David Getsy, "Punks and Professionals: The Identity of the Sculptor 1900-1925," in P. Curtis, et al., eds., *Sculpture in 20th-Century Britain: Identity, Infrastructure, Aesthetics, Display, Reception*, vol. 1 of 2 (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2003), 9-20.

Punks and professionals

The first decades of the 20th century saw an increasing competition between two different, yet related, definitions of the sculptor. Both established professional sculptors – sometimes referred to in derisory fashion as 'gentlemen artists' – and younger, less conventionally trained artists shaped sculpture in these years. One cannot adequately understand the complex range of sculptural options in the early 20th century without taking both these 'professionals' and these young 'punks' seriously, for the members of each group constructed their identities in relation to the other.

Professionals

Beginning in the late 1870s and early 1880s, a new set of parameters for sculptural practice and theory developed in Britain. This modernising movement, which would in 1894 become dubbed the 'New Sculpture', reconsidered the foundations of sculptural tradition and re-evaluated the roles played by sculpture in both public and private.[1] After gaining momentum in the 1880s, the New Sculpture style came to dominate sculpture in Britain, and by the Edwardian period many of its major players were firmly established.

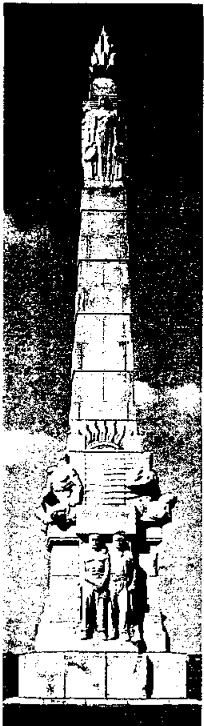
1 Williams Reynolds-Stephens, 'A Royal Game', 1906–11

2 William Goscombe John, 'Memorial to the Engine Room Heroes', 1916

3 Kathleen Scott, 'These Had Most to Give', 1923–4

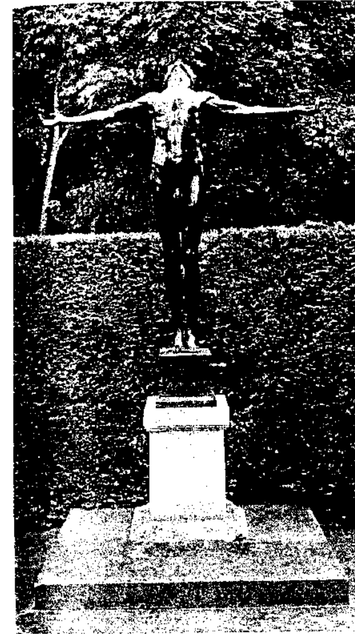
4 Charles Sargeant Jagger, 'No Man's Land', 1919–20

Broadly, a predominant theme in the many manifestations of the New Sculpture movement was its renewed concern with how viewers and publics engaged with sculptural objects. Artists strove to activate the encounter with sculpture, and reconsidered its place in the gallery, in the streets and in the home. The particularities of the style grew out of, on the one hand, the infusion of a greater degree of verisimilitude into the traditions and ideals of sculpture and, on the other, the investigation of the processes and materiality of sculpture as a means to activate these naturalistically rendered forms. Rather than an unchanging and eternal conception of sculpture as the image of the classical ideal, they engaged upon the vexed pursuit of updating or renovating the function and format of sculpture. The New Sculpture was distinct from other versions of modern sculpture being formulated in Europe at that time because of the degree of this dual commitment to naturalism as a manifestation of a new sculptural ideal and to the literal sculptural object as the site of the viewer's engagement.



