give a brief account of the development of formalism in British art in the first half of the twentieth century.

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[114] Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts, Catalogue (Dublin: Wood-Printcraft Ltd., 1997), 88.

2.7 The Influence of Formalism on British Art

As already shown, the great change that Whistler oversaw in the development of British art was one where preoccupation with technique and the expressive potential of surface replaced subjects which might be taken as moral exhortations.[115] The latter was reflected in the ideas of Ruskin and the early Victorian aesthetic of truth to nature, and the former represented the ideas of Whistler, the Aesthetic Movement, French Impressionism, and the new century. The founding of the New English Arts Club in 1886 represented the formal recognition of the influence of French art on British art. The fact that one of a number of names suggested for this new group had been the Society of Anglo-French Painters indicates the significance of the French influence on English art at this time. This situation contrasts with the situation a century earlier when German influence was dominant.[116]

French ideas about art, having been introduced to Britain by Whistler and other artists of the Aesthetic Movement, were reinforced by a number of exhibitions of the work of modern French artists that were held in Britain at this time. The painters Walter Sickert, Wilson Steer, and Frederic Brown, for instance, organised an exhibition of French Impressionist art in London in 1889. And in 1905 the French dealer Durand Ruel organised an exhibition of Impressionist paintings at the Grafton Galleries. Modern French art, however, made an explosive entry into British society in a number of exhibitions that were held in London just before the First World War. These were the 1910 and 1912 exhibitions of Post-Impressionist art which have already been mentioned. These exhibitions were to have a major influence on English art in the twentieth century, as they reinforced, very strongly, the idea, by now well

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[115] Harrison and Lane, *English Art and Modernism*, 17.

[116] Ibid., 19.

established as a result of the work of Whistler and the Slade, of the pre-eminence of formal values in art. The particular significance of the Post-Impressionist exhibitions, however, was that they made an explicit correlation between the formal elements of art and human feelings.

The artists represented at the Post-Impressionist exhibitions of 1910 and 1912 included Monet, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Picasso, Vlaminck, Matisse, Derain, and Cezanne. Gauguin was to have a particular influence on British artists. When it is realised that at the 1910 exhibition he was represented by forty-six works it is easy see why. It is also interesting to observe that Gaugin was noted for his use of colour.[117] Gauguin is important in the present context not just because his work fits into the context of formalist developments and preoccupations as established by the Slade, but because the spirit of symbolism infused it.

Symbolism had widespread influence in Britain in the late nineteenth century; W. B. Yeats was one of many artists and writers who came under its spell.[118] Symbolism is an important movement as it is the connecting link between the Romantic Movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and modernism in the twentieth century.[119] Symbolism rejected industrialisation and asserted a credo that held that the work of art was a consequence of the emotions and of the inner spirit of the artist, as opposed to observed nature. This was the basis or Tonks' difficulty with the response of his students to the Post-Impressionist exhibitions. According to the poet and critic Nathan Zach, vorticism – the link between symbolism and modernism - shared with

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[117] Ibid., 69.

[118] Symbolism was so called because it embodied a symbolic expression of inner life. It came about as a reaction from the aims of Impressionism and even more so from the principles of Realism which held that painting was essentially concrete art and could consist only of the representation of things both real and existing.

[119] H. H. Arnson, *A History of Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1969), 69.

symbolism a stress on "essential form" to the exclusion of all allegedly extra-poetic matter. Vorticism, which was a short lived movement that was inspired by both symbolism and Italian futurism, and which was the first organised movement towards abstraction in English art, had a strong influence on the development of British modernism. An important exhibition of futurism was held in London in 1910 at which the futurist poet Tommaso Marinetti, supported by futurists painters such as Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, and Carlo Carra, lectured on futurist ambitions, and, in line with the avant-garde values of futurism, provoked a scandal.[120] The central figure of vorticism was Wyndham Lewis. The sculptor Henry Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915), who was also a vorticist, was a key figure in British art in the twentieth century through his influence on the sculptors Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore. According to Moore and Hepworth, an art based on forms, especially organic forms, related to man's biological makeup and therefore spoke universally and was not hindered by its capacity to communicate by place, period or class.[121] Moore was to become the most influential British artist of the twentieth century.

In relation to the type of meaning that the formal elements of a painting convey, it is worth quoting Gauguin from a letter he wrote in 1899: "Think also of the musical role colour will henceforth play in modern painting. Colour which is vibration just as music is, is able to attain what is most universal yet at the same time most elusive in nature; its inner force."[122]

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[120] Nathan Zack, "Imagism and Vorticism." in *Modernism,* ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 228-242.

[121] Francis Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 92.

[122] John Rewald, *Paul Gauguin: Letters to Ambrose Vollard and Andre Fontainas*, (San Francisco, 1943), 21-24; quoted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 24.

The idea that form expresses some inner force and is the carrier of significant meaning, which is inherent in the above quotation, was legitimised and given the seal of approval for British artists when Clive Bell, the influential critic and supporter of Roger Fry in organising the Post-Impressionist exhibitions that were held in 1910 and 1912, coined the phrase "significant form":

> For a discussion of aesthetics it need be agreed only that forms arranged and combined according to certain unknown and mysterious laws do move us in a particular way, and that it is the business of an artist so to combine and arrange them that they shall move us. These moving combinations and arrangements I have called . . . Significant Form.[123]

The idea that form was a vehicle for carrying some basic truth or vital force through feelings had a profound effect on the development of British art after the First World War. This was particularly the case in the work of Henry Moore, but also in the work of Barbara Hepworth, Victor Pasmore, and Jacob Epstein, among others. These artists, through their dominance of British art, were to influence Irish art directly. This influence was felt not only in the inter-war period when they influenced Irish artists such as Mainie Jellett, but it was also felt in the 1960s and 1970s. This influence was particularly noticeable during the 1960s and 1970s in the work produced by the group of artists known as the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, which was established in 1943 and with which Jellett was associated. This influence was also to be felt in Irish art education at tertiary level in the 1960s and 1970s. The influence of Moore was to be ubiquitous throughout the western world after the Second World War. Significantly, Moore's work was included in a number of exhibitions that were held in Ireland in the 1960s, a time of major social and cultural change in Ireland. Moore, as already stated, had been influenced in his early years by the work of the sculptor Henry Gaudier-Brzeska. Gaudier-Brzeska, a young and brilliant artist who was killed in the First

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[123] Harrison and Lane, *English Art and Modernism*, 354.

World War, had expressed the growing rift between the older Victorian aesthetic, which was based on neo-classicism, and that of the more forward looking and strident young artists of the period, which was based on form and feeling, when he said: "The fair Greek saw himself only. He petrified his own semblance. His sculpture was derivative; his feeling for form secondary. The absence of direct energy lasted for a thousand years... plastic soul is intensity of life bursting the plane."[124] Gaudier-Brzeska went on to make a clear and explicit correlation between feeling and form when he said: "I shall present my emotions by the arrangement of my surfaces, the planes and lines by which they are defined."[125]

By the end of the First World War, the idea that form was the primary focus for artists had been accepted in Britain among the more avant-garde practitioners and theorists of art. It had also been accepted that an emotional response to the formal aspects of the visual arts represented a more truthful and more accurate expression of underlying forces, or, as Clive Bell described it, significant meaning, than rational or intellectual enquiry. This development reflects disillusionment with rationalism and with empiricism, the origins of which lay in the Enlightenment. For many artists at this time the First World War was seen as the apotheosis of the Enlightenment, which had created nineteenth century imperialism, which in turn had led to the First World War. Surrealism, it will be recalled, developed as a reaction to the First World War. It is an appropriate irony that Henry Gaudier-Brzeska was killed in the war. [126]

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[124] Quoted in Roger Berthoud, *The Life of Henry. Moore* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 70.

[125] Ibid., 70.

[126] The American literary critic Paul Fussell provides an interesting example of how aesthetic values were changed by the war. In his book *The First World War and Modern Memory* Fussell suggests that Ruskin's *Modern Painters* was the crucial document in British aesthetics in establishing the status of the sky and sunrises and sunsets in British art - think of Turner. The First World War brought the death of the sunrise and sunset as symbols of Romantic significance because, according to Fussell, it turned the sky into an ironic mocker of human stupidity and pain. This situation arose because of the association of the sunrise and sunset in the eyes of soldiers with the time of greatest danger; attacks tended to take place just after sunrise. Fussell goes on to say that by mocking the values of the

In 1934 an exhibition of contemporary British avant-garde art called 'Objective Abstractions' was held in the Zwemmer Gallery in London. The catalogue of this exhibition included a list of questions that were asked of the exhibiting artists. One particular question that the artists had to answer was the following: "Have you a clear conception of the picture before you begin?" The answers that the artists gave to this question, which are quoted below, throw some light on the new approach to the making of art that was taken by artists in the period after the development of a new formalist aesthetic in the first years of the twentieth century. This new approach to the making of art would become an integral aspect of the fine art curriculum in third level art education in Britain in the 1960s, after the publication of the First Coldstream Report.[127] This same approach would find its way into the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after the demise of the old neo-classical curriculum and the introduction of the new modernist inspired curriculum in the Fine Art faculty in 1975. The influence of this approach on the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin is clear. It is illustrated by the similarity between the answers given to the above question in 1934 by the artists whose answers are quoted below, and the description of the working process of students that were given to Professor Iseult McCarthy in interviews that she conducted with students in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in 1979.[128] The artists who exhibited in 'Objective Abstractions' included Clive Bell. Bell responded to the above question

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Victorian and Edwardian worlds the war had the effect of driving men further away from the Romantic era and into a new more confused epoch. Fussell illustrates the bathetic status of the sunset in the minds of the cultured classes in the inter-war period by the comment of Evelyn Waugh on seeing a beautiful sunset over Mount Edna in Italy in 1930. Having described the sunset in detail, according to Fussell, Waugh commented, "Nothing I have ever seen in art or nature was quite so revolting". (Paul Fussell, *The First World War and Modern Memory* [London: Oxford University Press, 1979], 51-55)

[127] See Chapter 6.

[128] See Chapter 14.

about whether he had a clear conception of the picture before he began in the following way: "No. Once the picture has been started, its growth is autonomous; that is to say, the additional marks are called into being by what is already on the surface of the canvas." The artist Rodrigo Moynihan, in reply to the same question, said: "No. The evolution is intimately bound up with the canvas and medium."[129] And an artist called Geoffry Tibble replied in the following way: "No. My pictures grow while working, guided entirely by my reaction to the picture at the time of painting."[130]

In art historical terms, the particular point of importance that is illustrated by the above quotes, as pointed out by Charles Harrison, is that purely formal interests had become, by the 1930s, the sole concern of progressive artists in Britain. Harrison states the following:

> The brush strokes were to be seen as constituting an object, which was the picture, rather than reconstituting an object or scene, of which the picture was then to be seen as a representation. Where the previous abstract art had been justified as the plastic expression of spiritual states or subjective feelings, their paintings were proposed as expressions of the visual attitude in painting, as opposed to the conceptual or idealistic, and as offering only answers to those questions which present or suggest themselves on the canvas.[131]

The ideas expressed in the 'Objective Abstractions' exhibition of 1934 were re-enforced by an exhibition called 'Abstract and Concrete' that was held in 1936. This exhibition contained the work of European and British artists and reflected a new and

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[129] Moynihan was Professor of Fine Art at the Royal College of Art when Campbell Bruce was a student there. Bruce, as Professor of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin between 1974 and 1987, was responsible for the introduction of the new Modernist inspired curriculum in the Fine Art faculty there.

[130] Harrison and Lane, *English Art and Modernism*, 335

[131] Ibid., 335.

influential movement that was known as constructivism. The Constructivist Movement, according to the historian Francis Spalding, held that

> behind much abstract art lay the Platonic belief that formal relationships reflected a metaphysical ideal; that the simplicity and clarity of means pointed to an underlying model of construction reflective of some larger vision of social organisation. . . .
>
> [In art constructivism meant] the honing of an idea into . . . work in which form and content are one. It aimed at objectivity and therefore favoured an impersonal treatment. It aspired, with varying success, towards a universal idea of abstract beauty which, in its harmony and balance was intended to make the viewer critical of the disorder in everyday life.[132]

2.8 Summary

If an overview is taken of the development of art education in Victorian Britain as it applies to fine art, and if the situation in 1837, when the Normal School of Design was founded, is compared with that of 1900, when the Slade was at the height of its influence and prestige, the various forces which were at work can be observed.

In 1837 most British artists trained at the Royal Academy or other academies abroad. In reflecting neo-classical ideas, the type of training that they received was based on the study of classical forms. The curricula at the academies were founded on copious amounts of drawing from the antique. After proficiency was achieved in this area students were allowed to draw from the life model. The dominance of this system was challenged in mid-century by the development of a national system of art education, and later in the century it was challenged by the development of private art schools; both of these developments reflected the influence of the Enlightenment.

The national system, as manifested in the Normal School of Design, had one simple objective: to train artisans and designers in order to improve the quality of design of British manufactured goods. The curriculum at the Normal School of

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[132] Spalding, *British Art*, 113-115.

Design thus focused, very narrowly, on the acquisition of specific manual skills. The methodology of this system was based on copying from examples in a sequential way, starting with simple shapes and progressing towards more complex forms and patterns. The governing council of the Normal School of Design felt that the training of fine artists was the domain of the Royal Academy and therefore had nothing to do with design, craft, or industry, which were the concern of their system; hence arose the exclusion of the life class from the curriculum of the Normal School of Design.

The system of art education that Henry Cole introduced - the South Kensington System - to replace the Normal School of Design was more broadly based than its predecessor. It aspired to teach the basic principles of art and design to a wider range of people from different social classes. Cole set out to do this by teaching drawing from historical precedents and by exposing the populace as a whole to examples of good design. The latter was achieved through exhibitions, and also by the opening of the South Kensington Museum. By the end of the nineteenth century the South Kensington System had changed from its original objectives and was concerned primarily with training teachers for regional art schools and for the national education system. From its foundation in 1851 the overall objective of Cole's system had been to raise the standard of public taste. It was believed by those who ran this system that it would automatically lead to an improvement in the quality of British manufactured goods, principally because of the law of supply and demand, but also because the standard of taste of the artisans producing the goods would rise.

In conclusion, by 1900 the Royal Academy had become conservative and was seen by the more avant-garde artists and by many of the wealthier students who could afford private art education as too traditional and out of touch with contemporary developments. The same people saw the South Kensington System as a vocational system for producing art teachers and mediocre fine artists. By contrast, the Slade was

the most popular art school in Britain, and it subscribed to the Romantic philosophy of individual creative development and to the new form based aesthetic. The curriculum at the Slade was built around the life class and was concerned primarily with the study of form. The Slade's particular contribution to art education was to identify form as the sole concern of study for artists. More particularly, the Slade taught that by refining the use of line some disinterested essence or truth would be revealed. Interestingly, Ruskin had already expounded on the significance of a highly refined line in art, as had the Nazarenes; for Ruskin, and in line with his moralistic approach to art, a correlation was made between the quality of the line and the ethical state of the artist.[133] In the case of the Slade, however, the moral truth that underpinned art had been taken out of the equation and had been replaced by a disinterested scientific truth, thus opening up the possibility of a link between feelings and form in the Kantian sense. The curriculum of the Slade, therefore, marks the point at which Kant's ideas encounter art education.[134]

British design and in particular British design education, which had been the preserve of the South Kensington System, was developed independently of the National System throughout most of the nineteenth century. Developments in design in the nineteenth century paralleled developments in the fine arts in many respects. These developments influenced fine art education in the twentieth century principally

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[133] Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, 89-90.

[134] It is interesting to note that by the early years of the twentieth century the study of form had been given a central role in art education within the general system of art education in Britain at first and second levels. This was a consequence of the influence of Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris. The approach to form, however, which was adopted by the state system contrasts sharply with that of the Slade, and it reveals the gap between the ideology of the avant-garde and that of the official education system. In the latter case the definition of form was moulded to suit the imperial ideology of the times, which was scientifically, commercially, and industrially driven. In studying form, the clearly stated objective of the official system was to enable man to understand form in order that he might control form. Hence the specific and narrow educational objective of the official education system, which was to teach manipulative skills. The stated objective of this approach to education was to enable man to "bend the forces of nature to [his] purposes." (J. Welton, *Principles and Methods of Teaching* [London: University Tutorial Press Ltd., 1909], 491.)

through their influence on the development of the Bauhaus School of Art in Germany in the 1920s. The Bauhaus, in turn, was the single greatest influence on tertiary art education in Britain in the twentieth century. These developments will now be looked at.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN EDUCATION IN BRITAIN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FUNCTIONALIST AESTHETIC 1830-1939

3.1 Introduction

According to Paul Thompson, between 1830 and 1870 the general standard of design of British manufactured goods declined to a very low level.[1] This decline happened despite the fact that the Schools of Design were set up in 1837 and the Schools of Art in 1852 with the specific objective of improving Britain's competitiveness in the marketplace. And yet, by 1900 British design was internationally renowned, and had influenced, to a significant extent, the development of design and design education on the continent. This influence was particularly notable in the Art Nouveau Movement.[2] Ironically, it was in Germany, Britain's chief industrial rival at the beginning of the twentieth century, that this influence was strongest.[3] While the details of the development of British design in the nineteenth century are not central to the present study, there are issues that lie at the heart of

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[1] Paul Thompson, *The Work of William Morris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 124.

[2] Nikolaus Pevsner, Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 90-116.

[3] David Thistlewood, "The Formation of the National Society for Education in Art and Design: A Dialectical Advance for British Art and Design Education," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 8 (1989): 140.

changes in design and in design education at that time which are relevant to the development of fine art education in the twentieth century. These issues will now be examined.

3.2 The Great Exhibition

In relation to the present study, the most convenient place to start a brief analysis of developments in British design during the nineteenth century is the year 1851. This was the year of the Great Exhibition. The Great Exhibition, which was held in a purpose built - and architecturally innovative - iron and glass structure in Hyde Park, was a huge display of British and foreign manufactured goods. Though not the brainchild of Prince Albert, as many believed, his patronage did help to ensure its success.[4] The Great Exhibition was not the first such large-scale exhibition of manufactures held; the French held the first in 1798, and the Royal Dublin Society held one in 1829 and subsequently every three years. There were many such exhibitions in Britain in the early nineteenth century.[5] The significance of the Great Exhibition of 1851 lies in the fact that it was international. Indeed, Albert conceived of the exhibition as a monument to peace and internationalism, though this was not the popular conception.[6]

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[4] John Steegman, *Victorian Taste: A Study in the Arts and Architecture from 1830 to 1870* (London: Nelson, 1970), 207-233.

[5] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 207-208. Exhibitions such as the Great Exhibition helped to establish middle class hegemony in Victorian Britain. Peter Gay points out, for instance, that the Manchester Exhibition of 1857, which reflected the aspiration to respectability and high mindedness, not alone of the Manchester bourgeois but of the Victorian middle classes in general, led to the establishment of the Halle Orchestra by the German Carl Halle. According to Gay, the Halle Orchestra has been an important vehicle in establishing middle class values since its inception, and thus reflects the efficacy of exhibitions such as the Manchester Exhibition of 1857 as mechanisms for changing society. (Peter Gay, *Pleasure Wars, The Bourgeois Experience Victoria to Freud,* Volume V [London: Harper Collins, 1998], 75-78)

[6] David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989), 19.

The radically innovative, functional, machine made and pre-fabricated architecture of the so-called Crystal Palace, which housed the exhibition, reflected the utilitarian principles of the mid-Victorian era. The financing of the exhibition by British industrialists, with no cost to the taxpayer, reflected the utilitarian philosophy and the efficiency of Henry Cole in particular. Henry Cole was a member of the small executive committee of five that was entirely responsible for carrying the exhibition into effect. The bias of the organising committee in favour of a functional style of architecture was manifested in the composition of the building committee; this was a sub committee that dealt with the question of a building to house the Great Exhibition. This committee included three famous engineers but only two architects. Joseph Paxton (1801-1865), who - after much debate - got the job of designing the Crystal Palace, was the Duke of Devonshire's superintendent of gardens, and the precedent for the radical iron and glass structure which housed the Great Exhibition was the vast greenhouse for tropical plants which he had built for the Duke at Chatsworth House.[7] The architecture of the Crystal Palace, in looking towards the future, contrasted sharply with the more stylish Gothic Revival architecture, which was the fashion of the day and which looked to the past. In this sense the Crystal Palace reflected the two chief motivating factors for the Great Exhibition, which were imperial sentiment and an unbridled optimism in industrialism and mechanisation. The Great Exhibition was popular with the Victorian public, and huge numbers of people visited it during the six months it remained open.

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[7] Steegman, *Victorian Taste*, 213-214

3.3 The Development of a Functionalist Aesthetic

The Great Exhibition had an immediate influence on Victorian design.[8] This is illustrated by the fact that naturalistic floral patterns that had won prizes at the Great Exhibition in 1851 were exhibited at the new Museum of Ornamental Art, one year later, as examples of false principles of design. The cardinal false principle was the principle which stated that art, and particularly applied art, must imitate nature.[9] This *volte-face* is evidence of undercurrents in Victorian society, which mark the mid-century out as a time of change. This change, as already discussed, was from a society that saw art as a means of moral improvement to a society that saw art as a means of commercial advancement. Within the world of Victorian design there were two forces working for change which reflected these two different views. The first was the utilitarian, functional, and machine-based aesthetic, as exemplified in the Crystal Palace, which reflected the reformative and strident agenda of many liberal thinkers at this time. The second, which was primarily a reaction against the excessive rigidity of the neo-classical style of architecture that was popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was galvanised into action by the Great Exhibition. This second movement rejected the architectural style of the Crystal Palace and the aesthetic values that the exhibits reflected. It also, however, involved a romantically inspired rejection of mechanisation and industrialisation. Though not formally organised until 1888 as the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, this movement became known in the latter half of the nineteenth century as the Arts and Crafts Movement. The Arts and

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[8] This influence was not restricted to Britain. Jacob von Falke, an Austrian writer, in his *History of Modern Taste* published in 1866, stated that the Great Exhibition had laid bare the misery of modern design to its full extent and that its lessons, though absorbed mainly by the British, had led to a welcome renovation of taste throughout Europe. (Gay, *Pleasure Wars*, 69)

[9] Harriet Bridgeman and Elizabeth Drury ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Victoriana*, (London: Country Life, 1975), 279.

Crafts Movement had the dual objective of reasserting the importance of craftsmanship in the face of increasing mechanisation and mass production, and of bridging the gap that separated the fine arts from the so-called decorative or applied arts. In short, it wanted to bridge the ever increasing gap between the artist and society, which it correctly identified as one of the principal forces of change in the world of art and design since the advent of the Romantic Movement.

The designer and teacher Gottfried Semper (1803-1879), who was one of the first to assert the arts and crafts aesthetic, identified the source of the perplexity of artists and designers of this movement when he said: "The hardest porphyry and granite are cut like chalk, and polished like wax, . . . rubber and gutta percha are vulcanised and used for bewildering imitations of carving in wood metal and stone".[10]

The rejection of mechanisation by some designers was not just a romantically inclined rejection of modern engineering processes. It also embraced a rejection of the order of the neo-classical style of the Georgian period. The forms of the neo-classical style, which had a common currency and a public aspect, were seen by many, because of their association with the old political order, as morally corrupt. It is perhaps significant that neo-classicism was also the style most closely associated with the French Revolution. While the rejection of the Georgian style reflected disenchantment with the social and political structures of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, at the same time it asserted the new philosophy of individualism. The Reform Bill of 1832 was a political manifestation of the same shift away from the old oligarchy - essentially the aristocracy – and, as stated in the last chapter, marked the arrival of the middle classes as a powerful force in British society.[11] A similar change

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[10] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 252.

[11] Steegman, *Victorian Taste*, 10-12.

had taken place in the social structure of France in the mid-eighteenth century, which, as was to happen in Britain, had manifested itself in French artistic practice at that time. In France, however, because of the resistance of the aristocracy, the outcome was different.[12]

This change in British society underpinned perceptions of design in early Victorian Britain. The Georgian period 1715-1830, which was associated with the old order, had positively embraced the idea that there were canons that must be adhered to. This situation was the antithesis of self-expression; self-expression was of course the driving force of the Romantic Movement.[13] This change in attitude towards design is consistent with the influence of the Romantic Movement on the fine arts at this time.[14]

Ironwork and plasterwork are obvious examples of the type of design made in the Georgian period that the new aesthetic rejected. Coade stone, which was very popular in Georgian architecture, is a more apt example, as it illustrates the antithesis of an idea that was to have a central role in the development of the Gothic revival aesthetic and eventually in the development of the arts and crafts aesthetic. This idea was based on the notion of the appropriate use of materials. Coade stone, which was an imitation of a natural substance, represented an inappropriate use of materials - coade stone was

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[12] Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art 3: Rococo, Classicism and Romanticism* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1962), 1-34. In France, at the end of the eighteenth century, the conflict between incumbent artistic structures, which were seen by many radicals as supporting the corrupt political system of the *ancien regime*, and the younger artists who were influenced by the Enlightenment manifested itself not alone in the work of Jacques Louis David but in his studio practises, where a system that echoed the master apprentice relationship of the Renaissance was revived. See Thomas Crowe, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 46-81.

[13] The idea of self-expression included national self-expression. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries experienced a romantic revival - and often invention - of national traditions and customs in Scotland, Wales, and England. (Eric Hobsbaw and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 1-17.)

[14] Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1966), 193-197.

moulded to represent carved stone.[15] The idea of the appropriate use of materials led to the development of an aesthetic principle that was generally known throughout the nineteenth century as the aesthetic of 'fitness for purpose'. This aesthetic would ultimately manifest itself in the maxim 'form follows function', which became the mantra of the Modernist Movement in the twentieth century.

3.3.1 *The Aesthetic of 'Fitness for Purpose'*

The Arts and Crafts Movement had its origins in the ideas of two of the most influential thinkers of the Victorian era, the great architect of the Gothic Revival style Augustus Welby Northwood Pugin (1812-1852), and the critic and art theorist John Ruskin (1819-1900). Though they were separated by their religious beliefs, both of these men deplored the effects of industrialisation, and both of them shared a longing for the standards of craftsmanship and values of the medieval guilds. The Arts and Crafts Movement had a profound influence on architecture, on design, and consequently on art education, not alone in the nineteenth century, but also in the twentieth century. The Great Exhibition was a critical point in the development of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It was the fulcrum on either side of which two completely different ways of thinking were balanced, one embracing mechanisation, the other rejecting it. The subsequent development of design in Britain reflects the struggle for dominance between these two different ways of thinking.

The Great Exhibition, though a financial and popular success, was not a critical success.[16] Owen Jones (1809-1874), who was the most influential designer of the early Victorian period, in commenting on the unevenness and multiformity of what he

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[15] John Summerson, *Georgian London*, (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1962), 130-132.

[16] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 248.

saw at the Great Exhibition, said: "We have no principles, no unity; the Architect, the upholsterer, the paper stainer, the weaver, the calico printer, and the potter, each run their independent course; each struggles fruitlessly, each produces in art novelty without beauty, or beauty without intelligence".[17] *The Times* of London put it more succinctly when it said, "The absence of any fixed principles in ornamental design is apparent in the exhibition."[18] The general standard of British design as made evident by the Great Exhibition led informed opinion to conclude that British design was in a state of confusion. The perceived reason for this confusion, as the above quotations make clear, was that there were no fixed principles to guide designers or manufacturers in the production of goods. Hence emerged a need for principles. Once this need was established, a search for underlying principles became the driving force of Victorian designers. This situation dovetailed neatly with the preoccupations of the neo-classical tradition in the fine arts and with the ideas of Ruskin, both of which influenced thinking on fine art education at this time.

The need for underlying principles as a guide to establish an aesthetic for the age was already in evidence before the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Great Exhibition had merely acted as a catalyst and had galvanised thinking around the idea. In 1841, ten years before the Great Exhibition, Pugin had published *The True Principles of Painted or Christian Architecture*. In this book he had put forward his ideas about fixed principles in art and design: "The two great rules for design are these. First there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience,

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[17] John Summerson, "Architecture," in *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain:* Vol. 7 *The Late Victorian Age*, ed. Boris Ford, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 234.

[18] Ibid., 234.

construction, or propriety; second that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building".[19] He went on to say:

> That art has its fixed principles any departure from which leads to inconsistency and unmeaning effect, is a truth never to be lost sight of; ornament in the true and proper meaning of the word signifies the embellishment of that which is in itself useful in an appropriate manner. Yet by a perversion of the term, it is frequently applied to mean enrichment, which deserves no other name than that of individual fancy and caprice.[20]

Though not the first British thinker to address the idea of the appropriate use of materials - it had already been addressed in the writings of the artist William Hogarth (1697-1764) and the idealist philosopher Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753).[21] Pugin made it the basis of his whole aesthetic. As the above quotations make clear, the principle of this aesthetic stated that the actual qualities of different materials must be taken into account before designs were made, and that there must be no unnecessary embellishment in any given piece of art or design. According to Pugin's ideas, merely to fulfil these conditions was sufficient to ensure artistic quality. These conditions were also, however, a prerequisite of aesthetic quality.

Essentially, Pugin's aesthetic focused on materials, and Pugin looked for clear rules by which to teach design as a branch of manufacture. The idea that there were rules that could be used to teach design underpinned the curriculum at the Schools of Design and the Schools of Art. Pugin's ideas, therefore, were echoed in the overall philosophy of these institutions. In the First Report of the Department of Science and

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[19] A.W.N. Pugin, *The True Principles of Painted or Christian Architecture*, (1841), quoted in Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 47.

[20] Pugin, *The True Principles of Painted or Christian Architecture*, quoted in Stuart Macdonald, *History and Philosophy of Art Education*, (London: University of London Press, 1970), 234.

[21] Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory* (London: Longmans, 1968), 27.

Art, for example, which was published in 1854, under the heading 'General Principles of Decorative Arts' it is stated by Richard Redgrave:[22]

> The decorative arts arise from, and should properly be attendant upon, architecture.
>
> Architecture should be the material expression of the wants, the faculties, and the sentiments, of the age in which it is created.
>
> Style in architecture is the peculiar form that expression takes under the influence of climate and materials at command.
>
> Ornament should arise out of and be subservient to construction.
>
> The true office of ornament is the decoration of utility. Ornament, therefore, ought always to be secondary to utility.
>
> True ornament does not consist in the mere imitation of natural objects, but rather in the adaption [sic] of their peculiar beauties of form or colour to decorative purposes, controlled by the nature of the material to be decorated, the laws of art, and the necessities of manufacture.
>
> Ornament requires a specific adaptation to the material in which it is to be wrought, or to which it is to be applied. From this cause the ornament of one fabric or material is rarely suitable to another without proper re-adaptation.[23]

In his book *The Stones of Venice*, which was published in 1851, Ruskin elaborated on Pugin's idea of fitness for purpose. In doing so he established what he called 'the law of technical conditions' which stated that: "All art working with given Material must propose to itself the objects which with those materials are most perfectly attainable; and becomes illegitimate and debased if it propose to itself any other objects better attainable with other materials".[24]

While Ruskin accepted the principle of fitness for purpose, he did not consider mere adherence to the principle of fitness for purpose as sufficient to ensure aesthetic quality; rather, unlike Pugin, he looked for guidance to divine inspiration.[25] As shown

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[22] Redgrave, as already stated, had been a teacher in the Schools of Design and was appointed Art Superintendent under Cole in 1852.

[23] Clive Ashwin, *Art Education Documents and Policies 1768 - 1975* (London: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1975), 44.

[24] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, quoted in John Ruskin, *Sketches from the writings of John Ruskin: First Series 1830-1860* (Orpington: G. Allen, 1884), 372.

[25] Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Craft Movement: a Study of Its Sources, Ideals, and Influence on Design Theory* (London: Studio Vista, 1980), 25.

already, Ruskin demanded a moral dimension in art, which in painting was manifested in the subject matter, which in turn reflected the spirit of man. A necessary concomitant of the depiction of this moral truth was a realistic and truthful representation of nature. Hence the brilliant detail and colour of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings of the 1850s and 1860s. When transferred to the area of applied design, truth in representation, for Ruskin, became truth of function and materials.[26] The act of working with materials was therefore a moral act, and consequently the hand of God was evident in all art and design by virtue of this fact.[27] According to Ruskin the soul of each individual, and consequently the spirit of God, was put into each piece of art or craft by virtue of the fact that it was created by the hand of man. From this arose his rejection of mass production. For Pugin, on the other hand, as stated above, merely respecting the integrity of materials was sufficient to ensure its aesthetic purity, machine production was, therefore, acceptable to Pugin.

Pugin's thinking left the way open for the development of a purely materials based aesthetic. The aesthetic which was developed by Vladimir Tatlin in Russia at the time of the revolution is an example of such an aesthetic, as is the aesthetic that was manifested at the Bauhaus in Germany in the 1920s, which had such a huge effect on tertiary art education in the twentieth century. Ruskin's ideas, building on Wordsworth's, and of course Kant's, idea that art was feelings based, left the way open for a more metaphysical and purely self expressive approach to art. At the heart of this approach is the idea that art cannot be taught, a pervasive idea in tertiary level fine art education in Great Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. Ruskin laid the ground for this approach in his statement that "the essence of composition lies precisely in the

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[26] Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "Form, Truth, and Emotion: Transatlantic Influences on Formalist Aesthetics," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 7 (1988): 84.

[27] Robert Hewison, *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 57.

fact of its being unteachable [sic], in its being the operation of an individual mind of range and power exalted above all others."[28]

The ideas of both Ruskin and Pugin were long lasting, and they fed into various organicist theories of art that developed throughout the nineteenth century.[29] These theories had their origins in the ideas of Goethe who believed that nature was a living unity in which mind and matter were inextricably linked. Organicist theories of the nineteenth century lay behind the ideas that were developed by Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus.[30] The Basic Design system of art education also manifested elements of nineteenth century organicist theories of art, including the ideas of Ruskin and Pugin, which it combined with the modernist theories of the Bauhaus to come up with a system suitable to the different context of post-World War Two Britain.

To summarise: Pugin and Ruskin advocated an aesthetic which was based on the principle that artists and designers must be aware of the limitations and potential of materials in order to design properly. This meant that the integrity of materials had to be respected. In other words, in order for a piece of art or design to be of good quality the properties of the materials from which it was made had to be taken into account when the design was being created. The imitation of nature without regard to these properties was no longer considered an acceptable practice. It was for this reason that the naturalistic patterns that had won prizes at the Great Exhibition of 1851 were exhibited as examples of bad design at the Museum of Ornamental Art in 1852.

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[28] Stankiewicz, "Form, Truth, and Emotion": 83.

[29] It is interesting to note here that Joseph Paxton used the leaf of the very large South American water lily, in which the veining has an important structural purpose, to illustrate his plans for the Crystal Palace. In doing this Paxton remarked: "Nature was the engineer, providing the leaf with longitudinal and transverse girders and supports that I, borrowing from it, have adopted in this building". (Herbert Read, *Education Through Art* [London: Faber and Faber, 1943], 21-22)

[30] Lawrence J. Starzyk, "The Non-Poietic Foundations of Victorian Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 26 (1986): 218-224.

As a consequence of the influence of the Gothic Revival Movement and of the writings of Ruskin in particular, developments in British design and design education throughout the nineteenth century rejected mechanisation and mass production. On the one hand, this led to the decline of British design in the early years of the twentieth century. On the other hand, however, it led to the great success of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the final years of the nineteenth century. The most widely known exponent of this movement and the greatest single reason for its success was the socialist and artist William Morris (1834-1896).

3.3.2 *William Morris*

William Morris - poet, artist, craftsman, decorator, and social reformer - was a gentleman and a larger than life figure who tried to live his life according to his radical and Romantic ideas. In the heat of passion and romance, and in reflecting his unconventional spirit, Morris married Jane Burden, a woman who was his social inferior; a decision they both came to regret. Adhering to the moral codes of their class, his family did not come to the wedding. In fighting against such codes, and in opposing the social and political injustices that he saw all around him in Victorian Britain, Morris tried throughout his life to improve the world around him. This was a world in which he felt alienated. This feeling of alienation was primarily the result of his romantic disposition. It might be suggested that Morris's relationship with his wife - who he worshipped as a remote and romanticised ideal, but who he could not come to terms with as a real human being[31] - mirrored his relationship with the world. It might also be suggested that it illustrates the reason for the failure of his ideas, ideas

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[31] Morris's friend, the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, had a similar relationship with his wife Elizabeth Siddal, who suffered a fate worse than Jane Burden as ultimately she was driven to suicide by her relationship with her husband. (Jack Lindsay, *William Morris: His Life and Work* [London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1975], 80-81)

which, despite their success in many ways, failed to come to terms with the modernising forces which were driving change in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Consistent with the romantic aspect of Morris's personality and ideas he was hugely talented artistically. Unlike many artists in Victorian Britain, however, his life and work not only reflected the political agenda of his day, but contributed to it through his contribution to the socialist cause. If Morris had one lasting idea, in the context of the development of English aesthetics, it was the idea that aesthetic activity embraces the whole of life. This idea would always have currency in English art but would be given only one real chance of practical application in English society. This chance would occur in the regenerative context of the post-World War Two epoch and would be manifested in the Basic Design system.[32]

Morris's personality was ideally suited to the context of mid-nineteenth century Britain and to the radical and Romantic aspect of the ideas of Pugin and Ruskin.[33] The aesthetic of fitness for purpose, as developed by Pugin and Ruskin, which gained currency very quickly among Victorian designers, found, in the work of Morris - whose romantic vigour, despite its lack of realism, was matched by his practical abilities - an ardent and tireless champion. Morris said of *The Stones of Venice*, in which Ruskin had put forward his law of technical conditions:

> To my mind and I believe to some others, it is one of the most important things written by the author and in future days will be considered as one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century. To some of

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[32] The idea that aesthetic activity embraces the whole of life was central to the Constructivist Movement in British art in the inter-war years and was manifested very clearly in the writings and artwork of this group. This group, as shown in the last chapter, had a significant influence on developments in the British art world and therefore on tertiary art education in the post-war years. (Harold Osborne, *Abstraction and Artifice in Twentieth Century Art* [Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1979], 125-134)

[33] In 1856 Morris had been apprenticed to the architect G. N. Street who, interestingly, under the influence of the Nazarenes, had at one time proposed a fraternity of British artists organised along similar lines to those on which the Nazarenes were organised.

> us when we first read it it seemed to point out a new road on which the world should travel.[34]

Morris's particular contribution to design in Victorian Britain was that he turned the ideas of Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts Movement into reality, firstly, through the practical application of their aesthetic, and secondly, through his business acumen. Though he was a romantic visionary, Morris was also a successful businessman, and through his company Morris, Marshall, and Faulkener he produced a wide variety of workable designs. Morris's company was particularly successful in the production of upholstered furniture, wallpaper, and fabrics. In the field of topography and book design Morris's influence was considerable. In reflecting the medieval influence, Morris's furniture was heavy in appearance and it was extensively decorated with carved and painted surfaces. Again in line with the medieval influence, Morris's idea of interior decoration included lots of heavily patterned fabric and wallpaper, deeply carved wooden surfaces, banisters, rails, and mouldings. Plant forms were ubiquitous in Morris's designs, though of a more elegant, balanced, and abstracted style than popular Victorian design.

Morris's influence as a designer - his preferred profession – continued long after his death. During his lifetime his designs for wallpapers and textiles were being widely copied, and after his death were widely plagiarised. His company continued printing his designs until 1940, afterwards concessions were given to other companies. Some of Morris's designs are still produced commercially today.

As a result of Morris's influence on topography and book design on both sides of the Atlantic more care was taken on the design and binding of books. Wider margins and clearer typefaces were introduced for instance; though Morris's own designs were

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[34] Gillian Naylor, "Design, Craft and Industry," in *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain: Vol. 7 The Late Victorian Age*, ed. Boris Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 242.

too medieval and ornate to have much impact on ordinary book production. Broadly speaking it can be said that, in spite of the still ornate and busy aspect of Morris's designs, he was a pioneer of functionalism, and in this sense he was the father of the Modern Movement in design.[35]

William Morris, as the last quotation makes clear, was deeply influenced by Ruskin's ideas about art. He was particularly interested in the relationship between morality and art as Ruskin had defined it. He did not believe that art was esoteric, nor did he believe that it was accessible or relevant only to an isolated elite of aesthetes, rather he demanded a return to a society where the artist had a useful role. Victorian society, where the artist was deified and elevated onto a pedestal, represented for Morris a decadent society. He famously remarked on one occasion: "That talk of inspiration is sheer nonsense, there is no such thing: [art] is a mere matter of craftsmanship."[36]

Morris was a socialist, though not a modernist. He longed for a return to a pre-industrial, pre-Renaissance, and the romantic, as he saw it, world of medieval craftsmen. He reportedly refused to enter the Crystal Palace when brought there as a boy because of what he perceived as the ugliness of its machine-made architecture,[37] and he called the Forth Bridge, one of the great engineering and aesthetic feats of its day, "That supreme specimen of ugliness."[38] Morris's wilful ignorance of the new aesthetic is illustrated by the reply of the designer of the bridge to the above remark

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[35] Ian Bradley, *William Morris and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 106-116.

[36] Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 23 .

[37] Thompson, *William Morris*, 56.

[38] Witold Rybczynski, "Design for Living," review of Engineers of Dreams: Great Bridge Builders and the Spanning of America, by Henri Petroski, *New York Review of Books* 18 (November 16 1995): 14.

that in building it he had been explicitly concerned with its aesthetic effect.[39] Going beyond the purely aesthetic, Morris particularly loathed the fragmentation of work practices in the nineteenth century, which he felt had contributed to the alienation of man from his true self and from his society. He believed that only by going back to the work practices and morality of the Middle Ages could modern civilisation save itself from the dangers inherent in industrialism, with its concomitant mechanisation and mass production. He held that the true basis of art could be found in the handcrafts in which people worked manually to fulfil their own needs. Morris's inspiration for this idea came from another of Ruskin's publications, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* Ruskin had said: "For it is not the material, but the absence of human labour which makes the thing worthless, and a piece of terracotta, or plaster of Paris, which has been wrought by human hand is worth all the stone in Carrara cut by machinery".[40]

Thus Morris's socialism fed into Ruskin's spiritualism. It also fed into Ruskin's idea that access to the true spirit of man lay in the physical act of working with materials. It also related to the idea that good design is not an abstract thing imposed on materials, but, on the contrary, comes from an intimate understanding of materials. The designer and artist, for Morris, must learn to design through using materials and not independently of materials; it was for this reason that Morris taught himself actual craft skills; a rare thing for a nineteenth century gentleman to do. Though he rarely commented on art and design education, the idea of learning through doing was Morris's great contribution to design education. This idea would feed into developments in modernism in the early twentieth century - particularly that aspect of

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[39] Ibid., 14.

[40] Naylor, "Design, Craft and Industry," 242.

modernism which focused on understanding materials - and would be manifested in the curriculum at the Bauhaus in the 1920s and in the Basic Design system in the 1950s.

3.3.3 *The Merging of the Fine Arts and Crafts*

A necessary condition of Morris's aspiration to recreate an idealistic medieval society was the elimination of the distinction between the artist and the artisan. In Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century, like elsewhere in Europe, the fine arts and the crafts were seen as two separate entities. Fine artists were trained at the Royal Academy, and craftsmen were trained in factories or workshops. The system that Dyce employed in the Schools of Design reflected this way of thinking. This was despite the fact that Dyce himself aspired to return, like Ruskin and Morris, to medieval ways. Dyce said on one occasion: "In former times the artists were more workmen, and the workmen were more artists, as in the time of Raphael, and it is very desirable to restore this happy connection".[41] The differentiation between tradesmen and artists was continued within Henry Cole's National System, despite Cole's wishes to the contrary. Morris took this differentiation as yet another symptom of an unhealthy society. Consequently he tried throughout his life to re-integrate the arts and crafts, as he believed they had been in medieval society. One way in which he tried to do this was by employing fine artists to make designs for his company. The Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne Jones (1833-1898), for instance, made many designs for Morris's workshop, as did the painters Dante Gabrielle Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown.[42] It will be recalled that Henry Cole turned down Ford Madox

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[41] Quentin Bell, *The Schools of Design* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1963), 80.

[42] Thompson, *Morris*, 18.

Brown's request for employment at the Schools of Art. With the exception of some notable but short-lived examples the merging of the fine arts and crafts, either in education or in practice, never came about in Britain. In Germany there were significant developments in this regard in the years leading up to the First World War which would have major implications for art education in the twentieth century.[43]

The problem of the relationship between fine art and design has proved a bone of contention in British art education since the time of Morris. This problem was addressed with most success at the Bauhaus in Germany between 1919 and 1933 and with some success in the Basic Design system in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. Generally speaking, however, the problem of the relationship between design and fine art within tertiary art education has never been fully resolved.[44]

3.3.4 *The Achievements of William Morris*

The role of Morris in nineteenth century Britain was to put Ruskin's ideas into practice. He did this with great success. With regard to his overall objective, however, which was to put an end to the idea of design as applied art, he failed.

On a practical level, the innovations of William Morris were unique, and they had an unprecedented and beneficial influence on British and European art and design. This is notwithstanding the fact that the overall philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement was based on ambiguities, which led to its ultimate demise. The wealth that sustained Morris's business came from industry and empire, the empire provided Morris with raw materials and captive markets, and industry provided him with wealthy customers. British architects and designers of the Arts and Crafts Movement

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[43] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 276.

[44] John Allen, "Where are the Arts Best Taught," in *The Arts and Higher Education* ed. Ken Robinson (Guildford: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1982), 143-155.

ignored these facts, and consequently they created an aesthetic that was based on nostalgia, and which was supported economically by a relatively small group of wealthy patrons; their work practices looked to pre-industrial conditions of craftsmanship in an era of mass production and increasing competitiveness. The artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement condemned capitalism and imperialism, which were the very forces that sustained them. This myopia was the chief cause of the decline of British design in the early years of the twentieth century.[45]

In a narrow sense Morris did not succeed in achieving his overall objectives, as his taste remained Victorian; this was so despite the potentially modernist ideas underpinning it. In the wider sense, however, his ideas were to bear fruit in the great influence that they enjoyed internationally. Ironically, given its great rivalry with Britain, this influence was particularly strong in Germany where, mainly through the work of the designer and architect Herman Muthesius (1861-1927), Morris's ideas were to influence the Bauhaus. This influence had come to Germany through the Art Nouveau Movement and the Werkbunds.[46] There is a double irony in the fact that the striking success of the Werkbunds, which Muthesius had founded along with the designer Henri Van De Velde and others, was based on their focus on mechanisation rather than on workshop or craft-based production. Morris's belief that hand-made artefacts were automatically superior to artefacts made by machine had led to his greatest failure, which was the rejection of machine production in favour of craft based production. Craft production was a more labour intensive means of production;

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[45] Fiona MacCarthy, *A History of British Design 1830-1970* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972), 39-57.

[46] The Werkbunds, which had been established in 1907, had been inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement and had the objective of improving the quality of European design. They aimed to do this through the production of durable work and the use of flawless genuine materials. Interestingly, in relation to the subsequent development of an organic and holistic aesthetic at the Bauhaus the Werkbunds aspired to "the attainment of an organic whole rendered functional noble and artistic by

it therefore produced a more expensive product, which the majority of people, despite Morris's wishes to the contrary, could not afford. Muthesius, who did not share Morris's belief that hand made goods were superior to machine made goods, had simply taken Morris's ideas and applied them to machine production.[47]

Other German designers took up Muthesius' lead. The work of the architect Peter Behrens is noteworthy in this respect. Behrens is a key figure in the development of modern design. Not only was he one of the first architects to embrace mechanisation and modern industrial processes, but it was in his practice that the three of the greatest modernist architects of the twentieth century started their careers.[48] These architects were Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), Charles Edouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier (1887-1965), and Walter Gropius (1883-1969),

Morris's aspiration to re-integrate the arts and the crafts and to change society by doing so contrasts sharply with Whistler's idea that the formal and abstract aspects of art, and not the social or moral condition of society, were the sole concerns of the artist. The failure of Morris's ideas to make an impact on fine art education can be measured by the success of Whistler's aesthetic. Peter Gay summarises the situation of Morris thus: "However valuable Morris's work, however vibrant his crusade against the evils of capitalism, he nourished the legend of an irreparable split between the aesthetic avant-garde and the anti-aesthetic bourgeois, a legend that has long survived him."[49] This is ironic given his efforts to stop British society fragmenting into monolithic blocks that he believed led only to social disharmony. There is a

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such means." (Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 35) The German Werkbund was the first to be founded, branches were subsequently opened in a number of other European countries.

[47] Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 118-146.

[48] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 270.

[49] Gay, *Pleasure Wars*, 70.

further irony in the focus of both Whistler and Morris on the actual qualities of materials, as it was the focus on materials, and ultimately the focus on abstract forms, which finally put an end to the Victorian idea that explicit moral content was a prerequisite of all art. This led to a preoccupation with form to the active exclusion of content, in the early years of the twentieth century, which would ultimately manifest itself in the elitist and exclusive aesthetics of Roger Fry and the Bloomsbury group.[50]

3.3.5 *Some Other Responses to the Aesthetic of "Fitness for Purpose"*

The aesthetic of fitness for purpose, and the search for principles to underpin artistic practice, created a context that produced some interesting responses among nineteenth century designers. Many of the ideas of these designers would influence in one way or another not only art and design education in the nineteenth century, but developments in the twentieth century as well. In the work of Christopher Dresser (1834-1904), for instance, who was a trained botanist, studies of plants led to an interest in the common principles of plant structure and also in the power and forces of growth.[51] Dresser's studies of plants led him to develop simple flat symbols which were of great use to designers as they were easy to reproduce; it has been suggested that his work presaged the style of the Art Nouveau Movement.[52] Dresser's approach to design was scientific, and he judged his work in purely commercial terms rather than in artistic terms.

Gottfried Semper, who was an exile from Germany and a republican, felt that good design would evolve naturally given the right conditions; consequently he believed

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[50] Jacqueline V. Falkenheim, *Roger Fry and the Beginnings of Formalist Art Criticism* (New York: UMI research Press, 1980), 87-101.

[51] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 250.

[52] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 249.

that it was not necessary to teach design in the rarefied atmosphere of an art school, but that it could be taught in workshops and factories instead.[53] In 1852 Semper was placed in charge of the special technical classes at South Kensington where he taught ornamental art as it applied to metal manufacture. In his classes, and contrary to the principles-based curriculum of the National System, Semper made his students work with the actual materials for which they were designing. By giving his students practical experience with materials Semper anticipated, not only the ideas of William Morris, but also the curriculum that would be developed at the Bauhaus. Semper was, however, working against the prevailing ideology of the South Kensington System. The irrelevance of the South Kensington System to the effective teaching of design is summarised by his comment that "Many a good talent has been spoiled by having been too long engaged in copying and studying from models, even from nature."[54] Despite the radical nature of his ideas on education, Semper never got a chance to influence the curriculum at the Schools of Art, as he left in 1855 to take up a position as Professor of Architecture at Zurich Polytechnic. When Semper left, the craft and applied design work of the department in which he worked rapidly waned in favour of designing on paper. As Semper went on to become one of the most influential designers of the nineteenth century in Europe, his leaving England was a serious loss for British art education.[55]

Charles F. Voysey, who was mentioned in the last chapter in the context of the development of an organicist aesthetic, was an architect whose light simple designs were based on abstracted and reduced, but realistic, forms. Though naturalistic, his designs were full of decorative charm. In an interview, which he did in 1893, Voysey

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[53] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 251-253.

[54] Ford, *The Late Victorian Age*, 238.

[55] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 252.

revealed his almost puritan aesthetic when he said: "The danger today lies in over decoration; we lack simplicity and have forgotten repose".[56] This style bridges the gap between Morris's vital and dynamic patterns, which were taken from nature, and the lighter and more airy designs of the nineteen twenties and thirties.[57] Voysey, like Dresser, saw the creative process as analogous to the biological process of growth.[58] His designs were very influential in European design and in the work of Henri Van de Velde (1863-1957) and his followers in the European Werkbunds. He was a favourite of *The Studio Magazine*, a copiously illustrated periodical, which was launched in 1893 to support new tendencies in furniture, tiles, tapestries, and the graphic arts. The work of Voysey forms a direct link between nineteenth century organicist theories of art and developments in the Modern Movement. Voysey was not a revolutionary in the social and political sense or in the aesthetic sense, nor did he strive for novelty. He was, in fact, a traditionalist who believed in dignity and individualism. He detested departures from sound tradition for their own sake. In many ways, as Peter Gay suggests, the Bauhaus designers were his rightful heirs.[59]

3.4 Design Education and the Schools of Art

In stark contrast with the ideas of Morris, the response in the Schools of Art of Cole's National System to demands for a governing aesthetic to guide artists and designers was to look to history and precedent. This was particularly so in the case of design. This approach was consistent with the overpowering influence of the neo-

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[56] Gay, *Pleasure Wars*, 194.

[57] Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 148-150.

[58] David Gebhard, *Charles F. Voysey, Architect* (Los Angeles: Hennessy and Ingalls Inc., 1975), 14.

[59] Gay, *Pleasure Wars*, 194.

classical tradition on art education throughout the nineteenth century, and it illustrates the fact that those with power within the National System still held with the traditions of the academy. It was because of this influence that many of the exercises that were on the curriculum at the Schools of Art were based on drawing from plaster casts and two-dimensional copies rather than from the live model. Ralph Wornham, who lectured on ornamental art at Somerset House, the Head School of the Schools of Design, and who was appointed librarian and keeper of the ornamental casts when it became a School of Art under Cole's administration, summarised the approach which the National System of art education took to design education when he said: "The great art of the designer is in the selection and arrangement of his materials, *not in their execution.*"[60] (present writers italics) This quotation reveals the extent to which the ideas of progressive thinkers like Morris were diametrically opposed to the ideas of the South Kensington System. For both Dyce and Cole, as educators, the guiding aesthetic lay in history and precedent and in what was brought to the design by the intellect. It was not to be found by the hands of the artist in the materials with which he or she worked. This situation probably reflects the Victorian attitude to manual labour and to the inflexibility of the class system as much as anything else. It also helps to explain why it took so long for the actual execution of craft work to become part of the curriculum of the South Kensington System; Morris was a socialist, after all. The inappropriateness of the curriculum of the South Kensington System to the teaching of design is neatly summarised in the remark, which was made by the designer William Lethaby, that the method of teaching at South Kensington was like learning to swim in a thousand lessons without water.[61]

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[60] Naylor, "Design, Craft and Industry," 237.

[61] MacCarthy, *British Design*, 31.

The preoccupation of the mid-Victorian era and of the Schools of Art with history, precedent, and principles as touchstones for quality in design is illustrated by the number of publications dedicated to the enumeration of historical examples published in the nineteenth century. The following are just some examples of this preoccupation: *Grammar of Ornament* by Owen Jones, *The Principles of Decorative Art* by Richard Redgrave, *On the Necessity of Principles in Teaching Design* by Richard Redgrave, T*he Principles of Decorative Design* by Christopher Dresser, and *The Analysis of Ornament* by Ralph Wornham.[62]

The preoccupation with history to the detriment of practical work within the design element of Cole's National System made it unattractive to artisans in much the same way as the limited availability of the life model made it unattractive to artists. As most exercises which students performed involved reference to precedents and models these exercises were easy to assess. In bureaucratic terms, therefore, the centralised curriculum of the South Kensington System was easy to manage. By isolating itself from the real world of design, however, and by working as a closed system with no reference to industry, the South Kensington System failed to address the real issues which concerned designers and manufacturers. It consequently failed to come up with a system of design education that had relevance to the rapidly changing world of middle and late Victorian Britain. The centralised, London based, South Kensington System, however utilitarian, was at odds with the spirit of independence and local autonomy that predominated in British politics in the late Victorian era. The provincial bourgeois saw themselves, according to Peter Gay, as the "heirs and custodians of a culture acquired, cherished, perpetuated with largely perfunctory

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[62] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 254.

assistance from the provincial gentry and the crown. . . . [the] government was, after all, simply [the] most influential citizens wearing formal attire".[63]

The situation of the South Kensington System began to change only when the centralised nature of the system was broken by the *Technical Instruction Act* of 1889.[64] This act allowed local councils to levy a penny rate in the pound to be put towards science and art teaching, and especially as it applied to the artisan classes. The chief effect of this was that most art schools were put under local control where they achieved greater autonomy and therefore greater liaison with local industry and local needs; the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art was one of a small number of art schools which remained centrally funded. At the same time the government levied a tax on whiskey, the income from which was given to local councils to be used on technical instruction. The attendance of artisans at art schools was further encouraged by the introduction of maintenance grants and local scholarships. Despite the continuing ubiquity of the South Kensington System, the fact that financing for most art schools was now local created an opening that facilitated development. As a result of this, by the end of the nineteenth century many of the smaller art schools were almost entirely preoccupied with craft and trade classes. The most important aspect of the 1889 Act was the loosening of the hegemonic grip of the South Kensington System; this led to some striking and innovative developments on the curriculum at local level, primarily because it allowed the Arts and Crafts Movement to infiltrate the national art education system. As a result of this, the Arts and Crafts Movement exerted a broad influence on design education in the closing years of the nineteenth

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[63] Gay, *Pleasure Wars*, 87.

[64] This was, incidentally, the same year in which Manchester established its principle art museum, called after Sir Joseph Whitworth, who left a large sum of money in his will to support high culture.

century and the opening years of the twentieth century. This influence was made possible largely through the efforts of the Art Workers' Guild.

3.5 The Art Workers' Guild

In 1884 the report of a Royal Commission on Technical Instruction stated that, contrary to the original intention in setting up the Schools of Art, industrial design – by which they meant handcraft - had not received sufficient attention in art schools in Britain. In order to improve this situation, by forcing art schools to make design a practical subject, the committee recommended that the Department of Science and Art should award grants for specimens of applied workmanship as a test of the applicability of the design.[65] Despite this suggestion, nothing was done to improve the standing of design on the curriculum, as the lobby resisting change within the schools was too strong. This situation did not go unnoticed. It reinforced the growing realisation, among one group of architects in particular, that design education was being neglected within art education at all levels. This group, which was made up of young men who worked in the office of Norman Shaw, one of the great architects of the Victorian era, had already become frustrated with the complacency of the Royal Academy and the commercialism of the Royal Institute of British Architects. This group, which had been inspired by the radical ideas of Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris, sought to put these ideas into practice by bridging the gap between architecture and the arts, by taking the decorative arts out of the hands of commercial enterprise, and by restoring the dignity of the artist craftsman. This group founded the Art Workers'

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[65] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 59-61.

Guild in 1885. Originally made up exclusively of architects, the group later broadened to include fine artists and designers.

Members of the Art Workers' Guild were particularly concerned that the educational priorities of the public art schools were restricted to the teaching of fine art, albeit in a limited way, and to the training of teachers. Consequently the guild, which was originally set up to discuss issues relating to art and architecture, under the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement, broadened its area of interest to include the crafts; it subsequently became the most effective lobby for the crafts in late Victorian Britain. The Art Workers' Guild was responsible for the setting up, in 1888, of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, which had a fundamental role to play in the raising of standards of design and of encouraging young artisans to enrol in art classes. The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society had a significant and beneficial influence on public taste and, more importantly, on designers. This influence was exerted principally through the medium of exhibitions, which it held regularly. These exhibitions rapidly became the forum for the best designers in Britain to exhibit their work. Through coverage of these exhibitions in *The Studio Magazine* the ideas of British designers were disseminated throughout Great Britain and the world. It was, for example, because of coverage in the *Studio Magazine* that the work of the now famous Glasgow School of Art was to influence the Art Nouveaux Movement in Europe.[66]

Within twenty years of its foundation the members of the Art Workers' Guild had secured for themselves a very solid and influential position in British art education. This was to be the most significant factor in the improvement of the situation for

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[66] Stuart Macdonald, "Newbery and the Four: A School for Europe," in *Histories of Art and Design Education; Cole to Coldstream*, ed. Stuart Macdonald, (Harlow: Longman in association with the National Society for Education in Art and Design, 1992), 91.

artisans and craft workers in British art schools in the early years of the twentieth century.[67] As a direct consequence of this situation, reform of the teaching of design was to be one of the principal achievements of the Art Workers' Guild. The Dublin Metropolitan School of Art was one of the many art schools in Great Britain that benefited from the positive influence which the Art Workers' Guild had on the teaching of crafts.[68]

An early and very significant success for the guild was the appointment in 1894 of William Richard Lethaby, who was a founder member of the Guild, as advisor on art to the Technical Education Board of the London County Council. George Frampton, who was also a member of the Guild, was appointed co-advisor, and when the council founded the Central School of Design in 1896, the year Morris died, both Lethaby and Frampton were made joint principals. At the Central School Lethaby and Frampton put Morris's principle that "doing is designing" into practice.[69] They swept aside the South Kensington curriculum, and instead focused their curriculum on teaching students by having them work directly with materials. Another of their initiatives, which would reappear at the Bauhaus twenty years later, was the elimination of the distinction between art, architecture, and design. And, in presaging both the Basic Design system and Sir William Coldstream's report of 1961, Lethaby and Frampton encouraged students to work in whatever area of the college they wished, depending on their particular interests, and with no regard to boundaries between areas.[70] Largely as a result of the efforts of Lethaby and Frampton, by 1901 the London County

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[67] Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 122.

[68] Paul Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland*, (Belfast: Friars Bush Press, 1992), 90-97.

[69] MacCarthy, *British Design*, 31.

[70] Ibid., 31.

Council had become a major centre for the advancement of craftwork in Britain, and the Central School had become one of the most advanced craft schools in Europe.[71]

Walter Crane (1845-1915) was another member of the Guild who was to influence art education directly. In 1898 Crane was appointed principal of the Royal College of Art, which the National Art Training School - the principal school of the South Kensington System - had been renamed in 1896. His comment on the college at that time was that "it had been chiefly run as a sort of mill in which to prepare art teachers."[72] His immediate response to the situation that he found at the college was to broaden its scope by introducing lectures and demonstrations in design and handcrafts.[73]

Crane maintained that there were two systems of education in art:

> (i) The academic or absolute, and (ii) the experimental, or relative and adaptive. The one teaching art and design in the abstract on certain cut and dried principles and methods . . . passing every mind through the same mill. . . . The other teaching . . . in concrete forms, and in direct relation to tools, methods, and materials with the object of calling out the individual feelings and setting it free to express itself.[74]

In this quotation Crane is describing two different approaches to the teaching of art, which were exemplified on the one hand in the curriculum of the South Kensington System and on the other hand in the curricula of the private schools and the French atelier. In 1899 Crane became a member of the newly formed Council of Advice on Art, and in 1901, on its recommendations, the Royal College of Art was reorganised into four main schools - the School of Design, the School of Architecture, the School of Sculpture, and the School of Painting. All the new heads of departments, including

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[71] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 265.

[72] Macdonald, *Art Education*, 297.

[73] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 290.

[74] Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 145.

Lethaby, were members of the Art Workers' Guild.[75] Despite these achievements, however, Crane found the bureaucracy of the college too difficult to deal with and he resigned a year after taking up his post.[76] The college slipped back to its old ways when Crane left, and, according to the *Journal of Art and Design Education*, the new principal, Augustus Spencer, "wore a dress morning coat, was described as 'an art official', and officiated for twenty dull years."[77] It would not be until after the Second World War, and then as a consequence of the efforts of Sir Robin Darwin, that design would acquire any real significance at the Royal College of Art, until then the college was to remain essentially a fine art college.

Despite the positive influence of the Art Workers' Guild on tertiary art education in Britain, at the end of the nineteenth century, and despite the fact that the Guild changed the profile of design education in Britain to a significant extent, it did not bring radical change to design education. Neither did it integrate with, or even take on board, the truly radical developments that were taking place in European design around the turn of the century. The energy and vigour that the Art Workers' Guild injected into design education in Britain at this time was not enduring and in the early years of the twentieth century it diminished, for two reasons. The first reason was the resistance of the South Kensington System, and the Royal College of Art in particular, to change, and the second reason was the demise of the arts and crafts aesthetic that underpinned the ideas of the various members of the Guild.

An example of the former occurred in 1896 when the National Art Training School of the South Kensington System was reconstituted as the Royal College of Art. As the college was being upgraded a new principal was needed. The ideal person for the job

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[75] Ibid., 145.

[76] MacCarthy, *British Design*, 32.

[77] Editorial, "Men of the Royal College," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 3 (1984): 138.

was Francis Newbery (1853-1946), who was the head of the Glasgow School of Art. Newbery was a friend of the innovative architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Under Newbery's headship the Glasgow School of Art had developed a reputation as one of the most advanced, innovative, and modern schools of art in Europe. This reputation was founded on Newbery's radical curriculum which grew out of his three main convictions about art and art teaching: his belief in the French atelier or workshop basis for art education, his faith in Whistler and the Aesthetic Movement, and his respect for William Morris. Newbery was able to fulfil the demands of the South Kensington System and yet give his students the freedom and challenge they needed. He did this by steering them directly to the courses which suited their needs, by not forcing them to follow the South Kensington System sequentially, and by refusing to allow any drawing from the flat copy.[78] Despite his work in Glasgow, however, and his overwhelming qualifications for the job, Newbery was not considered as a candidate for the job of principal of the Royal College of Art by the Science and Art Department. The reason for this was his high profile, or more accurately his notoriety, which was a direct result of the reaction of the arts and crafts fraternity to his students' work. When exhibited at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society's annual exhibition in 1896 this work was given high praise in *The Studio Magazine*, which, as already stated, was the main outlet for advanced thinking on design in the world at that time.[79] Despite this praise, however, the work of the Glasgow School was condemned by members of the Arts and Crafts Movement as being too exotic and, interestingly, especially in relation to the hegemony of the South

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[78] Macdonald, "Newbery and The Four," 92.

[79] Ibid., 100.

Kensington aesthetic, most condemned it because "the works were based on no traditional principles of design."[80]

The reaction of the Arts and Crafts Movement to the work of his students, and the fact that Newbery was not considered as a candidate for the principalship of the newly reorganised Royal College of Art, illustrates the conservatism of the Science and Art Department and the limits to the thinking of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It also illustrates the fact that the arts and crafts aesthetic, in penetrating the art education establishment, had prevailed over the functionalist aesthetic in the development of British design since 1851. From the turn of the century onwards, despite some successes, as, for instance, in Dublin just before the First World War,[81] the Arts and Crafts Movement would decline as a source of innovation and change, and would begin to lose its influential position in the world of design in Britain. In the area of design education, despite the innovations taking place in Europe, the arts and crafts aesthetic would predominate in British art schools until the 1950s.

It is worth noting that the power of the Royal College of Art to dampen innovation continued until after the Second World War. A couple of examples will illustrate this point. They will also show how the combination of a government which is unwilling to force change and the refusal of one powerful institution to allow change can prevent progress. This is a situation that was repeated at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in the 1960s.

The first example occurred during the years 1913-1918 when Frederic Burridge, who was principal of the Central School, lobbied to have all higher scholarship awards for craft and design areas transferred to his school from the Royal College of

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[80] Ibid., 80.

[81] Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts in Ireland*, 90-97.

Art. In Burridge's plan The Royal College of Art would continue to specialise in fine art. As his school excelled in the craft and design areas, Burridge felt that only by such a transfer would the country ever have a central institution properly committed to design.[82] He failed in his efforts because of the power of the Royal College of Art. The Royal College of Art did not want to lose its dominant position in the hierarchy of art education in Britain; the Royal College of Art was then, and is still today, exclusively a post-graduate school.

The second example occurred in 1936, when the Board of Education, in the Hambleden Report, made an attempt to rationalise art education in London. The Hambleden Report focused, in particular, on the role of the Royal College of Art, and it asked whether it should be turned into an advanced school for the study of design, - in line with the original intention in founding the school - or whether it should be abolished altogether. The motivation for this report, as was usual in such cases, was Britain's competitiveness in the marketplace; as a result of the economic situation in Britain during the 1930s there was a particular urgency in such a report in 1936. Despite the fact that the Hambleden Report was germane to the needs of British art and design education, and of course to Britain's commercial development at this time, it fudged. Essentially the report recommended a system of specialisation in which each one of the principal art education institutions in London would focus on a particular area of art education. The Slade, for example, would continue to specialise in painting; the Courtauld Institute of Art, which had been founded in 1931 as the result of an endowment by the British industrialist and art collector Samuel Courtauld 1876-1947, would specialise in the history of art; the Central School would continue to specialise in applied art; and the Royal College of Art would put greater emphasis

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[82] Editorial, "Men of the Royal College," *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 3 (1984): 138.

on the design side of its work but would continue to maintain the standard of fine art activities at the college.[83] Despite the urgency of the Hambleden report's recommendations and the relative modesty of its proposals, it got the same response from the Royal College of Art, and consequently from the other colleges, as did Burridge during the First World War. That response was inaction.

3.6 The Demise of the Arts and Crafts Aesthetic

By 1920 the standard of design education in art schools in Great Britain had declined for a number of reasons. One reason, as outlined above, was because of the refusal of the art schools to change; the main reason for this refusal was the power that the art masters wielded. The influence of the art masters will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. Another reason was because, as a result of recent developments in that area, fine art was on the ascent at this time. Fine art had always been popular with middle class students who tended to dominate the student body of the art schools; we have already seen the effect of this situation on the Schools of Design in the 1840s. The principal reason, however, for the decline in the standard of design education in British art schools at this time was because design was still seen as crafts based. The architect and educationalist, C. R. Ashbee (1863-1942), who had been a particularly active supporter of the arts and crafts aesthetic and who had subsequently become disillusioned with it, identified the source of the problem when he said in 1911: "Modern civilisation rests on machinery and no system for the teaching of art can be sound that does not recognise this."[84] In saying this, Ashbee

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[83] United Kingdom, Office of the Minister of Education, Committee on Advanced Art Education in London, *Report* 1936, 5-7; and Christopher Frayling and Claire Catterall, *Design of the Times: One Hundred years of the Royal College of Art*, (Shepton Beauchamp: Richard Dennis Publications, 1995), 25-28.

[84] Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, 172.

finally faced the one issue that British designers and design educators had been ignoring since the Great Exhibition: mechanisation.

Ashbee was not the only one who was disillusioned with the arts and crafts aesthetic. It was generally accepted by the more advanced designers, especially in the face of developments in Germany where the Werkbunds had successfully taken on mechanisation, that the problem of British design lay in its refusal to abandon the more exclusive and romantic art and craft aesthetic, and to embrace a more modern, industrial and mechanised one.

In 1910 at a lecture to the Royal Institute of British Architects William Lethaby said:

> The method of design, to a modern world, can only be understood in the scientific or engineer's sense, as a definite analysis of possibilities- not as a vague poetic dealing with poetic matters, with derivative ideas of what looks domestic, or looks farm like, or looks ecclesiastical - the dealing with a multitude of flavours.[85]

This quotation summarises an attitude towards the arts and crafts aesthetic that was gaining widespread currency as the twentieth century advanced. Lethaby suggested a remedy in the same lecture: "The solution to the problem or so it seemed lay in education, in schools as well as in art colleges, in industry as well as in the home, so that designers, manufacturers, and consumers would share a collective ideal of taste".[86]

The situation confronting British designers in 1910, not surprisingly, seems very much like that of 1851. The phrase "dealing with a multitude of flavours", and the perceived need for a "collective ideal of taste", bring to mind the responses to the

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[85] Gillian Naylor, "Design and Industry," in *The Edwardian Age and the Inter-War Years*, Vol. 8 of *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*, ed., Boris Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 258.

[86] Ibid., 265.

Great Exhibition quoted earlier. In 1910, as in 1851, the prevailing aesthetic was no longer seen as valid and modern technology was being ignored. Burridge, Lethaby, and other younger designers saw the solution to this problem in the recognition of the importance of mechanisation and industrial processes, with particular reference to affordability, and in the improvement of standards of taste. These ideas were driven home to them when they visited a major exhibition of the work of the German Werkbund, which was held in Cologne in 1914. In response to this exhibition Lethaby, Burridge, and a number of other designers founded the Design in Industries Association in 1915. The overall aim of this association was to develop British design in order to compete on world markets, and in particular with Germany and France, when the First World War had ended.[87] The guiding principles of the Design in Industries Association were fitness to purpose, affordability, and modern production methods.[88] It set itself the task of matching the success of the Werkbunds in improving German design by organising exhibitions, slide shows, and lectures throughout Britain. In other words, as was the case with Cole after the Great Exhibition of 1851, the answer to the problems facing British design after the First World War was seen by the Design in Industries Association to lie in the education of the general public. Despite these efforts to improve the standards of British taste, however, the Design in Industries Association was not a success as it failed to connect with the more influential developments taking place in Europe at this time, especially those taking place at the Bauhaus.

Throughout the inter-war years Britain tried to solve its commercial problems by improving design, and it tried to improve design through education. From the

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[87] Nikolas Pevsner, *Studies in Art Architecture and Design. vol. II, Victorian and After*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 227-228; and Macarthy, *British Design*, 40-41.

[88] MacCarthy, *British Design*, 41.

founding of the Design in Industries Association onwards the recommendations of various government bodies on British commercial development focused on education. In 1920, for instance, the Board of Trade and the Board of Education established the British Institute of Industrial Art with the specific objective of raising the standard of taste through education. The principal means to this end was the holding of exhibitions, which were organised on a regular basis on different themes. Another such example occurred in 1921 when the Federation of British Industry set up the Industrial Art Committee, which was made up of manufacturers and industrialists. Its purpose was to advise on design policy and on design education. And in 1931 the Board of Trade set up the Gorrell committee to investigate ways of improving British design. This committee, while recognising continental approaches to design problems such as developments at the Bauhaus, continued to advocate the education of the general public as the solution to Britain's problems. These developments, however, had little effect on the curricula of the art schools, which remained conservative and resistant to change. The design historian, Fiona MacCarthy, in commenting on the work inspired by the Design in Industries Association, summarised the overall effect which the various government bodies had on design and design education in the inter-war years when she said that British design was "more countrified than mechanised" and that "its standards were . . . unadventurous . . . and predictable."[89]

Most progress in British design in the inter-war years was achieved by individual designers employed by companies who had the power to direct enterprise. London Transport, the Orient Shipping Line, Shell Oil, and the British Broadcasting Corporation did more to change British design at this time than the entire art education system. They did this by giving work to individual designers and to the

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[89] Ibid., 60.

newly emerging design profession. An interesting fact to note in this context is that, during the inter-war years, most well known British designers had been trained outside Britain.[90]

3.7 Art and Design Education in Germany

Art gained widespread currency and value in German society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries largely as a result of the writings of German philosophers. The writings of Fichte and Hegel were particularly influential in this respect as they gave to art a central role in the life of man.[91] Consequently art played a central role in German education at all levels throughout the nineteenth century. This was particularly the case in infant education where the ideas of Froebel and Pestalozzi exerted a significant influence.[92]

New ideas found their way into German art schools through the enlightened appointment of innovative and advanced teachers.[93] The influence of the Nazarenes on German art education provides an example of such enlightenment in the early and mid-nineteenth century. As already pointed out, the Nazarene Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld was head of Dusseldorf Academy from 1846-1872. The aesthetic ideas of Peter Behrens, who also taught at the art school in Dusseldorf, are an example from the late nineteenth century. Behrens believed that the final form which a piece of art took was a result of the creative process, and not of ideas imposed by the intellect. In this belief the influence of Kant and of organicist theories such as those of Goethe and

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[90] Naylor, "Design and Industry," 263.

[91] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 266.

[92] Ibid., 266; and Clive Ashwin, "Pestalozzi and the Origins of Pedagogical Drawing," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 24 (June 1981): 138-151.

[93] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 267.

Dresser can be seen. For Behrens the creative process involved a search for a stylised and original form, a form which would manifest the underlying laws and unifying forces of nature.[94] Behrens' students were expected to develop personal styles originating from these forms. Behrens created one of the most important statements of modernist architecture in 1909. This was a turbine factory for Germany's largest supplier of electrical equipment, AEG, which Peter Gay described as "an impressive synthesis of steel, concrete, and abundant glass surfaces much admired and often published as a pioneering experiment in honest, sparsely ornamented functionalism".[95]

The architect, Herman Muthesius, who had spent seven years in London studying English art and design and who was superintendent of the Prussian schools, shared the same ideas as Behrens. Muthesius felt, however, that by confining the teaching of these ideas to art schools an isolated elite was being created. He advocated, therefore, the teaching of the new aesthetic, not just in art schools, but in trade and craft schools as well. Muthesius shared this idea with Gottfried Semper who, as shown earlier, was one of the most important designers in Britain in the early Victorian era. It will be remembered that Semper was German and that he did not stay long in Britain, as his ideas were not compatible with those of the South Kensington System where he worked. Nikolaus Pevsner suggested that Muthesius failed to broaden the base of art and design education in Germany because he followed the example of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain. He further suggested that by excluding industry and its needs from the creative process Muthesius only succeeded in creating another exclusive group of artist craftsmen, just as had happened in Britain.[96]

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[94] Ibid., 268.

[95] Gay, *Pleasure Wars*, 226.

[96] Ibid., 269.

The German Werkbund addressed the problem of exclusivity by setting out to harness the artist to machine production. The first Werkbund was set up in 1907 in order to create a link between German industry and German artists and craftsmen. The overall objective of the Werkbund was to give Germany an edge in capturing industrial markets at a time when competition between the great powers was particularly intense. The Werkbunds were effective, and they successfully killed off the potential elitism of the Art Nouveau Movement by putting standards of industrialism above standards of handcraft.[97] This affected design education in Germany by shifting its focus from the design of crafts to design for industry. This contrasts sharply with what was happening in Britain and Ireland at this time.

The idea of playing down exclusivity in design was in evidence in German art and design education before the Werkbunds decided to challenge it. It was addressed by William Bode, who was the director of the Berlin Museums, and by Henri van de Velde of the Weimar Art School in the curricula that they instigated at their respective institutions. As early as the mid-1890s both had complained about the danger to the academies caused by an overproduction of fine artists which was not justified by demand.[98] They had also complained about the low status given to the crafts in German art education. Largely as a result of their efforts a solution to the problem of exclusivity had been found in the common training of artists and craftsmen.[99] A notable feature of the system created by Bode and Van de Velde was that specialisation was allowed only at a late stage in the education process, and consequently smaller numbers of fine artists were produced. The development of tertiary art education in Germany in the first years of the twentieth century is marked

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[97] Ibid., 271.

[98] Ibid., 274.

[99] Ibid., 274.

by the successful implementation of the ideas of Bode and Van de Velde. As a result of these developments there were a number of notable successes in German design education. One such success was in Leipzig where a traditional art academy was turned into one of the most advanced academies of printing in Europe.[100]

At the same time as the above developments were taking place the development of the idea of the artist as designer, as envisioned by Morris, was becoming a reality in Germany. In Germany artists were employed by industry to design products and not just to create two-dimensional images which would be used by industry. The Bahlsen biscuit factory in Hanover and the AEG Company in Berlin, for example, commissioned artists to design their entire product ranges.[101] By 1914, and largely through the efforts of the European network of Werkbunds, these developments in German art education had influenced design and design education throughout Europe.

3.8 The Bauhaus

By 1918 the dynamic of change established over the previous twenty years, as illustrated by the above developments, and the atmosphere of social and political change that had grown out of the First World War came together to take root in the art education system in Germany. There were two particular manifestations of this. One was the work of Bruno Paul, the architect, at the Berlin Art School, and the other was the work of Walter Gropius at the Weimar Art School.[102] For the betterment of German society and in line with the thinking of Bode and Van de Velde, Paul

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[100] Ibid., 275.

[101] Alan Windsor, *Peter Behrens: Architect and Designer* (London: The Architectural Press, 1981), 77-103.

[102] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 276.

advocated the merging of the art academies with the schools of craft. He also advocated a more rigorous program of training for art students. This training would involve the acquisition of a trade by all students before they could advance within the educational system; training would all be workshop-centred and only a small number of gifted students would be allowed to become fully qualified artists. Gropius took up Paul's ideas.

Gropius, like Paul, was an architect. By the age of thirty-one he had been recognised as one of the most advanced and gifted modern architects of his day.[103] In 1919 when he was appointed principal of the Weimar Art School he merged the art school with the local school of arts and crafts and, having reorganised them along lines similar to those advocated by Paul, he reopened them as the Bauhaus Art School.

Gropius, who had fought in the First World War, was an idealist, and he believed, like Morris, that nineteenth century industrialism had had a progressively worsening effect on man. In particular he felt that it had a very negative effect on the structure of society, and that ultimately it had led to the alienation of the individual from his community.[104] He saw the conflicts and changes that had taken place in the early years of the twentieth century as a symptom of the undoing of this situation and as the harbinger of a healthier type of society. He felt that art and design, and consequently art and design education, had a significant role to play in this process.[105] Gropius hoped that his work at the Bauhaus would help to tame the machine for the benefit of man.

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[103] Reginald Isaacs, *Gropius: an Illustrated Biography of the Creator of the Bauhaus* (London: Bulfinch Press LTD., 1991), 23-33.

[104] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 277.

[105] Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, ed., *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 338.

Gropius, in common with many of those who had been through the First World War, wanted a change from a corrupt old order to a new, vibrant and more egalitarian type of society than had existed before the war.[106] In setting up the Bauhaus Gropius set out to change, fundamentally, the way in which art related to society. This approach had consequences for the way art was taught.[107] Gropius saw the academies and the system of art education as they existed prior to 1919 as contributing to the alienation of man from his community and from society, and therefore as contributing to the deterioration and ultimately to the disintegration of society. Although Gropius was in favour of giving greater importance to the role that art would play in the development of society he was against the mass production of mediocre artists, and he felt that only the very best students should get through to become fine artists, architects, and designers.[108] Like Paul, Gropius advocated workshop training, where the focus of the curriculum would be the teaching of the fundamental elements of form. This teaching would be based on the analysis of the structural laws underlying the phenomenal world and, in particular, materials. Gropius saw the acquisition of skill as an essential aspect of this process. He thus saw the acquisition of skill as a fundamental aspect of art education. Gropius' programme at the Bauhaus was, according to Nikolaus Pevsner, "To link up through practical training in production workshops with the exact doctrines of the elements of form and their structural laws."[109] This was the basis of the analytical style of the curriculum at the Bauhaus.

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[106] An interesting parallel can be drawn between the situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the situation at the end of the First World War. The early nineteenth century witnessed the demise of the neo-classical system and its replacement by a new aesthetic, partly because of its association with what was seen as an old and corrupt political order. The early twentieth century also witnessed the death of a similarly old and corrupt political order and the development of a new aesthetic, in this case modernism.

[107] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 339.

[108] Ibid., 389.

[109] Ibid., 339.

Gropius summarised his approach to art education in the following way: "We must all return to the crafts. The school is the servant of the workshops and will one day be absorbed by them."[110]

Many of the greatest names of twentieth century art, architecture, and design taught at the Bauhaus, and it became a laboratory for the development of modernism in art and design, and in particular in art and design education. According to Gropius,

> I realised that closer links had to be forged between the machine and the artistic individual. So I established workshops that trained people in two ways: as artists and as craftsmen. It is often wrongly thought that everything was based on handcrafts. In fact it was a place of preparation. You can't understand a machine until you've understood the tools of your craft.[111]

The success of the Bauhaus, though short lived as a school, is undisputed, and through the diffusion of its ideas, hastened by the onset of Nazism which exiled most of its staff, it has been the single greatest influence on tertiary art education in the twentieth century. The Bauhaus closed in 1933.

The curriculum at the Bauhaus was the culmination of developments that had been taking place in art and design since the middle of the nineteenth century. The overall program at the Bauhaus was very much rooted in a functional, utilitarian and scientific approach to art education. The chief aim of the Bauhaus was to find a way of dealing with life on an aesthetic level, and the contribution of the Bauhaus to modern art was that it developed a visual science. This was despite the fact that the Bauhaus recruited people to its staff who advocated an overtly metaphysical aesthetic, like Johannes Itten and Wassily Kandinsky.

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[110] Frank Whitford, *Bauhaus: Face of the Twentieth Century*, (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1994), videorecording.

[111] Ibid.

3.9 Conclusion

Changes in British society in the nineteenth century led to the development of the Arts and Crafts Movement. By 1900 the arts and crafts aesthetic dominated British design and British design education. This aesthetic declined during the First World War mainly because it ignored mechanisation. Within the national system of art education, however, the arts and crafts approach continued to dominate until after the Second World War. Despite this situation, throughout the nineteen twenties and thirties, and generally speaking outside the art schools, a more modernist and European inspired design aesthetic began to take hold in Britain. This aesthetic ultimately derived from the aesthetic of fitness for purpose, and it owed much to the modernist aesthetic of form follows function. As a result of this, by the start of the Second World War, British designers were fully conversant with modern trends. British art education, however, continued to focus on the neo-classical tradition and to consign design to a second rate position on the curriculum. In summarising the bleak situation of tertiary art education in Britain as it entered the Second World War, and in setting the agenda for post-war developments in tertiary art education, Nikolaus Pevsner, in his book *Academies of Art* which was published in 1940, said:

> The fact remains that, amongst European nations, Germany, since 1918, has gone farther than any other country in re-shaping her art academies and fusing them into an organic unity with schools for crafts and industrial design. And here lies beyond doubt the most important question of twentieth century art education. Industry cannot be held up in its triumphal progress, and art can only be restored to something like its former role in the life of the community if it joins forces with industry. In the modern style of architecture this is achieved, in industrial design it is advancing. Unless art schools take the lead in this movement, they will not have a place in the modern educational structure.[112]

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[112] Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 292-293.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEMISE OF THE SOUTH KENSINGTON SYSTEM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FINE ART EDUCATION IN THE INTER-WAR YEARS

4.1 The Decline of the South Kensington System

In 1913 the Board of Education replaced Henry Cole's National System with a new and less complex system of examinations. Under the new system the twenty-three separate stages which had comprised the old system were reduced to just five subjects: Drawing, Painting, Modelling, Pictorial Design, and Industrial Design for (a) handcrafts, and (b) manufactures.[1]

4.1.1 *Background*

The genesis of the above change was the competitive nature of industrial development that existed in Europe in the years leading up to the First World War; the relationship between Britain and Germany was particularly intense in this regard.[2] The

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[1] Ministry of Education, Committee on Art Examinations, *Report,* 1948, 7-8.

[2] Nikolas Pevsner, *Studies in Art Architecture and Design volume II Victorian and After* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 227-229. Competition between Britain and Germany had a major impact on education in general in the early years of the twentieth century, and not just on developments in art education. Earl Spencer in the debate that led up to the passing of the Education Bill of 1902 illustrates the thinking of the time: " We talk a great deal of the absolute necessity, in these days of keen competition in commerce with other nations, of giving a wide and good technical education, but

increasing intensity of this competition as the First World War approached paralleled a more general demand for social reform in Britain at this time, which was a consequence of the requirements of imperialist national efficiency.[3] The tension that the above issues caused in the body politic in Britain made many people in positions of power aware of the need to improve national efficiency in a concrete way. Satisfying this need had a direct influence on developments in British education, and consequently it had an influence on the development of British art and design education at all levels.[4]

The exhibition of the work of members of the German Werkbund, which was held in Cologne in 1914 - before the outbreak of war, marked a pivotal point in the development of the competitive relationship between Britain and Germany. It also fed into an already growing demand amongst designers in Britain for a move away from the arts and crafts aesthetic. More importantly, this exhibition marked a watershed in the development of German design that separated the ideas of the late nineteenth century from the ideas of the early twentieth century. In this regard, it marked the end of the dictatorial organisational methods favoured by Muthesius on the one hand, and the beginning of a more loosely based system favoured by younger designers and architects like Gropius on the other.[5] Muthesius, in reflecting nineteenth century ideas,

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I venture to say that we must include secondary with technical education, for without a good grounding in secondary education it is vain and futile to impart technical instruction to pupils. Parliamentary Debates, Lords, 4th ser., Vol. LXXXVI (1900), col. 809. In the same debate the comments of the Archbishop of Canterbury illustrate the fact that Germany had replaced France as Britain's chief industrial rival at this time, and that it had done so by improving its education system: "The expansion of German trade, of German industries, is directly due to the unremitting efforts of the German government to improve their secondary education." Ibid., 817.

[3] G. E. Sherington, "The 1918 Education Act: Origins, Aims, and Development," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 24 (1976): 67.

[4] Ibid., 66-69.

[5] Reginald Isaacs, *An Illustrated Biography of the Creator of the Bauhaus* (London: Bullfinch Press, 1991), 31.

had demanded a single style ordained from above which would be mass-produced. Gropius, who was more liberal than Muthesius and whose reputation as one of the worlds leading young architects was made at the 1914 Werkbund exhibition, believed that style evolved when individuals studied and analysed form and at the same time expressed their free will.[6] Thus the 1914 Werkbund exhibition marked the beginning of a new movement in design. The chief manifestation of this movement, in educational terms, was the curriculum at the Bauhaus, which, as already mentioned, opened in 1919. The Bauhaus aesthetic, which was utopian in nature - understandable in the context of post-war Weimar Germany, is summarised in Gropius' guiding principle for the school, which was "the idea of creating a new unity through the welding together of many 'arts' and movements: a unity having its basis in man himself and significant only as a living organism."[7] The aesthetic idea that underpinned the curriculum at the Bauhaus was put into practice at the school in a methodology that was based on two principles: the study of form, and the free expression of the individual. This methodology was the start of a whole new approach to art education that in Britain would reach maturity in the 1970s.

Notwithstanding its influence on German art education and on British designers like Lethaby and Frampton, the 1914 Werkbund exhibition was to have no particular, immediate, or lasting effect on art and design education in Britain until the influence of the Bauhaus reached British art schools in the 1950s.

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[6] Ibid., 33. Gropius' reputation had been established by his formally innovative Fagus shoe factory of 1911, a building that had been inspired by, but which had surpassed in formal innovation, his teacher Peter Behrens' similarly innovative Turbine factory of 1909.

[7] Walter Gropius, "The Theory and Organisation of the Bauhaus," in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, ed., *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford, Blackwall, 1992), 340.

With the few exceptions already mentioned, developments in British art education leading up to 1914 were less radical than those in Germany and took longer to develop. One of the earliest reports to criticise art and design education in Britain was the Samuelson Report of 1884, which, predictably, accused the South Kensington System of producing a "mass of inferior drawings."[8] Some change did take place in British art education as a consequence of the recommendation of the Samuelson Report that scientific and technical education be expanded. This was particularly so after the passing of the *Technical Instruction Act* of 1889, which, as shown in the last chapter, gave art schools some autonomy by putting them under local government control.

Another important change with implications for the future of art education was the separation of the schools and colleges of art from the system of general education that took place in 1899 when the Board of Education took over the functions of the Science and Art Department.[9] This change created a two tiered system of art education, which in the inter-war years would allow for the development of two completely different types of curriculum. This in turn would help to influence developments in fine art education at tertiary level after the Second World War.

Tertiary level art education in Britain in the early years of the twentieth century remained conservative and, outside of the Royal Academy Schools and private schools, faithful to the curriculum of the South Kensington System. This was despite the developments that took place in British art and art education around the turn of the century. These included the development of a new curriculum at the Slade, and

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[8] Clive Ashwin, *Art Education: Documents and Policies 1768-1975* (London: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1975), 59.

[9] Ibid., 82.

innovations that took place in the curricula of art schools in response to the Arts and Crafts Movement, like those at the Glasgow School of Art. They also included the new radical approach to form of the early modernists, as discussed in Chapter 1. The Royal College of Art in particular continued on its unadventurous course, unwilling to engage with developments taking place outside its walls. The extent to which the South Kensington System was out of touch with contemporary developments is illustrated by the fact that even the Royal Academy, which according to some commentators at this time was itself in desperate need of reform, had greater status than the Royal College of Art.[10] The status of the Royal Academy was so low in the eyes of progressive thinkers that, according to George Moore, "The existence of an immense fund of hate and contempt of the Academy is not denied. From Glasgow to Cornwall, wherever a group of artists collects, there hangs a gathering and darkening sky of hate."[11]

4.1.2 *A New System of Art Examinations*

The success of the Central School of Arts and Crafts, which was under the control of the London County Council, was the catalyst which led to the introduction of a new system of art examinations in 1913. The Central School had, by 1910, acquired a very high reputation as a training ground for designers and craftsmen; this was particularly the case in lettering, printing, and book production. By stark contrast, the Royal College of Art, the senior art school of the Board of Education, was producing neither crafts nor craftsmen of distinction.

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[10] H. Cliff Morgan, "The Schools of the Royal Academy," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 21 (1973): 101.

[11] George Moore, *Modern Painting* (London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd., 1893), 97.

As a consequence of this situation, both the Royal College of Art and the South Kensington System had come under government scrutiny in the first years of the new century. By 1910 the need for change was so obvious that the Board of Education appointed a departmental committee "for the purpose of considering and reporting on the functions and constitution of the Royal College of Art and its relations to the Schools of Art in London and throughout the country."[12] As a result of the work of this committee the Board of Education published circular 775 in 1911. Circular 775 recommended the introduction of a new system of art examinations; hence the change in the curriculum in 1913.[13]

The National Society of Art Masters, which had been established in 1888 and which represented the interests of art masters in the Schools of Art of the National System, saw its role as advancing British national well being by supporting a didactic and drawing based curriculum at tertiary level. This was in keeping with Cole's ideas and reflected the essentially conservative nature of this group. Under the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement this society expanded its view of art education to include the making of crafts.

Before the foundation of the National Society of Art Masters the status of the art masters in the Schools of Art had been low. This was partly a consequence of the fact that the presence of a state system threatened the art masters who were already established in the various regions. These masters taught in private or grammar schools and gave private tuition to fee-paying pupils. The lobby protecting this latter group

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[12] Stuart Macdonald, "Articidal Tendencies," in *Histories of Art and Design Education: Cole to Coldstream*, ed. David Thistlewood (Harlow: Longman in association with the National Society for Education in Art and Design, 1992), 17.

