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Citation: Cottrell, Joanne Louise (2024) Vorticist women, cosmopolitanism, and the cosmo-feminist spaces of resistance. [Thesis] (Unpublished)

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**Vorticist Women, Cosmopolitanism, and the Cosmofeminist
Spaces of Resistance**

Joanne (Jo) Cottrell

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Birkbeck, University of London, 2024

Abstract

In 1914 Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders were the only women among the eleven signatories of the Vorticist manifesto in *Blast*, yet they have been neglected in the historiographies of English modernism, their involvement in the Vorticist project viewed as peripheral and further distorted by critical interpretations of the visual material produced by their male counterparts. Taking as a prompt the dynamics of William Roberts's painting *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel, Spring 1915*, and drawing attention away from its compositional arrangement towards the setting in which the group gathering is presented, this thesis adopts a spatial approach to Vorticism and gender.

Composed of two parts, part one centres on London as the nexus of modernist endeavour in England to firmly position the artists under scrutiny as cosmopolitan women active in the city in promotion of a distinctly English art form. By charting their interactions with the communal spaces of the avant-garde, their presence is traced, exposing dialogues and performative strategies that strengthen their agency as independent artists in a male-dominated milieu. Part two signals a shift from the physical sites of modernism towards textual and abstract space to argue for its significance as a mechanism for the channelling of the personal and the political as a means of empowerment and a source protection.

Drawing on new material from the archive and diverging from preoccupation with their anomalous position within Vorticism as women towards a deeper

concern with them as cosmopolitans in collective revolt against the insular philistinism of English culture, this project at the same time exposes, through close attention to individual aesthetic strategies, cosmofeminist spaces of resistance in which personal desires and anxieties can be safely confronted, and as such offers a fresh assessment of the women as visible participants within Vorticism's constellation of ideas.

Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to write this thesis without the support of a great many colleagues, friends, and family members.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisors Professor Lynda Nead, Dr. Gabriel Koureas and Dr. Suzannah Biernoff for the invaluable advice and guidance that they have given me, and for patience that they have shown throughout the course of this project. Your support has been so much appreciated.

Special thanks go to Brigid Peppin and David Curtis, and to Quentin Stevenson for their deep generosity, warmth, support, hospitality, and good conversation.

Thanks to all my colleagues at Birkbeck for the stimulating debates and discussions, the opportunities to share ideas, and for the gallery visits that we have enjoyed over the years. I would also like to express my gratitude to my generous friends and colleagues from the wider networks of modernist studies.

Heartfelt thanks go to my family and friends for their love and encouragement.

Above all else, I want to thank Matt for his unwavering support, his care, and his love given unconditionally throughout the highs and lows of this project. I really couldn't have done this without him.

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Introduction

In 1956, on the occasion of the Tate Gallery's exhibition *Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism*, the artist, writer and polemicist Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957) went on record to state that 'Vorticism, in fact, was what I, personally, did, and said, at a certain period'.¹ Lewis's claim for primacy, one that effectively relegated all of his Vorticist collaborators and many of his modernist contemporaries to the periphery of his project, caused consternation at the time, provoking the ire William Roberts (1895-1980) and irritating others involved in the show.² By 1962 Roberts had completed his now emblematic work *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel; Spring 1915* (fig.1). Composed as if to redress the balance and have the last word,³ members of the Vorticist group are depicted at

¹ Wyndham Lewis, 'Introduction', *Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism* (London: Tate Gallery, 1956), p. 3.

² The exhibition at the Tate Gallery was designed to position Lewis as the dominant figure, and as such set him apart among a group of artists who were placed under the banner of 'other Vorticists'. See Richard Cork, *Vorticism and its allies* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1974), p. 5. Lewis added emphasis to his position in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue, where he made the oft-quoted statement. Lewis, 'Introduction', pp. 3-4. The exhibition and its methodology sparked Roberts into privately publishing a series of *Vortex Pamphlets* between 1956 and 1958 that presented his case against Lewis and the Tate's then artistic director John Rothenstein (1901-1992), objecting to Lewis's claim that he was the sole and prime mover within Vorticism. See Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London, The Social Scene of Early Modernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 129-31. Extracts and accompanying discussion on the *Vortex Pamphlets* can be accessed via a website devoted to the life and work of William Roberts. John David Roberts, 'A Brief Discussion of the Vortex Pamphlets', *An English Cubist: William Roberts, 1895-1980*, <<http://www.englishcubist.co.uk/vortexpamphlets.html>> [last accessed 9 March 2023].

³ Cork has observed that Roberts's composition is evocative of a 'Vorticist last supper'. Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), p. 554. Lewis died in 1957.

a celebratory gathering within one of their favourite meeting places.⁴ As the art historian Richard Cork has observed, the image is an imaginative evocation of the Vorticists, rather than an accurate historical record.⁵ The artist presents an amalgam of key moments and a document of the notable features of the group dynamic and the personalities involved, rather than the depiction of a specific event.⁶ The positioning within the composition of artists Helen Saunders (1885-1963) and Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939) has been interpreted as Roberts's commentary on the status of the women working under the banner of Vorticism⁷ as marginal. For example, in her thesis on Dismorr Catherine Heathcock states that Roberts:

clearly visualised the women as bit players in a drama, extras who were necessary to the overall coherence of the 'play' and needed to be clearly acknowledged, but did not partake in any significant action.⁸

⁴ Following Lewis's move to Percy Street in 1914, his rooms were a convenient meeting place for the Vorticists and the nearby Tour Eiffel restaurant became a regular haunt. Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early 20th Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 215.

⁵ Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Its Allies*, p. 106.

⁶ For a useful discussion on Roberts's painting and the motivations for creating it, see Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London*, pp. 129-31.

⁷ Wyndham Lewis used this phrase in an interview with *Vogue* magazine in August 1956, cited in William Roberts, 'Vorticism and the Politics of Belles-Lettres-ism: Vortex Pamphlet No. 5', *An English Cubist* < <http://www.englishcubist.co.uk/belleslettresism.html> > [accessed 9 March 2023].

⁸ Catherine Heathcock, 'Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): Artist, Writer, Vorticist' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1999), p. 38. Similarly, Lisa Ticker points to the 'ambivalent' position of Dismorr and Saunders in Roberts's painting, which 'suggests they were eager, but marginal.' Lisa Tickner, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism', in *Visual Culture, Images and*

At a superficial level Roberts's decision to place Dismorr and Saunders in the background of his painting might suggest that he viewed them as peripheral to the Vorticist group's activities. Yet the will to record their presence at all and setting them in such a significant space for Vorticism and its activities, while omitting altogether other co-signatories of the Vorticist manifesto,⁹ or those who were instrumental in other ways within Vorticism's ambit, clearly indicates that Roberts maintained a regard for both artists as key actors on Vorticism's centre stage.

Roberts's retrospective evocation of a particular moment in time welcomed visitors as they entered *The Vorticists*, an exhibition staged at the Tate Gallery in 2011.¹⁰ A touring exhibition curated by Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene

Interpretations, ed. by Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), p. 67. Roberts's painting has been compared with Johan Joseph Zoffany's *The Academicians of the Royal Academy* (1771-2, oil on canvas, 101.1 x 147.5 cm, Royal Collection, London), in which the artists Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffman are presented as portraits hanging on a wall, rather than being included with their male counterparts as they actively prepare for a life class. See Katy Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists In/Out of Vorticism', *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies, Volume 5*, ed. by Günter Berghaus (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), p. 25.

⁹ All the figures appearing in the painting were signatories of the Vorticist manifesto, with the exception of Frederick Etchells (1886-1973). Richard Aldington (1837-1962), Malcolm Arbuthnot (1874-1967) and Lawrence Atkinson (1837-1931) all signed the manifesto but are absent from the scene. See *Blast* ed. by Wyndham Lewis (London: John Lane, 1914), p. 43.

¹⁰ *The Vorticists: Rebel Artists in London and New York, 1914-1918* opened at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, running from 30 September 2010 to 2 January 2011. The exhibition was then presented at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice from 29 January to 15 May 2011, followed by Tate Britain, London from 14 June to 4 September 2011, where it was renamed. See *The Vorticists: Manifesto for a Modern World* ed. by Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), pp. 4-10.

to introduce Vorticism to audiences in the United States and Italy and designed to offer new insights and a wider consideration of its scope of activities to audiences in the United Kingdom perhaps more familiar with the movement,¹¹ *The Vorticists* showcased an impressive range of Vorticist artefacts and contextualising materials. Included in the show were six works by Saunders, three of which at the time were recent and significant discoveries.¹² Two works by Dismorr were shown, and four by Dorothy Shakespear (1886-1973),¹³ an artist who was not a signatory of the Vorticist manifesto announced in *Blast* but whose work was published in the magazine's second number alongside that of Dismorr and Saunders.¹⁴ Despite these inclusions in the show none of the essays in the accompanying catalogue focused directly on the work of these artists,¹⁵ an

¹¹ See *The Vorticists: Manifesto for a Modern World* (London: Tate Gallery, 2010), pp. 6-7.

¹² The exhibition was designed to evoke the three exhibitions staged by the Vorticists; the Doré Gallery exhibition in London in 1915, the exhibition at the Penguin Club in New York in 1917, and an exhibition of Vortographs by Alvin Langdon Coburn at the Camera Club in London in 1917. See *The Vorticists*, p. 12. Three watercolour drawings by Saunders of c.1915 – *Balance*, *Canon*, and *Dance* – were found by Richard Born un-catalogued but with sales tags and pencilled titles, in the collection of a private college in Chicago and were authenticated by Mark Antliff. They are now in the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago. See Brigid Peppin, 'Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a career', in *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel* ed. by Rachel Sloan (London: Courtauld Gallery, 2020), p. 16, n. 48.

¹³ Dismorr's *Edinburgh Castle*, 1914-15, and *Abstract Composition*, c. 1915, and Shakespear's *Composition in Blue and Black*, 1914-15, an untitled watercolour, an untitled collage and watercolour both of 1914-15, and a Cover Design for Ezra Pound's *Catholic Anthology*, 1915 were shown. Full details and specifications can be found in *The Vorticists* catalogue, pp. 186-188.

¹⁴ *Blast*, War Number, ed. by Wyndham Lewis (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1915). Original copies of *Blast* were on display in the exhibition.

¹⁵ Feminist art historian Katy Deepwell made this observation. See Katy Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists In/Out of Vorticism', p. 23. The catalogue

occurrence that inadvertently reinforced the visual dynamic of Roberts's composition. Women's contributions to the Vorticist project did, however, form part of a series of scholarly dialogues initiated by the show's curators at a symposium held at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. The papers were subsequently expanded upon in a series of essays that revealed the multifarious nature of the movement, acknowledging the diversity of its adherents, and offering new readings of Vorticism in a broad range of contexts.¹⁶ A similar event took place at Tate Britain.¹⁷ On this occasion feminist art historian Katy Deepwell criticised what she saw as the hitherto problematic approaches to Vorticist studies in relation to gender. Expanding on her argument in a subsequent essay published in 2015, Deepwell posed a series of questions in provocation to scholars investigating early modernist activity in relation to gender, calling for a radical reconsideration of the existing methodologies employed in the field of modernist studies when seeking to understand more

does provide reproductions of selected works by Dismorr, Shakespear and Saunders, though they are only mentioned in passing in the essays.

¹⁶ The symposium *Vorticism: New Perspectives* took place at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in October 2010, the papers providing the material for a volume of scholarly essays of the same title, published in 2013. See *Vorticism: New Perspectives*, ed. by Mark Antliff and Scott W. Klein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Literary scholar Miranda Hickman contributed an essay focusing on the work of Dismorr and Saunders.

¹⁷ Organised in conjunction with the exhibition at Tate Britain in 2011, *Repositioning Vorticism* sought to position the movement within its wider cultural and historical contexts and featured interdisciplinary papers from leading scholars in the fields of Vorticism and the British avant-garde, and from the field of Wyndham Lewis studies. The event took place on 17 and 18 June, 2011.

fully the position of women artists within the discourses of Vorticism.¹⁸ Drawing on the feminist critiques of the discipline of art history in the work of Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock,¹⁹ Deepwell refers to the prevalence of heavily gendered narratives in the wider context of studies of modernism that persistently maintain, and as such reinforce the marginal status of women artists, thus discriminating against their work.²⁰ In the particular case of Vorticism, Deepwell sees such narratives as denying the very presence of women within its historiography.²¹ Drawing on examples from the critical literature of Vorticism, accounts that she identifies as being largely biased in favour of the movement's male protagonists,²² Deepwell argues that a deconstruction of Vorticism's accepted history is necessary in order to look afresh at the position of women artists, away from what she terms as their 'state of exception' within

¹⁸ Through her examination of some of the narratives gleaned from the critical literature on Vorticism at the time, Deepwell's essay considers the position of these artists as continuing to be on the periphery of the discourses of Vorticism, suggesting that scholars may be 'constantly falling back into gendered stereotypes and unspoken assumptions about the alleged superiority of male over female artists.' Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', p. 22.

¹⁹ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, new edn (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

²⁰ Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists', p. 22.

²¹ Deepwell, p. 21-43.

²² Deepwell, p. 24. Deepwell singles out Cork's 'deliberately provocative questioning of the rôle of women artists' as expressed in his two-volume study of Vorticism. See Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, p. 416.

Vorticism and towards thinking about the reality of their situation as individuals living and working within the cultural landscape of London in the 1910s.²³

In setting out his own intention in the 1970s to offer a comprehensive examination of the cultural terrain from which Vorticism emerged, Cork's introduction to his pioneering history and analysis of Vorticism stated that:

[M]any of its participants were extraordinarily young, and inevitably passed through a whole gamut of influences before managing to develop a final, brief synthesis of all their heterogeneous impulses. The high-spirited iconoclasm which erupted from the pages of *Blast* in the summer of 1914 was caused by many factors, ranging from the Slade to the Omega Workshops, from Fry to Marinetti, from the insular philistinism of English culture to the multi-national character of the rebel group; and all these factors, no less than the hectic ambience of pre-war London, need pinning down.²⁴

Cork's précis of the multifarious factors contributing to the genesis of Vorticism that are woven into his project does not make any specific reference to gender,

²³ Deepwell, pp. 21-43; Griselda Pollock's updated preface for the 2013 edition of *Old Mistresses* re-emphasises Parker and Pollock's fundamental argument that feminist methodology must situate artist-women firmly in history, rather than merely integrating women into art history. Stressing at that moment in time that there was still much work to be done in the field, Pollock reiterates that work by artist-women must be analysed in direct relation to the historical period in which it was made and with acknowledgement of women's navigation of the gendered conditions in which it was made. See Griselda Pollock, 'A Lonely Preface' in Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, pp. xvii – xxviii. For a useful overview of the genesis of feminist art history and details of its trajectory over the last fifty years, see Gabriella Nugent, 'Celebrating Women Artists and Forgetting Feminist Art Histories', *Burlington Contemporary*, 23 March 2023 <<https://contemporary.burlington.org.uk/articles/articles/celebrating-women-artists-and-forgetting-feminist-art-histories> > [accessed 1 June 2023]. Nugent's article was written in response to the current trend for the celebration of women artists in museums, galleries, and the art market.

²⁴ Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, p. xxiii.

though the study itself does acknowledge the presence of the women operating within Vorticism's ambit and briefly analyses their active contribution to its spaces and its aesthetic, albeit as Cork himself later admitted, from an unconsciously male chauvinist viewpoint.²⁵ This can of course be viewed as one example of the biased narratives of Vorticism that Deepwell cites, and one that is subsequently challenged by scholars in the field of Vorticism and gender, as will be demonstrated. Yet, Cork's introduction offers a pathway for a fresh consideration of Vorticism and gender that this project takes up. Cork's reference to English culture's 'insular philistinism' and the Vorticists' 'multi-national character', both cited as important factors in *Blast's* realisation, emphasises a contradiction between the nationalist polemics expounded from the pages of *Blast* and the diversity of Vorticism's adherents as a cosmopolitan grouping at odds with 'John Bull' as an embodiment of English parochialism.²⁶ Whilst literary

²⁵ See Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism: Women, Modernity, Modernism', in *Blast: Vorticism 1914-1918*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2000), p. 59. Peppin also refers to Cork's handling of the women Vorticists, arguing that Cork's study was influenced by the dominant theoretical frameworks of the 1970s, when feminist art history was in its infancy. Brigid Peppin, 'The Thyssen 'Vorticist composition': a new attribution', *Burlington Magazine*, 152: 1290 (September 2010), 590-593 (p. 594). Dismorr and Saunders are mentioned briefly in William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972); Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939* (London and Bloomington: Allen Lane/Indiana University Press, 1981); and William C. Lipke, *A History and Analysis of Vorticism* (unpublished doctoral thesis for University of Wisconsin, 1996).

²⁶ Soon after the appearance of *Blast* Lewis wrote an essay entitled 'Kill John Bull with Art'. Published in *The Outlook* on 18 July 1914 Lewis called for an acknowledgement of the English temperament towards art, what he saw as its sentimentality and conformism that must be countered by a new 'Englishness' inspired by the latest artistic developments in Europe. Stating that the 'national enemy of each country is its nationality', Lewis called for the rejection of a traditionally 'unimaginative...unphilosophic' bourgeois Englishness as personified in the figure of 'John Bull' to achieve an energy and agility that would

scholar Paul Peppis has interrogated this paradoxical position within modernist polemicising and praxis in the period leading up to and during the First World War,²⁷ his study is largely centred on Lewis as a prime mover within the English avant-garde of the pre-war period, as and such Lewis's Vorticist colleagues are again left to languish in the shadows.²⁸ One might consider the question why Dismorr or Saunders, as artists already active within the interconnecting and transnational circles of European modernism, and who were at the epicentre of proto-Vorticist endeavour by the time *Blast* was published in 1914,²⁹ neither

allow for the development of a new English art, whilst at the same time maintaining that the very presence of a John Bull to do battle with must be necessary for 'Anglo-Saxon' creativity to flourish. Wyndham Lewis, 'Kill John Bull with Art', *The Outlook*, 18 July 1914, p. 74. The essay is reproduced in *Wyndham Lewis: Creatures of Habit and Creatures of Change, Essays on Art, Literature and Society 1914-1956* ed. by Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989), pp. 37-40.

²⁷ Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000). Peppis's study focuses specifically on the ways in which artists and writers of England's avant-garde responded, either consciously or unconsciously to the maelstrom of political and cultural debates proliferating in the early years of the 20th century, arguing that in seeking to radically transform art and society by bringing 'art' into 'life', avant-gardists utilized the rhetoric of imperialism and appropriated nationalist sentiments in their manifestos and praxis. For scholarly debates on the desire and strategies of avant-garde groupings to bring art into life, see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, transl. by Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post Modernism* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986); Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

²⁸ Peppis does briefly discuss Saunders's poem *A Vision of Mud*, which is published in the second number of *Blast*, commenting that it 'shows an editorial willingness to feature dissident artworks that deviate from the Vorticist line.' Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics and the English Avant-Garde*, pp. 126-128. See *Blast: War Number*, pp. 73-74.

²⁹ After studying Fine Arts at the Slade, Dismorr became a student of the American artist Max Bohm (1868-1923) at Etaples in northern France, going on

contributed work to the first number of *Blast*, despite signing the manifesto and actively contributing to its distribution.³⁰ As art historian Brigid Peppin has noted, perhaps they were not asked.³¹ Then again, if silently rejecting the boisterous and belligerent schoolboy nationalism of Vorticism's manifesto, perhaps they may have preferred to actively contribute to *Blast's* more sober and considered second number. These initial speculations prompt an interrogation of the dual and ambivalent positions of Dismorr and Saunders as 'committed'

to continue her studies in Paris at L'Académie de La Palette under Jean Metzinger (1883-1956), Andre Dunoyer de Segonzac (1884-1974) and John Duncan Fergusson (1874-1961), subsequently exhibiting with Fergusson's Rhythm Group at the Stafford Gallery, London in 1912, and exhibiting at the Société des Artistes Indépendants and at the Salon d'Automne in Paris. For full details of Dismorr's activities prior to joining the Vorticist group in 1914, see Catherine Heathcock, *Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): Artist, Writer, Vorticist*, pp. 1 – 36; Quentin Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles* (London: The Fine Art Society, 2000), pp. 5-6; Alicia Foster, *Radical Women: Jessica Dismorr and Her Contemporaries* (London: Lund Humphries, 2019), p. 111. Helen Saunders studied briefly at the Slade following her attendance at Rosa Waugh's (1882-1971) teaching studio in Ealing. She then studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts at Southampton Row. Saunders exhibits with Vanessa Bell's Friday Club in 1912 and in the same year contributes to Roger Fry's 'Quelques Indépendants Anglais' an exhibition held at the Galérie Barbazanges in Paris. See Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders 1885-1963* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1996), pp. 37-38; see also *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel* ed. by Rachel Sloan (London: The Courtauld, 2022), p. 90.

³⁰ Whilst Dismorr's name is correctly spelt as a signatory of the Vorticist manifesto in *Blast*, Saunders's name appears as 'Sanders', possibly to protect her identity, 'in deference probably to my conventional home background,' as she explains in a letter to William Wees. See Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, p. 178 n. 8. Dismorr's and Saunders's obligations for the distribution of the first number of *Blast* is commented upon by the artist Kate Lechmere (1887-1976) in a letter to Wyndham Lewis dated 23 July 1914, held at Cornell University, Wyndham Lewis collection, Box 117, 38. Lechmere was the chief financier and instigator of the Rebel Art Centre, the short-lived headquarters of the Vorticist group. See Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, p. 68; Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 146-147.

³¹ Brigid Peppin, 'Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a Career' in *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 25 n. 26.

Vorticists and as cosmopolitan actors within the circles of early modernism in Europe, and at the same time as women navigating the complexities of the cultural and political terrain of *avant-guerre* London, and further offering an opportunity to situate the other women who were active within Vorticism's sphere of influence to acknowledge their contributions to the movement. Such questions about Vorticism and gender provide the over-arching aim of this project.

Vorticism and gender in context

A term derived from the notion of the vortex invoked by Ezra Pound (1885-1972) to describe London in the 1910s as the epicentre of artistic activity,³² and an aesthetic concept and practical methodology driven by Lewis as its *de facto* spokesperson, Vorticism was a multimedia cultural phenomenon that was influenced by the art politics and aesthetic discourses that proliferated in London during the turbulent years leading up to the cataclysm of the First World War.³³ Originating from and promoted through its principal organ *Blast*,³⁴

³² Cork writes that the term 'vortex' was first coined by Pound to refer to London as the epicentre of artistic activity in a letter to imagist poet William Carlos Williams in 1913. See Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, p. 235. Pound's notion of the 'vortex' is discussed in *Blast* in 1914, which was followed by an article that appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*. See *Blast*, ed. by Wyndham Lewis (London: John Lane, 1914), pp. 153-154, and Ezra Pound, 'Vorticism', *Fortnightly Review*, 96, 1 September 1914, pp. 461-471. See also, Ezra Pound, *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska* (New York: New Directions, 1974), pp. 81-94.

³³ See Cork, *Vorticism*; Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*; Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism*, pp. 75-113; Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), pp. 37 – 60. For a recent addition to the literature see David Cottington, *Radical Art and the Formation of*

Vorticism emerged as an aggressively masculine radical English art movement designed to rival and dominate its European counterparts, yet remaining indebted, paradoxically, to European modernism for its very existence.³⁵ Like its European counterparts Cubism and Futurism before it, Vorticism's interdisciplinary nature has in recent years been situated by historians in the broader contexts of modernism, encompassing theories of modernity from a multiplicity of cultural and political arenas.³⁶

The contribution made by women to the Vorticist project began to receive serious critical attention in the late 1980s, over a decade after Cork's

the Avant-Garde (New Haven and London: Yale, 2022), pp. 171-281. For a discussion on the English avant-garde and its position in the months leading to the outbreak of war in August 1914, see Michael J. K. Walsh's introduction to *London, Modernism, and 1914*, ed. by Michael J. Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1-19. Samuel Hynes's survey of the social, political and cultural climate of the years immediately preceding the First World War remains one of the key texts for gaining a good understanding of the important issues of the period. See Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Pimlico, 1968). See also George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London: Constable & Co, 1936).

³⁴ *Blast*, ed. by Wyndham Lewis (London: John Lane, 1914).

³⁵ For a primary bibliography of studies of Vorticism, see William C. Lipke, *A History and Analysis of Vorticism* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Madison WI: University of Wisconsin, 1966); Wees, *Vorticism*, 1970; Cork, *Vorticism and its Allies*, 1974; Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, 1976; Paul Edwards, *Blast: Vorticism, 1914-1918* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2000); *Vorticism: New Perspectives* ed. by Mark Antliff and Scott W. Klein, 2013. For a recent, clear and succinct discussion on the definition of Vorticism see Andrzej Gasiorek, 'Vorticism', *The Literary Encyclopedia* < <https://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?UID=1175&rec=true> > [accessed 18 May 2022].

³⁶ Mark Antliff and Scott W. Klein use the term 'Vorticisms' as the title for their introduction to the collection of essays offering new perspectives on the multifarious nature of Vorticism, and its position within the wider European avant-garde landscape. See *Vorticism: New Perspectives*, pp. 1-2.

foundational analysis of the movement.³⁷ Prior to Cork's study, and into the interim period, only passing references are made to the women working within Vorticism in the accounts of scholars working in the field, these studies tending to focus instead on the aesthetics and theatrics of *Blast*, Vorticism's forceful aggression as seen through the practices and polemics of its male participants, and of Lewis's position as its primary protagonist.³⁸ These early studies of Vorticism, whilst inevitably reflecting the prevailing attitudes to artist-women when feminist art history was in its infancy,³⁹ are also over-shadowed by Lewis's dominance as Vorticism's prime-mover, his position further strengthened by his literary achievements, these spanning his proto-Vorticist period of the early

³⁷ A pioneering contribution to the literature on Vorticism in the context of its the women protagonists was made by Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry in their article "Women under the Banner of Vorticism", *Cahier* 8/9 (1988). Brigid Peppin's exhibition of Helen Saunders's work in 1996, staged at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and the Graves Art Gallery in Sheffield, and the accompanying catalogue marks another turning point for the serious analysis of women's contribution to Vorticism. See Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders 1885-1963* (Oxford: Ashmolean, 1996). Lisa Tickner also provides a critical analysis of the work of Dismorr and Saunders in the context of modernism and sexual difference in Lisa Ticker, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism' in *Visual Culture, Images and Interpretations*, ed. by Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. 63-69.

³⁸ See Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*; Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939*; and William C. Lipke *A History and Analysis of Vorticism*; Beckett and Cherry make specific reference to David Peters Corbett's almost exclusive focus on Lewis in the context of modern art in England in his opening of his book *The Modernity of English Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) in Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', *Blast: Vorticism 1914-1918*, ed. by Paul Edwards, p. 59.

³⁹ Brigid Peppin, 'The Thyssen 'Vorticist composition': a new attribution', *Burlington Magazine* (September 2010), 590-594 (p. 594).

1910s through to the mid 1950s,⁴⁰ with some biographical studies contributing to the discourses of English modernism as a predominantly masculine phenomenon and to the construction and fashioning of the figure of Lewis himself.⁴¹ Additionally, the homosocial nature of the art world in the 1910s, and the subsequent recollections of the period by the then surviving protagonists, collaborators, journalists and critics, have further contributed to the phallogocentric discourses of Vorticism, and as a result in the continued opacity of women as distinct actors within and outside of its sphere of influence.⁴²

Despite the critical attempts of the last three decades to recuperate artist-women from the peripheries of the Vorticist endeavour, there remain in existence relatively few analyses of their contributions to the project.⁴³ This can

⁴⁰ For a full bibliography of Lewis's written work see *A Bibliography of the Writings of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. by Bradford Morrow and Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1978).

⁴¹ Paul O'Keeffe's meticulously researched, and darkly humorous biography of Lewis is uncompromising, though it could be argued that the study has contributed to a certain 'aura' that has led to Lewis's lionisation as a modernist in some circles. Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Pimlico, 2001). It must be noted that Paul Edwards's critical analysis of Lewis's extensive oeuvre remains fundamental to Lewis studies. Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis, Painter and Writer* (London: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁴² Deepwell has argued that the homosocial nature of English culture reinforced the links between men that, for accounts of Vorticism 'it is only the conversation between male figures that have been reported', thus rendering the voices of the women mute or at the very least marginalised. See Katy Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', pp. 27-34. Heathcock has also noted that serious engagement with the Vorticist work created by Dismorr and Saunders has regularly been compromised by the habitual focus of historians on anecdotal accounts of their relationships with Lewis and other male Vorticists. See Heathcock, 'Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): Artist, Writer, Vorticist', pp. 44-48.

⁴³ An early discussion on the women Vorticists can be found in a newsletter produced by the Wyndham Lewis Society in the late 1970s. See Margot Speight, 'The Women in the Picture', *The Enemy News*, No. 9, December 1978, pp. 7-11. In addition to the pioneering contributions made by Beckett and Cherry, Tickner

be explained, as scholars have identified, by the lack of surviving Vorticist work available for close analysis,⁴⁴ as well as a paucity of documentary evidence.⁴⁵ Studies have tended to focus on Dismorr and Saunders as signatories of the Vorticist manifesto, with Shakespear's position neglected, despite her being an artist who experimented with a Vorticist aesthetic, this confining her to the shadows and acknowledged largely in relation to her marriage to the poet and

and Peppin, see Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, 'Modern women, modern spaces: women, metropolitan culture and Vorticism' in *Women Artists and Modernism* ed. by Katy Deepwell (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 36-54; Catherine Heathcock, *Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): Artist, Writer, Vorticist*; Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism: Women, Modernity, Modernism' in *Blast: Vorticism 1914-1918* ed. by Paul Edwards (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 59-74; Miranda Hickman 'The Gender of Vorticism: Jessie Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Vorticist Feminism' in *Vorticism, New Perspectives* ed. by Mark Antliff and Scott W. Klein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.119 – 136; Katy Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', and Miranda Hickman 'Beyond the Frame: Reassessing Jessie Dismorr and Helen Saunders' in *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies, Volume 5*, ed. by Günter Berghaus (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015) pp. 21-43 and 44-69. Recent contributions to the field are Alicia Foster, *Radical Women: Jessica Dismorr and her contemporaries* (London: Lund Humphries, 2019); and *Helen Saunders Modernist Rebel* ed. by Rachel Sloan (London: Courtauld Gallery, 2022).

⁴⁴ See Quentin Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles* (London: Fine Art Society, 2000), p. 7. Much of Dismorr's Vorticist work has been lost. A pen drawing, known as *Landscape* is owned by the Victoria and Albert Museum, and *Abstract Composition*, Dismorr's only known surviving Vorticist oil, is owned by the Tate Gallery (Tate ref. T01084). When writing in 1996 Peppin acknowledged that relatively few of Saunders's Vorticist works have been traced. See Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 6. Since then, further works have come to light, these discoveries of vital importance to the field of study and for the reassessment of Helen Saunders's fundamental contribution to the Vorticist project. Of major significance is the recent discovery of Saunders's Vorticist oil of c.1915 *Atlantic City*. The details are discussed in chapter one.

⁴⁵ Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', p. 22. See also Beckett and Cherry 'Modern women, modern spaces: women, metropolitan culture and Vorticism' in *Women Artists and Modernism* ed. by Deepwell, p. 39, Beckett and Cherry 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism' in *BLAST: Vorticism 1914-18*, ed. by Paul Edwards, p. 61.

modernist enabler Pound.⁴⁶ Similarly, Kate Lechmere (1887-1976) has been hitherto regarded mainly as facilitator and financier of the Rebel Art Centre, her important contribution to Vorticism marked by her relationship to Lewis.⁴⁷ However, recent research by Sarah Lolley has provided a welcome and more rounded understanding of Lechmere's pivotal importance to Vorticism's genesis.⁴⁸ In spite of these limitations, and fully cognisant of the necessity to disrupt any tendency to conflate their status as women into a unitary category,⁴⁹ feminist critical engagement with Vorticism has offered varied and productive interpretations of the artefacts and literature produced by the women working within its ambit, as well as more rounded accounts of their lives and work. For example, building on the important work of Heathcock, Alicia Foster has recently situated Dismorr's career in relation to those of her female contemporaries,

⁴⁶ See Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* p. 205; Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 288-9. Much of Shakespear's work remains in a private collection, though selected works are held at the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum at Hamilton University, Clinton, N.Y. A selection of works by Shakespear has been recently reproduced in Ester Coen and Richard Cork, *Futurliberty: Liberty Fabrics and the Avant-Garde* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2023), pp. 64-65. These works are currently held in a private collection.

⁴⁷ See Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 146-150; Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early 20th Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 190-200. William Wees discusses Lechmere's contribution to the Rebel Art Centre in *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, pp. 68-72.

⁴⁸ Sarah Lolley, 'Kate Lechmere, Patronesse du Mouvement Vorticiste', (Masters dissertation, Université Paris 1-La Sorbonne, 2019). I would like to thank Sarah for generously sharing her work with me.

⁴⁹ See Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, 'Women Under the Banner of Vorticism', ISAC (International Centrum voor Structuuranalyse en Constructivisme) *Cahiers*, 8:9 (1988). Beckett and Cherry acknowledge the complexity of dealing with women within the avant-garde, as part of a gendered group operating outside the mainstream, yet necessarily as individuals operating within the vanguard groups.

arguing for the possibility of an interconnected web of relationships between what she terms as ‘radical’ women artists and writers in the early twentieth century.⁵⁰ Most recently, on the occasion of *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, an exhibition of Saunders’s drawings staged at the Courtauld Gallery in 2022, Peppin has provided an updated and comprehensive survey of Saunders’s life and work, exploring the artist’s Vorticist period in the context of her wider body of work.⁵¹ My own contribution to the Courtauld’s exhibition is expanded upon in this thesis.⁵²

Whilst acknowledging fully the importance of the contributions of Heathcock, Foster and Peppin, the critical analyses of Vorticism in the context of gender offered by scholars Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, Lisa Tickner and Miranda Hickman remain highly influential to the shaping of new studies of the field. Drawing on Dismorr’s writings, and the Vorticist imagery produced by Dismorr, Saunders and Shakespear, Beckett’s and Cherry’s analyses have taken a spatio-corporeal approach to the gender of Vorticism to argue for each artist’s strategic engagement with Vorticist ideas in the contexts of new visions of the body, and of its perceived interactions with the modern metropolis.⁵³ In a

⁵⁰ Alicia Foster, *Radical Women: Jessica Dismorr and her Contemporaries* (London: Lund Humphries in association with Pallant House Gallery, 2019).

⁵¹ Brigid Peppin, ‘Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a career’, in *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel* ed. by Rachel Sloan (London: Courtauld Gallery, 2022), pp. 9-27. The exhibition *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel* was presented at the Courtauld from 14 October 2022 until 29 January 2023.

⁵² Jo Cottrell, ‘Helen Saunders as Vorticist – A discreet yet revolutionary spirit’, in *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, pp. 29-44.

⁵³ Beckett and Cherry ‘Modern Women, Modern Spaces: Women, Metropolitan Culture and Vorticism’, pp. 36-54; and ‘Reconceptualizing Vorticism: Women, Modernity, Modernism’ pp. 59-72. See Tickner, ‘Men’s Work?’, p. 64-67 for a

separate intervention Beckett has explored Vorticism's 'Englishness' in wartime, considering the work of Dismorr, Shakespear and Saunders in relation to threats to the island nation and of the shattering of the metropolis.⁵⁴ Beckett's and Cherry's reconceptualisation of Vorticism in these various contexts illuminated the many and varied contributions of women to the Vorticist project from a feminist perspective, offering a rich seam of interpretations as a basis for further research.

Tickner's fundamental and extensive contributions to modernist art history, which necessarily stress the multivalent nature of modernity itself, have provided another pioneering feminist intervention into studies of Vorticism. In an essay focusing on the relationship between modernism and sexual difference in English art from 1905 to 1915, Tickner briefly considers the contributions made by Dismorr and Saunders against the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' in the early years of the twentieth century.⁵⁵ Tickner argues that the seismic changes

discussion on 'feminist modernism' and how this relates to the Vorticist work of Helen Saunders. For new readings of Dismorr's and Saunders's work in the context of 'Vorticist feminism' see Miranda Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism: Jessie Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Vorticist Feminism' in Antliff and Klein, *Vorticism, New Perspectives*, pp. 119-136.

⁵⁴ Jane Beckett, '(Is)land Narratives' in *English art 1860-1914* ed. by David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 195-212.

⁵⁵ Tickner, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism', pp. 42-82. Tickner acknowledges Michèle Barrett's concepts of experiential difference, positional difference in discourse, and, in the psychoanalytical sense, sexual difference, against the 'crisis of masculinity' in the early years of the twentieth century. See Michèle Barrett, 'The Concept of Difference', *Feminist Review* 26 (Summer, 1987), and Tickner's discussion of this paper in Tickner, 'Feminism, Art History, and Sexual Difference' *Genders* 3 (1988). For discussions on 19th and early 20th century references to the crisis of masculinity see Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* (New York: Viking, 1990), pp. 8-9.

brought about by a rapidly modernising society, which brought with it significant changes in the opportunities for women to stake a claim within the new order resulted in a 'cult of rough masculinity and Nietzschean egoism' that was in part triggered by fear of women, effeminacy and feminism.⁵⁶ Posing the question as to why Dismorr and Saunders should wish to align themselves with what she terms as the 'bully boy' tactics of the Vorticist group, Tickner suggests that the very 'Blasting' of effeminacy offered opportunities for each artist to apply an individually distinct Vorticist aesthetic to feminist themes in order to attempt a 'feminist repudiation of femininity'.⁵⁷ In a more recent essay on Vorticism and gender that formed part of the aforementioned *New Perspectives* project, Hickman builds on Tickner's interpretations of Dismorr's and Saunders's work though diverges from them, arguing that each artist's attraction the aesthetics of Vorticism, through its abstract nature and its gestures and rhetoric coded as masculine, allowed Dismorr and Saunders in their individual applications of a Vorticist aesthetic to each counter the '[P]rettiness' associated with English art that was suggestive of feminine weakness and thus inferior artistry.⁵⁸ This,

⁵⁶ Tickner, 'Men's Work?', p. 64.

⁵⁷ Tickner notes that a 'feminist repudiation of femininity', with reference to the work of Saunders, came 'at the cost of swapping feminist content for geometric form', referring specifically to Saunders's drawings known respectively as *Female Figures Imprisoned* (1913) and *Abstract Composition in Blue and Yellow* (1915). However, Tickner advocates both Dismorr's and Saunders's literary contributions to the movement over their visual representations, stating that these are 'stranger and more vivid than their competent abstractions.' As Tickner does not refer to any specific works by Dismorr, this statement suggests a certain value judgement on Saunders's work if we adhere to the theory that both artists were attempting a 'feminist Vorticism'. Tickner, pp. 65-67.

⁵⁸ Miranda Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', pp. 121-122. 'Prettiness' was an insult used by Lewis in his open letter to Roger Fry that marked his break from the Omega Workshops. See Wyndham Lewis, *Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. by

Hickman argues, led each artist towards a 'Vorticist feminism', which in turn allowed Dismorr and Saunders to each pursue professional advancement as artists without the stigma of femininity.⁵⁹

Adjacent to the focus on gender binaries within Vorticism and more broadly within *avant-guerre* modernism, Tickner has in addition argued that for some artist-women working in the early years of the twentieth century, attempts to escape the 'debilitating aspects of femininity' involved adhering to the notion that 'art has no sex'.⁶⁰ Citing Clive Bell (1881-1964) and his inclusion of the Russian Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962) in his 1914 essay *The Debt to Cezanne*,⁶¹ Tickner suggests that 'we have to look outside Britain and not to Helen Saunders for something that smacks of a *feminist modernism*,'⁶² arguing that work by artists such as Goncharova gets nearer to achieving this, being 'more concerned in establishing her identity as a Russian and a modernist, than as a woman.'⁶³ The prioritisation of nationality used as an emancipatory strategy for artists such as Goncharova might correspond with a perception of Dismorr's

W. K. Rose (New York: New Directions, 1963), p.49. For a discussion on the perceived 'fatal prettiness' of English art in the context of Vanessa Bell and her insecurities about her work, see Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)Positionings* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 76-78.

⁵⁹ Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', p. 124.

⁶⁰ Tickner, 'Men's Work?', p. 67.

⁶¹ Tickner, p. 67. Bell's essay is published in Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914).

⁶² Tickner, 'Men's Work?', p. 67.

⁶³ Tickner, p. 67. Tickner notes that Goncharova is the only woman mentioned in Clive Bell's essay, which otherwise covers the work of over twenty other modern artists who are men.

and Saunders's allegiance to the 'Englishness' of Vorticism as signatories of *Blast*. Yet, if taken in conjunction with Deepwell's reading of Beckett's and Cherry's study of Vorticism in relation to gender and the spaces of the city,⁶⁴ a reading that Deepwell suggests:

foregrounds an image of the cosmopolitan woman, active in the city, in politics and fashioning her own destiny tracing her emotional life with reference to the city around her and not to men alone,⁶⁵

the issue of nationality and stake in one's country expressed as an emancipatory strategy through art becomes disrupted by Dismorr's and Saunders's attraction, as cosmopolitans and as women, to Vorticism and its nationalist polemics. The paradox of the image of the cosmopolitan woman active in the city, who asserts herself as an artist in the male-dominated arena of Vorticism, yet as a woman is at the same time subjected to Vorticism's polemics and affects, provides the intellectual pathway for this project. This thesis asks whether a feminist approach to Vorticism, when viewed through the prism of cosmopolitanism both as a mode of being and as a tool for a feminist critique, can provide a deeper understanding of the individual aesthetic strategies employed by the women operating within Vorticism's ambit to counter androcentric bias, which in turn might offer fresh perspectives for further and expanded research in the field.

⁶⁴ Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', pp. 59- 72.

⁶⁵ Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', p. 29.

Cosmopolitanisms, gender, and the critical possibilities of a cosmofeminist approach to Vorticism

The idea of the 'English' Vorticist as embodied by the cosmopolitan woman active in the city, and as a cosmopolitan employing her Vorticist practice as a unique strategy of self-fashioning, requires situating both within the contemporary and contested notion of what it meant to be 'cosmopolitan' in England in the 1910s, as well as within the wider scholarly field of contemporary cosmopolitanisms before a fresh approach to Vorticism from a feminist perspective can be attempted. Lewis's deliberate conflict with 'John Bull' as expressed in 1914,⁶⁶ whilst deemed necessary for him as a radical artist, reflects the myriad of contradictions and anxieties inherent in the cultural and socio-political arenas of London in the pre-war years. This period of flux and upheaval, where the self-regarding supremacy of British imperialism now found itself in direct competition with other foreign powers in the ascendant, and where new artistic and philosophical movements from Europe were gaining influence over the English cultural mind-set,⁶⁷ prompted a deep suspicion of the 'cosmopolitan' amongst conservative critics,⁶⁸ and a proliferation of discourses on nationality

⁶⁶ Wyndham Lewis, 'Kill John Bull with Art', *The Outlook*, 18 July 1914, p. 74.

⁶⁷ See Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Pimlico, 1991).

⁶⁸ Michael J. K. Walsh cites the British art critic and historian Sir Claude Phillips, who in a letter to the *Poetry Review* in October 1914 referred to cultural influences from the European continent as a 'Nietzsche virus', having previously warned the readers of his *Daily Telegraph* column about threat to high art in England being 'entirely of foreign growth'. See *London, Modernism and 1914* ed. by Michael J. K. Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 2.

and identity that served, as Peppis has argued in the context of the literary avant-gardes, as a means of reinforcing the prevailing nationalist agenda.⁶⁹

As a critical concept and a mode of being, 'cosmopolitanism' itself has long been acknowledged to be notoriously unstable. From the first philosophical expression of a cosmopolitan ideology in antiquity,⁷⁰ through Kant to the modern period,⁷¹ scholars accede to the impossibility of any clear genealogy or definition for cosmopolitanism.⁷² In recent years debates on cosmopolitanism as a concept and a practice have broadened significantly within the academy, opening up numerous lines of enquiry, potential theoretical directions, and attempts at

⁶⁹ See Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics and the English Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1-19.

⁷⁰ Cosmopolitan was a term used by the Cynics of the 4th century BC. Diogenes of Sinope is commonly regarded as the father of the term. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 6:63, ed. and transl. by Robert Drew Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925). Diogenes's declaration, 'I am a citizen of the world' is viewed by most as a negative form of world citizenship – one of extreme individualism affiliated to no social grouping. See Pauline Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism. The Philosophical Ideal of World Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 2. For a broad overview of the development of cosmopolitanism as a philosophy see Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown 'Cosmopolitanism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014), ed. by Edward N. Zalta <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/cosmopolitanism/>> [last accessed 29/06/23].

⁷¹ Kant's Enlightenment position is more rooted, arguing that to be cosmopolitan is an attitude of recognition, interest, openness and concern towards one's fellow human beings, whilst still acknowledging one's attachment to one's home country. See Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 1-2. See also Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View' and 'Towards a Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch' in *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. by H. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For a succinct description of Kant's philosophy and its legacy, see Costas Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007), pp. 159-164.

⁷² See *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Carol A. Breckenridge and others (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 1.

definition that offer particular views on modern identity.⁷³ For critical approaches to modernism, cultural theorist Janet Lyon acknowledges that as a term cosmopolitanism is ‘notoriously over-determined’,⁷⁴ noting that by its very speculative nature and thus inevitable malleability it has been open to much criticism, leading cosmopolitanism’s defenders to modify its definition either by shifting emphasis from the universal to the local, or viewing it as a mechanism for the dismantling of the structures of centre and periphery.⁷⁵ These modified cosmopolitanisms have proved fruitful for scholars of the humanities working in

⁷³ Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism*, p. 4. See also Janet Lyon, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Modernism’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Mark Wollaeger with Matt Eatough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 388.

⁷⁴ Stemming from its fundamental universalism Lyon offers a succinct overview of cosmopolitanism’s range of applications in Janet Lyon, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Modernism’, p. 389.

⁷⁵ Lyon, p. 390. Lyon lists the ‘types’ of modified cosmopolitanisms as ‘rooted, situated, discrepant, vernacular, critical, postcolonial, agnostic, and limited.’ A selection of key texts from the substantial literature on cosmopolitanism from a range of disciplines is listed here. For a cross-disciplinary exploration of cosmopolitanism see *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, Practice* ed. by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). For discussions on the plurality of cosmopolitanism and its theoretical possibilities, see *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Carol A. Breckenridge and others (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002). For a recent theoretical exposition on political cosmopolitanism in the context of human rights, see Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). For discussions on the ‘new’ cosmopolitanisms and the complex relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism see *Cosmopolitics. Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* ed. by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). For debates about cosmopolitanism and its relationship to patriotism, see *For Love of Country. Debating the Limits of Patriotism* ed. by Martha C. Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). For a critique of cosmopolitanism and its perceived self-indulgence, see Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

the field of modernism in early twentieth century culture,⁷⁶ its meanings and applications generally focused towards cosmopolitanism as an intellectual programme, or as a cultural or social experience.⁷⁷

Cosmopolitanism in relation to gender has gained critical attention in recent years, largely in response to the necessity for a reconsideration of cosmopolitanism as a concept, prompted by the nationalism, multiculturalism, and globalisation of the late twentieth century, and through the debates about these terms the implicit gendering of cosmopolitanism as masculine.⁷⁸ Pitching their arguments for a multi-perspectival cosmopolitanism, Carol A. Breckenridge, Homi K. Bhaba and others have put forward the possibility of 'cosmofeminism' as an alternative response to gender bias in these opposing fields, suggesting that this concept might offer:

⁷⁶ See Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006); Mica Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture, and the Normalisation of Difference* (Oxford and New York: Berg 2007), and Nava, 'Cosmopolitan Modernity: Everyday Imaginaries and the Register of Difference', *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 19, 1-2 (2002), pp. 81-99. Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001); Judith R. Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁷⁷ Judith R. Walkowitz provides a comprehensive review of the literature on theoretical approaches to cosmopolitanism in the introduction to Walkowitz, *Nights Out. Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 3-5.

⁷⁸ In their acknowledgment of cosmopolitanism as a concept operating on a grand scale, Breckenridge and others recognise the risks of restricting the notion of any cosmofeminism to that of the domestic sphere, arguing that any 'intimate sphere' should be 'conceived as part of the cosmopolitan.' *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Breckenridge and others, pp. 1-14.

a critically engaged space that is not just a screen for globalization or an antidote to nationalism but is rather a focus on projects of the intimate sphere conceived as part of the cosmopolitan.⁷⁹

Taking the position that cosmopolitanism should not be identified by the 'singular, privileged location of European thought and history', these critics propose that cosmopolitanism should be thought of in the plural, and as such, feminism, or feminisms could be used to open new avenues of enquiry.⁸⁰

Feminist approaches to critical thinking about cosmopolitanism in the humanities have proved fruitful for attempting a deeper understanding of the modes and strategies of women living and working within the constraints of patriarchy and for countering its affects, with the theoretical approaches of two critics working in field of literary modernism being pertinent to this project. Through analysis of the works of key modernist writers of the early twentieth century in the context of cosmopolitanism, Jessica Berman has situated their work in terms of community as a means to challenge the universal, masculine status quo, defining their cosmopolitanism as the 'recognition of both affiliation, and its limits'.⁸¹ Berman focuses on the notion of 'community' to argue that through their fiction modernist writers were attempting to articulate new forms

⁷⁹ *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁰ Breckenridge et al suggest that the notion of cosmofeminism as a critical alternative to cosmopolitanism would 'open up a new understanding of the domestic, which would no longer be confined spatially or socially to the private sphere.' *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 7-10. See also Ksenija Vidmar-Horvat, 'A Wandering Paradigm, or Is Cosmopolitanism Good for Women?', *QJB: Querelles: Jahrbuch für Frauen – und Geschlechterforschung*, 16 (2013), <10.15461/3> [last accessed 02/12/16]. Vidmar-Horvat's paper offers a brief overview of the theoretical development of cosmopolitanism from the perspective of feminist writers Julia Kristeva, Seyla Benhabib, Nira Yuval-Davis and Judith Butler.

⁸¹ Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction*, p. 16.

of society as an alternative to the dominant categories of affiliation, which, as exemplified by the work of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) Berman argues are inherently masculine.⁸² Also working with Woolf, Rebecca L. Walkowitz applies Michel De Certeau's concept of avant-garde strategies of resistance in the culture of everyday life to demonstrate that as a writer Woolf attempted to suspend national distinctions through the employment of particular 'tactics' in her writing, modes of being and thinking that Walkowitz terms as 'cosmopolitan style'.⁸³ Woolf's oft-repeated and politically loaded statement:

as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world⁸⁴

⁸² Focusing on Woolf's writing in the inter-war period, at a time when the writer was actively engaging with politics, Berman argues that through the subject creations of distinct communities of cosmopolitan selves or cosmopolitan voices Woolf effectively creates through these communities a feminist discourse that aspires to critique political life in Britain at the time. See Berman, pp. 114-156.

⁸³ Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, p. 29. Walkowitz argues that the cosmopolitan 'style' she identifies in the authors' texts discussed allow for alternative distinctions to emerge from 'the prevailing oppositions between postcolonial and British, East and West, margin and center, non-European and European'. See also Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. by Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. xii-xv. Walkowitz identifies a tactic of 'evasion' in Woolf's refusal to directly address colonialism, war or fascism in her writing, arguing that Woolf instead subtly articulates how these policies shape the patriarchal society in which she lives. Walkowitz. p. 31 and pp. 79-105.

⁸⁴ See Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, new edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 185. Berman points to the fact that Woolf is not merely proclaiming her cosmopolitan sympathies but is also highlighting her exclusion from the notion of citizenship itself. See Jessica Berman, *Modernist fiction, cosmopolitanism, and the politics of community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 22.

is seen by Walkowitz as evidence of a cosmopolitan 'tactic' of the 'outsider' who can critique the patriarchy from the margins.⁸⁵

In seeking, as Berman and Walkowitz do, to establish a historicised concept of modernist cosmopolitanism, and relating this to the plural concepts of contemporary cosmopolitanisms, whilst at the same time acknowledging the problems inherent with ideological frameworks of contemporary cosmopolitanism, the ideas put forward by both scholars provide a useful foundation on which to consider the artefacts and literature produced by the women working within Vorticism's sphere of influence as cosmopolitan women. The 'tactics', and the 'recognition of affiliation and its limits' that Walkowitz and Berman identify as cosmopolitan in Woolf's writing, have resonance with Deepwell's foregrounding interpretation of Beckett and Cherry's feminist study of Vorticism,⁸⁶ particularly when considered alongside the 'feminist modernism' identified by Tickner in modernist women's art practice as a feminist repudiation of femininity, and the 'Vorticist feminism' Hickman sees being expressed by Dismorr and Saunders as a feminist adoption of a masculine aesthetic to counter the 'feminine'.⁸⁷ These strategies, coupled with Breckenridge and others' identification of the possibilities of cosmofeminism as a method of critical engagement that might allow for a focus on the intimate sphere that is not restricted to the domestic,⁸⁸ prompts a deeper concern with

⁸⁵ Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, p. 81.

⁸⁶ Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', p. 29.

⁸⁷ Tickner, 'Men's Work?', pp. 65-67; Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', p. 134.

⁸⁸ Breckenridge et al, pp. 8-9.

the intimate towards a focus on the inner realm of the emotional life. This opens a pathway for a cosmofeminist approach to Vorticism that may be traced *from the perspective* of the intimate sphere of the mind space conceived as part of the cosmopolitan and as separate from a focus on the domestic,⁸⁹ that enables a fresh assessment of the Vorticist women's activities and aesthetics to offer a better understanding of their locational allegiance to Vorticism as English modernists, and at the same time allows for the identification of new and multi-perspectival expressions of Vorticism by these women as cosmopolitan artists.⁹⁰ Cosmofeminism, as an analytical tool used to offer (re)interpretations of visual and literary material, or deployed as a way to enter into a dialogue across time with material artefacts to reach new meaning, might shift the accepted narratives around Vorticism and gender to reveal individual strategies of self-fashioning that can be identified as feminist yet are highly personal modes of resistance to the insular philistinism of English culture and at the same time to Vorticism's overt macho-nationalism.

The possibilities presented by cosmofeminism as a critical approach to Vorticism and gender requires being alert to the fundamental necessity to treat

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ I am indebted to Gill Perry and David Peters Corbett whose valuable insights have prompted me to articulate more clearly my methodological approach to Vorticism through the conceptual lens of cosmofeminism. Perry's recommendation to consult Marsha Meskimmon's work, and in turn my understanding of Meskimmon's argument for a 'cosmopolitan imagination' expressed through visual art as identified in the work of selected contemporary practitioners, has allowed me to better consider Corbett's perception of the variations of 'Vorticisms' expressed by the women artists operating within its ambit as distinct from Lewisian Vorticism. See Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (London and New York, Routledge, 2010), pp. 5-10.

each woman working within Vorticism's ambit as an autonomous individual as opposed to being thought of collectively under the blanket category of 'woman'.⁹¹ The elusive concept of the 'Englishwoman', whilst on the surface appearing to suggest a paradox as a categorising label, is useful for considering these women as individuals who chose, in varying degrees of commitment, to align themselves to the Vorticist project and to position themselves within its borders as distinctly English modern movement. As contributors to Robert Coll's and Philip Dodd's study of English national identity, and in their attempts to navigate and define the nebulous category of the 'Englishwoman', social theorists Alice Jane Mackay and Pat Thane refer to the clearly defined idea of the 'classic English man' of the late 19th and early 20th century as the embodiment of certain qualities such as 'leadership, courage, justice and honour' to which there is no female equivalent.⁹² Drawing on contemporary popular magazines, religious, pseudo-scientific, and sociological texts and oral histories of the period, Mackay and Thane demonstrate that English women were repeatedly defined in terms of 'race' as opposed to nation, thought of as essential, biological and spiritual and only defined in their relation to men, yet in their unfixed status outside of the nation-state they were at the same time expected to be patriotic.⁹³ Acknowledging

⁹¹ Beckett and Cherry, 'Women Under the Banner of Vorticism', ICSAC (International Centrum voor Structuuranalyse en Constructivisme) *Cahiers*, 8:9 (1988), p. 129-130.

⁹² Alice Jane Mackay and Pat Thane, 'The Englishwoman', in *Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, ed. by Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, 2nd edn (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 217.

⁹³ Mackay's and Thane's analysis demonstrates the impossibility of the notion of the English woman in the late 19th and early 20th century in contrast to the clear and defined English man, the English woman's 'otherness' often created by women themselves. Mackay and Thane, 'The Englishwoman', pp. 217-254.

Walkowitz's notion of the envisaging of new forms of community as enabled through a cosmopolitan-styled 'outsider looking in' as a mode of critique,⁹⁴ what this project proposes is that a cosmofeminism is a 'tactic'⁹⁵ evoked from the 'inside' by each of the Vorticist women as an Englishwoman, who in her state of otherness as counterpart to the English Vorticist, is free to enact strategies of resistance to structures of power from within the intimate sphere of the mind, yet enabled through the aesthetics of Vorticism as a necessary mode of modernist expression symbolising cultural renewal.

This thesis focuses then on the dual concepts of the 'cosmopolitan woman active in the city'⁹⁶, and the cosmofeminist strategies enacted 'from the inside' via Vorticism to offer a fresh assessment of the lives and work of the women who were active within Vorticism's ambit. Taking Roberts's painting *The Vorticists* as the way in, and alert to the composition's setting as an important space on the city's map rather than its centre/periphery configuration, a spatial approach to Vorticism and gender in the context of cosmopolitanism is adopted to reassess the activities of the Vorticist women who negotiate the contested terrain of early modernism in London to ask how such a reconsideration of their work might provoke a fresh assessment of their positions as creative individuals active in the spaces of the city. At the same time, it seeks to understand their individual strategies of self-identification 'from the inside' as women to ask how they confronted and reconciled their own positions within Vorticism's necessary

⁹⁴ Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, p. 81.

⁹⁵ Walkowitz, p. 81.

⁹⁶ Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', p. 29.

borders as Vorticists and as cosmopolitans, and as such a reimagining of Roberts's composition is made possible to allow the women to take their place as important actors at the Vorticist table on their own terms.

Overview

This thesis is composed of two parts. Part one focuses on London as nexus of early modernism in England to offer a fresh assessment of the position and individual practices of the Vorticist women negotiating and responding to the social spaces of the avant-garde. Acknowledging the work of cultural historian Peter Brooker, who has argued for the importance of 'place', as opposed to 'type' to offer a better understanding of the cultural landscape of modernist practice in the capital,⁹⁷ part one interrogates key sites of avant-garde activity that are crucial to an understanding of artist-women's attraction to Vorticism. Drawing on personal anecdotes, fragmentary sources and contemporary press reports, and juxtaposing these with close analysis of selected visual and literary works by the artists under scrutiny, it is demonstrated that the women connected to Vorticism were visible and significant actors on the cosmopolitan stages of London's early avant-gardes, rather than mere understudies waiting in the wings.

Chapter one is concerned with amplifying the presence of the women Vorticists as 'cosmopolitan wom[e]n active in the city',⁹⁸ within the spaces of

⁹⁷ Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London*, p. viii-ix.

⁹⁸ Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', p. 29.

early modernist activity in London that carry significance for the promotion of Vorticism. Focusing specifically on the Tour Eiffel restaurant and taking Roberts's portrayal of its importance for the Vorticist group as pivot, three strategic spaces for the evolution of modernism are encountered on route, the women's dialogic interaction with these spaces leading them to the Tour Eiffel tableau. Through close analysis of selected works produced by the Vorticist women that can be connected to these dynamic social spaces in which artists, writers and critics gathered and talked and where alliances were formed, the presence of the women under scrutiny is traced to argue for their importance as significant actors within Vorticism's orbit. Writing in 1921 Ford Madox Ford recalled the groups that flourished during the years immediately preceding the First World War, cohorts in which 'friendships, enthusiasm, self-sacrifice [and] mutual aid' could flourish from the comradeship of avant-garde movements.⁹⁹ Following Ford's cognisance of the importance of these groupings as vehicles for dialogic exchange,¹⁰⁰ and considering the importance of dialogues for the formation of meaning, these sites of modernist interaction pivotal for the genesis of Vorticism, its staging, and for the expression of its aesthetic will be explored to amplify the voices of the women Vorticists amid the cacophony of dominant others.

⁹⁹ Ford Madox Hueffer, *Thus to Revisit: Some Reminiscences* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1921), p. 64.

¹⁰⁰ Ford states, 'A solitary thinker will take aeons to make his voice heard: seven working in concert will forty-nine times shorten the process'. Ford Madox Hueffer, *Thus to Revisit*, p. 64. See also William Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, p. 37.

Another important space for modernist interaction on London's map is discussed in chapter two. The arrival in 1912 of the European-style cabaret on the capital's night scene, and the prominence of Frida Strindberg's Cave of the Golden Calf on the public's consciousness provided artists with the opportunity to involve themselves directly in the material realisation of these spaces of performance, and benefit from their notoriety.¹⁰¹ Lewis was a prominent figure among the group artists commissioned by Strindberg to decorate the interior of her cabaret club with the brief to create an aesthetic that, according to the cabaret's manifesto would 'reveal the reality of the unreal,'¹⁰² the commission providing an incubator for the development of a Vorticist aesthetic and a high-profile vehicle for the promotion of the English avant-garde.¹⁰³ Whilst it is not

¹⁰¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the Cave of the Golden Calf see Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early 20th Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 61-115. Cork provides a detailed account of its genesis and of the key players involved, employing forensic analyses of archival materials to offer a valuable reconstruction of it may have appeared to contemporary audiences. See also Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 33-38. For a discussion on Strindberg's cabaret, Lewis and popular culture see Lisa Tickner, 'The Popular Culture of Kermesse: Lewis, Painting, and Performance, 1912-13', *Modernism/Modernity* 4.2 (1997), pp. 67-120. See also, Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 79-115. For a discussion on the cabaret in literature see Nathan Waddell, 'Bohemian Retrospects: Ford Madox Ford, Post-War Memory and the Cabaret Theatre Club' in *The Modernist Party* ed. by Kate McLoughlin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 192-209. For further discussions see Jo Cottrell, 'Bohemia in London: Frida Strindberg's Cabaret Theatre Club', *Into the Night. Cabarets and Clubs in Modern Art*, ed. by Florence Ostende with Lotte Johnson (London: Prestel in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 2019), pp. 86-101; David Cottingham, *Radical Art and the Formation of the Avant-Garde* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022), pp. 264-281.

