

# Ruskin and the Twentieth Century: the modernity of Ruskinism

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# *Ruskin and Roger Fry's Two Theories*

Emma Sdegno

It is now just fifty years since Graham Hough, the first and only scholar in England to attempt a comparative study of our two critics, published "Ruskin and Roger Fry: Two Aesthetic Theories".<sup>1</sup> This essay, which we might in retrospect see as containing the seeds of Hough's overall critique of Modernism,<sup>2</sup> offers an obvious starting point for us as we revive the subject of Ruskin and Fry.

Hough's aim was to account for the recent epistemic change which had sanctioned what he saw as the "fragmentation of sensibility" in modern art and the separation of the artist from his public. He begins by considering some of Ruskin's key aesthetic concepts - terms like "moral", "form", and "God" which, under a veil of semantic vagueness and obsolescence, imply an all-inclusive, vitalistic, and ultimately idealistic view of artistic experience. Hough's outline of Ruskin's "philosophic system" is somewhat general, his references lack precision, and his interpretation of his aesthetic is at times debatable. At one point, for example, in an attempt to re-allocate art to the ethical domain, he reduces the relationship between art and nature in Ruskin's totally organic vision to one of simple identity. Hough is, however, convincing when he states that, like Ruskin's, Fry's early critical writings made use of a moral terminology in referring to formal, historical and emotional elements in an artwork, and also when he draws attention to Fry's interest in the dramatic element in a painting.

He also shows clearly how the later change in Fry's critical approach, a change acknowledged by Fry himself in 1920 in *Vision and Design*,<sup>3</sup> involved a shift away from 'Ruskinian' organicism. Hough rightly noticed that Fry's change of attitude had taken place in conjunction with his "discovery" of Cézanne, whose painting not only was free from all dramatic emotion, but also embodied that typically modern denial of the Romantic vitalistic conception of nature as informed by a purposeful force which art has the duty to capture.<sup>4</sup> He does not date the turning point in Fry's career precisely, but places it after 1909 (when he wrote "An Essay in Aesthetics", which still bears the mark of his early phase) and associates it with the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions Fry organised at the Grafton Galleries, which he wrongly dates 1911. Despite its imprecisions, the kernel of Hough's

argument remains convincing and may be adjusted and substantiated by a careful reading of Fry's early writings, and in particular his Claude essay. I shall delineate the precise terms of Fry's shift distancing himself from Ruskin's aesthetic, which I would date around 1907, the year in which Fry first started to appreciate Cézanne, the year in which he also wrote his essay on Claude Lorrain.

It is now well known that Post-Impressionist painting had been on show in London for some years before Fry organised his two exhibitions in the years 1910 and 1912.<sup>5</sup> Fry had already seen Cézanne's paintings both at the 1905 Durand-Ruel exhibition of French art at the Grafton Galleries, and at the sixth annual exhibition of the International Society in 1906, but it was only on the second occasion that he expressed positive judgement, even enthusiasm.<sup>6</sup> Then, in August 1907, Fry published his article on Claude in *The Burlington Magazine*.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout this essay run both an undercurrent of subtle debate with Ruskin, who had notoriously attacked the French 17th-century painter in his defence of Turner, and a thread of argument which anticipates a new aesthetic stance. For, in raising general issues on Classical style, the essay also lays the foundations for an appreciation of Cézanne's modern art. The original context in which the article appeared makes this wider discourse quite clear. Fry's article was, in fact, accompanied by a rich apparatus of plates and notes by Charles J. Holmes, the editor of the journal. The plates reproduced eighteen landscape drawings by Claude from the British Museum, the Oxford Galleries, and two private collections. This substantial repertory of sketches was arranged in a chronological sequence with the declared purpose of illustrating not only the development of Claude himself, but also the evolution of that whole course of landscape painting from Classical to Modern times which Claude, the embodiment of a perfect model of phylogenesis in landscape art, had fully represented and anticipated.

