Art, Politics and Society in Britain (1880-1914)
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Edited by

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This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-1364-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1364-8

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PREFACE

One of the oldest words in politics is “new”. One of the oldest words in the writing of history may well be “modern”. It is, without doubt, one of the most overworked adjectives in the English language (though marginally less abused than the ubiquitous “nice”: at least if we are to judge by the results thrown up in seconds by various internet search engines). But the frustration sometimes born of this indeterminacy is perhaps just another way of saying that the difficulties raised are of a kind which simply will not go away. The “modern”, it almost seems, is now, has been and shall be for evermore.

And yet, the status of the word, its apparent timelessness, is immediately thrown into sharp relief if one looks at the history of the term. The Oxford English Dictionary (online edition) begins its voluminous entry for “modern” in the year 1485–an interesting coincidence to the extent that many (British) historians might place the beginning of the “modern” period precisely in the year which saw the end of the Wars of the Roses. Yet the meaning of “modern” here is limited to what is “present” or “current”. We have to wait until a century later, 1585, to find the first references to the adjective being used in the sense of that which is different from, or opposed to, the past: though even here, the difference or opposition–at the end of the sixteenth century at any rate–appears to be that which we might today establish by using “preceding” as against “present”: a sense of chronology, but not yet a sense of distance or loss. The idea of the “modern” as being innovative or ground-breaking does not surface until the beginning of the eighteenth century, while the idea of “modern” as the most recent–implicitly positing a chronological gulf between the “now” and the remote or far distant “then”–emerges with clarity only at the end of the seventeenth century: as does the opposite, far more conservative, meaning of the modern as the inevitable repetition of the past in the present. The collocation of “modern” and “art” has to wait a little longer still and is clearly an invention of the nineteenth century. As for “modernity” and “modernism”, they begin their histories in the mid-seventeenth- and mid-eighteenth-centuries respectively, with “modernism” being used in relation to artistic movements only from the end of the nineteenth century.

From an omnipresent, unavoidable, galumphing giant of a word, then, with timeless and limitless domains (or–less impressively–of limitless vagueness), "modern" appears to have been cut down to size, even to be a little parochial. But here we come up against a further difficulty. For grappling with the significance of such terms is made all the more complex by the fact that they have different meanings not only at different times, but also in different places. As with people(s), societies, events and artefacts, the history of "modern", like the history of any word, has its own geography. The history and the geography of that history, combine to create permutations of meaning which only add to the cumbersome nature of the "modern". Indeed, the temptation is strong to succumb to the seductive half-articulated, half-hidden sense: a relativity which conveniently fuels discussion but also obviates the necessity for any cumulative precision. Arguing about words is important, but sometimes becomes a substitute for historical debate.

It is hoped that the following essays avoid that pitfall. Several of the contributors to this volume make reference to the "modern" in countries other than Britain, an approach which might serve only to cloud the issue further. And yet, by establishing this comparative background and the impossibility of hermetic insulation from "continental" or global phenomena, this approach in fact helps to illuminate certain indigenous features of the British "modern". John M. MacKenzie, in the discursive essay which opens the volume, reminds us that, just as time and place, to an extent, determine the "modern"–whether in a complementary or a contradictory manner–, so the pre-modern and the post-modern often continue to co-exist with the modern in "dynamic interaction". His essay sets out the numerous complexities of the case, but also suggests some helpful paradigmatic lines of approach. David Cottington, then asks some difficult, but important questions by contrasting the British example with that of France.

The point which is underlined, above all, is that the significance of such terms and concepts as the "modern" can only be usefully explored if one admits and explores the contradictions, and even paradoxes that they generate. In the British context, the co-existence of pre-modern and modern was evident in both art and politics. In itself that was not necessarily distinctive: the consciousness of the modern was accompanied, in France too, for example, by either the desire to hasten its advance, or the desire to turn back the tide of modernity. The conviction that history was accelerating, and the growing realization that the modern was in practice irreversible, produced a political reaction to liberal capitalism which splintered opinion across party lines: the period during which

"modernism" emerged, and the period which interests the contributors to this book, was also a period of increasing diversity of political structures and a growing number of leagues, associations, pressure groups and so on. This is important, because the notion of a single-issue pressure group or single-issue political party may appear mundane at the beginning of the twenty-first century, but at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth the proliferation of extra-parliamentary political activity was deeply worrying for many observers of the traditional constitutional arrangements. Women and workers campaigned openly−and often violently−in favour of extensions to the franchise. But more alarming was the feeling that people were living in an "age of anxiety". The existence of new manufacturing technologies alongside long-established artisan production, capital rubbing shoulders with cottage craft, no doubt did bemuse and unsettle some observers. But the cohabitation of science and imagination, of the utilitarian and the creative, produced some curious paradoxes, with figures like Edward Carpenter, William Morris and Oscar Wilde striving to convince their entourage and their readers of the necessity to bridge the gap between these two poles. The work of all three is discussed in several chapters below (Harris, Cases, Fleurot) and, when considered together, these artists can be seen as leading exponents of a key question of the end-of-century: how is one to improve society while still retaining individual freedom and creativity? Although Carpenter, especially, is now largely forgotten, together with Morris and Wilde he was a prominent figure in late-Victorian Britain, and all three were trying hard to reconcile collective political action and respect for the individual.