¹⁰² 'Aims of the Programme of the Cabaret Theatre Club' from the unpaginated brochure entitled *Cabaret Theatre Club. The Cave of the Golden Calf* dated May 1912 and published from 9 Heddon Street, London W1.

¹⁰³ For a fascinating discussion on the significance of Strindberg's cabaret for the popular promotion of London's avant-garde, see Lisa Tickner, 'The Popular

clear whether the women working within the orbit of a nascent Vorticism visited Strindberg's cabaret, it will be argued that this new space of performance, its popularity, its aesthetic and its modernity provided a rich resource for these artists that is expressed in the work they produced during this period. Inspired by the entrepreneurial women who were the prime movers in establishing the cabaret into contemporary consciousness, the importance of the cabaret for the women Vorticists will be considered in three contexts: adventure, diversity, and possibility. As a space that promised adventure, the arrival of the cabaret on to the conservative landscape of imperial London's night-scene is charted to offer context, with Dismorr's poetry mapped against the cityscape to identify subtle references to the cabaret, thus revealing its importance as a destination for the cosmopolitan woman active in the city. Leaving the city's streets behind, the cabaret is then explored as a source of inspiration for the women Vorticists to celebrate diversity. The exoticised interior of the Cave of the Golden Calf, an aesthetic produced by Lewis and others to create Strindberg's 'reality of the unreal' will be juxtaposed with drawings by Dismorr and Saunders to argue that the work of the women Vorticists counteracted the club's unsettling aesthetic and its conflicted heterotopology as situated at the centre of empire by producing imagery that celebrates diversity without borders. The chapter concludes by considering the cabaret as an abstract space of possibility for the women under scrutiny. Taking Lewis's theory of the Vortex and the irresolvable

Culture of Kermesse: Lewis, Painting, and Performance 1912-13, *Modernism/modernity*, 4:2 (1997), pp. 67-120. See also Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, pp. 89-99.

duality of its 'disastrous polished dance',¹⁰⁴ it will be argued that the very idea of the cabaret space as imagined by Saunders and Shakespear offered a space of empowerment for each artist to enact Vorticist collaboration as desired, the spaces created providing a panacea for daily life that was restricted. Overall, chapter two argues that the cosmopolitan cabaret as a space of performance provided the Vorticist women with an aesthetic vehicle for a celebration of modernity in its diversity, and at the same time offered a conceptual space for cosmofeminist experimentation with transgression within Vorticism's borders.

Part two of this thesis signals a shift from the active engagement with the physical spaces of modernist exchange as experienced and as imagined by the cosmopolitan woman in the city, towards the realms of the textual and of the abstract, arenas that it will be argued hold equal, if not greater importance than physical space if a deeper understanding of the motivations and situations of the women under scrutiny can be reached. Whereas the focus on the lived spaces examined in part one allows for the physical presence of the cosmopolitan woman to be traced, part two is concerned with the intimate sphere of the inner life as evoked by Dismorr and Saunders as committed Vorticists for the enactment of cosmofeminist strategies of resistance yet necessarily expressed via Vorticism, spaces in which ideas can be freely expressed and used as a possible route to empowerment and emancipation.

Chapter three explores the particular introspective strategies employed by each of Dismorr and Saunders as expressed within and as influenced by the utopian spaces of the 'little magazines' as sites of modernist discourse and

¹⁰⁴ Wyndham Lewis, 'Our Vortex', in *Blast*, No. 1, ed. by Wyndham Lewis (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1914), p. 149.

vehicles for new forms of expression that encouraged aesthetic and ideological experimentation, radical opinion, and intellectual debate.¹⁰⁵ Each artist's individual trajectories towards Vorticism will be charted and consideration will be given to their position from within its borders to attempt to reconcile their unique positions from two interlinked perspectives - Vorticism as an aggressively masculine movement, and the complex terrain of Vorticism's assumed nationalism. Acknowledging, via Tickner and Hickman, each artist's adoption of Vorticism as a useable aesthetic to counter the stigma of femininity, and focusing on the female body as a site of instability, this chapter argues that Dismorr and Saunders subtly resisted the nationalist rhetoric of the Vorticist project published in the pages of *Blast*, despite this in itself being a Lewisian strategy of differentiation necessarily enacted to present Vorticism as a distinctly English project within the European avant-garde.¹⁰⁶ It will be argued that Dismorr and Saunders each attempted to achieve distance from this strategic nationalism through a cosmofeminist turn inwards towards a contemplation of the self in flux influenced by the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1941), that for each artist offered a strategy of defence as a means of easing the societal

¹⁰⁵ Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible, 'Little Magazines and Modernism: An Introduction', *American Periodicals*, 15:1 (2005), p. 3. For a general introduction to little magazines in Britain and Ireland, see *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume 1, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-26.

¹⁰⁶ Janet Lyon, 'Militant Discourse, Strange Bedfellows: Suffragettes and Vorticists before the War', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 4:2, 1992, p. 105. For a discussion on the genesis of *Blast* and Vorticism in the context of Lewis's 'anti-collaboration', see Paul Edwards, 'Foreword' in Wyndham Lewis, *Blast* (1914; London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), p. vii.

burden of the contained, institutionalised female body towards an open, cosmofeminist sensibility.

Strategies of defence and self-preservation, and the tensions between experience and its abstraction as articulated in the work of Dismorr and Saunders are further explored in the final chapter, in which the interior space of the mind as a site of cosmofeminist resistance is expressed by each artist through the figure of the protective shell. It will be argued that Dismorr and Saunders each articulated, via Vorticism, a conceptual carapace that was employed as a mechanism designed to provide a safe space for experimentation and to protect the self in challenging circumstances. Analysis of each artist's preoccupations with the corporeal continues from the viewpoint of introspection, the shell as articulated acting as a Vorticist armour that provides a protective environment in which an imagined 'wild' body can live and express itself freely, uncultivated and unconditioned by society, in compensation for the reality of the physical body in society that is constrained. It will be argued that Dismorr and Saunders each fashioned, via Vorticism, defence mechanism that allowed for a cosmofeminist exploration of desire shielded from personal anxieties and the debilitating forces of daily existence, in an attempt at creating conditions for the actual self to grow stronger.

Ultimately, this thesis considers the women connected to Vorticism in the context of the spaces they inhabited, imagined and envisaged during the period of their allegiance to Vorticism. It investigates their presence, interactions, achievements, and desires as cosmopolitan artists living and working within Vorticism's orbit to form a more rounded view of their contribution to the visual and literary culture of London as cosmopolitan metropolis at a time of cultural,

social and political upheaval, whilst at the same time recognising their transient positions as Englishwomen resistant to the unpalatable structures of patriarchal imperialism.

PART ONE: COSMOPOLITAN WOMEN ACTIVE IN THE CITY

CHAPTER ONE

Tracing Herstories: Vorticist voices amplified in the dialogic spaces of early modernism.

Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders walk through the door of the Tour Eiffel restaurant and are greeted by the waiter, while the rotund figure of Rudolf Stulik, with arms outstretched presents a slice of *Gâteau St. Honoré* to the Vorticist group.¹ In Roberts's imaginative painting of *The Vorticists* (fig.1) the discarded napkin suggests that the main course has finished, yet the conversation looks set to continue over glasses of champagne and scattered copies of *Blast*. Saunders holds her own copy as she makes her entrance, with Dismorr following behind, the latter acknowledging the waiter with a familiar wave.² The scene is congenial. Pound lounges in his chair to the lower left of the scene, whilst Cuthbert Hamilton (1884-1958) with cigarette in hand is seen

¹ William Roberts recalled that the cake, a favourite of Lewis's, 'a large circular custard tart ornamented round its edge with big balls of pastry.' William Roberts, 'Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist', first published in *The Listener*, 21 March 1957, reprinted in *An English Cubist: William Roberts, 1895-1980* ' < <http://www.englishcubist.co.uk/lewis.html> >[accessed 20 March 2020].

² Deepwell notes that the clutch bag or purse Dismorr holds in her right hand has been variously interpreted as a reference to the artist's financial independence, suggesting that a focus on this insignificant detail further undermines Dismorr's position as a talented artist. See Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, p. 25. Dismorr was born into a prosperous family and received a private income. See Catherine Heathcock, 'Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): Artist, Writer, Vorticist', p.1; Quentin Stevenson has noted that Dismorr received an allowance from her father until 1924, coming into her inheritance in 1925. Quentin Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles*, pp. 7-8.

above him. Next to Hamilton the quietly composed, yet conspiratorial self-portrait of Roberts can be identified, hands clasped resting on a copy of *Blast* as if surveying his own scene. An enthusiastic-looking Frederick Etchells (1886-1973) leafs through the pages of *Blast*, Edward Wadsworth (1889-1949) leaning back next to him, holding his hat in his right hand. The magnified figure of Lewis occupies the centre stage. 'Vorticism, in fact, was what I, personally, did, and said, at a certain period', stated Lewis in 1956,³ and his voice may have always spoken loudest within the arenas of Vorticist intent. Yet, in the same year that Lewis made his provocative statement, he himself acknowledged the presence of those working with him 'beneath the banner of Vorticism' as 'only a couple of women and one or two not very reliable men', naming each of Dismorr and Saunders and describing them as 'both very gifted women [who] would be willing to go down to history in my company'.⁴ This statement speaks for both Dismorr's and Saunders's centrality to the multifarious Vorticist project, and alludes to a collective effort in its realisation.

In his discussion of Roberts's painting of the Vorticists Peter Brooker has argued that by the very act of creating an idealised picture of collective camaraderie Roberts effectively produces a counter-image to what he saw as Lewis's self-mythology and its critical sustainment, the artist challenging the

³ Wyndham Lewis, 'Introduction' in *Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism* (London: Tate Gallery, 1956), p. 3.

⁴ Wyndham Lewis, 'The Vorticists', *Vogue*, September 1956, p. 216. Quentin Stevenson quotes the passage in full in his unpublished book on Dismorr to argue that Lewis was 'clearly not writing about facilitators – he is paying tribute to the talent and loyalty of both.' Quentin Stevenson, *Looking for Jessica Dismorr*, unpublished typescript, February 2023, p. 28.

viewer to consider the actual 'situated sociality of modernist art.'⁵ Read in conjunction with the written histories of Vorticism Roberts's firmly situated representation of a social gathering at the Tour Eiffel appears to amalgamate at least three notable events for the movement - the aftermath of a celebratory 'Blast dinner' marking the publication of the inaugural Vorticist magazine, whilst the painting's title gestures to the staging of the first Vorticist exhibition at the Doré Gallery and the publication of *Blast's* second number.⁶ According to Pound's memoirs the dinner to celebrate the first number of *Blast* took place at Dieudonné's restaurant in Ryder Street on 15 July 1914.⁷ Kate Lechmere, in her capacity as the magazine's financial backer, is known to have been there as guest of honour.⁸ Dorothy Shakespear was probably in attendance, being recently married to Pound,⁹ but it is not recorded if either Dismorr or Saunders, as signatories of the manifesto, were present. Similarly, Dismorr and Saunders each contributed work to the exhibition at the Doré, but there is no record of either

⁵ Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London*, p. 131.

⁶ The 'Blast dinner' took place at Dieudonné's Restaurant on Ryder Street on 15 July 1914. See Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, p. 237. The first Vorticist Exhibition opened at the Doré Gallery in June 1915, one month prior to the publication of *Blast*, War Number. For a discussion on the Vorticist exhibition at the Doré Galleries see Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'Reforming with a Pick-Axe: The First Vorticist Exhibition at the Dore Galleries in 1915', in *The Vorticists* ed. by Mark Antliff and Vivien Green (London: Tate, 2010), pp. 59-65. See also Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 275-280.

⁷ Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, p. 237.

⁸ Lechmere gave this information to Cork in an interview in the 1970s. See Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 237.

⁹ Cork notes that Shakespear accompanied Pound at an 'Imagist Dinner' two days after the *Blast* event on 17 July 1914, this suggesting that she would have probably been in attendance with him on 15 July. See Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 259.

artist's individual interactions with the planning and staging of the exhibition, or of their response to its critical reception.¹⁰ A Vorticist event that is known to have taken place at the Tour Eiffel is anticipated in Roberts's already loaded image. On 23 February 1916 a 'Vorticist Evening' was held to showcase the decorations that Lewis had created in one of the rooms at the restaurant.¹¹ Similarly, there is no record of Saunders having attended this event, or any of the others staged at the restaurant during this period,¹² despite being involved in the Tour Eiffel project. Examples such as these draw attention to the notable absence of two key players who were active on Vorticism's stages, the possibility of their presence, or acknowledgement or acceptance of their absence unremarked upon or unrecorded in Vorticism's written histories.

¹⁰ In published correspondence between Ezra Pound and the American collector John Quinn (1870-1924) in August 1915, Pound discusses the Doré show, telling Quinn that Lewis 'did all the work of getting it up'. *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts* ed. by Harriet Zinnes (New York: New Directions, 1980), pp. 234-5. It should be noted that Pound was in the process of trying to sell Lewis's work to Quinn at the time. See also Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'Reforming with A Pick-Axe': The First Vorticist Exhibition at the Dore Galleries in 1915' in *The Vorticists*, p. 59.

¹¹ For a comprehensive discussion on the decoration of the 'Vorticist Room' at the Tour Eiffel restaurant see Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, pp. 214-247; for a more recent intervention on the project, arguing for Saunders's importance as a collaborator on this project, see Jo Cottrell, 'Helen Saunders as Vorticist' in *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, pp. 29-44. The invitation card to the 'Vorticist Evening' is reproduced in Cork, p. 236, and he notes that the events that occurred at the event have gone unrecorded. Cork, p. 238.

¹² According to a separate invitation card there were opportunities to view the Vorticist decorations from 11 January until 1 February 1916 between the hours of 11am and 6pm. See Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 220. Two days after the 'Vorticist Evening' 23 February 1916 the *Daily Mirror* reported that among the 'queer people who call themselves Vorticists' who were "'At Home" at the Restaurant on Wednesday evening', were the actress and suffragist Edith Craig and her partner and fellow campaigner Christabel St. John, along with the actress Olive Terry. Lewis is described as 'the presiding genius', *Daily Mirror*, 25 February 1916, p. 10.

Such lacunae form the focal point of this chapter. Through attention to Vorticism's 'stages', important sites of exchange for early modernist activity on London's cultural landscape, the gaps and silences obscuring the presence of the women within Vorticism's histories will be traced and explored to amplify the 'herstories' of the Vorticist women in the spaces as 'cosmopolitan women active in the city.'¹³ The retrospective portrayal of the presence of Dismorr and Saunders together with their Vorticist colleagues in the social setting of the restaurant prompts a reassessment of the painting's compositional dynamics, away from one of centre and periphery, towards a concern with its setting as a social space frequented by notable groupings and personalities during Stulik's tenure as proprietor. This was a lived space of dialogic exchange for artists and writers and where discussions of significance occurred,¹⁴ and it was a space remembered, imagined, and reimagined within the written histories of modernism.¹⁵

¹³ Katy Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists In/Out of Vorticism', p. 29.

¹⁴ In 1909 the poet-philosopher T.E. Hulme (1883-1917) and poet and translator F.S. Flint (1885-1960) chose the Tour Eiffel as the venue for the inaugural gathering of their new group that was to become the Imagist movement in poetry. See Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 214. Press reports in 1912 record that other notable artistic gatherings took place at Stulik's establishment. The Irish Literary Theatre entertained the touring Ulster Players at the restaurant in February, and the newly formed Studio Club of poets chose the restaurant for their inaugural gathering, holding what was known as their 'freak dinner' there on a monthly basis thereafter. 'Ulster Players in London', *Northern Whig*, 12 February 1912, p. 8; 'Poets As Animals', *Daily Mirror*, 13 February 1912, p. 5.

¹⁵ For example, the Tour Eiffel features regularly in Nina Hamnett's autobiography. Nina Hamnett, *Laughing Torso* (New York: Ray Long & Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1932); and the socialite Nancy Cunard immortalised the restaurant in verse. Nancy Cunard, *Sublunary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), pp. 94-95. Wyndham Lewis uses the Tour Eiffel as the inspiration for his 'Restaurant Gambetta', in his play *The Ideal Giant*. See Wyndham Lewis: *Collected Poems and Plays* ed. by Alan Munton with an introduction by C. H. Sisson (Manchester:

The Image as Nexus for a Constellation of Dialogues

From the viewpoint of 1962 Roberts captures on canvas an image of his own version of Vorticism, its personalities, events, and interactions in a symbolic setting, based on his memories, influenced by his feelings, and motivated by his strategy. The viewer of the image, from their own time and place imagines the conversations that may have taken place in this space, the viewer's own thoughts in dialogue with Roberts's as recorded and as perceived across time, communicated through the marks on the canvas and influenced by Roberts's printed utterances of indignation and dissent in his *Vortex Pamphlets*.¹⁶ Cognisance of the visual layering of temporalities as materially encapsulated by Roberts in a recognisable place of Vorticist interaction, these temporalities viewed through and within space and digested and discussed by others in the pursuit of meaning, prompts a multi-perspectival concern with dialogues and the dialogics of space that is philosophically grounded in the spatial thinking of cultural historian and philosopher of language Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975).¹⁷ In

Carcanet, 1979), pp. 123-139. The Tour Eiffel also featured in W. Seymour Leslie's novel *The Silent Queen* (1927) as inspiration for the fictional 'The Big Wheel' restaurant, also inspiring the 'Mont Agel' in Michael Arlen's 1922 novel *Piracy*. See Hugh David, *The Fitzrovians: A Portrait of Bohemian Society 1900-55* (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), pp. 123-124.

¹⁶ John David Roberts, 'A Brief Discussion of the Vortex Pamphlets', *An English Cubist: William Roberts, 1895-1980*, <<http://www.englishcubist.co.uk/vortexpamphlets.html>> [last accessed 9 March 2023].

¹⁷ Focusing on the literary form of the novel, the concept of dialogics for Bakhtin is the way in which meaning evolves as a result of converging interactions between author, the text and the reader. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* ed. by Michael Holquist and transl. by Caryl Emerson and Michael

literature, Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, where 'spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought out, concrete whole'¹⁸ to make sense of situated space and its relationship to historical time, accords with the concern here with multi-perspectival dialogues traced within space and through time within the pictorial image to achieve new meaning. However, rather than fixing the image as a chronotope, the multiplicity of voices evoked by Roberts in his image, and the historiographical voices in commentary of its purported meaning create an ever-evolving space in which meaning remains fluid.

This notion of continuous dialogic interplay has affinities with recent research methodologies important for the field of pedagogy. For educator Rupert Wegerif, dialogic space is formed where existing perspectives are augmented with new perspectives to see things from at least two points of view at once, creating a space in which learning can take place.¹⁹ Drawing on the work of Bakhtin and other key thinkers in the field of dialogic theory,²⁰ Wegerif cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) as one who provides, in his view, the most eloquent evocation of dialogic space:

Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981). For a clear introduction to Bakhtin's spatial theory see Julian Holloway and James Kneale, 'Mikhail Bakhtin: Dialogics of Space', in *Thinking Space* ed. by Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 71-88.

¹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 84.

¹⁹ Rupert Wegerif, 'What is Dialogic Space?', *Rupert Wegerif* <https://www.rupertwegerif.name/blog/what-is-dialogic-space> [Last accessed 6 December 2021].

²⁰ Wegerif draws on the work of Bakhtin, Martin Buber, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Wegerif, 'What is Dialogic Space?'

Someone speaks, and immediately the others are now but certain divergencies [sic] by relation to his words, and he himself specifies his divergence in relation to them. Whether he speaks up or hardly whispers, each one speaks with all that he is, with his 'ideas', but also with his obsessions, his secret history which the others suddenly lay bare by formulating them as ideas.²¹

Wegerif places particular emphasis on Merleau-Ponty's notion of divergence. Rather than meaning being 'built up' methodically by dialogue within a particular space, dialogue is a process where, as Wegerif notes 'each new claim diverges in a new way and introduces a new structure of the whole',²² where meaning in any space is ever evolving. For Merleau-Ponty, divergence takes place 'whether [one] speaks up or hardly whispers'.²³ Such philosophical ideas concerning dialogues, language, and space present a method for tracing dialogues and interactions in the social spaces explored in this chapter, many of which are barely whispers and traces. By bringing attention to these dialogues the firm presence of the women connected to Vorticism might emerge from the shadows and their presence amplified within these spaces. Dialogues occurring within a space as documented and as imagined, and dialogues occurring via the space through time as materially recorded, as visually traced and as (re)interpreted, opens the possibility of reaching new meaning that in turn may offer new lines of scholarly enquiry for the field of Vorticism and gender. Such an approach, which acknowledges Henri Lefebvre's conceptual triad of space as

²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. C. Lefort, trans. A. Lingis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 119. Quoted in Wegerif, 'What is 'Dialogic Space'?'

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

experienced, designed, and perceived,²⁴ enables a reimagining of the social and ideological interactions that took place in communal settings, and reassesses those of historiography, which in turn might dismantle the hitherto accepted hierarchical and patriarchal histories and allow a space for reinterpretations to give the women a voice.

Four dialogic sites are encountered on the journey towards the Tour Eiffel tableau. The Poetry Bookshop, brainchild of the poet Harold Monro (1879-1932), founder and editor of the magazines *Poetry Review* and *Poetry and Drama*, and influential for his role as a supporter of poets and of poetry as an art form, was an important meeting place for modernists and remained so up until the 1930s.²⁵ It was a focal point for consumers of new poetry, and an interactive space for readers, writers, and artists to meet each other in passing and to congregate more formally to enjoy a regular programme of public poetry readings that were an important aspect of Monro's commitment to take poetry 'out of the study' and to the people.²⁶ As a platform for showcasing the new, and for championing the work of women writers in a male-dominated milieu, the Bookshop's public poetry readings acted not only as a touch point for avant-garde discourse and the dissemination of ideas, it also brought to the forefront dialogues between lesser-discussed writers and artists, what Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia Smyers have

²⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, transl. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 33.

²⁵ For detailed accounts of Harold Monro and the Poetry Bookshop see Dominic Hibberd, *Harold Monro, Poet of the New Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Joy Grant, *Harold Monro and the Poetry Bookshop* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967).

²⁶ Dominic Hibberd, *Harold Monro, Poet of the New Age*, pp. 113-127.

called 'another Bloomsbury'.²⁷ As a cosmopolitan artist who regularly moved within avant-garde circles in Europe, Dismorr was also a poet and a writer whose published work, which includes poetry, notes, and articles, appears in *Blast*, the *Little Review*, and the *London Mercury*, while her unpublished work includes poetry and three short plays.²⁸ Focusing on the divergent dialogues connected to the Poetry Bookshop and its sphere of influence as a dialogic space of modernist activity, and juxtaposing these with Dismorr's poetry, the artist's active presence is traced to Monro's establishment to open up the possibility of amplifying Dismorr's voice amid the cacophony of others in an important space for early modernism in London.

Dismorr's journey continues to the Rebel Art Centre, the short-lived headquarters and intended workshop of the group of artists coalescing around a nascent Vorticist aesthetic. A venture financed by Lechmere, who purchased a lease on two rooms at 38 Great Ormond Street and who was active in preparing and decorating the spaces in preparation for visiting students, the Centre was

²⁷ Hanscombe and Smyers provide an early survey on the then lesser-known lives and works of modernist women writers in the early twentieth century, their investigations uncovering not only the scope of their work but revealing networks between these writes that had been hitherto obscured. Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for their Lives, The Modernist Women 1910-1940* (London: The Women's Press, 1987) pp. 1-13. Bonnie Kime Scott also uncovers connections between modernist writers which she refers to as 'a tangled mesh of modernists' in her work on the gender of literary modernism. See *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 10-11.

²⁸ For a useful overview of Dismorr's published poetry and examples, see Alicia Foster, *Radical Women: Jessica Dismorr and her contemporaries* (London: Lund Humphries, 2019), pp. 91-106. Other unpublished poetry is held in a private collection, along with Dismorr's unpublished and undated plays, *The Intruders*, *Inconclusions*, and *The Lake*. I am currently working on *The Intruders* for a forthcoming publication.

launched as a platform intended for the promotion of avant-garde ideas and aesthetics, as a teaching facility and as a workshop for the delivery of commissions.²⁹ Alongside Lechmere, both Dismorr and Saunders were active members within the Centre, contributing to its activities and producing work under its aegis. Whilst it is evident that all three women involved with the Rebel Art Centre took the venture seriously, the contributions made by Dismorr and Saunders in their efforts to promote Vorticism in practice were over-shadowed by Lechmere who, despite her important role as instigator, used the Centre as a vehicle for self-promotion. The Rebel Art Centre is viewed as a dialogic space of conflict and collaboration, where Vorticism on the one hand was ostentatiously staged by the vociferous yet put into practice by those who remain silent.

The practical application of Vorticist ideas was publicly presented at the Doré Gallery in the summer of 1915. The Vorticist Exhibition was the first opportunity for the artists involved to present themselves as a coherent Vorticist group.³⁰ However, the show's timing was unfortunate as the escalation of the war and the greater public awareness of its horrors led to shifting priorities, the press either harshly criticising the exhibition or ignoring it altogether. Dismorr contributed four works to the exhibition and Saunders contributed six. Whilst

²⁹ For accounts of the genesis, promotion and decline of the Rebel Art Centre as the headquarters of the Vorticist group, and for Lechmere's involvement in the initiative see Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 145-184, also Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, pp. 190-202. Sarah Lolley provides a fresh intervention on Lechmere's role as financial backer of the scheme. Sarah Lolley, 'Kate Lechmere, Patronesse du Mouvement Vorticiste', (Masters dissertation, Université Paris 1-La Sorbonne, 2019).

³⁰ For a discussion on the Vorticist exhibition at the Doré Galleries see Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'Reforming with a Pick-Axe: The First Vorticist Exhibition at the Dore Galleries in 1915', in *The Vorticists*, pp. 59-65. See also Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 275-280.

Shakespear never exhibited her work in public, the drawings that she produced at this time reflected Vorticism's principal concerns as communicated by Lewis. The exhibition can be considered as the zenith of the Vorticist project, though arguably constructed by Lewis as a platform to explain his own theories. At the same time, it was a marker of Vorticism's inevitable demise, with many of the artists involved enlisting to contribute to the war effort through active military service and by serving on the home front. Whilst the Vorticist exhibition at the Doré Gallery can be seen as a space for the practical consolidation of Lewis's theories, the works by the women Vorticists presented within the exhibition, and as inspired by it, both demonstrate the individuality of each woman's practice as English modernists that at the same time speaks to more global concerns.

The chapter concludes with a focus on the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel, the iconic space of dialogue for Vorticism immortalised by William Roberts. As social spaces restaurants formed part of a vibrant network of meeting places frequented by the avant-garde in the first decades of the twentieth century. These were lived spaces in which, as Brooker has observed, key players could 'parade, be seen and hold court, to plot and plan, to write and edit in, and to paint.'³¹ In 1915 the Tour Eiffel's proprietor Rudolf Stulik commissioned Lewis to decorate one of the first-floor dining rooms of the restaurant. Saunders is known to have worked together with Lewis on the project, although the exact nature of her contribution remains unclear.³² Cork has assumed that Saunders acted in a subordinate capacity as assistant to Lewis on the project, whilst Beckett and Cherry suggest 'the possibility of a more direct and equal

³¹ Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London*, p. 113.

³² See note 11.

collaboration'.³³ Two Vorticist studies by Saunders of c.1915 can now be linked to the project and will be analysed to argue that Saunders contributed two designs to the Tour Eiffel project to argue that Saunders's work can rival the contributions to the project made by Lewis, the exact details of his contributions also still open to debate. Close analysis of the work produced by each artist during this period reveals a visual dialogue between Lewis and Saunders as they worked together on the commission to argue that whilst Lewis is credited as the sole creator of the scheme for the Vorticist Room, it was in fact a wholly collaborative project.

Overall, chapter one attempts to reveal, through analysis of new material from the archive, informed speculation and current discourse, the firm presence of the women connected to Vorticism and amplify presence of these women and their often whispered 'Vorticist voices' within the spaces of early modernist London. By being attentive to the divergences that form the dialogues discussed, those that are contemporaneous with the actions of the women under scrutiny and those of historiography, amplification of the presence of the women Vorticists within the shared spaces of the avant-garde can be attempted. The tracing of presence through attention to dialogic space may allow for a clearer picture of these women to emerge from the shadows in which they have hitherto been obscured, and in so doing amplify the presence of the women connected to Vorticism as cosmopolitan women, active in the city, in politics and fashioning their own destiny.³⁴

³³ Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p.229. Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', pp.64-65.

³⁴ Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists', pp. 21-43.

Dialogic journeys through space: towards the Vorticist Room at the Tour Eiffel Restaurant

In 1914 Lewis took rooms at 4 Percy Street, close to his studio in nearby Fitzroy Street.³⁵ Lewis's living quarters quickly became the meeting place for the Vorticists, and thanks to the generosity of Stulik and his admiration for Lewis, the group often continued their discussions at dinner at the Tour Eiffel.³⁶ In 1915, a significant year for the Vorticists that can be viewed as the movement's zenith before the war intervened and the group inevitably dispersed, the Tour Eiffel was likely to have been chosen as the space in which to celebrate two significant occasions, given its proximity to Lewis's flat.³⁷ As it captures the essence of this significant period for the Vorticists, and in its depiction of the arrival of Saunders and Dismorr at the Tour Eiffel, Roberts's painting allows the viewer to envisage this vibrant space of animated conversation, and to imagine the individual journeys that the protagonists may have made as they arrive at their meeting place to toast their achievements and to discuss future plans. Lewis would have had to walk but a few steps from his rooms to be greeted, as a regular and a favourite, to Stulik's establishment.³⁸ Perhaps visiting a publisher

³⁵ Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius* (London: Pimlico, 2001), p. 163. O'Keeffe's meticulously researched biography of Wyndham Lewis provides valuable details of Lewis's many and various living arrangements.

³⁶ William Roberts, 'Wyndham Lewis, The Vorticist', *The Listener*, 21 March 1957, quoted in Cork, p. 215.

³⁷ The first Vorticist exhibition was staged at the Doré Gallery in New Bond Street in June and July of 1915, and in July the second number of *Blast* was published. Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 215.

³⁸ Cork, p. 215-216.

or two along the way, Pound may have arrived on foot to better display his bohemian credentials by looking “every inch a poet”.³⁹ Saunders is depicted as an individual with a serious, business-like attitude. She arrives holding a copy of *Blast* firmly under her arm as if having completed a useful day’s work organising the distribution of Vorticist publications.⁴⁰ Self-confessed as being ‘solitary by nature’,⁴¹ Saunders nonetheless arrives at the Tour Eiffel with an air of purpose, perhaps amused by the prospect of a boisterous evening yet relishing the opportunity to discuss new projects. Dismorr, one might reasonably surmise, has travelled through the West End by bus from her studio on the Kings Road, Chelsea,⁴² the journey offering her the opportunity to view the cityscape and its

³⁹ Douglas Goldring recalled in his autobiography *Odd Man Out* that Pound ‘contrived to look “every inch a poet”’. See Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, p. 23. For an account of Pound’s trajectory as a poet in London see Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character, The Life of Ezra Pound* (New York: Delta, 1988), pp. 97 – 371.

⁴⁰ Saunders took responsibility for the distribution of the second number of *Blast*. Saunders’s address, 4 Phené Street, is given in the magazine as the location where copies could be obtained. See Wyndham Lewis, *Blast, War Number*, (1915; Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981), p. 7. See also Brigid Peppin, ‘Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a Career’ in *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 12.

⁴¹ Saunders makes this comment in a letter to Dismorr written in late 1917, whilst discussing a possible change in direction in her artistic practice. The letter is held in the collection of Quentin Stevenson. When recalling her friend Harriet Shaw Weaver at Vorticist dinners at Gennaro’s restaurant, Saunders is quoted as saying, ‘She was as silent in “company” as I was myself and I can’t remember anything that either of us said!’ Jane Lidderdale and Mary Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver, Harriet Shaw Weaver 1876-1961* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 119-120. Peppin has argued that, whilst Saunders may have been socially reticent, she was confident in her core identity as an artist. See Peppin, *Helen Saunders* (1996), p. 24.

⁴² Dismorr was known to be working at her studio on the Kings Road, Chelsea in 1913. See Catherine Heathcock, *Jessica Dismorr*, p. 33.

throng as *flâneuse*; the purse she holds in her hand equally likely to have been a notebook serving to record the fleeting observations made along the way and used as inspiration for her poetry.⁴³

The expressive power of poetry was important for Dismorr, and remained so throughout her life.⁴⁴ As a writer she contributed prose poetry and notes to the second number of *Blast*,⁴⁵ and subsequent work was published in the *Little Review* in 1918 and 1919 under the foreign editorship of Pound, and subsequently under the poet and publisher John Rodker (1894-1955),⁴⁶ her

⁴³ In many of Dismorr's literary contributions to the second number of *Blast* the narrator occupies the position of detached observer of the city and its inhabitants. As Jane Beckett has suggested with reference to *London Notes*, Dismorr positions herself as a Lewisian 'crowd master', who, in the mode of a twentieth century Baudelaire or Simmel, sees the metropolis through the eyes of detached masculinity as a means of objectifying it and as such assert control over it. See Beckett, '(Is)land Narratives', in *English Art 1860-1914* ed. by David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry, p. 203. Dismorr's prose poem *June Night* is both a documentary of a journey made by an independent female protagonist through the West End of London, and an experiment in aesthetic form. See *Blast, War Number*, p. 71 and pp. 67-68. Lewis's *The Crowd-Master* can be found on pp. 94-102.

⁴⁴ By 1934 Dismorr was frequently corresponding with the poet Roger Roughton (1916-1941). Dismorr was instrumental in introducing Roughton to Lewis and to T.S. Eliot. See Quentin Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles*, p. 11. There is evidence that Dismorr had provided Roughton with funds to support his writing. A letter from Roughton to Dismorr referring to the financial support is held in the papers of Sheila Watson at the University of Toronto. These are held in Special Collections, John M. Kelly Library, University of St. Michael's College, Sheila Watson Fonds, Series 8.0, Sub-series 8.3, Sub-sub series 8.3.4. Watson's papers also include letters to Dismorr from other significant writers of the early part of the twentieth century: T. S. Eliot, Stephen Spender and David Gascoyne.

⁴⁵ Dismorr contributed six pieces of writing to *Blast* - 'Monologue', 'London Notes', *June Night*, *Promenade*, *Payment* and *Matilda*. *Blast*, pp. 65-69.

⁴⁶ The following poems were published in the *Little Review*: 'Convalescent in the South' (4:9, 1918); 'Matinée' (4:11, 1918); 'Spring' (6:4, 1919); 'The Enemy', 'Twilight', 'Landscape', 'S-D-' (6:4 1919). For a useful discussion on the *Little Review*, see Alan Golding, 'The Little Review 1914-29', *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 2, North America, 1894-1960, eds

poetry also later published in the *London Mercury*.⁴⁷ Manuscripts of her published and unpublished poetry exist in a private collection, and she also gave her poetry to as gifts to friends.⁴⁸ Dismorr was also an avid consumer of the poetry of others and her taste was notably cosmopolitan, evidenced by the contents of her book collection, which is known to have spanned the late 19th century up until the year of her death in 1939.⁴⁹ Records show that she owned a significant number of poetry anthologies, some carrying details of handwritten notes in volumes given as gifts. Many are from family members, and those from friends include messages from Saunders, from the writer and publisher Douglas

Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 61-84.

⁴⁷ 'Interior' and 'Poem' appeared in the *London Mercury* in January and August 1935. A summary of Dismorr's published and unpublished writing can be found in Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 91. For further information on the *London Mercury*, see J. Matthew Huculak, 'The London Mercury (1919-39) and Other Moderns', in Brooker and Thacker, vol. 1, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955, pp. 240-259.

⁴⁸ 'Convalescent in the South' and 'Matinée' formed part of a collection of poems entitled "Poems 1918" given by Dismorr as a gift to the American sculptor John Storrs and his wife Marguerite. The manuscript is held in John Henry Bradley Storrs papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Whilst both poems were published in the *Little Review*, the Storrs manuscript also includes a further seven poems. There are some discrepancies with the texts published in the *Little Review*. Richard Warren regards the texts in "Poems 1918" as the definitive versions, as he notes that according to Pound the typesetter for the *Little Review* was "a bugger", suggesting either artistic license or incompetence. See Richard Warren, 'Jessie Dismorr Writings 1915-22' <<https://richardawarren.wordpress.com/jessie-dismorr-writings-1915-22/>> [last accessed 17 June 2022]. Foster details the discrepancies in the texts in Foster, *Radical Women*, pp. 91-106.

⁴⁹ A recorded, but incomplete list of the contents of Dismorr's book collection is held in a private archive. Dismorr owned an extensive range of publications, in English and in French, German and Dutch, and she was also a consumer of several periodicals of the European avant-garde. The contents of Dismorr's collection would be fascinating subject for future study.

Goldring (1887-1960), and from Dismorr's life-long friend and collaborator the artist Catherine Dawson Giles (1878-1955).⁵⁰ These inscriptions offer valuable glimpses into a private life, the publications themselves also prompting speculation about their importance for the reader and to the circumstances of their acquisition.

A significant number of the titles in Dismorr's collection were drawn from French literature and include books by writers whose poetry was promoted to British readers in *Poetry and Drama*, the most widely read 'little' magazine of 1913.⁵¹ It was edited by Harold Monro, himself a poet and a champion of poetry as a living, expressive art form to be spoken aloud rather than merely remaining on the page.⁵² In conjunction with his editorship of *Poetry and Drama* Monro created the Poetry Bookshop, a publishing house and venue dedicated to the crafting, reading, public recitation and promotion of poetry, with a mission to

⁵⁰ Dismorr had first met Giles in 1904 at Étampes when they were studying with Max Bohm. See Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles*, p. 3, and Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 13. Many of Dismorr's unpublished writings are preserved, transcribed in Giles's handwriting. Giles's transcriptions of Dismorr's writings are held in a private collection. Extracts are published in Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, pp. 91-106.

⁵¹ It is recorded that Dismorr owned books by Paul Claudel (1868-1955), Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), and André Gide (1869-1951). These writers and others were championed by the critic F.S. Flint in his quarterly column 'French Chronicle' in *Poetry and Drama*, which also drew extended attention to debates on futurism. See Cyrena N. Pondrom, *The Road from Paris, French Influence on English Poetry 1900-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 201-203.

⁵² Dominic Hibberd, *Harold Monro: Poet of the New Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 120. For a useful discussion on Monro's commitment to the recitation of poetry see Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception 1905-1920* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 54-82. See also Joy Grant, *Harold Monro and the Poetry Bookshop* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), pp. 60-85.

nurture writers regardless of school, clique or style.⁵³ His primary objective in launching his bookshop was to facilitate a convivial social setting in which the sounds of the words of poetry could be collectively enjoyed.⁵⁴ Dismorr owned four publications by Monro's enterprise; *Georgian Poetry: 1911-1912*, published immediately prior to the Bookshop's official opening in January 1913, the first edition of *Des Imagistes*, edited by Pound and published in 1914, a new edition of *The Farmer's Bride*, a collection of poems by the novelist and poet Charlotte Mew (1869-1928), first published by Monro in 1916, Mew having had her work read aloud to an audience at the Bookshop in late 1915,⁵⁵ and a copy of *The Chapbook*,

⁵³ Dominic Hibberd, *Harold Monro*, p.4. The Poetry Bookshop opened on 1 January 1913. By March that year Monro's programme of poetry readings were gaining a wide reputation. These events were efficiently organized by Alida Klemantaski (1892-1969), a trained actress and an active participant in the struggle for women's suffrage who continued to run the bookshop in Monro's absence during the war years and after his death in 1932, until the shop's final closure in 1935. See Hibberd, pp. 128-130. Poets known to have read at the bookshop include W.B. Yeats, Ford Madox Ford (then Hueffer), Rupert Brooke, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and F.T. Marinetti. See Joy Grant, p. 83. Douglas Goldring, who had met Marinetti 'in the company of Harold Monro' and who had previously contributed a number of his own poems to Marinetti's journal *Poesia*, recalls 'the descent on London of the Franco-Italian Futurist F.T. Marinetti [...] in addition to readings of his works accompanied by the banging of drums and loud noises [...] organized a show of Futurist painting.' See Douglas Goldring, *South Lodge*, p. 64. For an expanded discussion on Monro's relationship with Marinetti and Futurism see Robyn Sarah Jakeman, 'Italian Futurism and the Development of English Literary Modernism, 1909-1915' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College, 2019), pp. 97-107. I am grateful to Robyn for her insights on The Poetry Bookshop.

⁵⁴ Hibberd, p. 120.

⁵⁵ Alida Klemantaski championed the work of Charlotte Mew and was instrumental in persuading Monro to publish *The Farmer's Bride*. See Carrie J. Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 110 -111. Mew was reticent about reading her work in public but was present when Klemantaski read on her behalf at the Bookshop in November 1915. See Diane Collecott, "Another Bloomsbury", in *Networking Women: Subjects, Places Links Europe-America: Towards a Re-Writing of Cultural History, 1890-1939* ed. by Marina Camboni, (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e

the third journal edited by Monroe first published as *The Monthly Chapbook* in 1919.⁵⁶ These publications, and recorded fragments from the archive, taken in conjunction with extracts of Dismorr's own poetry provide the raw material with which to trace Dismorr to the Poetry Bookshop, and as a poet amplify her presence among the writers and artists within its orbit as one of the important dialogic spaces on London's the cultural scene where, in Monroe's own words, ideas would 'meet and concentrate, become expressed, sifted, and circulated'.⁵⁷

Dubbed the 'Parnassus off Holborn' by the *Daily Herald*,⁵⁸ the Poetry Bookshop was as different as it was removed from other London bookshops in

Letteratura, 2004), p. 68. See also Joseph Bristow, 'Charlotte Mew's Aftereffects', *Modernism/modernity*, 2, 16 (2009), 255 – 280 (p. 268). Klemantaski used her contacts to promote the work of women writers, her efforts contributing to an interconnecting and international network of writers, artists, editors and facilitators active on London's cultural landscape in the 1910s and 1920s to rival the now canonical names of Pound, Lewis and Eliot, thus contributing to what Bonnie Kime Scott has called 'a tangled mesh of modernists'. See Diane Collecott, "Another Bloomsbury", p. 68; *The Gender of Modernism*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott, pp. 10-11. There is to date no evidence of Dismorr attending the reading of Mew's work in November 1915. However, there may be some significance in the fact that Dismorr's close friend Catherine Giles met Mew through the poet and her relative Catherine Dawson Scott (1865-1934). There is evidence in Scott's diaries that Mew had been to see an exhibition of Giles's work in March 1914 at 'the salon and Women's International' and had afterward visited Giles's studio where Mew was persuaded by Scott to read her poetry. See Quentin Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles*, p. 23; Carrie J Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose*, pp. 113-114. The Women's International Art Club, originally called the Paris International Art Club was established in 1900, and afforded women the chance to show their work to the public. For further reading see Katy Deepwell, *Women Artists between the Wars, 'A Fair Field and No Favour'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 198-255.

⁵⁶ For a discussion on *The Monthly Chapbook* see Mark S. Morrisson, 'The Cause of Poetry' in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 1, pp. 405-427.

⁵⁷ Harold Monroe, 'The Bookshop', *Poetry Review*, I:II (November, 1912), p. 500.

⁵⁸ 'Parnassus, London W. C.', *Daily Herald*, Wednesday 1 January 1913, p. 8.

terms of its location.⁵⁹ Only accessible through ‘a dark and gloomy back street’,⁶⁰ the shop was situated at the eastern fringes of Bloomsbury in a slum area at 35 Devonshire Street, close to the intersection of what the *Pall Mall Gazette* termed the ‘cheerful’ Southampton Row and ‘gloomy’ Theobald’s Road.⁶¹ The Bookshop was, however, strategically placed for the British Museum, the Slade School and the Central School of Arts and Crafts,⁶² and was also a new neighbour to the radical *New Freewoman* magazine,⁶³ the Bookshop’s proximity to these important sites undoubtedly facilitating a cross-fertilisation of dialogues between literary, political and cultural networks.⁶⁴ Whilst well placed for the encouragement of cultural and intellectual exchange, prospective visitors to the

⁵⁹ Charing Cross Road was one of the established thoroughfares for bibliophiles of all persuasions. Osbert Sitwell reminisces about his visits to the bookshops there which ‘constituted a favourite saunter in a free hour’. Sitwell mentions Jäschke’s, where one could find new editions of foreign books and art magazines, “The Bomb Shop” the radical anti-capitalist bookshop, and a shop run by dance historian C. W. Beaumont. Osbert Sitwell, *Laughter in the Next Room* (London: The Reprint Society Ltd, 1949), pp. 34-36.

⁶⁰ ‘Our London Letter’ *Wigton Advertiser*, Saturday, 31 January 1914, p. 7.

⁶¹ ‘Talk of the Town’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, Saturday, 4 January 1913, p. 2. The street is now called Boswell Street, having been renamed in 1927. See *UCL Bloomsbury Project* <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/streets/devonshire_street.htm> [Last accessed 25 November 2021].

⁶² Joy Grant, *Harold Monroe and the Poetry Bookshop*, p. 61.

⁶³ The *New Freewoman* and subsequently *The Egoist* had office space at Oakley House, Bloomsbury Street. Susan Solomon, ‘Introduction to *The New Freewoman* and *The Egoist*’, *Modernist Journals Project* <<https://modjourn.org/introduction-to-the-new-freewoman-and-the-egoist/>> [Last accessed 2 December 2021].

⁶⁴ According to his friend Arundel Del Rey, Monroe thought that people interested in poetry were more likely to frequent the areas surrounding the British Museum rather than the West End. See Joy Grant, p. 61.

Poetry Bookshop were provided with colourful descriptions in the press of its immediate location. The literary critic for *The Bystander* wrote:

In one of the narrow streets of Theobald's Road, which is where those roofless trams dive down into the earth, there was opened the other day the Poetry Bookshop. Such an unusual enterprise naturally deserves mention in any Literary Log, for the Poetry Bookshop is not merely an emporium for selling verse over the counter: it provides board and lodging for poets, and it is to have a journal, *Poetry and Drama*, of its own. It is the kind of shop you might expect to find in a short story by H. G. Wells – a story with miracles and magic, a shop which had mysteriously inserted itself in between the greengrocer and the butcher, hitherto the closest of neighbours. It is an altogether romantic place which should be visited even by those who never read a line of poetry in their lives, for the Poetry Bookshop is like nothing else in the world.⁶⁵

Evocative of the fantastic, whilst simultaneously placing it firmly of the vernacular, Monro's enterprise is here presented to readers as a beacon to art shining alone amid the buildings of commerce, and a haven for poesy where anything might be possible. Visitors brave enough to venture into this neglected district,⁶⁶ which according to the recollections of the writer Osbert Sitwell was 'given over to screaming children, lusty small boys armed with catapults',⁶⁷ were welcomed into a deliberately homely environment. Here, men and women were equally encouraged to linger and browse amongst the bookshelves and enjoy, should they so wish, the attention and guidance of the proprietor himself, thus

⁶⁵ Ralph Straus, 'The Literary Log', *The Bystander*, Wednesday, 22 January 1913, p. 204.

⁶⁶ Hibberd, pp. 114-115; Grant, p. 61.

⁶⁷ Osbert Sitwell, *Laughter in the Next Room*, p. 34.

creating a sanctuary for quiet reading and contemplation as well as a space for conversation, debate, and discussion, away from the cacophony of London's streets.⁶⁸

In his complimentary review of *Streets, a book of London verses*, a book of poems by Douglas Goldring that was published in the first number of *Poetry and Drama*, Monroe criticises the attempts made by other modern poets to truly capture the 'impressions, sights, sounds, sentiment, effects' of the city, arguing that London as 'most straggling and heterogeneous of all cities' could not be captured in a long poem.⁶⁹ Clearly delighting in the inventive nature of Goldring's work, Monroe praises *Streets* for its series of short rhymes that offer snapshots of London life:

Mr Douglas Goldring knows his London thoroughly... he has taken certain streets as typical of characters and scenes, and he has made songs about them, natural clear catches, that one feels he might almost have invented as he walked along, or as he waited at some corner.⁷⁰

A well-connected writer, Goldring had been the editor of *The Tramp*, a short-lived literary magazine of the outdoors that offered, as Helen Southworth argues 'a distinctly modernist re-imagining' of the geographical, which marked a

⁶⁸ Joy Grant refers to the homely atmosphere of the bookshop, 'a coal fire in winter' and 'the occasional presence of Monroe's cat and Mrs. Monroe's dogs' completing the impression of intimacy and domesticity. Joy Grant, p. 64.

⁶⁹ *Poetry and Drama*, 1:1 (March 1913), p. 64. See *Modernist Magazines* <<http://www.modernistmagazines.com/media/pdf/296.pdf>> [Last accessed 24 November 2021].

⁷⁰ *Poetry and Drama*, 1:1 (March 1913), pp. 64-65.

transitional shift from the insular English consciousness.⁷¹ Goldring published early work by Lewis in *The Tramp* as well as extracts of Marinetti's Futurist manifesto,⁷² and was later to collaborate with Lewis, Dismorr, Lechmere and Pound on the production and promotion of the first number of *Blast* in which Monro, who was friendly to Lewis and sold copies of *Blast* in his bookshop, was amongst those 'blessed'.⁷³ An inscription written by Goldring to Dismorr in her copy of his book *A Country Boy and Other Poems* shows that Dismorr and Goldring were already in friendly dialogue prior to their collaboration on *Blast*, their having met in 1911 in the south of France.⁷⁴ The friendship was evidently

⁷¹ Helen Southworth, 'Douglas Goldring's *The Tramp*: An Open Air Magazine (1910-1911) and Modernist Geographies', *Literature & History*, 18:1 (2009), pp. 35-53.

⁷² Helen Southworth, 'Douglas Goldring's *The Tramp*, pp. 35-53. See also Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 22-23. Goldring is also notable for his reminiscences of Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt, and the circle around the *English Review*, which provides an invaluable register of the notable personalities of the period. See Douglas Goldring, *South Lodge* (London: Constable 7 Co Ltd, 1943).

⁷³ Goldring assisted Lewis in finding a suitable printer for *Blast* in 1914. Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 251; Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, p. 158. According to Kate Lechmere, who part-funded the publication, Dismorr and Lewis spent mornings at the Rebel Art Centre 'trying to translate *Blast* to a puzzled and bewildered typist'. See Jeffrey Meyers, 'Kate Lechmere's "Wyndham Lewis from 1912"', *Journal of Modern Literature* 10:1 (1983), p. 163. Goldring and Dismorr were both present at the inaugural tea party that preceded the publication of *Blast*, held at Lewis's studio in Fitzroy Street. Douglas Goldring, *South Lodge*, pp. 67-68. *Blast*, p.28. The name 'Munroe' is listed among the blessed. See *Blast*, p. 28; Dominic Hibberd, p. 119. The distinguished poet and luminary Henry Newbolt (1862-1938) is also among the blessed. Newbolt gave an address at the opening of Monro's Bookshop.

⁷⁴ Goldring's inscription reads: "Jessie Dismorr from Douglas Goldring. August 25th 1911 (Souvenir des Baux!)." Private collection. See also Douglas Goldring, *South Lodge*, pp. 67-68.

still warm in 1915 when Goldring wrote to Dismorr to accept an invitation and to offer friendly remarks about life in 'The Great English Vortex'.⁷⁵

Though similarly inspired by the experience of London, its topography and its characters, Dismorr's poetic contributions to the second number of *Blast* in 1915 are in marked contrast to Goldring's earlier romantic observations of city life. Refracted through the prism of Vorticism, Dismorr's writing is charged with the lived experience of an independent woman navigating and observing the streets of the metropolis.⁷⁶ In her prose poem *Promenade*, published in the second number of *Blast*, Dismorr appears to embrace the experience of the unfamiliar:

With other delicate and malicious children, a horde bright-eyed
with bodies easily tired, I follow Curiosity, the reticent
And maidenly governess of our adoration.

I am surprised to observe, in a converging thoroughfare,
Hunger the vulgar usher, whipping up his tribe of schoolboys,
who, questing hither and thither on robust limbs, fill the air
with loud and innocent cries.

The suspicion suddenly quickens within me that there is
an understanding. It is possible that we are being led by
different ways into the same prohibited and doubtful neighbour-
hood.⁷⁷

By definition meaning to take a leisurely walk in a public place to meet or be seen by others, *Promenade* registers the contradictory position of women's

⁷⁵ Goldring writes to Dismorr on 8 May 1915 to accept an invitation and offers friendly remarks about life in 'The Great English Vortex'. The letter is held in the Sheila Watson papers at the University of Toronto. See note 44.

⁷⁶ See note 43.

⁷⁷ Dismorr, 'Promenade', *Blast War Number*, p.69.

engagement with the city's streets as both spectator and spectacle that is charged with a sense of fear and anxiety. As Beckett and Cherry have argued, the ability to move freely across the city was a crucial element of the modern woman's claiming of an urban presence and for artist-women's participation in the avant-garde, yet 'questions of propriety (held by men or women) may well have shaped the conduct of middle-class women in 'unconventional' locations.'⁷⁸ The poem hints at an imminent danger for the woman on the street who ventures into a 'prohibited and doubtful neighbourhood'⁷⁹, and the words and phrases Dismorr employs are suggestive of a particular location on London's cultural map well known to writers and connoisseurs of poetry. If read as autobiography, the writer records her adventurous journey, as inquisitive poet-protagonist, to the Poetry Bookshop where the 'converging thoroughfare' marks a break from the comfortable Southampton Row towards the unsettling obscurity of Devonshire Street off Theobald's Road.⁸⁰ Dismorr uses marginalising observations of the lower classes as a 'tribe', such a term hinting at the privileged position of a middle-class woman of means. Yet the sentence is at

⁷⁸ Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', p.67. Beckett and Cherry remark upon women's interactions with the modern metropolis, which are often hidden from historical record, the experiences of women regularly infused with fear. Citing the work of Judith R. Walkowitz, Lynne Walker and others, they stress that there is no clear agreement amongst feminist historians on the freedoms offered by the new spaces of the city for women. Beckett and Cherry, p. 62. See Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992); Lynne Walker, 'Vistas of Pleasure: Women as Consumers of Urban Space, 1850-1900', *Women in the Victorian Art World* ed. by C.C. Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 70-85.

⁷⁹ Dismorr, 'Promenade', p. 69.

⁸⁰ 'Talk of the Town', *Pall Mall Gazette*, Saturday, 4 January 1913, p. 2.

the same time empathetic with their hungry plight. The reader may question why a woman has chosen to venture into an unfamiliar and unsettling environment. However, the poet-protagonist is not alone in being led by their curiosity, but is part of a 'horde bright-eyed', an ambiguous grouping that is both 'delicate' and 'malicious', these descriptors suggesting that the group is not used to physical exertion due to their lives of relative comfort. They are inquisitive voyeurs in a dubious setting that are at the same time compelled to share space with its inhabitants.

The environment in which the Bookshop was located was often remarked upon by visitors to Monro's bookshop, Goldring referring to Devonshire Street as a slum.⁸¹ At the same time one might speculate what the locals of Devonshire Street thought about the arrival of the Poetry Bookshop into their neighbourhood, and what they made of its clientele, though an amusing recollection exists. The writer and socialite Osbert Sitwell 'clad in a bowler, canary-coloured waistcoat and smart grey suit' was apparently pursued by mocking boys as he promenaded along Devonshire Street.⁸² Whilst the Bookshop probably did elicit a certain level of curiosity, the street itself was a working-class site of industry and as such the inhabitants of Devonshire Street necessarily continued with their daily business, regardless of the activities taking place at number 35.⁸³ The 'understanding' reached at the 'converging thoroughfare'⁸⁴ in

⁸¹ Joy Grant, p. 62. Monro's wife (Alida Klemantaski Monro) recalled that the street boasted three public houses and that policemen paraded in pairs.

⁸² Grant, p. 62.

⁸³ Alida Monro and others recalled that goldbeaters still worked next door to the Bookshop before and during the war. Joy Grant, p. 76.

Dismorr's *Promenade* evokes a local acceptance of this curious venue and of the eclectic nature of those venturing into the area to enjoy its lyrical pleasures.

If *Promenade* can be read as an autobiographical trace of a modernist poet's visit to the most important institution for the promotion of contemporary poetry in London in the years immediately preceding the First World War,⁸⁵ traces of dialogues between its author and poets of significance of the inter-war period can now firmly situate Dismorr within the orbit of Monro's enterprise and amplify her reputation as a poet of note. In 1919 Dismorr's *Promenade* was published in the *Little Review* under the editorship of Rodker,⁸⁶ who as a poet himself had been published in Monro's *Poetry and Drama*, and had expressed an interest in becoming an assistant editor.⁸⁷ In the same year a new poetry bookshop was opened in Pryme Street in Hull with the assistance of Monro, where he and his wife were among the first to read aloud at the bookshop's poetry events.⁸⁸ Fourteen years later the *Hull Daily Mail* ran a piece entitled 'Limelight for New Poets', the article reporting that a series of weekly poetry readings would take place in the city 'to give Hull people a chance of hearing the

⁸⁴ Dismorr, 'Promenade', *Blast, War Number*, p. 69.

⁸⁵ Mark S. Morrisson, 'The Cause of Poetry', *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 1, p. 419.

⁸⁶ 'Promenade' was published in *The Little Review* in August 1919.

⁸⁷ The *Little Review* was published in America by Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, with Pound becoming its foreign editor in 1917. Rodker became London editor in spring 1919. Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, pp. 46-48. See Dominic Hibberd, p. 282, n. 18, for details on Rodker's connection with Monro.

⁸⁸ The bookshop in Pryme Street was opened by Mrs Priestley Cooper and Miss Kathleen Wright. See Joy Grant, p. 75, and Dominic Hibberd, p. 201.

newest poetry written in the English language'.⁸⁹ Readers of the *Mail* were informed that over thirty poets were to be represented, concluding that:

It is unlikely that they will all become stars of first magnitude. But every one of them, I am assured by the readers, has made some original and person [sic] contribution to literature.⁹⁰

Dismorr's name is printed among the roster of poets that included Rodker, and W.H. Auden (1907-1973) who is described as 'a young writer whose work is beginning to create a big stir', Auden being a writer that Dismorr is known to have admired.⁹¹ Among the other notable poets whose work was to be read in Hull as reported by the *Mail* were Maxwell Bodenheimer (1892-1954) and William Empson (1906-1984). Archival evidence shows that Bodenheimer and Empson were each in correspondence with Dismorr.⁹² Their letters are undated but were likely written in the early 1930s. Bodenheimer is known to have travelled to Europe from his native United States in 1931.⁹³ In his letter to Dismorr

⁸⁹ John Humber, 'Limelight for New Poets', *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 March 1933, p. 6.

⁹⁰ *Hull Daily Mail*, p. 6.

⁹¹ Other names included Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) and E. E. Cummings (1894-1962). *Hull Daily Mail*, p. 6. Dismorr owned a copy of Auden's *Poems* of 1930, inscribed "Jessica Dismorr Oct. 1934." Inserted into the book was a contemporary newspaper cutting of Auden lighting a cigarette. These details are recorded and held in a private collection.

⁹² Letters from Bodenheimer, and from Empson are held in the papers of Sheila Watson. See note 44.

⁹³ Jim Burns, 'Maxwell Bodenheimer', *Penniless Press* <<http://www.pennilesspress.co.uk/prose/bodenheimer.htm>> [accessed 13 November 2023]. Bodenheimer also travelled to Europe in 1920.

Bodenheim expresses his admiration for her work and a desire to connect.⁹⁴ Empson's letter is jocular in tone and suggests that he and Dismorr had been collaborators on a project, Empson making enquiries about payment and making further arrangements to be sketched by the artist at his home in Bloomsbury.⁹⁵ The inclusion of Dismorr's poetry in this series of events designed to showcase the literary talent of the early twentieth century, her name appearing alongside the established early modernists and the rising stars of twentieth century poetry gestures to her significance as a poet of note as evidenced by Bodenheim's correspondence, these facts firmly embedding Dismorr as an artist who was fully connected to the networks of literary modernism yet one that has hitherto been underappreciated in the field. Her nominal presence on the bill at an event in Hull, whilst at a superficial level is far-removed from the cosmopolitan stages of metropolitan culture, amplifies the presence of Dismorr as a poet that can be traced to the orbit of Monro's Poetry Bookshop as an important space of dialogic exchange to the literary circles of early modernist London.

Conflicts and Collaboration: From the Rebel Art Centre to the Vorticist Exhibition at the Doré Gallery

The nominal presence of Dismorr as recorded in correspondence in the 1930s, coupled with her connection to the poetry event in Hull has allowed for the artist

⁹⁴ Bodenheim's letter appears to be a follow-up on a first that went unanswered. Undated letter from Maxwell Bodenheim to Jessica Dismorr held with the Papers of Sheila Watson. See note 44.

⁹⁵ Undated letter from William Empson to Jessica Dismorr held with the Papers of Sheila Watson. See note 44.

to be traced to the fringes of Bloomsbury to Monro's Poetry Bookshop and its orbit of cosmopolitan poets. Similarly, correspondence written in 1914 affirms that Dismorr's presence was felt just a few streets away at Great Ormond Street. Dismorr and Saunders had each been involved with the promotion of Vorticism through the distribution of *Blast* from the Rebel Art Centre at 38 Great Ormond Street, though their apparent diligence brought them into direct conflict with Kate Lechmere, the Centre's instigator and financial backer.⁹⁶ In one of a series of increasingly bad-tempered letters that Lechmere sent to Lewis regarding the Centre and its parlous financial position during the spring and summer of 1914, Lechmere appears to have taken pleasure in describing an altercation that had taken place between herself and Dismorr and Saunders regarding ownership of copies of *Blast* and an allocation that was to be sold to Monro to try to recoup some of Lechmere's financial losses.⁹⁷ Lechmere's tone is dismissive of both women, her words revealing a deep animosity towards her fellow artists that in turn may have contributed to the uncertainty surrounding the extent of their involvement in the Centre's activities, and the opacity of their position as colleagues and as central participants in the Vorticist project.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, p. 198.

⁹⁷ Kate Lechmere, letter to Wyndham Lewis dated 23 July 1914, Cornell University, Wyndham Lewis Collection, Box 117, 38.