[13] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 82.

ensured that the status of the art masters in the Schools of Art remained low. As a result of this situation the first task of the National Society of Art Masters was to establish its status.[14] By the outbreak of the First World War this objective had been achieved, and the Society had succeeded in establishing its authority within the British education system. It subsequently became an important lobbying force in tertiary level art education.[15]

Frederic Burridge, who was a particularly radical member of the National Society of Art Masters, lobbied the Board of Education Committee of 1910 to create a system whereby trade students in provincial art schools, having developed their skills to a certain level, could go on to study at the Royal College of Art. He also suggested a reorganisation of the curriculum at the Royal College of Art so that students with a range of backgrounds and different specialist diplomas from different Local Education Authority art schools could enter the college and thereby advance to a higher level of specialisation.[16] Burridge further suggested that the National Society of Art Masters, because it was a body of appropriately trained experts, could assess the new diplomates for access to the Royal College of Art; art inspectors at this time tended to be scientists and therefore inadequately trained for such a task.[17] In making the above

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[14] Derek Hanson, "The Art Masters," *British Journal of Educational Studies* XIX 1971): 40-50.

[15] David Thistlewood, "The Early History of the N.S.E.A.D.: the Society of Art Masters (1888-1909) and the National Society of Art Masters (1909-1944)," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 7 (1988): 37-61.

[16] Ibid., 51.

[17] This was a consequence of the fact that the Department of Art had been merged by Cole in 1853 with the Department of Science to create the Department of Science and Art.

suggestions Burridge was hoping to wrest control over curricular issues from central authority and to put it into the hands of the National Society of Art Masters.[18]

In the event, the report of the Board of Education's committee was highly critical of the Royal College of Art, and it found its work irrelevant to the needs of industrial design. There is, according to David Thistlewood, no record of the Boards response to Burridge.[19]

The report - Circular 775 - in stating the obvious, said of the South Kensington System that "The plan of applying a separate test to each of the numerous stages of a prolonged course of artistic studies . . . restricts unduly the development of schools of art and brings about a uniformity of method which is undesirable in view of the very different functions which the schools have to perform in different localities."[20]

As the vast majority of the departments examinees were entered at the most elementary stages of the examination system, the board decided that the elementary students could best be examined by the teachers in the schools, and that central control could be exercised through the medium of visits of inspection. This gave much greater freedom to the art schools at elementary level, and it allowed the Board of Education to concentrate on advanced studies.[21]

The most obvious and positive aspect of the new system was that it was less complex than the old South Kensington System. Under the new system full-time art studies normally began at the age of 16. After two years students could enter for the Drawing Examination. This consisted of tests in Drawing from Life, Drawing and

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[18] Thistlewood "Early History of the N.S.E.A.D.," 50.

[19] Ibid., 50.

[20] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 82.

[21] Ibid., 83.

Painting from Memory and Knowledge, Anatomy, Architecture, Drawing from the cast, and Perspective. Having completed the Drawing Examination, the full-time student normally studied for a further two years before entering for one of the four advanced examinations known as the Examinations in Industrial Design, in Illustration, in Painting or in Modelling; each of these had its own examining panel. The drawing Examination and the four advanced examinations were set and examined centrally.[22] Having completed the previous two stages, students interested in becoming teachers could take courses leading to a qualification entitled "Teaching Certificate for Teachers in Schools of Art". Intermediate courses were provided in the majority of art schools. Advanced courses were provided in what came to be known as Regional Art Schools. And courses entitled "Principles of Teaching" and "School Management", leading to the Teaching Certificate, were provided in newly approved centres attached to most of the upper tier of art schools. These latter institutions only admitted students who had matriculated and who already possessed Intermediate and Advanced Art School Certificates. This led to the most serious drawback of the new system, which was that it automatically ruled out the artisan classes, as the artisan classes could not afford full time study beyond the school leaving age of thirteen.[23]

4.2 The Influence of the National Society of Art Masters

In reaction to the Boards avoidance of the needs of artisans and local industry in the new examination system, the National Society of Art Masters took more initiative and

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[22] Ibid., 83.

[23] Thistlewood, "Early History of the N.S.E.A.D.," 52.

greater control of art education. It did this by developing its own courses for artisans and for the training of teachers.[24]

Stimulated by the success of these new courses, and frustrated by the fact that the Government was reducing its investment in art schools because of financial pressure brought on by the war between 1914 and 1918, the society pushed for more radical changes in the curricula of art schools during the war.[25]

In response to an initiative of the Design in Industries Association - an exhibition of the work of the German Werkbund which it organised in 1915 in order to stimulate British design[26] - the society submitted a plan to the Board of Education in 1917 which tendered the most far reaching comprehensive proposals for co-ordinating art and design provisions in Primary, Secondary, and Technical and Continuing education since Cole.[27]

A number of innovations were suggested in this plan. They included the following. Art education should cultivate aesthetic appreciation and a knowledge of the achievements of art as a first step in the training of public taste. Art should be obligatory at all levels of education, this latter suggestion would be good for the National Society of Art Masters as it would require vast numbers of specially trained teachers. Local Education Authority advisors should be created to identify and

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[24] Ibid., 52.

[25] Ibid., 54.

[26] Interestingly, the Design in Industries Association had been stimulated to organise this exhibition by the fact that the Board of Trade, in order to support British products, had been promoting exhibitions of 'enemy products' which were notable for their cheapness and shoddiness. The Design in Industries Association felt that this policy was wrong and that showing the worst of German design was to the detriment of British design. Consequently, and controversially, it successfully lobbied the Board of Trade to help them organise the above mantioned exhibition of the work of the German Werkbund. (Fiona MaCarthy, *A History of British Design 1830-1970* [London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972], 41.)

[27] Thistlewood, "The Early History of the N.S.E.A.D.," 55.

promote good practice. The school leaving age should be raised to fourteen. Pre-apprenticeship courses in art subjects should be provided for all pupils of artistic aptitude. All young workers entering manufacturing trades and industries should be required to attend day classes in art schools for between ten and twenty hours per week until the age of 18. It went on to suggest that scholarships should provide access from secondary schools to schools of art, from schools of art to provincial colleges and from provincial colleges to a central national institution in London. And finally, in order to attract men and women of ability, teaching was to be regarded as a strategic profession and its pay revised accordingly.[28] These demands were stimulated by concerns about the commercial and political position that Britain would occupy in the post-war world,[29] and they were made in the context of similar demands being made by others within the educational establishment during the War. These demands reflected a popular feeling that social change would be inevitable in the post-war years.[30] The war had clearly reinforced the demand for social change that had been developing before it began, and it had also reinforced the perceived need for competitiveness that had been such a fundamental aspect of the pre-war European political situation.

In the event, the 1918 *Education Act* was passed embodying virtually everything the National Society of Art Masters had asked for.[31] In practice, however, because of economic problems and the defensive nature of the post-war years, the new

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[28] Ibid., 55.

[29] G. E. Sherington, "The 1918 Education Act," 67.

[30] D.W. Dean, "H.A.L. Fisher, Reconstruction and the Development of the 1918 Education Act," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 18 (1970): 261-263.

[31] Thistlewood, "Early History of the N.S.E.A.D.," 55.

Government clawed back many of the gains, and over the next twenty years the position of tertiary level art education in Britain remained more or less static.[32]

Despite the fact that by 1918 the National Society of Art Masters had become a powerful lobbying force in tertiary art education, and that to some extent it had affected change during the War, its adherence to a didactic and drawing based curriculum helped to encourage stasis and conservatism in the inter-war period. It must be noted that this was a period of great change in the arts on the continent. The Bauhaus, it will be remembered, was active from 1919 until 1933, when many of its staff, including Gropius, having been exiled, came to Britain where, although they had an influence on avant-garde art, they had no influence on art education.

British society was deeply conservative throughout the inter-war years. This helps to explain why British art schools, whose greater autonomy since the war should have allowed for the influence of modernist ideas, remained rooted in the Neo-classical tradition and the arts and crafts aesthetic.[33] There was one notable exception to this situation, which will be discussed below. It must be said, however, that in a time of great confusion, change, and development, not only politically and socially but also in the art world, the situation in the art schools in Britain, and therefore the position of the National Society of Art Masters, also reflected, and perhaps helped to ensure, political and social stability. One has only to think of the proliferation of artistic movements in Europe after 1918, and in particular of the affiliation of some of the more important of these movements with extreme political change. Constructivism and surrealism were associated with communism, for instance, and futurism and social

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[32] Ibid., 56-57.

[33] Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, ed., *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford, Blackwall, 1992), 337.

realism were associated with Fascism. An interesting comparison may be made between the situation in Britain and the situation in Ireland after 1918, where the changing political situation in Ireland had a very visible manifestation in the work of Sean Keating. Keating in turn exerted a huge influence on art education through his position of authority in the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art; a position he was to maintain until the late 1950s.

4.3 Fine Art Within The New System

Despite social change and developments in the area of design in the first twenty years of the twentieth century, and despite the fact that after the 1918 *Education Act* increasing numbers of artisans and apprentices attended art schools on a part time basis, art schools continued to see their role in the inter-war years as the training of fine artists.[34] Throughout the nineteen twenties the majority of students who paid full fees at schools of art were studying fine art.[35] It is interesting to note the continuing dilettantish nature of fine art education between the wars, which is illustrated by the fact that many of those attending art schools did not sit for examinations.[36] For many in the inter-war period art schools were seen as finishing schools. In 1923, for example, the painter Walter Sickert referred to "an immense mob of idlers, male and female, to whom art schools serve as a kind of day nursery."[37] Notwithstanding this fact, art

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[34] D. Thistlewood, "The Formation of the N.S.E.A.D.: A Dialectical Advance for British Art and Design Education," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 8 (1989): 140.

[35] Macdonald, "Articidal Tendencies," 18.

[36] Ministry of Education, *Report on Art Examinations,* 1948, 8.

[37] Eammons Robert, *The Life and Opinions of Walter Richard Sickert* (London: Faber, 1941), quoted in Macdonald, "Articidal Tendencies," 14.

schools were not bereft of serious professional intent in the area of fine art, nor were they completely bereft of modernist influence.

The most significant example of the influence of modernism on British art education at this time was the reorientation of the Royal College of Art under the headship of the painter William Rothenstein (1872-1945). Rothenstein, who was a friend of the Liberal MP H.A.L. Fisher, the minister responsible for the 1918 *Education Act*, was appointed in the context of the reformative atmosphere that surrounded the passing of the act.[38] In explaining the reformative nature of this act Fisher said that Britain was "eager to compensate the wastage of war by some contribution to the arts of peace".[39] Culture was therefore an important aspect of Fisher's reforms, and the innovations that were made at this time in relation to creating support for cultural activities ultimately led to the setting up of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, commonly known as CEMA, which was the precursor of the Arts Council of Great Britain. Rothenstein belonged to the generation of bohemian British artists who subscribed to French aesthetic ideas, and who came to maturity between 1890 and 1910. Whistler was the role model of this group, which included Augustus John and William Orpen.[40] Consistent with the late nineteenth century preoccupation with a rigorous search for truth in both science and art Rothenstein aspired to "free the eye from the corruption of knowledge".[41] According to Rothenstein, "True simplicity comes after the shedding of much one would like to retain; it is a radiant fullness, from which needless detail has

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[38] Dean, "H.A.L. Fisher," 259-263; and Roger Berthoud, *The Life of Henry Moore* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 60.

[39] Richard Witts, *Artist Unknown: An Alternative History of the Arts Council* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 11.

[40] Michael Holroyd, *Augustus John: The New Biography* (London: Vintage, 1976), 56-57.

[41] Kenneth McConkey, *Impressionism in Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 85.

been removed. Simplicity is the final candour of things".[42] Rothenstein had studied at the *Atelier Julian* in Paris where written over the door was the motto of Ingres: "*Le dessein est la probite de l'art*", and "*Cherchez le caractere dans la nature*". Though sharing an interest in the aesthetic of truth to nature with other Victorian Artists, Rothenstein was considered to be more advanced in his ideas than many of his peers in Britain. This was largely as a result of his having been exposed to the work of the Symbolists before he left Paris to return to Britain. Rothenstein's ideas about art thus form a link between the aesthetics of the nineteenth century and the aesthetics of the new movement in English art which was manifested in the ideas of Roger Fry and Clive Bell. The preoccupations of modernism within British art were consistent at this time with the preoccupations of modernism within European art, which were, as already shown in the context of Gropius' ideas, individual expression and formal analysis. Like Fry and Bell, and as befits an ex-student of the Slade, Rothenstein's preoccupation was with the formal elements in art - interestingly, in this context, when Rothenstein toured the Continental art schools in 1924 he completely ignored the Bauhaus; a measure of the limits of his thinking perhaps. The art historian John Rothenstein in his book *Modern English Painters,* summarised his father's thinking thus: "The Wordsworthian connection that form is the discipline imposed by God upon the universe, and that by subjecting himself to it the artist may approach the innermost realities, is one which again and again find expression in his critical writings."[43]

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[42] Quoted in Robert Speaight, *William Rothenstein: The Portrait of an Artist in His Time* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962), 26.

[43] John Rothenstein, *Modern English Painters: vol. I Sickert to Smith* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1976), 127.

When appointed Principal of the Royal College of Art in 1920, Rothenstein, who was noted for his drawing skills, replaced pedagogues with artists, and in a short space of time he filled the college with a staff of talented fine artists and illustrators.[44] In having artists as teachers he was following the precedent set by the Royal Academy Schools in the late eighteenth century, and continued in more recent times by his close friends and contemporaries William Orpen and Augustus John at the Chelsea Art School. As a result of Rothenstein's efforts, the Royal College of Art with its faculty of respected artists and designers gained a reputation as a modern fine art college. Fine art came to dominate the college under Rothenstein's principalship to such an extent that when Eric Gill, the great craftsman, was offered a place on the staff he refused. The dilettantish image which fine art had at this time, and, interestingly, the status of women in art education, are both illustrated by Gill's response to Rothenstein in refusing to join the staff: "I am not of one mind with you and the aims you are furthering at the College, and may I whisper it, I think there are too many women about."[45] The change of orientation of the Royal College of Art by Rothenstein secured the dominant position of fine art within the national art education system for the foreseeable future. Subsequently, ambitious students in local and provincial schools regarded the Royal College of Art as the ultimate goal for an aspiring fine artist; a position it still holds today.[46]

Despite Rothenstein's efforts on behalf of modernism, however, there was still a conservative core to the Royal College of Art that had not been removed in the post-

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[44] Macdonald, "Articidal Tendencies," 19.

[45] Ibid., 19.

[46] Editorial, "Men of the Royal College," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 3 1984: 138-139.

war atmosphere of reconstruction. The power of this conservative core, as already mentioned, permeated the art schools of England through the National Society of Art Masters. The National Society of Art Masters demanded a curriculum based entirely on drawing in the Neo-classical tradition for fine art students, design students, and even for apprentices from industry, who, along with special courses devoted to their crafts and industries, were obliged to do substantial amounts of drawing.[47] This was a legacy of the approach of Reynolds to art education that was continued by Dyce and Cole, which stated that drawing was fundamental to all art and design education. Thus, the central position which drawing in the Neo-classical sense occupied on the curricula of art schools in the inter-war years illustrates two things. Firstly, the power of the National Society of Art Masters, who wanted to maintain the status quo. And, secondly, the dearth of change in tertiary level art education since the founding of the Schools of Design in 1837.

By stark contrast with the National Society of Art Masters, the Art Teachers Guild, which represented elementary teachers, was concerned with new and innovatory teaching methods. These were most evident in the so-called "New Art Teaching" that dominated elementary teaching between the wars, and which had grown out of the work of Franz Cizek in Vienna. Cizek's work was child centred and focused on individual expression. Consequently the Art Teachers Guild was more open to developments in modern art and aesthetics than the National Society of Art Masters. This greater openness is exemplified in the close ties between the most famous exponent of the New Art Teaching in Britain, Marian Richardson (1892-1946), and

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[47] Thistlewood, "The Formation of the N.S.E.A.D.," 139-140.

that most avant-garde of groups, the Bloomsbury group; in particular it is exemplified in Richardson's close association with Roger Fry.[48]

4.3.1 *The Conflict Between Innovation and Tradition in Fine Art Education*

The early career of the artist Henry Moore (1898-1986), who studied at the Royal College of Art from 1919-1923, provides an illustration of the possibilities for openness provided by the new system that was introduced in 1913. It also provides, however, an illustration of the tension between innovation and tradition that existed in art schools in the inter-war period.

Moore as an artist enthusiastically embraced the aesthetics of modernism, and in particular he embraced the formalist aesthetics of Roger Fry.[49] While still a student at the Royal College of Art Moore developed his own personal and abstract style by pursuing the more traditional Neo-classically based coursework during the semester and his own formalist interests during the holidays.[50] William Rothenstein recognised Moore's outstanding talent and gave him encouragement. Shortly after Moore graduated from the Royal College of Art Rothenstein brought him back as a sculptor instructor. This was in 1924, and Moore remained in this position until 1932. During his stay at the Royal College of Art Moore met with stiff opposition from three successive traditionalist heads of sculpture. Despite this opposition Rothenstein

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[48] Bruce Holdsworth, "Marian Richardson (1892-1946)," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 7 (1988): 139-140.

[49] John Rothenstein, *Modern English Painters: Lewis to Moore Volume II* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1976), 313; and Berthoud, *Henry Moore*, 55-57.

[50] This pattern had become well established in British art education before the changes of the 1960s. Anthony Caro, for example, describes a similar way of working that was employed by students at the Royal Academy Schools in the late 1940s. (Diane Waldman, *Anthony Caro* [Oxford: Phaidon, 1982], 18) Interestingly, this practice continued after the demise of the Neo-classical curriculum and the

persisted in his support and insisted on Moore holding his position.[51] Moore's situation eventually became untenable, however, because of this opposition, and he left to take up a position in the Chelsea School of Art which he held until 1939, at which point he ceased teaching.

Moor's early success in the reformative context of the immediate post-war years illustrates the potential for innovative change through individual action within the art education system. The fact that he was forced to leave the Royal College of Art in 1932, more importantly, however, illustrates the ability of those teaching in art schools to resist change. This resistance to change and, in particular, to change demanded by the government, was the single greatest issue affecting tertiary art education in Britain between the wars. The reason for this was that, as the National Society of Art Masters dominated art schools and as the Local Education Authorities controlled education, the Government could not cause change but could only exhort change.[52] The lack of response in the art schools to the Gorrell Report of 1933, which had demanded that art schools respond to the needs of industry,[53] and the Hambeldon Report of 1936, which tried to reorganise tertiary art education in London, are cases in point.[54] This resistance to change led to the atrophying of the tertiary level art education system in Britain during the 1930s. This was the situation that Pevsner so vigorously criticised in his

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introduction of more loosely structured courses in the 1960s and 1970s. (Charles Madge, Barbara Weinberger, Art Students Observed [London: Faber and Faber, 1973], 93-100.)

[51] Herbert Read, *Henry Moore a Study of His Life and Work* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 35.

[52] Peter Gosden, "Putting the Act Together," *History of Education* 24 (1995): 199-200.

[53] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 72-73.

[54] Ibid., 74-77.

comment on the state of art education in Britain as it entered the Second World War, and which was quoted at the end of Chapter 3.

This stasis contrasts sharply with the frenzy of change in the much altered context of the post-World War II period in British art education, and it illustrates the great difference between the two eras; the one conservative and resistant to change and the other radical and demanding of change. The situation in Ireland, by contrast with Britain, was the reverse. The Dublin Metropolitan School of Art went through a major reorganisation in 1936, and in the post-World War II epoch it resisted change and, by contrast with the change that was taking place outside of its walls in the wider society, it became increasingly conservative.

4.4 British Art Education and Developments in Europe in the Inter-War Period

The principal point to note about tertiary art education in Britain in the inter-war years is that, while the content of the curriculum was prescribed and while examinations were centralised, power, having been taken from the Board of Education in various acts of Parliament, now rested with the National Society of Art Masters and the Local Education Authorities.[55]

On a practical level, the new examinations introduced in 1913 eliminated the complex, tedious, and out dated categories of Cole's system, and replaced them with a less numerous and less complex list of categories. This new system of examinations failed to force any particular change from the Neo Classical, drawing based curriculum

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[55] Sherington, "The 1918 Education Act," 80-81.

of the Victorian era, but gave a certain amount of freedom, flexibility, and autonomy to individual art schools.

In the area of design, some colleges developed relationships with local industries that were of mutual benefit.[56] Many local businesses and industries used art schools as resources for the training of apprentices in part time courses and as recruiting centres for designers. Designers were usually recruited from the better students before they sat for any examinations.[57]

The role of the art schools during the inter-war period, in short, was to provide courses for aspirant artists and designers, to train art teachers, and to provide part time courses for apprentices in industry and, in particular, from the textile and printing industries.

The inter-war years saw changes in the wider art world in Britain - principally the development of an avant-garde - and in both the art world and art education on the continent, and some British artists had close connections with what was happening on the continent.[58] By contrast with the British art world, what was happening in tertiary level art education in Britain between the wars can be summarised in the hackneyed phrase "splendid isolation". Notwithstanding this isolationism, developments taking place in modern European art between 1910 and 1939 did influence British art education at tertiary level, but not until after the Second World War.[59]

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[56] Ministry of Education, *Pamphlet No. 6: Art Education*, 1946, 27.

[57] Ministry of Education, *Art Examinations, Report*, 1948, 8-9.

[58] For an interesting overview and personal account of the interaction between the Mainland European avant-garde and the British avant-garde in the inter-war years, and also the dilettantish aspect of the avant-garde at this time, see (Roland Penrose, *Scrap Book 1900-1981*, [London: Thames and Hudson, 1981]).

[59] Bryan Appleyard, *The Pleasures of Peace: Art and Imagination in Post-War Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 24-33.

The integration of developments taking place in European art with developments in British art in the inter-war years is largely the result of the work of Herbert Read (1893-1968). Read's influence and importance in twentieth century British art is comparable to that of Ruskin in the nineteenth century. Read's work is important for the present study as it influenced the development of art education after the Second World War in Great Britain at all levels, and in particular it influenced the development of the Basic Design system.

4.4.1 *The Influence of Herbert Read*

Herbert Read saw himself as a revolutionary and he shared the radical political agenda of many artists and intellectuals in the years after the First World War. Read, who headed the English Surrealist Movement in the 1930s, said in 1936, "The Surrealist is naturally a Marxian [sic] socialist, and generally . . . a more consistent Communist than many."[60]

Like Gropius Read had served in the War and with Gropius he shared a utopian and idealistic world-view. Read believed that the development of a new type of society was an inevitable outcome of the social and political changes which he saw taking place in the years following the First World War. In common with many other artists and intellectuals, and in particular with Gropius, he saw art as having an important role to play in the development of such a society.[61]

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[60] Herbert Read, "On the Social Aspects of Surrealism" *Bulletin International du Surrealisme*, IV (September 1936): 9-12; Quoted in Helena Lewis, *Dada Turns Red: The Politics of Surrealism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 136.

[61] Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 219-220.

Read's aesthetic ideas were Aristotelian, universalist and teleological, and were rooted in nineteenth century organicist theories of art.[62] Like Fry and Bell he believed that artistic processes were a manifestation of the underlying processes and structures of nature. For Read modern art revealed

> certain proportions and rhythms which are inherent in the structure of the universe, and which govern organic growth, including the growth of the human body. Attuned to these rhythms and proportions, the abstract artist can create microcosms which reflect the macrocosm... through access to the archetypal forms which underlie all casual variations presented by the natural world.[63]

Read's contribution to aesthetics in the inter-war years was to create an intellectual structure which defined developments in modern European art and at the same time to locate developments in modern British art in a European context. In doing this, Read synthesised elements of Victorian aesthetics; organicist theories of art, of modernist aesthetics; formalist theories of art, and of developments in modern European art, architecture, and design.

Read saw himself as an anarchist. He believed deeply that art had a revolutionary role to play in society.[64] This was not an explicit role, but an implicit or latent role:

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[62] David Thistlewood, "Organic Art and the Popularisation of a Scientific Philosophy," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 22 (1982): 316-317.

[63] Herbert Read, *Art and Society*, quoted in Benedict Read and David Thistlewood, *Herbert Read: A British Vision of World Art* (London: Heinemann, 1993), 38; It is appropriate here to point out the different kinds of beauty proposed by Ruskin. One of these has affinities with the 'form follows function' aesthetic of modernism, and the other has affinities with Read's archetypal forms. The first of these, according to Ruskin, is "the external quality of bodies . . . which, whether it occurs in a stone, flower, beast or man, is absolutely identical, which . . . may be shown to be in some sort typical of the divine attributes, and which therefore I shall, for distinctions sake, call typical beauty." The second, according to Ruskin, is "the appearance of felicitous fulfilment of function in living things, more especially of the joyful and right exertion of perfect life in man; and this kind of beauty I shall call vital beauty." Quoted in (Hewison Robert, *John Ruskin: The Argument of the Eye* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1976], 58.)

[64] Anthony Weaver, "Introduction and the 'Education of Free Men'," *New Era* 53 (1972): 4-8.

> Abstract art has a positive function. It keeps inviolate, until such time as society will once more be ready to make use of . . . the universal qualities of art - Those elements which survive all changes and revolutions. . .
>
> The artists are waiting for their opportunity; abstract artists who are, in this time of transition, perfecting their formal sensitivity, and who will be ready when the time comes, to apply their talents to the great work of reconstruction.[65]

Many artists and intellectuals on the left in Britain had, by 1939, become disillusioned with the effectiveness of art in bringing about political change. The final cause of this change in thinking was the Non Aggression pact between Nazi Germany and Communist Russia that was signed in May 1939. As a consequence of this, the idealistic aspirations of these artists and intellectuals in relation to the role of art in society changed. The subsequent retrenched and defensive position adopted by many on the left in Britain in relation to developments in the late thirties is encapsulated in the following statement by Read, which was made in 1939: "In our decadent society . . . art must enter into a monastic phase. . . . Art must now become individualistic, even hermetic. We must renounce, as the most puerile delusion, the hope that art can ever again perform a social function. . . . This is equally true in Russia and the West."[66]

The adoption of this new individualistic aesthetic by Read marks a major change in his thinking, and led to his being expelled from the Surrealist Movement in 1939. The poet Stephen Spender was another intellectual who was forced to reconsider the role of the artist in this context. Spender, in common with most artists and writers did not reject political issues completely. He did, however, suggest, in redefining the position of the artist in society, that the artist had a cultural as opposed to a doctrinally political

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[65] Charles Harrison and Allen Lane, *English Art and Modernism* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981), 304-5.

[66] Lewis, *Dada*, 158.

duty. In the case of the writer, according to Spender, this duty was to guard the language and the values it expresses against its abuse by propaganda of any sort. As a consequence of this change in thinking Spender suggested an organic rather than a political view of life. This thinking revitalised an organicist view of society, and the idea, according to Robert Hewison, that "Society is not a machine of mutually destructive means, but an organic growth around a central philosophy of life and a wide understanding of the needs of satisfactory living. What decides the nature of political institutions is ultimately values deriving from religion, philosophy, scientific methods, and art."[67]

It is interesting to note that Spender studied at the Euston Road School[68] in 1938, and that the membership of the Euston Road School at this time included William Coldstream (1908-1987); Coldstream was responsible for major changes in the development of tertiary level art education in Britain in the 1960s. It is also interesting to note that during the 1950s Spender was on the management committee on the Institute of Contemporary Art, commonly known as the ICA. The ICA, of which Herbert Read was a founder member, was hugely influential in developments in British art and in tertiary art education throughout the 1950s (see Chapter 5).

4.4.1.1 *Herbert Read and Education*

Read believed that the particular job of the artist, as shown above, was to get in touch with "the universal qualities in art, the elements that survive all changes and

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[67] Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-1945* (London: Methuen, 1988), 81.

[68] This was a group of painters who were united by their rejection on the esoteric nature of much modernist art, and by a desire for a return to a more straightforward naturalism in art.

revolutions." According to Read, access to these, for the artist, was through the vital rhythms that were everywhere present in natural forms.[69]

Read's quest for these vital rhythms and archetypal forms[70] led him to an interest in child art and therefore to education and art, because children's art, as Franz Cizek said, "contains in itself eternal laws of form."[71] The nineteen twenties and thirties, when Read was developing his aesthetic ideas, witnessed a growth of interest in the area of child art.[72] This interest was fed by a number of exhibitions that were held in Great Britain of paintings made by pupils of Cizek, who was at this time developing his ideas about child art in Vienna.[73] The work of Cizek provides an important link between the

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[69] Read and Thistlewood, *Herbert Read*, 79.

[70] It is interesting to note that the concept of the archetype was developed in the maelstrom of the Victorian scientific world by the English scientist Richard Owen about the time of the Great Exhibition. This concept played an important role in the thinking of Freud and Jung, both of whose ideas had an important role to play in the development of Read's thinking. Owen was England's greatest vertebrate anatomist during Darwin's generation. Darwin and Owen had a long and problematic relationship, which was a consequence of Owens rejection of natural selection as an excessively materialistic theory. Natural selection, as Owen understood it, depended on external environments to too great an extent and too little on laws of organic structure. This situation is interesting in relation to what was said earlier about Darwin's *Descent of Man* being rejected by many in Victorian Britain and of the negative influence of science on Ruskin's thinking. It is also interesting to note that Owen made a correlation between archetypal forms and Plato's ideal forms. He did this in a letter to his sister, which was written in 1852, in which he explains the concept: "It represents the archetype or primal pattern – what Plato would have called the 'divine idea' on which the osseous frame of all vertebrate animals – i.e. all animals that have bones – has been constructed. The motto is 'the one in the manifold,' expressive of the unity of plan which may be traced through all the modifications of the pattern, by which it is adapted to the very habits and modes of life of fishes, reptiles, birds, beasts, and human kind." Quoted in (Stephen J. Gould, *Eight Little Piggies: Reflections in Natural History* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993], 63). It is an appropriate coincidence in the context of the role of the South Kensington Museums in education in general, but in art education in particular, that Owen was the first director of the Natural History Museum at South Kensington. It is also an appropriate coincidence in this context that Read, who worked at the South Kensington Museum as an assistant keeper from 1922 until 1931, where he developed many of his ideas, aspired to create a symbiosis of art and science in education.

[71] S.B. Malvern, "Inventing 'Child Art': Franz Cizek and Modernism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35 (1995): 267.

[72] Bruce Holdsworth, "English Art Education Between the Wars," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 3 (1984): 161.

[73] Malvern, "Child Art," 262.

Modern Movement and child art; both had as their objective a quest for the archetypal structures upon which civilisation was founded. For this reason Cizek believed it was important "not to teach".[74] According to Cizek, "[the] longer a child's subconscious creative powers can be kept in the dark, the better. As soon as they are illumined by reasoning, they generally cease to exist."[75]

Read's interest in education was stimulated when he made the connection between children's art and avant-garde art.[76] Read believed that children had access to archetypes because they were innocent and because the rules, regulations, and conventions of society had not yet contaminated them; avant-garde artists intentionally eschewed these rules and regulations.[77] Like Cizek, Read felt it was important for the teacher not to teach, and for there to be a relationship of equality between teacher and pupil.[78] This belief became a fundamental principle of the Basic Design system and was an important part of the curriculum in the Fine Art Faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in the 1970s and 1980s.

4.4.1.2 *Education Through Art*

When higher level art and design education was separated from elementary art and design education in 1899 a two tiered system was established. The 1918 *Education Act*

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[74] Ibid., 267.

[75] Child Art and Franz Cizek, quoted in Malvern, "Child Art," 267.

[76] David Thistlewood, "Creativity and Political Identification in the Work of Herbert Read," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 26 (1986): 352.

[77] Herbert Read, "Extracts from the 'Significance of Children's Art'," *New Era* 53 (1972): 17-27.

[78] George Woodcock, "Herbert Read's Anarchist Masterpiece," *New Era* 53 (1972): 32.

and the Hadow Report of 1926 reinforced this situation.[79] This formal separation gave impetus to the development of separate curricula at elementary and secondary level, and at tertiary level, in the inter-war years. At tertiary level, for reasons already explained, the Neo-classically based system continued to focus on the teaching of drawing skills. At primary and secondary level, as shown, individualism and self-expression were the defining characteristics. The didactic curriculum and defensive nature of tertiary level art education at this time were largely a consequence of industrial competitiveness, in that skills were seen as the solution to Britain's problems in this area. This was a time of serious economic difficulties in Britain; hence, the defensive nature of the times. The reception of Cizek's ideas, on the other hand, was a concomitant of the regenerative and hopeful world view that had grown out of the destruction and chaos caused by the First World War, and which was reflected in the greater openness of the curriculum at primary and secondary levels.[80]

The great distance between the self-expressive approach to art education at second level and the didactic approach at tertiary level fostered an increasing polarisation of the two systems between the wars. This polarisation was further encouraged by the idea, which was generally accepted at this time, that at a certain age children would loose their innocent eye and would begin to conform to the demands, and therefore to the ways of seeing, of conventional society. The divide caused by such a separation, however, was not universally accepted. The work of Marian Richardson, for instance, represents an attempt to extend the age of onset of the self-consciousness that killed

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[79] Holdsworth, "English Art Education," 162. ; Thistlewood, "The Formation of the N.S.E.A.D.," 143.

[80] Holdsworth, "English Art Education," 161-162.

off the free expressive phase of children's development.[81] Developments in tertiary level art education after 1945 would be defined by efforts to synthesise both these positions.[82]

Given Read's ideas, it was natural that he was attracted to the regenerative aspect of child art. Read came to child art as a result of an exhibition of children's work which, in 1943, he was asked to select and which was to tour allied and neutral countries. Read was so impressed by what he saw in selecting this exhibition that he was stimulated to write *Education Through Art*. The central idea of this book was "that the general purpose of education is to foster the growth of what is individual in each human being, at the same time harmonising the individuality thus educed with the organic unity of the social group to which the individual belongs."[83]

This idea is taken directly from Gropius and has its origins in the Romantic period when the idea that art was the outgrowth of an organic society in which the artist had an integral and central role was developed.[84] Like Gropius, Read, in *Education Through Art*, sought to create a context for art education and for education in general that would focus on the development of the creative potential of each individual with the objective of contributing to the infinite richness of collective life. Read saw each individual as equal in this process, and he believed that social harmony would result from the successful creation of such a context.

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[81] Holdsworth, "Marian Richardson," 137-153.

[82] David Thistlewood and Ron George, *The Lawrence Batley Centre for the National Art Education Archive, Bretton Hall: The Bramley Occasional Papers Volume 1* (Pontefract: Lofthouse Publications, 1987), Introduction.

[83] *Education Through Art*, quoted in David Thistlewood, "Herbert Read: a Critical Appreciation at the Centenary of his Birth," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 12 (1993): 153.

[84] Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 340; and Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art: Vol. I From Prehistoric Times to the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1999), 179-180.

Education Through Art contained no recommendations for art training at college level, yet it did become intrinsic to the development of tertiary art education in the nineteen fifties and sixties where a number of its ideas found their way into art colleges. These included the following: activity of the imagination should be encouraged, lessons should take the form of play, the teacher pupil relationship should be one of mutual co-operation, and moral persuasion should replace discipline imposed from above.[85]

For Read, the methodology of the artist was to synthesise formal analysis, scientific method, and self-expression. David Thistlewood, in summarising the contribution of *Education Through Art* to British art education, illustrates how it led to the analytical aspect and organic style of the Basic Design system in the 1950s and 1960s:

> In *Education Through Art*, then, the organic principle was deployed in defining "art" which - reasonably interpreted as "good form" - could be illuminated by scientific analogy. Good form is perceptible in all manner of natural organisms at microscopic, normal, and macroscopic scales, and exhibits such attributes as structural order, elegance, harmony, economy, and dynamic equilibrium- as revealed to Read by the scientific philosophy of D. W. Thompson.[86]

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[85] Sjoerd Hennema, *Fads Fakes and Fantasies: The Crisis in the Art Schools and the Crisis in Art* (London, Macdonald, 1970), 101-102; All of these attributes can be traced to eighteenth century aesthetics. Kant's demand, for instance, that in aesthetic experience the psyche should delight in the free play of all its faculties which was crucial to Schiller's concept of the play impulse in aesthetic awareness. (William Vaughan, *German Romanticism and English Art* [London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1979], 69.) This, in turn, fed into Read's definition of play as, "mankind's effort to achieve integration with the basic forms of the physical universe and the organic rhythms of life".(Herbert Read, *Education Through Art* [London: Faber and Faber, 1970], 110)

[86] Thistlewood, "Herbert Read," 153.

4.5 The Euston Road School

Read re-established a moral dimension in art which he hoped would engender a sense of social responsibility in artists. In doing this he created an aesthetic which, in the late 1940s, coincided with post-war demands for a more egalitarian society than had existed before the war.[87] It must be remembered that Read belonged to a generation that had fought in the First World War hoping for change, and that had been disillusioned by the retrenchment of British society in the inter-war years. Read was thus not alone in the art world in his thinking. The development of Read's ideas coincided with the thinking of a particular group of artists who had been working together since the 1930s. These artists, generally speaking, had studied at the Slade, had flirted with abstraction and found it wanting, and consequently had looked for a sense of social responsibility in art. A significant number of these artists were to be influential in the development of art education after the war, and in particular in relation to the development of radical new curricula in the 1950s and 1960s. This group included Victor Pasmore and William Coldstream – Coldstream as already stated was Slade Professor at University College London between 1949 and 1975 - and was known as the Euston Road School.[88] Other artists associated with the Euston Road School included Lawrence Gowing, who went on to be Professor of Art at Durham University, and Rodrigo Moynihan, who went on to be Professor of Painting at the RCA. Moynihan though not a member of the Euston Road School was closely associated with it.

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[87] Gosden, "The 1918 Education Act," 195.

[88] Harrison and Lane, *English Art and Modernism*, 343.

The essential point to note about the artists of the Euston Road School is that under the influence of the Slade aesthetic and the ideas of Fry and Bell they started out advocating a purely abstract art, but by 1939 they had rejected abstraction and returned to figuration. As William Coldstream put it: "The slump had made me aware of social problems, and I became convinced that art ought to be directed towards a wider public. Whereas all ideas I had learned to be artistically revolutionary ran in the opposite direction. Public art must mean realism."[89]

The dilemma which British art faced going into the Second World War was one where a socially committed realistic style was opposed to a purely abstract style. The former represented by the Euston Road School and the latter represented by formalist artists who were established members of the avant-garde such as Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and Paul Nash.

The former developed a reactionary offshoot which was encouraged by the circumstances of war and which focused on the British Landscape, this movement was known as Neo-Romanticism.[90] Victor Pasmore joined this movement, only to return to abstraction after the war. The more formalist group continued to pursue the abstract agenda in relative isolation during the war at Saint Ives in Cornwall, where many abstract artists had moved in order to get away from the war.[91]

There was a return to the bi-polar position of realism versus abstraction after the war, and all developments in British art, and consequently in tertiary level art

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[89] Ibid., 338.

[90] Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940*, (London: Methuen, 1997), 23; There was a similarly named movement in British poetry during the war. See, Hewison, *Under Siege*. 108-159.

[91] Peter Fuller, "The Visual Arts," in *Since the Second World War*, vol. 9 of *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*, ed Boris Ford (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 100.

education, over the next forty years took place in this context.[92] Having said this, abstraction was to be the dominant style in British art until the 1980s, and, generally speaking, the Basic Design system was to be associated with abstraction.

[92] Charles Harrison, "England's Climate," in *Studies in British Art I: Towards a Modern Art World*, Brian Allen ed., (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 220-222.

CHAPTER 5

TERTIARY LEVEL ART EDUCATION IN BRITAIN IN THE POST-WAR ERA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "BASIC DESIGN" SYSTEM

5.1 The Second World War

> The People who are holding the first line are fighting for a new democracy, which they can understand and to which they themselves are giving meaning – 'democracy' without the capital. The coin is being re-minted, its true worth fresh assayed in the fires of human endurance, and its superscription is that simple remark of the docker, 'We are all in it together'. Because, if it is not a 'we-are-all-in-it-together' democracy, there is going to be hell to pay.[1]

As this quote from the *Daily Herald* reporter Ritchie Calder makes clear, the Second World War made radical political and social change a necessary condition of post-war development. Consequent on this was radical change in British education. Within twenty years the changes that were brought to British education in the post-war epoch would lead to a complete overhaul of art education at tertiary level. Behind these changes lay a synthesis of two forces. One of these forces was the progressive ideas of artists, philosophers, and educators that had been developing over the previous fifty years, and which had been frustrated in the atmosphere of caution and

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[1] Robert Hewison, *Under Siege, Literary Life in London 1939-1945* (London: Methuen, 1988), 46.

retrenchment that had dominated the inter-war period.[2] The other was political demands that art and design education be more responsive to the needs of the new type of society which some envisaged, and, as the above quote makes clear, many more demanded, would follow the war.

The popular demand for a changed society that infused the British body politic during the war and in the immediate post-war years both caused and was augmented by two developments that took place during the Second World War. Both of these developments would have significance for art education at tertiary level in the post-war epoch. The first was the creation of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, CEMA - this was the precursor of the Arts Council,[3] and the second was the 1944 *Education Act*.[4] The former introduced the idea of popular access to the arts, thereby creating popular demand for participation in the arts. This had the effect of removing, to some extent at least, the dilettantish, exclusive, and often esoteric sheen that the arts had had before the war.[5] This situation fed into the second, which, by creating rapid expansion in the education sector, led to a huge increase in the numbers attending art school. This in turn led to an increase in the numbers studying fine art.[6]

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[2] Bill Bailey, "J. Chuter Ede and the 1944 Education Act," *History of Education* 24 (1995): 213.

[3] Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the Fifty Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1995), 25.

[4] Peter Gosden, "Putting the Act Together," *History of Education* 24 (1995): 195-207; Hewison, *Under Siege*, 26-27 and 179-189; Gary McCulloch, *Educational Reconstruction: The 1944 Education Act and the Twenty-first Century* (Ilford: The Woburn Press, 1994)

[5] Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 30-35.

[6] Gosden, "Putting the Act Together," 195-200.

5.2 Post-War Developments in Education

The most notable effect of the Second World War on British tertiary education was that it exposed the inadequacies of the existing system of higher education in relation to the needs of technology.[7] This realisation created a context in which the need for greater liaison between the university sector and industry was made manifest.[8] Consequently technology and the needs of industry became the main focus of developments in the post-war expansion of higher education in Britain. Revealingly, the same inadequacies had been exposed during the First World War but had not been acted on.[9]

Both the McNair Report of 1944, which addressed the training of teachers,[10] and the Barlow Report of 1946, which looked at scientific manpower,[11] identified the rapid expansion of the education sector as the most immediate and pressing problem facing planners in post-war education. The University Grants Committee, which was a body set up in 1935 to advise the government on the level of funding needed by the university sector, was given the task of assisting in the preparation and execution of university development plans.[12]

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[7] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Higher Technological Education: Report of a Special Committee Appointed in 1944*, 1945, 5.

[8] Bailey, "J. Chuter Ede," 212.

[9] G. E. Sherington, "The 1918 Education Act: Origins, Aims, and Development," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 24 (1976): 73-74.

[10] Ibid., 57.

[11] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *University Development from 1935-1947: Being the Report of the University Grants Committee*, 1948, 28.

[12] Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years; A Social History* (London: Routledge, 1988), 60.

In 1945 the Percy Report on higher technological education established the nature of the expansion that was needed. The principal recommendation of the Percy Report was that a clear distinction should be made between the universities and technical colleges.[13] The report stated that "Technology . . . in its aspect as a science is concerned with general principles; in its aspect as an art it is concerned with the special application of general principles to particular problems. . . . universities have regarded it as their duty to select and emphasise the science aspect and technology colleges the art aspect."[14]

Thus the Percy report established the bi-polar nature of higher education in the post-war era between the universities, which taught a curriculum based on general principles, and the technological colleges, which taught a curriculum based on specialisation. The development of technological education to a level equal to that of university degrees was predicted by a parliamentary select committee in 1947, and this led, ultimately, to the development of degree courses at a number of technical colleges.[15] This had implications for art education that will be looked at in Chapter 6.

As a consequence of the Percy Report, the opposing forces of the above two poles drove the development of tertiary level art education in Britain after the war. On one side were those who claimed that art was about making, in a purely technical, skill based, and utilitarian sense, and was therefore in the domain of technical education. An example of this type of thinking was the bias in favour of design at the Royal College

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[13] Ministry of Education, *Higher Technological Education*, 10.

[14] Ibid., 10.

[15] Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years*, 64.

of Art under Sir Robin Darwin after he was appointed principal in 1948.[16] On the other side were those who claimed that art was about cultural expression and the development of artistically talented people, and was therefore about something more conceptual and intangible. According to this way of thinking tertiary level art education was aligned with the liberal arts.

The first effects of the above developments on art education were felt in 1946 when the system introduced in 1913 was replaced by a new system called the National Diploma in Design. The National Diploma in Design, as the name suggests and in reflecting the demands of the post-war era, slanted tertiary level art education in the direction of design and industry, putting it squarely on the technological side of the bi-polar system established in the Percy Report. This development was a consequence of the belief, which was held by those in power within the educational system, that art and design education must play a practical role in the regeneration of British society after the war. As has been shown, the association of art education with industry, manufacturing, and social and economic improvement had been ubiquitous in government thinking since 1837, and was particularly noticeable in government reports in the inter-war period. In the years following the Second World War, however, higher education in Great Britain was marked by a greater preparedness by the state to involve itself more directly in planning than was the case after the First World War.[17] As a consequence of this, and by stark contrast with what happened between the wars, art education was made to fit into the post-war program of educational reform. This

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[16] Jean McIntyre, "The Department of Design Research at the Royal College of Art," in *Design of the Times: One Hundred Years of the Royal College of Art*, Ed., Christopher Frayling and Claire Catterall (Shepton Beauchamp: Richard Dennis Publications, 1995), 58-62.

[17] Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years*, 56 ; see also Gosden, "Putting the Act Together," 198.

situation left fine art as it was defined within art education in a difficult position, as it could not easily fit into an educational context that was exclusively based on technological development.

5.3 The Binary Controversy

In the context of the rapid expansion of the education sector and, in particular, of the new focus on technology and the need for specialisation in the higher education sector in the years immediately following the Second World War, fears developed about the loss of standards and the potential loss of the liberal ethos of traditional third level education in Britain.[18] Influential conservatives like Michael Oakshott, a Cambridge don, feared that the new situation threatened the dominant position and traditional values of the Oxbridge system, and Sir Walter Moberly, chairman of the University Grants Committee, felt that the crisis in education was moral and religious rather than social and financial.[19] This led to increased polarisation between demands for more technological education to degree level, with consequent specialisation, on the one hand, and on the other hand, a traditional, more general, and liberal education based on the education of the whole person. The debate which surrounded this issue became known as the binary controversy, and it formed the background to all developments in higher education in Britain in the nineteen fifties and sixties. Roy Lowe states that "The expansion of the fifties and sixties took place against the

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[18] Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years*, 157-161.

[19] Robert Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945-1960* (London: Methuen, 1988), 37-67.

background of a vigorous and continuing debate on the appropriateness of the courses on offer to a swiftly changing industrial society."[20]

The stress which was laid on technology and on the vocational nature of courses in government reports on art education at this time contrasted starkly with the prevailing ideology in the art world, and in particular with the ideas of Herbert Read and other members of the avant-garde. Read and his supporters claimed that the relevance of art education was based primarily on the need to develop the whole person in a free, expressive, and aesthetic way, and not in a way which was based on the study of specific technical skills, and certainly not in a way which focused narrowly on the creation of employment.[21] Read did not see design and fine art as polarised, rather he saw them in a broad way, as something that grew out of the same common ground, and as something that was more fundamental than the physical manifestation of either one in the real world. In a sense, Read envisioned a situation not unlike the situation that Reynolds described when he asserted that drawing was the basis of design during the neo-classical era, where drawing was seen as a basic language that informed all artistic development.[22] Notwithstanding the subtleties of Read's position, the conflict which grew out of the above situation led to strained relations between the Department of Education and Science and the fine art lobby in art schools; this strained relationship has been a constant problem for the fine art lobby ever since.[23]

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[20] Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years*, 159.

[21] Malcolm Ross, "Living There: Herbert Read's Education Through Art Fifty Years On," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 12 (1993): 135-137.

[22] Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert Wark (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 13.

[23] United Kingdom, Department of Education and Science, Her Majesties Inspectorate, *Higher Education In the Polytechnics and Colleges of Art and Design*, 1992, 11.

5.4 Art Schools and Technological Development

The need to create employment and the consequent expansion of technical education, combined with the huge influx of ex-servicemen to the education sector after the war, fed into the design bias of the National Diploma in Design and led to an immediate expansion in the area of craft and technology in British art schools.[24] To illustrate this point, in the *Rules Governing the Awards of the Ministers Diplomas and Certificates in Art* for 1951 thirty-nine subjects other than painting, modelling, and sculpture are listed as being catered for,[25] in the Rules for 1954, however, this number has jumped to 70. All of the new subjects were craft and technology based.[26] The importance of technical education in art schools is further illustrated by the fact that most students attending art schools were part time and were studying for city and guilds examinations. By 1961, for example, there were 5,654 students at art schools studying for the National Diploma in Design,[27] but there were 24,258 studying for City and Guilds examinations.[28] This is a measure of the extent to which skills were still taught in art schools at this time.

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[24] Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years*, 63.

[25] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Rules Governing the Award of the Ministries Diplomas and Certificates in Art*, 1950, 10.

[26] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Rules Governing the Award of the Ministry's Diplomas and Certificates in Art (1954)*, 1953, 10-11.

[27] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Statistics of Education Part 2: 1961*, 1962, 36.

[28] Ibid., 41.

5.5 Fine Art Education

While the focus of art schools after the introduction of the National Diploma in Design tended to be technological, not all students who attended art school after the war saw art schools in technological terms. Many of the ex-servicemen who enrolled in art school saw education, not just in economic terms or in terms of technical specialisation, but in broad cultural terms. During the war, with Russia an ally of Britain and with propaganda about a peoples war being promoted by Brendan Bracken, the Conservative Minister of Information, the Left, which still regarded the arts as an instrument of social change rather than an expression of social privilege, was able to consolidate a major shift in public patronage. Consequently, a new audience was created for art, especially in the armed forces. The Entertainment National Service Association, commonly known as ENSA, promoted arts access for the masses at every level of taste, thus democratising access to the arts, and, more importantly, changing, or perhaps, and more significantly, opening minds. These open minds were the new generation of students who entered the education system in the immediate post-war years. Many of these students, who had experienced the worst aspects of the British Class system and of bureaucratic incompetence in the army, had radical ideas and aspirations.[29] Understandably, then, when these students came to art school they were quick to absorb new ideas. Existentialism, predictably, had a profound influence on this generation of fine art students who were, not surprisingly, influenced by modern

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[29] For a creative evocation of the mindset of many of those who had been through the war and who realised that change was inevitable see Evelyn Waugh, *The Sword of Honour Trilogy* (London: David Campbell, 1994). This trilogy describes the disillusionment of many members of the old cultural elite with the New Britain of the war years and after. For a more academic exploration of the thinking and experiences of those who lived through the Second World War see Paul Fussell, *Wartime, Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

French art.[30] Campbell Bruce, who was head of fine art at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin from 1974-1987 and who was himself an ex-serviceman, has said that the influence of existentialism was pervasive at the Royal College of Art when he was a student there after the war, where it was visibly manifested in the sombre black clothes that most students wore. According to Bruce, in rejecting the values of pre-war Britain at this time, everybody wanted to take responsibility for themselves and to break with the old paternalistic ways that had restricted individual freedom in the inter-war period.[31] The consummate expression of this philosophy was the publication in 1956 of *Look Back in Anger* and *The Outsider* by John Osborne and Colin Wilson respectively. The equivalent in the visual arts was the work of John Bratby (1928-1992) and the Kitchen Sink School. Bratby held his first one-man show in 1954.

The French influence came to British art students at this time principally through the work of David Sylvester, who was the first British art critic to go to France after the war.[32] Sylvester, whose ideas reflected those of the new and more liberal Britain of the post-war era, brought to the attention of the British art world the work of the modern European masters: Klee, Matisse, Picasso, Bonnard and Braque, to name but a few. Much more significantly, however, for the development of post-war art in Britain, he brought an awareness of the work of Alberto Giacometti, whose drawing style fed

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[30] The idea that each person has responsibility for him or herself was a pervasive theme at this time in films, some of which were made with propagandistic intentions. The film *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), directors Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, for instance, which was produced specifically in order to improve relations between the U.S. and Britain, had as it's principle theme the Kantian idea that rational thinking combined with emotional sensitivity could not only change the individuals life but could actually break with destiny, and create a whole new sense of freedom for the individual. A similar theme underpins *The Stranger* (1946), director Orson Wells, but this time includes the message that the discovery of self can help destroy despotism and the chains of past evils, an appropriate theme when this film was made.

[31] Interview with Campbell Bruce, 29th March 1995.

[32] Ibid.

into developing ideas about art in England; ideas which would ultimately lead to the development of the Basic Design system.[33] Giacometti, who, like Read, had been a surrealist but who broke with the movement in 1935, made drawings and sculptures which were rigorously analytical in a purely visual and non-intellectual sense. The work of Giacometti was exhibited in Britain in a major retrospective exhibition that was organised by the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1955. Giacometti's drawings, in their brittleness, isolation, and unique rendering of plastic form, were said to represent a perfect expression of the existentialist condition of man in the twentieth century. It is noteworthy that Jean Paul Sartre, one of the most important and influential of the existentialist philosophers, championed the work of Giacometti.[34] Campbell Bruce has stated that both Sylvester and the work of Giacometti had a huge influence on his thinking and on the thinking of his contemporaries as young students at the Royal College of Art at this time.[35] For many in the post-war era, therefore, art education in general, but fine art education in particular, took on a radical, political and philosophical aspect. It is important to note that, in reflecting the influence of Herbert Read and the post-war context of regeneration, much of tertiary fine art education at this time took on not just an existentialist, radical, and political aspect, but a utopian aspect. As a consequence of this, fine art, which tended to attract the more politically motivated students, took on an importance belied by the design bias of the curriculum. The situation of fine art education therefore often involved direct conflict with the demands of the system - a situation that would reach a climax in the student revolt of

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[33] David Sylvester, *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-1997* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 11-34.

[34] Jean Paul Sartre, *Situations* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), 175-192.

[35] Interview with Campbell Bruce, 29th March 1995.

1968. The student revolt of 1968 was lead by fine art students. Fine art students would also lead the student rebellion at the National College of Art in Dublin, also in 1968.

In the rapid expansion of the further education sector after the war many of the students of the immediate post-war years who held liberal and sometimes radical ideas became teachers in art schools. This development would have direct consequences for curricular reform. Campbell Bruce was such a teacher. These young, strident, and ambitious teachers of the post-war generation injected a new energy into fine art education, and they placed new demands on the traditional neo-classical curriculum. They were infused by the same spirit of radical reform, which was often utopian in spirit, which had informed changes in the educational structure in the 1920s, but which, as shown, had then been frustrated by government inaction. For reasons already mentioned the situation was different in 1945. Thus, greater access to tertiary education and greater access to art led to changes on the curriculum. These changes were not necessarily driven by the policies of a particular government. Rather, they had to do with developments in the art world and developments in the structure of English society that were brought about by the war: access to education had been facilitated by the 1944 *Education Act* – an act that was passed by a coalition government in which the prime minister was more concerned about other issues than about education - and access to art was facilitated by the work of the Entertainment National Service Association, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, and the Arts Council. It is noteworthy in this context that the need for change in tertiary level art education in the immediate post-war era had been very visibly manifested at the Festival of Britain, which was held in 1951, and where, according to Misha Black, the attempt to unify art and architecture - an ubiquitous theme of modernism and a theme of the festival - was a failure. Black would later influence developments at the National

College of Art and Design in Dublin. The reason for this failure, as Black saw it, was that the artists who were asked to become involved - the cream of Britain's artists at that time - unlike the architects and designers, were not willing to learn the new language of modernism. They were, according to Black, stuck in the old ways of thinking. Victor Pasmore, according to Black, was, significantly given his subsequent importance to developments in fine art education, the only exception.[36]

Much of the change wrought in fine art education at this time was caused by the demands of the post-war generation of students, who, because of the rapid expansion of the education sector, were quickly taken into the education system as teachers in art schools. These students came from a broader range of socio-economic groups than before the war and, because of the political and social situation at this time, were more demanding and less deferential than students in the inter-war years.[37] It is important to note that at the same time the old dilettantish aspect of the fine arts was being eroded by a new spirit of professionalism and a new sense of importance which was being engendered largely by the Arts Council's support of artists in behalf of the state. The Festival of Britain was pivotal in this respect. Twelve sculptors, for example, had work commissioned for the festival by the Arts Council. As well as this a grand anthology show, *British Painting 1925-1950,* was organised which was so large that it necessitated the use of a second gallery. Added to this, sixty selected painters were invited to create an especially large picture for the festival, five of which were to be brought by the council for five hundred pounds each.[38] In short, the demands of the

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[36] Hewison, *In Anger*, 58-59.

[37] Interview with Campbell Bruce, 29th March 1995.

[38] Hewison, *In Anger*, 61-62.

new generation of students and teachers, combined with social and political changes and the ideas and influence of the old reformers like Read, Coldstream, and Pasmore, led to the development of new curricula in art schools in the 1950s. This development in turn had a direct, if belated, effect on art education at the National College of Art and Design in the 1970s.

To summarise; the development of the fine art curriculum in British art schools after the war was influenced by a combination of different forces. Firstly, they were influenced by the traditional staff of the schools who demanded that the status quo be maintained; this meant a neo-classical and skill based curriculum.[39] Secondly, the forces of radical change in the art world influenced them. These forces were represented initially and broadly by Herbert Read and later by Victor Pasmore, Richard Hamilton, and other artists who became associated with the Institute of Contemporary Art. In the art schools the forces of change were represented initially by students, but later on a combination of students and the new younger and more radical members of staff represented them. Thirdly, and of vital importance for changes in tertiary art education, was government policy on art education. This was manifested in the various reports produced in this period which generally saw art education fitting in with the demands of the new type of technological society which many in government hoped to bring about.

Before looking more closely at the influence of government reports on fine art education in Britain in the post-war era, however, the Basic Design system of art education that was developed in the 1950s, as a response to the above changes, will be

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[39] The artist David Hockney, who attended Bradford Art School between 1953 and 1957 and the Royal College of Art between 1957 and 1962, describes his art education as being based almost exclusively on drawing from the figure. (David Hockney, *David Hockney* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1980], 30-40.)

described. The Basic Design system represents the kernel of new developments in tertiary level art education in Britain and is the foundation stone on which all future developments in fine art education were built.[40]

5.6. The Basic Design System

5.6.1 *Introduction*

In the 1950s art schools in Britain pursued curricula that focused on skill. There were two possible models for these curricula: the neo-classical model, which focused on drawing from the antique and from the figure, and the arts and crafts model, which was founded on Morris' principle that artistic creation was the result of a collaboration between the artist and his material. The latter model predominated. Of the one hundred and sixty four art schools in Britain at this time all but half a dozen were small art/craft/design schools.[41] Developments in the 1950s were about finding alternatives to this system, and, as a result of these developments, from 1960 onwards tertiary art education in Britain was about individual creative development.[42]

5.6.2 *Developments in Tertiary Art Education in the 1950s*

In the years immediately following the Second World War a number of new and innovative courses were run at different art colleges in Britain. Albert Haliwell ran one

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[40] Interview with Campbell Bruce, 29th March 1995.

[41] Victor Willing, "What Kind of Art Education," *Studio International*, (September 1966): 131.

[42] David Thistlewood, "A Continuing Process: The New Creativity in British Art Education 1955-1965," in *Histories of Art and Design Education: Cole to Coldstream*, ed., David Thistlewood (Harlow: Longman in Association with the National Society for Education in Art and Design, 1992), 152.

such course at Camberwell School of Art; later, with William Johnstone, he ran a similar course at the Central School of Art.[43] Johnstone, as principal of the Central School, brought innovative teachers such as the artists Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton to the college where he gave them free reign to design their own courses.[44] The most influential of the new courses was developed at a series of summer schools organised by the North Riding of Yorkshire Education Authority. These courses led to the development of courses at Leeds College of Art and at Kings College, University of Durham, where Lawrence Gowing of the Euston Road School was Professor of Art.[45] The principal innovators on the course at Durham were Victor Pasmore, Richard Hamilton, Tom Hudson, and Harry Thubron, all of whom were influenced by the ideas of Herbert Read and by the curriculum developed by Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus in the 1920s. All of these artists had a direct influence on subsequent developments in fine art education. Pasmore was the first to introduce a full-scale Basic Design course into a fine art department, which he did at Kings College where he was Head of Painting.[46] Thubron brought Basic Design to Leeds College of Art when he was appointed Head of Fine Art there in 1955.[47] Hamilton, significantly, taught design at Leeds College of Art. He also taught in the Fine Art department at the University of Durham between 1953 and 1956, and he taught at the Royal College of Art from

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[43] Geoff Hassell, *Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts: Its Students and Teachers 1943-1960* (Woodenbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1995), 13-19.

[44] Mervin Levy, "The Future of the Art Schools 2: The Central School of Arts and Crafts," *The Studio* 161 (1961): 198-200.

[45] Thistlewood, "A Continuing Process," 152.

[46] Ibid., 159; and Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 74.

[47] Norbert Lynton, "Harry Thubron: Teacher and Artist," in *Histories of Art and Design Education: Cole to Coldstream* ed., David Thistlewood (Harlow: Longman in Association with the National Society for Education in Art and Design, 1992), 169.

1957-1961. As an artist and a theorist Hamilton had a huge influence on fine art and therefore on fine art education throughout the 1950s and 1960s and well into the 1970s.[48] Significantly, Hamilton had studied at the Slade, and his work was exhibited at ROSC 77. Finally, as a consequence of his powerful position in the art world, and through the influence of his writings, Herbert Read's influence was ubiquitous in art and art education throughout the post-war period.[49] The ideas of Thubron, who worked periodically as a visiting lecturer at Canterbury College of Art in the early 1970s, made a strong impression on Campbell Bruce who was Head of Painting there at that time.[50]

Herbert Read's ideas had been the inspiration for the above courses. In *Education Through Art* Read had identified three areas which he felt should be central to all art education, and these became the foundation stone upon which the Basic Design system of art education was built. The three areas which Read identified were:

> (a) The activity of self-expression - the individual's innate need to communicate his thoughts, feelings and emotions to other people. (b) The activity of observation - the individual's desire to record his sense impressions, to clarify his conceptual knowledge, to build up his memory, to construct things which aid his practical activities. And (c) the activity of appreciation - the response of the individual to the modes of expression which other people address or have addressed to him.[51]

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[48] Massey, *Independent Group*, 108-125.

[49] Read's influence went beyond the fine arts. As a director of the publishers George Routledge and Sons he was also a key figure for a new generation of poets after 1939. Both Read and T.S. Eliot, who was at Faber, had a major influence on the development of poetry in the second half of the twentieth century, as they were in charge of the poetry lists of two major publishing houses. (Hewison, *Under Siege*, 110).

[50] Interview with Campbell Bruce, 29 March 1995.

[51] Thistlewood, "A Continuing Process," 157.

In 1947 Read founded the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, with the surrealist painter Roland Penrose. Read and Penrose envisaged the ICA, as the Institute of Contemporary Art was commonly known, as a forum for debating issues in contemporary art and for exhibiting the work of contemporary artists. Many of the more radical artists of the post-war years, including Pasmore and Hamilton, were associated with the ICA. All of the artists associated with the ICA were preoccupied with science, with scientific analysis, and in particular with the philosophy of organicism. They were sustained in this interest by regular discussion and debate with eminent scientists; hence the scientific aspect of the Basic Design system.[52]

Pasmore, through his membership of the Coldstream Committee, which produced four reports on art education in the 1960s and 70s, was the most influential of this group, and, in the tradition of British formalist aesthetics, he was preoccupied with formal and abstract values in art.[53] Pasmore was hugely influential as an artist throughout the post-war period. Pasmore's style and ideas permeated fine art education, particularly during the 1950s - to such an extent, in fact, according to Stuart Macdonald, that it was said humorously in art schools at that time, "If you want to pass more, paint Pasmore."[54] Pasmore was also knowledgeable about the Bauhaus, and he identified closely with Paul Klee's conception of an ordered process of learning. Klee and the abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) were both influenced by the writings of Konrad Fiedler (See Chapter 2).

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[52] David Thistlewood, "Organic Art and the Popularisation of a Scientific Philosophy," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 22 (1982): 313.

[53] Richard Yeomans, "Basic Design and the Pedagogy of Richard Hamilton," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 7 (1988): 172.

[54] Stuart Macdonald, "Articidal Tendencies," in *Histories of Art and Design Education: Cole to Coldstream* ed., David Thistlewood (Harlow: Longman in Association with the National Society for Education in Art and Design, 1992), 14.

Fiedler's search for a third way between the idealising art of the academies and a realism based on an ever greater approximation to the given provided, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a framework for understanding arts internal possibilities, thus feeding into avant-garde preoccupations. Efforts to develop such a framework paralleled the search for new artistic vocabularies that characterised innovative developments in the early modernist period. Fiedler's thinking re-enforced Whistler's ideas about the autonomy of art: "At its most extreme Fiedler's idea devolves upon the claim that the work of art does not need to be about anything but rather dramatises its own becoming." Fiedler insisted that art was "an independent form of enquiry, distinct from cognitive knowledge, whose activity does not take place in the head or even in the eyes alone but directly on the canvas or stone itself."[55]

For Klee the study of any artistic field, in its practical aspect, began with considerations of mark making, it then progressed through linear exploration towards planar construction in space. Klee also believed that the analysis of the elementary forms of art revealed the building blocks of design, and, consequently, the course that he developed at the Bauhaus was based on the analysis of these forms.[56] Klee taught his students by analysing his own work. His methodology involved the dismantling of the formal structure of his paintings, step by step, in order to analyse the process by which they were made.[57] Pasmore, in developing his own courses, worked from Klee's

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[55] Charles Harrison, Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 685.

[56] Magdalena Dorste, *Bauhaus 1919-1933* (Berlin: Bauhaus Archiv, 1993), 65.

[57] Hans M. Wingler, *The Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986), 73 and 148.

precedent, and he focused on the purely formal elements of art. He was mainly interested in establishing some objective basis for abstract art.[58]

Hamilton differed from Pasmore in that he was preoccupied with science and technology. He felt that thinking and, consequently, training of the mind were the essential ingredients of artistic creativity.[59] Hamilton's ideas had their origins in the work of Joseph Albers at the Bauhaus. For Albers constructive thinking was the essence of the creative process, and he felt that the best way to teach constructive thinking was to analyse the structure of materials.[60] Hamilton's ideas also owed something to Le Corbusier's axiom that good style must necessarily be the expression of contemporary technological advance. This idea, in fact, underpinned his interest in technology and materials.[61] Because of this interest, Hamilton was drawn to popular culture and to popular imagery. Hamilton was one of the first pop-artists in Britain. As a result of his interest in technology, materials, and popular culture, Hamilton's educational ideas were based on efforts to identify certain principles common to all the visual plastic arts. Hamilton and Pasmore thus shared a common interest in a search for principles underlying artistic practice.[62]

There was a crucial difference, however, between the ideas of Hamilton, Pasmore and the artists associated with the Independent Group[63] to which they belonged, and

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[58] Yeomans "Richard Hamilton," 157.

[59] Willing, "Art Education," 132.

[60] Dorste, *Bauhaus*, 142.

[61] Sjoerd Hannema, *Fads Fakes and Fantasies* (London: MacDonald, 1970), 82.

[62] Thistlewood, "A Continuing Process," 152-153.

[63] A small group, active in the 1950s in London, whose ideas about process and modern technology led to the development of Pop Art. Interestingly, the initial meeting place of the four most promising

the ideas of Herbert Read. The artists of the Independent Group rejected absolutes, and therefore they rejected the Neo-Platonic essence that all good art and design, according to Read, must have.[64] Anne Massey in her recent book on the Independent Group clarifies this difference in the following quotation:

> The crucial link between Thompson's thesis[65] and the Independent Group was the rejection of teleological, universal explanations of the environment. In the introduction to *Growth and Form* Thompson criticised Charles Darwin[66], among others, because 'it has been by way of the final cause, by teleological concept of end . . . that men have been chiefly wont to explain the living world.' Thompson understood that physical science should seek to explain the construction, growth and working of living phenomena in terms of the causal relationship between growth and form. Hence, the scientist should deal with the 'ephemeral and accidental, not eternal nor universal things.' Thompson's rejection of Aristotelian philosophy was crucial for the Independent Group's understanding of art, design and mass culture.[67]

The innovators of the 1950s were committed to child art, even though, because of the above focus on process, they rejected a curriculum based exclusively on self-expression. Pasmore, in particular, was fascinated by the richness of child art, and Thubron tried to find ways of extending the vibrancy of the artwork of the very young to the teenage years. Thubron's effort to do this - unlike the New Art Teaching in the

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artists of this group: Edwardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson, William Turnbull, and Richard Hamilton, was the Slade School of Art.

[64] Massey, *Independent Group*, 20.

[65] The scientist D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, whose standard biological text *On Growth and Form,* which had been published in 1917 but had been reissued in 1942, had been popular amongst avant-garde thinkers in the 1950s for the insights it offered into artistic formation. As a consequence of these insights, this book had a significant influence on artists in Britain at this time. The following quote will give an illustration of Wentworth Thompson's thinking: "The form, then, of any portion of matter . . . and the changes of form which are apparent in its movements and in its growth may in all cases alike be described as due to the action of force. In short, the form of an object is a 'diagram of forces', in this sense, it is a diagram - in the case of a solid of the forces which have been impressed upon it when its conformation was produced . . . in the case of a liquid . . . of the forces which are for the moment acting on it to restrain or balance its own inherent mobility. (Thistlewood, *A Continuing Process*, 154).

[66] Wrongly as it happens, see Stephen J. Gould, *The Individual in Darwin's World: The Second Edinburgh Address* (London: Widenfeld and Nicholson, 1990), 3.

[67] Massey, *Independent Group*, 44.

inter-war years, which focused on expression - focused on principles of construction and assemblage. Thubron, like Hamilton, argued that art should address the modern world of science and technology and should jettison any woolliness of thought that only sustained the romantic isolation of the artist.[68] In doing this, Thubron was asserting the values of the new technological Britain of the post-war era and rejecting the redundant values of the pre-war era. The relationship between art and social change at this time, interestingly, mirrors the situation that existed in the early nineteenth century when the Gothic Revival artists rejected the old political order and aesthetic values of Georgian Britain.

In developing their ideas about art education, all of the above artists worked closely together throughout the 1950s, and, though there were differences between them, essentially they were concerned with individual creative development and formal analysis. In this sense their preoccupations were exactly in line with Gropius' concerns at the Bauhaus.

5.6.3 *Organic Art*

As a means of focusing on the shared preoccupations of the artists and teachers who were developing the Basic Design system, a symposium was held at the Institute of Contemporary Art in 1951 entitled "Aspects of Form". The artists who attended this symposium were preoccupied with the relationship between art and science. This was particularly so in the case of Herbert Read, whose collaboration on a conjoint theory of artistic and scientific formation with the physicist Lancelot Lear White had been the

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[68] Lynton, "Harry Thubron," 172.

principal inspiration for this symposium.[69] The relationship between art and nature was an outgrowth of the above preoccupation, and, appropriately, an exhibition entitled "Growth and Form" was held in conjunction with the symposium.

The artists who attended this symposium saw analogies between the growth of a piece of art, from its inception to its completion, and the growth of an organism.[70] An important part of this process was the concept of positive and negative influences. These influences were seen to be a consequence of the relationship between a vital inner force and a restraining force coming from outside.[71] This idea had its origins in a course that was run by Johannes Itten at the Bauhaus that focused on opposites or polarisation as a stimulus to creative expression.[72] In particular, Itten focused on the difference between subjective experience and objective recognition, the former being based on feelings and the latter on materials.[73] It is important to note that Itten's excessive focus on feelings and individual expression led to a rift developing between Itten and Gropius. Ultimately this rift led to Itten leaving the Bauhaus in 1923. Notwithstanding this fact, Itten's ideas formed the basis of Pasmore's art, and

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[69] Thistlewood, "Organic Art," 313.

[70] Yeomans, "Richard Hamilton," 160.

[71] Thistlewood, "A Continuing Process," 154.

[72] Itten's ideas about polarities were developed at a time when the German art historian Heinrich Wolfflin (1864-1945) was finding new ways of looking at art history. Interestingly, in the context of the First World War and the influence of teleological ideas on German aesthetics, Wolfflin saw no qualitative difference between the different phases of art history as Hegel had done. Wolfflin believed that the history of art was the history of styles that develop out of each other in some independence of other social forces. He also believed that laws governed the ways in which forms changed through time, and that there existed a cyclical aspect to the development of art, which manifested itself in early, classic, and baroque phases. Wolfflin developed a methodology for the study of the characteristics of these cycles, which was based on the use of polarities such as linear versus painterly and plane versus recession for example. (Eric Fernie, *Art History and its Methods: A Critical Anthology* [London: Phaidon, 1995], 15.) Itten's approach also had a more distant echo in Ruskin's belief that the restraining force on the dynamic energy of his 'vital beauty' was a form of unity imposed by God acting with self-restraint. (Hewison, *Ruskin*, 54-64).

[73] Dorste, *Bauhaus*, 25.

consequently they formed the basis of his ideas on teaching. According to Pasmore, the restriction that the act of using materials imposed on the artist represented the external restraining force. This was juxtaposed with the vital inner force, which was the drive to create. Pasmore defined a piece of art as a series of mutually dependent interrelationships, or perhaps, more accurately, interactions, that were based on the above juxtaposition. Later on he broadened this idea to include the environment in which a piece of art was placed, its architectural setting for example. This idea would form the basis on which the methodology of Basic Design courses was built. It was also an important aspect of the work of Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and other artists working in the formalist style in Britain at this time; the connection with Gropius' idea that "the building - in which no barriers between the structural and the decorative arts exist" is clear here.[74] Thus, in the Basic Design system, process becomes paramount, and the metaphysical aspect of artistic creation recedes into the background.

The idea that materials and process, without a necessary metaphysical aspect, must form the basis of artistic endeavour was not new in modern art. It had its origins in Russian constructivism. The constructivist aesthetic opposed the irrationalist attacks of Dadaism and the surrealist doctrine of unconscious creation. Constructivism, as shown in Chapter 2 stood for conscious, deliberate composition in conformity with universal and objective aesthetic principles. Russian constructivism was, significantly, one of the principal forces of modernist influence on British art in the 1920s and 1930s.[75] The

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[74] Charles Harrison Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990 An anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 340.

[75] David Thistlewood and Ron George, *The Lawrence Batley Centre for the National Art Education Archive, Bretton Hall; The Bramley Occasional Papers Volume 1* (Pontefract: Lofthouse Publications, 1987), 3.

Russian constructivist artist Naum Gabo (1890-1977) who lived in Britain from 1935 until 1946 was particularly significant in this respect. Gabo, interestingly, had studied medicine and science, and he had taught at the Bauhaus. Gabo advocated a non-social and non-utilitarian constructivist aesthetic, which explicitly asserted the metaphysical nature of art.[76] By contrast, Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953), also a Russian constructivist, whose ideas are echoed in those of the artists of the Independent group, advocated a purely utilitarian, functional, and socialist aesthetic.[77] Tatlin, who never left Russia, advocated a culture of materials, which would make no distinction between art and design. He demanded of artists sensitivity towards materials and, significantly in the present context, he asserted juxtaposition as an aesthetic principle. A feeling for the passions of the era of early modernism - which informed the thinking of Gropius and Read, and in particular the passion inspired by Tatlin's purely materials based aesthetic, can be gleaned from the following quotation by Nikolai Punin, an art historian and critic, who, in describing Tatlin's projected work "*The Monument to the Third International*", stated the following:

> Up to now no one has succeeded in breaking rhythms down into the elements of material culture which define the growth and conditions of existence. But life itself consists of rhythms. Intuition flows in accordance with these rhythms. The purity and the intensity of the rhythms define the degree of talent, but I know of no more pure or intense rhythms than those in Tatlin's work. He possesses an eye of the greatest sensitivity with respect to material, and it is precisely the juxtaposition of materials which defines the limits of the rhythmic waves. We accept, as a basis, that the unit of a rhythm is the section of a wave, enclosed between the qualities of the glass and the qualities of the iron. Just as the production of a number of oscillations along a wave is a spatial measure of sound, so the relationship of glass to iron is a measure of material rhythm. There is a stern and incandescent simplicity hidden in the juxtaposition of these two most elementary materials, both in a similar way brought into existence by fire. These materials are the elements of modern art.

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[76] Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, 309.

[77] Ibid., 297.

> The form, defined by their juxtaposition, produces a rhythm of such broad and powerful oscillation that it seems like the birth of an ocean.[78]

5.6.4 *Basic Design*

Generally speaking, the educational objective of the Basic Design system was to encourage students to explore the formal areas that had been identified at the Bauhaus. These were point, line, plane, area, space, volume, tone, colour, drawing from nature, and technique. The objective in studying form was, in part, to avoid the distractions caused by imagery and superficial preoccupations with technique, but principally it was to discover the fundamental structures which underlie all art and design practice. An important aspect of this program was that students were not told what to do, as this, by imposing restrictions, would interfere with their free and creative exploration of materials[79] - this is an aspect of fine art education that continues today.[80] As this process was feeling-based and intuitive, the supporters of the Basic Design system rejected both academicism and didacticism. This situation led to a running battle between fine art departments and college authorities throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Fine art departments throughout these years fought hard to limit the influence of academic subjects on their area. These academic demands had been placed on them in

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[78] Nikolai Punin, "The Monument to the Third International," quoted in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 314. The idea of natural rhythms inspiring art is beautifully illustrated by the film director Serge Eisenstein's statement that the famous Odessa Steps scene in the film *Battleship Potemkin* was not planned in advance but was an improvisation inspired by his seeing, while filming in Odessa, cherries fall rhythmically down the steps as the result of a basket falling over.

[79] David Thistlewood, *A Continuing Process: The New Creativity in British Art Education 1955-1965* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1981), 8.

[80] Gillain Wayte and Nick Wayte, "Current Issues in Art and Design Education: Modularization and Course Ethos: The Case of Art and Design Higher Education," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 9 (1990): 291.

order that fine art courses conform to requirements for degree equivalence.[81] (See Chapter 6)

The overall objective of the Basic Design system was to achieve a synthesis of all art forms. The methodology employed to achieve this objective was a combination of analysis, construction, and play. It is interesting to note that the overall aspiration of the Basic Design system to achieve a synthesis of all the plastic arts took place in post-war Britain, which was a similarly regenerative context to that in which Gropius had developed his ideas, Weimar Germany. It was in similar context that Russian constructivism took place, revolutionary and post-First World War Russia.

David Thistlewood in *The Continuing Process,* which was published in 1981, summarised in the following way the preoccupations which Pasmore, Hamilton, Hudson, and Thubron had attempted to put into practice, and which became the basis of the Basic Design system:

> Children are capable of sorting from the confusing mass of stimuli which bombards their senses information which is immediately useful in coping with a problem of perception. Such abilities are damaged, as our culture diminishes the value of intuition; but efforts should be made to repair them in adolescent education.
>
> Analysis of the microscopic structures of nature, and observation of such processes as crystal formation or the growth of organisms, might provide insights into how designed structures might develop in space.
>
> There is a vast body of popular culture, reflected in the cinema, in advertising, in newspapers and pulp literature, which is at least as worthy of respect, in the education of artists and designers, as are the traditions of academic discipline.
>
> The production of art is a developing process which originates in the first dimension, the making of a single point. By an extension into the second dimension, drawing and painting, and into the third, sculpture or architecture, it is possible to achieve a developmental association between, at one extreme, the simple mark and, at the other, free standing construction in space.
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> There is an increasingly significant area in which art and design objects do not develop out of a direct contact between the designer and his materials.

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[81] Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, *The Hornsey Affair*, Penguin Educational Special (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 118-124.

> Care must be taken, whatever the distance between designer and product, that techniques and technologies remain creative.
>
> In fact, their only consensus [the artists who developed Basic Design] was in these unifying principles: an ideal learning environment is one in which an individual may discover his own aptitudes and test the relevance of his own ideas: in such an environment art might accrue incidentally. And the notion 'Art Education' should be replaced by 'Creative Education' - a total development of sensibility and intellect.[82]

Thus, Basic Design was essentially an attempt to create a tertiary level art curriculum, which grew out of nineteenth century ideas, which would be based on the study of form and on a synthesis of intellect and feeling, and which would be modelled on the Bauhaus. In the context of developments in post-war art education in Great Britain this became an attempt to create a synthesis of art and technology. This effort at synthesis between art and technology grew out of the type of technological society that was developing in Britain at this time. This attempt to synthesise art and technology is particularly interesting when looked at in relation to the fact that, in the context of the cold-war and particularly during the 1950s, technology was seen not only as a liberating influence, but also as a negative and threatening influence. Art, on the other hand, was seen as a civilising influence and as a manifestation of the free spirit of man. This was particularly so in the case of abstract art. Not only was the free spirit of man oppressed under communism - the official art of communist Russia was the strictly prescribed style of socialist realism - but technology in the context of communist ideology was seen as particularly and immediately threatening.[83] A

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[82] Thistlewood, *A Continuing Process*, 8.

[83] It is interesting in this context to compare the 1950s with the late eighteenth century. In the late eighteenth century the rise of an aesthetic, as mentioned earlier, based on individual freedom and rooted in a fundamental moral order coincided with the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon and his attempt to create a society rooted in the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Napoleon represented, for many, autocracy, despotism, and the death of individual freedom. During the 1950s Russian communism was viewed in the same way. So the development of an aesthetic at this time, particularly in America, that was based heavily on individual freedom is not surprising. (William

synthesis of art and technology was therefore essential if a new type of society was to be created, one that was neither communist, like Russia, nor the strife ridden and divisive type of society that had existed in Britain in the inter-war years.

In 1957 Thubron and Hudson initiated their new basic course at Leeds College of Art.[84] This course, through the publication of a book called *Basic Design The Dynamics of Visual Form*[85], which described the course in detail, became the model for all Basic Design courses. Maurice De Sausmarez who was head of the Department of Fine Art at the University of Leeds from 1950 until 1959 was the author of this book. The widespread influence of this publication is testified by the fact that the present writer pursued a fine art course at the Waterford Art School in 1975 which was a carbon copy of the programme laid down in this book.

5.6.5 *The Influence of* Basic Design: The Dynamics of Visual Form

Basic Design: The Dynamics of Visual Form is essentially a catalogue of sequential exercises. It was written with the aim of opening up the creative side of the student through the study of materials. It is organised along the lines suggested by Pasmore and Hamilton, and in relation to the formal areas of study identified at the Bauhaus: point, line, plane, area, space, volume. The changes recommended by the Coldstream and Summerson reports in the 1960s, and the consequent confusion in British art

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Vaughan, *German Romanticism and English Art* [London: Yale University Press, 1979], 70) In this context the paradigm shift that took place in American art in the immediate post-war years has some significance. This shift was from art that focussed on alienation; the role of the artist in society, to studies of neurosis; the individual. (Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism Freedom and the Cold War* [London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984], 165-170).

[84] Thistlewood, "A Continuing Process," 159.

[85] Maurice De Sausmarez, *Basic Design: The Dynamics of Visual Form* (London: Studio Vista, 1964).

education, when combined with government demands that tertiary art and design education fit into the post-war plan for scientific and technological development, created the ideal context for the success of the methodology suggested by this book.

In this book De Sausmarez identified five factors which had influenced thinking in the area of creative activity in the post-war period, and he suggested that these must in turn have an effect with regard to training in art and design.

The first of these was a rejection of conventions and an acceptance of the idea that only information that is derived from our own experience can be considered valid for us and for our expressive resources. The second was that information which we gain from an appreciation of the physical nature of our materials and from their formal and spatial functioning is as important, if not more important, than information restricted to the visible facts of nature. The third was that visual art is dependent upon the expressive and constructive use of the specific phenomena of vision, and that literary or other associations are essentially ancillary. The fourth was that the total personality was involved in making aesthetic decisions, and that personal preferences formed the inescapable bases of truly individual expression. The fifth was that art was not based on a number of static concepts, but that it constantly changed and extended its boundaries. These boundaries changed in response to the shifts of emphasis that were caused by different periods of history. These shifts could be intellectual or emotional.[86]

De Sausmarez' book, which was small - ninety five pages - and made up mostly of illustrations, could be read and used easily, even as a manual. As a consequence of this it was popular in art schools and therefore influential. Its influence was widespread in both Britain and Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s. The success of this book, in a very

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[86] Ibid., 9-10.

particular sense, was a consequence of the vacuum left by the demise of the old neo-classical curriculum, which was caused directly by the publication of the first Coldstream Report in 1960.

This leads us to the principal criticism of the Basic Design system, which was that it was just a box of tricks or a grammar that clever students could learn and apply without any real vigour or serious intent.[87] It has been widely accepted that it led to sameness in the artwork produced in art schools in the 1960s and 1970s. This was particularly the case in pre-diploma courses.[88] Critics were afraid that students would produce merely stylistic exercises, which would be based on what they knew was expected of them rather than the genuine and creative exploration of their own artistic potential and the potential of materials. The danger of this happening was very real in the context of the fashion for following styles which prevailed in fine art departments throughout the 1960s and 1970s following the introduction of Coldstream's recommendations. De Sausmarez was particularly aware of this danger and, in trying to steer students away from this trap, he stressed, in his book, that the Basic Design system of art education was:

> a) An attitude of mind not a method.
> b) Primarily a form of enquiry, not a new art form.
> c) Not only an enquiry about the marks and structures which appear out of the materials used, but also an enquiry about the sources and terms of personal expression and reaction to the world around us.
> d) Concerned with form in a fundamental sense in every field, it is not exclusively abstract or non figurative; there is as much need for intense re-thinking and re-shaping of our attitude to "realism" and figural studies;
> e) Emphatically not an end in itself but a means to making the individual more acutely aware of the expressive resources at his command; a fostering of an inquisitiveness about phenomena, great and small, on the

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[87] Thistlewood, "A continuing Process," 156.

[88] Peter Lloyd Jones, "The Failure of Basic Design," *Leonardo* 2 (1969): 156-158.

> paper or canvas, in the external world or the interior world of visions, personal reactions and preferences.[89]

The widespread success and popularity of the Basic Design system, and in particular its focus on individual creative expression, represents in tertiary art education the realisation of the aspiration of the artists of the Romantic era that "everyone have his manner and his way of expressing himself", as Caspar David Friedrich put it.[90] De Sausmarez reveals the fact that the origins of the Basic Design system lie in Kant's thesis that art is based on thought stimulated by feelings and in Roger Fry's demand that art concern itself with form rather than content when he says: "Every visual experience is at one and the same time a receiving of fragmentary information, a giving of form to these visual sensations and the arousing of felt responses . . . for the artist what ultimately matters is this quality of feeling which results."[91] Thus, the hegemony of modernism was established in tertiary art education in Great Britain, and ultimately in Ireland.

5.7 Summary

The Basic Design system is not easily defined though its results are easily identified. Essentially, it was a course designed to have universal applicability and usefulness, in the sense that in training people to focus on the underlying structures of art and design it would put them in touch with principles which were applicable in many areas of activity. It would also incidentally - as befits an aesthetic whose origins lie in Herbert

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[89] De Sausmarez, *Basic Design*, 11-12.

[90] See Introduction.

[91] De Sausmarez, *Basic Design*, 17.

Read's utopian socialism, and more generally in the regenerative context of the post-World War One and post-World War Two years - transcend national boundaries and language barriers. And finally, as was most important for Herbert Read, it would put people in touch with the creative side of their personalities. According to Read's thinking, the development or awakening of this aspect of man would be of use in different areas of life, and not just in areas which required an understanding of art. It would consequently, Read hoped, lead to the creation of a better type of society. This aspect of the Basic Design system fulfilled Herbert Read's aspiration to make art central to education rather than an added extra. The Basic Design system aimed to train people for life by teaching them creative thinking rather than skilled working; it was assumed that skills could easily be acquired if necessary. This aspect of the Basic Design system was to become central to the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin between 1974 and 1987. In conversation with the present writer Campbell Bruce stressed and iterated this aspect of the course that he instigated in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin.

On a practical level, there were many variations of the Basic Design system and it is very difficult to restrict them to a specific definition. One of the better attempts which the present author has found is from an article published in *Leonardo Magazine* in April 1969 which defined Basic Design in the following way:

> All versions of 'Basic Design' rest ultimately on the belief that there exists what Gropius called the 'elements and laws of design' - 'Elements' of form and 'Laws' for putting them together. Individual works, however different they may look, are all only manifestations of certain essential 'elementary' forms. What are these 'elements'? According to Kandinsky, the simplest ones are points, lines, and planes. In three dimensions there are corresponding spheres, cones, cylinders, and pyramids. Moholy-Nagy added to this list some new 'bio-technological' elements; crystal, plane or strip, rod and screw or spiral. These however are only a beginning in this systematisation of design.

> Itten had earlier devised a method for arranging such diverse materials as furs and feathers into a scheme of textural categories, plotting them as points along axes such as 'hard' - 'soft' - 'rough' - 'smooth' and so on. These categories became further 'elements' of design. But textures are perceived by us because of their way of reflecting light into the eye. An interest in processes of visual perception yielded further 'elements' in the psychometric variables of colour: hue, saturation, and brightness. In a different vein, there were such doubtful 'elements' as the physiognomically expressive properties of lines (lines were thought to be intrinsically 'happy' or 'sad'). This classifying technique has given rise to a most heterogeneous collection of 'elements', some of a distinctly mystical character . . ..
>
> Altogether then 'Basic Design' is a kind of 'atomic' view of art. Out of the 'atoms' of form the artist, through his understanding of the laws of design - the chemical reaction so to speak - builds up the molecules of a complete work of design.[92]

The immediacy of this process is of vital importance, hence the significance of drawing to the Basic Design system. The Basic Design system was essentially a method of teaching art based on a synthesis of Kant's idea that art was feeling based, on the Victorian idea that it was scientifically based, and on the modernist idea that it was form based. It was also Utopian, and it thrived because of the regenerative context of the post-war era, and because of the demise of the old neo-classical system.

The Basic Design system dominated tertiary art education in Britain throughout the 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s. It is too early to decide where it has led or what the trend is in tertiary art education in the post-modern era. The indications are that the utopian aspect is gone, and that the focus on the study of form has been replaced by a focus on ideas, and on different and discrete areas of specialisation, though self expression is still the driving force.[93]

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[92] Jones, "Basic Design," 157-158.

[93] Peter Abbs, "The New Paradigm in British Art Education," *British Journal of Aesthetic Education* 30 (1996): 63-71.

CHAPTER 6

THE POSITION OF FINE ART EDUCATION IN GOVERNMENT REPORTS IN THE POST-WAR ERA

6.1 A New Direction for Art and Design Education

Pamphlet No. 6 'Art Education', which was published in 1946, was the first post-war report on art education. In the tradition of most reports on tertiary level art education since 1837, this report stated quite clearly that the focus of art schools should be industrial needs, and, as with Henry Cole's objectives in setting up the National System in the nineteenth century, it stressed that the objective of art education should be the raising of the level of public taste and appreciation.[1] Though the objectives of this report echo the nineteenth century, the reconstructive context of the post-war years is evident in the overall tone of the report. This context is also evident in the assertion in the report that the principal objective of art and design education was to create employment for graduates, and that art schools must adapt to the needs of the areas which they serve, in both the commercial and industrial sense, in the artistic sense, and in the educational sense.[2] This new reconstructive context is particularly evident where the report states that art schools were seen as resources to

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[1] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Pamphlet No. 6 'Art Education'*, 1946, 5.

[2] Ibid., 33.

be used and shared by the community.[3] The report states clearly that its objective is "to raise the level of public taste and appreciation by cultivating discrimination and by encouraging art and craft as leisure time activities and to provide training for those who take up artistic careers, more especially in industries which depend on good design and craftsmanship."[4]

6.1.1 *Fine Art Skills: A Fundamental Aspect of Art and Design Education*

The role of fine art in tertiary level art education was defined in this report in the following terms:

> A department of drawing and painting will always be an essential element in an art school. Students who are already specialising or who will specialise in any of the branches listed above will require plenty of instruction under the teachers in this department in order that their artistic education shall be soundly based on their ability to draw. The influence of the staff of the drawing and painting department should be most valuable throughout the work of the school as a whole. The department which includes modelling and sculpture should similarly exercise a widespread influence, and all students will benefit by a course in that department.[5]

The influence of the National Society of Art Masters - since 1944 known as the National Society for Art Education - is evident in the above quotation where it states that fine art was still defined in terms of drawing. Although this report asserted the fundamental importance of fine art to art education as a whole, it did not elaborate on its role in the new context of post-war education policy. As it was not defined in relation to the new reformative context of the post-war situation, the traditional role of fine art in the curricula of art schools was maintained. In other words, in terms of its

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[3] Ibid., 24.

[4] Ibid., 5.

[5] Ibid., 36.

autonomy, its dilettantish aspect, and its neo-classical foundation, the role of fine art in tertiary level art education remained the same as it had been before the war. Further evidence of this *laissez-faire* attitude to fine art and to the maintenance of the status quo in the art schools is found where the report lists the range of career options available to students attending art schools. The report placed designers at one extreme and students who aspired to become artisans at the other. It did not mention fine art students. A positive consequence of fine art not being defined precisely in this new context, and yet having its role asserted, was a freedom that allowed the development of alternative and experimental courses at a number of schools in the forties and fifties. The Basic Design system would develop out of these courses.[6] Some of these courses were mentioned in the last chapter.