Artists, of course, were not alone in this quandary. Politicians, whatever their precise position on the Parliamentary scale of "left" to "right"–the meanings of those two labels were themselves in the process of definition–also grappled with the challenges thrown up by the material and moral transformations of the period. Was it possible to be radical and progressive without inevitably shading towards populist and authoritarian politics? There was a clear need to think about politics in a different way, as well as the manner in which the State went about its job: Arnaud Page, in his essay, looks at the way in which one theorist, Graham Wallas, approached the task. And certainly–as Constance Bantman argues–British anarchists came up against similar difficulties and laid themselves open to the accusation that, in their search for radical solutions to the problems of modernity, they were in fact resorting to reactionary methods.

Whether from within the hallowed walls of Westminster, then, or from an impertinent, makeshift base outside, many involved in politics constantly came up against a paradox which may well be peculiarly British: in

attempting to renew political philosophy, most thinking politicians and political thinkers tended to turn to the past. The new life, apparently, would need to be modelled on the old. Even–especially–Britain's imperial and foreign adventures (the subject dealt with by Stéphanie Prévost) appeared to be premised on the same desire to make the future resemble the past. Above all, the exponents of this paradox not only insisted on the relevance of the past in terms of providing models for a successful polity–for "good governance" as we might hear today–, but many of them also stressed the importance of the beauty and happiness which they argued had been part of the (idealised) Middle Ages to which they often turned: here again, one thinks particularly of figures like Morris, Wilde and Carpenter. Reform or, less frequently, revolution, was to allow people to aspire to the beautiful while performing the useful. This modernist alliance between the aesthetic and the political might possibly halt the degeneration of national life. But in order to have a chance of doing so, the political class were being asked to concede that national life was first and foremost a network of local and individual lives.

It is this convergence of aesthetics, politics and a quasi-spiritual dimension which is perhaps typical of British modernist thinking about modernity. The co-existence of all three may have produced figures whom we now dismiss as eccentrics or "aesthetes", it none the less produced figures whom many still think of as in some sense embodying the national identity: what, after all, could be more "English" than a William Morris wallpaper design? Rather than towards socialism in any of its "scientific" guises, then, what the British modernist approach to modernity may have been pushing at was yet another mutation of liberalism: a libertarian-humanitarian hybrid in which indigenous radical and Evangelical legacies keep scientific socialism in check, where fellowship and domesticity edge out a larger-scale, more abstract "fraternity", and where *citoyenneté* or *civisme* give way to what George Orwell was later to define simply as "decency".

CHAPTER ONE

SOME REFLECTIONS ON ASPECTS OF MODERNITY

JOHN M. MACKENZIE

The terms "modern" and "anti-modern", "modernity" and "anti-modernity", "modernism" and "post-modernism" are complex, contested and, at least in some respects, controversial.[1] I do of course bring a historian's perspective to bear on these and I shall be defining the three concepts of the modern, modernity and modernism from a historical point of view. Inevitably, the first question is where does the modern begin? If it is the case, as some argue, that the modern and modernity are essentially about the individual rather than the social collective, then we can push the perspective back. Such a sense of individualism can certainly be traced to the Reformation. Other scholars have seen the vital moment as being the start of the Enlightenment, say around the 1680s. Such a sense of the individual being at the heart of the modern leads to self-reflection, to those "a" phenomena of angst and anomie, and ultimately to the late-nineteenth and twentieth century concerns with the human psyche. But if the modern is also about technology, then it starts with Leonardo da Vinci's extraordinary grappling with technical forms and with the development of inductive scientific reasoning. This marches together with a growth in taxonomic fascinations, with classification and codification. Clearly, the industrial revolution constitutes both an apotheosis and a vital stage in these events. The transformations wrought by the shift from water and wind power towards steam produce the rapid development of the engine, first applied to mills and mines, then to trains and ships, ultimately in new forms to the horseless carriage (driven by the internal combustion engine)

[1] This was delivered as a keynote at a conference held in Tours on October 3rd, 2008. It has been slightly revised for this publication, but it perhaps retains some of the necessary discursiveness of the keynote.

and powered flight. This sense of dynamic interaction seems to lead to that obsession with threes in Hegelian philosophy and Freudian psychology.

Dynamic interaction is indeed my key phrase. A linear approach to the modern, modernity and modernism is in my view impossible, although many works pursue the linear even when dealing with its antithesis. My theme is going to be the manner in which the modern and the anti-modern, modernity and pre-modernity, modernism and anti-modernism were interleaved. As soon as these words are uttered, we have to check ourselves in order to appeal to that essential threshold of almost any academic discourse–the need for definitions. I am going to use these terms in the following ways. Few of us will agree on these definitions, for these words are so freighted with multiple meanings that various definitions are possible. Although those that follow are personal, they are surely defensible in wider contexts.

