

**EXPERIMENT: A Manifesto of Young England, 1928-1931**

Two Volumes

Vol. 1 of 2

Kirstin L. Donaldson

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the little magazine *Experiment*, published in Cambridge between 1928 and 1931. It represents the first book-length study of *Experiment*; and therefore offers a deeper level of engagement with the magazine's social and historical context, its influences, and crucially, its contents.

The appearance of *Experiment* coincided with the tenth anniversary celebrations of Armistice Day; an event which I argue was a catalyst for the formation of a new generation of artists and writers. The First World War created a rupture in society: the myth of the "lost generation" weighed heavily on those who were left behind. The *Experiment* group had lived through the War; however, their childhood experiences were far-removed from those of frontline soldiers. The *Experimenters'* self-identification with the term "postwar" recognised the importance of the War to their sense of identity while simultaneously acknowledging their temporal separation from that moment.

This thesis demonstrates how the *Experiment* group's conception of themselves as a generation was constructed around their relationship to the First World War. It will be shown that they embraced their temporal distinctiveness while nonetheless attempting to situate themselves within established historical narratives. This is evidenced in the group's appropriation and subversion of traditional avant-garde methods, for example the production of a magazine and manifesto. However, the *Experiment* group never explicitly adopted the term "avant-garde": it will be shown that their preference for the descriptor "experimental" was motivated by their desire to distinguish themselves from the past, by the scientism of Cambridge, and also by the contemporary perception of avant-gardism as "decadent."

The artistic and literary experiments produced by the Cambridge group display an emphasis on "process" over "results." I argue that this was a result of the contemporary social and political situation in the late Twenties and early Thirties. These years were marked by unprecedented social and political upheaval: the *Experiment* group were conscious both of the importance of their epoch and its ephemerality, and sought to capture this impression in their art and literature. These dual conditions of permanence and impermanence are inherent in the nature of the little magazine itself. It has been argued that such publications are necessarily incomplete: that they are "only historically legible at the point of their obsolescence." This thesis argues that in its quest to capture the essence of the period 1928-1931, the *Experiment* project was doomed: the success of such a venture can only be judged in retrospect. In this regard, *Experiment* represents the quintessential little magazine.

Ultimately, what this thesis provides is a pre-history to the canon of scholarship that addresses the artistic and literary movements of the nineteen-thirties. Previous studies have marked out 1930 as the critical year in the development of the Thirties generation. Members of the *Experiment* group went on to achieve considerable success beyond Cambridge, influencing the diverse fields of art, criticism, film, literature, and science. This thesis argues that the process of becoming a coherent and active literary and artistic generation was in fact begun in 1928. That process was *Experiment*.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that all of the research presented in this thesis is my own work. I also declare that none of the material in this thesis has previously been published in its current form. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University

## EXPERIMENT: A Manifesto of Young England, 1928-1931

### INTRODUCTION

In November 1928 a new student magazine appeared in Cambridge: that magazine was *Experiment*. It was the product of a coterie of Cambridge undergraduates – a self-appointed “local intelligentsia”<sup>1</sup> – that sought to provide a forum for their own literary and artistic endeavours as well as those of “likeminded individuals.”<sup>2</sup> The editorial committee of *Experiment* was comprised of mathematician, poet, and emerging critic William Empson (Magdalene College), mathematician Jacob Bronowski (Jesus College), Labour peer Viscount Ennismore, known simply as William Hare (Magdalene College), classics student Hugh Sykes Davies (St John’s College), and English student and aspiring artist Humphrey Jennings (Pembroke College).

The timing of the appearance of *Experiment* in Cambridge is critical to our understanding of the magazine and its importance in the history of twentieth-century Art and Letters: it marks the precise moment at which a new generation of artists and writers united in a collective endeavour to creatively express their shared experience of contemporary culture. The first proof copies of *Experiment* were released to Cambridge local presses on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1928 before formal publication on the 12<sup>th</sup>.<sup>3</sup> The timing of the magazine’s release to coincide with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Armistice Day is significant. The date of publication was a deliberate act of subversion undoubtedly encouraged by *Experiment*’s financial-backer Viscount Ennismore. Following the announcement in University magazines in early October of the magazine’s imminent arrival, *The Cambridge Gownsmen and Undergraduate* wrote on 20<sup>th</sup> October that:

Lord Ennismore, we hear, the aggressive Labour peer, has resolved to be known in the future as plain Mr. Hare, though it is untrue that he will go into mourning for his title. A noble

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<sup>1</sup> G.M. Turnell, ‘The Local Intelligentsia’, *The Cambridge Review* (March 7 1930): 320-321.

<sup>2</sup> Jason Harding, ‘*Experiment* in Cambridge: A Manifesto of Young England’, *Cambridge Quarterly* Vol.27, No.4, (1998): 289.

<sup>3</sup> *The Cambridge Gownsmen and Undergraduate* (November 10 1928): 10.

example, possibly set for Comrade Sir Oswald Mosley's benefit. Besides, if Mr. Hare *should* at any time get involved in one of the little riots Mr. Maxton is always promising us, and be obliged to inspect our prison system from the inside, what a change for our humourists to serve him up as an item on the menu! Question: Will Mr. Hare change his name on Poppy Day to Mr. Bull? Poppies are unaccountably said to be as a red rag to him. Perhaps they are not red enough for a follower of the Red Flag.<sup>4</sup>

The *Gownsmans*' tongue-in-cheek announcement of Lord Ennismore's preferred pseudonym reveals the importance of the Armistice celebrations (Poppy Day) to *Experiment's* ideology. The association of the magazine's benefactor with the high-profile socialist, chairman of the Independent Labour Party, and conscientious objector James Maxton reveals an enlightening historical narrative. At the end of the 1920s there was increasing opposition to the manner in which Britain chose to commemorate the Armistice of the Great War: "Many people at the time realised the hollowness of the victory and the danger in perpetuating and institutionalising, through the Armistice celebrations, the very ideals and beliefs which caused the war in the first place. Protest against official Remembrance ceremonies is as old as the ceremonies themselves."<sup>5</sup> A letter to the *Evesham Advertiser* in November 1930 describes some of the concerns people had about the annual Remembrance ceremonies. The author writes of Armistice Day celebrations that:

[...] their main tendency is to perpetuate the war spirit, which ever renders the coming of permanent peace impossible. The establishment of this day and the erection of memorials was a grave error [...] for these have fastened the system of armed defence upon one and all firmer than ever; for right through Europe [...] the man who has borne arms is memorialised and praised as never before and what man praises today he will practise tomorrow so that to honour war is, of necessity, to ensure its coming in all its horrors [...]. It is the living we should consider first; we should remember the young amongst us, whose bodies [...] will lie out upon the battlefields of Europe in 'the next war' which is said to be coming, and for which the Armistice Day celebrations and the memorials are simply paving the way. They are the sign and symbol that war shall be, and

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<sup>4</sup> 'One a Rabbit...?', *The Cambridge Gownsmans and Undergraduette* (October 20 1928): 2.

<sup>5</sup> Peace Pledge Union, [http://www.ppu.org.uk/poppy/new/tx\\_swimming.html](http://www.ppu.org.uk/poppy/new/tx_swimming.html): accessed 06/08/2014.



prevent altogether the dawning of that brighter and better day  
when war shall be no more.<sup>6</sup>

The appearance of *Experiment* on a day which had become so politically loaded was a form of protest in line with those opposed to the military monopoly on Remembrance celebrations. *Experiment* calls for its readers to celebrate youth, to not be “littered with the Illustrious Dead and Dying”.<sup>7</sup> The anniversary of the Armistice was a convenient milestone on which to launch the new generation: for them, the moment heralded a break with the past, an end to mourning the loss of the “generation 1914,” a new era for positive expressions of youth and artistic exploration.

However, as Scott McCracken asserts in his essay ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business’:

The dead weighed heavily on the [...] most significant student magazines published at Cambridge University between the wars. [...] this was the generation whose fathers and elder brothers had died in the First World War. They were at once cut off from the past and living forever in its shadow.<sup>8</sup>

This thesis offers a new perspective on the relationship between the interwar *Experiment* generation and their history. I acknowledge the profound impact that the First World War had upon the generation of artists who experienced it only as children, and analyse the development of their attitudes towards that conflict during the period 1928-1931. From the outset, the tone of *Experiment* was set by its irreverent attitude towards the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Armistice celebrations, by its proclamations of youthfulness, and declarations of being resolutely “post-war.” In the first three chapters, I will outline the agonistic relationship of the *Experimenters* to the past. I will show the desire of the *Experiment* group to distinguish themselves from previous generations temporally, while simultaneously assuming ownership of a historical narrative from which they felt excluded. The final chapters demonstrate

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Letter’, *Evesham Advertiser*, quoted in Peace Pledge Union, [http://www.ppu.org.uk/poppy/new/tx\\_swimming.html](http://www.ppu.org.uk/poppy/new/tx_swimming.html): accessed 06/08/2014.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Experiment’, *Experiment* 1 (November 1928): 1.

<sup>8</sup> Scott McCracken, ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume One Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, (ed.) Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 600.

the means by which the *Experiment* group achieved a resolution to the conflict between past and future inherent in the early issues. The concluding numbers of *Experiment* exhibit the artistic maturity that the group idealised in their first manifesto when they wrote that “It has been our object to gather all and none but the not yet ripe fruits of art, science and philosophy at the university [...]. Perhaps we will ripen into extravagance.”<sup>9</sup> The maturation of *Experiment* was achieved through a deviation from the original manifesto, allowing for the inclusion of established artists and writers from outside Cambridge University. The incorporation of contributions by distinguished older artists into the magazine allowed the group to confront the past head-on and ultimately, to achieve a kind of coexistence whereby history could be addressed without consuming the present.

The study of *Experiment* offers a unique perspective on art and literature during the interwar period. As a magazine published over the course of four years, it offers a protracted commentary on the socio-political and artistic concerns of a period defined by uncertainty. The nature of a periodical is dependent upon the cultural conditions of its production. For instance, journals and magazines published on a weekly basis develop a tone and aesthetic that is markedly different from those published monthly or quarterly. Generally speaking, one function of the dailies and weeklies is reportage; keeping their readership constantly informed regarding developments and affairs in the field of interest to which the publication subscribes. However, those journals produced on a less regular basis do not possess this relationship to on-going change: their cultural capital resides, as it were, in-between the lines. *Experiment* and the myriad of other little magazines published during the early twentieth century are examples of the second category of publication. McCracken has argued that these little magazines are:

Transient objects [...] destined for ruin, failure, and defeat; but like a momentary fashion or a passing style in architecture the magazines only become historically legible at the point of their obsolescence. At which point, they can be reconfigured in relation to a broader field within the history of modernity. It is, therefore, their incompleteness rather than their coherence

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Experiment’, *Experiment* 1, 1.

that signals the ways in which they contribute to a broader cultural history.<sup>10</sup>

Incompleteness is a useful concept when addressing *Experiment* and other little magazines. We often talk about the tone, influences, and politics of little magazines and papers, forgetting that they are not one thing: they are not complete. Unlike the visual analysis of a single painting, or the critical examination of a poem, little magazines are multifarious and unwieldy, and present the researcher with challenges unfamiliar to single-object and single-author studies. Little magazines are produced by multiple contributors, over long periods of time, often changing editors in the process.<sup>11</sup>

The problem facing little magazine studies is twofold. On the one hand, we are presented with an object that aesthetically resembles the daily or weekly newspaper; however, its irregular publication prohibits it from fulfilling a reportage function and, as a result, we decline to accept the contradictions and changes in attitude that we anticipate from the daily press. Instead, we expect that little magazines should produce a manifesto, and that they should abide by it. This expectation that small presses should release a mission-statement and accomplish its stated aims is symptomatic of the traditional scholarly approach to artistic and literary subjects. However, if we accept McCracken's assertions that little magazines are by their very nature "incomplete," we must alter our approach to arts scholarship in order to reflect our subject.

For this reason, I do not intend to present here a "definitive" account of *Experiment*: no such account is possible. *Experiment* is not a singular object: each issue marks a new beginning, no two issues evoking quite the same impression. It is the product of multiple authors and artists, each of whom contribute "complete" works; however, there exists no definitive conclusion. Nonetheless, certain themes and concerns permeate each of the issues, and certain runs can be grouped together, clearly demarcated by bibliographic issues. The pervading theme in *Experiment* is a concern with generations, and the young group's own relationship

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<sup>10</sup> McCracken, 'Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business,' 599.

<sup>11</sup> In the case of *Experiment* William Empson acted as editor-and-chief for issues 1-3, being replaced after his expulsion in 1929 by Jacob Bronowski and Hugh Sykes for the remaining issues 4-7.

to history. As a result, the little magazine genre assumes critical significance as the mode of communication adopted by the *Experiment* generation. As will be demonstrated in the following thesis, *Experiment* was a process of literary and artistic evolution: between 1928 and 1931 it changed editors, altered its editorial policy, and eventually transformed its entire appearance. These changes to the magazine were in direct correlation with the group's increasing artistic maturity. Ultimately, the obsolescence of *Experiment* was a consequence of its own success. The contribution of the *Experiment* group to the popular Paris-based magazine *transition* in June 1930, and the reviews of the final issue in the *Times Literary Supplement* and *London Mercury* afforded the group considerable publicity, effectively ending their artistic adolescence. The *Experiment* moment would be reconfigured in historical narrative as juvenilia, a passing comment in the success stories of the group's lives beyond Cambridge.<sup>12</sup>

Journal studies have become increasingly prominent in recent years, having been identified as a productive means of charting the development of movements in modern art and literature. Modernist studies have begun to recognise the role of periodicals and little magazines in servicing new writing, introducing readers to new movements in the arts, engendering debate, disseminating ideas, and challenging settled assumptions.<sup>13</sup> Peter Marks has suggested that periodicals provide "unrivalled contemporary documentation of [...] ongoing literary developments, of rivalries and collaborations, of short-lived enthusiasms and failed projects and of rich and illuminating work of lasting value" and, as such, question and historicize the later monumentalized curriculum of a few select and familiar names.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Experiment* is most often mentioned in passing in autobiographies and biographies of the magazine's contributors. See: Pierre Assouline, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: A Biography* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012). Keith Beattie, *Humphrey Jennings* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010). John Haffenden, *William Empson: Volume I, Among the Mandarins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Kevin Jackson, *Humphrey Jennings: The Definitive Biography of One of Britain's Most Important Film-makers* (London: Picador: 2004). Kathleen Rain, *The Land Unknown* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975). Julian Trevelyan, *Indigo Days* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1959).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, 'General Introduction,' *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume 1, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Marks, 'Making the New: Literary Periodicals and the Construction of Modernism,' *Precursors and Aftermaths: Literature in English 1914-1945* 2:1 (2004):37.

Owing to the fact that little magazine studies is a relatively new field, the majority of scholarship has thus far been focussed on a narrow range of comparatively well-known publications: British magazines *The Egoist*, *BLAST*, *The Criterion*, and *Scrutiny*, and continental periodicals *Littérature*, *Documents*, *transition*, and *Transatlantic Review* have all been the subject of major studies.<sup>15</sup> However, there exists a vast ‘hinterland’ of little magazines that remain unexplored.<sup>16</sup> The three-volume publication of Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker’s *Modernist Magazines Project* has gone some way to both making readers and scholars aware of the wealth of periodical material that exists, and actively stimulating research into those areas.

Despite the increased awareness of little magazines as objects worthy of academic study, several factors have undoubtedly contributed to the relative neglect of magazines in modernist studies.<sup>17</sup> The primary problem in studying little magazines is what Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman call ‘the hole in the archive.’ Describing this problem, Scholes and Wulfman write:

Most of our libraries simply do not have copies of the fragile but important magazines that published the work of writers like Ezra Pound and other young modernists in the first decades of the twentieth century. Because so many had small circulations and short runs, today these magazines are rare, preserved in a scattering of archives around the world but inevitably crumbling as century-old acidic paper consumes itself. Although reprints of some of these magazines are more widely available, they are not always complete, so for many who wish to study them, the magazines are simply not available. And even when a library

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<sup>15</sup> George Bornstein, *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Jayne Marek, *Women Editing Modernism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995). Andrew Causey, Richard Cork, David Curtis, and Penelope Curtis (eds.), *Blast to Freeze: British Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz and Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2002). William Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972). Keith Tuma, ‘Wyndham Lewis, Blast, and Popular Culture’ *ELH* Vol.54, No.2, (Summer 1987), 403-419. Jason Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny* (London: NLB, 1979). Dawn Ades, Simon Baker (eds.), *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and ‘Documents’* (London and Cambridge, Mass: Hayward Gallery and MIT Press, 2006). Noel Riley Fitch (ed.), *In transition: A Paris Anthology, Writing and Art from transition Magazine 1927-30*, (London: Secker&Warburg, 1990). Dougald McMillan, *transition 1927-38: The History of a Literary Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1975).

<sup>16</sup> Brooker and Thacker, ‘General Introduction,’ 4.

<sup>17</sup> That is, the number of magazine-studies relative to the number of magazines.

owns a full run of a magazine, it may be irredeemably mutilated. In order to preserve magazine issues and ensure that their runs remain complete, libraries often bind periodicals into volumes that combine several months of publication into one large tome.<sup>18</sup>

The constraints facing the scholar of little magazines are particularly pertinent to a discussion of *Experiment*. The full run of *Experiment's* seven issues is only available for access by researchers at three British institutions: Cambridge University Library, The Bodleian Library (Oxford), and the British Library (London).<sup>19</sup> The rarity of the magazine engenders further restrictions: in order to preserve the few extant copies of the periodical, conservation precautions are increased rendering access exceptionally difficult.<sup>20</sup> In the case of *Experiment*, conservation concerns prohibited photocopying or extensively photographing the magazine. However, I believe that in order to produce scholarship of the highest standard, the primary material ought to be available to the keen and critical reader. I have therefore produced a full transcription of *Experiment* as a second volume to this thesis. Although the reproduction of little magazines either as facsimiles, online resources, or otherwise is the subject of much debate in the journal studies community, I firmly believe that availability and content are of primary importance. This position largely corresponds with George Bornstein's argument in favour of a "material modernism" that examines "modernism in its original sites of production and the continually shifting physicality of its texts and transmissions."<sup>21</sup> For Bornstein, the inherent meaning of a text is mutable, dependent upon bibliographic codes such as typeface, layout, binding, and price. I am in agreement with Bornstein that these factors ultimately impact upon our critical reading of a magazine, and have therefore attempted as-far-as-is-possible to recreate the original layout and typeface of *Experiment* in my transcription. As will be demonstrated in this thesis,

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Scholes and Richard Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 196.

<sup>19</sup> Several other institutions possess part-runs, for instance the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh carry issues 1-6.

<sup>20</sup> In recent years measures have been taken to overcome access-issues with regard to little magazines. The Modernist Journals Project at Brown University has to-date digitised twenty-five modernist magazines. The University of Iowa's Dada Digital Library has established a similar online resource for the books, pamphlets and periodicals of the Dada movement.

<sup>21</sup> George Bornstein, *Material Modernisms: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

material analysis offers a further dimension of understanding when examining a magazine such as *Experiment*: many of the following analyses will illustrate the physical importance of the magazine layout and format in creating or extending meaning in individual works.

Usually the history of a little magazine is summarized in its format. The first issue consists, let us say, of sixty-four pages, with half tone illustrations printed on coated paper. The second issue has sixty-four pages, illustrated with linocuts. The third has only forty-eight pages; the fourth has thirty-two, without illustrations; the fifth never appears.<sup>22</sup>

The above quotation from Malcolm Cowley – American novelist, literary critic, and one-time editor of the little magazine *Broom* – effectively demonstrates the style of scholarship that has previously proliferated in journal studies. While these details are undoubtedly important in developing an impression of a magazine and its scope, it does not offer any significant insight into a magazine’s ideology or impact. The typical treatment of little magazines is conveniently summarised in the still-standard bibliographic text of Hoffman, Allen and Ulrich, who write of *Experiment*:

EXPERIMENT. (Trinity College.) Nov. 1928-Oct. 1930. Irregular. Cambridge, Eng. illus. Editors: William Empson (Nov. 1928- May 1929); J. Bronowski and Hugh Sykes (Nov. 1929-Oct. 1930).

William Empson’s work in poetics is already widely known. As editor of *Experiment*, he is able to give wide scope to his talents, and to publish the writing of other talented artists, most of them of

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<sup>22</sup> Malcolm Cowley, *Exile’s Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s*, ed. Donald Faulkner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 188.

the “Cambridge Group.” In the sixth number the magazine, mainly under the influence of J. Bronowski, who had become editor in November 1929, changed its policy, to give freer access to non-Cambridge writers. The magazine belongs definitely to the literature and aesthetics of the third decade of our century, and makes important experimental contributions to both. Included is the verse of William Empson, J. Bronowski, Richard Eberhardt, and Conrad Aiken; and the criticism of Empson, Bronowski, and W. G. Archer.<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately, the description given above poses more questions than it answers: Who are the “Cambridge Group”? What defines the literature and aesthetics of the 1920s? What kind of experimental contributions did the group offer to the fields of aesthetics and literature? However, the value of these types of bibliographies of little magazines lies in the questions they leave unanswered. They provide a springboard for researchers like myself who seek to address the lacunae in the information and extrapolate from the facts a narrative that provides a historically and socially relevant context for the magazine. Therefore, this thesis will seek to provide answers to the questions posited above, incorporating those inquiries in a broader historical arc.

*Experiment* has not escaped the attention of other scholars wishing to expand upon the factual bibliographies of Hoffman and others.<sup>24</sup> In total, three significant essays

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<sup>23</sup> Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946), 288.

<sup>24</sup> For examples see: Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946); David Miller and



have been published on *Experiment*: Jason Harding's 'Experiment in Cambridge: 'A Manifesto of Young England''; Kate Price's 'Finite But Unbounded: *Experiment* Magazine, Cambridge, England, 1928-31'; and Scott McCracken's 'Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business: *Experiment* (1928-30), *The Venture* (1928-30), and *Cambridge Left* (1933-4).<sup>25</sup>

Each of these publications has been a valuable resource for the study presented here: each offers a slightly differing perspective on the magazine, and raises issues that I have attempted to address. Harding's article is the earliest of the three, and has become the primary reference text in subsequent discussions of *Experiment*. His essay offers an extensive and detailed timeline of *Experiment*: he provides generous biographies of many *Experiment* contributors; a comprehensive overview of the magazine's reception in Cambridge; and a brief overview of some of the poetry that appeared in its pages, with particular attention to that of Empson. While providing an interesting cultural biography of *Experiment*, Harding's text fails to deliver any meaningful insight into the nature of the magazine: it is restricted both by its length, and its status as the first extended discussion of *Experiment*. However, the final pages of Harding's article introduce the idea of 'generation' as a unifying factor in the *Experiment* narrative. He writes that "If the bonds were never strong enough to constitute a unified movement, then *Experiment* did provide a rare meeting-place for a generation of Cambridge students. 'We felt ourselves to be a growing-point even when we were in the bud', stated Kathleen Raine."<sup>26</sup> This passing remark introduced to the current thesis a central focus: In what ways did the *Experiment* group constitute a 'generation,' and what socio-cultural factors – beyond shared age and location – united them in such a way as to make them historically relevant.

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Richard Price, *British Poetry Magazines 1914-2000: A History and Bibliography of 'Little Magazines'* (London: The British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2006); Alvin Sullivan, *British Literary Magazines: The Modern Age, 1914-1984* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> Full citations: Jason Harding, 'Experiment in Cambridge: 'A Manifesto of Young England'', *Cambridge Quarterly* 27:4 (1998), 287-309.; Kate Price, 'Finite But Unbounded: *Experiment* Magazine, Cambridge, England, 1928-31', *Jacket* 20 (Dec. 2002), <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/price-expe.html>; Scott McCracken, 'Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business: *Experiment* (1928-30), *The Venture* (1928-30), and *Cambridge Left* (1933-4)' in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume 1, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 599-622.

<sup>26</sup> Harding, 'Experiment in Cambridge,' 309.

The second notable publication to discuss *Experiment* at some length is Price's 'Finite But Unbounded.' Price professes to focus "on the earlier numbers of *Experiment* in an attempt to capture something of its original spirit."<sup>27</sup> And while her article is certainly interesting in drawing comparison between the magazine's attitudes towards science and literature, its focus on a very narrow spectrum of *Experiment's* output – primarily on 'science' subjects covered in issues one to four – results in a failure to contextualise *Experiment* holistically. Nonetheless, Price's text does raise issues that are pertinent to the discussion that follows. Price recognises that interdisciplinarity was a cornerstone of *Experiment's* ideology, and this *modus operandi* is explored more fully in the second chapter of this thesis. Price led me to question the nature of the 'experiment' that took place in Cambridge between 1928 and 1931, and examine how the scientific term might be applied to the arts.

The most recent and most critically illuminating essay to consider *Experiment* is McCracken's contribution to *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*. Although McCracken's work deals with two further Cambridge magazines – *The Venture* and *Cambridge Left* – his arguments are equally useful when applied solely to *Experiment*. The core of McCracken's thesis and its relevance to this study has been described elsewhere in this introduction. Essentially, McCracken posits that the value of *Experiment* lies in its incompleteness, its failure to present any firm conclusions before its dissolution. He prefers to scrutinize Cambridge's student publications as objects that chart social change as opposed to 'discrete cultural objects.'<sup>28</sup> As has been suggested above, the notion of 'incompleteness' has been advantageous as a means of theorising the nature of little magazines in this dissertation. However, McCracken attempts to draw direct correlation between the incompleteness of the little magazine and that of the interwar period. Unfortunately this leads to the author retrospectively attributing significance to events in light of his own historical knowledge. For example:

Cambridge between 1927 and 1930 was still haunted by the shadow of the First World War. The impact of the war marked the interwar period to the extent that every subsequent crisis

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<sup>27</sup> Kate Price, 'Finite But Unbounded', 4.

<sup>28</sup> McCracken, 'Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business,' 600.

took the form of an aftershock of that original tremor [...]; the images provoked by the war come to mean not just the 1914-18 conflict, but an imminent future, because it is the inevitable consequence of a failed system of capitalism, made manifest in the Wall Street Crash in October 1929 and subsequent Depression.<sup>29</sup>

Negotiating the interwar period poses many difficulties in light of the understandable tendency of the historian to draw seamless links between events in 1929 and others in 1939. From a historical perspective, the interwar years are attributed especial cultural distinctiveness, presented as an inevitable and uncontrollable movement toward disaster. The contributors to *Experiment* were self-conscious of their position as a generation defined by a war in which they did not fight, and sought to counter this through the organisation of a community and magazine that reflected their unique dilemma. However, having disbanded in 1931, the young *Experimenters* could not have foreseen the full significance their organisation would adopt post-1939. Indeed, in her 1975 autobiography, Kathleen Raine wrote that: "In the mid-nineteen-twenties revolution was not yet in the air. We did not know, young fresh folk as we were, that we were living in the last years of that European civilization of whose architecture, whose literature, whose thoughts we were the heirs."<sup>30</sup> I therefore reject McCracken's assertion that we can read in *Experiment's* treatment of war themes a dual implication pointing to both the past and the future. This does not mean to suggest that anxieties over possible future conflicts did not form an important part of the history of *Experiment*. They did. In contrast to McCracken's approach, this thesis will offer examples of how specific cultural and political events were interpreted by the *Experiment* group, leading to an increasingly political purview in later issues (5-7).

The political generalisations we find in McCracken's exposition are a product of his ambition. In attempting to address three Cambridge student magazines with a combined lifespan of six years, he is forced to conflate their contexts and histories. McCracken writes:

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<sup>29</sup> McCracken, 'Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business,' 609.

<sup>30</sup> Raine, *The Land Unknown*, 16.

The 1920s had been a period of labour militancy, culminating in the defeat of the General Strike in 1926. The year 1929 saw the Wall Street Crash, and the beginning of the Great Depression. The second failed Labour government lasted, in almost impossible circumstances, from 1929 to 1933; and 1933 saw the coming to power of the Nazis in Germany.<sup>31</sup>

Inarguably, the 1920s and early Thirties were a time of rapid political change. And undoubtedly the escalating political situation in Europe in 1933 had a profound effect on *Experiment's* successor, *Cambridge Left* (1933-34). However, *Experiment* itself was not subject to the same political context. A contributing factor to the contextual confusion of McCracken's work is that he does not address the magazines under examination sequentially. A defining feature of *Experiment* was that its ideology developed and changed during the course of its publication: as a result, contributions to issue one differ in their context from those published in issue six. This thesis is valuable in that it offers an in-depth and individualised analysis of *Experiment* and its political concerns. As opposed to being consumed in the broad arc of political upheaval of the interwar years, I will examine the specific issues that impacted upon *Experiment* between 1928 and 1931. It is therefore necessary that this study should be chronologically organised.

Each of the three studies of *Experiment* cited above provided a unique perspective on how to approach *Experiment* as a historical and material object. This research has benefitted not only from the conclusions reached in these papers, but also from their omissions. One feature possessed by all of the standard texts on *Experiment* is an overview of the magazine's contributors and its publication history. Previous researchers have chosen to highlight these aspects of *Experiment* as introductions to their essays: this inadvertently implies that the reason to study *Experiment* lies in the celebrity of its contributors and their career successes beyond Cambridge. The arguments in favour of a reassessment of *Experiment* are manifold: it offers especial artistic, political, and cultural insight into one of the most turbulent periods of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, *Experiment* is made more remarkable owing to its distinguished list of contributors, of whom something ought to be said.

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<sup>31</sup> McCracken, 'Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business,' 608.

In his espousal of the value of little magazines, Ezra Pound wrote in 1930 that:

There are plenty of people over forty who are willing to acknowledge that Mr. Joyce, Mr. Eliot, and the rest appeared (past tense) ten or fifteen years ago in small and allegedly eccentric magazines, and who are, on the other hand, wholly unwilling to behave as if writers who will, in ten or fifteen years, hold analogous positions in the world of letters may conceivably be now (1930-31) appearing in magazines as apparently tawdry and freakish.<sup>32</sup>

Adding that:

The work of writers who have emerged in or via such magazines outweighs in permanent value the work of the writers who have not emerged in this manner. The history of contemporary letters has, to a very manifest extent, been written in such magazines.<sup>33</sup>

The successes enjoyed by *Experiment's* contributors following their time at Cambridge testify to the verity of Pound's remarks. However, in the case of *Experiment*, the sphere of influence stretched far-beyond literature, permeating painting, photography, film, politics, and the sciences. The range of *Experiment's* interests reflects the intellectual atmosphere of Cambridge in the 1920s and 1930s. This was a period of remarkable intellectual vitality at the University: C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards were transforming the understanding of meaning within the newly formed English faculty; Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, and G.E. Moore's analytical investigations were transforming British philosophy; while the scientists at the Cavendish Laboratory decoded the universe and produced multiple Nobel Laureates.<sup>34</sup> Bronowski remembered this period as a time at which

All intellectual life was exhilarating and on the move [...]. Quantum physics was transformed by Dirac and the others. Cockcroft split the atom, and Chadwick discovered the neutron. At the same time, literature and painting were made over by

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<sup>32</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Small Magazines', *The English Journal* 19:9 (Nov.1930): 704.

<sup>33</sup> Pound, 'Small Magazines', 702.

<sup>34</sup> C.T.R. Wilson and Arthur Compton received the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1927, followed by Sir Owen Richardson in 1928. In 1929 Frederick Hopkins was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine.

the shock of surrealism and the films (and later the radio) grew to an art.<sup>35</sup>

The diversity of intellectual pursuits being undertaken at Cambridge by world-class academics attracted equally brilliant students. The *Experiment* group was comprised of extraordinarily gifted individuals covering a broad spectrum of talents. The range of expertise present in the magazine is effectively summarised in a list of their subsequent achievements: Empson enjoyed a long career as a poet, critic, and distinguished academic; Bronowski was co-founder and Director of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, and a prominent public intellectual in the UK and USA; William Hare, Lord Ennismore 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Listowel became Governor-General of Ghana; Sykes Davies achieved some notoriety as a Surrealist before becoming Head of English at Cambridge; and Jennings became Britain's most-celebrated documentary filmmaker before his untimely death.

The editorial panel of *Experiment* were by no-means the sole talents associated with the group. Many of its regular and sometime contributors also achieved considerable acclaim. These included: Basil Wright (documentary filmmaker); George Reavey (poet, publisher, translator); Gerald Noxon (filmmaker and radio producer); Richard Eberhart and Kathleen Raine (eminent poets); T.H. White (novelist, author of *The Once and Future King*); Malcolm Lowry (novelist); Henri Cartier-Bresson (photographer); Sir Misha Black (architect and designer, founder of Artists' International Association), and Julian Trevelyan (surrealist painter and etcher).

This exceptional constellation of talents and interests was a defining feature of *Experiment*. The opening editorial-manifesto published in November 1928 declared that "It has been our object to gather all and none but the not yet too ripe fruits of art, science and philosophy in the university. We did not wish so much that our articles should be sober and guarded as that they should be stimulating and lively

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<sup>35</sup> Jacob Bronowski in J.J. O'Connor and E.F. Robertson, 'Jacob Bronowski', <http://www-history.mcs.st-and.ac.uk/Biographies/Bronowski.html>.

and take up a strong line.”<sup>36</sup> The importance placed by the *Experiment* group on interdisciplinarity effectively animated the journal. As will be shown in the succeeding chapters, there is a fluidity of exchange between disciplines: poetry interacts with music and cinema, prose assumes the character of drama and performance, and literary criticism is transformed into a science. These are the qualities of *Experiment*. The dynamism of magazines like *Experiment* was celebrated by Pound, again in his 1930 article for *The English Journal*:

The little magazines that have printed only verse or only fiction have not been as effective as those which printed also editorial and critical matter. They are always more “fugitive.” Fruit unrelated to tree. Cut flowers. The active periodical is something different from an anthology collected after the fact. And the periodical anthology does not enter active contemporary life as effectively as the review that definitely, even with foolhardiness, asserts its hope and ambition.<sup>37</sup>

Pound’s use of the botanical metaphor is especially interesting here. He argues that magazines that publish only one literary form – eg. poetry – are not successful “as magazines.” He writes:

Where there is not the binding force of some kind of agreement, however vague or unanalysed, between three or four writers, it seems improbable that the need of a periodical really exists. Everyone concerned would probably be happier in publishing individual volumes.<sup>38</sup>

Where contributors to the magazine act solely as individuals, they are “fruit unrelated to tree.” Pound’s metaphor is highly compatible with that of the *Experiment* group. The youth and relative inexperience of *Experiment*’s contributors, combined with their shared sense of exclusion from recent history, provided the cohesion required to produce what Pound termed an “active periodical.” The dynamism of a periodical can be measured by its engagement with contemporary life, and the insight which it affords that period from a historical

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Experiment’, *Experiment* 1, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Pound, ‘Small Magazines’, 703.

<sup>38</sup> Pound, ‘Small Magazines’, 703.

perspective. On the basis of Pound's schema, *Experiment* can be declared an "effective" and "active" little magazine.

Returning to Pound's assertion that in order to produce a culturally active periodical, there must exist an agreement of sorts amongst the contributors as to the periodical's function, it is important to assess how and why *Experiment* came into being. The original figurehead of *Experiment* was Empson (Magdalene College), who had recently gained a mathematics degree, with a First in Part I and a 2i in Part II of the 1928 tripos. Following this "disappointing" result, Empson elected to remain at Cambridge to read for the English tripos and pursue his by-then burgeoning literary career. Empson had assumed the role of 'Skipper' – or literary editor – at the satirical weekly student paper *The Granta* in 1927, and during the final months of his mathematics degree began publishing poetry in *The Cambridge Review*. Through his literary endeavours Empson became something of a local celebrity; Raine noted that, at the time, "his presence spellbound us all."<sup>39</sup> Empson's status as *primus inter pares* has continued in the reception history of *Experiment*.<sup>40</sup> Empson's scientifically-inflected poetry was praised by his contemporaries as the most successful of the Cambridge poets in 1929, and his prominence amongst that group has continued into modern scholarship.<sup>41</sup>

In the Michaelmas Term of 1928, Empson was approached by Bronowski, a mathematician from Jesus College. Bronowski – then in his second year – proceeded to achieve the status of Wrangler (First Class) in Part I, and Senior Wrangler (ranked top amongst First Class students) in Part II of the Maths tripos. Amongst his colleagues Bronowski struggled to find other undergraduates who shared his wider – and particularly his literary – interests.<sup>42</sup> Recognising that Empson shared his dual passions for art and science, Bronowski proposed that they form a group to meet

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<sup>39</sup> Raine, *The Land Unknown*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> Harding, 'Experiment in Cambridge', 289.

<sup>41</sup> F.R. Leavis, 'Cambridge Poetry', *The Cambridge Review* Vol.50, (1 March 1929): 317.

<sup>42</sup> Jacob Bronowski, 'Recollections of Humphrey Jennings', *The Twentieth Century* (Jan. 1959): 45.



regularly and discuss their interests. From these meetings grew the idea of forming a magazine.<sup>43</sup>

It is critical to this thesis that the *Experiment* group was formed before the conception of the magazine. As suggested above in the quotation from Pound, the notion of “like-mindedness” and shared vision is paramount to a magazine’s success. In his introduction to *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, David Sylvester places a similar emphasis on importance of community to the Dada and Surrealist ‘movements’:

When we speak of dada and surrealist art, it is not like speaking of fauve or cubist art, of gothic or baroque art; it is like speaking of, say, Tantric art or, for that matter, Christian art. Dada and Surrealism are not art movements; they are not even literary movements with attendant artists. They are religions, with a view of the world, a code of behaviour [...], a proselytizing spirit, a joy in membership of a community of the like-minded.<sup>44</sup>

Sylvester’s assertion that cultural formations such as Dada and Surrealism are not ‘movements’ but rather the result of a shared world-view finds an interesting comparison in *Experiment*. In recounting his time at Cambridge during the *Experiment* moment, Trevelyan noted that “the word *weltanschauung* was used much by us at the time.”<sup>45</sup> Trevelyan’s statement implies that the group were united in their global outlook, but also that that outlook encompassed all of human experience.<sup>46</sup> The notion of a group organised around a perspective as opposed to a single aesthetic principle goes some way to accounting for the varied output of groups such as *Experiment*.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bronowski, ‘Recollections of Humphrey Jennings’, 45.

<sup>44</sup> David Sylvester, ‘Regarding the Exhibition’ in Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London: Arts Council Great Britain, 1978), 1.

<sup>45</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 17.

<sup>46</sup> See: Karl Mannheim, ‘On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*’, in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 33-83.

<sup>47</sup> In the case of Dada and Surrealism it also accounts for the multiple affiliate groups – for example the Dissident Surrealists – that appeared at different times and in different places to the original formation.

The magazine genre adopts an increasingly significant role in a system based upon a general principle of communality. The magazine is essentially “a vehicle simultaneously of individual and collective utterance.”<sup>48</sup> This proclamation of the magazine as the most efficient form of community – allowing contributors to remain individuals and, equally, part of a common enterprise – is echoed in the opening essay in the *Experiment* contribution to the June 1930 issue of *transition* in which Bronowski began:

I suppose the word *group* is unavoidable. *Aggregate* has no direction; and *arrangement*, a poor sound. But I should have liked *arrangement*. It pretends so little to order, is so much a convenience; it has that hint of casualness and, oddly, the arbitrary. I want to say accident, a stumbling upon discovery, *O my America*. Principles, as a foundation even, are well enough; a group may make much of them, they may be bandied about and become... tabletalk. But literature does not come that way, nor has that kind of immorality, a thing at best in common and perhaps no more than individual. Literature is somehow accidental, in the sense that accident is quick, is formative, bears into the very bone of quality. Growth comes afterwards.<sup>49</sup>

Bronowski's statement implies a level of informality not usually associated with artistic or literary 'movements.' Raymond Williams defines 'movements' as cultural formations “in which artists come together in the common pursuit of some specific artistic aim”; however, he notes that there are complex issues surrounding the study of groups, especially regarding their organisation.<sup>50</sup> One specific problem identified by Williams is the terms themselves, an issue clearly also recognised by Bronowski. Williams writes that “some of the most common descriptions of relatively informal groups, notably 'school', have been shared, often by deliberate if critical imitation, with more formal institutions.”<sup>51</sup> Chapter One will assess the question of group formation in further detail, but it is useful to acknowledge here that the *Experiment* group should be recognised as belonging to the second organisational strata in Williams' schema. That is to say that it is a group “not based

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<sup>48</sup> Sylvester, 'Regarding the Exhibition', 1.

<sup>49</sup> Jacob Bronowski, 'Experiment', in *transition: An International Quarterly for Creative Experiment*, No.19-20 (Spring-Summer: June 1930): 107.

<sup>50</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Formations' in *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981), 62.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, 'Formations', 63.

on formal membership, but organized around some *collective public manifestation*, such as an exhibition, a group press or periodical, or an explicit manifesto.”<sup>52</sup> This form of organisation was common in the twentieth century, with many groups forming around a “general programme, including many or indeed all the arts, and often additionally, in relation to this some very general cultural (often ‘political’) position.”<sup>53</sup> Williams states that the “best examples” of these types of organisations are the Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists, bringing his argument in line with Sylvester’s proposal of “likemindedness” and Bronowski’s “accident” as unifying factors in group formation.

Although parallels can be drawn between the activities of the *Experiment* group and those of the Futurists and Surrealists, what is of primary interest is the ways in which *Experiment* distinguishes itself from its predecessors. Chapter One analyses the role of the manifesto in *Experiment*. The manifesto was the cornerstone of many of the historical avant-garde movements, including those cited above. The challenge posed by studying the manifesto as it pertained to *Experiment* lies in the group’s complicated relationship to the past. It will be shown that the *Experimenters* had an agonistic relationship to recent history: they were engaged in a struggle to distinguish themselves temporally from the pre-war avant-gardes while simultaneously positioning themselves in a historical narrative inseparable from them. This is neatly evidenced by the group’s insistence on being “postwar”: this single word implies temporal differentiation while nonetheless inextricably linking the group to the 1914-1918 conflict. Using the manifesto as a starting point, Chapter One will also address questions of generation construction and the differing attitudes to time in the pre and post war periods. The Futurists were able to ask “Why should we look back?” declaring that “Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute.”<sup>54</sup> This kind of disavowal of the past was impossible after 1918. As a result, the *Experiment* group had to find a way of living with the past while avoiding becoming overwhelmed by it. The group then, sought a state of

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<sup>52</sup> Williams, ‘Formations’, 68.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, ‘Formations’, 69.

<sup>54</sup> F.T. Marinetti, ‘The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism (1909)’, in Umbro Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, trans. Robert Brain *et al* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 21-22.

coexistence with the past. This theme permeates *Experiment* and is adroitly condensed in Trevelyan's memory of Humphrey Jennings at the time:

He was alive to the ever-changing value of 'contemporariness' in art, and the word *weltanschauung* was used much by us at the time. 'That picture of yours hasn't got 1931ness,' he would say [...]. Humphrey's 1931ness became a sort of scales of conscience in which I weighed my work [...].<sup>55</sup>

Jennings' insistence on 'contemporariness' implies the dual existence – or coexistence – of things. Furthermore, Trevelyan's recollection suggests that the *Experiment* group understood *weltanschauung* to be the variety of human experiences that constituted the contemporary. The aim of *Experiment* was to capture the intrinsic nature of its period and communicate this in art and writing. On account of following the most catastrophic international conflict in history thus far, the past remains a fundamental part of *Experiment's* collective conscience. The legacy of the First World War is especially prominent in the early issues of *Experiment* partly owing to their proximity to national festivals of remembrance outlined above. The ever-changing nature of the periodical form means that the group's position gradually shifts. The alterations in attitudes towards World War I are addressed in Chapter Four, which assesses the later issues of *Experiment* (Nos.5-7). This second phase of *Experiment* was marked by another series of anniversary celebrations, namely the commemoration of ten years of the League of Nations. Ultimately, the dedication of the *Experiment* group to distilling the essential character of the period between 1928 and 1931 makes it an invaluable source for the study of that moment in history.

The theme of coexistence is continued in Chapter Two. Through an examination of the concept of experimentalism I develop a matrix of cultural interests that influenced the *Experiment* group. The group's opening manifesto declared its commitment to interdisciplinarity: *Experiment* was a forum in which avant-garde and scientific approaches could be tested.<sup>56</sup> This chapter analyses what the term 'experiment' might actually mean in the dual contexts of science and literature.

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<sup>55</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 17-18.

<sup>56</sup> Price, 'Finite But Unbounded', 3.

Price gives a brief outline of these two positions in her essay 'Finite But Unbounded':

The first sense of *Experiment*, then, is an analogy with scientific experiment that is itself putting the scientific outlook, and its implications for personal and social life, to the test. The second sense is that of aesthetic experiment, and there is a similar reflexiveness here: the magazine's poetry and prose contributions read more promisingly as tests of the avant-garde than as attempts at being avant-garde. If this is taken to be a feature of experimental art in general, and if a rhetorical aspect is granted to scientific experiment, then the cultural gap between literary and scientific experimentation begins to look less vast. Operating in the grey area between those two forms, *Experiment* magazine established a space in which its contributors could conduct social experiments as thought-experiments – arguments by means of which the physical world offers greater choice about how to live, rather than less.<sup>57</sup>

The idea that the contributions to *Experiment* function as "social experiments," complements the theory outlined in Chapter One that the group sought to convey a distinct *Weltanschauung*. The art, literature, and criticism addressed in Chapter Two will demonstrate the fluidity that existed between artistic and scientific subjects and approaches in *Experiment*. Although the inspiration for *Experiment* – both its name and its proposed programme – evidently lay in the sciences, in reality it was the exchanges between different arts that provided the most successful examples of experimentation. Chapter Two, then, focuses on the interchangeability of certain arts: specifically, I look to how the qualities of music are integrated into poetry, so that the two arts coexist in a single, unapologetically new form. Likewise, I scrutinize the manner in which cinema and criticism are combined so as to produce both a review and a re-creation of the film itself. While I do address the importance of modern science to the *Experiment* project – particularly its relevance to the poetry of Empson and Cartier-Bresson's paintings – the fairly rapid transformation of the magazine into an almost exclusively literary-cinematic production precluded the possibility of sustained analysis of its interactions with science. As Price notes, "The occasional article on biochemistry or biology, some

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<sup>57</sup> Price, 'Finite But Unbounded', 3-4.

hopeful remarks about the development of an aesthetic science and Empson's relativity poems are about the size of it."<sup>58</sup>

The importance of the cinema to the *Experiment* project is established as one of the cornerstones of experimentation in Chapter Two. This is developed further in Chapter Three, 'The Cinematic Idiom,' in which I examine the relationship between the *Experiment* group and the cinema through its interactions with the Film Society in London, *Close Up* magazine, and the critical writings on the cinema produced by *Experiment's* contributors, both in the magazine and in other Cambridge publications. Critical factors that emerge from the study of *Experiment* and the cinema include issues of state censorship, the transition from silence to sound, and the emergence of a better defined political position within the group. It is shown that the generational divide that influenced the literary works addressed in Chapters One and Two persisted in *Experiment's* reception of the cinema. This is most effectively demonstrated in the discussion of censorship: for instance, Basil Wright's essay 'Censorship and the Cinema' in *Experiment 2* criticises the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) on account of its outmoded and politically motivated policies. For Wright – a budding documentarist – the cinema was *the* art of the new generation, and any attempt to censor or suppress it was received in the spirit of revolt against the "old order."<sup>59</sup> The *Experimenters'* opposition to the BBFC especially regarding the censorship of Russian cinema in the UK also contributed toward the development of a political ideology based upon social conscience.

While the *Experiment* group's engagement with the cinema in many ways activated their opposition to the past, it also – counterintuitively – went some way to repairing their antagonistic relationship to it. Chapter Three will also address the importance of the late Twenties and early Thirties to the practice of making films. This was a turbulent period for the new art, with new technologies transforming

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<sup>58</sup> Price, 'Finite But Unbounded', 1.

For a comprehensive overview of the science in *Experiment* see: Price 'Finite But Unbounded'. For a detailed discussion of Empson's relativity poems see: Katy Price, 'Talking to Mars: William Empson's Astronomy Love Poems', in *Loving Faster Than Light: Romance and Readers in Einstein's Universe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 156-185.

<sup>59</sup> While at Cambridge in 1928 Wright directed his first film 'Poodabaer' (now destroyed), which gained him the status of local celebrity and 'prodigy'. See: *The Granta* (Nov 2, 1928):4.

the innate qualities of cinema. The advent of sound – ‘the talkies’ – was a particularly contentious issue during this period. The general position of the *Experiment* group was against synchronised speech in cinema: they argued that the spoken word would destroy the fundamental instruments of cinema as an *art*.<sup>60</sup> This stance united the *Experiment* group with the past, and simultaneously reasserted their *avant-garde* credentials: in championing the soon to be obsolete art of silent cinema, the group took ownership of the past and redefined it in accordance with contemporary political and social concerns.

Ultimately, Chapter Three demonstrates that, in their encounters with the cinema, the *Experiment* group found a medium through which they were able to oppose the establishment and reclaim their position in history. Being a relatively new art, the cinema held a position roughly analogous to the *Experimenters* in the artistic hierarchy: it too was engaged in a struggle to define itself, and to be taken seriously as an art. Furthermore, aesthetically film and cinema had the potential for temporal distortion. Temporal distortion allows that all of human experience can be condensed into short, significant sequences within the film. In many ways, this reflects the programme of *Experiment* outlined in Chapters One and Two, and perhaps goes some way to accounting for the fact that the magazine itself is often described as “cinematic”.<sup>61</sup>

Chapter Four ‘*Experiment* is Changed’ offers a critical examination of the contextual factors that affected the final issues of *Experiment*. In many ways this chapter is the mirror image of Chapter One: it demonstrates the increasing political engagement of the group, especially with regard to the tenth anniversary celebrations of the League of Nations (LN). The later numbers of *Experiment* are also marked by the transition from the Twenties to the Thirties; the Thirties being recognised as a politically activated decade with writers of the period categorised as ‘The Auden Generation’.<sup>62</sup> The epithet ‘generation’ in this instance is significant in that it

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<sup>60</sup> Basil Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema II’, *The Cambridge Review* (May 10, 1929): 433.

<sup>61</sup> Price, ‘Finite But Unbounded’, 1. And McCracken, ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business’, 604.

<sup>62</sup> The designation given to the poets and novelists who gathered around W.H. Auden was made famous by Samuel Hynes in his book *The Auden Generation*.

recognises the moment at which the young writers of the Twenties reached maturity, acknowledging their distinctness from their predecessors. The increasing professionalization of *Experiment* in its second phase is demonstrative of this maturation process: remaining true to their original manifesto, the group were “ripening into extravagance.”<sup>63</sup> Therefore Chapter Four provides a prelude to the wealth of scholarship that has examined the political nature of art and literature in the Thirties.<sup>64</sup>

*Experiment* officially changed its editorial policy in issue six, published in October 1930. The issues preceding this formal revision of the magazine’s original manifesto are usually considered as part of the first phase of *Experiment*’s lifespan. However, key factors have led me to re-categorise issues four and five as belonging to the second period of *Experiment*. Firstly, the original editor Empson was expelled from Cambridge in July 1929 on a charge of sexual misconduct.<sup>65</sup> As a result Bronowski and Sykes Davies assumed the role of editors from the fourth number (November 1929). The change in leadership led to further changes, namely in advertising and distribution which resulted in the policy change in 1930. Issues four and five then, mark a transitional phase in the magazine’s history that are critical to understanding its later issues and – ultimately – its demise.

The policy change in *Experiment 6* (October 1930) is shown to function as an expansion of the original manifesto as opposed to a complete departure from it. Although the magazine from this point on includes the names of established authors amongst its list of contributors, they are by no means “establishment” writers. *Experiment*’s editors declare these figures to be “writers whom English literary society taboos or neglects.”<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the contributions from non-

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Experiment’, in *Experiment 1*, 1.

<sup>64</sup> See: Bernard Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties: Texts and Contexts* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1978). Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976). Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Julian Symons, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* (London: Cresset Press, 1960). Lynda Morris and Robert Radford, *The Story of the AIA: Artists International Association 1933-1953* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1983). Robert Radford, *Art For A Purpose: Artists International Association 1933-1953* (Winchester: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987).

<sup>65</sup> Upon the discovery of contraceptives in his College room, Empson was removed from the University books and ordered to leave Cambridge immediately.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Experiment’, *Experiment 6* (October 1930): 2.



Cambridge writers adhere to the themes of war, revolution, and censorship explored in *Experiment* since its inception. The inclusion of recognised artists writing on the same themes that preoccupied the *Experiment* group functioned as a legitimisation of their position. This legitimisation was firmly cemented in the seventh and final issue – *The New Experiment* – which published an extract from James Joyce’s *Work in Progress* and also an explanatory ‘footnote’ by Stuart Gilbert.<sup>67</sup>

The reading of the extract from *Work in Progress* in Chapter Four offers a resolution to the manifesto presented in *Experiment 1*. Through the techniques exhibited in the Joyce text, the group achieved a means of acknowledging the First World War without directly referencing it. The editorial declared that *Experiment* was “in some ways the only literary group that is positively post-war, which honestly seeks to transcend the spirit of academicism and stoicism of the older generation.”<sup>68</sup> This statement implies that the group had established a means of reconciling their historical position with an artistic and literary aesthetic that simultaneously recognised the importance of WW1 in constructing their worldview, but was not overwhelmed by it. In the final issue the *Experiment* group had achieved a *positive* aesthetic that differentiated them considerably from the pessimism of their predecessors.

The final section ‘Towards a Conclusion: At the Point of No Return The Ship Sail On’ explores the final contributions to *Experiment* number seven – Empson’s review of W.H. Auden’s *Paid on Both Sides*, and Malcolm Lowry’s short story ‘Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre’ (At the Point of No Return The Ship Sails On). As I have indicated above, the Thirties were a period of political upheaval and activism. This was explicitly reflected in the art and literature of the decade, and Auden became a figurehead of the new political writing. Hynes 1976 book *The Auden Generation* addressed the work of the generation of writers that were “born in England between 1900 and the First World War, who came of age in the ‘twenties

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<sup>67</sup> The extract was previously published in *transition*, No.1(April, 1927): 1-4. Permission for reprinting given by the author. It has also been suggested that Joyce co-wrote the ‘Footnote’ credited to Gilbert. Eleni Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits at Cambridge’s Literary Laboratories’, *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, 2:2 (2011): 218.

<sup>68</sup>

and lived through their early maturity during the Depression.”<sup>69</sup> Hynes’ study is particularly interested in “how the development of this generation of writers was affected by the circumstances of their times, how the war behind them and the war ahead entered into their work, and how the forms of imagination were altered by crises.”<sup>70</sup> *The Auden Generation* has become a seminal text in the study of literature and politics in 1930’s England. However, Hynes dismisses almost all literary activity amongst young men and women prior to 1930:

the published undergraduate writings of the generation in the ‘twenties contain no significant parables of their state of mind: not even the most gifted writers reach that level of consciousness so early.<sup>71</sup>

Adding:

In 1926 there was scarcely a “thirties generation’ at all, if by generation one means contemporaries who are aware of their collective identity. But the special conditions of their situation already existed. They had been involved in the world in new ways – through the war that they had missed, and through the General Strike that they had helped to defeat.<sup>72</sup>

For Hynes, the Thirties generation began in earnest with the publication of Auden’s political parable *Paid on Both Sides* in the *Criterion* in January 1930. This thesis contests Hynes’ well-established historical narrative. I demonstrate here that conditions required to award the status of generation – the collective consciousness of a unique shared experience – existed in Cambridge in 1928. Furthermore, the concluding chapter will evidence that as opposed to being the starting point of a new movement in art and literature, Auden’s *Paid on Both Sides* in fact marked the second phase of a campaign that had been underway for some years.

Nonetheless, Auden’s political drama plays a critical role in our reception of *Experiment*. It draws together many of the themes that permeate this thesis. *Paid on Both Sides* addresses the effects of war, generational divides, and the pursuit of maturity: indeed, Empson’s final statement in his *Experiment* review of the play

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<sup>69</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976), 9.

<sup>70</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 9.

<sup>71</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 35.

<sup>72</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 35.

states that it “seem[s] to define the attitude of a generation.”<sup>73</sup> It is therefore critical, in that it offers a tenable connection between the current study, and existing interwar scholarship.

The final analysis in ‘Towards a Conclusion’ is concerned with Lowry’s short story ‘Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre’. Lowry’s text is the concluding contribution to *Experiment*, and it effectively encapsulates all of the themes presented in this thesis. ‘Punctum Indifferens’ is an experimental piece of prose that engages with issues of time, musicality, and the cinematic, while retaining an overarching reflection on the social situation of Lowry’s generation. The short story is a semi-autobiographical piece in which a young sailor – Dana Hilliot – finds himself unable to relate to his shipmates, but possessed of an uncontrollable desire to be accepted by them. It is a kind of coming-of-age tale which ends in the boy finally standing up to his detractors in an effort to gain their respect. However, the situation is quickly diffused, and Hilliot’s threats of violence do not materialise. Things quickly return to normal, the sailors return to their game of cards, and the ship sails on.

