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## Peter Fuller, Modern Painters and the Sensation exhibition

James Alexander Brown

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# UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

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## Peter Fuller, Modern Painters and the Sensation exhibition

Brown, James Alexander

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# UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

Peter Fuller, *Modern Painters* and the  
*Sensation* exhibition

by

James Alexander Brown

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University  
in fulfilment for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Art, Design and Architecture

**January 2019**

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## Acknowledgements

This research project has its origins in a second year undergraduate module I took at Lancaster University in 1998. The module was part of the Art: History and Culture degree and was on the subject of art criticism. It was while studying for that module that I started reading *Modern Painters*. The combination of articles on contemporary British and international art with those addressing pre-Modernist European painting was unusual, and led me to make connections between seemingly disparate forms of art that I otherwise wouldn't have.

The nature of the writing in *Modern Painters*, and other art magazines around this time, informed my undergraduate dissertation that explored the roles of interpretation and evaluation in contemporary art criticism. It was through the research conducted for this project that I encountered Peter Fuller's writing. I soon discovered that little had been written on this complex English critic, and I thank Plymouth University for giving me the opportunity to remedy this state of affairs.

That criticism module, like most of the rest of my undergraduate degree, was delivered by Professor Nigel Whiteley, who has had a more profound influence on my academic career and research than any other individual. In spite of his untimely passing in 2010, Nigel continues to influence the way I think about and teach art.

Equally, I must thank my supervisors, Malcolm Miles, Anya Lewin and Anthony Caleshu for their regular and stimulating conversations, thorough feedback and

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Throughout the research process, I have been given early access to the Tate's uncatalogued Peter Fuller archive. The Tate's archivist, Adrian Glew spent time showing me the collection and pointing me in the direction of the boxes that would most likely provide the more relevant material.

Thanks must also go to those who have given their time to be interviewed by me, or to write lengthy emails, about their various involvements with *Modern Painters*. My conversation with Karen Wright, who succeeded Peter Fuller as editor of *Modern Painters*, provided a personal insight into the role of the editor and the editorial board. The same can be said of both my conversation with Martin Golding and the thorough email from Jed Perl, both of which provided unique and informative perspectives on the changing nature of *Modern Painters* under the

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I would not have completed this thesis without the support of Cesca and the staff at The Crafty Cow, and Sam and staff at Grupo Lounge who have provided a supportive environment in which to write over the last ten months of this project.

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother.

## Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

A programme of advanced study was undertaken, which included the module MARE521: Research in the Arts and Humanities, regular meetings with the supervisory team, and attendance of relevant research development training sessions.

Relevant seminars and conferences were regularly attended at which work was presented.

### **Publications:**

*'Modern Painters & the Sensation Effect', The Arts and Popular Culture in History*, Plymouth: University of Plymouth Press, 2013

*'The Burlington Magazine and the "Tate Bricks" Controversy', Burlington Index* [burlingtonindex.wordpress.com], May 13<sup>th</sup> 2014

*'The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s – 1980s. A Geopolitics of Western Art Worlds. By Catherine Dossin' (Book Review), Burlington Magazine*, August 2016

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*'Neurotic Realism: New Avant-Garde or Just Bad Painting?'*, Association of Art Historians Annual Conference 2012, The Open University, Milton Keynes, April 2012

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## Abstract

**James Alexander Brown**

**Peter Fuller, *Modern Painters* and the *Sensation* exhibition**

This thesis investigates the decline of a particular form of art criticism, embodied by the English art critic and editor, Peter Fuller. Fuller's criticism developed out of a Kantian tradition, presenting judgements of objective worth arrived at through the exercise of taste, and championed what he described as the British or English Romantic landscape tradition. Central to the decline was the displacement of art criticism and the art critic in the creation and articulation of value in art worlds. Through a historiographical study of *Modern Painters*, the publication founded by Fuller in 1988, the thesis explores the changing relationship between the art magazine and the art world in order to identify and analyse the complex relationships between different agents acting within it.

The thesis begins by examining Fuller's critical position at the time he founded *Modern Painters*. This positions Fuller in relation both to Modernism and Modernist criticism, and to his contemporaries including John Berger. A particular focus is on Fuller's attitudes towards history and tradition. I then assess the extent to which the magazine's content evidences and confirms Fuller's position as expressed through his own writing on criticism. On Fuller's death, Karen Wright took over as editor of *Modern Painters*, and an editorial board was convened. The content of the magazine during this period is analysed to assess the extent to which Fuller's values did or did not remain integral to the editorial policy and subsequent content. *Modern Painters* and contemporaneous publications and criticism are compared and contrasted, examining shifting contexts in art criticism.

In 1976 Fuller wrote an article for *Studio International* that sets out his model for a magazine unaffected by market forces. *Modern Painters* (under Fuller) is analysed in relation to his model. The extent to which editorial content in the magazine may or may not have been influenced by the market during his editorship is assessed, and the changing nature of the relationship between criticism and the market discussed.

An analysis of the relationship between *Modern Painters*, its editors and writers, and the exhibition *Sensation: Young British Artist from the Saatchi Collection* at the Royal Academy of Arts, and the trajectory of the magazine over the following years, reveals the changing relationships between agents within the art world, and their role in the decline and displacement of art criticism and the art critic.

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## Introduction

### Research Questions and Objectives

This thesis is a study in the historiography of art criticism. It examines the nature and function of art criticism at a particular historical juncture through the construction of a historical narrative around the relationship between the magazine *Modern Painters*, its editors and writers, the exhibition *Sensation*, and the broader art market. The purpose of this is to reveal the displacement of the art critic and criticism in the formation of the art world in Britain, and in the creation and articulation of value within it. It looks at *Modern Painters* from its formation by Peter Fuller in 1988, to its sale to Louise Blouin Media in 2004 in order to chart and assess a significant shift in the magazine's editorial priorities and content that chart a decline in a particular form of art criticism. The impact of the art market, publicity and advertising on the symbolic value of artists and their work is assessed in order to contextualise this displacement.

For Fuller, as for many others before him, there was an integrity and authenticity to art criticism that separated it from the effects and function of the art market. *Modern Painters* can be read as a reaction against a shifting cultural landscape that had seen culture become just another category of commercial product. The changes in criticism to which I refer were affected by agencies that constitute the art world, including gallerists and publishers (and in relation to the publication of a magazine, advertisers), artists, collectors and dealers, etc. (see definition below). The critic was no longer the sole purveyor of quality and value. Quality and value had been put in the hands of other agents.

After Fuller's death in 1990, two years after he started *Modern Painters*, responsibility for editing the magazine passed to Karen Wright, who had previously been Fuller's assistant editor. I examine a gradual shift in editorial policy that began when Wright took over as editor, and accelerated around the time of *Sensation*. It explores the multifaceted relationship between *Modern Painters*, its editor and critics, and *Sensation*, and considers the extent to which *Sensation* represents the complex changes that affected criticism at the time.

As I discuss in Chapter 4, *Sensation* wasn't considered by many to be an epoch-defining, or paradigm-changing exhibition at the time. Many magazines gave the exhibition no more attention than they would any other show at one of the major London institutions. Some ignored *Sensation* altogether. However, Karen Wright and *Modern Painters* considered this major display of Charles Saatchi's collection as important enough to dedicate several articles over two issues of the magazine. I argue that the changes in the art world that were manifested in *Sensation* were central to changes in *Modern Painter's* editorial interests, and the nature of the criticism published in the magazine. This, in turn, is indicative of the decline of art criticism as defined by Peter Fuller as both editor and critic.

*Sensation* might be considered the culmination of Fuller's 'mega-visual tradition', the term he used to describe artworks that respond to, and take the forms of mass media and consumerist culture. As such the exhibition is also significant in that it provides a point of comparison between the editorial attitudes of Fuller and Wright towards a particular form of contemporary art. In her editorial for the first of two issues of *Modern Painters* that addressed *Sensation*, Wright reflected on Fuller's own dislike of the type of work the exhibition represented, and a



significant change can be identified in the following months and years. This is not to argue that the shifts in attitude and content were simply the result of *Sensation* and Wright's/ *Modern Painters*' reaction to it. The relationship between them is multi-faceted and complex, and *Sensation* is a manifestation of broader changes in the British art world that impacted on criticism. I focus on the ways in which *Modern Painters*, its editor and writers addressed *Sensation* in comparison to other contemporaneous magazines, and in relation to other art world agencies that also impacted on the decline in art criticism as characterised by Peter Fuller and *Modern Painters* in its early years under his editorship.

## **Definition of Terms**

### **Art World**

My use of the terms 'art world' and 'art worlds' throughout this thesis are, in one sense, informed by Howard S. Becker's definition in his book *Art Worlds*. He describes the term as denoting 'a network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for.'<sup>1</sup> Although this is not a sociological study of art worlds, Becker's description of the networks involved in art worlds provides a useful context within which to understand certain of the relationships that are addressed in this thesis.

This is exemplified in Chapter 5 in which I discuss the relationship between editorial content and advertising in *Modern Painters*. The idea of the network as Becker uses it is helpful to conceptualise where the relationships between the conventions of criticism and the conventions of advertising and publishing overlap, and where, potentially, they clash in terms of their objectives/ purposes.

I am using the term 'art world' to describe the complex group of agents who are involved in the creation, distribution, exhibition, sale, interpretation and evaluation of art works. This includes, but is not restricted to artists, agents, collectors, dealers, galleries, museums and other institutions, publishers, writers and audiences. The changes to which I refer throughout this thesis involve changes in the role and function of, and relationships between combinations of these agents. The structure of an art work is in constant flux, so this study takes a specific period in order to explore nature of the art world, and the role of criticism within it at that particular time.

## **Value**

The idea of value is central to the thesis. Some of the changes in *Modern Painters* are manifestations of changes in the agencies that define and articulate value. Fuller's criticism was Kantian in that it defended the primacy of 'taste' in the judgement of art works. Kant described three qualities that aesthetic judgement addresses; 'the agreeable, 'the beautiful' and the 'good'. Respectively that which 'gratifies', 'simply pleases' and is 'esteemed, i.e. that on which he sets an objective worth.'<sup>2</sup> This is what criticism is for Fuller; a judgement of objective worth. For Fuller, such judgements articulate the ineffable human, aesthetic dimension.

According to Kant,

...the judgement of taste, with its attendant consciousness of detachment from all interest, must involve a claim to validity for all men, and must do so apart from universality attached to Objects, i.e. there must be coupled with it a claim to subjective universality.<sup>3</sup>

This is where Fuller's criticism coincides with that of the Modernist formalist critics, such as Roger Fry, Clive Bell and, later, Clement Greenberg, in that they were all making judgments on behalf of 'all men' – identifying universal values within the subject. Greenberg, for whom Fuller expressed great admiration, identified 'control and order' as the elements of painting that provided the universal human experience of art. However, the formalist critics were more interested in judgements of value in response to a specific aesthetic experience, whereas for Fuller, the Kantian approach articulated a concern with meanings outside of the immediate aesthetic experience of the artwork, concerning Englishness, the spiritual and what Herbert Marcuse identified as 'the aesthetic dimension.'<sup>4</sup> He distanced himself from Formalism and the Formalist position that 'there is nothing left in nature for plastic art to explore' and 'nothing more to aesthetic experience than that which is given to the senses' (see Chapter 1).<sup>5</sup> Chapter 1 will explore in more detail Fuller's relationship to the Kantian/Romantic tradition. Like Kant, aesthetic judgements for Fuller were also moral judgements, not simply identifying the 'beautiful' – although Fuller was concerned with this too – but also that which is objectively 'good'.<sup>6</sup>

Anathema to the notion of the aesthetic dimension was the rise of what Fuller called the 'mega-visual tradition'. This was characterised by work that used the languages of popular culture, and Fuller identified American art as the major source of this tendency, and Warhol his *bête noire*. For Fuller, the mega-visual tradition precluded the possibility of criticism. Fuller's art criticism was concerned with the ineffable human condition. The role of criticism, therefore, was to identify in artworks the 'aesthetic dimension'. The mega-visual rejected the universal element in favour of a radical individualism. Notions of 'taste' and judgement

became subsumed into consumer choice, and the individual and authoritative voice of the critic into the noise of subjective value judgements. Because Fuller's aesthetic judgements also imply a moral judgement, the mega-visual is characterised not only as anti-aesthetic (or, to use Fuller's term, 'anaesthetic'), but also as immoral; against a moral duty of art to address the universal human condition. This can be seen in the language he used, for example, in relation to Gilbert and George, arguing that 'no serious case has ever been made – or could ever be made – that their work is worthy of our attention'.<sup>7</sup>

Through criticism, Fuller could identify art that, in Marcuse's words, 'by virtue of its transhistorical, universal truths... appeals to a consciousness which is... that of human beings as "species beings," developing all their life enhancing faculties.'<sup>8</sup> Fuller's taste for British Romantic landscape painting, and his subsequent criticism, articulated the ineffable human condition, the aesthetic dimension that contemporary art, via mega-visual culture, had dismissed.

For Fuller, value was a question of taste, which identified great works of art that express the universal human condition. Isabelle Graw describes a broader network of agencies that impart symbolic value upon the work. This is value that is not inherent in the object, but dependent upon the 'market of knowledge'. Graw's argument is that *any* discussion, representation or coverage of the work, positive or negative, adds to its symbolic value, and therefore legitimises its market value. This calls into question the evaluative function of the Kantian model of criticism. Michael Findlay supports this idea, arguing that critical judgements are 'trumped by big numbers'.<sup>9</sup>

## ***Modern Painters***

The magazine at the centre of this study, *Modern Painters*, was founded by Peter Fuller in 1988, with the encouragement and support of the London Gallerist Bernard Jacobson. Financing was provided by Fuller's father-in-law, Alan Burns, who was based in Perth, Australia, and two publishers; David Landau, the founder of *Print Quarterly*, and Tony Elliott, the owner and founder of *Time Out*.<sup>10</sup> These were the major share-holders. Jacobson also provided some of the initial financial backing. Fuller himself was a director of *Modern Painters*.<sup>11</sup>

According to Martin Golding, a member of Karen Wright's editorial board who had written for *Modern Painters* from the beginning, none of the owners 'had any appreciable influence on the magazine', fully supporting Fuller, 'his outlook and his tastes'. Golding explains that after Fuller's death, both Landau and Elliott were rarely at the quarterly editorial meetings.

According to Golding, the major shareholders decided that Wright should be the editor at least for the time being, and that she should be supported by an editorial board, which was composed with Wright's cooperation.<sup>12</sup> Although the editorial board had been put in place in order to support the magazine's editorial position under Wright's editorship, she gradually took increasing responsibility for editorial content, with meetings of the editorial board becoming less frequent.<sup>13</sup>

Karen Wright bought out the owners of *Modern Painters* after a few years of editing the magazine, which put her in the position to sell the magazine on to Louise Blouin Media. She said that she had been 'prepared to work for nothing in

order to up my ownership of the magazine. I was lucky at that point to be able to afford to do so.’<sup>14</sup>

In 2004, *Modern Painters* was bought by Louise Blouin Media (part of LTB Holding), owned by the Canadian businesswoman Louise Blouin and, at the time, registered in London. At around the same time, Blouin was building a large portfolio of arts publications and publishing companies. These included the auction industry magazine *Art & Auction*, Art Now Inc., which published a number of American gallery guides, and Somogy, a French art catalogue publishing company. She also bought and relaunched the art and fashion magazine *Spoon*.

In 2006, Wright made the announcement that *Modern Painters* would be relocating to New York. This came at a time when Blouin was closing down a number of her London-based projects, including *Spoon*, as well as the arts festival, Art Fortnight London.<sup>15</sup> Not long after this, the London office of Louise Blouin Media was closed, and the company was moved to New York. Golding has suggested that the decision to move *Modern Painters* to New York was wholly Blouin’s.<sup>16</sup> Once the move was made, Wright soon left the magazine.

Although there were other magazines, editors and critics whose focus was away from the ‘mega-visual tradition’, *Modern Painters* was significantly different from these in a number of ways. Fuller’s and *Modern Painters*’ concern was with the interpretation and evaluation of new or recent work (largely, but not exclusively painting) in the context of the pre-Modern traditions he preferred to both Modernism and the ‘mega-visual’. Although the *Burlington Magazine* and *Apollo*, for example, covered many of the same historical traditions as *Modern Painters*, as

well as some of the same artists, its concern was largely with art history, and criticism that addressed exhibitions of historical art. The changes in the art world and contemporary art market that affected change in *Modern Painters* did not, then, act on the *Burlington Magazine* in the same way. The market art world and art market agents that displaced the function of criticism concerned with new or recent art, did not have a similar effect on more art historical writing.

In an editorial from the April 1988 special issue on 20<sup>th</sup> Century art, the *Burlington's* editor set out the magazine's disagreement with Fuller's own position as editor of the new magazine, *Modern Painters*. The editorial expresses a concern with 'certain of his views [which]... have taken on a disturbing rhetoric.'<sup>20</sup> The editor explains how Fuller's neo-Romanticism and his concern with a 'national tradition' might be damaging to British art in the long term, and that 'young artists need the stimulus and refreshment of exposure to art beyond their own parish'.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Peter Fuller Memorial Foundation and The Peter Fuller Project**

Shortly after Peter Fuller's death in 1990, his widow, Stephanie Burns set up the Peter Fuller Memorial Foundation, with the support of several patrons, including the painter John Bellany, the Earl of Gowrie, who had written for *Modern Painters* from the very first issue, and the former Secretary-General of the Arts Council of Great Britain.<sup>22</sup> Throughout its existence, the Foundation's trustees included Roy Oxlade, who acted as chair. Oxlade had been a mainstay of Fuller's *Modern Painters*, both as a writer, and as the subject of Fuller's own admiration. Other trustees included Martin Golding, who was also on the Editorial Board at *Modern Painters*, Roger Scruton and Martin Gayford, both of whom wrote for the magazine.

The Foundation's main function was the organisation of the annual Peter Fuller Memorial Lecture, held variously as the Slade School of Fine Art, the Courtauld Institute and the Tate galleries. Speakers included Howard Jacobson, Roger Scruton, Martin Maloney and David Cohen, all of whom also wrote for *Modern Painters*. In 2006, the speaker was Fuller's son, Laurence, who announced his (ongoing) project to make a film dramatising his father's life and career.

Besides the annual lecture, Roy Oxlade also produced *Blunt Edge*. Although described later by Marcus Reichert in his foreword to a collection of essays from the publication, as 'the journal of the Peter Fuller Memorial Foundation', Oxlade himself defined it as 'an offspring of' the Foundation's newsletter.<sup>23</sup> Oxlade's aim was to provide 'a place for discussion about the arts free from the prejudice of current fashion and curatorial justification. Martin Golding explains that *Blunt Edge* 'reflected [Oxlade's] particular interests and tastes, often overlapped with Peter's, and was often quite feisty.'<sup>24</sup> Oxlade himself stated that the views represented by the publication were 'independent of, and might even be antagonistic to, views held by all or any of the memorial's trustees.'

The Foundation dissolved sometime around 2010 after some significant differences of opinion between the trustees and Stephanie Burns. The last Memorial Lecture took place that year. According to one member of the board, part of the disagreement concerned the ownership of the title *Blunt Edge*.<sup>25</sup> In 2008, Burns had started the online magazine Art Influence, with Laurence and Sylvia Fuller also named as trustees. However, by this time the Foundation's board of trustees no longer existed.<sup>26</sup>



Laurence Fuller's website is the home of 'The Peter fuller Project', which showcases some of the research the critic's son has conducted towards his film project.<sup>27</sup> This includes a concise but useful biography, tracing the various stages of Fuller's life and career, as well as gathering a number of videos of the critic's television appearances.

## **Contextual Framework and Key Terms**

### **Late Capitalism**

The changes identified and examined in this thesis – such as the influence of various agencies in the art world, and the changing relationship between the art market and notions of value – have been widely addressed by cultural theorists, including Frederic Jameson. Although this thesis does not present a Jamesonian analysis of art criticism, Peter Fuller, *Modern Painters* or *Sensation per se*, his characterisation of 'the cultural logic of late capitalism' provides a useful framework through which to understand and analyse the cultural landscape that contextualises my examination of these subjects.

Jameson compared the condition of postmodernism with the preceding Modernist paradigm.<sup>28</sup> Whereas Modernism critiqued the commodity in the attempt 'to make it transcend itself', postmodernism 'is the consumption of sheer commodity as a process.' According to this logic, then, Fuller's model of criticism – one that seeks transcendence and depth – could not possibly remain relevant or convincing.

The victory of late-capitalism and the commodification of culture not only preceded any possibility of an authentic criticism that transcends the late-capitalist condition, it also precludes a contemporary culture that provides the

kind of experience (depth) that that form of criticism relies upon. Jameson characterised the art world of late-capitalism as having dispensed with depth. Where Fuller, in line with the Romantic criticism he was following by the late 1980s, looked for authenticity both in art works and in the writing that addressed it, Jameson's postmodernism was characterised by the complacency with which it was received.

Fuller's complaint that the 'mega-visual tradition' had become institutionalised was made with the suggestion that this was somehow a decision made by the institutions themselves. Jameson, however, argued that this was an effect of the cultural condition of late-capitalism. He suggested that 'aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally' and that the resultant need (of the market) for novelty 'assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation'.<sup>29</sup>

In combination with the breaking down of the barrier between 'high' and 'commercial culture' (resulting in Fuller's 'Mega-visual tradition'), such innovation led to new forms of art 'infused with the forms, categories and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern'.<sup>30</sup>

The mega-visual culture against which Fuller set himself was, according to Jameson, then, an intrinsic part of the cultural and economic condition of the time. Whereas Fuller (and others) bemoaned aspects of the mega-visual as a subject for contemporary art, Jameson argued that postmodernisms had 'incorporated [them] into their very substance'.<sup>31</sup>

The decline in Fuller's form of criticism is inextricably linked to the rise of the mega-visual tradition, an aspect of the 'cultural logic of late-capitalism.' The displacement of criticism in the formation of art worlds by other agencies more closely engaged in the commercial aspects of the art world did not signal the end of art criticism, but rather a significant shift in its function and place – and that of the editors and publications in which they appeared – in the formation of art worlds.

### **The Crisis of criticism**

Over the last twenty years art criticism has been in decline. In 2008, James Elkins argued that 'art criticism is in worldwide crisis' and that 'its voice has become very weak, and it is dissolving into the background clutter of ephemeral cultural criticism.'<sup>32</sup> Ten years earlier, Maurice Berger remarked, with specific emphasis on America;

if earlier in the [twentieth] century, critics – journalistic, specialized, or academic – have frequently played a vital, even public, role in influencing the shape, texture, and direction of American culture, their value and relevance is growing increasingly tenuous in many sectors of mainstream American cultural life.'<sup>33</sup>

There are a number of reasons for why the 'crisis' manifests. Elkins, for example, points out that it has to do more with a shrinking audience base, than the production of a critical climate.<sup>34</sup> This correctly identifies that there was, in fact, more criticism than ever, but equally, fewer readers of it. Moving across multiple art forms, Maurice Berger picks up on how its reception by non-specialist art critics dilutes the power of criticism to inform consumer choice:

Ministers and politicians dismiss the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe as bad art. A presidential candidate cites *Independence Day* as an example of outstanding, wholesome American film-making. Teenagers gush over Marilyn Manson, REM, and countless other rock groups on their home pages.<sup>35</sup>

Since Berger made this statement, the role and function of not just the non-specialist critic, but the medium – the internet, with its blogs and the proliferation of social media – have become even more central to the dissemination of criticism/opinion, providing a service that, arguably, bypasses any need for traditional criticism. In the internet age, everybody can be an expert. In Berger's terms, the critic becomes 'decentralised', as 'the boundaries between high and low culture' are dissolved and 'the concomitant ethnic and geographic diversity of audiences for culture have lessened and even delegitimised the need for dominant, centralised critical voices'<sup>36</sup>.

The changes this thesis examines has been affected, then, by the multiple agencies that constitute the art world within which *Modern Painters* was published, and that contribute to the expanding field of criticism. *Modern Painters* can be used to chart a sizable shift away from what Peter Fuller considered criticism to be. Even within the art magazine itself, including *Modern Painters*, other agencies were being introduced. For example, celebrities, who were not art critics, or even experts as such, would be invited to write art criticism. While Karen Wright was editor of *Modern Painters*, the rock star David Bowie wrote several articles on a range of subjects. The quality of the writing might well have been less significant than the marketing power of Bowie's name.

The identification of a 'crisis' in criticism provides an opportunity to look back and examine shifts that have occurred in the art world of which British art criticism formed a part during the late-1980s and 1990s.

### **Methodology: A Historiography of Art Criticism**

Art criticism, its decline, and its relationship to art markets and art worlds, has been written about extensively and from the perspective of a range of areas of academic study. Art worlds and the networks that form and characterise them can be examined through sociological studies, for example, those extensive studies conducted by Becker and Pierre Bordieu. As discussed above, this is not a sociological study or an exercise in network studies, although I do examine some aspects of the networks involved in the creation of value. Becker, therefore, is useful in the sense that his study provides a social context within which art criticism exists and functions.

In her essay 'Framing Critics: the publishing context', Valerie Holman suggests that for too long, 'the study of publishing has tended to remain divorced from the study of art history' and, I would suggest, of art criticism.<sup>37</sup> She argues that the 'space within which meaning [and value] is constructed' consists not only of the 'text', but also of the published work, and this can best be explored through the study of how published works 'influence, and are influenced by, their technological, economic, social and artistic milieu.'<sup>38</sup> This thesis explores its subject – the decline of art criticism as a significant agent in the creation and articulation of value – through the detailed analysis of art criticism, the site of its publication (in particular, *Modern Painters*), and their relationship to their 'web of influences'.<sup>39</sup> The study of how art criticism is framed within a publication, in conjunction with the publisher,

editor, editorial board and advertisers, is as important to this study as the study of the writing itself.

Equally, it would be possible to examine the relationships with which I am concerned here through Bourdieu's concept of 'fields'. Bourdieu uses this term to describe bounded sites of practice, such as the law, education, religion and art worlds, through which the properties of a field are deduced by the way in which agents behave within it and, conversely, the properties of agents can be deduced through observing the way they behave within the known properties of the field.<sup>40</sup> As a method of analysing causal relations, field theory has been employed to explore the power relations between agents within art world networks. As stated, this study is not an exercise in sociology and, as such, whereas field theory explores the 'indivisible dynamics between a totality and the elements that constitute it', this study looks at relationships within the art world in an empirical way, rather than following Bourdieu's structuration of 'field', 'agent' and 'capital'. My approach allows for the fluidity and changeable nature of the agents involved in the art world I am addressing, whereas, as Dan O'Hara has argued, Bourdieu's fields are 'too static systems.'<sup>41</sup>

In constructing a historical narrative, the basis of much of my research relies on inductive analysis of primary sources. First and foremost, this research consists of a close analysis of the magazine from its foundation in 1988, through the period after Fuller's death during which Karen Wright edited the magazine, up until the years immediately following the *Sensation* exhibition. In particular, I examine changes that occurred within the publication during this period. I refer here to changes in the style and content of the magazine, and in the writing therein, as

affected by parallel changes in the art world within which *Modern Painters* was published and functioned.

My approach begins with, and includes at various points throughout, close reading and analysis of Peter Fuller's writings. Likewise, chapters that focus specifically on *Modern Painters* itself revolve around close readings of articles from the magazine. I have concentrated my research on close reading of texts - rather than a broader discourse analysis - because the thesis asks specifically how a particular magazine, *Modern Painters*, can be used as a case study to reveal and examine a decline in a particular form of art criticism. The close reading of texts allows me to explore multiple complex relationships between agents operating within the art world that create value. This is particularly useful in constructing an understanding of *Modern Painters'* participation in the art world in relation to other magazines, advertisers, the art market, etc.

The close reading of texts is supported by material from the Tate Gallery's Peter Fuller Archive, to which I have been given early access before it has been sorted and catalogued. This has provided both new insights into Fuller's editorship of *Modern Painters* - including relationships with advertisers and artists - and underscored certain aspects of his working practices both as critic and editor. The archival research supports the close reading of texts by providing primary evidence in support of some of the conclusions arrived at through inductive analysis. Because the archive has not yet been catalogued, and I have only had access to a limited number of boxes, this part of the research process has been both painstaking and partial. However, some useful material has been discovered.

A major aspect of the primary research for this study has been interviews with key figures in the early history of *Modern Painters*. The first of these is Karen Wright, who followed Peter Fuller as editor from 1990 until the magazine was sold in 2000. This interview has provided corroboration of certain aspects of *Modern Painters'* editorial operations, and the conditions under which she was brought into the role of editor. Wright also discussed with me the process through which the magazine selected advertisers. This has been important in developing a clearer understanding of the relationship between advertising and editorial content. Linda Saunders, who was initially Fuller's personal assistant and later took over production of *Modern Painters*, provided further detail regarding the role of the editorial board as well as insight into the transition between the magazine's first two editors.

I have also interviewed Martin Golding and Jed Perl, both of whom wrote regularly for *Modern Painters*; Golding under both Fuller and Wright, and Perl under the latter. Both were also members of the editorial board. As the sole American on the board, Perl has provided a unique perspective, and was important as he represented an early sign of the increasing interest *Modern Painters* was taking in American art. Golding, having written for both Fuller and Wright, has provided significant detail regarding the role of the editorial board under Wright, and the changing relationship between the editor and the board.

### **Chapter-by-Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 provides a detailed summary and analysis of Peter Fuller's developing critical position, leading up to the publication of the first issue of *Modern Painters*. The chapter explores the complexity of Fullers position, beginning with his earlier



Marxist perspective, which moved from an identification with, to a critique of John Berger. Fuller found that the German, Herbert Marcuse, and the Italian, Sebastiano Timpanaro, provided a model for Marxist criticism that was more aligned to his humanist concerns.<sup>42</sup> The chapter goes on to describe Fuller's developing interest in John Ruskin, and how Ruskin provided a critical language with which Fuller could address traditions of British painting that were rooted in the Romantic tradition.

The aspects of Fuller's critical position explored in Chapter 1 provide a detailed background to his editorial policy for *Modern Painters*. His pitching of British painting against American art, and his characterisation of the 'general anaesthesia' of the mainstream international art world, for example, contextualises the magazine's concern with British art of a particular type. The chapter finishes with an analysis of Fuller's editorial to the first issue of *Modern Painters*. It is necessary to construct a detailed account of Fuller's editorial position at the point at which he founded *Modern Painters* in order to fully understand the changes that occurred in the focus and philosophy of the magazine through the decade following his death.

Chapter 2 is a detailed analysis of *Modern Painters* Issue 1. This provides evidence of the extent to which Fuller's magazine was very much the product and manifestation of the editor's own complex critical position. These opening two chapters provide a detailed historical context for the changes that occurred in the magazine over the years following Fuller's death.

Chapter 3 describes the changes that took place in the editorial structure at *Modern Painters* after Fuller's death. This included the introduction of an editorial

board whose purpose was to maintain the specific editorial policy that had come from its founding editor. The chapter also examines the nature of contemporary British art at the time when Karen Wright took over as editor in order to contextualise the task she and the editorial board faced in relation to defining the magazine's place in a rapidly changing art world. Through the detailed analysis of the early issues of *Modern Painters* under Karen Wright's editorship, the chapter examines the extent to which the magazine continued to address Fuller's concerns, for example; the spiritual, pre-Modern Romantic traditions, and 'Englishness'. However, in those early issues there is also foreshadowing of some of the major changes that were to come, particularly the increasing interest in American art.

Chapter 4 examines significant changes in *Modern Painters'* editorial policy and focus regarding the forms of art that were addressed. Central to these shifts were changes in the British art world manifested in the Royal Academy exhibition, *Sensation*. *Sensation* was indicative of major shifts in power within the art market, and the increasing influence of 'supercollectors' like Charles Saatchi on the broader art world. The chapter also examines the wider art magazine scene at the time, and analyses the competition to *Modern Painters* represented by these. *Frieze* magazine provides a particularly useful comparison to Wright's magazine, as it was founded in the midst of the art world hype surrounding the 'young British artists'. Magazines such as *Frieze* and *Dazed & Confused* represented the collapsing of boundaries between cultural forms and between notions of 'high' and 'low' that would provide the background against which Wright and *Modern Painters* would reassess and redefine their position.

In chapter 5 I examine in detail the relationship between art criticism and the art market, in particular I identify the agents within the art world that had become the driving forces of value, and therefore displaced one of the central functions of criticism as defined and exemplified by Fuller and *Modern Painters*. Central to this chapter is an article written by Fuller in 1976, in which he posited a model for ‘radical criticism’, that is an art criticism that would not be bound up in the market.<sup>43</sup> The chapter then examines *Modern Painters* under Fuller and the extent to which the magazine demonstrates the ways in which criticism had not only become bound up in the art market, but had become a functioning part of it.

The final chapter examines the further shifts in critical concerns and art world focus in *Modern Painters* after *Sensation*. The art criticism in Wright’s magazine became significantly different to the writing that was published in *Modern Painters* under Peter Fuller. The magazine was addressing an increasing amount of international art, particularly art from America, both historical and contemporary. The writing in *Modern Painters* continued to move away from Fuller’s Kantian model of criticism towards writing that approached the interpretation and contextualisation of art from a broader range of critical and theoretical perspectives. This chapter explores the reasons for these changes, including the influence of changes in the art world, as well as Wright’s desire to break into the American art magazine market.

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- <sup>1</sup> Becker, H. *Art Worlds*, 1984, Berkeley/ London: University of California Press
- <sup>2</sup> Kant, I., *The Critique of Judgement*, 1952, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 49
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 51
- <sup>4</sup> Marcuse, H. *The Aesthetic Dimension*, 2014 (first published 1978). Boston: Beacon Press, p.29
- <sup>5</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey' in McDonald, J. (ed.), *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, 1993, Methuen, London, p. xxx-xxxi; Fuller, P. 'British Romantic Landscape Painting' in *ibid.* p. 28
- <sup>6</sup> Kant, I., *The Critique of Judgement*, p.49
- <sup>7</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A Renaissance in British Art?' *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 3
- <sup>8</sup> Marcuse, H. *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p.29
- <sup>9</sup> Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, 2014, Munich/ London/ New York: Prestel, p. 104
- <sup>10</sup> Golding, M., email to James A. Brown, 19 July 2017
- <sup>11</sup> Wright, K. 'Peter Fuller 1947-1990', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1990, p. 9
- <sup>12</sup> Golding, M. Interview by James A. Brown, Skype, 22 April 2015
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Wright, K. email to James A. Brown, 29 July 2017
- <sup>15</sup> Herbert, S. 'Queen of Arts', *The Telegraph*, 26 March 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3651176/Queen-of-arts.html>, [accessed 08/08/2017]
- <sup>16</sup> Golding, M. email to James A. Brown
- <sup>20</sup> Elam, C. 'Modern Painters', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 130, No. 1021, Special issue on Twentieth-Century Art (Apr., 1988), p. 267
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p.267
- <sup>22</sup> Fuller, L. 'The Peter Fuller Memorial Foundation', on *The Peter Fuller Project*, <http://laurencefuller.squarespace.com/peter-fuller-art-critic/>, [accessed 26/7/2017]
- <sup>23</sup> Reichert, M. (ed.) *Art Without Art: Selected Writings from the World of Blunt Edge*, London: Ziggurat Books, p. 1
- <sup>24</sup> Golding, M. email to James A. Brown
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Fuller, L. *The Peter Fuller Project*
- <sup>28</sup> Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991, London: Verso
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 4-5
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p. 2
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.* p. 3
- <sup>32</sup> Elkins, J. (ed.), *The State of Art Criticism*, 2008, London/ New York: Routledge, p. 71
- <sup>33</sup> Maurice Berger (ed.), *The Crisis of Criticism*, 1998, Now York: The New Press, p. 4. Although Berger is discussing art criticism in America here, these changes were equally evident in Britain (see Chapter 5)
- <sup>34</sup> Elkins (ed.), *The State of Art Criticism*, p. 72
- <sup>35</sup> Berger (ed.), *The Crisis of Criticism*, p. 4
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p. 6
- <sup>37</sup> Holman, V. 'Framing critics: the publishing context' in Gee, M. (ed.) *Art Criticism Since 1900*, Manchester/ New York: Manchester University Press, p. 68

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p. 69

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p. 71

<sup>40</sup> Hilgers, M. and Mangez, E. (eds.) *Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications*, 2015, London: Routledge, p.3

<sup>41</sup> O'Hara, D. 'Capitalism and Culture: Bourdieu's Field Theory', *American Studies*, vol.45, no.1, 2000, pp. 43–53

<sup>42</sup> See Fuller, P. *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, 1980, London: Writers & Readers; Fuller, P. *Art and Psychoanalysis*, 1988, London: The Hogarth Press

<sup>43</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', *Studio International*. Sept/ Oct 1976, Vol.193/ No.983, pp. 119-125

Fig. 2 (image) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

[Fig. 2] *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988

## Chapter 1

### **Towards *Modern Painters*: The Critical Positions of Peter Fuller**

Peter Fuller, the founding editor of *Modern Painters*, was a complex critic. Although the nature of art criticism is one of constant development and change in response to development and change in the work it addresses – as Clement Greenberg suggested when he said that ‘if you don’t find yourself changing your mind from time to time, then you’re not really looking for yourself’ – Fuller’s own critical position changed more radically over time than most.<sup>1</sup>

In order to analyse the complex relations between Peter Fuller, *Modern Painters* and *Sensation*, so as to explore and understand the displacement of the function of the art critic and art criticism, it is first necessary to understand Fuller’s own complex critical position. The changes that took place in the British art world – and in British art – during the first decade of *Modern Painters*’ existence, and the effect they had on the function of criticism with the art world, can be understood in relation to the extent to which Fuller’s founding critical principles were challenged by the shifting art world contexts that will be explored throughout this thesis. This chapter examines the development of Peter Fuller’s critical position up to the publication of the first issues of *Modern Painters*. I then analyse Fuller’s editorial article in that issue in order to establish what Fuller believed the role of the critic to be, and the critical values inherent in the magazine under his editorship.

When he first published *Modern Painters* as a ‘quarterly journal of the fine arts’ in 1988, Fuller had turned to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century artist, critic and historian John Ruskin,

from whose volumes the magazine took its name. This placed Fuller firmly in the tradition of English Romanticism, a tradition to which he referred regularly in his writing. This chapter will begin with a description of the key intellectual and thematic influences on Fuller of Romanicism.

Prior to his increased interest in John Ruskin, Fuller's critical outlook had gradually transmuted successively through Marxist, psychoanalytic and humanist positions, and throughout this time, had set himself up against materialist and formalist criticism. What is evident throughout his writing is a search for a universal aesthetic, a set of values that provide a solution to the 'art shaped hole' left by late Modernism. I will not provide an exhaustive account here of Fuller's Marxist period, nor of his position on the use of psychoanalysis as a critical tool. Rather, I will introduce these aspects of his criticism in order to contextualise the position at which he had arrived at the time when *Modern Painters* was conceived.

### **The move away from 'pure Marxism'**

In his autobiographical memoir, *Marches Past*, Fuller described his earlier deployment of 'pure Marxism' as 'a flight from the self into the autonomous reality of theory', and his discomfort amongst 'the theoretical Marxists, as I watched them dissolving [the] sensuous, living, loving, potentially fully human being into a desert of decentred, linguistic constructs'.<sup>2</sup> Marxist criticism, to Fuller, drew attention away from the universal elements of great art, opening art up to the subjective interpretations offered by semiotics and other relativist approaches to the deconstruction of meaning. By countering Marxist criticism, Fuller was advocating a de-politicisation and, in turn, de-theorisation of art criticism.



Although there were other critics who had also been turning away from theory and politics during the 1980s, these were in the minority. Aside from the Australian critic, Robert Hughes, many of these (in Britain, at least) wrote for *Modern Painters*. There were American critics whose writing was either never overly political or theoretical, including Jed Perl, who also later write for *Modern Painters*, or who became increasingly depoliticised, and Barbara Rose, for whom the process began earlier in the 1970s. The difference, I would argue, was that Fuller was looking for a deeper meaning, counter to the 'logic of late capitalism' as described by Frederic Jameson.

Fuller's turn away from Marxism was never an absolute rejection. Indeed, on reading the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse's book *The Aesthetic Dimension*, published in 1978, Fuller read that a work of art can be both *about* the class-struggle, but also address universal truths in a metasocial (universal) dimension.<sup>3</sup> Marcuse said that 'clearly, the class-struggle is not always "responsible" for the fact that "the lovers do not always stay together."' <sup>4</sup> He explained that in such cases 'the universal in the fate of the individuals shines through their specific social condition.'<sup>5</sup> The work, therefore, can be both revolutionary (in terms of class-war) *and* universal. Marcuse arrived at the assertion that allowed Fuller to justify his own position, that 'By virtue of its transhistorical, universal truths, art appeals to a consciousness which is not only that of a particular class, but that of human beings as "species beings", developing all their life enhancing faculties.'<sup>6</sup> This would provide Fuller with a fitting explanation for the importance of 'Higher Landscape' painting, and his celebration of a group of British painters whose work was

counter to the tendencies against which Fuller set himself and, eventually, his magazine.

The core of Fuller's concerns about Marxist aesthetics – or at least about 'left idealism' in criticism – is evident in *Seeing Berger*, his critique of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. Fuller's critique of Berger is significant, as he had previously considered Berger something of a mentor, stating that 'more than any other man, he taught me how to write about art'.<sup>7</sup>

In *Seeing Berger* Fuller expressed concern at the assertion throughout *Ways of Seeing* that 'art practice and aesthetics[...] were[...] mere derivatives or epiphenomena of the work of art's function as property'.<sup>8</sup> Fuller, on the other hand, argued that 'the greater the work of art, the less it seems reducible to the ideology of its time'.<sup>9</sup> This is central to Fuller's move away from Marxism towards a position that provides for the possibility of aesthetic judgment away from purely ideological exposition.

### **The Biological Condition**

Fuller critiqued Berger's reading of Frans Hals' two paintings of the *Regents* and *Regentesses of the Old Men's Almshouse* (1664-6). Berger had argued that the paintings should be read through the eyes of Hals, who was seeing his subjects with the bitterness of an impoverished man in thrall to their wealth. He argued that they were powerful because 'we... still live in a capitalist society and so the meaning of the works is accessible to us'.<sup>10</sup> However, for Fuller, judging the painting merely through a consideration of the artist's 'way of seeing' ignores that the paintings were made, by the artist, through a material process that is arrived at

via 'certain biological processes'. According to Fuller, Berger 'really has nothing to say about Hals' way of painting at all'.<sup>11</sup> What is clear here is that Fuller wanted to see painting as made through a physical, material process, which pertains to universal (not class-specific, ideological) elements of the human condition. His argument was that, if the Hals paintings were only readable because 'we still live in a capitalist society', then 'how are we to explain... [the] many works of art which come from societies where quite different "social relations and moral values" prevail but which nonetheless move us powerfully and are expressive for us?'<sup>12</sup> For Fuller, then, the ideological and the universal are not necessarily mutually exclusive in reading the artwork. He suggested that 'despite historical transformations and mediations, there is a resilient, underlying human condition, which is determined by our biological rather than our socio-economic being, by our place in nature rather than our place in history.'<sup>13</sup> This, for Fuller, would help to explain 'the fact that, in Christopher Caudwell's phrase, 'great art... has something universal, something timeless and enduring from age to age.'<sup>14</sup> This enduring timelessness was different to that put forward by Greenberg and the Modernist formalist critics who preceded him. Where Clive Bell and Roger Fry spoke of a universal 'aesthetic emotion' instilled through 'significant form', Fuller was identifying a deeper, more complex relationship between the viewer and the work that connects all humans on a biological level.<sup>15</sup>

Fuller also cited the Italian Marxist, Sebastiano Timpanaro, who posited that 'cultural continuity' – which manifests itself later in Fuller's identification of a British 'tradition' – is possible because of

the fact that man as a biological being has remained essentially unchanged from the beginnings of civilization to the present and those sentiments and representations which are closest to the biological fact of human existence have changed little.<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere, Fuller pointed out that Timpanaro referred to particular forms of art that relate more strongly to the biological human condition than to socio-economic elements of our existence.<sup>17</sup>

Fuller equated the universal elements of the 'biological condition' with 'the relatively "ahistorical" aspects of the spiritual... life of man'<sup>18</sup>, and this can only be accounted for adequately 'if one's materialism extends down to the biological level'.

However, Fuller was equally critical of the aesthetic tradition that argued that 'great art was great because it somehow embodied timeless, universal spiritual truths which remained universally manifest precisely because they were somehow *above* the vicissitudes of history'.<sup>19</sup> Fuller also posited this as an attempt by bourgeois society to make its own ideology appear universal. Fuller's problem at this stage was that neither this bourgeois universalism, nor the Marxist tendency to focus exclusively on the 'structure', suitably answered his question 'how can a work of art outlive its origins?'<sup>20</sup>

Equating the spiritual life to the biological constants between human beings went some way towards solving this problem. In *Art and Psychoanalysis*, Fuller explicitly described his own move away from the Marxist-influenced relativist interpretation of the art object toward this more universalist, biological perspective, using two interpretations of the *Venus de Milo* as his example. He re-presented his own

previous interpretation that had closely resembled Berger's method in *Ways of Seeing*, 'attempting to account for an *apparently* continuous response to the statue [by emphasising] the variability of both the signifier and the sign.'<sup>21</sup> This interpretation had depended upon 'countless thousands of images and ideas [of the Venus] each of which has a history of its own'.<sup>22</sup> The change he identified related directly to his attempts to answer the question posed above. This is not to say that Fuller completely rejected his former position, rather that he believed it to be *too* absolute, and that 'something was lacking'.<sup>23</sup> Thus he returned to the common ground shared by viewers of the work across cultures, and the *material* processes through which the sculptor had addressed these:

Much of the pleasure that we can derive from this statue today depends upon the expression which the artist has achieved through his mastery of human anatomy and musculature on the one hand, and of his techniques and materials on the other. The potentialities of our bodies are much the same as those of the ancient Greeks. One reason why this statue remains transparent to us and can communicate to us actively... is because we share that common physical condition.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, the universality that binds viewers of the work across cultures is a biological one. Indeed, Fuller believed works of art (in this case, sculpture in particular) potentially not only to be transhistorical, but also trans-class, trans-race and transcultural because sculpture 'is accessible to those who are subject to the common physical conditions of human existence, such as being in space, subjection to gravity, etc.'<sup>25</sup>

For Fuller, then, 'a very important part in what gives a work of art enduring value concerns the nature of its relationship to elements of experience which do not change, or rather which change at a very slow rate indeed and, for our purposes,

may effectively be regarded as constants.'<sup>26</sup> This represented a significant shift away from the purely ideological Marxist position described above, and one that provided Fuller with a solution to his question of the universal appeal of great art. The following passage from Timpanaro, as quoted by Fuller, addresses Fuller's question most directly:

...love, the brevity and frailty of human existence, the contrast between the smallness and weakness of man and the infinity of the cosmos, are expressed in literary works in very different ways in various historically determinate societies, but still in not such different ways that all reference to such constant experiences of the human condition as the sexual instinct, the debility produced by age (with its psychological repercussions), the fear of one's own death and sorrow at the death of others, are lost<sup>27</sup>

In this sense, then, for Fuller it is right to look for universal values in historical paintings that relate directly to the human condition, as well as contextually specific ideological significances. According to Fuller, the Hals paintings demonstrate elements of the universal human condition through biological truths such as the physical manifestations of old age, 'power, drunkenness, arrogance and disdain'. As Fuller explained, 'such things are *not* peculiar to the emergent capitalism of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Holland.'<sup>28</sup> The source of Berger's problem, Fuller suggested, is that he 'lacks a fully materialist *theory of expression*', which recognised expression as the 'imaginative and physical' activity of transforming materials.<sup>29</sup> Part of the critic's role, then, according to Fuller, is to identify in works of art that universal, biologically determined human condition, rather than subjective, historically determined, socio-economic modes of existence.

### **Ideology vs Aesthetic**

In his critique of Berger, Fuller quite forcibly argued for the distinction between the original and the reproduction and, thus, against another of the central tenets of Berger's book; that mechanical reproduction has rendered equivalent the work and its reproduction, and stripped meaning from the original through the means of reproduction (although I think that Fuller partially misunderstood this important aspect of Berger's argument). However, what is important here is that Fuller was, again, arguing that (a) painting can remain both 'authentic' and meaningful in the era of mass reproduction. A painting's respect to its subject is evident in 'the painstaking, imaginative and constitutive activity involved in [its] production'.<sup>30</sup>

Herein lies the irreconcilable difference between the two critics. Whereas Berger took what Fuller saw as a 'kind of left idealism', 'attack[ing] the oil painting medium as such for its inherent materialism, which he equates with bourgeois proprietorial values', Fuller preferred to acknowledge painting's materialism as an integral point of departure for the interpretation and judgment of the work.<sup>31</sup> Tellingly, Fuller suggested that 'there is no simple or necessary correlation between materialism, oil painting, and bourgeois attitudes towards property'. For him, then, the oil painting is not *either* an ideological site *or* a material work to be interpreted, but possibly both.

What Fuller argued is that painting 'in its very sensuality... helped to initiate an unprecedented form of imaginative, creative, yet thoroughly secular art which (though initiated by the bourgeoisie) represents a genuine advance in the cultural structuring of feeling and expressive potentiality.'<sup>32</sup> Paintings by Delacroix, Gauguin or Rothko, he argued, 'are... manifestly not reducible to their reproductions: their spiritual and aesthetic values... are clearly not penumbra of

their value in exchange'.<sup>33</sup> Fuller explained that, after Berger's 'discussion in terms of ideology, property values, sexism, etc.', 'any adequate "demystification" of bourgeois aesthetics... must retain an emphasis upon [the] vital, positive residue of sensuous mystery.'<sup>34</sup>

The key to Fuller's argument in *Seeing Berger* was that to turn entirely to ideology in the valuation of art is to deny both aesthetic judgment and the universal human elements of great art. Berger acknowledged that there are 'masterpieces' which 'leap beyond ideology' but characterised them as simply exceptions to the 'normative tradition' discussed throughout *Ways of Seeing*. Fuller suggested that this is too dualistic an approach, and that it does not allow for aesthetic discrimination 'between "good" and "bad" elements in "average" works'.<sup>35</sup> Making judgement of this sort, he suggested, 'is the continuing search for authenticity of expression.' This is what Fuller was searching for throughout the 1980s and also through the publication of *Modern Painters*. It is this authenticity of expression that was lacking in much of the work that Fuller saw being celebrated in the London art world of the 1980s, influenced, he argued, by what he saw as the worst of contemporary American art. Fuller's continuation of the Kantian tradition would continue to offer judgements of aesthetic taste, based on the 'common physical conditions of human existence'.

### **Against 'the chatter of secondary discourse'**

Fuller also set himself against other 'commentators on the left', particularly those addressing work from structuralist and post-structuralist standpoints. These included another Marxist art historian, Nicos Hadjinicolau, who, according to Fuller, 'claims to have dispensed with aesthetics and value judgements



altogether.<sup>36</sup> Fuller suggested that Hadjinicolau's concern with the structuralist perspective was that it 'looks at paintings as if they were advertisements' and, as such, part of what Fuller called the 'mega-visual tradition', the type of art work that oriented itself toward mass-media and popular visual culture.<sup>37</sup> Fuller's task, here and through most of his writing of the 1980s, was to defend painting as other than and beyond the purely ideological image.

In his essay 'The Journey', eventually published in the first issue of *Modern Painters* to be published after his death, Fuller further lamented the 'baleful influence' of 'modes of "discourse"' over the criticism of art and literature, which obscured the interpretation of works '*as art*.'<sup>38</sup> For Fuller, the concerns of what he called 'cultural materialism' obscured attempts to revive interest in the moral, spiritual and universal aspects of art in which he was interested. He cited George Steiner who 'argues that the chatter of secondary discourse... is just a defence against an encounter with that real presence which great art has to offer.'<sup>39</sup> Of course, this assumes a certain interpretation of what constitutes 'great art', or even that art can be evaluated in such a way.

In this way, Fuller refused to acknowledge other approaches to the interpretation and evaluation of artworks besides his own, which would become problematic when addressing work that merited exposure to other subjectivities. However, rather than address such work directly, Fuller would tend to dismiss it as not suitable for discussion at all. As a result of this, *Modern Painters* would, under Fuller's editorship, usually address only work that fitted firmly with his own position.

## **The British Tradition vs American Art**

In his editorial to the first issue of *Modern Painters* published in Spring 1988, Fuller set out the philosophy upon which he had built his rationale for creating the magazine.

By this time, according to his assistant editor and successor, Karen Wright, Fuller 'felt there wasn't enough [writing] about English art in general.'<sup>40</sup> As Julian Stallabrass has explained, Fuller's 'answer to the success of modernism [sic] and mass culture lay in a difficult attempt to re-establish links with native traditions, evolving a means of expression which created a new symbolic order without the foundation of religious belief.'<sup>41</sup>

The editorial begins with an argument for the strength of British art, suggesting that it was undergoing a new Renaissance. Quoting R.B. Kitaj, Fuller suggested that

'The bottom line is that there are artistic personalities in this small island more unique and strong and I think numerous than anywhere in the world outside America's jolting artistic vigour'.<sup>42</sup>

Fuller argued that, at the time of writing, even the latter qualification was rendered void by the recent Saatchi Gallery exhibitions of American art that 'so clearly demonstrated [that] American art, today, is aesthetically bankrupt'.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Fuller had previously lamented the 'aesthetic bankruptcy' of American art in his 1980 book, *Beyond the Crisis in Art*. Here he pinpointed the 'sensationalist, and conspicuously engineered moment' of American Pop Art and how 'the way in which it succeeded Abstract Expressionism itself illuminates the creative bankruptcy of the American Fine Art tradition at this time, its inability to

constitute any genuinely imaginative view of experience of the world.’<sup>44</sup> Such bankruptcy was caused by the ‘recognition by certain Fine Art world professionals of the fact that they had been eclipsed by and were dependent on the products of practitioners within the mega-visual tradition’.<sup>45</sup> It would appear, then, at this early stage in *Modern Painters*, then, Fuller identified the influence of ‘art world professionals’ on the nature of the work produced and distributed within an art world.

Fuller was dismissive of *any* work that ‘pilfered from commercial media’, but the turn to the ‘mega-visual tradition’ – the languages of advertising, ‘news photographs, glamour shots of stars, can labels, dollar bills, etc’ – was, as far as he was concerned, an American import.<sup>46</sup> For Fuller, this represented a turn away from expression. The ‘mega-visual tradition’ represented for him the antithesis of ‘good taste’. His role as critic is defined by this attitude to such work, making explicit judgements of value that contrast the work he considers worthy of attention with that which is not.

