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“Not Theory, Thought”: Collingwood’s Early Work on Art

Nancy S. Struever

ABSTRACT

R. G. Collingwood’s strong, early, inventive interests in aesthetic experience and art activity were of fundamental importance to his lifelong engagement with philosophy and his critique of the available “academic” philosophies. And his work finds reinforcement in the current speculations in the philosophy of art of Alva Noë.

KEYWORDS: Collingwood, aesthetic experience, art activity, neuroart inquiry, realism as error, primordial

Collingwood’s “*Libellus de Generatione: An Essay in Absolute Empiricism*” (1920) was a tract of strenuous philosophical revisionism; never published, perhaps unpublishable, supposedly destroyed, it survived. He begins by stressing his obligations to David Hume; he offers his thematic: “absolute denial of any such concept as substance and the resolution of all reality into the reality of experience.” “The reality of mind is the process of its experience, its life, and nothing else” (1920, 1). Or, “the mind is a mirror . . . whose being is solely the activity of reflecting”; it has no “substance of its own of which this activity is only a reflection” (1920, 6). Collingwood’s entire career as student and teacher transpired within the domain of Oxford philosophy, or, perhaps, within its range of philosophical errors. He does mention in the “*Libellus*” Italian philosophy as “a most lively and constructive effort,” but, still, “tinged with subjectivism which truly belongs to Realism,” which functions as an omni-incompetent term (1920, 1). And he mentions an obligation—beset by difficulties—to John Cook Wilson, because “it set

me free of the crude empiricism of the 19th century, and a great deal of loose thought which presents an empiricism of this kind under the label of Idealism" (1920, 2).

But his pre- and extra-collegiate life was usefully unacademic, productive of strong inquiry interests and methods. His father, William G. Collingwood, was assistant, biographer, and portraitist of John Ruskin; Collingwood claimed his father's book, *The Art Teaching of John Ruskin*, was the best account of Ruskin's notions of aesthetic experience and art activity (1920–34, 7 Feb. 1934). As well, his father was a zealous, productive archaeologist of Roman Britain, and therefore non-Roman Britain. Collingwood both participated in and continued this work, gaining necessary skills in working with the artifacts of practices, the atextual sources that furnish strong moments of societies and cultures. And later, he confided to Guido Ruggiero, the dedicatee of the "Libellus," that his own "retreat" to Roman history also avoided dysfunctional academic discussion ([1920–34], 4 Oct. 1927). "The only philosophy that can be of real use to anybody at the present time is a critical review of the chief forms of experience" (Collingwood 1924, 9). We move from the opposition of the empirical of the "Libellus," as "concrete," as inquiry virtue, with "abstract" as flaw, to the *Speculum mentis*, where the opposition persists and reformulates the revisionary mode. Collingwood, in the late *Autobiography* (1939), notes the *Speculum mentis* as "a bad book, in many ways," but "much better than I remembered," and "it has much that needs to be supplanted and qualified" (1924, 56–57). The preface and the prologue introduce as well the innovative "Trinity Term Lectures of 1924" and the *Outline of a Philosophy of Art* (1925); these and particularly chapter 3 of the *Speculum*, "Art as Pure Imagination," push the philosophical revisionism far into the domain of art experience, practice. And the prologue announces his purpose, "the creators and consumers of spiritual wealth are out of touch!" (1924, 20), then offers a historical background to Collingwood's inquiry that is completely Ruskinian, opposing valuable medieval sensitivities to their artistic practices to the distressing Renaissance theories, programs, that misread the valuable Renaissance practices.

But Collingwood is never less than historian. The review is a historical narrative, necessarily so as the material is "concrete," that is, timed, episodic, "historical." The *Speculum mentis* offers a "map of knowledge" with the "provinces," each a "concrete form of experience, an activity of the whole self." As "concrete activity, each is in some sense a form of knowledge, an activity of the cognitive mind" (1924, 39). Thus our chief modes of

inquiry: art, religion, science, history, with philosophy hovering as a kind of post-Greek commentary. He assures us this is provisional: there are, possibly, further forms. The program is already complex. Chapter 2 argues that serial arrangement, his historical review of the forms of experience and their claims to knowledge, reveals each term as “not a wholly fresh embodiment of (an abstract) Universal, but a modification of the term before.” It requires the inquirer’s sensitivity to modification, for “series” means concrete novelty, the denial of both abstract repetition and abstract change (1924, 55).