I take the title of the concluding chapter from the translation of Lowry’s story – ‘At The Point of No Return The Ship Sails On’. This phrase neatly encapsulates the experience of the *Experiment* generation. The First World War irreversibly altered British society: it was the first war of the machine age, and no one was quite sure how to behave after the fact. The “old men” who had led Britain into the Great War resumed their positions in government; the strong, brave, and beautiful young men of 1914 were celebrated for their heroism and remembered *ad nauseam*;<sup>74</sup> and the League of Nations failed to prevent the continuation of war – with the exception of 1914-1918 more men were engaged in warfare between 1920 and 1930 than at any other time in history.<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, in spite of history and the “war to end all wars,” time marches on. We must learn to live with our history, to coexist alongside it. So it was for the *Experiment* group. The position of Lowry’s short story as the final word

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<sup>73</sup> William Empson, ‘A Note on W.H. Auden’s ‘Paid on Both Sides’’, *Experiment* 7, (Spring 1931): 61.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), 85.

<sup>75</sup> Douglas Jerrold, *The Lie About The War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), 9.

in *Experiment* is symbolic of the moment at which the group stopped fighting history, and achieved the artistic maturity that they sought.

Throughout this thesis the theme of interacting and coexisting with history persists. The development of the *Experiment* group is marked by significant cultural milestones: the tenth anniversary of the Armistice; the tenth anniversary of the League of Nations; and the transition from the Twenties to the Thirties. The group's response to these events impacted upon their art and writing which, as a result, offers considerable insight into the interwar period. The mostly chronological arrangement of this dissertation is dictated by the magazine format: it allows for the extension and development of the group's ideology to be expressed coherently, minimising historical confusion. The term 'generation' is used to describe the *Experiment* cohort from the beginning of this text; however, the thesis evidences an increasing self-awareness of the implications of this nomenclature during the magazine's lifespan. Hynes has written that "a generation grows in definition by the interaction of consciousness and circumstance. One might say that a generation does not really exist until it has been made conscious of its identity, and that for such consciousness it must depend on the special awareness of its artists, and on their ability to create the forms appropriate to their own particular circumstances."<sup>76</sup> The *Experiment* group were conscious of their identity from the start; this thesis examines the process by which they developed the forms that would effectively communicate their unique situation. That process was *Experiment*.

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<sup>76</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 11.

## Chapter One: Experiment Made Manifest

In November 1928, a striking new magazine appeared on Cambridge bookstands. The design was bold and geometric, with three dimensional lettering: *EXPERIMENT* [fig. 1.1]. The simplicity of the black and green cover was redolent of Wyndham Lewis' *BLAST*, an audacious statement of *Experiment's* legacy of avant-gardism [fig. 1.2].<sup>77</sup> The cover possessed an almost cinematic quality: the banner projected off of the page like the title of a film. In this respect it differs considerably from *BLAST*, which is emphatically flat. The cover of *Experiment* is obtrusive, it colonises a space outside of itself. The colour pallet too is significant: unlike the aggressively pink *BLAST*, the dark green of *Experiment* is suggestive of nature, fecundity, and growth. Misha Black's design makes a forceful artistic statement with scientific precision. Taken alone, the title, the colour, and the geometry of *Experiment* are suggestive of a scientific periodical. However, the combined effect of these elements produces an altogether different impression: this is something *new*. Benjamin Kohlmann has stated that the angular aesthetic of *Experiment's* frontispiece is suggestive of the influence of Russian Constructivism.<sup>78</sup> This connection is significant to the development of *Experiment* when taken in conjunction with Victor Margolin's introduction to *The Struggle for Utopia*, which addresses the history of Russian Constructivism:

In the early 1820s, when the Comte Henri de Saint-Simon first conceived of the artist as a social visionary, allied in an elite triumvirate of leader with the scientist and the industrialist, he defined a role for the artist that has remained an elusive ideal ever since. For Saint-Simon, art denoted the broad creative exercise of the imagination. Artists would use all their techniques, including poetry, painting and music, to produce statements that could inspire human aspirations. In Saint-Simon's triumvirate, the artist's role was to envision the future of society, while the scientist would analyse the feasibility of visionary ideas, and the industrialist would devise administrative techniques for putting

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<sup>77</sup> Harding, 'Experiment in Cambridge', 289.

<sup>78</sup> Benjamin Kohlmann, *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-Wing Literature in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 34.

them into practice. Thus the triumvirate would be responsible for the invention, analysis, and execution of all social initiatives.<sup>79</sup>

The cover design of *Experiment* successfully combines the triumvirate of art, science, and industry. It is therefore a felicitous visual statement of the *Experiment* editorial that immediately follows it.

We are concerned with all the intellectual interests of undergraduates. We do not confine ourselves to the work of English students, nor are we at pains to be littered with the Illustrious Dead and Dying. Our claim has been one of uncompromising independence: therefore not a line in these pages has been written by any but degreeless students or young graduates. It has been our object to gather all and none but the not yet ripe fruits of art, science and philosophy in the university. We did not wish so much that our articles should be sober and guarded as that they should be stimulating and lively and take up a strong line. We were prepared in fact to give ourselves away. But we know that Cambridge is painfully well-balanced just now (a sign, perhaps of anxiety neurosis) and so we were prepared also to find, as the reader will find, rather too guarded and sensible a daring. Perhaps we will ripen into extravagance.<sup>80</sup>

This opening editorial has assumed the role of premier manifesto in subsequent studies of *Experiment*.<sup>81</sup> Although in theory this statement ought to apply to the first five issues of *Experiment* – the programme was officially changed in No.6 – it actually applies properly only to the first number.<sup>82</sup> There is a clear relationship between this statement and the cover design that it follows.<sup>83</sup> The group have slightly adapted the triumvirate of art, science, and industry implied by the constructivist design of their frontispiece to reflect the concerns of Cambridge undergraduates: industry is therefore replaced by philosophy in their cultural matrix. The organic quality of the cover's colour is echoed in the group's claim to being "not yet ripe fruits," which nonetheless indicates the potentiality of growth and development. Finally, the authors of the *Experiment* editorial claim that their

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1946* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>80</sup> 'Experiment', *Experiment* 1, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Jason Harding, 'Experiment in Cambridge', 292.

<sup>82</sup> The editorial was reprinted in *Experiment* 4 in an act of solidarity following a change of editors in 1929. See: 'Chapter Four: *Experiment* is Changed'.

<sup>83</sup> The original cover design was used for issues 1-6, it was changed for the seventh and final issue.

objective was that their articles should “take up a strong line”: the correlation between this statement and the front cover is overt. The geometric design of the binding literally possesses a “strong line.” Bradbury and McFarlane have stated that the cover of Vorticist manifesto *BLAST* was “largely a manifesto itself.”<sup>84</sup> This is true also of *Experiment*: the clear relationship between the cover graphic and the text of the editorial in *Experiment 1* are mutually reinforcing, producing the impression of a coherent and unified movement.

In my introduction, I claimed that the appearance of *Experiment* in Cambridge in November 1928 marked “the precise moment at which a new generation of artists and writers united in a collective endeavour to creatively express their shared experience of contemporary culture.” Before I return to examine the first issue of *Experiment* in more detail, this statement requires further explanation in the form of a three-tiered analysis. To begin, I will address the question of generations. The nineteen-twenties were characterised by an obsession with generations. The human losses of the First World War were understood as a “lost generation.”<sup>85</sup> Popular literature of the time reinforced this. In a letter to General Sir Ian Hamilton in 1930, Erich Maria Remarque wrote that the intention of *All Quiet on the Western Front* was to: “presen[t] the fate of a generation of young men who, at the critical age when they were just beginning to feel the pulse of life, were set face to face with death.”<sup>86</sup> The fixation with generations continued in contemporary scholarship: it was during this period that German theorist Karl Mannheim wrote his field defining essay ‘The Problem of Generations’.<sup>87</sup> The *Experiment* contributors self-identified as a generation: it is therefore of critical value to an assessment of *Experiment* to understand this term and its implications. Secondly, bound to the concept of a generation, and implied in the statement that *Experiment* sought to “express their shared experience of contemporary culture” is the idea that there existed an essential spirit of the age, or *Weltanschauung*. This term was also prolific

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<sup>84</sup> Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ‘Movements, Magazines, and Manifestos’ in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1976), 203.

<sup>85</sup> Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Erich Maria Remarque to General Sir Ian Hamilton, in Jerrold, *The Lie About the War*, 26.

<sup>87</sup> Karl Mannheim, ‘The Problem of Generations’ (1923) in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959).

during the period, and reflected the increasingly scientific approach to cultural and historical subjects. The final stage in the three-step analysis concerns the subject of groups. Understanding the social and cultural significance of group formation is crucial to an analysis of twentieth-century art and literary history. By addressing what type of group *Experiment* represented we will better understand how the magazine functioned.

Once it has been established how *Experiment* manifested itself at the level of the group and the generation, I will turn my attention to the texts the group produced and how they can be understood as manifestos. The manifesto is intimately related to the broader concepts of identity outlined above: it is a declaration of group unity based upon shared social and cultural objectives. Like the study of 'groups,' 'movements,' and 'isms,' the manifesto is a cornerstone of research in twentieth-century scholarship. The study of the manifesto, as it pertained to the *Experiment* group, is a useful medium for addressing questions of generations as introduced at the beginning of the chapter. The manifesto was an archetype of pre-war avant-garde activity. This chapter will show how the *Experiment* group assimilated and manipulated the medium as a means of simultaneously linking themselves to, and differentiating themselves from, the historical avant-gardes.

### **The Concept of Generation in the Early Twentieth Century**

There is a legend about the history of twentieth-century England. Like all legends, it exists in many variants and was the product of many minds. Though it is nowhere written down in its entirety, fragments of it are to be found in many books and it lives on in the national memory and the oral tradition. It goes something like this.

Once upon a time, before the Great War, there lived a generation of young men of unusual abilities. Strong, brave, and beautiful, they combined great athletic prowess with deep classical learning.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 85.



This is the myth of the generation of 1914. Robert Wohl has noted that this myth of the “lost generation” was particularly enduring in Oxford and Cambridge where many of the soldier-poets had travelled from.<sup>89</sup> The romantic idea of lost brilliance persisted long into the twentieth century: it formed the basis of T.E.B Howarth’s 1978 publication *Cambridge Between Two Wars*, the prologue to which quotes J.B. Priestley: “Nobody, nothing, will shift me from the belief, which I shall take to the grave, that the generation to which I belong, destroyed between 1914 and 1918, was a great generation, marvellous in its promise. This is not self-praise, because those of us who are left know that we are the runts.”<sup>90</sup> Priestley was one of the thousands of ex-servicemen who went up to Cambridge in 1919 following the end of the war, and although the last of them had left by 1923, many found positions as college fellows alongside returning demobilized dons such as J.M. Keynes and Arthur Quiller-Couch.<sup>91</sup> As a result of the presence of these figures, the myth of the lost brilliance of the generation of 1914 was actively institutionalised in Cambridge. It cast an immovable shadow over the succeeding generation: the only brilliance with which one cannot compete is that which is left unrealised. As a result of, and response to, the dialogue of inferiority into which they had unwittingly been placed, the generation which followed the mythical generation of 1914 – and who would later achieve mythical status themselves as the ‘Auden’ generation – sought to express themselves within parameters that would both assert their connection to, and difference from, their predecessors.

The question of generations was a highly visible concern in the Twenties and Thirties. As indicated above, the concept of generations was fundamental in the rationalisation of recent history. The concept was also finding its way into scholarship. In 1923 Mannheim published his sociological investigation ‘The Problem of Generations.’ Mannheim’s essay remains a highly relevant source in the twenty-first-century. Sociologists June Edmunds and Bryan Turner’s 2002 book *Generations, Culture and Society* stated that: “The importance of generations has been widely recognized in literary studies [...]. In contrast, the study of generations

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<sup>89</sup> Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 85.

<sup>90</sup> J.B. Priestley, quoted in T.E.B. Howarth, *Cambridge Between Two Wars* (London: Collins, 1978), 16.

<sup>91</sup> For a full list of prominent returning dons see Howarth, *Cambridge Between Two Wars*, 26.

has not played a large part in the development of sociological theory, despite the importance of generations in common-sense or lay understanding of cultural change.”<sup>92</sup> Edmunds and Turner proceed to use Mannheim’s thesis to “demonstrate the value of generations over class in understanding cultural, intellectual and national change in the twentieth century.”<sup>93</sup> By way of contrast to the apparent neglect of the concept of generations to modern sociologists, Mannheim’s essay recognised the acute importance of theorising these social groups in the nineteen-twenties. He wrote:

The problem of generations is important enough to merit serious consideration. It is one of the indispensable guides to an understanding of the structure of social and intellectual movements. Its practical importance becomes clear as soon as one tries to obtain a more exact understanding of the accelerated pace of social change characteristic of our time.<sup>94</sup>

Mannheim rejects the Positivist approach to generations that claims that “generation follows generation at regular intervals,” and that the “average generation period” was thirty years.<sup>95</sup> As an alternative to this simplistic schema, Mannheim offers a more fluid understanding of the structure of generations. Of particular relevance to this study is Mannheim’s assertion that:

The unity of a generation does not consist primarily in a social bond of the kind that leads to the formation of a concrete group, although it may sometimes happen that a feeling for the unity of a generation is consciously developed into a basis for the formation of concrete groups [...]. But in this case, the groups are most often mere cliques, with the one distinguishing character that group-formation is based upon the consciousness of belonging to one generation, rather than upon definite objectives.<sup>96</sup>

This description is apt for the study of *Experiment*. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the concept of the generation is in a three-tiered schema of which the

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<sup>92</sup> June Edmunds and Bryan Turner, *Generations, Culture and Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>93</sup> Edmunds and Turner, *Generations, Culture and Society*, 21.

<sup>94</sup> Karl Mannheim, ‘The Problem of Generations,’ in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 287.

<sup>95</sup> Mannheim, ‘The Problem of Generations’, 276-7.

<sup>96</sup> Mannheim, ‘The Problem of Generations’, 288.

group forms the visible, organised manifestation. Furthermore, the formation of the *Experiment* group was undoubtedly based upon a conscious generational feeling which developed antagonistically with the past. The prevalence of the myth of the generation of 1914 was a unifying factor in establishing an alternative generation. The core of the *Experiment* generation is contingent upon their social and historical location in relation to the First World War. The War as a defining factor of social location and generation identity is key to understanding not only the *Experiment* generation, but also the preceding generation of Modernist artists and writers.

The War engendered a visible rupture in the fabric of society: it actively separated one generation from another. While not entirely obliterated by the War, those born in the latter years of the nineteenth century were the conscription generation: they had seen action and lost friends. By comparison, the *Experiment* generation had a very different experience of the War: they experienced the War as children on the Home Front. Generational lines were drawn between those who were able to take ownership of that event – what I have termed the conscription generation – and those who were too young to feel fully a part of it, while nonetheless being defined by it. Hynes has noted that “the First World War dominated the lives of those who were children then as much as it did the lives of their elders. Perhaps more so, for the young had no real experience of the Edwardian world before the war; for them, awareness of the world and awareness of the war came at the same time.”<sup>97</sup>

According to the biologically positivist view of generations, the High Modernists and the *Experimenters* were essentially of the same generation. However, in the wake of World War I, scholars such as Mannheim were compelled to redraw the lines of generational theory in order to explain the fracture in society precipitated by that conflict. Consequently, the Cambridge *Experiment* group attain the appearance of a new generation, when in actuality it would be more productive to assess them as an addendum to what we understand as the Modernist period. The *Experimenters* legitimately reactivated pre-war cultural programs while providing their own inflection pertinent to their position in relation to the War. What was sought was a significant and effective means of communicating the sense of discontinuity

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<sup>97</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 17.

between the older generation and those who were too young to have seen service.

Mannheim's study offers a useful way of approaching this:

[When approaching the phenomenon of generations] not merely is the succession of one after another important, but also that their *co-existence* is of more than mere chronological significance. The same dominant influences deriving from the prevailing intellectual, social, and political circumstances are experienced by contemporary individuals, both in their early, formative, and in their later years. They are contemporaries, they constitute one generation because they are subject to common influences.<sup>98</sup>

The introduction of the concept of co-existence of generations is vital to this study. The First World War precipitated a generational fracture, altering the social and political circumstances of those who experienced it in their early lives from those who lived their formative years through the conflict. The War itself is a factor common to both generations, what separates them is their social and historical perspective of that event.

As outlined by Mannheim, and of utmost importance to our perception of generations, is the manner in which they organise themselves. The visibility of a distinct generation is dependent upon the formation of a group. As with generations, the formation of groups is often determined by biological and sociological factors such as year of birth and class-position. In his autobiography, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Wyndham Lewis wrote of the convenience of forming groups as a means of communicating generational concerns:

We are all familiar with the solemn gratification that occurs every year or so, usually, a half-dozen 'poets' or artists, introduced to the world by their impresario as the team chosen (by him if not destiny) to represent the absolutely newest generation. To-day these teams age and disintegrate with alarming rapidity. But new ones take their place. And always the rationale of their assemblage is that their members were all born of women about the same time.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations', 282.

<sup>99</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), 293.

Lewis' statement in reference to his *Zeitgenossen* – Pound, Joyce, and Eliot – is easily applied to the *Experiment* group, all of whom were born between 1906 and 1910. Unlike generations which are subject to retrospective formal sociological analysis, groups can be constructed according to single, arbitrary factors such as age and location. In the case of the *Experiment* circle, beyond the happy accident of birth dates, time also conspired to unite the individuals associated with the magazine in a single 'place', thereby creating a unity of lived experience within the "mechanical theory" of "age-class."<sup>100</sup>

Anthony Giddens' *The Consequences of Modernity* usefully and succinctly defines the concepts of 'place' and 'space':

'Place' is best conceptualised by means of the idea of locale, which refers to the physical settings of social activity as situated geographically. In pre-modern societies, space and place largely coincide, since the spacial dimensions of social life are [...] dominated by "presence" – by localised activities. The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between "absent" others, locationally distant from any situation of face-to-face interaction. In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly *phantasmagoric*: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. What structures the locale is not simply that which is present on the scene; the "visible form" of the locale conceals the distanced relations which determine its nature.<sup>101</sup>

The 'place' of *Experiment* was Cambridge, specifically the university; a geographically narrow field with little differentiation amongst its inhabitants – largely white, middle-to-upper class males, and members of the intellectual 'elite.' However, the 'space' occupied by the magazine was a far more expansive territory. The journal was in an historical dialogue with the pre-war avant-garde, and the modernist literary tradition that had been established in the early Twenties. Furthermore, through the involvement of contributors *in absentia*<sup>102</sup> *Experiment's*

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<sup>100</sup> Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 293.

<sup>101</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 18-19.

<sup>102</sup> George Reavey graduated from Cambridge in 1929 and moved to Paris, becoming Samuel Beckett's literary agent and very much a part of the ex-pat avant-garde community

social and cultural reference-points were considerably expanded, especially through contact with Parisian papers *transition* and *Cahiers d'Art*.<sup>103</sup> This expansion and identification with the non-local is especially evident in Max Black's essay 'Cynic or Sceptic' in *Experiment 5*, in which he writes:

The exotic creatures to be found in such numbers in King's Parade, Bloomsbury, Montparnasse, wherever a café and a studio are within easy reach, are neither cynics nor decadent.<sup>104</sup>

This statement clearly reconciles the 'place' of Cambridge (King's Parade) within the 'space' of British High Modernism (Bloomsbury) and the continental avant-garde (Montparnasse). Furthermore, it unequivocally situates *Experiment* and its contributors in an important historical lineage which reinforces the notion of co-existing generations. Black's blithe comment points to the group's self-identification as a new generation within a continuing historical narrative of avant-gardism. His remark is also an example of why we must address what is implicit in group manifestations as well as what is explicitly stated. In addressing this issue Williams has postulated:

the real point of social and cultural analysis [is] to attend not only to the manifest ideas and activities, but also to the positions and ideas which are implicit or even taken for granted. This is especially necessary in the England of the last hundred years, in which the significance of groups like Bloomsbury or, to take another relevant example, F.R. Leavis and *Scrutiny*, has been widely acknowledged but within an especially weak general perspective. For the concepts to which such groups are referred belong, essentially, to the definitions and perspectives of the groups themselves, so that any analysis which follows tends to be internal and circular.<sup>105</sup>

Williams' statement applies as productively to the *Experiment* group as to either Bloomsbury or *Scrutiny* (1932). As with *Experiment*, both of Williams' examples were cultural and literary movements begun in Cambridge, whose members throughout their careers exerted considerable influence in England and beyond. Following the establishment of the English Tripos in Cambridge in 1926,

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<sup>103</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 16-17.

<sup>104</sup> Max Black, 'Cynic or Sceptic', *Experiment 5* (February 1930): 42.

<sup>105</sup> Raymond Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction', *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 150.

controversial academic Leavis founded *Scrutiny*, which aimed to transform literature and literary criticism in interwar Britain. *Experiment* was the direct predecessor of *Scrutiny*, and shares its historical context, and its dissatisfactions with the practices of literature and criticism. Francis Mulhern has noted that:

The modernist movement had been strong enough to undermine but not to demolish the inherited literary order, and by the early 1920s its main energies had been dissipated. London was no longer an important international centre of avant-garde culture, and the most innovative English language exponents now worked abroad.<sup>106</sup>

These smoking embers of literature in England – the increasing conservatism of Eliot and fundamental continuity with the English literary past, despite evident modern inflections in Woolf and others – were the impetus required to alter the system. At the end of the Twenties, a new generation of poets and literary critics appeared, whose rise was “expressed not so much in a flurry of aesthetic manifestoes as in a struggle for a new critical canon.”<sup>107</sup>

*Scrutiny* shared with *Experiment* a programme of interdisciplinarity. The manifesto published in the first issue of *Scrutiny* vowed not to “confine itself to purely literary discussions,” a decision that Mulhern attributes to the “troubled social and cultural circumstances of the early 1930s.” Mulhern further notes that, in *Scrutiny*, a devaluation of the ‘purely literary’ acted as a “deceptive outward sign of a profound reevaluation of the duties and competence of literary criticism” but that in practice, “The predominance of the literary in *Scrutiny*, and its paramount role in the world-view of the *Scrutiny* circle, was the effect of a process of argument that was social and political in character and purpose.”<sup>108</sup> The implication of Mulhern’s analysis is that, during the Twenties and Thirties, interdisciplinarity was perceived as a means of expressing the inherent and unified “inner aim” – an inborn way of experiencing life and the world – of a generation.

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<sup>106</sup> Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of ‘Scrutiny’* (London: NLB, 1979), 15.

<sup>107</sup> Mulhern, *The Moment of ‘Scrutiny’*, 16.

<sup>108</sup> Mulhern, *The Moment of ‘Scrutiny’*, 48-49.

The interdisciplinarity of *Experiment* was, at least in the beginning, more wholehearted than that of its successor, *Scrutiny*. Furthermore, although *Experiment* did publish literary criticism – particularly Empson’s early studies on the subject of ambiguity – its primary focus was on altering literature itself, rather than its criticism. Nonetheless, the content of *Experiment* was intrinsically social and political. The variance in subject-matter across the arts and sciences lent to the journal a heterogeneous perspective intended to stimulate a new world-view or *Weltanschauung*, thereby eliciting social change.

### **Generations and ‘World-View’**

The concept of *Weltanschauung* is pertinent to this study for two reasons. The first is that, in his 1959 recollection of the *Experiment* moment, Trevelyan stated that in the group’s pursuit of capturing ‘contemporariness’ in their art and writing “the word *weltanschauung* was used much.”<sup>109</sup> Secondly, besides proving to be an influential contemporary commentator on generational theory, in 1921 Mannheim also published a widely available and widely translated essay entitled ‘On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*’.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, Mannheim employs the terms *Weltanschauung* and *Zeitgeist* in his ‘Generations’ essay as a means of understanding how we rationalise generations. He writes:

If we are speaking of the ‘spirit of an epoch’, for example, we must realize, as in the case of other factors, too, that this *Zeitgeist*, the mentality of a period, does not pervade the whole society at a given time. The mentality of which is commonly attributed to an epoch has its proper seat in one (homogeneous or heterogeneous) social group which acquires special significance at a particular time, and is thus able to put its own intellectual stamp on all the other groups [...].<sup>111</sup>

The decision of the *Experiment* group to adopt the term *Weltanschauung* for their construction of the global outlook of the period is more revealing than the term itself. Mannheim notes that the concept of *Weltanschauung* is difficult and

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<sup>109</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 17.

<sup>110</sup> Karl Mannheim, ‘On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*’ *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, 33-83.

<sup>111</sup> Mannheim, ‘The Problem of Generations’, 313.



paradoxical in nature.<sup>112</sup> However, it is essentially a concept that uses a rationalist scientific framework in order to establish a single unified global outlook as it is presented in cultural and historical disciplines.<sup>113</sup> The adoption of this term by *Experiment's* contributors points to the culture of scientism in Cambridge at the time and emphasises the dedication of the group to interdisciplinarity and the synthesis of artistic and scientific approaches to culture.

The methodology of the magazine was simply to *experiment* – whether in the laboratory or the library. Taken at face value, this programme might render *Experiment* not simply interdisciplinary, but incoherent. However, this seeming ‘incoherence’ of the young journal can be overcome through attention to its individual contributions. Although the magazine format demands a certain collective responsibility, each article and poem functions as a singular entity within the whole, as a cell functions within a larger organism. Mannheim has explained the rationalist approach to the concept of *Weltanschauung* thus: “As far as rationalism can see, the global outlook of an age or of a creative individual is wholly contained in their philosophical and theoretical utterances; you need only to collect these utterances and arrange them in a pattern, and you have taken hold of the *Weltanschauung*.”<sup>114</sup> In accordance with this rationalist approach, this thesis gathers the youthful utterances of the *Experiment* group and arranges them in such an order as to provide a clear sense of the contemporary *Weltanschauung*.

### **Generations and Group Formation**

The implication of the terms ‘generation’ and *Weltanschauung* is such that in order to analyse these concepts we must narrow the field of analysis. It has briefly been suggested above that this requires the introduction of a third concept: the group. As with the study of generations, there are significant problems posed by the study of groups. Williams has written that:

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<sup>112</sup> Mannheim, ‘On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*’, 37.

<sup>113</sup> Mannheim, ‘On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*’, 33.

<sup>114</sup> Mannheim, ‘On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*’, 38.

There are serious problems of method in the analysis of cultural groups. When we are analysing large social groups we have some obvious and useful methods at our disposal. The large numbers allow significant statistical analysis.<sup>115</sup>

Generational theories are the subject of large scale statistical analyses. *Experiment*, on the other hand, is an example of what Williams terms the 'cultural group'. The problem with addressing these types of formations lies in their smallness: they are too narrow for meaningful statistical analysis. Furthermore, "the principles that unite the group may or may not be codified."<sup>116</sup> In the Introduction I suggested that the *Experiment's* engagement with the concept of the group was evidenced in Bronowski's contribution to the June 1930 issue of *transition*. In order to expand the discussion of the problems of group formation and its significance, it is conducive to reassess Bronowski's statement here:

I suppose the word *group* is unavoidable. *Aggregate* has no direction; and *arrangement*, a poor sound. But I should have liked *arrangement*. It pretends so little to order, is so much a convenience; it has that hint of casualness and, oddly, the arbitrary. I want to say accident, a stumbling upon a discovery, *O my America*. Principles, as a foundation may be bandied about and become.. tabletalk. But literature does not come that way, nor has that kind of immortality, a thing at best in common and perhaps no more than individual. Literature is somehow accidental, in the sense that an accident is quick, is formative, bears into the very bone of quality.<sup>117</sup>

Throughout this discussion, the word 'group' has continually appeared: Bronowski himself writes that the term is unavoidable. It is therefore important at this juncture to assess more closely the meaning of that term, and contemplate how it might be useful in uniting issues raised previously such as the conditions of generations. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a 'group' as "A number of persons or things regarded as forming a unity on account of any kind of mutual or common relation, or classed together on account of a certain degree of similarity."<sup>118</sup> This definition belies the fact that groups are often simply "regarded" or conceived as a unity.

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<sup>115</sup> Raymond Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction' in *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 148.

<sup>116</sup> Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction', 148.

<sup>117</sup> Bronowski, 'Experiment', *transition*, 107.

<sup>118</sup> <http://oed.com/view/Entry/81855?rskey=nb6mxZ&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>

Therefore, it is critical to address how these conceptions come into being. Williams is one of the foremost cultural theorists on groups: his analysis is specifically focussed on the *formation* of such organisations.

Williams' 1981 essay 'Formations' somewhat schematically addressed the historical development of groups, from the medieval bardic orders, through to the rather less formal associations that are common to the twentieth century. A problematizing factor in the historical sociology of groups is their increased informality – marked by the absence of a constitution or rules – in the twentieth century. "The cases in which there was no constitution, or lesser formality of organization, merge into types of association which are more characteristic of the twentieth century."<sup>119</sup> The *Experiment* group are recognisable as archetypal of this type of formation:

Here [in the twentieth century] the break is more explicitly towards a particular style or more general cultural position. It may include such devices as collective exhibition or similar public manifestations, but it often does not include actual membership of anything. It is a looser form of group association, primarily defined by shared theory and practice, and its immediate social relations are often not easy to distinguish from those of a group of friends who share common interests.<sup>120</sup>

Any attempt at formal social analysis is complicated by the fluidity of groups like *Experiment*. Williams notes that "such cultural groups are typically small in numbers, and offer little opportunity for reliable statistical analysis, of the kind which is normal for larger institutions and groups."<sup>121</sup> A final characteristic of cultural groups identified by Williams is their often extremely short duration: among informal groups such as *Experiment*, the rapidity of their formation and dissolution, and the complexity of their internal breaks and fusions are often bewildering.<sup>122</sup> In order to distinguish and disentangle specific features in group formation, Williams classifies groups according to a three-tiered schema of *internal relations*: (i) those based on *formal membership*; (ii) those not based on formal membership, but

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<sup>119</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Formations', *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981), 65-66.

<sup>120</sup> Williams, 'Formations', 66.

<sup>121</sup> Williams, 'Formations', 66.

<sup>122</sup> Williams, 'Formations', 68.

organised around some *collective public manifestation*, such as an exhibition, a group press or periodical, or an explicit manifesto; and (iii) those not based on any formal membership or any sustained public manifestation, but in which there is a *conscious association or group identification*, either informally or occasionally manifested, or at times limited to immediate working or more general relations.<sup>123</sup> According to Williams' construction, a sect such as the Bloomsbury Group is exemplary of the third category, while the *Experimenters*, the Futurists, and the Surrealists all belong to the second.

The preceding analysis has outlined a matrix of cultural concepts that impact upon our understanding of a cultural formation such as *Experiment*. It has been shown that whilst often used individually, the concepts of *Weltanschauung*, generations, and groups are in fact inextricably linked. The manifestation of *Experiment* incorporated all three of these factors. Ultimately, *Experiment* was based on the formation of an informal group which congregated around the publication of a magazine. This formation was based on a consciousness of a unique shared social experience dependent upon their historical location. In this respect the group represented a generation. The sense of inherent commonality in the shared location in the social and historical process of generations led the group to explore the concept of *Weltanschauung* as a means of deducing the precise nature of their mutual worldview. This thesis aims to capture a sense of how these factors asserted themselves in *Experiment* and address how they affected the magazine's output. This in turn will give us an indication of contemporary feeling during the late Twenties and early Thirties.

Having established the importance of the concepts of generational theory, group formation, and *Weltanschauung*, we can now turn our attention to how these manifested themselves in the contents of *Experiment*. Conforming to the second category in Williams' schema of group formation, the *Experiment* movement began

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<sup>123</sup> Williams, 'Formations', 68.

as an informal group which would meet regularly and discuss their interests: from these meetings grew the idea of founding a magazine and manifesto.<sup>124</sup>

### **Manifestoes and Group Identity**

The manifesto has gained especial importance in the history of twentieth-century art and literature.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, it is particularly critical to the study of little magazines. In his 1930 article 'Small Magazines' Pound stated that "periodicals [...] can only be judged on their programs. I have, personally, a very strong belief in the clear announcement of a program – any program. A review that can't announce a program probably doesn't know what it thinks or where it is going."<sup>126</sup> On the subject of programmatical clarity, Richard Ellmann has commented that "Literary movements pass their infancy in inarticulate disaffection, but mature when they achieve a vocabulary."<sup>127</sup> Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker have interpreted Ellmann's statement as suggesting that "A manifesto is one way for a movement to shift from youthful grumblings to adulthood; starting a magazine in which to publish one's manifesto enables those mature reflections to reach, hopefully, a wider audience."<sup>128</sup> This interpretation is critical to our reception of *Experiment*. Although *Experiment* was an undergraduate publication that actively emphasised its youthfulness, it nonetheless endeavoured to be a serious cultural publication. Bradbury and McFarlane have noted that "the little magazine [...] was often an analogue or extension of the manifesto formula."<sup>129</sup> Their suggestion that the little magazine as a whole can be considered as a manifesto is a productive foundation for the study of *Experiment*: it allows us to reconcile the youthfulness of *Experiment* with the perceived maturity of the magazine-manifesto.

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<sup>124</sup> Bronowski, 'Recollections of Humphrey Jennings', 45.

<sup>125</sup> Mary Ann Caws (ed.), *Manifesto: A Century of isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001). Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). Luca Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism 1885-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>126</sup> Pound, 'Small Magazines', 702-703.

<sup>127</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1973), 101.

<sup>128</sup> Brooker and Thacker, 'General Introduction', 2.

<sup>129</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane, 'Movements, Magazines, and Manifestos', 203.

The manifesto has been the subject of many recent publications.<sup>130</sup> However, the exact nature of the genre of manifesto writing remains a contentious issue. Claude Abastado has written that: “The manifesto is [...] mutable, multiform, unseizable [...]. The search for *one* definition is deceiving; that of an essence, illusory. The manifesto does not exist as an absolute.”<sup>131</sup> We must therefore ask, not simply what is a manifesto; but what is the function of each specific publication that assumes the role of manifesto?

The standard definition of a manifesto is: “A public declaration or proclamation, written or spoken, *especially* a printed declaration, explanation, or justification of policy issued by a head of state, government, or political party or candidate, or any other individual or body of individuals of public relevance, such as a school or a movement in the Arts.”<sup>132</sup> This definition conforms to the basic understanding of the manifesto as an authoritative decree with a political objective. In contrast to this position, contemporary scholars have appealed for a more aesthetically focussed interpretation. For instance, Bruno Traversetti has written that the manifesto is a document that:

by defining a program of poetics and indicating its inspiring principles, establishes the operative horizon of a literary school, the aesthetic or ideological hypothesis linking together an already constituted group of writers, pretends to attract to itself and to formalize in its act of self consciousness a section of the contemporary literary experience.<sup>133</sup>

This definition, while useful in most instances, emphasises the creation of the manifesto as a deliberate, self-conscious act. While this is a fair assumption with regard to many of the twentieth century’s most (in)famous and paradigm-shifting manifestos – notably that of the Italian Futurists who employed the genre as their primary art form – it is not an accurate portrayal of all the texts which are known to us now as ‘manifestos’.

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<sup>130</sup> See footnote 47.

<sup>131</sup> Claude Abastado, ‘Introduction à l’analyse des manifestes’, *Littérature* No.89 (1980): 3-11, in Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, 23.

<sup>132</sup> OED Online, <http://oed.com/view/Entry/113499?rskey=e1GPax&result=1#eid>. Accessed 04/12/2012.

<sup>133</sup> Bruno Traversetti, *Le parole e la critica: guida terminologica alla letteratura* (Rome: Cooperativa Scrittori, 1978) in Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, 23.

Luca Somigli has written of this phenomenon that:

Other types of texts may *assume* [italics my own] the role of manifesto either because they seek to articulate, theoretically or practically, a normative paradigm, or because they are conceived *a posteriore* as the ‘synthesis’ of a series of motifs and formal solutions that best embody or even anticipate and in some way foster the principles of a movement or a school.<sup>134</sup>

### **Experiment and the Historical Avant-Garde**

The *Experiment* editorial falls into this latter category: it is now referred to as a manifesto. This corresponds with McCracken’s assertion that little magazines like *Experiment* “only become historically legible at the point of their obsolescence.”<sup>135</sup> Building on Bradbury and McFarlane’s assertion that little magazines in their entirety can be read as manifestos, this thesis takes its title from the *Experiment* contribution to *transition* in 1930, a group of texts that were titled ‘*Experiment: A Manifesto of Young England*’.<sup>136</sup> I consider that the complete process of *Experiment* constituted a manifesto. In line with Marjorie Perloff’s assertion that the manifesto is “the mode of agonism, the voice of those who are *contra*,” I consider *Experiment* in its entirety to be a written declaration of the group’s agonistic position against the *status quo*.<sup>137</sup> The nature of the little magazine is that of an on-going project, an enterprise of continual alteration and development. Unlike the Futurist manifesto – published in three columns of newspaper print – *Experiment*’s premier manifestation amounted to forty-eight pages of text. Here I address the specific texts in *Experiment* that have been attributed the status of manifesto; however, it will be shown that these texts are inextricable from their surrounding environment. The first issue of *Experiment* – typically described as “eclectic” – was itself a manifesto.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, 23.

<sup>135</sup> McCracken, ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business’, 599.

<sup>136</sup> ‘*Experiment: A Manifesto of Young England*’, in *transition: An International Quarterly for Creative Experiment*, no.19-20 (June 1930): 106-138.

<sup>137</sup> Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 82.

<sup>138</sup> Price, ‘Finite But Unbounded’, 6.

The *Experiment* editorial brings into sharp focus the issues of recent history, generational divides, and the contemporary worldview or *weltanschauung*. Despite its protestations of humility and timidity, there is much about *Experiment's* original manifesto that is direct and incisive. The most forceful statement of the group's concerns at this moment is their determination to temporally and ideologically separate themselves from the preceding generation of artists and writers. For instance, the emphatic statement not to be "littered with the Illustrious Dead and Dying," was a bold assertion of the magazine's independence. The *Experiment* group determined to establish the youthfulness of their small press, and also to mark *Experiment* apart from rival student magazine *The Venture*. *The Venture* included among its undergraduate articles contributions from established members of the generation of 1914 that cast a shadow over their immediate successors. *Experiment* certainly achieved this objective of independence, at least in its first issue: with the exception of critical quotations, not a line in the magazine was produced by any but the "not yet ripe fruits" of the university. Despite its admirable ideology, this manifesto for *Experiment* also functions as a warning – or an admission – of the often adolescent or underdeveloped contents of the journal. However, the potential of the group to "ripen into extravagance" emphasises the continuous process of development innate in little magazines. Cyril Connolly famously characterised little magazines whose aim it was to introduce new groups of writers, new styles of writing, new ideas about writing and its possible relevance to the real world as "dynamic": *Experiment* actively appropriates this term, juxtaposing their "lively" publication with the perceived impotence and stasis of the older generation.<sup>139</sup>

The preceding generation weighs heavily on the minds of the *Experiment* group at this juncture. It is clear that the group's programme was largely conceived in antithesis of what had gone before. It is therefore productive to examine the "anxiety neuroses" that the 'Five' editors identify as defining the contemporary conditions of Cambridge, as a prominent characteristic of *Experiment* itself. The 'well-balanced' nature of the university, and also the magazine, might be construed

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<sup>139</sup> Cyril Connolly, 'Fifty Years of Little Magazines', *Art and Literature*, Vol.1, No.1, (March 1964): 108.



as a defence mechanism in response to contemporary external stresses. The horrors of the First World War had altered behaviours at the level of the individual, group, and nation. The War also resulted in the creation of repressed memories and emotions: the stress-induced neurosis implied by the young *Experimenters* indicates the threat of repressed anxieties re-entering consciousness upon the resurgent presence of that event. This is especially relevant with regard to the first appearance of *Experiment*, whose publication coincided with the tenth anniversary of Armistice Day.

Although the group acknowledge a widespread lack of ‘daring,’ their publication cannot be said to perpetuate that condition. In the pre-war period intellectual ‘daring’ or *avant-gardism* was typified by the obsession with violence and the machine. The Futurists and the Vorticists espoused destruction and chaos. Avant-gardism came to *mean* war. F.T. Marinetti’s Futurist Manifesto declared: “We want to glorify war – the only hygiene of the world – militarism, patriotism, and the destructive gesture of emancipators, the beautiful ideas worth dying for [...]”<sup>140</sup> Pre-war avant-gardism, exemplified by the Futurists and Vorticists, was defined by their extravagance, rendering the timidity of the new generation of would-be avant-gardists understandable. Nonetheless, the *Experimenters* indicate a desire to “ripen into extravagance”. However, the particular quality of this coveted extravagance is clearly differentiated from their machine-worshipping forbearers in the verb “to ripen,” suggesting a far more natural/organic process. ‘Daring’ as it pertains to *Experiment* is the exact reverse of the pre-war position. Their daring lies in their decision to reject war and its commemoration. The act of renouncing “The Illustrious Dead and Dying” during Armistice celebrations was a potent gesture, and marked the establishment of a new, conscientious *avant-garde*. In its essence, the first manifesto unequivocally states its separateness from the historical avant-garde, while proposing the need for a new one.

It has been outlined in the above discussion of generational theory that the *Experiment* generation shared with their predecessors a social and historical

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<sup>140</sup> F.T. Marinetti, ‘The Futurist Manifesto’ (1909), in Lawrence Rainey, *Modernism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 2.

position determined by their relationship to the First World War, albeit from different sides of that historical chasm. Kohlmann has written that: “Stylistically at least, there is little doubt as to *Experiment’s* adherence to a brand of avant-garde writing which belonged more properly to the 1920s than the 1930s.” He continues that this is particularly noticeable in *Experiment’s* poetry, “which is steeped in the spirit of formal experimentation and *vers libre* associated with T.S. Eliot’s poetry.”<sup>141</sup> Kohlmann’s assessment of *Experiment’s* adoption of literary modes associated with the older generation results in him characterising *Experiment* as a “belated modernism” that offers “a brief respite before the plunge into the ‘political’ 1930s.”<sup>142</sup> This thesis offers an alternative appraisal of *Experiment’s* appropriation of modernist forms. As opposed to simply mimicking the High Modernists of the preceding generation, it will be shown that *Experiment* utilised modernist archetypes as a means of assuming ownership of a history from which they felt excluded; and subverting those forms in order to distinguish themselves temporally.

The young *Experimenters* therefore turned to the idea of founding a magazine and manifesto – mediums that received much pre-war enthusiasm – as a vehicle for communicating a series of ideas and concerns shared by an entire generation, a kind of *weltanschauung*.<sup>143</sup> The method the *Experiment* group chose to enact their understated rebellion was in explicitly aligning themselves with the methods of the pre-war avant-gardes such as the Futurists, while simultaneously alienating themselves from the driving principles of that movement. Indeed, in many ways it seems that *Experiment’s* first issue and manifesto was in fact a direct response to the historic Italian movement.

‘The Founding and the Manifesto of Futurism’ was published on the front page of Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909, amid much controversy and critical debate. This single event precipitated considerable impact in literary and

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<sup>141</sup> Kohlmann, *Committed Styles*, 34.

<sup>142</sup> Kohlmann, *Committed Styles*, 34-35.

<sup>143</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 17-18. The use of this word suggests that the group were familiar with Karl Mannheim’s 1923 essay ‘On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauung*,’ and that they had begun to conceptualise – and to some extent historicise – their ‘moment’ as a coherent ‘generation’ or ‘epoch’ in opposition to the past.

artistic circles for decades, becoming “a paradigm for countless movements to come, some embodying the most vital currents among the twentieth century arts (Vorticism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and the International Situationiste).”<sup>144</sup> As a means of generating comparison between this first great avant-garde manifesto and that of the *Experiment* group in Cambridge almost two decades later, it is constructive to translate the former here:

### The Manifesto of Futurism

1. We intend to sing to the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.
2. Courage, audacity, and revolt will be essential elements of our poetry.
3. Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap.
4. We affirm that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new form of beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath – a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.
5. We want to hymn the man at the wheel, who hurls the lance of his spirit across the Earth, along the circle of its orbit.
6. The poet must spend himself with ardour, splendour, and generosity, to swell the enthusiastic fervour of the primordial elements.
7. Except in struggle, there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece. Poetry must be conceived as a violent attack on unknown forces, to reduce and prostrate them before man.
8. We stand on the last promontory of the centuries!...Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, for we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.
9. We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the emancipators, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and contempt for woman.
10. We intend to destroy museums, libraries, academies of every sort, and to fight against moralism, feminism, and every utilitarian or opportunistic cowardice.
11. We shall sing the great masses shaken with work, pleasure, or rebellion: we shall sing the multicoloured and polyphonic tidal waves of revolution in the modern metropolis; shall sing the vibrating nocturnal fervour of factories and shipyards burning under violent electric moons; bloated railway stations that devour smoking serpents; factories hanging from the sky by the twisting threads of spiralling smoke; bridges like gigantic gymnasts who span rivers, flashing at the sun with the gleam of a knife; adventurous steamships

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<sup>144</sup> Rainey, *Modernism*, 1.

that scent the horizon, locomotives with their swollen chest, pawing the tracks like massive steel horses bridled with pipes, and the oscillating flight of airplanes, whose propeller flaps at the wind like a flag and seems to applaud like a delirious crowd.<sup>145</sup>

By comparison with the determinedly aggressive tract, *Experiment's* inaugural editorial can scarcely be assigned “manifesto” status. Described by Harding as “the most equable of avant-garde *reveilles*,” *Experiment's* declaration furnishes the reader with a policy – to only publish work by undergraduates and recent graduates – but neglects to offer a system of principles or intentions such as the reader might expect from such a youthful and ambitious venture. However, as stated above, the nature of the little magazine’s continual engagement and development allowed that the *Experiment* project as a whole can be read as a manifesto. This is particularly true of the inaugural issue. The inordinate diversity of contents included “experimental” poetry and prose, essays on aesthetics, theatre design, the poetry of Paul Valéry and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Impressionist painting, and biochemistry. It is through close attention to these texts that we can gain greater insight into the precise precepts and objectives of this burgeoning avant-garde, and draw pragmatic comparisons with literary and artistic ancestors such as the Futurists.

### **Experiment’s Interdisciplinarity**

Perhaps the most striking pledge in the *Experiment* editorial is the group’s insistence on interdisciplinarity. It has been outlined above that the ideology of combining the arts for greater social penetration had been developed in the nineteenth century; however the Futurists were perhaps the first movement to successfully infiltrate multiple artistic spheres. Umbro Apollonio has stated that the Futurists desired “to penetrate all aspects of life”<sup>146</sup>; and Lawrence Rainey has noted that this resulted in the group’s “relentless expansion into nearly all the arts,

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<sup>145</sup> F.T. Marinetti, ‘The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909’, in Umbro Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, trans. Robert Brain *et al* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 19-24. Also consulted F.T. Marinetti, ‘The Founding and the Manifesto of Futurism 1909’, in Lawrence Rainey (ed.), *Modernism: An Anthology*, 3-6.

<sup>146</sup> Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, 13.

including literature, music, the visual arts, architecture, drama, photography, film, dance, even fashion.”<sup>147</sup> The eclectic list of contents of *Experiment*’s first issue reflects the legacy of the Futurists in its desire to encapsulate all facets of artistic experience.

The interdisciplinary possibilities of *Experiment* are facilitated by the magazine’s institutional roots. As demonstrated in the ‘Introduction,’ the late Twenties was a period of outstanding achievement at the University, especially in the sciences. The collaboration between humanities and science undergraduates in the pages of *Experiment* extended the horizon of possibility for the movement beyond the typically creative arts, and into research science. This institutional context is in direct conflict with the position of the Futurists, who feared that the influence of institutions would stifle creativity. This fear resulted in their manifesto pledge to “destroy museums, libraries, academies of every sort.”<sup>148</sup> However, Apollonio has suggested that this should be interpreted as a Futurist claim for the social responsibility of the artist. He states that “art should not be created to sit in museums, in shrines full of dead heroes.”<sup>149</sup> In respect of this interpretation, the *Experiment* group are in accord with the Futurist programme. The interdisciplinary magazine is an interactive art form that seeks to address contemporary concerns rather than perpetuate historical myths. Ultimately, the institutional framework of *Experiment* generated a thoroughly modern impetus for a new form of creativity, wherein art and science combine to create a new mode of sociological and cultural understanding. This assimilation of all aspects of human knowledge and experience – art and science – was understood by the group to be the basic tenet of the concept *Weltanschauung*. This was a bold undertaking which remains a prominent scholarly concern even now, with collaborative projects between the arts and sciences being actively encouraged. Considering that the central tenet of the *Experiment* movement has achieved such longevity, we might reconsider the boldness and daring possessed of the young *Experimenters*.

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<sup>147</sup> Rainey, *Modernism*, 1.

<sup>148</sup> Marinetti, ‘Founding and Manifesto of Futurism’ 22.

<sup>149</sup> Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, 10.

The Futurist Manifesto declared that “courage, boldness, and rebelliousness will be the essential elements of our poetry,” and despite much derision, this also defined a significant portion of the poetry contributions to *Experiment*. The ridicule and satire directed at the young journal in local presses *The Granta* and *The Gownsmen* actually attest to the radicalness and rebellion of *Experiment*. Albeit that the original manifesto for *Experiment* did not offer some “literary panacea, or renounce some popular philosophy,” it attempted to shift, however slightly, the bases of literature, and life, with which youth had become so disillusioned.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, the predominant theme that links the *Experiment* group to the Futurists, and likewise to their English ancestors the Vorticists, is a concern with movement and dynamism. The Futurists wrote that “we stand on the last promontory of the centuries,” suggestive of a period of transition and upheaval, instilling a desire in that group to move forward, abandoning ties to the nineteenth century and embracing the twentieth. The advent of motorcars and other modern machines created a lust for speed, which the Italians sought to harness in their work, propelling society at full velocity into the new century.

Of the early part of the twentieth century, Michael Levenson has written that “the *sensation* of living in new times and the *theory* of time are inevitable features of modernity.” He continues:

The present was experienced not as a stable historical period, the latest in a succession of periods, but as something unprecedented and distinctive, ‘a period of transition’ characterised by ‘the expected otherness of the future and, associated with it, the alteration in the rhythm of temporal experience: acceleration, by means of which one’s own time is distinguished from what went before.’ The result was that ‘lived time was experienced as a rupture, a period of transition in which the new and the unexpected continually happened.’<sup>151</sup>

The Futurists embodied the continual unexpectedness of the present through the publication of controversial manifestos and the staging of public happenings or

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<sup>150</sup> ‘Experiment: A Manifesto’, *transition*, No.19-20, (June 1930): 106.

<sup>151</sup> Michale Levenson, [Quoting Reinhart Koselleck] ‘The time-mind of the twenties,’ in Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls, *Cambridge History of Twentieth Century English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 98

“evenings.” They asked, “Why should we look back over our shoulders, when we intend to breach the mysterious doors of the Impossible?”<sup>152</sup> This stance is typical of Modernist writing, in which time was arguably the greatest topos. The Modernists of the Twenties were also fixated on notions of time, specifically the “presentness” of time. In his essay, ‘The time-mind of the twenties,’ Levenson argues that the Modernist construction of the present relied on what Husserl has termed retention (that state of just-having-been or just-having-experienced) and ‘protention’ (a sense of an imminent future).<sup>153</sup> However, many Modernist texts rely strongly on recollected experience of the past. Levenson cites *Ulysses*, *To The Lighthouse*, and *A la recherche du temps perdu*, stating: “the harking back to some distant past – whether in the intimacy of childhood or in public history – is often the condition for any glimpse into a future.”<sup>154</sup> Levenson’s essay focuses exclusively on how modernists of the 1914 generation engaged with the concept of time; however this was also a prominent literary theme in *Experiment*. Being of the younger generation, the *Experiment* group possessed a markedly different relationship to time; however they too sought to capture the “ever-changing value of ‘contemporariness.’”<sup>155</sup> Unlike the preceding generation of modernists, the intimacy of childhood was not a subject of Romantic nostalgia for the *Experiment* sect. As I have outlined above, the new generation of artists and writers had no real experience of the pre-war Edwardian world; their childhoods were defined by the War. Hynes has given an insightful description of a wartime childhood:

At schools, boys learned to drill and to march and girls learned to bandage, dormitories were cold and the food was dreary, and there were no sweets. It must have seemed to children, as the war went on, that a war was simply the sum of small discomforts and of large losses; for them it meant sacrifices without glory, arms without enemies and bandages without wounds, but also it meant the absence of fathers and brothers.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Marinetti, ‘The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism’ 21.

<sup>153</sup> Levenson, ‘The time-mind of the twenties,’ 211.

<sup>154</sup> Levenson, ‘The time-mind of the twenties,’ 217.

<sup>155</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 17.

<sup>156</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 18.

Hynes' quotation effectively indicates the role played by children in the war-effort, a role largely written-out of history. The generational divide precipitated by the First World War is the subject of Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell's essay 'Wyndham Lewis, Evelyn Waugh and Interwar British Youth: Conflict and Infantilism.' They have written that:

[T]he generation which had been too young to fight in the war grew up during a moment of unprecedented socio-cultural upheaval, and came to adulthood in a post-war climate bereft of traditional moorings [...]. The generation that grew up during the war was denied the customary hierarchical relationship between age groups from which previous generations benefited. These young individuals faced the double prospect of having few immediate elders from whom to take their bearings (as an appalling number of them had been slaughtered in Europe), and of an ideological disparity between themselves and the forebears who had sent those elders to their deaths.<sup>157</sup>

George Orwell has confirmed the existence of this feeling of disparity between generations following the First World War. In *Road to Wigan Pier* he wrote that:

Throughout almost the whole nation there was a running wave of revolutionary feeling [...], it was a revolt of youth against age, resulting directly from the war. The war had been conducted mainly by old men and had been conducted with supreme incompetence. By 1918 everyone under forty was in a bad temper with his elders, and the mood of anti-militarism which followed naturally upon the fighting was extended into a general revolt against orthodoxy and authority.<sup>158</sup>

Having lived through the First World War, the *Experiment* group were defined in relation to that conflict. They were engaged in an agonistic relationship with recent history: they sought to distinguish themselves temporally from the 'old men' of the pre-war period, while simultaneously reclaiming their right to ownership of the past. This is neatly evidenced by the group's insistence on being "postwar": this single word implies temporal differentiation while nonetheless inextricably linking the group to the 1914-1918 conflict. The reactivation of pre-war modes of avant-

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<sup>157</sup> Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell, 'Wyndham Lewis, Evelyn Waugh and Interwar British Youth: Conflict and Infantilism' in Andrzej Gąsiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker, and Nathan Waddell (ed.), *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 165-166.

<sup>158</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 121.



gardism such as the little magazine and the manifesto should be interpreted as a gesture of defiance. Marjorie Perloff has written that “in the wake of the French Revolution the manifesto had become *the* mode of agonism, the voice of those who are *contra* – whether against king or pope or ruling class or simply against the existing state of affairs.”<sup>159</sup> The widespread discontent with those in power following the end of the First World War reinstated the need for forms of communication dedicated to voicing alternative positions.

As suggested at the beginning of this discussion of manifestos, the little magazine can be viewed as an extension of the manifesto formula.<sup>160</sup> With this in mind we will now turn our attention to the contents of *Experiment*, as a means of assessing how individual contributions to the magazine supported its overall programme – as a manifesto.<sup>161</sup>

### **The Magazine as Manifesto**

Immediately following the editorial in the first number of *Experiment*, the editors published Basil Wright’s poem ‘Postwar’. Printing this particular contribution as the preliminary declaration in issue one, functioned as an extension and restatement of the opening manifesto that vowed to obviate the ‘Illustrious Dead and Dying’. Wright’s poem presents as a “sympathetic narration of German patriotism in the face of external defeat and internal critique.”<sup>162</sup> However, the poem is a scathing exposition of contemporary British society.<sup>163</sup> Wright emphasises the importance of avant-gardism to the *Experiment* group when he writes: “You know how changed things are – one feels strongly – youth in revolt,” and “Yes, it is hard for us old people to get near new ideas.”<sup>164</sup> As has been outlined above, the young Cambridge *Experimenters* were supra-conscious of their role of custodians of the future, and

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<sup>159</sup> Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, 82.

<sup>160</sup> Bradbury and McFarlane, ‘Movements, Magazines, and Manifestos’, 203.

<sup>161</sup> Pound, ‘Small Magazines’, 702-703.

<sup>162</sup> Price, ‘Finite But Unbounded’, 4.

<sup>163</sup> Price, ‘Finite But Unbounded’, 4.

<sup>164</sup> Basil Wright, ‘Postwar’, *Experiment* 1, (November 1928): 2-3.

sought to explicitly differentiate themselves from preceding generations. For the *Experiment* group, to be 'young,' to be 'new,' was a defiant political statement.

