Reading *Ray*: Avant-Garde and Transnationalism in Interwar Britain

The British modernist little magazine *Ray: Art Miscellany* (1926–1927) pioneered the combination of text and image in the vein of the Continental avant-gardes. Amid the surge of interest in periodicals within modernist studies, *Ray* has managed to escape broader attention. Its editor, Sidney Hunt, was an enigmatic figure and the magazine itself also eludes categorization, as it did not conform to the standards of English modernism, which were in the process of crystallising at the time of its publication and then dominated the scholarly consensus on artistic innovation during the interwar period. Focusing on the specificities of the magazine form and on *Ray*'s explicitly interartistic and transnational ethos, this article locates *Ray* within the spectrum of British 'modernisms', while interpreting its manifest effort to introduce various European avant-garde movements to a British audience as part of a strategy to establish an alternative modernist project grounded in the ideals of the moribund Arts and Crafts tradition.

Until recent years, many accounts of British interwar modernism have regarded it as characteristically distinct from its contemporaries, the Continental avant-garde movements. For instance, even though British writers were influenced by Surrealism early on, an English Surrealist movement proper did not surface until the 1930s, having its early culmination at the 1936 London International Surrealist Exhibition.[1] Furthermore, in the field of periodical studies, British and Continental 'little magazines' have been living apart together, so to say, since the publication of the three-volume *Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*. Within this unified overview, separate volumes showcase British and Irish periodicals on the one hand and Continental avant-garde magazines on the other.[2] While this editorial decision places the two areas on an equal footing and thereby opens a space for comparison, it also leaves the divide in place. In this respect, Hammill and Hussey write that 'even in material modernist studies' there has been a tendency 'to separate the productions of the European avant-garde from a more general conception of modernism, isolating discussion of the radical visual experimentation of the pre-First World War period as precursive to rather than a continuing presence in modernist forms'.[3]

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[1] Paul C. Ray, *The Surrealist Movement in England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 67–68. For a particular contemporary discussion, see David Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935).

[2] Vol. 1: Britain and Ireland (1880–1955), ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Vol. 2: North America (1894–1960), ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Vol. 3: Europe (1880–1940), ed. by Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, and Christian Weikop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[3] Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey, *Modernism's Print Cultures* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 54.

This habitual approach is defied by *Ray: Art Miscellany* (1926–27, henceforth *Ray*), a little magazine of the late 1920s that requires a recalibrated view of the British interwar avant-garde.[4] Bringing *Ray* into the ambit of modernist periodical studies, we will assess its place in the history of the avant-garde and of contemporaneous British modernisms by examining its mission, reception, and interartistic and transnational character. Indeed, *Ray* actively encouraged 'Russian and European *modernism*', as Miller and Price have noted.[5]

Ray's editor, Sidney James Hunt (1896–1940), said he loved modernity's novelties, the inventions of tomorrow and all things not yet defiled by excess use.[6] He nevertheless expressed discomfort with the non-committal vagueness that attached to the term 'modernism' in Britain, in comparison with the specific avant-garde movements of the Continent. In a letter to the painter Paul Nash, he hedged his use of the term 'modernism' by placing it between scare quotes and explicitly expressing his distaste for it: 'horrible word!'[7] At the same time, however, he confirmed his unfailing '"modernist" sympathies' and his hope to see 'an English periodical devoted exclusively to new forms on the lines of some audacious and amusing Continental and American publications'.[8] A year later, Hunt started his project of redrawing English 'modernism' and launched *Ray*. In fact, when contacting fellow editors of little magazines abroad, Hunt dubbed *Ray* as 'the only English periodical of the avant-garde'.[9]

In a subscription bulletin for *Ray* – the title, it appears, was not yet decided – Hunt carefully avoided the term 'modernism', characterising the magazine as

> the only english [sic] periodical devoted exclusively to new art movements[.] The ART MISCELLANY, young and loving all things that 'dance on light feet', will not be wet with the sweat of meritorious endeavour or possess other Dureresque qualities. It will have no desire to reform the hoardings or the world, no ambition to bring 'beauty' into the lives of people. It will devote itself with as little verbiage as possible to presenting noteworthy work ENTIRELY OUT OF THE USUAL RUT.[10]

This polemical stance, setting itself in opposition not against immediate predecessors but Dürer's Renaissance painting as the pinnacle of fine art, already points to the angle of approach we take in

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[4] It should not be confused with the poetry magazine *Ray* (1925–1927) edited by B. J. Brooke and G. D. Bone.

[5] The writers postulate a divide between Europe and Russia (in Europe), which is an oft-repeated framing in art and literary history but historically inaccurate due to transnational networks. David Miller and Richard Price, *British Poetry Magazines, 1914–2000: A History and Bibliography of 'Little Magazines'* (Newcastle and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2006), p. 5 (emphasis added).

[6] Edmund Paul, *Sidney Hunt: Graveur anglais d'ex-libris* (Paris: L'ex-Libris, 1929), pp. 6–7.

[7] Sidney Hunt to Paul Nash, 22 April 1925, qtd. in Iria Candela, '"The only English periodical of the avant-garde": Sidney Hunt and the Journal *Ray*', *The Burlington Magazine*, 152.1285 (2010), 239–44 (p. 241).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Sidney Hunt to the editor of *Mécano*, 20 August 1926, qtd. in Candela, p. 241.

[10] Sidney Hunt (s.a.), 'Subscription Bulletin'. Tate Archive.

this essay to characterise *Ray*'s programme and its positioning among (or against) British modernist projects. Hunt here takes a stance against traditional fine art in the West since the Renaissance and its categories: beauty, the academy and its disciplinary boundaries, and the artist's creative endeavour. His own project with *Ray*, in contrast, values radical experimentation in style and materials, synergies between the different arts, the combination of high and low cultural forms, and the collective spirit that characterises Continental movements. That is why Hunt builds a transnational network of European artists and brings them together in *Ray*, which will come to occupy a unique place in the British context. In this way, *Ray* may function as a prism through which European modernism, on the one hand, and a highly particular type of British modernism (among various other 'modernisms'), on the other, are seen in a new light.

The Periodical as a Work of Art

Of *Ray*'s editor, Sidney Hunt, not much is known. He was primarily a visual artist experimenting with various styles in the early years of his career. He had studied at the Slade School of Fine Art and held his first solo exhibition at the Mayor Gallery in London in 1925. *The Observer* called Hunt a 'new recruit to the *avant-garde*', who was 'well acquainted with the experiments of the French Cubists and the Italian Futurists, as well as our own Mr. Wyndham Lewis'.[11] Edmund Paul states that Hunt '*est éminemment "avancé", et sans doute le plus aventureux et expérimental parmi l'avant-garde des artistes anglais*'.[12] Moreover, Hunt was a member of the Seven and Five Society of painters and sculptors. He was recalled as a headstrong character, as the critic Maurice Fort wrote that Hunt 'apparently believes that the end justifies the means and fights shy of no device to attain his artistic aims'.[13] In addition to this artistic attitude, Hunt was openly homosexual, which tended to be more or less publicly frowned upon. For instance, Fort suggested that in Hunt's portrait of a 'group of naked boys on a beach', those 'who look for subject rather than form [...] will certainly find something to object to in his other figure subjects'.[14] After all, homosexuality was not decriminalised in England until 1967. However, there is no apparent inclusion of aspects of or allusions to Hunt's personal life on the pages of *Ray*.

