De-authorising Narratives?:
The Case of Ithell Colquhoun:

Part I

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The only way to grasp the meaning of any work of art is to set it within a socio-historical analysis of its cultural field of reproduction, where field is taken to be the sum total of structural relations delineated within social space as a whole. The common alternative risks de-historising aesthetic production by replacing its conditions of exegesis with subsequent narratives formed externally. If this 'externalist' practice applies *post hoc* explanations to artists' motivations and output, a matching 'internalist' reading of the same submits to accepting works of cultural production as empirical expressions of talent, spirit, philosophy – art-for-art's-sake in its own terms. Essentially, these countervailing positions amount to the age-old dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism, which leads to a centrifugal opposition between naïve expressionism and scholastic appropriation. The theory of practice available within the work of Pierre Bourdieu offers an epistemology of practice, which allows for an understanding of the socio-cultural production of art as objectively constituted during a certain time and place, and for its subjective instantiation within a particular empirical biography in the temporal scope of its lifetime. With recourse to psychology of the subject/ object relation as a phenomenology of perception and to a social philosophical analysis of the cultural field of production and its symbolic capital currency of communications, it is possible, not only to understand the forces that give rise to artistic practice, but also, the aesthetic appreciation they interpolate and, ultimately, the foundational nature of reflexive (objective) aesthetics.

Those who classify themselves or others, by appropriating or classifying practices or properties that are classified and classifying, cannot be unaware that, through distinctive objects or practices in which their powers are expressed and which, being appropriated by and appropriate to classes, classify those who appropriate them, they classify themselves in the eyes of other classifying (but also classifiable) subjects, endowed with classificatory schemes analogous to those which enable them more or less adequately to anticipate their own classification' (Bourdieu, 1984/79: 484)

Perhaps we are here to say house, bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window – column, tower…. but to say them, you must understand, you must say them more intensely than the things themselves ever dreamed of existing…these things that live by perishing, want us to change them in our invisible heart, within us! Whoever we may be at last..
(Rilke: from the 9th Duino Elegy)

Introduction

Like many at this conference, I am sure, my own journey to the work of Ithell Colquhoun (1906-1988) contained a mixture of personal and academic attraction. The range of media of her own work – painting, poetry, drama, anthropological study, fiction – is extraordinary enough, especially when placed next to the range of her interests in history, psychology, and the traditions of Western Esotericism – in general and in the particular. Added to this is her own gender-based perspective, as a woman born at a particular time and place and the experiences these afforded her. It is therefore difficult to 'situate' Colquhoun within normal artistic and literary narratives of one and/ or the other. It is obviously not too fanciful to place her as part of history of British Hermeticism, which stretches back to the Romantic poetry of William Blake and beyond. Closer to her own lifetime, her concerns, and indeed art, seem nearer to those expressed by the Victorian theosophist Georgiana Houghton, 1814-1884 (see Vegelin van Claerbergen and Wright, 2016) and the Swedish artist Hilma af Klimt, 1862-1944, (see Almqvist and Belfrage, 2017), not to mention Colquhoun's near contemporary, the surrealist Leonora Carrington, whose life clearly overlapped with her own. Yet, Colquhoun's encounter with Surrealism was relatively brief, at least formally, and her involvement with spiritualism extended beyond drawing upon its visual imagery, to a full-blown near academic study of its many sub-disciplines.

Since her 'rediscovery', Colquhoun and her work have been particularly significant for two constituencies. Firstly, those who themselves have been drawn to esotericism and art, and find inspiration in her example. Second, those who see in her quest, a 'proto-feminist' struggle to mount a feminist aesthetic in the face of masculine dominance within the art field and beyond. For the French social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, these two distinct approaches can be considered to offer either an 'internalist' or 'externalist' reading. So, the first, accepts her works and builds on them in their own terms; whilst the second integrates them with broader social, political, and aesthetic issues salient within academic discourse. I do not wish to oppose either reading, I instead want to develop an argument taking into account both: considering the socio-cultural conditions of production of her work, but as an instantiation of personal artistic dispositions gained in the course of her life trajectory.

Methodology and Structure of the Paper

The methodological approach in this paper is constituted as an attempt to synthesis both an *internalist* and *externalist* reading of Colquhoun's work and its sources by working on the boundaries between the *subject* and the *object* – indeed, at base is really an exploration of the philosophy of the object. It therefore sets her biography and artistic output within the socio-cultural context of the day in order to demonstrate how moral forces of aesthetic expression emerged as part of an art field which was itself embedded in broader social political and economic structures. Yet, if such seems to risk asserting a socio-centric focus to the ways of art, I also want to anchor such discussions of its the object within Colquhoun's individual psychology as a personal psychic and affective source experienced and expressed at an intimate level.

The Socio-cultural
The socio-cultural approach will be based on the theory of practice of the French social philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, 1930-2002, (see Grenfell, 2004).

Figure 2: Pierre Bourdieu
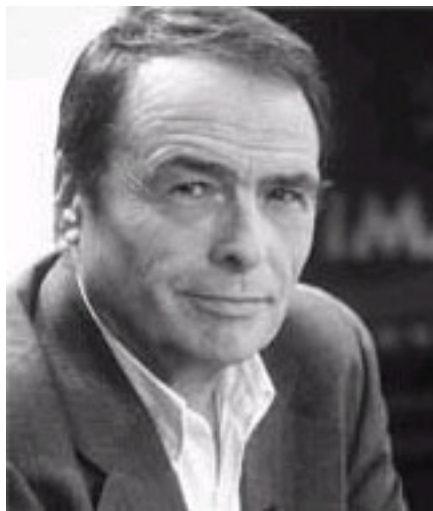
Bourdieu's approach (Bourdieu, 1977) sought to offer a kind of 'existential analytics' of social phenomena; defined as a 'science of dialectical relations between objective structures…and the subjective dispositions within which these structures are actualized and tend to reproduce them' (ibid.: 3) . This view of the social world was essentially relational, both phenomenologically and sociologically, and one with which he studied a number of social constituencies, such as education, law and the media, including culture and art (see Bourdieu, 1984, 1990, 1993, 1996, 2017). Central to this methodology was to conceive and study such constituencies as '*fields*'; that is objective, bounded social spaces with definable positions, and positional patterns within them (see Bourdieu, 1992: 72). Any one position was then determined by an individual's *habitus* (see Bourdieu, 1989: 43) – that is their subjective/ biographical trajectory and the consequent *dispositions* it constituted. The synthesis of object and subject is therefore achieved by seeing in terms of *structural relations*, where structure is both *structured* and *structuring*; that is cognitive and material (see Grenfell, 2014: chapter 13; Grenfell and Lebaron, 2014: 11ff). Specific placement within the *field* is the outcome of acquiring – consciously and unconsciously – specific forms of *symbolic capital* where both its quantity and configuration is critical to holding acknowledged and recognized positions of a particular *field* within social space. For Bourdieu, *Capital* (see Bourdieu, 2006) was the medium of *fields*. Although all are equally symbolic, it comes in three basic forms: *economic capital* (straight money), *cultural capital* (educational qualifications, but also culturally valued objects, and aspects of 'taste' – clothes, accent, behavior), and *social capital* (networks of social contacts).

Clearly, for Bourdieu, any one *field* characterized itself by the dominant forms of *capital* it displayed; individuals were then successful in locating themselves within the field to the extent to which their *capital* holdings mirrored these dominant forms (see Grenfell and Hardy, 2003 and 2007 for further exemplification in terms of the art *field*).

