

The International
JOURNAL
of the ARTS IN SOCIETY

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VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE ARTS IN SOCIETY
<http://www.arts-journal.com>

First published in 2006 in Melbourne, Australia by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd
www.CommonGroundPublishing.com.

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ISSN: 1833-1866
Publisher Site: <http://www.Arts-Journal.com>

The INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE ARTS IN SOCIETY is a peer refereed journal. Full papers submitted for publication are refereed by Associate Editors through anonymous referee processes.

Typeset in Common Ground Markup Language using CGCreator multichannel typesetting system
<http://www.CommonGroundSoftware.com>.

When Two Fields Collide

Bourdieu, Education and a British Artistic Avant-Garde

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Abstract: With the advent of the Second World War, a number of British artists left their urban environments for the relative peace and safety of rural and coastal residence in Cornwall. This paper examines a particular place in time: St Ives in the 1940s and 50s. It begins by tracking the artistic biographies of two of the leading exponents of British abstract art: Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth. It considers their encounter with the coastal paintings of Alfred Wallis and their subsequent move to the town where he had worked. The paper is framed by a theoretical perspective derived from the work of the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu and his conceptualisation of artistic avant-gardes. It consequently employs a three-level approach involving analysis of biographical habitus and field structures. The paper shows how artists of a certain habitus constituted themselves as an avant-garde by positioning themselves within the art field, and within the broader social space. Configurations of social, economic and cultural capital will be examined to show the education and formation of a particular British artistic style which, for a time at least, became an international avant-garde. The work of such painters as Heron, Barnes-Graham, Lanyon, and Wells will also be considered. Finally, the paper explores how such a social analytical approach to aesthetics enriches and deepens our understanding of both the 'rules' and values of art. The presentation will take the form of a discursive montage using text, diagrams, biographical analyses together with several examples of paintings and sculpture.

Keywords: Pierre Bourdieu, British avant-garde Habitus, Artistic Field, Cornwall, Education, Cultural Capital

Introduction

DIMENSIONS OF TIME of an artistic field are at the centre of this paper and, of Bourdieu's theorising about cultural avant-gardes and their role in the ever changing 'fashions' of cultural production. In 'The Rules of Art', Bourdieu writes about the temporality of the field of artistic production; how an avant-garde comes into being; how it matures and it is 'consecrated' and eventually becomes the rearguard of artistic production (Bourdieu 1996: 159). His avant-gardes are not single homogeneous groups, but 'generations' of artists, associated with one another by both their biological ages and by the artistic age of their practice in relation to the present artistic field. Bourdieu describes how one generation is pushed into the artistic past by the following artistic generation, defining the gap between two successive modes of production as both stylistic and chronological (Bourdieu 1996:159). Bourdieu developed these ideas in the context of literary and artistic production in late nineteenth century France; in particular, for the French novelist, Flaubert. This paper uses the same theoretical perspective to investigate a **particular time** – 1940's and 50's; **particular people** – fifty artists associated with St Ives including Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Wilhelmina Barns-

Graham, Peter Lanyon and Patrick Heron - and a **particular place** – St Ives in Cornwall.

Bourdieu's Thinking Tools

In the analysis undertaken for this paper, Bourdieu's thinking tools - habitus and field, cultural, social and economic capital, and legitimation - are applied in a British context. These ideas are used to reveal the socio-economic structures which generate and are themselves generated by art production and artists' practices. Here capital is understood as 'accumulated labour' (Bourdieu 1986/83). "Habitus and field designate bundles of relations. A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the forms of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action." (Bourdieu 1992: 16). Thus, habitus and field are inextricably linked and mutually dependent: the one personal and embodied; the other objective and structural (See Grenfell 1996). The crux of any individual's field position (and their choices about position taking) is the quantity and form of capital which has been accrued by that individual in a particular field. Bourdieu identifies three distinct forms of capital:



1. cultural capital – embodied dispositions, cultural goods and educational qualifications;
2. social capital - social connections and obligations, including those associated with associations and institutions; and
3. economic capital into which, given certain conditions, all other capitals can be converted (Bourdieu 1986/83)