"The history of art as a whole", writes Fry,

bears a singular relation to the development of great individual artists. The great artist has his primitive period, in which his work is stiff and precise almost to the close of the fifteenth century. He then enters upon the period in which his works are, perhaps, most perfect, when the precision of his youth is tempered with the freedom of perfect skill ... Sketches of Claude anticipate the qualities of many of his successors. We shall not, therefore, be far too wrong, if we conclude that their chrono-

logical order is analogous to that of the dates at which the respective artists whom he resembled lived and worked, and to conclude that a drawing of Gainsborough is later than one which resembles the work of Poussin, and that a drawing which recalls the Impressionists of the nineteenth century comes later still. Such dated sketches as we possess on the whole bear out on this assumption, though it must be remembered that the assumption applies only to sketches and studies from nature (154).

The style and tone of the many references to Ruskin in the essay on Claude are characteristic of Fry's early critical mode. As he himself at one point admits, his attitude towards the pictorial and art critical tradition was cautious and deferential, respectful towards the canonised view, even when that view was informed by the very principles he was aiming to upset.<sup>8</sup> As a result, there is frequent recourse in Fry's writing to cultural and rhetorical strategies that tend to avoid conflict: aesthetic and interpretative frameworks are updated, past cultural codes are referred to in an apparently balanced way, and facts are presented in an 'objective', 'impartial' manner. The argumentative techniques for disqualifying the adversary widely used by Ruskin - and, we may note in passing, by Clive Bell - are consistently avoided.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in his attempt to reduce Ruskin's aesthetic principles and tastes to an instantly recognisable (and therefore dated) "code",<sup>10</sup> Fry proceeds by the typically Modernist, critical and revisionist, technique of quotation and allusion. Not yet purely formalistic in approach, the essay on Claude employs this "cautious" form of argumentation, in a discourse on expressive modes which is also a debate with Ruskin.

The tone Fry aims to establish is quite opposed to the assertive, Ruskinian voice, and in tune with Claude's "tender" style.<sup>11</sup> It works by appealing to a certain mood in the sympathetic reader, a mood which, being the analogue of the painter's style, constitutes a pre-requisite to appreciation of him; and it illustrates Fry's view of the artist-audience relationship as a privileged and exclusive intercourse. Lastly, this mode of discourse, in proceeding by negations rather than assertions, offers itself as the cipher of the modern sensibility. In fact, in the opening pages of his 1926 book on Cézanne, Fry was to draw the reader's attention to this rhetorical feature as the only means of dealing, in words, with the artist's "not perfect" style: "to describe a masterpiece of the Salon d'Automne one should use positive terms; to describe Cézanne's works, ... I find myself reduced to negative terms".<sup>12</sup>

Fry's Claude is a sort of crossroads where old and new theories on art meet and confront each other. It introduces, indirectly, many of the aesthetic assumptions which would become central to French Post-Impressionist art. At the same time, it gives Fry the opportunity of placing himself as heir to the long line of British critics who had praised the French painter, although for different and often opposed reasons.<sup>13</sup> In the seventeenth century Claude had been appreciated as an instinctive genius, "an immaculate medium for the rendering of natural phenomena"; while in the eighteenth century, Sir Joshua Reynolds, anticipating the modern view of Lorrain, had highlighted his anti-naturalism. He maintained that Claude "was convinced that taking nature as he found it seldom produced beauty".<sup>14</sup> Ruskin's thoroughgoing attack on the French painter rests on and expands such anti-naturalistic assumptions, assumptions which Fry subjects to scrutiny in his essay. Although rarely heard out loud, the Ruskinian voice is quite easily detectable for a reader familiar with Ruskin, such as Fry's contemporary must still have been. In this intertextual dialogue with former authority, the modern code indirectly intrudes.

For Ruskin's attack on Claude Lorrain we naturally look at *Modern Painters*, where his "clumsy" and "artificial" formulaic representation of nature, his abstract stylisations, his "pride" in reason are all condemned out of hand. Throughout the five volumes of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin conducts his battle with Claude through a series of analyses of art modes supported by extensive description in the first two volumes, and by visual illustration from Volume III on. Like most of the matter to which Ruskin returns repeatedly in the course of the seventeen years it took him to complete *Modern Painters*, the argument against Claude undergoes a process of synthesis and revision. Thus we find Claude's depiction of natural scenery, first analysed and commented upon in Volume I, re-analysed, commented upon and illustrated in the "Teachers of Turner" chapter, and finally rediscussed in summary form in the "Claude and Poussin" chapter in Volume V, where the focus is on formal characteristics, and on the iconography of Classical French landscape painting. Of the three instances, it is in the "Teachers of Turner" chapter of *Modern Painters* III that Ruskin's tone is particularly assertive and polemical; and it is here that we find summarily listed and visually illustrated all of the issues that Fry takes up. For a series of variously disguised allusions to the Ruskinian text in the Claude article, we may suppose that it is to this chapter that we should look for the relevant subtext.