⁹⁸ It is notable that in his foundational study of Vorticism Cork's account of the short-lived headquarters, atelier and school founded for the furtherance of the Vorticist project is used to introduce both Dismorr and Saunders to his narrative, yet frames Dismorr's involvement as having been 'earned' by her support for Lewis in his spat with Roger Fry. See Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 149-150. Cork interviewed Lechmere in the 1970s, reporting that Lechmere scornfully described both Dismorr as Saunders as 'little lap dogs' in thrall of Wyndham Lewis. See Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 150. Lechmere possibly repeated these comments to Cork, having likely made them originally to Della Denman in an interview she

A self-styled 'Cubist painter',⁹⁹ Lechmere had known Dismorr when they were both students in Paris at L'Académie de La Palette between c.1910 and 1912.¹⁰⁰ Dismorr and Saunders had already been exhibiting work in Paris and London in 1912,¹⁰¹ and the three women showed work at the Allied Artists

gave for Apollo magazine in 1971. Della Denman, 'Kate Lechmere: Recollections of Vorticism', *Apollo*, vol. 93, n. 107, 1971, p. 52-53. See also Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', p. 21. This phrase has often been repeated in the historiographies of Vorticism, contributing to the marginalization of both artists within Vorticism. Noting Cork's unquestioning relaying of Lechmere's comments and similar disparaging comments made by Frederick Etchells, Brigid Peppin suggests that they may have been prompted by personal disappointment. See Brigid Peppin, 'Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a Career', *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, ed. by Rachel Sloan, p. 26, n. 59. Quentin Stevenson, writing about Dismorr, has suggested that there may have been professional jealousy on Lechmere's part. Stevenson, p. 7. It should be acknowledged, however, that Lechmere went on to become a successful milliner after the First World War. Della Denman, 'Kate Lechmere: Recollections of Vorticism', p. 53.

⁹⁹ Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁰ See Heathcock, *Jessica Dismorr*, p. 16. William Lipke interviewed Kate Lechmere in 1965 when he was researching Vorticism for his doctoral thesis and suggested that Lechmere and Dismorr met at L'Académie de La Palette in 1911-1912. Lipke's notes and correspondence are held in the Tate Gallery Archive. L'Académie de la Palette was a progressive teaching school in Paris run by Jacques-Émile Blanche, which aimed to promote, in the words of Walter Sickert, a supporter of its methods, 'conciliation entre la liberté et le respect de la tradition'. See Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'Walter Sickert and the Language of Art', *Internationalism and the Arts in Britain and Europe at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Grace Brockington (Oxford and New York: Peter Laing, c2009), p. 35. Lipke's notes and correspondence are held in the Tate Gallery Archive. Following a period in Munich, Lechmere returned to London in 1912 to study at the Westminster School of Art under Walter Sickert. See Duncan Marks, "'Artists a disappointment in real life": remembering and representing a real life of Kate Lechmere (1887-1976)', paper given at the conference 'Writing Women's Lives' at Bath Spa University, 25 April 2015.

¹⁰¹ In 1912 Dismorr exhibited with the Société des Artistes Independents in Paris between March and May, with the Allied Artists Association in July, and in October with the Rhythm Group at the Stafford Gallery in October. See Chronology appendix in Heathcock, *Jessica Dismorr*. For a detailed discussion on the exhibition at the Stafford Gallery, see Anna Gruetzner Robins, *Modern Art in Britain 1910-1914*, (London: Merrell Holberton in association with Barbican Art

Association London Salon at the Albert Hall in 1913.¹⁰² Saunders and Dismorr became friends that year probably through Lewis as a mutual contact, and the friendship may have been cemented as a consequence of Saunders being based in Phené Street in Chelsea, very close to Dismorr's studio on the King's Road.¹⁰³ The three were very likely to have been aware of each other's work as artist-women active within the circles of the avant-garde in Paris and London in 1912, yet aside from the dismissive references to Dismorr and Saunders in her letters to Lewis¹⁰⁴ no record of conversations between the three artists has yet come to light that might offer a more nuanced view of their interactions. Indeed, as artist-women already making their mark in the arenas of early modernism, and as new friends of Lewis Lechmere may have objected to their involvement in the Centre as rivals on both counts, which may account for her scornful accounts of both artists as recounted to Cork in an interview sixty years later.¹⁰⁵

Gallery), pp. 108-115. Saunders had exhibited with Vanessa Bell's Friday Club in February, with Roger Fry's 'Quelques Indépendants Anglais' at the Galerie Barbazanges in Paris in May, and with the Allied Artists Association in July. See *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 90; Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 38.

¹⁰² In her chronology Heathcock notes that Dismorr exhibited three portrait studies to the salon in 1913. Peppin records that Saunders exhibited *The Oast House*. Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 38. Lechmere was known to have contributed three cubist works. Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', p. 61.

¹⁰³ Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁴ Kate Lechmere, letters to Lewis, 23 & 26 July 1914, Cornell University, Wyndham Lewis collection, Box 117, 37.

¹⁰⁵ In addition to the comments Lechmere made in the interview with Cork, Lechmere is also dismissive of Dismorr in a letter to Lewis's widow Anne Hoskyns (known as Froanna) written in 1974. Lechmere writes, "I've got some man coming to see me who is writing a book on Dismorr. I in no way found her work interesting and have little to tell him – can't remember the man's name and have lost his letter!" Letter from Kate Lechmere to Anne G. Lewis, 10 January 1974, Wyndham Lewis Collection, Cornell, Box 117, 45.

Despite these tensions and acknowledging her absence in Roberts's pictorial celebration of the collective Vorticist endeavour, Lechmere's contribution to Vorticism should not be underestimated. Drawing on the work of Cork and others, Sarah Lolley's recent dissertation provides an illuminating and necessary reassessment of Lechmere's pivotal role as prime mover in the realisation, promotion and management of the short-lived Rebel Art Centre, and as such offers a fresh perspective on Lechmere's position as a woman-artist at the nexus of avant-garde endeavour in the years leading up to the First World War.¹⁰⁶ It was Lechmere who had the original idea for the Centre, which was premised on the establishment in London of an atelier and art school based on the French model.¹⁰⁷ Lechmere possessed the presence of mind and the financial means to initiate such a scheme, demonstrating her interest as an artist in the furtherance of avant-garde ideas in England.¹⁰⁸ Lewis was to act as manager of the Centre and as 'professor' of the art school, where according to the prospectus 'the starting point and the alphabet of the teaching' would be 'the principles underlying the movements in Painting, known as Cubist, Futurist, and Expressionist.'¹⁰⁹ The prospectus also announced that the Centre 'is being decorated by several artists...with a series of large mural paintings and

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Lolley, 'Kate Lechmere, Patronesse du Mouvement Vorticiste'. See Introduction, note 48.

¹⁰⁷ Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁸ Lechmere exhibited three works at the Allied Artists Association salon. Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁹ Prospectus of The Rebel Art Centre, quoted in Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 191.

friezes,'¹¹⁰ further promising that it would 'by public discussion, lectures and gatherings of people...familiarise those who are interested with the ideas of the great modern revolution in Art,'¹¹¹ though in reality the full range of events and scholarly activities promised by the prospectus never materialised.¹¹²

Despite Lechmere's retrospective and denigrating comments and the possible motives behind them, the interconnecting trajectories of each artist towards active involvement with the Rebel Art Centre hints towards a practical level of interaction between the three women during this short period, the details perhaps obscured by the more vocal participants' focus on self-promotion that was anathema to Dismorr and Saunders alike.¹¹³ Art historical accounts of the Rebel Art Centre have understandably given great attention to the existence of a series of news stories in the popular press carrying photographs of the key protagonists taken within its spaces at 38 Great Ormond Street in late March 1914.¹¹⁴ Lewis and Lechmere had made the astute decision to invite the press to

¹¹⁰ Prospectus quoted in Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 193.

¹¹¹ Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 158.

¹¹² Events that did take place included talks by Ford Madox Ford (then Hueffer), who according to Douglas Goldring spoke 'absent-mindedly in a tail coat', a lecture given by the Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, and a lecture by Pound. Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius*, pp. 150-151; Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 158.

¹¹³ See note 41. Dismorr is also known to have been guarded, this perhaps a coping strategy given her evident struggle throughout her life with mental illness. As Heathcock has documented, correspondence between Lewis and Dismorr indicates that Dismorr suffered from an unspecified recurring illness, necessitating periods of convalescence. Heathcock, p. 102. In his unpublished manuscript on Dismorr and based on his extensive research, Stevenson suggests that the artist may have been suffering from bi-polar disorder. Stevenson, *Looking for Jessica Dismorr*, 2023.

¹¹⁴ See Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 145-161; Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, pp. 190-202; Bernard Vere 'Two Steps Forward: The Faltering Progress of the Avant-Garde in

the Rebel Art Centre prior to its official opening on 4 April, a promotional tactic that, if nothing else, attracted the curious attention of journalists whose reports catered to the general populace. The photographs certainly give the impression of industriousness,¹¹⁵ with Lechmere playing a prominent role in her self-fashioning as an artist,¹¹⁶ her credentials staged in a photograph printed in the *Daily Graphic* (fig. 2) where she is seen putting the 'finishing touches' to her painting *Buntem Vogel*, a work that was in fact exhibited at the Allied Artists Association London Salon in 1913.¹¹⁷ The activities of the 'rebel' artists at Great Ormond Street also attracted interest overseas. On 19 April 1914 a feature entitled 'Londres possède une école futuriste' appeared in the Parisian photographic magazine *Le Miroir*. (fig. 3).¹¹⁸ The feature carries two photographs of Lechmere that had previously been published in the *Daily Mirror*, along with two further shots not previously published in the British press. In one Lewis is

England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College, 2006), pp. 30-52.

¹¹⁵ Vere writes entertainingly about the promotion of the Rebel Art Centre in the media, arguing that Lewis's real intention was to reach the 40,000 attenders of the successful Futurist exhibition in 1912. Cognisant of the lack of actual activity taking place at the Centre Vere notes that 'it was not really necessary for a great deal to take place at the Centre; it was enough for it to look like there was a great deal taking place.' Bernard Vere, 'Two Steps Forward', p. 35.

¹¹⁶ On 30 March 1914 the *Daily Mirror* published photographs of Lewis, C.R.W. Nevinson, Wadsworth and Lechmere 'in action' at the Rebel Art Centre. A group photo of Lechmere, Lewis, Wadsworth, and another artist, possibly Cuthbert Hamilton (1885-1959) appeared on the same date in the *Evening Standard*. See Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 148-149; Vere, pp. 30-52.

¹¹⁷ Cork, *Vorticism*, p.147; Vere, p. 36.

¹¹⁸ 'Londres possède une école Futuriste', *Le Miroir*, 19 April 1914, Gallica <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k11826825/f28.item#>> 19 April 1914, Gallica n.p. [accessed 25 November 2022].

seen posing alongside his unfinished mural, carrying the caption ‘M. Lewis fait de l’art décoratif’ and the other is a large photograph positioned as the article’s leader image showing Lechmere dressed professionally wearing a white blouse, dark skirt and dark hat with a brooch as she poses for the camera whilst hanging a curtain. Two unidentified women are shown with Lechmere, one woman looking directly towards the camera as the other holds the curtain out to better display its abstract design. The leader caption carries Lechmere’s name, and the accompanying copy informs the reader that:

L’artiste s’est assuré le concours d’une jeune femme, miss Lechmere, qui assumera dans le nouvel établissement les fonctions de répétiteur.¹¹⁹

Lechmere is also featured in an article published some months later in *Vanity Fair*. Rather than being directly concerned with the Rebel Art Centre the article focuses on Lechmere’s decoration of her private flat above the Centre on the top floor of the building,¹²⁰ signalled to the outside world by the decorations she had also made for her window boxes and deemed by the publication’s correspondent to be more radical in décor than the Rebel Art Centre, who writes that:

Miss Lechmere, one of the directors, has gone further and has decorated a whole flat – her own – in Futurism (the only one in London), in order to show the possibilities of the new decoration.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ ‘The artist (Lewis) has secured the assistance of a young woman, Miss Lechmere, who will take on the duties of tutor in the new establishment.’

¹²⁰ Paul O’Keeffe, p. 147.

¹²¹ *Vanity Fair*, 25 June 1914, quoted in Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 199.

The picture feature in *Le Miroir* and the feature in *Vanity Fair* demonstrate Lechmere's determination to promote herself and her very significant contributions towards the Rebel Art Centre as distinct from the minimal contributions made by Lewis and his 'associates'. It is tempting to speculate that Lechmere was instrumental in pitching the idea for both articles to the respective editors, her connections with Paris engineering the feature in *Le Miroir* and thus assuring her high profile within it, and her deliberate decoration of the interior and exterior of her own living quarters an astute move in attracting the attention of *Vanity Fair* to Great Ormond Street and as such heightening her own profile to an affluent and fashionable readership.

Neither Dismorr nor Saunders, as active members of the Rebel Art Centre appear in any photographs taken during its existence. They were probably part of the team that made candles, handkerchiefs, fans and scarves as party favours for the society hostess Lady Cunard (1872-1948), this being the only commission received by the Centre.¹²² They also contributed to the Rebel Art Centre's stand at the Allied Artists' Association exhibition at Holland Park in June 1914, which was reviewed favourably by Henri Gaudier Brzeska in a review article for the *Egoist*, who commented:

¹²² Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, p. 71. Also, Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 200. Wees and Cork cite an undated letter from Nevinson to Lewis. Lady Cunard had evidently wished for both artists, along with Hamilton and Wadsworth to work on the commission. Given the nature of the commission the job probably fell to Dismorr and Saunders to deliver.

People like Miss Dismorr, Miss Saunders and Miss Jones are well worth encouraging towards the new light. With them stops the revolutionary spirit of the exhibition.¹²³

Rather than 'staging' their avant-garde credentials as a mode of self-promotion, Dismorr and Saunders clearly preferred to demonstrate their commitment to Vorticism through action without fanfare, their practical and visible deeds speaking louder than words in the arenas of avant-garde endeavour as the quiet revolutionaries of the Vorticist project.

Despite its condescending tone, Gaudier Brzeska's endorsement in *The Egoist* of both artists the embodiment of the revolutionary spirit of the English avant-garde, is for Saunders further strengthened by an article that appeared in the same magazine a few months later. On 2 November 1914 an announcement appeared in *The Egoist* heralding the intention to establish a 'College of Arts' in London.¹²⁴ This unrealised project, designed to attract American art students to London, as 'the capital of the world'¹²⁵ was promoted by Pound, who had apparently enlisted the services of a high-profile international roster of

¹²³ Henri Gaudier Brzeska, 'Allied Artists' Association Ltd. Holland Park Hall', *The Egoist*, 15 June 1914, p.228. *Modernist Journals Project*, <<https://modjourn.org/issue/bdr520992/#>> [Accessed 3 April 2020]. The reference to 'Miss Jones' probably refers to the artist Bertha Jones who had studied at La Palette with Dismorr and Lechmere. Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles*, p. 6.

¹²⁴ 'Preliminary Announcement of The College of Arts', *The Egoist*, 2 November 1914, pp. 413-414. A brief mention of this article can be found in Mark Antliff, 'Alvin Langdon Coburn among the Vorticists: studio photographs and lost works by Epstein, Lewis and Wadsworth', *Burlington Magazine*, September 2010, 152:1290, p. 583. See also Jane Lidderdale & Mary Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 98.

¹²⁵ 'Preliminary Announcement of The College of Arts', *The Egoist*, 2 November 1914, pp. 413-414.

specialists in their fields.¹²⁶ Among those listed were the American photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882-1966) who would, it was announced, provide instruction in photography at the College,¹²⁷ with the Vorticist Edward Wadsworth set to run the 'Atelier of Design'. Gaudier Brzeska's name is listed alongside the 'Atelier of Sculpture', with Wyndham Lewis listed with the 'Atelier of Painting'. Concurrent with her inclusion as a signatory in *Blast*, Saunders appears as 'H. Sanders' in the 'Painting' category as 'Assistant, and Director of the Atelier'.¹²⁸ Readers are informed that prospective students of this new institution are guaranteed 'contact with artists of established position, creative minds, men for the most part who have suffered in the cause of their art'.¹²⁹ Saunders's designation as a primary figure for this ambitious yet unrealised project testifies to her growing stature as a practitioner within the international networks of artists who were active in London at this pivotal time for English modernism, and for her importance as an effective collaborator preparing to exhibit her unique interpretation of Vorticist ideas to a public audience.

Opening a just a month before the publication of the second number of *Blast* in which Lewis would attempt to explain his ideas more fully and so 'dispel

¹²⁶ The specialists selected by Pound included the French musician and early music specialist Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940) and celebrated English music critic Edwin Evans (1874-1945) who would each form part of the college's music department, and Russian writer and literary critic Zinaida Vangerowa (1867-1941) who would offer instruction on Russian Contemporary Thought. 'Preliminary Announcement', pp. 413-414.

¹²⁷ For a useful summary of Coburn's background and his involvement with Vorticism see Tom Norman, 'Alvin Langdon Coburn and the Vortographs' in *The Vorticists* ed. by Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene, pp. 85-91.

¹²⁸ 'Preliminary Announcement', pp. 413-414.

¹²⁹ 'Preliminary Announcement', p. 414.

the suspicion and puzzlement of the Public,¹³⁰ the Vorticist Exhibition attracted few reviews, which were for the most part negative.¹³¹ As the *Standard* explained, the exhibition would:

amuse the frivolous, infuriate the solemn, intrigue the scientific, and interest the plain person who wants to see the way things are going.¹³²

John Middleton Murry's review for the *Westminster Gazette* played on the concept of the 'vortex', likening it to a raging abyss in which thinly scattered swimmers are struggling to survive:

Thirteen in all, all in the Vortex; and so very little chance that they will get out again, for the Vortex is one of those furious primordial things that can only be defined in negatives [...] Apparent rari nantes in vortice vasto.¹³³

¹³⁰ Lewis uses the exhibition catalogue to promote *Blast* and to inform readers that a detailed explanation of Vorticist ideas will appear in the pages of its second number. Wyndham Lewis, catalogue note for the "Vorticist Exhibition". *Database of Modern Exhibitions (DoME), European Paintings and Drawings 1905-1915* <<https://exhibitions.univie.ac.at/exhibition/724>> [last accessed 6 December 2021].

¹³¹ The Vorticist Exhibition opened on 10 June 1915. Saunders contributed four paintings to the show – *Atlantic City, English Scene, Swiss Scene, Cliffs* – and two drawings – *Island of Laputa* and *Black and Khaki*. A copy of the catalogue of the Vorticist Exhibition at the Doré is held in the Tate Gallery Archive, extracts of which are reproduced in *The Vorticists* ed. by Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene (London: Tate Publishing, 2020), pp. 60-61. Details can also be found on the *Database of Modern Exhibitions (DoME)*, <<https://exhibitions.univie.ac.at/exhibition/724>> [last accessed 6 December 2021].

¹³² "Vorticism." Public Exhibition of a New Cult, *Standard*, 14 June 1915, p. 5. The *Daily Mirror* went further, describing the works on display as 'picture puzzles' that could be drawn by a baby on 'mamma's new white tablecloth'. 'Vorticists' Picture Puzzles', *Daily Mirror*, 11 June 1915, p. 2. A wag from the *Sunday Pictorial* joked that a visit to the exhibition induced the necessary avoidance of strong liquor. "Have another drink, old top?" "No thanks, I'm on the water-wagon now!" "Why?" "Well, a friend lured me into that show of vorticist paintings in the West End the other day." Mr. Mayfair, 'The Shock Cure', *Sunday Pictorial*, 13 June 1915, p. 9.

Taking as his prompt the short explanatory note in the exhibition catalogue, in which Lewis briefly explains the Vorticist aesthetic in terms of 'activity', 'significance', and 'essential movement',¹³⁴ Murry is lamenting what he sees as the overwhelming and incoherent nature of the abstractions in the Vorticists' works on display that results in what he terms as an 'artistic bankruptcy' wherein 'not Mr. Lewis himself appears.'¹³⁵ To Murry, Lewis's explanations and their practical application by the members of the Vorticist group 'and others'¹³⁶ only served to 'overwhelm' them in their own aesthetic endeavours,¹³⁷

¹³³ J. M. M., 'Vorticists and Others', *Westminster Gazette*, 18 June 1915, p. 2. Murry's comment in Latin is a play on a phrase used in Virgil's *Aeneid*, 'apparent rari nantes in gurgite vasto', meaning 'brilliant thoughts are sometimes lost in an ocean of words'.

¹³⁴ Wyndham Lewis, "Vorticist Exhibition." (London: Leveridge & Co., 1915), held at the V & A National Art Library. *Database of Modern Exhibitions (DoME). European Paintings and Drawings 1905-1915*. Last modified May 21, 2019. <<https://exhibitions.univie.ac.at/exhibition/724>> [Last accessed 6 December 2021].

¹³⁵ J. M. M., 'Vorticists and Others', *Westminster Gazette*, p. 2.

¹³⁶ The catalogue lists the 'Vorticist' members as Dismorr, Etchells, Gaudier Brzeska, Roberts, Sanders [sic], Wadsworth, Lewis. Those 'invited to show' were Bernard Adeney (1878-1966), Lawrence Atkinson, David Bomberg (1890-1957), Duncan Grant (1885-1978), Jacob Kramer (1892-1962) and Nevinson. Cork has commented on the diminished 'kernel of Vorticist aficionados', putting this in the context of Lewis's many feuds, Cork also speculating on the supposed strategy for the 'lumping together' of those 'invited to show.' Cork, *Vorticism, Vol.2*, pp. 275-276, this strategy appearing to prefigure that of the Tate's exhibition *Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism* in 1956. In contrast to Lewis's infamous statement that 'Vorticism was, in fact, what I personally said, and did, at a certain period,' Saunders recalled that the Vorticists were 'a group of very disparate artists each working out his [sic] own ideas under the aegis of the Group and its very able leader and publicist Wyndham Lewis.' Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders 1885-1963*, pp. 12-13.

¹³⁷ J. M. M., 'Vorticists and Others', p. 2.

presenting a garbled message to a sceptical audience. Staged almost a year into the First World War, the timing of the exhibition was less than ideal. Those critics who did comment on the show thought that the advanced abstraction of the works on display, coupled with Lewis's bombastic tone in the exhibition catalogue inappropriate when so many were losing their lives.¹³⁸ However, the critic P. G. Konody, who had been dismissive of the Vorticists in the past and had ignored the exhibition at its outset, was moved to comment when exhibiting artist Gaudier Brzeska was killed in action. As if to calm the indignation surrounding the exhibition Konody suggested that the artist's death:

should disarm the anger which might otherwise be aroused [because] the "Vorticists" continue their antics in times as serious and critical as the present.¹³⁹

As Anna Greutzner Robins has noted, Gaudier Brzeska's death had convinced Konody of the artist's seriousness, and by association the seriousness of the others,¹⁴⁰ marking a pivotal moment in Konody's acceptance of the Vorticists' work, despite his initial disapproval of the group's 'antics' and its apparent disregard for the severity of the escalating conflict.

¹³⁸ Anna Greutzner Robins, "Reforming with a Pick-Axe": The First Vorticist Exhibition at the Dore Galleries in 1915', in *The Vorticists*, p. 60-62.

¹³⁹ P. G. Konody, 'The Vorticists at the Dore Galleries', *Observer*, 4 July 1915, p.9, quoted in Anna Greutzner Robins, "Reforming with a Pick-Axe", in *The Vorticists* ed. by Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene, p. 62.

¹⁴⁰ Anna Greutzner Robins, "Reforming with a Pick-Axe", p. 62.

Aside from its unfortunate timing the Doré exhibition was arguably one of the most public demonstrations of the Vorticists' identity,¹⁴¹ and, according to the exhibition catalogue, proof of the existence of a distinctly English avant-garde movement.¹⁴² The catalogue's list of works detail the significant contributions of both Dismorr and Saunders to the show, gesturing to their centrality as Vorticists and for their importance to Lewis as *de facto* curator.¹⁴³ Whilst Lewis's approval of their work, presumably viewed by him as endorsements of his aesthetic terminology in service to English modernism, the unique formal contributions of Dismorr and Saunders suggest a preoccupation with more global concerns that subtly repudiate the vocal accusations of Vorticist 'antics' by the critics in the face of wartime stress. Their work can be seen to reveal personal anxieties that must have been in concert with, and empathetic of those of a nervous audience, whilst at the same time disrupting Vorticism's 'Englishness' by deploying Vorticist aesthetics to more cosmopolitan concerns.

¹⁴¹ Rebecca Beasley, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 137. Recently discovered material from the archive relating to the Tour Eiffel restaurant commission, to be discussed later in this chapter might refute this claim.

¹⁴² In the preface to the exhibition catalogue Lewis explains that 'this is the first exhibition of a group of painters, to whom the name Vorticist has been given. Their work has been seen in various Exhibitions, the London Group, the Allied Artists and elsewhere; also "BLAST" was started principally as a vehicle for the propagation of their ideas, and as a sort of picture-gallery, too. But this is the first time in England that a Gallery has been used for the special exhibition of nothing but the works of this tendency by English artists.' Wyndham Lewis, "Vorticist Exhibition." See *Database of Modern Exhibitions (DoME)*, <<https://exhibitions.univie.ac.at/exhibition/724>> [Last accessed 6 December 2021].

¹⁴³ See note 10.

Dismorr contributed four 'pictures' to the Doré show,¹⁴⁴ all now lost, but as Cork has commented their titles suggest an abandonment of all representational intentions.¹⁴⁵ *Abstract Composition* (fig. 4), Dismorr's only extant oil painting of the period, which will be discussed in detail in chapter three, may provide a sense of what the lost works conveyed to the contemporary viewer. Composed of a series of pastel-coloured shapes that appear to float in a black void, their movement cohering loosely with a vertical axis, the work shows a Vorticist interest in mechanical and architectural forms, the shapes and their dynamics appearing to act in concert with Lewis's stated doctrine of 'activity' and 'essential movement'. Yet the formal 'significance' of the composition might lie in its overwhelming sense of melancholy that feels foreboding.¹⁴⁶ Beckett and Cherry have argued that the work can be read in the dual context of a city in collapse and of the body turned inside out, evoking the shapes, lines and voids of the rapidly developing metropolis, the material and the corporeal now threatened by wartime aerial bombardment.¹⁴⁷ These readings are now reinforced by evidence in the archive that demonstrates that Dismorr was away serving as a nurse with the Voluntary Aid Detachment in France at the time of

¹⁴⁴ The works are printed in the catalogue as *Shapes, Interior, Movement, and Design*. See *The Vorticists*, ed. by Antliff and Greene, p. 61.

¹⁴⁵ Cork, *Vorticism, Vol. 2*, p. 417.

¹⁴⁶ Brigid Peppin has noted that *Abstract Composition* is a 'quiet but uncompromising interpretation of Vorticist ideas'. Brigid Peppin, *Women that a Movement Forgot*, Tate Etc. issue 22: Summer 2011, p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism: Women, Modernity, Modernism' in *BLAST: Vorticism*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 68.

the exhibition's staging in London.¹⁴⁸ It is not unreasonable to suggest that the prospect of an imminent departure to France to actively contribute to the war effort would have induced personal anxiety that the artist may have consciously or unconsciously translated onto canvas, thus presenting an unsettling body of work for contemporary viewers at the Doré show. Whilst audiences would likely not have viewed the work in this way, it is reasonable to assume that public awareness of the ever present threat of war overshadowing daily lives would have contributed to the muted reception of the exhibition.¹⁴⁹ Had Shakespear contributed her dramatic watercolour *War Scare* (fig. 5) to the show it may have resonated more clearly with the audience.¹⁵⁰ The work in itself qualifies as a valid expression of the three Vorticist tenets of 'activity', 'significance' and 'essential movement' espoused by Lewis that might suggest that she may have discussed these ideas with him.¹⁵¹ The image is composed of variously pointed

¹⁴⁸ A photograph held in a private collection provides a valuable document of Dismorr's active war service. She is seen tending to injured French soldiers in Cannes. The photograph is inscribed and dated July 1915. The photograph will be discussed in chapter three.

¹⁴⁹ Reports on the fear of imminent German Zeppelin raids proliferated in the press in 1915. A few weeks before the Vorticist Exhibition opened the *Pall Mall Gazette* ran a front-page story urging the trustees of the National Gallery to do more to protect their collections from imminent attack. 'Zeppelins and the National Gallery', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 May 1915, p. 7. For a discussion on the Zeppelin raids in London, see Jane Beckett, '(Is)land Narratives', pp. 205-206.

¹⁵⁰ Shakespear never exhibited her work to a public audience.

¹⁵¹ Shakespear did come under the influence of Lewis and visited the Rebel Art Centre with Pound. She is quoted as saying, "I watched it all with deep interest. I certainly never had any 'lessons' from him but the movement came just as I needed a shove out of the Victorian [...] W. L. caught me painting one day – said it was too tight – 'do something more free'. The only time he ever criticised me." *Etruscan Gate: A Notebook with Drawings and Watercolours by Dorothy Shakespear Pound* (Exeter: Rougemont Press, 1971), p. 11. Extracts from this volume are published online. See *Flashpoint Magazine: A Multidisciplinary*

forms in red, green and brown that move diagonally upwards from the lower right hand of the image, threatening to penetrate an angular form in grey and black to the top left. Separated from these menacing elements by an expanse of blue colour, a vortex is positioned at the centre of the angular form acting as a target, the composition easily interpreted by the viewer as a dynamic image of the capital under threat of attack by alien airborne forces now crossing the English Channel.¹⁵²

The impending assault dramatically evoked by Shakespear's *War Scare* appears to be conveyed as a shattering reality in Saunders's drawing *Atlantic City*. (fig. 6)¹⁵³ Composed of architectural forms that are shot through with a series of white shards, Beckett has analysed *Atlantic City* in the dual context of the modern city with its 'incisive glare of electric light', and of the effects of war on the metropolis through its rendering of an explosion that shatters the surface of the image.¹⁵⁴ Technical analysis of the recently discovered painting of *Atlantic City*,¹⁵⁵ one of the 'pictures' Saunders presented for display at the Vorticist

Journal in the Arts and Politics 'flashpointmag.com' <https://www.flashpointmag.com/dorothypond_etruscangate.htm> [last accessed 15 February 2024].

¹⁵² The verso of Shakespear's watercolour is inscribed 'Not to be shown to anyone done when the Stock Exchange shut, before war was declared [sic]'. See Beckett and Cherry, p. 70. It was announced in the press on 31 July 1914 that the Stock Exchange had closed due to the 'black outlook across Europe'. 'Stock Exchange Closed', *Westminster Gazette*, 31 July 1914, p. 7.

¹⁵³ The reproduction of the drawing *Atlantic City* is printed on page 57 of *Blast, War Number*.

¹⁵⁴ Jane Beckett, '(Is)land Narratives', pp. 206-207.

¹⁵⁵ In 2019 Rebecca Chipkin and Helen Kohn, then postgraduate students at the Courtauld Institute, made the ground-breaking discovery that a Vorticist work which had long been suspected to be hidden underneath Lewis's 1921 painting

Exhibition, has revealed valuable details of its likely original colour scheme, and a partial reconstruction (fig. 7) provides a tantalising opportunity to envisage how the painting might have looked at the time of its display.¹⁵⁶ These details offer an insight into the impact that the painting might have had on the audiences viewing it at the Doré, and at the same time challenge the existing interpretations of the printed reconstruction in *Blast* by offering the possibility of a new, cosmopolitan reading of the image and its composition.

Praxitella was Helen Saunders's painting *Atlantic City*. See 'The Mystery of Atlantic City: Helen Saunders' Secret Painting', *The Courtauld News*, Issue 44, ed. by Alistair Sooke (London: Courtauld, 2022), p. 15. This article can also be accessed online. < <https://courtauld.ac.uk/alumni/the-courtauld-news/the-mystery-of-atlantic-city/> > The discovery of *Atlantic City* attracted interest in the press, and the many questions it raises regarding the circumstances of its obliteration sparked some controversy. See Harriet Sherwood, 'Fit of pique': lost vorticist masterpiece found under portrait by contemporary', *Guardian*, 21 August 2022 < <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/aug/21/lost-helen-saunders-vorticist-masterpiece-found-under-wyndham-lewis-portrait> > [accessed 21 August 2022]. See also, Alan Munton, 'Portrait of Wyndham Lewis needs Revision', *Guardian* 26 August 2022 < <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/aug/26/portrait-of-wyndham-lewis-needs-revision> > [accessed 26 August 2022]; Brigid Peppin, 'The bigger picture on the erasure of Helen Saunders's Atlantic City', letter in response to Alan Munton, *Guardian*, 29 August 2022 < <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/aug/29/the-bigger-picture-on-the-erasure-of-helen-saunders-atlantic-city> > [last accessed 20 January 2024].

¹⁵⁶ As a result of Chipkin and Kohn's ongoing technical investigations into *Praxitella* and *Atlantic City*, Chipkin has been able develop a full colour reconstruction of Saunders's painting using the data she has gathered. A partial colour reconstruction of *Atlantic City* was on display to the public at the Courtauld in 2022, placed alongside Lewis's *Praxitella*, this installation coinciding with and complementing an exhibition of Saunders's drawings. A development of this installation was recently on display at Leeds Art Gallery. 'Things Left Unsaid. Percy Wyndham Lewis, Iris Barry, Helen Saunders and the Story of Praxitella,' Leeds Art Gallery, 22 June to 5 November 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/aug/29/the-bigger-picture-on-the-erasure-of-helen-saunders-atlantic-city> [accessed 25 June 2023]. I am sincerely grateful to Rebecca Chipkin and Helen Kohn for their generosity in sharing the full reconstruction with Brigid Peppin and myself, and for the collective conversations we have had, and continue to have together.

Peppin has recently put forward the suggestion that Saunders's image can be connected Atlantic City in New Jersey, the internationally renowned resort town that was undergoing major expansion in the early twentieth century.¹⁵⁷ Peppin suggests that Saunders might have been inspired by contemporary reports on the expansion of the city's seafront, and in particular the spectacular redevelopment of the Traymore Hotel in early 1915 (fig. 8).¹⁵⁸ Articles featuring Atlantic City and its vibrant modernity appeared frequently in the British press in 1913 and 1914, with some commentators choosing to focus on the apparently irreverent behaviour of the younger generation at their leisure. Reports on blasphemous revellers dancing and carousing on the boardwalks and lounging on the beaches on the Sabbath, sporting 'tango style' bathing costumes in 'vivid Mexican colours' held particular interest,¹⁵⁹ whilst other commentators focused

¹⁵⁷ Peppin argues that the fragmented elements of the drawing might refer to the Atlantic City's famous boardwalk, its modern hotel buildings, and the expansive coastline, suggesting that Saunders's may have been inspired by the work of the American Max Weber (1881-1961) who had exhibited work at Fry's Grafton Group show in 1913, which as a contributor herself she would have seen. Peppin, 'Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a Career', *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, pp. 12-13. See also Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'The Company of Strangers' in *Max Weber: An American Cubist in Paris and London, 1905-15*, ed. by Sarah MacDougall (London: Lund Humphries, 2014), pp. 64, 69, 92-93. In his detailed discussion of the project to create the 'Vorticist Room' at the Tour Eiffel Restaurant, Cork argues that Lewis took inspiration from the architecture of New York City, the designs that exist in his 'Vorticist Sketch-Book' and his painting *Workshop* influenced by these structures, which may also have translated as designs for the Tour Eiffel project. See Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 271.

¹⁵⁸ Peppin, pp. 12-13. I am grateful for Brigid Peppin for discussing her ideas with me.

¹⁵⁹ The American correspondent for the *Leeds Post* reported that the authorities were trying to clamp down on the scandalous behaviour of beachgoers who were refusing to observe the Sabbath by dancing the tango to hymn tunes. Tango to Hymn Tunes: American Seaside Scandal', *Leeds Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 31 July 1914, p. 10. A similar story appeared on page 5 the *Edinburgh Evening News* the day previously. Readers of the *Liverpool Echo* were informed that tight-fitting

on more serious concerns, preferring to report on the activities of British warships as they patrolled the Atlantic coastline of the eastern States, as the storm clouds of war gathered in Europe.¹⁶⁰ If Saunders was taking inspiration for her painting from the vivid stories about Atlantic City, the architectural forms and jutting 'shards' visible in the drawing reproduced in *Blast* can be viewed as references to the boardwalk thrusting outwards across the seafront to the composition's lower right. Now, neatly combined with the intelligence gleaned from the scientific investigations of the painting hidden beneath *Praxitella* (fig. 9) the vibrant red, blue and brown pigments Saunders used to create *Atlantic City* might playfully echo the 'vivid Mexican colours' of the impious revellers' bathing costumes.¹⁶¹ Perhaps Saunders's unique evocations of a Vorticist aesthetic in service to the promotion of an 'English' avant-garde as presented to the visitors of the Vorticist Exhibition at the Doré Gallery in London, was for her a Vorticism without borders.

The surviving works by Lewis that were exhibited at the Vorticist Exhibition share formal similarities with *Atlantic City*,¹⁶² suggesting that he and

tango bathing costumes 'in vivid Mexican colours' popular with some women were now taboo. 'On the Beach' *Liverpool Echo*, 11 June 1914, p. 4. A significant number of stories refer to Atlantic City as the 'Brighton of New Jersey'.

¹⁶⁰ 'Patrolling the Atlantic, Activity of British Ships' *Lichfield Mercury*, Friday 2 October 1914, p. 3. The story comments on the activities of boats off the coast of New Jersey.

¹⁶¹ Detailed descriptions of the pigments existing underneath *Praxitella* are presented in Rebecca Chipkin and Helen Kohn, 'Beneath Wyndham Lewis's *Praxitella*', p. 10.

¹⁶² The 'pictures' exhibited at the Doré were *Red Duet*, *Two Shafts. Man and Woman*, *Democratic Composition* and *Workshop*. For a discussion on the Vorticist exhibition at the Doré Galleries see Anna Gruetzner Robins, 'Reforming with a Pick-Axe: The First Vorticist Exhibition at the Dore Galleries in 1915', in *The*

Saunders had been sharing ideas from late in 1914 when Lewis was living in Percy Street and occupying a studio in nearby Fitzroy Street.¹⁶³ The architectural structures apparent in Lewis's *Workshop*.¹⁶⁴ (fig. 10) are comparable with the window-like shapes set within the building blocks to the upper left of *Atlantic City*, gesturing to a mutual aesthetic interest that may have been strengthened as they discussed the project to decorate a room at the Tour Eiffel in Percy Street. Cork records that the only contemporary description of *Workshop* refers to Lewis's painting as 'a Vorticist impression of a studio',¹⁶⁵ arguing that rather than the work being a direct reference to the interior of an artist's studio it likely evokes Lewis's interest in London as the 'workshop' of the world, a sentiment echoed in *Blast* by Lewis's lauding of England as 'industrial island machine, pyramidal workshop'.¹⁶⁶ Lewis's composition is static, the pinks and ochres jarring as the architectural forms close in to form a claustrophobic space that leads the eye towards the patch of blue paint.¹⁶⁷ It is as if the city's pavements

Vorticists ed. by Mark Antliff and Vivien Green (London: Tate, 2010), pp. 59-65. See also Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 275-280.

¹⁶³ O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius*, p. 163.

¹⁶⁴ *Workshop* is one of only two Vorticist works in oil by Lewis that survives, the other being *The Crowd*. See Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, p. 128. Lewis had exhibited both paintings at the Goupil Gallery as part of the second exhibition of works by the London Group in March 1915.

¹⁶⁵ Cork cites this description of *Workshop*, which was printed in the sale catalogue of John Quinn's collection. Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 341-342.

¹⁶⁶ Cork, pp. 341-342.

¹⁶⁷ In his discussion of *Workshop* David Peters Corbett makes specific reference to the rough patch of colour at the lower right of the canvas, arguing that here Lewis juxtaposes the 'mechanisms of modernity' with a more 'painterly surface', this emphasising a 'separate sphere' that transcends the 'materials and praxis of modern life.' See David Peters Corbett, *The Modernity of English Art*, pp. 34-35.

are the vantage point of the viewer, a glimpse of sky offering the only respite from modernity in its possible connection to the natural world. Saunders's work is more dynamic, the architectural structures giving way to an explosive display of forms that is mechanical yet at the same time free and exhilarating, particularly when viewed in the mind's eye with the existence of the painting and knowledge of its vivid colour scheme. As the formal compositions of each painting present two versions of the modern city's personality, one of efficiency through industry, the other as a vibrant spectacle, each under threat from the hostile forces now gathering, the ochres, brown and mauve pigments presented in the partial reconstruction of *Atlantic City* also appear to correspond with those in *Workshop*¹⁶⁸ suggesting that the two artists may have been working from the same palette, and, as three Vorticist projects were converging in the pivotal year of 1915, likely working from the same location in Lewis's own workshop at 18 Fitzroy Street.¹⁶⁹

The workshop was the setting for a now iconic image of the Vorticist. (fig. 11) On 25 February 1916 Lewis was photographed by Alvin Langdon Coburn in

See also, David Peters Corbett, 'The Aesthetics of Materiality: Avant-Garde Painting in London before 1914' in *The Great London Vortex: Modernist Literature and Art* ed by Paul Edwards (Bath: Sulis Press, 2003), pp. 116-125. Paul Edwards places Lewis's work in the context of a desire to 'counteract the spiritual and transcendent tendency in early abstract painting' of artists such as Kandinsky, preferring to critique the possibility of transcendence through rough attention to the work's materiality. Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, pp. 128-130.

¹⁶⁸ The full colour reconstruction of *Atlantic City* reveals some further similarities in pigment between the two paintings.

¹⁶⁹ According to William Roberts Lewis's rooms on the fourth floor at 18 Fitzroy Street were 'where the paintings for the Vorticist show at the Doré Gallery were carried out.' William Roberts, 'Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist', *An English Cubist* < www.englishcubist.co.uk/lewis.html > [last accessed 3 January 2024].

his studio, the image eventually forming part of *More Men of Mark*, a project by Coburn that set out to present a series of portraits of notable personalities of the period that included figures from the Vorticist movement.¹⁷⁰ Taken two days after the 'Vorticist Evening' was held at the Tour Eiffel restaurant in nearby Percy Street, which showcased the recently completed Vorticist decorations,¹⁷¹ Coburn's photograph of a bullish Lewis captures the artist's macho-aggressive stance, perhaps deliberately exaggerated by the artist to present himself as the undisputed leader of the Vorticists, the photograph a triumphal expression of his recent achievements. A painting is partially visible in the background of Coburn's photograph, which as Paul Edwards has suggested could be Lewis's now lost painting *Red Duet*, due to its striking similarities to *Design for Red Duet* (fig. 12), a drawing that is reproduced in the second number of *Blast*. As Edwards points out, the triangular 'head' seen on the figure to the right of the photograph is like the 'head' seen on the figure to the right in the *Design*,¹⁷² the 'head' of the figure on the left obscured by Lewis's body. *Red Duet* was one of four 'pictures' by Lewis that were shown in the Vorticist exhibition at the Doré Galleries in the summer of 1915,¹⁷³ the concept of the 'duet' an aesthetic concern that appears

¹⁷⁰ *More Men of Mark* was eventually published in 1922. See Mark Antliff, 'Coburn Among the Vorticists', p. 580.

¹⁷¹ See note 11.

¹⁷² Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven and London: Yale, 2000), p. 171. For a more detailed discussion on *Red Duet* see Paul Edwards, 'What Were Red Duet?' *The Wyndham Lewis Society* <<http://www.wyndhamlewis.org/images/WLA/1994/wla-1994-paul%20edwards.pdf>> [last accessed 3 December 2021]; See also, Antliff, p. 584. *Design for Red Duet* is reproduced in the second number of *Blast* on page 63.

¹⁷³ See note 162.

to underpin the artist's entire philosophy, the 'duet' a necessary tension to balance 'art' and 'life'.¹⁷⁴ In *Blast* Lewis proclaims that:

You must be a duet in everything...Why try and give the impression of a consistent indivisible personality?¹⁷⁵

As the silent partner in duet with Lewis on the public presentations of Vorticist ideas in 1915, and as the publicly announced colleague of both 'men of mark' who 'have suffered in the cause of their art',¹⁷⁶ one wonders if Saunders might have been present in the shadows at 18 Fitzroy Street when Coburn took the photograph, quietly working on another large canvas that is now lost or has suffered the injustice of a wilful erasure.

Images as Dialogues in the 'Vorticist Room'

The evening showcasing the decorations at the Tour Eiffel that took place before Coburn's visit to Fitzroy Street is likely the same event that Goldring refers to in his memoir *South Lodge*, in which the writer recalls receiving an invitation to 'a Blast dinner, held in the room in the Eiffel Tower Restaurant...which Lewis had decorated for its proprietor Rudolf Stulik'.¹⁷⁷ The dinner clearly had the promise

¹⁷⁴ For a brilliant exposition of Lewis's concern with the 'duet', see Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, pp. 167-197.

¹⁷⁵ Wyndham Lewis, 'Wyndham Lewis Vortex No.1', *Blast, War Number*, p.91.

¹⁷⁶ 'Preliminary Announcement of The College of Arts', *The Egoist*, 2 November 1914, p. 414.

¹⁷⁷ Douglas Goldring, *South Lodge*, p.70.

of being a boisterous affair, Goldring writing that his 'guru' did not allow him to attend, speculating that perhaps 'he thought I might spend too much of my own money and perhaps return rebelliously intoxicated,'¹⁷⁸ a sentiment suggesting that the Tour Eiffel restaurant had a reputation for being a place for high jinks and high living. A notably cosmopolitan establishment, the Tour Eiffel was situated at 1 Percy Street on the fringes of Soho and Bloomsbury, amid the immigrant German and Italian communities surrounding Charlotte Street.¹⁷⁹ Its Viennese proprietor Rudolf Stulik was a popular character known amongst friends and clientele as the "Burgomaster of Soho,"¹⁸⁰ and who like many other European professionals, had come to London to learn English.¹⁸¹ He took over proprietorship of the Tour Eiffel in 1908,¹⁸² and his establishment soon became a focal point for diversity, attracting high society, adventurous socialites, bohemians, experimental artists and writers of the avant-garde who all enjoyed

¹⁷⁸ Goldring, p. 70.

¹⁷⁹ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Nights Out, Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 92-103. Walkowitz's study of London's cosmopolitan night-life charts, from the seventeenth century onwards, the diversity of Soho, and focuses on the array of cosmopolitan culinary options on offer to visitors in the early twentieth century. For a discussion on the cosmopolitan make-up of those working in the catering industry in Britain, see Panikos Panayi and Stefan Manz, 'The Rise and Fall of Germans in the British Hospitality Industry', *Food and History*, 11 (2013), 243-266.

¹⁸⁰ 'The Round of the Day', *Westminster Gazette*, Friday 17 September 1926, p. 8.

¹⁸¹ R. De Cordova, 'Thumbnail Interviews With The Great', *The Sphere*, 12 June 1926, pp. 277-9.

¹⁸² Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 214. A contradictory date of 1906 is mentioned in a press report on the closure of the Tour Eiffel in 1937. The report also documents that the Tour Eiffel was called Homer's prior to Stulik's purchase of the business. 'London's "Eiffel Tower"' *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday 7 August 1937, p. 4.

Stulik's fine wines and French cuisine.¹⁸³ This cosmopolitan atmosphere is neatly evoked in a poem by the socialite Nancy Cunard (1896-1965), who here combines enthusiasm for matters of the flesh, as well as more cerebral concerns:

our carnal, spiritual home [...] wherein is found no lack
of wits and glamour, strong wines, new foods, fine looks,
Strange-sounding languages of diverse men.¹⁸⁴

Like the iconic Café Royal off Regent Street, Pagani's in Great Portland Street and Dieudonnés in Ryder Street and other notable venues in the West End frequented by artists,¹⁸⁵ the Tour Eiffel was a space for lively debate, a site symbolic of opposing ideas and differing worldviews, where rebel artists strategized and where modern women rubbed shoulders with members of high society.¹⁸⁶

Stulik gave Lewis permission to decorate one of the rooms on the first floor of the restaurant, which according to William Roberts was carried out over

¹⁸³ Hugh David, *The Fitzrovians, A Portrait of Bohemian Society 1900-55* (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), p. 127.

¹⁸⁴ Nancy Cunard, 'To the Eiffel Tower Restaurant', *Sublunary*, quoted in Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p.215; also Lois Gordon, *Nancy Cunard Heiress, Muse, Political Idealist* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007), p.28.

¹⁸⁵ These included the Florence on Rupert Street, Dieppe, Belotti's, the Roche and Brice's on Old Compton Street. *London, Modernism, and 1914*, ed. by Michael J. K. Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 3-4. See also Brooker, *Bohemia in London*, pp. 113-131. Gennaro's Restaurant is mentioned in the context of Imagist and Vorticist dinners in Peppin, *Helen Saunders* (1996), p. 14.

¹⁸⁶ Brooker, pp. 125-126.

the summer of 1915.¹⁸⁷ Though it is unclear if any money ever changed hands on the arrangement¹⁸⁸ Lewis's enthusiasm for creating large-scale interior decorations, and the prospect for financial benefits and the opportunities for self-promotion that these projects allowed was well known by this time, his rising status as a key player within London's avant-garde circles having been boosted by the contributions he made, in collaboration with others, to the striking decorations for Frida Strindberg's notorious cabaret club.¹⁸⁹ Lewis's much-publicised contributions to the cabaret's aesthetic led to the hiring of the Vorticist and 'his allies' by other notable patrons to decorate spaces within their private residencies.¹⁹⁰ These included a commission by Mary Borden Turner (1886-1968), a wealthy American painter, novelist and suffragist, to decorate dining rooms in her house on Park Lane,¹⁹¹ as well as another commission to decorate a dining room in the aviator and sportswoman Lady Drogheda's (1887-1966) house in Belgravia.¹⁹² Literary hostess Violet Hunt (1862-1942) also asked

¹⁸⁷ William Roberts, 'Wyndham Lewis, The Vorticist', reproduced in *An English Cubist*, <<http://www.englishcubist.co.uk/lewis.html>>, [last accessed 31 October 2023].

¹⁸⁸ Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius* (London: Pimlico, 2001), pp. 172-173. It is notable that in 1919 when William Roberts was commissioned by Stulik to create murals for the restaurant, 'payment' took the form of free and regular meals at the establishment. See Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 239.

¹⁸⁹ See note 100. The cabaret will be the focus of Chapter Two.

¹⁹⁰ Richard Cork uses the phrase 'his allies', suggesting that a collaborative approach was taken for the projects Lewis was commissioned to deliver. Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 270.

¹⁹¹ This project was unfulfilled. See Cork, p. 270. See also Paul O'Keeffe, *Some Sort of Genius*, pp. 167-171.

¹⁹² Cork, p. 270; O'Keeffe, p. 145.

Lewis to transform her partner Ford Madox Ford's study at South Lodge, which Goldring remembered as 'a large abstract decoration', a scheme later described by Rebecca West (1892-1983) as 'very violent and explosive.'¹⁹³ Whilst Lewis was commissioned solo on Lady Drogheda's project, Cork has suggested that the artist was not averse to 'a certain amount of sympathetic collaboration' with his patron on the designs for her dining room,¹⁹⁴ implying that whatever the particular motive, Lewis was willing to engage in discussions with both patrons and collaborators.

In his detailed account of the Tour Eiffel Cork documents that several friends 'acted as Lewis's informal assistants' on the restaurant project, making passing reference to Peter Keenan (1896-1952) and Richard Wyndham (1896-1948), two young artists who were both likely to have been drafted in as trainees.¹⁹⁵ Cork also remarks that Saunders, 'the most able of helpers', acted as Lewis's main 'assistant' on the commission,¹⁹⁶ these comments acknowledging Saunders's talent as an artist but at the same time relegating her to a position of subordination. The exact nature of Saunders's contribution to the project remains opaque and is unfortunately hampered by the recollections of Frederick

¹⁹³ Douglas Goldring, *South Lodge*, p.13. Rebecca West conveyed this information in an interview to Richard Cork, quoted in Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 270.

¹⁹⁴ Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 179.

¹⁹⁵ Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p.229. Both artists were barely twenty at the time. Richard Wyndham studied art under Wyndham Lewis. See *British Museum* <<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BI0G51777> > [accessed 5th June, 2020]. Peter Keenan knew Ezra Pound. He left for the United States in 1922. *Bucks County Artists Database* <<https://bucksco.michenerartmuseum.org/artists/peter-j-keenan> > [accessed 17th November 2021].

¹⁹⁶Cork, p. 229.

Etchells made many years later. Citing an interview that he conducted in 1970 with Etchells, Cork suggests that Saunders would have been content to act as faithful servant to Lewis as master of the project because she was, as Etchells was recorded as saying ‘completely potty about Lewis’.¹⁹⁷ This comment further diminishes Saunders’s role in the project to one of mere girlish admiration for her so-called master, and might have been at best unreliable and at worst deliberate in order to enhance Etchells’s own status and undermine Saunders’s position within the Vorticist group.¹⁹⁸ When asked by Lipke in the 1960s about Vorticism, Etchells appears to readily place himself in an ancillary position in collaboration with others, whilst at the same time attempting to distance himself from such, remarking that:

I am sorry to say that I was always a slightly unwilling adherent of this movement, which seemed mostly to “boost” Wyndham Lewis; most of us were anxious to help him, but we all passed on to other aspects very shortly, I think.¹⁹⁹

Etchells comments are notable, particularly when considered in conjunction with letters he wrote to Lewis during 1914 and 1915, which are conspiratorial in tone

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Peppin has recently remarked that Cork interviewed Etchells at a time when the artist’s work was relatively unknown. See Rebecca Chipkin and Helen Kohn, ‘Beneath Wyndham Lewis’s Praxitella, The Rediscovery of a lost Vorticist work by Helen Saunders’, *Courtauld* https://courtauld.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/July2020_Final-Report_Chipkin_Kohn.pdf, p.12. [Last accessed 2 December 2021].

¹⁹⁹ Undated letter from Etchells to William Lipke, held in the William C. Lipke Collection, Tate Gallery Archive, Ref. TGA8223. Gruetzner Robins suggests that Etchells denied that there was any close affiliation between the Vorticists. Anna Gruetzner Robins, ‘Reforming with a Pick-Axe’, p. 63.

and encouraging of Lewis and his activities, the contents of one also revealing that Lewis and Saunders were in regular contact with each other.²⁰⁰ Similarly, Lewis's letters to colleagues at that time also reveal that he and Saunders were meeting frequently, and make it clear that Lewis viewed Saunders as a central figure to Vorticist activities. In a letter to Dismorr in 1914 Lewis describes Saunders as 'exceptional' and that he valued her 'very highly'.²⁰¹

Lewis's clear regard for Saunders's skill as an artist during this period is now brought into sharp focus by the recent discovery of *Atlantic City*, which has not only significant implications for attempts to understand the exact nature of Saunders's contribution to the Tour Eiffel decorative scheme, it provides concrete evidence of Saunders's significance as a modernist innovator working at the centre of the Vorticist project and for a wider understanding of women artists' contribution to modernism, and not least in the context of its obfuscation and possible wilful erasure.²⁰² This discovery provides the vital evidence that Saunders was working on a large scale as a Vorticist, the emerging details of the painting's colour scheme revealing the scale of Saunders's aesthetic ambition,²⁰³ and adding weight to the significance of her contribution to the 'Vorticist Room'.

²⁰⁰ Etchells wrote an amiable letter to Lewis from Yorkshire on 11 August 1914, asking Lewis, among other enquiries, whether he or 'Miss Saunders go much to the rooms at 6 Chapel Street?', this suggesting that Lewis and Saunders were often in each other's company. Letters from Frederick Etchells to Lewis are held at Cornell University Library, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Wyndham Lewis collection 1877-1975, Collection no.4612.

²⁰¹ Undated letter from Wyndham Lewis to Jessica Dismorr held at Cornell, Wyndham Lewis collection, Box.61, fol.11.

²⁰² See note 155.

²⁰³ See note 156.

This important information, taken with a reconsideration of the surviving works produced by Lewis and Saunders at the time can now be complemented with two further discoveries that provide not only a significant insight into how the 'Vorticist Room' may have appeared to visitors, it allows for a visual dialogue of colour, form and subject matter to be traced between the work the two artists produced during the period under scrutiny, and in turn offer a better understanding of how they may have worked together on the commission on an equal footing, the acknowledgement of this partnership subsequently troubled by the implications arising from the uncertain circumstances of *Atlantic City's* erasure.

On 15 January 1916 the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported on the recent completion of the Vorticist room at the Tour Eiffel.²⁰⁴ The writer of the article adopts a jocular tone as they describe the room, affecting bemusement in their references to 'walls that shriek', and to 'paintings [that] have happened somehow to be in the places they occupy', yet marvelling at the sight of 'a frieze of dazzling blue and gold'.²⁰⁵ There is a notable reference to an explanatory card that lists the names of the designs, and is described as 'the only thing that is at all likely to prevent confusion'²⁰⁶ between the artworks listed and those appearing on the walls. Yet this reference provides valuable information that is crucial for attempting a better understanding of the nature of the decorations produced for

²⁰⁴ 'The Vorticists. Perils of a West End Restaurant', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 January 1916, p. 3.

²⁰⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

the commission, and for tracing the visual signs of collaboration. According to the report the card listed the works as follows:

Paintings and Ornaments

Two Silhouettes
A Pleasant Column

Drawings

Meat and Drink
Two European Lovers
Mother and Child²⁰⁷

Whilst the *Pall Mall Gazette* attributes to Lewis the sole execution of the room's decoration, Lewis is quoted in the article as stating:

After the war, if we survive, we Vorticists intend to develop and solidify our experiments, and find some logical basis to build up an art that will be an expression of our time.²⁰⁸

Lewis's words hint of a cooperative enterprise and anticipates a desire for further fruitful collaborations expressed through the language of Vorticism. A few days after the article appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the *Daily Mirror* printed a small photograph carrying the following caption:

²⁰⁷ The *Pall Mall Gazette* report also informs the reader that "Meat and Drink" is near the door, and the portrait "Mother and Child" at the opposite side of the room', this valuable information has provided evidence that has helped with a study of the 'Vorticist Room' in the context of its possible location in the building. See Jo Cottrell, 'Helen Saunders as Vorticist – a discreet yet revolutionary spirit' in *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, pp. 29-44.

²⁰⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, p. 3.

In the Vorticist Restaurant in Percy-street, which has been decorated by Mr. Wyndham Lewis. Note the vorticist table napkins which have red and white stripes.²⁰⁹

The photograph (fig. 13), which appears on page two and punctuates a report on one of the first public speeches made by Edward, Prince of Wales,²¹⁰ depicts three diners sitting at a table in conversation, whilst being served wine by a formally dressed and easily identifiable Stulik. Two Vorticist designs are discernible on the walls behind the group, one appearing in a frame which is partly obscured by Stulik and the diner on the right, the other, possibly a mural, is partly obscured by a wall seen higher up to the left of the photograph. On closer inspection the framed work appears to have striking similarities with Lewis's 1914 drawing *Red Duet* (fig. 14),²¹¹ and the other to the left possibly a work by Saunders.²¹² Until now, no photographs of the Vorticist room have come to light, despite the extensive efforts of Cork.²¹³ As a result it has been difficult to assess the exact nature of the room's decorations. Cork does refer to a

²⁰⁹ *Daily Mirror*, 18 January 1916, p. 2.

²¹⁰ *Daily Mirror*, p. 2. It is a notable coincidence that the photograph in question was published adjacent to this report. In 1937 the *Belfast Herald* reported that 'when he was the Prince of Wales the Duke of Windsor often gave dinner parties in the room decorated by Wyndham Lewis.' 'Oh, London', *Belfast Herald*, 10 August 1937, p. 6. See Jo Cottrell, 'Helen Saunders as Vorticist', p. 39.

²¹¹ Lewis's drawing *Red Duet* of 1914 should not be confused with the lost painting which was exhibited at the Doré Gallery in 1915. See note 172.

²¹² It is possible that this work is connected to a tailpiece drawing attributed to Saunders that appears on page 16 of *Blast*'s second number. These ideas are discussed in Cottrell, 'Helen Saunders as Vorticist', pp. 35-36.

²¹³ Despite Cork's extensive searches in the British Newspaper Library and elsewhere proving fruitless, he expressed hope that photographs of the 'Vorticist Room' may be found one day. Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 219 and p. 313, n. 27.

'tantalisingly short review' of the Vorticist room in the April edition of *Colour* magazine which reported that 'gay vorticist designs cover the walls, and call from the tablecloth,' suggesting a cohesive decorative scheme,²¹⁴ this now strengthened by the caption for the photograph. Cork also documents the recollections of Harry Jonas (1893-1990), an artist who was a frequent visitor to the restaurant. Jonas reported that the room's colour scheme was 'bright red and green' and 'very "raw"',²¹⁵ also recalling the decorations as 'semi-abstract Buildings, etc., very "Gothick", strong lines and flat patches of colour: a geometrical treatment.'²¹⁶ Cork also cites William Roberts, who remembered that 'Lewis painted three abstract panels' for the room, though the auction catalogue only mentions 'two wall panels'.²¹⁷ The fragments of information gleaned by Cork, and the details carried in the report in the *Pall Mall Gazette* until recently unmentioned upon in previous discussions of the Tour Eiffel commission;²¹⁸ combined with the *Daily Mirror* photograph and the discovery of *Atlantic City*, may now allow for more accurate assumptions to be made about the design of the 'Vorticist Room', and in turn offer the prospect of tracing the collaboration between Lewis and Saunders through visual analysis of the work they each created during this period of intense activity.

²¹⁴ 'Restaurant Art', *Colour*, April 1916, p. xiv., quoted in Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 220.

²¹⁵ Cork interviewed Jonas in 1974. See Cork, p. 221.

²¹⁶ Cork, p. 221.

²¹⁷ William Roberts, *Abstract & Cubist Paintings & Drawings*, p. 7., quoted in Cork, p. 221.

²¹⁸ The report in the *Pall Mall Gazette* is discussed in Cottrell, 'Helen Saunders as Vorticist', pp. 29-44.

Following Saunders's death in 1963, the artist's sister presented three Vorticist designs to the Tate Gallery, explaining that they were 'probably' created at the time of the Tour Eiffel decorations.²¹⁹ The designs are known as *Abstract Composition in Blue and Yellow* (fig. 15), *Abstract Multicoloured Design* (fig. 16) and *Monochrome Abstract Composition* (fig. 17). Beckett and Cherry have noted that in late 1915 Saunders acquired two watercolour and pen drawings by Lewis, *Composition in Blue* (fig. 18) and *Composition in Red and Mauve* (fig. 19), suggesting that these works 'might be associated with the Tour Eiffel wall panels, being schematic cartoons and/or gifts to Saunders following their joint work,'²²⁰ suggesting further that Saunders may have been responsible for creating a third panel design in addition to the two designs by Lewis based on the recollection of Roberts.²²¹ Additionally, it is also known that Saunders owned Lewis's *Vorticist Composition* (fig. 20) which is now also in the Tate's collection.²²² A close analysis

²¹⁹ Mary Chamot, Dennis Farr and Martin Butlin, *Tate Gallery, The modern British paintings, drawings and sculpture*, vol. 2 (London: Oldbourne press, 1964), quoted in Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 313, n. 50.

