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AND THE BIRTH OF ART NOUVEAU

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JOHN RUSKIN SUR LES FORMES NATURELLES ET L'ORNEMENTATION,
ET LA NAISSANCE DE L'ART NOUVEAU

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Note on Citation

All citations are relegated to footnotes. Citations from the writings of John Ruskin are given, in accordance with convention, with reference to the volume and page number of the Library Edition in 39 volumes:

E. T. Cook & A. Wedderburn (eds.), *The Works of John Ruskin*, London, George Allen, 1903-1912.

Therefore, '6.368' corresponds to volume 6, page 368 of this edition.

Citations from classical philosophers, such as Plato, Cicero, Locke, etc. or poets are also following the usual conventions, so that the reader can trace back relevant passages irrespective of particular editions.

Otherwise, citations follow a variant of the APA style, with author and date in italics, followed by volume (as the case may be) and page number. Thus, for example, '*Collingwood 1893*, I, p. 101', refers to volume 1, page 101 of the following entry in the bibliography:

Collingwood, W. G. (1893). *The Life and Work of John Ruskin*. 2 vols. London: Methuen.

Résumé

Cette thèse porte sur la théorie esthétique de John Ruskin et son influence sur les arts européens dans la deuxième moitié du 19^e siècle. Elle a pour but d'expliquer l'origine de la ligne « en coup de fouet » qui caractérise l'Art Nouveau, mais elle est aussi une recherche « généalogique » sur les multiples usages de lignes courbes dans l'art moderne, le but étant de démontrer dans les deux cas le rôle joué par l'esthétique de Ruskin. Au niveau méthodologique, l'approche privilégiée est inspirée des travaux de R. G. Collingwood et de Michael Baxandall. Il est aussi question de mettre en contexte l'œuvre de Ruskin et son impact au 19^e siècle en faisant appel au fait qu'il a préfiguré ce que nous appelons aujourd'hui l'anthropocène. Devant les ravages de l'industrialisation, il a voulu réformer la société britannique sur le modèle des guildes médiévales, en faisant revivre les arts traditionnels et en encourageant une éthique de la consommation et la protection de la nature. Dans son esthétique, présentée dans les chapitres 1 à 3, il avait d'abord renversé les canons de son époque, pour présenter les arts visuels comme une exploration des émotions ressenties au contact de la nature, ces émotions n'étant pas projetées sur celle-ci, mais le résultat de l'appréhension d'un ou des « aspects » de celle-ci. Dans cette 'Theoria', qu'il développera en une « phénoménologie », un « lien moral » avec la nature est établi, qui se retrouve au cœur du projet de réforme sociale, présenté au chapitre 4. Dans celui-ci, est aussi présenté l'impact de Ruskin sur la société britannique à travers entre autres son enseignement, menant à la création de nombreuses guildes et au mouvement des Arts and Crafts.

Ruskin voyait dans l'étude de la nature le moyen pour abstraire les lignes courbes qui seraient utilisées dans l'ornementation, et le chapitre 4 se conclut sur une étude de l'évolution de la ligne courbe de William Morris à A. H. Mackmurdo et d'autres tels que C. R. Ashbee et C. F. A. Voysey, menant aux portes de l'Art Nouveau. Le chapitre 6 contient une étude de la transmission des idées esthétiques et sociales de Ruskin et Morris et de ces lignes courbes aux Belges, Olivier-Georges Destrée, Georges Lemmen, Henry Van de Velde, Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, Paul Hankar et Victor Horta. Ce sont ces artistes qui accentuèrent la courbe pour produire celles qui devinrent emblématiques de l'Art Nouveau. On est en droit de se demander pourquoi les Britanniques, tels que Walter Crane, Lewis F. Day ou C. R. Ashbee rejetèrent avec véhémence ces nouveaux développements lorsqu'ils en prirent connaissance, ce qui est étudié dans la deuxième partie du chapitre 6. Il y a pourtant des développements parallèles de la courbe, par exemple chez Aubrey Beardsley, Margaret Macdonald & Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Mary Seton Watts et Archibald Knox. Pour mieux comprendre la transmission aux milieux artistiques belges et la réception de l'Art Nouveau en Grande-Bretagne, le chapitre 6 est précédé d'un chapitre où la construction sociale du concept d'Art Nouveau est analysée en détails.

Mots-clés : Ruskin, Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, abstraction, ornementation, ligne.

Summary

This thesis is about John Ruskin's aesthetic theory and its influence on European art in the latter half of the 19th century. It is intended to give a narrative of the origin of the 'whiplash', which is characteristic of Art Nouveau, but it also serves as a 'genealogy' of the multiple usages of curved lines in 20th-century modern art, trying to demonstrate the role Ruskin's aesthetics played in both respects. The methodological approach is inspired by the works by R. G. Collingwood and Michael Baxandall. Ruskin's work and his impact on the 19th century are contextualised with emphasis on the fact that Ruskin prefigured what we now call the 'Anthropocene'. Facing the social and environmental ravages brought about by industrialisation, he wanted to reform British society on the basis of medieval guilds, reviving traditional arts as well as encouraging ethical consumption and protection of nature. In his aesthetics, presented in the chapters 1 to 3, Ruskin began by overturning the conventions of his time, in order to present visual arts as an exploration of emotions felt in contact with nature. These emotions are not projected onto nature but are the result of the apprehension of one or some of its 'aspects'. He developed this 'Theoria' in a 'phenomenology', within which a 'moral link' with nature is established, which he further located at the heart of his social reform project, as presented in chapter 4. In the same chapter, Ruskin's impact on British society is also presented through his teaching, leading to the creation of many guilds and the Arts and Crafts movement.

Ruskin saw the study of nature as the source from which to abstract the very lines that are to be used in ornamentation, and chapter 4 concludes with a study of the evolution of the curved line from William Morris to A. H. Mackmurdo and others such as C. R. Ashbee and C. F. A. Voysey, who prefigured Art Nouveau. Chapter 6 provides a study of the transmission, *via* the writings of Olivier-George Destrée, of the aesthetic and social ideas of Ruskin and Morris as well as these new curved lines to Belgians artists: Georges Lemmen, Henry Van de Velde, Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, Paul Hankar and Victor Horta, who emphasized in their work curved lines – introducing the 'whiplash' – that became emblematic of Art Nouveau. In the second part of chapter 6, the motivations for the vehement rejection these new developments by British artists such as Walter Crane, Lewis F. Day or C. R. Ashbee are explored, as are parallel development of the line in Britain, in the works of Aubrey Beardsley, Margaret Macdonald & Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Mary Seton Watts and Archibald Knox. In order to achieve a clearer understanding of the transmission to the Belgian art scene and the later controversial reception of Art Nouveau in Britain, these developments are preceded in chapter 5 by a detailed analysis of the social construction of the concept of Art Nouveau.

Keywords: Ruskin, Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, abstraction, ornamentation, line.

*For a stone, when it is examined, will be
found a mountain in miniature.*

John Ruskin

1. Retrieving Ruskin¹

... Line is all-important. Let the designer, therefore, lean upon the staff of line, - line determinative, line emphatic, line delicate, line expressive, line controlling and uniting. It cannot lead him wrong; it will never deceive him.

Walter Crane, *The Claims of Decorative Art*

1.1. The Line and Ruskin's Eye

This thesis is about the history of an aesthetic idea, which led to extensive use of curved lines derived from the study of nature in late 19th century European arts.² More precisely, it is a study of John Ruskin's aesthetic theory of 'abstract lines' derived from 'natural shapes' and its influence on applied arts, leading *via* William Morris and the Arts & Crafts to the rise of Art Nouveau and its well-known curved line, often misleadingly called the 'whiplash' (for a characteristic example, see Plate # 1.1).³

Theorizing the use of curved lines is at least as old as art criticism itself. During the Renaissance, one spoke of '*figura serpentinata*' or 'serpentine line'. In contrast to straight lines, the latter was used in composition as a *contrapposto* (counterpose), along with other techniques such as *chiaroscuro*.⁴ Among characteristic illustrations of it, one finds Leonardo's lost *Leda and the Swan* (Plate # 1.2) – with Leda's body forming an S-shaped curve – *Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (Plate # 1.3) and *Laocoön* (Plate # 1.4). Although the *figura serpentinata* had already declined by the 16th century, there are of course numerous examples up to the 19th century, most notably in the paintings of Ingres, such as *Grande odalisque* (Plate # 1.5),⁵ and further theoretical discussions

¹ The idea of 'retrieval' is taken from *Wollheim 1980*, chapter iv, which is very close to the ideas of Michael Baxandall introduced in section 1.4 below.

² When making points of a more general nature, I shall often treat the three fields indiscriminately, referring to them simply as 'art'.

³ The origin of the expression 'whiplash' will be discussed below in section 5.2.

⁴ *Summers 1972*, pp. 273-275 & 277, *Summers 1977*, p. 339.

⁵ For a discussion of the serpentine line in Ingres, see *Ockman 1995*.

of it up to the 18th century, especially in chapter X of *The Analysis of Beauty*, where Hogarth calls it the “line of grace”.⁶ My aim here is not to research these origins, but to focus on more proximate roots of late 19th-century uses of the curved line. My claim is that it was Ruskin’s ideas about the study of nature and in particular his injunction ‘Truth to Nature’, that gave the impetus to the widespread use of curved line as derived from ‘natural shapes’. This little-known, albeit important, chapter in the history of art will form the central plotline of the following narrative, where the influence of Ruskin will be shown to extend, through William Morris and the Arts & Crafts, to the rise of Art Nouveau.

The choice of my topic had two motives. My second has to do with curved lines as a formal element in Modern art, and will be discussed in the next section. The first began as a reaction against the sort of narrative one finds, for example, in this guide to Art Nouveau in Paris, which opens with these words:

Baron Haussmann, who transformed the urban landscape of Paris, also had a great influence on the city’s architecture. The buildings erected along these wide new avenues were made of dressed stone, mostly according to the same model. Further decrees had to be issued, authorising more prominent outcroppings and modifying the rules governing building profiles, so that young architects could give free rein to their creativity.

So it was that Art Nouveau was born, and over a period of twenty years, it abandoned the monotony of classical geometry and ushered in a radical change in the aesthetic function of buildings. [...]

In fact, if Paris was at the centre of this movement, it was more the result of its status as the world capital of the arts and culture than any superiority on the part of French architects and artists. The movement was meanwhile propagating itself in Belgium with Victor Horta, as well as in Vienna, Barcelona, and above all, Nancy in Eastern France.⁷

⁶ Hogarth 1997, p. 50.

⁷ Casevecchie 2009, pp.4-5.

The main figure of Parisian Art Nouveau, Hector Guimard was inspired by Victor Horta in Brussels and not vice-versa,⁸ and Art Nouveau did not originate in France, only to spread afterwards across Europe. In his introduction to the catalogue of the landmark exhibition *Les sources du XX^e siècle. Les arts en Europe de 1884 à 1914* at the Musée National d'Art Moderne (Paris) in 1960, which signaled the end of the neglect of that period and the beginning of this rediscovery, Jean Cassou was nearer the mark when he claimed that "L'Art Nouveau a pris naissance en Angleterre".⁹ I will argue below that it originated in Belgium, and had roots in British Arts and Crafts.

Interestingly, narratives such as this leave unexplained the reasons why the typically Art Nouveau 'whiplash' would have been developed and why it would have become suddenly so popular. An appeal to 'fashion' hardly would have any explanatory value. In this respect, when reading proper introductions to Art Nouveau, one often encounters brief mentions of John Ruskin and William Morris as formative influences. But such mentions are hardly ever accompanied by any detailed explanations, as to which aspects of their work were important, and why they were so.

There were of course important studies that provided more information the origins of Art Nouveau, such as Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of Modern Design. From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (1936), whose first chapters are on Ruskin and Morris,¹⁰ Stephen Tschudi Madsen's *Sources of Art-Nouveau* (1956), with a section on 'English Proto-Art Nouveau',¹¹ Robert Schmutzler's *Art Nouveau* (1962) with opening chapters on the origins and early Art Nouveau from Blake to Morris and Rossetti,¹² or Roger-Henri Guerrand's *L'Art nouveau en Europe* (1969), with a chapter on 'La revolution

⁸ The true story of Guimard visiting Brussels to see Horta's *Hôtel Tassel* is told in *Goslar 2012*, p. 105.

⁹ *Cassou 1960*, p. xlvii.

¹⁰ *Pevsner 2005*, chapters 1-2.

¹¹ *Madsen 1956*, pp. 148-163.

¹² *Schmutzler 1962*, pp. 35-124.

décorative des Préraphaélites'.¹³ These formed the point of departure of my research,¹⁴ but my wish was to dig deeper and to try and find out what contemporaries of Ruskin and Morris took from them and why.

To put it bluntly, as opposed to merely plotting the emergence of the Art Nouveau 'whiplash', I wanted to understand why so many late 19th-century European artists thought it so important to focus on lines abstracted from nature in the first place, and my research led me to realize that Ruskin had simply taught (personally, at art school or through his writings) generations of artists, from the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts & Crafts at home, to Art Nouveau in Belgium, how to see – he had literally formed their eye, how they look at something. Perhaps one could for that reason speak of 'Ruskin's eye'.¹⁵ This is, in a nutshell, the argument of this thesis. The task ahead thus required that I try and re-read Ruskin as his contemporaries saw him, and understand what ideals he might have expressed that struck them as valuable, while trying to show how they sought to implement these ideals in their own art, leading to the Art Nouveau 'whiplash'.¹⁶

In chapter 2 and 3, I propose an interpretation of Ruskin's aesthetics, beginning with his overturning the aesthetic canons of Joshua Reynolds, built around some of its

¹³ Guerrand 2009, chapter ii.

¹⁴ See also Duncan 1994, Greenhalgh 2000.

¹⁵ The expressions 'Victorian eye' (Casteras et al. 1993) and 'Victorian visual culture' (Smith 2006) have already been used to characterize late 19th-century visual arts. Although the Victorian 'eye' and 'visual culture' were formed partly through the fundamental influence of Ruskin, whose life spans the Victorian era, it would not fit here because the expression 'Victorian' specifically refers to a particular era of British history, while my thesis covers non-British artists. One would also run the risk of confusing aspects of the 'visual' in the Victorian era with Ruskin's legacy. Moreover, the Victorian era is still very largely perceived in negative terms, for no other reason than a perpetuation of erstwhile prejudices, and it is perhaps inappropriate to tie Ruskin too closely to it, if only for this pragmatic reason.

¹⁶ I am not claiming, however, that the following provides an exhaustive explanation of the whole phenomena of Art Nouveau, it is only a study of the curved line, which is one of its formal elements, albeit one of central importance, thus a study of one of its sources. It is clear that *japonisme* also played an incipient role too, the study of which would greatly extend the scope and length of this thesis, if not require another one altogether. This topic was studied earlier on in Lancaster 1952 and Madsen 1956, pp. 188-206. For a recent study, see Takagi 2002.

central planks, the concepts of ‘pathetic fallacy’ and ‘*Theoria*’, and leading both to his influence on early Pre-Raphaelite landscape painting and to what I call in chapter 3 his ‘phenomenology’. The heart of the matter seems to be this: the experience of nature, say, when looking the scenery standing atop a mountain, is rich in emotions. Ruskin saw art as a medium for the exploration of these emotions: learn how to draw, then focus on what draws your attention in the scenery and try and express it. Emotions one feels are not to be understood as originating in the spectator and then projected on the scenery, but rather as originating in the scenery itself, so that exploration of one’s feelings are an exploration of aspects of the scenery itself. Ruskin’s aesthetics had a strong religious dimension, because he saw that in art one establishes a ‘moral link’ with nature,¹⁷ as given by God for human to live in and to enjoy their lives in contact with it.¹⁸

Chapter 3 also contains developments about Ruskin on geology (section 3.3) and on photography (section 3.4) that further support and extend this interpretation. In chapter 4, I conclude the overview of Ruskin’s ideals, presenting some of his key ideas about architecture and ornamentation, and turn to his endeavours to disseminate his aesthetic ideals through his teaching and the Guild of St George. His central idea with respect to ornamentation is that one should abstract lines from nature – the result of the exploration of one’s emotions – and use them in ornamentation. Ruskin’s art criticism and teaching were characterized by an evangelical intention, namely to improve the life of ordinary people – to ‘elevate’ them morally and to improve their economic situation. Ruskin turned in the 1850s towards social reform and proposed to revive the medieval model of the stonemason, owner of his means of production but also expressing himself

¹⁷ On the multifarious use of the adjective ‘moral’ in Ruskin, see *Ladd 1932*, part II, and *Unrau 1971*. In this context, it is an instance of the third sense distinguished by Unrau, which is linked with the notion of ‘*Theoria*’ presented in section 2.3. This point is central to Peter Fuller’s *Theoria*, see *Fuller 1988*, p. 45.

¹⁸ I shall not make much of this in what follows, but it goes without saying that it is not a view that presupposes a form of ‘theism’ in an essential way: one could reformulate it without reference to God.

artistically in his work, and organised socially in guilds. This idea struck Morris and many contemporaries, who saw it as the solution to the social ills caused by the advent of machine production (of cheap wares with poor design) and industrialisation, which brought about miserable conditions for the working classes, and whose environmental effects on the generation of Ruskin, raised in a very largely unspoiled land, must have been dramatic.

These social-political ideas, amplified by the advocacy of Morris, played a role which is difficult to underestimate as the conduit that brought people to Ruskin's own aesthetic ideals. This is because Ruskin's aesthetics lies at the heart of this proposed revival of the medieval model of the stonemason: in his teachings and pedagogical views, Ruskin put learning to draw from nature at the centre, so that a properly trained designer should be someone who is able of artistic interaction with nature, this interaction furnishing them with the abstract lines for ornamentation. Thus, the 'moral link' remains preserved at the very centre of the social reform.

As we shall see in chapter 4, it is thus that Ruskin's aesthetic ideals were transmitted to the generation of British artists that organized themselves in guilds, some of them founding the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1887, which would become emblematic of this larger movement. The 'Arts and Crafts movement' very quickly got an international audience, and many artists on the Continent emulated it: it thus spread further Ruskin's ideas across the Channel, and created the conditions for the rise of Art Nouveau. In section 4.4, I shall examine aesthetic developments of the line leading to the work that influenced the creators of Art Nouveau in Belgium, and in section 6.1 a careful plot the influence of Ruskin, Morris and others on the Belgian artists responsible for the Art Nouveau 'whiplash'. One intriguing question arising from the above is, given that the essential impulse appears to have come from British artists: Why is there no or so little Art Nouveau in Britain itself? Chapter 5 provides an extended conceptual analysis, laying bare problems linked with the artificiality of the concept of 'Art Nouveau' as a social construction. This analysis allows both for a better

explanation of the evolution of the line in Belgium, and a better answer to this question, once the ‘whiplash’ became publicized in Britain. As I shall argue, it was because they remain closer to Ruskin that Arts and Crafts artists involved in this debate rejected Art Nouveau.

1.2. Modernism, Straight and Curved Lines

A second motivation for this thesis was the wish to study the ‘genealogy’¹⁹ of curved lines in Modern Art. The advent of ‘Modernism’²⁰ at the beginning of the 20th century meant the early and rapid demise of Art Nouveau, with the disappearance of ornamentation. One may simply recall here the afterword to Adolf Loos’ provocative essay ‘Ornament and Crime’: “It demonstrates to us today that, at the time when *art nouveau* was flourishing, Adolf Loos was perhaps the only person who was clear about what is *modern*”.²¹ One might begin to wonder if the central topic of this thesis is historical in the sense that it also has little relevance for our understanding of art in the past century. I do not wish to argue against this point in a systematic manner, but some remarks are nevertheless in order at the outset.

The fact is, simply, that basic opposition between ‘straight’ and ‘curved’ lines is omnipresent throughout 20th-century European art, and the advent of abstract art certainly did not mean that inspiration from ‘natural shapes’ disappeared altogether. It suffices that one thinks, for example, of early Modernist sculpture, with Hans Arp,

¹⁹ This term was borrowed from Nietzsche by Michel Foucault, to foster the idea that the thoughts he studied were a contingent result of history, as opposed to the outcome of some rationally inevitable trend. This approach was first introduced in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977).

²⁰ I use as a working definition that of Lunn 1982, pp. 34-37, reprised in Wallace 2011, p. 15.

²¹ Loos 1998, p. 175. Written in 1908, this essay was not published in the original German until 1929, when the afterword was added.

Constantin Brancusi, Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth to realize this, or even the theoretical accounts of curved lines in Kandinsky's writings.²²

Such multifarious Modernist uses of curved lines, which also included those within surrealist paintings, began to attract attention in the 1930s, and Geoffrey Grigson coined in 1935 the expression 'biomorphic' to cover them.²³ Grigson actually divided abstract art in two kinds: "Abstractions are of two kinds, geometric, the abstractions which lead to the inevitable death; and biomorphic. The biomorphic abstractions are the beginning of the next central phase in the progress of art".²⁴ He also used the expression 'organic': "the half-abstract and organic art the art of life and spirit or spirit through life, and the properly abstract art or art of an ideal death".²⁵

Grigson's distinction between 'geometric' and 'biomorphic' was taken over and re-wrought by Alfred Barr in 1936, for the catalogue of an influential exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), *Cubism and Abstract Art*. Barr introduced his contrast with a memorable line: "The shape of the square confronts the silhouette of the amoeba". He too suggested that there are two main currents in abstract art, "emerging from Impressionism":

The first and more important current [...] may be described as intellectual, structural, architectonic, geometrical, rectilinear and classical in its austerity and dependence on logic and calculation. The second – and, until recently, secondary – current [...] by contrast with the first, is intuitional and emotional rather than intellectual; organic or biomorphic rather than geometrical in its forms; curvilinear rather than rectilinear, decorative

²² I am thinking here primarily of the discussion of the 'wavy line' in *Point and Line to Plane*. See Kandinsky 1982, II, 602-617.

²³ Grigson 1935, p. 93. Actually, Grigson wrote that he took the expression from an anthropologist's accounts of designs on Azilian pebbles, but did not provide a source. The only anthropologist he mentioned in his paper did not use the word, one finds it in the Cambridge anthropologist, A. C. Haddon. For this and a detailed study of the origins of the expression 'biomorphism', see Mundy 2011.

²⁴ Grigson 1935b, p. 8.

²⁵ Grigson 1935, pp. 75-76.

rather than structural, and romantic rather than classical in its exaltation of the mystical, the spontaneous and the irrational.²⁶

It should also go without saying that Barr's claim that both 'geometric' and 'biomorphic' traditions emerged from Impressionism is contradicted by my claim that emphasis on 'abstract lines' harks back to Ruskin and largely predates Impressionism. Barr's association of an "exaltation of the mystical, the spontaneous and the irrational" with use of curved line is probably to be explained by the fact that he had in mind Surrealism and an artificial contrast between dependence on "logic and calculation" and dependence on intuition and emotion. It also seems inappropriate, although there seems to be a grain of truth, inasmuch as it relates emotions to uses of curved lines derived from nature – this is indeed rather 'Ruskinian'.

The notion of 'biomorphism' suffered an eclipse until it was rediscovered by Laurence Alloway and William Rubin (who was chief curator at MoMA) in the 1960s.²⁷ Rubin had this to say, undermining claims that there are two currents in abstract art:

Although biomorphism opened the way to a new vocabulary of forms, it did not in itself constitute a style (in the sense that Impressionism and Cubism did). Rather it provided constituent shapes for paintings *in a*

²⁶ Barr 1936, p. 19. It is interesting to note here the association of the curve with the 'irrational', given that Nikolaus Pevsner co-edited in the 1970s, thus at a time of when it was experiencing a 'revival', a book on Art Nouveau across Europe under the title *The Anti-Rationalists* (Richards & Pevsner 1973). Pevsner saw both Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau as "to a large degree the same" being "Transitional" between Historicism and the Modern Movement" (Pevsner 2005, p. 90) and there seem to be nothing more to the contrast he uses between 'irrationalism' and the 'rationalism' of the Modern movement than the expression of a Modernist 'prejudice'. The use of the word 'rationalist' in conjunction with Modernist architecture may come from Choisy and Viollet-le-Duc, whose 'rationalism' was transmitted to the Modernist Garnier and Perret, whom Pevsner admired. At all events, I do not mean to use here the term 'prejudice' as pejorative. It is not as if historians can entirely free themselves from their own prejudices – this point is also made in Baxandall 1979, p. 463 – but the essential lesson from Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'hermeneutics' remains, that interpretation remains possible, only that it requires that one must learn to recognize one's prejudices in order to neutralise them as much as possible. See 'Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience' in Gadamer 1999, pp. 265-379. Unacknowledged, they would distort one's interpretation, thus only by becoming aware of one's own prejudices is one in a better position to understand the past.

²⁷ Alloway 1965 and Rubin 1966.

variety of styles and it did not determine or generate any new comprehensive principle of design or distribution of the total surface – or of the illusion of space – in pictures.²⁸

Both Alloway and Rubin saw biomorphism as linked to surrealism rather than abstraction, as Grigson and Barr also believed. A movement such as ‘optical’ or ‘retinal’ art, pushing to the limit the claim the experience of a painting should be purely visual,²⁹ and devoid of any literary or historical meaning, shows that biomorphic lines remained linked to abstraction. Optical art is limited to a composition of coloured surfaces,³⁰ that are often bounded by straight lines, in some of the key and better-known figures of these movement, such as Josef Albers or Bridget Riley, so much so that one might be excused for not noticing that here too there was also uses of curved lines, for example in the work of Lorser Feitelson (Plate # 1.6). Both tendencies are found in the 1965 exhibition *The Responsive Eye* at the MoMA, which is often seen as having marked the birth of ‘optical art’.³¹ In Quebec, the same contrast occurred within the movement known as ‘*les plasticiens*’, for example in paintings of Guido Molinari (Plates # 1.7) – whose work was included in the exhibition *The Responsive Eye* – and Yves Gaucher for the straight line (Plates # 1.8) and Fernand Leduc (Plate # 1.9) and others, such as the lesser-known Gilbert Marion (Plate # 1.10) for curved lines. In such cases, Rubin’s comment above, about biomorphism providing ‘constituent shapes’ seems right.

²⁸ Rubin 1966, p. 52.

²⁹ Albers’ insistence, for example in his contribution to the *Yale Scientific Magazine* (Albers 1965), to locate the *experience* of the work of art at the level of the retina and its effect on the spectator, is rather interesting on its own right, since it makes the role of the spectator essential: the work of art is not the painted canvass alone, it occurs when someone is perceiving it or in terms of the remarks at the end of this chapter: it is in the experience of it. In this sense, optical art is philosophically very interesting but it is also Modernist, as it attracts attention on this very point, and thus fits under ‘reflexivity’, which is the first heading of ‘Modernist art’ in Lunn 1982, p. 34 and Wallace 2011, p. 15.

³⁰ This sort of preoccupation was rejected by Rosalind Krauss in ‘Grids’, Krauss 1985, pp. 9-22.

³¹ Seitz 1965. The young film-maker Brian de Palma shot a 26 min. film about this exhibition, mostly during the opening, that can be viewed at: http://ubu.com/film/depalma_responsive.html

I discussed only painting and sculpture so far, but similar comments can be made concerning Modern design, where curved lines are omnipresent. It suffices that one thinks of well-known examples such as Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Chair or of the designs of Ettore Sottsass – himself an admirer of the '*stile Liberty*', as Art Nouveau is called in Italy – Alvar Aalto, Isamu Noguchi, Philippe Starck, Terence Conran, etc. The expression 'organic design' is often used to designate a short-lived flourishing of the curved line in the 1930s and 1940s, of which Carlo Mollino's creations are characteristic examples (Plate # 1.11).³² Likewise, in architecture, starting with Henry Van de Velde himself (Plate # 1.12), and even with the most Modernist of architects, such as Pier Luigi Nervi (Plate # 1.13) or Kenzo Tange. A study of Sigfried Giedion's 1941 classic volume *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*³³ would certainly show how curved lines, that were ornamental and not structural in Art Nouveau, disappeared at first with ornamentation, only to reappear as structural. There is also a well-established trend in 'organic' or 'biomorphic' architecture.³⁴

My aim is not to 'reactivate' the concept of 'biomorphism' as such. As a matter of fact, it seems to me to embody with the radical 'bio-' the wrong sort of contrast between 'inanimate' and 'living' objects. This contrast does not square well with the contrast between straight and curved lines, given that the curved lines also exist outside of the realm of the living, for example, in geological formations or even in the shape rocks such as those found on shores, in rivers or moraines, examples of which will be discussed throughout this thesis, since they are a key to Ruskin's aesthetic ideas.³⁵ He

³² See, for example, Irene de Guttry's chapter, 'Les nouvelles formes du design organique' in the catalogue of the exhibition on *Art Nouveau Revival* at the Musée d'Orsay, in *Thiébaud 2009*, pp. 87-104.

³³ *Giedion 2008*.

³⁴ See, for example, *Pearson 2001*, *Feuerstein 2002*, *Gans & Kuz 2003*, *Hess 2006*.

³⁵ This is the reason why it seemed preferable to speak in a more neutral way of 'natural shapes' in the title of this thesis.

provided himself a very good example with his study *Gneiss Rock. Glenfinlas* (Plate # 1.14).

Given such omnipresent uses of curved lines in 20th-century art, one may ask: are there reasons for choosing them over straight lines or is this a mere matter of taste concerning ‘constituent shapes’? This thesis is also meant as a contribution to an answer to this larger question, as it seems that emphasis on natural shapes and curved lines forms part of Ruskin’s legacy.³⁶

*

Modernism poses also a serious challenge to our ability to retrieve Ruskin, or any of the protagonists of this thesis for that matter since, from the Pre-Raphaelites to Art Nouveau, they all suffered an eclipse in their reputation, and lost their ‘writeaboutability’, to use an expression attributed to Lytton Strachey,³⁷ in the first decades of the 20th century. Although it was to experience periodical ‘revivals’ throughout the 20th century,³⁸ Art Nouveau never recovered from its decline just before the Great War – its houses, left unprotected, were razed until the 1970s –³⁹ while Pre-Raphaelitism was not included in the Modernist canon. Already in 1913, Clive Bell wrote that “The Pre-Raffaelite [*sic*] method is at best symbolism, at worse pure silliness”.⁴⁰ Clement Greenberg famously decreed, by-passing the Pre-Raphaelites, that Manet and the Impressionists stand at the origin of Modernism, because Manet

³⁶ Oliver Botar reconstructed a tradition of ‘biocentrism’ around the philosophies of Nietzsche, Bergson, James, Simmel and others (*Botar 2011*). It seems to me, however, that Ruskin’s aesthetics might be a more plausible source for uses of curved lines derived from natural shapes in 20th century abstract art.

³⁷ I have not been able to trace the origin of this expression.

³⁸ The exhibition *Art Nouveau Revival* at the Musée d’Orsay in 2009 traces back the stages of this revival, around the dates 1933, 1966 and 1974. See the catalogue, *Thiébaud 2009*.

³⁹ For example, Hector Guimard’s *Castel Henriette* in Sèvres was demolished in 1969. Werner Adriaensen pointed out to me (private conversation), that conservation efforts in Brussels began only in the 1970s. I found out at the CCA trace of the fact that, as late as 1989, part of a house built by Paul Hankar was demolished.

⁴⁰ *Bell 1914*, p. 186.

was the first to attract attention to the two-dimensionality of the canvass.⁴¹ This is part of the Modernist idea that the artwork is “to draw attention to its own constituent materials and to the issues or problems raised in the processes of its own construction”.⁴² Greenberg was quite explicit:⁴³

The Pre-Raphaelites, too, had wanted to do brighter pictures, but were unwilling to accept flatness, and so they had imposed detailed shading on their heightened color, imitating the Quattrocento Italians. But whereas the latter could get away with it because in their time and place they could get away with anything that served to increase the sculptural realism of their art, the Pre-Raphaelites could not. Their timidity in the face of the tradition of sculptural illusion led them into what proved to be a blunder of taste more than anything else. (A decade separated the beginnings of Pre-Raphaelitism [1848] from Manet’s beginnings, but the difference between them in artistic culture seems more like an aeon.)⁴⁴

⁴¹ See his short essay ‘Modernist Painting’, in *Greenberg 1993*, vol. 4, pp. 85-93.

⁴² *Wallace 2011*, p.15.

⁴³ This passage was to be echoed by Allan Staley in his own assessment of Pre-Raphaelite landscape, in *Staley 2001*, p. 253. See the discussion at the very end of chapter 3.

⁴⁴ *Greenberg 1993*, vol. 4, p. 242. In his very last essay on Modernism, ‘Modernism and Postmodernism’ (published in 1979), Greenberg softens his criticism, but still insists on defining Modernism as beginning with Manet: “By way of illustration I’d like to go into a little detail about how modernism came about in painting. There the proto-Modernists were, of all people, the Pre-Raphaelites (and even before them, as proto-proto-Modernists, the German Nazarenes). The Pre-Raphaelites actually foretold Manet (with whom Modernist painting most definitely begins)” (*Greenberg 2007*, p. 29). For another example of dismissal of Pre-Raphaelitism from a Modernist standpoint, one can take Linda Nochlin’s classic study of 19th-century *Realism*. While recognizing that Pre-Raphaelites were the first to paint large-scale canvasses outdoors, before Manet (*Nochlin 1971*, p. 139), she nevertheless discards their paintings as merely “craftmen’s hard-worked *tour de force*, leaning heavily on tradition rather than brisk, accurate recordings of present-day motifs”. They are then contrasted with Impressionists paintings, described here in terms of Modernist virtues: “It was precisely the capturing of the immediate present with brush strokes as fleeting and nonchalant as their motifs that constituted the Impressionists’ radical step. It was also, of course, their way of stressing the contemporaneity, the here and newness of both their subject and their way of recording them – and nothing *but* their visual immediacy here and now. And while for the Pre-Raphaelites, the identical formal approach which served for out-of-doors, contemporary subjects could serve just as well for invented literary and historical themes, for the Impressionists there was no question of turning their mode of vision to anything *but* the representation of the present day: their ‘technique’ and their sense of what was real – and pictorially possible – were inseparable.” (*Nochlin 1971*, p. 144). This is the only mention of Pre-Raphaelitism in her book.

Given the great reputation Ruskin reached as art critic under Queen Victoria's reign,⁴⁵ his name became associated with the 'Victorian period' and his posthumous reputation was eventually to suffer from the negative view of that period throughout the 20th century. The term 'Ruskinism', coined early on by Charles Eastlake in *A History of the Gothic Revival*,⁴⁶ became charged with negative connotations, and, from the Edwardian period onwards, British avant-garde, from Roger Fry, Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group,⁴⁷ to Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound and the Vorticists,⁴⁸ was consciously to move away from it.

If one event is to stand out as having caused greatest damage to Ruskin's reputation in Modernist eyes, it is the infamous 'Whistler trial'.⁴⁹ On the occasion of a visit to the Grovesnor Gallery in 1877, Ruskin had chanced upon J. A. McNeill Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold. The Falling Rocket* (Plate # 1.15), and commented in *Fors Clavigera*:

For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the half-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face. (29.160)

⁴⁵ Ruskin and Queen Victoria were both born in 1819 and Ruskin died one year earlier in 1900.

⁴⁶ *Eastlake 1872*, chap. xv. If we are to trust W. G. Collingwood, Ruskin himself despised what went under that name "more than any one" (*Collingwood 1893*, II, p. 253).

⁴⁷ On the Bloomsbury Group's rejection of Ruskin, see the evidence adduced in *Leng 2013*.

⁴⁸ See *Nicholls 2001*. As Nicholls points out, Ezra Pound's judgement was more sympathetic than that of his contemporaries.

⁴⁹ The Whistler trial occurred at the time of Ruskin's first mental breakdown in 1878, and Ruskin used the result of the trial as a convenient reason to resign from his chair as Slade Professor at Oxford. See *Hewison 2007*, p. 98, also *Evans 1954*, p. 382. To give only one example, Ezra Pound saw the Whistler trial as proof that Ruskin should belong to the anti-Modernist, conservative camp (*Nicholls 2001*, p. 67).

Whistler sued Ruskin for libel, and the jury found Ruskin guilty, but awarded only a derisory fine of one farthing for damages, while dividing court costs between the two.⁵⁰ Although Ruskin's half was paid by a public subscription, Whistler went bankrupt. Public sympathy was at the time behind Ruskin, but given that Whistler was hailed alongside Impressionists by Modernist art critics for an approach emphasizes two-dimensionality, it was easy to portray Ruskin as out of step, with precious little understanding of the new trends in art that would lead to Modernism in the 20th century. Nikolaus Pevsner disliked Ruskin's opposition to 'the machine' (see chapter 4), and Reyner Banham, who wrote his thesis under Pevsner's supervision at the Courtauld Institute, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, wrote this indictment:

Men whose means of moving ideas from place to place had been revolutionized at their writing desks by the type-writer and the telephone, could no longer treat the world of technology with hostility or indifference, and if there is a test that divides the men from the boys in say, 1912, it is their attitude to Ruskin. Men whose view of the aims of art and the function of design were as diverse as could be, nevertheless united in their hatred of *ce déplorable Ruskin*.⁵¹

Ruskin's eclipse lasted until the 1970s. In the intervening years, studies had been far and apart, such as Henry Ladd's (1932) or John Rosenberg's (1961), with R. H. Wilinski being the first to speak of his mental illness in a biography published in 1933;⁵² a recurrent topic ever since, whose discussion detracts attention from his ideas. Quentin Bell, the maverick son of Clive Bell and Vanessa Stephen, published a personal study in 1963, *Ruskin*, and Kenneth Clark, an admirer, published *Ruskin at Oxford* in 1947, but *Ruskin Today* (1964) is merely composed of extracts from Ruskin's major works. Not that, of course, this would be a bad idea: I quote Ruskin extensively

⁵⁰ See the report of the trial in 29.580-584 and Batchelor 2000, 277-280, Hilton 2000, 356-357 & 397-399). For an overview, see Barringer 2012, pp. 180-183, for discussion see Shrimpton 1999.

⁵¹ Banham 1960, p. 11-12.

⁵² Ladd 1932, Rosenberg 1961 and Wilinski 1933. During that period Joan Evans also published a biography, Evans 1954.

in this thesis precisely because of the feeling that he is not read enough and that it is worth letting him speak in his own voice, especially given the quality of his prose. But this hardly counts as arguing for the relevance of Ruskin.

It is truly with George Landow's *The Aesthetics and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (1971) and Robert Hewison's *John Ruskin and the Argument of the Eye* (1976) that Ruskin studies really started in earnest, on a sure footing.⁵³ John Unrau's *Looking at Architecture with Ruskin*, was the first book on his impact on architecture, in 1979, and it was not a scholarly study.⁵⁴ By then there was, as one young scholar put it, "a certain *frisson* of rebellion to the study of things Victorian", while for the older generation "Victorian culture was still a chamber of horrors".⁵⁵ Still, some post-modern currents in art history tend re-affirm negative judgements towards Victorian culture, and figures such as Ruskin.

In arguing recently for a reassessment of Aestheticism, Elizabeth Prettejohn made the following comment, which could easily be adapted to describe the argument of this thesis:

It will surprise no one to blame the generation of Roger Fry and Clive Bell among art critics, and of T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis among literary critics, for obscuring the historical inheritance of Victorian Aestheticism in the wish to effect a drastic shift in taste. What is more mystifying is that the late-twentieth-century historians of modern art have left this situation virtually intact, despite frequent claims to reinstate priority for the complexity of the historical record over the Modernist canon of taste.⁵⁶

⁵³ Landow 1971 and Hewison 1976.

⁵⁴ Unrau 1979. There have been a few studies since that also cover architects that he influenced, *Brookes 1987*, *Swenarton 1989*, *Daniels & Brantwood 2003*, *Hanson 2003*. Chapter 7 of *Swenarton 1989*, in which the above passage by Reyner Banham is quoted, provides ample evidence of the importance of Ruskin for some of the masters of modern architecture, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Frank Lloyd Wright.

⁵⁵ Lewis 2006, p. 144

⁵⁶ Prettejohn 2007, p. 6.

The work of Nancy J. Troy is also an example of such re-evaluation, as she argued for the continuity of French decorative arts between 1895 and 1925, focussing on Le Corbusier, whose early work was in Art Nouveau style.⁵⁷ My study of the line from Ruskin to Art Nouveau is meant in a similar spirit, and in the next sections, I shall explain from which particular angle I wish proceed.

1.3. Symptomatic vs. Surface Reading

The manifesto ‘Surface Reading: An Introduction’, published almost a decade ago by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus,⁵⁸ provides us with a nice point of entry on this topic, even though it is largely about literary criticism: its content applies *mutatis mutandis* to art history, given that art works are, to use Saussure’s signifier/signified distinction, every bit as much *signifiers* as are texts.⁵⁹ Its authors explicitly reject ‘symptomatic readings’ that seek “a latent meaning behind a manifest one”⁶⁰ in favour of ‘surface reading’, which takes meaning at face value, so to speak, since it sees “surface as literal meaning”.⁶¹

The contrast between ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ is linked, *via* the contrast between ‘present’ and ‘absent’ – with ‘presence’ being ‘manifest’ to one’s consciousness or ‘ego’ – to Jacques Derrida’s critique of the ‘metaphysics of presence’, which comes from his own interpretation of Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics.⁶² This is the source of the idea that the true meaning of a text is ‘absent’, thus ‘latent’.⁶³ In a nutshell, the

⁵⁷ See Troy 1991.

⁵⁸ Best & Marcus 2009.

⁵⁹ Saussure 1982, pp. 97-100.

⁶⁰ The expression is from Jameson 1981, p. 60.

⁶¹ Best and Marcus 2009, p. 12.

⁶² Derrida 1967, p. 411.

⁶³ Derrida also argued notoriously for a strong idealist conclusion, claiming that one not only replaces here one ‘signified’ by another ‘signified’, but replaces in fact one ‘signifier’ by another ‘signifier’ as

expression ‘symptomatic reading’ is meant to cover a variety of projects that are rooted in post-war French philosophy, from Althusser⁶⁴ to Foucault⁶⁵ and Derrida, to name just three. These French post-war ‘structuralist’ and ‘post-structuralist’ philosophers reacted against Husserl’s phenomenology and the privileged epistemic status it gave to the ‘ego’, by devising all sorts of ways to undermine it, including what came to be known as ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, that is the idea that a *sujet* is not truly in control of her actions or what she intends to express, the paradigmatic example here being the control that the ‘unconscious’ exerts over the conscious self, according to Freudian (or Lacanian) psychoanalysis. This point was then simply generalised with the broad claim that in order to understand what one says, one cannot take their word at face value. Rather, one must interpret the *sujet*’s own utterances in terms of a something else – a ‘structure’ – that controls it, be it the ‘unconscious’ of psychoanalysis, the class to which one belongs for Marxists such as Althusser, or Foucault’s ‘*epistēmē*’ as structuring and limiting the possibilities of discourse. The philosophical themes of Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ and Heidegger’s ‘unthought’ of the tradition of the ‘metaphysics of presence’ give this idea its philosophical credentials.

Thus, in a somewhat schematic way, if a *sujet* *S* uses a sentence *s* (the ‘signifier’) with the *intention* to express a propositional content *p* (the ‘signified’), using of the conventional meaning of the words it is composed of, then one should, on such theories, reject any claim – including by *S* herself – that *S* meant *p* by using *s*, and one would need instead to interpret *s* in terms of the *S*’s ‘unconscious’, ‘class consciousness’, etc. in order to reveal that *S* really meant some ‘signified’ other than *p*. The author’s meaning-intentions are thus simply overruled, to the point that Fredric Jameson even argued that *the critic is the author*, inasmuch as it is the critic who produces anything

the interpretation of a signifier and so on, in a free play of signifiers, disconnected from ‘reality’, and there is no end to interpretation, thus no reference, no ‘outside of language’.

⁶⁴ See especially the first two volumes of *Lire le Capital*, Althusser & Balibar 1968.

⁶⁵ I am referring here to *Foucault 1966*, but the claim has limited scope, since he moved away in the 1970s from the views expressed in this book.

related to truth within the text.⁶⁶ What Best & Marcus call a 'symptomatic reading' is simply the use of these ideas within the domain of literary criticism and, from there, in art history.

Approaches of this sort require that we uncritically adopt a particular 'metalanguage',⁶⁷ such as Marxism, psychoanalysis or a mixture of both in 'Freudo-Marxism',⁶⁸ in which to proceed with the interpretation, so that one should accordingly reject the *manifest* meaning of a text or work of art understood as superficial and deceptive, in favour of recovering – with help of a Marxist, psychoanalytic critique or the like – its supposedly truer but *latent* meaning.⁶⁹ It is not my intention to provide a critique of this set of philosophical views,⁷⁰ but merely to point out their *foundational* role with respect to 'symptomatic readings', so that one understands clearly what is involved in my simply steering away from such readings.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Taken from the discussion of *Jameson 1981* in *Best & Marcus 2009*, p. 15. It gets more complex when one realizes that the interpreter needs her own interpretation, and this new interpreter her own interpretation, and so on, and when one argues following Derrida that the 'signified' is not a 'signified' as such but yet another 'signifier', so that this infinite chain of interpretations becomes a free play of the 'signifier'.

⁶⁷ This is a metaphor adapted from mathematical logic. A 'meta-language' would be defined here as the language in which the interpreter discusses the meanings expressed in the 'object-language' of authors that are under interpretation.

⁶⁸ See *Lyotard 1974* for a critical discussion.

⁶⁹ These are not the only approaches to 'symptomatic reading'. There are others, such as art history in the optic of post-colonial studies, which integrates Edward Said's remarkable critique of 'orientalism', as yet another viewpoint enabling us to reveal latent meaning (*Said 1978*).

⁷⁰ For a *réquisitoire* against these philosophical ideas, collectively described as French philosophy in the 1960s, see *Ferry & Renaut 1990*.

⁷¹ My point is not to undermine 'symptomatic readings', as they may have their own validity and their results should be judged on their merit, but simply that there is equal room for approaches such as the one chosen for this thesis. At all events, if there is no 'grand narrative' about History, the claim that this post-war French philosophy, which is by now at all events very much contested and no longer dominant, is a necessary and unavoidable step in History which would render alternative approaches otiose makes no sense, so no one should under any disciplinary obligation to implement one of the 'symptomatic readings' that follows from it, and especially so given that alternative approaches already exist, exemplified, to list a few examples, in *Podro 1972*, *Podro 1982*, *Baxandall 1972*, *Baxandall 1980*, *Alpers 1983*, *Alpers & Baxandall 1994*, *Alpers 1995* – in listing these I am not implying any form of doctrinal unity, on the contrary. There is a sense, captured in *Preziosi 1989*, that the sort of art history illustrated by books such as these was at one point seen as 'old fashioned', but, as Baxandall himself

As I explained in the first paragraphs above, I wish to understand the 19th-century authors and artists from Ruskin to Art Nouveau in their own terms: I want to show that, with his aesthetic ideals, Ruskin helped forming the eye of generations of artists, in Britain and, later on, on the continent. Further, I want to show how this allows us to understand their artistic choices in their own terms, and the developments leading to the Art Nouveau ‘whiplash’. In doing so, I thus wish to appeal only to their own manifest intentions, assuming that their own motives were largely transparent to themselves – of course, up to a point – thus avoiding unnecessary reliance on external theories and (meta)languages.⁷²

I shall therefore adopt a stance akin to a ‘surface reading’, taking intentions, texts and works of art at face value: in this sense, the argument of the thesis is less philosophical, more purely ‘art historical’.⁷³ Philosophical ideas will be involved when I provide an interpretation of Ruskin’s aesthetics in chapter 2, simply because we need to explain what they were to understand properly not only what Ruskin was up to, so to speak, but also what reason there were for late 19th-century artists to follow his lead. Again, my aim is to understand what motives these artists invoked, thus to understand them in their own terms, as they perceived themselves, not in terms of a ‘metalanguage’ that would negate their own voice in favour of some structural analysis of their society.

Postcolonial studies, based on Edward Said’s remarkable critique of ‘orientalism’, is but a form of ‘symptomatic reading’, and promoted the study of authors such as

noticed in *Langdale 2009 p. 28*, that might just be an “after the fact reading” in light of philosophical ideas from the 1960s that were fashionable at the time.

⁷² For that reason, time and again, for example in sections 2.2 or 3.1, I shall appeal to Ruskin’s own autobiographical remarks in *Praeterita*. One should of course beware of after the fact reconstructions, as they may hide real motives, keep mum about this or that important event, etc. But I am here precisely interested in how these historical agents perceived themselves as acting and what their avowed motives were.

⁷³ One could thus add that it would be putative criticisms from the standpoint of ‘symptomatic readings’, which would turn out to be heavily ‘philosophical’, precisely because they rely on shared but unquestioned assumptions, such as a belief in truth of the philosophical views just presented.

Ruskin in such terms.⁷⁴ Ruskin was very much a product of his social upbringing,⁷⁵ with a religious and conservative bent of mind, probably reinforced by his admiration and friendship with Thomas Carlyle.⁷⁶ Ruskin never questioned Britain's imperialism, yet he was well aware of it.⁷⁷ Even Said pointed out that, like so many figures of the time, he had "definite views on race and imperialism" that are "quite easily to be found at work" in his writings.⁷⁸

Ruskin's support of the Eyre Defence and Aid Fund in 1865-1866, mentioned by Edward Said, illustrates his backing of imperialism.⁷⁹ When an attempt was made to indict the ex-governor of Jamaica Edward John Eyre of 'high crimes and misdemeanour' for his role in the violent repression of the Morant Bay rebellion in

⁷⁴ See Said 1978, a critique that has roots in earlier writers such as Frantz Fanon, and for which Hardt & Negri's *Empire* is an important milestone (Hardt & Negri 2000). One should distinguish, however, Said's critique from postcolonialism in one important respect: with writers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak or Homi Bhabha, the later developed into what is called here a 'symptomatic reading', by adopting the precepts of poststructuralism, deconstruction, Marxism, psychoanalysis, etc, that are largely absent in Said.

⁷⁵ Ruskin's father was one of the founders of Ruskin, Telford & Domecq, a company which would eventually lead the British sherry trade (Collingwood 1893, I, p. 10). He thus comes from the typically *bourgeois* background of a financially successful merchant. This explains the sort of class prejudices one finds, for example, in his criticism of Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, when he speaks of "Cockney impudence" (29.160). On the other hand, there are some interesting aspects to Ruskin that indicates disdain of upper-class behaviour, such as his opposition to fox hunting. See 25.124.

⁷⁶ On Carlyle's life and influence, see Heffer 1995. Ruskin appears to have studied Carlyle writings in 1849, and to have been particularly fond of *Past and Present*. This is particularly visible in chapter 4, below. In 1854, Ruskin first admitted his debts in 12.507, and he actually felt so close to Carlyle that he was obliged twice to rebut the charge of plagiarism, first privately in 36.184 and then defending *Modern Painters* against that very charge in 5.427-428. Later on, he dedicated *Munera Pulveris* to Carlyle (17.145).

⁷⁷ Ruskin ranked nations on their ability to foster the 'moral link', hence his constant despair that Britain would never elevate itself to the morality required by its 'imperial destiny', against which he had, indeed, no qualms. One could illustrate this point with the opening paragraph of *The Stones of Venice*: "Since first the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England. Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains; of the Second, the ruin; the Third, which inherits their greatness, if it forgets their example, may be led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction" (9.17). The implication here, given what Ruskin goes on explaining about Venice, is that, in order to rise up to its role, Britain must keep intact the 'moral link' to God, and that should show itself through its art.

⁷⁸ Said 1978, p. 14.

⁷⁹ Said 1994, p. 130.

1865, which included the execution of almost 200 prisoners, Ruskin published a letter in defence of Eyre,⁸⁰ gave a speech at a meeting of the Eyre Defence and Aid Fund,⁸¹ and was also active in recruiting members. Ruskin's defence of Eyre shows that he was grateful, because he believed that Eyre had saved the colony by his actions.⁸²

In his study *Empire Building. Orientalism & Victorian Architecture*, Mark Crinson spoke of the "overt racism of Ruskin's position" in *The Two Paths*, a series of lectures published in 1859, which play a crucial role in chapter 4. He quotes a telling passage concerning ornament in Alhambra:

All ornamentation of that lower kind is pre-eminently the gift of cruel persons, of Indians, Saracens, Byzantines, and is the delight of the worst and cruellest nations, Moorish, Indian, Chinese, South Sea Islanders, and so on. I say it is their peculiar gift; not, observe, that they are only capable of doing this, while other nations are capable of doing more; but that they are capable of doing this in a way that civilised nations cannot equal. The fancy and delicacy of eye in interweaving lines and arranging colours – mere line and colour, observe, without natural form – seems to be somehow an inheritance of ignorance and cruelty, belonging to men as spots to the tiger or hues to the snake.⁸³

Ruskin's odd view here seems to be that uses of lines that are not abstracted from the study of natural forms in ornamentation within a number of cultures, Arabic, Indian, etc., is an indication of their moral inferiority (cruelty, etc.), because they did not rely on the 'moral link' to God in art. This is undoubtedly a problematic dimension of Ruskin's thought, but it is not clear without further argument what work they actually do, as this ingredient is not essential to the formulation of aesthetic views, and, at any rate there is no argument that their documented historical influence relies on that dimension. The philosopher David Hume, who rejected slavery, is also known for

⁸⁰ 18.550-551.

⁸¹ 18.552-554.

⁸² For further background information on this episode, see *Winter 2012* and Ruskin's editors in 18.xliv-xlvi.

⁸³ 16.307 note. The reasoning behind this passage is discussed briefly below in section 4.2.

having expressed racist views.⁸⁴ In the 20th century, the antisemitism of Martin Heidegger is by now heavily documented.⁸⁵ Recognition of these very important aspects of the thought of these major philosophers should not detract one from a proper understanding of the grounds for their actual historical influence, even if one were to disapprove of their philosophy, and the same could be argued about Ruskin's aesthetic ideas, as interpreted in this thesis.⁸⁶

One could also point out to a number of Ruskin's stances that are echoed in today's concerns, such as his resignation as Slade professor of the History of Art at Oxford in 1885, because of the university's decision to endow a new physiology laboratory in which animal vivisection would be conducted, a stance deeply rooted in his views of art and science, as we shall see in section 3.1.⁸⁷ Or the surprisingly prescient stance on pollution and climate change already alluded to, whose upshot is that it results from the destruction of the link between humans and nature, which needs to be re-affirmed, so that nature be nurtured, not exploited. At all events, it is well-known that his writings on political economy, beginning with *The Political Economy of Art* (1857) and culminating in his critique of *laissez-faire* economics in *Unto this Last* (1860) and the 96 letters of *Fors Clavigera. Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (1871-1884), were enormously influential upon socialists such as William Morris and the founders of the Labour party.⁸⁸ The early critic of imperialism J. A. Hobson, who

⁸⁴ See in particular a notorious footnote to his essay 'Of National Characters' (Hume 1985, p. 208 note 10). This footnote is not isolated and linked with his methodological remarks, as well as with its cultural context. See Garrett & Sebastiani 2017.

⁸⁵ The recent publication of Heidegger's own *Black Notebooks* has provided extensive evidence of links that Heidegger himself saw between his antisemitism and his fundamental philosophical claims. See, for example, Trawny 2015 and di Cesare 2018.

⁸⁶ Heidegger's historical influence extends in particular to a crucial role in the development of the very idea of a 'symptomatic reading'. Authors such as Derrida were quite explicit in hiving off Heidegger's antisemitism from his philosophy in order to appropriate it for their own project. See his Derrida 1991.

⁸⁷ On this episode, see Mayer 2008.

⁸⁸ See Stead 1906. William Stead had asked the first Labour Members of Parliament what books inspired them, with Ruskin's *Unto this Last* coming up on top. See Bell 1963, p. 147, for Quentin Bell's take on Stead's questionnaire, and Bevir 1995.

actually coined the word, was such an admirer that he wrote *John Ruskin. Social Reformer*.⁸⁹ Tolstoy and Gandhi, who translated *Unto this Last* in, respectively, Russian and Gujarati, were also deeply influenced.⁹⁰ Gandhi recount reading that book during a train journey from Johannesburg to Durban in 1904:

I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book [...] I believe I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life.⁹¹

Perhaps more importantly in light of today's planetary challenges, Ruskin was one of the harshest critics of the effects of industrialisation during the Victorian era, of the plight of the working class and of its destructive effects on the countryside. In 'The Storm-Clouds of Nineteenth Century' (1884),⁹² Ruskin also spoke presciently of a "plague-wind" caused by industrial pollution,⁹³ thus linking human activity (coal burning) to climate change. Ruskin thus foreshadowed the very idea of the 'Anthropocene',⁹⁴ that is of a new geological age in which human activity causes geological change. This point has begun to attract attention,⁹⁵ and provides an interesting background over which one can tell the above story of Ruskin's message for art and social reform. His ideas can thus be summarized by saying that he saw

⁸⁹ Hobson 1898.

⁹⁰ Gandhi actually translated only parts of *Unto this Last*, summarizing the rest.

⁹¹ Gandhi 1948, p. 364-365. For discussions of Ruskin and Gandhi, see the detailed parallels drawn in Ganguli 1973, pp. 56-64, and Sawyer 2012. Edward Said acknowledges Ruskin's influence on Gandhi in *Culture and Imperialism* (Said 1994, p. 217), but Mark Crinson dismisses it in *Empire Building* (Crinson 1996, p. 60), claiming that Gandhi and the anti-imperialist J. A. Hobson "set aside the racial element in Ruskin's work and applied his critique of industrialism in the West to its extension into non-Western societies, a move of which Ruskin was incapable" (Crinson 1996, p. 60). For Ruskin and Tolstoy, see Hanson and Diamond 1996. See also Jahanbegloo 1998, for a discussion of 'nonviolence', another theme shared between Tolstoy and Gandhi, which was already in Ruskin.

⁹² 34.5-80. Ruskin gave these lectures within one year of the eruption at Krakatoa (27 August 1883), that caused noticeable changes to the world's climate. One should note, however, that his first observation of the link of pollution with climate dates from 1871. See Wheeler 1995.

⁹³ 34.31.

⁹⁴ On this concept, see Steffen et al. 2011.

⁹⁵ See Albritton & Albritton Jonsson 2016, pp. 34f. & conclusion, and Taylor 2018.

industrialisation as having severed the ‘moral link’ between humans and nature, while the latter needed to be carefully nurtured as opposed to be exploited, under pressure from the markets.

In a move reminiscent of – but in the end distinct from – a British tradition harking back to Gerrard Winstanley and the ‘Diggers’,⁹⁶ this meant withdrawal to the countryside at the fringe of society, in organised communities – Ruskin favouring the model of ‘guilds’ –⁹⁷ in order to live a self-sufficient life or what Vicky Albritton & Fredrick Albritton Jonsson called in *Green Victorians. The Simple Life in John Ruskin’s Lake District*, a ‘culture of sufficiency’.⁹⁸ Ruskin’s controversial claim in *Unto this Last* that ‘There is no wealth but life’,⁹⁹ was precisely meant as part of a critique of the unquestioned notion of ‘consumption’ underlying the concept of ‘demand’ in neo-classical economics; it was part of an argument for ‘wise consumption’,¹⁰⁰ or what Albritton & Albritton Jonsson call ‘ethical consumption’, linked as it is with self-sufficiency and care for nature.¹⁰¹ Ruskin deplored above all else the destruction of nature as the severance of the ‘moral link’, and, I hasten to add, he put art education, focussing on regaining one’s emotional response to nature, at the centre of this programme for ethical consumption and self-sufficiency, a crucial point in understanding the relation between Ruskin’s aesthetics and his social and political views. It is thus that Ruskin inspired key figures in the early history of the environmentalist movement, such as Hardwicke Rawnsley, who was one of the

⁹⁶ See Winstanley 1973 and the studies in Bradstock 2000. One should recall that Ruskin wrote of himself in 1871: “I am myself a Communist of the old school – reddest also of the red [...] for we Communists of the old school think our property belongs to everybody, and everybody’s property to us” (27.116). See, however, the next footnote.

⁹⁷ To be more precise, it was not Ruskin’s intention, if we are to follow W. G. Collingwood’s testimony, to found a ‘phalanstery’ (one would speak today of ‘communes’) or “to imitate Robert Owen or the Shakers” (Collingwood 1893, II, 154). See section 4.3 below.

⁹⁸ Albritton & Albritton Jonsson 2016, p. 8.

⁹⁹ 17.105. On this saying, see Hewison 2009.

¹⁰⁰ 17.98.

¹⁰¹ Albritton & Albritton Jonsson 2016, p. 8.

founders of the National Trust,¹⁰² but also the revival of local crafts, organized around guilds, so that people would have sustainable economic activities. Incidentally, one immediate effect of *Unto This Last* on Gandhi was that he set up outside Durban a small community in a farm called 'Phoenix', on the model of Ruskin's St George's Guild. Moreover, Ruskin's praise of the medieval stonemason, as self-sufficient owner of their means of production also expressing themselves creatively in their work, was of great importance to Gandhi.

The rise of the Anthropocene and the 'great acceleration'¹⁰³ in recent decades are a new and pressing issue for our globalized world, which is distinct from anything within a world structured around colonial relations, from which postcolonial studies justifiably arose. I am not claiming that this new situation renders the latter irrelevant,¹⁰⁴ simply that it opens up a new angle from which to study Ruskin, and this is the one adopted here. This idea abuts another one, which is the suggestion that one adopts a peculiar form of 'surface reading', in order to provide an account of Ruskin from this new angle.

1.4. Period Eye and Visual Culture

My own approach derives from that of Michael Baxandall and, to a lesser extent to R. G. Collingwood's. I wish merely to recall some basic ideas in Baxandall in relation

¹⁰² For a recent study of environmentalist movements in the 19th century and the role played by Ruskin's ideas in their emergence, see *Mathis 2009* and *Mathis 2010*.

¹⁰³ See *McNeill & Engelke 2016*.

¹⁰⁴ Claims that postcolonial studies are increasingly out of step have been made, for example: "Some scholars view postcolonial methods and vocabularies as out of step with an intellectual scene increasingly carved up by such rubrics as the information age (the so-called digital divide), transnational capital, globalization, and alternative modernities. What then is the value of postcolonial studies in our globalizing world, and does it have a viable future beyond its existing life span, identified by Vilashini Cooppan in this volume as the period from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000)?" (*Loomba et al. 2005*, p. 2). One could add climate change to this list of rubrics. Again, my claim is not to deny the validity of postcolonial studies, especially for the study of 19th century European culture, but simply to open up a new vista, from which a more positive account of Ruskin can be given.

to the argument of this thesis. As already mentioned twice, my aim is to show that Ruskin's aesthetic ideals helped forming the eye of generations of 19th-century artists, from the Pre-Raphaelites to Arts & Crafts and Art Nouveau. This aim is related to Baxandall's approach to art history in two interconnected ways.

First, it is connected with Baxandall's 'triangle of re-enactment' in *Patterns of Intention*,¹⁰⁵ a book (originally a set of lectures) in which he worked out his own view of "how one does art history".¹⁰⁶ One would readily grant to critics of substantial notions of 'ego' or '*sujet*', that authorial intentions are not retrievable,¹⁰⁷ so that understanding the meaning of a text or work of art could not be in terms of a direct appeal to meaning intention. It would be a *non sequitur*, however, to claim that no intentional analysis is therefore possible. As Michael Baxandall once quipped, "one might as well dissuade a man from running by pointing out that he will never run his distance in no time at all".¹⁰⁸

One suggestion is to see "texts as acts",¹⁰⁹ thus in terms analogous to a move in a game: by reconstituting their discursive context and explaining what contribution they made to the discussion they are embedded in. The point of the chess analogy is that to understand a given decisive move by, say, Bobby Fischer in a match against Boris Spassky, it is not enough to know that he moved the piece in accordance with the rules of chess – likewise, that a text is written following grammatical rules – one needs to reconstruct the strategy that the player was trying to implement in light of his adversary's moves, and the following moves that reveal its importance. So, although

¹⁰⁵ Baxandall 1985a, p. 34. The term 're-enactment' comes from Collingwood 1946, p. 215, as pointed out in Baxandall 1985a, p. 139, n. 1. Richard Wollheim's notion of art criticism as 'retrieval' in Wollheim 1980, pp. 185-204, is closely related, see Kobayashi 2009a.

¹⁰⁶ Langdale 2009, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ For well-known arguments, see Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954 or simply recall the theme of the 'death of the author' in Barthes 1977, pp. 143-148 or Foucault 2009.

¹⁰⁸ Baxandall 1979, p. 463.

¹⁰⁹ Skinner 2001, p. 186.

Bobby Fischer is now dead and cannot tell us, answering a question, what his intentions were, we can assume that a reconstruction of the interaction with Spassky gives us all that there is to know about what he intended to do. As Quentin Skinner, from whom I borrowed the analogy with chess, would put it:

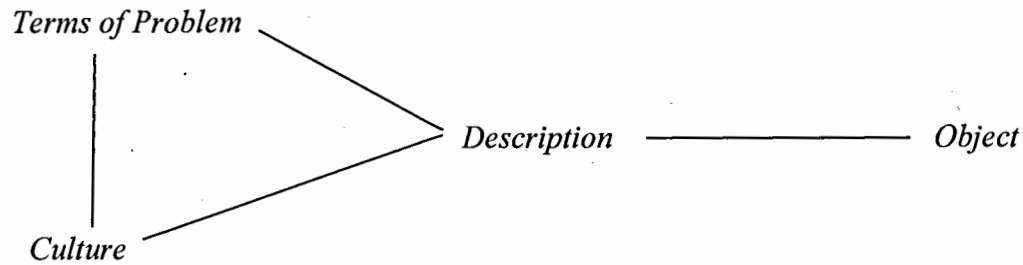
When we claim [...] to have recovered the intentions embodied in texts, we are engaged in nothing more mysterious than this process of placing them within whatever argumentative contexts makes sense of them.¹¹⁰

As I read Baxandall, his view is remarkably similar in outlook. He showed “how to do art history” in the first chapter of *Patterns of Intention*, through a study of Benjamin Baker’s Forth Bridge, in Scotland. His aim was not that of his mentor, Ernst Gombrich, to explain the author’s intention by a reconstruction of their mental states.¹¹¹ He first presented a brief narrative of the history of that bridge,¹¹² describing it as the production of an artefact and extracting from it a list of 25 ‘causes’ that are involved in its final shape. He then pointed out that some of them are merely statements of the terms of the problem to be solved itself (the geography of the estuary at the particular location where the bridge is envisaged, the need to take into account strong side winds in light of the Tay bridge disaster, etc.), while others were actually ideas found in Baker’s own cultural background (the available technology and in particular the shape of some Tibetan bridges he had learned about), as resources available to him in framing his solution to the problem, which took the shape of the Forth Bridge. This led Baxandall to suggest the following ‘triangle of ‘re-enactment’:

¹¹⁰ Skinner 2001, p. 186. See also Kobayashi & Marion 2011.

¹¹¹ Laying out his key ideas while discussing the design of a bridge by an engineer enabled Baxandall to move away from preoccupation with the artist’s mental states. For Gombrich’s psychologism, see Gombrich 1961. Richard Wollheim’s notion of ‘thematization’ is related to this sort of approach. According to him the psychological account that had been “quite rightly chased out in the field of language, most notably through the influence of Wittgenstein, is at home in painting” (Wollheim 1987, p. 22).

¹¹² Baxandall 1985a, pp. 15-25.



This idea is to conceive of the object – here the Forth Bridge, otherwise any work of art – in terms of a ‘solution to a problem’.¹¹³ The art historian must thus use elements providing the terms of the problems and elements from the artist’s background as resources (here called ‘culture’), in an equivalent to Skinner’s placing of the text ‘within the argumentative context’ that makes sense of it, thus in order to draw from the context elements that provide for a plausible explanation of it as the solution to the ‘problem’.

Doing this, one merely produces a ‘description’ of the ‘object’. Baxandall asked that the ‘description’ should further be compared visually with the ‘object’ itself, in a back-and-forth process of questions and answers,¹¹⁴ that leads one to progressively refined one’s explanation: new questions would then arise, on the basis of discrepancies between the ‘description’ and what one now *sees* – this being what I called above the ‘experience’ of the work of art –¹¹⁵ would provide answers that would perhaps require a readjustment of the ‘description’, so that one has to go on through the process of ‘re-

¹¹³ The idea of understanding the work of art in terms of an attempt to solve an artistic problem is already in Collingwood. See for example *Collingwood 1939*, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ The conception of inquiry as proceeding in terms of questions and answers is in *Collingwood 1939*, chapter v and *Collingwood 1940*, chapters iv-v. See *Marion 2018* and *Kobayashi & Marion 2018* for a reading of it in terms of Peirce’s ‘abductive reasoning’ that fits particularly well Baxandall’s ‘triangle’.

¹¹⁵ Given the topic of this thesis, vision is the primary focus, but the view extends, of course to other senses.

enactment' once more – as a matter of fact as many times as required until a state is reached which is deemed satisfying.¹¹⁶

In this thesis, I propose to explain in similar terms the steps leading to the rise of the Art Nouveau curved line. I do not aim at interpreting specific works of art with this back-and-forth, but I would like to adapt his idea of the 'triangle of re-enactment', so that my thesis should be seen as an extended argument in defence of the idea that what I have described as Ruskin's formative influence and what I called 'Ruskin's eye', must count at part of 'culture', as above, for early Art Nouveau artists. As will become clear in chapter 4, Belgian artists responsible for the Art Nouveau curved line were under pressure to produce a national art of a particular type, as they perceived Belgium at the cultural centre of Europe: they aimed to produce an art for the emerging European ideal. They also aimed to produce a socially meaningful art. My claim is that they drew on the resources available to them, and these turn out to be Ruskin's aesthetic and social-political ideals – in short 'Ruskin's eye' – and the realisations of Arts & Crafts to which they were exposed through intense economic and cultural exchanges. It is this idea that I think best fits descriptively early Belgian Art Nouveau art as 'object'.

Secondly, the idea of 'Ruskin's eye' was coined to evoke Baxandall's notion of 'period eye'.¹¹⁷ The key ideas behind the latter are introduced in the passages (my italics):

An object reflects a pattern of light on to the eye. The light enters the eye through the pupil, is gathered by the lens, and thrown on the screen in the back of the eye, the retina. On the retina is a network of nerve fibres, which pass the light through a system of cells to several millions of receptors, the

¹¹⁶ This procedure is illustrated in the following chapters of *Patterns of Intention*, with studies of paintings by Picasso, Chardin and Piero della Francesca. The discussion of Piero's *Baptism of the Christ* in the last chapter is particularly remarkable in this respect.

¹¹⁷ See Baxandall 1972, chapter ii and Baxandall 1980, chapter vi. This notion appears to be rooted in Gombrich's idea of a 'mental set' at work in the 'experience of art', that "sets up an horizon of expectations" (Gombrich 1961, p. 60). On art as experience, see the next section.

cones. The cones are sensitive both to light and to colour, and they respond by carrying information about light and colour to the brain.

It is at this point that human equipment for visual perception ceases to be uniform, from one man to the next. The brain must interpret the raw data about light and colour that it receives from the cones and it does this with *innate skills and those developed out of experience*. It tries out relevant items from its stock of patterns, categories, habits of inference and analogy – ‘round’, ‘grey’, ‘smooth’, ‘pebble’ would be verbalized examples – and these lend the fantastically complex ocular data a structure and therefore a meaning.¹¹⁸

[...] the picture is sensitive to the kinds of interpretative skill – patterns, categories, inferences, analogies – the mind brings to it. A man’s capacity to distinguish a certain kind of form or relationship of forms will have consequences for the attention with which he addresses the picture. For instance, if he is skilled in noting proportional relationships, or if he is practiced in reducing complex forms to compounds of simple forms, or if he has a rich set of categories for different kinds of red and brown, these *skills* may well lead him to order his *experience* of Piero della Francesca’s *Annunciation* differently from people without these skills, and much more sharply than people whose experience has not given them many skills relevant to that picture.¹¹⁹

The beholder must use on the painting such *visual skills* as he has, very few of which are normally special to painting, and he is likely to use those skills his society esteems highly. The painter responds to this: *his public’s visual capacity must be his medium*. Whatever his own specialized professional skills, he is himself a member of the society he works for and *shares its visual experience and habit*.

We are concerned here with Quattrocento *cognitive style* as it related to Quattrocento pictorial style.¹²⁰

Incidentally, one should note in the second passage Baxandall’s implicit reliance on a view of art as experience. These passages were selected to show where his emphasis lies, on the relationship between pictorial and ‘cognitive style’, on viewers being trained and acquiring skills, that they bring to viewing and interpreting a painting, and

¹¹⁸ Baxandall 1972, p. 29.

¹¹⁹ Baxandall 1972, p. 34.

¹²⁰ Baxandall 1972, p. 40.

on the fact that these skills vary from one culture to another.¹²¹ It is difficult to delineate properly what Baxandall meant, however, but we know that he did not mean to reintroduce the notion of *Zeitgeist*, that Gombrich despised so much,¹²² nor that the concept was meant to be merely a contribution to the anthropology of art¹²³ or the sociology of art.¹²⁴ It is perhaps closer to the 'visual culture' paradigm that Svetlana Alpers, who popularized it, admittedly owes to Baxandall.¹²⁵ For sure, if 'visual culture' is not confined to canonical great works of art as sociology of art may be claimed to be, but includes a larger set of visual images, then this thesis is on its side.¹²⁶

My claim is that Ruskin formed, with his writings, advice to particular painters and teachings, the eye of artists and viewers alike. To viewers, it meant, for example, an attention to details of the scenery, in order to explore what details, such as lines, have emotional meaning. There are obviously other acquired skills at work for late 19th-century viewers, but my focus is on what Ruskin brought to his period, on 'Ruskin's eye'. Again, this claim can be argued from the 'manifest' meaning of texts and works

¹²¹ Hence the necessity to pay special attention to the *language* of art history, as the language used by Panofsky, derived as it is from that of Renaissance Italy, might not be suitable for studying, for example, what Alpers has called "northern visual culture" (Alpers *et al.* 1996, p. 46). See also her critical comments in Alpers 1979, p. 106 and Alpers 1983, p. xxvii, and note the special attention to language in Baxandall 1980, chapter vi.

¹²² Gombrich 1961, p. 20.

¹²³ See Geertz 1976, pp. 1481-1488. As Baxandall readily admits, the work of anthropologists such as Whorf and Herskovits was involved in its inception given that he believes in "the power of culturally acquired skills", Langdale 2009, p. 8-9. But he stops short of the relativist conclusions of Whorf, Langdale 2009, p. 3, and the notion of 'carpentered environment', Langdale 1999, p. 20 & Langdale 2009, p. 9. See also Baxandall 1985b, p. 41. For a detailed discussion, see Langdale 1999.

¹²⁴ Pierre Bourdieu had attempted to bring the 'period eye' in line with his own notion of 'habitus' in Bourdieu & Delsaut 1981, reprised in Bourdieu 1998, pp. 313-321. For a discussion, see Tanner 2010, pp. 240-241. In 'Art, Society, and the Bouguer Principle', Baxandall claimed that there is "something wrong about anything approaching a one-to-one relation between pictorial thing and social thing" (Baxandall 1985b, p. 39), and that 'art' and 'society' are "unhomologous systematic constructions put upon interpenetrating subject matters" (Baxandall 1985b, p. 40). These claims minimally entail a sort of 'particularism' or 'nominalism' according to which sociology of art would provide tools that are, albeit useful, insufficient for a full understanding of individual works of art as expressions of a given artist in a given situation.

¹²⁵ Alpers 1983, p. xxvii.

¹²⁶ See Tanner 2010, p. 237.

of art, without resorting to specialized theories, however interesting and useful the results of their application might be in other contexts. In particular, for these reasons, there is no need to appeal to a sociological theory, for instance Latour's 'actor-network-theory'.¹²⁷ One could, however, envision how this thesis could be complemented by a study in social history of art of the various guilds, associations, and workshops that were set up across the British Isles (including, at the time, Ireland).¹²⁸ Such networks arose as the result of the influence of Ruskin and Morris. If my aim in this thesis is to understand what it was – the aesthetic ideals of Ruskin – that consciously motivated these actors, the specificity of my topic does not preclude other studies.

Ruskin is often criticized for his advocacy of the 'innocence of the eye':

The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the *innocence of the eye*, that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify – as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight.¹²⁹

It is often claimed against him that there is no such thing as an innocent eye.¹³⁰ This would also defeat any connexion with the idea of a 'period eye', given that it conditions how we see. If the claim is that according to Ruskin, one could in ideal conditions paint exactly what one's eyes see when viewing, say, a mountain scenery, with no interference of style or acquired skills, this is but a *non sequitur*. As a matter of fact, much of the next two chapters will be devoted to explaining how false a view of Ruskin this view is. He never believed that one could paint as one sees, on the contrary every brushstroke means an abstraction: "Good drawing is [...] an *abstract* of natural facts;

¹²⁷ Latour 2005.

¹²⁸ See, for example, the work done in Haslam 2004 for the Lakeland district.

¹²⁹ 15.27. See also 3.140-148.

¹³⁰ See, for example, Gombrich 1961, pp. 14 & 296-297 or Crary 1990, pp. 94-96.

you cannot represent all that you would, but must continually be falling short, whether you will or no, of the force, or quantity, of Nature.”¹³¹

Criticism of the idea of the ‘innocence of the eye’ is also related to what Elizabeth Prettejohn called the “persistent habit of referring to Pre-Raphaelite art as ‘photographic’”, a misunderstanding against which she argued, on the basis of Millais’ *Portrait of John Ruskin* (Plate # 1.16) and *Study of Rock, Glenfinlas* (Plate # 1.14).¹³² This point is central for our understanding of Ruskin, as these artworks will be discussed again in section 3.2, and Ruskin’s negative view on Daguerreotypes in section 3.4.

More importantly, one needs to understand this basic claim about Ruskin: if his wish was to get us to observe carefully and analyse what we are seeing, then it is obvious that one should seek to see in a direct, unencumbered manner. His claim was not so much that this sort of ideal seeing is possible, but rather that one has first to get rid of the conventions of painting (of his days), because they stand in the way of a proper analysis of that mountain scenery and the hold it may have on us. This is not the same claim. He would then try and teach the sort of skills needed to explore visually the mountain scenery.

*

To conclude on a philosophical note, art moves us¹³³ and when it does, we praise it. Sometimes we understand its value after understanding the historical circumstances of its production, but quite often we are simply struck by some unexplainable ability that it possesses to move us. Yet, another work of art may simply fail to engage us, and we

¹³¹ 15.200.

¹³² Prettejohn 2000, pp. 166-171.

¹³³ See Cavell 2002, p. 197. For the denial of this dimension, see Krauss 1985, pp. 3-4. In that passage, Rosalind Krauss expresses adherence to the type of ‘symptomatic’ reading, inspired by Saussure, which is discussed above in section 1.3.

say that we do not ‘understand’ it. It is also a fact that may simply fail to move us. Today, the nature of the production and understanding of the work of art is a central issue in the philosophy of art, as opposed, for example, to an earlier emphasis in the second half of the 20th century on the possibility of giving a definition of art,¹³⁴ but there has been no consensus emerging, and the whole approach is perhaps facing a dead end. For the purposes of this thesis, I shall adopt an earlier standpoint according to which the experience of a work of art is central to our understanding of it. Although the idea of ‘art as experience’ was first set forth explicitly by philosophers in the 1930s,¹³⁵ my interpretative claim is that it is implicitly at work for Ruskin onwards, so that it underlies much of the conceptions discussed below.

It remains a fact that we do claim sometimes that we ‘understand’ a work of art and sometimes that we don’t, and our ‘understanding’ of a given work of art sometimes changes or deepens with time, for a variety of reasons. There is a danger, however, in conceiving of this ‘understanding’ in too narrowly intellectualist terms, because our success or failure to understand a given work of art has to do with its capacity to engage us on an emotional level, that is as one experiences it.

As I read Ruskin, this was the basis of his aesthetic ideas, since they are derived from his own experience of nature: through his art, he continually sought to analyse his own emotional response to natural scenery, be it the sight of a mountain range, of a leaf of the water-plant known as *Alisma Plantago* or of the wing of a bird. His own drawings can indeed be seen as records of his own attempts at exploring his own response to

¹³⁴ For this earlier view see, for example, *Bell 1987, Dickie 1983, Sibley 2004 and Weitz 1956.*

¹³⁵ For classical statements of this approach, see *Dewey 1934 and Collingwood 1938.* This does not mean that the view was not held prior to the 1930s, for a statement, see Oscar Lovell Triggs in the midst of his chapter on Ruskin, in *Chapters in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Triggs 1902, p. 37). My starting point is not Dewey’s, but Collingwood’s philosophy of art. See *Kobayashi 2003* and *Kobayashi 2009a* – a slightly modified French translation of this last appeared as *Kobayashi 2009b* – and *Kobayashi & Marion 2011.*

nature. This is true as well of his experience of particular works of art and architecture, but we need to focus here on the experience of a natural scene or object.

The fundamental message of Ruskin – and I shall claim that this is how his work was received – was simply to ask that one raises one's own emotional response, to a scenery or to a work of art, to awareness, so to live it fully and explore it, in order to discover what brings about one's emotion. Now it is in such analyses that Ruskin was led to emphasize the 'abstract lines' and 'curvatures' in these 'natural shapes', and to attempt at providing some theoretical explanation of their role. There is a vivid example of this, which will play a key role in the forthcoming narrative, in a plate from *The Stones of Venice* (Plate # 1.17), where Ruskin reproduced the line formed by a mountain at Chamonix, from *a* to *b*, which he called "the most beautiful simple curve I have ever seen in my life" (9.267), as well as other mountain lines at *c* to *d*, *e* to *g*, and *i* to *k* and the curves of *Alisma Plantago*, with interior ribs, from *q* to *r*. A drawing of a mountain slope and bird wing, now at the museum located within his former house, Brantwood in the Lake District, also illustrates this (Plate # 1.18). The following is about the influence of John Ruskin's aesthetic theory of 'abstract lines', derived from 'natural shapes', on applied arts, leading to the rise of Art Nouveau. This is a topic in the history of art (and design), but I conceive of it also as an exploration of the value of theories of the experience of the work of art for our understanding of the history of art.¹³⁶

To recapitulate, my claim is that Ruskin's aesthetic theory was a theory of the experience of the work of art, and I shall plot its influence throughout the late 19th century, on numerous British artists – in particular but not exclusively William Morris – and up to the birth of Art Nouveau. In other words, in order to understand the

¹³⁶ One philosophical aspect that cannot be discussed here is the role of emotions in that very experience. The view presupposes that emotions are not 'private', in the sense of originating and belonging in one person, but 'public' in the sense that, like linguistic meanings, they are shareable. For articulations of this view, see *Collingwood 1939* and *Dumouchel 1995*.

phenomena of the brief but very intense flourishing of Art Nouveau – roughly from 1890 until the First World War – one needs to reconstruct Ruskin's theory as a theory of the experience of the work of art and then to see how it got transmitted to the pioneers of Art Nouveau.

2. Overturning Reynolds

2.1. Ruskin's Problem

John Ruskin is a protean writer and a prolific one. It is therefore neither possible nor desirable to try and provide an overall interpretation of his whole *oeuvre* within a thesis not specifically dedicated to this very task.¹ Given that the focus in this thesis is on the role that his aesthetic ideas played on the rise of Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau, it is better, at the price of fragmentation, first to single out a few central aspects of his aesthetic – his concepts of ‘pathetic fallacy’ and ‘*Theoria*’ – whose interpretation will indeed shed light on this specific area of influence. I shall proceed in two steps. First, I shall present in this chapter what I take to be the fundamental tenets of Ruskin's aesthetics, as they arise from his critical engagement with the aesthetics of his days. Secondly, chapters 2 and 3 will be devoted to the ramification of these ideas, aiming to show how these ideas are behind much of Ruskin's influence, on the Pre-Raphaelites, Morris and the Arts & Crafts.

Thus, sections 2.2 and 2.3 will be devoted to Ruskin's concepts of ‘pathetic fallacy’ and ‘*Theoria*’. These are well known from the secondary literature, and the novelty of my approach will reside in my attempt at explaining them in terms of Ruskin's critical reaction to 18th-century and early 19th-century British aesthetics, and an untheorized take on emotions that I shall outline in section 2.2. This is in accordance with

¹ Although I shall provide biographical details whenever necessary, I shall assume throughout basic knowledge of Ruskin's life and work. For a detailed chronology of Ruskin's life, see the appendices to the volumes of W. G. Collingwood's biography of Ruskin, *Collingwood 1893*, I, pp. 227-232 & II, pp. 259-275, and *Bradley 1997*. See also the very short intellectual biography, *Hewison 2007*. For biographies, I have relied on *Collingwood 1893* (last edition in 1911), *Cook 1911*, *Evans 1954*, *Batchelor 2000*, and *Hilton 1985 & 2000*. As is well known, Ruskin changed his views on numerous occasions during his long and prolific career, and one must be sensitive to the risk of anachronism. It would not be desirable to plot all such changes, but whenever necessary they will be mentioned.

Baxandall's 'triangle of re-enactment', as presented in the introduction, according to which one has first to establish the 'terms of the problem' to be addressed by Ruskin, and then extract it from his background – in Baxandall's terminology: 'culture' – which he drew on to solve it.

We also need to explain how he was able, starting with *Modern Painters I*, to effect a radical change in British art, by overturning the views then in fashion at the Royal Academy, which were largely derived from the writings of its first President, Sir Joshua Reynolds. As I shall argue in the remainder of this introductory section, this was *Ruskin's problem*, in Baxandall's sense. The keystone of Reynolds' aesthetics was his notion of 'Grand Style', based on the idea of an archetype that the artist should paint, disregarding nature, as it never instantiates this archetype without deformities. In practical terms, this meant abandoning the attention to details of Dutch masters, in favour of Italian or French masters. To undermine this, Ruskin has to conceive of painting in radically different terms, fostering a genuine encounter with nature and careful study of our sensual and emotional experience of it, and not involving the notion of an archetype only to be grasped by the 'mind's eye', so to speak. We will have gone through much of the basis of this in sections 2.2 and 2.3, but need to explore further notions such as that of 'archetype' in section 2.4, before explaining how Ruskin overturns Reynolds in section 2.5.

In 1836, thus when Ruskin was merely 17, three paintings by Turner, *Juliet and the Nurse* (Plate # 2.1), *Rome from Mount Aventine* and *Mercury and Argus*, were exhibited in London, whose criticism in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*² raised Ruskin "to heights of black anger", and he wrote an answer to the critic, a minor figure called John Eagles, "having by that time", in his own words: "some confidence in my power of words, and – not merely judgement, but sincere *experience* – of the charm of Turner's

² See *Eagles 1836*.

work.”³ Ruskin’s father forwarded his son’s letter to Turner, who suggested to lay the matter to rest, and it was not published.⁴ Turner’s paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1842 were also maligned in the *Literary Gazette*⁵ and in the *Athenaeum*⁶. Ruskin, who had seen the exhibition before departing, saw one or both of these⁷ while in Geneva, and was spurred to write *Modern Painters I*, whose full title is: *Modern Painters I, published in 1843, is Modern Painters: Their Superiority in the Art of Landscape Painting on the Ancient Masters Proved by Examples of the True, the Beautiful and the Intellectual from the Works of Modern Artists, Especially From those of J. M. W. Turner, Esq., R. A.* In speaking of ‘Ancient Masters’, Ruskin did not aim at Nicholas Poussin, “the historical painters”, such as Michelangelo or Titian, for whom he claimed a “veneration [...] almost superstitious in degree”, but only ‘elder masters’:

Claude, Gaspar Poussin, Salvator Rosa, Cuyp, Berghem. Both, Ruysdael, Hobbima, Teniers (in his landscapes), P. Potter, Canaletto, and the various Van somethings and Back somethings, more especially and malignantly those who have libelled the sea.⁸

As we shall see, the book is not merely a defence of Turner, it is also a critique of these ‘Ancient Masters’.

Although these 1836 and 1842 critiques are, quite rightly so, generally considered of great importance since they spurred Ruskin, they are seldom studied. Of these, Eagles’ critique in 1836 is the more interesting, being a little bit more elaborate and because it rises above insults to an interesting contrast, so it is worth quoting at length

³ 3.xviii. For the importance for Ruskin of ‘sincerity’, see section 2.2 below.

⁴ The letter was found in Ruskin’s papers after his death and is now reproduced as an Appendix to *Modern Painter I* in the Library Edition, 3.635-640. For Turner’s letter, see 35.218 or Hilton 1985, p. 40.

⁵ Anon. 1842.

⁶ Darley 1842.

⁷ See 3.xxiii-xxv.

⁸ 3.85. On Ruskin and the ‘Ancient Masters’, see Conner 1981.

for illustrative purposes. At the outset, Eagles declares his “enmity” towards new trends in British painting, which he lumps under the label of “this false English School”.⁹

Nor can we conceive such an argument of more avail now that in the days of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Wilson, and Gainsborough, from whose depth of tone, and indeed from that of every known school previous to our day, we are departing with a speed and haste that bespeak an antipathy to excellence, not originating in ourselves.¹⁰

At the end of his review, Eagles adds of figures such as Turner: “They have neglected nature, and run into bad systems which they call art. They are at total variance with all that has obtained the admiration of the world in the old masters”.¹¹ These comments show to what extent the canon of the Royal Academy still held sway over the mind of Ruskin’s contemporaries. Eagles’ comments on Turner’s *Juliet and the Nurse* suffice to get an idea of his disdain:

This is indeed a strange jumble – “confusion worse confounded”. [...] Amidst so many absurdities, we scarcely stop to ask why Juliet and her nurse should be in Venice. For the scene is a composition as from models of different parts of Venice, thrown higgledy-piggledy together, streaked blue and pink, and thrown into a flour tub. Poor Juliet has been steeped in treacle to make her look sweet, and we feel apprehensive lest the mealy architecture should stick to her petticoat, and flour it.¹²

⁹ For a brief overview of landscape painting in Britain during that period, see *Helmreich 2013*, pp. 334-340.

¹⁰ *Eagles 1836*, p. 543. See also the claim that Hogarth, Reynolds Gainsborough and Wilson “are still at the head of the English school”, *Eagles 1836*, p. 554. It is interesting to note that Eagles also severely criticized, *inter alios*, a painting by Constable, probably also representative, in his mind, of the ‘false English School’, *Eagles 1836*, pp. 549-550. Incidentally, Ruskin does not rail often against Constable, and only in vague terms. See 3.45 & 191.

¹¹ *Eagles 1836*, p. 556.

¹² *Eagles 1836*, p. 551. Criticisms by Eagles of the other two paintings are shorter, but of the same nature. On *Rome from Mount Aventine*: “A most unpleasant mixture, wherein white gamboge and raw Sienna are, with childish execution, daubed together”; on *Mercury and Argus*: “But we think the ‘Hanging Committee’ should be *suspended* from their office for admitting his ‘Mercury and Argus, No. 182’”. It is perfectly childish. All blood and chalk” (*Eagles 1836*, p. 551).

In addition to Eagles' inability to understand Turner's uses of colour, it is worth pointing out that he could not either comprehend what he saw as the disappearance of shadows:

He has robbed the sun of his birthright to cast shadows. Whenever Nature shall dispense with them too, and shall make trees like brooms, and this green earth to alternate between brimstone and white, set off with brightest blues that no longer shall keep their distance; when cows shall be made of white paper, and milk-white figures represent pastoral, and when human eyes shall happily be gifted with a kaleidoscope power to patternize all confusion, and shall become ophthalmia proof, then will Turner be a greater painter than ever the world, constituted as it is at present, wishes to see.¹³

The exhibition comprised 122 paintings including past masters, and it is worth contrasting the above comments, inept as they are, with Eagles' praise of Poussin:

We have in No. 37 a picture by N. Poussin of a different character [...] It is rich, and of that *conventional* character for which he is often blamed, we think, without reason. *It just sufficiently differs from that of common nature*, to throw the imagination back into antiquity; the rocks, the trees, the fields that we saw yesterday will never do for transactions of the earlier periods of the world. The mind would suffer under an ideal anachronism. This Nicolo Poussin knew; and we do not question the reality of his scenes because they are not circumstantially our realities. By demanding and engaging our faith, *we submit to his impression as of perfect truth*. How very masterly is the grouping of the figures; with great variety there is no confusion, and the parts of the composition are so connected that the unity of design is well kept up. The women and children are exquisitely managed, and the incidents have a charming air of truth and nature.¹⁴

Further on, Eagles adds: "The production of Calcott, Landseer, Cooper, and some others, will ever be admired for their *general truth* and purity".¹⁵ Eagles' language (*cf.* the italicized parts of these quotations) betrays his adherence to Reynolds, and the idea that, 'common nature' being everywhere defective and the most beautiful being "the

¹³ *Eagles 1836*, p. 551.

¹⁴ *Eagles 1836*, p. 547-548. My italics.

¹⁵ *Eagles 1836*, p. 548. My italics.

most general form of nature”,¹⁶ in painting “the highest style has the least of common nature”.¹⁷ Eagles does not speak of ‘general form’, but this is obvious what he meant when speaking of ‘general truth’. These ideas of Reynolds will be discussed in section 2.5 below.

When juxtaposed with Eagles’ clear inability to understand Turner’s compositions and his use of colour, which he could only deride,¹⁸ these further comments entail what we see as our problem. Quite obviously, Turner does not follow the precepts inherited from Reynolds and the Royal Academy, and we could leave it at that, assuming a relativist stance, but this was not Ruskin’s. He would thus need to explain why one should think these precepts defective and how Turner is painting from better ones. This, in turn, requires uprooting some aesthetic fundamentals.

Thus, Ruskin began writing the first volume of *Modern Painters* in 1842, his last year at Oxford. It was published anonymously¹⁹ in 1843, and was to be followed by a second volume in 1846, where Ruskin set out his aesthetic theory in even greater details and clarity, and a further three volumes were to appear between 1855 and 1860, which reflected the evolution of his thought on art, in relation, especially, to his deepened knowledge of and fascination for Greek art, and Italian art and architecture, as well as his encounter with the Pre-Raphaelites in 1850. Therefore, although Ruskin had gone far afield by 1860, one can simply see his defence of Turner as *Ruskin’s problem*. His objective was thus to overturn Reynolds’ precepts, and for this he had literally to rethink the aesthetic basis of painting.

¹⁶ Reynolds 1835, p. 132.

¹⁷ Reynolds 1835, p. 129.

¹⁸ In 1842, criticisms of the same sort were voiced, for example by Darley: “This gentleman [Turner] has, on former occasions, chosen to paint with cream, or chocolate, yolk of egg, or currant jelly, – here he uses his whole array of kitchen stuff” (Darley 1842, p. 433).

¹⁹ The book is presented as having been written by “a Graduate of Oxford”. One should note that Ruskin also used a pseudonym during these years, “Kata Phusin”, a transliteration of the ‘Ancient Greek for ‘according to nature’. This choice of pseudonym should become evident, especially in light of sections 3.1 and 3.3.