The opening stanza to Wright's poem succinctly demonstrates the strained relationship of the *Experiment* generation to preceding generations. Furthermore, Wright's verse suggests that the miscommunication and lack of understanding between these groups was mutual:

The broken glass shocked before the crumpling of the Kaiser's  
picture: Frau Pfaff saw crackling chips destroying her carpet  
symmetry: the picture so long clad in custom-sanctity, hung  
from ineradicable hook. A red-faced young man in a flameblue  
tie, snorting defiantly against monarchy: no more war. That was  
nothing: he is a lodger nameless and paying. But that carpet blotch  
at his feet, that destruction of his – what would Herr Colonel  
have said.<sup>165</sup>

The Kaiser and Frau Pfaff represent the past, tradition and authority, and the young man in the flameblue tie the decadence and 'disrespect' of the young. The Kaiser's painting hangs on an ineradicable hook, while equally evoking a sense of precariousness.<sup>166</sup> All symmetry and order has been shattered. The young man remains a nameless 'lodger' in a history that belongs to his ancestors: his efforts to alter society are met only with disdain. This can be unquestionably related to Wohl's assertion of the general feeling in Britain following the First World War that: "The hard-faced and hard-hearted old men had come back and seized the levers of power. Youth had been defeated by age. Civilization had been dealt a fatal blow."<sup>167</sup>

Wright's poem continues in addressing the apoplexy suffered at the hands of the War: the acknowledgement that life had changed, but an unwillingness, or incapacity to reinstate any kind of 'order'. As suggested above, there simultaneously existed in the late Twenties a sense of continuity *and* rupture in society. Continuity was provided by those who remembered and claimed ownership of the War and the period before 1914: by contrast, the younger generation were disconnected from

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<sup>165</sup> Wright, 'Postwar', 2.

<sup>166</sup> It should be noted here that the Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated in 1918. He was still living, but was in exile in the Netherlands.

<sup>167</sup> Wohl, *Generation of 1914*, 85.

the events of 1914-18 and demanded futurity as opposed to the return to a pre-War idealism. Wright's 'Postwar' describes a social condition – "...so settled and unchanging,/ a long timeless period," – that allows us to reassess the importance of time as a leitmotif in English modernist writing established immediately after the War. The writers of this canon – Eliot , Woolf, *et al* – did not possess the same relationship to society as the succeeding generation. They too were the *old guard*: for them time remained suspended, fragmented by the events of the War.

He puts the fragments in the waste paper basket: with that  
crumpled picture – no – this hand stretched out: let be: things  
are changed.<sup>168</sup>

This line is indicative of the change desired by the literary youth – a desire to reclaim the present, to reject the experiential and aesthetic practice of piecing together fragmentary forms. Furthermore, Wright's poem almost explicitly references the role of poetry in this ideal new scheme: the 'fragments' thrown into the waste paper basket represent the modernist poetry of Eliot that loomed over the new generation. As opposed to fragmenting his verse, Wright's 'Postwar' attempts to engage with the *ongoing* nature of time: although moments remain ephemeral, as in the fragmentary mode, one does not necessarily seek to reconstruct 'lost' time. Aesthetic pleasure is derived not from a recovery of the past, but from a continual sense of progression.

Time, and the human relationship to time, is a persistent theme in *Experiment's* inaugural number. Following Wright's experiential time-poem 'Postwar,' *Experiment* published Empson's poem 'Letter,' a metaphysical exploration of love and the universe.<sup>169</sup> Initially trained as a mathematician, Empson utilised his deeply theoretical understanding of the sciences to engage with the topoi of contemporary literature in a rigorously modern fashion. For Empson, space-time replaces experiential time as the location of 'truth.' The poet's experiments with space-time attempt to liberate his generation from the constraints of an understanding of time that had become defined by the events that occurred between 1914 and 1918.

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<sup>168</sup> Wright, 'Postwar', 3.

<sup>169</sup> Subsequently published as 'Letter I' with an additional stanza.

Linda Dalrymple Henderson has written that in the nineteenth century, new theories of geometry had resulted in the popularization of ideas concerning a fourth spatial dimension. She writes:

[T]hese notions had begun to capture the public's imagination [...] in much the same way Black Holes have done in recent years. Like a Black Hole, "the fourth dimension" possessed mysterious qualities that could not be completely understood, even by scientists themselves.<sup>170</sup>

Henderson continues, that "Emerging in an era of dissatisfaction with materialism and positivism, "the fourth dimension" gave rise to entire idealist and even mystical philosophical systems."<sup>171</sup> The nineteenth century experiments with Non-Euclidean geometries and the fourth dimension were conceived wholly on spatial terms; however the publication of Einstein's *General Theory of Relativity* in 1916 allowed for a reimagining of the fourth dimension, deducing that it was in fact *time*.

Henderson's seminal book addresses the key modern art movements across Europe, with the notable absence of two avant-garde centres, England and Germany. Henderson writes that this omission was the result of an absence of a coherent body of writing by artists and their contemporaries in the Vorticist and German Expressionist movements, on the subject of the fourth dimension. The Vorticist case is interesting in this regard: "the notion of a vortex itself had been connected to the fourth dimension" by popularising writers on the topic such as Charles Hinton; and T.E. Hulme and Pound were tangentially connected to the theory through the advocacy of a strong geometrical orientation and in their support of experiments with the musical fourth dimension respectively.<sup>172</sup> Despite these associations, Henderson postulates that the fourth dimension was "downplayed" by the Vorticists' authoritative figurehead Wyndham Lewis, who desired to "prove Vorticism independent of its Cubist and Futurist sources."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), xviii.

<sup>171</sup> Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, xviii.

<sup>172</sup> Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, xxi, fn.11.

<sup>173</sup> Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, xxi, fn.11.

Many of these historical strands are woven together in Empson's *Experiment* poem 'Letter.' In a new era of dissatisfaction, Empson's cosmological love story combines the analytical and the mystical. Empson utilises Einstein's theory of Relativity and the curvature of space-time to create a new dimension not understood by scientists despite paradigm shifting discoveries - that of love. To some extent, Empson's 'Letter' also served a scientific epistemological function: within his verse, Empson developed the theory of the time-space continuum to posit a new scientific possibility: the Black Hole theory. The period of transition and uncertainty addressed above with reference to societal progression after the First World War can be extended to encompass all aspects of cultural development. For example, during this period scientific discoveries relating directly to the understanding and perception of the physical world were being made with exceptional regularity. The nature of reality and knowledge were themselves in question. The form of Empson's 'Letter' enacts the theme of transition and movement from the known to the unknown. The first stanza reads:

You were amused to find you too could fear  
"The eternal silence of the infinite space,"  
That net-work without fish, that mere  
Extended idleness, those pointless places  
Who, being possibilized to bear faces  
(Pascal's or such as yours) up buoyed  
Are even of universes void.<sup>174</sup>

Compare this with the third stanza:

Only, have we space, common-sense in common,  
A tribe whose life-blood is our sacrament,  
Physics or metaphysics for your showman,  
For my physician in this banishment?  
Too non-Euclidean predicament.  
Where is that darkness that gives light its place?  
Or where such darkness as would hide your face?<sup>175</sup>

The first verse represents what is already known: "The network without fish is empty space which you could measure, lay an imaginary net of co-ordinates over."

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<sup>174</sup> William Empson, 'Letter', *Experiment* 1 (November 1928): 4.

<sup>175</sup> Empson, 'Letter', 4.

This is compared in the third stanza with the uncharted “condition when two stars are not connected by space at all.”<sup>176</sup> Empson’s “too non-Euclidean predicament,” draws our attention to what was then unknown, the frontier of research in modern physics: the Black Hole. Empson’s accompanying notes to the poem (1955) posit that: “A big enough and concentrated enough star would, I understand, separate itself out from our space altogether.”<sup>177</sup> The identification of the possibility of an emerging Black Hole Theory in Empson’s ‘Letter’ legitimates it as an epistemological tool. The poem and attendant notes display a deep “engagement with the new cosmology of [its] day; it plays with scientific ideas that were right on the edge between authoritative explanation and speculation during the late 1920s and early 1930s.”<sup>178</sup> Empson’s hypothetical giant star with a high density is in dialogue with the research of the contemporary scientific community at Cambridge, and with that of Arthur Eddington in particular. Eddington wrote on the possibility of giant collapsed stars that:

Firstly, the force of gravitation would be so great that light would be unable to escape from it, the rays falling back to the star like a stone to the earth. Secondly, the red-shift of the spectral lines would be so great that the spectrum would be shifted out of existence. Thirdly, the mass would produce so much curvature of the space-time metric that space would close up round the star, leaving us outside (i.e. nowhere).<sup>179</sup>

Price has written that “Empson liked to push his love affairs beyond the limits of physical theory, using the dramatic implications of Einstein’s theory to explore extreme psychological or social conditions.”<sup>180</sup> Given the context in which Empson’s poems were produced, we can attribute to his work wider sociological implications.<sup>181</sup> As discussed above, the psychological and social tensions in the transitory period at the end of the 1920s manifested themselves in a quest for

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<sup>176</sup> William Empson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Haffenden (London: Penguin, 2000), 211.

<sup>177</sup> Empson, *The Complete Poems*, 211.

<sup>178</sup> Katy Price, ‘Flame far too hot: William Empson’s non-Euclidean Predicament’, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* Vol. 30, No. 4 (Dec 2005): 312.

<sup>179</sup> A. S. Eddington, *The Internal Constitution of the Stars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 6.

<sup>180</sup> Price, ‘Flame far too hot’, 315.

<sup>181</sup> Price, ‘Flame far too hot’, 315.

greater understanding of the physical world. Therefore, the interpretive social function normally conferred upon the arts, was now equally impinging upon the sciences. Empson's 'Letter' attempts to serve a dual function: bringing the physicist and metaphysician together, the poet creates a mode of expression that is both epistemologically and socially relevant. This facet of Empson's work is especially relevant to the concept of *Weltanschauung*, introduced at the front of this chapter as an ideological buzz-word for the *Experiment* group. Empson's poetry alters the conceptual framework of the medium as a means of integrating art, science, and philosophy in a coherent global outlook.

### **Becoming a Manifesto**

It was noted at the front of this chapter that some texts *assume* the role of manifesto because they are "conceived *a posteriore* as the 'synthesis' of a series of motifs and formal solutions that best embody or even anticipate and in some way foster the principles of a movement or a school."<sup>182</sup> The publication of the *Experiment* group in *transition* in June 1930 marked the precise moment at which the group were canonised as a legitimate avant-garde movement and retroactively conferred the status of 'manifesto' upon their original programme. It was in *transition* that the descriptor 'manifesto' was first applied to the *Experiment* group: their contribution to Jolas' magazine was organised under the title 'Cambridge Experiment: A Manifesto of Young England'.<sup>183</sup>

Since the late nineteenth century, specifically the publication of Moréas' 'Symbolist Manifesto' in 1886, there had been a proliferation of both political and aesthetic manifestos, particularly in France. These two typical subject areas of the genre meant that it was quickly appropriated by the avant-garde as the preferred form of communication. However, by 1930 the manifesto had become so ubiquitous in its symbolic representation of avant-garde output that it attained the status of 'untouchable medium' for emergent youth movements. In many ways, the

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<sup>182</sup> Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, 23.

<sup>183</sup> 'Cambridge Experiment: A Manifesto of Young England' in *transition* No.19-20, (June 1930): 105-138.

manifesto was the intellectual property of what Perloff calls *les jeunes de la classe de 1915*, and Robert Wohl 'the Generation of 1914': "The Parisian avant-garde and its forms of cultural intervention [namely the popularization of the manifesto], [came] to constitute an example for other movements; however, by exporting such forms into socio-cultural milieus, these movements are forced to confront the contradictions of their model."<sup>184</sup>

Being of the younger generation, the *Experiment* group was perhaps reticent to categorise the opening editorial as a manifesto, thereby eliciting comparison to those who preceded them. However, the appearance of 'Cambridge Experiment: A Manifesto of Young England' in *transition*, in many respects circumvented any issues the Cambridge group might have in adopting that appellation. The fact that the claim to a 'manifesto' was first made in the Paris magazine is significant: it ostensibly created a dialogue between themselves and the historic continental avant-gardes of Impressionism, Fauvism, German Expressionism, and more crucially Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism.<sup>185</sup> The creation of this dialogue essentially canonized the *Experiment* group, and entitled them to assume the role of manifesto writers: they have been appointed "individuals of public relevance" upon whom the dictionary definition confers the privilege of manifesto production. Furthermore, this accolade is bestowed *upon* the group as opposed to self-designated: the title 'Cambridge Experiment: A Manifesto' is appointed by the host publication as opposed to the author(s) of the tract themselves.

Significantly, the epithet of manifesto is ascribed to the *Experiment* group in *transition* in two forms: 'Cambridge Experiment: A Manifesto of Young England' is presented to the reader on an otherwise blank page by way of introduction to multiple texts by different authors, not as a reference to a specific singular text. The texts which appear in this section represent the broad spectrum of *Experiment* and its interests, and include reprints from earlier issues alongside new material. The presentation of previously published material under the new aegis of 'manifesto'

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<sup>184</sup> Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, 50.

<sup>185</sup> The typical subjects of what Perloff calls the 'ism studies', those subjects 'whose tendency is almost invariably to stress the uniqueness of the movement in question at the expense of its context'. Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, xxxviii.



retrospectively endows the magazine and its contents with a certain level of importance, thereby altering our perception of it. Furthermore, the *transition* text supports the definition of manifesto that has been employed throughout this chapter, allowing multiple, single-authored texts presented in a single space to assume the status of manifesto. A second *Experiment* manifesto published in *transition* conforms to the traditional definition of a single text. However, this text, 'Experiment: A Manifesto' deliberately subverts the traditional demands of a manifesto for programmatic clarity:

If we were hawking some sharp and particular quarrel: with Miss M for a charlatan, Mr N for a Christian: if we had discovered some literary panacea: or renounced some popular philosophy: it would be easy now to be pointed, to be vigorous, to be witty. But because we have no panacea: and continue in humility: you will find us quite simply clumsy. We have lost faith, you see, in this tinkering with the structure of literature: and if you find us labouring it is because we are trying to shift, ever so slightly, its bases. Rather accidentally; because we invented no principles; and now that they have happened to us, they are uncertain and not at all startling. A sense that literature is in need of some new *formal* notation: an attempt to show how such a notation can be built out of *academic* notations, where academic means perhaps no more than non-moral and is after all best explained in our poetry: a belief in the compact, *local* unit: and in the *impersonal* unit: a belief finally, and a disbelief – for it is about this mainly that we are at odds – in *literature* as a singular and different experience, something more than an *ordering* of life. You see how haphazard it all is. And its criterion ultimately is only again *Experiment*.<sup>186</sup>

*Experiment: A Manifesto* refuses to conform to our expectations of the genre. Since the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, the genre of manifesto writing had transformed the traditional vehicle for political statement into a quasi-poetic construct. The preamble to Marx and Engels' celebrated manifesto is itself somewhat poetic: "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism". In *The Futurist Moment* Marjorie Perloff identified this as the point at which the paradigm of manifesto writing was set: the effectiveness of beginning with a kind of verbal *frisson* was recognised, and the so a formula for the successful creation of manifestos was

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<sup>186</sup> 'Experiment: A Manifesto', in 'Cambridge Experiment: A Manifesto of Young England', *transition*, No.19/20, (June 1930): 106.

established.<sup>187</sup> The *Experiment* group manifesto in *transition* initially conforms to our expectations for a dramatic and agitated exordium. We are encouraged to believe that the manifesto will act as a witty pronouncement on the current state of literary affairs. Instead we are presented with a satirical denouncement of the manifesto form and what it has come to represent. The young English *Experimenters* do not claim to be revolutionaries. They do not consciously portray themselves as a radical avant-garde. The multiple clauses and contradictory statements made in *Experiment: A Manifesto* are a statement of a new kind of avant-garde, in which the manifesto represents the preceding generation and its failures to affect change.

Appearing between the fifth and sixth issues of *Experiment* in Cambridge, the decision to officially name the *transition* tract a manifesto is an important and artistically loaded statement. By 1929 the manifesto was commonplace in France: almost any statement of artistic position was assigned the status of manifesto. Even in England the manifesto mode had become blasé as early as 1914 when the *Times* wrote of the Vorticist manifesto *BLAST* that “the art of the present day seems to be exhausting its energies in Manifestos.”<sup>188</sup> Therefore, it is understandable that a group who sought to position themselves at the forefront of a new generation of literary practice would be hesitant to align themselves with an ostensibly outmoded form.

The success of *Experiment: A Manifesto* in *transition* lies in its drawing attention not to itself, but to what follows it: their manifesto or rather artistic position is, after all, best explained in their poetry. However, it must also be noted that in the creation of a manifesto, regardless of the intended satire or subversion, the *Experiment* group conform to the stereotype of manifesto as witty intervention. While superficially claiming *not* to posit any strict principles, and likewise refusing to declare their pretensions to avant-gardism, several factors reveal the indebtedness of the youth movement to their forbears. Firstly, as has already been suggested, the *Experiment* group adopt the typically poetic narrative which had become archetypal in the

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<sup>187</sup> Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, 82.

<sup>188</sup> “‘Blast’ – The Vorticist’s Manifesto”, *The Times* (1 July 1914): 8.

manifesto tradition. Likewise, the rhetorical use of 'we' as a discursive strategy in order to present the author(s) as members of a group or movement with a common outlook is typical of manifesto writing.<sup>189</sup> These strategies necessarily undermine the programme of mockery that the *Experimenters* initially attempt to engage, and cast them simply as another new avant-garde movement in the manner of the Futurists and Surrealists. Indeed, the final line of 'Experiment: A Manifesto' recalls the virulent cries of the manifestos of the heroic avant-gardes: "And its criterion ultimately is only again *Experiment*." Although somewhat tempered, this retains in its brevity the vitality and indisputability of the closing lines to the Futurist, Vorticist, and Surrealist manifestos.<sup>190</sup>

The publication of *Experiment: A Manifesto* in June 1930 marks a crucial phase in the history of the group which produced it. By 1930, many of the key figures in the *Experiment* group had either left Cambridge already or were approaching graduation. 'Experiment: A Manifesto of Young England' reprinted carefully selected excerpts from the Cambridge magazine alongside purpose written articles for the international quarterly. The international distribution of *transition* to an avant-garde following provided the *Experiment* group with a broad and sympathetic audience. The appearance of the group in *transition* then, marked the point at which the new generation of artistic and literary talent relinquished their adolescence, and established themselves as a mature and coherent movement.

Beyond instituting *Experiment* in a generalised avant-garde narrative, the appearance of the group in *transition* linked them to the Surrealist movement specifically. Rob Jackaman claims that it was *transition* that "first gave Surrealism a clear voice in the English-speaking world."<sup>191</sup> The text which is most often referred

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<sup>189</sup> Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, 21.

<sup>190</sup> The Futurists consummated their 1909 manifesto with the declaration "Standing on the world's summit we launch once again our insolent challenge to the stars!" The Vorticists' preamble to their multiple manifestos, or 'Blasts,' 'Long Live the Vortex' was completed by the claim "Blast presents an art of Individuals"; and André Bretons 1924 'Manifesto of Surrealism' concluded simply with "Existence is elsewhere."

<sup>191</sup> Rob Jackaman, *The Course of English Surrealist Poetry since the 1930s* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1989), 26.

to in relation to the proto-surrealism of *Experiment* is Julian Trevelyan's essay 'Dreams,' published in *transition*.<sup>192</sup>

Significantly, Trevelyan's text 'Dreams' immediately follows in *transition* the republication of Wright's 'Postwar,' the implications of which have been discussed above. The dialogue created by placing these two pieces side-by-side is that of juxtaposing 'history' and 'reality'. Trevelyan suggests that the waking mind "struggles to connotate and project the dimensionless unity of the subconscious upon the one plane of its very limited conception of space and time."<sup>193</sup> This position is also complementary of Empson's poetic programme outlined above. By comparison, Trevelyan describes the state of dreaming thus:

In the state of dreaming or of hallucination, the mind loses that selfconsciousness which in its waking hours it can never quite banish, and begins to move silently through a timeless, spaceless world, where neither Destiny nor Chance have stepped; it is created by and at the same time creates its sleep liberated creatures, grows deeper and broader than the day-world; lines can be drawn in any direction instead of in the one; the tension which relates mind to matter in the waking hours disappears.<sup>194</sup>

As with Empson's poetry, the dream-space has conferred upon it a quality apart from lived experience and history: there is no sense of linear progression or inevitability. It is a state which is "deeper and broader than the day-world," which is to say a more "truthful" space apart from "remote disintegrating reality."<sup>195</sup> The question of the aesthetic possibilities offered by the dream is also of interest to Trevelyan. He writes that: "as the mind has changed, so too has the definition of meaning: the rhythm of living has its foundations deeper, and the mind gropes to justify, exemplify itself in the subconscious."<sup>196</sup> The young author believes that he and the *Experiment* group to which he belongs are best placed, being a new

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<sup>192</sup> See: Peter Nicholls, 'Surrealism in England', *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century English Literature*, 396-416. Paul C. Ray, *The Surrealist Movement in England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971). Michel Remy, *Surrealism in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999). Alan Young, *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981).

<sup>193</sup> Julian Trevelyan, 'Dreams', 121.

<sup>194</sup> Julian Trevelyan, 'Dreams', 121.

<sup>195</sup> Trevelyan, 'Dreams', 120.

<sup>196</sup> Trevelyan, 'Dreams', 121.

generation, to liberate new meanings and aesthetic truths afforded by the subconscious:

We have shown that aesthetic pleasure justifies itself in the fantasies of the dream-world, and we have suggested that the converse bears a very particular relation to truth. A cord stretched through the subconscious round which may crystallise the impersonal dream-fantasies, this affords so strange an analogy to the process of artistic creation that we felt justified in whispering, a little hastily, *to dream is to create*. Since then the years have shifted, Mr Joyce has waxed.. and waned, Sir Joynson Hicks has been banished to his shelf in the peerage, Mr Eliot has turned Anglo-Catholic; and we say with a little more assurance, *To Dream Is To Create*. Finally, since this is a manifesto, unencumbered with lurid inhibitions, let us gladly shout *TO DREAM IS TO CREATE*.<sup>197</sup>

It is of especial interest to this study that Trevelyan declares his contribution to *transition* to be a manifesto. Furthermore, in many respects this second manifesto is clearer in its position than the first. In the concluding statement to his manifesto (before appendices), Trevelyan explicitly casts his group as the new avant-garde, markedly different from the political (Hicks) and aesthetic (Joyce and Eliot) old-guard. We are told that “the years have shifted,” suggesting – while not explicitly referring to – the War. Indeed, Trevelyan’s reluctance to specifically reference that event, paired with the emphasis on the “timelessness” of dreaming and the subconscious, liberates the young *Experimenters* from their attachment to the War and reasserts Wright’s preceding affirmation that they are decisively *postwar*. Significantly, the issue of *transition* in which the *Experiment* group appeared was intended to be the magazine’s final number.<sup>198</sup> This fact adds weight to the claim that *Experiment* in *transition* had reached the point of maturation and was legitimately placed to assume the role of a new avant-garde generation.

This chapter has examined the key concerns of the *Experiment* group. It has demonstrated how the contemporary obsession with generations – precipitated by the losses of the First World War – influenced the way in which the *Experiment* group perceived of themselves. This self-identification as a generation has been

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<sup>197</sup> Trevelyan, ‘Dreams’, 122.

<sup>198</sup> Jolas re-launched the magazine as *Transition* in March 1932.

shown to have impacted upon the group's understanding of contemporary society, leading them to attempt to distil the character of the age in their art and writing. The ideal of capturing the contemporary spirit or *Weltanschauung* in turn informed the group's editorial, which pledged a programme of interdisciplinarity. The main body of this chapter has dealt with the manifestos of the *Experiment* group. It has been established that the term manifesto need not only represent a single tract, but can in fact be applied to the entire process of the little magazine. In light of this fact I have shown that the programmatical tracts in *Experiment* and the literary and artistic contributions to the magazine shared key concerns that were derived from the core concept of generations outlined at the front of the chapter. Through the discussion of manifestos it has been demonstrated that the *Experiment* group actively engaged with pre-war avant-gardes as a means of establishing themselves within a historical narrative, while simultaneously drawing attention to their temporal distinctiveness. Finally, I have addressed the *Experiment* manifesto in *transition* which marked the moment at which the group were effectively assimilated into the historical avant-garde narrative. The appearance of the *Experiment* group in the Paris magazine was symbolic of the new generation of artistic and literary talent relinquishing their adolescence and establishing themselves as a mature and coherent movement. They had fulfilled the expectations of their original 'manifesto': they had "ripened into extravagance."

The centrality of the historical avant-garde and notions of process continue in Chapter Two. Through a discussion of the concept of "experimentalism" I will illustrate the ways in which the group negotiated their relationship with the historical avant-garde not as a means to an end, but as investigations of the contemporary psyche. Process is implicit in the term "experiment": an experiment is after all a methodological framework not necessarily predicated upon a result. The procedural nature of experimentation requires perpetual 'presentness.' Therefore the concept of "experimentalism" offered the Cambridge group the ideal paradigm in which to conduct their explorations of the contemporary *Weltanschauung*.

## Chapter Two: The Nature of the *Experiment*

It has been shown in Chapter One that the *Experiment* group actively engaged with the historical avant-garde through a reactivation of the archetypal modes of vanguard expression – the manifesto and little magazine. However, I have also demonstrated that *Experiment* subtly subverted these historical genres as a means of differentiating their generation from their pre-war predecessors. This differentiation was a primary concern for the *Experiment* group. It is interesting in this regard that, despite being regularly referred to as an ‘avant-garde’ movement, the *Experiment* group never self-consciously identified with this term. This, I argue, is a result of the group’s cultural position in relation to the First World War. As opposed to ‘avant-gardism’ the Cambridge group championed a programme of ‘experimentalism.’ Bray, Gibbons, and McHale have noted in their recent *Companion to Experimental Literature* that although these terms often function roughly synonymously, there are important nuances of difference in connotation between *experimental* and *avant-garde*.<sup>199</sup> These nuanced differences are critical to understanding the generational distance between the *Experimenters* and their pre-war ancestors.

The term *avant-garde* comes to us from an explicitly military context, denoting the foremost position of an advancing army. The term was subsequently assumed by the political sphere, where the avant-garde was the faction that took the lead ahead of the rest of a political movement. Bray *et al* conclude from this largely etymological history of the avant-garde, that *aesthetic* avant-gardism continues to be allied with political radicalism in a number of twentieth- and twenty-first century artistic and literary movements.<sup>200</sup> Despite being rooted in military terminology, many theories of the avant-garde have been written which attend to the concept of avant-gardism as an explicitly cultural phenomenon. The best known and most

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<sup>199</sup> Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, Brian McHale (ed.), ‘Introduction’, in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1-2.

<sup>200</sup> Bray *et al*, ‘Introduction’, 1-2.

enduring accounts are provided by Renato Poggioli and Peter Bürger.<sup>201</sup> Both these authors posit arguments with reference to the avant-garde that offer plausible reasons as to why the *Experiment* group did not actively adopt the term. In his discussion of various nationalities' conceptions of the avant-garde Poggioli observes the "lexicographical uncertainty" of the use of the term "avant-garde" in English.<sup>202</sup> He notes that the phrase is often anglicised, becoming "vanguard" or "advanced guards."<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, when the original French term is employed it is usually "in quotes or italicised as if to indicate [its] alien origin."<sup>204</sup> Writing of the concept of avant-gardism in English and American criticism Poggioli writes:

Anglo-American criticism often uses these terms with primary reference to French art and literature, or to its influences and reflections beyond French borders, as if avant-garde art was an international manifestation only in an indirect and mediated way; more specifically, as if it were a continental an extracontinental extension of certain aspects of the French intelligence – a real, true case of spiritual Gallicism.<sup>205</sup>

Poggioli's assertion that the Anglo-American conception of avant-gardism was inextricably linked with French precedents offers one explanation as to why the *Experiment* group did not align themselves with the concept. It has been demonstrated that the *Experimenters* sought to clearly distinguish themselves from their predecessors: this was achieved by adopting an alternative term for their "new" art and literature.

Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* offers another insight which may have impacted upon the *Experiment* group's determination to endorse an alternative term to "avant-garde." Bürger writes that during the cultural-political struggle of the Twenties and Thirties, theorists like György Lukács judged the avant-garde to be a symptom of "decadence."<sup>206</sup> This narrative of decline was in direct opposition to

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<sup>201</sup> Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968). Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>202</sup> Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 7.

<sup>203</sup> Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 7.

<sup>204</sup> Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 7.

<sup>205</sup> Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 8.

<sup>206</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, li.



*Experiment's* progressive attitude and desire to “ripen into extravagance.”<sup>207</sup> For the *Experiment* group the War was the apotheosis of decadence, and universally despised.

As indicated in the discussion of Orwell in Chapter One, there was a general mood of anti-militarism in England following the Armistice in 1918.<sup>208</sup> The *Experiment* group's desire to distance themselves temporally from the violence of the First World War led them to reject the militaristic terminology ‘avant-garde’ and seek a new language to denote their progressive stance.

By comparison with the aggressive and bellicose connotations of the avant-garde, *experimentalism* alludes explicitly to the field of science. Experiment promises to extend the boundaries of knowledge, or in this case, of artistic practice. Furthermore, science is strongly associated with concepts of modernity and progress, and implies a rejection of inflexible traditions, values and forms. Bray *et al* note that “To call literature *experimental* is in some sense to aspire to compete with science – challenging science's privileged status in modernity and reclaiming some of the prestige ceded by literature to science in the nineteenth century.”<sup>209</sup> The notion of literature and art competing with science for acclaim is complementary to the *Experiment* programme of interdisciplinarity outlined in Chapter One. The group sought to embody the contemporary *Weltanschauung* through the *synthesis* of art and science. This has been shown to have been particularly successful in the cosmological poems of Empson which successfully combine the social function of poetry with the epistemological function of scientific research.<sup>210</sup>

Although this chapter claims that the *Experiment* group promoted experimentalism as an alternative to avant-gardism, their activities nonetheless converged with those of the traditional avant-gardes.<sup>211</sup> Indeed, Bray *et al* note that “The early twentieth-century avant-gardes – especially the Italian and Russian Futurists, and

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<sup>207</sup> ‘Experiment’, *Experiment 1*, 1.

<sup>208</sup> Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 121.

<sup>209</sup> Joe Bray *et al*, ‘Introduction’, 1-2.

<sup>210</sup> See: Chapter One: *Experiment Made Manifest*, 21-23.

<sup>211</sup> In this instance the distinction lies primarily in the self-conscious use of the term.

later the Surrealists – embraced the term experimentalism enthusiastically.”<sup>212</sup> Following on from the discussion in Chapter One of the relationship between *Experiment* and the Surrealists, it is useful to address the French group’s use of the concept of experimentalism.

There are precedents for experimental literature: however it is largely considered a twentieth-century phenomenon.<sup>213</sup> As suggested above, many of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes actively courted the concept of the experimental, culminating in the Surrealists’ insistence on scientific research. This insistence manifested itself primarily in the ‘Bureau for Surrealist Research’ or ‘laboratory’ opened in 1924 which was conceived as a public scientific project which aimed to *record* interior realities. The Bureau was so overwhelmed with respondents that it was forced to close to the public, but continued to interact with it via exhibitions, questionnaires, and periodicals, particularly *La Révolution Surréaliste (LRS)*. It is well documented that *LRS* adopted as its aesthetic model the popular illustrated scientific journal *La Nature*. However, as David Bate has stated: “The very aim of *La Nature* was also imitated by *La Révolution Surréaliste*. Just as *La Nature* was devoted to a ‘review of the sciences and their application in arts and industry’ (the subtitle of the magazine), so *La Révolution Surréaliste* also had a scientific research project of collecting and examining everyday pathological phenomena of ordinary people, dreams, slips and products of ‘psychic automatism.’”<sup>214</sup> As outlined in the preceding chapter, the appearance of *Experiment*, the title, the colour, and the geometry were suggestive of a scientific periodical. However, the combined effect of these elements produced an aesthetic that was undeniably literary and artistic. The Surrealists sought to present their artistic achievements as a *new* science, and the design of their group periodical reflected this ambition. The *Experiment* group, by way of contrast, desired to synthesise art and science into a new dual-form.

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<sup>212</sup> Bray *et al*, ‘Introduction’, 2.

<sup>213</sup> Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67) is often described as the first experimental novel.

<sup>214</sup> David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2004), 32.

While to some extent in dialogue with a project such as the Surrealists', the programme of the *Experiment* group remained markedly different. As opposed to attempting to achieve a scientific aesthetic for *Experiment*, the group's use of science was more embedded in the magazine's contents. In terms of its layout and design *Experiment* most closely resembles Eliot's *Criterion* (1922-39), very much an archetypal literary publication. The nature of the *Experiment* then lies primarily in its innovations with technique and form, as well as with its assimilation of scientific language into its creative output. A concept of *experimentalism*, what it *means* to experiment with literature, is fundamental to understanding the Cambridge group's project. As suggested in Chapter One with reference to the group's manifestos, the official programme of the journal – clearly indicated by the magazine's proclamatory title – was “only [to] *Experiment*”.<sup>215</sup> The desire to experiment is a definitive product of the historical position the youth movement self-consciously aligned themselves with, as introduced in the preceding chapter. It was shown in Chapter One through the analysis of Empson's 'Letter I' and Wright's 'Postwar' that there was a general movement amongst the *Experiment* generation to distance themselves from the events of the 1914 War, and the generation of writers and artists who came to define that historical moment. The poems of Empson and Wright, though markedly different in style and subject, engender a sense of rupture, a separation from the past that was psychic, cultural, and intellectual. This, however, poses the question as to how exactly *Experiment* navigated a cultural field in which the prominence of the First World War could be simultaneously addressed and diminished. It is here where experimentalism, combined with a self-fashioned avant-gardism as previously assessed, is most effective. If we consider that the defining feature of the avant-gardist gesture is its inherent and necessary questioning and critique of the very idea of art, then we must accord experimentalism a similar status: “experimental literature always interrogates the fundamental premises and enabling features of literary art. More particularly, it casts itself quite deliberately as experiment, that is, as a test or a process of discovery carried out in a rigorous manner and intended not only to produce

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<sup>215</sup> 'Experiment: A Manifesto', 106.

something new but also to make apparent aspects of the old which we hitherto neglected.”<sup>216</sup>

The process of experimentalism as laid-out above allows for inconsistencies in style and practice, and even for the possibility of failure. The benefit of claiming to experiment lies in an approach to failure more consistent with the sciences. Historically the arts perceived ‘failure’ as a dead end, a waste of time and resources: contrarily, the sciences allow failure as part of a larger learning process, in which each failure constitutes to some degree a success. This is in-line with the avant-garde programme: in writing failure into the narrative of experimentalism, it recognises its limitations. As Michel Beaujour has pointed out with regards to the avant-garde, they are involved in a “game” of “loser wins”. “That is, an avant-gardist cannot “win” according to the traditional rules of the game, since that would mean accepting the legitimacy of the establishment. He or she can only win through losing, by creating something that the establishment will decry as antiart.”<sup>217</sup>

The emphasis on experimental ‘process’ is complementary of the qualities of the magazine format outlined in the Introduction. I have suggested that the function of a little magazine such as *Experiment*, with an irregular publication pattern is markedly different from those published daily or weekly. The small presses of cultural groups do not fulfil a reportage role. We expect that cultural manifestations declare a single objective and abide by it. However, as expressed in McCracken’s essay on ‘Cambridge Magazines,’ little magazines are by their very nature incomplete. This position neatly corresponds with the notion that the value of experimentation lies in its process as opposed to its outcome. Approaching *Experiment* within these parameters allows us to conceptualise the magazine holistically and account for the considerable administrative changes and alterations to the programme which occurred throughout its lifespan. This is in direct

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<sup>216</sup> Warren Motte, ‘Experimental Writing’, in Lawrence D. Kritzman, *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 214.

<sup>217</sup> Motte, ‘Experimental Writing’, 215. In this account, some avant-garde groups, for example the Surrealists, can be seen to have failed in their objectives, given their assimilation into the canons of Art History and Literature.

opposition to previous studies of the magazine which fail to reconcile the final issues of *Experiment* with its original manifesto: Harding has described the final issue, *Experiment 7*, as being “stillborn from the press.”<sup>218</sup> Harding’s phrase implies catastrophic failure: what this thesis demonstrates is that through utilising the concept of experiment as learning process, the final issue can be interpreted as a positive continuation of process.

Reconciling the programme of the early issues of *Experiment* with that of the late issues requires attention to the modes of experimentation that were employed throughout. The group’s approach to experimentation provides a sense of continuity which cannot be gained through the assessment of external forces. The economic and political turbulence of the Twenties and Thirties meant that the group’s cultural reference points were continually shifting. The concept of experimentalism offered a stable vehicle through which to filter cultural commentary.

The modes of experimentalism practiced in *Experiment* can roughly be divided into three categories: language, technique, and form. This discussion will focus on the effects produced by combining elements of the above three categories. It will be shown that the group adopted the language of music as a means of interpreting painting, poetry, prose, and the cinema. In terms of technical innovations, the *Experimenters* explored the possibilities afforded by contemporary techniques such as automatism, and also cinematic methods of montage. The radical use of form was conceived as a means of extending the experiments in language and technique into the visual field. In all of the case-studies which follow it will be made evident that language, technique, and form were understood to be interrelated; and that, in order to portray the contemporary global outlook, these factors had to be synthesised in order to produce an approximation of lived experience.

Returning to Wright’s poem ‘Postwar’ introduced in Chapter One we find the first example of the types of innovations the group were experimenting with. Wright’s ‘Postwar’ uses the discordant vocabularies of destruction and domesticity alongside

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<sup>218</sup> Harding, ‘Experiment in Cambridge’, 295.

poetic and prosaic devices in order to construct his anti-traditionalist narrative. However, beyond simply exploring linguistic techniques, Wright's poem also resonates on a visual level. The images of death and destruction persist in the domestic setting: carpets are bloodstained, shards of glass litter the floor before the fragments are disposed into the waste paper basket. 'Postwar' therefore experiments with the symbiotic fracturing of life and language, both metaphorically and formally in the 'transcription' of half-thoughts and unfinished sentences. A comparable sense of fracture or hiatus is recorded in Max Ernst's 'autobiography' *Beyond Painting*, in which the artist states that he died on 1 August 1914 when he was drafted into the army, only to be resurrected on 11 November 1918. For Ernst, as with the *Experimenters*, the War was both self-defining and alienating, yet it provided the conceptual material for artistic innovation and experiment.

Much of this is reflected in Max Ernst's *Pietà or Revolution by Night* (1923) [Fig.2.1]. Partly I have chosen this comparison because of the wealth of scholarship that relates the supposed father-son relationship to the wider context of generational fracture following the War.<sup>219</sup> Ernst's painting, a self-portrait, depicts the artist in the arms of his father in a pose similar to the traditional Pietà image of the Virgin and dead Christ. The replacing of the Virgin with a male figure is only one of the many reversals which occur in this vaguely haunting image. The father figure, in his typically bourgeois attire of suit, tie, and bowler hat has his eyes downcast; and his son, cradled and barefoot in slacks and an open collar redolent of pyjamas, has his eyes wide-open, in a state of neither sleep nor death, but hyper-consciousness of his dark surroundings. As with the Kaiser in Wright's poem, Ernst's father – a staunch Catholic and deeply conservative painter – represents past generations, tradition, and their irrelevance in the new post-war society. The stiff posture and costume of the authority figure allow that he is almost camouflaged, absorbed by

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<sup>219</sup> See: Malcolm Gee, *Ernst: Pietà or Revolution by Night* (London: Tate Publishing, 1986). Malcolm Gee, 'Max Ernst, God, and the Revolution by Night', *Arts* 55 (March 1981): 85-91. Haim Finkelstein, 'Max Ernst: Conceptualization of Mental Space' *The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007). Elizabeth Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989). David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Werner Spies and Sabine Rewald, *Max Ernst: A Retrospective* (New York and New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2005). Maria Walsh, *Art and Psychoanalysis* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2013).

the painting's background, an automaton of culture, leaving the youth seemingly levitating, possessed of impetus capable of leading him up the staircase to the unknown. Nonetheless, also advancing the stairs is a third figure, also in a suit, but with his head bandaged and eyes completely closed.<sup>220</sup> This simply-sketched, ostensibly floating figure might be interpreted as a representation of the wounded and damaged past that continues to occupy a space in the (un)conscience of succeeding generations.

Both Wright's poem and Ernst's painting point to a desire for a kind of escapism: an escape not from the realities and horrors of the past, but from the conventions and institutions which led to those events. Experimentalism offered a convenient model, especially to the young Cambridge group, with which to tackle these contemporary issues. It allowed for the raising of fundamental questions about the very nature and being of literature: what its functions, limitations and possibilities were.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, "experimental literature, like any other kind of literature, involves a mixture of tradition and innovation," and this continued relationship to the past remained of crucial importance to the *Experiment* group, despite their desire for some level of subversiveness.<sup>222</sup> What marks the experimental apart from the traditional is the proportion of innovation in the work: "the experimentalist demands that proportion of innovation in that mixture be dominant; that the process of mixing itself be put on display with some degree of ostentation; and that the artefact from that process seem inescapably new."<sup>223</sup> The relatively modern institutions of science provided a firm linguistic grounding for these new literary and artistic currents in so much as their rhetoric was one of progress, methodology, and truth, as opposed to the old categories of tradition, genius, and faith.

Models of experimentalism and science allowed the artists and writers of the *Experiment* group and other avant-gardes to rigorously pursue a greater understanding of the contemporary. These ambitions are echoed in the work of

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<sup>220</sup> This figure has been interpreted variously to represent Sigmund Freud and also - perhaps more plausibly due to his well-documented head injury during the First War - Guillaume Apollinaire.

<sup>221</sup> Bray *et al*, 'Introduction', 1.

<sup>222</sup> Bray *et al*, 'Introduction', 1.

<sup>223</sup> Motte, 'Experimental Writing', 214.

Empson, as discussed in Chapter One, and also in the work of other practicing scientists who contributed to the *Experiment* project.<sup>224</sup> As previously discussed, Empson's poems, sought to achieve knowledge of spaces and universes separated from human consciousness and beyond comprehension, as well as to gain greater understanding of the peculiarities of the human condition. Where Empson's poetry begins to explore the hypothetical fourth dimension and the physical universe, many of his contemporaries both at home and abroad, looked to more intimate dimensions of alienation. As with the Surrealists, one aspect of human existence which fascinated the *Experimenters* was the act of dreaming, evidenced in Trevelyan's aforementioned 1930 contribution to *transition* entitled 'Dreams'. Surrealism sought to explore dream states through automatism in writing and painting – the attempt to achieve an 'unconscious' state whilst awake – and also by the transcription and recreation of dreams visually.<sup>225</sup>

The influence of this element of Surrealist 'laboratory' research being conducted in Paris is evident in some of the contributions to *Experiment*, falling into the category of experimental technique. David Lomas has written a useful paper on the history of mechanical recording devices and their links to the Surrealist movement. He states: "From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, recording instruments became vital tools in the production of scientific knowledge in a range of disciplines [...]. Such mechanical apparatuses, synonymous with the values of precision and objectivity, quickly became the benchmark of an experimental method."<sup>226</sup> Lomas argues that recording instruments that produced a graphic output were critical to the science of surrealism and went some way to bolstering its status as an experimental avant-garde.<sup>227</sup> Mechanical devices capable of producing graphic output were

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<sup>224</sup> See: Price, 'Finite But Unbounded'.

<sup>225</sup> See: Briony Fer, David Batchelor, and Paul Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and the Open University, 1993). Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995). Kim Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts: Theory and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). José Jiménez, Dawn Ades, Georges Sebbag, *Surrealism and the Dream* (Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2014). David Lomas, 'Becoming Machine: Surrealism Automatism and Some Contemporary Instances' in *Tate Papers* No.18 (November 2012) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/becoming-machine-surrealist-automatism-and-some-contemporary>. J.H. Matthews, *The Surrealist Mind* (Cranbury NJ and London: Associated University Presses, 1991).

<sup>226</sup> Lomas, 'Becoming Machine', 1.

<sup>227</sup> Lomas, 'Becoming Machine', 1.



commonplace in the medical profession from the mid-nineteenth-century: pulse, temperature, and respiration rate were readily visualised with the aid of recording devices.<sup>228</sup> The growth of the field of psychology, especially following the First World War and the identification of ‘shellshock,’ led to experimentation with the recording methods of physiology being applied to psychic processes. Breton gained first-hand experience of utilising recording devices to attempt to capture mental process through his experiences as a medical student at the neuro-psychiatric centre in St Dizier in 1916.<sup>229</sup>

Lomas has written that:

As an apparatus for visualisation, the graphic method carries implications for how to construe figures of the visible and invisible. It was not simply a technology for making visible something that lay beneath the human perceptual threshold (like a microscope), but rather a technology for producing a visual analogue – a translation – of forces and phenomena that do not themselves belong to a visual order of things.<sup>230</sup>

The graphic method promised scientific objectivity, a quality sought by Breton his 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* definition of surrealism as “psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought.”<sup>231</sup> This experimental technique for the production of poetry and images was greatly influenced by Breton’s readings of Sigmund Freud, his own experiences of creativity during periods of semi-consciousness, and by practical experience derived from treatment of shell-shock patients during the War.<sup>232</sup> Breton envisioned the Surrealists as “simple receptacles of so many echoes, modest *recording instruments* who are not mesmerized by the drawings we are making.”<sup>233</sup> For Breton and the Surrealists, like the *Experiment* group, the emphasis of their experiments was on process rather than outcome. Breton outlines the technique of automatism thus:

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<sup>228</sup> Lomas, ‘Becoming Machine’, 2.

<sup>229</sup> Lomas, ‘Becoming Machine’, 2.

<sup>230</sup> Lomas, ‘Becoming Machine’, 1.

<sup>231</sup> Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 26

<sup>232</sup> Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 22.

<sup>233</sup> Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 26-27.

Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can. Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else. [...] Write quickly, without any preconceived subject, fast enough so that you will not remember what you're writing and be tempted to reread what you have written. The first sentence will come spontaneously, so compelling is the truth that with every passing second there is a sentence unknown to our consciousness which is only crying out to be heard.<sup>234</sup>

Although Breton's initial definition of automatism focussed exclusively on the process of automatic writing, in a single footnote referencing the pictorial field Breton privileges the graphic automatism of Joan Miró and André Masson referring to the latter as "si près de nous" [one so close to us].<sup>235</sup> The emphasis on automatist process during the early phases of the Surrealist movement led to a proliferation of experiments poetically and visually, and assumed the role of avant-garde *mode du jour*. These experiments were well-documented in the surrealist mouthpiece *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1924-29).

There is evidence in *Experiment* of the influence of the surrealist automatist technique. The second issue of *Experiment* (February 1929) provides the most automatist examples of visual art that would appear in the magazine. During 1928-29, the young Frenchman and would-be photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson was a student of Magdalene College, Cambridge. At this point, Cartier-Bresson was still pursuing his intended career as a painter, having learned his craft as apprentice to cubist painter and sculptor André Lhote.<sup>236</sup> Cartier-Bresson studied in Montparnasse from 1927-8, and it was during this period and through his friendship with René Crevel that he first made contact with the Surrealist group. Of his work in this period, Cartier-Bresson is quoted as saying, "I was marked, not by Surrealist painting, but by the conceptions of Breton, [which] satisfied me a great deal: the role of spontaneous expression and of intuition and, above all, the attitude of

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<sup>234</sup> Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 29-30.

<sup>235</sup> Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>236</sup> Lhote founded the Académie Montparnasse in Paris in 1922.

revolt."<sup>237</sup> Despite his protestations of the influence of Surrealist painting, the *Portrait* [Fig.2.2] and *Composition* [Fig.2.3] published in *Experiment 2* belie a substantial indebtedness to the work of Surrealist painters, particularly André Masson and Joan Miró; albeit it is evidently the automatist qualities – derived from Breton’s conceptions – of those artists’ work to which Cartier-Bresson was attracted.

Of the two paintings Cartier-Bresson published in *Experiment*, *Portrait* is the first to appear (opposite Sykes Davies’ poem ‘Vendice’). *Portrait* combines a small section of automatic drawing with standard portrait form, so as that the automatic portion provides the ‘hair’ or ‘brain’ of the figurative image. If we accept the second interpretation – the automatist element as ‘brain’ – we can perhaps detect some level of interest on the part of Cartier-Bresson in the psychological implications of automatism and psychoanalysis as practiced by Freud. Besides the automatic process which is evident in Cartier-Bresson’s painting, other experimental processes are also employed. *Portrait* utilises multiple forms of mark-making normally associated with Surrealist techniques. The centre-left of the portrait seems to employ collage or collage-like techniques into the middle-ground of the painting. As the painting is now lost, and the *Experiment* photograph is black and white, it is difficult to ascertain whether these graphic elements were created in paint or using a cut-paper system. On the far left of the image, Cartier-Bresson has experimented with the *grattage* technique, wherein wet paint is scraped away from the canvas partly revealing what lies beneath the painted surface.<sup>238</sup> The combination of processes in *Portrait* interrupts the visual field, disrupting our concept of foreground and background. Taken together we find in Cartier-Bresson’s *Portrait* the surrealist impulse to make visible the invisible through experimentation with

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<sup>237</sup> Henri Cartier-Bresson quoted in Peter Galassi, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Early Work* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1987), 12.

<sup>238</sup> In 1927, Ernst developed the *grattage* as an application of the *frottage* technique in painting. Richly textured, relief-like materials such as wood, wire mesh, pieces of broken glass, and cord were placed under a canvas primed with numerous layers of paint. The individual layers of paint were scraped from the canvas pressed onto the textured object using a palette knife or spatula. The textures pressed themselves through the still-wet paint with the result that the characteristic features of the underlying objects were lost.  
<http://www.modernamuseet.se/en/Stockholm/Exhibitions/2008/Max-Ernst/Collage-Frottage-Grattage/>

process. In this respect we can legitimately credit *Portrait* 'experimental': although an undeniably juvenile example of the artist's work, it does attempt an intellectual examination of surrealist technique and its implications.

Cartier-Bresson's second contribution to *Experiment* continues to explore the transcription of the invisible world as a subject of visual art. *Composition* – while nonetheless immature in its derivation from surrealist sources – engages with key concerns of the *Experiment* project. *Composition* resembles many of Miró's works – particularly *The Birth of the World* (1925) [Fig.2.4] – in its use of schematic organisation and symbolic elements. The seemingly automatist configuration paired with its general impression as an unknown object in empty space, simultaneously evokes both an intimate dream landscape and a sense of the universal. In this respect, Cartier-Bresson's experiment complements the creative interiority of *Experiment's* poetic collaborators, and also the explorations of broader physical and astrological ideas that other contemporaries such as Empson sought to scrutinize. It is useful to employ the term 'constellation' here. Joan Miró adopted the term for a series of paintings created between 1939 and 1941 in which stellar and musical iconography combined to create new universal forms. Furthermore, the term 'constellation' has recently been appropriated as a means of discussing and understanding networks of people and influences.<sup>239</sup> The phrase is useful in a study of *Experiment* in that it encapsulates both the organisation of the group and their approach to capturing a contemporary world-view via scientific and artistic experimentation. This sense of combining iconography to produce dual meanings is apparent in Cartier-Bresson's *Composition*. *Composition's* use of repeated spherical motifs initially lend themselves to a cosmological interpretation, especially in the orb placed on the right of the central vertical line, which is shown to have an orbiting disc as seen in representations of the planet Saturn. The largest of Cartier-Bresson's celestial objects, almost directly beneath 'Saturn,' is a circle divided into four crescent shapes, symbolic of the phases of the Earth's Moon, a symbol which

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<sup>239</sup> See for instance Tate Liverpool's *DLA Piper Series: Constellations*, which aims to draw connections between artists and artworks in a non-chronological sequence.

recurs in much of the *Experiment* poetry that seeks to evoke the night as a realm symbolic of dreaming and the unconscious.<sup>240</sup>

The combination of cosmological and psychological was also a prominent feature in the work of Ernst, who, I have suggested, was a key influence on the picture-making processes employed in Cartier-Bresson's *Portrait*. Ernst's 1923 painting *Men Shall Know Nothing of This* [Fig. 2.5] uses astrological symbolism and an irrational use of space in order to evoke a mysterious dream-world.<sup>241</sup> Ernst's painting shares with Cartier-Bresson's *Composition* the use of the crescent moon as a symbolic signifier. Geoffrey Hinton has noted that the symbolism in *Men Shall Know Nothing of This* is explicitly sexual and that "a crescent moon is commonly a fertility symbol, as is the yellow colour."<sup>242</sup> Hinton's essay primarily explores the Freudian meaning of Ernst's painting; however he also elucidates some alternative influences. For instance, Hinton suggests that occultism was a "fundamental frame of reference" for the surrealists during the period. The occult offered the surrealists new perspectives on knowledge, especially arcane knowledge. This, Hinton states was critical in the naming of Ernst's painting – *Of This Men Shall Know Nothing*. I have suggested throughout this thesis that the *Experiment* group too sought alternative forms of knowledge: the group's experiments were based upon the predilection of combining traditional disciplines in order to produce new forms of understanding.

The final point of influence detected by Hinton in Ernst's painting is the theory of Relativity as outlined by Einstein. Hinton suggests that the whistle in the lower third of *Of This Men Shall Know Nothing* functions as a pendulum, referencing the General Theory of Relativity.<sup>243</sup> The relationship of Ernst's work to Einstein's theory was identified early in his career. André Breton wrote to André Derain in 1921 that: "[s]ometimes I claim that we owe a pictorial language to him in accordance with

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<sup>240</sup> Grigg, Sykes Davies, and Reavey in particular.

<sup>241</sup> Geoffrey Hinton, 'Max Ernst: Les Hommes n'en Sauront Rien', *The Burlington Magazine* 117:866, (May 1975): 292.

<sup>242</sup> Hinton, 'Max Ernst', 292.

<sup>243</sup> Hinton, 'Max Ernst', 295.

the new conception of things advanced by Einstein.”<sup>244</sup> This statement was elucidated by Breton in a 1920 essay on Ernst’s collages in which he wrote:

The belief in an absolute time and space seems to be vanishing [...], we begin to foresee with extreme emotion what this time-space of which people are talking may be. Soon the expression 'as far as the eye can reach' will seem to us devoid of meaning, that is, we shall perceive the passage from birth to death without so much as blinking [...].<sup>245</sup>

Breton’s statements imply that he believed that Ernst’s experiments in painting and collage were analogous to those of Einstein. As a result, Ernst’s paintings can be said to have served an epistemological function similar to that of Empson’s poems (Chapter One).

Cartier-Bresson’s *Composition* operates within a similar constellation of influence as Ernst’s work. It appropriates the languages of automatism and astronomy. There is however an alternative case to be made for the symbolism of Cartier-Bresson’s *Composition*. The title for instance alludes to more musical configurations akin to Kandinsky’s ‘Compositions’ than to Miró’s more explicitly astrological *Constellations* series. It is not inconceivable at this moment in Cartier-Bresson’s career – given his well-documented interest in the work of Mallarmé, his presence in Parisian jazz clubs, as well as the interest in musicality amongst his peers at Cambridge – that *Composition* may indeed be a reference to a fragmented, abstract trend emerging in modern music.<sup>246</sup> Alongside the planetary symbols in *Composition* appear instances of musical symbolism. If we look for example to the left-hand-side of the arrangement on the horizontal axis we encounter two symbols which appear as musical notes on a bar line. Likewise, in the lower left of the *Composition*, the sequence of dots resembles the articulation marks that indicate staccato on a musical score. Such a reading might extend to some of the objects originally understood in a cosmological capacity: the uppermost circular object at the

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<sup>244</sup> André Breton to André Derain, letter dated 3 October 1921 quoted in Gavin Parkinson, *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science: Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, Epistemology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 55.

<sup>245</sup> André Breton, ‘On Max Ernst’ in Max Ernst, *Beyond Painting: And Other Writings by the Artist and His Friends* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 177.