For me, the word “modern” should really be applied to all phenomena flowing from the industrial revolution and its precursors. The essential characteristic of the modern world is just such industrial mass production and the capitalist relationships, the commercial and social characteristics, as well as the aesthetic and communications phenomena that flowed from it. Thus, these all-embracing forms of the modern accelerated the creation of the global village, rendering people in one continent dependent upon, often through structures of dominance and subordination, those in another. The modern placed raw material production in continents inhabited by the European “Other”, feeding, at least temporarily, industrial production in the western world. The workers in the industrialised world were fed in two senses: first of all the raw materials which fuelled their laborious production, and second the food and sources of energy–such as sugar and tea–which fuelled them. The modern produced astonishing developments in infrastructures, through railways, steamships, harbours, roads, all ultimately designed to facilitate precisely those relationships of production, trade, distribution, and above all human labour, substituting wage and commodity production slavery, as some might see it, for the forms of slavery of the past. The modern fancied itself to be highly rational, dealing with the lines of supply and demand, the columns of the accountant, the listed trade figures of nation states, and the plans and designs for future developments. No wonder the people of the modern, as we might call them, thought in terms of straight lines rather than curves, in futures rather than pasts, in arithmetic sequences rather than spiritual infinities.

We can go further. The modern is also characterised by the exponential growth of what Benedict Anderson called "print capitalism".[2] The printed word became infinitely more widely available through the spread of literacy in the western world, promoted by compulsory education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Improvements in technology combined with, at least in Britain, the removal of print and paper taxes designed to halt the spread of radicalism, enormously reduced the unit cost of both newspapers and books. Cheap books became available as never before to satisfy the prize and present market for the young. Thus, the printed word appeared in almost every home. But commensurate with this went the spread of images: engravings and other forms of representation had been expensive to produce and, though popular, were limited in circulation. Photography was of course a major scientific revolution of the modern and by the end of the century the technology had been created to make photographic images available in newspapers, books and on popular ephemera such as postcards. A combination of the opportunities afforded by "print capitalism" and by the ready availability of images ensured that artistic and literary movements, formerly the preserve of an elite, percolated into popular culture. Aspects of modernity and of modernism became increasingly available to all. Although some see this development as characteristic of the inter-war years of the twentieth century, it unquestionably has antecedents decades earlier.

These versions of the modern sailed through a whole range of intellectual and artistic trends, through Romanticism, Realism, and a positive wave of philosophical movements. That perhaps leads us to another aspect of the modern, the fact that such phases seem to happen so quickly, constantly replacing or overlapping with each other. The concept of progress seems to be the dominant notion of the nineteenth century: yet its essentially optimistic grounding is overhauled by a strong sense of pessimism and of anxious apprehension by the end of that century. Moreover, as we shall see, the dominant zeitgeist of the city and of industrialism is overtaken by a revival of agrarian and rural values. All of these were reflected in the art, literature, philosophy and historicism of the era.

Sometimes, the word "modernity" is used to substitute for the modern, but I have decided to use this in a specialised form. For me, modernity represents the dissemination of the modern. It was always going to be impossible to restrict these aspects of the modern to the western dominant

[2] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. and ext. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 40-46 and *passim*.

imperial powers. All the characteristics of the modern were spreading rapidly throughout the non-western world by the second half of the nineteenth century. A book of essays edited by Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C. A. Bayly with the title *Modernity and Culture* (2002) seeks to examine this diffusion of modernity throughout the Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and South Asian Worlds.[3] Modernity is never defined in this book; it is assumed that all readers know exactly what the editors and contributors are on about. At any rate, all the dimensions of what I have called the modern, as well as the concomitant intellectual movements, spread throughout the so-called British World, that is the territories of white settlement–Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand (placing them in a sort of chronological order)–and also through the Empire of India and, later, both the so-called dependent Empire and the informal empires of Latin America and the Far East. A similar diffusion also took place in the American and French worlds, somewhat later through the German and Italian worlds. In the case of the former empires of Spain and Portugal, the agents for the dissemination of the modern were much more likely to be the USA, Britain and other western European countries. But the important thing to realise about this diffusion is that it went beyond the setting of the chains of imperial dominance and subordination. The spread of the modern ultimately offered the opportunities for empires to strike back. Even in the realm of industrialism, it is striking that by the First World War the jute industry of Bengal–to take but one example–was already overtaking the manufacture of jute in Scotland's Dundee.[4] The nexus of raw material and industrial production was already beginning to break down, as it would continue to do, albeit with much resistance from the west, in the course of the twentieth century. And of course the twin effects of education and print capitalism laid the groundwork for the nationalist reactions that were to predominate by the years after the Second World War.

So what about our third concept, the one that probably concerns us most closely–modernism? Despite the manner in which words seem to be used extraordinarily loosely by many scholars, modernism must mean something very different from the modern and modernity. Modernism is clearly related to the modern and modernity, but in curious ways. In describing a movement in the arts which begins to take hold at the end of the nineteenth century and is fully in place in the early twentieth,

[3] Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C. A. Bayly, eds., *Modernity and Culture: from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
[4] Gordon T. Stewart, *Jute and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

modernism paradoxically describes a phenomenon which is both entirely dependent on modernity and is yet a reaction to it. The modernist movement uses the opportunities and sometimes the capacities of the modern to offer up both its techniques and its critiques. If the classic era of the modern is the long nineteenth century from the 1780s to 1914, from steam-powered mills to heavier-than-air flight, then the time of modernism, essentially a term for the arts, overlaps with its final twenty years and runs through at least to the post-Second World War period. If the modern represents the age of the machine, the modernist (apart from in architecture) reflects an artistic urge to escape the paradigms of realism and linearity, the rational and the concrete that go with the modern. I mean here the metaphorically concrete; we shall return to the real concrete later.