I am not so much interested in what Ruskin had eventually to say about Turner's paintings as such, in *Modern Painters I* or later, as I am about what recasting of aesthetics he embarked on in order to formulate his defence. But a few words must be said about *Modern Painters I*, in relation to the above criticisms of Turner. According to Ruskin, in their failure to understand Turner on colour and shadows, critics such as Eagles made two related mistakes. First, they failed to see, so to speak, what is in front of their eyes. As Ruskin encapsulated it: "The first great mistake people make is the supposition that they must *see* a thing if it is before their eyes."²⁰

Turner was accused of disregarding nature, hence his odd colours and so forth, but Ruskin would argue that it is the conventions of painting, from Poussin, Claude, Reynolds, etc. that actually barred people from painting from nature. It is of course easy to criticise the artificiality of trees and leaves, of shadows in Claude, and it is important to see that such old masters were not painting from nature, as in the 'particular truth' of this or that flower, but seeking to paint 'general truth' – this is the point to be discussed in section 2.5 – but also this meant that one stopped *looking*, and their observations of nature were simply inadequate. Thus, *Modern Painters I* is replete with injunctions to the reader to go out and look by themselves, accompanied by pedagogical passages designed to guide them, so that they can experience nature by themselves. To take only one example, if we assume that we already know what a shadow is and mean to apply that knowledge in the critical evaluation of paintings, Ruskin would suggest this:

Go out some bright sunny day in winter, and look for a tree with a broad trunk, having rather delicate boughs hanging down on the sunny side, near the trunk. Stand four or five yards from it, with your back to the sun. You will find that the boughs between you and the trunk of the tree are very indistinct, that you confound them in places with the trunk itself, and cannot possibly trace one of them from its insertion to its extremity. But the shadows which they cast upon the trunk, you will find clear, dark, and

²⁰ 3.141.

distinct, perfectly traceable through their whole course, except when they are interrupted by the crossing boughs. And if you retire backwards, you will come to a point where you cannot see the intervening boughs at all, or only a fragment of them here and there, but can still see their shadows perfectly plain. Now, this may serve to show you the immense prominence and importance of shadows where there is anything like bright light. They are, in fact, commonly far more conspicuous than the thing which casts them, for being as large as the casting object, and altogether made up of a blackness deeper than the darkest part of the casting object, (while that object is also broken up with positive and reflected lights,) their large, broad, unbroken spaces, tell strongly on the eye, especially as all form is rendered partially, often totally invisible within them, and as they are suddenly terminated by the sharpest lines which nature ever shows.²¹

Encouraging readers to experiment by themselves and guiding them by explanations of what they will observe, so that they become more aware and perceptive was Ruskin's first step at undermining Turner's critics. He goes on arguing that Turner was in fact in this very sense the most *realist* of painters, and that this is precisely why he painted as he did, going as far as, say, using red and gold in a scenery where one would not necessarily detect any offhandedly.²²

We need not follow Ruskin in this part of the demonstration, which is tangential to the argument of this thesis, but I simply note that Ruskin did not stop at the 'realism' inherent to this first step. In *Modern Painters II* and *III*, he argued that in the observation of nature there is a deeper truth, a 'moral truth', still to be apprehended, and that 'imagination' and 'emotions' play a role in its apprehension, since moral truth has to be *felt* by the observer. Thus, the careful observation of the particulars of a

²¹ 3.303-04.

²² See for example his description of *Mercury and Argos*, a reply of sorts to Eagles' critique: "In the Mercury and Argos, the pale and vaporous blue of the heated sky is broken with grey and pearly white, the gold colour of the light warming it more or less as it approaches or retires from the sun; but, throughout, there is not a grain of pure blue; all is subdued and warmed at the same time by the mingling grey and gold, up to the very zenith, where, breaking through the flaky mist, the transparent and deep azure of the sky is expressed with a single crumbling touch; the keynote of the whole is given, and every part of it passes at once far into glowing and aerial space" (3.292-293). I shall have more to say on Ruskin on Turner on colour at the very end of this chapter and chapter 3, footnote 3.

scenery becomes identical with the exploration of one's own emotional resonance to it, and this is precisely what Ruskin thought needed to be asserted in order to overturn Reynolds. This is the train of thought that we will examine in the remainder of this chapter, up to the critique of Reynolds.

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Now, to understand Ruskin's further moves, we need to see which element of his background he made an appeal to, that is to see how his ideas emerged from his encounter with some of the key figures of the 18th century and early 19th century that shaped his background: philosophers, especially those who wrote about the newly-formed sub-discipline of 'aesthetics', as well as painters themselves such as Reynolds, and poets such as Wordsworth. Ruskin's aesthetic theory was thus devised as a *solution* to his original problem, that of defending Turner, by careful and original assemblage of critiques of competing aesthetic theories and elements taken from them.

I shall begin in the next section with a brief sketch of what I take to be an important dimension of Ruskin's life, involving the early influence of Wordsworth,²³ and introduce his notion of 'pathetic fallacy' in order to extract the outline of a theory of emotions and sincerity in art underlying Ruskin's aesthetics. In keeping with the tradition of *ut pictura poesis*²⁴ that Ruskin can be said to have revived,²⁵ my discussion will range freely from poetry to painting. Ruskin's own words illustrate how doing so can be productive:

²³ I am not so much forgetting the key influence of Turner, as I am following here Dinah Birch's lead in explicating Ruskin: "Ruskin's critical identity is defined by patterns of opposition. One of the most far-reaching is the fact that his inventiveness is deeply rooted in memory. The new draws on the old. Wordsworth's poetry and Turner's painting figure in his mind as part of his memory of childhood and youth" (Birch 1999, p. 332). I think that Ruskin brings to his interactions with Turner's art a particular vision, already partly formed, that I intend to explore in this chapter. I also take my lead in this section from Hewison 1976, chapter 1.

²⁴ 'as is painting so is poetry'. See Landow 1968.

²⁵ See Landow 1971, chapter 1.

[...] infinite confusion has been introduced [...] by the careless and illogical custom of opposing painting to poetry, instead of regarding poetry as consisting in noble use, whether of colours or words. Painting is properly to be opposed to *speaking* or *writing*, but not to *poetry*. Both painting and speaking are methods of expression. Poetry is the employment of either for the noblest purposes.²⁶

2.2. Nature, Emotions, the 'Pathetic Fallacy' and Sincerity

Ruskin's father collected art and encouraged his son's literary and artistic activities, including poetry, with the publication of his first poem at the age of 11.²⁷ Ruskin was to win the Oxford Newdigate Prize for poetry in 1839,²⁸ and poetry was to remain part of his literary output – his collected poems forming volume two of the Library Edition – albeit one that will not be surveyed here. One aspect of poetry which is relevant, however, is the encounter with Wordsworth's poetry in the context of his childhood visits to the Lake District.

During Ruskin's formative years, his family vacationed in Scotland, visiting on its way the Lake District²⁹ – they would also take opportunity to visit on their way places such as Blenheim Palace or Chatsworth, to see the collections of old masters they housed. It was not, however, art works that left the earliest and deepest impressions on Ruskin, but the mountains of northern England and Scotland:

The first thing which I remember, as an event of life, was being taken by my nurse to the brow of Friar's Crag on Derwent Water;³⁰ the intense joy, mingled with awe, that I had in looking through the hollows in the mossy roots, over the crag, into the dark lake, has associated itself more or less with all twining roots of trees ever since. Two other thing I remember as,

²⁶ 5.31.

²⁷ For Ruskin's family and early years, see *Hilton 1985*, pp.1-40.

²⁸ 2.xxiii.

²⁹ Detailed account of Ruskin's later tours of Scotland and of the Lake District in 1837-1838 provide a good idea of the earlier ones. See *Dearden 1963*, *Dearden 1968* and *Hanley & Wildman 2003*.

³⁰ Derwent water is one of the largest lakes of the Lake District.

in a sort, beginnings of life; – crossing Shapfells (being let out of the chaise to run up the hills) and going through Glenfarg, near Kinross, in a winter's morning, when the rocks were hung with icicles; these being culminating points in an early life of more travelling than is usually indulged to a child.³¹

As he was to put it in *The Eagle's Nest* (1872):

[...] the beginning of all my own art work in life [...] depended not on my love of art, but of mountains and sea.³²

In light of what was written in the previous section, these remarks give us a cue: a good deal of Ruskin's thinking was shaped by his own emotional resonance to land and seascapes (in particular mountain scenery). It might appear odd to focus on this topic, when one is interested in aesthetics ideas that supposedly had relevance on decorative arts but, as I hope to show, these very ideas actually originate in Ruskin's reflective thinking about his own emotional response to such scenery. These experiences also likely caused his early and abiding interest in geology, which will be discussed in section 3.3 below. But for the moment, it is worth drawing links with Wordsworth.

Among such formative experiences was a visit to Rydal on 4 July 1830, in order to catch a glimpse of the great poet William Wordsworth during a service in the chapel. This event made its way in one of Ruskin's early poems, *Iteriad*, itself modelled on Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, for which Ruskin later excerpted a passage to be reproduced on the title page of the volumes of *Modern Painters*:

[...] old Mr Wordsworth at chapel of Rydal,
Whom we had the honour of seeing beside all.³³

³¹ 5.365.

³² 22.153.

³³ These lines were omitted later, see 2.315, n. 2. Ruskin was apparently disappointed by Wordsworth's appearance: "He appeared asleep the greatest part of the time. This gentleman possesses a long face and a large nose" (2.xxvii), but thought that Robert Southey, also in attendance, corresponded more to his own ideal of a poet (2.297).

Their first and only proper meeting was in 1839, when Ruskin received the Newdigate prize from Wordsworth's own hands.³⁴

Although it is rather likely that he did at one stage, one does not know for certain whether Ruskin read Wordsworth's *Guide through the District of the Lakes* or not.³⁵ Still, Robert Hewison's description of it as a "guide as to how to *see*",³⁶ seems befitting. Indeed, Wordsworth's intention was "to furnish a guide or Companion for the *Minds* of Persons of taste, and feeling for Landscape, who might be inclined to explore the District of the Lakes with that degree of attention to which its beauty may fairly claim".³⁷ Discussing the respected merits of the mountain ranges of the Lake District and the Alps for painting, Wordsworth also commented:

I would be sorry to contemplate either country in reference to that art, further than its fitness or unfitness for the pencil renders it more or less pleasing to the eye of the spectator, who has learned to observe and feel, chiefly from Nature itself.³⁸

The suggestion that one should "observe and feel, chiefly from Nature itself" captures very well the spirit with which Wordsworth wrote his guide. As Hewison put it, the poet was asking that his spectator, in order to observe, "must abandon conventional attitudes and look at the object itself, without trying to adapt it into some ideal composition".³⁹ Wordsworth was thus aiming at accurate descriptions of the Lakes' sceneries, i.e., in Hewison's apt words, at "truthful apprehension",⁴⁰ thus teaching his readers how to see so that they may feel.

³⁴ Hewison 1996, p. 3 and Bradley 1997, p. 3.

³⁵ Wordsworth 1835. Wordsworth was merely adding to a tradition of such guides inaugurated in the 18th century by William Gilpin with his *Observations on the River Wye* (Gilpin 1779).

³⁶ Hewison 1976, p. 16.

³⁷ Wordsworth 1835, p. i.

³⁸ Wordsworth 1835, p. 102.

³⁹ Hewison 1976, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Hewison 1976, p. 17.

Wordsworth even introduced for this very idea the concept of “wise passiveness”, in *Expostulation and Reply*:

Nor less I deem that there are powers,
Which of themselves our minds impress,
That we can feed this mind of ours,
In wise passiveness.⁴¹

Ruskin’s description of his experience of drawing an aspen at Fontainebleau in 1842 exemplifies perfectly the idea:

Languidly, but not idly, I began to draw it; and as I drew, the languor passed away: the beautiful lines insisted on being traced – without weariness. More and more beautiful they became, as each rose out of the rest, and took its place in the air. With wonder increasing every instant, I saw that they “composed” themselves, by finer laws than any known of men. At last, the tree was there, and everything that I had thought before about trees, nowhere.⁴²

As I see it, this attitude of openness towards the scenery, and concomitant need sincerely to attend to one’s feelings as they arise from contemplation, is fundamental for Ruskin’s whole aesthetics. It can be seen as the product of his early encounter with the grandeur and beauty of the Lake District, as well as with the poetry of Wordsworth, which helped revealing that beauty and grandeur to his readers. It contained the seeds of Ruskin’s *‘Theoria’*.

To explicate further the thought, one needs to clarify what one understands by ‘emotion’ in this context. Alas, Ruskin never makes explicit what he means by ‘emotion’. There are today many competing theories of emotions,⁴³ some possibly

⁴¹ Wordsworth & Coleridge 2008, p. 188. Wordsworth’s ‘wise passiveness’ should not be confused, therefore, with John Keats’ ‘negative capability’. See Wigod 1952.

⁴² 35.314. Quoted in Rosenberg 1961, p. 14.

⁴³ William Lyons already distinguished four classical theories in Lyons 1980, chapters 1-2, introducing a fifth one in chapter 3, the ‘causal-evaluative theory’. The view I ascribe to Ruskin below has points in common with the latter and, especially, one of the classical theories, the ‘cognitive theory’. See also Deonna & Teroni 2008 and de Sousa 2013 for more recent overviews and discussions of the ‘cognitive theory’.

better grounded in current scientific literature,⁴⁴ but the point of this section is not to introduce any of them. In accordance with my methodological approach, my point is not to assume any of these and somehow tack it onto Ruskin's text, it is rather to try and find out what conception of emotions Ruskin and, in further chapters, 19th-century artists influenced by him, were implicitly adhering to, what conception motivated them, what they saw as 'emotions'.

One obvious point is that when one speaks of emotions, such as fear, joy, etc. one finds that many of them, now seen as 'motives', are *causally* related to action. For example, the sudden sight of a bear in a forest trail might frighten me and *cause* me to flee. The *locus classicus* of this view is Descartes in *Les passions de l'âme*:

[...] le principal effet de toutes les passions dans les hommes, est qu'elles incitent et disposent leur âme à vouloir les choses auxquelles elles préparent leur corps : en sorte que le sentiment de la peur l'incite à vouloir fuir, celui de la hardiesse à vouloir combattre, & ainsi des autres.⁴⁵

Now many theories of emotions (such as Descartes') actually founder on the attempt at linking emotion and action.⁴⁶ But we need not worry, as Ruskin was quite clearly not interested in such issues, his focus being on what might be called 'contemplative emotions'.⁴⁷ For example, in *Modern Painters III*, Ruskin listed love, veneration,

⁴⁴ For example, the 'James-Lange theory', according to which emotions are the result of perceiving one's own physiological changes, and not that one's physiological changes are caused by one's emotions, was revived and provided support from neuroscience in *Prinz 2004*. This view is antithetical to the view I ascribe here to Ruskin.

⁴⁵ Article xl. (Silently correcting typography and spelling.)

⁴⁶ In the particular case of Descartes' theory, it is because he claims that emotions are generated in the mind, as the result of information about the state of the body passes to it *via* the pineal gland. Thus, fear becomes a subjective awareness of states of the body. Not only, therefore, they acquire their meanings in a "purely private and uncheckable performance" (*Kenny 1963*, p. 13; *Lyons 1980*, p. 5)), but they cannot explain action in turn, given that feelings do not by themselves incite one to do anything (*Ryle 1949*, 11-115; *Lyons 1980*, p. 7).

⁴⁷ This expression is taken from *Lyons 1980*, p. 37. Incidentally, these types of emotions are also problematic for theories trying to connect emotions with action.

admiration and joy, along with their opposites, hatred, indignation, horror and grief, and their combinations as constituting “poetical feelings”.⁴⁸

Incidentally, it is interesting to note that Wordsworth’s comments in the preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) indicates that his interest was primarily in one specific subset of these, ‘backward-looking emotion’,⁴⁹ such as grief:

I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment.⁵⁰

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Ruskin ranked Wordsworth as a ‘reflective or perceptive’ poet, as opposed to a ‘creative’ one.⁵¹

Ruskin’s comment on Edmund Burke’s aesthetic category of the ‘sublime’ is of interest in this respect, given that Burke believed that the sublime arises from fear and self-preservation, albeit when one is removed from the source of danger – as he put it, “pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances”.⁵² Upon analysing the emotion, Ruskin finds that the ingredient of ‘self-preservation’ is not involved in the emotion, and “There is no sublimity in the agony of terror”.⁵³ So, although he allows for the sublime, it is in his eyes even more ‘contemplative’ an emotion than Burke’s.

⁴⁸ 5.28.

⁴⁹ See Lyons 1980, p. 44.

⁵⁰ Wordsworth & Coleridge 2008, p.183. One typical instance of this is poem xii in Wordsworth’s *Poems of Imagination*.

⁵¹ 5.205, note *.

⁵² Burke 1968, Part I, §§ 7 & 18.

⁵³ 3.129.

Experiencing fear at the sight of a bear does indicate, however, that emotions present to us the world in evaluative terms, one might say ‘appraisals’,⁵⁴ that might be deemed ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate’, if, for example, one felt joy instead of fear at the sight of the bear. This indicates that emotions have a mind-to-world direction of fit similar to beliefs (as opposed to desires, with which they should not be confused). In other words: “emotions are basically forms of cognition”,⁵⁵ and if emotions include feelings and impulses (such as the wish to flee), these are related to what we take (or imagine) the world to be.⁵⁶ This view harks back to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, where fear is defined on the basis of one’s belief about a future state of the world: “Fear may be defined as a pain or disturbance due to imagining some destructive or painful evil in the future”.⁵⁷ This seems to me a key to understanding Ruskin on emotions and his whole aesthetic theory. To try and bring this out, I would like to introduce Ruskin’s notion of ‘pathetic fallacy’ in *Modern Painters III*, chapter XIII,⁵⁸ and to begin with Ruskin’s own introductory discussion of John Locke on ‘secondary qualities’.⁵⁹ The point is crucial as my reading relies on Ruskin having treated emotions in terms akin to secondary qualities.

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Locke distinguished between ‘primary qualities’ as properties that objects possess independently of us (occupying space, having a certain figure, being either in motion or not, having solidity, texture, etc.) and ‘secondary qualities’ as “powers to

⁵⁴ Peters 1970, p. 188.

⁵⁵ Peters 1970, p. 188.

⁵⁶ See Lyons 1980, p. 34, who takes this to be the correct view.

⁵⁷ *Rhetoric* 5, 1382a. The issue of the ‘rationality’ of emotions, which is the topic of de Sousa 1987 and Elster 1999, lies in the vicinity.

⁵⁸ 5.201-220.

⁵⁹ Ruskin had more than a passing acquaintance with Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* from his student days at Oxford. See 3.xix-xx and Collingwood 1893, I, pp. 97-114, Cook 1911, I, p. 124. Although he does not mention Locke in his chapter ‘Of the Pathetic Fallacy’, the reference is obvious and one finds an earlier discussion in *Modern Painters I*, 3.158-162.

produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities”,⁶⁰ that is to produce by the interaction of our particular perceptual apparatus, color, taste, smell, etc. The way the distinction is drawn raises questions about the status of these secondary qualities: they occur in interaction between the objects and us, but are they either in the object or in us? Locke added:

What I have said concerning colours and smells may be understood also of tastes and sounds, and other the like sensible qualities; which, whatever reality we by mistake attribute to them, are in truth nothing in the object themselves, but powers to produce various sensations in us.⁶¹

Thus, if one looks at a rose and sees it as red, their sensation of red is the result of their interacting with it. One could thus say that the rose is not truly red, but looks red because of the way it absorbs all colours, but reflects light only for red and that the particular qualia of ‘redness’ it has is the result within the beholder of their seeing it.

This view opens the door to a form of scepticism,⁶² given that “it is impossible to prove that one man sees in the same thing the same colour that another does, though he may use the same name for it”, as Ruskin himself put it in *Modern Painters I*.⁶³ Ruskin’s reaction is to rule out this scepticism as simply irrelevant:

But I do not speak of this uncertainty as capable of having any effect on art, because, though perhaps Landseer sees dogs of the colour which I should call blue, yet the colour he puts on the canvas, being in the same way blue to him, will still be brown or dog-colour to me; and so we may argue on points of colour just as if men were all alike, as indeed in all probability they do.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ J. Locke, *Essay...*, II, chap. viii, 10.

⁶¹ J. Locke, *Essay...*, II, chap. viii, 14.

⁶² Of the sort already raised in *Essay...*, II, chap. xxxii, 15.

⁶³ 3.160.

⁶⁴ 3.160-161. E. H. Landseer (1802-1873) was a member of the Royal Academy who had a reputation as animal painter. (He is for example praised in *Eagles 1836*, p. 550, a page before the criticism of Turner

By the time he wrote *Modern Painters III*, Ruskin came back to the distinction in the opening paragraphs of the chapter XIII in order to raise another issue, that of 'subjective' idealism:

The word "Blue", say certain philosophers, means the sensation of colour which the human eye receives in looking at the open sky, or at a bell gentian.

Now, say they farther, as this sensation can only be felt when the eye is turned to the object, and as, therefore, no such sensation is produced by the object when nobody looks at it, therefore the thing, when not looked at, is not blue [...]

From these ingenious views the step is very easy to a farther opinion, that it does not much matter what things are in themselves, but only what they are to us; and that the only real truth of them is their appearance to, or effect upon us. From which position, with a hearty desire for mystification, and much egotism, selfishness, shallowness, and impertinence, a philosopher may easily go so far as to believe, and say, that everything in the world depends upon his seeing or thinking of it, and that nothing, therefore, exists, but what he sees or thinks of.⁶⁵

Ruskin does not name any philosopher, and could possibly have had in mind Coleridge, but the position just described is certainly that of Bishop Berkeley. His answer here is also dismissive, but in an interesting way. First, he offers a reading of Locke on our knowledge of the secondary qualities which differs from an idealist one:⁶⁶

Now, to get rid of all these ambiguities and troublesome words at once, be it observed that the word "Blue" does *not* mean the *sensation* caused by a gentian on the human eye; but it means the *power* of producing that sensation: and this power is always there, in the thing, whether we are there

that so incensed Ruskin.) Ruskin commented later in the same half-mocking tone that "it was not by the study of Raphael that he attained his eminent success, but by a healthy love of Scotch terriers" (12.365).⁶⁵ 5.201-202.

⁶⁶ Locke explained perceptual knowledge, both of primary qualities and of secondary qualities, in terms of 'ideas' that are neither in the perceived object nor in the perceiving agent, but a hybrid of the two. This *tertium quid* invites an idealist conception of knowledge. Whereas the primary qualities of an object are the properties that the object possesses independently from us, the secondary qualities are mind dependent. Then, our knowledge of secondary qualities exists only as modifications of the mind, and this opens the door to idealism. Ruskin's reading stresses the fact that the secondary qualities exists in the object in a different mode than primary qualities.

to experience it or not, and would remain there though there were not left a man on the face of the earth.⁶⁷

Ruskin equates here the denotation of the word 'blue' *not with the sensation, but with the power to produce the sensation*, and claims that this power is "always there in the thing". So, he read Locke in strongly 'realist' terms, barring the way to 'idealist' views according to which objects are nothing apart from our sensations of them.

Today, instead of 'powers' philosophers would speak of 'disposition', as in 'solubility' being defined as the disposition of a substance such as salt to dissolve in water. Ruskin gives an analogous example, with gunpowder having the power of exploding. To this he adds that this power is so arranged by God:

In like manner, a gentian does not produce the sensation of blueness, if you don't look at it. But it has always the power of doing so; its particles being everlastingly so arranged by its Maker. And, therefore, the gentian and the sky are always verily blue, whatever philosophy may say to the contrary, and if you do not see them blue when you look at them, it is not their fault, but yours.⁶⁸

This is the second point: the gentian's power to produce the sensation of blue is there, in it, because God put it there. This points to a teleological explanation of the sort Locke provided further along in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, chap. xxxii, when he explained that God both "fitted us to receive" sensations and set those powers "as marks of distinctions in things".⁶⁹ So, if the gentian has the power to produce the sensation of blue and we are so equipped to sense that blue, this is also because of God, who has fitted us with the proper sensory apparatus. Accordingly, Locke argues that it

⁶⁷ 5.202.

⁶⁸ 5.202. The mention of 'particles' is in reference to Locke's "operation of insensible particles on our senses" in *Essay...*, II, chap. viii, 13.

⁶⁹ This teleological dimension is explained in *Lenz to appear*.

is calibrated⁷⁰ so to perceive these secondary qualities “as marks of distinctions in things”:

For God in his infinite wisdom having set them [the power] as marks of distinctions in things, whereby we may be able to discern one thing from another, and so choose any of them for our uses as we have occasion; it alters not the nature of our simple idea,⁷¹ whether we think that the idea of blue be in the violet itself, or in our mind only; and only the power of producing it by texture of its parts, reflecting the particles of light after a certain manner, to be in the violet itself.⁷²

But there is also a purpose (hence the ‘teleological aspect’) to this ‘fit’:

We are furnished with faculties (dull and weak as they are) to discover enough in the creatures to lead us to the knowledge of the Creator, and the knowledge of our duty; and we are fitted well enough with abilities to provide for the convenience of living: these are our business in this world.
73

This teleological explanation of this sort was common within Ruskin’s background.

For example, it is clearly expressed Wordsworth’s ‘The Recluse’:

How exquisitely the individual Mind
[...] to the external World
Is fitted: – and how exquisitely, too
[...]
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish: – this is our high argument.

⁷⁰ To prove his point, Locke imagines what would happen if our senses were much sharper than they are, and even the case of angels in *Essay...*, II, chap. xxxii, 11-13.

⁷¹ Locke used the term ‘ideas’, literally his translation for Descartes’ ‘*idées*’, to mean ‘sensations’ or ‘sense data’.

⁷² J. Locke, *Essay...*, II, chap. xxxii, 14.

⁷³ J. Locke, *Essay...*, II, chap. xxxii, 12.

One could argue here that this 'fit', that provides us with a 'life-world'⁷⁴ and abilities to survive, etc., is the result of Darwinian natural selection, but Darwin's *Origins of Species* was only to appear in 1859, and thus not yet in part of the intellectual background. Wordsworth gave this teleological explanation a loftier twist,⁷⁵ with the idea that sensibility to natural beauty leads to a supra-sensual 'truth',⁷⁶ for example, in the following excerpts from 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798':

[...] we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

[...] And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; *of all the mighty world*
Of eye, and ear, — both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul

⁷⁴ See Lenz to appear for the use of this concept from Husserl.

⁷⁵ I do not wish to claim that Locke is here a source for Wordsworth's ideas, whose sources are rather in the British 'pantheistic' religious thinking in the 18th century, the Cambridge Platonists such as Cudworth, with his notion of 'world soul', and, of course, Coleridge. See Rader 1967, pp. 71-80.

⁷⁶ See Rader 1967, 156-157.

Of all my moral being.⁷⁷

In the italicized passage, Wordsworth could be read as imputing a creative role to the mind, a view that Ruskin would not countenance, but the idea that the deliverances of the senses lead to a supra-sensuous truth is congenial to Ruskin, who had already appealed in *Modern Painters I* to divine order to support his claim that 'beauty' has an objective reality:

Any material object which can give us pleasure in the simple contemplation of its outward qualities without any direct or definite exertion of the intellect, I call in some way, or in some degree, beautiful. Why we receive pleasure from some forms and colours, and not from others, is no more to be asked or answered than why we like sugar and dislike wormwood. The utmost subtlety of investigation will only lead to ultimate instincts and principles of human nature, for which no farther reason can be given than the simple will of the Deity that we should be so created.⁷⁸

Humans react in certain ways because God has so created them, but, Ruskin hastens to add, do not receive pleasure from certain odours or colours, "because they are illustrative of it [God's nature], nor from any perception that they are illustrative of it, but instinctively and necessarily, as we derive sensual pleasure from the scent of a rose".⁷⁹ Ruskin also described in *Modern Painters II* how he learned "real meaning of the word Beautiful" while experiencing an avalanche in the Alps:

Suddenly, there came in the direction of Dome du Goûter a crash – of prolonged thunder; and when I looked up, I saw the cloud cloven, as it were by the avalanche itself, whose white stream came bounding down the eastern slope of the mountain, like slow lightning. The vapour parted before its fall, pierced by the whirlwind of its motion; the gap widened, the dark shade melted away on either side; and, like a risen spirit casting off its garment of corruption, and flushed with eternity of life, the Aiguilles of the south broke through the black foam of the storm clouds. One by one, pyramid above pyramid, the mighty range of its companions shot off their shrouds, and took to themselves their glory – all fire – no shade – no

⁷⁷ Wordsworth & Coleridge 2008, p.144 & 145. My italics.

⁷⁸ 3.109.

⁷⁹ 3.109.

dimness. Spire of ice – dome of snow – wedge of rock – all fire in the light of the sunset, sank into the hollows of the crags – and pierced through the prisms of the glaciers, and dwelt within them – as it does in clouds. The ponderous storm writhed and moaned beneath them, the forests wailed and waved in the evening wind, the steep river flashed and leaped along the valley; but the mighty pyramids stood calmly – in the very heart of the high heaven – a celestial city with walls of amethyst and gates of gold – filled with the light and clothed with the Peace of God. And then I learned – what till then I had not known – the real meaning of the word Beautiful. With all that I had ever seen before – there had come mingled the associations of humanity – the exertion of human power – the action of human mind. The image of self had not been effaced in that of God [...] It was then that I understood that all which is the type of God's attributes [...] can turn the human soul from gazing upon itself [...] and fix the spirit [...] on the types of that which is to be its food for eternity; – this and this only is in the pure and right sense of the word beautiful.⁸⁰

The last sentences are a clear indication that he saw 'beauty' in objective terms, not unlike, as it turns out, secondary qualities. We are thus back to the Aristotelian idea that emotion are, like perceptions of secondary qualities for Locke, *forms of cognition* – cognition of something 'out there' and 'objective'.

It is also in *Modern Painters II*, that Ruskin introduced his key distinction between 'typical' and 'vital' beauty,⁸¹ as follows:

The definition is as follows: "first, that external quality of bodies already so often spoken of, and which, whether it occurs in a stone, flower, beast or in man, is absolutely identical, which [...] may be shown to be in some sort typical of the Divine attributes, and, which, therefore I shall, for distinction's sake, call Typical Beauty; and, secondarily, the appearance of felicitous fulfilment of function in living things, more especially of the joyful and right exertion of perfect life in man: and this kind of beauty I shall call Vital Beauty."⁸²

⁸⁰ 4.364-365.

⁸¹ 4.64.

⁸² 4.64.

I shall come back to 'vital beauty' in section 3.1, but for the moment, let us note that Ruskin claimed they both require a moral sensitivity that goes beyond mere sensing. In the case of 'typical beauty':

I have already noticed the example of very pure and high typical beauty which is to be found in the lines and gradations of unsullied snow: if, passing to the edge of a sheet of it, upon the Lower Alps, early in May, we find, as we are nearly sure to find, two or three little round openings pierced in it, and through these emergent, a slender, pensive, fragile flower, whose small, dark purple, fringed bell hangs down and shudders over the icy cleft that it has cloven, as if partly wondering at its own recent grave, and partly dying of very fatigue after its hard-won victory; we shall be, or we ought to be, moved by a totally different impression of loveliness from that which we receive among the dead ice and the idle clouds. There is now uttered to us a call for sympathy, now offered to us an image of moral purpose and achievement, which, however unconscious or senseless the creature may indeed be that so seems to call, cannot be heard without affection, nor contemplated without worship, by any of us whose heart is rightly tuned, or whose mind is clearly and surely sighted.⁸³

(This is a point on which I shall come back in the next section.) According to Ruskin, typical beauty has six modes: infinity, unity, repose, symmetry, purity and moderation,⁸⁴ all of them indicative of "God's working, and the inevitable stamp of His image on what He creates".⁸⁵ Since the central topic of this thesis is curves, it must be noted that Ruskin admired them, precisely because of their infinite aspect:

[...] while I assert positively, and have no fear of being able to prove, that a curve of any kind is more beautiful than a right line, I leave it to the reader to accept or not, as he pleases, that reason of its agreeableness which is the only one that I can at all trace; namely, that every curve divides itself infinitely by its change of direction.

That all forms of acknowledged beauty are composed exclusively of curves will, I believe, be at once allowed; but that which there will be need

⁸³ 4.146

⁸⁴ Chapters V-X, 4.76-141. See also for brief accounts, *Collingwood 1891*, pp. 120-123 and *Landow 1971*, p. 114f.

⁸⁵ 4.143.

more especially to prove is, the subtlety and constancy of curvature in all natural forms whatsoever.⁸⁶

As far as the argument of this thesis is concerned, this is one of the key passages in the whole of Ruskin, since it captures his idea that God's signature is stamped in the infinite divisibility of every curve, and that this is what renders them more beautiful than any straight line – a very pregnant idea as we shall see.

To get an idea of the progress of this thesis through this chapter and the next ones, it is worth quoting once more *Modern Painters II* on 'typical beauty' and curves:

The universal forces of nature, and the individual energies of the matter submitted to them, are so appointed and balanced, that they are continually bringing out curves of this kind in all visible forms, and that circular lines become nearly impossible under any circumstances. The acceleration, for instance, of velocity, in streams that descend from hill-sides, gradually increases their power of erosion, and in the same degree the rate of curvature in the descent of the slope, until at a certain degree of steepness this descent meets, and is concealed by, the straight line of the detritus. The junction of this right line with the plain is again modified by the farther bounding of the larger blocks, and by the successively diminishing scale of landslips caused by the erosion at the bottom. So that the whole contour of the hill is one of curvature; first, gradually increasing in rapidity to the maximum steepness of which the particular rock is capable, and then decreasing in a decreasing ratio, until it arrives at the plain-level. This type of form, modified of course more or less by the original boldness of the mountain, and dependent on its age, its constituent rock, and the circumstances of its exposure, is yet in its general formula applicable to all. So the curves of all things in motion, and of all organic forms, most rude and simple in the shell spirals, and most complicated in the muscular lines of the higher animals.⁸⁷

The asterisk marks the location of a footnote added by Ruskin in the 1883 re-edition of *Modern Painters*, which is extremely telling:

⁸⁶ 4.88.

⁸⁷ 4.107.

This is, I believe, the first intimation given in my writings of the care with which they were to enforce and follow out the study of abstract curvature; a study which, as yet unknown in our drawing schools, is nevertheless the indispensable basis of all noble design in art, and all accurate observation of external form by science. Twenty years of useless debate and senseless theory respecting glacier motion might have been spared us, if Professor Agassiz had been able to draw with his own hand, accurately, a single curve of mountain crest, glacier wave, river's bank, or fish's tail.⁸⁸

In this retrospective look, Ruskin informs us of "the care with which" his writings "were to enforce and follow out the study of abstract curvature", and claims that they form "the indispensable basis of all noble design in art, and all accurate observation of external form by science". These comments are a key to my thesis concerning the influence of Ruskin on generations of artists, extending to pioneers of Art Nouveau. The remark on "accurate observation of external form by science" and the critical comment on Agassiz and the scientific controversy over glacier motion will be discussed in section 3.3 below.

*

At all events, we can now grasp what is at stake in Ruskin's notion of 'pathetic fallacy'. He introduces the idea with lines from the American poet Oliver Wendell Holmes:

The spendthrift crocus, bursting through the mould
Naked and shivering, with his cup of gold.

Which he comments thus: "This is very beautiful, and yet very untrue. The crocus is not a spendthrift, but a hardy plant: its yellow is not gold, but saffron".⁸⁹ And two lines from Charles Kingsley:

They rowed her across the rolling foam
The cruel, crawling foam.

⁸⁸ 4.107, note.

⁸⁹ 5.204.

Which he comments in similar fashion:

The foam is not cruel, neither does it crawl. The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in which the reason is unhinged by grief. All violent feelings have the same effect. They produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the “pathetic fallacy”.⁹⁰

There seems, therefore, two points made by Ruskin, namely that one should aim at true description (this being Wendell Holmes’s mistake) and, moreover, avoid falsely imputing emotions to the natural scenery (this being Kingsley’s mistake). The contrast Ruskin wants to get across is between projecting one’s emotions on the scenery and having emotions arise in one from a truer engagement with it. As he writes further on:

[...] it is only the basest writer who cannot speak of the sea without talking of “raging waves”, “remorseless floods”, “ravenous billows”, etc.; and it is one of the signs of the highest power in a writer to check all such habits of thought, and *to keep his eyes fixed firmly on the pure fact, out of which if any feeling comes to him or his reader, he knows it must be a true one.*⁹¹

The phrase ‘to keep one’s eyes fixed firmly on the pure fact, out of which if any feeling comes to one, one knows it must be a true one’ captures his key idea perfectly – emotions are cognitions – and we can see here why Ruskin felt he needed to begin his chapter with a brief discussion of Locke’s notion of secondary qualities.

A related theme emerging in this chapter, which is of great importance for this thesis is that of ‘emotional sincerity’. Since Benedetto Croce’s *Aesthetics*,⁹² ‘sincerity’ is rarely discussed in secondary literature and, then, mainly within literary studies,⁹³ but it played a central role in the way Ruskin and other after him assessed works of art.

⁹⁰ 5.205.

⁹¹ 5.211. My italics.

⁹² Croce 1922, pp. 53-54.

⁹³ See Casey 1966, Casey 1972, Trilling 1973, or, in relation to Wordsworth, Perkins 1964.

The issue surfaces here in Ruskin's discussion of Alexander Pope's falsification of the emotion felt by Ulysses when suddenly encountering his companion Elpenor, who had died unbeknownst to him, in the shades of Tartarus. Pope renders Homer's

Elpenor! How camest thou under the shadowy darkness? Hast thou come
faster on foot than I in my black ship?

Thus:

O, say, what angry power Elpenor led,
To glide in shades, and wander with the dead?
How could thy soul, by realms and seas disjoined
Outfly the nimble sail, and leave the lagging wind?

Here, 'nimbleness of sail' and 'laziness of wind' are not true to Ulysses's emotion, so plainly rendered by Homer. There is more to Ruskin's complaint, however, than condemnation of superficiality, affectation or mere sentimentality, more than the idea that one ought to feel deeply one's emotions:⁹⁴ there is a moral injunction at work here, namely the duty not to deceive. This duty is foremost towards the artist's own emotions, given that an artist who is deceitful about her emotion could not be otherwise than deceitful towards others in her own expression. But under the terms laid out so far, this means that emotional sincerity is inseparable from minute attention to the external world, given that it is in interaction with it that emotions arise. In front of a mountain scene, attention to details will be equivalent to the exploration of one's emotions.

The whole idea goes even deeper than that, given that insincerity has ramifications within many theories, such as Freud's theory of 'unconsciousness' or Sartre's '*mauvaise foi*'. The thought is simple enough not to need heavy theoretical apparatus to be explained: one may possess emotions but at the same time wish to disown them,

⁹⁴ This is an obvious theme for poets such as Wordsworth, who wrote that "the writer who would excite sympathy is bound [...] to give proof that he himself has been moved" (*Wordsworth 1876*, vol. II, p. 38). For a study of the ways Wordsworth tried to find criteria of sincerity for his own writing, see *Perkins 1964*.

so to speak, so try and suppress them – one has in mind here Freud's '*Unterdrückung*' or 'repression'. Inspired by Spinoza and Freud, R. G. Collingwood described the state in which one would thus disown or repress one's emotions, as "corruption of consciousness".⁹⁵ Collingwood would therefore conceive of art as part of the struggle against this 'corruption' by bringing one's own emotions to one's awareness. Under such a view, art is cognitive in this sense that it helps us to know our emotions, and it also has intrinsic value for that reason.

For Wordsworth or Ruskin, only a sincere person would truthfully cope with her emotions,⁹⁶ so they conceived of art in broadly similar terms, as enabling one to know one's emotions: the process of coming to know one's emotions, say, in front of a mountain scene is the same as that of expressing them. Of course, we should be mindful of fully attributing Collingwood's view to Ruskin, but it is worth pointing out that he also claimed of the 'pathetic fallacy' that "so far as it is a fallacy, it is always the sign of a morbid state of mind".⁹⁷ Thus, Ruskin too senses that falsification in art is linked with a failure of the mind (but not just of the 'psychoanalytic' kind, strong emotions such as grief in the case of Kingsley, above, would count here as 'morbid states'). For him, avoidance of the pathetic fallacy, that is, sincerity, is the condition for emotions to emerge that are truer to the facts, and this sense 'healthier', since one would foster a better regulation of one's emotions. This may sound strange, but, as shall see in section

⁹⁵ Collingwood 1938, p. 218.

⁹⁶ On this point in Wordsworth, see Perkins 1964, p. 13. On sincerity in Ruskin, 5.58f.

⁹⁷ 5.218. In the catalogue of a recent exhibition of Ruskin's drawings and photographs at the National Gallery of Canada, the brief description of one of his watercolours of Lucerne in 1861/63 includes the following comment: "Ruskin was a neurotic man given to extremes of ecstatic emotion and bleak despair. This pattern of bipolarity can be read in his drawings, which are on occasions exhilarating and joyous and others marked by ominous forebodings" (Newall 2014, p. 178). The possibility of applying the pathetic fallacy to Ruskin's own work raises a difficulty. Indeed, that Ruskin was firmly against committing that fallacy does not preclude that he did not commit it himself. On the other hand, having recourse to such hypotheses might easily lead to inaccurate descriptions. Since symptomatic readings are excluded, descriptive analyses in this thesis do not, however, proceed in this way.

6.2, it helps understanding why British artists rejected the Art Nouveau line, because of its perceived lack of sincerity.

The foregoing should help guiding us through the following excursus in British aesthetics in the remainder of this chapter, with the aim to better characterize Ruskin's particular stance. Before moving on, a quick word on Ruskin's evaluation of Wordsworth, as I would not want to overstate my case, having relied heavily on Wordsworth to state my points about Ruskin. After all, Ruskin was to write in *Praeterita* not that Wordsworth but Byron was his "master in verse, as Turner in colour".⁹⁸ At first, Ruskin had but praise, for example in a letter in 1843:

Wordsworth may be trusted as a guide in everything, he feels nothing but what we ought all to feel – what every mind in pure moral health *must* feel, he says nothing but what we ought to believe – what all strong intellects *must* believe.⁹⁹

But he also distanced himself in the evaluation of his poetry in *Modern Painters II* citing Wordsworth as an example of poets who employ the 'pathetic fallacy'.¹⁰⁰ What was at issue in this section was the underlying attitude of openness to the world *via* exploration of one's emotion, which was broadly shared by Ruskin – and this is reflected again in the above quotation – not his evaluation of his poetry.

2.3. Taste, Aesthetics and *Theoria*

Eighteenth-century theories of art are often described as originating in the 'problem of taste'.¹⁰¹ The first key texts include *The Moralists; a Philosophical Rhapsody* by

⁹⁸ 35.144. Ruskin also believed Byron to be "the greatest poet after Shakespeare" (1.373).

⁹⁹ 4.392.

¹⁰⁰ 5.217. For another critical comment from *Modern Painters II*, see 5.359.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Guyer 2008, p. 33, Shelley 2010, 1. As W. G. Collingwood pointed out, 'taste' is only one of the senses, but it was used at that time *metaphorically* to refer to *the* faculty which perceives beauty (Collingwood 1891, p. 116).

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, reprinted in vol. II of *Characteristicks of Mean, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) and Joseph Addison's *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1712), which popularized Locke's views. Although it is trivial to say that taste varies from individual to individual, there were numerous attempts during that century to go beyond that simple claim and thus to try and account for the fact that we often agree in our judgements and that they are in some yet to be specified way objective. There were even some who believe in the existence of a universal 'standard of taste', to use David Hume's expression. Shaftesbury thought one needs to cultivate one's taste to discern it, while Hume insisted on one's ability to judge, as the parable of Sancho reminds us,¹⁰² and Lord Kames thought that "our taste [...] is not accidental, but uniform and universal, making it a branch of our nature".¹⁰³ Others would situate 'beauty' directly in the objects themselves. For example, Thomas Reid argued that point using the way we ordinarily express ourselves in language:

If it be said that the perception of beauty is merely a feeling in the mind that perceives, without any belief of excellence in the object, the necessary consequence of this opinion is, that when I say Virgil's *Georgics* is a beautiful poem, I mean not to say any thing of the poem, but only something concerning myself and my feelings. Why should I use a language that expresses the contrary of what I mean?

My language, according to the necessary rules of construction can bear no other meaning but this, that there is something in the poem, and not in me, which I call beauty. Even those who hold beauty to be merely a feeling in the poem that perceives it, find themselves under a necessity of expressing themselves, as if beauty were solely a quality of the object, and not of the percipient.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Recall that Sancho, upon sampling a barrel of wine, finds it tasting of leather and iron; he is then ridiculed by the others until the barrel is emptied and a key with a leather thong is found at the bottom (*Hume* 1985, pp. 234-235). Ruskin's only mentions of Hume in 7.285 and 36.517-518 are, however, on economic matters.

¹⁰³ *Kames* 2005, I, p. 145. Surprisingly, there is no mention on Lord Kames in Ruskin.

¹⁰⁴ *Reid* 1969, p. 759. The contrary view (about moral qualities), namely the view that beauty would be a 'secondary quality', was expressed by David Hume in *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Book III, Part I, Sect. I.

Although his position is more nuanced than this, from what we have seen so far, Ruskin too situated beauty in the object.

Perception was indeed nearly always involved in attempts at solving the problem of taste. After all, we predicate 'beauty' of things and we are naturally inclined to see it as a property that attaches to some of them, so that the question arises of our ability to recognize that a given thing possesses that property or not. Shaftesbury, for example, postulated an internal sense, literally an 'inward eye',¹⁰⁵ that allows us to discern beauty but whose functioning is as natural as that of external senses. Thus, this internal sense is on a par with the external senses. But Shaftesbury thought that beauty cannot be grasped by any of the latter, it is only to be grasped by the mind or intellect.¹⁰⁶ Addison suggested instead that, while to taste is to judge, one judges what imagination provides, namely 'representations' of material objects such as mountain ranges and waterfalls, etc. Thus, taste takes pleasure in material objects such as these. Without getting further into details, we can see that the idea that 'beauty' would reside in the things themselves as opposed to residing, as proverb has it, the 'eyes of the beholder' was also 'in the air'; it would help one to account for objectivity in judgements of taste. This idea was to be given further emphasis by the Scottish philosophers Francis Hutcheson and, as we just saw, Thomas Reid.

It is in connection with this emphasis on judgements of taste that A. G. Baumgarten used the Greek term '*Æsthesis*' to coin the expression 'aesthetic', in his *Metaphysics* (1st ed., 1735):

§ 533. The science of knowing and presenting with regards to the senses is AESTHETICS [...].

§ 607. [...] The art of forming taste, or the art concerning judging sensitively and presenting its judgement is AESTHETIC CRITICISM. [...].

¹⁰⁵ Cooper 2001, II, 231.

¹⁰⁶ See Cooper 2001, II, 238.

There was a tendency at the time, perhaps more prominent in J. C. Gottsched, to think that judgements of taste *track* objective rules that can be made explicit, in any given artistic domain, by “genuine masters”.¹⁰⁷ Baumgarten also believed that aesthetics could issue in determinate, non-subjective and universal rules.

In a footnote to his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant rejected this attempt to “raise” the treatment of taste “to the rank of science” as “fruitless”,¹⁰⁸ keeping instead the expression ‘aesthetics’ for his study of the principles of ‘sensibility’, the ‘transcendental aesthetics’. His stated reason for rejecting attempts at providing universally valid rules or criteria in aesthetics was that, “as regards their chief sources”, they are “merely empirical, and consequently can never serve as determinate *a priori* laws by which our judgement of taste must be directed”.¹⁰⁹ This is reminiscent of Hume’s argument to the effect that it is impossible to derive a prescriptive (or normative) ‘ought’ from a descriptive ‘is’.¹¹⁰

As we shall see in section 2.5, devoted to his critique of Reynolds, Ruskin never thought that judgements of taste or the artistic activity could follow some set of rules or laws,¹¹¹ but he had an altogether different reason to object to ‘aesthetics’. At bottom, he was very much aware of an essential, if trite, aspect of art, namely that there is more to a scenery (and therefore in a painting) than the sum of its description in purely physical terms. He expressed himself very clearly on this point, in a letter dating from September 1847:

There was a time when the sight of a steep hill covered cutting against the sky, would have touched me with an inexpressible, which, in the endeavour to communicate and intensity, I must have sought for all kinds of far-off,

¹⁰⁷ See Guyer 2014, section 2.1.

¹⁰⁸ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A21/B36, note.

¹⁰⁹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A21/B36, note.

¹¹⁰ *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Book III, Part I, Sect. I.

¹¹¹ For a statement, see for example 4.239. In this, he was followed by the Arts and Crafts movement. See for example Crane 1900, p. 38.

dreamy images. Now I can look at such a slope with coolness, observation of fact. I see that it slopes at 20° or 25°; I know are spruce fir – “*Pinus nigra*” – of such and such rocks are slate of such and such a formation; the soil, thus, and thus; the day fine, and the sky blue. All this I can at once communicate in so many words, and this is all which is necessarily seen. But it is not all the truth; there is something else to be seen there, which I cannot see but in a certain condition of mind, nor can I make any one else see it, but by putting him into that condition, and my endeavour in description would be, not to detail the facts of the scene, but by any means whatsoever to put my hearer’s mind into the same ferment as my mind.¹¹²

According to him, the Greek term ‘*Æsthesis*’ was meant merely to cover ‘sensation’, of cold, colour, etc. and perhaps ‘beauty’. But Ruskin thought that ‘fancy’,¹¹³ understood here as limited to sensations or ‘*Æsthesis*’, is insufficient to apprehend the proper sort of feeling:

Fancy, as she stays at the externals, can never feel. She is one of the hardest hearted of the intellectual faculties, or rather one of the most purely and simply intellectual. She cannot be made serious, no edge-tools but she will play with; whereas the imagination is in all things the reverse. She cannot be but serious; she sees too far, too darkly, too solemnly, too earnestly, ever to smile. There is something in the heart of everything, if we can reach it, that we shall not be inclined to laugh at. The ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα¹¹⁴ of the sea is on its surface, not in the deep. And thus there is reciprocal action between the intensity of moral feeling and the power of imagination; for, on the one hand, those who have keenest sympathy are those who look closest and pierce deepest, and hold securest; and, on the other, those who have so pierced and seen the melancholy deeps of things, are filled with the most intense passion and gentleness of sympathy.¹¹⁵

¹¹² 36.80.

¹¹³ The concept of ‘fancy’ here is not the same as in Burke, where it refers to the ability to recombine elements in a new image. See *Burke 1968*, p. 16. Ruskin also criticises Dugald Stewart for the same view in 4.224-228.

¹¹⁴ The “innumerable laughter [of the ocean’s waves]”, from Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 90.

¹¹⁵ 4: 257. One should beware of the attempt by Ruskin in *Modern Painters II* to distinguish between ‘fancy’ and ‘imagination’ – see 4.232 – a distinction that he recanted later in an introductory note for the 1883 edition (4.219).

For some 18th-century philosophers, such as Shaftesbury, beauty would not be ‘sensual’ but ‘intellectual’ – this point will be taken up again in the next section. But Ruskin considered this a false dilemma, and believed instead that it is ‘moral’, and he introduced instead the Greek term ‘*Theoria*’. Ruskin also devised in *Modern Painters II* a distinction between ‘theoretic’ and ‘imaginative’ faculties, in order to explain how one captures this ‘surplus’¹¹⁶ over and above that which is perceived. I shall come back to this point further in section 3.1.

Two passages deserve quotation and close scrutiny, if we wish to understand this key concept. The first is from *Modern Painters II* (1846):

I proceed, therefore, first to examine the nature of what I have called the Theoretic faculty, and to justify my substitution of the term “Theoretic” for “Æsthetic,” which is the one commonly now employed with reference to it.

Now the term “aesthesia” properly signifies mere sensual perception of the outward qualities and necessary effects of bodies; in which sense only, if we would arrive at any accurate conclusions on this difficult subject, it should always be used. But I wholly deny that the *impressions of beauty are in any way sensual; they are neither sensual nor intellectual, but moral*: and for the faculty receiving them, whose difference from mere perception I shall immediately endeavour to explain, no term can be more accurate or convenient than that employed by the Greeks, “Theoretic,” which I pray permission, therefore, always to use, and to call the operation of the faculty itself, *Theoria*.¹¹⁷

The second is from *Love’s Meinie* (1873):

The reader should know [...] that for what is now called “aesthesia,” I always used, and still use, the English word “sensation” – as, for instance, the sensation of cold or heat, and of their differences; – of a peacock’s and

¹¹⁶ Using here the English ‘surplus’ for Heidegger’s ‘*Überschuss*’. See Heidegger 2003, p. 66. It is this ‘surplus’ that Heidegger talks about when describing a painting of a pair of shoes by van Gogh, in his celebrated ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, Heidegger 1993, pp. 158-159, except that he appears to have mistaken these shoes for those of a peasant, while they most probably were van Gogh’s. See Schapiro 1968.

¹¹⁷ 4.42. My italics. On ‘*Æsthesis*’ vs. ‘*Theoria*’ in Ruskin, see, *inter alios*, Collingwood 1891, pp. 117-120, Landow 1971, pp. 90 & 159, Hewison 1976, pp. 57-58, and Fuller 1988, chapter 4.

lark's cry and their differences; – of the redness in a blush, and in rouge, and their differences; – of the whiteness in snow, and in almond-paste, and their differences; – of the blackness and brightness of night and day, or of smoke and gaslight, and their differences, etc., etc. But for the Perception of Beauty, I always used Plato's word, which is the proper word in Greek, and the only possible *single* word that can be used in any other language by any man who understands the subject, – "Theoria," – the Germans only having a term parallel to it, "Anschauung," [...] but which is not its real equivalent, for Anschauung does not (I believe) *include* bodily sensation, whereas Plato's Theoria does, so far as is necessary; and mine somewhat more than Plato's.¹¹⁸

As we see from these, Ruskin translates '*Æsthesis*' by 'sensation', and he introduces '*Theoria*' as the "faculty of receiving impressions of beauty" or, literally, "perception of beauty". The two concepts are not meant to refer to distinct faculties, since deliverances of '*Theoria*' are "neither sensual nor intellectual, but moral"; as W. G. Collingwood put it, Ruskin "calls "Theoria" (that is the higher contemplation) a moral faculty, and it takes place between sense-perception and intellect, embracing both, but resting wholly on neither".¹¹⁹ To understand better the reasons why '*Theoria*' is not mere '*Æsthesis*' requires that I quote at length a further passage from *Modern Painters II*:

But the pleasures of sight and hearing are given as gifts. They answer not any purposes of mere existence; for the distinction of all that is useful or dangerous to us might be made, and often is made, by the eye, without it receiving the slightest pleasure of sight. We might have learned to

¹¹⁸ 25.123-124. One might detect a reference to Kant's '*Anschauung*' in the last sentence of this quotation. German was not at the time the common philosophical language that it is today, a status that it acquired only later in the 19th century, and Ruskin did not read German. It is also for that reason likely he did not read Kant, but it is possible that he learnt about his ideas through his acquaintance with Carlyle or Coleridge, as W. G. Collingwood suspects, given that Ruskin's use of '*Theoria*' itself comes from Coleridge (*Collingwood 1891*, p. 117). At all events, the German '*Anschauung*' means 'view', and by extension, 'opinion', and although it is sometimes used to refer to sensations, it has a strong connotation of 'visual', as in the mathematical expression '*anschauliche Geometrie*' for 'visual' as opposed to, say, 'algebraic' geometry. In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, where it is translated as 'intuition' from the Medieval Latin '*intuitio*' for immediate knowledge, it refers the *a priori* forms of our 'receptivity', in the 'transcendental aesthetics', namely space and time. So Ruskin appears to be right when he claims that '*Anschauung*' is not an appropriate word to translate what he takes '*Theoria*' to be.

¹¹⁹ *Collingwood 1891*, p. 118.

distinguish fruits and grain from flowers, without having any superior pleasure in the aspect of the later; and the ear might have learned to distinguish the sounds that communicate ideas, or to recognize intimations of elemental danger, without perceiving either melody in the voice, or majesty in the thunder. And as these pleasures have no function to perform, so there is no limit to their continuance in the accomplishment of their end, for they are an end in themselves, and so may be perpetual with all of us; being in no way destructive, but rather increasing in exquisiteness by repetition.

Herein, then, we find very sufficient ground for the higher estimation of these delights; first, in their being eternal and inexhaustible, and, secondly, in their being evidently no means or instrument of life, but an object of life. Now, in whatever is an object of life, in whatever may be infinitely and for itself desired, we may be sure there is something of divine; for God will not make anything an object of life to His creatures which does not point to, or partake of, Himself. And so, though we were to regard the pleasures of sight merely as the highest of sensual pleasures, and though they were of rare occurrence, and, when occurring, isolated and imperfect, there would still be a supernatural character about them, owing to their self-sufficiency. But when, instead of being scattered, interrupted, or chance-distributed, they are gathered together, and so arranged to enhance each other as by chance they could not be, there is caused by them not only a feeling of strong affection towards the object in which they exist, but a perception of purpose and adaptation of it to our desires; a perception, therefore, of the immediate operation of the Intelligence which so formed us, and so feeds us.

Out of which perception arise Joy, Admiration, and Gratitude.

Now the mere animal consciousness of the pleasantness I call *Æsthesis*; but the exulting, reverent, and grateful perception of it I call *Theoria*. For this, and this only, is the full comprehension and contemplation of the Beautiful as a gift of God; a gift not necessary to our being, but added to, and elevating it, and twofold: first of the desire, and secondly of the thing desired.¹²⁰

This key passage contains a number of ideas that need to be unpacked. First, one should note the religious dimension. If, as Ruskin claims, “God will not make anything an object of life to His creatures which does not point to, or partake of, Himself”, then in ‘*Theoria*’ we capture “the Beautiful as a gift of God”. God created us so that we could

¹²⁰ 4.45-47.

enjoy the world as his creation, and so that enjoyment of it 'elevates' us. This is what George Landow called Ruskin's 'theocentric aesthetics'.¹²¹

Underlying this view is a form of 'pantheism', regarding not only the universe, thus nature, as a creation of God, but also created for the purpose of our own enjoyment as his creatures. This 'pantheism' has deep historical sources in 'neo-Platonic' thought, and it is a hallmark of British philosophy and aesthetics prior to Ruskin – this view is to be distinguished, however, from the 'Platonism' introduced at the end of the next section. Therefore, a harmony seems presupposed here between nature and us, as God's creation, while our enjoyment of nature could not merely be sensual, since it is not mere pleasure of the senses but access to God *via* what he has created for us. This is why, secondly, contemplation is 'moral', a point on which Peter Fuller rightly insisted.¹²² If '*Theoria*' differs from mere '*Æsthesis*', it is precisely in this, that contemplation of "the Beautiful as a gift of God" brings about specific emotions and feelings: "Joy, Admiration, and Gratitude". These emotions differ from the simple enjoyment of 'beauty', and their role seems crucial in the distinction between '*Theoria*' and '*Æsthesis*'.

One must, however, not understand these in simple 'Romantic' terms: while Romantic poets were looking for an accurate perception of the natural world because they were interested in how it would affect their own feelings, Ruskin was interested in those feelings because of what they reveal us about the natural world.¹²³ Thus, the greatest artists, poets and painters alike, are – in opposition to the Romantic view – disposed to self-effacement in an almost mystical manner:

It follows from all this, that a great idealist can never be egoistic. The whole of his power depends upon his losing sight and feeling of his own existence,

¹²¹ Landow 1971, p. 28.

¹²² Fuller 1988, p. 45. On this specific use of the expression 'moral', see, again, Unrau 1971, pp. 343-345.

¹²³ On this point, see Hewison 1976, 73.

and becoming a mere witness and mirror of truth, and a scribe of visions, – always passive in sight, passive in utterance, – lamenting continually that he cannot completely reflect nor clearly utter all that he has seen – [...].¹²⁴

2.4. Shaftesbury, Enthusiasm and Neo-Platonism

Having now introduced Ruskin's notions of 'pathetic fallacy' and '*Theoria*', I would like now to turn to Ruskin's stance on Reynolds. One first step, in this section, consists in getting, as it were *via* Shaftesbury, to the root in Plato of the teleological conception introduced in section 2.2, of the fit between our sensory apparatus and nature – we just saw in section 2.3 that it is not just 'teleological', it is also close to 'pantheism' and thus almost 'theological'. We shall thus discover that there is a Platonic idea at the origin of Ruskin's position, but also that Plato's viewpoint reached Reynolds in a modified way, leading him to the idea of 'Grand Style': it is this modification that Ruskin rejected, as we shall see in the next section. But first, I need to clarify the sense in which 'intellect' is involved in '*Theoria*', and the specific theory of perception underlying the notion of '*Æsthesis*'. I think that it is worth considering here Shaftesbury as a precursor to Ruskin.

There are no references to Shaftesbury in Ruskin and one must, as always, beware of superficial resemblances. For example, Shaftesbury also spoke about 'morality' in art: "after all, the most natural Beauty in the World is *Honesty*, and *moral Truth*. For all *Beauty is TRUTH*".¹²⁵ Ruskin did not equate beauty with truth, however, and he dismissed the idea with contempt: "I am at a loss to know how any so untenable a position could ever have been advanced".¹²⁶ His point is simply that 'true' is a predicate

¹²⁴ 5.125.

¹²⁵ *Cooper 2001*, I, p. 89.

¹²⁶ 4.67. Ruskin does not give any reference to the view, but it is quite likely that he had Shaftesbury in mind.

that applies to propositions, so that, strictly speaking, the view makes no sense.¹²⁷ Perhaps, it would be more appropriate to speak not of 'truth', but of 'truthfulness', but this was not Shaftesbury's point. Nevertheless, it is worth investigating possible anticipations and, interestingly, they lead directly to Plato.

In *The Moralists*, Shaftesbury argued, about the beauty of artefacts such as medals and coins, that "there is no Principle of Beauty in *Body*", so that, "of necessity", it must be "Mind, I suppose; for what can it be else?".¹²⁸ So that these artefacts are representatives of the beauty of the mind that formed them. But what about the origin of the mind, if it is not in the divine mind itself? This led Shaftesbury to his theory of the "*Three Degrees or Orders of Beauty*": First, "dead forms" fashioned by humans or nature; secondly, "*the Forms which form*"; and, thirdly, that "which forms not only such as we call mere Forms, but even *the Forms which form*", so that:

Therefore whatever Beauty appears in our *second* Order of Forms, or whatever is deriv'd or produc'd from thence, all this is eminently, principally, and originally in this *last* Order of *Supreme* and *Sovereign Beauty*.¹²⁹

In plainer words, God is the 'principle' or source of beauty, both as it is found in nature and as created by humans, because humans are his creation. If, however, God is the source of all beauty, then it cannot be relative to humans: it must be in some sense objective and real. Furthermore, and this is a point already mentioned, this means that beauty cannot be apprehended by the senses, only by the mind:

[...] there is nothing so divine as Beauty: which belonging not to *Body*, not having any Principle or Existence except in Mind and Reason, is alone discover'd and acquir'd by this diviner Part, when it inspects *it-self*, the

¹²⁷ On a more charitable interpretation, equating beauty and truth would mean that things that appear as they are would be beautiful, those that do not, ugly. But then, as Ruskin put it, this is "instantly contradicted by each and every conclusion of experience" (4.66).

¹²⁸ Cooper 2001, II, p. 226.

¹²⁹ Cooper 2001, II, p. 227-228.

only object worthy of it-self. For whate'er is void of Mind, is *Void* and *Darkness* to the *Mind's* Eye.¹³⁰

We just saw, however, that, according to Ruskin, perception of beauty is at best only partly a matter of the intellect, and that beauty is 'out there', so to speak, i.e., that it resides in the object or scenery itself. For those reasons, one cannot speak of an 'idealism' in Ruskin as one might in Shaftesbury's case, on the basis of passages such as this one. As we saw in section 2.2, the upshot of the 'pathetic fallacy' is that Ruskin would have been rather adamant that 'beauty' is not a property that we 'project' on reality.

Moreover, we also saw that Ruskin believed apprehension of beauty to involve the senses along with an emotional component of "Joy, Admiration, and Gratitude". If there would be an equivalent emotion in Shaftesbury's writings, it is the very 'enthusiasm' against which he so strongly inveighed. The term translates the Greek '*enthousiasmos*', which means something like 'being possessed' or 'inspired by the essence (*ousia*) of God',¹³¹ and it had renewed currency among 16th and 17th century puritan sects in Britain,¹³² to the point that it became charged with negative connotations of fanaticism.¹³³ It was criticized by the Cambridge Platonists, and John Locke, Shaftesbury's own mentor, famously opposed it to 'faith' and 'reason'.¹³⁴ Shaftesbury thought that it should be kept in check by enjoyment and "Good Humour".¹³⁵ But the project of his *Characteristiks* was precisely to distinguish the 'enthusiasm' of religious fanatics from a proper philosophical 'enthusiasm' and the

¹³⁰ Cooper 2001, II, p. 238.

¹³¹ This meaning can be found in *Phaedrus*, 241e.

¹³² See Knox 1962.

¹³³ See also G. W. Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, IV, xix: "L'enthousiasme était au commencement un bon nom. [...] l'enthousiasme signifie qu'il y a une divinité en nous". But, he adds that the term changed its meaning: "l'enthousiasme commença à signifier un dérèglement de l'esprit attribué à la force de quelque divinité [...] on l'attribue à ceux qui croient sans fondement que leurs mouvements viennent de Dieu".

¹³⁴ J. Locke, 'Of Enthusiasm', in *Essay ...*, IX, chap. xix.

¹³⁵ See, for example, Cooper 2001, I, p. 35, and Cassirer 1953, pp. 168f.

'*sensus communis*' that God gave humans as a basis from which they could reasonably enjoy the world he has created for them – an idea which is definitely reminiscent of Ruskin.

Therefore, one finds passages where Shaftesbury leaves room for "artistic enthusiasm", in Ernst Cassirer's words,¹³⁶ for example when he writes in reference to Plato:

So that *Inspiration* may be justly call'd *Divine ENTHUSIASM*: For the World it-self signifies *Divine Presence*, and was made use of by the Philosopher whom the earliest Christian Fathers call'd *Divine*, to express whatever was sublime in human Passions.¹³⁷

It may still be that on that point, as on the previous one, the views of Shaftesbury and Ruskin do not fully coincide, but their views thus appear more fully to coincide in the role they reserve for God. One should recall that Ruskin wrote, "God will not make anything an object of life to His creatures which does not point to, or partake of, Himself", and this is indeed strongly reminiscent of Shaftesbury. As is well-known, he owed a lot to the Cambridge Neo-Platonists,¹³⁸ and this points to a common source in Plato, to which, one may claim, Ruskin is in the end more faithful.

Ruskin does refer to Plato in the passage on '*Theoria*' in *Love's Meinie* quoted in the previous section, but he does not present matters exactly in the same manner as I presented them here. It is true that he often refers to Plato,¹³⁹ furthermore to the *Republic*, albeit more often toward the end of his career than at the early stages of *Modern Painters II*, and also more often than not in connection with his own ideas in political economy.¹⁴⁰ The connection with Plato is worth stating, given that this neo-

¹³⁶ Cassirer 1953, p. 167.

¹³⁷ Cooper 2001, I, p. 34. See also Cooper 2001, II, p. 222.

¹³⁸ See Brett 1942 and Cassirer 1953, chap. 6.

¹³⁹ A word search for 'Plato' in Ruskin's *Collected Works* already gives 143 entries.

¹⁴⁰ On the influence of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* on Ruskin's political economy, see Henderson 2000, chap. 5.

Platonic argument was certainly omnipresent in Ruskin's background,¹⁴¹ from Shaftesbury to Coleridge and Wordsworth, and also because it is rather probable that the *Republic* was part of his Oxford education.¹⁴² We also have the testimony of W. G. Collingwood, according to whom "Aristotle is [Ruskin's] leader and antagonist, alternately, throughout the earlier period of art criticism; and Plato his guide and philosopher ever after".¹⁴³

The common ground to Shaftesbury and Ruskin is easily captured by reference to Socrates' analogy between the good and the sun in the *Republic*, VI, 507c-509c. Socrates tells Glaucon that vision requires light, because without it the eye cannot see and the object cannot be seen. The source of light is the sun, so it is the cause of both seeing and being seen, i.e., vision, but it is not identical with vision, therefore with the eye that sees and the object which is seen. Socrates can thus argue from analogy that the good plays the same role in the domain of the intelligible: it is the cause of knowing and being known, but it is not identical with knowledge.¹⁴⁴ Likewise here, God is the cause of both our apprehension of beauty and of real beauty in the objects themselves, without being identical to '*Theoria*', i.e., without being identical to the process by which beauty is grasped. Furthermore, if vision and light cannot be said to be "sunlike", knowledge is not "goodlike" (508c-509a), and, in Ruskin, apprehension of beauty is, as we saw, part of God's plan.

Thus, at first blush Ruskin's '*Theoria*' can be seen to derive from an essential and well-known passage from Plato's *Republic*. There are reasons, however, why Ruskin's

¹⁴¹ As the economist William Smart, a follower of Ruskin, pointed out: "To what extent this following of Plato is conscious and intentional, and to what extent it came to him *through* general culture, it would not be easy to say" (Smart 1883, p. 8). It is worth pointing out that Ruskin read this essay and commented: "There is no word I want to add or change up to page 41" (Smart 1883, p. 43).

¹⁴² Ruskin mentions that he studied four dialogues of Plato as an undergraduate, without specifying their names, see 35.610.

¹⁴³ Collingwood 1893, p. 98.

¹⁴⁴ For this reading of *Republic*, VI, 507c-509c, see Gonzalez 1998, p. 212.

aesthetic views should not be viewed as a form of 'Platonism' or even 'neo-Platonism', which I hope to clarify in the section 2.5 by contrasting them with Reynolds'. To see the point, one may appeal to another part of the *Republic*, the controversial discussion of 'mimesis' in Book X, and rejection of art as mere imitation of appearances at 596e-602e.¹⁴⁵ Recall that Plato assumed the existence of a world of pure '*Ideas*' or 'Forms', to explain natural changes: an object, say a leaf, changing its colour from green to red would thus be said to 'participate' successively in the Forms of 'greenness' and 'redness'. These Forms would exist eternally and be located 'above the skies', in a "*huperourianos topos*"¹⁴⁶ or, as in the allegory of the cave, occurring only a few pages after the analogy of the sun,¹⁴⁷ simply in an intelligible realm, "*noeton topon*"; and one would, according to the famous passage of the Slave in *Meno*,¹⁴⁸ merely 'reminisce' them.¹⁴⁹ It was further assumed that none of this world's objects would be perfect instances of these Forms; they would be mere defective 'appearances', such as the shadows on the wall of the cave in Plato's allegory. Thus, in Plato's mind if art is merely a (defective) copy of appearances that are themselves defectives copies of Forms, it is twice removed from reality. Plato's philosophy could not, for that reason, provide of itself a proper basis for an aesthetics, i.e., for the developments presented above in 18th-century aesthetics, unless it would be modified.

A central modification thus occurred early in Antiquity, with Romans such as Cicero and Seneca,¹⁵⁰ as well as late Greek philosophers such as the influential Proclus, or

¹⁴⁵ That, as such, it is a factor of corruption for the soul is argued for in *Republic* 602-608b. The relation of cause to effect – that art corrupts *because* it is imitative – is not obvious; see Moss 2007.

¹⁴⁶ *Phaedrus* 247c.

¹⁴⁷ *Republic* 514a-520a.

¹⁴⁸ *Meno* 82a-85e.

¹⁴⁹ This doctrine is open to well-known objections, including the much debated 'third man' argument that Plato knew himself (*Parmenides* 132a-b). Aristotle used it against him to argue that one should locate Forms in immanent reality itself. Ruskin is clearly closer to Aristotle on this point.

¹⁵⁰ See for example Seneca, *Epistles*, LXV.

early Christian Platonists such as Origen,¹⁵¹ whose influence from the Renaissance until the 18th century was the topic of Erwin Panofsky's *Idea. A Concept in Art History*.¹⁵² W. G. Collingwood already discussed this issue in *The Art Teaching of John Ruskin*.¹⁵³ The idea is simply to claim that a beautiful object is fabricated in accordance to the '*Idea*' or '*Form*', and further to claim that it is in the '*Noûs*' or '*intellect*' – more colloquially, '*in our mind*' – an idea clearly echoed by Shaftesbury, as quoted above. Cicero wrote:

But I am firmly of the opinion that nothing of any kind is so beautiful as not to be excelled in beauty by that of which it is a copy, as a mask is a copy of a face. This ideal cannot be perceived by the eye or ear, nor by any of the senses, but we can nevertheless grasp it by the mind and the imagination. For example, in the case of the statues of Phidias, the most perfect of their kind that we have ever seen, and in the case of the paintings I have mentioned, we can, in spite of their beauty, imagine something more beautiful. Surely that great sculptor, while making the image of Jupiter or Minerva, did not look at any person whom he was using as a model, but in his own mind there dwelt a surpassing vision of beauty; at this he gazed and all intent on this he guided his artist's hand to produce the likeness of the god. Accordingly, as there is something perfect and surpassing in the case of sculpture and painting—an intellectual ideal by reference to which the artist represents those objects which do not themselves appear to the eye, so with our minds we conceive the ideal of perfect eloquence, but with our ears we catch only the copy. These patterns of things are called *ἰδέαι* or ideas by Plato, that eminent master and teacher both of style and of thought; these, he says, do not "become"; they exist for ever, and depend on intellect and reason; other things come into being and cease to be, they are in flux and do not remain long in the same state. Whatever, then, is to be discussed rationally and methodically, must be reduced to the ultimate form and type of its class.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Origen, *On First Principles*, 1.2.2-3.

¹⁵² Panofsky 1968, or Bredvold 1934.

¹⁵³ Collingwood 1891, pp. 69-72.

¹⁵⁴ Cicero, *Orator*, 7-10. This passage is so central that it is also quoted, albeit in a different translation, in Bredvold 1934, pp. 93-94 and Panofsky 1968, pp. 11-12. One finds echoes of this view in the early 20th century, with Benedetto Croce's view that it is not Raphael's superior technical ability that accounts for the quality of his paintings, but his ability to 'intuit' (Croce 1922, pp. 9-11). This view has been criticized

Part of this passage is quoted by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his *Discourses on Art*,¹⁵⁵ along with Proclus:

He who takes for model such forms as Nature produces, and confines himself to an exact imitation of them, will never attain to what is perfectly beautiful. For the works of Nature are full of disproportions, and fall very short of the true standard of beauty. So that Phidias, when he formed his Jupiter, did not copy any object ever presented to his sight; but contemplated only that image which he had conceived in his mind from Homer's description.¹⁵⁶

As we shall see in the next section, Reynolds's aesthetics owes indeed a lot to this 'modified Platonic view', and it is Ruskin's rejection of it which stands at the basis of his critique of the 'Grand Style'. But this involves first getting clear about Reynolds.

2.5. Reynolds, Ideal Beauty and General Truth

As far as artists go, Reynolds was a prolific writer,¹⁵⁷ and he is said often to have contradicted himself.¹⁵⁸ On the issue we are discussing, there appears to be no such contradiction, as I shall endeavour to show this in this section. His name had been traditionally associated with Platonism.¹⁵⁹ As with Shaftesbury, however, there are limitations to any parallels one might draw which would justify this labelling. Some,

for ignoring the significance of the medium, for example in Gombrich 1961, pp. 32-62 or Wollheim 1980, p. 40. I discuss this issue on Kobayashi 2009a.

¹⁵⁵ As quoted in Reynolds 1997, pp. 42-43.

¹⁵⁶ Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, I.265.18-22, quoted here from Reynolds' *Discourses* (Reynolds 1997, p. 42). One should note that Proclus was in this passage essentially reprising Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.8.1.

¹⁵⁷ Reynolds' writings were first collected in 1797 in the three volumes of *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (republished with corrections in 1798 and in many editions since). In this section, we shall concentrate on a set of early letters to *The Idler* (1759) and the better-known fifteen *Discourses on Art* (1769-1790), especially the third one. For the letters to *The Idler*, I shall use Reynolds 1835, and for the *Discourses*, Reynolds 1997.

¹⁵⁸ A complaint made already by Blake and Hazlitt, see Hipple 1953, pp. 231-232.

¹⁵⁹ For example, see Brevold 1934, pp. 113-117.

such as Roger Fry,¹⁶⁰ have insisted on the Aristotelian elements in his thought, but this would not contradict the above modified Platonic view, which is already partly Aristotelian.¹⁶¹ However, the most common view has been, for decades, that Reynolds had been instead essentially inspired by the empiricist philosophy of John Locke.¹⁶² Against this view, I shall simply state here the case for a reading of Reynolds that emphasizes conformity with the modified Platonic view,¹⁶³ and use this reading in order further to clarify Ruskin's own position (which is closer to Locke's as we saw in section 2.2), inasmuch as he elaborated this very point against Reynolds. Before reviewing his objections to Reynolds, I shall add brief remarks on 'objectivity', in relation to a recent book in the history of science by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity*.¹⁶⁴

That a painter should not endeavour to paint with minute attention to details, but from "general form"¹⁶⁵ is the leitmotiv of *The Idler* and the *Discourses* (especially the third one). To cite Walter Hipple Jr., this is "the primary and ubiquitous principle in Reynold's aesthetic system".¹⁶⁶ To understand this view, it is useful to think in terms of the Medieval distinction between 'particulars' and 'universals': a white wall, a white sheet of paper, a white piece of chalk are all particulars that are instances of the universal 'whiteness'. In Medieval times, some philosophers, 'nominalists' such as

¹⁶⁰ Fry 1905, p. 44. Brevold argues instead that, although Reynolds' conceptions (and those of many other art critics from Bellori to Winckelmann) are in fact nearer to Aristotle, they mistook them for Plato's (Brevold 1934, p. 115).

¹⁶¹ On the contrary, the two fit rather well. See Jacobs 2013, pp. 740-743.

¹⁶² See Trowbridge 1939.

¹⁶³ Taking my lead from Jacobs 2013.

¹⁶⁴ Daston & Galison 2007. The content of that book derives largely from Daston & Galison 1992. In Daston 1992, Lorraine Daston further enquired into the origin of the concept in the 18th century, where she sees it as having originated in aesthetics (Hume) and ethics (Adam Smith).

¹⁶⁵ Reynolds 1835, p. 132.

¹⁶⁶ Hipple 1953, p. 234.

William of Ockham, simply denied the existence of universals against 'realists', who asserted it.¹⁶⁷

Reynolds' view can be reformulated according to this terminology, as the claim that in nature objects are 'particulars' and *qua* particulars they are never the equivalent of the 'universal' of which they are an instantiation, so that the ideal of beauty or purity lies truly in the universal. For a painter to focus on minute details of one particular would simply be 'to imitate' nature, and this must be avoided. The artist must thus endeavour to paint the 'universal' or "general form", even though this means that

[...] in Painting, as in Poetry, the highest style has the least of common nature.¹⁶⁸

Reynolds also called this the 'Grand Style'.¹⁶⁹ He couched his point in reference to old masters praising the Italian over the Dutch, who were too 'literal':

The grand style of Painting requires this minute attention to be carefully avoided, and must be kept as separate from it as the style of Poetry from that of History. Poetical ornaments destroy the air of truth and plainness which ought to characterize History; but the very being of Poetry consist of departing from this plain narration and adopting every ornament that will warm the imagination. To desire to see the excellencies of each style united, to mingle the Dutch with the Italian School, is to join contrarieties which cannot subsist together, and which destroy the efficacy of each other. The Italian attends only to the invariable, the great and general ideas which are fixed and inherent in universal Nature; the Dutch, on the contrary, to literal truth and a minute exactness in the detail, as I may say, of Nature, modified by accident. The attention to these petty particularities is the very cause of this naturalness so much admired in the Dutch pictures which, if we supposed it to be a beauty, is certainly of a lower order, that ought to

¹⁶⁷ The meaning of 'realism' here differs from that in use in sections 2.1 and 2.2, as it is defined by the belief in the existence of 'universals' as entities separate from their instantiations in particulars.

¹⁶⁸ Reynolds 1835, p. 129.

¹⁶⁹ See also Reynolds 1997, p. 16. In the third of the *Discourses*, Reynolds lists other names, including 'gusto grande', 'beau idéal' and 'great style' (Reynolds 1997, p. 43).

give place to a beauty of a superior kind, since one cannot be obtained but by departing from the other.¹⁷⁰

It is worth recalling here from section 2.1 John Eagles' critique of Turner, and praise of Poussin, Reynolds, etc. It is clearly based upon such considerations. On the other hand, 'minute attention' to details and 'Truth to Nature' were key ideas for Ruskin, although, of course, he did not mean by this that one ought to follow the Dutch masters.

It is also worth underlining here Reynolds' own locution, "the invariable, the great and general ideas which are fixed and inherent in universal Nature".¹⁷¹ He assumes the existence, for a given natural species or kind, of a "central form" against which variations will be deemed "deformities":

Every species of the animal as well as the vegetable creation may be said to have a fixed or determinate form, towards which Nature is continually inclining, like various lines terminating in the centre; or it may be compared to pendulums vibrating in different directions over one central point: and as they all cross the centre, though only one passes through any other point, so it will be found that perfect beauty is oftener produced by Nature than deformity: I do not mean than deformity in general, but any other kind of deformity. To instance in a particular part of a feature; the line that forms a ridge of the nose is beautiful when straight; this then is the central form, which is oftener found than either concave, convex, or any other irregular form that shall be proposed.¹⁷²

The "central form" is thus supposedly occurring, perhaps not as often as all deformities put together, but at least more often than any specific deformity. If it occurred as often as a given deformity, it would not be possible to single it out:

I suppose it will easily be granted, that no man can judge whether any animal be beautiful in its kind, or deformed, who has seen only one of that species; so that, if a man, born blind, were to recover his sight, and the most beautiful woman were brought before him, he could not determine whether she was handsome or not; nor if the most beautiful and most deformed were

¹⁷⁰ Reynolds 1835, p. 128.

¹⁷¹ See also for an almost equivalent formulation, Reynolds 1997, p. 16.

¹⁷² Reynolds 1835, p. 132.

produced, could he any better determine to which he should give the preference, having seen only those two. To distinguish beauty, then, implies having seen many individuals of that species.¹⁷³

Thus, the artist must endeavour to capture this “central form” by studying as many as possible specimen of the given species or kind, in order to reach it by what could be described as a process of elimination of accidental deviations from it. The idea is given further emphasis in the *Discourses*, where Reynolds speaks of “Ideal beauty”:¹⁷⁴

This long laborious comparison should be the first study of the Painter who aims at the greatest style. By this means, he acquires a just idea of beautiful forms; he corrects Nature by herself, her imperfect state by her more perfect. His eye being enabled to distinguish the accidental deficiencies, excrescences, and deformities of things, from their general figures, he makes out an abstract idea of their forms more perfect than any original; and what may seem a paradox, he learns to design naturally by drawing his figures unlike to any one object. This idea of the perfect state of Nature, which the artist call the Ideal beauty, is the great leading principle by which works of genius are conducted. By this Phidias acquired his fame.¹⁷⁵

Thus it is from a reiterated experience, and a close comparison of the objects in Nature, that an artist becomes possessed of the idea of that central form, if I may so express it, from which every deviation is deformity.¹⁷⁶

One should note the claim, in the first of these passages, that the artist “makes out an abstract idea”.¹⁷⁷ It does look as if the “central form” or “Ideal beauty”¹⁷⁸ is, in Reynolds’ mind, a creation of the artist, as opposed to being in existence independently of the artist. This cannot be the case, however, because the above passages make it clear that it resides in Nature, where it is “invariable”. He even speaks of the “eternal

¹⁷³ Reynolds 1835, p. 131.

¹⁷⁴ The expression ‘Ideal beauty’ is interestingly ambiguous between the ordinary meaning of ‘ideal’ and the Platonic connotations, perhaps emphasized here by the use of the upper case.

¹⁷⁵ Reynolds 1997, pp. 44–45.

¹⁷⁶ Reynolds 1997, p. 45.

¹⁷⁷ See also Reynolds 1997, p. 47, where he speaks of the artist as having “reduced the variety of Nature to the abstract idea”.

¹⁷⁸ Reynolds also speaks of “perfect beauty” (Reynolds 1997, p. 47).

invariable idea of Nature”,¹⁷⁹ and even declares it a “principle” that “the idea of beauty in each species of beings is an invariable one”.¹⁸⁰ This invariability clearly contradicts the variability of human standards and fashions, with which he contrasts this invariability in the third discourse.

Reynolds writes further that “there is a *rule, obtained out of general Nature*, to contradict which is to fall into deformity” (my italics).¹⁸¹ It may be true that Reynolds believes that nature never truly exemplifies this “Ideal”.¹⁸² Still, this is in perfect consonance with the modified Platonic view. Reynolds also claims of the “ideal excellence” that it is “the lot of genius to contemplate, and never to attain”¹⁸³ – a claim already found in the passage from Proclus that he quoted.¹⁸⁴ If “Ideal beauty” were a human achievement, then these remarks would indeed make no sense. Although Reynolds never frames his views in terms of the distinction between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’, it is clear that he meant ‘Ideal beauty’ to be an ‘objective’ notion,¹⁸⁵ but in a peculiar, Platonic sense. His analogy of the central point through which a pendulum will pass in all its oscillations can be likened to a geometrical example: in a given triangle, draw a line between each angle and the middle of its opposite side. These lines will intersect at a point. Is this point in existence prior to the geometer drawing the

¹⁷⁹ Reynolds 1997, p. 49.

¹⁸⁰ Reynolds 1997, p. 46.

¹⁸¹ Reynolds 1997, p. 46.

¹⁸² See for example Reynolds 1997, p. 42.

¹⁸³ Reynolds 1997, p. 14. Reynolds also writes about “our nearer approaches to perfection” (Reynolds 1997, p. 41), implying that one does not truly reach the Ideal beauty.

¹⁸⁴ See also Reynolds 1997, p. 41.

¹⁸⁵ The definition of ‘objectivity’ and the contrast between the ‘objective’ and the ‘subjective’, I use is rather standard. For example, here: “Objectivity stands in contrast to subjectivity: an objective account is one which attempts to capture the nature of the object studied in a way *that does not depend on any features of the particular subject who studies it*. An objective account is, in this sense, impartial, *one which could ideally be accepted by any subject*, because it does not draw on any assumptions, prejudices, or values of particular subjects” (Gaukroger 2001, p. 10785). Or, here: “[...] to aspire to knowledge *that bears no trace of the knower*—knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgement, wishing or striving; objectivity is blind sight, seeing without inference, interpretation, or intelligence” (Daston & Galison 2007, p. 17). (My italics, in both cases.)

lines? The 'Platonic' answer is: yes. We can thus see that Reynolds' belief in the existence of an objective 'Ideal beauty' is 'Platonic' in this very sense. Although he does not quite put it in this way, one may thus speak with W. G. Collingwood of the existence of a 'Platonic archetype'.¹⁸⁶

Before examining the case of a reading of Reynolds in terms of Locke, I would like to introduce a brief digression on William Hogarth's 'line of beauty'. Hogarth's opening gambit in *The Analysis of Beauty* is bound to confuse many readers. After claiming that masters of the past arrived at "excellence in their works by the mere dint of imitating with great exactness the beauties of nature",¹⁸⁷ Hogarth mocked philosophers for what he perceived at their failed attempts at framing principles of beauty, adding that "*Je ne sçai quoi*" had become "a fashionable phrase for grace".¹⁸⁸ This mockery would attract a reply from Reynolds in the first and third of his letters to the *Idler*,¹⁸⁹ and it is likely to mislead readers into thinking that Hogarth assumed an anti-theoretical stance. As Timothy Costelloe pointed out,¹⁹⁰ however, this is far from the truth, given that Hogarth goes on enumerating six "fundamental principles, which are generally allowed to give elegance and beauty, when duly blended together, to compositions of all kinds whatever": fitness, variety, uniformity, simplicity, intricacy and quantity.¹⁹¹ The most important variety, however, is 'linear variety', and especially the 'serpentine line', midway between the straight line and lines of constant curvature, a line which he calls the 'line of beauty and grace'.¹⁹² Hogarth illustrates this line with the figure of the horn (Plate # 2.2):

¹⁸⁶ Collingwood 1891, p. 69.

¹⁸⁷ Hogarth 1997, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ Hogarth 1997, p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ See Burke 1943, p. 13.

¹⁹⁰ Costelloe 2013, pp. 64-66.

¹⁹¹ Hogarth 1997, p. 23.

¹⁹² Hogarth 1997, p. 51.

In the first of these figures, the dotted line down the middle expresses the straight lines of which it is composed; which, without the assistance of curved lines, or light and shade, would hardly shew it to have contents.

The same is true of the second, tho' by the bending of the horn, the straight dotted line is changed into the beautiful waving-line.

But in the last, this dotted line, by the twisting as well as the bending of the horn, is changed from the waving into the serpentine-line; which, as it dips out of sight behind the horn in the middle, and returns again at the smaller end, not only gives play to the imagination, and delights the eye, on that account; but informs it likewise of the quantity and variety of the contents.¹⁹³

As I read him, Hogarth appears, on this point concerning the 'line of beauty and grace', merely to be more explicit than Reynolds about what 'ideal beauty' might be. He also appears to have avoided the conundrums facing Reynolds' modified Platonist view.

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Attempts at linking Reynolds' aesthetics with Locke's empiricist philosophy, as opposed to (a modified form of) Platonism, are based on two claims, the first one being a much-quoted passage of the third of the *Discourses*,¹⁹⁴ where Reynolds appears to distance himself from Platonism:

Experience is all in all; but it is not every one who profits by experience; and most people err, not so much from want of capacity to find their objects, as from knowing what object to pursue. This great ideal perfection and beauty are not to be sought in the heavens, but upon the earth. They are about us, and upon every side of us.¹⁹⁵

Indeed, this passage implies a rejection of the idea that "Ideal beauty" would reside in an '*hyperourianos topos*'. Nevertheless, it is, again, perfectly in line with the modified Platonic view of Cicero and Proclus presented at the end of the last section, according

¹⁹³ Hogarth 1997, p.50.

¹⁹⁴ This claim is in Jacobs 2013, p. 738; see, for example, Burke 1943, p. 16 for an illustration.

¹⁹⁵ Reynolds 1997, p. 44.

to which it is in the '*Noûs*', i.e., 'in the mind'. Moreover, it may thus be the case that "Ideal beauty" is "in the mind" of the artist, but, to use the contrast introduced above between 'subjective' and 'objective', the claim here is that it is not because it is 'in the mind' that it is less 'objective' or simply 'subjective' – no more than ' $2 + 2 = 4$ ' would be 'subjective' merely because it is 'in one's mind' when one performs that addition. It is the sense of 'objectivity' that matters here, after which Reynolds was clearly hankering. It should thus be clear by now that Reynolds' aesthetics fits nicely, without any alleged contradiction, the modified Platonic view.

One may also emphasize similarities between what I described above as the process of elimination of accidental deviations in order to reach the "central form", and the notion of 'abstraction' as described in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

[...] the mind makes the particular ideas received from particular objects to become general; which is done by considering them as they are in the mind such appearances, – separate from all other existences, and the circumstances of real existence, as time, place, or any concomitant ideas. [...] Thus the same colour being observed to-day in chalk or snow, which the mind yesterday received from milk, it considers that appearance alone, makes it the name of *whiteness*, it by that sound signifies the same quality wheresoever to be imagined or met with; and thus universals, whether ideas or terms, are made.¹⁹⁶

Although this may be the case, it is never noted that a strictly 'imagist' view of the matter of the kind committed to by Reynolds – 'ideas' being here 'mental images' – conflicts with another controversial view expressed by Locke:

[...] when we nicely reflect upon them, we shall find that *general ideas* are fictions and contrivances of the mind, that carry difficulty with them, and do not so easily offer themselves as we are apt to imagine. For example, does it not require some pains and skill to form the general idea of a triangle, (which is yet none of the most abstract, comprehensive, and difficult,) for it must be neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral,

¹⁹⁶ J. Locke, *Essay...*, II, chap. xi, 8.

equicrural, nor scalene; but all and none of these at once. In effect, it is something imperfect, that cannot exist; an idea wherein some parts of several different and inconsistent ideas are put together.¹⁹⁷

Berkeley famously insisted on the word ‘inconsistent’ in this passage, to object to the idea that one gains knowledge of universals such as ‘triangle’ through the process of ‘abstraction’. The argument works well under the view that Locke is, as Berkeley was, an ‘imagist’:¹⁹⁸ it is indeed impossible to form a mental image, or simply one on a blackboard, which would possess “all and none” of these contradictory properties “at once”. The same argument may be levelled against Reynold’s Ideal Beauty: there is, *mutatis mutandis*, no abstraction to the “central form” of, say, a leaf of *Alisma Plantago*.

This difficulty should, however, be set aside. I merely wished to illustrate with it how far Reynolds’ conceptions were from Locke’s, over and above a common emphasis on ‘abstraction’ from a variety of specimen. It would have been more relevant to note how strongly reminiscent of scientific endeavours of the time, especially in botany, Reynolds’ ideas are. For an example of thinking in botany, one can take an illustration from the *Hortus Cliffortianus* (Amsterdam 1737), here a drawing of *Dalea*, commonly known as ‘prairie clover’ (Plate # 2.3).¹⁹⁹

This plate is the result of a close collaboration between the naturalists Carl Linnaeus and Georg Dionysius Ehret, who drew the image and Jan Wandelaar, who engraved it for this edition. The botanists’ intention was, upon observation of numerous specimens, to draw an image that would show none of the defects of any one of them, but capture

¹⁹⁷ J. Locke, *Essay...*, IV, chap. vii, 9.

¹⁹⁸ For such a reading, see *Ayers 1991*, pp. 44-51, and on the difficulties raised by the passage at IV, vii, 9, quoted here, see *Ayers 1991*, pp. 57-58. Note that the point here is not to deny that one forms such “fictions and contrivances of the mind”, but simply that there are no such universals existing outside one’s mind, that one would grasp by a process of abstraction. The view issues in a form of nominalism, as explained above.

¹⁹⁹ A plate from the same source is reproduced in *Daston & Galison 2007*, p. 20.

what is ‘essential’ or ‘typical’, i.e., to represent the ‘universal’ of *Dalea*. Reynolds drew the analogy himself (here one must read ‘botanist’ for ‘naturalist’):

Thus amongst the blades of grass or leaves of the same tree, though no two can be found exactly alike, the general form is invariable: a Naturalist before he chose one as a sample, would examine many; since if he took the first that occurred, it might have by accident or otherwise, such a form as that it would scarce be known to belong to that species; he selects as the Painter does, the most beautiful, that is, the most general form of nature.²⁰⁰

The botanists’ view is paradigmatic of the definition of objectivity that has been dubbed ‘truth-to-nature’ by Daston & Galison in *Objectivity*. As a matter of fact they use another plate from the *Hortus Cliffortianus* to illustrate this conception, and they quote this very passage from Reynolds.²⁰¹ They also illustrate this conception of objectivity with Goethe’s search for a *Typus* or ‘archetype’.²⁰² Their book covers a period extending from the late 18th century to mid-20th century, with a focus on the use of images and atlases in science.²⁰³ Although they claim that “‘objectivity’ has more layers of meaning than a mille-feuille”,²⁰⁴ they merely uncover the successive introduction of three different meanings or underlying conceptions, to which they give the names of ‘truth-to-nature’, ‘mechanical objectivity’ and ‘trained judgement’, the first one being associated to 18th-century science, botany in particular.

The ideal of ‘truth-to-nature’ is said to embody the search for the image of the universal, e.g., the attempt at revealing a type of a leaf that would not reflect any details that are particular to any specimen of it, while the ideal of ‘mechanical objectivity’, would be the attempt at eliminating all traces of subjectivity by the use of mechanical procedures of reproduction, illustrated by the use of photography, and ‘trained

²⁰⁰ Reynolds 1835, p. 132.

²⁰¹ Respectively, Fig 1.1 in Daston & Galison 2007, pp. 20 & 81.

²⁰² Daston & Galison 2007, pp. 69-71.

²⁰³ Since atlases have limited use within science, the conclusions reached by Daston & Galison have likewise a limited scope. For this point see Ruse 2008.