6.1.2 *A New System of Art Examinations is Established: The National Diploma in Design*

The publication of *Pamphlet No. 6 'Art Education* led to the introduction of a new system of examinations in 1946. This new system, as shown in Chapter 5, became known as the National Diploma in Design. With the introduction of the National Diploma in Design, the drawing examination that was set by the Board of Education, which was usually taken at the end of the second year of full-time art study, was replaced by the Ministry of Education's new Intermediate Examination in Arts and Crafts. The former had comprised of tests in the following six subjects: drawing from life, drawing and painting from memory and knowledge, anatomy, architecture, drawing from the cast, and perspective. In order to do the new examination the student had to submit an actual work in a chosen craft, a small cast model of the human figure,

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[6] Dick Field, *Change in Art Education* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1970), 91.

a life drawing, a costumed life drawing, an anatomical drawing of a figure in action, a pictorial memory composition, and a general knowledge paper that covered lettering, the history of architecture, the history of costume, and other subjects.[7]

Before 1946 full time students normally proceeded after a further two years study to take one of four alternative examinations in one of the following four subjects; industrial design, illustration, painting or modelling. These four examinations were replaced in the reorganisation by a single examination known as the examination for the National Diploma in Design. To qualify for the National Diploma in Design students had two choices. They could specialise in one subject taken from a list of twelve subjects; for example, they could choose to specialise in printed textiles, in dress design or in painting.[8] Alternatively, students could choose from a different list any two of twenty-three subjects in which to specialise. The second list was made up specifically of crafts such as die sinking, enamelling, terra cotta work, letter carving, and woodcarving.[9] The principal objective of the National Diploma in Design was to ensure a broad foundation at the intermediate level and a uniformly high standard at the diploma level.[10]

The principal effect of the National Diploma in Design was to shift the whole focus of art education onto a vocational footing, essentially this involved students studying a specific craft or skill. For instance, if a student chose painting as a chief subject then the specific area of study might be mural painting, as it had a practical and useful

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[7] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Report of the Committee on Art Examinations,* 1948, 8.

[8] Clive Ashwin, ed., *Art Education: Documents and Policies 1768-1975* (London: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1975), 83.

[9] Ibid., 83.

[10] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Report on Art Examinations*, 1948, 8.

application.

Although *Pamphlet No. 6* stated that "students should be encouraged to stay in college and to stick with specific tasks or classes" - thus indicating that they were not in the habit of doing so - it did not demand that students stay in college.[11] The vocational bias of the National Diploma in Design did not, therefore, eradicate the old dilettantish aspect of art education, which continued. This situation allowed a non professional ethos to prevail in fine art education. Another indication of the continuing dilettantish nature of tertiary level art education was the fact that students could sit for the National Diploma in Design without sitting for the Intermediate Examination. In other words the focus was on the examination and not on the course. Underpinning this situation was the belief that art education was primarily about nurturing artistic talent, which would develop naturally given time and encouragement; hence, the absence of a structured course.

Victorian ideas about the beneficial nature of art education to the community and the preoccupations of the South Kensington System with precedents are both evident in the recommendations of the report that all students should be encouraged to appreciate and enjoy fine specimens of the arts, and that art schools should be centres of inspiration in the communities which they serve.[12] The legacy of nineteenth century organicist theories is evident in the recommendation that a greenhouse was to be considered a useful part of the provision of art schools.[13]

In summary, *Pamphlet No. 6 'Art Education'* reasserted the neo-classical and drawing based curriculum as the basis of all fine art study and as the foundation stone

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[11] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Pamphlet No. 6*, 1946, 33.

[12] Ibid., 5.

[13] Ibid., 56.

of all art and design education. Despite this fact, the National Diploma in Design located art education in general and, without trying to define it, fine art education in particular, in the context of technological education, the need for expansion in this area, and, underpinning this, the need to create employment.

6.2 The Need to Maintain Standards: The Report of the University Grants Committee, 1948

In 1948 the University Grants Committee published a report which established that the national interest demanded a doubling of the output of graduates in science and technology. To avoid the dangers of too much specialisation, it also stated that there should be a corresponding expansion in the area of the humanities.[14]

On the subject of the curriculum this report stated that universities should balance the need for technical specialisation with the study of broad underlying principles.[15] This recommendation fed into the blue print for art education established in the 1946 report, which had already pointed out the need for broad underlying principles and later specialisation. The University Grants Committee report also highlighted the fact that due to the increase in the number of university entrants there was a danger that standards would drop.[16] This had direct implications for art education for two reasons. Firstly, in the context of the increase in student numbers, the existing centralised system of art examinations was seen to be inadequate as a means of keeping standards

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[14] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *University Grants Committee Report,* 1948, 28.

[15] Ibid., 61.

[16] Ibid., 32.

up.[17] And secondly, as a consequence of the demand to raise standards, it was necessary to eliminate the looseness and dilettantish aspect that had defined higher level art and design education in the pre-war years, and which was still evident in the National Diploma Design. These problems were addressed in the *Report of the Committee on Art Examinations* of 1948.

6.3 The Development of New Courses: The Report of the Committee on Art Examinations, 1948

The Bray report was commissioned to examine the existing system of art examinations for the award of the Intermediate Certificate in Art and Crafts and the National Diploma in Design of the Ministry of Education. It was also to consider the possibility of replacing them by a system of internal examinations with external assessment.[18] This development took place in the context of the overall aim of the Ministry of Education, which was to raise the status of major colleges of technology, commerce, and art:

> The Council of Industrial Design has been charged by the government with the task of improving industrial design. In reviewing the training of designers it has suggested that a similar system to that employed in technological subjects should be employed for designers. The Council believes that this would encourage the closer co-operation of art and technological colleges with each other and with industry.[19]

As a consequence of the lingering dilettantish aspect of tertiary art education, and of the fact that many students, and particularly design students, did not sit for the final examinations or finish programs of study, this report demanded a more professional

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[17] Ibid., 5.

[18] Ministry of Education, *Report on Art Examinations,* 1948, 5.

[19] Ibid., 5.

approach to art education with the specific objective of creating employment.

> The student who has decided upon a career as a painter or sculptor or as a designer for illustration or advertising often does not concern himself with examinations. We believe there may be a tendency for full time students to take courses leading to specific qualifications especially if employers recognise them.[20]

This report went on to redefine the focus of art schools in relation to the two main career options for students in the post-war era, which were teaching, and designing for industry and commerce.[21] It also reasserted that the position of fine art was of fundamental importance in art schools, and, in line with the 1946 report, it defined the role of fine art as providing a common, skill based program that all students would need access to. Having thus assured the traditional position of fine art within tertiary level art education, this report did not elaborate on its role or on the content of its curriculum.

The Bray report echoed Henry Cole's objective in setting up the Schools of Art - the raising of the general standard of taste in Britain - by stating that students should develop their sensitivity to aesthetic values in order to be able to discriminate between the good and the mediocre, and to enhance their ability to select the best.[22] The report stated that the correct way to achieve this overall objective was for art schools to provide a sound basic art education. It further stated that this should be provided by a common course that would replace the intermediate certificate. This new course would be compulsory.

The report went on to lay down three principles that the new examinations would

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[20] Ibid., 8.

[21] Ibid., 10.

[22] Ibid., 10.

have to satisfy.[23] The first, which related to the looseness that had hitherto defined art education, stated that only candidates who had completed a suitable course should be awarded the National Diploma in Design. The second principle stated that in order that courses be made relevant to the future employment of students it was necessary to relate these courses to local needs, therefore, schools should create their own curricula and assess their own students. The third principle stated that the system of central examination should be replaced by a combination of internal examinations and external assessment. This would help to establish standards, and it would help to keep those standards at a consistently high level.

The Bray report did not bring radical change to the fine art curriculum directly; the fine art curriculum remained essentially didactic and drawing based. It did, however, bring change to the overall situation in art schools, and this change would have consequences for fine art education. This report encouraged the general bias in art education in favour of design. The second principle, in particular, gave freedom to colleges to develop specialised courses, and these courses very often related to local industries. Stourbridge School of Art, which developed a strong Industrial Glass Department, is one example of such a school.[24] Rochdale School of Art, which developed a specialised course in fabric printing, is another.[25] More significantly, however, the need to create a new common course to replace the intermediate certificate, when combined with the freedom given to schools to create their own courses, provided the opening which allowed for the development of new curricula.

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[23] Ibid., 13.

[24] Mervyn Levy, "The Future For Art Schools 3: Stourbridge School of Art," *The Studio* 161 (1961): 232-239.

[25] Mervyn Levy, "The Future For Art Schools 4: Rochdale School of Art," *The Studio* 162 (1961): 32-35.

The green light was given to the development of new fine art courses by the report's assertion, again without providing any definitions, that there was a difference between art education and technological education, and that art education should not be affected by the requirements of technological education.[26] This assertion is probably a reflection of the influence of the National Society for Art Education and of the fact that of the five artists on the committee which drew up this report four were heads of art schools. In short, this report gave the go-ahead, indirectly, to the development of new fine art curricula in tertiary level art education in England. As a consequence of this, and although many colleges continued to teach fine art in the traditional way throughout the 1950s, some colleges developed now courses. A case in point is Maidstone College of Art, which by the late 1950s had developed a new fine art curriculum based on a combination of intellectual rigor and manual skill.[27] A similar curriculum was developed at Goldsmiths' College of Art, which sought to bring together fine art and applied art. The curriculum at Goldsmiths' focused on the development of skills and, significantly in relation to future developments in fine art education, it encouraged students to look on learning as a process that was rooted in experiment.[28]

Thus the new curricula that were developed following the Bray Report satisfied both government demands for technological and scientific relevance, and the demands of the art schools that fine art continue to have a central role in tertiary level art education. Apart from creating an opening which allowed for the development of new

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[26] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Report on Art Examinations,* 1948, 15.

[27] Mervyn Levy, "The Future For the Art Schools 1: Maidstone College of Art," *The Studio* 161 (1961): 157-159.

[28] Mervyn Levy, "The Future For Art Schools 5: Goldsmiths' College School of Art," *The Studio* 162 (1961): 72-75.

curricula, the chief educational effect of the Bray report was to shift attention from art examinations to art courses, and thus to the quality of education provided by the colleges.[29]

It is interesting to note in relation to the changes facilitated by the Bray Report, and in the context of the subsequent development of an analytical, organicist, and scientific bias in art schools in the early 1950s, that the Festival of Britain was held in 1951. This exhibition was directly analogous to the Great Exhibition of 1851, and it celebrated the wonders of science and technology. The idea of marking the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851 had been proposed as early as 1943. A Committee of the Board of Trade, who saw it as a chance to demonstrate Britain's moral, cultural, spiritual, and material recovery in the post-war era, officially took up the idea. And, thanks largely to the work of the Labour minister Herbert Morrisson (1888-1965), the exhibition was, with some difficulty, brought to fruition.[30] According to the official guide, the festival was to be a challenge to the sloughs of the present and a shaft of confidence cast forth against the future.[31] The principal difference between the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Festival of Britain was that, while sharing a futuristic vision with the Great Exhibition, the Festival of Britain, instead of imperial pomp, reflected a new and more egalitarian and humanistic Britain. The Festival of Britain thus reflected the new type of society that the Labour Party was trying to create at this time and which would be based on science and technology. This new society, it was hoped, would contrast starkly with the type of society that had existed before the war and in which science

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[29] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 87.

[30] Morrisson, as head of London County Council, had in the late thirties provided free art classes for children which Campbell Bruce, the future Professor of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, benefited from as a teenager and which helped him on his way to a career in art.

[31] Robert Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945-1960* (London: Methuen, 1988), 56-67.

and scientific education - the great hope of the nineteenth century and the Edwardian era - had been neglected.[32]

In accordance with the recommendation of the Bray report that there should be a national committee to deal with the approval of courses, examinations, and assessment, the minister appointed the National Advisory Committee on Art Examinations in 1949. This committee was primarily concerned with the arrangements for the conversion of the examinations, which until now had been external, into a system of internal examinations that would be externally assessed.[33] The terms of reference of this committee stated that it was to advise on the content and conduct of the minister's examinations. It published its first report in 1952, the overall effect of which was to increase the craft and technology component of the curricula in art schools.[34] It had no effect on fine art education – which, though still loosely defined, continued to adhere to neo-classical principles - other than to make it official that easel painting was now an alternative to mural painting, thus easing off somewhat, officially, on the design bias of the National Diploma in Design.[35]

6.4 Greater Autonomy for Art Schools

In 1956 the National Advisory Committee on Art Examinations felt the need to review the structure of the system which had grown out of its 1952 report,

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[32] Bryan Appleyard, *The Pleasures of Peace: Art and Imagination in Post-War Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 30-31.

[33] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 89.

[34] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Rules Governing the Award of the Ministry's Diplomas and Certificates in Art (1953)*, 1952, 8-11; and United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Rules Governing the Award of the Ministry's Diplomas and Certificates in Art (1954)*, 1953, 8-11.

[35] Ibid., 9.

consequently it set up a sub-committee to consider whether or not changes were needed in this structure. The report of this committee, which was published in 1957, focused on the wider aspects of art education and decided that major changes were called for.[36]

The overall feeling of the committee was that the issues of national assessment and the central setting of test papers restricted originality in course planning and initiative. It recommended, therefore, that the minister's control over art schools be brought to an end, so that schools could have even greater freedom to develop their own courses. It also recommended that central setting of examinations should be revised, and, in order to maintain national standards, it suggested that assessors would visit art schools.

The report also recommended that a new council for art education should be created to replace the old system. The new council would decide which art schools qualified for self-assessment, it would approve other courses for central examination, it would run examinations, and it would award the National Diploma in Design.[37]

The report went on to state that the intermediate examination should be abolished, that students should be 18 before they enrolled, that first year should be broadly based and specialisation introduced only at a later stage, and, finally, given that the National Diploma in Design would attract the most talented students, that there should be other courses that would lead to city and guild examinations.[38]

In Circular 340 of 1958 the minister accepted the recommendations of the 1957

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[36] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, National Advisory Committee on Art Examinations, *Report on Proposed Changes in the Art Examinations and in the Length of the Diploma Course,* 1957, 7.

[37] Ibid., 8-9.

[38] Ibid., 10.

report.[39]

6.5 A More Open Curriculum

Circular 340 broadened the definition of art education by stating at the outset that artists and designers played a vital role, not only in the fine arts, but also in industry, commerce, primary and secondary education, and national life generally. This assertion reflected both a further easing of the technological bias of the immediate post-war years and a new official view of art as valuable in itself as an important aspect of British culture.[40] In this context it is important to note that the Festival of Britain, while stressing science and technology, had also focused on the bucolic aspect of British culture, as manifested in its countryside and in its architectural heritage. This reflected positive and populist aspects of Britain's political and social history and was, to a great extent, a consequence of the work of the new Arts Council, which had been established in 1946, and of its predecessor, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. This new vision of Britain was a counterpoint to the straightened domestic conditions of post-war Britain and to the fraught international political situation that prevailed at this time. The Neo-Romantic Movement in painting, which flowered during the war, had been an earlier version of this aspect of British culture.[41] The future of Britain in the immediate post-war years had been seen primarily in industrial, technological, and scientific terms. This was a direct consequence of the Second World War and of the perceived and desperate need, in the context of the Cold

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[39] United Kingdom, Ministry of Education, *Circular 340*, 1958, 1.

[40] Appleyard, *Pleasures of Peace*, 213.

[41] Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1997), 57-65.

War, to build up Britain's industrial strength. It was also a consequence of the vigour of the new Labour administration that had followed the war. Hence the need for technical and scientific education. By the late 1950s, however, confidence and security had grown, Labour had lost power, and American money and influence were having an effect on how Britain saw itself. This new situation made it possible to think of art in broader cultural terms than hitherto. This new vision of art as culturally significant, as opposed to commercially significant, particularly in the context of the binary controversy, helped to place fine art education squarely in the liberal education camp. The late 1950s, therefore, saw the fine arts accepted on an official level and on a popular level as a reflection of high cultural values and as a positive aspect of British Culture, and this development was reflected in Circular 340.

This new role for art in British society coincided with a major debate about the nature of culture in the post war era, which focused on the polarisation of high culture and popular culture.[42] This debate was informed by a concomitant development in the art world, which was the conflict between the national and the international or universal, and which, as pointed out in the last chapter, impacted on British art directly.[43] All of the above issues were to inform developments in Irish art education at tertiary level in the 1960s and 1970s.

Circular 340 went on to announce the setting up of a new body, which was to be called the National Advisory Council on Art Education, to advise the minister on a number of issues arising out of the work of the National Advisory Committee on Art Examinations.

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[42] Ibid., 132-158.

[43] Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 63-70.

In line with earlier reports, the position of fine art as envisioned by the minister in Circular 340 was that fine art was fundamental to all art and design education; just as art education was, for Read, fundamental to all education at all levels. As the report put it, "In the ministers view all students, whatever careers they have in mind, should receive some fine art training as the basis of any later specialisation."[44]

The type of courses to be provided were defined in the following terms:

> The minister also thinks that students should not specialise too narrowly. He wants a small number of grouped courses rather than numerous single subject courses of the kind now accepted for the National Diploma in Design. It would follow that the present categories of special, main, and additional subjects would be abolished."[45]

This change, away from specialisation and towards a more flexible and open-ended curriculum, reflects a definite shift from a narrow technologically based art education system towards a more liberal and broadly based one. It also reflects a move away from a traditional neo-classical, drawing and craft-based approach to fine art. In this sense it reflects a move in the direction of the utopian aspirations of Gropius' curriculum at the Bauhaus and in the direction of Herbert Read's demands in *Education Through Art*, both of which asserted the fundamental importance of art and art education to the development of society as a whole - Gropius did, of course, demand technical specialisation, but only as a necessary first step towards an understanding of the qualities of materials.

The new body that was set up to advise the minister, the National Advisory Council on Art Education, would consider what kind of assessment was needed. It would lay down the academic conditions which courses designed to lead to the new diploma had to satisfy. And it would advise the minister on which colleges could award the diploma

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[44] Ministry of Education, *Circular 340*, 2.

[45] Ibid., 2.

and which colleges could not. The first report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education was the Coldstream Report of 1960.

6.6 A New System of Art and Design Education is Established: The First Coldstream Report

Three reports were produced by the National Advisory Council on Art Education in the early nineteen sixties. Firstly, the above report, which was produced in 1960. A second report was produced in 1962 which dealt with vocational courses and which is not relevant to the present study. A further report was produced in 1965, which dealt with post-diploma courses. And an addendum to the first report, which addressed the issue of pre-diploma courses, was published in 1965. One other report was produced in 1970. This last report was produced in response to problems that had developed within tertiary level art and design education. It was produced jointly by the National Advisory Council on Art Education and another body, which had been set up by the National Advisory Council on Art Education in 1961, called the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design. The first report had the greatest impact on the fine art curriculum.

The brief of the first Coldstream Report was to "advise on arrangements for a three year course which would approximate in quality and standard of achievement to a university course leading to a first degree."[46]

In deciding what kind of course to construct the committee took as their starting point decisions already taken by the minister of education and outlined in Circular 340.

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[46] United Kingdom, Department of Education and Science, National Advisory Council on Art Education, *The Structure of Art and Design Education in the Further Education Sector,* 1970, 1.

These were the following:

> i) The courses are to approximate in quality and standard of achievement to a university course of the same length leading to a degree. ii) The courses are to last three years full time. iii) Entrants to the courses should have a good standard of general education before they are admitted. iv) Entrants must have produced evidence of ability in art. v) All students should receive some fine art training as the basis of any later specialisation. vi) Students should not specialise too narrowly. vii) The new system should be based on a relatively small number of grouped courses rather than numerous single subject courses of the kind now accepted for the National Diploma in Design.[47]

Because its overall objective was to achieve degree equivalence, the first concern of the report was to make sure that the standard of students entering art schools was sufficiently high. This was achieved by establishing a minimum level of educational achievement at General Certificate of Education level. The minimum standard was five "O" level passes, or the equivalent in "O" and "A" level passes, at least three of which had to be in academic subjects.[48]

In order to bring students up to a level of confidence and maturity consistent with entering into full time study of art at third level, and to give the student time to discover his or her special interests and aptitudes, the report recommended the establishment of a Pre-Diploma course of one or two years duration. The actual content of the Pre-Diploma course was to be left up to the different art schools.[49]

The report went on to outline the construction of a course with four broad areas of specialisation. These included the following: fine art, which covered painting, sculpture and drawing; graphic design, which included illustration and communication design; three dimensional design, which included many of the traditional craft areas such as

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[47] United Kingdom, Department of Education and Science, *First Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education,* 1960, 3.

[48] Ibid., 2-3.

[49] Ibid., 1.

silversmithing, jewellery, furniture, ceramics, and theatre design; and, finally, textiles and fashion, which included woven and printed textiles, embroidery, and fashion. The committee stressed that the four broad areas were general recommendations and that each school could interpret these recommendations in their own way.[50]

The report recommended the establishment of an independent body to administer the new award. This body would be called the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design, and the new award would be called the Diploma in Art and Design.

The committee had problems with the idea that all students should receive some fine art training. While agreeing that certain fundamental skills and disciplines underlie and sustain all art and design education, some members felt that the term fine art was too restrictive and that not all students would need fine art training. The report left the question of how schools dealt with this issue up to the individual art schools, but stated clearly that all students should study the skills and disciplines that underpin fine art training.[51]

6.6.1 *History of Art and Complementary Studies*

The committee recommended that all students should study the history of art and other complementary subjects that would be helpful to the study of art. No particular subjects were prescribed. This was an important part of the program as it represented the academic content demanded for degree equivalence.

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[50] Ibid., 5.

[51] Ibid., 4.

6.6.2 *The First Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education: an Appraisal*

Unlike the National Diploma in Design, which had been a vocationally-oriented qualification entailing for its students the pursuit of a chosen narrowly defined studio activity, the new Diploma in Art and Design, or Dip. AD as it was popularly known and which Coldstream proposed in outline, was conceived of as a liberal education in art of first degree standard, not necessarily equipping its graduates with a vocational or occupational training. The Diploma in Art and Design changed the focus of art education from a narrowly defined studio activity to a more liberal and broadly based activity. It thus went some way towards fulfilling the demands of Read and the new generation of teachers and artists that the post-war context had produced. It also fulfilled the demands of the Ministry of Education for degree equivalence. There would be much resistance in fine art departments throughout Britain to the academic aspect of the new courses, as it was felt by many in fine art education that academic disciplines were alien to the artistic temperament. This resistance to the academic content of courses in the area of fine art was also to be a problem in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin when change came about there in 1975.

The recommendations of the first Coldstream Report, being open ended and of a general nature, were interpreted by the different factions within British art education at tertiary level in a relative way, depending on their own needs. Therefore, the overall reaction to the first Coldstream Report in British art schools was positive.

The reports recommendations were seen by those who favoured a technological and design based approach to art education as a means of finally eliminating what they

perceived as the wasteful attitude and dilettantish nature of the romantic ideas which art schools had hitherto engendered. According to Mervyn Levy,

> The recommendations of the Coldstream Report on Art Education may well prove to be the most fruitful contribution of their kind in the present century. The art schools are ripe for the changes it envisages.
>
> The romantic malaise which, in the past, bred generations of useless, woolly-minded, ridiculously attired, and often totally unemployable young men and women, has largely broken down. The yellow book is closed, No one today can accuse the art school of perpetuating the sterile myth of bohemianism. . . .
>
> The least concern of an art school is to produce 'artists'; creative designers, craftsmen, draughtsmen, yes: artists in the vacuum - no. This applies as much to the Department of painting and sculpture as to those of Graphic Design and Printing. . . . The Coldstream Report offers an antidote for a wasteful and retrogressive attitude. Its long-term effect will be to isolate the myth of Abstract-Expressionism in the limbo of those few institutions who still cling to the curious notion that Action Painting is avant-garde. Today, every responsible movement in art education is towards the practical application of the creative intelligence, and the manual skills that are essential to its expression.[52]

Building on this attitude many schools reacted to the Coldstream Report by demanding that fine art conform to the demands of design principles. Levy states that

> The loneliness of the long distance action-painter . . . is a profoundly disturbing problem, for it is this very apartness, the absurdness of an art form beyond the pale of purpose or responsibility, which makes the predicament of the abstract painter today so pitiful. Cubism and classical abstraction (Basic Design in fact) have borne their legitimate fruit along the branches of commercial and industrial design (and of course in architecture), and Abstract Expressionism waits to be absorbed, perhaps into the textile industry. I have always felt that Pollock and Sam Francis should be sold by the yard. Certainly Action-Painting and *Tachisme* have outstayed their welcome as aesthetic phenomenon in detachment. One cannot make an art form bigger than it is, nor more significant, nor more meaningful, no matter how hard certain critics may try to inflate its size. In the final analysis Action-Painting is as big as textile design. Halliwell was vehement in his condemnation of the stunt crusaders. 'I deplore all this tearing up of paper and paint dropping. Often the principles of Basic Design are pursued as an end in themselves. It's all terribly unfair on the students because it becomes so difficult to find employment for them'.[53]

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[52] Levy, "Maidstone College of Art," 157-158.

[53] Mervyn Levy, "The Future For Art Schools 2: The Central School of Arts and Crafts," *Studio* 161 (1961): 199-200.

As a consequence of this attitude, the role of fine art was seen by many in tertiary art education in Britain solely as a useful means of engendering creativity in students. The Head of Stourbridge School of Art had the following to say:

> We are also, of course, conscious of the function of automatic (abstract expressionist) painting as a means of stimulating a student's awareness of the possibilities of texture and pattern, but only in so far as these discoveries may then be related to specific problems of design: such as the textural possibilities of engraved glass. It is certainly not the business of an art school to present extreme situations as a final solution.[54]

Notwithstanding the above approach to fine art in many art schools immediately following the publication of the first Coldstream Report, drawing, in the traditional sense, was still seen by some as a fundamental aspect of tertiary level art education; albeit integrated into a curriculum based as much on creativity as on the development of skills. The curriculum at Maidstone College of Art was a case in point:

> Maidstone's all round insistence on the fusion of the aesthetic and the practical, its mistrust of the concept of 'art' in detachment from function, and its determination to establish early in a student's career the ability to draw, and to think of drawing as the basis, not only of good painting, but of good applied design, is the fundamental principle upon which the implementation of the Coldstream Report will rest.[55]

In the School of Art at Goldsmiths' College the role assigned to drawing in the curriculum still reflected quite clearly the ideas of Sir Joshua Reynolds, as the head of the school makes clear:

> At Goldsmiths' we think of the life class not as the Mecca of art training, but as *one* step in the development of an artist's overall skill. The craftsman with the pencil learns a skill which may be applied to the design of furniture, or the shaping of a pot, as much as to the delineation of a nude figure. It is the application of the subtleties and refinements learned in the life-class that will ultimately constitute the difference between the artist-craftsman and the craftsman; between the truly creative artisan and the merely soulless technician. For instance, once a student has learned the range of exquisite possibilities which exist within the compass of an H.B. pencil, his sensibilities will have been immeasurably deepened. Thereafter he will plane a piece of

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[54] Levy, "Stourbridge School of Art," 239.

[55] Levy, "Maidstone College of Art," 159.

wood with a finesse that would be quite lacking in plain carpentry.[56]

Despite the negative approach to the fine art ethos which is manifested in some of the above, and despite the strong position still held by traditional concepts of drawing in many, if not most, art schools, it was generally accepted by the early 1960s, because of developments already mentioned, that free and creative expression must be the overall driving force of tertiary level fine art education. In this new context, and as the creativity of the students in the first years of art education tended to be restricted by traditional attitudes - which had been engendered at secondary level - it was deemed necessary by many involved in art education for art schools to devise ways of freeing the student's creative core. In asserting this need, and in revealing the influence of Herbert Read's ideas and the ideas of German Romanticism, the principal of Stourbridge School of Art said: "What we want from our students is that they should not blindly accept conventional or academic assessments and rulings, but that they should try to find their own unique way, working outward from the hard core of a universal truth."[57]

As a means of developing creativity, of searching for the above universal truth, and of learning about materials - rather than specific craft skills, schools naturally gravitated towards the Basic Design approach to teaching that had been developed by Pasmore, Hamilton, Thubron and Hudson in the 1950s. The Head of Stourbridge School of Art stated the following:

> Stourbridge has initiated something of an original approach to the pursuit of those basic exploratory and experimental studies. . . . In its application as an intrinsic part of the first-year curriculum, . . . the first objective was 'brain washing'. Students come to us from every sort of school crammed with the usual misconceptions about drawing, painting, and art in general. The old,

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[56] Levy, "Goldsmiths' School of Art," 74.

[57] Levy, "Stourbridge School of Art," 239.

> familiar notion of art as a means of imitating appearances still exists, and one of the first problems we have to face is the need to empty a new student's mind of such useless and antiquated ideas. The way in which we carry out this cleansing process consists of getting students to smash up the literal appearances of a variety of natural forms (e.g.: stones, shells, feathers, the human figure) in order to arrive at an appreciation of their fundamental structure, and an assessment of the forces, rhythms, and actions which animate their identity. The process is similar in many ways to those investigations of the essential rhythms and forms of water, geological strata, and so on, which frequently occupied the attention of Leonardo. There exists at the heart of all things, and irrespective of personal appearances, purposes and functions, a pattern of universal energies and forms. If we can arrive at an appreciation of these we may find that the lines of force, or the basic structural qualities which exist in a head, for instance, may well provide us with an aesthetic pattern, or order, which we can usefully apply in another direction. It is a quest for basic truths.[58]

The same approach was taken at Maidstone College of Art where "Students explore and analyse the construction both of man-made and natural forms. The 'aesthetics' of the machine are examined, while crystallography and micro-photography reveal the miraculous diversity of the shapes, forms, and patterns that lie at the heart of nature."[59] Speaking on a similar theme, and broadening the concept of form as it was used in fine art education, James Cranmer, a member of staff in the School of Art at Goldsmiths', had the following to say: "I would like to see far less concentration upon the teaching of pre-conceived concepts, and far more upon the free use of a medium like the film as a means of developing a student's awareness of his own personality and creative capacities."[60]

In summary, as a consequence of the first Coldstream Report of 1960, many in art education felt that fine art was finished as an independent activity and would now be subservient to the new design and technology based ethos which played such an

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[58] Ibid., 239.

[59] Levy, "Maidstone College of Art," 158.

[60] Levy, "Goldsmiths' School of Art," 75.

important part in the development of post-war Britain. Fine art, however, saw itself, as the report implied, as the foundation stone on which all other areas within tertiary art education were built. The contradiction inherent in this situation was never fully resolved, as fine art ultimately asserted its independence and became, like all other areas within art schools, a discrete area of activity.

As a consequence of this unresolved relationship between fine art and design, and of the eventual isolation of the different faculties within art schools - despite Coldstream's demand that some form of integration was essential - fine art was cut off from the broader context of change in tertiary art education in Britain at this time. Consequently fine art areas within tertiary art education developed different types of curriculum depending on the contingencies of the situation in different art schools. Some schools developed courses that were rooted in the neo-classical tradition, others developed courses that were rooted in the principles of the Basic Design system, and still others developed courses that were based on a combination of the Basic Design system and the neo classical tradition. All courses were informed by one of the most basic tenets of the Romantic Movement, which held that each artist had to establish his or her own aesthetic values by working with materials from sources in the real world. As a direct consequence of the work of Coldstream and Summerson, and as the neo-classical tradition was on the decline at this time, the principles of the Basic Design system became a powerful force in fine art departments in the 1960s, a situation which persisted until at least the 1990s.[61] Given the iconoclastic aspect of contemporary art and the notion, inherent in the Basic Design system, that fine art reflected contemporary ideas, it is understandable that an iconoclastic avant-garde ethos would

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[61] Gillian Wayte and Nick Wayte, "Current Issues in Art and Design Education: Modularisation and Course Ethos: The Case of Art and Design Higher Education," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 9 (1990): 289-298.

develop in some fine art departments. This development was ensured by the freedom inherent in the Basic Design system, by the focus of this system on personal development, and by the general nature of the principles on which the Basic Design system was based. A negative consequence of this situation was that it allowed for the disproportional influence of the fashions and fads of the art world on the work that was produced in fine art departments following the publication of the first Coldstream Report.

6.6.3 *The Instigation of the New System: The National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design*

The National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design, the body that was set up to administer the new award of Diploma in Art and Design, was established by the Minister in 1961. Its purpose was to put into effect Coldstream's recommendations and to review submissions from art schools for the newly instituted Diploma in Art and Design, as defined by Coldstream. The first report of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design, the so-called Summerson Report of 1964, is an account of the results of the review which took place between February 1962 and March 1963.[62] Of eighty-seven colleges that applied for recognition by the committee only twenty-nine eventually succeeded in having courses approved. Most art schools were small arts and crafts based colleges.[63] Predictably, the effect of this situation on the colleges was traumatic. For a time there was much confusion and angry protests from the unapproved colleges, but these soon developed into new activities. These new

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[62] United Kingdom, Department of Education and Science, *First Report of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design*, 1964.

[63] Ibid.

activities were directed either towards recreating coursework and in forming links with diploma colleges, or in developing high level vocational and professional courses in association with local industry and commerce.[64]

On the subject of fine art the Summerson Report reiterated the recommendations of the Coldstream Report that the fine art department was to be the backbone of the art college: "We felt it to be essential that the fine art department itself should on all occasions be the effective source of method and direction."[65] In this way fine art still maintained a central position on the curricula of art schools, despite what many schools with a design bias felt, and was still considered essential for all students no matter what their area of specialisation. This situation allowed for the continuing influence of the neo-classical tradition, and also for the introduction of new curricula. This situation made conflict between the old and the new systems inevitable.

The course which students pursued in order to qualify for the award of Diploma in Art and Design was better than that pursued for the award of National Diploma in Design. It had greater range and greater depth. According to Norbert Lynton, head of the Art History Department at Chelsea School of Art, the Diploma in Art and Design was liberal, optimistic, non authoritarian, and was an award from one of the most open minded and open ended art education systems in the world.[66]

6.6.4 *Criticisms of Coldstream's System*

Despite Lynton's praise, there were problems with the new system. The principal

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[64] Harry Shelton, "Art Colleges: The Future," *Times Educational Supplement*, 10 November 1967, 1070.

[65] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 110.

[66] Norbert Lynton, "Waiting for Coldstream," *Studio International* 178 (1969) : 58.

problem was that the four broad areas recommended by Coldstream tended to be discreet with little or no interaction between them.[67] This lack of interaction led to specialisation within faculties, which went against the most basic principle of Coldstream's system, and ultimately it went against the utopian ideas of Read, which underpinned the first Coldstream Report.

This development was primarily the result of tension between the fine art ethos and the design ethos in the various colleges. The design areas tended to demand a specialised curriculum, and the fine art areas demanded a more open ended and flexible curriculum.[68] The principal of Stourbridge School of Art, for example, in demanding specialisation, said:

> It is basically wrong . . . to say to a student, if you take this training . . . you can become (A) either an art teacher, in any type of school, or (B) with the same qualifications, an industrial designer. This is quite wrong. However, if the recommendations of the Coldstream Report are implemented it is a misconception that can easily be rectified. Design courses should be closely related to the requirements of Industry, and teachers of art (except those who intend to specialise in the teaching of Industrial Design) should be trained with a regard to their special and quite different requirements.[69]

Everyone involved in design did not demand separation from other areas, nor did they necessarily demand a specialised curriculum. Design students at Hornsey, for instance, demanded a radical and open-ended curriculum and the freedom to integrate fine art practice into the design area. The issue of specialisation was one of the principal issues of contention in the student rebellion of 1968.[70] In 1970, while

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[67] Shelly Fausset, "Visits to 14 Colleges of Art," *Studio International* 178 (1969): 141-149; and Lynton, "Waiting for Coldstream," 59; and United Kingdom, Department of Education and Science, *Second Report of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design*, 1970, 8.

[68] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 124.

[69] Levy, "Stourbridge School of Art," 233.

[70] Students and Staff of Hornsey College of Art, *The Hornsey Affair*, Penguin Education Special (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 88-89

accepting that open systems within faculties worked well in some schools and that closed systems which focused on specialisation worked well in others, a report of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design recommended that greater care should be taken in relation to the open courses, particularly in relation to fine art.[71] The reason given for this recommendation was that the use of new materials, including audio visual and electronic media, made it difficult to assess and to maintain standards. The maintenance of standards was one of the most fundamental concerns of the tertiary level art education system in the post-Coldstream era.

As pointed out already, because the four broad areas recommended by Coldstream tended to work in isolation rather than as a loosely structured unit, fine art departments tended to become dominated by fashionable trends in contemporary art. This was a particular feature of art education at this time.[72] Given this situation, the proliferation of artistic movements in the 1960s led to fine art departments developing particular artistic styles, which varied from college to college depending on the particular interests of the staff who taught in them. The influence of the Modernist sculptor Anthony Caro, who is noted for his work in welded steel, on Saint Martin's School of Art is a case in point.[73]

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[71] Department of Education and Science, *Second report of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design*, 8.

[72] Levy, "Central School of Arts and Crafts," 199.

[73] Caro exerted a huge influence on British sculpture throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. It is interesting to note that Caro's influence came to the National College of Art and Design in Dublin through the work of the sculptor Brian King. King, who has been an influential lecturer in sculpture at the National College of Art and Design since the mid-1970s, and who is at the time of writing Head of Sculpture, worked in London during the period 1963-1965 and was heavily influenced by the type of work being done there. In relation to the above question of influence, it has been suggested that King's contribution to Irish art in the 1960s and 1970s was as an educator rather than as an innovator. According to Roderic Knowles, writing in 1982, King had been, throughout his career, "active, imparting ideas, [and] demonstrating and offering them for appraisal to a novice audience" - as opposed to breaking new ground as an artist, or speaking with an independent voice. (Roderic Knowles, *Contemporary Irish Art*, [Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1982], 206.)

The issue of specialisation led to two particular problems developing in British art education in the 1960s which went against the interests of students at both second and tertiary levels. The first was that students applying for entry to fine art courses from pre-diploma courses in other colleges were not fully aware of the often rigid specialisation of the fine art department to which they were applying. Consequently many students found themselves at odds with the courses that they were pursuing.[74] This situation led to the disillusionment of some students, which in turn fed into an already tension ridden situation in art schools, which was a consequence of the rapid pace of change in art education at this time. The second problem was created by the fact that, as a very high percentage of fine art graduates went on to become teachers at both second and tertiary level, the narrow specialisation and lack of academic training that fine art students received restricted their effectiveness as teachers. This was particularly so at second level. Design students found it easier to gain employment that was in some way related to their training, so fewer design students turned to education for gainful employment. As already pointed out, the difficulties that fine art students faced were exacerbated by the fact that history of art and complimentary studies were not popular in fine art departments. As a result of this, many fine art graduates did not develop academic skills. As the 1970 report of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design pointed out, the situation of fine art students was also made difficult by the fact that there were problems maintaining standards in some fine art courses.[75]

Pre-diploma courses presented other problems. The principal problem was caused by the fact that the title of the course caused many students to assume that transfer was

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[74] Department of Education and Science, *Second Report of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design*, 8.

[75] Leslie Cunliffe, "Tradition, Mediation and Growth in Art Education," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 9 (1990): 277-288.

automatic from pre-diploma courses to Diploma in Art and Design courses. When this was found not to be the case it was often too late for students to apply for enrolment in other courses or colleges. Another problem with pre-diploma courses was caused by the fact that students in pre-diploma courses applied in the spring for access to Diploma in Art and Design courses. Because they applied for entry to diploma courses in the spring, when they were barely half way through their pre-diploma courses, students did not have time to explore the range of options available to them in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses. This situation restricted their ability to make informed judgements on their future development. These problems were addressed in an addendum to the first report that was published in 1965. This report changed the name of the pre-diploma course to that of foundation course.[76] It also recommended that foundation courses should have a broader role than just preparing students for entry to Diploma in Art and Design courses.[77] The problems facing pre-diploma courses continued throughout the 1960s and were raised by students as major issues during the student rebellion at Hornsey.[78]

6.6.5 *The Student Revolt of 1968*

Difficulties in implementing Coldstream's recommendations led, in 1968, to widespread student unrest. In the course of this unrest several centres of higher education in Britain were brought to a standstill by sit-ins, strikes, and demonstrations. Essentially, the protesting students were demanding complete creative independence

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[76] United Kingdom, Department of Education and Science, *First Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education: Addendum,* 1965,2.

[77] Ibid., 2.

[78] Hornsey College of Art, *The Hornsey Affair*, 92-93.

within educational structures that they saw as too slow to change in response to what they perceived as the needs of contemporary society. The striking similarities between the principles of the Basic Design system, as outlined in Chapter 5, and the principles of the new educational structures that were demanded by the students at Hornsey is noteworthy in this respect.[79] Significantly, although statistically a small percentage of the student population in the various colleges, fine art students attracted a disproportionately large amount of attention.

In order to resolve the problems raised by the student disturbances a select committee of Parliament was established to investigate what happened, and to find solutions. This committee's report was published in 1969.

6.6.6 *The Report of the Select Committee on Student Relations*

This committee investigated four art schools that had been affected by student protests: Hornsey, Guildford, Brighton, and Manchester. It concluded that the rapid expansion of the education sector, without adequate provision in accommodation, equipment, and staffing, was the main cause of trouble.[80]

A concomitant of this problem was the inability of many art schools to come to terms with the provisions of the Coldstream and Summerson Reports. The committee identified some particular features of art and design education that presented problems. These included an apparent absence of agreed principles of teaching, too much subjectivity in assessment procedures, and uncertainty surrounding career prospects.[81] The principal manifestation of these problems at Hornsey was conflict between the

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[79] Ibid., 47-48.

[80] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 115.

[81] Ibid., 115.

older members of staff and the combined forces of the student body and some of the younger and more radical members of staff. This situation was mirrored at the National College of Art in Dublin between 1968 and the early 1988.

The students who protested at the four art schools that were investigated in this report made demands of the older members of staff and of the administration of the colleges which caused the colleges to claim that the students wanted to remove those in authority and to create anarchy. This led to a bureaucratic response by the colleges and by the older members of staff that only infuriated the students further, whose reactions, in turn, created greater conflict. It must be remembered that all of this took place against the background of the broader context of social and political conflict that took place in 1968 throughout the western world. A glance at *The Hornsey Affair*, which was written by the protesting students and staff at Hornsey art school, shows quite clearly that the Hornsey protest was part of this movement.[82]

Among other things, the students at Hornsey demanded a revolutionary language that would unite the physical and the mental, and the intellectual and the emotional, and which would, in order to create a new harmonious and egalitarian type of society, bring people from different walks of life together. Appropriately, this demand echoes the revolutionary ideas of Herbert Read and the utopian ideas of Walter Gropius. It also illustrates the fact that the radical aspirations of many of the innovators in post-war art education of the 1950s, as outlined in Chapter 5, had not come to pass, but had ground to a halt in bureaucratic and academic demands.[83]

As the student rebellions were taking place, and as a consequence of the expansion of the British education system in the post-war era, many art schools at this time were

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[82] Hornsey School of Art, *The Hornsey Affair*.

[83] Ibid., 88-89.

being merged with the new Polytechnics. This added a different dimension to the problems facing art schools, and ultimately, according to Campbell Bruce, it was one of the key factors that led to the resolution of the problems highlighted by students during the student rebellion. The reason for this was that as all factions within the art schools were afraid that they would loose their secure positions in the different administrative and educational context of the Polytechnics they had to present a united and coherent front. A united front was particularly necessary in order to enable fine art areas in art schools to assert their status within the now Polytechnics. The older members of staff in fine art departments were afraid that they would loose control of the curriculum under the new administrations. The students and the younger and more radical members of staff were afraid that the relaxed relationship that had developed between students and staff as a result of changes that had taken place since the war would change to a more formal and academic one in the more bureaucratic Polytechnics.[84] According to Campbell Bruce, who was involved in the merging of a local art school in Stoke-on-Trent with the North Staffordshire Polytechnic, the development of more formal, academic, and bureaucratic structures did eventually restrict the freedom of fine art departments. Bruce has said, in fact, that this was the principal reason why he left Britain to work in Ireland.

In summary, the merging of the art schools with the polytechnics resolved the problems that the student rebellion in British art schools had highlighted. These problems grew out of the demands placed on art education by the publication of the Coldstream Report of 1960, and were particularly influenced by the inability of bureaucratic structures to cope with the rapid expansion of the tertiary education

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[84] Elma Askham and Harry Thubron, "The Case for Polytechnics," *Studio International* 174 (1967): 83.

sector during the 1950s and 1960s. In relation to fine art education, notwithstanding the Coldstream Report of 1960, which challenged but did not endanger the position of fine art, the merging of the art schools with the Polytechnics threatened the autonomy of fine art as a subject. As a consequence of this, fine art departments were afraid that demands were being placed on them that were alien to the fine art ethos. Thus, the problems that the pending merger of the art schools with the polytechnics presented to fine art departments forced the different factions within them to patch up their differences in order to present a united front. Significantly, this was not a problem at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, and consequently the problems that beset the college in Dublin were more difficult to resolve.[85]

The student revolt in Britain led to demands that a review of the effects of the Coldstream Reports should be carried out. This in turn led to the setting up of a committee by the Department of Education and Science. This committee was set up under the auspices of the National Advisory Council on Art Education and the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design with Sir William Coldstream as chairman. The report of this committee was published in 1970.

6.6.7 *The Autonomy of Fine Art Education*

Submissions to the joint committee of the National Advisory Council on Art Education and the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design, which investigated the structure of art and design education in the further education sector, showed that the system introduced by Coldstream in 1960 was working quite well, but

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[85] Interview with Campbell Bruce, 29th March 1995.

that some changes were needed.[86]

As a result of problems that arose, on the one hand, out of the conflict between the need for specialisation and the learning of specific skills, and, on the other hand, the need for a more generalised and open curriculum, this report recommended the establishment of two levels of study. These were identified as Group A and Group B. The Group B area involved specialised study in certain categories of industrial and professional design practice, and therefore do not concern this study.[87] Group A, which does concern this study, referred to the Diploma in Art and Design, and the report demanded greater flexibility in this area.

This report looked critically at the four broad categories established by Coldstream and, generally speaking, found that these areas were working well. The committee stated, however, that they were not necessarily discreet and that courses need not necessarily be confined to them. It recommended, therefore, a more fluid system than the one that had developed since the publication of the first Coldstream Report of 1960. In making this recommendation the intention of this report was to enable students to move freely between different areas of study in order that their development would not be restricted by specialisation. This, as shown, had been the principal demand, in relation to the curriculum, of the students at Hornsey.

As a consequence of this recommendation, this report defined fine art in a more open way than it had been hitherto defined:

> Whilst painting and sculpture or a combination of the two will, we expect continue to be the main preoccupation of students in this area we do not believe that studies in fine art can be adequately defined in terms of chief studies related to media. We believe that studies in fine art derive from an

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[86] United Kingdom, Department of Education and Science, *Joint Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education and the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design: 'The Structure of Art and Design Education in the Further Education Sector'*, 1970, 6.

[87] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 126.

> attitude which may be expressed in many ways. Their precise nature will depend upon the circumstances of different colleges.[88]

The report went on to state that, as drawing skills were no longer considered essential to artistic practice, fine art was no longer considered a necessary component of the work of all students who attended art school. This report thus ended the hegemony of the neo-classical tradition, and in doing so it lowered the status of fine art in art schools.[89] This was the first time in a government report that fine art was not defined in relation to any one particular skill, and it was the first time in a government report that fine art was not considered as a necessary area of study for all students. In this report fine art was defined in an open ended and multi-faceted way, and in line with Herbert Read's thinking. Thus, this report marks the official segregation of fine art and design, despite the fact that it reiterated Coldstream's assertion that the different areas within art education were not of necessity discreet. Fine art was now officially separate from design and other areas in tertiary level art education. This further enabled it to develop independently of other areas within art education. So, as art was separated from craft in the Renaissance, and as it was separated from society in the Romantic era, this report manifests its separation from skill and the traditional association of fine art with manual dexterity. The way was now open - to Kant's delight no doubt had he been alive – for the raising of fine art to a new level involving free expression and the use of as broad a range of materials as thought necessary by

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[88] Department of Education and Science, *Joint Report*, 8.

[89] Jonah Jones, who was chairman of the Fine art panel of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design from 1968 - 1971 and Director of the National College of Art and Design in Dublin from 1974 -1978, felt that the position of Fine art within tertiary level art education was done a disservice in this report as a direct consequence of the fact that fine art was represented on this committee by only one expert in this area. (Jonah Jones, "Fine art Education and the Polytechnics", in David Warren Piper, ed., *Readings in Art and Design Education: 2 After Coldstream* [London: Davis-Poynter Limited, 1973], 66) Jones was fine art orientated and believed that all design was informed implicitly by fine art concerns. (Dave Rushton and Paul Wood, *Politics of Art Education* [London: The Studio Trust, 1979], 30)

the artist. Henceforth artistic practice could be expressed in many different ways, from wrapping buildings to placing the heads of dead sheep on gallery floors. Fine art could now be seen as a way of thinking as much as a way of doing. The function of the student from now on was to manifest his thinking through interaction with materials of any kind. Hence the collecting of ephemera and the preoccupation with personal notebooks to record thinking processes in art schools throughout the 70s and 80s (See Chapter 7).

The essential demand of this report was that the Diploma in Art and Design should continue to conform to the broad based and non-specialised approach recommended by Coldstream.

While there was general support among the committee members for the history of art and complementary studies aspect of the course, there were some problems with the content of the curriculum and there was criticism of assessment procedures. For instance, design students at Hornsey, in giving evidence to the committee, expressed the desire that, instead of taking a general history of art course, they should be allowed to take a specialised history of design course.[90] Other colleges felt that the history of art and complementary studies component was taking up too much of the curriculum.[91] The committee therefore recommended that history of art and complementary studies should be an integral part of the student's art and design education, informing, but not dictating, the creative aspect of the work.

The members of the committee that drew up this report were aware of the strong opposition in the colleges to the history of art and complementary studies aspect of the

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[90] John Phillips, "Coldstream/Summerson Putting You in the Picture," *The Technical Journal* (February 1971): 21.

[91] Ashwin, *Art education*, 118.

course. Campbell Bruce recalls strong opposition to the academic slant of developments in art education among fine art staff and students in Britain at this time. This was particularly so in relation to minimum entry qualifications, which, according to Bruce, had restricted access to art schools for some talented students.[92] The irrelevance of entry qualifications to students studying art and design was borne out by evidence from Hornsey School of Art where vocational students often produced better work than Diploma in Art and Design students.[93] There were minimum entry requirements for Diploma in Art and Design students, there were no entry requirements for vocational students. In the event, the report recommended minimum entry requirements because of the need for the Diploma in Art and Design to correspond to a first degree.[94]

The committee was divided on the issue of academic studies. In a note of dissent added to the report Nicholas Pevsner strongly condemned the anti-academic attitude that prevailed in the art schools and he demanded even higher academic standards for the Diploma in Art and Design. He was particularly critical of the approach of the committee to the issue of history of art and complementary studies.[95]

This report ended by giving three criteria for the creation and development of future courses: the demand for places by prospective students, the need for qualified people in society, and the intrinsic value of education in terms of the personal benefits and satisfactions derived from the courses by students.[96] In the first two criteria listed

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[92] Interview with Campbell Bruce, 29th March 1995.

[93] Phillips, "Coldstream/Summerson," 21.

[94] Department of Education and Science, *Joint Report*, 14.

[95] Ibid., 48-49.

[96] Ashwin, *Art Education*, 125.

above, this report asserted the position of the government in relation to jobs and the need to fit in with the projected further expansion of the education sector, as predicted in the Robbins Report of 1963.[97] In the third criterion it asserted Herbert Read's demands and the demands of the modern art establishment for a new and more open type of fine art education.

Later in 1970 the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design produced a second report. With some reservations this report accepted that courses were going according to plan. There were problems in the following areas: varying quality in foundation courses, uneven standard in fine art, some inappropriate design courses, and, in the three dimensional design area, a conflict between a broadly based education and professional training.[98]

It will be recalled that the Basic Design system stated that the making of art was not based on a number of static concepts, but that it changed and extended its boundaries in response to the shift in emphasis in the intellectual and emotional situation of each period of history. This approach to the making of art, which was fundamental to the curriculum that Campbell Bruce introduced at the National College of Art and Design after 1975, was echoed in this second report where it stated the following:

> The Council wishes to emphasise that it has never assumed a rigid or doctrinaire attitude as regards course development. On the contrary it would expect to find all course programmes flexible and capable of progressive modification within whatever terms of reference are established from time to time.
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> The artefacts of the artist whatever the form of manifestation are never final. The practice of art is a self-critical act which is subject to processes of

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[97] United Kingdom, Committee on Higher Education, *Report: Higher Education*, (The Robbins Report), 1963, 48-74; and Richard Layard, John King, and Claus Moser, *The Impact of Robbins*, Penguin Education Special (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1969), 41-44.

[98] United Kingdom, Department of Education and Science, *Second Report of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design*, 1970.

> continuing modification of previous concepts and attitudes. It is not limited by the exactitudes of the disciplined and methods of technology or science, nor by laws of nature even if it is profoundly affected by them. It is concerned with ideas believed to be right at the time of creation but which may or may not be affirmed in the course of time. This is the nature of art education in all its diversity. This diversity is central to its purpose and function in the structure of the education system as a whole.[99]

In relation to Campbell Bruce's assertion that the course that he instigated at the National College of Art and Design after 1975 was a developing process - along the lines suggested by the Basic Design system - that grew out of the needs of both staff and students, it is noteworthy that this report went on to state the following:

> In most colleges the staff have worked as closely knit groups sharing their concern for their Department and the students, who in many instances have a share of responsibility. The growing responsibility of all, including often quite junior staff, part-time staff and visitors, for framing policy, devising courses, selecting students and supervising individual progress through tutorials, as well as for assessing work and giving advice and help to leaving students, is noteworthy and to be commended. In general the argument has been towards studies based on the needs of individuals, together with in some colleges first-year introductory courses of a more didactic nature. The subject is treated much more as a continuously developing process. The 'class room' situation where work was set and criticism made of the job in hand has tended to give way to continuous appraisal of the student's work as a whole in tutorials.[100]

In the final analysis and despite opposition from the fine art departments, the Diploma in Art and Design achieved degree equivalence with the necessary academic content intact.

By the end of the 1970s fine art had drifted into an autonomous position within tertiary level art education which in many ways it still occupies today and which was summarised by one commentator at that time in the following way: "Fine art like everything else had become more specialised. After a brief excursion into Basic Design

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[99] Ibid., 4.

[100] Ibid., 8. See Chapter 14.

and a love affair with the Bauhaus, it had retreated into the world of self expression where the artist could be wholly preoccupied with his private and individual self."[101]

6.6 Conclusion

In 1982 the Society for Research into Higher Education produced a report which examined the effects of the first Coldstream Report in the twenty years since it had been written.

This report stated that Coldstream and Summerson had achieved their overall objectives of putting art education on a par with university education in academic terms and in terms of career viability.[102] The report had some significant criticisms to make, however. The principal criticism was that Coldstream's overall objective was militated against by the faculty system. This objective had been to create a broad based curriculum that would have influence beyond the specific technical needs of artists and designers, and that would have a beneficial effect on society as a whole. The faculty system, which involved each art school being divided into different areas, usually design, education, fashion and textiles, fine art, and history of art and complimentary studies, had the effect of narrowing the curriculum. Thus the faculty system, despite the warnings of the 1970 report, led to the development of different and discreet areas of study, which militated against much needed flexibility in curriculum and course planning, and, according to this report, the development of new types and levels of courses.[103] It therefore went against the ideas of Coldstream, of Read, and of the

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[101] Rushton and Wood, *Politics of Art Education*, 30.

[102] Ken Robinson, ed., *The Arts and Higher Education*, (Guildford: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1982), 145.

[103] Ibid., 147-148.

principles of the Basic Design system in general. The report went on to suggest that existing degree categories were inappropriate to the emergent needs of art education and that the degree awarding body - the Council for National Academic Awards - should broaden the context of art and design education to make it relevant to the multi-cultural and multi-media type of society that existed in 1982.

This report also stated that by building the entire art school curriculum on general fine art based principles, which it states was still the trend in 1982, too much vagueness resulted, and that, as a consequence, many students, but fine art students in particular, ended up without usable skills.[104] It also suggested that because of the high profile and romantic image that fine art had in society, and therefore in art education, a disproportionate number of students entered fine art departments. This situation created a glut of fine art graduates who, according to statistics, had great difficulty finding employment after graduation - this situation had not changed by 1988.[105] It also had the effect of depriving other faculties of a fair proportion of the better students.[106]

In conclusion, this report recommended that "all art and design courses . . . should be planned according to the principle of a broad base proceeding to an appropriate level of specialisation; that they should have a structured curriculum and an explicit set of educational objectives and should be designed to ensure that all students acquire a balanced range of perceptual, conceptual, motor, and social skills."[107]

Generally speaking British art education at tertiary level since 1982 has aimed to achieve the above objectives, whether or not these have been achieved is not the

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[104] Ibid., 147.

[105] John Brennan and Philip McGeevor, *Graduates at Work: Degree Courses and the Labour Market* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1988), 148-149.

[106] Robinson, *The Arts and Higher Education*, 150-151.

[107] Ibid., 148.

objective of the present study, however, it does seem that, to some extent at least, the above objectives have been achieved.[108] The principal problem facing fine art at tertiary level in Britain at the time of writing, according to Theo McNab, who was head of the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublini from 1988 to 2000, is a shortage of staff and a shortage of studio space for students brought on by cutbacks in education.[109]

To summarise: developments in fine art education in Britain between 1945 and 1988, which were closely related to developments in the fine arts, were about responding to developments in the art world and at the same time fitting in with the contingencies that were consequent on the education policies of various governments. Broadly speaking this meant conforming to government demands for the creation of employment and meeting the needs of the new technological Britain that various governments tried to bring about in the post-war era. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s this meant conforming to government demands for degree equivalence. At the same time developments in fine art education were also about the creation of structures and an ethos within fine art education that reflected Herbert Read's belief that art was open ended, of fundamental value to society, and politically radical. Despite the fact that fine art education throughout the period under discussion developed in many ways along lines suggested by Read's thinking, it did not develop in exactly the way that he had imagined. The reason for this was that fine art became isolated from, rather than integrated with, other areas of art education, not to mention education in general, as Read had hoped.

Developments in fine art education throughout this time were also informed by the

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[108] Her Majesties Inspectorate, *Higher education in the Polytechnics*, 9-11.

[109] Interview with Theo McNab, 12 June, 1998.

debate about new definitions of culture that centred on the question of the relationship between popular art and high art. Within fine art education the radical avant-garde, which challenged the position of high art, championed popular art, and high art, which resisted populist intrusions, was represented by classical formalism.

Developments in fine art education were also informed by the international political context of the 1950s and 1960s. This led, in the 1960s and 1970s, to American hegemony in western culture and in western art. In 1945 fine art education in Britain was still dilettantish and free from the restrictions imposed by the industrial needs, the social needs, and the educational needs of the broader society; even the idea of an avant-garde had little influence. In short, its position was one of autonomy within an education system that was broadly liberal and socially stratified. By 1988 the situation was much the same on a practical level within fine art departments. There were, however, two significant differences. The principal difference was that academic demands were now placed on students in order to maintain degree equivalence. A consequence of this was the development a new ethos of professionalism in fine art education. The second difference was that the overall philosophy was no longer based on neo-classicism, but on modernism. A significant consequence of the influence of modernism, and in particular of the influence of the avant-garde, on fine art education was that the concepts of progress, innovation, and criticism became central to fine art curricula in art schools. This led to much confusion among students, and it led to the production of much derivative work by students in art schools. The effects of the above changes on students will now be looked at.

CHAPTER 7

THE EFFECT OF THE COLDSTREAM REPORTS ON ART SCHOOLS: COVENTRY COLLEGE OF ART AND THE SCHOOL OF ART AT GOLDSMITHS' COLLEGE

7.1 Introduction

A significant study of British fine art students was published in 1973 entitled *Art Students Observed.*[1] This study was based on research done at a particular and anonymous art school between 1967 and 1969 to which the authors assign the fictitious name Midville, but which the present author has established was Coventry College of Art.[2] The context of this study was the confused state of third level art education in Great Britain in the late 1960s, and the motivation of the authors in

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[1] Charles Madge and Barbra Weinberger, *Art Students Observed* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973) [1]

[2] Coventry College of Art was incorporated after 1970 into Lanchester Polytechnic. At about the time the research for *Art Students Observed* was being conducted Coventry College of Art was developing a reputation for a particularly radical approach to art practice, an approach that was based largely on analysis and criticism. This approach to art had developed within the curriculum at Coventry at a time when conventional approaches to art and to art education were being challenged. These developments at Coventry paralleled the development in the wider art world of a movement known as "Art and Language" which, following criticisms of Minimal art, adopted language as its means of expression. The hallmark of this group was conceptual critique of contemporary art and its institutions. The influential mouthpiece of the Conceptual movement during the 1970s was the non-pictorial and Tractarian journal *Art & Language*, with which some of the staff at Coventry College of Art were closely associated. It is interesting to note in the context of the scientific bias of Basic Design that the artists associated with Art and Language, in failing to find structures within the disciplines of art itself which could be used to develop a discourse that would enable criticism of contemporary art practice, turned to science and the philosophy of science to provide such a discourse. (Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, *Provisional History of Art and Language* [Paris: Editions E. Fabre, 1982])

carrying out this study was to help resolve some of the problems that had developed in British fine art education since the publication of the Coldstream Report of 1960. In order to build up a profile of contemporary fine art students the authors of *Art Students Observed* recorded some of the changes on the ground that were brought to art education as a consequence of the Coldstream and Summerson Reports. In carrying out their research the authors focussed almost exclusively on the response of students to these changes. It is thus informative to compare the response of students to the new post-1975 curriculum at the National College of Art and Design, which appears in the appendices to Volume II, with the response of students at Coventry. While the research for *Art Students Observed* was being carried out the fine art course at Coventry, in line with developments in the wider art world, was developing a radical, critical, and challenging profile. This was also the case with fine art courses at other British art schools at this time. One such course was the fine art course at Goldsmiths' College in south London, which has since developed into the pre-eminent fine art course in Great Britain. The curriculum at Goldsmiths' over the last thirty years has been hugely influential in relation to the development of contemporary British art, as evidenced in its influence on the current generation of British artists, the so-called 'Brit Art' generation. The fine art curriculum at Goldsmiths' College had a significant influence on the development of the fine art curriculum at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin between 1975 and 1988. Developments at Coventry College of Art and Goldsmiths' College are looked at below.

7.2 The Situation at Coventry College of Art

First of all let us reiterate. Under the new situation in third level art education in Britain that followed the publication of the Coldstream and Summerson Reports

British art schools were free to develop courses that were based on their own ideas. These ideas would of course conform to the broad demands of the Coldstream Reports and to the monitoring eye of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design. Broadly speaking, it will be remembered, it was decided by Coldstream that students were not to specialise too narrowly and that all students who received an art school education were to receive some fine art training. This assertion, as already stated, reinforced the established fine art bias in tertiary level art education and allowed fine art to maintain a position of high status within art schools. This was particularly so within the new pre-diploma courses, or, as they were called after 1965, foundation courses. As a consequence of this situation there was a fine art bias in the foundation course at Coventry as at many other art schools in Great Britain. This bias, according to the authors of *Art Students Observed*, enticed many students who had done the foundation course at Coventry to choose fine art over other areas as their area of specialisation. Problems associated with this bias were addressed by the report of the Society for Research into Higher Education in 1982.[3]

Significantly, in relation to what was to happen in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975, the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design stated that its purpose was not to impose any predetermined pattern on the courses that were to be created in British art schools. Rather, they would let the schools evolve their own artistic standards: "Colleges will have freedom to pursue their own artistic direction and find their own solutions to the common problems".[4] This freedom was to prove problematic in relation to fine art education in British art schools, especially in the context of the rapid changes taking place in the wider art

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[3] See Chapter 6.

[4] Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, 16.

world throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The rapidly changing situation of the wider art world at this time led to much following of fashions and faddishness in art schools and was to lead to much confusion among fine art students. The authors of *Art Students Observed*, not surprisingly, found that, for students, the rapidly changing fashions of the modern art world were just as confusing as was the earlier insularity of British art education. Strikingly, in relation to what was to happen at the National College of Art and Design after 1975, the authors point out that although, theoretically, all styles were available to students at Coventry, in practice, expressionistic and representational modes were generally discouraged. The authors conclude: "A student who had decided to go to an art college at this time was, because of this situation, entering a maelstrom".[5] Thus, a key problem for the student, according to the author, a problem that was echoed at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin ten years later, was that the situation in art school was confusing principally because of underlying doubts about the viability of art in the modern world. This situation, according to the authors, "led to constant reformulations of the artist's role and of the products and activities that could be counted as art".[6] It was significant in this context, as the authors point out, that all modern movements had an influence at the college in Coventry. The authors also point out, again echoing what was to happen in Dublin, that there was a general anti-academic bias in third level fine art education in Britain at this time. This was a situation which the influential American artist and teacher Michael Craig-Martin, who taught at Goldsmiths' College and who had come to Britain in 1966, found striking by contrast with what he had experienced as a student at Yale University.

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[5] Ibid., 17.

[6] Ibid., 17.

The authors go on to make the general point that the choice of style of student's studying fine art at art school in 1969 was based on a combination of external and internal factors. The most decisive factor was what was happening in the art world, and, according to the authors, this essentially meant art in America. The authors point out that the two main trends in American art at this time were formalism and the avant-garde, both of which saw art as a comment on art: "The overriding tendency therefore, in art education, had been towards an autonomous art concerned with its own materiality, and towards the exclusion of extrinsic meanings and functions".[7] Formalists, according to the authors, accept the ends of art as a given aesthetic absolute. Avant-gardism, which is random and unstructured, is not interested in such timeless standards; "The avant-garde thus question the nature of art . . .. Their outlook is didactic and equalitarian where the formalists are more self enclosed and elitist".[8] This is the context into which art students entered when they went to art school at this time and it created problems for students because at art school, according to the authors: "Art students are being socialised into a role which is extremely fluid and ill defined".[9] Here the authors point out one of the major contradictions of art education in the post-Coldstream epoch. This contradiction lies in the idea that an organised three-year course with a diploma at the end could give the student the freedom to unfold in a way that was irregular, unexpected, and revolutionary.[10] This contradiction, as will be shown, was equally evident in the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975.

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[7] Ibid., 18.

[8] Ibid., 19.

[9] Ibid., 20.

[10] Ibid., 20.

The authors summarised the situation of fine art students as they found them in Britain in the late sixties in the following way:

> The problem of the art student is threefold: he has opted out of the dominant occupational system; he is driven to behave as though he had access to a charisma which may not be his to command; and he has to justify this, to himself and to his peers and teachers, in intellectual terms and under conditions of almost unbearable ambiguity.[11]

7.2.1 *Thinking For Oneself: The Foundation Course*

The authors of *Art Students Observed* found that on the foundation course at Coventry College of Art the staff who taught who were most fine art orientated set the tone for the course as a whole and tended to make the most frontal assault on the initial preconceptions of students. According to the authors, students who were most exposed to fine art oriented staff during their foundation year ended up in fine art. It is interesting to note in relation to the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975 (see Chapters 12-14) that one of Coventry's foundation year tutors in describing his objectives said that he aimed to

> disconcert the students, thereby breaking down their preconceptions; to open students' minds to the numerous possibilities contained within any given image; to impress the idea of intellectual stringency as being the important basis for the development of concrete ideas; and develop students general awareness of the essential formal elements.[12]

A further insight into the similarity between what happened at Coventry and what happened in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975 can be had by comparing a list of positively valued aspects of students' work as defined by staff in the Foundation department at Coventry College of Art with

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[11] Ibid., 21.

[12] Ibid., 31.

the syllabus of the fine art course at the National College of Art and Design for 1975.[13] These included the following: "clear logical thinking" as opposed to "woolly thinking", and "significant marks" as against "arbitrary marks". Other positively valued aspects of a student's work included an approach by the student that displayed an interest in one or more of the following: "process of enquiry", "structured analysis", and "spatial relationships". Information gathering was also a highly valued aspect of work, as was evidence of the students' "involvement" in what they were doing. Commitment and "personal development" were the two things that staff valued most highly. These positive attributes, as applied to the work of students and as defined by staff in the Foundation department, were opposed, according to the authors of *Art Students Observed*, with the following categories: "ordinary unadventurous looking work", "elegant decorative work", "work as therapy", "self expression", work based on "perceptions", and work based on "aesthetics".[14] In summary, the authors found that the foundation course at Coventry demanded a logical and analytical approach to work by students that showed evidence of a process at work and that resulted in what were perceived by staff as significant marks. Staff in the Foundation department rejected naturalistic, expressionistic, and decorative work.

The concerns of the foundation course at Coventry are summed up by the words of one tutor who, in criticising a particular piece of work by a certain student, said that it was not the student's job to express his or her ideas and feelings. Rather, it was the work's job to do this. "The artist's job" he said, "was to enquire into form".[15] According to the authors, many students going on to courses other than fine art after

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[13] See appendix 7.

[14] Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, 34.

[15] Ibid., 39.

foundation year, and a few going on to fine art, were critical of the fine art bias in foundation, which seemed to students to come from certain dominant tutors. According to Iseult McCarthy, who was the Professor of Education at the National College of Art and Design from 1985 to 1999, the same situation prevailed at the National College of Art and Design, where, in her opinion, there was also a fine art bias in the foundation course.

According to the authors of *Art Students Observed*, the function of the foundation course at Coventry, which was a typical Basic Design course, was to break down the student's prior conceptions and to prime them for the fine art course. For a majority of students interviewed, according to the authors, "Thinking", which in turn led to questioning, was a major part of the course.[16] The effect of the foundation course is encapsulated by the following remarks of students: "The course made me think for myself and I stopped being influenced by parents and school"; "I became more self analytical and open minded"; "I began to question whether art activity was valid at all".[17] The authors point out that the emphasis on thinking easily shades over into an emphasis on independence and individual development. Phrases like "thinking for oneself" and "making up ones own mind" recur in the comments of students. The majority of students interviewed felt positive about their experiences in the foundation year.[18]

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[16] Ibid., 82.

[17] Ibid., 82-83.

[18] Ibid., 86-88.

7.2.2 *The Fine Art Faculty: Freedom, Autonomy, and a Questioning Attitude*

In the Fine Art faculty at Coventry the two principal values that were held by staff, according to the authors of *Art Students Observed*, were an overriding belief in the need for individual freedom and autonomy, and an equally strong belief in the need for rational explanations and a questioning attitude. The authors found that students studying fine art were confused by the contrast between the apparent freedom implicit in the first of the above values and by the pressure to work in a certain way that grew out of the second. Students, according to the authors, deeply resented the pressures that they felt were being indirectly asserted to get everyone to work in an approved manner. This situation was echoed at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in the 1970s.[19]

The authors also found that students studying fine art regarded the emphasis of the course on the freedom of the individual somewhat cynically as they felt they were subjected to persistent bullying by some staff. Another interesting finding was that students did not expect or rely on staff guidance; this was another aspect of the course that had echoes at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975.[20] In fact, at Coventry the students' most constant complaint about tutors was that they didn't teach and that most were entirely indifferent to the students and to their work. As a result of this situation, according to the authors, the staff at Coventry were forced to admit during the second year of the fine art course that the *laissez faire* system of teaching that they had adopted had failed. No solution was suggested for this problem and no alternative system was suggested for the third year. The authors did not follow up on this study to establish whether there was a subsequent resolution of this issue.

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[19] See Chapter 15.

[20] Ibid.

7.2.3 *The Values of Staff and Students at Coventry College of Art*

In order to bring some clarity to the murky situation of fine art education at this time the authors of *Art Students Observed* constructed a value profile of British art students and art lecturers in the early 1970s. They did this by putting together a list of propositions which they established from research that they conducted at Coventry College of Art and at six other art colleges in Britain at this time. These propositions, they felt, summarised the values held at this and other British art schools by both fine art students and by fine art staff in the period after the publication of the Coldstream and Summerson reports.

A working document of statements of value was put together from this list to which both staff and students at Coventry College of Art were asked to respond. Staff norms were established to see how the particular value or belief was applied in the course at Coventry, and the reactions of students to these statements were recorded in order to establish student response to those values. Because of their usefulness in comparing what happened in British fine art education after the publication of the Coldstream and Summerson Reports with what happened at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975 a brief summary of the staff and student responses to these propositions follows.

Statement 1: "There exist certain undefined but commonly agreed on standards in art education."

The staff response to this statement was that there were standards and that students' work was criticised in relation to these standards.

The student response to this statement was that since standards are undefined students were not sure on what basis their work was being evaluated; they thus became very suspicious of formal assessments. Criticism of a student's work therefore tended

to be felt as an attack on the student's personality. The authors point out that staff made their assessment on intuition, based on years of experience comparing student artwork, and that students took results far too literally or else just dismissed them as personal opinion.

Statement 2: "There are no predictable end results or forms for any art activity as there are no fixed criteria on what constitutes art."

The staff response to this statement was that new forms and media were acceptable and that students were not required to justify the outcome of their activities as art.

The response of the students to this statement was that new forms and media were valued, particularly as they encouraged personal development. Students were not concerned that what they produced was art.

Statement 3: "Art cannot be taught."

According to many members of staff, this was generally agreed to be true and students were consequently left alone to develop along lines of their own choice.

The student response was that although many of them felt lost as a result of not being given direction by staff, they valued the freedom and the respect shown by tutors for their ideas.

Statement 4: "Art is the outcome of specific concepts and procedures pertaining to itself and therefore can be taught."

The authors found that an important sub-group of teachers who believed this taught according to clearly defined concepts. According to these members of staff these concepts emerged during the teaching process and students were expected to arrive at an understanding of them through their work.

Students responded positively to this statement if they were sympathetic to the ideas of tutors who supported this way of thinking; otherwise they avoided these tutors.

Statement 5: "An attitude can be taught, and one of the purposes of tuition in art college is to discourage a misguided attitude and to instil a better one."

The staff response to this statement was that an analytical attitude was encouraged and an expressionistic attitude was discouraged.

For students this was an area where the greatest conflict with tutors arose. The reason for this was that the apparent freedom which students were given was contradicted by the harsh criticism that they received from tutors.

Statement 6: "The professional artist who also teaches is of greater value at art college than the professional art teacher."

Among staff art teaching as a career was talked about in derogatory terms or not discussed at all. Staff told students that they were learning to become professional artists and that they were being taught by professionals.

Students agreed with this statement, and pursued the course with the aim of becoming professional artists. However, in the final year of the course students felt let down when they realised that little other than teaching was available to them.

Statement 7: "Clear thinking and a process of enquiry matter more than producing finished art objects."

In response to this statement, staff stated that students were encouraged to draw as a form of inquiry and to write down their thoughts, and that the finished art object was not the focus.

Students felt that as a consequence of this approach by staff they were discouraged from producing paintings and that little emphasis was laid on the production of finished

work. Students became self-conscious and developed theories about their work which were sometimes defensive. Nearly all students, however, valued the thought required of them on the course.

Statement 8: "Commitment is what matters."

According to staff, commitment was important, and students who were not committed to their work were put on probation. These students were sometimes asked to leave college.

The issue of commitment was, according to the authors, a difficult one for students. The authors found that, if students could provide convincing explanations and assurance of commitment, lack of work of any kind, completed or otherwise, was excused.

Statement 9: "Art departments are for students with a personal point of view."

In response to this statement staff agreed that standing up for ones work aggressively was approved of, that eccentric behaviour was tolerated, and that colourful or neurotic personalities stood a good chance of being selected at interview.

Many students, in response to this statement, said that they felt lost when not given a starting point or direction and that they had difficulties in finding a point of view.

Statement 10: "The value of an art education is in furthering personal development in whatever direction this may lead."

Staff agreed that student purposes were taken seriously and respected and that no evaluation of students was made prior to the "actualisation of aims". According to staff, consideration was given to each student's aims, desires, and problems, and an effort was made to help the students implement their aims. At the same time, according to staff, questioning was intended to be thought provoking, and critical awareness was assumed to foster personal development.

Students accepted this statement as a norm, but resented the questioning of staff as an intrusion into privacy. According to the authors, students developed cover stories to ward off tutors' questions.[21]

7.2.4 *Can Art be Taught?*

Having established the values held by both staff and students in the Fine Art faculty at Coventry College of Art the authors go on to address the attitude of the same staff and students to the question of whether art can be taught. They do this by comparing the responses of fine art students, graphic design students, foundation students, and tutors to specific questions.

The authors found that, in general, in the Fine Art faculty half of the tutors interviewed and two thirds of the students interviewed felt that art could not be taught. Students from all the different areas in the college were asked the following question: "Do you think there are basic principles in art which are teachable and which it is necessary to know?" In response to this question, eighty-three percent of foundation students expressed agreement, seventy-seven per cent of graphic design students expressed agreement, but only forty-four percent of fine art students expressed agreement. The orientation of fine art was therefore away from principles that could be taught. The forty-four per cent of fine art students who said that there were principles had less to say and were less specific about what these principles were than either graphic design or foundation students. In responding to a question about assessing their own or other peoples work, the authors found the ascendancy of personal, aesthetic, and intuitive criteria marked among fine art students, who also, according to

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[21] Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, 71-74.

the authors, related least to the work and opinion of others. Following on from this, the authors asked the question, "Are there any external standards in art?" Most fine art students answered this question in the negative. The authors then asked the question, "Do you think one needs talent in order to be able to do art?" In response to this question, seventy-three per cent of graphic design students said "yes", fifty-seven per cent of foundation students said "yes", and thirty-four per cent of fine art students said "yes". According to the authors, "A rather high proportion of fine art students either answered that they 'don't know', or 'don't know what talent is', or found the question nonsensical".[22] In response to the question, "Has the search for a suitable style ever been one of your problems in art?" forty-eight pre cent of foundation students said "yes", fifty-four per cent of graphic design students said "yes", and thirty-two percent of fine art students said "yes". Of the forty-one per cent of fine art students to whom the question was put, seven gave no reply and twenty-one denied that style had been a problem. For eight students the problem lay in the past; for four it was continuing. One Coventry student summarised the problem of a search for a style in the terse remark, "Such a search would be wrong".[23] Thus, the authors concluded, the majority of fine art students felt that art could not be taught, that art was a very personal intuitive thing, that there were no external standards in art, that talent was not necessary to make art, and that the search for a style was a real problem for fine art students. In making these assertions fine art students stood out in stark contrast with graphic design students and foundation students. The authors conclude from this that fine art students were socialised at art school into a particular set of values.

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[22] Ibid., 79.

[23] Ibid., 80.

Having said this, the authors pointed out that there was a high proportion of dissatisfied students in first year fine art as a consequence of the belief among staff that art cannot be taught. Fifty-nine per cent of first year fine art students felt this way, according to the authors, because the onus was on them to find their own direction. This percentage had dropped in second year and third year to seventeen per cent and seventeen percent respectively. Common responses of students in relation to this issue included the following: "I realise no-one - staff or students - quite knows what to do"; "I have become disillusioned"; "I thought I knew what I wanted to do, now I don't know".[24]

7.2.5 *The Response of Fine Art Students to Tutors*

In the comments of students on tutors, according to the authors, there was some variation and much consistency. In general students were critical of tutors and negative about their effectiveness as teachers. The following are some examples of student comments: "It's good that there isn't much [contact], I get as much as I want"; "You can have it [contact with tutors] if you want"; "Tuition is rather sparse, but I don't know what they could teach other than techniques"; "There is not enough communication or exchange of ideas with staff"; I haven't really had any tuition, I would like more contact with tutors"; "I would like more help in directing myself"; "There is no tuition".[25]

In second and third years, according to the authors, the situation had improved slightly. But there was still a strong negative feeling about tutors. The following are

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[24] Ibid., 92.

[25] Ibid., 93-100.

the comments of some second and third year students: "I was left on my own too much at the beginning"; "I would prefer the tuition to be more organised"; "There is not enough tuition; One is left to muddle on alone"; "I find staff are completely uninterested, there is no discussion or relationship between staff and students"; "I should like more technical help". Many students were confused by the approach of tutors to them and by the response of tutors to their work. The following comments show this quite clearly: "Because there is so much questioning you cut yourself off at the roots - there is very little work produced here"; "I was put on probation but was not told why . . . then I was told my work was too pretty . . . now I do 'hard edge', and I'm left to work on my own"; "I do my own type of work at home"; "I get depressed at times but I think I can develop a personal style when I leave college . . . my tutors have not spoken to me for over three years, but the freedom given one is good".[26] There is a strikingly negative aspect to the comments of students on the tutors at Coventry, and this certainly reflects a reaction to the confrontational and iconoclastic stance to the conventions of art taken by the avant-garde members of staff at the college and in particular to the disproportional influence of those members of staff who were associated with the Art & Language group within the faculty. This situation had exact parallels in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975, when a similar approach by an avant-garde faction created discord.[27]

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[26] Ibid., 93-100.

[27] See Chapter 14.

6.2.6 *The Response of Fine Art Students to the Course*

As fine art students criticised tutors so they criticised the course, however, as the course progressed students adapted to the lack of structure and comments became less critical. The comments of first year students included the following: "Something about the college drains confidence"; "Individual development is encouraged in theory but in practice I don't feel free"; "I don't see it as a course, it hasn't got any set form"; "The wishy-washy atmosphere is depressing, I never used to find coming to college . . . depressing . . . the apathy spreads to all activities". Apathy and pessimism were evident in the comments of many students in first year, some of which were particularly critical of staff: "I wouldn't know how to define the course, it isn't a course as such"; "Stupid, abysmal and blind . . . boredom and flippancy is a condition of survival in art college"; "Decaying glibness and blandness has set in as a rot"; "The college is pretty mixed up, tutors don't know what they want from students".

Though students were still critical, apathy was less marked in second year. By third year students had adapted better, as the following comments from one particular student indicate: "Not enough is expected of students; there is not enough pressure to work. I didn't like to be left alone and told to get on with my work at first; I was used to working for set projects. I found it took three years to cope with the freedom of the course; I'm only just beginning to appreciate it. I wasted a lot of time in the first two years wondering what to do with the freedom." Another student made the following comments: "I didn't realise early enough that what one made of the course depended on oneself . . . I wasn't prepared and didn't make use of the freedom given". Another student said, "Now I think the course was good but [during the course] I was often in

a state of confusion". And finally, on a positive note, one student stated the following: "Out of all the confusion one learns one's own sense of direction".[28]

In relation to the development of student's work during the course, twenty-nine per cent of students felt their work had become more conceptual, and nineteen per cent of students felt their work had become more personal and detached.[29] Twenty-six per cent of students felt that their work had developed in technique or style. The type of development that students had in mind is described in the following quotation: "I have changed from being directed by others and things done to please others to things done which I may not particularly like, but where the thought behind it matters more than the finished object".[30] While this quotation summarises the direction taken by students whose work developed, many students felt frustrated, confused, and indecisive because of questioning, and twenty six per cent of students felt that their work did not develop over the duration of the course.

In the case of some students, questioning caused them to produce no art works at all or to fail to complete work, as the following comments make clear: "I am now questioning the aims of what I am doing, so much so that I find nothing is valid to take to a conclusion"; "I have changed from just turning out canvases to being in great doubt not turning out anything at all - this bothers me a great deal"; "I think more and I don't work so much on impulse - thought often stops me putting anything down"; "I have a lot more ideas but haven't the visual representation of them. I have them written down. It is important for me to have them executed in visual form, but I

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[28] Ibid., 93-100.

[29] This apparent contradiction reflects the requirement of the curriculum that students develop their own personal approach to formal analysis and yet maintain an emotional distance, and adopt a non-declamatory approach to artwork.

[30] Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, 101.

haven't been able to concentrate. I don't know why - it is getting worse because I worry so much about it".[31] By third year the feeling of non-development is different, as the following comments indicate: "I don't know to what degree I have developed - the main value of the course has been to make me think more about my work"; "I haven't developed the skill in five years [including two years in foundation] that I should have, . . . I am . . . now producing finished work with a half finished technique. . . . I need finished work for the diploma show. I never managed to [finish work] before this year, I felt my work unfinished". The predilection for personal work, and even solipsistic work, which the fine art programme at Coventry College of Art encouraged among students, is illustrated in the following quotes: "My work has become far more personal; this is important to me, I don't care any more what others think of it"; "I am now producing work self directed and initiated, . . . it is no longer done for the sake of doing work because one is at college".[32]

By the end of the course some students had developed a very positive approach to their work. Examples of student comments include the following: "I have become more open to the use of different media - it is a process of experiment at the moment"; "I have developed from a forced abstract style to a more relaxed naturalistic style"; "I used to work more spontaneously, my work has become more definite in execution"; "I have learnt techniques of putting down what I want"; "I have become more sensitive to the media used".[33] In conclusion, the fine art course at Coventry was designed to encourage students to focus on themselves, their ideas, and the expression of these

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[31] Ibid., 100-103.

[32] Ibid., 100-103.

[33] Ibid., 100-103.

ideas in a situation that contained within it the contradictory aspects of rigorous criticism and total freedom.

7.2.7 *Self-Referential and Self-Directed Work*

According to the authors of *Art Students Observed*, the whole approach of fine art education that they found at Coventry College of Art was towards self-direction and self-referential work. They state that at Coventry fine art students generally agreed that this was a good thing. The authors found that ninety-two per cent of all students surveyed at Coventry, and not just fine art students, agreed that "the value of an art education is in furthering personal development in whatever direction this may lead".[34] They also found that in the Fine Art faculty this trend was exacerbated. Students were asked to respond to the question, "Was your outlook [at secondary school] different from those not taking up art?" In response to this question fifty-nine per cent of fine art students said yes and forty-one per cent said no. When they were asked whether now, as fine art students, their outlook was different, sixty-nine per cent said "yes" and twenty-seven per cent said "no". One graphic design student in commenting on this trend among fine art students said: "Fine art students are forced to be a bit more eccentric than others". Another said, "fine art [students] are shut away from everything"; and another said, "fine art [students] can do work that communicates only with itself". Continuing this theme, another graphic design student, in referring to the fashion among fine art students for building cubicles around themselves in order to isolate themselves from each other, said "In the fine art studio individuals cut

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[34] Ibid., 70.

themselves off physically from each other, so I suppose they do so mentally".[35] Some graphic design students were particularly critical, as the following comments illustrate: "Fine arts [sic] set up introversion as a cult"; "They are like Brahmins . . . even solipsist". The authors conclude that at Coventry fine art students were being socialised towards greater separateness as individuals, while graphic design students tended to be more group-minded.[36]

The authors of *Art Students Observed* point out that, when asked when they became self-directed in their work, all students understood what it meant. No one said, "It depends on what you mean by self-directed". Most students, according to the authors, could give the date that they became self-directed. In response to the question of whether their work was self-directed fine art students answered "yes" in the following proportions: first year students forty-one per cent, second year students seventy-eight per cent, and third year students eighty-eight per cent. By comparison with fine art students, graphic design students answered "yes" in the following proportions: first year nineteen per cent, second year fifty-one per cent, and third year eighty-one per cent.[37] In summary, then, the authors concluded that while art education in general encouraged students to think and work as individuals, and to be self-directed in their work, this trend was particularly marked among fine art students. The principal consequence of this situation was that much of the work that was produced by fine art students was esoteric, self referential, and self-directed.

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[35] Interestingly, this fashion of students cutting themselves off from each other by building partitions around their work areas in order to isolate themselves was repeated in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in the 1970s. This trend was commented on by the artist Charlie Brady, who taught in the Fine Art faculty at this time. See appendix 10.

[36] Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, 113-117.

[37] Ibid., 122.

7.2.8 *The Response of Individual Students to the Fine Art Course*

In a particularly informative section of *Art Students Observed* the authors look closely at the response of individual fine art students to the course. These responses are revealing, and they make an interesting comparison with the interviews that appear in the appendices to Volume II of the present study and with interviews that Professor Iseult McCarthy carried out in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in 1979, both of which are considered in Chapter 14. What follows is a very brief summary of some of the more pertinent observations of students at Coventry College of Art.

Before these observations are considered, it is interesting to note that the two principal tutors in the Fine Art faculty at Coventry represented the two dominant factions in the contemporary art world at the school: conceptualism and formalism. The authors point out that on occasion there was serious and very public disagreement between these two factions on the merits of the work of individual students.

The first student interviewed by the authors was a student called Pam. Pam found art school difficult and she was confused and unhappy there. She was particularly annoyed that technical ability was not valued, and she remarked that students who got high ratings in assessments were not able to draw. She felt that everything was given equal value, and therefore she felt that it was difficult to make judgements and decisions. As a consequence of this situation she had no interest in the opinions of teachers.

Another student called Jean, who had had a rebellious attitude at school, felt that the foundation year was about purging, but also about brainwashing, and had been rather painful. Jean felt that staff in the Fine Art faculty showed no interest in skill or in practical work because their only interest was in "the idea, the whole idea, and nothing

but the idea, regardless of visual interpretation". She summarised her attitude to her work thus: "The underlying idea behind all my work is to make more of me so that I can see it. It is essentially for me to see, for me to be surrounded, not for communicating me to others".[38]

Many students felt restricted and defensive about their work, and some were afraid to produce work. This response by students was a reaction to the complex and fraught situation in which they found themselves. One particular student called Giles felt that he was seriously and negatively effected by the foundation year and that he was terrified initially in fine art but eventually had overcome this fear. The authors felt he was defensive about his work.[39] A student called Liz stated that she had not got on well in fine art because she had not been given enough tuition. She thought that the intellectual approach to work in the faculty was good but that it meant less work was produced because students questioned the relevance of what they were doing.[40] The issue of students not being able to produce artwork was common and arose again in the comments of the authors on the work of a student called Frances. These comments reveal how staff put pressure on students to work in a certain way and how this pressure discouraged students from producing work. According to the authors, "Frances did not produce paintings, though motivated, because she needs to work out an acceptable response to pressures from staff before she does so".[41] Another student who the authors found to be negative and defensive about her work was a student called Diana. According to the authors, Diana painted in a traditional manner and was

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[38] Ibid., 129.

[39] Ibid., 134.

[40] Ibid., 150.

[41] Ibid., 141.

often too afraid of tutors to come into college. The paintings of another student called Jackie were considered vague and decorative by staff. In trying to get her to change her style, the authors pointed out, one staff member suggested that she should become more analytical in her approach to her work by doing analytical drawings, and that she should become more aware of formal problems.[42] The work of another student was very intellectual and, as a consequence, according to the authors, staff asked him why he was not at university instead of art school. As students were encouraged to be analytical by staff and to focus on the development of ideas, this response disconcerted him.[43]

The comments of one particular tutor on the work of a student called Brian illustrate the difficulty staff had in judging students' work. It also illustrates the fact that bluff was a tactic that students used in order to cope with the complex situation that they found in the Fine Art faculty at the college: "Brian gives the appearance of knowing what he is doing. . . . I get the impression sometimes that he is inclined to take up an avant-garde posture".[44] Brian told one of the authors that, apart from the avant-garde work that he does at art school, he also paints at home as a hobby. According to the author, this work involved

> mostly meticulous drawings of cars and machinery which he also does because he enjoys it and not with any sort of irony. On one occasion Brian did a drawing of the sun, taken from Hogusai. A member of staff told him it was rubbish. He was told to go and do some life drawing, which he took as a very critical remark, so he decided to keep this type of work as something he does at home.[45]

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[42] Ibid., 155.

[43] Ibid., 157.

[44] Ibid., 160-161.

[45] Ibid., 161.

Though interested in the avant-garde work that he was doing in college, and although his work was interesting to others, Brian lost a lot of interest in his work because of the response of staff to what he was doing.

The case of a student called Bert provides an interesting example of the confrontational type of relationship that developed between staff and students as a consequence of the avant-garde dimension of the course, and how that relationship impacted negatively on the performance of students. At a group discussion in the faculty, and in echoing the ideas of the American critic Clement Greenberg, (1909-1994) whose ideas were hugely influential at this time, Bert said that art could stand for itself. In response to this, one particular staff member said that it was the articulation of the problem and not the object standing there in its mystical silence that was important. He also pointed out, alluding to the demise of the art object in avant-garde art, that artists were increasingly taking to writing. Shortly after this discussion the same staff member asked to see Bert's work. Bert said that he, the particular member of staff, would not be interested, as he wouldn't consider it as art. The staff member said that it was more to the point whether Bert considered it to be art. Bert said he wasn't interested in art. The staff member said that was obvious. Bert was surprised and pointed out that he had received the highest mark in the assessments of the previous year and had therefore thought that the tutors all approved of his work. The staff member responded that he didn't approve of Bert's work. Bert then said that he had found the whole art set up farcical and that as a consequence he had deliberately set out to do something in a particular project so that he would get bottom marks. To his surprise, he stated, he got rated very highly. After this, according to Bert, he lost all respect for the tutors. The staff member then asked Bert if he had ever been interested in art. Bert said that it had been knocked out of him in the foundation

year where dots and hard edge work had been praised rather than personal imagery. This, according to Bert, is where the break with art had come from. The tutor then said that Bert's motivation could not have been very strong to begin with. Subsequent to this conversation the artwork that Bert produced took the form of performances - performance as an art form was gaining in importance and popularity at this time. The performances that Bert carried out attempted to interfere with the procedure of the college; they interrupted lectures, for instance. As he got no reaction to his performances in the Fine Art faculty Bert lost interest in producing artwork. He was eventually put on probation. Subsequently, while still at college, Bert took a full time job at a bakery, and he eventually graduated with a pass diploma.[46]

Another student called Joe remarked to one of the authors of *Art Students Observed* that because he had said to one of the tutors that he enjoyed making a series of cubes for a particular project he was told that his work was self-indulgent. This confused him. Revealingly, in showing a private notebook to one of the authors of *Art Students Observed* Joe said that it was all right for her to see it because she was not one of the enemy, that is, one of the tutors.[47]

The story of Dave proves another interesting case. Dave's work was about chickens. Dave built chicken huts and made complex looking graphs and charts that had to do with the live chickens that inhabited his huts. In commenting on how seriously the tutors took Dave's obsession with chickens, one of the authors said: "I am often amused at the patience tutors show towards students' aims and ideas which are not obviously related to any art product, while their tolerance of art products of which they don't approve is strictly limited". In response to a pep talk from staff Dave

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[46] Ibid., 162-168.