Applying these inter-related and interchangeable ideas within any particular field of production and to specific times and places involves asking the question: ‘What constitutes cultural or social capital in these particular contexts?’ It also demands commitment to an iterative exploration of field structure and specific forms of capital in order to refine the terms and structures of field, habitus and capital for any one particular context. (c.f. Grenfell and Hardy 2003) Bourdieu describes this reflexive process as: “... a sort of hermeneutic circle: in order to construct the field, one must identify forms of specific capital that operate within it, and to construct the forms of specific capital one must know the specific logic of the field.” (Bourdieu 1992: 108)

Analysis, therefore, is necessarily a fluid process. However, to be effective it must also be systematic. Bourdieu offers a clear methodological structure when he identifies “three necessary and internally connected steps” (ibid) to any analysis of the structure and functioning of a field: Firstly,

“one must analyse the position of the field vis-a-vis the field of power...” , then,

“one must map out the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which this field is the site...” and then,

“one must analyse the habitus of agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a determinate type of social and economic conditions, and which find in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favourable opportunity to become actualized.” (Bourdieu 1992: 104).

In other words, the artist’s work must be considered not only in relation to the artists themselves, but also in relation to attitudes, dispositions, agencies, institutions and the broader socio-political context. The order in which Bourdieu describes these steps of analysis is from the most general - the relation of the field of power to the field of study - to the most particular - individual habitus. In this paper, analyses are presented from the particular (artists’ habitus) to the more general (placing the artistic field within fields). Precedents for this order can be found in work on the field and habitus in Grenfell (1996: 291), Grenfell and James (1998: 168-169) and, in Grenfell and Hardy (2006). Thus, firstly we present

analyses of artists’ habitus in terms of an individual’s educational and social capital (**level 1**); then we map relations between artists and institutions as a way of identifying the field structures (**level 2**); and, thirdly we position the field of artistic production in relationship to other legitimating fields (**level 3**). Thus, local, national and international fields, and capital derived from each, all play a part in the generational shift which took place in St Ives in 1940’s and 50s.

St Ives: An Artistic Colony

St Ives is known as the ‘art colony by the sea’ (c.f. Baker 1959). Perched on a northern facing peninsula in the extreme south west of Cornwall, it enjoys considerable artistic attraction: strong bright light, dramatic seascapes, rocky cliffs and a picturesque fishing harbour. No surprise therefore that it has attracted artists keen to escape the city, soak up the Cornish atmosphere and paint pictures of the local scenery. An outpost of the Tate Gallery is located in St Ives. Its collection brings together successive generations of artistic styles – impressionist, representational, abstract, modernist and postmodernist. This story of one particular generation is underpinned by the Cornish landscape as exotic, remote and romantic. Painting trips by Ben Nicholson and others in the 1920’s helped to create the notion of St Ives as a distant colony of artists focused on the landscape and its representation. Nicholson’s chance meeting in 1928 with fisherman cum primitive painter, Alfred Wallis, provided further evidence that St Ives was indeed an ‘art colony by the sea’.

Methodology

This paper uses Bourdieu’s three level analysis of habitus and field to explore the artistic field in St Ives. Both cultural and social capital contribute to an individual’s artistic habitus and can be identified from their biographies. Thus, a sample database of fifty artists from St Ives was identified by their biological age - all artists born between 1890 and 1920. This choice of artists by their date of birth excluded many St Ives artists: older artists such as Julius Olsson or Moffat Lindner and younger artists from the 60’s, e.g. Mary Stork, Roy Ray or Bob Devereux. However, this choice did identify those artists most likely to have been active within the artistic field of St Ives between 1939 and 1950 – our period of study. Where older artists, Borlase Smart, Bernard Leech and Alfred Wallis, had significant influence within the artistic field they were included in the field analyses. Data about the artists was sourced from existing published material (See References for details) including individual biographies, exhibition catalogues, archive materials from St Ives Societies of

Art and surveys of artists in St Ives. Artists' biographies and their trajectories were analysed.