²²⁰ Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', p. 64. It is notable also that there are formal similarities between *Composition in Red and Mauve* and Saunders's lost drawing *Island of Laputa*, which was exhibited at the Doré exhibition, a design of the same title reproduced in the second number of *Blast* (p. 8). The recent discovery of *Atlantic City* allows for speculation that *Island of Laputa* might also be rediscovered.

²²¹ William Roberts recalled that there were three abstract panels displayed within the 'Vorticist room' at the Tour Eiffel. William Roberts, *Abstract & Cubist Paintings & Drawings*, p.9 quoted in Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 220. Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', pp. 64-65. Peppin had previously suggested that Saunders was likely to have 'made minor but independent contributions to the scheme, perhaps designing one of the wall panels.' Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders* (1996), p. 14. 1

²²² Peppin recalls this work hanging on the living room wall in her parents' house in the 1960s. Email correspondence to the author, 23 August 2020.

of the works held by the Tate Gallery is revealing. It could be argued that Saunders's *Abstract Composition in Blue and Yellow* (fig. 15) is a study for what eventually became the 'frieze of dazzling blue and gold' as reported in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.²²³ However, the orientation of Saunders's work does not easily lend itself to the horizontal nature of a frieze. If the design of the framed work visible in the *Daily Mirror* photograph is connected to Lewis's 1914 drawing of *Red Duet*,²²⁴ it is tempting to speculate that the blue and yellow colours Lewis used for his *Design for Red Duet* (fig. 12) are commented upon in the report of the blue and gold frieze in the *Pall Mall Gazette*,²²⁵ a speculative theory possibly strengthened by Edwards's tentative identification of the painting visible in Coburn's photograph of Lewis as the lost *Red Duet* exhibited at the Vorticist Exhibition, thus communicating visually his curatorial credentials and his authorship of the Vorticist Room's design for posterity as a 'man of mark'.²²⁶

The two other designs by Saunders held in the Tate Gallery's collection perhaps provide a better basis for theories on the nature of collaboration between Saunders and Lewis if considered in conjunction with the *Pall Mall Gazette* press report, as formal elements of Lewis's *Vorticist Composition* (fig. 20) and *Composition in Red and Mauve* (fig. 19), suggest a shared thinking about the overall scheme that links to a drawing made by Saunders during the same period. Saunders's retrospectively titled *Abstract Multicoloured Design* (fig. 16)

²²³ 'The Vorticists', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 January 1916, p. 3.

²²⁴ See note 209.

²²⁵ Paul Edwards provides a detailed discussion of *Red Duet* in Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis, Painter and Writer*, pp. 167-197.

²²⁶ Mark Antliff, 'Alvin Langdon Coburn Among the Vorticists', p. 583.

the corporeal elements identifiable in the composition immediately serving to undermine its given title, offer an opportunity to speculate on the given title of the drawing at the time of its execution. The viewer's eye is drawn to the left of the composition where a hand is clearly discernible, its index finger highlighted in red and contrasting with the ochre of the thumb and two other outstretched digits, whilst the little finger is also highlighted in red as it bends into the palm of the hand. Directly below the hand a curved patch of a lighter shade of red juts to a point, the curve forming part of a sickle shape, a motif that is echoed in Lewis's *Vorticist Composition* (fig. 20). In Saunders's work the sickle shape radiates outwards by four separate patches of colour, as if to accentuate the rounded shape of a torso. Another hand is discernible, supporting the outer limit of the curve with thumb and fingers defined in ochre, and the index finger and one other digit are highlighted in red. The arm of the body is clearly visible as the shoulder is raised upwards as if to aid the arm as it supports the torso. The figure's powerful neck merges with the back of its head, which appears to be wearing a hat, the head bowed down towards the right hand. The facial features are rudimentary, suggested by the lighter red inverted l-shaped area, hairline suggested by a patch of blue. Another inverted 'L' shaped patch of off-white colour containing circular and linear forms in pink and red appears to rest upon the torso supported by the left hand, whilst the other hovers above it as if to shield the form from external threat.

Elements of the design in Saunders's retrospectively titled *Monochrome Abstract Design* (fig. 17) appear to echo those visible in *Abstract Multicoloured Design* and the monochrome work is similarly composed of corporeal references. Three figures with rudimentary facial features appear to move either diagonally

upwards or downwards along a conveyor belt, depending on the orientation of the image.²²⁷ If the figures are read in the ascendant, they are positioned as if balanced on each other's shoulders along the line of a column that thrusts diagonally upwards from the bottom left-hand corner towards the top right of the composition. Echoing those of the body discernible in *Abstract Multicoloured Design*, rudimentary facial features are visible on each of those in transit, which in turn carry a semi-circular design on their torsos that is in dialogue with a large semi-circular design seen emerging from the right arm of the lower figure, curving around to the right and then back towards the column, disappearing underneath it to connect with a smaller crescent to the middle left creating an 'S' shape. This semi-circular design is also evident in Lewis's *Vorticist Composition* (fig. 20) and in *Composition in Red and Mauve* (fig. 19). As the central figures in Saunders's monochrome design ascend in unison along the column to the upper right, three additional figures in a darker shade and without features interact with the column as if to support it, the two to the right of the column holding it in place whilst the third figure dives down from the top left as if to steady the column as it is pulled upwards.

²²⁷ As Peppin has commented, the orientation of *Monochrome Abstract Design* is uncertain as it was unframed when given to the Tate Gallery in 1963. Acknowledging the work's ambiguity, that she suggests may have been intentional, Peppin reads Saunders's image in the context of conflicting attitudes towards the war. See Peppin, 'Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a Career', p. 14. Richard Warren discusses the orientation of *Monochrome Abstract Design* in 'Helen Saunders: a little gallery', *Richard A. Warren* <<https://richardawarren.wordpress.com/helen-saunders-a-little-gallery/>> [last accessed 10 February 2024].

When these two studies are considered together with the details recorded on the explanatory card as reported by the *Pall Mall Gazette*,²²⁸ and in the case of *Abstract Multicoloured Design* with the fragmentary descriptions gleaned by Cork of the colour scheme of the Vorticist Room, it becomes possible to link them to two of the titles listed: *Abstract Multicoloured Design* to 'Mother and Child', and *Monochrome Abstract Design* to 'A Pleasant Column'. Saunders's interest in the subject of mother and child is evidenced by two ink and wash studies on paper that she made on the theme after 1914.²²⁹ Both studies show a mother holding her child to her breast, left hand in the foreground supporting the child and right hand, the digits clearly visible protecting the child from behind (fig. 21). The body discernible in *Abstract Multicoloured Design* is presented in a similar position to those of the studies, with the left hand in the *Design* supporting the curved torso as a swaddled infant rests upon it, protected by the bowed head and outstretched right hand.²³⁰ In *Monochrome Abstract Design* (fig. 17) a column is clearly discernible as it carries the three uniform figures on their upward trajectory, supported by the ancillary figures. Both designs evoke notions of nurture and support, hinting at a playful reference to the assistance Saunders lent to Lewis as they worked together on the Tour Eiffel commission. Cork has speculated that Saunders 'may have been content to fulfil this subservient role'

²²⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 January 1916, p. 3.

²²⁹ The two studies are reproduced in Peppin, *Helen Saunders* (1996), p. 15; *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel* ed. by Rachel Sloan, pp. 51-53.

²³⁰ Edwards has suggested that Saunders's drawing may be read in Vorticist terms as 'showing the tension between the new mechanised sense of self and a traditional sense of the body as a site of maternity'. See Edwards, 'Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist Aesthetics and Literature', in *Blast: Vorticism 1914-1918*, ed. by Paul Edwards, p. 119.

arguing that 'Lewis would hardly have wanted anyone else's personality to obtrude in an interior which was essentially his own creation,'²³¹ this supposition emphasised by the bullish dynamics of Coburn's photograph. However, the decision to credit Lewis alone for the decoration of the Vorticist room may well have been Saunders's own, and as demonstrated by the deliberate obscuring of her public persona in *Blast* she was likely to have shunned any publicity.²³² Additionally, Peppin has remarked that Saunders was probably satisfied to let Lewis take the credit for financial reasons,²³³ her acquisition of some of Lewis's work during this period evidence of her support for the impecunious artist. This reticence for self-promotion should not be taken as artistic subservience.²³⁴ The confidence with which Saunders executes her Vorticist works of this period clearly testifies to her independent talents as an artist, the inclusion of figurative elements in the two compositions discussed perhaps revealing of a wry commentary by Saunders about her partnership with Lewis as collaborator, and therefore making a subtle personal stamp on the project. The featureless ancillary figures in *Monochrome Abstract Design* that support the uniformed others as they ascend may be understood as Saunders's anonymous, yet willing support of Lewis as he uses the commission to make a name for himself as an artist whose stock is rising yet threatened by his

²³¹ Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 229.

²³² Cottrell, 'Helen Saunders as Vorticist', p. 41.

²³³ Saunders's came from a comfortable middle-class background, whilst Lewis was dogged by financial worries throughout his life. Peppin, *Helen Saunders* (1996), p.14. Peppin also cites the 'deliberate mis-spelling' of Saunders's name in *Blast* as further evidence of Saunders's reticence to be named publicly.

²³⁴ Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders* (1996), p.24, n.59.

imminent departure for war service.²³⁵ It is documented that Lewis was given *carte blanche* by Stulik to decorate the first-floor room, providing the opportunity to create a truly Vorticist artwork at the moment when Vorticism as a movement was taking shape, and at the same time in need of a lasting legacy. 'Mother and Child' could therefore represent a commentary by Saunders of her 'nurturing' of the project with Lewis, the swaddled Vorticist child recently born of the Stulik commission, akin to the birth of the 'problem child' *Blast* a year previously.²³⁶ Saunders's ancillary figures in 'A Pleasant Column' may be 'faceless' but without their assistance the column carrying the uniform bodies will collapse, the 'S'-shaped motif as brand providing a clue as to Saunders's subtle message: without her contribution to the realisation of the Vorticist room the project could conceivably have not come so easily to fruition.

The playful evocation of nurture and support detected in *Abstract Multicoloured Design* and *Monochrome Abstract Design* gives way to a more open expression of collaboration and mutual admiration if another work acquired by Saunders in 1915 is compared to Saunders's *Vorticist Composition in Red and Black* (fig. 22), executed in the same period. In Lewis's *Composition in Blue* (fig. 18)²³⁷ sharp black lines of varying thickness draw the eye inwards to focus on a

²³⁵ Lewis enlisted in March 1916. Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis, Painter and Writer*, p. 167.

²³⁶ William Roberts, 'Cometism and Vorticism: A Tate Gallery Catalogue Revised', *Vortex Pamphlet* No.2, reproduced at *The English Cubist*, <<http://www.englishcubist.co.uk/cometism.html>> [Accessed 14 September 2020]. Roberts refers to *Blast* retrospectively as 'this chubby, rosy, problem-child *Blast*'.

²³⁷ Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', p. 64. Saunders probably purchased Lewis's *Composition in Blue*, *Vorticist Composition* and *Composition in*

stark pentagon-shaped cavity, the deep blue wash applied at the top right-hand section of the frame softening the composition. This doubles as a featureless head, the lines leading out from its base forming the outline of a seated figure, two bent lines projecting from the waist as if to evoke two digits of a hand.²³⁸ The solitary figure appears to deep in thought as it sits enclosed within an oppressive architectural setting, the blue wash the only respite from the feeling of claustrophobia. There are striking similarities between Lewis's composition and the red and black drawing by Saunders that suggests they could be viewed as a pair of studies for the Tour Eiffel commission. In *Vorticist Composition in Red and Black* a body is clearly discernible, partly enclosed by a series of hard black lines that have similarity with those in Lewis's work. Saunders's figure carries clearly defined facial features, a flushed cheek and eye fixed on a point to the right of the composition. The lines denoting the figure's arms appear to be folded across the torso which carries a heart-shaped motif at its centre. If Saunders's composition is placed to the left of Lewis's, the figure in red appears to look directly down on the figure in Lewis's work making it possible link the two images as studies for the drawing 'Two European Lovers' as listed on the explanatory card for the Vorticist room, the two figures each positioned within an architectural setting decorated with Vorticist designs, as if the figures are in close connection within the confines of the Vorticist Room. The two drawings act as a visual rendering of dialogue that is echoed by the corporeal dynamics on display in Lewis's *Design for Red Duet* (fig. 12) and in his *Vorticist Composition*

Red and Mauve as a way of providing financial support to the impecunious Lewis, and possibly as mementoes of their time working together on the commission.

²³⁸ Cork refers to the figurative element of Lewis's composition in Cork, *Vorticism Vol.2*, pp. 335-336.

(fig. 20). Yet in *Vorticist Composition* the dynamics of partnership are disrupted by the figure to the left, which imposes itself on the figure to the right, and in the only surviving document of *Red Duet* in the background of Coburn's photograph, the opposite number is completely obscured.

When Ethel Saunders presented Saunders's works to the Tate Gallery in 1963 following her sister's death, she told then director Sir John Rothenstein that the works in question were "probably" done at the time of the Tour Eiffel decorations.²³⁹ Peppin has pertinently remarked that Saunders's sister may not have seen these compositions prior to Saunders's death, and that the sight of them thereafter would have likely sparked a memory of her having seen the completed decorations *in situ* at the restaurant. Peppin has additionally made the observation that if Ethel Saunders had not seen the Tour Eiffel paintings in person it is unlikely that she would have remembered Saunders's part in their creation, especially given that the project was attributed wholly to Lewis, of whom she disapproved.²⁴⁰ Whilst this does not offer absolute confirmation that the Tate drawings are related to the Tour Eiffel commission, these facts, insights and recent discoveries in themselves contribute to ongoing contemporary dialogues, inspired by the dialogic space of the Restaurant de La Tour Eiffel that introduces new perspectives and in turn the possibility of new meaning.

²³⁹ See note 216.

²⁴⁰ Ethel M. Saunders worked as a nurse in the Voluntary Aid Detachment in France during the latter part of the war. Correspondence between Ethel and her mother during this period survives in a private collection. In one letter dated 8 July 1918 Ethel Saunders comments upon the 'futurist' décor that she witnessed in the WAAC club in Rouen, suggesting that she was familiar with avant-garde art at the time, possibly inspired by her knowledge of the Tour Eiffel decorations. Email correspondence from Brigid Peppin to the author 7 February 2021.

Dialogues and evolutions

This chapter has attempted to amplify the active presence of the Vorticist women in the dialogic spaces of significance for the Vorticist project as cosmopolitan women active in the city to allow these women a voice amid the cacophony of others that have dominated the field of study. These voices remain yet whispers due to the limited instances, in existence or currently available to consult, of their direct comment on personal thoughts, actions and experiences as artists at the vanguard of English modernism. By giving close attention to the work that they produced, and the contexts in which the work was made, complemented by fragmentary references to events gleaned from often unreliable memories and embroidered reminiscences of those present, and from coverage of significant events collected from contemporary press coverage and ancillary commentary, an attempt has been made to amplify these voices. Close examination of the contents of Dismorr's book collection has highlighted a network of contacts that opens the possibility of tracing the presence of artist as a writer within the cosmopolitan orbit of Monro's Poetry Bookshop, and ultimately to critical acclaim as a poet of promise in dialogue with the literary circles of the avant-garde of the interwar period. As members of the Rebel Art Centre and its role as headquarters for the Vorticist project, the tasks executed by Dismorr and Saunders as proscribed within the Centre's programme has revealed, despite a reticence about 'limelight', an appetite for the promotion of an English avant-garde through 'doing' as opposed to mere 'staging', whilst their participation in the inaugural group showing of Vorticist ideas in service to English modernism at the Doré Gallery, has revealed Vorticisms that speak of

more global concerns. The opportunity to decorate a room within a pivotal space of dialogue for Vorticism provided Saunders with a vehicle with which to collaborate with Lewis as Vorticist prime mover, albeit on an equivocal footing, with recent discoveries from the archive allowing for new interpretations of both artists' work to be explored and new dialogues to emerge. The dialogic sites examined in this chapter, and the conversations that may have taken place within them, are connected to them, and inspired by them, continue to be affected by the dialogues that occur in our present moment, as each new conversation and each new claim seeking to amplify the presence of the Vorticist women diverges in new ways to challenge existing structures and allow for new meanings to emerge.

Chapter Two

Cabaret as Panacea: Vorticist imaginings and the cosmopolitan spaces of performance

In chapter one the presence of the women operating within Vorticism's ambit has been traced and their voices amplified within four interconnected spaces of dialogue mapped onto the terrain of London's avant-gardes in the 1910s. As this project continues to consider the actual and broader experience of the women Vorticists as active players on the cultural landscape of the metropolis, the attention turns from dialogue to performance in this chapter to consider the cabaret as a space of performance that was pivotal for the staging and promotion of avant-garde activity in the capital, its notoriety and its very ubiquity in public consciousness having a marked influence on the Vorticist women that is reflected in various ways in the work that these artists produced as cosmopolitan women active in the city. In its modern guise, cabaret as an art form is multifarious in nature. Often providing a platform for the staging of satirical performances that critically reflected topical issues and events that held up an irreverent mirror to contemporary society, cabaret has also acted as a laboratory for new praxis, and as such has been used a marketing strategy for the self-conscious avant-garde.¹ The setting in which a cabaret was staged, its programme, its clientele and the spontaneity that its activities engendered combine to produce a space that offered the adventurous, the marginalised and the minority the opportunity to abandon convention and explore new

¹ Lisa Appignanesi, *The Cabaret*, p. 5.

sensations. A liminal space where one's status or identity could be momentarily suspended, dialogues between polarities are enabled, anticipating an imagined utopia where the forbidden is normalised. The cabaret might offer a space for corporeal or psychological experimentation where alter egos may be enacted, thus providing a sought-for space of fun and distraction for those whose lives were restricted and marginalised within conservative patriarchal structures of power.

In challenge to London's conservative night scene, the arrival of the cosmopolitan cabaret and in particular Strindberg's notorious Cave of the Golden Calf and its ubiquity within public consciousness had a marked effect on the visual and literary culture of this period, providing source material for cartoons, novels, and almost instant parody in theatre revue.² An ambitious initiative intended to provide a cosmopolitan space for late night entertainment Strindberg's project sought, according to its manifesto, to dissolve 'to some degree' the boundaries between the 'English' and the 'continental' and provide an escape from what Strindberg believed to be the 'drastic dull-ness of our home life'.³ As Strindberg states:

Our aims have the simplicity of a need:
We want a place given up to gaiety, to a gaiety stimulating
thought, rather than crushing it.

² For an in-depth discussion on the cabaret and how it was represented in popular culture see Lisa Tickner, 'The Popular Culture of Kermesse: Lewis, Painting, and Performance, 1912-13', *Modernism/Modernity*, 4:2 (1997), 67-120; see also Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, pp. 79-115.

³ 'Aims of the Programme of the Cabaret Theatre Club' from the unpaginated brochure entitled *Cabaret Theatre Club. The Cave of the Golden Calf* dated May 1912 and published from 9 Heddon Street, London W1.

We want a gaiety that does not have to count with midnight.
We want surroundings, which after the reality of daily life,
reveal the reality of the unreal.⁴

Though firmly based on the European model,⁵ Strindberg's cabaret was proclaimed to be 'the first English Artists' Cabaret'.⁶ Opened in June 1912, the venue was situated in the West End in a basement on Heddon Street, a cul-de-sac approachable from Regent Street that today still marks the unofficial boundary between the perceived bohemianism of Soho and the affluence of Mayfair. In order to transform this subterranean space to evoke the 'unreal' for her clientele, Strindberg commissioned artists Spencer Gore (1878-1914), Lewis and Charles Ginner (1878-1952) along with sculptors Jacob Epstein (1880-1959) and Eric Gill (1882-1940)⁷ to create a series of posters, paintings and sculptural installations, that together created a visual spectacle of 'primitive' forms designed to complement a cosmopolitan and often unorthodox programme of drama, music and dance performances, presumably to befit the hedonistic and profane spirit implied in the references to the biblical legend of the golden calf.⁸

⁴ 'Aims of the Programme of the Cabaret Theatre Club'

⁵ Strindberg had strong connections to the cabaret scenes in Berlin and Munich. See Monica Strauss, *Cruel Banquet* (New York, San Diego & London: Harcourt, 2000), pp. 128-139. For a cultural history of European cabaret see Lisa Appignanesi, *The Cabaret* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁶ The phrase used by the preliminary committee in an announcement to the press in Spring 1912, cited in Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early 20th Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985) p. 61.

⁷ Strindberg's arrival in London in 1908 meant that she was witness to the burgeoning avant-garde, and through her connection to the gallery owner and art dealer Robert Ross was introduced to influential figures on the English art scene. Strauss, *Cruel Banquet*, pp. 166 – 167.

⁸ Exodus 32: 1-24.

Strindberg's cabaret provided, as a direct result of the material nature of its genesis, the focal point for the development an English 'futurist' aesthetic,⁹ the project itself neatly providing the vehicle for the promotion of Lewis as a visual artist of the new English avant-garde, and acting as an impetus to the eventual realisation of Vorticism as a distinct English movement with Lewis as its prime mover.¹⁰ Critical analyses of the cabaret within the historiographies of modernism have centred on Strindberg and Lewis as the primary protagonists in the cabaret's realisation, focusing on the cabaret's significance for Lewis and his developing maturity as a visual artist as well as its influence on the literary and popular culture of its time, with more recent studies exploring its problematic aesthetic in the context of empire.¹¹ While no concrete records that the Vorticist women visited Strindberg's cabaret have yet come to light, the following analysis of its importance for them as a space of performance is coupled with substantial circumstantial evidence gleaned from the archive that will demonstrate that Strindberg's audacious project had a marked influence on their work in its context as a destination, and as a conceptual idea to argue for its specific importance to and as influence on the women under scrutiny.

⁹ The term 'futurist' was widely used as a catch-all term for the 'new', largely as a consequence of Marinetti's vocal public promotion of Italian Futurism. Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, pp. 215-217.

¹⁰ Lewis's name appears in numerous press stories documenting the cabaret and its decorations, firmly placing him in the public consciousness. This provided him with a springboard for the promotion of his status as a leader of the English avant-garde following the closure of the cabaret.

¹¹ See 'Introduction', note 100.

The discussion begins by charting the emergence of the European cabaret phenomenon in London, acknowledging the role of women as the entrepreneurial prime movers in its establishment on the cultural map, and as influence on the burgeoning avant-garde. Taking these inspirational women as cue and adopting Vorticist writing as navigator, Dismorr's prose poem *June Night* and its evocation of the experience of an independent woman as she ventures into the city after dark¹² will be juxtaposed with contemporary press reports on the cabaret to draw attention to the theatricality of the text and to the protagonist as a 'strayed Bohemian'.¹³ Through oblique references to Strindberg's cabaret club identifiable in Dismorr's poem the cabaret will be considered as a destination space of adventure that in its flirtation with the fluidity of bohemia ran counter to the lure of Vorticist detachment. Then, leaving behind the streets of the city above and venturing inside the exoticised interior of Strindberg's subterranean performance space, Saunders's drawings that were likely inspired by the Cave of the Golden Calf will be used to demonstrate that Saunders's celebratory evocations of the cosmopolitan cabaret as a space of diversity were in marked contrast to the problematic imagery produced by the male artists to promote the English avant-garde. Finally, the cabaret will be considered as an abstract space of possibility for the Vorticist women under scrutiny, either as experienced, or as imagined. Taking Lewis's theory of the Vortex and focusing on the irresolvable duality of its 'disastrous polished

¹² Dismorr, 'June Night', *Blast, War Number*, pp. 67-68.

¹³ Dismorr, p. 68.

dance',¹⁴ the cabaret space as a concept will be considered as a space of empowerment for the Vorticist women sparked by the desire for collaboration on an equal footing with their male counterparts. Overall, it will be demonstrated that the cosmopolitan cabaret as a space of performance offered the women within Vorticism's ambit an aesthetic vehicle for experimentation that offered a panacea for the reality of quotidian experience.

Cabaret in London

...It is a somewhat curious feeling when you first enter; the world of London seems to have completely disappeared. [...] It is not English; nothing is English; you cease yourself to be English.¹⁵

This extract from the London *Standard's* lengthy review of the opening of the Cave of the Golden Calf in the summer of 1912 was one of a series of press quotations used by Frida Strindberg to promote the cabaret's cosmopolitan credentials.¹⁶ Whilst this extract belies a reticence to the prospect of a dissolution of a fixed identity, the general tone of the review as a whole is exuberant, the author clearly taken with the cabaret's 'exotic atmosphere',¹⁷

¹⁴ Wyndham Lewis, 'Our Vortex', in *Blast*, p. 149.

¹⁵ 'New Sensation for London', *Standard*, 1st July 1912, p. 11.

¹⁶ 'The Press and the Cabaret Club', *Cabaret Club, The Cave of the Golden Calf*, unpaginated brochure for the cabaret club printed from 9 Heddon Street, London W1 dated September 1913.

¹⁷ *Standard*, 1st July 1912, p. 11.

revelling in its novelty as they describe the cabaret's multicultural clientele.¹⁸ At the time this new form of entertainment was emerging on to London's night scene the prominent place to witness the avant-garde at play was the Café Royal off Regent Street, where the remnants of *fin de siècle* bohemia mixed with the nascent modernists amid the faded opulence of its surroundings.¹⁹ For those better-suited to more conventional entertainments, the West End theatres and hotel restaurants catered for the upper and aspirant middle classes,²⁰ whilst the music hall revue continued to rise in popularity with the masses, entertaining audiences with its topical pastiches.²¹ The cosmopolitan traveller's view of the parochial conservatism of London's conventional night scene is documented with some wit by a group American writers in their series of 'man about town' essays documenting their first-hand experiences of the nocturnal entertainments

¹⁸ The author describes, somewhat rapturously, the multitude of languages they hear being spoken in the venue. *Standard*, 1st July, p. 11.

¹⁹ For an entertaining history of the Café Royal see Guy Deghy and Keith Waterhouse, *Café Royal, Ninety Years of Bohemia* (London: Hutchinson, 1955).

²⁰ The 1914 edition of the *Gourmet's Guide to London* offers rich descriptions of the extensive range of restaurants and eateries available to Londoners and visitors alike. Lieut.-Col. Newnham-Davis, *The Gourmet's Guide to London* (London: Grant Richards Ltd, 1914). For a comprehensive reference to theatre in England in the early twentieth century see *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre* ed. by Colin Chambers (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 244-245.

²¹ The following studies are useful for an in-depth grasp of the cultural and political histories of the music revue in Britain. Peter Bailey, 'Hullo, Ragtime! West End Revue and the Americanisation of popular culture in pre-1914 London', *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin 1890-1939* ed. by Len Platt, Tobias Becker and David Linton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.136-137; David Linton, 'New insecurities, new form, new identity-national identity and racilogies in *Eightpence a Mile* (1913)', *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 7:1 (2013), 9-22 < http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/smt.7.1.9_1; James Ross Moore, 'An Intimate Understanding: the Rise of British Musical Revue 1890-1920' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2000).

of Europe's main capital cities.²² What follows is a description of one writer's experience of an evening out in London's West End before the author's young companion, described as 'a man of means and easy morals',²³ offers greater opportunity for excitement by leading the visitor onward to sample the underground nightclubs of the city.²⁴ It is worth quoting at length:

But we must not tarry too long amid the jewelled women, the impeccable music and the subdued conversation of the Savoy. In fact, it is not possible to linger. No sooner have we hastened through the courses of our supper and started to sip a liqueur than we are suddenly plunged into darkness. A hint! A warning! A silent but eloquent reminder that the moral man must hasten to his bed, that midnight is upon us, that respectability demands immediate retirement. When the lights come on again there is a gentle fluttering of silken wraps, a shuffling of feet, a movement of chairs. The crowds, preparing to depart, are obeying that lofty English law which makes eating illegal after twelve-thirty. If you tarry after this signal for departure, a Parisian born waiter taps you gently on the shoulder and begs of you to respect the majesty of the law. Within ten minutes of the darkened warning the dining room is empty. Liqueurs are left undrunk. Ices are deserted. Half-consumed salads are abandoned. Out into the waiting taxis and limousines pours that vast assemblage. In fifteen minutes an atmosphere of desolation settles upon the streets. The day is ended--completely, finally, irrevocably. The moral subtleties of the fathers have been sensed and obeyed. Virtue snickers triumphantly.²⁵

²² See H. L. Mencken, George Jean Nathan and Willard Huntington Wright, *Europe after 8:15* (New York: John Lane Company, 1914), reprinted by Dodo Press [n.d.]. The essays cover these writers' experiences of Vienna, Munich, Berlin, Paris and London.

²³ H. L. Mencken, G. J. Nathan and W. H. Wright, *Europe after 8:15*, p. 65.

²⁴ The reference to underground nightclubs likely suggests a direct connection with Strindberg's notorious cabaret, though this is not made explicit in the text.

²⁵ H. L. Mencken et al., pp. 67-68.

This amusing yet mocking critique of London's lingering Victorian sensibilities is anticipated in the following extract from an article published in 1911 in the *Sunday Times* by the drama critic J. T. Grein:²⁶

[Y]et why...are the amusements of London soon exhausted?
How can we find a means of redeeming our reputation that
we do not understand the humours of life?²⁷

Grein's article celebrates the cabaret clubs of Europe, whilst at the same time emphasising the cabaret's role as a temporary social leveller, a space

where the artisan and the woman of the half-world may commingle in perfect decorum, with men of genius and the high lady of the land.²⁸

Grein alludes to a space that could be suspended from the realities of social hierarchies as he expresses disappointment at the state of London's dreary nightlife so lacking in such diversions. Lamenting the absence of an entrepreneurial spirit brave enough to lead the charge in establishing a cosmopolitan cabaret in the capital, the critic had an additional concern. Grein recognised the untapped potential of independent women in society, declaring:

If we only find the right man, or, I would prefer, the right woman to act the Châtelaine as well as the late Seigneur

²⁶ J. T. Grein (1862-1935) was a Dutch-born drama critic and theatre producer. For further reading on the life and work of J.T. Grein see Michael Orme, *J. T. Grein: The Story of a Pioneer 1862-1935*, (London: John Murray, 1936).

²⁷ J. T. Grein, 'Cabaret, The Panacea' in 'Premieres of the Week', *Sunday Times*, 19 March 1911, p. 6.

²⁸ J. T. Grein, 'Cabaret, The Panacea', p. 6.

Salis played the Lord of the Manor, I for one would feel certain that a Cabaret in London would create something more than a nine days' wonder.²⁹

Grein's preference for 'the right woman' to fill what he saw as the void of ambition in what London at night had to offer is evidence of this critic's already established feminist credentials. Settling in London in 1885, Grein was the founder in 1891 of the controversial Independent Theatre Society, a body that was free from censorship by the Lord Chamberlain's office due to its members-only status.³⁰ The Society dedicated itself to producing modern realist plays, mostly by European playwrights, and was free to promote new plays deemed of literary and artistic merit, as opposed to those of mere commercial value.³¹ Grein was instrumental in bringing the work of playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946) to the London stage, pioneers of the dramatic arts whose plays were ground breaking in that they featured women protagonists as subjects,

²⁹ J T Grein, p. 6. Grein uses the French term *châtelaine*, meaning a woman in charge of a large house, also referring to the late Seigneur Salis who played 'Lord of the Manor', this a reference to Rodolphe Salis, member of the Parisian literary society *Les Hydropathes*, who set up the first artistic cabaret the *Chat Noir* in Montmartre in 1881. For a discussion on Salis and the Chat Noir see Lisa Appignanesi, *The Cabaret*, pp. 9 – 22.

³⁰ 'J. T. Grein', *Holland Park Press* <<https://www.hollandparkpress.co.uk/translators/jt-grein/>> [Last accessed 12 March 2022]. The Independent Theatre Society had several influential members, including Henry James (1843-1916) and Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), however the small number of subscribers meant it closed in 1897, though Grein continued to promote European dramatists, eventually forming the German Theatre in London Programme in 1900. For background on the censorship of plays by Lord Chamberlain's office, see Steve Nicholson, *The Censorship of British Drama 1900-1968: Volume 1: 1900-1932* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2003).

³¹ 'J. T. Grein', *Holland Park Press*

rather than as objects.³² Perhaps most significantly, Grein championed women playwrights at a time where the prejudiced consensus amongst theatre impresarios was that 'women couldn't write'.³³ Grein's public announcement of his preference for an enterprising woman to bring the phenomenon of the cosmopolitan cabaret to London's nightlife as panacea to its more conventional offerings demonstrates his on-going commitment to the empowerment of women, and as such champions diversity within the entertainment spaces of the imperial metropolis. The spirit of Grein's critique, as will be argued, foregrounds the spirit of the women Vorticists' responses to the cabaret as expressed in their art, both as an inspirational space of adventure and as a space of empowerment.

At least two women possessed the entrepreneurial spirit to respond to Grein's challenge. On 28 January 1912 a news story appeared in the *New York Daily Herald* announcing plans for the establishment of a meeting place in London for 'devotees of the three arts on a line similar to the *Chat Noir* of Paris.'³⁴ Backed by the Arts and Dramatic Club,³⁵ the leading light of this 'New Bohemian rendezvous'³⁶ was to be a Miss Floyd Ariston (fig. 1), an American

³² Swapan Kumar Banerjee, *Feminism in Modern English Drama (1892-1914)* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors Pvt Ltd, 2007), p. 42.

³³ Leslie Anne Hill, 'Theatres and Friendships: The Spheres and Strategies of Elizabeth Robins' (unpublished thesis, University of Exeter, 2014), p. 147.

³⁴ 'London to have Art Rendezvous', *New York Herald*, 28 January 1912, p. 39.

³⁵ Details on the Arts and Dramatic Club appear to be scant. However, a story that appeared in the *Bayswater Chronicle* in March 1910 suggest that the Club was founded in the autumn of 1909. 'The Arts and Dramatic Club', *Bayswater Chronicle*, 19 March 1910, p. 4.

³⁶ *New York Herald*, 28 January 1912, p. 39.

singer and performer who was a regular on the London arts scene at this time.³⁷ Dubbed by the *Daily Mail* as the ‘Dorcas of Drama’,³⁸ a label confirming Ariston’s status as both a wealthy socialite and as an established theatre performer, little is known to date about this woman’s motivations for establishing the cabaret in London other than her stated desire to ‘wake London up’, and:

get away altogether from the theatre idea [...] to reproduce the Continental cabaret – exactly as you find it in Paris, in Vienna and in Munich.³⁹

Launched as ‘The Theatre Cabaret’ on 22 February 1912 at Clavier Hall, Hanover Square, the *Pall Mall Gazette* covered Ariston’s new venture, reporting that ‘a distinguished audience’ of ‘ladies and gentlemen well-known in the arts and literature were to be seen on all sides’, and where, amongst the other entertainments described, ‘a comely lady sang Russian ballads very sweetly’.⁴⁰

Regular stories charting the rise of cabaret in London appeared in both the domestic and international press during this period, often providing important insights into the changing status of women as confident actors visible

³⁷ Floyd Ariston’s name features in numerous press articles during this period. Some examples include: ‘Miss Floyd Ariston’, *Ealing Gazette and West Middlesex Observer*, 5 November 1910, p. 9., ‘Montmartre in Mayfair’, *Music Hall and Theatre Review*, 18 January 1912, p. 10., ‘The Cabaret in London’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 23 February 1912, p. 12. Dates of birth and death unclear.

³⁸ ‘The Continental Cabaret’, *Daily Mail*, 7 February 1912, p.5.

³⁹ *Daily Mail*, 7 February 1912, p. 5.

⁴⁰ ‘The Theatre Cabaret’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23rd February 1912, p. 5.

in the social spaces of the modern metropolis.⁴¹ Reporting on Ariston's venture, the *New York Tribune* makes specific reference to:

the presence of a number of Art School girls who sat on the corners of tables and choked on French cigarettes' [whilst] 'pale-faced young men...who wore flowing neckties of black' quaffed lager beer 'with an artistic flourish.⁴²

Observations such as this provide an amusing insight into the self-styled 'bohemian' clientele of these new spaces, where young independent women mixed freely with the opposite sex to enjoy what London at night now had to offer.⁴³ Writing in his autobiography in the 1930s the artist C.R.W. Nevinson appears to recall the launch event for the cabaret at Hanover Square, writing that 'many appeared, at [Strindberg's] invitation, overdressed *à l'apache*'.⁴⁴ Nevinson does not mention Ariston by name, instead citing Strindberg as the evening's

⁴¹ Meaghan Clarke, 'Sex and the City: The Metropolitan New Woman', *The Camden Town Group in Context*, ed. by Helena Bonett, Ysanne Holt and Jennifer Munday, Tate Research Publication < <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/meaghan-clarke-sex-and-the-city-the-metropolitan-new-woman-r1105659>> [accessed 1 September 2023].

⁴² 'At The Theatres, Foreign Notes: London and the cabaret', *New York Tribune*, 14 July 1912, p. 2. The report also discusses the Cave of the Golden Calf.

⁴³ Referring to the work of social historian Penny Tinkler, Clarke notes that 'smoking was to be an important symbol of social independence'. Meaghan Clarke, 'Sex in the City' < <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/meaghan-clarke-sex-and-the-city-the-metropolitan-new-woman-r1105659>> (para. 11). See also Penny Tinkler, *Smoke Signals: Women, Smoking and Visual Culture in Britain* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), p. 31.

⁴⁴ C.R.W. Nevinson, *Paint and Prejudice*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1938), pp. 57-58.

prime mover and as ‘the originator of night clubs in London’.⁴⁵ Nevinson’s recollections here suggest that Strindberg was involved with the Arts and Dramatic Club-sponsored vanguard of powerful women and their distinctly international initiative to ‘bring Bohemia to London’,⁴⁶ Strindberg possibly encouraged by Ariston’s venture to open her own venue in nearby Heddon Street.⁴⁷

As Ariston and Strindberg were busy launching their cabaret ventures in London in early 1912, Dismorr and Saunders were each active as independent artists on London’s cultural landscape. Their respective working spaces were based in close proximity to one another in Chelsea as they sought to establish themselves among the c teries of the English avant-garde.⁴⁸ In February Saunders exhibited work alongside Nevinson with Vanessa Bell’s Friday Club at the Alpine Gallery in Mayfair, the show including work by fellow proto-Vorticists Frederick Etchells and Edward Wadsworth.⁴⁹ Both women contributed work to the Allied Artists Association’s London Salon at the Royal Albert Hall in July

⁴⁵ C.R.W. Nevinson, *Paint and Prejudice*, pp. 57-58.

⁴⁶ ‘London to have Art Rendezvous’, *New York Herald*, 28 January 1912, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Strindberg’s club officially opened on 26 June 1912. See Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 103.

⁴⁸ Saunders took rooms at 4, Phen  Street, and Dismorr’s studio was located at 183, King’s Road. Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders 1885-1963*, p. 38; Peppin, ‘Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a Career’ in *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 9; Catherine Heathcock, *Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): Artist, Writer, Vorticist*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Saunders contributed *Rocks, North Devon*. See Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 38; Peppin, ‘Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a Career’, p.11. See also, Anna Gruetzner Robins, *Modern Art in Britain 1910-1914*, pp. 182-183; and Richard Shone, ‘The Friday Club’, *Burlington Magazine*, 117:866, Special Issue Devoted to Twentieth Century Art (May 1975), pp. 278-284.

1912,⁵⁰ an exhibition that also included a pivotal work by Lewis. Listed in the exhibition catalogue as *Creation*, Roger Fry in his review of the AAA exhibition described Lewis's contribution as a 'design of a Kermesse, originally intended for the Cave of the Golden Calf, the new Cabaret Theatre.'⁵¹ Dismorr's and Saunders's participation in these exhibitions meant that they would have been travelling regularly to the West End to view the work of their contemporaries,⁵² and in the case of the AAA exhibition at the Albert Hall they would have been aware of the role that the cabaret commission had in the bolstering of Lewis's public profile.⁵³ Furthermore, the fact that Grein's very public call for London to embrace the cosmopolitan cabaret⁵⁴ inspired women like Ariston and Strindberg to assert themselves in the otherwise male-dominated milieu of entrepreneurs

⁵⁰ Saunders contributed *Figure composition, Portrait and Sketch*, and Dismorr contributed three landscapes. See Peppin, p. 38; and Heathcock, *Jessica Dismorr*, p. 35, and Heathcock's Appendix: Works Exhibited, n.p. See also Mengting Yu, "'A Talented and Decorative Group': a re-examination of London's women artists, c.1900-1914' (doctoral thesis, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, 2017), p.149. Dismorr was exhibiting work in Paris as well as London at this time and travelling regularly between the two cities. See Heathcock, p. 33. Saunders contributed one painting to Roger Fry's exhibition *Quelques Independents Anglais* at the Galerie Barbazanges in Paris in May 1912. Other contributors included Gore and Lewis. See Peppin (1996), p. 38; Peppin (2022), p. 11.

⁵¹ Roger Fry quoted in Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 91. See also Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 37.

⁵² The rapid development of the public transport system offered unprecedented access to sites of leisure and consumption such as art exhibitions, museums, department stores, cafés and restaurants, as well as the freedom to enjoy evening entertainments at the theatres, music halls and the nascent cabaret scene. See Heathcock, p. 106. See also Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', pp. 62.

⁵³ For example, Lewis's name featured in the *London Evening Standard's* report on the opening of Strindberg's cabaret. 'Cave of the Golden Calf-Opening of the Cabaret Theatre Club', *London Evening Standard*, 27 June 1912, p. 5.

⁵⁴ J. T. Grein, 'Cabaret, The Panacea', *Sunday Times*, 19 March 1911, p. 6.

active on the more conventional performing arts scene⁵⁵ must surely have provided inspiration and impetus for many women working in the plastic and performing arts wishing to establish their own independent practice.

As Grein's article extols the virtues of the cabaret in all its diversity, similarly Dismorr's prose poem *June Night* (appendix 1) glimpses the variety of identities commingling in the metropolis after dark.⁵⁶ Dismorr's narrator/protagonist, accompanied at the outset by the romantic figure of 'Rodengo',⁵⁷ embarks on an evening out in the city, perhaps to take in a show,⁵⁸ whilst at the same time reacting to the performances of those around her. The imagery conveyed in the text evokes the frenetic pace of modern life, which is accentuated by the contrasting characterisation of a 'woman in the purple pelisse [who] is too beautiful', the woman's dress and other-worldliness signifying an age now passing.⁵⁹ Published in 1915 in the second number of *Blast*, Dismorr's text has been interpreted as both an empowering account of an independent

⁵⁵ Two key figures in London's theatre world were George Edwardes (1855-1915), managing director of the Gaiety Theatre and Daly's Theatre, and George Grossmith (1874-1935), a writer and actor who appeared in several of his own shows at the Gaiety, and wrote the popular revue *Kill That Fly!* which was staged at the Alhambra in 1912. Both were 'blasted' in the Vorticist magazine *Blast*. See Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, p. 252 n. 3. See also *Blast*, No. 1, p. 21.

⁵⁶ Dismorr, 'June Night', in *Blast, War Number*, pp. 67-68.

⁵⁷ It is likely that 'Rodengo' is a misspelling of the name 'Roderigo'. Foster chooses to use the latter in her discussion of *June Night*. Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 30.

⁵⁸ Dismorr refers to 'a night of opera' in her text. Dismorr, 'June Night', p. 67.

⁵⁹ Dismorr, p. 67. This long fur-lined robe or coat was popular in women's fashion in the 19th century. For an overview of the pelisse in fashion see 'Fashion History Timeline' <<https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/pelisse/>> [last accessed 30 January 2023].

woman's engagement with the modern city, and as a marker of the author's desire to reject emotionalism in favour of a detached Vorticist sensibility.⁶⁰ Additionally, the timing of the poem's publication, as Beckett and Cherry have observed, contributes to a multivalent reading of the text by paying attention to the oblique references to the impact of war on the city's inhabitants.⁶¹ These multi-perspectival interpretations of *June Night* as an exercise in conflicting aesthetics, as an evocation of the fast pace of modern existence and as a document of a particular moment in time can be expanded further and the poem's accepted chronology disrupted if close attention is given to the theatrical imagery evoked by Dismorr, and analysed in the contexts of personality, location, and contemporary commentary. Such a strategy reveals subtle references to the material fabric of the cabaret and to the cabaret's status as the progenitor of Vorticism through Lewis.

The flamboyant figure of Rodengo, whilst a romantic foil for the cool reticence of the protagonist, is characterised by Dismorr as a dramatic personage

⁶⁰ In terms of aesthetics Cork describes *June Night* as 'a parable of the artist's own conversion from Fauvism to Vorticism'. See Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 417. See also Heathcock, pp. 107-108; Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', pp. 67-69; Francesca Brooks, 'Jessie Dismorr: Walking and Rewriting London', *Flashpoint* <[https://www.flashpointmag.com/Francesca Brooks Jessie Dismorr Walking and Rewriting London.htm](https://www.flashpointmag.com/Francesca_Brooks_Jessie_Dismorr_Walking_and_Rewriting_London.htm)> [last accessed 3 October 2023]. For a brief discussion of the prose poem in the context of Vorticist feminism see Miranda Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism: Jessie Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Vorticist Feminism' in *Vorticism: New Perspectives*, ed. by Antliff and Klein, p. 128.

⁶¹ Beckett and Deborah Cherry, p. 67. Beckett and Cherry focus on Dismorr's evocation of the crowd and the mobilization of soldiers. There are other possible references to the impact of war in the text. Dismorr writes of 'ribbons of silver fire' in the air, which alarm the passengers on the bus, and a 'falling spangle' that momentarily disrupts the protagonist's search for aesthetic purity within the ordered 'precincts'. Dismorr, p. 68.

whose 'pink cheeks' and 'black beard' are 'too conspicuous for daylight'.⁶² Alicia Foster has linked Dismorr's description of Rodengo to a portrait of Lewis by Augustus John (fig. 2).⁶³ In it Lewis is depicted as a brooding young bohemian dressed in black, his pink-tinged complexion accentuated by his shock of long black hair. The figure's intense pose appears to hint at the sitter's ambition to emulate and ultimately supersede the notoriety of the image's creator.⁶⁴ Whilst Lewis-as-Rodengo takes centre stage in John's portrait, Rodengo is merely a supporting character in Dismorr's narrative. Described as 'half of mannequin and half of audacious and revengeful Corsican',⁶⁵ Rodengo is both a benign figure that can be manipulated to suit the occasion, and at the same time othered as a figure of unsettling unpredictability who is beyond control, this latter description suggesting an oblique reference to Lewis's volatile personality. Lewis's mercurial temperament is well documented, and like many others in his orbit Dismorr had first-hand experience of his contrary behaviour.⁶⁶ Strindberg too provoked Lewis's ire. Whilst Lewis was himself indebted to her for the opportunity to showcase his talents through the cabaret commission, he was frustrated with Strindberg's own erratic behaviour and questionable business acumen and sought revenge for unpaid work that led to an audacious act that signalled the

⁶² Dismorr, p. 67.

⁶³ Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 30.

⁶⁴ For a discussion on Lewis's admiration of Augustus John, See Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 1-25.

⁶⁵ Dismorr, p. 67.

⁶⁶ Deepwell comments that the surviving correspondence between Lewis and Dismorr suggests that the relationship was 'miserable', due to Lewis's behaviour. See Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', p.35.

denouement of their relationship.⁶⁷ While Strindberg struggled to do so with Lewis, Dismorr exercises her directorial control over Rodengo-as-Lewis, positioning Rodengo as ‘an indispensable adjunct of the scenery’ as she charts the journey of protagonist and companion along ‘the bare wings and corridors’ of the suburbs that lead to their ultimate destination at the centre of the city as ‘stage’.⁶⁸ As a key figure in the forging of an English avant-garde enabled by the cabaret as incubator for Vorticism, Rodengo-as-Lewis is ‘indispensable’ to Dismorr, yet is at the same time an ‘adjunct’, an accessory to Dismorr’s own position as active participant and collaborator within the wider landscape of the European avant-garde, the text thus allowing Dismorr to assert her own agency on Vorticism’s stage.⁶⁹

While Dismorr as author of the poem has the power to direct the narrative, the narrator/protagonist is crafted as a detached spectator observing, from the vantage point of the top deck of a bus the fleeting scenes that form the

⁶⁷ Spencer Gore’s widow had recalled Lewis’s alleged violence towards Frida Strindberg when Lewis was said to have kicked Strindberg down a flight of stairs following a *contretemps* about unpaid fees for his work. This story was recounted to Richard Cork in an interview with the Gores’ son Frederick in 1981. See Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 112, n. 190.

⁶⁸ Dismorr, *June Night*, p. 67.

⁶⁹ Dismorr’s allusion to London as a ‘stage’, and Foster’s linking of Rodengo with Lewis is enhanced by Lewis’s rising public profile as the artist responsible for the redecoration of Strindberg’s cabaret club in 1913. An article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported that ‘salle and stage have been entirely redecorated by Mr Wyndham Lewis and turned into one flame of pale yellow’. See ‘The Cabaret Club Re-opening for Winter Season’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 September 1913, p. 13. Writing in 1937 about his life in the years immediately preceding the First World War Lewis himself stated that ‘The Press in 1914 had no Cinema, no Radio, and no Politics: so the painter could really become a ‘star’’. Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering: An Autobiography 1914-1926* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1937), p. 36.

backdrop to London's stage. The text makes specific reference to 'Regent's Corner', the reader imagining the motor vehicle turning from Piccadilly Circus onto Regent Street where the narrator/protagonist witnesses the crowds that 'swarm under green electric globes'.⁷⁰ This descriptive phrase gestures towards the interior of Cave of the Golden Calf as reported in the press, the *New York Tribune* running a report on 'The English Cabaret' situated in its 'glorified cellar' off Regent Street where:

..rough beams cross the ceiling at intervals, the spaces between them coloured pale green and dotted with brightly tinted electric globes.⁷¹

The reporter notes the 'solitary electric light over the doorway' of the cabaret, which leads to a 'well-lighted flight of wooden steps' down to the venue below.⁷² Cork has suggested that 'as an overture to the far larger decorations beyond', two large posters by Ginner, one of the artists responsible for creating the decorations for the club's interior decorations, may have been on display at the entrance to the cabaret club, one of these likely to have been a version of *Piccadilly Circus* (fig. 3).⁷³ Ginner's evocation of the bustling, motorised

⁷⁰ Dismorr, p. 67.

⁷¹ 'The English Cabaret', *New York Tribune*, 11 August 1912, p. 3.

⁷² 'The English Cabaret', p. 3.

⁷³ Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p. 80. Cork cites Wendy Baron's work on the Camden Town Group. Ginner sold two posters in distemper to Strindberg's cabaret club. This information is recorded in Ginner's notebooks concerning his work with the cabaret commission. The posters are now lost. See Wendy Baron, *The Camden Town Group* (London: Scholar Press, 1979), p. 43. See also David Fraser Jenkins, 'Piccadilly Circus 1912 by Charles Ginner', catalogue entry, May 2005, in *The Camden Town Group in Context*, ed. by Helena Bonett, Ysanne Holt,

metropolis, the hurried figure of the young woman who strides along the street with purpose set in contrast with the seated costerwoman, who in attempting to sell her wares at a busy junction, is almost engulfed by the swirling traffic, this juxtaposition of the new with a time now passing neatly complemented by the reference to the woman in the pelisse in Dismorr's text.⁷⁴ The gestural references to the cabaret's material fabric and location, as evoked by the series of fleeting scenes expressed in Dismorr's poem imitate the eclecticism and tempo of cabaret and theatre revue,⁷⁵ whilst the signifiers of commerce and entertainment that contribute to the visual fabric of the city at night are clearly marked on the vehicle in Ginner's painting of 1912, one advertising a new revue at the Alhambra Theatre that provided audiences with a humorous glimpse into the world of the 'avant-garde' at play in their underground club.⁷⁶

The adventures of Dismorr's protagonist as a 'strayed bohemian' who observes the 'squalor and glitter'⁷⁷ of London's streets at night, anticipates,

Jennifer Mundy, Tate Research Publication, May 2012, <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/charles-ginner-piccadilly-circus-r1138997>>, [last accessed 25 March 2022].

⁷⁴ Dismorr, p. 67.

⁷⁵ In his discussion on the music hall in the context of Cubism Jeffrey Weiss refers to the 'jumbling and splicing of events in *tableaux* which occur in rapid succession'. Jeffrey Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and Avant-Gardism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), p. 30. See also Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, p. 95.

⁷⁶ André Charlot's new theatrical revue *Kill That Fly!* opened at the Alhambra Theatre in October 1912. The show included a scene titled 'The Metropolitan Cabaret', this described in the *Sketch* newspaper as a 'Skit on the Cave of the Calf'. Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, pp. 94-95.

⁷⁷ Dismorr, p. 68.

through oblique references to Strindberg's cabaret, the potential for new experience. Leaving the streets of the metropolis behind and now venturing down the stairs to witness the sensational spectacle of Strindberg's subterranean performance space and its eclectic mix of revellers, one might view the expression on the features of a mature woman depicted in an undated and untitled watercolour by Dismorr as an amused reaction to the club's audacious surroundings and the playful irreverence of its clientele.⁷⁸ (fig. 4) Probably created in 1912,⁷⁹ Dismorr presents her subject as if in caricature. The woman depicted is dressed in evening attire, wearing a broad choker at her neck, pendant earrings and a gold patterned bandeau encircles her coiffured head. Her body is set against a background of swirling abstract forms in shades of green and gold that accentuate her bare shoulders that have recently been covered by a fur stole which now rests behind her. The woman is unaccompanied and exudes an air of quiet confidence. There is the hint of a smile at her thin lips, the eyes are narrowed, and eyebrows arched as she reacts, with amusement, to the scene within her view. One might imagine her seated at one of the tables in the cabaret club on the opening night in June 1912, waiting for the decorated curtain to rise and for the evening's performance programme to commence, whilst observing the antics of those around her, the swirling abstract forms on the wall behind resembling the fronds of palm trees that evoke a sense of the exotic.

⁷⁸ The undated watercolour is held in a private collection. This image of the painting is a of poor quality due to the inaccessibility of the work at the time the photograph was taken. There is a band of shadow running across the middle of the image due to the reflection of light from a window opposite in the room in which it is kept.

⁷⁹ The owner of the work believes that Dismorr created it in 1912, given its similarity to other works of the same period and given the style of dress depicted. The identity of the sitter is unknown.

It is revealing that though the cabaret concept afforded adventurous women like Ariston and Strindberg with power and notoriety as they asserted themselves as foreign entrepreneurs in a patriarchal milieu, the existing evidence available to consult on Strindberg's cabaret project demonstrates that the artists commissioned to materially produce her vision for the 'unreal' were all men. The 'Cave' was envisaged and enabled by a powerful cosmopolitan woman but brought practically into being through the interpretations of the British men involved, and as such could not be distanced from the cultural and political field in which it was firmly positioned. Through their endeavours to 'realise the unreal'⁸⁰ for the cabaret these artists constructed, through their modernist experimentation of the notion of the 'primitive',⁸¹ what amounted to a

⁸⁰ See note 2.

⁸¹ In 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', T. E. Hulme acknowledges Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* and its idealised call for non-European art to be viewed with a cosmopolitan detachment for them to be understood on their own terms, but Hulme shifts the perspective to suggest that 'more primitive people' tend toward artistic abstraction because 'they live in a world whose lack of order and seeing arbitrariness must inspire them to a certain fear'. T. E. Hulme, 'Modern Art and its Philosophy', *Speculations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 85-88. See also Wilhelm Worringer, 'Abstraction and Empathy', (extract,) *Art in Theory 1900-2000* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 66-69. Urmila Seshagiri has observed that Hulme's racially determined theories retain a belief in the perceived superiority of Western culture as more advanced than non-Western cultures. Urmila Seshagiri, 'Racial Politics, Modernist Poetics', *Modernism*, ed. by Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins Publishing, 2007), pp. 581-582. Peter Brooker notes that Lewis was in the audience when Hulme gave his lecture 'Modern Art and its Philosophy' at the Quest Society on 22 January 1914. Brooker, *Bohemia in London*, p. 95.

Gesamtkunstwerk of the 'exotic',⁸² where the presence of the imaginary Other permeated the plastic artworks created for the space.

The cabaret's exotic atmosphere is variously recorded in the written memories of the habitués of Strindberg's club. In his autobiography published in the 1940s Osbert Sitwell describes the Cave as a:

super-heated Vorticist garden of gesticulating figures, dancing and talking, while the rhythm of the primitive forms of ragtime throbbed through the wide room.⁸³

Whilst this retrospective account of a 'Vorticist garden' alludes to the notion of an Edenic hothouse, its climate nurturing the green shoots of a nascent English avant-garde, Sitwell's description also conjures a palpable sense of unease in a space where the atmosphere is almost stifling. Sitwell's reference to the 'primitive forms of ragtime' pulsating within the 'super-heated Vorticist garden' conjures a space of 'otherness' that accords with the knowledge of the plastic artworks Lewis and others created in their pursuit of the 'unreal'. In stark contrast to Sitwell's uneasy recollections, Saunders's ink and watercolour drawing (fig. 5), now known as *Cabaret* adopts a more celebratory tone. The image acts as a dynamic visual metaphor for musical performance, and likely inspired by the cabaret phenomenon sweeping London at the time of its

⁸² Jo Cottrell, 'Bohemia in London: Frida Strindberg's Cabaret Theatre Club' in *Into the Night. Cabarets and Clubs in Modern Art*, ed. by Florence Ostende with Lotte Johnson, p. 86.

⁸³ Osbert Sitwell, *Great Morning, Being the third volume of Left Hand, Right Hand! An Autobiography* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd & The Book Society, 1948), p. 208.

creation.⁸⁴ The subject of Saunders's drawing appears to be ragtime or early jazz musicians positioned on a stage suggesting a nightclub setting. As the head and limbs of their conductor, baton in hand, gesticulate into view from the left of Saunders's composition, two musicians play on a small, red platform, their bodies almost fusing with their instruments. Each body is illuminated from above by the stage lighting that cuts through the green-tinged atmosphere, the beams highlighting the abstract designs on the walls behind, hinting towards Saunders's first-hand knowledge of the club's décor,⁸⁵ or perhaps witnessed at the exhibition in which Lewis's painting *Kermesse* was on display.⁸⁶ Saunders's decision to use the green and red pigments, in the otherwise black and brown palette used for *Cabaret*, suggests that these particular colours may have had some resonance for the artist, the green pigment possibly referring to the green-tinged ceiling of the club.⁸⁷ Similarly, perhaps the colours chosen are a nod to the green and crimson silk attire worn by the 'negro band' purported to be scheduled to play at the club at its re-opening in October 1913, following extensive redecoration undertaken by Lewis.⁸⁸ A particular detail was reported in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 'Every Woman's Page' in September 1913, hinting at the arrival of the jazz phenomenon in London before the First World War:

⁸⁴ Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 12. See also *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel* ed. by Rachel Sloan, pp. 66-67.

⁸⁵ Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', p.63.

⁸⁶ See note 51. See also Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, p. 78.

⁸⁷ 'The English Cabaret', *New York Tribune*, 11 August 1912, p. 3.

⁸⁸ See note 69.

Evidently colour dominates at the Cabaret in every way. The waiters will be costumed as Neapolitans. The negro orchestra is clad in crude green and crimson silks, resembling gorgeous figures by Tiepolo.⁸⁹

Whilst Saunders's subject and choice of colours in the drawing known as *Cabaret* may have been directly influenced by the various descriptions of the club carried in the press reports of 1913, the subject matter also allows for speculation that the artist may have enjoyed the musical entertainments first-hand. In the 1930s *The Tatler* recorded that Strindberg introduced to her cabaret the American string band *The Versatile Three*, and as a result according to the report 'syncopated music became the rage.'⁹⁰ *The Versatile Three*, also known as *The Versatile Four* (fig. 6), were one of the first small groups of African-American ragtime musicians to tour to Britain and Europe,⁹¹ and press reports in November and December 1913 document that the band were playing in the West End at the Oxford Music Hall on the same bill as popular performers George Formby (1875-1921), Charles T. Aldrich (1869-1955), and the notable female

⁸⁹ 'The Cabaret Club', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 September 1913, p.13

⁹⁰ The reader of the feature is told that Strindberg 'introduced a nigger band – the Versatile Three – and syncopated music became the rage.' 'The Passing Pageant 1910-1920', *The Tatler*, 1 May 1935, pp. 32-33. For a detailed commentary on early jazz in Britain see *Black British Jazz: Routes, Ownership and Performance*, ed. by Jason Toynbee, Catherine Tackley and Mark Doffman (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 26.

⁹¹ 'The Versatile Four', Wikipedia
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Versatile_Four> [last accessed 31 March 2024].

impersonator Malcolm Scott (1872-1929).⁹² Saunders's drawing allows for speculation that she may have witnessed the *Versatile* players either at the cabaret or at the Oxford. In any case, ragtime music was at the forefront of popular consciousness during this period largely due to the success of "*Hullo Ragtime!*", a musical revue that opened at the London Hippodrome in December 1912.⁹³

From the viewpoint of the 1930s the article in the *Tatler* firmly positions Strindberg as one of the pioneers in setting the trend for syncopated music in pre-war London as an early promoter of jazz, and the musical phenomenon is clearly remembered by habitués of the cabaret club. Sitwell's 'super-heated' memory of the cabaret also alludes to the advent of jazz music in his description of bodies gesticulating, dancing and talking 'whilst the primitive forms of ragtime throbbed',⁹⁴ his recollections hinting at an uneasy reaction to musical influences from across the Atlantic.⁹⁵ References to African-American musicians can also be

⁹² Numerous advertisements for the variety show at the Oxford appeared in the popular press during this period. For just one example see 'Variety Entertainments', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 December 1913, p. 14. For a recent study of music hall entertainment in Britain, see Richard Anthony Baker, *British Music Hall: An Illustrated History* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2022).