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Figure 3: Volumes of Capital within the Cultural Field

High
CC+

Elite
EC-

Mass
EC+

Low
CC-
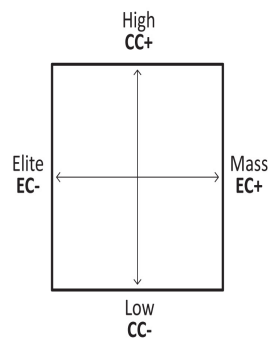
There are two further methodological points to make. Firstly, we need to see any approach using Bourdieu concepts in terms of three *phases*: the construction of the research object; *field* analysis; and participant objectivation (see Grenfell, 2012). The first phase involves reconstructing the object – in this case Ithell Colquhoun and her work - in terms of *field*, *habitus* and *capital*. The third of these involves researcher reflexivity to which I shall return in my conclusion. The second phase is *field analysis* and involves three levels of analysis:

- Level 1: the *field* and the *field* of power;
- Level 2: the *field* itself;
- Level 3: and the *habitus* of those within the *field*.

Figure 4: Level 1: The Field and the Field of Power

CC+

Music / Media

Commerce

EC-

EC+

Politics

CC-

Social
Capital
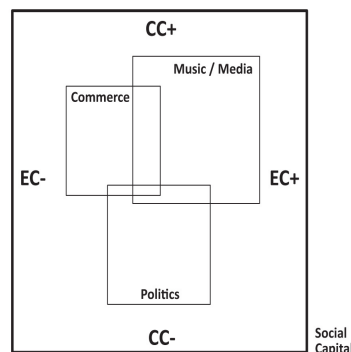
It is this basic methodology I propose to use for the rest of this paper. Of course, these levels cannot always be held as distinct; one necessarily implicates another. Nevertheless, in order to guide the reader with my underlying rationale, I shall make reference to these levels and *capital* forms at points in the discussion; the whole might

be seen as an analysis of *structural relations* and their interpenetration across a subjective/ objective continuum.

The Psychological
As noted above, I see art production – and consumption – as being an intimate activity; I consequently seek to avoid simply offering a socio-cultural deconstruction of its constitution in the work of Ithell Colquhoun. By including a 'psychological' exploration of the 'hidden order of art' (see Ehrnezweig, 1993/ 67), I am therefore looking to offer some account of the way the socio-cultural is instantiated within an individual psychology, and what that entails in terms of creative impulses and their products.

Figure 5: The Hidden Order of Art: Anton Ehrenzweig
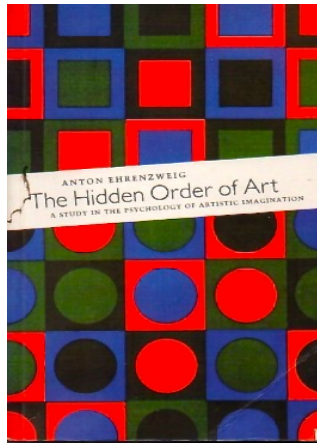
The details of the approach adopted will be set out later in the paper, but will include discussion of psychological states – manic and depressive – and their relationship to underlying art forms.

Structure of the Paper
After setting out some preliminary details of Colquhoun's background as empirical *habitus*, the paper is divided into two main parts. Part A deals with the socio-cultural in terms of the two distinct *fields* she was involved with – Esoteric and Artistic – both of which are interpreted in terms of their relation both to the *field* of power and the individual *habitus'* of individuals who were her closest contemporaries. There is then a return to her empirical *habitus* with reference to aspects of her personal, affective and professional life experience before, in Part B, I address psychological issues of creativity and examples of her work itself. The whole therefore builds up *discursive montage* as a way of developing our understanding of the life and art of Ithell Colquhoun.

The Empirical Habitus I: Symbolic Capital

In terms of genealogical *habitus*, Ithell Colquhoun's background seems solidly middle class with both her mother and father originating from military families with notable figures featuring in Imperial campaigns[i]. Her Grandfather on her mother's side distinguished himself by winning both the Victorian and Iron Cross.

Figure 6: William George Nicholas Manley

Her mother Georgia Frances Ithell Manley (1873-1961) was born in Woolwich but the family came from Cheltenham with ancestry coming from both Ireland and Devon. Her father Henry Archibald Colebrooke Colquhoun was born in Peshwar, Bengal, India and educated at Wellington College, and then Merton College Oxford[ii]. In 1895, he took up a post in the colonial civil service as a commissioner in Assam, India, where he married his wife in 1905. Ithell was born there one year later. It is said that the family returned to live in Cheltenham in 1907. In fact, Colquhoun was less than two years old when she and her pregnant mother travelled to England. After the birth of her brother, Robin, the children were raised by an elderly spinster aunt in Ventnor on the Isle of Wight and her mother returned to India to be with her husband. The parents then returned to England in time for Ithell to go to Cheltenham Ladies College.

Ithell was therefore probably the grand-daughter of a younger son of a Scottish Baronet, and a family who formed part of s strong Indian Colonial dynasty. Her later interests in Celtic culture can, therefore, partly be attributed to her family origins which included both Ireland and Scotland; no wonder, perhaps that she later felt at home in Cornwall.

Such a background would bestow a degree of *social*, *economic* and *cultural capital*: the confidence to move in educated networks, the cultural acquisitions that Colquhoun's education at *Cheltenham Ladies College* ingrained, and of course, the financial security and acumen that money wealth provides – an allowance from her father seems to have sustained Ithell for most of her life. At first comfortably off, inflation ate into its real value, leading to the kind of aristocratic poverty that was endemic in her generation. Later in life a degree of penury necessitating a fairly frugal life style.

The Broader Social Field
If Ithell's parents were firmly located in the Victorian époque, with all that entailed in terms of colonial attitudes, her childhood took her from the so-called Edwardian period – where ladies wore big hats but did not vote, and 'the sun never set on the British Empire'. In 1910, Roger Fry organized the exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* and a great number of novels were published in what was really the equivalent of the French *Belle Epoque*. The First World War, of course, blew that all away. 1918 marked the end of the war, and also the granting of full women's suffrage. What followed was a decade that has become to be known as 'the roaring twenties', since it marked such a paradigm shift in social, economic and cultural behaviours; increased prosperity brought with it enormous expansion in socio-cultural activities.

Part A: The Socio-Cultural

I want to consider this decade in terms of generational shifts, and it is something that is noticeable in the two *fields* that seem to occupy the life of Ithell Colquhoun: Esoteric and Artistic.