First of all, the dialogic nature of Fry's essay is betrayed by its thickly-woven rhetorical vest, a feature which is in itself quite remarkable in that it contrasts with the rather plain style of his other essays. The use of concessive clauses, of antithesis, and of *distinctio*, indicates the existence of a different point of view, of a text which makes itself felt, so to say, in reflection. These devices enable the speaker to present two differing, even opposing views at the same time, and also make Fry's point unusually oblique. They all appear in condensed form in the first paragraph, which thus opens by voicing the arguments of an opposed and stronger party. Repetition of the adverb "indeed" contributes to strengthen the concessive form, through which the speaker shows his intention to agree with his implied interlocutor. Ruskin's name only actually occurs at the end of the paragraph, as a casual and respectful reference, but in so doing it seems to confer a definite identity on the second persona of the foregoing dialogue, who thus assumes the paternity of all the statements so far attributed to an authoritative, or generic, figure.

I shall quote the whole passage: "

In spite of all the attacks of critics, in spite of the development of emphasis and high favour in modern romantic landscape, which might well have spoilt us for his cool simplicity, Claude still lives, not, indeed, as one of the gods of the salesroom, but in the hearts of contemplative and undemonstrative people. This is surely an interesting and encouraging fact. It means that a very purely artistic and poetical appeal still finds its response in the absence of all subsidiary interests and attractions. The appeal is, indeed, a very limited one, but it is within its limits, so sincere and so poignant, that Claude's very failings become, as it were, an essential part of its expression. These failings are, indeed, so many and so obvious that it is not to be wondered at if, now and again, they blind even a sensitive nature like Ruskin's to the fundamental beauty and grandeur of Claude's revelation (154).

Repetition of the words "appeal", "limits", and "failings" serve to undercut the endorsement implied in the first use of the term. The first statement is thus to be attributed to the author's voice, expressing his point with some immediacy and enthusiasm, while the second one is that of authority, the one that had maintained that "Claude's capacities were of the most limited kind".<sup>15</sup> This rhetorical, cautious mode is

then contradicted by the over-appreciative closing assertion of the "fundamental beauty and grandeur of Claude's revelation". Instead of contributing to saturation of a term's various meanings, the *distinctio* figure is here employed to give an open, dilemma-like character to words, and to the matter at large.

However, we must be careful not to count as failings qualities which are essential to the particular kind of beauty that Claude envisages, though, to be quite frank, it is sometimes quite hard to make up one's mind whether a particular characteristic is a lucky defect or a calculated negation (154).

It is in this overcautious mode, through continual juxtaposition of opposing views, that Fry's reconsideration of Ruskin's terms take place.

Another device that Fry uses to refer to Ruskin's point of view in a concealed, oblique way is to substitute the key-terms of Ruskin's attack on Claude with their French equivalents. He thus considers one by one all of Claude's "failings": namely "the peculiar *gaucherie* of his articulations", that is his incapacity to represent nature as a living organism, where trees "isolate themselves" from one another and from "their parental soil"; his employment of the *repoussoir*, "a clumsily constructed old bare trunk", acting as an internal frame to the picture thus creating an illusion of distance; some "*naïvetés* which may or may not be intentional", such as, for instance, the symmetrical division of the pictorial space (154-55).