Field Analyses Level 1: Artists' Habitus

Cultural capital is a key component of habitus. These analyses of artist's habitus considered constituents such as: age, place of origin, family background, art

education, art school teaching experience, gender, study abroad, major exhibitions, work in public exhibitions, type of artistic practice, art critical experience including published writing, time spent in St Ives, and public honours achieved. These elements represent cultural capital in this particular context – the artistic field.

Examples of the Cultural and Social Capital of Significant Artists are Shown in these Database Extracts

Artist's Habitus	Barbara Hepworth	Naum Gabo	Wilhemina Barns-Graham	Peter Lanyon
Age	Born 1903	Born 1915	Born 1912	Born 1918
Origin	Wakefield, UK	Briansk, Russia	Fife, Scotland	St Ives
Cornish Connections	Invited by the Stokes to Carbis Bay, St Ives in 1938	Moved to Cornwall in 1939 to join Nicholsons and Stokes	St Ives in 1940 after visit to Mellis/Stokes	Cornish
Family	Comfortable, but not artistic	Russian Émigré Family- Pevsner	Family against artistic career	Father a musician/ artist, Mother from wealthy Tin mining family
Education	Leeds Art School	Studied medicine in Munich	Edinburgh Art School	Private education at Clifton College, Bristol, Penzance and Euston Road Art Schools
Art Schools/ Groups	'Seven and Fives' Group St Ives Arts Society, Crypt Group, Penwith Society	Invited to lead Ceramics department at new Moscow Academy, instead chose to edit weekly paper on functions of art	Taught at Leeds Art School 1956/7 St Ives Arts Society, Crypt Group, Penwith Society	St Ives Arts Society like his father. Crypt group. Taught at Falmouth and West of England Academy
Public Honours	CBE 1958, DBE 1965 Trustee of Tate Gallery 1965-72	None	CBE 2001, Honorary doctorates - St Andrews, Plymouth, Exeter, Herriot Watt Universities.	

Every artist's cultural capital is different. For example one older, 'late impressionist' landscape painter was successful in St Ives, but lesser known nationally:

Bernard Nannes, born in 1899 in Surrey, studied at the Slade School of Art, 1927 -30; member of Arts Club and President of St Ives Society of Arts; lived in St Ives; exhibited at Royal Academy four times

This thumbnail biography extracted from the larger database shows an artist with educational capital derived from the national field (study at a prestigious London art school, but who, later in his career, accrued cultural capital mainly from within the local field. He was a successful local artist but occupied a position within the artistic field which left him vulnerable to field players with more national and

international capital. One example is a younger artist who joined the artistic field in St Ives relatively late, but with highly consecrated cultural capital.

William Scott, born 1913 in Greenock in Scotland; Studied at Belfast College of Art and Royal Academy; Painted in Mousehole 1936, then in Italy and Pont Aven; Met Nicholson, Lanyon, Frost after the war; Moved to Cornwall in 1952; taught at Bath Academy of Art 1941 and 46-56; Artist in residence in Berlin 1963-65, Awarded C.B.E.; Retrospective at Tate 1972, Elected R.A. 1977

This cosmopolitan profile includes formal art training at a legitimated national institution, art school teaching with its power to legitimate others and highly legitimated capital derived from institutions like the Royal Academy, the Tate and the state itself

– this is a high volume of institutionalised cultural capital.

Another extract from the database gives a comparison with a leader and innovator in the national artistic field, Ben Nicholson, who accrued a formidable array of social and cultural capital from national and international fields, sufficient that, when he engaged in the local artistic field of St Ives, change was inevitable:

Ben Nicholson, an artist committed to abstraction, born 1894 in Denham, Bucks; Father was a prestigious painter, Sir William Nicholson; his first wife, Winifred Dacre was a painter and grand-daughter of Earl of Carlisle; his second wife, Barbara Hepworth, an internationally recognised sculptor; he studied unsuccessfully at school and at the Slade in 1910-11; travelled in Europe 1911-14 meeting key artists including Mondrian, Picasso. Exhibited internationally; Was President of Seven and Fives Society 1926, Instigator of schisms on behalf of Abstraction in the St Ives Society, Crypt group and Penwith Society; Awarded the Order of Merit in 1968.