The New Sculpture was developed by a host of artists working from the 1880s and continuing through the 1920s and 1930s. The tenor of the New Sculpture undoubtedly changed as the 20th century began. Many of its important exponents, such as Edward Onslow Ford, Harry Bates and Frederic Leighton, had died (in 1901, 1899 and 1896, respectively). In 1903, Alfred Gilbert went into self-imposed exile in Bruges, only returning to England in 1926. Of those who remained, William Hamo Thornycroft – who had been crucial in the definition of the New Sculpture in the early 1880s – had steadily grown less innovative and less experimental as the 1890s wore on. By the 20th century, he had become the kind of establishment sculptor he longed to overthrow in his youth. For instance, he was instrumental in blocking James Havard Thomas' work from the Royal Academy, instigating the embarrassing 'Lycidas' scandal of 1905.[2] More public than Thornycroft was George Frampton, who became one of the most prominent sculptors of the first quarter of the century as well as a vocal opponent of modernist sculpture in England.

It would, however, be a mistake to look on the later New Sculpture as a jealous hold-over from the 19th century.[3] The movement evolved and developed new priorities and concerns. The conditions of sculptural production had undoubtedly changed. At the beginning of the 20th century, the death of Queen Victoria and the embarrassment of the Boer War concluded the 'statuemania' that had fuelled the New Sculptors and their annual innovations for the Royal Academy exhibitions. Even



though the production of monuments went on in the 20th century, there emerged far fewer opportunities than previously (a situation that would continue until after World War I).

The New Sculpture adapted to new conditions and reconfigured its general commitment to verisimilitude. William Reynolds-Stephens, for instance, became increasingly critical of the conventional emphasis on statuary; in his own work he productively cross-bred sculpture and decorative art (Fig.1) to create complex and often unexpected works (thus providing a prototype for emerging artists such as Gilbert Bayes).[4] Reynolds-Stephens even went so far as to advocate a break with the emphasis on the body that was central to the New Sculpture, seeing a more productive avenue in the hybridity of sculpture and decorative object.[5] A crucial figure in the second wave of the New Sculpture, William Goscombe John (Fig. 2) proved himself to be catholic in his stylistic choices, attempting to assimilate aspects of modernist sculpture throughout his 20th-century career.[6] Artists such as Bertram Mackennal and Kathleen Scott (Fig. 3) engaged in sophisticated attempts to update the New Sculpture's concerns with naturalism, contemporaneity and the address to the viewer.[7] Even Frampton incorporated aspects of modern stylisation and formal reductiveness in a work like his Cavell monument of 1915–20,[8] and sculptors such as Charles Sargeant Jagger (Fig. 4) compellingly built upon the New Sculpture style and concerns to capture the terrible drama of World War I.

In the first decades of the 20th century, the professional sculptor still had a major role to play. Despite the reduced demand for monuments and commemorations of the kind obsessively encouraged in the late Victorian era, there remained a body of professional sculptors who contributed to building and civic projects. The two decades of the New Sculpture in the 19th century and its emphasis on the contribution of sculpture to a variety of public and private spaces both fed off and fed into the Arts and Crafts movement. Consequently, there emerged an increasingly varied production of a range of objects integrating art and design.[9] At the same time, alternatives to the innovations of the 19th century began to emerge within the framework of professional sculpture. Most significantly, after the 'Lycidas' scandal (Fig. 5), Havard Thomas, who remained an outsider to the RA throughout his career, was appointed as professor of sculpture at the Slade School of Fine Art in 1911. Though critical of the RA and its methods, he and his students nevertheless operated within and contributed to the mode of the professional sculptor in the early 20th century.