At the very beginning of human history we find the extraordinary monuments of Paleolithic art, a standing problem to all theories of human development, and a delicate test of their truth. (Collingwood 1924, 52)

The *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* claim “art is the primary and fundamental activity of the mind” (1925, 14); the Trinity Term Lectures maintain that “the key to the place of art in life is this conception of the primitiveness of art” ([1924] 2005, 75). Then, Collingwood deplores nineteenth-century theory, placing art “above” other forms, in a “morbid, vicious worship of art” ([1924] 2005, 75n56). He cites, as he must, Vico on children and savages as sublime poets; for Vico’s discovery, poetry first, is the “master key of his science,” and he makes a strong case for art as first form. But Collingwood is sensitive to contemporary egregious changes in basic scholarly understandings, dispositions. He laments “certain archeologists” who “have conjectured that Paleolithic art had a religious motive. There is no evidence for this, it is simply a confession of failure to conceive a race primitively and intensely savage throwing its whole soul into artistic expression for its own sake.” He agrees that certain dim premonitions Paleolithic man certainly had. “But the evidence of archeology is clear that the full development was the work of the Neolith.” He notes “the curious lack of graphic art of the Neolith . . . but artless he was not . . . but this was an art not free, like the Paleolithic, but absorbed into the service of religion” (1924, 52). Collingwood dismissed the long, dominant postclassical tradition of commentary praising art as the bearer of philosophical, religious, and political ideas: propaganda is not art. And anticlassicism is a normal and beneficial reaction to authority (1925, 83–85).

For Collingwood, art was not simply previous but prior: first, powerful, indispensable. Collingwood would dismiss the historians and critics who lacked “breadth of appreciation,” the product of aesthetic, not reflective

activity, for aesthetic reflection is “the necessary basis for all historical and critical work” (1925, 87).

The concrete life of art is the creation of works of art. But this creation is altogether the act of imagination . . . an artist paints with one motive only, that he may help himself to see, and to see in the sense of to imagine. (Collingwood 1924, 67)

Chapter 3 is titled “Art as Pure Imagination.” The purity, to be sure, approaches diversity in the practice of art. He begins again, of necessity, with Vico and Hamann, eighteenth-century students of aesthetic primitivism, but not with claims for children, savages, as “sublime poets,” “natural artists”; rather, with art as “the foundation, the soil, the womb, the night of the spirit” (aka “consciousness”) (1925, 88). Yet, imagination must take its place in everyday activity, for “art . . . is not a facile explosion of the bare receptivity of sense, it is a life of discipline and endeavor . . . deliberate and self-constructive activity . . . of a self-determining mind” (1925, 64). Collingwood deplors the confusion of imagination and dream: “to dream is to imagine, but not work at imagining” (1925, 65). The psychoanalytic focus on dream as possible cure is impertinent, and thus his dismissal of Freudian theory of art (1924, 92–95).

I would argue the Collingwoodian usage in effect recalls a pertinent range of the variations of classical theory; certainly Collingwood’s translation and commentary of Aristotle’s *De anima* (1913–14), the particular interest in the interventions of *phantasia* in thought, not only supported his claim—shared with his contemporary, Martin Heidegger—that Aristotle was better than modern psychologists, but refined the definition of imaginative competence. Collingwood’s account recalls Klaus Dockhorn’s reading of Quintilian’s contrast of *imaginatio* with *imitatio* as activities: imitation can deal only with present perceptions, imagination is necessary for dealing with “everything else”: the past, certainly (1968). Then there is obvious sympathy with Jean-Luc Solère’s account of St. Augustine’s reading: imagining deals with “what happens” (again, concreteness), rather than contends with “what is,” metaphysically (2003). Finally, consider Claude Imbert’s minimalist Stoic definition of imagining: “presencing the non-present”; imagination deals with a range of necessary, preponderant transactions (1980). Just so, Collingwood’s definitions are powerful, speculative.