Figure 7: Artistic Generations of Field of Cultural Reproduction
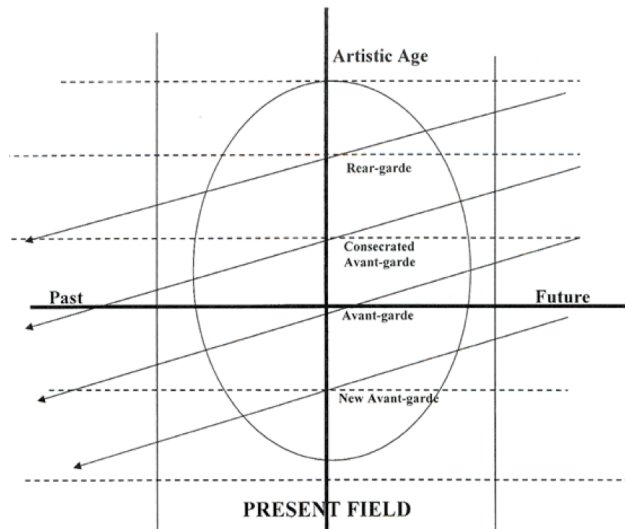
The diagram is an attempt to offer a graphic of the dynamic of the cultural *field* of production, of which the art/ esoteric *field* is one manifestation. It demonstrates one possible way that generations relate to each other and, indeed, the possible destinies of individuals who pass through the cultural field. It is predicated on **six** sorts of time. Firstly, there is actual time with a past, present and future. Secondly, these are accountable in terms of recognised dates: days, weeks, months and years. Thirdly, there is individual time: that any one person is born at one time and dies at another. Fourthly, is the presence of any individual in the cultural field – inevitably linked, if only by association (or indeed, non-association), with a certain state of the *field* at a specific time and place. Fifthly, is the recognised position of individuals at a point in time within the *field*. Sixthly, is the acknowledged significance of a particular individual or group within the field and across generations and their journey through them[iii]. The diagram is therefore conceived as *in flux*, with a movement from bottom to top, with everyone – individually and/or as part of a group – acting for recognition, and thus valued value, within the *field*. One further aspect of the ellipse diagram is that both between and within generational lines, time differences can expand and contract: years may pass by with little generational distinctiveness, or may contain many movements and sub-movements in a short period of time. Individuals may also be able to operate with a degree of inter-generational lassitude, or be closely defined according to a particular point in time. It is in the nature of the diagram that at a time of dramatic change – the arrival of French modernism into the British art *field* in the early twentieth century and surrealism in the 1930s, for example, or indeed, paradigm shifts within the esoteric *field* - changes in artistic practice are very time sensitive: someone 'might miss the boat' by being out by a few weeks or months.

Level 2: Fields

(i) Esoteric
The history of esotericism is beyond the scope of this paper. However, some preliminary remarks are needed in the light of Colquhoun's interest in and inspiration from this tradition: in 1923 she apparently read an article on Aleister Crowley's Thelema, and later in 1926 she wrote a one-act play *Bird of Hermes* whilst still at *Cheltenham School of Arts and Craft*. However, if we consider the key occult society of the day – the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* – it gives some indication of what was symbolically valued by those who were drawn to it, as well as their social provenance. The *Golden Dawn* was founded in 1887 on the basis of the *Cipher Manuscripts* that had been passed down from

mid-Victorian masons Kenneth MacKenzie (1833 – 1886) and the Rev. A Woodford (1821-1827) (*social capital*) and which outlined the areas of study: Hermetic Qabalah, astrology, tarot, geomancy and alchemy. Its roots therefore go back to the English Romantic period, medieval magic and the whole Hermetic tradition (*consecrated symbolic capital*).

Figure 8: Esoteric Field C19/C20
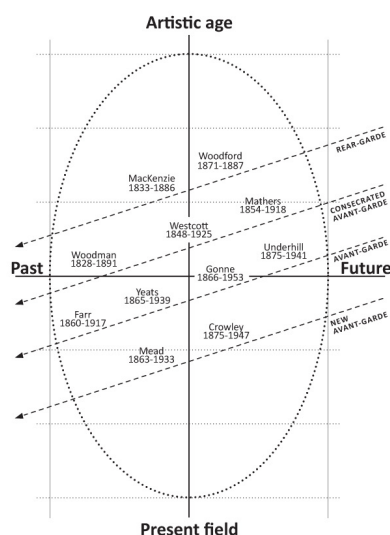
The acknowledged founders of the *Golden Dawn* were similarly masons and men of letters: William Robert Woodman (1828-1891 - Medicine), William Wynn Westcott (1848-1925 - law), and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854-1918 - history). Of course, the growth of the *Golden Dawn* needs to be set against the general air of imperial prosperity that characterized the age (*field of power*), at least in metropolitan centres. By the mid-1890s, its membership had increased to over one hundred and included the illuminati of the *cultural field* - Florence Farr (1860-1917 – actress – who, incidentally, also went to *Cheltenham Ladies College*), Maud Gonne (1866-1953 – poet/ actress/ radical politician), W B Yeats (1865-1939 – poet) and Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941 – spiritual writer). But, the more youthful punk pretender (*avant-garde*) was Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) whose actions led to the dissolution of the *Golden Dawn* in 1900. Mathers had taken control of the order in 1897 but by 1900, with Crowley at the centre, splits occurred which led to various splinter groups forming: *Isis-Urania Temple* and *Alpha and Omega* (under Mathers). Subsequently, Crowley took on an international profile developing his own Thelema philosophy, having had the *Book of Law* dictated to him in 1904 by the spiritual messenger of Horus, Aiwass in Egypt, with its dictum of 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law'. By the early 1920s, he had established an *Abbey of Thelema* in Italy as a place for his followers to go to practice his forms of ceremonial magic, which earned him the title of 'the beast' (*symbolic capital*), and 'the wickedest man in England' from the British press (1923). If such circumstances may have seemed an exciting story for Colquhoun, it is obvious that this was more than a passing adolescent titillation since she was soon pursuing her own esoteric readings – and writings.

Geographical locale is an important aspect of *capital* holdings and consequent *field* placement, so in 1928 it was a significant decision on the part of Colquhoun to move to London (now aged 22), which, at the time continued to act as a hotbed of cultural pursuit (including the esoteric) (*social* and *cultural capital*)[iv]. Here, she was able to join the *Quest Society* (1928) and later contributed an article – *The Prose of Alchemy* (1930) – to the *Quest* magazine. This text, written when Colquhoun was 24, displays three features that would later mark her esoteric writings: firstly, it is highly researched and informed; secondly, he demonstrates a fascination for its subject; thirdly, it is written with a 'cool' perspective, which offers a critical account of the content[v].