Hunt's most lasting artistic exploit is *Ray* itself, which now functions as an *objet d'art*, a commodity prized for its rarity and collectability – a status that is not merely a consequence of its

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[11] Anon., 'Mr. Sidney Hunt', *The Observer*, 30 October 1925, <https://www.mayorgallery.com/exhibitions/488/overview> [accessed 26 February 2019].
[12] Paul, p. 2.
[13] Maurice Fort, 'The Seven and Five Society', *Artwork: International Quarterly of Arts & Crafts*, 2.2 (1926), 101.
[14] Ibid.

scarcity on the art market: it was conceived as such from the outset in a typically avant-garde attitude to the work of art as a creatively designed and well-crafted object. *Ray* no. 2, for instance, was announced not only as the most expensive, but also as 'the most beautiful' magazine in the world, with Hunt presenting it explicitly as a work of art.[15] This work of art measured 24.5x17 cm over 21 richly illustrated pages with black and white halftones, while its predecessor, the first issue, extended over 17 similar pages.[16] The issues were continuously paginated, which suggests that Hunt envisioned *Ray* as a cumulative work of art. Funding for *Ray* presumably came from subscriptions and donations alone, because neither of the two issues contains any commercial advertising.[17] A lack of funds, therefore, seems the most likely cause for *Ray*'s short-livedness; one can also imagine the difficulties involved in maintaining a sufficient number of contributions from a varied array of artists and writers within a limited time frame. Whatever the main reason was, *Ray* stopped appearing, seemingly without causing a great stir, during its one-year existence. Surviving issues gathered dust in archives, and Sidney Hunt was no longer alive after the Second World War to tell the story of *Ray* – at a time, that is, when literary critics and art historians began to pay attention to little magazines.[18]

We do not claim to have 'rediscovered' *Ray*. The magazine was never wholly forgotten: over the years it was regularly remembered and would receive varying degrees of attention (and mixed levels of approval), each time from a specific scholarly angle. In the 1960s, for instance, the British arts magazine *Form* discussed *Ray* in a returning feature titled 'Great Little Magazines', which in other issues devoted space to, among others, *Mécano*, *Blues*, *Kulchur*, *LEF*, *De Stijl* and *G*.[19] In art

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[15] At the time of its publication, *Ray* was relatively expensive. It was sold through an annual subscription of 10 shillings within the United Kingdom, 11 shillings elsewhere in Europe, and $3 in the United States (a sum that was comparable to the day's wage of a skilled tradesman at the time, and approximately £20 in current valuation). Considering that Hunt nowhere clearly stated the journal's frequency of appearance, a yearly subscription to *Ray* was a somewhat insecure investment.

[16] *Ray* contains no information about its publisher, printer or print run. It only states its editorial address: 27 Eastcastle Street, London. As this is the same address as that of *Artwork*, it is conceivable that *Ray* made use of *Artwork*'s network and infrastructure. Hunt contributed to almost every issue of *Artwork* from its launch in 1924 until mid-1927, when he was focusing on *Ray*.

[17] The only form of publicity that *Ray* featured was for foreign avant-garde publications belonging to Hunt's network (*De Stijl*, *Der Sturm*, *Manometre*, *Contimporanul*, *La Révolution surréaliste*) and for an exhibition by the Seven & Five Society (*R* 1, 17).

[18] See, for instance, Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*, 2nd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), a book that has been called 'a classic example of the institutional sanctioning of modernism's anxious and territorial mapping of its field' (Kirsten MacLeod, 'The Fine Art of Cheap Print: Turn-of-the-Century American Little Magazines', in *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms*, ed. by Ann Ardis and Patrick Collier (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 182–98, here p. 184). This estimation makes *Ray*'s omission from it all the more significant.

[19] *Form* could be described as a late modernist project with a keen interest in the legacy of the interwar avant-gardes. In essence, it regarded itself as a successor of the magazines it placed in the spotlight. *Ray*, which was featured in *Form* no. 5 (September 1967), was presented mainly from the point of view of magazine design and typography, understood as an integral element of the avant-gardes' artistic project.

history and literary history, some cursory examinations of *Ray* appeared around 1980. In Charles Harrison's *English Art and Modernism, 1900–1939*, *Ray* is laconically called 'interesting', presumably for being so unexpected in such an 'unpromising decade' in English art.[20] In the same year, Alan Young discussed Hunt from a literary point of view. Quickly reviewing *Ray*'s Continental influences, Young concluded that 'the aggression of its Modernism was relatively tame'.[21] Young's estimation shares with that of Harrison a teleological view, since he likewise regarded Hunt's work as an out-of-place, somewhat slapdash instance of a force that would only fully come into its own later in the interwar period; while Harrison was thinking of Unit One, Young looked to the linguistic experimentalism of the writers around *transition*.[22] Both were attempting to place *Ray* in the tradition of British modernism, where the magazine would be out of place due to its politics of representation, fragmentariness and interartial links and allusions. In other words, *Ray* appeared to them as unfinished and open-ended in comparison to its peer magazines.

In more recent years, the rise of twenty-first-century modernist studies and its interest in print culture has altered the critical evaluation of *Ray*. Miller and Price's bibliography of British little magazines, for instance, praised *Ray* as 'one of the highlights of the interwar little magazine in Britain'.[23] Furthermore, in a brief but informative essay, art historian Iria Candela pleads the case for Hunt and *Ray* to be 'reconsidered within the history of modern art in Britain'.[24] Describing *Ray*'s design, its editorial statements, and a number of its contributions, Candela concludes that '*Ray* demonstrates a predominantly Dada-Constructivist affiliation' and that a wider recognition of its existence might result in 'a different narrative […] of modern British art'.[25] Indeed, the significance of individual little magazines is not only due to their predominance at the time but also to their valorisation in histories of art and literature.

If *Ray* is in no need of another rediscovery, what it does need – and deserve, in our view – is a shift in critical outlook. So far, *Ray* has only been considered in a fragmented manner: as a hard-to-

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[20] Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism, 1900–1939*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 184. Harrison finds little to admire in Sidney Hunt, whose 'characteristic work at the time was a weak amalgam of Cubist and Art-Déco styles' (ibid.).

[21] Alan Young, *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 147.

[22] Unit One was a multi-art group of modernist artists formed by Paul Nash, which existed between 1933 and 1935. For a contemporary view on the group, see Herbert Read, *Unit One: The Modern Movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture* (London: Cassell, 1934). Alternatively, *transition* (1927–38) was an experimental journal founded in Paris by Maria McDonald and Eugene Jolas, featuring both avant-garde and modernist artists (see Eugene Jolas, *Man from Babel*, ed. by Andreas Kramer and Rainer Rumold (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998)). For example, Hunt's poem 'white limp droop UP', published in *transition* in 1927, shows familiarity with Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, but content-wise the poem reads more like an early instance of concrete poetry that tests the accuracy of linguistic representation.

[23] Miller and Price, p. 44.