But of great importance are the refinements, exclusions of Collingwood’s definitions of art. “The aesthetic experience cares nothing for the

reality or irreality of its object” (1924, 60). And, “Art does not assert . . . it is a nonconceptual, nonlogical activity” (1924, 61). Then, “work of art” is an activity, not a “thing.” “Cease to look at it imaginatively, and it ceases to be a work of art” (1925, 25). Apprehension is of course response as well as creation; the work of the beholder as well as the painter. And, in a letter to Samuel Alexander he offers the equation: “a painting in an empty gallery is to a work of art as a chopped-off hand to a hand”; the responder is essential (1925–38, 24–25 Apr.). And, the work is isolate. “Every work of art is a monad, a windowless, self-contained world . . . thus careless of mutual consistency and interested only in their internal coherence” (1924, 64). Other works are nonessential.

Again, the broad revisionary moment. Art is a “concrete activity . . . not a purely immediate, instinctive, and undifferentiated activity,” like feeling, sensation, emotion that are “abstract elements,” or “subsidiary emotions,” and “can not give meaning” (1924, 63). Or, the ambitious claim: “art is concrete philosophy”—“the cutting edge of the mind [merely, I think] a perpetual outreach of the mind into the unknown,” that, together with the logical weight of “fact [color, shape?] gives the edge the power to cut” (1924, 101, 107). Yet “the artist does not think it out philosophically, he does not even[!] state it as a religion or creed” (1925, 51). Thus an early appearance of Collingwood’s “logic of question and answer”: art activity is a matter of spontaneity, questioning, supponal, of supposition of possibilities (1924, 76–80, 101). “There is no external moment that can circumscribe the possible objects of the imagination” (1925, 21). The artists’ entertainment of possibilities is not the entertainment of chance; it is discrimination between pertinent necessity and pertinent possibility. This is not “mere life” as ground, but its versions: fractures, interruptions, stalls, serendipities. Collingwood observes both the range and chance of the experiences; not fixed in external (non-aesthetic) frames, arguments of need or pleasure or nature. On the contrary, the artist’s intentions, insofar as he can, or wants to, articulate them, even to himself, may be only to question, subvert, modify. The response may be equally aesthetically unfixd. There is a passage in the later *Principles of Art* that observes that like all other efforts of “spirit,” richness of choice develops polarities of good and evil, a possible role in the enlargement of the domain of corrupt consciousness (1938, 171).

Certainly Collingwood defines art as both intuitive and expressive. And the early letter to Samuel Alexander claims that the artist paints *pari passu* with the process of creating his imaginary work of art, and the painting is an actual help to this creation, “fulfills a need that arises out

of the nature of the imagination itself” (1925–38, 24–25 Apr.). *Principles of Art* restates this: “The student learns by watching himself paint” (1938, 281). Thus, art’s success, its revelatory power, beauty. Beauty is, simply, imaginative coherence: “The coherence of the object of imagination is intuitively felt as an incandescence, so to speak of the whole,” a felt quality running through the whole rather than an articulated system. And then this is pure Collingwoodian lyric: it is like a moment in the Waldstein sonata that “turns out on analysis to be the contrast between the key of E Major and that of C in which the sonata began; the thrill is the fusion of these two keys into a single indivisible experience in which each acquires its significance from the simultaneous awareness of the other”; Collingwood appends: what a small boy (RGC?) called “the moonrise” (1925, 27–28).

“Inquiry supports judgment; wholeness, coherence is the substance of the claim “beauty is the birthplace of truth” (1924, 88–90). But coherence delivers only the possibility; art operates in an imaginative modality. It is the brilliance of the Paleolithic art that poses the “standing problem” for “theorists of human development” and creates “the delicate test” for their “notions of relations between the parts.”

ALVA NOË GLOSSES COLLINGWOOD

Collingwood seems positive that he has substituted a thorough account of aesthetic experience and art activity for the pretensions of “theory”; for Collingwood “aesthetic theory is the corpse of art” (1924, 263). And we may recall Joseph Koerner’s claim about Friedrich’s landscapes: the experience of the painting is not an experience of landscape, but an “experience of an experience [Friedrich’s] of a landscape” (2009, 219, 227). But Noë will push the Collingwoodian focus on aesthetic experience further; the point, the purpose of our experience of the painting is “to catch experience in the act of making the world available” (2004, 176). Certainly for Collingwood, “breadth of aesthetic appreciation” defines the thick aesthetic activity that is “the necessary basis for the pursuit of all historical and critical work” (1925, 87). For Noë, the precise acts, the particular interventions of art may create possibilities of historical truth.