Figure 9: G R S Mead
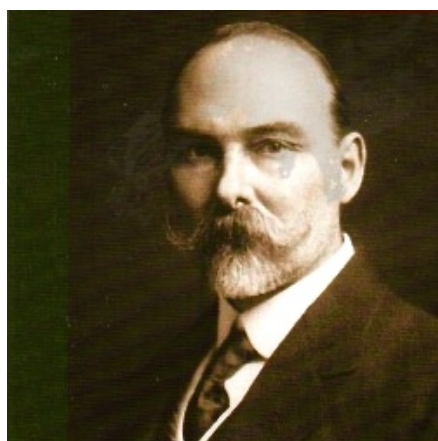
Quest had been founded in 1909 by G R S Mead (1863-1933), one time secretary to Helena Blavatsky, who had inaugurated the modern *Theosophical Society* in 1875. The term 'Theosophy' can be traced back to the 3rd century and, in many ways, runs in parallel and even crosses Qabalah and Western Hermeticism. However, in the modern context, it is/ was less concerned with ceremonial magic than occult groups such as the *Golden Dawn* and its associates, and has a more outward looking philosophy that would include the relationships between men and nature, medicine, the awakening of the inner-life, divine aspects of humans. Again, it was influential amongst artists and musicians who sought new systems of thought in pursuing their creative endeavours - Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), Kandinsky (1866-1944), Mondrian (1872-1944), Scriabin (1872-1915). G R S Mead's own special interests – history and Gnostic[vi] religions - also attest to the closer links between Theosophy and Christian philosophies. En passant, it is worth noting that Mead's *capital* dispositions would find resonance with Colquhoun's own – born into a military family, education in Cambridge, teaching. He was also an influence on a range of figures, who might in turn find associations (even direct) with Colquhoun's own enquiries: Ezra Pound, W B Yeats, Hermann Hesse, Carl Jung. In London, Colquhoun was also able to meet up with her distant cousin E J L Garstin, who had taken control of the *Golden Dawn* offshoot *Apha et Omega* when Mathers' widow Moina died in 1928. Both these sources gave her informed access to a range of ideas and documents within the Hermetic traditions and its various factions. Here, we can place Colquhoun as a young member in a generational *field* of occultists, many of who typified the same sort of educated middle class from which she had originated herself: ex-imperial, ecclesiastical, and financially comfortable. This led to a progressive outlook when non-conformist breaks with both Victorian and, in its turn, Edwardian society were needed and indeed made. Thus, within the esoteric *field*, Colquhoun's own background (*habitus*) and education (*cultural capital*) allowed her to develop a network of social relations that built up significant *social capital*, since *economic capital* was provided for from her family allowance.
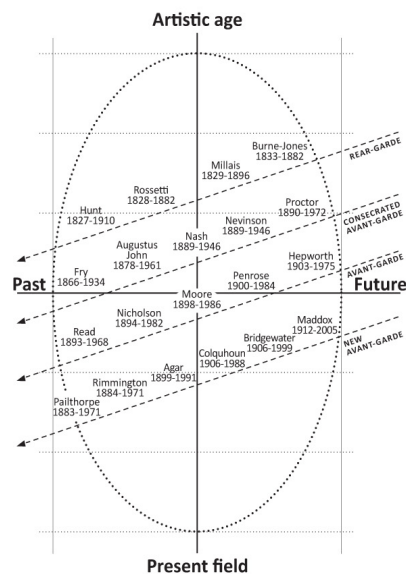
(ii) Artistic
From late Victorian to Edwardian society and beyond, changes within the art *field* were no less turbulent. It is possible to see these in generational terms as per figure 7, the interaction between *economic* and *social capital*, and the way this played out in terms of *cultural* aesthetic *capital*. For example, the *Tate Gallery* had opened in 1889 with a donation of some £80,000 (*economic capital* - equivalent to £10 million in today's value) from the industrialist Henry Tate, who also donated some 65 paintings from Pre-

Raphaelite artists[vii], that recent English renaissance in romantic art, for whom he was a great patron. Significant financial contributions (*economic capital*) were also made by Sir Joseph Joel Duveen (1843-1908) and his son Lord Joseph Duveen (1869 – 1939), who made their wealth in the commercial export/ import business (*commercial capital*), and were originally members of Sephardic Jewish immigrants (*social* and *cultural capital*). The success of the Tate demonstrates the rise of new wealthy social classes and the aesthetics they sought as an expression of their distinction. Lord Duveen used the commercial experience of his family's business in Europe to buy European art as the continent opened up; he would then sell it on to middle and upper class patrons in the UK and USA, making him extremely rich indeed.

Over the first two decades of the twentieth century, the social realism in British Victorian art gave way to a new expressionism; as epitomized by French Impressionism. When artist and critic Roger Fry (1866 – 1934) – a key member of the cultural aristocracy – organized the exhibition of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, a new avant-garde was very much announced to the British public, many of whom responded as the French public had to the Impressionists earlier, by finding it a 'moral outrage'. Indeed, Fry was publically ostracized for a while, and others were quick to note that his wife had actually been committed to an asylum. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that the exhibition included a very wide range of styles from the 'pre-impressionism' of Manet to the exoticism of Picaaso's Blue, Rose and African periods, as well as paintings by Cézanne, Gauguin, Matisse and Van Gogh. The exhibition was held in the Grafton galleries at the heart of affluent Mayfair, where Paul Durand-Ruel had already staged the first major show of Impressionist paintings in 1905. The significance of the Post-impressionist exhibition was captured by Virginia Woolf: 'On or about December 1910 human character changed'.

From the turn of the century, Roger Fry also taught at the Slade School of Art, in London, thus gaining important *cultural capital* in recognition of his position in the art *field*. The Slade, like the Tate, had its roots in philanthropic endeavor; most noticeably when the lawyer Felix Slade (1788-1868) bequeathed funds to establish three chairs in Fine Art at Oxford, London and Cambridge (*economic* and *cultural capital*). By the turn of the century it had become *the* site for the contemporary British artistic avant-garde: summed up (Haycock, 2009) as 'crises of brilliance'. The first crisis just before the turn of the century included Augustus John (1878-1961), William Orpen (1878-1931) and Percy Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957). The second crisis included Dora Carrington (1893-1932), Mark Gertler (1891-1939), Paul Nash (1889-1946), C.R.W. Nevison (1889-1946) and Sir Stanley Spencer (1891-1959). Clearly, examples of artistic generations can be placed on an elliptical diagram as given in Figure 7.

Figure 10: The Art Field C19 -> C20

Artistic age

Burne-Jones
1833-1882

REAR-GARDE

Millais
1829-1896

Rossetti
1828-1882

Proctor
1890-1972

CONSECRATED
AVANT-GARDE

Hunt
1827-1910

Nevinson
1889-1946

Augustus
John
1878-1961

Nash
1889-1946

Hepworth
1903-1975

AVANT-GARDE

Penrose
1900-1984

Past Fry
1866-1934

Future

Moore
1898-1986

Nicholson
1894-1982

Maddox
1912-2005

Read
1893-1968

Bridgewater
1906-1999

Colquhoun
1906-1988

NEW
AVANT-GARDE

Agar
1899-1991

Rimmington
1884-1971

Pailthorpe
1883-1971

Present field

Of course, it would be further possible to track the different forms of *capital* each of these artists displayed as part of their formative early lives (*habitus*), and the *dispositions* these formed. Perhaps nothing is more significant, however, than simple date of birth. As noted above, generational positions and movements are very sensitive to time, and it is possible simply to miss the boat by a few years, as we shall see. Even in terms of the youngest of these two important generations of British art, they would have been some fifteen years older than Ithell Colquhoun. Most were deeply touched by the First World War, indeed, even witnessed it at first hand; in contrast, Ithell would have been approximately eight when it began and twelve when it ended. The mid-twenties, however, marked her 'coming of age', at a time that saw the sweeping away of the 'old order' having its full impact on every level of society. Art was an expanding sector of this new world. In terms of physical locale, Cork Street in London, already known for its heritage of style and chic from the days of Beau Brummell (1778-1840), and a stone's throw away from the Royal Academy of Art in Piccadilly (*cultural capital* with *economic capital* consequences), became the centre of modern/ contemporary commercial art galleries. Meanwhile, student numbers at the Slade increased exponentially from the turn of the century and took a sharp rise in the 20s: sheer size is a key condition for *field* changes in Bourdieu's approach. Furthermore, the proportion of women students also increased, even if they were still taught separately from men. Egyptology, we are told, was particularly popular, which possibly attests to a growing sense of the exotic in art.

Perhaps it is worth comparing Ithell Colquhoun with a near contemporary, Dod Proctor (1890-1972).

Figure 11: Dod Proctor   Figure 12: Morning (1926)

Proctor was substantially influenced by both Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, and, indeed, a 1920 self-portrait possibly typifies feminine artistic style of the day. Moreover, her 1927 painting – *Morning* – is in a style not dissimilar to Colquhoun's early work and could even have been painted by her.