He identified Warhol as a prime example of this turn;

The key renunciation he made was that of his expressive relationship to his materials... The way in which his ‘paintings’ were made precluded the possibility of there being any realized, expressive correlation between the imaginative vision of the artist and the concrete working of his forms of paint<sup>47</sup>

What Fuller particularly resented Warhol for was that ‘he threw away what Marcuse called the power of art to break the monopoly of established reality’. He brought painting too close to ‘being a mere reflection of the prevailing ideology

and the dominant mode of production.’<sup>48</sup> Fuller, then, wished art to remain an expression of the relationship between the artist-subject and the material process. The art he saw celebrated by the major institutions that ‘was relinquishing its specific material practices’, was therefore also relinquishing ‘the capacity to create imaginative, ideologically transcendent forms’.

While Fuller and *Modern Painters* were rejecting American art, almost outright, as a suitable subject for serious art criticism, other publications were addressing it as important in its own right and as a significant influence on British art. It is of interest to look briefly at how other publications were addressing the work that Fuller refused to address. *October* translated Thierry De Duve’s Marxist comparison of Warhol and Joseph Beuys.<sup>49</sup> Although still implying judgements of value, De Duve’s essay explored the meanings of Warhol’s oeuvre in relation to its social context. Even the *Burlington Magazine*, which only relatively rarely would address 20<sup>th</sup> Century art at all, published in 1989 a review of an exhibition of Warhol’s later work that made judgements of value within the artist’s oeuvre, ‘ranging from the impressive and the pertinent, to the trite and banal’.<sup>50</sup> The *Burlington* review recognises and acknowledges that, in some of the more interesting work, Warhol had been raising ‘issues of appropriation, originality, and self-counterfeiting, in unexpectedly “eighties” terms.’

Fuller’s position on American art (and, more broadly, the mega-visual tradition), and the reasons he proposes for rejecting it, pits him not only against those critics who would address such work from the perspective of ‘secondary discourse’ (theory or politics, for example), but also against those who would at least explain in art critical terms their value judgements in relation to it. By choosing to ignore

such perspectives to explain his own value judgements, I argue, Fuller was weakening his own position. As a result, in the *Modern Painters* editorials and his own articles and essays, his judgements came across as subjective statements of taste by a reactionary critic. Fuller had much more to offer by way of interpretation *and* evaluation, as he had demonstrated previously, but his refusal to even engage with certain forms of art did not strengthen his position on the work and artists he did choose to address. The problem for Fuller was that so much of this work failed to break from 'established reality' (Marcuse).

According to Fuller, for American art – epitomised by pop and photorealism –there was little hope, and so the best British art did not look to America for its inspiration.<sup>51</sup>

Fuller's argument, put simply, was that 'there have been major painters and sculptors in Britain, this century, whose work requires no apology in comparison with the highest artistic achievements of Europe and America.'<sup>52</sup> He suggested that, rather than looking to Europe or America, the best British art had displayed an 'informed, and often intransigent, insularity.'<sup>53</sup> What he was identifying, then, was a specifically British tradition within which 'the best' work of recent years had been produced. He suggested that the strongest British art of the 1980s developed out of 'a history of almost three centuries', and identified 'continuities which link Hogarth and Reynolds to Freud and Bacon, or Constable to Auerbach.'<sup>54</sup> Also implied here was that the influences on such work were pre-modern. He argued that 'in Britain *refusal*, rather than acceptance, of modernity has often provided the greater creative stimulus.'

## **The Failure of the Modernist Project**

Fuller's identification of the best British painting with a pre-modern tradition reflected his dissatisfaction with the mainstream tendencies of Modernist art, which, in his view, had ended in failure. Modernist painting and sculpture, as far as he could see, had moved away from values he considered central to powerful art. For example, Anthony Caro was castigated for his determination to 'jettison the imaginative, or image-making, component of sculpture altogether', and for 'eschew[ing] all reference to anthropomorphic or natural form'. Furthermore, Caro's work 'ceased to show any of the sculptor's concern with mass, volume, the illusion of internal structure, or the qualities of his materials'; all aspects of 'traditional sculptural technique'.<sup>55</sup> He described Caro as no less than 'a Judas among sculptors, the betrayer of the tradition he inherited', and compared him unfavourably to Henry Moore beside whom 'Caro remains a mere upstart in sculpture'.<sup>56</sup> Fuller's position on Caro demonstrates a narrow conception of ways in which sculpture might demonstrate its concern with mass, volume and internal structure. Caro's sculptures might not do this in the same way as Moore, but achieve this by subverting those qualities. Caro's sculptures refer directly to the quality of their materials by making heavy steel appear light, and encouraging the viewer to consider its 'internal structure' through a direct and active encounter with the work that changes as one moves around the sculpture. Indeed, in an article for *Modern Painters* in 1996, Norbert Lynton argued that Caro's work can, 'like the best of Modern Art, [counter] the pull of Gravity'.<sup>57</sup>

In a review of an exhibition of Caro's later figurative work, published in the *Burlington Magazine*, Fuller laid the blame for the sculptor's diversion from 'the tradition that had most to offer him, and to which he might have made his most

significant contribution' (the figurative tradition of Henry Moore) on 'American art, and American criticism'.<sup>58</sup> Whereas Moore 'sought to affirm a humanist and yet spiritual vision in fully sculptural terms', Caro's progress towards such ends had been restricted by American criticism and theory. Fuller saw Caro's latter engagement with more organic forms as a courageous attempt to 'rid himself of those constraints.' Even the 'Judas among sculptors', then, was capable of redemption.

What separates Fuller's review from other critical perspectives on Caro's work, even from the same publication, is that Fuller continued to make explicit judgements of value while others were exploring the significance of Caro's work within broader contexts. A review of an earlier exhibition of Caro's work, by Tony Godfrey, also in the *Burlington*, focuses on the way in which his oeuvre is interpreted in the catalogue – as a 'self-enclosed system of assumed values – and the limitations of this particular reading.<sup>59</sup> This form of criticism acknowledges the limitations of subjective value judgements and eschews them – at least explicitly – in favour of a more objectively critical interpretation through analysis of the work and related discourses.

According to Fuller, Modernism's legacy was a generation of artists with 'nothing to say and no way of saying it'.<sup>60</sup> This was no more evident than in America, where he saw Jackson Pollock as Modernism's most iconic failure. The 'crisis' of Modernism, as Fuller saw it, had its roots in the 'promise' offered by the avant-garde at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century of a 'new way of seeing and representing the world appropriate to their conception of [a] promised land', 'a new world in which the problem of need had been solved, the means of production fully

socialised and, through advanced technology, nature had been put completely at the service of men and women'.<sup>61</sup> The promise never having been realised, 'fine artists found themselves almost unable to respond'. The twin threats of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's 'saga of atrocity' and the advance of the 'mega-visual tradition' meant that 'Professional Fine Artists were thus marginalised and rendered impotent: they seemed to have been stripped of an area of experience appropriate to their practice, of their visual means, and of their social function alike.'<sup>62</sup> Fuller argued that Pollock, alongside a generation of American artists, recognised 'the inadequacies... of the traditional socialist vision', but 'was unable to find any new way of looking at, or imaginatively grasping, the world or himself.'<sup>63</sup> Thus describing the 'mythological' paintings of the early 1940s, Fuller described Pollock 'thrash[ing] around unsuccessfully for "universal" representations of mythic archetypes'. The iconic drip paintings of the late 1940s were described as 'the despairing acknowledgment that the only subject available to him was precisely his inability to find a world view.'<sup>64</sup> Pollock's failure, then, was the failure of Modernism to provide a subject matter through which to channel his 'considerable abilities'.

By the 1970s, Fuller saw the legacy of Modernism 'in the ineptness of Ellsworth Kelly's steel cut-outs, the blandness of Brice Marden's and Robert Mangold's evacuated formalism, or the unspeakable banality of Richard Serra's all-black walls.' This was work that lacked 'even significant development of stylistic features. It signifies nothing but its own expansive vacuity.'<sup>65</sup>

Modernism, in this sense at least, had failed. And thus to be successful, Fuller believed, the best contemporary art needed to look back beyond the Modern to a



tradition that would provide a more meaningful connection to the world and to life and to the spirit. This was a very exclusive position to take in relation to painting, denying a significant context with which to interpret forms of painting that might have developed out of pre-Modern traditions, but owed much to Modernism and its traditions also, as articulated by Patrick Heron in a 1990/ 91 issue of *Modern Painters* (see Chapter 3).<sup>66</sup>

### **Higher Landscape** and the Romantic Tradition

As for what form this more meaningful art took, as far as Fuller was concerned it was largely painting and sculpture. He argued that ‘the best British artists have stubbornly maintained the traditions of an aesthetic rooted in the human figure, and, indeed, in the imaginative and spiritual response to the whole world of natural form.’<sup>67</sup> He included in this both ‘higher landscape’ painting and ‘abstract forms derived from nature’. Again, he positioned this ‘British tradition’ as ‘an idiosyncratic survivor of a wider, and now threatened, European culture’ in spite of ‘the emptiness of much Late Modernism or the recent anarchy of “post-modernism”’.<sup>68</sup>

Of significance here is the specific emphasis on ‘abstract forms derived from nature’. This set Fuller apart from the formalist critics – led by Greenberg, in the tradition of Clive Bell and Roger Fry – who were concerned with ‘pure form’ as unrelated to and unaffected by nature. Where their aesthetic was of human dimensions, located firmly on the surface of the canvas, Fuller’s was one of ‘higher’ concerns, the artwork a portal through which to access a more spiritual aesthetic dimension.

The successes in British art over the previous fifty years, Fuller argued, had been in landscape painting. He identified 'a revival of British higher landscape painting which may prove as significant as the neo-romantic resurgence of the late 1930s'.<sup>69</sup> Thus Fuller set 'higher landscape' as potentially the most important form of art of the recent past. As I discuss in Chapter 2, this was confirmed by the recurring subjects addressed within the pages of *Modern Painters* over the following two years.

Of course, other critics were celebrating the Romantic landscape as well as Fuller. The painter Roy Oxlade, before writing for *Modern Painters* under Fuller, had already written several articles and essays on his former tutor, David Bomberg, in terms similar to how his editor would later also write about the same artist and other English Romantic landscape painters.<sup>70</sup> Also sharing a similar viewpoint was Richard Cork, who, again, wrote a number of catalogue essays as well as a monograph on the subject of Bomberg, again with a focus on the painter's notion of the 'spirit in the mass', although Cork's writing was less polemic and more objectively art historical than Fuller's and Oxlade's.<sup>71</sup> David Sylvester, another critic who wrote regularly of the English Romantic Landscape, described John Constable's painting of Hadleigh Castle in terms that would be familiar to readers of Peter Fuller. The composition of the painting, he argued, balanced 'the presence of the ruined towers with that of a long stretch of poisonously dank, god-forsaken flatness.'<sup>72</sup> Fuller, then, was not alone in his celebration of the Romantic landscape tradition towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but was indicative of a prevalent, if marginalised tendency.

In 'The Journey', Fuller explained an earlier development in his own aesthetic tastes which ultimately informed the editorial position of the magazine.<sup>73</sup> He described 'the changes which took place in my taste from around 1979 onwards' as involving the development of an 'ever-deeper sympathy for the Romantic, the Gothic, and the spiritual dimensions of art'.<sup>74</sup> Although he claimed that 'the reason for this was [not] my growing interest in the writings of Ruskin', it is possible that he 'became ever more involved with Ruskin because my taste was changing anyway'. He particularly identified with Ruskin's distinction between 'aesthesia' and 'theoria', 'the former being merely a sensuous response to beauty, the latter a response to beauty with "our whole moral being"'.<sup>75</sup> Ruskin, then, provided Fuller with what Greenberg's aesthetics did not, that is a connection between the aesthetic qualities of the work and a higher purpose (moral and spiritual development).

This turn towards Ruskin can be understood in relation to a long history of Romanticism, stretching back to a preromantic (early 18<sup>th</sup> Century) 'retreat from reason and... delight in vagueness or mystery', Friedrich Schlegel and German Romanticism, via the French revolution and, most significantly for Fuller, English Romanticism, from Coleridge and Wordsworth, through Pope, Blake and Shelley, to Ruskin, Turner and Constable.<sup>76</sup> A brief discussion of the main intellectual currents that ran through these versions of Romanticism will help contextualise the critical position from which *Modern Painters* was conceived.

The early Romantics' reaction against the rationalism of the 'age of reason', in favour of inherent human creativity and the 'spirit' is a precedent for Fuller's concern with the exploration of the universal human condition as the basis for

works of art. Schlegel defined 'romantische poesie' as 'progressive and universal'.<sup>77</sup> The task of the Romantic, for Schlegel, was to 'fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical; poeticize wit and fill and saturate the forms of art with every kind of good, solid matter for instruction'.<sup>78</sup> As it would later be for Ruskin (and Fuller after him), nature, in its chaotic perfection, was central to the exploration and understanding of this universality. Schlegel used the literary form of the fragment to exemplify this, explaining that '[a] fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a hedgehog'.<sup>79</sup> The 'unity' of the work reflects a 'chaotic universality' that is the result of infinite conflicting positions. This idea is further represented through Schlegel's conception of 'irony', and the 'demonstration [*epideixis*] of infinity, of universality, of the feeling for the universe' through a limited perspective.<sup>80</sup> What is important here in relation to Fuller's position is the secular, humanistic ideals that influenced early Romanticism.

For Schlegel, the romantic 'both emphasised its links to classical and medieval literatures and its future-oriented mission'.<sup>81</sup> As Azade Seyhan argues, Schlegel

understood the truly classical text to be one with infinite possibilities for interpretation, just as he considered the inexhaustibility of interpretation Romantic poesy's most distinguishing feature.<sup>82</sup>

The end of the eighteenth century, then, was 'a dynamic encounter of the classical and the Romantic'. The same interest in medieval literature influenced English Romanticism, particularly through the epic treatment of heroic subjects.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the German historian, Alois Brandl drew this very comparison between German

and English Romanticism, with specific reference to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Walter Scott and William Wordsworth.<sup>84</sup>

Fuller's own romanticism, exemplified by 'English Romantic landscape' painting, was equally informed by the past, for him, a long pre-Modern history of the medium. Through these artists – Sutherland, Nash, Oxlade, etc. – he sought a contemporary response to Matthew Arnold's 'long withdrawing roar' of the 'sea of faith'.<sup>85</sup>

Fuller's Romanticism was more closely aligned, however, with the English Romantic criticism of William Hazlitt, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, particularly in their conception of nature and naturalism, but also the notion of art as 'revolutionary'. Hazlitt's position began from a kind of primitivism, in which he recognised the 'natural genius' of art as found where society is 'comparatively barbarous' and art has a 'reliance on the power of nature'.<sup>86</sup> Hazlitt recognised that this dependency of art on nature had since been lost, with genius replaced with 'cultivated and artificial minds'.<sup>87</sup> The result of such minds was, according to Wordsworth – on this occasion in his criticism of Pope – the dazzling effect of 'polished style'.<sup>88</sup> The Romantic scholar, Seamus Perry, cites the example of Shakespeare as described by Alexander Pope, who compared the bard favourably to Homer who 'drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature', stating that in Shakespeare, "'tis not so just to say that he speaks from [nature], but that she speaks through him'.<sup>89</sup>

Nature, then, as for John Ruskin in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (see below) and Peter Fuller at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>, was central to the creation of great art. For Hazlitt, the poet was 'one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart'. As for Pope, Hazlitt's favoured poets were

Homer and Shakespeare, for whom 'the power of the imagination... is the representative power of all nature'.<sup>90</sup>

For the English Romantics, the nature of artistic genius was aligned to nature herself. The mark of genius was 'originality', which grew organically, in the words of John Keats, 'as naturally as the Leaves to a tree'.<sup>91</sup> Originality is spontaneous, rather than 'mechanic'. Coleridge explains mechanic form as that which is 'pre-determined', and not 'rising out of the properties of the material'. Organic form, he explains, is 'innate, it shapes as it develops [sic] from within, and the fullness of its developement [sic] is one and the same as its outward Form'.<sup>92</sup> For Coleridge, then, the organic is natural, while the mechanical is artificial. Shakespeare, again, is the example *par excellence*, working as he did 'in the spirit of Nature, by evolving the germ within by the imaginative power'.<sup>93</sup> This is not dissimilar to the early-20<sup>th</sup> Century formalist approach to criticism, as exemplified by members of the Bloomsbury group, particularly Clive Bell and Roger Fry, and later taken up by the American critic Clement Greenberg. In Greenberg's 1940 essay, *Towards a Newer Laocoon*, he expounds the importance of an emphasis on an art form's medium over subject matter, a subject he returns to in his later essay 'Modernist Painters'.<sup>94</sup> In the latter essay, looking back over several decades of painting, he asserted that 'the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium'.<sup>95</sup> This reflects Coleridge's sense of organic form that rises 'out of the properties of the material'. Indeed, Greenberg argues that Romanticism 'was the last great tendency' in which the artist was 'conscious of certain inflexible obligations to the standards of his craft'.<sup>96</sup> (AinT 564) Fuller's problem with Greenberg's purism was that it drew attention entirely away from

nature to the art, and focused too much on the material characteristics of the medium itself. I discuss this in more detail later in this chapter.

Coleridge's, like Fuller's Romanticism, was somewhat contradictory. Although art for Coleridge 'improves' nature through the subjective exercising of the imagination, imagination can also have the 'power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature'.<sup>97</sup> In relation to Wordsworth, for example, Coleridge praised the 'perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions as taken directly from nature', but bemoans his lack of ability to 'add the gleam,/ the light that never was, on sea or land'.<sup>98</sup> Truth to nature, then, but lifted, improved.

Like the Germans, English Romanticism was influenced by revolution across the English Channel. As David Duff has explained, 'Romanticism seeks to effect in poetry what revolution aspires to achieve in politics: innovation, transformation, defamiliarisation.'<sup>99</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley described the task of poetry as being to 'strip the veil of familiarity from the world'.<sup>100</sup> This unfamiliar 'visionary world', in Robert Southey's words, is similar to that which Fuller sought in the English Romantic landscape painting he championed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 'Old things seemed passing away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race'.<sup>101</sup>

A direct line can be drawn from the early English Romantics to Ruskin in relation to the attitude to nature. Looking back on his life's work in art and criticism, he reflected, 'The beginning of all my own right art work in life, . . . depended not on my love of art, but of mountains and sea'.<sup>102</sup> Wordsworth was a formative influence on Ruskin, believing as he did in observing and accurately recording

nature and the emotional bond between himself and his surroundings; 'A motion and a spirit, that impels/ All thinking things, all objects of all thought,/ And rolls through all things.'<sup>103</sup> For Ruskin, the observation of nature draws the individual away from the petty concerns of everyday life and draws attention to the beauty and perfection of God's creation, 'even in all that appears most trifling or contemptible'.<sup>104</sup> This sentiment recalls Blake's incitement 'To see a World in a Grain of Sand/ And a Heaven in a Wild Flower.'<sup>105</sup> Ruskin's Romanticism, then, looked to nature as evidence of God's creation, where Wordsworth and Coleridge subscribed to a more secular Spirit of Nature.

Fuller's writing developed accordingly and started to focus on British (largely, but not exclusively English) landscape painting and how it 'faced up to the aesthetic consequences brought about by the spiritual dilemmas of the modern age'.<sup>106</sup> He stated that

I became interested in the links between natural theology and the triumphs of British 'higher landscape', and those beliefs about nature as divine handiwork which were held with a peculiar vividness and immediacy in Britain<sup>107</sup>

In a lecture of 1990, Fuller considered the Final words of the first volume of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, with which Turner is described as standing

upon an eminence, from which he looks back over the universe of God and forward over the generations of men. Let every work of his hand be the history of the one, and a lesson to the other.<sup>108</sup>

Although Fuller acknowledged the problems with this statement – not least that it is not clear whether Turner worshipped any God 'other than... the sun' – he



suggested that 'Ruskin was onto something fundamental when he argued that what Turner reveals about nature does not stop at appearances but reaches through and beyond them to a spiritual vision of nature itself.'<sup>109</sup> Fuller extended this observation beyond Turner, arguing that 'the truths which the higher landscape painting of the early nineteenth century struggled to express were not simply "natural", let alone merely "visual". They were religious and spiritual.'<sup>110</sup>

It was in the legacy of Turner and of British 'higher landscape', then, that Fuller found an answer to what he saw as the central question of art criticism; that is the 'art-shaped hole' that had been left by 'deconstructive and semiotic approaches to art criticism', and the disappearance of any response to 'the central question of evaluation in our response to art'.<sup>111</sup>

Ruskin preferred work that presented nature as 'God's second book... a physical revelation of Himself'.<sup>112</sup> 'The idea that obsessed him', Fuller claims 'was that of the wilderness, the desert – a place of desolation'. Fuller himself, like Ruskin, believed the Pre-Raphaelites to have been central to the history of British art.<sup>113</sup> William Holman Hunt was identified in particular for his 'landscapes in which he depicted the English countryside as a garden of Eden made by God for man.' However, it is the manifestation in his paintings of Hunt's experiences of the Holy Land which were of particular interest to Fuller; not least *The Scapegoat* which, quoting Hunt himself, Fuller describes as 'so extraordinary a scene of beautifully-arranged horrible wilderness', when what Hunt had hoped to find was 'material evidence of his redeemer'.<sup>114</sup> Following Ruskin, Fuller claimed that 'the image of a wasteland and its redemption, its transformation into new images of paradise, has been the subject of the best British painting ever since'.

## **The Spiritual as Opposed to the Formal**

In the essay 'British Romantic Landscape Painting' Fuller affirmed his belief in a canon, naming some of 'the best British artists of the twentieth century' who he argued were concerned more with spiritual narratives than formal investigation.<sup>115</sup> He listed 'Paul Nash, David Bomberg, Stanley Spencer, Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, John Piper, Cecil Collins.' These artists, he argued, demonstrated that not only is the spiritual element more important than formal objectives in this greatest of British art, but that 'sometimes formal ingenuity was not even necessary'. As was often the case, he used Stanley Spencer as his exemplar, suggesting that 'there was nothing at all original, in a pictorial sense' in his work, claiming that he had rightly been described as 'the last of the Pre-Raphaelites'. Even Paul Nash, whose work could be seen to fit comfortably within a Modernist tradition must, according to Fuller, still be thought of 'within the tradition of British Romantic landscape', pointing out that Nash spoke of his 'unspeakable, Godless, hopeless' experiences of the Ypres Salient. Indeed Fuller compared Nash to Hunt. He considered Nash's *Totes Meer*, depicting 'a dead sea of wrecked German aircraft' alongside *The Scapegoat*, both which 'survey [a] charred, injured and god-forsaken landscape'.<sup>116</sup>

To refer to such artists as working within – and out of – the British romantic tradition revealed Fuller's disaffection with more formalist traditions of criticism. On numerous occasions, Fuller set out his opposition to what he saw as a purely formalist tradition present in much twentieth century criticism from Britain and America. He pointed out Roger Fry's 'intent upon opposing the Ruskinian idea that attention to natural form could give rise to transcendent experience in art'<sup>117</sup> and

his subsequent hostility to Turner. For Fuller, a concern for 'Significant Form' alone was not enough.

As already suggested above, one of the more interesting comparisons to be made is between Fuller and the American critic Clement Greenberg. Fuller described Greenberg as 'without doubt, the greatest critic of art that America has produced or is ever likely to produce.'<sup>118</sup> However, Greenberg's belief that 'there is nothing left in nature for plastic art to explore' clearly went against the core of Fuller's own position, as did his belief that Neo-Romanticism was 'the enemy of modern art' and 'the fag-end of a boring, very great and violent war'<sup>119</sup>. Although he disagreed with Greenberg on many fronts, Fuller did identify with him to the extent that 'he understands that the values which great art proposes are trans-historical' and 'that taste is the only means we have for the apprehension of such values, and he realises that individual taste itself is never invested with the authority of those absolutes in whose name it aspires to speak.' This helps to contextualise Fuller's earlier dissatisfaction with forms of Marxist criticism that 'endeavoured to see every aspect of human culture as determined exclusively by historical circumstances.'<sup>120</sup>

As I have explained above, Fuller described his own sense of the universal transcendence of great art, using Marcuse's words, as one that 'appeals to a consciousness which is... that of human beings as "species-beings", developing all their life-enhancing faculties'<sup>121</sup>, echoing Timpanaro's 'biological fact[s] of human existence'.<sup>122</sup> Fuller's, then, was not the pure formal universal aesthetic of Greenberg, but a universal aesthetic at the service of the improvement of higher, broader, and unchanging human faculties. Greenberg did not address Marcuse's

'development of all [human] life-enhancing faculties', rather assuming 'that there [is] nothing more to aesthetic experience than that which is given to the senses'<sup>123</sup>. Greenberg reduced the aesthetic experience to 'that which is immediately given to the senses',<sup>124</sup> an issue Fuller also raised in relation to Roger Fry's preoccupation with 'Significant Form', which, Fuller suggests, 'soon became an argument for the idea of aesthetic effect as mere sensation, for aesthesis and the severance of the idea of beauty in art from any relationship to the world of nature or that of the spirit.'<sup>125</sup> Fuller, like Ruskin, insisted on there being something more behind the aesthetic experience, reasoning that if what Greenberg and Fry contended was true, 'then the sort of emotion to which a beautiful red scarf gave rise in me would be indistinguishable from that which I felt when contemplating the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.'<sup>126</sup> It was in this way that Fuller considered Greenberg's evaluation of Abstract Expressionism as particularly unjust, arguing that 'he inverted the Abstract Expressionists' conception of themselves', being 'indifferent to 'The Moment of Abstract Expressionism', to the struggle for subject and meaning.' Whereas Greenberg and other critics seemed solely concerned with 'the mechanics of pure picture-making', Fuller lamented that 'these critics pay no attention to the meaning of Pollock's painting, to its relation to his personal anguish, let alone his historic despair'.<sup>127</sup> Although Fuller considered the American movement ultimately to have failed, he at least recognised that the work may have meaning beyond its formal elements. Through Fuller's interpretation of Pollock, his work becomes equivalent, at least in aspiration, to the romantic landscape painting that the critic considered so highly. Pollock was a tragic character to Fuller because, like Holman Hunt in *The Scapegoat*, Pollock was found searching for redemption through paint, only to find that there was none.

## **Against Internationalism and 'Official Taste'**

When Fuller spoke of 'a welcome re-awakening of interest in the achievements of our national school, and signs of an efflorescence in the painting of nature' he framed this (re)turn to nature as an antidote to 'the infantile involvement with the trivia of the mass media which preoccupies the American artworld.'<sup>128</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1990, Fuller still considered the concern of artists with the mass media very much an American phenomenon, even though many increasingly prominent British artists were already producing work that directly addressed similar forms.<sup>129</sup>

The problem, Fuller suggested, was that the institutions in positions of power within the British art world – including other magazines – had turned their attention away from his preferred traditions, towards the 'emptiness of... Late Modernism' and the 'anarchy of Post-Modernism', and saw the notion of a national tradition as 'aberrant'. What he saw in its place was an internationalism that promoted a 'tacky preference for the novel and the fashionable'.<sup>130</sup> We can assume from this, then, that Fuller was positioning *Modern Painters* as 'anti-internationalist' and firmly against the 'fashionable', just as he opposed the 'trivia' of the American concern with the mass media, preferring the British tradition of higher landscape.

A key issue for Fuller – and therefore for *Modern Painters* – was that much of what was being shown in the major museums and galleries at the time was the very work against which he was railing. In the editorial he mentioned the Hayward Gallery's exhibition of Gilbert and George, for example, and the Whitechapel Gallery's exhibitions of work by Carl Andre, Malcolm Morley and Julian Schnabel.

The work of two of these was addressed in articles later in the first issue of *Modern Painters*, and are analysed in Chapter 2. Fuller argued that this 'fashionable', 'novel' work preferred by the institutions represented a form of 'official taste'.<sup>131</sup> He expressed his concern at the Arts Council being directed by Sandy Nairne who had previously been 'responsible for the universally execrated *State of the Art*', a TV series, book and exhibition which 'gave prominence to the worst excesses of international post-modernism' and 'was notable only for its assault upon the very idea of quality in art.' Elsewhere, Fuller described this type of work that 'took over in the art institutions and smothered any real response to the strengths of our national tradition' as 'a kind of Biennale Club Class Art', indicative of 'the rise of rampant commercialism of a crassness and vulgarity never before encountered.'<sup>132</sup>

However, Fuller described a rather over-simplified picture of the English art institutions at this time. For example, in the previous year (1987) the Whitechapel Gallery had held exhibitions of work by Fernand Leger, Jacob Epstein and David Smith.<sup>133</sup> Although none of these could be considered favourites of Fuller, they are certainly not 'Biennial Club Class Art.' Equally, during the same period, although the Hayward Gallery had held a major retrospective of Gilbert and George, they also had major exhibitions of work by Lucian Freud, Diego Rivera and Rodin, as well as a group exhibition with work by RB Kitaj and Helen Chadwick amongst others.<sup>134</sup> In 1988, the Tate Gallery held an exhibition of one of Fuller's most celebrated artists, David Bomberg.

As well as the major institutions, London's commercial galleries, including many that advertised in *Modern Painters*, were continuing to sell, and to put on exhibitions of the very work of which Fuller was lamenting the marginalisation.

Advertised in just the first two issues of *Modern Painters* were sales or exhibitions of work at London commercial galleries by David Bomberg (Fischer Fine Art and Bernard Jacobson Gallery), Therese Oulton (Marlborough Fine Art), Roy Oxlade (Odette Gilbert Gallery) and John Piper (Waddington Galleries). Each of these would be the subject of major articles in *Modern Painters* throughout Fuller's editorship.

The complicity of the institutions (government, museums, the market) in the setting of 'official taste' would remain a concern for *Modern Painters* even after Fuller's death in 1990 (see Chapter 4).

### **'General Anaesthesia'**

It is important to note that Fuller did not refuse to acknowledge the role of the institutions in defining art, or that the definition of art, because of this, had expanded. In a lecture presented on numerous occasions he claimed that 'I think that one can, indeed *should*, concede to the Post-Post-Structuralist contextualisers that art is a category constituted within ideology and maintained by institutions, especially the institutions of contemporary art.'<sup>135</sup> However, he argued that notions of art and of the aesthetic experience should be considered separately, as 'some art embodies aesthetic values and gives rise to aesthetic experience of the highest order, but much art does so only minimally or not at all.'<sup>136</sup> Fuller saw his task as art critic, and therefore the task of *Modern Painters*, 'as one of fostering those circumstances in which the aesthetic potential can thrive, even if it means opposing certain types of "art"'.<sup>137</sup> It was in this way that he proposed to counter the 'spread of General Anaesthesia'. It was through *Modern Painters* that he aimed to do this.

Fuller put down this cultural condition of 'General Anaesthesia', in part, to a decline in 'aesthetic education, the nurturing of aesthetic intelligence and, inevitably, the creation of objects of aesthetic value.'<sup>138</sup> The identification of such 'objects of aesthetic value' was central to Fuller's role as a critic, and one might assume that he saw his task as critic as that of aesthetic educator. The decline of the aesthetic dimension in art precludes the act of criticism in these terms.

Fuller also identified an 'unholy alliance between philistines of the [political] Left and the Right',<sup>139</sup> brought on by 'the left-wing aesthetic theories of the 1960s and 1970s' which, he suggested, 'provided the 'programme' for the right-wing governments of the 1980s'.<sup>140</sup> He described how Margaret Thatcher's government emphasised design education over fine art, and equated this to John Berger's argument that 'museums were "reactionary" middle-class institutions'. The suggestion here clearly that Berger's 'assault on the idea of Fine Art values, which he dismissed as "bourgeois" and anachronistic' should have been considered at least partially responsible for the 'pressure' put by the government onto the art institutions. This link between theory and policy was made explicit when Fuller stated that 'Mrs Thatcher initiated a regime of stunning philistinism and destructiveness, which aimed to sweep away the last vestige in public arts policy of exactly those things to which the Marxists had objected.'<sup>141</sup>

It is interesting to note that Fuller did not believe that the market itself was corrosive of 'higher values', but rather that 'if the art institutions foster a demand for trash, then most dealers will happily service that taste.'<sup>142</sup> In this sense 'the operations of the market are neutral; neither implying nor eliminating aesthetic



values. On its own, the market is simply insufficient or incapable of creating that “facilitating environment” in which good art can be created.’<sup>143</sup>

As well as Ruskin, Fuller also acknowledged the influence of another prominent Victorian thinker, the sociologist, educationalist and poet Matthew Arnold. Fuller cited Arnold on a number of occasions in relation to ‘the long withdrawing roar’ of the ‘Sea of Faith’.<sup>144</sup> But, like Fuller, Arnold was also concerned about ‘the philistines’, ‘the people who believe most that our greatness and welfare are proved by our being very rich, and who most give their lives and thoughts to becoming rich’.<sup>145</sup> He thus saw the value of culture in ‘stemming the common tide of men’s thoughts in a wealthy and industrial community, and which saves the future, as one may hope, from being vulgarised, even if one cannot save the present.’<sup>146</sup> For Arnold, the measure of Greatness lay in the search for ‘perfection’ as ‘an *inward* condition of the mind and spirit... at variance with the mechanical and material civilization in esteem with us.’ He believed in ‘the idea of perfection as a *general* expansion of the human family... at variance with our strong individualism..., our maxim of “every man for himself”’. Finally he saw the search for perfection as ‘a *harmonious* expansion of human nature.’<sup>147</sup> This is not dissimilar to Fuller’s dissatisfaction with the Thatcherite philistinism described above, and perhaps partly explains his interest in the Victorian’s writing.

In *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, Fuller argued that it was the institutions that had facilitated the rise of the ‘mega-visual tradition’ through the celebration of ‘every fatuous dilettante who had been thrown into prominence’.<sup>148</sup> This was a return to ‘every man for himself’. This might be considered an overly simplistic

interpretation of the rise of the 'mega-visual tradition' in relation to the complex relationships within the art world that this thesis examines.

### **Ideology, Conceptualism and 'Stuff'**

The 'crisis' to which the title of the book refers relates, then, to a 'suppression of personalised expression' by the institutions, with expression replaced either by ideology or – worse – 'stuff'. Fuller identifies both Clement Greenberg's and Anthony Caro's late-Modernist reductionism as having had a negative effect on later painting and sculptural practices. Of Caro's position, he suggests it

'was inevitably the immediate precursor of the view that only the material existence of the sculpture as object mattered. And if, of course, sculpture and painting are *just* 'stuff' in the world, then why bother with the stuff at all? Why not walking, breathing, or cutting out your adrenal glands? Physicalists like Greenberg and Caro are inevitably fathers of the total idealists, the conceptualists who abandon the medium altogether'.<sup>149</sup>

What is important here, in terms of the values behind *Modern Painters*, is Fuller's assertion that this 'assault on "personal expression" was not the initiation of a new revolutionary practice'. He later argued that conceptual art, which he saw as the 'inevitable' consequence of the reductionism of late-Modernism, was equally non-radical, in the sense that it rapidly became the institutionally accepted form of contemporary art.<sup>150</sup> His disappointment was that 'instead of resisting and exposing this progressive impoverishment, the art-left was forever seeking rationalisations for it'.<sup>151</sup> By comparison, we can assume that as far as Fuller was concerned, the creation of *Modern Painters* several years later was indeed revolutionary. That is, it railed against the predominant 'mainstream... institutional' ideology within the art world of the time.<sup>152</sup>

The aesthetic dimension, then, had been under threat for some time and from multiple directions. 'Cultural anaesthesia', as accelerated by cultural policy, was characterised by an increasing concern with the 'mega-visual tradition'. However, the legacy of late-Modernism – conceptual art – and its 'assault on personal expression' was considered equally damaging by Fuller. In conjunction with the influence on the arts institutions, this all added up to a cultural condition which was not conducive to the 'creation of objects of aesthetic value.' It is this, I would argue, that underlies the decline of a tradition of art criticism that depends on the identification of aesthetic value and taste. In *Modern Painters*, Fuller was attempting to counter this decline by providing a platform for the continuation of the Kantian critical tradition.

In response to the question of what does create 'a facilitating environment for high aesthetic achievement', Fuller suggested 'beliefs, faith and even will – but in a very different sense to the way those qualities were manifested in the culture of Modernism or in that of fashionable Post-Modernism.'<sup>153</sup> In a sense, then, *Modern Painters* could be considered a move by Peter Fuller towards re-establishing an aesthetic education, creating that 'facilitating environment' outside of the institutions and in defiance of governmental cultural policy.

### **Catering to the tastes of the 'British public'**

Fuller believed that, although the 'Biennial Club Class Art' he described may represent official taste, it was not representative of the taste of the British Public. He argued that 'despite all the publicity, promotion, commercial sponsorship, and institutional backing, the work of Gilbert and George is no more loved in this country than the official art of the USSR is loved in Eastern Europe.'<sup>154</sup> He pointed

specifically to the low number of visitors to the Gilbert and George retrospective at the Hayward Gallery.<sup>155</sup> By focusing the attention of *Modern Painters* upon the British tradition outlined above, Fuller perhaps perceived that he was bringing the British public closer to the art that they, like him, desired. The problem with Fuller's argument here is that 'official taste', as suggested above, was not restricted to 'Biennial Club Class Art', but only *included* it. Fuller was being selective in his characterisation of the work represented within the art world, as the major institutions and small galleries continued to show the kind of work that Fuller believed *was* representative of the tastes of the British public.

Fuller suggested that it should have been possible to engage the British public in art, and that its lack of interest in contemporary art was not down to a general lack of interest in art itself. He claimed that 'attendance figures at serious exhibitions of the art of the recent past indicate that gallery-goers retain a strong sense of the historic aesthetic achievements of European culture' and that 'there is little doubt that comparable responses could be attained for contemporary, British art if those responsible for the mounting of exhibitions exercised greater responsibility, taste and judgment'.<sup>156</sup> This suggests that Fuller saw one of the roles for *Modern Painters* as appealing to a public taste that had been turned-off from contemporary British art as a result of poor aesthetic decisions by the institutions. I would also argue that it also reveals a denial by Fuller of the cultural condition of late-capitalism as described by Jameson, and the over-simplification of the processes, structures and agents which inform such decisions.

The editorial to the first issue of *Modern Painters* ended with Fuller's mission statement for the magazine. *Modern Painters* 'intends to challenge "aesthetic

idleness””, he stated, quoting the Prince of Wales from his speech on the state of British architecture, reproduced elsewhere in the same issue. *Modern Painters* ‘will seek to uphold the critical imagination and the pursuit of quality in art.’ ‘Good art’, Fuller suggested, ‘can minister to the human spirit even in these troubled times.’<sup>157</sup>

Throughout this editorial, Fuller placed himself and *Modern Painters* as arbiters (and educators) of taste. For example, in relation to Gilbert and George, he claimed that ‘no serious case has ever been made – or could ever be made – that their work is worthy of our attention’, Malcolm Morley was a producer of ‘degraded photo-realism’ and Julian Schnabel ‘has produced nothing of merit or even consequence’.<sup>158</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Having founded *Modern Painters* with the gallerist Bernard Jacobson, and with the (initial) financial backing of his father-in-law Alan Burns, and the publishers David Landau and Tony Elliott, Peter Fuller was in a position largely to form the editorial position of the magazine along the lines of his own critical concerns. Martin Golding has explained that Fuller’s outlook was fully supported by the magazine’s backers, and so its editorial policy was effectively Fuller’s own critical position as stated in the editorial of the first issue.<sup>159</sup>

By this time Fuller had arrived at a critical position that had been cultivated over three decades of deliberation. His eventual identification with Ruskin was the result as much of a process of psychoanalytic self-analysis as it was of critical reflection on art. Ruskin provided Fuller with a spiritual perspective on art that allowed for the latter’s atheism. Indeed, Fuller clearly identified with the religious

doubts Ruskin himself suffered in his later life. In a sense, the *Modern Painters* project was, for Fuller, a process of finding and identifying a spiritual, if not religious, aspect to British art that would explain the universal appeal of great works. And, perhaps, their civilising influence.

It is important to consider what kind of Romantic Fuller was. First and foremost, he was a Romantic in the sense that he believed in the subjective genius of the artist in the imaginative representation of nature. This aligned him closely with Coleridge in particular. Ruskin was central to the direction taken by Fuller in response to a perceived failure of Modernism. Although the Modernist formalist critics, both of London and New York, would continue some aspects of the Romantic project; particularly a concern with the organic form that 'rises out of the properties of the material', Fuller's position challenged the simplicity of the formalist position, looking backwards in order to progress. Fuller's revolution was not one of destroying the past in order to forge a utopian future, but rather a revolution against the present (the 'mega-visual traditon') in favour of a pre-Modern Romantic perspective. What has become clear in this chapter is that Fuller's critical position developed out of a long and complex historical tradition. The philosophy out of which *Modern Painters* was conceived had been described, contextualised and rationalised in enormous detail by Fuller over the previous decades, and the strength of the magazine's position within the art world was testament to this complexity.

It might be suitable to label Fuller a Humanist in the classical sense. He was, after all, searching for universal human values out of an art critical landscape of

relativist interpretation and judgment arrived at through materialist and post-structuralist approaches. Indeed, Fuller's explicit rejection of theoretical approaches to art criticism was comparable to Humanist literary critic Irving Babbitt's (for example) disapproval of philological scholarship in favour of the search for the 'immortal essence', the universal moral and spiritual values at the centre of the literary masterpiece. Although I do not know whether Fuller read Babbitt, I would argue that Babbitt's Humanism can shed some light on Fuller's own position regarding the function of art. Babbitt's search for this moral centre was counter to the 'myth of man's natural goodness', perpetrated by Rousseau and Romanticism.<sup>160</sup> Thus for Babbitt, the Modern had corrupted the search for the moral core, and subverted 'the law of the spirit [that] can scarcely prevail... over the law of the members without a greater or lesser degree of succor in the form of divine grace.' For Babbitt, however, at the core of this corruption was Rousseau's replacement of God with nature, as the kingdom from which man has fallen. Fuller, on the other hand, looked to Romanticism (via Ruskin) for that reason. In nature, Romanticism provided him with an alternative to God, which provided a theology and spirituality based in nature where he may find the redemption he sought.

This is where Marcuse, in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, provided Fuller with a model for a more radical form of Humanism that allowed him to continue to believe in an art that was both revolutionary (in Marxist terms) at the same time as transcending ordinary reality. Equally, Timpanaro, through his 'constant experiences of the human condition', provided a Marxist perspective on the universal appeal of art works. It might be said, then, that Fuller saw himself as a Marxist Humanist, in a similar vein to both Marcuse and Timpanaro, but with a conflicted spirituality. Conflicted because, however much he insisted on his

atheism, Fuller identified with and celebrated the work of painters who were responding to the 'long withdrawing roar of the sea of faith'.<sup>161</sup> Like Babbitt, Fuller sought the universal moral and spiritual values to be found in great works of art.

What set apart both Fuller and *Modern Painters* from most of the other art criticism of the late 1980s was exactly this focus on pre-Modern concerns, but also the editor's resistance to viewpoints other than his own. Thus post-colonialism, feminism, and other subjectivities would not be brought to bear on work whose nature may warrant such attention. As a result of this, the early issues of *Modern Painters* might appear anomalous to much of the British art world of the time, when Damien Hirst was involved in *Freeze*, the inaugural exhibition of 'Young British Art', and Hoxton was becoming the centre of a new and exciting *post-Modern* movement in British art. In his first *Modern Painters* editorial, Fuller certainly implied that the magazine's position and focus was counter to the 'official taste', perpetuated by the major English (London) art institutions. However, the London art world, in particular, was not as one-dimensional as perhaps Fuller made out. Nonetheless, if the 'mega-visual' tradition was not worthy of address, *Modern Painters* would have to ignore much of a burgeoning London art scene.

Fuller was against the 'mega-visual tradition' because it did not fit his view concerning the 'universal appeal' of great works of art. When he asked how he could enjoy artworks without knowing anything about their socio-cultural origins, he did not recognise – or acknowledge – that he was speaking from a Western ideological perspective. This is, of course, one of the very issues addressed by some of the art work unilaterally rejected by Fuller as unworthy of critical address and by the criticism that addressed it, also rejected by Fuller as 'secondary chatter'.



When Fuller wrote of ‘the rise of rampant commercialism of a crassness and vulgarity never before encountered’, he did so in order to dismiss the work as unworthy of critical discussion.<sup>162</sup> However, in dismissing the work he failed to recognise the possibility that the work was, in fact, engaging with the zeitgeist in a potentially critical way, just as Holman-Hunt’s *Hireling Shepherd* did in 1851 in response to Ruskin’s concerns regarding Catholicism.

What Fuller was searching for was some notion of *authenticity* in art, whether this was through expression of the universal human condition, or spirituality, or through a relationship with artistic traditions – British or otherwise – that stretched back beyond Modernism.

What this exploration of Fuller’s developing critical positions demonstrates is that, whichever stance he was taking at any particular time, criticism was, to him, a Kantian presentation of value judgements through the exercise of taste. His rejection of the ‘mega-visual tradition’ provides a stark counterpoint to, and helps articulate, the human ‘aesthetic dimension’ that contemporary art had dismissed. The notion of value, of quality – what is worthy or not of serious attention – is central to Fuller’s criticism and, subsequently, central to the *Modern Painters* project. This was explicit throughout his editorials for the magazine. Peter Fuller’s defense of the aesthetic dimension was also a defense of criticism. He recognised that a decline in ‘personal expression’ and the rise of the ‘mega-visual’ was not compatible with his own conception of the task of the critic.

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- <sup>1</sup> Greenberg, C. 'Interview Conducted by Lily Leino' in *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance*, 1995, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 309
- <sup>2</sup> Fuller, P. *Marches Past*, 1986, London: Chatto & Windus, p. 118
- <sup>3</sup> Marcuse, H. *The Aesthetic Dimension*, 2014 (first published 1978). Boston: Beacon Press
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 24
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 25
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 29
- <sup>7</sup> Fuller, P. *Seeing Berger: A Revaluation*, 1981 (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), London: Writers and Readers, p. 1
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 4
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 7
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p. 8
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 9
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 23
- <sup>15</sup> Bell, C. 'The Aesthetic Hypothesis', 1912 in Harrison, C. & Wood, P. (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, London: Blackwell, pp. 107-110; Fry, R. 'An Essay in Aesthetics' in Harrison, C. & Wood, P. (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, pp. 75-82
- <sup>16</sup> Fuller, P. *Seeing Berger: A Revaluation*, p. 9
- <sup>17</sup> Fuller, P. *Art and Psychoanalysis*, 1988, London: The Hogarth Press, p. 19
- <sup>18</sup> Fuller, *Seeing Berger: A Revaluation*, p. 24
- <sup>19</sup> Fuller, *Art and Psychoanalysis*, p. 15
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 15
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 100
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 94
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p. 100
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 103-4
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p. 106
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 21
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p. 19
- <sup>28</sup> Fuller, *Seeing Berger: A Revaluation*, p. 9
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 10
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p. 14
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid.* p. 16
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p. 19
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p. 20
- <sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p. 21
- <sup>38</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey: A Personal Memoir' in McDonald, J. (ed.) *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, 1993, London: Methuen, p. xxxiii
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> Wright, Karen, Interview by James A. Brown, ICA, London, February 2013

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- <sup>41</sup> Stallabrass, J. 'Success and Failure of Peter Fuller' in *New Left Review*. I/207, September/ October 1994 <http://newleftreview.org/I/207/julian-stallabrass-success-and-failure-of-peter-fuller> [accessed 18/10/2016]
- <sup>42</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A Renaissance in British Art?', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 3
- <sup>43</sup> Over 1987 and 1988 the Saatchi gallery put on two shows titled *New York Art Now*, which included work by Peter Halley, Jeff Koons, Robert Gober and Haim Steinbach.
- <sup>44</sup> Fuller, P. *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, 1980, London: Writers & Readers, p. 84
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 19
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p. 21
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> de Duve, T. and Krauss, R. 'Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected', *October*, Vol. 48, Spring 1989, pp. 3-14
- <sup>50</sup> Cooke, L. 'Andy Warhol. New York and Chicago', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 131, No. 1036, July 1989, p. 505
- <sup>51</sup> The American artists of the Modern period whose work Fuller believed deserved 'centrality' included Edward Hopper, Andrew Wyeth, Isabel Bishop and Ivan Allbright; all painters whose work, he might have argued, looks back to a pre-Modern tradition. Fuller also wrote at some length about the American painter Robert Natkin, 'who in one sense also seems to be deploying, but also often denying, some of the conventions of the colour-field. Natkin uses these devices as tools for an emotionally charged investigation of psychological experience and biographical becoming.' See also Fuller, P. *Marches Past*, 1986, London: Chatto & Windus
- <sup>52</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A Renaissance in British Art?' p. 2
- <sup>53</sup> Patrick Heron had also identified the need for a 'native setting' as the 'principal natural source' for English painting (see chapter 3). Heron, P. quoted in Garlake, M. 'Between Paris and New York: critical constructions of 'Englishness' c.1945-60' in Gee, Malcolm *Art Criticism Since 1900*, Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1990, p. 189
- <sup>54</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A Renaissance in British Art?', p. 2
- <sup>55</sup> Fuller, P. 'Anthony Caro' in McDonald, J. (ed.) *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, p. 183
- <sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p. 182
- <sup>57</sup> Lynton, N. 'British Sculpture in Paris', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1996, p. 57
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- <sup>59</sup> Godfrey, T. 'Caro, Lupertz and Twombly. London', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 126, No. 975, June 1984, p. 377
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- <sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p. 72
- <sup>63</sup> *ibid.* p. 101
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- <sup>67</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A Renaissance in British Art?', p. 2
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- <sup>77</sup> Seyhan, A. 'What is Romanticism and where did it come from?' in Saul, N. *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, 2009, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 2
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- <sup>89</sup> *ibid.*
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- <sup>111</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey', p. xxix-xxx
- <sup>112</sup> Fuller, P. 'British Romantic Landscape Painting from Turner to Maggi Hambling', p. 27
- <sup>113</sup> *ibid.* p. 23
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- <sup>118</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey', p. xxx
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- <sup>120</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey', p. xxviii
- <sup>121</sup> *ibid.* p. xxx-xxix
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- <sup>123</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey', p. xxx-xxxi
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- <sup>126</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey', p. xxxi
- <sup>127</sup> Fuller, P. *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, p. 82
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- <sup>131</sup> *ibid.*
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<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.* p. 38

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.* p. 39

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.* p. 40-1

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.* p. 41

<sup>144</sup> Arnold, M. *New Poems*, p. 112

See also, Fuller, 'The Journey', p. xxxiii.

<sup>145</sup> Collini, S. (ed.) *Matthew Arnold: Culture and Anarchy and other writings*, 1993, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 63

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.* p. 65

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<sup>148</sup> Fuller, 1980, p. 18

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.* p. 25

<sup>150</sup> It might be argued that the Tate Modern is an example of this today.

<sup>151</sup> Fuller, P. *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, p. 22

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Fuller, P. 'But is it Art?' in McDonald, J. (ed.) *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, p. 41

<sup>154</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A Renaissance in British Art?', p. 3

<sup>155</sup> Hayward Gallery, *Gilbert and George: Pictures 1982-1985*, 1987, London

<sup>156</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A Renaissance in British Art?', p. 3

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<sup>160</sup> Babbitt, I. *Character and Culture: Essays on East and West*, 1995 (originally published 1940), New Brunswick/ London: Transaction Publishers, p. 227

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[Fig. 3] *Modern Painters*, Summer 1999





## Chapter 2

### ***Modern Painters* Issue 1: Writing for Peter Fuller**

*Modern Painters* was published, partly, in response to what Peter Fuller considered to be the 'anaesthesia' of late-Modernism. In his editorial to the first edition he had set out his position, placing a particular form of English painting at the magazine's philosophical centre. Equally, he derided the 'official taste' that supported what he called 'Biennial Club-Class Art'.<sup>1</sup> Fuller was clearly interested in new art, and the contents pages of *Modern Painters* are evidence of this, but for new art to be included in the magazine, and be treated with respect, it would very firmly have to comply with his own aesthetic values and, usually, be painting or sculpture.

For Fuller, Modernism, in its concern with the formal elements of painting, had failed to address art's more important functions. What Fuller took to be the universal human condition, in terms of both biology and spirituality, had been largely ignored in favour of formalism, leaving what Fuller described as an 'art-shaped hole'. This was being filled, he argued, by those whose work was rooted in a 'British Tradition', influenced very much by pre-Modern art and a Romantic sensibility.<sup>2</sup>

However, Fuller's position was characterised as much by his reaction against the aspects of the art world that he derided as by the work that he celebrated. His later writing, and *Modern Painters* itself, betrayed an antipathy towards what he called the 'mega-visual tradition'; the tendency for art to reflect the dominant popular visual culture. Fuller considered such work to be inauthentic, reflective of the

ephemeral and subjective signs of everyday culture, whereas authenticity was to be found in the expression of universal human experience.

This apparently dominant, 'inauthentic' art, Fuller argued, was not indicative of popular taste, but rather endorsed and maintained by art's institutions as a kind of 'official taste'. Therefore, he claimed that *Modern Painters* would be catering to the tastes of the masses – those who cared about art, but were not drawn by, and did not attend exhibitions of artists working in the 'mega-visual tradition'. Fuller clearly considered *Modern Painters* to be filling a space that he believed was not being addressed by the dominant art world.

In this chapter I analyse articles and reviews from the first issue of *Modern Painters*, in which Fuller's inaugural editorial, discussed in the previous chapter, was published. This first issue serves as a microcosm for Fuller's editorial position throughout his time as editor, and introduced the major themes that would continue to form the basis of the magazine's editorial philosophy for a period of time after his untimely death in 1990. This analysis will allow me to assess the extent to which Fuller's critical position as put forward in his writing before the publication of the magazine, and, in the editorial published in Issue 1, was evident in the magazine itself.

In exploring the relationship between Fuller, his critical position and the content and context of *Modern Painters*, this chapter will reveal the extent to which the magazine allowed Fuller – and his writers – to continue to address work that engaged with the 'aesthetic dimension'. This places *Modern Painters* in relation to other publications and the broader art world within which it was published and

read. The historical account of Fuller's critical position set out in Chapter 1, and this account of the early issues of *Modern Painters* will provide detailed historical context for the changes that would occur under the editorship of Fuller's successor, Karen Wright, and for changes in the nature and role of art criticism within the art world more broadly during the period in question.