[24] Candela, p. 244.

[25] Ibid., pp. 243–44.

categorise phenomenon in British art history; as a source of information about how its editor or its various contributions are to be considered in the history of modernism; as one of many short-lived little magazines; or as a case study in modernist graphic design. Even though all of these angles are illuminating in themselves, they do not ultimately do justice to the complex historical object that *Ray* was.

A Radically Interartistic Project

'How to remain young – keep that third eye-alertness', stated Hunt with a confident tone in the editorial to the second issue. In various Eastern spiritual traditions, the third eye refers to perception beyond ordinary sight, and in the modernist frame it became a token for mystical insight and vision.[26] Accordingly, Hunt seems to have envisioned the new modes of approaching the ordinary and everyday as revitalising. In an avant-gardist manner, this motto would function as a reading instruction to *Ray*, where the page design itself suggests unexpected links, allusions and cross-references between multiple visual and textual elements. A programmatic characteristic of *Ray* is its integration of all the arts in a typically avant-garde artistic vision. As Sascha Bru has shown, different strategies were adopted by avant-garde artists as to 'how the individual arts were to relate to the more encompassing project of a Total Art'.[27] Although Hunt does not favour one particular art form over others to 'contain' and synthesise them, a particular totalising strategy is illustrated by the magazine format itself, which showcases all the arts and, employing juxtaposition, fosters unique combinations enabled by the medium of the magazine as a 'miscellany'.

The contributions in *Ray* range from poetry to painting and graphic art, from architecture to sheet music, not to mention sculpture. Even though the performing arts are nearly impossible to reproduce in a magazine, theatre is present in the form of a manifesto by Herwarth Walden titled 'What is the Theatre?' (*R* 1, 11). *Ray* no. 1 opens with a painting: the famous 'Black Square' by Malevich. Immediately, however, that work's status as a painting becomes equivocal: when reproduced on a page, the 'Black Square' is no longer distinguishable from a graphic black square. Mechanical reproduction facilitates the creation of interartial allusions, as Lissitzky and Arp, who are

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[26] *Literary Modernism and the Occult Tradition*, ed. by Leon Surette and Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos (Orono, ME: The National Poetry Foundation, 1996); Gordon Bigelow, *The Poet's Third Eye: A Guide to the Symbolism of Modern Literature* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1976). In this respect, it is noteworthy that drawings of a left and a right eye respectively appear on pages 2 and 17 of *Ray* no. 1.

[27] Sascha Bru, *The European Avant-Gardes, 1905–1935: A Portable Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 35.

quoted on the same page, observe.[28] The ensuing pages are dominated by paintings as well, while the second half of the issue broadens the range to include a print of a skyscraper model by Mies van der Rohe, French poems by Malespine and Seuphor, and images of a glass sculpture by Naum Gabo and a woodcut by Moholy-Nagy. What is more, many of the individual works already combine different art forms: the de Chirico painting contains architectural and sculptural elements and gestures towards poetry in its lyrical and enigmatic title ('Le départ du poète'). In contrast, a striking collage by P. Capeli merges classical sculpture, industrial car design and even music, if the mechanical arm reaching to the open suitcase is interpreted as the arm of a gramophone (Fig. 1).[29] Yet another interconnection, on the level of the material used, is established between Gabo's glass sculpture and Mies's skyscraper 'in iron and glass'.

Fig. 1
<CAPTION>Capeli's collage is rich in interartial allusions while encouraging a 'new' mode of reading by dismissing conventional scale and rewriting the relations between its elements.</CAPTION>

In the second issue, this strategy is sustained and even intensified. Painting, sculpture, poetry and architecture are now supplemented with music (a rendition of the 'Largo' from Schwitters's *Ursonate*) and photography (a photo by Hunt himself). Schwitters was, of course, an excellent example of an artist who worked across many different art forms – two of his assemblages in this issue hold the middle between painting and sculpture.[30] A similar figure was Theo van Doesburg, who is equally well represented with an architectural model, a painting and (as I. K. Bonset) a sound poem. Here again, the interrelation between the arts is underscored using the visual correspondence of the model of the villa (*R* 2, 31) with the abstract geometric painting (*R* 2, 32). Both works accompany an introductory essay by Van Doesburg about the 'De Stijl' movement ('The Progress of the Modern Movement in Holland'), in which he advocates how the Stijl artists 'have, so to speak,

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[28] 'By the inflation of the square, the art exchanges have procured the means to deal in art to everybody. Now the production of works of art is judiciously so facilitated and simplified that nobody can do better than order his works of art by telephone from his bed, by a common painter.' (From 'The Isms of Art', by Lissitzky and Arp. Eugen Rentzsch Verlag, Zurich.) Quoted in *R* 1, 1.

[29] Iria Candela suspects that the otherwise unknown Capeli is a pseudonym of Hunt (Candela, p. 234n36). This is hard to prove, but also hard to disprove. However, a good clue can be found in Edmund Paul's essay booklet (dating from 1929) on Hunt's bookplates, which includes the same uncredited image that is featured in *Ray* no. 2 (p. 18). The style is unmistakably that of 'P. Capeli', which suggests that Capeli was indeed Hunt's pseudonym. Another twist in Hunt's 'pseudonymophilia' is the enigmatic character, Edmund Paul, who may also have been Hunt's *nom de guerre* (the translator H. Dort is equally elusive). Whatever the fact of the matter may be, the works by Hunt and Capeli included in *Ray* display distinct styles, which means that Hunt took care to create a separate 'author function' for the works of 'P. Capeli'.

[30] 'Konstruktion für edle Frauen' (1919) on page 24 and 'Das Undbild' (1919) on page 36 are early Merz constructions, comprising three-dimensional assemblages made of paint, paper, cardboard, wood and metal.

"elementarised" their means and have studied what are the true elements appropriate to each branch of art'; he advances architecture as 'the synthesis of all the arts' (*R* 2, 33). In yet a different way, the sound poems in this issue by Schwitters and Bonset also display an interartistic energy, as they appeal to both the aural and the visual senses.

Another striking aspect of the magazine that is exploited as an art form in its own right is typography and page design. At first sight, *Ray* seems to follow the avant-garde typographical design tradition begun in Britain by *BLAST* (1914–15) and Wyndham Lewis's later *The Enemy: A Review of Art and Literature* (1927–29), which was launched at almost the same time as Hunt's magazine in 1927. However, while Hunt was presumably acquainted with *BLAST*, the textual face of *Ray* was more indebted to the various Continental avant-garde little magazines, such as *Dada* (1917–21). In comparison to Lewis's magazine, *Ray* utilised far more radical ways of combining visual and textual material with multi-directional typesetting, the result being a centrifugal positioning of elements across the page, functioning as proto-ergodic literature.