Figure 13: Ithell Colquhoun - Self Portrait (1929)
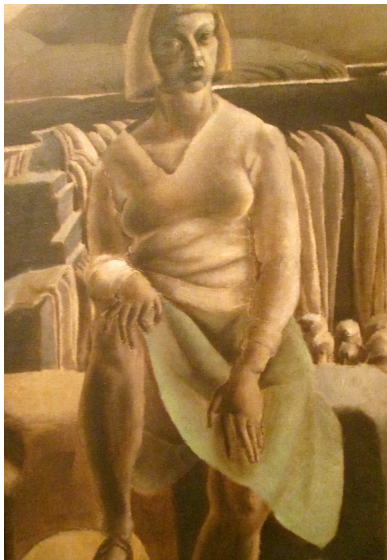
Morning painting so exemplified popular taste of the day that it toured the country to public acclaim and was bought by *The Mail* 'on behalf of the nation': the art critic Frank Rutter declared it 'a new vision of the human figure…the invention of a twentieth century style in portraiture'[viii]. However, such a style was unlikely to attract the younger generation to which Ithell belonged.

Ithell's artistic education at the Slade offered her consecrated *symbolic capital* (*social* and *cultural*), and yet this institution remained an epitome of classicism and aestheticism. At one point, she complained that the teachers wanted then to 'draw like Michaelangelo and paint like the Impressionists', later stating, 'I could not see how to combine these disparate modes, so I painted to match the drawings in monochrome with superimposed glazes of colour' (Colquhoun, 1976). What is clear from her work there is that Colquhoun could paint and draw with draughtsman like precision. Two years after *Morning* was being celebrated, Ithell herself won joint first prize in the Slade Summer Composition, *Judith Showing the Head of Holofernes*.
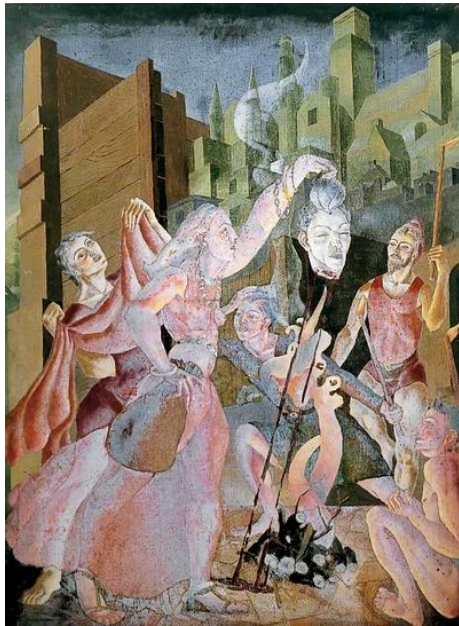
Figure 14: Judith Showing the Head   Figure 15: The Good and Bad Angels: Blake
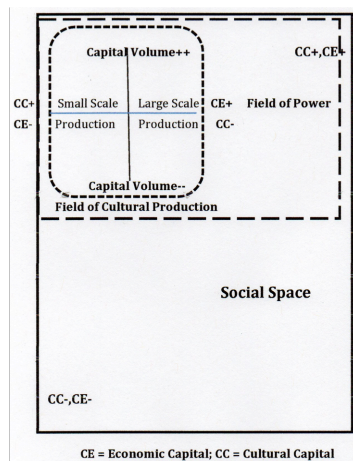of Holofernes. (1929)

En passant, we might note that her figures are not altogether dissimilar to the
anatomized figures in the work of the Romantic artist-poet William Blake – another
individual deeply immersed in Western esotericism.

Of course, the subject of *Judith* was set by the College, but there is little reason to believe
that its classical allusions would have been unattractive to Ithell: after all, she had
received a classical education, her budding esotericism was mostly based on knowledge
from antiquity, and indeed Surrealism itself, to which she would eventually be drawn,
frequently drew on classical myth as if to underline the universal significance of its
images. Still, Slade clearly represented a kind of active-denying dialectic for Colquhoun
out of which a third creative force would immerge, one fueled by the alchemy of
esotericism and the expression of the surreal.

A full account of the provenance and development of Surrealism is, of course, beyond
the scope of this paper. There are, however, several key points to make. Firstly,
Surrealism itself needs to be seen as artistic generational shifts within the avant-garde,
and these would be horizontal as well as vertical. Secondly, as such, possible
antecedents can be traced back to Impressionism and beyond; for example, Picasso, who
exhibited at both the 1910 Post-impressionist and 1936 Surrealist exhibition in London,
is now most obviously associated with Cubism[ix]. Thirdly, these movements only
crystalise in retrospect, and the whole thrust of fine art aesthetic needs to be seen as a
fluid movement in these years, in which individual styles shifted with fashion in the light
of those gaining prominence within the *fields* of cultural production. Fourthly, the very
style and content of Surrealism needs to be considered just as much in terms of the
social, economic, and political (as *fields* and the forms of *capital* they held) as much as
the aesthetic.

Figure 16: Large and Restricted Markets within the Field of Cultural Reproduction

Capital Volume++
CC+,CE+
CC+ CE-
Small Scale Production
Large Scale Production
CE+ CC-
Field of Power
Capital Volume--
Field of Cultural Production
Social Space
CC-,CE-
CE = Economic Capital; CC = Cultural Capital

As part of the cultural *field* of reproduction, individuals in the art *field* hold various *capitals* as characteristic of the sub-groups to which they belong within the avant-garde. *Large-scale mass cultural products* may accrue high monetary profits, but carry with them little *cultural capital* due to their popular appeal (lack of scarcity). Whilst the opposite is also true: *small-scale, restricted market orientated goods* may have little financial return but still possess high *cultural capital* due to laws of rarity and distinction: 'art-for-art's-sake' is the typical stance of those producing at this level. So, the *field* of cultural production is itself subdivided by the *field* strategy adopted by producers: large-scale and popular (CE+ = high *economic capital*) or small-scale, restricted production (CC+ = high *cultural capital*). These juxtapositions between large-scale production (art posters, for example), and, small-scale production (rare), generate (and are generated by) structures within the *field*. The avant-garde in fine arts is, almost by definition, small scale and within a restricted market: they thus appeal for consecration as 'pure art' and at a high price (high *cultural* and *economic capital*).

The Field and the Field of Power
The socio-seismic shifts in Europe in the late nineteenth century, and the total trauma of the First World War are to be set against the loosening of moral strappings so characteristic of *belle époque* decadence. Moreover, if the Great Exhibition of 1889, itself celebrating the great humanist revolution of 1789, had opened up Europe to the exoticism of overseas cultures and to a vision of modern technology, the strength of the cultural arbitrary grew as the certainties of the past were laid bare: and this was often experienced at an intimate level, especially by those – artists and writers for example – who originated in comfortably placed families not faced with the imperatives of domestic survival, even if they subsequently pursued bohemian life styles. Furthermore, as 'foreign' cultures and religions opened up the possibility of alternative beliefs and values, the contemporary prominence of the writings of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) amongst the educated classes offered the exciting prospect of exploring the unconscious trappings of the human mind, especially with respect to its primitive impulses.