The early issues of *Modern Painters* that are analysed in this chapter are indicative of Fuller's editorial leadership. This is evident in how the content of the magazine, the subjects and artists addressed, and the critical positions of those who were writing for the magazine all upheld the editor's own critical position as stated in his opening editorial.

Fuller was careful to ensure that his distinctive critical values would permeate the first issue of his magazine. The first major article was by Grey Gowrie, on Lucian Freud, in which the author displayed attitudes toward art reflective of those of his editor.<sup>3</sup> Roy Oxlade wrote on the painter David Bomberg, whom Fuller discussed in a number of articles, essays and lectures and whose work he upheld as concrete evidence of his arguments concerning the strengths of contemporary British painting.<sup>4</sup> The editor's values were further emphasised in an article by Fuller himself, addressing one of the artists he believed was most in tune with Ruskin's English Romanticism, Graham Sutherland.<sup>5</sup> These were accompanied by articles including the text of HRH the Prince of Wales's Mansion House speech on the state of architecture in the city of London, which placed similar concerns with tradition and history in the context of broader artistic practices, and two articles on artists apparently considered the antithesis of the *Modern Painters* philosophy – Julian

Schnabel and Gilbert and George – leaving no uncertainty not only as to what would be in the *Modern Painters* canon, but also what would not.<sup>6</sup>

Fuller's choice of writers for the first issue is important. Fuller would have been confident that most of them would represent values and opinions close to his own. For example, Fuller had been invited by Roy Oxlade to lecture at the painter's summer school in 1982, and had done so throughout the 1980s. He described Oxlade as one of 'the most original and challenging teachers of art that I had come across'<sup>7</sup> and stated that 'I have never doubted the fact that we share the same underlying values.'<sup>8</sup> In his previous writing, Oxlade had stated his own admiration for Herbert Marcuse's *Aesthetic Dimension* and his belief that 'an aesthetically aware society will be one which is receptive to an art that is unburdened by constraint.'<sup>9</sup> In the same essay Oxlade also expressed regret at how 'the prominent artists are the ones who have found success within a market system of patronage' and, thus, will 'conform to establishment requirements' rather than challenging 'the assumptions of establishment values.'<sup>10</sup> This is very close to Fuller's own concerns regarding the conformity of what he believed to be mainstream contemporary British art as set out in his editorial to the first issue of *Modern Painters*. Roger Scruton, like Peter Fuller, graduated from Peterhouse College, Cambridge soon after which he published his first book, *Art and Imagination* in 1974.<sup>11</sup> Fuller would also have empathised with much of Scruton's writing on art prior to asking him to write for *Modern Painters*. Scruton had written at length about the 'communal', humanist element of 'high art' that is 'continuous with the "common culture" from which it springs'.<sup>12</sup>

## Pre-Modern

From the very beginning, it was clear that *Modern Painters* would reflect its founding editor's own concerns. The first issue includes the full text of the Prince of Wales's Mansion House speech. He used the opportunity to speak about the state of architecture in the City of London. Although the Prince has often been outspoken on a range of subjects, the speech made national headlines partly due to its scathing and uncompromising tone. It is telling that the text of the speech should form a central part of the first issue of Peter Fuller's magazine. The Prince 'reminds us of Britain's historic classical tradition', and referred to 'the bind of aesthetic idleness which has afflicted the post-war world.'<sup>13</sup> As Fuller claimed in his editorial, '*Modern Painters* intends to challenge "aesthetic idleness" ... [and] will seek to uphold the critical imagination and the pursuit of quality in art'.<sup>14</sup> For the Prince, post-war late-Modernism was at fault, reflecting Fuller's own concerns about that period's disconnection from pre-Modern traditions.

The Prince contrasted post-war additions to the City, particularly the area around St. Paul's Cathedral, with equally functional 'commercial architecture as effective as the Mansion House or the Royal exchange or Sir Edward Lutyens' ... Midland Bank – worthy celebration, I would have said, of the fruits of commerce.'<sup>15</sup> He was calling for a reinvigoration of contemporary architecture through looking to historical – largely pre-Modern – traditions of British architecture. At the same time, he also rejected the purely functional buildings and spaces resulting from the Modernist tradition that had 'wrecked the London skyline and desecrated the dome of St. Paul's.'<sup>16</sup> The notion of 'desecration' recalling Fuller's own reference to Arnold's 'long withdrawing roar' of the 'sea of Faith'.<sup>17</sup>

There was a difference, however, between the solutions suggested by the Prince, and those implied by Fuller throughout his writings on the relationship between art and tradition. The prince seemed to suggest that the post-war City should perhaps have been reconstructed as it had been before the blitz, in a sense creating a simulation of what had been lost.

In order to remedy this, he asked whether it was 'time to... set down a few sensible rules such as limits on the height of buildings, the materials to be used, the proportions of windows, even *the appropriate style* perhaps.'<sup>18</sup> He stated that he 'would like to see the medieval street plan of pre-war Paternoster reconstructed, not out of mere nostalgia, but to give meaning to surviving fragments like Amen Court and the Chapter House, now left like dispossessed refugees in an arid desert of God-forsaken buildings.'<sup>19</sup> Again, the language used here is similar to that used by Fuller to describe the desolated landscapes of Paul Nash's *Totes Meer* and William Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat*.

Fuller was not so prescriptive and did not seek anything quite so 'neo' as Charles, who would have 'love[d] to see the London skyline restored'.<sup>20</sup> Fuller required an art that would find new ways to connect with and develop the themes of British traditions that had grown out of pre-Modern practices. However, the positions of the Prince of Wales and Peter Fuller appear closest where Charles said that he saw 'no reason... why wealth should not finance beauty that is in harmony with tradition, today as in the past', suggesting that we can 'learn from the age of Wren, that unique moment in our architectural history when the vernacular gothic and the classical were fused in a vigorously attractive style'.<sup>21</sup>

It is at the end of his speech that Charles most reflected Fuller's own reasoning behind founding *Modern Painters* in the first place, suggesting that

This... is a good time to reassert a sense of vision and civilized values amidst all the excitement and commercialism of the city. Perhaps such a scheme as I have sketched for Paternoster would help to drag us out of the bind of the deep aesthetic idleness which has afflicted the post war world.'<sup>22</sup>

This closely represented Fuller's apparent aims for the magazine, to reassert such values in art in contrast to the commercialism of the contemporary art institutions and market.

This concern with pre-Modern influences on the best art of the 1980s and of the recent past was also reflected in other articles in the first issue of *Modern Painters*. In his essay on Lucian Freud, the poet and former Minister for the Arts, Grey Gowrie argued that the painter 'derived at first from the Northern Renaissance'.<sup>23</sup> In an article published in the *Burlington* magazine at around the same time, Fuller agreed, claiming that Freud had 'something in common' with Frans Hals.<sup>24</sup>

Oxlade's article on Bomberg was written from the perspective of having attended his subject's drawing classes as a student. Bomberg was included by Fuller among 'the best British artists of the twentieth Century'.<sup>25</sup> The article was published to coincide with a major retrospective of Bomberg's work at the Tate Gallery. Again, Fuller himself had an article on Bomberg published in the concurrent issue of the *Burlington* magazine.<sup>26</sup>

It is clear that Fuller chose Oxlade to write this article not only because he was once a student of Bomberg, but also because Oxlade shared a central aspect of

Fuller's own beliefs on contemporary painting. Oxlade argued 'that [Bomberg] emphasises the need for artists to assimilate the past in order to contribute to the present.'<sup>27</sup> He placed Bomberg, both as a painter and a teacher, not only outside of the 'thoroughly analytic' academic tradition 'imposed by William Coldstream's plumb-line', but also outside of mainstream Modernism. He quoted Bomberg himself, who 'dismissed the modernism backed by the British art establishment as "the accumulated rottenness and rubbish of this time"'<sup>28</sup>. He suggested that

the most commanding aspect of his approach and his teaching was contained in his emphasis upon the poetic realisation of individual perceptions which are rooted in a basic and natural simplicity; a demand for the identification of an authentic tradition linking the art of the caveman with the personality and practice of his 20<sup>th</sup> century successor.<sup>29</sup>

I would argue that this places Oxlade's position firmly in line with Fuller's Romanticism, recalling Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic fusing of 'poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature', and William Hazlitt's concern with primitive responses to the 'powers of nature'.<sup>30</sup>

In his *Burlington* article on Bomberg, Fuller also alluded to influences predating Modernism. Although he acknowledged the influence of the early-Modernist painter Paul Cezanne, Fuller suggested that the Frenchman 'provided the sign-post which pointed [Bomberg] back beyond pre-Raphaelitism, to retrieve an aesthetic which... bears comparison with that of Turner.'<sup>31</sup>

In the second issue of *Modern Painters*, Fuller made a similar claim for the work of another British painter, John Piper. He described Piper's 'rehabilitation of a lost romantic tradition'.<sup>32</sup> Fuller argued that Piper was influenced by the 'school of



Paris', including Picasso, but specifically by the way in which they 'were building on the foundations provided by the French classical tradition'. Through this, Fuller claimed, Piper came to believe that 'the secret of the lost greatness of the English school of painting could be recovered and restored.'<sup>33</sup>

Oxlade explained that 'when Bomberg wrote, "we return to the cave", he was announcing his antagonism to the superficiality of contemporary painting as well as his commitment to a non-scientific approach to drawing'.<sup>34</sup> This provides the clearest reason why this was one of the first articles in Fuller's first issue of *Modern Painters*. He continued, 'according to this view, with the arrival of the new authentic work of art, we re-evaluate the whole of the preceding order.'<sup>35</sup> Fuller himself could have written either of those sentences.

It is worth noting, however, that in an earlier essay on Bomberg, Fuller suggested that the painter had, in the last 25 years of his life, been 'determined to hold fast to *both* types of expression', that is, the pre-Modern concern 'with what was expressed by the subject... as revealed through [the subject's] physiognomy and musculature', *and* the Modernist concern 'with the way in which the subject matter, and materials, have been worked so as to be expressive of the artist's own feeling.'<sup>36</sup> The former 'classical theory and practice of expression', Fuller suggested, was 'regarded as one of the painter's necessary scientific skills'. For Fuller, and for Bomberg according to Fuller, expression could be achieved through both analysis of physiognomy *and* expression. This squares with Fuller's ongoing concern with the medium's expression of the universal physical and spiritual human condition discussed in Chapter 1.

In the only article by Fuller himself in this issue, in which he compared and contrasted the work of Francis Bacon and Graham Sutherland, he argued that 'the work of both men is eccentric to Modernist concerns'. He explained that they both 'refer constantly to a vanished tradition of European painting, for which religious symbolism and belief were of central importance.'<sup>37</sup> This provides a reminder that the reason why Fuller derided the legacy of Modernism was because of its opening up of the 'art-shaped hole', which had been emptied of the universal elements of human experience.

### **Humanism as Opposed to Formalism**

This concern with the universal human experience of art, as opposed to Modernism's formalist concerns, was consistent throughout *Modern Painters* under Fuller's editorship. Towards the end of Oxlade's article on Bomberg, he suggested that 'the basic flaw in modernism has been its conceptual bias, which, combined with a preoccupation with novelty, has led to reductionist absurdity.'<sup>38</sup> This conflates a number of aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century painting, but focuses in on an aspect of 'late-Modernism' that Fuller also lamented; the ultra-formalist project, described by Greenberg and deliberately played out by Minimalism. It is not clear where novelty comes into this particular concern, unless Oxlade is simply referring to 'anything new', but it is quite easy to see here shared concerns between Oxlade and Fuller regarding the reductive nature of late 20<sup>th</sup> Century painting. What Oxlade would seem to have preferred was described through another quote from Bomberg;

The modern artist to be modern must be very unmodern and he must go completely unconsciously and not know what or why or where he is going...

[and] cannot and must not use their approaches to analyse apart from answering and solving and affirming problems he deems his vision.<sup>39</sup>

‘Vision’ is considered more important than analysis, characterising the artist as visionary, rather than scientific (either as recorder of ‘fact’, or as experimenter).

Just as Oxlade focused on the ‘unmodern’ aspect of Bomberg’s work, so Fuller, in his essay on Sutherland and Bacon, argued that any weakness in Sutherland’s work was a result of ‘too many concessions to accepted Modernist styles’.<sup>40</sup> Fuller argued that Sutherland’s strongest works were those such as his animal paintings, which ‘involved intense, imaginative transformation’ and ‘imbued an established genre with new layers of symbolism and imaginative resonance’ – and his portraits, which ‘recall landscape and reveal the depths of the *human* spirit.’<sup>41</sup>

Gowrie’s article on Freud also reflected some of Fuller’s own concerns regarding content. Gowrie suggested that ‘part of the excitement of the [Hayward] exhibition is the ability of Freud’s paintings to give us back an older, humanist, not formalist, language for talking about art.’<sup>42</sup> Indeed, when placing Freud within a tradition, Gowrie argued that Freud had ‘seen the point of the old masters, the humanist tradition’, rather than having been influenced by his contemporaries, immediate forebears or painters of the earlier 20th Century.<sup>43</sup> Freud did not come out of the Modernist formal tradition, as he saw that ‘formal things are there because you are a painter and can’t avoid them, and because you are an artist and therefore need them. Art is a rendering of life, your own and the lives your sensibility selects.’<sup>44</sup> He had not, therefore, ever ‘shown any interest in a modern, post-Cubist rendering of planes and perceptions. His Modernist side is all to do with content.’ Content, then,

takes precedent over formal matters, echoing Fuller's own position on formalism, and indeed Modernism.

Looking again to pre-Modern painting, Gowrie suggested that 'Ingres was the perfect master for Freud: a classicist of the romantic – that is to say, introspective – period; an identity without idiosyncrasy: someone whose own personality is present in every line but who will not allow tricks or distortions to reveal it.'<sup>45</sup> This did not only suggest the presence of a human element to the work's content, but also a psychological aspect. Not only was the artist's 'touch' present on the canvas, but also his 'personality'. This implies a psychoanalytic aspect to the viewing – and consequent interpretation – of the paintings. Freud's best portraits, argued Gowrie, 'are great... psychologically as well as pictorially.'<sup>46</sup>

In his *Burlington* article, Fuller's psychoanalytic interpretation of Freud's work was made in direct relation to the painter's grandfather's studies, suggesting that the theme of death, apparent in Sigmund Freud's 'own collection of artefacts and antiquities', was 'echoed again in the work of his grandson, from the studies of dead cocks and monkeys to the splayed nudes of later years, revealed to us with the pallour of the grave already flicking across them.'<sup>47</sup>

There is an interesting side to Gowrie's interpretation of Lucien Freud's development from his early work to his mature style. In one particular passage, he referred to a sculptural aspect to the paintings. He explained this in relation to his own beliefs about painting, saying that

It seems to me that painting starts with drawing, conceptually at least, something linear in the mind's eye, and ends with sculpture, in the sense that the density of a world seen in three dimensions needs modelling if a two-dimensional surface is going to approximate its richness. Drawings, etchings, lithographs photographs can all deliver an image. The emotional radioactivity at the core of humans appearance needs to be modelled.'<sup>48</sup>

Again, this places Gowrie's view of Freud's development as separate from the development of (formalist) Modernism. Rather than the self-critical tendency towards medium specificity, painting as painting, Freud's 'migration' was from 'exquisite, watchmaker precision' to a 'sculptural' handling of paint that 'allows us to move through the painting, so to speak, and into the life beyond it.' For Gowrie, Freud's achievement was not one of form, but rather his 'obsessive preoccupation with the human clay' which, he argued, 'is always richer, more rewarding than [an obsession] with form alone.'<sup>49</sup> For Gowrie, then, the strength of the greatest British painting could be found in its humanist content above its formal qualities alone.

Fuller also hinted at the phenomenological aspect of Freud's paintings when he suggested that he 'is driven by a sickening and ultimately terrible sense of the bruised and yet abundant otherness of the things and persons in the world – that is what he wants to touch and to paint.'<sup>50</sup>

Fuller himself was convinced that there was 'more to aesthetic experience than that which is immediately given to the senses.'<sup>51</sup> I am not sure that Gowrie's reading of Freud can quite be considered in the realm of Ruskin's 'theoria', the 'response to beauty with our whole moral being', but it is certainly more complex than mere 'aesthesis', the purely sensuous experience of art.<sup>52</sup> When Gowrie wrote of a 'revelation of [an] inner life in the contours of anatomy and its painful reassembling in oil paint',<sup>53</sup> he came close to what Fuller described as 'the terrible

beauty of an aesthetic transformation'<sup>54</sup>. This connection between the 'inner', spiritual life and the biological human condition is central to Fuller's position as developed throughout his writing of the previous two decades.

In a review of a Howard Hodgkin exhibition in the second issue of *Modern Painters*, Fuller argued that the painter's use of colour went beyond the 'sensuousness and luxury' of Matisse, into 'something resembling Ruskin's perception of Italian, decorated Gothic', an appreciation of 'the nobleness and sacredness of colour'.<sup>56</sup> As with Bomberg and Freud, then, Hodgkin was represented not as a product of Modernism, but from an older romantic tradition. The paintings, Fuller argued, offered an emotional response to nature.

### **The Spiritual and 'Higher Landscape' Painting**

The 'inner life' to which Gowrie referred in relation to Freud, included, for Fuller, a 'spiritual' element. As I explained in Chapter 1, Fuller was concerned that this spiritual element had largely disappeared from art that was celebrated and supported by the institutions, reflecting the 'long withdrawing roar' of the 'sea of faith' described by Matthew Arnold in his poem *Dover Beach*.<sup>57</sup> HRH The Prince of Wales lamented the 'desecration' by city planners of St. Paul's cathedral, a temple which glorifies God through the inspired expression of man's craftsmanship and art'.<sup>58</sup> Fuller found redemption, however, through the 'authentic' expression of the universal (spiritual) human condition in British 'higher landscape' painting. Again, this notion of the primacy of some spiritual aspect to the experience of art, and those British painters who represented it, permeated this issue of *Modern Painters*.

Fuller's call for a return to the romantic tradition was echoed in a review by Sandra Kingsley.<sup>59</sup> She reviewed two exhibitions, 'The Age of Chivalry' at the Royal Academy, and 'British Relief Woodcarvings' at Drumcroon, Wigan. Kingsley argued that the exhibitions provided an opportunity to reassess the English Gothic tradition and, like Fuller, cited Sutherland and John Piper as artists who revived the tradition in spite of the 'dull, "progressive", "internationalist" movements' of late- and post-Modernism. She argued that 'we need to develop an imaginative and spiritual response to nature, even if we don't believe in God.'<sup>60</sup> In a review of drawings by Dennis Creffield in the same issue, Fuller repeated this claim that a belief in God is not necessary for an appreciation of the spiritual aspect of the work, arguing that 'whether or not we share these beliefs [of Creffield, Turner, Bomberg and Cezanne], we are compelled to recognise the importance they had for their art.'<sup>61</sup>

In a catalogue essay for an exhibition of British drawing in 1985, Fuller had explained why David Bomberg was of such importance to him, identifying links between he and Ruskin. Fuller stated that Bomberg 'saw that the only possible redemption for art would come about through renewed imaginative contact with the world of natural form'.<sup>62</sup> Bomberg, then, represented a tendency that was counter to the 'anaesthesia' of late-Modernism, wherein 'most of the art produced and promoted... became drained of all sense of spirit'.<sup>63</sup> For Fuller, Bomberg's work represented a neo-romantic search for God, or at least the human spirit, in natural form. Fuller suggested that Bomberg's notion of 'Spirit in the Mass' was close to Turner's 'Angel in the Sun', what Ruskin recognized as the painter's 'spiritual vision of nature itself'.<sup>65</sup> This location of the 'indefinable in the definable' also allowed for Fuller's natural theology.

In his article for *Modern Painters*, Oxlade argued that Bomberg pursued form in the service of a higher outcome than the more analytical forms of Modernism; ‘we approach mass to unite in harmony, spirit and matter’.<sup>66</sup> In the *Burlington* article, Fuller argued similarly that ‘Bomberg appears to have resorted to an abstraction of form not in order to stake his claim to ‘progress’ and Modernity, but in the hope of intensifying his eschatological, even biblical motifs.’<sup>67</sup> He argued that Bomberg should be regarded in relation to the British romantic tradition, not as a Modernist. He suggested that ‘many of Bomberg’s preoccupations – including rocks, cathedrals and flowers, or even his reluctance when confronted with the human body – were uncannily Ruskinian’.<sup>68</sup> Oxlade, then, presented Bomberg as a representative of Fuller’s ‘higher landscape’, describing his work as ‘transformative’ and ‘redemptive’.<sup>69</sup>

It is in Bomberg’s writings that Oxlade found the most convincing expression of his search for the spiritual through form. Quoting from the artist’s *Syllabus*, he wrote

There is in man the desire to see perpetuated, in some form of imagery, his inward spiritual urge to a higher and more complete existence. In periods when the artist can be inspired – given freedom to express this inspiration, we get great art.<sup>70</sup>

In his own article in the first issue of *Modern Painters*, on the English painters Graham Sutherland and Francis Bacon, Fuller aligned both artists with a European tradition of painting ‘for which religious symbolism and belief were of central importance’.<sup>71</sup> He contrasted Sutherland’s ‘yearning for spiritual redemption’ and ‘aesthetic rooted in natural theology’, with Bacon’s concern with ‘only sense and sensation’ and ‘mundane sense of damnation’.<sup>72</sup> Bacon, then, represented Ruskin’s



aesthesis, and Sutherland, theoria. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Fuller saw spiritual redemption as central to the strengths of the Neo-Romantic landscape tradition. In his lecture on 'British Romantic Landscape Painting', delivered at the National Gallery in 1990, he claimed that 'the image of a wasteland and its redemption, its transformation into new images of paradise, has been the subject of the best British painting ever since [Ruskin's 'faith was shaken']'.<sup>73</sup> Sutherland also represented the continuing link between Ruskin and contemporary painting. Quoting John Hayes, Fuller suggested that 'for Sutherland, landscape, and all its elements, bears the impress of the divine creation, of which he seeks to catch a reflection'.<sup>74</sup>

As is made clear in Fuller's editorial to Issue 1 (see Chapter 1), the notion of a 'British tradition' rooted in the 'romantic landscape' would be central to the magazine's position. On Sutherland, Fuller argued that the painter

fused his English nature Romanticism with what he had learned from the best twentieth-century French art, to produce some of the most original and elegiac British paintings of recent years. *Conglomerate I*, 1970, bears witness to Sutherland's Ruskinian capacity to see in a pebble the grandeur and scale of a mountain range.<sup>75</sup>

His interpretation of the work of this period equally focused on the symbolism of natural theology, explaining that '*Forest with Chains II*, 1973, suggests the eventual triumph of the organic over the mechanical', and 'the troubled root forms of *Picton*, 1971-2, are heavy with presentiments of a return to the earth, of impending death'.<sup>76</sup> Fuller acknowledged that 'Sutherland denied conscious symbolic intent'. Again, he returns to Ruskin claiming that 'Ruskin seems almost to have had

Sutherland's last paintings in mind when he praises the 'infinite wonderfulness there is in this vegetation'"<sup>77</sup>.

Even in Sutherland's most pessimistic paintings, 'his responses to an injured and injurious nature, and his war work', Fuller identified a trajectory that was building toward 'the promise of salvation' to be found in more explicitly religious paintings.<sup>78</sup>

Whereas Sutherland was, like Bomberg, concerned with the 'spirit in the mass', Bacon's work was of the flesh, bringing 'extreme anatomical and physiognomic distortion as the principal means of expression; a general tenor of violence and relentless physicality... to an abandoned tradition of Christian religious painting.'<sup>79</sup> Although Fuller pointed out that Bacon shared the iconography of the crucifixion with Sutherland, he 'insists, however, that his interest in the subject has nothing to do with its symbolic resonances – least of all with any hint of salvation'.<sup>80</sup> Although not explicitly stating a relative judgment of the two approaches at this point, Fuller's concern with painting as redemption from 'the long withdrawing roar' would suggest that his preference was for Sutherland's search for salvation rather than Bacon's more base treatment of the subject.

The reason for the gradual collapse of Sutherland's reputation, suggested Fuller, was the replacement of 'the ethics of hope and 'reconstruction'' with 'the callous banalities of consumerism'. The fault was not any growing irrelevance of Sutherland's subject matter in an increasingly consumerist art world, in which 'his *Risen Christ* seemed like an iconic survival from a forgotten age of faith', but rather

with the misguided attempts of the art world and artists to respond to such changes.<sup>81</sup> In Sutherland's best work, Fuller argued,

he seems to affirm the intractable, unmalleable 'otherness' of the world of natural objects. And yet he insists, like Ruskin before him, upon the necessity of an imaginative, spiritual, and aesthetic response to nature, regardless.<sup>82</sup>

Sutherland was the more successful artist under Fuller's terms because his paintings 'celebrate the potentialities of a human relationship with the natural world beyond the water-closet.'<sup>83</sup> It was the notion of this potentiality that ran throughout Fuller's writing on art after his rediscovery of Ruskin. This article, as much as any other in the first issue of *Modern Painters* made absolutely explicit the nature of the magazine and the reason why it bears the title of Ruskin's own master work.

It is important to acknowledge that Fuller's interpretation and evaluation of the work of these British painters is very much his own. His interpretations are convincing in that they describe in detail the elements of the artists' work that can fit with his own particular position. Of course, the paintings of Bomberg, Sutherland, Freud and Bacon can, and have, been interpreted as representative of British Modernism, in the context of international Modernisms. The formal experimentation, and concern with the sensual experience of nature fit with the concerns of Modernist traditions as clearly as they do with Fuller's notion of 'theoria'.

### **Against 'Anaesthesia' and the 'Mega-Visual Tradition'**

The content of *Modern Painters*, then, very much reflected the concerns that were most prominent in Fuller's writing of the 1980s leading up to his founding of the magazine and the publication of the first issue. However, the magazine did not only reflect Fuller's position in relation to those artists and forms of art he believed represented the best of British art. Issue 1, and those that followed under Fuller's editorship also included articles that reflected Fuller's disdain for certain artists and art forms.

These articles, Robert Hughes writing on Julian Schnabel and Roger Scruton on Gilbert and George, closely resemble the editor's own views on these artists as stated throughout his own writing. It is clear through these articles, and through the first issue of *Modern Painters* as a whole, that Fuller intended to keep the content of the magazine as close to his own position on art as possible.

Furthermore, by including a very negative article on an American painter, Fuller emphasized his opinion of contemporary American art as 'aesthetically bankrupt' (See Chapter 1).

Hughes's article on Schnabel is very negative both in tone and in his more explicit evaluations of the artist's work. The article is, ostensibly, a review of the artist's recently published memoirs, *CVJ*, which, Hughes argued, was evidence of Schnabel's high sense of self-importance: 'He has been propelled by a manic, painfully sincere belief in his own present genius, and in his future historical importance.'<sup>84</sup> Much of the article focuses on this perceived high self-esteem. Later in the article, Hughes described Schnabel's 'foolish... claims to tragic elevation.'<sup>85</sup>

Much of Hughes's article concerns the relationship between Schnabel's success and the art market. The market, Hughes argued, is driven in part by 'a crack of doubt in the soul of every collector: [...] the fear that today's klutz may turn out to be tomorrow's Picasso. Thus nothing except the manifestly out-of-date may be rejected with impunity.'<sup>86</sup> The problem, he suggested, is related to the collectors' lack of connection to any aesthetic tradition. He claimed that

most of the aspiring collectors [of the early 1980s...] could not have told you the difference between a Cezanne watercolour and a drawing by Parmigianino. Their historical memory went back as far as early Warhol, where it tended to stop. Their sense of the long continuities of art was, to put it tactfully, attenuated.<sup>87</sup>

Indeed he went on to claim that 'they were apt to see 20<sup>th</sup> century art history as a series of neatly packaged attacks launched at the frowning ramparts of "tradition"'. In this way, Hughes was suggesting that Schnabel's work, along with other artists whose work represented 'essentially the same work by the same artists' that was purchased by these collectors, was born out of a cynical mode of production which 'embraced the aesthetics of Detroit, a new model with styling changes every year, and 'radical' restyling every five or so.'<sup>88</sup> Schnabel's work, then, is conflated with consumerist culture, his stylistic developments with the design processes of the motor industry. Hughes characterised Schnabel's work as an 'incoherent layering of mythic imagery' which served the collectors' 'aching for something hot and heavy' after 'the *cuisine minceur* of the '70s, a time of small pebbles on floors and sheets of typing on the gallery wall.'<sup>89</sup>

Amongst his more subjective attacks on Schnabel's work, and accusations of his manipulation of the market, Hughes described an 'art world of the early '80s

[which] closely resembled the fashion industry'<sup>90</sup>, in which 'things went down... as well as up'. As a result of this, Hughes argued, it was necessary for the artist

'to escape (or at least stave off) his fate, which looms larger as the market becomes jammed with a teeming proletariat of emerging artists – a mass from which trends can be condensed more or less at will.'

To do this the artist

must hammer in his pitons and quickly scale the museum system: the lavishly illustrated book, the traveling retrospective. Hence the steady pressure from the market on museums to hold full-dress 'retrospective' exhibitions of work by artists still in their 30s.'<sup>91</sup>

Here Hughes revealed something of the nature of the art world within which Schnabel functioned. Furthermore, he provided a reason why it may have been *necessary* for contemporary artists to be entrepreneurial. At the same time as describing with some insight the reasons why the contemporary art world – and therefore the work produced within it – had become shallow in his opinion, Hughes also seemed to have been both disappointed and surprised by this development. He referred to occasions in Schnabel's book where the painter described depthless responses to historically important works, sarcastically rebuking him for suggesting that the sight of a Van Gogh painting 'made me feel like I was standing on a Houston street in late November, when the temperature has just changed: I don't have a scarf and a friend has cancelled a dinner appointment with me.' Hughes responds, 'poor Vincent, who laboured so with this Texan culture starlet, hundred years later, may feel he has forgotten his scarf and, worse, been stood up for dinner! [sic.]'<sup>92</sup>

Just as Hughes judged Schnabel's work through his lack of 'talent as a formal draftsman', Roger Scruton in his article about Gilbert and George, argued that the artists' work failed to live up to their vulgar titles and

be disgusting only because [the artists] are so devoid of artistic talent as to be capable of producing no emotion whatsoever. They have little understanding of surface or light; their colours are those of the playground and the supermarket, and their lines are executed either photographically or in the hard-edged manner of the comic strip.<sup>93</sup>

Scruton continued in this vein throughout the article, asserting that 'the real test of their value lies in the works themselves rather than the words which package them. And in the works one finds only ritual gestures: empty rhetoric without a theme.'<sup>94</sup>

Scruton dismissed the work of these artists, then, because of their relevance to contemporary popular culture, reflecting Fuller's own difficulties in coming to terms with the 'mega-visual tradition'. In this way, this single article stands as a microcosm for the magazine as a whole, standing deliberately outside of a mainstream culture (and contemporary art) that was deemed to have taken a 'wrong turn'.

As well as defacing 'beauty', Scruton also argued that Gilbert & George 'have closed off the one remaining avenue in which significance could be sought' by producing 'works which cannot even be read as individual expressions'.<sup>95</sup> To the critic, this made their work even less valuable than Warhol's. He claimed that 'their works mean nothing: and therefore anyone, whatever his state of learning or cultivation, can understand them.'<sup>96</sup> This exposes an elitism that even Fuller's writing did not

portray, suggesting that a worthy work is one which only the learned/ cultured can 'understand', and which does not make itself accessible through speaking a more universal language; universal in the sense that it crosses boundaries of education and class. He stated that 'the new species of patron – the state cultural apparatus, represented by the Arts Council and its officials, and the fast-thinking, restless yuppies of the Saatchi school – is anxious to justify its financial power in terms which make no reference to elitist ideas of taste and discrimination.'<sup>97</sup> Scruton's biggest complaint about Gilbert & George was that 'the realm of taste and aesthetic value is by-passed by their work altogether.'<sup>98</sup> And then the most telling statement in terms of Scruton's own aesthetic values, which connect closely with those of his editor;

If the rubbish displayed on the walls of the Hayward Gallery has any spiritual significance it resides in this: that spiritual significance, as a category, no longer has any role to play in the sale and purchase of 'art'.<sup>99</sup>

This correlates with Fuller's own concerns about 'the ethical, aesthetic and spiritual bankruptcy of the institutions of contemporary art', of which he also saw Gilbert & George as representatives.<sup>100</sup>

Scruton complained that 'a work can now perform its economic function without being loved or admired; nobody need be awakened by it or moved by its deeper meaning.'<sup>101</sup> In this statement, as throughout the article, Scruton identified a major and significant shift in the art market and the work produced within it. However, like Fuller and most of the other writers the editor selected to write for *Modern Painters*, he was not yet ready to acknowledge such work as suitable for serious critical discussion. Therefore, for the following two years, at least, the magazine



would focus its attention almost exclusively on work which fell more easily into the writers' more traditional notions of beauty and the aesthetic, and continue to deride that which did not.

### **A Shallow and Philistine Art Market**

Both Hughes's and Scruton's arguments were essentially that Schnabel's and Gilbert and George's work lacked authenticity; that it was the product of a shallow and philistine art market, rather than the product of a meaningful relationship with a historical tradition. It was novel, rather than 'radical'. Hughes described Schnabel's paintings as 'just bombast and texture, a fresh 'look' that found its temporary spot in the Academy of the briefly New, and promptly became a cliché.'<sup>102</sup> In the art market of the 1980s, Hughes insisted, 'the uncertainty of new-market taste was such that if someone stood up to assert loudly and repeatedly that he was a genius, there was a chance he would be believed'.<sup>103</sup>

As he explained in the editorial to Issue 1, it was partly in order to counter the 'official taste' of the market that Fuller founded *Modern Painters*, aiming to provide a measure for taste that was not driven by art's institutions. This accusation of 'philistinism', of the market, the institutions, including government, appeared regularly in *Modern Painters*, significantly, in relation to *Sensation*, the exhibition of work from Charles Saatchi's collection at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1996 (See Chapter 4).

Scruton compared Gilbert and George's work to Andy Warhol's, which he described as 'the final production-line version of a romantic archetype'. The authentic romantic, he suggested, condemned 'through his art the pompous

nothingness by which he was surrounded, while at the same time exemplifying it in another form.’<sup>104</sup> Gilbert and George, on the other hand, represented the nadir that came later, when ‘what had begun as an attack on the banalities of *l’art pompier* became another mode of talentless banality, and on the whole a less agreeable one.’<sup>105</sup> Scruton’s attitude here is similar to Hughes’s toward Schnabel, describing Gilbert and George as indicative of ‘the new cult of the artist-prophet’. Scruton, again like Hughes, framed the artists as entrepreneurs – ‘masters of hype’ – who ‘can find for any painting, however boring, some suitable paragraph of art-school lingo with which to market it’, laying claim ‘with brazen effrontery... to every possible moral and artistic virtue.’<sup>106</sup> He suggested that ‘theirs is the culmination of the advertiser’s art and the realization of every advertising agent’s dream – to devise an advert which *sells itself*, for which no product is even necessary, and which, rejoicing in the assured dignity of art, is wrongly imagined to be a bargain at whatever price.’<sup>107</sup> In their banality, their false claims to moral virtue, and their mastery of the languages of the ‘mega-visual tradition’, Gilbert & George, like Schnabel, provide a counterpoint to the authenticity of the British tradition championed by Fuller. Scruton recognised and rejected the products of the breaking down of boundaries between ‘high’ art and market-driven consumerist culture identified by Jameson (see Introduction).

Scruton did, however, place Gilbert & George in relation to an art historical tradition out of which this new ‘cult’ had arisen, ‘dadaism, surrealism and the later lunacies of Duchamp’.<sup>108</sup> He then made explicit his own position on the rightful place, indeed ownership of the aesthetic realm, echoing Hughes’s concerns about the descent of expression into cliché: ‘The crown so hard-won by Courbet, Manet, and Cezanne ceased in time to be the property of the educated few and became

instead a universal cliché and also a weapon in the hands of the philistines.’<sup>109</sup>

Gilbert & George, then, belong to the legacy of this new ‘salon art’ of ‘mechanical spontaneity,... trashy novelty mongering whose one intention was to “challenge” whatever style had last commanded the market.’ Fuller, too, had described them as ‘the salon artists of our times. Praised by Left critics for their hatred of unique objects, painting and “elitist” aesthetic ideas’. According to Scruton, this tradition included Pop Art, and a generation of artists who had ‘been assimilated entirely into an anarchic middle-class and become a normal citizen in a lawless world.’ ‘Non-conformism had become an iron conformity, novelty a platitude, and emptiness the only form of signification.’<sup>110</sup> Like Hughes’s, Scruton’s article set itself against a contemporary art world that went against what he perceived art should achieve. Conformity, assimilation into the common culture, depthlessness, were all considered anti-art.

This complaint about the way in which contemporary art was being framed and marketed by the institutions was supported in a later issue of *Modern Painters* by the conservative critic Hilton Kramer,<sup>111</sup> who argued that

I may not be as convinced as Mr. Fuller is that Ruskin provides us with the best model for launching an attack on the current art establishment, but I nonetheless agree that some means must be found to rescue the discussion of art from the poisonous combination of commercialised triviality and ideological nihilism that is now dominant on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>112</sup>

The representation of certain forms of art that did not fit into the *Modern Painters* ‘canon’ as a new form of institutionalism, accepted and facilitated by the market, is a theme that ran through the magazine through much of its history, and not only under Peter Fuller. Again, similar notions were advanced under Karen Wright in relation to the work exhibited in *Sensation*, which would be indicative of changes

that would take place in *Modern Painters* specifically, and art criticism more broadly in the years that followed.

### **Addressing the Competition**

Arguably the most interesting article in Issue 1 of *Modern Painters* was written by Matthew Collings about *Artscribe International*, a contemporary art magazine that Collings himself had edited from 1983 until 1987. Collings would soon become a regular contributor to *Modern Painters*, writing a diary column for almost every issue between Spring 1989 and 2011.

The article consisted of Collings 'interviewing' himself, and addressed his reasons for leaving the magazine: 'the immediate cause was that I resolved an argument with the distribution manager by hitting him'.<sup>113</sup> However, of more interest regarding this thesis, Collings also discussed the position of *Artscribe* in the contemporary British and international art world, as well as his not altogether positive view of Fuller's critical position on recent British art. I suspect that Fuller included this article in order almost to gloat at *Artscribe*'s demise. The article also presented a counter argument to his own position, perhaps in the knowledge that the readership would side with Fuller and the critical standpoint represented by the majority of articles in the magazine.

The editorial introduction to the interview, which I deduce from the tone was written by Fuller, but could possibly have been written by another member of editorial staff, suggests that 'as an editor, Collings proved himself devoted to the pursuit of those things – represented by the Turner Prize, the Saatchi Collection, and Art and Language – which *Modern Painters* would like to see transformed, or

eradicated.’<sup>114</sup> These are perhaps the strongest terms in which Fuller framed his contempt for this particular type of international contemporary art. Not content simply with focusing the attention of *Modern Painters* away from such work, here the editor suggested that his aim was no less than its eradication.

Collings disagreed with this claim, arguing that ‘*Artscribe* was always rather contemptuous of the Turner Prize – it’s supposed to stand for new ideas in art but it doesn’t really, it’s just a media frippery that spotlights the circus aspect of modern art.’<sup>115</sup> Although he explained that ‘I never minded playing with [this aspect] in *Artscribe*... it’s not the main thing.’ What Collings appears to have been suggesting here, then, is that by railing against ‘Saatchi-style art’, Fuller was missing what was important about contemporary British art.

Prior to this, Collings asked himself what he thought of ‘Fuller’s idea that there was a ‘traditional sensibility’ in Britain that had been betrayed by the art institutions and by magazines like *Artscribe*.’ He explained Fuller’s belief that ‘there is a very wide potential public for art in Britain, a fact which, he said, was “proved” by the war-time enthusiasm for the work of Nash, Moore, Sutherland, etc.’ Collings’s response was negative – and Fuller must have known that it would be – stating that ‘I don’t know anyone who takes his ideas seriously’ and claiming that ‘his followers simply see their own fear and prejudice reflected back to them in his writings’. Again, Fuller and *Modern Painters* were framed as reactionary and too conservative to be relevant in the contemporary context. However, there is also the suggestion in this statement that the content of *Modern Painters* may have been right for its audience. Indeed he argued that *Artscribe*’s main concern was ‘to be

responsive and to think for yourself, and the British audience has certainly been taking its time in coming round to this new idea!’<sup>116</sup>

As a result of this perceived nature of the British audience, Collings explained that ‘the most enthusiastic audience for *Artscribe* is really in America, particularly in New York.... There it’s perceived as very radical and lively and on the ball, less predictable than the more established art glossies.’<sup>117</sup> This was in stark contrast to how the magazine was faring in Britain at the time. Collings suggested that one reason for its low circulation during his editorship of the magazine was ‘because it was considered too international and not enough involved with local issues.’ Perhaps it was precisely this condition within the market for British art magazines that Fuller was responding to in founding *Modern Painters*. Later in the article, Collings suggested that perhaps ‘the British art scene is too small and fragile to sustain a magazine of any international consequence’ at all.<sup>118</sup> This was quite a contrast to Fuller’s belief in the strength of a certain type of British art and that, given the correct guidance, an audience for it might be found. The picture of his time as editor of *Artscribe* that Collings presented was one of a persistent battle against an ownership and workforce none of whom ‘had any ideological commitment to, or understanding of, the magazine’.<sup>119</sup> It is possible, of course, that the reason why *Artscribe* ended in 1992 and *Modern Painters* continues today is because the latter found a market, however peripheral to the mainstream of contemporary art, whilst the former with ‘the type of material we were dealing with – pretty esoteric stuff – would never find its market.’<sup>120</sup> However, it is more likely that *Modern Painters* remained successful into the late 1990s and beyond precisely because it did change its position, its focus, and the forms of art criticism that it published in relation to concomitant changes that were occurring the art

world that effected the role and function of criticism. I will discuss these shifts in detail in the following chapters.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of the first issues of *Modern Painters* demonstrates the extent to which the magazine was a coherent expression of its editor's critical position. The magazine, its editorial position as communicated through Fuller's editorials and through the writing published throughout, articulated a consistent stance that reflected Fuller's Romanticism as described in Chapter 1.

Although not in line with certain prominent elements of the British art world at the time, Fuller's *Modern Painters* aligned itself with a prevalent, if perhaps partially sidelined, tendency towards Romantic landscape painting, the spiritual/ humanist element of art, and the market for it that continued to exist, represented by such as Nicholas Logsdale's Lisson Gallery, Anthony D'Offay and others who advertised in the pages of *Modern Painters*. In this sense, Fuller and *Modern Painters* were not so much anomalies in a contemporary art world characterised by Gilbert and George, the emerging young 'British artists' and Charles Saatchi's expanding collection, but rather gave voice to a significant sector of the contemporary British art market, represented by some of the more influential commercial galleries.

Although in his first editorial, Fuller claimed that *Modern Painters* intended 'to challenge "aesthetic idleness"' and sought 'to uphold the critical imagination and the pursuit of quality in art' that 'can minister to the human spirit', three of the major articles in the first issue focused largely on what the editor considered to be 'the worst excesses of international post-modernism... notable only for its assault

upon the very idea of quality in art'; the product of 'official taste' that 'is no more loved in this country than the official art of the USSR is loved in Eastern Europe.'<sup>121</sup>

This is indicative of the editor's concern that the 'cultural anaesthesia' brought about by the mega-visual tradition was a threat to the 'nurturing of aesthetic intelligence and... the creation of objects of aesthetic value.'<sup>122</sup> This identification of specific examples of artists whose work went against Fuller's humanist position strengthened the case for a criticism that continued to be driven by a sense of 'good taste'.

However, Fuller's concern that the mega-visual tradition was a threat to the aesthetic dimension and to the English Romantic tradition might be countered through the evidence provided by the advertisements carried by *Modern Painters* itself. These reveal an art world – centered around but not limited to London – that remained very much concerned with the very traditions that Fuller feared were under threat.

*Modern Painters* clearly represented the critical position of its editor. However, it is also clear that this position had a certain amount of currency, both with the writers (of some standing) that he attracted to write for the magazine, and a readership that facilitated strong sales figures. Although I have focused almost entirely on Issue 1 in this chapter, I have done so because its content was indicative of what was to come throughout Fuller's editorship.

Fuller's major concerns, as set out in his writings published in the years leading up to the publication of *Modern Painters*, were reflected and repeated throughout the



opening issue, and up to his death in 1990. It is significant that contributors such as Roy Oxlade and Grey Gowrie used language so similar to that employed by their editor in addressing the spiritual aspects of British painting. Also like Fuller, they both framed this universal element of art very much in Humanist terms. As I have discussed at length in Chapter 1, Fuller considered the best of British art in the latter half of the twentieth century to have been influenced by traditions that stretch back well before Modernism. Again, this was reflected regularly in the writing of individual contributors to *Modern Painters*, but also in the subjects covered by the magazine as a whole.

In a review of the Turner Prize in Issue 1, Brian Sewell – as conservative a critic as Fuller could have found to write for him – complained that the prize's title

suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of Turner, whose visionary and romantic leaps, firmly rooted in the art of the past, supported and respected the academic tradition, and would have been as comprehensible to Konrad Witz, Hieronymus Bosch and Leonardo as they are to us.<sup>123</sup>

He objected that 'the four shortlists since 1984 have been burdened with artists who not only ignore the traditional bounds of painting and sculpture, but are incapable of the skills necessary to observe them' and that those who influenced the shortlists 'appear to be interested only in the extreme, the outrageous and the determinedly different'.<sup>124</sup> Although there were nominations during this period for Art & Language, Victor Burgin, Richard Long, and other artists who were using non-traditional mediums, Howard Hodgkin and Richard Deacon both won the prize, and Therese Oulton, Stephen McKenna, Lucian Freud and John Walker were nominated. Most of these were painters, working out of various historical traditions, some of whom were celebrated in the pages of *Modern Painters* and by

Fuller elsewhere. The fact that these were present on the shortlists in the years stated by Sewell further emphasises just how selective his published view was regarding what constituted worthy art. It also demonstrates a lack of desire to at least engage with and attempt to understand the place of a major aspect of British art at the time, whether or not he actually liked it.

Perhaps an acknowledgement that 'Higher Landscape' could, indeed *did*, exist in the same environment – and market – as the work of Gilbert & George and Julian Schnabel, may have helped to place *Modern Painters* at the heart of a rapidly changing contemporary art world, rather than placing it on the periphery from the start. Instead, Fuller and his writers were, almost without exception, dismissive, or at least largely derogatory towards any work that was perceived as part of the 'mega-visual tradition' and, therefore, undeserving of serious critical attention.

The narrow definition of beauty described by Roger Scruton in his article on Gilbert and George, and Robert Hughes's polemical case against Schnabel, reflect Fuller's unwillingness also to acknowledge work that was in any way cynical, ironic or nihilistic. Fuller's attitude towards art, like Scruton's, was conservative to the extent that it excluded any work that was less than earnest or, in Fuller's terms, authentic.

What this attitude reveals about Fuller and many of the writers he employed is that they were pushing against an irresistible force in the form of the market for contemporary art. Rather than trying to understand and engage with major shifts that were occurring in the British art world at the time, Fuller and *Modern Painters* continued to reject without prejudice the very work that, later, the magazine

would eventually address (see Chapters 4 and 5). At this point in time *Modern Painters* had successfully positioned itself not only in opposition to one dominant aspect of the art market, but also firmly on the side of a form of art that continued to be prominent in the British art world, particularly in London. I would argue that Fuller's support of the Romantic tradition was warranted in a context within which such work continued to be exhibited alongside work in the 'mega-visual tradition'. In expending as much editorial energy dismissing the latter as he did celebrating the former, Fuller missed the opportunity to defend the continuing relevance of the Romantic tradition within the contemporary art world.

In a review of the early issues of *Modern Painters* for the *Oxford Art Journal*,<sup>125</sup> the artist and critic David Batchelor, who would later write for *Frieze* magazine, complained about the 'lack of discernible rigour in [Fuller's] argument', and the 'lack of a discernible argument in his writing'.<sup>126</sup> Batchelor suggests that this problem permeates *Modern Painters*, and in the language used by Hughes, Sewell and Scruton, it is not difficult to understand why.

At this stage *Modern Painters*, although dismissive of the mega-visual tradition generally, and American art in particular, maintained its role as a conduit for Fuller's form of criticism. That is a criticism based on judgements of quality arrived at through the exercise of taste. In order to emphasise the quality of the work celebrated by *Modern Painters*, the magazine also needed to address that work which did not meet Fuller's standards of 'great' art.

The first issue of *Modern Painters* set the tone for the magazine's position for the duration of the editor's tenure. The majority of the writing addressing either the

forms of work favoured by Fuller, or otherwise deriding the work that he did not consider part of his canon of recent and contemporary British and European art. Whilst writing on the latter tended to be dismissive and often lacking sufficient objective argument, the former usually demonstrated more considered critical reasoning.

In the next chapter, I examine the period immediately following Peter Fuller's death, and consider the changes that occurred in staffing, writing and critical positioning under Karen Wright, the new editor.

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- <sup>1</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A Renaissance in British Art?', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 3
- <sup>2</sup> Wheeler, M. & Whiteley, N. (eds.), *The Lamp of Memory: Ruskin, Tradition and Architecture*, 1992, Manchester University Press, p. 167
- <sup>3</sup> Gowrie, G. 'The Migration of Lucian Freud', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, pp. 5-11
- <sup>4</sup> Oxlade, R. 'David Bomberg: Notre Dames of the Mind', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, pp. 13-19
- <sup>5</sup> Fuller, P. 'Nature and Raw Flesh', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, pp. 21-27
- <sup>6</sup> HRH The Prince of Wales, 'The City: 'A Stunted Imitation of Manhattan'', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, pp. 29-33; Hughes, R. 'Julian Schnabel: The Artist as Entrepreneur', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, pp. 35-39; Scruton, R. 'Gilbert & George: Beastly Bad Taste', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, pp. 40-42
- <sup>7</sup> Fuller, P. 'Monson Road Remembered' in Reichert, M. *Art & Instinct: Selected Writings of Roy Oxlade*, 2010, London: Ziggurat Books, p. 1
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 2010, p. 2
- <sup>9</sup> Oxlade, R. 'There's an Iceberg Up Ahead' in Reichert, M. *Art & Instinct: Selected Writings of Roy Oxlade*, p. 8
- <sup>10</sup> Oxlade, R. 'There's an Iceberg Up Ahead', p. 9
- <sup>11</sup> Scruton, R. *Art and Imagination: A study of the Philosophy of the Mind*, 1974, London: Methuen
- <sup>12</sup> Scruton, R. *The Politics of Culture and Other Essays*, 1981, Oxford: Carcanet Press, p. 230
- <sup>13</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial' *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 3
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 3
- <sup>15</sup> HRH The Prince of Wales, 'The City: 'A Stunted Imitation of Manhattan'', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 29
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Arnold, M. *New Poems*, 1864, London: MacMillan & Co., p. 112
- <sup>18</sup> HRH The Prince of Wales, 'The City: 'A Stunted Imitation of Manhattan'', p. 32
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 30
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 33
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Gowrie, G. 'The Migration of Lucian Freud', pp. 5-11
- <sup>24</sup> Fuller, P. 'Lucian Freud. London, Hayward Gallery', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 130, No. 1022, May 1988, p. 386
- <sup>25</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey: A Personal Memoir' in McDonald, John (ed.), *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, 1993, London: Methuen, p. xxxii
- <sup>26</sup> Fuller, P. 'David Bomberg. London, Tate Gallery' *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 130, No. 1021, April 1988, pp. 305-307
- <sup>27</sup> Oxlade, R. 'David Bomberg: Notre Dames of the Mind', p. 14
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> Schlegel, F. 'from "Athenaeum Fragments"', 1798 in Bernstein, J.M. (ed.) *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, 2003, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 249; Perry, S. 'Romantic Literary Criticism' in Wu, D. (ed.) *A Companion to Romanticism*, 1999, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 372
- <sup>31</sup> Fuller, P. 'David Bomberg' in McDonald, John (ed.), *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, p. 120

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- <sup>32</sup> Fuller, P. 'John Piper: Neo-Romanticism in the 1980s', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1988, p. 19
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 20
- <sup>34</sup> Oxlade, R. 'David Bomberg: Notre Dames of the Mind', p. 17
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> Fuller, P. 'David Bomberg' in *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, 1980, London: Writers & Readers, p. 144
- <sup>37</sup> Fuller, P. 'Nature and Raw Flesh', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 21
- <sup>38</sup> Oxlade, R. 'David Bomberg: Notre Dames of the Mind', p. 19
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p. 19
- <sup>40</sup> Fuller, P. 'Nature and Raw Flesh', p. 24
- <sup>41</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> Gowrie, G. 'The Migration of Lucian Freud', p. 5
- <sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p. 6
- <sup>44</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.* p. 7
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>47</sup> Fuller, P. 'Lucian Freud. London, Hayward Gallery', p. 387
- <sup>48</sup> Gowrie, G. 'The Migration of Lucian Freud', p. 9
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> Fuller, P. 'Lucian Freud. London, Hayward Gallery', p. 386
- <sup>51</sup> Fuller, 'The Journey' in McDonald, 1993, p. xxxi
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> Gowrie, G. 'The Migration of Lucian Freud', p. 10
- <sup>54</sup> Fuller, P. 'British Romantic Landscape Painting from Turner to Maggi Hambling' in McDonald, John (ed.), *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, p. 33
- <sup>56</sup> Fuller, P. 'Howard Hodgkin and Robert Natkin', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1988, p. 76
- <sup>57</sup> Arnold, M. *New Poems*, p. 112
- <sup>58</sup> HRH The Prince of Wales, 'The City: 'A Stunted Imitation of Manhattan'', p. 29
- <sup>59</sup> Kinsley, S. 'A New Gothic Revival?', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, pp. 72-73
- <sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p. 73
- <sup>61</sup> Fuller, P. 'Dennis Creffield', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 81
- <sup>62</sup> Fuller, P. 'Rocks and Flesh' in McDonald, John (ed.), *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, p. 60
- <sup>63</sup> *ibid.* p. 65
- <sup>65</sup> *ibid.* p. 61
- <sup>66</sup> Oxlade, R. 'David Bomberg: Notre Dames of the Mind', p. 14
- <sup>67</sup> Fuller, P. 'David Bomberg' in McDonald, John (ed.), *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, p. 118
- <sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p. 119
- <sup>69</sup> Oxlade, R. 'David Bomberg: Notre Dames of the Mind', p. 17
- <sup>70</sup> *ibid.* p. 15
- <sup>71</sup> Fuller, 'Nature and Raw Flesh', p. 21
- <sup>72</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>73</sup> Fuller, P. 'British Romantic Landscape Painting from Turner to Maggi Hambling', p. 27
- <sup>74</sup> Fuller, 'Nature and Raw Flesh', p. 21
- <sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p. 26
- <sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

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- <sup>77</sup> *ibid.* p. 27  
<sup>78</sup> *ibid.* p. 22  
<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* p. 24  
<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>82</sup> *ibid.* p. 27  
<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>84</sup> Hughes, R. 'Julian Schnabel: The Artist as Entrepreneur', p. 35  
<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p. 38  
<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p. 35  
<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p. 36  
<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>90</sup> *ibid.* p. 37  
<sup>91</sup> *ibid.* p. 37-38  
<sup>92</sup> *ibid.* p. 38  
<sup>93</sup> Scruton, R. 'Gilbert & George: Beastly Bad Taste', p. 40  
<sup>94</sup> *ibid.* p. 41  
<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>96</sup> *ibid.* p. 41-42  
<sup>97</sup> *ibid.* p. 42  
<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>100</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey: A Personal Memoir', p. xxxvi  
<sup>101</sup> Scruton, R. 'Gilbert & George: Beastly Bad Taste', p. 42  
<sup>102</sup> Hughes, R. 'Julian Schnabel: The Artist as Entrepreneur', p. 39  
<sup>103</sup> *ibid.* p. 36  
<sup>104</sup> Scruton, R. 'Gilbert & George: Beastly Bad Taste', p. 40  
<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>107</sup> *ibid.* p. 41  
<sup>108</sup> *ibid.* p. 40  
<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>111</sup> Kramer, H. 'A New Criteria for Modern Painters?', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1989, pp. 80-81  
<sup>112</sup> *ibid.* p. 80  
<sup>113</sup> Collings, M. 'Doing it by the Book', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 60  
<sup>114</sup> *ibid.* p. 59  
<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>118</sup> *ibid.* p. 60  
<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>121</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A Renaissance in British Art?', p. 3  
<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>123</sup> Sewell, B. 'The Turner Prize', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 83  
<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>125</sup> Batchelor, D. 'The New Rote' *Oxford Art Journal* Vol. 12, No. 1, 1989, pp.66-69  
<sup>126</sup> *ibid.* p.69

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[Fig. 4] *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1991



## Chapter 3

### **After Fuller: Modern Painters under Karen Wright and the Editorial Board**

This chapter continues the historical account of *Modern Painters*, and sets out the gradual changes in editorial position that took place over the three years following Fuller's death in 1990. These subtle but significant shifts signalled more substantive changes in the way in which criticism functions within an art world. Although Karen Wright's *Modern Painters* continued to be shaped by Fuller's critical position for some years after his death, the content of the magazine gradually demonstrated a move away from the tradition of intellectualual leadership of art magazines by a single (and singular) critical voice. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the editorial to the first issue set out a rationale and editorial position for the magazine that came very much from Fuller himself, was supported by the magazine's backers, and was perpetuated by the writers who wrote for him. *Modern Painters* under Peter Fuller was, in this sense, a defense of art criticism as he understood it. That is, the identification and evaluation of work that fits into his characterisation of a Romantic tradition that expresses something of the universal human condition (see Chapter 1).