Fig. 2 (Pages 28–29, issue 2)
<CAPTION>*Ray*'s interartiality and design challenge commonplace strategies of reading.</CAPTION>

The first line on the centre spread draws the reader's attention away from the first page and directs it to the following one, which portrays P. Capeli's work. Consisting of multiple concentric circles, this work is reminiscent of Duchamp's later rotoreliefs (1935), and the placement of the title on the right-hand page encourages the reader to turn the magazine upside down. Indeed, the centrefold disrupts the conventional mode of reading by requiring the reader to zigzag between the pages. If they turn the magazine 180 degrees in order to read the title of Capeli's work, they might continue by reading Schwitters's poems on the adjacent page. Not turning the magazine, however, results in an equally centrifugal reading. Following the graphic elements on page 28, that is, the lines, arrows and hand (the latter being instantly recognisable from Dada journals), the reader's gaze is directed to a painting by Albert Gleizes, the French artist who was the self-proclaimed founder of Cubism. During the interwar period, Gleizes was studying displacements of original forms in painting through movements (what he called 'translations') and rotations of the planes of the picture.[31] This is to say that the painting's recognisable elements are reduced to biomorphic and geometric shapes due to their mutual 'misalignment', which obscures their relations. In this sense, Gleizes's painting reflects the whole page, where the idea of movement and the aim of guiding the eye of the beholder in a preordained manner are fundamental. Following the painting, the reader arrives at the poems by

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[31] Albert Gleizes, *La Peinture et ses lois, ce qui devait sortir du cubisme* (Paris, n.p., 1924).

Schwitters, which require turning the page 180 degrees. Here physical movement is involved, not merely its idea or representation. The *Lautgedichte* further allude to movements of the mouth in their recitation. Some of the sounds (such as 'too') reiterate the basic form of Capeli's work, not only visually (as the letter 'o') but also physically: one's mouth assumes a circular shape as the vowel is spoken. Moreover, their column-like typography directs the gaze back to the beginning. Altogether, this movement forms what could be called a 'hermeneutic spiral': the reader returns to the beginning but no longer in the same cognitive state, due to the affective and evocative contents of the page – in other words, the reading of the spread.[32]

Fig. 3

<CAPTION>*Ray*'s page design combined highbrow and lowbrow forms with typographical elements.</CAPTION>

Interaction between different art forms and creative page design contribute in *Ray* to a sardonic tone. In the case of *Ray*, humour is in the details. For instance, in the above image, a painting by Kandinsky is recontextualised ambiguously. Kandinsky's geometric abstraction displays partly machine-like and technological elements, some of which are simultaneously reminiscent of a chicken's head with a beak and a wattle. Underneath the painting Hunt has placed a drawing or a scrap relief (a lowbrow pictorial form) of two chickens with a chick, with an apparent reference to the avant-garde painting by Kandinsky. Instead of mocking Kandinsky or providing a didactic guideline on how to interpret modern art, the combination exemplifies the exchange between high and low cultural forms, going beyond modernist conventions that tended to favour less ambiguous combinations. Also, the page contains some compositional design elements, such as two minimalistic rectangular shapes next to the scrap relief with its Victorian tinge, and an oversized page number.

On the one hand, these shapes reflect the geometric elements and composition of Kandinsky's work; on the other, they are one of the basic geometric shapes a child learns to draw. Hence, the elements are not only crucial from a compositional aspect (of the page) but also link the various elements together in terms of content. In short, *Ray*'s interartistic input is based on innovative and even playful allusions while the page design supports the avant-gardist idea of reading in a non-conventional manner, crossing different art forms and 'brows' as well as stimulating motoric movement.

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[32] It should be noted that the 'eye-massage' also connects back to *Ray* no. 1, as a big concentric circle graced the front cover of that issue. From the very start, one might say, *Ray* intended to catch its readers' eyes, entrancing them to embrace the art of the avant-garde.

Transnational Networks

In a manner characteristic of avant-garde little magazines, *Ray* listed its present and future contributors, who formed a collaborative network (Fig. 4). This network was transnational, as aesthetic ideas and conventions crossed borders without appropriation. Where Pascale Casanova essentially suggested that every innovation emerged in a centre (e.g. Paris, London, Berlin) and spread out, her so-called centre-periphery model has since been contested in numerous ways, with the focus shifting towards 'horizontal' networks of peers.[33] The transnational avant-garde networks are characteristically non-hierarchical, even though their membership is necessarily limited in order for them to qualify as 'avant-garde'.[34] In practice, such networks connected cultural (and in some cases, ethnic-cultural) minorities through 'weak ties' that were often upheld through correspondence.[35]

Hunt was eager to experiment with various styles, but his works did not find a particularly receptive audience in Britain, so he started sending his work to foreign editors. In awe, he confided to his fellow artist Paul Nash that 'advanced foreign journals [are] very genial and willing to ignore our "academic" sins for the sake of finding out what English modernists are doing'.[36] He mentioned that the Romanian journal *Contimporanul* would be reproducing one of his abstract paintings and noted this being 'a recognition which has given me much pleasure'.[37] If little magazines 'helped to install [a] borderless space and facilitated the untrammeled traffic of artistic energy',[38] the case of *Ray* makes it abundantly clear that this was for Hunt always two-way traffic: exposing British artists and the public to Continental movements, and, vice versa, showing British art and artworks of kindred spirits to fellow artists on the Continent. As the editor of *Ray*, he would be seen as an essential mediating figure on both sides of the Channel, much like the Belgian artist E. L. T. Mesens. Both of their networks ranged from the British Isles to the Continent.

Hunt cleverly managed the abundance of Continental material. He announced that *Ray* would not propagate any particular 'ism': 'Its pages will be open to, and inoculated against, all the

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[33] Pascale Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999).

[34] Michal Wenderski, *Cultural Mobility in the Interwar Avant-Garde Art Network: Poland, Belgium and the Netherlands* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 17. For a further discussion, see Piotr Piotrowski, 'Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde', in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, ed. by Sascha Bru and others (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 49–58 (p. 53).

[35] Within such networks, groups identifying with a particular 'ism' would negotiate and even disagree, as the cases of dada (in Zurich, Berlin and Paris) and surrealism (e.g. groups in Paris, Brussels and Bucharest) illustrate.

[36] Here the term 'academic' refers to the so-called academic art, favouring neoclassicism and romanticism.

[37] Letter to Paul Nash, quoted in Candela, p. 241.

[38] Bru, p. 18.

Isms.'[39] The idea seems to be that all the vital (Continental) avant-garde movements, however incompatible they might be, were to be rallied against the tedious English artistic climate. By providing a supposedly neutral ground with his magazine, Hunt aspired to revitalise British culture without fully 'capitulating' to a particular Continental 'ism'. This was an opposite approach to that of, the contemporaneous Romanian constructivist magazine *Integral*, for instance, which proclaimed that it integrated and synthesised all previous avant-garde aesthetics into one.[40] Hunt was hesitant; after all, Continental movements were not as familiar in Britain as they were *in situ*. Some of his texts, especially in the first issue of *Ray*, seem almost didactic in their attempt to introduce the very basics of the avant-garde movements' aesthetics to the British reader uninitiated in modernism. *Ray*'s pedagogy was not theoretical, however, but rather it was based on showcasing works of art in order to provide an acute and immediate sense of avant-garde aesthetics.