It is quite clear that Fry is here referring to Ruskin's criticism of Claude, whose pictorial solutions, especially those concerning the depiction of nature in the foreground, are often referred to as "clumsy and childish." "The foregrounds of Claude afford the most remarkable instances of childness and incompetence", Ruskin writes in "Of the Foreground" in *Modern Painters* I (III: 408). In "Of the Truth of Vegetation" he writes that instead of "mystery and intricacy" - which stand for the aesthetic categories of infinity and organicism - Claude painted a finite and fragmented nature:

by representing every particular leaf, he made nature finite ...; and the perpetual repetition of the same shape of leaves and the same arrangement, relieved from a black ground, is more like an ornamental pattern for dress than the painting of a foreground (III: 594).

Fry's French words on the one hand have a defamiliarising effect, which neutralises the negative connotations of the English terms used by Ruskin. However, they also introduce, in disguise, some key-concepts of the new aesthetics: from the simplification of form, implying also distortion; to the representation of the third dimension in painting, which Ruskin had discarded when, in *Elements of Drawing*, he denied the possibility of a "stereoscopic" representation (XV: 215).<sup>16</sup> The French words also have the function of drawing attention to the linguistic phenomenon. They are a way of showing indirectly that those features of Claude's painting belong to a foreign and more sophisticated language, which must be learned rather than judged. The focus on language thus draws the reader's attention to French culture, that is, to the representational and philosophical sources of the Classical spirit which for Roger Fry informed "the best French art from the 12th century to the Moderns" (1912),<sup>17</sup> whereas for Ruskin it had constituted "the fetter and formalism" that Turner's "English instinct" had had "to break through" (V, *Modern Painters*: III, 390). Through language, then, Fry effects his indirect correction of acquired aesthetic categories. If the rhetorical frame of argumentation has the function of establishing an understated dialogue with the former code, on a deeper level it aims to propose a different set of values, values which would enable the reader to feel in tune with, and understand, the language of Claude.

Later on in the essay he is quite explicit about this. Referring to Claude's language of painting, he defines it as foreign to modern "more elliptical and quick-witted modes of expression", thus indirectly hinting at an alternative, less assertive style:

It is with slow ponderation and deliberate care that he places before us his perfunctory and generalised statements, finishing and polishing them with relentless assiduity, and not infrequently giving us details that we do not desire and which add nothing but platitude to the too prolix statement (156).

The features of Claude's "undemonstrative" language are therefore evoked through negations of the Impressionist model:

There is a whole world of beauty which one must not look for at all in Claude. All that beauty of the sudden and unexpected revelation of an unsuspected truth ... is absent from Claude. As

the eye follows his line is nowhere arrested by a sense of surprise ..., nor by that peculiar thrill which comes from the communication of some creative force in the artist... There is nothing in Claude's innumerable drawings which reveals the inner life of the tree itself, its aspirations towards air and light, its struggle with gravitation and wind.

Fry shows here an awareness of the hermeneutic potentialities of the negative form, which he was to fully exploit in his book on Cézanne:

To describe a masterpiece of the Salon d'Automne or of some equivalent English exhibition one would have to use positive terms, to describe Cézanne's works, I find myself, like a medieval mystic before the divine reality, reduced to negative terms. I have to say first what it is not. Cézanne is not decorative like so many of his gifted contemporaries; he is not what artists call 'strong' ...; he has not the gift to seize hold directly of an idea and express it with an emphasis which renders it immediately apparent; he seems indeed hardly to arrive at the comprehension of his theme till the very end of the work .... In short he is not perfect.<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere in the essay Fry writes of the radical difference between the Impressionist artist - "the acute and ardent observer" - and the Classical artist, "the contemplative wanderer", who "combines and recombines [nature's] abstract symbols so as to arouse ... more purely than nature herself can the mood of pastoral delight" (157). Thus he recontextualises the Classical artist's "even and unaccented harmony", his "nerveless and dull" line, his "inexpressive beauty" within the framework of seventeenth-century literature. In the process, the features Ruskin had highlighted as failings take on positive connotations: "It is in the cumulative effect of the perfect coordination of parts none of which is by itself capable of absorbing our attention or fascinating our imagination that the power of a picture by Claude lies" (157). This is a sentence which seems to be a paraphrase of Ruskin's statement:

But all these kinds of fallacy sprang more or less out of the vices of the time in which Claude lived; his peculiar character reaches beyond these, to an incapacity of understanding the main point in anything he had to represent, down to the minut-

est detail, which is quite unequalled, as far as I know, in human nugatoriness (V, *Modern Painters*: III, 404).