[47] Ibid., 168-174.

said to the authors that it was "the usual management lies about no one wanting to force anything on them and that they were all free to develop their own ideas". Later on Dave said to one of the authors that there was too much talk about art by staff and that he does work which he believes will be acceptable to them. He also admitted to the authors that all of the things that he does at college are "cover stories". He stated that he does the things he is really interested in at home. When asked why he couldn't do them at college, he said because he could not justify them, as he doesn't always know why he is doing something or where it is leading him. He felt there was pressure from staff to work in a certain way and that all the work in college looked the same. When questioned by the authors on the serious approach that he took to problem solving, Dave said that in the Fine Art faculty a serious approach was expected, and that therefore he took that approach. In other words, while dealing with fine art staff, Dave reserved his real thoughts about his ideas. When told by the author that he had been given a B assessment Dave laughed and said that conning had paid off. This convinced him all the more to keep the paintings that he did at home separate from the work that he did at college because he would not be able to justify them. He supposed, according to the authors, that the tutors thought there was something deep and intellectual behind the work that he did at college, but that it was quite simple really. Dave was the only student to get a 1:1 in his final assessment, and he went on to get a post graduate place at the Royal College of Art.[48]

From the interviews with students from which the above examples were drawn the authors summarised the situation in the Fine Art faculty at Coventry in the following way. (1) There was a general indication of strain among the art students observed. (2) This strain was rooted in the carving up of the class by tutors into two distinct groups,

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[48] Ibid., 182.

"interesting" students and "mediocre" students. The students considered to be mediocre were all painters. (3) Because of the difficult situation in the Fine Art faculty a significant number of students absented themselves from college. (4) The approved orientation of the Fine Art faculty was anti-art, but when students went too far in this direction they were accused of being philistine or challenged for staying at college. (5) As a consequence of the influence of one particular staff member who encouraged students to move away from the production of objects, a number of students produced work that was almost exclusively verbal.

7.2.9 *A New Trend: Art & Language*

The trend towards verbalisation in the fine art course at Coventry College of Art led, in the academic year 1968/69, to a radical reconstruction of the fine art course at Coventry. This involved students concentrating in the first five terms of the course on an analysis of language. There was a manifestation in the wider art world at this time of this trend towards verbalisation in the appearance of a periodical entitled *Art & Language*, and in articles in the art press.[49] As a consequence of this development, and of the influence of certain staff who were associated with this group, painting and sculpture became more or less obsolete descriptions of what was done at Coventry College of Art. They were replaced by a certain kind of linguistic philosophy, which was inspired by British analytical philosophy and other academic disciplines. An interesting consequence of this, according to the authors, was that high motivation in a student was no longer considered a good sign by fine art staff. Rather, low motivation

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[49] See Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," *Studio International* 178 (October 1969): 134-137; idem "Art After Philosophy part II: Conceptual art and Recent Art." *Studio International* 178 (November 1969): 160-161; idem Art After Philosophy: Part III." *Studio International* 178 (December 1969): 212-213.

was given a much higher valuation by staff as it might indicate a questioning attitude which had become increasingly desirable since the new approved mode was not the making of, but the definition of art. The authors illustrated the effect of this situation on the artwork that was produced by students with the example of work developed in a group show organised by the second year students. There were no paintings in this show. There were five framed two-dimensional images: photos and negatives. There were six written statements. There were five assemblages or events. There was one minimalist sculpture; this was the only 'art' object in the show, and, the authors point out, it was much despised for being an actual art object by staff and students alike. There was one diagrammatic drawing. There was one sheet of pencil rubbings taken from paving stones. And two of the most serious avant-garde students withdrew their work from the show as they disapproved of the frivolous type of work that predominated. The authors suggested that fourteen of the works were defensive or superficial adaptations of the idea-based style of art favoured by staff, that five were serious personal statements, and that one was an ironic personal statement.

7.2.10 *The Situation of Students After College*

The authors state that, after the merger of Coventry College of Art with the local Polytechnic in 1970, there was a move away from the radical avant-garde trend in the Fine Art area at Coventry and there was a partial reversion to visual work. Beyond that the authors did not know how the fine art course developed as no follow-up study was carried out. The authors did point out, however, that the insecurities of the students continued at Coventry as a consequence of the confused situation that prevailed in the college for some years after its merger with the polytechnic. During this period there was a high turnover of staff and there was much reorganisation of courses. Many of

the radical staff, whose contracts were temporary, did not have their contracts renewed after the merger with the polytechnic.

No particular follow-up study was carried out at Coventry to see how students did after they left the college. The authors of *Art Students Observed* did, however, give an account of the situation of art and design students in general in Britain at this time after graduation. Generally speaking they found that fine art students fared badly with regard to employment, especially when compared with graphic design students. The following table is a breakdown of the comparative situation of fine art and graphic design students in relation to employment two years after they graduated with a Diploma in Art and Design.

The Employment Situation of Fine Art Students and Graphic Design Students Two Years After Graduation

	Fine Art %	Graphic Design %
Painter, sculptor, other fine art	3	2
Commercial and industrial occupations related to art and design	7	52
Teaching	32	17
Lecturing	10	2
Full-time art or design courses	19	8
Full-time non-art courses	1	1
Non-art jobs	14	8
Unemployed, housewife, etc.	13	8
Not known	1	2

The trends illustrated by this table[50] were, according to the authors, confirmed by confidential information that they obtained from the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design. The following is a breakdown of how students who were awarded diplomas in art and design were employed one year later, according to this information.

The Employment Situation of Fine Art Students as Compared with Graphic Design Students One Year After Graduation

	Fine Art %	Graphic Design %
Art Teachers Dip. course	30	16
Other post-dip. course	28	18
Teaching	14	5
Work connected with art	7	44
Work not connected with art	4	2
Not known	17	15

7.2.11 *Summary*

In summarising the findings of *Art Students Observed*, the authors reiterated that the consensus among fine art students at the time the book was written was that the value of an art education was in furthering personal development in whatever direction this might lead, and that the freedom given to each student in a course such as that at

[50] This information is taken from a report called *The Employment of the Art College Leaver*. It was published in 1971 and it was based on 2788 questionnaires which were completed by former students of art schools.

Coventry to follow his or her own development was very valuable. The feeling of being different, according to the authors, was common among fine art students. An interesting observation in this context was that while graphic design students developed a sense of group identity while at art school fine art students did the exact opposite; ninety-four per cent of third-year graphic design students saw themselves as members of a group as compared with only sixteen per cent of fine art students. The authors thus concluded that fine art education was primarily about socialisation into a particular way of thinking; an individualistic, independent, and self-contained way of thinking.

The authors found that in the foundation year - alongside the disemphasis on the expressive, intuitive, and internal in favour of the cognitive, conceptual, and external - 'thinking' was repeatedly stressed as an important part of the process of art making. One student commented that at secondary school art had been a form of expression and rebellion, but that on the foundation course he discovered that the communication and investigation of ideas was more important. The authors found that fine art students felt disoriented by the discontinuities between school, the foundation course, and the diploma courses. This disorientation was made worse by the style of tuition adopted by the tutors in the Fine Art faculty. According to the authors, "this consisted in leaving students to their own devices over long periods and then exposing them to hard hitting criticisms in group tutorials". This approach was a consequence of the belief that art could not be taught. Students were expected to work out their own salvation. They were then told publicly and with no pulling of punches whether they were regarded by the tutors as having failed. Many students, according to the authors, especially girls, found this unnerving and depressing in the extreme. Having said this, the authors found that, broadly speaking, socialisation was successful at Coventry and that, as a

consequence, by the third year eighty-eight per-cent of fine art students answered "yes" to the question, "Have you become self directed?" Not all fine art students felt that this had been a good thing, however. The response of a number of fine art graduates who did the Art Teachers Diploma after they graduated from Fine Art was that doing the Art Teachers Diploma had counteracted the unrealistic aspects of the fine art course. These students felt particularly strongly about this and stated that as a consequence of doing the Art Teachers Diploma course they had become more practical and down to earth in their aims and objectives.[51]

In summary, the authors of *Art Students Observed* exposed the problematic, contradictory, and unresolved situation of fine art education in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Britain that had developed as a result of the changes brought about by the Coldstream and Summerson Reports. The confused, difficult, and disorganised situation of fine art students that was described in *Art Students Observed* continued well into the 1980s in Britain.[52]

The authors summarise the situation of fine art education in the early 1970s in the following way:

> The larger problem is of course the future of art itself as a socially recognised activity, and the future of the role of the artist as this activity continues to be re-examined and re-defined. Our study has demonstrated the ambiguities of the process of socialisation into art, in the framework of expanding higher education, and in the context of increasing technicization of all roles, activities and institutions.[53]

Subsequent to the above study the principal trend in fine art education in Britain has been towards specialisation, where schools develop house styles. These house styles

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[51] Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, 277.

[52] Dave Rushton and Paul Wood, *The Politics of Art Education* (London: Studio Trust, 1979), 44-50.

[53] Madge and Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, 277.

conform to the different approaches to art in the wider art world, and are usually related to the interests of staff. So, for instance, Saint Martin's School of Art is known for its focus on formalist sculpture and the Slade for its analytical approach to art. One art school, however, is outstanding for its contribution to contemporary British art. This is Goldsmiths' College in London. In as much as it is possible, given the pluralistic state of contemporary art, Goldsmiths' encapsulates the general situation of contemporary fine art education in Britain.

7.3 The Pinnacle of Achievement: Goldsmiths' College

As already shown, by the early 1970s tertiary level art education in Britain no longer looked to either the arts and crafts aesthetic or to the traditional neo-classical aesthetic, various combinations of which had dominated art education in Britain until the publication of the Coldstream reports. The new curricula that had evolved during the 1950s and 1960s were rooted in the liberal and regenerative political context of the post-war era and in the aesthetics of modernism. Broadly speaking, the curricula of most British art schools had been realigned by 1976, when degrees were first awarded, and by which time a whole new focus and structure had established itself in third level art education. This reorientation is best illustrated by the success of the School of Art at Goldsmiths' College in London – commonly known as Goldsmiths' College - which is attested by its status as the pre-eminent British art school today. Goldsmiths' is a constituent college of the University of London.

The work of artists who have graduated from the School of Art at Goldsmiths' College in south London since the mid-1970s represents the pinnacle of achievement of British art and British art education in the last twenty-five years. A significant

number of these artists have been responsible for the phenomenon known as Brit Art, the controversial and much hyped work of young artists such as Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Julian Opie, Fiona Rae, and Tracy Emin. The status of Goldsmiths' as the pre-eminent British art school was underlined by an article that appeared in the English newspaper *The Independent* in 1995, which described Goldsmiths' as the Oxbridge of English art schools.[54] The curriculum at Goldsmiths', which was developed largely in the 1970s, came out of the same social, historical, and political crucible as the post-1975 curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin and there are striking similarities between the two. In many ways, the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design was modelled on the curriculum at Goldsmiths'.

Goldsmiths' College, which had been founded in 1905, was the largest teacher training college in Britain before the Second World War. During the war it declined because of the evacuation of students and because of bomb damage. By 1950 the situation of the college had deteriorated to such an extent that it was scheduled for closure by the Department of Education and Science. The situation of the college was turned around by the appointment of a new Warden, Ross Chesterman, in 1953, and in the new context of the expansion of the education sector in the post-war years it thrived.

Throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s the School of Art at Goldsmiths' College kept abreast of developments in third level art education, and its curriculum, which has always been innovative, reflected this. As a result of this, during the reorganisation of tertiary level art education under the National Advisory Council for Art Education the School of Art at Goldsmiths' College was one of the few art

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[54] S.R. Chesterman, *Golden Sunrise* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press Ltd., 1996), 105.

colleges in Britain to have both its painting and sculpture courses passed for accreditation. It will be recalled (see Chapter 6) that only twenty-nine out of eighty-seven colleges of art had any course at all approved. Croydon, for instance, an art school of high reputation, had none and Chelsea had only one.

By 1975 the student body studying fine art at Goldsmiths' comprised 120 students divided into four groups, each group being in the charge of one full time tutor and several part time tutors. The largest group, in painting, had two full time tutors. A particular feature of the fine art curriculum at Goldsmiths' was that there was no separation between years - first, second, and third year students were mixed together - and there were no separate departments of painting and sculpture; there was only one department: fine art. This innovative and radically new approach to art education, which removed the barriers that separated the different disciplines of fine art, was a consequence of the first Coldstream Report. The first Coldstream Report, it will be recalled, had suggested that students should not specialise too narrowly and that all subjects should be studied in a broad context. The overall aim of fine art education, according to this report, was to teach students "the fundamental skills and disciplines which underlie and sustain any form of specialisation in art and design".[55] This objective was in line with Bauhaus ideas. The complete absence of barriers between different disciplines and different years was a particular feature of the course at Goldsmiths'. According to Michael Craig-Martin, who is Millard Professor of Fine Arts at Goldsmiths', this situation is as rare in British art education today as it was in 1974 when he started to teach full time at Goldsmiths'.[56]

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[55] United Kingdom, Department of Education and Science, *First Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education*, 1960, 4.

[56] Michael Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission: An Inaugural Lecture given by Professor Michael Craig-Martin on 16 February 1995* (London: Athlone Press Ltd., 1991), 13.

This innovative open curriculum at Goldsmiths' works very well and has done so from the very beginning. A panel of assessors for the Council for National Academic Awards who visited the college in 1975 found, for instance, that in the fine art course, despite the fact that all three years were mixed together, each group had a clear identity. It also found that this identity was conveyed to the students, and that this situation created a good working atmosphere. The assessors also concluded that there was good communication between groups, which prevented an unduly narrow course of study, and that students felt free to move between groups, exhibiting work in other group's studios, and engaging in seminars and discussions relating to their work.[57] Crucially in a course such as this, the panel of assessors for the Council for National Academic Awards found that there were adequate procedures in place to monitor students' progress and that consequently students work showed progression. They also found that students were working "seriously and with great commitment",[58] that part time staff made an impressive contribution to the course, and that the high proportion of part time staff did not mean that the course lacked direction or coherence. The panel stated, in fact, that the success of the course was based on the balance between full-time and part-time staff.[59] An important observation of the panel was that, because of the open nature of the course, the final assessment was not an adequate means for recommending the award of degree. As a consequence of this the panel felt that the procedure that was in place to monitor students progress throughout the course - a monthly reporting system based on a well-tried pattern of regular tutorials and staff

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[57] Council for National Academic Awards, "Report of a Visit made to University of London Goldsmiths''' College on 6 November 1975 in connection with the renewal of approval of the BA (Hons.) courses in Fine Art and in Textiles/Fashion (Embroidery)." (London: University of London Goldsmiths''' College, 1976, photocopied), 3.

[58] Ibid., 3.

[59] Ibid., 3.

meetings - should be considered as part of the assessment procedure; staff at the time of the visit did not consider it as such.[60] Subsequently this system became part of the assessment procedure. The fine art course at Goldsmiths' has blossomed since 1975 and, as stated, its success is attested by the high profile of many of its graduates in contemporary British art.

The success of the Brit Art generation of artists, which, as already stated, owes much to the fine art course at Goldsmiths' College, has been attributed by many commentators in the art world and in the art press to the efforts of Michael Craig-Martin.[61] Craig-Martin, who, as stated above, is Millard Professor of Fine Art at Goldsmiths', studied fine art at the School of Art and Architecture at Yale University in the United States - he graduated with an MA in 1966 - and has been working at Goldsmiths' since 1974.

Craig-Martin, like many of his generation of young Americans, was a radical student who questioned authority and its institutions. Coming from this background, it is no accident that Craig-Martin was disillusioned with some aspects of his own art education: "Much of it seemed inappropriate, old fashioned, misguided, irrelevant."[62] Not all of Craig-Martin's art education was negative, however. He had the good fortune in his first year at Yale to study under Joseph Albers; Albers had been one of the chief innovators at the Bauhaus and was noted for his interest in the formal aspects of materials. Craig-Martin is aware of his good fortune, "I believe that the radicalisation of form that had begun in the Bauhaus reached its highpoint and

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[60] Ibid., 6.

[61] Kim Patel, "Brit Art's Foundation Figure" *Times Higher Educational Supplement* 1318 (6 February 1998): 18-19.

[62] Ibid., 18-19.

culmination in art education in America in the Yale of my undergraduate experience, the Yale of Joseph Albers". Craig-Martin elaborates on the situation at Yale in the following way:

> The fine art program at Yale consisted primarily of a series of individual courses devised by Albers, each of which were focussed on visual experience, visual understanding, and visual expression. Although based entirely on the personal development of perceptual skills by each individual student, teaching was done with groups of students in classrooms, each student working on common exercises and comparing results critically; individual discovery through shared experience. The courses sought to develop what Albers considered the basic skills needed by the artist, encompassing the primacy of visual and formal innovation. In general, the students' personal work, their 'art', was done privately in the studio guided by an individual tutor, without direct reference to these courses.[63]

While a student at Yale Craig-Martin learned that the centre of gravity of modern art had shifted from Europe to America after the Second World War. This attitude was, of course, reinforced by the presence of Joseph Albers at Yale. Not surprisingly, as a student of Albers, Craig-Martin learned that modern art was about creative innovation and discovery and that this marked it out as radical. Craig-Martin states: "The history of Modern Art is the history of an ever expanding domain, with the borders of the possible, the meaningful, and the acceptable being repeatedly redrawn".[64] Another discovery that Craig-Martin made while at Yale was that there was a difference between Contemporary art and Modern art. Contemporary art for Craig-Martin meant art that was produced in the demanding and complex contemporary context that young artists like Craig-Martin saw themselves working in. These young artists, according to Craig-Martin, found the formal reductivist trajectory of modern art, as defined by the most important American and international critic of

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[63] Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission*, 6.

[64] Ibid., 5.

the day, Clement Greenberg, restrictive in this milieu. They thus looked for ways in which to expand the boundaries of art. This led Craig-Martin to develop his own understanding of the situation of contemporary art.

According to Craig-Martin, art in the twentieth century has undergone three principal phases of radicalism: first, radicalism of form, then radicalism of materials, and finally radicalism of content. The radicalisation of form involved the questioning, re-thinking, and re-evaluation of all the assumptions that underpin art. Most of the innovations of the early period of modernism, according to Craig-Martin, were based on innovations of form: Impressionism, pointillism, fauvism, expressionism, cubism, and futurism. The artists in these movements, according to Craig-Martin, explored formal innovation in terms of space, light, colour, scale, structure, composition, texture, and brushwork. Abstraction was a legacy of this movement and it was predominantly expressed in painting.[65] Craig-Martin goes on to say that the radicalisation of materials was fundamentally different. It involved a non-formalist approach to art and owed much to the influence of the French-American artist Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp was the first to challenge the idea that artwork must necessarily involve formal invention and composition. He did this, firstly, by presenting ready-mades, which demanded straightforward acceptance and presentation;[66] secondly, he did it by emphasising the central importance of context; and thirdly, he did it by constantly challenging the accepted idea of what art is.[67] The radicalisation of materials, according to Craig-Martin, was most evident in sculpture and had developed

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[65] Ibid., 5.

[66] Ready-mades were mass-produced articles selected at random by Duchamp, which he would set upon a pedestal and exhibit as art. The intention was to be provocative.

[67] Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission*, 7.

out of formal innovations that had taken place in this area in the 1950s and 1960s. This phase is evident in the work of the sculptors David Smith, Anthony Caro, Philip King, and others who worked with assemblage and construction, as opposed to modelling, casting and carving. The radicalisation of materials opened up the production of art to the widespread exploration of different materials and processes.

The liberation of materials in turn, according to Craig-Martin, led to intense speculation about the nature of art itself, and became the foundation of "a new art of ideas" which became known as conceptual art. This, according to Craig-Martin, expanded our understanding of what a work of art might be to include "texts, photographs, film, video, people, places, rubbish, objects, installations, performances, earthworks, even thoughts: in other words, . . . anything".[68]

The final phase of Craig-Martin's trilogy, the radicalisation of content, has taken place over the last ten or fifteen years, the period usually described as post-modern. The artists and students who work in this phase, according to Craig-Martin, are interested in all forms of content. And, just as previously art might employ any language of form and be made out of anything, now it can legitimately engage with any content. This content can range "from the most trivial to the most grand, from the most revealingly personal to the most socially relevant". This situation is important because it has created a hitherto unknown liberalism in art and it has given a voice to those who previously did not have a voice. With the radicalisation of content, according to Craig-Martin, "the marginal and the mainstream have come to co-exist".[69]

In the context of the evolving radicalisation of art, according to Craig-Martin, and having found much that was "inappropriate, old fashioned, and irrelevant" in their art

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[68] Ibid., 8.

[69] Ibid., 16.

college experience, Craig-Martin and his peers, as young lecturers, "wanted to find a way of teaching that was consistent with our sense of ourselves."[70] It is not surprising then that Craig-Martin developed the course at Goldsmiths' College, which was an environment that he found conducive, around his idea of the essential radicalism of art. Craig-Martin states,

> Goldsmiths' was the first art school in my experience that was clearly the product of my own generation, the generation educated in the mid and late sixties, whose ideas and values implied new and radical propositions for art education. Whereas all the other schools I had been in had been based on the values of the radicalism of form, Goldsmiths' was being developed on the promise of the radicalisation of material.

Craig-Martin goes on to say that the decision to create a single Fine Art department at Goldsmiths' was a simple acknowledgement of the educational implication of the radicalisation of materials.[71]

At Goldsmiths' in the seventies there was, again according to Craig-Martin, an "incredible freedom of thought. You were left alone to figure things out without constraint, and act on them to see if they worked. That basically is what we did at Goldsmiths'."[72] The objective of the course was to create a framework for art education that made sense to artists: "Because what I felt was that I was the same person when I was [teaching] at Goldsmiths' as I was when [working] in my studio. . . . [and] that I should not try, as a teacher, to be something I was not".[73] Thus, the curriculum at Goldsmiths' was and is student led, and it derives from different influences. These influences include the Basic Design system, which asserted that the

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[70] Patel, "Brit Art's Foundation Figure", 18-19.

[71] Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission*, 13.

[72] Patel, "Brit Art's Foundation Figure", 18-19.

[73] Ibid., 18-19.

creative process was a developing process that covers many disciplines. They also included Herbert Read's idea that art was about personal development in a broad, organic way, and that it was emphatically not about establishing separate territories and inviolable frontiers. According to Craig-Martin:

> Goldsmiths' idea was to see what happens when you take away the boundaries between painting, sculpture, printmaking, and so on, within the school, and just say to students: 'Its all art. You can make it any way you want, use the materials you want and see what you come up with.' The dividing line is not necessarily according to how the medium has been developed. The tradition of Goldsmiths' is very much resplendence in diversity - that is its greatest strength.[74]

Sensation, which was a major exhibition of the work of forty young British artists from the collection of Charles Saatchi which was held at the Royal Academy in 1989, brought attention, and notoriety, to British art and to the School of Art at Goldsmiths' in particular. For Craig-Martin this flowering of British art as made evident in the *Sensation* exhibition marked the end of an era, and involved the coming together of a whole complex of forces. Craig-Martin believes that the *Sensation* phenomenon is the end result of the last fifty years of developments in the arts and art education in Britain, and that it is primarily due to Britain's complex infrastructure of the arts, covering galleries, institutions, art colleges, and studio space built up over this time span. According to Craig-Martin, the reason New York had been so dominant in the art world for much of the late twentieth century is because it had that base for a long time. This is now the situation in Britain, which, according to Craig-Martin, has created a remarkable grass roots structure since the war, a base that has enabled an enormous number of people to try a creative life. Craig-Martin states:

Now everybody automatically talks about the British as a creative people, but

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[74] Ibid., 18-19.

> the truth of the matter is that we have had forty years of art schools, produced thousands of art graduates and there has been a cycle of them going into schools to teach. This is now the third generation of that phenomenon. *This is how it has happened.* [Craig-Martin's italics][75]

One major criticism of the success of Brit Art is that most of the work associated with this movement is bought and owned by one collector, Charles Saatchi. Craig-Martin admits that this is a problem. "Obviously in any monopoly situation there are things that make one uncomfortable." In this context, Craig-Martin points out that, as Saatchi likes only painting and sculpture, video is left out and tends to be neglected, which is unfortunate, because, as Craig-Martin also points out, film and video are dominant art forms at Goldsmiths'. The rapid change of fashions in the art world, as a reflection of contemporary society and of popular culture in particular, poses another problem for Craig-Martin. Craig-Martin denies that this is a problem, and he accepts this situation as an integral aspect of the art world as we enter the twenty-first century: "At Goldsmiths' we are seeing the pace quicken in relation to students' needs and demands. The dynamics of change emphasises even faster change."[76] Craig-Martin goes on to say that some students will be successful in this context of rapid fashion changes and others will not. These successful students, according to Craig-Martin, because of this fast pace of change, will rapidly be displaced from their position on top of the pedestal and will not like it. Craig-Martin accepts this as entirely proper because, he states, it's the way the art world operates. This aspect of the contemporary art world fulfils the vision of Richard Hamilton, whose ideas influenced the development of the Basic Design system. Hamilton, as shown in Chapter 5, believed that the values

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[75] Ibid., 18-19.

[76] Ibid., 18-19.

of popular culture, popular imagery, and technology were vital and fundamental aspects of contemporary art practice.

In the sense of its perceived importance Goldsmiths' represents the apotheosis of post-war British art education. As Craig-Martin suggests, the artwork produced at Goldsmiths' represents the coming together of different forces in British culture over the last fifty years. These forces go right back to the Romantic Movement and they echo Friedrich's call, quoted in the Introduction to this dissertation, that the artist be given freedom to have his own manner and way of expressing himself. In this context it is interesting to note the connection between Kant's *noumena*, and the artwork produced by the Taiwanese student Hui-Ting Chang (Jing) for her final show at Goldsmiths' college in 1998. It will be recalled that Kant's *noumena*, of which Platonic ideas and forms are an example, are knowable, according to Kant, only by pure reason and by the exclusion of the sensible world of phenomena as known through our senses.[77] The work of Hui-Ting Chang (Jing) is described in a personal statement, which appears opposite a photograph of the student in the catalogue. This photograph is in the place where a photograph of the student's work normally appears. The caption which accompanies the photograph states the following: "I produce objects and images that do not exist in the actual world. They bridge my thought and understanding of things or happenings around me to the beholder".[78]

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[77] Ted Hondrich ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 657-658.

[78] Goldsmiths' College, *Goldsmiths' Fine Art 1998* (Bromley, The Christmas Daisy, 1998), 12; It is interesting to note here that Peter Gay has suggested, alluding to Kant's influence on the development of modern art, that abstract art was an attempt to have the inner world of the artist speak to the inner world of the viewer – directly. The work of Hui-Ting Chang (Jing) would thus be a logical development of the abstract ideal in art. (Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience Victoria to Freud*, Vol. V, *Pleasure Wars* [London: Harper Collins, 1998], 217.)

PART II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FINE ART EDUCATION IN BRITAIN AND THE TEACHING OF FINE ART AT THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN IN DUBLIN

CHAPTER 8

THE DUBLIN SCHOOL OF ART 1746-1945

8.1 Origins

The origins of the National College of Art and Design lie in a figure drawing school that was run by the artist Robert West in what is now South Great George's Street in the first half of the eighteenth century. The Dublin Society, to be renamed the Royal Dublin Society in 1820, took over this school in 1746 in order to provide training for artists and craftsmen. Subsequent to this change, as the Dublin Society received government subsidies, all students were offered free tuition.[1]

The Dublin Society's school was expanded in 1756 with the addition of a school of landscape and ornament. It was expanded again in 1764 with the addition of a school of architectural drawing, and, finally, a school of modelling and sculpture was added in 1811. The figure school offered drawing from plaster antique busts and statues, and the school of landscape and ornament taught by means of copying original drawings and engravings. The students who attended the Dublin Society's schools were mostly Dublin artisans, though a number of well-known Irish artists, including George Barret,

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[1] Turpin John, *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century: A History of the National College of Art and Design* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1995), 9.

were trained at the schools.[2] According to Professor Turpin, the training that the Dublin Society's schools gave to artisans led to a very high standard of craftsmanship in Dublin, which can be seen to-day in many of the houses of the late Georgian period.[3]

The situation of the Dublin Society's schools changed in 1801 as a result of *The Act of Union*, which caused many of the patrons of the Society to leave Ireland and to settle in London. This had a negative effect on the schools for two reasons. Firstly, as many of the patrons of the Dublin Society removed to London there was little financial support for artisans or artists who had been through the Society's schools. Secondly, as control of the Dublin Society went to Westminster its autonomy was diminished. Later in the century, when the South Kensington System had established its power within the national art education system, this would lead to a complete loss of independence for the schools.[4] The establishment of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1823 diminished the role of the recently renamed Royal Dublin Society Schools further, as from then on the new academy took over the advanced teaching of drawing. Subsequent to the latter development the chief function of the schools was to teach drawing of ornamental art to artisans. The schools, which had been located at premises in Hawkins Street, were relocated to the renovated stables of Leinster House in 1818. Leinster House had become the headquarters of the Royal Dublin Society in 1815, and the school of art in Dublin would maintain a presence here until 1998.

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[2] Ibid., 39.

[3] John Turpin, "The school of Design in Victorian Dublin," *Journal of Design History* 2 (1989): 245.

[4] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 76.

8.2 The Dublin School of Design

The Royal Dublin Society's Schools were put under the administration of the Normal School of Design in 1849 when they were restyled the 'School of Design in connection with the Royal Dublin Society'.[5] As a result of this change the autonomy of the schools was diminished yet again, though the overall situation of the schools was improved. One immediate benefit was that one hundred casts, many taken from neo-classical models, were sent from London to enhance the role of the new Dublin School of Design in improving design for industry.[6] The foundation of a School of Design in Dublin in 1849 was a consequence of the same forces that led to the foundation of the Normal School of Design in London twelve years earlier, the need for improvement in the quality of British manufactured goods.[7] The curriculum at the Dublin School of Design, as in the rest of Britain, was based on the principle that drawing was the foundation upon which all art and design education was based. Consequently the curriculum at the Dublin School of Design remained drawing based, thus continuing the tradition of drawing established at the Dublin school in the eighteenth century.[8]

In the context of the schools of the Royal Dublin Society losing autonomy to the Normal School of Design in London, it is noteworthy that during the changeover, and as had happened in England, the issue of the life class proved problematic. Isaac Weld, secretary of the Royal Dublin Society, in defending the right of the school to include the life class on its curriculum, pointed to the importance of the life class in French

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[5] Ibid., 145.

[6] Ibid., 126.

[7] Ibid., 131-145.

[8] Ibid., 148.

schools of art.[9] He also pointed out, in criticising the preoccupation of the Normal School of Design with drawing from flat copies, that the reason the French excelled at floral design for woven and printed textiles was because the designers drew from living examples rather than from drawings.[10] In responding to demands that the curriculum in its schools conform to that of the Normal School of Design in London, the Royal Dublin Society asserted the link between fine art and ornamental art – the Council of the Schools of Design, as has been shown, was trying to deny this connection in its dictates to the other schools of art in Britain. In affirming this link, the Royal Dublin Society asserted the value of the life class as the foundation stone upon which the curriculum was built, rather than as a component of the curriculum, as was the demand of Council of the Schools of Design in London. In asserting the centrality of the life class, the Royal Dublin Society subscribed to the idea that the fine arts and the decorative arts were interconnected in a symbiotic and hierarchical way, in the sense that Sir Joshua Reynolds meant when he said "If [the Royal Academy] has an origin no higher [than commerce], no taste can ever be formed in manufactures; but if the higher Arts of Design [drawing] flourish, these inferior ends will be answered".[11] Reynolds was, of course, asserting the primacy of drawing in the neo-classical sense, rather than the Romantic sense, as was the case with the French *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*.

Isaac Weld, in line with Reynolds' ideas, considered drawing to be of fundamental importance for all those who worked in the arts, and consequently he believed that it should form the basis of the curriculum. The importance of figure drawing was, he

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[9] Turpin, "The school of Design in Victorian Dublin," 248.

[10] Ibid., 250.

[11] Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert Wark (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 13.

stated in 1845, "to teach the student to depend upon his eye and thereby qualify himself for almost any other department of art."[12] This, as shown in the last chapter, was to be the official position in relation to drawing in British art education until 1970. It was to be the official position at the school of art in Dublin until 1975. Subsequently the Dublin School of Design developed a successful curriculum based on drawing, and it continued to use the old four school structure, established in the eighteenth century, of school of figure drawing, school of ornament, school of modelling, and school of architecture. The figure school covered principles of light and shade, drawing from casts, and anatomical drawing. The course on ornament included landscape painting in watercolours and tempera, and drawing from flowers and plants. The course in modelling comprised elementary figure drawing, modelling the figure, modelling ornament, and modelling flowers and nature. And the course in architecture included elementary ornament, use of instruments, and geometry.

Attendance at the Dublin School of Design between 1849 and 1854 showed that the schools were not fulfilling the ideal of design for industry. Most of the women students planned to be teachers, and the male students tended to be architects and engineers who used the school to learn technical drawing. A very small minority planned to be either craftsmen or artists.[13]

8.3 The Dublin School of Art

In 1854 when the Dublin School of Design became the Dublin School of Art it came under the control of Henry Cole and the newly formed Department of Science

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[12] Turpin, "The School of Design in Victorian Dublin," 249.

[13] Ibid., 251.

and Art. Subsequently, as Westminster asserted its control, the curriculum at the school changed. From now on, as in all other schools of art in Britain, the focus of the curriculum was on the fundamental principles of design.[14]

Henry McManus, who was headmaster from 1849-1863, resisted demands that his curriculum conform to the demands of the South Kensington System. As he did not go along with Cole, however, McManus was removed and replaced by Edwin Lyne, an Englishman. McManus was noted for his moral high-mindedness and his drive to reform public taste. These were, ironically, qualities that were ideally suited to the demands of Cole's system. The removal of McManus is therefore a measure of the extent to which extreme conformity was demanded by the South Kensington System.[15] In relation to the preoccupation of the nineteenth century with science, it is interesting to note that McManus was particularly interested in the forms that lay hidden from reality. According to McManus, "The source of design lies in geometric form . . . [and the objective of the artist or designer] is to draw the real objects showing their dependence on science."[16] McManus's interest in underlying forms is also interesting in relation to the distinction between underlying form and surface description as already mentioned in relation to Plato's ideas.

Under the headship of Lyne, an ardent disciple of Cole and lover of the fine arts,[17] the curriculum of the South Kensington System was applied at the Dublin School of Art, where the old four school structure was replaced by Cole's twenty three categories. True to the preoccupations and to the objectives of the South Kensington

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[14] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 152.

[15] Turpin, "The School of Design in Victorian Dublin," 250.

[16] Quoted in Ibid., 250.

[17] Alan Denson, *John Hughes Sculptor 1865-1941: A Documentary Biography* (Kendal: Alan Denson, 1969), 40.

System, Lyne focused on principles. In doing so he asserted that the practical application of design in industrial operations was of secondary importance by comparison with the broader aim of his school, which was "the diffusion among all ranks of society of just ideas, right practice, and correct taste in art."[18] Thus, like Cole, Lyne subscribed to a utilitarian view of society, and he aspired, through art education, to change society for the better.

A measure of Lyne's success in reorienting the Dublin School of Art towards the South Kensington System is the fact that in 1866, just three years after he took over, the Dublin School of Art came second in the United Kingdom in the annual awarding of medals in the National Competition.[19] Interestingly, however, despite his rigorous application of Cole's system, Lyne was a firm believer in the importance of the life class in art and design education.[20] During the 1880s, in the midst of a moral crusade against immorality in Britain, which had a negative impact on the nude in art,[21] Lyne continued to assert the role of the nude in art education.[22] This crusade came after a period of widespread acceptance of the nude in art in the context of the Aesthetic Movement.

In 1877 the Royal Dublin Society's involvement with the school of art in Dublin came to an end when the Dublin School of Art was taken over by the government under the *Dublin Science and Art Museum Act*. Under this act the Dublin School of Art became the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, and from now on was managed

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[18] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 158.

[19] Ibid., 157 and 171.

[20] Turpin, "The School of Design in Victorian Dublin," 253.

[21] Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 217-237.

[22] Denson, *Hughes*, 42.

directly from London by the Department of Science and Art. Following the passing of this act, the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art and the National Art Training School in South Kensington were unique in Great Britain in not being managed by a local committee.

8.4 The Dublin Metropolitan School of Art 1877-1936

The objective in setting up the South Kensington System, as already shown, was to improve industrial design by raising the standard of public taste. After 1875 when Edward Poynter succeeded Richard Redgrave as Inspector of Art for the South Kensington System - Redgrave had been a particularly ardent disciple of Cole, who retired in 1873 - this orientation changed, and from now on the South Kensington System focused on the training of teachers.[23]

As teaching became the focus of the Schools of Art in Britain, so it became the focus of the School of Art in Dublin. Henceforth, the pinnacle of achievement for students at the Dublin school was to gain admittance to the National Art Training School in South Kensington. The National Art Training School, which was, as already mentioned, renamed the Royal College of Art in 1896, was essentially a post-graduate school for students who sat for the examinations of the South Kensington System in the various schools of art throughout Britain. At the National Art Training School students would polish their skills as teachers and become what Professor Turpin has called, "missionaries of the system".[24]

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[23] John Turpin, "The South Kensington System and the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art 1877-1900," *Dublin Historical Record* 36 (March 1983): 42.

[24] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 168.

Despite the change in orientation after 1875 the emphasis of the curriculum in Dublin was still on copying historic models, and original creative work was largely overlooked; the course at the Metropolitan School of Art was emphatically not a fine art course. The following were included on the syllabus at this time: model drawing, freehand drawing of ornament, drawing in light and shade from the cast, perspective, anatomy, the antique, principles of ornament, painting and drawing from still life, architecture, historic ornament, design ornament, drawing the antique from memory, painting ornament in monochrome, architectural design, modelling from the cast, modelling from life, modelling from the antique, and modelling design.[25] By the end of the nineteenth century the Metropolitan School of Art was an efficient cog in the South Kensington machine.

The orientation of the Metropolitan School of Art changed slightly in 1889 when James Brenan was appointed headmaster. Brenan, who served until 1904, reasserted the role of the school in relation to industry. In the annual report for 1890 Brenan stated his intention to concentrate the schools curriculum on "the wants of those engaged in trades and handicrafts to which art is applicable; making the teaching practically useful to the designer, house painter, stone carver, iron worker etc. I have made some alterations in the elementary course of study, rendering it more suitable for those engaged in such trades."[26] Brenan also formed a special class for designers. In responding to a drift in the direction of fine art at the school - no doubt a response to the same forces that brought success to the Slade School of Art at this time[27] - Brenan

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[25] Ibid., 169.

[26] Denson, *Hughes*, 46.

[27] For a glimpse of life at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art at this time see Beatrice Campbell, Lady Glenavy, *Today We Will Only Gossip* (London: Constable, 1964)

said that "the province of the school of art was to give a sound education in all branches of art which might be allied to industry, and not to the production of tenth rate artists of which I am sorry to say there are too many".[28] Despite changing the focus of the schools to industry Brenan still subscribed to the overall objective of the South Kensington System, which was the improvement of taste. In striving to do this, he still adhered to the mid-Victorian aesthetic that focused on the study of principles.

8.4.1 *Arts and Crafts at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art*

In 1894, when he visited art schools in Hamburg, Berlin, Stockholm, and Vienna, Brenan came into contact with developments taking place in mainland European art and design, and consequently he came into contact with developments in art and design education in Europe.[29] He was particularly impressed by what he saw of the Art Nouveau Movement, which had such a huge influence on the development of design in Europe and Britain at this time. As a result of what he saw happening in Europe, Brenan felt there should be greater focus on technical education at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin. This resulted in a flowering of the crafts under his leadership and in particular the crafts of stained glass, enamelling, art metal work, and mosaic. This development coincided with a more general revival of the crafts in Ireland at this time. The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland was founded in 1894, and the first

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[28] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 173.

[29] It is interesting to note the Teutonic bias in Brenan's choice. It was not until the very end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century that Germany replaced France as Britain's most feared economic and military competitor. See (Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of the Great War* [London: Pimlico, 1992]). For a more personal and very revealing, though brief, illustration of this change, especially in relation to English education, see (Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957]).

exhibition of the work of this society was held in 1895.[30] It is interesting to note in this context that in 1887 the role of the Metropolitan School of Art in the training of artisans and technicians had been devolved to the City of Dublin Technical Schools at Kevin Street and to the Dublin Municipal Training School at Bolton Street.[31] The reorientation of the Metropolitan School of Art did not therefore mirror a shift towards design and manufacturing, as was happening in Germany at this time, but instead reflected a shift towards the fine crafts and the training of artist/craftsmen. It thus reflected the values of the Arts and Crafts Movement. As already mentioned, the dominant position of the Arts and Crafts Movement in British art education at this time was illustrated by the appointment of Walter Crane, president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, to the directorship of the South Kensington System in 1898.

As shown in Chapter 3, administrative changes that took place in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century weakened the hegemony of the South Kensington System and gave some independence to British art schools, this, in turn, again as shown, led to developments in the area of curricular reform. Similar developments took place in Dublin. In 1900 the Department of Science and Art, under which the Metropolitan School of Art was administered, merged with the new Board of Education. Subsequently the Metropolitan School of Art came under the administration of the new Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, which was nominally run by the Chief Secretary for Ireland. As the bias of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction was towards design and industry, and as the influence of the South Kensington System on the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art was weakened by

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[30] John Turpin, "The Metropolitan School of Art 1900-1923," part 1, *Dublin Historical Record* 37 (March 1984): 72-73.

[31] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 180.

control of the college being transferred to Ireland, the crafts bias of the curriculum, as introduced by Brenan, was re-enforced. [32] The appointment of Horace Plunkett as the first political head of the Department gave the crafts a further boost at the school; Plunkett was the founder of the co-operative movement and an ardent supporter of self-sufficiency and local crafts based industries,

Between 1894 and 1914 the situation of the crafts at the Dublin Metropolitan School improved to such an extent that by 1912 an English newspaper, *The Daily News and Leader*, in an article on the Fourth International Congress for Art Education, Drawing, and Art Applied to Industries, which was held at Dresden, could say:

> The whole credit of the United Kingdom is saved by the really splendid exhibit of stained glass and enamels from Ireland. It is impossible to exaggerate the sense of gratitude in the mind of the British delegates at the service Ireland has done the British peoples. The work is good absolutely and comparatively, and the isle of saints may again, as in far off days, glory in a national art.[33]

8.4.2 *Fine Art Education at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art*

As was happening in England, and parallel to the development of the crafts at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, there was a growing demand that fine art education at the school respond to contemporary developments in painting and sculpture, this applied particularly to developments taking place in French art.[34] As developments in French art influenced British artists at this time, so they influenced Irish artists. Many Irish artists studied or worked in France and Belgium in the latter years of the nineteenth century. These included Sarah Purser, Nathaniel Hone, George

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[32] Turpin, "The Metropolitan School of Art," 60.

[33] Quoted in Paul Larmour, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland* (Belfast: Friars Bush Press, 1992), 96.

[34] S. B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism, 1880-1950* (Dublin and Belfast: Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art and Institute of Irish Studies, Queens University Belfast, 1991), 14.

Moore, Dermod O'Brien, Walter Osborne and Roderic O'Connor. Dublin audiences had been exposed to recent developments in French art in various exhibitions that were held around this time. In 1884, for example, the work of Whistler was exhibited in Dublin. On the first of April 1899 a loan exhibition was opened in Dublin which displayed the work of the best British and Continental artists, including eight paintings by Corot, a Courbet, two paintings by Degas, a Manet, a Monet, and two paintings by Puvis de Chavannes. This exhibition also included six Whistlers and pictures by Burne-Jones, Daubigny, Daumier, Fantin-Latour, Millet, Theodore Rousseau, Steer, and Watts.[35] In 1904 Hugh Lane organised an exhibition that included paintings by Degas, Corot, Manet, O'Connor, Osborne, de Chavannes, Renoir and Sisley.[36] Subsequent to these exhibitions there were two exhibitions of Post-Impressionism, one in 1911 and the other in 1912. These latter two exhibitions included paintings that had been shown in London at the influential Post-Impressionist exhibitions of 1910 and 1912 that had been organised by Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Dublin was clearly not far behind London as far as exposure to developments in modern art were concerned. It is interesting to note, in relation to the scientific bias of the South Kensington System and in particular to its preoccupation with principles, that the Irish Times critic George Russell, who described the work of the 1911 exhibition as decrepit, excepted the work of Paul Signac, which he praised for its unemotional and cold application of science to art.[37] This comment illustrates the fact that resistance to the new aesthetic values that originated in France was as strong in Dublin society as in London.

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[35] John O'Grady, *The Life and Work of Sarah Purser* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), 84.

[36] Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, 9.

[37] Ibid., 15.

The French influence on British artists, as already shown, had resulted in a shift from an aesthetic with explicit moral overtones to one with formalist preoccupations and Bohemian attitudes, as represented respectively by the ideas of Ruskin and Whistler. In the area of art education, as stated already, the new aesthetic had manifested itself most clearly in the curriculum that was developed at the Slade School of Art, which was to have a significant influence on the curriculum at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art.

8.4.3 *The Influence of the Slade on the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art*

8.4.3.1 *The Dublin Metropolitan School of Art and the Royal Hibernian Academy*

In the nineteenth century the only place for advanced fine art study in Ireland was the Royal Hibernian Academy. Consequently, most aspirant fine artists either ignored the Metropolitan School of Art or treated it as a basic preliminary drawing course from which they progressed, when they had acquired some skills, to the Academy.[38] This was the context of Brenan's comment about tenth rate artists that was quoted earlier. The atmosphere at the Royal Hibernian Academy suited aspirant fine artists because it was freer than the atmosphere at the Metropolitan School of Art, in addition, classes were free and tuition was by professional artists, much like the atelier in France. According to Bruce Arnold, the Royal Hibernian Academy Schools "had limited funds and [were] badly run, with students staying on for as long as they liked, pursuing no particular line of study, and being subject to little discipline or direction."[39] Students who did not aspire to become fine artists, whether through lack of money, skill, or

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[38] Thomas Ryan, "The Royal Hibernian Society, its Forerunners and Establishment," *Martello* (1991): 26.

[39] Bruce Arnold, *Orpen: Mirror to an Age* (London: Cape, 1981), 26.

ambition, stayed at the Metropolitan School of Art and studied to become teachers. The contrast between the Royal Hibernian Academy Schools and the Metropolitan School of Art reflected the difference between the two types of art education available in Britain at this time. At the Metropolitan School of Art the course was rigid and was based on drawing from copies and the study of principles, and at the Royal Hibernian Academy Schools it was more freely structured and was based on drawing from living models. The curricula in the respective schools reflected the difference between the thinking of the nineteenth century and the thinking of the twentieth century. The restrictive approach to the role of the figure in art education at the Metropolitan School of Art is illustrated by the following remark made in the annual report of 1890:

> From Dublin is presented a small figure, by John Hughes (1865-1941), of a boy rather younger than the one who sat in the National Art Training School, which is very remarkable for its truthful rendering of boyish form and for good movement: to this a silver medal is awarded. The examiners would point out that it is not desirable to work often from models at this stage of growth.[40]

The restrictive and historically bound approach to the figure, implicit in the above quote, was reiterated in the following remarks, also on the work of John Hughes, from the annual report or 1891: "The frieze . . . by John Hughes of Dublin, which receives a gold medal is . . . remarkable. The figures are full of style, are excellent in relief, and indeed might have been done by an Italian sculptor of the sixteenth century, with such mannerism and great skill."[41]

William Butler Yeats, who attended both institutions, summed up the differences between the two institutions in the following comment: "the contrast between the two schools was the contrast between system on one hand and the influences of individuals

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[40] Denson, *Hughes*, 49.

[41] Ibid., 49.

on the other."[42] He went on to say that the curriculum at the Metropolitan School of Art was destructive of enthusiasm and of all kinds of individuality. The reason being that the curriculum was based on routine, where exercise followed exercise until, by the fourth year of the course when students finally got to draw from the live model, all individuality had been knocked out of them. He went on to say that the objective of every student was simply to evade the system and to get to the life class as soon as possible.[43] Lest it be assumed that he welcomed the radical new aesthetic of the French School, it must be pointed out that in his autobiography he states that he did not like the popular French style of realism and "the young men fresh from the Paris art schools", who advocated it.[44] By contrast with the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, students at the Royal Hibernian Academy were allowed to draw from the live model as soon as they showed competence.[45] Bruce Arnold states in his biography of William Orpen that the Metropolitan School of Art was very gradgrind in its sober, calculating, and efficient way, and that it produced remarkably few artists with the exception of Orpen, Roderic O'Conor, and W.J. Leech. Arnold goes on to suggest that the Metropolitan School of Art handicapped Orpen's development, though he does not elaborate on exactly how, and that Orpen himself saw his experience of the Metropolitan School of Art as oppressive.[46]

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[42] John Turpin, "The South Kensington System and the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art 1877-1900," part 2, *Dublin Historical Record* 36 (March 1983): 50.

[43] Ibid., 51.

[44] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies: W.B. Yeates* (London: Papermac, 1987). 115.

[45] Turpin, "The South Kensington System and the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art", 52.

[46] Arnold, *Orpen*, 24-37.

8.4.3.2 *William Orpen and the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art*

The change in the administration of the Metropolitan School of Art in 1900, and the subsequent development of a technological bias at the school, led to questions being asked by the authorities about whether the Metropolitan School of Art or the Royal Hibernian Academy should teach fine art. Such questions resulted in a parliamentary enquiry being held into this problem in 1905.[47] Though this enquiry found each institution wanting in the quality of its teachers, it was decided that both institutions could teach fine art, but that improvement would have to be made in the fine art provision at the Metropolitan School of Art.[48] In order to bring this about William Orpen was employed to give classes at the school from 1906. For the first few years Orpen came to the college four times a year, and afterwards for varying periods. Orpen continued giving classes until 1915, when he became an official war artist and consequently stopped coming to Dublin.[49]

Orpen, who had studied at the Metropolitan School of Art from 1891-1897 and at the Slade from 1897-1899, subscribed to the drawing-based aesthetic of Henry Tonks, and he was to have a lasting influence on the fine art curriculum at the school. Predictably, Orpen felt that industrial art and fine art should be separate, and he criticised the Metropolitan School of Art for having fine art and industrial art under one man. Orpen established a fine art ethos at the school, and in doing so his role was analogous to that of his friend William Rothenstein at the Royal College of Art in the 1920s; Rothenstein, like Orpen, had studied at the Slade. There were clear similarities

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[47] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 187.

[48] Turpin, "The Metropolitan School of Art 1900-23," part 3, *Dublin Historical Record* 38 (June 1985): 86-90.

[49] Bruce Arnold, *Mainie Jellett and the Modern Movement in Ireland* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 19.

between the Royal College of Art under Rothenstein's administration and the Metropolitan School of Art when Orpen taught there. In both cases a design bias was being demanded of the schools, in both cases the French School and the Slade style was the inspiration for the new fine art curriculum, and in both cases, subsequent to the involvement of each of the above artist, the respective institution became dominated by a fine art ethos.

Orpen's method of teaching focused on the figure, and consequently when he arrived at the Metropolitan School of Art he brought a revolution in the life class. The atmosphere under him was much more relaxed than before, and students could talk and smoke during classes. Despite the relaxed atmosphere, however, Orpen valued effort and worked only with students who worked hard. He therefore inspired great respect among his best students who became his disciples.[50] These students included James Sleator, Leo Whelan, Sean Keating, and Patrick Tuohy.[51]

Orpen criticised the Metropolitan School of Art for being a teacher training school. In reflecting the style of teaching available at the atelier in France, Orpen stated that the only person who could teach painting was a painter, and that the only way to teach fine art was from the figure. In asserting that only artists could teach art, Orpen established a principle of fine art education at the school that still holds today at the National College of Art and Design. And in asserting that the only way to teach fine art was from the figure he established the basis of the curriculum for the next sixty years.

Despite Orpen's influence, however, James Ward, the headmaster who was appointed in 1907 when the previous head Albert Willis died unexpectedly, had a technological background, and his thinking was very much in the South Kensington

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[50] Arnold, *Mainie Jellett*, 19.

[51] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 220.

mould. His appointment was seen by many at the time as a step backwards, as under the previous head, who had served from 1904-1905, the school had been developing a strongly independent and nationalist orientation.[52] Interestingly, as Willis had studied under Alphonse Legros at the Slade he had been exposed to the new French aesthetic. Ward's aesthetic values, by contrast, were rooted in Germany and in scientific principles, and came to him through the influence of the Nazarenes and the academic mural painter Sir Frederick Leighton.[53] Consequently, under Ward, who retired in 1918, the college continued to adhere to the principles based South Kensington tradition.

In 1913 the system of examinations for aspirant art teachers, the National Graded Examinations in Art, were replaced at the Metropolitan School of Art by the Technical Schools examinations. These were generally known as the TS examinations and were essentially a shorter version of the old system. The Technical School system was made up of sixteen categories at two levels, various combinations of which had to be taken to qualify as a teacher.[54] These examinations were to remain in force at the school of art in Dublin until 1980.[55]

Despite the orientation of the Metropolitan School of Art towards technology and industry under Ward, the atmosphere in the school was distinctly casual and dilettantish. Unless a student aspired to become a teacher there were no formal

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[52] Ibid., 189.

[53] Ibid., 191.

[54] United Kingdom, Dept of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Technical School Examinations, 1915, Examination Papers and Examiners' Reports*, 1915. 4.

[55] A list of the subjects taken by students sitting for the Technical School examinations after 1913 is included in appendix 2. A list of the subjects taken by those students who sat for the examinations after the system was overhauled in 1936 is included in appendix 3.

examinations to be taken. Professor Turpin has the following to say about the school at this time:

> No admission tests of any kind were administered, which meant that people of all ages and abilities could be admitted. On average more than half the students were part time, with a large number attending in the evening after 1915. Young men and women whose parents could pay the fees formed the majority of day students, while most of the evening students were men who had to work for a living.[56]

The atmosphere in the college at this time was described by one student as "thoroughly British and thoroughly Protestant."[57] Bruce Arnold points out that there was a certain amount of hostility in the school between the well off and dilettantish day students and the less well off students who attended evening classes.[58]

8.4.3.3 William *Orpen's Legacy at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art*

Orpen had a powerful personality, and his teaching style was founded on the idea of developing a strong relationship between himself and a small number of talented students. Given Orpen's predilection for hard work, this development is understandable in the context of the dilettantish aspect of the college at this time. The model for future relationships between teacher and pupil, in the fine art area, was the relationship between Orpen and Sean Keating. Keating was very close to Orpen and had worked for a while as his assistant in London before returning to Ireland in 1914 because of the First World War.[59] Keating continued Orpen's style of teaching when he became a teacher at the college. Consequently, as Keating was to become the most

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[56] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 188.

[57] Arnold, *Mainie Jellett*, 17.

[58] Ibid., 48.

[59] John Hutchinson, Vera Ryan, and James White, *William Orpen, 1878-1931: A Centenary Exhibition* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1978), 9.

influential member of staff after independence, Orpen's style of teaching was to become the model for the teaching methodology at the college until Keating finally left the college in the 1960s – and, indeed, beyond. According to Tom Ryan, Keating continued the tradition of Orpen but he had limitations:

> Keating was a very good teacher and he would speak about his admiration for William Orpen. He admired him greatly. Orpen was talented literally from the age of twelve on. A great natural draughtsmen. I'd say that Keating wasn't a natural draughtsman. It's a curious sort of contradiction, do you know. I'd say in a way that Sean O'Sullivan was. Not anything as well informed, but Keating was a draughtsman. Probably his best work was in draughtsmanship in many ways. . . . He was a halting draughtsmen, everything was inspected, everything was based on knowledge, he was an anatomist with a covering of skin on top of it. And if you look at some of his pictures like the Tipperary Hurler they are really anatomy lessons, everything was rather clinical.[60]

During Orpen's time at the Metropolitan School of Art there were three types of student working from the figure: dilettantes, those who aspired to become professional artists, and aspirant teachers. As Orpen's focus was on the students who aspired to become fine artists, aspirant teachers and dilettantes were more or less ignored.[61] As a result of this and because of Orpen's demand that art schools should teach only artists, student teachers acquired inferior status at this time. Thus was established a tradition at the school that continued until the 1970s, which was manifested in the low status given to students doing the Technical Schools examinations after 1913. The higher status assigned to prospective artists in Orpen's time was assigned to diploma students after the structure of the school changed in 1936, thus institutionalising the ethos of exclusivity which surrounded fine art students in Open's day.

The particular method of teaching that Orpen employed involved his going into a class, setting up an easel, doing some work, and leaving it as an example for students

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[60] Vol. II, appendix 17, 305.

[61] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 221.

to refer to. With other classes he would set up a pose, say a few words, and go away to come back later, whereupon he would work over some of the better drawings to give example.[62] This system, which bears a remarkable similarity with the system employed by Turner at the Royal Academy Schools in the early nineteenth century, was still employed by some staff in the college in the 1970s.[63]

Though Orpen did not return to the Metropolitan School of Art after 1915, his influence, and therefore the tradition of the Slade and of the New English Arts Club, would continue through the influence of his students. Sean Keating and James Sleator became assistant teachers in 1919, when Sleator left in 1920 Patrick Tuohy and Charles Lamb joined the staff.[64]

8.4.3.4 *The Dublin Metropolitan School of Art Post-Independence*

Despite the closure of the school for a period during the War of Independence, there was a smooth transition from pre-independence to post-independence Ireland. After 1922 the structure of the school remained the same, though Keating's position within the school was strengthened by the advent of nationalism, and in particular by the rise to power of Eamonn de Valera and the Fianna Fail party in 1932.

Keating's particular contribution to fine art education at the Metropolitan School of Art was to marry the nineteenth century French realist tradition of drawing, which came to him through Orpen and the Slade, with the old neo-classical tradition of the academies. Seventeenth and eighteenth century Spanish painting, and in particular the

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[62] Ibid., 220-221.

[63] Lorcan Walsh, interview by author, see Vol. II, appencix 21.

[64] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 248.

work of Velazquez, had a particular influence on Keating. The Slade's preoccupation with objective analysis was taken up with enthusiasm by Keating whose style of art throughout his life, as Tom Ryan has pointed out, focussed on the underlying structure of what was seen. Though favouring the linear description of the Slade style Keating was not preoccupied with analysis as a methodology or as an isolated aesthetic value, he was equally interested in nationalist political values. Keating saw himself in his early years as a revolutionary as well as an artist. The 1920s and 1930s were times of political and social revolution throughout the world and the style in which Keating worked was often associated with social and political movements. It is no coincidence that this style resembled the social-realist style of painting that was popular in the United States and in Europe throughout the nineteen twenties and thirties. Keating's interest in the Spanish School – he was also influenced by the Venetian School and the work of Tiepolo in particular who, though Venetian, spent the last eight years of his life in Spain – is appropriate given the influence of the Spanish painter Velazquez on the New English Arts Club, which in turn influenced the development of the curriculum at the Slade. There was a fashion for the work of Velazquez in the early years of the twentieth century, which was sparked by the publication of an influential book on Velazquez by R.A.M. Stephenson in 1895. As a consequence of this the influence of Velazquez can be seen in the work of many British artists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including J.A.M. Whistler and John Lavery.[65]

The shift in emphasis at the Metropolitan School of Art to a neo-classical and New English Arts Club inspired fine art tradition after 1914 was reinforced by the burning down of the Royal Hibernian Academy gallery in Abbey Street during the 1916 rebellion. The reason for this was that subsequent to this event the annual exhibition of

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[65] Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 11-13.

the Royal Hibernian Academy was held at the Metropolitan School of Art in Kildare Street. Thus a direct association was established between the two institutions. This relationship was made permanent in 1941 with the demise of the Royal Hibernian Academy School and its virtual transfer to the National College of Art. This relationship was to last till the end of the century.

In summary, between 1877 and 1936 the Metropolitan School of Art taught artists, teachers, craftspeople, artisans, and technicians. Its role in the training of artisans and technicians devolved after 1887 to the City of Dublin Technical Schools at Kevin Street and to the Dublin Municipal Technical School at Bolton Street. The college was particularly successful in the area of crafts during the period of the arts and crafts revival between 1895 and 1916. During Orpen's tenure between 1906 and 1915 it was successful as a fine art college. Subsequently the life class formed the artistic kernel of the curriculum at the Metropolitan School of Art. From the demise of the South Kensington system in 1913 until 1936 there was no formal curriculum to be followed and there were no academic departments; rather, a variety of teachers taught a range of specific subjects.[66]

8.5 The National College of Art

At the request of Joseph O'Neill, the secretary to the Department of Education, Sean Keating wrote a report on the Metropolitan School of Art in 1925. This report condemned the school as lacking direction and a professional approach to art education. Keating's ideas about the purpose of the school are encapsulated in his derisory comment that the school produced only "get rich quick illustrators and

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[66] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 244.

secondary teachers of 'art' for whom there is little demand".[67] In this report Keating reiterated Orpen's basic principle of art education by suggesting that the formula for the making of a good school of art was the following phrase: "By artists for artists"[68]

As a consequence of Keating's action, the government appointed a committee to report on the school in October 1926. This committee was made up of Dermod O'Brien, head of the Royal Hibernian Academy, Thomas Bodkin, Director of the National Gallery of Ireland, and three French experts on art education. The report of this committee condemned the school and made five recommendations for its future restructuring: (1) drawing should be compulsory in primary schools and staff should be trained accordingly, this went against government policy which considered art as inessential at primary level;[69] (2) the provincial schools of art should be reorganised; (3) the Metropolitan School of Art should become a major school for fine arts and crafts and for art teacher training; (4) manufacturers should participate in education and create a real union between art and industry; and finally (5) an effort should be made to influence public opinion in favour of the arts. Due to Government inaction, however, this report made no impact on the Metropolitan School of Art.[70]

Change finally came to the school in 1936 after the accession to power of the Fianna Fail party. This was a consequence of the desire of this party to set its stamp on the country. Keating initiated this change by writing to the Minister for Education and to the Taioseach, Eamonn de Valera, demanding a new, revitalised, and Gaelic

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[67] Ibid., 262.

[68] Ibid., 263.

[69] This was of course connected to the policies of language revival.

[70] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 265.

college.[71] In this new context the recommendations of the report of 1927 were looked at again, and this time action was taken. As a result, in 1936 the Metropolitan School of Art was designated the National College of Art with schools of painting, sculpture, and design, each headed by a professor, A new three year diploma course was introduced in each of the three schools at this time. The first diploma was awarded at the newly organised college in 1939.[72] In 1937 Keating was appointed professor of painting, with Maurice MacGonigal as his assistant. In 1941 George Atkinson, who had been headmaster since 1918, died, and in 1943 Michael de Burca, a painter and art inspector at the Department of Education, was appointed director. De Burca was only 29 years old and had no experience of managing a teaching department.[73]

8.5.1 *The Curriculum at the National College of Art*

In 1942 a new preliminary school was set up and a comprehensive programme was laid down for the diploma. The function of the preliminary school, where students were obliged to follow a course in the antique and still life, was to prepare students for admission to the diploma schools, and to cut out social dilettantism.[74] The entrance examination to the school of painting, which was taken after students had completed the preliminary course, consisted of drawing from observation and from memory; it also involved the execution of a composition based on a prescribed subject. Thus, an ability to draw well was a prerequisite for entry to the painting school. This was also the case in the school of sculpture and the school of design. Those who failed entry to

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[71] Ibid., 282.

[72] John Turpin, "The National College of Art Under Keating and MacGonigal," in *The GPA Irish Arts Review Yearbook, ed. Homan Potterton* (Belfast: Ann Reihill and Brian de Breffany, 1988), 203.

[73] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin,* 323.

[74] Turpin, "National College of Art Under Keating and MacGonigal", 204.

a school could pursue the Technical Schools examinations, which would qualify them to teach.

In the school of painting the diploma course lasted three years. In the first year students drew from the antique, from the live model, and from still life. Anatomy was also part of the course in the first year. In the latter part of the first year, painting with oils, with watercolours, and with tempera was added, and there was also an introduction to pictorial composition for which a subject was set each month.

In the second year students drew from the antique and from life. The latter included studies of the head and of the figure, both in repose and in action. Students also did drawing from memory, drapery studies, painting in oil and watercolour or tempera, copying of paintings in the National Gallery, and painting from life. The high point in the routine of the school of painting was composition. Composition was primarily of figure subjects but might also include decorative work, for example, posters, tapestries, or mural decoration.[75]

The diploma examination consisted of tests in life painting, and life drawing, each of three hours duration. It also consisted of a written paper on anatomy, and a pictorial composition for which three weeks were allowed. In addition students had to produce a portfolio and six studies of importance. Samples of a craft were executed but not examined. The life class and the composition class formed the core content of the diploma course in the school of painting.

The curriculum in the school of sculpture provided instruction in modelling and carving for idealistic representation, monumental and architectural features, and hand and machine processes. It also included teaching in the construction of armatures,

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[75] Ibid., 204.

modelling in clay and wax, carving in marble, stone, wood, concrete, and plaster, and piece moulding, waste-moulding, gelatine-moulding, and casting.[76]

In the first year, the curriculum in the school of sculpture covered modelling simple ornament from casts, natural forms suitable for decorative purposes, modelling details of the head from plaster casts, modelling from memory, and modelling the human head from life. It also included modelling drapery and simple architectural features, such as mouldings. The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement is evident here.

In the second year students modelled the head and figure. They also studied anatomy, relief work and drapery, and ornament from photographs and memory.

In the final year students modelled the full-length figure both in relief and free standing. Pottery was included in the sculpture school curriculum. Drawing was a major part of the course in the sculpture school.

From 1942 onwards the National College of Art was firmly established as a fine art college whose curriculum, thorough association with the Royal Hibernian Academy, whose teaching function had ceased in 1942, was firmly based in the neo-classical, New English Arts Club, and arts and crafts tradition.

8.5.2 *The Methodology of the Painting School at the National College of Art*

The pedagogic method in the painting school after 1936 was the same as in Orpen's time. A master, who set a pose that was held for days, directed the life class, which students of the three schools within the college attended. According to John Kelly, who studied at the college in the 1930s, Keating set a pose on a Monday that would be held for a week or a fortnight.

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[76] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 348.

The teaching methods of Keating and MacGonigal were different, though they followed the general pattern set by Orpen. In reflecting the Slade tradition, Keating's primary focus was on objective analysis and the delineation of form. In the sense that his focus was on line and drawing, Keating's teaching style was closer to that of Orpen than was that of MacGonigal. Keating was inclined to draw over a student's work while teaching, a trait that many students did not like. He was also noted for his charismatic personality, and he had his own studio in the college where students could see his work. This was one of the perks that went with the job and was a legacy of the atelier system. Keating also taught anatomy.

MacGonigal, on the other hand, was less dogmatic and did not interfere as much with the work of the students as Keating did. According to Tom Ryan, "MacGonigal was a better teacher at painting. MacGonigal wasn't a good draughtsman. He was an adequate draughtsman, not a real good one. But he was quite a good painter."[77] MacGonigal was clearly more flexible than Keating, as Ryan criticises him for allowing himself to be influenced by what Ryan calls the "new dispensation" that led to changes in Irish art in the nineteen fifties and sixties. He was also more broadminded in his approach to art and to what was acceptable. MacGonigal's brushwork was vigorous and he stressed broad description of planes.[78] Ciaran Lennon, who was a student of MacGonigal in the 1960s, described MacGonigal's style of painting as "smudging", or building up images with dabs of paint. By this Lennon meant that MacGonigal's work lacked the crispness and clarity, though not the precision, of Keating's. Tom Ryan neatly summarised the difference between Keating and MacGonigal when he said:

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[77] Vol. II, appendix 19, 1064.

[78] Ciaran Lennon, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 13.

"Keating used drawing to show the construction of the figure, where MacGonigal was interested in the exterior."[79]

When MacGonigal succeeded Keating as professor of painting in 1954 - Keating continued teaching at the college until the 1960s - the composition class became more important and popular. The requirement for this class was that each month students had to present a painting done outside of class time. MacGonigal assigned a mark to these paintings and put them in order of merit.

Though still rooted in the neo-classical tradition, the composition class, by its nature, would have encouraged students to consider issues raised by modernism even if they were not encouraged to experiment by the staff in the school of painting. Ireland had opened up to developments in modernism in the 1950s and 1960s and consequently students at the National College of Art were exposed to the influence of modernism. This influence inevitably led to a questioning of the academic tradition on which the curriculum of the National College of Art was based. This atmosphere of criticism, together with other developments, would eventually lead to change in the structure of the college in the early 1970s.

An important event in relation to the management of the college occurred in 1942 when a standing committee that had been set up during the reorganisation of the college in 1936 was allowed to demise. This standing committee, which was only advisory, was in effect a board of management. The demise of the standing committee led to a situation where the Department of Education acquired complete control of the college and where the director had complete charge of the college. After 1943, when de Micheal de Burca became Director of the college, a very cosy relationship

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[79] Turpin, "National College of Art Under Keating and MacGonigal", 208.

developed between the Department of Education and de Burca; de Burca had very good political connections. This was a situation which, as Professor Turpin shows, was very bad for the college and which persisted until 1969.[80]

[80] Turpin, *School of Art in Dublin*, 282-285, 303-308, 318-320.

CHAPTER 9

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART IN THE POST-WAR YEARS

9.1 Introduction

The four-school[1] structure at the National College of Art, as established in 1936, continued until 1975 when a new faculty structure was introduced. The course in each of the diploma schools prior to 1975 was of three years duration and that of the preliminary school was of two years duration. This structure was much like that of the National Diploma in Design in Britain, though with a much narrower range of craft options.

9.2 The Preliminary School

The stated aim of the preliminary school, according to the prospectus, was "to furnish a thorough training in general drawing practice as a foundation on which the succeeding courses might be established, and as preparations for the entrance examinations of the schools of design in industry, painting, and sculpture."[2] The

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[1] The four schools were the preliminary school, the school of painting, the school of sculpture, and the school of design.

[2] Ireland, Department of Education, *National College of Art: Prospectus for the session 1962-1963*, 1962, 9.

preliminary school was compulsory, except in cases of exceptional talent or adequate previous training.

The subjects taken on the preliminary course, again according to the prospectus, included object drawing, drawing from memory and imagination, mechanical drawing and design, drawing from natural forms, perspective, geometrical drawing, and craft-work.[3] All students had to pursue one craft course.

Drawing, as can be seen from the above list, was the cornerstone of the curriculum in the preliminary school and, according to students who attended the college at this time, life drawing was either not part of the course at all or was an insignificant part of the course. The preliminary school was, according to Professor Iseult McCarthy, who studied at the college in the 1950s,

> a progression, the idea was you went upstairs and started with ornament, literally ornament, acanthus leaves and so on. Then you progressed to sections of the face where you did a nose or an ear, eventually a head. Then at a given signal, MacGonigal, or whoever was with you, would say, "Now you can go to the figure." That was kind of promotion or progression and you went on to the full figure in the antique room. Eventually you got promoted downstairs to the life class.[4]

The preliminary school had one major drawback. This was the low standard of skill and knowledge of the students entering the course, which was caused by the very low priority given to the visual arts in Irish secondary education at this time. As a consequence of this, one of the principal functions of the preliminary course was to compensate for the lack of art education at second level. When combined with the narrow focus of its curriculum, this need to compensate restricted the effectiveness of the preliminary school in relation to its overall objective of preparing students for entry

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[3] Ibid., 10-11.

[4] Iseult McCarthy, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 14, 937.

to the diploma schools. Some small changes were made in the course following criticism of the National College of Art, and of Irish art education in general, in the Scandinavian Report of 1961,[5] but these were not substantial. More serious criticisms of the preliminary school were made during the student rebellion when a report on the National College of Art, which was produced by Micheal O'Nuallain of the Department of Education, Diarmuid Larkin of Carysfort College, and Christopher Ryan of St. Patrick's College, condemned it in the following terms:

> It did not appear to equip the student with the necessary background and experience to allow for the development of the student's creative talent and potential. The present course could not be regarded as giving a proper foundation prior to entry into painting, design, or sculpture schools as is understood in the context of present day requirements. We were informed that the preliminary course was dictated by the requirements of the Diploma schools. Yet on the other hand students entering the Diploma schools were considered by the professors to have fallen short of the requirements pertaining in these schools.[6]

As a consequence of this report, the preliminary course was reorganised on the British model in 1969, and was reduced from two years duration to one year. The theory behind the new course was the promotion of individual creativity through experience in various media; the particular educational objective was to diagnose the talents of individuals through project work. This was the first break from the exclusively skill based classes of the old curriculum at the National College of Art.[7] Subsequent to this change the preliminary school developed into an efficient, Basic Design inspired, preliminary course for the rest of the college. And, just as fine art

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[5] Ireland, Coras Trachtala, *Design in Ireland: Report of the Scandinavian Design Group in Ireland*, 1961.

[6] Christopher Ryan, Micheal O'Nuallain, and Diarmuid Larkin, "Report on the National College of Art 1969", National College of Art and Design Archives, File 61, 1.

[7] John Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century: A History of the National College of Art and Design* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1995), 497.

interests dominated the preliminary school under the old regime, so, according to Professor McCarthy, they came to dominate the new preliminary course.[8]

9.3 The Teaching of Fine Art at the National College of Art

Before the changeover to a new system was brought about in the early 1970s the curriculum at the School of painting was built around the life class and the composition class. This curriculum focused specifically on developing skill. The same situation applied in the school of sculpture. Entrance to the diploma schools was therefore completely dependent on the mastery of certain skills. The rigour with which students were judged is illustrated by the fact that of the students applying for entry to the school of painting from the Preliminary school for the session 1954-55 not one was accepted. According to Carey Clarke, even the student with the highest marks for that year in the preliminary school failed to get in. On application to the Director of the college this student was allowed to reapply the following February, on which occasion he was successful. This student subsequently went on to become a successful member of the Royal Hibernian Academy.[9]

To be accepted by one of the diploma schools the student had to submit "testimonies of study executed by the applicant during the preceding two years"[10] and to sit an entrance examination. The prescribed testimonies of study included six studies of importance in drawing from actual observation, six studies of importance in colour; either from nature or copied from reputable examples, two original compositions in

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[8] Iseult McCarthy, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 14, 946.

[9] Carey Clarke, interview by author, June 26, 1995.

[10] National College of Art, *Prospectus 1962-1963*, 15.

colour, and an original example of a craft work. The examination consisted in drawing from observation, drawing from memory, and design for a composition for a prescribed subject.[11]

According to Professor McCarthy, who studied design under Professor Romein, there was greater flexibility in the college under the old regime than in the period following the changeover to the new system in the early seventies: "What I particularly liked was the fact that there weren't the rigid boxes in terms of your chosen disciplines as there are today. . . . We worked with the fine art students a great deal. There was far more crossing over. The boundaries weren't nearly as marked. All day-students did three to four evenings a week in life drawing". She goes on to say: "It's actually much more difficult to cross over [under the new regime] . . . the old system worked like that totally freely. And drawing was common to all areas". In elaborating on the theme of openness and the interrelationship of different areas within art education, which was to be a key aspect of the fine art course at the college after 1975, Professor McCarthy points out that there was "great richness both for design people and fine art people going to the same life classes and spending time in the life room". At that time, she says, "Neither fine art nor design were specialised, in that the fine art people could wander into print and out of print, and into whatever. The design people did a lot of print, which would today be labelled fine print and fine art, and no way could a design student go near it."[12] The study of drawing was clearly vital to all students at the college and formed the core of studies. Professor McCarthy makes this clear in describing the timetabling in the college:

> At the beginning of the year you went to talk to the Director. Remember there were, say, thirty or forty students. I don't remember the exact number.

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[11] Ibid., 16.

[12] Iseult McCarthy, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 14, 940.

> It was small anyway. And he saw each student, and each student had an individual timetable. Now there were common things for whatever course you were following or whatever year group you were in. If you said you wanted to do a little painting he would say, "good, now you to on Thursday". It worked like that. Of course we were timetabled for Saturday mornings as well, you have to remember, for more life drawing. We did vast amounts of drawing. It was considered essential to do drawing.[13]

The aim of the school of painting until the early 1970s, as stated in the prospectus, was to "provide facilities of a comprehensive character for the study of painting in its various forms, and chiefly in respect of decoration and portraiture."[14] The prospectus went on to say that "the work of the school embraces the study of the methods of preparation of painting surfaces, the use of various mediums for painting, the study of precedents, and individual expression in original composition."[15]

As these quotes demonstrate, painting was seen purely in terms of its decorative function; the school of painting did not consider modernism. Indeed, in an interview with RTE in 1971, Sean Keating, who retired in 1954 but continued to teach until well into the 1960s, declared his hostility to modernism quite openly. In doing this he stated unapologetically that while he was working at the National College of Art he was trying as hard as he could to teach a drawing based, neo-classical curriculum, which was founded on precedent and absolute rules.[16]

There was a strong technical aspect to the fine art curriculum at the college, along the lines advocated by William Morris one hundred years earlier. Students were taught to study the properties of different materials and the use of different media. In the

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[13] Ibid., 941.

[14] National College of Art, *Prospectus 1962-1963*, 16.

[15] Ibid., 16.

[16] Videotape from Radio Telefis Eireann archives in possession of the author.

school of sculpture, for example, Professor Domhnall O'Murchadha was noted for his interest in the particular qualities of stone.[17]

The use of the phrase "individual expression in original composition" in the prospectus for 1962, which is quoted above, might give the impression that there was some accommodation of modernist principles in the fine art area of the college under the Professorship of Maurice MacGonigal. This was not the case. Though it was generally agreed, as already stated, that MacGonigal was more flexible than Keating, he did not in any way allow the preoccupation of modernism with individual expression to make inroads into the neo-classical ethos of the school of painting. Students of MacGonigal have said to the present writer that those who wanted to express themselves in an original way had to do so outside of the college, in much the same way as had happened in England before the publication of the Coldstream Report of 1960.[18] That the fine art curriculum at the college was uncompromisingly rooted in a didactic methodology and skills based ethos is borne out by the syllabus for 1962-63, which states that the school of sculpture "provides instruction in modelling and carving for idealistic representation, monumental and architectural features, and hand and machine processes."[19]

9.4 The School of Painting and the School of Sculpture

According to Dennis Bannister, who graduated from the National College of Art in 1968, students studying fine art were divided into two groups, those who were

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[17] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 358.

[18] Interestingly, the same thing happened after the publication of the Coldstream Reports, as shown in Chapter 7, under equally harsh and exclusive modernist inspired regimes in many art schools.

[19] National College of Art, *Prospectus 1962-63*, 20.

destined to become fine artists and those who were not. The students who were selected to become fine artists, according to Bannister, felt themselves to belong to an elite. Consequently, these students got more attention from teaching staff than the students who were destined to be teachers.[20] At the pinnacle of this elite, according to Bannister, were the diploma students in the school of painting, next down were the diploma students in the school of sculpture, next were the diploma students in the school of design, and at the bottom were those students doing the Technical Schools examinations.

The following were the subjects studied in the school of painting throughout the 1950s and 60s: drawing from the antique, drawing the antique from memory, drawing from life, anatomy, still life, craftwork, drawing the living figure from memory, drapery, painting in oil, water-colour or tempera, painting from life, and composition.[21]

Carey Clarke, who was a student at the college in the 1950s, described the programme followed by students in the school of painting at that time as very rigid and exacting. There was little change by the late 1960s when, according to students who studied in the college at that time, the curriculum was equally rigid.

First year students had to perfect the rigorous classical discipline of antique drawing before going on to the figure. At the school of painting, according to Ciaran Lennon, "You had life drawing in the morning from 9.30 to 12.30. Some days that would be broken into history of art from, say, 11.30 to 12.30, with Mrs. O'Murchadha".[22] Tom Ryan recalls the following situation: "First of all I did the classes from the antique, and they were absolutely emphatic, there was no question of doing your own thing. You

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[20] Dennis Bannister, interview by author, May 17, 1995.

[21] National College of Art, *Prospectus 1962-63*, 17-18, see appendix 4.

[22] Ciaran Lennon, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 13, 918.

had to do it and you had to do it correctly, plumb line and so on".[23] In the second and third years, four mornings a week were spent painting the figure and four afternoons a week were spent drawing the figure. One half day each week was given over to a craft and another half day was given over to pictorial composition; history of art was taught on Saturday mornings. Many painting students chose a printing process as a craft. In the case of Carey Clarke, for instance, his chosen craft was lithography.

According to Professor Turpin, the school of sculpture was dominated by the personalities of the Professor of Sculpture, Friedrich Herkner, and the Assistant Professor of Sculptor, Domhnall O'Murchadha. Herkner was primarily a modeller and O'Murchadha was primarily a carver. The curriculum in the school of sculpture therefore was built around modelling and carving, though modelling predominated as the principal area of concern for students. Domhnall O'Murchadha, according to Professor Turpin, would have liked to develop carving as an aspect of the course. However, he was prevented from doing this by Herkner, who favoured modelling. There was a strong arts and crafts aspect to the school of sculpture.

According to Brian King, presently Head of Sculpture at the National College of Art and Design, as a student in the school of sculpture in the 1960s "all you did was modelled". King points out that Herkner and O'Murchadha worked all day in their studios at the college. Consequently, according to King, " you did what you wanted to do yourself". He goes on to say that there was never any discussion, debate or dialogue about art. Herkner and O'Murchadha, he states, "would visit you for half an hour [each day], wreck your clay model, and you started again".[24] This was the pattern of teaching, according to King, throughout his student days at the college.

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[23] Tom Ryan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 19, 1060.

[24] Brian King, interview by author, 12th March 2001.

King goes on to state that "you had to produce one eighteen inch standing figure a year, two relief plaques, about one foot by one foot, and a cast head, and that was it. That was the years requirement, nothing else."[25]

The program in the school of sculpture was, according to King, dominated by academic modelling and drawing. The craft tradition also had a significant influence: "You made your own stone carving tools, you forged them, and then you were set to stone."[26] King states emphatically that modern art had no presence in the school of sculpture, and that students were completely ignorant of what was happening outside of the college in relation to developments in modern art.

Professor Turpin states that, although students in the school of sculpture were deprived of any outside influence, neither Professor Herkner nor Domhnall O'Murchadha stood in the way of students who wanted to experiment with new materials, like fibreglass for instance. In fact, he states that they encouraged its use. He also states that no obstacles were placed in the path of students who wished to make abstract work. Professor Turpin quotes Michael O'Sullivan, a student at the college in the 1960s, as saying that as students in the school of sculpture, "we felt far freer: less strict than in painting". According to Professor Turpin there was a more open and academically tolerant attitude in the school of sculpture than in the school of painting. To a great extent this was due to the intellectual interests of Domhnall O'Murchadha, but also to his interest in materials and abstract forms. Brian King relates that Domhnall O'Murchadha's decision to take him into the school of sculpture was based solely on a simple, and abstract, half sphere that King had modelled; though abstract this form was intended for a realistic depiction of a human face.

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[25] Ibid,.

[26] Ibid,.

For many students the working day was from nine in the morning until nine at night and day students could attend any night classes they wished. According to Tom Ryan, there was on nonsense tolerated at all:

> You were expected to be there on time and you went – well it was more liberal in the afternoon. But it was long and quite a disciplined day. We began in the morning. We worked up to half past twelve, and then we came back at two and we worked from two till four, and then we went back at half seven and we came out at nine.[27]

Every month, in conjunction with coursework, a composition was set for execution outside school hours.[28] Compositions were primarily figure subjects and could be for mural decoration, tapestry, posters, or other types of decorative work.[29] Once a month a 'crit' was held. A 'crit' involved the student mounting a display of the work executed as part of the composition project, and it involved the critical assessment of that work by staff. This system was continued into the new curriculum after the faculty system was introduced.

In the third year at the school of painting the previous three years of work culminated in a single composition by each student. This included the preparation of a colour sketch, the setting out of a full size cartoon, the preparation of studies from life, and the execution of the whole or part of the composition.

The curriculum that fine art students pursued at the National College of Art was almost identical with that of most art schools in Britain before 1960. In Britain, as in Dublin, drawing formed the core of the curriculum, composition was the culmination

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[27] Tom Ryan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 19, 1061.

[28] This was a legacy of the neo-classical system in which history painting - the painting of major compositions on historic themes - was an integral part of the educational system. In France, for instance, in the eighteenth century the Prix de Rome, a prize coveted by art students that more or less guaranteed a successful career, was awarded on the basis of a set composition.

[29] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 332.

of study, and the study of a craft was compulsory. The course in the school of painting in the post-war years was defined largely by the interests of Keating and MacGonigal, whose presence dominated the school until the resignation of MacGonigal in 1969. The course in the school of sculpture was dominated by the figures of Herkner and O'Murchadha. Herkner retired in 1967 and O'Murchadha retired in 1981. According to Professor McCarthy, personality dominated the curriculum. She states:

> Teaching in those days was very didactic. Looking back on it we accepted it. What would happen was, say in life class – if one was clever and had thought of it at the time one would have kept them – they would come along and do little doodles on your drawings, at the side of the page, and they'd walk on making no comment. But that was teaching, which really it wasn't. It didn't teach you how to *do* it. It just showed you how they did it, which is a bit different. There was no mention of teaching or structure, and there was nothing written down in those days by way of a course document.[30]

In order to acquire the diploma of the National College of Art it was necessary to pass sessional tests and a final diploma exam. The sessional tests consisted of the following: a submission of the work done during the session, an examination of technical proficiency in drawing and painting or modelling, an examination in original design, an examination in craftwork, and an examination in history of art and general knowledge.

The diploma examination consisted in the preparation of an original design or composition for a prescribed subject. This included full working drawings and an estimate of cost. It also included the execution of a portion of the scheme if for a hand process, or working direction for execution if for a machine process.[31]

As already pointed out, lack of flexibility in the curriculum at the college drove many students to produce work of a more modernist style outside the college. Students

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[30] Iseult McCarthy, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 14, 936.

[31] National College of Art, *Prospectus 1962-1963*, 11.

who were able exhibited this work in galleries or in group-shows. The Irish Exhibition of Living Art and the Independent Artists' annual shows were the most important of these. The style of work exhibited at these shows was generally different to the work that produced at the National College of Art. The lack of correlation between work executed and exhibited outside the college and work produced in the college is a clear manifestation of the extent to which the fine art curriculum at the college had became outmoded in the context of developments in the Irish art world of the 1960s.

The most obvious and serious fault of the system of teaching fine art at the National College of Art before 1975 was that it excluded people who did not share the *beaux-arts* tradition. In this context, it is revealing to note that two of Ireland's most successful modernist artists of recent times, Ciaran Lennon and Seamus Coleman, who both attended the college in the 1960s, were able to develop their interest in modernism while part of the group of students who were studying for the Technical Schools examinations, and not for the college diploma.[32] Lennon and Coleman are, significantly, critically acclaimed artists who both work in an uncompromisingly modernist idiom.

Notwithstanding the above examples, students who failed to enter the diploma schools, for whatever reasons, generally studied for the Technical Schools examinations and went on to become teachers.

9.5 Student Teachers

The Technical Schools examinations were the principal route to teacher qualification at the National College of Art until they ceased to be held at the college in

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[32] Denis Bannister, interview by author, May 17, 1995.

1978. The Department of Education set these examinations, and students who were registered in the school of painting, school of sculpture or school of design also took them.[33] The Technical Schools examinations, which dated from 1913, could be described, as already stated, as a continuation of the curriculum of the South Kensington System, but with fewer categories. The T.S. examinations, as they were called, comprised of 11 different subjects, which were examined in four stages over a four-year period. There were twenty different examinations to be done. The Arts and Crafts Movement was the overwhelming influence on this course.[34] This system was overhauled in 1936 when the four-year scheme was replaced by three stages: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Under the new system there were fewer individual subjects, there was a greater effort to promote specialisation, and fine art subjects were introduced. At the elementary level there were examinations in imaginative drawing, object and memory drawing, drawing from natural forms, and mechanical drawing and design. At the intermediate level there were papers on object and memory drawing, drawing from natural forms, pictorial design, industrial design, and modelled design. At advanced level were drawing, painting and modelling from life, pictorial design, industrial design, and modelling design.[35] While all levels had to be completed, only the examinations in subjects relevant to the students' specialisation were taken, and particular examinations could be repeated until the necessary standard was reached. Having completed the necessary Technical Schools examinations students went on to do a one-year course entitled Principles of Teaching. This course was held at certain approved centres, of which the National College of Art was one.

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[33] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 329.

[34] United Kingdom, Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Technical School Examinations, 1915, Examination Papers and Examiners' Reports,* 1915. 4.

[35] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 255.

Students graduated from this course with a qualification entitled the Art Teachers Certificate.[36]

There were a number of disadvantages to the Technical School system. One disadvantage was that weak and ill advised students were allowed to prepare for the examinations. This was a consequence of the fact that no entrance test was stipulated by the Department of Education for enrolment. This situation led to some students spending an excessive amount of time trying to get specific examinations.[37]

There was a more serious problem, however, with the Technical Schools examinations, which affected the development of the curriculum at the National College of Art. This was caused by the fact that, because the Department of Education controlled both the Technical Schools examinations and the curriculum of the National College of Art Diploma, teachers at the college did not have the academic freedom to set papers and examine their own students. As a result of this, coursework tended to be dictated by the Department of Education's criteria for success and not by the requirements of the diploma curriculum or by the requirements of the staff at the National College of Art, who, despite being assessors for the Technical Schools system, had no control over its content. The continued existence of the Technical Schools system therefore, as was noted by Professor O'Murchadha in the school of sculpture, precluded any real changes in the curriculum at the National College of Art.[38]

The hierarchical aspect of the National College of Art that Dennis Bannister describes, which assigned different status to different areas within the college, was a

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[36] For a full list of the subjects and levels see Vol. II, appendix 3.

[37] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 409.

[38] Ibid., 355-356.

legacy to a great extent of both Orpen's and Keating's powerful personalities, and was exacerbated by the Department of Education's lack of interest in art education. This system, which put teachers, as failed artists, at the bottom of the pecking order at the college, and fine artists, as the chosen elite, at the top, had, precisely because of the Department of Education's lack of interest, become institutionalised by the 1960s. In educational terms this was deplorable, as it defined trainee teachers as failures, and consequently teaching was seen in a negative context within the college. This situation had obvious consequences for art teaching at second level, which in turn had consequences for the National College of Art. The negative context in which future art teachers found themselves was exacerbated by the tendency of staff to leave them to work on their own while they got on with the job of teaching the students who were studying for the diploma.[39] The tendency of staff to identify with those students who are perceived by them as destined to become fine artists is an ubiquitous aspect of tertiary level art education, and continued after 1975 at the National College of Art and Design. The irony of this situation is, of course, that under both the pre-1975 system and the post-1975 system, because of the lack of opportunities for artists in Ireland, many, if not most, fine art graduates went on to become art teachers.

There is very little statistical evidence on the career destinations of fine art graduates for Ireland. It is helpful, therefore, to look to Britain for guidance. In Britain it has been found that seventy one per cent of those who describe themselves as professional artists have a second career - that is, they earn all or part of their income from work other than the direct practice of art. Seventy per cent of these dual career

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[39] Dennis Bannister, interview by author, May 17 1995.

artists work as teachers, just over half of this number being art college teachers.[40] As seventeen of the twenty two people interviewed formally by the present writer for this work, twenty one of whom studied fine art, receive or have received, most of their income from teaching, it can be assumed that the situation in Ireland is similar to that in Britain.[41]

The fact that many fine art graduates become teachers has implications for fine art curricula at tertiary level, and it has implications for the training of art teachers for second level. There is a need for more study and accurate statistical information, however, in order to deal with these implications, in particular in relation to the National College of Art and Design.

In summary, the fine art curriculum at the National College of Art until 1975 was rooted firmly in the neo-classical tradition and in a nationalist ideology. The methodology employed in the school of painting and the school of sculpture was based on copious amounts of drawing, compositional studies, modelling, and carving. The learning of skills was the driving force of the curriculum. At the same time the school of painting, and to a significantly lesser extent, according to some, the school of sculpture were actively hostile of modernist influence.

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[40] Gulbenkian Foundation, Enquiry into the Economic Situation of the Visual Arts, Nicholas Pearson, "Art Schools and the Un-Publicness of Art" in *The Teaching of Art: The Roots of Self Deception* (Department of Extra Mural Studies the University College of Wales Aberystwyth in Conjunction with the Welsh Arts Council, 1981), 4.

[41] The advent of *Aosdona*, which gives artists a *cnuas* or stipend that is paid for by the Arts Council of Ireland, has freed some of these people of the need to teach.

CHAPTER 10

THE DEMISE OF THE NEO-CLASSICAL TRADITION AT THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART: BACKGROUND

10.1 Developments in the Irish Art World in the Post-War Years

Generally speaking, from independence until the 1950s the Dublin art world was divided between two different groups, each made up of artists who shared broadly similar interests: a traditional group, which was associated with the Royal Hibernian Academy, and a more loosely organised Modernist group. Those artists associated with the latter group tended to look to Paris and London as their artistic homes. Some members of this group, including Norah McGuinness, Mainie Jellett, and Evie Hone, exhibited regularly in London; McGuinness exhibited with the London Group, and all three exhibited with the 7 and 5 Society. Both the London Group, which has been active since 1914, and the 7 and 5 society, which was active between 1919 and 1936, are and were, respectively, loosely organised groups of avant-garde artists who shared impatience with what they saw as the conservatism of the Royal Academy and the New English Arts Club.[1] The New English Arts Club, as shown earlier, was closely associated with the Slade School of Art. Interestingly, in relation to Sean Keating's association with the Slade style, his dogmatic adherence to its principles, and his

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[1] Charles Harrison and Allen Lane, *English Art and Modernism* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981), 346.

rejection of modernism, Henry Tonks said of the London Group: "The leaders of the London Group have nearly all come from me. What an unholy brood I have raised."[2] This statement illustrates the radical nature of the work of this group when compared with the more traditional style of the Slade. It also helps to explain Keating's opposition to the work of the Irish modernists.