A core set of traits characterised what I am calling the professional sculptor in this period. Generally, these artists worked within existing institutions for the production and consumption of sculpture (training academies, established exhibitions and commissioning committees) and understood their training in the traditions and techniques of sculpture to qualify them for participation in civic life. The professional sculptor was considered primarily a creator of public monuments, building on the celebrity status Royal Academicians enjoyed in the Victorian era. Throughout history, sculpture has played an important civic role in western societies. The most durable and permanent of media, sculpture has been used by various constituencies in and out of power to consolidate and illustrate a set of ideals for that group. Consequently, sculpture (even that intended for the gallery) labours under an expectation of exemplarity. It is this underlying assumption that fuels the virulent and recurring debates about the propriety of public sculpture. At the same time, this assumption guaranteed for the sculptor a discrete place in polite society during this period. Even among the competitive versions of professional sculpture represented by artists such as Thornycroft at the RA, Reynolds-Stephens and the later Arts and Crafts movement, and Havard Thomas at the Slade, such professionalism (rooted in tradition and a body of technical education) was taken to be the starting point for a sculptor's individual efforts and contributions.

5 James Havard Thomas, 'Lycidas', 1905

Many professional sculptors in early 20th-century Britain (in contrast with the last quarter of the 19th century) responded to the new climate for sculpture by reaffirming established stylistic choices and art-theoretical concerns, and it was this retrenchment that became the target for so many modernist attacks. The active competition on art-theoretical terms that characterised the first decades of the New Sculpture gave way to a more restrained and cautious environment. It is in such a climate that the work of Havard Thomas, Reynolds-Stephens, Goscombe John, Scott and Jagger stands out for its commitment to the definitions of professional sculpture and for its continued efforts to work within these parameters in the face of a vibrant and burgeoning modernism. We should be aware that the innovations of most professional sculptors in this period are not readily discernible, in marked contrast with those of more deliberately oppositional artists. Within the realm of art theory, the work of these sculptors proved to be sophisticated and compelling, while still meeting the expectations of the institutions underwriting their position as 'professionals' in society.

Punks

The constellation of tradition, training and received societal values was targeted and rejected with the emergence of the modernist sculptor. This type of individual would often pride himself on working outside and against the established norms and networks for sculpture. Instead, he appealed to a new, specialised audience, one aggressively pursuing novelty and modernity.

In the art-historical narratives of subsequent decades, modernist art came to overshadow other, concurrent forms of aesthetic production. Not only for Britain, but in accounts of 20th-century art generally, the celebration of avant-garde values and ideals has structured the way earlier historical periods have been characterised and remembered. This is especially problematic when considering the co-existent strands of modernising sculpture – the New Sculpture *and* more self-consciously modernist art – during the early 20th century. Crucially, what has been overlooked is the symbiotic relationships across the range of possible positions and groups.

The rhetoric surrounding modernist art (in Britain and elsewhere) is, at base, a negative proposition defined by rejection and repudiation, though more recent studies of modern art across Europe have begun to take seriously the more fundamental and often fraught engagements with conventions and traditions that form the basis for these disagreements and rejections. British modernism, however, is often reductively characterised as autogenic or merely imported. This is especially the case with modern sculpture in Britain, often believed to be born almost fully formed from the 1908 scandal surrounding Jacob Epstein's British Medical Association sculptures.[10]

In the brief yet volatile years before World War I, artists such as Epstein, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Eric Gill moved sculptural representation beyond 'plausibility,' as Ezra Pound argued.[11] Convincing and recognisable mimesis waned as a priority in favour of increasing emphasis on formal arrangements and their material determinants. Critics such as Pound and T. E. Hulme ardently defended these new forms of sculpture. They argued that illusionism and veristic representation were disingenuous aims for sculpture and saw in the stylised carvings of the modernists a more direct and authentic purpose. In the developing rhetoric of sculptural modernism, it was direct carving (Fig. 6) that gradually came to overshadow other elements in the newly expanded range of sculptural options. Reinforced by the likes of Henry Moore in the 1930s, direct carving became simplistically equated with modernist sculpture, and work that did not fit into that equation (such as Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska's modelled figures) was dismissed or ignored.[12] In fact, a survey of the sculptures produced by Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Frank Dobson, J. D. Fergusson and Gill discovers significant instances of morphological similarity between works by these modernist sculptors and the 'professionals'.