First, this chapter outlines the broader art world context within which Karen Wright took over the editorship of *Modern Painters*, particularly in terms of the work that was being produced and exhibited in Britain, specifically in London, at the time. This will provide a sense of the contrast between the forms of work that were being addressed in some of the other, newer magazines, such as *Frieze* and *Dazed & Confused*, and the oppositional position taken by *Modern Painters* towards

such work that responded to what Fuller had pejoratively called the 'mega-visual tradition'. I then examine the ways in which Wright's early issues continued to address Fuller's editorial and critical concerns, but also the increasing interest in forms of art that were outside of Fuller's interests, particularly American art. Throughout the chapter I also assess the relationship between the critical position upheld by Wright and the editorial board and the broader critical discourses taking place outside of, and in relation to, the magazine's core concerns.

### **The London Art World in the Early-1990s**

When Karen Wright took over as editor, the focus of *Modern Painters* was placed firmly on what Fuller had considered to be the best of historical and current British (and European) art. In order to understand the position the magazine held within the art world throughout its early years, it is necessary briefly to explore the nature of that world and the changing art market that was driving it.<sup>1</sup> As I have argued previously, *Modern Painters* reflected a major part of the art market at the time. This is demonstrated by the magazine's circulation figures and its support from so many from that sector of the art world. Because there are no records available on the readership of *Modern Painters*, it is difficult to assess who the readers were with any accuracy. However, there are a number of clues. Karen Wright has said that many of *Modern Painters'* subscriptions were sold at art fairs, suggesting that those involved in the market (dealers, collectors, gallery owners, etc) were reading the magazine.

Contributors to the letters pages also represent a cross-section of the magazine's readership. Letters published in the first issue, responding to the brochure that was sent out announcing *Modern Painters*, were largely written by British artists,

including Frank Auerbach, David Hockney, Gillian Ayers, John Bellany and R.B. Kitaj. That the magazine's readership included a large amount of artists – both British and American – is supported by statements from Saunders and the American critic Jed Perl, who wrote for the magazine under both Fuller and Wright. Saunders has said that 'an enormous number of artists I've met and still meet knew the magazine well and were regular subscribers,<sup>2</sup> and Perl explained that 'I cannot tell you how much *Modern Painters* meant to many American artists I know.'<sup>3</sup> However, the early-1990s saw the increasing prominence of a new tendency in British art, centred around London, and gaining the attention of the market, galleries, museums and art magazines.

By the time the first few issues of *Modern Painters* had been published, Damien Hirst, Angus Fairhurst and the other pioneers of what became known as 'young British art', had put on successful shows of their work in the new spirit of entrepreneurship engendered within Goldsmiths College, taking their work out into the disused spaces of Docklands and the East End. The most notorious of these was *Freeze*, organised and curated by Hirst, and including work by artists who would become major figures in the young British art scene of the 1990s, including Sarah Lucas, Matt Collishaw and Fiona Rae. By 1991 Jay Jopling was representing Hirst through his White Cube Gallery, and the advertising mogul, Charles Saatchi had commissioned *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), a fourteen foot Tiger Shark suspended in Formaldehyde. The nature of this work was very different from that addressed within the pages of *Modern Painters*. Very little of it could be described, in a traditional sense at least, as painting or sculpture. Although some of his student work had resembled some Minimalist sculpture of the 1960s, Hirst's dead animals of the 1990s, and

Fairhurst's conceptual photographs and paintings, addressing art history from an ironic and nihilistic perspective, would certainly not have been approved of by Fuller.

Saatchi's perceived dominance of the London art world during the 1990s has been questioned by John A. Walker in later editions of his book on the collector/dealer.<sup>4</sup> He pointed out that in several 'power' lists of the time, Saatchi was placed relatively low down.<sup>5</sup> Walker suggested that the perception of Saatchi as the major force in 1990s British art may actually come partly from the title of the collector's book, *Young British Art: The Saatchi Decade* (2000), accusing him of having 'appropriated art history itself'.<sup>6</sup> This notion is supported by Julian Stallabrass, who has pointed out that 'in joining the spinning of the epoch's spirit to a display of Saatchi's collection, this book—like the *Sensation* exhibition before it—makes out that the art that appealed to the taste of the advertiser-dealer-collector is in fact that most representative of its time.'<sup>7</sup>

There were also many artist-led projects that were equally a part of the paradigm shift taking place at this time. In 1988, for example, a group of artists, including Keith Coventry, Paul Noble and Matt Hale founded City Racing in a former bookmaker's property in Kennington, South London. City Racing exhibited work by a number of artists whose work would eventually be bought by Saatchi (including Sarah Lucas, Bryan Cyril Griffiths and Gillian Wearing), but also by artists who would become key figures in British art without being bought by the collector/dealer, not least Fiona Banner, whose installation in Tate Britain's Duveen galleries was the most visited UK exhibition of 2011.<sup>8</sup> In 1993, Sarah Lucas opened The Shop with Tracey Emin, both of whom became central to the London

art scene some time before Saatchi bought their work. And, of course, Saatchi only started collecting the work of Hirst and his generation of Goldsmith's graduates as a result of *Freeze*, which brought the work to the attention of the London galleries and collectors in 1988. Moreover, *Freeze* itself was preceded by other, similar projects, including an exhibition organised by Angus Fairhurst at the Bloomsbury Gallery of the Institute of Education by Russell Square. This exhibition also included works by Collishaw and Hirst as well as by Fairhurst himself, all of whom would be represented in both *Freeze* and *Sensation*, the major exhibition of work in the Saatchi collection hosted by the Royal Academy in 1996 (see Chapter 4).<sup>9</sup> Although a number of these artists also had work subsequently bought by Saatchi, by that time they were already a part of the burgeoning scene. If the 1990s is to be considered 'the Saatchi decade' in any sense, perhaps it is largely as a result of his having bought his place in an exciting, artist-led paradigm shift that already had momentum. It is also worth restating that all of this took place *alongside* the English Romantic tradition previously championed by Fuller that continued to be exhibited and sold in many of London's major commercial galleries.

Also at this point a number of new art and culture magazines had, or were about to come onto the scene, including *Frieze*, *Artscribe* and the lifestyle and culture magazine *Dazed & Confused*. The significance of the competition represented by these publications is discussed in Chapter 4.

### **Karen Wright and the Editorial Board**

It is in this environment that Karen Wright took over from Peter Fuller as editor of *Modern Painters*. She had been assistant editor for Fuller from the beginning, and

had already become managing editor before Fuller's death. She commented that she needed to convince the shareholders of the magazine to keep her on as editor when Fuller died.<sup>10</sup> Part of this process involved Wright putting together an editorial board that would strengthen her position as a potential long-term editor of the magazine – the owners initially brought her in as an interim editor to cover for Fuller's sudden absence.

Linda Saunders, who was Fuller's Personal Assistant from almost the start of *Modern Painters* and was responsible for the production of the magazine when she became Assistant Editor under Karen Wright, explained that the function of the editorial board was 'to give the magazine ongoing credence'.<sup>11</sup> As Fuller had been 'the sole commissioning editor' up to this point, it was important that there was a sense of continuity in editorial content, position and philosophy, if the magazine was to retain its particular place in the market and in the critical discourse of the time.<sup>12</sup>

The board that Wright assembled included both writers that had written for *Modern Painters* under Fuller, and new faces previously unconnected to the magazine.<sup>13</sup> They were a mix of art critics, historians, authors, philosophers and others involved, mainly, in the London art world. Continuity was particularly maintained through the inclusion of the philosopher Richard Wollheim and the cultural critic and fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, Martin Golding, both of whom had written several articles for *Modern Painters* under Fuller and were close to the founding editor. The former politician, and now chairman of Sotheby's, Grey Gowrie, had also written for Fuller from the very first issue of *Modern Painters*. However, also on the new board was the New York-based critic Jed Perl, who had

previously written about *Modern Painters* in an article for *The New Criterion* in 1989.<sup>14</sup> He had praised its 'mix of straightforward writing, critical detachment, and a vigorous engagement with the current scene [that] is all too rare on either side of the Atlantic.' As a result of this, Fuller contacted him and they had planned to meet, but never did. Wright later asked him to be on her editorial board. Of his reasons for agreeing to be on the board, he has said that

I was sympathetic to the magazine's independence from art world super star thinking. I was interested in the English orientation, as we in the US knew less of the twentieth-century English artists than we came to learn in the next couple of decades.<sup>15</sup>

Perl's inclusion was perhaps an early sign of the increasing interest *Modern Painters* would take in American art over the following years.

Martin Golding was one of the first to be asked by Fuller to contribute to *Modern Painters*, having met the founding editor on a number of occasions since the late 1960s and, in that time, 'talked a lot about painting'.<sup>16</sup> Golding sympathized with Fuller's position from the beginning, although didn't necessarily 'share his taste' ('first of all I thought it was crazy to prefer Sutherland to Bacon').<sup>17</sup> He 'very much warmed to [Fuller's] attack on... the "mega-visual tradition", his attack on the art market, and his admiration for figurative painting.'<sup>18</sup> However, Golding also acknowledges that the Marcusian humanist aspect of Fuller's critical project was equally attractive. As a member of the editorial board Martin Golding, in some respects, represented continuity of Fuller's critical position.

Saunders explains that the board ‘met quarterly for a very civilized dinner’.<sup>19</sup>

Although it is difficult to tell how much of an impact the board had on content, Perl argues that ‘editorial boards by and large have much less impact on policy and direction than outsiders sometimes imagine. What you need is a dynamic editor – that’s the key – and that’s what Karen was.’ However, he explains that Wright ‘listened; she asked questions and invited comment and welcomed critical comment. Then, like any editor worth her salt, she went off and did what she judged to be the right thing.’<sup>20</sup>

Martin Golding further describes the input of the editorial board:

we would be asked what we thought of the last issue and then Karen would bring along a whole list of shows that were coming up in the next couple of months. And we’d try and work out which ones were going to be worth reviewing and who should write.<sup>21</sup>

He describes the process as collaborative and, although Wright ‘did most of it’, ‘she felt answerable’ to the board. Furthermore, at this time, Golding argues, ‘she was very strongly in [Fuller’s] camp, and so she didn’t need much pushing. She was already on that path and so was Linda [Saunders], so it was very collaborative for the first few years.’<sup>22</sup> The dedication of Wright, Saunders and the board to Fuller’s position throughout these early years after Fuller’s death was evident in the content of the magazine, as I examine below. The major concerns remained the same, driven largely by the decisions made by Wright and the Board, and the careful consideration of what writers would be brought in to write about which artists and exhibitions.

Part of the function of the editorial board was to replicate the intellectual



leadership represented by the former editor with a board that was largely sympathetic to his values. With the new editor also having worked with Fuller from the beginning, the first few years under Wright's editorship saw a continuation of Fuller's critical and editorial values. To begin with, at least, *Modern Painters* remained very much Fuller's magazine, even after his death. So *Modern Painters* continued, for at least a few more years, to represent a stable and identifiable critical position under the editorial leadership of Wright, with the support of the board. However, the introduction of the editorial board represented a shift away from the singular intellectual authority of an editor to a more collaborative, democratic approach between editor, board and writers.

### **Modern Painters under Wright: Early Issues**

Fuller's central concerns, which continued to be addressed by *Modern Painters* under Karen Wright, can be broadly categorised as follows: the Englishness of English art, the Romanticism of English landscape painting, spirituality and painting, the relationship/ conflict between English and European/ International Modernism, and the pre-Modern influences on English art. Taking these themes as a starting point, I will examine the position taken by Karen Wright's *Modern Painters*, and the extent to which this represents a continuation of Fuller's editorial position, but also the beginnings of a gradual shift towards different concerns.

As I have shown in previous chapters, Fuller's vision for *Modern Painters* was singular, the result of his own hard-fought and hard-won critical position, which was recognised by the magazine's backers as at the service of a marginalised but significant sector of the art world in Britain. In the first editorial after her predecessor's death, Wright described the genesis of the magazine, which had

developed out of conversations between Fuller and the gallerist Bernard Jacobson, who 'suggested that they should start a magazine'.<sup>23</sup> In his own tribute to Fuller in the same issue, Jacobson explained that Fuller 'had a vision, and pushed his way through to get his vision across'<sup>24</sup>. The 'assignments' that Fuller set his authors were peculiar to his own concerns and the position of the magazine as expressed through their articles. For example, the attitude taken by Perl in his article on Jenny Holzer in the Summer 1990 issue reflects the mocking tone taken toward the American artist by Fuller in a telephone conversation recalled by Howard Jacobson, another of Fuller's roster of writers.<sup>25</sup> Jacobson recalled asking Fuller of Holzer, 'was she the one who painted slogans?', to which Fuller replied, 'painted?... You're a little behind the times... We're talking message-making here'<sup>26</sup>.

Early on under Wright and the board there was relatively little shift in the focus of *Modern Painters*, with a number of Fuller's writers continuing to write for the magazine, largely on the same group – or at least type – of artists. However, Wright significantly expanded the list of contributors, explaining that she met a lot of writers through Bill Buford, who was editing *Granta* at the time; 'we were basically using more, I'd say almost political people, philosophers, scientists, the odd poet'.<sup>27</sup> Fuller's choice of writers had very much reflected his own critical ideology and tastes. The fact that one can talk about taste as remaining central to the magazine's editorial position demonstrates the extent to which the Kantian critical tradition remained within the pages of *Modern Painters*.

Karen Wright partly credits her editorial board with giving her the confidence to bring in writers with whom she was particularly interested in working. Even before Fuller's death, it was Wright who had largely introduced the literary element to *Modern Painters*, explaining, 'I really started that; it comes from my

obsession with literature'.<sup>28</sup> This suggests, to some degree, that in spite of the editorial board being in place, the editor remained largely responsible for commissioning new writers. Although Fuller had already had a few novelists and poets writing in the magazine from the start (for example, Elaine Feinstein and Howard Jacobson), Wright really opened up *Modern Painters* to a broad range of literary writers. This brought more diverse perspectives to the art and artists addressed within its pages. She has said, 'the way I was working was I was trying very hard to see if people were actually visual, if they were visual writers.'<sup>29</sup> Early on in her editorship, Wright brought in the novelist William Boyd who would become a regular writer for the magazine, writing articles on Stanley Spencer (see below), amongst others.

Over the first half of Wright's editorship, just as Fuller had over his two years as editor, she gradually introduced a significant number of new writers to the magazine. She explains that she 'had this [rule] that [in] every single issue of *Modern Painters* I had to introduce at least three new writers, of which one would be a feature, and I stuck to that rule even if it was a rod for my back.'<sup>30</sup>

She is clear that she felt she needed 'different voices', that 'no matter how good the voice is, you want to have different opinions, different ideas and fresh voices, so I never want to repeat the same writer writing about the same thing over a period of time.'<sup>31</sup>

### **Pre-Modern Influences**

The concern with the influence of pre-Modern art on contemporary English painting is manifested both in articles on pre-Modern artists, and in articles on contemporary artists in relation to their pre-Modern influences. Fuller's insistence

on the primacy of pre-Modern influences in the creation of 'authentic' British painting is also reflected in the content of *Modern Painters* across the early period following his death.

In a series of articles titled 'The Artist's Eye', *Modern Painters* continued to include articles by contemporary painters – many of whom had already written for Fuller – on historical artists, in relation to their own work *as artists*. In the Autumn 1990 Issue, English painter Simon Edmondson wrote about Titian, and explained his own dissatisfaction with the legacy of Modernist abstraction:

I did not really envy the freedoms of the current abstraction: I could not find myself involved in it and wanted to be more certain about the connection between myself and what I painted.<sup>32</sup>

Edmondson's solution to this problem of abstraction was to look back, specifically to Titian, whose 'beautifully sustained compositional and subliminal symbolism in a very painterly surface achieved a tension and a freshness that had eluded my own efforts.' He said a lot about Titian's technique and composition and the way in which it had directly influenced his own perspective on the painterly surface, stating that 'we falsely credit ourselves today with the modern appreciation and comprehension of painterliness', again preferring the pre-modern influence to the Modern.<sup>33</sup>

In relation to Modernism's hard-won freedoms, he was almost apologetic that 'it may seem I am the ungrateful inheritor of a century of "barrier breaking", but it sometimes feels as though the baby was lost with the bathwater.'<sup>34</sup> In printing a reproduction of Edmondson's work alongside Titian's, the editor further stressed

the purpose of the article to emphasise the relationship between contemporary British painting and pre-Modern traditions.

In the same issue, Colin Wiggins, an employee of the National Gallery, wrote an article with a very similar focus, albeit from a third-person perspective, on the influence of the Old Masters on another English painter, Frank Auerbach.<sup>35</sup> In his editorial to the first issue of *Modern Painters*, Fuller himself had identified 'continuities which link... Constable to Auerbach.'<sup>36</sup> Like Edmondson, Wiggins began with Titian, comparing Auerbach's *Tree on Primrose Hill* (1987) to Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1523). He argued that 'the whole dynamic of *Bacchus and Ariadne*, with the vigorous, agitated rhythms of the crowd on the right from which Bacchus breaks away as he springs towards Ariadne, is echoed in Auerbach's picture.'<sup>37</sup> Again, the two paintings were reproduced on adjacent pages. Wiggins argued that Auerbach, in *After Rembrandt* (1961) stripped the Dutch Master's work 'of specific or easily recognizable Christian Narrative and translate[d it] into living form'.<sup>38</sup> However, Wiggins also argued that 'the picture is not simply a formal exercise', and that 'these forms are organic wholes, not simply existing, but also feeling and reacting'. This is also redolent of Fuller's concern (via Timpanaro) with the universal human experience. Throughout the article, the author discussed the influences of Titian, Rembrandt, Reynolds, Phillips Koninck, Constable and Turner, demonstrating the breadth of influence of pre-Modern painters on arguably the most Modern of living English painters.

This theme continued in issue after issue. In the first issue after Fuller's death, there was an interview with Quentin Bell by Martin Gayford in which the son of the Bloomsbury critic and formalist Clive Bell described how writing about the pre-

Raphaelites was his 'way of kicking my elders in the pants, and saying "You can't dismiss them, not like that. There is much more good in them than you supposed."'”<sup>39</sup> Again, this strongly aligned with Fuller's celebration of Romanticism in preference to Modernist formalism (see Chapter 1). At the end of the article, Gayford argued that 'now, Paris and New York having failed us in turn, we seem to be left after all with the British tradition'.<sup>40</sup> Another wholly Fullerian sentiment, lamenting the erosion of a perceived 'British tradition' by the advances of international Modernism.

In an article on 'British Artists in New York' in the following issue, Roy Oxlade, another painter who had written for Fuller from the first issue of *Modern Painters*, contrasted the British painters with their American counterparts through highlighting their historical influences.<sup>41</sup> For example, Graham Nickson's paintings, he argued, had developed out of

his encounter with the paintings of Giotto and other Renaissance masters [that] convinced him that he was not looking at art history, but at a 'density' of experience, a 'magic' which is directly communicated, transcending the distance of time and custom which otherwise separates us from earlier artists.<sup>42</sup>

Again, the historical distance between the present and pre-Modern art history is collapsed, allowing for a direct engagement with traditions that stem from the Renaissance.

### **The Spiritual in Art: Redemption Through Form**

Another of Peter Fuller's major concerns was the universal, spiritual aspect of art and, particularly, his notion of redemption through form (see Chapters 1 and 2). It is perhaps more surprising that this very personal position on the spiritual in art

remained a concern throughout a number of articles in the issues immediately following his death.

That Fuller's concerns would remain a touchstone for *Modern Painters* under Wright was emphasised by the fact that the first major article in the first issue after his death was an interview that Fuller himself conducted with the Australian painter Arthur Boyd, included in this issue as if to set the tone for the content of *Modern Painters* beyond Fuller. In it, Boyd talks of the

use [of] everyday landscape [tied] up with something that was either in the nature of design or of some psychological essence. In other words to bring [the figure] into this pristine paradise, or landscape – pristine in the sense of being untouched.<sup>43</sup>

What Boyd was describing here was the paradise that is absent in both Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat* and Nash's *Totes Meer*. Fuller followed this up by asking whether, by the time he was painting his more 'specifically' religious paintings in the 1940s, Boyd had seen the work of Stanley Spencer, another of Fuller's favourite painters. Boyd's response was that he had seen Spencer's paintings, but that the English painter was influential not for his resurrections, but for his scenes of domesticity. In fact, Boyd suggested that the biblical content in his own paintings could be explained more 'by the business of family bible reading, than by any specific religious beliefs', stating, 'I can't remember ever having a belief in God. I didn't think it was necessary; it just didn't crop up'.<sup>44</sup> Again, this was reminiscent of Fuller's own atheist spirituality, in which painting provided the possibility of 'redemption through form' in the absence of God; or in the case of Boyd's 1945 painting, *The Mockers*, in the presence of God who is turning his back on 'all the terrible things that people do to each other'.<sup>45</sup>

The discussion later turned to Boyd's landscape paintings, and particularly the contrast between his Australian and his English landscapes. In the English paintings he 'think[s] of England as a marvellous green island, and of the people going off in the hulks from England to Australia.'<sup>46</sup> However, as Fuller points out, there 'is always something sinister in your English landscape'.<sup>47</sup> Boyd agrees, describing the England in his paintings as 'like a paradise with someone putting a whip through it', and that with the storms of the late 1980s 'you feel like some sort of unstated retribution is being meted out.'<sup>48</sup> This brings Fuller back to his concern with the ravaged landscape, the fallen paradise, and he refers to Ruskin's 'Sudden belief that English weather was becoming malevolent, when he decided that with the storm clouds of the nineteenth century something diabolical was coming in which was to do with the effects of industrialisation.'<sup>49</sup> Boyd's English landscapes fitted into Fuller's model of the English romantic landscape, depicting the loss of paradise – Matthew Arnold's 'long withdrawing roar' of the 'sea of faith' – yet at the same time providing redemption through form.<sup>50</sup>

For the Summer 1991 issue, Howard Jacobson wrote a piece titled 'No Head for Heights' on the 'vertiginous' in painting.<sup>51</sup> In it he considered a series of paintings of Ayers Rock by Michael Andrews – who trained at the Slade under William Coldstream – and contrasted them unfavourably with examples of Romantic landscape painting which, through inciting a sense of vertigo, approached the 'delightful Horror, [the] terrible Joy' of the sublime.<sup>52</sup> In doing so, Jacobson, like Fuller before him, lamented the absence of divine terror from landscape painting.



For Jacobson, Andrews' paintings of Ayers Rock simply do not compare. He accused Andrews of 'cultural cross-dressing', visiting 'the monolith with Methodist hymns in his head and the Dreamtime in his sights'.<sup>53</sup> The suggestion here was that Andrews' 'sublime' lacked the authenticity of his 19<sup>th</sup> Century forebears:

What he might have learned from Turner – how to render altitudinousness, how to overwhelm us with mountain by filling the canvas with it, by doing away with heavens – he eschews in favour of postcard blue skies.<sup>54</sup>

Once again, the work of an artist receives a negative value judgement due to its not fitting the critic's narrow conception of what painting should achieve. If it does not express the sublime, then it considered to lack worth as a landscape painting. Inherent in this judgement is the dismissal of the multivalent interpretations available to the critic.

### **The Englishness of English Art**

The most pervasive themes over the first year of *Modern Painters* under Karen Wright – as they were under Fuller – were the related questions of what constitutes 'Englishness' in English art (more often coined more inclusively by both Fuller and Wright as 'Britishness'), and the relationship – usually framed as differences – between English/ British art and European/ American art in the twentieth century. Although the 'Special American Issue' would bring a different perspective to this relationship as I discuss later.

The notion of 'Englishness', as particularly opposed to 'Frenchness', or 'Americanness', had been a subject of English art criticism following World War II. Art Historian Margaret Garlake has described 'a strand of chauvinist, sometimes

xenophobic writing which sought to identify and promote a specifically 'English' (rather than 'British') art practice', typified by Michael Ayrton, whose criticism 'reveals the insecurity of a generation deracinated by war... and their fears of cultural loss, of absorption into a supranational cultural block.'<sup>55</sup>

Garlake also identified Patrick Heron as one of the early proponents of this nationalist critical position. Fuller had brought Heron in to write for *Modern Painters* from the very first issue, no doubt partly because of his sympathy for the painter's identification with a national tradition. Heron was less inclined to reject the influence of French painting on post-war English painting. He identified first of all what he called 'St. Ives Painting', later broadening this out to a 'School of London'. Although very definitely characterised as a national movement, Heron suggested that 'the values informing the new movement derive from France, but there are four or five British artists who did the work of importing and adapting'. Nonetheless, Heron asserted that 'a native setting must be the principal natural source of inspiration for an English artist.'<sup>56</sup> Heron's 'Englishness', then, was informed by Modernism, particularly by the School of Paris, but 'with commitment to a personal locale.'<sup>57</sup>

By the early 1990s, academic art history and criticism had long since moved from identifying a national identity to problematising the very notion of doing so. Critical perspectives such as post-Colonialism were being brought to bear on the subject, making Fuller's notion of the romantic English landscape appear increasingly parochial and, arguably, outdated.<sup>58</sup> In his essay 'The Englishness of British Art', published in 1990, William Vaughan, for example, suggested that the interchanging of the terms 'English' and 'British' in relation to the characterisation

of a national tradition is in itself problematic.<sup>59</sup> He argued that ‘it suggests that other cultures — those of the Scots, the Irish, the Welsh nations, as well as those of other cultural and geographical minority groups — are to be seen as sub-sections of this larger English entity’, implying the cultural superiority of England, particularly the South, over the rest of the British Isles.<sup>60</sup> This tendency to treat the two terms as interchangeable was apparent throughout Fuller’s writing and in *Modern Painters* more generally.

In the editorial for the Spring 1991 issue, the journalist Peter Jenkins, who was a member of the *Modern Painters* editorial board, argued a case for the defence of ‘Englishness’. He began by describing ‘the un-Englishness of the twentieth century’, in which ‘Armies did not invade us; dictators did not trample upon us; revolutions spared us.’<sup>61</sup> Although he acknowledged the ‘Americanisation of daily life’, equally he suggested that the English had not ‘experienced the melting and remoulding of our society that is the American twentieth century’. Britain, England – Jenkins, too, treats these terms as interchangeable – through its

historical continuities, sturdy institutions, ancient customs and settled ways resisted and survived the onslaught of war, revolution and much of modernity’s onslaught against the liberal civilization of which late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain seemed the most perfect flowering.<sup>62</sup>

He described this as ‘the England of Stanley Spencer’ where the English painter ‘hearkened to the distant bells and entertained visions of harmony which were the antithesis of the continental spirit’.<sup>63</sup> Spencer, one of the painters most celebrated by Fuller, was thus presented as the model for mid- to late-twentieth century British painting, rooted not in European Modernism, but ‘in the spirit of the age, and of place, but in an older tradition of national character.’<sup>64</sup>

Jenkins contradicted the views of those who had dismissed English art as insular (Baudelaire), 'introverted and personalistic' (Herbert Read) or 'little island art' (the 'condescending American view of English art as summed up by Robert Hughes').<sup>65</sup> For Jenkins, as for Fuller, Spencer was indicative of a continuing English concern with figurative art, which 'was kept alive in Britain during the dark age of art's decadence which followed the early Modernist flowering'.<sup>66</sup> At the Slade,

Coldstream guarded the ancient techniques of drawing; landscape painting flourished as the imaginative transformation of nature;... religious symbolism and belief, the mainstreams of the European tradition, found a reservoir in the backwater of England and there survived the 'death of God'; art survived the 'death of art'.<sup>67</sup>

For Jenkins, painting in England, had achieved nothing less important than to rescue art from the 'decadence' of European Modernism. This theme of the significance of English, or British, art in the context of the twentieth century, in relation to European Modernism and in contrast to American art, continued to be addressed within the pages of *Modern Painters*, beyond the direct influence of Fuller as editor.

The third issue of *Modern Painters* under Wright was dedicated to 'Art in Britain', and, particularly, to the question of what might constitute a 'British tradition'.<sup>68</sup> The editorial, by Patrick Wright, who co-wrote the catalogue for the Recording Britain project (see below), grappled with the danger of being perceived either as 'dim-witted, if not frankly xenophobic, parochialists, or... paid up followers of the latest anti-traditional trend'.<sup>69</sup> Wright was looking for a third way, that would

allow him – and *Modern Painters* – to look to a Romantic British (or even English) tradition for relevance and value without appearing parochial and irrelevant.

It is significant that this concern was raised by Patrick Wright at this point, still early on in the evolution of *Modern Painters* following Peter Fuller's death. It may be argued that the accusation of parochialism threatened the continuing relevance of the magazine from the beginning, a concern shared by Jed Perl, who said that, at that time, he 'worried about English insularity'.<sup>70</sup> However, whereas Fuller was arguably strong enough in his conviction to shake off such concerns, in this editorial Wright represents a concern – perhaps also held by Karen Wright and the board – that in the early 1990s *Modern Painters* may well be considered not only as parochial, but, at worst, as irrelevant to the contemporary British art world and market. This is a fear that may explain the further shifts in the magazine's editorial focus examined in the following chapters. Indeed, one criticism of *Modern Painters* under Peter Fuller had been that it was, in artist and writer David Batchelor's words, 'the theoretical mouthpiece of the Keep Britain philistine movement'.<sup>71</sup> However, to become more inclusive of forms of work outside of the magazine's traditional subject matter might equally have appeared to be capitulating to the mainstream of the art world that *Modern Painters* was set up to counter in the first place. After Fuller *Modern Painters* and its editorial board needed to define – or redefine – its position as a relevant voice within the late twentieth century British art world either in relation to, or in opposition to an increasingly multifaceted and international art world.

Patrick Wright raised the example of the 1987 Barbican gallery exhibition, *Paradise Lost*. The exhibition included paintings by a number of artists who had

been upheld by Fuller as the best Britain had to offer, including several works by Graham Sutherland and Paul Nash. Also on display was work by Michael Ayrton, David Jones, Robert Minton, Robert Colquhoun and the pop artist, Eduardo Paolozzi. Wright explained that Charles Harrison had detected in the exhibition 'an alarming deviation from the onward march of British modernism' and 'dismissed the whole exhibition as an exercise in petty fascism'.<sup>72</sup> For Harrison and others, Wright suggested, 'the pictures on display were gruesome scenes from the oubliette'.<sup>73</sup> However, this would surely have formed Fuller's own defence of such work. That is to say that Blake and Nash for certain, and possibly Michael Ayrton and other exhibitors' work was evidence of an English tradition whose opposition to Modernism was its strength. Indeed, Wright argued that one might see a form of parochialism in the 'inverted Little Englander [the modernist] with his smart iconoclasm, his instant superiority and his apparently endless supply of abstract oppositions'.<sup>74</sup> What Wright was arguing for in this editorial was a middle way of sorts that did not necessarily consider tradition and modernism as irreconcilable. He cited A.R. Powys ('the highly regarded Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings') who 'was quite insistent on his commitment to both "Tradition and Modernity"'. He even argued that in William Coldstream one could find 'definite risks being taken in the painting, an unexpected regard for Marcel Duchamp, an interest in the photographic idea of replication...', seemingly suggesting that these things make him not entirely un-Modern. Finally, Wright discussed Kenneth Rowntree, who took part in the Recording Britain project. He argued that Rowntree 'paid his respects to the "landmark" of English identity' in a way that 'has an incomparably greater depth of feeling than any barely disguised line of racist graffiti could ever attain.' Rowntree's themes, Wright argued, were universal and, therefore, international themes 'which now cluster around the

landscape – questions of place, cultural particularity, conservation and expressive quality’. Most importantly, Wright asserted, ‘chauvinism need be no essential part of their meaning.’<sup>75</sup> Fuller, I am sure, would have agreed with most of what Wright said in this editorial except, perhaps, that he may not have worried so much about reconciling the English tradition with Modernism. In characterising a specifically English tradition that also engaged with international (at least European) Modernism through both its themes and the ‘risks being taken’, Wright opened up the possibility of a broader, international perspective on British art.

The same issue of *Modern Painters* included two articles about the wartime ‘Recording Britain’ project, both of which addressed the fear that seemed the basis of its initiation by Kenneth Clark. As Patrick Wright put it in his article ‘Signs of the Horrid Tendency Here’, the project ‘met the emergency of war by summoning up a pre-war imagery that showed a Britain that was apparently already dying at its own hand.’<sup>76</sup> Wright was clear, in his commentary written for the four published volumes of the Recording Britain work, that Arnold Palmer ‘tries to distance himself from the pre-war preservationist despair on which it nevertheless drew so heavily’.<sup>77</sup> However, Wright argued, the Recording Britain scheme ‘forced its artists in the direction of exactly this kind of melancholy.’<sup>78</sup> He suggested that ‘as they gave expression to the overriding Nazi menace they invoked a whole cluster of more domestic dangers’, including ‘urban encroachment’, ‘the pylons that marched across the beautiful areas of the countryside’, ‘the tendency to smarted pubs, and the commercial pressure that was ruining old town houses by forcing them into service as modern shops.’<sup>79</sup>

This concern with the gradual disappearance of an historic Britain characterised by churchyards, pubs and the rural landscape (although the scope of the project rarely crossed the borders between England and its neighbours) was closely related to Fuller's concern with the disappearance and absence of the spiritual as depicted by the very same British landscape painters, some of whom were involved in the Recording Britain scheme.

The second of the two articles about Recording Britain, 'The Topography of Disappearance', by the art critic David A. Mellor, suggested that the retrieval of works from the scheme from regional council departments by the Victoria and Albert museum, 'prompts a revision of our understanding of British twentieth century art and the culture from which it springs'.<sup>80</sup> Again, this resonates with Fuller's undertaking to provide an alternative history of twentieth-century British painting; one that focuses on the landscape and its association with specifically British cultural traditions.

For Mellor, the significance of the Recording Britain project was that 'it attended to a central issue of the period, the creation of a distinctively national cultural style through fostering local identity and documenting a core of such images' just as Walker Evans and Ben Shahn had in the southern United States.<sup>81</sup> Towards the end of the article, Mellor suggested that 'the picturing of the threatened island and its buildings... entailed a recognition of its popular and vernacular culture, the subjects of "Britishness" that were relished and cherished in the post-war Ealing Studios films.'<sup>82</sup> According to Mellor, then, Recording Britain was responsible – at least in part – for fostering the national style and identity that Fuller would recognise and champion in the early issues of *Modern Painters*.



## **The UnAmericanness of English Art**

The Englishness of English art – or the Britishness of British art – is further emphasised across issues of *Modern Painters* over the years immediately following Fuller's death through contrast with American art as a counterpoint. Fuller himself was critical of American art after Modernism, particularly the influence of Warhol and Pop on contemporary American artists like Jenny Holzer. He was also critical of the reductionism of late-Modernist American criticism and its apparent rejection of nature as a significant subject. He wrote of the 'chilling words' of Alfred Barr who argued that 'resemblance to nature... might as well be eliminated' and objected to Greenberg's suggestion that 'there is nothing left in nature for the plastic arts to explore'.<sup>83</sup> To Fuller American art and criticism represented the antithesis of what made British painting great. The position and tone taken towards American art in a number of articles in the earlier years of Karen Wright's editorship was often equally negative.

In his article on 'British Artists in New York', Oxlade 'appraised the work of five British artists who lived and worked in New York'. The editorial text above the article asked whether 'their artistic sensibilities can survive in a city based on the Andy Warhol aesthetic of dollars', and 'where all values are relative except one – success'.<sup>84</sup> Even before the article itself began, the aesthetic sensibilities of the British artists in question were set in opposition to an apparently incompatible American ideology within which they must 'survive'. The evocation of Warhol here is significant, as it was Warhol who Fuller used as his archetype of the American anti-aesthetic, and was upheld regularly in *Modern Painters* as evidence of the weakness, and depthlessness, of American art.<sup>85</sup> For example, in response to the

American Critic Arthur Danto's description of Warhol as 'the nearest thing to a philosophical genius the history of art has produced', Fuller had argued that only in a 'dying culture' that had lost sight of the 'nature of the good, the true and the beautiful' could the pop artist be celebrated as such.<sup>86</sup> Oxlade recalled one of Fuller's earlier *Modern Painters* editorials in which he 'had deplored a culture so lacking in sensibility that it promotes a Warhol to eminence'.<sup>87</sup> Oxlade later lamented the scholarly and curatorial acquiescence that had 'left [contemporary art] to a capricious market'.<sup>88</sup> American values were thus presented as in direct opposition to 'perspicuity' and 'poignancy', which Oxlade argued are central to aesthetic appreciation. Quoting the phenomenological philosopher, J. N. Findlay, he explained these terms: Perspicuity is 'presence to consciousness' involving 'a certain stationariness or arrest', and poignancy, 'the accompanying "shockingness" that "luxuriates" in vision, where "one is necessarily rapt, caught up, fascinated, under a spell"'. It is the market here that is 'capricious', drawing American art away from more suitable concerns. The language Oxlade used here, as in his article on David Bomberg written under Fuller's editorship (see Chapter 2) closely represented Fuller's own language concerning the almost spiritual aspect of aesthetic appreciation.<sup>89</sup>

For Oxlade, the 'novelty tactic[s]' employed by Warhol et al. are not necessary and, indeed, 'ignored by most artists', because of 'the continued validity found in authentic painting, drawing and sculpture from the past'.<sup>90</sup> As for Fuller, the notion of authenticity is central to Oxlade's judgments. That 'much of today's critical comment is dissipated in discussing, even when they are dismissed, the promoted productions of artists like Warhol, Koons, Salle or Holzer' – all Americans – is nothing less than 'a scandal'.<sup>91</sup> Authenticity here was associated with tradition, and

the work of these American artists with inauthenticity. Just as Fuller celebrated a handful of American painters, so Oxlade also argued that, in the New York Studio School, as well as in the five British artists addressed in the article, a 'necessary bedrock of artists who form the foundation of the tradition [of painting] continue to work, searching, it is to be hoped, for authenticity rather than stardom.'<sup>92</sup> The British painters Oxlade discussed were presented as engaged not in the market-driven concerns of recent American art, but, as he said of Carole Robb's work, in 'authentic' concerns with 'the lasting tradition of painting, in composition, portrayal, story and symbol.'<sup>93</sup>

Oxlade's concern here with 'authenticity' reflects a concern that ran through *Modern Painters* from the beginning. Fuller's complaint regarding American art, with very few exceptions, was that it lacked a universal human element. His was a search for the authentic aspect of art that touched its audience on a spiritual level. However, as I have discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, this either ignores, or again, is ignorant of contemporaneous discourse around the question of authenticity and whether it is even possible to 'be' authentic within the mass-media/ consumerist culture.<sup>94</sup> Part of what defined *Modern Painters'* position was its standpoint against such discourses. However, by engaging with, and critically contesting such positions, perhaps the magazine's (and Oxlade's and Fuller's) own position(s) might have been strengthened.

In the same issue, Peter Jenkins – a member of the *Modern Painters* editorial board and associate editor of the *Independent* newspaper – wrote a diary-style article on the Venice Biennale in which he went 'in search of painting'.<sup>95</sup> Central to his argument was that outside of the centres of the international art market there was

still to be found painting that 'reconcil[ed] the past to the future', again repeating the concern with an authentic engagement with tradition.<sup>96</sup> This included the work of Hungarian painter, Lazlo Feher, whose work had an 'evocative quality of an individual moment frozen in time'.<sup>97</sup>

Jenkins contrasted this rare authenticity, again, with Jenny Holzer, about whose work he takes a rather dismissive tone. He was critical of her claim that to 'reach a general audience it's not art issues that are going to compel them to stop on their way to lunch, it has to be life issues.'<sup>98</sup> The outcome of this position, Jenkins explained, was that 'she starts scribbling about "life issues" on T-shirts and putting signs up around New York.' He contrasted Holzer's task with that of Velazquez and Titian, who 'painted and painted until there was nothing much they did not know about the human condition.'<sup>99</sup>

He described the contemporary painting on show at the Biennale as 'a glorious "return to zero"' and was explicitly disparaging of some of those who defended such work, imploring not to 'give me this crap about Koons engaging with the consumer culture, trying to get the upper hand. Koons is engaging (carnally) with La Cicciolina, for money.'<sup>100</sup> Of post-Modern appropriation more generally, Jenkins argued that it is 'harmless enough, if you like what is being appropriated, but what is the point?'

This insouciant rejection of the use of appropriation by a contemporary artist ignored (or was ignorant of) the significant discussion of the strategy that had taken place since at least the early-1980s, particularly in the magazine *October*. For example, in the first part of his essay 'The Allegorical Impulse', Craig Owens cited

appropriation as one of the core characteristics of postmodern 'discursivity', and central to postmodern art's content.<sup>101</sup> This followed articles in the same publication by Douglas Crimp and Rosalind Kraus that had also analysed and problematised the characteristics of the postmodern condition and the work produced therein in some considerable depth.<sup>102</sup> In comparison, Jenkins' rejection seems uncritical to say the least.

### **English vs International Modernism**

Although this concern with the nature of Englishness remained central to *Modern Painters*, under Wright there was certainly less inclination to distance English painting and sculpture from the European and American forms of Modernism. Again, it is significant that Heron reappeared in *Modern Painters* under Karen Wright, having previously characterised post-war English painting as developing out of 'French values'.<sup>103</sup> In relation to American art, as early as 1966, Heron had defended himself against charges of chauvinism, arguing that it was his generation of British artists who had first acknowledged the importance of developments in American art in the mid-1950s. He explained that the 'mid-generation' British painters to which he belonged, were 'in varying degrees influenced by them at the time'.<sup>104</sup>

In a number of articles across these first three issues after Fuller, writers were identifying influences from beyond the country's borders at the same time as – indeed often in the service of – identifying a national tradition and identity. In the later 'Special American Issue' (see below), American painters were discussed, either by Jed Perl, who edited the issue, or by the artists themselves, in relation to

their European influences, bringing them closer to the English painters and their influences as discussed in Wright's earlier issues.

In his article on Recording Britain, Mellor described Kenneth Rowntree's drawings of 'the parish churches of Essex' as 'pictures which seem to deploy Cézanne at the antiquarian service of Niklaus Pevsner'.<sup>105</sup> In identifying the Englishman's work with European Modernism he was, at the same time, embedding it deeper in the English tradition described by Pevsner.

This identification of Fuller's 'English tradition' with European Modernist traditions was most explicitly the case in Waldemar Januszczak's article on Tony Bevan and Vincent van Gogh, in which he explicitly compared the Dutch post-Impressionist's work with that of a contemporary English painter, as if to further emphasise the strength of the English tradition to which he belonged.<sup>106</sup>

In his essay on the British abstract and still-life painter William Scott in the Winter 1990/91 issue, Heron also focused on the international nature of the Modernist enterprise, identifying a 'generation of British painters... which is fast becoming known to an international audience.'<sup>107</sup> Like Fuller, then, Heron was of the opinion that this generation of British artists was important, historically and internationally. What is interesting in this case is Heron's suggested that 'the vague "group" to which I refer displays few specifically British qualities: like painters everywhere, at the present time, they participate in pictorial developments that may be said to be worldwide.'<sup>108</sup> He argued that 'with the world as their parish, the painters of today are not stylistically restricted by *place*'.<sup>109</sup>

He claimed that 'it is his intuitive grasp of the central attitudes of modern French painting that gives Scott's work its additional richness, authority and originality.'<sup>110</sup> France, then, wasn't only an influence, but also the French tradition was inherent in Scott's painting. His 'newness', Heron argued, was the result of his 'unconcealed love of the immediate past'. However, in Scott's work, the influence of the 'deliberate science of French painting' was 'married to that raw energy, and the spirit of radical innovation, which one associates with the Americans.'<sup>111</sup> Again, the best of British painting was presented as the opposite of the parochialism that Wright warned against in his editorial to this issue. Whereas for Fuller, mid-twentieth Century British art was the development of a definitely British tradition, for Heron it was indicative of international Modernism. Scott, then, was placed firmly within the Modernist idiom, whereas Fuller had viewed English painting as a Romantic endeavour, closer to the pre-Raphaelite concerns of Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat*, than Cezanne's or Van Gogh's Modernist experiments.

Nevertheless, Heron still characterised Scott's painting as unmistakably British, synthesising the best of French and American painting, without the lack of subtlety of the American and the lack of energy of the French, instead producing 'a certain combination of opposites – combinations which I believe are essential to painting, if it is to achieve the status of major painting.'<sup>112</sup> This statement regarding a 'lack of subtlety' demonstrates a frustration felt by Heron for some time that the New York painters had not really progressed after the early 1950s. In an essay for *Studio International* in 1966, he had explained that the

'first generation' New York painters have never really progressed beyond the formats which each had arrived at by 1950: instead, they seem to have

'gone into production', repeating their discoveries instead of going forward to new ones.<sup>113</sup>

Heron described a 'nervous *energy*', and '*lurchingly controlled expressiveness*' which is 'equally immediate in its impact and effect.'<sup>114</sup> This description of balance in Scott's paintings was very similar to Clement Greenberg's evaluation of Jackson Pollock's later work in his 1967 *Vogue* article, 'Jackson Pollock: Inspiration, vision, intuitive decision' in which he describes the American painter's skill in overcoming 'difficulties... in the interest of control and order'.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, Heron's evaluation of Scott, at times, bordered on formalism; a perspective with which Fuller had little sympathy (See Chapter 1).

Heron's interpretation of Scott as both unmistakably British *and* influenced by both European Modernism again reveals the more narrow focus of Fuller's own interpretation of painters working in a similar idiom, such as Sutherland, Nash and Bomberg. I would argue that Heron's position also demonstrates how, already under Karen Wright, *Modern Painters* was beginning to re-evaluate its position in relation to international Modernisms.

### **The 'Special American Issue'**

Where much of the early issues after Fuller's death continued to focus on his concerns as editor, this period also saw subtle and gradual shifts towards the inclusion of more articles on and reviews of the work of international artists, looking in particular to America. The Autumn 1991 issue of *Modern Painters* was described on its front cover as a 'Special American Issue' (see Fig. 1). Published almost exactly a year after Fuller's death, this issue suggests an interest, perhaps on Karen Wright's part, in selling *Modern Painters* to a more international



audience. Indeed, Golding describes a gradual shift of focus toward the international market which he identifies as having started with Wright bringing David Bowie in to write for the magazine in 1994, but really started as early as this 1991 issue. Jed Perl was asked 'to organize a special section on New York City'.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps the numerous Pop Art shows that were on in London and elsewhere at around this time presented the perfect opportunity not only to pitch American art to the traditional *Modern Painters* readership, but also to pitch *Modern Painters* to an American readership and market.<sup>117</sup> The title of one of the articles, 'What & Who was Pop?', reads almost like the title of an educational pamphlet, aimed at the *Modern Painters* readership who may have been put off learning about such movements by the sentiments of the previous editor.<sup>118</sup> One of Perl's aims in this issue appears to have been to reassess American art, particularly painting, in relation to Fuller's own largely anti-American, and certainly anti-Pop position. He has said that 'Karen [Wright] understood – quite rightly, in my view – that English art needed to be seen in a broader context' and that 'there was lots and lots of American art—and probably art all over the world—that also hadn't gotten its due.'<sup>119</sup>

As if with the understanding that the *Modern Painters* readership might be resistant to a shift in perspective on American art, the issue began with its three leading feature articles all on archetypal *Modern Painters* subjects; Constable, Bonnard and Toulouse-Lautrec. Having front-loaded the issue with subjects to please the traditional readership, the next thirty pages were dedicated to American art, mainly painters. These were followed by an article on 'Painting and Music', which addressed the question of 'whether the arts can survive and flourish without engaging with transcendence'.<sup>120</sup> Boris Ford, the author of this piece, ended the

article reminding the reader that ‘this is the question that Peter Fuller was deeply concerned with towards the end of his life’.<sup>121</sup>

As opposed to the largely negative tone taken towards American Modernism and ‘late-Modrnism’ by Fuller, and continued by Oxlade and others in Wright’s earlier issues, Perl presented a more positive perspective. The focus of each of the articles in this issue was very much on the influences of European Modernism on later 20th Century American painting. Perl was making the case for American painting to the *Modern Painters* readership, arguing that these American painters are not so different from their British counterparts after all, particularly if the British painters could equally be aligned with European Modernism, as Heron had argued previously.

In his editorial for this issue, Perl described the ‘overbearing size’ of the New York art world and how he understood the people ‘who complain about the hype, about the bloated reputations, about the junk that appears in the galleries and museums’.<sup>122</sup> However, he suggested that ‘good things get lost in the shuffle’ and that ‘it is the overwhelming size of the scene that gives New York its richness, that makes New York a place where you can in fact get away from the hype’.<sup>123</sup> This ‘richness’, Perl argued, came from a ‘constant reformulation of connections’, ‘and the way we find ourselves aligning contemporary artists in relation to past artists’, keeping ‘tradition’ alive.<sup>124</sup> Perl, then, argued for a New York art scene whose ‘moments of illumination don’t necessarily happen in the top ten type galleries’.<sup>125</sup> The examples Fuller used to illustrate the paucity of ‘late-Modernist’ American art were usually major art market figures. The artists whose work – according to Perl and this issue of *Modern Painters* – fitted this description were largely engaging

with European traditions of painting. In an article introducing the America/ New York section, 'Art in New York: An Alternative View', Perl reported that the American painter Deborah Rosenthal saw the late Ilya Bolotowski's 'career [as] one proof that an artist can develop an original and independent dialogue with European abstraction.'<sup>126</sup> He later described the painter David Russell as having invented

a figurative style that is at once grounded in classical traditions and attuned to the transformations that those traditions must undergo if they are to have meaning in the modern world – the world in which abstract art has been such a dominant force.<sup>127</sup>

In a later article in this section, Joan Snyder again emphasised the influence on her own painting of European Modernist traditions: 'Expressionism has always been my way of working. At the same time I'm attracted completely to artists like Malevich and Mondrian, who were able to make very simple, clear, profound, brilliant abstract statements.'<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusion

In the first four issues of *Modern Painters* after Peter Fuller's death Karen Wright and the editorial board appeared to make a conscious effort to continue addressing the founding editor's central concerns; the Britishness of British painting (if not so focused on a specific 'Englishness'), Romanticism, the spiritual in painting, and the relationship between mid-century British painting and European/ international Modernism. However, in each case, the tone of post-Fuller *Modern Painters* was more cautious and, gradually, more inclusive. Perl has argued that Wright 'took what [Fuller] had begun and made it a richer and more complex periodical – a

magazine that at its best reflected the true complexity of the art world as we know it.<sup>129</sup>

With the support of the editorial board, Wright continued to produce a magazine that stayed mostly true to Peter Fuller's philosophy and critical position, if not entirely to his tastes. In Martin Golding's words, 'she started to take in conceptualists and so on'.<sup>130</sup> Certainly there was a greater focus on contemporary British artists who were not painters or sculptors in the traditional sense, and these were not treated with the suspicion or downright contempt with which Fuller might have addressed them.

The editorial board ensured, at least early on, that *Modern Painters* remained the magazine it had been under Fuller, but allowed for some questioning of its former restrictive perspective. Its focus broadened to include viewpoints on international art, particularly American painting, which would allow such traditions to fit with Fuller's and the magazine's continuing position on British/ English painting.