It is possible, therefore, to see Surrealism as the confluence of social, cultural and psychological energies being played out in the political economic contexts of the day: and at base, in Europe, this amounted to an acute crisis in so-called Western Civilisation as the *belle époque* and *Roaring Twenties* collapsed into severe economic depression following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. If the First World War had called into question the validity of Western logic and rationality, allowing Dadaism to offer nonsense and irrationality as a credible alternative, Surrealism only amplified this aesthetic response, with its focus on the 'uncontrolled' pathways of the mind. Both drew on advances in forms founded by Impressionism, Abstraction and Cubism, as well as pushing further artists' appropriation of techniques other than those trained into them at conventional art schools (collage, for example). Although, ironically, in some works, those standard techniques were deployed *in extremis* but to convey content that bore only passing reference to the traditional subjects of art. Bourdieu makes the point that a major

distinction between popular and bourgeois art is that the former tolerates no ambiguity between content and form; the Surrealists, pushed these as wide apart as they dared in their own *prise de distance* from the ruling artistic elites. All this is to be seen as the epicenter of inter- and intra- generational competitiveness within the art *field*, with groups earning various amounts of *economic* and *cultural capital* corresponding to their position within it according to the symbolic rules of scarcity of demand.

It is therefore unsurprising that André Breton (1896-1966), the so-called 'founder' of Surrealism, and who wrote both the First and the Second Surrealist Manifestos of 1924 and 1929, in which he referred to it as 'pure psychic automatism', came from bourgeois stock and trained as a medic in psychiatry (*habitus*), and routinely employed Freud's methods of psychoanalysis. Mute objects were seen as 'symbolically functional' in ways not altogether different from esoteric iconography, with their power to both stimulate and exacerbate the exegetic morphology of thoughts and desires, and their expressions. Breton and his associates were preaching revolution – both psychological and political; it is therefore unsurprising that artists drawn into its sphere of influence could trope one or other or, indeed both, as the socio-economic crises of the 1920 and 30s deepened.

Given the amorphous boundaries between artistic movements and their styles – at least in their formative periods – it is perhaps unsurprising if some artists became 'Surrealists' by accident, as it were. For example, Salvador Dali (1904-1989) himself is said only to have 'converted' to Surrealism after seeing in the window of a Gallery a piece by Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), who seems never to have started out with Surrealist ambitions at all, even if he later engaged (and fell out) with them. Eileen Agar (1899-1991), the only female British to exhibit at the 1936 London exhibition, similarly only became a Surrealist when one of the organisers, Roland Penrose (1900-1984) declared her so (an act of consecration). This seminal exhibition marked surrealism major's entry into the British art *field* and included the magic pastoralism of Paul Nash, the spiritual visions of Cecil Collins (1908-1982), and contemporary sculpture from Henry Moore (1898-1986) – artists who would not now be understood as true Surrealists at all. Of course, this statement itself needs to be seen as *a posteriori* comment on what each did subsequently, but even in their day, Surrealism included a range of associations, some central and some quite distant.

Two of its organisers - Roland Penrose (1900-1984) and Herbert Read (1893-1968)- of the 1936 exhibition were again both from strong bourgeois stock with significant *cultural*, *economic* and *social capital*. Penrose was the son of a successful portrait painter and the daughter of a wealthy banker (*economic capital*), studying at private schools and Cambridge University (*social* and *cultural capital*). A conscientious objector in the First World War, he moved to France in 1922, married the poet Valentine Boué in 1925 and became good friends with Max Ernst, Wolfgang Paalen and Pablo Picasso, all of whom both influenced the Surrealists and were the most exhibited in the 1936 show: Ernst (16), Paalen (12), Picasso (11) (*social* and *cultural capital*). Penrose therefore used a high level of *economic* and *cultural capital* to enhance both through *social capital*, affording him both acknowledged and recognised consecration as a hub individual within the *field* of cultural reproduction. As Bourdieu would argue: 'There are positions in a *field* that admit only one occupant but command the whole structure' (Bourdieu and Wacquant. 1992: 243). Returning to England in 1936, he settled in Hampstead (*cultural capital*) where he would have rubbed shoulders with the likes of Ben Nicholson (1894-1982), Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975) and Naum Gabo[x] (1890-1977) (*social capital*). He also opened a Gallery in Cork Street (*cultural*, *social* and *economic capital*), selling the work of these painters and other surrealists becoming friends also with Eileen Agar, Lee Miller (1907-1977), Man Ray (1990-1976), Edouard

Mesens (1903-1971), Paul Eluard (1895-1952) and Joseph Bard (1922-1975) – all of whom shared significant aspects of his own *habitus*. In 1937 he then became the lover of Colquhoun's younger contemporary, surrealist painter Leonora Carrington; someone else who had considerable *capital* holdings, being the daughter of a successful Northern manufacturer. A year later, Penrose had an affair with millionairess, art collector Peggy Guggenheim (1898-1979)[xi]; and the American art photographer Lee Miller a year later. *Social*, *economic* and *cultural capital* were therefore closely inter-related in the personal lives, work and expression of the artistic styles of the day.

Bourdieu argues that all art movements need writers to express their aesthetic. The French intellectual-poet Mallarmé (1842-1898) provided this role for the French Impressionists in the second half of the nineteenth century; for the British surrealists in the 1930s it was Herbert Read. His is another story of position defined in terms of his background – *habitus* – and how he used it to accrue further forms of *symbolic capital* which allowed for his prominent position within the art *field* of the day. Read was born into a wealthy farming family. However, by his early twenties he was already publishing his own poetry and that of others like T. S. Eliot (*symbolic capital*). In fact, he was a champion of English Romantic and Metaphysical poetry (*consecrated avant garde*), which seems to have chimed with his interest in fine arts. By the early 1930s, he was teaching arts at the University of Edinburgh (*cultural capital*); he was also friend and supporter of painters such as Nash, Hepworth and Nicholson (*social capital*) and the contemporary arts group *Unit One*[xii]. Therefore, significant levels of *economic* and *social capital* that, invested well, could only offer further good *capital* returns. He became a trustee of the Tate, curator of the London based Victoria and Albert Museum, and founded the *Institute of Contemporary Arts* in 1947 (*cultural capital*). From 1933-38, he also edited the *Burlington Magazine*, that very pillar of the art establishment. In 1936, he had published a book on Surrealism to which Breton contributed. He therefore had a perfect hand of *symbolic capital – social*, *economic* and *cultural* – both to legitimate and consecrate his position in the *field*.

Ithell Colquhoun
If we place Ithell Colquhoun in this context, in London in the mid-1930s, we see a *social space* with a number of salient influences:

- Art - traditional English romantic (Pre-Raphaelite/ Arts and Craft), Classicism, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism; abstraction, exoticism; English modernism; surrealism;
- Political/ Economic – depression after expansion (thus, shrinking art markets, political crisis (capitalism, fascism and communism);
- Psychological – Freud, radicalization, new values and beliefs imported from a range of sources.

All of these need to be understood generationally and in terms of the relevant forms of *capital* they implied. One might say that the old world - Edwardian and Victorian – had died, but the new world was struggling to be born (it took another world war to do so) – to use an allusion to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. For Colquhoun, however, there was one further significant factor: as well as imbibing, both personally and aesthetically, these socio-cultural conditions, there was already established a deep affinity (*elective affinity*) to esoteric traditions referred to above, many of which struggled with similar forces, expressing them in different ways and yet reflecting the same changes in the relationship between the individual and the social and psychic worlds that surrounded them. Colquhoun met with Meredith Starr (born Herbert Close in 1890-1971), a man born of landowning parents, and who was instrumental in bringing the Indian Guru Mehar Baba to the UK. He wrote for the *Occult Review* (along with Crowley and other

leading occultists; and in turn wrote for Crowley's own *Equinox*). It is said she was impressed by him; and it may well be that this man, renowned for his lack of humour, offered her an example of seriousness and discipline that was close to her own dispositional intent as she considered her artistic work.