Nicholson's formidable profile possibly underplays the range and volume of capital accumulated. Institutional cultural capital abounds derived both from national and international fields. Since Nicholson's parents were both artistic, he benefited from inherited cultural capital, particularly inherited educational capital which Bourdieu argues provides a particularly powerful relationship to art and culture (Bourdieu 1991:20). This inherited capital gave Nicholson the confidence to rebel against his early schooling, his artistic training and established art practices. Nicholson's marriage to Winifred Dacre further enhanced his habitus with significant amounts of economic and social capital, since she came from English nobility. Thus, much of his capital was derived from the highest social groups and from an international artistic field.

There are clear differences in the types and balance of cultural capital indicated in each of the artistic biographies considered, but there are general principles which apply. Capital can function in more than one field at a time. For example, a public honour represents cultural capital accumulated in the artistic field which simultaneously represents social distinction within a national field of power. Art school teaching gives both legitimation and the power to legitimate within the artistic field.

These biographies indicate the clear positioning and position-taking of individual artists within the field. Bernard Nannes had habitus which provided a strong field position but only within the local artistic field. William Scott's habitus placed him within both national and local fields of artistic production, and

within a more general field of power. As art college tutor, he had the power to legitimate artistic production within the field. As an elected R.A. and a C.B.E., he belonged to a consecrated social and artistic elite.

Ben Nicholson accumulated a formidable range and volume of cultural and social capital. However, his early oppositional attitude to the established art field transformed his habitus to that of an innovator and maverick. Consequently, despite his dominant position within the artistic field as a member of an avant-garde, he occupied a dominated position with the broader socio-political field. Bourdieu in fact argues that the field position of any artist is a dominated one within the dominant field of power (Bourdieu 1996:249).

What general patterns were shown by the biographical analyses of all fifty artists in St Ives?

St Ives artists generally did not come from St Ives, but they were almost all

British. Peter Lanyon was unique in coming from St Ives. The patterns of visits

and length of time spent in St Ives by 'St Ives' artists varied considerably.

Most of the St Ives artists of this period were painters, not sculptors or potters.

About a quarter had no formal art training. A higher than expected number of

the more successful artists studied at the Slade School of Art.

Less than a third of the artists were women and a third of these were married

to artists. A high proportion of the women artists in the group studied abroad.

Older artists generally taught privately in Cornwall (individual pupils or own school). Roughly half of younger artists taught in institutionally based Schools of Art, particularly Central School of Art in London or Bath Academy in Corsham.

Most of the artists who had moved into positions where they could be said to legitimate artistic practices (indicated by Honours or art school teaching) were modernist in outlook with an interest in abstraction.

A high proportion of St Ives artists (13%) received a national honour. All of these artists/craftsmen had adopted an abstract or non-figurative approach.

The categories of cultural capital in these biographies do not of themselves provide a definite means of distinguishing between differing modes of artistic production. However, there are correlations between the age of an artist's artistic practice and the configuration of educational, cultural and social capital which their biographies display. For example, older artists (late impressionist) taught privately, whilst younger non-figurative artists were more institutionally-orientated. Of course, there were exceptions: Alfred Wallis, for example, who was older and un-

trained as an artist, or, Naum Gabo who was the only war-time émigré from European avant-gardes to stay for any length of time in Cornwall.