²⁰⁴ Daston & Galison 2007, p. 378.

judgement' would oppose both 'truth-to-nature', in that one sought not to reveal a 'type' but 'patterns', and 'mechanical objectivity' in rejecting its attendant ideal of realism, and thoroughly *embracing* subjective intervention. Two brief remarks are in order here. First, it should be plain from the above that the expression 'truth-to-nature' is a misnomer: the search for a true representation of a type is precisely not an attempt to be true to nature, but to 'correct nature by herself', to paraphrase Reynolds. The expression is all the more confusing since Ruskin, whose views are, as we shall see, opposed to Reynolds, also spoke of 'truth to nature' on numerous occasions,²⁰⁵ so much so that the expression has become a dictum associated with his aesthetics. Secondly, discussion of Ruskin on photography in the next chapter will show that, of the three meanings uncovered by Daston & Galison, it is 'trained judgement' that fits particularly well. We get an idea of this merely from considering the title of chapter 2 of *Modern Painters I*: "That the Truth of Nature is not to be Discerned by the Uneducated Senses".²⁰⁶

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I am not aware of a passage where Ruskin states his opposition precisely to the idea of a 'Platonic archetype', to use again W. G. Collingwood's expression, and this might simply be because he did not envisage matters explicitly in the same way as I did, or simply because the point was too obvious for him to state. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is no equivalent conception in his writings, and that his conceptions are rather antithetical to it. But Ruskin could not leave matters standing, given that he had to undermine Reynolds' injunctions in order to defend Turner. He criticized the claim that, as he put it himself, "General truths are more important than particular ones",²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ For example, 3.617, 7.204, or when claiming that "the truth of nature is a part of the truth of God" 3.141. See *Collingwood 1891*, pp. 63-65.

²⁰⁶ 3.140. One could add here Crane on the 'careless eye', in *Crane 1900*, p. 49.

²⁰⁷ 3.149.

in chapter 3 of *Modern Painters I*,²⁰⁸ and, later on, Reynolds on the 'Grand Style' in chapter 1 of *Modern Painters III*.²⁰⁹ The latter is usually discussed in the secondary literature on Ruskin, but no one appears to have taken notice of the former. This is a pity because it contains an interesting argument which show Ruskin's analytic skills at their best. His main claim depends on seeing painting as an activity in which one answers a question of the form 'Shall I represent this or not?', that is: 'Shall I attribute or not this predicate to the subject I am painting?'. He writes:

Now almost everything which (with reference to a given subject) a painter has to ask himself whether he shall represent or not, is a predicate. Hence, in art, particular truths are usually more important than general ones.²¹⁰

This view depends on the traditional distinction between 'genus' and 'species' or 'difference'. Ruskin must have learned it as an undergraduate at Oxford, it deserves a quick rehearsal, using the Locke's example, above, of the concept 'triangle'. The objects that fall under that concept form a 'class', which may be divided into subclasses, 'equilateral', 'isosceles' and 'scalene'. Following Plato's 'method of collection and division',²¹¹ the concept of 'triangle' is called the 'genus', and its subclasses its 'species'.²¹² Concepts were also traditionally conceived as related together in an inverted tree-like structure, where, for example, 'triangle' would be both genus to the species 'equilateral triangles', while being itself species of the larger class or genus 'polygon':

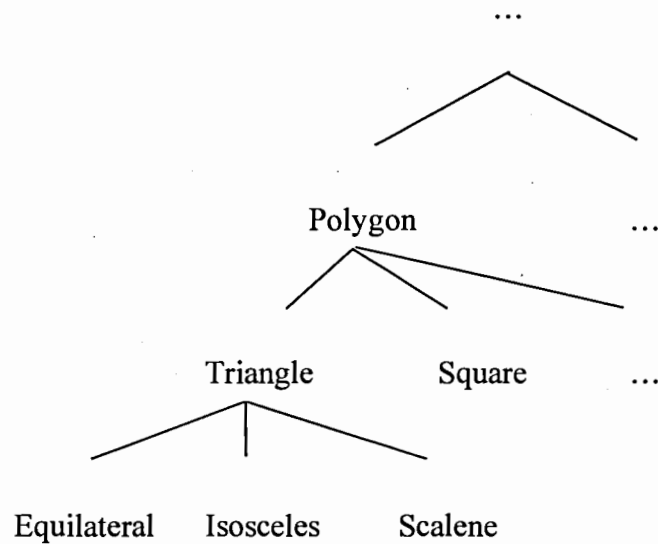
²⁰⁸ 3.149-155.

²⁰⁹ 5.17f.

²¹⁰ 3.151.

²¹¹ See *Phaedrus* 265c-266c.

²¹² Ruskin's argument shows his mastery of traditional Aristotelian logic, which he learned at Oxford. See *Collingwood 1893*, pp. 97-98.



What would allow one to establish such relations are the complex ‘attributes’ or ‘characteristics’ that make up the definitions. For example, a triangle would be a three-sided polygon. So ‘three-sided’ is the characteristic that distinguishes triangles from other polygons, but the genus ‘polygon’ itself is defined in terms of further characteristics. Furthermore, there are characteristics that are also predicable of other things and do not serve to distinguish them from other things. One important point concerning the above structure is that the higher one moves up, the ‘extension’ grows, until one reaches an all-embracing concept, a ‘*summum genus*’ such as, traditionally, ‘Being’, while the ‘intension’ (what the concept ‘connotes’ or its ‘sense’) diminishes. So ‘Being’ has no connotation, a fact that Hegel used at the beginning of his *Science of Logic* to claim that ‘Being’ is equal to ‘Nothingness’.²¹³ Likewise, when one moves

²¹³ With this remark, I am not implying any knowledge of Hegel on Ruskin’s part, especially at this early stage, at a time when he was virtually unknown in Britain. Hegel was only translated during the second half on the 19th century and practically no one knew German in the early 19th century, given that it was not the established philosophical language that it is now. Ruskin’s early context remains largely that of British philosophy in the late 18th century. My wish in making this comment was merely to emphasize the point that the *summum genus* has no connotation.

down, the extension diminishes while the 'intension' becomes progressively richer, until only one single particular is covered, an *individuum omni determinatum*.

To use now Ruskin's example, in 'silk drapery', the predicate 'silk' does not serve to distinguish objects that fall under the genus 'drapery', and *may be predicated of other things*. He points out that there are characteristics that define the genus and others that allow to define its species and writes:

Now that which is first and most broadly characteristic of a thing is that which distinguishes its genus, or which makes it what it is. For instance, that which makes drapery *be* drapery, is not its being made of silk, or worsted, or flax, for things are made of all these which are not drapery, but the ideas peculiar of drapery; the properties which, when inherent in a thing, make it a drapery, are extension, non-elastic flexibility, unity, and comparative thinness. Everything which has these properties, a waterfall, for instance, if united and extended, or a net of weeds on a wall, is drapery, as much as silk or woollen stuff is. So that these ideas separate drapery in our minds from everything else; they are peculiarly characteristic of it, and therefore are the most important group of ideas connected with it; and so with everything else, that which makes the thing what it is, is the most important idea, or group of ideas, connected to the thing. But as this idea must necessarily be common to all individuals of the species it belongs to, it is a general idea with respect to the species; while other ideas, which are not characteristic of the species, and are therefore in reality general (as black and white are terms applicable to more things than drapery), are yet particular with respect to that species, being predicable only of certain individuals of it.²¹⁴

This point allows him to argue that:

[...] it is carelessly and falsely said that general ideas are more important than particular ones; carelessly and falsely, I say, because the so-called general idea is important, not because it is common to all the individuals of that species, but because it separates that species from everything else. It is the distinctiveness, not the universality of the truth, which renders it important. And the so-called particular idea is unimportant, not because it is not predictable of the whole species, but because it *is* predictable of

²¹⁴ 3.151-152.

things outside that species. It is not its individuality, but its generality, which renders it unimportant.²¹⁵

With this point, Ruskin can finally *overturn* Reynolds' grounds for advice on 'generalising':

Finally, then, it is to be remembered that all truths, as far as their being particular or general affects their value at all, are valuable in proportion as they are particular, and valueless in proportion as they are general, or to express the proposition in simpler terms, every truth is valuable in proportion as it is characteristic of the thing of which it is affirmed.²¹⁶

Ruskin's rejection of Reynolds' leitmotiv does not, however, entail that any of his advice on how to paint, say, landscapes is automatically wrong: it might be good advice, but would then be based on wrong reasons.²¹⁷ So we do not have, as of yet, the whole of Ruskin's standpoint. Ruskin's advice will be quoted and discussed at the very beginning of the next chapter, in section 3.1. To get a glimpse of its meaning, we can look at some of Ruskin's specific criticisms.

First, in the preface to the second edition of *Modern Painters I*, Ruskin reacts to Reynolds' eleventh *Discourse*:

A Landscape-Painter certainly ought to study anatomically (if I may use the expression) all the objects which he paints; but when he is to turn his studies to use, his skill, as a man of Genius, will be displayed in shewing general effect [...] for he applies himself to the imagination, not to the curiosity, and works not for the Virtuoso or the Naturalist, but for the common observer of life and nature. When he knows his subject, he will

²¹⁵ 3.152.

²¹⁶ 3.154.

²¹⁷ Ruskin's stance is indeed a bit more complex than my presentation might suggest. He argued that Reynolds' suggestion that properties that characterize humans as a species are more important to art than those exemplifying defects, and his claim in some circumstances, such as painting the drapery of a Madonna, it is important to avoid details, in order not to deflect attention for the idea of the Virgin, are "perfectly just and right, while yet the principle on which they base their selection (that general truths are more important than particular ones) is altogether false" (3.154).

know not only what to describe, but what to omit; and this skill in leaving out, is, in all things, a great part of knowledge and wisdom.²¹⁸

Against this, Ruskin asserts:

Every landscape painter should know the specific characters of every object he has to represent, rock, flower, or cloud; and in his highest ideal works all their distinctions will be perfectly expressed, broadly or delicately, slightly or completely, according to the nature of the subject, and the degree of attention which is to be drawn to the particular object by the part it plays in the composition.²¹⁹

Noting Reynolds' claim that the landscape painter would paint not for the naturalist but for the 'general observer', Ruskin points out that this does not dispense her from knowledge of the 'anatomical', 'geological' or 'botanical' details:

That which to the anatomist is the end, is to the sculptor the means. The former desires details for their own sake; the latter, that by means of them he may kindle his work with life, and stamp it with beauty. And so in landscape: botanical or geological details are not to be given as a matter of curiosity or subject of search, but as the ultimate elements of every species of expression and order of loveliness.²²⁰

As an example of inferior treatment caused by this lacuna, one could cite Ruskin's critique of Claude:

Hence these mountains of Claude, having no indication of the steep vertical summits which we have shown to be the characteristic of the central ridges, having soft edges instead of decisive ones, simple forms (one line to the plain on each side) instead of varied and broken ones, and being painted with a crude raw white, having no transparency, nor filminess, nor air in it, instead of rising in the opalescent mystery which invariably characterizes the distant snows, have the forms and the colours of heaps of chalk in a lime-kiln, not of Alps.²²¹

²¹⁸ Reynolds 1997, p. 199.

²¹⁹ 3.27.

²²⁰ 3.28.

²²¹ 3.408.

And Ruskin further chastises Reynolds for making claims that are not only “false in principle” but also “inaccurate in fact”, giving examples of inaccuracy, such as this comment on Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Plate # 2.4):

The great masters of Italy, almost without exception, and Titian perhaps more than any (for he had the highest knowledge of landscape), are [against Reynolds’ claim] in the constant habit of rendering every detail of their foregrounds with the most laborious botanical fidelity: witness the “Bacchus and Ariadne”, in which the foreground is occupied by the common blue iris, the aquilegia, and the wild rose; *every stamen* of which latter is given, while the blossoms and leaves of the columbine (a difficult flower to draw) have been studied with the most exquisite accuracy.²²²

Secondly, although Ruskin sheds the idea that nature is never exhibiting any archetype as such but only inferior instantiations, he would assert the obvious truth that it never indeed repeats itself,²²³ and that

[...] there is not one of her shadows, tints, or lines that is not in a state of perpetual variation: I do not mean in time, but in space. There is not a leaf in the world which has the same colour visible over its whole surface.²²⁴

Thus, Ruskin could criticize Claude for his monotonous use of colours, especially his brown: “Nothing can be natural which is monotonous; nothing true which tells one story”,²²⁵ and praised Turner instead for his “inimitable power” of varying colour, “so as never to give a quarter of an inch of canvas without a change in it, a melody as well as a harmony of one kind or another”.²²⁶

²²² 3.29.

²²³ 3.542.

²²⁴ 3.294.

²²⁵ 3.295. See also 3.467. For this reason, I do not agree with Denis Cosgrove, when he claims that Ruskin’s approach to nature and his pedagogical vision as Slade Professor at Oxford were common to those of Thomas Huxley, because true landscape art is “charged with faithfully representing law-like qualities of a nature that reflected divine purpose” (*Cosgrove 2008*, p. 123). If indeed divine purpose is involved, it is not in terms of scientific ‘law-like’ qualities.

²²⁶ 3.293-294.

Thirdly, and this thought will be picked up at the beginning of the next chapter, one of Ruskin's key complaints is that this sort of theoretical thinking requesting that one 'generalises', would foster disregard of the very study of nature itself, with pernicious consequences:

And a little careful watching of nature, especially in her foliage and foregrounds, and comparison of her with Claude, Gaspar Poussin, and Salvator, will soon show him that those artists worked entirely on conventional principles, not representing what they saw, but what they thought would make a handsome picture; and even when they went to nature, which I believe to have been a very much rarer practice with them than their biographers would have us suppose, they copied her like children, drawing what they knew to be there, but not what they saw there. I believe you may search the foregrounds of Claude, from one end of Europe to another, and you will not find the shadow of one leaf cast upon another. You will find leaf after leaf painted more or less boldly and brightly out of the black ground, and you will find dark leaves defined in perfect form upon light; but you will not find the form of a single leaf disguised or interrupted by the shadow of another.²²⁷

These quotations should suffice to illustrate the consequences for art criticism of overturning Reynolds; they also show how acute and powerful a critic Ruskin was. It is with criticisms of this sort that he was to sow the seeds of a revolution in British art, which was to occur with the advent in the late 1840s of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. In Chapter 2, we shall see how it was prolonged in their art, and how Ruskin sought to guide them along.

²²⁷ 3.309.

3. Truth to Nature and Pre-Raphaelitism

The best, in this kind, are but shadows.
Shakespeare¹

3.1. Ruskin's Advice: 'Reject Nothing, Select Nothing and Scorning Nothing'

In a key passage from the conclusion to *Modern Painters I*, Ruskin advised the younger generations to steer away from the artificiality of 'Ancient Masters',² and begin instead with the study of nature:

From young artists nothing ought to be tolerated but simple *bona fide imitation* of nature. They have no business to ape the execution of masters [...] making the early works of Turner their example, as his latest are to be their object of emulation, [they] should go to Nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth. Then, when their memories are stored, and their imaginations fed, and their hands firm, let them take up the scarlet and the gold,³ give reins to their fancy, and show us what their heads are made of. We will follow them wherever they choose to lead [...] They have placed themselves above our criticism, and we will listen to their words in all faith and humility; but not unless they themselves have before bowed, in the same submission, to a higher Authority and Master.⁴

As we shall see in sections 3.2 and 3.3, this advice was taken to heart by members of a new generation of British painters, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti

¹ *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 5, scene 1.

² See the list at 3.85, quoted in section 1.1.

³ Ruskin's reference to 'the scarlet and the gold' is to Turner. Although his use of colours to render light effects tended to blur or dissolve objects rather than emphasizing their particular qualities, Ruskin believed this to be the result of Turner having "studied and mastered his subject to the bottom" (3.469). Turner's knowledge of colour theory was based on Brewster's *Optics*. The latter was Professor of Perspective at the Royal Academy from 1811 onwards, where he lectured on colour. See *Kemp 1990*, pp. 301-303. But Ruskin means here a thorough study of nature itself, in an untheoretical fashion.

⁴ 3.622-623.

and William Holman Hunt, who founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in London, in 1848, and those who joined them in the 1850s.⁵ When taking up their defence a year later in his pamphlet on *Pre-Raphaelitism*, Ruskin repeated this very advice in its preface.⁶ It is at the origin of the maxim ‘Truth to Nature’, which will be at the centre of this chapter.⁷ This maxim does not occur as such in *Modern Painters I*, where Ruskin nevertheless defines truth in art as “the faithful statement, either to the mind or sense, of any fact of nature”.⁸

Ruskin’s advice can be read narrowly as the mere precept that in painting one should imitate nature “rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and, scorning nothing”.⁹ This maxim is likely to be misinterpreted, especially in conjunction with the passage on the need to recover the ‘innocence of the eye’,¹⁰ quoted at the end of the introduction, turning Ruskin into an advocate of the possibility of reproducing nature as one sees it, with the underlying claim that vision is not a ‘construct’ but ‘universal’, and painting can be devoid of any conventions. This would perhaps be a programme for some late 20th-century trends in ‘realism’.¹¹ For the sake of the following discussion, I would like to call this view ‘empirical literalism’.¹² That Ruskin wanted painters to shed the conventions of the ‘Ancient Masters’ and first study nature does not entail this sort of view; this would be a *non sequitur*. But even the passage quoted above does not say

⁵ For studies of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, see Gaunt 1966, Hilton 1970, Tate Gallery 1984, Prettejohn 2000, Fagence Cooper 2003, Townsend, Ridge & Hackney 2004, Whiteley 2004, Harrison & Newall 2010, Waggoner 2010, Waggoner 2011, Barringer 2012, and Barringer, Rosenfield & Smith 2012. On Pre-Raphaelite landscape, see Staley 2001, Staley and Newall 2004 and Prettejohn 2000, chapter 5. For Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, see Hewison, Warrell & Wildman 2000 and Hewison 2000.

⁶ 12.339.

⁷ On the Pre-Raphaelites in relation to ‘Truth to Nature’, see Barringer 2012, chapter 2.

⁸ 3.104.

⁹ E. T. Cook has already warned against this narrow reading in Cook 1911, I, pp. 139-140.

¹⁰ 15.27.

¹¹ I have in mind the work of Charles Bell, Chuck Close or Duane Hanson, more than the ‘22 realists’ represented in the epoch-making exhibition at the Whitney Museum, in 1970. On the latter, see Monte 1970.

¹² I take this expression from Krieg 2017, p. 718, but my own use differs slightly from hers.

this, as Ruskin merely asks that the study of nature unencumbered by the sort of conventions that, as we saw at the end of last chapter, he criticised, be a pre-requisite, not the end of the story.

Indeed, in the same passage Ruskin also speaks of painters as having to “give reins to their fancy”, *after* this study, “when their memories are stored, and their imaginations fed”. We saw in the very last quotation of the introduction that Ruskin never foolishly believed one could reproduce what the eye sees. After all, and to say the least, one’s attention in the visual field is always selective. Section 3.4 below will be devoted to his views on photography: very interestingly, he saw that it too is not faithful to what the eye sees. There is more, however, to Ruskin’s stance than this, since he also believed that memory and imagination are involved in an essential way in painting. Leaving aside the topic of memory, a few comments on Ruskin on imagination should suffice to underline this point. It is of course a difficult concept to define and Ruskin’s ideas are rather complex, as the term covers three distinct concepts, and cannot be developed fully here.¹³

As mentioned in section 3.3, above, Ruskin, who is still talking in terms of 18th-century ‘faculty psychology’, distinguished in *Modern Painters II*, between ‘theoretic faculty’ concerned with passive apprehension of beauty and truth, and an ‘imaginative faculty’. In a nutshell, the term ‘imagination’ covers three functions, for which he gives the names of imagination ‘penetrative’, ‘associative’ and ‘contemplative’ – I shall simply focus here on the first two. In the apprehension of beauty and truth, it involves an element of ‘penetrative imagination’ is needed in order to reach what I call below a ‘synoptic’ understanding of the object, that is a vision of the object as a whole and of its inner essence.¹⁴ An element of ‘associative’¹⁵ imagination is also involved in the

¹³ On this topic, see Burd 1956, Hewison 1976, chapter 4, Sprinker 1979 and Natarajan 2017.

¹⁴ Hewison 1976, p. 69.

¹⁵ As Hewison 1976, p. 74 points out, ‘associative’ is an unfortunate choice of words because it suggests connections with the psychological theory of the ‘association of ideas’. (Although originating in the 18th-

creation of beauty and truth, say, in painting, inasmuch as imagination is needed to compose a harmonious whole out of the beauty provided by the 'theoretic faculty' and imperfections (bear in mind that Ruskin is speaking here about composition in painting):

And now we find what noble sympathy and unity there are between the Imaginative and Theoretic faculties. Both agree in this, that they reject nothing, and are thankful for all; but the Theoretic faculty takes out of everything that which is beautiful while the Imaginative faculty takes hold of the very imperfections which the Theoretic rejects; and, by means of these angles and roughnesses, it joints and bolts the separate stones into a mighty temple, wherein the Theoretic faculty, in its turn, does deepest homage. Thus sympathetic in their desires, harmoniously diverse in their operation, each working for the other with what the other needs not, all thing external to man are by one or other turned to good.¹⁶

One can thus see that in the act of painting, imagination is involved, and there is no such thing as rendering on the canvas what the eye, once it has recovered its 'innocence', has apprehended.

Perhaps it is also worth recalling here sections 2.2 and 2.3 and Ruskin's objective view of emotions. As Hewison put it:

Ruskin's vision was not that of the cold Cartesian eye that gazed out on the world in order to control it. [...] the act of description is also an act of the imagination, but it is one where the emotion comes from the object to the viewer, and not the other way around.¹⁷

This direction of fit, from mind to world (emotions come from the object), and not world to mind (emotions are projected unto the world), will become important in section 3.3.

century with Hume, Hartley and others, it was still in vogue in Britain, with Mill and Bain, until late in the 19th-century.)

¹⁶ 4.241-242.

¹⁷ *Hewison 1996*, pp. 32-33.

*

In this chapter, I shall try and clarify this point examining Ruskin's views on geology and his early influence of the Pre-Raphaelites and, for the reason just mentioned, his views on photography. To tie this discussion to Chapter 1, it is worth first picking up the thread where I left it. Again, an event in Ruskin's life recounted in *Praeterita* is a useful starting point.

In 1842, thus at the time of *Modern Painters I*, Ruskin, reflected on some sketches recently obtained from Turner:

I saw that these sketches were straight impressions from nature – not “artificial designs, like the Carthages and Romes. And it began to occur to me that perhaps even in the artifice of Turner there might be more truth than I had understood. I was by this time very learned in *his* principles of composition; but it seemed to me that in these later subjects Nature herself was composing with him.¹⁸

Ruskin then recounts that in May of that year he stopped to sketch a branch of ivy, on the road to Norwood in Tulse Hill, south London. It is as if he had an epiphany, leading to his advice at the end of *Modern Painter I*:

[...] I noticed a bit of ivy round a thorn stem, which seemed, even to my critical judgment, not ill “composed”; and proceeded to make a light and shade pencil study of it in my grey paper pocket-book, carefully, as if it had been a bit of a sculpture, liking it more and more as I drew. When it was done, I saw that I had virtually lost all my time since I was twelve years old, because *no one had ever told me to draw what was really there!* All my time, I mean, given to draw as an art; of course I had the records of places, but had *never seen the beauty of anything, not even of a stone – how much less of a leaf!*¹⁹ (My italics)

W. G. Collingwood commented as follows:

¹⁸ 35.310.

¹⁹ 35.311. See *Hewison 1976*, p. 41. According to Hewison, it took a number of years for the lessons of that day to sink in, *Hewison 1976*, p. 41-46.

As he drew, he fell in the spirit of its natural arrangement, and soon perceived how much finer it was as a piece of design than any conventional rearrangement would be. Harding²⁰ had tried to show him how to generalise foliage; but in this example he saw that not generalisation was needed to get at its beauty, but truth. If he could express his sense of the charm of the natural arrangement, what use in substituting an artificial composition?

In that discovery lay the germ of his whole theory of art, the gist of his mission.²¹

Although the vocabulary of ‘truth’ is new, this is but an illustration of the lesson learned from overturning Reynolds, presented in section 2.5: do not aim at generality or the ‘archetype’, observe what you see, because this is where beauty resides, not in some abstract entity defectively instantiated in this world.

Collingwood also adds a comment on ‘sincerity’ that captures very well the importance of that dimension, already discussed in section 2.2, for generations of Ruskin’s followers. It is as if the above advice is here rewritten in term of it:

Be sincere with Nature, and take her as she is; neither casually glancing at her “effects”, nor dully belabouring at her parts, with the intention of improving and blending them into something better: but taking her all in all. On the other hand, be sincere with yourself; knowing what you truly admire, and painting that: refusing the hypocrisy of any “grand style” or “high art” just as you refuse to pander to vulgar tastes.²²

Now, Ruskin developed what could be described as a ‘phenomenological’ approach. I take this suggestion from the geographer Dennis Cosgrove, in his study of ‘John Ruskin and the Geographical Imagination’:

Ruskin’s approach [...] was thus to be phenomenological. He wished to rid himself of a priori notions and theory in order to see, or experience directly,

²⁰ At the time, Ruskin was learning how to draw from James Duffield Harding, who also shared a disdain of Dutch masters and admiration for Turner. Although Ruskin praised Harding, he complained in typical fashion that, “when systematically adopted”, his choices of tree forms were “untrue” (3.601). On Ruskin and Harding, see *Landow 1970*.

²¹ *Collingwood 1893*, I, p. 101.

²² *Collingwood 1893*, I, p. 101-102.

external phenomena and to develop an understanding from that direct or “lived” experience of landscape rather than to explain it scientifically.²³

This seems to me an essential insight, but I need precisely to define the sense in which I wish to use the term ‘phenomenology’, in order to avoid misunderstandings as to the nature of that insight. The OED, distinguishes four meanings: “The science of phenomena as distinct from that of the nature of being”, “The branch of a science which describes and classifies its phenomena”, the philosophical and psychological meanings associated with Edmund Husserl’s ‘phenomenology’. Husserl himself indicated in many places²⁴ that he took the name from a school of thought in physics harking back to Gustav Kirchhoff and Ernst Mach, sometimes called the ‘descriptive view’. These physicians wished fully to describe the movements in nature, in ‘the simplest manner’. By this they meant that the point of departure should be the *descriptum* or description of sensory data and their connections (to imagine an example: seeing a white dot moving from *a* to *b* over a black background), which is ‘simple’ in the sense that it is couched in a language that does not use terms referring to unobservable entities, such as ‘atoms’, that would be otherwise postulated to explain these movements.

This covers the first two meanings distinguished by the OED, but, as just stated, Husserl borrowed the term ‘phenomenology’ in order to talk about the ‘descriptive psychology’ of his teacher Franz Brentano, which was also meant to provide the preliminaries, through careful description of subtle variations of mental states, for a psycho-physiological theory.²⁵ But this original meaning got somewhat modified by him, as he was critical of both Mach and Brentano,²⁶ and it was further modified within the ‘phenomenological tradition’ he inaugurated, so I must insist that my use of the

²³ Cosgrove 1979, p. 45.

²⁴ For example, in Husserl 2006, p. 76.

²⁵ On this point, see Moran 2000, p. 7.

²⁶ For detailed studies, see, respectively, Fisette 2012 and Fisette 2018.

adjective is merely in reference to the 'descriptive view' within 19th-century physics, although the work of Kirchhoff or Mach was almost certainly unknown to Ruskin.

For this 'descriptive view', 'phenomenological' descriptions are meant as surface descriptions of 'sense-data', 'sense impressions', 'sensation', 'appearances' and the like. Mach proposed on the basis of this 'descriptive view' what is known as 'neutral monism' (the idea that there is only one thing which is studied in two different directions) and 'epistemological dualism' (the idea that studies in these two different directions use two different methods). For example, he wrote:

A color is a physical object as soon as we consider its dependence, for instance, upon its luminous source, upon other colors, upon temperatures, upon spaces, and so forth. When we consider, however, its dependence upon the retina [...] it is a psychological object, a sensation. Not the subject-matter, but the direction of our investigations, is different in the two domains.²⁷

Furthermore, for the likes of Mach one should be able to describe sensations in a language free of terms referring unobservable entities, thus of theoretically posited entities. Ruskin analogously repeatedly claimed that his work involves no theory, in terms akin to this 'descriptive view':

I never theorize, I give you the facts only.²⁸

We must begin where all theory ceases; and where observation becomes possible.²⁹

[...] the true power of art must be founded on a general knowledge of organic nature [...] in representing this organic nature, quite as much as in representing inanimate things, Art has nothing to do with structures, causes, or absolute facts; but only with appearances.³⁰

²⁷ Mach 1959, pp. 17-18.

²⁸ 26.109.

²⁹ 26.112. See also 26.233.

³⁰ 22.222.

We can tie this to some broader comments by Ruskin on the relation between art and science,³¹ in *The Stones of Venice*:

Science deals exclusively with things as they are in themselves; and art exclusively with things as they affect the human sense and human soul. Her work is to portray the appearance of things, and to deepen the natural impressions which they produce upon living creatures. The work of science is to substitute facts for appearances, and demonstrations for impressions. Both, observe, are equally concerned with truth: the one with truth of aspect, the other with truth of essence. Art does not represent things falsely, but truly as they appear to mankind.³²

And in *Modern Painters III*:

We cannot fathom the mystery of a single flower, nor is it intended that we should; but that the pursuit of science should constantly be stayed by the love of beauty, and accuracy of knowledge by tenderness of emotion. Nor is it even just to speak of the love of beauty as in all respects unscientific; for there is a science of the aspects of things, as well as of their nature; and it is as much a fact to be noted in their constitution, that they produce such and such an effect upon the eye or heart (as, for instance, that minor scales of sound cause melancholy), as that they are made up of certain atoms or vibrations of matter.

It is as the master of this science of *Aspects*, that I said some time ago,³³ Turner must eventually be named always with Bacon, the master of the science of *Essence*.³⁴

The idea of art as the attempt to “portray the appearance of things”, concerned with “truth of aspect”, as opposed to “truth of essence” fits well the idea of a ‘phenomenological’ approach, with “truth of aspect” resounding very well with the

³¹ The following paragraphs are very much indebted to *Alexander 1969*. On Ruskin and science, see also, in alphabetical order, *Ball 1971*, *Birch 1981*, *Hewison 1996b*, *Krieg 2017*, *O’Gorman 1996*, *O’Gorman 1999*, *O’Gorman 2010* and *Weltman 1999*.

³² 11.47-48.

³³ See 12.128.

³⁴ 5.387. It is worth getting ahead of the narrative here and noticing that ‘aspect’ is the word Walter Crane used in *Line and Form*, in a typically Ruskinian passage: “We are striving to grasp the facts of *Aspect*” (*Crane 1900*, pp. 29-30).

phenomenological notion of ‘adumbration’ or ‘aspect’ (*Abschattung, Aspekt*),³⁵ while “truth of essence” would here refer to the sort of theorizing that requires postulation of unobservable entities such as atoms. This idea also fits both the above ‘descriptive view’ and the OED definition quoted above: “The science of phenomena as distinct from that of the nature of being”.

Thus, Mach’s views shed light on Ruskin’s text, and clarifies what I meant by ‘phenomenology’. I would not, however, simply confuse both. Mach, for example, would suggest a drawing of his field of vision (Plate # 3.1), in his *Analysis of Sensations* (1886).³⁶ Obviously, the two projects are of a different nature, since Mach approach is much more ‘subjective’ than Ruskin – in a nutshell: while Mach pictures his sensations on his retina, Ruskin sees himself as picturing not his retinal image, but the scene in front of him. Still, they share the same departure point: a description of what is seen. Furthermore, and more importantly, Ruskin never conceived what I call here his ‘phenomenology’ as a scientific endeavour: it was meant, as we saw, to be art, not science.

To Ruskin, in *The Eagle’s Nest*, the complete truth is made of both:

You will find that the complete truth embraces great part of both; and that you may study, at your choice, in any singing bird, the action of universal heat on a marvellous mechanism, or of individual life, on a frame capable of exquisite passion.³⁷

By this, Ruskin indicates that he believed that, in the end, the ‘phenomenological’ description in art and the scientific explanation would fit together, and this explains his negative reaction when he realised that they would not – see the next section on geology. Still, it seems important to realize at this stage that these are two distinct

³⁵ For Husserl objects only reveal themselves as ‘adumbrations’ (*Husserl 1982*, § 3) or ‘perspectival aspects’ (*Husserl 1960*, § 61). See the entry on the former in *Moran & Cohen 2012*, pp. 29-30.

³⁶ See *Mach 1959*. For an overview of Mach’s programme, see *Pojman 2012*.

³⁷ 22.162-163.

projects, both in their aims and their ‘method’. Ruskin does speak of art as opposed to science, and his ‘phenomenology’ was not meant as a counter-science, a bad or pseudo-science like anthropologists such as Frazer and Tylor used to think of ‘magic’.³⁸ That he believed wrongly that the systematizations he achieved within his ‘phenomenology’ were to cohere with scientific explanations according to science as such, does not make his ‘phenomenology’ part of science, nor was it even meant to be ‘scientific’ in its own way – it is artistic. If it were the case, then he would have proceeded according to the scientific method outright, and not devised this ‘phenomenological’ programme for a different purpose, away from ‘scientific method’. This point will come up again in the next section and in the conclusion.

Ruskin’s advice “rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing” has of course a lot to do with his critique of Claude and learning how to paint without ‘generalising’, as we saw in the previous chapter, but it can be understood also in accordance with this ‘phenomenology’: just describe what you see, and forget about not just about Platonic archetypes, but also about any underlying process whose understanding would require an appeal to what you cannot see. Of course, no one draws what one sees, so one necessarily needs to select or ‘abstract’, but the idea is precisely that in order to ‘abstract’ one must analyse and follow one’s emotional response – this is the theme of ‘*Theoria*’ – not the Platonic archetype or underlying process.

It is interesting to note *en passant* that Ruskin’s pronouncements, above, are consonant with Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities, as presented in section 2.2. Indeed, for a given object, science studies under this view its primary qualities and its ‘powers’ to produce secondary qualities, namely the

³⁸ This is the view criticized both in the chapter on Art as Magic’ in R. G. Collingwood’s *The Principles of Art* (Collingwood 1938, chapter iv) and in Ludwig Wittgenstein in his posthumously published ‘Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*’ (Wittgenstein 1993, chapter 7). One should be wary of replicating this mistake, imputing to Ruskin and those influenced by him a pseudo-scientific approach to art, simply because I have described Ruskin’s project in terms of the ‘descriptive view’ in late 19th-century German physics.

“operation of insensible particles on our senses”³⁹ or in Ruskin’s words “of certain atoms or vibrations of matter”,⁴⁰ while art studies it from the point of view of its perceptual and emotional resonance in us: “art studies only their relations to man [...] what that thing is to the human eyes and human heart, what it has to say to men, and what it can become to them”.⁴¹

Thus, Ruskin did not merely advise that one studies nature, he also affirmed the independence (from natural science) and validity of artistic perception – and we saw in the last chapter how emotions are intimately related to this ‘perception’. It may be felt, however, that it is insufficient to simply sketch or study one solitary ‘aspect’ of, say, ivy or *Alisma Plantago*, thus one may wish to bring together a number of them in order to arrive at a more comprehensive or ‘synoptic’ understanding. This idea is captured by Ruskin’s image of ‘making a garland’:

The power [...] of thus fully perceiving any natural object depends on our being able to group and fasten all our fancies about it as a centre, making a garland of thoughts for it, in which each separate thought is subdued and shortened of its own strength, in order to fit it for harmony with others; the intensity of our enjoyment of the object depending, first, on its own beauty, and then on the richness of the garland.⁴²

W. G. Collingwood described Ruskin on his trip to the Continent, after his ‘epiphany’ at Tulse Hill, in these interesting words:

At Chamouni he studied plants and rocks and clouds, not as an artist, to make pictures out of them, nor as a scientist, to class them and analyse them; but to learn their aspects and enter into the spirit of their growth and structure.⁴³

³⁹ J. Locke, *Essay...*, II, chap. viii, 13.

⁴⁰ 5.387, quoted above.

⁴¹ 9.48.

⁴² 5.359. To emphasize the appropriateness of the label ‘phenomenological’, one should note that Husserl spoke of a ‘manifold of adumbrations’ (*Abschattungsmannigfaltigkeit*), for example in *Husserl* 1982, § 41.

⁴³ *Collingwood* 1893, I, p. 102. ‘Chamouni’ is the old spelling of Chamonix.

This passage is indeed of great interest because it indicates how Ruskin sought to go further than mere imitation and use artistic perception, always guided by one's emotions (sympathy), to understand natural objects at a deeper level than their mere perceptual surface.

Two related points need to be made in relation to the content of this passage. First, it is clear that Ruskin's advice does not presuppose or entail what I called above 'empirical literalism', because he does not limit the study of nature to this 'literalism'; his aim is synoptic understanding. We shall see in a moment that the role of imagination also precludes any form of 'empirical literalism'.

Secondly, we are brought here to 'vital beauty' and the ambiguous relation of Ruskin to science, which form the background to this chapter. Recall from section 2.2, that Ruskin defined 'vital beauty' as "the appearance of felicitous fulfilment of function in living things, more especially of the joyful and right exertion of perfect life in man".⁴⁴ So, in Ruskin's mind art perception would extend in this way to the study of botany, geology and ornithology: "I have set myself to write three grammars – of geology, botany, and zoology – which will contain nothing but indisputable facts in those three branches of proper human learning".⁴⁵ Thus, Ruskin wrote *Proserpina* on the topic of botany in the years 1875-86, and *Love's Meinie* in 1873-1881 on ornithology, and *Deucalion* in 1875-1883 on geology. In this chapter, Ruskin on geology will play an important role – his writings on botany is equally important, I merely choose to focus on one of the two topics.

Both approaches, Ruskin's extended form of art perception and the science of his days, were akin inasmuch as they were based on observation and classification, but it was perhaps inevitable, given its 'moral' dimension, that results issuing from this approach would be at variance with the science. After all, what Ruskin calls 'science'

⁴⁴ 4.64.

⁴⁵ 28.647.

in the above quotation does not necessarily describe accurately what the likes of Darwin, Faraday, Herschel, Huxley, Maxwell, Tyndall, or even Whewell and Mill understood as 'science', to name just a few prominent Victorian scientists and philosophers of science.

Although at times guarded towards Darwin,⁴⁶ whom he knew personally, it was inevitable that Ruskin would clash with the theory of natural selection⁴⁷ given that Ruskin struggled to conciliate it with the narrative of *Genesis* – more on this in the next section. Ruskin's criticism of Tyndall on glaciers in the letter 34 of *Fors Clavigera* (1873)⁴⁸ is some time seen as having had an effect on Ruskin's reputation in the domain of science equal to that of his notorious remark on Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, discussed in section 1.3.

The complex and intricate relation of Ruskin with the science of his days would require more space for discussion than is available here, so I should limit myself to one central critique, while more will be said on the topic of glaciers in section 3.3. One should first note that perception of vital beauty would, according to Ruskin, be impaired by a fully scientific approach. I could illustrate this with a page from *Proserpina*, where Ruskin concludes that the leaf of burdock is for our visual enjoyment:

When a leaf is to be spread wide, like the Burdock, it is supported by a framework of extending ribs like a Gothic roof. The supporting function of these is geometrical; every one is constructed like the girders of a bridge, or beams of a floor, with all manner of science in the distribution of their substance in the section, for narrow and deep strength; and the shafts are mostly hollow. But when the extending space of a leaf is to be enriched

⁴⁶ See for example 19.358 note, and 24.177. Ruskin first met Darwin at a dinner party at William Buckland's in 1837 (26.xx), and it appears that they remain on cordial terms. See 19.xliv and 25.xlvi.

⁴⁷ For instance, in *Deucalion* Ruskin wrote that the story of Deucalion and the flood myth of Ancient Greek mythology is as true as Noah's and "incomparably truer than the Darwinian theory" (26.99). We shall encounter another instance below.

⁴⁸ See below section 3.3 for a brief review of this controversy. For further discussions, see *Sawyer 1981* and *O'Gorman 1996*.

with fulness of folds, and become beautiful in wrinkles, this may be done either by pure undulation as of a liquid current along the leaf edge, or by sharp "drawing" [...] and stitching of the edges together. And this stitching together, if to be done very strongly, is done round a bit of a stick, as a sail is reefed round a mast; and this bit of stick needs to be compactly, not geometrically strong; its function is essentially that of starch, – not to hold the leaf off the ground against gravity; but to stick the edges out, stiffly, in a crimped frill. And in beautiful work of this kind, which we are meant to study, the stays of the leaf – or stay-bones – are finished off very sharply and exquisitely at the points; and indeed so much so, that they prick our fingers when we touch them; for they are not at all meant to be touched, but admired.⁴⁹

This should be compared to what he had to say earlier in *Modern Painters II* on dissecting a shark's fin:

But still clearer evidence of its being indeed the expression of happiness to which we look for our first pleasure in organic form, is to be found in the way in which we regard the bodily frame of animals [...] whenever we dissect the animal frame, or conceive it as dissected, and substitute in our ideas the neatness of mechanical contrivance for the pleasure of the animal; the moment we reduce enjoyment to ingenuity and volition to leverage, that instant all sense of beauty disappears. Take [...] the action of the dorsal fin of the shark tribe. So long as we observe the uniform energy of motion in the whole frame, the lash of the tail, bound of the body, and instantaneous lowering of the dorsal, to avoid the resistance of the water as it turns, there is high sense of organic power and beauty. But when we dissect the dorsal, and find that its superior ray is supported in its position by a peg in a notch at its base, and that when the fin is to be lowered, the peg has to be taken out, and when it is raised put in again; although we are filled with wonder at the ingenuity of the mechanical contrivance, all our sense of beauty is gone, and not to be recovered until we again see the fin playing on the animal's body, apparently by its own will alone, with the life running along its rays.⁵⁰

It is at this juncture that we can fully appreciate Ruskin's anti-vivisectionist stance, as he restricted for moral reasons observation to the unaided use of the sensory apparatus,

⁴⁹ 25.287.

⁵⁰ 4.154-55.

thus the exclusion of scientific apparatus, and that meant no dissection: “the first vital principle is that man is intended to observe with his eyes, and mind; not with microscope and knife”.⁵¹ As was mentioned in the introduction, he resigned as Slade professor at Oxford in 1885 because of the university’s decision to endow a new physiology laboratory in which animal vivisection would be conducted.⁵² In a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, justifying his objection to vivisection, he called Darwin’s theory “mischievous”.⁵³ The reason for this is that it fosters the wrong moral attitude towards animals:

For one secret discovered by the torture of a thousand animals, a thousand means of health, peace, and happiness were lost, because the physician was continually infecting his students not with the common rabies of the dog, but with rabies of the man, infecting them with all kinds of base curiosity, infecting the whole society which he taught with a thirst for knowing things which God had concealed from them for His own good reason, and promoting amongst them passions of the same kind.⁵⁴

Thus, his stance is ultimately a moral one, based on his view of human responsibility towards animals. This is captured in these quotations:

In representing, nay, in thinking of, and caring for, these beasts, man has to think of them essentially with their skins on them, and with their souls in them.⁵⁵

The inhabited world in sea and land should be one vast unwallled park and treasure lake, in which flocks of sheep, or deer, or fowl, or fish, should be tended and dealt with, as best may multiply the life of all Love’s Meinie, in strength, and use, and peace.⁵⁶

⁵¹ 25.xxx.

⁵² Again, see *Mayer 2008*.

⁵³ 34.596.

⁵⁴ 34.644.

⁵⁵ 22.223.

⁵⁶ 25.132.

These remarks lead one to what seems Ruskin's fundamental idea, namely that the moral link to God, which is, as we have seen in section 1.3, at the centre of '*Theoria*' appears to be severed in modern science. Ruskin's advice in the conclusion to *Modern Painters I* should, therefore, not be seen as an encouragement to study nature in a scientific fashion, not even with reliance on scientific material, but to study it in terms of one's moral sympathy towards it, having in mind an *alternative programme*, resulting in different observations, descriptions, classifications, potentially conflicting with those of science. This alternative is often called Ruskin's 'mythopoeic science', because of his heavy reliance on Greek methodology in describing it.⁵⁷ This project may be ridiculed as a grandiose failure to build a counter-science of sorts, but it may more modestly be seen as an alternative descriptive project, a 'phenomenology' for art and artists. This point is often missed and, as a consequence, some confusedly describe Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites as relying on the science of their time, or even sharing the 'scientific outlook' in their approach to nature. This point will resurface in section 2.3, discussing works John Everett Millais and John Brett. I can thus conclude this section with a quotation from Kenneth Bendiner, which summarizes my argument so far:

Ruskin's seemingly objective, scientific regard for the visual facts of nature was a recognition that there is no such thing as the objective transcription of nature, of the outside world. Ruskin realized that seeing is an imaginative act; the brain always selects and orders the perceptions. He wanted artists to be true to their imaginations, to their immediate sensations of nature; he wanted them to avoid traditional rules of art, to avoid conscious attempts to clarify, beautify, recompose, or simplify their perceptions. Ruskin's realism is actually an emotionally reverent devotion to immediate response, to psychological truth, and the passion of his beliefs is evident in his rich language.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See Moore & Ostwald 1996, Moore 2000, Hewison 2007, p. 102, Cosgrove 2008, pp. 125f., and Atwood 2011, p. 67. The earliest source I know of is Sawyer speaking of 'mythopoeic imagination' in Sawyer 1985, pp. 236, 274 & 313-314.

⁵⁸ Bendiner 1984, p. 244.

3.2. Encounters with the Pre-Raphaelites

As mentioned in the previous section, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded by John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt in 1848. They rapidly included into their circle new members, including Dante Gabriel's brother, the art critic William Michael Rossetti. Because of Modernist canons of art history,⁵⁹ Pre-Raphaelites were largely discredited. They were not seen as precursors to Modernism, and, to put it bluntly, were ranked alongside Academic Art as part of 19th-century art that should be consigned to the dustbins of History. As with Ruskin, when not simply ignored, they were at best seen as representatives of their times, a Victorian era which was at any rate usually portrayed in very negative terms. Successive revaluations since the 1960s have led to a more informed and better-balanced appraisal. Far from being representatives of an arch-conservative era, the Pre-Raphaelites were by definition revolutionaries, as they wanted to throw away an established order. As their chosen name indicates, they wished to do away with the whole of the Western painting tradition since Raphael, and wanted explicitly to revert to the painting techniques of the Quattrocento. For example, they rejected *chiaroscuro* and any attempt at depicting light effects on fabrics with touches of white. They aimed instead for the vivid colours of earlier Italian paintings, such as the younger Giovanni Bellini or Sebastiano del Piombo.

Such a description, however, would be incomplete, because it would miss Ruskin's import. To discuss it, I would like to circumscribe one specific aspect of Pre-Raphaelitism. This movement extends into the late 19th century and it is formed of a variety of artists (painters, poets, photographers), including some that moved away later in their career while they produced art that should not be identified as 'Pre-

⁵⁹ See Greenberg 1993, vol. 4, p. 242.

Raphaelite' – we shall come across an instance of this with Millais, below. Pre-Raphaelites are certainly better known today for their medieval scenes and legends (with a possible influence of Carlyle), for their illustrations of literature, such as Millais' *Ophelia* (Plate # 3.2) from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or John Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott* from a poem by Tennyson, and for figure painting and the later portrayals of women by Rossetti and Burne-Jones, than they are known for their landscapes. The latter form, however, an important contribution to 19th-century painting, as significant as those of Constable and Turner before them in their own country, or the Barbizon school or even the Impressionists later on in France. Of the same period, a comparison of the landscapes of Millais, Madox Brown, Holman Hunt, Inchbold, or Brett with Courbet, the 'realist' of the day, should suffice to rehabilitate them. I shall argue here for the influence of Ruskin and his aesthetic ideals on *early* Pre-Raphaelite landscape, taking my lead from another comment by Kenneth Bendiner, about the "brief eruption of realism in British landscape painting in the 1850s" marked by Pre-Raphaelitism:

Before the 1850s scenery was prettified, or emotion filled, or tradition bound, or generalized, or metaphoric, or imaginatively based, or religious inspired. After the 1850s, factual recording gradually disappeared. Landscapes became vague poetic suggestions (e.g., the works of Whistler and his followers), or idealized visions of pastoral sweetness (e.g., the paintings of Myles Birket Foster) or planar arrangements of delicate abstract beauty (e.g., the works of George Hemming Mason and the Etruscan School), or bold rectilinear patterns in heavy impasto (e.g., the landscapes of the Glasgow School), or French-inspired glimpses of a sunny world, fleeting and unclear (e.g., the Impressionist works of Phillip Wilson Steer). Landscapes of scientific perception of the 1850s gave way to nostalgic evocations, mood paintings, or artificial plays of form. The hard physical objects of Pre-Raphaelite landscape were often replaced by ungraspable light, unfocused and insubstantial.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Bendiner 1984, p. 247.

I shall thus focus on Pre-Raphaelite landscapes of the 1850s, and argue that this “brief eruption of realism in British landscape” resulted from the impact of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* and his efforts to influence directly their landscape painting (by close association at the time of painting, bringing them to the Grand Tour, etc.), although for reasons laid out in the previous section, I disagree with the use by Bendiner of the expression “scientific perception” to describe Pre-Raphaelite paintings. It is rather Ruskin’s ‘phenomenological’ programme that they were following. To argue that point I shall begin with a description of Ruskin’s first encounters with the Pre-Raphaelites, and then, in the next section, discuss his impact on their landscape painting. This would be the topic of a thesis in itself; I shall limit myself to a few paintings related to Ruskin’s views on geology.

*

The idea of a ‘Brotherhood’ and the medieval and Renaissance revivalism that they exhibited in some of their paintings, coupled with their overt religious mood, point to a source,⁶¹ the ‘Brotherhood of St. Luke’, also referred today as the ‘Nazarenes’. This group of early 19th-century German painters included Franz Pforr, Johann Friedrich Overbeck, Peter Cornelius, and Philip Veit, who revived the Renaissance technique of fresco painting. For religious reasons, they reacted against the prevalent Neoclassicism and sought inspiration from late Middle Ages and early Renaissance art, which they perceived as embodying the spiritual values supposedly lacking in later artistic periods, characterized by mere superficial virtuosity. Raphael was to them the symbol of worldliness and paganism.

Most of the Nazarenes moved to Rome, where the Scottish painter William Dyce got acquainted with their work, during his travels there in 1825 and 1827-28. It was Dyce who first spread their ideas in Britain. Another painter more closely related to the

⁶¹ See *Staley 2001*, pp. 225-237.

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Ford Madox Brown also saw some of the Nazarenes' paintings in Rome in 1845-6, and painted in their spirit *The Seeds and the Fruits of English Poetry* (Plate # 3.3).⁶² It is thus that the younger artists, Rossetti, Hunt and Millais came into contact with the Nazarenes with whom they shared a yearning to become a religious community (although their views on religion would always remain vaguely defined).

The medieval revivalism, religious content, and the wish to emulate the painting techniques of late Middle Ages and early Renaissance left a strong imprint on the Pre-Raphaelites. Ruskin himself was to become in the later part of the 19th century one of the leaders of medieval revivalism for reasons linked with his rejection of the industrial revolution and his Christian socialism. But one should note that Ruskin was not the key influence in these aspects. More interestingly, I would like to claim that early Pre-Raphaelite landscapes also show independence of thought from Ruskin. To be sure, it is not the Nazarene landscape which is the model here. One quick look at a landscape from Koch (Plate # 3.4) suffices to show that they had not truly freed themselves from the conventions they sought to destroy. As Overbeck put it, they favoured for art the 'Road of the Ideal of Beauty' over the 'Road of Nature and Truth'.⁶³ This is antithetical to Ruskin's overturning of Reynolds in *Modern Painters I*.

The Pre-Raphaelites themselves always claimed that their paintings had precious little to do with those of their German predecessors. For example, William Michael Rossetti wrote:

The English revivalists recur to one primary school – nature, as interpreted by their own eyes and feelings; the Germans, to the purest form of a school

⁶² The integral painted triptych style of this painting was direct influence of the Nazarenes. See *Roberts 1995*, pp. 58-59. For Nazarene influence on the Pre-Raphaelites, see also *Bennett 1988*, p. 22, *Bennett 2010*, I, 5, p. 92, *Roberts 2010*, pp. 557-559. See *Andrews 1989* for an excellent comparative study on Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites.

⁶³ *Eitner 1970*, II, pp. 37-39.

ready-organized. [...] Actual consonance between the outcomings of the two systems there is none.⁶⁴

For their inspiration, Ruskin's advice in the conclusion to *Modern Painters I* (by 1848, only the first two volumes had appeared, with volume II published in 1846) seems to have played an important role. The Pre-Raphaelites' first paintings were about medieval scenes, in imitation of the Nazarene, but their treatment of nature, first in some elements of the paintings such as leaves on the foreground in William Holman Hunt's *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (Plate # 3.5) or the vegetation in Millais' *Ophelia* (Plate # 3.2), but then progressively extending to the landscape as a whole, owed as little as possible to convention, and as much as possible to a meticulous study of nature. On the reeds in the foreground of *Ophelia*, Elizabeth Prettejohn had an insightful remark, which is very much in the spirit of Ruskin's rejection of generalisation and emphasis on 'truth':

At the base of the clump are broken reeds, some molted with brown. We do not forget that we are looking at a representation of reeds, rather than at 'real' reeds. But we are persuaded that the representation documents a 'real' act of looking at these particular reeds. Otherwise, there would be no reason to show their broken ends and wayward angles. A more regular clump of pictured reeds would resemble 'real' reeds just as adequately, or even better in some respects; such a representation would stand a better chance of corresponding to our own experiences of other clumps of reeds, which would not display the individual particularities of this particular clump. But this representation does not claim 'verisimilitude' in the sense of resemblance to the average clump of reeds. Instead it claims to represent the 'truth' of this particular clump of reeds [...]⁶⁵

Hunt's *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* inaugurated the use of a technique that was to characterize much of the Pre-Raphaelite's paintings, namely, painting over wet white ground, applied fresh each day. This technique was adapted from Renaissance fresco painting (rediscovered and introduced in Britain at the time in order

⁶⁴ Rossetti 1970, p. 176. (This book was originally published in 1867.)

⁶⁵ Prettejohn 2000, pp. 165-166.

to decorate the newly rebuilt Houses of Parliament) and gave the brilliant colours which are characteristic of their paintings. The vegetation in Millais' *Ophelia* is a case at hand, and the meticulous rendering of the water plants in the foreground of Charles Allston Collins' *Convent Thoughts* (Plate # 3.6) another one.

These hardly count as landscapes but the same striving for accuracy is found in the painstaking study of the forest in the Millais' *The Woodman's Daughter* (Plate # 3.7), or William Holman Hunt's *Strayed Sheep* (Plate # 3.8), to which I shall come back. It is clear from these early paintings that the pre-Raphaelites, much influenced as they were by the Nazarenes' ideals, took their lead from Ruskin's *Modern Painters I* (and *II*).

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had their first exhibitions in 1849 and 1850. Ruskin took no notice at first, until Dyce brought them to his attention in 1850, and Millais asked him in 1851, through a common acquaintance, to write a rejoinder to the numerous critiques the Brotherhood had already received for these early exhibitions. Ruskin complied and wrote two letters to *The Times* in 1851 and published in the same year a pamphlet entitled *Pre-Raphaelitism*.⁶⁶ He was to meet Millais for the first time immediately afterwards, in July 1851.⁶⁷ Keeping his distances from what he perceived as sympathy for the Tractarian movement and for Roman Catholicism, Ruskin nevertheless vigorously defended the Pre-Raphaelites. He wrote about Collins' *Convent Thoughts* (Plate # 3.6) that:

I happen to have a special acquaintance with the water plant, *Alisma Plantago* [...] and I never saw it so thoroughly well drawn, I must take leave to remonstrate with you, when you say sweepingly that these men "sacrifice *truth* as well as feeling to eccentricity." For as a mere botanical

⁶⁶ For letters to *The Times* see 12.319-335, and for the pamphlet, 12. 339-393. For Ruskin's collected writings on the Pre-Raphaelites, see *Wildman* 2012.

⁶⁷ *Holman Hunt* 1905, II, p. 257.

study of the water lily and *Alisma*, [...] this picture would be invaluable to me, and I heartily wish it were mine.⁶⁸

The Pre-Raphaelites followed Ruskin and did not 'generalise', so what was perceived by their critics as 'sacrificing truth' was exactly the contrary in Ruskin's eyes. The reason for his fascination for *Alisma Plantago* is, in Peter Fuller's words, that "Ruskin apparently believed that in the proportions of the stem and the curvature of the leaves of *Alisma Plantago*, the common water plantain, he had placed his finger upon a type of God's beauty on the world".⁶⁹ In the illustration from *The Stones of Venice* we encountered in chapter 1 (Plate # 1.17), the curve of *Alisma Plantago* appears as that from *q* to *r*, along with a number of other natural curves, such as the southern edge of the Matterhorn, the slope of a glacier, etc.

Ruskin also defended the Pre-Raphaelites against further critiques concerning alleged errors of perspectives⁷⁰ or the allegedly poor treatment of light and shade,⁷¹ but he also added numerous critical comments of his own, in particular against Millais' and Hunt's mediocre treatment of faces and hands.⁷² Nevertheless, Ruskin kindly concluded his second letter to *The Times* stating emphatically that the Pre-Raphaelites may "lay in our England the foundations of a school of art nobler than the world has seen for three hundred years".⁷³

⁶⁸ 12.321. Peter Fuller notes, however, at the very end of his book, the water plant depicted by Collins is not *Alisma Plantago*, but *Sagittaria sagittifolia*. See Fuller 1988, p. 234. This was an embarrassing mistake to make, but not one that makes much impact on Ruskin's point. Fuller used Ruskin's comment on *Alisma Plantago* to lead his provocative charge against what he perceived as the dereliction that the modernist movement brought to British art, exemplified in the works of Gilbert & George. See Fuller 1988, pp. 1-6. For this re-appropriation of Ruskin within the context of his provocative critique of contemporary British art, see Fuller 1993, pp. 3-20. One needs not follow Fuller here, nor should one assume, however, that Ruskin is only a resource for this type of art criticism.

⁶⁹ Fuller 1988, p. 59.

⁷⁰ 12.322.

⁷¹ 12.358.

⁷² 12.324-27. As one can see from Hunt 1905, p. 256, this criticism was well taken.

⁷³ 12.327.

It is quite telling, however, that the defence mounted by Ruskin in his pamphlet turns out to be for the larger part a long discussion of... Turner. He wrote, in conformity with the conclusion to *Modern Painters I*:

I am thus tedious in dwelling on Turner's powers [...], because I wish it to be thoroughly seen how all his greatness, all his infinite luxuriance of invention, depends on his taking possession of everything that he sees, – on his grasping all, and losing hold of nothing, – on his forgetting himself, and forgetting nothing else. I wish it to be understood how every great man paints what he sees or did see, his greatness being little else than his intense sense of fact. And thus Pre-Raphaelitism and Raphaelitism, and Turnerism, are all one and the same [...] They are different in their choice, different in their faculties, but all the same in this, that Raphael himself, so far as he was great, and all who preceded or followed him who ever were great, became so by painting the truths around them as they appeared to each man's own mind, not as he had been taught to see them, except by the God who made both him and them.⁷⁴

So, Ruskin could do no more than point at the fact that Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites had in common the fact that they sincerely followed the precept 'truth to nature', as opposed to following the artificiality and conventions of the Royal Academy. And he still held Turner in higher esteem: while Millais has "a feeble memory, no invention, and excessively keen sight", Turner has "a memory which nothing escapes, an invention which never rests, and is comparatively near-sighted".⁷⁵ This is actually echoed by William Michael Rossetti, some years later:

The ruling quality stamped by Turner on the long series of his work is comprehension. Brilliancy and fervour of imagination, and breadth of observation, are indeed conspicuous; but these are rather the modes of that vivid penetration with which he entered into the secrets of Nature. In many of his works there is an air almost of intuition. He sometimes misunderstood Nature – construed her in hyperbole and distortion; but scarcely ever failed to catch a portion of her meaning.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ 12.384-85.

⁷⁵ 12.359.

⁷⁶ Rossetti 1970, p. 315.

When Millais first spent a week with Ruskin in July 1851, he wrote to a friend: "One of our differences is Turner. He believes that I shall be converted on further acquaintance with his works, and I that he will gradually slacken in his admiration".⁷⁷ The precise nature of the Pre-Raphaelites' criticisms of Turner is difficult to discern, however, in absence of any detailed discussion. At any rate, Ruskin's line of argument is hardly convincing. What we see here is more like Ruskin struggling to find a way to reconcile his earlier defence of Turner with his new stance for Pre-Raphaelitism.

The Pre-Raphaelites took Ruskin's advice to heart and sought, in the words of Bendiner, to paint what their eyes saw "without selectivity, monumentalization, simplification, or artificial systems of light and perspective".⁷⁸ But the Pre-Raphaelites did not paint in scarlet and gold, and did not "give the reins to their fancy". If they produced landscape of a very different nature, it is perhaps because Turner is, after all, a painter of light and shade as Ruskin put it,⁷⁹ while they treated sunlight in a diametrically opposed manner.

To illustrate this, I would like to come back to the remarkable *Strayed Sheep* (Plate # 3.8) by William Holman Hunt. It was painted in 1852, thus a year after Ruskin had defended the Pre-Raphaelites in his letters and pamphlet.⁸⁰ In his study of *The Pre-*

⁷⁷ Millais 1899, I, p. 119.

⁷⁸ Bendiner 1984, p. 243. One should rectify here Bendiner on one point: in reply to Ruskin, William Michael Rossetti argued that 'strict non-selection' (3.623 & 12.339.) could not be taken as a rule. See Rossetti 1970, p. 174n. On the face of it, however, the Pre-Raphaelite point of view as expressed here by Rossetti is rather reminiscent of Ruskin: "Praeraphaelitism has arisen to assert that there is no necessary antagonism between the most pictorial conception of a thing and the thing itself; that it is open to the painter, however imaginative, to follow nature in all respects, not only in some, in detail and in all details [...] that entire freedom of invention, and every possible latitude of artistic aim and point of view, are compatible with, and may in the main be even aided by, entire adherence to visible matter of fact. This is the gist of Praeraphaelitism, and not the crude notion, so often attributed to it, that mere matter of fact, subserving no artistic purpose, is the be-all and end-all of art." Rossetti 1970, p. 147.

⁷⁹ 12.366.

⁸⁰ Hunt's painting has a hidden religious message with its metaphor of strayed sheep, possibly influenced also by Ruskin, but this is a dimension in which we cannot enter here.

Raphaelite Landscape, Allan Staley contrasted it with Turner's landscapes in these words:

[Hunt's] sunlight does not dissolve objects but emphasizes their particular qualities. It glows through the thin membranes of the sheep's ears, and it illuminates each leaf, blossom, and butterfly separately. Hunt's concern was with what light does to the colour of the specific object or surface, not with the general visual effect.⁸¹

Indeed, Hunt's colours are striking. For example, the shadow of the legs of the sheep on the upper right corner is a plain blue. But, if Hunt's colour cannot be said to be quite true, at least one can say that he had found the equivalents to give the optical impression of sunlight, not just, as we saw, through the membranes of the sheep's ears in the foreground, on their fleece, or on the patch of grass on the sea-cliff, but also with the whitish haze softening the line of the horizon at the hedge of the cliff, a phenomenon rarely depicted.

Ruskin commented on Hunt's *Strayed Sheep* only much later, in 1884, in his lectures as Slade Professor at Oxford entitled *The Art of England*. Millais was right in thinking that Ruskin would gradually "slacken his admiration" for Turner. Although he still says of Turner's "conventionalism" that "it is credible to a few of you, and offensive to many", Ruskin praised Hunt's *Strayed Sheep* in no uncertain terms, that betray a shift, as the ground for his praise is not the same as he used to defend Turner:

It showed us, for the first time in the history of art, the absolutely faithful balance of colour and shade by which actual sunshine might be transposed into a key in which the harmonies possible with material pigments should yet produce the same impressions upon the mind which were caused by the light itself. [...] the pure natural green and tufted gold of the herbage in the hollow of that little sea-cliff must be recognized for true merely by a minute's pause of attention. Standing long before the picture, you were

⁸¹ Staley 2001, p. 79.

soothed by it, and raised into such peace as you are intended to find in the glory and stillness of summer, possessing all things.⁸²

This point could be expanded into an argument according to which the relation between Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites was not 'one-way': they certainly took their lead from *Modern Painters*, but his views evolved as a result of his appreciation of their art. Another aspect of this evolution, which will be the topic of the next chapters, is that natural curves took on an importance in Pre-Raphaelite paintings that was simply not there in Turner, and, while Ruskin mainly focussed on colour in his defence of Turner, he gradually moved to a greater appreciation of the role of lines. This seen, for example, in his later appreciation of Burne-Jones, mentioned in the next chapter.

Of course, Ruskin remained critical of Pre-Raphaelite landscapes. He regularly criticised them for their choice of topic, including their prominent choice of British pastoral scenes. Of Millais' *Ophelia* (Plate # 3.2), he complained: "When you do paint nature why the mischief should you not paint pure nature and not that rascally wirefenced garden-rolled-nursery-maid's paradise?".⁸³ Still, when they met in July 1851, Millais reported that Ruskin and him are "such good friends that he wishes me to accompany him to Switzerland this summer".⁸⁴ Clearly, Ruskin was hoping to reconcile his earlier defence of Turner with those of the Pre-Raphaelites such as Millais by bringing them to the Swiss Alps.

So, leaving aside 'Turnerism', Ruskin tried to guide the Pre-Raphaelites. He would eventually end up disappointed at their continued interest in the narrow confines of British scenes, of which John William Inchbold's *A Study in March (In Early Spring)* (1856) (Plate # 3.9) or Atkinson Grimshaw's *Autumn Glory: The Old Mill* (1869)

⁸² 33.272-73.

⁸³ James 1947, p. 176.

⁸⁴ Millais 1899, I, p. 118.

(Plate # 3.10) are but two examples among a multitude. He expressed his disappointment, in *Modern Painters V* (1860):

I was surprised by the rise of that school, now some years ago, by observing how they restrained themselves to subjects which in other hands would have been wholly uninteresting. [...]: and in their succeeding efforts, I saw with increasing wonder, that they were almost destitute of the power of feeling vastness or enjoying the forms which expressed it. A mountain or a great building only appeared to them as a piece of colour of a certain shape. The powers it represented, or included, were invisible to them. In general they avoided subjects expressing space or mass, and fastened on confined, broken, sharp forms; like furze, fern, reeds, straw, stubble, dead leaves, and such like, better than strong stones, broad-flowing leaves, or rounded hills; in all such greater things, when forced to paint them, they missed the main and mighty lines; and this no less in what they loved than in what they disliked; for though fond of foliage, their trees always had a tendency to congeal into little acicular thorn-hedges, and never tossed free. Which modes of choice proceed naturally from a petulant sympathy with local and immediately visible interests and sorrows, not regarding their large consequences, nor capable of understanding more massive view or more deeply deliberate mercifulness; – but peevish and horror-struck, and often incapable of self-control.⁸⁵

One certainly finds in the ‘power of feeling vastness’ echoes of the ‘sublime’, a category which Ruskin inherited from Burke.⁸⁶ More importantly, Ruskin had by the early 1850s succeeded in focussing on curves, such as found in the leaf of *Alisma Plantago*, the edge of a mountain or the slope of a glacier, all represented in (Plate # 1.17), as fundamental to his aesthetic theory, and he realized that the Pre-Raphaelites were, in the end, not seeking these at all. I found no greater condemnation, no clearer statement of a fundamental divergence between Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites. But it is worth investigating his failed attempt at converting them to his views, by bring some of them to the Alps, and how geology got thrown into the bargain.

⁸⁵ 7.233.

⁸⁶ See Burke 1998.

3.3. Geology and Landscape Painting: Millais and Brett

In this section, I shall argue for the influence of Ruskin on Pre-Raphaelite landscape painting focussing on two paintings, John Everett Millais' *Portrait of John Ruskin* (Plate # 1.16) and John Brett's *Glacier at Rosenlaui* (Plate # 3.11), paintings that engage with Ruskin thoughts on geology or, rather, his alternative to geology that I described as a 'phenomenology'. A brief overview of background debates in geology in order to situate Ruskin will help understanding more precisely the sort of influence he sought to achieve, as well as helping to assess the real impact of his ideas.⁸⁷

Ruskin's lifelong passion for mineralogy and geology began in his childhood, and his very first publication at the age of 15, in September 1834, was 'Enquiries on the Causes of the Colour of the Water of the Rhine', in Loudon's *Magazine of Natural History*.⁸⁸ He chose as birthday gift for that year the four volumes of Horace-Bénédict de Saussure's *Voyages dans les Alpes*,⁸⁹ which were probably a decisive impulse behind his fascination with Alpine geology. Ruskin was later to write that de Saussure "had gone to the Alps, as I desired to go myself, only to *look* at them, and describe them as they were, loving them heartily – loving them, the positive Alps, more than himself, or than science, or than any theories of science".⁹⁰

At Oxford, his closest acquaintance among professors was the natural theologian and geologist William Buckland, whose lectures he followed assiduously.⁹¹ The year before Ruskin went up to Oxford, Buckland published his account of *Geology and*

⁸⁷ For a detailed account, see *Rupke 1983* or *Bowler 2003*.

⁸⁸ Reprinted as 1.191-192.

⁸⁹ *de Saussure 1779-1796*. As Ruskin wrote in *Modern Painters IV*: "De Saussure always a faithful recorder of those facts, and my first master in geology" (6.214). See also 26.xix & 35.121.

⁹⁰ 6.476.

⁹¹ See *Burd 2008*, p. 301.

Mineralogy as one of the *Bridgewater Treatises*.⁹² Ruskin also was a regular at the Buckland's, meeting Darwin, who had just come back from his trip around the world on the H. M. S. *Beagle* in 1837 – Darwin was at the time interested in matters of geology. Ruskin's interest in the topic lead him to join the *Geological Society* in 1837 – he became a fellow in 1840,⁹³ and even had at one point the ambition to become its president.⁹⁴ Not only was he rather knowledgeable on geology, on which he lectured, but also published papers in specialized journals such as the *Geological Magazine*, now collected, along with his catalogues, in the Library Edition of *The Works of Ruskin*, volume 26, alongside *Deucalion* (written in 1875-1883).⁹⁵

Geology, popularized by Georges Cuvier, was a new discipline in 19th-century Britain: Buckland, who was to become Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, and Adam Sedgwick, Woodwardian Professor of Geology (1818-1873) at Cambridge, were the first to teach it.⁹⁶ The main difficulty facing everyone at the time was to reconcile the Biblical narrative of *Genesis* with mounting evidence that contradicted it. For example, Buckland, who made his reputation in arguing about the antediluvian origin of hyena bones in some Yorkshire caves, was the first to describe the fossil of what we now call a 'dinosaur' in 1837, in a lecture that alarmed Ruskin's parents because of its subversive nature.⁹⁷ Two parties formed around the issue, as they tried to reconcile past geological history, as it was coming to light, with the Biblical narrative in terms either of a uniform process or set of processes, the 'uniformitarianism' whose early champion was James Hutton, or in terms of non-recurrent catastrophic episodes – hence

⁹² Buckland 1836.

⁹³ Hewison 1996, p. 32.

⁹⁴ 26.97.

⁹⁵ Ruskin's papers are collected in 26.2-88, his letters, addresses and notes in 26.545-582. For an overview of Ruskin on geology, see Gully 1993.

⁹⁶ Rudwick 1971, p. 45. Sedgwick takes no part in what follows, but I should point out that Fuller pointed out some similarities between his conception of science and what I call here Ruskin's 'phenomenological' approach. See Fuller 1988, p. 42-44.

⁹⁷ On fossils of dinosaurs, see Secord 2000.

the name ‘catastrophism’— such as Noah’s flood. Oxbridge was the intellectual centre of catastrophism, in particular because of the prominence of Buckland.⁹⁸

Another issue, of importance in what follows, was that of presence of ‘erratic boulders’ strewn across continents, in North America and northern Europe, whose presence needed to be explained, and the hypothesis of Noah’s flood, or ‘diluvialism’ popularized by Cuvier,⁹⁹ was quickly given up, because no convincing explanation of the ability of water to carry huge boulders across such distances was provided. Still, the idea was at one time shared by Ruskin: de Saussure was a diluvialist in his *Voyages dans les Alpes*. Ruskin visited decades later a site near the Lake Geneva that the Swiss had mentioned and it inspired him a poem where he spoke of “monster surges”.¹⁰⁰

Then came the idea that these boulders might have been carried on ‘ice rafts’ (transport of boulders on icebergs being observed in the Arctic), an idea championed at first by a student of Buckland and close friend of Darwin, Charles Lyell, who had switched allegiances, and was by then defending a revised ‘uniformitarianism’ in the third volume of his *Principles of Geology* (1833).¹⁰¹ But this hypothesis required that North America and northern Europe must have subsided under sea level at one point and risen above it at a later stage. Part of the difficulties with the theory was that it could not account for the presence of boulders at high altitude, for example in the Alps. This led some, including the Swiss Louis Agassiz to suggest in *Études sur les glaciers* (1840) to that their shape and displacements were caused by the action of glaciers. Buckland was an early enthusiast, who even introduced for the first time the idea of an ‘ice age’.¹⁰² But he was soon to turn his attention to other topics, and the controversy

⁹⁸ Rupke 1983, p. 5 and Bowler 2003, p. 118.

⁹⁹ Bowler 2003, p. 115.

¹⁰⁰ 2.406-7. Mentioned in Rupke 1983, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ Lyell 1833. See Rupke 1983, p. 5.

¹⁰² See Lurie 1988, pp. 97-99, Rupke 1983, chapter 9, Fuller 1988, p. 40.

largely abated by the late 1840s. In the end, it was Lyell's hypothesis of regular processes that won the day, and his influence extended to Darwin's theory of evolution.

Ruskin remained throughout his life on the side of the diluvialists such as de Saussure and Buckland against the uniformitarian view of Hutton and Lyell,¹⁰³ but he did not keep abreast of developments in geology, as a letter to Mrs Buckland in 1856 already shows.¹⁰⁴ He was to publish *Modern Painters IV* during that year, dealing with rocks and mountain chains – leaves and clouds were to be taken up in *Modern Painters V*. A great deal of *Modern Painters IV* is dedicated to rocks and their classification. This is a classification in which *their structure plays no role*; Ruskin classified them in terms of their visual characteristics and shapes, in virtue of the 'phenomenology' described in the previous section. In *Pre-Raphaelitism*, Ruskin pointed out that: "It is most difficult, and worthy of the greatest men's greatest effort, to render, as it should be rendered, the simplest of the natural features of the earth".¹⁰⁵ So, he dreamt – as part of this 'phenomenology' – the day would come when "each recess of every mountain chain of Europe had been penetrated, and its rocks drawn with such accuracy that the geologist's diagram was no longer necessary".¹⁰⁶ Again, he is quite explicit about this in an Appendix to *Modern Painters IV*:

[T]he natural tendency of accurate science is to make the possessor of it look for, and eminently see, the things connected with his special pieces of knowledge; and as all accurate science must be sternly limited, his sight of nature gets limited accordingly. I observed that all our young figure-painters were rendered, to all intents and purposes, *blind* by their knowledge of anatomy. They saw only certain muscles and bones, of which they had learned the positions by rote, but could not, on account of the very

¹⁰³ For kind word on Buckland, see *Deucalion*, 26.134 and *Fors Clavigera*, 27.636. According to Hewison, Ruskin "liked Saussure's approach, because it had become his own": "Saussure's principle was that geology must work from the facts to the theories: 'it must be cultivated only with the aid of the observation, and systems must never be but the result or consequences of facts'. (Voyages dans les Alpes, vol. 1, p. i.)" (Hewison 1976, pp. 20-21).

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Burd 2008, pp. 311-312.

¹⁰⁵ 12.350.

¹⁰⁶ 12.349.

prominence in their minds of these bits of fragmentary knowledge, see the real movement, colour, rounding, or any other subtle quality of the human form. And I was quite sure that if I examined the mountain anatomy scientifically, I should go wrong, in like manner, touching the eternal aspects. Therefore *in beginning the inquiries of which the results are given in the preceding pages, I closed all geological books, and set myself, as far as I could, to see the Alps in a simple, thoughtless, and untheorizing manner; but to see them, if it might be, thoroughly.*¹⁰⁷

Clearly, his mind was never about the latest scientific advances in geology or mineralogy, let alone taking an active part in quarrels such as those just described. He even candidly admitted in a footnote:

I have simply stated in this chapter the results of my own watching of the Alps, for being without hope of getting time for available examination of the voluminous works on these subjects, I thought it best to read nothing (except Forbes's most important essay on the glaciers, several times quoted in the text), and therefore to give, at all events, the force of independent witness to such impressions as I received for the actual facts.¹⁰⁸

Incidentally, Forbes' book is mentioned five times in that *Modern Painters IV*.¹⁰⁹

Ruskin did claim later on in *Fors Clavigera* to have kept abreast of the scientific literature all along, but there is not much evidence of this.¹¹⁰ At all events, this does not mean that he had not chosen his side, or that he did not have any inclinations one side more than the other. In *Deucalion*, thus a good thirty years after these debates had abated, Ruskin saluted predecessors such as de Saussure, Agassiz and Forbes among others, and belatedly took a stance on the old controversies, claiming that Lyell's theory is in "larger measure disputable; and in the broadest bearings of it, entirely false".¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ 6.475. My italics.

¹⁰⁸ 6.214 note.

¹⁰⁹ 6.54, 84, 224, 284 & 287.

¹¹⁰ 27.637.

¹¹¹ 26.177.

Ruskin took part in only one related scientific controversy, over the proper explanation of the motion of glaciers, taking sides with James David Forbes, whom he had met only once in 1844.¹¹² At the instigation of Agassiz, Forbes had been able in a series of papers and lectures starting 1841, capped by *Travels through the Alps of Savoy and other parts of the Pennine Chain* in 1843,¹¹³ to explain the motion of glaciers in terms of their being viscous bodies that “ran down their beds like so much treacle”, as Ruskin was to put it in *Deucalion*.¹¹⁴ The controversy began in 1857,¹¹⁵ when Tyndall and Huxley published a paper in which they argued for the superiority of their alternative to Forbes’ ‘viscous theory’, known as the ‘regelation theory’,¹¹⁶ while Tyndall was also later (1860) to try and diminish the role of Forbes in the establishment of the ‘viscous theory’. As we just saw, Ruskin simply took for granted Forbes’ book in *Modern Painters IV*, but now spoke publicly in defence of Forbes.¹¹⁷ When, Tyndall renewed his attacks in *The Forms of Water in Clouds and Rivers, Ice and Glaciers* (1872),¹¹⁸ Ruskin replied in Letter 34 of *Fors Clavigera* (1873) with forceful, if misguided, criticisms on both the issue of priority and the claims of superiority for the ‘regelation theory’.¹¹⁹

That Ruskin was, siding with the catastrophists or with the ‘viscous theory’, on the wrong side of science is not relevant to the main point here, as it should be clear that his interest was elsewhere. If we are able to understand his intellectual project not as an attempt at building an alternative science, but at pursuing an investigation of Alpine

¹¹² Ruskin had met Forbes by chance in the Hotel de la poste in Simplon, Switzerland in 1844, when Forbes was studying glaciers. Ruskin recounts the event, writing from the same Hotel, in *Deucalion*, 26.220-221. See also his praise of Forbes in 26.559-560.

¹¹³ See *Forbes 1843*, and his papers, addresses, etc. on glaciers were collected in *Forbes 1859*.

¹¹⁴ 26.639.

¹¹⁵ The main steps of the controversy are summarized by the editors in 26.xxxiii-xl.

¹¹⁶ *Tyndall & Huxley 1857*.

¹¹⁷ See 26.xxix, 26.10, 26.550, with Forbes writing a letter of thanks, 26.561.

¹¹⁸ See *Tyndall 1872*, § 60.

¹¹⁹ 27.636-643.

geology from an artistic point of view. Furthermore, as we now see, he only took part in a scientific controversy on the motion glaciers, not mineralogy or geology (in the sense of the history of the Earth). Even then, if we are to understand his involvement with the Pre-Raphaelites, his implication in that controversy took place at a much later date (1864 and 1873). But the preceding remarks should greatly help clarify the meaning of Brett's *Glacier at Rosenlaui*.

*

Millais' *Portrait of John Ruskin* (Plate # 1.16) is the result of joint planning with Ruskin: Millais should paint under Ruskin's supervision a picture which would "make a revolution in landscape painting", as Ruskin himself put it.¹²⁰ They wanted this painting to be both a manifesto and illustration of a new form of landscape painting, hence its central importance for the understanding of Pre-Raphaelitism. The sort of statement Ruskin was hoping for Millais' portrait of him should be transparent to anyone having read *Modern Painters I and II* and Ruskin's overturning of Reynolds, and his various criticisms of Claude and other 'Ancient Masters', and having read his advice; it is just that Ruskin was relying on Millais' talent to transcribe these lessons on canvas.

Millais travelled to Glenfinlas, Scotland in the summer of 1853 to meet Ruskin. After 15 weeks of hard work on 'detail', on rocks and moss in the foreground, and so forth, Millais was unable to finish the painting, having achieved only part of it. He had the canvas sent to London, where Ruskin posed for it on a flight of stairs during the winter, but could only finish the background in the following summer. Millais chose to paint the missing rocks in Wales instead of returning to Scotland, but Ruskin objected strongly, because "the rocks are of quite a different Strata there".¹²¹ He even produced

¹²⁰ Staley 2001, p. 60 and Grieve 1996, p. 228. On Millais' painting, see Luytens 1967a and Luytens 1967b.

¹²¹ Quoted in Newall 2004, p. 134.

what remains perhaps his most beautiful drawing, *Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas* (Plate # 1.14) to show Millais how to draw the rocks. Ruskin occasionally painted rocks, for example *Fragment of Alps* (Plate # 3.12). A comparison of gneiss in *Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas* and Millais' *Portrait of John Ruskin* illustrates the level of accuracy, as one may put it: 'attention to detail', henceforth requested of landscape painting. In this the painting can indeed be seen as 'programmatic'. A good example of Pre-Raphaelite landscape, appreciated by Ruskin, is Inchbold's *The Moorland (Dewar-stone, Dartmoor)* painted in 1854 (Plate # 3.13), and so is Hunt's *Strayed Sheep* (Plate # 3.8), already discussed. Another one is, as we shall see, Brett's *Glacier at Rosenlaui*.

There was more, however, than an obsession with geological accuracy in Ruskin's reaction. It was not accuracy for the sake of accuracy. In his own categorization of *Modern Painters IV*, gneiss was to be classified as one of the 'slaty crystallines', and his comments on these are worth quoting in full:

I might devote half a volume to a description of the fantastic and incomprehensible arrangements of these rocks and their veins; but all that is necessary for the general reader to know or remember, is this broad fact of the undulation of their whole substance. For there is something, it seems to me, inexpressibly marvelous in this phenomenon, largely looked at. [...] Where they are, they seem to form the world; no mere bank of a river here, or of a lane there, peeping out among the hedges or forests: but from the lowest valley to the highest clouds, all is theirs—one adamantine dominion and rigid authority of rock. We yield ourselves to the impression of their eternal, unconquerable stubbornness of strength; their mass seems the least yielding, least to be softened, or in anywise dealt with by external force, of all earthly substance. And, behold, as we look farther into it, it is all touched and troubled, like waves by a summer breeze; rippled, far more delicately than seas or lakes are rippled: they only undulate along their surfaces—this rock trembles through its every fibre, like the chords of an Eolian harp—like the stillest air of spring with the echoes of a child's voice. Into the heart of all those great mountains, through every tossing of their boundless crests, and deep beneath all their unfathomable defiles, flows that strange quivering of their substance. Other and weaker things seem to express their subjection to an Infinite power only by momentary terrors: as the weeds bow down before the feverish wind, and the sound of the going in the tops of the taller trees passes on before the clouds, and the fitful opening of pale

spaces on the dark water, as if some invisible hand were casting dust abroad upon it, gives warning of the anger that is to come, we may well imagine that there is indeed a fear passing upon the grass, and leaves, and waters, at the presence of some great spirit commissioned to let the tempest loose; but the terror passes, and their sweet rest is perpetually restored to the pastures and the waves. Not so to the mountains. *They, which at first seemed strengthened beyond the dread of any violence or change, are yet, also ordained to bear upon them the symbol of a perpetual Fear: the tremor which fades from the soft lake and gliding river is sealed, to all eternity, upon the rock;* and while things that pass visibly from birth to death may sometimes forget their feebleness, the mountains are made to possess a perpetual memorial of their infancy, [...]¹²²

This passage is accompanied with an illustration of such accentuated curvatures as one finds in 'slaty crystallines' (Plate # 3.14),¹²³ which is interesting, inasmuch as it reminds one of the Art Nouveau curves, while Ruskin was rather to insist on the beauty of curves that are much less accentuated. Also, as Hewison put it in a quotation above, we can see here what it means for Ruskin that "the emotion comes from the object to the viewer": fear is forever fixed, so to speak, in the gneiss itself. This is, admittedly, a later text (1856), and we should not assume that Ruskin already had this idea in mind three years earlier when dealing with Millais. Still, this is an illustration of what Ruskin was aiming for throughout the period: an emotion is not a subjective colouring of the world by viewer, it is brought about by something 'out there' in the scene itself, and painstaking attention to details is the key to becoming conscious of it by exploring it. Our emotional and imaginative engagement with the scene thus reveals its meaning for us, and this is why Ruskin must have insisted that Millais sticks to exactly the gneiss formation he began with, probably selected by Ruskin for that reason.

Now, Ruskin's association with Millais would terminate in the following year, with the annulment of Ruskin's marriage to Effie Gray, and Millais eloping with her. Millais was also to distance himself rapidly afterwards from the Brotherhood, and his

¹²² 6.150-152. My italics.

¹²³ Being Fig. 7 at 6.151.

landscapes began showing a definite tendency towards the sort of 'mood painting' mentioned above in a quotation from Bendiner, who actually points out as an example Millais' *Chill October* (Plate # 3.15) painted in 1870. Millais said himself that he chose the scene, near Perth, Scotland "for the sentiment it always conveyed to my mind".¹²⁴ Millais had thus stopped adhering to Ruskin-inspired Pre-Raphaelite precepts, with the landscape being, as Bendiner put it, a "metaphor of human emotion".¹²⁵ This may serve as a reminder that not all that passes under the term 'Pre-Raphaelite' is relevant to the discussion of this chapter.

In the years that followed, Ruskin took Inchbold under his tutelage, whose landscapes I already mentioned.¹²⁶ When in Switzerland in the summer 1856 at the instigation of Ruskin, he met by chance another young painter, John Brett,¹²⁷ who was by then only aspiring to join the Brotherhood. The young Brett was a great admirer of Ruskin having already acquired and read *Pre-Raphaelitism* and *Modern Painters I* by 1852,¹²⁸ and, deeply devout as he was, he considered painting as an act of worship.¹²⁹ Alas, Brett's diaries are missing for the summer 1856, and preceding months, so we can only speculate on certain matters. In April of that year *Modern Painters IV* appeared, and we assume that Brett read it avidly at that stage. In the summer 1856, having some money at his disposal, he went to Switzerland, where he painted, *in situ*, *The Glacier of Rosenlaui* (Plate # 3.11), which he dated 23 August 1856. It is on this occasion that Brett met Inchbold, at work on his own painting barely 10 kilometres away from Rosenlaui. In December, when his diaries resume, he spoke of an epiphany reminiscent of Ruskin's, but also of his advice: "There [...] there I saw him do a few

¹²⁴ Millais 1899, II, p. 29.

¹²⁵ Bendiner 1984, p. 247.

¹²⁶ On Inchbold, see Staley 2001, pp. 149-167.

¹²⁷ On Brett, see Payne 2010, as well as Staley 2001, pp. 169-186 and Hickox & Payne 1995; on Brett and Ruskin: Bendiner 1984, Hickox 1996 and Brett 2005.

¹²⁸ Brett 2005, p. 613.

¹²⁹ Payne 2010, p. 24.

touches to his Jung-frau & there & then saw that I had never painted in my life, but only fooled and slopped; & thenceforward attempted in a reasonable way to paint all I could see".¹³⁰

We do not know why Brett went to Switzerland, nor why he chose to paint the glacier at Rosenlaui; we have no testimony that would allow us to ascertain his purpose and the point of the painting. Although he referred to Forbes' *Travels through the Alps of Savoy*, and mentioned the Bernese Oberland, where the glacier of Rosenlaui is situated or the Wetterhorn situated just kilometres away – Brett produced a watercolour of it that summer –,¹³¹ Ruskin did not really discuss glaciers in *Modern Painters IV*, but Agassiz did, of course, and it is definitely possible that Brett chose to depict one as the result of having read his book.¹³² The scene depicted has boulders in the foreground as if deposited there by the now receding glacier, and we have seen that one of Agassiz's main claims, picked up by Buckland, was that boulders were transported by glaciers. The scene thus appears to be an illustration of this thesis, possibly even in the spirit of 'catastrophism', in its attempt at conciliating the presence of boulders with the Biblical narrative. As we saw above, the Biblical flood as the catastrophe explaining the earth's history was replaced by Agassiz and Buckland by a period of glaciation, which would have destroyed flora and fauna prior to God's creation of humans. Brett's religious fervour at the time – he was to lose his faith later on – and the absence of any hint of human life in the painting tend to give weight to this interpretation.¹³³

None of this, however, contradicts the idea that *The Glacier of Rosenlaui* is deeply Ruskinian. After all, Ruskin shared the catastrophist outlook, as we saw, and was to

¹³⁰ Quoted in Payne 2010, p. 33. Inchbold's *Jungfrau* is lost.

¹³¹ It is reproduced in Payne 2010, p. 34.

¹³² Newall even cites a passage from Agassiz's *Études sur les glaciers* on the glacier of Rosenlaui (Newall 2004, p. 139), and Christiana Payne shares his opinion, Payne 2010, pp. 32-33.

¹³³ Hickox, in a lecture reported in Payne 2010, p. 34, interprets the trees in the upper left corner as symbolizing the ark of Noah, and the crucifixion, but this seems unwarranted.

get embroiled in a defence of the ‘viscous theory’ of Agassiz and Forbes, this last being, as we also saw, mentioned numerous times in *Modern Painters IV*.

If there is any issue at this stage, it has rather to do with the possibility that Brett’s painting only exhibits catastrophist ideas or if it did this, within a broader ‘Ruskinian’ context, also exhibited by other aspects of the painting, not with its exhibiting one *or* the other. On this score, two additional comments can be formulated. First, as noted above, Millais’ *Portrait of John Ruskin* established a standard of accuracy in the ‘attention to details’, which is too obviously exemplified by Brett’s painting to need further justification. It is not just that the painting is obviously ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ in that sense,¹³⁴ and it was largely on its merits that Brett was able to join the Brotherhood, it is also that it displays features of Pre-Raphaelite landscape painting that can be directly traced back to Ruskin. Secondly, Allan Staley has pointed out connections between the group of boulders in the foreground (Plate # 3.16) and Ruskin’s own classification in *Modern Painters IV*.¹³⁵

Although the actual spot where he painted is still strewn with boulders and pebbles today, we do not know if Brett painted the scene with these specific boulders in their precise position, or if this is a composition of his own. At all events, Brett’s composition of the painting seems devised to draw the attention of the viewer to these boulders (and pebbles) in the foreground. The sense of scale and perspective is even skewed when we look at the trees on the top of the cliff, on the top left – a fact that seemed to have escaped Modernist art critics that should have appreciated the sense that the three dimensions collapse into two that results from this. So, the key to the painting largely resides in what Brett wanted to tell us about these boulders. As Staley pointed out, the boulders at the left and the centre of the group illustrate Ruskin’s central distinction between, respectively, granite and gneiss or, in his vocabulary,

¹³⁴ This point is made in *Bendiner 1984*, p. 243.

¹³⁵ *Staley 2001*, pp. 170-171.

between 'compact crystallines' and 'slaty crystallines', while the boulder on the right exemplifies the category of 'slaty coherent'. The boulders can thus be read not just an illustration of Agassiz' theory, but also of Ruskin's 'phenomenology'. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that when Rossetti showed Brett's painting to Ruskin, he immediately approved of it,¹³⁶ while Agassiz gave "unqualified praise", when it was exhibited in Boston.¹³⁷

Ruskin and Brett became acquainted soon after Brett returned to Britain. By 1858 Ruskin treated him as a close friend and they travelled to Switzerland and Italy, where Brett painted his last Alpine landscape, *Val d'Aosta* (Plate # 3.17), under Ruskin's supervision. The latter's *Elements of Drawing* had appeared in 1857, which influenced deeply Brett's technique.¹³⁸ But Ruskin was in the end disappointed with Brett, because of a perceived lack of sentiment. To Ruskin, *Val d'Aosta* appeared "wholly emotionless":

I cannot find from it that the painter loved, or feared, anything in all that wonderful piece of the world. There seems to me no awe of the mountains there – no real love of the chestnuts or the vines. Keeness of eye and fineness of hand as much as you choose; but of emotion or of intention, nothing traceable.¹³⁹

He would write in 1880 of Brett's development that "he took to mere photography of physical landscape, and gradually lost both precision and sentiment".¹⁴⁰ This is as good an indication as any that Brett stopped painting in the direction Ruskin wanted to impart on the Pre-Raphaelites.

¹³⁶ Hickox 1996, p. 521.

¹³⁷ Peattie 1990, p. 88, note 4.

¹³⁸ See Brett 2005.

¹³⁹ 14.236.

¹⁴⁰ 14.238.

Ineluctably, it seems, as Ruskin's friendships often did not last long, their relation came to an end in 1864. Ruskin recalled that:

Brett told me [...] that a statement of mine respecting a scientific matter (which I knew *à fond* before he was born) was "bosh". I told him in return he was a fool; he left the house, and I will not see him again "until he is wiser".¹⁴¹

Given that Ruskin was embroiled in 1864 in a dispute with Tyndall on glacier theory, and this was a topic of common interest with Brett, one might suppose that this was indeed the topic at issue here, but there is not solid ground for this hypothesis. Brett went on losing his faith and he became enamoured with astronomy, even serving as the official draughtsman of a delegation of British scientists that went to Sicily to observe a solar eclipse, being praised for his drawing of the sun's corona.¹⁴² This fact is sometimes used as proofs that his paintings, including earlier ones, display a scientific interest in nature.¹⁴³ Concerning the late 1850s, however, this would be an anachronism, given that he was by then deeply devout and his paintings were, as I argued, in the spirit of Ruskin's 'phenomenology'.

Christopher Newall provided a social explanation in 'Understanding Landscape':

Because geology had entered the national consciousness, Pre-Raphaelite landscapes were judged and valued in terms of their accuracy as documentary accounts of places in their actual form according to criteria handed down by scientists. The need to provide precise and factual information had profound consequences in the way Pre-Raphaelite landscape art looked, with foreground motifs the object of intense and focused inspection, and the abandonment of traditional compositional devices, such as repoussoirs to lead the eye into the composition or alternating bands of light and dark to emphasize distance. Landscape artists followed botanical and geological illustrators in moving closer to their

¹⁴¹ 36.493-494. Quoted in *Bendiner 1984*, p. 242, *Staley 2001*, p. 181, *Payne 2010*, p. 89.

¹⁴² *Payne 2010*, p. 111.

¹⁴³ See Bendiner, quoted above. Staley recognized, however, that "references to microscopes and to botany – and also to geology – are rhetorical tropes, employed to emphasise the work's precise detail, not to claim serious scientific content for them" (*Staley & Newall 2004*, p. 30).

subjects, to fulfil the exacting requirements of scientific observation, so that the scale of distance or sense of space within a composition became less important than the surfaces of the forms.¹⁴⁴

Thus, according to Newall, it is a new “national consciousness” induced by debates about geology that caused the Pre-Raphaelites to paint with greater accuracy, as they were supposedly aiming to “fulfil the exacting requirements of scientific observation”.¹⁴⁵

I have argued in the previous section that Ruskin’s ‘phenomenology’ was never meant to be ‘scientific’ in that sense, so, inasmuch as painters followed the art criticism of Ruskin, who had explained to them why they should not paint like Claude, they were not, as far as the pictorial dimension is concerned, engaged as such in an enterprise amounting to emulating science. If we look at *The Glacier of Rosenloui* from Newall’s position, we should grant Brett’s obvious wish to illustrate Agassiz’s theory and to account for his religious faith – given that ‘catastrophism’ was an attempt at clinging to the Biblical narrative in light of rapidly mounting scientific evidence contradicting it – as the two are compatible. But compatibility does not entail necessity, and it would be a *non sequitur* to claim that he also wished for that reason to produce a ‘scientific’ painting. The influence of Ruskin’s ‘phenomenology’, itself more the result of his own artistic fascination with rocks, mountains, clouds, moss, etc. than of a ‘scientific’ mind inquiring about nature, forced by some debate about geology of national proportions, would provide here for more accurate ‘terms of description’, to use Baxandall’s expression.