Colquhoun had already encountered Surrealism when she lived in Paris for a short period in 1931, and subsequently read Peter Neagoe's *What is Surrealism* when it was published in 1932. But, it is the 1936 exhibition, where Salvador Dali spoke dressed in a Diver's Suit that mostly marked her commitment to this approach in art. The age difference between her and Eileen Agar was seven years, so she was too young to be included in the exhibition. Nevertheless, the event would have given impetus to her rapidly expanding artistic dispositions, the knowledge and functional skills of which she had spent her previous life acquiring. In the same year she had her first solo exhibition in Cheltenham: *Decorations, Paintings and Drawings*. Many of these included her designs and floral pictures, but it was Surrealism, which was next to preoccupy her. The key period, of course, was from 1936-1947, and it was during this time that some of her most renowned pieces were accomplished: *Scylla* (1938); *Rivières Tièdes* (1939); *The Pine Family* (1940); *Diagrams of Love: the Androgyne* (1940; *The Trees* (1941); *The Dance of the Nine Opals* (1942); *Sunset Birth* (1942); *Dreaming Leaps* (1945); *Linked Senses* (1946).

What happened next needs again to read against the socio-political climate of the day, and indeed the response of the socio-cultural. A deepening international political situation meant that everyone was somehow obliged to take up a position when confronted with alternatives: fascism or communism, capitalism or nationalism, the Spanish Civil war, the French Popular Front, Munich? It was a world in which Dali could subsequently be accused of being Hitlerian for not denouncing the German dictator and holding out for art-for-art's-sake; a position which others shared in marking out the mission of Surrealism as the development of art itself, and therefore against the institutional forms existing at the time. Others allied with Surrealism in both its explicit and implicit political tasks: Breton was an ex-communist party member and positioned his second surrealist manifesto within the culture-centred philosophy of the Italian communist Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), whom he visited in Mexico in 1938 (where, incidentally, he also met the Mexican social realist painter Frida Kahlo – 1907-1954). However, personal transformation was always at the heart of the cause, even if that was seen as proceeding through the destruction of the capitalist, bourgeois order. Of course, Surrealism itself might be seen as somewhat of a decadent form on the part of bourgeois artists themselves, but that is another matter.

By January 1939, Colquhoun was included in the *Living Art in England* exhibition at the London Gallery, along with Eileen Agar, Grace Pailthorpe, Edith Rimmington, Conroy Maddox and Roland Penrose. Just to share this company was *symbolic capital* for her; acknowledgement of her position within the *field* – a kind of consecration. As the exhibition included both surrealists and constructivists, as well as English and international artists (Gabo, Mondrian, Kokoshka), its organizer E L T Mesens, was able to offer a united front against fascism and highlight overseas artists now as refugees in London. Exhibitions of Surrealist only artists later in the same year, included Colquhoun's two-person show with Roland Penrose at Mayor Gallery (Cork Street) and, as Shillitoe points out, it is here in setting works like *Scylla* next to Penrose rather limp interpretations, that the power of her mission at the time becomes clear. The same year, as war became imminent, Colquhoun travelled to France where she met with Breton. He would certainly have shared her interests in adopting automatic methods in paintings, which could tap the unconscious images of the mind, somewhere between 'waking and sleeping'. She had first learned about automatism from Roberto Matta (1911-2002) and

Gordon Onslow Ford (1912-2003) in 1939, having spent time with them and the group of artists invited to work in Chateau Chemillieu, Brittany, France. Both Matta and Onslow Ford were interested in the links between art and metaphysics, as well as the use of mathematics in art – indeed, art, automatic techniques and the cosmos as one inner/ outer expression. Both were, of course, also part of Breton's surrealist group in Paris. Such 'psycho-morphological' methods would become increasingly significant for Colquhoun from this period on and include Decalcomania, Fumage, Parsemage, Stillomany, Frottage and Entoptic graphomania.

With so many issues in flux – social, personal, psychological, spiritual, political, and aesthetic – it would be surprising if groups did not take sides and indeed individuals oppose one another, and so they did. Things came to a head in April 1940 in the Barcelona Restaurant in Beak Street, London. The meeting included all surrealists currently living and available: Buckland Wright (Chair) , Herbert Read, Roland Penrose, Ruth Adams, Eileen Agar, John Banting, Robert Baxter. Jacques Brunius, Stanley-William Hayter, Charles Howard, Ruben Mednikoff, Gordon Onslow-Ford, Grace Pailthorpe, Edith Remington, A C Sewter, Sybil Stephenson, Wener von Alvenslebe. Their relative *habitus* and *field* positions are themselves an interesting study and demonstrate how quantity and relative volume of the major forms of *capital* defined their profile within the movement. E L T Mesens (Director of the London Gallery, and Editor of the London Bulletin) was *de facto* the 'head' of the Surrealist movement and called the meeting with the aim of re-focusing its activities and *raison d'être*. He then laid down three conditions for continuing 'membership' of the Surrealist group: that they should adhere to the 'proletarian revolution'; that they should boycott any non-surrealist activity/ associations/ groups; that they should boycott any non-surrealist exhibitions. Colquhoun objected on every count: that political activity at this level was antithetical to artistic work; that she wished to continue her explorations of the 'occult' (a not unreasonable ambition given the way Breton had encouraged the 'occultation' of Surrealism); that this meant not exhibiting since there were few if any outlets for surrealism at that time. What had sparked Mesens' concern were discussions between Herbert Read and Peggy Guggenheim to open a *British Art Centre*. The worry was that, although this offered an opportunity, some artists seemed to be included and others excluded; a classic struggle between *economic* and *cultural capital* played out in terms of *social capital*. Others agreed with Colquhoun and similarly 'left' the group. Thirty-six years later, she was still sore about it stating that Eileen Agar 'apologised' and was allowed back in, Herbert Read was 'too useful' to be left outside, but Adams, Pailthorpe and Mednikoff were deemed 'expendable'. In a sense, it is too easy to read this event as one of many in which, even if Surrealism was revolutionary, its leading exponents tended towards a central orthodoxy which allied itself to key figures already acknowledged within the *field*. Anyone on the margins, for whatever reason, was expendable. So, Adams was American, and anyway an architect. Pailthorpe and Mednikoff were considered just too weird, even for the surrealists[xiii].

In a way, Colquhoun veered in the direction of non-conformism, which, ironically for a so-called dissident group, could only be tolerated so far. As is often the fate of avant-garde marginals, she fell out with a group of which she was only a partial member to begin with; in terms of outlook, sources and dispositions. That did not mean it did not hurt, or that her objections did not have consequences. She comments that Mesens stated they could still be friends. However, she thought she had 'cooked her goose' and so it proved with a successful Surrealist exhibition held without her one month later in the Zwemmer Gallery, even if critical reception summed up Surrealism as 'shocking bad taste' in the socio-political circumstances and 'good psychological cocktail when cocktail time was over'. Indeed, 'reality' was pressing: the 'automatic writings' of Mednikoff's

char woman may seem to have paled in significance to the public when set next to the occupation of France by the Nazis.