<sup>246</sup> For relationship of Cartier-Bresson to Mallarmé see: Clive Scott, *Street Photography: From Atget to Cartier-Bresson* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

extremities of the image frame can concurrently be read as both “solar object” and “open note” according to the musical accent system.<sup>247</sup>

Like Cartier-Bresson, the *Experimenter* Malcolm Grigg’s contribution to the first issue – ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’ – fully adheres to the magazine’s precept to experiment, both technically and psychologically, achieving an effect which might be deemed ‘dreamlike’ through its innovative combinations of visual and musical effects. Grigg’s mode of experimentalism falls into the category of formal innovation: although there is evidence of some engagement with automatism as a form of technical experiment, it is difficult to judge whether Grigg actively practices this technique or simply borrows from it aesthetically. Grigg’s ‘Sonata’ exists in text form; however the implication is that it is intended as a performance piece. Immediately following the work’s title Grigg has included a “stage-direction” which states: “Recited through a voice-amplifier and a very visible loud speaker.”<sup>248</sup> Once again, process is a key factor in Grigg’s experiment: it offers an alternative form of theatre wherein actors are mediated through technology. As with the automatist experiments outlined above, the human subject “becomes machine.” The voice is disembodied through the presence of the loud-speaker. The Futurist Luigi Russolo wrote in his ‘The Art of Noises’ manifesto in 1913 that “Ancient life was all silence. In the nineteenth century, with the invention of the machine, Noise was born. Today Noise triumphs and reigns supreme over the sensibility of men.”<sup>249</sup> The importance of sound and noise remained a contentious issue when Grigg’s ‘Sonata’ was published in 1928: the advent of the ‘Talkies’ was generating considerable debate as to the function of sound in the cinema (see: Chapter Three). In its experimentation with different modes of representation – poetry, theatre, and cinema – Grigg’s ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’ also reengages with questions of space-time. In his ‘Max Ernst’ essay in *Beyond Painting* Breton wrote that cinema, modern science and technology demanded the recognition of new temporalities outside of the lived one, adding, “[w]e eagerly look

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<sup>247</sup> It is impossible to say whether use of colour might alter any interpretation of Cartier-Bresson’s *Composition* as the artist destroyed much of his early work in the Thirties, and these black and white images are therefore all that survive.

<sup>248</sup> Malcolm Grigg, ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’, *Experiment* 1 (Nov. 1928): 24.

<sup>249</sup> Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, (1913), in Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, 74.

forward to seeing what this ‘relative time’ we have heard about might be.”<sup>250</sup> Ultimately, Grigg’s experiment offers an alternative temporal experience by means of manipulating spatial and acoustic forms.

It is difficult to definitively categorise Grigg’s work: it is a self-stated ‘sonata’ which provides guidelines as to the tempo – ‘moderately fast’ – but does not utilise traditional instruments, instead employing a voice-amplifier and ‘a very visible loud speaker’. As such, the piece disrupts the categories of music, performance, and in its written form, poetry. Like the dreamlike paintings of Surrealism, the ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’ creates a landscape which is disorientating and disturbing, a kind of non-place conceived of familiar yet estranged objects.<sup>251</sup> Indeed, although not explicitly stated in the directions, the tone of the sonata suggests darkness, perhaps rendering the loudspeaker the only visible element of the performance, thus decontextualised and anomalous – a surrealist object. The implied dark conditions required for successful recital of Grigg’s work – supported in the language of the piece, in its invocation of the moon – allows that a conducive environment for the creation of a dreamlike space might be created.<sup>252</sup>

A very definite “space” is also created in the form of the sonata as it is presented as script. The typography is suggestive of the changes in pace within the piece, alternating between longer prose-like sections and disjointed fragments composed primarily of repetitions. The effect of these repetitions is two-fold. In the first instance, it reinforces the image which is created lending it increased vitality and vividness, as with recurring dream images. Further, the repetitions are often altered slightly, making minor developments to the image: as in a state of dreaming, the image is unstable, changing, in a state of not-quite-being. In the second instance,

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<sup>250</sup> Parkinson, *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science*, 56.

<sup>251</sup> I think particularly of the paintings produced by Yves Tanguy and Salvador Dalí during this period.

<sup>252</sup> Grigg, ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’, 24-25: “Even when the moon sails behind a dark cloud even when the frightened moon so lonely fees behind a scudding cloud the grasses always talking.” Also: “Only there is a very gentle trembling every now and then through the reed-beds./The moon is still hidden.”



the repetitions in Grigg's would-be symphonic poem lend it a jazz-like quality, a sort of syncopation which disturbs the central narrative.<sup>253</sup>

The jazz movement was one which was of interest to the young *Experimenters*, linking it as they did to other important trends in modern art. The third issue of *Experiment* carried Sykes Davies' essay on 'The Primitive in Modern Art.' He wrote: "As a reaction from the complication of modern civilization art is becoming rapidly more and more primitive. Or rather, it is endeavouring to do so. And the measure of its success differs in different forms of art."<sup>254</sup> Sykes Davies cites jazz music as the field in which the primitive urge has achieved "almost complete success," compared with poetry in which similar efforts have resulted in "almost complete failure." In the same article, Sykes Davies transcribes the Latin poem 'Hymn of the A[r]val Brotherhood' in which he believes the primitive effect – which is largely that of rhythm, he concludes – has been successfully achieved.<sup>255</sup>

Sykes Davies writes that the Hymn "is an odd ritual song with immense rhythmical effect. The obvious way to perform it is to shout in unison, in the manner of an American college 'yell.'" The noise and intensity that is implied here is echoed by Grigg's use of the loudspeaker, giving his work the effect of incantation. However, a comparison of the 'Old Latin' hymn and Grigg's piece reveals that despite the commonality in their use of repetition as a means of establishing rhythmic form, the effect achieved is markedly different:

Enos. Lases. iuvate.  
enos. Lases. iuvate.  
enos. Lases. iuvate.  
neve lue rue. Marmar, sins incurrere in pleoris  
neve lue rue. Marmar, sins incurrere in pleoris  
neve lue rue. Marmar, sins incurrere in pleoris  
satur fu, fere Mars: limen sali: sta berber,  
satur fu, fere Mars: limen sali: sta berber,  
satur fu, fere Mars: limen sali: sta berber<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> The practices of non-idiomatic improvisation and free jazz are in some ways comparable to Surrealist automatist techniques.

<sup>254</sup> Hugh Sykes Davies, 'The Primitive in Modern Art', *Experiment* 3 (May 1929): 29.

<sup>255</sup> The 'Hymn of the A[r]val Brotherhood' is more commonly known as 'Carmen Arvale' an ancient hymn of the arval priests of Rome, preserved by inscription.

<sup>256</sup> Sykes Davies, 'The Primitive in Modern Art', 29.

Compared with:

There a hill with willows  
    There is a hill  
    There is a hill with sad-haired willows  
    There is a hill           a hill  
    There is a hill with willows.  
    Is it a tall hill yes it is very  
tall yes it is very round.  
    A hill           there is a hill.  
    Is there a stream on the hill-side?  
    A stream       there is a stream  
    There is a     hill  
    Is there a hill with willows?  
    A stream       there is a stream     a stream.<sup>257</sup>

The former possesses an innate self-assuredness by comparison with Grigg's 'Sonata'. The form of the work is compact and firm parameters are set – the repetition is exacting, without alteration, and the typographical manifestation of the text is likewise.<sup>258</sup> Grigg's experimental piece is, by comparison, insecure: the repetition serves to alter, and question the image and the rhythm, simultaneously slowing and quickening the pace of the piece. The concrete form of the sonata is also insecure: the physical gaps in the text embody a sense of hesitation or fragmentation, and negate any semblance of confined space. One assessment of such structural handling might be to assume that the youth and inexperience of Grigg as an author was the central contributing factor to the hesitancy and uncertainty of his work; however, a more conducive approach, I feel, is to contextualise such a condition within the wider framework of *Experiment* as a publication, and contemporary social conditions and discoveries.

As has been suggested above, the central tenet of *Experiment* was to do just that, experiment; a process which, by its very definition, is tentative, ongoing, and insecure in its outcomes. The discussion of manifestos and generations in Chapter

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<sup>257</sup> Grigg, 'Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen', 24.

<sup>258</sup> Sykes Davies transcription of the hymn in *Experiment* 3 does utilise an interesting formal structure for the piece, this seems however to be the poetic licence of the young writer, as opposed to the standard typographical presentation of the chant.

One contextualized the cultural conditions of uncertainty during the period according to political and social concerns which arose as outcomes of the First World War. Chapter One also addressed the role of contemporary physics with regards to the work of *Experiment* editor Empson, but this was by no means the only sphere of modern science with which the young Cantabrigians were engaged. Psychology for instance, as suggested in the analysis of Cartier-Bresson's paintings, was a rapidly expanding field of academic research which achieved a level of public/lay interest which was not achieved by the majority of the sciences. The psychology department at Cambridge was founded in 1897, and this was followed in 1912 by the establishment of the University's Psychological Laboratory. The key figure in the development of psychology and psychoanalysis as a science at Cambridge was William H.R. Rivers. The connection of Rivers to Cambridge Psychology is especially interesting with regard to the *Experiment* generation and their relation to the First World War. Rivers rose to prominence following his war work at Craiglockhart War Hospital where he used psychoanalytical methods to treat British Army officers suffering from shellshock.<sup>259</sup> Rivers' methods of psychoanalysis differed greatly from Freud's. His book *Conflict and Dream* (1923) claimed "the inadequacy of Freud's theory of wish-fulfilment as an explanation of dreams; [and] the exaggerated importance assigned by the psycho-analytic school to incidents in the dreamer's early life to the neglect of recent conflicts" which he regarded as more important as causal agents.<sup>260</sup> The *Experiment* generation at Cambridge then, inherited a psychological tradition which considered dreams to be "attempts to solve in sleep conflicts which are disturbing the waking life."<sup>261</sup> This interpretation is interesting in relation to the group's programme in which the literary and artistic experiments conducted in the magazine can be viewed as attempts to "solve" the problems of contemporary culture.

The 'experiments' which were carried out within the young magazine, such as Grigg's, sought to synthesise all aspects of modernity, with certain themes emerging as particularly critical. The previous chapter began contemplating the role

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<sup>259</sup> Rivers' methods are described in Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Viking, 1991).

<sup>260</sup> William H.R. Rivers, *Conflict and Dream* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923), v.

<sup>261</sup> Rivers, *Conflict and Dream*, v.

of 'time' in modernist literature and the formation of groups, its relationship to historical events, and the alteration of our understanding of time through the new physics. Each of these frameworks is, however, largely abstract, separated from direct human experience and understanding. Much of the interdisciplinary project of the *Experiment* writers rested on exploring the nuances of humanity, and human life itself, through mediums which would be understood by its audience, utilising familiar themes. The experiments carried out in the magazine therefore allow time to become more than an abstract concept, instead developing as a material, bodily concept.

This is evident in Grigg's performance-based experiment 'Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen,' in which musicality is a fundamental element. The stage-directions for the 'tempo' counterpoised with the enactment of line breaks, gaps in the verse, and repetitions, serve to draw attention to the expansion and contraction of time in human psychology. Thus, the audience are uncertain of exactly how much 'time' passes in the course of the narrative, much like in dream-time, while nonetheless being acutely aware of the 'actual' time of the performance – eg. to begin at 7pm and to last thirty minutes. As such, time presents itself through Grigg's 'Sonata' as both psychological and physical in nature: the reader/audience is aware simultaneously of real-time and conceived time through the application of auditory aids.

The 'material' presence of music in human experience, its ability to express change over a period of time, appears to fascinate the young *Experimenters*: the first issue alone contains four poems with musical inflections. Appearing alongside Grigg's 'Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen,' was Bronowski's poem entitled 'Serenade,' Wright's 'String Quartet,' and Sykes Davies' 'Music in an Empty House'. Furthermore, J.D. Solomon, a student of Geology at Trinity, published in the same pages an essay entitled 'Schubert or Schonberg Melody or Mathematics', in which he explored the relative merits of content and construction in classical music. Solomon concluded that what was required was a new *unity* between the content (tune/melody) and the formal composition of a piece of music. He stated that music should not be simply a pleasant tune, or a purely formalist mathematical

construction. This type of musical unity was also sought in poetry and other forms of writing in *Experiment*. In terms of interdisciplinarity, the example of music allowed for an exploration of narrative, formal scientific method and construction, and an engagement with the modernist concept of time, both *absolute* and *durational*.<sup>262</sup>

The relationship between proto-surrealist poetry and music has begun to be critically investigated in recent years, notably in Elizabeth McCombie's *Mallarmé and Debussy: Unheard Music, Unseen Text*. Whilst acknowledging the concrete differences in the work of these two contemporaries, McCombie notes that in the poetry of Mallarmé and music of Debussy "we experience multiple temporalities, shifting perspectives, double focuses, instabilities, and the melting of one form into another, all of which effects are produced in dialogue between the two expressive systems."<sup>263</sup> Complementary systems of construction highlighted by McCombie are, in music, the "stretched and compressed psychological time, the saturated density and motivic working out of the musical language in quasi-dream sequences and themes of foreboding"; and in poetry, *l'impair*, or unevenness, an idea advanced in Verlaine's 'Art poétique':

De la musique avant toute chose,  
Et pour cela préférer l'Impair  
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,  
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui  
pose.<sup>264</sup>

McCombie shares with Verlaine a perception that the musicality of poetry appears as an "unhindered weightlessness produced by the *vers impair* [...] which divests verse of the traditional vectors of poetic organisation, that verse can draw attention first and foremost to its rhythmic and sonorous qualities. Some of the ballast and

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<sup>262</sup> See: Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, trans. F.L. Pogson (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001).

<sup>263</sup> Elizabeth McCombie, *Mallarmé and Debussy: Unheard Music, Unseen Text* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003), xiii.

<sup>264</sup> Paul Verlaine, 'Art poétique', *Euvres complètes*, ed. Y.G. Le Dantec and Jaques Borel (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 326, in McCombie, *Mallarmé and Debussy*, 3. "Let us have music before everything, and, to obtain it, we will choose a subtle irregularity with nothing which balances and makes weight."

anchors of regular prosody are loosened; rhythm and sound can float in a new ethereal space.”<sup>265</sup>

It is clear that an assessment of the relationship between poetry and music – such as that by McCombie with reference to Mallarmé and Debussy – reveals somewhat more general issues which are pertinent beyond the narrow parameters of the *oeuvres* of those two figures. Issues of time, space, psychology and *beingness* are critical to both fields, and can be seen as much in the work of the *Experimenters* in Cambridge as in that of *fin de siècle* Paris.

Mallarmé is a useful figure to address when exploring general questions of experimentalism as well as concepts crucial to *Experiment* specifically. Histories of experimental literature, as it is understood as a largely twentieth-century phenomenon, cite Mallarmé as an immediate predecessor of the avant-garde template of self-interrogation. Specifically, Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés* (1897) with its dramatic typographical form “can be read as a quest for the essence of the book, taking the form of a dramatic questioning of the very idea of the book on the very material level of a series of words on a series of pages.”<sup>266</sup>

The highly stylized topography/typography utilised by Grigg in his ‘Sonata’ and to a greater extent by Sykes Davies in his contributions to *Experiment* can be seen as attempts to radically disrupt established poetic codes. It is useful in this respect to reference Mallarmé’s revolutionary poem of 1897 *Un Coup de Dés* which famously experimented with typographical structure.<sup>267</sup> In his preface to *Un Coup de Dés* Mallarmé wrote of the novel spacing of the text that:

The ‘blanks’ indeed take on importance, at first glance; the versification demands them [...]. The paper intervenes each time as an image, of itself [...]. The literary value, if I am allowed to say so, of this print-less distance which mentally separates groups of words or words themselves, is to periodically accelerate or slow the

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<sup>265</sup> McCombie, *Mallarmé and Debussy*, 3.

<sup>266</sup> Motte, ‘Experimental Writing’, 214.

<sup>267</sup> I am using here Mallarmé as a model for this kind of formal experimentation as it maintains many traditional aspects of writing – grammar, punctuation, and the ‘proper’ use of capitalisation. Other more contemporary sources of inspiration might include Appollinaire’s *Caligrammes* and the typographical experiments of Dada and the Futurists. However, these experiments more radically challenge poetic convention, and their influence upon *Experiment* appears less pronounced.

movement, the scansion, the sequence even, given one's simultaneous sight of the page [...] Imagination flowers and vanishes, swiftly, following the flow of the writing, round the fragmentary stations of a capitalised phrase introduced by and extended from the title. Everything takes place, in sections, by supposition; narrative is avoided. In addition this use of the bare thought with its retreats, prolongations, and flights, by reason of its very design, for anyone wishing to read it aloud, results in a score.<sup>268</sup>

Here Mallarmé gives us some insight into the reasons for utilising such a radical poetic form. The spaces between words have the effect of activating the page, of setting the words in motion. Operating in a similar way to a musical score, it has been suggested that the 'blank' white spaces in Mallarmé's poetry indicate "silence."<sup>269</sup> The emphasis on sound (or lack thereof) is pertinent to the argument advanced above. Furthermore, as has been shown above, issues of fragmentation, movement, and chaos were also contextually relevant to the *Experiment* period 1928-31. The typographically experimental poetry of Grigg and especially Sykes Davies – although redolent of that of Mallarmé – provokes an alternate reaction in its reader. Mallarmé's musico-poetic score is an emotive *tour de force*; the rising, swelling rhythms enacted on the page effecting, McCombie argues, a distinctly aural experience. This too can be argued of Grigg's 'Sonata,' although the particular quality of the young *Experimenter's* work can be read as relating far more closely to twentieth-century concerns aligned with Surrealism and psychology, than with seascapes. In his review of the first issue of *Experiment* for *The Cambridge Review*, G.M. Turnell wrote that:

The fragment printed in *Experiment* does not give a fair impression of Mr Grigg's "Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen." It is impossible to judge of its particular merit without hearing it performed and, like a good deal of Cambridge poetry, it cannot be understood without a working knowledge of the psychology of sex.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Stephane Mallarmé, 'Preface', *Un coup de dés*, in Charles Chadwick, *The meaning of Mallarmé: a bilingual edition of his 'Poésies' and 'Un coup de dés'* (Aberdeen: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>269</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (London: Continuum, 2004), 189. Derrida's interpretation is focused on Mallarmé's poem 'Mimique' which represents the story of the Commedia dell'Arte character Pierrot. This is especially interesting in relation to Grigg who published his own 'Harlequinade' in *Experiment* number two.

<sup>270</sup> G.M. Turnell, 'Two Cambridge Papers', *The Cambridge Review: A Journal of University Life and Thought* (November 16, 1928): 129-30.

The relationship between dreaming and sex is a subject which greatly occupied Freud in his writings, and likewise influenced much Surrealist painting and writing, not to mention its subsequent criticism. There is certainly a case to be made for latent sexual content in Grigg’s poem, with certain images lending themselves to typically sexual readings: “a very gentle trembling every now and then through the reed-beds”<sup>271</sup>; “congealed into a black contortion of terror it cannot escape”<sup>272</sup>; “It can only stand whilst through its blasted torn-up limbs the wind will whistle and shriek like pain [...]. Then it is – yes ah yes then it is that they all bend one way and laugh/ and laugh”.<sup>273</sup> The performance aspect of the poetry which I have discussed, and which Turnell also emphasises in his review, is highly pertinent and enlightening in an argument that seeks to identify a sexual element in Grigg’s ‘Sonata’. Immediately following those quotations just given, is a section which foregrounds the importance of performance to this piece:

<i>(Very fast)</i>	Then it IS then it IS then it IS
<i>(A tempo)</i>	<i>Then</i> it is      ah yes <i>then</i> it is      they
	laugh.
<i>(Very fast)</i>	What are they plotting what are they plotting
	what are they plotting?
<i>(A tempo)</i>	<i>Then</i> it is      ah yes <i>then</i> it is
	they laugh. <sup>274</sup>

The combination of emphases on tempo – especially given that it is intermittently ‘very fast’ and presumably slightly slower at rhythmically alternating intervals – and the significance placed on certain words in each line through capitalisation, italics, and repetition, allude in a dramatic and physical way to the energy and pace of sexual desire. The impetus to capture movement by aural means was important to Grigg and other members of the *Experiment* cohort. However, the aural and typographical experiments outlined above ultimately pursue a visual goal. The formal and metaphorical devices evidenced above seek to produce a visual effect.

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<sup>271</sup> Grigg, ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’, 22.

<sup>272</sup> Grigg, ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’, 25.

<sup>273</sup> Grigg, ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’, 25.

<sup>274</sup> Grigg, ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’, 25.



This goes some way to explaining the subsequent attribution bestowed upon the *Experiment* group of achieving “a distinctly literary and cinematic avant-garde.”<sup>275</sup>

Despite the emphasis on achieving *visual* effects in poetry, experiments with musicality persist in *Experiment*: the categories of music and visual art not mutually exclusive for the *Experiment* group. The contribution to the first issue of *Experiment* that most effectively engages with the both the musical and visual nature of poetry is Sykes Davies’ ‘Music in an Empty House’ which, like Mallarmé’s *Coup de Dés* – and perhaps in direct reference to it – utilizes a stylized typographical structure in order to explore the possibilities of the poetic format. In a BBC radio interview with Jonathan Smith in 1982 Sykes Davies explained:

[...] acquaintance with literature often leads you into trying to make a bit of it yourself. I think it works in two ways. It makes you want to try out what you think you’ve learnt from it: and knowing what has been done already suggest directions in which you might go to do something else – there’s no sense in repeating it all over again. This is what began to happen to me when I was at school. My other “art” so to speak was music, and I was making some experiments in combining musical form with literary form. One of them was a slight, rather wispy description of a deserted house which built up two refrains, and then tried to have them sounding together. Very difficult to do then – the tape recorder wasn’t yet invented.<sup>276</sup>

Although the musical aspect of ‘Music in an Empty House’ is well documented integrally and externally to the text, its prominence as theme is what perhaps led to Sykes Davies’ dismissal of it as “slight” and “wispy” later in life. Davies admitted that his musical concern in early poetry experiments such as this was with the “counterpoint” and “intertwined refrains,” the “meaning” of the resultant “blanks” perhaps being lost or overlooked at the expense of precise formal ideals.

The importance of this early poem to Sykes Davies’ career is also attested to in the material held in his archive at St John’s College, Cambridge. Amongst the boxes of papers and letters collected by Davies and also his literary executor John Kerrigan, is

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<sup>275</sup> Price, ‘Finite but Unbounded’, 1.

<sup>276</sup> Hugh Sykes Davies, in conversation with Jonathan Smith, BBC Radio 3 Broadcast, ‘Bristol Interval: Scales of Disaster’, recorded 29 October 1982, Programme Number BDC276V057W, Tape Number TBS43/276V057, Transcript in Hugh Sykes Davies Archive, St John’s College, Cambridge.

a scrapbook containing different extracts of Sykes Davies' work. Here, we find a pasted photocopy of section (iv) from Part Three of the author's 1935 novel *Petron*. The extract reads:

*Some way outside the town stands a solitary house, furnished elaborately, but without taste, and inhabited entirely by birds. Throughout the day they fly from room to room scattering the dust into little clouds that catch the sun, and picking busily in the heavy scarlet carpets which cover the floors.*

*In the evening, as the sun sinks, its ruddy beams are cast straight through the rooms and passages, and all within becomes visible to the watcher. The smaller birds settle on chairs, tables, the backs of settees and sofas, arranging their wings with sudden little flutters of restlessness. Along the mantelpieces of rich marble, magpies perch. Less securely, a crow alights on a chandelier, which for a time swings to and fro with the impetus of its flight so that the bird is thrown off balance, and falls to the ground. At the second attempt, more cautiously made, it is successful, and the chandelier gradually swings to rest, as the bird falls asleep. A raven flies down to the piano, and produces as it slips along the keys a melancholy soft glissando, a chord which more slowly dies away from the notes held down by its weary weight. Herons perch on the stairways, and larks down the gilded balustrades, while on the clocks and chimneys un-winking owls keep watch.*

*Are these birds real or artificial? To whom do they belong?*<sup>277</sup>

Written in Sykes Davies' hand onto this pasted extract is the note "poem 1929 Experiment ... Expansion image-narrative". Although the date of the appearance of 'Music' in *Experiment* was in fact 1928, it is clear from the 1982 interview that the author believed the 'solitary house' occupied by birds in his 1935 novel to be an image-expansion of the rat and moth infested location of his early poem. In the BBC interview the author outlines the similar interest that occupied the "second version of the empty house," including the persistence of music as an integral part of his poetry, or as he would now call it, "cadenced prose". Sykes Davies claimed that, by 1935, he was thinking of music as a model "not as counterpoint, as intertwined refrains, but as melody, which has always struck me as being essentially like narrative, story-shape[d]".<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Sykes Davies, 'Scales of Disaster', 4.

<sup>278</sup> Sykes Davies, 'Scales of Disaster', 4.

The importance to Sykes Davies of the 'shape' of the narrative is also highly pertinent to the formal innovations which he executed in 'Music in an Empty House'. Although Mallarmé has been held up here as a critical predecessor to the formal and typographical experiments that appeared in *Experiment*, in the case of 'Music' a productive comparison is Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1918) [Fig.2.6]. Although the visual aspects of Sykes Davies' poem are not as precise or 'figurative' of those of Apollinaire, there remains nonetheless an impetus to recreate the contents of the poem formally, to create a synthesis of form and content. This is not necessarily evident for the poem in its entirety, but the sections in which this synthesis is achieved are arresting and successful. For example:

The much-bitten  
tapestry  
                  holds  
                          many  
                  moths

In     a     certain curtain'd room  
                  the halting steps evade  
chairs white shrouded<sup>279</sup>

Sykes Davies' experimental form succeeds in animating the page visually. The text evokes the moth-eaten tapestry of his imagination, whilst retaining the musicality of the piece: the jazz-like halting rhythms of the work simultaneously accomplishing a comparable effect aurally.

Appearing in the same year as David Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, *Petron* has come to be celebrated as the first Surrealist novel written in English. It is therefore important to recognise the formative role played by *Experiment* in establishing what has come to be understood as an English Surrealist aesthetic.

Although generally described as a novel, *Petron* is perhaps better understood as a prose-poem, or "cadenced prose."<sup>280</sup> Michel Remy has described *Petron* as "a novel

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<sup>279</sup> Hugh Sykes Davies, 'Music in an Empty House', *Experiment* 1 (November 1928); 34.

of adventures based on the slipping of reality into dream-like visions and the permanent drifting of its narrative stance.”<sup>281</sup> While to some extent true, Remy’s statement does not satisfactorily identify the particular quality of tone achieved by Davies. Likewise, Peter Nicholls’ assessment of *Petron* concludes that “the book now seems hampered by its own parodic designs, which ultimately bring it closer to Gothic fiction than to Surrealism”.<sup>282</sup> Nicholls’ reading of *Petron* is driven by comparison to the works of established French Surrealists, typified by their “light, electric touch,” compared to which Sykes Davies prose seems “laboured” and too deliberately fragmented. A more productive assessment of Davies’ work compares him with his direct contemporaries – for example Grigg – and continues to pursue the musical quality in his work.<sup>283</sup> Therefore, we might redress the “hallucinatory landscape” of *Petron* and the “idiom of conventional horror” which it utilises to describe it according to the dramatic conventions of classical music or opera, as opposed to a poor imitation of continental Surrealism.

It is crucial that we recognise the explicit non-relationship to continental Surrealism that Sykes Davies establishes in his introduction to *Petron*: the author deliberately aligns his work with that of Milton, Thomson, Shakespeare, Shelley, Poe, Ariosto, Coleridge, and perhaps most interestingly, the *Silly Symphonies* of Walt Disney.<sup>284</sup> The *Silly Symphonies*, like the Harlequinade, are a comic form set to music.<sup>285</sup> They are simultaneously visual, musical, and fantastical. The Harlequin is capable of performing magic transformations using his “slap-stick”: similarly absurd metamorphoses seamlessly materialise in Disney’s animations at the hands of the cartoonist. The hallucinatory qualities of *Petron* in their effect of mock-horror can,

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<sup>280</sup> Sykes Davies, ‘Scales of Disaster’, 5.

<sup>281</sup> Michel Remy. ‘Introduction’, in David Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935) (London: Enitharmon, 2003), 18.

<sup>282</sup> Nicholls, ‘Surrealism in England’, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century English Literature*, 406.

<sup>283</sup> Sykes Davies’ experimental approach to the musicality of narrative is shared also by Malcolm Grigg, as has been suggested above with reference to his ‘Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen’. However, perhaps a more apt comparison with reference to the specificities of Davies’ *Petron*, is Grigg’s ‘Harlequinade’ which appeared in *Experiment* number two.

<sup>284</sup> Hugh Sykes Davies, *Petron* (London: Dent, 1935), vii.

<sup>285</sup> The *Silly Symphonies* were animated shorts that were produced between 1929 and 1939. The *Symphonies* combined fantastical image and narrative with original musical scores.

therefore, be seen to relate directly to the magic and comedy of the traditional Harlequinade, and the similarly macabre silliness of the *Symphonies* typified by the very first short of August 1929, *The Skeleton Dance*. Moreover, a number of the *Symphonies* combine these phantasmagorical elements with typically pastoral subjects: trees, flowers, birds, toadstools, and insects are all recurring features in both *Petron* and the Disney shorts. As has already been suggested above with reference to Sykes Davies' conception of birds in 'Music in an Empty House' and *Petron*, the author considers that birds are essentially *melody*: "When those birds came swooping into my head I wasn't bird-watching. I was taken by the cadence, the shape and rhythm of their roosting, and wheeling motions all arrested in stillness. The melody of the story was all that concerned me."<sup>286</sup> As with the Disney cartoons, each element and character embodies a different symphonic element, which is integral to the narrative.

Finally, we might consider the affinities of form that exist between Sykes Davies' *Petron* and Disney's *Silly Symphonies* before advancing a discussion of the relevance of this to other experimental aesthetic strategies employed in *Experiment*. *Petron* does not adhere to a typical novel form, appearing instead as a formal innovation that combines novelistic, poetic, and theatrical templates. Essentially, the "novel" is divided into three 'books'. Part One – beginning with the epigram 'Forse era ver, ma non però credibile' from Ariosto – is structurally the simplest: there are nine short clear 'chapters' that function simultaneously as individual 'scenes' and as part of a larger narrative.<sup>287</sup> Part Two – "... pity, like a naked new-born babe..." – is divided into two chapters (1 and 2) with part 2 being subdivided into a further two parts (i and ii). Part Three is a yet more convoluted form: split into three 'chapters' (1,2, and 3) with chapter 2 being subdivided into a further nine sections (i-ix). It is in the divisions of Part 3 Chapter 2 that we experience a form that complements synchronously themes of surreality, musicality, and animation. Each of these sections – one of which being the episode of the empty house quoted above – function essentially as filmic 'shorts' akin to the Disney animations. They are

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<sup>286</sup> Sykes Davies, 'Scales of Disaster', 6.

<sup>287</sup> Epigram translates from the Italian as "Maybe it was true, but not, however, believable."

concurrently active musical movements, and self-contained image poems, a kind of “stop motion” prose.

The influence of Disney in Sykes Davies’ work reintroduces the question of the cinema alluded to elsewhere in this chapter in relation to modes of perception and temporal consciousness. Disney’s cartoons and his *Silly Symphonies* in particular were critical to debates on the cinema in the Twenties and Thirties. Writing on Disney in the Forties, Sergei Eisenstein noted the importance of the *Symphonies* to debates surrounding sound synchronisation in films. In 1927, the first synchronised sound film *The Jazz Singer* was released. This was followed in 1928 by a ‘Statement on Sound’ signed by Soviet filmmakers Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov. The ‘Statement on Sound’ outlined the fear that the commercial saleability of the ‘talking film’ would destroy the powerful visual effect of montage.<sup>288</sup> Instead, the Russian filmmakers proposed that sound montage should be developed along the lines of visual montage. This was the effect achieved by Disney in his cartoons. Douglas Kahn has written that:

Disney extended the elements of silent cinema into sound under the actuality (not metaphoricity) of music in such a way that the music and sound *performed* the visual elements of the film – its characters, objects, and actions.<sup>289</sup>

Eisenstein wrote of this process that “Mickey [Mouse] starts to sing, his hands folded together. The hands echo the music as only the movements of Disney’s characters are capable of echoing a melody.”<sup>290</sup> This argument complements Sykes Davies’ conception of his work, in which the characters possess an inherent melody. By extension, we can conclude that, through the manipulation of typographic structure and the integration of sound elements, Sykes Davies’ literary experiments amounted to creating a cinema effect “by other means.”<sup>291</sup> Indeed, this effect was noted in a review of *Experiment* in 1929 in which J.L. Longland wrote: “Old

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<sup>288</sup> Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Alexandrov, ‘Statement on Sound’ in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (ed.), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 83-85.

<sup>289</sup> Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 149.

<sup>290</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda, trans. Alan Upchurch (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1986), 10.

<sup>291</sup> Pavle Levi, ‘Cinema by Other Means’, *October* No. 131(Winter 2010): 51-68.

fashioned eye-patterning has its staunch devotee in Mr ‘Sykes,’ whose second stanza in ‘Pocelum’ is as pretty to look at as a well-constructed theatre poster.”<sup>292</sup>

It is conducive to reassess the experimental work of Sykes Davies and other contributors to *Experiment* in a more explicitly visual and cinematic realm. Christophe Wall-Romana has previously readdressed the work of Mallarmé in a similar manner, and coined for the purposes of addressing this formally experimental literary aesthetic a new critical terminology – *cinpoetry*. The term *cinpoetry* is intended to account for the “large corpus of experimental writings permeated by the film apparatus (among canonical and noncanonical poets), at a tangent to organized groups and avant-garde aesthetics.”<sup>293</sup> Of *Un Coup de Dés* in particular, Wall-Romana writes that it is an “experimental sublation of the page and the book [...], one long strip of visually montaged text.”<sup>294</sup> Experiments in *cinpoetics* engage with “two poles of specularity” – “synoptic immobility,” and the “flowing present” and the “mobility of its images.”<sup>295</sup> Pavle Levi has also written a theory of how concepts of cinema might be applied to objects that do not actually engage the cinema apparatus. Levi describes this ‘Cinema by Other Means’ as “not art made under the influence of, or referring to the cinema; but conceptualization of the cinema as itself a type of practice that, *since the invention of the film apparatus*, has also (simultaneously) had a history of execution through other, “older” artistic media.”<sup>296</sup> Levi’s thesis reinforces the concept of ‘experimental’ that has been posited throughout this chapter: that is ‘experimentalism’ has to do with process as opposed to product. This definition allows that, for example, ‘cinema’ can be created without producing a ‘film.’

The central thesis of both cinpoetry and cinema by other means is that technological developments at the end of the nineteenth century irreversibly altered human psychology and imagination – beginning with the physiological

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<sup>292</sup> J.L. Longland, ‘Two Cambridge Magazines’, *The Cambridge Review* (June 5, 1929): 538.

<sup>293</sup> Christophe Wall-Romana, ‘Mallarmé’s Cinpoetics: The Poem Uncoiled by the Cinématographe, 1893-98’, *PMLA* 120:1 (January 2005): 130.

<sup>294</sup> Wall-Romana, ‘Mallarmé’s Cinpoetics’, 129.

<sup>295</sup> Wall-Romana, ‘Mallarmé’s Cinpoetics’, 129.

<sup>296</sup> Levi, ‘Cinema by Other Means’, 53.

movement studies conducted by Etienne-Jules Marey graphing movement via chronophotography leading ultimately to the synthesis of photographed motion: the cinema.<sup>297</sup> Such a change in normative psychology would explain the tendency to describe the work which appears in *Experiment* as “cinematic”.<sup>298</sup> The cinema permeates the little magazine both literally – in the form of reviews and essays – and conceptually – in the appearance of its poetry and the preoccupations of its criticism.<sup>299</sup>

E.E. Phare’s essay ‘Valéry and Gerard Hopkins’ provides a useful example of the way in which poetry was approached by the *Experimenters*. Phare’s article attempts to “expose the antithetical elements” in the work of Paul Valéry and Gerard Manley Hopkins which, she posits, “corresponds perfectly to the antithesis between the static and the dynamic”.<sup>300</sup> The form of Phare’s essay is that of an undergraduate essay demonstrating tutor I.A. Richards’ method of practical criticism: that is, a close reading of the formal aspects of the poem, and the dismissal of biographical/historical interpretation. However, Phare’s article is interesting in that it provides historical context and evidence of the contemporary psyche through the choices and language of the critic herself.

The subject of Phare’s essay is self-evidently cinematic: the author assesses the images created *in print* by Valéry and Hopkins according to the qualities of dynamism or stasis that they *embody*. The creation of the cinematic in this instance is not, as Phare would have it, in the poetry of Hopkins – “Hopkins is never merely graphic, but rather cinematographic” – but rather in the imagination of the reader (Phare). Being that the method of practical criticism employed by Phare did not allow for contextual historical detail, the fact of Hopkins’ death in 1889 does not figure in her essay as an impediment to the conclusion that Hopkins’ ‘The May

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<sup>297</sup> Christophe Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry: Imaginary Cinema’s in French Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>298</sup> Price, ‘Finite But Unbounded’, 1.

<sup>299</sup> For discussion of reviews and essays regarding the cinema in *Experiment* see Chapter Three.

<sup>300</sup> E.E. Phare, ‘Valéry and Gerard Hopkins’, *Experiment* 1 (Nov. 1928): 19.



Magnificat' (1878) "is essentially a motion picture".<sup>301</sup> The (pre)history of the cinema largely post-dates Hopkins' poem, generally accepted to begin with the Etienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic gun of 1882. We might therefore conclude that the cinematic impulse is a product of the altered psychology of the 1920's critic as opposed to the 1870's poet. It is not solely in her discussion of movement that Phare strikes a filmic tone: likewise, in her treatment of stasis in the work of Valéry, there remains a decidedly vivid pictorial quality akin to a *tableau vivant*, wherein each element is imbued with life yet resolutely still. The quoted passages of Valéry in Phare's analysis evidence the tension between movement and stasis which is engendered after the advent of cinema. From 'Cantique Des Colonnes' Phare quotes:

Douces colonnes, *aux*  
*Chapeaux* garnis de jour<sup>302</sup>

Also:

Pieusement pareilles  
 Le nez sous le bandeau  
 Et nos riches Oreilles  
 Sourdes au blanc fardeau<sup>303</sup>

From 'Ébauche d'un Serpent', the description of an ear:

le dédale duveté  
 [De cette merveilleuse oreille!]<sup>304</sup>

Phare is correct in her appraisal that these images remain static by comparison with, for example, Hopkins' 'Harry Ploughman':

Each limb's barrow brawn, his thew  
 That onewhere curded, onewhere sucked or sank—  
 Soared or sank —

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<sup>301</sup> Phare, 'Valéry and Hopkins', 21.

<sup>302</sup> "Sweet columns, with/ Chaplets adorned with day" translated by Vernon Watkins in *Paul Valéry Selected Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1964), 57.

<sup>303</sup> "Piously matched peers,/The nose beneath the string-course/ And our rich ears/ Deaf to the white load's force", *Selected Writings*, 59.

<sup>304</sup> "In the dædalian softness glossed/ Of that most marvellous ear!" translated by Peter Dale, *Paul Valéry 'Charms' and Other Pieces* (London: Anvil Press, 2007), 117.

Though as a beachbole firm, finds his, as at a roll-call, rank  
And features, in flesh, what deed he each must do –  
His sinew-service where do.

Hopkins' poem is, in the imagination of the critic, cinematic inasmuch as it supplies a continuous flowing image. However, Phare is also cinematic in her treatment of Valéry, presenting to us the most anthropomorphic of images, lending credence to a *tableau vivant* approach to material objects. Furthermore, the "succinct" images that appear in Valéry have the effect, especially as they are quoted by Phare, of the cinematic close-up. The young critic's essay suggests that Valéry "is like someone chipping with an axe at a lump of stone; he uses single, detached blows: the unity is in the result, the figure which disengages from the rock".<sup>305</sup> Although Phare chooses, in this instance, to employ a sculptural simile, her sculptor may just as well be a movie director; combining multiple still frames (*tableau vivant*) in order to produce a unified result. This filmic comparison is yet further supported by Phare's assertion that Valéry's innovation was his compulsion to "rearrange" language and images in order to produce *new* results. This was a preoccupation shared by many cinematic experimenters in the twentieth century, most notably Eisenstein in his development of montage techniques – greatly admired by the contributors to *Experiment* (see: Chapter Three).

Further evidence of the *Experiment* group's engagement with the multiple preoccupations of experimental techniques, avant-garde approaches to poetry, and the assimilation of the cinema as a conceptual framework, is provided in N.N. Sen's experimental poem-review of Man Ray's *L'étoile de mer* (1928). The form of Sen's review is, perhaps, its most conceptually interesting and frustrating feature. The author has attempted to transcribe his critical synopsis in a poetic format, employing the most basic verse strategies to varying success. Conceptually, the principle of creating a review of *L'étoile de mer* in verse form is interesting and innovative: the subtitle of the film is "a poem by Robert Desnos as seen by Man Ray," and thereby, according to Wall-Romana's definition, a cinempoetic text. Nikhil Sen's motivation to produce his criticism as a poem supplies a neat conclusion to

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<sup>305</sup> Phare, 'Valéry and Hopkins', 20.

the practice of cinepoetics: the inspirational poem (Desnos' automatic 'text' produced in Surrealist trance) becomes a visualised "poem" (Man Ray's film), which in turn inspires further cine-poetic experiment (Sen's poem-review). By re-transcribing Man Ray's poetic film into text, Sen creates cinema by other means: it achieves the effect of cinema while being explicitly not a film.

Sen's experimental cinematic review uses poetic techniques to recreate Man Ray's film. Certain aspects of the format work well, such as his use of a single stanza to describe specific and self-contained episodes or frames in the film:

The man and the woman walk up a flight of stairs and enter a room. The woman undresses and stretches herself in a bed, the man bids farewell and leaves her.<sup>306</sup>

The effectiveness of this stand-alone "scene" is doubled by the first line following the line break, which reads: "A delightful comedy touch, effective because it is so un-/expected." The break in the review actively recreates the moment of comic oddity experienced by the viewer of the film, and can thereby be deemed to be a successful translation of the visual experience (back) into text.

Sen also achieves some success in his transcription of the verbal/textual pun which Man Ray exercises. Given the constraints of the medium of silent film, all concrete narrative aspects are delivered via the medium of intertitles/title cards. Intertitles physically interrupt the sequence of moving images with supplementary textual information. Sen's poem-review implements one of Man Ray's intertitles in a similar fashion: Sen presents the line "'Sybille" [sic] says the hero, "Si belle"' as a stand-alone statement, unconnected to the longer stanzas either side. Although in principle the use of the titlecards as insertions in the poem is innovative, and creates an intelligent aesthetic relationship between the dual mediums of cinema and poetry, it is unfortunate that Sen has, to some extent, misrepresented Man Ray's film.

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<sup>306</sup> N.N. Sen, 'L'étoile de mer: a poem as seen by Man Ray', *Experiment 1* (Nov. 1928): 43.

Sen writes of *L'étoile de mer* that “[t]he only subtitles used are the play of words –” and quotes the previous pun on the name Cybèle and the exclamation *si belle!* which he attributes to male “hero” of the piece. However, the use of intertitles is in actuality far more extensive than this, and represents a significantly greater complexity in the convergence of text and visuals. On the most basic level, text appears in two forms in *L'étoile de mer*: diegetically and extradiegetically. That is to say text appears both internally and externally to the “narrative”. To press these designations further, we reveal multiple layers of cinepoetic meaning that are generated by the medium of silent films generally, and by Man Ray and Robert Desnos’ *L'étoile de mer* specifically. As stated above, silent film can always to some extent be approached as textual, due to its inclusion of title cards as compensation for its lack of sound. However, this leads to complications when discussing the medium in terms of diegesis, given the differing definitions of the term depending on whether literature or cinema is its subject. The theoretical framework of cinepoetry goes some way in rationalising interdisciplinary and cross-medium experiments in film and literature; however this is an area in which much work remains to be done.<sup>307</sup>

The lack of clarity in intermedial definitions allowed for a highly experimental exploration of the possibilities available to silent film as a medium. *L'étoile de mer* was always intended to function as both a film and a poem: “*poëme* de Robert Desnos tel que *l’a vu* Man Ray” [italics mine]. Text in this instance is therefore attributed a kind of hyper-importance that is further emphasised by the frequency with which it appears both diegetically and extradiegetically. For reasons of simplicity, I am using these terms according to the most basic cinematic

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<sup>307</sup> For further reading on Surrealist Film see: Haim Finkelstein, *The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Paul Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow and its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema* (London: BFI, 1978). Graeme Harper and Rob Stone (eds.), *The Unsilvered Screen: Surrealism on Film* (London: Wallflower, 2007). Inez Hedges, *Languages of Revolt: Dada and Surrealist Literature and Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1983). Steven Kovács, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema* (London: Associated University Presses, 1980). Kim Knowles, *A Cinematic Artist: The Films of Man Ray* (New York & Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009). Rudolf E. Kuenzli (ed.), *Dada and Surrealist Film* (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987). J.H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971).

understanding, deeming text which appears in the action of the film as diegetic, and that which does not (ie. title cards) as extradiegetic.

Instances of diegetic text in *L'étoile de mer* include two instances where the viewer is presented with close-ups of newspapers. This first occurs when we witness the central female character (Kiki) lowering the newspapers from in front of her face [Fig.2.7]. As the actress is revealed from behind the broadsheet, a paradoxical relationship between viewer and reader is enacted. The cinema-goer ceases to "watch" the film as the actress ceases to "read" the newspaper: the actress watches the audience as they attempt to read the film. This confrontation with "reading film" is made difficult here by the movement of the image, we the reader-viewer are capable only of distinguishing a few words from the page. However, the second use of the same technique presents the text to *the viewer* in the form of a still-life subsequent to a sequence wherein a male character is forced to chase the windblown newspaper down the street. Here roles are reversed yet again: the text is static and immediately attainable to the viewer of the "moving picture," whereas it is in a state of dynamic insecurity within the film narrative.

The final example of diegetic text in the Desnos-Man Ray cinepoetic experiment forms the final scene in the film. We watch the central female character seemingly from behind a screen or from outside a shop window with the word "belle" stencilled on it, in the style of store signage. Suddenly, the glass is shattered, and it is made apparent to us that what we were in fact witnessing was a reflection in a mirror. The actress therefore conceptually occupied the same space as her audience and experienced the text exactly as they did (as opposed to in reverse as would be the case if she were behind it). Both actress and audience achieve the status of watcher-reader, and neither person nor medium acquires superior status.

Understanding the use of text which appears *in* the narrative of the film, although crucial, is far more straightforward than deciphering that which appears extraneously to it. These extradiegetic forms of text arise in the form of titlecards in *L'étoile de mer* and assume four markedly different manifestations: (1) Standard

typescript, (2) Handwritten, (3) Handwritten with inverted commas, (4) Italicised typescript.

The most common form of text in Man Ray's cinempoem is the titlecard utilising standard typescript. This type appears nine times in the course of the film, a fact which Nikhil Sen somewhat inexplicably overlooked in his response for *Experiment 1*. Sen's experimental poem-article claims that the male character of the film speaks the words "Sybille ... si belle." However analysis of the film suggests that this is in fact not the case. Considering that the film uses four alternative textual strategies, it seems practical to assume that decisions considering the presentation of text were not arbitrary. As such, being that the famous pun "si belle! Cybèle?" was not originally presented in inverted commas, it can be assumed that it was never intended to be interpreted as having been "spoken". Instead, I would like to posit that the majority of the titles used in *L'étoile de mer* – those that use standard typescript – actually denote the traditionally poetic element of the film-poem, as we might expect it to have been *written* by Desnos.<sup>308</sup> Furthermore, this poetic narrative bears little resemblance to the images which appear alongside it, with the exception of the lines "Nous sommes à jamais perdus dans le désert de l'éternèbre," which is followed by a black/blank screen.<sup>309</sup> Of this technique Sen writes: "...Besides having a restful/ influence on the eyes it might serve various other purposes./ The one that comes first to my mind is that of suggesting/ a gap in the continuity of a person's thought."<sup>310</sup> Superficially, this seems to be a fairly legitimate assessment of the use of blankness; however, in the particular case of *L'étoile de mer* it seems that the opposite is true. In the course of the film, the images and text rarely correspond as one might expect: it is in the moments of blankness that continuity is achieved.

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<sup>308</sup> There is no original "poem" by Desnos – *L'étoile de mer* was very much a collaboration piece, and most sources suggest that the poem was recited to Man Ray by Desnos. This raises questions as to whether it was originally one of the poet's "automatic" pieces, wherein he would enter into a "trance" amongst company, and write free-association poetry.

<sup>309</sup> "We are forever lost in the desert of eternal darkness."

<sup>310</sup> Sen, 'L'étoile de mer: a poem as seen by Man Ray', 43.

Besides the moments of prolonged blankness, one further instance in which image corresponds with the text which immediately precedes or follows it, is in the instance of the handwritten intertitle. The viewer is presented with the image of a hyacinth on a table: “si les fleurs étaient en verre” reads the accompanying card. This peculiar musing is not strictly part of the poetic narrative of the cinempoem, as indicated by its alternate presentation. We might then consider that the specific nature in which it is presented to us – as handwriting – denotes significance, for example the inherent connection to its producer. The handwritten card, therefore, can be seen to represent forms of interiority – either thoughts belonging to characters that appear on screen or perhaps the peculiar images or phrases which occur to us in dreams. The notion of a dreamlike connection in this instance is further suggested by the use of repetition, as has been shown to exist also in the work of Grigg and Sykes Davies. Once again the effect is two-fold: it reinforces the image which is created, lending it increased vitality and vividness – as with recurring dream images – whilst also developing the image. Man Ray uses montage and multiple imaging in order to immerse his viewers in a world resembling the dream-state, in which images are simultaneously alien and familiar, and time is either non-existent or a continual loop. The montaged images [Fig. 2.8] are either themselves repetitions (as with the cleaning of the sword centre-left above largest vitrine), or continual rotations (as the vitrine containing the starfish, and the roulette wheel). Therefore, the second appearance of the hyacinth and the accompanying intertitle engenders a feeling of *déjà vu*: we have encountered it before but it is somehow changed – its significance has been altered by its precedents.

Obviously related to the handwritten title card and its implications – while remaining somewhat different – is the intertitle that appears handwritten with the addition of inverted commas. This is the only card which we can feasibly interpret as signifying the spoken word. Returning to the likely mode of the original poem’s creation allows us to understand the possible disruptive function of the verbal intertitle. If we accept the premise that *L’étoile de mer* was conceived as an automatist experiment, in which Desnos created the work in a dream-like trance while in the company of other Surrealists (most likely Man Ray), then we might

interpret the title cards bearing inverted commas as actual verbal interruptions to Desnos' writing process. These were perhaps the poetic visions which transcended the dream/trance and actualised as speech in the external world. As has been addressed above, repetition is used as a trope in dream-writing, and is unsurprisingly used not only in the imagery of *L'étoile de mer*, but also in its text. One title card exclaims: ""belle, belle comme une fleur de verre"": the repetition suggests tentativeness, something which is not fully understood, as in a dream. A similar effect is achieved later in the sequence with the card ""belle comme une fleur de feu"" which appears to be glowing like embers, and blurred as if by smoke, achieving a quality of making the material immaterial and vice versa. Similarly, the film makes the dream material, and the imagined material qualities of the dream are made immaterial via the spoken word.

The final type of intertitle is that which appears as italicised typescript. The typescript is markedly different from that which has been used previously, possessing a far softer curved outline than either the standard typeface or the handwritten title cards. These formal factors, combined with the meaning of the text "*Vous ne rêvez pas,*" create a sense of rupture in the film and in our understanding of it. To begin with, it is unclear who the intended recipient of the intertitle's message is: is it the female character in the film who has been seen in her bed, and whose eyes whether open or closed have been the focus of the filmmaker's attention? Is it the cinema audience, the inhabitants of the "dream palaces" being urged to *believe their eyes*? Or, is it the poet who enters trance, experiencing not a dream, but a higher reality, a *sur-reality*? The only answer to these questions can be that all three are true, and that in fact the statement "*You are not dreaming*" is intended as a comment on the potentiality of the medium of film.

It can be concluded that Sen's 'L'étoile de mer' essay was experimental in that it actively engaged with the concept and processes of the cinema as a means of producing an explicitly new type of text. He engages with the methodology of filmmaking – constructing scenes, inserting title cards – through the use of literary



devices. It is revealing that Sen's final 'stanza' states that: "Man Ray does not depend on a cameraman. He does it/ himself and knows how to do it. The whole thing is more/ like a series of photographs than a moving picture [...]"<sup>311</sup> Here we are returned to the questions of stasis and motion which arose in the discussion of Phare's critical essay on Valéry and Hopkins. Pavle Levi's 'Cinema by Other Means' states that "The idea of the cinema, then, is not a function of the materials of the film, but the other way around – the materials of the film are a function of the idea of cinema."<sup>312</sup> If we accept this thesis, we can easily reconcile Sen's position in simultaneously creating cinematic writing, while questioning whether Man Ray's film is in fact cinema. Man Ray uses film technology to create a series of self-contained static images which are subsequently animated. Sen animates the static genre of poetry by subjecting it to the cinematic process. This effect is redoubled if we consider it as part of the wider dialogue of little magazine production. As discussed in the Introduction, McCracken's theory of the 'incompleteness' of little magazines places *Experiment* in a continual state of motion.<sup>313</sup> Furthermore, the contributions to *Experiment* sought to represent 'presentness,' the ongoing. We might therefore consider that *Experiment* itself was a product of the cinematic imagination.

There are precedents for thinking about textual sources in this way. For instance, in 1923 El Lissitzky developed the concept of the "bioscopic book" in his manifesto 'Topography of Typography' published in *Merz* number four. The "bioscopic book" demanded "continuous page sequence."<sup>314</sup> The use of the term "bioscopic" emphatically linked the practice to the cinema – the Skladanowsky Brothers named the film projector they used for the first time in Berlin in 1895 a "Bioscope."<sup>315</sup> Matthias Noell has written of El Lissitzky's practice that:

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<sup>311</sup> Sen, 'L'étoile de mer: a poem as seen by Man Ray', 45.

<sup>312</sup> Levi, 'Cinema by Other Means', 54.

<sup>313</sup> McCracken, 'Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business', 599.

<sup>314</sup> El Lissitzky, 'Topography of Typography', *Merz* 4 (June 1923): 47.

<sup>315</sup> Matthias Noell, 'Bioscopic and Kinematic Books: Studies on the Visualisation of Motion and Time in Architectural Books ca.1900-35', *Photoresearcher* 18 (October 2012): 44.

Even though the linear construction of the book, and the subsequent narrative structure that connects time while the book is being read or a series of illustrations are being looked at, makes it fundamentally better suited to explore the subject of movement than a single image, coherent series of pictures are comparatively rare in the history of the illustrated book.<sup>316</sup>

Again, it emerges from an assessment of El Lissitzky's work that the notion of process was critical to the reception of work. What is of especial interest with regard to the "bioscopic books" is that there are no photographic elements in them, even though "the designation 'bioscopic' suggests production and/or reception by an optical device."<sup>317</sup> As with the automatist programme of the Surrealists discussed above, the "bioscopic book" internalises the technological function. The artist *becomes* the machine.<sup>318</sup> This theory can be applied to all of the above case studies, in which the creator and the reader/viewer are actively engaged in transforming the medium of the work via an imaginative process.

From the examples given above, a very distinct understanding of 'experimentalism' has emerged as it pertained to the *Experiment* group. Although our initial response to this term might be to align it with science, this study has portrayed a far more artistic engagement with the concept. It has been demonstrated that process was fundamental to the group's conception of 'experiment.' Science and technology function more as a source of inspiration for the group's activities as opposed to a cornerstone of investigation. Ultimately what comes to the fore is the process of cinematisation. The cinema as a technology represented a combination of disciplines: the science of constructing the apparatus and developing the film; the literary requirements of producing a scenario; and the artistry of cutting and editing the film to create an approximation of lived experience. By way of synthesising these factors the cinema offered the *Experiment* group a conceptual framework which offered the closest approximation to their understanding of *Weltanschauung*.

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<sup>316</sup> Noell, 'Bioscopic and Kinematic Books', 44.

<sup>317</sup> Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20.

<sup>318</sup> Lomas, 'Becoming Machine', 1.

Sen's experimental essay on Man Ray's film also speaks to the potential of film as an artistic medium. Sen was himself a poet, art-lover, and would-be filmmaker.<sup>319</sup> The piece produced for *Experiment* by the young 'dilettante' is a clear attempt to explore the potentiality of a reciprocal relationship between film and literature.<sup>320</sup> As has been shown above, Man Ray's silent film *L'étoile de mer* was a particularly apt source for addressing these questions. Christian Metz has argued that "writing about the cinema is always in danger of having the discourse *about* its object swallowed up by the discourse *of* its object."<sup>321</sup> Sen's decision to create a critical 'poem' effectively balances the tension between the literary and the cinematic. He does not simply translate the film's imagery into text, yet neither does he lose completely the sense of the cinematic: the formal elements of the poem allow him to mirror the aesthetics of Man Ray's production within his own critical framework. Sen's critical-poem becomes therefore both *about* and *of* the cinema. These are issues that were also being engaged by another contemporary journal – *Close Up*, an international film journal published by POOL, a triumvirate of novelist and filmmaker Kenneth Macpherson, modernist poet and novelist H.D, and heiress and novelist Bryher. *Close Up* was a highly visible influence on the *Experiment* group. It is referenced frequently by Cambridge writers on the cinema, and images published in *Experiment* are often credited to the international monthly. Chapter Three will assess the relationship between *Experiment* and *Close Up*, especially in relation to *Experiment's* ideology of film practice.