But it would surely be quite wrong to see these forms of the modern and the modernist in global economies and the arts and literature as operating on some kind of chronological continuum, with neat transitions between the pre-modern and the modern, the pre-modernist and ultimately the post-modernist. History generally does not operate that way in any case, but when dealing with movements that are essentially fuzzy and difficult to define, it is even less likely that we could demarcate discrete boundaries between them. Given this inter-penetration of the modern and the anti-modern, modernity and modernism, it is surely essential to analyse why each group of two should coexist, why modern and modernist also fed off each other. We also need to try to comprehend why each pair was complementary rather than antithetic. And in passing we should note the currently common use of the words modernity and modern, simply meaning the here and now, the characteristics of today. Finally, given the fact that I am an imperial historian, another major theme for me must be the extent to which these groups of two cohabited in the practices of imperialism and the structures and characteristics of empires.

It is indeed striking that in the nineteenth century, the modern and its supposed antithesis were always present. Let me start with the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London's Hyde Park. What could conceivably be more modern than the architectural envelope in which this exhibition was displayed? Joseph Paxton's vast iron and glass palace owed its origins to conservatories and orangeries, but it was to become the classic–and indeed global–language of the railway station, the Victorian market building, and much else. It was of course dependent on industrial-scale production of both iron and glass. Such exhibitions–and the many French examples are of course just as illustrative of this–have often been constructed as vast displays of industrial and other forms of developing, and supposedly enveloping, modernity. Here we had the potential of the

modern displayed on an encyclopaedic scale. But, intriguingly, the interior was filled with what looked like the anti-modern or at least the pre-modern. Of course the exhibition was devoted to the application of aesthetic values to industrial items, but somehow such values could only be imparted through the celebration of craft. Thus the pure modernist envelope contained a great clutter of both crafts and industrial products. So much so that one of the most recent scholars of the event, Jeffrey Auerbach, has suggested that it was not the expression of an overweening industrial and imperial confidence as has so often been suggested, but actually a sign of anxiety, a fear of weakness in the face of, for example, what were seen as superior French values.[5]

As a direct result of the Exhibition and of these anxieties, the Victoria and Albert Museum was founded in South Kensington with a specific remit to collect craft items from around the world in order to inform and instruct British craftspeople and workers.[6] Whether it ever fully performed that function is a moot point, but that was the intention. Interestingly, another V&A Museum with similar objectives was founded in Bombay (Mumbai) not long afterwards. One personality common between the two was Sir George Birdwood, director in Bombay and later influential in South Kensington.[7] He was a fervent protagonist of the craft values of India, believing that the position of craftspeople within each Indian village represented an ideal form of production. He brought these ideas back to Britain and of course the philosophy of Ruskin, the publications on "The Grammar of Ornament" by Owen Jones, William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement all flowed from this. Thus on the one hand there was a desire to introduce something akin to craft values in the industrially produced artefact. On the other there was a drive towards recreating crafts in the face of the apparently all-conquering industrial output. There was so much anxiety about the debasement caused by the modern that a yearning for a craft world that had been lost manifested itself with some force. In passing, I shall just mention another dimension of this. When John Ruskin addressed some military cadets in a lecture on war, he seemed to hanker

[5] Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
[6] Anthony Burton, *Vision and Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publications, 1999).
[7] For Birdwood, see John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 121-4 and John M. MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire, Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), chapter 10.

for what he saw as an older, nobler, more chivalric form of war.[8] He castigated war as an industrial product which, he said, yields nothing but tombs. Unlikely as it seems, Ruskin even wanted to introduce craft values into warfare, pleading for an abandonment of industrially produced armaments and the types of war they engendered.

This desire to escape the industrial world was famously manifested by the great magnates of industrialism themselves. The American scholar, Martin Wiener, pointed out some years ago that the wealthy captains of industry soon transformed themselves into country estate owners.[9] Wiener's point was that in Britain the entrepreneurial spirit was rapidly extinguished as such families sent their sons to public schools and Oxbridge and used their wealth to create a grand rural form of living that placed them alongside the old landed aristocracy. The ownership of an estate tended towards the reintroduction of a whole set of atavisms, sometimes coexisting with the advantages of modern machinery. An excellent example is Sir William Armstrong of Newcastle, a great industrialist who manufactured the most up-to-date armament for British naval vessels and the like. His architect, Norman Shaw, created at Cragside, in Northumberland, a residence that combined antique pastiche in architecture and crafts with hydraulics and other modern techniques thereby creating a picturesque and often medievalised composition nonetheless imbued with up-to-date comforts.[10]