¹⁴⁴ Newall 2004, p. 143.

¹⁴⁵ It is fitting to note that Newall’s attempt to explain in quasi-causal terms a particularity of Pre-Raphaelite paintings as being the consequence of a ‘national consciousness’ is a form of ‘symptomatic reading’ mentioned in section 1.3. It is at all events not supported by any quantitative sociological analysis of the importance of debates in geology during that period for British society as a whole. But my claim is not that this sort of explanation is not possible, it is simply that it is better to explain Pre-Raphaelite landscape paintings in terms of what I have called Ruskin’s ‘phenomenology’.

3.4. Daguerreotypes and the Eye

When the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron¹⁴⁶ asked him in 1868 to sit for a photographic portrait, Ruskin replied arrogantly:

Fifteen years ago I knew everything that the photograph could and could *not* do – I have long ceased to take the slightest interest in it, my attention being wholly fixed upon the possibility of wresting *luminous* decomposition which literally *paints* with sunlight.¹⁴⁷

Ruskin is usually portrayed as having been averse to photography. For example, David L. Phillips wrote:

Critics of photography also argued that the automatism of photography necessarily precluded it from having any artistic potential. Ruskin, an early but subsequently disillusioned admirer of photography, claimed that ‘a photograph is *not* a work of art’ as only art ‘expresses the personality, the activity, the living perception of a good and great human soul.’¹⁴⁸

Still, as Phillips points out, Ruskin had been an early enthusiast. The reasons for his early enthusiasm and subsequent disillusionment are worth investigating, because they shed further light on some of Ruskin’s central aesthetic concerns. Some commentators have claimed that his interest in photography was purely accidental and had nothing to do with his aesthetic theory,¹⁴⁹ while others have claimed it did.¹⁵⁰ In the previous section, I had argued that Ruskin’s attitude towards landscape painting was neither that of wishing to achieve what could be described as a near photographic record of the scenery, nor one of openness towards a subjective representation, where one’s

¹⁴⁶ Cameron was a photographer of note, close to the Pre-Raphaelites, her art, which is often seen as a photographic counterpart of Pre-Raphaelite painting, figures prominently in *Waggoner 2010* and *Waggoner 2011*.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in *Harvey 1985*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁸ *Phillips 2007*, p. 272

¹⁴⁹ See *Hanson 1981* or *Harvey 1985*.

¹⁵⁰ See *Arrhenius 2005* or *Smith 1995*, chapter 1.

emotions are 'projected' on the landscape. Edward Alexander's succinct explanation of Ruskin's enterprise of *Modern Painters* in relation to his later idea of art and science should set the tone:

In *Modern Painters*, [...] we can see Ruskin using the scientific ideal of fidelity to natural fact as a weapon against neo-classicism in painting and subjectivism in poetry, yet insisting that the wholeness and the integrity of artistic perception must be preserved from the analytic and dissecting habit of modern science. He rejects all idealism yet he will not admit that it is possible, in art, to depict the object as in itself it really is, apart from the artist's human reaction to it.¹⁵¹

In this section I shall argue that Ruskin's attitude towards photography, falls within this broad description, and that Ruskin's change of mind about photography had a lot to do with his own aesthetic theory.

That Ruskin had been an early admirer of daguerreotypes is undeniable. He wrote in *The Stones of Venice*, that they possess:

[...] a power of obtaining veracity in the representation of material and tangible things, which, within certain limits and conditions is unimpeachable, has now been placed in the hands of all men, almost without labour.¹⁵²

Although Ruskin already knew about them when he was still a student at Oxford,¹⁵³ he first purchased daguerreotypes in Venice during a trip, the purpose of which was to study religious figurative painting for *Modern Painters II*.¹⁵⁴ It was on that occasion that he first noticed the beauty of architecture, thus began his life-long admiration for Venice itself but especially Venetian Gothic. Preservation of architectural heritage was

¹⁵¹ Alexander 1969, p. 511.

¹⁵² 11.199.

¹⁵³ 35.372-373.

¹⁵⁴ Hanson 1981, p. 104, Harvey 1985, p. 25.

not ‘in the air’ in those days – Ruskin is after all an early proponent of this idea – and Venetian Gothic was all too often being literally destroyed in front of his eyes:

You cannot imagine what an unhappy day I spent yesterday before the Casa d’Oro, vainly attempting to draw it while the workmen were hammering it down before my face. [...] The beauty of the fragments left is beyond all I conceived, & just as I am becoming able to appreciate it, & able to do something that would have kept record of it, to have it destroyed before my face.¹⁵⁵

This incident and others led him to fight against ‘restoration’, taking part in 1877 in a campaign against de ‘restoration’ of St. Mark’s, and influencing Morris and others for a similar campaign for the preservation of architectural heritage in Britain. (More details about this are given in section 4.1 below.) Shortly after, on October 7, 1845, he wrote again to his father:

I have been lucky enough to get from a poor Frenchman here, said to be in distress, some most beautiful though very small Daguerreotypes of the palace I have been trying to draw; and certainly Daguerreotypes taken by this vivid sunlight are glorious things. It is very nearly the same thing as carrying off the palace itself—every chip of stone & stain is there—and of course, there is no mistake about *proportions*. I am very much delighted with these and am going to have some more made of pet bits. It is a noble invention, say what they will of it, and anyone who has worked and blundered and stammered as I have for four days, and then sees the thing he has been trying to do so long in vain, *done* perfectly & faultlessly in half a minute, won’t abuse it afterwards.¹⁵⁶

This passage provides us with much information concerning Ruskin’s early enthusiasm towards photography. First, it tells us that Ruskin was trying to keep a record with his own drawings of Venetian Gothic before it would be hammered away, so that he needed, therefore, very detailed drawings – which we would indeed call today ‘photographic’ – and he needed them fast. Daguerreotypes greatly helped him in this

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in 8.243, note 1, also in *Shapiro 1972*, p. 209.

¹⁵⁶ 3.210, note 2.

task, hence his enthusiasm. But he also praised them in the letter for getting proportions right – a difficult thing to achieve when drawing.

It is well known that Ruskin also took daguerreotypes himself, mostly to use them for his own drawings.¹⁵⁷ He praised them for their *ability to capture details*.¹⁵⁸ He spoke about this in 1859 at a meeting of the Architectural Photographic Association, saying that painting cannot capture details accurately as photographs.¹⁵⁹ This point also comes to the fore in the preface to *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*:

I would particularly desire to direct the attention of amateur photographers to this task: earnestly requesting them to bear in mind that while a photograph of a landscape is merely an amusing toy, one of early architecture is a precious historical document; and that this architecture should be taken, not merely when it is present itself under picturesque general forms but stone by stone, and sculpture by sculpture; seizing every opportunity afforded by scaffolding to approach it closely, and putting the camera in any position that will command the sculpture, wholly without regards to the resultant distortions of the vertical lines; such distortions can always be allowed for, if once the details are completely obtained.¹⁶⁰

One should note that Ruskin describes here photography of architecture as ‘historical document’, and he might just look as if he held a view of photography as ‘documentary’, a point to which I shall come back later.

Now, Ruskin did not simply use daguerreotypes as basis for his own drawings, they actually had an influence on his own drawing, as can be seen from drawings of the church of Santa Maria della Spina, Pisa in 1840 and 1845, before and after his

¹⁵⁷ Ruskin wrote about this practice in the preface of *Examples of the Architecture of Venice: Selected and Drawn to Measurement from the Edifices*. See 8.4, 11.312, or Plates IX and XI of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, that are actually drawn from daguerreotypes.

¹⁵⁸ Still, he hardly ever made use of them in his books. There is for example only one instance of a daguerreotype instead of a drawing in the whole *Modern Painters*. This is plate 48 of *Modern Painters IV*. In the accompanying text he apologizes for its inadequacy, because it cannot show the colour of the rock’s surface (6.369).

¹⁵⁹ Harvey 1985, p. 27.

¹⁶⁰ 8.13.

discovery of daguerreotypes. While the former exhibits a linear perspective style and a conventional framing of the church (Plate # 3.18), after taking daguerreotypes (such as Plate # 3.19), the latter drawing cuts the frame out, and ignores consequently the entire perspective of the church, and focuses instead on details with a strong contrast of light and shade (Plate # 3.20).¹⁶¹ Thus, when one compares the two images, the difference of the impression and impact of the same object (the church) is apparent: the latter conveys to the viewer the feel of the building under the peculiar sunlight of Italy, with details and their shadows. This drawing conveys better the experience of seeing the actual building with one's own eyes, standing in front of it. This effect is what Ruskin sought for by stressing the importance of details. Thus, daguerreotypes appeared to him at first to be perfectly suited for this purpose, since he assumed that they cannot make mistakes in details.¹⁶² As he confessed: "I much regret that artists in general do not think it worth their while to perpetuate some of the beautiful effects which the daguerreotype alone can seize".¹⁶³

This Ruskin is further confirmed by his comments on his own daguerreotype of *A Courtyard at Abbeville* (Plate # 3.21), a comment which is not without reminding the reader of Barthes's notion of 'cognitive connotation':¹⁶⁴

The natural vine leaves consent in grace and glow with the life of the old wood carving; and thought the modern white porcelain image ill replaces the revolution-deposed Madonna, and only pedestals of saints, and canopies, are left on the propping beams of the gateway — and though the casque, and cooper's tools, and gardener's spade and ladder are little in accord in what was once stately in the gate and graceful in the winding stair — the declining shadows of the past mingle with the hardship of the present day in no unkindly sadness; and the little angle of courtyard, if tenderly painted in the depression of its fate, has enough still to occupy as much of

¹⁶¹ Muthesius 1972, p. 27.

¹⁶² Shapiro 1972, p. 224-5

¹⁶³ 11.312.

¹⁶⁴ Barthes 1977, p. 29.

our best thought as maybe modestly claimed for his picture by any master not of the highest order.¹⁶⁵

His comment that this picture would be perfect topic for a painting, as one felt “the declining shadows of the past mingle with the hardship of the present day in no unkindly sadness” – an aesthetic experience that one receives through the very details he describes – is telling. One must not, however, be misled here into thinking that Ruskin is searching for some ‘realism’. What he is seeking after is a peculiar emotion – here a peculiar form of sadness – perhaps associated to what Barthes called the “awareness of *having-been-there*”,¹⁶⁶ but an emotion that can only be captured in the scene through attention to the details captured by the daguerreotype.

It is not that the daguerreotype is the perfect medium for this, and Ruskin became increasingly aware of its limitations and dangers. Hence his later critical remarks, for example when he claims that, after all, it is not ‘Turnerian’ enough:¹⁶⁷

Photographs never look entirely clear and sharp; but because clearness is supposed a merit in them, they are usually taken from very clearly marked and un-Turnerian subjects; and such results as are misty and faint, though often precisely those which contain the most subtle renderings of nature, are thrown away, and the clear ones only are preserved. Those clear ones depend for such of their force on the faults of the process. Photography either exaggerates shadows, or loses detail in the lights, and, in many ways which I do not here pause to explain, misses certain of the utmost subtleties of natural *effect* (which are often the things that Turner has chiefly aimed at) while it renders subtleties of *form* which no human hand could achieve. But a delicately taken photograph of a truly Turnerian subject, is far more like Turner in the drawing than it is to the work of any other artist; though, in the system of chiaroscuro, being entirely and necessarily Rembrandtesque, the subtle mystery of the touch (Turnerism carried to an infinitely wrought refinement) is not usually perceived.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ 14.388.

¹⁶⁶ Barthes 1977, p. 44.

¹⁶⁷ On this see Bradley 1955, p. 297.

¹⁶⁸ 11.81-82.

I hasten to add that the remark that “a delicately taken photograph of a truly Turnerian subject, is far more like Turner in the drawing than it is to the work of any other artist” should not mislead on Ruskin’s considered opinion of the artistic value of photography. He could not in the end countenance that idea:

All art is great, and good, and true, only so far as it is distinctively the work of *manhood* in its entire and highest sense; that is to say, not the work of limbs and fingers, but of the soul, aided, according to her necessities, by the inferior powers; and therefore distinguished in essence from all products of those inferior powers unhelped by the soul. For as a photograph is not a work of art, though it requires certain delicate manipulations of paper and acid, and subtle calculations of time, in order to bring out a good result; so neither would a drawing *like* a photograph, made directly from nature, be a work of art, although it would imply many delicate manipulations of the pencil and subtle calculations of effects of colour and shade. It is no more art to manipulate a camel’s-hair pencil, than to manipulate a china tray and a glass vial. It is no more art to lay on colour delicately, then to lay on acid delicately. It is no more art to use the cornea and retina for the reception of an image, than to use a lens and a piece of silvered paper.¹⁶⁹

It seems that Ruskin did not envision possible artistic uses for photography, with the same role for imagination in using aperture, speed and techniques in developing and printing. Still, it is interesting to note that, according to him, “neither would a drawing *like* a photograph, made directly from nature, be a work of art”, in contradiction with the view ascribed to him, according to which his remark on the ‘innocence of the eye’ implies that he believed in the possibility of faithfully recording what one sees in drawing or painting.

While still conceding the earlier point about proportions or ‘form’, Ruskin now claims that photography “either exaggerates shadows, or loses detail in the lights, and [...] misses certain of the utmost subtleties of natural *effect*”. He has now become aware that daguerreotypes are not as revelatory of the play of light and shade as he used to

¹⁶⁹ 11.201-202.

think, and he starts seeing them as a *possible* hindrance to the painter, who might seek to capture details that had become blurred, distorted or plainly invisible on the daguerreotype. The result of a daguerreotype might simply be, for example, as bad as excessive *chiaroscuro*. If the daguerreotype is not valid in this sense, then it is of no use according to Ruskin's own aesthetic claims.

Comparing Ruskin's daguerreotype of one of the towers of Fribourg, Switzerland with his own drawing may help clarifying this point (Plate # 3.22). There are discrepancies, such as the curve on the wall as it climbs up the hill behind the tower (on the top right corner), which is visible on the drawing, but not on the daguerreotype, where it appears straight. The same for his depiction of the lower part of the wall on the left, since the details he drew are not visible on the daguerreotype, because of the peculiar way in which it has recorded the shadows. One might argue that, after all, Ruskin had already suggested (as we saw) that the daguerreotype should be used to picture details and not a scene as a whole as in this very case – the lack of clarity might be caused by the fact that the camera does not focus well at such a great distance), but the point is that the details are there, even if the daguerreotype does not capture them.¹⁷⁰

Furthermore, and even more interestingly, Ruskin drew the tower thinner, while the angle of the tower and the wall are depicted differently than on the daguerreotype: he is therefore not attempting to capture even the 'form' right. He clearly wanted to emphasize steepness to accentuate the striking feeling one has when overlooking the tower and wall from that angle. In the sketch of the tower at Fribourg, deviations from the daguerreotype are thus a denial of its absolute value, even for 'form'. This much comes out in his remarkable comparison in *Modern Painters IV*:

The next day, on a clear and calm forenoon, I daguerreotyped the towers [...] and this unexaggerated statement, with its details properly painted, would not only be the more right, but infinitely the grander of the two. But the [...] sketch nevertheless conveys, in some respects, a truer idea of

¹⁷⁰ Harvey 1985, p. 28.

Fribourg than the other, and has, therefore, a certain use. For instance, the wall going up behind the main tower is seen in my drawing to bend very distinctly, following the different slopes of the hill. In the daguerreotype this bend is hardly perceptible. And yet the notablest thing in the town of Fribourg is, that all its walls have got flexible spines, and creep up and down the precipices more in the manner of cats than walls; and there is a general sense of height, strength, and grace, about its belts of tower and rampart, which clings even to every separate and less graceful piece of them when seen on the spot; so that the hasty sketch, expressing this, has a certain veracity wanting altogether in the daguerreotype. Nay, sometimes even in the most accurate and finished topography, a slight exaggeration may be permitted; for many of the most important facts in nature are so subtle that they *must* be slightly exaggerated, in order to be made noticeable when they are translated into the comparatively clumsy lines of even the best drawing, and removed from the associating circumstances which enhanced their influence, or directed attention to them, in nature.¹⁷¹

The Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin had an interesting argument about illusion: “talk of deception only *makes sense* against a background of general non-deception [...] It must be possible to *recognize* a case of deception by checking to odd case against more normal ones”.¹⁷² His point was that, if indeed it is only possible to talk of deception against a background of non-deception, it is not possible to claim that all perception is illusory.¹⁷³ What Ruskin says about the daguerreotype of the tower at Fribourg in comparison with his sketch and what he saw does makes sense, simply because he is like us in a position to compare, and there is therefore a legitimate sense in which one may speak of a photograph as a register of the reality of, say, architectural details, and to speak of details that are there and that are better captured or not by a daguerreotype. One can tell the difference between the photograph and what one can see.

¹⁷¹ 6.46-47.

¹⁷² Austin 1962, p. 11.

¹⁷³ Barthes' discussion of 'trick effects' in photography, Barthes 1977, p. 21-22, is thus flawed since it presupposes what his theory ultimately denies.

Thus, his view would stand perhaps closest today to Susan Sontag's, when she wrote that:

First of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask. [...] a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects) – material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be.¹⁷⁴

But Ruskin would claim that, as a register of light waves reflected by objects, daguerreotypes are defective, so that he could still agree with Sontag's well-known remark: "Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are".¹⁷⁵ Just that Ruskin could not, alas, bear himself to call photography an art.

It is very clear, however, from the following that the difficulties perceived by Ruskin had to do, unbeknownst to him, with deficiencies in the early photographic process:

When you have made a few careful experiments of this kind on your drawings, (which are better for practice, at first, than the real trees, because the black profile in the drawing is quite stable, and does not shake, and is not confused by sparkles of lustre on the leaves,) you may try the extremities of the real trees, only not doing much at a time, for the brightness of the sky will dazzle and perplex your sight. And this brightness causes, I believe, some loss of the outline itself; at least the chemical action of the light in a photograph extends much within the edges of the leaves, and, as it were, eats them away, so that no tree extremity, stand it ever so still, nor any other form coming against bright sky, is truly drawn by a photograph; and if you once succeed in drawing a few sprays rightly, you will find the result much more lovely and interesting than any photograph can be.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Sontag 1977, p. 154.

¹⁷⁵ Sontag 1977, pp. 6-7.

¹⁷⁶ 15.72-73.

Since early photographic processes were sensitive only to blue and ultra-violet regions of the spectrum, this sort of defect was unavoidable.¹⁷⁷ It is to be regretted that Ruskin did not keep apprised of further developments, once he reached some balanced view of the value of the daguerreotype. Although his initial enthusiasm, which had a lot to do with the dramatic circumstances of his stay in Venice, gave way to a more nuanced assessment, the fundamentals of his appreciation of photography remained the same: its' worth (or lack of) resides in attention to details, those that it may (or may not) capture, since it is in the details that the emotion in the work of art is captured by the viewer and it is through their rendering that it is conveyed by the artist.¹⁷⁸ So the point is really that Ruskin believed that, even though both the painter and the photographer introduce distortions, those introduced by photography are the 'wrong' ones, presumably because it is the direct experience with the human eye which is the ultimate arbiter.

I alluded earlier to the possibility that Ruskin's views might be seen as supportive of the 'documentary' view of photography. This view has been criticized in the past decades, for example by Allan Sekula who described the view that a photograph is an 'unmediated copy of the real world' as a 'myth', part of 'bourgeois folklore'.¹⁷⁹ It is clear that Ruskin also viewed some daguerreotypes, including some of his own (such as Plate # 3.23), as 'historical documents', needed preserve knowledge architectural details. But it would not be fair to saddle Ruskin with this 'myth'. As we saw, he was well aware that photography is not 'unmediated copy of the real world', if only because it does not capture some details that the human eye captures, and distorts others.¹⁸⁰ One can tell such a story, because one can *see* the details that are imperfectly rendered by

¹⁷⁷ Harvey 1985, p. 30.

¹⁷⁸ On this point, see Harvey 1985, pp. 28-30. On the importance of detail, Ruskin influenced key pre-Raphaelites such as William Holman Hunt and Gabriel Rossetti. See Smith 1995, chapter 3 for Hunt and Hersey 1982, pp. 53-56 for Rossetti.

¹⁷⁹ Sekula 1984, p. 5.

¹⁸⁰ A similar point is made at Burns 1997, p. 31.

the daguerreotype.¹⁸¹ That any photograph, by virtue of the choices of the photographer, is always an 'interpretation' is another reason for talking about a 'myth'. I do not know of a passage in Ruskin addressing that point. Still his views about the ineliminable role of imagination in painting would lead one to believe that he would agree with this point or, rather, declare that photography is not an art precisely inasmuch as it restricts this role – he could not, it seems, fully envisage a sufficient control of photographic techniques on the part of the photographer.

Furthermore, his own drawing of the tower of Fribourg shows that he himself distorted some of the details and thus perspective, as we saw Brett did, quite strikingly in his *Glacier at Rosenlauri*. This, again, underlines the importance of the role of imagination. To summarize, one can use the following quotation from Walter Crane's *Line and Form*, which captures very well Ruskin's thought (while softening some of its asperities):

In the selection of any subject we should naturally be influenced by the attractiveness of particular parts, characters, or qualities it might possess, and we should direct our efforts towards bringing these out, as the things which impress us most. That is the difference between the mind and hand working together harmoniously and the sensitized plate in the photographic camera, which, uncontrolled in any way by human choice (and even under that control as it always is to some extent), mechanically registers the action of the light rays which define the impress of natural forms and scenes through the lens focussed upon the plate. So that, as we often see in a photograph, some unimportant or insignificant detail is reproduced with as much distinctiveness (or more) as are the leading figures or whatever form the interesting features or the motives of the subject. The picture suffers from want of emphasis, or from emphasis in the wrong place. It is, of

¹⁸¹ It is quite standard also to criticize the 'myth' of photography as an 'unmediated copy of the real world' in terms of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory (*Barthes 1977*). One should beware of using the latter to form an impassable barrier – with the free play of the signifier and the necessary historicity of all interpretation – between the photograph and reality, of which it is after all a record. In doing so, analysis is re-centred on the viewer's or photographer's interpretation at the expense of any 'indexicality', to use an expression borrowed from C. S. Peirce, that is at the expense of the fact that there is something to which it points. See *Lefebvre 2007*. It is of course along this dimension that Ruskin relates to photography.

course, here that the art of the photographer comes in; and, although he can by careful selection, arrangement, and the regulation of exposure, largely counteract the mechanical tendency, a photograph by its very nature can never take the place of a work of art – the first-hand expression, more or less abstract, of a human mind, or the creative inner vision recorded by a human hand.¹⁸²

*

Before moving on to the study of Ruskin on ornamentation, his educational ideals, and the transmission of his aesthetics to British decorative arts, I would like briefly to settle the issue raised at the end of the introduction, concerning a common misunderstanding of Ruskin on the ‘innocence of the eye’, so to close this chapter of my narrative. In the concluding chapter of his remarkable study on *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, Allan Staley attempted to situate that movement in broad historical terms, using a typically Modernist scheme, that of Ernst Gombrich’s study of representation in *Art and Illusion*, where he compares traditional schemata of painting, as ‘illusionist art’ with results in the psychology of perception.

According to Gombrich, “the postulate of an unbiased eye demands the impossible”,¹⁸³ and the ‘illusionist art’ that grew out of the tradition “collapsed as soon as this tradition was questioned by those who relied on the innocent eye”.¹⁸⁴ Thus, no illusion is possible, without any appeal to prior conventions and the likes of Constable, Courbet or Monet simply adjusted the formulae of their day, while, Staley now concludes, Pre-Raphaelite landscapes were a failure because they were “too revolutionary”:

The Pre-Raphaelites were against ‘brown foliage, smoky clouds and dark corners’ because they considered them artificial. They felt that in avoiding such conventions they were not on the road to abstraction but to realising in paint the exact look of nature. That their pictures should become flat in

¹⁸² Crane 1900, p. 55.

¹⁸³ Gombrich 1961, p. 298.

¹⁸⁴ Gombrich 1961, p. 313.

effect because of the bright colours, and visually confusing because of the weight of detail was not what they intended; it does, however, provide a demonstration of the limits of naturalism in painting.

[...]

If [the Pre-Raphaelites] failed by the measure of what they set out to do, they are yet failures who have a considerable historical significance. They anticipated the collapse of the illusionist tradition, which prepared the ground for twentieth century modernism, and, in attempting to rely on their own resources without the aid of sustaining tradition, they seemed extremely modern.¹⁸⁵

It is important that one distinguishes here Gombrich's version of the Modernist narrative of the collapse of the 'illusionist tradition' from the 'evaluation of Pre-Raphaelitism' necessary to make it play this subordinate role. Although it is right that they followed Ruskin in painting "without the aid of sustaining tradition", in this sense they were remarkable revolutionaries. But it seems to me that the argument of Chapter 1 and 2 shows it is wrong to portray the Pre-Raphaelites as having aimed for "the exact look of nature". As any good painters, they knew this was not possible and they never pretended to do this; in accordance with Ruskin, they only sought to produce an art faithful to their emotional response in front of natural scenes – not literally what the eye sees. This was, after all, the point of Ruskin's 'phenomenology'. In a nutshell, wishing to paint a particular leaf as it is, with its defects, as opposed to a 'generalised' ideal one involves no crude misconception about an "unbiased eye".

Whatever the Pre-Raphaelites' supposed 'failure' was, it is not thus of the sort described here by Staley. It is this very concept of 'failure' in art which would need to be questioned here, since what is deemed a 'failure' is determined by the Modernist canon and its retrospective look at its own pre-history: the Pre-Raphaelite did not 'fail' more than any movement in history, they 'failed' because the Modernist could not understand their art as a worthwhile precursor. I am not suggesting a counter-narrative, but simply that one should refrain from embedding in such a way the Pre-Raphaelites

¹⁸⁵ *Staley 2001*, p. 253.

– and through them Ruskin – in the standard Whiggish narrative of Modernism's pre-history in 19th-century art.

4. Natural Shapes, Ornamentation and the Arts and Crafts

*With our present system of individual Mammonism, and
Government by Laissez-faire, this Nation cannot live.*

Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*

4.1. Ornament, Abstract Lines and 'Truth to Materials'

William Morris read *The Stones of Venice* when he was still a student at Exeter College, Oxford.¹ His enthusiasm was immediately transmitted to his lifelong friend, Edward Burne-Jones. They published in 1856 an anonymous defence of Ruskin against a critique in *The Quarterly*, 'Ruskin and the Quarterly'.² They met Dante Gabriel Rossetti in Ruskin's Edinburgh lectures, and later collaborated to paint the Oxford Union murals.³ Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* impressed Morris so deeply that, when he established the Kelmscott Press in 1892,⁴ he published under separate book form its key chapter on 'The Nature of Gothic' – the same chapter which was to be distributed to the attendants at the inaugural ceremony of the Working Men's College, as we shall see below – and wrote in the preface these famous lines:

To my mind, and I believe to some others, it is one of the most important things written by the author, & in future days will be considered as one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century. To some of us when we first read it, now many years ago, it seemed to point out a new road on which the world should travel.⁵

That road led Morris to become both an immensely important designer and one of the founders of British socialism. The reasons for his socialism are to be found in

¹ Just to give a few examples, see *Vallence 1898*, pp. 238-9, 308-309, *MacKail 1901*, vol.1, p. 38, *MacCarthy 1994*, pp. 69-70, *Goldman 2005*, pp. 7-8, *Blakesley 2006*, p. 29, *Barringer et al. 2012*, p. 178.

² *Burne-Jones 1856*, pp. 353-361. I follow *Cook 1911*, I, p. 348 in attributing the actual authorship of the paper to Burne-Jones, although it was meant to represent their common views.

³ On Oxford Union Murals, see, for example, *Whiteley 2004*, pp. 42-43, *Prettejohn 2000*, pp. 101-103.

⁴ On Morris and the art of printing, see *Morris 1982*, on his aesthetics in relation to the Kelmscott Press, see *McGann 1992* and *Boos 2010*.

⁵ *Morris 1892*, p. i. See also *Morris 1982*, p. 90.

Ruskin's chapter, as we shall see in section 4.3 below. Morris acted as a great promoter of Ruskin. Henry Van de Velde, one of the first Art Nouveau artists and one of the theoreticians of that movement, was much taken by this remark by Morris.⁶

Wishing to travel down that new road, a constellation of British artists would eventually join Morris and his Pre-Raphaelite friends.⁷ Just to name a few: Philipp Webb who sat next to him on the first day at G. E. Street's office, William De Morgan who turned his career from painter to potter thanks to him, W. A. S. Benson who converted from architect to metal designer also partly thanks to him, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, who became a bookbinder thanks to his wife, and A. H. Mackmurdo, the main figure in the transition to Art Nouveau, as we shall see at the end of this chapter. They later played a role for creation and running the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1887, along with other major figures such as its first president, Walter Crane, who was one of the main theorists, with many books,⁸ and Lewis F. Day, who also wrote extensively for art magazines.⁹ Not only did they both write extensively, they also played an important role in the controversy over Art Nouveau to be discussed in section 6.2.

With his teaching at the South Kensington school, his written and visual work, Crane helped turn the Arts and Crafts 'mainstream' in Britain, and to popularize it on the Continent, where his books were read by early Art Nouveau artists. One must also include here C. F. A. Voysey,¹⁰ C. R. Ashbee, and the architect M. H. Baillie Scott¹¹ to

⁶ See Van de Velde, undated typescript FAV/D/64 at l'ENSAV – La Cambre.

⁷ The art of Burne-Jones and Rossetti is implicated in the change from Pre-Raphaelitism to Aestheticism, very much away from Ruskin's concerns (this is one of the reasons why I focused in chapter 3 on early Pre-Raphaelite landscape painting). See *Barringer 2012*, chapter 5 or, more specifically about Burne-Jones, *Calloway & Federle Orr 2011*. This does not mean that Ruskin had no appreciation of their art, see for example his praise of Burne-Jones in 33.301.

⁸ See the important *Crane 1892* and *Crane 1900*. On Crane, see *O'Neill 2010*.

⁹ See, for example, *Day 1887*, *Day 1888*, *Day 1892*, *Day 1893*, *Day 1904*, and the papers discussed in section 6.2. On Day, see *Hansen 2007*.

¹⁰ On Voysey, see *Hitchmough 1995* and *O'Donnell 2011*.

¹¹ On Baillie Scott, see *Haigh 1995*.

name a few – Baillie Scott’s architecture, along with that of Voysey, and Philipp Webb’s before them, transformed vernacular architecture in Britain.¹²

Works by these artists and many others, grouped in a variety of ‘guilds’ – see section 4.3 below – came to be known collectively as the ‘Arts and Crafts movement’; the name derives from the better known of these associations, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. Their art was displayed through numerous exhibitions at home and abroad, and promoted through journals such as *The Studio* and the *Magazine of Art*. Not only did they influence artists on the Continent, ‘Arts and Crafts’ spread further, for example in America.¹³ The reason for this large influence abroad is an idea that we owe to Morris, not Ruskin, namely the suggestion in ‘The Lesser Arts’ that a revival of the ‘decorative arts’, including architecture, should be based on study and adaptation to local traditional arts and crafts:

I can only say that [...] if we do not study the ancient work directly and learn to understand it, we shall find ourselves influenced by the feeble work all around us, and shall be copying the better work through the copyists and *without* understanding it, which will by no means bring about intelligent art. Let us therefore study it wisely, be taught by it, kindled by it; all the while determining not to imitate or repeat it; to have either no art at all, or an art which we have made our own.¹⁴

[...] For there indeed if anywhere, in the English country, in the days when people cared about such things, was there a full sympathy between the works of man, and the land they were made for. [...] never coarse, though often rude enough, sweet, natural and unaffected, an art of peasants rather than of merchant-princes or courtiers, it must be a hard heart, I think, that does not love it [...] A peasant art, I say, and it clung fast to the life of the

¹² One of Baillie Scott’s better known and remarkable realizations is Blackwell House (1898-1900) on the shores of Lake Windermere, now billed as the ‘Arts and Crafts House’. Other Arts and Crafts artists such as W. A. S. Benson, William De Morgan and Arthur Simpson worked for its remarkable interior decoration. On Benson, see *Lakeland Arts Trust* 2007.

¹³ For international influence of Arts and Crafts movement, see *Kaplan 2004* and *Livingstone & Parry 2005* and *Blakesley 2006*. For the United States, see *Massey & Maxwell 1998*. The recent exhibition *Artists, Architects and Artisans. Canadian Art 1890-1918* at the National Gallery, Ottawa, contains much valuable information on Arts and Crafts in Canada. See *Hill 2013*.

¹⁴ *Morris 1966*, XXII, pp. 15-16.

people, and still lived among the cottagers and yeomen in many parts of the country while big houses were being built “French and fine”: still lived also in many a quaint pattern of loom and printing-block, and embroiderer’s needle, while over-seas stupid pomp had extinguished all nature and freedom, and art was become, in France especially, the mere expression of that successful and exultant rascality, which in the flesh no longer afterwards went down into the pit for ever.¹⁵

Although Morris addressed himself to an English audience (but one should not assume that the criticism of France is not a narrowly patriotic one but a political one), it was easy for anyone to adapt the suggestion, and the spread of ‘Arts and Crafts’ thus led to the emergence of numerous national variants, especially across Europe. Art of colonial countries such as Britain is often seen through the lens of postcolonial studies. Britain’s impact on the culture of the countries that it subjugated can be examined in parallel to those developments with British art that depend on mechanisms of cultural appropriation. It is possible to study late 19th-century art as, for example, falling back on national traditions that are assumed to originate in a fear of ‘the foreign’. It is important to note in this respect, however, that the message from Morris was also not understood in such terms, but in countries such as, for example, Finland or Latvia, not yet independent but experiencing a national revival, and chaffing under Russian czarist rule, it spurred the development of a national art and architecture, also known as ‘National Romanticism’.¹⁶ Vernacular architecture was renewed in parallel to developments in Britain.¹⁷ In Morris’ own country, the Celtic revival in the Arts and Crafts has a lot to do with artists from Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man. One should not forget that Ireland was under British occupation at the time, and it is interesting to see how Morris’ message also played out within its rising nationalism.¹⁸ So, Morris’ message should also allow one to see Arts and Crafts in a positive light. The

¹⁵ *Morris 1966*, XXII, p. 18.

¹⁶ For more details, there is a further discussion in section 5.2 below.

¹⁷ See *Bowe 1993*.

¹⁸ See *Bowe 1993b*.

adaptability of its recipe to local ingredients, so to speak, might just explain its popularity overseas. The case of Belgium is in this respect fascinating, given that it was a relatively new country in search of a national art that would reflect its position within Europe, and although there was a neo-Flemish revival, Art Nouveau was conceived really as a new art for a new country within a more pacific, fraternal and transnational Europe – a dream that came down crashing in 1914.¹⁹

In ‘The Lesser Arts’, Morris went on adding:

Such was the English art, whose history is in a sense at your doors grown scarce indeed, and growing scarcer year by year, not only through greedy destruction, of which there is certainly less than there used to be, but also through the attacks of another foe, called nowadays “restoration”.²⁰

This allows me briefly to digress, as this point is tangential, on an important aspect of the legacy of Ruskin and Morris concerning ‘restoration’ which is still very much with us today. In *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), Ruskin rejected any possibility of recuperation of the authentic through restoration:

[...] if you attempt to restore [...] you do it conjecturally, if you copy what is left, granting fidelity to the possible [...] how is the new work better than the old? [...] The first step to restoration (I have seen it, and that again and again – seen it on the Baptistery of Pisa, seen it on the Casa d’Oro at Venice, seen it on the Cathedral of Lisieux) is to dash the old work to pieces; the second is usually to put up the cheapest and basest imitation which can escape detection, but in all cases, however careful, and however laboured, an imitation still, a cold model of such parts as *can* be modelled, with conjectural supplements; [...]²¹

Ruskin’s indignation at the restoration of the Ca’ D’Oro²² may have remained private at the time, but *The Stones of Venice* played an important role within Italy and

¹⁹ This point will be explored in section 6.1.

²⁰ *Morris 1966*, XXII, p. 19.

²¹ 8.243.

²² See the letter, quoted in section 3.4 above, dated 23 September 1845 printed in 8.243, note 1.

for Venice in particular, in raising awareness of the importance of protecting its architectural heritage, by promoting what Ruskin saw as its true preservation, as opposed to its destruction under the guise of 'restoration' projects. In 1877, Ruskin wrote the preface to a book by Count Alvise Zorzi, who fought successfully against a 'restoration' project for the façade of St Mark's.²³ Incidentally, it is quite fitting to notice that Ruskin's views were in direct opposition to those of Viollet-le-Duc that had underpinned the unsuccessful proposal.²⁴ It appears that the rise of this new aesthetic sensibility, now widely accepted as part of those efforts that have succeeded in saving much of Venice's heritage, is concomitant with his influence – it is thus worth underlying the modernity of Ruskin's views on this score. We can see here Morris following Ruskin in condemning 'restoration' in the very same year, 1877. This is also the year when Morris along with others such as A. H. Mackmurdo founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.²⁵

²³ 24.405-411.

²⁴ Hewison 2009, pp. 348-373. Ruskin had already been critical of Viollet-le-Duc's work at the Abbey of St. Ouen in Rouen, see 8.244. Hewison quotes Viollet-le-Duc as stating in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française*, that "To restore a building is not to maintain it, or to repair it, or to remake it, it is to reinstate in a complete state such as it may never have been in at any given moment" (Hewison 2009, p. 361). Ruskin's 'Letter to Count Zorzi' might be seen as a direct reply to this supposedly 'rational' view: "Though the new building [St Mark's proposed restoration] were in all points fairer than the old, the fact would remain the same that it was *not* the old church, but a model of it. Is this, to the people of the lagoons, no loss? To us foreigners, it is *total* loss. We can build models of St. Mark's for ourselves, in England, or in America. We came to Venice to see *that* St. Mark's whose pillars trembled with Crusader's shouts, seven hundred years ago" (24.410). Viollet-le-Duc's views about 'restoration' were immensely influential and led to much destruction of the architectural heritage of France, notoriously at Notre-Dame de Paris. Viollet-le-Duc's work for this landmark of Paris does not resemble the original, as can be seen from the very same photographic record, as discussed in section 3.4, that Ruskin thought important for the very reason of preservation. On Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc, see also Pevsner 1969.

²⁵ It is also known colloquially as 'anti-scrape'. See Thompson 1955, pp. 226-242 and Donovan 2008. The anecdote surrounding the decision to create this society, told by Mackmurdo, is related in Vallance 1899, p. 186. This Society, possibly the oldest in the world of its kind, is still in existence today. Ruskin was invited by Morris to chair in 1880, but declined. See Morris 1984, I, pp. 559-560, and Goldman 2005, p. 8.

The above-mentioned artists who collectively formed the ‘Arts and Crafts movement’, did not share a platform that was common in all respects. For example, as opposed to Morris, Crane or Ashbee – or Van de Velde and Guimard on the Continent – Lewis Day was no socialist.²⁶ Although very much inspired by Morris’ designs, he disagreed with Ruskin’s rule that the art should begin with the study of natural forms.²⁷ Nevertheless, they are united by their enthusiasm towards some ideas from Ruskin. This chapter is about the content of their enthusiasm. I wish to explain how Ruskin’s aesthetic ideals, presented in chapters 2 and 3, were transmitted to William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. Ruskin was already seriously incapacitated by mental illness by the early 1880s, and he became inactive for much of the last decade of his life, unaware of the new developments with which I shall be concerned in this second half of my thesis – for example, there is no evidence he ever heard about Art Nouveau. But Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement absorbed his ideals, amplified and modified them somewhat and, more importantly, they served as a communication channel between Ruskin and the early Belgian Art Nouveau artists, who also integrated them in their own manner, resulting in this important chapter in the history of art.

There is one last set of Ruskin’s ideas that needs to be presented, however, since we are shifting attention specifically to ‘applied’ or ‘decorative’ art. These will be presented in this section, while the next section will be concerned with Ruskin’s attempts to transmit his ideas through teaching and his peculiar approach to pedagogy, and through his endeavours to promote association under the model of medieval ‘guilds’. It is through these that Ruskin’s aesthetic ideals were transmitted to the generation of William Morris and others after him.

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²⁶ Hansen 2007, p. 82. For Crane’s socialist views, see *The Claims of Decorative Arts* (Crane 1892, pp. 80-81 and the chapter on ‘Art and Social-Democracy’, pp. 140-156).

²⁷ Hansen 2007, p. 46.

What seems the key issue here is that of the distinction between 'fine', and 'applied' or 'decorative' arts. Indeed, if there is such a distinction, then it is possible that what one says about fine arts does not carry over to applied arts or vice-versa, and all that was written about in chapters 2 and 3 risk being irrelevant. But this is not how the author of *The Stones of Venice* saw the matter, as he simply argued in the third lecture of *The Two Paths* that there is no such distinction:

72. The first of these [obstacles] is our not understanding the scope and dignity of Decorative design. With all our talk about it, the very meaning of the words "Decorative art" remains confused and undecided. I want, if possible, to settle this question for you to-night, and to show you that the principles on which you must work are likely to be false, in proportion as they are narrow; true, only as they are founded on a perception of the connection of all branches of art with each other.

73. Observe, then, first—the only essential distinction between Decorative and other art is the being fitted for a fixed place; and in that place, related, either in subordination or in command, to the effect of other pieces of art. And all the greatest art which the world has produced is thus fitted for a place, and subordinated to a purpose. There is no existing highest-order art but is decorative. The best sculpture yet produced has been the decoration of a temple front—the best painting, the decoration of a room. Raphael's best doing is merely the wall-colouring of a suite of apartments in the Vatican, and his cartoons were made for tapestries. Correggio's best doing is the decoration of two small church cupolas at Parma; Michel Angelo's, of a ceiling in the Pope's private chapel; Tintoret's, of a ceiling and side wall belonging to a charitable society at Venice; while Titian and Veronese threw out their noblest thoughts, not even on the inside, but on the outside of the common brick and plaster walls of Venice.

74. Get rid, then, at once of any idea of Decorative art being a degraded or a separate kind of art. Its nature or essence is simply its being fitted for a definite place; and, in that place, forming part of a great and harmonious whole, in companionship with other art; and so far from this being a degradation to it – so far from Decorative art being inferior to other art because it is fixed to a spot – on the whole it may be considered as rather a piece of degradation that it should be portable. Portable art – independent of all place—is for the most part ignoble art. Your little Dutch landscape, which you put over your sideboard to-day, and between the windows to-morrow, is a far more contemptible piece of work than the extents of field and forest with which Benozzo has made green and beautiful the once

melancholy arcade of the Campo Santo at Pisa; and the wild boar of silver which you use for a seal, or lock into a velvet case, is little likely to be so noble a beast as the bronze boar who foams forth the fountain from under his tusks in the market-place of Florence. It is, indeed, possible that the portable picture or image may be first-rate of its kind, but it is not first-rate because it is portable; nor are Titian's frescoes less than first-rate because they are fixed; nay, very frequently the highest compliment you can pay to a cabinet picture is to say – "It is as grand as a fresco."

75. Keeping, then, this fact fixed in our minds, – that all art *may* be decorative, and that the greatest art yet produced has been decorative [...].²⁸

Ruskin's last claims, that "all art *may* be decorative, and that the greatest art yet produced has been decorative", is a powerful one, which resonates throughout the remainder of the century: he undermines here the root of the distinction between 'fine' and 'applied' or 'higher' and 'lesser' arts, by claiming that what one would recognize as some of the greatest artistic achievements were in fact instances of decorative art. Once this is realized, it makes no more sense to claim some arts to be of higher value or purpose than others, and to draw any distinction based on such values.

Incidentally, it is worth noticing the strength of Ruskin's ideas in this paragraph by quoting Edward Burne-Jones, who once said that he "never could understand anything but a picture painted in the place it is intended to fill, never cared for a travelling picture, though mine are all that, never really cared for anything but architecture and the arts that connect with it".²⁹

This is the first of the important lessons of this chapter for William Morris, whose 1877 lecture on 'The Lesser Arts' was devoted to the topic. As he writes:

I shall not meddle much with the great art of Architecture, and less still with the great arts commonly called Sculpture and Painting, yet I cannot in my own mind quite sever them from those lesser so-called Decorative Arts, which I have to speak about: it is only in latter times, and under the most intricate conditions of life, that they have fallen apart from one another;

²⁸ 16.319-321.

²⁹ Burne-Jones 1904, pp. 333-334. See Prettejohn 2007, p. 236.

and I hold that, when they are so parted, it is ill for the Arts altogether: the lesser ones become trivial, mechanical, unintelligent, incapable of resisting the changes pressed upon them by fashion or dishonesty; while the greater, however they may be practiced for a while by men of great minds and wonder working hands, unhelped by the lesser, unhelped by each other, are sure to lose their dignity of popular arts, and become nothing but dull adjuncts to unmeaning pomp, or ingenious toys for a few rich and idle men.³⁰

We thus have here a source not only for William Morris and the following generations of British artists, but also to the Belgian artists after them.

The rejection of this distinction entails some important consequences – the first one being that what goes on for painting and sculpture goes on for ornament – that are explored in *The Stones of Venice*, whose chapters 20-29 of its first volume are devoted to ornament. Ornament must also result from sincere expression of one's emotions as one experiences nature, or, as he puts it one's "delight in God's work":

[...] The first thing we have to ask of the decoration is that it should indicate strong liking, and that honestly. It matters not so much what the thing is, as that the builder should really love it and enjoy it, and say so plainly. [...] the second requirement in decoration, is that it should show we like the right thing. And the right thing to be liked is God's work, when He made for our delight and contentment in this world. And all noble ornamentation is the expression of man's delight in God's work.³¹

By "delight in God's work", Ruskin also meant that architecture should elevate us morally and spiritually, this being one of the functions of architecture, as we shall see below. Since Ruskin believed that beauty is related to natural shape, he believed, conversely, that "forms which are not taken from natural objects must be ugly".³² Given that he thought it impossible for an artist to depict everything, the result is necessarily an abstraction from nature, and this abstraction is the result of artist's

³⁰ Morris 1966, XXII, pp. 3-4.

³¹ 9.69-70. See also 9.253 and 9.264-265.

³² 4.154-155.

imagination.³³ Thus, if the material of ornament is to come from nature, Ruskin tells us that it has first to be abstract lines:

Then the proper material of ornament will be whatever God has created, and its proper treatment, that which seems in accordance with or symbolical of His laws. And, for material, we shall therefore have, first, the abstract lines which are most frequent in nature; and then, from lower to higher, the whole range of systematized inorganic and organic forms.³⁴

Our first constituents of ornament will therefore be abstract lines, that is to say, the most frequent contours of natural objects, transferred to architectural forms when it is not right or possible to render such forms distinctly imitative. For instance, the line or curve of the edge of leaf may be accurately given to the edge of a stone, without rendering the stone in the least *like* a leaf, or suggestive of a leaf; and this the more fully, because the lines of nature are alike in all her works; simpler or richer in combination, but the same in character; and when they are taken out of their combinations it is impossible to say from which of her works they have been borrowed, their universal property being that of ever-varying curvature in the most subtle and subdued transitions, with peculiar expressions of motion, elasticity, or dependence, which I have already insisted upon at some length in the chapters on typical beauty in *Modern Painters*.³⁵

³³ See *Collingwood 1891*, p. 258.

³⁴ 9.265. Ruskin provides an ordered list these forms – it is interesting to keep it in mind when looking at Arts and Crafts or Art Nouveau ornament – which he proceeds to discuss one by one. I focus here only on abstract lines:

- “(1) Abstract lines.
- (2) Forms of the Earth (Crystals).
- (3) Forms of Water (Waves).
- (4) Forms of Fire (Flames and Rays).
- (5) Forms of Air (Clouds).
- (6) (Organic Forms). Shells.
- (7) Fish.
- (8) Reptiles and Insects
- (9) Vegetation (A). Stems and Trunks
- (10) Vegetation (B). Foliage
- (11) Birds.
- (12) Mammalian animals and Man” (9.265-266).

³⁵ 9.266-267.

He demonstrates this sets of abstract lines that we already encountered in chapter 1 (Plate # 1.17). Walter Crane echoed this in *Line and Form*:

Look at any of the systems of line in the organic structures of nature: the radiating ribs of the scallop shell, or the spiral of many other varieties: the set of feathers upon the expanded wing of a bird; the radiation of the sun's rays; the flowing line of the wave movement; the lines of structure in flowers and leaves; the scales of a fish; the scale of a pine cone or an artichoke. We feel that any of these combinations of lines are harmonious and beautiful, and we know that they are organic lines, in short. They mean life and growth.³⁶

Talking about the lines from leaves, Ruskin suggested a further reason to think abstract curved line from nature beautiful, not found in *Modern Painters*:

Why lines of this kind are beautiful, I endeavoured to show in the *Modern Painters*; but one point, there omitted, may be mentioned here, – that almost all these lines are expressive of action or *force* of some kind, while the circle is a line of limitation or support. In leafage they mark the forces of its growth and expansion, but some among the most beautiful of them are described by bodies variously in motion, or subjected to force; as by projectiles in the air, by the particles of water in a gentle current, by planets in motion in an orbit, by their satellites, if the actual path of the satellite in space be considered instead of the relation to the planet; by boats, or birds, turning in the water or air, by clouds in various action upon the wind, by sails in the curvatures they assume under its force, and by thousands of other objects moving or bearing force.³⁷

For example, the curve of *Alisma Plantago* (*q* to *r*) and its interior ribs, “mark the different expansions of its fibres, and are, I think, exactly the same as those which would be traced by the currents of a river entering a lake of the shape of the leaf, at the end where the stalk is, and passing out at this point”.³⁸ I shall briefly discuss in the

³⁶ Crane 1900, p. 141.

³⁷ 9.268.

³⁸ 9.269.

conclusion this link between 'line' and 'force' as it was reasserted on a different basis by Henry Van de Velde with his notion of '*ligne de force*'.

A second consequence of great importance has to do with 'harmony' or 'unity' in architecture. This was already expressed in the passage from *The Two Paths* quoted above. The phrase is worth citing anew to give it proper emphasis:

Get rid, then, at once of any idea of Decorative art being a degraded or a separate kind of art. Its nature or essence is simply its being fitted for a definite place; and, in that place, forming part of a great and harmonious whole, in companionship with other art.³⁹

Ruskin develops this idea by pointing out, among other things, the well-known fact that a sculpture which is perfect in its details cannot always be the best ornament in architecture, because ornament is usually seen at a distance, from which one cannot discern any details. Ruskin illustrates this with his own sketch of the peacock ornament of Palazzo dei Badoari Partecipazzi, also known today as Palazzo Gritti Badoer (Plate # 4.1). The most characteristic part of peacock is its eyes in the tail feather, but:

A rigidly *true* sculpture of a peacock's form could have no eyes, – nothing but feathers. Here, then, enters the stratagem of sculpture; you *must* cut the eyes in relief, somehow or another; see how it is done in the peacock opposite; it is so done by nearly all the Byzantine sculptors; this particular peacock is meant to be seen at some distance (how far off I know not, for it is an interpolation in the building where it occurs [...]), but at all events at a distance of thirty or forty feet; I have put it close to you that you may see plainly the rude rings and rods which stand for the eyes and quills, but at the just distance their effects is perfect.⁴⁰

So, the artist, taking account of the distance between the viewer and the sculpture (on the first floor of the Palazzo), takes away some elements (and adds some) so that the result gives more pleasure viewed from that distance, than the whole with what is

³⁹ 9.320.

⁴⁰ 9.288-289.

omitted.⁴¹ Ruskin does not say that the calculation of distance of the beholder is to be accurate to give an intended effect. As Ruskin admits, it is “difficult to give the rules, or analyse the feelings, which should direct us in this matter”.⁴² Ruskin suggests accordingly that ornament is necessary, but difficult to deal with because one needs to be capable of creating an ornament simple enough not to spoil the effect, so to speak.⁴³ Ornamentation is of a building or of a sculpture, which is to be seen from a specific distance. As such, it must therefore be “beautiful in its place, and nowhere else” and “aid the effect of every portion of the building over which it has influence”.⁴⁴ In short, “its being ornament at all, consists in its being governed.”⁴⁵

This means that ornament cannot be added merely for its own beauty but such that it fits appropriately at a given place and nowhere else:

[...] in distributing our ornament, there must never be any sense of gap or blank, neither any sense of there being a single member, or fragment of a member, which could be spared. Whatever has nothing to do, whatever could go without being missed, is not ornament; it is deformity and encumbrance. Away with it. And, on the other hand, care must be taken either to diffuse the ornament which we permit, in due relation over the whole building, or so to concentrate it, as never to leave a sense of its having got into knots, and curdled upon some points, and left the rest of the building whey.⁴⁶

The reason for this is that Ruskin did not see ornament as ‘capricious’ decoration, but a necessary element of the entire architectural work. In the same way that a painter organizes her canvas, to draw minute details in one part and omit others in other parts, in order to give harmony and unity in the painting to be produced, ornament in architecture can neither be too much or too little. Thus, “a noble building never has any

⁴¹ 9.296.

⁴² 9.307.

⁴³ 9.308-9.

⁴⁴ 9.284.

⁴⁵ 9.308.

⁴⁶ 9.307. See also 9.285.

extraneous or superfluous ornament: that all its parts are necessary to its loveliness, and that no single atom of them could be removed without harm to its life".⁴⁷

Ruskin's ideas on ornament being 'useful'⁴⁸ are related to the concept of harmony. For example, in a letter to Henry Acland on the Oxford Museum of Natural Science, Ruskin wrote that on the "usefulness" of Gothic decoration:

The first principle of Gothic decoration is that a given quantity of good art will be more generally useful when exhibited on a large scale, and forming part of a connected system, than when it is small and separated. That is to say, a piece of sculpture or painting, of a certain allowed merit, will be more useful when seen on the front of a building, or at the end of a room, and therefore by many persons, than if it be so small as to be only capable of being seen by one or two at a time; and it will be more useful when so combined with other work as to produce that kind of impression usually termed "sublime"—as it is felt on looking at any great series of fixed paintings, or at the front of a cathedral—than if it be so separated as to excite only a special wonder or admiration, such as we feel for a jewel in a cabinet.⁴⁹

Discussions of Arts and Crafts and, later on, of Art Nouveau often emphasise the attempt at coordinating architecture and ornament, in all details, down to the design of doorknobs, etc., as opposed to simply providing a room as a space to be decorated or filled in haphazardly. This is often described under the name of 'Total Work of Art' or 'Total Art' – in French '*l'art total*'. The German '*Gesamtkunstwerk*' immediately brings to mind Richard Wagner, who had introduced the concept in a series of essays in 1849-1852, including *The Artwork of the Future* (1849) and *Opera and Drama* (1852), and sought to apply it to his own opera, merging music and drama. Volumes of English translations of Wagner's *Prose Writings*, including these, started to appear in

⁴⁷ 9.452.

⁴⁸ I put scare quotes because Ruskin thought that "the most beautiful things are the most useless" in the sense of "inapplicable to the service of the body", citing the facts that peacock does not taste good and that dried lilies make bad hay (9.451). The usefulness referred to here is in the creation of an "harmonious whole".

⁴⁹ 16.213.

1892, and his ideas must have percolated beforehand, so Wagner is indeed a likely source. It is often assumed to be the unique source in the secondary literature.⁵⁰ Still, Ruskin's comment on ornament "forming part of a great and harmonious whole, in companionship with other art" in *The Two Paths*, was certainly more readily available – and widely read –⁵¹ at an earlier stage, and more in tune with preoccupations of architects and designers, than Wagner's comments on the opera as *Gesamtkunstwerk*. I would thus suggest that the above passages from Ruskin form the source of later approaches to 'unity' and 'total art'.

Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that Wagner's close friend in Dresden, the architect Gottfried Semper, who had to flee to London after the failure of the May 1849 uprising, found work at the South Kensington school. While in London, he published 'Science, Industry and Art' in 1852, where he railed against the division of labour between the architect and the decorator,⁵² and can be seen as having argued for *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey was to assert in 1892.⁵³ Although I am not aware of any Arts and Crafts artist that paid attention to Semper, he should not be ruled out as a possible source.

At a later stage, Van de Velde read Semper, but dismissed him for not having broken with 'historicism',⁵⁴ of which his architecture – especially on the Ringstraße in Vienna – is typical. Along with Wagner, Semper is also cited as a source for the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the Bauhaus.⁵⁵ It was certainly William Morris who popularized the idea among the Arts and Crafts movement, who decided to decorate his own Red

⁵⁰ See, for example, *Claes & Demoor 2010*, p. 138.

⁵¹ In section 6.1 we will encounter Olivier-Georges Destrée, who cites the above-quoted passage. This is a strong indication of the widespread knowledge of Ruskin's views and of their influence. It seems that both *The Two Paths* and *Seven Lamps of Architecture* were read by practically everyone in Britain and Belgium at the time.

⁵² *Semper 1989*, p. 158.

⁵³ *Dilthey 1985*, p. 197.

⁵⁴ Van de Velde, undated typescript FAV/D/64 at l'ENSAV – La Cambre, p. 9.

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Winkler 1976*, p. 1.

House in 1860 on his own (with some help from others).⁵⁶ In light of the discussion of the concept of 'Art Nouveau' in the next chapter, it is thus worth keeping in mind that the idea of a 'Total Work of Art', which is associated with it, has deeper historical roots.

Ruskin does not merely argue, however, that ornament should be such that it forms a "harmonious whole, in companionship with other art", he also argues that it must not disguise function, it must not be used "as a mask and covering of the proper conditions and uses of thing".⁵⁷ Inasmuch as ornament would thus be wrongfully used to hide structure, this claim from *The Stones of Venice* can be linked to Ruskin's earlier castigation of "architectural deceits" in 'The Lamp of Truth' in *Seven Lamps of Architecture*,⁵⁸ the first one being "the suggestion of a mode of structure or support other than the true one".⁵⁹ Ruskin's request that architecture does not lie or deceive is linked with his view that "the value of every work of art is exactly in the ratio of the quantity of humanity which has been put into it, and legibly expressed upon it for ever".⁶⁰ Against industrialisation and mass production by machines, Ruskin put great weight on human labour and what humans produce with their own hands, working with different materials. Already in *Modern Painters I*, this was factored in the experience of art and architecture: "The delight with which we look on the fretted front of Rouen Cathedral depends on no small degree on the simple perception of time employed and

⁵⁶ On Red House, see MacCarthy 1994, chapter 6 and Kirk 2005, chapter 2.

⁵⁷ 9.265.

⁵⁸ For a rare study of the 'lamps', see Baljon 1997. As pointed out by Baljon, there are hardly any studies of the argument of *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice II & III* on which one can rely. See Baljon 1997, p. 401. One interesting feature of Baljon's study of *Seven Lamps* is that he brings to the fore the reliance of Ruskin's argument on the British tradition (Alison, Addison, Hogarth, Burke), as I have sought to do in chapter 2 and 3.

⁵⁹ 8.60. As Roger Scruton pointed out, Ruskin's criteria, if applied, would for example rule out the Centre Pompidou in Paris, as its displays outwardly is not essential to its structure, but it is attuned to praise of Gothic architecture. See Scruton 1979, pp. 41-42.

⁶⁰ 9.456.

labour expended in its production".⁶¹ As regards ornament, the point is made in this remarkable passage:

Ornament, as I have often before observed, has two entirely distinct sources of agreeableness: one, that of the abstract beauty of its forms, which, for the present, we will suppose to be the same whether they come from the hand or the machine; the other, the sense of human labour and care spent upon it. How great this latter influence we may perhaps judge, by considering that there is not a cluster of weeds growing in any cranny of ruin which has not beauty in all respects *nearly* equal, and, in some, immeasurably superior, to that of the most elaborate sculpture of its stones: and that all our interest in the carved work, our sense of its richness, though it is tenfold less rich than the knots of grass beside it; of its delicacy, though it is a thousandfold less delicate; of its admirableness, though a millionfold less admirable; results of our consciousness of its being the work of poor, clumsy, toilsome man. Its true delightfulness depends on our discovering in it the record of thoughts, and intents, and trials, and heart-breakings – of recoveries of joyfulness of success: all this *can* be traced by a practiced eye; but, granting it even obscure, it is presumed or understood; and in that is the worth of the thing, just as much as the worth of any thing else we call precious.⁶²

We shall come back to this point in the next section, since it stands at a nexus in Ruskin's thought, related as it is to his social-political views. It is also the key to understand why Morris thought Ruskin so important.

'Functionalism' is usually defined as the idea that beauty in architecture (or design) consists in adapting form to function.⁶³ Stated as such, Ruskin comes indeed very close to be one of the early 'functionalists'; he is often treated as such, along with Augustus Pugin, Harold Greenough, and Viollet-le-Duc.⁶⁴ One should recall here the incipient functionalism in the notion of 'vital beauty' in *Modern Painters II* as "the appearance

⁶¹ 3.94.

⁶² 8.81-81.

⁶³ For example, *Scruton* 1979, p. 6.

⁶⁴ For example, in *de Zurko* 1957, chapter 6 or *Bell* 1978, pp. 145-146. We even have the early testimony of Ralph Waldo Emerson claiming in *English Traits* that Greenough's functionalism prefigures Ruskin's. See *Emerson* 1893, p. 12.

of felicitous fulfilment of function in living things, more especially of the joyful and right exertion of perfect life in man",⁶⁵ or his admiration of the form of (sailing) ships in *The Stones of Venice*: "a ship is one of the loveliest things man ever made, and one of the noblest; nor do I know any lines, out of divine work, so lovely as those of a head of a ship [...] able to breast a wave and break it".⁶⁶ One could add here his admiration of the functional forms of cups and vases:

There is first the need of cup and platter, especially of cup; for you can put your meat on the Harpies, or on any other, tables: but you must have your cup to drink from. And to hold it conveniently, you must put a handle to it; and to fill it when it is empty you must have a large pitcher of some sort; and to carry the pitcher you may most advisably have two handles. Modify the forms of these needful possessions according to the various requirements of drinking largely and drinking delicately; of pouring easily out, or of keeping for years the perfume in; of storing in cellars, or bearing from fountains; of sacrificial libation, of Panathenaic treasure of oil, and sepulchral treasure of ashes, - and you have *a resultant series of beautiful form and decoration*, from the rude amphora of red earth to Cellini's vases of gems and crystal, in which series but especially *in the more simple conditions of it, are developed the most beautiful lines and most perfect types of severe composition which have yet to be attained in art*.⁶⁷

This is part and parcel of his argument for his general claim for formal simplicity, which marks him again as a forerunner of 'functionalism', namely that "all architectural arts begin in the shaping of the cup and the platter, and they end in a glorified roof".⁶⁸ The picture that emerges from the above is of ornamental lines that they should adorn a "serviceable" thing,⁶⁹ in an unobtrusive, controlled way, but Ruskin goes as far as suggesting that objects belonging to work and active life should not be decorated: "Work first, and then gaze, but do not use golden ploughshares, not

⁶⁵ 4.64.

⁶⁶ 9.258.

⁶⁷ 20.108-109. My italics.

⁶⁸ 20.96. See also 20.111.

⁶⁹ 20.96. See also 20.111.

bind ledgers in enamel".⁷⁰ Of decorations in train stations, he wrote: "Better bury gold in the embankments, than put it in ornaments on the stations. [...] Railroad architecture has, or would have, a dignity of its own if it were left to its work".⁷¹ The previous quotations may fail to convince that Ruskin was truly a precursor to 'functionalism', given that he reserves after all a role to ornament and that the idea of an 'harmonious whole' implies constraints that might clash with sheer functionalism. But they should at least serve to show that he was not a fanatic about ornament, quite the contrary, and it is this restraint that turned out to be influential.

There is another side to the request that one should not deceive in 'The Lamp of Truth', namely that "another and less subtle, more contemptible, violation of truth is possible: a direct falsity of assertion respecting the nature of the material, or the quantity of labour".⁷² We already encountered this above, with the example of the peacock ornament of Palazzo Gritti Badoer. The thought recurs in Ruskin's writings. Its most cogent expression is in Appendix 12 to volume II of *The Stones of Venice* on painting of glass:

All art, working with given materials, must propose to itself the objects which, with those materials, are most perfectly attainable; and becomes illegitimate and debased if it proposes to itself any other objects better attainable with other materials.

Thus, great slenderness, lightness, or intricacy of structure, – as in ramifications of trees, detached folds of drapery, or wreaths of hair, – is easily and perfectly expressible in metal-work or in painting, but only with great difficulty and imperfectly expressible in sculpture. All sculpture, therefore, which professes as its chief end the expression of such characters, is debased; and if the suggestion of them be accidentally required of it, that suggestion is only to be given to an extent compatible with perfect ease of execution in the given material, – not to the utmost possible extent. For instance: some of the most delightful drawings of our own water-colour painter, Hunt, have been of birds' nests; of which, in

⁷⁰ 8.157.

⁷¹ 8.160.

⁷² 8.59.

painting, it is perfectly possible to represent the intricate fibrous or mossy structure; therefore, the effort is a legitimate one, and the art is well employed. But to carve a bird's nest out of marble would be physically impossible, and to reach any approximate expression of its structure would require prolonged and intolerable labour. Therefore, all sculpture which set itself to carving birds' nests as an end, or which, if a bird's nest were required of it, carved it to the utmost possible point of realisation, would be debased. Nothing but the general form, and as much of the fibrous structure as could be with perfect ease represented, ought to be attempted at all.

But more than this. *The workman has not done his duty, and is not working on safe principles, unless he even so far honours the materials with which he is working as to set himself to bring out their beauty, and to recommend and exalt, as far as he can, their peculiar qualities.* If he is working in marble, he should insist upon and exhibit its transparency and solidity; if in iron, its strength and tenacity; if in gold, its ductility; and he will invariably find the material grateful, and that his work is all the nobler for being eulogistic of the substance of which it is made. But of all the arts, the working of glass is that in which we ought to keep these principles most vigorously in mind. For we owe it so much, and the possession of it is so great a blessing, that all our work in it should be completely and forcibly expressive of the peculiar characters which give it so vast a value.⁷³

This idea was to become embodied in the all-important dictum of 'Truth to Materials', which was almost universally adopted by the British Arts and Crafts artists; as Walter Crane would put it: "to adapt design to the characteristics and conditions of the material, to its structural capacity".⁷⁴ For the moment we can discern two thoughts here: first, the injunction not to deceive, by hiding the true nature of the material employed, as in the case of *trompe l'œil*. In the case of ornament, Ruskin does not

⁷³ 10.455-456. My italics. For further statements, see *The Two Paths*, 16.386-389 and *Lectures on Art*, 20.163-164, as well as 11.38, 16.427-430, 19.135-140 and 20.306-308.

⁷⁴ Crane 1900, p. 255. For that reason, 'Truth to Materials' is often mentioned in the secondary literature, but it is seldom studied for its own sake, and its roots in Ruskin not always properly recognized. 'Truth to Materials' was integrated in what Pevsner called the 'Modernist Movement', and it is still alive today, for example with *béton brut*, when one leaves traces of the wood shuttering. See, for example, Pevsner 1969, p. 16, Pevsner 2005, pp. 16-17 & 42, where it is, surprisingly, only very briefly alluded to.

mince words in this respect: “if fallacious, [it is] utterly base”.⁷⁵ But there is another equally if not more interesting injunction, to respect the intrinsic limits of the materials.

Again, this idea is not new to Ruskin and it was enormously influential. As we shall see in section 6.2, the apparent breach of this rule by Art Nouveau was one of the major causes for complaint by British Arts and Crafts artists such as Crane and Day. We find ‘Truth to Materials’ already in Pugin or in Semper, who wrote in 1834:

Let the material speak for itself; let it step forth undisguised in the shape and proportions found most suitable by experience and science. Brick should appear as brick, wood as wood, iron as iron, each according to their own statical laws.⁷⁶

All that could be claimed here is that Ruskin turned out to be the most effective promoter of this idea.

To close this section, it seems fitting to quote from Arthur Lasenby Liberty, who commissioned and sold artworks in his shop on Regent Street (about which more in section 5.1), London, with an incredible flair for the fashion of the day, ranging from his well-known fabrics such as the ‘peacock feather’ designed by Arthur Silver (Plate # 4.2), to Arts and Crafts and even, as we shall see in section 6.2, Art Nouveau. Liberty gave a lecture on ‘English Furniture’ to the Society of Arts a few months after the death of Ruskin, in March 1900. The following excerpts, even though limited to furniture, embody much of what has been said in this section, and I cannot see a better illustration of the influence of Ruskin over British (applied) arts at the time:

If I have understood aright the teachings of the great art critic and teacher who has just passed away, I should say that our text and motto in furniture manufacture, as in every other of the arts of life, should be utility before all, but aesthetic utility. Furniture is not made primarily to be looked at but to be used. Better a Windsor chair with comfort than a *chaise à la Louis Quinze* which makes one’s back ache. Let every part have its meaning and

⁷⁵ 8.83.

⁷⁶ *Semper* 1989, p. 48.

fulfil its purpose. [...] Utility, which means fitness, is in itself beauty if rightly understood [...] Form, by which I mean the general outline of a piece of furniture, should be always perfect in itself, and should primarily be independent of decoration, and if the cabinet, the table, or the chair does not look well before the ornament is added no ornament subsequently applied will correct the first error. Good outline and good proportion are both necessary to produce excellence in form, and in good proportion there should always be a dominant mass to which the other parts are subsidiary, and to which the eye constantly returns. [...] The proper main lines for good woodwork are the perpendicular and the horizontal. The curved line is only admissible as an adjunct to these, and should always be subordinate. [...] It is an axiom of good construction that whatever the material used it should be as far as possible homogeneous, and in the case of wood work recourse should be had as little as possible to metal and glue. [...] The abuse of mouldings is a fruitful source of failure to produce good woodwork.⁷⁷

This comment goes a long way to explain why the British reacted so negatively to Art Nouveau in the specific circumstances detailed in section 6.2, at the time when, as a matter of fact, Liberty delivered his lecture.

4.2. Pedagogy and Transmission

From the late 1840s onwards, most notably with the chapter on 'The Nature of Gothic' in *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin's thought evolved from art criticism to social reform. This transformation was first fully revealed in the summer of 1857, with a pair of controversial lectures delivered in Manchester, entitled *The Political Economy of Art*, later republished as *A Joy For Ever. And Its Price in the Market*.⁷⁸ His aesthetics had taken account of the conditions of production of the work of art, but this dimension was now to become central. As we shall see, the result of his theorizing now encompassed an alternative to the industrial age, at the centre of which one finds a

⁷⁷ Liberty 1900, pp. 375-376.

⁷⁸ 16.3-169. On these lectures, see Bliss 1979 and Throsby 2011.

modern counterpart of the medieval stonemasons, owner of their mode of production and expressing themselves artistically – thus renewing the moral link to nature and God – in their work. In parallel, he initiated concrete actions to bring about this new vision. In this section, I would like to examine his teaching and the pedagogical views he developed, and his attempts at popularizing the concept of the ‘guild’, as a form of association for these counterparts of the medieval stonemasons.

Ruskin had already given private lessons and public lectures in the 1850s, and he taught at the Working Men’s College, London, from its opening in 1854 until 1858, and then for a term in 1860.⁷⁹ It is worth recalling here that this College was founded by Christian socialists, including F. D. Maurice, with the aim of providing to the working class an education going beyond ‘continuing education’. Ruskin got involved when he granted them permission to print and distribute as a pamphlet ‘The Nature of Gothic’ to the students on its inauguration – when contacted, Ruskin offered to teach.⁸⁰ and then at the University of Oxford as the first Slade Professor of Fine Arts, from 1870 until his first resignation in 1877, and from 1882 until his final resignation in 1885.⁸¹ Ruskin’s teaching is of great historical importance, given that many of the key figures of the following generation, such as W. A. S. Benson,⁸² W. G. Collingwood, Selwyn

⁷⁹ Hilton 1985, p. 151. For Ruskin’s and the Working Men’s College, see Strudwick 1986, pp. 315-318 and Haslam 1988.

⁸⁰ This is recounted by F. J. Furnivall, see 10.lx.

⁸¹ Ruskin was elected as Slade Professor, when the Chair was endowed according to the will of Felix Slade. See Emslie 1904, p. 36 and Mackmurdo undated, chapter ii, p. 31. His inaugural lecture was held during Hilary Term, 1870 at the Sheldonian Theatre, because of the large audience (20.xlvii). W. G. Collingwood described his teaching in glowing terms: “As a teacher, Mr. Ruskin was most engaging. What is called ‘personal magnetism,’ the attraction of a powerful mind and intensely sympathetic manner, he exercised to the highest degree over all with whom he came into personal contact. His enthusiasm for the subject in hand, his obvious devotion to his work, his unselfish readiness to take any trouble over it, his extreme consideration for the feelings of any man, woman or child, high or low, clever or stupid, in his company, his vivacity and humour and imagination, all spent, as the pupil proudly felt, ‘on little me,’ made him simply adored” (Collingwood 1893, I, p. 188). For further testimony, from Rossetti, Holman Hunt and others, about Ruskin at the Working Men’s College, see Atwood 2011, p. 53.

⁸² See Rose 1985, p. 50.

Image, Hardwicke Rawnsley or his editors E. T. Cook & A. Wedderburn, sat in his classes. My aim in what follows is not to cover the whole of Ruskin's pedagogical ideas.⁸³ Rather, I wish to sketch some aspects that are relevant to my narrative. Ruskin used the classroom not only for lecturing about his ideas, but also to impart them *via* drawing lessons. This is, after all, part and parcel on the construction of what I called, in chapter 1, 'Ruskin's eye'.

Ruskin's avowed aim behind his teaching, both at the Working Men's College and at Oxford, was not to train artists *per se*, but to promote art appreciation to a wider audience as part of their general education. In W. G. Collingwood's words, Ruskin's intentions were "*not to make artists, but to make the workmen better men, to develop their powers and feelings, – to educate them, in short*",⁸⁴ and

[Ruskin']s whole influence with students and artists has been given to make them better men, that is, with broader sympathies and keener intellectual habits. [...] His first great attempt at teaching, at the Working Men's College, was, as he said in his evidence before the National Gallery Commission, directed towards the general culture of the pupils rather than to their special training in Art; and although they did, in some cases, become very good painters or engravers or teachers, none of them have come before the public as popular artists. It would be a serious mistake, then, to read his works in the hope of learning any secret of professional success.⁸⁵

Perhaps because art education from children to continuing education is almost perpetually under attack today, one is aware of its importance. But one should not lose sight of the revolutionary aspect of the idea of teaching art outside of specialized schools, such as the Royal Academy or the South Kensington, especially to London's

⁸³ For overviews of Ruskin on education, see *Thwing 1916*, pp. 74-130, *Haslam 2000* and *Atwood 2011*. For the influence of his views on education in Canada, see *Grant 2006*, pp. 140-171.

⁸⁴ Collingwood 1893, I, p. 188.

⁸⁵ *Collingwood 1891*, pp. 340-341. Ruskin's intentions are also reported by Llewelyn Davies, a former student and colleague at the Working Men's College. See *Llewelyn Davies 1904*, pp. 34 & 46-47.

working class,⁸⁶ and to make art education part of the curriculum. At his inaugural lecture, as Slade Professor in 1870, he presented his ambitions thus:

I conceive it to be the function of this Professorship, with respect to [the present conditions of art], to establish both a practical and critical school of fine art for English gentlemen: practical, so that, if they draw at all, they may draw rightly; and critical, so that, being first directed to such works of existing art as will best reward their study, they may afterwards make their patronage of living artists delightful to themselves in their consciousness of its justice, and, to the utmost, beneficial to their country, by being given to the men who deserve it [...].⁸⁷

This view might be supplemented by an early letter on 'The Arts as a Branch of Education', in 1857, written when his opinion had been solicited on the possibility of art education at Oxford.⁸⁸ Ruskin then wrote:

I think the art examination should have three objects:

- (1) To put the happiness and knowledge, which the study of art conveys within the conception of the youth, so that he may in after-life pursue them, if he has the gift.
- (2) To enforce, as far as possible, such knowledge of art among those who are likely to become its patrons, or the guardians of its works, as may enable them usefully to fulfil those duties.

⁸⁶ Incidentally, Ruskin did not see any reason for excluding women from art education, see 16. 147-148. He had contacts with the headmistress of Winnington School, herself much influenced by the Christian socialism of Bishop Colenso and F. D. Maurice, and he lent an enormous amount of money in support of that institution. See *Burd 1969*, p. 640 and *Birch 2002*, p. 124. Moreover, women had won the right to attend university lectures in 1866, and Ruskin's lectures were very popular among them (*Birch 2002*, p. 127). Alas, the opening of the first women halls, Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville came after Ruskin's first resignation, in 1879, but he became a supporter, visiting them, making donations, etc. (*Birch 2002*, p. 128-129), and his interest for women's education was not restricted to Oxford, but also to women's colleges in Cambridge, etc. On Ruskin and women's education, see also *Lloyd 1995* and *Atwood 2011*, chapter 3, and, about the influence in Canada, *Grants 2006*, pp. 153-171.

⁸⁷ 20.27-28.

⁸⁸ 16.449-454. See *Acland 1858*.

(3) To distinguish pre-eminent gift for the production of works of art, so as to get hold of all the good artistical faculty born in the country, and leave no Giotto lost among hill-shepherds.⁸⁹

To these, one may, finally, add the testimony of J. P. Emslie, who had followed Ruskin's classes the Working Men's College, and who later became a professional artist and taught there:

[Ruskin's] wish was to teach men drawing in order that they might see greater beauties than they had hitherto seen in nature and in art, and thereby gain more pleasure in life: if they had the artistic gift it would ultimately display itself.⁹⁰

From these passages, we can see that, over and above training Oxford students that might become patrons of the arts, Ruskin's main concern was to teach art to the public primarily in order for them not only to develop an appreciation of art, by learning to draw and discovering not just how difficult it is, but also literally how to see, so that one can draw. In doing so, one might further one's appreciation of nature, and thus reconnect with it – we hit here on the theme of the 'moral' link to nature. This, it was presumed, would enhance their lives and make them better citizens, while any artistic talent might be encouraged to pursue his studies.

In relation to this, Ruskin held another clearly revolutionary view, as he abolished the distinction between artist and amateur. We can pry Ruskin's reasons from a letter to his student Louisa Stuart, Marchioness of Waterford:

I am not surer of anything I know, than of this, that there is no real occasion for the gulph of separation between amateur and artist – The existing reason is simply this – that people think drawing can be learn't in play, while they feel – & I know – that *music* requires fingering for four hours a day – for some years. Now drawing CANNOT be learn't in play. It is much more easy than singing – or playing on any instrument. But it *must* have its scales learn't – it must have its grammar & method & practice learn't – by *some*

⁸⁹ 16.450.

⁹⁰ Emslie 1904, p. 47. Emslie engraved some of the plates for *The Modern Painters V*. See 7.lxii. Ruskin hired former students of the Working Men's College to engrave images for his works.

degree of dull labour – and your drawings have upon me exactly the effect which, if you had great inventive power in music – suppose Cimarosa’s – & had never received a lesson – you would produce on any ordinary musician by sitting down to a piano & trying to express your ideas powerfully – with utterly unpracticed fingers... be assured of this – that in drawing, as in music, the greatest *power* can only be attained by those who have capacity of greatest tenderness: that with *refinement* you gain at once grasp and decision—and that in truly good drawing, *first rate* drawing, – there are multitudes of passages in which if you can *see* the touch you have put on the paper – it is *too coarse* – It ought to have its effect – together with others, in time, but if itself definitely visible – it is too dark.⁹¹

Ruskin argues here that there is no difference between artists and amateurs in what they *do*, and that they both need practice. For him, art “learn’t in play” does not exist, and if it does, it is learning of something other than painting and drawing. So, the question of status of the ‘artist’ vs. the ‘amateur’ is meaningless to him. So, when Collingwood writes, as quoted above, on his behalf that he meant “*not to make artists*” of working men but “to develop their powers and feelings”, thus “to educate them”, he simply meant not to make them *professional* artists.

Art education was a means for Ruskin to impart to others the very aesthetic ideals, that we explored in chapters 2-3. The point might usefully be introduced by considering the ‘two paths’ in the eponymous series of lectures. In the second one, delivered at Manchester in February 1859, the two paths are introduced succinctly:

[...] here are your two paths for you: it is required of you to produce conventional ornament, and you may approach the task as the Hindoo does, and as the Arab did, without nature at all, with the chance of approximating your dispositions somewhat to that of the Hindoos and the Arabs; or as Sir Joshua [Reynolds] and Velasquez did, with, not the chance, but the certainty, of approximating your disposition, according to the sincerity of your effort – to the disposition of those great and good men.⁹²

⁹¹ *Surtees* 1972, p. 8.

⁹² 16.310.

If we abstract from the examples meant to illustrate the distinction, in essence the two paths are: either one learns conventions or tries to get at natural facts. Earlier in this lecture, he also called these two approaches, respectively, 'idealism' and 'realism'.⁹³ This brings us back to the overturning of Reynolds in chapter 2, although, confusingly, Reynolds now appears on the opposite side: Ruskin was then criticizing his thoughts on art, but now he was praising him in an attempt to contrast the 'realism' of British art from the 'idealism' of Indian and Arabic art. In the first lecture, given at the South Kensington Museum – today's Victoria & Albert Museum – in January 1858, he inveighed against the later in no uncertain terms:

It is quite true that the art of India is delicate and refined. But it has one curious character distinguishing it from all other art of equal merit in design – *it never represents a natural fact*. It either forms its compositions out of meaningless fragments of colour and flowings of the line; or, if it represents any living creature, it represents that creature under some distorted and monstrous form. To all the facts and forms of nature it wilfully and resolutely opposes itself: it will not draw a man, but an eight-armed monster; it will not draw a flower, but only a spiral or a zigzag.⁹⁴

I shall not, for reasons explained in chapter 1, discuss further what Mark Crinson has described as the "overt racism" of Ruskin in these lectures.⁹⁵ I should simply mention, following Crinson, that Ruskin meant this contrast as an attack upon the curriculum set by Richard Redgrave and Henry Cole at the South Kensington School (attached to the Museum), about which more below. I am more interested in the nature of the contrast: we can see that the path of 'conventions' supposedly led away from nature, while the other path, towards "expressive representation of fact",⁹⁶ means developing the 'moral' link with nature – this being the reason why Ruskin, commenting on the Indian Mutiny

⁹³ 16.304.

⁹⁴ 16.265.

⁹⁵ *Crinson 1996*, p. 60.

⁹⁶ 15.95.

of 1857-58, associates in this lecture Indian art with cruelty, cowardice, etc.⁹⁷ But at heart this is the contrast underlying our discussion in chapter 2. Indeed, where Ruskin argued, as we saw, against the wish to 'generalise' because one believes that one should paint the 'archetype', he argues here against the 'conventions', which is just to say that the supposed-to-be 'archetype' is in his eyes nothing but 'convention'. Thus, Ruskin aimed in his lectures first to introduce students to drawing, in order to get them to learn by themselves to see. This passage from his lectures at the Working Men's College illustrates very well what he intended to partake:

Now, remember, gentlemen, that I have not been trying to teach you to draw, only to *see*. Two men are walking through Clare Market, one of them comes out at the other end not a bit wiser than when he went in; the other notices a bit of parsley hanging over the edge of a butter-women's basket, and carries away with him images of beauty which in the course of his daily work he incorporates with it for many a day. I want you to see things like these.⁹⁸

His various lectures on art are indeed is replete not just with technical remarks, but also with advice to students to grapple by themselves the basics of drawing, such as this one from the *Lectures on Landscape* (1871), which embodies the very advice discussed in section 3.1:

Choose, then, a subject that interests you; and so far as failure of time or materials compels you to finish one part, or express one character, rather than another, of course dwell on the features that interest you most. But beyond this, forget, or even somewhat repress yourself, and make it your first object to give a true idea of the place to other people. You are not to endeavour to express your own feelings about it; if anything, err on the side of concealing them. What is best is not to think of yourself at all, but to state as plainly and simply as you can the whole truth of the thing. What you think unimportant in it may to another person be the most touching part

⁹⁷ 16.263.

⁹⁸ 15.xx-xxi. As Ruskin also writes: "drawing ought to be used to fix the attention, and test, while it aided, the memory" (16.145).

of it: what you think beautiful may be in truth commonplace and of small value.⁹⁹

This comment is quite interesting to reflect upon in terms of what Michel Foucault called, following Pierre Hadot, “*techniques de soi*”.¹⁰⁰ These are practices that forge the self, and in this context they remind one of what Daston & Galison described as the suppression of subjectivity as one strives for objectivity.¹⁰¹ The latter had in mind techniques for the scientific self, but given his idea of a ‘moral’ link involved in the experience of nature, in Ruskin’s case any such ‘technique’ is for the ethical self.¹⁰²

In relation to the line, about which I shall talk in section 4.4, *Elements of Drawing* has an interesting passage, where ‘vital truth’ comes to the fore:

[...] whatever skill you may reach, there will always be need of judgement to choose, and of speed to seize, certain things that are principal and fugitive; and you must more and more effort daily to the observance of characteristic points, and the attainment of concise methods.

104. I have directed your attention early to foliage for two reasons. First, that it is always accessible as a study; and secondly, that its modes of growth present simple examples of the importance of leading or governing lines. It is by seizing these leading lines, when we cannot seize all, that likeness and expression are given to a portrait, and grace and a kind of vital truth to the rendering of every natural form. I call it vital truth, because these chief lines are always expressive of the past history and present action of the thing.¹⁰³

By this, Ruskin means, for example in the case of a mountain that its leading lines are expressive of the forces that caused its formation and of the forces that wear it away, etc. The idea of seeking to capture leading lines indicative of vital truth, because “we cannot seize all” is very much the expression of Ruskin’s aesthetic ideals. The idea of

⁹⁹ 22.28-29.

¹⁰⁰ Foucault 2014. Hadot spoke rather of “*exercices spirituels*” in Hadot 2002.

¹⁰¹ Daston & Galison 2007, p. 374. See also pp. 198-199.

¹⁰² For example, Ruskin would insist in the same lectures that only “natural phenomena in their direct relation to humanity” is to be the subject in landscape (22.17).

¹⁰³ 15.90-91.

'leading lines' was, of course, influential on the Arts and Crafts movement, for example one finds a clear expression of it in Walter Crane's *Line and Form*:

When we look at a landscape, putting aside for the moment all the surface charms of colour and effect, and concentrating our attention upon its lines and structures, we shall find that it owes a great part of its beauty to the harmonious relation of its leading lines, or to certain pleasant contrasts, or a certain impressiveness of form and mass, and at the same time we shall perceive that this linear expression is inseparable from the sentiment or emotion suggested by that particular scene.¹⁰⁴

The idea of the "linear expression" being "inseparable from the sentiment or emotion suggested by that particular scene" is a vindication of sorts of my reading of Ruskin on exploring one's emotional resonance to the scenery.

Ruskin's teaching about drapery will be my last illustration. When one observes how fabric falls, say, over a rod to make a graceful drapery, or the same fabric wrapped around a statue, the resulting drapery is different. Every time one throws fabric over the rod or wraps it over the same statue, the resulting drapery is never the same. The drapery of a dress worn by a living person is again different, and as that person moves, the drapery changes its shape, etc. Thus, one must observe how drapery results in each case. When it comes to draw a drapery, says Ruskin, "The first thing you have to ask is, Is it scientifically right? That is still nothing, but it is essential."¹⁰⁵ Then, Ruskin promises to his students that he will enable

[...] you to make accurate studies from real drapery, so that you may be able to detect in a moment whether the folds in any design are natural and true to the form, or artificial and ridiculous.¹⁰⁶

To Ruskin, this is basic training and not at all the goal of art education. Ruskin continues:

¹⁰⁴ Crane 1900, p. 158.

¹⁰⁵ 22.219.

¹⁰⁶ 22.219-220.

But this, which is the science of drapery, will never do more than guard you in your first attempts in the art of it. Nay, when once you have mastered the elements of such science, the most sickening of all works to you will be that in which the draperies are all right, – and nothing else is. In the present state of our schools one of the chief mean merits against which I shall have to warn you is the imitation of what milliners admire: nay, in many a piece of the best art I shall have to show you that the draperies are, to some extent, intentionally ill-done, *lest* you should look at them. Yet, through every complexity of desirableness, and counter-peril, hold to the constant and simple law I have always given you – that the best work must be right in the beginning, and lovely in the end.¹⁰⁷

This echoes strongly his comment on Brett's *Val d'Aosta* mentioned in 3.3, and one is also reminded Ruskin's dissatisfaction at daguerreotypes and his own drawing of the Tour of Fribourg being distorted in order to show the steepness that he felt upon looking it.¹⁰⁸

Now, soon after he began teaching in Oxford, Ruskin realised that the level of drawing skills was very low and that he needed to improve upon the teaching of it in the South Kensington School:

[...] after carefully considering the operation of the Kensington system of Art-teaching throughout the country, and watching for two years its effect on various classes of students at Oxford, I became finally convinced that it fell short of its objects in more than one vital particular: and I have, therefore, obtained permission to found a separate Mastership of Drawing in connection with the Art Professorship at Oxford.¹⁰⁹

This is the 'Ruskin School of Drawing', founded in 1871, which was to occupy part of what is now the Ashmolean Museum on Beaumont St.¹¹⁰ Ruskin believed that Henry

¹⁰⁷ 22.220.

¹⁰⁸ See above, section 3.4.

¹⁰⁹ 27.159. Compare *Cook 1891*, p. 65.

¹¹⁰ For more information, including on the Galleries, see *Hewison 1996*, pp. 19-22, *University of Oxford undated*.

Cole's Programme at South Kensington falls short of what he thinks is proper for that task:

The Professorship of Sir Henry Cole at Kensington has corrupted the system of art-teaching all over England into a state of abortion and falsehood from which it will take twenty years to recover.¹¹¹

The actual programme was devised by Richard Redgrave, a Royal Academician who worked with Cole as Art superintendent of Department of Practical Art,¹¹² along the following lines:

There are three stages of instruction in design : –
 The first. – The acquisition of *technical* skill, consisting of the power of *imitating* the form and colour of objects, acquired by carefully copying the fine examples of former times, and the works of Nature.
 The second. – The inculcation of a pure taste in design, together *with the exposition of the principles* upon which those fine examples have been composed, and their adaptation to the end for which they were composed, and including, therefore, the knowledge required to form *original* combinations *from Nature*, and to apply them to the new purposes required.
 The third. – The knowledge of manufacturing processes, with which the masters should be conversant, that they may be able to direct design into the proper channels, and to teach the students to unite beauty and fitness with practicability.¹¹³

The resulting programme had 22 stages (see Plate # 4.3),¹¹⁴ beginning with learning to draw with geometrical instruments and all but the last one was meant to train students strictly to imitate. Only the 22nd was a true design course:

Hitherto [up until the twenty-second step], the study of the pupil has been strictly imitative; that is to say, he has obtained technical skill in the use of his tools and materials by means of exact imitation, and in this respect the route of the artist and the ornamentist has been so far the same. But in this stage the special direction of the latter, which had as yet only been

¹¹¹ 29.154.

¹¹² On Redgrave see Casteras & Parkinson 1988.

¹¹³ Redgrave 1891, p.358.

¹¹⁴ Casteras & Parkinson 1988, p. 54 or Appendix C of MacDonald 1970, pp. 388-391.

suggested by the examples used for the purpose of study, becomes real; and the ornamentist enters upon the consideration of the fundamental principles wherein his art differs from Fine Art.¹¹⁵

Training was mostly two-dimensional, even for three-dimensional objects, Redgrave insisting that even sketching a flower should be in two dimensions:

It [students' training] consisted first in the ornamental analyses of plants and flowers, displaying each part separately according to its normal law of growth, not as they appear viewed perspectively, but diagrammatically flat to the eye; so treated, it was found that almost all plants contain many distinct ornamental elements, and that the motives to be derived from the vegetable kingdom were inexhaustible. Moreover, this flat display of the plant was especially suitable to the requirement of the manufacturer, to reproduction by painting, weaving, stamping, &c., to which naturalistic renderings do not readily lend themselves.¹¹⁶

Ruskin believed that this pedagogical system "crushes the imagination" by fostering in students "painstaking attention to technical detail".¹¹⁷ He expressed his objections in the preface to *Elements of Drawing*¹¹⁸, where he described it as attempting to give students "such accurate command of mathematical forms as may afterwards enable him to design rapidly and cheaply of manufactures".¹¹⁹ But that is not at all decorative art in Ruskin's sense, because students are not trained to be capable of using their own creative power. Underneath this, there lies a misconception about the nature of decorative art:

Of the fitness of the modes of study adopted in those schools [including the South Kensington], to the end specially intended, judgement is hardly yet

¹¹⁵ Lecture given by Redgrave on 27 November 1852, quoted in *Frayling 1987*, p. 42.

¹¹⁶ *Redgrave & Redgrave 1866*, II p. 565.

¹¹⁷ *University of Oxford undated*, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ It is to be noted that *Elements of Drawing* was written out of Ruskin's experience of teaching at the Working Men's College and both Ruskin and the Working Men's College recognizes the connection between his teaching and writing: "This is the first year in which the teachers have given any of the lessons they have delivered in the College to the world. We believe we may claim some share in the origination of Mr. Ruskin's book on the Elements of Drawing." (*Working Men's College 1858*, p. 4). See also *Harrison 1954*, p. 68, *Haslam 2000*, p. 150-151.

¹¹⁹ 15.11.

possible; only, it seems to me, that we are all too much in the habit of confusing art as *applied* to manufacture, with manufacture itself. For instance, the skill by which an inventive workman designs and moulds a beautiful cup, is skill of true art; but the skill by which that cup is copied and afterwards multiplied a thousandfold, is skill of manufacture: and the faculties which enable one workman to design and elaborate his original piece, are not to be developed by the same system of instruction as those which enable another to produce a maximum number of approximate copies of it in a given time.¹²⁰

Ruskin's chief criticism, therefore, is that this system lets considerations pertaining to manufacture interfere with education of the artist, while the latter should come first, unhindered: "Obtain first the best work you can, and the ablest hands, irrespective of any consideration of economy or facility of production". Or, as he also put it: "Try first to manufacture a Raphael; then let Raphael direct your manufacture".¹²¹

This point is of importance in the rise of the guilds and the Arts and Crafts movement to be described in the next section, because it was enormously influential. For example, it is essentially the same reasons that William Morris criticized in turn the South Kensington school:

The fact is these schools were not intended to turn out what are conventionally termed artists, they were intended first for general artistic education, and second or the special education of those who design for industrial arts. As for the result of the second of these purposes, I have some doubts if it has quite answered the expectations formed, as for that of the first I suppose it has not been disappointing on the whole.¹²²

It is also fitting to recall that this emphasis on beginning with a true art course was kept in the 20th century, most notably in the *Vorkurs* at the Bauhaus, at least when it was taught at first by Johannes Itten.¹²³

¹²⁰ 15.11-12.

¹²¹ 15.11.

¹²² *Morris 1969*, p. 46. On Morris and South Kensington, see *Morris 1975*.

¹²³ See *Wick 2000*, chapter 5. This is not surprising, given that Ruskin and Morris formed part of the background. See *Wick 2000*, pp. 17-20.