Avant-garde artists were represented in Dublin in the early years of the new state by the Society of Dublin Painters. This group was formed in 1920 by Paul and Grace Henry, and included among its members were Harry Clarke, Letitia Hamilton, Clare Marsh, and Mainie Jellett. The Society of Dublin Painters was founded as a focus for artists who were not associated with the Royal Hibernian Academy, and who needed an alternative venue to the annual Royal Hibernian Academy exhibition to exhibit their work. Members of this group tended to Anglo-Irish and liberal, and consequently were at odds with the ideology of the new state. This was particularly so after 1932 when Eamon de Valera took power.

The more traditional group, and the group with which Keating was identified, by contrast with those artists who supported avant-garde ideas, was associated with realism and the Neo-classical tradition. The Royal Hibernian Academy, as already mentioned, was the focus of this group. As the 1930s advanced and as the relationship between the Royal Hibernian Academy and the Metropolitan School of Art became closer the school became associated with this group, consequently the curriculum at the school became synonymous with the Neo-classical and realist traditions.

In the 1920s and 1930s the new political situation in Ireland informed the relationship between modern art and traditional art. This relationship was manifested as

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[2] Quoted in, Harold Osborne ed. *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 332.

the thirties progressed in the development of an isolationist and nationalistic ethos that resulted in all forms of modern art, and in particular Modern English art, being excluded from the canon of what was acceptable by the new state.[3] As a result of this situation many of the artists associated with the more traditional group saw the rejection of avant-garde art as an active move towards the creation of a new type of society. As Sean Keating and Maurice MacGonigal, who were both nationalists, were prominent members of the Royal Hibernian Academy and also the dominant members of the staff at the National College of Art the school of painting at the college became associated with the new nationalist ethos. Domhnall O'Murchadha, who was appointed assistant Professor of Sculpture in 1948, shared similar attitudes. As a consequence of the influence of these men, the curriculum at the college not only became solidly embedded in the tradition favoured by them, which was a combination of the Neo-classical tradition, the Slade tradition, and social realism, but, in the case of the school of painting, set out to re-invent the Neo-classical tradition in an Irish mode. In doing this it excluded all forms of modern art as being un-Irish. This situation put modernist Irish artists in a defensive position in Irish society throughout the inter-war years.

10.2 Ireland and The Advent of Modernism

After 1945, as Irish society changed in response to new economic, political, social, and cultural developments that were consequent on the Second World War this situation was reversed, and modern art gradually became associated with a new and more outward looking vision of Ireland. This was particularly so after the government White Paper *Economic Development* was published in 1958. Consequently, in the late

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[3] Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-1985* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), 45-78.

1950s and 1960s, the ethos of the schools of painting and sculpture at the National College of Art became increasingly outmoded and defensive. Terence Brown has said of Ireland at this time:

> A society that had sought its rationale in a separatism justified by national distinctiveness had decided to open itself to the forces of the international marketplace, to seek economic growth as the primary national goal, and to enter fully into the economic and political life of the industrially developed states of Western Europe. Not unnaturally, the social and cultural effects of such an ideological volte-face have been the substance of much concerned, even heated, discussion.[4]

This context of change would inform developments in Irish art education at tertiary level for the next thirty years, and although the National College of Art did not involve itself in the debate about the changing Ireland of the post-war epoch, Dublin's growing art world did. It was through developments in modern art, therefore, rather than through developments in art education, that Irish artists and art students throughout the 1950s and 1960s were exposed to new ideas. More importantly for the future of the college in Dublin, however, was the fact that through the influence of the European and American avant-garde on modern art in Britain, and thus in Ireland, Irish artists and art students were exposed, not just to new ideas, but to radical ideas.

10.2.1 *The Arts Council*

In the post-war era Irish artists were exposed to developments in international art in the usual ways: through books, newspapers, magazines, and travel. They were, however, particularly open to influence through exhibitions, many of which were organised by the Arts Council.

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[4] Ibid., 267.

The Arts Council had been established in 1951 as a consequence of a gloomy report on the arts in Ireland that was published in 1949 by Thomas Bodkin. Bodkin was former Director of the National Gallery of Ireland and then Professor of Fine Arts and Director of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts at the University of Birmingham.[5] Though perceived by many as being elitist and exclusive, as was the British Arts Council, the Irish Arts Council was liberal and modernist in outlook. Subsequent to its foundation it became an important force in exposing Irish society to developments in modern art.

The development of the British Arts Council in its early years took place in the context a debate within British culture about the nature of society that was to develop as the 1950s and 1960s advanced. This debate had developed as a consequence of changes that had taken place in British society in the 1940s and 1950s and had focused on the question of power, the nature of the establishment, and the development of a more democratic society than had existed before the Second World War. The conflict that grew out of this situation formed the background to developments in British art and therefore in British art education throughout the post-war years.[6] Developments in Irish art were informed by the same debate.

In this context the Irish Arts Council set out to expose Ireland to developments in international art and, in the eyes of the Council, to raise the standard of art produced in Ireland by holding exhibitions and by providing support for Irish artists. It provided support for Irish artists by purchasing their work, by providing financial assistance to public institutions to encourage them to buy contemporary Irish art, and by organising

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[5] Ibid., 232-234.

[6] Robert Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 160-200.

exhibitions of Irish art abroad.[7] Throughout the 1950s therefore, by stark contrast with the pre-war years, there was some state support for Irish artists working in the modern idiom. This situation helped to give modern art a small though significant role in Irish society. More importantly, however, because it was officially sanctioned, it gave to modern art a legitimate role in Irish society.

One of the principal functions of the Arts Council was to increase public awareness of developments in modern art and in modern design, and to open up Irish society to cultural developments taking place outside the state. It did this primarily by organising exhibitions. Other developments in the 1950s reflected this same desire for openness within Irish society. Among these developments were the publication of the critical journal *Envoy,* for instance, which encouraged debate of literary and artistic issues, and the construction of public buildings in the modernist mode, most notably Busaras in 1953.[8]

In relation to developments taking place internationally in the fine arts - and the post-war years were very active in this respect - the principal agent of change in the Dublin art world at this time was the Irish Exhibition of Living Art.

10.2.2 *The Irish Exhibition of Living Art*

The exposure of the Dublin art world to modernist influence increased during the second World War when a number of avant-garde British artists who had come to Dublin to avoid the war set up the White Stag Group. The influence of this group led

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[7] S.B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism 1880-1950* (Dublin: Hugh Lane Municiple Gallery of Modern Art and Institute of Irish Studies, Queens University Belfast, 1991), 204-205.

[8] Browne, *Ireland,* 232-235.

directly to the setting up of the Irish Exhibition of Living art in 1943.[9] The particular incident that led to the setting up of Irish Exhibition of Living Art was the rejection of the work of Louis le Brocquy from the annual Royal Hibernian Academy exhibition; le Brocquy had been living in Europe before the war, but had returned to Ireland because of the war. Sybil le Brocquy, who was the artist's mother, Mainie Jellett, Evie Hone, and Father Jack Hanlon were the organisers of the first exhibition to be held by this group.[10] The artists who exhibited at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art looked to Europe, and in particular to Paris and London, as their spiritual home and as their source of inspiration. Predictably, the first exhibition of this group was criticised in some quarters for bringing foreign influence to Ireland. Generally, however, its reception in the press was good, and from 1943 onwards the annual Irish Exhibition of Living Art show became the principal forum for the display of modernist, an in particular formalist, artwork in Ireland.[11] Over time the Irish Exhibition of Living Art became a respected institution, and in reflecting the new and outward looking ethos of the period – and in particular the influence of American art - many foreign artists exhibited work at its annual shows. In the 1961 and 1962 shows, for instance, out of a total of 135 paintings exhibited 59 were exhibited by non-Irish artists who resided outside the state.[12] Brian King points out that the annual show was held in the National Gallery of Ireland and that the Irish Exhibition of Living Art had significant financial backing from Dublin's cultural and social elite. The high status of the Irish Exhibition

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[9] Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, 90-91.

[10] Ibid., 90-91.

[11] Ibid., 122.

[12] *Irish Exhibition of Living Art*, Catalogue of Annual Exhibition, 1961 and 1962.

of Living Art thus reflected the values of a new strident, liberal, confident, and outward looking middle class.

Another increasingly important source of support for artists working in the modern idiom throughout the post-war period was the modest, though growing, modern art scene in Dublin. This was centred on a few commercial galleries such as the Victor Waddington Gallery and the Ritchie Hendriks Gallery, the Arts Council, and on corporate buyers of art such the Bank of Ireland and Sir Basil Goulding.[13]

As a result of the above changes, by the mid-1960s there was a small but vibrant modern art scene in Dublin.

10.2.3 *Conflict in the Dublin Art World*

The changes that occurred in Irish society throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and the ensuing debate involving considerations of national identity, led to a split developing in the Dublin art world between two different factions, both of which supported modern styles.

One faction, which was generally associated with the Arts Council, with the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, and with the new commercial galleries, identified with the new image of an economically strident Ireland and looked to international formalism for its inspiration.

The other faction, which centred on the group known as the Independent Artists, who first exhibited as a group in 1960, looked to the School of Paris, Central Europe, and German Expressionism as its artistic sources.[14]

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[13] Brian O'Doherty, "The Irish Imagination 1959-1971," *The Irish Imagination 1959-1971* (Dublin: ROSC Committee, 1971), 10-11.

[14] Henry Sharpe, *Michael Kane: His Life and Art* (Dublin: Bluett, 1983), 39-45.

10.2.4 *The Independent Artists Group*

The Independent Artists group, like the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, felt that it had its finger on the pulse of change in Irish society. Mainie Jellett, the most influential member of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art when it was set up, had said that her objective in painting was to "delve deeply into inner rhythms and constructions of natural forms. . . [and to seek] the inner principle and not the outer appearance".[15] In expressing a similar idea, the catalogue of the first exhibition of the Independent Artists group stated that "true independence is an ability to look beyond the immediate appearance to a reality which underlies all outward aspect."[16] Both groups therefore had the same essential concern, which showed that they both adhered to broad modernist principles.

Notwithstanding these similarities, the artwork produced by artists associated with the Independent Artists group differed from that of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art chiefly by being openly political in content and expressionistic in style. Parallels can be drawn between the generation of "angry young men" that was inspired by John Osborne's book *Look Back In Anger*, and the artists who belonged to the Independent Artists. In fact, there is a striking similarity between the work of John Bratby, the leading fine artist who represented this generation in Britain, and the work produced by many artists associated with the Independent Artists group in Ireland. The Independent Artists group saw themselves as unappreciated and alienated from the cultural elite who dictated taste and who dominated the art scene in Ireland.[17] This

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[15] Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, 38.

[16] *Independent Artists*, Catalogue of Annual Exhibition, 1960, 3.

[17] Brian P. Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion, 1998), 149-179.

group also saw itself as populist and nationalist, by contrast with what it perceived as the more exclusive and internationalist Irish Exhibition of Living Art group.[18] As stated above, the Independent Artists espoused a more figurative and expressionistic style than that of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art. The members of the Independent Artists group were not concerned with form for its own sake. The catalogue note of the 1970 Independent Artists annual exhibition makes their position very clear:

> Our ten years working in the shadow of a declining art tyranny in Dublin has taught us that Unionism is not confined to the Six Counties. . . . the Arts Council and certain art committees and public galleries . . . [have] contrived to curtail the evolution of an independent culture in Ireland and is content to represent it as equivalent of the vision of a backward English region. Along with this, it shares with its Unionist counterparts in the six counties, symptoms of class bigotry, racial prejudice and pernicious art snobbery.[19]

Artists who belonged to this group included Michael Kane, Charlie Brady, Charlie Cullen, John Kelly[20] and Paddy McElroy. Both the Irish Exhibition of Living Art group and the Independent Artists group dominated the Irish art scene from the 1950s to the 1980s, by which time both groups had ceased to exist, having fulfilled their function of bringing Ireland into line with developments in the wider international art world.

10.3 The Hegemony of Formalism

By the early 1970s the Irish Exhibition of Living Art had become established as an institution that favoured a formalist[21] approach to art and that represented the values of

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[18] Sharpe, *Michael Kane*, 44.

[19] *Independent Artists*, Catalogue of Annual Exhibition, 1970.

[20] John Kelly, the printer, known as Little John Kelly in order to distinguish him from Big John Kelly. Big John Kelly was Professor of Painting at the National College of Art from 1969-1984.

[21] The term formalism is being used to denote paintings or sculpture which are preoccupied with the expressive potential of the formal aspects of art, for example colour, tone, and texture, or the physical attributes of wood and stone.

Dublin's cultural and social elite. In particular it had become associated with the type of formalism that was associated with the New York School. Twelve examples of the work of this school had been exhibited at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art annual show in 1963. As a particular feature of the work of the New York School was physical size, twelve was not a small number.[22] The New York School emphasised the physical act of painting and was divided into two groups: action painters and colour field painters. The artists of this school were iconoclastic in nature and saw the act of creating as having more importance than the finished artwork. The overall objective of the artists of this group was to achieve some state of authentic being by focusing on materials like paint, canvas, and steel, for instance. Hence, arose the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), and the large flat stained canvases of Morris Louis (1912-1962).[23]

According to Brian King, the work on display at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art's annual shows was seen by the critics and by the corporate buyers of art as more fashionable and acceptable than the work on show at the exhibitions of the Independent Artists Group. This would explain why artists associated with the Independents Artists group believed that the Arts Council favoured the work of the Living Art group over that of the Independent Artists Group. Though it is simplifying the case to say so, it is true that the modern art scene in Dublin in the 1960s, 1970s,

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[22] *Irish Exhibition of Living Art*, Catalogue of Annual Exhibition, 1963.

[23] It is interesting to note in this context that in the 1950s the aesthetic values of the formalist American art world superseded those of the old European avant-garde at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. This was partially a consequence of American sponsorship of exhibitions at the I.C.A. Herbert Read expressed concern about this situation. He felt that it would lead, because of the nature of American society, to corporate sponsorship of the arts, which by definition, according to Read's thinking, was against the essential spirit of art, which was its subversive nature. (Anne Massey, *The Independent Group*, 64-69.) For a more detailed discussion of American influence on European art see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1948).

and 1980s was divided between these two groups. This division lingers today. It was illustrated to the present writer during interviews for this study when two very well known Irish artists complained of a bias in favour of the formalist camp in choosing work for *L'Imaginaire Irlandais*, the festival of Irish art that was held in Paris in the summer of 1996. A glance at the *Annual Reports* of the Arts Council certainly gives the impression that until the early seventies at least the Arts Council favoured the more formalist international style over expressionistic or figurative art. Whether it is true or not, this is certainly a belief held by many Irish artists today.[24]

As the creation of a new Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s involved the replacement of the old inward looking and nationalistic society with a new outward looking society, it is understandable that the art of the explicitly nationalist Independent Artists Group was out of favour, and that the formalist style of the international art scene was in favour. It is no surprise then that the type of art on show at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, being more obviously international and universal in style, was in favour. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the Arts Council in choosing Irish art for exhibition abroad tended to favour the formalist style of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art over the more realistic and expressionistic style of the Independent Artists.

In this context, it is understandable that the members of the Independent Artists group saw themselves as outsiders, and therefore that they saw themselves as opposing the Arts Council and the Irish Exhibition of Living Art. The riven state of the relationship between these two groups was manifested in an iconoclastic attack on the

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[24] Arts Council of Ireland, Annual Reports, 1960-1973. Some members of the R.H.A. shared this attitude to the Irish Exhibition of Living Art Group. See interview with Tom Ryan in appendix 19.

Arts Council and the Irish Exhibition of Living Art in the catalogue of the annual exhibition of the Independent Artists in 1970, part of which was quoted above.[25]

In adopting the position of the outsider, the members of the Independent Artists Group were subscribing to the idea of the artist as defined by the Romantic tradition. Artists who subscribed to the Romantic tradition typically saw themselves as outsiders who were ostracised by bourgeois society and who were opposed to the official art of the state, which in the case of the Independent Artists was represented by the fashionable formalism of the commercial galleries, by the Irish Exhibition of Living Art group, and by the Irish Arts Council. Ironically the Irish Exhibition of Living Art also saw itself as rejecting bourgeois values and the art of the state, albeit the older nationalist state.

The artists of the Independent Artists group were to some extent correct in their assessment of the situation; at least to the extent that formalism was seen by many as the official art of the new Ireland. There is some evidence that the more formalist artists associated with the Irish Exhibition of Living Art did get more support from the Arts Council than those of the Independent Group.[26] It has been suggested to the present writer by a well known and financially successful Irish artist, and one who was associated with the Irish Exhibition of Living Art group, that in providing support for Irish artists abroad even the Department of Foreign Affairs favoured the work of artists associated with the Irish Exhibition of Living Art group. The tension between the Independent Artists and the Irish Exhibition of Living Art was to ease off somewhat after the reorientation of the Arts Council in 1973 under a new Director, Colum O'Briain; O'Briain had an association with some of the artists of the Independent

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[25] *Independent Artists*, Catalogue of Annual Exhibition, 1970.

[26] Sharpe, *Michael Kane*, 44.

Artists group. The Arts Council under O'Briain introduced a new policy of opening up the broader art world to Arts Council support.

It is interesting to note in this context that Michael Scott, the architect, has said of O'Briain, in discussing his role as director of the Arts Council, that he "is a very able fellow but I do not think he is a very visual person."[27] Scott, had been a member of the committee of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art for many years, he had been a member of a number of Arts Council boards, and he was an ardent supporter of the formalist aesthetic. In criticising O'Briain's taste, Scott was criticising the policies of the post-1973 Arts Council, and he was revealing his own partisan stance and the polarised state of the Dublin art world at this time.

Notwithstanding the change that came in the Arts Council's policies after 1973, or the opposition of the Independent Artists Group, formalism was the dominant style of art in Ireland throughout the 1960s 1970s and into the 1980s. Having been introduced by the Arts Council and a small coterie of artists and gallery owners such as the Hendriks Gallery and the Dawson Gallery, formalism gained significant and conspicuous status in Irish society through the institution of ROSC. ROSC was the most important agent in establishing the hegemony of formalism in the Irish art world and in Irish society in the 1960s and 1970s.

10.3.1 *The Influence of the ROSC Exhibitions on Irish Art*

ROSC was the name given to a series of exhibitions of international art that were held in Dublin between 1967 and 1988. The overall objective of ROSC was to expose Ireland to the influence of developments in modern international art. The year 1967, which was the year in which the first ROSC was held, was pivotal in this respect. The

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[27] Dorothy Walker, *Michael Scott Architect* (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 1995), 179.

overall effect of ROSC was to broaden the appeal of modern art in Ireland and to re-enforce the relationship between modern art and Irish culture by establishing modern art in general, but formalism in particular, as an acceptable, and, more importantly, as an Irish art form. Subsequent to ROSC '67 formalist art became associated in Ireland, in a broader sense than it had before, with sophistication and progress. ROSC '67, therefore, can be seen as the Dublin art world's official response to the government White Paper of 1958 on economic development.

ROSC '67 was organised by a group of people who were associated with the Arts Council and with the Irish Exhibition of Living Art. These included the art critic Dorothy Walker and the architect Michael Scott. Scott was chairman of the executive committee of ROSC. That the organisers of the first ROSC favoured a formalist aesthetic is evident in the forward to the catalogue, which was written by James Johnson Sweeny;[28] Sweeny was the first American critic to analyse the work of Jackson Pollock.[29] According to Sweeny,

> Naturalistic representation is an outgrowth of virtuosity in the employment of copying techniques which, once they get out of hand, tend to bury the essential form - to hide it under distractions. The ideal in painting and sculpture is an objective reality which is the product of an artist's personal selection of natural shapes and colours, their abstraction from nature and reconstitution into an individualised form which can be admired for itself, that is to say for the order it embodies.[30]

Thus, the aesthetic that ROSC advocated was the same aesthetic as that advocated by British formalist artists, and this aesthetic, quite clearly, encompassed the

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[28] Sweeny, an American who had a house in the west of Ireland and who was a friend of Michael Scott, had selected and obtained the twelve examples of modern American painting which were exhibited at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art in 1963.

[29] Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, 85.

[30] *ROSC '67: The Poetry of Vision: an International Exhibition of Modern Painting and Ancient Celtic Art* (Dublin: Cahill & Co., 1967), 14.

preoccupations of the Basic Design system; the interconnections between European and American modernism have been well documented.[31]

10.3.2 *International Formalism and Irish Art*

Significantly, as well as establishing formalism as the favoured art form of the new progressive Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s, ROSC set out to make a connection between ancient Irish art and modern formalist art, thus giving formalism greater legitimacy in an Irish context. In doing this ROSC asserted both the universal and timeless nature of formalism, and it established a link between Irish art, both ancient and modern, and modern international art. Both Sweeny and Scott, in the catalogue of ROSC '67, make a clear association between ancient Irish art and formalism in modern art.[32]

> It is of course true that all forms in sculpture and painting, no matter how arbitrary, formalised, or schematic, are derived from visual experiences of nature just as are the individual elements of the salmon fisherman's fly. And because these shapes and colours are found in nature the temptation to the artist is to try to copy in his medium the natural source-form rather than to face the more difficult task for the imagination, that of organising a new form from these factors. . . .
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> West European art during the past seventy-five years, in turning from its temptations to copy nature and the production of something that was primarily interesting for its resemblance to something else rather than for its own sake, has made a major advance in re-seeing and in the intensification of expression. We see this notably illustrated in the painting of the past four years. In poetry the sinew of expression is metaphor. And the power of the metaphoric approach in contrast to that of the simile toward an achievement

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[31] The development of this relationship can be seen clearly in the pages of Studio International during the period 1950 to 1975. For a discussion of this relationship in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War see (Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art)* and (John A. Walker, *Cultural Offensive: America's Impact on British Art Since 1945* [London: Pluto Press, 1998]) For an analysis of the interaction between European and American formalists at the beginning of the twentieth century see (Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "Form, Truth, and Emotion: Transatlantic Influences on Formalist Aesthetics," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 7 [1988] : 81-85)

[32] *ROSC 67*, 8 and 14.

> of the intense and memorable in the visual arts is clear from the great art of pre-twelfth century Ireland.[33]

Thus, ROSC re-enforced Ireland's image as a member of the community of advanced western nations.

ROSC '67 comprised two exhibitions, the first, which was held in the buildings of the Royal Dublin Society, was the exhibition of modern art, and the second, which was held in the National Museum of Ireland, was an exhibition of ancient Celtic art that included the Book of Kells. In a similar fashion, the second ROSC exhibition, ROSC '71, made an association between modern art and ancient Viking art, again re-enforcing the international context of Irish art and the idea of the universal nature of ancient art and, by association, modern art.

An explicit relationship between modern international formalist art and modern Irish formalist art was established by an exhibition called "The Irish Imagination, 1959-1971" which was held in conjunction with ROSC '71. In the introduction to the catalogue for this exhibition Brian O'Doherty, an Irish artist working in the formalist tradition in New York, made an association between international formalism and the work of the modern Irish artists Louis le Brocquy, Cecil King, and Patrick Scott. Patrick Scott had worked in the architectural practice of Michael Scott before becoming an artist, and Cecil King was a member of the executive committee of ROSC.[34]

The idea of associating Irish culture with modernist art was an established, though not old, tradition by 1976. The precedent was the Irish Pavilion at the New York Worlds Fair of 1939. Michael Scott who designed this building, aimed, in executing his

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[33] Ibid., 14-15.

[34] O'Doherty, "The Irish Imagination 1959-1971", 11.

design, to create a modernist piece of architecture in an Irish idiom. He did this by applying an Irish motif, the shamrock, to the modern style of architecture as developed by Gropius. Ironically, Sean Keating painted the mural in the main hall of this monument to Irish modernism.[35]

A later example of the same idea is the mixture of modern abstract art and Celtic art in the paintings of Michael Farrell, which were painted in the 1960s. Farrell was a regular exhibitor at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art and in Arts Council travelling exhibitions throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Another example of this idea is provided by the work of Robert Ballagh, which also married the modernist style with Irish themes, though this work had a more explicit political message. A more obvious example of this type of work is provided by the paintings of Louis Le Brocquy. All of these artists, it will be noted, were associated with the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, and none with the Independent Artists.

10.3.3 *The influence of British Art on Contemporary Irish Art*

Along with the influence of ROSC and the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, developments in formalism had been made available to Irish audiences throughout the 1960s through the auspices of the Arts Council, which had organised a number of important and influential exhibitions of formalist art before 1967. For example, in 1963 two different exhibitions of recent British painting were held at the Dublin Municipal Gallery of Modern art. In 1964 the Arts Council organised a major exhibition of recent American art, and, significantly, in 1967 a number of important exhibitions of modern British art were held.[36] These included an exhibition of the work of contemporary

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[35] John O'Regan, ed., *Works 10, Michael Scott 1905-1989* (Dublin: Gandon Editions, 1993), 16.

[36] Arts Council of Ireland, *Annual Reports*, 1963-1967.

British sculptors at the National College of Art in Kildare Street, which included the work of Barbara Hepworth, Jacob Epstein, and Henry Moore. They also included a one-man show of the work of Henry Moore, which was held in the new exhibition hall in the Berkeley Library in Trinity College. All of these artists had a fundamental role to play in the development of formalist aesthetics in British art in the inter-war period. The work and ideas of these artists had influenced the development of the Basic Design system in the 1950s. More significantly, however, and also in Trinity College, there was an exhibition of the work of Victor Pasmore, who, as has been shown, was one of the most important agents in the development of the Basic Design system.[37] Pasmore's work had been included in ROSC '67.

In summary, by 1971 formalism was well established as the dominant art form in Ireland and its influence was clearly visible in the work of many young Irish artists. Thus, by the early seventies the way was prepared for the introduction of formalism as a force in tertiary art education in Irish art schools.

10.3.4 *The Influence of the ROSC Exhibitions on the National College of Art*

ROSC '67 had a very powerful influence on Dublin's community of artists, and many of these influenced by ROSC went on to become influential in their own right as teachers at the National College of Art and at other art schools throughout Ireland.[38] As a result of the influence of ROSC, modernism was embraced with such enthusiasm by some teachers that students were overwhelmed by their vigour. Graham Knuttal, for example, one of Ireland's most successful artists of the 1990s, has complained of the overpowering influence of the New York School on some of the staff at the Dun

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[37] Arts Council of Ireland, *Annual Report 1968*.

[38] Ciaran Lennon, interview by author, see Vol. II appendix 13.

Laoghaire School of Art when he was a student there in 1975.[39] Knuttal abandoned painting because of the anti-figurative stance of these tutors and took up sculpture instead. He only returned to painting later, and, it must be stressed, to great financial success.

By negative association with ROSC, and therefore with formalism, which was seen by many young artists and art students as progressive, sophisticated, and radical, the National College of Art, which still adhered to the figurative and Neo-classical tradition, was seen by the same people as backward, unsophisticated, and outmoded. This negative association would have been reinforced for students at the National College of Art by Sean Keating's reactionary, and, it must be said, very entertaining response to the ROSC '71 exhibition, which was recorded for television by Colm O'Briain.[40] This interview had the effect of encouraging the alienation of the more radical students at the college from the more traditional staff, and it would have helped to prepare the ground for the acceptance of the new curriculum that was brought to the college in the early 1970s.

Significantly, between 1967, the first year in which ROSC was held, and 1971, the year of the second ROSC, the profile of the Dublin art world changed from being modernist to being aggressively modernist and more explicitly formalist. One symptom of this change was that the old committee of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art resigned and was replaced by a completely new, younger, and more dynamic one.[41] Brian King, who headed the new committee, had been appointed by the old committee after he had

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[39] *New Works by Knuttal*, Catalogue of an Exhibition held at the New Apollo Gallery, Dublin, 1994, 5.

[40] 'Aurora', Radio Telifis Eirann, 23rd November 1971.

[41] Ciaran Carty, *Robert Ballagh* (Dublin: Mount Salus Press, 1986), 102-106.

suggested at a committee meeting of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art that a complete shake up of modern Irish art was needed to take account of new formalist developments in modern Irish art and in particular to the development of Minimalism.[42] Despite the fact that, as Ciaran Lennon has suggested, King had difficulty in finding enough Irish artists who represented this new movement, the first exhibition organised by the new committee was a watershed in Irish art. It involved performance art, sound art, and installations. It also involved photography, video art, and language art. The challenging nature of this new art can only be imagined now. In the context of the political changes that took place between 1967 and 1975, however, it must have seemed quite a threat. Firstly, to the Independent Artists group as modern nationalists, whose response to the formalist and internationalist onslaught at their show of 1970 was mentioned earlier. Secondly, and more significantly for this study, it must have appeared as a very serious threat to the staff at the National College of Art who identified with the Neo-classical tradition and the Royal Hibernian Academy.

In this context it is understandable that when the authorities within the National College of Art resisted demands for change there was a reaction that led directly to the student revolt. It is important to note that the student rebellion at the National College of Art was located not only in the context of changes taking place in the Dublin art world, but in the broader context of the radical political activity of the late 1960s in Dublin. This included student involvement in political activity and the general political situation in Ireland at the same time. This situation in turn was located in the context of the student rebellions in Britain, Paris, and in the United States in 1968, which included the student rebellion at Hornsey College of Art. It is important to note that all of the above took place in the context of the developing political difficulties in the North of

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[42] Brian King, interview by author, 12 March 2001.

Ireland at this time. It is significant that the student unions in Ireland were actively involved in left wing political activity at this time. A number of those former students, including some who were involved in the Students Union at the National College of Art are today members of liberal or left wing political parties and are actively engaged in political activity.

The context of radical political and social change at the end of the 1960s created disproportional support for the relatively small number of students who fomented protest at the National College of Art. This was exactly the same situation as had happened in British art schools.[43] The radical political aspect of student protest at the National College of Art in the late 1960s led to a negative reaction by the authorities in the college, who believed, correctly, that left wing political influence was being brought to bear on students. The general context of turmoil, conflict, protest, and reaction, that grew out of all this political activity led directly to the demise of the Neo-classical system at the National College of Art and to the introduction of a new system in 1971.

In summary, Ireland had been exposed to developments in modern art since the 1880s, and since then there have always been a significant number of avant-garde artists working in the modernist tradition in Ireland. In the early years of the century the artists associated with fashionable or progressive developments in art in Ireland and with modernism in particular, notwithstanding the influence of William Orpen, had very little influence on the teaching of fine art at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art. After independence both Keating and MacGonigal, and consequently, particularly after 1936, the National College of Art, identified with the new nationalist Ireland.

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[43] Clive Ashwin, *Art Education: Documents and Policies 1768-1975* (London: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1975), 114.

Until the 1960s Keating and MacGonigal in the school of painting, and until the 1980s, to a lesser extent, Domhnall O'Murchadha in the school of sculpture and John Kelly in the school of painting, self-consciously set themselves in opposition to the modernists who were derided as being alien to the new nationalist ethos. As the 1950s and 1960s advanced, and as the ethos of the new nationalist Ireland that de Valera had established in the 1930s and 40s was eroded by the opening up of Ireland to international influence, the position of strength of the nationalist ethos at the National College of Art was diminished. Consequently, as Irish society began to change, and as modern art became an acceptable part of this change and a reflection of Ireland's new self-image, the National College of Art found itself in an isolated position. As a consequence of this, when change was finally demanded of the college in the 1960s and 1970s the administration of the college took a defensive stance, and this inevitably led to conflict with the forces of change.

CHAPTER 11

THE DEMISE OF THE NEO-CLASSICAL TRADITION AT THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART: TRANSITION

11.1 Design as an Agent of Change in Third Level Art Education in Ireland in the 1960s

It is interesting to note that changes in tertiary level fine art education in Ireland in the 1960s were sparked off by demands for improvement in the quality of Irish design. The spark which ignited interest in design education was the publication in 1958 of the Government White Paper *Economic Development*. The reason for this development was that subsequent to the publication of this white paper economists emphasised education as an economic investment rather than as a consumer service.[1] Thus, as fine art education in Britain in the post-war years had found itself under pressure to conform to the needs and demands of British society in terms of its technological needs so in Ireland.

In the context of this new emphasis in Irish education, William Walsh, chief executive of Coras Trachtala, convinced Sean Lemass to put the development of Irish design under the auspices of Coras Trachtala and not under the control of the Arts

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[1] John Coolahan, *Irish Education; History and Structure* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1981), 131.

Council, as it had been hitherto.[2] Design was henceforth seen as a vital aspect of Ireland's economic development.

The Arts Council had encouraged the development of Irish design since its foundation chiefly by organising exhibitions of design, and by organising lectures by prominent people in the design world. In 1954, for instance, it organised an exhibition of international industrial design which was held in Dublin and which had the stated objective of raising "the standard of good taste and artistic judgement at home". It had the further objective of improving the competitiveness of Irish exports in world markets.[3] Two years later, in 1956, the Arts Council organised an exhibition of modern Irish design with the same objectives. The goods to be exhibited at this exhibition were selected by Ake Hult, director of the Swedish Council of Industrial Design, and, as befitted a didactic exhibition, it toured the country.[4] Generally speaking, the approach of the Arts Council to design education was not unlike that of the Design in Industries Association in Britain after the First World War. This was particularly so in the sense that while it set out to make people aware of good design through exhibitions, the Arts Council could not force change in those areas of society that would affect the production of good design.

Walsh took a different approach to that of the Arts Council, and he was more ambitious in his efforts to improve Irish design than the Arts Council had been. He planned to reorganise design education in Ireland completely, in much the same way as Henry Cole had done in Britain almost exactly one hundred years earlier. With this

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[2] John Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century: A History of the National College of Art and Design* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1995), 416.

[3] Ireland, Arts Council of Ireland, *Annual Report*, 1955. 17.

[4] Ireland, Arts Council of Ireland, *Annual Report*, 1957. 10.

objective in mind, Walsh organised an investigation into design education in Ireland by a number of Scandinavian designers, one of which was the above mentioned Ake Hult. The report of this committee, which visited Irish art schools in 1961, condemned the National College of Art outright and stated unequivocally that the college should be completely reorganised on different lines.[5]

There were five members on the committee that produced this report, and, although three of the members were trained architects, all were designers. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the bias of the report's recommendations on the National College of Art were in the direction of design, and that they favoured some sort of liaison with a department or school of architecture. Essentially this report recommended a completely new college of art for Dublin which would teach design, architecture, and fine art, and which would possibly be affiliated with one of the universities or with Bolton Street College of Technology. It is important to note that this committee saw design as crafts based rather than industrially based.

In relation to fine art, the report stated that while the members of the group that drew it up did meet a number of prominent architects they did not meet many Irish artists.[6] So, even though it would have consequences for fine art education, this report did not address fine art in any detailed or significant way, nor did it attempt to define the overall objectives of fine art education.

Having discussed the condition of design education in Ireland, this report recommended that a body should be set up to look into the problems facing Irish design and to reorganise design education in Ireland. It also suggested that "this body

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[5] Ireland, Coras Trachtala, *Design in Ireland: Report of the Scandinavian Design Group in Ireland*, 1961, 45.

[6] Ibid., 41.

should be formed as a core around which present day thinking in art and design can grow". It provisionally entitled this body the Irish Institute of Visual Art.[7]

As a consequence of the criticisms of the Scandinavian Report a new head of design was appointed at the National College of Art in 1964, and there was also some reorganisation of the preliminary school. The lack of urgency that the college authorities had shown towards the development of a design course prior to the publication of the Scandinavian Report is illustrated by the fact that no professor of design had been appointed since the previous one had retired in 1959.[8] Given the Government White Paper of 1958, and given the importance of the Scandinavian report and its recommendations, the above changes at the National College of Art can be seen a minimal response.

11.1.1 *The Report of the Council of Design, 1965*

By stark contrast with the National College of Art, the Government took the Scandinavian report seriously. This is demonstrated by the fact that, in direct response to the Scandinavian report, the Government set up the Council of Design in 1963. The brief of the Council of Design was to consider future arrangements for design education in Ireland, and the role of the Council was to advise the minister on all design activity, especially in relation to industrial design and the training of designers. Essentially, according to Professor Turpin, the brief of the Council was to "lay out a new scheme for design education based chiefly on reform of the National College of Art".[9] Sir Robin Darwin (1910-1974), who was Rector of the Royal College of Art

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[7] Ibid., 53.

[8] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 424.

[9] Ibid., 427.

between 1948 and 1971, was the most important and influential educator on the Council of Design. Darwin, who had studied painting at the Slade, belonged, not surprisingly, to the analytical and scientifically oriented tradition in British art education. When appointed rector of the Royal College of Art in 1948, he had completely reorganised and reoriented the College towards design and modern technology, and, significantly, away from fine art. Darwin had served on the Coldstream Committee and virtually every other committee on art education since the war. Darwin also had experience of the Irish situation as he had worked with the Irish Arts Council in the early 1950s. [10]

The report of the Council of Design, which was published in September 1965, displayed an open ended and liberal approach to education in the visual arts by stating at the outset that, as well as having a role to play in commercial development, the visual arts had a role to play in the development of cultural identity. In expressing the belief that the interpenetration of art and technology was of fundamental importance in the development of good design, the council showed the influence of recent British thinking. The influence of the first Coldstream report was evident in the recommendation that a faculty of industrial design should be associated with faculties of architecture, technology, and fine art, and, further, that it should have access to the specialised teaching and facilities of these faculties. The Bauhaus model was invoked in the suggestion that a new National College of Art should be associated with a college of technology.[11] The report, in fact, cited the Bauhaus as an example of an institution

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[10] Sir Robin Darwin, "Wide Influence of the Royal College of Art," *Times Educational Supplement* November 10 1967, 1049.

[11] Ireland, Department of Education. *Report of the Council of Design,* 1965, 21.

with the type of curriculum that would promote a vigorous academic climate.[12] From the above it is clear that the authors of this report were influenced by developments in Britain and in particular by the thinking expressed in the Coldstream reports.

The recommendation in this report that a new college of art should be associated with a college of technology reflects a shift away from the recommendations of the Scandinavian committee, which had stressed that the orientation of the new school of art should be towards architecture. The Scandinavian committee had felt that the attitude of fine artists to media and to society was alien to what was needed to make good designers. Understandably, the members of the Scandinavian Committee had felt that architects made the best designers. There were two reasons for this belief. Firstly, because architects were used to working with other people in situations which involved compromise and a more democratic approach to decision making. Secondly, because, as part of their training, architects had to develop a sensitivity towards materials and this, the members of the committee felt, was a prerequisite for the creation of good design. In short, the Scandinavian committee felt that the fine art mentality was incompatible with good design practice.[13] This position is echoed by the findings of the authors of *Art Students Observed*, as shown in Chapter 7. Given that the Basic Design system in Britain failed in the final analysis to realise the overall objective of the Bauhaus – the ultimate aim of the Basic Design system was to create a synthesis of art and technology and consequently fine art and design - this stance on the part of the Scandinavian committee is striking.

It is interesting to note that when the student rebellion broke out at the National College of Art in 1968 the radical students opposed developments which favoured a

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[12] Ibid., 17-18.

[13] Coras Trachtala, *Design in Ireland*, 41.

design bias at the college and yet demanded a new structure based on the Bauhaus model, which was, of course, primarily a design school. To be fair to the radical students, it may be that in making their demands they were just reflecting the reformative aspirations of Gropius. Alice Hanratty, who was one of the radical young teachers at the National College of Art during the student rebellion, dissented from this position. In submitting her own suggestions for a new curriculum at the college, Hanratty criticised the Bauhaus model because, as she pointed out in a letter to the board of the new National College of Art and Design in 1972, the fine artists who worked at the Bauhaus in the 1920s failed to arrive at a significant or lasting statement.[14]

The report of the Council of Design recommended a new structure for the National College of Art. This new structure was to include the following: (1) a preliminary school; (2) a faculty of fine arts, with departments of painting and sculpture; (3) a faculty of industrial design, with departments of interior design and furniture, fashion and textile design, glass, stained glass, ceramics and mosaic, silversmithing, jewellery and metalwork, and design for theatre, cinema and television; (4) a faculty of graphic design, to include commercial art, illustration, typography, lithography, etching and photography; (5) a faculty of architecture; and (6) a teacher training course.[15]

In relation to the bias in favour of handcrafts in the Scandinavian report, it is

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[14] National College of Art and Design Archives, File 84. This statement is erroneous, as many of those who taught at the Bauhaus left a significant mark of twentieth century art. Lazlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), who was a painter and a sculptor, exercised an important influence on the arts in the United States after he settled there in 1937. The work of Paul Klee has been hugely influential in western art since the 1920s. Wassily Knadinsky has been called the founder of Abstract Expressionism, which had such a major influence on western art after the Second World War. And Joseph Albers, quite apart from his involvement with the influential Black Mountain College, had a major influence on a number of artistic movements in the second half of the twentieth century: Hard Edge Painting, Op Art, and Serial Art for example.

[15] Department of Education, *Report of the Council of Design*, 35.

noteworthy that Sir Robin Darwin felt that the report of the Council of Design tended to focus too much on design as hand-crafts and not enough on design as engineering. Darwin also felt that the overall orientation of the college should be shifted from fine art to industrial design. His intention in doing this was to make people realise that the new college was not merely a modern version of the old one. This approach to the new college of art in Dublin echoed the changes that Darwin had brought about at the Royal College of Art in London.[16] The report of the Council of Design did not elaborate on the nature of the fine art curriculum within the new college.

As the Department of Finance had recommended that nothing should be done until a report on higher education in Ireland, which was being produced by the Commission on Higher Education, was published, no action was taken by the government on the recommendations of the report of the Council of Design. The Council of Design had recommended that the National College of Art should come under the new Higher Education Authority whose establishment would follow the report of the Commission on Higher Education.

11.1.2 *The Report of the Higher Education Authority, 1967*

The report of the Higher Education Authority, which was published in 1967, explored a number of possible models for the new National College of Art. One suggestion was to include it in a projected new college, the National Institute of Higher Education, now known as Dublin City University. Another suggestion was a possible link with Bolton Street College of Technology. The Higher Education Authority report, following on from the Council of Design report, explicitly rejected the recommendation of the Scandinavian design group that the college link with

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[16] Ibid., 37.

architecture rather than technology.[17] The Higher Education Authority report, in short, recommended two possible polytechnic type solutions but did not favour either. Eventually, after a number of other possibilities had been explored, including liaison with Trinity College Dublin, the National Council for Education Awards awarded the first degrees at the new college of art in 1980. According to Professor Turpin, discussions with Trinity College were aborted at an advanced stage largely for political reasons.

The recommendations of the Council of Design and of the Higher Education Authority reports were to form the basis for the reorganised National College of Art, which would be created in the *National College of Art and Design Act* of 1971.

In relation to immediate change at the National College of Art, however, despite the recommendations of these reports, the Department of Education remained inactive, and successive Ministers for Education did nothing to improve the situation of the college.

11.2 The Student Rebellion

Continued inaction on the part of the Department of Education in relation to the National College of Art led to the publication of an anonymous letter in the *Irish Times* on the 10th of January 1968. According to Professor Turpin, Michael O Nuallain, one of the Department of Education's inspectors, wrote this letter, which was a long and hard-hitting letter. It clearly and concisely pointed out the problems that caused the National College of Art to be so backward and ineffectual as an art education institution, and it resulted in a public debate in the press. At about the same time as the

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[17] Ireland, Department of Education, *Commission on Higher Education Report, Vol. 1* 1967, 322-323.

above letter was written, a body called the Student Representative Council was elected at the National College of Art. On the 19th of January 1968 Donal O'Sullivan, a student in the school of sculpture and president of this new body, wrote to the *Irish Times* demanding that the National College of Art be removed from the control of the civil service and that a new college designed to meet current standards be built.[18] Unfortunately, the reformist Minister of Education of the day, Donogh O'Malley, who was working towards such changes, died unexpectedly in March 1968.

In April 1968 the Student Representative Council presented the new minister, Brian Lenihan, with a twenty-page report on conditions at the National College of Art, which demanded a new college without delay and an independent governing body with student representation. The demands of the students were similar to the recommendations of the Commission on Higher Education and were the final push that set in train events which led to change.

Speaking at a symposium on art and design education, which was held in Trinity College in April 1968, Lenihan reiterated O'Malley's commitment to the National College of Art, but in the event did nothing. At the same symposium Sir Robin Darwin condemned Irish art education and the National College of Art in no uncertain terms. In doing so he exhorted the smashing of the plaster casts of neo-classical sculpture that filled the college, which he saw as symbols of the dead neo-classical tradition of the nineteenth century.[19] This was an exhortation that would be taken up by some students later on. Both Lenihan's prevarication and Darwin's exhortation fed into student frustration and anger.

The student rebellion broke out, appropriately, in May 1968. It was influenced by

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[18] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 450.

[19] Ibid., 457.

the student revolt at Hornsey School of Art in London, also in May 1968, and by student rebellions in Paris and the United States. The student revolt at Hornsey, as shown, was caused by problems associated with the introduction of the recommendations of the Coldstream Committee, and, in line with student politics of the day, it was essentially anti-didactic and anti-disciplinarian.[20]

The complaints made by the students at the National College of Art in the report that they had presented to the minister in April 1968 reflect the same focus as the students at Hornsey and the influence of developments that were taking place in Britain. In this report students had demanded that, after initial consultation with the professor, students in the painting school should be encouraged to pursue their own particular interests, reporting on their activities to the painting staff only periodically. Students also demanded that the annual examination should be based on this work, and that students should feel free to devise their own working hours, as they thought necessary.[21]

The Student Representative Council was the organising committee of the student rebellion. Fine art students dominated this committee, and this situation accounts for the very strong resistance by the Student Representative Council to the design bias of the various reports on the college and to the general pressure to orient the college towards design at this time. Despite this fine art bias, the demands of the students were more or less the same as the reforms suggested by the Council of Design.

In response to the report produced by the students in April, the minister, Brian Lenihan, promised a new building within five years and an independent governing

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[20] Sjoerd Hennema, *Fads Fakes and Fantasies: The Crisis in the Art Schools and the Crisis in Art* (London: Macdonald, 1970), x.

[21] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 462.

body, with student representation, within one month. He later modified this and rashly promised a new building within three months and an autonomous governing body by Christmas. In December 1968 Sean O'Connor, assistant secretary at the Department of Education, withdrew the promise of an immediate governing body and instead proposed an interim advisory council, with student representation, to advise the director, Michael de Burca.[22] On the 13th of January 1969 O'Connor informed de Burca that the first meeting of this interim advisory council would be held on the 16th of January. There would be student representation at this meeting.[23]

11.2.1 *The Rebel Students Demand an Open Curriculum*

At the meeting of the interim advisory council on the 16th of January various issues were discussed with no particular relevance to the curriculum in fine art. A more important development was the establishment of an academic council, which was to be the focus of academic debate and the promulgation of policy. Significantly, there was no student representation on this council. In the event, the academic council proved useless in relation to solving the problems of the college, and the Department of Education dealt directly with students.[24]

At a second meeting of the advisory council of the 28th of January the most controversial curricular issue was the course in painting. At this meeting the students complained that the curriculum was not flexible enough and was too heavily in favour of figurative painting. In demanding change in fine art, students invariably demanded a

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[22] Paddy Gillan, *A Case History of Education Under Neo-Colonialism* (Dublin: National College of Art Student Union, 1971), 8.

[23] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 467.

[24] Ibid., 469.

system based on the Bauhaus model, which would involve a common course for all students irrespective of their specialisation. A member of the more traditional staff of the college at this time has said to the present writer that students were encouraged to demand a course modelled on the Basic Design system by the more radical members of staff, who, he claimed, gave the students copies of Maurice de Sausmarez'[25] book *Basic Design: The Dynamics of Visual Form* in order to influence their thinking. Paul Funge, one of the radical staff, was particularly influenced by this book - Funge ran a course that was a carbon copy of the course described in de Sausmarez' book while head of the art school in Waterford in the mid-nineteen seventies. The long-term aim of the students was to break down the barriers between the various schools in the college and to create a completely new structure that was egalitarian, non-didactic, and non-disciplinarian. This objective was clearly in line with Herbert Read's utopian ideals, with Coldstream's recommendations, and with the objectives of the Basic Design system. Paddy Gillen, who represented the students of the Preliminary course at the meeting, asked specifically for a Basic Design course that would involve the exploration of all media. At the same meeting a suggestion was made that a common first year be established in order to get rid of bad training and thinking, which would be followed by three years of specialisation leading to a final examination.[26] A member of the more traditional staff in the school of painting at that time has told the present writer that the majority of teachers found it very difficult to debate with the students as the students were very dogmatic in their demands for a Basic Design course, having been primed by their reading of de Sausmarez' book.

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[25] See Chapter 5.

[26] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 472.

From the above developments it can be seen that the Student Representative Council wanted a completely open course based on a mixture of the ideas of Herbert Read, the Bauhaus model, and the Basic Design system.

11.2.2 *The Fine Art Course is Condemned: The Report of Ryan, Larkin, and O Nuallain*

Tension was rising in the college as a consequence of the difficult situation brought about as a result of the student rebellion. At a meeting of the advisory council on the 17th of February 1969 it was announced that Maurice MacGonigal, the Professor of Painting, was going to resign, as he would not agree to student demands for a restructured course behind which he felt there was left wing political motivation. Amidst a deteriorating situation in the college MacGonigal walked out on the 19th of February.

At a meeting of the new advisory council that was held on the 17th of April it was agreed that Christopher Ryan of Saint Patrick's College, Diarmuid Larkin of Carysfort College, and Michael O Nuallain of the Department of Education, would prepare a report on the college with the objective of advising on change.

This report, which was submitted on June 6, condemned the college and suggested that it should be closed down and a new one opened. On the school of painting it said the following:

> On examining the programme for the School of Painting we found that the emphasis was on the representation and description of objects in the tradition of Renaissance painting, the illusion of the three dimensional object from a fixed viewpoint. No examination was made of the physical qualities of colour, combining pigments with binders (oil, egg, gum Arabic) and present day materials or their proper application. There was no evidence of experiments with all kinds of surface painting, preparation of grounds, fresco and three dimensional colour problems. Tone painting and a style of impressionism dominated the school and the mastery of colour and spatial relationships appeared to be neglected. The reiteration of basic principles as exemplified in

the Modern Movement was absent.[27]

This quotation belies the impression of the school of painting given in the prospectus and highlights the difference between what happened in practice and what happened in theory. De Burca's reply to this criticism reveals the difference between the student's interpretation of the curriculum and that of the college authorities:

> The emphasis in this school is not on as stated the tradition of Renaissance painting or the illusion of a fixed viewpoint. I can only presume that this statement is arrived at by the fact that a model is used in the life class. The model in fact is used as a jumping off ground for those who wish to experiment creatively and for the students who wish to paint representationally. To infer that the policy here is to force students to paint in an outmoded mannerist way is absolutely wrong. The policy of the retired Professor and his replacement has always been to stimulate experimental creativity, spatial relationships; composition diagnosis of all styles abstract and contemporary was and is an integral part of the course.[28]

In response to the report of Ryan, Larkin, and O Nuallain, and despite de Burca's affirmation of the current curriculum, there was an effort by John Kelly, who had replaced Maurice MacGonigal as Professor of Painting, to change the curriculum, as the syllabuses for the years 1969-1970 and 1972-1973 make clear.[29] In these new syllabuses John Kelly introduced a more open curriculum, which included the study of modern movements, and a relatively free final year. The programme goals, as outlined in the above syllabuses, make it clear, however, that the curriculum was still quite rigid, skill based, and focused on close and rigorous study of specific and narrow aspects of the art of painting. The preoccupations of the new curriculum were still clearly rooted in the neo-classical tradition, and therefore they came nowhere near

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[27] Ryan, O Nuallain, and Larkin, "Report on the National College of Art 1969", (Dublin: National College of Art Advisory Council, 1969, photocopied), 2.

[28] Micheal De Burca, "Notes re Report fabricated by three members of the Interim Council", National College of Art and Design Archives, File 67.

[29] See Vol. II, appendices 5 and 6.

fitting in with the Basic Design program. Consequently the new curriculum was not acceptable to the students. Most fine art students at this time pursued their own course. A number of students who were in the college at this time, including the painter Mick Cullen, have said to the present writer that neither the curriculum in the schools of painting and sculpture nor what was happening in the college in general had any effect on their artwork, which they were able to produce without any demands that they conform to a curriculum.[30] According to Cullen, there was an area upstairs in the college known as "the free area" where students were free to work in whatever manner they liked, without interference from the staff.

11.2.3 *The Political Context of the Student's Demands*

The modified curriculum that Professor Kelly tried to introduce as a response to the report of Ryan, Larkin, and O Nuallain was doomed from the start, as the Student Representative Council had a very strongly felt negative attitude towards the traditional staff at the College. This was, in part at least, because the radical students associated the neo-classical ethos of the college with Britain, neo-classicism, and colonialism; it must be remembered that the conflict in Northern Ireland had just erupted at this time. The attitude of the Student Representative Council was illustrated in a pamphlet published by Paddy Gillen of the Student Representative Council in 1971. This pamphlet makes it clear that under the influence of the left wing politics of the day students demanded a complete change at the National College of Art and not just a modified structure, as the following quotation illustrates:

> [Until 1924] . . . the School [Metropolitan School of Art] was a colonialist institution. . . The work conducted in the School was a mixture of Graeco-Roman and English art-decorative traditions. The actualisation [of this work]

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[30] Mick Cullen, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 12.

> took place in a British colony,. . . [after 1924] the Department continued to apply, with minor alterations, a British system... it completely ignored art and visual education.[31]

The author goes on to say that the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, who had been the principal supporters of the arts before independence, had been replaced after independence by a native Irish ascendancy who, through the Royal Hibernian Academy, continued to impose a pseudo Gaelic visual tradition instead of an authentic Irish one. The radical students, therefore, demanded a complete break with the past so that they could create an authentic Irish visual tradition and, ironically, they looked to England to provide the educational structure – the Basic Design system - that would allow for such a development.

Given the context of the difficult political situation that existed in Ireland at the time of the student rebellion, the situation in the college throughout this time was heavily politicised, and this created a very charged atmosphere. In this context it is interesting to note that though many of the radical students found a free and easy atmosphere in which to work, for many staff members it was a different situation. One member of the traditional staff has said to the present writer that he found it difficult to work in what he felt was an atmosphere that was very hostile towards him and what he stood for. Denis Bannister, who was a member of staff at the time of the student rebellion - the youngest member in fact - and who was the same age as many of the radical students, has said that though he could understand both sides of the situation, and though he tried to get on with both sides, he found it impossible to remain neutral because of the intensity of feeling on both sides.

In the context of the demand of rebel students for the creation of an authentic, as

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[31] Gillen, *National College of Art*, 2-3.

opposed to a pseudo, visual tradition, it is interesting to note that in 1981 – six years after a new regime had been installed in the Fine Art faculty along the lines demanded by the radical students - a panel of assessors for the National Council for Educational Awards, the validating body for diplomas and degrees awarded by the National College of Art and Design, described the work produced by students in the Fine Art faculty at the college under the influence of the newly reorganised curriculum as derivative and an unoriginal imitation of fashionable international art.[32] Ironically, Professor Kelly predicted such a situation in a document that he wrote in March 1969, in which he quoted a UNESCO report from a conference on the professional training of artists which was held in 1965:

> We live in times of great perplexity, and Art has not escaped the undermining which has attacked life at the social and creative levels everywhere. The young are first to suffer, being ill-equipped by experience to withstand outside influences and moving as it were blindfolded. New critics, self styled interpreters of artist's intentions, grow up like mushrooms, write up their theories in a light-hearted way; periodicals too, where art chatter is so torturous and recondite that the average reader would need a specialised dictionary for a glimmer of understanding. Some young people resist; others give themselves over body and soul to the undigested ideas of their idols.[33]

Professor Kelly, in asserting the distinct national identity of Ireland in the face of the internationalism of the Modernist Movement, went on to state the following, which is quoted verbatim:

> That coming into such a world as a nation in a small country and with political immaturity there exists the real threat that the remaining vestiges of our identity and our cultural heritage are in great danger of being swamped and ultimately extinguished in a welter of internationalism of a spurious and often of dangerous nature, resulting in lack of confidence in ourselves and our particular talents and abilities and an ensuing tendency to look to other people

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[32]National Council for Education Awards, "Report of Panel of Assessors", on B.A. Degree in Fine Art and Joint Degree in Fine Art and History of Art at the NCAD, November 1981, file AR/BH? 1.AD (3). Nov. 1980-Feb. 1990, National Council for Educational Awards Archives, 5.

[33] John Kelly, "Notes on a Policy for the National College of Art", National College of Art and Design Archives, File 62.

for the solution of problems which we are best fitted to solve ourselves.[34]

11.2.4 *The Response at the National College of Art to the Report of Ryan, Larkin, and O Nuallain*

One positive result of the report on the National College of Art by Ryan, Larkin, and O Nuallain was that in June 1969 a new system of assessment was introduced which involved students presenting a show of the work that they had produced over the previous academic year. Another positive result of this report was that a new one-year foundation course, modelled on the British system, was started in the college in November 1969 to replace the preliminary course.[35] This course was founded on the Basic Design system and was run by teachers with a distinctive fine art bias. This situation was similar to what was happening in British art schools at this time.

Despite these developments the situation in the college deteriorated throughout 1969 and 1970, and further such developments were precluded by the widening gap between the Student Representative Council and the staff of the college. This gap was manifested in April 1970 when students held an exhibition at the Project Art Centre, which the director of the college and the majority of staff did not attend, despite being invited. On the 6th of May 1970 a meeting of students demanded that students and staff be given control of the College and - echoing the recommendations of Coldstream - that the three-school diploma system be abandoned. They also demanded that students be allowed to share in all the college's facilities, and that all students should take a common diploma, majoring in the subject of their choice. Following this meeting students attempted to take over the college but were removed by the gardai. As a

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 497.

consequence of this action the college was closed.[36]

At a meeting of students on the 22nd of May 1970 a majority unanimously adopted proposals for an association comprising students and staff and an immediate end to government control of the College. Students met the new minister, Padraig Faulkner, in order to put their ideas to him; Faulkner had replaced Brian Lenihan when Fianna Fail was returned to power after the general election of 1969. Faulkner rejected the suggestions of the students, stating that he was working on proposals for a bill to be passed by the Dail, which would create an autonomous body to administer the College.[37]

When the new academic session opened in September 1970 the students produced a mock prospectus, which condemned the various courses within the college, and which demanded a curriculum in line with left wing thinking at the time. At the heart of student's objections to fine art education at the college was the belief that it was not socially relevant.[38]

A further illustration of the left wing position that the students were taking was a teach-in on the subject of art and society. The speakers included the republicans Cathal Goulding, Seamas O'Tuathail, and Philip Petit of the Department of philosophy at University College Dublin. The speakers at this teach-in demanded a revolutionary role for art. Some students, in reflecting the ideas of Herbert Read, claimed that art was by its nature revolutionary, and that it was not for the speakers to tell artists what to do. Professor John Kelly, asserting a skill-based approach to fine art education, told the students that it was more important that they should learn their craft and that

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[36] Ibid., 500.

[37] Ibid., 504.

[38] Ibid., 508.

revolution could come later.

11.3 The Killarney Seminar of 1970

Reflecting the other side of the political coin, Coras Trachtala and the Department of Education organised a seminar on the reform of industrial design education, which was held in Killarney, in November 1970. One hundred and thirty delegates including architects, designers, engineers, civil servants, and fifteen students from the National College of Art attended this seminar.

Misha Black (1910-1977), Professor of Industrial Design Engineering at the Royal College of Art, who had always stressed that fine art and design were two completely separate areas,[39] pointed out at this seminar that although the Coldstream report of 1960 had stated that art and design education were one, the joint report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education and the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design, which was published in 1970, had accepted that not all diplomas in the design field should require fine art study as part of the curriculum. Black found four changes that had taken place during the 1960s which were relevant to design education in 1970: (1) new currents in art such as pop art had weakened the traditional elitist aspect of fine art; (2) traditional craft based industries had become more automated, thus necessitating greater knowledge and skills; (3) industrial design had become a new element in design education; and (4) the establishment of departments of general studies had expanded the design students' intellectual horizons, as did film and television. Black went on to point out that at Hornsey students had made a number of demands, some of which he agreed with and some of which he did not. These demands

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[39] Victor Willing, "What Kind of Art Education?", *Studio International* 172 (September 1966): 220.

included the following: that studies be based on network curricula which would allow students to study subjects which best suited their development, that generalists were necessary and not specialists, and that students be allowed to partake in making decisions. Black stated that, while he agreed with students partaking in decision making, he did not agree with the call for generalists. He also felt, in reflecting the ideas of the Scandinavian committee, that, as fine art was expressive in nature and as design was a problem solving activity, network curricula could not work. He suggested that they might work at school or undergraduate level, if a post graduate specialisation option was available. He summarised his thinking thus: "Generalised studies there must be, social awareness is essential, but the core of undergraduate studies must remain, I believe, intense concentration of known techniques." For Black, as for Darwin, crafts were out, and industrial techniques were in.[40]

Paddy Gillen of the Student Representative Council, speaking at the meeting, attacked the commercial base of design, which he said was inappropriate to Ireland, as it was not an industrial country. Gillen's position revealed the radicalism of the student's aspirations for a society free of the negative aspects of industrial capitalism, a position inspired by the Romantic Movement. Gillen shared this attitude with Read and the students at Hornsey School of Art. Gillen's attack on the commercial base of design was in effect purely rhetorical, and he had no hope of achieving the fundamental political changes that he demanded. Coras Trachtala had not come to Killarney to discuss the philosophical or political aspects of art and design education, but to discuss "ways and means of turning out a corps of trained, professional Irish designers".[41] Coras Trachtala considered the attainment of this objective as essential if Ireland was

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[40] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 512.

[41] Ireland, Coras Trachtala, *Nineteenth Annual Report and Accounts*, 1971, 24.

to reduce its over-dependence on outside talent and to evolve a national design expertise in the context of the Keynesian ecenomic system initiated by Whittaker.

The Killarney seminar did not resolve any of the problems that the National College of Art was facing, although it did promote the primacy of design. During the seminar the Department of Education tried to satisfy everybody and to give some credibility back to the government and to the staff of the College. The Department reassured everyone that a bill was quite advanced which would set up an autonomous body to govern the college.[42] This would take the college back to the position it had been in during the late 1930s when a standing committee had been created to advise the college. As Professor Turpin points out, the creation of this standing committee in the 1930s, which was not autonomous and which had no real power, was a lost opportunity to put the college on a proper footing. This situation could now be rectified by the creation of a proper board.

Between the Killarney seminar and the 1971 *National College of Art and Design Act* the National College of Art continued on its troubled course. There were a number of developments during this period.

Paul Funge and Alice Hanratty, both radical teachers in the preliminary year, were dismissed on the 20th of October 1971 for allegedly failing to carry out their duties in the college when they refused to teach in protest at the fact that they were being forced to teach a curriculum which conflicted with their ideas as artists. As a result of this situation students picketed the Department of Education. This led to the Department of Education closing the college. This, in turn, led to the opening of an interim College of art in Crow Street by a number of dissident students and staff. These included Paul

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[42] Turpin, *School of Art in Dublin*, 516.

Funge, Alice Hanratty, Charles Harper, and Charlie Cullen.[43] The dismissal of Funge and Hanratty was a last desperate effort by the Department of Education to exert control of the college. It is noteworthy, as already pointed out, that Funge and Hanratty, while teaching at the National College of Art, ran a course that was directly inspired by the Basic Design system in Britain. One could speculate that as a result of this the authorities saw this course as a crucible of dissent and a first seditious step into the college by a radically new system, and that this perception led to Funge and Hanratty being targeted. Whether or not this was the case the course that was run by Funge and Hanratty certainly represented the radical type of new curriculum demanded by the students, and it represented the death of the old system.

Subsequent to the above events a rift appeared in the student body which weakened the position of the radical students. As a result of this the Department of Education felt confident enough to reopen the college on the 6th of December. The Minister stated that the reopening of the college would enable him to establish a new College Board to which the administration of the college could be transferred.[44]

11.4 The National College of Art and Design Bill, 1971

Both houses of the Oireachteas passed The National College of Art and Design Bill on the 25th of November 1971. This development led to the closure of the interim college of art and the re-instatement of Funge and Hanratty.

The establishment of an autonomous board whose members were appointed by the

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[43] Charlie Cullen eventually became head of Painting at the National College of Art and Design. Paul Funge went on to become a Department of Education Inspector. Charlie Harper became head of Limerick School of Art. And Alice Hanratty went on to become a practising artist.

[44] Ibid., 534.

Government freed the National College of Art and Design from the two problems that had restricted change: the fact that control of the college lay in the hands of the civil service, and the fact that the director had absolute power within the college.[45] After 1971 the structure of the college was more democratic, and the National College of Art and Design was free to develop into a modern art college.

The first board of the National College of Art and Design sat in May 1972. It set up three subcommittees: an education committee, a staff student relations committee, and a resource, planning, and administrative committee.

In November 1972 the education subcommittee presented a policy document to the board. It was debated in January and was approved in May 1973. This document was a broad open manifesto, which stated the general aims of the College. It stressed that divisive and isolating barriers between disciplines would be eliminated and that pluralism would replace the narrower programs of previous decades, thus establishing the basic principle of the first Coldstream report at the new National College of Art and Design.

The staff-student education committee published a related document in June 1973. This document was more left wing in tone, and, in line with what was happening in Britain, it demanded, among other things, that teachers and students should work as partners in the education process. It also demanded that the three-school system of the National College of Art should be replaced by a network system where students could pursue any set of disciplines leading to a common diploma, where the student could specialise in one discipline.[46] The first part of this demand was to become the

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[45] For a detailed account of the development of the Department of Education's involvement with the National College of Art after 1936, see Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 318-330.

[46] Ibid., 571.

foundation stone of the new fine art curriculum, the second demand, however, was not to be realised.

The appointment of James Warwick as consultant director was announced in 1973. Warwick, who was the retired principal of Belfast College of Art, took up his post in October 1973. As a result of Warwick's appointment a new faculty structure was created. This was based on the British model, and included the following four divisions: fine art, graphic design, three dimensional crafts, and fashion and textiles.[47] The Fine Art faculty was the most difficult to organise. Problems in this area were eventually sorted out by giving the existing professors of painting and sculpture parity of status and salary with the new head of fine art with no diminution of status. This was a technical arrangement.

One of the first issues of contention that the new board had to confront was the issue of assessment in fine art. Despite a new system of assessment having been introduced in 1969, and some other developments since 1971, the curriculum had not changed substantially in the school of painting. This had led to criticism of the examination procedures by students. As a result of protests two students were suspended: Eugene Lambert, and Robert Armstrong. The problem of the suspension of these students was resolved in the courts. The development of this problem had focused attention on examination procedures. Warwick's appointment resolved the issue of examination procedures, as he introduced a new system of assessment in fine art. This system was based on the format used for the new diplomas in Great Britain. This involved the students mounting a show of their work at the end of their course which was assessed by the staff of the department and by external assessors, of which

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[47] Ibid., 573.

there were three, one for painting, one for sculpture, and one for printmaking.[48]

Warwick retired in October 1974 and a new director, Jonah Jones, took over. Jones had been educated at Newcastle University, had been chairman of the fine art panel of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design from 1968-1971, and was a governor of Newcastle and Loughborough Polytechnics. Along with Jones, Campbell Bruce, who had been Head of Fine Art at Canterbury College of Art, was appointed Professor of Fine Art. Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe, both recent graduates of the British system, were appointed as lecturers, in painting and sculpture respectively, in the Fine Art faculty. The ground was now prepared for the full influence of the British system, as demanded by the radical students, to be felt in the Fine Art faculty at the new National College of Art and Design.

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[48] Ibid., 565.

CHAPTER 12

THE FINE ART FACULTY, 1975-1988

12.1 Introduction

The years 1975-1988 have been chosen as the limits for this part of the study because they represent the limits of the tenure of Campbell Bruce as Professor of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design. Campbell Bruce, as Professor of Fine Art, had primary responsibility for the development of the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty, and the structure and content of this curriculum were largely the result of his efforts. It is coincidental that this document is the present course document, with some minor changes added to cover developments between 1988 and 2000. Chapters 12 to 16 are based largely on original documents held in the library at the National College of Art and Design, on original documents kindly lent to the present author by Campbell Bruce, on original documents held in the archives of the National Council for Educational Awards, and on interviews with former staff and students of the National College of Art and Design which were conducted by the present writer, some of which are reproduced in the appendices which appear in Volume II of this work.

12.2. The Structure of the Fine Art Faculty, 1975 – 1988

After 1975 the teaching of fine art at the National College of Art and Design was the responsibility of the Fine Art faculty. As shown in the last chapter, the Fine Art faculty, which had three subdivisions, painting, sculpture, and fine print, was one of five faculties in a completely restructured college. The other faculties in the college were Education, Design, History of Art and Extra Mural Studies, and Foundation Studies.[1] This new structure was modelled on the British system and had been designed by James Warwick, principal of the Ulster College of Art, after he had been appointed as an advisor to the board of the National College of Art and Design in 1972.[2] Warwick went on to be consultant director of the college from October 1973 to October 1974. The faculty system was implemented by Jonah Jones who was Director of the college from October 1974 until October 1978. The other directors of the college in the period under discussion were Domhnall O'Murchadha (1978-1980), and Noel Sheridan (1980-1989).

The board, which was appointed by the Minister of Education, was the seat of power in the newly structured college. The board controlled all aspects of college policy. As part of the restructuring of the college an academic council was established. The academic council was responsible for maintaining academic standards, and was the forum for debate on new courses and on academic policy. Faculty boards, which were

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[1] John Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century: A History of the National College of Art and Design* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1995), 583-584.

[2] Ibid., 570.

answerable to the board, dealt with the day to day running of the individual faculties.[3] Course documents were drawn up and curricular issues were dealt with at staff level.[4]

The National College of Art and Design is today located in Thomas Street. Throughout the period under discussion the Faculty of Fine Art was located at different sites throughout the city, including Kildare Street, the home of the college since 1827. From 1975 until 1978 the majority of fine art students were located at a warehouse in Clarendon Street. The college had taken these premises on a three-year lease, and many staff and students, including the head of the faculty, considered them to be inadequate and unsafe.[5] These inadequate conditions were the subject of some controversy and created discord within the faculty.[6] When Clarendon Street was vacated around Christmas 1978 the faculty removed to another temporary home, this time safer though still inadequate, on Moss Street. After the Moss Street premises were vacated, and the majority of students were relocated to Thomas Street, the faculty continued to maintain a presence in Kildare Street. The presence of the Fine Art faculty in Kildare Street ended in 1998 when the disparate parts of the college finally came together at one site, the new premises in Thomas Street. Thus ended an association between Irish artists and Kildare Street that went back to 1827.[7] The nomadic situation of the Fine Art faculty at this time of major change in the fine art curriculum at the National College of Art and Design had a negative effect on many students, and, according to Campbell Bruce, reduced the effectiveness of the faculty

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[3] Ibid., 585.

[4] Iseult McCarthy, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 14, 948.

[5] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 878.

[6] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1005.

[7] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 122.

educationally.[8]

By the time the new faculty system was introduced in January of 1975 staffing difficulties, which had persisted in the area of fine art since the student rebellion of 1969, had been resolved. Under the new system a core of permanent staff was established in the faculty. Also, as already stated, both the Professor of Painting, John Kelly, and the Professor of Sculpture, Domhnall O'Murchadha, were given parity of status and parity of salary with the new head of faculty, Professor Campbell Bruce.[9] Although designed to ease the transition from the old to the new structure within the faculty, this situation led to conflict. The reason for this conflict was that, while Professor Kelly, Professor O'Murchadha and Professor Bruce had parity of status, Professor Bruce, according to his own testimony, was in charge.[10] After the introduction of the new faculty system in January of 1975 this situation led to the development of two opposing regimes within the Fine Art faculty. These opposing regimes supported different sets of aesthetic values and different ideologies. On the one hand and closely associated with Campbell Bruce were two new, young English members of staff. These were the painter Rob Smith and the sculptor Nigel Rolfe.[11] On the other hand were those members of staff who had worked under the old system and who adhered to tradition and to the neo-classical model; chief among this group were John Kelly, Domhnall O'Murchadha, Carey Clarke, and Brett McEntaggert. All of this group, except for Domhnall O'Murchadha, who was a sculptor, were painters.

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[8] Aidan Dunne, *National College of Art Decade Show: Faculty of Fine Art Graduates 1975-1985* (Dublin: National College of Art, 1985) 16.

[9] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 583-584.

[10] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 876.

[11] Rob Smith, who died in 1990, taught painting in the Fine Art Faculty from 1975 until 1990. Nigel Rolfe is a performance artist and taught at the college from 1975 until the mid-eighties.

From the very beginning of the new situation at the National College of Art and Design the traditional neo-classical curriculum at the college was opposed by Campbell Bruce, Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe, all of whom, having studied art in Britain in the post-war period, shared a different set of aesthetic and cultural values to that of the incumbent members of staff. These values were modernist in outlook and radical in content and intent. Smith and Rolfe had studied under the new Council for National Academic Awards system for the Diploma in Art and Design. Campbell Bruce had studied for both the Board of Education's Industrial Examination and the Ministry of Education's National Diploma in Design.

Broadly speaking, then, after 1975 the Fine Art faculty found itself with a staff divided between two groups with different sets of aesthetic values, what were, in effect, two regimes. As will be shown, as a consequence of the way in which the new regime was imposed, these two groups quickly polarised and a confrontational situation developed. This led to serious problems in the faculty. These problems continued well into the 1980s and had implications for the effectiveness of the faculty educationally. Thus, conflict associated with the polarisation of the faculty between two rival camps formed the background to the development of the curriculum in the faculty throughout the period under discussion. Over time this polarisation diminished and the faculty became less riven, and by 1988 the extreme polarisation of the 1970s and early 1980s had largely disappeared.

The situation in the faculty during this time, however, was more complex than a simple bipolar division between opposing modernist and neo-classical aesthetic value systems. There was, for instance, a third group, according to a number of interviewees,

who played an important role in the faculty at this time.[12] Two painters, Charlie Cullen and Charlie Brady, represented this group in the faculty. Cullen had been involved in the student rebellion at the college and is at present Head of Painting in the faculty. Charlie Brady, who died in 1998, was an American and had come to Ireland in the 1950s. This group shared the values of the Independent Artists group, which tended to look to Central Europe, German Expressionism, and the Romantic Movement as its spiritual home. As shown in Chapter 9, this group opposed the formalism of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art group with which, according to Nigel Rolfe, the new English staff in the Fine Art faculty quickly became associated after they arrived in Dublin. There was a nationalistic aspect to the Independent Artists group, as already mentioned, which was consistent with the influence of the Romantic Movement and of German art. The nationalism of the Independent Artists group contributed to the developing polarisation of the faculty. The reason for this was that the formalists and avant-gardists in the faculty, who supported the Irish Exhibition of Living Art group, subscribed to a universal modernism, as exemplified in the ROSC exhibitions of the sixties and seventies, and opposed an explicitly nationalist art.

Charlie Brady, who was a founder member of the Independent Artists group,[13] represented an interesting variation on this theme. Having been born in New York, and having spent his formative years there in the 1930s and 1940s, he had an acquaintance with members of the New York School and in particular with the painters Franz Kline and William de Kooning. He therefore formed a direct link with Abstract Expressionism, one of the most influential movements of the twentieth century.[14]

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[12] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1144.

[13] Charlie Brady, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 10.

[14] Ibid., 834.

Students formed another aspect of the complex mix that was the Fine Art faculty at this time. Students, however, unlike staff, were not easily divisible into two or three factions, depending on aesthetic sensibilities. According to Ollie Whelan, who was a student in the college in the mid-1970s and who is a lecturer in painting in the Fine Art faculty today, some students did identify with factions. This generally happened after students had spent some time in the college and had been exposed to the various divisions within the faculty. Many students, however, did not get involved in factions, and generally speaking the student body in the Fine Art faculty formed a heterogeneous assortment of people from a variety of backgrounds and varying ages. Students had their own concerns, and, being new to the college, knew very little of its complexities or internal politics. While some students, like Ollie Whelan and Gwen O'Dowd, both of whom found the situation in fine art supportive, had few difficulties adjusting to the situation in the faculty, other students found the adjustment difficult. Many students, especially those from country areas, were reticent and unsure of themselves, as Charlie Brady points out.[15] These students were made particularly vulnerable by their ignorance of the complexities of the situation in which they found themselves. Added to this vulnerability was the fact, again as Charlie Brady points out, that "not every one of these instructors, who certainly came from England, were able to talk to Irish boys and girls".[16] Brady goes on to state that there was an unavoidable arrogance on the part of the new English staff towards students, and that many students could not relate to them: "These kids could not relate to these people, they could have come from the moon".[17]

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[15] Ibid., 815-816.

[16] Ibid., 815.

[17] Ibid., 816.

The difficulties caused by conflicting ideologies and changing structures within the faculty were exacerbated by the fact that the period under discussion was also one of rapid growth in the faculty. In 1975, according to Campbell Bruce, there were twenty-eight students in fine art, and nine academic staff. In 1980 there were ninety-eight students, twenty-one members of staff, numerous visiting lecturers, and two technical assistants. In 1985 there were one hundred and twenty three students, twenty-three academic staff, various visiting lecturers, and three technical assistants. In 1988 the figures were twenty-three staff members, various visiting lecturers, four technical assistants, and one hundred and fifty-six students.[18]

As already stated, throughout the period under discussion there were three principal divisions in the Fine Art faculty: painting, sculpture, and printmaking, with photography as a support area. From 1975 onwards, although students tended to identify themselves with specific areas of specialisation, like painting or printmaking for example, there was flexibility in relation to the free movement of students from one area to another within the faculty. This flexibility was built into the curriculum in order to facilitate the unfettered development of student's work. This, as will be shown, was a key aspect of the curriculum after 1975.

In summary, the situation on the ground in the Fine Art faculty between 1975 and 1988 was unsettled. Factionalism, in the early stages, created an insecure, unsteady, and inconsistent curriculum; this was exacerbated by the fact that the course contained an aspect of fluidity. This early unsteady curriculum, which had a complex and changing structure and which is the subject of the present study, has over time

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[18] Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe, "National College of Art and Design Fine Art Faculty; Syllabus", 1975, Photocopy, Campbell Bruce's files; Fine Art Faculty, National College of Art and Design, "Draft Course Document 1980", Typed Manuscript, Campbell Bruce's files; National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Department, "Course Document 1988", 1988, National College of Art and Design Library.

solidified into a curriculum that is today the sum of many and diverse parts. These many and diverse parts, which are the origins of the present curriculum, are examined below.

12.3 The Ethos of the Faculty

Before the written statement of the curriculum is examined it is important to point out that the replacement of the neo-classical model of art education at the National College of Art and Design by an alternative paradigm was a more complex matter than altering bureaucratic structures and writing a new course document. Though the new curriculum was obviously rooted in a course document, it was, like the course document itself, the result of a more gradual process that involved the development over time of patterns of teaching, of interaction, and of behaviour, which eventually became established as the new paradigm. An important agent in the development of this new paradigm was the influence of personality. Personality was, of course, also an important influence on the curriculum before 1975. Given the polarised aesthetic value systems within the faculty after 1975, however, the situation was different to that which preceded it, and the role of personality took on a different significance, one that was marked by factionalism. This factionalism inevitably led to confrontation. This situation led to quarrels that were sometimes bureaucratic and political and at other times personal and psychological; these quarrels, despite Campbell Bruce's retrospective positive spin,[19] impacted negatively on many students. Thus it can be concluded that the ethos of the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975, which was defined to a great extent by the personalities who made

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[19] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 883; Dunne, *Decade Show*, 13.

up the faculty, formed a major part of the new curriculum. This situation, as will be shown below, was exacerbated by the structure of the new course.

In order to understand fully the complex ethos of the faculty throughout the period under discussion it is necessary to understand something of the personalities that created the ethos of the college both before and after 1975. The influence of personality has been an important aspect of artistic practise since the Renaissance. During the period of the Romantic Movement personality was given even greater importance in the fine arts than it had hitherto, an importance that it still has today. As personality has been an important aspect of artistic practice since the Romantic Movement, so it has been an important aspect of art education. John Ruskin, J.A.M. Whistler and William Morris in the Victorian era are obvious examples of larger than life personalities who had a significant influence on art education. Henry Tonks, Augustus John and William Orpen are examples from the late Victorian and Edwardian era. William Rothenstein, Henry Moore, Victor Pasmore, William Coldstream and Michael Craig-Martin are examples from the more recent past.

12.3.1 *The Ethos of the Old Regime*

Until 1975 the ethos of the painting and sculpture schools at the National College of Art was a synthesis of a number of different influences, These influences were chiefly neo-classicism, William Orpen, and the New English Arts Club. They also included various aspects of art and aesthetics that are examined below. Because of the influence of Sean Keating and Maurice MacGonigal the political values of post-independence Ireland, and the political values of De Valera's Ireland in particular, as expressed in the paintings of both of the above artists, were dominant at the college until 1975. Until the student rebellion, the majority of the staff at the National College

of Art had close connections with the Royal Hibernian Academy and the college was effectively the teaching arm of the Academy. As stated already, the college had taken over this role in 1942 when the teaching function of the Academy had ceased. According to Professor Turpin, this role had been copper-fastened when Maurice MacGonigal became president of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1962.[20] Charlie Cullen's wry comment on this situation was that until the student rebellion the National College of Art was "a branch office of the Royal Hibernian Academy".[21]

12.3.1.1 *Sean Keating*

Until he stopped teaching at the National College of Art in the mid-1960s - having retired in 1954[22] - Sean Keating was the defining and overpowering personality in relation to the teaching of the fine arts at the college. According to Tom Ryan, who taught at the college throughout the 1960s, Keating had continued to teach at the college after he retired for two reasons. The first reason was that he had not been given a pension by the college - despite being Professor of Painting[23] - so he had to teach in order to earn a living. According to Ryan, the second reason was more important: Keating had a studio in the college and the availability of professional

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[20] Turpin, *A School of art in Dublin*, 344, 492.

[21] Brian Lynch, *Charles Cullen Retrospective* (Dublin: Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, 1997), 25.

[22] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 320.

[23] The reason the professor of painting had no pension was that, in line with the thinking of Orpen and of Sean Keating, a policy that only artists could teach art had been institutionalised at the college; artists were neither bureaucrats nor civil servants but free agents. According to Professor Turpin, when John Ingram, Chief Inspector of the Technical Instruction Branch of the Department of Education, reorganised the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art as the National College of Art in the 1930s he "preserved 'artistic authority' by emulating the tenure of Orpen". (John Turpin, "Problems in the Teaching of Painting at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in Post Independence Ireland," *Studies*, LXVIII [1979]): 84.

models that he used as the models for his pictures.[24] On this subject Ryan recounts a humorous anecdote which involves two women that he saw at an exhibition admiring one of Keating's paintings of the Aran Islands. According to Ryan, the paintings were "full of bauneens and the whole paraphernalia of western sartorial presentation".[25] In noting the distinctively Irish characteristics of the face of one of the characters in the painting, one of the women said to her companion that you wouldn't get a face like that outside of the Aran Islands. Ryan points out that the model for the character, who he knew, was "Jose Ann Goulet, straight from Brittany".[26] Ryan points out that Keating sometimes used students as models. According to the painter Ciaran Lennon, who was a student of Ryan in the 1960s, this was a common practice among staff at the National College of Art. Lennon, amongst other students, posed for Ryan's historical painting of the General Post Office in 1916, and Keating himself appears as a character in Ryan's painting *The Flight of the Earls* which, according to Ryan, was painted at the college in 1957.

After he left the college Keating's influence continued there because of the effect of his powerful personality on those who taught at the college until the paradigm change of the 1970s. Keating's teaching had a particular influence on Maurice MacGonigal, John Kelly, and Tom Ryan, all of whom were students of Keating before he retired. Although there is conflicting evidence as to when exactly Keating finally left the college, it is clear that he continued to teach well into the 1960s, and thus a whole new generation of students were doubly exposed to his influence after he retired in 1954. Iseult McCarthy, who has recently retired as Professor of Education at the National

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[24] Tom Ryan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 19, 1062.

[25] Ibid., 1062.

[26] Ibid., 1062.

College of Art and Design and who was taught by Keating in the mid-1950s, was one such student. Professor McCarthy has said that Keating was still working at the college and still exerting influence when she started teaching there in 1962.[27] A student of a later generation again who was also exposed to the direct influence of Keating is the above-mentioned formalist painter Ciaran Lennon. The work of Lennon, who was taught life drawing by Keating when he attended the college in the mid-1960s, provides an interesting example of how the pre-1975 curriculum at the college could feed into the formal preoccupations of a modernist artist.[28] Partly as a result of the influence of Keating – Lennon was one of his best students - drawing, and in particular line in its abstract sense, has been one of the principal preoccupations of Lennon's mature work. Lennon was and continues to be inspired by the nature of line, how it describes form, and how that description of form in turn relates to the picture plane.[29] Thus, it is interesting to note, through the influence of the traditional curriculum at the National College of Art in the 1960s, a continuity is maintained between the aesthetic interests of Henry Tonks as manifested in the curriculum at the Slade at the end of the nineteenth century and the work of a modernist artist working at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Another contemporary artist of a later generation who was also taught by Keating is the expressionistic artist Mick Cullen, who graduated from the college in 1974.

An interesting glimpse of Keating's personality, teaching-style, and influence is given by Lennon, who, in recounting Keating's classes, states the following:

> Keating's classes were all terribly macho. The girls did not get a look in, and so the tough guys would be with Keating doing drawing. He'd draw too. You

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[27] Iseult McCarthy, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 14, 939.

[28] Ciaran Lennon, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 13, 916.

[29] Ibid., 917.

> would feel you were a part of a real elite, like being champion boxers training, the very same feeling. And damn all to do with art.[30]

The exclusive aspect of Keating's classes is illustrated clearly in this quotation, and Lennon's last sentence in particular reveals the huge chasm separating the values of the old school from those of the new generation of modernist inspired artists of the 1960s. According to Tom Ryan, who was a student of Keating in the early 1950s, no nonsense was tolerated in Keating's classes and students were expected to be punctual. Keating was admired by some and disliked by others of the younger generation of artists of the 1950s and 1960s. According to many of his former students he was an irascible and caustic personality, and some of them considered him interfering as a teacher. Michael Kane, for instance, one of Ireland's most prominent expressionist artists today, disliked his teaching style and found him overbearing as a teacher. Ciaran Lennon, on the other hand, an ardent modernist, speaks well of him as a teacher, as does the painter Paul Funge, one of the most radical of the staff during the student rebellion.

Despite his obvious faults Keating took his art and his teaching very seriously, and he was more than the caricature that was ridiculed by modernists in the 1960s and 1970s. The literature on Keating is sparse, as the art historian Fintan Cullen points out,[31] and there is a need for greater exploration of his life and work, something that is beyond the scope of the present study. However, some exploration of his motivation, of his character, and of his work is appropriate in the present context.

Keating had a strong sense of social justice and of the need for greater equality in

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[30] Ibid., 924.

[31] Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland 1750-1930* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 206.

Irish society. It is probably true to say that he was an idealist. As Professor Turpin points out, "Keating represented the new Ireland of humble and rural social origin that had come to power in the new state. . . . Keating stressed his artistic and Gaelic identity, which is abundantly clear in his many paintings such as *Men of the West* (1917). He had an exclusive and romantic fine art view, with little time for the world of design and industry".[32] As a member of the generation that had lived through the First World War and the subsequent revolution Keating shared a visionary outlook with many people in Britain, Ireland, and mainland Europe. Waltar Gropius and Herbert Read belonged to the same generation.

Keating had arrived in Dublin from the poverty-stricken Limerick of the Edwardian era which, revealingly and angrily, he described on at least one occasion as a medieval dunghill. It is interesting to speculate that Keating's approach as a teacher and artist might have been informed by the contrast between his background in Limerick in the first years of the new century and the dilettantish aspect of art education that he had encountered at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art when he went there on a scholarship from Limerick Technical School in 1911. Bruce Arnold says of the school at this time:

> The reality was that women, particularly the daughters of wealthy Dubliners, dominated the daytime studies, and were designated 'full time' or serious students, while men who had to earn their living during the day, studied at night.[33]

In an interview with Radio Telefis Eireann that he did in 1971, in response to a question about what kind of people went to the school of Art in Dublin when he was a

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[32] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 322.

[33] Bruce Arnold, *Mainie Jellett and the Modern Movement in Ireland* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 17.

young man studying and later working there, Keating replied: "young ladies, they were there for the purpose of being cultured and being kept out of mischief. It was a kind of finishing ground, stamping ground before marriage".[34] It will be remembered that the visionary artist Eric Gill expressed similar attitudes to women students in English academies in the 1920s. Ciaran Lennon recalls that Keating did not take women seriously as artists because he believed it was incompatible with their role in life. According to Lennon, Keating felt that as women would eventually get married they would never need to make a living from their art and therefore they were not serious students. In short, Keating considered women artists to be dilettantes.[35] The implication here is that the serious students were those who had certain skills and attributes, who would need to make a living from their art, and who, as a consequence, took a professional approach to their work. Keating's attitude to women students is clarified to some extent if considered in this context.

Keating's neglect of women students and of less talented students in favour of what he considered gifted students who might succeed as professional artists was quite clearly modelled on Orpen's behaviour as a teacher.[36] It might also partly be explained if considered in the context of meritocracy as a principle in social organisation and especially in relation to new values of social and political responsibility that were developing in Britain in the years leading up to the First World War. These attitudes would have informed Keating's thinking as a young man, especially in the context of the social stratification, tension, and polarisation of Irish society, but also, and

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[34] Radio Telefis Eireann, *Seven Days*, 1971.

[35] For an interesting insight into the life of one particular female student at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art see Beatrice Campbell, *Today We Will Only Gossip* (London: Constable, 1964).

[36] Joseph O'Connor, *Hostage to Fortune* (Dublin: Michael F. Moynihan Publishing Co., 1951), 156-157.

crucially, British society in the early years of the twentieth century.

Given Keating's remark about Limerick as a medieval dunghill, he presumably did not have simplistic romantic notions about the Ireland that he knew as a youth. He did of course have aspirations of a political and romantic nature, especially in relation to art, the role of art in society, and the new type of society he envisioned as a revolutionary young man at this time.[37] In line with the thinking of many in Ireland in the early years of the twentieth century, Keating had aspirations that were revolutionary in political terms and traditional in religious and moral terms. It is interesting to note in this context that Willie Pearse, who was a brother of Patrick Pearse, and Patrick Tuohy, who fought in the General Post Office during the Easter Rebellion of 1916, were both students at the Metropolitan School of Art at this time.[38]

The intensity of nationalist feeling at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in the very early years of the twentieth century is illustrated by the example of Joseph O'Connor. O'Connor, who was a teacher, attended summer courses at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art under Orpen. In commenting on a new and more Gaelic program instigated at the school by a new headmaster, R.H.A. Willis, in 1904, O'Connor remarked that Willis had "felt the dead hand of the ascendant Britains [sic] on everything Gaelic in art and culture and had devised a new program with a strong native bias for the Metropolitan School of Art of the future". O'Connor locates what he saw happening at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in the broader political context when he says that this happened "at a time when native Irishmen were

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[37] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 322.

[38] Willie Pearse, whose father was a monumental sculptor, was evidently a promising student as he got a grade "1" in an advanced figure drawing examination in 1900; Alan Denson, ed., *J Hughes: Sculptor 1865-1941: A documentary Biography* (Kendal: Published by the author, 1969), 70.

beginning . . . to inculcate the spirit of self expression - sinn fein - in the early beginnings of the Gaelic League". And finally, O'Connor makes an explicit reference to the socially exclusive and politicised type of society that existed in Ireland at this time when he states that J. Ward, who replaced Willis when he died tragically in an accident in 1905 and who remained headmaster of the school until 1918, was:

> A mild Ulsterman, trained in the British exclusive tradition, knew nothing of Willis' ideals, carried on in the bad old ways, which was inspired from South Kensington. It took a bloody revolution to dislodge the alien tradition and the racial exclusiveness in which it had flourished.[39]

Keating attended the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art under Ward and was therefore exposed as a nationalist to this politicised atmosphere. This experience would inevitably have informed his thinking after the granting of independence when he had acquired a position of power at the school. Having said this, Keating's ideal of an art college was the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art when he attended it as a student, and he was very proud of the college and its achievements at that time under the South Kensington System. In the interview that he did for Radio Telefis Eireann in 1971 he made this very clear.

Keating is often criticised for the narrow focus of his teaching, which was aimed at the development of the innate talent of the students that he deemed gifted artistically. In this context the irony that the style of art favoured by the new nationalist regime at the National College of Art after 1936 under the influence of Keating and MacGonigal was as much English as Irish is often pointed out. Keating's particular forte was linear description, which, as shown in Chapter 2, was the preoccupation of the Slade. In the light of this criticism, it is important to note the more general context in which Keating

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[39] O'Connor, *Hostage to Fortune*, 159.

developed his aesthetic ideas.