Noë’s double professional commitments, as professor of philosophy and as member of the Institute of Cognitive and Brain Science at the University of California, Berkeley, furnishes both a double critique of current notions of aesthetic experience and art activity, and a useful commentary on Collingwood’s arguments.

We can learn a lot about art and its importance to us by better understanding why the neuroart program fails. (Noë 2015, 120)

Failure is restriction: to Noë’s dismay, neuroscience is confined not so much by a theory as by an ideology (2015, 120): an enthusiasm for brainy complexity. “We need a neuroscience of embodied activity, a focus not simply on patterns of neural function, but patterns of skilful activity, in which brain, body, world work together to make consciousness happen” (2004, 227). The neuroscience we have does not offer an “intellectual ready-made . . . it has yet to frame an adequate concept of our biological nature” (2015, 125). Thus Noë turns to Daniel Dennett for a “biological” model of “what the brain does in relation to the whole life of the animal. We shift back and forth from what the animal does and achieves to what happens in the brain, and so we tell a story about how what is going on in the brain belongs to and is part of the story of the animal’s life” (2015, 122). Neuroscience needs complexity: for our “perceptual experience . . . is an activity of exploring the environment, drawing on, [incorporating] knowledge of sensorimotor dependencies [vital eye, hand movements] and thought” (2004, 228).

But what is of peculiar interest is that his remedy for neuroscience’s theoretical vacuity is an engagement with the complexities of art activity; indeed, he suggests that perhaps a better understanding of art will help us reframe neuroscience (2015, 125). But he does not claim reciprocity. Certainly, “neuroscience is too individualistic, too internalistic, too representationalistic to be a suitable technique for the study of art and its activity” (2015, 133). Rather, he wishes to reverse the usual direction taken by neuroart inquiry; “it is not pictures as *objects* of perception that can tell us about perceiving,” “rather it is *making pictures*—that is, the skilful construction of pictures—that can illuminate experience,” as making, enacting (2004, 179). The inquiry must be “enactive,” deliver “embodied activity”; this is perhaps an appeal similar to Collingwood’s employment of the term “re-enactive” as definitive of responsible historical inquiry. Pictures, then, are “technologies of presence,” practices of display (2015, 162). Indeed, here Noë asserts his philosophical allegiance: art, like phenomenology, is simply “a mode or activity of trying to explain” (2015, 133): and “to engage in phenomenology” is “to study the way experience—mere experience, if you like—acquires world-presenting content” (2004, 179).

Perhaps Noë’s primary allegiance is to philosophy: he concludes his “Very Abbreviated History of Aesthetics” with an invocation of John Dewey—“who more than any other thinker, brings the nature of art . . .

into focus” (2015, 205–6). The work that art does depends on the nature of experience. And for Dewey experiences that are “organized, structured, integral” are “achievements,” they are “aesthetic.” In a way, then, we are all artists, Noë claims. But he needs to discriminate between “ordinary pictures” and pictures that are also “works of art.” Thus *true* artists make objects that offer the opportunity for (the rest of us) to experience structure, the integral—“coherence,” perhaps. And, you, the viewer, “must now make your own experience of the art work. Art works give you the opportunity to enact the way in which our lives unfold” (2015, 205–6).

We are, in short, now looking back to, glossing, Collingwood’s successful art as possessing “imaginative coherence.” Of course, “beauty” as successful structure, the “birthplace of truth,” is missing. Noë feels “no help to appeal to beauty here. Beauty is both too wide and too narrow” (2015, 96). And the notion of beauty as incandescence, emotional coloring that can be formally explained is unnecessary. And he cannot seem to place “imagination” as an activity he cares or needs to explain. But his account of art as the enemy of function, the perversion of technology, where works of art are “strange tools,” that design functions where art subverts, is a generous account (2015, 98–99), inclusive of much we regard as “great” art. But “pictoriality,” picture’s innate, deliverable, structure—and an abstract term that would be abhorrent to Collingwood—signals art’s achievement for both of them.