Fuller's interest in 'redemption through form' was largely continued through the writing of artists and writers who had already been addressing such subjects under his editorship, for example, Roy Oxlade and Arthur Boyd. Wright also continued to employ Sister Wendy Becket, who had also written for *Modern Painters* under Fuller, perhaps in the recognition that she [Wright] lacked the spiritual perspective that formed so central a part of Fuller's later critical position. Becket's perspective was, naturally, more explicitly Christian than Fuller's more natural theology-based spirituality, but nonetheless allowed for that spiritual thread to continue into a decade when British art might seem to have been more

secular than ever in its forms and subjects. This latter concern is confirmed in Howard Jacobson's essay in which he lamented the absence of the sublime in at least one contemporary English landscape painter.<sup>131</sup>

The concern with the pre-Modern continued not only through articles on historical artists, but also, and more significantly, through interpretations of contemporary artists (by the artists themselves or by third parties) that focused on pre-Modern influences where the more obvious interpretation might be to see the artist's work as a continuation or development of Modernist concerns. Colin Wiggins' essay on Auerbach, for example, presents the English painter as more a descendent of Titian and Rembrandt than of Cezanne or German Expressionism.<sup>132</sup>

As the 'Art in Britain' issue demonstrated, the issue of the 'Englishness of English art' remained at the heart of *Modern Painters* during this period. The related questions of what made English art English, and what differentiated English art from international art (particularly international Modernism) were key subjects brought up by the magazine's regular writers. However, this English art with its pre-Modern influences was beginning to be presented more regularly as having also developed out of international Modernist concerns. William Scott was presented by Heron as more of a European Modernist than a British abstractionist with roots in the English landscape tradition. Furthermore, American painting was no longer seen as the antithesis of English painting, but rather as having its roots in the same European traditions.

The major question that must be asked when considering the determination with which all involved at *Modern Painters* kept to the heart of Fuller's values, is to what

extent the magazine was positioning itself outside of the contemporary discourses that were driving art criticism at the time. Secondary to this question is whether this meant that *Modern Painters* in the early-1990s was taking up a position in opposition to what Peter Fuller had considered an institutionally-driven 'state art', or that it was failing to acknowledge the rich contexts provided by European and American Modernism within which more complex interpretations of British art might be facilitated.

While *Modern Painters* had been concerning itself with the nature of Englishness/Britishness and the superiority of British Romantic landscape painting over, for example, American art, other magazines and journals were broadening the scope of the discourse that had been developing out of the 'new criticism' of the 1960s and 1970s, addressing aspects of art and its interpretation relating to representation and identity politics, for example. *October*, for instance, during the period covered in this chapter, published an on-going and complex debate regarding the legacy of conceptual art of the 1960s.<sup>133</sup> Both sides of the argument were represented and, rather than one position being rejected outright, the debate was played out critically and even-handedly over a number of issues, regardless of the publication's editorial position. This debate was framed by other articles exploring the historical context for contemporary art, including an article by Rosalind Krauss on Marcel Duchamp.<sup>134</sup> This demonstrates what was, I would argue, a significant issue for *Modern Painters*, which presented itself as a 'journal of the fine arts' and, as such, as a serious art historical and art critical publication.

Even in relation to the discourse around Romantic landscape painting, *Modern Painters* had been, and continued to address the genre from a very narrow

perspective. In an essay on 'Landscape and Feminist Art Practices', published in 1989 in the *Women Artists Slide Library Journal*, art critic Katy Deepwell discussed the work of, amongst others, Thérèse Oulton.<sup>135</sup> Oulton is a painter about whom David Cohen had written in *Modern Painters*. Cohen contrasted her with 'the "post-modernists" who pillage art history in a cold cynical manner to produce quotational and deliberately kitsch works', arguing that 'she makes an inventive and respectful contribution to a tradition she both loves and understands'.<sup>136</sup> In contrast, Deepwell did not simply argue for Oulton's significance as a female artist who painted landscapes, but also asked what it meant to describe her as a 'feminist landscape painter'. Deepwell presented a number of ways in which Oulton's feminism had been interpreted; as the 'inversion of the extremely macho tenets of British abstraction', as an 'avoidance of the "problem of representation" debate', and 'as 'écriture féminine', a language from/of the female body'.<sup>137</sup> In her book, *Sappho is Burning*, the feminist theorist Page duBois took issue with the claims Fuller made in *Art and Psychoanalysis* for 'an invariable stratum of biological givens in human experience'.<sup>138</sup> DuBois argued that such assumptions, 'that tend to regard the masculine body, experience, and response as normative and therefore the touchstone of the human', need to be challenged and undermined.

These examples demonstrate the extent to which art criticism had broadened its perspective to question the language, assumptions and interpretations of the preceding generations. Such critical debates emphasise a lack of engagement in these particular contemporary discourses, by Fuller, and by *Modern Painters* following his death. This is not to say that Fuller's own discourses were not equally valid, but rather that his rejection of all others did make his appear narrow and disengaged. For at least the next couple of years, *Modern Painters* would continue

to put forward an argument for the recognition of an ongoing, specifically British tradition.

What is important here is that Wright, with the support of the editorial board, continued to allow Fuller's intellectual legacy to guide the content of *Modern Painters* and the critical positions put forward by those who wrote for the magazine. As a result, *Modern Painters* continued to publish art criticism in the Kantian tradition that, largely, set British painting and sculpture in the context of a national and European tradition. Where other magazines (and critics) were taking a more diverse critical approach, *Modern Painters* remained guided by Fuller's singular editorial vision and, in doing so, continued to address a section of the art world that was being neglected elsewhere, albeit from an unnecessarily limited perspective.

The next chapter examines a period in which the editorial interests of *Modern Painters* shifted further from Fuller's central concerns as addressed in this and the first two chapters. A central catalyst for these accelerated changes in *Modern Painters*, I argue, is the exhibition, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Gallery*. This will reveal broader changes in the role and function of art criticism within an art world, and a rejection of art criticism as it was understood and executed by Peter Fuller.



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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relationship between *Modern Painters* and the art market, see Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Perl, J., email to James A. Brown 12 August 2016

<sup>4</sup> Hatton, R. & Walker, J. A. *Supercollector: A Critique of Charles Saatchi*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2005, London: Institute of Artology

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 195

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Stallabrass, Julian 'Token Images: A User's Guide' [review of Marc Quinn, *Incarnate*, Booth-Clibborn Editions, London 1998, and Jonathan Barnbrook and Jason Beard (designers), *Young British Art: The Saatchi Decade*, Booth-Clibborn Editions, London 1999], *Third Text*, no. 52, Autumn 2000, p. 94

<sup>8</sup> Waters, F. 'Britain's Most Popular Exhibition of the Year? Have a Guess', *The Telegraph* [online] 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012 [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2016]

<sup>9</sup> Muir, G. *Lucky Kunst: The rise and fall of young British art*, 2009, London: Aurum Press Ltd, p. 18

<sup>10</sup> Wright, K., Interview by James A. Brown, ICA, London, February 2013

<sup>11</sup> Saunders, L., email to James A. Brown

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Founding members of the *Modern Painters* editorial board:

Martin Golding (Fellow of English, Peterhouse, Cambridge)

Grey Gowrie (Chairman of Sotheby's, previously politician)

Howard Jacobson (Author)

Peter Jenkins (Journalist)

Catherine Lampert (Director of the Whitechapel Gallery, previously worked for Arts Council England)

Edward Lucie-Smith (Art critic)

Jed Perl (Art critic)

Michael Podro (Art historian/ Philosopher)

Richard Wollheim (Philosopher)

Patrick Wright (Cultural historian)

<sup>14</sup> Perl, J 'Letter from Europe: They do it Their Way' *The New Criterion*, April 1989 [accessed online 11/10/2016]

<sup>15</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown, 6th August 2016

<sup>16</sup> Golding, M. Interview by James A. Brown, Skype, 22, April 2015

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Saunders, L., email to James A. Brown, 19 April 2015

<sup>20</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown

<sup>21</sup> Golding, M., Interview by James A. Brown

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Wright, K. 'Peter Fuller 1947-1990', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1990, p. 7

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 9

<sup>25</sup> Perl, J. 'Jenny Holzer: Billboards', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1990, pp. 46-47

<sup>26</sup> Wright, K. 'Peter Fuller 1947-1990', p. 15

<sup>27</sup> Wright, K., Interview by James A. Brown

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

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- <sup>32</sup> Edmondson, S. 'Titian: The Artist's Eye', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1990, p. 20
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 21
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 22
- <sup>35</sup> Wiggins, C. 'Frank Auerbach and the Old Masters', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1990, pp. 34-41
- <sup>36</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A renaissance in British Art?', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 2
- <sup>37</sup> Wiggins, C. 'Frank Auerbach and the Old Masters', p. 34
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p. 35
- <sup>39</sup> Gayford, M. 'Quentin Bell at Eighty', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1990, p. 55
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> Oxlade, R. 'Spotlight: British Artists in New York', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1990, pp. 72-76
- <sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p. 73
- <sup>43</sup> Fuller, P. 'Arthur Boyd Interviewed by Peter Fuller', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1990, p. 22
- <sup>44</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 26
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> Arnold, M. *New Poems*, 1864, London: MacMillan & Co., p. 112
- <sup>51</sup> Jacobson, H. 'No Head for Heights' *Modern Painters*, Summer 1991, pp. 66-69
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.* p. 66
- <sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p. 66-7
- <sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p. 69
- <sup>55</sup> Garlake, M. 'Between Paris and New York: critical constructions of 'Englishness' c.1945-60' in Gee, M. *Art Criticism Since 1900*, 1990, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 180
- <sup>56</sup> Heron, P. quoted in Garlake, M. 'Between Paris and New York: critical constructions of 'Englishness' c.1945-60', p. 189
- <sup>57</sup> Garlake, M. 'Between Paris and New York: critical constructions of 'Englishness', p. 189
- <sup>58</sup> See, for example, Godfrey, Tony 'A British Painting for the '90s', *Art in America*, April 1991, Vol. 79, p. 144; Vaughan, William, 'The Englishness of British Art', *Oxford Art Journal*, 1990, Vol. 13 Issue 2, pp. 11-23
- <sup>59</sup> Vaughan, William, 'The Englishness of British Art', pp. 11-23
- <sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p. 11
- <sup>61</sup> Jenkins, Peter, 'Editorial: The Englishness of Stanley Spencer', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1991, p. 6
- <sup>62</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>64</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>65</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> *ibid.* p. 7
- <sup>67</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> *Modern Painters*, Winter 1990/91
- <sup>69</sup> Wright, P. 'Editorial: Englishness: The Romance of the Oubliette', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1990/91, p. 6
- <sup>70</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown

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- <sup>71</sup> Batchelor, D., 'Gray Matter', *Frieze*, September/ October 1991, Issue 1, p. 46
- <sup>72</sup> Wright, P. 'Editorial: Englishness: The Romance of the Oubliette', p. 7
- <sup>73</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p. 7
- <sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p. 7
- <sup>76</sup> Wright, P. 'Signs of the Horrid Tendency Here', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1990/91, p. 38. 'Recording Britain', initially called 'Recording the Changing Face of Britain', was a wartime government scheme funded by the Pilgrim Trust and led by Sir Kenneth Clark. The scheme produced a collection of 1,549 'topographical water-colour drawings of places and buildings of characteristic national interest'. Saunders, G. *Recording Britain*, 2011 London: V&A Publishing, p.9 & Victoria & Albert Museum, ' "Recording Britian" Collection at the V&A' <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/r/recording-britain-collection/> [accessed 16/11/2016]
- <sup>77</sup> Wright, P. 'Signs of the Horrid Tendency Here', p. 38
- <sup>78</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>79</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>80</sup> Mellor, D. A. 'The Topography of Disappearance', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1990/91, p. 41
- <sup>81</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>82</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>83</sup> Fuller, P. 'A National Art? The Legacy of Romanticism' in McDonald, John (ed.) *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*. 1993. Methuen. London, p. 28
- <sup>84</sup> Oxlade, R. 'Spotlight: British Artists in New York', p. 72
- <sup>85</sup> See, for example, Scruton, Roger 'Gilbert & George: Beastly Bad Taste', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, pp. 40-42
- <sup>86</sup> Fuller, Peter, 'Ivon or Andy: A Time for Decision' *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1989, p. 20
- <sup>87</sup> Oxlade, R. 'Spotlight: British Artists in New York', p. 72 with reference to Fuller, P. 'Editorial: Britain and America: A special Relationship?', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1989, pp. 4-5
- <sup>88</sup> Oxlade, R. 'Spotlight: British Artists in New York', p. 72
- <sup>89</sup> Fuller, P. 'David Bomberg' in McDonald, 1993, p. 117
- <sup>90</sup> Oxlade, R. 'Spotlight: British Artists in New York', p. 72
- <sup>91</sup> *ibid.* p. 72-73
- <sup>92</sup> *ibid.* p. 73
- <sup>93</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>94</sup> See, for example, Lyotard, J-F. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984; Burgin, V. *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*, 1986, Basingstoke/ London: MacMillan Press Limited; Baudrillard, J. *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1994, New York: Semiotext[e]
- <sup>95</sup> Jenkins, P. 'Paradigm Crisis in Venice' *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1990, pp.111-113
- <sup>96</sup> *ibid.* p. 112
- <sup>97</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>98</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>99</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>100</sup> *ibid.* p. 113
- <sup>101</sup> Owens, C. 'The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism', *October*, vol. 12, Spring 1980, pp. 67-86

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- <sup>102</sup> Crimp, D. 'Pictures', *October*, Vol. 8, Spring 1979, pp. 75-88; Krauss, R. 'Notes on the Index: Part 1', *October*, Vol. 3, Spring 1977, pp. 68-81; Kraus, R. 'Notes on the Index: Part 2', *October*, Vol. 4, Fall 1977, pp. 58-67
- <sup>103</sup> Garlake, M. 'Between Paris and New York: critical constructions of 'Englishness' c.1945-60', p. 189
- <sup>104</sup> Heron, P. 'The Ascendency of London in the Sixties' in Gooding, M. (ed.) *Painter as Critic: Patrick Heron Selected Writings*, 2001, London: Tate Publishing, p. 157
- <sup>105</sup> Mellor, D. A. 'The Topography of Disappearance', p. 41
- <sup>106</sup> Januszczak, W. 'With a Handshake: Van Gogh and Bevan', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1990, pp. 36-39
- <sup>107</sup> Heron, P. 'William Scott', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1990/91, p. 22
- <sup>108</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>109</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>110</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>111</sup> *ibid.* p. 22-23
- <sup>112</sup> *ibid.* p. 23
- <sup>113</sup> Heron, P. 'The Ascendency of London in the Sixties', p. 158
- <sup>114</sup> Heron, P. 'William Scott', p. 23
- <sup>115</sup> Greenberg, C. 'Jackson Pollock: Inspiration, Vision, Intuitive Decision' in O'Brian, J. (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1993*, Chicago/ London: University of Chicago Press, p. 246
- <sup>116</sup> Perl, J. 'Art in New York: An Alternative View', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1991, p.34
- <sup>117</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, *Pop Art* [exhibition], 13 September – 15 December 1991, London; Serpentine Gallery, *Objects for the Ideal Home* [exhibition], 11 September – 20 October 1991, London; The Museum of Modern Art, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* [exhibition], 7 October 1990 – 15 January 1991, New York
- <sup>118</sup> *Modern Painters*, 'What or Who was Pop?', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1991, pp.56-57
- <sup>119</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown, 6th August 2016
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- <sup>121</sup> *ibid.* pp. 75
- <sup>122</sup> Perl, J. 'New York Letter', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1991, p. 10
- <sup>123</sup> *ibid.*
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- <sup>125</sup> *ibid.*
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- <sup>127</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>128</sup> Snyder, J. 'Artists on their Art' *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1991, p. 49
- <sup>129</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown
- <sup>130</sup> Golding, M. Interview by James A. Brown
- <sup>131</sup> Jacobson, H. 'No Head for Heights', pp. 66-69
- <sup>132</sup> Wiggins, C. 'Frank Auerbach and the Old Masters', pp. 34-41
- <sup>133</sup> See, for example, Buchloh, B. 'Conceptual art 1962-1969: from the aesthetic of administration to the critique of institutions', *October*, Issue 55, Winter 1990, pp. 105-143; Kosuth, J. and Siegelau, S. 'Reply to Benjamin Buchloh on Conceptual Art', *October*, Issue 57, Summer 1991, pp. 152-157; Buchloh, B. 'Benjamin Buchloh

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Replies to Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub', *October*, Issue 57, Summer 1991, pp. 158-161

<sup>134</sup> Krauss, R. 'Bachelors', *October*, Issue 55, Winter 1990, pp. 53-59

<sup>135</sup> Deepwell, K. 'Landscape and Feminist Art Practices', *Women Artists Slide Library Journal*, Issue 27, February/ March 1989, pp. 25-26

<sup>136</sup> Cohen, D. 'Therese Oulton's Painting: The Jewels of Art History', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 43

<sup>137</sup> Deepwell, K. 'Landscape and Feminist Art Practices', p. 25

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Fig. 5 (image) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

[Fig. 5] *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997

## Chapter 4

### **The *Sensation* Effect: A Tipping Point**

The early years of Karen Wright's editorship of *Modern Painters* were characterised by a continuation of Peter Fuller's editorial values and concerns. Many of the artists covered in articles and reviews were working within Modern/pre-Modern idioms, and concerned with nature, the spiritual, the aesthetic, or a combination of these. This continuity was, in part, ensured by the introduction of an editorial board, although, according to Martin Golding, Wright was already 'very strongly in [Fuller's] camp, and so she didn't need much pushing.'<sup>1</sup> However, as the art market and the environment for art publishing continued to change through the 1990s, Wright would find herself, and her magazine, facing some difficult choices regarding which new work to address and how to address it. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, under Wright and her editorial board the magazine included increasingly more articles and features on the subject of American art, with a particular focus on the New York art world. During this period, there was also some re-appraisal of the relationship between British art, specifically painting, and European traditions.

If Karen Wright's editorship started out as one of continuity, by the mid-90's a significant shift was being made in *Modern Painters* from a concern with the universal humanist, 'spiritual' aspect of art (Fuller's 'theoria'), towards an acceptance of art forms that Fuller, previously, had rejected. The postmodernism described by Jameson (see Introduction) had, by this time, become a predominant and much-explored, analysed and critiqued aspect of culture (in the broadest

sense). So much of the art that had been rejected by Fuller had become central to discourses around contemporary art. The changes that this thesis addresses were affected by – and arguably an inevitable result of – the cultural shifts that Jameson recognised in 1991, and that I explore in Chapter 5 regarding the creation and articulation of value in art worlds.

At the centre of this chapter is an analysis of *Modern Painters'* response to the exhibition *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, at the Royal Academy of Arts. Of course, *Sensation* was indicative of wider, more complex changes. Most significant among these changes – certainly as far as they were perceived by Wright and *Modern Painters* – was the increasing 'state sponsorship' of contemporary art in Britain, and major shifts in power within the art market in favour of the 'supercollector', a title coined by John A. Walker to describe Charles Saatchi (See chapter 3). In this chapter I examine the historical context within which these shifts took place. This includes comparing and contrasting *Modern Painters'* approach to the new paradigms in British art represented by *Sensation*, with the approaches of other publications, specifically *Frieze*, *Art Monthly* and *Dazed & Confused*. The latter of these publications demonstrated more than any the move away from Fuller's 'theoria', the concern with the human, spiritual aspect of art, to the visual and sensual.

### ***Modern Painters and the Magazine Scene***

In 1991, the year after Wright took over as editor of *Modern Painters*, *Frieze* was launched. Edited by Matthew Slotover and the artist Thomas Gidley, who at the time was still studying for his MA at Central St. Martin's, *Frieze* directly addressed the work of the very artists that it would take *Sensation*, six years later, to prompt



*Modern Painters* to consider. This is not to suggest that *Modern Painters* necessarily needed to address this work, or to compete directly with these magazines, but they exemplify the major upheavals that occurred in the British art world at this time, and the ways in which other publications approached them.

Fig. 6 (image) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

[Fig. 6] *Frieze*, Pilot Issue, Summer 1991

The cover of the pilot issue of *Frieze* featured a detail from a Damien Hirst butterfly painting (see Fig. 6). This set the tone for the focus of the magazine. There was an evident contrast between the subjects covered in *Frieze* Issue 1 and Wright's magazine.<sup>2</sup> The opening article of *Frieze*, by Stuart Morgan, addressed the rejuvenated *Turner Prize*, focusing on the fact that two of the artists were Goldsmith's graduates, and referring to the changes occurring at the college in response to the perceived over-commercialisation (and over-interpretation) of its previous generation of artist-graduates.<sup>3</sup> Morgan immediately contextualised this current group of artists as post-*Freeze* generation, suggesting *Frieze* had already moved its attention on from the earlier generation young British artists.<sup>4</sup>

Later in this issue was an article on self-referentiality in contemporary advertising. This immediately framed 'fine' art and advertising as culturally equivalent, a notion that was emphasised through a series of articles later in the same issue on Richard Prince, much of whose work plays on the same juxtaposition. This placed *Frieze* as absolutely of its time, aware of, and accepting, the cultural paradigm shifts that had already been occurring over the previous decade.

*Dazed & Confused* was first published in 1992 and therefore, like *Frieze*, developed its position on British art through the yBa generation. It has also always made explicit the relationship between all aspects of visual culture, including art and advertising, as well as fashion, music, cinema, television, and the idea of celebrity more broadly. For an interview with Damien Hirst from 1997, Mark Saunders deliberately focused the conversation on the art/advertising relationship, referring to Chris Burden's works for television, known collectively as *TV Ad Piece* (1973-7).<sup>5</sup> In doing so, Saunders acknowledged the breaking down of the boundary

between 'high' and 'low' culture, at the same time as framing it within an artistic tradition. Hirst himself suggested that advertising in Britain had led to a 'visually educated' public.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, *Dazed & Confused* was presented as a self-aware manifestation of Fredric Jameson's postmodernism, 'the consumption of sheer commodification as a process.'<sup>7</sup>

This is contrary to Fuller's notion of the 'mega-visual tradition', which implied a negative value judgment, and suggested that art that is part of or responds directly to that culture is somehow inferior to, even degrades 'higher' art forms, such as the 'higher landscape painting' to which he regularly referred in his own writing.

These new magazines, then, were indicative of a significant cultural shift characterised by the breaking down of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms. I would argue that Fuller's position, however strongly held, was becoming untenable in a multifaceted art world in which art, fashion and popular culture existed alongside one another in galleries, museums, and magazines.

In his editorial piece in the Winter 1989/90 issue, Fuller argued that 'it is no longer absurd to look forward to a Carolean Renaissance of both art and architecture in the coming century.'<sup>8</sup> Thus the editorial position of *Modern Painters* – and the critical position of most of its contributors – was restricted by the editor's irreconcilable views on the relationships between mass culture, middle-class taste and high culture. It was from this starting point that Wright would find herself, as editor, addressing both the major shifts in the nature of British contemporary art, and the competition manifested in *Frieze*, *Dazed & Confused* and other, newer publications, which were unencumbered by such a restrictive editorial position.

On two occasions in *Frieze* Issue 1 Fuller's and *Modern Painters*' perceived conservatism was directly criticised. In Stuart Morgan's analysis of the reinvigorated Turner Prize, he described the opposition of Fuller and his followers, suggesting that 'if hating current art was what art criticism was all about, then [Fuller's admirers] could join in and demonstrated as much by keeping *Modern Painters* provided with reams of articulate philistinism.'<sup>9</sup> Equally, David Batchelor described *Modern Painters* as 'the theoretical mouthpiece of the Keep Britain philistine movement'.<sup>10</sup> Karen Wright's approach to *Sensation*, and *Modern Painters*' shift towards a more inclusive editorial position might be interpreted, in part, as an attempt to cast off this impression. Rather than rejecting Fuller's critical position outright, Wright framed *Modern Painters*' ongoing critical position in a broader context of British and international (mainly American) art, even when, to begin with, her – and her writers' – judgements were negative. This signalled an acknowledgement of *Modern Painters*' changing situation within a complex and multiplicitous art world, wherein myriad forms of art compete for attention.

One need only look at the contemporaneous issues of *Modern Painters* to emphasise the rupture represented here by Issue 1 of *Frieze*. In the Spring 1991 issue of *Modern Painters* there is an article by the painter Oliver Soskice in 'response to Peter Fuller's book on Ruskin, *Theoria*... a passionate argument for the necessity for "looking", and the painter's uniquely human responsibility to the "visibility" of things.'<sup>11</sup> Also in the same issue is an article by novelist William Boyd on Stanley Spencer, and reviews of exhibitions of André Derain, Peter Lanyon and Norman Adams.<sup>12</sup>

By the time the Royal Academy hosted *Sensation*, Saatchi and the 'young British artists' were prominent forces in the London art world, at least as far as the media (in the broadest sense) were concerned.<sup>13</sup> The introduction of *Frieze* and *Dazed & Confused* only served to emphasise how 'out of touch' with a large sector of contemporary British art *Modern Painters* might now have seemed.<sup>14</sup> What Fuller did through *Modern Painters* was to redress the balance, and provide a view of British art that was not so influenced by the specific sector of the art world dominated by Charles Saatchi. As Jed Perl has explained, Fuller 'had believed that English contemporary art hadn't received its due.'<sup>15</sup>

### **Where was *Modern Painters* before *Sensation*?**

The issue of *Modern Painters* (Summer 1997) immediately preceding those that directly addressed *Sensation* contained little hint of the consternation that would be caused by the Royal Academy's exhibition. This issue largely followed the pattern of the previous seven years following Fuller's death; mostly covering artists and issues reflecting the founding editor's sympathies, with one or two articles introducing new perspectives on those he may have been less likely to address. The cover featured a portrait of a woman by Euan Uglow, and inside were articles on subjects including Uglow, Piet Mondrian, Ellsworth Kelly, David Nash, still life painting and the notion of the masterpiece. In his essay on Uglow, David Sylvester described the painter's work in terms of how it creates metaphors that 'express feelings and emotions most powerfully.'<sup>16</sup> This is very close to Fuller's concerns regarding the expression of a universal human condition (See Chapter 1).

## Moving Forward

Although I am arguing that *Sensation* marked a turning point for *Modern Painters*, it is important to point out that it was indicative of broader changes in the art world that contributed to the decline of art criticism as defined by Fuller. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Wright was already turning her attention towards more international art. In the years leading up to *Sensation*, articles started to appear on other artists whose work had not previously been addressed in *Modern Painters*, or at least not received positively. The issue before the first of those addressing *Sensation* included a three-page article on Richard Long, an artist who had been much derided by Fuller.<sup>17</sup> In one essay, Fuller had described Long's work dismissively as 'the barren arrangement of rocks and stones'.<sup>18</sup> In the same issue, there is a review of an exhibition by the American hyper-realist sculptor Duane Hanson, typical of the 'mega-visual tradition'.<sup>20</sup> Even before *Sensation*, then, there is an increasing acceptance of the multiplicitous nature of the art world of which *Modern Painters* was a part.

John Haldane argued that, far from being anti-traditional, Richard Long worked out of a long tradition and 'recover[s the] ancient animating spirit' of art's past and 'distances his practice from conceptualism and minimalism'.<sup>21</sup> Haldane suggested that those critics who were hostile towards Long's work were 'generally modernists preoccupied with formal concerns' or those whose aesthetic sensibilities had been eroded through theory.

He argued that Long's work, although rooted in the landscape, related more broadly to 'the frame of the universe', measuring 'space and time by marking the earth'.<sup>22</sup> This recalled Fuller's conviction that the greatest art appeals to universal

aspects of humanity. Haldane stated that Long combined 'naturalism with a sense of the transcendent', which was very close to Fuller's interest in natural theosophy. Although Haldane was discussing the work of an artist whom Fuller upheld as an example of 'anaesthesia', he did so in terms that fitted in with Fuller's own ideas. This was one example of where *Modern Painters'* writers were beginning to address and interpret the work of a broader range of artists in relation to Fuller's concerns in order to convince a readership which might previously have been hostile to such work.

Duane Hanson was the only non-painter reviewed in the Summer 1997 issue, and his was the first Saatchi Gallery exhibition ever reviewed in *Modern Painters*. All of the others in this issue were landscape or figurative painters who were working in styles and with subjects that would fit firmly with Fuller's values. Because of this, the Hanson review appears even more incongruous. The reviewer, Edward Winters (who at the time was Director of the Centre for Arts and Critical Study at the University of Westminster) presented a positive evaluation of the exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery. He contrasted Hanson's waxworks with those to be found at Madame Tussauds, explaining the 'different level' at which the American artist's sculptures work. He carefully argued for the 'power' of the work, which comes from Hanson's depiction of 'little people with dreary lives'. The 'point' of his work, Winters argued, is 'to recognise that we too are little people with dreary lives.'<sup>23</sup> Winters, then, identified universal themes in Hanson's work, but universal on a culturally local level. The strength of these sculptures, he argued, is how the viewer relates to them on a personal, cultural level, rather than on a more universally human level.

These examples both demonstrate the way in which *Modern Painters*' writers were beginning to address and interpret the work of a broader range of artists in relation to Fuller's concerns. What links these two articles is that they both took their subject *seriously* and *critically* without being dismissive. This points towards a more critical and inclusive attitude towards the broader range of contemporary practices that would be apparent in *Modern Painters* following *Sensation*, and in spite of the largely negative response to the exhibition within the pages of the magazine. Although these changes were gradual, they demonstrate the effect on the content of a magazine of shifts in agency within an art world with regard to the creation of value, which in turn determines the work that is exhibited in both commercial galleries and the major art institutions. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the content of the magazine is being influenced by the changing nature of the art world and the concerns of the art market. Of course, *Modern Painters* could have continued to have focussed on the specific sector of the market as it had previously, but by expanding its scope, it potentially appealed to a wider audience, both in terms of readers and, crucially, advertisers.

### **The Redesign of *Modern Painters***

The Autumn 1997 Issue of *Modern Painters*, the first to address *Sensation*, saw a significant visual redesign of the magazine's cover (see Fig. 5). This change in design lent a very different feel to the magazine. The font was changed from a Goudy-style serif font – an early-twentieth century style – to the more contemporary bold Helvetica sans-serif, a font that became widely used by graphic designers in the 1990s. Previously, the cover had consisted of a standard white background with an image in the centre, surrounded by text describing highlights of the magazine's content. With the new design, the colour scheme would change



for each issue, but would be bright and, therefore, more eye-catching on a shelf with other competing titles. There was less 'clutter' in terms of text, and the overall effect was of a cleaner, more contemporary feel to the design of the magazine.

It was not only the design of the magazine's cover that changed. The types of artwork depicted on the front of *Modern Painters* also changed significantly.

Following the Summer 1997 issue, with the old design and an image of a female nude by Euan Uglow, the Autumn 1997 issue, with a bright yellow cover, depicted a mixed media work by young British artist Gillian Wearing. This took the form of a photographic version of the 'exquisite corpse' game depicting figures who were central to the London art world of the time; Jay Jopling, Gary Hume, Tracey Emin, Georgie Hopton, Harland Miller and Peter Blake. The piece had been produced for an event in Hoxton organised by another of the young British artists, Gavin Turk, called *Live Stock Market*. The event was typical of a certain type of artist-run event that had been happening in East London over the previous few years. The following issue had on its cover a full-width bleed of a Gilbert and George stained-glass self portrait piece, which would arguably have been even more offensive to Peter Fuller's tastes than the cover of the previous issue.

These changes in the design of the magazine are significant in that they demonstrate an increasing concern with the visual. By removing the text from the front cover, the full-bleed art work and bright colours of the covers' design competes to catch the viewer's attention within a culture that is increasingly defined by, and communicated through, the visual and sensual. The new *Modern Painters* covers are an equivalent of Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*, in which, according to Jameson, 'the external and coloured surface of things [is] debased and

contaminated in advance by their assimilation into glossy advertising images'.<sup>24</sup>

The removal of text from the cover demonstrates that text – and the ideas implicit in language – is simply not necessary to sell an art magazine within this cultural context.

This represented a major and sudden shift in the visual feel of the magazine and placed it closer to the centre-ground of contemporary art magazines. This could be seen as a bold statement of intent for the future direction of the magazine. The works depicted on the covers, I would argue, appears to be a deliberate renunciation of Fuller's firm rejection of the 'mega-visual tradition'. However, over the same two issues, the editorial content of the magazine would also begin a significant change that would eventually lead to *Modern Painters* increasingly turning its attention towards art that was neither Modern, nor painting.

A detailed examination of how *Modern Painters* addressed the *Sensation* exhibition reveals the extent to which the authority of the critic as creator and articulator of value was being displaced by other agents within the art world, particularly those involved in the market: Collectors, dealers (in this case Charles Saatchi), institutions (the Royal Academy) and decision makers.

### ***Sensation***

In the Autumn of 1997, the Royal Academy held the exhibition, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*.<sup>25</sup> The show was the result of the late cancellation of an exhibition planned by the director of the RA, Norman Rosenthal.<sup>26</sup> *Sensation* attracted an unprecedented amount of coverage in the national press and many arts journals and magazines, nationally and

internationally. The reasons for this include the controversial nature of much of the work on display, including Marcus Harvey's *Myra* (1995) and Matt Collishaw's *Bullet Hole* (1988), in conjunction with the fact that this was taking place in the home of classical British art.

The collaboration between the Royal Academy and Charles Saatchi is an explicit example of the increasing influence of the art market – represented here by a private collector/ dealer – on the public exhibition and reception of contemporary art. Not only does the collector directly influence the work that is exhibited, but as a result influences what work, and what artists, are addressed in art magazines, newspapers and popular media. *Sensation* might be considered as much an effective exercise in the marketing of the Saatchi collection as it was a finance-creating blockbuster for the Royal Academy.

One reason for such unusual blanket coverage of an exhibition at the Royal Academy may be explained in part by Fuller's own characterisation of a cultural condition within which

paintings and sculpture acquire an ever more drained out, vacuous character, as if artists were voluntarily relinquishing the skills and techniques which they had previously possessed. But those skills have not vanished altogether. They have been picked up by *advertising* artists.<sup>27</sup>

If *Sensation* was indeed populated by the art of the advertiser, then it should come as little surprise that the popular media chose to appropriate its power to draw an audience.<sup>28</sup> What this also means is that any specialist art publication that covered contemporary art in any form would likely be driven to address such a divisive and controversial exhibition. It is also possible that other magazines addressed

*Sensation* in the way that they did because they considered it an important moment in British art, whether or not they liked the work. Even though *Sensation* is only indicative of much wider changes in the functioning of the art market, it certainly encouraged an urgency in Karen Wright and *Modern Painters* to address the type of work it represented. The influence of the art market on the editorial content of specialist publications, identified by Fuller in his *Studio International* article discussed in Chapter 5, is explicit here.

### ***Sensation* and the Art Magazines**

*Sensation* affected the editorial positions of *Modern Painters* and *Frieze* differently. Having been born into the London art world of young British art, *Frieze* had traced the development of this strand of contemporary British art from ground level over the previous five years, recognising from its unique perspective those artists who were, or would become, some of the more important artists of their time. The exhibition was not covered by *Frieze* at all, not even reviewed. I suspect that, to its editors and contributors, it was simply of less importance than newer work. This may seem an oversight, and it could be argued that *Frieze* failed to recognise the importance that the show would later hold. Nonetheless, to cover *Sensation* would, for *Frieze*, have been to cover old ground.

As far as *Modern Painters* and other publications were concerned, this was an exhibition, an event, that needed addressing. It had brought this particular form of contemporary British art to the attention of a wider public audience, which would have included the readership of *Modern Painters*. The question for Karen Wright, her editorial board and their writers was, what position should the magazine take on this intrusion into the still somewhat entrenched Fullerian editorial position

and its perspective on the London art scene? How should what was once Peter Fuller's (via Ruskin's) *Modern Painters* approach this seemingly most non-traditional of contemporary British art? The response of *Modern Painters* reveals much about the creation of symbolic value in an art world, and the diminishing of the critic's (and editor's) authority in this process. The financial success and the symbolic value (in Isabelle Graw's terms) of *Sensation*, the artists exhibited therein, and the art collection of Charles Saatchi, would have been effected very little however a magazine, its editor and writers chose to address and assess the exhibition. The fact that it was being written about contributed to its symbolic value (see Chapter 5).

It is interesting, at this stage, briefly to examine the approach of other publications towards the type of work represented in *Sensation*. *Dazed & Confused* addressed this new movement in British Art largely through interviews with the artists themselves. In so doing, the artists were given the opportunity to frame and explain their work in the context of its production. Thus when questioning the Chapman brothers on the display of *Disasters of War* in the Victoria Miro Gallery on Cork Street in 1994 – the life-sized reproduction of Goya's etching of mutilated soldiers during the Spanish Civil war was partially visible from the street through one of the Gallery's windows – the interviewer, Mark Saunders, suggested an interpretation, allowing the artists to respond.<sup>29</sup> Saunders suggested that viewers of the sculpture from the street were 'revolted and yet excited at the same time, fascinated by their own disgust'. Jake Chapman replied,

A dead work of art. We wanted to produce a morally ambivalent focus for consumption, where the mediation itself becomes physiological, so that, say for the voyeur, pleasure is heightened by having a smaller and smaller

orifice to peep through. It is the mediation that becomes the pleasure, it is not the object but the mediation.<sup>30</sup>

This is just one example of the largely artist-centred approach of the magazine, which relies heavily on the interview format. This allows for interpretation and contextualisation of the work to be negotiated between the critic/ interviewer and the artist. The interview removes the evaluative aspect of criticism. Furthermore, like *Frieze*, the approach taken by *Dazed & Confused* was to consider art as one aspect of a broader visual culture, contextualised in relation to advertising, fashion, television, etc., acknowledging the cultural shift towards postmodern radical individualism, and away from concerns with the universal human element of art.

For other publications, there were other aspects of *Sensation* to address. For *Art Monthly*, it was what the exhibition said about the relationship between art and commerce (a subject picked up in part by Bryan Robertson in his article for *Modern Painters* – see below). Rather than dwelling on the question of aesthetic value, as did *Modern Painters*, *Art Monthly* recognised, perhaps, that this work was not so much concerned with visual beauty as with more conceptual concerns. In the November 1997 issue, the magazine's editor, Patricia Bickers, wrote about Charles Saatchi's influence on the art market (via his influence over *Sensation* and Norman Rosenthal).<sup>31</sup> Bickers suggested that 'when a collector is also a dealer, his ability to manipulate the market, as Saatchi has shown, is potentially greater than that of a mere dealer'.<sup>32</sup> Quoting from Lisa Jardine in her catalogue essay for *Sensation*, she asked

how far are collectors with a reputation for having... "flawless taste" in fact being commended for their ability to establish a good price for that kind of

piece, at the same time as identifying its lasting aesthetic value and perhaps its relevance to an emerging school?<sup>33</sup>

This focus on the art market identified what was arguably the most interesting element of *Sensation*, and telling in relation to the subject of this thesis. I suggest that the exhibition's legacy in terms of art historical (and critical) writing in seems more discussion of its significance as an indicator of the art market than its relevance to shifting aesthetic tastes.

Although Bickers' article went on to elaborate in some detail the 'distorting' effect of Saatchi's activities on the market, she also echoed the sentiments put forward by Walker and Stallabrass, that 'it is only in the case of Charles Saatchi that one collector's personal "take" on the art of his day has come for many to stand for a whole period, the gold standard against which all contemporary practice is to be judged'.<sup>34</sup> Bickers lamented the way in which Saatchi's dominance 'subsumes the real diversity of contemporary art practice into a false homogeneity.' She was wary of blaming Saatchi himself for this state of affairs, but rather described it as a 'measure of the immaturity of the art world in Britain, its relative lack of historical and critical depth' and the failure of 'our major public museums and art galleries... to address the unprecedented volume of challenging work produced in this country over the last decade or so.'<sup>35</sup> What Bickers was acknowledging here is the far more diverse nature of the British art world at the time, which included much more than what was represented by the relatively narrow focus of Saatchi's collection. Bickers was implying the necessity of art criticism to address a broader range of work that that represented in *Sensation*.

The second article in *Art Monthly* directly addressing *Sensation* appeared in the February 1998 issue, and was written by Simon Ford and Anthony Davies.<sup>36</sup> Their article further addressed the significance of the 1990s art market to Britain's wider economy 'when culture became strategically linked to inward investment'.<sup>37</sup> Although the article began with *Sensation*, the discussion soon broadened out to a discussion of the role of the 'fashionable image' of the 'yBa' artists, and the way in which high street purveyors of fashion and lifestyle 'jumped on the credibility bandwagon'.<sup>38</sup> Tellingly, the authors quoted John Warwicker, co-founder of design company Tomato, who suggested they need to be seen 'as part of that culture'.<sup>39</sup> Again, this acknowledges art as an integral aspect of visual culture in the broadest sense, rather than separate, or 'higher'. Karen Wright and *Modern Painters* found themselves within a rapidly developing market for art and lifestyle magazines, such as *Dazed & Confused* and *Wired*, which were, by their nature, bound up in the culture market.<sup>41</sup> The choice to be made was whether to continue to resist such a relationship, or to acknowledge that these were the new contexts within which *Modern Painters* was functioning, and British art of any type could be interpreted. In continuing to resist this relationship between art, visual culture, criticism and the market, *Modern Painters* continued to defend the role of art criticism as defined and exemplified by Fuller, but rejected other potentially enlightening approaches to traditions the magazine continued to address.

### ***Modern Painters and Sensation***

In his essay on *Sensation* in the Winter 1997 issue of *Modern Painters*, Bryan Robertson acknowledged the significance of the market in the success of the exhibition and the type of work represented in it.<sup>44</sup> He stated that



institutions as well as private investors have invested too heavily in the more ephemeral and over-hyped aspects of late twentieth century art for the market to fall. Far too much money, time and space have been committed to allow any radical correction to be made to the excesses of recent years [ending hope that] the market itself will finally regulate things.<sup>45</sup>

The implication here, whether or not it was recognised by Robertson, is that the market, as much as any other agent, was responsible for the perceived value of the type of work represented by *Sensation*, meaning that the role of critic as perceived by Fuller had been eroded. Bickers, Ford and Davies in *Art Monthly* were also critical of the exhibition, but in the context of the role of the art market in its failure to satisfactorily 'regulate' contemporary British art.

A more neutral attitude towards the market was demonstrated by Matthew Collings in his Autumn 1997 diary piece in *Modern Painters*. He described the Royal Academy exhibition as 'the Coca Cola sensation [sic]. Or the weapons industry sensation.'<sup>46</sup> However, he also argued that, although it might be admirable to be 'against galleries, Americanism, commercialism and trendiness' – all things that Fuller was firmly against – 'realistically it's impossible to be against them because they are part of our being.'<sup>47</sup> Collings' point here is important as, like the articles in *Frieze* and *Dazed & Confused*, it demonstrates an understanding of the increasingly close relationship between art and popular visual culture. Placed in a more prominent position than usual towards the front of this issue, it is difficult not to read this article as a call (or justification) for a more inclusive editorial position more generally, or, perhaps, an implicit acceptance that in order to contextualise and therefore understand and interpret *any* work that an editor might wish to address, it is necessary to do so in relation to the wider cultural shifts that are exemplified by *Sensation*.

## Old Vs New

In her editorial piece, 'An Overwhelming Sensation?', for the Autumn 1997 issue of *Modern Painters*, Karen Wright addressed directly the editorial dilemma faced by the magazine in relation to the types of work represented by *Sensation*; 'The art scene may be more vibrant and influential than for many years, but it remains at odds with the title of this magazine.'<sup>48</sup> Wright was referring to the Ruskinian perception of 'modern' painting as an expression of the spiritual significance of nature's beauty. If *Sensation* represented the culmination of a shift away from the spiritual, universal humanism that formed the basis of Ruskin's (and Fuller's) philosophical position that itself developed out of twentieth-century European and American Modernist concerns with the visual and sensual, then, I argue, not only did *Modern Painters* need to address *Sensation*, but also in order to contextualise this work, it needed to reassess twentieth-century Modernism (see Chapter 6). This would lead to an inevitable move away from Fuller's critical values, both in terms of making judgements based on a notion of standards of 'taste', and interpreting work through, and within, a specific historical context (for Fuller, the English Romantic tradition).

Wright's statement could be read as an admittance that *Modern Painters* might be, at this particular moment, in danger either of becoming an irrelevance in the face of such major changes in contemporary British art, having to become an art historical (rather than current art critical) publication, or needing to state even more forcefully than ever its position as a champion of the Romantic tradition within an art world that was increasingly (if not entirely) defined by a market for the 'mega-visual tradition'. To have continued only to address work by those artists who were working in more traditional idioms (i.e. painting and sculpture)

and to ignore or routinely deride the work that others were covering as amongst the most important art of the time, would have created the impression of a magazine that was unwilling to acknowledge the major shifts that were taking place, even though it would have continued to have been representative of an important element of the market. The 'total absence of a painter in the shortlist for [that] year's Turner Prize... and the near total absence at the Venice Biennale' only served to emphasise this problem. Wright has suggested that even when Fuller was still editor of *Modern Painters*, she had felt that they should be addressing some of the artists that the editor was ignoring. She recalled telling Fuller, 'you can't just ignore the fact someone like Jeff Koons is out there just because you don't like him'.<sup>49</sup> She wanted to ensure that, under her editorship, the magazine didn't simply continue to publish the same writers writing about the same artists.

Wright did go on to argue, however, that painting 'continue[d] to thrive' elsewhere, outside of *Sensation*, including in the Royal Academy summer show and the Nat West Art Prize. That *Modern Painters* continued to concentrate on what it considered to be the best of British painting emphasises the fact that it addressed areas of the market that were either ignored or rejected by the majority of rival contemporary art magazines, placing the magazine within a niche in a saturated market.

Wright clearly recognised that *Sensation* represented a potential tipping point for *Modern Painters*. In order to maintain its critical authority, it was necessary to restate its position in relation to the changing art world, and market, ensuring that the judgements of value communicated by its writers stood firm in the face of an

art world in which other agencies were taking the role of value creation (see Chapter 5).

In response to this problem Wright initially remained somewhat staunch in her Fullerian defence of painting, reiterating 'our insistent belief in painting as a unique conduit to beauty, drama and spirituality, to say nothing of its physical properties, through craft and imagination that leads us to conclude that painting is [not] dead'.<sup>50</sup> This is a curiously Modernist statement placed, as it is, at the front of the issue that would see the continuation of an ongoing shift towards an editorial policy more inclusive of international contemporary art in all its forms. Yet, Wright went on to suggest that 'a decade on [from the founding of *Modern Painters* by Peter Fuller], we... find that while much has changed, some of the frustrations of ten years ago remain'.<sup>51</sup> Here she was referring to Fuller's belief that technical skill and imagination was lacking in contemporary art, and had been replaced by gimmick and snappy titles.

The conflict between tradition (the historical) and the new within *Modern Painters* is clear to see here. The notion that much of this new art lacked 'technical skill, talent and insight' was supported by the authors of several other articles addressing *Sensation* in these two issues (see below). However, Wright acknowledged that

our most high profile artists have become trend setters and... leading to an increased buzz about contemporary art, with resulting higher attendances in galleries... Internationally, the likes of Hirst, Whiteread and others win prizes and command key exhibition spaces. More important than any of this, *some of the work is good, thought-provoking, witty, incisive and imaginative* [my emphasis].<sup>52</sup>

The conflict between tradition and the contemporary, then, was characterised by a debate about quality and value. Having voiced the 'old frustrations', Wright here acknowledged that some of the work about which concern was being expressed proved such concerns baseless. Indeed, what Wright's article seemed to suggest was that, at a basic level, there was some very good contemporary art (which was not painting) as well as some bad. The conflict being set up between painting and non-painting here, then, seems something of a false one, exacerbated by the very title of the magazine itself, a point alluded to by Wright at the beginning of the article (see above). Furthermore, Wright pointed out that 'the rise of women artists – occupying all four places on the Turner Prize shortlist – is as unprecedented as it is welcome.'<sup>53</sup> From early on in her editorship, Wright brought in significantly more women writers, including the novelist Siri Hustvedt, art historian Sarah Whitfield and historian Lisa Jardine. There was also a significant increase in articles on women artists, particularly in the exhibition reviews section.

The conflict between tradition and the new is evident in the editor's (apparent) conception of the value of non-traditional media in art: 'There is too ready an acceptance of the multi-media approach to art, and too little debate on its intrinsic worth as art rather than documentation.'<sup>54</sup> Even Clement Greenberg, in his 1981 essay 'Intermedia' art, acknowledged that 'Good art, great art can come from anywhere. Means don't matter, only results.'<sup>55</sup> Yet Wright questioned the validity of Douglas Gordon's and Gillian Wearing's video-based work, asking whether the latter is 'any more aesthetically interesting in their grotesqueness than cable television's topless darts'.<sup>56</sup>

Wright summarised the dilemma faced by *Modern Painters* thus:

Our dilemma in *Modern Painters* has been whether to continue largely to ignore Young British Art. People say that this is what Peter Fuller would have done. We are not so sure. Young British Art is both influential and acclaimed... Peter Fuller would not have stopped thinking or looking. He surely would not have liked the contents of *Sensation*, in fact he would have hated them, but he would have accepted the need to investigate what was happening.<sup>57</sup>

Here Wright is acknowledging the cultural shifts at the centre of this thesis. Much of the art world of which *Modern Painters* was a part had moved away from the concerns that had formed the basis of Fuller's magazine. *Sensation* signalled the acceptance of the tastes of an individual collector/ dealer by an established (public) institution. By arguing that *Modern Painters* needed to investigate this work, Wright was conceding that the work represented in *Sensation* was part of the same art world as the work previously covered in the magazine, and thus provided context for the work that Fuller would have preferred to have seen within its pages. Indeed, as Wright's editorship progressed, the types of work exemplified by *Sensation* would be increasingly written about in the context of *Modern Painters'* more traditional concerns (see Chapter 6). *Modern Painters* was changing, but as the result of a broader shift towards the acceptance of postmodernism, in the Jamesonian sense of the cultural logic of late capitalism (see Introduction).

Towards the end of the article, Wright suggested that perhaps the reason there was not much painting in *Sensation* was because 'too many of the Goldsmiths' generation [are] overwhelmed [by painting] where they should be excited or challenged'. Finally, she challenged the Young British Artists: 'You have made us laugh, you have outraged and sometimes even moved us, you have bewildered and

delighted us. But you have yet to transport us, yet to profoundly stir our spirits.’<sup>58</sup>

Of course, this assumes that all new forms of art must, in some way, conform to Romantic notions of spiritual transformation. It is from a similarly singular viewpoint that Fuller rejected any work that did not fulfil his narrow criteria for ‘great’ art.

‘Painting’, Wright suggested, ‘is still too much neglected’, although she did not state by whom it was neglected. It is likely she was speaking about the art world in general, in which case, as I have discussed previously, she was focusing on only a narrow element of that art world. It is also possible that she might have been referring to the art press in particular, much of which did focus to a significant extent on the new forms of art, although there were other exceptions, such as the *Burlington Magazine* and *Apollo*. Wright’s editorial, then, demonstrates a conflict between acceptance of the changing nature of the art world and discontent at its apparent neglect of painting and the Romantic tradition.

In his editorial in the following issue, ‘Something is Rotten in the State of Art’, Bryan Robertson, a writer on Modernist painting, also displayed a suspicion of certain forms of contemporary art, when he argued that ‘the rot really began’ with Daniel Buren’s banner in the Guggenheim in 1972, which ‘came in a decade which also saw mounds of fat deposited by Beuys, melting in museum after museum, as an “exhibition”’.<sup>59</sup> He then suggested that ‘today the situation has deteriorated much further when you consider the vacuity of this year’s entrants for the Turner Prize.’ Compared to the more analytical tone of the articles on *Sensation* that followed, Robertson’s editorial betrayed a subjective, personal dislike of a certain type of art that, as he acknowledged, developed out of a tradition that started in

the 1960s and 1970s. The effect this had was to make the magazine and its editorial board appear reactionary and exclusive, when, in reality, its treatment of *Sensation* largely signalled a shift towards a more inclusive editorial attitude, in spite of the concerns voiced by Wright in her editorial.

### ***Sensation* as 'Official Taste'**

Although Wright and Robertson denigrated the majority of the work in Saatchi's collection as anti-aesthetic, other writers in *Modern Painters* framed it not as non-traditional, but as utterly conservative, supported wholeheartedly by the establishment. This is a concern that Peter Fuller raised in his editorial in the very first issue of *Modern Painters* (See Chapter 1), referring to such work as 'fashionable' and 'novel'.<sup>60</sup>

This was a position supported by Marxist critic John A. Walker in his book *Art & Outrage* in which he questioned the popular position that Hirst's work, for example, was ever subversive, asking 'how can an artist who is fêted by the art world, who shows no interest in politics, who has used his wealth to buy bourgeois lifestyle trappings... be thought radical or subversive?'<sup>61</sup> He went on to argue that more shocking work involving animals was produced by Herman Nitsch and Raphael Ortiz in the 1960s, rendering Hirst's work 'neither original nor radical.'<sup>62</sup> Again, Walker was acknowledging that the creation of value around this work was driven by other agencies within the art world; the market, collector/ dealers, institutions.<sup>63</sup>

George Walden's article, 'Art, Where is your Sting?' picked up on some of the issues in Robertson's editorial, and supported the position put forward by Walker, that an



official art can never be considered a subversive art.<sup>64</sup> As a former politician, Walden addressed what he perceived to be the ‘official embracing of “subversive” art’ by those in power.<sup>65</sup> To Walden, *Sensation* was evidence of the ‘officialisation’ of what previously may have been considered ‘subversive’ art. He began by forwarding then Secretary of State for National Heritage, Virginia Bottomley’s description of British contemporary art as ‘the most exciting and innovatory in the world’ as evidence of ‘official approval’ of Avant Garde art. Although this, and the rest of the article, assumed that Bottomley was indeed referring to the particular aspect of ‘British contemporary art’ represented in *Sensation*. He continued;

In saying what she did, Mrs. Bottomley was pronouncing herself excited by the spectacle of sections of animals pickled in formaldehyde by Damien Hirst, by the concrete cast of a desolate house by Rachel Whiteread, and by the private parts of Gilbert and George.<sup>66</sup>

The underlying suggestion here seems to be that Bottomley was demonstrating a lack of taste. Moreover, suggested Walden, she was aligning herself with work that ‘portrays itself, not just as avant garde, but as antinomian, and thus subversive of her view of the world.’<sup>67</sup> Again, the suggestion here is that politicians, also, are involved in the creation of value.