The lists of contacts and contributors from abroad included in many little magazines, such as the one in *Ray*, were far from comprehensive and mirrored the inner conflicts of these networks. Indeed, inclusion and exclusion were both conspicuous signals. However, Hunt's magazine was able to steer clear of disputes brewing on the Continent, some of which would come to a head later. For instance, in the early 1930s, Theo Van Doesburg founded *Abstraction-Création* to counteract Bretonian surrealism, yet both his and the surrealist André Masson's works were printed in *Ray*. Regarding the network, *Ray*'s unique input was to incorporate aesthetic innovations from *throughout* the Continental avant-garde movements, both geographically and temporally. Such a 'curated' view of the avant-gardes is a sign of appropriation, reflecting Hunt's sovereign use of avant-gardist material in his cross-Channel endeavour.

Hailing from Eastcastle Street in Fitzrovia, London's famous artistic and bohemian centre during the interwar period, *Ray* reproduced works by an impressive line-up of international contributors without effacing its British origins (Fig. 4). Hunt's primary concern was to stir up the avant-garde spirit among British artists by showcasing recent developments in the Continental movements. To that end, he also included several essays or manifestos by artists such as Van Doesburg and Walden. Hunt also included works by fellow British artists whose works were in line with the Continental aesthetics he favoured. By recruiting fellow members of the Seven and Five Society (such as Ben Nicholson and Claude Flight) to contribute to *Ray*, he maintained a connection

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[39] However, the header of the subscription bulletin includes a typewritten blurb stating 'Dadaism. Surrealism. Cubism. Futurism. Suprematism::: the only english [sic] periodical devoted exclusively to new art movements', which was added later. 'Subscription Bulletin', Tate Archive.

[40] Scans of some issues of *Integral: revistă de sinteză modernă* are available at the Bucharest Central Library. See <http://digitool.dc.bmms.ro:8881/R/?func=collections&collection_id=3262> [Accessed 28 February 2019]

with contemporary British art and emphatically inscribed it in the transnational project of the avant-garde.

Fig. 4

<CAPTION>Contributors to *Ray* hailed from the Continent and the British Isles.</CAPTION>

Hunt proudly advertised his magazine's transnationalism with a list of contributors organised alphabetically by country. He included only one Belgian (Jozef Peeters), however, because the Antwerpian Michel Seuphor (Fernand-Louis Berckelaers) is listed as French. Future issues would feature a cavalcade of international artists, including Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, Max Ernst, Gertrude Stein, Theo van Doesburg and George Grosz. All of these figures were mainstays of the various European avant-garde movements, to the extent that Hunt listed some only by their surname (e.g. 'Chirico', 'Gabo' and 'Malewitsch').[41]

How did Hunt manage to compile a network consisting of such key figures? Hunt had likely met many of them in Paris. Especially de Chirico seems like the odd one out in the group of avant-gardists, even though at the time he was hailed a pioneer of pre-surrealist painting by André Breton. Hunt and Janco had already collaborated in 1925 when the latter published reproductions of Hunt's paintings in *Contimporanul*.[42] He had also collaborated with Walden, who published his bookplates in *Der Sturm* in 1927. It is conceivable that a similar collaboration would have been launched with *Ray*, as Britain otherwise lacked comparable, direct networks with Continental avant-garde literature and art. In this context, one should not forget that in the 1910s and 1920s, avant-garde art also had a market value among collectors, and seeking economic gain would not have been unheard of in the avant-gardist circles.[43] Therefore, providing a list of contributors with their respective nationalities may not only have added to *Ray*'s credibility but also made the magazine more appealing to potential subscribers.

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[41] Adoption of the German transliteration of Malevich's name suggests that Hunt came into contact with his work through German publications.

[42] Hunt's works were reproduced in issues 60 (September) and 61 (October) in 1925. *Contimporanul* was published in Romanian, so it is unlikely that Hunt could have read the articles. Most issues are available through the University of Cluj Digital Library (<http://dspace.bcucluj.ro/jspui/handle/123456789/13576>) [Accessed 28 February 2019].

[43] A common practice was to produce so-called *grand papier* versions of artists' books. The sale of these luxury editions funded the more modest print run. Regardless of the radical rhetoric of the avant-garde, the artists in the movements often took part in the bourgeois art market (with the notable exception, for instance, of the Belgian surrealists). In this sense, Hunt's promotion of *Ray* as the most expensive magazine can be regarded as a sarcastic comment on the avant-garde 'art market'.

Of particular interest from a transnationalist perspective is the network of *Ray*'s contributors in the Low Countries, because their magazines were not as internationally well-known as their French and German counterparts. For instance, Van Doesburg, whose texts were included in the second issue, had sought in vain to publish his writings in Britain. His theoretical texts 'appeared, in translation, in German, French, and numerous East and South European periodicals, but only in 1927 did he grace the English with a summary of recent Dutch innovative art in the small periodical *Ray*, edited by the painter-poet Sidney Hunt, who was above all Europe- and Cubist-oriented'.[44] Accounts such as this illustrate Hunt's crucial and pioneering position in importing Continental avant-garde ideas and creating visibility for movements and artists from abroad.

Another case in point is the Belgian connection, which illustrates even better the 'horizontal' nature of many a transnational avant-garde network, since both Britain and Belgium would be considered 'peripheral' areas when it came to avant-garde activity. Peeters and Seuphor, who are featured in *Ray* no. 1 with a painting and a poem, respectively, were the editors of the Antwerp-based magazine *Het Overzicht* ('The Overview').[45] Hunt may, of course, have known *Het Overzicht* directly, but it is also possible that he was referred to the Belgians via his network in Berlin, where Peeters and Seuphor had met Walden and Moholy-Nagy at the end of 1922 – linocuts by Peeters had also appeared in *Der Sturm* from 1922 to 1925 – or in Paris, where Seuphor had settled in 1925. Although *Het Overzicht* had closed down by the time of the appearance of *Ray*'s first issue in 1926, the presence of Peeters's work in *Ray* suggests that he had succeeded in putting himself forward as the leader of the Belgian avant-garde through its mouthpiece *Het Overzicht* and that Hunt approached him for that reason.

Seuphor later commented that with *Het Overzicht*, 'l'essentiel était l'échange avec d'autres revues de même esprit partout dans le monde'.[46] He envisaged the same two-way traffic as Hunt did: importing the work and views of European artists and movements to Belgium was one thing; finding a bigger audience (and market) for their work and that of their like-minded compatriots was definitely another. Peeters, for instance, sent a portfolio of his linocuts to many foreign periodicals, including *De Stijl* and *Der Sturm*, but also *The Little Review*.[47] This indicates that, as was the case with

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[44] Sjoerd van Faassen and Hans Renders, 'Theo van Doesburg and Wyndham Lewis: An Aborted Attempt at Collaboration', *The Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies*, 8 (2017), 30–56 (p. 46). For a further discussion of the relations between van Doesburg and the Belgian avant-gardes, see August Hans den Boef and Sjoerd van Faassen, *Van De Stijl en* Het Overzicht *tot* De Driehoek: *Belgisch-Nederlandse netwerken in het modernistische interbellum* (Antwerpen-Apeldoorn: Garant, 2013), pp. 27–56.

[45] Seuphor co-edited *Het Overzicht* under his real name Fernand Berckelaers. Hunt may not have been aware that they were, in reality, the same person, since this was not widely known at the time of *Het Overzicht*. The fact that he listed Seuphor as French points in this direction.