4.3. On 'Guilds'

Ruskin would say of Medieval stonemasons: "the right question to ask, respecting all ornament, is simply this: Was it done with enjoyment – was the carver happy while he was about it?"¹²⁴ Abolishing the distinction between 'artist' and 'amateur' should be put side by side with one of the most important pronouncements of 'The Nature of Gothic', against the division of labour:

We have much studied and much perfected, of late, the great civilized invention of the division of labour; only to give it a false name. It is not, truly speaking, the labour which is divided; but the men: – Divided into mere segments of men – broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail. Now it is a good and desirable thing, truly, to make many pins in a day; but if we could only see with what crystal sand their points were polished, – sand of human soul, much to be magnified before it can be discerned for what it is – we should think there might be some loss in it also. And the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blast, is all in very deed for this, – that we manufacture everything except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages.¹²⁵

This critique of division of labour was not, however, thought of as part of a grander scheme such as the critique of capitalism that Marx developed during the same period, and Ruskin has been perceived and criticized from that perspective as a reactionary.¹²⁶ Ruskin's claim seems limited to the idea that the machine, with division of labour into

¹²⁴ 8.218. See also 10.192-3 and 29.137: "The *Stones of Venice* taught the laws of constructive Art, and the dependence of all human work or edifice, for its beauty, on the happy life of the workman."

¹²⁵ 10.196.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Raymond Williams' indictment of Ruskin in *Williams 1963*, chapter 7, especially pp. 145-6.

segmented repetitive tasks, has taken away any possibility of deriving any pleasure in one's work:

It is verily this degradation of the operative into a machine, which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for a freedom of which they cannot explain the nature to themselves. Their universal outcry against wealth, and against nobility, is not forced from them either by the pressure of famine, or the sting of mortified pride. These do much, and have done much in all ages; but the foundations of society were never yet shaken as they are at this day. It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure.¹²⁷

But Ruskin definitely shared Marx's outrage at the terrible effects of industrialisation on working families, and it would be wrong to portray his stance as merely conservative and merely nostalgic of the Medieval past. As Michael Alexander put it, in such a stance "there is more of machine-breaking than of nostalgia".¹²⁸ This outrage at the destructive effects of 'the machine' on human lives (to which Ruskin added its effects on nature) also leads to one of the keys to his thinking about art, as he argued that there should be no division between intellectual and manual labour, for example, between the architect and the stonemason:

We are always in these days endeavouring to separate the two; we want one man to be always thinking, and another to be always working, and we call one a gentleman, and the other an operative; whereas the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker often to be working, and both should be gentlemen, in the best sense. As it is, we make both ungentle, the one envying, the other despising, his brother; and the mass of society is made up of morbid thinkers, and miserable workers. [...] It would be well if all of us were good handicraftsmen in some kind, and the dishonour of manual labour done away with altogether; so that though there should still be a trenchant distinction of race between nobles and commoners, there should not, among the latter, be a trenchant distinction of employment, as

¹²⁷ 10.194. One should recall here that these lines were written within a few years of the 1848 uprisings.

¹²⁸ *Alexander 2017*, p. 88.

between idle and working men, or between men of liberal and illiberal professions.¹²⁹

We can see here again that Ruskin's critique was not meant to undermine social order, if that meant getting rid of the privileges of aristocracy (the word 'race' being understood here in its old meaning, close to 'genealogy'), but the essential lesson is not there, it is in his rejection of the division of labour, which he illustrates a few lines below: "The painter should grind his own colours; the architect work in the mason's yard with his men".¹³⁰

Now, when this refusal to divide labour between architect and the stonemason is put side-by-side with the refusal to distinguish between artist and amateur, one can see how Ruskin envisaged stonemasons not as mere 'amateurs' employed to bring to life the ideas of some idle artist, but fully as artist, as they express themselves in their work, and we have here the basis for his wanting to revive the Medieval model of the 'guild'. There is more than mere 'Medievalism' here.¹³¹ This idea is certainly the root of Morris' utopian vision of *News from Nowhere*, which is not mere nostalgia of Medieval ages shorn of all its defects (the Black Death, peasant's revolts, etc.),¹³² as it is the source of the typically British form of 'guild socialism', first with *The Restoration of the Gild System* by the Ruskin-inspired architect A. J. Pentty,¹³³ and culminating in S. G. Hobson's *National Guilds. An Inquiry into the Wage System and the Way Out* and G. D. H. Cole's *Guild Socialism Restated*.¹³⁴ (This guild system collapsed in the early

¹²⁹ 10.201.

¹³⁰ 10.201.

¹³¹ It appears that it is even Ruskin who coined the term 'Mediaevalism' in 1854, while talking about epochs in architecture, see *Alexander 2017*, p. xxvi. On the concept of Medievalism, see *Matthews 2015*, and on Medievalism in Britain, *Alexander 2017*.

¹³² On this point, see *Matthews 2015*, p. 28.

¹³³ *Pentty 1906*. On Pentty, see *Swenarton 1989*, chapter 6.

¹³⁴ *Orage 1914* and *Cole 1920*.

1920s.) Arthur Penty stated the essential role of Ruskin in this 'guild socialism' in 1914:

Now the difficulty which faces the reformer in these days when there are no established standards of thought and everything is in a state of flux, is to determine what is truth. If, however, we can get certainty at one point we may ultimately get certainty all round. And Ruskin fixed it for us at one point, once and for ever. The aesthetic truth that the artist and craftsman must be one has a profound sociological significance, for not only does it call in question the whole basis of modern industrialism, but it gives us the key to the problems of social organisation. I have no hesitation in saying that the discovery that the artist and craftsman should be one was the greatest discovery of the nineteenth century. Once grasp that fact and everything else follows from it. The social fabric may be reconstructed from that one fragment of truth. It is because this truth has been tested over and over again and never fails that the Mediævalist is so obstinate in the position he has taken up.¹³⁵

This much probably goes beyond what Ruskin would have been ready to countenance, but, to keep to the metaphor of the 'new road' at the beginning of this chapter, it is an idea that fellow travellers found when they committed themselves to that path. This idea is also very productive because it allows us to understand more clearly why he argued against, as we saw in the previous section, the distinction between 'fine' and 'applied' arts. This is the essential message that struck Ruskin's contemporaries, from Morris to Van de Velde. The point is of importance, if one wishes to understand these figures, as opposed to standing in judgement of Ruskin as we erect our norms as the standard: as explained in section 1.4, I am trying to understand figures such as Morris in terms of what they took from their background. How did they read and reacted to Ruskin? How did they push what they took from him in new directions?

¹³⁵ Penty 1914, p. 683.

As Morris said himself: "it is impossible to exclude socio-political questions from the considerations of aesthetics".¹³⁶ In the preface to the Kelmscott edition of 'The Nature of Gothic' he wrote:

[...] the lesson which Ruskin here teaches us is that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour; that it is possible for man to rejoice in his work, for, strange as it may seem to us to-day, there have been times when he did rejoice in it.¹³⁷

And he added an interesting reference to Owen and Fourier:

I know indeed that Ruskin is not the first man who has put forward the possibility and the urgent necessity that men should take pleasure in Labour; for Robert Owen showed how by companionship and good will labour might be made at least endurable; & in France Charles Fourier dealt with the subject at great length; & the whole of his elaborate system for the reconstruction of society is founded on the certain hope of gaining pleasure from labour. But in their times neither Owen nor Fourier could possibly have found the key to the problem with which Ruskin was provided.¹³⁸

The 'key to the problem' is, according to Morris, simply art: it is possible for one to rejoice in one's work if it involves one's artistic expression, which is derived from one's emotional engagement with nature. Nine years earlier, Morris had already delivered that very message during a lecture at Oxford attended by Ruskin, 'Art under Plutocracy':

My reason for this hope for art is founded on what I feel quite sure is a truth, and an important one, namely that all art, even the highest, is influenced by the conditions of labour of the mass of mankind, and that any pretensions which may be made for even the highest intellectual art to be independent of these general conditions are futile and vain [...] ART IS MAN'S EXPRESSION OF HIS JOY IN LABOUR. If those are not Professor Ruskin's words they embody at least his teaching on this subject. Nor has any truth more important ever been stated: for if pleasure in labour be generally possible, what a strange folly it must be for men to consent to

¹³⁶ Morris 1966, XXII, p. 332.

¹³⁷ Morris 1892, p. i.

¹³⁸ Morris 1892, pp. iii-iv.

labour without pleasure; and what a hideous injustice it must be for society to compel most men to labour without pleasure!¹³⁹

In *Bible of Amiens* – translated in French by Marcel Proust – Ruskin confirmed that Morris understood him right, in speaking of “the truth which Mr. Morris dwelt so earnestly in his recent address to you—that the excellence of the work is, *ceteris paribus*, in proportion of the joy of the workman”.¹⁴⁰

As we just saw Ruskin was not developing a Marxist philosophy of history, but Morris wanted to combine the Marxist analysis of the development of the economic structure underlying the production of art, from Medieval ages to the 19th century, with Ruskin’s view on the development of art during the same period. This meant that the rise of modern capitalism and ‘commercialism’ during the Renaissance was coupled with Ruskin’s critique of the (moral) degeneration of Western art that began some time during that period (in *The Stones of Venice*, he locates this in the early 15th century).¹⁴¹

The theme of ‘commercialism’, which developed here from Ruskin’s and Morris’ critique of ‘the machine’, became a dominant one in the mind of artists of the Arts and Crafts movement. Walter Crane devoted one chapter of *The Claims of Decorative Art* to it,¹⁴² While C. R. Ashbee was to write in 1909:

[...] industrial methods, and the methods of Craftmanship are incompatible [...] where machine reduplication enters the winged spirit flies away. [...] Profit-mongering through the agency of the machine, and Ruskin’s Lamp of Sacrifice are entirely incompatible.¹⁴³

Commercialism was to be, as we shall see in section 6.2, among the main charges against Art Nouveau by British Arts and Crafts artists.

¹³⁹ Morris 1966, XXIII, p. 173. Morris repeats the same message in different lectures. See, for example, Morris 1966, XXII, pp. 42, 46-7, 141 & 165.

¹⁴⁰ 33.386.

¹⁴¹ See Morris 1966, XXII, pp. 16f. for a statement along these lines.

¹⁴² Crane 1892, pp. 122-139.

¹⁴³ Ashbee 1909, pp. 10-11.

Morris also entertained the idea that in his times the tide has turned, that there is a revolution in the making so to speak, which gives him hope in the 'revival of handicrafts',¹⁴⁴ a revolution both in the arts and in society that will bring about some new order in society inspired by the Medieval system of guilds of craftsmen. One can see these very ideas at work in the following passage (obviously in reference to Pre-Raphaelite painters):

[...] those only among our painters do work worth considering whose minds have managed to leap back across the intervening years, across the waste of gathering commercialism, into the later Middle Ages [...] Anyone who wants beauty to be produced at the present day in any branch of the fine arts, I care not what, must be always crying out 'Look back! look back!'.¹⁴⁵

In 'The Beauty of Life', Morris credits Ruskin for his role in apparently turning the tide:

It would be ungracious indeed of me who have been so much taught by him that I cannot help feeling continually as I speak that I am echoing his words, to leave out the name of John Ruskin from an account of what has happened since the tide, as we hope, began to turn in the direction of art.¹⁴⁶

*

In relation to these lofty ideals of 'guild socialism', Ruskin's own efforts appear at first sight to be small beer. But they were not without greater effect. To his above endeavours in the classroom, one must add indeed his schemes outside of Academia. While in Oxford, Ruskin also initiated in 1874 a scheme, the Hinksey road-digging project, fostering the idea of public service and personal duty among Oxford students. The plan was to improve a road link west of Oxford, in a low-lying marshland, a scheme for environmental improvement and public sanitation, or, as it was then called

¹⁴⁴ See the eponymous text in *Morris 1966*, XXII, pp. 331-341.

¹⁴⁵ *Morris 1966*, XVI, pp. xx-xxi.

¹⁴⁶ *Morris 1966*, XXII, pp. 59-60.

“landscape improving”,¹⁴⁷ but also a call for social action, as Ruskin wanted students to turn to physical labour with “serviceableness and duty”, as opposed to, say, merely taking part in rowing competitions on the Isis.¹⁴⁸ W. G. Collingwood, whose close relationship with Ruskin originated in this project, also commented many years later: “Not make them into navvies, but to give them a respect for the skilled use of a pick and a trowel, was his intention; just as drawing school was not to make them artists but to show them how hard it was”.¹⁴⁹ To appreciate this remark, one should remember the social class from which Oxford used to draw its students. At all events, it is worth noticing here the connection between his intention behind the Hinksey project and his avowed aims in teaching at the Working Men’s College and at Oxford.

The project was ridiculed but it attracted numerous students of note such as Benson, Collingwood, Rawnsley and Wedderburn, already mentioned, and the social reformers Alfred Milner and Arnold Toynbee, the philosopher R. L. Nettleship and Oscar Wilde.¹⁵⁰ Nettleship was to become the posthumous editor of the great political philosopher T. H. Green (who died in 1882).¹⁵¹ As Stuart Eagles pointed out, their calls for social action form an interesting link between Ruskin, Toynbee and Green.¹⁵² To this, one may add that their influence was meant to extend further than the confines of Oxford academia.

¹⁴⁷ *Eagles 2011*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁸ 22.274.

¹⁴⁹ *Collingwood 1904*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁰ For details, see the carefully study in *Eagles 2011*, chapter 3, especially pp. 103-114. See also *Hilton 2000*, pp. 291-295.

¹⁵¹ For his two major works, see *Green 1883* and *Green 1911*. Green was the main figure behind Oxford’s ‘idealism’ (also called ‘neo-Hegelianism’), and their social philosophy had an enormous impact on the late Victorian society, see *Milne 1962*, *Richter 1964*, *Carter 2003*. According to *Ulam 1951*, Green was also an important source to the Labour party, see the following footnote.

¹⁵² Green was an important force in the development of ‘ethical socialism’, that formed part of the Labour party in the first half of the last century. See *Carter 2003*. The tenets of this ‘ethical socialism’ quite similar to Ruskin’s. For broader studies of the social and political impact of Green and the idealist movement, see *Nicholson 1990* and *den Otter 1996*. This forms an important part of the proper background against which one should evaluate Ruskin’s social-political ideals.

But Ruskin's real ambitions turned around the idea of a 'guild', that germinated around 1870-71. His project evolved throughout the 1870s, until it was granted in 1878 a licence as a limited liability company under the name 'Guild of St George'.¹⁵³ Ruskin first described his plans for it in the very first letter of *Fors Clavigera*.¹⁵⁴ They were clearly summarized by W. G. Collingwood:

Its objects were to set the example of Socialistic capital as opposed to a National debt, and of Socialistic labour as opposed to competitive struggle for life. Each member was required to do some work for his living – without too strict limits as to the kind – and to practice certain precepts of religion and morality, broad enough for general acceptance. He was also required to obey the authority of the Guild, and to contribute a tithe of his income to a common fund, for various objects. These objects were – first: to buy land for the agricultural members to cultivate, paying their rent, not to the other members, but to the company; not refusing machinery, but preferring manual labour. Next, to buy mills and factories, to be likewise owned by the Guild and worked by members – using water power in preference to steam [...] – and making the lives of people employed as well spent as may be, with a fair wage, healthy work, and so forth. The loss on starting was to be made up from the Guild store, but it was anticipated that the honesty of the goods turned out would ultimately make such enterprises pay, even in a commercial world. Then, for the people employed and their families, there would be places of recreation and instruction, supplied by the Guild, and intended to give the agricultural labourer or mill-hand trained from infancy in Guild schools, some insight into Literature, Science and Art – and tastes which his easy position would leave him free to cultivate.¹⁵⁵

Thus, Ruskin did not want to establish a 'colony', with the Guild situated in one specific location, as in Owen's New Lanark; its activities could be dispersed, although in practice they centred around Sheffield. Although still nominally in existence today, the Guild of St George was not a resounding success. At Ruskin's death in 1900, after a period of dormancy in his last ineffective years, it had only 33 companions. Its plans for agriculture at Totley floundered because of mismanagement, and the only major

¹⁵³ Dearden 2010, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵⁴ 27.11-26. The relevant passage begins at p. 13.

¹⁵⁵ Collingwood 1893, II, pp. 156-157.

industrial outputs were the short-lived ‘Laxey cloth’ from a mill on the Isle of Man,¹⁵⁶ and the ‘Langdale linen’, discussed below. It seems that, very quickly, the only activities centred around the library and museum for educational purposes, first at Walkley, near Sheffield, and still in existence today, in its latest reincarnation as part of Sheffield’s Millenium Gallery.

But the artists he influenced organised themselves in guilds across the country. I should simply recall that the *Century Guild of Artists* and *The Fifteen*, (the former founded by A. H. Mackmurdo and Herbert Horne, the latter by L. F. Day and Walter Crane, both in 1882) and the *St George’s Art Society* (founded in 1883 by students of Norman Shaw, including Edward S. Prior, Mervyn Macartney and W. R. Lethaby), merged with the latter in 1884 to form the *Art Worker’s Guild*. This was also the year of the foundation of the Home Arts and Industries Association, which was to federate numerous guilds, and provide exhibitions in parallel to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (itself created in 1887, as we saw). Finally, C. R. Ashbee founded the *Guild and School of Handicrafts* in 1888, in London, which moved in 1902 to Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire.¹⁵⁷

In what follows, I would like, however, merely to illustrate the importance of ‘guilds’ in rural contexts across the British Isles (which included at the time Ireland). I do not aim at exhaustivity, but will simply explore some of the work in guilds federated to the Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) created by Eglantyne Louisa Jebb.¹⁵⁸ Its aim was a form of what Hilary Underwood called “cultural philanthropy”, which, very much in the spirit of Ruskin, sought “to cultivate, artistic feeling” and “a

¹⁵⁶ See Dearden 2010, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵⁷ On Ashbee’s life and the *Guild of Handicrafts*, see MacCarthy 1981.

¹⁵⁸ See Bruce 2001, p. 6, Underwood 2011, pp. 47-48 & 60. Jebb established the forerunner of HAIA in 1877. It took the name HAIA in 1884, and annual exhibitions began in 1885. See Helland 2007, pp. 6-7.

genuine love of the work for its own sake".¹⁵⁹ She provides a concise description of the activities of the HAIA:

The association offered classes in handicrafts – woodcarving, cut and hammered brass work, pottery, leatherwork, textile work or other subjects depending on local traditions and the skills and interests of the class organizer. Classes were free to pupils, and instructors were also usually voluntary.¹⁶⁰

Quoting from the *Magazine of Art* in 1885, she also explains the intention behind the HAIA:

Through this, 'art and its influences' were 'introduced into the humblest homes and remote rural districts'. The association intended to 'develop dormant faculties, to encourage the perceptive powers and to establish habits of application in the pupils', noting that the training was 'a sound preparation for the serious pursuit of trade'. If a class developed a high level of skill, it could be turned into a 'developed industry' giving paid employment to its workers.¹⁶¹

It was, as we can see, more than widening horizons of the lower classes by introducing them to some leisurely pursuits, as opposed to, say, drinking, and a means of social control through this: it was providing means for the trainees to learn how to earn a decent living out of these trades, finding pleasure in one's work, reconnecting along the way with nature – Ruskin's 'moral' link –, as opposed to debilitating work at the factory for indecent wages. Moreover, it was no attempt at imposing some middle-class standard on lower classes, but a means of reviving practices and trades that were already theirs. This 'revival of handicrafts' across the British Isles and Ireland was thus thought of a means to provide countryside inhabitants with a source of income – and they were never far from poverty – more respectful of its environment and regional heritage (as traditional handicrafts would be more attuned to local conditions), so that

¹⁵⁹ Underwood 2011, p. 48.

¹⁶⁰ Underwood 2011, p. 48.

¹⁶¹ Underwood 2011, p. 48.

they would fight against the increasing mechanisation of agriculture and avoid the workhouses instituted in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834¹⁶² or exile to the industrial centres, while continuing their own traditional arts within a ‘culture of sufficiency’, as explained at the beginning of this thesis.

Many members of HAIA also exhibited in international exhibitions so that their art was also known on the Continent. In this way they also played a key role in the transmission of artistic style and ideas of Ruskin to the Continent. In order to illustrate how the ‘revival of handicrafts’ was encouraged under the aegis of HAIA, and inspired by Ruskin’s and Morris’ ideals, I shall focus here on the Lakeland art revival, the Keswick School of Industrial Arts, and Mary Seton Watts’ Compton Potters’ Arts Guild in Surrey. There are, of course, other examples one could discuss, such as that of the Cotswolds craftsmen Ernest Gimson and Ernest & Sidney Barnsley.¹⁶³ Accounting for the role of women within this movement – one of its important social dimensions is that it made room for them – mention ought to be made of Alice Rowland Hart,¹⁶⁴ also trained at the South Kensington school, who became later the founder of the Donegal Industrial Fund. She was clearly sympathetic to the views of Ruskin and Morris and we can see her endeavours as implementing them.¹⁶⁵ Hart certainly played a key role in the transmission of Celtic motifs to the Continent through national and international exhibitions in London, Paris, etc. and through media such as *The Studio*.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² See *Barringer 2005*, pp. 94-95, for the importance of this issue. The Poor Law was amended (in 1834) under the principle that the poor conditions in the workhouses would be a deterrent to natural laziness, by being made an ‘object of wholesome horror’. This expression is often attributed to Jeremy Bentham, for example in *Thompson 2018*, but I have not been able to locate it.

¹⁶³ See *Greensted 1980* and *Greensted 1993*.

¹⁶⁴ For Alice Hart and the Donegal Industrial Fund, see *Helland 2007*, and *Beattie 2009*. Janice Helland’s book is the first in-depth study of the role of women within the HAIA, focussing on Alice Hart and the Donegal Industrial Fund, Ishbel Aberdeen and Irish Industries Association, and the Duchesses of Sutherland (Harriet, Anne and Millicent) and the Scottish Home Industries.

¹⁶⁵ *Helland 2007*, pp. 34 & 37.

¹⁶⁶ *Helland 2007*, p. 27, *Beattie 2009*, p. 60.

The Lakeland arts revival was closest to Ruskin's house, Brantwood, on the shores of Coniston Waters in the Lake District. He was acquainted with its main figures, and watched the development with benevolence, but was already incapacitated by mental illness by the early 1880s and incapable of any sort of active involvement. The Lake District is one of Britain's most scenic regions, where many artists lived permanently or parts of the year; it was popularized by poems from Coleridge and Wordsworth, who lived in Grassmere, not far from Coniston. Its striking beauty was at risk from industrial development, mining, etc. – for example, slate mining on the Old Man of Coniston in direct view from Brantwood. Ruskin and others successfully fought to preserve it. The National Trust was born of such efforts at preserving both nature and the rural setting itself Nature – the full name is *The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty*.¹⁶⁷

The Lakeland arts revival was initiated by Ruskin's friends Albert Fleming and Marion Twelves, who revived the local industry of hand spinning, running their business following Ruskin's precepts. They both joined the Guild of St. George in 1883,¹⁶⁸ and Langdale Linen even became part of the Guild of St George and known as the 'Ruskin Linen Industry'.¹⁶⁹ They are said to have been "eagerly sought after"¹⁷⁰ because of their quality, and even *Liberty's* bought them on several occasions.¹⁷¹ Their motifs were Ruskinian inasmuch as they promoted natural shapes.¹⁷² Because of the demands of the technique, the motif of a typical 'Ruskin Lace' is, however, geometrical (plate # 4.4), but there are some examples that contain curved lines (Plate # 4.5).¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ This was no incidental matter but a cause they truly believed in. Rawnsley and Ashbee even toured America in order to lecture on the National Trust. See *Hall 2003*, p. 354.

¹⁶⁸ *Haslam 2004*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁹ *Dearden 2010*, p. 16-17.

¹⁷⁰ *Cook 1891*, p. 173.

¹⁷¹ *Haslam 2004*, p. 75.

¹⁷² *Haslam 2004*, p. 167.

¹⁷³ I would like to thank Ms. Vicky Slowe, the director of Ruskin Museum, Coniston for her help in examining linens in their collection.

The establishment of the Keswick School of Industrial Art goes back to the winter 1883-84. As a former student of Ruskin at Oxford and lifelong admirer of him, Canon Hardwicke D. Rawnsley put his ideas into practice and initiated the revival of traditional local craft of metal works and woodcarving.¹⁷⁴ The aesthetic ideals of Ruskin were implemented: for example, design would take as a source not only other artistic works in the form of plaster casts and photographs, but also traditional local designs and direct drawing from nature.¹⁷⁵ Some of the products would be designed by Walter Crane, William Holman Hunt, and G. F. Watts.¹⁷⁶

Traditional Keswick design included the Norse 'worm-twist'¹⁷⁷ design (Plate # 4.6), which is reminiscent of the better-known Celtic 'cord' or 'heart knot'. This is due to Rawnsley's promotion to the revival of Norse-Celtic decoration in the Keswick School.¹⁷⁸ In this, he was greatly aided by W. G. Collingwood, a student of Ruskin inspired in turn by William Morris' own interest in Norse and Celtic cultures.¹⁷⁹ He was able to point the common root between Scandinavian and Celtic motifs.¹⁸⁰ He also initiated archaeological study – in which his son was to distinguish himself – in the Lake District and wrote novels in historical settings such as *Thorstein of the Mere*, again in imitation of Morris. Collingwood was primarily a painter and produced a large quantity of watercolours, but among his other creations, it is worth noting the design of Ruskin's tomb, in style of a Celtic cross (Plate # 4.7).

Of the Keswick craftsmen, Arthur Simpson distinguished himself with his Scandinavian and Celtic motifs, including in Collingwood's own house, Lanehead,

¹⁷⁴ Bruce 2001, pp. 10-13.

¹⁷⁵ Bruce 2001, p. 26.

¹⁷⁶ Rawnsley 1901, p. 124.

¹⁷⁷ This expression is used in Collingwood 1883, p. 121, see Bruce 2001, p. 25 and Townend 2009, p. 198.

¹⁷⁸ Bruce 2001, pp. 25-28. However, Rawnsley was a clergyman, not an artist, and he did not produce any designs himself.

¹⁷⁹ On W. G. Collingwood, see Townend 2009 and Hawkes 2015.

¹⁸⁰ Townend 2009, p. 201. See also Collingwood 1883, pp. 113-116.

which is located about a mile from Brantwood, so that Collingwood could act as some sort of secretary for Ruskin.¹⁸¹ His spinning chair now at the Ruskin Museum is a characteristic example of his art (Plate # 4.8). Among craftsmen of a younger generation, Harold Stabler used Celtic motives (Plate # 4.9) and some of his pieces show a limited tendency towards Art Nouveau (Plate # 4.10). So did the work of the Isobel McBean,¹⁸² for example her prize-winning work from 1898 (Plate # 4.11). It is interesting to notice such developments in artists interested in the line patterns of Celtic art (Plates # 4.12 & 4.13). To conclude this brief survey of the Lakeland revival, I would like to point out the role of both Rawnsley's and Collingwood's spouses, overshadowed by their husband. Both were artists in their own right: Edith Rawnsley was a watercolour painter trained at the South Kensington School,¹⁸³ while Edith Mary 'Dorrie' Collingwood was also a painter who exhibited her work locally.¹⁸⁴ They were also both very active in the HAIA.

Mary Seton Watts founded the Compton Potters' Arts Guild in 1904,¹⁸⁵ as an offshoot of her work for the Watts Chapel in Compton, Surrey. The Chapel has been described as "the most extraordinary Art Nouveau building in Britain",¹⁸⁶ and I shall talk about this aspect of the chapel in section 6.2 below. As a kiln had been built and local workers had been trained in the technique of terracotta for that purpose, operations could continue as a guild, with profit sharing and Seton Watts keeping a veto on designs. It produced mainly garden decorations such as the scroll pot (Plate # 4.14),

¹⁸¹ Townend 2009, 203.

¹⁸² McBean was a teacher at the School around the same time as Stabler. Before she got hired, she had won an Honourable Mention for the design of a silver cup in *The Studio* national competition in 1897, and a further award in the following year.

¹⁸³ Bruce 2001, p. 30.

¹⁸⁴ I would like to thank Teresa Smith for showing me pictures in her possession.

¹⁸⁵ The very name 'guild' indicates sources in Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts. For overviews of Mary Seton Watts and the Compton Potters' Arts Guild, see Franklin Gould 1993, Franklin Gould 1998, Franklin Gould 2005, Cheasley Paterson 2005, Underwood 2011 and Underwood 2011b.

¹⁸⁶ Franklin Gould 2011, p. 67.

but occasionally tombstones and ceramic, and only wound up as a guild, being replaced by a limited company, in 1934, and closed definitely in 1951.¹⁸⁷

Seton Watts studied art on the Continent and in London at the South Kensington school, where she took lessons in modelling from Aimé-Jules Dalou, a pupil of Carpeau who took refuge in London after the Paris commune, in 1871. After her marriage to G. F. Watts, she got acquainted with numerous figures we have already encountered, Ashbee, Burne-Jones, Crane and Mackmurdo, some of whom gave her private guidance.¹⁸⁸ For example, Burne-Jones found an expert to teach her the technique of gesso painting which she was to use for the interior of the Watts Chapel.¹⁸⁹ She would in turn train villagers, including a large percentage of women to work with that technique, so that they would work together on the chapel.¹⁹⁰ Seton Watts wrote a guide to her chapel, *The Word in the Pattern*, which she dedicated to Eglantyne Webb, the founder of HAIA, whom she had met in London in the 1880s.

The Watts were fervent admirers of Ruskin, being especially fond, like Morris, of 'The Nature of Gothic',¹⁹¹ and they saw their various projects in Compton – the interior decoration of their house, Limnerslease, and gallery, the chapel and cloisters, and the guild (some initiated after the death of G. F. Watts in 1904) – as implementing what they understood from Ruskin. For example, the Watts Chapel, which was Mary's creation after her husband's death, was constructed by villagers with locally-made red brick (as was Morris' Red House) and terracotta mouldings, in compliance with Ruskin's principle of 'Truth to Materials', with the material handcrafted and the design displaying its particular qualities, as Veronica Franklin Gould put it, 'the earthiness of

¹⁸⁷ An attempt at reviving it failed and production definitely ceased in 1956. *Underwood 2011b*, p. 115.

¹⁸⁸ *Franklin Gould 2011*, pp. 67-70.

¹⁸⁹ *Franklin Gould 1993*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ *Cheasley Paterson 2005*, p. 717.

¹⁹¹ *Cheasley Paterson 2005*, p. 716, *Underwood 2011*, pp. 51-52.

the clay'.¹⁹² As Underwood pointed out, however, Ruskin said little about local materials as such, this was an added tenet of the Arts and Crafts movement.¹⁹³

Although Mackmurdo praised the importance of the HAIA, claiming that “had it not been for the work done by the [HAIA], it may be questioned whether the Art Worker’s Guild [...] would yet have been founded”, and seeing it as “the first fruit of the Arts and Crafts movement”,¹⁹⁴ it was not on an equal basis with the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, whose exhibitions were always at a prestigious venue, lasted longer, and were accompanied by a catalogue, while those of the HAIA had none, and coverage by the media was better – for the HAIA it had faded away after 1902.¹⁹⁵ That the spotlight was thus put on the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society might explain why artists of the HAIA had less coverage and thus less notoriety overseas, although some also exhibited at Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society.

This concludes my brief survey of the rural guilds. As explained, it was not intended to be exhaustive, but merely to illustrate the effect of Ruskin’s aesthetic and social-political ideals, amplified by the advocacy of Morris, on the British art scene, with their renewed unity of the arts and regained dignity for crafts-persons. It remains to be explained how these ideals got transmitted to the continent, first to the Belgian artists that are responsible for Art nouveau. In this respect, I need to talk now about curved lines, beginning with William Morris, and concluding with two major figures in this transition A. H. Mackmurdo and (if to a lesser extent) C. R. Ashbee.

¹⁹² *Franklin Gould 2011*, p. 71.

¹⁹³ *Underwood 2011*, p. 56.

¹⁹⁴ *Mackmurdo undated*, chapter xi, p. 3.

¹⁹⁵ *Underwood 2011*, pp. 60-63.

4.4. Curved lines from Morris to Mackmurdo

Morris' influence and notoriety are largely linked to his pattern designs, for fabric, wallpaper, tapestry, books, etc. In reflecting on these, Morris shows time and again the influence of Ruskin. He does not merely repeat him, however, but departs on occasions, for example, concerning the role of nature:

To take a natural spray of what not and torture it into certain lines, is a hopeless way of designing a pattern. In all good pattern-designs the idea comes first, as in all other designs, e.g., a man says, I will make a pattern which I will mean to give people an idea of a rose-hedge with the sun through it; and he sees it in such and such a way; then, and not till then, he sets to work to draw his flowers, his leaves and thorns, and so forth, and so carries out his idea.¹⁹⁶

Or here about the expression of negative emotions such as 'sorrow':

For I suppose the best art to be the pictured representation of men's imaginings; what they have thought has happened to the world before their time, or what they deem they have seen with the eyes of the body or the soul: and the imaginings thus represented are always beautiful indeed, but oftenest stirring to men's passions and aspirations, and not seldom sorrowful or even terrible.¹⁹⁷

More noticeably, while Ruskin speaks (as quoted above) of "the abstract lines which are most frequent in nature; and then, from lower to higher, the whole range of systematized inorganic and organic forms" as material for ornament – and in *Two Paths* he adds students must sketch accurately and continually "above all, figures" –¹⁹⁸ Morris appears to have abstracted for his patterns almost exclusively from plants and flowers. Still, this is broadly in accordance with Ruskin's insistence on "natural forms which are at once most familiar and most delightful for us". Therefore, as far as the visual fabric of Morris is concerned, the emphasis on curved lines derived from nature is but

¹⁹⁶ Morris 1966, XXII, pp. 199-200.

¹⁹⁷ Morris 1966, XXII, p. 176.

¹⁹⁸ 16.329.

Ruskin's legacy. This emphasis is particularly noticeable in most patterns, such as (Plate # 4.15) or (Plate # 4.16), where lines very close to Ruskin's curved line x-y in (Plate # 1.17) are exhibited.¹⁹⁹

Morris' general advice of pattern design breaks new ground, where Ruskin had said practically nothing. In his essay on 'Textiles', Morris writes:

The aim should be to combine clearness of form and firmness of structure with the mystery which comes of abundance and richness of detail [...] Do not introduce any lines or objects which cannot be explained by the structure of the pattern; it is just this logical sequence of form, this growth which looks as if [...] it could not have been otherwise, which prevents the eye wearying of the repetition of the pattern [...] Do not be afraid of large patterns.

The geometrical structure of the pattern, which is a necessity in all recurring patterns, should be boldly insisted upon, so as to draw the eye from accidental figures [...]²⁰⁰

In 'Some Hints on Pattern Designing', he adds:

Above all things, avoid vagueness; run any risk of failure rather than involve yourselves in a tangle of poor weak lines that people can't make out. Definite form bounded by firm outline is necessity for all ornament [...] Rational growth is necessary to all patterns [...] Take heed in this growth that each member of it be strong and crisp, that the lines do not get thready or flabby or too far from their stock to sprout firmly and vigorously; even where a line ends it should look as if it had plenty of capacity for more growth if so it would [...] Outlandishness is a snare [...] Those natural forms which are at once most familiar and most delightful to us, as well from association as from beauty, are the best for our purpose. The rose, the lily, the tulip, the oak, the vine, and all the herbs and trees that even we cockneys know about, they will serve our turn [...]²⁰¹

When he speaks of the "geometrical structure of the pattern", he does not sound particularly Ruskinian, but he is after all constrained in the case of wallpaper by the

¹⁹⁹ In one instance, entitled *Wandle* (1884), Morris sought to capture the flow of water. See *Eisenmann 2002*, pp. 20-22.

²⁰⁰ *Morris 1996*, pp. 35-36.

²⁰¹ *Morris 1966*, XXII, pp. 199-200.

need for repeatability: in order to cover seamlessly a given surface with iterations of the same basic square, filled with pattern composed of a combination of curved lines.²⁰² Morris' use of curved lines, with the repetition of same square pattern, creates the illusion of infinite growth (of stem), for example in (Plate # 4.17). Another such constraint, from which Art Nouveau sought to emancipate itself, is symmetry, which appears at first to curtail the free development of the curved line.

Edward Burne-Jones' *The Golden Stairs* (Plate # 4.18) is worth noticing here, as its curve from top to bottom recalls, as Elizabeth Prettejohn noticed, Morris' printed cottons.²⁰³ Having now in mind the transition to Art Nouveau, the most important figure here is undoubtedly Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo,²⁰⁴ since Pevsner elevated him in the first edition of *Pioneer of the Modern Movement* (1936) to the rank of the missing link between Arts and Craft and Art Nouveau. Although he does not come across as one of the more prominent figures within the broader Arts and Crafts Movement, Mackmurdo was not a minor one either. After 1880, the house of his office, as an architect, at 20 Fitzroy St., London, became an important meeting place for people revolving around the Arts & Crafts.²⁰⁵ Its first floor had exhibition and performance rooms, and the basement was a communal dining area.²⁰⁶ As we saw, Mackmurdo was active on the organisational side, as he was involved in the founding of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Building in 1877, the HAIA in 1884 and the Arts and Crafts

²⁰² Other noticeable departures from Ruskin would include the fact that Morris was, along some Pre-Raphaelites such as his friends and business partners Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, certainly more sensitive to female beauty than Ruskin ever was. But whatever effect it had on his art is not central to it or to its legacy.

²⁰³ Prettejohn 2007, p. 244.

²⁰⁴ On Mackmurdo, see Vallance 1899, Pevsner 1938, Madsen 1956, pp. 152-163, Haslam 1975, Stansky 1985, Evans 1986, Lutchmansing 1990, Brett 1995, and Skipwith 2004.

²⁰⁵ Hatcher 1995, p. 27, Rothenstein 1932, p. 332, and Mackmurdo *undated*, p. 82. The importance of this house, for exchange of ideas and influence, remains largely unnoticed in the literature.

²⁰⁶ Blakesley, pp. 56-58.

Exhibition Society in 1887. He was also to be responsible for the foundation of the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow, to which he donated his archives.

More importantly, in 1882 Mackmurdo founded with Herbert Horne and Selwyn Image the Century Guild, which was in existence for about a decade.²⁰⁷ (They were the only members, and about 20 artists were gravitating around it.) In 1884, he became editor of the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, later simply called *Hobby Horse* (in its final two years, 1892-1894). This front page was designed by Selwyn Image (Plate # 4.19), which was to have some influence in Belgium, where the journal was read, making it a conduit between the two art scenes, and Image was another key figure in this respect (see section 6.1).²⁰⁸ The journal had many invited contributors, including Ruskin.²⁰⁹

Not only is the content of these publications noteworthy, but so is the quality of their printing too, as a precursor to Morris' Kelmscott Press (founded in 1890) and Lucien Pissarro's Eragny Press (founded in 1894).²¹⁰ The *Hobby Horse* can also be seen as the model for later Aestheticist journals, *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy* (see section 6.2 for Aubrey Beardsley's involvement in these).

Mackmurdo was on his own admission deeply influenced by Ruskin,²¹¹ but there is some suspicion that he might have invented, partly or wholly in relation with Ruskin. Indeed, Pevsner reports in 1938, after having met Mackmurdo:

²⁰⁷ On the Century Guild, see *Evans 1985*.

²⁰⁸ As a student of Ruskin and lifetime follower at Oxford, as an artist of the Arts and Crafts movement close to Mackmurdo, as a visitor to Belgium with Laurence Binyon, and as a successor to Ruskin as Slade Professor at Oxford, Image himself, whose archives are housed at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, actually deserves more scholarly attention.

²⁰⁹ Among contributors, one finds: Ford Madox Brown, W. M. & Christina G. Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, G. F. Watts, Edward Burne-Jones, Matthew Arnold, Selwyn Image, John Addington Symonds, May Morris, W. B. Yeats, etc. See *Mackmurdo undated*, chapter viii, p. 8. Ruskin's article is in the volume for 1887.

²¹⁰ *Hitchmough 1995*, p. 29. Lucien Pissarro, the son of Camille Pissarro, lived in Britain, where he founded Eragny Press, closely modelled on William Morris' Kelmscott Press. See *Whiteley et al. 2011*.

²¹¹ He was to write of his appreciation of Ruskin in the 1880s: "I was a hero worshipper", *Mackmurdo undated*, chapter viii, p. 9.

Ruskin he discovered for himself and felt so profoundly moved by his books – it was at the time of the first issues of *Fors Clavigera* – that he decided to graduate at Oxford in order to attend Ruskin's lectures. Ruskin seems to have recognized at once the exceptional qualities of his new pupil. He took him to Italy, travelled with him, induced him to sketch wherever they went, and to pay as much attention to nature as to the works of man.²¹²

Pevsner was probably told this by Mackmurdo himself. Indeed, while the claim that he attended Ruskin's classes at the Slade School in Oxford is found in an earlier paper,²¹³ evidence that he travelled with Ruskin to Italy is only found in manuscript form in his archives at the William Morris Gallery, and for the first time in Pevsner's paper.²¹⁴ There is, however, no trace of Mackmurdo in Ruskin's diaries for the period they supposedly travelled together.²¹⁵ This much would normally shed doubt on the reliability of Mackmurdo's testimony, but I found out that he was at least registered at Oxford, albeit not belonging to any college,²¹⁶ and I have uncovered an illustration in Mackmurdo's archives (Plate # 4.20) which is clearly a copy from a drawing by Ruskin used as teaching material (Plate # 4.21).²¹⁷ This militates in favour of the fact that Mackmurdo attended Ruskin's classes. The William Morris Gallery also houses many drawings by Mackmurdo that were clearly inspired by Ruskin's teaching, such as Plates # 4.22 and # 4.23.²¹⁸

At any rate, Mackmurdo did travel to Italy and Florence, where he was fascinated not by Gothic but by Renaissance architecture,²¹⁹ and there are traces of their

²¹² Pevsner 1938, p. 141.

²¹³ Vallance 1899, p. 184.

²¹⁴ Mackmurdo undated, chapter v, p. 17.

²¹⁵ See Pevsner 1938 and Madsen 1956, p. 154. I would like to thank Stephen Wildman for pointing out this fact to me.

²¹⁶ Foster 1888, vol. 3, p. 896.

²¹⁷ Stephen Wildman pointed out to me in private correspondence that one of the drawings of 'Study of Ornamentation' at the William Morris Gallery (D162 viii) is not by Mackmurdo but by Ruskin himself.

²¹⁸ Stephen Wildman claimed in private correspondence that the author of Plate # 4.22 must be John Ruskin. Thus, I can only provisionally attribute it here to Mackmurdo.

²¹⁹ Vallance 1899, pp. 184-185.

interaction, as Ruskin used one of Mackmurdo's illustrations in *Mornings in Florence* – Ruskin was in the habit of asking students to provide illustrations –²²⁰ and he also approved of Mackmurdo's symbol design for the Ruskin Society in Manchester.²²¹

In a critical review of Lewis F. Day's *Nature in Ornament*,²²² Mackmurdo stated his own principles in a lengthy but very revealing passage:

I. The principles that govern ornamental design are deductions from the laws of imagination, while laws arbitrarily govern all imaginative work. The forms therefore which ornament may take under the hand of the artist are illimitable in their range as individual in their treatment, and as original in their source as fancy herself. They will be imitative of established forms only by choice, and not by preference nor of necessity.

II. The law which governs any phase of imaginative life, is the law which dominates all life, whether of the human order or of the external order. [...] Further, however varied the individual results of the imaginative faculty may be, there will be thus one characteristic in each work [...] namely a strict conformity with all organic structure [...]

From these two radical principles there follows three corollaries:

A. That a design, or any ornamental figure, considered in the abstract, is as truly a work of nature as a plant may be said to be a work of nature. For it is an evidence of the same influence. [...]

B. That a student of art must put himself to school, first under the great masters of the past, so that, by a familiarity with the best examples, he may refine a taste too apt to be engrossed with commonplace performances, which of necessity surround us. Secondly, he must school himself by the study of all living forms about him, storing his memory with materials for his creative gift to employ, and for ever fertilizing his imagination with motives of new interest and lively association.

C. That the capital intention or central purpose of any design will arbitrarily shape the structure into a organic whole and guide the movement of its members in strict accord with itself, by this means securing as a result, a full and singular harmony throughout. [...] [The artist] will be

²²⁰ 23.308.

²²¹ 34.539.

²²² Day 1892 and Mackmurdo 1892.

consciously bound by no convention, and no school will control him; time will be as naught to him, and place he will not know.²²³

That any abstract curve is not merely analogous to, but *identical* to a natural one is a very strong claim, and its metaphysical basis in principle II is not an easy one to agree with. Mackmurdo does not refer to any source, and some have seen links with Charles Darwin's *The Movements of Plants* (1880)²²⁴ or with Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* (4th edition 1880),²²⁵ because of the evolutionary nature of the 'law' in principle II, but I would for my part simply underline the Ruskinian nature of the rest, especially in the corollaries A-C: there Mackmurdo's claims are in essential conformity with Ruskin when he claims, perhaps too strongly, that the ornamental design is, albeit abstract, identical to nature, when he requests that the artists study nature to fill in their memory so that their imagination freely combine anew these elements, and when he claims that by essence the artist is thus "bound by no conventions". This last claim is against 'historicism', and the claim is universalist in ways that cannot be supported by Ruskin's arguments, but echoes Ruskin's overturning of Reynolds, which we saw in chapter 2.

In a well-known passage, Pevsner wrote:

If the long, sensitive curve, reminiscent of the lily's stem, an insect's feeler, the filament of a blossom, or occasionally a slender flame, the curve undulating, flowing, and interplaying with others, sprouting from corners and covering asymmetrically all available surfaces, can be regarded as the *leitmotif* of Art Nouveau, then the first work of Art Nouveau which can be traced is Arthur H. Mackmurdo's cover of his book on Wren's City Churches, published in 1883.²²⁶

²²³ Mackmurdo 1892, p. 63-65.

²²⁴ Haslam 1975.

²²⁵ Lutchmansingh 1990 and, following him, Brett 1995. Mackmurdo's father was a friend of Spencer and he read him. He was also close to the British positivists.

²²⁶ Pevsner 2005, p. 80.

Having sought Mackmurdo when the latter was living as a recluse in 1938,²²⁷ Pevsner evidently admired him as one of the pioneers of Modern design; he also wrote in praise of his architecture, in *The Architectural Review*:

Some of his works between 1880 and 1890, this is an easily proved fact, were more advanced, more original, more adventurous than those of any other British architect during that decade (which is tantamount to saying the work of any European architect).²²⁸

Pevsner is referring in the first of these quotations to Mackmurdo's cover plate for *Wren's City Churches* (Plate # 4.24), and this view has been adopted since by historians of Art Nouveau.²²⁹ There are other pieces displaying similar lines, such as a chair dating 1881, now at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow (Plates # 4.25). As Madsen pointed out, the cover image has actually nothing to do with depiction of any of Sir Christopher Wren's churches, but it is composed of wavy lines similar to those on the back of the chair, representing flowers and peacocks – the preferred bird of Art Nouveau – on both sides.²³⁰ There are more artefacts with similar lines at the William Morris Gallery, which indicates that such lines are typical of Mackmurdo's style (Plates # 4.26, # 4.27 & # 4.28). Some 'studies of design' by Mackmurdo exhibit a more pronounced Art Nouveau style that are to be found in the archives of the William Morris Gallery, (Plate # 4.29).

Mackmurdo's wavy lines are more pronounced in their curvatures than those highlighted by Ruskin's, and do not exhibit the symmetry or the typical intricate

²²⁷ Mackmurdo was by then 86, living secluded in the countryside, and only interested in his own utopian schemes for social and economic reform. As with Ruskin or Morris before him, Mackmurdo had a strong penchant for social and economic matters, and he developed many utopian schemes, but they came much later and were widely unorthodox, so did not have any noticeable impact. See, for example, *Mackmurdo 1932a*, *Mackmurdo 1932b* or *Mackmurdo 1933*.

²²⁸ Pevsner 1938, p. 141.

²²⁹ Although they refer to other artworks, *Wren's City Churches* duly appears in *Madsen 1956*, p. 158, *Seltz & Constantine 1960*, p. 27, *Schmutzler 1962*, p. 111, for the earliest post-war illustrations of this. The cover was also #69 of the 'Art Nouveau in Britain' exhibition, see *Pevsner 1965*, p. 17. See also *Haslam 1975*.

²³⁰ *Madsen 1956*, p. 159.

geometry of Morris' patterns. These lines are seen, therefore, as a missing link between Morris and the later whiplash of Horta and Van de Velde (we shall see that the situation is much more complex on the Belgian side in section 6.1), and it is interesting to think of them in light of Mackmurdo's principles and corollaries, above, as they exhibit a freedom allowed for by his principles.

Mackmurdo also 'discovered' the architect and designer C. F. A Voysey, for whom he played an important role as mentor,²³¹ and the painter Frank Brangwyn, whom he introduced to Morris, and who was to paint part of Siegfried Bing's Paris shop, *L'Art Nouveau* in 1895.²³² Voysey was recognized as one of the most talented of his generation, and he was seen by informed figures on the Continent such as Bing, as the one who would produce the next advance in British design. As one can see from (Plate # 4.30), his later work was pointing away from Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau. There is a strong similarity between Voysey's *Walnut Tree Farm*, constructed in 1890 (Plate # 4.31), and Van de Velde's first house, *Bloemenwerf*, in Uccle, built five years later (Plate # 4.32). But Charles R. Ashbee is even more interesting in this respect.²³³

Ashbee discovered Ruskin's works during his studies in Cambridge, and immediately became a "convinced Ruskinian".²³⁴ As Alan Crawford puts it:

The most fruitful and, as it turns out, unshakeable convictions of his life seem to have been found in reading Ruskin. [...] From Ruskin he learned to see art, architecture and the decorative arts as the reflection of the social

²³¹ There is letter at the William Morris Gallery from Voysey to Mackmurdo dated April 3rd, 1930, acknowledging the latter's "very great influence" (Catalogue of A. H. Mackmurdo and the Century Guild Collection, p. 20, J573).

²³² Frank Brangwyn was one of the British artists that were involved in the opening of Siegfried Bing's shop *L'Art nouveau* (painting walls of the entrance), see section 5.1. On Brangwyn, see *Shaw-Sparrow 1911*, *Horner & Naylor 2006* and *Horner 2006*.

²³³ On Ashbee, see the biography *MacCarthy 1981* and the monumental study *Crawford 1985*. At the time, Oscar Lovell Triggs has a chapter on 'Ashbee and the Reconstructed Workshop' in *Chapter in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement (Triggs 1902, chapter iv)*, which consists mainly of quotations.

²³⁴ *Blakesley 2006*, p. 69.

conditions in which they are made, and to bring them within the scope of morality.²³⁵

After graduating, Ashbee worked for Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel, where he taught a Ruskin class that led to the founding of the School and Guild of Handicrafts in 1888.²³⁶ Ashbee recounted these events in *An Endeavour Towards the Teaching of John Ruskin and William Morris*:

The Guild and School had its beginnings in the years 1886-87 in a small Ruskin class conducted at Toynbee Hall, and composed of three pupils. [...] The readings of Ruskin led to an experiment of a more practical nature out of *Fors Clavigera* and the *Crown of Wild Olive* sprang a small class for the study of design. The class grew to thirty [...] then it was felt that design needed application, to give the teaching fulfilment. A piece of practical work, which involved painting, modelling, plaster casting, gilding, & the study of heraldic forms, gave the stimulus to the corporate action of the thirty students, and the outcome of their united work as dilettanti was the desire that permanence might be given to it by making it work for life & bread. From this sprang the idea of the present Guild and School. Very undefined at first, the notion was that a School should be carried on in connection with a workshop.²³⁷

Ashbee had in mind the example of Ruskin's own Guild of St George, but he already knew that, as we saw, he had not been much of a success.²³⁸ The original notice of the Guild read:

The Guild and School of Handicraft has for its object the application of Art and Industry. It is a Co-operative Society of Workmen, working out original designs, either of their own or such as may be submitted to them from without. [...] Its effort is to apply the Guild system of Mediæval Italy to modern industrial needs, and to the movement of Technical Education.²³⁹

²³⁵ Crawford 1985, p. 11.

²³⁶ Crawford 1985, chapter 2.

²³⁷ Ashbee 1891, pp. 1-2.

²³⁸ Ashbee 1891, pp. 1-2.

²³⁹ Quoted in Triggs 1902, pp. 154-155.

More specifically, it would be a co-operative with worker's management:

We accept broadly the co-operative principle. We consider that every workman who is permanently to work for the place should have a share and an interest in it, & [...] we believe that much of the hard business of organisation can be perfectly well done by the Committee of the men themselves.²⁴⁰

Ashbee's art cannot truly be said to have played the same anticipatory role as Mackmurdo's, except for an intriguing similarity between the wall decoration of Ashbee's 1894 house, *The Magpie and the Stump*, 37 Cheyne Walk, London (Plate # 4.33), which was advertised in *The Studio*,²⁴¹ and the interior decoration of Victor Horta's *Hôtel Tassel*, reputed to be one of the first Art Nouveau houses (see section 6.1). But, as we shall see in section 6.2, Ashbee's art straddles both styles, especially his metalwork (Plate # 4.34 and Plate # 4.35).

The next step in my narrative occurs on the other side of the Channel, in Belgium, when artists were inspired by these developments of the line and pushed them further, creating the Art Nouveau 'whiplash'. There remains one major hurdle, however, one that lies in the concept of 'Art Nouveau', and before I shall examine the evidence of this early transmission, it will be necessary to engage in a bit of conceptual analysis in the next chapter.

²⁴⁰ *Ashbee 1891*, pp. 1-2.

²⁴¹ *Anon. 1895*.

5. Crossing the Channel: From Arts and Crafts to Art Nouveau

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet.*

Shakespeare¹

5.1. Exhibitions, Galleries and the Social Construction of Art Nouveau

Chapter 4 was devoted to the transmission of Ruskin's aesthetic ideals to the Arts and Crafts movement, and I now need to explain how these ideals were further transmitted on the Continent to artists responsible for the birth of Art Nouveau, to form a key part of their 'Culture' to use Baxandall's concept, this being the terminus of my historical enquiry. One would ordinarily assume here a strict distinction between Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau, but my case will largely rest upon problematizing it. In order to do so, I need to distinguish at the outset between historical reality itself and the categories or concepts we use to talk about it.

Some opening remarks on 'Art Nouveau' as social construction are in order. The concept may indeed be said to be a social construction in two distinct but interrelated ways. My first point will be to show that the concept of 'Art Nouveau' as it is one ordinarily deployed in the study of that era is a social construction. Secondly, I shall argue that the very idea that participants perceived themselves as pertaining to Art Nouveau amounts itself to the construction of a social fact. It is precisely this character as 'construction' that hides from view the points I wish to make on the relations between Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts, in the next chapter.

I am not just interested in this chapter with the advent of Art Nouveau in the 1890s when Arts and Crafts crossed the Channel, I also want to say something, in order to wrap up my investigations, about the British reaction when Art Nouveau crossed the Channel in the opposite direction in the early 1900s. In both cases, achieving a proper

¹ *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, scene 2.

understanding requires overcoming the conceptual limitations of the distinction supposedly entrenched in these labels, and I must make a number of preliminary remarks about this at the outset. But this is not my only task in this chapter, as I need also to delineate within the phenomenon of Art Nouveau broadly construed which aspects are relevant to my discussion – as I did with Pre-Raphaelitism in section 3.1 – so as to avoid unnecessary confusion on the reader's part.

I shall presently suggest a few dates to frame my discussion, and then, within that time frame, I shall explain why we should focus on Belgian Art Nouveau. Once this is done, I shall have more to say in this section about the social construction of Art Nouveau (the social fact and the concept). These preliminaries out of the way, I shall then study the influence of British Arts and Crafts on Belgian Art Nouveau in section 6.1, and then the British reaction to Art Nouveau in section 6.2.

The name 'Art Nouveau' is said to originate in the name of Siegfried Bing's gallery, *La Maison de l'Art Nouveau*, that opened on 26 December 1895, at 22 rue de Provence in Paris (Plate # 5.1).² In speaking about Art Nouveau, one would ordinarily not assume this event as a strict watershed, so that only post-1895 artworks may be stamped 'Art Nouveau': the name is, after all, merely a convention, associated here with a specific date, and might cover art produced before 1895. For example, we already saw in Chapter 3 Lemmen's covers for *L'Art Moderne* and the catalogue of *Les XX* in 1891, and their links with illustrations by Mackmurdo. Victor Horta's *Hôtel Tassel* and *Maison Autrique* in Brussels are without controversy considered to be the very first houses recognizably in Art Nouveau style, and they were built c. 1893-1897. At all events, Bing had gathered objects to sell in his gallery that were created at a prior date – more on these below – and the question remains open not only if they reflected only

² This is universally agreed, for obvious reasons detailed below. For early instances within post-war scholarship, see *Madsen 1956*, pp. 81-83, *Selz & Constantine 1959*, p. 11, *Schmutzler 1962*, p. 73.

one single style called 'Art Nouveau', but also if the artists that created them were motivated by the same aesthetic ideals or not.

Nevertheless, in this chapter I shall use this event, not as a watershed so that one could affix the label 'Art Nouveau' to artworks only after 1895, but as an historical marker for my investigations. If one were to make an analogy with the 'Christian Era' as having begun with the birth of Jesus Christ, so that an 'Art Nouveau Era' would be seen as having begun with the opening of Bing's gallery in 1895, then, given that it is concerned with the transmission of aesthetic ideals of Arts and Crafts to early Art Nouveau in Belgium, section 6.1 would be concerned with the pre-history of Art Nouveau. It is after all my plan not just to document the transmission of Ruskin's aesthetic ideals (via Morris and Arts and Crafts) to the Continent, but also to show that, historically, this transmission was the impetus behind the rise of Art Nouveau. For this the period 1891-1895 will turn out to be crucial.

While there was no organized exhibition of Arts and Crafts – in fact very few British artists exhibited at the *Exposition universelle* in Paris in 1900, Bing had the pavilion *L'Art Nouveau Bing* to showcase his own brand of Art Nouveau. It is interesting to note here how Bing attached his name closely to Art Nouveau in identifying the pavilion. Two years later, however, Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau works were exhibited side by side at the *Prima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna* in Turin, creating an air of rivalry. In between these two events, George Donaldson, who had been a member of the Jury of Awards at the Paris exhibitions of 1889 and 1900, donated to the Victoria and Albert museum a sizeable collection of 'Art Nouveau' pieces.³ These events provoked a very negative reaction in Britain, in a debate that went on, initially, until 1904. This negative reaction is worth investigating, because of the nature of the arguments involved. Given that both movements entered into a decline in the following years, we can take the periods 1891-1895 and 1900-

³ See Donaldson 1901, where his 'statement of intentions', making his gift, is reproduced.

1904 as our frame. Of course, I am *not* implying that 'Art Nouveau' should be enclosed within these periods or that this label could only be applied to artworks produced within that period. I only wish to clarify the periods upon which I shall focus in the following sections. Still, it is worth noting at the outset, that there was no such thing as a temporal succession, as if Art Nouveau would have replaced Arts and Crafts at one moment in time, since they were in existence side by side. Before studying the periods 1891-1895 and 1900-1904 successively in sections 6.1 and 6.2, I would like to look in some depth at the social construction of Art Nouveau, in order further to clarify a few more points in a preliminary fashion. But just before doing this, I would like still to add some more points of chronology, in order to explain why I need to focus on Belgian Art Nouveau.

In the briefest possible terms, the timeline I adhere to was already laid out in 1901, in what may be the first detailed historical account of Art Nouveau, Jean Lahor's *L'Art Nouveau. Son histoire. L'Art Nouveau étranger à l'exposition. L'Art Nouveau au point de vue social*.⁴ Lahor suggested three stages, illustrated by these snippets:

But reform, revolution started in England.⁵

From England, the movement spread to the neighbouring land of Belgium.⁶

From England and Belgium the movement finally spread to Nordic countries, to Germany and Austria, to America, to France.⁷

Bing also recognized, within a debate about Art Nouveau in the pages of *The Craftsman* in 1903, the British roots of 'Art Nouveau':

In its first phases, the principal part was not played by the country which had long occupied the first place in European decorative art. France remained attached with what might almost be termed patriotic tenderness

⁴ *Lahor 1901*. Jean Lahor, sometimes misspelled 'Lahore', is one of the pen names of the symbolist poet Henri Cazalis (1840-1909), who played with Gabriel Mourey a significant role in the diffusion of the idea of Ruskin, Morris and the Arts and Crafts in France. On Cazalis, see *Joseph 1972*.

⁵ *Lahor 1901*, p. 4. See also *Lahor 1897*, p. 9.

⁶ *Lahor 1901*, p. 12. See also *Lahor 1897*, p. 45.

⁷ *Lahor 1901*, p. 15.

to traditions whose roots struck into the lowest depths of the soil of the fatherland.

The initial movement [...] began in England, under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites and the ideas of Ruskin, and was carried into practical affairs by the admirable genius of William Morris.

[...]

To Belgium belongs in all justice the honor of having first devised truly modern formulas for the interior decoration of European dwellings.⁸

It is here that we encounter our first difficulty. If there had been a pre-history in Britain before the origin in Belgium, what concept or label one should use to describe it? Madsen coined in 1956 the expression 'English Proto-Art Nouveau',⁹ and Robert Schmutzler also spoke in 1962 also of 'Proto-Art Nouveau', but distinguished between 'early', 'high' and 'late' Art Nouveau, with the early period being essentially British.¹⁰ Roger-Henri Guerrand also opened his 1965 book on *L'Art Nouveau en Europe* with successive chapters on Britain and Belgium, but did not coin any specific expression.¹¹ One can measure here too the difficulties raised by our categories, when we wish to apply them to historical reality.

It is thus quite clear – and has been clear to historians just mentioned – that the popularity of Arts and Crafts on the Continent prepared the ground for a variety of developments that are considered as Art Nouveau, but they did not all burgeon at the same time; some essential early impetus is due to the Belgian artists. The remainder of this section and the next one will provide evidence of the priority of Belgian Art Nouveau over Paris, and attention to chronology shows that Lahor was also right concerning the third stage, with the spread of Art Nouveau from Belgium to the whole of Europe (and beyond) within the span of a few years. I would like to make my point with only two illustrative examples, Vienna and Riga. Vienna is reputed to be “the last

⁸ Bing 1903, pp. 7-8.

⁹ Madsen 1956, pp. 148.

¹⁰ See his chapters on 'The Origins of Art Nouveau' and 'Early Art Nouveau', in Schmutzler 1962, pp. 35-61 & 62-124 but also Schmutzler 1955.

¹¹ Guerrand 2009, chapters 2-3.

of the major European capitals to adopt Art Nouveau",¹² with the *Wiener Secession* being formed in 1897 and Olbrich's famous exhibition hall dating from 1899, whose frontispiece motto serves as the title of this chapter. The main formative influences on Viennese Art Nouveau were the Munich Secession, C. R. Ashbee, Margaret Macdonald & Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and Henry Van de Velde. Their first exhibition at the *Wiener Secession* was in 1900.¹³ The celebrated *Wiener Werkstätte* was founded only in 1903.¹⁴

It is interesting to note *en passant* that Adolf Loos wrote in 1897: "For we have been standing still too long. In the arts and crafts over the past ten years the whole world has been marching under England's leadership, and it is high time we caught up before it is too late."¹⁵ A year later, in 'The English School in the Austrian Museum', he added: "The English, as pathfinders in uncharted regions, as pioneers clearing the virgin land, have lost time. Without wasting our strength on experiments we can use the well-worn paths to catch up with them."¹⁶ Loos was asking Austrian architects and designers, and the School of Applied Arts, to do like everybody had done in Europe already a decade ago, and take their lead from British Arts & Crafts.

In the same vein, the city of Riga, Latvia possesses one of the largest and most remarkable ensemble of Art Nouveau buildings outside Brussels, including some styles unique to that city. But the first Art Nouveau building in Riga dates only from 1898.¹⁷

¹² Schmutzler 1962, p. 244.

¹³ See Selkler 1979, p. 136, Föhl et al. 2013, p. 289, and, for Ashbee, Crawford 1985, 411-412. Van de Velde also lectured in Vienna in 1901, see Stewart 2000, p. 125.

¹⁴ On the *Wiener Werkstätte*, see Fahr-Becker 1995 and Völker 2004.

¹⁵ Loos 1998, p. 15.

¹⁶ Loos 1998, p. 145.

¹⁷ Krastiņš 2007, pp. 384, 386 & 389.

The peak of Art Nouveau in Riga is after 1903,¹⁸ and Mihails Eizenštein's unique houses (Plate # 5.2) date from 1901-1906.¹⁹

*

If one is to claim as I do that Art Nouveau is a 'social construction', one should distinguish two different 'constructions'. The first one concerns the fact that historical agents or actors perceived themselves at the time as pertaining to Art Nouveau and creating artworks in that spirit, and that they were perceived accordingly – this amounts to a socially constructed fact. The second one concerns the truism that the concept and label 'Art Nouveau' that we, as art historians, use to inquire about the past is also, like any of our concepts, a 'construction'. I shall examine these in turn.

Concerning the first aspect, since artists were exhibited under the banner 'Art Nouveau', since their artworks were sold and circulating under that name, houses were built as 'Art Nouveau', and artists recognized themselves as part of that movement, it is right to claim that 'Art Nouveau' is constitutively constructed *qua* social fact, in the same sense that, for example, a gathering of people is a 'cocktail party', simply in virtue of the conceptual and social recognition of the participants.²⁰ To track the construction of that social fact, it is appropriate to examine Bing's own efforts to popularize the concept, in terms first of the background to *La Maison de l'Art Nouveau*, and then in terms of reception.

A German émigré, Bing had until then specialized mainly in the importation and sale of Japanese and Asian *objets d'art*. If anything, in converting from selling Japanese to Art Nouveau artworks, he wanted to reproduce in France the success that Belgians had in their own country, in promoting a change in decorative arts, by emulating Arts

¹⁸ *Banga* 2010, p. 10.

¹⁹ *Rush* 2003, p. 31. For an overview, see *Raša* 2003. Mihails Eizenštein was the father of the Soviet film director Sergei Eizenštein.

²⁰ See *Searle* 1995, pp. 33-34 on this point.

and Crafts. A similar gallery *La Maison d'Art*, opened in Brussels a year earlier, on 7 March 1894.²¹ The *Société anonyme de l'Art* had already been founded (about which more in the next chapter), with the explicit purpose of promoting decorative arts along the lines of Morris, Crane and the Arts and Crafts. It was situated on the rue de la Toison d'or, hence the fact that it is also known as *La Maison d'Art de la Toison d'Or*.²² It wasn't even the first of its kind, as it was preceded by *La Maison Serrurier-Bovy* on rue de l'Université in Liège, which opened much earlier in 1884. Works from Arts and Crafts figures such as Heywood Sumner, Walter Crane and Frank Brangwyn were already available since 1881 at a Brussels art shop owned by Paul Dietrich and Joseph Schwarzenberg, sometimes called *La Maison Dietrich*.²³ These Belgian galleries and shops were themselves modeled on *Morris & Co.*, founded in 1861 and by then established on Oxford Street, London, and *Liberty's* founded in 1875 by Arthur Lasenby Liberty, and still located to this day on Regent Street.²⁴ Liberty had also been importing and selling non-European decorative art (from the Middle East to the Subcontinent and the Far East, namely China and Japan), not just fabrics, such as the 'soie Liberty', but all manners of wares and furniture. For reasons having to do with distance and the lack of an ability to supervise production, Liberty began to substitute items manufactured in Britain for imported goods, such as, in 1887, the 'peacock feather' fabric designed by Arthur Silver (Plate # 4.2), which became synonymous with the name Liberty. Thus, Liberty opened the door to British designers, even before the creation of Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. As we shall see in section 6.2, with the case of Archibald Knox, the 'Liberty style' became at one stage hardly distinguishable from Art Nouveau.

²¹ On the relation of Bing's gallery and *La Maison d'Art* in Brussels, see Block 1991, Thiébaud 2004a, and Block 2010.

²² Anon. 1895b, p. 175. See Thiébaud 2004a, p. 99.

²³ See Maus 1980, p. 113, also Madsen 1956, p. 304.

²⁴ On *Liberty's* see Adburgham 1975, Levy 1986, Morris 1989 and Nichols 1989.

Bing visited Belgium in 1894, accompanied by his friend Julius Meier-Graefe. Together they visited *La Maison d'Art* in Brussels, attended the exhibition of *La Libre esthétique* in Liège, and met with numerous key figures of the Belgian art scene, including Henry Van de Velde,²⁵ with whom they would remain closely associated. Meier-Graefe was also to open in 1899 his own Art Nouveau gallery on rue des Petits-Champs, Paris, to which he gave another generic name, *La Maison moderne*, and for which Manuel Orazi was to produce in 1900 a well-known poster (Plate # 5.3).²⁶ Both ventures were in the end short lived: *La Maison moderne* went under in 1903, while Bing closed his *Maison de l'Art Nouveau* in 1904. These early closures indicate how short-lived the fashion for Art Nouveau was, but also how little success Bing and Meier-Graefe actually met in trying to promote it in Paris.

Bing did not merely adapt the name of the Brussels gallery when naming his own, he also adopted its formula. Describing Ruskin as the prophet who first protested against the derelict state of decorative arts,²⁷ he wanted to emphasize, as the Belgians did before him, the need for a “revival” or a “new departure” in decorative arts.²⁸ He was also impressed by their exhibiting ‘fine’ alongside ‘decorative art’, the underlying intention being not only to reflect new developments in both, but also to abolish any distinction between the two.

Descriptions of the gallery at its opening²⁹ and the first catalogue of the *Salon de l'Art Nouveau*, published within a year,³⁰ give us a good indication of the artists and artworks it exhibited. The catalogue shows that French fine arts was very well

²⁵ On meetings with Van de Velde, see *Adriaenssens 2013*, p. 90, and Van de Velde's own account in *Récit de ma vie*, *Van de Velde 1992*, pp. 262-266.

²⁶ On Bing, Meier-Graefe and the concept of *La Maison moderne*, see *Weisberg, 2010*.

²⁷ *Bing 1902b*, p. 2.

²⁸ *Bing 1902*, p. 281.

²⁹ For a description of the gallery, see *Cousturier 1896*. Such descriptions are not complete, one might supplement the information from photographs, although the conclusions one might draw may be limited.

³⁰ *Anon. 1896*. Meier-Graefe wrote at the time a sympathetic review of the Salon in *Meier-Graefe 1896b*. For a discussion of Meier-Graefe's paper, see *Weisberg 2010*, pp. 130-135.

represented, including by numerous pointillists and *Nabis*, but not as well in decorative arts, where the key figures are Belgian and British.³¹ Rooms decorated by Henry Van de Velde were central for the gallery.³² Bing was to sell items from British purveyors such as *Morris & Co.*, *Liberty & Co.* and the lesser-known firm of *J. S. Henry*.³³ We can thus see that Bing adapted a formula for his gallery that came from Belgium and had British roots, and this is what he meant by 'Art Nouveau'.³⁴

Although new trends in French decorative art were represented, with Gallé and Lalique, they were not the dominant group, when compared to the Belgian, while the British were also well represented. It is thus not surprising that 'Art Nouveau' was not perceived as home-grown at all. Arsène Alexandre mocked the idea of a 'new art' which would justify the name of the gallery, and was particularly harsh; for example, when he commented on rooms decorated by Van de Velde:

The new art would thus consist in revealing to us that the English are good cabinet makers and that Belgians do not know how to handle lines anymore? We knew this. [...] And this is all confused, incoherent, and almost unhealthy. It is at times too slovenly, at times too clean; it is at times

³¹ A full list would be too long to reproduce. Among paintings (watercolours, drawings, prints, etc.), French artists were strongly represented, with names such as Pierre Bonnard, Mary Cassatt, Henri-Edmond Cross, Maurice Denis, Camille Pissarro, Henri Rivière, Paul Sérusier, Paul Signac, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Edmond Vuillard, whose exposure to Japanese art via Bing left an imprint on his art. There were sculptures by Émile Bourdelle, Camille Claudel and Auguste Rodin. Britain was represented by Aubrey Beardsley, Frank Brangwyn (who contributed to the decoration with outside friezes and the two entrance panels of the gallery), Charles Conder and Walter Crane. Belgian artists included Fernand Khnopf, Georges Morren, and Théo Van Rysselberghe, whom we will encounter in section 6.1, and among painters of other nations, one should note two Germans: Max Liebermann and Otto Eckmann. In decorative arts, one should mention glass works by Émile Gallé, Georges Morren, and numerous works from Louis Comfort Tiffany along some '*verreries anglaises*'; jewellery by René-Jules Lalique and, again, Morren; furniture by Georges Lemmen, Henry Van de Velde and Theo Van Rysselberghe; wallpaper by Van de Velde along with numerous '*papiers peints anglais*', some possibly from Morris; light fixtures and other objects by W. A. S. Benson, and books by Lucien Pissarro.

³² They were not, however, the only 'ensembles', there were other from the French painter Albert Besnard, who played an important role in the development of decorative arts in his country, and the British-born Australian painter, Charles Conder. See *Cousturier 1896*.

³³ *Lacquemant 2004*, p. 214. John Sollie Henry's firm, established c. 1880, was not linked to the emergence Arts and Crafts movement, but by the 1900s its designs were influenced by it and Art Nouveau, and it employed, among others, Frank Brangwyn and C. F. A. Voysey on a 'freelance' basis.

³⁴ On Bing and Britain, see *Possémé 2004*.

as inapt as the work of a man who does not know his trade, at times a caricature of English art. All of this reeks of perverse Englishman, morphine-addicted Jewess, or crafty Belgian, or an all too agreeable mixture of these three poisons.³⁵

Among its reprehensible aspects, the blatant antisemitism of this passage should be put in its context, with the Dreyfus Affair breaking out a year earlier in the Autumn 1894. Alexandre's paper was then quoted almost in full (including this passage) with approbation by Victor Champier, editor of the *Revue des arts décoratifs*, just a few months later.³⁶ The influential Edmond de Goncourt, who is said to have coined 'Yachting style' to describe Van de Velde's rooms, because they reminded him of ocean liners,³⁷ also wrote these harsh xenophobic words about Bing's gallery in his *Journal*:

What! Our country, heir to the coquettish and curving furniture of eighteenth-century languor, is now menaced by this hard, angular stuff, which appears to have been made for crude cave and lake dwellers? Will France be condemned to forms crowned in a contest for the ugliest, to bay alcoves, windows, sideboards borrowed from ship's portholes, to the back of sofas, armchairs, chairs looking for rigid platitudes of corrugated iron, covered with fabrics where goose-dropping [*caca d'oie*] coloured birds fly above a laundry piss blue [*bleu pisseux de savonnage*], to toilets and other furniture akin in a dentist's sink near the morgue? [...] And will Parisians really sleep in a bedroom lacking all taste, on a mattress poised as if on a tomb? Will we be denationalized, morally conquered in a conquest worse than real war? [...] Is this an age where there seems also only to be room

³⁵ "Tout cela sent l'anglais vicieux, la Juive morphinomane ou le Belge roublard, ou une agréable salade de ces trois poisons" (Alexandre 1895, p. 2). This sentence is quoted in Néret 1998, p. 8. Pevsner wrongly attributes this overtly racist remark to Octave Mirbeau (Pevsner 2005, p. 87), and Eidelberg to 'Arsène Houssaye' (Eidelberg 1983, p. 33). For a correct attribution, see Madsen 1956, p. 361.

³⁶ Champier 1896, pp. 4-5. Champier did not fully condemn Art Nouveau though, because he agreed with its rejection of what we would call today 'historicism', the imitation of past styles.

³⁷ For this attribution, see Madsen 1956, p. 79, Duncan 1994, pp. 23-24. I could not find a precise passage for this attribution, but the mention of "bay alcoves, windows, sideboards borrowed from ship's portholes" in the passage quoted here certainly reflects the idea.

in France for Anglo-Saxon or Dutch furniture? Is this the future furniture of France? No! No!³⁸

In 1897, Charles Genuys, professor at the *École nationale des arts décoratifs* (where he was to teach Hector Guimard) entitled his paper on Art Nouveau '*Soyons français!*'. His argument was simply to the effect that Art Nouveau is foreign and should therefore not be imitated if French decorative arts were to avoid disappearing:

Nobody will transform us, sons of Gauls and Latin, into Saxons or Anglo-Saxons. If, as some pretend, our race will one day disappear, let us not help it. [...] Indeed, we will always be inferior to the English as English, to the Belgians as Belgians and to the Germans as Germans. Artists of these countries are sincere; they are coherent [*logiques*] with their own race, their environment and themselves, and we aren't if we imitate them in our country, so different from theirs.³⁹

In the same year, someone even wondered if, given that Art Nouveau had failed, an explanation of this odd incident would ever be forthcoming.⁴⁰ These testimonies show not only that Art Nouveau did not appear to the French public as a typically French product – it was not –, but that it was even very badly received because it was perceived as foreign. The pejorative and explicitly xenophobic expression '*style rastaquouère*' was even coined, a '*rastaquouère*' being an ostentatious *nouveau riche* foreigner with bad taste.⁴¹

³⁸ *Goncourt & Goncourt 1956*, XXI, pp. 156-157. This oft-cited passage is quoted by Debora Silverman, who also underlined the nationalistic fear it expresses (*Silverman 1989*, p. 279). It is perhaps apposite to quote here Julius Meier-Graefe's portrait of Edmond de Goncourt's house: "[A visitor] would sink half dead from exhaustion on one of the charming little chairs of Marie Antoinette with the only wish – to get away as fast as possible from all this stuff! And leaving he would take away with him the conviction to have visited a highly interesting man, an educated one, a scholar – But also a man of taste? – No, No, No." (*Meier-Graefe 1896a*, p. 3). Translation quoted from *Weisberg 2010*, p. 126.

³⁹ *Genuys 1897*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Coupri 1896-1897*.

⁴¹ See *Madsen 1956*, p. 81, who gives an improper explanation the meaning of '*rastaquouère*' as 'foreign adventure'; Larousse defines it as: "*Terme injurieux qui servait à désigner un étranger étalant un luxe suspect*".

In reaction to this adverse reaction, Bing took stock and sought to repackage what goes under the name 'Art Nouveau'. In an article published in 1902 in the *Architectural Record*, he explained the *raison d'être* of *La Maison Bing*:

What was lacking was a means of stimulating artists to new efforts, of establishing some connection between isolated endeavors, and of providing a suitable place for displaying the latter and submitting them to the judgement of the public.

In the beginning I confined myself to this rôle of intermediary – of standard bearer in the service of the good cause.⁴²

But he realized this role to be insufficient, and the need to take an active part in shaping Art Nouveau:

Soon, however, the disillusion came. The productions gathered together in my establishment had a chaotic appearance. Many were faulty in conception, due to inexperience: all suffered in their aspect from a want of cohesion, due to the extreme diversity of origin. [...]

It was evident that the future of this new-born movement was in great danger. The only way to save it from total collapse was to endeavor to make it follow a fixed direction, carefully marked out; to keep it within the bounds of sobriety and good sense, avoiding the extravagances of exuberant imaginations and relying for its salvation upon these two fundamental rules. *Each article to be strictly adapted to its proper purpose; harmonies to be sought for the lines and color.* It was necessary to resist the mad idea of throwing off all associations with the past, and to proclaim that, on the contrary, everything produced by your predecessors is an example for us, not, assuredly, for its form to be servilely copied, but in order that the spirit which animated the authors should give us an inspiration.⁴³

So Bing decided to play an active role in the development of the style, by commissioning artworks and taking the lead in implementing some basic rules that would ensure a greater unity of style, but also, as we see from these last sentences, in giving it a specific direction, bringing this nascent style in line with tradition.

⁴² Bing 1902, p. 283.

⁴³ Bing 1902, p. 283.

Although he wrote in the first part of ‘Wohin treiben wir?’ (1897) an encomium to Ruskin and Morris as forerunners and initiators of the movement, he also argued that Arts and Crafts had only produced an “extension of Queen Anne style” and that the “archaism” of their artworks “prevents our times from seeing them as its children”.⁴⁴ To describe Arts and Crafts as an extension of Queen Anne was then common⁴⁵ and even fits the aims of some in its first generation, such as the architect Philip Webb, whose creations were by then already decades old.⁴⁶ Of course, this is tendentious and not at all representative of the Arts and Crafts. Bing’s suggestion serves a purpose, however, namely to dissociate the British tradition from the Art Nouveau he was attempting to sell.

In the *Architectural Record*, he made it plain that he wanted to align instead the new style with the French tradition, in these remarkably candid words:

There was only one way in which these theories could be put into practice – namely, by having the articles made under my personal direction, and securing the assistance of such artists as seemed best disposed to carry out my ideas. The thousand ill-assorted things that I had collected together in a haphazard way gave place, little by little, to articles produced in my own workshops, according to the following program, to the exclusion of all other considerations. Thoroughly impregnate oneself anew with the old French tradition; try to pick up the thread of the tradition, with all its grace, elegance, sound logic and purity, and give it new developments, just as if the thread had not been broken for nearly a century; [...].⁴⁷

The pavilion *L’Art Nouveau Bing* in 1900 should thus be seen as the result of this conscious effort to rebrand Art Nouveau, giving Bing his own imprimatur on what goes under the label ‘Art Nouveau’. His pavilion was to comprise six rooms, and he

⁴⁴ Bing 1897, p. 3.

⁴⁵ See for example Lahor 1901, p. 10.

⁴⁶ On Queen Anne in relation to Arts and Crafts, see Girouard 1977, chapter ii; on Philip Webb, Kirk 2005.

⁴⁷ Bing 1902, p. 285.

commissioned three artists, Edward Colonna,⁴⁸ George de Feure, and Eugène Gaillard to decorate them.⁴⁹ In an apparent move to assuage French critics, he tasked them to provide ensembles that would adapt Van de Velde's 'whiplash'⁵⁰ while being more readily seen as pertaining to the French tradition of decorative art, especially in the lineage of Louis XV (with its 'rocaille', a forerunner of Rococo).⁵¹ Bing was thus, with the help of his artists, literally inventing historical links with the French tradition that simply did not exist in the minds of the very artists that were responsible for Art Nouveau.

One should note that no mention is made of the fact that this invented link with the past was in the hope of assuaging critics, and in the furtherance of Bing's ambitions as an art merchant. It seems, therefore, that the false understanding of Art Nouveau as a typically French product with historical roots in Louis XV and Rococo is largely the result of Bing's manoeuvres *qua* art merchant,⁵² in order to pander to a rather xenophobic audience by devising a narrative and offering for sale objects more

⁴⁸ After studies in architecture in Brussels, the German born Edward Colonna went to New York in 1882, where worked for Louis Comfort Tiffany and the architect Bruce Price, and he worked later for Barney Smith & Co. in Ohio, designing railcars. (One of Colonna's railcar designs (1888) for the Barney and Smith Co. for service on the Milwaukee Lake Shore & Western Railway is now at the Mid-Continent Railway Museum in Wisconsin.). Colonna moved to Montreal from 1888 to 1893 where he worked for William van Horne and the Canadian Pacific. After moving back for a few years in New York, he began work for Bing in Paris around 1898. For more on Colonna, see *Eidelberg 1983*.

⁴⁹ For a detailed description of these rooms, see *Mourey 1900*. They were partly reconstituted for an exhibition at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam in 2004-2005. See *Weisberg, Becker & Possémé 2004*.

⁵⁰ A contributor to the 14th edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1929) spoke to Colonna in 1926, who told him that Bing had adopted Van de Velde's curve (described at this late date as 'whiplash', see the end of this chapter on the origin of this expression), so that Colonna intentionally copied it. See *Eidelberg 1983*, pp. 33, 40 & 76-77, note 101.

⁵¹ *Lacquemant 2004*, p. 191. One should note, on the other hand, the historical connections between curved lines in the art of William Blake and those of British forerunners such as Mackmurdo and Beardsley – extending as they are to Art Nouveau – that are discussed in *Schmutzler 1955b* and *Schmutzler 1962*, pp. 35-53. See also *Lukacher 2007* on Blake himself, and *Madsen 1956*, p. 172 for Walter Crane on Blake.

⁵² On Bing's endeavours as an art merchant, inextricably linked here with his moves to publicize 'Art Nouveau' to attract attention to the artworks he sold, but as a seller of Japanese decorative art, see *Weisberg 2005a*, *Weisberg 2005b* and *Eidelberg 2005*. Weisberg's lifelong effort has been to show that *japonisme* is intricately linked with Bing's specific form of Art Nouveau.

specifically tailored to their nationalist prejudices. We shall see in section 6.2 that the British themselves are also partly responsible for this, in their negative reaction. But for the moment it is worth underlining how the nascent category of Art Nouveau got to be formed partly in relation to pressures of the art market. It is also interesting to note here that the social ideals of Ruskin, Morris, Crane and so forth of an art for everyone, carried on in France by anglophiles such as Lahor, were utterly abandoned, in favour of negotiations in an art market exclusively for the *bourgeoisie*.

Still, endeavours to argue for and devise a specifically French Art Nouveau were not limited to Bing. Gallé and the Nancy School predated the opening of Bing's shop, and their use of natural shapes in ornament was already noted in the late 1880s. Reporting on the 1889 Exhibition, Paul Desjardins wrote:

Je crois, à ce propos, que Gallé serait ravi de retrouver dans John Ruskin le développement magnifique des mêmes idées. L'auteur des *Modern Painters* est si mal connu en France (et en Angleterre aussi), que l'artiste lorrain n'a pas dû le lire. S'il l'avait lu, sûrement il le citerait, tant la parenté de génie est frappante entre eux.⁵³

If this is true, then it is quite likely that Gallé's use of natural shapes does not derive from Ruskin; Desjardins himself sees it as also deriving from the 'rationalism' of Viollet-Le-Duc.⁵⁴ In 1897, Raymond Bouyer saw two sources, Japonisme and the medievalism of Ruskin and Morris:

Du chaos des formes surgissent deux influences impérieuses: depuis que les Goncourt, ces explorateurs de l'Art, ont importé les trouvailles des Japonais qui font une science de la composition des bouquets et qui donnent à leurs femmes des noms de fleurs, depuis que le penseur John Ruskin, suivi par le poète-peintre William Morris, a rêvé d'étendre à toutes les provinces créatrices "la religion de la Beauté" – l'Extrême-Orient s'allie

⁵³ Desjardins 1889, p. 2.

⁵⁴ See Desjardins 1889.

curieusement aux songes moyen-âgeux d'Albion pour conseiller nos chercheurs. La plante triomphe.⁵⁵

But others such as the influential Roger Marx⁵⁶ argued, in line with Bing's realignment of Art Nouveau with Louis XV, that it had been Rococo all along. The journal *Art et décoration* was also founded in 1897, with contributors defending a French 'rationalisme' harking back beyond Viollet-le-Duc to the 18th century, while Marx had completely abandoned by 1897 his early fascination for Ruskin and Morris and campaigned on a more nationalist and 'rationalist' tone for Gallé and the group *L'art dans tout* (which included Plumet and Selmersheim of the Nancy School mentioned below and, later on, Lalique).⁵⁷ Still we have Marx clearly indicating the sources of French artists such as Émile Gallé:

Jusqu'à hier, Carabin était seul, avec Émile Gallé, à tenter la rénovation du mobilier moderne. Voici que, maintenant, les architectes convoitent, à leur tour, de donner des modèles à l'ébénisterie, à la menuiserie. C'est de Belgique qu'est venu l'exemple : les ensembles exposés à la Libre Esthétique et chez Bing par Serrurier et Van de Velde, ceux de Horta aussi, ont retenu l'attention et provoqué les commentaires.

À Paris, des meubles de M. Plumet [...] valent, par la logique de la construction et l'agrément des lignes ondoyantes ; bien mise en évidence, la beauté de la matière constitue le seul décor.⁵⁸

Interestingly enough, Marx's 'logique de la construction', albeit rationalist sounding, has all to do with Ruskin's 'truth to materials'. But Marx adds to this a layer of essentialist discourse about 'races' and 'nations', in order to disqualify the British as a true source:

La sympathie vouée au mobilier anglais n'a pas eu d'autre origine que la lassitude pour les meubles où le confort était sacrifié à l'aspect. La

⁵⁵ Bouyer 1897, p. 219.

⁵⁶ Roger Marx published over 1300 papers on artistic 'actualité', and he held key administrative appointments in the French state at the *Administration des Beaux-Arts*. On Marx, see the voluminous Méneux 2007.

⁵⁷ See Méneux 2007, pp. 631-640. On Lalique, see O'Mahony 2009.

⁵⁸ Marx 1897, p. 2.

simplicité nous a reposé des complications auxquelles se plaisaient trop souvent les artisans parisiens ; elle nous a semblé une nouveauté piquante ; nous l'avons goûtée avec autant de passion que l'ingéniosité des peintres primitifs ; mais l'imitation des modèles d'Outre-Manche n'a pas manqué de provoquer une réaction ; on les a reproduits textuellement, servilement, sans tenir compte des différences de climat, de tempérament, de race, sans leur faire subir les transformations nécessaires sans les accommoder à notre goût très particulier. Alors, et très naturellement, des protestations se sont élevées et on a revendiqué en faveur du génie national méconnu...

M. Plumet et M. Selmersheim n'ont eu garde de verser dans les travers communs ; ils sont remontés au principe des exemples anglais ; ils l'ont analysé ; ils se sont convaincus de son excellence [...] ; mais l'heure venue de créer, ils se sont imposés de rester dans la tradition nationale et ils ont allié à la règle britannique de la simplicité, de la commodité, le charme d'une grâce toute française.⁵⁹

I assume that when speaking of 'race', Marx, who was Jewish and 'Dreyfusard', did not refer to the biological concept that became current afterwards, but to the older concept with 18th-century roots of 'race' as defined in terms of family lines and extending to larger groups such as the nation.⁶⁰ In this context, talk of 'race' and talk of 'nation' is largely co-extensive, and it forms part of the vocabulary of what Benedict Anderson called 'imagined communities'.⁶¹ The debates that led to the construction of our categories of Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau are always involving such imagined communities, as arts were seen as playing part in their definition. We shall see more of this in the next chapter, when Belgians sought to define themselves through their new art.

Having excluded British sources, Marx has to explain the role of Japanese art, and he finds it precisely in a long tradition of "sympathie esthétique" within French decorative arts, towards Far-Eastern art (China and Japan):

⁵⁹ Marx 1897, p. 2.

⁶⁰ On the 18th-century roots of the concept, see Hudson 1996.

⁶¹ Anderson 2006. There are of course many other competing definitions of the concept of 'nation', I merely want to emphasize here the 'imagined' part.

Cette sympathie, cette influence, doit-on les imputer, les assujettir au caprice d'une mode et partant les juger éphémères, ou bien ne procèdent-elles pas plutôt d'une affinité de tempéraments dès longtemps prouvée: "L'apothéose" d'aujourd'hui ne serait alors que la reprise d'une tradition, le retour à une préférence, vive comme jamais à l'heure présente, mais nouvelle non pas.⁶²

This is how Marx is able to construct a direct link between Rococo and Art Nouveau.

These paragraphs illustrate the efforts deployed in France to eliminate the immediate Belgian and British sources and claim a direct link to a more distant national past. It is in that spirit that Émile Gallé and the Nancy School, the true fount of French Art Nouveau, were given national antecedents in 18th-century decorative arts, and put to the fore as representatives of a national art.⁶³

Bing's pavilion was not only a commercial success, with its furniture sold mostly to foreign museums and individuals, and mostly favourable reviews, abroad if not at home, it also went a long way to impose 'Art Nouveau' as the name of the movement

⁶² Marx 1890, p. 142.

⁶³ On *l'École de Nancy* see Debize 1998, on its glassworks Thomas 2000, Thomas 2007, Thomas & Thomson 2004 and on its links with the 18th century, see Rossinot 2005. Artworks by Émile Gallé were already selected by Bing to be exhibited in his gallery in 1895. He visited London and the South Kensington Museum in 1871 (now, the Victoria & Albert Museum), and certainly knew of Ruskin and Morris, but the extent of his knowledge of their work and the extent of their influence are hard to evaluate. In the secondary literature, Gallé is often described as sympathetic to Ruskin and/or Morris, see Le Tacon 2004, p. 18, Silverman 1989, p. 52, O'Mahony 2007, p. 5, Dandona 2010, pp. 8 & 13. Gallé did not mention much Ruskin, see Gallé 1980, pp. 196-199, and on Morris, Gallé 1980, p. 226. Some of his remarks evoke Ruskin or Morris, such as Gallé 1980, p. 242, without any mention of them. Possible borrowings include the themes of 'art for all' and 'joy of labour'. According to Philippe Thiébaut, Gallé truly developed his aesthetic ideas after 1884, being interested in theories of the 'unity of art' and 'art for all' (Thiébaut 2004b, pp. 14-15). The former appears to come from Comte Léon de Laborde's report on the Great exhibition in London, in 1851. (See Thiébaut 2004b, p. 14 note 4.). But it is also a well-known idea of Ruskin and Morris. That the ideas of 'art for all' and 'joy of labour' show the influence of Ruskin and Morris (for which see the chapter 4 above), is argued in O'Mahony 2007. For example, Gallé is explicit in his appraisal of Morris in Gallé 1980, p. 226. Close study of nature appears to be another common point, but Gallé did not use botanical forms merely as motifs, and went beyond inspiration from nature, he meant to 'symbolise', bringing his art closer to the aesthetics of French Symbolism, and his art has indeed some formal resemblance with that of symbolists such as Gustave Moreau. See Debize 1998, pp. 61-63 and O'Mahony 2007. Gallé couched his ideas in 'Le décor symbolique', Gallé 1980, pp. 210-228.

whose artworks he wished to sell, even creating, in absence of the Arts and Crafts and the deliberate attempt to downplay the Belgian roots in favour of an imagined link with Louis XV, the illusion of French roots to Art Nouveau. As we saw above, the vice-president of the Jury of Awards, George Donaldson acquired a large number of pieces of “the style of the so-called ‘New Art’” and donated them in 1901 to the Victoria & Albert Museum, causing a backlash to be discussed in section 6.2 below. In the statement accompanying his donation, Donaldson wrote that he acted out of a

[...] sincere desire to see my countrymen to the front in the artistic and mercantile race which my special opportunities have shown me to exist, and which observation leads me to feel that Englishmen have been either apathetic to or largely unconscious of. Those impressions are the *raison d’être* of the gift of ‘New Art’ furniture.⁶⁴

The fact that most of these pieces were French, including many from *l’École de Nancy*, that he praised above all Gallé, and that he proceeded to describe recent developments in British decorative arts in terms woefully ignorant of the Arts and Craft, were certainly conducive to thinking that the ‘New Art’ was of French origin, and that British arts had nothing to do with its origin. This is the sort of mistake committed a year later by the architect and Columbia professor A. D. F. Hamlin:

While many of its roots can be traced to England, its chief growth had been in France (or rather in Paris), with offshoots in Belgium, Germany and Austria (or rather Vienna). [...] In England, the movement had been partly spontaneous or indigenous, springing from seeds sown by William Morris and other artistic reformers from Preraphaelites down: partly a reflection of the French activity. Vienne caught the fever partly from Germany, partly from Paris.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Donaldson 1901, pp. 469-470.

⁶⁵ Hamlin 1902, pp. 131-132.

Even as astute and knowledgeable an observer as Octave Maus – whom we will encounter in the next chapter – could write in *L'Art moderne*, that one finds in Bing's pavilion:

Beautiful furniture of a new style, neither English nor Belgian, trying to, and even succeeding at times, to combine the aesthetic of the day with the traditional elegance of French furniture.⁶⁶

This impression of French origins might have been magnified by the lack of proper representation of British and Belgian artists at *Exposition universelle*, which was duly noted by specialists such as Jean Lahor and Gabriel Mourey.⁶⁷ Given the publicity that the *Exposition* provided for 'Art Nouveau', Bing might be said to have succeeded in his attempt, contributing to the impression of French origins to the movement.⁶⁸

As could be expected of a phenomenon that developed and spread across Europe so rapidly, a plethora of terms were immediately coined, before 'Art Nouveau' gained the widespread currency it enjoys today.⁶⁹ Bing definitely had a role to play in this. Although, as Donaldson did above, the British used first the term 'New Art'⁷⁰ and the French used the expressions '*Style Liberty*'⁷¹ or 'Modern style',⁷² to cover both Arts

⁶⁶ Maus 1900, p. 209.

⁶⁷ Lahor 1901, p. 47 and Mourey 1900, pp. 164-165.