It is necessary to point out that Walker and Walden (and *Modern Painters*) were not alone in arguing that the type of work exhibited in *Sensation* represented an ‘officialisation’ of ‘concept’ art. In an article for the *New Statesman*, Ivan Massow, who was at the time chairman of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, compared this state of affairs to the official art of totalitarian states, ‘a chosen aesthetic that is authorized and promoted at the cost of other, competing styles.’<sup>68</sup>

Walden's argument as to *why* the state might support such work was that it *had to*; 'It is the function of Ministers of Culture to patronise art'. If the state is not supportive of its art, whatever it may look like, then 'they would appear reactionary or elitist', and so 'indiscriminate enthusiasm is the best bet.'<sup>69</sup> More specifically, the state cannot afford not to support contemporary art, as Robertson stated, because of its close relationship to the market. As Walden pointed out, that British contemporary art is 'highly rated on the international market... has no bearing on its lasting aesthetic qualities'.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, he argued, the state cannot afford to be 'squeamish' about 'the ethical or aesthetic viability' of the work as their role is to boost the value of the 'product' on the international market. What Walden was suggesting then, was that the reason why such work had been 'allowed' into the academy – even become the 'new academicism', as Robertson put it – was because nobody was in a position to make judgements of value. In this case, the Minister of Culture because she must support the 'arts industry' in all its guises, and in the case of Rosenthal, because he must support the Royal Academy by selling tickets. The work then accumulates value as a result of being collected by Saatchi, exhibited in the Royal Academy and addressed extensively by the art press and popular media. The value of the work has been reimagined outside the traditional spaces of art criticism. Not only is the art critic no longer the only agent of value, but the evaluation of the critic has a diminished role in the creation of value. The *Modern Painters* articles on *Sensation* demonstrated a recognition of this.

This suggests that the art market had reached a stage where it was not compatible with Fuller's – and even Robertson's – notions of good taste and a 'higher' art. As was widely argued by the postmodern theorists and critics of the 1970s and 1980s,

including Fredric Jameson (see Introduction), a consumerist culture that is characterised by the visual languages of the mass media necessarily breaks down the boundaries between 'high' and 'low'. This breakdown of the boundary between 'high art' and popular taste has perhaps been most succinctly explained by the English critic Lawrence Alloway. In his 'Personal Statement', published in 1957, Alloway argued that he was 'born too late to be adopted into the system of taste that gave aesthetic certainty to our parents and teachers.'<sup>71</sup> What Fuller derided as the 'mega-visual tradition', Alloway described as his 'natural environment' within which 'a new level of skill and imagination' was reached.

Walden argued that, by supporting this work that has been described as 'shocking' or 'subversive', ministers were taking little risk. The reason Walden provided for this took the form of a value judgement worthy, as with Robertson, of Fuller or Greenberg. 'The reason [the work] has little if any of the subversive power attributed to it is that it is art of a low order'.<sup>72</sup>

Walden's argument, then, was that rather than being at all subversive or a 'genuine affront' to the status quo, the work was, in fact, 'provincial, derivative and residual: pallid or garish echoes of genuinely exciting and innovative movements that flowered in Russia, France and, later, America in the first half of the century.' He argued that 'the tardy adoption of these styles... is an aspect of national conservatism in the arts. Only when a style has lost its power to sting do we feel safe to espouse it.'<sup>73</sup>

Walden's argument resembles Fuller's in his essay *Fine Art After Modernism*.<sup>74</sup> Fuller described the stated intention of the Arts Council on its introduction as

showing the world that Western artists 'produce works of great beauty and imaginative strength', as opposed to the Soviet 'Socialist Realist' system which 'produces only hollow, rhetorical, academic *art officiel*'.<sup>75</sup> He argued, on the contrary, that the truth was that the lack of constraints regarding the projects to which Arts Council funding would be given meant that

the splendid efflorescence envisaged in the Keynesian dream,... has ushered in an unparalleled decadence. Piles of bricks, folded blankets, soiled nappies, grey monochromes, and what have you, can hardly demonstrate to those nasty Russians, or to any one else for that matter, the creative power with which 'freedom' invests our artists in the West.'<sup>76</sup>

Capitalism also had an '*art officiel*', which, 'if anything, was more pervasive, banalizing, and destructive of genuine imaginative creativity than its equivalent in the USSR.'<sup>77</sup>

The other article in the Winter 1997 issue that addressed *Sensation* was by the American critic and member of the editorial board, Jed Perl.<sup>79</sup> Perl's article discussed the significance of *Sensation* to the Royal Academy of Arts, and to contemporary British art more broadly. Perl claimed that the controversy surrounding the exhibition was not only inevitable, but deliberate. He suggested that Norman Rosenthal wasn't simply asking for trouble, but was 'getting down on his knees and begging for it.'<sup>80</sup> He argued that *Sensation* was newsworthy for no reason other than that it was sensational, and that artists such as Marcus Harvey – whose portrait of Myra Hindley was the subject of most ire from the press and public – had achieved notoriety 'by offending middle-class taste', and had become stars of the art world because many who might not previously have considered their work noteworthy 'now see it as a free-speech issue.'<sup>81</sup>

*Modern Painters*, in addressing the work of these very same British artists of whom Walden was writing, was responding to the changing conditions that led to their acceptance into the new 'academy'. Walden's and Robertson's articles, and Wright's editorial, collectively demonstrate a more reflective attitude on the part of *Modern Painters*, which frames the changes that occurred in the magazine in response to changes in the art world.

In this sense, it I argue that whatever misgivings Walden, Robertson or Perl may have had about the work on display in *Sensation*, and the nature of the relationship between the art market and the academy, it was necessary for *Modern Painters* to frame its own position in relation to the art world as it was at the time. Indeed, at the end of his article, Walden accepted that 'we have got what we wanted [, a democratic art], and are stuck with it. Here, contemporary art is a true mirror of the times. The times are not going to change, and neither is the art.'<sup>83</sup>

These articles demonstrate concisely the position in which Wright and *Modern Painters* found themselves at this point. The art market in Britain was becoming part of an inclusive and liberal international market which was being driven in part by collector/ dealers like Charles Saatchi. The British government clearly recognised the importance of this and supported this work that was bolstering the economy, both by explicitly championing it, like Bottomley, and by funding it (at arm's length) through the Arts Council.

### **Lacking Taste: Blaming the art schools and the audience**

In his Winter 1997 editorial Bryan Robertson acknowledged, as Wright had previously, that contemporary art was more diverse than *Sensation* would suggest. He argued that the Royal Academy was presenting the artists in *Sensation* 'as if they were alone in the field and in their generation', when, in truth, 'a sizeable number of other young artists are painting and making sculpture or installation pieces and videos which have nothing in common with any of the work [in the exhibition]'.<sup>84</sup>

For Robertson the blame did not lie with Saatchi, but with the Royal Academy. More specifically he blamed Norman Rosenthal for allowing the work into the Academy. He argued that 'although he brings knowledge and enthusiasm to his task his knowledge is patchy and partial and his enthusiasm often geared to fashionable promotion.'<sup>85</sup> It was the changing relationship between art, commerce and the audience that Robertson believed was the issue here.

The work, Robertson suggested, was 'only too apt for a new TV culture'. Indeed, without supplying any evidence, empirical, anecdotal or otherwise, he argued that 'a hefty proportion of the public which flocks to art shows these days is conditioned by hype and not all that knowledgeable about art.' This hints at an attitude of elitism echoing sentiments communicated previously by both Fuller and Greenberg.

Robertson claimed that

Taste has declined inexorably in the past two decades. The same public that can listen... to Dimbleby's hushed clichés [commentating on the funeral of Princess Diana]... can also walk around the bits of sado-kitsch at the RA with equally blank faces.<sup>87</sup>

Again, he characterised the audience for contemporary art as a kind of collectively 'dumbed-down' automaton, 'unaware even of the phrase "avant garde"', who 'could not care less about cutting edges. They are at the RA because newspapers and TV have hyped the show'.<sup>88</sup> This echoed George Walden's implication that Virginia Bottomley's apparent support for young British art belied a lack of taste.

Implicit in Walden's and Robertson's judgment of the work was the assumption that *Modern Painters'* readership would share their taste, rather than Bottomley's and the mass of visitors to *Sensation*. This in turn implies a continuing subscription to the notion of a high/ low divide, apparently epitomised by the difference between art that relies on concept and addresses popular culture, and that which requires skill and addresses the universal human condition; a divide also implied by Wright in her editorial. Like Fuller, Walden and Robertson are appealing to a Kantian model for judgement, wherein statements of taste 'involve a claim to validity for all men'.<sup>89</sup> In his 1984 article for *Design* magazine, 'Taste, You Can't Opt Out', Fuller spoke of 'legitimate' aesthetic judgements, arrived at by experts, as opposed to popular taste.<sup>90</sup> My argument is that the influence of the market on taste and the decisions of the museum-going public, as described by Robertson, overrides any judgement made by the critic. If paying customers are walking through the doors of the institutions, the 'legitimacy' of any critical judgement becomes immaterial.

### **In Praise of *Sensation***

Although much of *Modern Painters'* coverage of *Sensation* itself was negative, some of the artists exhibited in the Royal Academy exhibition were given more positive attention. Indeed, amongst Robertson's almost all-pervading negativity toward *Sensation* was (faint) praise for the 'better artists at the RA'; Hume, Whiteread and Rae. Each of these were given substantial coverage in previous and subsequent issues of *Modern Painters*.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, in Summer 1999 Robertson wrote a long article on Hume that was full of praise for the artist and his work.<sup>93</sup> This demonstrated a more discerning approach by the publication towards which contemporary British artists to cover, certainly than was evident under Fuller. This was an approach that had developed out of Fuller's own philosophy, but led to more critical coverage of work by artists working outside of the Romantic tradition.

Jed Perl also singled out for praise a few of the artists in *Sensation*. However, he preceded this with the suggestion that the nature of the work on display as a whole could encourage the gallery-goer to look for 'subtexts, for relevance' even in work that was more visual in its register.<sup>94</sup> For example, he suggested that Jenny Saville's fleshy nudes might have been seen to have 'something to do with feminism and fat' when they could, perhaps should, be judged as 'misbegotten additions to a line of unvarnished English realism that goes back to Stanley Spencer.'<sup>95</sup> Here Perl likened Saville to one of Fuller's favoured artists, and distanced her work from the 'chatter of secondary discourse'.<sup>96</sup> However, it is difficult not to read Saville's painting as part of broader contemporary discourses around feminism, which suggests that perhaps even though the magazine was addressing a broader range



of contemporary practices, *Modern Painters* was not yet ready to engage in certain aspects of more recent critical and theoretical discourse.

In the Autumn 1997 issue there was a largely positive article on Rachel Whiteread's casts of domestic negative spaces, a very positive piece on Gillian Wearing's video work (that was derided by Wright in her editorial to the very same issue), and a long interview between rock star David Bowie and 'young British artist' Tracey Emin.<sup>97</sup> There was also an article on Damien Hirst's book, although not as complimentary as the others.<sup>98</sup> Taken together, four of the first five articles that addressed individual artists in this issue were on artists represented in *Sensation*, and who worked in non-traditional mediums. The fifth was on another more conceptual artist, Nina Saunders.<sup>99</sup> This was the first time this had happened in *Modern Painters*. In the following issue, in spite of the largely negative editorial and articles on the subject of *Sensation*, was an article by the young British novelist Nick Hornby in praise of the photographs of *Sensation* artist Richard Billingham.<sup>100</sup> Also in this issue was an interview with the Russian installation artist Ilya Kabakov and a long (eight page) interview with Fuller's *bêtes noir*, Gilbert and George, by David Sylvester.<sup>101</sup>

Much of what was written about *Sensation* and 'young British art' in *Modern Painters* suggested an understanding that the readership would largely be hostile towards such work. However, that there were also articles that celebrated some of the artists again indicated some attempt either to attract a new audience or at least to acknowledge the changing art world landscape that provided the context for the types of work that *Modern Painters* had always, and continued to address.

## Conclusion

The analysis of *Modern Painters'* response to *Sensation* reveals some key issues relating to the changing role of the art critic in the creation of value within an art world. Although *Sensation* was only indicative of broader changes that had been occurring in the British art world over the previous decade, for *Modern Painters* it represented a significant tipping point regarding the work that the magazine addressed, the attitude the editor and its writers took towards that work, and also the (largely implicit) acknowledgement that other agents in the art world were influencing the value of artists and their work, displacing the role of the art critic as understood by Peter Fuller.

What was consistent across the articles on *Sensation* in *Modern Painters* was the sense that the majority of the work on show was, in Walden's words, 'inauthentic', empty and worthy of little more discussion. In denouncing the work as inauthentic, these writers were aligning themselves with – and in doing so, reminding the reader of – the position that Fuller took against what he called 'anaesthetic art'.<sup>102</sup> The implication here, as with Fuller, was that there was other, more 'authentic' art to be addressed in preference to this 'derivative' work.

What we are seeing, then, is a rupture occurring, a deliberate turning of attention toward the contemporary, but from a split perspective, as if acknowledging the necessity of addressing this new contemporary British art at the same time as not wanting to distance itself from the publication's core readership and values.

*Sensation* may have been, according to Jed Perl, 'a hot air balloon of a show that started deflating the minute you walked into the galleries', but by placing his collection in the Royal Academy, Saatchi had claimed institutional acceptance of

his artists in one shrewd move.<sup>103</sup> This caused the editor, board and owners of *Modern Painters* to rethink their position in relation to a significant section of contemporary British art and, I am certain, their place in a changing art world and market.

For Bryan Robertson and Karen Wright, as for Patricia Bickers, Simon Ford and Anthony Davies, and Ivan Massow, *Sensation* and 'young British Art' more broadly represented the increasing 'state sponsorship' of British art, particularly that which was more prominent in the major (mainly London) institutions. These articles also reveal the extent to which the success of *Sensation* owed far more to market forces, and Saatchi's aggressive self-marketing strategy, than to any conclusion a critic might arrive at regarding the relative value of the work on display through judgements of taste.

However Peter Fuller might or might not have responded to *Sensation*, Karen Wright considered it necessary to reframe *Modern Painters'* editorial (and critical) position in relation to a wider range of contemporary art forms, using the Royal Academy exhibition as a way of articulating this relationship. Even though all of the articles addressing *Sensation* directly were mostly negative about the exhibition and the work included in it, there were other articles in these and the issues that followed that redressed this negative balance towards more nuanced and often positive discussion of the work of some of the individual artists involved.

I would argue that Wright, in recognising the necessity to articulate her magazine's ongoing concern with the English Romantic tradition in relation to other sectors of the art world, ensured that *Modern Painters* remained relevant and did not become

anathema to an art world that included Saatchi, Hirst, sharks in formaldehyde and *Myra*. In continuing to address its more traditional concerns, but in response to a changing art world, Wright ensured that *Modern Painters* retained relevance within its new context.

The 'Letters' section of the Winter 1997 issue of *Modern Painters* was dominated by letters complaining about the direction in which the magazine seemed to be heading. One correspondent suggested that 'it was inevitable after his death that Peter Fuller's magazine, once a riposte to rubbish, is now full of it.'<sup>104</sup> She supported her argument by quoting the 20<sup>th</sup> Century British poet and philosopher Bryan Magee's statement that how good artists are as conceptual thinkers 'has nothing to do with how good the art is'.<sup>105</sup> Another letter continued in this vein, arguing that *Modern Painters* 'cannot remain a champion of all that Peter Fuller stood for and a mouthpiece for the views of those who support the principle of "novelty at all costs"'.<sup>106</sup> The correspondent continued by pointing out that none of the work in *Sensation* was concerned with the aesthetic or the spiritual. These two letters demonstrated the problematic position in which *Modern Painters* and Karen Wright as its editor found themselves in the light of the rise to prominence of the young British artists in the first half of the 1990s.

What is interesting here is that, in spite of the negative response of the readership via the letters pages, the trajectory of *Modern Painters* immediately following this issue was increasingly (and rapidly) towards this broader range of contemporary art, with the exception of the single issue immediately following Winter 1997, perhaps a deliberate move in the opposite direction, filled exclusively with articles on (non-contemporary) painters. This accelerated shift can be seen not only in

terms of the art addressed, but also in terms of the style and content of the writing, with Fuller's Kantian legacy rapidly making way for Wright's more creative writers.

Whatever the starting point of a magazine – in the case of *Modern Painters*, as an antidote to Fuller's 'mega-visual tradition' – what appears to be inevitable is the effect of market forces on the publication's editorial content. *Sensation* at the Royal Academy can be interpreted as one aspect of The Saatchi Gallery's marketing strategy, which also included the publication of the accompanying book that framed the collector/ dealer's collection as among the most important art of the decade. The two issues of *Modern Painters* that directly addressed *Sensation* function, in one sense, as part of Saatchi's marketing mix and therefore part of the art market (and art world) about which the articles themselves were expressing concern. Regardless of the negative tone and value judgements, Wright's magazine dedicated a significant proportion of two issues to the exhibition and the artists represented therein.

These changes in *Modern Painters* indicate the decline of the Kantian critical tradition wherein judgements of value are made through the exercise of taste. Where the notion of 'taste' is based on a fixed set of values perceived to be universal – in Fuller's case, the universal human and/ or spiritual experience – the radically individualistic nature of the art market within Jameson's late-capitalism erodes criticism's authority as value creator.

What Wright achieved by addressing *Sensation* and the forms of work the Royal Academy exhibition represented was to frame *Modern Painters* and its continuing

editorial and critical concerns in the context of a changing art world. The Changes to *Modern Painters* were not simply editorial choices, but part of a wider cultural shift in relation to the agencies involved in the creation of value beyond art criticism: the state, institutions, the market. The shift is indicative of a move away from Fuller's 'theoria', the concern with the human, universal and spiritual aspect of art and towards the visual, sensual surface. *Modern Painters*, along with the wider art world, was beginning to accept the postmodern as defined by Jameson, Alloway and others. After *Sensation*, this acceptance of the postmodern would be framed in *Modern Painters* through a re-evaluation of Modernist European and, particularly, American painting in the mid-twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Golding, M. Interview by James A. Brown, Skype, 22, April 2015

<sup>2</sup> A more detailed comparison of the contents of *Frieze* Issue 1 and the contemporaneous issue of *Modern Painters* (Spring 1991) further emphasizes the challenge to the latter represented by the former:

### **Contents of Frieze Issue 1:**

Georgie Hopton and Simon Periton, 'Hope' (artwork commissioned by Frieze)  
Stuart Morgan, 'The Turner Prize';  
'Gavin Turk and the Royal College Degree Show';  
David A. Bailey, 'Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma' (on Adrian Piper);  
Gavin Pinney, 'Crossed Lines: Self-reference in British Advertising';  
Adrian Searle, 'Fragments of Memory' (interview with Vong Phaophanit);  
Greg Hilty, 'Diamonds and Dirt: Richard Prince's Greatest Hits' (book review);  
Julian Opie, 'Project for Frieze' (commissioned artwork);  
'Vernissage: Pictures from the Summer's social events';  
'Northern Lights: A look at recent artists' initiatives in Glasgow';  
Michael Bracewell, 'Someone to watch over me' (on Andrew Renton);  
David Batchelor, 'Gray Matter' (on Channel 4's *Art is Dead* series);  
'Adrian Scrivener: Installation at Tram Depot studios' (single page image);  
Letters.

### **Contents of *Modern Painters*, Spring 1991:**

William Boyd, 'Stanley Spencer';  
Bill Jensen & Simon Edmondson, 'Albert Pinkham Ryder';  
A.S. Byatt, 'Noel Forster's Work';  
Martin Gayford, 'Hilton Kramer' (interview);  
Hilton Kramer, 'Donald Kuspit: Laureate of the 1980s Art Glut';  
George Szirtes, 'Kingdom of Shadows' (on André Kertész and photography);  
Clive Turnbull, 'Miscellany: The Tate at St. Ives';  
Pie & Melanie Corbett, 'Spotlight: Children's Art, Looking to Learn';  
John Ellis, 'At Issue: Television and the Arts: Another Fine Mess';  
Oliver Solskice, 'Art and Ideas: Painting and the Absence of Grace';  
'Interview: John Bratby talks to David Mellor';  
Karen Wright, 'Gallery';  
Andrew Norris, 'Diary: Artist on Site';  
Clive Wilmer, 'Poem: Minerals from the Collection of John Ruskin';  
Edward Lucie Smith, 'Saleroom: Art Market';  
Exhibition Reviews:  
Jed Perl, 'Derain';  
Anthony O'Hear, 'Modern Painters' (exhibition of work selected by Peter Fuller before his death);  
Sister Wendy Beckett, 'Norman Adams';  
John Spurling, 'Elizabeth Vellacott: Chinese Parallels';  
Andrew Wilson, 'Peter Lanyon';  
Malcolm Yorke, 'Rigby Graham';

### **Book Reviews:**

Brian Sewell, 'An English Visionary' (Duncan Robinson (1990) *Stanley Spencer*. Phaidon Press);

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- Martin Pawley, 'John Summerson, Defender of Modernism?' (John Summerson (1991) *The Unromantic Castle and other essays*. Thames & Hudson;
- David Watkin, 'A sense of Belonging: The New Classicism' (Andreas Papadakis & Harriet Watson (eds.) (1991?) *New Classicism*. Academy Editions;
- Michael Greenhalgh (1991?) *What is Classicism?* Academy Editions;
- Robert Adam (1991?) *Classical Architecture: A Complete Handbook*. Viking);
- Ralph Steadman, 'M. Sempé's Holiday' (Sempé (1991) *On Holiday*. Prestel);
- Paul Johnson, 'Raw Material' (Peter Raby (1991) *Samuel Butler: A Biography*. Chatto & Windus);
- Jane Haville, 'Berthe Morisot: A Demure Defiance' (Anne Higonnet (1991) *Berthes Morisot: A Biography*. Collins);
- David Kennedy, 'Artists, Myths and Models' (Jan Marsh (1991) *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*. Quartet)
- <sup>3</sup> Morgan, S. 'The Turner Prize', *Frieze*, Issue 1, 1991, pp. 4-11
- <sup>4</sup> Hirst, D. et al. *Freeze* [Exhibition], 6<sup>th</sup> August – 29<sup>th</sup> September 1988, Port of London Authority Building, London. The exhibition included work by Damien Hirst, Angus Fairhurst and other Goldsmith's graduates.
- <sup>5</sup> Hack, J. & Saunders, M. *Star Culture: The Collected Interviews from Dazed & Confused Magazine*, 2000, London: Phaidon, pp. 165-73
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 169
- <sup>7</sup> Jameson, F. *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1993, London: Verso, p.x
- <sup>8</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: Art and Money: Post-Saatchi Painting', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1989/90, p. 7
- <sup>9</sup> Morgan, S. 'The Turner Prize', P. 4
- <sup>10</sup> Batchelor, D. 'Gray Matter'. *Frieze*, September/ October 1991, Issue 1, p. 46
- <sup>11</sup> Soskice, O., 'Painting and the Absence of Grace', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1991, pp. 63-65
- <sup>12</sup> Boyd, W. 'Stanley Spencer', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1991, pp. 16-21; Perl, J. 'André Derain', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1991, pp. 78-79; Wilson, A. 'Peter Lanyon', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1991, pp. 89-90; Beckett, Sr. W. 'Norman Adams', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1991, pp. 84-85
- <sup>13</sup> For example, Channel 4 played a major role in the resurrection of the Turner Prize, dedicating short programmes to each of the shortlisted artists, and a live programme from the award ceremony itself. *Modern Painters* contributor Matthew Collings became the regular host of the live programme, which formed the beginning of an extended TV career for the critic. Collings went on to produce and present the series *This is Modern Art* (1999), also for Channel 4, as well as *Hello Culture* (2001), *Matt's Old Masters* (2003) and *This is Civilisation* (2007).
- <sup>14</sup> Wright's Gallery column, which focused mainly on London Galleries, included barely a single 'young British artist' before 1997.
- <sup>15</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown, 6th August 2016
- <sup>16</sup> David Sylvester, 'Getting it Right', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1997, p. 19
- <sup>17</sup> Haldane, J. 'In the Nature of Things', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1997, pp. 52-54. Haldane was Professor of Philosophy at the University of St. Andrews. His family had accrued a large collection of the Richard Long's work through friendship with the artist.
- <sup>18</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Visual Arts' in Ford, B. (ed.), *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain: Volume 9, Modern Britain*, 1992, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 113
- <sup>20</sup> Winters, E. 'Duane Hanson at the Saatchi Gallery', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1997, pp. 92-3



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- <sup>21</sup> Haldane, J. 'In the Nature of Things', p.53.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 54
- <sup>23</sup> Winters, E. 'Duane Hanson at the Saatchi Gallery', p. 92
- <sup>24</sup> Jameson, F. *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p.9
- <sup>25</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* [exhibition], 18<sup>th</sup> September – 28<sup>th</sup> December 1997, London
- <sup>26</sup> The exhibition of European Modernism, originally scheduled to open at the Royal Academy in September 1997, eventually opened in Berlin. Rosenthal has explained that the Academy's administration showed 'a lack of confidence that I would get it together', and that many of the works to be loaned depended on the impending result of an election in Russia. Bredin, L. 'Meltdown at the Academy', *The Telegraph*, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1997  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4710616/Meltdown-at-the-Academy.html> [accessed 19/11/2016]
- <sup>27</sup> Fuller, P. 'Fine Art After Modernism' in Fuller, P. *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, 1980, London: Writers and Readers, p. 56
- <sup>28</sup> According to the Royal Academy, *Sensation* attracted 284,734 visitors. Jury, L. 'Royal Academy's *Sensation* Proves to be a Shockingly Good Crowd Puller', *Independent*, 30<sup>th</sup> December 1997 < <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/royal-academys-sensation-proves-to-be-a-shockingly-good-crowd-puller-1291068.html> > [accessed 30<sup>th</sup> October 2015]
- <sup>29</sup> Norman, G. 'Contemporary Art Market: Arresting Art Explores Dark Side of Humanity' *Independent*, October 1, 1994
- <sup>30</sup> Hack, J. & Saunders, M. *Star Culture: The Collected Interviews from Dazed & Confused Magazine*, p. 29-30
- <sup>31</sup> Bickers, P. 'Sense and Sensation', *Art Monthly*, no. 211, November 1997, pp. 1-6
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid.* p. 3
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> Ford, S. and Davies, A. 'Art Capital', *Art Monthly*, no.213, February 1998, pp. 1-4
- <sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p. 2
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p. 4
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> *Wired* was an American culture and lifestyle magazine, focused mainly on digital culture, which started up a UK version in 1995 in conjunction with *The Guardian* newspaper. The venture only lasted until March 1997 (The Guardian's involvement ended after only a few issues), before the magazine was reborn in April 2009. Johnson, Bobbie 'The UK gets reWired' *The Guardian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009 <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2009/mar/23/wired-magazine-media-technology>> [accessed 12/10/2016]; Arthur, Charles 'Magazine of the US Digerati Fails to Hack it Here', *Independent*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1997  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/magazine-of-the-us-digerati-fails-to-hack-it-here-us-bible-of-the-digerati-fails-to-hack-it-over-1277702.html> [accessed 12/10/2016]
- <sup>44</sup> Robertson, B. 'Something is Rotten in the State of Art', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, pp. 15-16
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.* p. 16
- <sup>46</sup> Collings, M. 'Diary: Fame is the Spur', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997, p. 40
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p. 42

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- <sup>48</sup> Wright, Karen, 'Up Front: An Overwhelming Sensation?', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997, p. 23
- <sup>49</sup> Wright, K., Interview by James A. Brown, ICA, London, February 2013
- <sup>50</sup> Wright, Karen, 'Up Front: An Overwhelming Sensation?', p. 23
- <sup>51</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> Greenberg, C., 'Intermedia' in Morgan, Robert C. *Clement Greenberg, Late Writings*, 2003, Minnesota/ London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 94
- <sup>56</sup> Wright, Karen, 'Up Front: An Overwhelming Sensation?', p. 23
- <sup>57</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> Robertson, B. 'Something is Rotten in the State of Art', pp. 15-16
- <sup>60</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A renaissance in British Art?', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 3
- <sup>61</sup> Walker, J. A. *Art and Outrage: Provocation, Controversy and the Visual Arts*, 1999, London/ Virginia: Pluto Press, p. 186
- <sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p. 182
- <sup>63</sup> See Chapter 5 for further discussion of the creation of value within art worlds.
- <sup>64</sup> Walden, G. 'Art, Where is Your Sting?', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, pp. 70-72
- <sup>65</sup> *ibid.* p. 70. Walden was a Member of Parliament for the Conservative Party between 1983 and 1997, including a period as Secretary of State for Education and Science, and Minister for Higher Education. He also wrote a column for *The Evening Standard* between 1991 and 2002
- <sup>66</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>67</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> Massow, I. 'Why I Hate Our Official Art' in *New Statesman*, 21 January 2002 <<http://www.newstatesman.com/node/194309>> [accessed 20/11/2016]
- <sup>69</sup> Walden, G. 'Art, Where is Your Sting?', p70
- <sup>70</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>71</sup> Alloway, L. 'Personal Statement', 1953 in Kalina, R. (ed.), *Imagining the Present: Context, Content and the Role of the Critic*, 2006, London/ New York: Routledge, p. 52
- <sup>72</sup> Walden, G. 'Art, Where is Your Sting?', p70
- <sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p. 71
- <sup>74</sup> Fuller, P. 'Fine Art After Modernism', pp. 44-67
- <sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p. 60
- <sup>76</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>77</sup> *ibid.* p. 61
- <sup>79</sup> Perl, J. 'A Tempest in a Teapot', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, pp. 53-55
- <sup>80</sup> *ibid.* p. 54
- <sup>81</sup> *ibid.* p. 53
- <sup>83</sup> Walden, Winter 1997G. 'Art, Where is Your Sting?', p. 72
- <sup>84</sup> Robertson, B. 'Something is Rotten in the State of Art', p. 15
- <sup>85</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p. 16
- <sup>88</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>89</sup> Kant, I., *The Critique of Judgement*, 1952, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.51
- <sup>90</sup> Fuller, P. 'Taste, You Can't Opt Out', *Design*, no. 423, March 1984, pp. 38-43

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- <sup>92</sup> Hyman, T. 'Giving and Withholding' *Modern Painters*, Winter 1995, pp. 44-47; Bell, J. 'Fiona Rae and Alison Watt: Different Rooms', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1995, pp. 90-92; Lubbock, T. 'The Shape of Things Gone', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997, pp. 34-37; MacMillan, I. 'Bold with Beauty', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1996, pp. 36-39; Gayford, M. 'Something Like a Snowman', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1999, pp. 54-57
- <sup>93</sup> Robertson, B. 'The real Thing', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1999, pp. 25-30
- <sup>94</sup> Perl, J. 'A Tempest in a Teapot', p. 54
- <sup>95</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>96</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey: A Personal Memoir' in McDonald, J. (ed.) *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, 1993, London: Methuen, p. xxxiii
- <sup>97</sup> Lubbock, T. 'The Shape of Things Gone', pp. 34-37; MacMillan, I. 'Signs of the Times', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997, pp. 53-55; Bowie, D. 'It's Art, Jim, but as we know it', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997, pp. 24-32
- <sup>98</sup> Gayford, M. 'I Mean to Say' *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997, pp. 56-59
- <sup>99</sup> Jardine, L. 'Pregnant with Meaning', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997, pp. 48-50
- <sup>100</sup> Hornby, N. 'Life Goes On', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, pp. 32-34
- <sup>101</sup> Zinik, Z. 'The Past is Another Installation', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, pp. 56-60; Sylvester, D. 'I Tell You Where There's Irony in Our Work: Nowhere, Nowhere, Nowhere', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, pp. 18-25
- <sup>102</sup> Peter F. 'But is it Art?' in John McDonald (ed.) *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters*, p. 35
- <sup>103</sup> Perl, J. 'A Tempest in a Teapot', p. 55
- <sup>104</sup> Gopal-Chowdhury, A. 'Dear MP (Modern Painters)' *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, p. 108
- <sup>105</sup> *ibid.* p. 108-9
- <sup>106</sup> Grenville, H. 'Get Off the Fence', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, p. 109

## Chapter 5

### Criticism and the Market

In Chapter 4, I identified a concern with the nature of the relationship between contemporary British art, the market, and institutions, expressed by critics writing for *Modern Painters* on the subject of the *Sensation* exhibition at the Royal Academy. George Walden emphasised the reliance of the state on the market, suggesting that the state's role was 'to patronise art' and therefore be supportive of whatever work was currently successful on the international market.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter I consider in more detail the relationship between *Modern Painters* and the art market, and what this reveals about the displacement of the art critic in the formation of, and the creation of value in the art world.<sup>5</sup> I explore in depth the changing relationship between art criticism, the art market and the art world, and examines the agents that became the driving forces of 'value'.<sup>6</sup>

Isabelle Graw, in describing the art market, suggests that 'we are all, in different ways, bound up in specific market conditions'.<sup>7</sup> Peter Fuller argued that a magazine should be able to remain detached from the influence of the market. Of foremost concern in this chapter is the question of whether, or to what degree, the editorial position of Peter Fuller's (and subsequently, Karen Wright's) *Modern Painters* may or may not have been driven by, or at least bound up in, the market. This will reveal the changing nature of the relationship between art critic and the art market more broadly.

Graw describes the market as being located 'wherever its participants interact with one another'.<sup>10</sup> The pages of *Modern Painters* are one location where articles, advertisements, images and editorial content all interact, forming part of what Graw calls 'the market of knowledge', an area of the market that generates 'symbolic value' which is a key driver of the commercial value of artworks.<sup>11</sup> For example, one double-page advertisement placed by the Peter Nahum Gallery in *Modern Painters* illustrated a single work by Paul Nash, alongside information regarding provenance, exhibition history and also literature, where the particular work has been written about (see Fig. 7).<sup>12</sup>

Fig. 7 (image) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

[Fig. 7] Peter Nahum Gallery, *Modern Painters*, Winter 1989/90, pp. 8-9

In this way, *Modern Painters* was contributing to the symbolic – and subsequently commercial – value of the work it addressed within its pages. Furthermore, the existence of adverts at all demonstrates the cooperation between Fuller, as editor, the magazine itself, and the advertisers (mostly commercial galleries), revealing *Modern Painters'* role within the art market.

In September/ October 1976, the art magazine *Studio International* published a special edition on art magazines and their position in the contemporary art world.<sup>13</sup> By this time, the critic Richard Cork had edited the magazine for over a year. During this period, Cork had set about using the form of the art magazine to address and, at times, question the nature of art criticism and its relationship to art, artists and the market.<sup>14</sup> This special issue provided Peter Fuller with an early opportunity to consider his own position in relation to the art magazine and its problematic relationship to the art market. Although he would not create *Modern Painters* until over a decade later, in proposing the ideal magazine for 'radical criticism' *at the time*, Fuller's article provides an enlightening point of departure for consideration of the relationship between his own magazine and the market.

Although the article was written at a time when Fuller still considered himself a 'Marxist', or at least 'leftist' critic, and before his shift toward Ruskin and English Romanticism, I argue that Fuller's *Modern Painters* is indicative of the decline of criticism's role in the creation of value within an art world. Fuller framed *Modern Painters* as a response to what he viewed as conservative, market-driven and 'state-sponsored' forms of art (and criticism) that manifested in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Chapter 4). However, I suggest that his magazine became part of the art market.

## Criticism as a Complicit Part of the Market

The article, 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', outlined Fuller's position regarding the need for a space for a 'radical criticism' that rejected the current inevitability of the art magazine's dependence, in Cork's words, 'on advertising revenue culled almost exclusively from the private gallery network'.<sup>15</sup> Cork's concern, which formed the basis of Fuller's article, was that the art magazines were 'bound up... with a value-system propagated by powerful and sometimes cynical commercial motives.'<sup>16</sup>

Fuller suggested that this was 'self-evidently true of the majority of successful, commercial art magazines published in Europe, Britain or America.'<sup>17</sup> He described a 'subservience' to the market characterised by the 'appearance, choice of content and mode of discourse' to be found within such publications, which was reflected through their advertising matter and readership.<sup>18</sup>

The problem, Fuller argued, was that these relationships between the magazine, the criticism published in them, and the market were rarely explicit. Indeed, 'most of the magazines are forever disguising the way in which they are so bound up to themselves'.<sup>19</sup> He posits the 'extreme example' of *The Connoisseur*, a magazine he described as reflecting the 'subservience of art and history to the arrogance of the rich.'<sup>20</sup> The content of *The Connoisseur*, Fuller claimed, was dictated by the interests of the market, via those who paid for advertising space – often taking up around half of each issue – and, therefore, making the magazine little more than 'a special kind of trade magazine'. Such magazines, claimed Fuller, are 'the mirrors through which the artworld reflects itself, and its values, back to itself.'<sup>21</sup>

What Fuller was suggesting, then, was that the art magazines were tools of the art market, serving the market by representing, unquestioningly, the work of artists

determined by those who buy advertising space to market the artists whose work they sell.

### **The Role of Criticism in the Creation of Value**

Central to this thesis is the notion of value, and the agencies involved in the creation of value around art works. The notion of 'value' here is complex and embodies conflicting definitions. As I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, value for Fuller was a question of taste. However, Isabelle Graw argues that value (symbolic, financial, cultural) is determined by multiple agents. In *The Value of Art* Michael Findlay splits his definition of value into three main aspects; commercial value, social value and what he calls 'the essential value' of art. Regarding the basic arbiters of the commercial value of art works, Findlay suggests that 'what makes one painting or sculpture more or less expensive than another in [the] primary market is usually size.'<sup>22</sup> He also describes equally arbitrary qualities that confer value upon works, including medium.<sup>23</sup>

Graw describes the function that art criticism (and writing about art more generally) has in the production of value within a commerce-driven society. She describes 'the concept of a "knowledge society" [that] refers to a situation in which knowledge is highly valued and has become a marketable commodity'.<sup>24</sup> In terms of the relationship between art and commerce, Graw paraphrases the gallerist Harry Lybke, who said that 'his artists were not aiming for commercial success... but for success in the history of art'. In the creation of value – which must include commercial value – 'in its role as producer of "knowledge" and "meaning", [art history – and criticism –] is becoming a decisive factor.'<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, once lifestyle magazines started pushing 'knowledge' as a 'must-have' aspect of one's



demonstrative lifestyle, it was no longer the concern solely of specialist publications. The boundary between 'knowledge' and 'lifestyle' was dissolved, and art history and criticism had become desirable commodities that could help to sell the artist's product. This articulates a major element of the problem faced by the magazine editor. According to Graw, the art magazine is as bound up in the knowledge/ lifestyle market as it is a part of the art market.

As a result of this commodification of criticism, the roles of the dealer, artist, gallerist and auctioneer expanded to include the writing of criticism; or at least writing which took on the form of criticism. In his editorial in the Winter 1989/90 issue of *Modern Painters*, Fuller gave the example of Alistair Hicks, who authored two books in the 1980s on works from the Saatchi collection and was, at the time, the editor of two art magazines, *Antique* and *Mercury*.<sup>26</sup> The role of these books was to increase the symbolic (and therefore market) value of the artists and works included therein, a strategy employed by Saatchi on a number of occasions since.<sup>27</sup> Fuller argued that 'the shallowness of Saatchi's appreciation of art is evidenced in the vacuity of those whom he employs to write up his acquisitions.'<sup>28</sup> As I discuss later, the quality of the writing in such volumes may be beside the point. Another example of such writing, offered by Michael Findlay in his book, *The Value of Art*, is the auction catalogue, which often includes essays written by the collector/ seller.<sup>29</sup> According to Findlay, the catalogue not only provides glossy, often full-colour coverage of the artists whose work is for sale, thus giving the work further symbolic value, but also 'extoll[s]... the collector's depth of knowledge, wisdom and perspicacity.'<sup>30</sup> This is just one more example of where other agents within the market fulfil a function for which criticism had previously been relied upon. It might be argued that the auction catalogues, glossy books, and magazine such as

*Modern Painters* are aimed at different, although related audiences. However, what matters in terms of this thesis is that the audiences for each are all, in some way, bound up in the art market, whether as artists, gallerists, dealers, collectors, or other potential buyers of art works.

The function of such writing is to create symbolic value, which, in turn, legitimises the high saleroom 'value' that it might attract. Not only does this mean that magazine criticism is competing with these new forms of 'critical' writing in providing interpretation of art and art works, but it also recalls Fuller's concern (via Cork) that art magazines are bound up in a value system driven by cynical motives. Indeed, in the context of consumer culture, 'a negative review may also have a favourable impact on the value-creation process – "all press is good press"'.<sup>31</sup> The problem for art criticism here is that any writing written about art by dealers, for auction houses, and by other agents in the art market becomes equivalent, in that it all performs the same function. Whether Hicks' books on the Saatchi collection, an auction house catalogue essay, or *Modern Painters*, their role in the art market is the creation of, ultimately, market value.

### **The Institution, the Magazine and the Paying Public**

Fuller and Graw, then, identify the art magazine as a functional part of the art market in much the same way as Craig Owens has characterised the 'recent alliance of museums and corporate capital'.<sup>33</sup> In his essay 'The Yen for Art', Owens also pointed out the relationship between criticism and the market. He cited the example of Robert Hughes who, at the same time as 'condemn[ing] the marriage of art and commerce', 'has been travelling around the country lecturing on "Art and Money" for \$3,500 a shot'.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, such lectures were likely taking place

within the very institutions that were central to the 'cultural protectionism' that perpetuated the ownership of artworks as private property. Like the art magazine according to Fuller, Hughes himself became 'constituted within the hermetic space of the "art world"'.<sup>35</sup> Where editorial content in the magazines is, arguably, directly affected by the institutions that advertise in them, so the exhibition (and marketing) policies of the museums must to some degree be directly affected by the corporations that sponsor them. Moreover, this corporate support 'has brought with it an emphasis on box-office receipts and on productivity', leading to the expansion of the museum shop and the employment of directors of marketing.<sup>36</sup> As Julian Stallabrass explained in his book *Art Incorporated*, 'the activities of these museums became steadily more commercial..., establishing alliances with business, bringing their products closer to commercial culture, and modelling themselves less on libraries than shops and theme parks.'<sup>37</sup> Owens argued that 'it is clear that, at least in the 1980s, museums regard "the public" as a mass of (potential) consumers.'<sup>38</sup> The museums, the magazines, the critics, were, and all remain, integral to the functioning of the art market in this way.

Additionally, Owens raised the issue of 'The Public', who might also be referred to as 'The Audience', reminding us that artworks, museums and critics all exist in relation to an audience or audiences. That audience may consist of (paying) consumers, but in order to be convinced to part with money, it still needs to be attracted to the product. The exhibition of artworks (whomever they are owned by, and whether they are displayed in a museum or in reproduction in a magazine) is, in a sense, a secondary market. In this sense, *Sensation* can be read as a lucrative shop window for Charles Saatchi, simultaneously putting the work on display for potential future buyers at the same time as creating additional symbolic value

around the work. This is only increased through the reproduction of works, and discussion of the exhibition in the media, popular and art press, including *Modern Painters*.

### **The Case for a 'Radical' Criticism**

Fuller's *Studio International* article was a defence of art criticism. He argued that there was a potential space for a form of 'radical' criticism that at least recognised and at best questioned these relationships. Whereas the majority of the art magazines 'contain little intended to be of interest to those who wish to see the works more clearly and engage with their possible meanings', this potential magazine, which 'could not be editorially, or economically, dependent on either commercial gallery reviewing, or commercial gallery advertising', would draw attention to these problematic relationships and 'reassert the distinction between the production of art and the practice of criticism'.<sup>39</sup>

This 'Radical criticism', then, was one that would not be involved in this *Catch 22* within which criticism is driven by and precipitates the market. The purpose of the magazine which published such criticism could 'only be the involvement of a readership interested in art, but not necessarily engaged in the collection, sale, or production of it'.<sup>40</sup> This, arguably, might describe the target audience for *Modern Painters*. Quoting the editorial of the first issue of *October*, Fuller suggested that this hypothetical magazine would concern itself with 'the renewal and strengthening of critical discourse through intensive review of the methodological options now open', rejecting the distorting 'identification of art as property'. However, in terms of Owens' argument, the readership is always implicitly involved in, if not explicitly engaged in, the 'collection, sale and production' of art

as it is made up of potential paying consumers. Furthermore, as I discussed in Chapter 1, Wright has suggested that many of *Modern Painters'* subscriptions when she was editor were sold at art fairs.<sup>41</sup>

### **What is 'Radical' Criticism?**

The radical criticism for which Fuller was arguing here was very much a leftist criticism, dedicated to the exposure of society and culture's obsession with property and the 'demonstration that... [this obsession] does not belong to "the nature of things", but is determined by specific modes of production, and specific social relations, which are prevalent within a specific, impermanent historical moment.'<sup>42</sup> Quoting Marx, Fuller lamented that 'all the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple estrangement of all these senses – the sense of having'.<sup>43</sup> As discussed in previous chapters, Fuller, Like Marcuse, was interested in the elements of artworks that appealed to universal aspects of the human condition, and *Modern Painters* under Fuller addressed artists and work that fitted with these concerns, rejecting and ignoring (or denouncing) any work that didn't fit. With very few exceptions, the artists addressed in *Modern Painters* were necessarily part of, and therefore framed by, the art market. Therefore, the magazine was inevitably, and unavoidably, bound up in the market, whether Fuller liked it or not.

Fuller argued that the majority of the art magazines perpetuated the relationship between art criticism and art as private property, and, by carrying the advertisements of art sellers, maintained 'the illusion that the sense of having is not only necessary to the "appreciation" of art, but indeed constitutes that appreciation in itself'.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, because *Studio International* itself 'is

constituted within the hermetic space of the “art world”, wherein anything that is said may be appropriated by that illusion, even if the sayer was to posit a specific, direct attack upon it’, anything written within the magazine would become bound up in the narrative driven by the market.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the art magazines’

very conditions of existence – their appearance, their price, the points at which they are offered for sale, the advertising they carry – create an impermeable shell that mediates, contains, and absorbs their content, and confirms art’s function... as a private pleasure for the rich.<sup>46</sup>

An example of this is *Modern Painters*’ coverage of *Sensation* (see Chapter 4). The articles addressing the Royal Academy exhibition in the Autumn and Winter 1997 issues constituted, largely, a ‘specific, direct attack upon it’, concerning its thrall to the mainstream art market, and its consequent conservatism. In addressing these issues, the magazine was at least recognising and questioning these relationships, something that Fuller argued should be an aim of his hypothetical radical magazine. However, the fact that *Modern Painters* reacted at all to *Sensation*, and that subsequent issues included positive value judgements of the work of a number of the artists involved, at least maintains ‘the illusion that the sense of having is not only necessary to the “appreciation” of art, but indeed constitutes that appreciation in itself’. Saatchi’s influence on the art world, as manifested through *Sensation*, had a direct impact on the content of *Modern Painters*, not only within these two specific issues, but also more permanently over the following years (see Chapters 4 and 6). In this way, *Modern Painters* fulfilled its role in creating value around Saatchi’s art collection, along with the Royal Academy, the books, magazines, popular media and press. Furthermore, the role of criticism to present judgements of value is diminished, as value creation is achieved through other agents.

## Mystification

The relationship between criticism and the market is not often explicit in the writing itself. As Fuller suggested at the start of his article, 'most of the magazines are all too often disguising the way in which they are so bound up to themselves'.<sup>48</sup> He argued that, more recently, 'the attempt to identify art with the interests of a particular class, and to mediate perception of it through an "obsession" with property' is 'often veiled behind "taste", or a bogus spirituality.' These obsessions, he argued, are 'rarely spelled out... transparently' in criticism.<sup>49</sup>

One form of criticism that appeared to conform to this model, according to Fuller, was formalism. Although formalist criticism did not explicitly draw attention to the work as property, it was 'developed and expounded by critics who possessed and wielded instrumental power within the art market.'<sup>50</sup> Although formalism purported to be objective, in that it addressed 'that which was really there', Fuller argued that in projecting 'visual relations, realised in the minds of the perceivers, back into the canvas or steel, where they were held to exist as concrete qualities', the formalist critics were, in fact, expounding a 'possessive way of seeing'. Even though a painting may have 'endeavoured to transcend pictorial modes deriving from the sense of having', through 'mystification' it could be reclaimed as a potential possession. Fuller suggested that 'in this way, formalism redeemed such works for the market, and indeed brought them to the very centre of that expanding market'.<sup>51</sup> Fuller also possessed instrumental power within the market, which is evident in the amount of advertising he was able to attract to *Modern Painters*. The (often physical) correlation between advertising and editorial content in *Modern Painters* discussed below demonstrates a similar relationship between criticism and the market that Fuller describes in relation to formalist

criticism. The concrete qualities described both in text and image are presented in direct relation to advertisements for the galleries that will sell the physical art work itself (the commodity) to the potential customer (reader). In this way, the content of the magazine is unavoidably directly influenced by the market.

### **Shifts in Critical Thinking**

Fuller claimed that it was only due to a contracting market that certain publications, such as *Artforum* and *October*, began to move away from the formalism of the recent past, to include more socio-political approaches.<sup>52</sup> Due to 'falling prices and reduced sales, it becomes more difficult to idealise and mystify the work in itself'. The outcome, suggested Fuller, was that 'not only do "inherent" qualities come to be questioned, but it is also necessary to consider which relations between the observer and the work *do* count'.<sup>53</sup> For Fuller, then, 'formalist idealism' was not open to such questions. Interestingly, the one magazine that Fuller suggested came close to achieving his notion of a 'radical criticism' was *October*, a magazine which 'dissociated from traditional "art world" parameters'.<sup>54</sup> *October* did not comply to the art world parameters that other art magazines did. Part of what allowed it to eschew convention was that it didn't, and has never carried advertisements, thus removing a major obstacle to positioning itself outside of the market. *October*, then, created change through devising 'a way to gather the greater resources required' through being funded within an educational institution, rather than through cooperation with the art world through advertising.<sup>56</sup>

What Fuller perhaps recognised in *October* was its anti-formalist position; a position that he identified with, and carried into *Modern Painters* (albeit in favour



of a very different perspective). The similarity between *October* and *Modern Painters* was that they were both concerned with the question of those relationships between the work and the viewer that 'count.' For *October* these were social and political relations, for Fuller and *Modern Painters*, spiritual or universal human relations.

Fuller's hypothetical 'radical' magazine, then, would 'take a political position on the present use of art as property'.<sup>57</sup> It would turn away from the tendency that 'produced self-advertisements, compatible with the hermetic, narcissistic and individualistic traditions of the arts magazines, and with the interests of the art market [which] has reinforced the ghetto'.<sup>58</sup> Criticism can, and should, Fuller suggested, 'play a part in constituting the meanings of [the] work *within the social world* [my emphasis]'. Criticism 'would enable [the viewer] to see [the work] differently from the way he would have seen it had that criticism not been written'.<sup>59</sup>

Fuller's concern with art criticism in 1976, then, was that 'everyone persists in ways of seeing which derive from the ideology of possession, rather from any meaningful perceptual or cognitive interaction with the work, or a search for its meanings.'<sup>60</sup>

At this time, Fuller was aligning himself most closely to the criticism that he saw in *October*; certainly seeing the journal's location of the artwork in 'the social world' as more profitable than formalism's restrictive concern with 'inherent qualities'. Bearing in mind Fuller's position as expressed in his editorial piece in the first issue of *Modern Painters*, this might at first appear illustrative of just how great an

ideological shift occurred in the intervening years. Indeed, within the pages of *Modern Painters* and in other lectures and essays of the late 1980s, Fuller explicitly denounced post-structuralism and other post-modern ‘modes of “discourse”’ as ‘obscur[ing] the view of pictures and sculptures *as art*’.<sup>61</sup> However, the editorial position of Fuller’s *Modern Painters* may not represent quite such a major shift, as in the first editorial he also expounded the idealism of being separate from the market. To what extent he achieved this is another matter, which I discuss in detail below.

What is clear is that the position Fuller put forward here was very much of its time in relation to his own critical timeline. In evoking Berger and Marx, we are reminded that his essay was written firmly a decade earlier than the culmination of his shift away from Berger and Marxist criticism back toward Ruskin and the representation of the spiritual/ universal (see Chapter 1). However, there were aspects of Fuller’s argument here that remained pertinent in relation to *Modern Painters*, particularly concerning the relationship between editorial content and the market; specifically advertisers, but also in terms of its location within that market. An analysis of *Modern Painters* under Fuller, in relation to Fuller’s hypothetical ‘radical’ magazine, will reveal the extent to which a magazine is necessarily part of the art market and, therefore, how its complicity with the concerns of the market is inevitable.

### **The Art Market and Value After the 1970s**

Before I am able properly to assess the relationship between *Modern Painters* and the art market, it is first necessary to consider how the market developed between

when Fuller wrote the article in *Studio International* in 1976, and when he (and Karen Wright after him) was editing *Modern Painters* from 1988.

Findlay, in *The Value of Art* describes 'the enormous growth of the contemporary art market' over the 1960s, '70s and '80s, which saw the development of an early model for collector/ dealers who aggressively profited 'by bouncing recent gallery purchases into auction after barely months of ownership'. These collectors would drive the prices of art works in the secondary market, helping to create a landscape in which 'the price of art, whether sold in the primary or secondary market, is governed by supply, demand, and marketing.'<sup>64</sup>

Only rarely throughout a book on 'the value of art' does Findlay mention criticism. Where he does, this is mostly to point out – as he puts it in his index entry for 'criticism' – how it is 'trumped by art prices'.<sup>65</sup> His list of five 'attributes' that contribute to a work's market price – provenance, condition, authenticity, exposure and quality – does not include critical reception.<sup>66</sup> If it is involved in any way, criticism might merely add to the exposure of a work, but a critic's judgment will matter far less than whether the work is illustrated alongside the article or review. This marginalisation of the critic in the functioning of the art market is partially explained by Leo Steinberg in his seminal lecture at the Museum of Modern Art in 1968, 'Other Criteria', in which he argued that the notion of 'quality' had been replaced by 'market attractiveness', thus replacing the judgment of the critic with the choices of the consumer.<sup>67</sup>

Findlay suggests that it was not always the case that the critic lacked influence in the market. In addressing the 'demand' element of the market dynamic, he

discusses the various influences on what a collector might look to buy. He suggests that

an individual's background, education, and early exposure to a particular type of fine art often define what he or she buys when the individual has the means to collect. Others collect what they believe will give them entrée into a particular social scene.<sup>68</sup>

He goes on to claim that 'all too often collectors respond to what they read or hear' rather than being 'guided only by [their] personal response to the art itself.'<sup>69</sup> This would appear to suggest that criticism at least has some role to play in influencing buyers. Findlay's argument appears to be that the market depends on individual taste, and that taste may be influenced by 'the mix of dealers, collectors, critics and museum curators who constitute the "art world"'.<sup>70</sup> He cites Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg as critics who had a strong influence on taste in the 1950s and 60s, but suggests that 'in recent years it is often the collectors themselves who influence taste, as more and more of them shed anonymity and become involved in micro-managing the art world, building their own eponymous museums, commissioning artists, and even curating exhibitions.'<sup>71</sup> The suggestion here is that the influence of the critic is waning as the power of other agents within the art world are on the rise.