Meritocracy, with its concomitant aspects of development of innate talents and skills and reward for effort, was a significant ideal in the context of the social changes that were taking place in the early years of the twentieth century in Britain. This was an outcome of utilitarianism and the 'new liberalism' of the late nineteenth century.[40] It is interesting to note here that in the context of imperial expansion and imperial rivalry the Boer War had helped to expose the inefficiency of British public institutions and in particular of the British army. The war had revealed the need for greater professionalism and for less elitism in the internal hierarchies of the army, thus focussing the attention of the public on to these issues.[41] This same context and the demand for greater imperial efficiency that grew out of it led to the passing of the 1902 *Education Act*.[42] In an age when imperial adventures and conflict, and, in particular, Edwardian opulence and dilettantism, were contrasted with extreme poverty and revolution, it is understandable that a set of beliefs would develop which puts the development of skill and talent to the fore as a mechanism for the development of a fair and just society. It is also understandable that they would be put forward as a means of redressing the wrongs of an unequal society. It is no coincidence that the first person of working class background to attain cabinet rank in a British government did so at

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[40] See Tony Kusher and Kenneth Lunn, *Traditions of Intolerance: Historical Perspectives on Fascism and Race Relations in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988), 95-122.

[41] Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 4th ser., vol. 118 (1903), cols. [Feb 17-Mar 5.]

[42] The 1889 *Technical Instruction Act* had also been inspired by the same need. Ironically, given its future role in art education, this act had led directly to the setting up of Goldsmiths' College in South London. See A.E. Firth, *Goldsmiths' College: A Centenary Account* (London: The Athlone Press, 1991), 125-132. See also, F.R. Phillips, *Creating an Education System for England and Wales* (Lampetr: E. Mellon, 1992), 117-177; Robert K. Massey, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of The Great War* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1992), 643.

this time, and did so under a Liberal Prime Minister.[43] It makes complete sense then in the context of the strife torn Britain and Europe that existed between 1900 and 1918 that Keating would develop an educational philosophy that would oppose dilettantism. It makes even more sense that he would develop a philosophy that focussed on the development of skill as a mechanism for underpinning the new meritocratic type of society that he, and many like him, aspired to create at this time. It matters little whether this new society was liberal, organic, and evolutionary; socialistic or Marxist; or romantic, nationalistic and catholic. The almost scientific preoccupation with skill and clarity of vision that grew up around the Slade curriculum in the last years of the nineteenth century can be seen in a sense as an aesthetic expression of meritocracy and the new liberalism. It is no accident that so many of these associated with the Slade found positions of real power and influence in cultural circles in British society from 1918 onwards; William Rothenstein, Augustus John, William Orpen, William Coldstream, Nicholson, Robin Darwin, and Rodrigo Moynihan for instance. It was probably no accident that Keating was drawn to the Slade aesthetic.

A concrete and visible aspect of Keating's thinking is of course his work as an artist. In form and style this is derived directly from the Slade tradition but in choice of subject matter it differs. Keating's choice of subject matter was nationalistic, a choice he shared with Patrick Tuohy, James Sleator and Maurice MacGonigal. These artists, who were all active after 1916, aspired to give to an independent Ireland and its people a nobility and historical significance which they had hitherto not had.[44] The new image

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[43] This was John Elliot Burns, MP for Battersea, who was appointed President of the Local Government Board in the first Cabinet of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in December 1905.

[44] James White, *Sean Keating Royal Hibernian Academy 1889-1977* (Dublin: Royal Hibernian Galleries, 1989), Catalogue of an Exhibition held at the Royal Hibernian Academy Galleries 7th Nov.-17th Dec. 1989.

of the Irish people that these artists introduced was presented in a visual language that was easily understood. It would also have been, amongst other things, a foil to the patronising and stereotyped depiction of Ireland and the Irish people that was common at this time. In particular it would have been seen as an antidote to the derogatory and sometimes racist image of the nationalist Irish that existed prior to independence, particularly in British periodicals and newspapers. It would also, of course, have been part of the reinvention of Ireland as a racially and culturally specific nation. In popular nineteenth century illustrations the Irish were often denigrated, ridiculed, treated as objects of fun, or regarded as subjects of pity. The work of Aloysius O'Kelly is a notable exception to this rule.[45] It is sufficient to contrast depictions of social strife in Ireland in British publications with those of other European countries to see this clearly.[46] Until Keating and his peers changed the paradigm, the Irish tended not to be represented as noble figures with a historical role to play in the world except, as Fintan Cullen points out, as willing servants of the British Empire.[47] Orpen was, for instance, during the First World War depicting Irish 'Tommies' as heroic individuals. Orpen's depiction of soldiers contrasts with the traditional serried rows of anonymous heroic uniforms in the hugely popular military paintings of Lady Elizabeth Butler (1846-1933),[48] the sentimental and anecdotal paintings of Victorian artists such Henry Nelson O'Neill, and the paintings of Frederic Goodall. In this context Orpen's highly realistic

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[45] Kevin Whelan, "Enigmatic, Eclectic, Exotic, Fugitive, Secretive," *Circa* 91 (2000), 21-24; Niamh O'Sullivan, *Aloysius O'Kelly*, (Dublin: Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, 1999)

[46] The cover of the French journal *Le Petit Journal*, for instance, for 31 December 1899, which depicts a street riot in Dublin against Joseph Chamberlain, provides an interesting contrast with similar English magazines of the same era. (Chamberlain's opposition to Gladstone's Home Rule policies famously had led to the splitting of the Liberal party in 1886.)

[47] Cullen, *Visual Politics*, 11-13 and 160-174.

[48] Sir William Orpen, *An Onlooker in France* (Dublin: Parkgate Books, 1996)

and unsentimental depiction of heroic individual soldiers traumatised by battle was revolutionary. It is not surprising, then, that Keating was hugely proud of Orpen's honest depiction of the horrors of war and the nobility of the simple soldier - as opposed to the aggrandisement of war.[49] This is an indication perhaps of what Keating felt he was trying to do for the Irish people. His painting *Men of the South,* for instance, depicts Irish nationalist guerrillas in the same heroic sense. It might provokingly be suggested that Keating's painting *Men of the West,* a painting that also depicts heroic nationalist guerrillas, has the feel of a Hollywood poster for the popular cowboy films of the day. This painting was, incidentally, painted in the year of the Somme and four years after the completion of the film *Birth of A Nation* by D.W. Griffith; Griffith, like Keating, was a romantic nationalist. It is a measure not just of the force of Keating's personality but of the enduring nature of that which moulded his artistic temperament, ideas, and social and political philosophy, that his thinking remained potent at the National College of Art until 1975.

It is worth speculating that Keating's hostility to modernist or abstract art so infamously displayed on television in the well known interview with Colm O Briain at ROSC '71, may owe something to his dislike of dilettantism. In the eyes of Keating, Mainie Jellett, Ireland's high priestess and proselytiser of modernism, would have exemplified the dilettante. Jellett was Anglo-Irish, Protestant, upper middle class, and, relatively speaking, independently wealthy. Crucially, she produced art that was abstract, universal in style, highly esoteric, and exclusive. It did not and could not address itself to the nationalist political agenda because that agenda was by definition localised, populist, political, and social.[50]

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[49] Sean Keating, "William Orpen: A Tribute," *Ireland Today* 2 (August 1937), 21-26.

[50] Cullen, *Visual Politics*, 160-174.

12.3.1.2 *Maurice MacGonigal*

Until Sean Keating retired his closest ally at the National College of Art was Maurice MacGonigal. MacGonigal was the most influential personality and respected artist at the National College of Art during the 1950s and 1960s. Having witnessed with euphoria the events of 1916, MacGonigal, was active in the republican movement during the War of Independence. Henceforward his deep-rooted sense of his national identity and republicanism determined the character of his work as an artist. MacGonigal started his career as an apprentice stained glass artist in the studio of his uncle, Joshua Clarke, the father of the well-known stained glass artist Harry Clarke. Sean Keating had made his first trip to the Aran Islands in 1914 at the suggestion of Harry Clarke, MacGonigal's older cousin.[51] MacGonigal's experience as a stained glass artist gave him a deep respect for craft and a belief in the absolute requirement of craft skills in an artist's education.

In 1923 MacGonigal, like Keating before him, won a scholarship to the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in which he studied painting. MacGonigal was a brilliant student and his teachers included Sean Keating, Patrick Tuohy and James Sleator. According to another student of the time, MacGonigal was "vivacious, eloquent and knowledgeable, full of wit and intelligence . . . he had all sorts of theories about art and knew a lot about artists."[52]

In 1927 MacGonigal spent some months in Holland where he was impressed by the work of the Spanish School, especially the work of El Greco, Goya, and Ribera; Keating, as already stated, was also attracted to the Spanish School. While in Holland

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[51] Marie Burke, "A Growing Sense of National Identity: Charles Lamb (1893-1964) and the West of Ireland." *History Ireland* 8 (Spring 2000): 30-35.

[52] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 250.

MacGonigal was particularly taken by the emotional expressiveness of Van Gogh's work: "He was more knowledgeable than all those old masters and I have not seen a modern that could come near him in intensity."[53] During his stay in Holland MacGonigal steeped himself in the painting of the Dutch School. According to Katherine Crouan, while in Holland MacGonigal learned that landscape painting in the realist tradition could be a vehicle in which are contained territorial, national and cultural identities. This was an important lesson that would sustain him throughout his career.[54]

MacGonigal had a politically democratic yet idealistic approach to art and culture that was similar to that of Keating. MacGonigal painted what he saw, and he favoured the west of Ireland landscape of small cottages, mountain, sea and bog. It is notable that, like Keating, MacGonigal sought to avoid mannerism, which he felt to be affectatious; he also, unlike Keating, avoided allegory. The newness of MacGonigal's approach was noted in the 1930s and 1940s. The *Father Matthew Record* observed in 1946, "In a sort of rebellion against mannerisms . . . he [MacGonigal] went to nature, studied the appearance of things, whether of men or of mountains, for their own essential values."[55] A particular feature of MacGonigal's work was that he tended not to see nature as something apart from man but as something with which man interacted, of which man was an integral part. Nature was a theatre of action, however modest, and a location of cultural values. In this sense MacGonigal's landscapes are infused with the values of De Valera's romantic vision of Ireland, particularly his

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[53] Katherine Crouan, *Maurice MacGonigal R.H.A., 1900-1979: An Irish Palette* (Dublin: Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, 1991), 12

[54] Ibid., 12.

[55] Ibid., 16.

paintings of the west of Ireland.

In the 1950's and 1960s MacGonigal's work went through a period of change, a change that is ridiculed today by some traditionalists.[56] During this period MacGonigal produced many paintings that differed substantially from his earlier work. Some of these paintings were almost purely abstract. At this time MacGonigal expressed the liberal belief that "every kind of art expression should be encouraged in Ireland. There is little enough of it. All the various manifestations of idioms are necessary to represent truly the trends of a period and this is the function of a modern academy."[57] MacGonigal's ability to accept abstract art as valid indicates a sophisticated understanding of painting. Katherine Crouan states that "MacGonigal believed that geometrical structure created a compositional logic in all painting, a conceptual and reductionist understanding of art which allowed him to consider abstract art as a version of realism."[58] This open approach to how art was defined made MacGonigal one of the few traditional artists whose work was bought in any quantity by the modernist leaning Arts Council during the 1950s and 1960s. The effect of MacGonigal's acceptance of a broad range of styles is reflected in the opinions of former student's who state that his approach to teaching was less dogmatic than that of Keating. Notwithstanding this more liberal approach, however, and crucially, MacGonigal still saw painting as skill based: "The art schools do not claim the almighty power to create the artist. They can only help - they give him his craftsmanship".[59]

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[56] Tom Ryan, interview by author, See Vol. II, appendix 19.

[57] Crouan, *Maurice MacGonigal*, 27.

[58] Ibid., 27.

[59] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 333.

MacGonigal was a committed member of the Royal Hibernian Academy. He was elected ARHA in 1931 and RHA in 1933. He was Keeper of the Royal Hibernian Academy, in charge of its school, from 1934 to 1939 and again from 1950 to 1961, by which time its school had closed. He was made Assistant Professor of Painting at the Academy in 1937, and was Professor of Painting from 1947 to 1978. In 1962 he became president of the Royal Hibernian Academy.

MacGonigal shared the same attitude to dilettantes as Keating and Orpen. When MacGonigal was a young teacher in the 1930s, according to Professor Turpin, there was a small core of serious professional students in the life class. This was just as it had been under Orpen, and just as it would continue to be in the 1960s under MacGonigal himself. Professor Turpin points out that most students were not so committed and included some young women who saw the college as a finishing school.[60] Hilda van Stockum, who studied at the college during the 1930s, made a revealing comment when she said that, the only thing that a potential student needed to gain entry to the school of painting at that time was the painting equipment.[61]

MacGonigal was appointed Assistant Professor of Painting at the National College of Art in 1937, at the same time that Keating was made Professor of Painting, and he took over as Professor of Painting from Keating when Keating retired in 1954. He taught at the National College of Art until he resigned as a result of the student rebellion in 1969, when he was replaced by John Kelly; Kelly had been teaching at the college since 1942 and he shared the aesthetic and political values of Keating and MacGonigal.[62]

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[60] Ibid., 334.

[61] Ibid., 249.

[62] Ibid., 333.

Outside of the legacy of his artwork MacGonigal's singular achievement was, according to Professor Turpin, that he unified the Royal Hibernian Academy and the teaching of painting at the National College of Art. Whatever about the practicalities of this arrangement, there is an important symbolic significance to this situation for a republican who started his career before the birth of the new state. It is easy to forget that when MacGonigal was a young man both of these institutions had a particular symbolic status; they were associated with the old structures of British power. Despite the fact that there were many things that had not changed in these institutions by the 1960s, MacGonigal's status in them was symbolic of a major social and political change for someone of his generation, however inadequate it might appear to those of a later generation. It must be remembered that early in his career MacGonigal had hoped to create a pictorial language for the newly emergent nation. There was an attempt in his youth, he said in 1972, "to be aware of the contribution the artist should make to Ireland. . . . We did think that we were doing something to create a new Ireland."[63] The student rebels of 1969, of course, felt that MacGonigal and his generation had merely replaced the old British system by taking over its institutions and style of art, a view that was shared by the new English staff after 1975. There was a widely held belief at the time of the student rebellion that MacGonigal and his peers had, in their positions of power within the Royal Hibernian Academy and the National College of Art, prolonged the life of an outdated, elitist and exclusive system of a bygone era, and that this situation needed to be changed. Notwithstanding this particular criticism, MacGonigal and his generation were also criticised for their particular nationalistic political beliefs. This makes sense in the context of the post-Whitaker opening up of Irish society to outside influence in the 1960s and 1970s.

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[63] Crouan, *Maurice MacGonigal*, 8.

Significantly, in the context of the political situation in Ulster after 1969, some of the more radical students criticised MacGonigal and his peers for creating an ersatz Irish art and they demanded the creation of a more truly Irish art. In this context the fact that the style in which MacGonigal worked was as much English as Irish took on a particular significance. There is some irony in the fact that the new post-1975 curriculum in the Fine Art faculty, which, as will be shown later, was based entirely on an English model, aimed to answer this need and to give to Irish artists, according to Campbell Bruce, their own voice as Irish artists. Campbell Bruce makes much of the fact that many of the visiting artists that he brought to the college after 1975 had Irish connections and were thus bringing something specifically Irish to the students. Having said this, almost all of these artists had studied in an exclusively British system of art education and the style of art that they practised was specific to this system. Thus the old pre-1975 curriculum and the post-1975 curriculum were similar in the sense that the style of art favoured by each was essentially an English style.

In summary then, the consensus among former students is that MacGonigal had a broad outlook but specific demands in terms of skills. Generally speaking these were the skills associated with the work of Orpen and the New English Arts Club. On a practical level he was a better teacher than Keating, with a less caustic approach. Henry Sharpe, who was a student at the college in the early 1960s, describes MacGonigal's teaching style in the following way:

> MacGonigal encouraged or rather he insisted on, a very specific form of painting. This might succinctly be described as the rendition of observed reality in terms of simplified tonal areas - a methodology ultimately derived from Corot and Manet via Sickert, Orpen and Keating. Lines were superfluous, 'edges' were everything - colour was a disruptive element and had to be suppressed. Experiments with distortion, whether for purely formal or expressive ends, were actively discouraged. An artist who was a student in the college during this period recounts the following: "I remember down in the Life Room once grinding up bits of charcoal and stuff and trying to incorporate them onto a surface. I had been at an exhibition of Gerald

> Dillon's and I liked his stuff and some of the things he was trying to do. MacGonigal said 'he's not a good painter, you shouldn't be influenced by someone like that. Anyway you can't do that sort of thing here'".[64]

12.3.1.3 *The Ethos of the Old Regime: Summary*

Before 1975 the ethos of the National College of Art was nationalist and traditionalist and in the schools of painting and sculpture there was broad hostility to any demand for change in the curriculum. This hostility came from members of staff who, with exceptions, identified themselves very defensively with the neo-classical tradition and with traditional nationalist political values. A document written in 1969 by John Kelly, at the height of the student rebellion, outlining the policy for the teaching of fine art at the National College of Art illustrates this thinking. This document, a part of which is quoted here, vehemently asserts the need for students to adhere to the traditional curriculum, to concentrate on the fundamental disciplines of the neo-classical system, and, significantly, to protect Irish National identity from outside influence. It is quoted verbatim.

> We have been a nation with control of our own destiny for only half a century and as such have come into a world of massive scientific advancement: sociological and political uncertainty and confusion, exposure to propogandic [sic] forces never before in existence.
>
> That coming into such a world as a nation in a small country and with political immaturity there exists the real threat that the remaining vestiges of our identity and our cultural heritage are in great danger of being swamped and ultimately extinguished in a welter of internationalism of a spurious and often of dangerous nature, resulting in lack of confidence in ourselves and our particular talents and abilities and an ensuing tendency to look to other people for the solution of problems which we are best fitted to solve ourselves.[65]

During the student rebellion, in November 1970, at a meeting of students called to

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[64] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 344 -345.

[65] John Kelly, "Notes on a Policy for the National College of Art", National College of Art and Design Archives, File 62.

discuss issues of course content John Kelly reiterated the values of Keating and MacGonigal and stated that the focus of the curriculum must remain craft and skill and that revolution could come later.[66] Thus, John Kelly made it clear that, as Professor of Painting, he was firmly resisting any attempt to change the curriculum at a crucial and pivotal moment in the history of fine art education at the college.

The school of sculpture prior to 1975 shared the traditional values of the school of painting. According to Professor Turpin, "The austere Catholic and nationalistic viewpoint, typical of the Ireland of the 1940s and 1950s was strongest in the sculpture school."[67] Having said this, Professor Turpin points out that though technical instruction was emphasised in the sculpture school there was a more open and academically tolerant attitude than in the school of painting, and no obstacles were placed in the path of students who wished to make abstract work.[68] This was a reference to the influence of Domhnall O'Murchadha who, though deeply nationalistic and Catholic, had a much broader aesthetic vision than MacGonigal or Kelly. Broadly speaking, then, the aesthetic values of the schools of painting and sculpture at the National College of Art until 1975 remained solidly wedded to a combination of the neo-classical and realist traditions and to the political ideology of post-1922 nationalist Ireland that strongly resisted outside influence.

Not surprisingly then, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, talented students, and particularly those who were talented in drawing, found the National College of Art supportive. Charlie Cullen, who was a student at the college in the nineteen-fifties, states: "If you had any kind of facility and you were working in the house style the

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 360.

[68] Ibid., 359.

praise was unending . . . now that I think about it what we were getting was the rump end of the Orpen thing."[69] Ciaran Lennon, a gifted draughtsman, puts it more bluntly:

> I was a star, like Paddy Graham was the star before I was. And literally you were a star, people looked up to you, and kids came over to you and would stand around watching you draw. I would have four or five behind me watching me draw. The girls all wanted to be with me and follow me around.[70]

It is self evident that many of the most important and successful Irish artists of the last thirty years attended the National College of Art. However, it is interesting to note that, apart from those working in a traditional mode, a significant number of these were expressionistic in style, as opposed to formalist. It is also interesting to note that many of these expressionistic artists were associated with the Independent group of artists and that many of them had attended the National College of Art under Kelly, MacGonigal, or Keating. Of ten key artists representing this strand of modern Irish art that exhibited at the Project Gallery in 1983 in a show called "Making Sense", nine had studied at the National College of Art before 1975. By contrast, many of the big names working in the formalist tradition in Ireland from the 1950s through to the 1980s did not. Those that did not attend the National College of Art include Cecil King, Michael Farrell, Patrick Scott, Robert Ballagh, Louis le Brocquy, and Erik Adriaan van der Grijn. There is thus an interesting inverse correlation between the type of work produced by the artists represented in this exhibition and the neo-classical curriculum at the National College of Art while they were students there. The curriculum taught a controlled, tight, homogenous and traditional style. By contrast, the work of these other artists is expressive, loose, personal, often cathartic, and sometimes rebellious. It

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[69] Henry Sharpe, *Making Sense: Ten Painters 1963-1983* (Dublin: The Project Arts Centre, 1983)

[70] Ciaran Lennon, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 13, 915.

is noteworthy that most of the work of these artists is figurative, as opposed to purely abstract or formalist. Michael Kane, who was associated with the Independent artists, was singularly unimpressed by the teaching he received at the college. His comments bring to mind the teaching style of Turner as described by Richard Redgrave. (See Chapter 1)

> I couldn't see any value in the process that they [Sean Keating and Maurice MacGonigal] carried out. As far as I was concerned, at my best, there was an extremely delicate fineness of line in some of the drawings I did. Then Keating would come along and make some objection about my observation and make an extremely crude charcoal mark on my paper, which I resented very strongly.[71]

Michael Kane was not the only artist who felt restrained by the aesthetic narrowness of the curriculum. Brian Burke, a more rebellious personality, who also studied at the National College of Art in the 1950s, having been asked by the Director to leave the college replied, " Whether you like it or not I'm going to be a painter." And Paul Funge, a student at the college in the 1960s and one of the teachers who supported the students during the student rebellion, has said that MacGonigal taught him by default: He'd say 'you can't do this or that'. Anyone saying you can't do something to me is like putting a red rag in front of a bull. I'd say 'I'm bloody sure I'm going to prove precisely that you can do it'.[72]

Another artist who exhibited in the "Making Sense" exhibition was Mick Mulcahy. Mulcahy, who is a major painter in the new expressionist mode that became fashionable in the 1980s, studied sculpture at the college during the student rebellion. As a consequence of the loss of power of the old regime at this time, Mulcahy found that as a student he was able to work in his preferred and non-traditional medium of

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[71] Sharpe, *Making Sense*.

[72] Ibid.

fibreglass and resin without any restrictions. The freedom that Mulcahy found in the sculpture area, and which he ascribes to the chaos that prevailed in college in the early seventies[73], was not solely attributable to the loss of power suffered by the old regime. It was also a consequence of Domhnall O'Murchadha's more open approach to the teaching of art than that of other members of the traditional staff. O'Murchadha's approach to teaching, as discussed below, was based on the study of materials. Another of the country's most successful expressionist artists of today, Mick Cullen, also attended the college during the most troubled and difficult period of its existence. Cullen's student years, from 1970 to 1974, coincided with the student rebellion. Cullen has stated that, despite the problems at the National College of Art while he was a student there, he was able to get on with his work without any difficulty whatsoever. He also stated that he was completely free to work in whatever manner he liked.[74] According to Cullen, when he attended the college there were two options available to fine art students. They could follow the remnants of the old course, which was comsidered outmoded by the radical students and which was very unorganised because the system was breaking down, or they could go to the so called 'free area'. It was here that Cullen chose to work.[75] The 'free area' was located in the large upstairs galllery in the Kildare Street premises. Students who worked here followed their own program. Charlie Cullen recalls that at this time students were free to go where they pleased in the college with minimal interference from staff and that most fine art students chose to work in the 'free area'[76]. According to Mick Cullen, there was no

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[73] Mick Mulcahy, interview by author, February 29th 1996.

[74] Mick Cullen, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 12, 895-896.

[75] Ibid., 895.

[76] Charlie Cullen, Interview by author, June 18th 1998.

course as such when he attended the college, either in the 'free area' or downstairs where the traditional curriculum was being taught. The atmosphere of rebellion and freedom that existed in the 'free area', as recounted by a number of former students and which proved such a boon to Cullen's creative activity, echoes the spirit of Carsten and the rebellion of the Nazarenes against the academies as discussed in Chapter 1. Some students, like Brian Maguire and Gene Lambert, in response to the same freedom and spirit of rebellion that enabled Cullen to develop as an artist, became actively political. A number of these students, including the above two, were suspended from the college as a result of their political activity. Most of these students were eventually awarded their diplomas.[77]

As the above examples make clear, art students of the post-war generation in Ireland were making demands of the curriculum at the National College of Art throughout the 1950s and 1960s that it could not or would not meet. This situation contrasted starkly with what was happening in Britain and inevitably led to problems.

It is clear that as early as the mid-1950s tension was beginning to develop as a consequence of the refusal of the National College of Art to allow developments in contemporary art to influence the curriculum. The college was aware of these demands. The annual report of the Director of the college, Michael de Burca, for 1959-1960 admits the interest of students in contemporary art forms where it states: "The work produced during the year displayed an awareness of the fundamental abstract values underlying contemporary art forms."[78] De Burca refused to countenance change, however, as an unpublished version of the report for 1962/63 makes clear.

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[77] Sharpe, *Making Sense*.

[78] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 341.

> The conflict of the contemporary art scene with its attendant literature and large-scale reproductions makes the training and guidance of students an onerous and exacting job today . . .. The avant-garde doctrines do not favour the traditional disciplines of life drawing and painting and hold that they are out of touch with the modern spirit as the bias is all, at the moment, towards the abstract. Students are exposed to such a diversity of propagandic [sic] forces that in their immaturity they tend to become confused or uncertain . . . it is our own belief that a sound academic training cannot be replaced by comparatively easier disciplines required in the study of abstract forms and such replacement would be detrimental.[79]

An important aspect of the ethos, and therefore of the curriculum, in the fine art area at the National College of Art until 1970 was the preoccupation with the talented individual and potentially great artist. As shown in Chapter 10, this preoccupation led to the neglect of trainee teachers and others who did not belong to the small group of diploma students studying to be artists. Orpen and Keating were the models of the potentially great artist, and Ciaran Lennon, Charlie Cullen and others were the beneficiaries of this preoccupation. Terence de Vere White suggested in 1957 that the veneration of Orpen had led to sterility and impoverishment of the Royal Hibernian Academy in the late 1940s. This criticism might equally have been applied to the National College of Art under Keating and MacGonigal.[80] The preoccupation of the curriculum with specific skills lay behind this sterility and was rooted in the search - inherent in the curriculum - for new national artistic genius expressed in terms of either the neo-classical tradition, nineteenth century realism or some combination of both.

As the 1960s advanced, as the concept of national identity began to change, and as outside influences made themselves felt the traditional ethos of the National College of Art became more and more outmoded. This led to the curriculum becoming even more discredited in the eyes of many students than it had been in the 1950s. The new ethos

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[79] Ibid., 342.

[80] Brian Kennedy, "Modernism and Living Art," *Circa* 14 (Jan-Feb 1984): 27-29.

to which young Irish people were being exposed was made up of a combination of forces which the National College of Art was progressively being forced to acknowledge but which it was strenuously resisting. This new Ireland was a place where T.J. Whitaker's outward-looking social and economic model was replacing the old inward-looking model. It was one where the philosophy of existentialism, as manifested in the writings of the angry young men of the 1950s in Britain, was being felt. It was a place where the values of the American consumer society were being felt. And, finally, it was a place where the radical political ideas that would culminate in the student revolt in Paris in 1969, the student and black movements in the United States, and the civil rights movement in the north of Ireland were gaining strength. All of these forces came together at the National College of Art in the explosion that was the student rebellion, which shattered the old model of art education at the college. Crucially, the student rebellion took away the financial and ideological security of those who taught at the college, a situation that exacerbated the resistance of the old regime to the new regime after 1975 and which left a residue of bitterness that persists to the present day. When it finally ended the student rebellion left a confused, problematic and unresolved situation in the schools of painting and sculpture. Thus, by the early 1970s, when the internal and in many ways organic structure of the old college had been destroyed, there was no clear new ethos or structure in relation to the fine arts to replace the discredited and outmoded neo-classical curriculum. The schools of painting and sculpture were thus primed and ready for change. Into this context came a new group of people with a clear vision that had been worked out in British art education since the war and that had been institutionalised by the Coldstream and Summerson Reports. According to the artist Brian Maguire, who was a member of the Independent Artists and a student rebel, and who is at the time of writing Head of the

Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, "We were so exhausted at the end of that victory that the English people just walked in and took over . . .."[81]

12.3.2 *The Ethos of the New Regime*

The faculty structure at the National College of Art and Design which replaced the old four school system of the National College of Art, as already stated, mirrored the British system which had been developed during the 1960s by John Summerson in response to the recommendations of the Coldstream reports. This is understandable as, according to Professor Turpin, most of the newly appointed senior staff who were to oversee the introduction of the new faculty based system were from Britain.[82] It was thus inevitable that the ethos of the new regime at the National College of Art and Design would be rooted in recent developments in British art education at tertiary level. The first two directors of the college who respectively designed and oversaw the introduction of the new system had wide experience of the new post-Coldstream British system. As already stated, James Warwick, a graduate of the Royal College of Art, had been director of Belfast College of Art. And Jonah Jones had been educated at the University of Newcastle and at Eric Gill's workshop in Britain. Jones had also been a member of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design since 1961 and had been chairman of its fine art panel: the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design controlled art and design awards in Britain from 1968 until 1971. The new curriculum that was developed in the Fine Art faculty after 1975 was designed by Campbell Bruce and by the two new English members of staff, Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith.

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[81] Sharpe, *Making Sense*.

[82] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 584.

12.3.2.1 *Professor Campbell Bruce.*

The teaching experience of Campbell Bruce, the new Head of Fine Art, had been almost exclusively in post-Coldstream British art schools. Starting in 1957 as a part-time teacher Bruce worked at a number of art colleges, including Croydon College of Art, Walthamstow School of Art, Colchester School of Art, and Chelsea School of Art. In 1965 he became a senior lecturer in painting at Stoke-on-Trent College of Art. While at Stoke he participated in the incorporation of the Stoke-on-Trent College of Art into the North Staffordshire Polytechnic - a valuable experience given the problematic and strife torn transition which he was to oversee in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. In 1971 Bruce became Head of Painting at Canterbury College of Art.[83] He left this post in 1974 to take up the position of Head of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design.

Bruce was a very effective administrator and organiser of people. He was also a great mixer and was very sociable, and he quickly established valuable contacts within the Dublin art world. He was already well connected with the British art world, and his wife, Jackie Stanley, who also taught at the National College of Art and Design, had taught at Hornsey and at the Chelsea School of Art - Chelsea School of Art, as already stated, had been set up by Augustus John and William Orpen in 1903. Bruce's social skills proved very useful in his new job, particularly in terms of bringing new people in

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[83] Michael Craig-Martin was teaching at Canterbury while Campbell Bruce was head of painting there. Craig-Martin had come to Canterbury from Bath Academy of Art, which Nigel Rolfe had attended, in the early seventies and he left Canterbury in 1974 to teach at Goldsmiths' College. Craig-Martin's description of Canterbury College of Art at this time is revealing: "While essentially benign and well meaning, the school was directionless, lacking any strong guiding principles, any clear sense of what it was trying to do. Its muddled liberal surface sometimes fell away to reveal a deep conservatism. Important decisions tended to be inconsistent and arbitrary. There were always some students on probation. . . . The school could be breathtakingly anti-intellectual: I was once on an interview panel that turned down a student because it was decided that he was too intelligent - too

to the college as part-time or visiting lecturers. The American artist Charlie Brady, for example, was hired after meeting Campbell Bruce socially.[84] Nigel Rolfe has said that it was a Machiavellian trait in Bruce's character that enabled him to survive in the factional and partisan world that was the National College of Art and Design at this time.[85] According to Ollie Whelan, who was among the first intake of students under the new regime, Campbell Bruce was a very understanding Head of Department and was more accepting of a broad range of talents among students than those who represented the old regime.[86] Whelan had been rejected when he applied to enter the college under the old regime. Whatever about his particular skills, Campbell Bruce did succeed in bringing the rapidly changing and modernising Dublin art world into closer contact with the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, a situation that was of immense benefit to both. He was also responsible for bringing a quite a few visiting English artists to the college, and in doing so he brought the Fine Art faculty at the college into the compass and influence of the contemporary English art world.

Campbell Bruce's first experience of a changing political and social context in relation to art education - though he wouldn't have been aware of it at the time - was the art classes that he had attended as a boy; Bruce had been born in 1927. According to Bruce, these classes had been provided free by a new socialistic London County Council that had been reorganised by Herbert Morrisson after Labour gained control of the LCC in 1934; Morrison was later to be one of the chief architects of post-war Britain.

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clever by half. (Michael Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission: An Inaugural Lecture by Professor Michael Craig-Martin on 16th February 1995* [London: Athlone Press 1991]), 11.

[84] Charlie Brady, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 10, 813.

[85] Nigel Rolfe, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 18, 1036.

[86] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1140.

Campbell Bruce had first studied art formally at Croydon Art School under the system that had been brought in to replace the South Kensington System after 1913. He took the Drawing Examination of the Board of Education Industrial Examination, which was part of that system and which was the first of two examinations which students sat in order to graduate. Because of military service Bruce never took the second examination, the Examination in Industrial Design. This examination, it will be recalled, was replaced after the introduction of the National Diploma in Design in 1946 by the Intermediate Examination in Art, which was in turn replaced, after the publication of the Coldstream reports, by the new pre-diploma year, later to be renamed foundation studies.

According to Bruce, the course that led to the old Industrial Examination was rigorous, demanding, and old fashioned:

> You started at nine in the morning and most of us did a voluntary two hour evening class. . . . The drawing exam consisted of perspective and mechanical perspective, which means you had three hours to do an examination paper which obviously you hadn't seen until the commencement of the examination. You also had to do a three-hour paper on mechanical perspective and another paper which was three hours of memory perspective. . . . Composition was . . . four hours; they would set the subject. There was an anatomy paper in which you had three hours to do a nine-inch figure. You did the outline of an action they gave you: a man chopping up a log or carrying two buckets of water up a stairs for instance. And you did the first one in outline with a skeleton inside it, then you traced off the outline and with the other one you did the muscles. . . . And then you had one hour to answer three questions about muscles: their origins, their insertions, and their function.[87]

Having had his education interrupted by the social and political upheaval caused by the Second World War, followed by military service, Bruce resumed his education under the new system, the National Diploma in Design. Bruce's formative years, and his art education, were thus spent in the shadow of the Second World War and in the

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[87] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 855.

midst of the consequent social and political change. This provides the immediate background for the development of his thinking.

On a philosophical level Bruce has stated that both T.S Eliot's *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*,[88] which was published in 1948, and A.N. Whitehead's *Adventures of Ideas*,[89] which was published in 1932, were significant influences on his thinking and on the thinking of his peers. These influences throw some light on what lay behind the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975.

Adventures of Ideas by Whitehead describes the organic – if troubled - evolution of, and complex interrelationships within, western society and religion from their beginnings in the ancient middle east to their modern forms. It seeks to establish a case for the continuing influence of classical civilisation on modern man, and expounds a complex description of such influence. The themes of this book are freedom and the human soul. In short, it aims to provide an explanation of how modern society has evolved and a prescription for how it should function. It is quite detailed and examines the process of historical change and its impact on man's thinking and on the social and political structures that he has created. It contains ideas that in the present context have resonance within the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. These ideas will be dealt with in the text as they arise. While *Adventures of Ideas* was being written western civilisation was being threatened by the development of totalitarianism and scientific materialism. This threat informs much of the thinking expressed in this book. Though it is beyond the scope of the

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[88] T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948)

[89] A.N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933)

present study to examine in detail, it is interesting to note that process was of central importance to Whitehead's thinking. This is important in the context of the importance given to process by the Basic Design system and in the thinking of Campbell Bruce. Both see process as a significant aspect of the aesthetic experience of artists.

As the theme of organicism was an important aspect of Whitehead's thinking so it was an important aspect of Eliot's thinking. Eliot had expressed the hope in his writings that the ideal organic type of society that he believed had existed in the past could be recreated in the present. Eliot also believed in the idea that a thriving and vigorous culture necessarily involved the existence of a harmonious organic relationship between the different social strata within a society, and he believed in the need for a cultured elite to safeguard high cultural values. The philosophy expressed in *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* is drawn from various essays and articles that articulate Eliot's ideas about Culture at a time of major social and political change, and particularly in the context of the threat to high cultural values that was posed by the development of the welfare state in the post-war epoch.[90]

Having received his National Diploma in Design, Bruce went on to do post-graduate study at the newly reorganised Royal College of Art between 1950 and 1953. The Royal College of Art had been completely reorganised by the landscape and portrait painter Robin Darwin (1910-1974) after he had been appointed principal of the college in 1948. Interestingly, given that he had attended the Slade for a while under Henry Tonks during the 1920s, Darwin brought a whole new ethos to the Royal College of Art, which he revitalised, particularly in relation to the teaching of design. According to Campbell Bruce, he did this without diminishing the painting bias

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[90] Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: English Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1995), 50-54.

established by Rothenstein in the nineteen-twenties, but, according to Bruce, he "got rid of the snobbery that was attached to painting".[91] Darwin remoulded the college to help bring about his own vision of a new and more vital industrial age in which fine art would have an integral role to play as part of a rapidly changing and resurgent post-war Britain. With this in view Darwin appointed Rodrigo Moynihan (1910-1990), who had been associated with, although not a member of, the Euston Road School, to run the painting department. Moynihan, who had studied at the Slade between 1928 and 1931, was a close friend of William Coldstream and had been one of the first truly abstract artists working in Britain in the early 1930s. In the late 1930s Moynihan had become a realist painter, as a reaction against what he felt was the increasing isolation of abstraction. Moynihan returned to abstraction in the late 1950s only to revert to realism again in the 1970s.

After the war, according to Bruce, a great many painting students in English art schools were influenced by what was happening in France. In common with these students and in the context of the changes that he saw taking place in Britain as a young man, Bruce found the influence of French art and thinking, while he was a student at the RCA, a revelation and an inspiration. This influence, according to Bruce, also tied in with what he knew of radical thinkers such as William Morris and modern thinkers such as Whitehead and Eliot. According to Bruce, Morris's name and ideas still had currency in the art world in Britain in the 1940s. These ideas and the radical tradition of nineteenth century Britain were of a piece, Bruce believes, with what was happening in the immediate post-war years, and tied in with the whole notion of what Morris had been doing with the crafts.[92]

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[91] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 859.

[92] Ibid., 862.

Sartre and existentialism were another influence on his thinking, according to Bruce, and they had a profound effect on students, who, as a consequence, became particularly interested in, and influenced by, French art and by what Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) in particular had been doing. Major exhibitions of the work of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and of Henri Matisse (1869-1954) that were held in the Victoria and Albert museum immediately after the war had helped to seal the French influence. David Sylvester, who was the most influential critic in Britain in the post-war period, had a significant role to play in spreading the influence of French art. Sylvester, who was a particular advocate of Giacometti's work, gave a seminal lecture entitled 'Towards a New Realism' at the Royal College of Art in 1951, when Campbell Bruce was a student there. This lecture expounded on recent developments in French art, and in particular on the work of Giacometti. Using Giacometti's work as an example Sylvester presented a new aesthetic, or perhaps more accurately a new approach to art practice, in this lecture that involved a new methodology which he believed that artists must follow in order to access the underlying structures that lay behind the world of phenomena. This new aesthetic was analytical and was based on the artist's responding to visual sensations stimulated in the consciousness of each individual by the appearance of reality. Campbell Bruce recalls Sylvester's influence.

> We had very little history or tradition to go on, so when the critic David Sylvester came back from France after the war – Sylvester had been the first English critic to go to France after the war – he said, "look, I've got photographs of Giacometti's drawings here, and he showed them to us. We saw that Giacometti had gone into the business of focus, which went right back to Durer and so on. This raised questions like, what do you focus on when you draw? Giacometti might focus on the nose or a particular part of the head, and then everything else was peripheral vision. It was almost an expressionist way of looking. And if you were focussing on the nose you felt where that was - you know exactly what I'm saying. It was fifteen years later that Chuck Close did these large paintings. It was precisely the same thing, but different in scale. To us this was absolutely riveting, because what we had been told about drawing was strictly based on the tensions which had to do with structure and the relationship of the marks to achieve it, weights and all

> the rest of it. This old system was ridiculous. So this notion that we fixed focus was like some kind of revelation. Consequently all the teaching that came out of the Bauhaus suddenly made a lot more sense, like taking the negative shape of something. Then the Duchamp thing suddenly became, instead of theory and laughable, practised reality. It was tremendously exciting, and all that knowledge that exploded later, all those other ideas, we wanted to encompass all that. So we thought teaching was disastrous. Remember, teaching was for us architecture, drawing, perspective, anatomy, illustration.[93]

The curriculum that Campbell Bruce developed while head of the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975 owes much to this new aesthetic.[94] As described by Campbell Bruce above, the focus on what is observed, and, more importantly, on how the viewer observes, goes back to Kant's ideas, as discussed in Chapter 1. To reiterate, Kant believed that the locus of aesthetic experience was the mind of man - as opposed to ancient Greek models - and that this formed a bridge between the world of phenomena and the metaphysical world or world of underlying structures. The search for underlying structures through an intelligent, critical, and spontaneous engagement with materials that was such an important aspect of post-war English art, and thus art education, is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is interesting in relation to the search for truth that lay behind new developments in French art, which had such a profound influence on the New English Arts Club at the end of the nineteenth century. These were developments, as shown in Chapter 2, which influenced the creation of a radically new curriculum at the Slade School of Art in the late nineteenth century. This curriculum, as shown, isolated and focussed on line because of its value in describing observed reality. And secondly, it is interesting because of how it ties in with contemporary developments in American art.

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[93] Ibid., 871.

[94] David Sylvester, *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-1997* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 11-34 and 52-55.

These developments are discussed below.

Politics also played a significant role in the development of Campbell Bruce's ideas. According to Bruce, by the early 1950s the generation to which he belonged had had enough of the old patrician attitudes and the exclusive social and political structures of British society as exemplified by Churchill. Churchill at this time, according to Bruce, was one of the most disliked men in Britain: "when the war was over he didn't loose an election; he was slung out".[95] Bruce goes on:

> Everybody was . . . coming out of a very doctrinaire, ordered world. . . . we had had enough of rules. Everybody wanted to be responsible for themselves. We believed . . . that the system existed . . . to answer our needs. The Royal College at one stage looked ridiculous. It looked like everybody was in mourning. We all wore black.[96]

The disillusion of Bruce's generation with the social and political structures of pre-war Britain, and its subsequent frustration as a consequence of its inability to bring about change, were reflected in the writings of the angry young men of the 1950s. The values of this generation, and the efforts which America was making to step into the cultural vacuum which had been left in Europe by the Second World War, inevitably led Campbell Bruce's generation to look to the United States as the cultural beacon of the era. This situation helped to establish the hegemony of American art, and in particular Abstract Expressionism, in Britain and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s; this was, after all, the era of James Dean, Montgomery Clift, Paul Newman, and Marylin Monroe. It is no accident that Britain's most famous visual artist of the post-war generation, David Hockney, a working class lad from Yorkshire, has had a love affair with the United States since the early 1960s and that he lives there today. It is

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[95] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 862-863.

[96] Ibid., 875.

interesting to note in this context that, according to his own testimony, Hockney spent a lot of his time as a student at the Royal College of Art going to movies at local cinemas. This was at a time when the influence of British cinema was in decline and when American cinema was in the ascent. The decline of British cinema was a direct result of America's use of culture as a means of spreading its influence and of restricting the influence of communism in the early years of the cold war.[97] In relation to the political aspect of Campbell Bruce's thinking, and in relation to the increasing importance of radicalism and the avant-garde to third level art education as the sixties and seventies advanced, it is interesting to note that one of the things that attracted the younger artists of the immediate post-war period, especially in Britain, to American art and to Abstract Expressionism was its freshness and iconoclasm. The iconoclastic approach of much American art, as manifested in the lack of 'finish' in the work of the Abstract Expressionist artists, was a key issue in the disparagement of French art and the concomitant aggrandisement of the New York School at this time.[98] When the present writer was a student in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in the 1970s lack of finish was still considered a sign of vigour and integrity in a student's work. This lack of finish was of vital importance to another key aspect of Abstract Expressionism that attracted younger artists, and particularly those of Campbell Bruce's generation in Britain, and this was, significantly, its focus on process. The Abstract Expressionist artist Robert Motherwell describes this approach in the work of the artists of the New York School:

> I dislike a picture that is too suave or too skilfully done. But contrariwise, I also dislike a picture that looks too inept or blundering. I noticed in looking at

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[97] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 133-138.

[98] Ibid., 176.

> the Carre exhibition of young French painters who are supposed to be close to this group, that in "finishing" a picture they assume traditional criteria to a much greater degree than we do. They have a real "finish" in that the picture is a real object, a beautifully made object. We are involved in "process" and what is a "finished" object is not so certain.[99]

American art came to dominate western art in the post-war era because of its iconoclasm and freshness, attributes that could be applied to much American culture at this time, especially popular culture. The brightness and brashness of American popular culture contrasted starkly with European culture in the post-war epoch; hence its attraction to Richard Hamilton and other artists in Britain associated with the Basic Design system. It was the attraction of this culture to young Irish art students that John Kelly was responding to when he made the comments quoted earlier which criticised international influence on young Irish artists. Astutely, John Kelly was concerned that a still embryonic Irish culture was vulnerable to an all-consuming, homogenous, international and popular modernism. This is a stance that time has vindicated.

The overpowering influence of American culture in the post-war era led to a minor backlash during the late 1960s and early 1970s against what was seen as an American bias in contemporary art by some mainstream British artists - and not necessarily left-leaning ones. This backlash was aimed in particular at the critic Clement Greenberg, the hugely influential American critic and apologist for modernism, and in particular for American formalism, during the 1960s and 1970s. Greenberg was perceived by many to be chauvinistic and there was resentment towards him in the British art world. The painter and critic Patrick Heron (1922 -) was a particular opponent of what he saw as American cultural imperialism and its domineering influence on modern British

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[99] Ibid., 177.

art.[100] The big, brash, bold exhibitions of American art that came to Europe at this time were seductively attractive for many young artists as an assertion of individual freedom, universal liberty; and a refreshing break with outmoded ways of thinking. This was especially so when seen in the political context of the recently defeated ogre of Fascism and prevailing current ogre of communism. The independent, spirited, and radical work of Jackson Pollock was seen crucially, in this context, as aesthetically sophisticated (it was existentialist), as politically relevant, and as the perfect foil for confronting the old values of Britain and Europe. Bruce states:

> When people came out of the services there was such a desire to change the world, to make it different, and there was enormous frustration built up because financially there was no way one could change anything. The money was not even in the country. It was in the States. There was an enormous frustration.[101]

The *Art:USA:Now* show of modern American art with its thick catalogue of reproductions, which was held in a number of European cities in the early 1960s, including Dublin, was a showcase of such art.[102] The influence of this show on modern Irish artists is evident in the work of Ciaran Lennon and is attested by both Lennon and Simon McLeod in the interviews that appear in appendices 13 and 14. The Irish Exhibition of Living Art, as already pointed out, played a significant role in Ireland in this respect and regularly exhibited at its annual shows during the 1950s and 1960s artwork from Paris and the U.S. that represented this new international style.[103]

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[100] Patrick Heron, " A Kind of Cultural Imperialism," *Studio International* 175 (February 1968): 62-64; and idem, "The Ascendancy of London in the Sixties," *Studio International* 172 (December 1966): 280-281.

[101] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 866.

[102] Lee Nordness, *Art: USA: Now: The Johnsone Collection of Contemporary American Paintings* (Lucerne: US Information Agency, 1962) Catalogue of an Exhibition that Toured Europe in 1963.

[103] A flavour of the romantic picture that many Britons had of the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s can be had by reading David Lodge's comic campus novel *Trading Places.* Though written in 1975 this book

It is no accident that the first exchanges set up between the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design under Campbell Bruce and foreign art schools were with the United States and not with Britain. These exchanges started in 1977 with the Department of Studio Arts in the University of Minnesota, and continued with exchange programs at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Department of Art at the Pennsylvania Art Institute, and the Minnesota Art Institute.[104]

Though their aesthetic values were, of course, very different, it might be suggested that Campbell Bruce and Sean Keating were similar in some ways. For example, as a member of the post-war generation of artists Campbell Bruce was a visionary, a revolutionary, and a radical in much the same way as Sean Keating was for his generation. The ideas of both lay in nineteenth century liberalism, and ultimately in the Romantic Movement. Keating's aesthetic values and ideas were rooted in the social and political turmoil of the final years of the nineteenth century that heralded the end of imperialism. Imperialism led to the First World War after which a New World order prevailed in which idealism, if not utopianism, had a role to play and in which Keating participated actively as an artist. Philosophically and intellectually Campbell Bruce's ideas were formed in the context of major social change that grew out of disillusionment with old social and political structures that occurred during the Second World War. This situation was analogous with Keating's at the time of the First World War. Like Keating, Bruce was similarly disillusioned with old values that had been challenged by a major war. And, also like Keating, he looked with hope towards a new world order, in this case the American influenced and universalist world order, that

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neatly encapsulates the view that Campbell Bruce's generation had of the perceived differences between the drab world of post-war Britain and the more dynamic United States. Lodge, an English Catholic academic who grew up in post-war Britain has written a series of novels, as well as academic work, which chronicle the changing values of British life throughout the post-war period.

[104] Dunne, *Decade Show*, 14.

followed the Second World War. It is ironic in this context that the failed new world order that followed the First World War was largely the result of the vision of an American president, Woodrow Wilson. On a technical level Keating was influenced by the broad European traditions of neo-classicism and realism, and in particular nineteenth century French realism, the Spanish School of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the Venetian School of the Renaissance. More significantly, as shown, the New English Arts Club, the Slade tradition of drawing, and Orpen were the particular influences on Keating; all three shared an interest in the precise delineation of what is seen. As Bruce has produced almost no artwork by comparison with Keating there is, of course, no comparison in terms of artistic practice. Having said this, the artwork that Campbell Bruce has produced was also influenced on a technical level by the Slade tradition and by French art, and was, significantly, drawing based.[105] This is particularly interesting given that the professor of painting at the Royal College of Art when Bruce was a student there was Rodrigo Moynihan; Moynihan had trained at the Slade under Henry Tonks, Orpen's teacher.

In summary, Campbell Bruce was an active participant, though his involvement with the arts, in the dissemination of new artistic styles and aesthetic values after the Second World War, firstly in Britain and later in Ireland. These were inextricably bound up with the creation of a new idealistic social and political order. Sadly, the creation of Campbell Bruce's new social and political order inevitably involved the destruction of the new order that Keating had helped to create after the First World War. It is an appropriate double irony that both Bruce and Keating had struggled to create a new meritocratic society in the face of what they both saw as a corrupt, elitist,

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[105] National College of Art and Design, *National College of Art and Design 250: Drawings 1746-1996* (Dublin: National College of Art and Design, 1996), 103.

and exclusive political and social systems, and that both subscribed to an aesthetic that was drawing based and analytical.

12.3.2.2 *Nigel Rolfe*

The other two new members of staff in the fine art faculty, Rob Smith in painting and Nigel Rolfe in sculpture, were both, as already stated, recent graduates of British art schools. Rolfe was very much a product of the Britain in which he grew up and in particular of its social stratification. According to his own testimony, he almost developed a split personality as a result of living in a "tendant" world between his working class origins and the middle class grammar school that he attended as a teenager.[106] This situation, according to Rolfe, led to his becoming a rebel, which, in turn, led to his choice of art school as his career option; as opposed to the expected avenue for a grammar school boy, university. Rolfe attended Farnham Art School for two years - one of these years was a foundation course - and Bath Academy of Art for three years.[107] He graduated from Bath Academy with a BA in fine art in 1974.[108] According to Rolfe, the whole fashionable culture of rebellion that was the sixties and

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[106] Nigel Rolfe, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 18, 1027-1028.

[107] Bath Academy of Art was the first art school in Britain in which Michael Craig-Martin taught after he arrived from the School of Art and Architecture at Yale University in the United States in 1966. Craig-Martin, who had left Bath by the time Rolfe arrived as student, remembers Bath Academy of Art as very adventuresome and cosmopolitan, full of interesting people. He states that Bath was "a particularly interesting school . . . based on Bauhaus ideals, though with very different emphasis. Clifford Ellis, its renowned principal, was committed to elevating the role of design, and considered art to be more or less obsolete, a kind of design without function. . . . Ellis' ideas and values gave the school a unique sense of purpose and identity. [Bath Academy of Art] typified many of the best qualities of British art schools during the late sixties and early seventies. It was progressive, liberal, and serious. . . . It still amazes me that I was invited to teach there, straight out of art school in America". (Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission*, 9.)

[108] Nigel Rolfe, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 18, 1027-1028.

seventies struck a chord with his rebellious spirit.[109] Thus, in line with the thinking of Richard Hamilton and of the Basic Design system, as discussed in Chapter 6, popular culture and particularly the rock and roll culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s, had an influence on Rolfe and the type of work he produced at art school. Yoko Ono, who visited Farnham Art School when he was a student there, and the Rolling Stones, were particular influences. Predictably, then, at Farnham Art School Rolfe was very influenced by two particular members of staff who had helped organise the Hornsey and Guildford sit-ins during the student disturbances of 1968. He elaborates thus:

> All of the troublesome staff from Guildford had been moved there (to Farnham) as a twinning with Guildford Art School to place them in a kind of backwater away from their rebellious construction. . . . My direct influence at this time was from two of the guys who had organised the Guildford sit-ins - Jack Milroy and Geoff Metcalf. Both of them were extremely anarchic and wanted to challenge.[110]

As stated above, Rolf's preoccupation as an artist with popular culture and fashions echoes Richard Hamilton's interest in popular culture, and, appropriately enough, Rolfe was to develop an interest in technology and electronic media after he came to Dublin. At Farnham, during his first year in art school proper - excluding the foundation year - Rolfe had been left completely free to work on his own. At the end of this free year Rolfe transferred to Bath Academy of Art, where Michael Craig-

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[109] The condition of seeing oneself as a 'rebel' at secondary school was, at this time, consistent with the self-image of many fine art students. In 1971 a majority of fine art students surveyed at a number of British art schools said that they had an outlook at secondary school different from those not taking up art. Research has shown that attendance at art school encouraged this tendency. Comments such as "I was always a rebel", "I tried to be arty to show I wasn't conforming", and "I was always against authority" were common. It is no accident that there were strong connections between art schools at this time and rock and role music. (Charles Madge and Barbara Weinberger, *Art Students Observed*, [London: Faber and Faber,1973], 106,109.)

[110] Nigel Rolfe, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 18, 272. The authorities changed Guildford School of Art into a college of design as a reaction to the student rebellion there. As a consequence of this, fine art activity at the school was transferred to Farnham School of Art in 1968. The two schools would eventually amalgamate. (Peter Hall and Kay Hunt, "Dismissals at Guildford School of Art" *Studio International* 176 [December 1968]: 239)

Martin had taught when he first arrived in England. Rolfe's reason for transferring to Bath from Farnham was that he liked the idea of landscape and he wanted to be in the English landscape. This interest in landscape was inspired, according to Rolfe, by the influence of the American land artist Robert Smithson; landscape and the relationship between man and nature is an ubiquitous theme in modern American art. This attraction to nature was true to the spirit of the Romantic Movement, and it is particularly interesting in relation to Rolfe's later attraction to Ireland. It is noteworthy in this context that one of the earliest exhibitions that Rolfe organised in his first few years in Ireland was an exhibition of photographs of Irish national monuments taken by the Board or Works. These photographs were all of monuments from the Celtic and Early Christian eras that stressed the isolation and wildness of their locations. The choice of this subject matter by Rolfe was ironic, given Rolfe's subsequent very difficult and confrontational relationship with the Professor of Sculpture at the National College of Art and Design, Domhnall O'Murchadha, who was noted for his love and knowledge of ancient Celtic and Early Christian Irish art.

When Rolfe arrived at Bath he found a strong modernist tradition in the sculpture department where the formalist sculptors Kenneth Hughes and Mike Denny were lecturers; Michael Craig-Martin had left Bath to teach at Canterbury before Rolfe arrived. Rolfe rejected Hughes and Denny and the type of work they represented, which, in conflating the two traditions that as an avant-garde rebel he was rebelling against, he called "academic formalism". Academic formalism was also the dominant style in the painting department at Bath where the formalist painter Adrian Heath taught.[111] In this context it is interesting to note that there were strong connections

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[111] Bath had a very strong tradition of painting that was rooted in the new post-war aesthetic of formal analysis. William Scott, one of the first external assessors under the new regime at the National College of Art and Design after 1975, was appointed Senior Master in painting at the newly

between the Slade School of Art and Bath Academy of art. Heath had been to the Slade and his work was abstract and geometric. He was a friend of Victor Pasmore and belonged to the generation that had been in the war. He had been a prisoner of war for four years.[112]

In the true spirit of the avant-garde artist Rolfe did not like that aspect of the course at Bath that looked to history or tradition, even the modernist tradition, so, to use his own words, "I rebelled".[113] He goes on to say:

> I went into this class and they said you must model the figure. I said, 'Why? You never met me before. How do you know I should model the figure?' From moment one I took this risk. They kept me but put me right outside the school. And three years I worked like that, just by myself, arguing the toss.[114]

Rolfe's personality suited the avant-garde strand of modernism as it manifested itself in British art schools at this time, and in particular it suited the type of approach being developed at Coventry College of Art between 1968 and 1972 that manifested itself in the Art-Language group during the early seventies.[115]

Rolfe not surprisingly, given his rebellious personality, subscribed to that aspect of the avant-garde that was confrontational and iconoclastic in its approach. This approach suited the situation that he found himself in at the National College of Art and Design in 1975 and made him a valuable ally of Campbell Bruce in confronting the old regime. This was helped by Rolfe's charismatic personality, which had a tendency

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established Bath Academy of Art in 1946. Scott brought Bryan Wynter, Peter Lanyon, and Terry Frost, all formalists, and the latter a close friend of Heath, to teach at Bath. (Mel Gooding and Patrick Heron, *The Fifties: Art from the British Council Collection* [London: The British Council, 1998], 60)

[112] Ibid., 40-41.

[113] Nigel Rolfe, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 18, 1031.

[114] Ibid., 1031.

[115] See Chapter 7; see also Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, *Provisional History of Art & Language* (Paris: Editions E. Fabre, 1982).

to be confrontational; he was either deified or hated by students, few were indifferent.

It is interesting to note in passing that Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), Rolfe's idol before he came to Ireland, had begun to focus on Ireland as a centre for radical art activity in the early 1970s. Around 1974 Beuys, who was given a lot of coverage in the English art magazine *Studio International*, had expressed an interest in coming to Ireland to set up a radical new and free art school. *Studio International* was still at this time the most influential of the international modern art magazines. This was just before the New York based magazine *Artforum* took over this role. In 1974 Beuys held an exhibition of drawings at the ICA in London called *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*. This exhibition travelled to Belfast and Dublin.[116]

In summary, when Nigel Rolfe arrived at the National College of Art and Design he was young and energetic, rebellious and iconoclastic, and he subscribed to the radical aesthetic values of the contemporary avant-garde. Added to this was the fact that he was *au fait* with all the latest fashions on the international art scene; this, according to Campbell Bruce, was his major asset as a teacher.[117] Thus, apart from his status as an avant-garde artist, Rolfe brought to the Fine Art faculty the influence of the Basic Design system, and in particular its focus on popular culture as an agent of change and progress.

12.3.2.3 *Rob Smith*

Rob Smith, the new appointee in painting, had graduated with a BA in fine art from Wolverhampton College of Art in 1972. An MA at Manchester College of Art followed this in 1974. Smith was a true child of the Romantic Movement in that he

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[116] Anonymous, "Review", *Studio International*. 188 (September 1974): 10.

[117] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 875.

loved the landscape, nature, and the freedom from constraint and convention that art implied. True to nineteenth century utopian ideals and to the spirit of William Morris, he hated industry and the modern world of work, commerce, and drudge. This hatred is very evident in his writings.[118] Interestingly, in this context, Smith had been trained as a craftsman before he trained as an artist; he was a crystal glass engraver. Unlike Morris, however, Smith was not overtly political.

In the tradition of the Enlightenment Smith's character was marked by an intense dislike of anything that impinged on the freedom of the individual. Campbell Bruce has said that though Smith could be stubborn, obtuse, and arrogant, he was "fierce in attacking attitudes and beliefs that encroached on personal freedoms".[119] Smith was in many ways frustrated as an artist, perhaps as a consequence of this, and his writing suggests a struggle within himself against anything that he perceived as imposing restrictions on the freedom of the individual. After he came to Dublin these forces included the National College of Art and Design, which he described angrily on one occasion as being "not even a mousetrap of worth".[120] This led to a contradictory aspect in Smith's teaching. On one hand Smith assertively and dogmatically condemned styles that did not conform to his particular definition of art, and, on the other hand, in giving direction to students, he was vague and noncommittal. The present writer, who had Smith as a tutor, recalls Smith's highly critical approach to students whose work took a definite stand but did not conform to his ideas. The work of two particular students comes to mind, both, interestingly, American. One of these students worked, not surprisingly, in a traditional and figurative way. The other

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[118] Rob Smith, "Notes", National College of Art and Design Archives, Rob Smith file.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

worked in an expressionistic way. The work of this latter student was abstract, highly esoteric, and, conspicuously, was not based on the observation of reality. It was based purely on the student's imagination. Observation was a key aspect of art making for Smith. In the case of students whose work Smith believed was on the right track the approach was quite different. With these students Smith took a *laissez faire* approach. He gave support and did not interfere so that the work of students could evolve and develop at its own pace. By contrast with these two scenarios was the situation of students who had no sense of what they were supposed to be doing and who consequently needed guidance. In the case of these students Smith's reluctance to interfere with the free development of students work led to an approach that to some students appeared vague, and that, for some, gave no direction or guidance. The effect of this latter approach was that a number of students were left confused and without a sense of direction.

Smith, who had been influenced by Schiller's ideas, looked to nature as a source of freedom, artistic inspiration, and moral purity. In the tradition of the British Romantics Smith polarised nature with the city; Smith was from the urban British midlands.

As a teacher, and again in the tradition of the Romantic Movement, Smith placed a strong emphasis on the world as a source rather than as a model, and consequently on drawing as a methodology of excavation:

> Source material [is] a starting point, a platform on which to build and discover a visual language . . . to observe beyond the ordinary level of consciousness and penetrate its inner structure. . . . Drawing, being the art of focussing, brings one's consciousness to a higher state of awareness.[121]

According to Ollie Whelan, who was one of Smith's first students at the National

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[121] Ibid.

College of Art and Design, Smith was interested in art "as a form of enlightenment, a form of self-knowledge, . . . [a form of] religious sensibility".[122] For Smith, according to Whelan, art must be an integral part of one's life, "What you do every day, every minute", as Whelan puts it. He goes on to say that Smith was not a very easy person to get on with, that he was difficult to talk to, and that he was a very determined personality. He could, Whelan continues, "give people a very hard time". Whelan goes on to state that Smith was demanding and tough. He points out that Smith found it difficult to accept the idea that art was "just about making academic drawings". Whelan emphasises the fact that Smith found the idea that art was confined by academic interests very difficult to handle.[123] Smith's antipathy to the academic tradition, therefore, made him, like Rolfe, an ideal candidate for the job at the National College of Art and Design in 1975, where one of the principal objectives was the elimination of the influence of the Royal Hibernian Academy and the neo-classical tradition.

Nigel Rolfe has suggested that what made Smith interesting, as an artist, was a chip on the shoulder "about being working class, about the landscape, and about changing the world".[124] More importantly, according to Rolfe, this chip made Smith very effective in combating what Rolfe described as the "racism and fundamentalist right wing approach about what things are in art"[125] that he, Smith and Campbell Bruce found when they first arrived at the National College of Art and Design in 1975.

Both Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe believed deeply in their respective systems of

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[122] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1141.

[123] Ibid., 1149-1150.

[124] Nigel Rolfe, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 18, 1048.

[125] Ibid., 1047.

aesthetic values, and, according to a number of people, worked very hard to realise their vision in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design. In doing so they gained many loyal followers among the student body and laid the ground for the future development of the fine art curriculum at the college, and, indeed, for the future development of much Irish art.

Given the personalities of Campbell Bruce, Nigel Rolfe, and Rob Smith, it was inevitable that developments in fine art education in Britain since the war would inform the implementation of the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty after 1975. These developments were underpinned, as will be shown, by the principles of the Enlightenment, of the Romantic Movement, of the Basic Design system, and by the general social and political context of developments in Britain in the post-war era. Given the ethos of the new members of staff from England, it was inevitable that there would be a clash with the incumbent staff in fine art. The primary reason for this was the adherence of the incumbent members of staff to the old neo-classical model, to the teaching of skill, and, ironically, given its origins in the Romantic Movement, to nationalism.

12.3.2.4 *Brian King*

Brian King attended the National College of Art as a student during the early 1960s. As a student in the school of sculpture his training was heavily influenced by the arts and crafts values of Domhnall O'Murchadha. According to King, the curriculum at that time was primarily concerned with the acquisition of skill and with the study of materials.[126] King states that the values of this curriculum, which he quickly rejected

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[126] Brian King, interview by author, 12 March 2001.

after he left the college, were outmoded and out of touch with what was happening in the world of contemporary art at that time. When King left the college in Dublin he went to England for a year where he familiarised himself with developments in the contemporary art world in London, which at that time was a major centre of artistic innovation, experiment and development. On his return and as a young artist working in Ireland in the 1960s King kept in touch with developments in the international art world by reading the international art magazines of the day and by monthly trips to London to visit the art galleries which exhibited contemporary art. In 1965 King won the Carrolls Award, which was the main prize at the annual Irish Exhibition of Living Art show. In the same year the Arts Council awarded him the William J. McCauley Fellowship, a one thousand pounds prize which he used to travel to Paris in order to familiarise himself with developments taking place there. In 1969 he won the Top Individual Award at the Paris Biennale. In 1972 King became President of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, which he felt had become stale over the years and was in need of change. Kings appointment to this position, which he held for ten years, brought a whole new approach to the type of work that was exhibited at this show. This work was much more radical than that of earlier shows and it included the work of innovative young artists such as Robert Ballagh and Ciaran Lennon. King has suggested that the radical nature of the changes that he and his peers brought to the Irish Exhibition of Living Art weakened its support among Dublin's cultural elite. King started teaching at the National College of Art and Design in 1976 and he was put in charge of the sculpture department in the Fine Art faculty in 1981. King thus brought to the fine art area in the college his progressive ideas about art and his experience of both the contemporary international art world and of the contemporary Irish art world. As already stated, Roderic Knowles, in his book *Contemporary Irish Art*, has

suggested that King's principal contribution to contemporary art in Ireland has been to bring international influences to bear on the development of contemporary Irish art. Kings role in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design has been hugely important in this respect.

12.3.3 *The Neo Classical Tradition in the Fine Art Faculty after 1975*

In the fine art faculty after 1975 Domhnall O'Murchadha, John Kelly, and Cary Clarke were the chief representatives of the old regime.

12.3.3.1 *Domhnall O'Murchadha*

Domhnall O'Murchadha was the Professor in the school of sculpture from 1969 until 1975 and Professor of Sculpture in the Fine Art faculty from 1975 until 1981. He was an Irish nationalist, Irish speaking, and assertively Catholic. He was passionate about Irish and Celtic culture, and he had a deep knowledge of art history and of Celtic and Early Christian monuments in particular, both in Ireland and abroad. He was a close friend of the archaeologist, Dr. Francoise Henry, who taught the history of art at University College Dublin and who had written extensively about Early Christian art in Ireland. As an artist and as an Irish cultural nationalist, Domhnall O'Murchadha identified more with continental Europe than with Britain. He was a frequent visitor at the home of Professor Henry in France on the regular summer tours of the continent that he undertook with his wife Mairin, who taught the history of art and the National College of Art.[127]

O'Murchadha, who was a dominating presence in the school of sculpture from the

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[127] Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 358.

1950s until the 1970s believed that carving was a higher form of sculpture than modelling, hence his particular interest in Early Christian stone carving in Ireland. O'Murchadha's teacher at the National College of Art, Laurence Campbell, was acting Professor of Sculpture at the college from 1939 until 1946. Unlike Oliver Sheppard who had taught at the school from 1902 until 1937 and who favoured modelling, Campbell had encouraged his students to carve in stone and wood. O'Murchadha, who was a native of Cork, had studied carving at the Cork School of Art before he went to the National College of Art in Dublin. O'Murchadha was appointed assistant Professor of Sculpture at the National College of Art in 1948. According to O'Murchadha, Laurence Campbell's particular contribution to Irish art had been the re-introduction of formal values into the practice of sculpture. While modelling copies of plaster originals in clay – a legacy of the nineteenth century – remained an important part of the curriculum at the National College of Art between 1936 and 1971 carving was the particular preoccupation of O'Murchadha. Carving was important, according to O'Murchadha, because it was a discipline that instilled an understanding of materials and forms.[128] O'Murchadha's interest in materials and forms led to a more open approach to drawing in the school of sculpture than in the school of painting, and one which was much closer to that of the new regime after 1975. Professor Turpin states that in the sculpture school "Drawing was not an end in itself: it was an aid to a sculptural resolution. This more open, experimental use of drawing, rather than the set routines of the painting school, related easily to newer attitudes to the fine arts in art schools of the 1960s".[129] Professor Turpin illustrates O'Murchadha's approach to drawing with the following quotation from Professor O'Murchadha himself: "I

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[128] Ibid., 355.

[129] Ibid., 356

believed that it could be very helpful for drawing to be conscious of planes and solids; otherwise drawing was just illustration".[130]

Domhnall O'Murchadha was noted for his intellectual interests. As well as his knowledge of Irish art he had a deep knowledge of Medieval and Renaissance art. O'Murchadha gave public lectures at the National Gallery of Ireland, and he had a particular interest in the Quattrocento and in the work of Giovanni Pisano, Donatello and Michelangelo. He was noted for his enthusiasm, which he put across to students. The present writer, while a student at the National College of Art and Design found O'Murchadha's enthusiasm infectious, and recalls illuminating and rewarding discussions with him where he conveyed a deep understanding and love of his subject.

Though considered old fashioned by certain members of the post-1975 regime in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design O'Murchadha was a formalist. He believed that the abstract formal values of sculpture were the most important aspect of sculpture and that these must not be sacrificed to expressive subjectivity. That is why, according to Sarah Finlay, "O'Murchadha believes that 'self portraiture might not be a suitable subject for sculpture, or indeed for painting'. The problem, he feels, lies with the striving for the life-like image, which so often results in the neglect of the overall design."[131] It is interesting to note that, despite his disagreements with them, O'Murchadha shared this approach to expressive subjectivity with the new English staff who came to the college after 1975. In summary, O'Murchadha's concerns as an artist embraced the classical tradition, the tradition of ancient Irish high crosses, and modern figurative stone carving. As a teacher

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[130] Ibid., 355.

[131] Sarah Finlay, *The National Self-Portrait Collection of Ireland, Vol. 1 1979-1989* (Limerick: University of Limerick Press, 1989), 240.

O'Murchadha was knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and he was the most open of the traditional staff.

Domhnall O'Murchadha's assertion of Catholicism and traditional Irish nationalism offended many, particularly among the more radical students during the student rebellion. It also offended the new English staff and the students who identified with them after 1975. This sense of offence is illustrated by Ollie Whelan's statement that some members of the more traditional staff, like O'Murchadha, wore berets - a loaded symbol of Irish nationalism - specifically to intimidate English staff and the faction associated with them during the 1970s.[132] Whether this is true or not, this statement illustrates the fraught situation in the Fine Art faculty at this time. This fraught situation was most evident in the relationship between O'Murchadha and Nigel Rolfe in the sculpture department. According to Lorcan Walsh, O'Murchadha, the Professor of Sculpture, would communicate with Nigel Rolfe, the most influential personality in the sculpture department, only through Irish, a language Rolfe didn't understand. The conflict within the faculty that was manifested in the relationship between O'Murchadha and Nigel Rolfe impacted negatively on the curriculum for a number of reasons. One particular reason was that it encouraged students to ignore the depth of knowledge and experience of members of staff such as Domhnall O'Murchadha. These members of staff were considered outdated and old fashioned by the new staff and by their student supporters whose rejection of the aesthetic and cultural values of staff such as O'Murchadha was a salient aspect of the ethos of the faculty after 1975. As one student, the American Brian Palm put it: "There was one staff member, Domhnall O'Murchadha, who I hardly knew, but everyone sort of held him up as what by all

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[132] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1144.

accounts to avoid: traditional, classical, Celtic stone carver".[133]

It is not surprising, then, that O'Murchadha had a difficult relationship with the new regime whose program of change he tried unsuccessfully to reverse as chairman of the Academic Council and as Director of the National College of Art and Design in 1979, after Jonah Jones had retired.[134] Having said this, O'Murchadha's scholarship, his love of materials, his deep understanding of art, and his warm personality caused many to respect, admire, and like him. Campbell Bruce, for instance, has said that, however much he disagreed with him, Domhnall O'Murchadha was the most coherent of the older staff. The reason for this, according to Bruce, was that "sculpture and the Renaissance had carried him into mathematics, so he knew all about the mathematical formulae of things. Therefore abstraction as a notion was not something strange to him, not something emotional or something lacking in skills. In fact it was very skilful."[135]

12.3.3.2 *John Kelly*

Professor John Kelly, who had studied at the National College of Art under Keating and MacGonigal in the 1940s, was a very quiet, shy, and private person. According to Lorcan Walsh and Ciaran Lennon both of whom studied under him, he had great skill as an artist and his shyness belied a very deep personality of great pain and sensitivity.[136] He was acknowledged by the students during the student rebellion as

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[133] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1008.

[134] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 881-882; Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 587-588.

[135] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 872.

[136] Lorcan Walsh, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 21, 1118-1120.

being more liberal than MacGonigal but was criticised by them for being of the old school. Kelly, in line with Keating's influence, believed vehemently in the traditional discipline of drawing and in the values of De Valera's Ireland. The course curriculum which he tried to instigate in the troubled period between the resignation of MacGonigal in 1969 and the imposition of the new system in 1975 was of some merit, though the students did not support him in his efforts to apply it.[137] According to Mick Cullen, Kelly would have instigated a more lax and liberal type of course during the student rebellion if he had had a choice. Cullen points out that Kelly's position in the college, which placed him between the rebellious students on the one hand and a conservative and intransigent Department of Education that was slow to allow change on the other, denied him that possibility.[138] John Kelly, unlike Domhnall O'Murchadha, found it difficult to cope with the fraught situation in the Fine Art faculty after 1975. In this new situation, which increasingly marginalised staff who supported traditional values, Kelly became very withdrawn. According to many former staff and students, John Kelly suffered considerably under the new regime in the faculty. Tom Ryan has stated that Kelly's wife "had to go up and beg them, beg them not to terrify the man as he was".[139] Iseult McCarthy states that Kelly was marginalized within the new regime to an extent that was pathetic. And Noel Sheridan states baldly that Kelly was "crushed" by the conflict between the two regimes.[140] The abiding memory that many students have of John Kelly is of a very skilful and quiet man who didn't interfere unless asked. In summary, John Kelly had great skill as a draughtsman and as a painter,

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[137] See Vol. II, appendices 5 and 6.

[138] Mick Cullen, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 12, 894-895.

[139] Tom Ryan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 19, 1083.

[140] Noel Sheridan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 20, 1092.

he worked in the tradition established by Keating and MacGonigal whose nationalism he shared, and he was completely marginalised within the Fine Art faculty after 1975.

12.3.3.3 *Carey Clarke*

Carey Clarke had studied at the National College of Art in the 1950s, under Keating and MacGonigal. Clarke considered MacGonigal to be an easygoing teacher, whereas Keating, who had an acerbic wit, according to Clarke, was a more difficult personality. Having graduated in 1959, Clark worked for a while in theatre design and started teaching drawing from the antique at the college in 1963. According to a number of former students, Clarke, as a traditionalist, was given a particularly difficult time during the student rebellion. According to Professor MacCarthy, Carey Clarke was young enough to survive the difficult years and to go on to build up his legitimate position in the Fine Art Faculty as an academic painter. Having said this, Professor MacCarthy points out that both John Kelly and Carey Clarke were undervalued and disregarded in the faculty, and that they were made into models of what should not be happening, and of styles that should not be seen to happen within the college. In short, she said, they were deemed unfashionable. Under the new regime Carey Clarke adapted. After a few difficult years he got on very well with students, and he was admired by many as a great craftsman. In the early eighties both Clarke and Campbell Bruce designed a six week course in drawing that was aimed at introducing students to the Fine Art faculty. This course covered a broad spectrum of approaches to drawing and was aimed at introducing students to the continuing tradition of drawing that goes back to the Renaissance. This drawing course had its origins in the original syllabus of 1975 where the central role which drawing was to hold on the curriculum was spelled out. This introductory drawing course continues to be a part of the curriculum today.

CHAPTER 13

THE CURRICULUM

13.1 Introduction

The first document which set down the philosophy and aims of the course in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975 was a document drawn up by Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith, in consultation with Campbell Bruce, for the academic year 1975-76.[1] This document is not as clear as it might be and it contains passages that are somewhat ambiguous. It is sometimes vague, imprecise, contradictory, and difficult to understand. Despite ambiguity and vagueness, however, certain themes emerge in this document which are consistent with developments in third level art education in Britain since the Second World War, and in particular with the principles that underpin the Basic Design system as discussed in Chapter 5. Apart from the Basic Design system, other influences are reflected in this document. The influence of Herbert Read, for instance, is very obvious. The influence of thinkers such as Ruskin, Morris, Tonks, and Whitehead, though less obvious in the text, is also evident. The relationship between the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design and developments in British art education will be looked at

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[1] Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe, National College of Art and Design Fine Art Faculty, "Syllabus", Photocopy, 1975, Campbell Bruce's files. See appendix 7.

more closely in Chapter 15. The present chapter will examine the curriculum as it is described in the documentary evidence.

The course that was described in the document that was drawn up by Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith in 1975 was intended to replace both the old pre-1971 neo-classical curriculum and the more confused transitional curriculum of the troubled period between 1971 and 1975. This document is important primarily because it sets out the aims and objectives of the course, but also because it sets out the basic principles which underpin the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty between 1975 and 1988. As it reveals the values of the new English staff who drew it up, it has an added importance. Also, because it was the foundation stone upon which the post-1975 curriculum in the Fine Art faculty was built, it describes the thinking behind the curriculum, as it was subsequently to develop. Therefore it still has relevance today. As it is essentially a description of the aims and objectives of the curriculum it is more of a syllabus than a course document. Hereafter it will be referred to as the "syllabus" for 1975.

Campbell Bruce has stated that his first objective in creating a new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty after 1975 was "to break the tyranny of the individual [teacher] insisting that students do things his way"; that is, the way of the teacher.[2] This was the first move in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design towards the creation of a student-centred course along lines developed in Britain after the publication of the Coldstream and Summerson Reports. Continuing this theme Bruce has stated that in developing a new course he aimed to create a situation where students could develop their own ideas as a continuum, that is, as a continuing process or as an evolving process, as the Basic Design system had envisaged. One way in

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[2] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 875.

which he hoped to do this, according to Bruce, was to enable students to stay working on a particular piece of art for at least one week rather than for three hours every week as the old system had done. The old system of timetabling, according to Bruce, disrupted the thinking process and actually prevented the students from developing their ideas in the way that he felt they should be developed.[3] Bruce's overall objective, in short, was to allow students to develop their own ideas, styles, interests, modes of working, and artistic personalities in a more freely structured situation than had hitherto been the case. In this context, manual and technical skills – the specific focus of the old curriculum – were not seen as being central to the curriculum and should not, according to Bruce, be imposed from above by a master. Rather, they would be picked up as needed by students.[4] The emphasis of the new course was thus on the student, the student's ideas, and the development of these ideas.[5] The resulting artwork of students, in line with the thinking of Herbert Read, which demanded that the making of art exercise both intellect and intuition,[6] was seen, according to this way

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[3] Ibid., 118, Aidan Dunne, *National College of Art Decade Show: Faculty of Fine Art Graduates 1975-1985* (Dublin: National College of Art, 1985), 13.

[4] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 881.

[5] There is no precise definition given in the documentation of what is meant by ideas. It is assumed that ideas will come to the student as the student engages creatively with materials. As constructive criticism and creative thinking are the means by which the student is expected to develop ideas, it is also to be assumed that ideas will contain a critical aspect. As will become clear to the reader, ideas may relate purely to the formal qualities of materials or to the real world.

[6] Herbert Read believed that there was a tendency in education in general to focus on intellect. Intellect for Read meant predominantly logical or reasoned intellectual activity. This tendency, according to Read, created an imbalanced and unhealthy mental development in man. Read also believed, not surprisingly for an ex surrealist, that an excessive focus on the non-rational or intuitive would promote impaired mental growth of an equally undesirable kind. He felt that if the rational and the irrational were synthesised by activity that straddled both, an equilibrium would result that would lead to the development of harmoniously balanced individuals and thus a more healthy type of society than had hitherto existed. It is important to recall that Read developed these ideas in the context of the political and social confusion and insecurity of the inter-war period and the Second World War, which were dominated by the dual ogres of fascism and communism. (David Thistlewood, "Disciplined Irrationality: A Process-Dominant Art Education," in *The Teaching of Art: The Roots of Self-Deception? A Symposium* The Department of Extra Mural Studies, The University College of Wales

of thinking, as concrete evidence of the student's thinking process, which was the result of interaction between the artist and his materials. This process, as envisioned by Read, would induce harmony. This process was approached by a methodology based on the analysis[7] of form. The analysis of form, then, according to this way of thinking, should lead directly to the expression of ideas. Campbell Bruce felt that this objective could be followed with greater consistency and depth within the new curriculum that he set up than was possible within the old neo-classical curriculum.[8] This whole process would also, of course, have the effect of subverting the old regime by replacing its methodology.

In stating his objectives, Campbell Bruce may to some extent have simplified the situation and underestimated the flexibility of the old regime. According to Iseult McCarthy, who studied at the college in the 1950s and who taught at the college throughout the 1960s, there was a lot of freedom under the old system to move from area to area within the college: "You did whatever interested you. And in a sense you basically formed your own course".[9] This was, of course, done with the guidance of staff and within the parameters of a traditional, skill based and neo-classically orientated course rather than one that was student-led. Tom Irish, a student at the

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[Aberystwyth: The Department of Extra Mural Studies, The University College of Wales, 1981], 28-46.)

[7] The notion of analysis is recurrent in all of the documentation that pertains to the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. Though it is not defined in any precise way in the documentation, it is clear that there is an analogy between analysis in the scientific sense and the analysis that pertains to artistic practice. The origins of this approach lie in nineteenth century organicist ideas and in Herbert Read's assertion that art and science had related roles to play in describing the world. (See Chapter 15) It will be recalled that there was a scientific aspect to the Basic Design system in which analysis played a significant role. (See Chapter 5) In the writer's opinion, as it applied to the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, analysis referred to an approach to form that was based on observation, examination, and construction. This method was interpreted broadly and involved a logical and sensible process, but also an intuitive, spontaneous, creative, and intensive process.

[8] Dunne, *Decade Show*, 13.

[9] Iseult McCarthy, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 14, 941.

college in the late 1960s and early 1970s, pointed out, in conversation with the author, that students could range freely from area to area within the college without any difficulty in order to pick up skills and that staff were very helpful in accommodating students. What Campbell Bruce was trying to achieve, then, was a shift away from a loose course that focussed on the development of craft skills in a broadly neo-classical context to a loose course that focussed on materials and the development of ideas. This course, as envisioned by Campbell Bruce, can be seen as paralleling the development of the individual as an artist, along lines suggested by Herbert Read's thinking as expounded in *The Education of Free Men* and *Education Through Art*.[10] Consequently this course owes much to developments in modern British art and British art education since 1945.

13.2 The 1975 Syllabus: An Analysis

The following is an attempt to tease out the principal aspects of the syllabus for 1975 in order that they may be looked at in relation to developments in British art education since 1945, and in relation to what students experienced on the studio floor. Student recollections of the course are dealt with in Chapter 14. The syllabus for 1975 is a seminal document because it was the template on which the course as it was practised after 1975 was built. The course that grew out of this syllabus led to the development of the course document that was submitted to the National Council for Education Awards for approval in the 1980s. This document was also the parent of the present course document and there are strong similarities between them. The syllabus

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[10] Herbert Read, *Education Through Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948); idem, *The Education of Free Men* (London: Freedom Press, 1944)

for 1975, though a small document, is hugely informative. It is an assertive document. It reveals a lot about the thinking of the new regime in the Fine Art faculty after 1975. It also serves well to illustrate the values, assumptions, and historical origins of this regime.

The syllabus for 1975, as already stated, is essentially a statement of the aims and objectives of the course. It opens by stating that the overall aim of the course in fine art is to help students to develop as artists. The writer, as a former student of the Fine Art faculty at this time, recalls this being made very clear to the assembled students on the first day on the studio floor. The methods suggested in the syllabus for 1975 to achieve this end reveal the authors' conception that art is essentially about the "evolvement"[11] of ideas. The evolvement of ideas therefore was the *raison d'être* of the fine art course at the National College of Art and Design after 1975, just as it was the *raison d'être* of the curriculum at Coventry College of Art and at Goldsmiths' College, both of which were discussed in Chapter 7. Thus, under the new regime in fine art, according to the syllabus for 1975, the making of art was no longer about learning skills in order to express cultural values, as it had been under the old regime; rather it was about the evolvement of individual and unique ideas. These ideas were believed, according to this way of thinking, to be accessible only through artistic practice. Artistic practice was a process. This process had to be learned. And the learning of this process, or induction into this process, was the aim of the course in the Fine Art faculty. This course was comparable with the continuing process referred to by David Thistlewood as "Basic Design". The experience of students reveals that the course was presented on

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[11] The concept of the Evolvement of ideas has its roots in Paul Klee's ordered process of learning, which, as shown in Chapter 5, had influenced the development of the Basic Design system and had its origins in nineteenth century organicist ideas. Klee asserted that art works evolved in an ordered way from the initial mark making through linear exploration towards planar construction in space. Klee's *Notebooks* were recommended reading for students on the Fine Art course.

the studio floor in these terms. The writer, for instance, recalls a project being set early in the course with the vague title 'The Container and the Contained'. The objective of this project was to give students a starting point from which, and by exploring materials, they could develop ideas. In the brief for this project the students were intentionally given no guidelines as to how to approach this theme in terms of materials to be used or particular objectives to be achieved. Students were expected to explore the general and vague concept of the container and the contained in order to come up with their own ideas that could then be developed using whatever materials they thought appropriate. The type of materials used by students in the execution of this project varied. One student, for instance, used the content of skips; this included black plastic bags, bits of wood, metal, and other such waste. Other students used more conventional materials. Drawing, in a very loose sense, as a means of collecting information, was encouraged. Though the approach to drawing that the staff had in mind was not defined in any precise way, traditional drawing was discouraged. Ollie Whelan, who was a student in the faculty between 1975 and 1978, recalls the focus of the course as on ideas and materials. In describing the intensive teaching program of his first year in fine art, which was the academic year 1975/76 and which was exclusively under the tutelage of Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith, Whelan states that it "was more or less [about] digging into the whole process [of working with materials] as a way of putting together ideas very quickly".[12]

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[12] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1142.

13.2.1 *A New Approach to Fine Art Education at the National College of Art and Design: Critical Thinking and Constructive Criticism*

According to the syllabus for 1975, creative thinking and constructive criticism were the suggested mechanisms for enabling the students to engage with the process of making art. The cultivation of self-discipline and the development of a sense of responsibility were seen as an essential aspect of this process. This meant, in practice, that the student must take himself or herself seriously as an artist and thus must begin thinking independently and critically as an artist, and not as a student who is dependent on staff for motivation. This aspect of the curriculum echoes the influence of existentialism on Campbell Bruce's generation. It will be recalled that Campbell Bruce has stated that the big difference between his generation and the previous generation was that he and his peers wanted to break with traditional social structures that they felt restricted their personal freedom, and that they "wanted to be responsible for themselves".[13] As a consequence of the belief that students must think for themselves some staff were intentionally vague and unclear in stating the objectives of the projects that they set and the demands that they were placing on students. Many former students, including the present writer, recall the initial confusion of not knowing what was expected of them because of this approach by staff. This confusion was exacerbated by dogmatism on the part of some staff in relation to their condemnation of unapproved approaches to art making. This situation was made worse for some students by an atmosphere of criticism and defensiveness on the studio floor that grew out of an abuse of critical thinking and constructive criticism as a methodology. Because of excessive zeal this methodology had led to the development of a critical

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[13] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 869.

approach by some staff and students to work that was produced on the studio floor, an approach that was extreme and that had an intimidating effect on many students.

The focus on the student as an artist who is self-critical and independent is a constant theme of this document; its importance is underlined by the fact that the point is reiterated a number of times in the text. In this context it is important to note that criticism as a methodological tool of the artist fed into another key aspect of the course; this was the demand that students question the role of the artist in society. Questioning the role of the artist, as already stated, was an ubiquitous theme in avant-garde art at this time. This aspect of the course is dealt with in greater detail below.

13.2.2 *An End to Dilettantism: Self Discipline*

Self discipline, which is stressed a number of times in the text of the 1975 syllabus document, is suggested as an antidote to the normal haphazard hit and miss approach of students to the creative process. This criticism of the hit and miss approach of students to the creative process is an acknowledgement of amateurism in art education. It can thus be interpreted as a reference to what was seen as the now outmoded dilettantism of the old education system in British art schools that pre-dated the Bray Report of 1948 and that persisted at the National College of Art and Design, according to a number of former students, until 1975. It is also a reference to the fact that artistic integrity was considered no longer to be about traditional skills, which, according to the syllabus for 1975, were superficial, but about something more deep, distinct, and immutable. The overall point that is stressed here appears to be that the production of art work is seen as a professional commitment and as something that does not come easily; it is seen to follow from dedication and from some rigorous process, whether intellectual, physical, or both. In short, a new approach of professional commitment is

seen by this document as a prerequisite of artistic practice.[14]

It is interesting to note in this context that Nigel Rolfe, who was one of the authors of the syllabus for 1975, lays particular stress on the physically arduous aspect of the creative process. In a project that he set for first year students in 1980, for example, students were told "to expect hard work and absolute intent and commitment as the only way for the artist to achieve results of any quality".[15] Significantly, physical stress and travail are important aspects of Rolfe's own creative artwork, which often involves a physically arduous aspect. For example, Rolfe's performances at ROSC '80, which involved his crawling around in flour, were very difficult to do physically, according to his own testimony, because he was breathing in the flour as he performed.[16] For days afterwards, according to Rolfe, as his lungs were clogged up with flour, he found it difficult to breathe. On the same theme, a more recent performance by Rolfe at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, which involved much tedium and which went on for hours, involved Rolfe cutting his own flesh. According to Ollie Whelan, rigour and hard work were an important part of the course when he was a student, and he stresses that during his first year in the Fine Art faculty students worked intensively from nine in the morning till late at night. The discipline and intensive activity that were stressed in the syllabus for 1975 were thus carried over into the course as it was put onto practice on the studio floor.

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[14] It is interesting to note in this context that a new professional approach to fine art education was one of the key developments in third level art education in Britain in the 1950s, as shown in Chapter 7, and that professional skills, as opposed to craft skills, were a key issue in the thinking of A. N. Whitehead. See below.

[15] National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Faculty, "Course Document", 1980, photocopy, Campbell Bruce's files, 102.

[16] ROSC '80: *An International Exhibition of Modern Art and Chinese Painting* (Dublin: Irish Printers Ltd., 1980), 94-95.

13.2.3 T*he Student's Future Career as an Aspect of the Curriculum*

Having established the overall aim of the course, the authors of the syllabus for 1975 address the issue of the students' future careers. According to the authors, the students themselves should address their specific career options as soon as possible after they enter the faculty. The authors do not elaborate on or discuss the careers or career prospects of students, and no information is given on this theme, other than to point out that there are few career options for students who pursue a fine art course – as already stated, it was made clear to students on entering the faculty that the objective of the course was to train artists. Thus, despite the fact that there was no detailed examination of the issue, the consideration of the future career of students was seen by the authors as an integral part of the course and, according to the syllabus, would help the students to focus their thinking. Thinking, as already shown, was at the core of the curriculum as an evolving structure that was student led. Thus, consideration of the future career of students, as the syllabus makes clear, informed the content of the curriculum.[17] It will be recalled that this approach to tertiary level art education was one of the key aspects of the curriculum at Goldsmith's College.[18] Having said this, as a student in the Fine Art faculty in the late 1970s and early 1980s the present writer saw no evidence that this aspect of the curriculum was put into practice on the studio floor. In fact there was a conspicuous absence of any concern for the future career of students, in the writer's experience, other than the stated assumption that a small number of students would become professional artists and that the majority of students would fail in this objective. One former student who was

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[17] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 778.

[18] Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission*, 13.

interviewed by the author was particularly critical of staff in this respect. This student stated quite categorically that she and a number of her peers felt that they were allowed to drift aimlessly by staff because they had not been marked out as favoured students, in the respect of being seen as future artists.

An important aspect of the post-1975 curriculum that was closely bound up with the focus of the curriculum on the future career of students was the requirement that students should question their role as artists.