⁹³ 'Hullo, Ragtime!', *The Guide to Musical Theatre* <https://www.guidetomusicaltheatre.com/shows_h/hulloragtime.htm> [last accessed 31 March 2024]. See also Peter Bailey, 'Hullo, Ragtime! West End Revue and the Americanisation of Popular Culture in pre-1914 London', *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin 1890-1939* ed. by Len Platt, Tobias Becker and David Linton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 135-152.

⁹⁴ Sitwell, p. 208.

⁹⁵ References to the advent of the jazz phenomenon in London before the First World War can also be found in a letter written by Mark Gertler to Dora Carrington in c. 1912. In it Gertler writes, 'If you possibly can go to the Victoria Palace this week, there is the finest set of Rag time niggers I ever saw. Wonderful!', Dora de Houghton Carrington Collection, Harry Ransom Center,

found in Ford Madox Ford's fictional reconstruction of the club based on his recollections of his visits to the Cave in his 1923 novel *The Marsden Case*, in which he describes 'Madame's negroid orchestra' as a mixed-race ensemble composed of 'South American mulattos, Barbadoes, quadroons, and Cuban octoroons, not to mention Bowery Buck negroes.'⁹⁶ Edgar Jepson, another cabaret habitué recalled the club's clientele dancing the 'Bunny Hug' and the 'Turkey Trot',⁹⁷ Jepson's references to the sensational and often sexualised 'animal dances' and Ford's explicit and derogatory categorisation of black musicians from the Americas imbuing the 'Vorticist garden' with both a desire for the 'exotic' and a fear of total abandonment to foreign influences.

Saunders's *Cabaret* is an altogether more playful evocation of the newly popular music of the period, and the image itself would not be out of place if used on a poster to promote Strindberg's exciting musical programme. Indeed, Saunders's latterly discovered drawing *Dance* of c. 1915 (fig. 7) might act as a companion piece to *Cabaret* whilst also neatly anticipating Sitwell's memory of the gesticulating figures dancing to the syncopated rhythms of jazz in the frenetic atmosphere of the cabaret space. Two geometric forms appear to dance together, their genderless bodies barely constrained by the series of lines in red, flesh tone

University of Texas. My thanks go to Alex Grafen for alerting me to the existence of this letter.

⁹⁶ For a discussion on Ford Madox Ford and Strindberg's cabaret see Nathan Waddell, 'Ford and the Cabaret Theatre Club', *The Modernist Party* ed. by Kate McLoughlin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 192-209. Ford's description of the orchestra in *The Marsden Case*, is also quoted in Peter Brooker, *Bohemia in London*, p. 78.

⁹⁷ Edgar Jepson, *Memories of an Edwardian and Neo-Georgian*, London 1937 quoted in Cork p. 107.

and shades of blue that run perpendicular to one another creating a container space reminiscent of a small dance floor. As the figures dance, they appear to flex their muscles as if about to go into combat,⁹⁸ though it is as if they are braced to fight in unison against an outside force not visible. Saunders's image is a joyous visual evocation of the potency of the new rhythms, whilst also perhaps a subtle acknowledgement of the achievements of Strindberg as the powerful impresario who introduced them to an eager audience, the genderless, mechanical bodies dancing together in a show of strength, celebrating new forms of expression without resort to corporeal appropriation.

Cabaret as an abstract space of empowerment

The Vorticist figures dancing together in Saunders's drawing in celebration of the new musical innovations of the age, their bodies barely contained within their geometric frame, appear to act as a subtle rebuke to Lewis's developing theory of the Vortex. In the first number of *Blast*, which appeared just a few months after the closure of Strindberg's cabaret,⁹⁹ Lewis announces the vortex as the central metaphor for his modernist aesthetic. Lewis states:

⁹⁸ *New Rhythms Henri Gaudier-Brzeska: Art, Dance and Movement in London 1911-15*, ed. by Jennifer Powell (Cambridge: Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge, 2015), p. 37.

⁹⁹ Following the closure of her cabaret Frida Strindberg wrote to Wyndham Lewis with a proposal, announcing: "On Thursday a special night will take place, reuniting all the "founders" of the Cabaret. I have an idea, that the Cabaret will be reborn, if you like, as "Blast-Club", in a Palace within 4 weeks." Strindberg's letter also reveals that her invitation was also extended to the Countess of Drogheda, who Lewis had recently completed decorating a room for at her house in Wilton Crescent, Belgravia. The 'Blast Club' as envisaged by Strindberg did not

Our Vortex is proud of its polished sides. Our Vortex will not hear of anything but its disastrous polished dance.¹⁰⁰

The contradiction inherent in Lewis's statement accentuates the tensions between polarities and their necessary dialectical relationship. For Lewis, in order to try to achieve detachment, it is necessary that diametrically opposed entities unify into stasis by means of the very force that creates their opposition.¹⁰¹ In her undated poem 'The Cave' (appendix 2) Saunders focuses on the word 'polished'.¹⁰² As Hickman has observed, Saunders's beautiful 'polished' environment is envisaged in a space that engenders a desire for certainty in its pristine exactitude.¹⁰³ Whilst Lewis evokes the volatility of existence necessarily contained in the impenetrable shell of the Vortex, the polished environment of the interior of Saunders's cave is a deliberately envisaged haven set apart from the outside world, though external pressures are acutely felt as the cave's walls

materialise. Undated letter from Frida Strindberg to Wyndham Lewis held at Cornell.

¹⁰⁰ Wyndham Lewis, 'Our Vortex', *Blast*, p. 149.

¹⁰¹ David A. Wragg, *Wyndham Lewis and the Philosophy of Art in Early Modernist Britain* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 2005), pp. 87-95. Scott W. Klein, *The Fictions of James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis: Monsters of Nature and Design* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 34-37.

¹⁰² Helen Saunders, 'The Cave', reproduced in Peppin, *Helen Saunders* (1996), pp. 31-32.

¹⁰³ Miranda Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', in *Vorticism New Perspectives*, p. 131.

'strain beneath the weight of the lifted earth.'¹⁰⁴ The poem is undated, but as Hickman has proposed, its lexicon suggests that it was composed during the formation of Vorticist ideas, the poem's title gesturing towards Vorticism via the Cave of the Golden Calf.¹⁰⁵ Saunders's poem is evocative of primitive energies, of the sea 'too glittering and wide', the jagged rocks and the 'brazen' sun, these external forces that are viewed by Hickman as being at odds with the preferable sanctuary of the cave.¹⁰⁶ Whilst Hickman does not elaborate further on the poem's possible connection to the cabaret, Saunders's evocation of primal forces resonates with the atmosphere evoked in the club by the brilliantly-coloured paintings of imagined landscapes that adorned its walls, their radiance hinted at as if the colours are visible from within the imaginary cave where 'everything is beautiful'.¹⁰⁷ The sea has 'scoured and swept with industry' the walls of the cave, as if referring to the act of making work within the sanctuary of the artist's studio.¹⁰⁸ Saunders twice uses the word 'polished' to describe the cave, which Hickman connects to the 'water-tight compartments' of Lewis's Vorticist aesthetic.¹⁰⁹ However, Vorticist theory is put into practice by Saunders as her text alludes to the external real world that is ever-present outside of the cave,

¹⁰⁴ Saunders in Peppin, p. 31.

¹⁰⁵ Hickman, p.130.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.131

¹⁰⁷ Saunders in Peppin, p. 31.

¹⁰⁸ Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', p.131.

¹⁰⁹ Wyndham Lewis, 'Our Vortex', *Blast*, p.147. Hickman, p. 131.

Saunders's description of the 'curved grey lines [that] trace shapes on the black metal of the air',¹¹⁰ as if referring to the cityscape after dark.

Hickman argues convincingly that Saunders employs the 'atmospherics' of Vorticism, transposing them towards her imagined 'cave' envisaged as a conceptual safe space to practice the defensive aggression required as a woman artist aligned to Vorticism and its masculine 'severity of mind', this creating a pathway away from the expectations of 'ordinary femininity' required by the outside world.¹¹¹ It is possible to build on this position if further consideration is given to the possible connection of Saunders's poem to Strindberg's cabaret, and to view Saunders's imaginary cave as a space for artistry as directly inspired by the Cave of the Golden Calf as a space set apart from the realities of daily life. A different reading might be offered to suggest that whilst Saunders's conceptual 'cave', deliberately 'hollowed out in concentrated narrowness'¹¹² as a sanctuary for the practice of 'polished' Vorticist ideas, it was also a safe haven from which to envisage the possibility of a humorous riposte to Vorticism's self-conscious masculinity through the contradictory and irresolvable notion of a 'disastrous polished dance', an aesthetic and mode of practice that is arguably reified within the space of the Cabaret Theatre Club. This self-consciousness can be identified in the aesthetic of virility as expressed within the walls of the cabaret club, perhaps most explicitly in the contributions of Eric Gill in his overtly phallic studies for and his bas-relief of the calf and in the brilliantly coloured totemic

¹¹⁰ Saunders in Peppin, p. 31.

¹¹¹ Hickman, p. 131.

¹¹² Saunders in Peppin, p. 31.

caryatids of copulating figures by Jacob Epstein that appeared in Lewis's recollections, 'to hold up the threateningly low ceiling'.¹¹³ This might be read as an unconscious reference to masculine anxieties in the face of the growing confidence of the modern cosmopolitan women active on the city's streets above. To counter this, one might imagine a self-conscious hyper-masculinity was practised by the 'men of 1914' who regularly frequented the club.¹¹⁴ Drawing from written memoirs and literary re-enactments Brooker speculates on the various interactions and activities of key figures of the avant-garde at play in the Cave of the Golden Calf.¹¹⁵ Brooker quotes the artist Stella Bowen (1893-1947) who recalled that Pound had evolved a 'highly personal and very violent style' as he danced in the cabaret club, 'springing up and down as well as swaying from side to side', this description conjuring up an image in the mind's eye of a very specific 'Vorticist dance' that embodies masculine bravado. If Saunders is rebuking Vorticism's hyper-masculinity yet enabled by the evocation of the imaginary cave of sanctuary through the aesthetics of Vorticism, a similar

¹¹³ Cork quotes the recollections of Lewis and others in his discussion on Epstein's sculptural contributions to the Cave's aesthetic, suggesting that *Totem*, a pencil and wash drawing by Epstein of c.1913 could be linked to the designs of the decorated caryatids within the space. Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, pp. 95–96. *Totem* is in the Tate Gallery's collection. See fig.3.

¹¹⁴ In his autobiography of 1937, Lewis described T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Ezra Pound as the 'men of 1914', this statement suggesting that this group of men had been the only significant players in the maelstrom of modernist activity at that time. Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p. 252. The phrase is often used more generally to describe the (male) Vorticists, though as Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell have commented Lewis's emphasis on the 'men of 1914' was 'simplistic in its masculinist account of modernist innovation'. *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity*, ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek, Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Brooker, *Bohemia in London*, pp. 72-92.

strategy can be detected in the work of Dorothy Shakespear. Between 1912 and 1914 both artists appear to be devising their own playful dance in riposte to masculine bravado using the atmospherics of the 'Cave', either as a humorous response to and therefore a sought-for liberation from its effect, or in Shakespear's case one born of an aspired-to collaboration, despite the patriarchal posturing of her partner, that gestures towards a desire for equality.

In a letter to Shakespear that mentions in passing his visit to Strindberg's club, Pound writes 'tried the Cabaret on Tuesday with the F.M.H.'s - Konody & Czernikoff on the premises etc. till 3.20 A.M.'¹¹⁶ Pound also mentions that Czernikoff 'is asking Evah for a chunk of opera there on the 19th', this a reference to Eva Fowler, the American socialite and patron of the arts and the person originally responsible for introducing Pound to her mother, the writer and playwright Olivia Shakespear (1863-1938).¹¹⁷ This comment suggests that the emerging cabarets, as well as being places run by entrepreneurial women, were also places for the cultivation of powerful women with means who were known to provide financial support for artistic endeavour. Shakespear's own exposure to London's cultured circles was already well assured by the time she was introduced to Pound in 1909.¹¹⁸ Her mother was an intimate friend of William

¹¹⁶ Ezra Pound to Dorothy Shakespear, 11 October 1913, printed in *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear, Their Letters 1909-1914*, ed. by Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1984), pp. 270-271. Paul G. Konody (1872 – 1933) was the art critic for the *Observer* and the *Daily Mail*. Pound visits the cabaret with Ford Madox Ford (Hueffer) and his partner Violet Hunt.

¹¹⁷ J.J. Wilhelm, *Ezra Pound in London and Paris 1908-1925* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), pp. 12-13.

¹¹⁸ Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz state that it is impossible to know exactly when Shakespear met Pound. Pound appears in Shakespear's notebook for the

Butler Yeats, and was an active attendee of the salons given by society friends in Kensington and on the wider avant-garde lecture circuit.¹¹⁹ Shakespear frequently accompanied her mother to lectures and salons where she met the significant figures of the day, and was in attendance at her mother's own salons given at their home in Brunswick Place.¹²⁰ Whilst clearly active on London's cultural scene, it is unclear whether Shakespear visited Strindberg's cabaret, despite frequenting the area for her various social engagements at the progressive New Century Club,¹²¹ yet the cabaret likely loomed large in Shakespear's consciousness. A year or so prior to his letter discussing his visit to the cabaret, Pound makes oblique reference to Strindberg in his letters on two other occasions, describing her as 'a divorced countess, or at least that she wasn't a male friend of W.L.' and as a 'german countess', suggesting that Strindberg and her entrepreneurial endeavours may have been a subject ongoing

first time on 16 February 1909. *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear, Their Letters 1909-1914*, pp. xi & 3.

¹¹⁹ John Harwood, *Olivia Shakespear and W. B. Yeats* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1989). John Harwood's book on the relationship between Olivia Shakespear and W.B. Yeats is to date the definitive source material on Olivia Shakespear's life, and her relationship with Yeats.

¹²⁰ Harwood, *Olivia Shakespear and W. B. Yeats*, pp. 130-131.

¹²¹ Shakespear reports on her various visits to the New Century Club to Pound in the published letters. The Club was situated in Hay Hill, Mayfair W1, and had been in existence from 1908. It was one of the growing number of clubs catering, often exclusively, for like-minded women from the late nineteenth century into the early decades of the twentieth. Many of these clubs were fertile ground for the growing suffrage movement and this may indicate Shakespear's interest in or allegiance to the suffrage cause. Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (London: UCL Press, 1999), pp. 117-118 & 126. Shakespear was also a subscriber to the radically feminist *New Freewoman* magazine. See Brooker, *Bohemia in London*, p. 44.

in conversations between Pound and Shakespear.¹²² Indeed, given the detailed nature of Shakespear's letters to Pound during this period it would seem odd that she did not mention visiting the cabaret if she had been there, suggesting that there may have been a conscious decision not to frequent the club, perhaps due to her upper-middle class status in society and her traditional Victorian upbringing.¹²³ Whilst the facts remain unclear, it is documented that Shakespear was interested, like many of her contemporaries, in the dance craze of this period, witnessing Nijinsky perform with the *Ballets Russes* in Diaghilev's production of Debussy's *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden in March 1913, and, according to Pound, learning to dance the risqué tango.¹²⁴

This interest in dance is explored in a watercolour and pencil drawing by Shakespear of May 1912. (fig. 8). Titled *A Dream*, the drawing is inspired by a dream that the artist recounts in a letter to Pound.¹²⁵ Shakespear depicts a lone

¹²² The references to Strindberg appear in the letters dated 9 August 1912 (with mention of Wyndham Lewis), and 13 August 1912. *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear, Their Letters*, p. 139 & 142. Lewis would have been in close contact with Strindberg at this time on the decoration of the Cave of the Golden Calf.

¹²³ A brief biographical note on Shakespear's sheltered early life can be found in the preface to *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear, Their Letters 1909-1914*, pp. x-xi.

¹²⁴ *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear*, pp. 190-191. J. J. Wilhelm, possibly citing Pound, refers to Strindberg's cabaret as 'the loosest and most entertaining place in town', and goes on to refer to a much later correspondence in 1955 between Pound and Ingrid Davies to say that the dances of those days 'were still the relatively innocent turkey trot and bunny hug – not the sensuous tango that Dorothy was then trying to learn'. J.J. Wilhelm, *Ezra Pound in London and Paris 1908-1925*, p. 108-109.

¹²⁵ Shakespear writes to Pound, on 19 May 1912, 'I had pleasantly picturesque dreams last night – one that I shall try to paint later. The other was of a Nijinsky-Amor dance'. *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear*, p. 99.

ballet dancer holding an *arabesque* position on an otherwise empty stage. The dancer's body is balanced on the stage by her delicate standing leg holding firm *en pointe*, and despite the voluminous and rather romanticised tutu and the robust modelling of the upper body, the image suggests a level of precarity. The lone dancer's body is contained within a cavernous yet ethereal space, the brushstrokes constituting the stage backdrop adding to the ghostly effect. Whilst the subject of the work is probably inspired by a recent performance given in London by the ballerina Anna Pavlova,¹²⁶ it is tempting to wonder whether this work is in some way revealing of a personal aspiration, perhaps the visual manifestation of the artist's unconscious desire for personal empowerment and independence, channelled through the depiction of a lone dancer within the safe environment of the dream-like stage. Shakespeare's published letters to Pound of this period paint the picture of an engaging, intelligent woman who appears to know her own mind, though she acts regularly as a sounding board for the perceived 'genius' of her *fiancé*. Pound discusses his literary, poetic, and aesthetic ideas with Shakespeare, as well as his aspirations. He also reports on his day-to-day activities as a self-styled 'artist-about-town' with a narcissistic sense of entitlement, though at the same time tacitly seeking her approval as a means towards self-validation. Shakespeare appears to be complicit in the inflation of Pound's ego by encouraging his various musings, though a sense of irony can be glimpsed. In the same letter in which she discusses *A Dream*, this part of an

¹²⁶ Shakespeare mentions an intention to 'see Pavlova' in a previous letter of 13 April 1912. Pound and Litz, p.92. A performance by the 'incomparable' Pavlova is reviewed in 'Anna Pavlova, Return of the Famous Russian Dancer', *The London Daily News*, 16 April 1912, p.5.

ongoing dialogue concerning the meaning of what constitutes great 'art' and the work of the artist,¹²⁷ Shakespear states:

*You can be scholarly: I'll be surface: I can't be anything else! But nevertheless I am painting quite half-seriously. And I love it very much.*¹²⁸

This playful statement, coupled with the image of the lone dancer as inspired by the dream that materialised soon after, seems to speak of a growing self-confidence in Shakespear as an artist. This developing sense of empowerment in solo performance is perhaps motivated towards an aspiration for a productive partnership, as identified through Shakespear's allusions to Pound's 'depth' and her own 'surface', and whilst this evokes the possibility of an aesthetic conflict, her comment gestures towards a complementary duet of mutual respect that might be achieved through the aesthetics of Vorticism.

Shakespear's experimentation with a Vorticist aesthetic has generally been perceived as wholly influenced by her relationship with Pound. However, Shakespear's 'quiet allegiance' to the movement, which was met with encouragement by Lewis,¹²⁹ may not have been encouraged by Pound. In a letter to art collector John Quinn in 1917 Pound wrote, 'I distrust the "female artist" as

¹²⁷ Shakespear tells Pound in a letter dated 11 May 1912 that she has been reading Tolstoy's *What is Art* in which Tolstoy argues that great art must have religious or moral purposes, and rejecting his own early works as "bad art". Pound and Litz, p. 98.

¹²⁸ Shakespear to Pound, 19 May 1912, in Pound and Litz, p. 99.

¹²⁹ Cork comments on Shakespear's 'quiet allegiance' to Vorticism as he briefly discusses her work during this period, citing a letter from Lewis to Pound in early 1915 enquiring whether Shakespear was 'still busy in the Vortex?' Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 288-289.

much as even you can,'¹³⁰ a comment that both asserts Pound's belief in masculine superiority whilst also demonstrating a level of insecurity. Shakespear's aspiration towards an equal partnership can be detected in her Vorticist design (fig. 9) which is printed in the second number of *Blast* and positioned as a tailpiece to Lewis's article 'A Review of Contemporary Art'.¹³¹ The design appears to depict two futuristic figures positioned on a black plinth or stage. Each figure has its right arm outstretched gesticulating towards the other in forceful angularity as if both are engaging in an intense struggle or vigorous debate. The figures could be embracing one another, their arms appearing to encircle one another's 'torso' in a precisely executed Vorticist dance. In 'A Review of Contemporary Art' Lewis article attempts to articulate the radical changes taking place in European art during this period, as traditional forms of representation were reimagined in new and complex ways, and according to Lewis, made manifest in British art through Vorticism.¹³² Shakespear's design can be viewed as an appropriate visual accompaniment to the content of the article promoting Vorticism, the figures articulating a duet emblematic of the 'polished dance' of Lewis's Vortex. Whilst Shakespear's Vorticist figures can be seen as her visual signifier of her ongoing conversation

¹³⁰ Ezra Pound to John Quinn in 1917, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character, The Life of Ezra Pound* (New York: Delta, 1988), p. 239.

¹³¹ In addition to the tailpiece design in *Blast* 2, Shakespear is credited with *Snow Scene*. A third design known to have been executed by Shakespear but unattributed in this publication, is a design accompanying an advertisement for 'Ezra Pound's New Book'. *Blast, War Number*, pp. 35, 47, 103.

¹³² Kathryn Milligan, 'BLAST and the Canon: Exploring Wyndham Lewis's "A Review of Contemporary Art"', *BLAST at 100: A Modernist Magazine* ed. by Philip Coleman, Kathryn Milligan and Nathan O'Donnell (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), pp. 35-40.

with Pound about what constitutes art, or what art should be, the tension between the polarities of perceived masculine superiority and the desire for mutual respect fix and contain the 'polished dance' in an eternal 'disastrous' struggle that can never be resolved. Shakespear's depiction of dancing figures, From the lone dancer set within a Cave-like space that imagines the body as a site of liberation as inspired by the dance crazes of the period, this position of solitude then moves towards one of desired collaboration, enacted by Vorticist bodies toward an aspirational duet that while it speaks of a desire for dialogue with her partner on an equal footing, in reality fails to neutralise masculine power.

A duet shares its stage with a Vorticist body in Saunders's *The Rock Driller* c.1913 (fig. 10). Saunders depicts three figures within a cavernous space akin to the compartment enclosing Shakespear's lone dancer, though Saunders's cave is claustrophobic. A pink amorphous figure appears to be dancing to the left of the composition, the hard outline of the figure's form struggling to contain the pink mass within its frame, as the figure's head is tossed towards its right shoulder, facial features suggesting laughter. A yellow figure, which appears to be hooded, is dancing with the pink one, its arms held aloft in gleeful enjoyment. To the right a Vorticist figure shadows the dancing yellow one as it observes the duet in front of it, its expression of calm control seemingly set in stone as it holds a pointed object that it uses to drill into the ground below, three shards of rock dislodged as the drill penetrates the earth. The retrospective title given to Saunders's drawing is clearly motivated by its reference to Epstein's *Rock Drill*

(fig. 11), a work that was in development during 1913.¹³³ Cork emphasises the virility of the ‘rock driller’ describing it as a ‘demonic warrior ploughing his mechanistic weapon into the ground’,¹³⁴ and refers only to the presence of a single figure to the left of the rock driller, presumably the pink figure, suggesting that its nerves are shattered by the vehemence of the drilling,¹³⁵ Cork revealing his phallogocentric reading of the composition. Hickman offers a more convincing reading of Saunders’s drawing. In identifying the two dancing figures as female and suggesting that in their ‘ludic mode’ they counterbalance the driller’s ‘robotic virility’, Hickman sees this as a sign of Saunders’s rebuff to Epstein’s ‘obsession with pregnancy and copulation’.¹³⁶ Epstein’s work at this time was preoccupied with virility, procreation and birth. He had recently completed the controversial tomb of Oscar Wilde in Paris (fig. 12), and in 1910 had been collaborating with Gill on an unrealised project to build a ‘secret temple’ in Sussex, dedicated to pleasure; a surviving study of one of the intended pillars showing a copulating couple (fig. 13).¹³⁷ Cork has suggested that Epstein may

¹³³ Hickman, ‘The Gender of Vorticism’, p. 133. For an account of the development of Epstein’s *Rock Drill* see Richard Cork, *Wild Thing, Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Gill* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2009), pp. 53–65.

¹³⁴ Richard Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 150.

¹³⁵ Cork, p. 150. Rachel Sloan has read the yellow patch of colour as a plume of dust that rises as a result of the rock driller’s exertions. Helen Saunders: *Modernist Rebel*, p. 56.

¹³⁶ Hickman, p. 133. Hickman quotes Tickner’s reference to Epstein’s ‘obsession with pregnancy and copulation’. See Lisa Ticker, ‘Men’s Work? Masculinity and Modernism’, in *Visual Culture, Images and Interpretations*, p. 46.

¹³⁷ In 1910 Epstein and Gill decided to collaborate on an ambitious project to create an immense pagan temple at Asheham in Sussex that would be decorated with colossal sculptural figures. The project was unrealised. Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, p.92.

have used his commission for Strindberg's cabaret club to 'implement his frustrated ambition to make caryatids for a building dedicated to the gratification of the pleasure principle'.¹³⁸ Saunders's drilling figure clearly gestures to the work of Epstein, and whilst the connection to Epstein's *Rock Drill* in this drawing is clear, the sphinx-like formation of Saunders's rock driller reads more clearly of Epstein's design for Wilde's tomb,¹³⁹ and as such links the cavernous space of Saunders's drawing to the Cave of the Golden Calf. The amorphous figures dance in duet with playful abandon as if to taunt the phallogocentric preoccupations of the Vorticist body as it makes its presence felt within the walls of the cabaret. The Vorticist body of *The Rock Driller* as sphinx shifts the emphasis away from the hyper-masculinity of the driller, towards the *femme fatale* of the mythical beast. In conflating the two images of the *Rock Drill* and the Sphinx, Saunders effectively neutralises the rock driller's power, and in so doing destabilises the 'disastrous polished dance' of the Lewisian Vortex.

In the second number of *Blast* Lewis continues to explore the irresolvable contradiction of the Vortex. Lewis states 'Be Thyself', and thereafter:

You must be a duet in everything...Why try and give the impression of a consistent indivisible personality?¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery*, pp. 95–96. See also Richard Cork, *Wild Thing: Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska, Gill*, pp. 53–65.

¹³⁹ Alan Munton draws attention to this similarity in 'Abstraction, Archaism and the Future: T. E. Hulme, Jacob Epstein and Wyndham Lewis', in *T. E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism*, ed. by Andrzej Gasiorek and Edward P. Comentale (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 78-79.

¹⁴⁰ Wyndham Lewis, 'Wyndham Lewis Vortex No.1', *Blast, War Number*, p.91.

In considering these statements Paul Edwards has argued, acknowledging Lewis's Nietzschean framework of oppositions as relative, that Lewis's 'blatant inconsistency is intentional, and the inconsistency is only relative'.¹⁴¹ This position of inconsistent oppositions can be identified in both Saunders's and Shakespear's works as inspired by the safe haven of the 'cave'. For Saunders, the sanctuary of the cave allows the practice of a modernist aesthetic free of the stigma of the 'feminine' through Vorticism, and in so doing problematises the Vorticist body through its female opposite. For Shakespear the cave enables an independence of mind to envision the possibly of a partnership via Vorticism, whilst acknowledging the inconsistency of the partner. In countering the notion of Vorticism's 'disastrous polished dance' as dependent on the containment of disparate forms into energy,¹⁴² both Saunders and Shakespear aspire to an energetic dance of joy towards liberation without limitations, away from the expectations foisted upon these artists from the 'outside [where] rocks are jagged'.¹⁴³ The cave as sanctuary opens up the possibility of realising one's individual potential through artistry in an imagined reality safe from the demands and expectations of the patriarchy.

¹⁴¹ Paul Edwards, 'What Were Red Duet?', *Wyndham Lewis Annual*, 1994, < <http://www.wyndhamlewis.org/jwls/55-wyndham-lewis-annual-i-1994> > [last accessed 23 March 2022].

¹⁴² Scott Klein explores the various interpretations of what 'the vortex' meant from the viewpoint of each of its main exponents. For Pound, it was 'the maximum point of energy', an intensification of presence. For Lewis it can be interpreted as 'a symbol of an insecure imagery that is centrifugal from, yet inescapably linked to, the referent that is integral to its power'. Scott W. Klein, *The Fictions of James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis: Monsters of Nature and Design* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 35.

¹⁴³ Saunders, 'The Cave', in Peppin, p. 31.

This chapter has considered the significance of the cabaret as an important space of performance for women at the nexus of avant-garde activities in pre-war London as cosmopolitan women active in the city. It has been argued that the space of the cabaret, as imagined or as directly experienced, provided a source of inspiration for the women connected to Vorticism. The cabaret has been considered as a vehicle of empowerment for women, for its importance as a vehicle for experimentation and promotion, and as a source material for escapism and for envisaging emancipatory activity. It has considered the adventurous women who brought the cabaret phenomenon into being in 1912, against the backdrop of London's more conservative entertainments of the time. Focusing on Dismorr's poem *June Night*, and acknowledging its importance as an experiment in aesthetics, the text has been analysed to identify descriptors with possible connections to Strindberg's cabaret club as a destination space of adventure for independent women, and to Lewis as a key yet volatile protagonist of the cabaret's realisation. The cabaret was then considered as an experiment in 'realising the unreal' to argue that Saunders's imagery of the cabaret evoking the new rhythms introduced to London by Strindberg as impresario, and of the genderless bodies dancing together in a show of strength in celebration of Strindberg's achievements were in marked contrast to the problematic appropriation of the bodies of the Other used in service to promote the English avant-garde. Finally, the cabaret has been considered as an abstract space of empowerment. Taking Lewis's *Vortex* as a 'disastrous polished dance', a descriptor for the eternal conflict and necessary contingency of diametrically opposed forces as the central metaphor and concept for his modernist aesthetic, the 'Cave' as a concept acted as an abstract haven in which to explore these

forces in safety as an emancipatory strategy as counter to the aggressive masculinity of the Vorticist project.

PART TWO: COSMOFEMINIST STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE

Part one has focused on London as the nexus of early modernist activity in England to argue for a more rounded picture of each of the women working under the banner of Vorticism as cosmopolitan women active in the city.¹ Focusing on the key sites of early modernist exchange in the city, and exploring activities and interactions taking place within these spaces of dialogue and performance that it has been argued are crucial to an understanding of women's allegiance to Vorticism and its practices, the presence of each of these women has been traced and amplified, and the influence of these spaces on their work explored to shine a light on the women Vorticists as significant actors within the theatres of the avant-garde in the capital.

Part two marks a shift from the physical sites of early modernism in the city towards a concern with the abstract. Focusing specifically on the work of Dismorr and Saunders as committed Vorticists, and in identifying a concern with the corporeal as imagined and as evoked in the work that they produced during the period under scrutiny, the abstract body as a contested site of conflict and instability that disrupts their allegiance to Vorticism will be explored in two contexts: the modernist magazine as a tool for communication and as political influence, and the modernist concern for the carapace, employed in this context as a conceptual device to address personal distress. It will be argued that these spaces hold greater importance than physical space for gaining a deeper understanding of the motivations and particular situations of Dismorr Saunders

¹ Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women in/out of Vorticism', p. 29.

as modernists and as women as they navigate a changing world. Where the focus on physical space has allowed for the actual presence of the women committed and connected to Vorticism to be traced as cosmopolitan women active in the city, part two is concerned with interior space, what will be termed a cosmofeminist spaces of resistance to containment in which desires can be freely expressed through the body as inscribed and as envisaged, practised as a means of empowerment and a possible route to emancipation.

CHAPTER THREE

Vorticism in Flux: the modernist magazine and cosmofeminist strategies of self-care.

This chapter focuses on the significance of the modernist 'little' magazine for Dismorr and Saunders as committed Vorticists. As dialogic sites of avant-garde discourse and as platforms for showcasing new forms of expression that fostered aesthetic and ideological experimentation, presented radical opinion, and encouraged intellectual debate,¹ the little magazine as tool for communication and as organ of influence will be used to chart the individual trajectories of Dismorr and Saunders towards Vorticism to examine their respective aesthetic strategies as cosmopolitan English women operating within Vorticism's borders. The corporeal imagery evoked by each artist will be explored, these images signalling an unsettled relationship with the physical body, yet at the same time the body as a concept is used as a necessary conduit through which to channel distress. It will be argued that each artist attempted to control distress through a turn inwards towards a contemplation of their own mutable self that recognises and accepts the dynamic individual within. For each woman this was as a way of bearing the burden of the contained, institutionalised female body in society and thus revealing in their work a distinct cosmofeminism enacted from the inside,

¹ Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible, 'Little Magazines and Modernism: An Introduction', *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism and Bibliography*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2005, p. 3. For a general introduction to little magazines in Britain and Ireland see *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume 1, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-26.

yet is paradoxically enabled by Vorticism as a necessary aesthetic used to counter the stigma of femininity, this further countering the strategic nationalism of the Vorticist project.

The materials used to make this argument are either reproduced in the selected magazines or are viewed through the lens of a publication's particular ethos. They will be analysed to explore the individual aesthetic strategies of Dismorr and Saunders from within Vorticism to attempt to reconcile their unique positions from two interlinked perspectives: their adherence as artist-women to Vorticism as an aggressively masculinist movement, and their individual navigation, as women, of the complex terrain of Vorticism's assumed nationalism as promoted in the pages of *Blast*.² It will be demonstrated that in each case a body in flux is expressed that is at odds with, yet enabled by Vorticism as an aesthetic of containment.

To frame this discussion two philosophical statements offering opposing views on the nature of existence are here presented. In his philosophic treatise *Creative Evolution*, which was translated into English in 1911,³ Henri Bergson extols life's innate mutability. Bergson argues that 'for a conscious being, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.'⁴ For Bergson the mind and body are in a communal and continual state of flux as time is experienced instinctively. Conversely, in the second

² Detailed discussion of these ideas is covered in the Introduction.

³ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, transl. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover, 1998 [1911]).

⁴ Henri Bergson, 'Creative Evolution', reproduced in *Henri Bergson Key Writings* ed. by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London: Bloomsbury Revelations, 2014), pp. 213-214.

number of *Blast* Lewis considers existence from the viewpoint of the artist-philosopher. Lewis states, '[T]here is Yourself: and there is the Exterior World, that fat mass you browse on.'⁵ For Lewis as Vorticist, to create art the self must aspire to be a discrete entity separated from its environment, and from this external position is empowered to view everyday existence with detachment, time standing still at the moment of observation where art can exist.⁶ Whilst Bergson privileges time over space, the body and mind as one entity living in and of its surroundings, Lewis's Vorticist philosophy promotes the spatial, advocating the artist's separate self as necessary to observe the exterior world and through art control its interpretation at any given moment.⁷ The apparently conflicting viewpoints of Bergsonian flux versus Vorticist containment provide the overarching framework for this chapter.

⁵ Wyndham Lewis, 'Vortex "Be Thyself"', in *BLAST*, War Number, p. 91.

⁶ Paul Edwards has argued that Lewis acknowledges the impossibility of being an absolute observer of life from within life, of being separated from one's own bodily existence. Edwards explains that Lewis's aspiration for the complete detachment of the artist from life is just one among many of Lewis's constellation of philosophical ideas. These concepts that are fundamental to Lewis's life-long aesthetics and politics are discussed and debated regularly at the monthly meetings of the Wyndham Lewis Reading Group. See also Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, pp. 167-197.

⁷ Lewis's aesthetic of detachment may have been directly influenced by T. E. Hulme's particular interpretation of Worringer's treatise *Abstraction and Empathy*, which was adopted by Hulme to explain what he saw as modern artists' tendency towards abstraction. (see chapter 2, n.81). This led, as Wees has argued, to a newly detached and crystalline English art for the machine age and was taken up by Lewis in the framing of Vorticism. See Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, pp. 82-83. In his discussion on early modernist ideas in London, Christopher Butler remarks that whilst Lewis may have been influenced by Hulme's ideas it is impossible to know to what extent. See Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 209-239.

Bergson's philosophy of flux, and Lewis's aesthetic of detachment are conceptual frameworks that have echoes with the broader political and cultural climate of *avant-guerre* London. The 'splendid isolation' of imperial Britain⁸ and the resulting insular mind-set of the nationalist Englishman were both marked by anxieties about the perceived physical invasion of England by ascendant foreign forces,⁹ and a cultural invasion by the intellectual ideas of the European avant-garde.¹⁰ Bergson's 'invasion' of England's fashionable society and the influence of his theories on cultural élites cannot be underestimated. As literary scholar Mary Ann Gillies has argued, Bergson's popularity in England in the immediate period before the outbreak of war was determined by the widespread availability of English translations of his writing between 1909 and 1911, the influence of these texts bolstered by Bergson's visits to England in 1911 to give a series of lectures on his philosophical theories.¹¹ The popularity of these lectures

⁸ 'Splendid Isolation' was a term used to describe British foreign policy, stemming from the end of the Crimean War until the first decade of the twentieth century. See Allan Palmer, *The Penguin Dictionary of Modern History, 1789-1945*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 268.

⁹ See 'Introduction', note 33. Hynes' opening chapter offers a succinct overview of the socio-political complexities of the Edwardian period, set against the backdrop of the illusion of the 'garden party'. Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, pp. 3-14. For a useful overview of the military climate in the years preceding the First World War see Martin Gilbert, *First World War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994), pp. 1-15.

¹⁰ For a useful discussion of the cultural climate of late Victorian and Edwardian London see Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Pimlico, 1991), pp. 307-345. Hynes discusses the connection between England's imperial expansion and as a result its withdrawal from cultural and political relations with Europe, noting that the 'rediscovery' of Europe from 1910 led to a 'disordering of social and political systems and a radical revision of England's relations to the thought and life of Europe'.

¹¹ Mary Ann Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp. 28-38.

not only reinforced the impact of Bergson's work, the ideas contained within them seemed also to chime with the major issues of the time.¹² Recognisant of the presence of the artist-women under scrutiny as fully embedded actors within the cultural landscape of their time, rather than occupying hitherto a 'state of exception' in the historiographies of Vorticism,¹³ it is argued that the influence of Bergson's philosophy is identifiable in the work of each of Dismorr and Saunders,¹⁴ which reveals their own particular mode of being as Englishwomen whose nationality is unfixed,¹⁵ yet paradoxically enabled by their pledged allegiance to Vorticism as a staunchly English aesthetic¹⁶ that 'blasted' Bergson.¹⁷

¹² Gillies argues that Bergson's appeal stemmed largely from his ability to articulate contemporary anxieties within British culture, these in part arising from the new scientific discoveries of the time that presented difficult questions about the position of the human as a central force in the world, with Bergson's philosophy offering some answers to these questions. Mary Ann Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*, pp. 28-38.

¹³ Katy Deepwell, 'Narratives of Women Artists in/out of Vorticism', pp. 21-43.

¹⁴ Gillies' study is focused on Bergson's influence on key modernists of the early twentieth century and includes a short discussion on Bergson's influence on Lewis. Gillies, pp. 49-52. A new study of Bergson's influence on British culture has recently been published. See Charlotte de Mille, *Bergson in Britain c.1890-1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

¹⁵ Discussing the situation of women in the early twentieth century Mackay and Thane note that women had no fixed nationality given that if they married, they were made to adopt the nationality of their husband. Alice Jane Mackay and Pat Thane, 'The Englishwoman', in *Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, ed. by Colls and Dodd, pp. 218. See also Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, p. 185; Berman, *Modernist fiction, cosmopolitanism, and the politics of community*, p. 22. See also Alice Jane Mackay and Pat Thane, 'The Englishwoman', in *Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, ed. by Colls and Dodd, pp. 217-218.

¹⁶ Dismorr's and Saunders's enigmatic allegiance to Vorticism's aggressively masculine aesthetic has been variously interpreted by feminist critics as constituting each woman's unique adoption of a useable strategy to stake a claim within modernism as individuals on their own terms. Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann

Prior to her public statement of intent as a Vorticist in *Blast*, Dismorr made a significant contribution to the cosmopolitan *Rhythm* magazine,¹⁸ creating corporeal imagery that was in concert with the magazine's interest in Bergson's theory of *élan vital* for its aesthetic.¹⁹ The recorded contents of Dismorr's book collection reveal that she was well versed in Bergsonian theory.²⁰ This cosmopolitan outlook is carried into her written contributions to *Blast's* second number in 1915, and she was at the same time writing poetry of a distinctly personal nature, highly charged, it will be argued, with corporeal imagery marked by a Bergsonian aesthetic, the texts eventually published by Pound in the

Wallace's work on the rethinking of androcentric discourses of modernism towards a renegotiation of the *imposed* positions of women within these discourses to re-position them from the periphery to the centre, is of particular importance, and chimes with Deepwell's call for a breaking down of thinking about women artists in a state of exception. See Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers, Modernist (im)positionings* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-30.

¹⁷ Bergson's name appears amongst those 'blasted' on page 21 of the first number of *Blast*. As Gillies has argued, Lewis's relationship with Bergson's theories is complex in that 'they become both the yardstick by which he measures what art should not be, and, because they underlie Lewis's own theories, they subvert them.' Gillies, p. 52.

¹⁸ For a discussion on *Rhythm* magazine, which ran from 1911-1913, see Peter Brooker, 'Harmony, Discord, and Difference: *Rhythm* (1911-1913), *The Blue Review* (1913), and *The Signature* (1915), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, Vol. I. ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, pp. 314-336. See also Carey Snyder, 'Introduction to *Rhythm* and *The Blue Review*' *The Modernist Journals Project* <<https://modjourn.org/introduction-to-rhythm-and-the-blue-review/>> pp. 1- [last accessed 17 June 2022].

¹⁹ For an in-depth study of *Rhythm* and its aesthetics see Faith Binckes, *Modernism, Magazines, and the British Avant-Garde: Reading Rhythm, 1910-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Dismorr owned a copy of Herbert Wildon Carr's *Henri Bergson: The Philosophy of Change*, published in 1911.

American *Little Review* magazine under his foreign editorship.²¹ The influence of Bergson's philosophy can also be detected in Saunders's work though for markedly differing reasons. In addition to her poem *A Vision of Mud*, Saunders's only literary contribution to *Blast*, which will be discussed in chapter four, Saunders wrote texts and produced imagery of an intensely private nature that were heavily influenced by the Bergson-inspired egoism promoted by the radical feminist Dora Marsden within the pages of the *New Freewoman*.²² For each artist theirs was a Vorticism in flux, this instability identifiable in the thinking and practice of each artist as a woman seeking an outlet or escape, yet enabled, paradoxically, by a Vorticist aesthetic as masculine that is necessarily charged with strategically nationalist rhetoric.²³ Dismorr's and Saunders' visual and

²¹ For a discussion on the Little Review and Pound's involvement see Alan Golding, 'The Little Review (1914-29)', *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, Vol. II. ed by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 61-84.

²² *The Freewoman* (1911-12), *The New Freewoman* (1913) and *The Egoist* (1914-1919) were a consecutive, and inter-linked series of publications edited by militant feminist turned activist Dora Marsden, working with the co-editing support and financial backing of Harriet Shaw Weaver. Weaver eventually took over the editorship of *The Egoist* in 1914. For a useful overview of the development of Marsden's thinking as each iteration of the magazine evolved, and the connections and disruptions between them, see Robert Scholes, 'General Introduction to the Marsden Magazines' in *The Modernist Journals Project*, pp. 1-5. <<https://modjourn.org/general-introduction-to-the-marsden-magazines/>> [last accessed 17 June 2022]. See also Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Gender and Modernism, *The Freewoman* (1911-12), *The New Freewoman* (1913), and *The Egoist* (1914-19) in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines Volume I*, ed. by Brooker and Thacker, pp. 269-289.

²³ The nationalist sentiments expounded in *Blast* were born of Lewis's attempts to position England as the epicentre of the modern art world, though his strategies were inexorably linked to the European avant-gardes from which he wished to differentiate himself. Debates on the nationalist rhetoric expounded within the pages of *Blast* need highlighting here. Peppis has argued that popular anxieties of national decline as well as ambitions for success on the international stage were influential on intellectuals from both the older, more 'patriotic'

literary contributions to Vorticism will be viewed through the paradoxical context of the cosmopolitan body as a fluid, intuitive self that perceives and experiences a global and living environment, in conflict with a detached self, isolated yet protected with Vorticism's borders.

The chapter is in two parts, the first section dealing with Dismorr's pathway to Vorticism, charting her journey from the *Rhythm* circle, towards Vorticism as a self-proclaimed 'English' art movement. Whilst on a superficial level this might suggest an ideological turn towards a nationalist sensibility that would align with populist attitudes of the time, Dismorr's literary contributions to *Blast's* second number suggest that as a woman her attraction to Vorticism as a radical, yet workable form of self-expression was yet influenced by a cosmopolitan sensibility that permitted reinforcement of her independence as an artist confident working within both global and domestic contexts. However, in the work Dismorr produced following the publication of *Blast* this confidence appears to be tested. Dismorr wrote two prose poems during the war that were eventually published in the *Little Review*.²⁴ *Convalescent in the South* and *Matinée*

generation who resisted increasing contact with their European neighbours, and the younger more 'cosmopolitan' generation who were receptive to international exchange, a position that created a sense of foreign competition that needed to be addressed, whether in the military realm, or the cultural arena – the pages of *Blast* as an example of the latter. See Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde*, p. 10. In the context of *Blast's* overt 'Englishness' Laura Winkiel's exploration of the myth of 'racial community' in the context of the avant-garde manifesto is pertinent. Winkiel argues that the manifesto 'has long depended upon racial myths to ground its creation of communities who break from the past in order to realize their liberties.' Laura Winkiel, "The Rhetoric of Violence. Avant-Garde Manifestoes and the Myths of Racial Community" in *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde (1906-1940)*, ed. by Sascha Bru and Gunther Martens (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006), p. 69.

²⁴ Dismorr, 'Convalescent in the South', *Little Review*, 4:9, 1918, pp. 15-16; Dismorr, 'Matinée', *Little Review*, Vol. 4. No. 11, 1918, pp. 31-32. *Convalescent in*

(appendices 3 & 4) were likely written when Dismorr was in France, where she was serving as a nurse with the Voluntary Aid Detachment and where she spent time recovering from an unspecified illness.²⁵ Juxtaposing the texts with Dismorr's *Abstract Composition* of c.1915 (chapter 1, fig. 4) a preoccupation with the corporeal is evident, Dismorr's texts evoking the visceral and the biological suggesting suffering and desire. This preoccupation with the body suggests an ongoing conflict that suggests a psychological desire for flux and freedom of expression that echoes Bergsonian metaphysics, and the necessity for detachment and containment via Vorticism employed as a means of self-preservation.²⁶ It will be argued that these texts reveal a cosmofeminist strategy of resistance enacted from within to counter personal suffering, this

the South and *Matinée* formed part of a collection of poems entitled "Poems 1918" given by Dismorr as a gift to the American sculptor John Storrs and his wife Marguerite. Jessie Dismorr, *Poems, 1918*. John Henry Bradley Storrs papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Whilst both poems were published in the *Little Review*, the Storrs manuscript also includes a further seven poems. There are some discrepancies with the texts published in the *Little Review*. Richard Warren regards the texts in "Poems 1918" as the definitive versions, as he notes that according to Pound the typesetter for the *Little Review* was "a bugger", suggesting either artistic license or incompetence. See Richard Warren, 'Jessie Dismorr Writings 1915-22' <<https://richardawarren.wordpress.com/jessie-dismorr-writings-1915-22/>> [last accessed 17 June 2022]. Some of Dismorr's poems have been reproduced in Alicia Foster, *Radical Women, Jessica Dismorr and her contemporaries* (London: Lund Humphries in association with Pallant House Gallery, 2019), pp. 91-106.

²⁵ Heathcock suggests that Dismorr volunteered in France 'during the latter period of the war', citing a letter written from Saunders to Dismorr dated November/December 1917. Catherine Heathcock, 'Jessica Dismorr', p. 118. The exact period of Dismorr's volunteer war service is unclear but photographic evidence suggests that she was serving in the summer of 1915.

²⁶ In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* Bergson states that there is only one reality, that is 'our own personality in its flowing through time'. When one directs one's attention inwards, away from the hard surface of the exterior world, there is a continuous flux. Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, transl. by T.E. Hulme (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1999 [1912]), p. 25.

paradoxically enabled by Vorticism that in tandem acknowledges a universal suffering that recognises no borders.

A similar preoccupation with the corporeal is expressed in Saunders's work. Part two will focus on Saunders's two untitled proto-Vorticist drawings of c.1913, subsequently known as *Female Figures Imprisoned* and *Hammock*. (figs 1 & 2) These drawings will be juxtaposed with *Bells of West Liss*, (appendix 5) an unpublished poem written by Saunders likely in the same year.²⁷ Taken in conjunction with the knowledge that Saunders was directly involved with the activism of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), it will be argued that the drawings and text are marked by the influence of the *New Freewoman* magazine and the anarcho-individualist politics of its editor, the radical feminist Dora Marsden.²⁸ Under this influence, the creation of these works act as an attempt by Saunders to emancipate the self from within through the evocation of an alternative self via art as a means of protection, paradoxically enabled by Vorticism and used as an attempt to liberate her actual self from the 'sex antagonism'²⁹ of the time, and in tandem signal a rejection of her restrictive Victorian upbringing.³⁰ It is well-documented that Saunders was a signatory of

²⁷ *Bells of West Liss* is held in a private collection.

²⁸ See note 21.

²⁹ Rebecca West coined this phrase when discussing the treatment of the suffragettes in an article titled 'An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty, The Beginnings of Sex Antagonism' for *Clarion* on 27 September 1912. Reprinted in *The Young Rebecca West, 1911-1917* ed. by Jane Marcus (London: Virago, 1982), pp. 97-101. See also Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', p. 60.

³⁰ Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde. Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 8-9. In her study of avant-garde feminism Delap refers to the work of Elizabeth Francis who 'situates feminism as occupying an ironic, paradoxical position in

Blast under the pseudonym of 'H. Sanders',³¹ this probably a deliberate move to conceal Saunders's identity to protect her conservative family from having any connection to a vociferous and self-publicising avant-garde.³² Viewed as a protective strategy, Saunders effectively projects an alternative self onto 'H. Sanders' as a means of freeing her own self from categorisation.³³ This may be understood as an emancipatory act of 'freeing' from any categorisation, that if taken in the context of a cosmopolitan mode of being is, in its displacement of an institutionalised gendered subject towards an individual 'I' that exists, as Nigel Rapport offers, 'beyond the conventional practices and traditions of classifying

relation to modernism and modernity.' As such Delap sees that feminism was attractive to modernists 'as a means of conveying a critique of feminine characteristics.' Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde. Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 8-9.

³¹ *Blast*, 1914, p. 43.

³² See *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 12; See also William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, p. 178.

³³ Evidence of Saunders's preference for an 'alternative self' can be found in the papers of Walter Sickert (1860-1942). A typed transcript given to Jane Palliser by Ethel M. Saunders after Saunders's death refers to an etching by Sickert. Written in pencil below the etching, are the words '[T]he studio where 'H. Sanders Esq' came to see me. Whistler's old studio and Duncan Grant's 8 Fitzroy Street, Sickert.' Walter Sickert Family Collection, Islington History Centre. In their discussion of Saunders's friendship with Harriet Shaw Weaver Jane Lidderdale and Mary Nicholson have documented that Saunders was 'a friend of Walter Sickert and Fred Etchells' when Saunders was 'honorary secretary of the Vorticist Group'. See Lidderdale and Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver*, p. 119. Peppin documents that Sickert and Saunders were in regular contact from 1920 onwards. Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, (1996), p. 16. However, Sickert also rented a studio at 8 Fitzroy Street between 1905 and 1907. See Wendy Baron, 'Camden Town Recalled', in *The Camden Town Group in Context* ed. by Helena Bonett, Ysanne Holt, Jennifer Mundy, Tate Research Publication, May 2012, <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/wendy-baron-camden-town-recalled-r1104354>> [last accessed 25 May 2022]. This opens the possibility that Saunders may have visited Sickert during this period, perhaps whilst she was a student at the Slade.

the world',³⁴ is a position that has resonance with the egoism articulated by Marsden in the *New Freewoman*.³⁵ For Saunders in this context, the appeal of Vorticism 'to the individual', as articulated by Lewis,³⁶ may have been born out of an urgent desire to break free of the constraints of her Victorian upbringing and her awareness of feminist politics as she aspired towards independence as an artist.³⁷ Vorticism, paradoxically, offered Saunders a chance for recognition to work as an artist in her own right, and free, as Tickner has offered, from the physical and psychological burden of fixed gender binaries, and the debilitating attributes of femininity.³⁸ Saunders's turn inwards to contemplate her own conflicted personality, inspired by Marsden's writings and acted out through Vorticism, offered a cosmofeminist space in which to navigate the pain of the contained and constricted female body and aspire towards an ideal self that is unfettered. This ideal self would be free to live 'beyond the bounds of

³⁴ Nigel Rapport, 'Emancipatory Cosmopolitanism: A vision of the individual free from culture, custom and community', *Handbook of Cosmopolitan Studies*, ed. by Gerard Delanty (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 101. Rapport asks that if one envisions the individual human being as 'freed' from custom, culture and community, any individual 'I' is afforded the space to become their true self.

³⁵ *New Freewoman*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1 July 1913, ed. by Dora Marsden (Oxford: New International Publishing Co., 1912-13), p. 25.

³⁶ Lewis announces that Vorticism 'will not appeal to any particular class, but to the fundamental and popular instincts in every class and description of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL.', *Blast*, p. 7.

³⁷ Peppin stresses that despite fundamental differences, Saunders remained close to her immediate family. See *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 11, n.14.

³⁸ Lisa Tickner, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism' in *Visual Culture*, p. 67.

collectivities, their norms, conventional practices and traditions of classifying the world'³⁹ and in so doing offers Saunders a possible route to emancipation.

Freedom desired yet constrained: Dismorr from *Rhythm* to the *Little Review*

An article entitled 'The New Thelema' opens the first number of *Rhythm* magazine,⁴⁰ the title framed by two female nudes, their bodies acting as heralds for the rebirth of free will. (fig. 3) A globe floats above the outstretched arm of a kneeling figure positioned at the article's close (fig. 4), which acknowledges the universal as if to complement the quest for creative instinct extolled by the author's prose.⁴¹ The article sets the tone for the journal's manifesto, the author of the piece calling for a belief in pure emancipation, an absolute freedom that can only be achieved through transience and flux, unfettered by material structures. Goodyear declares that:

[M]en have always sought for a permanent stable reality in this world of flux. At last they have found it in the principle of flux itself.⁴²

³⁹ Rapport, 'Emancipatory Cosmopolitanism', pp. 101.

⁴⁰ Frederick Goodyear, 'The New Thelema', *Rhythm*, 1:1, (June 1911), p. 2.

⁴¹ Binckes has argued, however, that the images printed in *Rhythm* should not be thought of as illustrations relating to the texts as they were not subordinate, this seen as an indication of their status. Faith Binckes, *Modernism, Magazines, and the British Avant-Garde: Reading Rhythm, 1910-1914*, p. 131.

⁴² Frederick Goodyear, 'The New Thelema', in *Rhythm*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1 June 1911, ed. by John Middleton Murry (London: The Saint Catherine Press, 1911-13), p. 2.

Launched in London in June 1911 by John Middleton Murry (1889-1957) and Michael T. H. Sadler (1888-1957), and viewed as the precursor to Vorticism's *Blast* for its corporate promotion of an avant-garde identity,⁴³ *Rhythm* magazine aspired to be an organ for absolute freedom of expression through art, Sadler himself later going on to translate Wassily Kandinsky's seminal treatise *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* into English.⁴⁴ *Rhythm's* inaugural article espoused that only through creative contemplation can a utopian community be achieved, a doctrine that could be advanced by a more perceptive response to the rhythms of modern life.⁴⁵ The idea for the magazine emerged when Murry travelled to Paris in late 1910 to engage directly with Post-Impressionism and to study the philosophy of Bergson.⁴⁶ There, Murry met John Duncan Fergusson (1874-1961), a Bergson

⁴³ Faith Binckes, pp. 132-133.

⁴⁴ Sadler's English translation was originally published under the title *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*. See preface to Wassily Kandinsky *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* transl. M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover publications, 1977), p. ix. Sadler had developed a close relationship with the Russian artist after seeing his work at the Allied Artists Association London salon at the Royal Albert Hall in 1909. See Adrian Glew, 'Every work of art is the child of its time, often it is the mother of our emotions', *Tate Etc.* issue 7: Summer 2006 <<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/every-work-art-child-its-time-often-it-mother-our-emotions>> [last accessed 17 June 2022].

⁴⁵ The author proclaims that '[W]hatever you want, that is what Thelema will be like... Thelema will be a place where you do as you will. So it will be essentially a place of liberty.' Goodyear, 'The New Thelema', *Rhythm*, p. 2. Frederick Goodyear was a contemporary of John Middleton Murry and Michael T. Sadler when they were undergraduates at Oxford and had with others introduced Murry to Bergson's philosophy. Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 72. In a later article of the same number Murry argued that 'Modernism...penetrates beneath the surface of the world, and disengages the rhythms that lie at the heart of things'. Murry, p. 12.

⁴⁶ David Cottington points out that when Murry first visited Paris in 1910-11 as an aspirant Bergsonian he never actually made it to the Collège de France to hear Bergson speak. See David Cottington, *Radical Art and the formation of the Avant-Garde* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022), p. 256.

enthusiast who was teaching at the progressive L'Académie de La Palette,⁴⁷ and where Dismorr was as a student active within his circle.⁴⁸ Whilst Murry and Fergusson each adhered to their own particular definition of 'rhythm' as an aesthetic concept, the magazine emerged from a mutual desire to define and promote modern art in England, aligned closely with Post-Impressionism and the Bergsonian philosophy of *élan vital*.⁴⁹ Intentionally cosmopolitan in its vision and distribution, and with strong connections through Fergusson to Paris, *Rhythm* introduced to an English audience for the first time the work of Gaudier-Brzeska, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and André Derain (1880-1954),⁵⁰ and was also notable for its unusually high number of women contributors.⁵¹ That

⁴⁷ See chapter one, note 100.

⁴⁸ Quentin Stevenson, Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles, p. 5. Catherine Heathcock, *Jessica Dismorr*, p. 19.

⁴⁹ Bergson rejected Cartesian rationalism and substituted it with intuition, which he viewed as capable of emulating the reproductive nature of vital force (*élan vital*) and thus artistic creativity, no longer premised on rational thought and thus becoming embedded in the act of being itself. Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, pp. 11-12. See also Carey Snyder, 'Introduction to Rhythm and The Blue Review' *The Modernist Journals Project* <<https://modjourn.org/introduction-to-rhythm-and-the-blue-review/>> p. 1. [last accessed 17 June 2022].

⁵⁰ Murry stressed that *Rhythm* was 'to be kept absolutely cosmopolitan' in a letter to P. Landon. See F. A. Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry* (London: Methuen, 1959), p. 24. From 1912 the editorial board was expanded to include correspondents in France, Russia, Poland, and the USA. See Peter Brooker, 'Harmony, Discord, and Difference', *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume 1*, p. 316. For reference to Picasso, Gaudier-Brzeska, and Derain's contributions to *Rhythm* see Sheila McGregor, 'J. D. Fergusson and the Periodical "Rhythm"', *Colour, Rhythm & Dance: Paintings & Drawings of J. D. Fergusson and his Circle in Paris* ed. by Elisabeth Cumming (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 1985), p.15. See also Faith Binckes, p. 2.

⁵¹ In addition to Dismorr, female contributors to *Rhythm* included Katherine Mansfield, Anne Estelle Rice, and Marguerite Thomson. Carey Snyder, 'Introduction to Rhythm and The Blue Review', *The Modernist Journals Project*, p.

Dismorr's designs feature at the outset of *Rhythm's* publication lifespan, framing the opening essay that launched the magazine's ethos and aesthetic, gestures to her significance as a cosmopolitan artist working at the vanguard of early modernism in Britain.⁵²

The globe motif appears again in a reproduction of Dismorr's woodcut *Isadora* (fig. 5) reproduced in *Rhythm's* second number.⁵³ A female dancer is on stage dressed in a short shift with legs exposed. The performer's arms are held aloft and each hand holds what appear to be scarves, the body set against a black backdrop hatched with white lines to denote stage curtains. Set against the stage curtains the globe acknowledges the dancer's universal appeal. Clearly inspired by the American dancer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) who was performing in Europe at this time,⁵⁴ and referencing the Rhythmist preoccupation with modern forms of dance,⁵⁵ Dismorr's angular image expresses an austerity that marks a distinct shift in style from her depictions of curvilinear bodies more traditionally associated with the female form that were printed in the first and subsequent numbers of the magazine.⁵⁶ Hickman has suggested that this shift from an apparent concern with the celebration of elemental femininity as a Rhythmist

3. For a discussion on the women connected to *Rhythm* see Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, pp. 15-27.

⁵² Dismorr's designs featured in every edition of *Rhythm*.

⁵³ *Rhythm*, 1:2, Autumn 1911, p. 20.

⁵⁴ Lori Belilove, *The Isadora Duncan Dance Company* <<http://isadoraduncan.org/foundation/isadora-duncan/>> [last accessed 17 June 2022].

⁵⁵ Faith Binckes, pp. 18-19; Brooker, 'Harmony, Discord, and Difference', p. 330.

⁵⁶ Binckes, p. 159.

interpretation of *élan vital*, towards a more angular aesthetic that prefigures Vorticism, might signal Dismorr's repudiation of a 'Bergsonian line of thought',⁵⁷ yet Dismorr's chosen subject at the same time gestures towards a preoccupation with the body free from containment, advocated by Duncan herself who 'preach[ed] freedom of the mind through freedom of the body.'⁵⁸

Dismorr's interest in Duncan as the embodiment of freedom of movement as expressed within the overtly cosmopolitan *Rhythm* is disrupted by her subsequent shift to Vorticism and adherence to *Blast's* macho-nationalist rhetoric as a signatory,⁵⁹ which Peppis has argued sought to position the English avant-garde in nationalist terms as a deliberate strategy to help shore up Britain's declining imperial status on the world stage.⁶⁰ Whilst her voice was

⁵⁷ Miranda Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism: Jessie Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Vorticist Feminism', *Vorticism: New Perspectives*, p. 127. Tickner has argued that Dismorr's rendering of Isadora is an attempt to cast off the 'debilitating attributes of femininity' to position herself as a serious modern artist free from the burden of gender. See Tickner, 'Men's Work?', p. 67.