COLLINGWOOD GLOSSES NOË

Not political theory, but the thought that occupies the mind of a man engaged in political work. . . . (Collingwood 1939, 110)

If we turn to the *Autobiography* we find Collingwood’s narrative of inquiry moments, and this distinction between political theory and the thinking that engages the politician. It reflects his strong motive: a devotion to the “concrete” as opposed to the formulations of the “abstract,” that is, to the material of activity and experience; the choice still describes his arguments of the late political tract, *The New Leviathan*. Collingwood places discovery within the argumentative experience, that can be internal debate, perhaps. Alain De Libera has stressed the importance in the *Autobiography* of Collingwood’s claims for his early discovery of the inquiry practice of “Question and Answer” (1999, 486–90). For Collingwood, “the

questioning activity . . . was not an activity of achieving comprehension with, or apprehension of, something; it was not preliminary to the act of knowing; it was one half (the other half being answering the question) of an act which in its totality was knowing” (1939, 26). And he immediately selects as exemplary his first lectures on Aristotle’s *De anima*; the material is available in his “Translation and Commentary” (1913–14; 1939, 27).

But his epiphany, the strategic discovery, was “aesthetic” (1939, 29). Collingwood was employed by Naval Intelligence during World War I, and his daily commute required walking past the Albert Memorial. It was, he seems to claim, a conversion experience. “Everything about it was visibly misshapen, corrupt, crawling, verminous.” What did Gilbert Scott think he was doing? Collingwood’s solution: we must establish the specific questions the disgusting building answered.

Collingwood had been raised in academic philosophy, Realism, which erred by neglecting history (1939, 28). The interruption to his career seems to have furnished an opportunity for revisionary ambition. There is no date for his remarkable unpublished treatise “Confusion of Sense,” but the questions raised by Scott’s Memorial, and the troublesome narrative of Aristotle as revelatory of imaginative practice, had already confirmed false art theory as another kind of Realism. There is a peculiarly strong statement by John Ruskin in *Modern Painters, Volume 2*: in all the work of Tintoretto “imaginative verity” is “distinguished from Falsehood on the one hand, and from Realism on the other” (n.d., II, 437). The enemy, Realism, is in art, simply Representation; and James Porter’s excellent *Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece* nails its flaw: “Like Midas, representation idealizes whatever it touches, damning it to irreality, or hyperreality” (2010, 423). That is to say, Realism, as representation, for Ruskin, and for Collingwood, and for Noë, is a strong example of the kind of theorizing that distorts, devalues art activity. Indeed Noë cites Ruskin exactly in connection with this misunderstanding: art does not represent, deliver, experience, but, recall, in Noë’s neat phrase—“catches experience in the act” of a kind of discovery, “making the world available.” Observe: Collingwood’s connection with Ruskin is very strong, but Ruskin seems an authority for Noë; for, he appeared, uncited, in a general lecture on art, abstemiously illustrated by PowerPoint with many examples of—only—Paleolithic art, and two versions of Millais’s portrait of Ruskin.

Then, Collingwood’s (Ruskinian) *Speculum mentis* prologue had contrasted medieval sensitivities to medieval art practices with Renaissance divergence: Renaissance art theory did not explain specific benefits of the

excellent Renaissance art practices. And the text on practices of perspective, “The Confusion of Sense,” more directly addresses the theoretical dysfunction of Renaissance perspective: “The theory of vision which has on the whole become current in modern philosophy has, I suggest, become deeply vitiated by failure to observe the difference between seeing an object and drawing it.” In this theory we have “the unsound assumption that the rules of perspective as laid down by Renaissance art in Italy, and adopted by academic painting since that time are based on accurate psychological investigation . . . instead of being based, as they are, that drawing is done on a flat surface” (n.d., 11). The essence of Collingwood’s argument is that the theory is a mistake: “The shape of a *visum*, which in his perspective drawing the painter is assuming to be determinate, is in actual vision never determinate” (n.d., 11–12). This premise is, of course, the burden of much of Noë’s critique of vision theory of inadequate neuroscience. And, perspective theory is “in itself a gratuitous piece of mythology based, if it is based on anything, upon a representative theory of perception according to which what we see is not things but pictures of things” (n.d., 10–11). Noë tackles the same problem with the same exasperation, “what is remarkable is that representationalist pictures—I don’t mean art work—just pictures—purport to show what is not present” (2015, 108). Or, we must observe that the depicted center “scene” of a perspective painting has to be a painted *hole*, nothing.

And in the same text of “confusion,” Collingwood gloomily notes that “accurate perspective has always been the work of highly sophisticated and intellectualized periods in art history” (n.d., 12). But note: in the seminal Trinity Lectures he claims that functional theory “is simply an organic element within the process by which works of art come into being and it cannot exist except as an element in that process” ([1924] 2005, 111). Recall the letter to Alexander: “The artist paints *pari passu* . . . [paint] fulfills a need that arises out of the imagination itself.” Theory is simply the artist’s own particular sense of his art task, position.