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<sup>319</sup> Very little is known of Sen. He was a friend of Mulk Raj Anand and the Bloomsbury group whilst studying at UCL in the mid-twenties. He matriculated as a non-collegiate law student at Cambridge in 1926, but failed to graduate. In the 1930s, Sen was producing essays for the Indian film journal *Filmiland*.

<sup>320</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (London: Wildwood House, 1981), 13.

<sup>321</sup> Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Signifier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) in Anne Friedberg, 'Introduction: Reading *Close Up*, 1927-1933' James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (eds.), *Close Up: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998), 3.

### Chapter Three: The Cinematic Idiom

Chapter Two demonstrated how the *Experiment* group's methodological approach to experimentalism led them to appropriate concepts of the cinema as a means of unifying literature, the arts, and the sciences to create explicitly new art forms. The new forms that were produced by the *Experimenters* are aptly described by Jonathan Walley's theoretical framework of "paracinematic" practices. Walley writes:

Paracinema identifies an array of phenomena that are considered "cinematic" but that are not embodied in the materials of film as traditionally defined. That is, the film works I am addressing recognize cinematic properties outside the standard film apparatus, and therefore reject the medium specific premise of most essentialist theory and practice that the art of cinema is defined by the specific medium of film. Instead, paracinema is based on a different version of essentialism, which locates cinema's essence elsewhere.<sup>322</sup>

Although the *Experiment* group were deeply engaged with paracinematic practices, they were also committed to exploring medium-specific issues facing cinema. The medium of film – like the *Experiment* group themselves – was coming-of-age in the late Twenties. Like society, the film industry was undergoing a period of transition. The period was marked by rapid transformations in technology: for instance the coming of sound offered new aesthetic possibilities, but ultimately raised questions as to the artistic versus the commercial function of the cinema.<sup>323</sup> It will be shown that these questions allowed the *Experiment* group to simultaneously align themselves with the historical avant-garde while nonetheless distinguishing themselves as a new and explicitly "young" generation of artists. The concurrent historicisation and technological innovation of the cinema during the period of *Experiment* offered the group a medium in which to negotiate their relationship both to the past and to the future. Ultimately, the ascendancy of the cinema

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<sup>322</sup> Jonathan Walley, 'The Material of Film and the Idea of Cinema: Contrasting Practices in Sixties and Seventies Avant-Garde Film', *October* 103 (Winter 2003): 18.

<sup>323</sup> James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus, 'Preface' in *Close Up 1927-1933*, vii.

disrupted the hierarchy of the visual arts and represented the change that the *Experimenters* hoped to effect in society more broadly.

This chapter will interrogate the direct treatment of the cinema as an art form as the group conceived of it. The engagement of the Cambridge group with the cinematic arts covers a broad spectrum: issues of censorship;<sup>324</sup> cinematic and photographic technique; the production of filmic ‘scenarios’;<sup>325</sup> poetry directly inspired by contemporary cinema;<sup>326</sup> and essays and criticism on specific films and directors.<sup>327</sup> A key component of this analysis will be the relationship of the *Experiment* group to the contemporary film journal *Close Up*. The relationship with the transnational contemporary film review is evident not only in the content of *Experiment’s* essays – a preoccupation with Eisenstein and Vertov for example – but also in the reprinting of film stills from that publication. However, this chapter hopes to show that, more than a mere imitation of the concerns of *Close Up*, *Experiment* sought to develop its own understanding of movements in contemporary cinema in order to recast it as a “new” art, one which was capable of responding to the concerns of the emergent youth movement.

The writings on the cinema in *Experiment* are neatly categorised in the bibliographic conditions of the journal: spanning the first six issues they permeate the journal’s output.<sup>328</sup> Following Sen’s reflection on Man Ray’s ‘L’etoile de mer’ in *Experiment 1*, various members of the coterie achieve sustained critical meditation on the subject in diverse formal capacities up-to and including the penultimate sixth number.

As we have seen in the previous chapter’s analysis of Sen’s poem-critique ‘L’etoile de mer’ there was a clear movement within the *Experiment* group to explore the potentiality of a reciprocal relationship between film and literature. One of the modes through which this was explored was in the production of film scenarios as

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<sup>324</sup> Basil Wright, ‘Censorship and the Cinema’, *Experiment 2* (February 1929):40.

<sup>325</sup> Nikhil N. Sen, ‘Scenario’, *Experiment 3* (May 1929):19.

<sup>326</sup> William Empson, ‘Ufa Nightmare’, *Experiment 4* (November 1929):28.

<sup>327</sup> See: J.H. Whyte, ‘Wertoff and the Kino-Auge’, *Experiment 4* (November 1929): 38. Gerald Noxon, ‘Brugière’, *Experiment 5* (February 1930):47.

<sup>328</sup> Although there are no critical essays on the subject of cinema in *Experiment 7*, many of the contributions engage with cinematic ideas. See the discussion of Lowry in ‘Towards a Conclusion: At The Point of No Return The Ship Sails On.’

literature in the magazine. The literary-cinematic relation that was posited in *Experiment* was the result of an engagement with the ongoing debates and dialogues surrounding the cinema as an art, which reached an apex in the mid-to-late Twenties, largely in *Close Up*. The specific goal of the *Close Up* contributors was “to transform the cultural topography of the cinema and its future” via a programme of “writing *about* film, enlisting it as a discursive midwife to aid in the development of cinema’s potential.”<sup>329</sup> Anne Friedberg has suggested that the *Close Up* group achieved a nuanced and effective way of writing about the cinema by using method which avoided simply extending the cinema’s effects, but instead “advocated a cinema that mirrored the aesthetics and production of their own written discourse.”<sup>330</sup>

The ‘moment’ of *Close Up*, as Laura Marcus has termed it, came in 1927, a period during which the cinema was undergoing rapid transformation, and discussions of the medium – or art – were split according to populist or elitist visions.<sup>331</sup> Marcus’ publication *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (2007) marks out the Twenties as being a particularly active period of cinema writing in Britain, citing the coming of sound – ‘the talkies’ – and the founding of the Film Society in 1925 as important contributing factors to the development of cinematic interest and understanding during that decade.

The fact that cinema was the art form with which the *Experiment* group had the most sustained engagement reinforces the arguments put forward in Chapters One and Two about the self-aware “youthfulness” of the *Experiment* movement, and corresponds with the writing of the history of cinema in Britain via certain institutions. One such institution with which the *Experimenters* in Cambridge had a demonstrable relationship was the Film Society in London. The founding of the Film Society was announced in an advertisement on the front page of the *Daily Express* in May 1925 which “promised to encourage ‘the production of really artistic films’

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<sup>329</sup> Friedberg, ‘Introduction,’ 3.

<sup>330</sup> Friedberg, ‘Introduction,’ 3.

<sup>331</sup> These contrasting visions were particularly evident with the coming of sound. The artistic community largely rejected synchronised sound on the grounds of commercialism and its imitation of theatre.

by showing those which the trade deemed uncommercial or which the censor refused".<sup>332</sup> The founders of the Film Society included exhibitor Sidney Bernstein, recent Cambridge graduate Ivor Montagu, director Adrian Brunel, film critic for the *Spectator* Iris Barry, and actor Hugh Miller. This heterogeneous group of young cinéasts straddled the film business, Fleet Street, and the intelligentsia,<sup>333</sup> and were publicly supported by 'prominent members' of the intelligentsia and the art-world, including David Cecil, Roger Fry, J.B.S. Haldane, Julian Huxley, Augustus John, John Maynard Keynes, George Pearson, George Bernard Shaw, J.C. Squire, and H.G. Wells.<sup>334</sup> Ahead of the launch of the Film Society at the New Gallery Cinema in Regent Street on 25th October 1925, Ivor Montagu published a statement entitled 'The New Film Society' in the Oxford student magazine *The Isis* on 10 June 1925. Montagu's article explicitly stated 'we are young' – undoubtedly a strategy intended to draw a university audience: this strategy was seemingly effective given that Oxbridge undergraduates were well represented at the Sunday afternoon programmes.<sup>335</sup>

Montagu was the youngest of the founding group of the Film Society, being only twenty-one at the inauguration of the Society. Besides the link the young cinéaste had to Oxford as a result of his publication on the subject of the Film Society in *The Isis*, he also had a longstanding relationship to Cambridge, having recently graduated with a zoology degree. Speaking in an interview in 1972 with *Screen*, Montagu described his time at Cambridge and its importance to his future film career thus:

[A]t Cambridge I began to be interested in the highbrow things that came along like *Caligari* — we gave a special show up there, got it down in spite of censorship and so on. After that we started film criticism at Cambridge in several papers - one or two we began ourselves. We managed to get some into the *Granta*, which was the sort of establishment paper. After Cambridge, looking for a job, imagining one was a journalist because one does undergraduate journalism, I got an

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<sup>332</sup> Henry K. Miller, 'Film Society, The (1925-39)', [www.screenonline.org.uk/fil/id/454755/index.html](http://www.screenonline.org.uk/fil/id/454755/index.html)

<sup>333</sup> Miller, 'Film Society', [www.screenonline.org.uk/fil/id/454755/index.html](http://www.screenonline.org.uk/fil/id/454755/index.html)

<sup>334</sup> Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 264.

<sup>335</sup> Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 261-264.

assignment from *The Times* to go to Germany to report on the German film industry. I went over for a short time and made the acquaintance of a number of people, saw Jannings and Elizabeth Bergner. The trouble was that, having had a scientific training, I found it much more difficult to write about something when I knew a little about it than when I knew nothing. I would have been delighted to write about it before I went, but when I came back I told *The Times* that I didn't know enough and turned it in.<sup>336</sup>

During his period at Cambridge, Montagu had acted as film critic for the university weekly *Granta*, a role which would subsequently be filled by both Empson and Noxon. Montagu's interview suggests that film criticism as an intellectual pursuit at Cambridge was gaining considerable ground in the early Twenties. This is reinforced by his allusion to the existence of student magazines dedicated to the subject, as well as the availability (however irregularly) of foreign films ordinarily subject to censorship. This historical basis for the study of cinema in Cambridge meant that Cambridge University, and therefore *Experiment*, had a firm basis from which to take up the intellectual pursuit of films.

Montagu's interview also points to the centrality of German films to the new conception of the medium as an art. This is reflected in his article for *The Isis* which named *Nju*, *Cinderella*, *Waxworks*, *Dracula (Nosferatu)*, and *Raskolnikoff* as works which the Film Society aimed to screen, and noted: "the predominance of Germany in this list is due to the fact that we are young and that we have only so far had the time to consider those films which one or other of our members has seen and admired."<sup>337</sup> The prominence of German films as a subject continued in *Experiment*, largely in direct correlation with the work of the Film Society: the youthfulness of the *Experiment* group and their location in the largely provincial Cambridge considerably limited their access to films which were, for all intents and purposes, banned by the BBFC. Furthermore, as the scope of the Film Society broadened, especially in the direction of Soviet films in the late 1920s, these too were taken-up by *Experiment* as a favourable subject.

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<sup>336</sup> Ivor Montagu, 'Interview: Ivor Montagu', *Screen* 13:2 (1972): 72.

<sup>337</sup> Ivor Montagu, 'The New Film Society', *The Isis*, (10 June 1925), 20. Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 262.



Following the example of the Film Society, in 1929 the Cambridge Film Guild was formed, only the second such society in Britain, following that in London.<sup>338</sup> The Cambridge Film Guild was founded by *Experiment's* publishing editor Gerald Noxon, along with Francis Baker-Smith and Stuart Legg, and announced in *Experiment* number four, published in November 1929 [Fig.3.1]. Noxon came up to Cambridge in 1928 to study for the modern language tripos. He had previously (1925-28) spent time on the continent, mainly in Paris, where his familiarity with avant-garde cinema and literature became properly formed. During the time spent in Paris, Noxon socialised with some of the most significant members of the intercontinental avant-garde, including Joyce and Lewis, alongside renowned film-makers Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Cavalcanti, and Man Ray.<sup>339</sup>

The advertisement for the Cambridge Film Guild which appeared in the fourth number of *Experiment* marked the moment at which the interest of the group in the youthful art of cinema was firmly established. Carrying on the momentum from the previous third number (May 1929) which published a 'Scenario' by Nikhil N. Sen, and an essay on 'The Cinematic Idiom' by Noxon alongside multiple stills from European films; number four carried Empson's poem 'Ufa Nightmare' and an essay by J.H. Whyte on 'Wertoff [Vertov] and the Kino-Auge'. When Noxon first announced in March 1929 that a Cambridge University Film Society was to be formed, he stated that its function was "to afford people interested in the Cinema an opportunity of seeing films which are otherwise unavailable to them, in Cambridge, and to carry out the same kind of work as does the London Film Society".<sup>340</sup> Proctoral permission for the foundation of the Guild was obtained for the following academic year, with screenings to begin in the autumn of 1929.<sup>341</sup> The Cambridge Film Guild henceforth had permission to show films which had previously been shown by the London Film Society and those passed by the national

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<sup>338</sup> Gerald Noxon, 'How Humphrey Jennings Came to Film', *Film Quarterly*, 15:2 (Winter 1961-2): 19.

<sup>339</sup> Paul Tiessen, *Apparently Incongruous Parts: The Worlds of Malcolm Lowry* (Metuchen, NJ. and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1990), 11.

<sup>340</sup> Gerald Noxon, *Granta*, (March 8 1929): 345. See also (April 19 1929): 368.

<sup>341</sup> However, it seems from the advertisement carried in *Experiment* no.4 that screenings did not in fact commence until the New Year (1930).

censor (BBFC), an organisation whose actions elicited much debate in artistic circles, in the pages of *Close Up*, and also those of *Experiment*.

Differing slightly from those advertised on the poster printed in *Experiment*, the films which were screened under the auspices of the Cambridge Film Guild in its first year (1929-30) included: Georg Wilhelm Pabst's *The Love of Jeanne Ney* (1927); Jean Epstein's *Finis Terrae* (1929); Roberto Cavalcanti's *En Rade* (1927); Jacques Feyder's *Therese Raquin* (1928); Rene Clair's *Les Deux Timides* (1928); Eisenstein's *The General Line* (1929); Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg's *CBD [The Club of the Big Deed]* (1927); Viktor Alexandrovitsh Turin's *Turk-Sib* (1929); and Pudovkin's *The End of St Petersburg* (1927) and *Storm Over Asia* (1929).<sup>342</sup>

Of the films shown by the Cambridge Film Guild, whose stated purpose according to the poster in *Experiment 4* was to present "films of technical interest and artistic merit," Noxon later wrote that:

Our programs of contemporary French, German, and Russian films were a revelation [...] since such films were not generally shown at all in Britain at that time. There was in fact only one theatre in the whole country in those days where films other than the standard American or British product were shown. That was the Shaftesbury Avenue Pavilion where Stuart Davis maintained a lonely and precarious beachhead [sic] for continental films. We got some of our films from him, often ones that he could not hope to exploit commercially; others we obtained from a variety of obscure sources. Sometimes we imported films ourselves directly, sometimes in collaboration with the London Film Society. At first we were concerned only with silents, but gradually sound films from France and Germany began to trickle in. It was a great event when we imported Pabst's *Dreigroschenoper [Threepenny Opera]* in collaboration with the London Film Society.<sup>343</sup>

Noxon's original statement on the Cambridge Film Guild clearly reflects the previously stated aims of the Film Society, whose initial leaflet produced for members stated that "The Film Society has been founded in the belief that there are in this country a large number of people who regard the cinema with the liveliest

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<sup>342</sup> Tiessen, *Apparently Incongruous Parts*, 14.

<sup>343</sup> Noxon, 'How Humphrey Jennings Came to Film,' 22.

interest, and who would welcome an opportunity seldom afforded by the general public of witnessing films *of intrinsic merit*, whether new or old” [italics my own].<sup>344</sup> Furthermore, the active relationship between Noxon’s Film Guild and Montagu’s Film Society in London is reflected in their joint efforts to import the most relevant and talked-about films from the continent, working together to exploit the debilitating regulations of the national censor.

A further organisation which shared the aims of both the Film Society in London and *Experiment* and the Cambridge Film Guild was the magazine *Close Up*. Sharing with *Experiment* connections to Eugene Jolas’ Paris-based English-language avant-garde journal *transition*, POOL and *Close Up* were announced in an advertisement in that publication in July 1927 [Fig.3.2]. The notice of this – again explicitly – “new” periodical read as follows:

And the first part of CLOSE UP, a monthly magazine to begin the battle for film art. Beginning July. The first periodical to approach films from any angle but the commonplace. To encourage experimental workers, and amateurs. Will keep in touch with every country, and watch everything. Contributions on Japanese, Negro viewpoints and the problems, etc. Some of the most interesting personages of the day will write.<sup>345</sup>

The central concerns then of these three groups – the Film Society, *Experiment*, and *Close Up* – was to establish in their localities, and in Britain more widely, a cinema-going audience and readership who appreciated film as an art in itself – not as an auxiliary to the theatre, or as mere entertainment – but as a legitimate subject of connoisseurship and criticism.

A critical issue that united these three groups was that of censorship, a subject which affected the running and writing of the Film Societies and contemporary journals. James Donald and Anne Friedberg have written of censorship issues with regards to *Close Up* that its “most focussed political campaign was its petition for

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<sup>344</sup> The Film Society Collection, British Film Institute, Item 9 (Membership information and leaflets to members, 1925).

<sup>345</sup> POOL, ‘POOL is announced’, *transition* 4 (July 1927): 184.

reforms to the United Kingdom's censorship laws. At the time *Close Up* appeared, these were being imposed in a manner which was both politically partisan and aesthetically boorish".<sup>346</sup> The legal basis for the censorship of films in the United Kingdom was imposed by the Cinematograph Act of 1909. The Act - written largely in response to the 1897 fire at the Charity Bazaar in Paris where projection equipment caught fire and caused the deaths of 126 people – gave local authorities licensing powers to establish safety regulations for lighting and exits. However, despite the basic intention to protect cinema audiences the Cinematograph Act was vague in its written form, and allowed local authorities to abuse its initial purpose and effectively censor films by withholding licenses.<sup>347</sup>

In 1929 Ivor Montagu of the Film Society published a pamphlet entitled *The Political Censorship of Films* in which he argued that the 1909 Cinematograph Act was being manipulated as a means of censoring films in the United Kingdom, specifically those from the Soviet Union. Censorship was a topic covered extensively from the inauguration of *Close Up* and, in January 1929, the magazine launched a formal petition in its back pages. The petition form was to be signed and returned to the *Close Up* offices, with the signatures being added to the formal petition and presented to Parliament.<sup>348</sup>

These contemporaneous events evidently had a considerable impact on *Experiment*: the second issue, published in February 1929, carried an essay entitled 'Censorship and the Cinema' by future documentarist Basil Wright. Wright's article was the first critical essay on the subject of cinema to be published in *Experiment* and firmly set the tone, both aesthetically and politically, for an uncompromising approach to film as an art, and therefore as an act of freedom which should explicitly not be subject to censorship.

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<sup>346</sup> James Donald and Anne Friedberg, 'Cinema Culture', *Close Up 1927-1931*, 271.

<sup>347</sup> Donald and Friedberg, 'Cinema Culture', 271.

<sup>348</sup> Donald and Friedberg, 'Cinema Culture', 272.

'Censorship and the Cinema' begins, by once again referencing the Shaftesbury Avenue Pavilion as the "only [cinema] at which there is a programme of films which are definitely attempts at art and sensitivity".<sup>349</sup> This, Wright continues, is in direct contrast to an implied enlightenment in Germany where "there is no difficulty in seeing acknowledged masterpieces and sound sane minor films in even the smallest towns".<sup>350</sup> Thus follows an attack against the British censors, attempting to expose their censorship of films (again as with Montagu's pamphlet, specifically Russian films) as politically and commercially motivated. From the beginning of his essay, a relationship can be drawn between Wright's pseudo-political text on the cinema and his poem 'Postwar' discussed in Chapter One. As in 'Postwar,' Wright portrays the British establishment as stuffy and out-of-date, with past political traumas directing the course of the future and the development of youth and youth movements in Britain.

Wright's article continues by comparing the appearance of Eisenstein's film *Potemkin [Battleship Potemkin]* – a film which caused much furore in the British Press when it was rejected by the censors in 1926<sup>351</sup> – in Germany with the censor's belief that, in Britain, the pro-Bolshevik silent film would produce riots, subversive actions, or other immoral deeds.<sup>352</sup> 'Censorship and the Cinema' provides *Experiment's* enlightened readers with an abridged list of prohibited subjects as decreed by the BFCC. Wright's footnotes indicate this list was taken directly from the February 1929 issue of *Close Up* which – following the January petition – was devoted to the question of censorship. In their account of the February 1929 issue of *Close Up*, Donald and Friedberg identify that "Macpherson is at his most scathing and condescending as he mockingly itemizes the list of criteria used by the British Board of Film Censors."<sup>353</sup> Wright's inaugural publication on the cinema for *Experiment* emulates Macpherson's derisive tone, highlighting the hypocrisy of the

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<sup>349</sup> Basil Wright, 'Censorship and the Cinema', *Experiment 2* (February 1929): 37.

<sup>350</sup> Wright, 'Censorship and the Cinema', 37.

<sup>351</sup> Indeed, the early years of the Film Society the immense success of the group in bringing previously unseen films to Britain was overshadowed by their failure to secure *Potemkin*. See Miller, 'Film Society', [www.screenonline.org.uk/fil/id/454755/index.html](http://www.screenonline.org.uk/fil/id/454755/index.html)

<sup>352</sup> Wright, 'Censorship and the Cinema', 37.

<sup>353</sup> Donald and Friedberg, 'Cinema Culture', 272.

censors' decisions, and arguing that those films passed for exhibition in England had only "thinly veiled immorality and salaciousness" and that many of the subjects that appeared on the censors' list regularly appeared in commercial cinemas: "Well, far be it from us to demand all the subjects in that list. In fact, we are dead sick of most of them and have to go abroad to see good films."<sup>354</sup>

Much of Wright's problem with censorship in Britain has to do with the political divide, addressed elsewhere in this thesis, between generations. As suggested in Chapter One, the events of the First World War had caused rupture in the fabric of British society which effectively alienated the young, due to their distance from that event. Preceded by a period of intense and often politically motivated avant-gardism, the War, to a great extent, curbed the progress of culture in Britain. Following the Armistice, the political situation in Britain was unstable: General Elections were held in 1922, 1923, and 1924, followed by the General Strike in 1926 which saw trade union militancy driven by the issue of mass unemployment. This political instability – with fear in some quarters of revolution in Britain following the nine day strike in May 1926 – paired with an apparently regressive attitude to artistic progress, created a climate in which establishment and youth visions were seemingly irreconcilable.

Wright's essay on censorship points to the irrational and politically motivated nature of many of the BFCC's classifications in noting that many of the films banned in Britain were not censored on the grounds of the official list, but instead under the heading: "Subjects which are calculated to wound the susceptibilities of foreign people, and especially our fellow-subjects in the British Empire. Stories and scenes which are calculated and possibly intended (A-ha!) to foment social unrest and discontent."<sup>355</sup> Wright offers instead a heading which "might as well be stated" as "Films likely to further the cause of art and beauty; films throwing light either in a dramatic or expository manner on pressing social or political problems; and films likely to educate the ignorant in a clean and sane manner on such subjects as sex,

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<sup>354</sup> Wright, 'Censorship and the Cinema', 38.

<sup>355</sup> Wright, 'Censorship and the Cinema', 38-39.

justice, and life in general.”<sup>356</sup> It is in this essay that the general political tone of *Experiment* is best expressed: the young generation of *Experimenters* are hostile towards a society in which they are “treated like children” and are “not [...] allowed to see and think for [themselves].”<sup>357</sup> Indeed, moving towards a conclusion to his argument, Wright begins to approach the characteristically equable tone of revolution shown elsewhere to exist in *Experiment*:

[...] are the English intelligent and capable of thinking for themselves or are they a nation of overgrown babies, whose intellectual fare must be tasted and tested by narrow-minded nurse-maids? There is no surer way of bringing about undesirable things than by choking them, attempting to choke them rather, without permitting them at least a free and public trial. [...] it is necessary for some action to be taken by everyone who is patriotic enough not to enjoy watching England falling behind the rest of the world in a new most potent form of art.<sup>358</sup>

This comment emphatically states the generational division which existed in England at this time, with Wright and his generation explicitly identifying with the “babies” in the metaphor. They are, however, “overgrown,” coming of age, and the threat of youth revolt against their oppressive “nurse-maids” is implicit. Couched in the language of revolution and patriotism, Wright’s ‘Censorship and the Cinema’ is an artistic call-to-arms, an appeal to overthrow the old order. His closing statement – “One can but register a protest against the deliberate suppression of an art” – maintains the political vernacular, while simultaneously referring to the official petition published in the previous month’s *Close Up*, and heralding film and the cinema as *the* art for a new generation.

The centrality and importance of the cinema – and specifically issues of censorship – to the *Experiment* group is reinforced by the appearance of a scathingly satirical piece of experimental criticism provided by Noxon entitled ‘We Have Films in England’ in the *Experiment* contribution to *transition* in June 1930. Noxon’s

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<sup>356</sup> Wright, ‘Censorship and the Cinema’, 38.

<sup>357</sup> Wright, ‘Censorship and the Cinema’, 38.

<sup>358</sup> Wright, ‘Censorship and the Cinema’, 39-40.

contribution to *transition* begins with a mock advertisement for a film, "Drain," in the style used by American production companies which it directly satirises. The "trailer" reads as follows:

TRAILER

"Drain", positively the most colossal singing-shouting-crying-weeping-leaping-moving motion picture yet made, soon to be released throughout the world. You'll see it at all the principal and magnificent movie temples and don't forget our stupendous offer to every married orchestra patron - a free £500 insurance coupon against involuntary child-birth. "DRAIN" directed by Dr. Stomack Pumpst, the great German director whose masterpiece "Strife" has revolutionised the movie world. This is a film backed by the firm of PARA-METRO-GOLDMOUNT-PLAYERS.

YOU MUST NOT MISS IT

See "Drain", the costliest motion picture ever made and make use of the free involuntary childbirth insurance coupon issued at the doors of all PARA-METRO-GOLDMOUNT theatres throughout the world to married orchestra patrons only.

SEE "DRAIN", AN INTENSE DRAMA OF LOVE,  
HATE, JEALOUSY, PASSION, VENGEANCE,  
AND DEATH !

IT GRIPS

and

MOVES !

A PARA-METRO-GOLDMOUNT PICTURE

WATCH FOR IT

COME BEFORE BREAKFAST AND GET A 3/6 SEAT  
FOR 2/8. ITS VALUE FOR MONEY!

PARA-METRO-GOLDMOUNT 24 HOUR SUPER CON-  
TINUOUS MOVIE SERVICE

IT'S ALWAYS WARM INSIDE ! <sup>359</sup>

This pastiche is a striking comment on the kinds of film which were ubiquitously shown in England, and distributed by the large American production firms, especially Paramount (previously Famous Players) and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). Noxon attacks the consumer-led language which is used by the large American companies, and effectively highlights the banality of the films produced by such conglomerates via a method of replicating their language to such an extent as

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<sup>359</sup> Gerald Noxon, 'We Have Films in England', *transition* 19-20 (June 1930): 129.



to accentuate their ridiculousness. He also foregrounds the consumerist tactics afforded by American companies, via a means of offering discounts and coupons in order to attract patrons. Noxon's article then proceeds to compare the ridiculousness of the American films available for distribution in England with English films themselves, about which he states "except for fifty feet of 'Blackmail' [...] are just damn bad."<sup>360</sup> The primary problem with the state of mainstream cinema is identified by Noxon to be the problem of censorship, of which he says: "the censor, being stupid, is a bad censor and being commercial is American, moral, irreligious, [and] makes it hard for us to see serious cinema here."<sup>361</sup> The remainder of Noxon's essay provides a short overview of French films of which, he concludes, there have been both bad and good examples, but that are evidence of "the intelligent Gallic response to a new medium [...], a response with humour and spirit in spite of American combines and the audience, it has a certain pretty style and finish and occasionally stimulates but is not important. It is minor."<sup>362</sup>

For Noxon, as for Wright, the Film Society, and *Close Up*, "Important and Major" cinema was that made by certain Russian directors, namely Eisenstein and Pudovkin. Noxon's engagement with the work of these directors is rooted in the apparently social aspect of their output. It is, he writes, "chiefly important because it is brief, sudden, economical, cruel, kind, happy, sorrowful in ten feet. It is of living people, folly and hopelessness, greatly sorrowful, full of brick deeds, built courageous walls, insanity and up against it, the organisation of the other side. There is in these films an ordered form of lawlessness that is of personal ordered conceptions."<sup>363</sup> Noxon and Wight are in agreement that the films being made in Russia were, for all their apparent violence and disorder, in fact well-ordered portrayals which performed an important social function. Noxon appears, in his appraisal of the films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, to be moving towards a conception of film which calls for the "real," a cornerstone of the British Documentary movement which was beginning to establish itself around this time,

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<sup>360</sup> Noxon, 'We Have Films in England', 129.

<sup>361</sup> Noxon, 'We Have Films in England', 129.

<sup>362</sup> Noxon, 'We Have Films in England', 129.

<sup>363</sup> Noxon, 'We Have Films in England', 130.

and which Noxon would become involved with following graduation.<sup>364</sup> Moving towards a conclusion Noxon writes:

There is panic in order, there is chaos in order, there is famine in order, there is killing and death in order and there is a crying out for ultimate order in our lives, there is human sacrifice and silent crucifixion in the streets with the shooting in the streets, there is life and men's place in life. Their beauty is in their precision and in their thought, in the pure beauty of their images, in the subtleties of their direct contact with you through the eyes and screen shapes. Eisenstein and Pudovkin are of universal appetite [...]. The structure of their work is difficult and faithful to their thought, their language is simple, their words are simple, their people and faces, their films are art.<sup>365</sup>

Noxon's desire for "life" in the cinema is based a series of technical specificities that pertain both to abstract and documentary-style filmmaking. For example, in 2006 the Tate Liverpool exhibition *Making History* described John Grierson's 1929 film *Drifters* as "in part a response to avant-garde, Modernist films, adopting formal techniques such as montage – constructive editing emphasising the rhythmic juxtaposition of images – but also aimed to make a socially directed commentary on its subject."<sup>366</sup> For the *Experiment* group these formal techniques of rhythm, composition, cutting and montage simultaneously represented the intrinsic artistic quality in both pure films, and the socially driven films of the Soviet Union.

Noxon's article for *transition* then, functions on multiple levels in allowing us to understand the relationship of the *Experiment* group to contemporary debates surrounding the cinema. Primarily, it continues the satirical tone of many of the group's contributions to the Parisian journal, particularly the 'manifesto' discussed in Chapter One: it establishes the group as youthful and subversive, actively seeking change. However, it achieves this within the narrow parameters of avant-garde

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<sup>364</sup> When Eisenstein's *Potemkin* was finally screened in England by the Film Society in November 1929, it was part of a famous double-bill with John Grierson's *Drifters*, a documentary about North Sea fisheries.

<sup>365</sup> Noxon, 'We Have Films in England', 130.

<sup>366</sup> 'Making History: Exhibition Guide, section 1 films', <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/making-history/making-history-exhibition-guide/making-history-0-1>

acceptability: the treatment of censorship and the preoccupation with “fashionable” Russian film-makers, casts *Experiment* as an avant-garde in the model of other journals such as *Close Up*, whose roots were firmly in the tradition of High Modernist literature.<sup>367</sup> Nonetheless, writing about cinema, and actively participating in film culture, is an area in which members of the *Experiment* group achieved much success: Noxon, Wright, and Jennings all became successful film-makers and administrators under the tutelage of Grierson. The proximity of *Experiment* to the avant-garde and the understanding of film art and method gained via this adjacency, combined with their simultaneous distance from the traditions of that avant-garde, placed members of the group in a favourable position to alter the course of cinema’s future in Britain – integrating avant-gardism and social conscience as a means of creating an explicitly new artistic mode.

The principals of film construction as they pertain to art were understood by the *Experimenters* as the ‘cinematic idiom,’ and were clearly put forth in Noxon’s essay of the same title, published in *Experiment* number three (May 1929). ‘Cinematic Idiom’ attempts to identify the “pure basic technique” for the cinema, which takes, as its basis, a study of abstract or “pure” cinema as exemplified by the contemporaneous work of Hans Richter, Eugene Deslaw, and Francis Bruguière. Noxon argues that the need to address pure cinema and its methods is imperative because “the commercial cinema came before the artistic cinema. Consequently the artistic cinema has had to go back and make abstract films in order to discover the elements of which it is composed.”<sup>368</sup> The insistence on the return to the basis of cinematic method is a form of response to the contemporary status of the cinema. As referenced previously, large American companies had a stronghold on production during this period, due largely to the prevailing economic situation in Europe, and their films were, for the most part, more economically viable in their appeal to mass-audiences. The financial disparities between American and

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<sup>367</sup> From its inception, *Close Up* promised contributions from “some of the most interesting personages of the day” and actively sought contributions from Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf (rejected), Wells, Arnold Bennett and Osbert Sitwell (never published). Although the journal initially sought to gain literary status by inviting significant literary figures to contribute, this desire soon ceased to govern the journal’s editorial policy. See Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 322.

<sup>368</sup> Gerald Noxon, ‘Cinematic Idiom’, *Experiment* 3 (May 1929): 37.

European film companies allowed that technological advances in the United States were accelerating, and a transition from the impartiality of the silent film to the nationally-driven 'talkies' was well underway.

Beyond issues of censorship, the transition from silence to sound was a further keystone in the narrative history of *Close Up*. Commencing publication in July 1927, within three months of the journal's first appearance *The Jazz Singer* opened in the United States.<sup>369</sup> James Donald has suggested that:

The rapid increase in the cost of film production brought about by the talkies, and the massive investment needed to adapt cinemas for sound projection, led to a new economic regime in cinema. These new conditions entrenched yet more deeply Hollywood's domination of European markets, and played their part in constraining even further the production of a universal pure film language and the creation of an internationalist film culture. So it is true that *Close Up's* *raison d'être* was being undermined at the very moment the magazine came into being.<sup>370</sup>

Noxon's contribution to *Experiment* number three had the benefit of distance from the initial experiments with sound that was not afforded to the elder journal. Indeed, in 'Cinematic Idiom' Noxon acknowledged that artistic films had "profited immensely by the technical perfections essential to the practice of commercial cinematography and the commercial cinema has, in turn, poached upon the preserves of the artistic cinema. The danger is, of course, that they will find a compromise and a common level of mediocrity."<sup>371</sup> Here, we find in *Experiment* a point of difference from the general tone of *Close Up*, wherein mainstream films were viewed as almost unanimously a bad thing.<sup>372</sup> Noxon, and ergo the *Experiment* group more broadly, were willing to accept and adopt commercial cinema, while maintaining a somewhat elitist vision of separateness. However, within their

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<sup>369</sup> James Donald, 'From Silence to Sound: Introduction', *Close Up* 1927-33, 79.

<sup>370</sup> Donald, 'From Silence to Sound: Introduction', 79.

<sup>371</sup> Noxon, 'Cinematic Idiom', 37.

<sup>372</sup> See: Ernest Betts, 'Why 'Talkies' Are Unsound', *Close Up* 4:4 (April 1929). Also, Kenneth Mscpherson 'As Is', *Close Up* 5:4 (October 1929): "I have seen most of the talking films. Without exception any power they may have had to hold us was fragmentary, accidental – purely and wholly accidental. Bouldery jumble without interrelation or any specific plan, without architecture and without mortar, the object of which must be considered to be served if it can get its story told."

conception of what the cinema *might* be, there remains scope for reconciliation of these divisions – a conception which was largely achieved in the films made by *Experiment's* contributors under the auspices of the GPO and Crown Film Unit in the 1930s and 1940s.

The return to pure cinema for the *Experiment* group was essential to the future development of *all* cinema, specifically that which they term “interpretative” cinema or “second degree” films. That is, “object films or [...] films about humans.”<sup>373</sup> Noxon wrote that “the experimenters in pure cinema to-day know that the future of all interpretive cinema depends upon the efficient development of a pure cinema technique.”<sup>374</sup> The developments in poetry made by the *Experiment* group discussed in Chapter Two were shown to rely upon a concept of experimentalism which is likewise critical to the group’s vision for the development of the cinema. Furthermore, as with poetry, the fundamental principles of cinema are identified by Noxon as being:

1. Significant composition of the individual image with regard to the rhythm in which it is involved.
2. Significant rhythm of such images.<sup>375</sup>

Chapter Two addressed the concept of rhythm, as dictated by movement, as central to the poetic experiments with cinema that appeared in the pages of *Experiment*. Similarly, it can be seen in the articles on the subject of cinema that poetry and poetic techniques were fundamental to the group’s understanding of that medium. We can see, in the following statement from Noxon’s ‘Cinematic Idiom,’ that his theory of cinema is compatible with approaches to poetry outlined elsewhere:

The integral rhythm of any composition in pure cinema is separate from the general rhythmic structure of the suite of images in which it may occur. Films have been made in which a series of images, which are individually stationary compositions or stills, follow one another in a certain rhythmic sequence. It is questionable whether such a sequence constitutes cinema: I

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<sup>373</sup> Noxon, ‘Cinematic Idiom’, 37.

<sup>374</sup> Noxon, ‘Cinematic Idiom’, 35.

<sup>375</sup> Noxon, ‘Cinematic Idiom’, 35.

suggest that it does not, but that it is merely a mechanical development of the lantern slide story. The true cinema rhythm is complex and difficult to resolve. A single shot may well consist of some fifty images and may have an individual rhythm. It may be followed by a totally different shot with its particular rhythm. This may continue indefinitely until the film reaches completion. Obviously the order and the relative length of these shots constitutes a controlling rhythm in the film. This controlling rhythm is really what determines the worth of a film as a whole. The rhythm of individual shots is the means of controlling the feeling in a particular series of images. In the old days of the cinema, shots were long and complex, they were strung together without a thought of the controlling rhythm: today, the tendency is to have short shots of greater intensity (achieved by a certain regard to significant composition) which are very much more flexible and can be fitted in to a significant controlling rhythm.<sup>376</sup>

One of the challenges posed to the writing of cinema in *Experiment* is the difficulty of writing about film and its essential quality – movement – while remaining constrained by the ability only to reproduce “stills.” Noxon’s essay quotes James Huneker as saying of still photographs that “a photograph is a picture when it combines significant subject matter, composition and atmosphere.”<sup>377</sup> However this further complicates Noxon’s desire to illustrate the essential qualities of film, while reproducing stills, ergo photographs. The stills which appear in *Experiment* number three – reprinted courtesy of *Close Up* – in accompaniment to Noxon’s ‘Cinematic Idiom’ are taken from Deslaw’s *La Marche des Machines* (1929), Eisenstein’s *Potemkin* (1925), Man Ray’s *L’etoile de Mer* (1928), and Francis Bruguière’s uncompleted *The Way* (1925) [Figs. 3.3-3.7].

The stills reproduced in *Experiment*, while individually beautiful, act against Noxon’s argument that individually stationary stills do not constitute cinema. Lacking the movement intrinsic to cinema and the rhythm created in individual shots according to this movement, printed stills have the opposite effect in the context of the journal from the poetry discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>378</sup> However, attempts to

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<sup>376</sup> Noxon, ‘Cinematic Idiom’, 36.

<sup>377</sup> James Huneker in Noxon, ‘Cinematic Idiom’, 35.

<sup>378</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, poetry was ‘activated’ by means of experimenting with form. For instance, blank spaces between words assumed symbolic significance depending on the words

counteract this inertia were made in the editorial decisions of the *Experiment* group in publishing the stills in the third issue. For example, the pairing of the still from *La Marche des Machines* with that of the sailor in *Potemkin* strives to reanimate both images [Fig.3.5]. Despite coming from exceptionally different types of film – one abstract, the other pertaining to significant historical narrative – the chosen examples offer associations and intellectual stimulus and therefore the continuity essential to cinema. In ‘Cinematic Idiom’ Noxon writes that:

The essential in the object film is that the intellectual stimulus derived from it should have continuity. Such continuity is difficult to achieve on account of the fact that the mentalities of the spectators differ both in regards to experience and speed. Here one of the greatest cinema problems looms up, that of a temporal expressionism based, together with the whole cinematic phenomena, upon the optical speed of the human eye.<sup>379</sup>

The placing together of the stills from Deslaw and Eisenstein’s films appears to be an active attempt to achieve continuity, and to engage the eye of the reader as a means of optically enlivening the images via a process of looking from one to another and forming intellectual and temporal associations. It is possible that a similar process is being encouraged with Man Ray’s *L’etoile de Mer*: printed on a single page with no accompanying image, the still – included to demonstrate Man Ray’s use of rotating objects – is printed vertically on the page [Fig.3.6]. This requires active participation on the part of the reader, who is required to “rotate” the magazine in order to view the image. Furthermore, the continuation of the endeavour to cut similar shapes together in the manner of montage practice can be seen in the replication of the circle motif from the previous page. Indeed, the effect of cutting similar shapes together can be seen both in *Experiment*’s bibliographic decisions, and also in the specific still taken from Man Ray’s film, which displays the repetition of similar shapes shot and cut together so as to appear simultaneously.

By deliberately occupying the reader’s eye using devices inspired by cinematic technique, the problem of illustrating the cinema using stills was recognised and

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printed around them. Words were elevated to the status of image. Conversely, removed from its intended dynamic state, the significance of the film ‘still’ is necessarily diminished.

<sup>379</sup> Noxon, ‘Cinematic Idiom’, 37.

treated consciously and effectively. The corporeal and optical absorption of the viewer with the material object accords the liberation of a kind of temporal expressionism of the images directed by optical speed of the viewer's eye. Furthermore, these encounters attempt to recreate a process of rhythmical movement of the eye. This is best seen in the Man Ray image, where the cutting together of images in a single shot remains visible in the completed film. Even as a still, the viewer is forced to direct his/her attention from object to object, unable to assimilate the entire image instantly, in a manner analogous to the reading of a comic strip. This movement between parts of the image arguably constitutes the rhythm of the cinematic image. The use of still images to recreate the effects of cinema in the alternative medium of the journal achieves the effect of 'cinema by other means' outlined in Chapter Two. The activation of the images in *Experiment* functions in a similar way as El Lissitzky's 'Bioscopic Book': through a process of continual viewing, the eye of the viewer is essentially mechanised. This reading offers an extension of the theory of cinematic imagination offered in Chapter Two: by incorporating still images into the journal, *Experiment* engages not only with cinema but also with film. While the eye continues to be engaged in a mechanical capacity as the "projector" of cinema, the magazine itself is representative of the film medium. The combination of these two factors produces not just cinematic effect, but actual cinema.

We are reminded at this juncture of the poetry and prose contributions to the journal discussed in Chapter Two, and the equivalence between Noxon's principles for film-making and those of the group's literary experiments. For example Sen's poem-review of Man Ray's *L'Etoile de Mer* – addressed in Chapter Two – used techniques traditionally associated with poetry to recreate the rhythm and pace of the film under discussion. Within each stanza, enjambment controlled the "integral rhythm"; and each stanza functioned as a substitute for the camera "shot". Stanzas differed in length and metre, some employing caesura as a further pacing technique. The effects Sen used correspond with Noxon's assessment of the same film in 'Cinematic Idiom,' of which he writes: "Development of rhythm in individual shots has been the aim of Man Ray. A still from his film *Etoile de mer* is reproduced



[Fig.3.5]. The composition consists of objects in movement, it is split into a number of sections and each section is a separate shot; each shot has a rhythm of its own.”<sup>380</sup>

In the same issue of *Experiment* in which Noxon’s ‘Cinematic Idiom’ appeared, Sen contributed a further experimental piece envisioned as a compound of cinema and poetry entitled ‘Scenario for a Film’.<sup>381</sup> This work, as Paul Tiessen has noted, is “as much a work of literature as a script” and again complements the desire of the contemporaneous writers of the *Close Up* circle to develop a category of cinema which reflected the process and aesthetic of writing, as opposed to *vice versa*.<sup>382</sup> As Anne Friedberg has suggested, “*Close Up* writers hoped that writing which contested the commercial illusionism of the ‘Hollywood code’ would create a cinema whose imaginary effects could be determined *a priori*.”<sup>383</sup> Sen’s ‘Scenario’ augments Noxon’s critical writing in that it integrates hypothetical “shots” with the use of devices more commonly associated with poetry. The ‘Scenario for a Film’ also engages with contemporary art cinema in its subject: the street. Tiessen has noted the relationship of this work to films such as Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927), a quasi-documentary silent film in which visual montages of the city were accompanied by a purpose-written score played by an orchestra.<sup>384</sup> Despite having no specific narrative, Ruttmann’s film employed rhythm as both a visual and auditory means of representing the daily rhythms of urban life. Moreover, the city scenario was an established genre of art film by this time, with Alberto Cavalcanti’s *Rien que les heures* (1926) and Dziga Vertov’s *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) both experimenting with similar motifs.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Noxon, ‘Cinematic Idiom’, 38.

<sup>381</sup> Nikhil N. Sen, ‘Scenario for a Film’, *Experiment* 3 (May 1929): 19-22.

<sup>382</sup> Tiessen, *Apparently Incongruous Parts*, 15.

<sup>383</sup> Friedberg, ‘Reading *Close Up*, 1927-33’, in *Close Up 1927-33*, 3.

<sup>384</sup> Tiessen, *Apparently Incongruous Parts*, 15.

<sup>385</sup> Vertov’s *Man with the Movie Camera* was shown during the 1930-31 season at the Cambridge Film Guild. See: Tiessen, *Apparently Incongruous Parts*, 15.

Sen's 'Scenario', in dialogue with those of Ruttman and Vertov, attempts to capture an impression of the city by night.<sup>386</sup> The author, responding to the theories of writers on cinema such as Eisenstein and Pudovkin as well as colleagues like Noxon, attempts to compose images exhibiting something approaching a montage aesthetic. His images are fleeting and instantly recognisable, perfect subjects for cinematic montage: "Empty restaurants./Thinly filled dance floors./Tube stations./Bus stops./Streets, streets, streets." In Sen's scheme each full-stop gives the impression of "cutting," as it is employed in films whose aesthetic method relies on montage. Sen's use of language and the formal composition of his poem also reflects, in its expansion and contraction, the desired pace of the "film".

In his *Theory of the Film* (1952) Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs discusses the artistic importance of extra-dramaturgic editing in films, editing which "does not increase the tension of sequences, does not express internal, emotional storms. It has merely formal, musical, decorative significance."<sup>387</sup> Balázs posits that "Shots of landscapes, buildings, interiors can by cutting be given a certain irrational interrelation, like melodies in a good symphonic structure."<sup>388</sup> In order to exemplify the process of rhythmical cutting in film making, Balázs references specifically the urban scenarios of Ruttman and Cavalcanti:

What have the subtle changes and forms of rhythm in Walter Ruttman's *Berlin* in common with the trams shown in the film? What have the shots of Montmartre streets in Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* in common with the *legato-staccato* of his cutting? From the viewpoint of rhythm these features are merely carriers of light and shadow, of form and movement. They are no longer objects at all. The visual music of the montage is played in a separate sphere that is parallel to the content.

Shots can be made to appear long or short not only through the rhythm but also as a result of what they depict. In editing, not only the content but the *shape* of shots must often be taken

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<sup>386</sup> A further influence may be Deslaw's *Les Nuits Électriques*, however this is an example of abstract cinema.

<sup>387</sup> Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: (Character and Growth of a New Art)* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1972), 133.

<sup>388</sup> Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 133.

into account. Lines of direction and movement must be brought into relation with one another. One of the devices used in editing is to bring details together according the resemblance or contrast of their shapes.<sup>389</sup>

Sen's scenario attempts to achieve in writing what Balázs identifies in the films of Ruttmann and Cavalcanti. For instance, in the opening sequence images are gradually contracted into shorter sentences and lines alongside the literal compression of the text on the page:

Big square, with blazing lights and electric signs on all sides. A clock is set amongst these signs of moving engines, stars, advertisements, etc. Clock points to a few minutes before eleven.  
Rather emptyish square with a vacant garden.  
Shots of streets, rather empty with stray taxis strolling.  
Theatre fronts with "House Full" boards.  
Shots of streets again.  
Empty restaurants.  
Thinly filled dance floors.  
Tube stations.  
Bus stops.  
Streets, streets, streets.<sup>390</sup>

Compare this with the second sequence, which begins with a return to the clock in the first image now "pointing [to a] few minutes after eleven," at which time crowds begin to fill the streets, "coming out of theatres and cinemas."

Crowds filling the streets.  
Porter shouting for taxis.  
Crowded bus stops.  
Taxis and cars hurrying past full of gaily dressed theatre crowds.  
Crowded tube stations.  
Feet rushing downstairs.  
Escalator full of people moves down slowly.  
Hectic hands at ticket offices, automatic machines.  
Automatic change machines.  
Hands, hands, hurrying hands.  
Crowds moving in all ways.  
Shot of filled square.

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<sup>389</sup> Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 133.

<sup>390</sup> Sen, 'Scenario', 20.

Here, Sen endeavours to use language and the repetition of images from the first sequence – now slightly altered by the presence of people – as a counterpoint in his narrative. The action of the second sequence is juxtaposed to the inaction of the first. However, since the scenario remains *writing* and not cinema, his images fail to be transformed into mere “carriers of light and shadow,” and remain explicitly objects, due to the constraints of the specificity of language. Sen also relies heavily on language as the sole means of continuity in his script:

Crowds in streets, vast crowds moving away in all directions.  
Shot of thousands of backs walking away.  
They walk off fast chattering gaily.  
One back stands out of all the rest, just distinct enough to be noticed.  
It seems slowly left behind all the crowds.  
A back moving dragging footsteps.  
The crowd thins and slowly the street grows empty.  
The camera follows (long shot) this back slowly through lonely streets to the embankment.  
A coffee stall, a row of taxis behind it, a bench in the background.  
Taximen by the stall, chatting, smoking.  
Shot of the river.  
Dark, murky water, the moonbeams make silver patches here and there.<sup>391</sup>

Here we see that the words “vast,” “fast,” “chattering” initially control the pace of the sequence, and are then replaced with “empty,” “slowly,” and “dragging.” The rhythm of the scenario is further controlled by the lengthening of sentences or “shots,” as a means of providing a slowing effect, allowing images to span multiple lines of the text. This is further emphasised by Sen’s use of camera direction within the body of the text. In indicating the presence of a “long shot” within the narrative the author both lengthens the sentence itself, and directs the reader’s imagination toward an impression of drawn-out time. Again, Sen’s experiment conforms to Noxon’s theories on the ‘Cinematic Idiom,’ in which he concludes: “The possibilities of interpretive cinema are wider than those of any other form of graphic art, because the cinematic idiom allows for a distortion in time. This immunity from the ordinary laws of time is perhaps the greatest advantage of the cinema, and upon it

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<sup>391</sup> Sen, ‘Scenario’, 20.

are based all photoplays, good, bad, and indifferent.”<sup>392</sup> It is interesting that Noxon chooses to allude to the written output of the cinema as opposed to films themselves, creating a convenient dialogue with Sen’s literary-cinematic experiment, and suggesting that, for the *Experiment* group, like *Close Up*, literature and the cinema were inextricable, and that the ultimate goal of each medium was to achieve an approximation of lived experience via experimentation with the distortion of time. As with the discussion of the images in *Experiment* above, Sen’s second contribution to the magazine differs slightly from the first in that it is not simply ‘cinema by other means.’ Levi’s theory of ‘Cinema by Other Means’ represents writing and objects which explicitly do *not* refer to the cinema apparatus.<sup>393</sup> In the instance of Sen’s ‘Scenario,’ the properties of the film are combined with the cinematic imagination to produce a written film, which differs fundamentally from the written cinema discussed in Chapter Two.

In an essay published in another Cambridge paper – *The Cambridge Review* – in November 1929, Noxon wrote at length on the subject of ‘Temporal Distortion in the Cinema,’ in which he addressed interpretative films specifically as opposed to abstract (as in ‘Cinematic Idiom’). Of temporal distortion Noxon wrote that there are “two forms, distortion of incident relative to the sequence or play in which it is involved and distortion of the incident within itself.”<sup>394</sup> The first form of distortion he identifies as being “present in all form of dramatic art and indeed it is upon this principle of temporal distortion that all representations of the life of bodies is based.” All drama that consists of multiple scenes, he argues, relies upon a “compression or temporal distortion of the life sequence which it is meant to represent.”<sup>395</sup> Noxon’s second mode of distortion is also present in drama, particularly in modern form of expressionist drama through the use of the compound stage wherein “action is contemporaneous on different parts of the

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<sup>392</sup> Noxon, ‘Cinematic Idiom’, 38-39.

<sup>393</sup> Levi, ‘Cinema by Other Means’, 53.

<sup>394</sup> Gerald Noxon, ‘Temporal Distortion in the Cinema’, *The Cambridge Review* (November 15 1929): 115.

<sup>395</sup> Noxon, ‘Temporal Distortion’, 115.

stage.”<sup>396</sup> This “modern stage fashion” the author continues, “is merely an imitation of the cinematic idiom.” This statement is of particular interest in the context of *Experiment* as it conforms to the idea that contemporary literary and dramatic output was subject to the influence of the cinema, but remained by comparison with that art “an impure medium, and any temporal distortion incorporated in drama must conform to the restrictions which the spoken word imposes upon it.”<sup>397</sup> By comparison with performed drama, Noxon writes:

In the cinema, in its true state as a purely visual medium, the field for temporal distortion is infinite and, since the very beginnings, cinema technique has developed along the lines of temporal distortion, slowly, but surely, breaking away from the stage conceptions of temporal distortion in order to exploit the natural resources of the new dramatic medium. Shots have become shorter and more significant, individual images more calculated and convey complex meanings, and rhythms balanced against each other in order to produce that admirable fluidity of sequences which the best modern cinema now achieves.<sup>398</sup>

It is evident, in Sen’s ‘Scenario,’ that the author is striving to imitate the cinema by means of affecting ‘shots’ and rhythm using varying sentence lengths, and seeking balance through formal constructions of shape. However, since Sen’s work is, despite its aspirations, essentially a literary as opposed to visual production, it too, like drama, is restricted by the presence of the word.

Sen’s montage aesthetic is also naive, especially by comparison with that of experienced film makers such as Eisenstein. Despite attempting to affect rhythm by means of the formal *shape* of the text, as can be seen in the contraction of the first section, visually Sen’s montage is overly reliant on repetition of similar forms, for example in the succession of images of hands. Although this section is effective in giving an idea of pace, it does not adhere to the formalist ideals of artists such as Eisenstein, who practiced the cutting of images according to their *line*, illustrated by his cutting together of a cricket and a reaping-machine in *The General Line* (1929)

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<sup>396</sup> Noxon, ‘Temporal Distortion’, 115.

<sup>397</sup> Noxon, ‘Temporal Distortion’, 115.

<sup>398</sup> Noxon, ‘Temporal Distortion’, 115.

“because they had the same line.”<sup>399</sup> In the analysis above, we have seen in the choice and physical placement of film stills, that stimulating and nuanced montage can be effectively achieved through a process of the aesthetic association of shapes, as opposed to repetitions of the same forms. Therefore, we might conclude that Sen’s ‘Scenario’ to some extent fails to achieve its objective of successful imitation of cinematic technique, largely due to its intrinsic reliance as a written work on language as distinct from the purely visual ideal of avant-garde cinema. However, this conforms to the definition of “experimentation” given in Chapter Two, which places emphasis on the importance of “process” over “result.”

The opposition between the purely visual ideal of the cinema and the word is a conflict which was present in both specialist journals such as *Close Up* and in more mainstream papers. The division between the artistically driven visual model and the narrative driven ‘populist’ mode was typified in the contemporaneous debates regarding the coming of sound, with supporters of art films championing silent productions as *true* cinema. However, the transition from silence to sound is perhaps a more nuanced process than we might first imagine. James Donald has noted that:

the issue was not with *sound* as such. You would always have heard a musical accompaniment (whether a specially written score played by a full orchestra or an ill-prepared pianist trying to keep up), a lecturer commenting on the film and guiding audience reactions, a manager filling in while reels were changed, or simply the whir of the projector and the conversation and noisiness of other people. The objection was specifically to synchronized *speech*, and the increased reliance on the spoken word it implied.<sup>400</sup>

On May 10 1929 in *The Cambridge Review*, Basil Wright – as part of a series entitled ‘Aspects of the Cinema’<sup>401</sup> – published an article entitled ‘Talking Pictures and Sound Synchronisation’ in which he argued that “spoken dialogue synchronised with

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<sup>399</sup> Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 134.

<sup>400</sup> Donald, ‘From Silence to Sound’, *Close Up* 1927-1931, 79.