Those who sought this intriguing inter-penetration of the modern and the pre-modern often took up antique pastimes that would place them in a non-industrial rather than an industrial world. They were almost inevitably lovers of the horse; they rode to hounds; and they used their wealth to go shooting in Scotland or further afield in search of big game. Shooting is, after all, a strikingly ageless, yet ambivalent, pastime. On the one hand, it made use of the most modern industrially produced firearms. On the other it represented an extraordinary set of antique impulses, representative of the pursuits of the rich and powerful through all ages, if with different technologies. Shooting is at once a rational and a non-rational activity. It takes place in environmental contexts that are loaded with symbolic attributes of authority and power, whether in Scotland or on safari in Africa or in the classic imperial world of India. It was hunting and

[8] This lecture on war can be found in E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds., *The Complete Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1905), 18: 459-93.
[9] Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[10] See *Cragside, National Trust Guide* (The National Trust, 1981) for an excellent survey of these paradoxes.

shooting which created major areas of ambivalence throughout the world. Scotland was classically modern, one of the first industrial societies which had also experienced an agricultural revolution, yet it had a strikingly pre-modern population beyond the frontiers of the Central Belt, peoples viewed as backward and akin to the indigenous of empire and progressively forced into migration. Shooting changed a landscape, turning large areas of the country into vast estates for stalking red deer stags, deer forests morphed into heather-clad hills, heather which also created shelter and food for the grouse. The Highlands and Islands of Scotland were literally happy hunting grounds for an elite, English and otherwise, which generally made its fortunes out of the modern. And a pre-modern architecture of shooting lodges and country cottages was created to match it. In some ways Scotland retains that ambivalence to this day, as the USA does on a grander scale. The same became increasingly true of Canada, India and New Zealand, any place where gun and rod offered an escape from the modern even as the modern increasingly and successfully encroached.[11]

The modern also introduced the technique of photography, the characteristic science of both modern optics and chemistry. The camera progressively became, particularly from the 1880s, the vital additional tool, along with gun, rod, binoculars, collecting equipment, and also taxidermy, in consuming and assimilating the world and removing it to the domestic interior of home. Interestingly, the camera took on the language of the gun: after all it "shot" photographs. It also involved careful observation, stalking, and positioning. By the 1920s, even Baden Powell, no doubt influenced by the carnage of the Western Front, asserted that it was more agreeable to use the camera rather than the gun as a response to nature. Yet photography was viewed as a mystery, a form of magic. Some understood the chemical techniques that went into its successful prosecution, but it still seemed somehow the work of the devil, rational and non-rational all at once. Once the box camera and the concept of photographic film had been invented, the photographer became more remote from its key chemical processes and it became in some respects even more magical. The quintessentially modern had again conjured up intimations of a pre-rational magic akin to the philosopher's stone.

I mentioned earlier Armstrong's preferred architecture, and there is of course an entire theme here. This brave new modernist world, with its

[11] John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). See also Greg Gillespie, *Hunting for Empire*: *Narratives of Sport in Rupert's Land, 1840-70* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

factories, large-scale production, steam and communications technology, failed initially to spawn a wholly new style for the built environment. What happened instead was a set of appeals to the past. The Victorian era in Britain was characterised by the architectural "battle of the styles", a debate as to whether this modern world should be expressed through classical or Gothic forms, through the Ancient or the Medieval worlds. It is often suggested that in the "British World" by the 1860s, the Gothic had won, at least for a season. This is not of course wholly true. Even in the architectural world of Christianity, Gothic revival had not taken hold in the so-called nonconformist denominations where classical styles often suited their non-liturgical, sermonising forms much better than the Gothic. We would of course expect religious forms to be atavistic. But what of factories themselves, so often chastely classical in appearance, like the great symmetrical and ordered mills? Classical and renaissance styles continued to hold sway in the world of government and administration. And, most surprisingly of all, Gothic often dominated in the grandest of structures relating to modernist infrastructure, the railway station and attendant hotel.[12] When I first became aware of the fascinations of architectural history, I remember reading of the condign lessons afforded by the almost adjacent St. Pancras and King's Cross stations in London: St. Pancras expressed in a wild and florid Gothicism of its hotel, King's Cross a simple, almost modernist, brick façade bearing the impress of the twin arched sheds behind, with a simple clock tower to represent the revolution in time represented by railway technology.[13] With the rediscovery of St. Pancras and its elevation in status to the British terminus of the Eurostar system, it is now being lauded afresh, not least because of its extraordinary juxtaposition of staggering Gothic façade with the technical virtuosity of its amazing train shed. Of course, such striking contrasts can be found all over Europe and the world. In some places in North America, Australia and Europe, railway technology was expressed through an overblown and dramatic classical, as in Grand Central Station, New York, Toronto Union in Ontario, and Sydney, New South Wales. Thus a dramatically modernist world entirely failed to find an architectural expression for its modernity until the twentieth century. It was almost as though the exponents of utterly disorientating modern technologies sought

[12] Jeffrey Richards and John M. MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: a Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Steven Parissien, *Station to Station* (London: Phaidon, 1997).

[13] This was the view, for example, of Robert Furneaux Jordan in *Victorian Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 131, where he extolled the functionality of King's Cross.

refuge in a comforting image of the past. Similarly, the Arts and Crafts movement, renewed appeals to Queen Anne, Jacobean and other styles in domestic building, at least on a grand scale, were themselves further searches for a comforting past.