Beyond these resemblances, it should be noted that terms through which modernist sculpture was articulated and defended in early 20th-century Britain shared core concerns with the earlier modernising theories of the New Sculpture (most notably, an activation of materiality and a concern for its productive interplay with the figural image).[13] One needs to have some common ground as the basis for a disagreement, and the 'punks' often took on their 'professional' predecessors on their own terms. Pound, for instance, attacked the 'caressability' of the Greek tradition, correctly discerning (and strategically inverting) the New Sculptors' emphasis on the corporeal fusion between sculptural image and object.[14] There was substantial antagonism (and much misunderstanding), but there were also shared assumptions and beliefs.

6 Henri Gaudier-Brzeska carving the 'Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound'

Overall, given that the rhetoric around sculpture was so passionate on both sides, one must question the received presumption that the established and the oppositional were wholly alien to each other. The overlapping webs of engagements and dependencies amongst sculptors and critics at that time have, subsequently, gone undiscussed in the story of British sculpture.

Beyond the level of sculpture theory, the public identities these sculptors espoused were also inextricably linked. In order for 'modernism' to define itself as a movement, as a group and as an identity, the 'establishment' had to be consolidated and caricatured into a relatively stable stereotype, thus making it easier to reject. This is not to deny the value of modernist innovations but rather to acknowledge that they, like the sculptors themselves, did not operate in a vacuum. Modernism in early 20th-century Britain was, to all intents and purposes, a distinct subculture that defined itself through critique and opposition. Consequently, these young 'punks' who thumbed their noses at tradition needed the very 'professionals' they purported to reject. The groups formed their identities through mutual conflict.

In his classic study of the punks and teddy-boys of post-World War II Britain, Dick Hebdige defined subculture as a style which 'signals a Refusal'.[15] A style, like an identity, is constituted through the repeated and shared use of elements which, in turn, come to act as signifiers *of* that style.[16] Modernist sculpture in Britain (and indeed modernisms in other locales as well) came into being through such a process of style-formation. Subculture, Hebdige reminds us, is articulated in direct opposition to established ideologies and institutions. Even if not overtly critical or revolutionary, subculture is nevertheless based on a partial exclusion and refusal. Appropriating this definition, we can begin to re-evaluate the accepted narratives of modernist sculpture in Britain. Without losing the critical and oppositional basis of modernism that is often simplified and heroised as 'avant-garde', this concept provides the basis for an understanding of the actual historical complexities of the period in which punks and professionals worked in tandem.

A central component of Hebdige's analysis is the concept of *bricolage*, borrowed from Claude Lévi-Strauss. The 'do-it-yourself' recombination of received concepts, commodities and signs, *bricolage* as used by Hebdige referred to the active appropriation and subversive transformation of tradition and convention. An example, he states, was the mods, who 'could be said to be functioning as *bricoleurs* when they appropriated another range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which served to erase or subvert their original straight meaning'.[17] Though I risk over-simplifying both Hebdige's argument and the complex concept of *bricolage*, it seems that his argument about the formation of subcultures illuminates the historical situation of British art in the first decades of the 20th century.

Bricolage transforms commodities into oppositional signs (which, of course, may in turn become commodified). What is significant about Hebdige's argument, however, is his stress on aesthetic commodities such as style, fashion and attitude (Fig. 7). Just as the punks and mods constituted new, subversive messages through dress, fashion and music, so too did the bohemian circles advocating modernism recombine aspects of received tradition and convention to articulate an oppositional (but nevertheless dependent) subculture. Lisa Tickner has recently put forth a compelling account of modernism in Britain that stresses the importance of these subcultural formations and the bohemian (but, importantly, not working-class) society of artists and patrons in the years before World War I.[18] The many autobiographical (and often gossipy) accounts of the period take as a given the existence of a group of collectors and viewers who fuelled the fad for modernism and to whom the affectations of Wyndham Lewis, Pound, Epstein or Gaudier-Brzeska appealed.[19]