⁵⁸ Isadora Duncan, *Isadora Speaks* ed. by Franklin Rosemont (San Francisco: City Lights, 1981), p. 53. See also Penny Farfan, 'Women's modernism and performance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. by Maren Tova Linett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 56-57. Farfan refers to Duncan's work in context of corporeality, performance and everyday life, which is linked to a rejection of containment, confinement, and the servitude of marriage.

⁵⁹ It is not clear when Dismorr agreed to be a signatory of *Blast*, and the inclusion of other names of the list has been open to speculation. See Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, pp. 178-179. The fact that the more belligerent 'Vorticist' elements of the publication were added well over six months after the magazine was first collated further complicates the positions of the signatories and their stated allegiance to the tenets of the Vorticist 'movement'. See Paul Edwards, 'Blast and the Revolutionary Mood of Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism', *Vorticism: New Perspectives*, pp. 199-219.

⁶⁰ Paul Peppis, *Literature, politics, and the English avant-garde: Nation and Empire, 1901-1918*, pp. 1-19.

silent in *Blast's* first number, Dismorr's *London Notes*, published in the second number of *Blast* hints at a cosmopolitan response to British imperialism, whilst embracing a Vorticist aesthetic. Dismorr presents a series of stylised vignettes that offer glimpses in staccato of the terrain of the modern metropolis.⁶¹ The text is charged with the aesthetics of Vorticism, Dismorr's reference to the British Museum evoking the monumentality and immobility of the building's structure in its 'black columns of immense weight...threaded by a stream of angular volatile shapes'.⁶² Dismorr emphasises this impression of monumentality by drawing attention to the Reading Room and its domed ceiling, described as a:

colossal globe of achievement [that] presses upon two-hundred cosmopolitan foreheads, respectfully inclined.⁶³

There is emphasis on the intrinsic power of the Reading Room and its structural dominance over the marked diversity of bodies 'respectfully' studying within its walls, the text alluding to the patriarchal power of empire and the influence it brings to bear on the 'colossal globe', as Britain amasses and displays within the Museum the artefacts plundered in the pursuit of colonial dominance to impress the appreciative visitor.

Dismorr's text prefigures Woolf, who writing in 1921 casts the Reading Room as a bastion of national privilege that epitomises class and gender bias,

⁶¹ Dismorr, 'London Notes', *Blast, War Number*, p. 66.

⁶² Dismorr, p. 66.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.66

and as such is antithetical to women writers.⁶⁴ Yet, as Ruth Hoberman has noted, prior to its 1907 refurbishment and the subsequent inclusion of notable male names inscribed prominently upon its dome, the Reading Room was a place where politically active middle-class women played out their demand for access to knowledge in the public sphere.⁶⁵ Dismorr had direct experience of the Reading Room's importance as resource for academic study whilst a student at the Slade, where all students were encouraged to use the Print Room.⁶⁶ She eventually gained access to the Reading Room in 1906 at the age of 21, renewing her membership regularly as she travelled frequently between London and Paris, and thereafter until 1925, suggesting regular visits.⁶⁷ In Francesca Brooks's pertinent analysis of Dismorr's text the 'achievement' that 'presses upon' the foreheads, a clear reference to the room's monumental domed ceiling, is a signifier of patriarchal dominance and oppression of those that dare to transgress into this space seen as the domain of the male academic.⁶⁸ Whilst Dismorr's use of the Reading Room affiliates her with the politically active

⁶⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, New Edition 2015), pp. 20-31.

⁶⁵ Ruth Hoberman, 'Women in the British Museum Reading Room during the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries: From Quasi-to Counterpublic', *Feminist Studies*, 28:3 (2002), 489-512 (p. 490). See also Susan David Bernstein, *Roomscape. Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 159-160.

⁶⁶ Catherine Heathcock, p. 10.

⁶⁷ Heathcock, p. 105.

⁶⁸ Francesca Brooks, 'Jessie Dismorr: Walking and Rewriting London', *Flashpoint Magazine: a Journal of the Arts and Politics*, issue 17 <[http://www.flashpointmag.com/Francesca Brooks Jessie Dismorr Walking and Rewriting London.htm](http://www.flashpointmag.com/Francesca_Brooks_Jessie_Dismorr_Walking_and_Rewriting_London.htm)> [last accessed 17 June 2020].

women publicly asserting their right to have access to knowledge, her deliberate use of the word 'cosmopolitan' as descriptor suggests that she does so in concert and in solidarity with *all* of the bodies using the space, regardless of nationality or gender. She aspires to position all users of the Reading Room on an equal footing, the 'globe of achievement' she cites an assertion of her status as an independent woman with trans-cultural links to the European avant-garde, and as such as an equal among the 'two-hundred cosmopolitan foreheads' as they collectively draw on the 'colossal' knowledge of the world's greatest minds.⁶⁹

Kwame Anthony Appiah's contemporary cosmopolitan assessment of the purpose of the British Museum adds weight to this reading of the 'colossal globe of achievement' that Dismorr describes. Taking a multi-perspectival view, Appiah acknowledges the institution's status as a celebrated receptacle of the plundered artefacts of the British imperialist project, and as an example of our contemporary notion of cultural patrimony, and also considers it in the context of the imaginary connections of an individual to a constructed nation-state.⁷⁰ Appiah argues that the institution's twenty-first century insistence that it is a repository of the heritage of all humanity, as opposed to one of British 'achievements' as a nation-state seems important, though this conditional on unhindered access to its collections for a cosmopolitan constituent.⁷¹ Viewed through this lens, and writing both as a confident, cosmopolitan artist, and as a

⁶⁹ Dismorr, 'London Notes', p. 66.

⁷⁰ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism, Ethics in a World of Strangers*, pp. 115-135. See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁷¹ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 130-135.

woman with familial connections to a colonised landmass,⁷² Dismorr's Vorticist evocation of the Reading Room is expressed in a similar context of multi-perspectival cosmopolitanism. In *London Notes* the British Museum is viewed as a bastion of nationalist and patriarchal triumphalism, though in the diversity of its readers, its visitors and of its objects, there is the aspiration that it could be open, receptive to, and acknowledging of all humanity.

Following the appearance in 1915 of *London Notes* and her other bold contributions to *Blast's* second number, the writing she produced in its immediate aftermath suggests that Dismorr's confidence as a Vorticist is tested. As with many of her contemporaries, Dismorr volunteered as a nurse in 1915 to help the war effort,⁷³ and as a consequence would have had scant opportunity to paint, turning instead to poetry as the means of artistic expression.⁷⁴ Dismorr's only surviving Vorticist oil painting discussed briefly in chapter one, was likely completed early in 1915⁷⁵ as the artist was preparing to leave for France to serve

⁷² Heathcock, pp. 2-4. Dismorr's parents were both born in the Australian state of Victoria, following her great-grandparents' emigration from England in the 1840s.

⁷³ Quentin Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles*, p. 7; Heathcock, p. 124. See also Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 38.

⁷⁴ Stevenson notes that poetry 'became a substitute for painting in her rare breaks from work'. See Quentin Stevenson, p. 7.

⁷⁵ Heathcock comments on the dating of *Abstract Composition*, speculating that whilst the date of c.1915 has been adopted by the Tate Gallery and endorsed by Richard Cork, the work could have been completed 1913 when Dismorr had recently returned from Paris. Heathcock notes that the work is stamped with the name of the artists' supplier Foinet, who was based in Paris at this time, and argues that the colour palette Dismorr uses is distinctly Fauvist. As Heathcock points out, '[T]he repercussions of an earlier dating are profound in terms of the development of abstraction in England.' The details of the stamp are contained in the curatorial file on the painting in the Tate Gallery Archive. See Heathcock, 'Jessica Dismorr', p. 112, n. 162.

as a nurse with the Voluntary Aid Detachment.⁷⁶ *Abstract Composition* (chapter 1, fig. 4) offers in visual form an overwhelming sense of melancholy and anxiety evoked by the slow-moving shapes suspended in the void,⁷⁷ hinting perhaps at an apprehension about her decision to contribute to the war effort in such visceral terms, this mood prefiguring the language and tone of the poetry that Dismorr wrote during the war. Two photographs of Dismorr, held in a private collection provide visual evidence of the toll that the war took on Dismorr as she served in France. One shows Dismorr and her sister Beatrice posing in uniform, the image a notable visual record of their physical vitality before their experiences of active service (fig. 6). The other shows the two women in their uniforms in a makeshift hospital ward, standing among a group of soldiers (fig. 7) and looking directly at one of the men who lies injured in bed, who in turn looks directly at the camera. Pictured in the centre of the photograph, Dismorr looks visibly diminished, a shadow of her former self. Judging by the photograph and an accompanying inscription recording that it was taken in Cannes in July 1915, Dismorr and her sister were evidently serving within an international military setting, as opposed to working with a British outfit. The late

⁷⁶ For a useful overview of the Voluntary Aid Detachment see the website of the Red Cross, 'Medical Care During WW1' <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/medical-care-during-ww1/nursing-during-the-first-world-war>> [last accessed 12 February 2024].

⁷⁷ In its depiction of a series of forms that appear to be in motion around a vertical column, Cork has likened *Abstract Composition* to *The Mud Bath* by David Bomberg (1890-1957). The dynamism of Bomberg's sculptural forms contrasts sharply with the quiet melancholic sense of foreboding evoked by Dismorr's composition, Cork arguing that Dismorr's work is lethargic in comparison by offering that Dismorr 'injects none of the knife-edge vitality of Bomberg's masterpiece into her sluggish mechanisms.' See Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 416-7.

parliamentary peer Shirley Williams, whose mother Vera Brittain served as a volunteer nurse in the First World War, has documented that early volunteers to the Voluntary Aid Detachment were obliged to serve with the French and Belgian forces, due to the British Army's resolute opposition to the deployment of female military nurses to its forces.⁷⁸ Scholarship on the actual experiences of nurses, either as trained experts or as volunteers with little or no experience of the medical profession, has explored the physical and emotional effects on women who were exposed to the carnage of the First World War.⁷⁹ Researching the experience of nursing in the First World War Christine E. Hallett documents that VAD nurses were drawn to volunteering to help the war effort because they were inspired by the perceived moral strength and calm compassion of the professional nurses.⁸⁰ But as Vera Brittain's diaries attest, the practical ability of a nurse was of much less importance than her psychological fitness for the task.⁸¹ The direct experience of dealing with the broken bodies and minds of those injured in combat on Dismorr's already fragile state of mind can only be

⁷⁸ The exception to this rule applied to those of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. Shirley Williams, 'World War One: The many battles faced by WW1's nurses', *BBC* < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-26838077> > [last accessed 18 June 2022]. As a well-travelled artist with a command of the French language, the necessity for VAD nurses to serve with French and Belgian forces may have been less problematic for Dismorr than it may have been for others in the service.

⁷⁹ See Christine E. Hallett, *Containing Trauma, Nursing Work in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁸⁰ Christine E. Hallett, *Containing Trauma*, p. 202.

⁸¹ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (Glasgow: Collins and Sons, 1980, first published 1933), p. 236; Hallett, *Containing Trauma*, p. 204.

imagined.⁸² As was the case with many of her contemporaries who witnessed the war first-hand, Dismorr suffered a nervous breakdown during the years directly following the conflict.⁸³

If the slow-moving shapes suspended in the void in Dismorr's *Abstract Composition* is an evocation of melancholia, the work of Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) on the psychology of colour might offer some sense of the artist's possible frame of mind when the work was conceived. Dismorr owned a copy of Michael Sadler's translation of *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, Kandinsky's pioneering treatise on art,⁸⁴ though she would certainly have been very familiar with the artist's theories whilst studying in Paris and through her connection to Sadler and the Rhythmists.⁸⁵ Extracts were published in synopsis in the first

⁸² It has been suggested that Dismorr suffered throughout her short life from manic depression, possibly bipolar disorder. In his correspondence with Dismorr Lewis makes oblique references to Dismorr's periods of ill-health. See chapter one, note 113.

⁸³ Heathcock, p. 126.

⁸⁴ These details are recorded in a private collection. Cork has also noted that a translation of Kandinsky's treatise came into Dismorr's possession in 1914. See Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 417. Sadler's translation was published in late 1911. See Richard Stratton, 'Preface' to Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* trans. By M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977), p. viii.

⁸⁵ Sadler and Kandinsky were in regular correspondence during 1911 and 1914. In a letter from the artist to Sadler dated 6 October 1911, Kandinsky thanks Sadler for sending a copy of *Rhythm*, acknowledging with pleasure that 'the so-called modern art movement is mirrored in your journal and meets with interest in England.' Papers of M. T. H. Sadler, Tate Archive Ref. TGA 8221/6. Kandinsky had been exhibiting in Paris from 1905 onwards. See Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis*, p. 108. Dismorr may also have seen Kandinsky's work in Munich. Quentin Stevenson has suggested that Dismorr may have studied in Germany for a period, prior to enrolling at the Académie de la Palette. See Quentin Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr*, p. 5.

number of *Blast* in a review of Kandinsky's treatise written by Wadsworth,⁸⁶ this revealing a Vorticist interest in the freeing of art from the traditional bonds of material reality and its significance for abstraction as a form of artistic expression.⁸⁷ Wadsworth states:

[Kandinsky] writes of art – not in relation to the drawing-room or the modern exhibition, but in its relation to the universe and the soul of man [...] form and colour are as much the vital and integral parts of the cosmic organisation as they are his means of expression.⁸⁸

Dismorr's rendering of form and colour in *Abstract Composition* read as an evocation of melancholia resonates with the concept of 'inner necessity' as evinced by Kandinsky, a principle that closely aligns with the metaphysics of Bergson. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* Bergson writes that for the individual:

[T]here is one reality, at least, which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by simple analysis. It is our own personality in its flowing through time – our self which endures.⁸⁹

Bergson explores two profoundly different ways of being. One is analytic, concerned with concepts and space, which is the *relative*, and the other of intuition, reaching to the very heart of things through sympathy, that is the

⁸⁶ Edward Wadsworth, 'Inner Necessity', *Blast*, pp. 119-125.

⁸⁷ Cork speculates that Kandinsky's *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* 'may have helped Dismorr to embrace the full implications of abstraction'. See Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 417.

⁸⁸ Wadsworth, 'Inner Necessity', *Blast*, p. 119.

⁸⁹ Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T. E. Hulme (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 24-25.

absolute. For Kandinsky, the 'inner necessity' of the artist arises from three fundamental 'mystical' elements; self-expression through one's personality, style as shaped by the epoch in which the self lives and 'dictated by the period and particular country to which the artist belongs', and through those elements a third is exposed, 'pure artistry, which is a constant in all ages and among all nationalities'.⁹⁰

If the dating of *Abstract Composition* to c. 1915 is accurate⁹¹ the work was realised at a pivotal time when the realities of mechanised warfare and the potential for its devastating effect on the human body were becoming apparent to the general populace.⁹² Comparing Dismorr's composition with David Bomberg's work of the period,⁹³ Beckett and Cherry have suggested that the architectural and mechanical forms in *Abstract Composition* are 'perhaps reworkings of the body'.⁹⁴ Drawing on this notion of the work as a variation of the corporeal, and cognisant of its probable dating of 1915 in its supposed

⁹⁰ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. By M.T.H. Sadler, pp. 33-34. See also *Blast*, p. 119.

⁹¹ See Heathcock, p. 112, n. 162.

⁹² Jane Beckett, '(Is)land Narratives', *English Art 1860-1914, Modern Artists and Identity* ed. by David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 199-200.

⁹³ Cork has previously commented on the similarities between *Abstract Composition* and *The Mud Bath* by David Bomberg in both artist's depiction of a series of forms that appear to be in motion around a vertical column. See Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 417.

⁹⁴ Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', p. 72. Bomberg drew inspiration for *The Mud Bath* from Schevzik's Steam Baths in London's East End, the bodies of the bathers reduced to geometric forms. See Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 52.

similarity with the formal qualities of the lost works exhibited at the Doré⁹⁵ a multi-perspectival reading of the work is made possible, if taken in conjunction with the poetry she wrote during the same period and eventually published in the *Little Review*. Such a reading acknowledges both the influence of Kandinsky's treatise on Dismorr's aesthetics and reveals a continued interest in Bergsonian metaphysics. Viewed in these terms the painting acts as an evocation of melancholy that belies the tensions felt by the artist at the time of its execution and prefigures direct experience of corporeal suffering, this echoed in her writing.

Kandinsky's linking of the colour yellow to the terrestrial, of blue to the heavenly, and to pink calling forth the corporeal⁹⁶ prompts a reading of the pink pigment evident in *Abstract Composition* as a visual evocation of the corporeal that gestures to the bodies in combat, prefiguring the devastating consequences of which Dismorr would soon witness as a nurse, the casualties she would tend to covered in the soil of the battlefield.⁹⁷ The architectural and mechanical forms

⁹⁵ Dismorr contributed *Shapes, Interior, Movement and Design* to the Vorticist Exhibition at the Doré Gallery in June 1915. Catalogue of Vorticist Exhibition 1915, reproduced in *The Vorticists* ed by Mark Antliff and Vivien Greene, pp. 60-61.

⁹⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Translated with an introduction by M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1977), pp. 27-45.

⁹⁷ Sue Light has gathered a significant amount of archival material relating to British military nursing, publishing several personal accounts of VAD nurses working in challenging conditions in France. In one such account Kathleen Marion Barrow recalled that 'when convoy after convoy poured in, and when one piteous wreck after another, whose bandages were stiff with mud and blood, had been deposited on a clean white bed; the extent of a V.A.D.'s work was bound to be decided far more by the measure of her capacity than by rule of seniority, or red tape', this encapsulating both the horror of the first mechanised war and the toll that witnessing such scenes must have taken on those tasked with dealing

as ‘reworkings of the body’⁹⁸ suspended in the black void suggest oblivion through the ever-present fear of imminent death indicated by the white paint that elicits ‘a great silence, like an impenetrable wall [that] shrouds its life from our understanding.’⁹⁹ Such corporeal precarity echoes that of the civilian body that was under constant threat of attack¹⁰⁰ or acutely affected by the hardship of a result of total war across Europe. 1915 witnessed the first German zeppelin attack on England, violating both physically and mentally the comfortable myth of its ‘splendid isolation’.¹⁰¹ This situation was compounded by the knowledge that the Allied Forces were struggling to achieve any breakthrough on the Western Front, with news of the first use of poison gas on Allied soldiers in the trenches rapidly reaching the population at home,¹⁰² whilst in Germany shortages of food, partly due to blockades by the Allied Forces, resulted in many people dying of malnutrition or related diseases.¹⁰³ *Abstract Composition* prefigures the inevitable stress of witnessing others in pain as a volunteer nurse, and forebodes the onset of another period of personal illness elicited by the

with them. See Sue Light, ‘Voluntary Aid Detachments: VAD Accounts’, *Scarletfinders* <http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk/184.html> [accessed 14 February 2024].

⁹⁸ Beckett and Cherry, p. 72.

⁹⁹ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁰ Beckett and Cherry, *Reconceptualizing Vorticism*, p. 68.

¹⁰¹ See note 8.

¹⁰² *Firstworldwar.com* <<http://www.firstworldwar.com/timeline/1915.htm>> [last accessed 17 June 2022].

¹⁰³ Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), pp. 269-306.

yellow and its connotations of mental instability.¹⁰⁴ The futility of war evoked by the black void in which the forms are suspended and loosely cohered to the yellow marker, suggest a collective mental and physical fragility in uneasy concert with impending death and oblivion, as Dismorr attempts to reconcile herself to the inevitable rupture created by the war and its effects, whilst also empathetic to the lives of all those living under the shadow of conflict. In this darkness, however, hope is expressed through the colour white, which for Kandinsky evokes a great silence, the blue gesturing towards aspiration for heavenly salvation.¹⁰⁵

Echoes of this reading of Dismorr's composition can be found in *Convalescent in the South* and *Matinée*, two prose poems likely written when she was serving in France and recovering from an unspecified illness.¹⁰⁶ Subsequently published in the *Little Review*,¹⁰⁷ each text is infused with references to the corporeal, the highly sexualised language conjuring an existential awareness of a body in space and time that is both open and contained, as if the cathartic act of writing is an attempt to make sense of her place in the world at a time of acute emotional upheaval, and at what appears to be a transitional point in her life and career as an artist.¹⁰⁸ In *Convalescent in the*

¹⁰⁴ Kandinsky posits that yellow is a marker of mental instability, a colour that 'may be paralleled in human nature, with madness'. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁵ Kandinsky, p. 39.

¹⁰⁶ Heathcock discusses correspondence between Dismorr and Lewis where references are made to an unspecified illness. See Heathcock, p. 126.

¹⁰⁷ See note 23.

¹⁰⁸ Heathcock, pp. 124-125.

South, an on-going torment is palpable. As the title suggests, the poem likely refers to a period of rest and recuperation in the south of France during a break in active service. Dismorr writes:

Out of the horrid tangle of waters a faggot is tossed on to a couch of foam.

I am bedded in the silken winter of the south: storm and fever have ebbed away. Oh, the lull of this security! I am emptied of my old violences!

Nevermore will delirium nor ecstasy [sic] shake the perilous nerve of the brain¹⁰⁹

Dismorr refers to the body as a faggot, a bundle of sticks or twigs used as a source of fuel. Yet these reserves of energy are exhausted by the experience of a recent violent episode as the body emerges from the 'horrid tangle of waters', suggesting an allusion to the writer's state of mind and the visceral experience of tending to the wounded. The body rests on 'a couch of foam' in the mild and comfortable surroundings of the south, yet this repose is uneasy as if in the aftermath of an intense emotional episode. The text is imbued with a frisson of sexual tension, the expression of a docile subjugation following the 'tyranny' of the traumatic episode, as Dismorr likens herself to a faithful dog, which 'nuzzle(s) at the knee of power,' as if acutely aware of the dominant force of her illness. Whilst acknowledging the likely state of mind of the writer at this time, Heathcock's analysis of the text focuses on what she identifies to be a shift in

¹⁰⁹ Jessie Dismorr, 'Convalescent in the South' in the manuscript *Poems 1918*, held within the papers of John Henry Bradley Storrs. Also published, with small textual discrepancies as 'The Convalescent in the South' in *The Little Review*, 4:9 (1 January 1918), ed. by Margaret C. Anderson (New York: Margaret C. Anderson, 1914-22), pp. 15-16.

aesthetic concerns, viewing the poem as Dismorr's written acknowledgement of her shift from a Vorticist aesthetic towards 'colour, enormity, ostentation of gold'¹¹⁰ that signals a new phase of her life as an artist, turning to more 'painterly' representations and gradually to a more conventional idiom.¹¹¹ Heathcock's reading of the poem has resonance, suggesting that Dismorr appears to look back upon her earlier artistic confidence, possibly even the arrogance, of her Vorticist period, with some regret.¹¹²

Once like a gay circus-rider I paraded the fine animal that
belonged to me.
All its bells and trappings clapping, it played its superb pranks.
Oh, the rapt performance in a well of round eyes and lifted
palms!
Oh, the perfectly centralized stupidity of the arrived artiste!¹¹³

Together with the reading of the Vorticist *Abstract Composition* as a re-working of the body, and in accordance with the artist's written contributions to the second number of *Blast*,¹¹⁴ *Convalescent in the South* is imbued with corporeal references. Yet while the cold detachment aspired to in *Blast*, in which Dismorr

¹¹⁰ Dismorr, *Convalescent in the South*.

¹¹¹ Heathcock, p.122.

¹¹² Heathcock, p. 125.

¹¹³ Dismorr, *Convalescent in the South*

¹¹⁴ Dismorr's fascination with the body is perhaps most acute in 'Monologue', in which the physical and the mechanical is melded to conjure an image of a modernist cyborg. 'Monologue' is discussed in chapter four. See *Blast*, War Number, p. 65.

positions herself 'on the side of all the severities,¹¹⁵ in *Convalescent in the South* cool, hard clarity appears to threaten to dissolve into flux, revealing a tension between the aesthetics of Vorticism and the metaphysics of Bergson. The 'docile' body is weakened and sedated, the 'quaint effigy of bones' a facsimile of an 'emaciated' body that acutely resonates with the startling image of Dismorr in the photograph. The poem alludes to a crossing of psychological boundaries, the body 'twice dragged' over the 'yellow paths' of mental instability,¹¹⁶ yet it is at the same time a 'victim of [...] solitary perfecting', the impossibility of Vorticist strategies of detachment pitting the ascetic against the aesthetic in a perpetual tension that echoes the 'disastrous polished dance' of a Lewisian duet.¹¹⁷ Dismorr appears to both celebrate the unimportance of the detached body in its 'superb nullity', yet the body as facsimile reacts to the effects of external forces as 'warmth pricks and pickles its coat of membrane'.¹¹⁸ There is an aspiration for fluidity of form and receptiveness to the possibility of new experiences, whilst at the same time an acknowledgment of the effects of a detached 'solitary perfecting' that may have hampered access to them. The 'effigy' appears to act as the solid surface onto which the memory of Dismorr's

¹¹⁵ Dismorr, 'June Night', *Blast*, War Number, p. 67. For discussions on *June Night* see Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', *Vorticism: New Perspectives*, p.128 and Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', *Blast*, *Vorticism 1914-1918*, pp. 67-68.

¹¹⁶ Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 38.

¹¹⁷ Lewis, *Blast*, War Number, p.91.

¹¹⁸ Dismorr, *Convalescent in the South*

suffering adheres, urgently opening up the possibilities of corporeal engagement through flux¹¹⁹ that suggests a cosmopolitanism that veers towards the erotic:

My appetite covets the secrets of ten million lives in lieu of my virginal stupidity....
I have abandoned the banality of choice; I pursue the last intimacy with any stranger.
My personality unhedged admits the travelling seeds and dust of unnumbered cultures...
It is a flame, blown by the spirit: nothing eludes the thrust of its streaming tongues.¹²⁰

Walkowitz has argued that cosmopolitanism can be viewed 'as a model of perversity, in the senses of obstinacy, indirection, immorality, and attitude', acknowledging that ambivalence and conflict can be useful in cosmopolitan thought.¹²¹ Dismorr's writings reveal a preoccupation with sexual intimacy, that parallels with radical feminist thought of the period. As Lucy Delap has argued, 'ultra-feminists' were 'notorious for their celebration of diverse forms of sexuality, and frank discussions of bodily functions'.¹²² In this context *Convalescent in the South* reads as a written act of cosmofeminist transgression. Fixity becomes flux and boundaries are crossed, the detached and contained

¹¹⁹ Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 24-25. Bergson argues that the 'solidified crust' of the body's outer appearance, which is the thing that is projected to the outside world, is in effect dead without the fluid, living self within. For Bergson, external perceptions are activated by memory which link the two elements for the integrity of the individual. See also Mary Ann Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*, pp. 15-19.

¹²⁰ Dismorr, *Convalescent in the South*

¹²¹ Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style, Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 13-14, n.49, p.177.

¹²² Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde*, p. 122. Delap explores these concerns in a discussion of the feminist *New Freewoman* magazine.

Vorticist body, intact in its 'virginal stupidity' merges with its surroundings, giving way to a promiscuous abandonment.¹²³ It is as though Dismorr's visceral experiences of the war, the close proximity of her troubled self to the traumatised bodies of the French soldiers so vividly documented in the unpublished photograph, has awakened her to the possibility of an intercourse free from the constraints of tradition and perceived propriety.

In *Matinée*,¹²⁴ the author's reference to the 'Croisette' firmly situating it in Cannes, is similarly concerned with the dissolving of corporeal boundaries towards a desire for openness. Yet desire is tempered here by a necessity for protection against the very openness it advocates, Dismorr's words implying a tension between an engagement with flux and a reticence towards this engagement which is necessarily achieved through the protection of the body's outer 'shell'.¹²⁵ The poem explores a turning inwards as a means to seek safety within the protection of the outer 'shell' of the body, the imagery Dismorr evokes appearing to echo a Freudian concern with the 'protective shield', the psychic mechanism which functions as a dynamic barrier to protect the ego from the outside world.¹²⁶ Such a concern with the protective shell might suggest that

¹²³ Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style, Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 13-14, n.49, p.177.

¹²⁴ Dismorr, 'Matinee', in the manuscript *Poems 1918*, held within the papers of John Henry Bradley Storrs. Also published, with small textual discrepancies in the *Little Review*, 4:11 (March 1918), pp. 31-31.

¹²⁵ Dismorr's preoccupation with the body's shell as a source of protection for the self within is explored in chapter four.

¹²⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 43-102.

Dismorr was cognisant of Freud's theories.¹²⁷ The text belies a tension between an engagement with flux, and a reticence from connection to outer stimuli, the shell protecting the truth of the suffering felt by the body within,¹²⁸ as it attempts to acclimatise to coming new stimuli, yet acknowledging that time is limited:

My nerves spring to the task of acquisitiveness. The secret of my success is a knowledge of the limitedness of time. Economy is scientific: I understand the best outlay of intention. Within this crazy shell, an efficient machinery mints satisfactions.¹²⁹

The nerves are alert and receptive to new stimuli, though these now come from within, the minutiae of existence itself examined, as if to try to prepare for a future violation that is inevitable. There is a need for restraint and efficiency in the management of finite resources within the 'crazy shell', which is unsettling in its prescience with the knowledge of Dismorr's eventual suicide.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ From 1911 David Eder, a contributor to Marsden's *Freewoman* magazine had made early translations of Freud's work which would have further contributed to the contemporary discussions amongst the intelligentsia about the inner life and its transformative effects, particularly for feminists seeking a new world order free from the external bonds of the patriarchy. Lucy Delap, 'The Superwoman: Theories of Gender and Genius in Edwardian Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 47:1 (March 2004), p. 120. See also Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde*, p. 267, pp. 315-16.

¹²⁸ The work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok on psychoanalysis as a development of Freud's theories is useful here. Abraham sees the ego struggling on two fronts, protecting, via the 'protective field', against assaults from external stimuli, and channeling excessive impulses from within. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, Vol.1 (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1994) pp. 80-81.

¹²⁹ Jessie Dismorr, 'Matinee', in the manuscript *Poems 1918*, held within the papers of John Henry Bradley Storrs. Also published, with small textual discrepancies in the *Little Review* Vol. 4, No.11, March 1918, pp. 31-31.

¹³⁰ Heathcock, p. 189.

Each poem emphasises the micro and the macro, Dismorr simultaneously 'thrilling' to the microscopic and immersed in the 'unnumbered cultures' of the cosmic. In *Convalescent in the South*, whilst there is an expression of receptiveness to other cultures as an interested observer, a desire for full interaction, to immerse totally within the macrocosm is demonstrated by sexualised language. Conversely, in *Matinée* the language is evocative of a desire to turn inwards and embrace the minutiae of experience and its precise biological detail. The text evokes the scientific, whilst at the same time seemingly opposed to a material determination. Whilst Dismorr is receptive to and immersed within the cosmos, there is at the same time the desire to withdraw from the outside world to avoid the uncertainty of indeterminate 'shadows', her aesthetics of 1915 providing a mechanism to attempt to contain her own suffering, her work infused with an acute and on-going struggle against competing forces, which is necessarily cathartic, yet ultimately unresolved.

Breaking the Binary Bonds: Saunders's Vorticist unfettering.

The vivid evidence of an unsettled conflict in Dismorr's work of 1915 has parallels with Saunders's proto-Vorticist work of 1913, though rather than suggesting an aesthetic conflict that in its ultimate irresolution is traumatic, for Saunders the conflict evident in her work suggests a desire for personal emancipation through psychological transformation. Saunders's drawings and writings of 1913 are imbued with a sense of corporeal struggle, her evocations of female figures in varying degrees of distress allusive of the prevailing climate of

'sex antagonism,'¹³¹suggesting feminist concerns an interest in radical feminist discourse.

Despite her friendships and connections to activists, it had until recently been thought that Saunders was not overtly political.¹³² She was close friends with artists Rosa Waugh (1882-1971) and Katie Gliddon (1883-1967), two women who were actively involved in progressive causes, and who each had spent time in prison as a result of their actions and convictions.¹³³ Saunders was also friendly with Harriet Shaw Weaver (1876-1961), who as a patron and an activist was supporter of the feminist *New Freewoman* magazine was a long-term advocate and confidante of its editor Dora Marsden.¹³⁴ Recently discovered correspondence between Waugh and Gliddon has revealed that Saunders had in fact been engaging with the complex terrain of the sexual politics of the time, having taken part in the Women's Coronation Procession on June 17th 1911 in

¹³¹ See note 28.

¹³² Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 11.

¹³³ Rosa Waugh was a Slade-trained artist and political activist, who spent time in prison during the war for distributing pacifist literature. Katie Gliddon, also Slade-trained, spent time in Holloway Prison for her political actions in the cause of women's suffrage. See Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, pp. 6-11; also Peppin, 'Helen Saunders (1885-1963): Mapping a career', in *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p.9. The papers of Katie Gliddon are held at the Women's Library at LSE and contain detailed personal accounts of Gliddon's experiences of her incarceration at Holloway Prison in 1912.

¹³⁴ For a detailed account of the life of Harriet Shaw Weaver see Jane Lidderdale & Mary Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver, Harriet Shaw Weaver 1876-1961* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970). Saunders and Weaver encountered each other at one of the regular Imagist and Vorticist suppers held at Gennaro's restaurant in Soho in 1914. See Lidderdale and Nicholson, pp. 119-120.

London, organised by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).¹³⁵ In addition to this active engagement with the suffrage cause, close analysis of the work Saunders produced in 1913 suggests that the artist was already aware of Marsden's politics, likely due to her friendship with Weaver during this period.¹³⁶ It will be argued that the proto-Vorticist work created by Saunders in 1913 was not only influenced by her own interest and actions in the suffrage cause, but that it was also heavily influenced by the egoist discourse published in the overtly feminist *New Freewoman*, a politics that offered a radical alternative to the notion of 'women's suffrage' towards the absolute freedom of the individual, unconstrained by the boundaries enforced by gender binarism. Yet whilst egoism offered Saunders the possibility of personal emancipation, the very possibility of emancipation itself resulted in an acute personal conflict.

When Saunders took part in the Coronation Procession in London in the summer of 1911, Britain's borders were being strengthened and nationalist rhetoric heightened as a result of rising tensions internationally, and in particular between Britain and Germany in the lead up to the Agadir Crisis.¹³⁷ Whilst this large-scale event in support of the suffrage movement was staged at

¹³⁵ Gliddon glimpsed Saunders taking part in the WSPU's Coronation Procession. Katie Gliddon, undated letter to Rosa Waugh held in the LSE Women's Library.

¹³⁶ Lidderdale and Nicholson document that Saunders 'a friend of Walter Sickert and Fred Etchells' was liked by Weaver, the two often meeting for tea. It is not clear when Saunders first met Weaver. *Dear Miss Weaver*, pp. 119-120.

¹³⁷ Britain's alliance with France in the face of German military aggression in Morocco contributed to rising tensions across Europe and heightened anti-German feeling in Britain. For a discussion on the Agadir Crisis in the context of contemporary intellectual debates on cosmopolitanism see Peppis, pp. 70-75. Peppis argues that military threats to Britain's supremacy on the international stage lead to Vorticism's adoption of nationalistic rhetoric being used as a strategy for asserting supremacy within the arenas of the European avant-garde.

the centre of an Empire that was perceived to be under threat, the Procession itself was an intentionally cosmopolitan endeavour, and as a participant Saunders would have been marching in unity with groups and individuals from all walks of life, coming from all over the British Isles, as well as from across the Empire and beyond. According to the official programme:

The flags of every great country are being carried, and banners proclaim in many tongues, yet with one voice, the insistent claim which one half of the human race is making for recognition as a part of the body politic.¹³⁸

The programme emphasises the intention to welcome like-minded individuals from a diversity of backgrounds together in collective solidarity, regardless of social, cultural, or political differences. Saunders took part anonymously, marching with the 'Prisoners' Pageant' as a representative of one of the estimated 700 women who had been imprisoned for their activism.¹³⁹ It is not clear how Saunders came to represent one of the imprisoned suffragettes, or whether she was there as a member of a specific group, but the knowledge of her participation demonstrates a personal motivation towards a desire to offer a presence in solidarity with an unnamed woman who could not be there herself.¹⁴⁰ By inhabiting the space of another who is absent to express a political

¹³⁸ *Memento of Women's Coronation Procession to demand Votes for Women. Order of March and Descriptive Programme* (London: The Woman's Press, 17 June 1911), p. 2. A copy is held at The Women's Library at LSE.

¹³⁹ This information was discovered in an undated letter from Katie Gliddon to Rosa Waugh, held in The Woman's Library at LSE. See also *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁰ The souvenir programme lists some of the names of participants within the lists of all the groups taking part in the Procession, which included the Women's

viewpoint, this symbolic act by Saunders signals an adoption of an alter ego as a means of being present in a space that may otherwise have been closed to her. Moreover, the act of marching in solidarity with thousands of other individuals from across the globe at a time when Saunders had very recently been living in a sheltered and protective family home, would have likely been as unsettling as it was exhilarating in her exposure to radical ideas.¹⁴¹ Saunders's decision to leave the family home to pursue life as an artist in London would have been a brave one for a young woman who had been brought up in a conservative and conventional middle-class suburban household. Indeed, the stress of such a move cannot be underestimated, particularly at a time when traditional values were perceived to be breaking down and the status quo challenged within political, cultural, and sexual arenas. This rupture with the past towards an uncertain future is acutely expressed in the work Saunders produced during this period.

In the same year that the Women's Procession took place in London, Marsden had become *persona non grata* of the WSPU due to her ultra-militant activities as a member,¹⁴² and had launched the *Freewoman*,¹⁴³ her little

Social and Political Union, Freewomen, the Actresses Franchise League, the Artists Suffrage League, the Empire Pageant, International Contingent, as well as several men's groups sympathetic to the suffrage cause.

¹⁴¹ Saunders grew up in Ealing, where she and her sister Ethel were educated at home by governesses and tutors. See Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 37. In c.1911 Saunders moved to 4 Phene Street in Chelsea. See *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 90.

¹⁴² Marsden resigned from the WSPU in 1910 after defying the WSPU's orders to refrain from serious civil disobedience and disrupting a political appearance by Winston Churchill at a theatre in Southport. See Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 50-51.

magazine promoting self-empowerment. Developed partly from a critical engagement with Otto Weininger's misogynist thesis *Sex and Character*,¹⁴⁴ a tract that Saunders was known to have read,¹⁴⁵ and used as a provocation to force open a discussion about societal acceptance of gender binaries, Marsden's radical shift away from women's suffrage towards egoism shaped the ethos of the subsequent *New Freewoman*. In July 1913 Marsden presented her manifesto to her readers:

The New Freewoman is not for the advancement of Woman, but for the empowering of individuals – men and women; it is not to set women free but to demonstrate the fact that 'freeing' is the individual's affair and must be done first hand, and that individual power is the first step thereto.¹⁴⁶

According to Marsden's egoist philosophy, individual power can only be attained through universal acceptance of the fixed concepts of gender binaries as

¹⁴³ See note 21.

¹⁴⁴ Otto Weininger (1880-1903) was an Austrian philosopher who gained posthumous notoriety for publishing *Geschlecht und Charakter*, his racist and misogynist yet hugely influential thesis on relations between the sexes. For an in-depth discussion on Weininger's thesis see Chandak Sengoopta, 'The Unknown Weininger: Science, Philosophy, and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna', *Central European History*, 29:4, 1996, 453-493.

¹⁴⁵ Saunders had read Weininger's thesis, as evidenced by existing correspondence between Saunders and Lewis on the subject of 'henids', Weininger's term to describe what he argued to be the foggy, unformed thoughts that are characteristic of the female mind. Saunders was clearly skeptical of Weininger's arguments, informing Lewis wryly that 'I had discovered most of his facts for myself but persist in thinking I have a soul.' Undated letter from Helen Saunders to Wyndham Lewis held in the Wyndham Lewis Collection at Cornell quoted in Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p.11.

¹⁴⁶ Dora Marsden, 'Views and Comments', *The New Freewoman*, 1:2, 1 July 1913, p. 25.

irrelevant.¹⁴⁷ The empowerment of the individual, and the struggle to attain it in challenging circumstances appears to be a deep concern for Saunders. As Marsden was launching the *New Freewoman* in 1913, Saunders made a gouache drawing (fig. 1) depicting seven figures grouped closely together on a rocky outcrop, each expressing varying degrees of tension, disorientation, and anxiety. The bodies are trapped within a claustrophobic space, their movement restricted by a containing device that also appears to be under pressure from external forces, indicated by the diagonal hatching above, which appears to press down onto the figures' heads. The pressurised atmosphere is further emphasised by the vertical branch-like structures visible on each side of the restricted space. The position of each of the figures in Saunders's drawing is important and worth analysis. To the far left of the composition a discernibly female figure looks away from the group towards a distant point bathed in light colour, closely followed by another female body, the two almost conjoined as they move towards the light. The third is static, wrapped in what resembles a shroud, the figure's face akin to a mask that stares directly outwards, as if to implicate the viewer in complicity with the source of the figures' struggle. The two central characters act as a rupturing device within the composition, one turning towards the left. The other, an imposing and possibly male figure appears to be obstructing the character to its left, whilst an isolated individual sits on the edge of the rocky structure and stares back towards the right of the scene. The drawing is untitled, though is

¹⁴⁷ See Andrew Thacker, 'Dora Marsden and *The Egoist*: "Our War is with Words"', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 36:2 (1993), 179-196.

known as *Female Figures Imprisoned*,¹⁴⁸ and has been variously interpreted as Saunders's personal response to the febrile atmosphere of militant feminist revolt of the early years of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁹ Yet, as is the case with many of Saunders's images, the ambiguity of this drawing invites a multi-layered reading that acknowledges its feminist overtones but also hints at a concern with the turbulence of the wider social, political and cultural climate of Britain in the years leading up to the First World War.¹⁵⁰ Saunders's depiction of a rocky outcrop suggests an island, which alludes to the position of Britain as an island nation, the group of figures trapped on the island perhaps Saunders's critique of the 'splendid isolation' of Britain's self-regarded superior status on the modern world stage,¹⁵¹ the proto-Vorticist handling of the drawing at the same time anticipating *Blast's* promotion of a distinctly English modern artform as dominant in the arenas of the European avant-garde.¹⁵² The forces threatening

¹⁴⁸ Cork uses the title in *Vorticism*, p. 150. See also *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁹ Cork has suggested that Saunders's figures are 'trapped unhappily in a cage structure presumably symbolising the forces against which suffragettes were at that moment fighting'. See Cork, *Vorticism*, p. 150. Referring to Saunders's drawing Tickner comments that Saunders 'probably comes closer than anyone else in the avant-garde to producing an overtly feminist painting.' Tickner, 'Men's Work?', p. 65. 1913 saw the height of the militant activities of the suffragettes. A useful summary of these events is found in Janine Utell, 'The Woman Question', *Modernist Journals Project*, <<https://modjourn.org/essay/the-woman-question/>> [last accessed 23 June 2022].

¹⁵⁰ For discussion and analysis of the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War see Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Pimlico edition, 1991), George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1936).

¹⁵¹ See note 8.

¹⁵² For a brief discussion on the gradual erosion of the sense of Britain's 'splendid isolation', as well as Lewis's promotion of the English mind-set in the

the 'imprisoned' figures, signified by the diagonal hatching suggesting the infiltration of British society by philosophical ideas from Europe that added to the increasing anxieties of the status of Britain and empire in the wake of competing world powers and impending conflict.¹⁵³

The female figure positioned to the left of Saunders's drawing appears to be leading the way out of this isolated space, stepping with one foot forward towards the edge of the rock into a brightly shaded patch of colour, as if towards a new kind of future, away from the confines of imposed boundaries in anticipation of liberation. Saunders's depiction of this hopeful character, which appears to echo Dudley Harvey's *Are the lights in the New Year's sky of 1911 a false dawn, or do they presage the coming of a new and better day?* (fig. 8)¹⁵⁴ appears to aspire to look beyond its own status as restricted towards a utopia unfettered, this chiming with the concept of 'emancipatory cosmopolitanism' explored by Rapport.¹⁵⁵ Rapport envisions seeing beyond surface difference towards human sameness as a mode of thinking beyond categories towards emancipation from all forms of enclosure, this to enable the right of the

context of Vorticism see Jonathan Black, "A hysterical hullo-bullo about motor cars': the Vorticist critique of Futurism, 1914-1919', *Back to the Futurists, The avant-garde and its legacy*, ed. by Elza Adamowicz and Simona Storchi (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 159-160.

¹⁵³ See Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, pp. 307-345.

¹⁵⁴ Dudley Harvey's (c.1867-1922) image was printed in the *Lady's Realm* in January 1911. See Meagan Clarke, 'Sex and the City: The Metropolitan New Woman' < <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/meaghan-clarke-sex-and-the-city-the-metropolitan-new-woman-r1105659> > [accessed 1 September 2023].

¹⁵⁵ Nigel Rapport, 'Emancipatory Cosmopolitanism', *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitan Studies*, pp. 101-114.

individual to live according to the best knowledge available to humankind, as distinguished from knowledge that is circumstantial and contextual.¹⁵⁶ Read as an 'overtly feminist' image of the avant-garde,¹⁵⁷ Saunders contrasts her graphic depiction of an emancipated individual to the left of her composition that aspires to be open to the world 'free from culture, custom and community'¹⁵⁸ with a figure in isolation to the far right of her image that resolutely faces the opposite direction, as if looking to the past and the stasis of the existing patriarchal order, comfortable within his country's border. In this context Saunders's drawing offers a cosmofeminist riposte to a patriarchy under threat from within its comfortable borders, paradoxically anticipating, through its proto-Vorticist aesthetic, a feminist rejection to *Blast's* nationalist polemics.

Whilst Saunders's untitled drawing can be read as a feminist critique of society that hints at the radical influence of Marsden's growing egoism as expressed in the pages of the *New Freewoman*, the atmosphere of oppression evoked by the composition belies a hesitancy that suggests a personal anxiety that contradicts the confident feminist politics of her circle. The bodies Saunders depicts at the centre of her drawing appear to be torn between the two opposing directions as if confused by their role on this small island, the sense of disorientation most strongly evoked by shrouded figure that stares out of the image as if to directly engage the viewer with its personal anguish. In the act of catching the viewer's eye the figure acts as a cipher onto which the artist can

¹⁵⁶ Rapport, pp. 101-114.

¹⁵⁷ Tickner, 'Men's Work?', p. 65.

¹⁵⁸ Rapport, 'Emancipatory Cosmopolitanism', p. 101.

safely work through her own struggle between tradition and the new, and between the 'sex antagonism' of the moment and the promise of a Marsdenian release from a preoccupation with fixed gender binaries.¹⁵⁹ By transmitting her pain through the act of drawing Saunders might aspire to free her institutionalised female self from its debilitating attributes towards an ideal and individual 'I', a political act that has affinities with egoism, Marsden's manifesto for the *New Freewoman* itself offering a subtitle for Saunders's drawing. In this context, the male and female figures that Saunders presents in her untitled drawing are each in the process of their own individual struggles towards freedom from the enclosed space within which they are all trapped, the shrouded figure invoking a personal desire for emancipation.

In the same edition of the magazine Marsden signals her own move towards a politicised interpretation of Bergsonian philosophy and its critique of language, which Bergson argues is a structure that forces the fluidity of life into static concepts.¹⁶⁰ Marsden states:

If men and women would try to turn their attention away from the infinitesimally small differences which distinguish them [...] we should soon have heard the last of Man and Woman spelt with capitals, and the day of the individual would be at hand. And the measure of the individual would be not sex, but individual power.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Dora Marsden, 'Views and Comments', *The New Freewoman*, 1:2, 1 July 1913, p. 25.

¹⁶⁰ Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*, p. 99. See also Mark Antliff, 'Sculptural Nominalism/Anarchist Vortex: Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Dora Marsden, and Ezra Pound' in *The Vorticists, Manifesto for a Modern World* ed. by Mark Antliff and Vivien Green, pp. 47-49.

¹⁶¹ Dora Marsden, *The New Freewoman*, 1:2, 1 July 1913, p. 24.

Inspired by Bergson's critique of static concepts as imposed by language and using it to argue for the dissolution of fixed ideas 'to set free life impulses',¹⁶² Marsden vehemently promoted her Bergsonian vision of the importance of the individual above all other concerns. This she saw as being a direct evolution of the radical egoist philosophy of Max Stirner (1806-1856) whose 1844 thesis *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* was translated into English as *The Ego and its Own* in 1907.¹⁶³ Further strengthening her position Marsden published an extract from Bergson's seminal *Creative Evolution* under the title 'The Philosophy of Ideas' in the final number of the *New Freewoman*, before she made the strategic decision to rename it the *Egoist*.¹⁶⁴ Delap documents that Marsden adopted an egoist position from around 1912 following her definitive move to distance herself from the suffrage movement, emphasising that the radical change that Marsden

¹⁶² *The New Freewoman*, 1 July 1913, p. 25

¹⁶³ Marsden discovered Stirner's thesis in 1912, eulogising its philosophy in the *Freewoman* over that summer. See Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Gender and Modernism: *The Freewoman* (1911-12), *The New Freewoman* (1913), and *The Egoist* (1914-19) in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, pp. 274-278. See also Mark Antliff, 'Sculptural Nominalism', p. 47.

¹⁶⁴ Bergson's seminal work *Evolution Créatrice* was published in English in 1911, and in the same year he gave lectures in Birmingham, Oxford, and London, cementing his status as a cult figure in both society and avant-garde circles. Marsden published an extract from *Creative Evolution*, entitled 'The Philosophy of Ideas' in the final number of the *New Freewoman* on 15 December 1913. See *Henri Bergson, Key Writings* ed. by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. xii. See also Mark Antliff, 'Sculptural Nominalism' in *The Vorticists*, p. 49. For a discussion on the strategic decision to rename the *New Freewoman* as the *Egoist* see Susan Solomon, 'Introduction to The New Freewoman and The Egoist', *Modernist Journals Project* < <https://modjourn.org/introduction-to-the-new-freewoman-and-the-egoist/> > [last accessed 23 June 2022]. See also Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*. pp. 95-136.

sought in women was fundamentally psychological.¹⁶⁵ Some Edwardian feminists thought that liberation could not be achieved through external concerns, such as being granted rights by men, but by the transformation of one's psyche and sexuality through listening to one's inner voice, what Delap terms as the 'introspective turn'.¹⁶⁶ This notion of introspection as a psychological strategy of empowerment might be identifiable in Saunders's untitled drawing through the shrouded figure that engages directly with the viewer. But this will to empowerment through introspection feels unresolved, the figure's haunted expression as cipher channelling the artist's own inner turmoil, a sense of anxiety that is carried across in other work the artist created during the same period.

The expression of an inner turmoil is palpable in Saunders's ink and watercolour drawing known as *Hammock* (fig. 2). Saunders depicts a naked female figure lying in a hammock, one arm reaching backwards to hold on to the ropes that secure it to its frame, the other arm reaching across the body to grasp the left breast as if to indicate its unwelcome presence. The hands are contorted and resemble claws reminiscent, as Peppin has suggested, of the hands of the crucified Christ in Matthias Grünewald's altarpieces,¹⁶⁷ this reading heightening the impression of self-sacrifice. The figure's facial features resemble a mask and gesture to the faces depicted by Picasso in his seminal work *Les Femmes d'Alger*.

¹⁶⁵ Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde*, p. 115.

¹⁶⁶ Delap, p. 7.

¹⁶⁷ Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 10.

d'Avignon.¹⁶⁸ However, rather than expressing any perceived malevolence, the grimacing mask rendered by Saunders implies acute pain or psychological distress that accords with the face of the shrouded figure in the drawing known as *Female Figures Imprisoned*. This anguish is accentuated in both drawings by the dark shaded areas that seem to close in around the head of each figure, casting a shadow on the face. Peppin has likened the hexagonal shape visible within the structure supporting the hammock to that of a Queen Anne chair, noting that this item of furniture would have been found in comfortable middle-class households similar to that of Saunders's upbringing.¹⁶⁹ The hexagonal shape also gestures towards the funereal in its similarity to a coffin, the hammock itself reminiscent of a winding sheet for a corpse,¹⁷⁰ the sheet again echoing the shrouded figure in *Female Figures Imprisoned*. Peppin has offered an astute reading of *Hammock* as an autobiographical image of a woman 'strung out' between the demands of her conventional middle-class background and the possibilities afforded by her leanings towards the avant-garde.¹⁷¹ Indeed, Saunders's depiction of the female body lying contorted and distressed on this symbol of leisure, as if in parody of the popular imagery of the carefree Edwardian woman, would certainly reinforce this reading of conflicting

¹⁶⁸ Peppin suggests that Saunders' drawings of this period 'acknowledged the work of Picasso and Braque of 1907-8'. See Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 10; *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 58.

¹⁶⁹ Hickman makes this suggestion following a conversation with Brigid Peppin in 2011. See Miranda Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism: Jessie Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Vorticist Feminism' in *Vorticism: New Perspectives*, p. 126. See also *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 58.

¹⁷⁰ Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 10.

¹⁷¹ Peppin, 'Helen Saunders and her Contribution to Vorticism', paper presented at The Vorticists: International Symposium, Venice, Italy, January 29, 2011.

identities and allegiances, the significance of the clawing of the breast, perhaps signifying an egoist rejection of the category of 'Woman'¹⁷² that prefigures the anguished content of a cache of undated letters Saunders wrote to Lewis in the latter part of the war, in one of which she implores Lewis to 'free' her from the female body.¹⁷³ The body in *Hammock* appears to be waking up from a troubled, fitful slumber, the cocoon of sleep a temporary protective field against the realities of the outside world, and yet at the same time an unwanted barrier to the possibilities an engagement with the outside world might offer, the sensory wrapping of deep sleep echoed in the untitled drawing by the lines that contain and restrict the female figures. Equally, *Hammock* presents the viewer with a body that cannot rest. It fights against an irresolvable inner turmoil that is at the same time empowering in its impetus towards a kind of awakening, which in the untitled drawing is echoed by the patch of light colour that the female figure is drawn towards.¹⁷⁴

The uneasy juxtaposition between repose, awakening, and unending conflict is also evoked in an unpublished poem likely written by Saunders in 1913.¹⁷⁵ *Bells of West Liss* [appendix 5], is clearly inspired by Saunders's visits to the new parental home in the sleepy Hampshire village of West Liss, where the

¹⁷² Dora Marsden, *The New Freewoman*, 1:2, 1 July 1913, p. 24.

¹⁷³ The undated letters are held in the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust Archive. See also, *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p.16.

¹⁷⁴ As with Dismorr's work, Abraham's development of Freud's theory, that of the ego struggling against external forces whilst simultaneously attempting to control inner impulses feels pertinent. Abraham, *The Shell and the Kernel*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁷⁵ The poem is kept amongst Helen Saunders's writings and ephemera, held in a private collection.

Saunders family moved in 1913 and remaining there until 1918.¹⁷⁶ The move followed swiftly after Saunders's departure from the family home to pursue a life of independence in London,¹⁷⁷ the poem written at a pivotal point in Saunders's newly independent life as her politics were evolving and as she was forging her as a serious artist within the circles of the avant-garde. Like the bodies depicted in the drawings she made at this moment, Saunders's poem evokes the corporeal to express inner feelings of disorientation and frustration, the three artworks providing a conduit through which the artist attempts to allow an independent and emancipated 'I' to exist without the burden of containment within a fixed identity. *Bells of West Liss* describes the act of waking from a deep sleep that might allude to the artist's comfortable and conventional upbringing and act a metaphor for expressing the attempt to escape from the claustrophobic grip of the past. The poem's subject is roused from its slumber by the repetitive pealing of the church bells stressing the necessity to wake up, but the body is lacking in strength to move, remaining trapped within the 'close-fitting iron mould of sleep', the reference to 'cold pressure' alluding to the author's sheltered upbringing.¹⁷⁸ The sensation of claustrophobia through corporeal entrapment is tangible at the outset. Societal pressure to conform to accepted norms of femininity is conflicted by the urgency to pursue freedom and recognition as an individual and an artist on her own terms as Saunders tries to extricate herself

¹⁷⁶ Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁷⁷ Peppin, p. 8.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

from the 'magnet(ic)' force of her past.¹⁷⁹ The sounds of the bells are likened by Saunders to 'hammer-strokes falling on the smooth grey surface of my shell', the inert body 'glued' to the bed by the 'heavy blanket of air overhead'.¹⁸⁰ There is a reluctance to try to draw on the strength to fight against the oppressive atmosphere described in the text, this reflected in visual form by the shrouded figure that stares out from the untitled drawing as if directly referring to Saunders' struggle, the visual embodiment of her 'female' self, standing alone in a state of confusion. This oppressive atmosphere is similarly evoked in *Hammock* through the dark shading that presses down upon the head of the body contorted in anguish in the hammock-as-winding sheet that contains a body buried alive, suffocated by the cloying pressure of the past.¹⁸¹

Saunders refers to the body in *Bells of West Liss* as a shell that acts as a protective shield from the forces of her childhood memories and is at the same time a barrier preventing access to new stimuli. The reference to a shell, a concept that is explored in greater detail in chapter four, is echoed in Dismorr's writing, though as Dismorr's shell acts as an unpredictable, or unreliable protector of the self within, the shell for Saunders, whilst vulnerable to attack, does not sufficiently yield to outside pressure to allow for the self within to break free. As Saunders writes:

¹⁷⁹ Saunders, *Bells of West Liss*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ The sense of a body buried alive is similarly evoked in Saunders's 'A Vision of Mud', published in the second number of *Blast* and discussed in the following chapter. See *Blast*, pp. 73-74.

Cracking and tearing the welded joints of machinery –
I try to shrink myself loose in the shell
So that I can slip easily out of a small opening.
But the case fits too well.¹⁸²

The motif of the shell has accords with Bergson's theory of the self. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* Bergson says that the 'solidified crust' of the body's outer appearance, which is the thing that is projected to the outside world, is in effect dead without the fluid, living self within. For Bergson, external perceptions are activated by memory which link the two elements for the integrity of the individual.¹⁸³ The act of remembering appears to be troubling for Saunders. The body she describes is constricted by the magnetic recollections of a past from which she is unable to break free, even as the shell is attacked by external stimuli. The 'hammer-strokes' of desire for freedom batter the shell's 'smooth grey surface', which Saunders likens to 'the sides of a Dreadnought',¹⁸⁴ a notable reference to the powerful warship heavily manufactured by Britain during this period in response to the rapid expansion of the German navy and the perceived threat to Britain as an island nation. In contrast to the Dreadnought that was viewed by the British populace as being the principal deterrent to invasion,¹⁸⁵ the Dreadnought evoked by Saunders shows weakness. The possibility of liberation is hinted at by 'the morning air [that]creeps through the chinks in the

¹⁸² Helen Saunders *Bells of West Liss*

¹⁸³ Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 24-25. See also Mary Ann Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*, pp. 15-19.

¹⁸⁴ Helen Saunders, *Bells of West Liss*

¹⁸⁵ Amelia Hadfield-Amkhan, *British Foreign Policy, National Identity, and Neo-classical Realism* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), p. 105.

metal', Saunders's reference to 'the whirlwind' alluding to the vortex and the anticipation of an empowering new way of life made possible by affiliation with the avant-garde that 'will split the Dreadnought's sides.'¹⁸⁶ There is a hint of transgression as the 'welded joints of machinery' of the body's shell-as-Dreadnought start to give way, and the empowered, emancipated self within endeavours to shake loose, but the attempt is futile as 'the case fits too well ..it fits with the cold precision of the past'.¹⁸⁷

Resignation turns to faint hope as Saunders has 'grown in the night',¹⁸⁸ the author emboldened by the cathartic act of articulating emotions. A reference to 'a two-headed tiger'¹⁸⁹ as if likening herself to Janus, the artist look backs on the past, though is on the cusp of breaking free of the weight of tradition towards an independent future freed from constraint and striving for the challenge of an unknown future without barriers. The process of introspection, enabled by the articulation of the corporeal on which to exorcise pain is revealing as a cosmopolitan strategy of individualism. Saunders's fight for psychological emancipation from communitarian enclosure, made possible through the development of her own personal aesthetic as cathartic route towards an egoist desire for recognition free from the bonds of convention and tradition, is a position that is in distinct alignment with Marsdenian thought.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Saunders, *Bells of West Liss*

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Rapport, 'Emancipatory Cosmopolitanism', p. 103.

Conflict, pain and catharsis

Analysis of the texts and images discussed in this chapter has revealed the recurring themes of conflict, pain and catharsis, which have been explored in the context of the cosmopolitan body or body politic. The corporeal, either tangible or imagined, is envisaged by each artist in differing ways and used as the apparatus to explore painful experience towards a possible resolution. The cosmopolitan body has been considered through the literary, aesthetic, and polemical spaces of the modernist magazine, these arenas heavily influenced by Bergsonian philosophy, and seen as a medium for the presentation of, and as an influence on the work of both artists and motivated towards Vorticism as a workable means of expression. Particular emphasis has been placed on each woman's individual engagement with the body as a site of suffering, and the expression of the corporeal used as a route to catharsis. The body is a site that permits the search for liberation through fluidity, for a self that exists beyond all boundaries of classification, as opposed to being contained in isolation. In acknowledging the now generally accepted theory that has attempted to understand each artist's motivations towards Vorticism as a usable aesthetic despite the movement's aggressively masculine stance,¹⁹¹ this chapter has also sought to reconcile what has been identified as each woman's innate cosmopolitanism with Lewisian Vorticism as a strategically nationalist endeavour. It has been argued that in the act of creating the works discussed, both Dismorr and Saunders were influenced either directly, or indirectly by the

¹⁹¹ Tickner, 'Men's Work?' p. 67. Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', pp. 121-134.

cosmopolitan force of the philosophy of Bergson, an influence that jarred with the Vorticist strategies of detachment.

Chapter Four

Shell Shocks: Vorticist armour and the volatile body within.

In her poem the *Bells of West Liss*, Helen Saunders used the image of a mechanistic shell that served both as a defensive device and as a source of necessary restraint for a self in turmoil.¹ Saunders's evocation of a body within the shell that shifts and contorts in an attempt to emerge from its cocoon resonates with the poetics of space eloquently explored by Gaston Bachelard in the context of the shell.² Drawing on selected philosophical, literary and lyrical sources Bachelard acknowledges the shell for its exterior diversity, its complex geometric form, and as a haven and source of protection for its inhabitant. He allows for an imagining of the shell's interior, evoking in the inhabitant a turbulent yet controlled becoming, as it prepares to reveal, through spasmodic bursts, its corporeal existence to the world outside, the space within the shell facilitating the necessary force to enable its emergence. As Bachelard states:

by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being.³

¹ Helen Saunders, 'Bells of West Liss', unpublished and undated poem held in a private collection.

² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), pp. 125-153.

³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 131.

Here the shell is considered as a living, dynamic form of protection that the inhabitant builds from within as it develops and grows, the dramatic experience of existence itself, with its 'temporal explosions' and 'whirlwinds of being' articulated vividly as the living creature within its shell prepares its emergence into the world.⁴ Conversely, Lewis as Vorticist sees the body itself as a shell, its 'stark apparatus' the necessary mechanism for protection of the self:

[T]he Wild Body is this supreme survival that is us, the stark apparatus with its set of mysterious spasms...⁵

Whilst this 'stark apparatus' is necessary, it is unpredictable. Lewis's concept of the 'wild body', developed initially to articulate what the artist saw as the need to break free from the 'vast Anglo-Saxon conspiracy against the body', was first introduced in a short essay published in *The New Age* in May 1910.⁶ For Lewis, the English body is repressed by civilisation and convention, contained and closed in. It withstands temptation, or pretends that temptation does not exist, whilst the 'Wild Body' is a hospitable body, one that is open to all sensations and

⁴ Bachelard, p. 131.

⁵ Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), p. 238.

⁶ Wyndham Lewis, 'Our Wild Body', *The New Age*, 7:1, 5 May 1910 (London: The New Age Press, Ltd), pp. 8-10. See also Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body: A Soldier of Humour and Other Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927). The article and subsequent book were inspired by Lewis's travels in Europe, and most notably in rural Brittany, and marks Lewis's developing philosophy on the fundamental absurdity of human existence. I draw here on a conversation that took place at a meeting of the Wyndham Lewis Society Reading Group on 24 April 2021, focusing on Lewis's *The Wild Body*. For a discussion on Lewis's evolving concept of the 'Wild Body' see Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*, pp. 11 – 34.

stimuli, a body that makes another at home in its own body.⁷ Lewis's 'Wild Body' provides the necessary apparatus to contemplate life, armoured and ready to do battle with an absurd world. Lewis speaks of the mechanics of the body as its own protective shell, a structure that is governed by involuntary convulsions. Yet it is a necessary carapace, a ludicrous vehicle that allows for the existence of a free-ranging and true self within. Fundamentally for Lewis as the development of his theory towards Vorticism, the artist is in control, the 'laughing observer' of 'the other that is the Wild Body.'⁸

This chapter will consider the aesthetic expressions of body and shell as articulated in the drawings and poetry of Dismorr and Saunders. Focusing again on Vorticist strategies of defence and feminist strategies of resistance as expressed through each artist's preoccupation with the body as a site of instability, this chapter will argue that Dismorr and Saunders each articulated, through their individual Vorticist practices, a conceptual shell that is used as an aesthetic device for self-care, creating as a safe space from within for experimentation and as a means of protection for the self in challenging circumstances. It will be argued that for each artist the protective shell is envisaged to provide a space for the freedom of thought and as a testing ground for ideas, often articulated by an imaginary body that is either housed or trapped within the shell, or acts as the protective shell itself. It will be suggested that whilst Dismorr and Saunders were certainly exposed to Lewis's concept of the 'Wild Body' and likely in direct dialogue with his theory, the 'wild bodies' evoked by each artist, rather than acting as a mere 'apparatus', were employed in

⁷ Wyndham Lewis, 'Our Wild Body', pp. 8-10.

⁸ Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body*, p. 244.

differing ways to navigate, in safety, personal anxieties and aesthetic concerns as cathartic acts. Turning to focus on the intimate sphere of the mind-space and considering the tension between the lived experience of the body and its necessary abstraction, it will be argued that the shell as articulated by Dismorr and Saunders through their individual Vorticist practice acts as a necessary Vorticist armour that offers a protective environment in which the imagined ideal body can live and express itself freely, uncultivated and unconditioned by society, in compensation for the reality of the gendered physical body in society that is constrained. This acts as a cosmofeminist strategy of self-care enacted from within to create a safe space for experimentation and as a means of protection for the self in challenging circumstances that at the same time allowed for an exploration of desire shielded from personal anxieties and the debilitating forces of daily existence, in an attempt at creating conditions for the actual self to grow stronger.

In 'Poem' Dismorr imagines a shell as the act of thinking which provides a space in which to take refuge from turbulence:

Here all is whole and well;
And thought is a safe shell.
But what of those lost spaces
And cataclysmic places
Where dwells un-reason and must ever dwell!⁹

Dismorr's words suggest an uneasy peace. The shell offers a space in which thoughts can form freely, though this momentary freedom is quickly infiltrated

⁹ Jessica Dismorr, 'Poem', an undated and unpublished poem, transcribed by Dismorr's close friend, the artist Catherine Giles. The poem is held in a private collection.

by doubt, as if the liberty of thinking must inevitably lead to the dangers of the irrational. The shell protects a space in which to think clearly, but at the same time allows for a subtle hospitality to unreason, where thoughts harboured are threatened through the shell's instability, a carapace that is a source of protection yet one that is under constant threat. The shell is a recurring motif that appears in the visual and literary work Dismorr and Saunders produced in the 1910s and employed as a device to express feelings of conflict and constraint, and at the same to inspire a desire for control or release from corporeal containment. This preoccupation with the shell evidenced in both artist's work echoes a wider fixation on the carapace and the corporeal make-up of insects and insect behaviours identified by scholars of modernist literature and in their analyses of discourses of the early twentieth century, these concerns traced back to fin-de-siècle strategies of self-preservation used to counter the debilitating aspects of modernity.¹⁰

In his novel *Tarr*, Lewis makes the following statement through the mouthpiece of his titular protagonist on the conditions of making art:

¹⁰ The shell or carapace has been most recently explored in the work of literary scholar Rachel Murray in her study of modernist writers' fascination with the exoskeleton, these studies acknowledging and building on the work of contemporary scholars Steven Connor and Jessica Burstein. Murray's study focuses on the work of Lewis and others, further examining an already identified fascination with insects and insect behaviours in their writing. See Rachel Murray, *The Modernist Exoskeleton: Insects, War and Literary Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020). See also Steven Connor, 'As Entomate as Intimate Could Pinchably Be', in 'stevenconnor.com' < <http://stevenconnor.com/insects.html> > [last accessed 17 September, 2021], Jessica Burstein, *Cold Modernism* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University, 2021).

...deadness is the first condition of art. The armoured hide of the hippopotamus, the shell of a tortoise, feathers and machinery; naked pulsing and moving of the soft inside of life – along with elasticity of movement and consciousness – that goes in the other camp.¹¹

Lewis's championing of a hard, protective shield against what he saw as the amorphousness of modern life as being necessary to create art, is unsettled when juxtaposed with a passage that appears earlier in the novel. Echoing Lewis's concept of the 'Wild Body' as 'that small, primitive, literally antediluvian vessel in which we set out on our adventures'¹² Tarr speaks of 'English training' as constituting a system of 'deadening feeling', this hardening of the surface creating an 'armature' that when it breaks down leaves the man underneath 'softened' and 'subject to shock, over-sensitiveness.'¹³ For Tarr, this is a condition that is not felt by 'the more direct races' whose 'superficial sensitiveness allows of a harder core; our core is soft, because of course our skin is so tough.'¹⁴ Lewis's contradictory statements, one proposing the necessity of the hard exterior for the conditions of art-making, the other speaking of the problem of the 'deadening feeling' of the Englishman's hard exterior that causes the individual beneath to become vulnerable,¹⁵ has implications for critical readings

¹¹ Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr* (1918; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 265.

¹² Lewis, *The Wild Body: A Soldier of Humour and Other Stories*, p. 327.

¹³ Lewis, *Tarr*, p. 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* See also Rachel Murray, *The Modernist Exoskeleton*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Murray uses these two quotes in the context of the effects of the First World War on Lewis to argue that, following the war modernist writers such as Lewis 'began to develop a more nuanced understanding of the modern subject's psychic defenses moving beyond the 'dead shell'. See Murray, p. 16.

of Dismorr's and Saunders's concern with the shell as modernists. By 1913 both artists were in dialogue with Lewis as they were each forging their practice towards a Vorticist aesthetic. Dismorr owned a copy of *Tarr*,¹⁶ a novel that Lewis had been working on since c.1908. It had been serialised in *The Egoist* in 1916-17,¹⁷ and the manuscript of the novel was subsequently typed up by Saunders for its eventual publication in 1918.¹⁸ More broadly, Dismorr and Saunders had both been reading books about insects and insect behaviours, corresponding with the contemporary interest in entomology. Dismorr owned a copy of *The Life of the Fly* by the French entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre,¹⁹ a book that had also been serialised in part in the *Daily Mail* reaching a wide readership, as well as *The English Review* and *The Fortnightly Review*.²⁰ Correspondence between Saunders and Dismorr also reveals that Saunders had read Maurice Maeterlinck, and entomological metaphors appear frequently in both artists' published and unpublished writings in context of cocooning, 'eclosion' and metamorphosis,²¹

¹⁶ The novel is recorded as having been in Dismorr's collection of books. A transcript of the list of publications is held in a private archive.

¹⁷ Scott Klein, 'Introduction and Notes', in Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr*, pp. xxx-xxxiii. See also Paul Edwards, 'Symbolic Exchange in Tarr', in Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis Painter and Writer*, pp. 35 – 51.

¹⁸ Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p.15.

¹⁹ See note 16.

²⁰ Murray, *The Modernist Exoskeleton*, p. 25.

²¹ Belgian symbolist poet and writer Maurice Maeterlinck had an interest in the natural world. His essays include *The Life of the Bee* (1901), and *The Intelligence of Flowers* (1907) in which he sets out his philosophy on the human condition. Britannia Encyclopaedia, < <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Maurice-Maeterlinck> > [Last accessed 17 September 2021]. Saunders speaks of 'eclosion' in her poem 'A Vision of Mud', published in the second number of *Blast*, p. 73.

that explore the notion of a body protected and a desire for the body's emergence from the shell transformed.

Corporeal imaginings, Vorticist armour, and cosmofeminist mechanisms of (in)defence.

In 1913 Dismorr used the verso of one of her Fauvist canvases to create a drawing in self-portrait (fig. 1) that appears to express visually the feelings of anxiety that her undated 'Poem' articulates, whilst simultaneously being suggestive of a repudiation of the aesthetics of Fauvism through the drawing's proto-Vorticist idiom.²² Dismorr presents herself as an uneasy figure, with eyes downcast and jawline clenched and taut. The head and shoulders are set against a background composed of strong lines, some by way of an extension of the lines denoting the hairline and others appearing to violently project from within the cranium, the emerging lines evocative of a crown of thorns. The bone structure of the cheeks and eye sockets are accentuated by jarring strokes that in their brutal angularity render the face as an impenetrable armoured mask, yet at the same time appears to be under attack by forces from without and within. The lines denoting the features evoke the linear markings made on a body in preparation for a surgical operation, directing the intended course of the scalpel that threatens to carve into the surface of the skin and expose the visceral reality

²² Quentin Stevenson has confirmed that Dismorr produced this self-portrait in 1913 on the verso of her Fauvist painting of 1911, *The Square in Avignon*. The painting was held in his private collection until 2016, then sold through Sotheby's to another private collector. Information acquired via a telephone conversation with Quentin Stevenson, 30 May 2021.

of sinew and skull beneath. The image is austere, yet hints of a battleground of conflicting forces, the figure in self-portrait closed-in but at the same time threatening a violent, almost explosive exposure.

Dismorr's rendering of her own self-image as both contained yet appearing to be on the point of fracture suggests a dual concern for the psychic and the aesthetic. Roughly executed on the verso of an earlier work and thus signalling its status as an experimental image not designed for public display, the drawing advances the discernible shift towards asceticism in its severe proto-Vorticist idiom. It has been established that by 1913 Dismorr had met Lewis, and had expressed her support for him over the rupture with Roger Fry and the Omega Workshops.²³ Whilst Dismorr was clearly interested in Lewis's opposition to the aesthetics of Bloomsbury, the formal qualities of the drawing find their precedent in Dismorr's sparse illustrations of the female body made for *Rhythm* magazine in 1911 and 1912 and demonstrates an on-going mode of experimentation that continued for the rest of her life.²⁴ Drawing on the work of Faith Binckes, Foster has noted that Dismorr, along with her then Rhythmist colleague Anne Estelle Rice, used the pages of *Rhythm* to subvert contemporary depictions of women's bodies, with those of Rice asserting overt sexuality, whilst

²³ Undated letter from Dismorr to Lewis held in the Wyndham Lewis Collection at Cornell. In it Dismorr asks Lewis how he was 'getting on with the Fry campaign', stating, 'I am really with you, despite my apparent want of sympathy.' See also Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 29. For a full account of the controversy between Lewis and Fry see Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 92-95.

²⁴ An acknowledgement of Dismorr's on-going mode of artistic experimentation is neatly encapsulated in William C. Lipke's foreword to the exhibition catalogue for the Dismorr retrospective at the Mayor Gallery in 1965, where he states that, 'Jessica Dismorr's work presents a continuity of effort which illustrates in capsule form, the stylistic development of 20th century British art.' See Heathcock, *Jessica Dismorr*, 1999, p. 20.

the bodies produced by Dismorr are according to Foster 'playing a cleverly balanced game of revelation and concealment' in their subtle refusal to allow for any possibility of titillation.²⁵ Dismorr's self-portrait in its jarring austerity goes far beyond any need for such repudiation of gratuitous sexualising, shifting the point of balance towards an aesthetic that evokes a psychological battleground between exposure and containment wrapped within the impenetrable yet vulnerable skin-shell, a border marking the boundary between the interior and exterior worlds that becomes a space of extreme tension, the skin-shell barely able to contain the volatile body within.

The tension evident in the self-portrait seen as a visual manifestation of a psychological battleground has echoes with the recorded recollections of friends, acquaintances, and former associates of Dismorr. From the viewpoint of 1973 Henrietta Frankfort remembered her friend as 'a dormant volcano... [A] precarious balance of conflicting tendencies was of her essence,'²⁶ suggesting a personality simmering with pent up energy. The sense of an inner turmoil is suggested by the artist Frances Hodgkins (1869-1947),²⁷ who recalled that she

²⁵ Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 20. See also Faith Binckes, *Modernism, Magazines and the British Avant-Garde*, pp. 158-61, 165.

²⁶ Henrietta "Jettie" Frankfort's recollection of meeting Dismorr for the first time, recorded in a letter to Quentin Stevenson, dated 4 December 1973, held in his private collection. Henrietta Antonia "Jettie" Groenewegen-Frankfort was a Dutch archaeologist and an expert on ancient art, married to Henri "Hans" Frankfort, Egyptologist, archeologist, and orientalist. They were resident in Hampstead in the 1930s and were friends with Dismorr. Lee Sorensen, ed. "Groenewegen-Frankfort, Henriette." [Dictionary of Art Historians](https://arthistorians.info/groenewegenfrankforth) <<https://arthistorians.info/groenewegenfrankforth>> [accessed 13 June 2021], see also Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, pp. 57-58.

²⁷ Frances Hodgkins was a fellow member of the Seven and Five Society with Dismorr in the 1920s. Dismorr exhibited with the group between 1927 and

had known Dismorr ‘in a wild phase... determined to trample on her puritanism with alarming psychological results,’²⁸ this comment appearing to align with one made by Kate Lechmere, the source of a possibly apocryphal story often repeated in the historiographies of Vorticism. Lechmere recalled that Dismorr ‘decided to take off all her clothes in the middle of Oxford Street’,²⁹ the threat of an explosive exposure of the body beneath the respectable carapace of dress spilling into the realms of ‘reality’. Whilst the veracity of Lechmere’s recollection remains in question, the incident appears to be referred to by John Rodker in the manuscript for his unpublished novel *An Ape of Genius* which appears corroborate Lechmere’s account, or draws on the myth for dramatic effect.³⁰ These recollections and re-imaginings suggest a troubled personality that correlates with the knowledge that Dismorr suffered throughout her life with an

1931. Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles*, p.10. For a discussion on Dismorr’s contribution to the Seven and Five Society see Catherine Heathcock, pp. 147-154. See also Foster, p. 60.

²⁸ Jettie Frankfort recalled the conversation in a letter to Quentin Stevenson in December 1973. Quentin Stevenson, ‘Jessica Dismorr: Addendum and Corrigendum February 2018 to the Introduction to the Fine Art Society Catalogue of June to July 2000’. Unpublished document shared with the author in February 2018.

²⁹ Kate Lechmere recounted this story to Richard Cork in an interview in the 1970s. Cork, *Vorticism*, p.414.

³⁰ John Rodker’s 1933 manuscript for “An Ape of Genius”, viewed as his riposte to Lewis’s portrayal of him in Lewis’s 1930 satirical novel *The Apes of God*, includes a character named ‘Hailey’ who has a dysfunctional relationship with the main protagonist, the artist ‘Disraeli’, modeled on Lewis. ‘Hailey’ having been rejected by ‘Disraeli’ tears her clothes off in the street in extreme distress. Manuscript held in the papers of John Rodker at the Harry Ransome Center, Austin, Box 35, Folder 7. I express my gratitude to Evi Heinz and Alex Grafen for sharing this information with me.

unspecified mental illness³¹ evidenced by archival sources that attest to the fact that Dismorr did suffer from periods of ill-health throughout her life, culminating in her eventual suicide.³² As if to echo the simmering tension evident in Dismorr's self-portrait, and in turn appearing to inspire a poem written by Dismorr which was published in the *Little Review* in 1919 Lewis enquires after Dismorr's health in an undated letter, writing that he was 'sorry to hear that once more your organism has become septicly active', his language evoking the parasitical, as if Dismorr's body as host is battling with its unwelcome inhabitant, yet one that is simultaneously being fuelled by it.³³ This in turn appears to inspire Dismorr's poem *The Enemy*, published in the *Little Review* in 1919, the title and contents alluding to a dual meaning in its possible reference to Lewis himself as 'The Enemy',³⁴ and his volatile relationship with the author:

³¹ Following his extensive research Stevenson argues that Dismorr may have been suffering from bipolar disorder. This information is presented in Stevenson's 'Addendum and Corrigendum', p. 6, and more recently in an unpublished manuscript, 'Looking for Jessica Dismorr' (February 2023). Letters from Wyndham Lewis to Dismorr enquiring after Dismorr's health are held in the Wyndham Lewis Collection at Cornell University Library.

³² Dismorr committed suicide on 29 August 1939. See Stevenson, *Jessica Dismorr & Catherine Giles*, p. 13; Heathcock, p. 189-190.

³³ Undated letter from Lewis to Dismorr, held in the Lewis collection at Cornell, box 61, folder 16.

³⁴ In the mid-1920s Lewis styled himself as 'the enemy', which Paul Edwards describes as 'an isolated and virulent critic of a 'failed' avant-garde and of anyone else he considered responsible for betraying the revolutionary potential of scientific techniques by using them to create the frivolous and passive cultures of the depressed Western democracies.' Lewis published a magazine called *The Enemy* in 1926. Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, pp. 286-287. Stevenson has commented that he had always considered that the subject of 'The Enemy' was Lewis's artistic relationship with the Dismorr, though he suggests it might also refer to her unspecified illness. Quentin Stevenson, *Looking for Jessica Dismorr*, unpublished manuscript, revised version shared with the author in February 2023, p. 28.

The microbe that inhabits my body makes me sick; but it is
he that pushes me to impossible and exasperated feats of skill.
He drinks my strength, then pushes me to unwilling exploration.³⁵

Whilst it is impossible to know exactly the nature of Dismorr's struggle with ill health, and recollections and retrospective diagnoses should be taken with extreme caution,³⁶ evidence of an on-going conflict is acutely discernible in her work of this period and matched by a life-long concern with aesthetic form. This conflict appears to manifest itself, particularly in Dismorr's surviving writings, as an on-going tension between the representation of reality and the experiences of a reality desired evoked by a visceral exposure of the body, yet is countered with a necessity for the purity of abstraction and corporeal containment.³⁷ To quote Frankfort once more, 'There was a deep longing in her for the coolness, the impersonal quality of abstract form.' According to Frankfort, Dismorr had:

on the one hand a strong intellectual approach to human beings (I have never known anyone who could 'sum up' even her best friends with such ruthless detachment) and on the other an

³⁵ Dismorr, 'The Enemy', *The Little Review* 6. 4 19; reproduced in Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 102.

³⁶ It is of course problematic to attempt to ascribe a retrospective diagnosis onto an historical subject, and I am grateful to Dr. Anna Jamieson for sharing her thoughts with me.

³⁷ There is a dearth of visual material surviving from Dismorr's Vorticist period, which hampers a full analysis of Dismorr's Vorticist aesthetic. It is notable that the character of 'Hailey', created by Rodker in *An Ape of Genius* frequently takes comfort in a marble 'head' carved by Brancusi, suggesting that Dismorr's preoccupation with aesthetic form may have bordered on obsession. Manuscript held in the papers of John Rodker at the Harry Ransome Center, Austin, Box 35, Folder 7.

extraordinary sensitivity and penetrating awareness of human problems, a distinctly non-intellectual approach.³⁸

The dual concerns of a necessity for detached containment within a hard boundary and the inevitable porosity of such boundaries are of key concern for Dismorr, echoed in the aesthetics of surface and interior in Dismorr's self-portrait, the marks on the surface of the skin as armoured mask threatening to reveal the troubled self within.³⁹

Brandon Truett has argued that Dismorr's writing evokes a preoccupation with the vicissitudes of the boundary between experience and abstraction.⁴⁰ Yet at the same time it is evocative of a psychological conflict concerned with corporeal restraint that has its echoes in the visual documentation of Dismorr's real-life experience of the war and its aftermath. The photograph of an emaciated yet composed Dismorr taken during her service as a voluntary nurse (chapter 3, fig. 7) and discussed in chapter three can be juxtaposed with Dismorr's own words to demonstrate this tension between conflict and restraint, between a

³⁸ Jettie Frankfort, quoted in Quentin Stevenson's 'Addendum and Corrigendum February 2018 to the Introduction to the Fine Art Society Catalogue of June to July 2000'.

³⁹ I draw here on the work of French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, and in particular Anzieu's theory of the skin-ego. Following from Freud's formulations on the ego as primarily a bodily ego, and as such is supported by a function of the body that then transposes itself onto a mental frame, Anzieu sees the skin, as the bodily organ that is the receiver of physical contact with the external world and the bearer of its traces, as the psychic wrapping of the body and connecting directly with the ego. Didier Anzieu, *The Skin-Ego*, a new translation by Naomi Segal (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018). See also Maria Walsh, *Art & Psychoanalysis* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), p. 125.

⁴⁰ Brandon Truett, 'Materialities of Abstraction: Jessie Dismorr's Poems, Transatlantic Modernism, and Feminist Poetics', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 67:2, 1 June 2021, pp. 191-214.

desire towards corporeal experience and the necessity of containment. In a letter to her friend Marguerite Zorach in October 1918, Dismorr writes:

I was in for the bombardment of course: and found that such things suit my constitution admirably: in fact we need some danger in our lives to make our blood circulate.⁴¹

Dismorr's comments here infer a certain level of stoicism in their evocation of English 'stiff upper lip' whilst at the same time welcoming the nervous energy generated by shelling and its potential effect on the mechanics of the body that appears to accord with the Englishman's hard carapace and vulnerable soft core as evoked by Lewis.⁴² Yet Dismorr's stoic championing of the hard exterior and her anticipation of the prospect of an exposure of the pulp beneath as expressed in her letter, coupled with the aesthetics of unreliable surface and volatile interior evident in her war poetry, suggests a cosmofeminist transgression that, through its 'wild body' challenges the surface stoicism of the Englishman, a concern that has its precedent, or birth, in the grotesque brutality of Dismorr's *Monologue*.

Published in the second number of *Blast*, *Monologue* imagines a body that is enacting its own becoming, 'squeezed out with intact body' as it emerges pristine through 'the hole of birth'.⁴³ The new-born yet precocious body is readily equipped to protect itself from external threats by 'the machinery that

⁴¹ Extract quoted from a letter written by Dismorr to Marguerite Zorach dated 25 October 1918, held in a private collection.

⁴² Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr*, p. 29.

⁴³ Dismorr, 'Monologue', *Blast, War Number*, p.65.

wields the chains of muscles fitted beneath [the] close coat of skin', a Vorticist armour that is 'admire[d]'. Acknowledging Dismorr's critiques of conventional femininity elsewhere in her writings, and referring specifically to Dismorr's accompanying poem *Matilda* Hickman has read *Monologue* as signalling a 'female masculinity' through its implicit 'theorizing [of] a Vorticist modality of New Womanhood.'⁴⁴ Hickman points to Dismorr's strategic deployment of the word 'tresses', a distinctly feminine word for hair, to an aggressively 'arrogant' Vorticist body coded as masculine, and noting that *Matilda* 'covets neither delight nor risk', suggests that the speaker in *Monologue* enjoys both.⁴⁵ For Hickman, this 'risk', framed within the context of birth, is Dismorr's riposte to the fertility imagery prevalent in the work of the *Rhythm* circle, and in the work of Epstein and others by pitting a dynamic, aggressive Vorticist female against the passive fecundity of 'mother as vessel'.⁴⁶ However this 'risk' also suggests a threat to the self in Dismorr's pursuit of abstraction through the masculine aggression of Vorticism. As the pristine and 'balanced' armoured body is moving slowly on its 'pivot of contentment', its perfect equilibrium is compromised by 'inquisitiveness', an impropriety that escapes the body in the form of a butterfly that 'spins with drunken invitation' to the perfect body, leading it towards transgression. The perfect Vorticist body is lured towards a breach of corporeal

⁴⁴ Miranda Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', p. 132 & 125. Hickman refers specifically to Dismorr's poem 'Matilda', also published in the second number of *Blast*, as a 'critical response to an angel-in-the-house femininity'. See *Blast*, p. 69.

⁴⁵ Hickman, p. 132.

⁴⁶ Hickman, pp. 132 - 133.

boundary as fingers 'poke...into the middles of big succulent flowers,'⁴⁷ exposing the body's vulnerability but in so doing is fuelled by the act, as a butterfly is fuelled and energised by a flower's nectar. *Monologue* evokes an ensuing battle, as 'obsessions rear their heads', between detachment and corporeal engagement, the hard Vorticist body countering the invaders and battering them into submission by 'hammer[ing] their faces into discs'. The exhaustion of violent combat between the opposing forces of transgression and defence ultimately renders the body an empty vessel, the Vorticist armour reduced to a mere 'slack bag of skin',⁴⁸ the battle unresolved.

The notion of a battle with earthly temptations of the flesh is also evident in *Interrogation*, a poem that alludes to a profound regret.⁴⁹ Dismorr writes of a 'just mood' that righteously fulminates 'against soiled intricacies of a sweetish civilisation'. In order to control the urge for engagement with the sullied and perplexing details of life, Dismorr takes her anger 'to a plot of solitude' where 'there against encroachment to strengthen the granite of a contemptuous peace',⁵⁰ she achieves 'a security' but in so doing questions 'power inexperienced', the security 'issueless, impermeable' and rendered a 'close

⁴⁷ Dismorr, 'Monologue', *Blast, War Number*, p.65.

⁴⁸ Dismorr, *Blast*, p. 65.

⁴⁹ Jessica Dismorr, 'Interrogation', *Poems 1918*, manuscript held in the papers of John Henry Bradley Storrs papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The poem is reproduced in Foster, p. 98.

⁵⁰ Jessica Dismorr, 'Interrogation', *Poems 1918*

simulacra of the shut pocket of death'.⁵¹ It is as though Dismorr is lamenting an opportunity lost, as if evoking a bodily experience that is desired yet fruitless, necessarily kept at bay by self-imposed boundaries.

The lure of corporeal transgression and the tension between an experience desired and its necessary denial evoked by instability of the carapace permeates Dismorr's writing and may allude to the contemporary navigation of the complex and multifaceted terrain of relationships between the sexes. Foster has noted, in the context of Lewis's tendency for self-aggrandisement, that it is possible that the relationship between Dismorr and Lewis, and indeed that of Lewis and Saunders, may have been complicated by desire.⁵² But the threat of transgression voiced in Dismorr's writings speak clearly of an on-going preoccupation with the desire for visceral experience and the need for the discipline of abstraction that borders on obsession, creating a liminal space of eternal tension that transcends any concern with emotional attachment.

The liminal space between protective boundary and wild body as a battleground site of desired transgression for Dismorr becomes a restrictive yet necessary buffer zone in which internal and external forces threaten to collide in Saunders's Vorticism. A surviving letter written by Saunders to Dismorr in c.1917 is particularly revealing of a persistent feeling of self-doubt in Saunders's own capabilities as an artist, and as a woman negotiating the social 'sets' of avant-garde circles in pre-war London. One passage is worthy of quoting at length:

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 32.

I have done no work for such a long time – I suppose Art only really comes naturally out of an excess of energy to [sic] great for ordinary life – Certainly I have not got that – Perhaps no woman has – but I should very much like the chance of doing some quite representative painting – as literal as Van Gogh – It would give one a chance I feel of “finding my level” in Art – and perhaps inventing something – I still have a rough time emotionally – one’s original character cheerful or gloomy is very little modified I think by circumstances – I am still a solitary by nature – and I still find it difficult to get much out of actual things except retrospectively or imaginatively – what I fear more than anything is the monotonous stampede of other people’s second-rate thoughts through my mind when my own thoughts are too tired or dissipated to give battle to the invaders.⁵³

In her own words Saunders describes her mind as a battle ground, a space in which external forces are a constant threat to a fragile equilibrium that is also besieged by the forces of private insecurities. Saunders speaks of a desire to make new work, but this desire is simultaneously curtailed by the conditioning of societal structures. The ‘wild body’ of personal liberty, confidence and ambition has the potential to thrive if contained within the protective boundaries of the mind but the body’s shell is under constant attack by the ‘stampede’ of the imposition of ‘other people’s thoughts’ that invade the psyche, creating a space that is also in combat with itself.

In marked contrast to the (im)penetrable surfaces evoked by Dismorr’s self-portrait (fig. 1), Saunders’s *Abstract Composition in Blue and Yellow* of c. 1915 (chapter 1, fig. 15.) depicts Vorticist bodies and cloistered enclosures that draw the viewer towards an interior space housed by the jutting armature of

⁵³ Helen Saunders, undated letter to Jessica Dismorr, held a private collection. The letter’s contents suggest that it was written during the latter part of 1917.

angular lines and geometric planes that hold the composition together. A large head in profile facing to the left can be identified as the viewer's eye is drawn inwards towards a central recess, a kernel within the shell of the head's cavity, a vortical space of stillness articulated and supported by angular lines below denoting a mechanistic hand and wrist. The composition's ambiguity is highlighted as the eye turns towards the lower plane. The outline of the chin and neck of the figure in profile is extended by a further series of angular lines allowing for two legs to become apparent, and a mechanistic figure to become discernible as it appears to climb upwards along the lower diagonal, one foot sinking into the section below as if to hamper movement. The composition becomes a dual image as the Vorticist armature that constructs the figure in profile and houses and protects the kernel of thought, and traps within it a mechanistic figure that appears heavily burdened as it negotiates the confined space within the Vorticist shell. The image is contemplative yet communicates an inner struggle, appearing to echo the sentiments expressed by the artist in her letter to Dismorr and so leading the viewer to read the image as a self-portrait.

A series of letters written by Saunders to Lewis in 1919 during what appears to have been an extremely difficult period of estrangement seem to support this hypothesis.⁵⁴ The passionate yet anguished tone of Saunders's writing makes the correspondence painful to read, suggesting the possibility of a

⁵⁴ Peppin has documented that Saunders was still in contact with Lewis in the early part of 1919, visiting him in hospital when he was suffering with double pneumonia from January to March. By the summer he was refusing to communicate with her for reasons yet unknown, which caused her extreme distress. Peppin notes that this period coincided with Lewis's relationship with Iris Barry. Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p.16. See also *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 16. Letters from Saunders to Lewis relating to this period are held in the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust archive.

romantic attachment between Lewis and Saunders that has reached its denouement.⁵⁵ Whatever the circumstances that prompted her to write these letters, the language Saunders uses testifies to an on-going struggle with feelings of entrapment, containment and the longing for emancipation, themes that permeate her work. Saunders speaks of a 'double perversion', a phrase that neatly evokes the ambiguity of her graphic work, this coupled with the desire for 'release' from 'this female life', what might be understood as the problem of the female body and the woman restricted within patriarchal structures of power, yet simultaneously pleads for the body not to be 'turned into a machine', devoid of individual agency.⁵⁶ Saunders appears to echo the egoist sentiments of radical feminism as expressed in the *New Freewoman*, whilst simultaneously demonstrating a fear of de-gendering towards dehumanisation.⁵⁷ Saunders's letters to Lewis, coupled with *Abstract Composition in Blue and Yellow* of 1915 demonstrate a continued struggle between the desire for an unfettered individual identity and the "ordinary life"⁵⁸ of societal expectation, enacted through the enabling aesthetic of Vorticism. The image Saunders creates renders the body a machine through its Vorticist idiom, though the body-as-machine is

⁵⁵ Foster refers to the suggestion of an affair between Saunders and Lewis, in Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, p. 32. However, whilst acknowledging Saunders's evident passionate attachment to Lewis, Peppin has argued that the risks of conception, or of contracting venereal disease may have prevented Saunders pursuing a sexual relationship with him. See *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁶ Undated letter written by Saunders to Lewis, held in the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust archive.

⁵⁷ The possible effect on Saunders of Dora Marsden's anarcho-individualism expounded in the pages of *The New Freewoman* is discussed in chapter 3.

⁵⁸ See note 53.

simultaneously a protective shell in which the possibility of freedom of thought away from the constraints of “ordinary life” through the articulation of an individual, genderless form is made possible by the aesthetics of Vorticism.

Whilst acknowledging the defeatist language of Saunders’s letter to Dismorr, Hickman has noted that Saunders regarded art as necessitating ambition beyond conventional life whilst also registering sensitivity to the impact of one’s gender on such aspirations.⁵⁹ In arguing for Saunders’s feminism achieved through the adoption of a Vorticist idiom, Hickman posits that Saunders’s work of this period allowed for an imagining of a move beyond “ordinary life” towards ‘a preferable, unconventional alternative’ through art.⁶⁰ Citing Saunders’s poem *The Cave* (appendix 2) which was discussed in chapter two in the context of cabaret performance, Hickman argues that the cave’s walls as described in the poem afford Saunders a conceptual space of respite from the pressing conditions of the outside world.⁶¹ However, these protective walls house a space of uncertain respite, one that is not hermetically sealed and as such is receptive to the accommodation of external forces. Saunders writes:

Here underground the sea has scoured and swept
With industry it has pressed and hewn and polished;
Twice a day it bursts the new-grown parchment skin
Which holds a fluid chaos
Panting to submerge dry delicate forms;
It fills the hollow places and withdraws.⁶²

⁵⁹ Miranda Hickman, ‘The Gender of Vorticism’, p. 130.

⁶⁰ Hickman, p.130.

⁶¹ Hickman, p.131.

⁶² Helen Saunders, ‘The Cave’, in Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p.31.

Whilst providing respite from external forces, the boundaries of the cave are regularly breached, the act of breaching itself enabling 'industry', carving out a space in which to create work despite volatile conditions. The unwelcome charge of others' opinions that invade clarity of thought, as described by Saunders in her letter to Dismorr,⁶³ is in *The Cave* tempered by the imagined construction of the cave as sanctuary. In the cave the 'stampede of other people's second-rate thoughts' is supplanted by a regular ebb and flow of influences that, despite breaching the cave's protective boundary, become controllable through a cyclical process of surface renewal that emulates an insect's developmental method of moulting. A 'new-grown parchment skin' develops through which it is possible to grow and breathe anew, though albeit fleetingly before a resigned acceptance of the power of external forces takes over and the boundary is breached once more. The fragility of this sanctuary as constructed by Saunders is evident as the poem concludes, a feeling of helplessness towards resignation to fate is sensed. 'There must be no life here,'⁶⁴ Saunders declares of the pristine and sterile interior of the cave, and she speculates:

If the sea found me here,
Me who am life, pollution, feebleness –
How it would lift and twist and throw my body up and down
Catch it again and never let it drop
Till it had beaten out the soft gold life
Into a hard plate, thin as a wafer.
When it swept back it would suck my lifeless body out

⁶³ See note 53.

⁶⁴ Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p.31.

And pass it on to the shingle with a hundred soft and clumsy pushes.⁶⁵

Saunders equates her body with weakness and contamination, not worthy of the 'polished' space of 'industry'. Corporeal vulnerability would allow the body to become malleable to opposing forces, but in its malleability the body is rendered unresolved and so unable to function efficiently, life ebbing away to leave behind a lifeless shell, impermeable and yet barely there.

This ongoing concern with the survival of individual consciousness against all odds, as evoked by the imagery and metaphor of corporeal invasion and containment in Saunders's writing, also suggests a preoccupation with sensory occlusion that also flirts with the prospect of death.⁶⁶ In the poem *I Have Eaten Daffodils* the act of consuming a toxic organism, its 'delicate gold death' entering the bloodstream, initially expresses what appears to be the ultimate act of self-destruction as a result of a lifetime of 'swallowing' life itself:

I have eaten daffodils
Their delicate gold death is in my blood
Yellow fumes jealous of old thoughts-
I have swallowed more than flowers
Mountains, rivers, and plains
Men walking and the stars which are invisible
I have eaten daffodils
Their death is in my blood.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Saunders, 'The Cave', in Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p.31.

⁶⁶ Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p.15.

⁶⁷ Helen Saunders, 'I Have Eaten Daffodils', published in Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p.30.

Foster has read Saunders's poetry as expressive of a way of leaving the past behind enacted through experimentation of literary form, and in the particular context of *I Have Eaten Daffodils* argues that this is attempted through the notion of destruction and consumption.⁶⁸ Deftly connecting Saunders's daffodil to the Romanticism of William Wordsworth and the Aestheticism of Wilde, Foster argues that Saunders's 'voracious' consumption of the flowers, and of the world around her acts as a counterpoint to the conventional relationship between poet and flower, that of the contemplation of beauty and beauty's 'nourishment' of the soul.⁶⁹ Through the act of writing Saunders effectively destroys the past and is able to move on. An alternative reading of the poem is offered here, one that acknowledges Foster's focus on consumption and destruction, though here consumption is read in the context of 'having one's fill' of a certain kind of life that threatens to destroy, but this very threat of destruction prompts a desire for renewal, yet it is a renewal that is out of reach. The meaning of final stanza of the poem is ambiguous:

Birds sing in the palms of my hands
Wind blows in my feet
Colour sits on the ridge over my eyes
Thought bores a hole in my forehead –
Ears stuffed with clay
Eyelids shut down.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Alicia Foster, *Radical Women*, pp. 42-44.

⁶⁹ Foster, p.42.

⁷⁰ Saunders, 'I Have Eaten Daffodils', in Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 30.

The body, in death, is interred and is at one with the elements, but the body's lifeless shell is penetrated from within its corporeal boundaries as the process of thought 'bores a hole' from inside the forehead, the green shoot of new life emerging as if nourished by the clay that has enclosed the body and occluded the senses. The shell of the 'old' dead body now becomes the nurturing container in which new life can emerge. The ultimate act of self-destruction through consumption of the toxic flower therefore becomes a penultimate act, the final being the anticipation of metamorphosis and a rebirth desired. The consumption of the old life here nourishes the act of thinking, willing the flower to be born anew, yet renewal is out of reach as 'eyelids shut down' in death's release.

The evocation of corporeal interment is explored in *A Vision of Mud* as Saunders focuses again on death, or of a death evaded.⁷¹ The work's title and its inclusion in *Blast's* second 'war number' has inevitably led critics to interpret the text as an expression of Saunders's imaginary 'vision' of the horrors of trench warfare during the First World War.⁷² Saunders envisages 'hundreds' of bodies, viewed as 'fellow-monstrosities' floating in the mud of the trenches, though combines this with the experience of the home front in the reference to a 'recruiting band' and allusion to the threat of Zeppelin attack by the 'giant cloud

⁷¹ Helen Saunders, 'A Vision of Mud', *Blast, War Number*, p. 73.

⁷² Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p.15. See also Kate McLoughlin, 'Muddy Poetics: First World War Poems by Helen Saunders and Mary Borden', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 26:3 (2015), 221- 236, <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09574042.2015.1069145>>. See also, Jane Beckett, '(Is)land narratives: Englishness, visibility and vanguard culture 1914-18', *English art 1860-1914*, pp. 195-212; Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde*, pp. 126-128.

like a black bladder' that 'hovers overhead'.⁷³ Saunders would have been familiar with the sight of recruiting bands marching through the city, and keenly aware of the threat of Zeppelin airships in the skies overhead, but unlike Dismorr she had no direct experience of working in close proximity to the war zones and of witnessing the realities of the mental and physical conditions of the soldiers fighting on the front line.⁷⁴ However, Saunders's contribution to the war effort on the home front through her work for a government office and in her capacity as unofficial 'secretary' to Lewis, typing letters and manuscripts for him whilst he was at the Front,⁷⁵ and coupled with possible correspondence with her sister Ethel who was working as a VAD nurse, would have offered an insight at varying points into what was at stake for the human body.⁷⁶ Whilst the gender of the narrating subject remains unclear, Jane Beckett has suggested that they are 'masquerading as feminine and as masculine' in the poem's references to the corporeal experiences of women and the envisaging of masculine bodies in

⁷³ Helen Saunders, 'A Vision of Mud', p.73.

⁷⁴ Recruiting bands were a popular sight in London in 1915, their activities reported frequently in the press. The *Evening Mail* reported on a concert given by recruiting bands at the Albert Hall in April 1915, which was attended by members of the royal family. 'The King and Queen at a Concert. Recruiting Bands at the Albert Hall', *Evening Mail*, Monday 26 April 1915, p. 4. For a discussion on the Zeppelin raids in London, see Jane Beckett, '(Is)land Narratives', pp. 205-206.

⁷⁵ Peppin has documented that Saunders worked in a government office from mid-1916 to the end of 1918, at the same time acting as an unpaid secretary to Lewis. Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 15; *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 90. See also, Jane Beckett, '(Is)land narratives', p. 209-10. Beckett also notes that during the first eighteen months of the conflict the proliferation of heroic images of the war in the press slowly started to give way to images of dug out trenches and bodies mired in mud appearing in newspapers and the illustrated press.

⁷⁶ Typescripts of letters written by Ethel Saunders to her mother whilst Ethel was serving as a VAD in 1917-18 are held in a private collection.

trauma in the mud of the trenches.⁷⁷ Kate McLoughlin has argued that Saunders's poem can be read as a text that 'undermines the authority of combat gnosticism' in placing a body of indeterminate gender as either combatant or non-combatant within a substance that is eponymous with the conditions of the trenches on the Western Front.⁷⁸ It may be recognised, however, that as *A Vision of Mud* was published in *Blast* in July 1915, and therefore written at the very latest in the June of that year, Saunders's vicarious exposure to the realities of trench warfare might have yet to have had a deep influence on the work in the context of the body.⁷⁹ Yet though the poem evades attempts at arriving at a definitive meaning, Saunders's preoccupation with corporeal entrapment is a central concern, and as with *I Have Eaten Daffodils* the notion of an invasion of boundaries by external forces is at play as the all-pervading mud engulfs the body:

There is mud all around
This is favourable to the eclosion of mighty life: thank God for
small mercies!
How is it that if you struggle you sink?
I lie quite still: hands are spreading mud everywhere: they plaster
it on what

⁷⁷ Jane Beckett, '(Is)land narratives', p. 210.

⁷⁸ Kate McLoughlin, 'Muddy Poetics', p.231. McLoughlin refers to James Campbell's term 'combat gnosticism' in the context of war writing as a traditionally male preserve, inspired only through direct experience. Campbell argues that the experience of battle is 'a kind of gnosis, a secret knowledge which only the initiated elite knows'. See James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Criticism', *New Literary History* 30, 1999, pp. 203-15.

⁷⁹ Peppin has recently argued that Saunders may have gleaned information about the appalling conditions endured by those fighting at the Front from her cousin Reynolds Ball (1882-1918). Ball was a conscientious objector who early in the war worked with a Quaker ambulance mission in France. *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, p. 14.

should be a body.
They fill my mouth with it. I am sick. They shovel it all back in
again.
My eyes are full of it; nose and ears too.
I wish I could feel or hear. I should not mind what it was.⁸⁰

The body is supine, and though the question of rebellion is posed, rather than risk sinking the body readily submits to the manipulation of the 'hands' that 'plaster' on the mud, occluding orifices and stifling the senses as corporeal boundaries become indecipherable, the mud threatening to consume the body that 'should' be there, towards dissolution. There is an attempt to eject the cloying substance from the mouth, but it is gagged with mud once more by the 'hands' and rendered silent, the desire to make use of all senses thwarted. McLoughlin has commented that the concern with sensory deprivation and the consequent challenges of expression in Saunders's work suggests a preoccupation with the notion of female silencing.⁸¹ The politicised concern with collective female struggle in Saunders's drawing of *Female Figures Imprisoned* discussed in chapter three is in *A Vision of Mud* combined with Saunders's self-confessed 'solitary' nature.⁸² The mud, whilst administered to the body by

⁸⁰ Helen Saunders, 'A Vision of Mud', *Blast, War Number*, pp. 73-74.

⁸¹ Citing Saunders's letter to Lewis on the subject of Otto Weininger's notorious thesis *Sex and Character*, which Saunders had read on Lewis's recommendation, McLoughlin suggests that Saunders's female protagonists who are 'trapped, gagged, imprisoned' are to this extent Weiningerian, going on to argue that, whilst abhorrent, Weininger's ideas can 'offer a positive way of thinking about Saunders' method of making meaning in her art and poetry: alogical, patternless, muddy.' McLoughlin, 'Muddy Poetics', p. 227. See also Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders*, p. 11. Saunders's letter to Lewis, undated but considered to have been written in 1912 or 1913, is held in The Wyndham Lewis Collection at Cornell University.

⁸² See note 53.

external forces that attempt to silence, at the same time acts as a salve, its 'curious properties' allowing 'like poisoned arrows' for metaphysical contemplation but through that contemplation is threatened by eventual death before any resolution is found.⁸³ As the mud stifles it is at the same time seen as a necessary cocoon for the body, providing 'favourable' conditions for 'eclosion'. Beckett picks up on the word 'éclosion', which in the French language describes the blooming of a flower, as well as meaning to hatch, or to emerge fully formed from a pupa. Beckett notes that to the English ear the word eclosion can suggest 'exclusion or occlusion, a shutting out or closing down of something, as well as seclusion,'⁸⁴ the word's true meaning and its phonetic suggestion providing a succinct route towards finding meaning in *A Vision of Mud* that evokes a struggle between the desire for release and rebirth yet countered by the acceptance and safety of the cocoon. When confronted by the knowledge of the existence of 'fellow-monstrosities' floating in the 'medicinal' mud bath, rather than destroy them and struggle towards an emergence out from the mud's cocooning properties, Saunders's narrator resigns and 'turn[s] over' as if to sleep, 'to think of my ancestors'.⁸⁵ As Saunders wrote to Dismorr, she was 'too tired or dissipated to give battle to the invaders'.⁸⁶ The suffocating conditions may be

⁸³ I refer here to the Buddhist parable of the poisoned arrow, which teaches that life is too short and endless metaphysical speculation will not bring one closer to the truth.

⁸⁴ Jane Beckett, '(Is)land narratives', p. 210.

⁸⁵ Saunders, 'A Vision of Mud', p.74.

⁸⁶ See note 53.

favourable for eclosion, but the muddy cocoon is a welcome source of comfort and protection for a body besieged and debilitated, and unable to emerge anew.

In his poetic evocations of the shell Bachelard states that:

Everything about a creature that comes out of a shell is dialectical. And since it does not come out entirely, the part that comes out contradicts the part that remains inside.⁸⁷

The notion of contradiction has arisen as a key theme for this chapter. The figure of the shell as variously imagined by Dismorr and Saunders serves as a protective yet unstable outer layer that contains within it a space that aspires to be a utopic space of possibilities, but it is at the same time a space unsettled by the very notion of possibility itself. Insect metaphors are often used to evoke a body that inhabits and negotiates the space within the shell's casing, negotiating impulses from within whilst simultaneously battling forces from without. The body that inhabits the space within the shell is vulnerable, but it is also volatile in its dialectical negotiations with the external world, the very act of being is fraught with conflict, but there is a desire for control through the very act of its imagining. For Dismorr, the shell acts as a necessary barrier to house and conceal the volatility beneath the surface, the liminal space between surface and interior becoming an aesthetic battleground between corporeal experience and its abstraction, and a psychic battleground between desired transgression and the necessity for corporeal containment. The Vorticist body is celebrated for its perfection, but the visceral reality of corporeal experience exposes the points of weakness in the Vorticist armour to reveal the wild body beneath it. For

⁸⁷ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.128.

Saunders, the shell is a necessary container for a freedom desired yet feared. The space within the boundary is a safe space in which to enact 'wildness', whilst the reality of acting freely, too risky to attempt, is at the same time reassuringly out of reach. To conclude, two images that perhaps best encapsulate in visual form the argument proposed here are juxtaposed. In Saunders's *Vorticist Composition* (fig. 2), bodies in flesh-coloured tones evoke an air of carefree abandon as they leap, glide and dive through a yellow channel with arms outstretched. Described by Cork as 'perhaps the most purely joyful of all surviving Vorticist pictures',⁸⁸ the carefree figures are yet tethered, remaining connected to the surrounding armature of forms, with more bodies seen embedded within, set fast. Saunders's bodies are comfortable within the Vorticist shell. Conversely, in Dismorr's *Self-Portrait* of 1920 (fig. 3) an acute sense of trauma is evoked, as the angular facial features of the *Self-Portrait* of 1913 now appear ossified through the brutality of abstraction, the blurred contours evoking the spasms of the wild body within. Saunders's composition is an image of acceptance, perhaps resignation at the status quo, whilst for Dismorr the conflict is eternal, the ultimate resolution too bleak to contemplate.

⁸⁸ Cork, *Vorticism*, pp. 423-424

CONCLUSION

The facial expression on the figure visible in Helen Saunders's *Vorticist Composition* of c. 1915 (fig. 1) shows resolute determination. A steadfast dark eye under the furrowed brow of concentration and the single straight line signifying a mouth set rigid indicates of a oneness of purpose. The body is propelled forward by a powerful force, its source a tubular form that juts forth from the lower left corner of the picture frame towards an aperture suggesting a window, the slatted shutter opened wide to the left of the figure to allow it access to the blue sky beyond. The image is evocative of an imminent escape from a claustrophobic interior composed of muddy brown hues that are illuminated by the light pouring in from the opening, the pink tones denoting the figure's flesh appearing bloodied as if reborn, ready to face a new dawn.¹ Yet the figure remains tethered to its surroundings, the hook attached to its outstretched arm suggesting a tool or weapon that will be used to forge a new path, but at the same time appearing to drag against the interior as if to hinder progress, the active leg of the figure set fast within the architectural frame, the body itself a component part of its own source of incarceration.

¹ *Vorticist Composition* c. 1915 yet again demonstrates the ambiguity inherent in Saunders's Vorticist images, which invite multiple readings. Peppin has likened this image to an explosion, 'a personified BLAST that appears simultaneously to signify cannon fire and its human victims'. See Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders 1885-1963* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1996), p. 13. Similarly, Rachel Sloan suggests an explosion, pointing to the timing of the work's execution in the context of the war and the knowledge of its human cost. For Sloan the body explodes from the mouth of a rifle, the flesh bloodied by its violent force. See *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel*, ed. by Rachel Sloan (London: The Courtauld, 2022), p. 74.

The ambiguity of Saunders's image in its evocation of a dynamic force that propels a body towards the freedom of open space beyond the static interior, that is at the same time a body restrained by its very attachment to its environment, neatly encapsulates in visual form the recurring themes and the contradictions that have arisen through the investigations undertaken for this research project which has sought to offer a fresh perspective on the women connected to Vorticism. Presented in two parts, the first designed to draw attention to the spaces of modernity, and the latter to the modernist concern with inner space, part one focused on the Vorticists as modern, cosmopolitan women active within the vibrant spaces of early modernist activity in London in the 1910s. These sites were selected for their significance for the genesis of Vorticism, for its promotion and staging of its polemics and for the practical application of its aesthetics and were explored to demonstrate that the women connected to Vorticism were visible and significant actors on the cosmopolitan stages of the English avant-gardes as opposed to the marginal figures portrayed in the historiographies of modernism.

Chapter one was concerned with amplifying the voices of the women Vorticists by paying attention to dialogues and the importance of dialogic exchange for the creation of meaning. Taking as axis William Roberts's iconic painting of the Vorticists gathered in the Tour Eiffel Restaurant, the Vorticist women were traced within the orbit of three sites that were pivotal for the evolution of English modernism, these spaces encountered on the route back to the Tour Eiffel tableau as an attempt to recalibrate the dynamics of Roberts's composition to allow the women a seat at the Vorticist table. To do this, attention was given to the work that they produced and the contexts in which it was made,

this complemented by fragments gleaned from correspondence, unreliable memories as recorded, and from coverage of significant events collected from contemporary press coverage and ancillary commentary. Firstly, using Jessica Dismorr's own poetry as launchpad, and being attentive to the diversity of her collection of anthologies as recorded in the archive, a network of contacts was revealed that allowed for the artist's presence to be traced to the cosmopolitan orbit of Harold Monro, this exposing Dismorr's prominence as a poet of acclaim in direct dialogue with the literary circles of the avant-garde of the interwar period, thus strengthening her position as an important player in the earlier trajectories of the European avant-garde. The discussion then moved to the Rebel Art Centre as the enterprise faltered, to argue that Kate Lechmere's fractious missives to Wyndham Lewis placed Dismorr and Helen Saunders firmly within the headquarters of the nascent Vorticist project as its 'quiet revolutionaries'. The promotional tactics of Lechmere, ostensibly in service to the Vorticist endeavour, were explored and juxtaposed with the execution of Vorticist tasks undertaken by Dismorr and Saunders, revealing an appetite for the promotion of an English avant-garde through 'doing' as opposed to mere 'staging' as a means of self-promotion. Furthermore, Saunders's subsequent nominal inclusion in the promotion of a similar, yet unrealised endeavour placed the artist firmly within the cosmopolitan networks of the cultural life of London in 1914.

The public staging of group ideas at the inaugural Vorticist exhibition in 1915 was then explored, uncovering dialogues between Lewis as *de facto* curator and Dismorr and Saunders as contributors to the show at the Doré Gallery. Whilst the exhibition was criticised for its lack of clarity and chided for its 'antics'

which were deemed inappropriate when people were losing their lives in combat, its reception as a whole muted by the circumstances of its timing, it was demonstrated that whilst the contributions made to the show by Dismorr and Saunders were in dialogue with the principles of Vorticism as expounded by Lewis in service to the promotion of English modernism, they at the same time revealed through their particular interpretations a multiplicity of Vorticisms that, for Saunders in particular spoke to more global concerns. Furthermore, Saunders's contribution to the Doré show in 1915, coupled with the new knowledge of the scale at which she was working during this period was then used to shed new light on her contribution to the decoration of the 'Vorticist Room' at the Tour Eiffel restaurant. Whilst the opportunity provided Saunders with a vehicle with which to collaborate with Lewis as the movement's prime mover, recent discoveries from the archive were used to enhance the existing knowledge of the decorative scheme, with materials relating to the project analysed to reveal Vorticist dialogues in visual form between the two artists, inviting new interpretations of their work in the context of the Vorticist duet reimagined as an emblem of nurture and support that countered the prevalence of Vorticist aggression.

The physical sites of avant-garde endeavour on London's early modernist terrain were further explored in chapter two. Focused on spaces of performance, and in particular the arrival of the European-style cabaret onto London's night scene in 1912, Frida Strindberg's notorious Cave of the Golden Calf was used as the pivot to argue that the cabaret, as imagined or directly experienced provided these women with a vehicle for aesthetic experimentation, a source material for escapism as well as a conduit for the expression of emancipatory activity.

Exploring first the cabaret as a destination space of adventure for independent women as cosmopolitan actors on London's stage, close reading of Dismorr's Vorticist text *June Night* was employed as navigator, revealing descriptors that connect the poem directly to the materiality of Strindberg's cabaret club as recorded in the popular press, and to Lewis as a key yet volatile protagonist of the cabaret's realisation. Whilst the poem has been read as an experiment in aesthetics, and as a celebration of the growing independence of the writer/narrator as a modern woman who disentangles herself from the oppressive male, a reading of *June Night* as a performative journey allows for the cosmopolitan woman active in the city to have directorial control over her own destiny on London's modernist 'stage'.

The interior of the cabaret was then used to contrast the attempts made by the artists charged with realising Strindberg's vision to create the 'reality of the unreal' in the space with the work produced by the artist-women as inspired by the cabaret. Recollections and literary reconstructions of the exoticised atmosphere within Strindberg's cabaret club and its musical entertainments revealed problematic attitudes towards performers as 'other' used to promote the English avant-garde that was in marked contrast to Saunders's interpretations. It was argued that Saunders's drawings were directly inspired by the new rhythms introduced to London by Strindberg as impresario, the genderless bodies presented dancing together in a show of strength in celebration of Strindberg's achievements free of recourse to racial stereotypes.

Finally, the cabaret was considered as an abstract space of empowerment. Taking Lewis's theory of the Vortex as a 'disastrous polished dance', this a descriptor for the eternal conflict and necessary contingency of diametrically

opposed forces as the central metaphor and concept for his modernist aesthetic, it was argued that the 'Cave' as an abstract concept provided an aesthetic haven for Saunders and Shakespear in which to explore these forces in safety as an emancipatory strategy to counter to the aggressive masculinity of the Vorticist project. Overall, chapter two argued that the cosmopolitan cabaret as a space of performance provided the Vorticist women with an aesthetic vehicle for the celebration of modernity in its diversity and at the same time offered a conceptual space for 'cosmofeminist' experimentation with transgression enacted from within Vorticism's borders.

These cosmofeminist strategies were explored in greater detail in part two, which marked a shift from the physical spaces of modernist exchange identified as being experienced or as imagined by the women Vorticists as cosmopolitan women active in the city and in charge of their own destinies, towards abstract arenas that it has been argued hold greater importance for our contemporary assessment of the situation and likely motivations of the women under scrutiny in this project. Focused on introspection as an analytical tool for self-empowerment as identified by Lucy Delap in her work on the feminist avant-garde,² and alert to its manifestation in the writings and artefacts created by Dismorr and Saunders, it was argued that the intimate sphere of the mind allowed for the material enactment of cosmofeminist strategies of resistance that countered the restrictions of Vorticism as a masculine space. This was explored in chapter three in the context of the modernist magazine as the organ for the expression of new forms and for radical ideas, to argue that each artist enacted in their work feminist strategies of defence as a means of easing the societal

² Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde*, pp. 315-316.

burden of the contained, institutionalised female body towards one of openness, recognising each woman's innate cosmopolitanism within Vorticism as a strategically nationalist endeavour. It has been argued that in the act of creating the works discussed, both Dismorr and Saunders were influenced either directly, or indirectly by the cosmopolitan force of Bergsonian metaphysics, an influence that jarred with the Vorticist strategies of detachment. Emphasis was placed on each woman's individual engagement with the body as a site of suffering, the material expression of which used as a cathartic route to explore painful experience towards a possible resolution. Dismorr's journey towards Vorticism, her allegiance to its manifesto of detachment as a tool for the expression of modernity free from the constraints of accepted tradition and gendered expectation, coupled with shifts in aesthetic as her practice developed, can be viewed on the surface as a continuing journey of self-discovery by an artist experimenting with different forms of expression to assert independence. However, whilst Vorticism offered a space for expression free from the prejudices of what constituted female 'prettiness' in the creative process, Dismorr's work of 1915 reveals, via a visceral engagement with the body, an ongoing conflict between the desire for fluidity and freedom of expression, and the necessity for detachment and containment used as a means of self-preservation. Saunders's attraction to Vorticism, whilst similarly influenced by the freedom it could offer from the 'debilitating attributes of femininity',³ provided a medium through which to work through the problem of social and sexual conditioning as a means of achieving a personal emancipation. It was

³ Lisa Tickner, 'Men's Work?', p. 67.

suggested that Saunders's exposure to the radical politics of Marsden's egoism, fuelled by her involvement in the suffrage movement propelled Saunders towards the notion of an alternative self, this used in an attempt to set free her heavily gendered subject position from the psychological constraints of the fixed binaries of 'man' and 'woman' in order to embrace individualism, and thus attempt to break free of the bonds of the past towards a liberated, though uncertain future. Conflict looms large for both women, be this a conflicted allegiance to an aesthetic programme, a contested political viewpoint, or philosophical debate; or in Dismorr's case the conflict witnessed first-hand of a world at war. Above all, it was demonstrated that personal struggle is acutely evident in both artists' work, arising from what appears to be a necessary turn inwards by each woman enacted as an attempt to work through these conflicts to find meaning from within the self, and in so doing achieve a better understanding of that individual self rather than being dependent on others for validation or recognition.⁴

The aesthetic enactment of cosmofeminist strategies of defence and self-preservation was further explored in chapter four in the context of the modernist carapace. It was proposed that the figure of the shell or exoskeleton as variously articulated by Dismorr and Saunders, serving as a protective yet unstable outer layer that housed a space of possibilities aspired to, yet at the same time is a space unsettled by the very notion of possibility itself. It was argued that the shell motif constituted a Vorticist armour for an imagined 'wild' body to express itself freely, uncultivated, and unconditioned by society, in

⁴ Lucy Delap, 'The Superman: Theories of Gender and Genius in Edwardian Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 47:1, March 2004, p. 110.

compensation for the reality of the physical body in society that is constrained. These mechanisms of defence allowed for cosmofeminist explorations of desire shielded from personal anxieties and the debilitating forces of daily existence, this an attempt to create the conditions for the actual self to grow stronger. The discussion highlighted a web of contradictions. The armoured body as articulated by each woman was viewed as both vulnerable and volatile in its dialectical negotiations with the external world, but by the very act of its imagining it is controlled. It was proposed that for Dismorr the shell as articulated provided a necessary barrier to conceal volatility, the liminal space between surface and interior an aesthetic battleground between corporeal experience and its abstraction, and a psychic battleground between desired transgression and the necessity for corporeal containment of the 'wild' body beneath. For Saunders, the shell acted as a necessary container for a freedom desired yet feared, providing a safe space in which to enact 'wildness', whilst the reality of acting freely is too risky to attempt, yet at the same time reassuringly out of reach.