Field Analysis Level 2: Institutions, Social Relations and Artists

Bourdieu defines social capital as “the sum of the resources, actual and virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” (Bourdieu 1992:119). In other words, social capital accrues from personal and institutional connections; thus, a three-level analysis, examining these forms of social capital, gives a view of the structural links between field participants and field institutions. In the St Ives artist colony, two key sources of social capital existed: arts societies and social groupings/friendships which can be mapped from biographical data. Of particular significance here is the group of artists, designers and commentators which existed in Hampstead immediately before the war. Nicholson, Hepworth, Moore, and Herbert Reed were joined by émigré European avant-gardists, including Mondrian, Gabo, Groupius, Moholy-Nagy. Thus, when Stokes, Nicholson and Hepworth moved to Cornwall, they brought with them a particularly wide network of powerful connections including influential British figures – Herbert Reed, Henry Moore, - and European artists and teachers from a highly consecrated avant-garde. Nicholson also brought with him a proclivity to lead schisms between representational and abstract artists as he had shown in his leadership of the Seven and Fives group in the mid 1930s. .

Arts Societies

The development of arts societies in St Ives was based on both pre-existing social groupings and on shared artistic philosophies, but they were equally motivated by functional relationships; e.g. exhibiting and marketing. In 1927 when the St Ives Society of Arts was formed, its stated aim was to be a means of presenting exhibitions of a national standard within the locality (See Whybrow 1994); in other words, as a ‘marketing agency’ for its members. A number of the artists included in the database belonged to the St Ives Society of Art. They exhibited together during the early 40s, including Julius Olson, Borlase Smart, John Park, Leonard Fuller, Bernard Ninnies, Misome Piele, Sven Berlin and Wilhemina Barnes- Graham. Many of these artists also exhibited in London at the Royal Academy. Many of these artists shared common interests in landscape painting of a ‘late impressionist’ genre.

At the same time, a group of the ‘younger’ artists, Wells, Nicholson, Gabo, Lanyon and Mellis, were

exhibiting in London galleries, for example, in 1942 at the London Museum with Mondrian. These ‘younger’ artists rejected the Royal Academy as a market for their work, since they saw themselves as artistic innovators, not as members of the English artistic establishment.

There was a functional separation between the two groups of artists indicated by their distinct art markets. This network of younger artists – the incomers – was largely independent of the established network of artists in St Ives. The only artists to appear in both networks were Peter Lanyon – the only Cornish artist, and Wilhemina Barnes-Graham who was uniquely a friend of Borlase Smart, the Stokes and the Nicholsons. Typically, the social capital gained from membership of each artistic group was characterised by their artistic stance – avant-garde or establishment – and, of course, was redeemable through different institutions. In artistic terms, “the young moderns had not yet begun to make their mark on the town” (Whybrow 1994: 121).

In 1945, at the instigation of Borlase Smart, then President, and Wilhemina Barnes-Graham, ‘the abstract’ artists first exhibited with the St Ives Arts Society. Miriam Gabo, Margaret Mellis, Nicholson, Wells, Sven Berlin, Barnes-Graham and Lanyon exhibited paintings in The Mariner’s Church in St Ives, whilst Nicholson and Hepworth exhibited in Borlase Smart’s Porthmeor studio. However, by 1946, the tensions between the two ‘generations’ in the Society led to the formation of the ‘Crypt Group’, exhibiting on a lower floor of the Mariner’s Church. This group included Lanyon, Wells, Berlin, Bryan Wynter, Barnes-Graham and Patrick Heron. Borlase Smart continued to act as mediator between the artists of differing practices within the St Ives Society. After his death in 1947, this rather uneasy alliance failed to hold. Representational artists again separated their exhibiting and marketing from those of abstract artists.

Neither was 1949 comfortable for artistic relations in St Ives. The Penwith Society was formed, when a ‘progressive’ group including Hepworth, Lanyon, Barnes-Graham, Berlin, Fuller, Leach, Wells, Nicholson and Mitchell, left from the ‘conservatives’ of the St Ives Society. Social relationships from 1930’s Hampstead were called upon by Hepworth and Nicholson when Herbert Reed, a nationally recognised supporter of abstract art, was invited to be the Penwith’s first president.

For the first time ever, a large number of paintings by St Ives artists were refused for the Royal Academy exhibition. Alfred Munnings’ public abuse of modern art in his parting speech to the Royal Academy, and his later election as President of the St Ives Arts Society (c.f. Wormleighton 1995), solidified the split between the two artistic groups.