But this kind of interpenetration of the modern, the anti-modern and the pre-modern occurs in many fields other than architecture. In 2001, the V&A Museum in London held an exhibition entitled "The Victorian Vision", commemorating the centennial of the death of Queen Victoria.[14] The poster for this exhibition was dominated by an image of the Queen in her widow's weeds and her white cap clutching a mobile phone. This conveyed a number of intriguing truths. The Queen was fascinated by modern technology. She loved the telegraph and its opportunities; she enjoyed steam travel; she had a lift installed at Osborne House; and she followed modern technologies with an acute eye. Yet her physical presence was supremely old-fashioned, as were some of the architectural styles which she favoured. At Osborne, she commissioned an Indian durbar dining room, created by Lockwood Kipling–father of Rudyard–and Bhai Ram Singh–which both alluded to her Indian Empire and to its craft values. She was so fascinated by India that she also commissioned the Austrian artist Rudolf Swoboda to travel to India and paint pictures of her subjects there.[15] This was after she had admired and acquired the paintings he had produced of Indian craftspeople who had worked at the Indian and Colonial e in London in 1886. It need hardly be said that these paintings were resolutely realist, filled with colour and character, and making no concessions at all to modernist styles. They are also, in my view, notably sympathetic to their subjects.

If modern technologies often stimulated a flight to the comfortable, so did the new science. On the one hand, science seemed all-conquering, almost offering up a future where the world would be understood through comprehensive taxonomies. Secrets and mysteries seemed to be more and more capable of being unlocked. Imperial science could ensnare the world as effectively as industrial production. The unveiling of the geological pasts of deep time, so much longer than the 6,000 years or so of Biblical creationism, was at once enthralling and deeply troubling. Charles Lyell's great works of geology, dating from the 1830s, were soon followed by Darwin's evolutionary theories, in which his notion of natural selection seemed to explain the concept of evolution which had been dawning in the

[14] John M. MacKenzie, ed., *The Victorian Vision* (London: V&A Publications, 2001).
[15] Saloni Mathur, *An Indian Encounter: Portraits for Queen Victoria* (London: National Gallery, 2002).

minds of several of his contemporaries and predecessors. That such ideas led to a Christian religious storm, ranging from outright rejection to desperate efforts at accommodation, was not surprising. But what interests me is that these ideas and these controversies swept the world. In my recent work on the dispersal of the idea of the museum around the British Empire I have been struck by the quite extraordinary speed with which the revolutionary ideas of the age penetrated the world, using modern technologies to do so.[16] Darwin's great work *The Origin of Species* of 1859 literally went round the globe in a matter of weeks from its publication. By 1860 it was being debated in Sydney and Singapore, Vancouver and Wellington, Cape Town and Calcutta as well as other places outside the Empire. Thoughts and ideas travelling at this speed represent the modern to its highest degree. But these imperial places were not passive recipients. They had striking biological and natural environments of their own. Darwin's ideas had been forged in great travels, just as those of the botanist Sir Joseph Banks had been, and the scientists and museum curators in the colonies felt they had much to offer in development, modification, and sometimes contradiction of the ideas of the *savants* of Europe.

However, even as these intellectual streams spread rapidly through the capillaries of empire, there emerged a fascination with indigenous, apparently anti-modern, knowledge. To return to hunting, all European hunters overseas were dependent upon "native" trackers, gun bearers and helpers of various sorts. The white hunters never ceased to be amazed by the environmental insights, the sharp eyes, and understanding of the quarry of such people. It is true that this was sometimes expressed in racial terms, the children of nature living closer to the natural phenomena which they understood precisely because of their alleged backwardness. But at other times there could be real respect. For example, doctors brought up in the medical traditions of Leiden and the Scottish universities, deeply rooted as they were in botany, were intrigued by indigenous pharmacopoeias wherever they went. This is an outstanding characteristic of David Livingstone's 1856 book on his travels in Central Africa.[17] It continued to be a closely observed study of doctors throughout the imperial world. Again, the implication was that modern science could still learn from the pre-modern.

White settlers may often have been dismissive of their indigenous neighbours even as they enslaved them into low-pay labour or drove them

[16] See John M. MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire.*

[17] David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London: John Murray, 1857).

off, but they also learned from them. The settler experience of survival in difficult, harsh and initially little-understood environments often necessitated drawing on such "native" knowledge and examples can be drawn from Canada, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Some settlers were more open than others to such knowledge transfer and they were often the most successful ones. In some instances, apostles of the modern were deeply respectful of pre-modern techniques. A surprising example is the great engineer, Sir William Willcocks, responsible for the damming of the Nile at Assuan. He was intrigued by, and greatly admired, the irrigation and agricultural techniques that he encountered in Egypt, the Sudan and India The distinguished planner Sir Patrick Geddes would be another example.[18]

In any case, modernity kept on encountering its nemesis. Plagues which swept the world seemed to offer both challenges to modern medical science and also major crises for globalisation, perhaps akin to terrorism today. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the new science of microbiology introduced its own terrors. The supposed capacity to transport fatal organisms in a jar or some such vessel offered anarchists and others–or so it was thought–the opportunity to contaminate water supplies or the very air itself and strike back against western dominant Establishments. Such fears soon surfaced in the works of H. G. Wells, Conan Doyle, as well as other authors and the new genre of doom-laden predictions of the future which are a characteristic of the early twentieth century. Modern technologies and modern science were raising the spectres that could stifle hope. Progressive modernity carried within it the bacilli of its own destruction.