⁶⁸ Arsène Alexandre would once more not be fooled, and he would now write about 'Modern Style' – the choice of the English word seems on purpose to make plain its foreign origin – describing it as 'ill' and as resembling bones (*os*) and noodles (*nouilles*), and claiming that "Louis XV had become its own larvae". See Alexandre 1900.

⁶⁹ See Madsen 1956, pp. 75-83, Selz & Constantine 1959, pp. 10-11 or Duncan 1994, p. 23.

⁷⁰ For other instances, see Day 1901 or Blizard et al. 1904.

⁷¹ See Adburgham 1975, p. 77, for a circular by a French firm chastising its customers for using the expression '*Style Liberty*', thus "gratuitously advertis[ing] – and without giving any credit to the French taste – a name which stands for nothing in regard to these creations, which are specialities due to inspiration purely French, and interpreted by French artists. The new style advances day by day, by reason of its undoubted merits; but this is due to the unremitting toil of French artists and manufacturers, and it is they who have the right to give the style a name. Their long years of efforts and self-sacrifice and perseverance, should attain other results than the glorification of the foreigner – or Liberty. Honour to whom honour is due; to the new style give the credit of its French good taste and originality".

⁷² See, for example, Alexandre 1900 – Alexandre using here the English expression 'Modern style' to emphasize the foreignness of Art Nouveau – Maus 1900, p. 209, Lahor 1901, p. 72, de Chessin 2001, which is a reprint of a paper which appeared originally in 1905 under the title, 'La philosophie du

and Crafts and Art Nouveau, they both came to be replaced over time by 'Art Nouveau', causing more mental confusion over its true genealogy.

It is worth noting to conclude this section that, with the exception of the Dutch '*Nieuwe Kunst*', which is of late coinage (the 1960s),⁷³ no major European language other than English has adopted 'Art Nouveau' or a translation of it. In German-speaking countries '*Jugendstil*', deriving from the Munich-based journal *Jugend* (youth), because it popularized Art Nouveau, was ultimately kept.⁷⁴ But there were other terms in use, such as '*neu-stil*' or '*neudeutsche Kunst*', and in Austria, '*Secession*' or '*Secessionsstil*', referring to the *Wiener Secession*. Although '*stile floreale*' is often used in Italy, which is meant to trace another imaginary connection, this time with Italian Renaissance, one still often speaks today to '*stile Liberty*' or simply '*Liberty*',⁷⁵ while one finds in Spanish the simple '*Modernismo*' – in Catalan: '*modernisme*' – or, with specific reference to Antoni Gaudí, '*Modernismo Catalan*'.⁷⁶

"Modern Style", and the Surrealist poet Aragon's autobiographical preface to the first edition of Roger Guérand's *L'art nouveau en Europe*: 'Le "Modern Style" d'où je suis' (Guérand 2005, pp. ix-xxxi). Salvador Dalí had already published 'De la beauté terrifiante et comestible de l'architecture Modern' Style' in *Minotaure* in 1933 (Dalí 1933). Because of this link with surrealism, the expression 'Modern Style' was kept by French psychoanalysts, while it was supplanted by 'Art Nouveau'. See, for example, Waldberg 1964 and Quiguer 1979.

⁷³ Eliëns, Groot & Leidelmeijer 1997, p. 8. The Spanish expression '*Art Joven*' was used as the name of a journal first published in 1901, by Francisco Asís de Soler and Pablo Ruiz Picasso, but its content had more to do with a renewal of fine arts and literature, and little to do with Art Nouveau.

⁷⁴ Madsen 1956, p. 78.

⁷⁵ On Art Nouveau in Italy, see Bossaglia 1989, de Guttry 1989, Lyttleton 1989, Weisberg 1989 and de Guttry & Paola 2012.

⁷⁶ Delevoy 1958, p. 5. There were also expressions coined in reference to specific artists or movements, such as '*Belgische*' or '*Veldesche Stil*' in Germany in reference to Henry Van de Velde, '*style Métro*' or '*style Guimard*' in reference to Hector Guimard and '*Glasgow style*', which refers exclusively to 'The Four', namely the sisters Frances and Margaret Macdonald and their respective husbands, James Herbert McNair and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. For the origin of this last expression, see Howarth 1977, p. 25.

5.2. Carving Art History at its Joints?

Concerning the second aspect of the social construction of Art Nouveau, I merely wish to emphasize that our concepts are ‘constructed’, but not the historical reality to the study of which we apply them, so that a term such as ‘Art Nouveau’ in art history is not determined by a ‘metaphysically’ independent historical reality: it is the result of a ‘construction’. That this ‘constructing’ is done by specific social agents or more impersonal causal ones is not an issue that needs to be settled here, although I emphasize more in what follows the role of personal agents.

Since Plato one talks of expressions for ‘natural kinds’ such as ‘water’, ‘snow’, etc. as ‘carving nature at its joints’.⁷⁷ My point here is that we tend to think that, because we inherit them from the past, categories such as ‘Art Nouveau’ have somehow already and adequately carved up past reality at its joints, but our inclination should be treated with suspicion. In other words, we negotiate our understanding of the past in terms of ‘constructions’ such that ‘Art Nouveau’ may simply have a distorting effect.

The concept of ‘Art Nouveau’ is admittedly problematic. It is a truism that every epoch has its own ‘new’ art.⁷⁸ Even if we grant that it is not meant to refer simply to making something new out with old recipes – what Greenberg famously called ‘kitsch’ in the 1930s⁷⁹ – there were lots of tendencies in decorative arts at the end of the 19th century premised on attempts to start from scratch from new principles, as opposed to recycling old ideas, which were therefore anything but ‘new’, and calling them accordingly ‘the new art’ does not imply that they shared the same principles or stylistic features. Siegfried Bing himself, who coined and publicized the expression, thought of ‘Art Nouveau’ as “the name of a movement, not of a style”.⁸⁰ Following his lead on

⁷⁷ *Phaedrus* 265d.

⁷⁸ The expression ‘art nouveau’ has been used prior to Bing, in *Lemmonier* 1887 and *Marx* 1893. In both cases the reference is to new developments in fine arts. Marx’s paper is about two exhibitions, on Japanese prints (Utamaro and Hiroshige), and the other of Toulouse-Lautrec and Charles Maurin.

⁷⁹ In ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’, in *Greenberg* 1986, I, pp. 5-22.

⁸⁰ *Bing* 1903, p. 1.

this point, as well as that of many historians of 'Art Nouveau',⁸¹ I shall use the expression 'Art Nouveau' as an umbrella term to cover a variety of styles, which may be taken collectively to form a movement, although there was never any manifesto or shared set of beliefs or objectives, except some rather broad ones having precisely to do with Ruskin's legacy.

As already pointed out, the fact is that there are no stylistic features common to the artworks ordinarily called today 'Art Nouveau'. For example, I have referred at the very beginning of this thesis to the Art Nouveau curved line called 'whiplash' (Plate # 1.1). The expression 'Art Nouveau' signifies objects in the design of which curved lines similar to this 'whiplash' feature prominently. Still, it is not to be found at all in many instances where we are inclined to use the label 'Art Nouveau', for example in Viennese *Jugendstil*, which was described by Madsen as 'geometric linearism'.⁸²

The ambiguity I am addressing here can be illustrated by the case of the Antwerp architect Jos. Bascourt, who realized about 20 houses in the Art nouveau style. Bascourt's case is interesting when compared to, say, Van de Velde. While the latter adopted a stance and never looked back, Bascourt kept producing houses in 'neo-Greek', 'neo-Roman', 'neoclassical', 'neo-Gothic', 'neo-Baroque', 'neo-Flemish', etc. alongside his 'Art Nouveau' houses, which amount to no more than ten percent of his production.⁸³ He had no ideological *parti pris* like Van de Velde, and saw Art Nouveau as a style like any other, on offer for his clients to choose from.⁸⁴ This attitude implicitly confirms that actors saw themselves as producing artworks or houses in Art Nouveau style, thus that there was an apparently recognizable style to begin with, if not truly

⁸¹ As Paul Greenhalgh noted, there is an ongoing debate among specialists about this *Greenhalgh 2000*, pp. 15 & 437 note 3. Among those with whom I agree, see *Duncan 1994*, p. 7.

⁸² *Madsen 1956*, p. 68.

⁸³ *Strauven 1993*, pp. 9-11.

⁸⁴ *Strauven 1993*, pp. 13.

definable. Still, whatever Bascourt would describe as Art Nouveau may not have many formal similarities with what a Finn or an Austrian would label 'Art Nouveau'.

Indeed, one should thus recognize that it is not possible to define the concept of 'Art Nouveau' in terms of a single set of properties that every artwork which we would be prepared to call 'Art Nouveau' would possess. If we were even able to establish a set of properties $\{a, b, c, d, e\}$, including presence of the 'whiplash' as being characteristic of 'Art Nouveau', probably none of artworks we commonly describe as 'Art Nouveau' would exhibit them all at once: a given artwork would exhibit a subset of these properties $\{a, b, c\}$, while another one would exhibit another subset $\{a, c, d\}$, another $\{b, d, e\}$, etc. In this respect, the concept is akin to that of 'game', and we should perhaps describe it as a 'family resemblance' concept, in the sense of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein.⁸⁵

Thus, the concept of 'Art Nouveau' does not admit a precise delimitation, and it is no surprise that there are no attempts at defining its 'style'. This does not mean that it ought really to be inoperative, as perfectly legitimate concepts are vague, such as our colour concepts. It means rather that applying the label 'Art Nouveau' to specific art works while refraining from doing it for others often conceals underlying issues and concerns, that I shall endeavour to bring forward in this chapter. For instance, a particular Arts and Crafts artwork might exhibit properties in the above imagined set $\{a, b, c, d, e\}$ of properties associated with Art Nouveau, while we would not wish to call it Art Nouveau. This raises the issue of the delineation between 'Arts and Crafts' and 'Art Nouveau'. One illustration of this is the case of 'National Romanticism' in Finland, which is often classified under 'Art Nouveau',⁸⁶ while it displays hardly any

⁸⁵ Wittgenstein 2009, §§ 66-67. If we are to follow Morris Weitz – not Wittgenstein himself – the very concept of 'art' is also a 'family resemblance' concept. See Weitz 1956.

⁸⁶ For example, in Moorhouse & Moorhouse 1987.

visual similarities with it, and has everything to do, in its inception, with Arts and Crafts.

To digress briefly about the Baltic countries, Finland and Latvia were experiencing a national awakening by the end of the 19th century, leading to their independence from Russia (Finland in 1917, Latvia in 1919). Finnish and Latvian arts naturally reflected this wider socio-political phenomenon, with a search for national identity that emphasized historical roots with, for example, the revival of national folklore. In Finland, a well-known painting by Akseli Gallen-Kallela taking as its theme the epic of Kalevala was quickly elevated to the status of a national icon, whose elaborately decorated frame has interest in itself (Plate # 5.4).⁸⁷ As it turns out, key figures at the origin of the revival of decorative arts such as A. W. Finch and Louis Sparre owed much to Ruskin and Morris.⁸⁸ Following Morris' call for a revival of local traditional arts and crafts (see section 4.3), they helped foster the formulation of the architectural movement known as 'National Romanticism'.⁸⁹ Flourishing briefly in Helsinki in the first years of the new century,⁹⁰ this 'National Romanticism' was formed by Finnish practitioners who sought to revitalize architecture by integrating elements from the vernacular.⁹¹ It can be argued that the resulting style, with its sparse decorations and absence of the notorious Art Nouveau line, has more to do with Arts and Crafts than Art Nouveau. This conclusion is made possible by comparing works by leading architects such as Lars Sonck, for example his Eira Hospital built in 1905 (Plate # 5.5), with a typically Arts and Crafts house by Voysey (Plate # 5.6). There were also buildings from a roughly similar period (1905-1911) in the 'National Romantic' style

⁸⁷ Finnish painters such as Gallen-Kallela were not unique in this endeavour, see *Salé 2000* for an overview.

⁸⁸ A. W. Finch opened his atelier in Finland in 1897. See *Supinen 1992*, p. 66.

⁸⁹ See *Wäre 1993*.

⁹⁰ Spanning the years 1895-1915 (*Moorhouse 1998*, p. 8). An anonymous article in *The Studio* in 1896 entitled 'The Artistic Movement in Finland' makes no mention of trends related to Arts and Crafts or Art Nouveau (*Anon. 1896b*).

⁹¹ See *Moorhouse & Moorhouse 1987*.

in Riga, on the other side of the Baltic sea, which reflect a similar socio-political situation;⁹² for example, Konstantīns Pēkšēns and Eižens Laube's house at Tērbatas iela 15/17 (Plate # 5.7). In both instances, however, 'National Romanticism' has been classified as a sub-style of Art Nouveau.⁹³ But this classification looks *prima facie* unprincipled and somewhat arbitrary.

To come back to Plato's metaphor, our concepts are thus not carving reality at its joints, after all, for such joints are not so easily located. Madsen's coinage of the expression 'British Proto-Art Nouveau' or Schmutzler's need to delimit a period of 'high' Art Nouveau, distinct from a rather British 'early' Art Nouveau, mentioned above, also illustrate this type of difficulty. Perhaps the reason for such difficulties is that there are no 'joints' to begin with, only categories with variable extensions.

We also saw the early use of 'Modern style' in France: what we call today 'Arts and Crafts' was not called as such in the late 19th century, when referring to it, one used 'Modern style', so the use of this expression to refer to Art Nouveau shows how blurred the line between 'Arts and Crafts' and 'Art Nouveau' was (at least until people were later convinced by the false narrative of the French roots of the latter). Other French expressions that also reveal this, such as '*style anglais*' or '*genre anglais*' were used, as were the German '*moderne Stil*' (before use settled on the already-mentioned *Jugendstil*) and the Italian '*stile inglese*' and '*stile Liberty*'.⁹⁴ The fact of contemporary usage of this variety of terms underscores the above comment about there not being any 'joint' for these expressions to carve.

⁹² Latvia was also part of Russia and in the midst of a national awakening leading to independence in 1919.

⁹³ For the case of Riga, see (Krastiņš 2007, 21).

⁹⁴ Given the prominence of flower motifs embodying these curved lines, the Italian '*stile floreale*' mentioned above makes much sense; the art critic Irene Sargent also coined 'neo-floral style' (Sargent 1902, p. 132). One should note here the German expressions '*Lilienstil*' and '*Wellenstil*'.

One should also keep in mind that part of the difficulty with these labels has to do with the need first to overcome a deep-seated reluctance to talk about such a thing as 'British Art Nouveau'. As we shall see in section 6.2, there was a strong negative reaction against Art Nouveau in Britain in the first years of the 20th century. Adversaries won the day, creating the impression that there could not have been any 'British Art Nouveau' because it was some foreign art whose importation was blocked. This is contradicted by the art of figures as diverse as Aubrey Beardsley, Archibald Knox, Margaret Macdonald & Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Mary Seton Watts, all to be briefly discussed in section 6.2. But why would one not recognize Arts and Crafts as one trend among the many that form collectively the 'new art'? Is there a clear demarcation line that sets all of Arts and Craft on one side and all that qualifies as part of Art Nouveau as a movement on the other?

Be this as it may, my central concern in this thesis is the development of the curved line from Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts to the Belgian "*parafe en coup de fouet*", to use Roger Marx's expression (quoted below), with its more pronounced curvatures and kinks. Granted that the definition of the Art Nouveau style is not possible, and that this 'whiplash' does not occur in all artworks that are commonly called 'Art Nouveau', its centrality is undeniable. This can be seen already from the numerous expressions to which it gave rise, including many pejorative ones: or 'wave style', close to the 'wavy line' of the American critic Irene Sargent,⁹⁵ and ranging from the mildly derogative '*Schnörkelstil*' ('Flourish style') and '*moderne Strumpfbandlinien*' ('Modern garter lines') to the strongly derogative '*Bandwurmstil*' ('Tapeworm style') and its derivatives such as '*belgischer bandwurm*' ('Belgian tapeworm') and '*gereitzter Regenwurm*' ('Irritated earthworm'). To these one may add the Flemish '*Paling stijl*' ('Eel style'), and the milder French '*style nouille*' and the Italian '*stile Vermicelli*'. Discussants in the above-mentioned symposium on Art Nouveau in 1904 were also

⁹⁵ Sargent 1902.

particularly loathsome and inventive: 'squirm', 'squirmy line'⁹⁶ or 'squirming curve',⁹⁷ 'wriggles',⁹⁸ 'entrails',⁹⁹ 'cluster of reptiles'¹⁰⁰, 'flabby form and twisting tentacles of the octopus',¹⁰¹ and 'fungoid growth'¹⁰² being some of the words used to describe the Art Nouveau line.

The English 'whiplash', commonly used today, comes from the German '*Peitschenhieb*'. Georg Fuchs first used that word in a 1895 article in the journal *Pan* on Herman Obrist, pointing out that the curves in one of his embroideries "evoke the crack of a whip".¹⁰³ Obrist exhibited some of his embroideries at the Arts and Crafts exhibition a year later, and Mary Logan reported on them in *The Studio*, writing:

The *Peitschenhieb* – that blue and gold panel suggested to the artist, as the name indicates, by the lightning-like flick of a whip – has the endless continuity of a line and spring of curve of some fascinating monster orchid.¹⁰⁴

One finds an early occurrence of the use of 'whiplash' in Roger Marx' critique of Colonna in 1899:

Au rebours, M. Colonna n'utilise comme élément de décor que les ondoiements de la ligne serpentine et ses motifs d'or mat trouvent à plaire, quoiqu'ils rappellent d'un peu trop près parfois le parafe en coup de fouet des Horta et des Van de Velde.¹⁰⁵

No illustration of *Peitschenhieb* accompanied Logan's paper, which is strange given that she describes it as the most striking illustration of Obrist's "genius for

⁹⁶ *Blizard et al. 1904*, pp. 209, 210, 379.

⁹⁷ *Crane 1902b*, p. 230.

⁹⁸ *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 209, 213

⁹⁹ *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 209.

¹⁰⁰ *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 263.

¹⁰¹ *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 325.

¹⁰² *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 213.

¹⁰³ "*beim knallen eines Peitschenhieb erscheint*", *Fuchs 1896*, p. 324.

¹⁰⁴ *Logan 1896*, p. 102. Mary Logan is the *nom de plume* of Mary Smith, who was also the wife of Bernard Berenson.

¹⁰⁵ *Marx 1899*, p. 558.

composition”,¹⁰⁶ but it appears that Obrist chose this new title for an embroidery originally entitled *Cyclamen* (Plate # 5.8), dated between 1892 and 1894. The name ‘*Peitschenhieb*’ has been associated with it ever since,¹⁰⁷ and this association led to misconceptions about the origin of the Art Nouveau line.

Debora Silverman recently sought to prosecute Belgian Art Nouveau as the flawed product of Belgium’s colonial violence in Congo.¹⁰⁸ Given that she speaks of Art Nouveau as having thus originated as “the return of the repressor in visual form”, her approach is an instance of ‘symptomatic reading’ as described in section 1.3.¹⁰⁹ In order to uphold the validity of my own approach, I would like to conclude this chapter with some critical comments.

The ‘whiplash’ plays a central role in Silverman’s overall project:

Van de Velde’s and Horta’s line of force, with its twisting aerial curves, integrally links the architectural whiplash style to the imperial culture in which it flourished.¹¹⁰

That Art Nouveau began in an era of colonial violence does not prove that it is a product of it, unless one can actually draw links, and in one of her arguments she takes a literal interpretation of the fact that the Art Nouveau line has been described as ‘whiplash’ and links it with a specific whip called ‘*chicotte*’ used in Congo.¹¹¹ She thus failed to notice or simply ignored that this expression is merely one of many used at the time – as we just saw – and that none of the others indicate any link with colonialism. Even Obrist’s embroidery had nothing to do with a whiplash, it represents a cyclamen. In light of the numerous names given above for the Art Nouveau line, she

¹⁰⁶ Logan 1896, p. 102.

¹⁰⁷ For an example of this common practice, see Becker 1985, p. 106

¹⁰⁸ Silverman 2011b, Silverman 2012 & Silverman 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Silverman 2011b, p. 139. This must be an allusion to Freud’s ‘return of the repressed’, in the spirit of the use in the form of an analogy of concepts taken from psychoanalysis (see Krauss 1985, p. 22). See, for example, Freud 1915. There is no justification provided for this sort of analogy.

¹¹⁰ Silverman 2011b, p. 170.

¹¹¹ Silverman 2011b, p. 170.

thus appears to have selected the only expression that could support her main thesis. Still, the *chicotte* is a short rigid whip, not able to produce the ‘whiplash’ shape characteristic of the Art Nouveau line, even less the undulations of Obrist’s embroidery.

She also committed an anachronism: Horta and Van de Velde (the only Belgian artists on which she focuses in relation to the curved line) produced their characteristic lines several years before anyone thought about describing them as ‘whiplash’, even before Fuchs used the expression to describe Obrist’s embroidery of a plant, a different context, that cannot be read as an explanation of the art of Horta and Van de Velde.¹¹²

¹¹² Silverman also suggested ornamental body art of scarification in Congo as a visual source to Art Nouveau, on the basis of a passage in *Van de Velde 1895a*, pp. 736-737. See *Silverman 2011a*, pp. 745-746 and *Silverman 2012*. Silverman keeps silent about the fact that Van de Velde, who also cited extensively Morris and Crane (*Van de Velde 1895a*, pp. 742-743), self-consciously held not an imperialist but a socialist view of art, according to which art properly conceived would play a revolutionary role in improving the life of the working class. Far from denigrating African or primitive art, he argues that “la civilisation aurait fait de nous moins que les primitifs” (*Van de Velde 1895a*, p. 740) and actually suggest that the relationship of art to life in ‘primitive’ art is the right one, not the degenerated version of late 19th century bourgeois art. Van de Velde makes a more explicit claim on this point in his *Aperçus*: “The distinction [between high- and low-art] is a recent one: it would no more have occurred to the ancients than it would, say, to the primitives. For them, there was only *one* art, or – not to mince words – Art itself, which they revered in all its manifold manifestations, without any idea of creating hierarchies of value for those who worked in its several fields of activity” (*Van de Velde 1895b*, 7, also *Van de Velde 2000*, p. 195). Compare *Van de Velde 1992*, p. 259. It is quite interesting to note therefore that Ruskin’s denial of the distinction between high- and low-art would count as one the factors paving the way to a renewed appreciation of ‘primitive’ art. Thus, the passage used by Silverman does not reflect some unconscious desire for colonial violence, but simply the *stated* idea, illustrated with the case of an African man tattooing his child, that the true relationship of art to life is exhibited not in the so-called civilization of late 19th century bourgeois aesthetic doctrines, but in the ‘primitive’ urge to decorate one’s life and body. At all events, there is no derivation by Silverman of anything central to Art Nouveau from the bodily scars that she depicts. Given that Art Nouveau has many theoretical and visual sources and that Van de Velde explicitly refers to closer visual antecedents as well as to theoretical reasons derived from Ruskin and Morris, and given that these *tatouages* do *not* exhibit typically Art Nouveau lines, it seems to me that this further suggestion cannot be made to carry as much weight as Silverman claims it does in the visual analysis or Belgian Art Nouveau.

6. 'To Every Age its Art, to Every Art its Freedom'¹

Je laisse la fleur et la feuille, et je prends la tige.
Victor Horta

6.1. Belgian Art Nouveau

To understand the roots of Belgian Art Nouveau, we need to recall the fact, discussed above, that when Bing opened his gallery in 1895, he was exhibiting and selling artworks that were already Art Nouveau, and that, when they were not British Arts and Crafts, a large amount came from Belgium. I also mentioned Georges Lemmen's covers for *L'Art Moderne* and for the catalogue of *Les XX* ("les vingts"), both from 1891, as marking the beginning of Art Nouveau *per se*, along with houses by Victor Horta in 1893-1894. My brief in this section will thus be to cover the period 1891-1895, and document the extent to which knowledge of Ruskin, Morris and the Arts and Crafts had spread within Belgium, and the extent to which it influenced Belgian artists, who adopted their ideas and visual style. I have organized the material around a few key figures, but it would be useful to have a quick overview of the conditions that led to the spread of British art and aesthetic ideals, the role of printed media and, especially, two associations, *Les XX* and its successor, *La Libre esthétique* which were responsible for an important part of the animation on the Belgian art scene, with annual exhibitions, lectures and concerts.²

¹ The motto of the Viennese Secession building '*Der Zeit ihre Kunst. Der Kunst ihre Freiheit*'. Built by Joseph Maria Olbrich in 1897, and financed by the steel magnate Karl Wittgenstein (father of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein), the *Wiener Secession* was meant as an exhibiting hall for artists wishing, as its name indicates, to break away from the Academy. It became representative of Viennese '*Jugendstil*'.

² For example, Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine were invited to lecture in Brussels by *Les XX*. Following the formula of *Les XX*, concerts were organized in conjunction with the annual Salon of *La Libre esthétique*. Helped by Vincent D'Indy, Octave Maus selected Fauré, Debussy, Dukas, Ravel, Albeni, Milhaud, and others (*Nyns 1954*, p. 5). Debussy's piece *La Damselle élue*, inspired by a poem by Rossetti was played in 1893. Interestingly enough, Oliver-Georges Destree published a translation of

Belgium became a country in 1830, partly with help from the British, who were happy to take away from the French the estuary of the Scheldt at Antwerp. It became heavily industrialized throughout the rest of the century, because of its coal mines in Wallonia. The social and environmental conditions to which Ruskin and Morris reacted in Britain largely prevailed in Belgium as well. At the same time, British merchants and industrialists, who took part in this process, were keen on access to the hinterland *via* the Scheldt at Antwerp (and an extensive network of canals linking it to industrial regions in northern France and the Ruhr in Germany), and there was a sizeable British expatriate community by the end of the century, with its own journals (*Belgian News*, *Continental Advertiser*) and so forth. Both James Ensor and Alfred William Finch were born in Belgium of British parents. Although sharing their language, Belgians – notably the upper middle class which spoke French, so that even Flemish-speaking artists all spoke French – did not feel themselves to be vassals of France, especially as the country had, politically and economically, strong ties with Britain. Not only were conditions not propitious for the spreading of Anglophobic prejudices (notably in cultural matters), it was quite the reverse: Anglophilia was on the rise in Belgium throughout the second half of the 19th century.³ There was correspondingly a great demand in Belgium for artistic news from London and a more unprejudiced appreciation of British culture.

At the same time, Belgians were looking for a higher cultural purpose, in order to take a place within Europe, seeing their new nation (this being an instance of an ‘imagined community’) in geographical terms as being at the *crossroads* between southern and northern Europe, or even between French (and Latin), Anglo-Saxon and

that poem in *Les Préraphaélites. Notes sur l'art décoratif et la peinture en Angleterre*, in 1895. See *Destrée* 2005, pp. 39-44.

³ This Anglophilia was documented in *Gilsoul* 1953.

Germanic cultures.⁴ The fact that Belgians thus sought to play a European-wide role in these terms is quite important to understand the rise of Art Nouveau. As I have pointed out in the previous section, the boundaries between Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau were to be debated largely in nationalist terms (with frequent use of the terminology of ‘race’ as the original meaning of ‘family line’ was extended to ‘people’ and ‘nations’), but the idea that a new art of European significance would rise in Belgium is quite significant. Eventually, many Belgians began to see their country no longer in terms of ‘crossroads’, but as closer to Northern Europe. Olivier-Georges Destrée, the first figure that we will encounter below, published late in his life, at a time in 1911 when he had become a Benedictine monk, a book whose title, referring to Belgium, captures this idea: *L’Âme du nord*.⁵

Belgian artistic elites were of course interested in retrieving their artistic past. But even a strong inclination towards the revival of traditional Flemish architecture belied the feeling that their new country had no deep cultural tradition to carry it forward. The formulation of an identity that would help them fulfil their role in Europe was a complex task. Hence, Belgian artistic elites sought out conditions that would allow them to play this role in the most basic fashion by opening themselves to artistic currents from all over Europe, including Britain, at a period when this country was perceived to be unique in having fostered a renewal of decorative arts.

We have already encountered in the previous sections the Belgian model of the *Maison d’art* that Bing copied for his Paris gallery, which was itself a variant on *Liberty’s* and *Morris & Co.* and we can see here what sort of role *La Maison d’art* could play in the specific Belgian context. It is also important to keep in mind the role of the printed media. They certainly increased access – and at a faster rate – *via*

⁴ See, for example, *Olinger-Zinque 1995*, *Brogniez 2005*, pp. 90-93, *Brogniez & Fréché 2011*, pp. 210-211. This is another instance of what Benedict Anderson called ‘imagined communities’ in *Anderson 2006*.

⁵ *Destrée 1911*.

engravings or photographic reproduction to new artistic trends, so that they could now spread across Europe almost instantly – the role of magazines such as *The Studio* being central, and they were also the locus for the exchange of ideas.

The first issue of *La Jeune Belgique* captured this spirit very well in its mission statement:

La Jeune Belgique will ascribe (sic) to no school whatsoever. We consider that all genres are good if they remain moderate and if they have real talents to interpret them. [...] We are inviting the young, that is to say, those who are vigorous and loyal to help us in our work. Let them show that there is a Jeune Belgique as there is a Jeune France, and let them follow our advice: *Let's be ourselves.*⁶

The motto “*Soyons nous*” and the injunction to learn and absorb from new European trends seem to have been the primary motivation behind the profusion of cultural activities that characterizes the Belgian artistic scene in the last decades of the 19th century.

La Jeune Belgique was far from being the only ‘avant-garde’ journal. A leading role was played by *L’Art moderne*, founded in 1881 (with Edmond Picard, Victor Arnold, Eugène Robert and Octave Maus as editors, with the poet Émile Verhaeren eventually replacing Arnold and Robert); its purpose was identical to that of *La Jeune Belgique* except that it was widened to all the arts.⁷ Other journals included *La Wallonie*, *La Société Nouvelle* and *L’Émulation*. Given that not everyone could read the original English, these journals played an essential role in publishing translations. For example, *La Société Nouvelle* published a translation of parts of Morris’ *News from Nowhere* in 1892, and ‘The Lesser Arts’ in 1893.

⁶ *La Jeune Belgique* vol. 1, n. 1 (1881), p. 1. Translation from Vandemeulebroucke 2009, p. 123.

⁷ *L’Art moderne*, vol. 1, n. 1, p. 1. On *La Jeune Belgique* and *L’Art moderne*, see Canning 1992.

Special mention should be made of the Flemish avant-garde journal *Van Nu en Straks* (Plate # 6.1),⁸ whose first issue appeared in 1893 – its last issue appearing in 1901. The journal styled itself after the Century Guild's *Hobby Horse*,⁹ with vignettes as well as a page-size illustrations accompanying the texts (Plate # 6.2 & # 6.3). Willy Finch, Georges Lemmen, Jan Toorop¹⁰, Henry Van de Velde, and Théo van Rysselberghe collaborated for the illustrations of its first issue.¹¹ The journal was the brainchild of the industrialist Auguste Vermeyleen. Van de Velde held the *Hobby Horse* in high regard, but believed it could not be emulated in Belgium.¹² Still, Van de Velde's close friend, the poet Max Elskamp, commented after having received the second issue: "Superbe, je pense que tu auras de la peine à faire mieux, c'est vraiment plus beau que le *Hobby Horse*".¹³

⁸ The title translates approximately as 'From now and later'.

⁹ Even *The Studio* commented, vol. 4 (1894), p. xxxi: "The Dutch magazine, *Van Nu en Straks*, published at 81 Pachecostraat, Brussels, is one of the many art periodicals founded on the lines of the Century Guild *Hobby Horse*" (*Block* 1992, pp. 105 & 122 note 19).

¹⁰ Born in Java, Jan Toorop studied art in Brussels and became the only Dutch member of *Les XX*. His maternal great-grand-father was British, and he stayed in Britain between 1884 and 1886, and was influenced by British artists such as William Blake and Charles Ricketts. On his stay in London, see *L'Art Moderne*, Sep. 27, 1885, p. 311 and *Rothenstein* 1931, p. 177. Rothenstein was a member of Mackmurdo circle at 20 Fitzroy street, frequented by Olivier-George Destrée. Toorop was introduced to Maus by Edmond Picard and he played an instrumental role disseminating ideas and art from *Les XX* in Holland. He invited Paul Verlaine in Holland as well as introduced van Gogh to the *Association pour l'art* and *Les XX*. See *Siebelhoff* 1982 and *Siebelhoff* 1988. Mary Sturrock, daughter of Francis Newbry, said that Mackintosh had been influenced by Toorop (see *Eadie* 1990, pp. 61-2). Another Dutch artist, Gerrit Willem Dijsselhof worked for *Van nu en Straks*. Although he is not well-known, he played an important role in Dutch decorative art. An exceptional room entirely decorated by him, which shows strong influence from Arts and Crafts is rebuilt in The Hague's *Gemeentemuseum* (Plate # 6.4). He also did book design, including for the Dutch translation of Walter Crane's *Claims of Decorative Art*, published in 1903. Unfortunately, there is no English-language secondary literature available on Dijsselhof. See the entry by van Smoorenburg in *Muller* 1997. For a monograph in Dutch, see *Paradijs* 2002. For general studies of Dutch decorative art in which both Toorop and Dijsselhof are discussed, see *Eliëns et al.* 1997 and *Braches* 2009.

¹¹ On van Rysselberghe's contributions, see *Fontainas & Fontainas* 1997. Among collaborators through the years, G. W. Dijsselhof, Charles Ricketts and Lucien Pissarro deserve mention. See, *Clock* 1992, p. 105, *Hammacher* 1967, p. 90.

¹² *Van de Velde* 1992, p. 181.

¹³ Quoted in *Hammacher* 1967, p. 88.

As was the case in other European countries at the time – we saw this already with Ruskin in Britain – Belgium experienced a movement against ‘academicism’ that had already led to creation of the *Société Libre des Beaux-Arts* in 1868.¹⁴ The *Cercle des XX*, commonly known as *Les XX* or sometimes as *Les Vingt*, was founded in 1884 by Octave Maus, with a splinter group from the earlier *L'Essor*, in existence from 1876 to 1891 – some artists were dissatisfied with the lack of a real programme and the rejection of a painting by James Ensor.¹⁵ *Les XX*’s name derives from the fact that membership would be limited to twenty. It is worth noting that *Les XX* was founded in the belief that art and literature were effective means to transform society, already embodied in the journal *L'Art moderne*, whose editors at the time included Maus and Edmond Picard.¹⁶ Among the founding members, one finds Willy Finch, Fernand Khnopff and Théo van Rysselberghe, and both Georges Lemmen and Henry Van de Velde were elected members in 1889 (alongside Rodin). *Les XX*’s annual exhibitions included invited artists from Belgium and, mainly, other countries.¹⁷ They reflected ‘avant-garde’, but without any restriction of school or style. For example, French painters and sculptors exhibiting at *Les XX* included Cézanne, Gauguin, Monet, Morisot, Pissarro, Redon, Renoir, Rodin, Sisley, Toulouse-Lautrec. Paintings by van Gogh were exhibited twice in 1890 and, posthumously, 1891. This list also included pointillists, Seurat being invited in 1887, 1889, 1891 and (posthumously) 1892, while Paul Signac exhibited in 1888 and 1890-1893, being elected member in 1891. As we shall see, both pointillists and van Gogh exerted a profound influence. There were not many British artists invited, but among them one should note Walter Crane (1891), Herbert Horne (1892), Selwyn Image (1892), and Ford Madox Brown (1893).

¹⁴ See Block 1984, pp. 1-8.

¹⁵ On avant-garde in Belgium before *Les XX*, including *L'essor*, see Block 1984, chapter 1.

¹⁶ Block 1984, p. 11.

¹⁷ For the complete list of members and invitees, see Block 1984, pp. 78-84 and Maus 1980.

Les XX was dissolved in 1893, but it was immediately replaced by *La Libre esthétique*, also founded by Octave Maus under a slightly different mandate, to reflect “l’art neuf dans toutes ses expressions”,¹⁸ including decorative arts. It animates the Belgian art scene until 1914.¹⁹ The main difference between the two groups is that membership of *La Libre esthétique* would not be limited to twenty, as a matter of fact there was no formal membership of that sort, and it would also encompass decorative arts, that had been introduced for the first time in one of the last Salons of *Les XX*, in 1891, with works by Morris, Crane, Lemmen, Van der Velde and vases by Gauguin.

Both *La Libre esthétique* and *L’art moderne* suspended their activities because of the First World War, and never resumed them afterwards, as many of the key actors died in the meantime, notably Lemmen in 1916 and Maus in 1919.

Oliver-Georges Destrée

The earliest trace of Ruskin I was able to find in the Belgian press is a discussion of *Modern Painters* by a certain ‘J. C.’ in a paper entitled ‘Les doctrines de M. Ruskin’, published in 1856.²⁰ The author took a stern view of Ruskin’s aesthetics. For example, he writes:

La nature n’a jamais enseigné la religion ni la morale; or, comment le peintre, et plus particulièrement le paysagiste, qui n’est que le copiste de la

¹⁸ Block 1984, p. 76.

¹⁹ See Maus 1980 for a very detailed list of its activities.

²⁰ J. C. 1856. For a detailed study of the Belgian reception of Ruskin, which does not include this early paper, however, see Brogniez & Fréché 2011. Brogniez and Fréché distinguish two trends in the reception of Ruskin, one more conservative, in religious circles, reading Ruskin as arguing for a religious aesthetics, and seeing the possibility of it in the art of the Pre-Raphaelites, and a more modernist and progressive approach, exemplified by Van de Velde, reading Ruskin and the British as promoting an art that that could regenerate the society (Brogniez & Fréché 2011, p. 210), and they see Destrée as pertaining to the former (Brogniez 2005, pp. 107-111) & (Brogniez & Fréché 2011, pp. 214-216). Such a reading of Destrée’s book is consonant with his joining the Order of Saint Benedict, but one should not forget that the social dimension is far from lost for Destrée (and his brother), it is rather a common point with readings such as Van de Velde.

nature, enseigneraient-ils ce que leurs études n'ont jamais pu leur révéler ?²¹

By contrast, Olivier-Georges Destrée (1867-1919) appears to have had a kinder appreciation, and I would like to claim that he played a key role in the dissemination of Ruskin's ideas, as well as those of the Arts and Crafts in the period that culminates in 1895.

The brother of the socialist politician Jules Destrée (1863-1936), Olivier-Georges was to become Benedictine monk in 1898 (under the name Dom Bruno, ordained in 1903), so his implication and role cease at around that date. Like his brother, he had studied law and he was very much an anglophile.²² He was at first particularly fond of British poetry, and he published numerous translations and articles on it, in *La Jeune Belgique*, of which he was a collaborator, and also in *Magazine littéraire et scientifique*, *La Société nouvelle* and the catholic journals *Revue générale*, *Le Spectateur catholique* and *Durendal*.²³

Destrée also developed a strong fascination for Pre-Raphaelitism, perhaps at first through their poems, and his interest extended from these to decorative arts. As was common at the time, Destrée saw Morris and his pupils, such as Walter Crane, as 'Pre-Raphaelites', so when he wrote about Pre-Raphaelitism, he included not only the 'Pre-Raphaelites' themselves but also Morris and, by extension, the Arts and Crafts.²⁴ Today, we would see this identification as mistaken, reserving the label 'Pre-Raphaelite' to a specific group of painters. But this identification is also revealing. As I shall explain below, Destrée followed Ruskin in refusing to distinguish between fine and decorative arts, and mentioning of Pre-Raphaelitism in common with British

²¹ *J. C.* 1856, p. 228.

²² Again, on the role of 'anglophilie' in Belgian art and literature, see *Gilsoul* 1953.

²³ For a list of translations and articles on British poems and art by Destrée, see *Demoor, Forestier & Guttzeit* 2016, note 24, also *Delsemme* 1973. The earliest translation was Swinburne's *Anactoria* in *La Société Nouvelle* in April 1888 (*Swinburne* 1888).

²⁴ *Destrée* 2005, p. 67.

decorative arts – Arts and Crafts – partly because people such as Morris (or Mackmurdo) encouraged it. They saw craftsmen producing decorative artworks as artists belonging to a single movement along with the Pre-Raphaelites, and Destrée fostered this view in Belgium. Likewise, as we shall see, the first Belgian Art Nouveau artists such as Van de Velde came from fine arts, where pointillism was the fashion and saw a continuity between these two aspects. A similar link could be drawn between Gallé and French ‘symbolism’ in painting (Puvis de Chavannes, Moreau, Redon).

Destrée made numerous trips to London from 1886 onwards,²⁵ building friendships with British artists and literary figures, for example while visiting Mackmurdo and Horne’s house at 20 Fitzroy street,²⁶ and becoming close friends with some of them. For example, he was to visit Italy in 1897 with Laurence Binyon and Herbert Horne.²⁷ In 1894, Destrée even met his favourite painter, Edward Burne-Jones, when sent by the Belgian government to London to attend the annual meeting of the Arts and Crafts Society.²⁸ It is through these friendships that Destrée acquired knowledge of Ruskin and of those aspects of his philosophy that were already influential.²⁹ He translated into French the sixth chapter of *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, ‘The Lamp of Memory’ (published in *La revue générale* in 1895).³⁰ But it was Destrée’s publications on Pre-Raphaelitism and the Arts and Crafts (understood as a single movement) that were of the greatest importance.³¹ His key book, *Les Préraphaélites. Notes sur l’art décoratif*

²⁵ Brogniez 2005, p. 98.

²⁶ Plarr 1914, pp. 68-69, Demoor & Morel 2011, p. 185.

²⁷ Brogniez 2005, p. 110. It is after this trip that Destrée sought to become a Benedictine monk. Binyon was a close friend of Selwyn Image, they visited Belgium together (Demoor & Morrel 2011, pp. 189-192).

²⁸ de Wiart 1931, pp. 74-79, Demoor & Morel 2011, p. 190, Brogniez 2005, pp. 99 & 101.

²⁹ See Destrée’s introduction, *Ruskin* 1895, p. 481.

³⁰ *Ruskin* 1895. Destrée’s translation does not include paragraphs 11-17. See Autret 1965, p. 37 and Gamble 2002, p. 45.

³¹ See *Destrée* 1892, *Destrée* 1893, *Destrée* 1894, and *Destrée* 1894c. Destrée’s own poems, in French, were published at Chiswick Press in London, with a cover design by Herbert Horne (*Destrée* 1894b).

et la peinture en Angleterre, published in 1894³² was pivotal in spreading knowledge – more than literally introducing – of British aesthetics and art to Belgian artists.³³ Destrée pointed out the crucial role played by Ruskin (and others after him) in promoting applied arts and British public taste for it, suggesting that Belgians should imitate their British counterparts if they wished attain the same success on the international scene.³⁴ Walter Crane's report confirms the importance of Destrée's role:

The work of English artists of this kind [decorative art] has been exhibited in Germany, in Holland, in Belgium and France, and has met with remarkable appreciation and sympathy. In Belgium, particularly, where there appears to be a somewhat similar movement in art, the work of the newer school of English designers has awakened the greatest interest. The fact that M. Olivier Georges Destrée has made sympathetic literary studies of the English pre-Raphaelites and their successors, is an indication of this. The exhibitions of the "XXe Siècle," "La libre esthétique," at Brussels and Liège, are also evidence of the repute in which English designers are held.³⁵

Together with his cousin Paul Tiberghien (translator of Keats, Swinburne and Rossetti) and Lemmen, Destrée had already formed a little study group already in 1880s.³⁶ His testimony shows that he imparted his knowledge of British art, and Ruskin in particular, to this group:

Dans les conversations à bâtons rompus que j'eus le plaisir d'engager avec des amis, poètes et artistes anglais à propos de la littérature et de l'art anglais contemporain, ces amis après m'avoir fait passer en revue leurs maîtres préférés, et s'être réjouis à voir l'enthousiasme qu'ils m'inspiraient, m'ont souvent demandé ce que je pensais de Ruskin. Et souvent aussi il me parut qu'il y avait alors comme une hésitation dans leur

³² Destrée 1894. I quote, however, from the new edition, Destrée 2005. For reviews, see Goffin 1895, Gilbert 1895, Krains 1895.

³³ See Hammacher 1967, p. 25.

³⁴ Destrée 2005, p. 82.

³⁵ Crane 1896, p. 241. What he calls here "XXe Siècle" is most probably *Les XX*.

³⁶ Cardon 1990, p. 59, Brogniez 2005, pp. 97-98, Hammacher 1967, p. 87. Hammacher also reported that van Rysselberghe and two other Belgians started studying British graphic works because of Lemmen.

curiosité, et comme une sorte d'appréhension de la réponse que je pouvais faire.³⁷

This would explain Lemmen's early interest in British art,³⁸ leading to his first Art Nouveau covers in 1891. Although Lemmen did not visit London, his interest was thus probably awakened through his acquaintance with Destrée, but also from seeing Crane's works in Antwerp in 1885 and in Paris in 1889.³⁹ In 1891, he lent more than a dozen books by Crane to the Salon of *Les XX*,⁴⁰ and published a paper on Crane in *L'Art moderne*.⁴¹

Unlike 'J. C.', Destrée had but the greatest admiration for Ruskin:

[I]l n'est point de livre signé par lui qui ne contienne un enseignement précieux, une foule d'idées nouvelles et de remarques salutaires aux jeunes artistes ; et pour ce qui concerne spécialement l'architecture, je ne connais rien de plus éloquent, de mieux entendu et de plus artiste en même temps que certains chapitres de ses livres et notamment des *Stones of Venice*, et des *Seven Lamps of Architecture* dont je traduis ici un chapitre que je voudrais voir connu du public français, pour les remarques précieuses et salutaires qu'il contient sur la restauration et la conservation des édifices et des monuments publics.⁴²

Ruskin only appears at the very end of *Les Préraphaélites. Notes sur l'art décoratif et la peinture en Angleterre*, in the form of a very long passage from *The Two Paths*, which was quoted at the beginning of chapter 4.⁴³ As we saw, this passage contains an important argument, as Ruskin undermines in it the root of the distinction between the 'higher' and the 'lesser' arts (Destrée speaks of *arts majeurs* and *mineurs*), by claiming

³⁷ *Ruskin 1895*, p. 481.

³⁸ Lemmen was already fascinated by Pre-Raphaelitism as early as 1886. See *Cardon 1990*, p. 64. According to Jane Block, by 1891 Lemmen was "studying seriously the work of A. H. Mackmurdo, Selwyn Image, and Walter Crane" (*Block 1992*, p. 100).

³⁹ *Lemmen 1891*, p. 84, *Block 1992*, p. 122, note 21.

⁴⁰ *Block 1992*, p. 99.

⁴¹ *Lemmen 1891*.

⁴² *Ruskin 1895*, p. 482.

⁴³ 16. 319-321. Quoted in *Destrée 2005*, pp. 78-81.

that what one would recognize as some of the greatest artistic achievements were in fact instances of *decorative* art. Once this is realized, it makes no more sense to claim some arts to be of higher value or purpose than others, and to draw any distinction based on such values. This important philosophical point entails the idea that there should be no difference in training: 'craftsmen' trained to produce decorative arts should not be considered as lacking in the competence for training in the fine arts but also trained in them, so that they hone their sensibilities, hoping that this would help them producing artworks of greater value. Industrial wares were not of lesser quality because they were made in greater quantities in a mechanical fashion, but because they were designed by poorly trained 'craftsmen'.⁴⁴ These were the thoughts amplified by Morris in his 1877 lecture on 'The Lesser Arts', that made their way as far as the Bauhaus in the 20th century.

Destrée concludes his book accordingly with a plea for the lesser arts. To understand the importance of the point, we need to reflect on his context. Since Belgian independence in 1830, efforts were apparently made to improve the quality of industrial art. The government initiated educational reform aiming for their improvement.⁴⁵ But already in 1860s critics had pointed out a continued lack of the quality despite these efforts,⁴⁶ and nothing had changed at the time Destrée wrote his book. Destrée saw that the reason why industrial art in Belgium had not yet attained good enough quality to compete in the international market lies in the division of arts into *majeurs* and *mineurs*, with trained painters that are not interested in decorative art and craftsmen producing

⁴⁴ Hammacher claims that Ruskin and Morris saw the decline of traditional crafts as the result of craftsmen's losing manual ability because of mechanization (*Hammacher 1967*, p. 22). Destrée's point makes it clear that the problem lies at a deeper aesthetic level.

⁴⁵ *Canning 1980*, pp. 4-9, *Murphy & Strikwerda 1992*. For the general history of art reform in Belgium, see *Leblanc 2004*, pp. 22-32, *Prina 2010*, *Prina 2012*.

⁴⁶ *Prina 2012*, p. 259.

second-class products because they did not have the proper sort of education, reserved for *les arts majeurs*.⁴⁷

Lack of education in craftsmen extends to absence of a concept of 'total work of art,' thus Destrée complains that Belgian and French rooms are cragged with furniture displaying a mixture of styles, that the number and symmetry of the pieces in each room is decided by the regulation rather than the usefulness, convention rather than decorative purpose, etc.⁴⁸ On this point, Destrée shared the view of the Arts and Crafts architect Edward Prior, saying that the tendency to create the furniture not 'for the room', taking into account the harmony of the room as a whole, degraded the situation of interior decoration.⁴⁹ By contrast, British rooms are seen to be superior in the sense that pieces of furniture form together 'decorative unity' with a well-defined style.⁵⁰

Destrée was also well aware of the importance of Ruskin's aesthetic ideas on the art of the Pre-Raphaelites on two further points. First, Pre-Raphaelites such as Burne-Jones and Rossetti followed Ruskin's critique of the distinction between 'high' and 'low art', they modelled themselves as both artists and craftsmen. Morris was not a painter, but he had professional education as architect and collaborated with many professional artists. The idea was to make use freely of their knowledge of painting and architecture in order to create new works; thus they were artists and craftsmen. This is how the first generation of Arts and Crafts came about, wanting no difference in basic education nor

⁴⁷ Destrée 2005, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁸ "La maison française ou belge au contraire, en admettant que les chambres en soient bien proportionnées, ce qui est rare, ne présente ni pareil "confort" ni pareil souci de la décoration : les chambres ne paraissent guère avoir reçu une destination spéciale ; elles sont généralement encombrées de meubles, le nombre et la symétrie de ces meubles semblant réglés plutôt par l'usage et la convention que par la destination et l'arrangement décoratif de la chambre...en outre, les meubles qui ornent la chambre forment le plus souvent un horrible mélange de tous les styles et de toutes les époques" (Destrée 2005, p. 10).

⁴⁹ See Prior's 'Furniture and the Room' in Morris et al. 1996, pp. 261-273.

⁵⁰ "La maison anglaise est divisée en chambres bien proportionnées, chaque chambre bien appropriée à sa destination, chaque objet, chaque meuble de la chambre concourant à former un ensemble, de façon que la chambre offre, sinon un style défini, du moins une unité décorative" (Destrée 2005, p. 9).

in exercising creativity – therefore no difference in status – between artist and industrial artist in Britain. Destrée further pointed out that these artists-cum-craftsmen collaborated to create a single work, such as the mural of the Oxford Union,⁵¹ to the extent that one could not tell which part was executed by whom. This harks back to Ruskin's views, discussed in section 4.1 on the absence of a distinction between architect and crafts-persons and collaborative work in architectural ornament, as well as on the importance of harmony between the building and ornament.

Secondly, Destrée pointed out that these artists (again, including Arts and Crafts) called themselves 'Pre-Raphaelites' not because they wanted to set the clock back to before Raphael, so to speak, but to what they believed artists of that time did, namely painting works free from any convention.⁵² In the words of Holman Hunt, "the whole spirit of the art was simple and sincere". For example, a tree was depicted as seen, meaning not, as we saw in Chapter 2, as seen by the 'innocent' eye, but simply: not "diseased" by convention.⁵³ Their aim was "to go back sincere and attentive study of nature."⁵⁴ As I shall explain in a moment, Destrée believed that this was the way forward for Belgian decorative arts to reach international recognition. We come back here to two interrelated Ruskinian themes: 'truth to nature' and 'sincerity'.

Henry Van de Velde

As I have pointed out in chapter 4, the distinction between 'fine' and 'decorative' arts was blurred within the Arts & Crafts movement, and this was a main point emphasized by the likes of Destrée, to be eventually picked up by Art Nouveau artists. Furthermore,

⁵¹ The project was actually abandoned in 1858. The mural was completed later by William and Briton Riviere. See *Whiteley* 2004, p. 42.

⁵² *Destrée* 2005, pp. 19-20. See 3.621 note.

⁵³ *Holman Hunt* 1886, pp. 480-1.

⁵⁴ *Destrée* 2005, p. 18.

the spread of ideas such as this was in a context such as *Les XX*, where the focus was on fine arts (painting, sculpture, poetry, music), where there was a growing awareness of the importance and equal status of decorative arts, leading to their being introduced in the Salon of 1891. The other side of this growing awareness lay in the realisation that abolishing this distinction meant that one could finally teach fine arts to decorative arts students, and thus improve the quality of their output. Destrée had already presented Pre-Raphaelitism in painting and poetry and Arts and Crafts as an organic whole. One could envision a house, with interior walls, fixtures and furniture, all in Arts and Crafts style, with Pre-Raphaelite paintings hanging on the walls. Belgian artists clearly did not want to imitate this but to move on to their own version of that formula. Some Belgian artists were influenced by the likes of Burne-Jones and Whistler,⁵⁵ others were struck by Impressionist painting from France, but it turns out that Pointillism was to be their ingredient in that new formula.⁵⁶

The key event is a visit by Théo van Rysselberghe to Paris in August 1886. With the poet Émile Verhaeren, van Rysselberghe was tasked to find new artists to exhibit at the annual Salon of *Les XX*.⁵⁷ In Paris, van Rysselberghe saw Georges Seurat's *Un dimanche après-midi à l'île de la Grande Jatte* (Plate # 6.5), itself a manifesto for Pointillism, and was struck not so much by the new technique, but by the emotion it

⁵⁵ I have already mentioned Destrée's fascination for Burne-Jones. In a letter reproduced in *Delevoy et al. 1987*, pp. 26-7, Fernand Khnopff wrote that he first saw Burne-Jones' paintings at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1878, but went for the first time to London only in 1891. Félicien Rops wrote in 1893 that Khnopff "no longer imitates the French; he has sunk up to the chin in the boots of the Englishman Burne-Jones". (Quoted in *Busine 1992*, p. 60.) See also *des Cars 1998*, p. 35 and *Casteras 2005*, p. 131. For van Rysselberghe's and Finch's early interest in Whistler see, respectively, *Block & Lee 2014*, p. 60 notes 59 and *Block 1984*, p. 47. About both, see *Block 1984*, p. 49). Felkamp attribute their style, and van Rysselberghe's to Velásquez, by pointing out that this grand master was admired by them (*Feltkamp 2003*, p. 41). Van de Velde started as a landscape painter in the style of the Barbizon school.

⁵⁶ It is the most recent and detailed study of the influence of pointillism to Belgian artists is (*Block & Lee 2014*). I thank M. Roger Cardon for letting me know about the exhibition during my work in Brussels.

⁵⁷ Verhaeren introduced van Rysselberghe to Maus. See *Feltkamp 2003*, p. 228.

was able to express.⁵⁸ Seurat was duly invited to exhibit his work at the Salon, in February 1887. Maus assumed that it would create a stir in Brussels, and Picard replied: “donc, mon cher Maus, il faut l’exposer aux XX, l’an prochain”.⁵⁹ It did create quite a stir,⁶⁰ but Finch, Lemmen and Van de Velde were more than awestruck. Van de Velde recounts:

Coming into contact with *Sunday Afternoon on the Grande Jatte*, I was thrown into disorder and fell prey to an inexpressible agitation. From that moment on it was impossible for me to resist the need to assimilate, as quickly and as conscientiously as possible, the theories, rules, and fundamental principles of the new technique to test its validity.⁶¹

Do we actually know what it [Neo-Impressionism] attempts? Strict Objectivity for some of them –farther short-sighted – Reality. When it is rather: Colour and the vast field of its sensuous pleasures and abrupt changes. Sensuality that likens to the most shocking knocks, the most fugitive whims, the tenderest harmonies. [...] The signs are loudly proclaimed in such works – determining the Real beyond the Real: “The life of Things” and these unforgettable landscapes of the First of the neo-Impressionists.⁶²

Finch, who had been painting in a manner reminiscent of Whistler until then, immediately changed his style to pointillism.⁶³ Van de Velde, Toorop, Lemmen and

⁵⁸ Maret 1948, p. 10, Feltkamp 2003, pp. 43-46, 48 & 230.

⁵⁹ See Maus 1886, p. 204, also Block & Lee 2014, pp. 10-12.

⁶⁰ See Maus’ testimony: “1887, l’année de la Grande-Jatte! [...] [La Grande Jatte] absolue nouveauté, limpidité, soudaine, transparence inconnue!”, and: “les émeutes qu’elle provoqua, [...] détournèrent l’attention du public des six paysages d’Honfleur et de Grandcamp qui l’accompagnaient” (Maus 1980, p. 52). See also Giedion 2008, p. 297.

⁶¹ Van de Velde 1992, p. 114; translation from Block & Lee 2014, p. 12. See also the editor’s introduction to Van de Velde 1992, p. 30 and Föhl et al. 2013, p. 51, Wendermann 2013, p. 59 & Adriaenssens 2013b, p. 78 note 5.

⁶² Van de Velde 1890, pp. 90-92; translation from Canning 1985, p. 133.

⁶³ Finch wrote to Signac: “I was profoundly moved by the canvasses of Messrs. Seurat and Pissaro (sic), who were at Les XX”. Quoted in Block 2014, p. 12, translating a letter by Finch in Derrey-Capon 1992, p. 101. He exhibited his first pointillist work at the Salon of Les XX the next year, in 1888.

Van Rysselberghe himself were to follow him within a year.⁶⁴ They became curious about the importance of the theoretical basis of this unprecedented and innovative style.

One should recall here that the key of Seurat's Pointillism was that one should paint with dots of complementary *pure* colours next to each other: from a distance, the coloured dots tend to fuse in the spectator's eye. Unlike the colour mixed in the palette and put on the canvas, this 'optical mixture' creates an illusion of luminosity. Among books Seurat studied, there is Charles Henry's *Introduction à une esthétique scientifique* (1885) and Ogden N. Rood's *Colour: A Text-Book of Modern Chromatics* (1904).⁶⁵ Henry's main idea, on which Seurat relied, was that lines, colours and musical notes express emotion according to certain mathematical regularities.⁶⁶ More importantly, however, Seurat's technique derives from Rood's explanation of the generation of luminosity by the placement of dots of different colours next to each other:

Another method of mixing coloured light seems to have been first definitely contrived by Mile in 1839, though it had been in practical use by artists a long time previously. We refer to the custom of placing a quantity of small dots of two colours very near each other, and allowing them to be blended by the eye placed at the proper distance. Mile traced fine lines of colour parallel to each other, the tints being alternated. The results obtained in this way are true mixtures of coloured light, and correspond to those above given. For instance, lines of cobalt-blue and chrome-yellow give a white or yellowish-white, but no trace of green; emerald-green and vermilion furnish when treated in this way a dull yellow; ultramarine and vermilion, a rich red-purple, etc. This method is almost the only practical one at the disposal of the artist whereby he can actually mix, not pigments, but masses of coloured light.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Nyns 1954, p. 9, Feltkamp 2003, p. 20, Block & Lee 2014, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁵ Henry 1885 and Rood 1904. He also read Michel-Eugène Chevreuil's colour theory. The first edition of Rood's book dates from 1879. For a detailed explanation of pointillism, see Block 2014, pp. 6-10.

⁶⁶ For example, in the following passage: "Le schéma de l'expression de douleur nous présente une rotation dans le sens de la pesanteur: le schéma de l'expression de plaisir, une rotation dans le sens inverse" (Henry 1885, p. 9). See also Foa 2015, p. 144.

⁶⁷ Rood 1904, p. 139-140.

Interestingly enough, Rood quoted immediately after this an “interesting opinion” of Ruskin, from *Elements of Drawing*:

Breaking one colour in small points through or over another. This is the most important of all processes in good modern oil and water-colour painting [...] In distant effects of a rich subject, wood or rippled water or broken clouds, much may be done by touches or crumbling dashes of rather dry colour, with other colours afterward put cunningly into the interstices. [...] And note, in filling up minute interstices of this kind, that, if you want the colour you fill them with to show brightly, it is better to put a rather positive point of it, with a little white left beside or round it, in the interstice, than to put a pale tint of the colour over the whole interstice. Yellow or orange will hardly show, if pale, in small spaces; but they show brightly in fine touches, however small, with white beside them.⁶⁸

It is thus quite striking to see the filiation from Ruskin to Rood, and from Rood to Seurat and the pointillists. Of course, Ruskin’s own advice on painting would have differed from Seurat’s and it is best exemplified in early paintings by the Pre-Raphaelites, which we saw in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

In 1890, *Les XX* exhibited paintings by Vincent van Gogh. These also had a profound effect on Van de Velde, among others:⁶⁹

The revelation of the Salon of 90, the works of Vincent van Gogh, among them, “Sunflowers,” moved me violently in the opposite direction [from the pointillism of Seurat and Signac]. On the one side, a technique hopelessly calm and slow; on the other, a fiery technique, determining forever a moment of extreme emotion. I remained pulled between these two techniques. Canvases patiently pointillist, pastels slashed with lines of a dynamism in which I recognized—after having practiced academic drawing for nearly ten years—a true sense of drawing and of line. The anomaly of the cold technique of the “point” and the ardour of the felt

⁶⁸ 15.151-152. Quoted in *Rood 1904*, p. 140.

⁶⁹ Madeleine Octave Maus wrote that “Van Gogh fit une profonde, une marquante impression sur la plupart des Vingtistes” (*Maus 1980*, p. 100).

impression, demanding immediate possession quickly became master of my nervous system.⁷⁰

Van de Velde's passion for the line dated from his very first landscape paintings.⁷¹ With van Gogh he now felt the line as expressing "symbolically the forces and energies of nature."⁷² Van de Velde's paintings in 1892 (Plate # 6.6) shows not only a renewed interest in lines, but also the two-dimensionality of his famous embroidery work, *La Veillée d'Ange* in 1892 (Plate # 6.7), about which more below. The same goes for Lemmen who used sinuous lines in order to express *dynamically* the movement of the American dancer in his 1893 work *Loïe Fuller* (Plate # 6.8). Van de Velde was to pursue his interest in the curved line, for which he coined the expression '*ligne de force*' or '*dynamographique*', with help of the theory of 'empathy' in psychology (see the conclusion for more details). I shall, however, leave this topic for the moment and discuss it briefly in the conclusion, as I wish merely to account for the role of British thinkers and artists in the development of Van de Velde's art prior to 1895.

The above merely suggest at best an indirect influence, from a certain distance, by Ruskin, nothing more. But those years mark an important shift for Van de Velde, when he progressively abandoned painting for decorative arts and architecture. Van de Velde had strong theoretical inclinations and he was bound to encounter the writings of Ruskin and Morris sooner or later. According to his *Récit de ma vie*, this happened in 1892, in a conversation with Willy Finch at the opening banquet of the Salon of *Les XX*. Van de Velde declared himself "thunderstruck" (*foudroyé*) by this discovery:

⁷⁰ Quotation in *Canning 1985*, p. 134 of the manuscript of Van de Velde's 'Mémoires' (Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, van de Velde Archives). See also *Delevoy 1963*, p. 28, *Van de Velde 1992*, p. 31, *Föhl 2013*, pp. 66 & 79). Van de Velde is strangely silent about this incident in his *Récit de ma vie* (*Van de Velde 1992*, pp. 154-159).

⁷¹ In one of his manuscripts, Van de Velde describes his early experiences as landscape painter, writing: "La passion que je ressens pour la ligne date de l'instant où j'acquire une pareille conception du dessin" (Musée de la littérature, Fonds Henry van de Velde, FSX16, No 15).

⁷² *Föhl et al. 2013*, p. 66.

Au cours de cette conversation, me furent révélés l'existence de Ruskin, son action en faveur d'un retour de la Beauté et l'enthousiasme qu'il suscitait [...] Je découvris encore le mouvement suscité par son disciple, William Morris, qui ne poursuivait rien de moins que la résurrection de tous ces métiers d'art dont la décadence et l'irréversible disparition avaient été consacrées par l'introduction de la production mécanique. Dès le lendemain de *ce jour qui pourrait bien avoir marqué l'un des points cruciaux de ma vie*, je me renseignais sur les ouvrages publiés par John Ruskin et William Morris, sur les publications consacrées aux créations de celui-ci.

[...] je me plongeai (sic) dans la lecture des *Sept lampes de l'architecture* de John Ruskin, L'effet du premier contact fut foudroyant. La conférence intitulée *Espérances et craintes pour l'art* fut le premier écrit de William Morris dont je pris connaissance, suivi de *News from Nowhere* et d'une excellente biographie de ce poète, anarchiste militant, ayant sa boutique dans Oxford Street. *Fors Clavigera* et *Praeterita* achevèrent de me conquérir. Tout mon être s'enflammait, se consumait pour la réalisation d'un idéal sublime, celui de la Beauté ressuscitée. Quand William Morris m'apparut comme l'artisan de la prophétie de Ruskin, j'entrevis l'avènement de ce qui m'avait conquis à l'anarchie : la jouissance de la Beauté accessible à tous les hommes et le pain assuré par un travail accompli dans la conscience de la dignité humaine reconquise.⁷³ (My italics)

The mention of anarchism is rather interesting. Van de Velde had been much influenced early on in his life by his reading of anarchists such as Bakunin, Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus⁷⁴ (who was, incidentally a great admirer of Ruskin). Putting here Ruskin and

⁷³ Van de Velde 1992, p. 178. 'Espérances et craintes pour l'art' was the French title for Morris' 'The Lesser Arts'.

⁷⁴ Van de Velde 1992, p. 206. The French geographer and writer Élisée Reclus was educated in Germany, lived in Britain and Ireland, the United States and Switzerland. He taught at the New University in Brussels, where he died in 1905. Reclus was a well-known anarchist. He had read with profit Ruskin and shared his aesthetic and, especially, his views on ecology. Reclus considered the world as a whole as a work of art, in which human activity takes part to create a complete harmony, the key for this harmony being love. His ideas influenced Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist painters alike, among whom Paul Signac, Henri-Edmond Cross, Camille & Lucien Pissarro. His influence extends also to Belgian avant-garde artists such as Emile Verhaelen and Théo van Rysselberghe. One noticeable, unrealized project by Reclus was for a gigantic globe of 127 meters diameter for the Exposition Universelle at Paris in 1900, whose surface would have been painted by Signac, Cross, Luce, and Van Rysselberghe. See Roslak 2007, p. 109, Ferretti 2014, p. 9. For introductions to Reclus' life and ideas, see Reclus 2013 and Brun 2014.

Morris on a par with them shows that Van de Velde was very receptive to their social and political message. Van de Velde's early writings illustrate this influence of anarchism, for example, in 'La predication d'art', where he speaks of a revolt against the bourgeois conception of art, centered around private possession of a unique artwork, while one ought to revert to a state where the artwork "belongs to the community".⁷⁵ This is the theme of 'art for all', which we encountered in section 4.2 (as the absence of distinction between artist and amateur). Political themes are mixed with a defense of ornament:

L'ornementation est une manifestation aussi unanimement vitale qu'on peut dire que tant que le peuple n'aura pas clamé son désir d'une vie ornée, le réveil ne sera pas complet.⁷⁶

Another theme typically derived from Ruskin and Morris, which is blended in in this paper, as it is also in 'Déblaiement d'art', is that of the 'unity of art':

Avant que d'être connues sous ces formes, la Peinture et la Sculpture faisaient partie de cette trinité constituent avec l'Architecture l'unité de l'art. Aucune des trois unités ne *s'appartenait* en réalité; l'action de chacune d'elles restait soumise à une pensée unique, qui les tenait liées entre elles comme par un ombilic d'où elles prenaient une vie identique.

Le sang qui leur venait aux veines était celui de l'*ornementalité* [...].⁷⁷

L'ornementalité leur apparut du coup la matrice insoupçonnée qui alimenta de sang toute les œuvres qu'on tenta bien de classer sous des dénominations justificatives, mais auxquelles celle-ci seule convient, qui implique et magnifie le retour des enfants prodiges : – décoratives ! ...⁷⁸

Van de Velde's papers of that period are replete with references to Arts and Crafts figures: Crane, Day, Image, Morris, Sumner, Voysey, etc.⁷⁹ They show his extensive

⁷⁵ *Van de Velde 1895a*, p. 735.

⁷⁶ *Van de Velde 1896*, p. 289.

⁷⁷ *Van de Velde 1895a*, p. 735.

⁷⁸ *Van de Velde 1979*, p. 19.

⁷⁹ See for example *Van de Velde 1893*, *passim*, *Van de Velde 1895b*, *passim*, *Van de Velde 1979*, pp. 15 & 18-19.

study and knowledge of British artworks, but there are precious little discussions of Ruskin and Morris as such, only themes surfacing such as the above ones. Van de Velde moved away from their ideals at the turn of the 20th century, and his later discussions, while containing words of praise that illustrate his early admiration, also contained critiques, which will be briefly discussed in the conclusion.

So, very clearly, by 1892 Van de Velde was literally a convert. This also happened at a time of personal crisis, as Van de Velde was by then seriously doubting that painting was the right medium for him. In 1892-93, he decided to learn embroidery, and turned a sketch for a painting, *La Veillée d'anges* into an embroidery, with help of his aunt Maria Elisabeth Van Halle:

À plusieurs reprises déjà, j'avais conçu le projet d'apprendre un métier. Un métier d'art de préférence. Mais ce fut devant l'esquisse de *La Veillée d'anges*, au moment où je ressentis que je ne l'achèverais jamais, que je conçus l'idée de réaliser en broderie ce que je ne pouvais plus me décider à réaliser par la peinture.⁸⁰

La Veillée d'ange, a key piece in his career, was exhibited at the Salon of 1893, and it is often described as marking a turning point,⁸¹ as Van de Velde was then won to decorative arts, and progressively abandoned painting.

This is also the period when Van de Velde got involved in *Van Nu en Straks*, modelled, as we saw, on *The Hobby Horse*. He branched into design for wallpapers and fabric for women's clothes, and moved soon enough into architecture, for which he had, however, no formal training. His first house *Bloemenwerf* (Plate # 4.32), build for himself and his wife Maria Sèthe,⁸² was completed in 1895. It was built in Uccle,

⁸⁰ *Van de Velde 1992*, p. 191.

⁸¹ See for example *Tschöpe 2013*, p. 192.

⁸² Marie-Louise or Maria Sèthe was born in Paris from a German father, who was a textile manufacturer in Paris and Brussels. She is a pianist and was active in musical scene in Brussels before she got married with Van de Velde. She played an important role in her husband's switch from painting to architecture and decorative arts. In 1893, she went to London, contacting William Morris and bringing back samples of fabric and wallpaper. The correspondence between Sèthe and her husband is available at the

now a suburban area of Brussels, but at the time in the countryside. This cottage house is clearly inspired from Arts and Crafts. I would only like to mention a few facts about this. The resemblance with Voysey's *Walnut Tree Farm* (Plate # 4.31) was already mentioned in section 4.4, but one should also notice that the floor plan reflects Baillie-Scott.⁸³ In accordance with the idea of a 'total work of art', already implemented by Victor Horta (see below), who despised Van de Velde and thought ill of *Bloemenwerf*, Van de Velde conceived the whole interior decoration.⁸⁴ One should, incidentally, note the resemblance of his wallpapers 'Dahlia' (Plate # 6.9), and 'Tulip' (Plate # 6.10), with Mackmurdo's wallpapers and textiles, especially the one also called 'Floral velvet' (Plate # 6.11).⁸⁵ Van de Velde had already published analyses of British 'papiers peints'.⁸⁶

Van de Velde was not the only one to switch to decorative arts. According to Maus, Lemmen and Finch were initiators alongside Van de Velde.⁸⁷ Their motivation for moving into decorative arts, which began with graphic works and book design, was therefore the result of their continuous search for the best medium to express themselves, but we saw that Ruskin and Morris had not only made decorative arts respectable as media for an artist to express herself, they also argued for their social value (something of importance for Van de Velde); they opened up, so to speak, a space

Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Brussels (FSX 784, 786/93), in which one can see detailed instructions he gave to her on that occasion. Morris' letter to Sêthe is in the same archive (FSX 597/1). See Anne Van Loo's note in *Van de Velde 1992*, p. 211. Maria Sêthe also designed wallpaper and women's clothes, and published a catalogue of the women's clothes in German (in collection at Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Brussels). She was the sister of the violinist Irma Sêthe, and it is interesting to note that Irma's husband, Samuel Saenger was the author of *John Ruskin: Sein Leben und Lebenswerk* (Saenger 1901), whose design was by Henry Van de Velde (Bibliothèque van de Velde, ENSAV la Cambre).

⁸³ See Aubry 1979, p. 87.

⁸⁴ Interesting to note that Van de Velde praised Voysey in that very year for being, as architect, able to see the house as a whole and think its parts as forming a harmonious whole, his wallpapers being true ornaments. See *Van de Velde 1895b*, p. 33.

⁸⁵ Aubry et al. 2006, p. 181. This maybe the wallpaper 'Tulip' mentioned in *Van de Velde 1979*, p. 19.

⁸⁶ *Van de Velde 1893*, *Van de Velde 1895b*.

⁸⁷ Maus 1901, p. 274.

for them to explore. Lemmen, we saw briefly above. Born of British parents, Finch visited Britain almost every year since 1888, and had extensive knowledge of its art scene; he introduced Van de Velde to Ruskin and Morris.⁸⁸ He tried ceramic at Keramis (property of the family of Anna Boch),⁸⁹ his first works showing a definite interest in curved lines, sometimes completely abstract (Plate # 6.12), while others were meant to represent natural shapes (Plate # 6.13). In 1897, Finch moved to Finland, at the invitation of Louis Sparre, and became a key figure in the rise of Art Nouveau in that country.⁹⁰

Gustave Serrurier-Bovy

In *W. Morris et le mouvement nouveau de l'art décoratif*, Jean Lahor introduced Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, Paul Hankar and Victor Horta in these terms:

Tous trois m'intéressent vivement, car ils me semblent bien près d'avoir trouvé dans l'architecture et le mobilier la formule ou les formules d'un art vraiment nouveau, et non plus anglais ni néo-flamand, mais très personnel, moderne et très moderne.⁹¹

In a footnote, he added that "M. Serrurier s'est affranchi de plus en plus de l'imitation, si séduisante qu'elle fût et par lui si bien réussie d'abord de l'art mobilier

⁸⁸ See also *Derrey-Capon 1992*, p. 112.

⁸⁹ Anna Boch is perhaps best known for having bought shortly before his death the only painting, *La Vigne rouge*, that van Gogh ever sold during his lifetime. She also bought Seurat's *Un après-midi à la Grande Jatte*. But she was also a painter, having studied under Isidore Verheyen. She became a member of *Les XX* in 1885, where she first met Théo van Rysselberghe under whom she also studied. She exhibited her first pointillist painting in 1889. She was the daughter of Victor Boch of the family owning Villeroy & Boch. Her father had opened Keramis in La Louvière in 1842 with his brother. To emphasize the tight relationships within these Belgian circles, it is worth noticing that her brother Eugène was also a painter and that Octave Maus was a cousin. On her work see *Thomas & Duroisin 2005*.

⁹⁰ On Finch, see *Derrey-Capon 1992*.

⁹¹ *Lahor 1897*, p. 47.

d'Angleterre." To conclude this review of the British sources of Art Nouveau, prior to 1895, I shall say a few words about these three architects.

Serrurier-Bovy, also known simply as 'Serrurier', was trained as an architect, but built only one Art Nouveau cottage, his own *L'aube*. His legacy is mainly in the domain of cabinet-making. The most interesting issue concerning Serrurier is raised already in Lahor's comment and footnote. It is that of the passage from alleged mere imitation of British art to a more Belgian or 'personal' art.

It is difficult to ascertain anything about Serrurier's activities and thoughts for the period 1884-1894, for which there are hardly any traces. He only resurfaced at the Salon of *La Libre esthétique* in 1894 with a *Cabinet de travail*, to which I shall refer below, and his *Chambre d'ouvrier* in 1895.⁹² We know (his contemporaries knew this too)⁹³ that he travelled to London, probably after 1890,⁹⁴ perhaps in 1891 to visit the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society or Ashbee's *Guild of Handicrafts* or, more likely, in 1893 to attend the Arts and Crafts Exhibition.⁹⁵ Serrurier was to exhibit his work at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1896. This much shows mutual appreciation. This is also further proof that artists did not see their work as strictly classifiable as

⁹² This *Chambre d'ouvrier* shows a preoccupation for working classes that results from the influence of Morris. This preoccupation remained to the fore, see his 'Intérieur ouvrier' (*Serrurier 1905*).

⁹³ See for example *Meier-Graefe 1898*, p. 199.

⁹⁴ It is usually assumed he travelled to London in 1884, for example in *Watlet 1986*, p. 118, *Watlet 2008*, p. 27, but Françoise Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson as argued that Watlet's evidence does not prove conclusively that it was in 1884. She points out instead a manuscript by Van de Velde that indicates Serrurier went to London at a comparatively later date, after 1890, possibly in 1891 (*Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson 2004*, pp. 265-270). Indeed, Watlet relies on Georges De Vos-van Kleef and Delchevalerie, both of whom were contemporaries of Serrurier, but Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson has shown that there is no clear indication in De Vos-van Kleef. As for Charles Delchevalerie, he vaguely set Serrurier's trip to London in the years 1884-1894. See *Madsen 1956*, pp. 318-319.

⁹⁵ Françoise Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson think that Serrurier probably travelled to London in 1893, because of his correspondence. In his letter dated 17 December 1893, Serrurier wrote: "Comme je vous l'ai promis, je vous envoie l'adresse de Voysey, à laquelle je joins celles de quelques autres artistes qui ont exposé aux 'Arts and Crafts' d'une façon remarquable", the others being Image, Sumner, Day, Bell, Powell and sons. (Letter from Gustave Serrurier-Bovy to Octave Maus, Liège, 17 December 1893. Ink on paper with the printed letter-head. MRBAB, Fonds Octave Maus, Sous-fonds La Libre Esthétique 1894, inv. 6917.)

either 'Art Nouveau' or 'Arts and Crafts' – a stricter divide probably occurred after 1900 with Bing's pavilion at the Exposition universelle in Paris, discussed in section 5.1. At all events, Serrurier certainly encountered British art at an earlier date, given that he imported goods from *Liberty's*, e.g., fabrics designed by Voysey, Lindsay Butterfield, Harry Napper and Lewis Day, to sell in his own shop in Liège.⁹⁶ We also know that he owned a copy of *Liberty's* catalogue for 1889, alongside books by Ruskin and Morris.⁹⁷

Françoise Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson, who is of the opinion that Viollet-le-Duc was the 'predominant' theoretical influence on Serrurier,⁹⁸ pointed out that these books were published at later dates (after 1894) and that Serrurier had too poor a mastery of English to have read them.⁹⁹ It goes without saying that anyone old enough to have had any training before knowledge of British art and aesthetic ideals was disseminated in Belgium would have had some acquaintances with the French canon, Viollet-le-Duc in particular. It is also true that Serrurier had his own atelier from 1899 onwards, where he employed number of workers, whose names did not appear on their products,¹⁰⁰ contrary to the common practice within the Arts and Crafts.¹⁰¹ But this does not prove much, for instance, about the inspiration for Serrurier's cabinet-making in the mid-

⁹⁶ Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson 2004, p. 263. Delevoy also claims that Serrurier was the first in Belgium to use Morris' wallpaper in Delevoy 1958, p. 8.

⁹⁷ For books owned by Serrurier, see Albert 2011-2012 and Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson 2004, Annexe II. Incidentally, Serrurier had several books by Lahor in his library, one of which is *W. Morris et le mouvement nouveau de l'art décoratif* (Lahor 1897). Curiously enough, there is a dedication of the author to Serrurier, which reads: "À Monsieur Serrurier en souvenir de la maison d'artisan que nous espérons voir en 1890, et le ***** à Liège, chez lui et pour lui, Jean Lahor". (As transcribed in Albert 2011-2012, p. 53.) Considering the fact that the year of publication is 1897, it is puzzling that Lahor expected to see a forthcoming 'maison d'artisan' in 1890.

⁹⁸ Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson 2004, p. 259. See also Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson & du Mesnil du Buisson 1999, p. 281, Folville 2010, p. 6, Folville 2011, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson 2004, pp. 181-190.

¹⁰⁰ Watlet 1986, p. 40, Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson & du Mesnil du Buisson 1999, p. 341.

¹⁰¹ When he could not cope with the volume of orders, Van de Velde would let the galleries of Paul and Bruno Cassirer and Keller & Reiner in Berlin deal with them, and later in 1898 created a company with help of his Berlin friends.

1890s, *after* he got acquainted with them. Moreover, there would be no need to read Ruskin or Morris *dans le texte* as translations were available and their key ideas could have been transmitted orally.

The testimony of Van de Velde, who wrote on several occasions about Serrurier,¹⁰² might be of interest here. He claimed that Serrurier knew about British Arts and Crafts before he even began his own work – a claim that fits the evidence available, since we know he knew about it before his first exhibited piece in 1894 –¹⁰³ and he praised him for being the first to work in that style. He thus wrote of Serrurier that he was “le premier sur le continent, incontestablement, eut la notion de l’art industriel anglais moderne et le courage de l’introduire et de le pratiquer chez nous”.¹⁰⁴ This could be evidenced by a letter to Octave Maus dated 17 December 1893, where Serrurier-Bovy recommends British artists (Plate # 6.14). But Serrurier’s own comment seems to imply the contrary:

Je compte comme première manifestation du mobilier moderne, de ma part, l’ensemble exposé au premier Salon de la *Libre Esthétique* en 1894. J’avais bien fait quelques essais précédemment – très peu nombreux – mais indépendamment de ce que ce n’était que des objets ou meubles isolés et peu intéressants par eux-mêmes, d’un autre côté, ils se ressentaient trop d’influences ou classiques ou étrangères pour avoir quelque valeur. Je considère ce cabinet de travail exposé en 1894, comme totalement débarrassé de réminiscences des styles anciens et du style anglais. Maintenant que j’en revois les plans après huit années, je vous assure, sans vanité aucune, que j’en suis aussi content que le premier jour. Et si j’ai fait mieux depuis lors, je n’ai rien fait qui me causa plus ni même autant de plaisir ! – On m’a dit et écrit que l’influence anglaise se sentait trop dans

¹⁰² See for example *Van de Velde 1902a*, *Van de Velde 1902b*, *Van de Velde 1992*, pp. 162-165. See also *François 1965*, p. 30 and *François 1966* for exhaustive lists of writings on Serrurier by Van de Velde.

¹⁰³ *Van de Velde 1902b*, p. 286. Van de Velde also claims that Serrurier had knowledge independently from Finch, who, Van de Velde claims, disseminated that knowledge to circles in Brussels (we saw that Van de Velde learned about Ruskin and Morris from Finch).

¹⁰⁴ *Van de Velde 1902b*, p. 286.

ce que je fais, je crois que c'est absolument inexact. Cet ensemble comme première tentative le prouve, je crois, péremptoirement !¹⁰⁵

It would be correct to read this passage as evidence that Serrurier did not want to imitate the British style. But it would be too hasty to conclude from this that Serrurier's work shows no influence whatsoever. He does not deny the influence altogether but points out that "l'influence anglaise se sentait *trop*". This fits the wish, often expressed and captured by the motto "Soyons nous!", for Belgians to create their own art. It is important to understand that not only the British were seen as leading the way in the renewal of decorative arts, but the Arts and Crafts offered a formula, so to speak, that could be adapted to different contexts. This, the Belgian Art Nouveau artists understood this rather well, and this is precisely why they enthusiastically seized on the formula.

It is not as if Serrurier claims here that he worked from another style but that he avoided styles altogether. He is known first to imitate a style and then quickly discard it,¹⁰⁶ and it is useful to understand that Serrurier strongly disliked the very idea of creating while imitating a style, and asked that one simply aims at a sincere expression. And, if anything, that is exactly the principle by which the British worked. In his response to Henri Nocq's questionnaire about new trends in art, written in 1894,¹⁰⁷ Serrurier clearly stated that fashion or aiming at a certain style is the biggest enemy of art, and artist must not be a "serviteur de cette chose absurde et inintelligente".¹⁰⁸ On the contrary, he writes:

Que sera ce style neuf ? Voilà certes la chose dont, pour ma part, je me préoccuperais le moins. On ne peut penser à improviser, ni à échafauder tout

¹⁰⁵ Serrurier's letter to Van de Velde in *Van de Velde 1902b*, p. 291.

¹⁰⁶ *Lahor 1897*, p. 47, *Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson 2004*, p. 273. This is also suggested in Serrurier's own narrative above.

¹⁰⁷ Nocq's *Tendance Nouvelle* was published in *Nocq 1896*, but the questionnaire was available in *Journal des Artistes*, also appeared in *L'Art Moderne* in 1894, pp. 288-289. A summary of Serrurier's response is also in *L'Art Moderne*, 1894, p. 334.

¹⁰⁸ *Nocq 1896*, p. 31.

d'une pièce un style nouveau. Il faut avant toute chose que l'artiste, s'élevant au-dessus du chaos artistique où nous sommes, se forme quelque chose comme un Credo d'Art ; qu'il se débarrasse ensuite du bagage de choses surannées que nous traitons après nous et que, dans la pauvreté de notre imagination, nous exploitons impudemment depuis un siècle.¹⁰⁹

Rather, Serrurier's 'Credo d'Art' is: "Il devra [...] lutter contre bien des idées reçues et des principes consacrés par la routine. C'est à lui d'imposer au public une Esthétique plus sincère et plus conforme à la saine raison".¹¹⁰

It is worth underlining here the role of sincerity. It is found in other passages such as these:

Il faut que les architectes se décident enfin à nous construire des habitations qui ne soient plus des pastiches mesquins et prétentieux des architectures passes, des habitations d'où soit enfin bannie cette "insincérité" qui domine et caractérise l'art de notre époque.¹¹¹

Mais j'ai l'absolue certitude que cet Art devra et ne pourra éclore que simultanément avec un ordre de choses moral et philosophique nouveau. Un Art sincère, je dirai même honnête, n'est pas compatible avec la vie fausse et artificielle dont nous vivons.¹¹²

And Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson quotes from Serrurier claiming that "la jouissance artistique, dans ce qu'elle a de plus vrai de plus sincère et de plus justifié [consiste en] une sensation de bien-être physique, de joie de l'esprit et de satisfaction intellectuelle et morale".¹¹³

Again, we have seen that the role of emotions and the need for sincerity is the hallmark of Ruskin (and Morris), in opposition to Viollet-le-Duc's rationalism, and this is evidence if not of their early influence, at least of a receptive frame of mind.

¹⁰⁹ *Nocq 1896*, p. 33.

¹¹⁰ *Nocq 1896*, p. 31.

¹¹¹ *Nocq 1896*, p. 31.

¹¹² *Nocq 1896*, p. 33.

¹¹³ *Serrurier 1905*, quoted in *Bigot du Mesnil du Buisson 2004*, p. 275.

Paul Hankar

Paul Hankar is responsible for one of the first houses recognizably in the Art Nouveau style, the *Maison Hankar* (Plate # 6.15), also built in 1893, but later than Horta's *Maison Autrique* and *Hôtel Tassel*. The *Maison Hankar*, at first sight perhaps less flamboyant than Horta's, is sometimes seen as a source for 'modernism'.¹¹⁴ It was the result of collaborative work with Adolphe Crespin.¹¹⁵ This collaboration is typically in the manner of Arts and Crafts – we saw that this was one of the lessons on which Destrée insisted. As with Serrurier-Bovy, Hankar and Crespin wanted no imitation of past styles – what one would call today 'historicism' – and their views also resonate with the slogan "Soyons nous", with the added idea that one should use the new materials brought on by progress in the 19th century:

Soyons de notre époque : au lieu de regarder en arrière, voyons devant nous. Nous ne sommes plus outillés comme au moyen-âge ni comme au XVI^e siècle. Tenons compte des progrès réalisés. Pensons qu'au XIX^e siècle on a domestiqué la vapeur et l'électricité. Pensons aux nouveaux matériaux qui sont à nous. Faisons travailler l'imagination créatrice de nos artistes en dehors de toute copie, de toute imitation de nos ancêtres.¹¹⁶

For Crespin too imagination is the key. He saw that composition in ornamentation would be the medium or language of expression: "[à] la base des études, il faut placer la composition, c'est-à-dire la culture de l'imagination. Imaginer, créer des formes, exprimer des idées dans ce prestigieux langage qu'est l'ornementation".¹¹⁷ Still, Van

¹¹⁴ *Conrady & Thibault 1923a*, p. 25.

¹¹⁵ For the collaboration between Hankar and Crespin, see *Loyer 1986*, pp. 106-110. Their collaboration extended to a project for a new suburb of Brussels, presented at Maison d'art in 1896, entirely in the new style. See *Khnopff 1896*, p. 117. See also *Loyer 1986*, pp. 302-309 for Hankar's design.

¹¹⁶ *Crespin & Hankar 1894*, p. 224. See also *Maus & Soulier 1897*, p. 90. Maus commented: "Monsieur Hankar was clever enough to cast off from the very first all the barren repetitions to which he had been enslaved during the years of his pupillage" (*Maus 1901*, p. 275). Hankar even styled himself as "démolisseur" of routine and prejudices. See *Maus & Soulier 1897*, p. 90.

¹¹⁷ *Cools & Vandendaele 1984*, p. 84.

de Velde claimed that Hankar “réalisa le plus parfaitement l’idéal de Ruskin et de William Morris: un retour au style gothique régénéré”.¹¹⁸

The point is compelling, since it is true that, although not imitative, Hankar’s architecture connoted in obvious ways Flemish Renaissance.¹¹⁹ This is also in line with the idea typical of the Arts and Crafts, that one ought to refer to one’s own tradition, especially the vernacular, from Queen Anne in Britain to National Romanticism in Finland and Latvia. Hankar’s use of curved line was limited to wrought iron at first, but extended to wood. His front door of *Chemiserie Niguet* in 1896 (Plate # 6.16) and façade of *Grand Hotel* grill room (Plate # 6.17) display the Art Nouveau line.¹²⁰

A description of the *Maison Hankar* is perhaps the only comment needed here, and it is appropriate that I quote extensively two witnesses of that era, Octave Maus and Gustave Soulier, not only for the quality of their comments, but also because they display the trained judgement and values of the period. They do not mention explicitly, except once, the aesthetics ideals that inform their appreciation, all of which are derived from Ruskin, Morris and the Arts and Crafts. Their description of decoration shows four elements taken from the British, namely sobriety and harmony in ornamentation, inspiration from natural shapes, and ‘Truth to materials’ (all themes from Ruskin discussed in chapter 4):¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Quoted in *Loyer 1986*, p. 89. There is no precise reference to Van de Velde’s manuscript; alas, I could not locate the original in Fonds Henry Van de Velde of the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Archives & Musée de la Littérature.

¹¹⁹ This probably comes from his teacher Bayeart. Hankar introduced a picture of Bayeart’s *Château de Wespelaer*, within his summary of Lahor’s book (*Lahor 1894a*) on William Morris (*Lahor 1894b*, col. 129-130).

¹²⁰ See respectively, *Loyer 1986*, pp. 154-156 and pp. 167-169. For images of the entire façade, and other designs not chosen for the façade and the interior, consult, respectively, *Loyer 1986*, pp. 356-365 and 417-421.

¹²¹ On Hankar’s use of natural shapes, see *Conrady & Thibault 1923b*, p. 39. Conrady & Thibault’s descriptive analysis is also in accordance with Maus & Soulier : “Elle [Maison Hankar] offre un grand intérêt, elle tranche sur les maisons voisines, elle attire et lorsqu’on l’étudie, on ne peut qu’en admirer la magnifique ordonnance, la logique, et la simplicité. L’originalité de l’élévation, les bretèches superposées que termine un balcon en fer forgé dont les sveltes colonnettes soutiennent le toit qui

Comme décoration, beaucoup de sobriété: des motifs tantôt empruntés à la nature et stylisés, tantôt purement linéaires. Aucune dissimulation dans la bâtisse. Les matériaux apparents honnêtement montrés sans maquillage, mais en les faisant participer à l'ensemble décoratif, au concert de tous les éléments mis en œuvre.¹²²

The theme of harmony is reprised in the description of the facade:

Tout y est ordonné selon ces principes, avec une logique et une simplicité admirables. L'originalité de la façade, le dessin du balcon en fer forgé qui la couronne, l'élégance des proportions, l'absence de tout ornement banal la signalent aux passants qui ne peuvent manquer de dire : 'voilà la maison d'un artiste'.¹²³

Crespin's wallpapers (Plates # 6.18) are praised in ways that betray again the British legacy:

M. Crespin interprète quelque motif fourni par la nature : fleur, feuille, fruit, animal, dont il dégage la synthèse. Et de la répétition du même sujet, combinée avec le souci d'une heureuse harmonie de lignes et de couleurs, il fait jaillir une ornementation primesautière, élégante, d'une nouveauté séduisante. C'est, faut-il le rappeler, le retour aux procédés des grands décorateurs d'autrefois, l'application des principes enseignés et mis en œuvre par Eugène Grasset en France, par feu William Morris en Angleterre, pour ne citer que deux maîtres.¹²⁴

Finally, Maus & Soulier drew a comparison with Victor Horta's *Hôtel Tassel*, bringing to the fore once again typically British themes (so much so that the authors speak of 'home' *dans le texte*): the need to do away with ready-made formulas and past styles and the need for an all-embracing approach, the 'total work of art':

s'avance pour protéger la façade des pluies, le *sgraffito* dû à M. Ad. Crespin, tout donne une impression de joie. La porte d'entrée est un petit chef-d'œuvre de logique et prouve que cette logique, même lorsqu'elle provoque des irrégularités inattendues, n'est pas une entrave pour celui qui sait en tirer parti. Près de cette porte se trouve la signature, cachée actuellement par la plaque indiquant le nom du confrère qui habite l'immeuble." (Conrady & Thibault 1923a, p. 24). For further analysis of the façade, see Loyer 1896, pp. 91-95.

¹²² Maus & Soulier 1897, p. 90.

¹²³ Maus & Soulier 1897, p. 90-91.

¹²⁴ Maus & Soulier 1897, p. 94.

[...] tout est compris et réalisé avec une parfaite entente de ce que doit être un *home* confortable et gai. À cet égard, la maison de M. Hankar peut être comparée à la maison déjà célèbre, construite par Victor Horta pour M. Tassel [...] Les tendances de Paul Hankar sont, en effet, analogues à celles de son ami Horta. Tous deux, ils ont le même dédain des formules, des recettes, des modes conventionnels de construire et de décorer. Novateurs, ils le sont au même titre, chacun d'eux poursuivant avec un égal acharnement l'expression d'un style qui échappe aux influences du passé et relève directement de notre époque. L'un et l'autre, ils comprennent l'architecture comme la synthèse des manifestations plastiques, embrassant, outre le bâtiment, la décoration et l'ameublement de toutes ses parties.¹²⁵

Victor Horta

The last Belgian artist I have chosen is Victor Horta, not only for his importance within Art Nouveau, but also because, strangely, there seem to be no trace of the British in his background. Horta is known to have influenced Hector Guimard, together with Hankar. The building that impressed the Frenchman so much is *Hôtel Tassel* (Plate # 6.19), which was built in 1893-94.¹²⁶ One of the very first Art Nouveau houses,¹²⁷ it quickly became a landmark of Art Nouveau architecture. Of Horta, Maus wrote:

C'est à lui, à son esprit inventif, à la persévérance – j'allais écrire à l'entêtement – dont il fit preuve, au talent original qu'il attesta dès ses débuts qu'est due la magnifique efflorescence de l'architecture d'aujourd'hui.¹²⁸

In *Hôtel Tassel* Horta freed the Art Nouveau line from any constraints, evoking not so much the 'whiplash' but tendrils, e.g., in the staircase at *Hôtel Tassel* (Plate # 6.20).