Disagreements continued, this time, causing an acrimonious split within the Penwith Society itself between those artists who sought reconciliation between the differing artistic practices (Lanyon, Berlin and Morris) and those who wished to see separate categories (Hepworth, Barns-Graham, Leach, Nicholson and Wells). Nonetheless, this newly formed society quickly attracted a grant from the Arts Council and interest in the artists' work from several public bodies. In other words, as a functional grouping, this was clearly one which had accrued significant social capital. Herbert Reed's position as president of the new society and trustee of the Tate Gallery in London co-incided with heated controversies about modern art. Consequently the activities of this new St Ives group were noticed at a national level with commissions from the Arts Council for the 1951 Festival of Britain to follow for Hepworth, Nicholson, Lanyon, Heron and Wynter.

These institutionalised groupings offered opportunities for joint exhibitions (access to economic capital) and a forum for developing an extended network of artistic contacts (access to extensive social capital). As such they were sites of struggles for position by individual artists and alliances within the artistic field of St Ives. In Bourdieu's words "The volume of social capital possessed by a particular agent depends therefore on the extent of the network of connections which he can effectively mobilise and on the volume of capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed characteristically by each of those to whom he is connected." (Bourdieu 1984:79). Membership of an arts society offered significant social capital to an artist, and, where prestigious individuals such as Sir Alfred Munnings or Herbert Reed were part of a group, an artist's social capital was further increased by the volume of social capital of that 'important' individual.

Here the displacement of one art society by another exemplifies Bourdieu's artistic generations - *avant-gardes* - and the defining role played by artistic age. With its pre-existing local artistic field nostalgic for impressionism, St Ives presented a consecrated *avant-garde* generation to the 'younger' *avant-garde* of the incoming abstract artists. Internationally, a homologous change in Europe had taken place two decades earlier, when Mondrian and De Stijl, Picasso, Braque, Delaunay and Cubism, succeeded to the title 'avant-gardists' in opposition to the more established modernism of Manet, Monet and Pissarro who became a 'consecrated *avant-garde*'. Similarly, a British generational succession had been contested through institutions like the Royal Academy which had shown caution about accepting even a "well-adapted domestication of modernism." (Corbett 1997: 199). The relationship in St Ives between the figurative and the abstract, similarly matched every such contest

between successive artistic generations who struggle for field positions and the power of legitimation for their respective modes of representation.

Uniquely, in 1940's St Ives, the time scale of an artistic generation was foreshortened by the collision of the local, national and international artistic fields. The incoming modernists arrived with high volume social and cultural capital, legitimated by national and international networks which acted as 'meta-capital' in the local field (Bourdieu 1992: 114). Dominant field positions in St Ives, previously occupied by more conservative 'locals', were lost to the more powerful *habitus* of the invading abstractionists.

A further field distortion occurred to the future of artists who would have been the next local generation. Only two artists survived: Peter Lanyon who was assimilated into the 'younger' group of artists through Nicholson and Gabo; and Patrick Heron through his war placement with Bernard Leach in 1942/3.

Field Analyses Level 3: Fields within Fields

We have already referred to the differing artistic fields - local, national, international - which met in 1940's St Ives. Now we turn to consideration of how each artistic field relates to the broader socio-political field and to the field of power, since it is these relationships which structure the internal structure of a field and provide legitimation to agents, institutions and capital. The relationship of St Ives artists to St Ives itself must be understood in terms of an artistic field *vis-à-vis* the broader economic and social fields of the county as a whole, and further, as a regional field within a national and international field of power.

The depression of the thirties was neither a Cornish nor British phenomenon but a 'crisis of capitalism' which affected most industrial countries. Unemployment and poverty, and, the resulting pressures on both government and people, tended to produce a frightened and defensive middle class, an increase in nationalism and personal and national insularity. (See Joll 1990: 330). For artists, this meant a collapse of the art market and the need to undertake functional design work, e.g. publicity posters in order to survive.

It is not coincidental that the period under discussion includes the Second World War. There was dramatic change in the wartime functioning of a nation, including St Ives and its artists. The most obvious effect was the exodus from London to the relative safety of the country undertaken by any family who could arrange it; e.g. the Stokes or the Nicholsons.