According to Hebdige, this subculture was – like that of the punks of later decades – decidedly not an autogenic break with convention but a savvy and strategic appropriation and subversion of norms and conventions. New ideals were put in place and new networks of patrons developed to support them. This fad for the modern fed

7 Jacob Epstein in Epping Forest, 1924

8 Jacob Epstein, 'Bust of Mary McEvoy', 1910

directly off mainstream culture, gaining its cachet from its defiance. This may at first seem like a simple point, but it is essential to remember this symbiotic relationship between mainstream and subculture, for it has frequently been overlooked in the accounts of modern art in Britain. Too often commentators have simply repeated the rhetorical assertions of the modernists, and their story has become a history not of the vital and contentious culture of art but of the insular story of the modernists themselves. Understanding early 20th-century modernism as a subculture allows us to move beyond the simplistic – and still determining – myths of the break, the rupture and the revolution of modernism.

Pushing the concept of *bricolage* further, we can also begin to expand the scope of a history of modern art in Britain. The modernists were *bricoleurs* in that they adapted and appropriated elements of mainstream sculpture theory, aesthetics and forms in order to subvert them and articulate an alternative. That is, the innovations of the modernists can only be adequately understood if one grasps the conventions they were defying and, quite substantially, adapting. The professionals, in such an account, are equally important, and any story of modern art that reduces the formation of modernist subculture to a wilful and complete rupture with the past overlooks the actual historical complexity and, more fundamentally, the deeper art-theoretical questions.

The story of modernist sculpture in Britain begins to look different, and ultimately more complex, with this interdependent relationship in mind. For instance, we can take more seriously the formative roles played by sculptors such as George Gray Barnard and Havard Thomas in the early development of Epstein (which he downplayed in his much later autobiography), as well as begin to acknowledge the significant morphological and art-theoretical affinities of his work with the New Sculpture as practised in the Edwardian period (Fig. 8). After coming to England, he sought out sculptors such as Havard Thomas, and his apprehension of the terms of Edwardian sculpture provided the basis for his gradual development of new attitudes. Gill contributed to many diverse projects, and even Gaudier-Brzeska hints in his writings and artworks at a greater awareness of Victorian sculpture than is usually assumed.

Additionally, the ostensibly 'traditional' works by the likes of Goscombe John or Scott can be re-evaluated in the light of modernist sculpture theory. In addition, those disavowed bronzes of Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska can be more adequately discussed if we conceive of modernism as a nuanced subcultural recombination of convention and tradition. A problem in the heroic accounts of modernism in Britain has been its fundamental eclecticism. All the artists involved experimented in a range of styles, yet the non-carved work of Epstein, for instance, has been relegated to an uncomfortable footnote in the story of modern-sculpture-as-direct-carving (based on the writings of Pound and R. H. Wilenski). There are many such works that do not fit, and in striving to defend modernism in Britain in relation to its contemporary formulations in Europe, art historians have omitted these works from the story.[20] A further example is the hotly contested legacy of Gaudier-Brzeska, over whose work debates raged for decades, speculating on what path – direct carving or modelling – he would have ultimately pursued had he lived.

The answer to these dilemmas lies in reconsidering the rhetoric of modernism to account for the complex range of affinities, contestations, dependencies and parallels that existed as present options for both the punks and the professionals in the first decades of the 20th century. The historical complexity that has proven so resolutely unassimilable to the received rhetoric of modernism is exactly what is significant and compelling about sculpture in Britain in these years. In other words, we – like the artists themselves – need to be aware of the identities of both the punk and the professional in order to begin to understand the historical situation of sculpture in Britain and argue for the wider relevance of its conceptual concerns.

David J. Getsy

Notes

1 See S. Beattie, *The New Sculpture*, New Haven, CT, and London, Yale University Press, 1983, and B. Read, *Victorian Sculpture*, New Haven, CT, and London, Yale University Press, 1982, pp. 273–386.