<sup>401</sup> The title of this series seems, again, to be in dialogue with *Close Up*. Beginning in *The Cambridge Review* in April 1929, it follows the publication of J. Shige Sudziky’s ‘An Aspect of Cinema Construction’ in the March 1929 issue of *Close Up*.

moving pictures destroys one of the fundamental instruments of the Cinema, I mean Cutting, on which the tempo, rhythm and excitement of any and every film depends to such a great extent.”<sup>402</sup> The adoption of a stance in-line with that of *Close Up* – in whose pages just a month before the appearance of Wright’s text appeared an article by Ernest Betts entitled ‘Why ‘Talkies’ Are Unsound’ – demonstrates the group’s active engagement with, and adoption of, contemporary avant-garde viewpoints. Wright’s comments on sound synchronisation are in agreement with Noxon’s essay on temporal distortion in which he argued that “the ‘talkies’ fail” in much the same way that stage plays that are filmed for the cinema fail, because the temporal distortion displayed is “not suitable for the cinema.”<sup>403</sup> Noxon continued that ‘talkies’ had “ignored the experience of what twenty years [had] taught to the cinema, and [...] gone back with a great show of technical achievement to the dark days where they have [...] sought to apply stage principles of temporal distortion to a medium that is primarily visual.”<sup>404</sup>

Wright’s study of sound films similarly criticised ‘talkies’ according to their proximity to drama. While acknowledging the contemporaneous “boom in talking-pictures,” he writes that it seems “to be in the highest degree improbable that it should ever be a serious menace to the art of the film proper. Artistically, talking pictures can, in their highest manifestation, approximate only to a perhaps spectacular form of stage drama. They are no more likely to supplant silent films than photography is likely to supplant painting.”<sup>405</sup>

Donald has cited *Close Up* as *the* forum for debate on sound and its far-reaching aesthetic and cultural implications.<sup>406</sup> The benefit for *Close Up* in this regard was that it was at this point (1929) still operating as a monthly magazine, and therefore was able to join debates on the coming of sound at a rate comparable to the technological changes themselves. Ostensibly published “termly” (and even then

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<sup>402</sup> Basil Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema II: Talking Pictures and Sound Synchronisation’, *The Cambridge Review* (May 10 1929): 433.

<sup>403</sup> Noxon, ‘Temporal Distortion’, 115.

<sup>404</sup> Noxon, ‘Temporal Distortion’, 115.

<sup>405</sup> Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema II’, 433.

<sup>406</sup> Donald, ‘From Silence to Sound,’ 80.



inconsistently) *Experiment* was unsurprisingly reliant upon already-published material taken from *Close Up*. There is cause to believe, then, that the increased visibility of the *Experimenters* in the University's weekly publications such as *The Cambridge Review* on issues pertaining to the cinema is indicative of the group's desire to keep up with the pace of change in the cinematic arts.

*Close Up* and *Experiment*, then, with regard to their stance on the coming of sound adopted what might be termed "a rearguard defence of the aesthetics of silent art cinema."<sup>407</sup> This is obviously in direct contradiction of the evidence provided elsewhere in this thesis as a means of classifying the *Experiment* group as an explicitly *avant-garde* enterprise. However, it is in fact in the defence of the soon to be obsolete art of silent cinema that the coterie reasserted their *avant-garde* credentials. The development and proliferation of sound cinema was essentially the product of commercial enterprise, and by maintaining support of silent films groups like *Close Up* and *Experiment* rejected what was seen to be the Americanisation of the cinema: "the issue was less about what sound would do to or for Hollywood, than what it meant for the search for pure cinema."<sup>408</sup> This shared ideology marked a crucial point in the development of the *Experiment* group. In championing the art of silent cinema, the group took ownership of the past and redefined it in accordance with contemporary political and social concerns. As opposed to enacting a rejection of progress, the group were in fact reacting against a capitalist system that they held accountable for the atrocities of the past. Rather than displaying a retrogressive attitude, *Experiment's* advocacy of the universality of silent film was a progressive display of the desire to change a failed political and economic system.

The disregard for Hollywood commercialism is evident in Wright's essay on talking pictures, in which he largely accepts the innovations being made with sound, but proceeds to explore the effect this might have on artistic films. Predating in this instance Kenneth Macpherson's tract 'As Is' in the October 1929 issue of *Close Up*,

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<sup>407</sup> Ian Christie, 'Introduction', in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 6.

<sup>408</sup> Donald, 'From Silence to Sound,' *Close Up 1927-1931*, 80.

Wright appears to be arguing for a “sound-sight aesthetic” that achieves “An illusory amplification of reality” which cannot be achieved by merely “adding odd effects haphazardly.”<sup>409</sup> This is reminiscent of Wright’s discussion of “the enormously important factor [of] sound-synchronisation,” of which he writes that “We have already seen it in practice in some American films, in which it is used in a somewhat desultory manner.”<sup>410</sup> However, Wright recognises that:

The essential possibilities of sound synchronisation lie far deeper. Dismissing the use only of music as an incidental emotional effect, we come to the following available functions:  
- Varied sounds employed rhythmically or arhythmically either as sheer realism, or expressionistically, or as a mixture of the two elements. For example; you have the sound of Niagara Falls. You synchronise it with a moving picture of the Falls themselves. That is realism. You synchronise it with, say, a picture of a mob sweeping along to destroy some ‘ancien régime.’ That is expressionism, for what it is worth. Finally, if you substituted shots of Niagara for the breaking ice in Pudowkin’s ‘Mother,’ and synchronised your record throughout, both with the mob scenes and the Falls themselves, you would be combining (not ineffectively) the two methods.<sup>411</sup>

This practical discussion of sound synchronisation as it might be applied to artistic filmmaking seems to be heavily influenced by the October 1928 issue of *Close Up*, which published the famous ‘Statement on Sound’ signed by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov.<sup>412</sup> The statement from the USSR, which is directly referenced in Wright’s article,<sup>413</sup> strikes a similar tone to that in the Cambridge weekly. Firstly, the incredible technological feat of realising the talking picture is recognised; however the Soviets also acknowledge the threat that “a misconception of the possibilities of this new technical discovery may not only hamper the work of developing and

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<sup>409</sup> Kenneth Macpherson, ‘As Is’ in *Close Up* 4:4 (October 1929), reprinted in Donald, Friedberg, Marcus, *Close Up 1927-39*, 92.

<sup>410</sup> Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema II’, 433.

<sup>411</sup> Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema II’, 433.

<sup>412</sup> S.M. Eisenstein, W.I. Pudowkin and G.V. Alexandroff, ‘The Sound Film: A Statement from U.S.S.R.’ *Close Up*, 3:4 (October 1928), reprinted in reprinted in Donald, Friedberg, Marcus, *Close Up 1927-39*, 83-84.

<sup>413</sup> Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema II’, 433: “The principles recently written down by the Russian directors in a “manifesto” issued by Eisenstein, Pudowkin [sic] and Alexandroff [sic], and also by some Germans, notably Meisel, revolve in a carefree manner round the word counterpoint, which covers a multitude of meanings, and is sufficiently vague to satisfy everyone.”

perfecting cinematography as an art, but also threatens to ruin its present and actual achievements.”<sup>414</sup>

As with Wright’s conceit that spoken dialogue synchronised with moving picture will destroy the fundamental instrument of the cinema – namely cutting – the Soviet film-makers in *Close Up* also suggest that the “automatic utilisation” of spoken word technology in ‘high cultural dramas’ and other photographic performances of a theatrical nature “will destroy the meaning of mounting.”<sup>415</sup> The resolution of the problem of sound and its effect on mounting [montage] is conceived “Only [in the] utilisation of sound in counterpoint relation to the piece of visual mounting” so as it functions in support of the montage aesthetic in a “*pronounced non-coincidence with the visual images.*”<sup>416</sup> Wright echoes this statement:

The principles recently laid down by the Russian directors, in a ‘manifesto’ issued by Eisenstein, Pudowkin and Alexandroff [...] revolve in a carefree manner round the word counterpoint, which covers a multitude of meanings, and is sufficiently vague to satisfy everyone. As far as I can pretend to understand this principle, it comes to the necessity of securing a definite non-coincidence of sound realistically with the visual image.<sup>417</sup>

This exact replication of language as it is used in the ‘Statement from U.S.S.R.’ clearly indicates the indebtedness of the *Experiment* commentators on cinema to the information disseminated by *Close Up*. Furthermore, the specificity of the use of ‘counterpoint’ as a category for speaking technically about the cinema, returns us once again to the issue of rhythm, tempo, and music more broadly. This particular statement recalls the discussion of Sykes Davies’ poem ‘Music in an Empty House’ addressed in Chapter Two, where we saw that the author used similar language to describe his early poetry experiments. However, it is interesting that despite engaging with the topic of talking films (and poetry in the case of Sykes Davies) the vernacular used remains one which avoids the use of the spoken word; preferring instead a language which pertains to the abstract category of music, or pure

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<sup>414</sup> Eisenstein, Pudowkin and Alexandroff, ‘The Sound Film’, in *Close Up 1927-33*, 83.

<sup>415</sup> Eisenstein, Pudowkin and Alexandroff, ‘The Sound Film’, *Close Up 1927-33*, 84.

<sup>416</sup> Eisenstein, Pudowkin and Alexandroff, ‘The Sound Film’, *Close Up 1927-33*, 84.

<sup>417</sup> Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema II’, 433.

sound.<sup>418</sup> This commitment to the abstract or pure method of film, despite suggesting a theory of practice for avant-garde or artistic film production, also displays a level of political idealism built on a socialist model:

*The contrapunctal method* of constructing the talking film not only will not detract from the *international* character of cinematography, but will also enhance its significance and its cultural power to a degree unexperienced hitherto.

Applying this method of construction, the film will not be confined within any national market, as is the case with the theatre dramas, and will be the case with the 'filmed' theatre dramas, but there will be an even greater possibility than before of circulating throughout the world those ideas capable of expression through the film, and the universal hiring of films will still be practicable.<sup>419</sup>

The ideal of an internationally accessible art that silent film offered was a cornerstone of understanding for many of the contributors to *Close Up*. In her 1963 memoir Bryher wrote that "the silents' offered a single language across Europe."<sup>420</sup> The notion that the cinema could function as a unifying tool available to all people of all nationalities is in its essence deeply socialist. Although the *Experiment* group had very little direct engagement with political issues, and it is difficult to say with certainty that they adhered to any specific ideology, it is through their relationship with the cinema, as we have seen in the discussion of Noxon's work, that they most closely approach the adoption of a political position. The championing of the Russian directors and the desire to disseminate their writings is one way in which we might deduce a socially driven vision for the development of cinema in *Experiment*. This can largely be seen in the final instalment in Wright's 'Aspects of the Cinema' series, entitled 'The Soviet on Soviet Film Principles,' published in *The Cambridge Review* on May 24 1929.

The primary purpose of Wright's article is to find a wider audience for two rare Soviet publications recently acquired by the student: the first number of a

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<sup>418</sup> By this I mean those sounds that are naturally occurring, the examples Wright gives being, Niagara Falls, the dripping of a burning candle, a roaring lion, and a train.

<sup>419</sup> Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandroff, 'The Sound Film', *Close Up* 1927-33, 84.

<sup>420</sup> Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoirs* (London: Collins, 1963), 247-8.

magazine, *Kino und Kultura*, and a pamphlet published by 'Voks,' the U.S.S.R. Society for cultural relations with foreign countries. Although Wright's intention is, as far as is possible, to let "the Soviet speak entirely for itself," the quotations which he chooses to reproduce belie a certain level of sympathy with Soviet principles. Wright begins by echoing the words of constructivist writer Sergei Tretjakoff [Tretyakov] on the subject of cinema audiences, of which he writes:

It appears that the cinema has to deal with two types of public, the old average theatre goer and the new activist theatre goer, who is the worker. With the wants of the former we are not concerned; we know quite enough about the Hollywood Illusionists and the great heart of the public. But it is for the activist that the new school of cinema in Russia has been formed; what the activist wants (we are told) is "a specification of present times" and the driving power of world facts. He wants an exposition of human emotions of all sorts, the real human emotions.<sup>421</sup>

It is with the "activist" audience that the *Experiment* contributors on the cinema identify. As has been shown elsewhere, the *Experiment* group sought to achieve in the magazine, and through individual works, a sense of "presentness," or "1931ness" – an approximation of lived experience for the post-war generation.<sup>422</sup> In a direct display of criticism of their contemporaries, the cinéastes of the *Experiment* circle, again casting themselves as avant-gardists against the populace, wrote respectively that:

In the formation of local film societies lies the sole remaining hope of those in this country who are interested in the cinema as an art. Last term the Cambridge Film Guild was founded and three interesting films were shown. This term the appeals of the Guild for members have met with a very poor response. Perhaps Cambridge is not interested in films as art, perhaps this resistance of the very few is to be short lived?<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Basil Wright, 'Aspects of the Cinema III: The Soviet on Soviet Film Principles', *The Cambridge Review* (May 24 1929): 474.

<sup>422</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 17.

<sup>423</sup> Gerald Noxon, 'The Cinema, 'Anticipation and Retrospect', *The Cambridge Review* (February 7 1930): 240.

The accusation of a ‘faddish’ following for art cinema is supported by Ivor Montagu’s 1972 statement on the subject of the Film Society in which he said: “Films were in general disdained. It was supposed to be low taste. Intellectual snobs would have nothing to do with film but of course when it was organised on the lines of the Film Society, they poured in.”<sup>424</sup> Wright also adopts a derisory tone towards an unsubstantiated “fashionable” following of avant-garde films, suggesting that the following passage from Tretjakoff’s tract should be “chalked up wherever the cinema intelligentsia of our Universities is gathered together”:

Representatives of the bourgeois idea, an idea which is to us strange, can hail the liquidation of pure aesthetic construction at the points at which we see only an improvement in the process of a substantial fight for a substantial life. They can only applaud the revolutionary film because they are snobs.<sup>425</sup>

Compared with the “snobbish” art-for-art’s-sake appreciation of contemporary revolutionary film, Wright appears to endorse the ideology of the new Russian directors, who, despite deploying different methods, have in common one main idea: “a desire ‘to put into reality the social functions of our time.’” He continues (now in his own words): “The function of cinema is informatory, active, agitational.”<sup>426</sup> For Wright, interest in the cinema should be based upon “the *social* effect of the film and the social task which it is the film’s duty to perform.”<sup>427</sup> This stance is solidified in Wright’s penultimate quotation from Tretjakoff’s thesis:

The definition of facts is of tremendous importance to a country which has enlisted its inhabitants for the difficult but enjoyable work of reconstructing their lives. For us, art as something entertaining, or art as something apart from reality, is of no value. What we want is art that will help us to *systematise reality*, which will help us to improve the conditions of real life.<sup>428</sup>

This perception of cinema as an art that could perform a socially transformative function was central to the *Experimenters’* engagement with the medium. For this

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<sup>424</sup> Montagu, ‘Interview with Ivor Montagu’, 72.

<sup>425</sup> Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema III’, 475.

<sup>426</sup> Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema III’, 474.

<sup>427</sup> Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema III’, 474.

<sup>428</sup> Wright, ‘Aspects of the Cinema III’, 475.

adamantly post-war generation, reconstruction was perceived to be required in Britain. As I argued in Chapters One and Two, the individuals who congregated around *Experiment* pursued, via a programme of experimentation and dialogue with historical avant-gardes, a means of communicating a semblance of contemporary feeling and motivations. The status of cinema as a young art form provided the youth movement with an ideologically coherent medium for their efforts: initially despised and oppressed by establishment powers like the BFCC, the cinema represented the struggles faced by youth more broadly. The example set by Russian film-makers in this context is important: having experienced revolution, and from that experience created socially relevant art, the early work of directors such as Eisenstein provided a valuable model of what could be achieved in England.

Despite the extended preoccupation in *Experiment* and related papers with the subject of Russian films, the concluding contribution to the magazine on the subject of cinema marks a change in tone towards the Soviet model. Noxon's final essay – entitled 'Conflict in the Russian Cinema' – is a rumination on the changes that have occurred within Russian cinema in the preceding five year period, and deals primarily with the issue of propaganda. He writes:

The abnormally eventful period during which the Russian Cinema was born is now at an end. The diet of daily events in Russia is still unusual but markedly less sensational. Startlingly, so soon it seems, the great pictures commemorative of the revolution are sunk into history, obscure history for the average Briton. After being nicely forced in the natural hot-house of political strife, the plant of the Russian cinema, grown very strong, is to be put out into the difficult fields of economy.<sup>429</sup>

Recognising Russian films such as *The General Line* (1929) and *Potemkin* (1925) as propaganda, Noxon sees fit to establish that the status of a film as "propaganda" is *not* a legitimate basis for criticism. Noxon believed that the fact a film was propagandistic did not preclude it from being a work of art. He states: "All films are propaganda, from Clara Bow in *Three Week-ends* (propaganda for vulgar salacity of thought and action) to Eisenstein's *Potemkin* (propaganda for Soviet thought and

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<sup>429</sup> Gerald Noxon, 'Conflict in the Russian Cinema', *Experiment* 6 (October 1930): 43.

action).”<sup>430</sup> The conflict of propaganda which Noxon identifies as irreversibly changing the course of film-making in Russia is that which exists between directors and the Soviet government who dictate their subject matter. The economic situation in Russia is recognised to be the emerging dominant subject of contemporary Russian films, typified by Eisenstein’s *The General Line*, of which Noxon writes:

*The General Line* contains just as much propaganda as *Potemkin*, but it is of a different kind. It is concerned with the fundamental problem of economy, the food supply; and only incidentally with the rights of men. Problems of economy will from now on be the prime mover behind the Russian cinema and the Russian régisseur is up against a kind of subject matter which will test his ability to the utmost, for revolutions of men with flags and fighting are easier to deal with interestingly than revolutions of agricultural method.<sup>431</sup>

The narrative history surrounding *The General Line* aptly illustrates the effect that a rapidly changing government structure in Russia had on the development of the cinema. As Noxon notes, in the making of *The General Line* “Eisenstein had to put up with a great deal of interference from the Soviet.”<sup>432</sup> *The General Line* was first commissioned by the Soviet Government in 1927 as a celebration of collectivised agriculture as it was envisioned by one of the foremost Bolshevik revolutionaries, Leon Trotsky. However, filming was interrupted by a second commission for *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*, a glorification of the Revolution for release on the tenth anniversary. When Eisenstein returned to making *The General Line*, the agricultural policy of the Soviet Union had changed, and Trotsky had been exiled from the Communist Party. As a result, Eisenstein “was told that he must include certain sequences concerning the mechanisation of industry which were quite out of place” in his film.<sup>433</sup> The increasing control of the Soviet government then was beginning to actively destroy art cinema in Russia. Directors working according to formalist principles were beginning to find themselves in “hot water” with their

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<sup>430</sup> Noxon, ‘Conflict in the Russian Cinema’, 43.

<sup>431</sup> Noxon, ‘Conflict in the Russian Cinema’, 43.

<sup>432</sup> Noxon, ‘Conflict in the Russian Cinema’, 44.

<sup>433</sup> Noxon, ‘Conflict in the Russian Cinema’, 44.



government, and leading practitioners, such as Eisenstein, were leaving for America.<sup>434</sup> Noxon believed that this was largely due to the fact that:

The Soviet [government] is not interested in art, it is not, generally speaking, interested in cinema at all, its prime interest at the moment is the economic development of the country. The value which the Soviets attach to its great régisseurs is not artistic value, but a purely economic one. In the Russian film the art is a sweet to render palatable the economic pill.<sup>435</sup>

We see here then that the issue of propaganda in films is not so much a problem for Noxon as the idea of the removal of artistic freedom. This, therefore, does not contradict statements made previously by the *Experiment* group in support of Soviet film-makers, but marks a juncture at which the group see fit to break their continuing association with them.

The fact that this essay functions as the final word on the cinema in *Experiment* provides a neat conclusion to the group's writings on film and a movement towards practice. Following the graduation of many of *Experiment's* initial members, in 1930 both Noxon and Wright joined Grierson at the film unit of the Empire Marketing Board,<sup>436</sup> and later the General Post Office and Crown Film Units. It is interesting that in their roles in these departments, the *Experimenters* were largely following in the footsteps of their Soviet idols: working under the auspices of the government to create socially driven propaganda films.<sup>437</sup>

It has been demonstrated here that the relationship between the *Experiment* group and the cinema was complex. Following an examination of experimental cinematic processes in Chapter Two, this chapter has explored the group's relation to explicitly filmic practices. However, what emerges from this study is a sense that the cinematic and the filmic were not mutually exclusive categories for the *Experiment*

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<sup>434</sup> Noxon, 'Conflict in the Russian Cinema', 47.

<sup>435</sup> Noxon, 'Conflict in the Russian Cinema', 44.

<sup>436</sup> The Empire Marketing Board Film Unit was run by Grierson. The Unit was transferred to the General Post Office (GPO) in 1933 and became the Crown Film Unit in 1940.

<sup>437</sup> I am thinking specifically of the films made by the GPO during the Second World War, which, though undoubtedly propagandistic, were intended to fulfil a social function.

group. This is of critical importance to our reception of *Experiment* as an emphatically new and conscientious avant-garde. Beyond simply experimenting with cinematic concepts in poetry, the group also intellectually engaged with the medium of film. However their experiments extended beyond the conceptual level, and physically animated the format of the journal. In confronting the dualism of cinema – the cinematic versus the filmic – the *Experiment* group created a new vision of the cinema that was both artistically and socially relevant. The group’s artistic legitimation was largely achieved through its dialogue with established institutions dedicated to fomenting cinema as an art such as the Film Society and *Close Up*. In many ways, the cinema offered a neutral ground on which the *Experimenters* could engage with the historical avant-garde. The medium itself was essentially adolescent, and therefore unblighted by historical phantoms.<sup>438</sup>

It has also been shown that through contact with these groups and societies and the information they disseminated, the *Experiment* group began to develop something approaching a political position. Through an apparently retrogressive commitment to silent cinema the group actually reasserted their avant-gardism. The distinction they made between populist films – ‘talkies’ – and art films represented their rejection of commercial capitalism and its historical failures. Essentially, silent cinema offered the group the opportunity to “cut away from the past, overcome history, and yet reconnect to it.”<sup>439</sup>

The political dimension of the *Experimenters’* interactions with the cinema and film were largely influenced by the ideologies of Russian film-makers of the period. Russian directors like Eisenstein offered a model to the *Experiment* generation in which art and politics could function symbiotically. However, as members of the *Experiment* group and the magazine itself reached maturity, reliance upon outside sources gradually receded. This is especially evident in Noxon’s final statement on ‘Conflict in the Russian Cinema.’ Noxon’s perceived disintegration of the values of

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<sup>438</sup> Although film as a medium had been in existence for some thirty years, I used the term ‘adolescent’ to describe its history in relation to more traditional art forms, such as painting and sculpture.

<sup>439</sup> McCracken, ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business’, 611.

Russian cinema in 1930 was concurrent with the establishment of the Documentary Film Movement in Britain under the auspices of the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit. *Experiment* was a critical factor in the development of the documentary movement in Britain. The aesthetic and political ideologies developed in the pages of *Experiment* and other Cambridge magazines are abundantly evident in the Movement at which the cinéastes of *Experiment* were at the forefront.

Ultimately, through the engagement with cinema and film outlined here, the *Experiment* group actively reengaged with politics. The studies of censorship issues and revolutionary Russian cinema reinvigorated the group's questioning of British society and institutions. In 1930, the year of Noxon's 'Conflict' essay and the founding of the EMB Film Unit, *Experiment* took a decidedly political turn. *Experiment* was changed.

## Chapter Four: 'Experiment is Changed'

Scholarship on *Experiment* has traditionally struggled to reconcile what I have termed the dual existence of the magazine. Price and Harding have dismissed later issues of *Experiment* as unrepresentative of its “original spirit”<sup>440</sup> or “stillborn from the press.”<sup>441</sup> Commonly, issues one through five (November 1928 – February 1930) are aligned with the first period of the magazine, with the policy change in issue six (October 1930) taken as a decisive marker of the second phase. Here, I posit an alternative system of classification. I show that key factors indicate that the natural point of division in the magazine’s history actually occurred in November 1929 with the publication of *Experiment 4*. I will demonstrate that the fourth and fifth issues of the student publication – published either side of the change of decade – marked a transitional phase in the history of *Experiment*. This middle period is critical to understanding the formal policy change in October 1930 and, moreover, the circumstances which led to its demise following the appearance of *Experiment 7* in Spring 1931.

In many ways, this chapter functions as a mirror image of Chapter One. Where Chapter One evidenced the antagonistic relationship of the *Experiment* group to the past, here I outline the group’s increasingly future-oriented vision. This vision was organised around a self-conscious adoption of the designation ‘generation,’ which the group first explicitly ascribed to themselves in *Experiment 5*. The unification of the group under this rubric was accompanied by a more rigorous engagement with politics. As with the first issue of *Experiment*, the transitional issues four and five were contextually concurrent with national victory celebrations: in this instance, the victory of the League of Nations in delivering international “peace.”

The political positions espoused in the intermediate issues of *Experiment* complemented the official policy change in number six. I will demonstrate that the *Experiment* group sought to legitimise their political position by means of introducing established writers who supported or reflected their post-war, anti-

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<sup>440</sup> Price, ‘Finite But Unbounded’, 1.

<sup>441</sup> Harding, ‘*Experiment* in Cambridge’, 295.

establishment position. This assimilation of “mature” artists into *Experiment* provided a means by which to confront the past head-on and ultimately, to achieve a kind of coexistence whereby history could be addressed without consuming the present. Finally, this chapter will indicate that, in self-consciously identifying as a generational unit and developing a means of taking ownership of the past through forging relationships with sympathetic members of the older generation, the *Experiment* group moved beyond simple antagonism toward the British establishment. Eleni Loukopoulou and Mark Morrisson have asserted that little magazines like *Experiment* presented a counterpublic sphere that challenged the establishment and ultimately influenced the dominant public sphere.<sup>442</sup> I will argue that the increased organisation, professionalization, and national and international visibility of *Experiment* in its second phase drew the group into an establishment that had once been its adversary. The unity of vision that the *Experiment* group achieved through the publication of the magazine gave them the ability to change the system from within once they had graduated to the pages of papers such as the *Criterion*. This infiltration of the establishment was what ultimately secured the mythologisation of the *Experiment* contributors as members of the Thirties Generation.

Thus far, attention has been given to the social constructs and literary and artistic concepts that formed the basis of the *Experiment* movement. These analyses have focussed primarily on the contents of *Experiment* published prior to the policy change in issue six. This portion of the thesis will demonstrate how changes that were enacted within the magazine and the group commencing from *Experiment 4* served to re-focus and unify the movement, allowing it to fulfil the objectives of its original editorial-manifesto.

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<sup>442</sup> Eleni Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits at Cambridge’s Literary Laboratories’, *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 2:2 (2011): 231-232. Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 11.

The critical moment of transformation for *Experiment* was the expulsion of Empson in July 1929.<sup>443</sup> Despite the loss of their primary editor, the group remained resolute, and perhaps more intent upon effecting changes within literary and artistic society. The removal of Empson from the university was formally responded to in the magazine: published on the anniversary of the first number (November 1929) the fourth issue reprinted an extract of the inaugural editorial, albeit with minor changes:

*We are concerned with all the intellectual interests of the University. We do not confine ourselves to the work of English students, nor are we at pains to be littered with the illustrious dead and dying. Our plan has been one of uncompromising independence: therefore not a line in these pages has been written by any but degreeless students or young graduates. It has been our object to gather all and none but the not yet too ripe fruits of art, science and philosophy at the University. We did not wish so much that our articles should be sober and guarded as that they should be stimulating and lively and take up a strong line. We were prepared in fact to give ourselves away.*

Despite being most closely aligned with the first period of what we might consider the journal's dual existence, *Experiment* number four marks a critical moment of transition in the publication's history. It is significant that the group chose to republish key passages from their initial manifesto at this juncture: the exclamation not "to be littered with the illustrious dead or dying" achieves a new level of insubordination in the wake of Empson's expulsion from the university.<sup>444</sup> Furthermore, this acquired intractability is reinforced in changes made to the bibliographic conditions of the magazine: it is in this number that the magazine's editors – now Bronowski and Sykes Davies – are explicitly named alongside publishing and distribution information for the first time. The appearance of these details functioned as an act of defiance, like the public signing of a petition. It was also a demonstration of the magazine's resilience: specifically, the declaration of its availability at renowned London booksellers' Zwemmers and Bumpus, and also in

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<sup>443</sup> John Haffenden, *William Empson Volume One: Among the Mandarins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 245.

<sup>444</sup> The *Experiment* group continued assert their independence and to tacitly display their support for their former editor by continuing to publish Empson's work in every issue.

Toronto and Paris, highlighted the journal's increased visibility outside of Cambridge and validated its claims to "uncompromising independence."

The widening of the parameters of distribution, combined with the printing of the editors' and publishers' names, indicated the increasing professionalization of the *Experiment* enterprise. This is further exemplified by the greater number of advertisements in *Experiment 4*. The first two numbers of the magazine had contained no advertisements, a considerable contributing factor to the naïve quality of the early issues. However, the ability to publish without the pressure of attaining advertising revenue had also had a positive impact on the journal: free from market pressures, their claim to independence was strengthened.

In his essay 'Re:Covering Modernism' Edward Bishop posits that "Little magazines are by definition magazines that do not make money; they are trying to promote new ideas or forms of art, rather than sales".<sup>445</sup> This statement accurately describes the preliminary phase of *Experiment* (issues 1-2) during which period Magdalene student William Hare (Viscount Ennismore) was the magazine's sole patron. The inclusion of advertising in a 'little magazine' might be somewhat adversarial when one accounts for the definition of the genre given above; that is, that the little magazine exists to "print artistic work which for reasons of commercial expediency is not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals or presses".<sup>446</sup> Although not necessarily 'commercial,' little magazines like *Experiment* nonetheless increasingly relied upon the world of commerce as a means of financial security. Furthermore, the ability to print relevant – especially visual – artistic work was contingent upon the magazine's financial viability.

A further contextualising event that marked the significance of *Experiment* number four as the key transition issue of the magazine was the Wall Street Crash of October 1929. The collapse of the United States stock market precipitated an international economic crisis that lasted throughout the 1930s. With the Crash the

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<sup>445</sup> Edward Bishop, 'Re:Covering Modernism – Format and Function in the Little Magazines', Willison, Gould, and Chernaik, *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1996), 287.

<sup>446</sup> Hoffman, Allen, Ulrich, *The Little Magazine*, 2.

price and availability of goods was dramatically altered, including the cost of paper. Discussed at length in the preceding chapter, *Experiment* number three was the most visually abundant single issue of the magazine, containing a total of four images.<sup>447</sup> The abundance of images was accompanied by the first advertisement, which suggests a direct correlation between increased images and increased production costs. Comparatively, the fourth number sees a dramatic increase in the number of advertisements to a total of twelve; however the edition publishes no images. The financial insights offered here are twofold: either external economic factors impeded printing costs so gravely as to force the group to seek advertising revenue *and* abandon the use of images; or, the magazine's finances were badly managed from its inception. Given the propensity of little magazine projects to run out of capital, the latter hypothesis offers the most plausible explanation for increased advertising in *Experiment* number four. It follows that the increased professionalization in the appearance of the journal was an external manifestation of internal organisation provoked by the change of editorship. Indeed, Trevelyan largely attributed the "discipline" of the *Experiment* group to the leadership of Bronowski who, he writes, "ordered our lives for us."<sup>448</sup>

Bronowski's promotion to the role of primary editor had considerable impact on the group and the magazine. Acting as chief editor he immediately downsized his editorial cabinet: the 'FIVE' signatories of the original manifesto were reduced to three.<sup>449</sup> This editorial strategy minimized the likelihood of internal conflict, and effectively accorded Bronowski full editorial control. The significance of this change is exposed in the reprinting of the original manifesto. Previously, the manifesto was followed by a request that contributions be sent to Empson at Magdalene College, with the addendum "We five are acting on behalf of the contributors, who have entrusted us with this part of their work": however, this communal statement was deleted from the issue four reprint, retaining only the editor's request for contributions. The result was that Bronowski's name appeared twice in the opening

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<sup>447</sup> The magazine's final number *Experiment* 7 included a total of five images, however this is widely regarded as a "double number."

<sup>448</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 15-16.

<sup>449</sup> Bronowski, Sykes Davies, and Noxon.



two pages. Ultimately, the contraction of the group into a more ideologically focussed and coherent unit under the leadership of Bronowski exemplifies the transformation from coterie to 'movement' begun in *Experiment 4*.<sup>450</sup>

Besides the obvious material changes to the magazine with the inclusion of pervasive advertising, the content of *Experiment* in issues four and five remained largely unchanged from earlier issues: contributors were all undergraduates or recent graduates, and poetry persisted as the predominant cynosure. However, *Experiment 5* did possess a slight alteration of tone that we might now read as indicative of changes that were to follow. Appearing in the first months of the new decade, *Experiment 5* adopted a more sombre inflection. Owing largely to the contributions of Sykes Davies, Empson and Max Black, *Experiment* number five achieved a level of political engagement that would come to epitomise the literature of the Thirties.

It is significant that the longest contribution to the fifth issue of *Experiment* was Sykes Davies' essay 'The League of Nations.' The League of Nations was an international, intergovernmental organisation formed following the end of the First World War at the Paris Peace Conference (1919). The Covenant of the League of Nations was signed by 44 nations on 28 June 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles negotiations. Sykes Davies' article on the League effectively draws together many of the concerns that have been discussed in the preceding chapters. It marks a dual departure: it signifies a rejection of the politically apathetic literature of the Twenties, and also a repudiation of the League's inefficacy. Furthermore, the co-editor's essay indicates an increasing self-awareness of the generational impetus that has been discussed throughout this thesis. In his autobiography, *Lions and Shadows*, Christopher Isherwood wrote that "we young writers of the middle 'twenties were all suffering, more or less subconsciously, from a feeling of shame that we hadn't been old enough to take part in the European war." He continues that the misfortune of the shame was its subconscious nature, positing that "[had it] ceased to be a curiosity for the psycho-analyst," the juvenilia of himself and his contemporaries may instead have become "genuine, perhaps [...] valuable, work[s]"

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<sup>450</sup> See: Chapter One.

of art.”<sup>451</sup> The examples provided by the previous chapters attest that the juvenilia of the period – of which *Experiment* is an example – is a vital component in understanding the art and literature of the later twentieth century. However, Isherwood’s contention that self-conscious attention to generational issues would improve artistic quality is evident in the transitional, mature phase of *Experiment*.

The League of Nations was a contextually apt political focus in early 1930. Just as it had shared the date of its first publication with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armistice, the fifth issue of *Experiment* – published in February 1930 – followed public celebrations to commemorate ten years of the League. On 9 November 1929 the Lord Mayor’s Show had celebrated the signing of the Covenant in Paris with an “intricately decorated” horse-drawn pageant car “occupied by a giant birthday cake.”<sup>452</sup> Indeed, public celebration of the League was commonplace by 1930. Helen McCarthy has stated that the supranational body had been assumed into public rituals of national identity in Britain since its inauguration. Only months after the League was created by Allied Forces at the Paris Peace Conference it was lavishly celebrated in London at the 1919 Lord Mayor’s Show. Following this extravagant public appearance, McCarthy argues that the League was subject to ‘invented traditions’. Eric Hobsbawm famously defined this term as practices “normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>453</sup>

Many of the invented traditions surrounding the League were created as a result of the activities of a separate body: The League of Nations Union (LNU). The LNU was a British non-party pressure group formed in 1918 to “secure the whole-hearted acceptance by the British people of ‘The League of Nations’ as the Guardian of International Right, the organ of International Co-operation, the final arbiter in

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<sup>451</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties* (London: Minerva, London, 1996), 46.

<sup>452</sup> Helen McCarthy, ‘The League of Nations, Public Ritual and National Identity in Britain, c.1919-56’, *History Workshop Journal*.70 (2010): 109.

<sup>453</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1. Via McCarthy, ‘The League of Nations’, 110.

International Differences, and the supreme instrument for removing injustices which may threaten the Peace of the World.”<sup>454</sup> By 1930, the LNU was one of Britain’s foremost voluntary organisations: it had a Royal Charter, over 400,000 members, and thousands of organisational affiliates comprising political parties, peace societies, religious institutions, youth organisations, women’s associations and other civic bodies.<sup>455</sup> Besides the organisation headquarters in London, the LNU also had local branches in all major towns and cities across Britain.

One of the most significant activities of the LNU in the context of *Experiment* was the instigation in 1919 of the first League of Nations Day, held on 11 November to commemorate the signing of the Armistice Treaty the previous year. Alongside public pageantry, League of Nations Day celebrations incorporated a League of Nations Sunday observed in churches two days previously. Both incarnations – the League as sentimental performance and as subsidiary to the Church – are key to Sykes Davies’ objection to it.

The appearance of Sykes Davies’ article draws the League into the dialogue of discontents of the new, post-war generation. The opening paragraph purposefully declares the author’s position; he writes: “I [...] limit my scope by confining myself to the post-war generation: roughly my contemporaries.”<sup>456</sup> Although feelings of generational discontent had been present in *Experiment* from the first issue, Davies’ essay is the first instance in which the term is used directly and authoritatively as a collective cultural phenomenon. The explicit association of the League with the First World War necessitated a relationship with the past that was anathema to the emergent youth movements in art and literature. Furthermore, the ‘invented traditions’ of the League – supported as they were by Church and State – enacted a historical continuity that undermined the programme of futurity sought by the young *Experimenters*.

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<sup>454</sup> Donald Birn, *The League of Nations Union 1918-45* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), via McCarthy ‘The League of Nations’, 111.

<sup>455</sup> McCarthy, ‘The League of Nations’ 111.

<sup>456</sup> Hugh Sykes Davies, ‘The League of Nations,’ *Experiment* 5 (February 1930): 6.

Addressing the subject of the League of Nations, Sykes Davies outlines a three-tiered argument regarding the problems faced by the organisation. The first of these problems, he suggests, is that the League and “its doings are never discussed” in “polite conversation.” However, a further contextualising event in the publication history of the article was its proximity to the publication of George Bernard Shaw’s tract on the League. First published in the English and American press in October and November 1928 (concurrent with the publication of *Experiment 1*), Shaw’s ‘The League of Nations’ was published in England as Fabian Society Tract #226 in 1929. Shaw’s argument was that ethical heterogeneity of nations, different concepts of justice, and different habits of mind and practices made the League of Nations unwieldy and impractical. Such an organisation could not act as an executive power in world affairs.<sup>457</sup> Shaw’s essay was republished in the collection *What I Really Wrote About The War* in early 1930.<sup>458</sup> This context apparently undermines Davies’ assertion that the League is never discussed in ‘polite conversation’. Instead we might consider the pretence of politeness surrounding the League to be the cornerstone of its perceived failures.

Davies attributes the absence of the League in ‘polite conversation’ to the fact that “beyond the pious hope that it may save us from being shot, the feeling towards it is one of complete apathy.”<sup>459</sup> For Davies, apathy is “the general attitude” of the post-war generation. Specifically, this cultural group display “a complete apathy towards all political matters.” However, Davies’ tract suggests that this tendency towards political indifference amongst his contemporaries is in the process of being overturned. He writes:

This [political apathy] is derived from the general tendency towards retreatism which characterised post-war psychology. Our retreat has been towards academicism. Hence political questions, if they are mentioned at all, are treated in a purely academic spirit [...].

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<sup>457</sup> Gareth Griffith, *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of George Bernard Shaw* (London: Routledge, 1993), 237.

<sup>458</sup> Standard edition published 1931.

<sup>459</sup> Sykes Davies, ‘The League of Nations,’ 6.

The academic retreat is represented in “The Waste Land” and Pound’s “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley.” Though in Pound it is attempted rather than achieved.<sup>460</sup>

While Sykes Davies utilises the possessive “our” in accepting some responsibility for cultural passivity, he explicitly aligns the retreatism of the post-war period with the preceding generation. His article continues to outline the specific failings of the League from a position that associates these with his perceived shortcomings of the older generation. His first objection to the League is its “sentimentality” which, he believes, derives principally from its name. He states that the opposition to sentimentality is a generational aversion. The rejection of sentiment among Sykes Davies’ contemporaries is in large part a reaction to their effective exclusion from the Great War and its immediate aftermath. Recognising that the antipathy toward specifically the mawkishness of the League’s title is confined to the younger generation, Davies declares this factor “unimportant,” considering that “the whole movement is essentially popular, and must have a popular title.”<sup>461</sup> This popularity of the League might be ascribed to the melodrama Sykes Davies detects in it. McCarthy’s analysis of the ‘invented traditions’ surrounding the League presents evidence of the sentimentalisation of the organisation. For example, the 1919 Lord Mayor’s Show presented “the Herald of Peace, followed by a horse-drawn wagon festooned with foliage and conveying five exotically attired women representing the continents of the world. Appearing next [...] was a long cavalcade of women on horseback, personating the Allied States and neutral countries, all in national costumes, and attended by ‘maids of honour’, young girls in white with flowing veils and bearing roses.”<sup>462</sup> The co-opting of women and children in the symbolic representation of the League of Nations attests to its sentimentality. However, being neither young enough to participate in disingenuous propagandistic activities like the LNU’s Festival of Youth, nor old enough to have participated in the 1914-18 War, the *Experiment* generation were likewise excluded from the League of Nations: it did not represent them, neither did they represent it. Davies concludes his diatribe on the Romantic idealism of the League by suggesting that sentimentality is

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<sup>460</sup> Sykes Davies, ‘The League of Nations,’ 6.

<sup>461</sup> Sykes Davies, ‘The League of Nations,’ 7.

<sup>462</sup> McCarthy, ‘The League of Nations,’ 109.

miasmatic, that “titles have a tendency to affect the characters of the things that they represent,” and that “a long and growing tradition of cheap sentimentality may mask the underlying historical truth.”<sup>463</sup> The pageantry and ritual that surrounded the League of Nations during this period obscured its ineffectiveness. During the same period that the Herald of Peace was paraded in the streets of England, the great Powers made repeated efforts to escape from the Covenant of the League, which forbid them to go to war without pleading their case before it. These attempts, Shaw argued, were camouflaged as attempts towards universal peace.<sup>464</sup> A further compromised attempt at securing peace was the well-publicised Kellogg-Briand pact, of which Shaw writes: “Mr Kellogg was humbugged into securing for the nations the right to go to war on their own accord in self-defence: that is, whenever it happens to suit them.”<sup>465</sup> The implied deception in Shaw’s statement belies the author’s scepticism as to the integrity and effectiveness of the League.

Corresponding with Shaw’s reservations about the actions of the League, Sykes Davies’ second and more serious objection to the League was its apparent inefficacy. He writes that the League “exaggerates a pre-existing tendency towards cynicism and laissez-faire, so that action in any form becomes impossible.”<sup>466</sup> In support of his argument that “the League has failed in practice,” Sykes Davies enlists quotations from Douglas Jerrold’s contemporaneous and controversial pamphlet *The Lie about the War* (1930). Quoting Jerrold, Sykes Davies writes:

War is the oldest trade, save one, in history, and at no time save from 1914 to 1918 have so many men been engaged in it as during the last ten years, when people in these islands have been blissfully satisfied that a new era of peace has dawned. I mention the fact not to discredit the conscientious and, on the whole, fairly successful efforts of statesmen, journalists, and ministers of religion to re-establish peace in Europe – of the European powers only France, England, Ireland, Spain, Turkey,

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<sup>463</sup> Sykes Davies, ‘The League of Nations,’ 7.

<sup>464</sup> George Bernard Shaw, ‘Contents: Chapter XVI The League of Nations,’ *What I Really Wrote About the War*, (London: Constable and Company, 1931), xviii.

<sup>465</sup> Shaw, ‘Contents: Chapter XVI The League of Nations,’ xviii.

<sup>466</sup> Sykes Davies, ‘The League of Nations,’ 7.

Greece, Russia and Poland, have been actively engaged in major military operations since 1918...<sup>467</sup>

He continues:

We shall hear, no doubt, that the Russian attacks with tanks and gas on two Chinese towns was only a practical gesture of their adherence to the spirit of the Kellogg Pact.<sup>468</sup>

The Kellogg-Briand Pact, signed in 1928, features prominently in both Shaw and Jerrold's criticism of the League of Nations. Sykes Davies legitimately implies that the disclaimer that only acts of military aggression – and not military acts of self-defence – would be penalised under the terms of the pact, represented the effective failure of the League. Foreshadowing Benito Mussolini's statement in response to League accusations during the Abyssinian Crisis that "the League is very well when sparrows shout, but no good at all when eagles fall out," Sykes Davies writes that the "inability [of the League] to deal with these smaller wars does not argue any possibility of its being able to prevent wars on the scale of the last one."<sup>469</sup>

It is not simply in practical terms that Sykes Davies perceived the League to have failed, but in the sphere of Ideas. Shaw believed that "for the present the League must be regarded as holding its own by the sheer force of its Idea, and the zeal inspired thereby in its staff, in the teeth of the inveterate nationalism and consequent angry disaffection of all its most powerful constituents."<sup>470</sup> However, Sykes Davies believed that the Idea of the League was in direct competition with the Idea of Science. The popular authority of scientists was immense: the laboratory the new Delphi.<sup>471</sup>

Soon the scientist emerges with his oracle: "War is a biological necessity." [...]

The scientist is inclined to war because it allows him the opportunity to produce some of his most convincing conjuring

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<sup>467</sup> Douglas Jerrold, *The Lie about the War*, in Sykes Davies, 'The League of Nations,' 7.

<sup>468</sup> Jerrold, *The Lie about the War*, Sykes Davies. 'The League of Nations,' 7-8.

<sup>469</sup> Davies, 'The League of Nations,' 8.

<sup>470</sup> Shaw, 'Contents: Chapter XVI The League of Nations,' xix.

<sup>471</sup> Davies, 'The League of Nations,' 8.

tricks. The god comes out of the temple and works miracles against the Persians. Also he is opposed to movements like the League of Nations because they are idealistic, “humanitarian.” His romantic pose is that of the inscrutable, implacable interpreter of scientific fact. Anagke, silent, strong-jawed and unemotional. The mob love it as they love a dictator. [...] In the face of a theatrically managed opposition like this the league has achieved nothing.<sup>472</sup>

In support of his contention that science had won the battle of Ideas, abrogating public faith in the League of Nations as competent protectorate, Sykes Davies turns his attention to the contemporary issues in the national press. Addressing a *Daily Mail* article entitled ‘Gas War of Future. Poison from Air in 24 Hours’ Sykes Davies quotes the prominent scientist Dr Herbert Levinstein, member of the Chemical Warfare Committee:

It is an elementary act of prudence for a nation situated as we are to see that research for chemical warfare purposes should continue to be a subject for special study, and that funds for this purpose should not be cut down below the safety point. Gas is of such outstanding importance in war that *when the time comes it will be used, even if its use is against the spirit of treaties, etc.*<sup>473</sup>

By way of contrast with Levinstein’s pessimistic – though ultimately prescient – view, Sykes Davies cites the idealist attitude, represented by journalist Desmond McCarthy<sup>474</sup>:

To the historian, the year 1929-30 will be remembered chiefly as that in which men’s emotions first began to turn against the idea of war.

“Poor Mr. McCarthy!” Sykes Davies’ article exclaims: for the years 1929-30 would be pivotal to the future understanding of history, but for rather less idealist reasons. It has been posited above that the years 1929-30 were of critical importance to the history of the *Experiment* group. The changes that have been examined regarding the formal appearance and organisation of the group can be read as symptomatic of

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<sup>472</sup> Sykes Davies, ‘The League of Nations,’ 8.

<sup>473</sup> Herbert Levinstein, in Sykes Davies, ‘The League of Nations,’ 8-9.

<sup>474</sup> Douglas Jerrold, *The Lie about the War*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), 7.



external conditions. Perceived by Sykes Davies as “completely futile,” the failure of the League of Nations both in practice and in the sphere of ideas represented, at the turn of the decade, a change in the national psyche towards anticipation of a second war. McCracken has written that, in Cambridge’s little magazines “images provoked by the war came to mean not just the 1914-18 conflict, but an imminent future, because it is the inevitable consequence of a failed system of capitalism, made manifest in the Wall Street Crash in October 1929 and subsequent Depression.”<sup>475</sup> I postulate, therefore, that the years 1929-30 in which the fourth through sixth issues of *Experiment* appeared, were characterised in the magazine by a sense of preparation for future conflict.

*Experiment* number five, commencing with Sykes Davies’ ‘The League of Nations,’ marks the first phase in the coming-of-age narrative of both the magazine and its contributors. The preoccupation with generational issues and maturation continues throughout the fifth issue. The significance of the historical moment of *Experiment* number five to the development of the post-war generation as a singular social formation is concretized in Max Black’s generational discourse ‘Cynic or Sceptic.’ As with Sykes Davies’ article, Black’s exordium explicitly identifies with “The Younger Generation.”<sup>476</sup> These two articles are, in many ways, a complement to one another: both provide self-reflexive critiques of their own epoch, and indicate the direction of future development.

Sykes Davies’ assertion that the League of Nations exaggerated “a pre-existing tendency towards cynicism and laissez-faire, so that any action in any form becomes impossible” was followed in *Experiment 5* by Black’s treatise exploring the differences between “cynicism” and “scepticism.” For Sykes Davies, cynicism was a “pre-existing tendency,” suggestive of its association with a period and a peer group previous to his own. Contrary to this, Black notes: “No accusation is so often levelled by their elders at those who form the vaguely-defined body known as “The Younger Generation” as that of cynicism, a word which, with its associations of sterility,

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<sup>475</sup> McCracken, ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business,’ 609.

<sup>476</sup> Max Black, ‘Cynic or Sceptic,’ *Experiment 5* (February 1930): 42.

decadence, and insincerity, is useful for the expression of disapproval.”<sup>477</sup> This social attitude to interwar British youth was summed up by contemporary satirical accounts of the Bright Young People such as Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* (1930). However, Black’s statement functions almost ironically, both following Sykes Davies’ piece, and also preceding an equally critical statement on “The Younger Generation” itself. He writes:

Yet cynicism is not, in general, a quality of extreme youth, which tends rather towards an unjustified optimism. The examples produced in support of this accusation are usually specimens of the “pseudo-cynic,” a person who satisfies his gregarious instincts by accepting the habits of some fashionable sect or clique, becoming little more than a conversation-machine for the reproduction of its accepted tenets. The exotic creatures to be found in such numbers in King’s Parade, Bloomsbury, Montparnasse, wherever a café and a studio are within easy reach, are neither cynics nor decadent. There is a fervour and a zest about their fulminations against the philistine, a gusto about their jargon, which are so many signs of a pathetic optimism. No, the typical cynic is the old man, snarling at a world which refuses to reward his lack of talents; the youthful imitator is a fraud, to be taken with a pinch of salt and encouraged.<sup>478</sup>

It is of particular interest that the specific subject of Black’s criticism appears to be his direct contemporaries: the intelligent youth to be found in universities, publishing poetry and magazines in imitation of the Bloomsbury group and the Parisian avant-garde. However, given the changes that had recently been enacted within the *Experiment* group, rather than providing a necessarily self-reflexive examination, Black’s critique can be read as a sideswipe at the principles and affiliations of rival magazine *The Venture*. As a means of differentiating *Experiment* from its rival, Black’s commentary continues:

It would be a pity, nevertheless, if the antics of aesthetes were to obscure the very deep unrest among the “Younger Generation” of to-day caused, among other factors, by a revolution in scientific thought during the last few years of far more importance than the superficial bubblings of the intelligentsia which it has produced.

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<sup>477</sup> Black, ‘Cynic or Sceptic,’ 42

<sup>478</sup> Black, ‘Cynic or Sceptic,’ 42.

That change has been ever in the direction of a more humble scepticism, not based on a defective vision of life, not the result of a more comprehensive survey of the fundamental difficulties which beset the search for knowledge. Let the critics concentrate on these changes, even if it involves their learning something of the sciences, and forget to bait the eccentrics for a while.<sup>479</sup>

With the ascension of mathematics student Bronowski to the role of editor and chief, the comparatively rationalist claims of *Experiment* to those of *The Venture* began to more clearly define the former's position. However, the new scientific position identified by Black was, like the arts, anguished by the preceding generation. Like the writers of his generation, Black was intimidated by the success of his forebears:

It may be useful to repeat that scarcely a generation ago the world was still a very safe place, working astonishingly well, and framed, as it were, by scientists who went from discovery to discovery, their pregnant imaginations producing strange and useful fruit. Bicycles, gramophones, and locomotives delighted and terrified the spectator. Imperialism flourished, and scientific doctrines were as dogmatic as political creeds.<sup>480</sup>

This scientific decadence was ended by The War, which Black argued “sufficiently punished this too-prosperous and self-satisfied civilization, and the corresponding iconoclastic process in the scientific laboratories continued long after the armistice.”<sup>481</sup> For Black, scientific decadence was replaced in the postwar period by a “general self-critical movement” expressed not through cynicism – as the critics might have it – but by scepticism. The tendency to apply scientific doctrines to fields for which they were not originally intended was a contentious issue. Black wrote that in the past:

The struggle for existence was held to explain the universe; monkeys and giraffes obeyed a law of evolution remarkable in that it need no policemen to enforce it. Yet the over-complacency of this unprecedented activity betrayed its essential shallowness; laws became a substitute for morals, dogma for faith.

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<sup>479</sup> Black, ‘Cynic or Sceptic,’ 42.

<sup>480</sup> Black, ‘Cynic or Sceptic,’ 42-43.

<sup>481</sup> Black, ‘Cynic or Sceptic,’ 43.

Black believes this moralist dilemma can be overcome by philosophers becoming good scientists, and scientists good philosophers. However, until that point, he states, “little progress will be made towards purifying the sciences into something more than a tremendously useful system of practical information.”<sup>482</sup> Here we detect the essential purpose of Black’s article: he wishes to achieve the status of both good scientist and philosopher through the exhibition of the rational attitude that, he posits, is the defining attitude of the age. Black concludes:

The rational attitude would seem to be a suspension of judgement rather than a reactionary renunciation of the intellect, which has produced great advances in civilisation and may yet produce greater. And scepticism, springing from a deeper sense of the insignificance of the human animal, need have nothing of the bareness of cynicism. Enlightened scepticism is the basis of a rational social attitude.<sup>483</sup>

Despite his proclamations of iconoclasm in the laboratories, Black failed to recognise, as Sykes Davies put it, that the laboratory has been transformed into the new Delphi. The enlightened scepticism and rational social attitude Black praises is tantamount to Sykes Davies’ ‘cynicism.’ “Modern cynicism,” Peter Sloterdijk writes, “presents itself as that state of consciousness that follows after naive ideologies and their enlightenment.”<sup>484</sup> In the context of the postwar generation, a sceptical and self-reflexive attitude is engendered via the cynical and scientific attitude. As a generation that is coming-of-age, the *Experimenters* have developed a mode of consciousness that breaks with the ideologies of their forebears. The development of a generational consciousness has been treated elsewhere in this thesis (See: Chapter One); however at the turn of the decade the conscious treatment of the subject was commensurate to revolution.

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<sup>482</sup> Black, ‘Cynic or Sceptic,’ 45.

<sup>483</sup> Black, ‘Cynic or Sceptic,’ 45.

<sup>484</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, ‘Cynicism: The Twilight of False Consciousness’ *Critique of Cynical Reason*, translated by Michael Eldred (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3.

The anticipated youth revolution of the Thirties was further suggested in *Experiment* 5 in the publication of the recently-departed editor Empson's poem 'Note on Local Flora.'