Noë, in turn, theorizes the artist’s and the responder’s position as “enactive”; pictures require us to use our sensorimotor skills to see, to enact vision. This follows from Noë’s assumption: the world is a domain for our active exploration, our historical engagements. Collingwood believed Oxonian Realism neglected history. T. J. Clark’s “Lucky Hunter-Gatherers” offers intrinsic historical interest. This is a review of the British Museum’s exhibit, “Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind” (2013). The title announces the good luck; the review relates Clark’s confusion confronting the very small images of “some 25,000 years ago”; his modern mind “reels” at the departure

from his brain of all his theories: “How fabulously, ruthlessly brilliant the best craft performances were, and how pathetic and negligible the worst.” “Consciousness of the aesthetic has never necessarily meant competence: or even, most often, the wish to compete. A lot of time, any old visualization will do.” Clark develops a parallel “wild theory” of the iconoclasm—destruction—also present, then suggests “what happened must have been a new pattern of cognition directed and deformed by an ongoing symbolic sociability.” But “the true cognitive depth to the Paleolithic sculptures”—that is, their challenge to our theories—is “the way they suggest how self-loss and self-consciousness were intertwined.” He then quickly notes that most of the images exhibited were of animals—thus, “the invention . . . of more and more ways to bring the realm of animals up close, imaginatively—into being, into movement.” Yet, Clark finds the show of figurines gives us “a drive to depict the ‘human,’ the not-quite-like-me, in all its shape-shifting concreteness and abstraction.” “The creation and response of the figures of the cat-female” had to be “admitted, touched, manipulated, magnified, made familiar, but also petrified, stilled, defleshed, stylized, abstracted, given (ultimate, mysterious word) form” (2013, 11–12). Brilliance generates form as performance possibility, even offers those Collingwoodian “pre-theoretical emotional charges.” He does not deny beauty, he denies abstract beauty, the value of beauty is simply generative. Or, Clark’s practice is exemplary of the Collingwoodian claim that aesthetic activity is the necessary basis for all historical and critical work.

To his great credit, the review is argument for the continuity of art, that is, one must stipulate place in the general account of human development. And this of course is the shared assumption of Noë’s statement, “the cave paintings of Europe and Africa date from just this same period of revolutionary innovation that witnessed our birth as a species” (2015, 99), as Collingwood’s emphasizing that the extraordinary monuments of Paleolithic art were found at the very beginning of human history (1924, 52). Further, Clark’s account specifies social competence: a “new pattern of symbolic sociability.” Inquiry has the task of dealing with “civil,” communitarian value; “unhinged theory” is solipsist: compare Collingwood: “Art, merely because it is a human activity is a corporate activity” ([1924] 2005, 67). Noë states that he “is not interested in the artist’s self-understanding” (2015, 167). The fashionability of Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* fades; it describes perhaps the Renaissance art market better than the Renaissance artist. Collingwood, and Noë, seem committed to Robert Pippin’s strong assumption: that is, Pippin maintains that art gives

us evidence, our best evidence, for “the possibility of shared intelligibility” (2014, 140). While “symbolic sociability” is not a very happy formula, it does separate this speculative program of Collingwood, Ruskin, Noë, from the insensitively abstract program of Erwin Panofsky, Ernst Cassirer, Weimar: it does not take on Panofsky’s faith in perspective as omniscient aesthetic solution; it does not share Cassirer’s metaphysical fancy for symbolic forms. And it certainly is indifferent to Weimar’s failure.

Collingwood’s last chapter of the *Autobiography* deals with “Theory and Practice”; it returns to the topics, the values of the *Speculum mentis*; it condemns, almost with ferocity, the “philosophical attitudes” of his Oxford training that still persist (1939, 167). “I know now that the minute philosophers of my youth,” the Realists/Idealist factions, “for all their profession of purely scientific detachment,” the pretensions of pure theoretical positions, detached “from practical affairs, were the propagandists of a coming Fascism”; detached, vulnerable, impervious to experience and activity as their true professional concerns. The full Bodleian text of the outline for the Trinity Term lectures offers art inquiry as less argument than interlocution: it is arguable that aesthetic inquiry frames, displays civil, political activity.

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