Ruskin's attack on Claude's depiction of nature questioned not only the formal representation of nature, but also a vision of landscape which implied what in the well-known chapter in *Modern Painters* III he would call the modern "pathetic fallacy" - that is, the projection of the self's feelings and emotions upon nature. In the "Modern Landscape" chapter in *Modern Painters* III, he contrasted the nature of Keats and Tennyson - "altered by [their] own feelings" - with that of Turner, "having an animation and pathos of its own, wholly irrespective of human presence and passion" (V: 340).

In his customary search for new terms to describe as yet unexplored areas of aesthetic and psychological experience, Ruskin coined a new word to describe this form of subjectivism: "pastoralism". He had first used the word in one of his 1854 Edinburgh lectures to refer to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century "modern artificial school" of landscape, whose "total absence of any subject but humanity" was epitomised by Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (XII: 119). The term then reappeared in *Modern Painters* III in the chapter on Claude that Fry seems to have had in mind. Thus when Fry refers to Milton and Racine, and subsequently to Virgil's *Eclogues* as the literary analogues to Claude's style, we perceive him to be offering precise references for, and correctives to, Ruskin's reading. Analogously, in the last paragraph of the essay, where he explains that "Claude's view of landscape is false to nature in that he is entirely anthropocentric", we sense his intention to provide a technical term for Ruskin's notion of pastoralism. In fact, we perceive Ruskin's voice, introduced but soon silenced by that, by now familiar, rhetorical concession: "it may be admitted that this is not the finest kind of art". Here Fry explains "anthropocentrism" as "the art of a self-centred and refined luxury which looks on nature as a garden of its own pleasure-house" (161). This view of nature, infused with the Keatsian "sense of nostalgia" which Fry evokes in the closing lines, is fully resolved within the aesthetic sphere, a sphere which Fry's modernism conceived of as isolated and remote from "actual life."

Ruskin's view of nature in terms of alterity, as an organism endowed with a life of its own, also led him to investigate the social and cultural factors that had been involved in the rise of landscape as an independent subject in art.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Fry's reflections on landscape

art, not only in Claude, are limited in scope. They deliberately stop on the verge of extra-aesthetic matters. Fry's interest is in the formal aspects of the artwork and their relation to the art-historical tradition. His debate on Romantic organicism and Impressionist assumptions in the discourse on Claude and on modern painting proceeds also by way of an account of Claude's sketches from nature:

... he was a man with vigorous ideas of the laws of design and the necessity of perfectly realised unity, and to this I suppose one must ascribe the curious contrast between the narrow limits of his work in oil as compared to the wide range, the freedom and the profound originality of his work as a draughtsman. Among all these innumerable effects which his ready susceptibility led him to record he found but few which were capable of being reduced to that logical and mathematical formula which he demanded before complete realisation could be tolerated" (160).<sup>20</sup>

Fry referred to these drawings from nature as responding to the laws of spontaneity, variety and freedom, subsequently reduced to abstract schemes of nature in oil-painting. He aimed to show how Claude had overcome, through a process of formal simplification, the first creative impression, which was, Fry says, that of a "Romanticist" and an "Impressionist":

It is, indeed, in the second group of studies from nature that we come from time to time upon motives that startle and surprise us... Here we find not only Claude the prim seventeenth-century classic, but Claude the Romanticist, anticipating the chief ideas of Corot's later development, and Claude the impressionist, anticipating Whistler and the discovery of Chinese landscape (159).

In this way, not only did Fry aim to provide further proofs to what Reynolds had said about Lorrain's creative and compositional process,<sup>21</sup> but also and more importantly, he inserted Claude within a pattern of Western landscape art tradition in which, as Holmes had clearly stated in his commentary, the evolutionist model was at work.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Fry's argument aimed to demonstrate that Claude, having gone through all - past and future - stages of landscape art, having therefore also surpassed the Impressionist moment, was virtually to be placed

within the domain of "Post-Impressionism" - a term that he had coined with the purpose of stressing the modern painters' overcoming the assumptions of Impressionism:

For purposes of convenience it was necessary to give these artists a name, and I chose, as being the vaguest and most non-committal, the name of Post-Impressionists. This merely stated their position in time relatively to the Impressionist movement. In conformity with my own previous prejudices against Impressionism, I think I underlined too much their divorce from the parental stock... but I was none the less right in recognising their essential difference, a difference which subsequent development of Cubism has rendered more evident.<sup>23</sup>

Starting from Hough's essay, my reading has highlighted Fry's implicit debate with Ruskin and his aesthetic theories, his attempt to promote an alternative to an organic view of nature as well as to Impressionist representation. That Fry's discovery of Cézanne should have led him to take up once more the subject of naturalism in painting, and that this inevitably involved him in a confrontation with Ruskin was rightly pointed out by Hough; that Claude's painting should be the ideal "battle-field" on which that confrontation should take place was to be expected, given Fry's familiarity with Ruskin. Thus the Claude article widely ranges in its reconsideration of Ruskinian issues, and the context in which the article originally appeared throws light on this. It also marks an important stage in Fry's development of his art-critical discourse: in focusing on the problem of style Fry inquired on the relation between language and the figurative arts, dealing with themes and rhetorical forms which were to be exploited in his later writings on Cézanne.

Concluding this reading of Fry's "Claude" as a reflection on/of modern Cézannesque art, we may speculate that this may not be the only case in which Cézanne has been associated with the name "Claude". In his controversial novel *L'Oeuvre* (1886), Zola had attacked Cézanne in the guise of a character named Claude Laugier. By the turn of the century the name "Claude" has certainly acquired what semioticians refer to as a "surplus of connotation" within later art discourse. In the light of this the very title of Fry's essay, with its apparently referential and yet ambiguous simplicity, would seem to evoke the contemporary art scene as the background to this confrontation between Ruskin's and Fry's "two theories". Whether this was a delib-

erate cryptic allusion or whether it is one of those extra meanings we postmoderns are inclined to superimpose onto texts of the past, it is difficult to determine. But in any case, it would not seem so strange that in Fry's thinking at that stage in his career, Zola and Ruskin should figure together, as two different 'ghost'-opposers to the modern movement.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge Journal*, 1 (1947-48), pp. 14-27. Some general references to the Ruskin-Fry relationship are also in: Frances Spalding, *Roger Fry. Art and Life* (London: Granada, 1980); Quentin Bell, *Roger Fry. An Inaugural Lecture* (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1964); Solomon Fishman, *The Interpretation of the Art Criticism of John Ruskin, Walter Pater, Clive Bell, Roger Fry and Herbert Read* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); Jaqueline V. Falkenheim, *Roger Fry and the Beginnings of Formalist Art Criticism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980). Some early lines of the Ruskin-Fry relationship, with reference to the "pure visibility" theory, were drawn in Italy under the impulse of Lionello Venturi's "La pura visibilità e l'estetica moderna", *L'Esame*, 2 (1923). See: Gwylm Pryce-Jones, "Roger Fry e la critica inglese contemporanea", *L'arte* (nov. 1935), pp. 480-90; Maria Luisa Gengaro, "Orientamenti della critica d'arte nel secolo ventesimo", *L'arte* (1935) pp. 97-117; and Elettra Cannata's introduction to: Roger Fry, *Visione e disegno* (Milano: Menunziano, 1947).

<sup>2</sup> See Graham Hough, "Reflections on a Literary Revolution", in *Image and Experience* (London: Duckworth, 1960). For an extensive account of Hough's attack on Modernism, see: Giovanni Cianci, *Modernismo/Modernismi: Dall'Avanguardia storica dagli anni Trenta e oltre* (Milano: Principato, 1991), pp. 25-26.

<sup>3</sup> See the note added to his 1901 essay on Giotto as well as his "Retrospect" essay, in *Vision and Design* (Oxford: OUP, 1981), pp. 92 and 199-211, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> "Reflections on a Literary Revolution", p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> J. B. Bullen, *Post-Impressionists in England. The Critical Reception* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 2-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4; see also Roger Fry, "Retrospect," p. 203.

<sup>7</sup> "Claude", *The Burlington Magazine*, II (August, 1907), pp. 275-314. The essay was republished in *Vision and Design*, pp. 154-161. Quotations from the essay are given in the text, and refer to the book edition.