[46] Quoted in den Boef and Van Faassen, *Van De Stijl en* Het Overzicht *tot* De Driehoek, p. 19.

[47] Ibid., p. 37.

Van Doesburg, Peeters was eager to make his work known in the English-speaking world, too. Indeed, in comparison with *Ray*, the *Overzicht* editors were at least as well-connected throughout Europe and beyond, and printed a similar list advertising their network (including magazines in Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Vienna and Lyon, but also New York and Brazil).[48] Such networks would necessarily be multilingual and include various alternative and overlapping avant-garde 'isms'. Like Hunt's 'art miscellany', *Het Overzicht* claimed to be neutral ground where no 'ism' was dogmatically imposed, even though the centrality of constructivism is apparent. Nonetheless, it devoted space to various movements represented by figures such as Russolo, Kassak, the Delaunays, Moholy-Nagy, Malespine and Walden (the last three also appeared in *Ray*).

In the case of *Ray*, the compilation of contributors representing various backgrounds, regions and aesthetic ideologies means that the magazine did not impose a robust programmatic vision on the works displayed in its pages, but instead remained receptive to Continental ideas and approaches. A practical matter in this respect was the gathering of materials, and one can only surmise about Hunt's sources and methods. Some seems to have been sent in by contributors, which the editor then selected, while Hunt may have acquired other material from alternate sources (such as other magazines or anthologies). This is to say that there was no strong thematic or aesthetic principle behind the selection in *Ray*. However, there was an editorial strategy behind the combination of the various contributions, especially when it came to the transnational vision that emphasised correspondences between Continental and British art. One instance, the synergy between Capeli's 'Eye Massage' and the painting by Gleizes in the centre spread of *Ray* no. 2, has already been discussed above. Similar cross-alliances were suggested, for example, by the placement of a Capeli collage within the text of Kurt Schwitters's essay on 'Art and the Times' (*R* 1, 4) or the juxtaposition across a double page, with Marcel Janco's 'Lyrical Composition' on the one hand and paintings by Hunt and Ben Nicholson (*R* 1, 12–13) on the other.

Whether readers of *Ray* were convinced by Hunt's proposition of productive transnational relationships or not, *Ray* would in any case have presented a broad smorgasbord of more radical contemporary art and literature than the potential British reader was likely to come across elsewhere among British little magazines. For publications of a like-minded spirit, readers were referred to 'some foreign publications dealing with [the] modern effort in art and work' (*R* 1, 17) – all of them Continental; the list included the Bauhausbücher series, *Manomètre*, *La révolution surréaliste*, and the 1925 anthology *Kunstismus* by El Lissitzky and Hans Arp. Yet, in a shrewd final move, below the list of foreign publications, beneath a thick black line, as if it were the sum total of European avant-

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[48] 'Het netwerk', *Het Overzicht* no. 20 (January 1924), 136.

gardism, we get the details about the latest Seven & Five Society exhibition, where Hunt and Nicholson, among others, were showing their work.

Art, Craft and the Avant-Garde

In a rare instance of *Ray*'s editorial voice intruding amid the works of art, a comment about 'ACADEMICISM (all kinds)' appears on page 12: 'Be goooood sweeeeet mai-eed and let who wi-i-ill beee cle-ever.' The line, borrowed from a nineteenth-century poem by Charles Kingsley ('A Farewell'), is a Victorian piety mockingly repurposed here as the motto of all kinds of academicism in the art world. Its sardonic tone reveals Hunt likening academicism to an inherent subservience to classicist aesthetics. In the academy, we are led to understand, one is told to follow the rules and to leave creativity and experimentation to the swaggering impostors out in the world. This ostensibly juvenile anti-academic statement is not merely a timid rebellion against the art schools and the methods and styles favoured by them. It can be unpacked to reveal a more sustained critique of the ideology of 'fine art' as such and of a version of (mainly pictorial) modernism in Britain that remained attached to this institution. *Ray* offers more than a few hints as to what this critique entailed; in combination with elements from Hunt's career as an artist and editor, an alternative modernist project – in line with the transnational avant-garde, yet distinctly English at the same time – comes into view.

As an artist, Hunt was somewhat a jack of all trades. Indeed, his contemporary, Edmund Paul, noted that for Hunt 'l'*Art est trompeur et multilatéral, se trouvant des fois dans des endroits inattendus*'.[49] Besides Hunt's work in painting and poetry, he also produced linocuts and designed bookplates.[50] This range of activity demonstrates that Hunt worked across the traditional distinction between 'fine art' and 'applied art' (alternatively labelled 'decorative art', 'craftwork' or 'design'). The woodcut and the linocut had gained popularity among avant-garde artists before the First World War (for instance, in German Expressionism), and in Britain they are often associated with the artist Claude Flight.[51] Flight, who worked in a futurist style, happened to be among the four British artists included in *Ray* no. 1. Linocuts by Hunt himself did not appear in *Ray*, but were published in *Der*

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[49] Paul, p. 19.

[50] In general, Hunt was willing to portray himself in various guises in different contexts: as a bookplate artist in the British *Artwork* and German *Der Sturm*, an abstract artist in the Romanian *Contimporanul*, and a poet both in the French *transition* and the British *Seed* (published in 1933). Paul (p. 17) mentions that by 1929, Hunt had also started to experiment with photomontages.

[51] For a discussion of Flight's vision of the linocut as an art form in between high art and popular culture, ideally suited for consumption by the middle classes, see Hana Leaper, '"Old-fashioned modern": Claude Flight's *Lino-Cuts* and Public Taste in the Interwar Period', *Modernist Cultures*, 11.3 (2016), 389–408.

Sturm in 1927 and 1928. All of those were bookplates, a particular type of decorative art in which Hunt specialised. While bookplates designed by artists were not uncommon a century ago (Paul Nash, for example, produced some fine specimens), they have only recently begun to be more widely recognised as a source of high-quality miniature art.[52] Hunt, who acted as a secretary of the English Bookplate Society and as an editor of its magazine *The Bookplate*, was intent not on elevating the form from the marginal to 'fine art' but instead on engaging high and low cultural forms in a dialogue: high-quality graphic artwork in a ('high') modernist idiom printed on an inexpensively reproducible object.[53] Bookplates had indeed an important role in his work: his '*ex-libris constituent une grande partie de son oeuvre et il leur apporte la même puissance d'invention, le même soin méticuleux, la même quasi-solennité qu'à ses travaux plus importants*'.[54] Hunt's diligence for the bookplate speaks to his belief in the ideal of the artist-craftsman producing objects both beautiful and functional – an ideal that places him in the tradition of the Arts and Crafts movement. The association is particularly strong, as the bookplate belongs to the 'arts of the book' broadly speaking, a particular interest of William Morris himself.