Maybe it was for these reasons that there was such a powerful appeal to a new ruralism at the end of the nineteenth century. The cities that so strongly represented the modern had become places of physical deterioration, cesspits of illness and social problems, and consequently breeding grounds of dangerous dissent and political agitation. The visual arts which in the nineteenth century had never really warmed to the modern, failing to find there fertile ground for aesthetic expression, turned yet again to the rural and pre-modern wellsprings of inspiration. Writers had of course presented fictional cities, but seldom as an attractive milieu. Late romanticism returned to rural contexts with a real sense of relief. Countryside was again seen as a source of regeneration, trains offering access for rambling that could restore not only physical, but also cultural

[18] Helen Meller, *Patrick Geddes: Social Evolutionist and City Planner* (London: Routledge, 1990) which deals particularly with Geddes's interest in India.

health. Baden Powell's Boy Scout movement was extraordinary in this respect. It took characteristics and techniques from the frontiers of empire–tracking, environmental awareness, country observation, even a dress code–to the metropolis as part of this new ruralism.

It seems to me that this helps to explain the tremendous fascination with the Middle East and North Africa in this period. Here were regions which seemed to be distinctively pre-modern, offering the purity of the desert to a smutty, soot-covered industrial world. The vast corpus of Orientalist painting that took these regions as their subjects–most recently celebrated in the "Lure of the East Exhibition" at Tate Britain in London in 2008, later moving on to Istanbul and Sharjah–presented colourful peoples, strikingly antique architecture, magnificent crafts in carpets, wood carving, ceramics, and textiles, chivalric social relations, and much else.[19] Artists from all the major European countries travelled the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern World, enabled to do so by modern technologies, and in doing so gave a fresh lease of life to conventional perspectives, to realist representations, and powerful evocations of colour and light. The drabness of northern Europe was set alight by this brilliance. Pre-modernist artistic values were alive and well in all this material.

The Middle East and North Africa also represented the decline of pre-modern empires, like that of the Ottomans, new forms of supposedly indirect imperialism–as in the Levant, Arabia, the Gulf, Egypt and the Sudan–and aggressive new imperialisms like that of the French in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. It was also the region in which rulers like Mohammed Ali of Egypt and the last of the Ottoman sultans struggled to come to terms with the modern in order to keep European power at bay.

These paradoxes were universal in empires: as they acted as both the handmaiden of the modern while also helping to spread it, colonies became the refuge of an enticing pre-modernity. David Cannadine has written of the Ornamentalism of empire, the fascination with ceremony, with hierarchy, with the presentation of the body in antique, often

[19] Nicholas Tromans, ed., *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008). Over the years there has been a whole succession of exhibitions on Orientalist painting, surveyed in John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism*. For a recent critique of the views of Edward Said in respect of literary and intellectual orientalism, see Robert Irwin, *The Lust for Knowing: the Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006). See also Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: a Critique of Edward Said* (New York: Prometheus Press, 2007).

chivalric, forms.[20] But it goes much deeper than this. Even as industrialism and its attendant infrastructures swept the globe, imperialists attempted to cling to atavistic social forms. Empire went together with indirect rule, the effort to dominate distant territories through an indigenous aristocracy, whether in India or in Africa. Sometimes, chieftaincies and princelings were simply invented where they did not exist in the form that the imperial rulers required. Such systematised social throw-backs survived surprisingly into the 1940s and 1950s, only to fall in the face of the onward march of a bourgeois nationalism. It is interesting that one of its last great manifestations was in Ian Smith's Rhodesia where, between 1965 and 1980, the minority white administration sought to resurrect and bolster indigenous chieftaincies as a means of clinging to patterns of divide and rule. In some places, such an appeal to atavistic forms survived into the nationalist period. Even the French were seduced, as policies of *assimilation* in Africa morphed into notions of *association.* These were classic instances of the modern cohabiting with the pre-modern, manipulating the latter to its own ends. Empire at one and the same time was aggressively modern and also profoundly nostalgic.

So where does modernism come into all of this: the movement in writing, the visual arts, and architecture that seems to present a critical reaction to the interweaving of modern and pre-modern in all that I have described thus far? I start with architecture because the greatest paradox seems to lie here. From the late-nineteenth and until well into the twentieth centuries, architecture suddenly seemed to catch up with the modern, with the battle of the styles put to one side. This partly occurred in order to meet the challenges of building higher and higher as in the USA. The development of steel frame construction transformed building construction, first in Chicago, then in other American cities before being transferred to Europe. This facilitated building in modular, often symmetrical forms, within the frame construction. In the twentieth century, this moves forward into such schools as Art Nouveau, the Bauhaus and then into Art Deco in the inter-war years. Curves return; windows are severely geometrical in form, often metal-framed. Decoration either disappears all together or reappears in Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles, with new materials like chrome. By the post-Second World War period, modernist has become brutalist, with concrete being extensively used, architects extolling its creative plasticity and users and viewers generally being much less convinced. Of course old styles survive, notably

[20] David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2001).

bankers' classical, some modern baroque, and other references to the past. The point about this modernism is that it is indeed severely industrial and yet is rejecting the derivative forms of the past. More than any other art, modernist architecture trades off the opportunities afforded by industrial production while rejecting the earlier and often bizarre expressions of the modern.