13.2.4 *The Influence of the Avant-Garde on the Curriculum: Questioning the Role of the Artist*

The syllabus document of 1975 states that a rigorous questioning of the role of the artist was one of the key aspects of the curriculum. The document lays particular stress on this aspect of the course, and in doing so it highlights the need for students to look to the real world and to "lift their horizons beyond those of the college situation".[19] This emphasis appears, on one level, to be an attempt to break with the past and with tradition, and thus to confront the real world and the art world in terms of the paradigm of contemporary avant-garde practice. This approach to art is consistent in the author's experience with the style of Nigel Rolfe as a teacher, and thus owes something to his influence. This exhortation, then, in line with the influence of avant-garde thinking, can be seen in purely iconoclastic terms. On another level this exhortation can be read as an attempt to fulfil Herbert Read's Utopian aspiration to blend the fine arts into the new all-encompassing, democratic, and harmoniously integrated type of society that had been envisaged by Read and other reformers since

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[19] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 777.

the First World War, and which assigns to artistic practice a key role in education and in society. On this reading the syllabus for 1975 would seem to be exhorting students to break out of the dilettantish, restricted and exclusive role that is traditionally assigned to art and to forge a new definition of that role. This new definition would encourage a rigorous professionalism. On this reading, art is seen as valuable in itself, beneficial to society, and an agent of social reform. This approach is not necessarily discrete from the iconoclastic approach. Both of the above aspirations were implicit in Basic Design and other developments in post-war British art education; the latter in particular inspired the Coldstream reports. They were, and indeed are, also important aspects of the curriculum at Goldsmiths' College.[20]

The theme of questioning the role of the artist in society is addressed with greater vigour later in the text of the syllabus for 1975. It does so where it states that the efforts of both staff and students must be aimed at breaking down and destroying the artificial walls that divide the "vivid, hard, and exciting world"[21] that exists outside the art college from that within it. This assertion is both iconoclastic and reformative, and it has clear echoes of the visionary Bauhaus philosophy as expounded by Walter Gropius.[22] A questioning approach to the role of art in society, especially one that is both iconoclastic and reformative, is consistent with the thinking of the new English staff that art must be socially and politically relevant, and, most importantly, that, as well as bringing social change, it must oppose outdated beliefs. This thinking has its roots in the Enlightenment, when radical ideas and progressive thinking were set against tradition, authority, and outmoded ways of thinking. In post-war Britain it had

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[20] Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission*, 13.

[21] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 781.

[22] Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996)

a particular resonance.

Given the perceived imperative of the new program in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design to transform the traditional and entrenched thinking associated with the teaching of fine art at the college, a radical dimension in the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty was useful. It is interesting to note in this context that the syllabus document of 1975 described the overall Irish political climate of which the old National College of Art was such an integral part, and which had to be confronted in order to bring change, in a pejorative way. Revealingly, it did so using language which is a model of the divisive clichés of colonialist rhetoric as described by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*.[23] The Irish political climate was described in the syllabus as "devious and innocent, labyrinthine in its complexities".[24]

One interpretation, then, of the exhortation to question is to see it as an echo of Carsten's youthful attack on the old academic system of the Enlightenment on behalf of the new spirit of the Romantic Movement, as discussed in Chapter 1. In this context it can also be seen as an echo of the spirit of subsequent avant-garde iconoclasm. On this level, then, the exhortation to question can be seen as an assertion of individual liberty. On another, more local and not unrelated, level the exhortation to question can be seen as a consequence of a clash of cultures in a much deeper and more complex sense, a sense that is buried in Irish history and in Irish culture and which reflects the problematical, confrontational and polarised relationship between England and Ireland over the last seven hundred years. This aspect of the relationship between English and Irish culture has most recently and very interestingly been explored by Declan Kiberd

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[23] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), 205-207.

[24] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 779.

in his book *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of Modern Ireland.*[25] In this book Kiberd makes a case for an intelligent and critical exploration of the relationship between the two cultures that is not trapped in the usual clichés and stereotypes, regardless of whether they are traditional or revisionist. In relation to the visual arts Fintan Cullen has touched on this approach.[26]

In summary, whatever about the complexities of the situation, the new questioning approach to the making of art was the key to the introduction of a new set of aesthetic values onto the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin after 1975. It was also a mechanism, a new methodology, and one, as we shall see, of major importance in establishing the hegemony of the new regime. It is interesting to note in this context, given his influence on Campbell Bruce, that in developing a new philosophical approach to the world A.N. Whitehead stressed the importance of questioning as a methodological tool.[27]

13.2.5 *A New Approach to Skills*

In stating that there are few career opportunities for artists, and therefore for those who pursue the fine art course at the National College of Art and Design, the authors of the syllabus document of 1975 point out, as already mentioned, that it was important for students to begin to organise their future careers while attending the college. In this context the hope is expressed in the syllabus that the "range of tools and visual language that the student will be introduced to [on the course] will present

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[25] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd. 1995)

[26] Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The representation of Ireland 1750-1930.* (Cork: Cork University Press 1997)

[27] A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 151.

many . . . vocational possibilities".[28] This seems to be saying that, while pursuing the course, students would learn a range of skills that will be of use to them in finding employment. The particular skills that students will learn are not mentioned. However, the type of skills that the course aspired to teach can be gleaned from Campbell Bruce's statement: "When we did the course we said we are not training painters or sculptors. We are training people to be visually literate; in four years you can't train a painter".[29] Thus, the skills that were being taught were of a general nature, and included visual skills that Campbell Bruce believed were fundamental to all art and design areas; and indeed, as Campbell Bruce makes quite clear, to all aspects of life. The only restriction that was placed on the skills that students needed to aquire was the needs of the students themselves. These needs would arise as a consequence of working with materials and as ideas developed. So, for instance, a painting student who had a particular interest in the relationship between the picture plane and the wall on which the painting hung might develop, out of this interest, a need to make three dimensional objects. This need would dictate that the student study space in order that he might learn about space. The skills that the student would learn in this way might be of use in theatre design. This is an aspect of the course that Campbell Bruce believes was most successful and of which he is particularly proud.[30]

The teaching of skills that are seen as fundamental to all art and design has been an important aspect of art education in Britain since the establishment of the Royal Academy, and since the founding of the Schools of Design it has been inextricably bound up with the belief that art can change society.

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[28] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 778.

[29] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix, 11, 888.

[30] Ibid.,888.

As shown in Chapter 1, the Schools of Design and the Schools of Art of the South Kensington System aspired to improve society by teaching skills that would improve the quality of craftsmanship among artisans and therefore the quality of manufactured goods produced in Great Britain. Though the overall aim in improving skills was to raise the standard of taste throughout Britain in an industrially competitive imperial age, there was a moral aspect to this aspiration that reflected a desire to create a better society in a social, political, cultural, and moral sense. This desire, which was evidenced in the aspiration to improve the quality of work produced by artisans, was also evidenced in criticism of the Royal Academy Schools in the 1860s, as discussed in Chapter 1. This criticism was aimed at improving skills among British artists, and particularly drawing skills, which, when compared with the work produced by contemporary French artists, were felt to be inadequate. The debate about the role of the nude in nineteenth century British art, of which the above criticism was a part, brought to the fore questions about the fundamental nature of drawing skills, and reflects the changing nature of British morality in the second half of the nineteenth century.[31]

It is therefore not surprising that ideas similar to those that are expressed in the syllabus document of 1975 and that ascribe reformative powers to the learning of skills, and to drawing skills in particular, can be found in the writings of many English thinkers since the nineteenth century, including John Ruskin, William Morris, Henry Tonks, A.N. Whitehead, and Herbert Read. It is particularly interesting to note, then, in the context of the current discussion about skills, that in outlining his philosophy in *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead stressed the distinction between the mind of the

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[31] See Chapter 2.

craftsman and the mind of the artist in relation to their role in society. The mind of the craftsman, according to Whitehead, dominated the communal life of ancient civilisations and contributed to the development of these societies. However, these societies, Whitehead stresses, were founded on slavery. In modern society, which, according to Whitehead, is founded on liberty, the situation is different. Whitehead believed that in the troubled modern world - *Adventures of Ideas* was published in 1933 - the values of liberty and social responsibility guarded against oligarchy and an absolutist state, the principal threats, according to Whitehead, to liberty and progress; the defining values of modern man. Interestingly in the present context, the values of liberty - individual freedom - and social responsibility were, Whitehead believed, embodied in professionalism – social institutions founded on professional qualifications - and in this, according to Whitehead, lay hope for the future of mankind. In other words, as T.S Eliot was to do in *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, Whitehead advocated the idea that the safeguarding of high cultural values, and thus development and progress, were best achieved by the establishment of professional elites.[32] Hence arose the denigration of the crafts, which, according to Whitehead, were purely technical and were based on trial and error, as opposed to the enlightened wisdom – the mark of modern man - of the professions. This distinction between the mind of the craftsman and the mind of the artist in the above sense, given the influence of *Adventures of Ideas* on the thinking of Campbell Bruce, may have contributed to the negative approach to traditional craft skills in the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975. It is certainly something that must be taken into account when considering the development of a new code of

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[32] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 73-79.

professionalism, however loosely defined, in British art and art education since the Second World War. Herbert Read, who was influenced by the thinking of Whitehead, developed an interpretation of skill in an artistic sense that perhaps owes something to Whitehead's thinking: the skill of matching form to emotion. This was a skill that demanded an understanding of form, and sensitivity to emotion. It is looked at more closely in Chapter 15.

In terms of its approach to skill, then, the curriculum in fine art at the National College of Art and Design after 1975 reflects different and sometimes contradictory aspects of British art education over the last two hundred years. For instance, it reflects Ruskin's demand that artists describe the world that they see without artifice. In the tutor-student relationship and in its focus on materials, it reflects William Morris's attempt to re-create the medieval workshop in nineteenth century Britain. In its visionary aspect it reflects the innovations of Gropius at the Bauhaus in Germany between 1919 and 1933. And in its radical aspect it reflects the innovations of Richard Hamilton, Victor Pasmore and others involved in the development of the Basic Design system during the 1950s in Great Britain. In particular it reflects Herbert Read's belief, as discussed earlier, that art is essential to the education and development of all human beings, and that this approach is based on a balance between an intellectual and intuitive response to form. Read considered that art was not a separate aspect of life but an essential aspect of life. He also believed that the creative skills of man, applied properly to education, could lead to social and political harmony. Predictably, therefore, the authors of the syllabus for 1975 saw the new course in fine art at the National College of Art and Design after 1975 as an organic situation that undergoes constant change according to the needs of both students and staff, whose interests, as artists, lie in the phenomenal world. Thus the fine art course, as a developing process,

is seen in the syllabus document of 1975 as a balance between the activities and needs of the staff and the activities and needs of the students. Both staff and students are seen as partners in the creative process and in the educational process, processes that are, according to this thinking, symbiotically related: this is again one of the key aspects of the curriculum at Goldsmiths' College.[33] Manual skill is seen by the syllabus document as something that is picked up as part of this process.

As a direct consequence of the organic and interactive aspect of the fine art course at the National College of Art and Design and of the downgrading of traditional skills on the course, the authors of the syllabus document of 1975 felt that it was not possible to give rigid timetables and schemes that must be adhered to. In the syllabus of 1975, therefore, there is no attempt to describe the course in any detail or to give examples of projects. The authors do however give a broad outline of the aims of the course in the first, second and third years.

13.2.6 *The First Year of the Course*

The first year of the course under the new regime after 1975 was seen as a crucial time in terms of moulding the student's approach to the process of making art. In the context of the need to teach "habits of work calculated to develop the students capacity for logical and constructive formal thought", and the need to "lead the students enquiry towards a positive understanding of visual phenomena and himself",[34] it was seminal. In order to help students to establish a *modus operandi* and a personal identity, therefore, the program in first year involved projects that were 'heavily

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[33] Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission*, 13.

[34] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 781.

directed and aimed'.[35] The first year was thus a critical time in terms of establishing in the student's mind a paradigm of future behaviour; this paradigm would be the model for the methodology of the new curriculum. It would also have the effect of subverting and replacing the more traditional curriculum of the old regime.

According to the testimony of a number of students, what happened on the studio floor followed closely what was laid down in the syllabus. According to Ollie Whelan, for example, both Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe "took complete control" of first year students in 1975, and "pushed that year as hard as they could".[36] Whelan goes on to state that his first year was, "buzzing from beginning to end. . . . The incredible thing was the work rate that Rob and Nigel took on. It was quite unbelievable in actual fact. It's only now that I'm doing it [teaching] that I realise the work rate. . . . It was their baby. It was new. They were young. They had a lot of energy".[37] In the present writer's experience, the first year of the course was indeed controlled completely by Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith, and the course was directed in a way that was consistent with the syllabus document. However, it was not a totally exhausting experience nor was it in any way an intensive program; it was quite the opposite in fact.

Whether it was intentional or not, the new paradigm did have the effect of downgrading, in the eyes of the students, the status of the old regime, its values, and those associated with it. Whelan states that there was a feeling among students who were involved in the new program of being part of something new, something important, and something more advanced than what was available to the students of

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[35] Ibid., 781.

[36] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1143.

[37] Ibid., 1143.

previous years.[38] This was certainly the experience of the present writer, who recalls the distinct impression being given that the staff who adhered to traditional values had low status compared with the new and younger staff. Ollie Whelan points out that there was a contrast between his year, which was the first of the new regime, and that of the students in the year ahead of him, who were perceived as being backward in some sense: "We were the new kids on the block. . . . It was almost felt that they were the tail end [of something]. . . . Whereas with us there was definitely a feeling that we were new and the thing was new".[39] In the eyes of students, then, during the first year of the course the old regime and its values had low status. An illustration of the fact that the old regime had no influence on the new curriculum is given again by Ollie Whelan, who points out that during his first year in the faculty the projects that were set for students were not craft and skill based but "idea" based. Another indication of the marginalisation of the old regime at this early stage in the development of a new curriculum is the fact that recruitment of students to the Fine Art faculty was done exclusively in terms of the new program. When Whelan applied to get into fine art from the pre-diploma course in 1975 the Fine Art faculty did not choose students in terms of what they had to offer on a skills level, according to Whelan, "They were looking for a lot more in terms of ideas and content."[40] He goes on to state that the projects that were set by Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe in the first year "were experimental", and "about pushing the boundaries of language". The curriculum, he states, "was completely against the traditional idea of what an art school at that point was. Everything was . . . throw away, it wasn't about making works of art in

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[38] Ibid., 1143-1145.

[39] Ibid., 1145.

[40] Ibid., 1140.

brackets".[41] This approach is evident in a project that was set by Nigel Rolfe in April 1980, which aimed "to set up a structure whereby students can record impermanent but actual ideas as documentation . . . in video/audio, photograph/slides, drawing/text". The method suggested by Rolfe to achieve this aim was the following: "To question why and what and when art is a useful avenue for expression. To challenge more conventionally accepted ways of 'art-making' as an invalid and unnecessary interruption in an already over complex forum".[42] In summary, then, the first year of the course, in the early years at least, was about inculcating the new values that were spelled out in the curriculum document of 1975. One effect of this, in line with Campbell Bruce's stated objectives, was the replacement of the old values.

13.2.7 *The Second and Third Years of the Course*

The syllabus document for 1975 states that, having been introduced to a working process during the first year, students were expected, in the second year, to evolve their own language and chosen means of communication as part of the 'continually developing process' that was the course. According to Ollie Whelan and Gwen O'Dowd, and the experience of the present writer, students were expected to be self-motivated during the second year. They were thus free to pursue their own interests without the restrictions of a formal course, but with the guidance of tutors. It was envisaged that visiting lecturers would have an important part to play in this developing process during this second year. It was Campbell Bruce's policy to bring in a lot of visiting artists from England who understood the type of course that he was trying to create. These visiting artists, in sharing the aesthetic values of the new

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[41] Ibid., 1141-1142.

[42] Course Document, 1980, 107.

regime, would thus, especially in the second and third years, reinforce what had been achieved in the "heavily directed and aimed" first year. Campbell Bruce has stated the following: "I wanted a . . . considerable number of visiting staff. The visiting staff would come in as the needs of students emerged; there was no good having visiting staff that had nothing to do with the students."[43]

Most of these visiting lecturers, who came from England, had been trained in post-Coldstream English art schools, and many were recent graduates with Diplomas in Art and Design. Simon McLeod, who is Scottish, who attended the college between 1977 and 1980, and whose work as a student was broadly modernist in approach, points out that "the visiting lecturers were all imports, and all very much the product of, and, on occasion, a recent product of the English art schools".[44] The third year of the course, which was a relatively free year, also involved interaction with visiting lecturers, and was, according to the syllabus for 1975, about developing student's abilities to the highest level. The influx of new ideas brought about by the visiting lecturer program was clearly of benefit to students and helped to make students aware of new approaches to art. Gwen O'Dowd stresses that this aspect of the course, which, as she says, introduced students to "an awful lot of practising artists that Rob and Campbell brought over [from England]", was of immense benefit to her development as an

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[43] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 884.

[44] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 211. The Director of the college, Noel Sheridan, implicitly acknowledged the bias in favour of English visiting lecturers in a letter to Mr Padraig MacDiarmada, Director of the National Council for Educational Awards in 1981. He also acknowledged in this letter that there were problems with the English tradition as it was put into practice at the college in Dublin. He does not elaborate on these problems. This letter concerned the appointment of an external assessor for the sculpture area called John Mooney, who came from the United States. (Noel Sheridan, Letter to Padraig MacDiarmada, Este, 3 April 1981, File number Div. 027 (b) National Council of Art and Design 1980-1982, National Council for Educational Awards Files, National Council for Educational Awards, Dublin.)

artist.[45] And Ollie Whelan states that a very dynamic and stimulating situation was created by the constant appearance of different visiting lecturers on the studio floor who, he claims, brought a cosmopolitan atmosphere to the faculty.

The writer recalls a succession of visiting artists from England while he was a student in the Fine Art faculty in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The normal procedure was that these artists would show slides of their work, after which there would be a question and answer session. Sometimes the visits of these artists coincided with an exhibition of their work in an Irish gallery. While at the college visiting artists would call to the studios where students worked, and while there they would engage in conversation with students whose work they found interesting or with students who were willing to talk. Sometimes visiting artists would be instructed to speak with specific students for specific reasons. The writer recalls the painter Sean Scully being sent to him because of similarities in their work, for instance. The writer found the ensuing discussion, which lasted for two or three hours, particularly stimulating and rewarding. Sometimes visiting artists generated animated discussion at their slide shows, and occasionally, as in the case of the performance artist Kevin Atherton, whose visit to the college coincided with a show of his work at the Project Gallery in Essex street, visiting artists used slide shows to confront and challenge student assumptions. Because of the absence of a clearly defined program of instruction on the course, the small number of students attending the college, and, in the present writer's experience, a high rate of student absenteeism[46], some visiting lecturers had very little

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[45] Gwen O'Dowd, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 986.

[46] Because of the open nature of the course it was difficult to monitor students activity. As a consequence of this it was easy for students to absent themselves from college. The writer recalls many students who stayed away from the studios on a regular basis for various reasons. It was common practice for students to produce most of the work for their degree show in the final months, and in some cases weeks, of their final year.

to do. This was the case with a particular visiting lecturer from the United States who visited the college as part of an exchange program with the University of Minnesota. Because of the shortage of students on the studio floor this lecturer visited the writer almost every single day of his stay at the college and had many long discussions about a wide range of subjects. These were discussions which again the writer found rewarding.

By the end of the 1970s the bias in favour of choosing predominantly English artists as visiting lecturers had exacerbated the polarisation of the faculty and narrowed the aesthetic field. The significance of the role played by the new English lecturers in the developing factionalism within the faculty is illustrated by Ollie Whelan's tripartite division of the faculty at this time into the following categories: those who subscribed to the values of the Independent artists, the old regime/traditionalists, and "Nigel, Rob, and the artists invited in from the UK".[47] In summary, the course as it was envisaged in the syllabus document of 1975 included a provision for the inclusion of visiting lecturers, who were seen as an integral part of the second and third year programmes. The bias in favour of visiting lecturers from England during the early years of this course would thus serve to reinforce the values inculcated by the intensive first year program of Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith.

13.2.8 *The Theme of the Course: Life and its Variations*

A section of the syllabus headed *Comments on the Aims* opens by warning that, as the faces of reality are diverse and varied, there is a danger that the student may develop merely eclectic attitudes by focussing on ephemera. It is essential therefore,

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[47] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1145.

according to the authors, that the student should be pointed in the direction of the 'actual', which the present writer takes to mean the world of phenomena, of things as they are seen and experienced, as opposed to superficial things or things that are imagined. Thus, as the syllabus states, "life and its various and endless permutations of reality" are the 'theme' of the course, and the aim of the students is to explore this theme in a specific way. This way is to be found through the expression of ideas.

13.2.9 *The Methodology of the Course: Formal Analysis*

Following on from the assertion that life is the theme of the course, the authors go on to say that out of his experience of life, and as a result of analysis and study of forms, the student will develop a residue of formal knowledge. This seems to mean that by working in a practical way with materials, by drawing, constructing, or playing for example, students will build up a repertoire of skills based on an understanding of a whole range of materials and forms. Having acquired this repertoire of formal knowledge, according to the authors, students will be able to express their ideas with greater clarity and conviction than before. The methodology of the course, then, is bound up with the acquisition of this formal knowledge. This ties in with Herbert Read's idea that the skill of the artist lies in the matching of form to emotion.

The authors go on to emphasise that the student will, in building up a formal knowledge, develop sensitivity to "what is and not what appears to be". This statement appears to reiterate the demand that students ignore the superficial aspects of reality and that they address the actual world in a direct way without the use of artifice; a common exhortation on the studio floor during the 1970s and 1980s was that students should try to see the world in a new way, and that they should stop looking at the world through art glasses. This exhortation reiterates the demand of John Ruskin and

Henry Tonks that students address, in a direct way, the world of phenomena. Having established the importance of this approach the syllabus goes on to state "that the student, in directing his attention towards the world, will do this through himself". Thus, in their assertion of the primacy of the perceiver in the world that he perceives, the authors seem to demand a revitalisation of the spirit of the Romantic Movement. The implication is that through this process the student will express a deeper reality than the one which he or she sees daily in the world around them. This day to day world is seen by the syllabus document of 1975 as a superficial reality. The new and deeper reality, the nature of which is not defined, will be manifested in the student's own particular and personal vision. This vision will be expressed in a form-based way. Thus, the methodology of this course is based on the observation of reality, the analysis of form, and the development and expression of a personal vision. Having said this, the writer recalls no clear methodology being established to guide students while he attended the National College of Art and Design. Neither does he recall a systematic programme to enable students to acquire an understanding of materials and forms. In fact, in the writer's experience, students were left free during the three or four years of the course to develop their own particular way of working, at their own pace, and in their own time.

13.2.10 *The Development of a Personal Language: Drawing*

The issue that the student should direct his attention towards the world and through himself brings us to one of the most important elements of the course - drawing. Drawing, which, as already shown, was of vital importance to Rob Smith, is seen in the syllabus document as a key part of the reflexive and critical aspect of this course. It is defined in this document as a "very immediate, nervous, highly personal, almost

conversational basic language".[48] Drawing, according to the authors, must be encouraged to the extent that it becomes an automatic reaction for the student to take visual notes. This new approach to drawing - by contrast with the old neo-classical model where students had to learn specific skills such as accurate linear description or perspective, and which involved copious amounts of drawing from the cast and the figure - makes it incumbent on the teacher, according to the syllabus document, to be imaginative in setting up drawing projects that will encourage the students to "see things freshly and in their own way".[49] Despite the fact that drawing had a key role to play in the new course after 1975, it is difficult to establish exactly how drawing was defined in the new curriculum. This was especially so given that the statement 'drawing is dead' was the constant refrain of the avant-gardists, both staff and students, on the studio floor. The present writer, who spent four years in the faculty, can recall no clear definition emerging over the course of these four years. Students were never shown how to draw, nor were they asked to draw in a certain way – as already stated, some students were told not to draw in a certain way. There were, of course, short projects that involved students drawing in specific styles. These styles were dictated by the style of the particular teacher who was in charge of the project. These projects were of short duration and were not necessarily of importance to the overall ethos of the course. The writer, for instance, never enrolled for one of these projects. The illustrations in the publications *NCAD 250 Drawings 1746 - 1996* and *NCAD Decade Show* give a sampling of what was accepted as drawing throughout the period under discussion. These vary from the three dimensional drawing using cloth, silk tissue and paper of Ruth Johnstone and the minimal and purely abstract graphite work of Ciaran Lennon

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[48] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 780.

[49] Ibid., 780.

to the narrative cartoon-like story-board style of Chris Maguire's work and the highly emotive and naturalistic work of James Hanley. They include the neo-classical precision of Cary Clarke and the provocative 'bad' drawing of Noel Sheridan. The comments of Ollie Whelan throw some light on what the syllabus document meant by "drawing". In stating that drawing was a major part of the course, Whelan points out that it was seen "as a documentation and ideas collecting, as opposed to a technical gathering or an academic gathering kind of thing. . . . It was more or less digging into the whole process as a way of putting together ideas very quickly".[50] In elaborating on drawing and its importance to the curriculum, the authors of the syllabus document of 1975 make a statement that has almost religious overtones: "A great part of this study [drawing] will be hard work as its purpose is not only to increase the students vision, but also to increase his freedom".[51]

Drawing is thus a fundamental and vital aspect of this course, but drawing in a particular sense. This sense is difficult to define other than to say that it is part of a process and that it is not drawing in the tradition sense. Drawing is seen in the syllabus document as an analytical and personal but also as a free and spontaneous response to materials. It is primarily seen by this document as a process that reveals a deeper reality, perhaps Plato's ideal world, Kant's noeumena, or Whitehead's spirit of an historical age (see below); it certainly reflects the artist's own inner world.[52] The new

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[50] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1142.

[51] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 780.

[52] It is unclear whether a distinction is made here between the boundaries set by formal restrictions in the classic modernist Greenbergian sense, and the more radical approach to form of Michael Craig-Martin, both of which were discussed in Chapter 7. Where Greenberg saw form in a literal sense, colour, shape and volume, for example, Craig Martin sees form in a broader and more abstract sense. For Craig-Martin the artist's confrontation with materials is more than an effort to express the artist's inner vision through an intuitive, analytical, and emotional response to form. Rather he sees it as leading to the situation that he believes exists today in avant-garde art, which he describes as radicalisation of content; a breaking free from formal restrictions into a much broader area that

approach to drawing that was advocated by the new regime after 1975 was not universally accepted in the faculty. Ollie Whelan points out that some students who "felt that their craft skills weren't improving"[53] found this new approach to drawing very difficult, and that this situation, because it disparaged traditional skills, led to the polarisation of students at an early stage in the course. This assertion is borne out by other interviewees.

In relation to the evolutionary and progressive model of art practice that was asserted by Michael Craig-Martin at Goldsmiths' it is interesting to note that a teleological approach to drawing, to art, and to history, is implicit in the syllabus for 1975. It is implied in the suggestion, for instance, that drawing done in the past, from the drawings of the cave man to those of the present day, should be shown to students in order to give a sense of the subject as a continuous human activity; this approach to drawing, it was hoped, would also give students access to the deeper meanings underpinning reality. It is interesting to note that this suggestion fits in with the thinking of A.N. Whitehead. Whitehead believed that there was a particular outlook in each age; that in each period of history there was a general form of the forms of thought, as he put it. He believed that, like the air we breathe, such a form is so translucent, so pervasive, and so seemingly necessary, that only by extreme effort can we become aware of it.[54] Art, according to Whitehead, enables man to become aware of this form. Art for Whitehead is thus the repository of the spirit of an historical age.

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encompasses abstract ideas. Craig-Martin, as shown in Chapter 7, believes that art in the twentieth century has evolved in a linear way through three phases of radicalism: radicalism of form, radicalism of materials, and radicalism of content. The present phase in this evolution, the radicalisation of content, is much more deeply challenging and progressive, according to Craig-Martin, than the old, and what he sees as outmoded, Greenbergian position. (Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission*, 8)

[53] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1142.

[54] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 13-14.

According to Whitehead, the revelations of art reveal man to himself, and ultimately reveal deeper metaphysical meanings. It is interesting to note, in the context of the importance given in the syllabus document of 1975 to criticism as a methodological tool, that Whitehead suggested in *Adventures of Ideas* that criticism, both logical and aesthetic, was the methodology that man might use in order that he might approach this revelation.[55]

The reflexive, imprecise and very personal model of the drawing process discussed here ties in with organic and progressive models of history whose origins have already been discussed and with which, through the process of drawing, the student is linked. Drawing, in this indistinct sense, is seen almost as a right of passage in the new curriculum after 1975, and it has been a key aspect of the course since then. It was modified in the early to mid-eighties by Carey Clarke and Campbell Bruce when it was made into an important six week block which all students entering the faculty had to do. This block made some attempt to give to students an understanding of the different approaches to drawing throughout history. Ollie Whelan and Charlie Cullen further modified this aspect of the course in the late 1980s by reducing it to three weeks duration. It continues today as a major part of the first year program. During this block students would be introduced to different approaches to drawing from the history of art and different approaches to drawing that were current at the time. So, for instance, Carey Clarke would introduce students, through studio practice, to a very precise, neo-classical style of drawing. Charlie Cullen would introduce students to a much more expressionistic style. And Ollie Whelan and Rob Smith would introduce students to an ideas and research-based approach to drawing. The style of drawing that students addressed would depend on the interests of the staff who taught the particular block.

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[55] Ibid., 210-213.

13.2.11 *A Logical Approach to Art Making: Reason*

As mentioned above, A.N. Whitehead suggested in *Adventures of Ideas* that criticism founded upon logical analysis was one of two methods for excavating the spirit of an historical age.[56] Given the influence of *Adventures of Ideas* on the thinking of Campbell Bruce and his generation, it is interesting to note that a significant aspect of the course, according to the syllabus for 1975, was the demand that the process of making art must be logical and sensible. This assertion leads to the requirement, as stated in the syllabus document, that the students must think and act out of a logical intelligence. This requirement echoes the Slade approach to art, with its origins in nineteenth century scientific enquiry and analysis as a philosophical method. The assertion of the syllabus document that the process of art making must be logical and sensible is a significant assertion as it opposes an emotional approach to art making that is expressive or declamatory. It is interesting to note here that a number of staff representing the new regime in fine art at the National College of Art and Design were very much against an Expressionistic approach to art practice. Simon McLeod states that the attitude presented by new English staff was that "a painting is a painting and you are you, and there is a gap there. And that you are being self indulgent or declamatory to have too much autobiographical input into your work. . . . I had been virtually instructed by staff to disregard the German Expressionists who had interested me before".[57] It is noteworthy in this context that for the formalist critic Clement Greenberg declamation was the *bete noir* of art.

It is important to point out here, at the risk of oversimplification, that two types of

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[56] Ibid., 221.

[57] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 974.

expression prevailed in the Dublin art world, and by extension at the National College of Art and Design, throughout the period under discussion. One was a disinterested expression through formal analysis, and the other was an emotional expression through line, colour, personal imagery and symbolism.

The former approach was represented by the work of many artists including Cecil King, Brian King, Felim Egan, Patrick Scott, Ciaran Lennon, and Gwen O'Dowd. The latter approach was also represented in the work of many artists including Mick Mulcahy, Michael Cullen, Charlie Cullen, Michael Kane, Paddy Graham, Brian Maguire, and Patrick Hall.

In relation to the playing down of an emotional approach to art on the studio floor, it is important to note that just as drawing is seen in the syllabus for 1975 as a means of increasing the student's freedom and vision so it is seen as a means of developing the student's own personal approach to the world. This personal approach to the making of art, and to drawing in particular, it must be stressed, is defined in the syllabus document in a non-declamatory way. This assertion of a logical and non-declamatory approach to the creation of artworks would appear to be an implicit condemnation of an expressionistic approach to the making of art. Interestingly, it is also an affirmation of Kant's requirement of a disinterested approach to aesthetic judgement. The importance given to the development of a personal approach to the making of art by the new staff in fine art - an approach that is logical, disinterested and focused on aesthetic development - is underlined in the syllabus document by the statement that at the end of the first year the staff will assess what achievement has been specifically in relation to the development of the student's artistic personality. Therefore, the development of an artistic personality, as the outcome of a process of logical analysis, is seen by the authors of the syllabus document as a key aspect of the

course. Implicit in this is the requirement that students develop an artistic style. This is consistent with the earlier statement that the principal objective of the course was the training of artists. This leads us to one of the principal problems of the course, the problem of fashions and fads.

13.2.12 *The Danger of a Superficial Approach to Art Making: Fashions and Fads*

The authors of the syllabus document of 1975 echo the fear of Maurice de Sausmarez of a cosmetic approach to the creative process where they point out the dangers to creativity of a superficial and fashionable use of new materials. This approach, they admonish, constitutes an exciting challenge to the student. The authors warn that students must always be aware that mechanical shapes have a short fashionable lifetime. This is a reference to the dangers inherent in the attraction to students of popular culture and to the consequential dangers that lurk in a merely fashion-conscious approach to the making of art. This is an interesting assertion and throws some light on the difference between the values of the art world in the 1970s and those of today's art world. This is especially so when seen in the context of Michael Craig-Martin's statement that the free market's preoccupation with fashionableness is now an integral aspect of art practice, and an acceptable part of the artist's life. Craig-Martin's statement is an interesting measure of the intellectual shift that has taken place in the teaching of art since 1975, and of the acceptance by contemporary artists of the current social and political reality.

Continuing the theme of fashions and fads the authors of the syllabus document for 1975 warn of the dangers to the integrity of student's work of "beneficial

eclecticism".[58] This constitutes a major problem for this type of course, and the authors point out that one of the most difficult tasks for tutors will be to prescribe the limits of this eclecticism. This problem has been resolved to some extent in tertiary art education in Great Britain by schools adopting house styles - usually related to the interests of staff.[59] This enables students to choose a school whose house style reflects his or her interests and where the ethos is one of a deep understanding of the issues involved in their particular specialisation. This is now an accepted aspect of tertiary art education in Britain. Eclecticism has been a problem in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design. The effect of this problem on the curriculum is looked at in Chapter 16. According to Theo McNab, the head of fine art between 1988 and 2001, and Ollie Whelan, this problem has been resolved by the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design adopting a pluralist approach to style. As a consequence of this approach there is no house style in the Fine Art faculty today.

13.2.13 *The Autonomy of Fine Art: Independence from Bureaucratic Interference*

One of the biggest problems for fine art education in Great Britain in the 1960s and 1970s was the struggle to avoid bureaucratic pigeonholing and restrictions placed on courses by academic demands. This is a problem which in many ways fine art education still has and which goes to the heart of Herbert Read's anarchism and the radical demands of the post-war generation of British artists. In attempting to deal with this problem the syllabus for 1975 requests that the administration of the National

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[58] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 782.

[59] The phrase 'house style' refers to the situation where a particular art school is identified with a particular style of art. So for instance the Slade is associated with a controlled, precise and analytical style of art, the work of the modernist artist Felim Egan and the traditionalist artist John Long exemplify this style. Goldsmith's college is associated with the challenging and avant-garde 'Britart'

College of Art and Design should minimise the extent to which its bureaucratic needs and demands interfere with the development of the individual student: this is of course what the student rebellion at Hornsey was all about. This request, which is presented in the syllabus document of 1975 as a curricular imperative, also enables the new regime to distance itself further from the old regime and to assert its independence from the sources of power within the college. It is pertinent that when the document of 1975 was drawn up the old regime still had significant influence within the bureaucracy of the college.

There is a further assertion of the autonomy of the new faculty, and of its independence from the college bureaucracy, where the syllabus document states that the injection of "value concepts" – which are not defined - within a course such as this has two main influences: those initially agreed by the staff within the faculty, and those originating outside the college in new artistic movements and discoveries. The authors declare that the most applicable of these options for this course will be those over which the staff have direct control, and where part time staff can make the greatest contribution.[60]

The issue of agreed value concepts within the faculty is problematic. Certainly, new developments and discoveries, as the syllabus puts it, will influence the values of students. But will old movements and discoveries not also influence students? Clearly the values of the avant-garde are to the fore here. Another problem arises from the fact that, given the polarised value systems of the two principal factions within the faculty, it is difficult to see how any values could be agreed on in the confrontational situation that existed in the faculty at this time. Given this situation, the authors' declaration that

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style. And the City and Guilds of London Art School is associated with traditional drawing, sculptural, and craft skills.

[60] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 782-783.

the "value concepts" that will be applied in the course will be those over which staff have direct control and where part-time staff can make a contribution is difficult to understand.

13.2.14 *The Role of Tutors and Tutorial Structures*

Under the heading 'Course Structure', the syllabus document of 1975 states that tutorials are the cornerstone of the curriculum and that the tutorial system will enable tutors to take personal responsibility for students. Tutorials, it states, will be continuous throughout the course. Year tutors, it points out, are responsible for slide lectures, seminars, attendance, and assessments. In the early stages of the course, as already pointed out, Rob Smith and Nigel Rolfe were tutors for all of the first year students. In the second and third years of the course students chose their own tutors. Ollie Whelan points out that students tended to choose tutors along partisan lines. The most radical students, according to Whelan, went with the more avant-garde members of staff and the more traditional students went with the more traditional members of staff. There were of course students who were not in either camp. These students chose tutors for other reasons, sometimes for reasons of technical expertise in certain areas, and sometimes for personal reasons.

The syllabus document for 1975 points out that it is the responsibility of year tutors that part-time staff are properly used and that the barriers that tend to build up in a situation such as existed in the Fine Art faculty are reduced to a minimum.[61] Tutors are thus seen as essential to the efficient running of the course. They are also the key to the success of the student's career within the college. According to the testimony of

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[61] Ibid., 784.

former students, and in the experience of the present writer, some students built up very close and supportive relationships with individual tutors, which in many cases continued after college and which were of great benefit to their careers as artists. Other students, as can be seen in the testimony of some of the former students that are recorded in the appendices that appear in Volume II of this study, and according to other interviewees, got little or no support from their tutors, and some students had very difficult and strained relationships with their tutors.

The authors of the syllabus of 1975 state that throughout the term continuous assessment by personal tutors and by visiting lecturers is a mainstay of the course. Close monitoring and control of students within the faculty is implied where the authors declare that as students mature they must state what their aims are and what process they would choose to achieve these aims. The authors go on to state that the validity of the suggestions of students in this respect will be assessed by the student's tutor, and that later on assessment of technical ability will be made in terms of efficient execution of the student's ideas.[62] They point out that if problems arise for a particular student an assessment will be held at the end of term during which this problem will be addressed. The head of faculty, personal tutors, and year tutors or other staff will attend this by mutual consent. Students will be put on probation if it is deemed necessary.[63] The authors go on to suggest that a sense of achievement is a basic motivating factor for students and that it is by tutors identifying the achievements of students that direction can emerge for students.

The requirements of the tutor-student relationship, as laid down in the syllabus for 1975, shows quite clearly that it was the principal mechanism for control and order in

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[62] Ibid., 782.

[63] Ibid., 784.

the new curriculum, and that it was modelled on the curriculum at Goldsmiths' College as discussed in Chapter 7.[64]

The response of tutors to the tutorial situation varied. Gwen O'Dowd found the role of tutor stressful. "You were entirely responsible for that student. I found the onus far too much. You were working for five hours or six hours a week and you had maybe six to eight students to carry through the whole year."[65] Ciaran Lennon, on the other hand, points out that the tutor-student relationship was a particularly good one for staff in the sense that tutors were neither overworked nor restricted by bureaucratic demands. Consequently, according to Lennon, tutors had a lot of time to devote to students in an atmosphere that was free and bohemian. This free and bohemian atmosphere was largely a consequence of the earlier assertion of independence by the faculty from the bureaucracy of the college. Ollie Whelan points out that this freedom was a consequence of Campbell Bruce's successful efforts to shield both staff and students from bureaucratic problems. The freedom and support that many students found within the tutor-student relationship fitted in with the student centred nature of the course and was of immense benefit to students.

The tutor-student relationship as it is described in the syllabus document was very liberal. The syllabus states that all staff members were available as tutors, that no member of staff should be responsible for more than eight students, that students could request whom they wished to attend their tutorials, and that students could, "if their developing needs required it",[66] change their tutor. An interesting stipulation in relation to the perceived need to remove the influence of the old regime was the one that stated

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[64] Ibid., 785-786.

[65] Gwen O'Dowd, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 994.

[66] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 785.

that "students in the first term will be allocated tutors by the head of department".[67] The function of tutorials was essentially to facilitate contact between students and staff, and to provide a forum for the discussion of problems. It was particularly helpful where problems might arise out of a clash between student's needs and course requirements.

Year tutors, who were appointed by the head of faculty, played a key role in the new curriculum. Their function was manifold: they were responsible for one year of the course, they were responsible for implementing policy, and they were to ensure that movement through the faculty did not lead to disruption. A key role of year tutors was to ensure that educational standards were maintained: they were to inform the head of faculty of all developments, they were to call tutorials or discussions where necessary, and they were to advise the head of faculty on part time staff requirements for that year.

In such a loosely structured course as the one being discussed tutorial monitoring and control was self evidently of vital importance. The development of this aspect of the course in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design is looked at in the following chapters. The curriculum at Goldsmiths', as already stated, provides the model for this structure. The reason for Goldsmiths' reliance on tutorial structures was precisely because Goldsmiths' gave equal weight to all choices open to students by removing implicit and explicit hierarchies within the Fine Art faculty; there were, for example, as shown in Chapter 7, no separate departments at Goldsmiths'. As well as eliminating separate departments within the fine art area, Goldsmiths' also eliminated the usual year structure; consequently there was an exceptional degree of flexibility in the course. This situation enabled the curriculum to respond spontaneously and

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[67] Ibid., 785.

immediately to the changing focus of student interest and work. As a result of this situation all students were responsible for structuring their own courses. And it was this that made tutorial guidance and support crucial at Goldsmiths'.[68] The same approach in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design also made tutorial guidance and support crucial. This situation as shown worked very well at Goldsmiths' College. Its effectiveness at the National College of Art and Design is looked at in the following chapters.

13.3 The Development of the Curriculum from 1975 to 1988

13.3.1 *Introduction*

A comparison of the syllabus document for 1975 with the course documents for 1980 and 1988 shows the development of the curriculum between 1975 and 1988. The syllabus document for 1975, as already mentioned, is less a course document than a short text describing the aims and objectives of the course. It does not contain any statistical information. The course documents for 1980 that the present writer used for analysis were different. There were two of these documents. One was a complete but draft version for the document that was submitted to the National Council for Educational Awards for approval in 1980. The other was the course document that was submitted to the National Council for Educational Awards for approval. These documents, which are almost identical, contain facts, figures and statistical information. Though they list aims and objectives, these documents do not do so in the discursive, thorough, and eager way of the syllabus for 1975. They are essentially bureaucratic documents and they are consequently less revealing of the attitudes and

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[68] Craig-Martin, *Given Permission*, 14.

ideas of the writers than the 1975 document. The 1988 course document, which is the current course document, is a slightly modified version of the course document for 1980, and is almost identical to the course document that was submitted to the National Council for Educational Awards for approval. The modifications are outlined below.

The aims, objectives and overall philosophy of the course documents for 1980 and 1988 derive directly from the syllabus document of 1975. They are, in effect, an expansion and elaboration of that document; the curriculum since 1975 has thus remained true to its definition in the syllabus document of 1975 as a developing process. Campbell Bruce, as head of the faculty and as already stated, was chiefly responsible for the drawing up of all of these documents. The course documents are not necessarily, given this type of course, an exact guide to what was happening on the ground; this will be looked at later. Throughout the period under discussion the proposed subject areas, as listed in the course documents, are painting, sculpture, printmaking, and photography; a new area called "multimedia" has been added recently. History of art and design and complementary studies do not come under the control of the Fine Art faculty. Until 1979 students received a college diploma on completion of the course; the course was until then a three-year course. When degrees were introduced in 1980 the course became a four-year course. It changed back to a three-year course in 1988 in order to bring it into line with other degree courses. Since 1975 most students have pursued a one year pre-diploma or foundation course before entering the faculty.

In the late 1970s the college decided to introduce a joint BA degree course in history of art with fine art. This course was introduced for students who were equally strong in the practical and theoretical areas. The students who follow this course

pursue the fine art curriculum as laid down in the course documents, but put greater emphasis on the history and theory of art than students who don't follow this course. The History of Art course that all students in the Fine Art faculty pursue provides a good historical foundation in art history since antiquity but concentrates heavily on contemporary art theory. It thus feeds into the developing needs of students as they arise from their work on the studio floor. The details of the history of art aspect of this course are not of the concern of the present study.

A comparison of all of the documents listed above reveals that the overall aims and objectives of the course remained fundamentally the same throughout the period under discussion. According to Ollie Whelan, who has been studying or working in the Fine Art faculty continuously since 1975, the course in fine art today is essentially the same as the course that was introduced in 1975.

13.3.2 *The Course Documents for 1980 and 1988*

The course documents for 1980 and 1988, as stated above, are essentially the same documents. Much of the text is the same, as are the basic philosophy, aims, and objectives. The document for 1988 differs from the earlier document in two respects: it asserts a more pluralist philosophy than the earlier documents, and it lays less stress on the fact that it trains artists. The curriculum, in short, since 1975 has remained true to its definition in the syllabus document of that year as a developing process whose aim is the training of artists.

The 1980 and 1988 course documents, in outlining their educational philosophy, reassert and summarise in identical texts the general approach and themes of the syllabus for 1975:

> Art is a creative, expressive, intellectual discipline, which requires the application of informed procedures and lines of enquiry to whatever material

> or idea is under consideration. These procedures will be referred to as research, analysis, extension and practice. These will, we believe, promote a framework for future action.[69]

13.3.3 A *Pluralist Curriculum*

Both the 1980 and 1988 course documents reflect the implicit pluralism and freedom of the 1975 syllabus document. They state that students can select their principal area of activity as their interests, ideas, and abilities dictate on the basis of tutorial counselling. Both documents stress a pluralist approach to fine art education where they state that "though no system can cater for every possibility, with sensitivity most aspects of contemporary art practice can be catered for".[70]

13.3.4 *The Training of Artists*

The training of artists, which is stated as an explicit aim in both the syllabus document of 1975 and in the course document of 1980, is not stated in such a forthright way in the 1988 course document. This change of emphasis is probably a consequence of criticism of the course by the National Council for Educational Awards that was made as a result of a visit to the college by assessors for the Council in 1981. The assessors, who visited the college in November of 1981, felt that there was too much emphasis placed on the training of artists, especially as most students who pursued the course would not, they pointed out, become artists. Notwithstanding this fact, the training of artists, which remains the principle objective in all course documents, is seen by these documents, in line with Herbert Read's thinking, in the context of individual student development, where the making of art is envisaged as an

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[69] Course Document 1980, 5; National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Faculty, "Course Document", 1988, National College of Art and Design Library, 7

[70] Course Document, 1980, 5; Course Document, 1988, 7.

outcome and manifestation of personal development. The stress on the development of the individual thus remains the same in all documents. The course document of 1980, for instance, in a text that is almost identical with that of the 1988 course document, states that "the aim of the course is to provide a comprehensive basis of knowledge and practice of visual arts for the continuing development of the individual as an artist".[71] The course document for 1988 states that "the course aims to present a comprehensive basis of knowledge, and practice of the visual arts, and through its teaching to provide the challenge and incentive to develop the whole individual."[72]

13.3.5 *The Artist in Society: The Future Career of the Student*

The course document of 1980 reiterates the implicit aspiration of the 1975 document that as a consequence of the skills that the student will learn in the faculty, the art student will have an active role in society when he or she leaves the college. It states that "through the expertise gained he or she will be capable of making a contribution in their own subject of study to the society in which they live".[73] The corresponding statement in the course document for 1988 is essentially the same, but, interestingly, reflects a more pro-active and less passive approach to the position of the artist in contemporary society: "The student will develop schemes and create opportunities which meet the needs of a changing society".[74] Perhaps this change, which, though small, is a significant change, reflects the more aggressive society of the late 1980s.

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[71] Course Document, 1980, 6.

[72] Course Document, 1988. 8.

[73] Ibid., 6.

[74] Ibid., 8.

13.3.6 *The Teaching of Skill*

In line with the syllabus for 1975, both the 1980 and the 1988 course documents state that the course will develop the student as a whole individual and that it will do this by giving the student certain skills. As is the case with the syllabus document of 1975 neither the course document of 1980 nor the course document of 1988 identify what the particular skills are. The course document of 1980 states, for instance, that one of its objectives is "to provide the aesthetic and technical information that will help the student to organise his or her work through a range of tools and visual language that will encourage optimal use of inherent abilities and motivation."[75] The course document of 1988 states that students will be given "formal and expressive abilities through practical experience".[76] At the same time as developing these "skills" both the 1980 and 1988 documents state that students will also develop critical and evaluative skills, and thus will be fully enabled, through this course, to mature as creative individuals. All of these objectives will be achieved, according to both documents, through tutorials, discussions, studio practice, and seminars.[77]

13.3.7 *The Development of the Individual as a Key Aspect of the Curriculum*

As already mentioned, all of the course documents aspire to enable students to develop fully as individuals. With this aim in mind, the course as it is manifested in the documents of 1980 and 1988, continuing the model established in 1975, is still described as an organic and developing process that moulds itself to the needs of the

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[75] Course Document, 1980, 6.

[76] Course Document, 1988, 8.

[77] Course Document, 1980, 6; Course Document, 1988, 8.

individual student. The course document for 1980, for instance, states that one of the objectives of the course will be to "take into consideration the individual's aspirations about his or her future as soon as they become apparent and provide programmes of study which will form the foundations on which disciplined activity can be built."[78] On the same theme the course document of 1988 states that its aim is to "take into consideration individual aspirations about the future and to relate and evolve them within the aims and objectives of the course structure".[79] There is a discernible but subtle change noticeable in this last statement that implies a less vehement assertion of the fact that student needs dictate course content. This last quotation makes it clear that though student aspirations are still taken into account by staff when developing a programme they must fit in with the demands of the course.

13.3.8 *An Integrated Department: An Open Curriculum*

Both the 1980 and the 1988 course documents state that academically no barriers exist within the Fine Art faculty which could prevent the creative needs of the student from being met. In doing this they echo the 1975 syllabus and the recommendations of the Coldstream reports. In making this assertion both course documents state that the division of the faculty into three areas, painting, sculpture and printmaking, is merely to simplify the administration. They stress that there are, in terms of the curriculum, no barriers between different areas. Both documents, however, add, revealingly: "providing they fall within the academic structure of the relevant area".[80] This last statement clearly indicates fudging and thus implies a weakening of the idea of an open

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[78] Course Document, 1980, 6.

[79] Course Document, 1988, 8.

[80] Course Document, 1980, 10; Course Document, 1988, 23.

curriculum.

13.3.9 *The Curriculum as a Developing Process*

The basic principle underlying the Basic Design system and the 1975 syllabus was that the creative process is a developing process. This principle is restated in identical texts in both the 1980 and 1988 course documents:

> For students studying painting, sculpture, or printmaking any rigid time structure after term three would of necessity condition and limit the possible and creative development of his or her ideas. This is a continuous, evolving process whose direction or duration cannot be prophesied, particularly in the latter part of the course, when commitment to one's chosen area is self-motivated.[81]

The assertion of the 1975 syllabus that it was not possible to give a detailed break down of the course was reiterated in the 1980 and 1988 course documents where it is stated, again in identical texts, that "because of the objectives of the course, it is not possible to give a weekly breakdown of hours under specific headings".[82] Having established this, both documents go on to state that, as a consequence of the academic demands of the course on one hand and the need for absolute flexibility on the other, a six hour unit or day was devised which would allow for planning and timetabling based on a six hour module. This would also, it was hoped, facilitate students who wished to work in other areas and faculties. As it sought to create a balance between the bureaucratic demands of the college and the needs of the student this six-hour unit can be seen as more fudging which further weakened the idea of an open curriculum.[83]

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[81] Course Document, 1980, 18; Course Document, 1988, 36.

[82] Course Document, 1980, 17; Course Document, 1988, 34.

[83] Course Document, 1980, 17; Course Document, 1988, 34.

13.3.10 *The Role of Drawing on the Curriculum*

Under the heading of 'General Synopsis', both the 1980 and 1988 course documents state that the first year of the course in fine art is a common year. In echoing the syllabus document of 1975 they also assert the importance of "drawing" to the creative process. In both documents it is stated that the first phase of the course is a drawing project which is undertaken by students at the beginning of their first year. This project is aimed at introducing the students to a wide knowledge of drawing concepts. The 1980 course document states that all students who enter fine art must do a six-week block in drawing before they begin to specialise: "In the first phase of six weeks aims are to introduce the students visually and intellectually to a wide knowledge of drawing concepts, together with their historical development. This period is devoted entirely to drawing, with positive emphasis on creativity."[84]

In the 1988 course document this paragraph is reproduced verbatim, with the difference that the six weeks duration of the course has been reduced to three weeks. This was a consequence of the course being changed from four to three years' duration. There is one other important change. Instead of the approach to drawing being based on creativity, as the 1980 document states, the 1988 document states that the emphasis will be on analysis, research, and, significantly, "the ability to record."[85]

In elaborating on the nature of the creative approach to drawing taken in the faculty the course document for 1980 asserts the primacy of the Basic Design system and the redundancy of traditional approaches.

> Participants are often burdened with prefixed ideas – sediments from previous stages that persist negatively throughout, interfering with the

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[84] Course Document, 1980, 20.

[85] Course Document, 1988, 37.

development of a truly dialectical practice of work.

Despite basic design courses ostensibly dealing with the operation of formal and spatial relationships, material colours and so on, the tendency remains to think object mindedly (because of a built in bias in the structure of our language) rather than relationship minded. We should seek after a natural ability to see connections and relationships rather than the persistence of an illustrative sensibility.

Breaking through this literal mindedness should enable the participants to recognise the visual language as a rich potential source of equivalents with which to develop an integrated vision.[86]

The substitution of the very precise categories of 'analysis', 'research', and 'ability to record' for the less precise category of 'creativity' implies a tightening up of the approach to drawing in the faculty. The phrase 'ability to record', in particular, implies an acceptance of the traditional drawing skill of recording what is seen in a realistic manner as an acceptable aspect of drawing practice. This is interesting in relation to a demand by the Board of the National College of Art and Design in the mid-eighties for a reassertion of the old values. (See below) This change of wording thus appears to be a compromise between the demand of the board for a return to old values and the radical programme of the new regime, as asserted in the above block quotation.

Throughout the period under discussion, then, drawing in the loose and imprecise sense that it was defined in the 1975 syllabus continued to be seen as a fundamental aspect of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty. In other words, drawing continued to be seen as a manifestation of the thinking process. Interviewees confirm this assertion. Significantly, however, as shown above, a more pluralistic approach to drawing is evident in the 1988 course document.

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[86] National College of Art and Design, Fine Art Faculty, "Four Year Course in Fine Art Leading to the award of Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours", Course Document 1980, National Council For Educational Awards Archives, Dublin, 6-7.

13.3.11 *The First Year of the Course*

In a more detailed breakdown of the first year programme than the 1975 syllabus attempted, the course documents of 1980 and 1988 present essentially the same aims, ideas, and methodology as did the syllabus document of 1975. The first phase of this program, which is a drawing project and which is given in a series of separate blocks by different staff members, opens with an introduction to the mechanics of vision and objective drawing. Though neither the 1980 or the 1988 course document give a specific or precise definition of drawing, they state that they look on drawing as a language that expresses itself through marks, structures, process, and the various methods by which very precise information can be conveyed by drawing. They then go on to look at narrative in drawing, and finally at social and political content in drawing. In line with the overall approach of the 1975 syllabus, critical evaluation is stressed as an essential aspect of this project. What happened in practice was that this project was given by different staff members who taught in short blocks. These staff members addressed their own interests in the projects that they set. Thus the precise definition of drawing varied depending on the particular interests of staff.

In the second phase of the first year programme, according to both course documents, students spend a period of time - two weeks in 1980, three weeks in 1988 - in each of the different areas: painting, printmaking, sculpture and video/photo. The objective of this aspect of the course is to introduce students to studio and workshop practice. This period is followed by a number of set projects of longer duration in each of the above areas. The choice of area depends on how the work of students develops during the two or three week introductory blocks. Six projects are listed in the document of 1980, and four projects are listed in the document of 1988. Students were obliged to choose two of these projects depending on their interests. In other words, in

this phase students did two three-week projects. These projects were aimed, according to the course documents, at extending the students' skill, knowledge, and ability to follow an original idea through to a conclusion. The period spent on these projects continues into another period devoted to a personal project. This project is suggested by the student and is followed with tutorial guidance. The theme of this project will have evolved out of the earlier projects.[87] In summary, according to both the 1980 and 1988 course documents the first year of the course was organised in a sequential way. Students started off with a drawing project, which aimed to introduce students to different approaches to drawing. This led into projects that aimed to introduce students to the different departments within the Fine Art faculty. These introductory projects led to projects of longer duration, which aimed to give students a deeper understanding of chosen areas. Finally, students set a project for themselves, which they completed with tutorial guidance. All projects except the final one were set by individual staff members and varied from year to year and from staff member to staff member.

13.3.12 *The Second Year of the Course*

According to both the 1980 and 1988 course documents, students in the second year will enter one of the three different departments, depending on their particular interests. Here they will be encouraged to develop directions and attitudes that emerged in the first year. At this stage the students will be introduced to professional artists. These artists will either carry out block projects, which they will set themselves, or alternatively they will show students slides of their work, which they will discuss with students. They will also give advice and support to students. The course

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[87] Course Document, 1980, 23-24; Course Document, 1988, 37.

documents of 1980 and 1988 state, as did the syllabus of 1975, that visiting artists were a major feature of this year. The aim of this year is seen as being two pronged - to extend the students' understanding of specific areas by using artists who specialise in these areas, and to raise the level of activity by stimulating ideas and discussion. The course document of 1980 states that this year also introduces the students to artists who are surviving by their work. It adds, interestingly, alluding to the fact that many artists can only survive by teaching: "This may not always be true [that artists survive by their work] since some visitors will be teachers from other colleges". This statement does not appear in the 1988 course document.[88]

The projects that students engage in during the second year have their roots in the disciplines of painting, printmaking, and sculpture. The students' choice of area does not preclude students from working in other departments within the faculty or in a combination of departments. However, both course documents stress that specialisation will be encouraged so that students can, as early as possible, develop the necessarily high level of skills to enable the achievement of academic excellence. Apart from the fact that the definition of skill is difficult to establish from the various documents this assertion clearly works against the idea of an open curriculum.[89]

13.3.13 *The Third Year of the Course*

In the third year, according to both the 1980 and 1988 course documents, students are expected to make final decisions about their future plans, to continue to follow their particular interests, and to specialise.

When the course was a four-year course, students were expected to behave like

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[88] Course Document, 1980, 21.

[89] Course Document, 1980, 21; Course Document, 1988, 17.

professional artists in their final year. They were encouraged to exhibit in public and private exhibitions and to compete for prizes. The stated aim of this year was to use accumulated knowledge in a professional context.

To recapitulate: in 1975 there was an intensive first year, a less intensive second year, and a free third year. During the second year students were exposed to the influence of visiting lecturers and they were given quite a lot of freedom. In third year - and after 1980 when degrees were awarded for the first time in fourth year - students continued to develop their own interests in a freely structured environment with tutorial guidance. The overall aims, objectives, and methodology of the course were the same in 1988 as they had been in 1975. The course was, however, more structured and less rigid in its adherence to the specific aesthetic values of the new curriculum as they were manifested in the syllabus for 1975. In short, the course in 1988 was more pluralist and more structured than the course in 1975, and broadly speaking, the aims and objectives of the course remained the same.

13.3.14 *The Course in Fine Art 1975 – 1988: A Change of Emphasis*

If the details of the course documents of 1980 and 1988 are examined they can be seen to continue the aims, objectives, and themes laid down in the 1975 syllabus document. The course curriculum in painting, for instance, shows the influence of the 1975 document quite clearly where it states that painting involves a multiplicity of processes to which the student will be introduced during the course. In echoing the questioning aspect of the aesthetic values that underpin the 1975 syllabus, both the 1980 and 1988 documents state that "through discussion, critical analysis and practice

we question the function of art in society".[90] The methodology established in the 1975 syllabus is further reasserted in these documents where they state that "thinking attitudes and concentrated work habits will be installed that will give the individual confidence in themselves [sic] through achievement and skills".[91] It is echoed again where both documents state that "the department aims by careful timetabling to progressively increase, through the practice of painting, formal and expressive clarity required for continued development".[92]

Throughout the period under discussion, analysis as a concept and as a methodology, and analysis of form in particular, continued to be a major theme of the course.[93] Thus the theme of observing the phenomenal world: "the world as it is and not as it appears to be", as the syllabus of 1975 put it, continued through all course documents. The introduction to a two-week painting block in the 1988 course document makes this clear:

> A number of procedural patterns will be used to explore the use of paint in an exciting and creative way, learning by discovering the diverse and interesting possibilities inherent in the materials.
>
> The difference between seeing and just looking will be emphasised, observation and the method of communicating what is observed is an intentional and not accidental act.
>
> The process of painting as a means for researching visual information by reference to long established practice will be taught through practice, examples, and discussion.[94]

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[90] Course Document, 1980, 25; Course Document, 1988, 41.

[91] Course Document, 1980, 25; Course Document, 1988, 41.

[92] Course Document, 1980, 25; Course Document, 1988, 42.

[93] Analysis as a concept, as already stated, derives from the scientific aspect of Basic Design as discussed in Chapter 5. This approach to art making is exemplified in the work of Giacometti and was suggested as a methodology for artists by the English art critic David Sylvester at a lecture given at the Royal College of Art in 1952. See Chapter 12.

[94] Course Document, 1988, 42.

The last paragraph of this quotation is very interesting and implies a less vehement adherence to the Basic Design model than the syllabus for 1975. The use of the words 'practice' and 'examples' in relation to pedagogy are particularly revealing. It is also interesting to note the use of the phrase 'long established practice' as something to be referred to, thus implying that tradition, the *bete noire* of the avant-garde, now has an accepted place on the curriculum and that the influence of the avant-garde in the faculty has therefore declined. This interpretation is consistent with Nigel Rolfe's statement that after he left the college in the mid-1980s the Faculty of Fine Art reverted back to a less avant-garde and a more traditional approach to art.[95]

The overall objectives of the print department are identical in the 1980 and the 1988 course documents: the development of technical skills within a broad modernist approach. Print was not identified as a discreet area in the syllabus for 1975, as the vision was then for a more integrated faculty where all departments shared the same aesthetic values and educational objectives. By 1988 this situation had changed and the print area had acquired a certain amount of autonomy. The themes stressed by the print department in both the 1980 and 1988 course documents are the same as the general themes of the 1975 syllabus - research, analysis, self-criticism, and evaluation.[96]

According to both the 1980 and 1988 course documents, and in line with the painting and print areas, the sculpture department subscribes to the educational aims and objectives of the new post-1975 curriculum. In the sculpture department the need for diversity, technical knowledge, and a pluralist approach to the creative process is asserted. Early in the course there are set projects aimed at introducing students to the various materials with which sculpture is concerned: metal, wood, clay, plastics, and

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[95] Nigel Rolfe, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 18, 1053-1057.

[96] Course Document, 1980, 33-35; Course Document, 1988, 50-56.

stone. The use of new media, including video and photography, is stressed. In the second, third and fourth years, according to the brief for the sculpture area, students are given freedom to follow their own interests as developing artists. Thus sculpture, like print, follows the same program as the painting area. All areas within the faculty are thus interrelated in the sense that they share the same objectives and overall methodology. The only difference relates to the actual materials used. In short, the course documents of 1980 and 1988 show that the first year of the course is heavily directed and aimed and is oriented towards the teaching of specific sculptural, printing, and painting techniques. In the second year there is more specialisation, greater concentration on skills, and more exposure to professional artists. In the third, and after 1980, fourth year, more freedom is given to students to develop as artists.

Both the historical origins of this course and the values that underpin it as it developed between 1975 and 1988 are revealed more clearly in the more ardent syllabus for 1975 than in the bulkier later documents. The course documents for 1980 and 1988 project the feeling that they itemise and bureaucratise the more vigorous earlier document. Essentially the later documents present a curriculum which is a more elaborate and more developed version of the syllabus document of 1975 and which aspires to put into practice the values expressed in the earlier document. In their essentials the course documents of 1980 and 1988 are identical. There is, however, one notable difference, which reveals a major change in official thinking within the Fine Art faculty during the period under discussion. This change is revealed on page 41 of the 1988 course document in a list of twelve statements which describe the course in painting and which are almost identical to a similar list that appears in the 1980 document. In the 1988 course document three new statements have been added to the list that appears in the earlier document. These statements reflect a more pluralist and

less dogmatic approach than either the 1975 syllabus or the 1980 document. These three statements make a very obvious effort to impress on the mind of the reader the fact that a pluralist approach is actively encouraged in the faculty. They also make it clear that there is no overall house style, and that figurative work has a status on the curriculum that is equal to non-figurative work. Significantly, they stress the fact that the aim of the faculty is not to clone students in the styles of the staff or in the style of the current fashion, whatever that happens to be, but to give them a broad view of the possibilities open to them in the context of past and present artistic practice. The three new statements are as follows:

> The painting department has actively fostered a pluralist individual approach and has been opposed to any overall house style. This is reflected in the degree shows over the past years where figurative and non-figurative work has flourished together.
>
> The aims are not to clone students in styles of the staff or current fashionable modes but rather to stimulate a broad investigative approach giving the student a platform on which to survey the spectrum of creative possibilities generated by both past and present artistic endeavour.
>
> Over the past five years painting has become revitalised and free from overall dogmas. This is a healthy climate where multiplicity of modes of expression are active together. We feel the painting department is reflecting this.[97]

In the context of the introduction of a more pluralist ethos in the course document of 1988, it is interesting to note that in the list of twelve statements that appear in the 1980 course document that describe the curriculum in painting, and which appear in almost identical texts in the 1988 course document – with the addition of the above quoted statements, one significant statement has been removed and does not appear in the 1988 course document. This statement read: "Greater value is placed on

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[97] Course Document, 1988, 41.

intellectual curiosity and quality than the acquisition of technical skills".[98] This may be a small thing but it shows a clear shift in the painting department - on paper at least - away from a dogmatic rejection of skills, and towards a more accepting approach to different aesthetic traditions. This shift may have been a consequence of an attempt that was made at a seminar that was held in Killiney in 1985 to reduce the influence of the new regime in fine art and to bring back, as already mentioned, some of the values of the old school.

13.3.15 *The Killiney Seminar of 1985*

In 1985 a seminar was held in Killiney which all members of staff at the National College of Art and Design attended.[99] This seminar was organised by Bruce Arnold who was chairman of the Board of the college at that time. The seminar had been organised, according to Arnold, because the Board had been concerned about the development of the college in a number of areas.[100] One area of concern to the Board was design. The board felt that the design curriculum was not really relevant to what was happening in Irish industry. One of the objectives of the Killiney seminar was to change this situation. Another area of concern for the board was the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty. According to Arnold, the Board felt that the direction that the Fine Art faculty was taking was uncertain at that time. Many on the Board also felt, according to Arnold, that the rigour and toughness that had been associated with the neo-classical system were very evidently lacking in the new curriculum, and that this

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[98] Course Document, 1980, 25.

[99] This seminar was held on the weekend of the 4th and 5th of May at the Court Hotel, Killiney Bay, County Dublin.

[100] Bruce Arnold, interview by author, 27 January 2000.

was an alarming situation. It was thus felt by the Board that it was necessary to bring back some of the fundamentals that had been lost in the period after 1975. Arnold has stated that it was for this reason that Patrick Hickey was brought in as head of painting. Hickey was technically good, according to Arnold; he understood about oil painting, and he was a good graphic artist.

When called to the seminar in Killiney, according to Ollie Whelan, the staff of the Fine Art faculty had assumed that the meeting was a general meeting about policy. When they arrived at the seminar they were surprised by the approach of some of the participants and by what they felt was the confrontational nature of the meeting for which they were not prepared. Ollie Whelan states that a lot of the criticism of fine art came from the Education faculty which, he felt, had no right to tell the Fine Art faculty how to teach artists – the Education faculty, according to Professor McCarthy, was very concerned that students entering their area from fine art were particularly lacking in drawing skills. Campbell Bruce, according to Whelan, deflected criticism and enabled the faculty to continue its new curriculum without having to go back to the an accommodation with the old ways.

> [Campbell] immediately said, "Look, hang on a second, this meeting has nothing to do with this. That's your opinion, and that's the end of the matter." And that was it. And we went on from there, but you got the feeling that the whole thing was set up for that very purpose: to put this argument across. It was very heavy in fact, initially, the way the argument was put to us. The fact was, I must admit, Campbell was fantastic in those situations. . . . [He] just basically cooled the whole thing down and it went off in another direction.[101]

Notwithstanding Bruce's vigorous defence of the new fine art curriculum at the seminar in Killiney in 1985, by 1988 there had been a calming down of the

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[101] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1160.

confrontational situation that had prevailed in the faculty between 1975 and 1985. This was a consequence of changes in the faculty that led to a diminution in the aggressiveness of the new regime. One reason for this development was a change of emphasis in the art world away from a rigorous adherence to a formalist oriented modernist agenda and towards a less formally and stylistically restricted post-modernism – it will be recalled that Expressionism enjoyed a fashionable resurgence in the 1980s, the so called "New Expressionism". This change allowed, to some extent at least, for a more pluralist approach to art practice within the faculty. Another reason for this development was the retirement of some of the older and more traditional members of staff. Both of these developments are reflected in the course documents. It is noteworthy in the context of the present discussion that Nigel Rolfe was "expelled", to use his own word, in the early 1980s because, he claims, the faculty had lost its edge and had drifted back into a kind of academic formalism that was bureaucratic, lacking in spirit, and opposed to his way of thinking. According to Rolfe, having opened up for a few years between 1975 and 1985 the college went back to what it had been under the old neo-classical system after he left: "It closed up with a different clique, a different model, but in exactly the same way. Now it is a conflict between modernism and post-modernism. There is a modernist group who refuse to allow post-modernism in."[102] Now, he says, if the college doesn't mind itself, "It will turn around and be an academy".[103] Though Nigel Rolfe left the college in the early 1980s the sculpture department continued to adhere to the uncompromisingly modernist if not avant-garde approach of the syllabus document of 1975. This is made clear in the syllabus for the

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[102] Nigel Rolfe, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 18, 1053.

[103] Ibid., 1056.

sculpture department that appears in the course documents of 1980 and 1988, both of which state in identical texts:

> While technology steadily reduces the need for specialised physical skills in art the basic sculptural course would retain its emphasis in metal, clay, plastics, wood and stone. But the student must be aware that the craftsman's skills with the traditional materials can be limiting and demarcate the possibilities open to producing sculpture today.[104]

In conclusion, then, the course in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design as it evolved between 1975 and 1988 continued to adhere to the principles and values laid down in the 1975 syllabus. These were emphatically not neo-classical and were broadly modernist. At the beginning, in the mid-1970s, the course was aesthetically narrow and defined very closely in relation to what was happening in Great Britain. This situation changed in the mid-1980s, and by 1988 the course was more pluralist, though to exactly what extent is difficult to ascertain. Despite this change neo-classicism was still effectively excluded from the canon of what was acceptable.

According to the written evidence, the overall methodology of the curriculum that was established in the 1975 syllabus was continued in the 1980 and 1988 course documents. Apart from the time that was spent on history of art and complementary studies, most of the student's time was spent working on the studio floor under tutorial supervision. In the early stages of the course, according to the documentation, and in particular during the first year of the course, programs and projects guided students. As the course developed over the three or four years of the student's time in the college the importance of projects decreased and freedom for students to develop their own interests increased.

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[104] Course Document, 1980, 37; Course Document, 1988, 57.

13.4 The Key Aspects of the Curriculum: A Summary

The curriculum as it is described in the various documents that have been looked at was loosely structured, and, apart from training artists, its primary and stated aim was to accommodate the needs of students in terms of their personal development.

The syllabus for 1975, which was written exclusively by the new English staff, was the foundation stone upon which subsequent course documents were based. It was, consequently, the foundation stone of the curriculum throughout the period under discussion. Because it was written in the heady exuberance of the first year which the new staff spent in Dublin - Campbell Bruce, the new head of faculty, was forty seven, Nigel Rolfe was twenty four and Rob Smith was twenty nine - it was enthusiastic, candid, openly proselytical, and revealing of youthful vigour. Consequently it illustrates very clearly and fully the influences on and the thinking behind the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty. The new Director, Jonah Jones, who was fully conversant with developments in fine art education in Britain, was fully supportive of Campbell Bruce's approach. Jones, as already stated, was a fine artist and had been chairman of the fine art panel of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design in Britain between 1968 and 1971.

13.4.1 *The Origins of the Course*

The complex origins of the curriculum in fine art in the period after 1975 lie in the Enlightenment and in the Romantic era, with important elements that are in line with social, political, aesthetic and artistic developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Modernism is, of course, the key influence. This influence is manifested

chiefly in the preoccupation of the curriculum with form but also in its organic, progressive, and self-reflexive aspects. In having as its principal aim the creative development of the individual this course indirectly subscribed to the educational ideas of J.J. Rousseau, which had come down to modern times through the influence of Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), and John Dewey 1859-1952. Having said this, the staff in the Fine Art faculty showed no interest in pedagogical theory. In the immediate past there are many influences on this curriculum, including the Bauhaus School of Art, the thinking of Herbert Read, the methodology of the Basic Design system, and the recommendations of the Coldstream and Summerson reports in Britain.[105]

13.4.2 *Aims of the Course: Progression, Development, Individuality*

The syllabus document of 1975 did not set out to provide a breakdown of the course as it was run on the studio floor; because of the nature of the curriculum, as already shown, it was not deemed necessary to provide such a specification. It did, however, provide a blueprint for the course that has held ever since. The following, which is quoted verbatim, is a summary of the course as it appears in the syllabus document of 1975:

> Basically, the three Diploma years are visualised as an organic situation which undergoes constant change according to the needs of the individuals who form it, both staff and students, so it is not possible to give a timetable or rigid scheme that must be adhered to, but the following broad outlines indicate our

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[105] It is worth noting that John Dewey had a significant influence on the thinking of Herbert Read, who shared Dewey's interests in social issues and political reform. The influence of Dewey on Read's thinking and therefore on the curriculum in Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design can be inferred from the following. "The terms 'activity', 'process' and 'growth' were central and controlling in [Dewey's] analysis of the psychology of learning. As he saw it, thought and learning is a process of inquiry starting from doubt or uncertainty and spurred by his desire to resolve practical friction or to relieve strain and tension. Education must therefore begin with experience, indeed at its best it is ever evolving experience, which has as its aim growth and the achievement of maturity." *(Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Dewey.")

> aims: - Namely that the first year is heavily directed and aimed, not at craft disciplines but through projects to extend their abilities and to establish a personal identity; the second year is seen as a continuously developing process where they begin to evolve their own language and chosen means of communication. The third is an opportunity to develop those means and abilities to the highest level.[106]

The course in the Fine Art faculty, then, as it was originally conceived in 1975, was designed to enable the creative development of each individual student through a freely structured curriculum. This curriculum was designed to develop organically through the interaction of staff and students. Its ultimate aim was to produce artists. Thus, the first principle of the curriculum was that the course was student centred. The specific aim of the course was to encourage the student's creative development in terms of the materials and techniques of art and his or her personal needs, interests, and abilities. This imperative minimised distinctions between departments within the faculty and allowed maximum freedom to students to follow their ideas without constraints imposed by the need to work exclusively in specialised departments. The course was thus redolent of the course at Goldsmiths' College. This is still the situation at the time of writing. As Ollie Whelan points out: "The whole course [today] is geared around the individual developing. That's a really crucial thing. So . . . if you've got a student - this is what is keeping the thing open - if you've got a student in painting, and all of a sudden the work starts moving towards multi-media, you've got to go with it."[107]

13.4.3 *An End to Hierarchy: The Changed Role of the Tutor-Student Relationship*

As the course in fine art at the National College of Art and Design was designed to respond to the needs of students it was deemed important that staff saw themselves as

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[106] See Vol. II, appendix 7, 778.

[107] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1167.

artists who were developing and changing creatively in parallel with the students. This aspect of the curriculum, as shown, was one of the principal features of the curriculum at Goldsmiths'. This situation enabled staff to empathise with the students and to be more effective not just as teachers but as tutors, if not as mentors. Thus the tutor-student relationship, as Campbell Bruce has said, was the foundation stone of the curriculum.[108] This relationship was based on the master-apprentice model of the Renaissance and on its various revivals since then. In the context of the utopian vision of many artists and art educators in post-war Britain, which contained within it an aspiration to change society, the tutor-student relationship as an aspect of art education took on a new vitality. The importance given to the tutor-student relationship by Campbell Bruce reflected this new situation. In particular it reflected the socialist politics of William Morris, as Campbell Bruce has stated. Thus the tutor-student relationship embodied the rejection by many of the post-war generation of art educators in Britain of the old class-based and hierarchical pre-war model of education. It did this by removing the hierarchical relationship between the student and teacher and by replacing it with a new relationship that was based on equality of status and equality of purpose.

The old model of art education was seen by Campbell Bruce and his peers as a paradigm of the pre-war society that they felt was outdated in the context of the new post-war society that they felt they were creating.[109] For this generation, the outmoded aspect of pre-war Britain was symbolised by and encapsulated in the deferential

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[108] See Vol. II appendix 7, 785-786; Course Document 1980, 61-62; Course Document 1988, 118-119.

[109] This situation was not confined to the fine arts but was also evident in literature. See Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1970; idem, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-1945* (London: Methuen, 1998); idem, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945-1960* (London: Methuen, 1998).

relationships and hierarchies that existed on a personal, social, and political level within British society. The bureaucratic structures of British society in general were seen as a particularly virulent aspect of the old hierarchies.[110] More than anything else these structures were encapsulated for Campbell Bruce and his peers in the relationship between the student and teacher in pre-Coldstream art education, a relationship which, as Campbell Bruce points out, was rejected most vehemently by the post-war generation of students that had been in the war.[111] This explains Bruce's very concerted efforts to remove the influence of the Royal Hibernian Academy from the National College of Art and Design; the Royal Hibernian Academy with its loaded appellation, 'Royal' symbolised the pre-war structures that the Liberal, Bruce, had spent his adult life fighting against.

A concomitant issue that was of concern for Campbell Bruce's generation was the fact that pre-war and pre-Coldstream art education still had a dilettantish aspect. This aspect of pre-Coldstream art education was seen by Campbell Bruce and his peers as harking back to, and re-enforcing, old elitist structures that were founded on privilege, and which relegated art to an exclusive pedestal. The Bloomsbury Group embodied this view of art in British society for Campbell Bruce. In British art education the exclusivity of art was exemplified for Campbell Bruce, as it had been for William

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[110] The popularity of the comedy film *The Admirable Crichton* which was released in 1957 reflected the potency of the aspiration to meritocracy in British post-war society. In this film an aristocrat and his entourage are stranded on a desert island. Through his skill and natural talent Crichton, the butler, becomes the ruler of this group of helpless individuals. In the changed context of their new situation and of the need to survive in a very practical sense the castaways take on roles that are the inverse of their roles in civilised society. At the end of the film after the stranded group are rescued, the old values are quickly resumed, but this time with a different spirit, a spirit that reflects new attitudes to deference in post-war British society. J.M. Barrie wrote the original play on which the film was based in 1902. This year was significant as it was just after the Boer War and the same year as the *Education Act*, which sought to create a more meritocratic education system. The play was first published in 1914, again a significant year as it was the year in which the Great War started. (J.M. Barrie, *The Admirable Crichton* [London: University of London Press Ltd. 1967])

[111] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 868-870.

Morris in the nineteenth century, in the separation of fine art from design.[112] Bruce's stress on the interrelation of art and design is a manifestation of his aspiration to remove the old values in art education and to replace them with a new set of values along more meritocratic lines. The aspiration to unite art and design was radical in an obvious sense in that it challenged hierarchies and structures. It was also radical, however, in a philosophical sense in that it reflected Herbert Read's aspiration to create an anarchistic society – again in the context of Kant's ideas – by uniting the rational and the intuitive. These issues were thrown into relief for Campbell Bruce and his generation when seen in the context of the developments that had taken place in the Bauhaus in the 1920s, the context of developments in French art and thinking in the 1930s and 1940s, the context of the new political situation in Britain after 1945, and in the context of American influence in the 1950s and 1960s.[113] A new paradigm of art education of which the tutor-student relationship was an integral part and which was founded on freedom and meritocracy was thus developed in the context of the utopian dreams and radical aspirations of many British artists, intellectuals, and educators of the post-war generation. As shown in Chapter 6, in the context of the rapid expansion of the education sector in Great Britain in the 1950s and 1960s this paradigm became institutionalised in fine art education. The thinking that informed this paradigm went on to influence the thinking of a younger generation of which Nigel Rolfe, Rob Smith, and other artists and teachers who were trained in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s belonged. Many of these artists came to the National College of Art and Design as visiting lecturers or external examiners after 1975. Thus the relationship between students and

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[112] See Paul A.C, Sproll, "Matters of Taste and Matters of Commerce: British Government Intervention in Art Education in 1835," *Studies in Art Education* 35 (Winter 1994): 105-113.

[113] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 870-871.

staff, which was manifested in the tutor-student relationship within the new curriculum, was of a different nature than the relationship between staff and students at the National College of Art under the old neo classical curriculum before 1975. This relationship was also by definition radical. The tutor-student relationship was thus a major part of Campbell Bruce's agenda to open up what he saw as structures which reflected old values and which restricted the freedom of students to develop, primarily as artists, but also as autonomous, critical, and independently minded human beings.

13.4.4 *An Open Curriculum: Painting, Sculpture, and Print as One Area*

A key aspect of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty after 1975 on which the above freedom depended was its openness. The reason for this was that, as it aimed to teach the fundamentals and basics of artistic practice as envisioned in the Basic Design system in a context that encouraged individual liberty, it was not permissible to have barriers between different departments. The openness of the curriculum stems directly from the utopian vision of the post-war generation and was asserted in the first Coldstream Report, which demanded an interdisciplinary approach to art education. This openness was a particular feature, it will be remembered, of the curriculum at Goldsmiths' College.[114] This openness was not just a symbolic openness or an openness aimed at giving students a range of different craft skills. Herbert Read had envisioned an openness that went beyond the openness of a curriculum that accepted the interrelatedness of the different disciplines within fine art education for purely practical or technical reasons. In *Education Through Art* he stressed the value of an open curriculum to a truly organic and harmonious society.

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[114] Craig-Martin, *Giving Permission*, 13.

> I believe that what is wrong with our educational system is precisely our habit of establishing separate territories and inviolable frontiers: and the system I propose in the following pages has for its only object the integration of all biologically useful faculties in a single organic activity. In the end I do not distinguish science and art, except as methods, and I believe that the opposition created between them in the past has been due to a limited view of both activities.[115]

For Read and for those that he influenced in the post-war generation of modernist inspired artists, the creative process was not seen as restrictive, closed, or a narrow skill-based activity, but most emphatically as an open and at the same time an integrating activity. The type of open curriculum that developed in fine art education in Great Britain in the immediate post-war era was envisaged in the context of a new and more open society as a new and more open aspect of that society in which art had a significant, meaningful, and integrated role to play. The complex philosophy that A. N. Whitehead espoused in *Adventures of Ideas*, appropriately enough written in the ominous atmosphere of 1933, can be seen as underpinning this new approach to art. In terms of education, as pointed out above, Herbert Read spelled out this new approach in 1943 in *Education Through Art*. As a consequence of this new vision of education, which had the precedent and inspiration of the child centred approach to art teaching of the 1920s and 1930s, the curricula that were developed in British art schools after 1960 allowed students to move freely between disciplines. For many, like the radical students at Hornsey, the provision of open curricula meant that there could be no divisions between faculties. What happened in practice was that the creation of faculties had the effect of isolating areas from each other so that movement and flexibility came to mean movement within faculties.

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[115] Herbert Read, *Education Through Art*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 11.

As mentioned earlier, the pre-1975 structure of the National College of Art was a relatively open structure, though it was, of course, hierarchical. It was quite free in many ways in relation to distinctions between the different areas of the college in terms of interaction between students. What openness there had been did not continue into the new regime, as the creation of the faculty structure after 1975 sanctioned the separation and isolation of the different areas within the college. The separation of areas was precipitous at the National College of Art and Design and had a negative effect on students. This is not surprising given the general situation in the college at this time. Iseult McCarthy has said that, as a consequence of the very confrontational nature of the atmosphere in the college after the introduction of the faculty system in 1975, staff began to build imaginary walls around themselves and their respective areas, and that the whole ethos of the college became defensive.

The ethos of defensiveness that Iseult McCarthy describes had a marked influence on students in the Fine Art faculty who, according to Charlie Brady, literally started to build walls around their studio spaces in order to isolate themselves from each other. One student actually built a cubicle with a lock that no one could enter without knocking. It is highly symbolic that three particular sculpture students in the academic year 1977-1978 built a room out of black plastic in which they sat all day and from which they confronted and provoked, in an aggressive manner, students who did not conform to their ideas. The free, open, and avant-garde nature of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at this time allowed for this as legitimate art practice. Charlie Brady could not understand the desire on the part of students to cut themselves off from each other, and he felt that it was opposed to everything in which he believed. This type of situation did not encourage the development of a pluralist ethos or curriculum in the Fine Art faculty.

As a consequence of the creation of a faculty structure, then, the Fine Art faculty after 1975, like other areas within the college, developed autonomously in terms of its curriculum; however, it still adhered to the philosophy of openness. Thus the curriculum in the faculty did not distinguish between different areas within the faculty itself, and students were free to explore their creative interests in whatever medium or variety of media they chose, whether print, sculpture or painting. There was virtually no communication between the Faculty of Fine Art, the Faculty of Design or the Faculty of Education: this situation still holds today.

Having said this, the success of the openness of the faculty, and the playing down of distinctions between departments as a teaching methodology, is attested by the fact that a number of very successful and well known Irish artists who came through the college at this time work in this way. The work of Kathy Prendergast, which ranges from drawing and painting to three-dimensional work, is the most obvious example of an artist who works in a non-media specific way. Other successful and well-known Irish artists who use a variety of media in their artwork include Aileen MacKeogh and Alanna O'Kelly. Having said this, most graduates of the Fine Art faculty at this time who are practising artists today work in media specific ways.

Broadly speaking, then, after 1975 there was an open curriculum in the Fine Art faculty and students were free to move between departments. In practice, painting, sculpture, and print were separate and distinct areas and students tended to specialise.

13.4.5 *Integrated Individuals: Drawing and the Creative Self*

Consistent with the openness of the curriculum in relation to the different disciplines of art, the course in fine art after 1975 explicitly encouraged students to explore a range of tools and visual language in order to develop skills. In doing this,

the curriculum aspired to open up possibilities for students that would encourage creative development but that would also provide employment. In short, the curriculum hoped to provide students with a broad range of skills that would be of use in a wide variety of future careers.

As the writer interprets it from the evidence of the course documents, from his own experience, and from what former students and staff have said, drawing was seen by the new regime as vital in this context, in that it was perceived as a vehicle that would facilitate the development of the individual's creativity in a broad sense. Drawing, then, as a creative act, allowed the individual student to explore and record his impressions of the visible world using a language that was not restricted by conventions or traditional practises. Drawing was also considered important because it encouraged the student to develop his or her critical faculties. The engagement with the phenomenal world that was the act of drawing, exercised both the spontaneous and intuitive, and the rational and intellectual aspects of the student's mind, as Herbert Read had demanded in *Education Through Art*. This gave free reign to the development of the student's true creative self. The aspects of the student's mind that was brought to life by this process was of such a fundamental nature, according to this way of thinking, that it enabled students subsequently to engage with the world on many different levels and in many different ways. Students who graduated from such a course as this, then, as well as being artists, could, according to Campbell Bruce, work in a diverse range of areas, such as radio, television, stage design, and teaching, any area, in fact, that demanded a creative approach to the world. The acquisition of these basic creative skills, therefore, would by definition open up endless career possibilities for students. Drawing, then, which was interpreted broadly as the outcome of a dialogue between the creative individual, his materials, and the phenomenal world, was seen as vital to

the development of the student and as one of the most important aspects of the course. Drawing was not seen as an end in itself – though drawings could of course be exhibited as individual pieces of art - or as a skill to be learned and used merely to describe reality in a literal or declamatory way.[116]

Nigel Rolfe, the most influential of the staff in the Fine Art faculty in the late seventies and early eighties, gives some idea of this approach to drawing in the following statement:

> [Drawing is] the first stage of recording ideas, dreams, work. [It is] putting something down to go on from, a bridge, fragile, breaking open, untried, fresh, in some way incomplete. It may occur before working or at any time during the process. [It is] question asking and not statement making; how, why, with what, timing, rhythm, form. [It is] usually private but sometimes not. [It can be executed] on paper or as live work. [It helps you to] try to connect directly with your inner thoughts, to bring what is inside out.[117]

The approach to drawing as a way of recording thought was widespread in British art in the 1960s, and was seen by many artists, critics, and art educators as a fundamental aspect of the art making process. Harold Cohen, a high profile British modernist artist of the 1960s was one such artist. Cohen remarked in 1968 that, "Part of me . . . has always maintained that most of what was important in art could be done in a notebook, with a pencil. . . . only with painting it's canvas and colour". He

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[116] It is interesting to note here what Maria Montessori said about drawing, and, appropriately enough, in the epochal context of 1918. "There can be no 'graduated exercises in drawing', leading up to creation. That goal can be attained only through the development of mechanical technique and through freedom of the spirit. That is one reason for not teaching drawing directly to the child. We prepare him indirectly, leaving him free to the mysterious and divine labour of producing things according to his own feelings. Thus drawing comes to satisfy a need for expression, as does language; and almost every idea may seek expression in drawing." (The Advanced Montessori Method, Scientific Pedagogy as Applied to the Education of Children from 7-11 Years [London: Heinemann, 1918]; quoted in Read, *Education Through Art* 113.) Significantly, Montessori went on to say: "Free drawings are possible only when you have a free child who has been allowed to grow and perfect himself in the assimilation of his surroundings and in mechanical reproduction . . . The universal development of the wondrous language of the hand will come not from a 'school of design', but from a 'school of the new man'". (Ibid., 114.)

[117] Paul M. O'Reilly, *The National Collection of Contemporary Drawing*, Vol. I (Limerick: Limerick City Gallery of Art, 1996), 120.

clarified this remark with the following statement: "That remark was directed towards the idea of purpose not of technique. . . . The paintings themselves are the notebook for further development, less the object of public use than the pattern book upon which these objects are fashioned."[118]

Because drawing as a form of exploration, dialogue, and analysis was seen as unstructured engagement with a wide range of materials, it was permissible to use a broad range of materials in drawing. This approach to drawing must be understood in the context of the modernist preoccupation with formal analysis. Nigel Rolfe, for instance, used his whole body as a drawing tool, and he exhibited paintings at the Oliver Dowling gallery in the 1980s which had been made by his rolling in pigment which had been placed directly on the canvas. The new sense of drawing, therefore, as it developed in the post-war era in Great Britain, was both a means of analysis and study of the real world of forms - or phenomena, and a means of self expression, exploration, and creative development. Thus, drawing, in the sense that Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith meant, though vague in the sense of having no specific or tight definition, was a process, and it produced an identifiable and finished end result. This end result could vary from a performance by Nigel Rolfe to a huge realistic drawing of a hand by Kathy Prendergast. The act of drawing by definition resulted in the production of an art object in the sense that Harold Cohen meant in the statement quoted above.

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[118] Harold Cohen, "Comment" *Studio International* 175 (January 1968), 2-3.

13.5 Conclusion

According to the syllabus for 1975 the stated objective of the Fine Art faculty was to train artists. There is no doubt that the curriculum that was in place in the period under discussion worked well as a means of doing just that. A very significant number of Ireland's most successful artists of today attended the college at this time and were trained under the new regime. It is necessary to name but a few: Gwen O'Dowd, Kathy Prendergast, Michael O'Dea, Cecily Brennan, Lorcan Walsh, Paul O'Keefe, and Alanna O'Kelly.

In describing the course that he pursued as a student in his first year in the Fine Art faculty during the academic year 1975-1976, Ollie Whelan describes a course that was intensive, concentrated, and exhausting. This situation had changed by 1977. Speaking of her own experiences in the Fine Art faculty between 1977 and 1980, Gwen O'Dowd also asserts the importance of the project-based program that was mentioned in the course document, and which she found in the faculty when she entered it first as a student. She stresses, however, that the projects were loosely structured and were essentially starting points for creative activity. She also stresses that the curriculum was open-ended enough to allow students such as herself to develop as artists: "When you go to art-college you are constantly exploring possibilities in an effort to develop one's own personal visual language. At the time I attended, it was very much project-based, usually quite open ended, and that really acted as an aid or starting point for researching a subject."[119] Kathy Prendergast, who was in the same year as Gwen O'Dowd and who is now based in England, concurs.[120] She has stated that she was

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[119] Rosemarie Mulcahy, *Gwen O'Dowd*, (Dublin: Gandon Editions, 1994), 13.

[120] At this time the students in the first year of the Fine Art faculty were divided into three different groups: painting, sculpture, and a third group which, though less clearly defined in its orientation

given complete freedom to develop as an artist while attending the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, and she makes it clear that for her there was no pressure whatsoever to produce artwork while pursuing the course.

> The first piece [of art] I made was in my third year in college. . . . I'm always grateful to the National College of Art and Design to have allowed me time. Nowadays on a course you wouldn't last two years not making something. I did make things that were all disasters along the way but I think that space of being left to myself was the best thing that anyone could have given me - time to mature.[121]

The stark contrast between the intensity of the first year in fine art that Ollie Whelan experienced and the more lax situation described by Gwen O'Dowd and Kathy Prendergast may be explained by the fact that Whelan's first year in the Fine Art faculty was the first year of the new course and of the new regime. It would appear therefore that there was in that year a particular and concerted effort to socialise the student intake in order to establish the authority and influence of the new regime. It may also partly be explained by the fact that the foundation area was still dominated at that time by staff who subscribed to the old neo-classically inspired curriculum, and therefore socialisation into the new system had to be carried out in the first year of the fine art course. Thus, as time passed and as the Foundation year came around to the new way of thinking the need for intense induction in first year fine art diminished. Notwithstanding the veracity or otherwise of this speculation, Ollie Whelan found an intensive program in fine art which helped him to develop as an artist, Gwen O'Dowd found a less intensive project based curriculum in the Fine Art faculty which helped her to find her creative voice, and Kathy Prendergast found a curriculum that was so open

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than the other two groups, was broadly speaking, graphics based. Kathy Prendergast was assigned to the latter group. The program in this group was more rigorously project based in the early stages than that of the other two.