There is a tree native in Turkestan,  
Or further east towards the Tree of Heaven,  
Whose hard cold cones, not being wards to time,  
Will leave their mother only for good cause;  
Will ripen only in a forest fire;  
Wait, to be fathered as was Bacchus once,  
Through men's long lives, that image of time's end.  
I knew the Phoenix was a vegetable.  
So Semele desired her deity  
As this in Kew thirsts for the Red Dawn.<sup>485</sup>

Using the particularities of the tree in Kew Gardens as the basis of his metaphor, Empson's poem successfully integrates botanical detail with contemporary feeling. The most striking connection with regard to *Experiment* lies in the repetition of "ripen," first used in the inaugural manifesto. However, the conditions of the appearance of the verb here have altered considerably. Chapter One of this thesis suggests that the Experimenters possessed a desire to "ripen into extravagance"; however the specificities of the process are at that point non-descript. As described above, when the fifth number of *Experiment* appears in 1930 the magazine has undergone many changes. Furthermore, the international political and economic situation has shifted considerably. Corresponding with the perception outlined above in the discussion of Sykes Davies' and Black's essays, Empson's poem foresees a future cataclysmic event that alters the fate of his generation. Writing in 1940 Empson offered some explanation of the poem as it related to the tree:

The cones of course carry the seeds, and the tree only casts them in a forest fire, if the white label is correct. The cones, therefore, only leave their mother when there is a violent event like the fire at the end of the world mentioned I think in the Apocalypse, but anyway a stock medieval idea. The cones are not wards of time because time does not 'bring them up,' help

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<sup>485</sup> William Empson, 'Note on Local Flora', *Experiment* 5 (February 1930):27.

them out; they grow up when something like the end of the world happens [...].<sup>486</sup>

Empson's 1940 account adds: "Of course you are meant to think of corresponding human affairs."<sup>487</sup> The simplicity of the metaphor as it relates to *Experiment* is virtually self-evident: the beginning of a new decade presented a more self-conscious analysis of what it meant to be a youth movement. The young "cones" of the *Experiment* group possess the "seeds" to become active adult members of society. However, in light of past and current affairs the belief is that they will only mature as the result of catastrophe. We can extend this line of argument to suggest that there was in fact a latent desire amongst the *Experiment* generation to experience devastation. I stated in Chapter One that the 'generation of 1914' achieved mythic status as a consequence of their actions and contributions to the First World War: Empson's 'Note on Local Flora' conveys a zeal for revolution that would remove his generation from the oppressive shadow of their ancestors. In the 1940 expatiation of his poem, Empson stated that "The business of not leaving your mother is made a very undignified one by Freud."<sup>488</sup> I argue then, that at the turn of 1930 – as the *Experimenters* approached graduation – the group were beginning to challenge their status as "overgrown babies," and pursue adulthood with revolutionary fervour.<sup>489</sup>

The final line of Empson's 'Note on Local Flora' is noteworthy for the nature of violent uprising it predicts. Unlike Sykes Davies' 'The League of Nations' essay which fixates upon the idea of a future war fought on the grounds of nationalism and patriotism, Empson's revolution is resolutely Communist. The possibility of an international Communist Revolution was emphasised by Aristide Briand's warning regarding the limitations of the League of Nations that "the next world war may not be between nations or alliances of nations but a war of proletarians of all nations

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<sup>486</sup> William Empson, in Elizabeth Drew with John L. Sweeney, *Directions in Modern Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1940), 81-83 in *William Empson: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Haffenden (London: Penguin, 2000), 267.

<sup>487</sup> Empson, *The Complete Poems*, 267.

<sup>488</sup> Empson, *The Complete Poems*, 268.

<sup>489</sup> For commentary on the statement "overgrown babies" see the discussion of censorship in Chapter Three.

against capitalists of all nations.”<sup>490</sup> The ‘Red Dawn’ that Empson and the *Experiment* generation thirsted for presented them with the opportunity of establishing themselves in a new world order. The revolution would be fought by the young against the old.

Concurrent with the political changes that were presented in *Experiment 5*, there was also a revolution of sorts occurring within the ideology of the magazine. In contrast to the claim made in the first editorial-manifesto (reprinted in No.4) that *Experiment* would publish “none but the not yet too ripe fruits of art, science and philosophy at the University” the fifth number prints translations by Elsie Elizabeth Phare of poems by Paul Eluard. The significance of the publication of these translations is twofold. Firstly, they set a precedent for the change of editorial policy that would appear as a second mission statement in *Experiment 6*. Secondly, the implications of publishing work by one of the foremost Surrealists suggested a confluence of ideology between that high-profile avant-garde and the Cambridge group.<sup>491</sup>

The movement towards a more self-conscious avant-garde stance was made explicit in the interim between the publication of *Experiment 5* and issue six. As detailed in Chapter One, it was during this period that the group appeared in the Paris-based international journal *transition*. The presence of the Cambridge group in that publication forged substantial links between them and the established European avant-gardes. The *transition* moment is critical to understanding the late period of *Experiment* as it marked the assimilation of the group into broader historical narrative, fundamentally altering the “localism” of the magazine’s origins.

In the June 1930 issue of *transition*, Sykes Davies published an essay entitled ‘Localism’ that effectively elucidates the policy change made between issues five

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<sup>490</sup> Shaw, *What I Really Wrote about the War*, xix.

<sup>491</sup> It is worth noting that the Surrealists were also undergoing a period of transformation at this juncture. The *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930) marked a political turn in the Surrealist movement, with Breton attempting to align the movement with Marxian politics and collective action.

and six of *Experiment*. He begins his article with a statement that productively describes the early output of the *Experimenters*:

It is obvious that in the past small communities have produced the greatest art. Athens, Renaissance Italy, Elizabethan England. The smallness of the unit is not in itself decisive or productive of any special kind of art. It is important merely in so far as it concentrates and intensifies other influences.<sup>492</sup>

The influences that Sykes Davies identifies as critical to Localism are: National Consciousness, Value of Belief, Traditional, Classical, and Romantic Forms, Politics, and Morality. With reference to the *Experiment* movement specifically, Sykes Davies' comments on the subjects of national consciousness and politics are most enlightening.

The most important of these [influences] is national selfconsciousness. It arises in its most productive form after wars, when men look back from a prosperous present to a past that has been full of effort and glory – “look, we have come through!” The effect of this selfconsciousness is to solidify national tradition in all spheres. Ideology tends to become fixed for a time (“we have won through on these ideas”), religion is in a strong position (“the gods have won victory and not we”). And though new, foreign influences are admitted, by contact with the enemy and by commercial expansion, they are not strong enough to disturb or obscure the local tradition. They act only as a fertilising agency. The advantages to the artist are obvious: he is presented with definite material – definite ideas, mythological, moral and religious.<sup>493</sup>

The relevance of this statement to the early period of *Experiment's* output is clearly evident. Postwar Cambridge was an intense intellectual environment with its roots firmly placed in the traditional. The recently established Faculty of English (1919) taught the traditional forms of literature; furthermore the rapidly expanding field of internationalism – partly owing to the formation of the League of Nations – provided unprecedented access to foreign and avant-garde publications. However, as Sykes Davies states, these influences initially “act only as a fertilising agency.” The result of this germination can be seen in the early work of the *Experimenters*

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<sup>492</sup> Hugh Sykes Davies, 'Localism' *transition* 19-20 (June 1930): 114.

<sup>493</sup> Sykes Davies, 'Localism,' 114.



analysed elsewhere in this thesis. I have argued that their work at that juncture represented flirtations with the European avant-gardes; however, their influences were not coherent enough to categorically place them within one of the established *isms*.

Despite the many advantages of the local unit identified in Sykes Davies' essay, the author also recognises "a constant tendency for the unit of localisation to increase geographically (by 'unit of localisation' I mean the number of people affected vigorously by the same local tradition)." The result of the expansion of the local is that the work produced by it becomes more diffuse, and ultimately more accessible. However, Sykes Davies states that "Undoubtedly the war seriously hindered the formation of this new kind of art, which attempts for the first time to synthesise the Culture of Europe."<sup>494</sup> Having developed an ideology of internationalist art, he returns briefly to the subject of the League of Nations, suggesting that politically "the artist should support the idea of peace – even the idea of the League of Nations" as a means of achieving a pan-European cultural coalescence.<sup>495</sup> Sykes Davies' article therefore provides a valuable source for understanding the editorial changes that were made to *Experiment* immediately following the appearance of the group in *transition*.

Published in October 1930, issue six of *Experiment* declared a bold new position on its opening pages:

With this issue the editorial policy of EXPERIMENT is changed. The change is not arbitrary, but is the outcome of a growth of interest, and is in a direction we have for a year foreshadowed. A "young" magazine, a survivor among "young" magazines, becomes in time a focus for much writing which it has not countenanced, and interests it has not invited. The rôle of

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<sup>494</sup> Sykes Davies, 'Localism,' 115.

<sup>495</sup> Despite this comment Sykes Davies remains sceptical of the usefulness of the League of Nations: "Though there is evident a tendency for the League to be absorbed in the Church. On the part of the Church the move is an astute one. It hopes that a fresh and popular ideal may prove the monkey-gland by which it may regain a little of its lost youth. To the League the move would be disastrous. Religious differences are more violent than national ones and would speedily wreck the League". Sykes Davies, 'Localism,' 116.

spokesman thus thrust upon it, it should assume diffidently; and we have been careful always to keep in mind our original policy to “be concerned with all the intellectual interest of undergraduates,” to make any extension of such interests which is legitimate but neither to belittle nor disregard them. The writers whom we have chosen to represent the non-Cambridge element in this issue are not extravagant writers: they are writers whom English literary society taboos or neglects; and it is part of the policy of EXPERIMENT to question, progressively, the neglect as well as the taboo of considerable writers. We propose in our next issue to extend this, shall we say questionnaire to the literary societies; the extension, we insist, is in the direction of vitality, but also of sanity. We need not add that it seems to us within the scope of intellectual interest.

Sykes Davies’ essay on ‘Localism’ in *transition* goes some way towards resolving the movement between the first *Experiment* editorial addressed in Chapter One and this second declaration. The editorial quoted above is simultaneously vehement and conciliatory: *Experiment* is both changed and mindful of its original policy. The non-Cambridge writers published in *Experiment 6* were French novelist and playwright Alexandre Arnoux, Russian poet and novelist Boris Pasternak, Richard Aldington, author of the censored 1929 novel *Death of A Hero*, and American poet and novelist Conrad Aiken. The national diversity of these authors represents a movement toward literary-cultural assimilation as espoused in Sykes Davies’ ‘Localism.’ However, the predominant themes of war, revolution, and censorship are maintained in the submissions from “mature” contributors.

Despite the extension of *Experiment’s* policy in number six that issue in fact falls somewhat flat. The introduction of established writers to the magazine’s pages disrupts the fundamental coherence the group had previously achieved. The reiteration in Bronowski’s editorial of the magazine’s youthfulness – albeit tempered by inverted commas – is undermined by the inclusion of material originally published as early as 1919 (Arnoux’s *Le Cabaret*). Furthermore, the use of “young” in inverted commas suggests hostility on the part of the editor toward this designation. The editor, despite protestations of diffidence, considers the process of professionalization, begun with the previous year’s *Experiment 4*, to have achieved

maturity: however, as Sykes Davies stated in his critical contribution to *transition*, “precocity is the prevalent moral and intellectual disease of our time.”<sup>496</sup> I will now explore the contention that it was in fact precocity, and the achievement of the aims of the first editorial – to ripen into extravagance – that was ultimately the *coup de grâce* of *Experiment*.

The further ‘extension’ of the policy that Bronowski’s editorial foresaw for the seventh issue of *Experiment* was realised in the group’s considerable feat in securing an excerpt of Joyce’s much-anticipated *Work in Progress (Finnegan’s Wake)*. Joyce’s standing in literary circles secured for *Experiment* a far wider audience than one could possibly imagine for a student publication, with reviews of the issue appearing in mainstream publications *The London Mercury* and *Times Literary Supplement*. However, the extension was not merely literary: the magazine itself underwent a significant transformation between its penultimate and final issues.

The seventh and final issue of *Experiment* appeared in ‘Spring’ 1931. The exact date of publication is unclear, but accounting for the date of its review in the *TLS* on 4 June, we can assume it was between March 1931 and that date. Bronowski’s letters to Trevelyan suggest that the magazine was running considerably behind schedule. Writing to Trevelyan and George Reavey in Paris (3 March 1931) Bronowski states that “Experiment [...] has been suffering a major tremor or agitation in the last fortnight – I say major temporarily, because the hell of a tremor is going to recur next term when the bill comes in” and also “This number has gone on and on, and swollen to the most terrific proportions, so now our position is that we are going to look on it as a double number, and will not bring out another before the end of the summer, if then.”<sup>497</sup> When the would-be final issue appeared it was under a revised title, *The New Experiment*, and was increased in size and volume as well as price. Now priced at a relatively high two shillings and published by Heinemann,

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<sup>496</sup> Sykes Davies, ‘Localism,’ 116.

<sup>497</sup> Jacob Bronowski to Julian Trevelyan and George Reavey, 3 March 1931. Julian Otto Trevelyan Collection, Trinity College, Cambridge.

*Experiment* was no longer a student magazine but an ambitious publication aimed at national and international distribution.<sup>498</sup>

The changes made both internally and externally to *Experiment* were addressed by Bronowski and Sykes Davies in the concluding editorial:

An expansion of policy which we began in our last number has in this number brought with it a corresponding increase in the size of the magazine: partly because we did not wish our invitations to older writers to be made at the expense of young writers; partly because it seems to us that some of those who have contributed during the last three years have so far advanced that we must print more solid pieces of their work. It is in terms of young writers that we continue to think of EXPERIMENT, as a young magazine. Those established writers who at our invitation contribute, do so because they feel themselves to be, and we feel them to be, in sympathy with us.

We have always avoided making protestations of policy, choosing to leave it to the reader to conclude that we really do stand for a single direction of outlook. This number will, we hope, simplify and unify the conclusion; so that we feel it is now not arrogant to say that we are in some ways the only literary group which is positively post-war, which honestly seeks to transcend the spirit of academicism and stoicism of the older generation. Our first editorial, in 1928, promised that we would be “at pains not to be littered with the illustrious dead and dying.” We are still taking pains.<sup>499</sup>

This final proclamation for *Experiment* effectively synthesises the position that the group had been striving for in the preceding three years. The emphasis on “youth” is retained despite the inclusion of work by well-established literary figures: however, the precise nature of *Experiment*’s youthfulness is subtly changed. The “youngness” of the magazine is no longer synonymous with amateur inexperience, but rather with a “freshness” of perspective. Its youth is a challenge to the stoic academicism of the literary establishment exemplified by magazines like Eliot’s *The Criterion*. Eleni Loukopoulou has suggested that Joyce’s contribution to *Experiment* added cultural value that increased the magazine’s assets in London’s literary marketplace,

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<sup>498</sup> Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits at Cambridge’s Literary Laboratories, 216.

<sup>499</sup> ‘Editorial,’ *Experiment* 7 (Spring 1931): 4.

placing it in direct competition with Eliot's comparatively conservative publication. By entering their magazine into a public sphere occupied by *The Criterion*, Loukopoulou argues that *Experiment's* editors were "reacting to the overbearing father figure of Eliot" and "aiming at creating a novel and alternative space for discussing new experiments in literature to the one of *The Criterion*."<sup>500</sup>

Despite the ambitions of *The New Experiment* to develop into a cohesive and (inter)nationally recognised literary forum, the editorial-manifesto in issue seven suggests awareness among the group of the precariousness of their position. As demonstrated above, Bronowski was acutely aware of the financial difficulties facing the group owing to the magazine's expansion: as a result, the septenary editorial reads like a departing statement. The emphasis placed by the editors on conclusions – those reached by *Experiment's* readership and the group itself – suggests a finality and desire to evaluate the magazine's achievements. The editorial's terminating tone is further accentuated by the suggestion that the group sought to "transcend" the spirit of academicism and stoicism that defined the older generation. However, the editors' final statement in *Experiment* also asserts the desire to explicate the magazine's position: a position that has been shown in this thesis to have been effectively maintained throughout all seven issues. In stating that "we feel it is now not arrogant to say that we are in some ways the only literary group that is positively post-war [...]; Our first editorial, in 1928, promised that we would be 'at pains not to be littered with the illustrious dead and dying' we are still taking pains", Bronowski and Sykes Davies were effecting to retroactively unify the magazine's ongoing concerns, returning to the emphatic declaration made in the opening pages of the first issue, and reinforcing the group's position as an explicitly post-war generation. However, where they had previously been defined according to their position outside of the War – but nonetheless characterised by it – they are now presented as a coherent generational movement that has *transcended* the preoccupations with that conflict.

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<sup>500</sup> Loukopoulou, 'James Joyce Exhibits', 216-17.

Loukopoulou has suggested that the reference to the “illustrious dead and dying” reused from the opening manifesto represents a noticeable shift in attitudes toward the 1914-18 conflict: she writes that *Experiment* and its contemporaries (*The Venture*, *Cambridge Left*) were engaged in a “distinctive revisioning of the unquestioned reverence for victims of the Great War.”<sup>501</sup> Citing London’s Cenotaph as a site of this presupposed veneration, Loukopoulou argues that the inscription dedicated to “The Glorious Dead,” is evoked in the form of the *Experiment* group’s initial form of the words “Illustrious Dead and Dying.”<sup>502</sup> However, the issue seven editorial conspicuously changes this formation: no longer capitalised, the deferential tone is extinguished. McCracken’s essay ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business’ states that the *Experiment* generation were “at once cut off from the past and forever living in its shadow”: the concluding editorial, marked by its apathetic acceptance of the past – evident in the decapitalisation and ergo deposing of the older generation – marks the point at which the *Experiment* group step out of the “shadow” of their predecessors and achieve “an aesthetic and a politics that both resisted the constraints of history and produced forms of writing that would be resolutely contemporary.”<sup>503</sup>

*The New Experiment* having increased in size and volume held true to the promise of its editorial and devoted more pages to longer pieces by regular contributors. Indeed, the only extraneous texts were those by the Russian satirist Michail Zoschenko (translated by Fania Polanovskaya), Joyce and Gilbert. The appearance of the latter two in *Experiment* significantly increased the perceived scope of the magazine. In June 1931 it received its first national review in the *Times Literary Supplement*:

Increased in size and space, this number of *Experiment* offers a well-varied assortment of critical and creative work. The chief article is by Mr. Bronowski, a skilful and painstaking analysis of the works of D.H. Lawrence, viewed “strictly from the standpoint of literary criticism,” in which he distinguishes, with

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<sup>501</sup> Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits,’ 219.

<sup>502</sup> Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits,’ 225.

<sup>503</sup> McCracken, ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business,’ 600.

Matthew Arnold's definition of poetry as a working basis, between the "powerful and beautiful" in Lawrence's "application of ideas to life," showing the conflict in his work between "his protestant passion for an issue" and his desire to express emotion directly, "without equivalents," on the one hand and his "poetic irresolution" and objective approach on the other. In "The Ornate Style" Mr. Hugh Sykes discusses the possibilities and achievements of "word order" as a decorative literary device, and Messrs. Humphrey Jennings and J.M. Reeves give us an ingeniously reasoned "Reconsideration of Herrick," in which they insist on the deliberately symbolic, as opposed to naturalistic, significance of his imagery on the "ritual" which "was integral to Herrick's way of thinking." Mr. Malcolm Lowry contributes a short story consisting almost entirely of the rough dialogue of a group of sailors playing cards: a kind of prose fugue with recurrent themes, effectively contrived. Among other prose contributions is a reprint from "Transition" of a portion of Mr. Joyce's "Work in Progress," accompanied by an explanatory note by Mr. Stuart Gilbert. There are also numerous poems, which vary in the extent of their departure from tradition: among the more adventurous we would mention Mr. William Empson's "Poem about a Ball in the Nineteenth Century," an engaging exercise in word-play and assonance.<sup>504</sup>

The appearance of this review was significant in that it marked the legitimization of the group as a significant cultural movement. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the language of *Experiment* recognisably impacted upon the review. This is particularly evident in the *TLS* author's description of Lowry's short story as a "prose fugue with recurring themes."<sup>505</sup> This characterisation almost exactly mimics Gilbert's 'Footnote to *Work in Progress*' which explains the effect of Joyce's work as "one of polyphony; themes flow one above the other as in a fugue."<sup>506</sup> As stated above, with regard to *Experiment*, Loukopoulou utilises Morrisson's model of "counterpublic spheres whose ultimate aim was to influence the dominant public sphere."<sup>507</sup> Morrisson argues that similar little magazines in the early-twentieth century "created a lively, even exhilarating, awareness of opposition and of the possibilities that the new century provided for an alternative art to become part of

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<sup>504</sup> 'Experiment', *Times Literary Supplement* 1531(4 June 1931): 448.

<sup>505</sup> 'Experiment', *TLS*, 448.

<sup>506</sup> Stuart Gilbert, 'A Footnote to *Work in Progress*', *Experiment* 7 (Spring 1931): 30.

<sup>507</sup> Loukopoulou, 'James Joyce Exhibits,' 232.

the public sphere.”<sup>508</sup> Loukopoulou suggests that by publishing the reprint of *Work in Progress* from *transition*, the *Experiment* group introduced Joyce to an English public sphere that had previously neglected his work – the *TLS* had never reviewed *Ulysses*, even before it was banned in 1922.<sup>509</sup> However, as opposed to being antagonistic towards the *status quo* of English literary society, *Experiment* moves closer to an already-accepted critical style to be found in publications like *The Criterion*. Indeed, the Cambridge magazine explicitly evidences its relationship with Eliot’s publication in Empson’s critical review of Auden’s *Paid on Both Sides* which had been published in *The Criterion* in January 1930. Therefore, we might conclude that as opposed to introducing a counterpublic sphere to the public sphere, *Experiment* was instead subsumed by the establishment that had been its adversary. This conclusion is given further authority in Harding’s statement that “Empson, Bronowski, Sykes Davies, Phare, Wilson, Raine and Reeves graduated to the pages of T.S. Eliot’s quarterly review, *The Criterion*, but that was a matter of natural talent, coincidence or the influence of I.A. Richards, and not the expression of group solidarity.”<sup>510</sup> From this position as “the enemy within,” the *Experiment* group radically transformed literary society in England. Furthermore, the group’s infiltration of the dominant public sphere was critical in cementing their status as a generation. The prominence of *Experiment* writers and artists alongside their Oxford counterparts during the Thirties led to their mythologisation as ‘the Auden Generation.’<sup>511</sup> The coming together of the Oxford and Cambridge groups as a united force was begun in earnest in late 1930. Archival evidence suggests that in November of that year Oxford graduate and member of the Auden circle Rex Warner visited Cambridge where he was introduced to *Experiment*. Following his sojourn in Cambridge, Warner wrote to Trevelyan:

“Experiment” interested me a lot. But I think that the despised edition of “Revolt” has got hold of a good idea in publishing this journal in Cambridge, Oxford & London at once. If you could widen

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<sup>508</sup> Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism*, 11.

<sup>509</sup> Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits,’ 232.

<sup>510</sup> Harding, ‘*Experiment* in Cambridge,’ 309.

<sup>511</sup> See: Hynes, *The Auden Generation*.



the group of “Experiment” you would avoid all danger of parochialism, & get a bigger bubble.

I often dream of a paper widely sold and revolutionary all round. To unite literary revolution with political revolution might strengthen both. For our problems are in many ways political.<sup>512</sup>

Warner’s recognition of the significance of *Experiment* and his desire for the group to merge with others in Oxford and London as a means of producing a more politically forceful youth movement legitimises my own claim that understanding *Experiment* is of critical importance to our perception of 1930s art and literature.

The seventh issue of *Experiment* attempts to function, as did the first, as a manifesto in its entirety. Despite having grown in size and in confidence, the editors essentially achieve their objective of presenting to their readership a unified stance that is “positively post-war.” Specifically, the introduction of established writers achieves coherence with *Experiment*’s ongoing interests. The predominant themes tackled in the seventh issue create an effective conclusion to the moment of *Experiment*: these included a focus on the importance of experimentalism in art and literature, and an increasingly political preoccupation.

Ultimately, each of these factors converges in the contribution from Joyce. When *Experiment* was established in 1928 it was as a forum for their respective talents and “those of a group [...] of likeminded individuals.”<sup>513</sup> Bronowski later suggested that this like-mindedness was partly a presupposed admiration of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, about which they had organised a debate at the university.<sup>514</sup> Furthermore, despite its status as a banned book, *Ulysses* was taught at Cambridge from the mid-1920s by Richards, whom the group idolised: Trevelyan wrote in his autobiography *Indigo Days* that Richards’ “*Meaning of Meaning* [...] became a sort of bible for us.”<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> Letter from Rex Warner to Julian Trevelyan, (November 1930). JOT2/7. Julian Trevelyan Archive, Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge.

<sup>513</sup> Bronowski, ‘Recollections of Humphrey Jennings’, 45.

<sup>514</sup> Bronowski, “The Time of My Life,” Transmission 16<sup>th</sup> December 1973, Radio 4, BBC Archives, Caversham. Tape Transcript, 4, in Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits,’ 214.

<sup>515</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 16.

The 'Museyroom' extract from *Work in Progress* that appeared in *Experiment* was a reprint from the first issue of *transition* (April 1927). The sequence is a satirical rendering of Wellington's Victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo and, more generally, an incisive anti-war statement. The anti-war connotations of Joyce's contribution complemented the established critical purview of *Experiment*, and reinforced the group's emerging position as a new generation of vehemently postwar intellectuals. Despite its ostensible preoccupation with Wellington and the Battle of Waterloo, references to the First World War abound in Joyce's "coded statement."<sup>516</sup> Much of this implicit subversion is reinforced in Gilbert's 'Footnote.' Gilbert's exegetical article focuses primarily on Joyce's technical skill, and elucidates allusions to specific events in the Napoleonic Wars and recurring Joycean characters. Where Joyce's Napoleonic spoof meets the contemporary Gilbert maintains the satire:

*Work in Progress* may be likened to such a folded fan or a polyptych whose surface is inscribed with an akasic record of all the stages of human progress, its cycles of growth and decline, illusions that flourish, decay and then revive, its wars to end war, utopias each as futile as its precursor, no less and no more, ultimates identical with antepenultimates, world without end. A comic world indeed, a world for clowns to live in, which only the ostrich-minded can take in earnest or even sympathetically. Satirists, moralists, reformers, all alike are mocked by the phantoms of their meliorism [...].<sup>517</sup>

Here, the implication of the contemporary situation is brought rapidly into view: the "war to end war" was an immediately recognisable phrase that had been coined by H.G. Wells in 1914 and passed quickly into the public domain via the print media and political oratory. The phrase also holds some significance in linking the Napoleonic Wars with the First World War, and the perceived failures regarding that conflict's resolution. Anthony Pagden has written that:

The Paris Peace Conference opened on 18 January. Nothing quite like it had ever happened before. As the British prime minister, David Lloyd George, told the House of Commons, the

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<sup>516</sup> Loukopoulou, 'James Joyce Exhibits,' 219.

<sup>517</sup> Gilbert, 'Footnote,' 32-33.

Congress of Vienna, which had brought the Napoleonic Wars to an end in 1813, had lasted eleven months. But Vienna had resolved only the affairs of Europe. At Paris, 'It is not one continent that is engaged – every continent is affected.' It was meant to bring about a new world order, to ensure that the First World War really was the 'War to end all Wars'. Sadly, as it turned out, it only laid the grounds for another series of conflicts which, on several fronts, have continued and continue to this day. As Field-Marshal Earl Wavell remarked bitterly when it was all done, 'after the "war to end war", they seem to have been pretty successful in Paris at making the "Peace to end Peace"'.<sup>518</sup>

We are presented here with a point of intersection between the political position of Joyce and that of the *Experiment* group. Broadly speaking, politicians are the "clowns" and "ostrich-minded" figureheads on whom Gilbert and Joyce focus their scathing critique. Furthermore, the anathematised "meliorism" that "mocks" these figures is typified in the Paris Peace Conference and founding of the League of Nations which, as we have seen, had been a political catalyst for the *Experiment* group for some time.

There are many linguistic references in Joyce's extract from *Work in Progress* in *Experiment* that inarguably conflate Wellington and the Battle of Waterloo with the circumstances of the 1914-1918 War.<sup>519</sup> However, here I will focus on just one short section that I believe clearly and concisely consolidates the positions of Joyce and the *Experiment* group.

This is a ttrinch. This is mistletropes. This is Canon Futter with the popynose. This is the blessed. [...] With a trip on a trip on a trip so airy. This is me Belchum's tinkyou tankyou silvoor plate for citchin the crapes in the cool of his canister. Poor the pay!<sup>520</sup>

Joyce's linguistic allusions to the language of the First World War are everywhere in evidence here. The first sentence clearly references the trenches that lined the Western Front in the 1914-1918 conflict: this is immediately followed by the

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<sup>518</sup> Anthony Pagden, *Worlds at War: The 2,500 Year Struggle Between East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 407.

<sup>519</sup> For a full examination of Joyce's linguistic techniques in the 'Museyroom' extract published in *Experiment* see Loukopoulou, 'James Joyce Exhibits,' 212-236.

<sup>520</sup> James Joyce, 'From *Work in Progress*,' *Experiment* 7 (Spring 1931): 28.

introduction of an apparent object – Canon Futter – in which the reader hears the phrase “cannon fodder.” This explicit allusion to mistreatment of combatants is followed by the term “popynose,” and the single statement, “This is the blessed.” Here, Joyce emphasises the hypocrisy of establishment powers in firstly, their treatment of army recruits during the War, and secondly the unquestioned reverence of those lives lost following the Armistice. This style of dramatic juxtaposition is continued in the following sentences. Gilbert’s ‘Footnote to *Work in Progress*’ states that the piece “may be likened to a carefully planned and exactly ordered fantasia, based on a set of ancient but abiding folk-tunes.” This is clearly in evidence in the phrase “With a trip on a trip on a trip so airy” which alludes to the best known marching song of the Great War, “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary.”<sup>521</sup> The joviality of this phrase is tempered by the succeeding line which evokes the soldier-beggar and a further popular song based on a poem by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling’s poem – set to music by Sir Arthur Sullivan – was published in the *Daily Mail* in 1899 as part of a charitable appeal to help the families of soldiers fighting in the Boer War. The song’s famous refrain read “Pass the hat for your credit’s sake, and pay – pay – pay!” In Joyce’s adaptation however, it is the poor that pay: and the soldiers who pay with their lives. Described in Gilbert’s ‘Footnote’ as having the “effect of polyphony; themes flow one above the other as in a fugue,” the multiple references of Joyce’s textual formations imbue each sentence with multiple meanings. For example, we might read “citchin the crapes in the cool of his canister” as referring to the slang phrase “cool crape” meaning shroud, and “canister” evoking ammunition and an almost certain death. However, we can also read a dual allusion to Lord Kitchener, who was a crucial figure both in his role as Chief of Staff during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) and as Secretary of State for War from 1914-16. Kitchener is perhaps best known now for his presence on the recruitment posters with the slogan “Britons. Your Country Needs You.” This second interpretation perhaps makes better sense of the final sentence quoted above. “Poor the pay” can be simultaneously read simply in its English form, or alternatively in the dual French form: “Pour le pays” (for the country) and – as in Gilbert’s formation – “Pour la Paix”

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<sup>521</sup> In the final version of *Finnegan’s Wake* Joyce added the line “For their heart’s right there” which echoed the line “But my heart’s right there” in the song. Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits,’ 222.

(for the peace). The multilingualism we find in Joyce links to the earlier discussion of Sykes Davies' conception of 'Localism' and his desire for a synthesis of European cultures as a means of creating literature that holds both local and international significance.

The triptych of meaning encapsulated in the final statement of the extract of *Work in Progress* quoted above constructively evidences the "sympathy" between Joyce and the *Experimenters* described in the magazine's final editorial. Both Joyce's techniques in the extract, and political preoccupations and experiments of the Cambridge group respond to the emerging post-war anger of the late 1920s. The 'lost generation' had become a political tool resented by the young. Likewise, the perceived futility of the peace process – epitomised in Sykes Davies' critique of the League of Nations – was a further failure of an English liberalism that was already held responsible for the War.

The *Experiment* group share, too, with Joyce the desire to aestheticize the post-war zeitgeist via a programme of artistic and literary experimentalism. This is evident in the group's insistence on 'presentness' and *Weltanschauung* discussed elsewhere in this thesis. In the other contributions to the final issue of *Experiment* we see a reiteration of the commitments to innovation and contemporaneity that the magazine espoused from its inception. It is significant that these issues should reappear in *Experiment's* final issue through the work of Jennings, to whom the group's conception of *Weltanschauung* is attributed.<sup>522</sup> Jennings' and Noxon's article 'Rock Painting and *La Jeune Peinture*' offers an artistic complement to Joyce's literature. Gilbert's 'Footnote' described Joyce's work thus:

The effect is one of polyphony; themes flow one above the other as in a fugue; the printed words represent a series of cross-sections, chords. Syllabic sounds are treated as units which can be moulded or reassembled so as to convey a host of meanings in a single vocable. A slight vowel change may suffice to as the required nuance, or – and this is where the plain

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<sup>522</sup> Trevelyan, *Indigo Days*, 17.

reader is apt to stumble – the basic word or root is sometimes deformed out of easy recognition.<sup>523</sup>

Jennings' and Noxon's review of the recent exhibition of South African rock paintings organised by Christian Zervos (editor of *Cahiers d'Art*) is similarly concerned with different conceptions of time and space that ultimately achieve an "extraordinary unity."<sup>524</sup> Furthermore, as with Gilbert's description of Joyce's work, and also with the contributions of Grigg and Sykes Davies discussed in Chapter Two, the language of experimentalism for *la jeune peinture* borrows heavily from the field of music. Jennings and Noxon write of the South African rock paintings that:

A fundamental difference between these works and practically all other painting lies in the different conceptions of time and space evidently natural to the African mind. A single work may have been painted at different times by different men with no apparent consciousness of the consequences of superimposition. Figures overlay, definite planes are abandoned, rhythms intersect and above all, scale is widely varied.<sup>525</sup>

For Jennings and Noxon, those qualities found in ancient African rock painting provided an example for *la jeune peinture* that marked a seismic shift in contemporary art. Their article begins:

This article is prompted by a vital exhibition recently held in Paris, whose vitality derives from its co-incidence with the contemporary situation of painting, a coincidence which is to our generation what the discovery of Negro art was to the generation of Cubists. This is not essentially a coincidence of technique, but rather of directional feeling.<sup>526</sup>

Here we see once again the reiteration of a generational impetus and "feeling" behind contemporary artistic developments. Furthermore, that generational impulsion is categorised as markedly apart from that of the Cubists – the painterly

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<sup>523</sup> Gilbert, 'Footnote,' 30.

<sup>524</sup> Humphrey Jennings and Gerald Noxon, 'Rock Painting and *La Jeune Peinture*,' *Experiment* 7 (Spring 1931): 37.

<sup>525</sup> Jennings and Noxon, 'Rock Painting,' 37.

<sup>526</sup> Jennings and Noxon, 'Rock Painting,' 37.

contingent of the 1914 generation: indeed, Jennings and Noxon go so far as to state “the acknowledged death of Cubism in 1925.”<sup>527</sup>

Jennings and Noxon’s article successfully encapsulates for painting many of the preoccupations that have been attributed to the wider interests of the *Experiment* group. The relations between African rock painting and the activities of contemporary artists presented can be read as a meditation on the contemporary situation more broadly and perhaps on the *Experiment* group specifically. Writing about the diversity of the African rock paintings on display in Paris, Jennings and Noxon assert that:

Despite all this diversity there is extraordinary unity; a unity new to us because it does not depend upon a frame-induced composition. The African pictorial cosmos is cellular in structure; when you look at the largest of these copies, you are impressed by the fact that however small or large an area is considered, that area is itself a unity at the same time is organically related to the surrounding work.<sup>528</sup>

Under the auspices of evaluating the relationship of prehistoric African painting to the “young painters” emerging in France we witness the intersection of two of *Experiment*’s core themes. The first is concerned with their status as a group. Since its commencement, *Experiment* espoused an interest in multiple disciplines: this broad purview made the group susceptible to accusations of incoherence and fragmentation. However, as I hope this thesis has demonstrated, *Experiment* successfully consolidated multiple individual-talents in a single space: within the magazine each article functioned independently while remaining organically related to surrounding work. Furthermore, we might attribute Jennings’ and Noxon’s particular metaphor for this process – that of a ‘cellular structure’ – to a bi-product of Cambridge thinking during this period. As has been shown elsewhere, scientism was a defining feature of the University at this time, and reflections on both the cosmos – in the work of Empson – and the behaviour of cells – in J.O. Giršavičius and R.S. Alcock – featured prominently. We might conclude then, that in defining the

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<sup>527</sup> Jennings and Noxon, ‘Rock Painting,’ 38.

<sup>528</sup> Jennings and Noxon, ‘Rock Painting,’ 37-38.

spirit of the African rock-painter and likening it to the *esprit de la jeune peinture* Jennings and Noxon were positioning themselves and their group as a product of such thinking.

Jennings and Noxon state that, in the wake of Cubism – and the War Generation – “Freedom had to be regained, both technically and mentally.”<sup>529</sup> This desire for freedom from the past conforms to the project of *Experiment* that has been outlined throughout this thesis.<sup>530</sup> The examples given by the *Experimenters of les jeunes peintres* further elucidate this point:

Miro [sic] shook flat the areas of Cubism into movement; Borès [sic] and Cossio revived brushwork on a large scale; Masson contributed spontaneous quality of line, Viñes new ideas of space and light. Vigorous rhythms, both of areas and line, light and grace interrelated, revolt against architectural composition [...].<sup>531</sup>

The notion of “revolt” in painting by emerging artists reflects a wider desire to be emancipated from the strictures of the past, felt particularly by the *Experiment* generation as a result of the First World War. However, following the dissolution of Cubism, painting required new ideals, or “myths.”

The want of myths following on Cubism has been filled from various sources, pre-eminently by Surrealism. Of Surrealist paintings two things can at once be said: their principle of construction is that of dreams and their unity depends, not upon demonstrable composition, but upon mental reconstruction of elements which are in themselves pictorial unities; and not, as in cubist pictures, wedge-like fragments. The one follows from the other; a dream has two aspects: its obvious shapes and the impulses these shapes represent. So that, for example, a picture by Dali [sic] has in it a group of recognisable objects, which by arrangement, lighting, and so on, form a piece of phallic symbolism. It is a kind of pictorial pun.

Evidently the Surrealist myth may be constructed of anything, and the scope of myth-construction is by this almost

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<sup>529</sup> Jennings and Noxon, ‘Rock Painting,’ 38

<sup>530</sup> Jennings and Noxon, ‘Rock Painting,’ 38.

<sup>531</sup> Jennings and Noxon, ‘Rock Painting,’ 38.



infinitely widened [...]. But at the present moment the Surrealists (especially Ernst) are exploiting the rather temporary emotive qualities of incongruity provided by the juxtaposition of objects as objects (with literary associations).<sup>532</sup>

Surrealism appears to be the new movement that the *Experimenters* are drawing closest to.<sup>533</sup> Indeed, letters between Bronowski and Trevelyan suggest that *Experiment 7* sought articles from Georges Hugnet and Ernst as well as poetry from Eluard, through these never materialised.<sup>534</sup> The French movement offered the group a mode of expression that combined literature and experience in a way that both drew it closer to reality and liberated it from historical constraints. However, Jennings' and Noxon's assessment also finds problems with Surrealism: the effects of much of their work is "temporary," and relies too greatly on "shock." Trevelyan's essay 'Dreams,' published in *transition* the previous year, echoes this hesitance in fully embracing Surrealism. He writes that "Today artists have identified the aesthetic faculty, still chiefly by analogy, with the subconscious (where Surréalisme flounders, prematurely corpulent, through treasure-trove). For as the mind has changed, so too has the definition of meaning: the rhythm of living has its foundations deeper, and the mind gropes to justify, exemplify itself in the subconscious."<sup>535</sup> Trevelyan, and so too Jennings and Noxon, suggest that *les jeunes peintres* – as distinct from the Surrealists – develop a form of painting in which the techniques and ideals of both Surrealists and African rock painting are consolidated to achieve the depth of human feeling. They aim to achieve a "Painting [that] stands between Fear and Nature: between Surrealism and Realism." They continue that "The work of Masson and the Surrealists is based on fear primarily, and is correspondingly limited [...]. This is not to disparage the painters we have mentioned for a moment: in spite of contrary opinions in this country, painting in

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<sup>532</sup> Jennings and Noxon, 'Rock Paintings,' 39.

<sup>533</sup> It is worth noting here that none of the Surrealists referenced by Jennings and Noxon – Masson, Miró, Ernst or Dalí – had exhibited in England by 1931. Indeed, Dalí had only joined the Surrealist movement in 1929.

<sup>534</sup> Letter from Jacob Bronowski to Julian Trevelyan and George Reavey, undated, [1931]. JOT2/3. Julian Trevelyan Archive, Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge.

<sup>535</sup> Trevelyan, 'Dreams,' 121.

Paris has more promise and energy now than at any time since the first period of Cubism.”<sup>536</sup>

It is clear that the *Experimenters* admire the work of the Surrealists but believe that their “discoveries” are but an instrument in the development of the *new painting* and not an end in themselves. For Jennings and Noxon, the work of the Surrealists and the emerging *jeunes peintres* in Paris “challenges comparison with [...] African paintings [...] and compared to the finest, the “classical style” of South Rhodesia, it naturally looks rather fragmentary.”<sup>537</sup> What the young English group sought was a greater unity in painting of technique and subject “producing a world of heroic mutations parallel to the heroic proportions of African painting.”<sup>538</sup> This final statement on visual art in *Experiment* effectively recapitulates the ideology of the group presented throughout this thesis pertaining not only to painting but also to poetry, prose, and the various forms of cinema. Jennings and the *Experiment* group sought to create new forms of artistic output that captured the contemporary spirit while continuing to coexist with established historical narratives. The group achieved this by experimenting with the processes of their historical precedents while nonetheless transforming them by means of combining techniques associated with divergent mediums, and reflecting in their work the intellectual, social, and political concerns of their own epoch.

From the evidence provided here, we can see that the changes made to *Experiment* in issue six were central to the history of the magazine. Following the restatement of the original manifesto in issue four – with the introduction of high-density advertising – the group were gradually moving toward a “mature phase” marked by increased political awareness and interaction with the established avant-garde. However, it is critical to note that despite changes in the magazine’s editorial policy the fundamental principle of representing the *Weltanschauung* of the new

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<sup>536</sup> Jennings and Noxon, ‘Rock Paintings,’ 39-40.

<sup>537</sup> Jennings and Noxon, ‘Rock Paintings,’ 40.

<sup>538</sup> Jennings and Noxon, ‘Rock Paintings,’ 40.

generation of artists, writers, and philosophers remained paramount to the *Experiment* project.

Finally, the concluding issue of *Experiment* possessed in its editorial manifesto a sense of foreboding. Its language suggested finality and yet simultaneously an ongoing project: “Our first editorial, in 1928, promised that we would be ‘at pains not to be littered with the illustrious dead and dying’. We are still taking pains.”<sup>539</sup> The considerable professionalism that had been achieved in *Experiment* by the seventh issue, the contacts that had been made both in England and on the continent combined with the mainstream exposure that had been achieved through reviews in the national press, allowed the group the opportunity to deliver their vision for a new generation of artists and writers to a wider audience. Ultimately, the final issue of *Experiment* was outward looking. There was an inherent self-awareness of the “incompleteness” that McCracken argues, is the essential nature of little magazines.<sup>540</sup> However, the tone of finality in *Experiment 7* is tempered by a concurrent sense of new beginnings.

The following, concluding chapter will address the final contributions to *Experiment* as a means of demonstrating that, as the lifespan of the magazine drew to an end the group’s ultimate objective of creating work that seized the musical, cinematic, social, and political *Weltanschauung* of contemporary life had been achieved. Furthermore, the concluding essay and short story published in it act as a point of intersection with traditional scholarship on the Thirties. They mark the moment at which the *Experiment* group entered the national consciousness as a fully-fledged artistic generation.

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<sup>539</sup> Bronowski and Sykes, ‘Editorial,’ 4.

<sup>540</sup> McCracken, ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business’, 599.

### Towards a Conclusion: At The Point of No Return The Ship Sails On

The final contributions to *Experiment 7* mark the point at which the group realised the objectives of their inaugural editorial-manifesto and cemented their position as a new generation of artists and writers. The broadening of the magazine's purview gained it recognition beyond Cambridge's local magazines and placed its contributors in the immediate public sphere: as Harding has noted, "in no sense could *The New Experiment* be described as an undergraduate magazine."<sup>541</sup> The extension of *Experiment* into the wider literary market united the group with other members of their generation, integrating the Cambridge group in what has been called 'The Auden Generation.' The continuation of the title 'generation' for the group of artists and writers who congregated around the figure of Auden is significant: it supplements the theme of continuation that was indicated in the *Experiment* group's final declaration to 'continue taking pains.'

Hynes' seminal publication *The Auden Generation* attempts to elucidate critical factors that united the group of artists and writers that emerged in the Thirties. Delimiting the scope of his study to men and women born in England between 1900 and 1914, Hynes' project resembles this study inasmuch as his subjects are the group of artists that "came of age in the twenties and lived through their early maturity during the Depression."<sup>542</sup> Where this study departs dramatically from Hynes' is that it offers a preface to the conditions described in *The Auden Generation*. Hynes' study focuses almost exclusively on the period after 1930, positing that the transition from one decade to another was pivotal to the emerging self-consciousness of the generation.

A generation is, first of all, people of roughly the same age in roughly the same place. But not all groups of contemporaries have thought of themselves as separable from the stream of history. What makes a generation aware of itself as a collective entity must depend on two things: consciousness of unique shared experience, and a sense that that experience distinguishes persons who have shared it from those who have

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<sup>541</sup> Harding, 'Experiment in Cambridge', 295.

<sup>542</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 9.

not, or who live through it in other ways. English men and women born during the first decade of this century are a generation in these terms: they shared two catastrophic historical experiences – the First World War and the economic and political events of the ‘thirties – and shared them in particular ways because of the age at which they encountered them.<sup>543</sup>

As has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the *Experiment* group fulfilled all of the criteria of a generation according to Hynes’ schema. Moreover, due to the existence of the magazine as a creative forum for contemporaries, the group that congregated around *Experiment* achieved the level of self-awareness required of the designation ‘generation’ prior to 1930. Hynes’ monograph is primarily concerned with the second catastrophic experience outlined above, and how the economic and political conditions of the Thirties surfaced in the writing of young artists of the period. By comparison, this dissertation has offered more of a dual approach. I have explored the relation of the *Experiment* generation to the War and their forebears in art and letters, and developed a thesis which acts as a prelude to our understanding of the Auden Generation of the Thirties. Indeed, an alternative title for this thesis might have been ‘The Making of the Auden Generation.’ The argument advanced here charts the increasing self-awareness of the group centred around *Experiment* and contextualises their increasingly political position towards the end of the decade according to contemporary social upheaval.

The transition from the youthful self-publishing of *Experiment* in the Twenties to the professionalization and popularisation of young artists like Auden in the Thirties is enacted in the final issue of *Experiment*. Empson’s positive review of Auden’s *Paid on Both Sides* appears as the penultimate contribution in the final issue of *Experiment*, and functions as a transferral of literary responsibility to his politicised contemporaries. It is also the point at which this thesis meets that of Hynes.

At the same time as the first resolutely political issue of *Experiment* was published (Number 5), in January 1930 Auden published the dramatic work *Paid on Both Sides* in the *Criterion*. Hynes has suggested that “it is a nice bit of accidental symbolism

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<sup>543</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 17.

that this, the first parable of the 'thirties generation, appeared in January 1930."<sup>544</sup> The symbolic relation between the changing decade and the publication of Auden's "charade," the increased activism of *Experiment* from issue five, and the publication of Empson's review of *Paid on Both Sides* in the final number is significant. Hynes went on to say that *Paid on Both Sides* was "uncompromisingly modern: elliptical and knotted in style, ambiguously located in time and space, unstable and untraditional in its mixture of tragedy, lyricism, and farce."<sup>545</sup> Much of this assessment is easily transferred to the conditions experienced by the generation themselves. They too were ambiguously located in the shadow of the myth of the preceding generation. For that reason, Hynes' description of Auden's dramatic verse as a 'parable' is particularly interesting: the parable form allows Auden to convey a moral message in relation to the contemporary without the impediment of political detail. It also delivers a historical narrative, recognising the past without explicitly referencing it. Consequently, Auden finds a means of expressing the agonistic relation of his generation to history, an ambition he shared with the *Experiment* group. As suggested in Chapter Four, the final *Experiment* editorial similarly achieved a means of integrating an acceptance of the past into contemporary discussions without being overwhelmed by it. We see, then, that *Paid on Both Sides* provides a useful point of confluence between the *Experiment* group and the 'Auden Generation'. The play simultaneously marks the conclusion of one phase and the beginning of another, engendering a sense of both maturation and infancy that accompanies the transition from amateur to professional.

As outlined in the preceding chapter, the focus of the *Experiment* group shifted in the later issues of the magazine from the First World War to an imagined future conflict. Hynes has written that:

This expectation of a coming war became an insistent part of the consciousness of the 'thirties generation. It enters into – or perhaps one should say intrudes upon – some of the best work of the decade's best writers, as a central image or an off-stage threat, as an obsessive metaphor, an image, or an allusion; in one form or another it seems always to be there, at the edge of

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<sup>544</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 47.

<sup>545</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 47.

the imagination, a fearful trespasser into private realms, a presence, a part of reality.<sup>546</sup>

Chapter Four discussed how this underlying threat of military upheaval surfaced in Empson's poem 'Note on Local Flora,' and Sykes Davies' quasi-political writings; however, nowhere is it more in evidence than in Auden's *Paid on Both Sides*. Ostensibly a tale of family feuds, Auden's "charade" is essentially a commentary on international politics and the seemingly inescapable cyclicity of conflict. Hynes provides a useful, if compressed overview of Auden's tragic verse:

In the play a feud exists between two families, The Nowers and the Shaws, who live in the North of England at a time that is at once modern and primitive. John, the leader of the Nowers, is the son of a man killed from ambush by the Shaws; he is born, in the first scene, on the day of the ambush, and is dedicated by his mother to revenge his father's death. As a young man he continues the feud, though he has conflicting feelings about it: he helps a friend to escape from the fighting by emigrating, and he falls in love with Anne, the daughter of his enemy. In the middle of the play John kills Red Shaw, who had killed John's father, and orders a captured spy to be shot. Then, while the Shaws prepare to retaliate, he seeks to end the feud by marrying Anne. The wedding takes place, but the mother of the Shaws compels her son to murder the bridegroom, and the feud is resumed.<sup>547</sup>

Empson's exegesis, published in *Experiment 7*, adds the further detail that the birth of John Nower at the beginning of the play is "premature," a result of "shock" at the death of the father, and that he is "peculiarly a child of the feud."<sup>548</sup> Like the *Experiment* generation, John Nower is simultaneously the adult male patriarch in the absence of his father, and also the child subject to his mother's will.

As a young man he [John Nower] carries it [the feud] on, though he encourages a brother who loses faith in it to emigrate. Then he falls in love with the daughter (apparently the heiress) of the enemy house; to marry her would involve ending the feud, spoiling the plans of his friends, breaking away from the world

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<sup>546</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 41.

<sup>547</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 48.

<sup>548</sup> Empson, 'A Note on W.H. Auden's *Paid on Both Sides*,' *Experiment 7* (Spring 1931): 60.

his mother takes for granted, and hurting her by refusing to revenge his father.<sup>549</sup>

Auden's play, then, is "'about' the antinomies of the will, about the problems involved in the attempt to change radically a working system."<sup>550</sup> This is the problem that defines the Thirties generation: we have seen in the preceding analyses of *Experiment* that what is continually sought is a means of addressing the future without discrediting or disrespecting the past. Empson believed that Auden's *Paid on Both Sides* finds a mode that makes possible the integration of historical understanding with foreknowledge of an unrealised future. The mode that Empson identifies in Auden's writing is "a sort of surrealist technique," a "plunging below the rational world," in order to provide justification for the protagonist John Nower's decision to either kill or spare the life of an enemy spy. The decision to abandon rational reasoning in favour of a personal psychological approach to the play's crisis relieves the protagonist of any conscious responsibility for his decision.

The summary given above suggests that besides being a political parable, *Paid on Both Sides* also functioned as a parable of adolescence and maturity. The correlative relationship between the political allegory and the passage from youth into maturity has been addressed in Chapter Four's discussion of Empson's 'Note on Local Flora' which, as with Auden's play, uses the 'mother' as a pivotal figure. The potential for a Freudian reading of these two works is explicit; however, it is in Auden's dramatic work that we find the more richly nuanced scheme of psychological exploration.<sup>551</sup> It has been suggested that the structure of the charade "can be interpreted as a Freudian psychoanalytic projection, with the various poles of conflict (Ego, Id, etc.) being represented by the antithetical forces of the two families, who are still 'Sharers of the same house/ Attendants on the same machine.'"<sup>552</sup> The quality of psychological depth in *Paid on Both Sides* was recognised almost immediately by Empson, who wrote of the play's crisis:

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<sup>549</sup> Empson, 'A Note on W.H. Auden's *Paid on Both Sides*,' 60.

<sup>550</sup> Empson, 'A Note on W.H. Auden's *Paid on Both Sides*,' 60.

<sup>551</sup> See: Janet Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Routledge, 1996), 81-112.

<sup>552</sup> Christopher Innes, 'Auden's Plays and Dramatic Writings: Theatre, Film and Opera,' *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*, ed. Stan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 85.



[...] we sink down, in this crucial and solvent instant of decision, into a childish scheme of judgement, centring round desire for, and fear of, the mother; jealousy of, and identity with, the brother, who is also the spy; away from the immediate situation, so that younger incidental reminiscences of the author become relevant; below the distinction between murderer and victim, so that the hero escapes from feeling his responsibility [...].<sup>553</sup>

The Oedipal struggle implied in Empson's review of Auden's charade to some extent reiterates the apparent separation anxiety of 'Note on Local Flora,' albeit to considerably different effect. Empson's "cold hard cones [...] / Will leave their mother only for good cause; / Will ripen only in a forest fire"; but they will ripen nonetheless. In Empson's schema there is hope of changing the system: mature freedom begets political revolution and *vice versa*. Auden's play retains no such optimism. *Paid on Both Sides* is about the transition from childhood to liberated adulthood, however "for the young people in the play, the past is a curse: it is the feud, an inherited responsibility to continue a meaningless destructive pattern. The force of this responsibility is embodied in the two mothers; to be a mother's son is to be ruled by the past."<sup>554</sup> However, it is implicit in Auden's writing, and likewise in that of the *Experiment* group, that the burden of the past can be overcome not through action, but rather writing.

Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex – the desire of the child to kill the parent of the same sex in order to sexually possess the parent of the opposite sex – is evident in Auden's play: the birth of John Nower was marked by the death of his father, and his life was dedicated to exacting his mother's revenge. Nower attempts to liberate himself from his mother's power through his marriage to Anne Shaw, however "the past is stronger than he is, his bid for maturity fails, and the killing goes on."<sup>555</sup>

But he is defeated; let the son  
Sell the farm lest the mountain fall;  
His mother and her mother won.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> Empson, 'A Note on W.H. Auden's *Paid on Both Sides*,' 61.

<sup>554</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 48.

<sup>555</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 49.

<sup>556</sup> W.H. Auden, *Paid on Both Sides, Collected Longer Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 34.

The killing of John Nower on his wedding day by Seth Shaw occurs at the insistence of his mother-in-law. Mrs Shaw provokes her son to end the peace achieved by the marriage of John Nower and Anne Shaw: "Have you forgotten your brother's death... taken out and shot like a dog? It's a nice thing for me to hear people saying that I have a coward for a son. I am thankful your father is not here to see it."<sup>557</sup> The result is the death of not only of John Nower but also of Aaron Shaw, the eldest of Mrs Shaw's sons. Anne Shaw, sitting amongst the dead bodies of her husband and brother sombrely states, "Now we have seen the story to its end."<sup>558</sup> The abiding tone of Auden's play is explicitly anti-war. This is a position that I have argued throughout this thesis also applied to the *Experiment* group. It is reflected in the group's self-identification with the term "experimental" as opposed to "avant-garde," despite the recognised interchangeability of the two terms.<sup>559</sup> I have also chosen, when utilising the latter term, to employ the caveat "conscientious," as a means of emphasising the explicitly anti-war sentiment of the *Experiment* group.

In *Paid on Both Sides* Mrs Shaw's speech – in its appeal to the memory of the dead – also reiterates the perverse patriotism of John Nower's rhetoric at the "trial" of the spy:

I know we have and are making terrific sacrifices, but we cannot give in. We cannot betray the dead. As we pass their graves can we be deaf to the simple eloquence of their inscriptions, those who in the glory of their early manhood gave up their lives for us? No, we must fight to the finish.<sup>560</sup>

Janet Montefiore has suggested that the tone of this statement is parodic. She writes that "The rhetoric that Auden parodies here does not merely accuse his speaker, by implication, of hypocrisy; more specifically, it identifies him with the bloodthirsty generals and politicians who were responsible for the mass slaughters of the trenches."<sup>561</sup> Furthermore, we can see the dual relation of this statement to the phrase "illustrious dead and dying" – coined in the first issue of *Experiment* (1928) and reiterated in its final manifesto (1931) – and to the inscription of "The

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<sup>557</sup> Auden, *Paid on Both Sides*, 33.

<sup>558</sup> Auden, *Paid on Both Sides*, 33.

<sup>559</sup> See: Chapter Two.

<sup>560</sup> Auden, *Paid on Both Sides*, 21.

<sup>561</sup> Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s*, 82.