In art, the questions of perspective and realism, colour and light that I identified in, for example, Orientalist painting, are almost entirely rejected in the various forms that constitute the major reaction to all of this. Ironically, some impressionist painters return to the city to produce atmospheric effects. Painters like Whistler drain out colour from their canvases. As realism progressively retreats, painters become interested in the abstractions of non-European art. Around the British Empire, painters who had desperately tried to emulate European styles, suddenly tumble to the fact that if they are to create a truly national art, they must draw on the abstract and other characteristics of indigenous art.[21] The African mask and other artefacts become increasingly influential in some movements. In other words, these forms draw upon the experience of empire and the global village which it created while rejecting the aesthetic conservatism which is seen as the prime characteristic of the imperial period.

Literature, it seems to me, can readily be tied into other art forms and to contemporary political, social and intellectual movements. We see the rejection of realist and linear forms, the embracing of streams of consciousness, of dramatically intermittent or apparently confused chronologies, above all the adoption of new sciences like psychiatric analysis. The influence of the study of psychopathologies emerges early in the twentieth century (in music we find it in the work of Busoni). But this was greatly developed by Frantz Fanon, in his highly influential works *Black Faces, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) where he brought innovative psychiatric insights to bear upon the cultural predicaments of people whose identities were severely confused by the compromises and adjustments of the colonial situation. In these ways they suffered from the all-embracing psychology of oppression bound up with the inherent violence of imperial rule as he encountered it in Algeria. Certainly, modernism's relationship with the crisis in the colonial system is extensive and complex. While it was stimulated by the traumas of twentieth-century warfare and the recognition that any hint of moral

[21] John M. MacKenzie, "Art and the Empire" in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History: of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 296-315; Timothy Barringer, Geoff Quilley and Douglas Fordham, eds., *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

authority had drained out of the imperial relationship, its products and their authors were sometimes accused of being simply a more subtle and sophisticated version of modern cultural imperialism. Irish literature was very important here, as were some of the works emerging from the "territories of white settlement".[22]

In the case of English, the great outburst of literary products emerging from Africa and Asia in the second half of the twentieth century helped to push all this forward, often linking–as in the work of Wole Soyinka–traditional (invariably oral) forms of story telling to modern literary forms. At times, all this placed a greater reliance upon the mystical, a non-institutional spirituality (as it may be called) and occasionally wholly new methods of evoking environments. What is interesting, I think, is that some of the works associated with empire sail on in the old ways, at least until English and French literature are taken up by the newly published indigenous writers of the extra-European continents of the wider world. Kipling and the many women writers who set their romances in India–there were a lot of them and it is a largely unknown genre[23]–remain conventional and conservative, though E. M. Forster and others introduce new moods into traditional forms. When we do reach the era of Asian and African writers, essentially writing from a nationalist perspective, we have another paradox. Not only are they are now manipulating the print capitalism of modernity for their own ends, but they also tend to be wholly schizophrenic. Some wish to see the spread of forms of the industrial revolution which help to press on the social transformations wished for by Marxist positions. But others again seek a return to a traditional world, if not in political, then at least in social, aesthetic and spiritual ways.[24] Among non-fiction writers in India, Jawaharlal Nehru argued for an industrial India, replete with the panoply of five year plans and the like. Modernity would thus transform India and bring it into the contemporary world he had experienced in his English education. Gandhi on the other hand sought to re-inspire and in a sense recreate the world of those

[22] See the contributions to Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, eds., *Modernism and empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

[23] Dominic Omissi, "The Mills and Boon Memsahibs: Women's Romantic Indian Fiction 1877-1947" (PhD thesis, Lancaster University, 1995).

[24] Such ambivalence is evident in Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya: the Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938). While rooted in the traditions of his own people, Kenyatta still wished to create a modern, multi-ethnic state in Kenya.

traditional workers who had been marginalised by modernity. No wonder he enormously admired Ruskin.[25]

Literary concerns should be placed into much wider contexts since, as it seems to me, much of modernism cannot be fully understood without historicist, cultural and global approaches. When I read some literary works of the early twentieth century, I invariably sense authors writing in strikingly innovative ways that are infused with that mixture of confidence and anxiety which are the mark of the era. After all, the Edwardian period is marked by a strange mixture of a comfortable progressivism and the deepest of anxieties. The fact is that the interleaving of the modern and the anti-modern, modernity and pre-modernity, modernism and its critical response has been a phenomenon weaving in and out of my work for a number of decades. Perhaps the key to this is the adoption of a post-modernist stance. Thus, the convolutions and eclecticism of post-modernism actually match the complexities of the industrial and imperial era and the many aesthetic phenomena that were stimulated and stifled, developed and dispersed, disparaged and rejected during the two hundred years in which humanity underwent the greatest changes in its long history.

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[25] M. K. Gandhi, *The Story of my Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Narajivan Press, 1929), 2: 106-9.

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