[121] John McBratney, "The Art of Kathy Prendergast," in *The Irish Art Review Yearbook*. (Dublin: Ann Rehill, 1998), 183.

that it did not interfere with her slow pace of development, and which allowed her complete freedom to achieve the same end as Whelan and O'Dowd. The curriculum after 1975 thus moulded itself to the needs of the individual student. In terms of providing flexibility to students in order that they might develop their latent artistic personalities in their own time, this course clearly lived up to its claim that it was "visualised as an organic situation which undergoes constant change according to the needs of the individuals who form it."

On a practical level then, the course in fine art involved students doing loosely based projects from which they were expected to develop particular interests. These interests were seen to be both intellectual and technical. Through interaction with materials students were expected to develop these interests to a more highly finished level in the final years of the course. By the end of the course students were expected to have developed technical skills and intellectual interests to a high level of achievement in an artistic sense. They would then be in a position to mount a professional exhibition of their work as artists. The final year show in the college was thus the first step in the career of the young artist.

The ideal scenario would then involve the student renting a studio, producing more work, and subsequently exhibiting in a commercial or state sponsored gallery. In this way there would be a seamless connection between the art college and the career of artist. This is the route that a number of artists have followed since the early 1980s when the first of the major state-supported studios for artists, the Visual Arts Centre, was opened in Strand Street by two National College of Art and Design graduates, Gay Murray and Ollie Whelan. Others who helped found this studio included Eithne Jordan, Gwen O'Dowd and Cecily Brennan. It is noteworthy in relation to the importance placed on the student-tutor relationship at the National College of Art and

Design that Rob Smith was one of the first artists to take a studio in Strand Street.

CHAPTER 14

THE STUDENT RESPONSE TO THE CURRICULUM IN THE FINE ART FACULTY AFTER 1975

14.1 The Response of Students to the Curriculum: (I)

14.1.1 *Introduction*

The response of students to the new curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design after 1975 is illustrated by interviews with former students of the college that the present writer has carried out, some of these interviews are reproduced in the appendices to this work. When these interviews took place it had been between fifteen and twenty-five years since the persons interviewed had attended the college. This lapse in time has made possible a considered reflection on the part of these former students in relation to their experiences at the National College of Art and Design. These interviews, which are considered below, thus provide the reader with a mature response to what happened on the studio floor in the Fine Art faculty during the period under discussion. By chance, another and important source exists which illustrates how students responded to this course at the time without the benefit of hindsight. This source thus provides a more spontaneous view of the curriculum than the interviews that appear in the appendices to this work. This alternative source is provided by a series of interviews that were conducted with students who were

attending the Fine Art faculty in 1979. These interviews were undertaken by a lecturer at the National College of Art and Design, Iseult McCarthy, who subsequently became Professor of Education at the college. These interviews were carried out in relation to a thesis that Professor McCarthy was writing for the Department of Higher Education and Research at Trinity College Dublin on the subject of creativity, introversion, and communication through art.[1] Although the specific issues that Professor McCarthy addresses in her dissertation are not particularly relevant to the present study, the interviews themselves are enormously useful in assessing the influence of the curriculum on students at a point in time when they were pursuing the course in the Fine Art faculty. The interviews, which were transcribed by Professor McCarthy, are reproduced verbatim in an appendix to her dissertation, which can be consulted in the library at Trinity College Dublin.

These interviews, which were carried out with students in their second and third years of the course, present a candid reaction on the part of these students to the curriculum. In these interviews the students were asked to discuss their interests and objectives as creative artists by answering questions about particular pieces of their own artwork which the students themselves had chosen. Professor McCarthy was particularly interested in discussing this work in relation to the issue of communication through art. Students were not asked to make judgements on or to describe the curriculum, they were asked to describe their own work and their objectives in making this work. The candid responses of the students therefore reflect the influence or otherwise of the curriculum on their thinking. Professor McCarthy interviewed fifteen students.

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[1] Iseult McCarthy, *Creativity, Introversion, and Communication Through Art* (M. Ed. diss., University of Dublin, Trinity College, 1989)

14.1.2 *Professor McCarthy's Interviews*

In discussing their artwork, the students whom Professor McCarthy interviewed – and these include the present writer and Gwen O'Dowd - express a variety of opinions, motivations and objectives. These opinions, motivations, and objectives reveal the values that were held by them at this time. Broadly speaking, the students that were interviewed by Professor McCarthy fall between two poles. On one extreme are those students who fully accepted the values of the new curriculum, and therefore of the new English staff, and who aimed in their work to express ideas that came from two sources - the artwork itself, and their own preoccupations and interests. The ideas of these students were expressed through a variety of media, and their work tended to be abstract. The working methods described by these students are invariably in line with the methodology suggested in the syllabus document for 1975. On the other extreme are those students who worked in a more traditional mode, who aspired to describe the world as they saw it in a representational manner, who had aspirations that related to the acquisition of skill and the learning of technique, and who did not subscribe to the values of the new curriculum and the new English staff. The work of these students tended to be representational.

As Professor McCarthy's interviews make clear, the work of students who were inspired by the values of the new English staff tended to be self-referential and is often based on the response of these students to some particular source that inspired them. Sometimes the response of the students to this source is expressed in terms of feelings and sometimes the source inspired ideas. The response of students to source is always expressed in terms that address the qualities of materials. These students usually approach materials in a loose, unrestricted, and freely expressive way. Quite often the materials themselves are the source of inspiration. At other times the source of

inspiration is the world outside, the world of phenomena. Sometimes the work of the student is a response to a combination of things. In expressing their ideas about their work all of the students discussed particular pieces of artwork that are illustrated in Professor McCarthy's thesis. As Professor McCarthy preserved the anonymity of the students who were interviewed, the present writer will do the same.

14.1.2.1 *The Interviews: Students who Subscribed to the New Aesthetic.*

When asked why he had painted a particular painting, a question that was addressed to all of the students interviewed by Professor McCarthy, one particular student whose work subscribed to the aesthetic values of the new English staff, asserted a self referential and teleological artistic process. The work of this student, which was purely abstract, formal, and minimalist, was noted for its subtle, understated, serene quality, and, significantly, for its very logical, progressive, and analytical methodology:

> I painted it to find out more about what I was working on . . . [Painting is] a progressive, autonomous thing . . . It's an autonomous thing in which I immersed myself. I look at it [this painting] and look at it, then get an inclination of what to do the next day. It's that kind of process . . .. As the work goes on I take ideas from it.[2]

A different student expressed the same themes with the following comment: "The inspiration was the actual image itself. . . . I had a strong feeling for this work. The idea came later. . . . My feeling was totally one of response to the image."[3] The painting being discussed by this student was purely abstract.

Another student, whose work was three dimensional, non-traditional, and made with found objects like bits of plastic, wood and string, also echoed the ideas expressed

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[2] Ibid., 48.

[3] Ibid., 307.

in the new curriculum. The comments of this student were in line with those of the above two students. The discarded materials with which this student's work was made gave to the work a very tactile, visceral and organic aspect. In response to the same question that was asked of the other students this student revealed a particular interest in ideas, in abstract forms, in drawing in a very loose sense as it was defined by the new English staff, in expressing feelings through materials, and in working from a particular source.

> I started off with drawings, drawing everything around me, they provided the source . . . There is a balance of idea and feeling in what my work says . . . Ideas and what I write on my work are very important but personal to me. I pick up on visual images to do with time, a total feeling. . . . Like clear bright spaces which really reach me . . . For me this is clouds. When I was in the States [working in the summer holidays] the skies and sky lines hit me, a real physical excitement But release is the main thing, the basic wish to put it down in some work. [My work is] much more expressive than communication. I question the communication aspect of it. [Art] is about where you as artist fit in. . . . I'm concerned with feeling, expression, not words, communication. . . . I want to express the state I'm in at a given moment.[4]

The comments of one student, a more traditional figure painter, who pursued a different agenda than that laid down by the new English staff, nonetheless reveals the influence of the new English staff. This student, who is today a well-known artist – at the time of writing he is a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy and of Aosdana – produced work that was very skilled and realistic in a traditional manner but which was also dynamic, colourful and expressive. The work of this student was almost exclusively based on the figure. Like the previous students, this student expressed an interest in feelings and ideas, but, by contrast with the last student, who wanted to express an emotional state through materials, this student sought to impose his

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[4] Ibid., 260.

personality onto the artwork: "Technique, feeling, and ideas are all important. If I work on something I like to leave something of myself in it, to try and project my personality onto it."[5]

One of the most comprehensive descriptions of the creative process as it was defined in the new curriculum was given by another student when describing a particular project that was set by Nigel Rolfe. The particular artwork that this student was discussing was a site-specific installation. The project that stimulated the production of this particular piece of art was to be carried out in the Project Art Centre, which was an experimental art gallery with which Nigel Rolfe was closely associated. The comments of this student, whose unconventional and very unobtrusive work was not specific to any particular medium, but which roamed through different media, address the usual themes of the new curriculum. In particular, this student asserts a belief in the progressive nature of a form based approach to making art. It is interesting to note the emphasis given to the notion of art as play by this student.

> The first thing I did was go to the gallery and sit for an hour in the space I had been given. It was a great 'high', no pressure. So I played there, alone. It was really exciting. I stood on my head and just enjoyed the space, becoming in tune with it. I got a very strong reminder of little camps we used to make as kids. . . . I just got a feeling of the space. That was what I wanted to do, make it my space. So then I decided to make a space within a space. I decided that during this time I would let my whole living revolve around this space. I would see how people reacted in other space in relation to my space. Because of the way I felt I wanted to use a natural primitive material. I chose string because it drew lines in space. The more I worked in this space the more . . . ideas came, one leading to the other.[6]

The comments of another student, who is today a very successful Irish artist and a member of Aosdana, and whose gritty, tactile, very dark and colourless paintings

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[5] Ibid., 270.

[6] Ibid., 291.

reflected the dingy nature of the city of Dublin that inspired them, illustrate a particular preoccupation with materials. The comments of this student illustrate the importance that was placed by the authors of the new curriculum on source, and on the notion that the creative act must be a response to a particular source in the phenomenal world. In common with other students, this student saw the creative act as a process. Also, just as the comments of a number of other students repeatedly assert the belief that ideas and feelings are interconnected so do those of this student. The belief that feelings and ideas are interrelated has its origins, as shown in Chapter 1, in the thinking of Kant and was a vital notion in post-war British aesthetics and in the philosophy that underpinned the Basic Design process.

> I was working from a precise charcoal drawing of the surface of wood. It was a development. I don't think I thought about it at all, I just did it. . . . It started with this drawing which I did last year. . . . It was a feeling for the surface of wood. The idea was in the feeling. . . . I don't think we can separate the feeling from the idea.[7]

Continuing the Kantian theme of the interrelationship of feelings and ideas, another student says: "I'd say this work is mostly about feelings and ideas. The feelings are very immediate when I am working, even though the idea may come first".[8]

The comments of another student, a painter whose work was more expressionistic than that of other students, continues the theme of formal issues as the driving force for creative endeavour. This painter's interests lay at the time in pure abstraction. Organic processes and the hermetic nature of modern art are other themes that are asserted by this student: "It [this painting] came about from other work [and] is contained within itself. It is self sufficient and not related to anything in the outside

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[7] Ibid., 306.

[8] Ibid., 313.

world."[9] In going on to describe a particular painting on heavy card that was irregular in shape, jagged edged, and emotionally intense in terms of colour, texture, and form, and yet which was very sensitively painted, this student went on to stress the sovereignty of art: "When I am finished with it, it is responsible for itself without having me to back it up. Once I've made it I cease to matter. The ideas I've got from doing it might help later and come into other work. But once I've finished with it I don't care what happens to it."[10]

In throwing some light on what happens in the mind of the artist while making artwork that is self-referential, this student describes an almost meditative process. "Once you start to paint an intuitive thing takes over. Things stop and you are isolated, you shut out everything. It's an all-over feeling . . . very quiet and full. You live in the work while you are making it."[11] Having described this almost religious state, this student went on to invoke the spirit of Rousseau and the primitive ideal: "I'm very interested in primitive feelings. The veneer of over-civilisation feels wrong. The primitive thing has less hang ups."[12] Continuing the allusion to Rousseau, and echoing the sentiments of many thinkers and artists since the Enlightenment on the subject of progress and civilisation, this student says regretfully, "I think we have lost so much."[13]

Maurice De Sausmarez in his description of the Basic Design process, as shown in Chapter 5, held that materials and formal relationships were as valid a source for the stimulation of the artist's feelings and ideas as nature or anything else. This belief was,

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[9] Ibid., 313.

[10] Ibid., 313.

[11] Ibid., 313.

[12] Ibid., 313.

[13] Ibid., 313.

as shown earlier, an important aspect of the course in the Fine Art faculty after 1975. In this context it is interesting to note that the same student quoted above goes on to make the following statement:

> I'd say this work is mostly about my feelings and ideas. The feelings are very immediate when I am working even though the idea may come first. I limit myself on purpose to materials. I make my work problematic and try to set myself problems. The feelings are to do with coping with the immediacy of actually working.[14]

The same student goes on to assert that the artistic process was self referential, autonomous, and teleological, and that it focused solely on the creative development of the individual, even to the extent of the isolation of the artist from the real world: "The subject is the thing itself . . . It was the motivation. . . . It's expressive. It is very much art for the artist. Sometimes you do a work and it's only for yourself or the future. It's a twilight zone sort of thing. It doesn't matter much and is only meant to get information from."[15]

For many of the students who were most influenced by the new curriculum the idea that art was a process was a firmly held belief. For a number of these students the artistic process is seen as analogous to natural processes and cycles. These students see the relationship between themselves and the world, especially in relation to the production of art, as an organic relationship. Though it may not be obvious to the uninitiated viewer of the particular piece of art that is being discussed, this relationship is often seen as the vital ingredient for the student. Implicit in this belief for many students is the idea that the same organic relationship should underpin society; thus these students see their work as critical of society. This belief often leads to alienation

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[14] Ibid., 313-314.

[15] Ibid., 315.

as a theme of artistic expression. Alienation is, of course, an ubiquitous theme in art which has inspired Winckleman, Ruskin, Giacometti, the Abstract Expressionists, and many more. Alienation as a theme is common in much of the artwork that is discussed here. In asserting this theme a number of students allude to organic processes in their comments and see their artwork as having an organic aspect, as something which grows organically in the act of making, and as something which has an existence of its own that is independent of the artist and of society. One student, who worked in a progressive and reductive way, says of a particularly abstract painting that it was just one "stage in a whole body of work. . . . [This is] a body of work I've been working on for a year and three-quarters."[16] Another student, whose work was unselfconscious, non declamatory, and developmental, stated that as an artist she "is growing all the time, . . . my work is a changing thing . . . I consider things in a whole sense."[17] And the student who made the very unobtrusive, unconventional and multi media work at the Project Gallery that was mentioned earlier, in discussing another piece of work, this time a painting, made a clear reference to the organicist philosophy underpinning the curriculum in the following statement:

> Around the time I did that I was beginning to use nature as a source to try and communicate mental movements and philosophical things. Things like cycles, growth, and natural surroundings. . . . I was trying to grow a painting rather than make it. I wanted to enable it to grow by each mark I made. When it stopped growing it was finished.[18]

Note the passive and non-declamatory role of the artist that is implied in this quotation. The same student continues this theme later on where, in echoing Itten's interest in the

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[16] Ibid., 279.

[17] Ibid., 261.

[18] Ibid., 280.

use of opposites as a creative force, she says: "[The creative process] is a focussing in. The most direct inspiration [for this painting] was the idea of a cycle. . . . There are ideas of duality in it, of opposites working together . . . It's about the idea of growth, the relationship between growth and a cycle."[19]

Continuing this theme, and in echoing the concerns of Kant, Read, and the new curriculum, this student goes on to criticise a declamatory approach to the making of art and the idea that art was about communicating in a literal sense. In doing this, this student asserts the fact that art was an effort to communicate something very deep:

> If someone [the artist] sets out to communicate they don't allow for growth within the work. The natural ability of painting is expressive, subconscious. . . . I'd hope [that the viewer of this painting gets] a feeling of a natural pattern which is in the painting in the form of a cycle. It is not strong enough to be a feeling of growth cycle, but is strong enough to give the feeling of an ongoing movement, no reference to man, but mental and physical.[20]

Another student, whose work was discussed earlier and who had a particular interest in working from source material, also asserts process as a methodology that has an analogous relationship with natural processes. In the case of the particular painting that was being discussed with Professor McCarthy the source material that inspired this statement was a piece of discarded wood. "It was a development. . . . I started with this drawing which I did last year and which I really liked. . . . The idea was in the feeling. But the idea was also to do with the nature of wood, the way it expands, the core of it."[21]

Continuing the theme of process, another student, whose expressive and abstract

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[19] Ibid., 288.

[20] Ibid., 289. In this context it is noteworthy that Herbert Read was very influenced as a young man during the First World War by the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche.

[21] Ibid., 306.

work has already been discussed, states the following in discussing a different piece of artwork:

> It's a stage of development . . . It is a finished piece but it hasn't ended. The line of thought is still going on. The three pieces I did before this were essential to the existence of this work. I use a sort of elimination process in my work. I get a lot of ideas together then cut them down to one strong idea.[22]

The idea of questioning as a key part of the creative process, which was such a vital aspect of the curriculum, was stressed by a number of students. One student stated quite clearly: "I wanted to find out more, to answer questions".[23] Another said: "I wasn't working for a long time, I was frustrated and questioned the value of painting. 'Why painting?' I said to myself. I didn't want to paint permanent static things. The 'why?' is a natural impulse and a very necessary one. It is the way I can get things out of myself."[24]

An interesting feature of Professor McCarthy's interviews is the way in which they reveal the belief of some students that the source of their inspiration is outside of themselves and that their approach to materials is a disinterested one. In expressing this belief, these students are adhering to the requirement, which was made clear in the syllabus document for 1975, that artistic expression must be non-declamatory. This non-declamatory approach to artwork is asserted in the comments of one particular student, who stated that the painting that was being discussed was the result of a process over which he had very little control: "[It was] an autonomous thing in which I immersed myself. If there was inspiration it came from the painting. It's more free than

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[22] Ibid., 313.

[23] Ibid., 248.

[24] Ibid., 259.

controlled [by the artist]." The same student went on to state that art was "the sounding board of the world; you project yourself onto it."[25]

Continuing this theme, another student said: "I just let whatever happens come on to whatever I'm doing."[26] And another student, this time a photographer, said, "What happens with photography is that despite all your preoccupations something just hits you and you take it. . . . This picture just had to be taken".[27] Continuing this theme, and in conflating the autonomous, organic, and non-declamatory nature of art and in portraying a particular piece of artwork as a living thing, another student said the following: "I wanted to enable it to grow by each mark I made. Like any other relationship it takes on a life of its own and you have to be prepared to stop and listen to that".[28] Later on the same student made the ultimate statement in support of a non-declamatory approach to the creative process when he said that, in making a particular piece of art, "I was trying to get outside of myself".[29]

The issue of the student's future, the issue of life after college, and the relevance of art to the outside world, which the written documents stressed were of central importance to the curriculum, seem to have had no real impact on the studio floor. It will be recalled that the syllabus document for 1975 stated that students must "break down the barriers between the art school and the real world". The outside world and life after college were, however, present to the minds of some of the students, as the following comment makes clear: "In college you are isolated. You don't have to think

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[25] Ibid., 249.

[26] Ibid., 259.

[27] Ibid., 280.

[28] Ibid., 288.

[29] Ibid., 289.

of outside or of an observer. You do it more for yourself . . . though I do think an awful lot about [what happens] afterwards".[30] Finally, a particularly candid student revealed a solipsistic and dilettantish attitude in the following comment: "In the college everything is egocentric, you fall back on yourself as the centre of the earth. So maybe you become a bit self-indulgent. I've got time, space and money . . . to fall back on myself. So I fall back on my own experiences."[31]

14.1.2.2 *The Interviews: Students who did not Subscribe to the New Aesthetic*

Before the responses of the students who did not subscribe to the new aesthetic are looked at, it must be stated that, regardless of whether students supported traditional aesthetic values or those of the post 1975 curriculum, all of the students, with one exception, according to Professor McCarthy, expressed an equal concern to express themselves through their work and to communicate through their work.

In relation to the students whose work was of a more traditional type, or perhaps, more accurately, who did not embrace the aesthetic values of the new curriculum so wholeheartedly, a number of issues are shown to be of concern. Many of these issues overlap with those of the other group, but most of them reflect more traditional values and a more traditional approach to art making. A significant number of students who did not identify with the values expressed in the new curriculum, for example, expressed an interest in addressing a subject that was outside of themselves in their work, but in a more literal, descriptive, and traditionally artistic sense than that of the students who subscribed to the aesthetic values of the new curriculum. One such student, in discussing a realistic painting of a shop-front, said, "I felt a need to do it.

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[30] Ibid., 262.

[31] Ibid., 270.

My interest [was] in the subject and my need to make art as well as respond to the environment".[32] Later on the same student said, "The subject is completely the inspiration. The particular subject [of this work] is just a bit of the total subject, which is the sounds and smells of Dublin".[33]

In discussing a realistic portrait that was very much a description of the sitter, another student stated:

> Usually when I work it is to do with my own attitude to things. In this one I'm interested in reading people. I've been absorbed with them. I want to see what they have to say. I'm socially conscious. . . . I don't know, . . . I like to pinpoint one thing and look at it closely. Its very internal, my approach to art. I am trying to get into something from the inside.[34]

This student was interested in developing more traditional drawing skills, and also in developing some kind of relationship with her subject and with the real world.

Another student for whom art was also a means of relating to the real world, in discussing a figurative drawing of the model, stated that in making this drawing his interest was in developing his technique in a traditional manner and in describing what he saw in a realistic manner:

> The fact that there is someone sitting doing something interested me. The body is more interesting while involved in doing something. . . . The feeling in my work is like Millet and the peasants, the subject and the work, the being involved in an occupation. It has more relevance to everyday life. . . . The girl [model] provided the inspiration, her unusual clothes and nimble fingers. She was doing some crochet, creating a piece of work. The painting is very much concerned with technique.[35]

Another student, in explaining his reason for painting an impressionistic, colourful,

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[32] Ibid., 322.

[33] Ibid., 325.

[34] Ibid., 332.

[35] Ibid., 339-340.

and realistic image of a brightly-lit shop window, also expressed an interest in describing the world that he saw in an objective way. The particular picture that was being discussed was painted, according to this student, "because I wanted to catch some of the atmosphere of a shop window as I looked at it. The colours in the window are really brilliant".[36] In discussing a small, multicoloured, very sensuous and detailed semi-abstract landscape, another student made it clear that he had no interest in the aesthetic values of the new curriculum and that abstract ideas in particular were not his interest. This painting, he said, "followed a trip to the country. It's about techniques and feelings rather than ideas. . . . The landscape in part of the work is taken directly from nature. . . . In this work I painted in order to communicate. I didn't distort the landscape."[37]

A number of the students who did not support the values of the Post-1975 curriculum stated that the learning of craft and technique were their key interests. One particular student said: "I wasn't so concerned with the philosophy of art as the practice of it. . . . I have to learn this trade".[38] Later on, in discussing a very realistic, bright, colourful and yet loose and sensitive painting, the same student said, "[In this painting] I was trying technique . . . improving my drawing, finding new ways of working".[39] And another student, in discussing a small, fluid, and loose pen and ink double portrait, said, "By drawing [these people] I hope to draw what they would say. But I couple this with the technical thing".[40] And, interestingly, in echoing Professor

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[36] Ibid., 346.

[37] Ibid., 361.

[38] Ibid., 322.

[39] Ibid., 323.

[40] Ibid., 332.

Kelly's assertion that the learning of craft was the primary concern of tertiary art education and that the expression of ideas were secondary, another student said: "But first of all you want to express yourself. Then when you can draw you are free to start to think about communicating".[41] A figurative painter, in discussing a painting of a clothed figure and addressing the fact that for much of the time there was no heat in the studios, said, "Life class, it's winter, and there's no heat. I'm not interested in drawing from the nude figure. I'm more interested in life drawing as training."[42] And yet another student said, "I wanted to master the thing I was doing, to have control. I did it in order to improve technique".[43]

Other themes that were dealt with by students who favoured a more traditional way of working, and who had no interest in expressing themselves in terms of the new curriculum, included a search for truth, alienation, and the projection of ideas. On a technical level, interestingly, colour and composition were mentioned as issues that those students who did not subscribe to the values of the new curriculum would like to address in their work.

And finally, one particular student who worked in the realist tradition went against one of the most basic tenets of the post 1975 curriculum, which stated that art does not deal with beauty, when he said that, "Art deals with beauty without necessarily being pretty".[44]

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[41] Ibid., 332.

[42] Ibid., 339.

[43] Ibid., 370.

[44] Ibid., 322.

14.1.3 *A Summary of the Situation in the Fine Art Faculty as indicated by Professor McCarthy's Interviews*

The students that Professor McCarthy interviewed formed two different and distinct groups: those whose work and ideas embraced the aesthetic values of the new curriculum, and those whose work and ideas did not. Eight of the students interviewed by Professor McCarthy subscribed to the values of the new curriculum and seven did not. Broadly speaking, of those students who subscribed to the principles on which the new curriculum was founded the expression of ideas was the main concern. On a technical level, formal and abstract interests prevailed in this group. In terms of methodology, process was the governing principle. The students who did not subscribe to the new curriculum generally subscribed to an aesthetic that demanded some form of recognisable visual imagery in two dimensions. These students generally tried to depict what they saw or felt by using recognisable imagery. Sometimes this involved the use of colour, patterns, and other formal but recognisably realistic arrangements. Often this involved the use of imagery from the real world that struck an emotional chord with the artist; landscape, cityscape, and people were the most common source of imagery.

An insight into the difference between the two modes of working within the Fine Art faculty at this time is provided by the different approaches of two particular students who were interviewed by Professor McCarthy, both of whom were also interviewed by the present author. Both of these students shared an interest in the city of Dublin, and in particular they shared an interest in the destruction and decay caused by urban blight. At the time when Professor McCarthy's interviews were carried out Dublin was going through a particularly bad period in its history, and the old city was

being destroyed systematically by speculators. At the time when these two students attended the National College of Art and Design the protest against the destruction of the old Viking site at Wood Quay was at its height - it will be recalled that the course document for 1975 described the recent architecture of Dublin as an obscenity.

In response to the environment of destruction and decay that in many ways defined the city of Dublin in the 1970s, one of the students being discussed made drawings of the textures of the city. These textures were recorded in drawings that were made by this student in situ from bits of broken wood, stone, iron, and other such debris. Having brought these drawings back to the studio this student made paintings that were derived from these drawings. These paintings were built up in layers, were heavily textured, and tended to be grey, black, muddy, and abstract. They gave an appropriate feeling of the grimy and run-down condition of the city at the time. This student's work was almost exclusively studio based and college centred, and once the original source had been explored in terms of drawing the work was exclusively preoccupied with process, and with abstract and formal concerns. The style of this work was consistent with the demands of the new curriculum. It was based on observation of the phenomenal world. It was analytical. It was form based. It was non-declamatory, and its theme was universal. This student got on very well in the faculty and built up a close and supportive relationship with her tutor, who was one of the new English staff.

The other student, by contrast, though interested in the same theme, developed a very negative relationship with the staff in the faculty who supported the new curriculum. The reason for this was the wish of this student to paint the city in a realistic and naturalistic fashion, using traditional skill-based techniques. As a consequence of opposition from the staff who represented the new values of the post-

1975 curriculum, this student more or less abandoned the fine art studios and went out into the city where he spent hours exploring its nooks and crannies. This student took hundreds of photographs of the people and places of the city of Dublin; he also made drawings, paintings, and etchings in a realistic manner of particular places in the city. In travelling around the city this student got to know people who lived in the city and became very actively involved in the various protests against the destruction of Dublin. The most prominent of these was the Wood Quay protest. Some of the places and people with which this student had built up a relationship, which was often a very emotional relationship, were painted in a realistic fashion over and over again. The subject of this student's work was the city of Dublin, but, interestingly, given the predilection of modernism for universal themes, specific places and people within the city. These people and places were described in this student's artwork in a realistic and recognisable manner. The artwork of this student was thus not abstract and universal in its focus, the favoured approach of modernism, but was realistic and local.

In summary, one of the above two students worked in an abstract manner that was in line with the methodology and ideas that were laid down in the new curriculum. This student identified closely with the new English staff. The other student worked in a realistic and skill-based manner that was not in line with the values expressed in the new curriculum. This student most emphatically did not identify with the new English staff.

The important thing to note about these two students, as already stated, is that the first student, who took a formalist approach, was given support by the dominant staff in the faculty, whereas the second student met with opposition from these same staff. According to his own testimony, and as the present writer recalls very clearly, the student who pursued a realistic style was actively discouraged from pursuing his

artistic objectives. Both of these former students are today practising artists, and both of them continue to work in the same style that they used while at the National College of Art and Design. Only one of them, the student who worked in an abstract style, earns a living as an artist; the other student survives today by other means unrelated to the practice of art.

The different responses of the dominant members of staff in the Fine Art faculty to the work of the above two students illustrates the fact that formalism was the dominant and favoured style at the National College of Art and Design when the above students were in attendance. It also illustrates the fact that a particular effort was made to instil the principles of modernism. The situation of the above two students in the Fine Art faculty at this time makes it very clear that the realistic depiction of specific themes and sources was frowned upon by the staff who supported the new curriculum in the faculty. This was especially so if artwork contained an emotional, expressive, or declamatory aspect. It is significant in this context that formalism was at its most potent and influential in international art and in Irish art at this time.

As pointed out earlier, the power and influence of American formalist art at this time was embodied in the person of the eminent art critic Clement Greenberg. It is an interesting coincidence in the present context that Greenberg spoke at the Fourteenth Congress of the International Association of Art Critics that was held at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1980. Appropriately, and coincidentally in relation to the work of the two students discussed above, the theme of this conference was international influence on local art communities. In his comments at this conference Greenberg asserted the superiority and hegemony of western culture, or "the transcendent vitality of western art", as Conor Cruise O'Brien put it at the conference, over non-western cultures and civilisations. What Greenberg had in mind, of course, was modernism.

The present writer, who attended Greenberg's lecture, recalls being impressed and disturbed by the vehemence of Greenberg's condemnation of non-western cultures for their backwardness and provinciality. Greenberg's comments at this conference, in the present writer's opinion, were arrogant and superior.[45] This arrogance and superiority illustrates the fact that modernism, and in particular the type of formalism that Greenberg supported at this time, had reached a peak of achievement and power which reflected one side of a bifurcated world. This world, which was divided economically, politically and culturally had many facets: rich and poor, east and west, developed and undeveloped, capitalist and communist. It is no accident that post-modernism, which at this time represented an assault on the modernist edifice, was gaining momentum in the 1970s and 1980s. Given the remarkable confidence of Greenberg, it is no coincidence that the dominant position of modernism in the modern world, and thus the high status which modernism had by contrast with non-metropolitan or traditional art forms, was reflected in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design at this time. The approach of staff who supported the new curriculum in the faculty to the work of the two students discussed above was a reflection of this situation. It is significant in this context that there was a close relationship between the staff in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design who supported the new curriculum, and the Irish Exhibition of Living Art group, which was the dominant group of artists in the Dublin art world at this time. According to Brian King, the Irish Exhibition of Living Art represented the cultural elite of the contemporary Irish art world. Brian King, Nigel Rolfe, Rob Smith, Ciaran Lennon and the sculptor Mick O'Sullivan, who all taught in the Fine Art faculty at this time, were closely associated with the Irish

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[45] Clement Greenberg, "Oral Discourse," *International Influence on Local Art Communities: Proceedings of the 14th Congress of AICA (International Association of Art Critics) Congress Held in Dublin August/September 1980* ed. Dr. John Turpin (Dublin: AICA, 1980), 134 – 136; 153.

Exhibition of Living Art group.

The historian Peter Gay has suggested that the broad context in which the Enlightenment took place was man's recovery of nerve after various catastrophic set backs to progress during the Middle Ages, such as the Great Plague.[46] For many people during the second half of the twentieth century modernism symbolised progress, sophistication, and the culmination of modern western civilisation, as initiated by the Enlightenment. It might be suggested, then, that man's recovery of nerve after the devastation of the Middle Ages had by the late twentieth century, in the comments of Greenberg at this conference, developed into an arrogant and superior confidence.

14.2 The Response of Students to the Curriculum: (II)

14.2.1 *Introduction*

The interviews that Professor McCarthy carried out in the Fine Art faculty in 1979 make it very clear that the aesthetic values of the new English staff, which were manifested in the syllabus document of 1975, had been successfully incorporated into the new course as it was put into practice on the studio floor. These interviews also make it clear that the same values had been fully absorbed by a significant number of students, and especially by those students who chose to work in the modernist mode. Professor McCarthy's interviews also make it clear that not all students subscribed to these values, and that there was a second group of students whose interests lay in a skill-based approach to the making of art. There were thus two distinct groups of students in the Fine Art faculty at this time: those who followed the new curriculum

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[46] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 3-12.

enthusiastically and who accepted its principles, and those who did not. The work of the students who supported the values of the new curriculum, as Professor McCarthy's interviews show, tended to focus on ideas and on the broad range of materials through which these ideas could be expressed. The themes chosen by these students echoed those of the syllabus document of 1975 and tended to be general in their nature and universal in their aspiration; for example, growth, process, disinterested personal development and expression. The work of the students who did not subscribe to the values of the new curriculum aspired to technical improvement and the development of skill. The work of these students favoured specific and objective themes and a more naturalistic approach to the making of artwork. Though naturalistic, the approach of these students was not necessarily traditional or neo-classically inspired.

The interviews that Professor McCarthy carried out were a record of what students felt their work was about at a specific point in time during their student years. The interviews that the present writer conducted, by contrast, were not a record of a particular point in time. They were a record of the students' mature response, with the benefit of hindsight, to the three or four years that they spent in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design. These interviews will now be looked at in order to explore more fully and in greater depth what happened on the studio floor. The present writer interviewed formally four of the students who were interviewed by Professor McCarthy.

The interviews on which this chapter is based are not meant to be a detailed description of everything that happened in the Fine Art faculty between 1975 and 1988. Neither are they meant to be a progressive analysis of the relationship between the faculty and the administration of the college in a bureaucratic or academic sense. Rather, they are an attempt to build up an understanding of the influences that lay

behind the curriculum, of how these influences were brought to bear on students, and of what happened on the studio floor as a direct consequence of these influences. Issues that are illuminated by the interviews include the following: the influence or otherwise of the course documents on the curriculum, the influence of the curriculum on the studio floor, the methodology of the course as it was practised on the studio floor, the relationship between staff and students, the relationship between the different departments within the faculty, and finally how conflict between different ideological positions affected the curriculum and the student body. Because of the need to get a broad understanding of what happened on the studio floor the interviews are discursive in nature. Twenty-two people were interviewed formally and in depth. Fourteen of these interviews were taped. Nine relate to persons who were students at the college between 1975 and 1988, the time span covered by this study. Transcripts of the taped interviews are reproduced in the appendices that appear in Volume Two.

Though not all of the former students whose comments are discussed in this chapter make a living as artists most are today practising artists. These former students provide a cross section of the student body, and they represent all shades of opinion in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion.

Representing the abstract extreme of contemporary painting is Ciaran Lennon, whose work is minimalist and formalist. Lennon, who is a well-known artist and a member of Aosdona and whose work is noted for its austerity, attended the National College of Art and Design as a student in the 1960s. He did not study at this time for the Diploma but for the Art Teacher's Certificate. Lennon returned to the college as a student in the seventies to study for the college diploma. He thus has the unique experience of having studied under both the old curriculum and the new curriculum.

Lennon taught extensively at the college in the seventies and early eighties, and has since, on occasion, been a visiting lecturer. Representing a completely different aspect of contemporary painting is Lorcan Walsh. Walsh's work, which is highly crafted and skilful, is representational and traditional in terms of materials and style, and it is often neo-classical in inspiration. Walsh has never taught at the National College of Art and Design. Though all of the persons interviewed are Irish in terms of belonging to the broad community of contemporary Irish artists, Simon McLeod is Scottish by birth and Brian Palm is American. Ciaran Lennon and Gwen O'Dowd are high profile modernists who inhabit the mainstream of acknowledged and lauded Irish artists. Both of these artists are members of *Aosdana*, and both have taught extensively at the National College of Art and Design. Mick O'Dea is a realist artist, a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy, and a full time lecturer in Core Studies at the National College of Art and Design. Ollie Whelan is a practising artist and a full time member of staff in the Fine Art faculty. Simon McLeod, who works in an impressionistic style and who is recognised as a significant artist in that style, is a struggling artist. The livelihoods of Lorcan Walsh and Brian Palm, who are both practising artists and who exhibit regularly, are independent of the Dublin art world. At the time of writing both of these artists work in a realistic style.

14.2.2 *The Positive Aspects of the Course*

Ollie Whelan, who has been teaching painting in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design since 1979, entered the faculty as a student in 1975. His first year in the faculty was the academic year 1975/76. This was the same year that Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith initiated the new curriculum. In line with the objective of the new English staff to eliminate the influence of the old curriculum and of those

associated with fine art education at the college before the new curriculum was introduced in 1975, Whelan recalls a course that was run exclusively and intensively in the first year by Rolfe and Smith. This course, which was based on projects of one or two week's duration, as the syllabus document of 1975 specified, was rigorous, according to Whelan, and students worked from nine in the morning till late in the evening. Though Smith and Rolfe worked in tandem, Whelan states that there was a contrast between their personalities and approach to art. Nigel Rolfe was very much concerned with what was happening in the contemporary art scene. Rob Smith was more interested in art as an aspect of the personality. For Smith, according to Whelan, art was a form of enlightenment and a form of self-knowledge that involved an almost religious sensibility.[47] For Rolfe art was a professional occupation.

According to Whelan, the projects that students did in the early stages of the course were open ended, experimental, and about "pushing the boundaries of language".[48] These projects, in which drawing played a major part, were about helping the students to develop their ideas about art – its aims, its objectives, its formal aspects, its theoretical aspects. According to a number of former students, drawing as a way of putting ideas together very quickly was a major preoccupation of Rob Smith. Smith, as already stated, saw drawing as a way of collecting visual information. Essentially Smith saw drawing as the art of "focussing". According to Smith, drawing "brings one's consciousness to a higher state of awareness".[49] Simon McLeod, who attended the college a few years after Ollie Whelan, has the following to say about the approach to drawing in the faculty: "Drawing was christened mark making . . .. Drawing was

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[47] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1141.

[48] Ibid., 1142.

[49] Rob Smith, "Notes", National College of Art and Design archives, Rob Smith File.

encouraged to exist, not in its own right but to show the flatness of the surface, to demonstrate the flatness of paper. Drawing as a means of putting thought on paper was another big thing repeatedly put to us."[50]

Gwen O'Dowd's first impression of the Fine Art faculty was a drawing project that she did as a pre-diploma student while on a two week block in the Fine Art faculty during the academic year 1976/77. This block, which was given by Rob Smith, was aimed at introducing pre-diploma students to the Fine Art faculty. According to O'Dowd, "It was a life drawing project, we were all kneeling on the floor with newsprint, looking up at two models, which we had never done before from that angle, a simple thing like that. Rather than sitting in front of a model, he [Rob Smith] put us on the floor, and that captivated everybody."[51]

Drawing was clearly a key aspect of the process of making art in the Fine Art faculty, and, according to O'Dowd, was integrally bound up with the process of personal development. It was also, as pointed out by Ollie Whelan and as mentioned already, about helping students to develop their ideas. Brian King has stated that all students in the faculty since 1975 have had to acquire basic skills of observational drawing. King stressed, in making this statement, that drawing was not seen in the faculty in a traditional or realistic way. When asked to give a definition of drawing as the post-1975 curriculum defined it, however, he said that it was not possible to do so. It is interesting to note here what the external assessor for sculpture in 1984, Patrick Ireland, said in his report on the sculpture area for that year:

> The sculpture and environmental students filled their notebooks with many good ideas. In representing these ideas, I did not find a high competence in drawing. As a basis for testing and communicating ideas, drawing is a *sine-qua-non* for a sculptor. The subtle articulation of an idea, the ability to

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[50] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 978-979.

[51] Gwen O'Dowd, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 983.

> visualise in three dimensions, seems to me an indispensable skill. I recommend that more formal attention be paid to developing drawing skills.[52]

Gwen O'Dowd is more forthcoming than Brian King in giving a definition of drawing, as it was envisaged in the new curriculum and as it was seen by staff members who supported the new curriculum. Drawing was a tool, she says, it was not an end product.[53] She goes on to state that Rob Smith taught students to work in the way that he worked. According to O'Dowd, this approach "was based on drawing, researching, and getting enough material to work from, and then bringing that into the studio and trying to make something of it in a very individual way".[54] In discussing drawing O'Dowd stresses enquiry. Drawing was the collecting of source material, she states, and was part of the process of enquiring into the phenomenal world. For Rob Smith, according to O'Dowd, drawing was the "spinal artery" of the creative process.[55]

This new approach to drawing was clearly meant to supplant the neo-classical and the arts and crafts approach to drawing of the pre-1975 curriculum. It certainly created a division between those students and staff who supported the idea that the acquisition of skill – or the development and improvement of skill for those who were talented in the traditional sense – was a *sine qua non* of fine art education and those who supported the new curriculum. According to Ollie Whelan, from a very early stage this new approach to drawing alienated students who "had really considerable skills" and

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[52] Patrick Ireland, "Report of External Assessor for Sculpture, Fine Art Faculty, National College of Art and Design", 1984, Typed Manuscript, File Number AR/ BH/ 1AD (3) February 1980-February 1990, National Council for Education Awards archives.

[53] Gwen O'Dowd, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 490-491.

[54] Ibid., 490.

[55] Ibid., 490.

who looked to drawing in a more traditional way.[56] Whelan states that these students found the new approach to drawing very difficult, because they felt that in following the new curriculum their craft skills weren't improving. This situation led to discord in the faculty. According to Whelan, the difficulties that were created by this discord persisted in the faculty for about eight or nine years. The faculty was thus polarised, according to Whelan, "between the people who were interested in conceptual ideas and those who were interested in the skills/craft elements".[57] The polarisation of the faculty on this issue was encouraged by the new members of staff actively taking a position against the use of the figure in a traditional or realistic way, and, according to some, in any way. Simon McLeod makes the position of the members of staff who favoured the new curriculum towards the figure very clear: "The use of the figure was, quite frankly, discouraged", he states.[58] It is important to stress that because of their close relationship with the head of the faculty and with the head of the college the new members of staff were in a position of great power. As a consequence of this they were in a dominant position in relation to other staff members in the faculty. This position of dominance, combined with the fact that they were seen by many students as being charismatic, as Ollie Whelan points out, gave them undue influence among students. This situation, then, because of the stance of new members of staff, and in particular the new English members of staff, against the use of the figure in a traditional sense, had a detrimental effect on the use of the figure by students.

Though opposition to the figure was based ultimately on aesthetic grounds, in that the values associated with the traditional use of the figure in fine art education were

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[56] Ollie Whelan, Interview with author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1142.

[57] Ibid., 1142.

[58] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 978.

rejected by the supporters of the new curriculum, who held different aesthetic values, in the context of the strife-ridden National College of Art and Design in the 1970s and 1980s it inevitably had a mundane political dimension; discouraging the use of the figure in the traditional sense had the effect of diminishing the status of staff members who used the figure in their work. The staff members who used the figure in their work tended to be associated with the Royal Hibernian Academy or the Independent Artists group. Opposition to the figure consequently diminished the role of the staff members associated with these groups within the faculty. This diminution in the status of some staff members, and especially of those associated with the pre 1975 curriculum, was magnified in the eyes of students by an exclusive aura that those associated with the new curriculum took on. This aura applied to both staff and students. According to Ollie Whelan, students like himself, who identified with the new course and with the new members of staff, felt a sense of difference and importance by contrast with students who were identified with the old curriculum. The students who did not identify with the new curriculum were seen, according to Whelan, as a "hang over" from the older and now outmoded program of the pre-1975 college. Whelan claims that the group of students to which he belonged, and who identified with the new curriculum, felt a particular sense of dynamism and energy, and even exclusiveness. According to Gwen O'Dowd, fine art as a subject area had a more exciting profile in the eyes of students who were doing the Foundation course (first year) than other areas in the college. She points out that this was a consequence of the high status that was given to the new members of staff and thus to the new curriculum. O'Dowd goes on to say that the students who subscribed to the new program in the fine art area felt that it was sympathetic to their needs, and that the course was there to help them to

develop as artists.[59] O'Dowd says that the projects which were set for students "were just to help you, you were always expected to develop an interest for yourself out of that. . . . this was really a way of trying to find your own particular interests. . . . the main endeavour was really to find out what your own natural sympathies were."[60]

In relation to the requirements of the curriculum as they impacted on the work of students, O'Dowd states that, as a student, you followed your nose, and if you wanted to continue one project into the next you were free to do just that.[61] This easygoing approach was continued in assessments, according to O'Dowd, which she found very relaxed: "Just a few tutors coming along and talking to you about your work".[62] Significantly, bearing in mind the inner sense of discipline that Herbert Read stressed as a necessary concomitant of the production of art, O'Dowd stresses that self discipline was an important aspect of the course, and that students had to be one hundred percent committed to the course to succeed. She adds that quite a few students did not make it through the course because they didn't have the self-discipline required. Ciaran Lennon echoes O'Dowd's assertions. Lennon, as a student in the mid 1970s, found the situation in the Fine Art faculty totally conducive to his creative development and to the development of his ideas: "I had my own program . . . I just went in and used the facilities of the college".[63] Lennon had a similar attitude to assessments as O'Dowd, which, he felt, were occasions for like-minded artists to meet and discuss their interests. This was clearly so in Lennon's case, as, according to his own testimony,

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[59] Gwen O'Dowd, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 982-988.

[60] Ibid., 984.

[61] Ibid., 983-984.

[62] Ibid., 984.

[63] Ciaran Lennon, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 13, 921.

William Scott, who was his external assessor, "used to look forward to the visits" as an opportunity to discuss Lennon's work.[64]

The easy going approach to the teaching of fine art in the faculty, and the implied relaxed atmosphere that is described in the comments of Gwen O'Dowd, is corroborated by Lennon. Lennon states that when he taught at the college in the late 1970s and early 1980s he felt there was very little he could do as a tutor because "for some students one hour a week was too much, half an hour would be quite enough".[65] For Lennon, the situation at the college in the 1970s and 1980s contrasted starkly with the situation in the sixties. In the 1970s and 1980s, according to Lennon, students were allowed to do what he had not been allowed to do as a student at the college in the 1960s - to work on things that really interested them in an atmosphere of freedom. As a teacher in the 1970s and 1980s Lennon felt the same freedom. He also felt that the responsibility was on him to teach what he wanted to in his own way. He was free, he claims, as a teacher, to follow his own interests and preoccupations. This freedom ties in with the philosophy that was expressed in the syllabus document of 1975, which, it will be remembered, stated that the course was defined not alone by the developing needs of students but by those of staff. It also ties in with Campbell Bruce's strategy of giving staff total freedom to teach in their own way: "If I employ staff I employ them to do the job. I'm not going to tell them how to do it. They are the experts".[66] Brian King points out that the very great influence that Nigel Rolfe came to exert on students and on the Fine Art faculty in the 1970s and 1980s was a consequence of the philosophy that underpinned the curriculum and of the complete freedom given to him

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[64] Ibid., 922.

[65] Ibid., 922.

[66] Campbell Bruce, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 11, 876.

by the open nature of the curriculum. The tutor-student relationship played a key role in giving Rolfe such influence. The tutor-student relationship was an aspect of the course that also worked well for Ciaran Lennon and his students. The present writer, who had Lennon as a tutor, remembers helping him, apprentice like, to construct a very complex site-specific installation that Lennon was making for an exhibition of modern Irish art that was held at the Bank of Ireland in Baggot Street in the early 1980s. This was an experience that the writer found invaluable in helping him to understand not alone the work of Lennon, but also other such site-specific formalist art.

For the students who subscribed to the new program in the Fine Art faculty after 1975 the visiting lecturers that were being brought into the college from outside constituted a major source of stimulation and interest. In the early stages, as already pointed out, most of these visiting lecturers came from England; as time passed and as the situation in the faculty settled down and became less factional these included modern Irish artists from the different factions within the Irish art world. For Ollie Whelan there was an exuberant atmosphere in the faculty in the early years of the new course. This atmosphere was to a great extent, according to Whelan, a consequence of the number of visiting lecturers who came to teach in the faculty. It was also helped by the open nature of the new curriculum. This situation, according to Whelan, created a bohemian atmosphere that was particularly stimulating to students.

> The Boomtown Rats used to come in and out in that first year. . . . We used to bring in people, theatre acts and music, poetry readings and that sort of thing. . . . I remember sitting in my space in second year and Joseph Beuys comes walking up the stairs. . . . Everyone at that time was looking to him to some degree. And don't forget that at the time Sean Scully was teaching part time, and Gerard Hemsworth, the guy from Goldsmiths' and Winchester. Martin Parr was teaching photography. There was Tim Mara who since

became head of print at the RCA, and Chris Ploughman who now teaches in Chelsea.[67]

That aspect of the course that utilised visiting lecturers who were practising artists to inspire, enthuse, and inform students had a specific effect that tied in very well with the overall objective of the course. It amplified the fact that the course focussed on the training of artists. According to Gwen O'Dowd, visiting lecturers were very helpful to students in their efforts to develop as artists. The visiting lecturers, she says, "told you stories about the way they do things or the way they survive or the type of studios they had, the whole art world thing".[68]

For those who identified with the new program there was a very positive atmosphere in the Fine Art faculty after 1975. The curriculum, as these students saw it and as the course documents describe it, was very open ended and flexible, and it was quite clearly meeting the needs of both staff and students as they had been envisioned in the syllabus document for 1975. As shown above, the tutor-student relationship worked particularly well in this context, and, according to a number of former students, very close and supportive relationships were built up between individual tutors and students. These relationships were vital in providing support for students in their efforts to become professional artists, and these relationships often continued after college.[69] In fact these relationships were vital in helping students to make the

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[67] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 389-340. Sean Scully had studied at Croydon School of Art, where Campbell Bruce had studied, and at Newcastle Polytechnic. Gerard Hemsworth had studied at Saint Martins under Anthony Caro. Chris Plowman had studied at Wolverhampton, where Rob Smith had studied, and Tim Mara had studied at the RCA.

[68] Gwen O'Dowd, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 986.

[69] In the catalogue of an exhibition of her work, which was held in the Douglas Hyde Gallery in 1991, Cecily Brennan, who graduated in 1978, includes a dedication to her recently deceased former tutor, Rob Smith. (Luke Gibbons and Penelope Curtis, Cecily Brennan; *Catalogue of an Exhibition at the Douglas Hyde Gallery*, 6th November – 19th December 1991.)

transition from college to the real world that students faced after graduation. Ollie Whelan points out that the very close and supportive relationships that built up between staff and students at this time were encouraged by the fact that a student could have the same tutor for two consecutive years.

Though the curriculum worked very well and as planned for many students in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion in terms of its aims and objectives, this was not the case with all students who took the course. A different picture of what happened in the fine art area emerges from the comments of a number of former students. This divergent picture illustrates the fact that the course was not the same for all students, and that the course did not run smoothly for all students.

14.2.3 *The Negative Aspects of the Course*

Ollie Whelan, who, as already stated, entered the faculty in 1975 as a student, describes an intensive course based on back to back projects in first year where students worked from nine in the morning till ten at night. Gwen O'Dowd, who entered the faculty in 1977, also referring to first year, describes a similar situation. The course that she pursued in first year was, she says, "very much [a] project based course". Simon McLeod, who was in the same group of students as Gwen O'Dowd, describes a different situation. McLeod recalls that, apart from one initial and very loosely structured drawing project entitled 'the container and the contained', there was no course as such in the Fine Art faculty when he was there as a student. Apart from the project mentioned above, McLeod did not recall any specific projects in the painting area where he and O'Dowd were located. Others recalled the same situation. The American student Brian Palm, for instance, has the following to say:

> I think the idea of [projects] was to get people doing the same thing to be able to judge them. For example there was a drawing [project] of a life model with a plastic garbage bag between her legs, so that it was not just doing a life drawing but then you had to draw the plastic garbage bag. I don't know what that was all about. I just didn't really have any interest in it. There was another sort of weird sculpture that was like a cage and you put the life model inside the cage, so instead of drawing the model you had to draw the bars. There were a few projects like that, and quite frankly I thought they were banal projects in a very dirty, grotty, environment. It meant nothing to me, absolutely nothing. I was much more inclined to go out along the canal and into the city.[70]

Simon McLeod recalled that during his first year in the college students were divided into three groups: painting, sculpture, and an "odd group, most of whom went on to work in the print area; some of this group just remained isolated and were not part of anything".[71] According to McLeod, the odd group, to which neither O'Dowd nor McLeod belonged, but, interestingly, to which Kathy Prendergast belonged, up to the Christmas of the first year, "got the most teaching and all the visiting lecturers".[72] One member of this last group, who was interviewed by the author, but who did not wish to be named, said that for the entire duration of her time in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design she received minimal teaching, virtually no tutorial support, and often only negative responses from staff when asking for help. This former student stated that she and others in her group were neglected by staff. She also said that when they developed problems and difficulties they were allowed to drift aimlessly.

Simon McLeod also states that there was very little teaching in the faculty. He did, however, recall being shown how to make a stretched canvas. He points out that there

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[70] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1006.

[71] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 968.

[72] Ibid., 968.

was what he called a slight element of "arts and crafts" about the fine art area - in the sense of being withdrawn from modern society rather than in the sense of learning traditional skills - and of being introduced to the idea that the artist does his own work from start to finish. This was largely the result of the influence of Rob Smith who was, according to Ollie Whelan, into "alternative life styles". Consistent with this approach is McLeod's recollection that sending work to a framer was considered anathema: "It really was mooted to us that you take a completely independent stance from society and from the commercial, or should I say the market place. And incidentally there was no guidance whatever, that I can remember, about marketing your work afterwards."[73] McLeod's recollection contradicts the statement in the syllabus document for 1975 that the future career of the student was an essential part of the curriculum and that it was bound up with that aspect of the course that aimed to make it relevant to the world outside of the exclusive art school atmosphere. The artist Mary Lohan, who graduated in 1976, has the following to say about the situation that she found in the Fine Art faculty while she was a student there:

> I was one of those people who was good at life drawing. . . . [I went] straight from boarding school to NCAD. It is hardly surprising that I was miserable in college a lot of the time. . . . I was a shy person and I found it intimidating. I would have to admit that during the last two years in college I did very little work. Looking back, what was good for me about college is that it must have given me some skills. But then I am not that sure that it did. I still cannot make a stretcher or do any of these sort of things. I had the urge to paint when I was there but it actually took me years to discover the self confidence I needed to do my own work . . . In college I just wandered.[74]

The attitude within the faculty that sought to exclude the real world and which was recalled by Simon McLeod was consistent with the modernist aesthetic and the

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[73] Ibid., 969.

[74] Aidan Dunne, *Mary Lohan* (Dublin: Gandon Editions Ltd., 1997), 15.

influence of Clement Greenberg. As already shown in relation to the influence of Greenberg, there was an exclusive aspect to modernism at this time that rejected the real world in favour of an enclosed world of purely artistic concerns. This approach is encapsulated in the statement of the American modernist Ad Reinhardt, which the present writer recalls as an often repeated phrase at the National College of Art and Design at this time: "Art is art as art and everything else is everything else. Art as art is nothing but art. Art is not what is not art".[75] Simon McLeod points out that, although students had little or no guidance or advice from the college or from staff in relation to exhibiting their work, they showed their work in group-shows. He also points out that, having attended a foundation course at the Dun Laoghaire School of Art that was very structured, he found the freedom at the National College of Art and Design, "allowing for the lack of a course",[76] very good. On balance, McLeod felt that all the students in his group had made a good start in the first year of the course.

As time passed, however, McLeod felt that the situation in the fine art area became more complex and difficult. In place of a course, he felt, there were "subtle, and often frequently less than subtle, suggestions about what art should be and what way you should be going, which would have been following the dictum of highly defensive and highly opinionated individuals".[77] He goes on to say that it was rather strongly put to the students in his first year that they must not automatically assume that drawing from the model was an essential aspect of fine art education. In effect, according to McLeod, there was a proscription on the figure that applied to "any figurative imagery,

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[75] Joseph Kosuth "Art after Philosophy" *Studio International* 178 (October 1969): 134.

[76] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 970.

[77] Ibid., 980.

any transcription from reality into drawing or painting".[78] According to McLeod, this caused the first split that he remembers in the faculty. Other students also recall drawing in the traditional sense being condemned. Brian Palm, for instance, remembers Nigel Rolfe saying, "We don't want to teach people to draw, drawing is finished".[79] This statement, which contradicts the syllabus document of 1975 and the thinking of Rob Smith, caused much confusion among students.

As time went on, according to McLeod, the dogmatic attitude of some staff led to the development of a difficult situation on the studio floor. As a consequence of this, the fine art area, according to McLeod, very quickly became "terribly polarised, excessively polarised".[80] According to Brian Palm, the two camps were very obvious to students:

> One was painting in the traditional vein and the other was I suppose what would be considered performance/installation work. They were at times simply broken down into painting and sculpture, where I don't think painting and sculpture have this polarisation, but as it was put across at the time there was a very definite attitude difference between those who were painting and those who were involved in sculpture; 'painting is dead' was the refrain.[81]

Simon McLeod states that, according to those in the sculpture area, painting was outdated, along with working from the figure. Other students also remember the phrase "painting is dead" as a refrain that was commonly heard from the sculpture department. The denigration of the figure, according to McLeod, included any sort of representational sculpture, which, he stresses, would include the work of the modern American sculptors George Segal (1924-) and Edward Kienholz (1927-), two of

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[78] Ibid., 968.

[79] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1004.

[80] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 974.

[81] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1009.

the most important artists of the twentieth century. The reason that the work of these artists was seen as lying outside of the pale of acceptable art was, according to McLeod, because it was permanent and related to earlier art. As those in the sculpture area saw it, he states, anything that was permanent and related to earlier art was out and performance was in. He goes on to point out that a bond that he had already established with modernism, and in particular with modern American art, from illustrations that he had seen of the *Art:USA:Now* exhibition of modern American art that was held in Dublin and in other European cities in the early 1960s and from other illustrations in books and magazines, was quickly spotted by staff in fine art who identified with that strand of modernism. Following on from this, and revealingly, he goes on to say:

> I had been virtually instructed by staff to disregard the German Expressionists, who had interested me before, and to take a very clean, fresh, and this almost goes in inverted commas, 'approach'; a painting is a painting and you are you and there is a gap there. And that really you are being self indulgent or declamatory to have too much autobiographical input into your work.[82]

A form-based and formalist inspired approach to the making of art was very much encouraged, according to McLeod. He goes on to point out that the issue of making a stretcher for a canvas, which students were shown how to do, ties in with the new modernist approach to art to which the new curriculum subscribed, and which focussed on materials, spatial and formal relationships, and so on. McLeod points out that from this point of view the stretcher is seen as a drawing that has a role to play in relation to the gallery wall. This is an aspect of modernism that preoccupied a number of Irish

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[82] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 972-973.

artists in the era of modernism. It is particularly evident in the work of Ciaran Lennon.[83]

McLeod is now, twenty years later, critical of that aspect of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design, which tried, he claims, to impose a particular aesthetic. This attempt to impose a particular aesthetic was, according to McLeod, to the detriment of the course, to the detriment of teaching, and to the detriment of students. McLeod suggests that, unlike what he experienced at the National College of Art and Design as a student, art education should be about "bringing out what's there, and helping somebody to discover themselves".[84] This is a revealing comment, considering that the stated objective of the syllabus document for 1975 was to encourage the development of the individual student. When asked if he was saying that the course that he pursued didn't do that he replied: "I'm saying it

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[83] This aspect of modernism, which has already been discussed, held that all of the arts in an ideal world were organically interrelated in a harmonious way. This idea, which goes back to the Bauhaus and ultimately to developments in nineteenth century aesthetics, was not a new idea in Irish art. In 1934 in a lecture to the Architects Association of Ireland Mainie Jellett said: " . . . modern painting, . . . is essentially linked with modern architecture. It is two-dimensional in its foundation, its starting point is the wall or surface it is to fill, its aim to animate that surface and make it live without destroying - as with Renaissance perspective - the natural properties of that surface. The architects have already recognised two-dimensional modern sculpture [with] Epstein and Gill in England, and in Holland, France, Germany were [sic] at once given greater significance by the organic introduction of sculpture cut direct in stone, not treated as filling . . . I think the same use could be made of painting inside the great modern buildings and more especially with abstract painting as it is an art that has its foundations in the same ideals of harmony and form as modern architecture". (Bruce Arnold, *Mainie Jellett and the Modern Movement in Ireland* [London: Yale University Press 1991], 149). This same aspect of modernism was used by Clement Greenberg in establishing the hegemony of American art in relation to the new, as he saw it, themes of the post-war epoch. According to Greenberg, "there is a persistent urge, as persistent as it is largely unconscious, to go beyond the cabinet picture, which is destined to occupy only a spot on the wall, to a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall, like a mural, would *spread* over it and acknowledge its physical reality. . . . Thus, while the painters relation to his art has become more private than ever before because of a shrinking appreciation of the public's part, the architectural and, presumably, social location for which he destines his product has become in inverse ratio, more public." Clement Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," *Partisan Review* 5 (January 1948) : 82; quoted in Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expression, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer [London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984], 170.)

[84] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 980.

didn't, . . . I'm repeatedly saying that there wasn't a course that I could see".[85] McLeod goes on to condemn what he claims was a shocking lack of enthusiasm on the part of staff in the fine art area. He points out that this lack of enthusiasm was so great that some students completely lost interest in the course and were left to flounder. Gwen O'Dowd interprets this situation differently and lays the blame for failure on lack of commitment on the part of some students. O'Dowd, as already stated, says that you had to be one hundred percent committed to the course to succeed, "And that's where half of the people I think drifted off in those first or second years really. A considerable amount of people anyway lost interest, or were not able to keep up that kind of self discipline".[86] Clearly, there were two different views of the situation in the Fine Art faculty: some students saw staff as enthusiastic and supportive, and some students saw them as lacking in enthusiasm and unsupportive.

O'Dowd's interpretation may be unfair. It does not take into account the fact that, as Charlie Brady states, some students, especially those from rural backgrounds, were intimidated by the apparent arrogance of some members of staff whose cosmopolitan demeanour and very different cultural background was alien to them. As a consequence of this situation some students shied away from staff. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that staff, inevitably, because of their status and because of the nature of the curriculum, spoke from a position of great power and influence over students. This was despite the fact that the syllabus document for 1975 claimed that students and staff were equal partners in the educational process, and in particular that they were equal in the sense of having the same overall artistic objectives.

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[85] Ibid., 223.

[86] Gwen O'Dowd, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 985.

As a consequence of this situation, many students interpreted the critical approach of the new English staff as aggressive and arrogant. This situation was not conducive to giving students confidence, let alone encouraging their development. A number of former students have stated to the present writer that they were greatly intimidated by the attitude of some members of staff. Many students found it difficult to cope in this situation without support. This support that was not there in many cases, especially if the preferred style of the student was opposed by the dominant members of staff who adhered to a different style and who were the tutors of the students.

The situation of the American student Brian Palm provides an interesting illustration of how one student coped with such a situation. Palm has stated that very strenuous efforts were made to dissuade him from working in his preferred style, which was realism: "From the word go most of what I got was negative criticism negative feedback".[87] According to Palm, the fact that he prevailed and completed the course was due to his strong personality and his determination: "Where I come from [aggression] was seen as a positive attribute. Especially if you are an athlete or if you are going into business or whatever". He continues with the following assertion: "Quite simply, nothing stopped me. I would not be stopped, I would not be ridiculed, I would not be put down, and I would not allow the lack of support to spoil it for me".[88] In the final analysis, according to Palm, "By my second year I made it quite clear that I was doing my own thing and would not be dissuaded."[89]

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[87] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1006.

[88] Ibid., 1008 and 1013.

[89] Ibid., 1010. Apart from his aspiration to become an artist, Palm had come to Ireland for two reasons: his ancestry was Irish, and he was unhappy with the social and political situation of the United States in the 1970s.

Simon McLeod suggests that an aggressive attitude on the part of some staff was damaging to students who were easily discouraged and dispirited by such an attitude. McLeod is referring in making this criticism to staff in the sculpture department, but in particular to Nigel Rolfe, whose influence by force of personality went beyond the sculpture area and was felt throughout the faculty; this, as already stated, was a consequence of the open nature of the curriculum. A number of students were particularly confused by the assertion of some members of staff that, as McLeod said, "painting did not exist or should not exist or was outdated, along with working from the figure."[90] The present writer recalls the feeling of confusion and loss of confidence on hearing Brian King say dismissively, and without putting it in context or explaining it, that painting was outdated and finished as a valid artistic pursuit. The reason given by King for this statement was that in pursuing a formalist agenda, painting had gone up the wall, gone down the wall, and come out from the wall, and that consequently it had nowhere else to go in a formal sense. Painting, then, and realistic painting in particular, was seen by some influential members of staff as outmoded and of no value in the context of modern art. This was especially so in the context of the view of many who supported a modernist agenda that artistic practice must be seen exclusively in terms of a constant demand for technical and formal innovation.

Lorcan Walsh, who states that painting from the figure had led him to produce a series of realistic and highly accurate drawings of skulls over a long period of time, found that: "except for Campbell [his tutor] and John [Kelly] the other lecturers kept away from me. I think most of them just thought that I was being some kind of freak. .

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[90] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 974.

. . I would not have interested anyone else, so I never had a conversation with Nigel Rolfe or Ciaran Lennon or Rob Smith or Jackie Stanley."[91]

Simon McLeod recounts that when the first year students came together for the first time the sculpture students immediately cordoned themselves off and took an extremely aggressive approach to the other students. He claims that the sculpture students were encouraged to feel different: "It's hard to know, but I think the sculpture students were being made to feel exclusive and being put a certain way, pointed in a certain direction, away from the other students, which I would not agree with".[92] McLeod goes on to state that the aggressive approach taken by those in the sculpture area towards students in other areas resulted in "an immediate cutting off of students from each other."[93]

The sculpture area at this time, according to a number of former students, was dominated by an avant-garde ethos whose approach was aggressive, confrontational, arrogant, and dismissive of art forms that were not approved of. These art forms included modernism. It is noteworthy in this context that the late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a rise in the popularity of the fashionable and overtly aggressive and anarchic Punk Rock Movement in Britain and Ireland. A number of former students point out that this influenced the behaviour of certain students in the sculpture area. Popular fashions and trends were thus making themselves felt in the domain of high art. This situation is consistent with the influence of the Basic Design system and the ideas of Richard Hamilton. Hamilton

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[91] Lorcan Walsh, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 21, 1119. Jackie Stanley, who taught at the college, was Campbell Bruce's wife.

[92] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 975.

[93] Ibid., 975.

believed, as shown in Chapter 5, that popular culture had a legitimate and significant role to play in the development of the fine arts. He also believed that art as an expression of contemporary technological advance might emulate popular culture and popular imagery.

As a consequence of the influence of the Basic Design system, then, popular culture was seen as a legitimate aspect of the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty at this time. Thus the conflict between popular culture and high art that had animated the British art world since the war, and that had been manifested in British fine art education in the curriculum at Coventry College of Art in the late 1960s and early 1970s, had arrived at the National College of Art and Design. According to Brian King, this situation was a direct consequence of Nigel Rolfe's influence. Given this situation, conflict on an ideological level was set to continue in the faculty, despite the decline in the influence of the staff who adhered to traditional values, and despite the passing of time since the student rebellion. This conflict developed between those who advocated some form of continuity in artistic practice, and those who advocated a radical break with all tradition and all that went before. It did not matter whether continuity was seen in relation to traditional values that advocated a skill-based approach to art education or in relation to modernist values that focussed on formal analysis. Unfortunately for students, however, this confrontation involved no debate, discussion, or critical analysis. It was purely reactionary. Because of the open nature of the curriculum this confrontation had a significantly disruptive influence on the course in the Fine Art faculty and therefore on students.

14.2.4 *Conflict Within the Faculty*

A number of former students recall that at the first meeting of staff and students in the Fine Art faculty at the beginning of the academic year 1977/78 it was made clear to students that the objective of the course was to train fine artists. It was also recalled that Nigel Rolfe pointed out at this meeting that most of the students in the room would fail in this objective. Brian Palm remembers Nigel Rolfe saying: "Look around, only two per cent of you are going to make art, the rest of you are going to fail or quit or drop out".[94] A number of other students also recall this being said and the disheartening effect it produced. In making this statement, Rolfe established, in the eyes of students, the status of fine art as an exclusive practice as opposed to an inclusive practice. In doing this he re-enforced the idea that was introduced by Orpen, and which was continued and institutionalised by Keating, that the course was there to support only a small number of "talented" individuals, and that all other students by this definition were failures. Brian Palm recalls that with the passing of time a clear division became obvious between staff and students. Palm is particularly critical of what he describes as a "we will tell you"[95] approach to students by staff members who, according to Palm, were not much older than himself. This is interesting in relation to the assertion in the curriculum document that the course was defined by the shared needs of students and staff and that the interaction of staff and students was an integral part of the course.

According to a number of students a difficult relationship developed between students and staff as a consequence of what was perceived as a very critical, negative,

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[94] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1004.

[95] Ibid., 1004.

and aggressive atmosphere on the studio floor. This situation was exacerbated by what some students felt was the *ad-hoc* way that things were done on the studio floor. This situation was not helped by the physical surroundings of the studios. The building in Clarendon Street that housed the Fine Art faculty in the late 1970s was, according to Ollie Whelan, a "shanty town".[96] Simon McLeod recalled the place as filthy. And Brian Palm recalls it as "a sweat shop that the college had gotten hold of. I don't think it was very safe. There were no fire exits for instance. It was essentially a death trap."[97] The premises in Moss Street, which housed the faculty after it left Clarendon Street and before it went to Thomas Street was not much better. Having said this, some former students have said that they were happy just to have a place in which to work and that they didn't pay too much attention to conditions.

As an American, Brian Palm found the faculty and the students disappointing. In particular he felt that the situation in the faculty was very disorganised. He did not understand the projects that students were asked to do in first year, which he described as "goofy". And as he tried to develop his own work, which was figurative, he felt that he got no support; Palm, who specifically wanted to develop skills, felt that there was an overriding desire "to stop me doing what I was doing and to try and make me do something else."[98] Palm clearly did not fit the profile of what was envisaged by the staff as an artist and his work did not fit their profile of art as it was defined by the new curriculum. His response to this situation was to spend more and more time away from the faculty. This raises the obvious question of why he was accepted into the faculty. Palm has stated that he made his intentions and his interests as a potential student of

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[96] Ollie Whelan, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 22, 1145.

[97] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1005.

[98] Ibid., 1006.

the Fine Art faculty clear to Campbell Bruce, Rob Smith, and Nigel Rolfe when they interviewed him as a potential student before he entered the faculty.[99]

One area in which Palm found sanctuary, because of its focus on skill, was that of print. According to Palm, having become disillusioned with the staff who were in charge of the first year in the fine art area, he sought out staff who were interested in his style of work. These staff, according to Palm, were "more traditional handlers of materials". These included Little John Kelly[100], Carey Clarke, Charlie Cullen, and Charlie Brady.[101] According to Palm, he learned what he needed from those more traditional teachers; he learned perspective for instance. The acquisition of skill was also a problem for other students in the faculty, and not necessarily for students who worked in a more traditional vein. One first year student, whose style was uncompromisingly modernist, enrolled in night classes at the Technical School in Mount Street in order to learn woodwork so that he could make stretchers for canvases on which to paint. Because of the factionalism in the faculty, this student believed that woodworking skills were not taught in the faculty, even though there was an entire woodwork area at the disposal of students. Though in different locations, only by a ten-minute walk separated the woodwork area and the Fine Art faculty at the time that this student was in attendance at the college. Crucially, the woodwork area was dominated by members of staff who were associated with the pre-1975

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[99] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1003.

[100] As pointed out earlier, John Kelly the printer was known as Little John Kelly in order to distinguish him from John Kelly the painter, who was sometimes referred to as Big John Kelly.

[101] Ibid., 1010.

curriculum, and who had a particularly difficult relationship with the staff who represented the new curriculum in the faculty.[102]

A particularly contentious issue throughout the period under discussion that was noted by a number of students was a shortage of materials. This clearly restricted that aspect of the curriculum that aspired to increase student's vocational possibilities by introducing them to "a range of tools and visual language", as the syllabus document of 1975 put it. According to one former sculpture student, the shortage of materials in the sculpture area was so bad that she and a number of other students approached their tutor to see if they could remedy this situation. He told them that there was nothing that he could do about this problem. When they pointed out that one particular student was using large quantities of steel for his work they were told that he had bought the steel himself.[103] The present writer recalls that a similar situation existed in the painting area where basic materials like paper were in short supply. Some students, including Lorcan Walsh, felt that favouritism was shown when it came to the allocation of materials.[104] Whether this is true or not, this accusation was repeated by quite a few students and was clearly what was felt by students at the time. This belief fuelled the divisiveness on the studio floor, and especially the conflict between the sculpture and painting areas. It is important to stress that the dismissive approach of the sculpture

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[102] The playing down of traditional skills by the new English staff contributed to the tension in the faculty and continued for some time after 1975. Liam O'Ruaidh, a staff member in the woodwork area, which was part of the sculpture department, wrote to the National Council for Educational Awards in 1984 complaining that staff who were traditional handlers of materials were being marginalised within the Fine Art faculty. Brian King, who was the head of the sculpture area, in a subsequent letter to the National Council for Educational Awards denied this claim. File AR/BH/ 1.AD (3). Nov. 1980-Feb. 1990, National Council for Educational Awards Archives.

[103] This situation continues today. At the time of writing, according to Brian King, many of the poorer students in the sculpture area produce work of an unfinished and inferior nature compared to that of wealthier students. The reason for this, according to King, is that poorer students cannot afford expensive materials. Affluent students thus have an advantage over poorer students.

[104] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1007; Vol. II, Lorcan Walsh, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 21, 1122.

area to those in the painting area was not necessarily aimed at traditional styles but at any style of painting. This caused confusion for many students.

The deteriorating situation on the studio floor during his first year at the college contributed to the disillusionment of the American student Brian Palm. Ultimately, as a consequence of his disillusionment, Palm, according to his own account, "lost interest in staff teaching".[105] Palm's summation of his first year in the faculty is as follows.

> When the bell rang at the end of the first year I had found that I really wasn't interested in working indoors in Clarendon Street and there was a sort of reluctance to have me on my own out in the streets just drawing. There was an attempt by Rob Smith to try to bring me back into the fold and teach me what he knew. But by my second year I made it quite clear that I was doing my own thing and would not be dissuaded.[106]

Palm is particularly critical of the absence of structure in the course. "I realised that if you wanted to bend the rules or ignore the roles that was easily done. There wasn't really anyone going to hassle you. Once you had enough work around assessment time and you could stand up for what you were doing [you were all right]."[107] He goes on to point out that some students succumbed, "There were some students who quite clearly weren't going to make it. . . . They didn't fit in anywhere. . . . I believe some of them didn't make it. . . . But for the most part there were a lot of people hanging around doing very little. . . . There were a lot of excuses for not working."[108] The absence of structure in the course, the consequent confusion and lackadaisical approach of many students, and the aggressiveness of the factionalism in the faculty contributed to the situation that Palm describes. This situation echoes the situation in

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[105] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1010.

[106] Ibid., 1010.

[107] Ibid., 1011.

[108] Ibid., 1011.

Britain in the late 1960s, as described in *Art Schools Observed.* As shown in Chapter 7, periods of uncertainty, confusion, and apathy were a common reaction among fine art students in Britain to a situation that was similar to that which prevailed at the National College of Art and Design throughout the period under discussion.[109] An interesting reaction that grew out of the very critical approach to the practice of art that was fostered in many art schools in Great Britain in the 1960s and 1970s was a need to verbalise. In some cases this need drove students to lengthy periods of library research in an effort to resolve doubts about the validity of art and to develop justifications. There was a similar reaction to the same situation at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. This situation raises questions about the effectiveness of the tutorial system that was in operation.

Simon McLeod states that it took him a long time to recover from his experiences at the National College of Art and Design, and that former students have said to him that they felt completely disenchanted as a result of being in the Fine Art faculty at this time:

> I'd say from my own part it has taken me a long time to recover and I was teaching for nine years after I left college. A few people have said to me that they went teaching because of what they went through in the college. They said that they had no wish and had very little inclination to practice as artists, and that they rather felt that the future was closed and that they couldn't aspire to anything; a number of people, not everyone.[110]

The present writer has spoken to a number of former students who claim that their development as artists was frustrated by the situation in the Fine Art faculty at this time. Brian King states candidly that the situation in the faculty damaged people and

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[109] Stroud Cornock, "Towards a Methodology for Students of Fine Art," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 2 (1983) : 81-99; idem "Learning Stratagies in Fine Art," *Journal of Art and Design Education* 3 (1984) : 141-159.

[110] Simon McLeod, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 15, 979.

that many students gave up practising art completely as a result of their experiences in the Fine Art faculty at this time.

Allowing for all of this, Brian Palm feels in retrospect that he got a lot out of the college in terms of what he got from other students and of what he got from staff who were willing to help him and give him advice. "Charlie Brady gave me one of my best pieces of advice ever: 'Use bigger brushes'".[111] He points out, however, that he had to fight a hard battle to assert himself and to be allowed to pursue his interests: "I would say I was personally strong enough not to let this stuff dominate me. I won't say it didn't distract me, but there were those who didn't know where they were going and were happy to go wherever they were led. I was not among them."[112]

It is clear that, however open the methodology of the curriculum might have been, there was a restricted approach to the definition of art in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design in the 1970s and into the 1980s. It is clear that certain styles were prescribed and that efforts were made to influence students to produce work of a certain kind. It is also clear that tutorial support was lacking in the case of many students. It is particularly interesting to note in this context that Professor McCarthy found an unusually high level of stress and tension in the students that she interviewed in the Fine Art faculty at the college in 1979 when compared with similar groups in Britain and the United States.

It can be concluded, then, that in the early years of the new course in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design the situation was factional and divisive, and that this situation had a negative effect on students. Campbell Bruce

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[111] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1013-1014.

[112] Ibid., 1015.

admits that there were problems but puts a positive spin on them. He says that the changes that were brought about at the college between 1975 and 1985 were brought about as a result of intense discussions that were "at times acrimonious, at times appalling, but nearly always stimulating"; Bruce is talking primarily about discussions between staff. At the root of the factionalism that led to the above problems was the conflict between staff who represented the old neo-classical system and nationalist cultural values and staff who represented the new modernist inspired program.

14.2.5 *The Position of staff who supported traditional values in the Fine Art Faculty after 1975*

According to Ciaran Lennon, there was terrible animosity during the late 1970s and early 1980s between lecturers who adhered to traditional values like Carey Clarke and Professor Kelly, and those who tried to supplant them. The latter included Campbell Bruce, Nigel Rolfe and Rob Smith, and the various visiting lecturers who came to the college. According to Lennon "the animosity, . . . the resentment from the older teachers was really palpable".[113] In mixing his metaphors Lennon says that, "there was a cold war that you could cut with a knife" between the two factions.[114] Lennon states candidly that the traditional art forms were clearly and intentionally being frozen out, and that there was no question about it. As a former student of the traditional neo-classical curriculum Lennon states that he felt sorry for these "stoical"[115] people who had so much to offer. It is interesting to note that while the staff members who were being frozen out tended to be involved with the Royal Hibernian Academy - whose

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[113] Ciaran Lennon, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 13, 924.

[114] Ibid., 924.

[115] Ibid., 925.

influence, it will be recalled, Campbell Bruce had stated had to be removed from the college - quite a few of the staff who represented modernism in the faculty belonged to the group known as the Irish Exhibition of Living Art. According to Lennon,

> The Living Art group sometimes held meetings in the art school because a lot of us involved in the Living Art were in the art school, and they [staff associated with the RHA] wouldn't be allowed at a meeting. I threw him [Professor Kelly] out once. . . .
>
> He came to a meeting, and I said, 'Are you a member of the Living Art group? This is a meeting of the Living Art group'. He said 'I'm just interested'. I said, 'I'm sorry, you can't'."[116]

While some students, as Ollie Whelan points out, became involved in the factional situation in the Fine Art faculty, others were merely confused by it. Brian Palm, for instance, states that he was perplexed by the attitude of some staff members to the Professor of Sculpture, Domhnall O'Murchadha:

> There was one staff member, Domhnall O'Murchadha, who I hardly knew, but everyone sort of held him up as what by all accounts to avoid: traditional, classical, Celtic style stone carver. I always liked what he was doing; it never bothered me at all. In fact . . . I [made] regular pilgrimages to monuments: castles, ruins, mountains, Ogham stones, high crosses, all around Ireland. And I learned quite a bit from Francois Henri's books and research into ancient Irish stonework and monuments. And then here's a staff member doing it in his own country and everyone's just putting him down because he is so, "Oh, you don't want to do that".[117]

Lorcan Walsh, who worked primarily from the figure, became aware of the split between the traditional and the modernist factions in the faculty shortly after he arrived at the college. It happened as a result of a visit to his studio space by Professor Kelly. Walsh was working on a painting of the figure from the life model when Professor Kelly, who, as a traditional artist had an interest in such work, came and started discussing Walsh's work with him. According to Walsh, the discussion became

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[116] Ibid., 925-926.

[117] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1009.

lengthy, and he showed Professor Kelly slides of the work he had been doing over the previous few years. While Walsh was showing Professor Kelly the slides of his work, Campbell Bruce, who was Walsh's tutor and with whom Walsh claimed he had been trying in vain to arrange a tutorial, walked in. According to Walsh, "Campbell Bruce was really annoyed, which surprised me, and he said: 'John this is my student and not yours'. And I did not know what was going on between them". A couple of weeks later a similar incident occurred. Walsh recounts that on this occasion, as he was working on a life drawing project, he developed a problem with a particular area of the figure. Professor Kelly, who was, given his position, an ubiquitous presence in the faculty, came in one day to see how he was doing and with a couple of applications of paint solved Walsh's problem. To quote Walsh, "he picked up the brush and he made this arm move. . . . I was shocked that he had this talent inside him".[118] When Professor Bruce found out about this, according to Walsh, he was not happy and started to pull back from him. As can be seen from the interview which is reproduced in appendix 21, the situation of Walsh in the Fine Art faculty subsequently deteriorated and led eventually to a major confrontation between him and the new English staff. The situation of Lorcan Walsh shows that staff members had a major problem relating to each other as a result of the factionalism that split the faculty until the mid 1980s. Equally it shows that this problem was allowed to interfere directly with the tutor-student relationship in a negative way and to the detriment of students.

14.2.6 *Confrontation*

In the late 1970s, as a consequence of the factionalism in the faculty, the relationship between the sculpture and the painting areas on the studio floor

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[118] Lorcan Walsh, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 21, 1118.

deteriorated to a particularly low level. As already shown, there were two different aspects to this relationship: the conflict between traditionalists and modernists, and the conflict within modernism between the avant-garde position and the classic or academic formalist position. This situation self evidently created problems for students, in the early stages of the course at least. The principal reason for this was that students were ill equipped to deal with this situation, as they were not familiar with the historical and philosophical contexts of conflicts and debates within modern art, let alone the details of the complex situation at the National College of Art and Design. Students were particularly ill informed when it came to the conflicts within contemporary British culture that lay behind the thinking of the new English staff. These conflicts concerned the hostile relationships between formalism and the avant-garde, traditionalism and modernism, and popular culture and high art.

Notwithstanding the complexities of the conflicts within modern art or the extent to which students understood conflicts within the faculty, by the late 1970s the factional situation on the studio floor had deteriorated to such an extent that a meeting of students was called to try and clear the air. The confused situation in the faculty at this time, especially in the minds of students, is revealed by the fact that there are conflicting accounts today as to who organised the meeting and why exactly it was organised. Some say that it was called to help clear the tension in the faculty. Lorcan Walsh says that Charlie Cullen called a meeting in order to challenge Nigel Rolfe. According to Gwen O'Dowd, Nigel Rolfe set up the meeting in order to be confrontational and in order to break down barriers between departments. Ollie Whelan states that the meeting was called as a consequence of the very negative attitude of staff members to one and other, and of the need to resolve this problem.

Whatever about these differing opinions, the consensus is that there was a problem in the faculty and that a meeting was called in order to break the ice.

This meeting was held in the Clarendon Street studios, and the sculpture students, most of whom were based in Kildare Street, came over for the meeting accompanied by Nigel Rolfe. When they arrived at the meeting the sculpture students were dressed almost identically in dark coloured three piece suits; this was a fashion that Nigel Rolfe had adopted for himself from the English performance artists Gilbert and George, who were considered very avant-garde at this time. When they entered the room where the meeting was held Rolfe and his students marched in, military style, and stood in a straight line facing the painting students and some of the painting staff who were sitting around in a casual manner.

After this dramatic entrance, according to a number of former students, the meeting became confrontational and developed into an argument between two of the painting staff. This argument degenerated into a row between staff members during which a number of students recall it being said by Nigel Rolfe that no art of any value had ever been produced in Ireland. This greatly upset many students. In the event, the students didn't do much of the talking at this meeting, and nothing was resolved by it. In fact the situation on the studio floor was made worse by it. This was a low point for the faculty and a point of great disillusionment for many students.

Brian Palm points out that this situation must be seen in the context of the punk era:

> It was a very aggressive time for music and dress. . . .That aggression informed some of the work, not everyone's work. I feel, definitely, that some tried to hide from it through art and others embraced a sort of punk spirit in their art. I kind of fell between two stools. . . . Where I come from aggression

> was seen as a positive attribute. . . . Well suddenly everyone was aggressive.[119]

The adoption of the punk spirit, if not the punk dress code, by Nigel Rolfe and some of his students, as already pointed out, was perfectly consistent with the thinking behind the Basic Design system and in particular the thinking of Richard Hamilton.

Subsequent to that meeting the situation in the Fine Art faculty deteriorated further, and things came to a very public head when a number of students in the class that graduated in 1979 refused their diplomas on the grounds that they had been unfairly treated by staff. Lorcan Walsh gives an account of what happened. In summary it was as follows.

Apart from most sculpture students and a small number of painting students, the majority of painting students in the graduation class of 1979 worked in a figurative style. These students felt that there had been a negative and generally neglectful attitude to their work in the faculty throughout their time at the college. Walsh makes a number of claims in this respect. He claims, for instance, that an assessor for their year was chosen by Campbell Bruce whose work bore no relationship to the type of work that that most students were doing. According to Walsh, the group of students with which he was associated had been asked by Campbell Bruce to nominate a number of potential external assessors from amongst whom the assessor of their diploma show would be chosen. Walsh states that his group did nominate a number of artists none of whom were appointed external assessor. Walsh's group was particularly incensed by this situation. Walsh

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[119] Brian Palm, interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 17, 1008.

believes that the request that students could nominate potential candidates was just a sham in order to create the impression that students had input into the curriculum. In the event the assessor chosen by Campbell Bruce was Alan Green. Green was an English artist whose style of work was diametrically opposed to the kind of work that Walsh and his peers were doing; Green was a minimalist whose work was totally non expressive and non figurative. Walsh also claims that his portfolio was not looked at in the final assessment, and that one student felt so despondent that he did not even present his work for assessment. During the end of year assessment, according to Walsh, his group received consistently low marks as a consequence of the fact that their style did not fit in with the values of the new English staff. As a consequence of this the group of students with which Walsh was associated refused their diplomas.

This action by students had little effect on the situation in the faculty, which remained polarised and confrontational. The National Council for Education Awards document which was written by a panel of assessors who examined the course in fine art in 1981, and which was looked at in Chapter 13, makes this very clear.[120]

The continuance of this situation eventually led to the intervention of the Board in 1985 at the Killiney Seminar. As the Board saw it, and as already shown, there was a need for changes that would bring discipline and some order to the faculty. The Board felt that the situation in the Fine Art faculty had deteriorated since 1975 and that the time had come to put things right. As shown in Chapter 13, as a

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[120] National Council for Education Awards, "Report of Panel of Assessors", on B.A. Degree in Fine Art and Joint Degree in Fine Art and History of Art at the NCAD, November 1981, file AR/BH/ 1.AD (3). Nov. 1980-Feb. 1990, National Council for Educational Awards Archives. This document is dealt with more fully in Chapter 16.

consequence of the Killiney Seminar the situation in the Fine Art faculty changed and by 1988 the curriculum included a more tolerant and pluralist approach to the teaching of fine art than hitherto. The overall aims and objectives of the course, however, remained the same, and the course continued along the lines developed between 1975 and 1985.

14.3 Summary

As it is described in the written documentation, and as discussed in Chapter 13, the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty after 1975 aimed to create an open course that encouraged the development of the individual student as an artist. In order to bring this about the actual program that students followed was, according to the written documentation, loose, flexible, and supportive of student's needs. Professor McCarthy's interviews demonstrate that the curriculum in the Fine Art faculty successfully instilled in the minds of many students the values of the new curriculum. They also demonstrate that these values were evident in the work that was produced by these students. For many students, then, this course was supportive, and many of Ireland's most successful artists of today came through this course. However, as Professor McCarthy's interviews also show, and as the present chapter makes clear, the course as it was run on the studio floor did not suit all students and did not run smoothly. The present chapter also shows that for the first ten years of the course there were serious problems with the curriculum which caused disruption to students. Most of those who were interviewed by the present writer concurred with this view. As the present chapter also shows, the principal cause of problems within the faculty was the conflict between those staff

and students who supported the new post-1975 curriculum and those staff and students who found the methodology and ideology of this course detrimental to their interests and consequently to their development as artists. A significant number of students who were interviewed by the present writer felt that the course had been a negative experience and had actually hindered their development as artists. Gwen O'Dowd suggests that some students failed to complete the course because they just lost interest and that others failed the course because they did not have the necessary self-discipline to become successful artists.[121] In other words, as Gwen O'Dowd sees it, motivation was a problem.

In a course such as that in the Fine Art faculty at the National College of Art and Design between 1975 and 1988, which was heavily dependent on the student-tutor relationship, which was vague in a methodological sense, and which existed in the context of the conflict and change that is described in Chapters 12, 13, and 14, it is not surprising that difficulties arose which hindered the development of students. It is also not surprising that students lacked motivation. In the author's opinion the situation of these students would not have been so difficult and motivation might have been higher had there been a more organised and structured course.

As the present chapter makes clear, one of the major sources of difficulty in the faculty, which comes up again and again in the comments of students and staff and in the written documentation, was the divide between the sculpture department and the rest of the faculty. After the introduction of the new curriculum in 1975 the situation in the sculpture department had very quickly become polarised and

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[121] Gwen O'Dowd, Interview by author, see Vol. II, appendix 16, 985.

confrontational. As a result of this situation the traditional staff in the sculpture area found themselves marginalised. Much bad feeling resulted from this situation, and this bad feeling undermined the curriculum. It also diminished the quality of teaching available to students and the learning experience of students. The conflict in the sculpture department was primarily a conflict between different personalities who had different and opposing values and beliefs: Nigel Rolfe supported radical avant-garde beliefs, Brian King's interest lay in minimalism, and Domhnall O'Murchadha's interests lay in Irish art, traditional stone carving, and in the neo-classical tradition. In the early stages of the course there were other members of staff in the sculpture area, like Liam Roe in woodwork, who supported traditional values and who had difficulties with the new staff in the faculty. The intensity of the conflict in the sculpture area in the early years of the course affected the whole faculty, which had its own problems in relation to clashing personalities and the divide between traditionalism and modernism. By 1985 most of the members of staff who supported traditional values had been replaced by new members of staff who had come through the faculty since 1975, like Alanna O'Kelly, Aileen McKeogh, Gwen O'Dowd, and Ollie Whelan. As these new members of staff shared the values of the new English staff, there was a decline in the factional situation in the faculty.

A Key source of difficulty in the faculty that emerges from the comments of former students and staff was the conflict between the ideology of the avant-garde and the ideology of formalism. This conflict was most intense in the sculpture department. Nigel Rolfe has stated that in his experience at the college there were two sources of conflict in the Fine Art faculty, the relationship between the traditionalists and modernists, and the relationship within modernism between

those who supported avant-garde values and those who supported formalist values. Rolfe states quite candidly, as already shown, that, after power had been taken from those who supported traditional values, formalism won out in the early 1980s. As a consequence of this situation, according to Rolfe, he left the college. Subsequent to his departure, he claims, the college reverted to the type of situation that it was in before he arrived at the college in 1975. Rolfe claims that the curriculum, and consequently the development of students in the Fine Art faculty, is now restricted by academic and bureaucratic demands. The only difference between the Fine Art faculty that he left in the mid-eighties and the situation of fine art education at the college before he arrived was, he claims, that the old neo-classically inspired orthodoxy of the pre-1975 college had been replaced by a modernist orthodoxy. This situation, according to Rolfe, prevails in the Fine Art faculty today.