In his book, *Art Worlds*, Howard Becker suggests that although critics – 'professional aestheticians' – can legitimate the work that artists are creating at any particular time and, 'more important, what the other institutions of the art world... accept as art, and as excellent art', if they don't, or choose not to, 'someone else probably will.'<sup>72</sup> Thus the critic loses influence on the art world, and, in

particular, on the institutions. Saatchi's management of his collection, its distribution and reception is just one example of this.

### **Collectors as Arbiters of Taste**

The function of criticism has been dealt a further blow by the market in the form of major market players – collectors/ dealers – who bypass the museum/criticism system by opening their own museums and galleries. Findlay cites American examples, such as the Getty, Frick and Armand Hammer Museums.<sup>73</sup> The function of such institutions, he suggests, is 'to burnish [a collector's] social image in life or even after death'.<sup>74</sup> The motivation for the collector to open a museum of art, then, is not solely altruistic, but neither is it necessarily purely a business decision. Largely, it is a way of ensuring a certain type of legacy, often at odds with less desirable associations.<sup>75</sup>

In Britain, the most influential collector-created museum by far has been the Saatchi Gallery, the significance of which was not lost on Fuller. Initially located in a low-key former paint factory building in St. John's Wood, North London, the gallery is now housed in the grander Duke of York's HQ in Chelsea, having also spent over five years in County Hall on the South Bank of the Thames. Although he has always employed a curator, Saatchi himself is in ultimate control of what is on show in his museum, all exhibitions being made up of work from his own collection. Saatchi, more than any other collector in Britain, has been enormously influential over the market for British art, both at home and abroad. He has also influenced the coverage of British art in the art press, as well as having published books on groups of artists and individuals within his collection, again using art

critical writing (or at least writing that *looks* like, and speaks the language of art criticism, or even art history) to burnish the market value of his stock.<sup>76</sup>

### **Fuller on Saatchi & the Market**

Peter Fuller bemoaned Saatchi's influence on the market, complaining that he focused his 'attention on BICCA, i.e. Biennial International Club Class Art', Fuller's derogatory title for what he considered to be the depthless, interchangeable work found at the international Biennials and art fairs around the world.<sup>77</sup> He argued that Saatchi had ignored 'works of real quality which were being created by... Freud, Kossoff, Auerbach, Hodgkin, etc.'<sup>78</sup> and expressed his concern 'about the fact that Saatchi seemed to have well-established relationships with an influential coterie of Young Turks who were the rising stars of what, in Australia, they describe... as "The Curatorium"'. As a result of this, he suggested, Saatchi's 'low tastes were increasingly reflected in exhibitions and purchasing policies of the national art institutions.'<sup>79</sup> Fuller's concern, then, was that the tastes of the collectors were now major drivers of institutional collecting and exhibiting policies, and that these tastes were not reflective of aesthetic quality. In this way, the collectors had become influential agents in the creation of value around the work in their own collections. Again, criticism is bypassed, in that the value judgements of critics have little impact on either the collecting habits of collectors or institutions.

Fuller was concerned that 'a major gap has opened up between the pricing, marketing and promotion of contemporary art and aesthetic valuing of any kind.'<sup>80</sup> Indeed, he argued that Saatchi was being replaced by 'new-styled operators' who

were even more moneyed than him, who were acting 'without any aesthetic motive whatsoever'.<sup>81</sup> As a result of this, he expressed a nostalgia for

the days when it became fashionable to argue that not only the desire to collect works of art, but "connoisseurship" or even "aesthetics" were in effect necessary derivatives of the market.<sup>82</sup>

Fuller was, however, clear that the market was not 'necessarily inimical to the production of great art', as evidenced through the economic histories of Dutch and Venetian painting.<sup>83</sup> In a diary piece in the Summer 1989 issue of *Modern Painters*, he remarked on the collection of Robert and Susan Summer, American collectors who 'could hardly have spent their money better'. 'Unlike the Saatchis' he claims, 'the Summers have eyes'.<sup>84</sup> In spite of these rare exceptions, the major issue here for Fuller was 'the philistinism of the marketplace'.

### **Market Trumps Criticism**

Findlay argues that taste is not only driven by the collector, but also by 'increasingly skilful marketing by a combination of art gallery, auction house, artist and art fair'.<sup>85</sup> Although Findlay does not mention the critic or the art magazine here, it does play a role as one of the locations in which advertising is placed by the galleries and auction houses that are selling the work. As Findlay claims, 'the selling agents are not always the tastemakers, and sometimes even the artists and works of art seem merely to be pawns in a game directed not by the dealers or auction houses, but by the collectors'.<sup>86</sup> Again, the critic is not involved in Findlay's description. Taste and value are driven by the market, not the critic.

Where advertisements appear in specialist art magazines – like *Modern Painters* – they stand out from the articles and reviews because they speak about art in a language that more explicitly addresses the potential buyer of the work. This is especially the case in full-page advertisements placed in *Modern Painters* by Christie's, for example, which include a large, colour reproduction of one of the works for sale, with a caption including the estimated price, the title, date and location of the auction, and a telephone number for enquiries, all the potential buyer needs to know.<sup>87</sup> As Findlay claims, when it comes to discussions between collectors of art, 'issues of quality and critical judgments in general are trumped by big numbers.'<sup>88</sup>

### **The Market as a closed club**

Findlay presents the art market as something of a closed club, within which 'leading galleries... keep themselves in the news by holding well-publicised openings and currying favour via exclusive dinner parties for tight groups of artists and curators'.<sup>89</sup> Again, critics appear to be excluded from this club.

He explains that major artists, their studios, homes and families would be featured in lifestyle magazines, generating symbolic (and market) value so much more effectively and efficiently than criticism in a magazine that may be read (and illustrations seen) by only a fraction of the audience of these more popular publications. In the 1980s at least, during a boom in the art market, criticism held very little power in terms of influencing judgement or taste, as 'the commercial success of an artist immunised him or her from any front-row critical evaluation' and any dissenting voices 'went unheard by the speculators and their fellow



travellers who took charge when the auction houses started to serve Dom Perignon champagne and Beluga caviar at their preview parties.’<sup>90</sup>

When Jed Perl wrote a negative article on Jenny Holzer’s work at the Venice Biennale in *Modern Painters*, it became only another drop in the ocean of publicity enjoyed by a generation of ‘celebrity’ artists.<sup>91</sup> As Findlay explains, ‘brand identity’ becomes more important than positive critical reception, ‘where we once might have looked for a discussion of meaning or interpretation’.<sup>92</sup> Perl’s article on Holzer, however negative in judgment or tone, simply contributes to the artist’s ‘brand’.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the reason for Perl’s negativity toward Holzer’s work was, largely, its relationship to the market; ‘have artists ever before thought to judge the value of their work by the size of the newspaper headlines that it inspires?’<sup>94</sup> Perl argued that Holzer’s work was of a type that ‘is mainly an occasion for the spokespeople of the left and right to lob accusations and law suits at one another’ and suggested that ‘to complain that [her] work is nothing but an occasion for debate will not necessarily deter the artist, for that is perhaps all that is intended’.<sup>95</sup> That Holzer’s work was successful in these terms renders Perl’s overall judgment irrelevant in relation to the creation of value. Her work was the subject of an illustrated article in a popular art magazine, adding to its ‘symbolic value’.<sup>96</sup> The ‘knowledge market’ neither relies on, nor requires, the collusion of critics.

### ***Modern Painters and the Market***

In questioning whether any art magazine could be anything other than ‘the mirror through which the “art world” reflects itself’, and the extent to which the changes specific to *Modern Painters* were the result of changes in the art world and its

relation to the market, it is worth repeating Richard Cork's observation about the art magazines' 'inevitable dependence on advertising revenue culled almost exclusively from the private gallery network'.<sup>97</sup>

Such dependence is inevitable because the magazine's proprietor needs capital in order to produce a physical magazine. The most accessible form of capital for an art magazine comes from the art market via potential advertisers. The magazine is, from the outset, inextricably bound up in the market. An exception to this is the magazine that is produced and funded from within an institution (for example, *October*, which is published by the MIT press) and, therefore, does not need to carry advertisements.<sup>98</sup> As Graw points out, though, the institutions (including universities) form an integral part of the 'market of knowledge'.<sup>99</sup>

It is difficult to analyse the editorial content of an art magazine against the advertising content, in the sense that one cannot be certain as to whether editorial content is driven by the interests of the advertisers, or whether galleries and other advertisers choose to buy space in the magazine based on its editorial content. What is certain is that, where advertising and editorial content overlap, the independence of a magazine's or critic's position is necessarily called into question. In relation to a certain type of corporate sponsor of the arts, it will usually be the case that it is the content of the publication that drives the organisation's desire to advertise in it. An example of this is BP's sponsorship of the Tate Gallery as advertised in *Modern Painters* between Spring 1995 and Spring 2002 (see Fig. 8).

Fig. 8 (image) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

[Fig. 8] BP/ Tate, *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, p. 14

The adverts taken out by BP/ Tate consisted of a large reproduction of a painting in the Tate collection, usually Modernist or pre-Modernist, with a text explaining the reasons for BP's decision to sponsor the institution and the company's logo in a prominent position. BP's association with both the Tate Gallery and *Modern Painters* would help convey a particular (softer) image of the petroleum company. With advertising necessary to the magazine's financial viability, the regular stream of income offered by BP/ Tate represents the double bind within which *Modern Painters*, its backers and editor find themselves. Fuller's critical agenda, and those of his writers, are inevitably compromised by the apparent influence of the advertiser. Even if the critics themselves are not directly influenced by the advertisers, the potential correlation is apparent.

In relation to Gallery advertisers, Findlay suggests that from the 1950s and 60s 'a half-page [advertisement in an art magazine] might buy not only the advertisement but a good review'. However, he suggests that although in the 1980s 'advertising budgets grew', they 'no longer guarantee[d] good coverage'.<sup>100</sup>

Analysis of *Modern Painters* during Fuller's editorship shows that there was a visible and consistent relationship between editorial and advertising content from the beginning. In the *Studio International* article Fuller signalled *The Connoisseur* as an example of a magazine whose content was heavily dictated by market interests, pointing out that advertisements took up about half of a single issue. Although at the start, Fuller's magazine carried only approximately twenty pages of advertisements out of 108 pages of the magazine (18.5%),<sup>101</sup> by the end of his editorship, this figure rose to thirty-five pages of out of 116 (30%).<sup>102</sup>

One specific and explicit example of the relationship between editorial and advertising content can be found in the Summer 1989 issue of *Modern Painters*.<sup>103</sup> The issue included a five-page interview with the painter Helen Frankenthaler by Sister Wendy Beckett.<sup>104</sup> Also in this issue was a review by Beckett of John Elderford's book on Frankenthaler that accompanied the retrospective of her work at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.<sup>105</sup> At the front of the magazine was a full-page advertisement for the MoMA show, also promoting other exhibitions of Frankenthaler's work at three other American museums. The advertisement was placed by the André Emmerich Gallery, which represented the artist.<sup>106</sup> Clearly there is a relationship here between editorial content and the market which calls into question the authenticity of any positive judgment (either clearly stated or implicit) of the artist's work. The interview with the artist had a warm tone, certainly positive, as is invariably the case with the form. Beckett allowed the painter to speak about her work without asking questions that may have challenged. The review of Elderfield's book is also wholly positive, and longer than most book reviews in *Modern Painters*.<sup>107</sup>

There are many other examples of this cross-over between advertising and editorial content within Fuller's *Modern Painters*. In the Winter 1988/89 issue, for example, the publisher Thames & Hudson has a full-page advertisement within the book review section of the magazine. Of twelve books reviewed in the issue, four (one third) were published by Thames & Hudson. Of course, Thames & Hudson are a major publisher of art books, and one may expect a relatively high proportion of the reviews in *Modern Painters* to be of their books. However, again, the presence of the advertisement renders the content of the reviews inextricably bound up

with the market, via the advertiser, and therefore open to question regarding their critical independence.

On close scrutiny, these links between editorial content and advertising continued throughout the magazine. For example, in the first issue, there were advertisements for exhibitions of, representatives of, or sales of, work by eight artists who were also the subject of articles, reviews or were included in the assistant editor's 'Gallery' section. In the same issue, two London galleries – Fischer Fine Art and Bernard Jacobson – had full page advertisements publicising work by David Bomberg, the subject of one of the four major articles in the magazine.<sup>108</sup> Elsewhere in the same issue two other galleries, including the Tate, had smaller advertisements publicising the same artist. There was also an article by David Cohen on Therese Oulton, whose work was promoted by five separate advertisers. This was more or less the case throughout each issue of *Modern Painters*, and one begins to see patterns emerging of Galleries whose artists were regularly subjects of articles and reviews.

In Issue 2, this pattern continued to emerge. The magazine carried advertisements by Odette Gilbert gallery for an exhibition of work by Roy Oxlade (the subject of a major article in issue one), by Fischer Fine Art for work by Ken Kiff, and by the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, and the Newlyn Gallery. The Oxlade and Kiff shows were reviewed in the same issue, as were exhibitions at both MoMA Oxford and Newlyn. There was also a review of Robert Medley at Louise Hallett Gallery and a long two-page review of Paul Gopal-Chowdhury at Benjamin Rhodes Gallery, both of which exhibitions were advertised by their respective galleries in the previous issue. The reviews of Oxlade, Kiff and Medley were invariably positive in their

value judgments, reflecting, perhaps, the 'guarantee [of] good coverage' that Findlay suggests was present earlier in the 1960s – although also, arguably, simply reflecting the tastes of the editor (and the authors) through the exhibitions he chose to have reviewed.<sup>110</sup> Martin Golding's review of Gopal-Chowdhury, however, was slightly more reserved in its praise, describing 'a struggle with form in a passionate attempt to do justice to his feeling. The outcome is attractive but in some ways confusing and not, I believe, wholly successful.'<sup>111</sup> However, the reviewer then qualified this judgment by allowing that 'the sense of his engagement with the classic aims of art is acutely pondered, and so is his sense of his current direction'.<sup>112</sup> The review ended with a quote from the artist, allowing him the last word on his work.

This relationship between the publication, its editor and its regular advertisers is further emphasised in a letter received by Peter Fuller from Karol Pawsey of the Curwen Gallery in early 1990, in which the gallery's director expressed delight 'that you have shown an interest in this [John Hubbard] exhibition and sincerely hope that you will consider featuring this show'.<sup>113</sup> Pawsey adds that 'Curwen Gallery has been advertising with *Modern Painters* from the very first edition and I was beginning to feel that we were somewhat neglected!', suggesting an assumption that the purchase of advertising space should be repaid with editorial coverage.<sup>114</sup> Although not actually reviewed in *Modern Painters*, the Hubbard exhibition at the Curwen gallery was included in a subsequent 'Gallery' section, which would seem to imply the editor at least paying some attention to Pawsey's letter.<sup>115</sup>

Whichever came first, the fact that the relationship was there between the magazine and those who advertised within its pages confirms the legitimacy of Fuller's concern that the 'very conditions of [the magazine's] existence – [its] appearance, [its] price, the points at which [it is] offered for sale, the advertising [it] carr[ies] – create an impermeable shell that mediates, contains, and absorbs [its] content, and confirms art's function... as a private pleasure for the rich'<sup>116</sup> and would appear to betray a 'subservience' to the market with the magazine's 'appearance, choice of content and mode of discourse... duly reflected in advertising matter and readership'.<sup>117</sup> Whereas Fuller, in the *Studio International* article, claimed that the radical art magazine 'could not be editorially, or economically, dependent on either commercial gallery reviewing, or commercial gallery advertising', the content of *Modern Painters* was, at least in part, reliant on both.<sup>118</sup>

### ***Modern Painters and Mystification***

Another way in which Peter Fuller's *Modern Painters* exemplified the very market conditions that his *Studio International* reacted against was the way in which magazines disguise their complicity with the market behind "'taste", or a bogus spirituality'.<sup>119</sup> This becomes problematic when considered in relation to the position developed and described by Fuller during the period leading up to the publication of, and expressed through the editorial content of *Modern Painters* (see Chapter 1). Sister Wendy Beckett's interview with Helen Frankenthaler is an instructive case in point, titled 'Concerning the Spirit in Art'.<sup>120</sup> The title referenced that of Kandinsky's book, therefore implicitly comparing from the beginning the aesthetic and spiritual concerns of the two artists.<sup>121</sup> Throughout the interview Beckett focused the discussion on aspects of the spiritual, leading the artist to



discuss her own work in similar terms.<sup>122</sup> At one point the artist claimed that 'I don't know the nature of a breakthrough, thank goodness, but I think if one did know, *a priori*, it wouldn't be a breakthrough'. To this Beckett responded, 'it's a bit like an encounter with God. If you can put it into words, it isn't an encounter.'<sup>123</sup> This turned the conversation sharply from the secular (the process of making art), to the spiritual, Frankenthaler replying, 'well, it's feeling spirit. You know when you're in the presence of something that moves you, because you're *moved*!'

A discussion about Jackson Pollock moved from development and process to notions of the artist's work as some kind of spiritual response to 'deep sorrow'. Frankenthaler began by explaining how she came to be influenced by Pollock: 'I had already "digested" Kandinsky and analytic cubism (seen Gorky, etc.). This was the next step', suggesting that 'it had to do with *painting*, not with shocks.'<sup>124</sup> Beckett soon shifted the conversation toward Pollock's work as expressions of 'sheer beauty' and 'deep sorrow', as a 'springboard for the creative impulse.'<sup>125</sup> She also said to Frankenthaler of Rothko that 'his luminous silence seems to me to have a connection with something deep in you: But you come at it from another direction.'<sup>126</sup>

Pollock and Rothko were both artists whose work, by the time this issue of *Modern Painters* was published, was commanding enormous prices at auction. This discussion of value in terms of the spiritual, then, acted as the very kind of mystification Fuller had identified in the *Studio International* article, disguising the work's meaning in relation to its market prices behind what, in 1976, Fuller may well have described as a 'bogus spirituality'.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the fact that in the very same issue Frankenthaler's work was being marketed by the gallery that

represented her made such mystification even more important, if *Modern Painters* was at least to appear not to be driven by the market.

In an earlier issue of *Modern Painters*, Germaine Greer had already called out Sister Wendy Beckett on her mystification of painting. In an article reviewing Beckett's book *Contemporary Women Artists*,<sup>128</sup> the feminist cultural critic complained that 'in every work she identifies moral, spiritual, even mystical values', 'unconsciously reducing the struggle with medium and the awful daring of earthly creation to bathos.'<sup>129</sup> Greer pointed out that 'paint is not always a vehicle for the spirit' but that 'the less representational a work, the more "otherworldly" Beckett finds it, no matter how insistently the painting asks to be apprehended as an immediate object'.<sup>130</sup> By mystifying the work in this way, then, Beckett removed any physical element from its interpretation and appreciation, therefore denying it the 'concrete qualities' which suggest a 'possessive way of seeing', making it a potential possession, a product in a marketplace.<sup>131</sup> By calling out Beckett in this way, Greer was also, in a way, calling out Fuller and his own position as represented by *Modern Painters*.

In the same issue as Beckett's interview with Frankenthaler was an article by Hilton Kramer, another critic whose position shifted from largely leftist to a more conservative position.<sup>132</sup> However, Kramer, unlike Fuller, was a champion of Modernism. His article assessed the 'successes, and the failures' of the *Modern Painters* project up to this particular point (Summer 1989).<sup>133</sup> Kramer was broadly supportive of Fuller's 'ambitious attempt to "save" whatever can be rescued in Ruskin and made useful to our troubled cultural life today', and 'the unembarrassed moral earnestness of this endeavour – its insistence that art not be

judged by standards that are socially destructive and morally obtuse'.<sup>134</sup> However, there was much about Fuller's critical position – on Modernism, and on contemporary art – with which the American critic disagreed. Of interest here, however, is Kramer's assessment of *Modern Painters'* relationship with the market. He argued that

*Modern Painters* will one day have to face the task of addressing the reasons for the immense acclaim that such sacred cows as Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon, David Hockney and R.B. Kitaj have achieved in the face of what look to some critics – myself especially – as their obvious artistic failures.

The suggestion here was that in this way, *Modern Painters* may have been one such magazine that was a 'mirror through which the art world [and market] reflects itself, and its values, back to itself', albeit a different sector of the market to that reflected in other, contemporaneous magazines.<sup>135</sup> Kramer suggested that 'one [American] critical condition that *Modern Painters* might do well to emulate [is] the tradition of subjecting the idols of the marketplace to the severest scrutiny.'<sup>136</sup> He argued that 'in this respect, the campaign waged against the absurd renown of Gilbert and George stands out as one of the most important contributions that both *Modern Painters* and Peter Fuller have made to contemporary cultural life.' However, he later added that 'now that *Modern Painters* has shown what it can do with Gilbert and George... it would be interesting to see what it can do with the really difficult cases.'<sup>137</sup> In this sense, one could argue that Fuller's magazine was as complicit with – or at least 'bound up in' – the market as any other.

### ***Modern Painters* on the Market**

At the start of his article in the Spring 1990 issue of *Modern Painters*, 'Selling Modern British', the British critic Edward Lucie-Smith acknowledged that 'what

the auction rooms call “Modern British” is a growth area at the moment, in terms of the sums realised as well as the publicity attracted.’<sup>138</sup> Lucie-Smith described an international market for certain British artists – including Francis Bacon, David Hockney and Henry Moore – which implied that the focus of the magazine had an appeal to the international market (many of the artists mentioned in the article were written about in *Modern Painters* at least once during Fuller’s editorship). That Lucie-Smith’s article addressed in some detail the strength and nature of the market for ‘Modern British’ art, implicitly acknowledging the magazine’s position within that market.

Karen Wright has said that during her time as editor she

never ever chased advertising until I had the editorial [list]. I would give my advertising person the editorial list and say “this is what you should go after”. And we would chase sponsors from major shows, of course. But we would have been doing those shows anyway. However, ‘People would often phone me up and say “if you cover this show then we’ll give you a huge ad.” And I would say “well what’s the show?” and if I didn’t like the show, I wouldn’t do it.’<sup>139</sup>

To an extent, this statement is justified by the content of the magazine under Wright’s editorship. Although there were still examples of reviews of exhibitions at galleries that had advertised in the same or recent issues, these were less common than under Fuller, and the correlation between advertisements and editorial content was generally less evident. Part of the reason for this was that, although many of the same galleries were advertising under Wright, the editorial content was gradually beginning to shift towards more international art, particularly American art and American exhibitions. It was not until later in Wright’s tenure as editor that American advertisers started buying space in *Modern Painters*.

However, what this did demonstrate was that Wright's *Modern Painters* was taking a less oppositional and, arguably, more cooperative approach to the art world within which it functioned. Alongside the increasing concern with American and international art, the way in which *Modern Painters* approached *Sensation*, particularly Karen Wright's editorial, demonstrated an awareness of the complexity of the relationship between criticism and the market, as well as the magazine's own position within an ever-changing marketplace.

### **Conclusion: Modern Painters as Part of the Art Market**

Peter Fuller's description of and argument for a hypothetical 'radical' criticism that was not in thrall to the art market provides a useful starting point to assess the extent to which his magazine, *Modern Painters*, might or might be considered to have met its founding editor's own criteria. By exploring the relationships between the magazine, the market and the art world, I can identify and examine the agents that displaced criticism in the formation and articulation of 'value'.

Fuller addressed the importance of being separate from the market in his editorial to the first issue of *Modern Painters*. As Hilton Kramer pointed out, *Modern Painters*, like any other publication of its type, was inextricably bound up with a market in which everyone who is concerned with art is involved. As Fuller himself explained in the *Studio International* article, where there is advertising, there is interest in the market. All criticism within any publication that carries advertising can never be considered truly disinterested. *Modern Painters*, then, under Peter Fuller and subsequently under Karen Wright, was as complicit with the art market as any other publication, failing to achieve what Fuller had argued would be possible in the form of his hypothetical 'radical' journal. *Modern Painters* was a

producer of 'symbolic value' in the same way as any other agent in the knowledge market.

*Modern Painters* was, largely, concerned with painting (and sculpture, but less so). As Julian Stallabrass has pointed out in his book *Art Incorporated*, 'painting, whether or not it occupies the limelight of art discourse, is still the most saleable form of art, and continues to be made and sold to individuals and corporations more or less successfully depending on the state of the economy.'<sup>140</sup> This, perhaps, helps to explain why Fuller's magazine found a market at a time when Western stock markets were in recession, 'put[ting] paid to the bloated artistic giants of the 1980s glut, shattering art-world self-importance and confidence'.<sup>141</sup>

Nonetheless, it is not sufficient simply to consider Fuller's *Modern Painters* as in thrall to a singular, generalizable art market. As I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Fuller began his magazine with a polemical stance against what he considered to be the mainstream market-driven tendencies in British (and international) art, which had developed out of the Modernist *avant gardes*. He addressed head on the effects of the market on the nature of contemporary art, and specifically, of collector/dealers like Charles and Doris Saatchi. If Gilbert and George were archetypal of such work, then at least by taking a principled, reactionary stand against them (and it), Fuller was portraying himself, and *Modern Painters*, as outsiders.

Fuller's principled reaction to Modernism was, eventually, different to that of, for example, *Artscribe* and *October*, even though he had earlier named *October* as a positive example for his hypothetical magazine. He was anti-formalist, but the

position he took in *Modern Painters* was not anti-formalist in the direction of conceptual art, but rather in the direction of spiritual and/or humanist content in a pre-modern, Romantic tradition. Where *Artscribe* and *October* looked towards the contemporary social conditions under which art was made and distributed, Fuller sought to renew art through a principled return to the past. Rather than advocating a new movement, he was looking to retrieve a style that was already established. Many of the painters championed in *Modern Painters* had been successful painters, in the sense of being established and well known within the market, for some time.

However, in looking backwards as he did, Fuller subsequently dismissed lot of art – it might be argued the majority of art – of the late-twentieth century. Stallabrass has suggested that one of the effects of the ‘triumph of capitalism’ was a reconfiguring of the art world in which ‘artists of many nations, ethnicities, and cultures long ignored by the West were borne to critical and commercial success.’<sup>142</sup> Fuller’s principled stance was exclusive to the extent that he addressed only a very narrow sector of the market, very much in the vein of the ‘white male “genius”’ who had been ‘unveiled [by postmodern critique]... behind the universalist façade of high culture’.<sup>143</sup> In doing so he opened himself to accusations of dogmatism. Very little work by artists of non-white Western ethnic backgrounds were covered in Peter Fuller’s *Modern Painters*, and in this way the magazine certainly did not contribute to ‘the demolition of cultural barriers that accompanies the supposed destruction of barriers to trade, and the glorious cultural mixing that results.’<sup>144</sup> One result of the exclusive nature of the magazine’s editorial content was that in subsequent years under Karen Wright, *Modern*

*Painters* would find itself catching up on the 'remarkable success' of work from non-Western markets.

One such accusation of exclusivity is evident in a letter sent to Fuller by the British sculptor Antony Caro in 1980, having been accused in turn by Fuller of being responsible for a dissolution in sculpture during the 1970s.<sup>145</sup> In the letter Caro claimed that Fuller seemed 'at the moment, unable to "see" large areas of sculpture and Painting' and that he 'should be a little humbler in the face of difficult but serious art.' Caro suggested that 'criticism such as yours, which appears to stress quality but is in fact based more on ideological attitudes, does indeed sow seeds of misunderstanding for many young and idealistic people trying to "see" art.' If anything, Fuller's response to this further demonstrated the inflexibility of his position, annotating Caro's comment about his approach to more 'difficult art' with 'Not difficult/ all too easy (to make and to see) No challenge to "taste": dogmatic...'.<sup>146</sup>

Fuller positioned himself outside of established attitudes to post-Modernist art and firmly defended that position. He found a narrow but significant market for his position in the subscribers and buyers of *Modern Painters* (according to an advert in the Winter 1988/89 issue, sales of the magazine for only the second issue reached 13,028), who remained interested in a significant, if marginalised, sector of the British art market.<sup>147</sup> Although Fuller had suggested that his hypothetical radical magazine could only involve 'a readership interested in art, but not necessarily engaged in the collection, sale or production of it', it would at least appear, if only on the evidence of the 'Letters to the Editor' pages, and later, in the



tributes to Fuller that were published in the first issue following his death, that *Modern Painters* had just such an audience.<sup>148</sup>

*Modern Painters*, although positioned by Fuller outside of what he considered to be a 'mainstream' of the contemporary British and international art market, was as 'bound up in' the particular sector of the market that the magazine did address as any other magazine was in theirs. The analysis of the relationship between editorial content and advertising content reveals the extent to which the magazine fulfils the objective function of the art market. That is, to contribute to the symbiotic – and subsequently the economic – value of the works of artists who are represented by commercial galleries advertising alongside the very articles that interpret and evaluate their work.

The changing relationships between art magazine, art world and art market reveal how difficult it is to consider the art market and the art world as separate entities. I would argue that, where previously the art market might have been considered an *element* of the art world, the way in which the market has come to drive value, influence exhibition policy, media coverage and the editorial content of the art magazines suggests that the art world has, largely, *become* an art market. Fuller's – and after him, Wright's – *Modern Painters*, in this sense, becomes one more agent in the service of creating value around commercial products (art works). It is not the case that *Modern Painters* was 'bound up' in the market, but that, along with the institutions, museums, dealers, collectors, publishers and auction houses, was a *part of* the art market.

As Isabelle Graw suggests, 'being constrained by market conditions does not imply that we cannot reject them'.<sup>149</sup> Although *Modern Painters*, like any other art magazine, was constrained by such conditions, I would argue that it remained a publication that defined itself through difference (to rival magazines). Indeed, as Fuller himself argued, 'markets can... be conducive to greatness in art, so long as they are informed by ethical and aesthetic values.'<sup>150</sup>

This chapter demonstrates that the centrality of the art critic and art criticism to the art world was challenged by the rise of other agencies in the creation of value, and the integration of art world and art market. Criticism became a tool of the market and, therefore, the authority of the critic as creator of value diminished. In Findlay's terms, 'the mix of dealers, collectors, critics and museum curators who constitute the "art world"' have all combined to displace art criticism from its traditional role within the formation of, and creation of value within art worlds.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Walden, George 'Art, Where is Your Sting?' *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, p70

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I am defining the art market as the mechanisms through which art works are bought and sold. The art world is made up of any and all agents with a stake in the creation and distribution of art works, including the art market, but also through writing, exhibiting, making, etc.

<sup>6</sup> For a definition of 'value' in relation to this thesis, see Introduction.

<sup>7</sup> Graw, I. *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, 2009, New York: Sternberg Press, p. 9

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 11

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p. 229

<sup>12</sup> Peter Nahum Gallery, [advertisement], *Modern Painters*, Winter 1989/90, pp. 8-9

<sup>13</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', *Studio International*. Sept/ Oct 1976, Vol.193/ No.983, pp. 119-125

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- <sup>14</sup> See, for example: Harrison, C. 'British Critics and British Sculpture', *Studio International*, February 1968, Vol. 175, pp. 86-89; Brook, D. 'Art Criticism: Authority and Argument', *Studio International*, September 1970, Vol. 180, pp. 66-69; Faure Walker, J. and C. 'Activity of Criticism Part 1: Interviews with Max Kozloff, Darby Bannard, Rosalind Krauss, Harold Rosenberg', *Studio International*, March/ April 1975, Vol. 189, pp. 83-87; Faure Walker, J. and C. 'Activity of Criticism Part 2: Interviews with Roberta Smith and Lucy Lippard', *Studio International*, May/ June 1975, Vol. 189, pp. 184-186; Plagens, P. 'Towards a definition of trends in American football uniforms: an exercise in a certain kind of art criticism', *Studio International*, February 1969, Vol. 177, pp. 96-97
- <sup>15</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 119
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, 2014, Munich/ London/ New York: Prestel, p. 16
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p. 17
- <sup>24</sup> Graw, I. *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, p. 229
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: Art and Money: Post-Saatchi Painting', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1989/90, pp. 5-7. Hicks, A. *The School of London*, 1989, London: Phaidon Press; Hicks, A. *New British Art in the Saatchi Collection*, 1989, London: Thames & Hudson. Interestingly, Hicks is now art advisor to Deutsche Bank, owner of the world's largest corporate art collection.
- <sup>27</sup> Price, D. *The New Neurotic Realism*, 1998, London: The Saatchi Gallery
- <sup>28</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: Art and Money: Post-Saatchi Painting', p. 6
- <sup>29</sup> Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, p. 93
- <sup>31</sup> Graw, I. *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, p. 231
- <sup>33</sup> Owens, C. 'The Yen for Art', in Foster, H. (ed.), *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, 1999, Seattle: Bay Press, p. 17
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 16
- <sup>35</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 121
- <sup>36</sup> Owens, C. 'The Yen for Art', p. 17
- <sup>37</sup> Stallabrass, J. *Art Incorporated*, 2004, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 14
- <sup>38</sup> Owens, C. 'The Yen for Art', p. 17
- <sup>39</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 124
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.* p. 120
- <sup>41</sup> Wright, K., Interview by James A. Brown, ICA, London, February 2013
- <sup>42</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 120
- <sup>43</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> *ibid.* p. 121
- <sup>46</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> *ibid.* p. 119
- <sup>49</sup> *ibid.* p. 122
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.* p. 123
- <sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

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- 52 *ibid.* p. 124
- 53 *ibid.*
- 54 *ibid.*
- 56 *ibid.*
- 57 Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 124
- 58 *ibid.*
- 59 *ibid.*
- 60 *ibid.* p. 123
- 61 Fuller, P. 'The Journey: A Personal Memoir' in McDonald, J. (ed.), *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, 1993, London: Methuen, p. xxxii
- 64 *ibid.* p. 21
- 65 *ibid.* p. 203
- 66 *ibid.* p. 39
- 67 Steinberg, L. 'Other Criteria' in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, 2007, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 55-92
- 68 Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, p. 31
- 69 *ibid.* p. 32
- 70 *ibid.*
- 71 *ibid.*
- 72 Becker, H. *Art Worlds*, 1984, Berkeley/ London: University of California Press, p. 162
- 73 Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, p. 87-88
- 74 *ibid.* p. 93
- 75 *ibid.* p. 88
- 76 Barnbrook, J. *Young British Art: The Saatchi Decade*, 1999. London: Booth-Clibborn Editions; Price, D. *New Neurotic Realism*, 1998. London: The Saatchi Gallery
- 77 Fuller, P. 'Editorial: Art and Money: Post-Saatchi Painting', p. 5
- 78 *ibid.*
- 79 *ibid.*
- 80 *ibid.*, p. 6
- 81 *ibid.*
- 82 *ibid.*
- 83 *ibid.* p. 7
- 84 Fuller, P. 'Pages from the Diary of a Country-Lover and Hyper-Nat', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1989, p. 113
- 85 Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, p. 32
- 86 *ibid.* p. 33
- 87 Christie's, [Advertisement], *Modern Painters*, Summer 1989, p. 7
- 88 Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, p. 104
- 89 *ibid.* p. 34
- 90 *ibid.* p. 157
- 91 Perl, J. 'Jenny Holzer: Billboards', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1990, pp. 46-47
- 92 Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, p. 152
- 93 Perl, J. 'Jenny Holzer: Billboards', pp. 47-47
- 94 *ibid.* p. 47. Holzer did, indeed, inspire many newspaper headlines. See, for example: Glueck, G. 'And Now, a Few Words from Jenny Holzer', *The New York Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1989, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/03/magazine/and-now-a-few-words-from-jenny-holzer.html?pagewanted=all>> [accessed 24/08/2016]; Taylor, P. 'Jenny Holzer Sees Aphorism as Art', *Vogue*, November 1988, pp. 388-393; Danziger, J.

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- 'American Graffiti', *The Sunday Times Magazine*, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1988, p. 5; Buck, L. 'Clean and Keen, Clean and Mean', *The Guardian*, December 14<sup>th</sup> 1988, p. 17
- <sup>95</sup> Perl, J. 'Jenny Holzer: Billboards', p. 47
- <sup>96</sup> Graw, I. *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, p. 229
- <sup>97</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 119
- <sup>98</sup> Of course, *October* is also an academic journal, and so does not pay its authors, saving on one expense.
- <sup>99</sup> Graw, I. *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, p. 11
- <sup>100</sup> Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, p. 34
- <sup>101</sup> Fuller, P. (ed.), *Modern Painters*, Summer 1988
- <sup>102</sup> Fuller, P. (ed.), *Modern Painters*, Summer 1990
- <sup>103</sup> Fuller, P. (ed.), *Modern Painters*, Summer 1989
- <sup>104</sup> Beckett, Sr. W. 'Concerning the Spirit in Art', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1989, pp. 45-49
- <sup>105</sup> Beckett, Sr. W. 'Meditations on Frankenthaler', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1989, pp. 117-119
- <sup>106</sup> André Emmerich Gallery, 'Helen Frankenthaler' [advertisement], *Modern Painters*, Summer 1989, p. 6
- <sup>107</sup> Beckett, Sr. W. 'Meditations on Frankenthaler', p. 118
- <sup>108</sup> Bernard Jacobson was a co-founder of *Modern Painters* with Peter Fuller
- <sup>110</sup> Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, p. 34
- <sup>111</sup> Golding, M. 'Paul Gopal-Chowdhury', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1988, p. 78
- <sup>112</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>113</sup> Curwen Gallery, letter to Peter Fuller, Tate Archive 10<sup>th</sup> January 1990
- <sup>114</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>115</sup> Wright, K. 'Gallery', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1990, p. 88
- <sup>116</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 121
- <sup>117</sup> *ibid.* p. 119
- <sup>118</sup> *ibid.* p. 124
- <sup>119</sup> *ibid.* p. 122
- <sup>120</sup> Beckett, Sr. W. 'Concerning the Spirit in Art', pp. 45-49
- <sup>121</sup> Kandinsky, W. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1977, New York: Dover Publications
- <sup>122</sup> Beckett's focus is, of course, on the spiritual in terms of the potential for painting – both as an act, and in terms of subject, form and content – to bring both the painter and the viewer closer to God. This is significantly different to Fuller's concern with the spiritual in painting, which is more to do with the relationship between man and nature and the search for a universal human condition.
- <sup>123</sup> Beckett, Sr. W. 'Concerning the Spirit in Art', p. 47
- <sup>124</sup> *ibid.* p. 45
- <sup>125</sup> *ibid.* p. 45
- <sup>126</sup> *ibid.* p. 45
- <sup>127</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 122
- <sup>128</sup> Beckett, Sr. W. *Contemporary Women Artists*, 1988, London: Phaidon
- <sup>129</sup> Greer, G. 'Contemporary Women Artists', Winter 1988/89, p. 51
- <sup>130</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>131</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 123
- <sup>132</sup> Kramer co-founded *The New Criterion* magazine in 1984, and was equally outspoken in his championing of the aesthetic appreciation of Modernist painting as he was in his disavowal of conceptual art and the onset of postmodernism.

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- <sup>133</sup> Kramer, H. 'New Criteria for Modern Painting?', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1989, pp. 80-81
- <sup>134</sup> *ibid.* p. 80
- <sup>135</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 119
- <sup>136</sup> Kramer, H. 'New Criteria for Modern Painting?', p. 80
- <sup>137</sup> *ibid.* p. 81
- <sup>138</sup> Lucie-Smith, E. 'Selling Modern British', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1990, p. 106
- <sup>139</sup> Wright, K., Interview by James A. Brown
- <sup>140</sup> Stallabrass, J. *Art Incorporated*, p. 25
- <sup>141</sup> *ibid.* p. 23
- <sup>142</sup> *ibid.* p. 11
- <sup>143</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>144</sup> *ibid.* p. 13
- <sup>145</sup> Caro, A. Personal correspondence to Peter Fuller, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1980, Tate Archive
- <sup>146</sup> Fuller, annotation on Caro, A. 27<sup>th</sup> March 1980
- <sup>147</sup> *Modern Painters*, 'Modern Painters at L.A. Art Fair' [advertisement], *Modern Painters*, Winter 1988/89, p.52
- <sup>148</sup> Fuller, P. 'Clearing a Space for Criticism', p. 120
- <sup>149</sup> Graw, I. *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, p. 9
- <sup>150</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: Art and Money: Post-Saatchi Painting', p. 7
- <sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

Fig. 2 (image) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

[Fig. 9] *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998

## Chapter 6

### Modern Painters after *Sensation*: 'Looking to America'

Chapter 5 explored the relationship between art criticism and the art market in order to reveal the rising power of the market in the formation of art worlds, and the creation of value within them. Subsequently, the authority of the critic in creating and articulating value diminished. This chapter examines the critical direction taken by *Modern Painters* after *Sensation*, the changes in focus that this represented, and the changing nature of the critical writing therein. The writing published in *Modern Painters* after *Sensation* would become very different from art criticism as Fuller perceived it. Fuller's criticism evaluated artworks against a very specific set of criteria, meaning that any work that did not fit was considered either not worthy of discussion at all, or otherwise, the subject of explicit scorn, so be addressed only as the reverse of great art. In the issues of *Modern Painters* that addressed *Sensation* and those that immediately followed, there were a greater number of articles on artists whose work was exhibited in the Royal Academy show, and other artists working within a similar idiom, many of whom had also been prominent in the British art world over the previous decade. This was work that had, over that period, been a prominent fixture in other British art magazines. Furthermore, *Modern Painters* addressed an increasing amount of international art, reflecting the internationalisation of the art world at the time. In a context defined by international biennales and art fairs, to continue to attend only to a narrow sector of the art world might have maintained *Modern Painters'* specific focus, but would not have expanded its readership in the same way that approaching the American market for art magazines would. Also, as I have argued



previously, by expanding the magazine's focus, Wright, as editor, allowed her writers a broader set of contexts within which to interpret the work of British artists, including those working within the traditions preferred by Fuller. By exploring the continuing changes that occurred in *Modern Painters* after *Sensation*, this chapter analyses the developing influence of the art market on the content of the magazine, and the nature of the criticism published therein.

At the end of 2004 ownership of *Modern Painters* was transferred to Louise Blouin Media, and publication moved to New York (see Introduction). Although it is impossible to know exactly what led to the sale of *Modern Painters* in 2004, it seems plausible that these shifts in subject matter and focus might have been made, partly, in order to prepare the ground for sale into an international market that would require a broader range of interests than English painting and sculpture. It is equally possible, however, that Wright was simply more interested in the international context for British art and that, being a New Yorker herself, she was naturally drawn to the comparisons between British and American art.

Although the editorial board remained into the latter half of the 1990s, Golding described how Wright 'stopped calling the quarterly meetings of the Editorial Board some years before she sold the magazine' and as a result 'her decisions [regarding editorial content] were more exclusively her own.'<sup>1</sup> It appears that the decision to sell *Modern Painters* to the New York-based publisher might also have been made somewhat unilaterally. Golding explains that Wright 'told us out of the blue that she had sold the magazine to Blouin, of whom most of us had not heard. That was the first I knew of it, and I think it's likely that most if not all the other members were in the same position.'<sup>2</sup>

### ***After Sensation***

The editorial board, put in place by Karen Wright at the request the Magazine's financiers, ensured that Peter Fuller's concerns and interests remained at the centre of the publication (see Chapter 3). However, as explained in Chapter 4, *Sensation* provided the opportunity to re-evaluate *Modern Painters'* position in relation to forms of art that were more aligned with what Peter Fuller had called the 'mega-visual tradition', and to examine the increasingly international nature of the art world.

After *Sensation*, there was a very visible shift in *Modern Painters* away from its traditional focus on British painting and sculpture, and mainly European Modernist and pre-Modern painting. The magazine would feature an increasing number of articles addressing new subject matter that explicitly contradicted the concerns upon which Peter Fuller founded the magazine. Although under Wright, *Modern Painters* would continue to address Fuller's preoccupations, his singular focus would be irreversibly diluted after *Sensation*. As Golding, a founding member of the editorial board has suggested, 'I felt (and regretted) that [Wright] was increasingly making concessions to the prevailing ethos of the art world that was blurring the magazine's focus and turning it into much more of a catch-all publication than it had been before.'<sup>6</sup> However, Jed Perl, another member of the editorial board, 'worried about English insularity' and has argued that Wright 'understood the kind of mix that makes a magazine both interesting and important'. He explains that

English art needed to be seen in a broader context. Part of what Karen and I shared was a sense that there was a lot going on in the art world that didn't get covered in Artforum, etc. Peter had believed that English contemporary

art hadn't received its due. He was right. But what Karen and I understood was that there was lots and lots of American art—and probably art all over the world—that also hadn't gotten its due.<sup>7</sup>

This wider focus ensured that *Modern Painters* would not remain insular and narrow-focussed, but reframe the kinds of work that Fuller had celebrated from the magazine's beginning in the context of a broader art world, and to better understand its place in an international context. This required a more expansive form of criticism that was able to examine multiple forms of contemporary art, including but not restricted to painting.

The increasing engagement with issues and debates relating to critical theory – for example, the 'death of painting' – moved the writing in *Modern Painters* further from Fuller's conception of criticism, to include what he had previously called 'the chatter of secondary discourse.'<sup>8</sup>

### **Post-Sensation: What Remained?**

The shifts I am discussing here were neither sudden nor absolute. Much of what made *Modern Painters* unique from other contemporaneous publications before *Sensation* remained up until its sale. The autumn 1998 issue, coming a year after the first of the issues addressing *Sensation*, both exemplified the changes but also included articles on a more recognisable collection of subjects. These included articles on John Singer Sargent, Lorenzo Lotto, Pierre Bonnard and the Romanian Modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi, as well as an interview with the British painter, and a favourite of Peter Fuller, Frank Auerbach.<sup>12</sup>

This pattern continued, with some issues being more typical of *Modern Painters* before *Sensation*. For example, the Winter 1999 edition included only two articles on contemporary non-painters, one of whom was a photographer of Modern architecture, the other an installation artist whose work was framed by the author in the context of Western traditions of the sublime.<sup>13</sup> Other articles in the issue reflected concerns that would have fitted with Fuller's own. These included an article by Bryan Robertson on colour in British sculpture.<sup>14</sup> There were also articles on Renaissance Venice and Diego Velasquez.<sup>15</sup> The special section on Scottish art in the same issue focused mainly on painting, particularly figurative and landscape work in the traditions preferred by Fuller. The Winter 1998 issue included an article on an exhibition in Antibes of one of Fuller's favourite artists, Graham Sutherland, questioning why his work hadn't been seen in Britain for so long.<sup>16</sup>

It was as much the change of cover design and subject matter as the content of the *Sensation* issues that signalled the more permanent shifts that would become evident over the following years. As well as the Gilbert and George and Gillian Wearing covers, later covers would feature work by artists working in non-traditional forms and the 'mega-visual tradition'. By this time, the covers showing more traditional and/or historical work had become the exception rather than the rule. For example, the Summer 1998 issue shows Bonnard's *Almond Tree in Blossom* (1946-7), whereas the previous three issues held images of work by Jeff Koons, Gilbert and George, and Gillian Wearing. The following issue's cover displayed Ron Mueck's hyper-realist self-portrait *Mask* (1997). This demonstrates a change in focus not only in terms of the content of the magazine, but also a broadening of the market at which the magazine was aiming, to include an

audience more interested in the 'mega-visual tradition'. This articulates the tension between the drive to appeal to a wider market, Wright's concerns that to address the Royal Academy exhibition might go against *Modern Painters*, and Peter Fuller's, editorial philosophy.<sup>17</sup>

### **Critical Context for Changing Concerns: The Crisis of Painting**

The challenges and questions faced by *Modern Painters* during the years following Fuller's death in 1990, including and beyond the discussion of *Sensation*, were indicative of wider discourses questioning the continuing validity of 'master-narratives', including painting.<sup>18</sup> Through *Modern Painters*, Fuller had presented the best painting as specifically *other* than the 'mega-visual culture'. However, for some years before the publication of *Modern Painters*, critical theorists had identified tendencies in art that questioned the uniqueness (what Greenberg called the 'irreducible' nature) of painting.<sup>19</sup> In his book *After the End of Art* Arthur Danto described the mixing of representational and presentational codes 'in which painters no longer hesitate to situate their paintings by means of devices which belong to altogether different media'.<sup>20</sup> Other magazines, such as *Frieze* and *Dazed & Confused* had already recognised this and responded by discussing contemporary art, advertising, fashion, and other aspects of popular/ consumer culture as belonging to the same paradigm.

*Sensation* provided Karen Wright and *Modern Painters* with the opportunity to acknowledge the symptoms of the cultural 'moment, at least (and perhaps only) in art, of deep pluralism and total tolerance' in which 'nothing is ruled out.'<sup>21</sup> After *Sensation*, Wright's magazine continued to examine its place in relation to these cultural paradigm shifts through the theoretical discourses that framed them.

A major aspect of these discourses was the notion of the 'death of painting'. In a 1992 article in *Art Papers*, Paul Ryan summarised three late-twentieth century perceptions of the end of painting: the 'loss of momentum in Modernism's linear progression' that led to claims of the end of originality; the claims of post-structuralism that 'meaningfulness is no longer possible'; and 'the Marxist critique which points out painting's co-option by the general culture and its loss of criticality.'<sup>22</sup> As a result of its investigation into these problems, painting had reached a point at which it was 'questioning its own existence and future'. Each of these had an effect on criticism. *Modern Painters* approached these issues in its own particular ways. As I have discussed previously, Fuller rejected post-structuralism as 'the chatter of secondary discourse'. The 'end of originality' was countered through the magazine's focus on work with pre-Modern concerns, less affected by the non-linearity of postmodernism. The cooption of painting by 'the general culture' was more problematic. The relationships between painting, criticism and the market – as explored in Chapter 5 – had become complex and significant enough that it was necessary for a magazine with the title *Modern Painters* to address these questions, which were central to the magazine's own identity.

The notion of the death of painting was not new. In 1935, Kenneth Clark had argued that 'the art of painting has become not so much difficult as impossible', and that the only way a 'new style' might emerge would be out of 'a new interest in subject matter'.<sup>23</sup> However, in the 1980s and 1990s the subject had become a central theme of art theory and criticism.

In his book *Painting as Model*, first published in 1990, Yves-Alain Bois raised the question of whether the end of painting had already arrived. His answer was contradictory, a 'double bind'. He argued that 'to say no... is undoubtedly an act of denial, for it has never been more evident that most paintings one sees have abandoned the task that historically belonged to modern painting'.<sup>24</sup> Yet, at the same time, 'to say yes, however, that the end has come, is to give in to a historicist conception of history as both linear and total.' The historical task of modern painting to which Bois referred here was the 'working through of the end of painting'. If, as Bois argued, paintings are made for and of the market, then it might be argued that any use-value is subsumed by market value, and the critical arguments for the continued 'life' of painting must be doomed. The critic is excluded from the value creation process, and aesthetic value becomes only relevant as a potential selling point rather than valuable in and of itself.

In an article for *October* in 1981, Douglas Crimp referred to a 1979 exhibition of painting curated by the critic Barbara Rose in response to the 'disintegrating morality, social demoralisation and lack of conviction in all authority and tradition' that had been evident in the conceptual and politicised art of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>26</sup> Much like Fuller's championing of the British Romantic landscape painters, Crimp explained that the artists on show were presented as 'noble survivors', linked by a 'conviction in quality' and 'a belief in art as a model of transcendence.'<sup>27</sup> The exhibition, then, was seeking to 'win back' the notion of a transcendent aesthetic, and the articulation of aesthetic quality, from the market. Crimp, however, dismissed the work as 'parochial' and unoriginal in an art world defined by pluralism. He argued that the question that should have been asked at this point was not 'why these particular artists', but 'why painting?' He argued that all

'resurrections' of the 1980s – which included Fuller – ignored the questions about the 'ideological supports of painting' and the 'myths of high art' raised by the art of the 1960s and seventies, and by writers such as John Berger (see Chapter 1). In a similar way to Bois, Crimp argued that each attempt to resuscitate painting (his example was Frank Stella's work of the later 1970s) was a desperate 'expression of painting's need for a miracle to save it'.

Karen Wright may have been aware of Crimp's question, 'why painting?', or at least aware of the broad critical discourse that raised it. If this was indeed the case, then it should be of little surprise if she reached the conclusion that *Modern Painters* could no longer present painting as 'other' than, and detached from, other modes of artistic and cultural representation. The art world, including critical theory, criticism, the institutions and other magazines, had moved beyond Fuller's restricted perspective on British art and his rejection of questions around broader, more theoretical discourses. I argue that if *Modern Painters* was to justify its continuing relevance in the context of radically individualistic art world, then it would need to address the question of the 'end of painting' in order to do so.