<sup>8</sup> In 1914, in his review of Clive Bell's book *Art*, Fry had defined the difference between Bell's and his own way of dealing with tradition in these terms: "unlike the younger generation, we have always had a sense of the awful responsibility of profaning the temples; we have been apologetic and deferential even while we were undermining the foundations". R. Fry, "A New Theory of Art", *Nation*, 7 (March 1914), pp. 937-38. Reprinted in J. B. Bullen, *Post-Impressionists in England*, pp. 487-91. What Fry had defined as an apparently respectful, although not less revolutionary, attitude towards tradition was also acutely noticed and explained by Virginia Woolf: "There is plenty of evidence in these old articles [for the *Athenium*, (1900-1906)] that Roger Fry was qualifying himself to do that work of differentiation and inter-

pretation which, he said, has to be done over and over again for each generation in order to bring about a more profound understanding of great imaginative creations". V. Woolf, *Roger Fry. A Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, [1940] 1991), p. 116.

<sup>9</sup> For some analogies between Ruskin's and Bell's rhetoric and aesthetic views see J.B. Bullen's introduction to Clive Bell, *Art* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), pp. xli-xlix.

<sup>10</sup> I am referring to Jurij Lotman's notion of "code" ("On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture", *New Literary History*, 9:2 [1978], pp. 211-232). Lotman has extensively studied the ways in which culture proceeds owing to an internal "stereotyping mechanism", whose function is performed by natural language, and which is responsible for the structure and the collective use of the code.

<sup>11</sup> Assertiveness and dogmatism are some of the charges constantly addressed to Ruskin also by his contemporaries, as his defensive preface to *Modern Painters* III makes very clear. At the turn of the century he was defined as "one of the most violent writers" of nineteenth century, "a Torquemada of aesthetics" by the not less violent Max Nordau, who devoted a chapter of his very controversial and widely-read *Degeneration* (1889) to Ruskin.

<sup>12</sup> Roger Fry, *Cézanne* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> See Claire Pace, "Claude the Enchanted: Interpretations of Claude in Earlier Nineteenth Century", *The Burlington Magazine*, III (1969), pp. 733-40.

<sup>14</sup> See "Discourse IV", in Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses* (London: Walter Scott, 1887), p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E.T. Cook & A. Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: G. Allen, 1903-12), V (*Modern Painters*, III), p. 337. References to the volumes in this collected edition are hereafter given in brackets in the text, e.g. (V, *Modern Painters*: III, 337).

<sup>16</sup> For Ruskin's theory of the two-dimensionality of visual perception, as an anticipation of the doctrine of the Impressionists, see: E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon, 1992), p. 250.

<sup>17</sup> See "The French Post-Impressionists", *Vision and Design*, p. 169.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Fry, *Cézanne*, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Modern Painters* might therefore be related to German aesthetic, scientific, historical enquiries, such as Carl Gustav Carus's *Briefe über Landschaftsmalerei* (1831), Georg Simmel's *Die Philosophie des Landschafts* (1912-1913), and Joachim Ritter's *Landschaft* (1963) - the actual formulation of a philosophical theory of landscape.

<sup>20</sup> In the article in *The Burlington Magazine* references to the illustrative appendix are made explicit.

<sup>21</sup> "His pictures are a composition of the various draughts which he

previously made from beautiful scenes and prospects." Sir Joshua Reynolds, "Discourse IV", p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> For Fry's view of the evolution from schematic to impressionist representation in art, in relation to Constable's painting, see: "From one point of view the whole history of art may be summed up as the history of the gradual discovery of appearances. Primitive art starts, like that of children, with symbols of concepts ... Indeed, it has taken from Neolithic times till the nineteenth century to perfect this discovery. European art from the time of Giotto progressed more or less continuously in this direction, in which the discovery of linear perspective marks an important stage, whilst the full exploration of atmospheric colour perspective had to await the work of the French Impressionists. In that age-long process Constable occupies an important place". Roger Fry, *Reflections of British Painting* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1934), pp. 134-35.

<sup>23</sup> Roger Fry, "Retrospect", p. 203.