¹²⁵ Maus & Soulier 1897, p. 91.

¹²⁶ When visiting Brussels, Guimard drew the facades of both *Hôtel Tassel* and *Maison Hankar*. This was part of the background to his move to Art Nouveau. See Loyer 1986, p. 122 and Goslar 2012, p. 105) One should recall here the very first quotation of this thesis, with the contrary claim that Horta had learned from Guimard. On Guimard, see Cantacuzino 1973.

¹²⁷ Horta's first Art Nouveau house, built earlier in the same year, was the *Maison Autrique*.

¹²⁸ Maus 1900a, p. 221.

Enquiring about his sources, Nikolaus Pevsner wrote in 1936 to Horta, asking him if he had known Voysey, Beardsley or Toorop at the time he designed it, but Horta wrote back that Voysey and Beardsley were unknown to him at the time, while omitting to mention Toorop.¹²⁹ Horta also claimed in his *Mémoires* that British art remained largely unknown in Brussels until a later date, when Khnopff became the Belgian correspondent for *The Studio* in 1895, thus implying that the Belgian movement had been independent and fully original all along.¹³⁰

There is certainly evidence that Horta knew of Ruskin, Morris and the Arts and Crafts. For example, he owned copies of Ruskin's *Seven Lamps* and *The Two Paths*, and Morris' 'Arts and Crafts: Circular letter'.¹³¹ He also took notes reading them, but these are not significant.¹³² He took notes from Cobden-Sanderson's 'Of Art and Life'.¹³³ Although precise dating is difficult, none of these indicate knowledge prior to 1893.

It has been pointed out that Horta's second claim above, concerning British art being largely unknown in Brussels before 1895, is odd, considering the fact that he kept appraised of Belgian avant-garde,¹³⁴ which was very heavily immersed in British art and aesthetic ideals, as I hope to have shown. He could not have failed to take notice. Even Maus was to write in 1900:

Les théories audacieusement proclamées par MM. Henry Van de Velde, Georges Lemmen et Willy Finch dans le domaine des arts du décor étaient déjà en plein épanouissement lorsque M. Horta, dont l'éducation avait été, sous la direction de M. Balat, toute classique, s'y rallia avec enthousiasme

¹²⁹ Pevsner 2005, p. 173 note 8 to chapter 4.

¹³⁰ Horta 1985, p. 146.

¹³¹ Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 24 note 49 & 30 notes 66-67.

¹³² 'Notes on Ruskin's *Seven Lamps*' (Archives du Musée Horta, XVI.2) and 'Notes on Morris' (*idem*, XVI.4).

¹³³ Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 24. This is the text of a conference Cobden-Sanderson gave at the Arts and Crafts exhibiting Society in 1897.

¹³⁴ See Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 32.

et en fit, dans ses travaux d'architecture domestique et publique, l'application la plus rationnelle et la plus ingénieuse.¹³⁵

Furthermore, Horta used Liberty wallpapers and Morris fabrics for *Hôtel Tassel*.¹³⁶ This much implies knowledge he claimed not to have had at the time, although it is quite possible he did not know about more specifically Voysey or Beardsley. So, reasons for Horta's odd denials will remain shrouded in mystery. Adrien Cools & Richard Vandendaele simply assumed that Horta did not wish to be associated with Van de Velde and his aesthetic, given that he despised him.¹³⁷ Horta did not appreciate Van de Velde's lack of formal training in architecture – Horta called him a “peintre défroqué” – and thought very poorly of *Bloemenwerf*.¹³⁸ But Horta confessed in his memoirs:

Ainsi est le programme “original” de Van de Velde, mais quand on sait que la maison Tassel est commandée en [1893] et que mobilier, décors sur mur, vitraux, luminaires, tapis-mosaïques et autres sont le programme réalisé dans différentes maisons à Bruxelles par moi au su de tous, on peut se demander : “Comment ne pas avoir revendiqué immédiatement vos droits de priorité?” Mais parce que le travail n'en valait pas la peine, ayant pour seule originalité d'être inspiré de l'école nouvelle anglaise que Van de Velde représentait plus ou moins à Bruxelles, et qu'au surplus, aucun artiste d'esprit n'eût osé revendiquer que le décor intérieur était réellement inconnu avant lui! La maison Tassel était un retour oublié et une nouveauté par la forme et l'assemblage des matériaux.¹³⁹

Here, Horta's claim that he could have argued for priority over Van De Velde's work already contains an implicit admission that their work was similar-minded, otherwise there would be no grounds for a claim to priority, and his explanation, according to

¹³⁵ Maus 1900a, p. 221.

¹³⁶ See Horta 1985, p. 146 note 5. Horta also used British products for *Hôtel Solvay* and *Hôtel Winssinger*.

¹³⁷ For Horta's on van de Velde, see Horta 1985, pp. 151-157 and Cools & Vandendaele 1984, pp. 32-33.

¹³⁸ Horta 1985, p. xx. Horta was also critical of Hankar, as he claimed that the latter did not innovate in the *Maison Hankar*, it was traditional except in its decorative aspects. See Goslar 2012, p. 95.

¹³⁹ Horta 1985, p. 152.

which he judged the claim not worth making – “le travail n’en valait pas la peine, ayant pour seule originalité d’être inspiré de l’école nouvelle anglaise” – is but a frank admission. One possible source would be C. R. Ashbee’s house in Chelsea, *The Magpie and the Stump*, mentioned at the end of section 4.4 above (Plate # 4.33). Ashbee took part in the *Salon de la libre esthétique* in 1894, and it was reported in *The Studio* in 1895.¹⁴⁰ There is no evidence left behind, but even if it were not the case that Horta knew about Ashbee’s house, it is still interesting to note, in light of the discussion in the next section, the parallels between the two.

One can make further rapprochements. Although Horta was trained in architecture was by Alphonse Balat, nothing in the latter’s classicism seems to prefigure Horta’s Art Nouveau.¹⁴¹ (This seems to confirm Maus’ comment quoted above.) For the theoretical aspect Horta of his training seemed to have relied on Viollet-le-Duc.¹⁴² One point he owed to the latter concerns ‘rational’ planning: “L’architecte doit faire un raisonnement constant, ne rien faire sans demander le pourquoi”.¹⁴³ By this, Horta meant that the architect must design the building and its interior with a view to solve practical problems, including hygiene, lightings, functional needs, and composition of space.¹⁴⁴ It also meant in his mind that the building should fit the lifestyle of the client.¹⁴⁵ For example, Horta broke the traditional floor plan of his Brussels’ townhouse

¹⁴⁰ Anon. 1895. I would like to thank Françoise Aubry for pointing out to me this possible connection between Horta and Ashbee.

¹⁴¹ See Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 19. In a letter to Siegfried Giedion, Horta wrote about one of Balat’s houses: “Its fine ground plan –thoroughly organic and independent of conventional formulae – was entirely of Balat’s creation. Why then did he have to copy the classic in its façade? Why not make a modern elevation, too, and be as independent and individual as the painters were?” (Giedion 2008, p. 306).

¹⁴² Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 24.

¹⁴³ From notes of Horta’s classes at l’Institut Supérieur des Beaux-Arts d’Anvers, 1920-1921, taken by A. Courtens, quoted in Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 122.

¹⁴⁴ Loyer 1986, p. 124, Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 22.

¹⁴⁵ See the comments of Horta on the architect-client relation quoted in Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 122.

in order to suit the life of the owner of *Hôtel Tassel*, who was a university professor living alone with his mother, and whose hobby was photography.¹⁴⁶

Horta also thought of some 'formal unity' of all aspects of the house, including its furniture. He thus appears to have shared the idea of a 'total work of art', which certainly came from Ruskin, Morris and the Arts and Crafts.¹⁴⁷ So he designed house, fixtures and furniture together in compliance with his client's occupation and taste. Like Hankar, and Arts and Crafts artists before him, he wanted to avoid the usual eclectic assemblage of already-made furniture. He even considered it important to have a collaborative effort of all the workers involved,¹⁴⁸ a typically Arts and Crafts idea, we saw expressed by Destrée in 1895.

There are other points where Horta seems more Ruskinian in spirit, such as his insistence on teaching architecture students first to draw from nature:

Tant que les architectes ne 'jonglent' pas avec leur crayon, tant que leur *esprit d'observation ne sera pas formé au dessin d'après nature en vie*, il n'y aura pas d'architecture comme il n'y aura pas d'art de la peinture et j'ajoute de la sculpture.¹⁴⁹

As we already saw, one aspect that demarcates Ruskin from Viollet-le-Duc was the role of emotion. Here, Horta was definitely more Ruskinian in spirit. In his lectures, he claimed:

L'architecte doit aimer son métier et l'exercer avec joie. – Le travail doit être son but.
Cette passion pour le travail et l'amour de la profession que l'on exerce, doit être pour ceux qui vous entourent un réel exemple.
[...]

¹⁴⁶ Horta 1986, p. 38. See also Loyer 1986, pp. 124-5. Giedion pointed this out as marking the beginning of what Le Corbusier was to call "le plan libre" (Giedion 2008, p. 305).

¹⁴⁷ See Loyer 1986, p. 128.

¹⁴⁸ Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 26-27.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 49. I would like to thank Françoise Aubry for having pointed out to me the 'oriental story' that Horta told his students to underline this point, quoted in Oostens-Wittemar 1980, pp. 248-9.

Il faut avoir comme grand but dans la vie : Bien faire, être sincère dans tout ce que l'on fait et ne faire que son idée.¹⁵⁰

Horta also wrote in 1936 to Pevsner about his motivation, drawing *Hôtel Tassel*: “De faire œuvre personnelle d’architecte, à l’égale du peintre et du sculpteur qui ne souciaient que de voir avec leurs yeux et sentir avec leur cœur...”¹⁵¹ Therefore, in the end, as Cools & Vandendaele pointed out, Horta would have agreed with Van de Velde:

L’Art Nouveau naîtra de l’honnête expression de la matière, de la personnalité de l’ouvrier et de la réunification des arts dans le bâtiment. Horta aurait pu accepter cette dernière proposition si elle n’avait été brandie par le maître du ‘Werkbund’.¹⁵²

Horta was thus very much a product of his time. He may have been more talented as an architect than Van de Velde, but he was less of a theoretician, and if he wished to stay away from the theorizing of Van de Velde, his art was the product of the absorption of key British aesthetics ideals by Belgians prior to 1895, ideals that he pushed, like Serrurier, Hankar and Van de Velde, in new directions.

*

The preceding remarks were limited to a few key artists and should be supplemented to get the full picture of the intellectual and artistic ferment of the years 1891-1895 in Belgium, that gave rise to Art Nouveau. Although they could, for that reason, be seen as a fragment of a larger study, they should suffice to establish a greater historical accuracy for my narrative: out of the contact with British Arts and Crafts, and theoretical influence harking back to Ruskin, Belgian artists picked up the idea of abstracting curved line from the study of nature. Because they were convinced of their greater value through their understanding of Ruskin’s aesthetics, they made them the central motives for ornamentation. Surely, they did not simply copy what they found

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Cools & Vandendaele 1984, p. 122.

¹⁵¹ Pevsner 2005, p. 173 note 8 to chapter 4.

¹⁵² Cools & Vandendaele 1984, pp. 29-30.

in the likes of Mackmurdo: Horta, with his 'tendrils', and Van de Velde with his 'parafe' together rapidly freed the curved line from any restraint, resulting in the 'whiplash' that came to be associated with Art Nouveau as one of its most popular and recognizable stylistic features. We have seen in section 5.1 that we must nevertheless beware of reductive definitions, and one cannot claim more than this. Still, the point remains that we have here a nodal point in the passage from Arts and Crafts to Art Nouveau of great explanatory importance.

6.2. Could there be a British Art Nouveau?

To conclude this chapter, I would like to discuss the possibility of a 'British Art Nouveau'. Taking stock before moving on to this, we saw in chapter 5 not only that the concept of 'Art Nouveau' was a socially constructed fact in *fin de siècle*, but also that it is a construct in art history which does not, as I claimed, admit of precise delimitations. Thus, there is no dividing line, no joint to carve, between it and 'Arts and Crafts'. As with vague concepts, though, this lack of boundary is not an impediment in ordinary life, as we can in most cases tell if an object is 'red' or not, or if someone is 'tall' or not, although borderline cases are problematic. What interests me here is what happens in these borderline cases, that is when it would not be immediately obvious which label to apply, 'Arts and Crafts' or 'Art Nouveau'.

Although there is no formal property that belongs to all artworks that we label 'Art Nouveau', my focus is on the Art Nouveau line, the so-called 'whiplash' or "*parafe en coup de fouet*". When reporting on the *Prima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna* in Turin, Walter Crane reproduced by hand an instance of that curve (Plate # 6.21) to illustrate his comment:

A prevalent motive in the new art is a long-drawn-out, irregular spiral stem, often multiplied, and varied with “kinks” and elbows, and terminating in formal rows of disks or floral forms. (See sketch.)¹⁵³

Recalling here that Ruskin had identified in Plate # 1.17 for *The Stones of Venice* the particular curves *e-f* and *x-y* (Plate # 6.22) as ‘serviceable’ for ornamentation, we could place them at one extremity of a spectrum, and the Art Nouveau lines of Crane’s sketch or Obrist’s ‘whiplash’ (Plate # 5.8) at the other, and some typical curve in Morris (Plate # 4.16) and Mackmurdo’s cover for *Wren’s City Churches* (Plate # 4.24) in between. One can see a progressive accentuation in curvature.

Of course, as in the case of the Ancient Greek paradox of the Sorites, according to which taking away a grain of sand one by one from a heap one cannot tell at which point the heap stops being a heap, it is not possible to determine a specific point where the curvature makes the line Art Nouveau. This does not mean, of course, that it is not possible at all to apply the concept in particular cases, only that in some cases this will become difficult, all the more so in the case of Art Nouveau given that the negotiations over its meaning involve, as we shall see, matter of nationalism, morality, etc. My argument in this section will be to the effect that, when presented to them, the ‘whiplash’ appeared to the British as exaggerated, having lost its origin in the study of nature, having lost as well any of the constraints embodied in the dictum ‘Truth to Materials’, becoming instead the insincere product of a commercial art. In this, British artists and critics remained faithful to the lessons learned from Ruskin and Morris. Still, while Crane and others rejected the ‘whiplash’, contemporary British artists utilized lines that were similar to it in their own work.

Any reluctance at the time to speak of ‘British Art Nouveau’ feeds into unquestioned negative prejudices about a Victorian era variously describable as ‘retrograde’, ‘conservative’ or ‘reactionary’. Still the narrative of chapters 1-3 should have shown

¹⁵³ Crane 1902a, p. 489.

that this period was far from being reducible to these qualifiers.¹⁵⁴ If we are to question this construction, what of the possibility of a homegrown 'British Art Nouveau'? I shall argue below that there were parallel first-rate non-imitative developments, in particular in the art of Aubrey Beardsley, Mary Seton Watts and Archibald Knox. If our reluctance is thus partly based on ignorance, there is a reason for it. As I shall first argue, there were debates surrounding Art Nouveau in the period 1900-1904 that led to a definitive rejection of the style. One of the effects of this was to have obscured the remarkable achievements of these artists.

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As explained in section 5.1, early British responses to Art Nouveau occurred in the span of four years, from 1900 to 1904. Bing had already exhibited his own brand of Art Nouveau at the Grafton Galleries in 1899: *Exhibition of l'Art Nouveau: S. Bing, Paris*,¹⁵⁵ giving to the British a first taste of what would fall under the heading 'Art Nouveau'. There was, however, not yet much unity in the designs of Tiffany or Colonna, the paintings from Besnard, Fantin-Latour, Meunier, Pissarro, etc., and sets of Japanese prints and Indo-Persian miniatures from Bing's own collection that were on display in the Grafton Galleries. This was followed, however, by an important milestone: the pavilion *L'Art Nouveau Bing* at the Paris Exhibition in 1900 and the gift in 1901 of an important set of Art Nouveau objects by George Donaldson to the Victoria & Albert Museum. Finally, Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau were exhibited side by side at Turin in 1902.¹⁵⁶ These events mark stages of the reception of Art Nouveau in Britain, as if Arts and Crafts, having crossed the Channel, had morphed

¹⁵⁴ We already saw in section 5.1 that the French turn out to have been rather retrograde in their reaction to Art Nouveau.

¹⁵⁵ See the catalogue *Grafton Galleries 1899*. He also had a similarly named exhibition in Dresden in 1897.

¹⁵⁶ On the different modes of display and their significance, see *O'Neill 2007*.

into Art Nouveau and was sailing back to England under this new guise, eliciting a strong critical reaction.

The stages of the reception are as follows: there was first a report on Donaldson's gift in the *Magazine of Art*,¹⁵⁷ that elicited negative reactions in a letter to *The Times* on 15 April 1901 and in a damning anonymous editorial of the *Architectural Review* aptly titled 'Pillory'.¹⁵⁸ These are accompanied by extended negative reactions in pairs of papers by Lewis Day in *Art Journal* and *Macmillan's Magazine* and Walter Crane, reacting to the Turin Exhibition in the *Magazine of Art* and, also, in *Art Journal*.¹⁵⁹ Finally, the *Magazine of Art* published in 1904 a three-part symposium on 'L'Art Nouveau: What it is and What is Thought of it', opening with a brief 'Challenge on Behalf of L'Art Nouveau' by the designer F. S. Blizard, followed by short reactions (ranging from a few columns to a single sentence) from 36 British figures of the art scene.¹⁶⁰ A large majority of these comments were negative. In addition to these British reactions, there were developments in American journals in 1902-1903, with a series of papers debating Art Nouveau in *The Craftsman*,¹⁶¹ while the *Architectural Record* published papers by Hector Guimard and Gabriel Mourey in June and Siegfried Bing in August.¹⁶²

This negative stance was not ephemeral or to be corrected later. Its lasting impact is evidenced by later comments from Crane in 1911,¹⁶³ or by Roger Fry in 1921:

¹⁵⁷ Donaldson 1901.

¹⁵⁸ Anon. 1901. There is also an anonymous letter to the *Morning Reader*, reproduced in *The Journal of Decorative Arts*, whose author points out that the roots of Art Nouveau are British, and that Arts and Crafts was therefore "equally wrong in taste and infinitely duller" (Anon. 1901b, p. 237).

¹⁵⁹ Respectively, Day 1900, Day 1901, Crane 1902a, Crane 1902b.

¹⁶⁰ Blizard et al. 1904.

¹⁶¹ Hamlin 1902, Sargent 1902, Schopfer 1903 and Bing 1903.

¹⁶² Guimard 1902, Mourey 1902 and Bing 1902. I have already quoted the latter in section 5.1, but one should note that Guimard 1902 is evidence that Guimard knew his British sources, as he also presents Ruskin and Morris as forerunners.

¹⁶³ Crane 1911, p. 232.

Even when the eczema of *l'art nouveau* spread from the offices of the *Studio* all over the world, the French gave to it a certain elegant sobriety, whereas in Germany it flourished into forms of colossal and nightmarish horror.¹⁶⁴

Although the pieces gifted by Donaldson toured the country in accordance with his wish, they were afterwards sent to an annex of the Victoria & Albert in Bethnal Green, only to resurface in 1985.¹⁶⁵ Assessing this reaction, it is important to note first that the vast majority of the participants to the symposium in the pages of *Magazine of Art* are not associated with the Art Workers Guild and the Arts and Crafts. They are mainly Royal Academicians (with acronyms 'R.A.' and 'A.R.A.'), few of them of note.¹⁶⁶ Still, key Arts and Crafts figures such as Ashbee, Crane, Day, Prior and Voysey were involved, whose criticisms are of greater interest from the point of view of this thesis. I shall thus try and keep my discussion to criticisms from their vantage point.

Although Blizard commits the mistake of seeing Art Nouveau "as a stranger"¹⁶⁷ in his opening statement, he is corrected by Reginald Blomfield:

[...] as a fact it started in England some twenty years ago, with the ingenious experiments of two young architects with an uncommon share of eccentric ability, who for the first time revealed the numerous possibilities of the "swirl" and "the blob".¹⁶⁸

Alas, Blomfield did not mention who he had in mind, but it is worth noting *en passant* that he imputes here key stylistic features of Art Nouveau to two British architects, decades ago. Although many at the time noticed the attempt at bringing Art Nouveau

¹⁶⁴ Fry 1921, p. 18.

¹⁶⁵ Turner 2001, p. 134, Olsen Theiding 2006, p. 220.

¹⁶⁶ Thus, some of the more negative judgments came from artists that were at any rate probably ill-disposed towards new developments, not from an 'avant-garde' more sensitive to them and likely to incorporate them in their own research. Still, as one can see below, harsh comments also came from key figures of the Arts and Crafts movement.

¹⁶⁷ Blizard *et al.* 1904, p. 112.

¹⁶⁸ Blizard *et al.* 1904, p. 263.

in line with Louis XV,¹⁶⁹ the British sources of Art nouveau were noted by many contributors, for example by Frederick Hamilton Jackson, who wrote in his report on the Paris Exhibition:

The Continental appreciation of the work of certain well-known Englishmen, resulting first in imitation, and afterwards in an endeavour to create works of applied art which should be treated more or less on the same lines, and yet possess those national characteristics which ought to be present and give flavour to the productions of individual nations, was one of the principal factors in producing the movement known as “L’Art Nouveau”, in which certain peculiarities of design are repeated with more or less extravagance in the modern furniture and decoration of Holland and Belgium, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, and France; though other explanations of its inception have been given, which either claim for it an entirely French origin, from the Nancy school of designers, or a basis in the imitation of the work of a clever Belgian.¹⁷⁰

It is interesting to note, below, that talk of nations quickly drops when contributors discuss the specifics of Art Nouveau, such as its line in relation to both nature and material.

Indeed, it cannot be said that nationalism or nationalistic anxieties played overall a fundamental as opposed to an auxiliary role in these British reactions. One exception is a seemingly intemperate remark by Lewis Day aimed at Aubrey Beardsley: “His was an imagination touched with a taint of decadency, caught, no doubt, in Paris”.¹⁷¹ This remark is all the more appalling, given that Beardsley had died two years earlier, at the age of 26. The reference to ‘decadency’ is ambiguous, since it may simply be read as a pejorative – the expression of some sort of moral outrage at some of Beardsley’s more *outré* drawings and homoeroticism – or in reference to the ‘decadent movement’ in art. This last was already in the 1890s a category in use by art critics, for example by Arthur

¹⁶⁹ See, for example, *Day 1900*, p. 294, *Day 1901*, p. 22, *Jackson 1901*, p. 129, *Blizard et al. 1904*, pp. 327 & 380.

¹⁷⁰ *Jackson 1901*, p. 120-121. For another contributor, aware of the British roots, see *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 379. Crane also pointed out the British roots in *Crane 1902a*, p. 493.

¹⁷¹ *Day 1900*, p. 293.

Symons in *Harper's Magazine* in 1893,¹⁷² covering both 'symbolism' and 'impressionism'. Symons discussed mainly French-speaking literary sources (Goncourt, Maeterlinck, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam), and his discussion is nowhere tainted with the sort of pejorative meaning just mentioned.¹⁷³ In Britain, 'decadence' is closely linked to 'aestheticism' and, although Symons mentions him, Walter Pater remained distant from that movement, to which one associates Oscar Wilde, the other main theoretician of 'aestheticism'. In painting, William Blake and Edward Burne-Jones are mentioned in connection with the French 'symbolists'. Beardsley illustrated in 1894 the English translation of Wilde's *Salomé*, hence his being frequently associated with the 'decadent movement'.¹⁷⁴ Day is not specific, but he may have been referring to Beardsley's stay in Paris in 1895-1896, when he lost his job and income because of the adverse publicity caused by Oscar Wilde's trial. If we are to assume that Day's remark was merely pejorative and aimed at the person (see below), it is possible that he may have had in mind not only this scandal, but also Beardsley's provocative illustrations for *Lysistrata* (1896). At all events, this would be confused given that Beardsley had already illustrated Mallory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1893) and *Salomé* (1894) before his stay in Paris, and it is these early illustrations that stand closest to both Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau – this point will be further discussed below.¹⁷⁵

The authors of the letter to *The Times* also spoke of Donaldson's gift in terms of potential harm "on our national art", but they were not worried that British artists would

¹⁷² Symons 1893. This article was later enlarged and published as *The Symbolic Movement in Literature*, further revised as *Symons 1919* – it played an influential role on the generation of T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. I do not mean to imply that the label 'decadent' originates with Symons. Prior to him, 'décadent' was already introduced by Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire, and later on picked up by the Belgian illustrator of Baudelaire, Félicien Rops.

¹⁷³ Symons, who published in *The Yellow Book* and was co-editor with Beardsley and Leonard Smithers of *The Savoy*, was sympathetic to Beardsley's art, as can be evidenced from *Symons 1967*.

¹⁷⁴ Beardsley's work for the literary magazines *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy* also links him to the 'decadent movement'. See Claes & Demoor 2010.

¹⁷⁵ On Beardsley's biography, see Weintraub 1967 or Brophy 1976.

be infected by some alien decadent taste or morality. Indeed, their arguments were of a different nature:

It is much to be regretted that the authorities of South Kensington have introduced into the Museum specimens of the work style 'L' Art Nouveau'. This work is neither right in principle nor does it evince a proper regard for the material employed. As cabinet-making work it is badly executed. It represents a trick of design, which developed from debased forms, has prejudicially affected the design of furniture and buildings in neighbouring countries. In its present position it is in danger of being looked upon as a recognized model which has received the approval of the authorities for study by students and designers, and the harm it may thus produce on our national art cannot be easily gauged.¹⁷⁶

If there was a fear of "pedagogical corruption",¹⁷⁷ it is linked to the idea that the work on display is "neither right in principle nor does it evince a proper regard for the material employed". The oft-repeated claim that Art Nouveau artworks are of 'bad execution' or inferior 'workmanship'¹⁷⁸ may be interpreted as indirect nationalist praise of a supposed superiority of British craftsmen and craftswomen, but the worry here concerns aesthetic principles and harks back to Ruskin's 'Truth to Materials', as we saw in section 4.1. That a design is seen not to display 'Truth to Materials' is, however, not the same as instantiating some dangerous foreign fashion – all the more so when one recognizes the source of that fashion as British.

¹⁷⁶ *Belcher et al. 1901*. This well-known letter is quoted in *Madsen 1956*, p. 300, *Pevsner 2005*, p. 101, and *Olsen Theiding 2006*, pp. 219-220. One should note that, of the four co-authors, only Edward Prior was an important Arts and Crafts architect, the others, John Belcher, Reginald Blomfield and Mervyn Macartney were closer to the architect Norman Shaw, a key figure in the Queen Anne revival.

¹⁷⁷ *Olsen Theiding 2006*, p. 220.

¹⁷⁸ For example, Lewis Day: "No workman thoroughly trained in his craft, and quick therefore to recognize really cunning workmanship, could be content to turn out work technically beneath contempt" (*Day 1900*, p. 296). For another instance, see also *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 210. There is a brief description of the contents of Donaldson's gift in *Olsen Theiding 2006*, p. 229 note 52. It appears that a sizeable number of artworks were from the Nancy school, Gallé and Majorelle in particular, and although one cannot study these to confirm this, there is a strong presumption that the accusation is gratuitous at the very least in their case.

The authors of the anonymous editorial 'Pillory' aimed at Donaldson's gift did speak of 'bad fashion' and a 'fantastic malady', when they expressed similar worries:

The British furniture designer has no need, one would think, to go so far abroad for examples of what to avoid in design. [...] Not only are the things wretched in design and construction, and indifferent in workmanship, but they are not even typical and original examples of a bad fashion. They are the rinsings of the dish, the after-effects of the fantastic malady. The Belgian and the French designers who started the fashion (on English inspiration) are not represented; we have merely the commercial hackneying up and down Europe of motives at a fifth sixth ... tenth remove from an unhappy original.

[...]

If the directors of South Kensington seriously wish to encourage the same movement over here, let them get hold of the prime offenders abroad, or install our own offenders.¹⁷⁹

Granted that the donated artworks were representatives of what is perceived as a 'malady' to begin with, the main point remains that Donaldson's choice was poor, and there is no insinuation here that the 'malady' is actually of alien origin. When one asks what that malady might be, one finds again the same reason: having departed from the constraints imposed by the dictum 'Truth to Materials'. The fearsome foreign element seems circumscribed to this, and this last is recurrent even in absence of such fears. Here are some examples. One of the participants to the symposium, T. G. Jackson cites the Council of Arts' stance on Donaldson's gift:¹⁸⁰

[...] we explained that [...] the forms of the objects, instead of expressing and illustrating the lines of the construction, obscured and ignored them; that the natural quality of material was not respected or made the mainspring of the design as it should be; [...]¹⁸¹

Another contributor, Reginald Blomfield, also commented on the line when stating that Art Nouveau "has no regard to material, treating stone as if it were wood, and wood as

¹⁷⁹ *Anon. 1901*, p. 104.

¹⁸⁰ Among members of this Council, Jackson mentions Walter Crane.

¹⁸¹ *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 210.

if it were lead; and as to its intention, the crazy network of its lines makes the sort of appeal that would be made by a – cluster of reptiles.”¹⁸² Finally, Hamilton Jackson, also criticized Art Nouveau for its lack of respect towards the possibilities of the material, along with an interesting appreciation of Art Nouveau jewellery:¹⁸³

The greatest successes of L'Art Nouveau have been obtained in jewellery, much of which is very beautiful, as might be expected in the case of a craft which deals with metals of great ductility and with objects of small scale. The mistake which has been made most by the followers of the new cult is in supposing that certain lines which are pleasing in design and appropriate to the qualities of some materials are equally applicable to every material, and equally pleasing in every relation, and they are thereby failing into the very pitfall through which the new artists have been disgusted with the work of craftsmen and designer in the historic styles which are now considered effete and lifeless.¹⁸⁴

In another passage, Jackson made a similar point, adding in a very Ruskinian manner that the Art Nouveau line not only does not respect the constraints of ‘truth to materials’, but that it is also not ‘true to nature’:

This “New Art” supposes itself to base its design upon natural growth, and one either of the German or Belgian architects expressly asserted this in an interview, but these laws are in truth continually violated by the curves which are to be met with in nearly every design made by its exponents, which do not suggest the vigorous curves with which vegetation bursts in spring from its winter sleep, or the delicate lines of growth with which bud and flower burgeon to their full beauty, but rather the sapless and dead forms of half-withered vegetation, or of some soft and ductile material which can easily be forced into the desired curves in any direction. In the wooden furniture that modelling of the terminations from which these curves spring, and the morbidezza and modulation of surface, which are often exceedingly beautiful and masterly, do, however, usually suggest

¹⁸² *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 263.

¹⁸³ On Art Nouveau jewellery, see *Sataloff 1984*, *Becker 1985*, and *Spiegelfeld 2011*. To get an idea of the low esteem to which Art Nouveau sank in the first half of the 20th century, it is worth noticing that it is only in 1963 that second-hand Art Nouveau jewellery was sold for the first time at an auction (at Christie's) for more than the cost of its mineral content. See *Sataloff 1984*, p. 47.

¹⁸⁴ This is from his report of the Paris exhibition, *Jackson 1901*, p. 129, but he repeated this point in his contribution to the symposium, *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 380.

metal work and the modelling in wax which sometimes precedes casting, qualities which are not suitable for wood construction or carving, and joined to this is an apparent dislike for straight lines and right angles, which are avoided by all sorts of curious expedients [...].¹⁸⁵

Day made a similar point in his assessment of the British representatives at Paris Exhibition, on grounds that are derivative of Ruskin and Morris (for example in mention of functionalism), but also with an implicit recognition – with a mention of the ‘whiplash’ – that something like the Art Nouveau line is present in British artworks:

British decorative art is [...] less accomplished than French work, but not so wild, nor yet so wilful; and the best of it shows not only a true appreciation of natural beauty, but a consistently ornamental treatment of flower forms. True, the principle of growth is not always conscientiously enough adhered to – the stems of plants may remind one at times, for example, more of whip-lashes than of any growing thing – but the problem of duly decorative modification of ideas derived from nature, and adapting ornament both to the purposes it is designed to fulfil and to the means by which it is to be rendered is on the whole so satisfactorily solved, that it seems as if we were really on the way to building up a style of decorative art which may hereafter be identified with the turn of the century.¹⁸⁶

There are other aspects of the British reactions that deserve further discussion such as the many comments on the difficulties associated with the very possibility of an art which would be without any historical roots,¹⁸⁷ or the more Ruskin and Morris inspired complaints that Art Nouveau is synonymous with ‘commercialism’. While Blomfield denounces a ‘fallacy’,¹⁸⁸ Day is particularly upset about the name ‘new art’ of ‘Art Nouveau’ itself:

[...] the frivolous demand for novelty comes from the shop. The recommendation of the newest thing, and the ideas that it has something to recommend it, comes to us from across the counter.

¹⁸⁵ Jackson 1901, p. 121. I assume that by ‘interview’ Jackson meant personal communication.

¹⁸⁶ Day 1900, p. 296. Day also criticized what he saw as a factitious reliance on nature in Day 1901, pp. 22-23.

¹⁸⁷ Day 1901 is devoted to this issue.

¹⁸⁸ Blizard et al. 1904, p. 263.

Was there ever, apart from the salesman's point of view, a more preposterous conception than that of a New Art?¹⁸⁹

But Crane links this commercialism with a feature of 'Art Nouveau' in a very perceptive manner, noting the connection between the prevalence of the Art Nouveau curve and concomitant loss of meaning (and link with the material) with commercial interests:

[...] even here, in surface design, the restless squirming curves, the tangles of spiral and attenuated stems, with semi-detached spots, or degraded peacock's-eye feathers, were reiterated too often.

A growing suspicion enters the mind that this kind of design is becoming, or, indeed, has become, a sort of aesthetic rhetoric, with little or no thought or meaning behind it, and that its superficial characteristics are being rapidly assimilated, and imitated in degraded forms for purely trade purposes.¹⁹⁰

It was in many ways a remarkable exhibition, but to my mind, in spite of very remarkable and original work, the result, on the whole, seemed to suggest that the new art carried the seeds of dissolution within itself. One rather unfortunate sign was the readiness with which its characteristic forms seemed to lend themselves to exploitation and commercialism. A certain decorative rhetoric in form and line has already been so oft repeated, and so constantly reappears in nearly every kind of design, that we are already weary, and any impression of novelty has completely worn off.

I have no prejudice as to ornamental treatment – so long as it *is* ornamental; but when certain lines and forms in design are continually played upon and repeated, without reference to material or purpose, one is bound to feel fatigued, just as one is by constant repetition of the same phrase in music. In an artist's hands lines and forms must mean something, but too often the imitator comes along and imitates merely the superficial characteristics of his style and so cheapens and ruins the whole thing.¹⁹¹

One can indeed see in Bing's efforts to devise a specific Art Nouveau a 'rhetoric', as Crane puts it, that renders the products he sold recognizable, with the idea of 'Art

¹⁸⁹ *Day 1901*, p. 21.

¹⁹⁰ *Crane 1902b*, p. 230. See *O'Neill 2007*, p. 219.

¹⁹¹ *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 211.

Nouveau' behind the label serving, as Day complains, as a sales pitch. Art Nouveau was thus perceived as having sold its soul to commercial interests. For Arts and Crafts members such as Crane, who were socialists, this may be a legitimate critique: it was seen as art for the *bourgeoisie*, that did not contribute to the improvement of the daily life of the working classes, for whom the products were too expensive. Crane also commented presciently that modern life, with its constant flow of innovations and its internationalization, meant the constant "dislocation of artistic and constructive tradition".¹⁹²

We are thus able to understand better the British reaction to Art Nouveau. I suggested at the beginning of this chapter a development of the curved line from Ruskin to Art Nouveau. Crane seems to represent well the general sentiment, when he stopped along the way:

There are in truth, I venture to think, two principles at work in this modern development of decorative art – a principle on the one hand of health, of life and growth, and on the other of decomposition and decay. The first tends in direction of restraint of ornament and simplicity of construction in architecture, furniture, and the decorative accessories of life. In the crafts of design it maintains the principle of adherence to the limitations, as well as the capabilities, of the material [...] The second principle rather tends to follow a fashion whithersoever it may lead; to adopt forms and lines for the sake of the forms and lines, irrespective of their adaptation to particular materials and uses [...]¹⁹³

In a nutshell, their inclination was towards restraint and soberness. They wished to remain within the confines of an ornamentation that was close to nature and within the limitations imposed by the dictum 'Truth to Materials', and they recoiled when presented with what they perceived as the excesses of Art Nouveau treatment of the line, in the 'whiplash', etc. We are here very close to the distinction introduced by Mary Greensted, according to which the difference between 'Arts and Crafts' and 'Art

¹⁹² Crane 1902a, p. 489.

¹⁹³ Crane 1902a, p. 489.

Nouveau' artists is that, while the latter followed the dictum of Aestheticism, 'Art for art's sake' and therefore focused on end-products that are "dramatic, sophisticated and extravagant", the former focussed on the artists' attitude, first of all striving for unity of design and making (designer and maker being ideally the same person), and secondly, striving for unity of making and material (design and technique are thus chosen according to the character of the material).¹⁹⁴ To these one may add sincerity. Day's and Crane's suspicion, above, that these excesses and extravagance are linked to commercialism makes good sense from this perspective.

Another theme which is omnipresent and explainable from this perspective is that of 'sincerity', for example by Lewis Day,¹⁹⁵ with the concomitant idea of a 'disease'. For example, the painter Gerard Moira wrote in the 1904 symposium:

I feel sure that this extreme in *l'Art Nouveau* of to-day is the outcome of diseased minds, and it is a form of production that cannot be tolerated after a good talk over the green fields and across the heather; and that is one of the surest tests to which a man's creation can be put.¹⁹⁶

Lewis Day's comment on "Continental decadents"¹⁹⁷ shows personal animus; given the above, it is quite possibly directed at Beardsley's homoeroticism:

It shows symptoms not of too exuberant life, but of pronounced disease. It is more than morbid; there is a suspicion about it of something downright loathsome, something you cannot precisely put into words, but which makes you feel you would not care to know the man who could imagine it.¹⁹⁸

As for Voysey, who does not speak of 'disease', he gave the idea a religious twist:

¹⁹⁴ Greensted 2010, p. 10.

¹⁹⁵ Day 1901, p. 23.

¹⁹⁶ Blizard et al. 1904, p. 380. For another occurrence see the contribution of the architect Arthur Beresford Pite, claiming that Art Nouveau displays symptoms of "mental disease", Blizard et al. 1904, p. 327.

¹⁹⁷ Day 1900, p. 296.

¹⁹⁸ Day 1900, p. 296.

The Art of to-day seems void of intuition and shows no sign of reverence. Atheism, conceit, and apish imitation seem to be the chief features [...] Is it not merely the work of a lot of imitators with nothing but mad eccentricity as a guide; good men, no doubt, misled into thinking that Art is a debauch of sensuous feeling, instead of the expression of human *thought* and feeling combined, and governed by reverence for something higher than human nature?¹⁹⁹

Metaphors of 'disease' are delicate to interpret, and one should be wary of reading too much into them.²⁰⁰ In section 2.2, I related the ideas of 'corruption of the mind' and of 'diseased mind' to a lack of sincerity in artistic expression. This seems to me the appropriate context in which to understand claims that Art Nouveau is the product of a diseased mind (or 'malady' as above). Viewed from the perspective just described, these accusations are, if not excusable, made comprehensible. It suffices that one thinks of the lack of sincerity involved in the "aesthetic rhetoric" that Crane linked with commercialism, as opposed to letting one's art be guided by one's sincere emotional resonance with nature and respect for materials.

¹⁹⁹ *Blizard et al. 1904*, p. 213.

²⁰⁰ Both *Guerrand 2009*, pp. 60-63 and *Olsen Theiding 2006*, pp. 216-217 use Max Nordau's voluminous *Entartung*, which appeared in 1892 and translated in 1895 (*Nordau 1895*), to interpret these uses of the metaphor of 'disease'. The problem with reliance on Nordau's book is that, although it is historically warranted, given the date of its publication, it introduces anachronic connotations, because of the use of it in conjunction with the notorious exhibition *Entartete Kunst* organised by the Nazis in 1937. (Incidentally, the artists aimed at by Nordau and the Nazis are not the same, the latter focussing on post-war expressionism, as can be seen from the complete inventory of the 16,000 or so works seized by the Nazis is available at <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/e/entartete-kunst/>.) Talk of 'disease' and 'degeneracy' are not synonymous and mention of Nordau's 'degeneration' introduces a meaning which is clearly *not* in the text of the British reactions to Art nouveau (and the connotations just mentioned that could not have been there, even *in nuce*). There are many further reasons why one should thus be wary of any such imputations. To begin with, in Nordau there is a wider sense in which the whole of humanity is in a state of degeneracy that has no equivalent in any of the authors discussed in this thesis, who would at best have claimed some national superiority. Furthermore, Nordau's book appeared before the advent of Art Nouveau and does not discuss it, so it could not have been used as a reference for criticisms, except in an indirect way. There is at all events no indication any of the figures discussed here knew of Nordau's book and theses, and if they did they probably would not have accepted them given his inclusion of the Pre-Raphaelites and Ruskin among degenerates. See *Nordau 1895*, book II, chapter ii.

It should go without saying that this negative portrayal of Art Nouveau at the hands of its British critics needs to be nuanced, since its complexity cannot be captured with such simple brushstrokes. To mention only one example, in France the movement *L'art dans tout*, which we briefly saw in section 5.1, and whose roots are somehow distinct from British sources, certainly had a social conscience, so does not fit this characterization of l'Art Nouveau.²⁰¹

It is also interesting to note that Nikolaus Pevsner, who admitted not to be an *aficionado* of Art Nouveau,²⁰² saw the British reaction against the Art Nouveau line as having led the way towards Modernism:

The main stream of development – once again thanks to Morris – led by way of Voysey, Ashbee and others direct into the rational style of the twentieth century. This stream, usually labelled Arts and Crafts as against Art nouveau, had its great effects on the Continent too, but they were anti-Art Nouveau and post-Art Nouveau.²⁰³

²⁰¹ See Froissart Pezone 2004, pp. 67-86. Pevsner wrote of Art Nouveau that it was “entirely lacking in a social conscience” (Pevsner 2005, p. 92). Given, for example, the strong socialist, if not outright anarchist, ambitions expressed by Van de Velde for his art, Pevsner’s claim cannot be entirely true. In France, Gallé and later on Hector Guimard also expressed socialist views broadly similar to Crane’s and also had similar wishes for their art. (For Gallé, see O’Mahony 2007, for Guimard, see Clendenim 2008, pp. 170-171.) The art critic Roger Marx campaigned for ‘l’art social’, see his Marx 1913, while Jean Lahor, who also shared such socialist inclinations, wrote *L’habitation à bon marché et un art nouveau pour le peuple* (Lahor undated). Rossella Froissart Pezone also pointed out that the supporters of ‘l’art social’ in France considered science, technology and machine as essential elements for their project, an idea that can be traced back to Léon de Laborde in 1850s. See Froissart Pezone 2004, pp. 13-18. The resulting discrepancy, between these avowed socialist intentions and the result, which extends to Arts and Crafts, was often noted, for example in Pevsner 1965, p. 2. But a similar discrepancy is also noticeable for the Arts and Crafts, about which Morris himself complained that he is “ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich” (quoted McKean & Baxter 2000, p. 136).

²⁰² Pevsner 1973, p. 1.

²⁰³ Pevsner 1965, p. 3-4.

This thesis is not the place to provide an assessment this overarching historical thesis, but I shall say a few words on the survival of the curved line, thus of Ruskin's aesthetic ideals, in the conclusion.²⁰⁴

*

Combined with Bing's successful effort to dissociate Art Nouveau from any British roots and aligning it with a French tradition harking back to Louis XV, this initial negative reaction from the British fosters the idea Art Nouveau is simply a foreign movement, which was eventually kept at bay, and this view entails in turn that there was no such thing as 'British Art Nouveau', hence the reluctance to speak of such a thing. But would any such residual reluctance, today, be the result of a misunderstanding? Already in 1965 an exhibition entitled 'Art Nouveau in Britain' toured Britain (Glasgow, Newcastle, Swansea, Brighton, Birmingham and Leicester), with Pevsner writing the introduction to its short catalogue.²⁰⁵ This is an early attempt at constructing the concept, with an air of artificiality, with works from a motley of forerunners such as Christopher Dresser, William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti or Edward Burne-Jones, and works from artists openly against Art Nouveau, as we just saw, such as C. R. Ashbee, Walter Crane, Lewis F. Day, and C. F. A. Voysey on display. Even the 'historicist' Alfred Gilbert, whose curved lines inspired from rococo could be confused with Art Nouveau is represented, who loathed Art Nouveau.²⁰⁶ Still, Mackmurdo's essential pieces were included (a total of seven), along with works from Aubrey Beardsley, Archibald Knox, Margaret Macdonald & Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and numerous others.

²⁰⁴ One should at least notice here the value judgement implicit in the expression 'rational style', which is typical of Pevsner's approach. By contrast, Art Nouveau appears here to be 'anti-rationalist' (*Richards & Pevsner 1973*), if not plainly 'irrationalist'. See chapter 1, footnote 26.

²⁰⁵ *Pevsner 1965*.

²⁰⁶ See *Handley-Read 1967*.

I have argued in section 5.2 that the category 'Art Nouveau' was first and foremost a social construct, one that continues to bedevil, or at the very least poses challenges to art historians who, across the generations, have also held evolving ideas about what constitutes useful categorisation in the history of styles. There is no better example of the arbitrariness of the 'construct' than Lewis Day's comments, among the harshest against Art Nouveau. His paper is illustrated with images of British prize-winning work at the Paris Exhibition, including designs for book covers by a now obscure student of Leeds College of Art, Fred Paul, that exemplifies Art Nouveau (Plate # 6.23). Surprisingly, given the comments quoted above, Day praised these very students in his last paragraph.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, Day helped with the selection of work by Pilkington's Tile & Pottery Co. for the Paris Exhibition, and among those he selected – and half of those were his – were some from Alphonse Mucha, along with Crane and Voysey.²⁰⁸ Finally, the Swiss Eugène Grasset, influenced early on by the Arts and Crafts, published in 1897 a study emblematic of Art Nouveau, *Plants and their Application to Ornament*,²⁰⁹ whose patterns bear comparison with Day's. Clearly, the label 'Art Nouveau' arbitrarily separates what is and what is not Art Nouveau, when there might actually have been a more seamless development on both sides of the Channel. A brief consideration of the art of Aubrey Beardsley, Margaret Macdonald & Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Mary Seton Watts and Archibald Knox – whose curved lines that are less 'sober' than Mackmurdo's or Ashbee's and definitely parallel to any development on the Continent – will suffice to prove this point.

Beardsley's first illustrations for *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1893) and *Salomé* (1894) are the most interesting from the point of view of this thesis, as the curved lines for which he is justifiably admired are practically absent from illustrations produced after his stay in Paris, such as those for *The Rape of the Lock* or *Volpone*, as well as most of his

²⁰⁷ Day 1900, p. 297.

²⁰⁸ Hansen 2007, p. 34.

²⁰⁹ Grasset 2008.

drawings for *The Savoy*.²¹⁰ What makes these early illustrations interesting is that they were drawn before Bing inaugurated his shop in Paris, some of his work was in fact selected by Bing for that occasion. Still, Beardsley's art is often classified as 'Art Nouveau'.²¹¹ His first work on *Le Morte D'Arthur* shows the influence of his mentor, Edward Burne-Jones. Morris' reaction was apparently negative. Beardsley reports in a letter that Morris "has sworn a great oath against me for daring to bring out a book in this manner". Given that the book was published by J. M. Dent using new methods of reproduction that reduced costs, to compete with expensive books from the Kelmscott press, this should not come as a surprise. But Beardsley adds: "The truth is that, while *his* work is a mere imitation of the old stuff, mine is fresh and original".²¹² If Beardsley already shows in 1893 a tendency to break free from symmetry (and progressively a greater reliance on the techniques of Japanese block print), it is as difficult to classify his intricately laced lines in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, for example in (Plate # 6.24) or the dominant lines in 'The Peacock Skirt' from *Salomé* in 1894 (Plate # 6.25), as either 'Arts and Crafts' or 'Art Nouveau'. (In this respect, they remind one of Mackmurdo's lines.) Still, his advertisement in *The Studio* for the French version of *Salomé* in 1893 is replete with lines one would qualify as 'Art Nouveau' (Plate # 6.26).

It is apposite to discuss the art of Margaret Macdonald and Charles Rennie Mackintosh immediately after Beardsley's, given that his influence is clearly apparent when one compares the lines in Plate # 6.25 with Frances and Margaret Macdonald's *repoussé* white metal plaque *The Iliad* exhibited two years later (1896), at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition.²¹³ The similar lines are also found in her gesso painting *the White*

²¹⁰ See either *Harris 1967* or *Zatlin 2016*.

²¹¹ For example, his work was included in the above-mentioned 1965 exhibition on 'Art Nouveau in Britain'. See also *Zatlin 2007*.

²¹² Quoted in *Brophy 1976*, pp. 64-65.

²¹³ The sisters were to contribute to the *Yellow Book* in the same year. On Beardsley as a source to Macdonald & Mackintosh, see *Howarth 1977*, pp. 225-228. As Janice Helland pointed out, however, one should avoid inferring too much from Beardsley as a source, given Frances and Margaret Macdonald had already developed their own style beforehand, *Helland 1996*, p. 77.

Rose and the Red Rose in 1902 (Plate # 6.27). I purposefully mention Macdonald and Mackintosh in the same breath because, in rather Ruskinian spirit, they worked together – see also the collaboration between Mary Seton Watts and her husband, immediately below – and one should beware of apportioning their art too easily. Over and above simply subsuming their collaborative work under Mackintosh, who gets all the credit, there is a long and, alas, successful tradition allocating architecture to Mackintosh and decoration, being perceived as feminine and in her case also inferior, to Macdonald. Seeing matters this way allowed Pevsner – likewise for Thomas Howarth, whose book bears the title *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement* – to present Mackintosh as a pioneer of Modernism, a forerunner of Le Corbusier, because of his architectural work and its influence on the likes of H. P. Berlage.²¹⁴

Ruskin was one of Mackintosh's favourite authors along with, notably, Lethaby.²¹⁵ He took *The Stones of Venice* with him for a tour of Italy in 1891.²¹⁶ Mackintosh's lecture notes were published posthumously, all from the 1890s except *Seemliness* from 1902.²¹⁷ It is interesting to note that they contain many passages silently lifted from Ruskin and Lethaby. Mackintosh thus took many ideas from Ruskin, for example, that of 'Truth to Materials' in architecture.²¹⁸ One obvious lesson was that of the importance of a close study of nature.²¹⁹ For example, Mackintosh wrote: "If we trace the artistic forms of things made by man to their origin, we find a direct inspiration from if not a

²¹⁴ Pevsner 2005, pp. 133-135. The idea that Margaret Macdonald's responsibility was limited to decoration and that her work was inferior comes from Morton Shand 1935. For a criticism of this bias, see Helland 1994.

²¹⁵ Howarth 1977, p. 7; Macaulay 1989, p. 142; Macaulay 2010, p. 88. Also: "Ruskin was his first and most profound intellectual mentor" (McKean & Baxter 2000, p. 136).

²¹⁶ See Macaulay 2010, pp. 88-107, who discusses Mackintosh's trip to Italy in relation to Ruskin.

²¹⁷ See Robertson 1990.

²¹⁸ Robertson 1990, p. 191.

²¹⁹ A point repeatedly emphasized: Macleod 1983, pp. 23-24; Walker 1990, p. 178; McKean & Baxter 2000, p. 136.

direct imitation of nature”.²²⁰ His saying in *Seemliness* (1902) also embodies the idea: “Art is the flower – Life is the green leaf”.²²¹

Macdonald and Mackintosh are certainly known for a style that emphasizes a subtle interplay between curved and straight lines or between curves and geometric forms (Plate # 6.28). They are, if we are to agree with Pevsner, one of the key sources for Viennese Art Nouveau, especially in light of the impact of their work exhibited at the *Secession* in 1900.²²² We just saw that Macdonald’s art was already exhibiting curves that are ‘Art Nouveau’ independently from her better-known work with her husband, and it is interesting to note that Mackintosh’s own drawings also exhibit similar lines, for example in *Part Seen, Part Imagined*, offered to Macdonald in 1896 (Plate # 6.29), or in a sketch of Westwick Hall, Norfolk in 1897, on which he freely superimposed biomorphic curved lines (Plate # 6.30).

It is also fitting to note that, although Mackintosh regularly drew flowers,²²³ he was also interested in curved lines within rock formations, as evidenced from one of his last paintings, *The Rock* (1927) (Plate # 6.31). This painting could serve as a coda for my narrative, and should be compared to Ruskin’s *Study of Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas* (Plate # 1.14) and Millais’ *Portrait of John Ruskin* (Plate # 1.16), by then painted close to 75 years beforehand.

We already encountered Mary Seton Watts in section 4.3, in connection with the Compton Potter’s Arts Guild, as one of the most interesting figures of the Arts and Crafts movement, who also did some work for *Liberty’s*. I merely wish to attract

²²⁰ Robertson 1990, pp. 204-205

²²¹ Robertson 1990, p. 224.

²²² Pevsner 2005, p. 137. (Pevsner mentions only Mackintosh, but for reasons just explained, I consider this wrongheaded.) For the contrary view that there is no lineage between Macdonald & Mackintosh and Hoffmann and the *Wiener Werkstätte*, see Howarth 1977, p. 268 and Madsen 1956, pp. 403-405.

²²³ See Robertson 1995 and Robertson 1997.

attention here on her masterpiece, the Watts Chapel in Compton (Plate # 6.32).²²⁴ Its interior and exterior ornamentation is heavily laden with symbolic meanings, and she even published a detailed description of her intended meanings in 1905, *The Word in the Pattern*.²²⁵ I would like, however, to keep to one of its formal elements, the curved lines. As a testimony of the low level to which appreciation of Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau had sunk in mid-20th century, it is worth quoting the Pevsner volume on *Surrey*:

[...] the chapel desperately attempts Art Nouveau effects from the outlandish standpoint of the Celtic Revival.

The inside was designed in 1901, and this *is* Art Nouveau. It is a very startling and effective room, though not a pleasant one because of the intolerable torpor and weariness of the motifs. There is nothing like Mackintosh here – it is one of the most soporific rooms in England.²²⁶

Over and above the denigration, it is worth noting that the Chapel is recognized here as Art Nouveau. Veronica Franklin Gould, who has produced studies of the Chapel, presents it as an ‘Arts and Crafts Memorial’, but she talks at times of ‘Art Nouveau’ when describing it,²²⁷ and even describes Seton Watts as the ‘Unsung Heroine of the Art Nouveau’.²²⁸ The possibility of switching from one label to another is further grist to my mill. Seton Watts’ use of the line (Plate # 6.33) certainly distinguishes it from other Arts and Crafts Chapels, such as the Chapel at Great Warley, Essex by Charles Harrison Townsend and William Reynolds-Stevens,²²⁹ and the remarkable Mortuary

²²⁴ On the Watts chapel, see *Beazley 1973*, *Franklin Gould 1993*, *Cheasley Paterson 2005*, *Franklin Gould 2011* and *Greenhow 2011*.

²²⁵ *Seton Watts 1905*. For studies of the Chapel’s multiple layers of meanings, see *Cheasley Paterson 2005*, *Bills 2010* and *Greenhow 2011*.

²²⁶ *Pevsner 1962*, p. 170. The author of these lines is not Pevsner himself, but his collaborator for the volume: Ian Naim, the maverick editor of ‘Outrage’, the issue of the *Architectural Review* for June 1955.

²²⁷ For example, *Franklin Gould 1993*, pp. 28, 30, 32.

²²⁸ See *Franklin Gould 1998*.

²²⁹ This Chapel is presented as Art Nouveau in *Malton 1973*, but its most distinctive elements, chancel screen and pulpit, and embroidered hangings, do not display the Art Nouveau line, so the contrast that I am making still holds.

Chapel of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh, by Phoebe Anna Traquair. Drawings of the interior by the artist John Furnival²³⁰ allow us clearly to see the distinctive Art Nouveau curved lines (Plate # 6.34 and Plate # 6.35). In her own words, she developed her own intricate lines as a style “sympathetic for the expression of one’s idea”.²³¹ One senses again here the spirit of Ruskin, although she went much further in the development of her lines than most British would have allowed. We thus have with the innovative art of Mary Seton Watts another borderline case, where both labels are applicable.

Archibald Knox is probably the most intriguing artist to have worked for Liberty, since he may with some justice be called a ‘British Art Nouveau’ artist, although he himself did not like the Continental style.²³² A native of the Isle of Man, he drew also inspiration from his study in his youth of local Runic and Celtic ornamentation, as well as from Medieval manuscript illuminations. He had studied Celtic art at the Douglas School of Art, publishing on this topic in 1893 what was probably part of his examination thesis, a study of Celtic crosses of the Isle of Man,²³³ and he began providing designs for Liberty & Co. in 1899, for their Celtic range of metalwork called ‘Cymric’.²³⁴ This was during the ‘height of the ‘Celtic revival’, he was also to design ‘Tudric’ pewter, while Mary Seton Watts designed potteries with Celtic ornament.²³⁵ Knox’s best-known work would be his jewellery and his metal and pewter works, in which he occasionally used ‘Ruskin cabochon’. These are a particular form of (lead free) enamel that became very popular because of their colours, and which were invented by the founder of the Ruskin Pottery in Birmingham, Edward Richard Taylor,

²³⁰ These are reproduced in *Beazley 1973*.

²³¹ Quoted in *Franklin Gould 2011*, p. 68.

²³² *Adburgham 1975*, p. 82. On Knox, see *Tilbrook 1976* (of which there is a new edition in 2006) and *Martin 1995*.

²³³ *Knox 1893*. See *Tilbrook 1976*, pp. 25-29.

²³⁴ *Bury 1973*.

²³⁵ *Adburgham 1975*, p. 81.

who did not have any personal contacts with Ruskin, but simply gave the name to his pottery and enamel out of admiration for Ruskin.²³⁶

Knox appears to have had published very little and he left no substantial manuscripts or letters behind, so it is thus difficult to settle any questions concerning his theoretical influences. He was at any rate known *not* to have been inspired by Arts and Crafts²³⁷ and, as opposed to Seton Watts (see section 4.3) he appears not to have had any influence from Ruskin. At all events, the remarkable art of Archibald Knox is also exhibiting Art Nouveau curved lines, for example in its jewellery and boxes (Plates # 6.36 & 6.37). The comparison with jewellery from Colonna is quite striking in that respect (Plate # 6.38). If only to emphasize once more the relativity of these labels, one could compare both with a brooch from Josef Hoffmann of the *Wiener Werkstätte*, where one may see the influence of Macdonald & Mackintosh (Plate # 6.39).

It is worth noting that Margaret Macdonald & Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Mary Seton Watts and Archibald Knox all produced the remarkable artworks just mentioned after 1900, thus exactly when the reception for Art Nouveau in Britain caused the negative reaction discussed earlier in this section. This much shows that one cannot reduce the British reactions to Art Nouveau to the negative views expressed in the *Magazine of Art*, the *Art Journal*, etc. and discussed above. This would provide a skewed picture of historical reality. At all events, the possibility that Seton Watts and Knox knew about Art Nouveau and intricately integrated its curved lines to their art cannot be discounted. On the other hand, they were both careful students of Celtic art, providing Celtic-inspired designs for Donegal carpets²³⁸ and Liberty's 'Cymric' and 'Tudric' lines of products.²³⁹ In her studies, Seton Watts paid particular attention to

²³⁶ To my knowledge there is no scholarly discussion of 'Ruskin cabochon'.

²³⁷ At least if we are to give credence to the testimony of his friend W. T. Quayle. See *Quayle 1973*, p. 17. But this is subject to caution.

²³⁸ See *Morris 1989*, p. 41.

²³⁹ It was suggested by Karen Olsen Theiding that the Celtic Revival was a British answer to Art Nouveau, as Liberty & Co. was "able to capitalize" with its 'Cymric' line of products "on art nouveau's

Celtic bronzes at the British Museum and the illuminations of the *Book of Kells*,²⁴⁰ and her marvel at the Celtic patterns of curved lines is apparent in her own work, from brooches (see, for example, Plate # 6.40) and pottery for *Liberty's*, who hailed her as a pioneer of Celtic design.²⁴¹ Commenting on the Watts Chapel, she wrote : "In trying to revive in some degree that living quality which was in all decoration when patterns had meaning, the character of our own Celtic art [...] has been followed".²⁴² Their artworks thus display a rich combination of the whiplash with Celtic motifs, which would

commercial appeal while countering its perceived foreignness" (Olsen Theiding 2006, p. 227). This suggestion assumes the very distinction that I have been arguing against. I also argued that, in the end, the nationalist rhetoric in the British debate about Art Nouveau, which is made here to play a central explanatory role, is in fact not so central a motive (at least not for the British, as opposed to the French), and I would beg to differ with her suggestion for the following reasons. First, the sources of the 'Celtic revival' pre-date by decades this supposed countering of Art Nouveau's 'foreignness'. For example, William Morris had already produced a cabinet with Celtic-inspired decoration as early as 1861, visited Iceland in 1872 and he translated sagas. See Madsen 1956, p. 211 and pp. 207-221 for further evidence. It is possible, however, that the fashion for Celtic lines was given an impetus towards the last years of the century with the publication of images from the *Book of Kells* (Abbott 1892) and, in *The Studio*, Scandinavian wood-carvings (Romilly Allen 1897-98). Finally, the 'Cymric' line of products itself was introduced in 1898 (see also Tilbrook 1976, p. 78), thus – once more – before the adverse reaction to which it supposedly was a response, and *Liberty's* was not the only merchant involved in the Celtic revival. (See for example the advertisements for Murrel Bennett and Connell reproduced in Tilbrook 1976, pp. 184-185.) *Liberty's* is better seen not as having generated, rather as having merely popularized the Celtic revival, perhaps thanks to better designs. The firm did revive, however, the craft of pewter with the 'Tudric' line, see *Liberty* 1904. The 'Cymric' line was phased out already in 1905. It is thus difficult to see *Liberty's* introduction of the 'Cymric' line of products as a shrewd move to capitalize on negative 'nationalist' reaction to Art Nouveau. On the contrary, given for example Knox's jewellery designs, *Liberty's* appeared to have upheld Art nouveau at a controversial time. Secondly, it would unduly reduce the British reaction to Art Nouveau to Liberty & Co.'s commercial move and ignore all elements of British design unrelated to the Celtic revival. The Celtic art revival has many roots, harking back much earlier than the introduction of the 'Cymric' line of products to the popularity of Morris' own interest in Celtic roots (as a specific case of the general idea that ought to find inspiration in local design, not a as 'nationalist' endeavour). One could go back even further to the renewal of interest in decorative arts in Britain was the result of the Great Exhibition of 1851, when its organizers realized the paucity of the ornaments, and Owen Jones, who was one of the organizers, proceeded to instruct people by writing a treatise on ornamentation, *Grammar of Ornament*, that included a chapter on 'Celtic Ornament' (Jones 1856, chapter xv).

²⁴⁰ For Seton Watts and her studies at the British Museum, see, for example, Franklin Gould 1993, p. 13 or Cheasley Paterson 2005, p. 728.

²⁴¹ Franklin Gould 2011, p. 79.

²⁴² Seton Watts 1905, p. 3.

explain why Mario Amaya could argue in 1963, largely on the basis of 'Cymric' and 'Tudric' artworks, for the identity between *Liberty's* and the 'Modern Style'.²⁴³

Amaya quite rightly pointed out that too great a focus on the whiplash of the Belgian artists would explain why British Art Nouveau was not properly assessed:

Liberty's importance has been underestimated because current literature on Art Nouveau has tended to emphasise the easily-recognizable whiplash motif, which appeared throughout the movement. In fact, Liberty's reflected the essential qualities of the style, for Art Nouveau was not only a riot of curvilinear patterns, but constituted an urgent attempt to break with traditional styles in order to give the applied arts an individuality dependent on invention rather than on a confusion of 'period' references.²⁴⁴

We saw in chapter 5 how Bing manoeuvred both to associate the name 'Art Nouveau' to artworks he sold in his shop, and to use the label to attract customers to his shop. In the end, we see that Bing directed designers so that they would create under that name a particular style (aligned as we saw with Louis XV), which is not reflective of the wide variety of styles that go under the catchphrase 'Art Nouveau' today. Arthur Liberty, who was in the end a more successful merchant than Bing – whose shop went under in 1903 – never had such grand ambitions. When knighted in 1913 for his role in the promotion of decorative arts in Britain, he ironically remarked about his famous fabrics: "I am afraid that in this and other respects I have become a mere adjective".²⁴⁵ While it would be exaggerated to confuse that 'style' with 'Art Nouveau',²⁴⁶ Amaya was right to claim that Liberty played an important role within Art Nouveau, besides Bing (and others).

²⁴³ Amaya 1963.

²⁴⁴ Amaya 1963, p. 109.

²⁴⁵ Quoted in Nichols 1989, p. 76.

²⁴⁶ If only because, as Sarah Nichols pointed out, it is impossible to define a 'Liberty's style', Nichols 1989, p. 90.

When *Liberty's* 'Cymric' wares came out, Aymer Vallance observed in the *Magazine of Art*, that "the Guild of Handicraft has for some years been producing work which seems to possess not dissimilar properties".²⁴⁷ The point can be illustrated by the comparison of Ashbee (Plates # 6.41 & 6.42) and Knox (Plates # 6.43 & 6.44). But Ashbee rejected Art Nouveau. In 1909, he described the fate of a tureen and cover (Plate # 6.45), commissioned by the Venetian Count Lionel Hirschel de Minerbi: "This piece was only partially completed, being then melted down; as the Count changed his mind and wanted something more in the manner of 'L'Art Nouveau', which I was unable to give him."²⁴⁸ Interestingly enough, Alan Crawford sees Ashbee as having been influenced by Art Nouveau:

As for Art Nouveau, some of Ashbee's handles would not have been so generously looped, his organic ornament so sinuous, or his handles sometimes fixed with such serpentine curves, if he had not been aware of developments in Belgium, France and Germany; the influence is palpable. But to compare his metalwork with the fluid, sometimes precious, semi-sculptural work of Guimard, Lalique or Van de Velde is to feel how sober it is.²⁴⁹

Crawford's remark is of great interest on two counts. First, because he attributes an influence of Art Nouveau to Ashbee where there might be none – there is no evidence of his having had anything but contempt for the style – and this, of itself, shows how difficult it is to demarcate what is and what is not Art Nouveau. Secondly, Crawford rightly points out that the contrast with Art Nouveau, shows 'soberness' on the part of the Ashbee.

To this above remark, Amaya also added that the British were more sensitive to structure and function:

²⁴⁷ Vallance 1901*t*, p. 271.

²⁴⁸ Ashbee 1909, p. 34.

²⁴⁹ Crawford 1985, p. 343.

Britain, and Liberty's in particular, had the edge on continental Art Nouveau in so far as the curvilinear motifs were relegated to their proper place as light decorative relief and were not allowed to choke the basic structure of an object. The best British Art Nouveau not only rested on an inventive employment of linear patterns, borrowed from sources as dissimilar as Blake, the Pre-Raphaelites, Celtic manuscripts and Japanese and near Eastern design, but of the form of the object itself and its related function.²⁵⁰

We saw in section 4.1 that Liberty himself was quite consciously following Ruskin and Morris on this very point. This sensitivity is thus part of the legacy of Ruskin and Morris, but this multiplicity of sources for the 'riot' of curved lines, to use Amaya's word, shows that Ruskin's essential message of study of nature and abstracting curved lines from it, was being diluted or simply lost. If Celtic or Japanese art displayed lines that were originally abstracted from nature – and this is not *prima facie* obvious and would need to be argued for – then studying then with the aim of integrating them in one's art is at best at one remove from the direct study of nature, and one is indeed at risk of losing sight of Ruskin's very point. This is an important point to make, if only to indicate the limits of Ruskin's influence and better to define the scope of this thesis' central claims concerning his aesthetic ideals. This is why its narrative must come at an end here. We shall see in the conclusion that these ideals nevertheless remained alive.

²⁵⁰ Amaya 1963, p. 109.

7. Conclusion

It would be tempting to enquire further into changing conceptions of the line, for example with Henry Van de Velde's notion of '*ligne de force*' or '*ligne dynamographique*'. Although he was an early enthusiast, as we saw, Van de Velde perceived that Ruskin and Morris had argued for a '*religion de la beauté*', to use Robert de la Sizeranne's formula,¹ and he abandoned their views in favour of a scientific basis in psychology, with the theory of '*empfindung*' or 'empathy' (literally: 'feeling-in') of Theodor Lipps and Wilhelm Worringer.² This would have been anathema to Ruskin inasmuch as it is a version of the 'pathetic fallacy', but also because of the belief that these matters might be amenable to treatment by scientific method, with the hope of providing an explanation of universal value, which would be applicable to art education. Interestingly enough, when Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus, he explicitly rejected Van de Velde's pedagogical principles based on his '*ligne de force*', on grounds that are rather 'Ruskinian'.³

At all events, Van de Velde's viewpoint would form an important continuation of the narrative of this thesis, from a key theoretician of Art Nouveau to a pioneer of Modernism. But my brief was to study the influence of Ruskin on the rise of Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau, not to pursue my investigations further. Before leaving this topic and bringing the thesis to a close, it should be noted that Van de Velde's grounds

¹ See de la Sizeranne 1897, mentioned in Van de Velde 1979, pp. 38 & 54, for example. Van de Velde often portrayed Ruskin and Morris in simplistic terms, as being merely outraged by what he called '*offenses à la beauté*' caused by industrialisation (Van de Velde 1979, p. 67).

² To see the contrast, one must compare '*La triple offense à la beauté*', written around 1893, in which he confesses his admiration for Ruskin and Morris (Van de Velde 1979, pp. 31-68), and the section on the '*ligne de force*' in *Les formules architectoniques de la beauté* (1902-1912) (van de Velde 1978, pp. 59-81). The key figure of the theory of empathy is the psychologist Theodor Lipps, of whom practically nothing is translated, but see Lipps 1935. This theory has roots in the philosophy of Hermann Lotze and Robert Vischer. See the papers in Mallgrave & Ikonomou 1994. Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*, first published in 1908 is another important work in this tradition (Worringer 1953). Lipps and Worringer are discussed in Spuybroeck 2016, chapter 3, but his approach, although original, is not meant to be scholarly.

³ See Gropius 1963, p.10.

for his rejection shed light on the perception of Ruskin (and Morris) in *fin de siècle*. One of the principal claims of this thesis had been that Ruskin saw in art, as experience, a ‘moral link’ with nature (and God). Abandoning the ‘*religion de la beauté*’, Van de Velde shows that he had understood Ruskin’s message in those very terms.

I would like to look back the road traveled in the preceding chapters, from Ruskin’s overturning of Reynolds to the British rejection of Art Nouveau. As explained in section 1.2, the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin, and Art Nouveau (and to a large extent the Arts and Crafts movement too) suffered a sharp decline in their reputation in the first decades of the 20th century, leading to a period during which they were understudied and, although this is no longer our situation, as they were all ‘rediscovered’ since the 1960s and 1970s and have been studied intensely ever since, there still is room for further studies that aim at understanding the multifarious aspects of this important period of art history. Research leading to this thesis began with an enquiry into the role played by Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts movement in the rise of Art Nouveau in Belgium, focusing on the role of the curved line. I have specifically argued for this by giving detailed evidence of this in section 6.1, but my study unveiled a deeper dimension to this influence, mentioned in the previous paragraph, namely Ruskin’s key idea of the ‘moral link’, which stands at the heart of his thought, and explains why he was so much admired and influential.

In section 1.3, I proposed a framework for my thesis that differs from postcolonialism as it focuses on a global issue, the Anthropocene, in the hope of presenting Ruskin in a positive light, as having a message for today’s global concerns. For all his failings, Ruskin had been an early and important critic of the industrial revolution and his aesthetic ideals were intimately linked with this critique. If we understand his ‘moral link’ simply in terms of the artistic relation humans have with nature, Ruskin’s message was as follows: with the advent of industrialisation and ‘the

machine', humans had lost contact with nature,⁴ but it could be recovered and fostered through focussing on our emotional response as we experience it through art, with art education for all, and by organizing labor and society around it. What I have called Ruskin's 'phenomenology' did not square well with science – neither was it meant to as I have claimed that it was about art. The idea of guilds as an economic scheme was never really implemented, and their objection to 'the machine' was to cause the downfall of Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts movement in the eyes of Modernism,⁵ but this message remains today a strong one – it is perhaps made even more urgent with the eminent collapse of eco-systems around the globe – , with its condemnation of the evils of industrialisation and the need to keep a nurturing and protective relationship with nature.

To go outdoors and enjoy nature, analysing one's enjoyment by trying to draw, may not be the most practical solution to our most pressing environmental challenges, but the idea of placing art as experience at the heart of our relationship to nature and placing the latter at the heart of lives – including our work – so that it becomes crucial that we respect and protect nature, remains an interesting one for aesthetics and art history: it is not just that Ruskin urged us to reconnect with nature in ways that have been largely eradicated by the industrial revolution, but also that he envisioned a central role for art, as he conceived it. Furthermore, as he sought to abolish not only the distinction between pure and applied arts, but also that between 'artist' and 'amateur', he wanted his message not to be limited to an artistic elite, but to be accessible to every citizen.

⁴ Ruskin saw nature as a gift from God for us to enjoy our lives, hence the need to protect and nurture it, it is easy to bracket away the religious dimension and focus on the relation to nature.

⁵ Although Ruskin was, as we saw in chapter 4, very much against 'the machine', the opposition to it by Morris and others within the Arts and Crafts was not as vehement as it was made to be by critics such as Pevsner or Banham, when they are lumped with Ruskin. What Morris could not accept was the division of labour as the basis for exploitation, not machines *per se*. See *Kocmanova 1967*, p. 415-416 & 417-418.

This message stands at the heart of this thesis. In the first half, I sought to explain the central claims of Ruskin's aesthetics, studying how it is progressively set up from Ruskin's first book, *Modern Painters I*, where he undermined the conventions of his day to get his readers to see and explore by themselves, to his advocacy of social reform on the basis of the guilds. In the second half, I plotted its influence on the Arts and Crafts movement and early Art Nouveau. To my mind, Ruskin's message had to be retrieved in order properly to understand why curved lines played the role they so ostensibly played in the advent both of Arts and Crafts and of Art Nouveau. As far as decorative arts were concerned – and we saw how Ruskin saw this distinction as factitious – Ruskin's aesthetics boiled down to the idea that one ought to abstract lines from the study of nature and use them in ornamentation.

The road travelled led us through the following stages. The starting point, Ruskin's problem (section 2.1), is the very point of *Modern Painters I*: 'overturning' Reynolds, which meant rejecting 'conventions' and the tendency to 'generalise' in painting, that is to paint having in mind an 'archetype' and not what is actually seen. Ruskin actually developed, in a loosely systematic way, an underlying aesthetic theory to achieve his purpose, which is explored in chapter 1. Not that he believed that painting without 'conventions' meant that one could achieve an 'innocence of the eye' in the sense that one could reproduce directly what one sees without convention, style, etc. He meant that, in order truly to experience of nature, one should learn to get rid of the artificial conventions his days. This was the meaning of Ruskin's advice (section 3.1). We saw that '*Theoria*' is not the sort of pure receptivity that this misconception of 'innocence of the eye' would presuppose, but always involves selection and an 'imaginary' element (section 2.3). A brief section on photography (section 3.4) also helped getting this point across, as Ruskin clearly rejected photography as a means of mechanically reproducing reality 'as it really is', so to speak, and one can see in his own discussions that he would even recognize visual distortions of the painters' eyes as valid.

'*Theoria*' also has an emotional component which is crucial, because herein lies the 'moral link' to nature (section 2.3), but also because he saw art in terms of exploring one's experience of nature in terms of following one's emotional resonance to it; the 'pathetic fallacy' (section 2.2) indicates that he rejected any idea that one projects one's emotions on nature, and believed instead emotions as resulting of perception of aspects of what is experienced that are in it, not projected on it.

Although Ruskin did not thematize this point but merely assumed it, reliance on emotions in '*Theoria*' is also linked with the need for sincerity and 'sincere expression' – an idea inherited from the Romantics – in the sense that one must be true to one's emotions, not disown them, for this exploratory work to be performed (section 2.2). This theme turns out to be historically quite important, because sincerity of expression is regularly assumed and alluded to by artists in the Arts and Crafts movement, who oppose it to 'commercialism', and this forms the basis of the principal reason why they rejected Art Nouveau developments when they became aware of them in the first years of the 20th century (section 6.2).

Ruskin sought to impart his ideas first with the first generation of Pre-Raphaelite painters, and we looked at his influence of Millais and Brett (section 3.2 and 3.3), because it allowed us to explore ways in which Ruskin developed his early ideas into what I have called a 'phenomenology', that is, a systematic description and classification of natural phenomena, in geology, botany, etc. from an artistic point of view, not one linked to scientific explanations in terms of underlying physical processes. Moving into the field of decorative arts, which he refused to distinguish from pure arts (section 4.1), one can see the usefulness of this 'phenomenology', as it becomes the basis for study of natural shapes that one would need to abstract in order to serve for 'ornamentation'. In *The Stones of Venice* and other important texts such as *The Two Paths*, Ruskin laid out the rudiments of rules for architecture, such as 'Truth to Material' and ornamentation, leading to the idea of a 'Total Work of Art', that are explored in section 4.2.

Ruskin also taught at the Working Men's College (1854-1858 & 1860) and as Slade professor in Oxford (1870-1877 & 1882-1885), developing pedagogical ideas fitted to his aesthetics, insisting on development of artistic abilities and imagination, before any technical training for the design of manufactured goods; ideas that were, alongside the critique of the distinction between 'artist' and 'amateur' and the above views on ornamentation, quite influential on the generation of artists responsible for the revival of traditional crafts in Britain, leading to the creation of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (1887), and further along, on the *Vorkurs* in the Bauhaus and today's art teaching at school (section 4.2). But Ruskin had by then become a social reformer, the author of books such as *Unto This Last* that had a profound influence on British socialism, and led to the rise of 'guilds', described in section 4.3. As explained above, Ruskin did not envisage art teaching only as a means to provide students, without distinction, to learn how to draw so that they would connect with nature. He envisioned artists thus formed, *qua* crafts-persons, to introduce their art in their production, and earn a living from it – a life more in conformity with protection of nature than industrialisation, etc. – in association with others on the medieval model of the 'guilds'. This message certainly gave to his aesthetic ideals a greater audience, and allowed many to put them into practice.

Finally, this thesis was also conceived as a study of the line, a study of the antecedents of the Modernist focus on curved lines (section 1.2), meant to give these figures, from Ruskin to Art Nouveau, their proper historical due. Having kept the line at the forefront up until section 4.4, I then focussed specifically on it, showing how Ruskin's lines abstracted from nature were taken in and modified by the likes of Morris, Mackmurdo and Ashbee, leading us to the door of Art Nouveau.

One conceptual hurdle needed to be cleared before proceeding into the study of the next stage, the transmission to Art Nouveau, that has to do with the fact that the concept of 'Art Nouveau' is a social construct in two different but interrelated senses (discussed in sections 5.1 and 5.2). It is very clear from the term now nearly universally used, 'Art

Nouveau', that the concept was first introduced and defined through the endeavours of the art merchant Siegfried Bing. So, to participate in an 'Art Nouveau' exhibition was a form of social construction in the same way as a 'cocktail party' is social constructed by its participants. But the concept of 'Art Nouveau' is also one used by art historians to talk about historical reality, which is a construct too, related in fact to Bing's efforts. In chapter 5, these issues were explored in depth in order to clear the way to a proper understanding of the links between British Arts and Crafts and Belgian Art Nouveau, which can be claimed to be the origin of that movement on the continent, as this is explored in section 6.1, as well as a proper understanding of the negative British reaction to Art Nouveau, explored in section 6.2.

Art Nouveau has been held to begin with the line being transformed into a '*parafe en coup de fouet*', to use Roger Marx's expression. If this is so, it remains that its impetus was far more imbricated in the circulation of Ruskin's ideas whose contribution to the complex contexts of later nineteenth-century art in Europe is to be assessed beyond the measure afforded by the five seductive words of a much-repeated slogan. Establishing first the conditions for cultural exchange between Britain and Belgium, with special attention to the role played by Olivier-Georges Destrée, I explored the earliest works of Art Nouveau, in Henry Van de Velde, Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, Paul Hankar and Victor Horta, before Siegfried Bing introduced the term in 1895, and I have attended to the specific connexions that can be described with Ruskin and British artists. If, however, one can thus suggest a 'genealogy' from Ruskin to early Belgian Art Nouveau, it remains to be explained why there appears to have been no such counterpart in Britain. So, in the very last stage of my narrative, I have pointed out that the initial negative reaction in Britain, including by members of the Arts and Crafts artists such as Crane and Ashbee, relied again on some ideas of Ruskin – on sincerity vs. commercialism – and, finally, that there nevertheless were Art Nouveau artists in Britain (whose recognition has been impaired in some cases by the misconstrual of concepts as constructs), such as the remarkable Aubrey Beardsley,

Margaret Macdonald and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Mary Seton Watts and Archibald Knox.

Having thus begun with the development by Ruskin of aesthetic categories in order to set up no less than a new agenda for art, and the impact of his ideas for social reform on the arts and crafts of his country, this thesis thus moved into the proper terrain of art history, revealing how these very same aesthetic ideas can be made to explain some of the developments in the late 19th-century European arts. We can now see the benefits of studying Ruskin in a revised light. By paying close attention to his writings and ideas and by paying close attention as well to the paths that they followed, and the destinations (artists, dealers, theorists, journalists) that they reached, we can describe how his ideas functioned in his own time. Provided that we also approach the topic from a particular form of 'surface reading' inspired by Michael Baxandall (section 1.4), the result is intended as a contribution to our understanding of this chapter of art history that forms the basis of further investigations, at once broader and more detailed in scope, into the wide ramifications of his aesthetics and artistic practice for the arts of the 19th and 20th centuries. A contribution which should also help us to realize that some of Ruskin's insights were not only important in their day to the point that one could introduce the concept of 'Ruskin's eye', but also that they remain productive to this day.

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1.1 Drawing.
 From *Verneuil, Auriol & Mucha 1900*, p. 59.



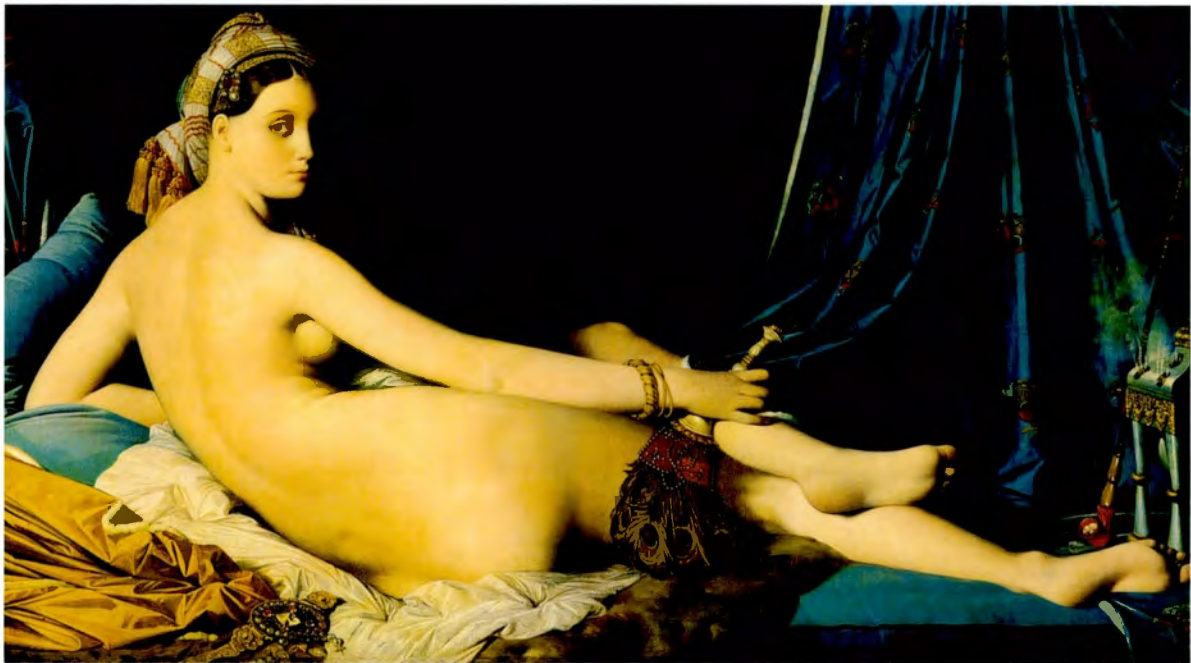
1.2 Leonardo da Vinci, *Leda*, c. 1510-15. (Copy)
 Tempera on wood, 112 x 86 cm.
 Galleria Borghese, Rome, Inv. 434.



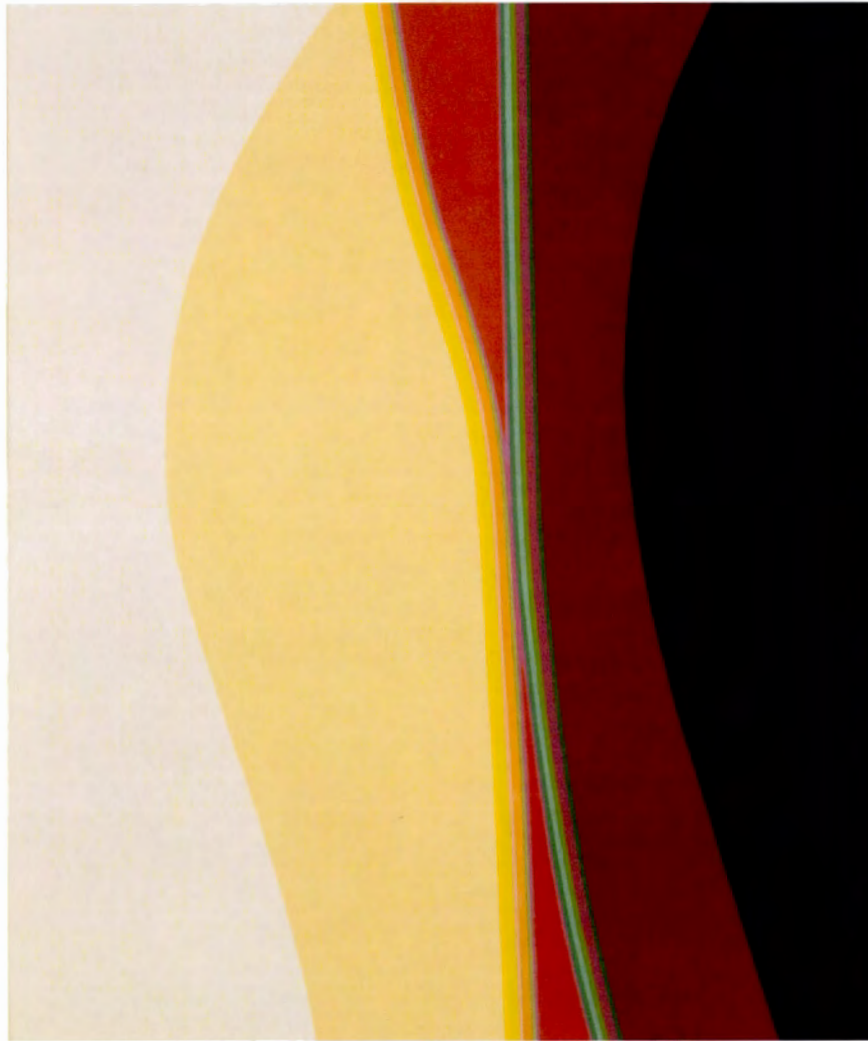
1.3 Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, c. 1503-1519.
Oil on poplar wood, 168 x 130 cm.
Paris, Louvre, Collection de François 1er, Inv. 776.



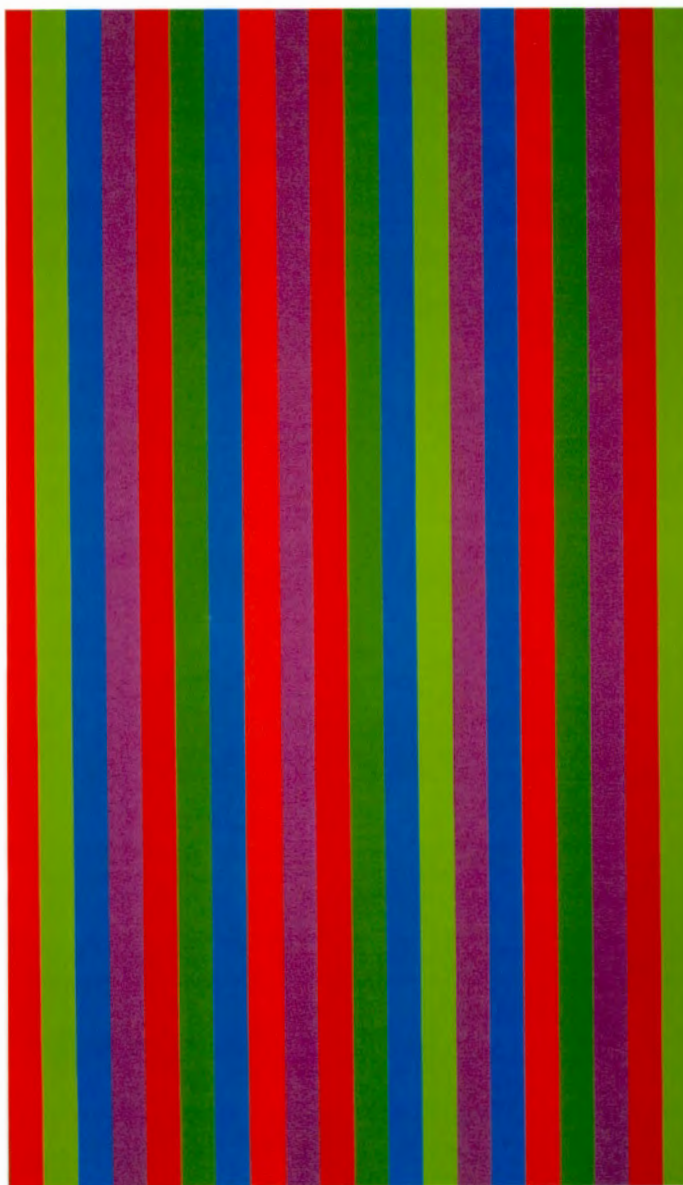
1.4 Baccio Bandinelli, *Laocöon Group*.
Parian marble, 208 x 163 x 112 cm.
Florence, Uffizi.



1.5 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Grande Odalisque*, 1814.
Oil on canvas, 91 x 162 cm.
Paris, Louvre, R. F. 1158.



1.6 Lorser Feitelson, *Untitled*, 1967.
Oil and enamel on canvas, 152.9 x 125.5 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York, 766-1965.



1.7 Guido Molinari, *Mutation Quadri-violet*, 1966.
Acrylic on canvas, 171.7 x 105.6 cm.
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.
©Succession Guido Molinari / SODRAC (2017)



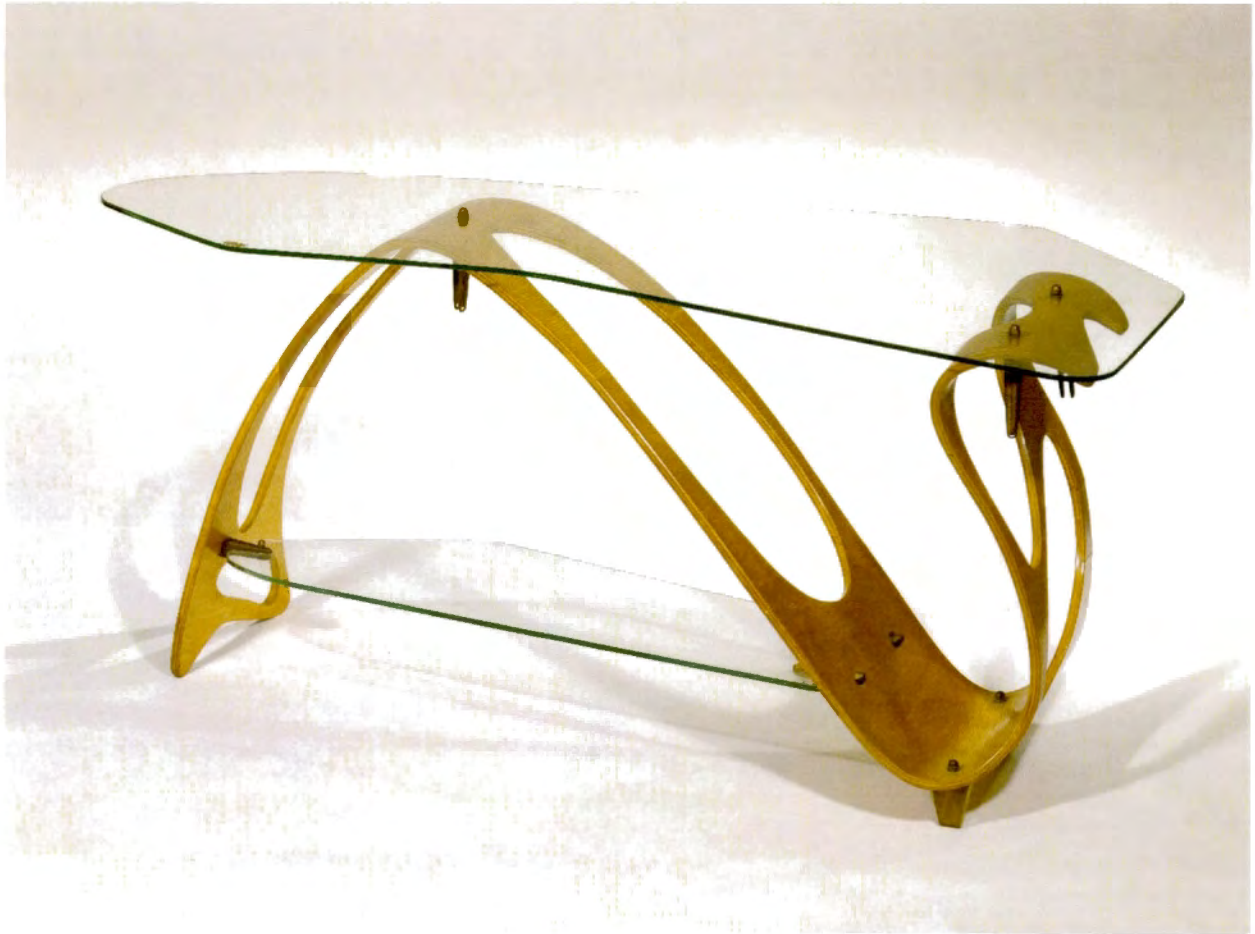
1.8 Yves Gaucher, *Two Blues, Two Greys*, 1976.
 Acrylic on canvas, 289.6 x 487.7 cm.
 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
 © Estate of Yves Gaucher / SODRAC (2015)



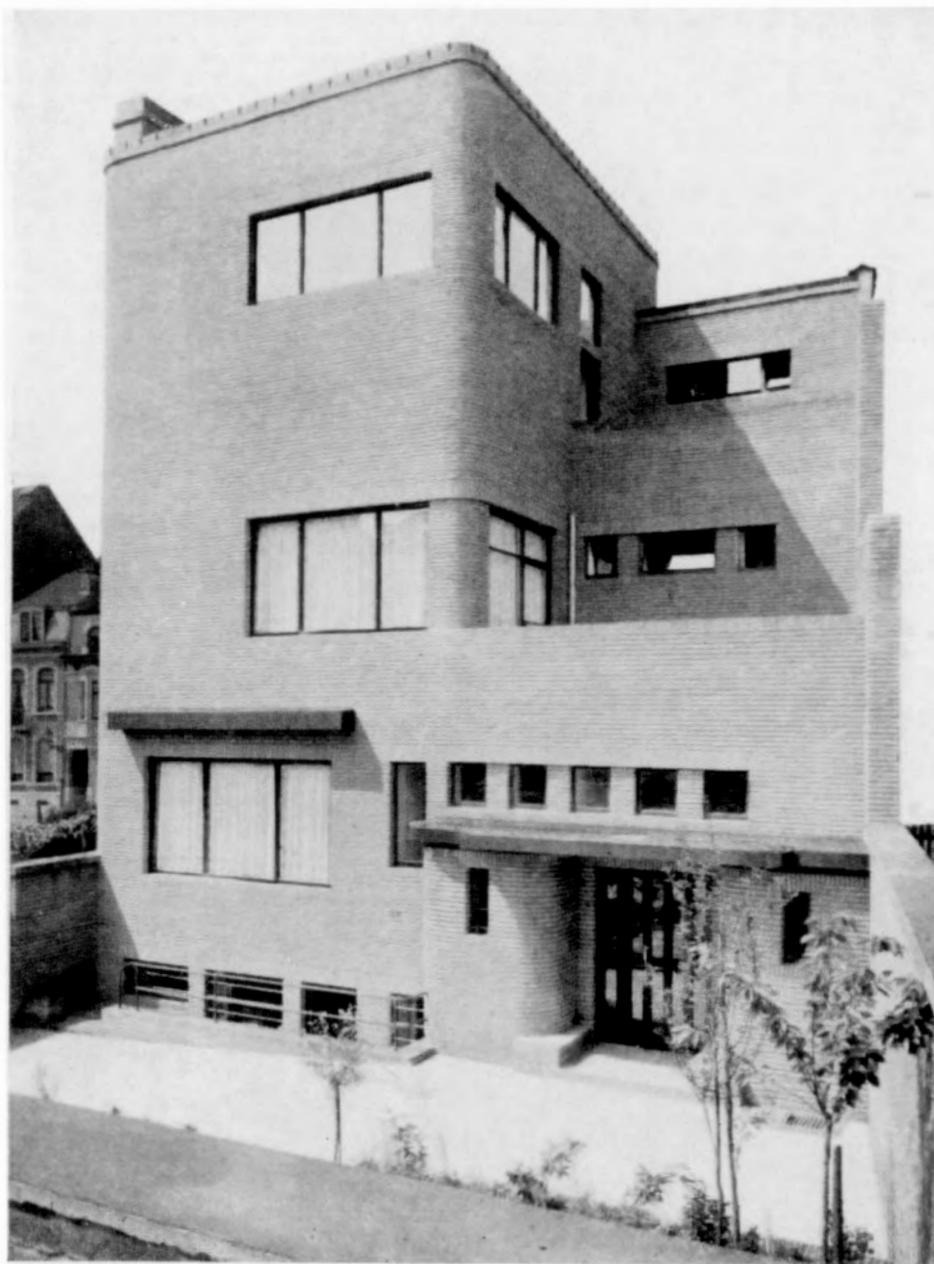
1.9 Fernand Leduc, *Tryptique ochre-violet-rouge*, 1965.
 Oil on canvas, 195.4 x 291.6 cm.
 Musée des beaux-arts du Québec.