This thesis offers a fresh attempt at understanding Vorticism in the context of gender. It has sought to illuminate the position of the women connected to Vorticism in the context of the spaces they inhabited, imagined, and envisaged during the period of their allegiance to Vorticism as an English avant-garde movement in its attempt to differentiate itself from its European counterparts, and in its repudiation of the aesthetics of its domestic rivals. This project has investigated the Vorticist women's presence, interactions, achievements, and desires as cosmopolitan artists living and working within Vorticism's orbit to form a more rounded view of their contribution to the visual

and literary culture of London as cosmopolitan metropolis at a time of cultural, social, and political upheaval, whilst at the same time recognising their transient positions as Englishwomen resistant to the unpalatable structures of patriarchal imperialism. In seeking to present the women connected to Vorticism as cosmopolitans who were active in the city, in politics and fashioning their own destiny as individuals navigating the rough terrain of *avant-guerre* politics, their position as English women enclosed within the structures of power and their desire for an escape from enclosure as artists seeking to be with others in the world yet working in service to the promotion of an English avant-garde has accentuated the ambiguity of their position that in a sense echoes the tensions inherent in the Vorticist duet and its 'disastrous polished dance.'

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

In seeking to offer a fresh perspective on Vorticism and gender by focusing on the lives and work of the women operating within its orbit, and aspiring to bring their presence closer to the forefront of the field of modernist studies, this project has focused largely on the figures of Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders, and as such can be accused of consigning again the contributions made by Dorothy Shakespear and Kate Lechmere to the shadows of the Vorticist project. The author has been fortunate to have been given access to archival materials relating to Dismorr and to Saunders and it is hoped that this access has allowed for new avenues of enquiry to be put forward that complement the work already undertaken in the field. It is to be hoped that in the future new information on Dorothy Shakespear as an active contributor to Vorticism will come to light.

Materials that have emerged from the archive during the course of research undertaken into the lives and work of Dismorr and Saunders, the nature of which have been beyond the scope of this project, are ripe for further research into these artists as 'committed' Vorticists and more broadly as artist-women active within the networks of European modernism in the 1910s. Dismorr's unpublished plays, the contents of which offer a rich seam of source material for further exploration that will further enhance her position as an important figure for early twentieth century literary modernism and for women's position within its arenas, the potential for their staging offering further opportunities for the communication of her ideas to a wider audience. Similarly, Saunders's contributions to the promotion of Vorticism, as both facilitator and as significant actor in its public presentation, these enhanced by the recent discovery of her work and the circumstances surrounding its erasure also opens new avenues for exploration, these also providing opportunities for public presentation that ensures that the conversation about the importance of Vorticism and its women will continue.

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IMAGES AND APPENDICES

Introduction



Fig.1. William Roberts, *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel, Spring 1915, 1961-62*, oil on canvas, 182.9 x 213.4 cm, presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1962, Tate Gallery, London. © The Estate of William Roberts.

Chapter one



Fig. 2. 'The Cubist: A Disappointment in Real Life', *Daily Graphic*, 30 March 1914.
My thanks go to Dr. Bernard Vere for generously sharing this material.

LONDRES POSSÈDE UNE ÉCOLE FUTURISTE



MISS LECHMERE POSANT DES RIDEAUX DANS LA SALLE DE COURS

Le mouvement futuriste, venu d'Italie, remonte vers le nord. Voici que la capitale de l'Angleterre est menacée de devenir un centre d'art révolutionnaire. Un jeune peintre, célèbre pour ses conceptions artistiques extravagantes, M. Wyndham Lewis, vient de fonder dans Ormond street une école où il espère que de nombreux disci-

ples viendront profiter de son expérience et de son enseignement. L'artiste s'est assuré le concours d'une jeune femme, miss Lechmere, qui assumera dans le nouvel établissement les fonctions de répétiteur. Elle est représentée ici travaillant à poser dans la salle de cours des rideaux évidemment dans le goût de la maison.



LE PROFESSEUR D' « AMBIANCE »

Pour M. Wyndham Lewis, la ressemblance n'existe plus, l'ambiance du modèle, seule, importe. Miss Lechmere, professeur de portrait, a, paraît-il, réalisé ici de façon parfaite, l'ambiance d'un correct dandy.



LE CUBISME ENVAHIT LES DRAPERIES

Le futurisme ne se contente pas de mettre hors cadres le nu odieux et le bitumineux classique, il s'en prend aux tentures. Les rideaux qui décorent les salles de l'école constituent une étrange innovation.



M. LEWIS FAIT DE L'ART DÉCORATIF

A en juger par les peintures murales du fondateur de l'école nouvelle, les enfants de trois ans qui tracent des arabesques avec un crayon sont tous, sinon de futurs artistes, du moins des futuristes accomplis.

Fig. 3. 'Londres possède une école futuriste' *Le Miroir*, 19 April 1914. Source: *Gallica* <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k11826825.item>

My thanks go to Sarah Lolley for sharing this information with me.



Fig. 4. Jessica Dismorr, *Abstract Composition*, c.1915, oil on wood, 41.3 x 50.8 cm, purchased 1968, Tate Gallery, London.



Fig. 5. Dorothy Shakespear, *War Scare*, 1914, watercolour and graphite on paper, 25.4 x 35.6 cm, Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. Extended loan from the Estate of Omar S. Pound. From *New Directions Pub.* acting as agent, copyright ©2024 by Mary de Rachewiltz and the Estate of Omar S. Pound. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.



Fig. 6. Helen Saunders, *Atlantic City*, 1915, black and white line block reproduction, 153 x 105 mm, in *Blast*, War Number, July 1915, p. 57. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).



Fig. 7. Becky Chipkin, partial colour reconstruction of *Atlantic City*, displayed at the Courtauld Gallery. Photograph taken by the author on 11 October 2022.



Fig. 8. Scanned postcard of Hotel Traymore and boardwalk, Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1916.



Fig. 9. Wyndham Lewis, *Praxitella*, 1920-21, oil on canvas, 142 x 101.5 cm, Leeds Museums and Galleries (City Art Gallery). © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).

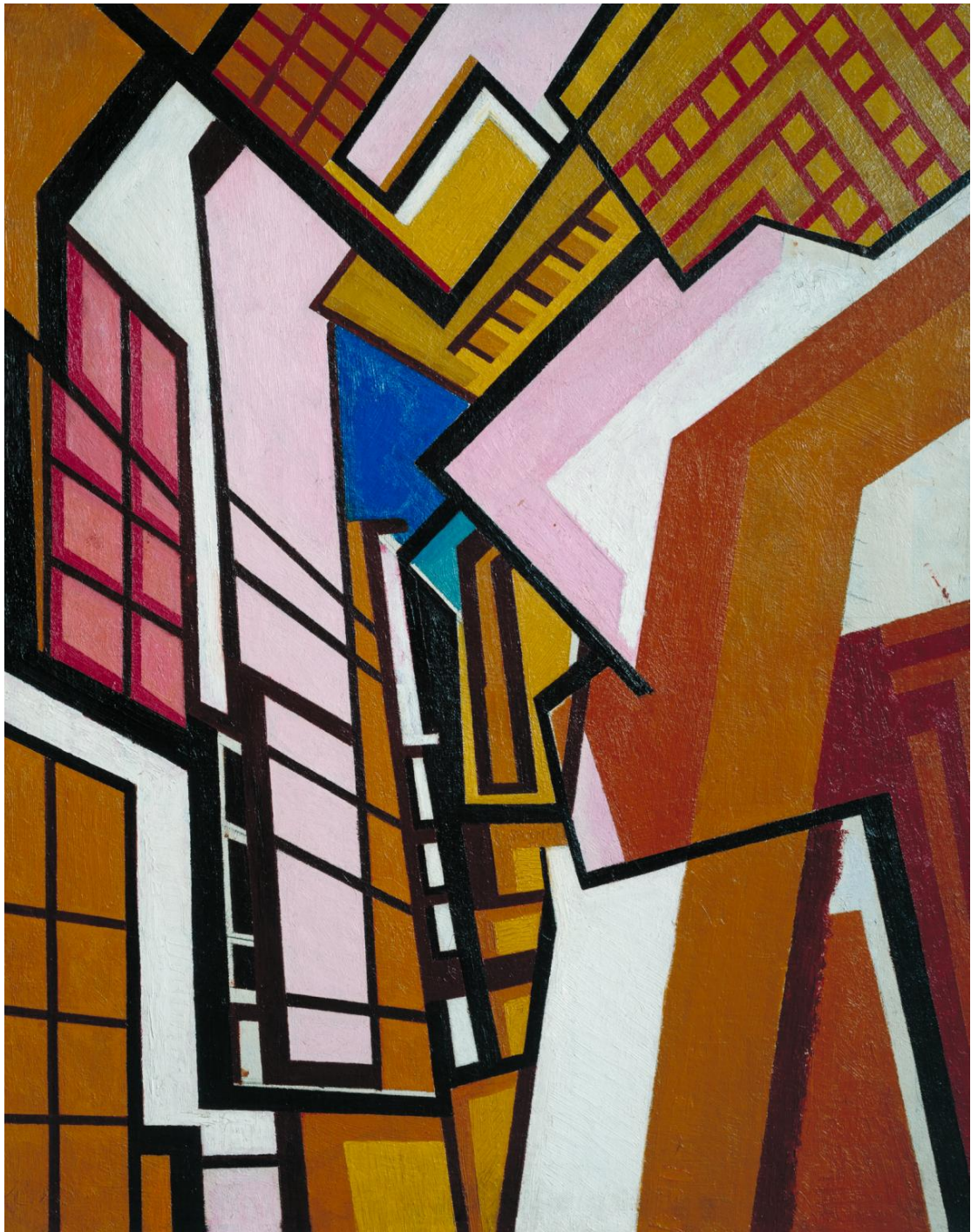


Fig. 10. Wyndham Lewis, *Workshop*, c.1914-5, oil on canvas, 76.5 x 61 cm, Tate Gallery. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).

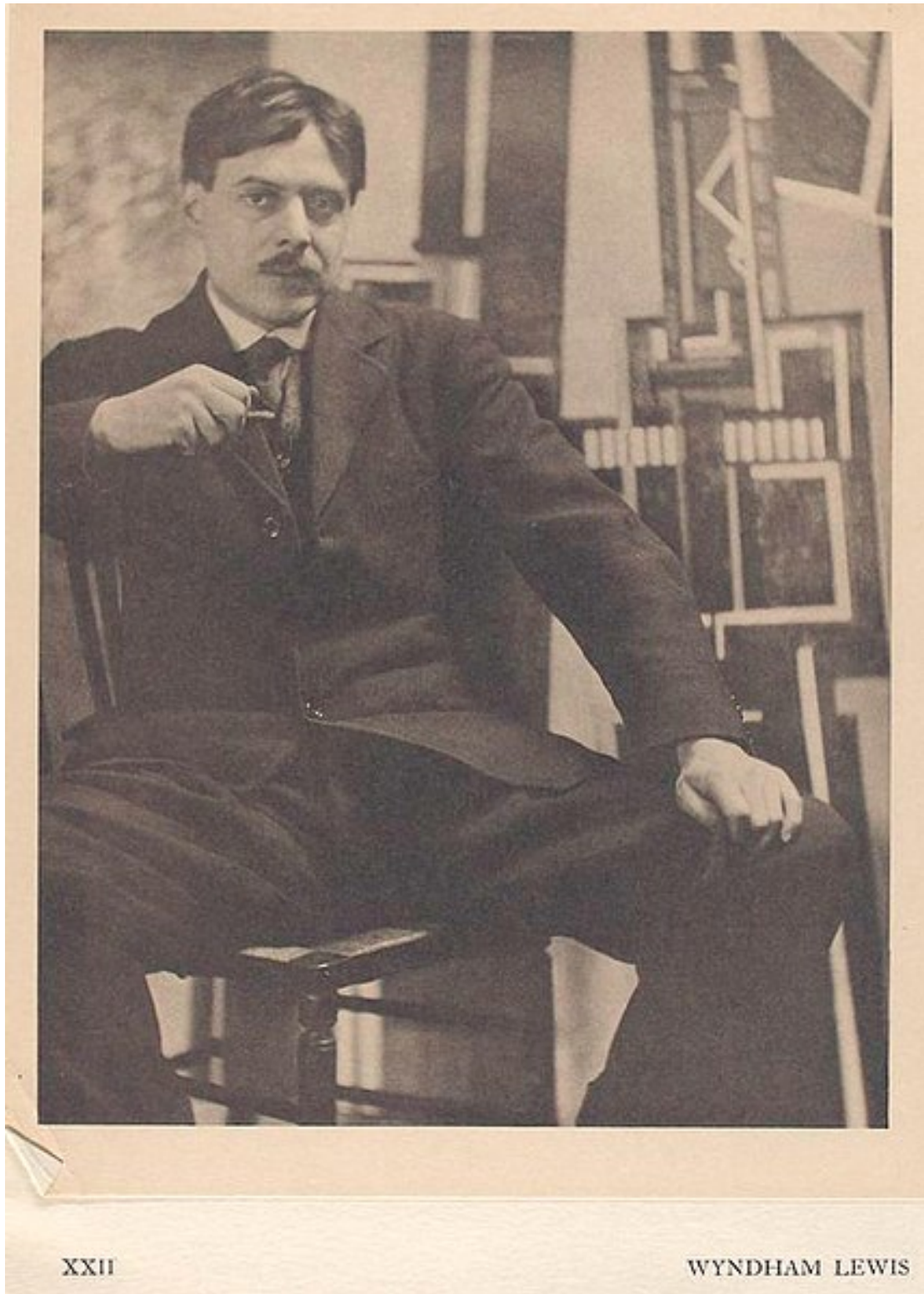


Fig. 11. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Wyndham Lewis*, collotype photograph, 25 February 1916, National Portrait Gallery, NPG AX7830. © The Universal Order (with thanks).



Fig. 12. Wyndham Lewis, *Design for Red Duet*, 1915, pencil and ink, watercolour and gouache, 31.5 x 25 cm. Private Collection. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).



Fig. 13. 'In the Vorticist Restaurant in Percy-street', *Daily Mirror*, 18 January 1916. British Newspaper Archive, British Library.

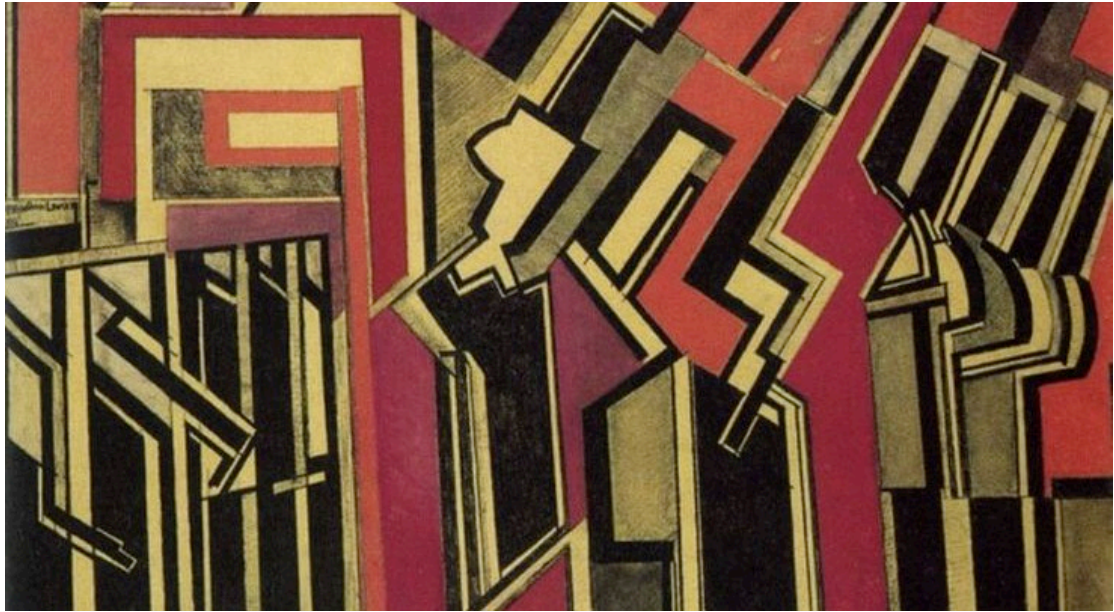


Fig. 14. Wyndham Lewis, *Red Duet*, 1914, black and coloured chalks and bodycolour on paper, 385 x 560 mm. Ivor Braka Ltd, London. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).



Fig. 15. (Above) Helen Saunders, *Abstract Composition in Blue and Yellow*, c1915, graphite, coloured chalks and watercolour on paper, 276 x 171 mm, Tate Gallery, London. © The Estate of Helen Saunders.



Fig. 16. Helen Saunders, *Abstract Multicoloured Design*, c.1915, bodycolour, watercolour and graphite on paper, 359 x 275 mm, Tate Gallery. © The Estate of Helen Saunders.



Fig. 17.1 Helen Saunders, *Monochrome Abstract Composition*, c.1915, ink, watercolour and graphite on paper, 289 x 184 mm. Tate Gallery. © The Estate of Helen Saunders.

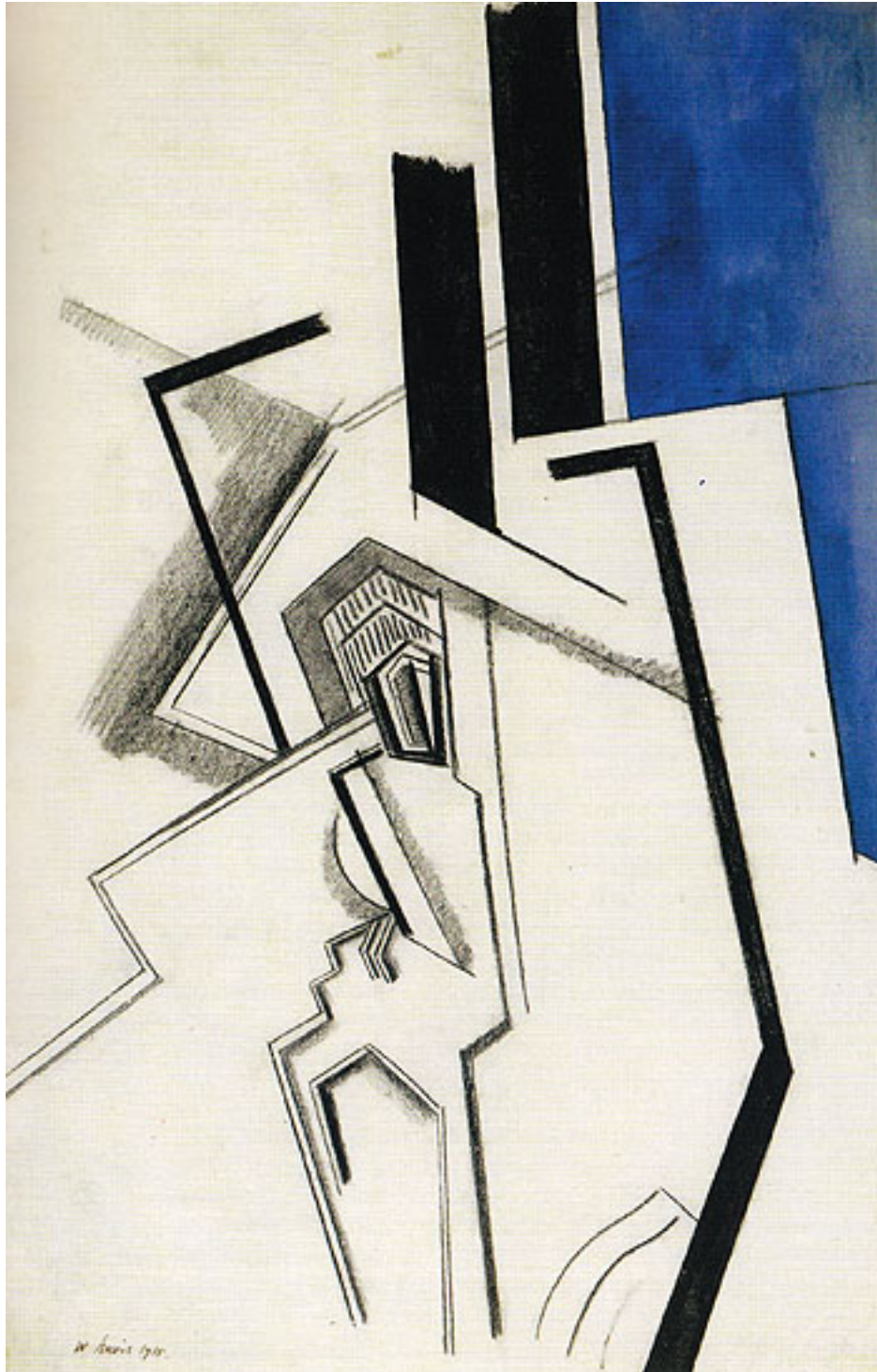


Fig. 18. Wyndham Lewis, *Composition in Blue*, 1915, chalk and watercolour, 47 x 30.5 cm. Private Collection. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).



Fig. 19. Wyndham Lewis, *Vorticist Composition in Red and Mauve*, 1915, pen, ink, chalk and bodycolour on paper, 347 x 245 mm. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).



Fig. 20. (Above) Wyndham Lewis, *Vorticist Composition*, 1915, bodycolour and chalk on paper, 375 x 173 mm. Tate Gallery, London. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).



Fig. 21. Helen Saunders, *Mother and Child with Elephant (2)*, c. 1914-22, graphite, pen and brown ink and brown wash on wove paper, 44.7 x 28.7 cm. The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust). © The Estate of Helen Saunders.



Fig. 22. Helen Saunders, *Vorticist Composition in Red and Black*, 1915, V&A. © The Estate of Helen Saunders.

Chapter Two



Fig. 1. 'Miss Floyd Ariston: At the Theatre Cabaret performance at the Clavier Hall off Hanover Sq.', *The Sphere*, 9 March 1912. British Newspaper Archive, British Library.

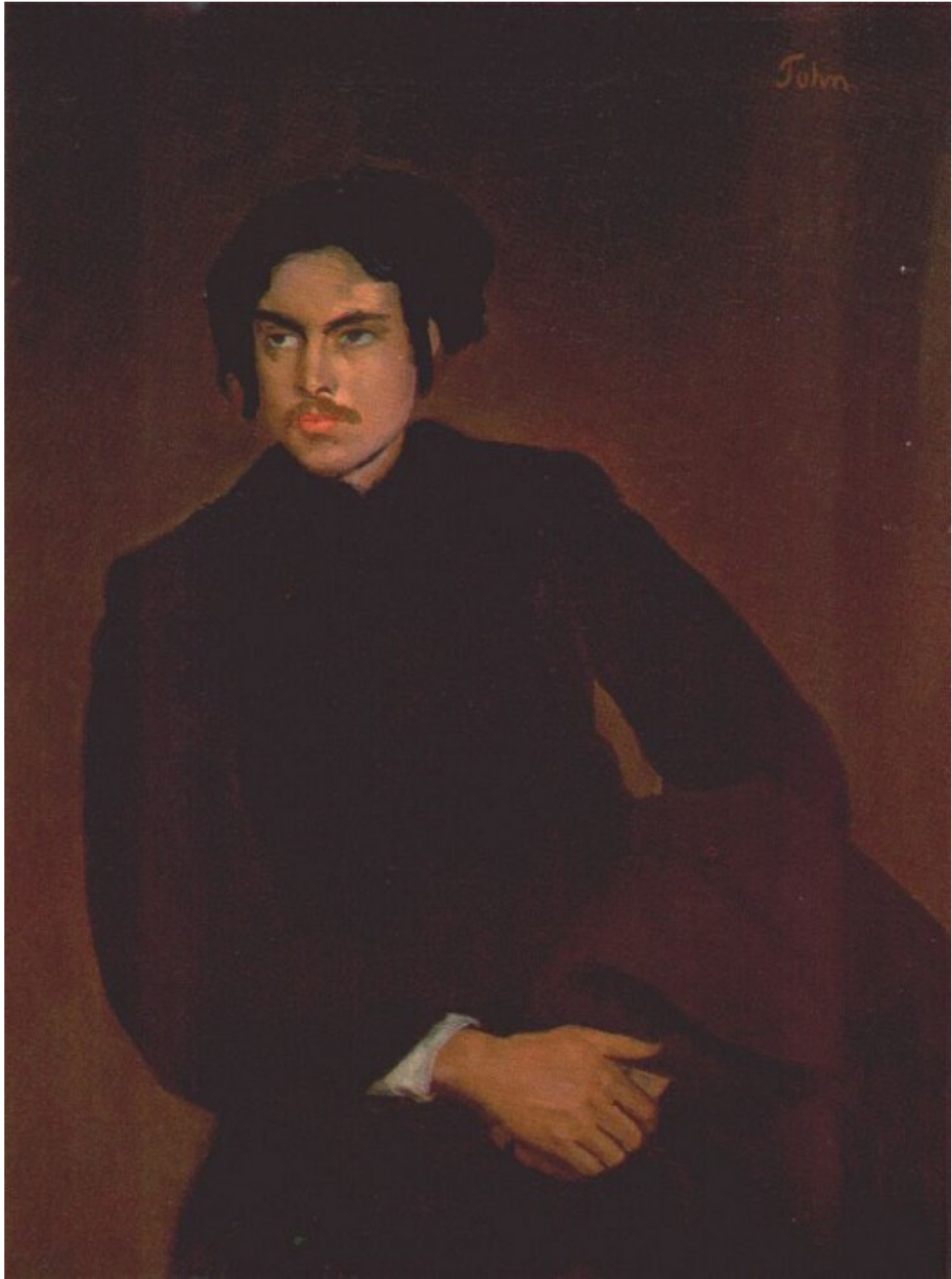


Fig. 2. Augustus John, *Wyndham Lewis*, c. 1905, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Private Collection. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).



Fig. 3. Charles Ginner, *Piccadilly Circus*, 1912, oil on canvas, 93.9 x 66 cm, purchased 1980, Tate Gallery, London.

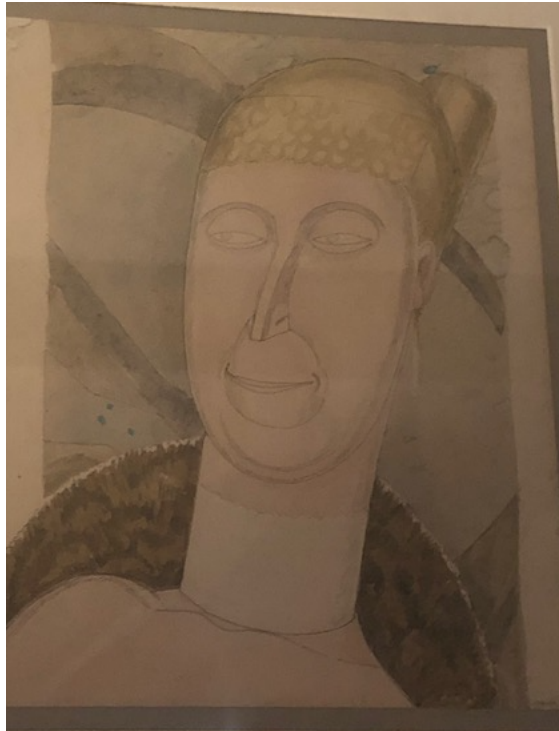


Fig. 4. Jessica Dismorr, photograph of untitled drawing c. 1912, dimensions unknown. Private Collection, reproduced with kind permission.

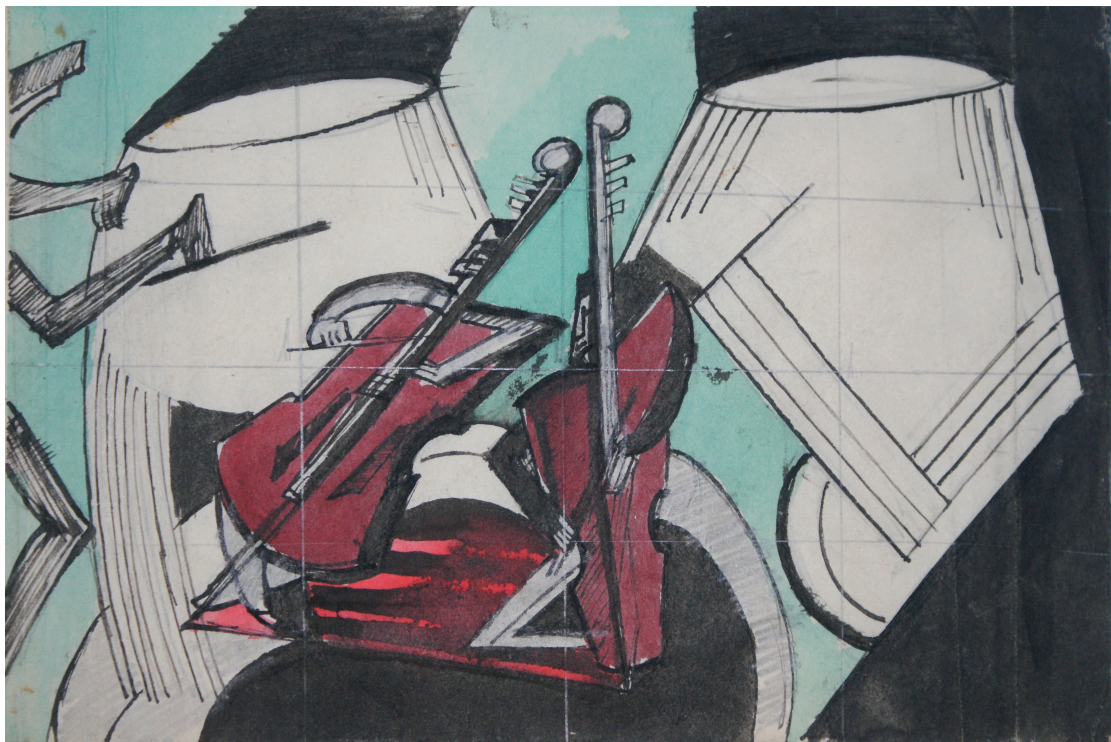


Fig. 5. Helen Saunders, *Cabaret*, c. 1913-14, graphite, black ink, and watercolour on wove paper, 148 x 227 mm. The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust). © The Estate of Helen Saunders.



Fig. 6. Unknown author: *The Versatile Four*. Source: Discogs.com



Fig. 7. Helen Saunders, *Dance*, c.1915, graphite and gouache on wove paper, 37.5 x 29.5 cm. The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago; Purchase, The Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions and with a donation from Lorna Ferguson and Terry Clark in honour of Richard Born. Photograph © 2024 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago.



Fig. 8. Dorothy Shakespear, *A Dream*, 1912, watercolour and graphite on paper, 35.2 x 25.1 cm, Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. Gift of Omar S. Pound. From *New Directions* Pub. acting as agent, copyright ©2024 by Mary de Rachewiltz and the Estate of Omar S. Pound. Reprinted by permission of *New Directions Publishing Corp.*



Fig. 9. Dorothy Shakespear, tailpiece design printed in *Blast, War Number*, 1915, p. 47. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).



Fig. 10. Helen Saunders, Untitled ('The Rock Driller'), c. 1913, traces of graphite, black ink and bodycolour on wove paper, 9.9 x 13.2 cm. The Courtauld (Samuel Courtauld Trust). © The Estate of Helen Saunders.

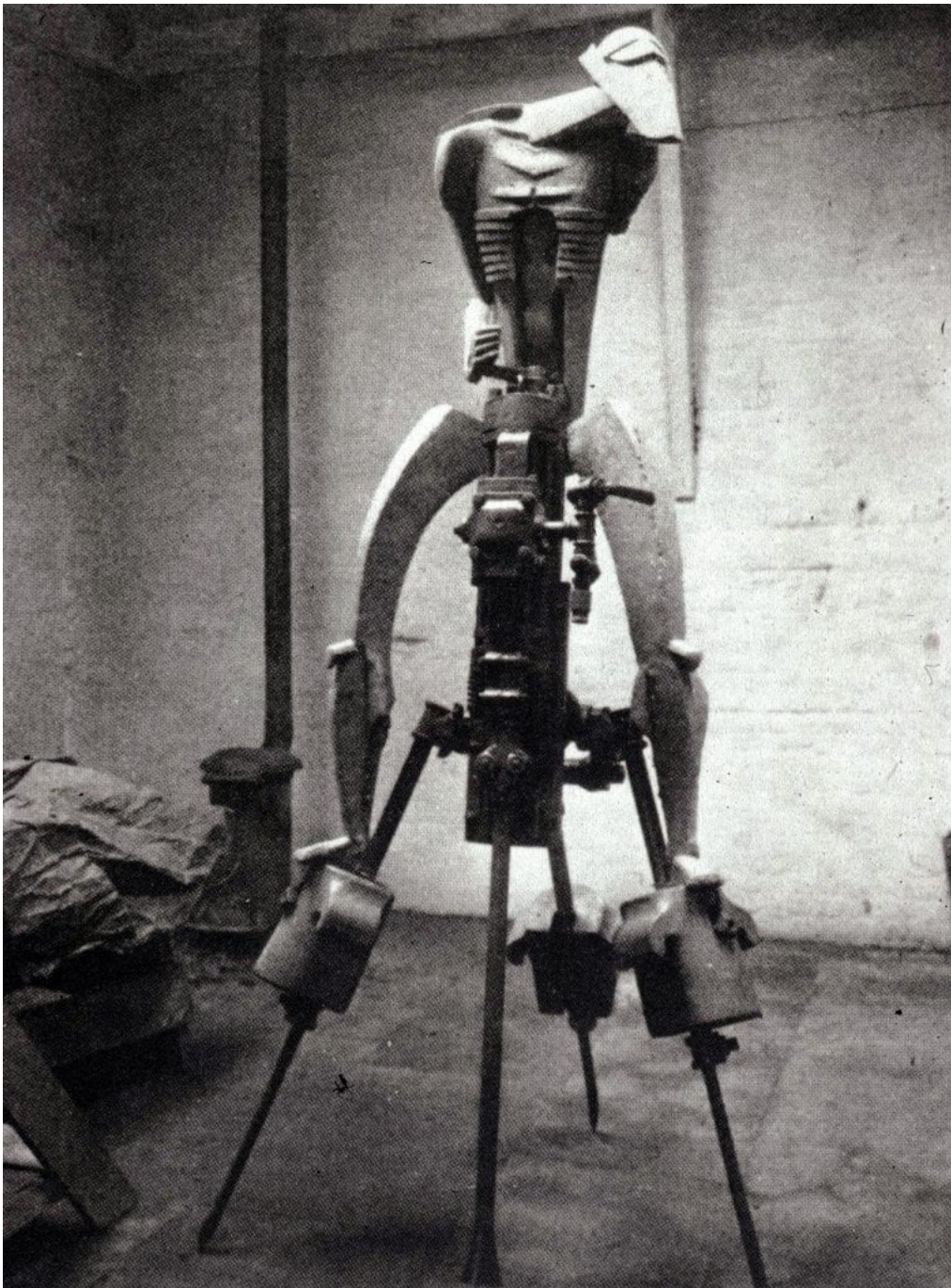


Fig. 11. Photograph of Jacob Epstein's Rock Drill, c. 1914. Source: Modernism Lab, Yale University.



Fig. 12. Jacob Epstein, Tomb of Oscar Wilde, in Père Lachaise cemetery, Paris, September 1961. Photograph: Express/Getty Images.



Fig. 13. Jacob Epstein, *Totem*, c.1913. Graphite and watercolour on paper, 58 x 41.5 cm, Tate Gallery, London. © The Estate of Sir Jacob Epstein/Tate.

Chapter Three



Fig. 1. Helen Saunders, Untitled ('Female figures imprisoned'), c.1913, black ink, watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 15.8 x 19.6 cm. The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust). © The Estate of Helen Saunders.



Fig. 2. Helen Saunders, *Hammock*, c. 1913-14, graphite, brown ink and watercolour on wove paper, 35.5 x 41.4 cm. The Courtauld, London. (Samuel Courtauld Trust). © The Estate of Helen Saunders.

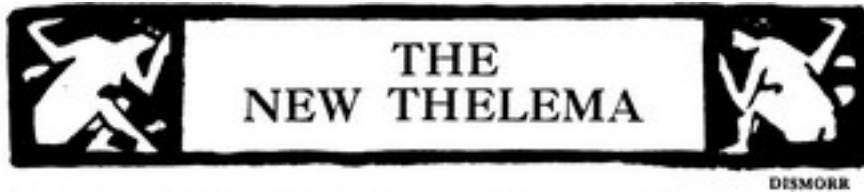


Fig. 3 Jessica Dismorr, illustrations in *Rhythm*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1 June 1911. Source: Modernist Journals Project.



Fig. 4. Jessica Dismorr, illustration, *Rhythm*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1 June 1911. Source: Modernist Journals Project.

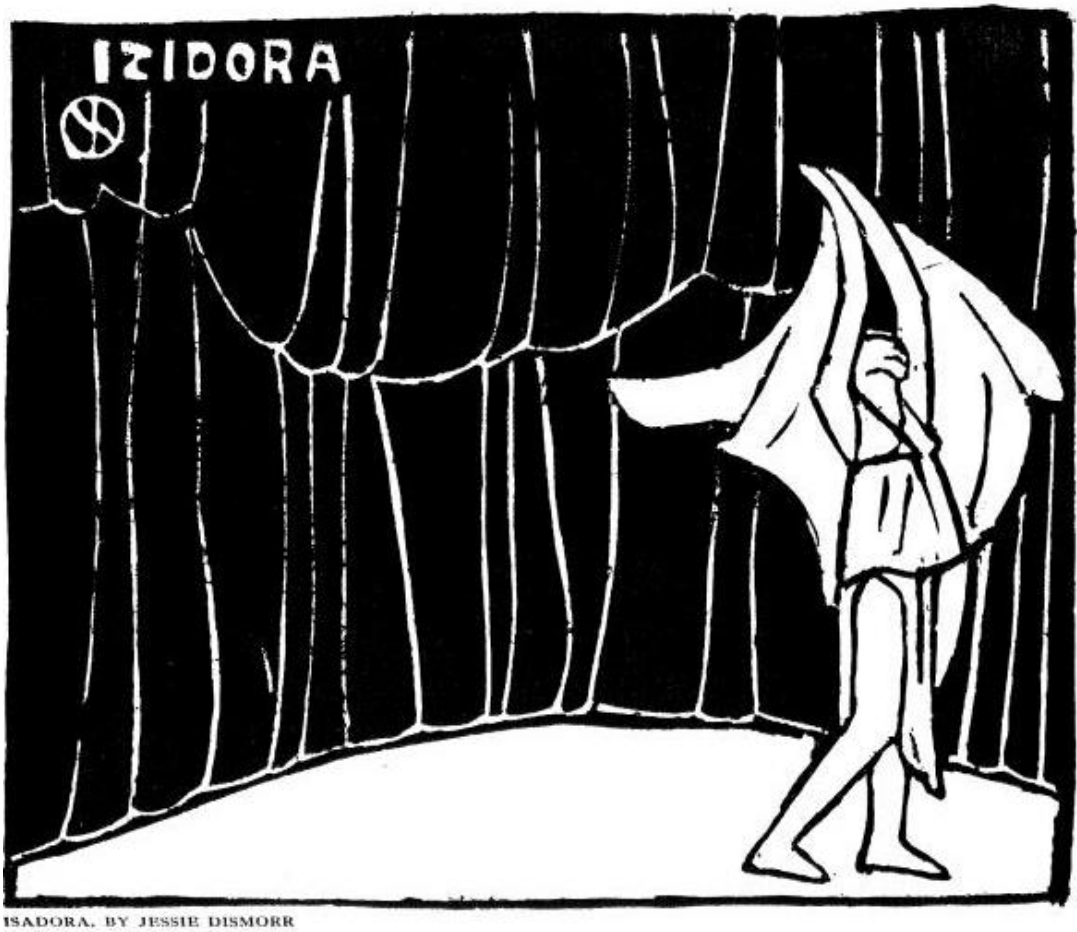


Fig. 5. Jessica Dismorr, *Isadora*, illustration in *Rhythm*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1911. Source: Modernist Journals Project.



Fig. 6. Photograph of Jessica Dismorr (standing) and Beatrice Dismorr in nursing uniform. Private Collection, reproduced with kind permission.



Fig. 7. Photograph of Beatrice and Jessica Dismorr serving in France, 1915. The photograph carries the following inscription: 'Beatrice Mary Dismorr, Jessica Stewart Dismorr and French soldiers, volunteer nurses in a French war hospital in World War 1. Cannes, France, 1915.' Private Collection, reproduced with kind permission.



Fig. 8. Dudley Harvey, *Are the lights in the New Year's sky of 1911 a false dawn, or do they presage the coming of a new and better day?*, January 1911. Source: Tate Gallery website.

Chapter Four



Fig. 1. Jessica Dismorr, photograph of *Self-Portrait* c.1912. Reproduced with kind permission.



Fig. 2. Helen Saunders, *Vorticist Composition, Yellow and Green* (formerly 'Gulliver in Lilliput'), c. 1915, graphite, brown ink and bodycolour on paper, 30.8 x 36.8 cm, The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust). © The Estate of Helen Saunders.



Fig. 3. Jessica Dismorr, Self Portrait reproduced in Group X exhibition catalogue: Mansard Gallery, March 26-April 24, 1920. Source: V&A.

Conclusion

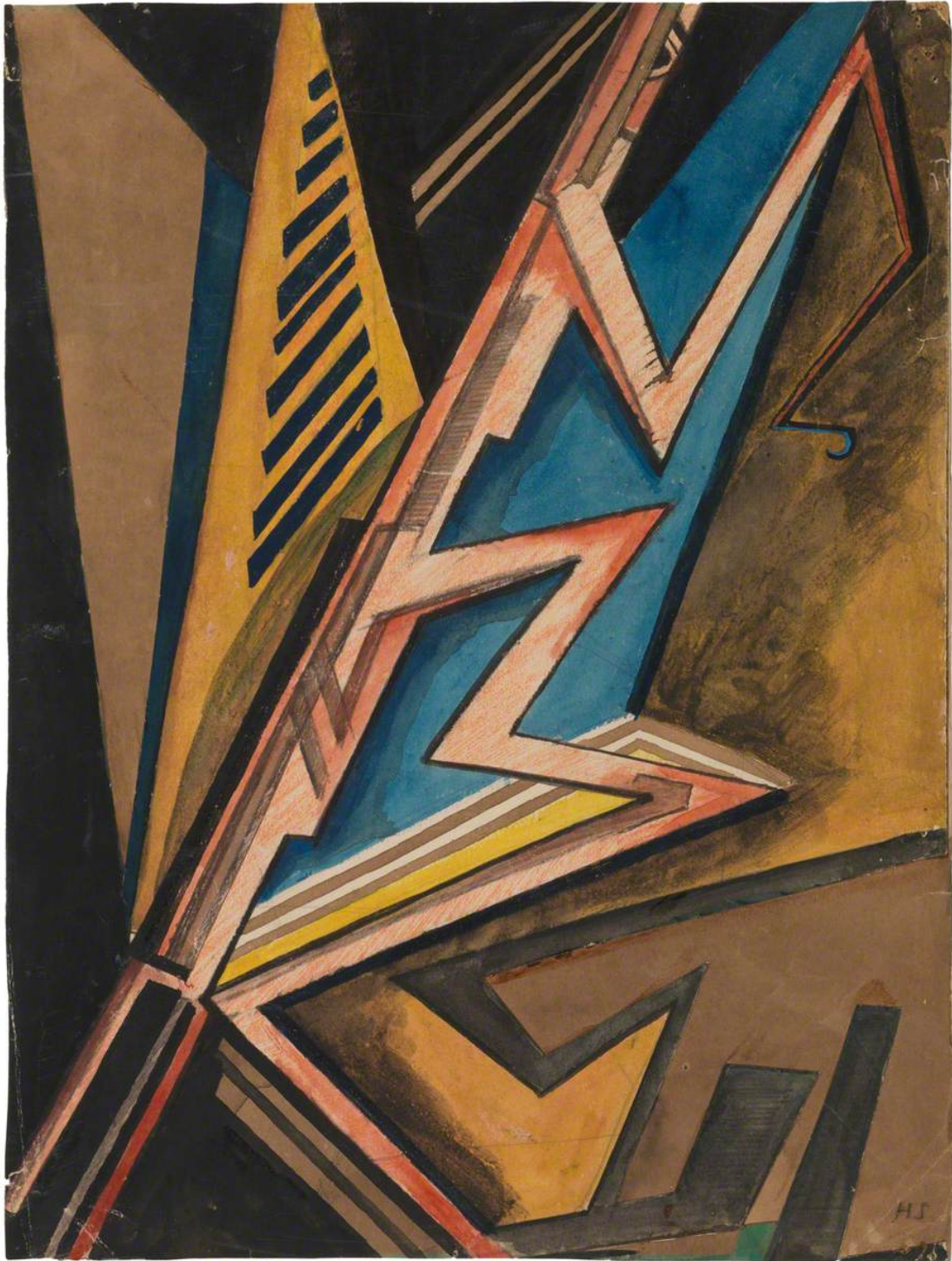


Fig. 1. Helen Saunders, *Vorticist Composition (Black and Khaki?)*, c. 1915, graphite, black ink, watercolour, bodycolour and collage on wove paper, 37.3 x 27.8 cm. The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust). © The Estate of Helen Saunders.

APPENDICES

1. Jessica Dismorr, 'June Night', *Blast: War Number*, July 1915. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).

JUNE NIGHT.

Rodengo calls for me at my little dark villa. I am waiting with happiness and amiability tucked up in my bosom like two darling lap-dogs. Should I never return to the place, they are safe. I am not good at finding my way back anywhere.

For Rodengo I have an ardent admiration. His pink cheeks, black beard, and look half of mannequin and half of audacious and revengeful Corsican amuse me. Ah, Rodengo! you are too conspicuous for day-light; but on a night of opera, this night of profound mutterings and meaningless summer lightning you are an indispensable adjunct of the scenery.

No 43 bus; its advertisements all lit from within, floats towards us like a luminous balloon. We cling to it and climb to the top. Towards the red glare of the illuminated city we race through interminable suburbs. These are the bare wings and corridors that give on to the stage. Swiftly at least is exquisite. But it makes me too emotional. Amazing, these gymnastic agitations of the heart! Your blindness, my friend Rodengo, is your most intelligent attribute.

The Park, to our left, glimmers through strips of iron. Its lawns of antique satin are brocaded with elaborate parterres, whose dyes are faded beyond recognition. Dark as onyx with rims of silver are the little pools that suck in the dew. The tea-kiosk of whitened stucco is as remote as a temple shuttered up against the night. My desires loiter about the silent spaces.

We stop for passengers at Regent's Corner. Here crowds swarm under green electric globes. Now we stop every moment, the little red staircase is besieged. The bus is really too top-heavy. It must look like a great nodding bouquet, made up of absurd flowers and moths and birds with sharp beaks. I want to escape; but Rodengo is lazy and will not stop warbling his infuriating lovesongs. Ribbons of silver fire start into the air, and twist themselves into enormous bows with fringes of tiny dropping stars. Everybody stands up and screams. These people are curious, but not very interesting; they lack reticence. Ah, but the woman in the purple pelisse is too beautiful! I refuse to look at her when she stares round.

It is hot for a night in June. "Che, che, la donna." Rodengo, you have a magnificent tenor voice, but you bore me. Your crime is that I can no longer distinguish you from the rest of the world.

Surely I have had enough of romantics! their temperature is always above 98½, and the accelerated pulse throbs in their touch. Cool normality and classicalism tempt me, and spacious streets of pale houses. At the next arrest I leave you my friends, I leave you Rodengo with the rose in your ear I escape from the unmannerly throbbing vehicle.

I take refuge in mews and by-ways. They lead to the big squares of the better neighbourhoods. Creeping through them I become temporarily disgraced, an outcast, a shadow that clings to walls. At least here I breathe my own breath. A decrescendo of sound pursues me, and a falling spangle.

Now out of reach of squalor and glitter, I wander in the precincts of stately urban houses. Moonlight carves them in purity. The presence of these great and rectangular personalities is a medicine. They are the children of colossal restraint; they are the last word of prose. (Poetics, your day is over!) In admiring them I have put myself on the side of all the severities. I seek the profoundest teaching of the inanimate. I feel the emotion of related shapes. Oh, discipline of ordered pilasters and porticoes! My volatility rests upon you as a swimmer hangs upon a rock.

Now the pool of silence reaches unplumbable depths. My dropping footsteps create widening circles of alarm. After all, I do not know why I should be here, I am a strayed Bohemian, a villa-resident, a native of conditions, half-sordid, half-fantastic. I am the style of a feuilleton cherishing a hopeless passion for Latin prose. This is an interlude of high love-making. I must get back to the life of the thoroughfares to which I belong.

Rodengo, you have long disappeared; but I think of your charm without regret. I have lost my taste for your period. The homeward-going busses are now thronged. Should I see you, I shall acknowledge you with affection. But I am not returning that way.

2. The Cave by Helen Saunders, reproduced in Brigid Peppin, *Helen Saunders 1885-1963*, pp. 31-32.

THE CAVE

This cave is hollowed out
In concentrated narrowness
And cold contact of shiny sides.
Sea is too glittering and wide;
The sun is brazen;
Earth spreads itself out with diffuse explanatory splendour.
Heroic rocks jut out,
Promontories stride,
Crouching cliffs ruminant their feet in the blue pond.
I can ride on the back of this and tap old England's sides
with bare impatient heels.

Walls of my cave lean heavily
One over the other.
The pool at the entrance rose over my knees in cold silence,
Slow drops fall in the dark behind me,
They swell an invisible lake.
Like a Chinese torture the sound thuds on my ears with ghostly persistence
But the water is level in the lake.
Walls strain beneath the weight of lifted earth.
Curved grey lines trace shapes on the black metal of the air.

Here everything is beautiful
It is so polished.
Outside rocks are jagged
Their edges break and splinter, they are rusty and cold.
If you fall on them you are torn,
But if you take a hammer you can smash and batter
their coarse features out of shape.
Here underground the sea has scoured and swept
With industry it has pressed and hewn and polished;
Twice a day it bursts the new-grown parchment skin
Which holds a fluid chaos
Panting to submerge dry delicate forms;
It fills the hollow places and withdraws.

There must be no life here
multitudes of ant-like waves carry away refuse,
They have licked the walls as a dog cleans a plate.
If the sea found me here,
Me who am life, pollution, feebleness -
How it would lift and twist and throw my body up and down
Catch it again and never let it drop

Till it had beaten out the soft gold life
Into a hard plate, thin as a wafer.
When it swept back it would suck my lifeless body out
And pass it on to the shingle with a hundred soft and clumsy pushes.
And some old lady, from the towns, would say
"An animal has fallen off the cliff,
A cow perhaps or else a sheep. Poor thing!"

3. Jessica Dismorr, 'Convalescent in the South', *The Little Review*, 1 January 1918. Source: Modernist Journals Project.

THE CONVALESCENT IN THE SOUTH

Jessie Dismorr

Out of the evil tangle of waters a faggot is tossed on to a couch
of foam.

I am bedded in the silken winter of the south: storm and fever
have ebbed away.

Oh, the lull of this security! I am emptied of my old violences.
Never more will delirium nor ecstasy shake the perilous nerve of
the brain.

Tyranny has elicited sweetness; my eyes are dark with fidelity;
Dog-like, I nuzzle at the knee of Power.

Why should I disdain prescription and advice?

Docile I drag my body over yellow paths . . .

With ribbons and webs of sunlight that quaint effigy of bones is
garlanded, the warmth pricks and pickles its coat of membrane.

Caught at my breast, the frail rainbow of possibilities strains like
a shimmering scarf.

Frensh games and ameliorations! This taste for delicate finery is
a new thing.

Once like a gay circus-rider I paraded the fine animal that belonged
to me. All its bells and trappings clapping, it played its
superb pranks.

Oh, the rapt performance in a well of round eyes and lifted palms !

Oh, the perfectly centeralized stupidity of the arrived artiste !

The adoption of this novel aesthetic punishes like a graft of new
bone.

I am the victim of my solitary perfecting.

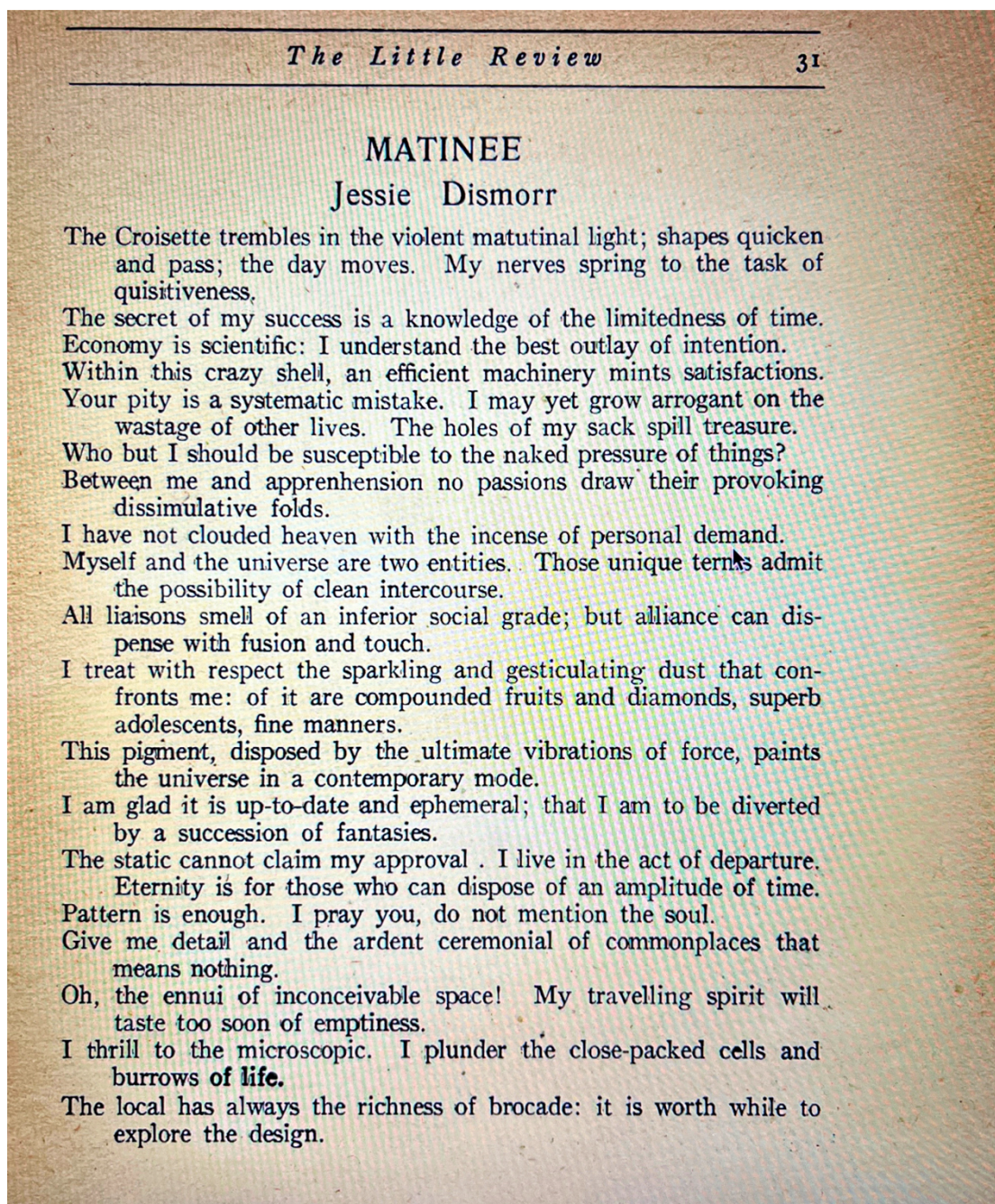
Dismayed, I watch the coloured company of boon delights roll away
in a rattle of wheels and dust.

The involuntary stare of my elevation has cowed the creole and
inconsequent mob.

Oh, hilarity of the senses ! oh, colour, enormity, ostentation of
gold, your term has come !

A tardy primitivism supersedes the Renaissance of gifts.
The superb nullity of the body no longer arrogates command.
Reactive to disaster, it must assume the lesser style of the inanimate.
In it, as in a blackened tower, I sit morose and intelligent, the
reconnoitrances of my fine wits bringng me flesh and honey.
I no longer turn under my tongue the cud of intensive valuations.
Wings carry my provision: vicissitude and long transit produce
strange flavourings.
My appetite covets the secrets of ten million lives in lieu of my
virginal stupidity.
Perfection alone balances perfection. My loss must be paid with
omniscience and final concepts.
I have abandoned the banality of choice; I pursue the last intimacy
with any stranger.
My personality unhedged admits the travelling seeds and dust of
unnumbered cultures.
Observation is no longer a complacent and mirroring lake;
It is a flame, blown by the spirit: nothing eludes the thrust of its
streaming tongues.
Oh, happiness, I have not yet done with you! By all means I must
preserve the attenuated thread of life.
I drag my body over yellow paths. The sunlight folds my emaciation
in a thread of gold.

4. Jessica Dismorr, 'Matinee', *The Little Review*, 1 March 1918. Source: Modernist Journals Project.



I spell happiness out of dots and dashes; a ray, a tone, the insignificance of a dangling leaf.

Provided it has a factual existence the least atom will suffice my need.

But I cannot stomach shadows. It is certain that the physical round world would fit my mouth like a lolly-pop.

You ask: To what end this petty and ephemeral busines, this last push of human sensation?

Is one then a neophyte in philosophy, demanding reasons and results? I proclaim life to the end a piece of artistry, essentially idle and exquisite.

The trinkets stored within my coffin shall outlast my dust.

5. *Bells of West Liss* by Helen Saunders, undated manuscript (1913?).
© The Estate of Helen Saunders.

Ringing again. Eight o'clock then.
I must begin to tug my inert body inch by inch
Out of the close-fitting iron mould of sleep.
Ding ——— Dong.
Two words with a long hyphen between.
Hammer-strokes falling on the smooth grey surface
of my shell
Like the sides of a Dreadnought.
Concussion moving in quick jerks
Tears the soft web of dreams which lay between
my skin and sleep's cold pressure:
It shrinks into a ball and the iron sticks.
Huge yawns fill the grey arched vault like smoke.
Eight o'clock.
It will be eight when the bells stop
I shall have to get up.
Night has gone down into the earth
But ~~it~~ it is a magnet.

4

I am glued to my bed by its attraction
And by the heavy blanket of air overhead.
These gusty gawns and gases of sleep's breath
Leave a hole in my lungs for the morning air
Which creeps through cracks in the metal:
The whirlwind will split the Dreadnought's sides,
Laughter poured out of a full bottle
Cracking and tearing the welded joints of machinery.
I try to shrink myself loose in the shell
So that I can slip easily out of a small opening:
But the case fits too well
It fits with the cold precision of the past.
I have grown in the night
My shell is too small.
The Bells drop a plumb-line into a sea of sound
The clang of the Bells in the Tower drags a curling
body of ~~dead~~ sound after it:
A two-headed tiger it stalks through the cornfields
Stems rub one another and the dry grain rattles

6. Jessica Dismorr, 'Monologue', *Blast*, War Number, July 1915. © Wyndham Lewis and the estate of Mrs G. A. Wyndham Lewis by kind permission of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust (a registered charity).

MONOLOGUE.

My niche in nonentity still grins—
I lay knees, elbows pinioned, my sleep mutterings blunted against a wall.
Pushing my hard head through the hole of birth
I squeezed out with intact body.
I ache all over, but acrobatic, I undertake the feat of existence.
Details of equipment delight me.
I admire my arrogant spiked tresses, the disposition of my perpetually
foreshortened limbs,
Also the new machinery that wields the chains of muscles fitted beneath
my close coat of skin.
On a pivot of contentment my balanced body moves slowly.
Inquisitiveness, a butterfly, escapes.
It spins with drunken invitation. I poke my fingers into the middles of
big succulent flowers.
My fingers are fortunately tipped with horn.
Tentacles of my senses, subtle and far-reaching, drop spoils into the vast
sack of my greed.
Stretched ears projecting from my brain are gongs struck by vigorous
and brutal fists of air.
Into scooped nets of nostrils glide slippery and salt scents, I swallow
slowly with gasps.
In pursuit of shapes my eyes dilate and bulge. Finest instruments of
touch they refuse to blink their pressure of objects.
They dismember live anatomies innocently.
They run around the polished rims of rivers.
With risk they press against the cut edges of rocks and pricking pinnacles.
Pampered appetites and curiosities become blood-drops, their hot
mouths yell war.
Sick opponents dodging behind silence, echo alone shrills an equivalent
threat.
Obsessions rear their heads. I hammer their faces into discs.
Striped malignities spring upon me, and tattoo with incisions of wild claws.
Speeded with whips of hurt, I hurry towards ultimate success.
I stoop to lick the bright cups of pain and drop out of activity.
I lie a slack bag of skin. My nose hangs over the abyss of exhaustion,
my loosened tongue laps sleep as from a bowl of milk.

JESSIE DISMORR.

7. Jessica Dismorr, 'Interrogation', *Poems 1918*. Handwritten manuscript held in the John Henry Bradley Storrs papers, Smithsonian.

Interrogation

The quiet mood spent fulminating
Against the soiled intimacies
Of a secretish civilization.
Betakes its anger
To a plot of solitude.
There against encroachment
To strengthen the granite
Of a contemptuous peace.
Is this then, oh honour,
The sum of all interrogation?
A clean withdrawal.
And power inexperimented
In too slight material?
A security
Issueless, impermeable,
Close simulacra of the shut pocket of death?
Think you with such immaculacy
To blunt the general urge,
Or punish the push of atoms
And obstinate burgeoning
In cracks of mortar?
Dare you, oh honesty complete,
Blink the eventuality,
Of a toppled defence,
Or could that be rather
An original pudence
That thus averted aspect,
Contesting no creeps of the central impulses
And one with life's business,
Presents the mode of an exigent masculinity
Sifting earth for its mate?