### ***Modern Painters'* response to 'the death of painting'**

In the latter half of the 1990s, Wright's *Modern Painters* would address in some depth these questions regarding the status and validity of painting. In the Spring 1998 issue the novelist Rick Moody directly addressed the issue in an essay on the photographer Gregory Crewdson, and the painters Elena Sisto and Julia Jacquette.<sup>28</sup> The article began with a response to Danto, arguing that the philosopher had avoided addressing technique in his characterisation of a post-historical postmodernism. That is to say, that technique 'with its own separate



history, may have narratives and reversals and vogues with respect to colour or paint-handling or the necessity of leaving paint behind altogether'. Thus he set up his article as an investigation into 'how energetic art has been since its collapse.'<sup>29</sup>

Later in the article, Moody acknowledged the difficulty in differentiating between mediums within the postmodern condition. Moody suggested Crewdson's highly staged photographs 'occupy the space once accorded the art of painting'.<sup>30</sup> He located the photographs within a tradition of painting, suggesting that their subject matter 'immediately leads us to a Grant Wood supposition, to a landscape of admirable and coherent Americans, to a landscape of landscape painting.'<sup>31</sup>

Rather than avoiding the implications of the questions asked by Danto, Bois and others since the 1960s and seventies, as Fuller did, Moody explicitly embraced the breaking down of cultural boundaries. At the end of the article he referred to the breaking down of the boundary between 'high' and 'low' culture, arguing that 'the old high art doesn't really exist without a little low' and that by 'collapsing these distinctions' an 'energy is released'. The end of art, he suggested, 'is always an inauguration'.<sup>32</sup>

In the same issue, David Hockney began an article by explaining that 'the question "is Painting Dead?" was recently discussed on television, a situation which has its ironies.'<sup>33</sup> The painter went on to describe how television and photography, mediums that had previously been blamed for the death of painting, were themselves in crisis. Hockney argued that the fact that the camera can no longer be trusted to tell the 'truth' (digital images can easily be altered), 'seems to me to put painting... on a new road.' Painting, he argued, allows the viewer to see beyond the

frame into life, something that television does not. His conclusion was that ‘what the hand, the eye and the heart can do, and make, and *paint*, can never be replaced.’<sup>34</sup>

This response to the question of the death of painting – that it did, in fact, live on at the turn of the millennium – was also made through the increasing inclusion of articles on contemporary painters. In the Summer 1999 issue, Bryan Robertson, whose response to *Sensation* and what it implied had been largely negative, wrote an article on the contemporary British painter Gary Hume.<sup>35</sup> Robertson explained how he was ‘completely won over as a whole-hearted enthusiast’ when he saw Hume’s work at the Saatchi Gallery in 1997.<sup>36</sup> Robertson set Hume, as a painter who studied at Goldsmiths’ College, in opposition to that institution’s tendency towards ‘conceptual alternatives to painting’. He also suggested that Hume’s ‘enduring love of medieval art, painting and sculpture’ is significant, framing his work within a historical context.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the article, Robertson interpreted Hume’s work in relation to other, mainly Modernist and early-postmodern artists, including Matisse, Robert Ryman, Ellsworth Kelly and Andy Warhol.

Robertson also argued that Hume’s work was not subversive, did not set out to ‘attack’ painting or make it redundant, but rather that he was one of

a sufficient number of outstanding artists in Europe and America [who] have kept going through all the attempted destruction and the frequent proclamations that “painting is dead”<sup>38</sup>

Robertson’s article demonstrates how this evolution of *Modern Painters’* position allowed for the author to continue to address some of Fuller’s concerns, specifically the ongoing engagement of painting with the traditions of the medium.

The argument for the persistent vitality and significance of painting continued over the following years, with, for example, the philosopher Richard Wollheim arguing that ‘painting is alive in California’.<sup>39</sup> In the same issue, Steven Vincent addressed the work of the American painter Damien Loeb. He explained how the paintings ‘were the first I’d seen that seemed to originate not from some art-school trend or tedious critical theory, but from the sensibilities of an *entirely different generation*’.<sup>40</sup>

By addressing rather than avoiding these questions, Wright’s *Modern Painters* was able to re-assert its position in support of painting as an important medium at the turn of the twenty-first century. This engagement with current critical discourses brought the magazine in line with concerns of the wider art world, but also framed the historical origins of Fuller’s critical position in the context of contemporary practices. *Modern Painters* was continuing to address painting, but, as Vincent suggested, often of a very different type to that favoured by Fuller. Painting had become as individualistic as other forms of contemporary art and, therefore, resisted comparative judgements of value. In addressing painting in the context of theoretical debates around the medium, *Modern Painters* was moving away from Fuller’s Kantian model for criticism.

### **Framing ‘anaesthetic’ and ‘young British art’**

If work that sat outside of the traditions preferred by Fuller was now to be addressed by *Modern Painters*, the magazine needed to catch up (and catch its readership up) on the traditions from which it grew. *Modern Painters* went through a process of re-assessing the work that had led to the questioning of the

status of painting and the narrowing gap between art and popular culture. The art of institutional critique was addressed, for example, through the monumental site specific minimalism of Donald Judd in Marfa, Texas, and the walking/ travelling-as-art practices of Hamish Fulton and David Tremlett.<sup>41</sup>

In an interview with Eduardo Paolozzi, the Italian-Scottish pop artist expressed his (well documented) belief in the non-hierarchical nature of visual culture, explaining that 'even in the '50s I used to say that certain advertising was as good – or more interesting – than, say, a rather bad watercolour by an RA.'<sup>42</sup> This reassessment of the 1960s and seventies allowed for a historical framework for the discussion of the forms of British art exemplified by *Sensation*. The two issues that directly addressed *Sensation* (Autumn and Winter 1997) included between them six articles on the subject of historical British painters or sculptors. Across the same two issues were thirteen articles (including the two editorials) on contemporary British art in non-traditional mediums, including the five articles directly addressing *Sensation*. After this, more artists working with non-traditional forms were covered. The Autumn 1998 issue covered the UK-based Australian hyper-realist sculptor Ron Mueck and *Sensation* contributor Gavin Turk.<sup>44</sup> In future issues Martin Creed, Bob and Roberta Smith, and David Batchelor would all be the subjects of articles.<sup>45</sup>

The prominence these new forms of work in the contemporary British art world, and its significance in an international art market, would have made it difficult to ignore, particularly for an editor with the intention of moving their magazine into the international (specifically American) market. Write has stated that she was 'doing a lot of the business side of [*Modern Painters* at that time] and I was quite

aggressively trying to get into America'.<sup>46</sup> She argued, regarding the influence of *Sensation* and the effect it had on *Modern Painters*, that

it was a very muted and quite dull [British] art scene until then.... And I think it was a great opportunity to [show that] England has something to talk about in America as well.... I think it's another reason that the Americans picked up on an English magazine, because they knew that there was this energy, that there was this passion coming out of England.<sup>47</sup>

The changes in *Modern Painters*, then, were the result of changes in the art world. Wright, as editor, was responding to the art of the time, and the significance of that work in the international art market.

As significant as the increase in articles addressing such artists was, it is the critical evaluations offered of their work and the broadly positive tone adopted by the magazine towards them that is particularly telling. Craig Raine's article on Ron Mueck in the Autumn 1998 issue begins, 'Ron Mueck's *Dead Dad* is an authoritative masterpiece – the equal of Vermeer's *The Lace Maker* or Hilliard's portrait of Sir Walter Raleigh', comparing the work favourably to pre-Modern painting.<sup>48</sup>

Although praise of such work was not always quite so explicit, a less tangible – but just as noticeable – change was the seriousness with which the work was taken.

For *Modern Painters* after *Sensation*, this was work that deserved serious attention and interpretation, rather than dismissal as a lower, less valuable form of art, as had usually been the case under Fuller and in Karen Wright's earlier years as editor. In his article on the Scottish conceptual artist Martin Creed, Ian MacMillan provided detailed interpretations of, for example, *Work # 128: All the Sculpture in a Collection*. He explained how in this work, other people's sculptures

become his material, their positioning his very own sculpting. Flung together in this fashion they're all reduced to their most elemental materiality, just yet more things, divested of the unique status normally conferred upon them.<sup>49</sup>

This level of scrutiny betrays an interest in non-traditional forms of work that previously had not been evident in the magazine. It might be argued that, beside the effect of the market on the displacement of the critic in the creation of value, the nature of the work itself questions the notion of value. Such work requires a different form of criticism that considers the context within which the work exists, rather than understanding it in relation to a historical, pre-Modern tradition. If Creed's work is to be understood in terms of its historical context, this would be in relation to the conceptual art of the 1960s and 70s, which, again, might require as much discussion of critical theory as of formal aesthetics.

A continuing interest in British art would be evident, if diminishing, up to the sale of the magazine in 2004. However, the Summer 2000 issue had a special section on Britishness, guest edited by Matthew Collings. Whereas historically, *Modern Painters'* default subject had been British art, now it required a special section in a single issue. The issue included an article on Lucian Freud, a painter who had featured in *Modern Painters* during Fuller's period as editor. There were also interviews with the sculptor Tony Cragg and pop artist Peter Blake, and an article on the work of the conceptual painter Douglas Gordon.<sup>51</sup> This selection of artists demonstrated the expansion of *Modern Painters'* conception of 'Britishness', toward a concern with British art in the context of an international art world.

## Reassessment of American Modernism

If *Sensation* encouraged Wright and *Modern Painters* to address more work in the 'mega-visual tradition', and more 'young British art', this, in turn, paved the way for the inclusion of more international contemporary art and, particularly, more American art. The Spring 1998 issue was almost entirely dedicated to New York (see Fig. 9), with the exception of a one page article by David Hockney on art and television, one by Martin Golding on still life painting, and one on international war photography.<sup>52</sup> The 'New York issue' included an interview with Jeff Koons by David Bowie, an article by Jed Perl on the New York art world, and an essay on 'the American Sublime', among others.<sup>53</sup> Whereas Peter Fuller's *Modern Painters* focused almost entirely on the significance of British art in the history of painting and sculpture, in the late-1990s the magazine was reassessing the importance of art from the other side of the Atlantic.

The autumn 1998 issue that immediately followed the two *Sensation* issues included five articles on American art and artists, including a memoir of life in the 1960s New York art world by the poet Bill Berkson. The article serves as an introduction to a period of history in American art that had previously been withheld from the *Modern Painters* readership. The increasing inclusion of articles on historical American art, particularly painting, filled in the gaps left by previous editorial priorities that largely ignored art from the USA and, as Jed Perl suggested, provided a broader context for the continuing discussion of British art.

The cover and the first three articles of the Spring 1999 issue were dedicated to Jackson Pollock. Pollock was a painter whom Fuller claimed had, ultimately, failed to 'meaningfully represent... perceptions and experience through painting', dying,

as he did, 'at the vortex of a ferocious despair which he could never satisfactorily depict.'<sup>54</sup> Rudy Buckhardt's article in the Spring 1999 issue reminisced about the author's experiences photographing the Abstract Expressionist painter.<sup>55</sup> This was followed by articles on Pollock by *Modern Painters* regular Martin Gayford and novelist Philip Hensher.<sup>56</sup> This issue also contained two more articles on historical American artists: Trevor Winkfield on Joseph Cornell and Ron Padgett on Jim Dine.<sup>57</sup> With three more articles on contemporary American artists, and the first of Lance Esplund's regular 'New York Letter' columns, the issue was, effectively, another special American edition.<sup>58</sup>

This was followed a year and a half later by another special issue, subtitled 'Looking at America'. Again, this issue was almost exclusively filled with articles on historical and contemporary American art, including articles on Ed Ruscha, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Alice Neel.<sup>59</sup> Besides these special issues, increasingly more of the content of *Modern Painters* was dedicated to American art and artists. Collectively these articles might be read, retrospectively, as preparing the magazine's readership for the eventual move to New York, or positioning *Modern Painters* as an attractive purchase for a potential North American buyer.

### **Addressing Recent American Art**

The shift towards the inclusion of more conceptual contemporary British art practices was initially characterised by scepticism. The reassessment of American art was more immediate. From the Spring 1998 'New York Issue', the vast majority of writing on American art in *Modern Painters* was positive, even celebratory. It was as if the writers had finally been given permission to celebrate over a



century's worth of art that had previously been outside of the magazine's editorial scope.

In his editorial to the 'New York issue', Jed Perl, who was based in the city, acknowledged its central position in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> Century art. However, he also named New York as the location of modern art's 'armageddon', 'where Marcel Duchamp spent much of his life hoping to convince the world that lead was gold'. He suggested that if the reader were to find him/herself 'on the wrong side of the *status quo*' there might be 'no better place on earth to try and understand how things could have gone so terribly wrong.'<sup>62</sup> The editorial may well have been targeted at *Modern Painters*' established readership, offering empathy with what the author might perceive as their anti-conceptual, even anti-contemporary, preferences. However, Perl explained that if one looked beyond the market-driven centre of the New York art world, there was great art to be found. For example, he described the 'darkly magical abstract paintings of Bill Jensen'.<sup>63</sup> Perl argued that artists such as Jensen and Joan Snyder had 'turned abstract art around by creating paintings that are strongly stamped with their complex personalities'.<sup>64</sup> He then went on to describe the work of other New York artists who he felt were worthy of closer attention. He described the paintings of Louisa Matthiasdottir as 'the very greatest produced anywhere in the world in these years.' He acknowledged the likely scepticism of the *Modern Painters* readership towards New York and the art it had and continued to produce, and then attempted to win them round by arguing the case for those he thought worthy of the magazine's discerning audience. Perl's writing, then, was implicitly evaluative, contrasting the work of the painters whose work he recommended to *Modern Painters*' readers with the tradition that came from Duchamp.

The reassessment of the history of American painting continued in two more articles in the same issue. The first was by Jamie McKendrick on the artist/ graphic designer Stuart Davis, the other by Trevor Winkfield on the painter Gerald Murphy.<sup>65</sup> Both of these articles questioned in different ways the monolithic status of Expressionism. The former expanded the definition of Abstract Expressionism, arguing that artists such as Davies should be included under the term. The latter argued that the creation and perseverance of the idea of such a movement drew attention to a relatively small group of artists and away from those that did not quite fit the title, creating the impression of the existence of only a narrow range of practices in America during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

This reassessment of historical (mainly Modernist) American art provided a historical context for the discussion of contemporary American art, in the same way that *Modern Painters'* discussion of contemporary and recent British art was contextualised through its ongoing concerns with historical European art, particularly European Modernism.

After *Sensation*, as well as increasing its coverage of historical American art and contemporary American painting, *Modern Painters* also significantly increased the amount of writing on contemporary American art in non-traditional media. There were enthusiastic articles on artists working with new media, installation and more conceptual work. Furthermore, many of these articles emphasised the inherent affiliation these practices had with popular culture and the mass media. Two articles by the film-maker and writer Ian MacMillan focus explicitly on this correlation. The first, in the Spring 1998 'New York' issue, was about Tony Oursler.<sup>66</sup> Oursler's installations usually include dolls, mannequins and other

artificial bodies or disembodied heads upon which has been projected footage of real faces, often speaking to the viewer through concealed speakers. MacMillan contextualised this work in relation to 'Generation X', the generation born in the mid-60s to mid-70s, often characterised by disaffection and alienation, summed up in the lyrics of a Talking Heads song (*Psycho Killer*) and the titles of daytime talk shows on American daytime television. Although he argued that it might be difficult for the viewer to make sense of the work, he dismissed this concern by suggesting that 'presumably, that's the point'.<sup>67</sup> This demonstrates an understanding and acknowledgement of the changing nature of meaning in certain forms of contemporary art, and, therefore, the role of the critic in the interpretation of art works. The article is largely descriptive, offering some interpretation of the works, but mostly making comparisons with popular American culture. Although there is little explicit evaluation of the work, the tone is largely positive. MacMillan described the series of works consisting of projected eyeballs as 'both penetrable and impenetrable, startling and unsettling, uncomfortable voyeuristic, exciting and enervating to encounter.'<sup>68</sup>

MacMillan's article on Tom Friedman continues this enthusiastic tone towards contemporary American art and its relationship to popular culture. This is the opening article in the Autumn 2000 'Looking at America' issue, coming before articles on work more typical of *Modern Painters* in the years before *Sensation*.<sup>69</sup> Again, MacMillan drew parallels between the artist's work and popular culture. He suggested that Friedman's work engages as much with contemporary popular culture, via the satirical American adult animation *South Park*, as it does with the history of 20<sup>th</sup> Century art – via Dada and 1960s conceptualism. MacMillan was as enthusiastic about the 'puerile and scatological' humour of *South Park*, as he was

about Friedman's work. The boundary between 'high art' and the 'mega-visual tradition' that Fuller argued so strongly in favour of is collapsed in MacMillan's fantasy of Friedman and his work inhabiting the fictional world of the adult cartoon. MacMillan imagined:

In a fantasy episode Friedman might appear as a despondent magician at one of the kids' birthday parties, conjuring up bizarre objects from drinking straws, bubble gum and toothpaste while Cartman, the fat leader of the gang, shrieks obscenities and says 'That's not art, asshole!'<sup>70</sup>

Steven Vincent began his piece on Damien Loeb in the same issue by outlining the American painter's status as a 'star of the contemporary art scene', as anointed by a 'select group of magazine and newspaper editors' as well as major dealers in both London (Jay Jopling) and New York (Larry Gagosian), explicitly acknowledging the relationship between reputation and the market.<sup>71</sup> However, at the same time, Vincent explained, many critics disliked the painter's work:

'Soulless', charged Art in America; 'lowbrow', muttered the New Yorker; his work 'lacks real invention or imagination', hissed the 'Village Voice'; it has 'no idea what it is about', sniffed *Modern Painters*.<sup>72</sup>

The positive tone of this article, then, can be read as an attempt to reassess, to 'win back' the critical reputation of this artist as previously besmirched by critics including one writing for the very same magazine. Whereas previously Loeb's paintings had been denounced for reflecting the lack of depth of the culture it reflects, Vincent argued that 'with near-perfect pitch, their intense colours and brutal imagery articulated the *zeitgeist* of [his] Generation X'. The qualities and subject matter of the work, Vincent suggested, is absolutely of its time, and Loeb

seemed to have it pegged: the emotional attenuation of his peers, their lack of historical awareness and indifference to hierarchy, ideology, teleology – anything that might organise and give meaning to the deluge of images spewed forth by the mass media.<sup>73</sup>

Again, the relationship between art and the mass-media, the ‘mega-visual tradition’, is made explicit and celebrated, acknowledged as an integral aspect of the work’s meaning rather than something to be lamented.

### **Conclusion: Art Criticism Changed – British art in the broader context**

The changes that occurred in *Modern Painters*, instigated by changes in the art world that were embodied by *Sensation*, were indicative of broader changes in art criticism. The increasing concern with a broader range of contemporary and international art practises demonstrated not only an attempt to appeal to other markets, but also an acknowledgement that the forms of art that had been at the centre of *Modern Painters*’ interests could only be properly understood, contextualised and evaluated in the context of a multifaceted British and international art world. As Jed Perl said, ‘English art needed to be seen in a broader context’.<sup>74</sup>

Criticism as the expression of value judgements through the exercise of taste, was giving way to the contextualisation and interpretation of art practices in relation to broader (international) cultural influences, theoretical discourses, for example the ‘death of painting’, and the market. The two *Art Monthly* articles on *Sensation* both explicitly drew meaning from the ways in which the exhibition itself was bound up in the conditions of the market, and the *Modern Painters* articles on the

same exhibition, although largely negative in their judgements, explored the relationship between art institutions, the market, and the state (see Chapter 4).

The contexts for painting were changing and, I argue, it was no longer sufficient to discuss painting as separate from the rest of the art world and the 'mega-visual tradition'. The shift away from an almost exclusive focus on British painting and sculpture was an inevitable outcome of the changing condition of art as outlined by Arthur Danto and others. The blurring of boundaries between mediums meant that for *Modern Painters* to align itself with 'only' painting, and 'only' sculpture, would have been both increasingly difficult as well as incongruous with the nature of the cultural condition and the art world of the time. Rick Moody, in his article on photographer Gregory Crewdson and painters, Elena Sisto and Julia Jacquette, described this blurring of boundaries, and demonstrated how an engagement with theoretical discourses was essential to any defence of the continuing relevance of painting.

The shift in subject matter in *Modern Painters* towards significantly more American art was also the result of an internationalised art world and market. Another reason for this shift was Karen Wright's stated intention to move the magazine into the American market. Competing publications had already been addressing an international art world, with one of its major centres in New York. It could be argued, however, that the extent of the move toward American art after *Sensation* took *Modern Painters* far enough away from Fuller's concerns that it was at risk of becoming – or perhaps had already become – another international contemporary art magazine. I would argue, however, that Wright struck a balance between continuing to address the most important British art, including work in

the traditions previously celebrated by Fuller, but in the context of a broader, more diverse and international art world.

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- <sup>1</sup> Golding, 2016M. Interview by James A. Brown, Skype, 22, April 2015
- <sup>2</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown, 6th August 2016
- <sup>8</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey: A Personal Memoir' in McDonald, J. (ed.) *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, 1993, London: Methuen, p. xxxiii
- <sup>12</sup> Saumarez Smith, C. 'More than Likeness', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1998, pp. 68-70; Gayford, M. 'Lotto Safari', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1998, pp. 62-65; Hyman, T. 'A New Space for the Self', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1998, pp. 86-89; Bailey, P. 'Constantin Brancusi: Some Reflections', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1998, pp. 56-58; Greig, G. 'Paint or Die', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1998, pp. 74-77
- <sup>13</sup> Ryan, D. 'Art and Photography: Modernity Illuminated', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1999, pp. 66-67; Hensher, P. 'Glimpsing the Iceberg', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1999, pp. 52-54
- <sup>14</sup> Robertson, B. 'Colour as Form', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1999, pp. 30-34
- <sup>15</sup> Gayford, M. 'Crosscurrents in Venice', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1999, pp. 56-59; Jacobs, M. 'Velázquez in Seville', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1999, pp. 42-47
- <sup>16</sup> Winkfield, T. 'Graham Sutherland in Exile', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1998, pp. 42-45
- <sup>17</sup> Wright, Karen, 'Up Front: An Overwhelming Sensation?', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997, p. 23
- <sup>18</sup> Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art*, 1997, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 47
- <sup>19</sup> Greenberg, C. 'Modernist Painting', 1960 in Harrison, C. & Wood, P. (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 2003, London: Blackwell, pp. 773-779.
- <sup>20</sup> Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art*, p. xii
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. xiv
- <sup>22</sup> Ryan, P. 'On the Continuity of Painting', *Art Papers*, Jan/Feb 1992, vol. 16 Issue 1, p. 45
- <sup>23</sup> Clark, K. 'The Future of Painting', *Listener*, 2 October 1935, p. 543
- <sup>24</sup> Yves-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, 1993, The MIT Press: Michigan, p.241
- <sup>26</sup> Crimp, D. 'The End of Painting', *October*, Vol.16, Spring 1981, pp. 69-86
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p. 73
- <sup>28</sup> Moody, R. 'Art is Dead, Long Live Art', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, pp. 80-81
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 80
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81
- <sup>33</sup> Hockney, D. 'A Wider View', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, p. 74
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> Robertson, B. 'The Real Thing', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1999, pp. 25-30
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p. 25
- <sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p. 25
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p. 30
- <sup>39</sup> Wollheim, R. 'Letter from California', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 2000, p. 32
- <sup>40</sup> Vincent, S. 'In the Eye of the Spectacle', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 2000, p. 54
- <sup>41</sup> Darwent, C. 'Judd's Uneasy Shade', *Modern Painters*, Winter 2000, pp. 66-68; Haldane, J. 'Images After the Fact', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1998, pp. 92-95; Haldane, J. 'From One Place to Another', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1999, pp. 32-35



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- <sup>42</sup> Hare, D. 'A Great Feeling for Voltaire', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1999, p. 38
- <sup>44</sup> Raine, C. 'To the Life', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1998, pp. 20-23; Freedman, C. 'Making Omelettes', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1998, pp. 99-101
- <sup>45</sup> MacMillan, I. 'I'm Saying Nothing', *Modern Painters*, Spring 2000, pp. 42-45; Collings, M. 'The Meaning of Criticality', *Modern Painters*, Spring 2003, pp. 18-21; Biggs, E. 'Come on Down Colour', *Modern Painters*, Winter 2000, pp. 51-53
- <sup>46</sup> Wright, K. Interview by James A. Brown, ICA, London, February 2013
- <sup>47</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> Raine, C. 'To the Life', p. 21
- <sup>49</sup> MacMillan, I. 'I'm Saying Nothing', p. 44
- <sup>51</sup> Sylvester, D. 'Almost a Pauseless Thing', *Modern Painters*, Summer 2000, pp. 66-72; Johnson, H. 'Meeting the Magician', *Modern Painters*, Summer 2000, pp. 90-93; MacMillan, I. 'Inside Out and Round and Round', *Modern Painters*, Summer 2000, pp. 94-96
- <sup>52</sup> Hockney, D. 'A Wider View', p. 74; Golding, M. 'An Echo in the Body: Painting, Experience and Still Life', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, pp. 110-113; Dyer, G. 'If I Die in a Combat Zone', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, pp. 84-86
- <sup>53</sup> Bowie, D. 'Super-Banalism and the Innocent Salesman', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, pp. 27-34; Perl, J. 'The Unvarnished Truth', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, pp. 21-25; Mitchell, J. 'American Sublime', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, pp. 50-53
- <sup>54</sup> Fuller, P. 'American Painting Since the Last War', *Art Monthly*, No. 27, 1979, p. 8-9
- <sup>55</sup> Burckhardt, R. 'Rudy Burckhardt Remembers', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1999, p. 27
- <sup>56</sup> Gayford, M. 'Suddenly he is Flying', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1999, pp. 28-34; Hensher, P. 'Blue Poles', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1999, pp. 35-37
- <sup>57</sup> Winkfield, T. 'Duchamp's Fan', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1999, pp. 46-48; Padgett, R. 'Making OO LA LA', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1999, pp. 62-65
- <sup>58</sup> Esplund, L. 'New York Letter: Truth or Dare', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1999, pp. 104-107
- <sup>59</sup> Mitchell, A. 'Just Nothing', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 2000, pp. 28-31; Miller, H. 'A Wave from Jean-Michel', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 2000, pp. 42-43; Kernan, N. 'Eyes Wide Open', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 2000, pp. 44-47
- <sup>62</sup> Perl, J. 'The Unvarnished Truth', p. 21
- <sup>63</sup> *ibid.* p. 22
- <sup>64</sup> *ibid.* p. 24
- <sup>65</sup> McKendrick, J. 'Reality's Ouch', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, pp. 41-43; Winkfield, T. 'From a Friend of Gerald Murphy', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, pp. 44-48
- <sup>66</sup> MacMillan, I. 'Expressway to your Skull', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1998, pp. 77-79
- <sup>67</sup> *ibid.* p. 77
- <sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p. 79
- <sup>69</sup> MacMillan, I. 'Oh My God, They Killed Dada!!!', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 2000, pp. 25-27
- <sup>70</sup> *ibid.* p. 25
- <sup>71</sup> Vincent, S. 'In the Eye of the Spectacle', p. 54
- <sup>72</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>73</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>74</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown

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<sup>2</sup> Fuller, Peter, *Seeing Berger: A Revaluation* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), 1981, London: Writers and Readers, p. 16

## Conclusion

Through the construction of a historical narrative around the magazine *Modern Painters*, its development under two different editors (Peter Fuller and Karen Wright), and its relationships with *Sensation*, the art market and the wider art world, this thesis has explored the changing nature and function of art criticism between 1988 (when the first issue of *Modern Painters* was published) and 2004 (when the magazine was sold). Indeed, more than undertaking a mere change, I argue that art criticism as known by, and defined through the writing of Peter Fuller and his magazine was displaced as a significant agent in the formation of art worlds, including the central function of creating and articulating value of art and art works.

I consider the Royal Academy exhibition, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* as a microcosm for the broader, complex changes in the art world that affected criticism at the time. Although it was not considered by many at the time to be a paradigm-changing exhibition, the approach taken towards it by *Modern Painters* and other art magazines is instructive in relation to the increasingly pluralistic nature of the British art world. *Sensation* undoubtedly represented a pivotal moment in terms of the strategic shifts in *Modern Painters'* editorial position and interests.

### ***Modern Painters Changed***

*Modern Painters* was very much formed in Peter Fuller's image. The magazine was born out of more than twenty years of critical reflection and, by the time the first issue was published, a very specific and personal set of opinions. For Fuller, as for

many others before him, there was an integrity and authenticity to art criticism that separated it from the effects and function of the art market.

The detailed examination of Peter Fuller's developing critical position as evident through his writing of the 1970s and 1980s provides a thorough background to his rationale and philosophy behind *Modern Painters*. Fuller's own critique of John Berger emphasised his belief in the importance of the 'expressive potentiality' of art over ideological concerns. He agreed with Berger that bourgeois aesthetics must be questioned and 'demystified', but whereas Berger aimed to reveal meanings relating to class, property value and gender representation, Fuller aimed to emphasise the 'vital, positive residue of sensuous mystery'.<sup>2</sup> An analysis of Fuller's interest in Marxist writers, specifically Herbert Marcuse and Sebastiano Timpanaro, reveals how he was able to maintain a delicate balance between a form of Marxist Humanism and his atheistic spiritualism (see Chapter 1). It was Ruskin who provided Fuller with a language with which to express this concern, and a tradition upon which to focus. The notion of 'theoria', 'a response to beauty with "our whole moral being"' applied to a British tradition of landscape painting, filled the 'art shaped hole' Fuller believed was left by late Modernism.<sup>3</sup>

Such concerns were consistently present in *Modern Painters* under Fuller. For example, the painter Roy Oxlade, who had also expressed an admiration for Marcuse, wrote regularly for the magazine, including an article on Bomberg. Equally, Grey Gowrie's article on Lucian Freud expressed an interest in the artist's ability 'to give us back an older, humanist, not formalist, language for talking about art'.<sup>7</sup>

Fuller believed that these universal moral and spiritual concerns were not reflected in the 'official art' selected for exhibition by the institutions, or for representation and discussion by the media, the press and the art magazines. *Modern Painters*, therefore, was pushing against what Fuller saw as the prevailing institutional mainstream of the British art world of the time, characterised by what he called the 'mega-visual tradition'. His dismay at the prevailing pop-culture oriented tradition was reflected in the writing of those he chose to write for the early issues of *Modern Painters*. Roger Scruton, for example, spoke of the 'empty rhetoric' of Gilbert and George's work, and Robert Hughes of Julian Schnabel's as 'just bombast and texture'.<sup>10</sup> This inauthentic art was driven by the philistinism of the art market and, as I have argued in Chapter 2, it was partly in order to counter the 'official taste' of the market that Fuller founded *Modern Painters*.

Fuller's art criticism, then, was in the Kantian tradition, presenting judgements of taste that involved 'a claim to validity for all men.'<sup>11</sup> For Fuller this universal validity related to the universal human experience, with its biological, spiritual and aesthetic dimensions.

Fuller's major concern throughout this period was with the loss of an authentic engagement with the universal (spiritual) aspect of humanity, and the connection between man and nature, replaced by what he called the 'anaesthesia' of the art he saw promoted by the major institutions. He would continue to write, and publish criticism in the Kantian tradition, offering judgements of aesthetic taste in response to art that fitted with the Romantic tradition out of which his own position developed. His recognition, and resistance, of the rise of the mega-visual

tradition demonstrates an acknowledgement of the changing nature of the art world, and the risk that these changes represented to art criticism.

By refusing to engage with a broad range of contemporary British art, Fuller put himself at risk of appearing both elitist in his tastes and in denial of the changing contexts for British art. His writing on the British Romantic tradition interpreted the work as developing out of pre-Modern traditions, and therefore detached from the contemporaneous changes that had been occurring in the art world that equally might have had a bearing on the development of such work. That there were artists like, for example, Dennis Creffield who continued to work out of that tradition at a time when a mainstream of British art was moving away from concerns with the universal human condition toward the purely sensual, could – I would argue should – have provided an interesting and important framework within which to interpret and understand the place of the Romantic tradition within a contemporary context.

These concerns with the ‘human potentiality’ and its location in the relationship between man and nature, as well as Fuller’s disdain for the ‘mega-visual tradition’, continued to be evident for some time after Fuller’s death in 1990. The introduction of an editorial board helped Karen Wright maintain continuity with Fuller’s editorial position, continuing to resist reference to the mainstream concerns of the British art world.

A thorough study of *Modern Painters* from the point Karen Wright took over as editor shows that, initially, the magazine continued to focus largely on Peter Fuller’s concerns and the form of criticism that he represented, although Wright suggests that she had been ‘moving away’ from Fuller at the time of his death.<sup>15</sup> At

a time of rapid cultural change, the ongoing discussion of 'Englishness' needed contextualising in relation to the increasingly international and multifaceted nature of the art world. Contemporary debates questioned the very possibility of an 'English/ British tradition' within the context of post-colonial discourses and a globalised art world. As Jed Perl suggested, Wright 'took what [Fuller] had begun and made it a richer and more complex periodical—a magazine that at its best reflected the true complexity of the art world as we know it.'<sup>17</sup>

*Modern Painters'* answer to this conundrum was to allow for a broader conception of the contexts within which contemporary British art might be framed. For example, in his Editorial to the Winter 1990/91 issue, Patrick Wright argued that the English tradition championed by Fuller might be more readily reconciled with Modernism, allowing for a more international perspective on English painting, and removing the potential for accusations of chauvinism.<sup>18</sup> This perspective was shared by Patrick Heron, who argued that the painter William Scott belonged to a generation of British artists who were not 'stylistically restricted by place'.<sup>19</sup> Both Wright and Heron recognised that the forms of contemporary art that Fuller had largely ignored as editor of *Modern Painters* had developed out of Modernist traditions, and that to be able to address and contextualise these, the magazine also needed to address and reassess its position in relation to Modernism.

As Chapter 4 demonstrates, without Fuller, the wider art world to which *Modern Painters* belonged would eventually influence change in the content and focus of the magazine. Although coming almost a decade after the initial arrival of 'young British art', *Sensation* represented a tipping point for *Modern Painters*. The exhibition brought a particular form of contemporary art in Britain to the centre of

cultural attention both in Britain and internationally. The dilemma faced by *Modern Painters* was that this scene was at odds with the title and position of the magazine. Wright was clearly aware of the nature of this dilemma, acknowledging that *Sensation* represented the vibrancy and influence of a significant part of the art scene and market in Britain at that moment, and that the artists exhibited were the ‘trend-setters’ of the time.<sup>20</sup> Although at first the magazine’s response to *Sensation* was largely negative, increasingly more coverage was given to the artists shown in the Royal Academy exhibition. In turn, this led to more articles addressing work of a similar type.

After *Sensation*, increasingly more attention was paid by *Modern Painters* to international art, particularly art from the USA, and particularly New York. Peter Fuller had defined the best British art partly in contrast to American art. For Fuller, American art was too infatuated with the ‘mega-visual tradition’. This shift of focus required a major reassessment of America’s influence and the importance of American art during and after Modernism.

The changes that I have identified in *Modern Painters* demonstrate a move away from reacting against the shifting cultural landscape to becoming part of that shift. Peter Fuller, from his first editorial in Issue 1 of *Modern Painters*, set out his editorial position as challenging the “aesthetic idleness” that he saw in much of the prominent contemporary art in both America and Britain.<sup>25</sup> Karen Wright reoriented the magazine. *Modern Painters* continued to address the forms of art that Fuller preferred, but in the context of a multifaceted, international art world.



## Criticism Changed

The changes that I have identified in *Modern Painters* were indicative of a decline in a particular form of art criticism. Peter Fuller's *Modern Painters* represented a critical position that was indicative of the editor's own tastes. In his first editorial, Fuller stated that *Modern Painters* would 'seek to uphold the critical imagination and the pursuit of quality in art.'<sup>26</sup>

By the time the first issue of *Modern Painters* had been published, much art criticism had already moved away from the Kantian tradition towards other approaches. For example, the theorisation of art writing, what Fuller dismissed as the 'chatter of secondary discourse'.<sup>27</sup> By the mid-1970s, Marxist art criticism was questioning notions of 'value' that centred around the art object itself, and considered the art work as part of broader socio-cultural discourses. Other perspectives – class, gender, race – were challenging the validity of value judgements as a legitimate objective for art criticism. In this sense, *Modern Painters* might be considered something of an anomaly, a last stand for a criticism based on this kind of value judgement.

Magazines such as *Frieze* and *Dazed & Confused* had recognised the dissolving boundaries between notions of 'high' and 'low' culture, and their contents reflected this in the juxtaposition of art, media, fashion and other sectors of the broader cultural landscape. Again, for *Frieze* the focus was more on interpretation of cultural phenomena in the context of a changing art world, and less on judgement.

Magazines like *Frieze* and *Dazed & Confused* were responding to the changing conditions of the art world and the changing nature of the work it produced.

Rather than lamenting the depthlessness of the 'mega-visual tradition', like Fuller, these publications recognised the postmodern condition (as defined by Jameson) as central to an understanding of the work. It was not that the work had become meaning/less, but that the meanings had changed with the contexts and required different modes of interpretation.

In 1882, the American critic, Hal Foster, characterised new forms of art whose 'primary concern is not with the traditional or modernist properties of art – with refinement of style or innovation of form, aesthetic sublimity or ontological reflection on art as such'.<sup>28</sup> Foster recognised that this new work 'seeks out its affiliations with other practices (in the culture industry and elsewhere)'. This represents an important shift in the reception of the art work. Foster explains that 'the artist becomes a manipulator of signs..., and the viewer an active reader of messages rather than a passive contemplator of the aesthetic or consumer of the spectacular.' Although Foster is speaking about a specific group of artists involved in an art of institutional critique, his argument suggests the necessity of a new approach to the interpretation of work that acknowledges 'the status of art as a social sign entangled with other signs in systems productive of value, power and prestige.'<sup>29</sup> In this sense, rather than to make judgements of value, it had become more pertinent for criticism to interpret and critique notions of value as inherently problematic within the 'cultural condition of late-capitalism'.

Through the study of *Modern Painters*, and the relationships between the magazine, the market, institutions and other publications, I have identified a number of factors that contributed to the decline of the form of art criticism manifested in Peter Fuller, his writing and his editorship of the magazine.

Fuller identified the philistinism of the art market, and the ‘chatter of secondary discourse’ as aspects of criticism that threatened to dilute the task of the critic to make judgements of value based on taste. The value-giving role of criticism was being significantly displaced by the art market. Alongside the influence of collectors and dealers (e.g. Charles Saatchi) and institutions (e.g. The Royal Academy, central government and its concerns), criticism as a significant agent in the creation and articulation of value had been considerably displaced. As I have discussed in detail in Chapter 5, Findlay describe a situation in which aesthetic judgements are ‘trumped by big numbers’.<sup>30</sup> Graw explains how art criticism is one more factor in the creation of symbolic value, along with advertising, media coverage, exhibitions, catalogues, etc. This, in turn, legitimates a work’s market (monetary) value.

The presence of advertising in the same physical – and ideological – space as criticism necessarily calls into question the objectivity and independence of any comparative aesthetic judgement. Although criticism continues to play a role in the creation of value, it does so because the work in question is being represented in an art magazine, which adds to the work’s symbolic value, rather than because of any positive (or negative) judgement passed by the critic.

*Sensation* provides a salient example. The collector/ dealer, Charles Saatchi, arranged an exhibition of work in his collection to be displayed in one of the major public art institutions in London. The controversial nature of the work, and its being situated within an institution associated with conservatism and tradition, resulted in an unprecedented amount of media and press coverage. Visitor

numbers were very high, and the value of Saatchi's collection increased – both symbolically and monetarily – after *Sensation*. Criticism plays a similar role to the auction catalogue, newspaper article or gallery guide in the creation of value in a commerce-driven 'knowledge market'.<sup>31</sup> All that matters to the dealer is that his/her collection has exposure and the work sells for a good price. All that matters to the institution is that it retains its cultural importance and visitor numbers are high.

The post-modern condition, consumer capitalism, and the rise of the 'mega-visual tradition' all contributed to changes in the art world of which *Modern Painters* formed a part, a pluralistic cultural landscape wherein singular and exclusive critical positions such as Fuller's were insufficient to articulate the place of any single artistic practice within a heterotopia of forms and traditions. The integration of 'aesthetic production' into the processes of late-capitalism, and the breakdown of boundaries between 'high' and 'commercial culture', as identified by Jameson, precede the possibility of an art criticism that differentiates between and assigns value to art works.<sup>32</sup> Value is determined by and within the commercial culture itself, through a combination of the institutions, the dealers and collectors, and the market.

Fuller's criticism, and that which was published in *Modern Painters* during his years as editor, was concerned with notions of authenticity, which was to be found in the expression of the universal human experience, and, in terms of recent British painting, the relation to national traditions. Fuller recognised that the 'mega-visual tradition' did not allow for authenticity in these terms, but also argued that the now dominant inauthentic art was not indicative of popular taste. He considered

*Modern Painters* to be filling a gap in the market that was not otherwise being serviced.

Jameson addressed this shift from authenticity to inauthenticity in his comparison of Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes* and Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*. For Jameson, Van Gogh's painting depicts something of the universal human condition. The painting's 'raw materials', he argues, are 'the whole object world of agricultural misery, of stark rural poverty, and the whole rudimentary human world of backbreaking peasant toil'.<sup>33</sup> The work 'in its inert, objectal form is taken as a clue or a symptom for some vaster reality which replaces it as its ultimate truth.'<sup>34</sup> The painting, then, is indicative of an authenticity that is lacking in its postmodern equivalent. Warhol's painting, by contrast, 'no longer speaks to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's footgear'. Unlike with Van Gogh, 'in Warhol [there is] no way to complete the hermeneutic gesture and restore to these oddments that whole larger lived context of the dance hall or the ball, the world of jetset fashion or glamour magazines.'<sup>35</sup> Warhol's paintings, argues Jameson, explicitly foreground the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital'. Where Van Gogh's shoes speak of a universal human experience, Warhol's display 'a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense'. This he calls 'the supreme formal feature of [postmodernism]'.<sup>36</sup> The shift from authentic/ depth (Modernism) to inauthentic/ depthless (postmodernism) is the same as that which was recognised but resisted by Fuller. The problem for art criticism is that the shift suggests the redundancy of a criticism that searches for and judges value on the basis of authenticity.

As I discussed in Chapter 6, during Karen Wright's years as editor, *Modern Painters* continued to address painting more than any other medium, but the forms that this painting took had changed significantly, including in the way described by Jameson. Just as other publications had been for some time, including *October*, *Modern Painters* started to examine painting from more theoretical perspectives (for example, the ongoing debate around the 'death of painting').

Criticism changed in accordance with the work to which it responded, and the cultural condition that provided the contexts for its interpretation. Karen Wright recognised that art criticism was already changing, and that Fuller's Kantian model was no longer sufficient to engage with much of the work that was of interest from the perspective of *Modern Painters*.

### **Karen Wright's *Modern Painters***

As I have demonstrated, the decline in the form of art criticism exemplified by Fuller, but which developed out of a long tradition that took in Romanticism and formalism, was caused by a multitude of factors. Although the function of art criticism as creator and articulator of value has been displaced by the market and other agents, I argue that it does not preclude the act of criticism altogether.

Changes in the art world meant that the position taken by Fuller, and continued through *Modern Painters* for some years after his death, was compatible with an ever diminishing sector of the art world. Greenberg had encountered a similar problem, identifying 'intermedia art' (video, sound, performance, written and spoken word, etc.) as 'incursions of mediums not originally proper' to visual art, which he defines as 'painting or sculpture'.<sup>37</sup> His conception of the task of painting

was challenged by these new forms, and so he was effaced with the choice of either changing his position, or simply dismissing increasingly large sectors of the art world of which he was a part. This was a similar situation to that in which Fuller found himself as editor of *Modern Painters*.

Wright, and those who wrote for her, continued to address the work that *Modern Painters* had always championed, but also interpreted (and evaluated) other forms of contemporary art in relation to those traditions. Although this did not please all of the magazine's readers, along with the redesign of the cover, and the inclusion of a broader range of artists and work both on the cover and inside the magazine, *Modern Painters* continued both to sell and to attract advertising, not only in its traditional UK market, but also in the USA. Indeed, as Jed Perl has suggested, the magazine became an important source of information for American artists regarding a particular sector of the British art world.<sup>38</sup>

Karen Wright's approach was not to reject forms of work that did not fit into Fuller's narrow characterisation of great art, but rather to question, examine, and (re)consider *Modern Painters'* position in relation to it, and what it meant to continue to produce, and discuss, work in the Romantic tradition within such a landscape.

In her earlier years as editor, certainly up until *Sensation* and for a time afterwards, Wright maintained *Modern Painters'* relevance in a multifaceted and changing art world, wherein the Romantic tradition continued to form a major part of the market for British painting, and the major London institutions continued to put on blockbuster exhibitions of Modernist and pre-Modern British and European

painting, while other, newer forms of art were also attracting the attention of dealers, collectors, museums, the media and the public. The exploration of the ways in which *Sensation* altered the focus of *Modern Painters*, and the writing published therein, demonstrates how Wright achieved this, addressing the threats that these changes posed to art criticism as previously manifested in the magazine. I would argue that, at its best, this balance showed the British Romantic tradition extolled by Fuller from an interesting and relevant new perspective, as well as celebrating a broader segment of the vibrant British art world.

Karen Wright's *Modern Painters* included a significant proportion of writing on American art after *Sensation*. As I have already argued, a major reason for this is the changing nature of the art world and the necessity to contextualise British art in relation to broader contexts. However, as I have discussed in Chapter 6, it is likely that another reason for this shift of focus towards America was Wright's intention to move *Modern Painters* into the American market. It might be argued that, as Wright and *Modern Painters* moved toward a sale to Louise Blouin Media in New York, the balance of content shifted too heavily towards international, and particularly American art and that the magazine's identity was perhaps too diluted.

### **Peter Fuller**

Fuller began writing art criticism in an art world characterised by individual(ist) critics. It might be argued that Fuller was the last of his kind, an art magazine editor whose own critical position was so influential in the content and position of his publication, and in terms of what was and wasn't considered suitable for inclusion. Although he had been accused of representing 'the voice of... orthodoxy, repeating the same trivial truths and idle fallacies about modernism', this study



has demonstrated that the reality is more complex.<sup>44</sup> Although his critical position regarding certain forms of contemporary art could appear conservative or reactionary, Fuller – and some of those who wrote for him – argued that it was those aspects of the art world that he fought against that were conservative. In this sense, perhaps it was Fuller who held the more radical position. Radical or conservative, it was both Fuller's humanism and his concern with the connection between human beings and nature, via the spirit, that set him aside from most of his peers.

Fuller's position on American art (and, more broadly, the mega-visual tradition), and the reasons he proposed for rejecting it, pitted him not only against those critics who would address such work from the perspective of 'secondary discourse' (theory or politics, for example), but also against those who would at least explain in art critical terms their value judgements in relation to it. By choosing to ignore such perspectives to explain his own value judgements, I believe Fuller weakened his own position. As a result, in the *Modern Painters* editorials and his other articles and essays, Fuller's judgements often came across as subjective statements of taste by a reactionary critic. Fuller had much more to offer by way of interpretation *and* evaluation, as he had demonstrated previously, but his refusal even to engage with certain forms of art did not strengthen his position on the work and artists he did choose to address.

It is from this reactionary perspective that Karen Wright moved away, through addressing *Sensation* and the work of the artists represented in the exhibition, and later, through including increasingly more American art. She kept the core of *Modern Painters* as developed from Fuller's critical position, but strengthened it

through contextualising it in relation to contemporary practices and debates.

Criticism as understood by Fuller may have been in decline, but Wright and her writers replaced it, for a time at least, with writing that continued to contextualise, interpret and value the work Fuller championed within a changing art world context.

### **New Knowledge**

The detailed analysis of Peter Fuller's critical position leading up to the founding of *Modern Painters* is among very few sustained studies of the range of the critic's work, and reveals the extent to which the magazine and its editorial values were tied in with Fuller's own values and tastes. This provides an understanding of *Modern Painters'* position within the British art world at the time when Karen Wright became editor.

My analysis of *Modern Painters* has produced the first sustained study of the magazine as part of a wider discourse around British art criticism. It has identified and examined factors and agents within the broader art world that have influenced changes in art criticism and, significantly, the decline of a particular form of Kantian criticism represented by Peter Fuller's *Modern Painters*. The conclusions I have drawn regarding the relationships between art magazines, criticism and the market contribute to ongoing critical debates on the subject.<sup>45</sup> Archival research has allowed me insight into Fuller's critical processes, and his relationships with advertisers and artists.

### **Contemporary Relevance**

This study has shown that art criticism has lost its authority as a creator of value, and that a model for criticism that is based on the judgement of value through the

exercise of taste is no longer sufficient to address work that is made, distributed and sold within a multifaceted, international art world characterised by the radical individualism of 'late-capitalism'. The relativism of postmodern culture and the disintegration of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' have revealed the contingency of value judgements. Where value judgements are made, they are bound up in, and become a tool of the art market. The authenticity of judgements, then, is questionable due to the apparent or potential commercial interests that might influence any evaluation of the work in question.

Fuller's model of criticism was not sufficient within this context because it did not acknowledge or allow for the changing contexts within which art works, and particularly paintings, are made, distributed and understood. When *Modern Painters* started to address ideas and questions relating to the dissolution of medium specificity, the 'death of painting', international perspectives and influences, this provided a more convincing argument for the continuing relevance of the British traditions of painting favoured by Peter Fuller within a changing art world.

If criticism has become a functioning part of the art market in terms of value creation, the question must be asked, what value can criticism continue to have beyond that role, and can criticism retain authenticity and authority within that context? What *Modern Painters* demonstrated under Karen Wright was that, moving away from the Kantian model, there was much more to be said about British art in a broader context.

Fuller is important because he kept alive an interest in British painting and sculpture at a time when other publications were turning their attention to other, less traditional forms of art, including the 'young British artists', and embracing the global nature of the 'mega-visual tradition'. Although Fuller's model of criticism was unsustainable within that cultural context, by providing a platform for the continuing assessment and interpretation of such work, he provided the opportunity for his successor, Karen Wright, to renegotiate *Modern Painters'* position in relation to the new contexts.

The British Romantic landscape tradition continues to form a significant part of the British and international art market, and Fuller remains one of the few writers (and editors) to have produced and published such a volume of writing on these artists. His magazine provided a platform for other artists and writers to explore, examine, interpret and evaluate the work of artists in whom other publications might not have had the same interest. Roy Oxlade was one such artist and writer. After Fuller's death, he went on to edit *Blunt Edge*, the journal of the Peter Fuller Memorial Foundation, which published writing that continued to address art, ideas and concerns similar to Fuller's.

Fuller's importance, then, is not only in the writing that he published while he was alive, but also in his continuing influence after his death. As time has passed, art criticism has continued to move away from Fuller's concerns. Although, as I have argued, these shifts have been both inevitable and, mostly, necessary, the work that Fuller celebrated, and the reasons he gave for his assessment of artists like Stanley Spencer, Graham Nash, Roy Oxlade and Graham Sutherland, should continue to be seen and heard.

## Limitations and Further Research

This thesis has focussed on a single publication, *Modern Painters*, its editors and writers, and its role in the creation and articulation of value within an art world. Although I have referred to other publications – including *Frieze*, *Dazed & Confused*, *Art Monthly*, and others – this has been to contextualise the discussion of *Modern Painters* by way of comparison and contrast. Although *Modern Painters* as discussed here is indicative of a particular type of art criticism, Fuller's (and later Wright's) magazine was unique, and therefore many of the conclusions drawn do not directly relate to other publications. Further analysis of the wider art critical landscape of this period is required in order to ascertain the broader implications for criticism of the shifts and changes addressed in this thesis. For example, *Frieze*, as a product of the early 1990s British art world, would provide a valuable case study to explore and understand the new forms of criticism that displaced the Kantian tradition represented by Fuller and *Modern Painters*. This would be of particular interest in relation to the further changes that occurred in *Modern Painters* after Karen Wright left the magazine. Any full study of *Modern Painters* would require a detailed study of this period up to the present.

There is much still to be said about Peter Fuller, his writing and his life and work as an art critic. There is a much of interest in the archive of his work, correspondences and ephemera held by Tate Britain, to which I have not referred in this text. A critical biography of Fuller, his life and his writing would fill a gap in knowledge and understanding of this under-studied and undervalued critic. His critical position was often contradictory and problematic, and, as such, requires further dissection and analysis, where Chapter 1 of this thesis has only summarised. What this study has proven for certain, to the author at least, is that

Peter Fuller and his legacy, in the shape of *Modern Painters*, deserves to be reconsidered as a significant figure in the history of art criticism in Britain, and worthy of further consideration.

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- <sup>2</sup> Fuller, Peter, *Seeing Berger: A Revaluation* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), 1981, London: Writers and Readers, p. 16
- <sup>3</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey: A Personal Memoir' in McDonald, J. (ed.), *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*, 1993, Methuen, London, p. xxxi
- <sup>7</sup> Gowrie, G. 'The Migration of Lucian Freud', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 5
- <sup>10</sup> Scruton, R. 'Gilbert & George: Beastly Bad Taste', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 41; Hughes, R. 'Julian Schnabel: The Artist as Entrepreneur', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 39
- <sup>11</sup> Kant, I., *The Critique of Judgement*, 1952, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 51
- <sup>15</sup> Wright explained that 'I did not want the magazine to stay focused only on the small group of English artists Peter was interested in.' Wright, K. *Email to James A. Brown*, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2016. Although not within the scope of this thesis, there are important questions to be raised regarding the politics (not least the gender politics) and power relationships at play within the editorial team at *Modern Painters*.
- <sup>17</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown
- <sup>18</sup> Wright, P. 'Editorial: Englishness: The Romance of the Oubliette', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1990/91, p. 6
- <sup>19</sup> Heron, P. 'William Scott', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1990/91, p. 22
- <sup>20</sup> Wright, K. 'Up Front: An Overwhelming Sensation?', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1997, p. 23
- <sup>25</sup> Fuller, P. 'Editorial: A renaissance in British Art?', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1988, p. 3
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Fuller, P. 'The Journey: A Personal Memoir', p. xxxiii
- <sup>28</sup> Foster, H. from 'Subversive Signs', 1985, in Harrison, C. & Wood, P. (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 2003, London: Blackwell
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> Findlay, M. *The Value of Art*, 2014, Munich/ London/ New York: Prestel, p. 104
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991, London: Verso
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 7
- <sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 8
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p. 8-9
- <sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p. 9
- <sup>37</sup> Greenberg, C., 'Intermedia' in Morgan, Robert C. *Clement Greenberg, Late Writings*, 2003, Minnesota/ London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 94
- <sup>38</sup> Perl, J. email to James A. Brown 12<sup>th</sup> August 2016
- <sup>44</sup> Batchelor, D. 'The New Rote', *Oxford Art Journal*. Vol.12, No.1, 1989. p. 67
- <sup>45</sup> See, for example, Bowman, M. (convenor) *Values or Prices: Reconsidering the Relation Between Art Criticism and the Art Market*, academic session presented at the Association of Art Historians Annual Conference, 2014

## **Appendix I**

**Karen Wright, Interview, ICA, London, February 2013 [edited]**

Appendix I (interview) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions



## **Appendix II**

**Martin Golding, Interview, Skype, 22, April 2015 [edited]**

Appendix II (interview) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

### **Appendix III**

**Linda Saunders, email, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2015 [edited]**

Appendix III (email) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

## **Appendix IV**

**Martin Golding, email, 19 July 2017 [edited]**

Appendix IV (email) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

## **Appendix V**

**Jed Perl, email, 6th August 2016 [edited]**

Appendix V (email) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions

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