1.10 Gilbert Marion, *Divorce*, 1965.
Acrylic on canvas, 61 x 72 cm.
Private collection.



1.11 Carlo Mollino, Low table, ca. 1949.
Maple plywood and glass, 20 1/2 x 47 1/2 x 21 1/4 in.
Brooklyn Museum, New York, 54.64.231a-c.



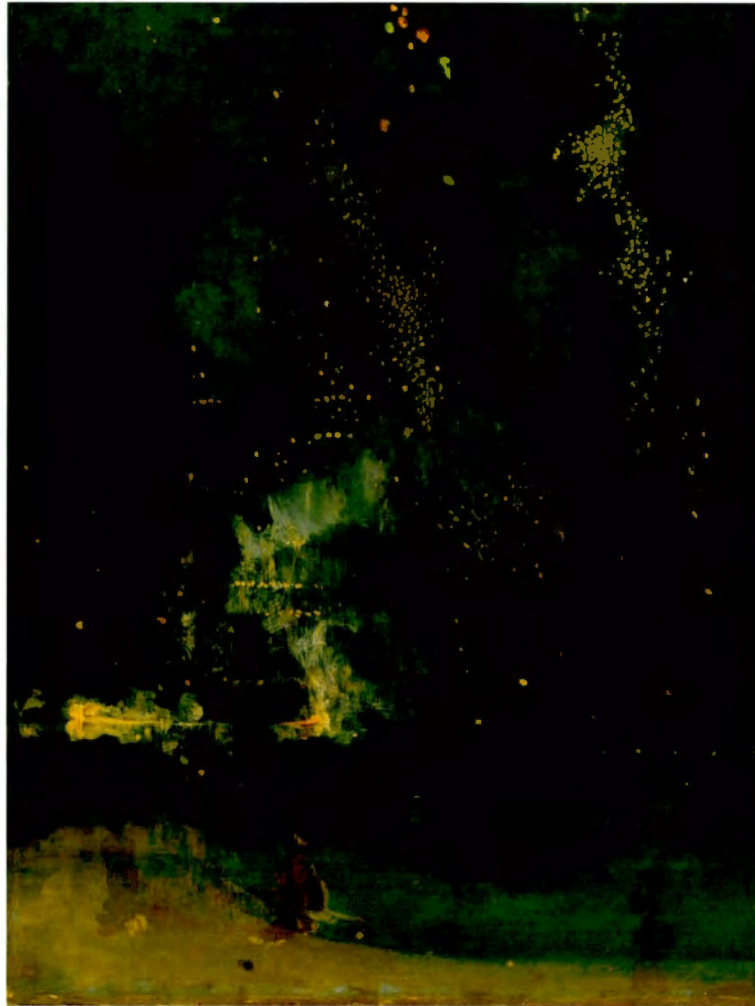
1.12 Henry van de Velde, Hôtel Wolfers, Ixelles, 1929.
From *La Cité*, 11/6 (1933), p. 119.



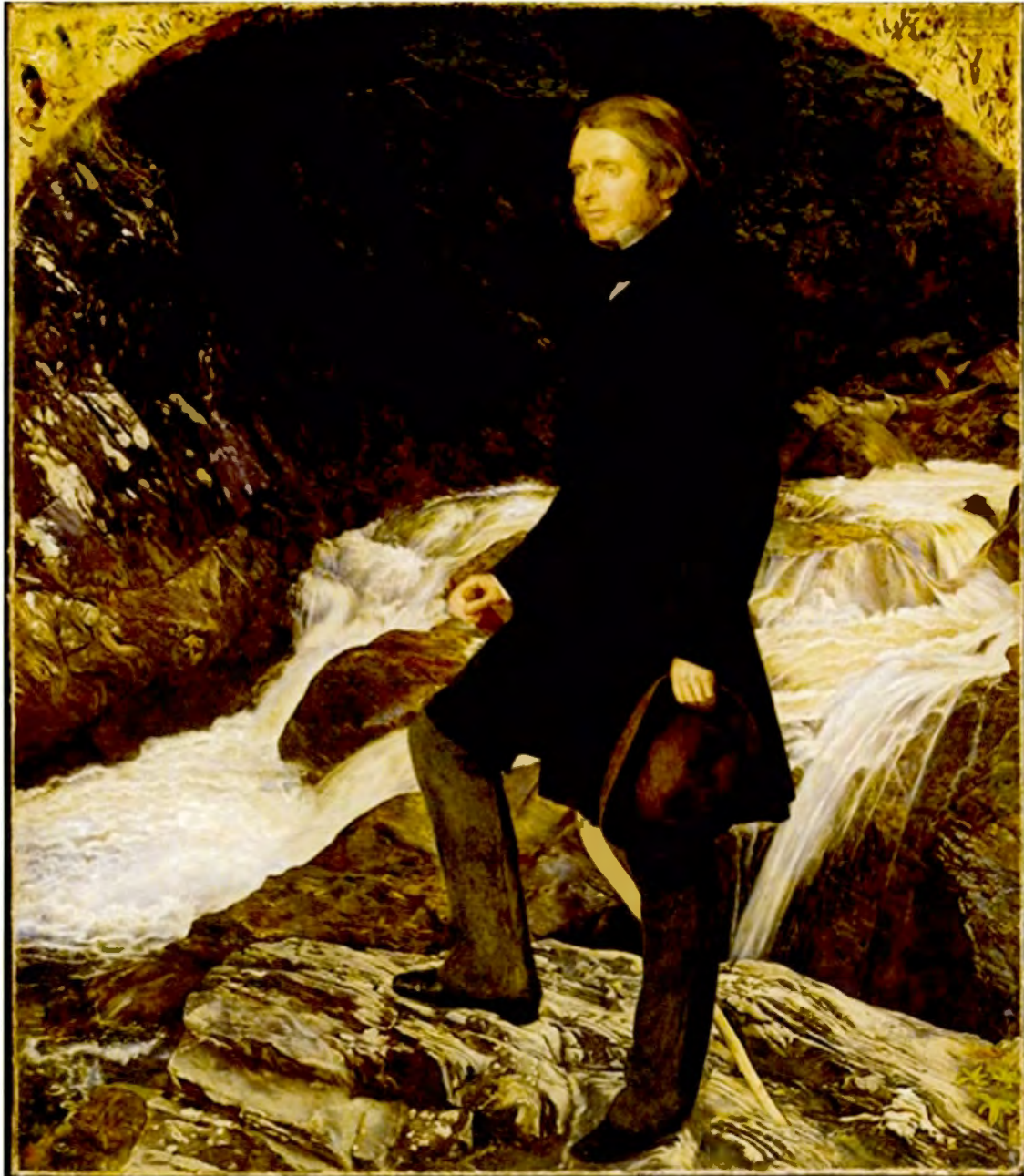
1.13 Pier Luigi Nervi, Orvieto Aircraft Hangar, 1938 (destroyed in 1944).
Reinforced concrete structure.
Orvieto, Italy.
From *Tang 2015*, p. 3.



1.14 John Ruskin, *Study of Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas*, 1853-1854.
Lampblack, bodycolour and pen and ink over graphite on wove paper, with some scratching out,
47.8 x 32.7 cm.
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA. RS. REF. 89.
Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.



1.15 James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket*.
Oil on panel, 60.3 x 46.7 cm.
Detroit Institute of Arts, 46.309.

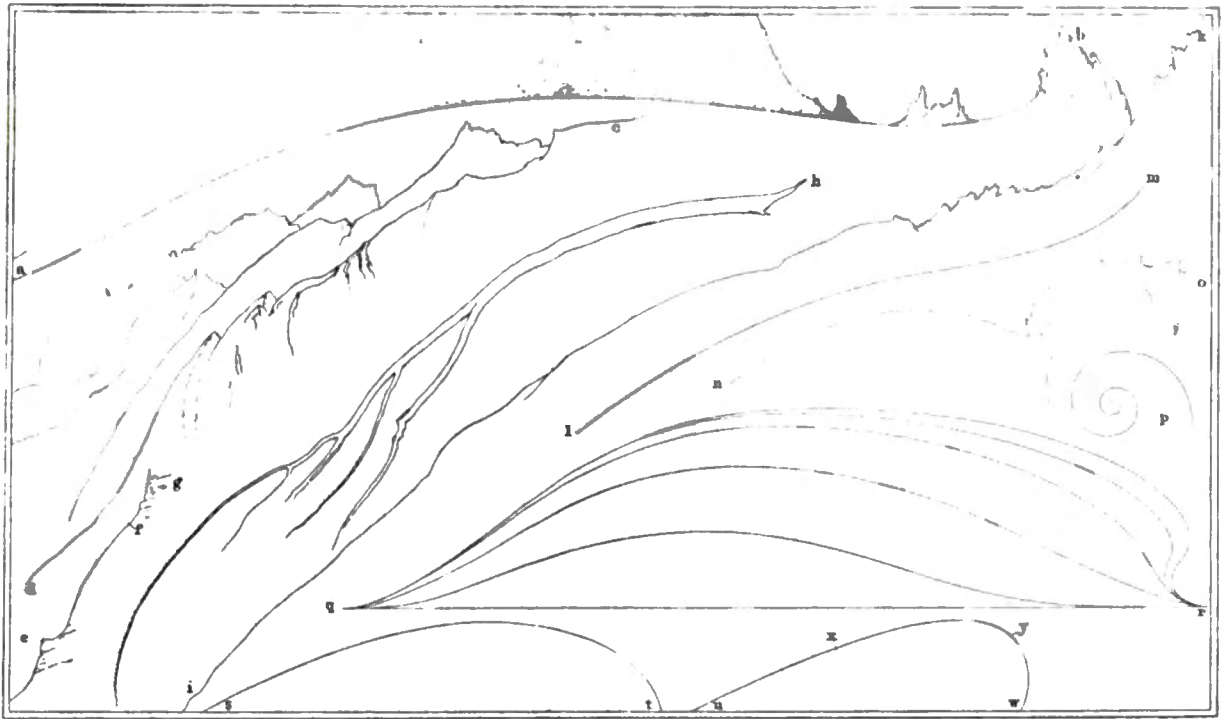


1.16 John Everett Millais, *Portrait of John Ruskin*, 1853-4.

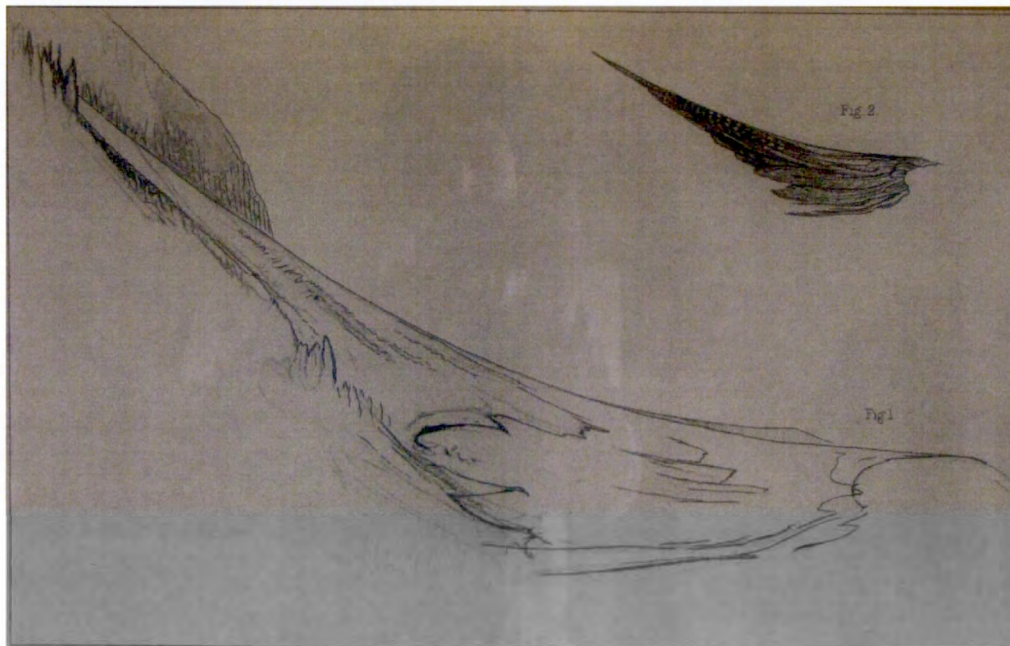
Oil on canvas, 71.3 x 60.8 cm.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA2013.67.

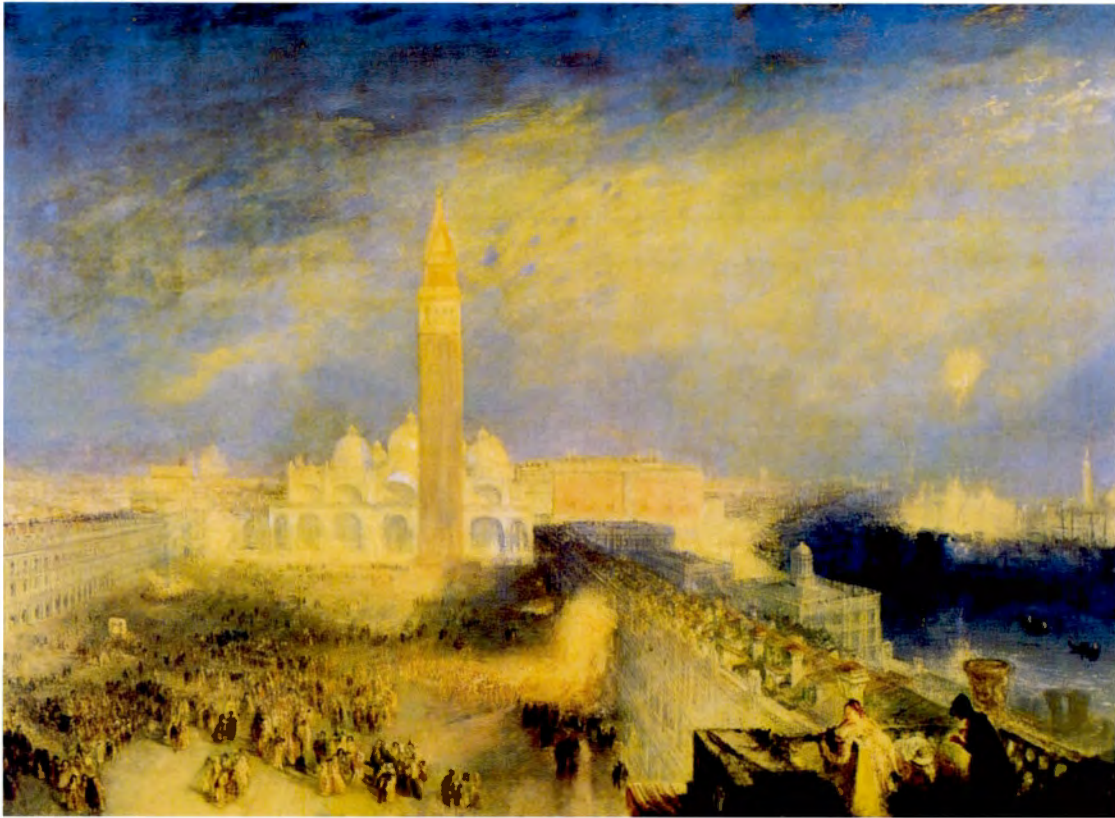
Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.



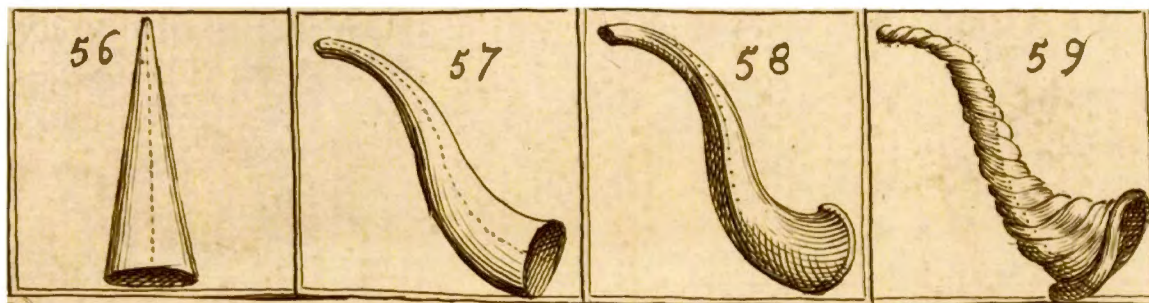
1.17 John Ruskin, *Abstract Lines (Line Block)*,
From *The Stones of Venice I*, Works vol. 9, plate VII.



1.18 John Ruskin, *Drawing of Mountain Range and Bird Wing*.
Pencil on paper.
Brantwood, Coniston.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



2.1 Joseph Mallory William Turner, *Juliet and her Nurse*, 1836.
Oil paint on canvas, 88 x 121 cm.
Colección de Arte Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat, Buenos Aires.



2.2 Detail from *The Analysis of Beauty*, Plate 2, sec. state.
From Hogarth 1997.

TAB XXII



DALEA. *Hort. Cliff.* 363. *sp.* 1.

- a Calyx paulo supra basin detrusus.
- b Flor. juxta magnitudinem, bractea exceptis.
- c Bractea.
- d Calyx diffusus & aspicatus.
- e Corolla carina.
- f Stamen in vaginam deflexum.
- g Petalum unum ex quatuor uniformibus.
- h Pistillum.

G. D. ERNST del.

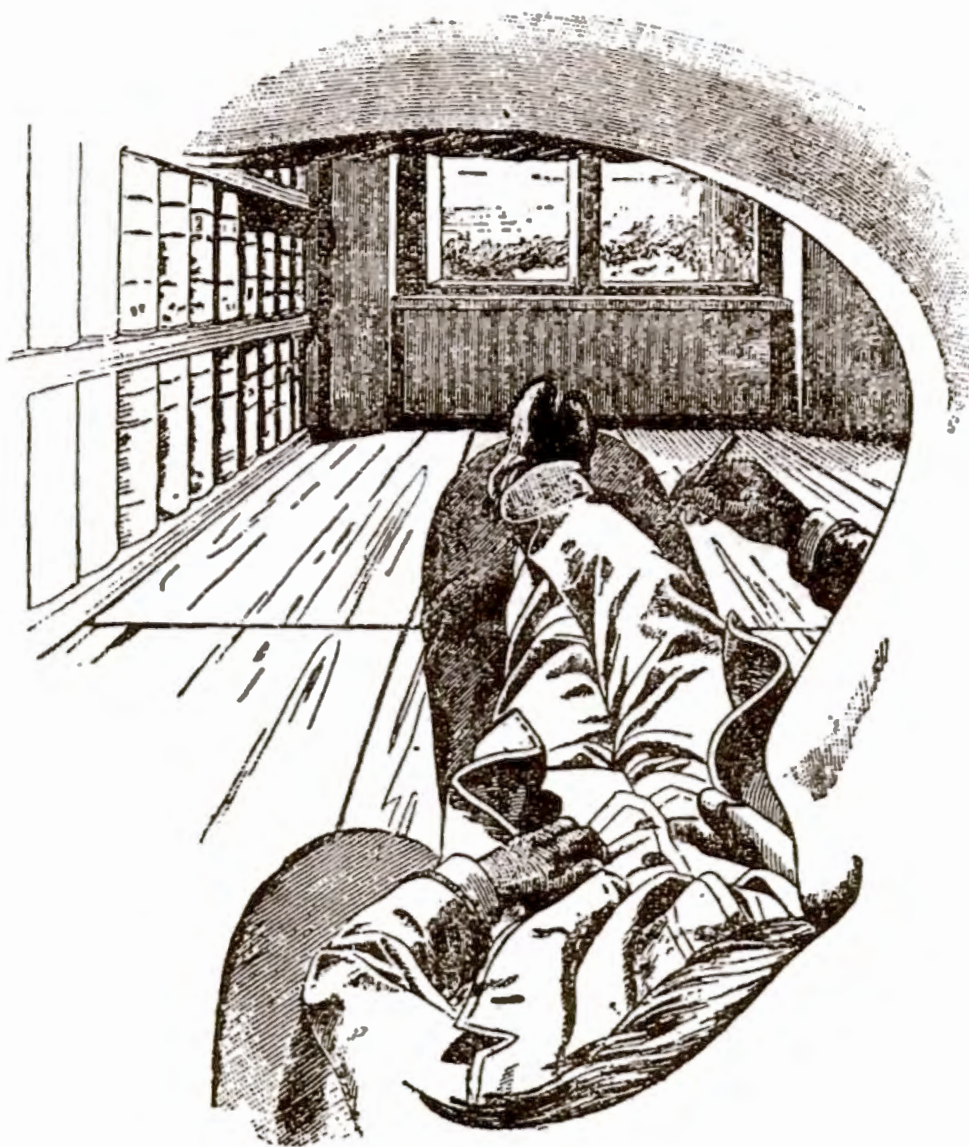
J. WANDelaar fecit.

2.3 Dalea.

From C. von Linné, *Hortus Cliffortianus*. Amsterdam, 1737.



2.4 Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, c. 1520-3.
Oil on canvas, 176.5 x 191 cm.
National Gallery, London, Inv. NG35.



3.1 Ernst Mach, *The Analysis of Sensations*, Fig. 1 (1897).
From Mach 1959, p. 19.



3.2 John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1852.

Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 111.8 cm.

Tate, London, NO1506.

Photo © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0.

< <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-ophelia-n01506> >



3.3 Ford Madox Brown, *The Seeds and Fruits of English Poetry*, 1845-51.

Oil on canvas, 36 x 46 cm.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA 1920.3.



3.4 Joseph Anton Koch, *Landscape with Ruth and Boaz*, 1823-25.
Oil on canvas, 33 1/4 x 43 1/4 in.
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, M1999.117.



3.5 William Holman Hunt, *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus*, 1850-1.

Oil on canvas, 38 1/2 x 52 1/2 in.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.



3.6 Charles Allston Collins, *Convent Thoughts*, 1851.

Oil on canvas, arched top, 33 1/8 x 23 1/4 in.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, WA1894.10



3.7 John Everett Millais, *The Woodman's Daughter*, 1850-1.
Oil on canvas, 35 x 25 1/2 in.
Guildhall Art Gallery, London.



3.8 William Holman Hunt, *Our English coasts "Strayed Sheep"*, 1852.

Oil on canvas, 43.2 x 58.4 cm.

Tate Gallery, London, N05665.

Photo ©Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0.

<<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hunt-our-english-coasts-1852-strayed-sheep-n05665>>



3.9 John William Inchbold, *A Study, in March*, 1855.

Oil on canvas.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA 1962.4.2.



3.10 John Atkinson Grimshaw, *Autumn Glory: The Old Mill*, 1869.
Oil on canvas, 62.2 x 87.6 cm.
Leeds Art Gallery, LEEAG.PA.1947.0021.0002.



3.11 John Brett, *Glacier of Rosenlauri*, 1856.
Oil paint on canvas, 445 x 419 mm.
Tate Britain, N05643.



3.12 John Ruskin, *Fragment of Alps* (former title: *Boulder at Chamonix*). c. 1854-56.

Watercolor and gouache over graphite on cream wove paper, 33.5 x 49.3 cm.

Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, 1919.506.

Cf. The Works of John Ruskin, vol. 36, plate XVII.



3.13 John William Inchbold, *The Moorland (Dewar-Stone, Dartmoor)*.
Oil paint on canvas, 35.6 x 53.3 cm.
Tate Britain, NO1477.



3.14 John Ruskin, Drawing of Slaty Crystalline.
From 6.151, Fig. 7.



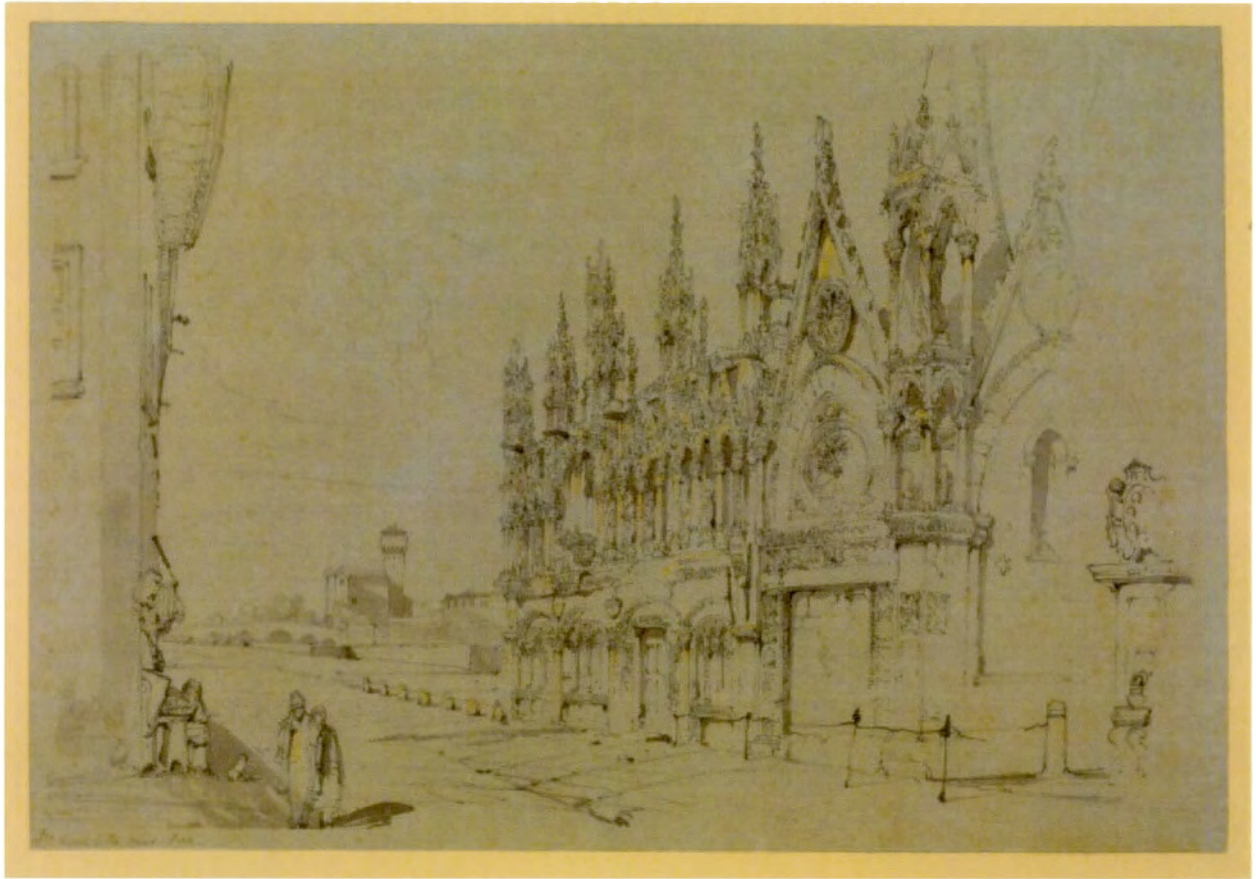
3.15 John Everett Millais, *Chill October*, 1870.
Oil on canvas, 186.7 x 141 cm.
Private collection.



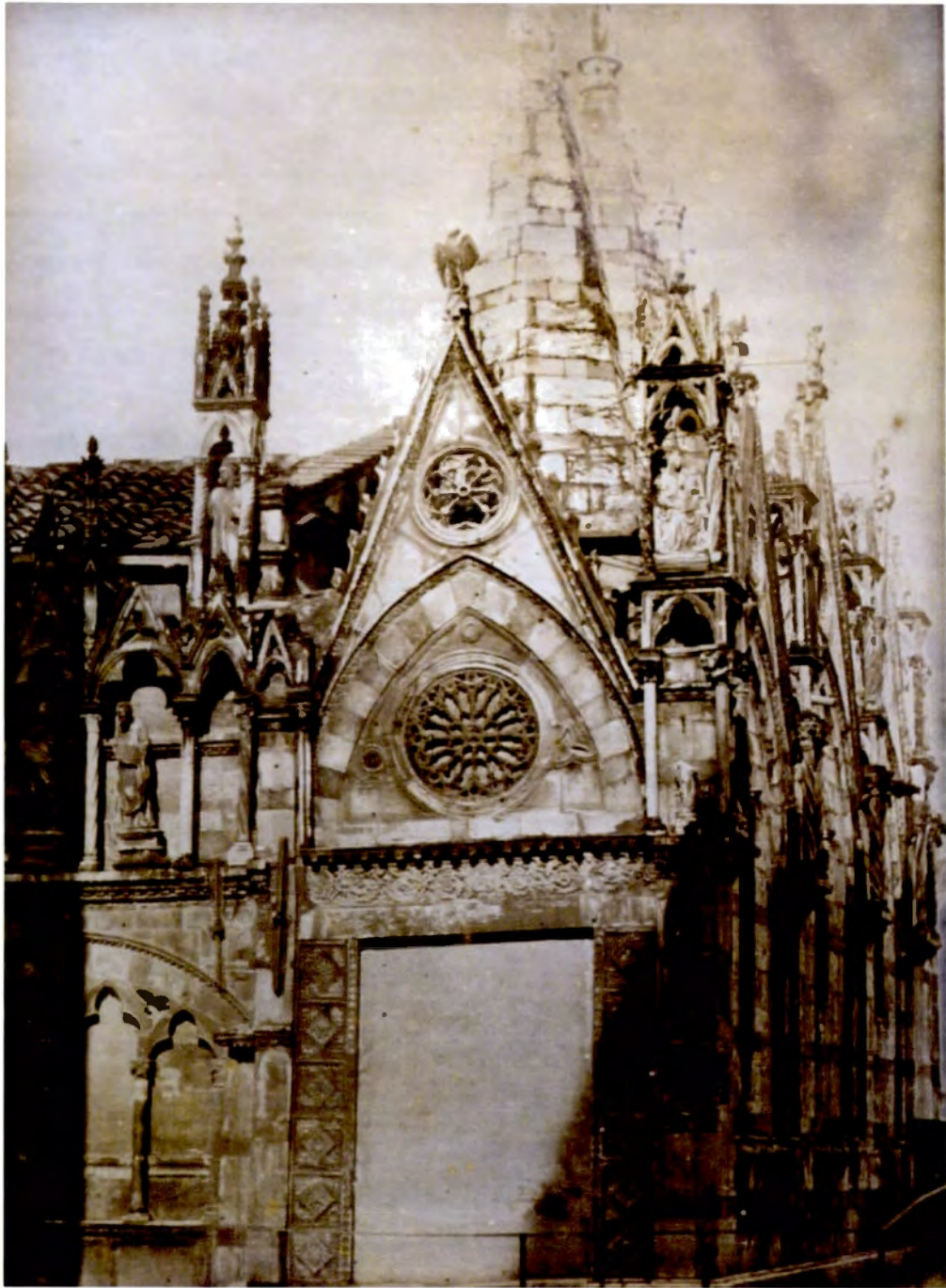
3.16 John Brett, *Glacier of Rosenlaui* (plate 3.11), detail.



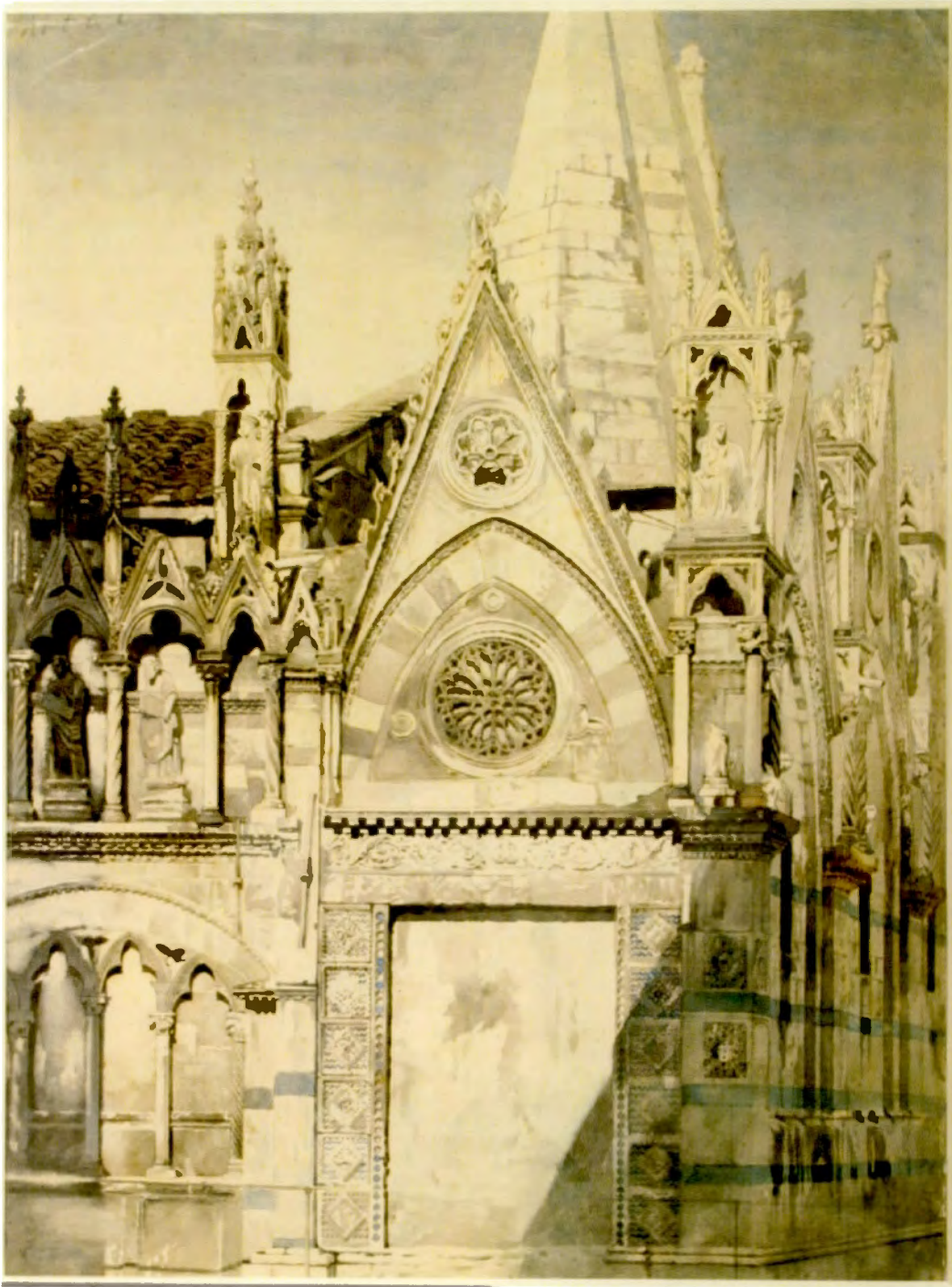
3.17 John Brett, *Val d'Aosta*, 1858.
Oil on canvas, 87.6 x 68 cm.
Private collection.



3.18 John Ruskin, Drawing of Santa Maria della Spina, Pisa, 1840.
Pencil and bodycolour on light blue paper, 33.5 x 55.7 cm.
Courtauld Gallery, Courtauld Institute, London.



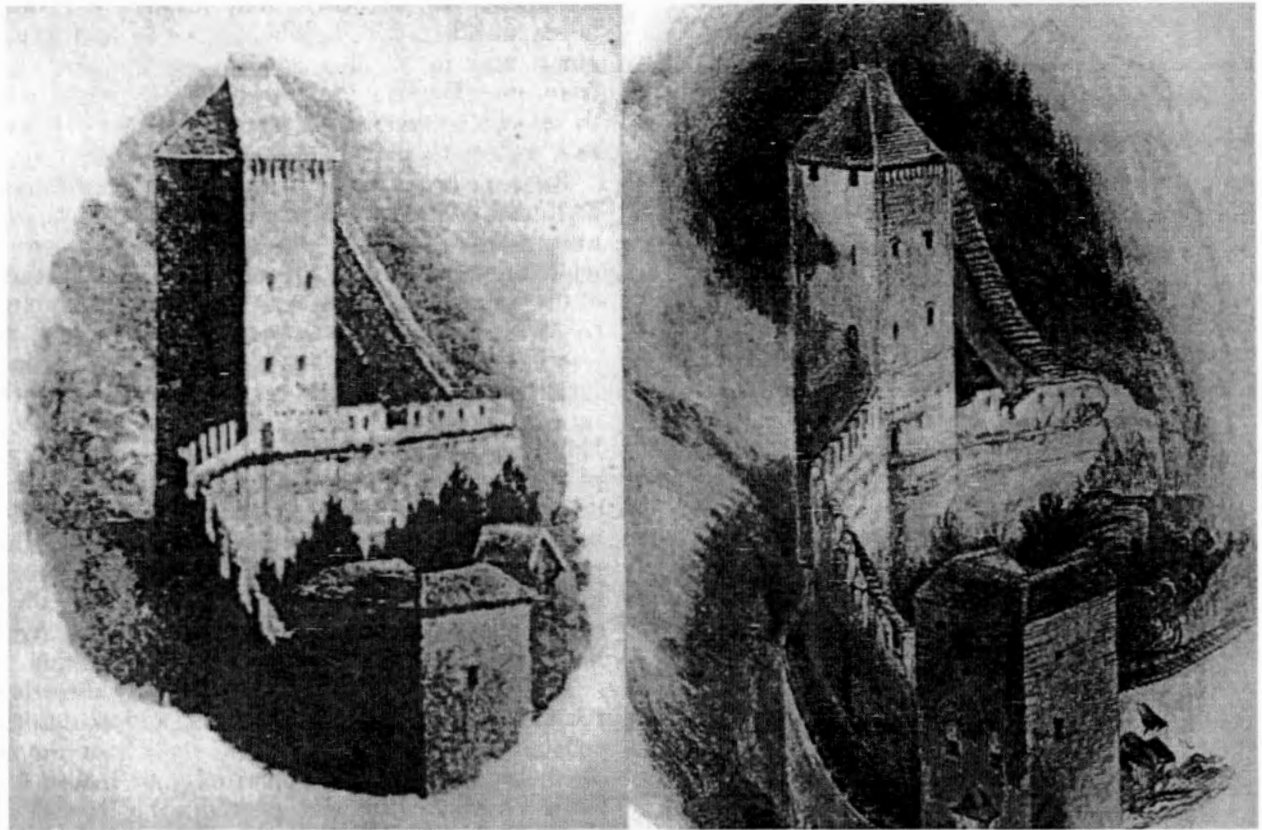
3.19 John Ruskin, Pisa, Santa Maria della Spina, 1846.
Daguerreotype. 14.8 x 11 cm.
Ruskin Collection, Ruskin Galleries, Bembridge, Isle of Wight.



3.20 John Ruskin, Drawing of Santa Maria della Spina, Pisa, c. 1847.
Watercolour, ink and pencil, 49.5 x 36.5 cm,
Ruskin Collection, Guild of St George, Sheffield.



3.21 John Ruskin, *A Courtyard at Abbeville*, 1858.
Albumen print, 22.3 x 17.3 cm.
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA.RS.ED.062



3.22 Left: reproduction of a daguerreotype of the tower of Fribourg.
Right: John Ruskin, Drawing, *The Tower of Fribourg*.
From *Modern Painters IV*, *Works* vol. 6, plate 25, fig. 2 & plate 24



3.23 John Ruskin, Architectural study taken in Italy, almost certainly Venice, 1840s.
Daguerreotype, dimensions unavailable.
Museum of History of Science, Oxford.



4.1 John Ruskin, *Decoration by Disks. Ca' Badoari*
Chromolithograph.
From *The Stones of Venice I, Works*, vol. 9, plate VIII.



4.2 Arthur Silver, *Peacock Feathers*. Made for Liberty & Co.
Roller-printed cotton.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.50-1953.
©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Redgrave's system of art instruction for the Schools

			Stage
Drawing Course	Ornament –	Geometrical Perspective and Architectural detail – – – – –	1
		Outlined from flat examples – – – – –	2
		" " the round – – – – –	3
		Shaded from the flat examples – – – – –	4
		" " the round – – – – –	5
	The Figure	From flat examples – – – – –	6
		Outlined from the Cast – – – – –	7
		Shaded from the Cast – – – – –	8
		Anatomy – – – – –	9
		Flowers, outlined from Nature – – – – –	10
Painting Course	Ornament –	In Monochrome – – – – –	11
		In Colours – – – – –	12
	Flowers –	From flat examples – – – – –	13
		" Nature – – – – –	14
	The Figure	Compositions of Objects as Studies of Colour – – – – –	15
		From Casts – – – – –	16
Modelling Course –	The Figure	In Colour – – – – –	17
		Ornament – – – – –	18
Composition in Design		The Figure – – – – –	19
		Flowers and Objects from Nature – – – – –	20
		Studies from the Life – – – – –	21
		Elementary Design – – – – –	22

4.3 The 22 stages of the South Kensington System.
From *Casteras & Parkinson 1988*, p. 54.



4.4 Ruskin Lace (geometric pattern).
 Ruskin Museum, Coniston.
 Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



4.5 Ruskin Lace (curved lines).
 Ruskin Museum, Coniston.
 Photographs by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



4.6 Kist-panel from Cunsey.

From W. G. Collingwood, 'The Vikings in Lakeland: their Place-names, Remains, History',
Saga-Book I, 1896, p. 198.

From *Townend* 2009, p. 198.

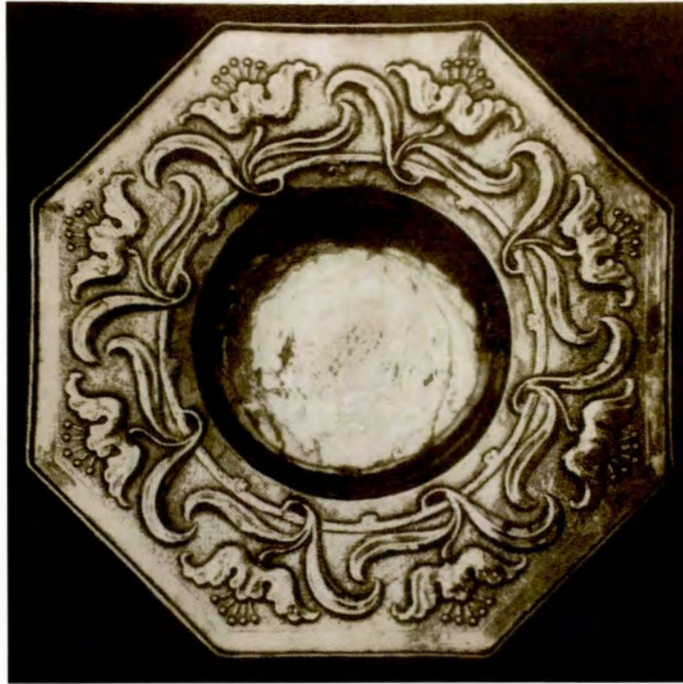


4.7 W. G. Collingwood, Ruskin's Grave, St Andrew's Church, Coniston, detail.

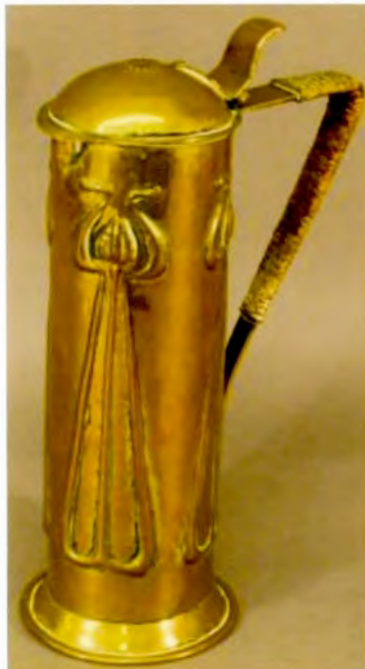
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



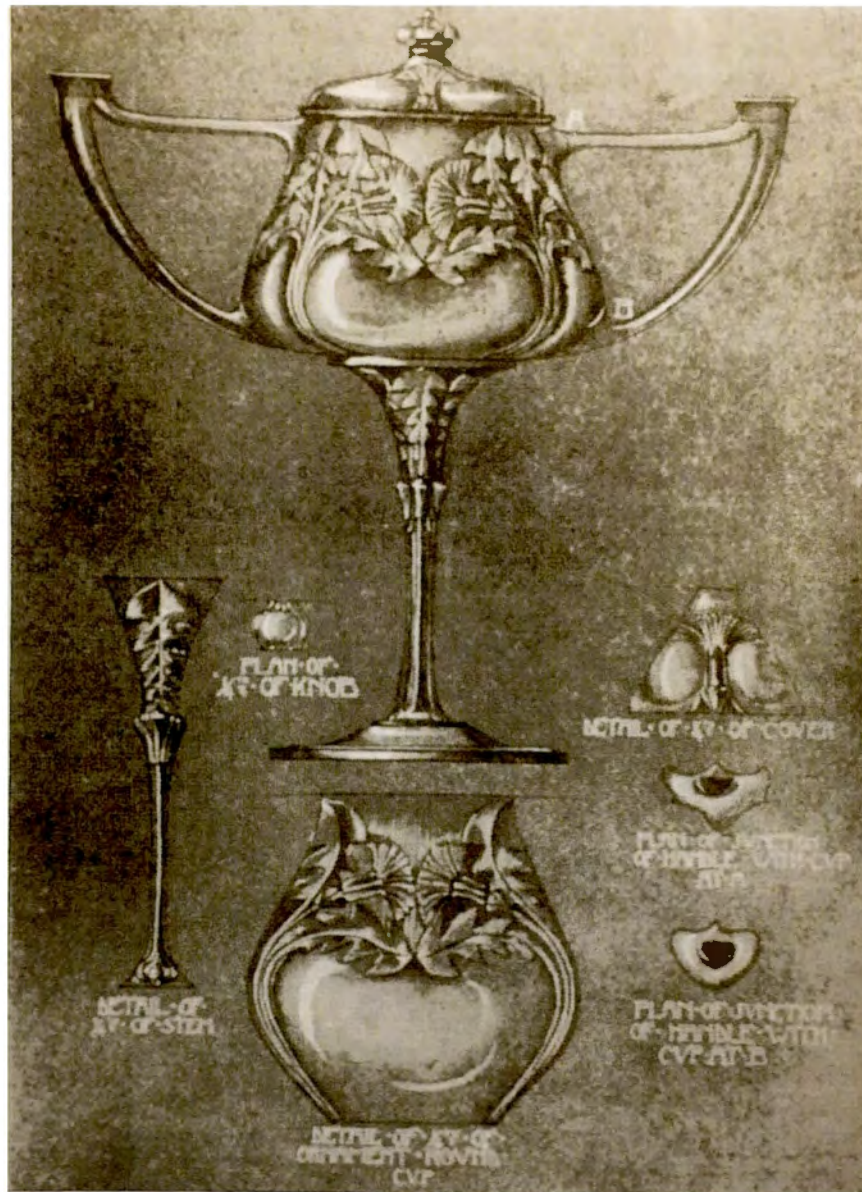
4.8 Arthur Simpson, Spinning chair.
 Ruskin Museum, Coniston.
 Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



4.9 Harold Stabler, Plaque.
Diameter: 42 cm.
Private collection.
From *Bruce 2001*, p. 48.



4.10 Harold Stabler, Hot water jug, 1899.
Brass, 29.5 cm.
Private collection



4.11 Iain McBean, Design for a silver cup.
 Exhibited at the National Competition at South Kensington, 1898.
 From *Bruce 2001*, p. 60.



4.12 Keswick School of Industrial Arts, Repoussé plate, Sweet Pea card tray, Trivet, Fern pot.
Private collection.
From *Bruce 2001*, p. 39.



4.13 Keswick School of Industrial Arts, Charger.
Private collection.
From *Bruce 2001*, p. 64.



4.14 Potters' Arts Guild, Scroll Pot, 1903.
Terracotta.
Watts Gallery, Compton Surrey.



4.15 William Morris/Morris & Co., *Larkspur*, Furnishing fabric.
Block-printed silk.
Victoria and Albert Museum, CIRC, 493-1965.
©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



4.16 William Morris/Morris & Co. *Acanthus*, Wallpaper.
 Block-printed paper.
 Victoria & Albert Museum, E. 496-1919.
 ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



4.17 William Morris, *Tulip and Willow*, Furnishing fabric.
 Block-printed, indigo discharge cotton.
 Victoria and Albert Museum, CIRC.91-1933.
 ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



4.18 Edward Burne-Jones, *The Golden Stairs*, 1880.

Oil paint on canvas, 316.2 x 163.7 x 12.2 cm.

Tate Gallery, London, N04005.

Photo ©Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0.

< <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/burne-jones-the-golden-stairs-n04005> >



4.19 Selwyn Image, Front page of the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, first issue, April 1884.
20.3 x 25.4 cm.

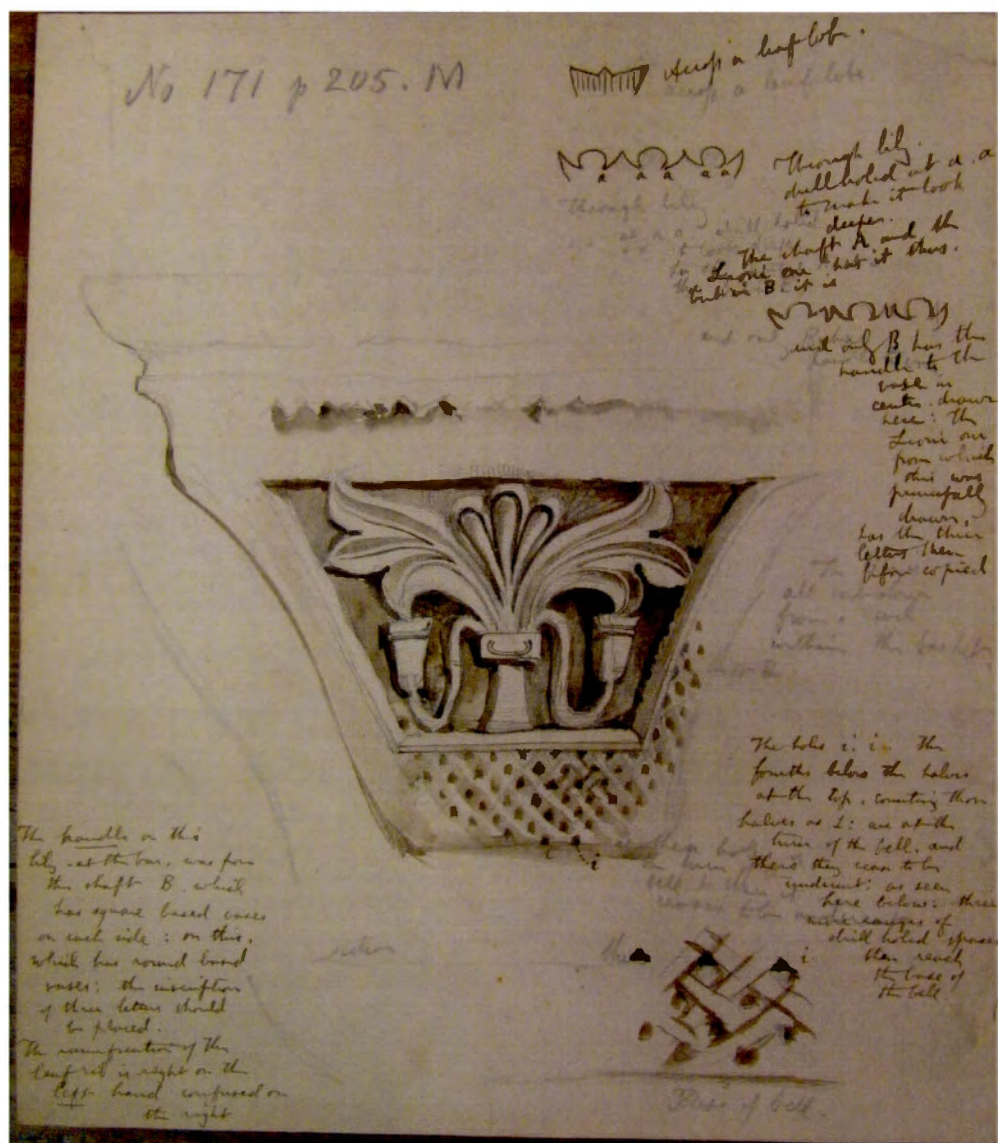
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, K920.
© William Morris Gallery, London.



4.20 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, Sketch of an Eagle.
Watercolour on paper.
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, W124xxxii.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



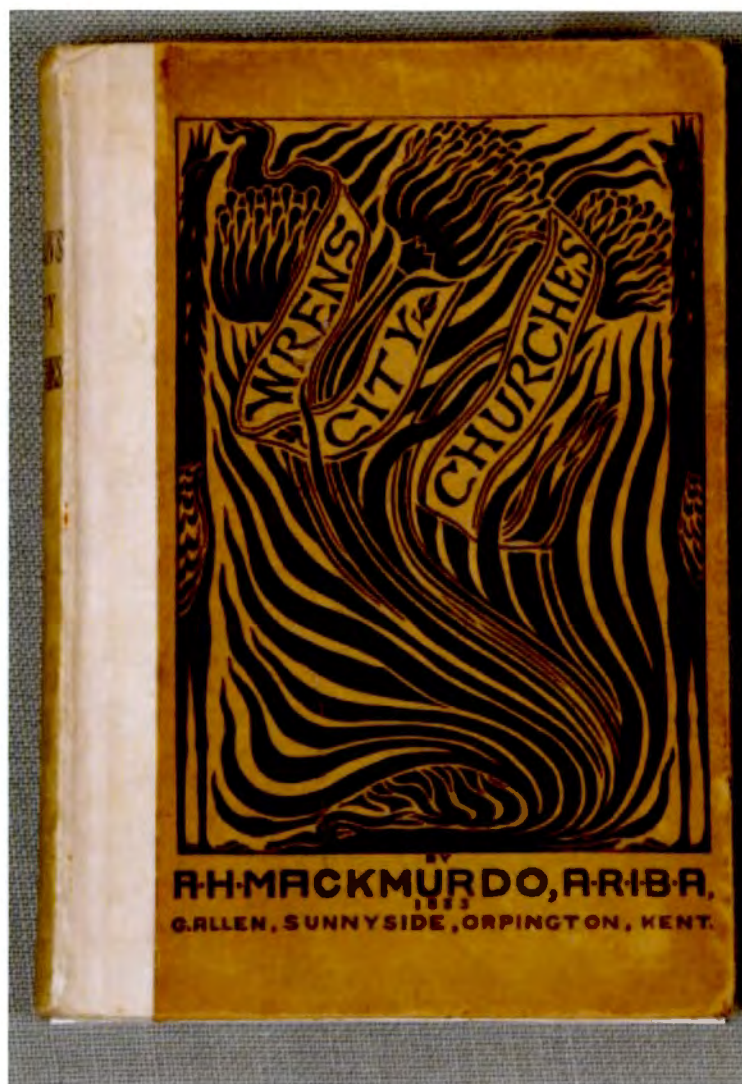
4.21 John Ruskin, *The Head of a Common Golden Eagle, from Life*.
Watercolour, bodycolour and pen and ink over graphite on pale brown wove paper.
16.3 x 19.6 cm.
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA.RS.ED.165.b.



4.22 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, Study of ornamentation.
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, D162 viii.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



4.23 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, Study of Plants.
 William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, w124xxv.
 Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



4.24 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, Cover of *Wren's City Churches*.
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, K104.
© William Morris Gallery, London.



4.25 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, Fretwork chair, c. 1882.
96.5 x 48.3 x 49.5 cm, mahogany, leather and brass,
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, G36b.
© William Morris Gallery, London.



4.26 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, Drawing.
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, A180.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



4.27 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, Drawing.
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, A138.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



4.28 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, Drawing.
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, A127.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



4.29 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, *Drawing*.
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, A207.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



4.30 Charles Francis Annelsey Voysey, Furnishing fabric sample.
Woven wool and silk double cloth, 76 x 30 cm.
Victoria and Albert Museum, CIRC.99-1966.
©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



4.31 Charles Francis Annelsey Voysey, Plan of Walnut Tree Farm, Castlemorton, Hereford, 1890.
From *British Architect*, October 24, 1890.



4.32 Henry Van de Velde, Bloemenwerf. Uccle, Belgium, 1895.
Photograph in public domain.



4.33 Charles Robert Ashbee, Embossed leatherwork in the hall of Magpie & Stump,
37 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, London.
From *Crawford 1985*, p. 299.



4.34 Charles Robert Ashbee, Tray, 1896-1897.
Silver, 1.6 x 32.3 x 20 cm.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, CIRC.471-1962.
©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



4.35 Charles Robert Ashbee, Decanter.

Glass with silver mounts and a chrysoprase set in the finial, 23.5 x 13 cm.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 121:1, 2-1966.

©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



5.1 La Maison de l'Art Nouveau, 22 rue de Province, Paris, 1895 (demolished in 1922).
Photograph in public domain.



5.2 Mikhail Eisenstein, Apartment building, Elizabetes ielā, Riga, Latvia, 1901.
Photograph in public domain.



5.3 Manuel Orazi, Advertisement for La Maison Moderne, 1902.
Image in public domain.



5.4 Akseli Gallen-Kallela, *Aino Myth*, Triptych, 1891.
Middle section: 154 x 154 cm, side sections: 154 x 77 cm, frame: 200 x 413 cm
Ateneum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki, AI 518.



5.5 Lars Sonck, Eira Hospital, 1905. Tehtaankatu 30, Helsinki.
Photograph in public domain.



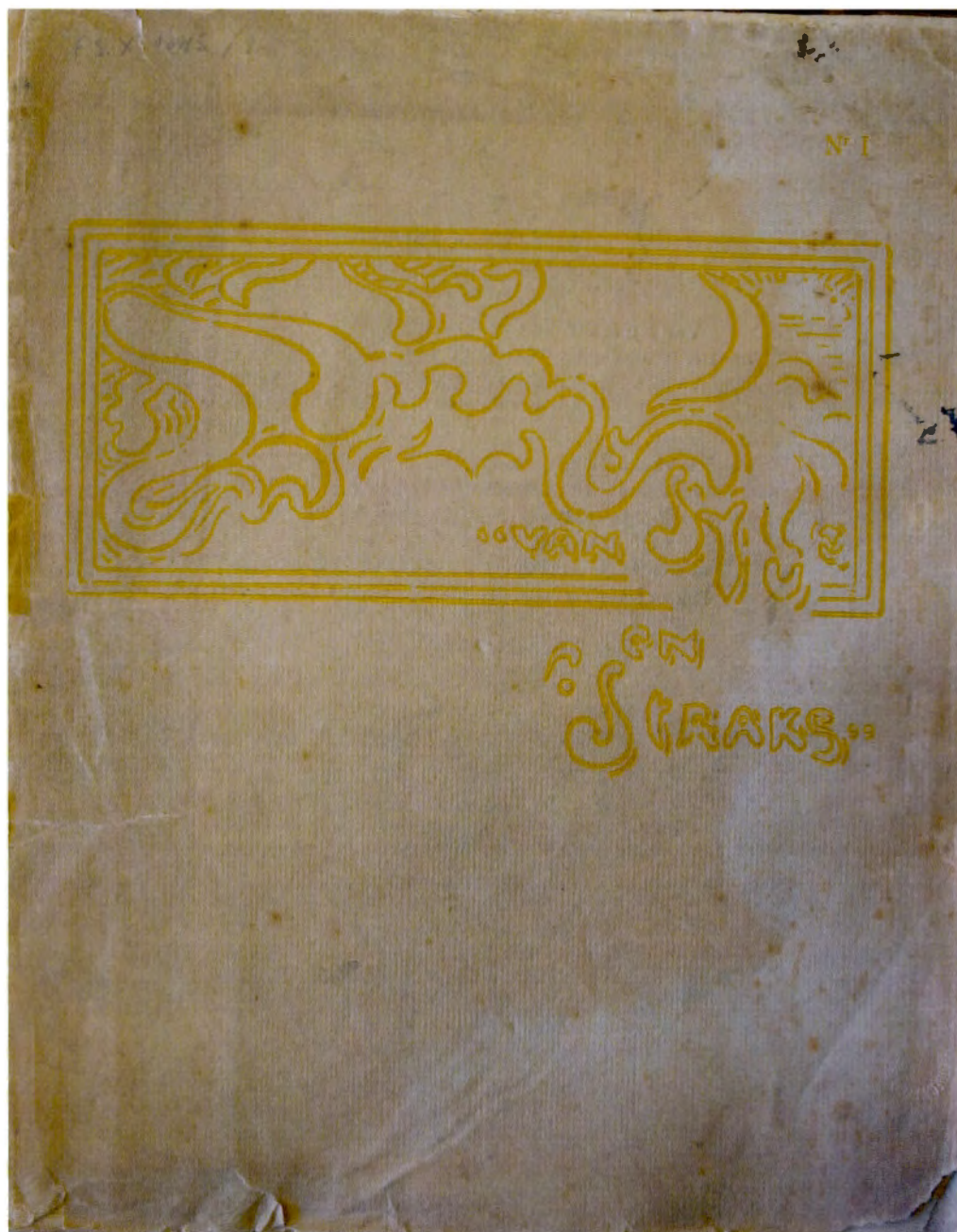
5.6 Charles Francis Annelsy Voysey, Norney, near Shackleford, Surrey, 1897.
From *Hitchmough* 1995, p. 103.



5.7 Konstantīns Pēkšēns and Eižens Laube, School, Tēbatas ielā 15/17, Riga.
Photograph in public domain.



5.8 Hermann Obrist, *Cyclamen (Whiplash)*, 1895.
Satin stitch on woolen cloth, 119.5 x 182.5 cm.
Stadtmuseum, Munich.



6.1 Henry van de Velde, Front page of *Van Nu en Straks*.
 Archives de la Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1^{er}, Bruxelles, FS X 1045 LP.
 Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.

mindert van 't salonnetje dat de XX, navolgend wat men deed te Antwerpen
in het eerste salon van de « Association pour l'Art. » (Mei 92), hebben
gewijd aan de kunstindustrieën, — dat ze niet anzochten de aanwezigheid
van den meester.

HENRY VAN DE VELDE.



23

6.2 Jan Toorop, Illustration, *Van Nu en Straks*, no. 2.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



OTA OVER DE PLEISTERBEELDEN
VAN GEORGE MINNE. — Het is nu vier
jaar geleden dat ik ze zag, maar nog richten
zich op in mijn geest die hooge & hoekige, stijf-
pijnende gestalten. Het was in-ééns de smart
van eeuwen, als een kreet.

Waar vandaan gekomen, uit welke woestijn-
defolatie eener aarde nog in vorming, heel dat
menschdom primordiaal, deerlijke lichamen tegen elkaar geleund & scheef
buigend in evenwijdige schuinte naar de dorheid van den grond, den nek
voor eeuwig gebogen onder welken vloek? En die vrouwen met beenachtige
handen gekrompen op het schrale vleesch van een doodgeboren kind, & al
die eindeloze droefheid eindeloos stilzwijgend & strak-onbeweeglijk, waar
vandaan gekomen? Openbaring plots van kunst zeer ongewoon: die
symbolisch-vereenvoudigde anatomieën, — als uit rotfen gehouwen
grootheid van aegyptische beelden — afgewerkt met de ontroerde &
meelijdende hand der naïeffte Gothieken. Vazen van wee! zij zeiden de
fataliteit van verborgen machten op dat naakt arme-menschen-vel, de
verlatenheid van doodgeweende oogen midden geheimen, & daarna het
einde van alle denken, den laafsten val der armen die tegen de uitgemer-
gelde & pijnlijke lijven plakken, te moè om voortaan een gebaar op te
heffen. Dingen heel heel ver in het geheugen verzonken zeiden ze, zij
stonden daar als autochtonen eener verdoemde aarde, in de tijden der
Genesis.

Vergeten in een dorpje van Vlaanderen leeft de kunstenaar die gebeeld
heeft de oneindige ellende van alles, in gestalten groot als van steen
alleenstaand door eeuwen heen.

GUST VERMEYLEN.

6.3 Enluminure, *Van Nu en Straks*, no. 4.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



6.4 Gerritt Willem Dijsselhof, Dijsselhofkamer.
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag.

Top: photographs by Chinatsu Kobayashi.

Bottom: photograph from

<<https://www.architectuur.nl/nieuws/exposities/art-nouveau-interieurs-in-het-gemeentemuseum/>>



6.5 Georges Seurat, *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte*, 1884.
Oil on canvas, 207.5 x 308.1 cm.
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, 1926.224.



6.6 Henry van de Velde, *Garden in Kalmthout*, c. 1892.
Oil on canvas, 70.5 x 95.5 cm.
Neue Pinakothek, Munich
From *Sembach* 1989, p. 15.



6.7 Henry van de Velde, *Veillée d'anges*,
Silk embroidery on wool appliqué, 140 x 233 cm.
Museum für Gestaltung Zurich.



6.8 Georges Lemmen, *Loie Fuller*, 1893-4.
Crayon on paper, 46 x 69.5 cm.
From *Block & Lee* 2014, p. 113.



6.9 Maria & Henry van de Velde, *Dahlia*, Wallpaper, c. 1893-1896.
 From *L'Art décoratif, 1898-1899*, p. 29.
Cf. van de Velde 1992, p. 236.



6.10 Maria and Henry van de Velde, *Tulip*, Wallpaper, c. 1893-1896.
 Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique, Bruxelles.



6.11 Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo *Floral velvet*, Textile.
Cotton velvet, stamped and embossed, 49.5 x 63.5 cm.
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, London, F43.



6.12 Alfred William (Willy) Finch, Cup with 'Wave and Moon' for La Maison moderne, Paris,
1900-1902.
Red clay, height 9.5 cm.
Private collection



6.13 Alfred William (Willy) Finch, Ceramic Work, undated.

From a photograph by Speltdoorn & fils.

Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique, Archives de l'art contemporain en Belgique,
MRBAB-AACB 11.934.



Liège 17 Dec. 93

Cher Monsieur,

Comme je vous l'ai promis, je vous envoie l'adresse de Voysey à laquelle je joins celles de quelques autres artistes qui ont exposé aux Arts and Crafts d'une façon remarquable.
Bien cordialement de votre
G. Serrurier

— James Powell and Sons, Whitefriars
Glass Works, Tudor Street E.C.
(Venerie Artistiques)

- Q. F. A. Voysey 11 Melina place
Great End Road N.W. London
- Selwyn Image 6 Southampton Street
Holborn Square W.C.
- Heywood Sumner 2 Notting Hill
Square W.
- F. Lewis Day 13 Mecklenburgh Square
W.C.
- R. Arning Bell
98a Warter Road, Camberwell Green S.E.

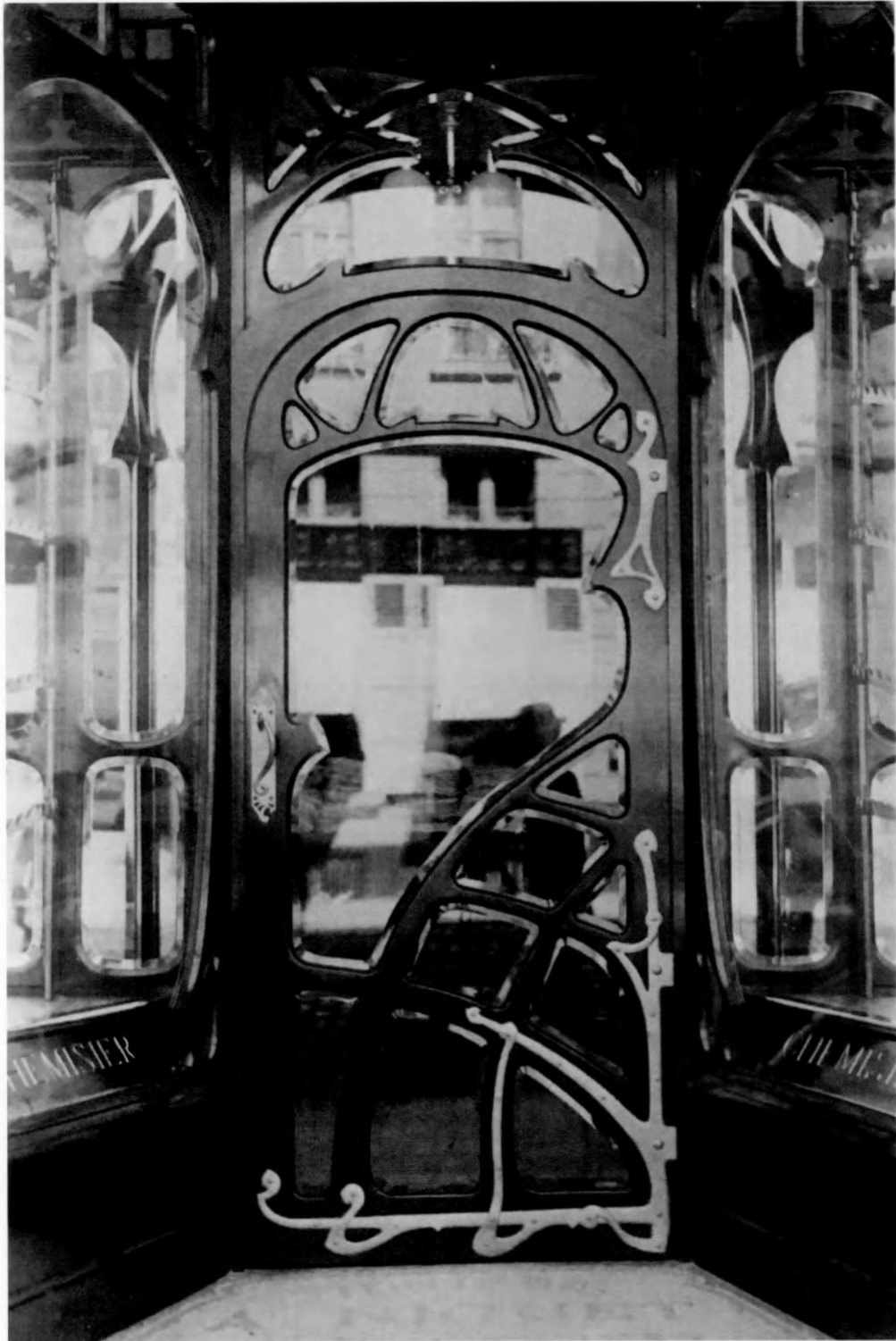
6.14 Letter from Gustave Serrurier-Bovy to Octave Maus, Liège, 17 December 1893.

Ink on paper with the printed letter-head.

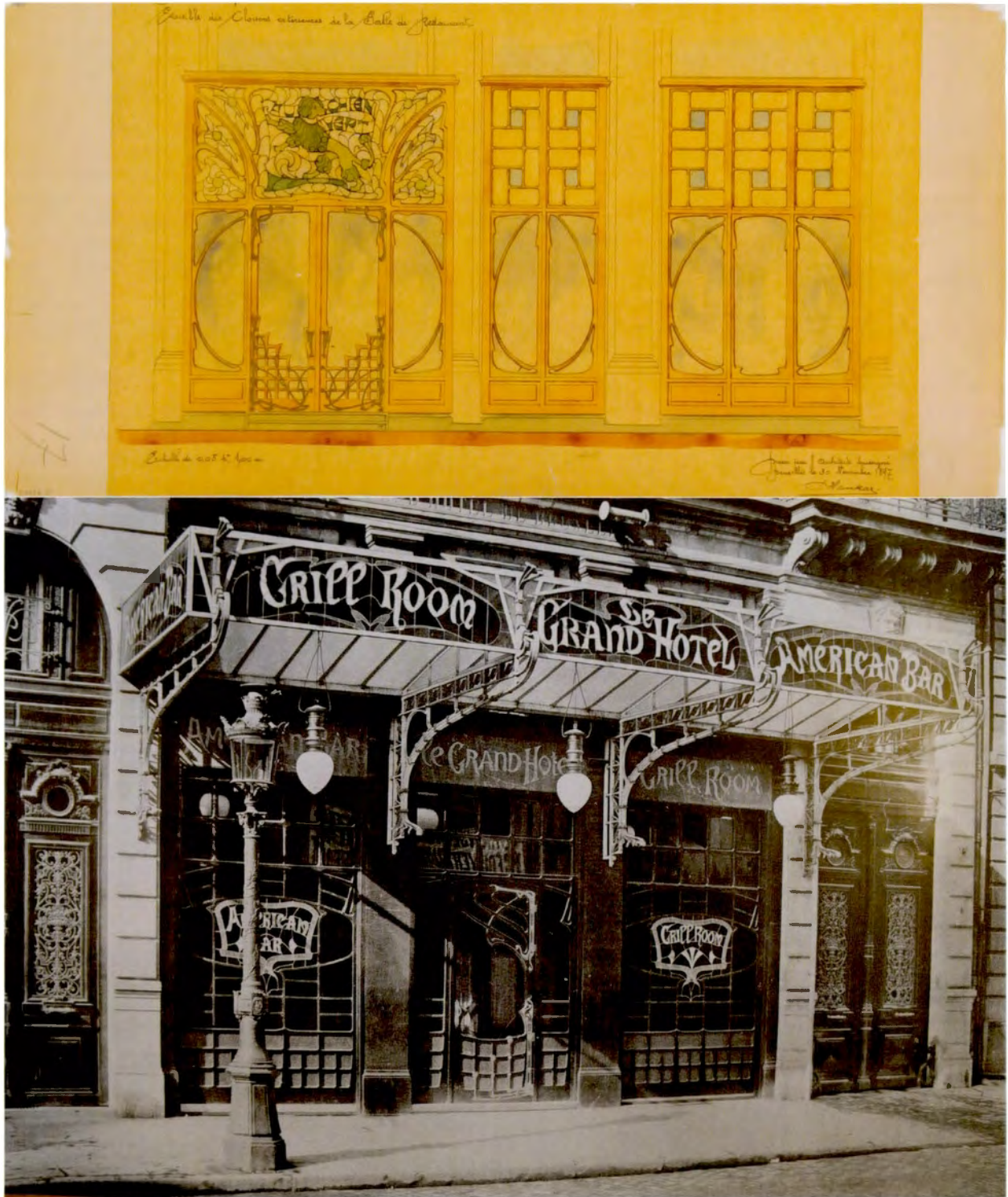
MRBAB, Fonds Octave Maus, Sous-fonds La Libre Esthétique 1894, inv. 6917.



6.15 Paul Hankar, Maison Hankar, rue Defacqz 63 (now 71), Brussels, 1893.
From *Emulation*, n. s., vol. 5, 1895.



6.16 Paul Hankar, Front door of Chemiserie Niguet, Brussels, 1896.
From *Loyer* 1980, p. 357.



6.17 Top: Paul Hankar, Sketch, November 30, 1897.

Musée Royaux d'art et d'histoire, Fonds Paul Hankar, FH.008.97-3.11_0046.

Bottom: Paul Hankar, Façade of *Grand Hotel* grill room, Brussels. Fonds Paul Hankar, AAM.



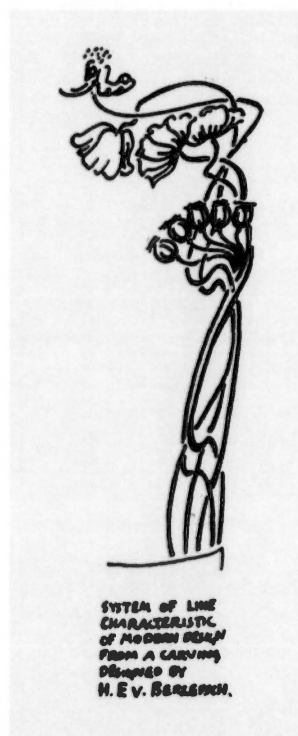
6.18 Adolf Crespin, Wallpapers.
From *Maus & Soulier* 1897, pp. 92 & 94.



6.19 Victor Horta, Hôtel Tassel, Brussels.
Photograph by Chinatsu Kobayashi.



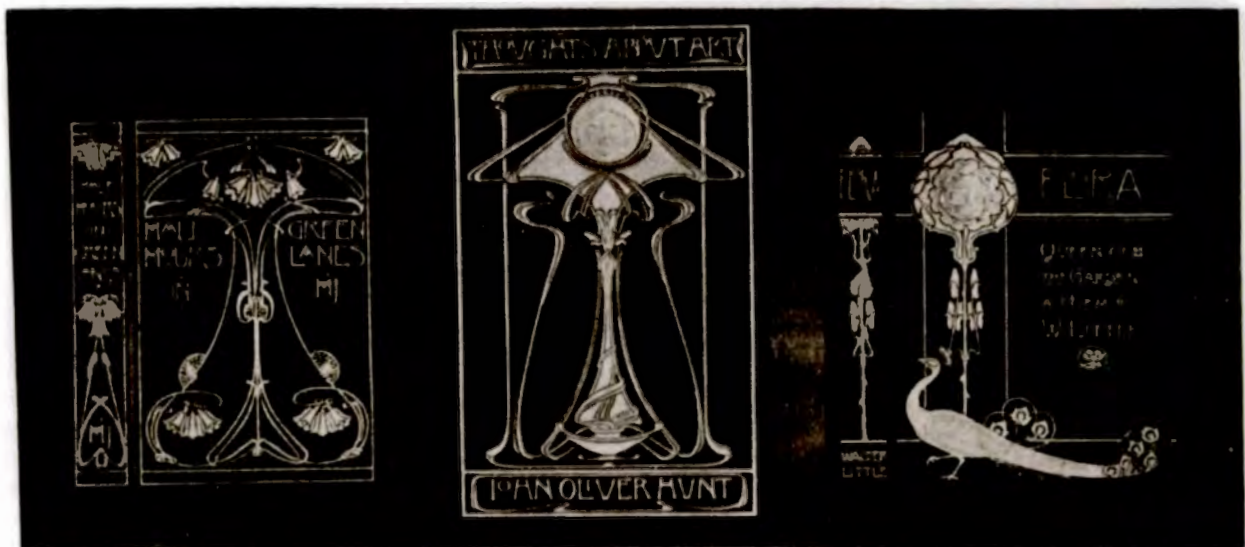
6.20 Victor Horta, Staircase of the Hôtel Tassel.
From *Aubry* 2005, p. 38.



6.21 Walter Crane, Sketch.
From *Crane 1902a*, p. 489.



6.22 Curves *e-f* and *x-y* from Plate # 1.17.



6.23 Fred Paul, Designs for gesso bookcovers.
From *Day 1900*, p. 293.



6.24 Aubrey Beardsley, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, 1893-1894.
From *Symons 1967*, pp. 32-33.



6.25 Aubrey Beardsley, *Salomé*, 1894.
From *Symons* 1967, p. 56.



6.26 Aubrey Beardsley, Advertisement for *Salomé*, 1893.
From *Symons* 1967, p. 65.



6.27 Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, *The White Rose and The Red Rose*, 1902.
 Painted gesso set with shell.
 The Mackintosh House, Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow, GLAHA 41259.

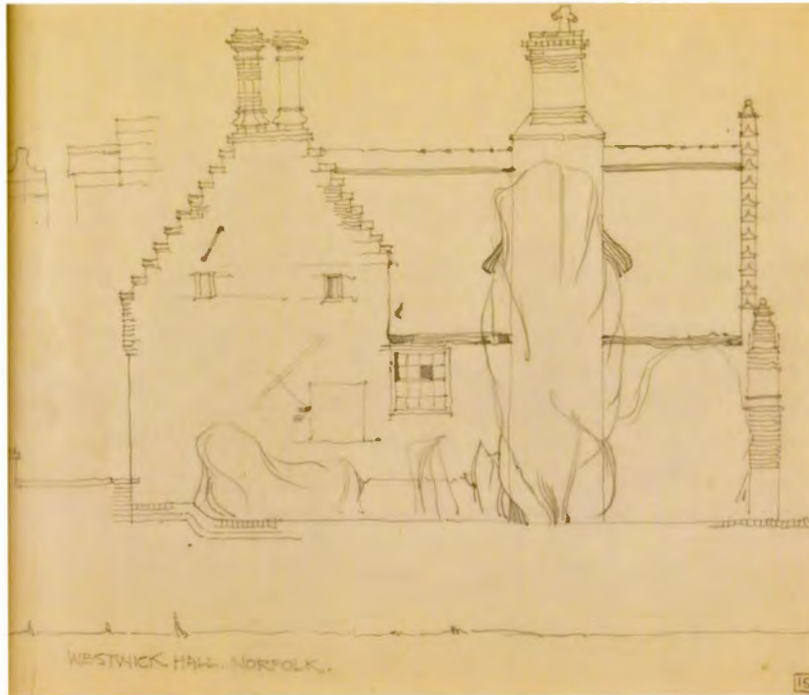


6.28 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Stained glass window,
Willow Tea Rooms, Glasgow, 1903.
 Photograph in public domain



6.29 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, *Part Seen, Part Imagined*, 1896.
Watercolour.

Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow.
From *McKean & Baxter 2000*, p. 55.



6.30 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, *Westwick Hall, Norfolk*, 1897.
Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow.



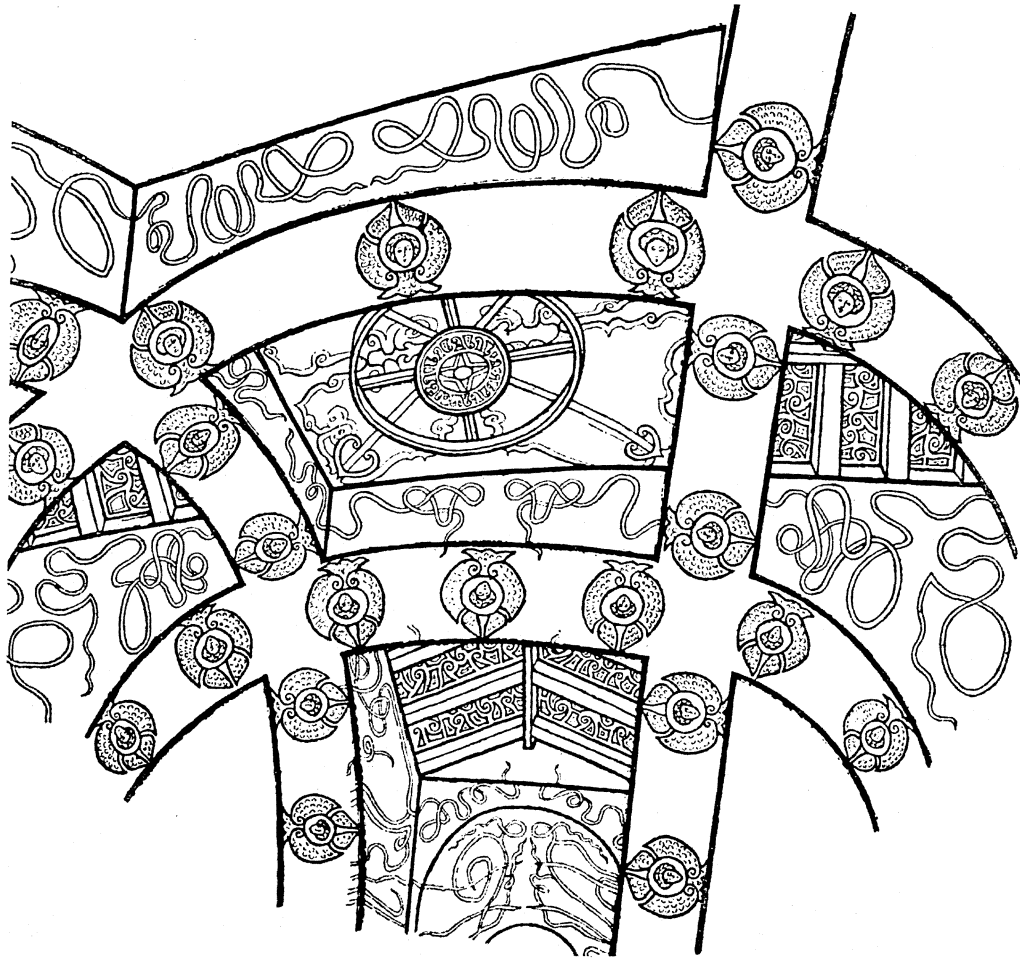
6.31 Charles Rennie Mackintosh, *The Rock*, 1927.
Watercolour, approximately 12 x 10 in.
From McKean & Baxter 2000, p. 23.



6.32 Watts Chapel, Compton, Surrey, 1898, exterior.
Decoration by Mary Seton Watts.
Photograph in public domain



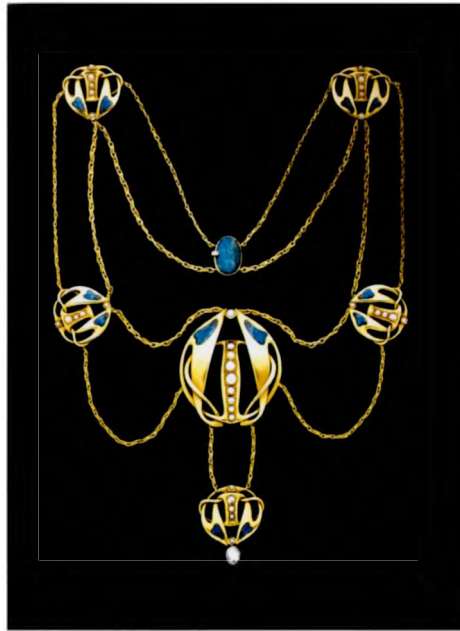
6.33 Watts Chapel, Compton, Surrey, interior.
Decoration by Mary Seton Watts.
Photograph in public domain



6.34 John Furnival, Drawing of the interior of Watts Chapel,
From *Richards & Pevsner 1973*, p. 175.



6.35 John Furnival, Drawing of the interior in the Watts Chapel.
From *Richards & Pevsner 1973*, p. 176.



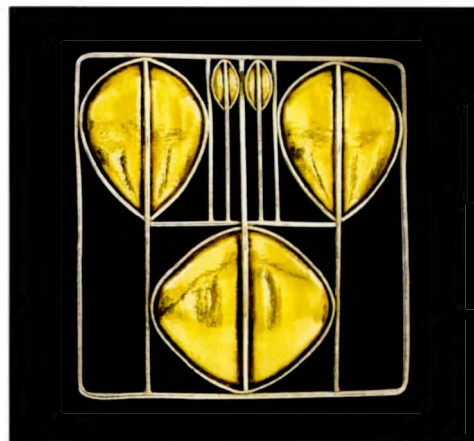
6.36 Archibald Knox, Necklace, Liberty & Co., c. 1900-1904,
Gold, pearl, enamel.
Tadema Gallery, no. 858.
From *Martin 1995*, p. 119.



6.37 Archibald Knox, Casket, Liberty & Co. 1903.
Silver on a wooden carcass and opal, length 21.6 cm.
Victoria and Albert Museum.
From *Martin 1995*, p. 82.



6.38 Edward Colonna, Pendant, c. 1898-9.
Gold, enamel and freshwater pearl, 3.4 x 2.7 cm.
Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe, 66/143.
From *Eidelberg* 1983, p. 36.



6.39 Joseph Hoffmann, Brooch, 1905, Wiener Werkstätte.
Silver and gold, 5 x 5 cm.
Private collection.
From *Weinhäupl et al.* 2011, p. 61.



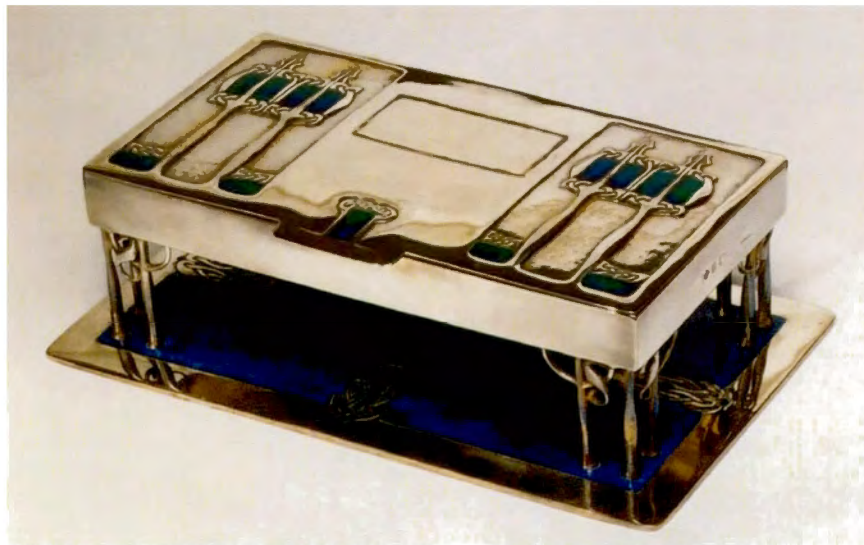
6.40 Mary Seton Watts, Brooch with a motif from *The Word in the Pattern*, Liberty & Co., 1906.
Private collection.
From *Bills 2011*, p. 81.



6.41 Charles Robert Ashbee, Dish.
Silver, foot set with chrysoprases, height 8.2 cm.
Private collection.
From *Crawford 1985*, p. 332.



6.42 Charles Robert Ashbee, Fruit stand, 1905.
Silver decorated with painted enamels, height 15.4 cm.
Collection of John Jesse.
From *Crawford 1985*, p. 333.

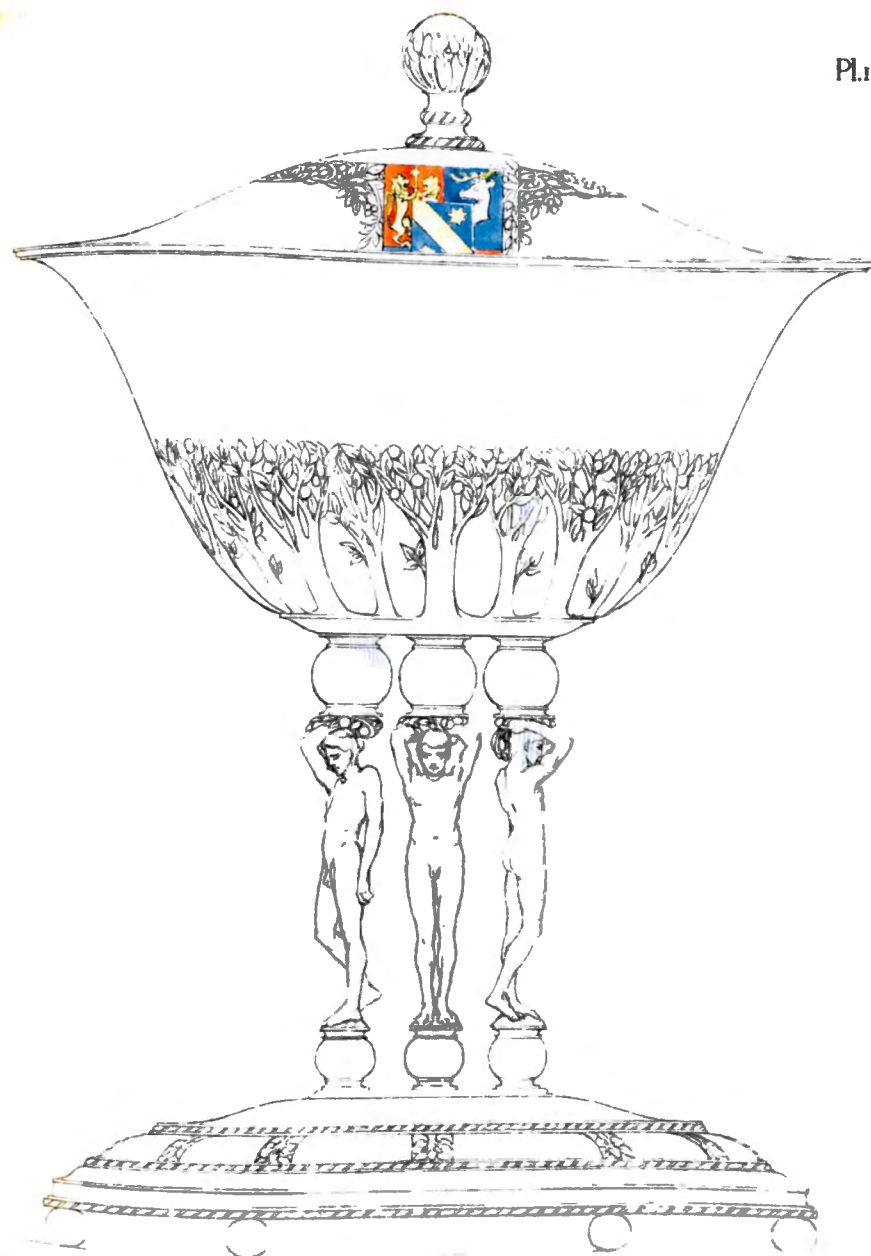


6.43 Archibald Knox, Cigarette Box, Liberty & Co., 1901.
Silver and enamel, length 20.3 cm.
Private collection.
From *Martin 1995*, p. 81.



6.44 Archibald Knox, Casket, Liberty & Co. 1900.
Silver, blister pearls and turquoise, length 28.5 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
From *Martin* 1995, p. 81.

Pl. 100



6.455 Charles Robert Ashbee, Tureen and Cover.

Height 17 ½ in.

From *Ashbee 1909*, plate 100.