Hunt's grounding in this tradition is even more evident in his role as a co-editor for *Artwork*, subtitled 'The International Quarterly of Arts and Crafts', the magazine that *Ray* shared its editorial office with. *Artwork* devoted much attention to decorative and applied arts, from poster art and bookplates to textiles and stained glass, and placed them on an equal footing with so-called 'fine art'. Interestingly, it reproduced and discussed illustrations by an artist like Walter Crane, a genuine Arts and Crafts figure, alongside contributions by the most radical British modernists, such as Wyndham Lewis, Edward Wadsworth and Frederick Etchells.[55]

Hunt's appreciation of craftsmanship likewise shines through in his work outside of the applied arts. His interest in the technical aspects of craftwork is evident in the poem 'design V', published in *transition* in 1927.

      design V

BRONZE PLATES WITH

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[52] See, for example, Martin Hopkinson, *Ex Libris: The Art of Bookplates* (London: British Museum Press, 2011).
[53] Hunt's involvement in bookplate design may have been, at least in part, a materialist question. Canvasses and pigments were costly and required exhibiting, whereas bookplates would have been mainly made to order.
[54] Paul, p. 2.
[55] There is evidence that Hunt was already expanding his transnational network while co-editing *Artwork*. For example, *Artwork* exchanged advertisements with the Brussels-based modernist magazine *Sélection*, which focused on fine as well as applied arts. Moreover, a letter from Hunt in the archive of *Sélection* editor André De Ridder shows that Hunt used his position at *Artwork* to seek opportunities to spread his work abroad; for example, he asked De Ridder if he could send drawings or photographs of paintings to be considered for publication in *Sélection*, adding: 'I think I may say I am one of the coming English modernists.' Hunt to De Ridder, 5 February 1925, Letterenhuis archive (Antwerp), BE-ANN07/lh/R462/1103, no. R 462 / 904.

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EXTRA
DEEP   CHISELLED
V-CUT

LETTERS

        SOLID
        BEAUTIFUL
        LEGIBLE
        PERMANENT[56]
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The poem's title – in lower case perhaps to pay homage to the parent publication or to highlight the contrast with the depth of the 'V' cut – refers to design, which here denotes the very practical aspect of *Formgebung* ('form-giving') as artistic practice, not industrial design. In other words, the poem deals with the material labour involved in the engraver's craft and the exhilarated contentment of the artist-craftsman at work. The words in the latter part of the poem, however, recall (neo-)classicist associations: permanence, sublime beauty and visual clarity in the form of readability seem to contest what Hunt was promoting on the pages of *Ray*. Indeed, they sound precisely like a typically 'academic' insistence on rules, technical skill, and the importance of tradition. Hunt here appears to have switched roles from the rebellious editor of *Ray* to another kind of artist altogether. Yet, what this poem makes clear is that the attack on 'academicism' in *Ray* is not a rejection of the rules and skills learned in art schools – the careful honing of a technique handed down by tradition was a positive value for craftsmen working in the applied arts, which Hunt admired. His impatience was not so much with academies as with academic*ism*, a set of values enforced by a conservative discourse on 'fine art'.

  This impatience with traditional views of 'fine art' can also be found quite literally in *Ray*. 'Fine art is banished', a quote from Malevich affirms on the very first page. A few pages further, the essay by Kurt Schwitters appears to have been selected to elaborate this point, as it strongly denounces what Schwitters calls 'art fashion' and redefines the notion of 'art' against and beyond the one honoured by the traditional institutions. By 'art fashion', Schwitters means the styles that are fashionable in a certain period, but also the specialists' discourse legitimating them. True art, he argues, is found elsewhere:

> In periods of fashion in Art, many incompetents occupy themselves with Art because such occupation then brings wealth, glory and position of distinction. […] But Art is not bound down or restricted by the professional artist, for there is no such profession in this sense. And so it may come about that Art -- quite apart from the professionally working

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[56] Sidney Hunt, 'design V', *transition*, 2 (1927), 135.

incompetent artist -- exists where nobody of the community of snobs supposes it to exist, maybe in handicraft or in the play of a child. (*R* 1, 6–7)

This redefinition of art may have prompted the inclusion of a child's drawing in *Ray* no. 2, but Hunt must also have identified himself with Schwitters's celebration of artists working in the crafts:

The fact is that many artists have other occupations; but one must not draw the conclusion that the fact of art has outlived itself; for even where the Art factor expresses itself as a formation in handicraft or in industry, it is still alive; and even much more alive than the work of the artist of fashion. So now in many cases art saves itself by entering into handicraft, industry and the play of a child, unfettered though forming a thing with a different purpose. (*R* 1, 7)

While the 'artist of fashion' (i.e. the professional painter celebrated by the 'snobs') furnishes the art market with 'fine art' that is, in reality, unartistic, the craftsman working outside this institutionally sanctioned milieu keeps the spirit of art alive.

One such milieu, from the standpoint of someone like Hunt, was Bloomsbury. As a graphic artist but also as a poet and a painter, Hunt stood outside this artistic hub, which dominated 'modernism' in Britain in the interwar period. Bloomsbury intellectuals, such as Roger Fry and Clive Bell, shaped the discourse on visual modernism after the First World War, championing the particular 'art fashion' which they had first defined around 1910: Post-Impressionism. They identified the modern movement with 'a move towards progressive autonomy' and 'elevation of the status of formal design per se'.[57] This brand of aestheticist formalism was challenged in England for a very brief time before the War, when a 'radical', 'militant', 'rebel' avant-garde faction *blasted* Bloomsbury and its autonomist conception of art: Vorticism was a celebration of the machine, violence, and of art's social function as a catalyst of profound cultural change. The classic narrative has it that this type of radical avant-gardism was smothered by the horrors of actual machine-age warfare, especially in Britain.[58]

Despite the general 'return to order' that can be seen in interwar British modernism, *Ray* exemplifies that the 'spirit of avant-gardism' was not absent from British art and literature in the 1920s. While *Ray* may not be an example of a 'militant', 'violent', 'destructive' avant-garde project after the image of Futurism or Vorticism, it is no less 'avant-garde' in the sense suggested by Peter

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[57] Harrison, p. 60.

[58] See Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age, Vol. 2: Synthesis and Decline* (London: Fraser, 1976). After the war, Lewis and other pre-war Vorticists (Wadsworth, Roberts, Dismorr, Etchells) – Cork calls them 'the lapsed revolutionaries' (p. 545) – formed Group X to revive the spirit of avant-gardism. According to one critic, the group was mainly Lewis's new vehicle for attacks against Bloomsbury and Roger Fry (Andrew Wilson, 'Demobilization: The End of Vorticism or Another "Blast"? 1919–1921', in *Vorticism*, ed. by Andrew Wilson, ICSAC Cahier 8/9 (Brussels: Internationaal centrum voor structuuranalyse en constructivisme, 1988), pp. 205–19).

Bürger, which highlights the confluence of art and life.[59] In fact, *Ray*'s attack against academicism and 'art fashion' logically leads to a vision of art as integrated with everyday life. It opposes the 'fine art' ideology that went unchallenged in Fry and Bell's modernist vision of aesthetic autonomy, a formalism practised in a sphere separate from the social. *Ray*'s interartistic page design, for instance, enacts Hunt's avant-garde stance against 'fine art': stimulating motoric movement, encouraging the reader to manipulate the object in hand, as with the double spread in *Ray* no. 2 (Fig. 2), comes down to a more fundamental challenge of the passive, contemplative attitude towards works of art favoured by the traditional notion of 'fine art'.[60] It is also in this respect that Hunt's multiple roles as an experimental painter-poet and a craftsman become understandable: in a sense, this variety of roles enacts the integration of art and everyday life, of the formal and the functional, of 'high' art and 'low' craft.