War gave rise to patriotism and an actively promoted positive image of England. Landscape painting was thus fore-grounded by the traditional pastoral image of 'our green and pleasant land'. In such a

climate, artistic practices which offered representational images of British landscape were aligned with the mood of the country; artistic practices grounded in a European avant-garde tradition were problematically positioned. Indeed, the figurative art practice of older St Ives artists, Borlase Smart and Leonard Fuller, remained largely unchanged, whilst Nicholson's austere abstract practice was softened by representations of the local landscape, and Hepworth made clear claims that the Penwith Landscape was central to her work. (Hepworth 1985). As all human and economic resources were directed towards the war effort, younger artists like Peter Lanyon and Terry Frost were conscripted in the Services and their artistic development postponed.

After the war, "The experience of occupation, collaboration and resistance had led many Europeans to think about social and political problems in a new way, and to hope for a new order in Europe ..." (Joll 1990: 435). Britain and America participated in restructuring decisions about Europe and there were significant shifts in political co-operation and economic dependencies. The transformed structure in the economic and political fields combined with the need to 'put the war behind one', and gave rise to national changes away from the tradition towards the new. For example, changes in Royal Academy selection criteria heralded, not for the first time in history, a new art for a new society.

Post war, a forward-looking society required a 'modern' art and could find one ready-made in St Ives in the artistic generation which had formed around Nicholson and Hepworth. They moved smoothly into a legitimated position within the national field; e.g., Festival of Britain commissions (and much later, personal Honours), and into the position of a consecrated avant-garde within St Ives and nationally. Younger artists like Heron, Lanyon, Frost and Wells found themselves swept along in this new British avant-garde. In this case, biological age was less powerful in defining an avant-garde than was an aesthetic attitude – that is, artistic age.

At about the same time, similar changes were taking place in the artistic and political field structures in America but on a larger scale. The American art critical community, art institutions and art markets had survived the war in much better shape than those of Europe or Britain. What was available ready-made in the States was an imported consecrated avant-garde of European artists – Mondrian, Gabo, Duchamp. Consequently, the new Abstract Expressionist

avant-gardists – Rothko, Pollock – could define themselves in simultaneous opposition to both preceding national and international artistic generations. With all this in their favour, the American avant-garde flourished as part of the massive national resurgence of American self-confidence.

Younger British artists – Heron, Scott and Lanyon – whose natural artistic generation had been prematurely aged by its unexpected collision with Nicholson and Hepworth's, achieved early recognition, but despite their active engagement with this new artistic generation across the Atlantic, they lost the international initiative as an oppositional artistic group. Having established a war-time foothold in St Ives, the artistic avant-garde stepped firmly across the Atlantic and regenerated itself in the more fertile soil of the States.

Concluding Remarks

This article has offered some preliminary remarks on the ways in which the artistic field in St Ives was positioned in relation to other fields of cultural production or power and how these were mutually interactive and often homologous. Using a '3-level Analysis' derived from Bourdieu, we have shown that, in the space of time between 1939 – when the first modernist artists arrived in St Ives – and the early 1950's, significant changes took place in the structure of the artistic field in St Ives. Two previously disconnected artistic fields were brought into unexpected contact: a consecrated avant-garde (locally based and artistically representational); and a newer avant-garde (dislocated from its commercial markets and its links with a European avant-garde). They 'collided' – hurled together by the exigencies of war. Through the Penwith Society, the modernists in St Ives achieved a critical mass of cultural capital so that their artistic generation occupied a dominant field position and possessed power to legitimate artistic practice in the national field. In the international artistic field, the migration of European avant-gardes affected first Britain, then America. The cultural capital accrued from these artistic émigrés shifted the balance in the British field to favour a generation of abstract artists who were themselves subsequently eclipsed by the more extreme abstraction of the combined cultural capital of younger American generation and the same European rear-garde. But, for a moment in time, St Ives was the centre of the art world.

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