2 See D. Getsy, 'The *Lycidas* "scandal" of 1905: James Havard Thomas at the crux of modern sculpture in Britain', in D. Getsy (ed.), *Sculpture and the Pursuit of a Modern Ideal in Britain, c.1880–1930*, Aldershot, Ashgate, forthcoming 2004. An expanded account of this incident will also be a chapter of my forthcoming *Body Doubles: Encountering Modern Sculpture in Britain, 1877–1905.*

3 For commentary, see B. Read, 'Whatever happened to the New Sculpture?', in J. Glaves-Smith (ed.), *Reverie, Myth, Sensuality: Sculpture in Britain 1880–1910* (exhibition catalogue), Stoke-on-Trent, Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, 1992, pp. 21–5.

4 See L. Irvine and P. Atterbury, *Gilbert Bayes: Sculptor 1872–1953* (exhibition catalogue), London, Richard Dennis and Fine Art Society, 1998.

5 W. Reynolds-Stephens, 'A plea for the nationalisation of our sculpture', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, vol. 69, no. 407, January 1911, pp. 160–8.

6 See F. Pearson, *Goscombe John* (exhibition catalogue), Cardiff, National Museum of Wales, 1979.

7 See M. Stocker, '"My masculine models": The sculpture of Kathleen Scott', *Apollo*, vol. 150, no. 451, 1999, pp. 47–54.

8 See S. Malvern, '"For King and Country": George Frampton's *Edith Cavell* (1915–20) and the writing of gender in memorials to the Great War', in D. Getsy (ed.), *Sculpture and the Pursuit of a Modern Ideal in Britain, c.1880–1930.*

9 See S. Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism 1900–1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England*, London, Routledge, 1988.

10 For a discussion of the events of 1908, see R. Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early 20th Century England*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 9–60.

11 E. Pound, 'The New Sculpture', *Egoist*, 16 February 1914, p. 68; reprinted in H. Zinnes (ed.), *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts*, New York, New Directions, 1980, p. 181.

12 For a discussion of this development, see P. Curtis, 'Barbara Hepworth and the avant garde of the 1920s', in P. Curtis and A. Wilkinson, *Barbara Hepworth: A Retrospective* (exhibition catalogue), Liverpool, Tate Gallery, 1994, pp. 11–28; and P. Curtis, 'How direct carving stole the idea of modern British sculpture', in D. Getsy (ed.), *Sculpture and the Pursuit of a Modern Ideal in Britain, c.1880–1930.*

13 For an example of this concern from the 1890s, see D. Getsy, '"Hard realism": the thanatic corporeality of Edward Onslow Ford's *Shelley Memorial*', *Visual Culture in Britain*, Spring 2002, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 53–76.

14 There are many instances, but in particular see E. Pound, 'The Caressability of the Greeks,' *Egoist*, 16 March 1914, reprinted in Zinnes (ed.), *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts*, pp. 184–6.

15 D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London, Methuen, 1979, p. 3.

16 My use of 'style' in reference to Hebdige should be distinguished from the multifarious concept of style in art-historical narratives. The literature on style – individual, group, period, etc. – is vast. For a methodological prolegomenon for its usage, see Whitney Davis, 'Style and history in art history', in W. Davis and R. W. Quinn (eds), *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996, pp. 171–98.

[17] Hebdige, *Subculture*, p. 104.

[18] L. Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2000. See also Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*.

[19] There are too many autobiographical accounts to cite here. A discussion of the bohemian scene can be found in W. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, which largely tells the history of Vorticism as a story of these social networks.

[20] A highly visible example was the 1996 exhibition at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, *Un Siècle de Sculpture Anglaise*. For commentary, see A. Sleeman, 'In the Queen's Parlour, inspired by tea and made of gentlemen: British sculpture in the twentieth century as "sculpture Anglaise"', *Sculpture Journal*, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 72–9.