It is in this sense – an emphasis on functionalism and a focus on craftwork, industrial art, and design – that Michael Saler has identified a particular type of 'avant-gardism' in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s.[61] Saler argues that Bürger's opposition between 'modernism' and 'avant-garde' can be modified to accommodate formalism and functionalism as antinomic aspects within modernism itself. This notion of a version of modernism that favours functionalism over formalism, he argues, brings into view a native English interwar avant-garde, the practitioners of which he calls 'medieval modernists'. Medieval modernism emerged from an informal network of artists, critics, educators and institutions that developed a discourse which 'challenged Fry and Bell's formalist conception of art and sought to integrate modern art and modern life'.[62]

In the context of this challenging endeavour, the Middle Ages recur as a trope in interwar discussions of art:

> The English avant-garde repudiated the separation of 'art' from 'craft' or 'design' that had occurred during the Renaissance, and sought to restore the classical and medieval definition of art as simply a well-constructed artefact that was fit for its purpose. […] Similar ideas can be found among modernists on the Continent.[63]

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[59] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[60] In the latter role, Hunt even contributed a futurism-inspired 'readie' to Bob Brown's machine-reading project, which was launched on the pages of *transition*. Brown regarded the book as an obsolete interface and intended readies – fragmentary, often non-syntactical texts – as the proper way literature could keep up with the developing reading practices of a cinema-viewing public. Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 89–92.

[61] Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[62] Ibid., p. 8.

[63] Ibid., pp. 9–10.

Indeed, the idealised image of the Middle Ages did not only spread among the British artists of the interwar period. However, Continental artists active in Expressionism and Dada (e.g. Kandinsky, Schwitters, Hugo Ball) went a step further, so to speak. They frequently applied the metaphor of a medieval 'cathedral', which stood in for the Tönniesian community (*Gemeinschaft*) as a kind of figure of thought.[64] In their use, the medieval community denotes an informal network in the modern age. The particularity of this figure of thought is apparent in the oxymoron of 'medieval modernism', which captures a twofold idea: on the one hand, the medieval, past community provided the means to criticise the rational and 'enlightened' people of the city, as well as their 'fine art' and academicism, while, on the other, it enabled a mythological vision of a utopian future that could be modelled on the medieval community – or how it was perceived during the interwar period. However, the English avant-garde was not as thoroughly engaged with medieval mysticism as many Continental movements, especially Expressionist ones. Therefore, instead of seeking religious or romantic solace, the English avant-garde revived, as Saler writes, 'the moribund arts and crafts tradition'.[65]

Focusing on institutional figures such as W. R. Lethaby, William Rothenstein, Frank Pick and Herbert Read, Saler notes how they 'sought an underlying totality that reconciled such antinomies as the personal and the universal, the transient and the permanent, the expressive and the rational'.[66] Based on this conviction, the movement reintroduced certain pre-modern (i.e. pre-Renaissance) notions about the function of art into modernism by reinstating the Arts and Crafts ideal of fusing 'fine' and 'applied' art without reverting to the anti-modern or anti-industrial romanticism of Ruskin and Morris. Saler points out that they also had more pragmatic motives; by witnessing the success of the German *Werkbund*, they 'intended to rescue the legacy of Ruskin and Morris from both the Germans and the more staid English arts and crafts enthusiasts'.[67] Institutions such as the British Institute of Industrial Art (BIIA) and the Design and Industries Association (DIA) made it their mission to wed the Arts and Crafts ideal to industrial production, in order to get artists to work in industrial design. To what extent Sidney Hunt was involved in these projects is hard to reconstruct – what we know is that his bookplates entered the Victoria & Albert Museum's collection via the BIIA, which in all likelihood means that he took part in the BIIA exhibitions organised in the 1920s.

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[64] Staffan Källström, *Framtidens katedral: Medeltidsdröm och utopisk modernism* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2000), pp. 97, 133.

[65] Saler, p. 62.

[66] Ibid., p. 24.

[67] Ibid., p. 62. A similar sentiment is ascribed to Hunt by Edmund Paul: '*Reconnaissant que les machines ne sont que des outils, il n'a pas de sympathie pour les amateurs sentimentaux de "travail à la main", qui sont si nombreux en Angleterre*' (p. 18).

In any case, if various elements here discussed indicate that Sidney Hunt was embedded in the Arts and Crafts tradition, Saler's account makes it clear that this tradition was fully in the process of receiving a machine-age update at the hands of the 'medieval modernists'. By all accounts, Hunt's work as an artist and an editor seems to fit Saler's description of 'medieval modernism', even though Hunt nowhere explicitly refers to the Middle Ages. In a sense, Hunt went all the way, taking this position to its logical consequences in allying his version of modernism, embedded in distinctly English discourse, to avant-garde movements on the Continent that advocated similar views of art. All this gives a whole new dimension to *Ray*'s 'Dada-Constructivist affiliation' (Candela's phrase): it was not just imported from the Continent and dumped on the British art market. On the contrary, in Hunt's curatorial vision, Schwitters, Van Doesburg, Lissitzky and others were given new meaning within the framework of this native English art discourse that associated avant-garde design with the arts and crafts ideal of art. Moreover, *Ray* was meant to be more than just a vehicle showcasing Continental art; presenting itself as 'a work of art' because it was 'the first English example of modern bookmaking' (*R* 2, 18), *Ray* was to embody the ideal of an artfully designed object by a skilful craftsman.

As an artist-craftsman, Sidney Hunt was unquestionably one of the key figures of British interwar art, especially in his role as a mediator of and publicist for Continental avant-garde art and literature. At the heart of that London modernist scene, he attempted to carve out space for an alternative British 'modernism' more attuned to Continental avant-garde movements. Taking into account Hunt's aversion to the term 'modernism' as an artistic label, it almost seems like *Ray* was designed to escape comparison with other (British) magazines and categorisation as a 'modernist' phenomenon. Despite its confident avant-gardism, the magazine refused to commit to a particular identifiable 'ism', making it difficult to categorise even in terms of Continental movements such as Futurism, Surrealism or Constructivism. Nonetheless, *Ray* was unique in many senses, not least in its bold interartistic approach and its original straddling of the divide between high and low cultural forms. This strategy fits into Hunt's attack against a conservative 'fine art' ideology. Comprehensive analysis of *Ray*'s interartistic and transnational ethos enables us to understand *Ray* both as a figurehead in a broader vision of an alternative modernism emerging out of the ashes of Britain's Arts and Crafts tradition and as a substrate for an avant-garde movement in the spirit of Continental avant-gardism. A phenomenon like *Ray* and a position such as that taken by Sidney Hunt merit a critical re-evaluation that could reawaken a general interest in the complex cross-Channel exchange of ideas taking place in the modernist period. Such a re-evaluation would shed new light on the occasional arguments regarding the endemic and particular character of British modernism. Hunt's many roles in the British interwar avant-garde provide an utterly unique view on the cross-exposure

of a variant of the avant-garde that remained receptive yet determined to maintain its own

independent, sometimes stubborn, aims.