Glorious Dead” on London’s Cenotaph. As Loukopoulou has described, the rejection of “the Illustrious Dead and Dying” by the *Experiment* and Auden Generation was “imbued with a committed contestation of set values and ideologies” that were increasingly subject to critical reconsiderations in the late Twenties and Thirties.<sup>562</sup>

Loukopouklou writes:

In the late twenties, after a decade of respectful silence, the veterans and the younger generations were coming to terms with prevailing views and attitudes toward the concept of the War’s dead. They started questioning the imposed reverence for the London Cenotaph’s inscribed concept of “The Glorious Dead,” the phrase, coined by Prime Minister Lloyd George in 1919 and inscribed in the monument in Whitehall to commemorate the victims of the Great War. Such reverence, formerly internalized and habitual, was coming to be seen as a means and site of manipulation.<sup>563</sup>

Following a decade of respectful silence, there was suddenly “a rash of books about the generation of 1914 and their war experiences. [...]. These books were pessimistic, cynical, and sometimes very bitter and brutal.”<sup>564</sup> Robert Wohl has written that “The big year for war books in England was 1929. Some twenty-nine were published, as compared with twenty-one in 1928 and only six in 1926.”<sup>565</sup> Indeed, 1929 saw the publication of some of the most celebrated literary critiques of the 1914-18 war: the translation of Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Robert Graves’ *Goodbye to All That*, and the one-time *Experiment* contributor Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero*. These revisionist texts published by veterans of the First World War began to break-down the myth of the generation of 1914 as courageous and gallant men fighting willingly for King and Country. “By the end of the 1920s most English intellectuals believed that the war had been a general and unmitigated disaster, that England’s victory was in reality a defeat, and hence that the men who had caused England to enter the war and to fight it through to the bloody end were either mercenary blackguards or blundering fools.”<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>562</sup> Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits,’ 218.

<sup>563</sup> Loukopoulou, ‘James Joyce Exhibits,’ 219.

<sup>564</sup> Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 105.

<sup>565</sup> Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 105.

<sup>566</sup> Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 109.

The critical rethinking of the First World War that was occurring at the end of the decade allowed young English intellectuals like Empson and Auden the opportunity to deliver their cultural agendas to a more mainstream audience. *Experiment* from its first manifesto and contribution (Wright's 'Postwar') rebelled against the use of War Casualties as political tools. However, the new generation of artists and writers who emerged with Empson and Auden in the Thirties did not commit to the myth of 1914: the myth that a generation of strong, brave, beautiful and gifted men had been wiped out on Flanders' fields and the beaches of Gallipoli. For the younger generation, the myth was part of the manipulation, reinforcing the power of the state.

The writings of Auden, Empson, and other members of the *Experiment* group at the end of the Twenties began to challenge figures of authority. In Auden and Empson it is the "mother" who assumes the burden of blame, and in work such as Wright's 'Postwar' the *Frauen* and the *alten Militärs* are obstructionists to social and political progress. In her reading of *Paid on Both Sides*, Montefiore claims that:

The devouring mother who dooms her son to destruction represents the bitterness famously felt by the younger wartime generation against its patriotic elders in the Great War, and thus personifies a whole blameworthy generation. More than this she represents the means whereby the claims of the state get their claws into the young man's psyche.<sup>567</sup>

Fundamental to the projects of Auden and the *Experiment* Generation was the question of how the First World War had affected *them*. As McCracken has pointed out, "this was the generation whose fathers and elder brothers had died in the First World War. They were at once cut off from the past and forever living in its shadow."<sup>568</sup> In the previous chapter, it was shown that the fifth issue of *Experiment* – which marked the turn of the decade – demonstrated an increased self-awareness amongst the group of the unparalleled circumstances of their generation. This heightened self-consciousness led to experimental literary assessments of the social conditions that contributed to individual and collective generational experience of the period.

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<sup>567</sup> Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s*, 81.

<sup>568</sup> McCracken, 'Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business', 600.

Throughout this thesis, I have examined some of the modes through which the *Experiment* group explored the unique outlook of their generation. The artistic and literary activities that occupied the cohort included experiments with music, science, the cinema, and psychology. However, the transition of the decades was marked by an increasingly tumultuous economic and political situation in Britain, and this was reflected in both the work of the *Experiment* group and that of Auden. The challenge for the emergent generation of artists was to develop methods that could integrate individual experience into a politically relevant narrative. Empson's review of *Paid on Both Sides* suggested that his contemporary had achieved this:

One reason the scheme is so impressive is that it puts psycho-analysis and surrealism and all that, all the irrationalist tendencies which are so essential a part of the machinery of present-day thought, into their proper place; they are made part of the normal and rational tragic form, and indeed what constitutes the tragic situation. [...] Within its scale (twenty-seven pages) there is the gamut of all the ways we have to think about the matter; it has the sort of completeness that makes a work seem to define the attitude of a generation.<sup>569</sup>

It is tremendously significant that this is the final statement in *Experiment* from its founder. Empson's conclusion that Auden's play "define[s] the attitude of a generation" implies the success of the *Experiment* project in rejecting the "Illustrious Dead and Dying," and developing a style that was "stimulating and lively and [took] up a strong line."<sup>570</sup> However, *Paid on Both Sides* and *Experiment*, are not explicitly political ventures. Both Auden's play and the *Experiment* moment function as a prologue to the expressly political Thirties. Hynes notes that a key feature of Auden's "parable of growing up" was the interweaving of the world of blood-feuds and a kind of public school authority: a Public School, First World War tradition of the games-playing male society.<sup>571</sup> Christopher Isherwood, writing about Auden's poetry in 1937 said that:

The saga-world is a schoolboy world, with its feuds, its practical jokes, its dark threats conveyed in puns and riddles and understatements: 'I think this day will end unluckily for some;

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<sup>569</sup> Empson, 'A Note on W.H. Auden's 'Paid on Both Sides'', 61.

<sup>570</sup> 'Experiment,' *Experiment* 1(Nov. 1928): 1.

<sup>571</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 51.

but chiefly for those who least expect harm.' I once remarked to Auden that the atmosphere of *Gisli the Outlaw* very much reminded me of our schooldays. He was pleased with the idea: and, soon after this, he produced his first play: *Paid on Both Sides*, in which the two worlds are so inextricably confused that it is impossible to say whether the characters are really epic heroes or only members of the school O.T.C.<sup>572</sup>

Bernard Bergonzi's seminal publication *Reading the Thirties* emphasises the hitherto unparalleled importance of the public school to the generation of artists and writers who emerged in the Thirties. He writes that "The culture of the English public school was intended to put a firm – ideally, ineradicable – stamp upon young men. The writers of the thirties did not escape the process."<sup>573</sup> It is significant that the relation that Isherwood finds to the school yard in Auden's work is through the Officer Training Corps (OTC), the junior division of which was central to the programme of the English public schools during the War. The prevalence of the OTC in schools in wartime England allowed that the War impacted upon the lives of children as much as it did the lives of their elders. Hynes goes so far as to suggest "Perhaps more so, for the young had no real experience of the Edwardian world before the war; for them, awareness of the world and awareness of the war came at the same time."<sup>574</sup> In schools, the OTC taught boys military drills, marching, and the values of courage, self-sacrifice, honour, and duty.<sup>575</sup>

The young men of the *Experiment* generation were, from their earliest years, prepared for what Isherwood has called 'The Test.'<sup>576</sup> He writes:

Like most of my generation, I was obsessed by a complex of terrors and longings connected with the idea "War." "War," in this purely neurotic sense, meant The Test. The Test of your courage, of your maturity, of your sexual prowess: "Are you really a Man?" Subconsciously, I believe, I longed to be subjected to this test; but I also dreaded failure.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> Christopher Isherwood, 'Some Notes on Auden's Early Poetry,' *New Verse* 26-27 (Nov. 1937): 5-6.

<sup>573</sup> Bernard Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties: Texts and Context*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1978), 11.

<sup>574</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 17.

<sup>575</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 18.

<sup>576</sup> Isherwood, *Lions and Shadows*, 46.

<sup>577</sup> Isherwood, *Lions and Shadows*, 46.

As before, we find in Isherwood's writing a sense of shame in adolescence: as in the writing of his contemporaries, there is a desire to *prove* oneself to be "a Man." The theme of asserting one's maturity has permeated this thesis. The concept of *Experiment* as an independent cultural vehicle for the expression of undergraduates is, from its inception, a bold statement of self-awareness. While emphasising their youth – "the not yet ripe fruits" – the group nonetheless present themselves as a mature and coherent movement. It has been shown in Chapters One and Two that in the early phases of *Experiment's* publication, this appearance of adult sophistication was at least in part achieved by a conversely immature reliance on historical models of avant-gardism. However, throughout the course of its publication *Experiment* developed its own legitimately mature voice.

The final contribution to *Experiment* represents the ultimate "test" of the magazine's success. Written by the young author Malcolm Lowry, 'Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre' (At the Point of No Return The Ship Sails On) is a semi-autobiographical tale of Dana Hilliot's (Lowry's) experience as an eighteen-year-old deckhand on a freighter heading for the Far East.<sup>578</sup> 'Punctum Indifferens' was the second contribution Lowry made to *Experiment* – the first, 'Port Swettenham,' was published in number 5 – and was later expanded to form Chapter Four of his first novel *Ultramarine* (1933). In an introductory note to the republication of *Ultramarine* in 1963, Lowry's wife wrote of the story that "The [sea] voyage provided him with the background for the novel, but the real theme is the necessity of the boy, Dana Hilliot, to prove himself as a man among other men."<sup>579</sup> In an interview with the *Liverpool Echo* prior to his departure, Lowry is quoted as having said "No silk-cushion youth for me. I want to see the world and rub shoulders with its oddities, and get some experience of life before I go back to Cambridge University."<sup>580</sup> Lowry's statement suggests an early consciousness of a perceived resentment toward the new generation of youth by their elders. As direct successors of the "strong, brave, and beautiful" men of 1914, the *Experiment*

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<sup>578</sup> Gordon Bowker, *Pursued by Furies: A Life of Malcolm Lowry* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 121.

<sup>579</sup> Margerie Lowry, Introduction to *Ultramarine* by Malcolm Lowry (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 7.

<sup>580</sup> Gordon Bowker, *Malcolm Lowry Remembered* (London: Ariel Books, BBC, 1985), 29.

generation were acutely aware – and ashamed – of their comparatively privileged existences.<sup>581</sup>

'Punctum Indifferens' is a story told over a game of cards. As the sailors play, they tell the tale of an incident that happened between Hilliot and the ship's cook Andy. Written primarily as dialogue, Lowry's narrative achieves a similar effect to Auden's charade, *Paid on Both Sides*. The interspersal of the language of the card game with the plot of the incident resembles the shifts in dialogue in *Paid on Both Sides* between the saga-world of the blood-feud and the small talk of the public school, all about swimming matches and rugby teams.<sup>582</sup> Lowry's saga replaces the school room with the sailor's mess-room but the dynamic of military-style obedience combined with idle gossip remains.

Lowry's short story provides a fitting conclusion to *Experiment*, drawing together many of the themes that have been addressed throughout this thesis. It is an experimental piece that formally engages with issues of time, musicality, and the cinematic, while retaining an overarching reflection on his generation's social situation. "Lowry, like many others of the generation that grew to adulthood in the early thirties, was attempting to break free from the enclosed world of middle-class propriety and guilt-ridden Victorian morality into which he had been born."<sup>583</sup> However, we might consider that it was the condition of being "guilt-ridden" that united the *Experiment* generation in their quest to communicate their shared experience and to alter the world through art and literature.

When the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewed *Experiment* number seven in June 1931 Lowry's story was identified as a notable contribution, praised as a "prose fugue with recurrent themes."<sup>584</sup> Recognising the deliberate musical influence in the author's work, this description of Lowry's prose testifies to the success of the forms of experimentalism discussed in Chapter Two. In discussing the poetry of Sykes Davies and Grigg, Chapter Two addressed the importance of music and

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<sup>581</sup> Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 85.

<sup>582</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 49.

<sup>583</sup> Bowker, *Pursued by Furies*, xvii.

<sup>584</sup> 'Experiment,' *TLS*, 448.



musical description to the *Experiment* group's conception of 'experimentalism.' Their contributions were shown to be emphatically experimental: Grigg's 'Sonata for a Young Man of Nineteen' was accompanied by stage directions regarding the tempo of his poem, suggesting that the desired musical effect was integral to the composition itself. Likewise, Sykes Davies' 'Music in an Empty House' was a piece which the author returned to, and attempted to refine throughout the Thirties.<sup>585</sup> In an attempt to define his poetic technique, Sykes Davies coined the phrase "cadenced prose" as a means of describing both its musical and narrative qualities. In contrast to his peers, Lowry's closing contribution to *Experiment* successfully integrates the dual properties of narrative and music without recourse to external explanation. The discovery of the fugue as a literary model accommodates both a repetitive musical structure and a narrative based on the interaction of two or more voices – represented by Lowry as the sailor's conversation. The main 'theme' or 'subject' of the fugue is an altercation between Hilliot and Andy, the details of which are repeated throughout the narrative as more voices join the conversation. This first phase of the narrative, known as the *exposition*, is complete once all of the voices have repeated the subject. This phase is normally followed in a fugue composition by an episode or passage of "connective tissue," typically a development of something that has appeared in the *exposition*. Lowry's 'Punctum Indifferens' provides this expansion via the interior monologue of Hilliot executed in parentheses. The first connective episode reveals the psychology of a young man dogged by fear and self-loathing. As he considers the incident which is the subject of the sailor's idle chatter he reflects:

But the joke's on me. I have to admit that of these men who become day by day intricately and more intensely part of me I know nothing. Nothing at all! Even Andy, who is more part of me than the rest of them, I know nothing. That awful incident in the galley, everybody is talking about it. Why do I not fight Andy, then? To know a thing is to kill it, a post mortem process? Why won't I? Undignified? Too Richard Barthelmess? ... Perhaps, but I might lose, and I know less than nothing.<sup>586</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> See: Chapter Two.

<sup>586</sup> Malcolm Lowry, 'Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre', *Experiment* 7 (Spring 1931): 65.

Lowry's tone here is inescapably morbid, undoubtedly influenced by his reading of D.H. Lawrence on Edgar Allan Poe in the 1923 *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Lawrence wrote that Poe was "absolutely concerned with the disintegration-processes of his own psyche," a statement that might just have easily been attributed to Lowry himself.<sup>587</sup> Lawrence continues that:

Moralists have always wondered helplessly why Poe's 'morbid' tales need have been written. They need to be written because old things have to die and disintegrate, because the old white psyche has to be broken down before anything else can come to pass.<sup>588</sup>

Lowry's 'Punctum Indifferens' fulfils a similar role to Poe's tales in its attempt to self-psychologise as a means of cultural exorcism. This is explicitly emphasised in Lowry's statement that "to know a thing is to kill it, a post mortem process," a phrase adapted from Lawrence's essay on Poe.<sup>589</sup> The primary conflict of consciousness that afflicts Lowry's 'hero' Dana Hilliot is between *knowing* Andy and *killing* him: he wants simultaneously to share his experience and to be freed from the older sailor's scrutiny. However, at this point in the scenario Hilliot decides not to act, suggesting that he may be "too Richard Barthelmess." This peculiar allusion draws into Lowry's short story a further influence that has been much discussed elsewhere in this thesis: the cinema. Barthelmess was a highly successful film-actor of the silent era, known particularly for his role in the acclaimed film *Tol'able David* (1921). It is this film that seems to have specifically influenced Lowry in writing the story which would appear in *Experiment*.

*Tol'able David* is the story of David Kinemon (played by Barthelmess), a young boy who longs to be accepted as a man. David is described as "his mother's boy," while his older brother Allan is "reckoned the strongest man in Greenstream County." We see here already the dichotomous portrayal of generations: the young man of eighteen is depicted as weak and childish, while his elder brother is thought to be

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<sup>587</sup> D.H. Lawrence, 'Edgar Allan Poe', in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, edited by Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey, and John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66.

<sup>588</sup> Lawrence, 'Edgar Allan Poe', 66.

<sup>589</sup> Lawrence, 'Edgar Allan Poe', 70. "It is easy to see why each man kills the thing he loves. To *know* a living thing is to kill it. You have to kill a thing to know it satisfactorily. For this reason, the desirous consciousness, the SPIRIT, is a vampire."

abnormally physically capable. Here we find the basic tenets of the myth of the generation of 1914 discussed elsewhere, and the parallels continue throughout the film. David's brother is paralyzed when he is subject to a vicious attack, and his father dies of a heart attack brought about by the stress of organising revenge upon his son's assailants. David is now the head of the family, and has responsibility for his brother's revenge. However, David's mother pleads with her son not to carry out his plan, and he succumbs to her will.

The analogies between *Tol'able David* and many of the other texts discussed here are striking: there is a continued theme of young men struggling to be accepted as adults in a world that simultaneously expects them to assume adult responsibilities and remain subservient to a "lost" generation. However, 'tol'able' David is eventually given the opportunity to assume the role of a 'man': following an incident where the driver of the mail cart is fired for drunkenness, David is finally given the job that he had longed for. Subsequently, one of his brother's attackers steals the mailbag and David is forced into confrontation with the villain. David is shot in the arm by his adversaries, but manages to respond, resulting in his killing all three of the antagonists in a prolonged battle that recalls the biblical tale of David and Goliath. The end of the film sees David return to the village victorious: he has achieved the status of 'man' and 'hero.'

The illusion to Barthelmess' role depicting the transition from boyhood to manhood foreshadows the third phase of Lowry's fugue wherein Dana Hilliot summons the courage to challenge the gossip of his shipmates and confront Andy. Addressing all of the sailors, but Andy in particular, Hilliot says:

[...] you can't deny that you've been doing your level best to make life a misery for me since we left home. And what's more, you've been telling a lot of damned lies about me [...]. I haven't wanted to fight before – but to be frank with you that wasn't because I'm afraid of you and your Glasgow punches – no, simply because I didn't want to hurt you ... You weak-chinned son of a Singapore sea-lion. You cringing cowardly skulker. You've got a face like a dirty jackal, all nose and no chin ... What a spiteful cunning dirty wreck of the Hesperus you are! That's just it, your *face*. I've just been afraid *for* you, that's all. Why by Christ if you'd *got* a chin you little bastard, I'd hit you on it.

[...]

Come on, you ship's cook, you chinless wonder, you – Put them up. Up I say.<sup>590</sup>

Although the language of Hilliot's attack appears harsh, it reflects the tone and language of the sailors he has been listening to talking about him. Lowry effectively conveys the intensity of the young man's anger at being accused of theft and having been employed through nepotism over merit. Furthermore, the frustration of Hilliot's desire to prove himself a man in an intensely masculine environment where he is constantly undermined by his youth reflects the innate frustration evidenced in the writing of Lowry's *Experiment* peers. However, the climatic episode is quickly diffused by the other sailors:

Now then, Hilliot, don't you be a bloody fool either and go shouting your face off about Andy. He's an older and better man than you. Now go easy boy: we all know, you see, Andy lost his chin in the war and he's had plates in it, and all, and if you hit him on it he might croak. You mustn't talk like that. We know it's your first voyage and you just get the same as any one of us got on his first voyage. Andy and I've been shipmates for ten years. You mustn't talk like that. Go easy man.<sup>591</sup>

The significance of this exchange as one of the concluding statements in *Experiment* is clearly evident. The acute resentment between the two generations – those who fought in the First World War and those who did not – is deeply felt. The ship's cook Andy is marked as being a 'better' man than his young shipmate along lines clearly defined by age. This is accentuated by the intervening sailor's insistence upon referring to Hilliot as 'boy.' Despite the protagonist's courage in standing up for himself – an act which he believed would demonstrate his adulthood – his actions are received as a childish display. The futility of Hilliot's stand is further emphasised by the reference made to Andy's role in the War: although the young man has subjected himself to 'the test' of going to sea and performing hard-labour, he cannot possibly *know* his shipmates because he is culturally isolated from their shared experience of the 1914-18 conflict. The First World War was a single determining factor in 'separating the men from the boys': society would always view

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<sup>590</sup> Lowry, 'Punctum Indifferens', 74.

<sup>591</sup> Lowry, 'Punctum Indifferens', 75.

those who were not old enough to fight in diametric opposition to the 'lost generation' of brave young men who fought in 1914-18. The loss and injury of young soldiers during the War engendered a kind of cultural stagnation that prohibited those who were too young to be directly involved from psychologically progressing beyond youth.

Lowry's closing contribution to *Experiment* effectively combines many of the experimental impulses demonstrated elsewhere in the magazine's pages. 'Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre' is a sophisticated exercise in combining many of the influences that permeate the little magazine. In terms of literary influence, this is best expressed in the name of the young protagonist: Eugene Dana Hilliot is essentially a portmanteau of the dramatist Eugene O'Neill, D.H. Lawrence (Hilliot's second and third initials – D.H.), American author Richard Henry Dana, and T.S. Eliot.<sup>592</sup> Furthermore, the use of the portmanteau as a literary device demonstrates a level of indebtedness to Joyce. The title of Lowry's story also exhibits considerable refinement: "The title, part Latin, part the Norwegian name of [Nordal] Greig's book, meaning 'At the Point of No Return the Ship Sails On', embodies 'that ceaseless struggle to maintain an equipoise between past and present.'"<sup>593</sup> The conflict between the past and the present was an idea that was pervasive in *Experiment*. The title of Lowry's story reflects historical process: time marches on, and the past remains unchanged. The Latin portion of the title is particularly apt to the discussion of *Experiment*: 'The Point of No Return' acts as a cipher for the First World War. In this respect, Lowry's story – like *Paid on Both Sides* – functions like a parable: the author is able to recognise the past without direct reference thereby avoiding becoming consumed by it. The multilingual aspect of Lowry's title also recalls the discussion in Chapter Four of Joyce's extract from *Work in Progress*, in which multilingualism was used as a means of promoting internationalism. This was a contextually relevant subject at Cambridge in the late Twenties and early Thirties: in 1930, prominent Cambridge academic C.K. Ogden published *Basic English: A*

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<sup>592</sup> Richard Henry Dana Jr. was best known for his memoir *Two Years Beyond the Mast* (1840) which documents a two year sea journey made between 1834-36.

<sup>593</sup> Bowker, *Pursued by Furies*, 121.

*General Introduction with Rule and Grammar*.<sup>594</sup> Basic English was an international auxiliary language or “universal language.” Significantly, the Basic English movement gained immense publicity following the Second World War as a means of world peace. Indeed the development of Basic English was in large part envisioned as tool for fostering peace.<sup>595</sup> Ogden wrote in 1931 that:

What Europe needs most is about fifty more dead languages’, said a sagacious observer at the outbreak of the World War. What the World needs most is about 1,000 more dead languages – and one more alive.

‘Make everybody speak English’ was the four-word peace-slogan suggested by Henry Ford some years ago; ‘Basic English for all’ is its modern counterpart. The so-called national barriers of today are ultimately language barriers. The absence of a common medium of communication is the chief obstacle to international understanding, and therefore the chief underlying cause of War.<sup>596</sup>

In light of Ogden’s comments, Lowry’s short story takes on renewed significance. His use of Latin in the title of his narrative creates a direct link to Ogden’s statement on “dead languages,” and emphatically associates this inaccessible language with the War. Lowry’s use of Norwegian as a representation of progress and the future is also highly symbolic. Norwegian along with Swedish and Danish form the language group known as the North Germanic Languages (or Scandinavian Languages) which represent a dialect continuum wherein all three languages are mutually intelligible. It is, therefore, implicit in Lowry’s ‘Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre’ that mutual understanding is critically important to future progress and peace.

Ultimately Lowry’s short story embodies a similar tone as the editorial of the seventh issue in which it appears. In the previous chapter, I suggested that the concluding *Experiment* editorial simultaneously possessed the sense of an ending

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<sup>594</sup> The connection between Joyce and Ogden’s Basic English is further cemented by the fact that the March 1932 edition of *transition* published a translation by Ogden of the ‘Anna Livia’ portion of Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*. See: Susan Shaw Sailer, ‘Universalizing Languages: *Finnegans Wake* Meets Basic English’, *James Joyce Quarterly* 36:4 (Summer 1999): 853.

<sup>595</sup> ‘Memorandum on Basic English as an Aid to Language Communication in the Pacific’, *Institute of Pacific Relations, American Council*, 2:10 (May 1933): 1.

<sup>596</sup> C.K. Ogden, *Debabelization: With a Survey of Contemporary Opinion on the Problem of a Universal Language* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1931), 13.

and also of new beginnings. This sentiment is neatly encapsulated in the phrase “At the Point of No Return the Ship Sails On.” Lowry’s narrative marks the point at which the *Experiment* group capitulated to the past. However, their surrender was imbued with positivity and a sense of progress. *Experiment*, like Lowry’s story, was a coming-of-age tale. ‘Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre’ and the final number of *Experiment* share a sense of both mourning the loss of youth and celebrating one’s arrival at maturity.

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Throughout this thesis I have illustrated the antagonistic relationship the *Experiment* group had with the past. The group’s struggle manifested itself in a desire to both comment on past events – particularly the First World War – while avoiding becoming defined by it. The unstable and ambiguous nature of the period under discussion is reflected in the phrase ‘interwar years.’ The tendency among scholars of the period 1918-1939 is to align their argument either to the immediate aftermath of the First World War or to the escalating political situation immediately prior to the Second World War.<sup>597</sup> With regard to some of the most prominent artistic and literary movements of the period this is a useful and valid historiographical approach. However, *Experiment* presents the researcher with a complex problem: published between 1928 and 1931 the magazine occupies a historical position roughly equidistant from both conflicts. The memory and aftermath of World War I inform the contents of the magazine; however it has been shown here that the *Experiment* group were both temporally and conceptually detached from that moment. It has likewise been shown that although the increasingly precarious political situation of the Thirties manifested itself in the writing of the *Experiment* group, their distance from key political milestones associated with World War II prevented them from being co-opted as a wholly prescient movement.<sup>598</sup> A second tendency that can be detected in the wider body of literature pertaining to *Experiment* is the proclivity to categorise the magazine as

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<sup>597</sup>See: Briony Fer, David Batchelor, and Paul Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 1993).

<sup>598</sup>*Experiment*’s successor *Cambridge Left* (1933-34) is often historicised in this way.

a proto-English Surrealist publication.<sup>599</sup> However this inclination is the result of a flawed methodology. Although many members of the *Experiment* group contributed to the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936 we cannot unquestionably presume that their shared prehistory in *Experiment* constituted an early organisation based on Surrealist principles. While there are undoubtedly aspects of *Experiment* that indicate knowledge of, and interest in, continental Surrealism, the group are careful not to explicitly ally themselves to Breton's artistic and literary principles. Indeed, Trevelyan wrote in *transition* in 1930 that "Surréalisme flounders, prematurely corpulent."<sup>600</sup> It follows, then, that none of the historiographical methods posed above offer an adequate framework for the study of *Experiment*.

What this thesis has offered is an examination of *Experiment* on its own terms. The group of young intellectuals who produced the magazine were acutely aware of their position at the threshold between the past and the future. It has been shown that the recent past was anathema to the group; and social and political upheaval rendered the future unknowable. As a result of, and response to, these contemporary conditions the *Experiment* group emphatically championed the idea of 'presentness.' They recognised, and hoped to capture the transient and fleeting nature of their epoch. By promoting the concept of "experimentalism" with its emphasis on "process," the group were able to translate their impression of both the importance of the moment at which they were living and its ephemerality.

This dual approach to the concept of time as both permanent and impermanent is evident throughout *Experiment*; however, it is in Lowry's final contribution to the magazine that it is most successfully implemented. Through his reading of P.D. Ouspensky's *A New Model of the Universe* and J.W. Dunne's *Experiment with Time*,

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<sup>599</sup> See: Rob Jackaman, *The Course of English Surrealist Poetry since the 1930s* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1989). Rod Mengham, 'Bourgeois News: Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge' *Jacket Magazine* No.20 (Dec. 2002) <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/meng-jen-madg.html>. Peter Nicholls, 'Surrealism in England', *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century English Literature*, 396-416. Paul C. Ray, *The Surrealist Movement in England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971). Michel Remy, *Surrealism in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999). Alexander Robertson, *Angels of Anarchy and Machines for Making Clouds: Surrealism in Britain in the Thirties* (Leeds: Leeds City Art Galleries, 1986). Alan Young, *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981).

<sup>600</sup> Trevelyan, 'Dreams', 121.



Lowry developed a mode of writing “in which present time is seen to encapsulate all time.”<sup>601</sup> This kind of philosophical basis for his approach to literature reflects other experiments that were conducted in the Cambridge magazine, including those by Empson on the subject of the fourth dimension and Trevelyan on ‘Dreams’ (see: Chapter One). This approach to an all-encompassing literature further complements the ideals for art that were beginning to be espoused by Jennings and Noxon: the discussion of ‘Rock Painting and *La Jeune Peinture*,’ also in *Experiment 7*, calls for unity in contemporary painting that can cohesively encapsulate a feeling of all-time such as is achieved in cave paintings found in South Africa (see: Chapter Four). This conceptual approach to painting was likewise present in the *Experiment* group’s vision of the cinema, particularly with regard to the use of superimposition as a cinematic technique borrowed from historical cave painting. Noxon later wrote that when Jennings “first introduced [him] to the subject of pre-historic cave paintings [he] became greatly excited about them, particularly about their significance in relation to the development of the moving image.”<sup>602</sup> Noxon continued this line of research long into the 1960s, publishing a series of articles on the ‘Pictorial Origins of Cinema Narrative’ for *The Journal of the Society of Cinematographers*. The overlaps described here between literary, scientific, artistic, archaeological, and cinematographic technique clearly evidence the conceptual fluidity of the investigations that were being conducted in *Experiment*.

The little magazine is an ideal medium for the *Experimenters*’ attempts to capture the ephemeral nature of their epoch. Little magazines are, after all, “transient objects” that “only become historically legible at the point of their obsolescence.”<sup>603</sup> Published over a period of four years, the historical narrative of *Experiment* is not dominated by any single event. The magazine is not a singular object; it is a protracted commentary, a process, an *experiment*. It is serendipitous that the cinema should feature so prominently in *Experiment*’s literary and artistic investigations. The cinema as a technology was able to capture fleeting moments. The Russian directors that the *Experiment* group so admired took these instants

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<sup>601</sup> Bowker, *Pursued by Furies*, 121.

<sup>602</sup> Noxon, ‘How Humphrey Jennings Came to Film’, 20.

<sup>603</sup> McCracken, ‘Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business’, 599.

and, using the montage technique, retroactively imbued them with powerful significance. A similar process created *Experiment*: the group's attempts to realise cinematic effects in their individual works were met with varying levels of success, however, when approached holistically the magazine evokes a compelling sense of the cinema. Ultimately, the great irony of *Experiment* is that group's pursuit of the essential qualities of their age, to achieve in their work a sense of '1931ness,' was doomed to fail; for the success of such a venture can only be judged in retrospect. *Experiment*, then, is the quintessential little magazine in that it actively embodies the definition of objects "destined for ruin, failure, and defeat."<sup>604</sup>

*Experiment* provides unrivalled insight into a critical moment in British society and culture. Represented in the pages of the Cambridge magazine are the social attitudes that defined the transitional period between the 1920s and 1930s. We find, from the first issue, a deep concern with what has gone before; allusions to the Great War and a manifesto that seeks to unite those isolated from that event. This was a generation that was defined by the War in a way that was deeply destructive to their collective psychology. Four months after the first appearance of *Experiment* in November 1928, magazine contributor James Reeves published a short poem in *The Cambridge Review* entitled 'Lines for a Volume of War Poets':

Your brief songs sung, you rose and put off life,  
As a bright sword its scabbard, and are dust.  
And we, uncalled to danger and to strife,  
Within the scabbard's damp are left to rust.<sup>605</sup>

Reeves' lines demonstrates further the impact that the First World War and the myth of the 'lost generation' of 1914 had upon the *Experiment* generation. Many of the texts discussed throughout this thesis suggest that the young men of the interwar period desired to be 'tested,' to prove themselves to be 'men' as their fathers and brothers had done before them. Hynes has noted that "it is one of the peculiar burdens of the 'thirties generation that it moved into the shadow of the coming world war before the shadow of the past war had faded."<sup>606</sup> This is a further

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<sup>604</sup> McCracken, 'Cambridge Magazines and Unfinished Business', 599.

<sup>605</sup> J.M. Reeves, 'Lines for a Volume of War Poets,' *The Cambridge Review* (March 1 1929): 321.

<sup>606</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 38.

critical factor in our reception of *Experiment*. Although the idea of War permeates the pages of the magazine, there is a critical shift at the turn of the decade (*Experiment* 5 See: Chapter 4): as opposed to fixating their attentions on the 1914-18 conflict the *Experiment* group began to look towards the possibility of future conflict. From 1929, contributions to the student magazine became more explicitly political, expressing opinions on contemporary issues affecting the arts – such as censorship – and the failure of the government-led initiatives like the League of Nations. They also began at this juncture to publish the work of established authors whose work complemented their political outlook (see: Chapter Four). The *Experiment* group were in the process of becoming a fully-fledged generational movement that would come to be recognised as the politically motivated ‘Auden Generation.’

Ultimately, what this thesis offers is an alternative perspective on the Thirties generation. The work of Auden, Spender, Isherwood, *et al* has been the subject of extensive academic research. However, publications such as *The Auden Generation* only offer a singularly literary perspective on the interwar years. Furthermore, these publications are limited by restrictive timescales – looking only at the Thirties – and their solely political argumentation. The study of *Experiment* offers a more holistic approach to understanding the interwar generation. Beginning in November 1928, the magazine shared its inauguration with the tenth anniversary of Armistice Day, a critical moment of reflection for British society. *Experiment’s* insistence on interdisciplinarity also offers a multifaceted approach to the examination of cultural production during a period of unprecedented social and political upheaval in the United Kingdom.

What we discover through close analysis of the contents of *Experiment* is that key cultural determinants are present across multiple disciplines; themes and techniques are shared between mediums; and that, by avoiding a singularly defined political position, the group more effectively represented the contemporary *Weltanschauung*. *Experiment* represents a hitherto understudied moment in British culture which encompasses many arts, and offers unprecedented insight into the

early careers of some of the twentieth-century's most lauded artists, writers, and filmmakers.

## Abbreviations

**BBFC** British Board of Film Classification

**EMB** Empire Marketing Board

**GPO** General Post Office

**LNU** League of Nations Union

**LR** *La Révolution Surréaliste*

**TLS** *Times Literary Supplement*

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Illustrations



Fig. 1.1. Misha Black, 'Experiment', cover design, card, 1928.

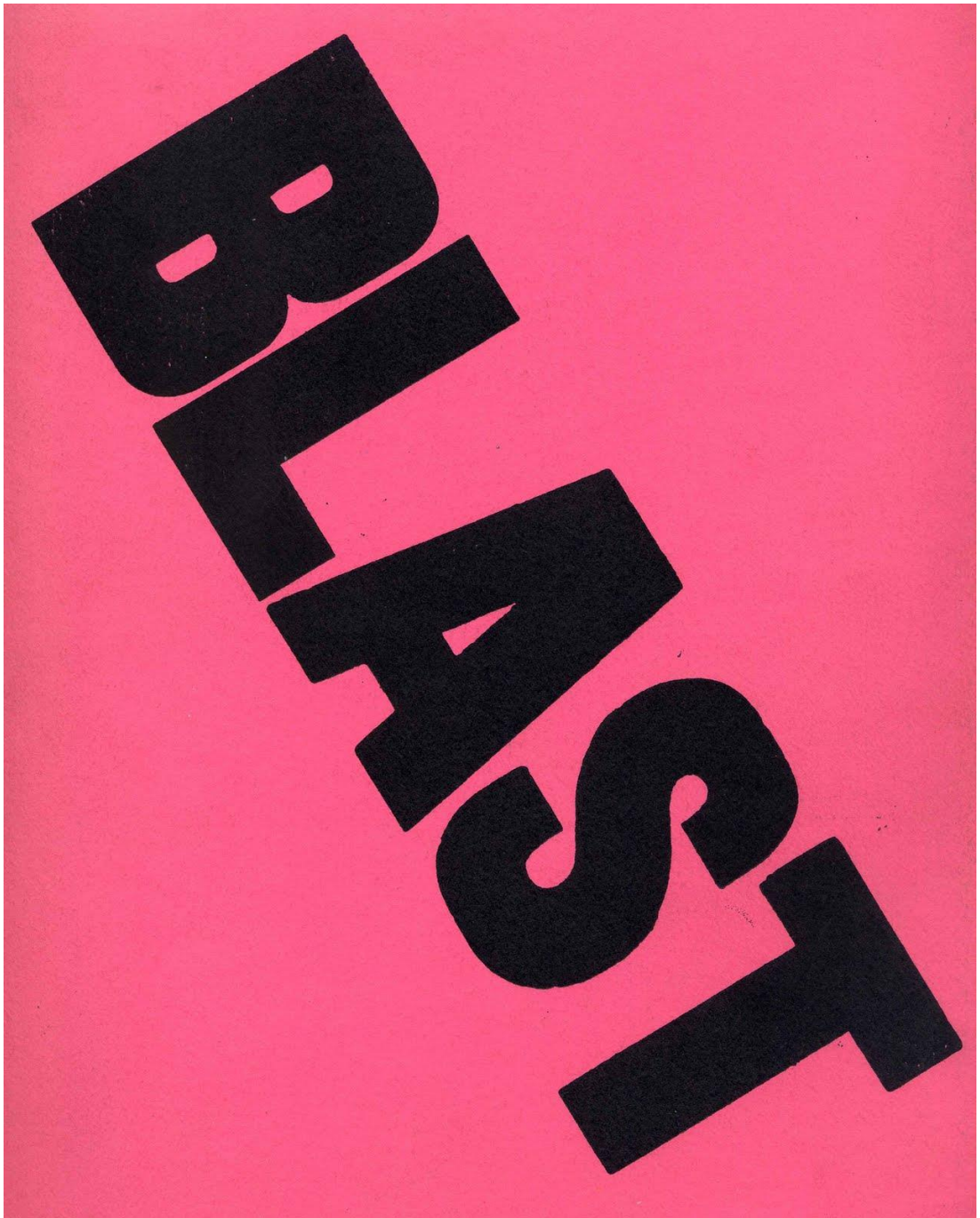
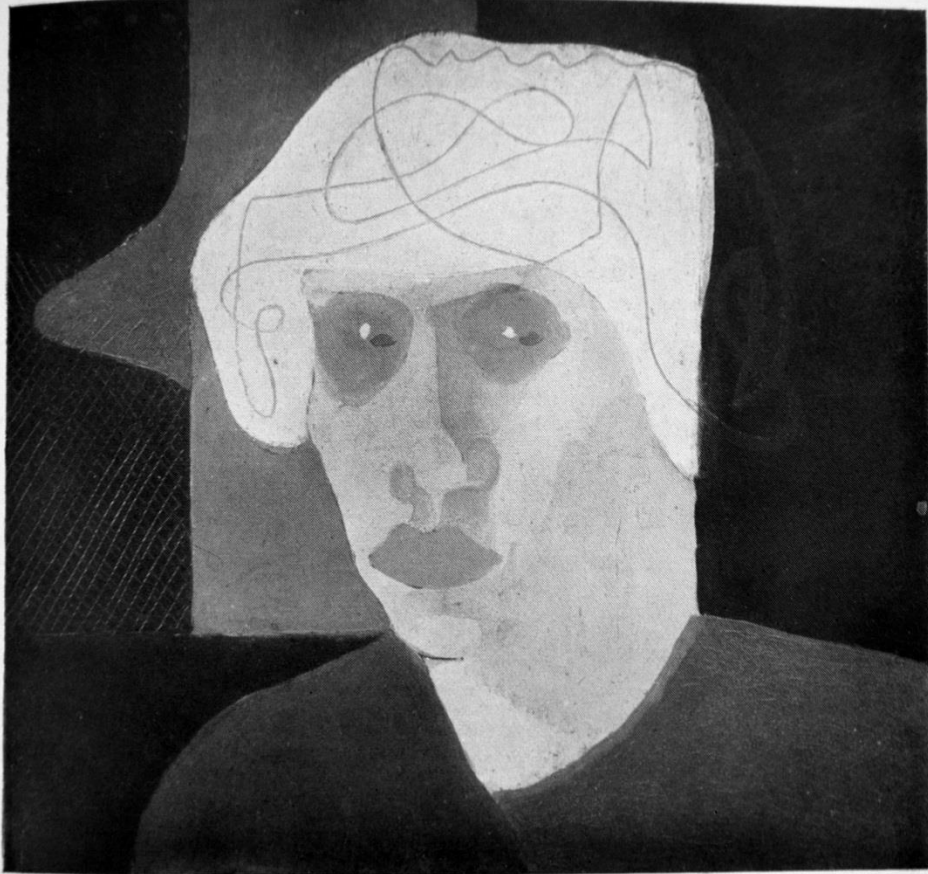


Fig. 1.2. Wyndham Lewis, 'BLAST', cover design, card, 1914.



Fig. 2.1. Max Ernst, *Pietà or Revolution by Night*, 1923, Oil on Canvas, 1162 x 889 mm, Tate Collection, London.



*Photo. Marc Vaux, Paris*

PORTRAIT

HENRI CARTIER BRESSON

Fig. 2.2. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Portrait*, 1929, medium unknown, dimensions unknown, lost. Published in *Experiment*, No.2, (February 1929).

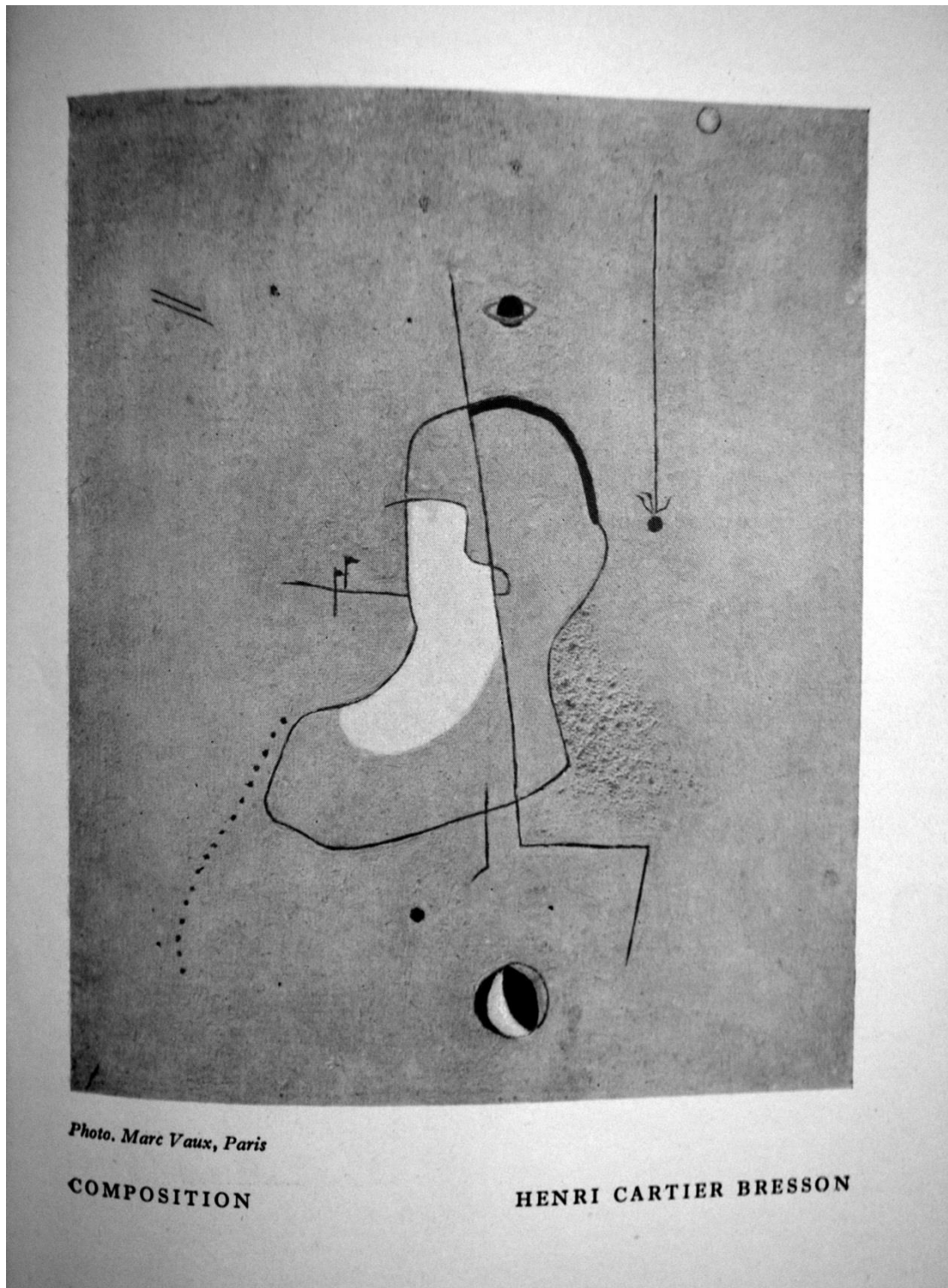


Fig. 2.3. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Composition*, 1929, medium unknown, dimensions unknown, lost. Published in *Experiment*, No.2, (February 1929).





Fig. 2.4. Joan Miró, *The Birth of the World*, 1925, Oil on canvas, 250.8 x 200 cm, MOMA Collection, New York.



Fig. 2.5. Max Ernst, *Men Shall Know Nothing Of This*, 1923, Oil on Canvas, 803 x 638 mm, Tate Collection, London.

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Fig. 2.6. Apollinaire, 'Tour Eiffel' in *Calligrammes: poèmes de la paix et de la guerre 1913-1916*, 1918.



Fig. 2.7. Man Ray, *L'Etoile de mer*, 1928, 35mm film, 15mins, black and white, silent.



Fig. 2.8. Man Ray, *L'Etoile de mer*, 1928, 35mm film, 15mins, black and white, silent.  
Published in *Experiment*, No.3, May 1929.

# THE CAMBRIDGE FILM GUILD

1929-30,

G. F. NOXON,  
Trinity College,  
President.

F. M. BAKER-SMITH,  
Queen's College,  
Secretary.

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND,

Hopes to present during the New Year

LES DEUX TIMIDES

and

LE CHAPEAU DE PAILLE D'ITALIE

both by RENE CLAIR from LABICHE.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

by JEAN EPSTEIN from POE.

EN RADE  
by CAVALCANTI

THE TRAGEDY OF THE STREET  
by PABST.

and other films of technical interest  
and artistic merit.

Applications for membership should be made during  
the first two weeks of term to the Secretary at  
Queen's College.

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THE CAMBRIDGE FILM GUILD.

Fig. 3.1. Advertisement for the Cambridge Film Guild. Published in *Experiment*, No.4, November 1929.

# POOL

is announced.

It has projects. Pool will mean, concerning books, new hope.

It has projects. Pool will mean, concerning cinematography, new beginning.

New always. Distinguished, and with a clear course.

BOOKS. FILMS.

..... encouragement.

Announced are

WHY DO THE LIKE IT? by E. L. Black. with a foreword by Dorothy Richardson. A fifteen year old boy has written this. His piercing "Why" is the last comment on Public School system. One sees the young keen intellect in constant rebellion against endless stupidities. Oddly, the beat of curious reluctance and fear toward life that one finds in the young and more sensitive types of adolescents, can be traced always with its cause — the cumulative effect of paltry injustices, crudities, brutalities. An absorbing and revealing document, boldly accurate.  
**On sale.**

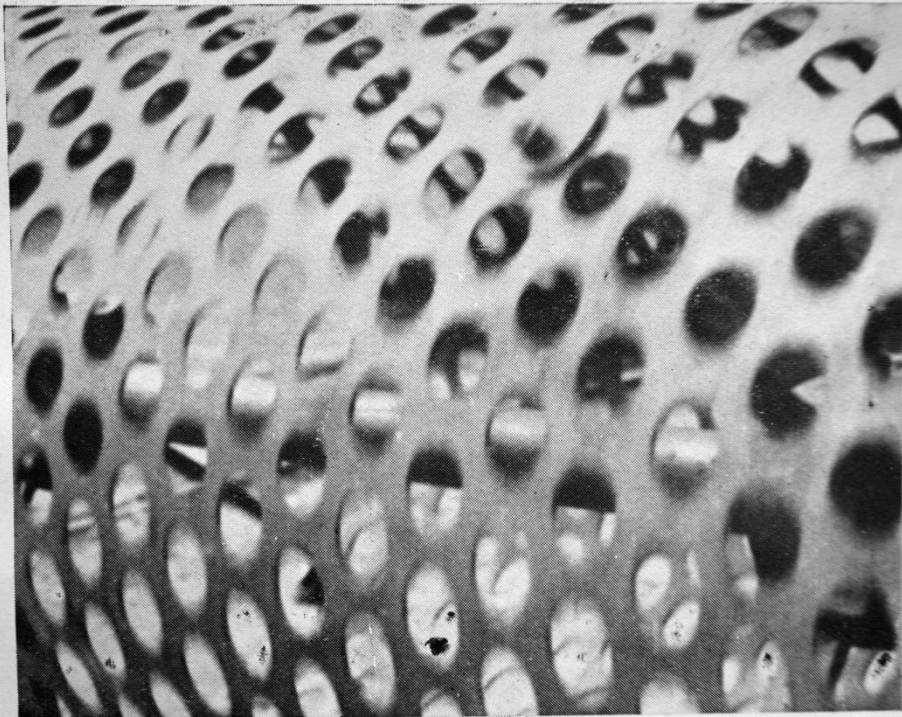
POOLREFLECTION. A novel by Kenneth Macpherson. H. D. writes "Has the ripe grape been frosted, or has the frozen ice lily been drenched as with Falernian? This is the problem that confronts us with our first breathless wonder at the clarid perception of this urbane poet. The lyric quality of Mr Macpherson hides, as it were, under a robe of very tangled worldliness. The robe however does not obstruct the free play of white limbs beneath it. Heavy with riotous colour, and at the same time chaste as some Olympian victor..... Phrase after phrase of penetrating psychic power..... The scientific and the lyric meet in a super-ecstasy that reduces to a 'magnesium ribbon flared out'. Superhuman effort toward parental appreciation leads to 'kick the young cub into the army.' Affection and hypercritical detachment tied in indissoluble love knots. Gorgon knots that must be severed with the casting away of the fretting physical encumbrance. The physical and spiritual writhe, unrelated yet indissectable. Laocoon."..... **ready shortly.**

And the first part of CLOSE UP, a monthly magazine to begin battle for film art. Beginning July. The first periodical to approach films from any angle but the commonplace. To encourage experimental workers, and amateurs. Will keep in touch with every country, and watch everything. Contributions on Japanese, Negro viewpoints and problems, etc. Some of the most interesting personages of the day will write. Price 5 fr. 25 cents. 1 shilling. Limited to 500 copies per month. *Will intending advertisers please enquire.*

Look for announcements. Write for particulars.

POOL. Riant Chateau. Territet. Suisse.

Fig. 3.2. Advertisement for POOL and *Close Up*. Published in *transition*, No.4, July 1927.



Courtesy of 'Close-Up'

Eugène Deslaw LA MARCHÉ DES MACHINES

Fig. 3.3. Eugène Deslaw, *The March of the Machines*, 35mm film, 5mins, black and white, silent. Published in *Experiment*, No.3, May 1929.

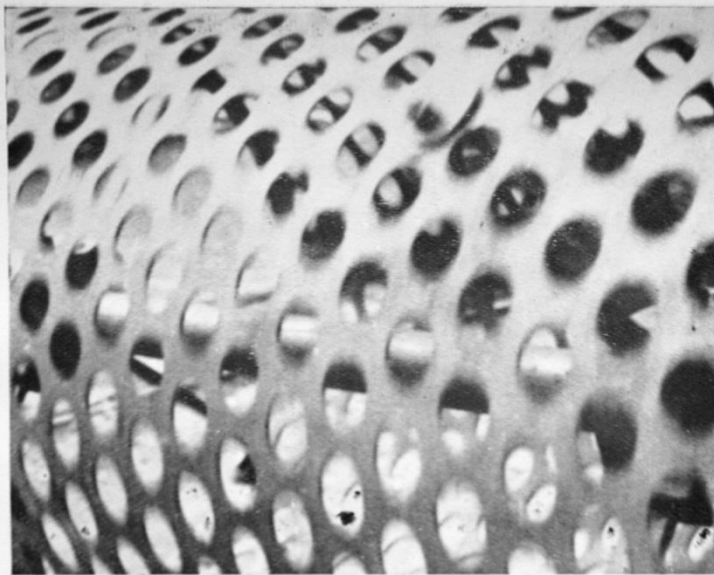


Courtesy of 'Close-Up'

Eisenstein

POTEMKIN

Fig. 3.4. Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925, 35mm film, 75mins, black and white, silent. Published in *Experiment*, No.3, May 1929.



Courtesy of 'Close-Up'

Eugène Deslaw

LA MARCHE DES MACHINES



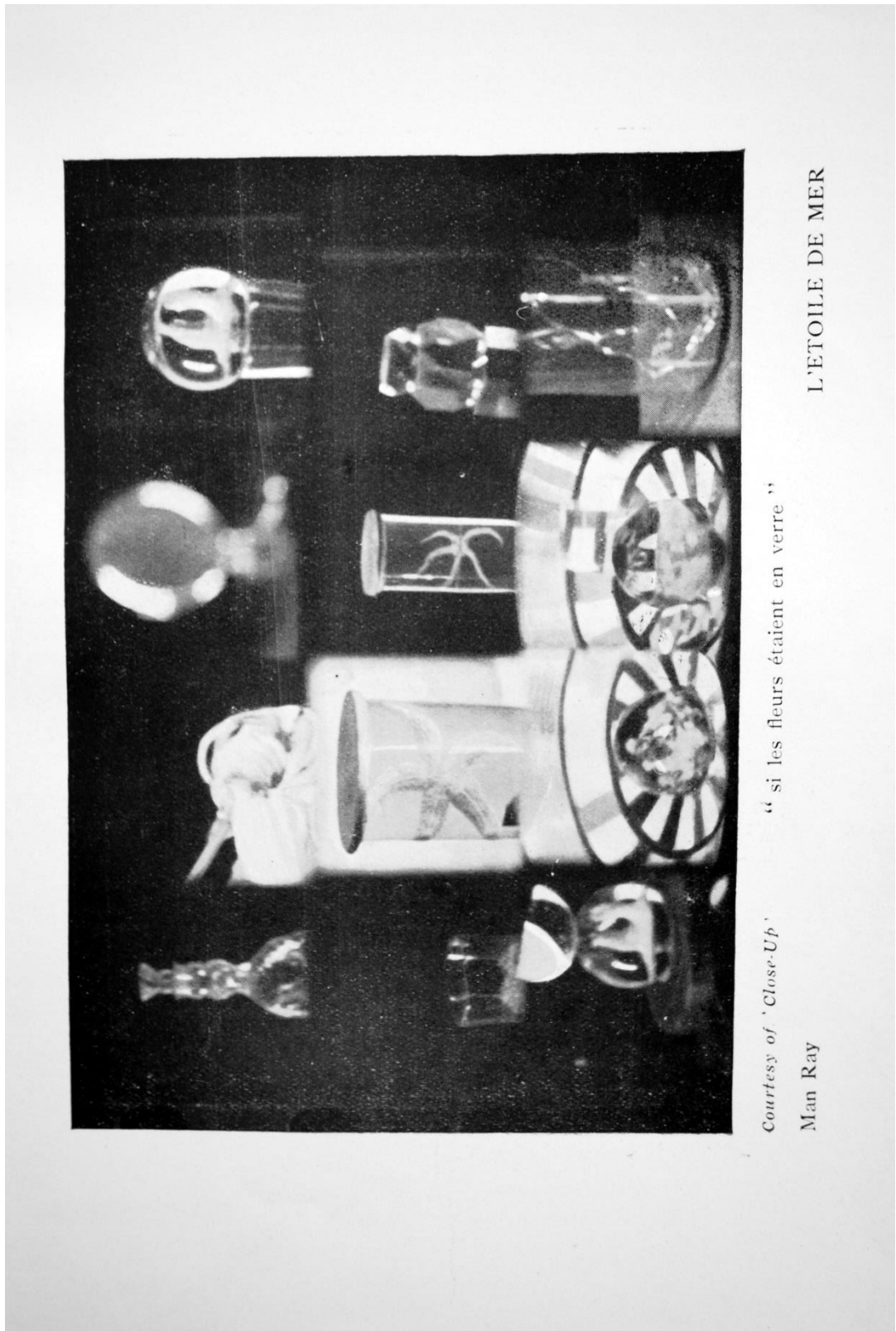
Courtesy of 'Close-Up'

Eisenstein

POTEMKIN

Fig. 3.5. Page Layout featuring Eugène Deslaw, *The March of the Machines* and Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin*, in *Experiment*, No.3, May 1929.





Courtesy of 'Close-Up'  
Man Ray

“ si les fleurs étaient en verre ”

L'ETOILE DE MER

Fig. 3.6. Page Layout featuring Man Ray, *L'Etoile de mer*. Published in *Experiment*, No.3, May 1929.



Courtesy of 'Close-Up'  
Francis Brugière

THE WAY

Fig. 3.7. Francis Bruguière, *The Way*, 1925, 35mm film, black and white, silent, unfinished, lost. Published in *Experiment*, No.3, May 1929.