One outcome of this falling out was that she was left to more or less work on her own. She says as such in a letter to the *New Apocalypse* editors J F Hendry (1912-1986) and Henry Treece (1911-1966). *New Apocalypse* took its name from *Apolcalypse* by D H Lawrence (1931) and was interested in the 'wholeness' of man and the 'harmony of nature', as expressed by its writers in poems, prose and other pieces. She also writes that she is interested in exploring the relationship between 'human forms and those of rocks, trees and architecture'. Such an ambition would resonate with various esoteric traditions as well as the 'psychological morphology' of Roberto Matta (and can certainly be seen in such paintings as *Gouffres Amers* – see below). Colquhoun sent various writings to *New Apolcalypse*, which were initially well received. Indeed, she was even offered to join them as artistic editor, before being vetoed. Another editor remarked that if they were not careful, 'she would end up running the show' (see http://www.ithellcolquhoun.co.uk/new_apocalypse.htm), which is perhaps indicative of her single mindedness, commitment and sense of originality.

As a relative 'outsider', now even more so, it is perhaps unsurprising that Colquhoun gravitated towards another outsider: Toni del Renzio.

Figure 117: Toni del Renzio
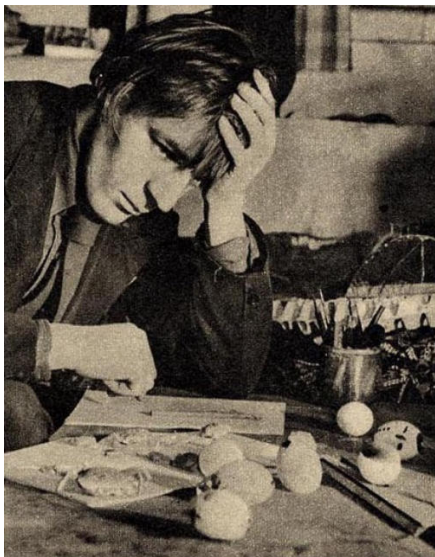
Del Renzio had arrived in Britain around the same time as the Barcelona restaurant meeting, by way of North Africa, Italy, Spain and France. Faced with the dispersal of the Surrealists, he attempted his own *régroupement*, launching the *Arson* journal in 1942 with, it is said, encouragement from Kenneth Clark (*social*, *cultural* and *economic capital*). If del Renzo was himself lacking in *economic capital*, he obviously knew how to construct a social network and play the *cultural capital* card. The first edition of *Arson* (March 1942), which he co-edited with *New Apocalypse* member Robert Melville (also a friend of Conroy Maddox), was an attempt to define the *field* in his own terms; disguised as an exercise in consolidation – he dedicated it to Mesens. However, the latter was having none of it and, along with Penrose and Brunius, he denounced del Renzio as an 'arriviste', 'a baffoon' and a 'spam-brained intellectual'. The infighting continued as del Renzo discovered that Read was preparing to defend Dali and Eluard against Breton who, incidentally, was also advocating that surrealists should involve themselves in the occult.

At first, del Renzio was negative about Colquhoun: 'she condemns herself in her own words'. In *Arson*, he writes of the 'New Apoplexy' and of her 'sterile abstractions'. Later, however, she had paid off his debts, they are living together and eventually marry in 1943.

Figure 18: Wedding of Toni del Renzio and Ithell Colquhoun

The clash of the material and the spiritual was somewhat summed up in his own words: She is 'essentially a mystic, therefore individualistic, conscious of being an artist, anxious to exhibit'. Clearly, Colquhoun financed a lot of del Renzo's activities and, after being 'banned' from the 1940 exhibition, possibly saw him as the front man for her own form of resistance to the new Surrealist orthodoxy. Certainly, by 1944 there was uproar at a poetry reading attended by Mesens and his friends when del Renzio and Colquhoun refused to have a protest letter from a Surrealist read out. Hostilities between these two factions of the surrealists continued for some time but, in a sense, neither of them were quite travelling in the direction as Colquhoun. She was already visiting Cornwall as sketches of *Lanyon Quoit* and the *Merry Maidens* attests. And, the energy behind her relations with del Renzo rapidly seemed to decline; but again, the social, the aesthetic, the personal and the political (the chthonic and the cosmic) are all intertwined. Del Renzo describes her as 'very self-centred'. And, recognized that having two artists under the same roof was always going to be a problem; especially when he felt he was expected to defer to her 'requirements'. Of the two, of course, she was the one with a traditional art school training (*symbolic capital*), and possibly felt that that gave her precedence. At the same time, del Renzio felt that he engaged her in the looser directions of automatism, etc. He also describes her as 'intensely jealous of other women', which would have been a problem for such a gregarious social activist. Navigating through the break with Mesens and the surrealists is tricky, and sixty years later, del Renzio still claims not to understand it. Certainly, it is hard to appreciate why Mesens objected to occultism when the acknowledged leader of the Surrealists – Breton – openly advocated it and supported Pierre Mabille's associations between the esoteric and the Surreal. Still, Mesens sought the support of Breton to have Colquhoun 'expelled' from the group. The problem seemed less the involvement with occultism than with occult *groups* per se, of which, of course, there were many around in London at the time. Mesens' own experiences with the Belgium Surrealists may explain his nervousness at the formation of parallel groups in competition to their own in the light of their explicit socio-political mission.

Colquhoun rightly declared that she was never formally 'expelled' by Breton as such, even if *de facto* she was: none of her work appeared in any of the subsequent major Surrealist exhibitions. Indeed, as noted above, it is debatable to what extent she considered herself 'a surrealist' as such from that moment on, even if she subscribed to some of its techniques. The term is certainly used in the 1976 retrospective, but that could be for the want of any better term, and there are other options which probably more realistically describe her subsequent work: 'esoteric realism', or 'magical realism', or even '*fantasmagie'*, but, of course, all of these have a less consecrated meaning (*symbolic capital*). When exactly Surrealism came to an end is debatable, and its influence lives on to this day. However, times moved on: post-war and American tastes went more in the direction of *Abstract Expressionism*, and English art followed suit (some might say led) in the whole St Ives movement of the 40s and 50s (see Grenfell and Hardy, 2003). Rothko took an interest in its biomorphic forms, and many artists experimented with surrealist techniques. But, the relevance of its contemporary voice

was superceded and, by the time of Breton's death in1966, genres such as Pop Art were the aesthetic language of the day, even if Surrealist elements could be seen within it.

As for occultism, Crowley died in 1947 'perplexed'. This did not mark the end of the interest and influence in esoteric matters but generations moved on from the significance of theosophy and the Golden Dawn in London artistic society during the first decades of the twentieth century.


The Empirical Habitus II

In these last sections, I have gone to some lengths to present the social and political forces at play in the world (*fields*) of Ithell Colquhoun from her birth up to the mid-40s, focusing in particular on the seminal events and their antecedents around the rise and eclipse of British Surrealism in the 1930s and 40s. In the next section, I want to say something about Colquhoun's art itself and the processes that went into it. Since these are best understood in relation to the artist herself, initially I want to return to her own personal dispositions (*habitus*).

I have previously described her family background and education: her traditional art training and personal links with esotericism. Undoubtedly, she had natural artistic ability and it was honed by places like the Slade into a high level of skill. Despite her somewhat disparaging remarks about her training, she won prizes there: its then Principal Henry Tonks, a man who was known to be able to reduce an art student (including Paul Nash) to tears with his comments of their work, described her 'remarkable gifts', even if he also acknowledged that with a mind like hers she was somewhat at risk of losing her way; or, as he expressed it, 'going out for strawberries and coming back with spiders and beetles'.

Figure 19: Perspective   Figure 20: Life Class Drawing
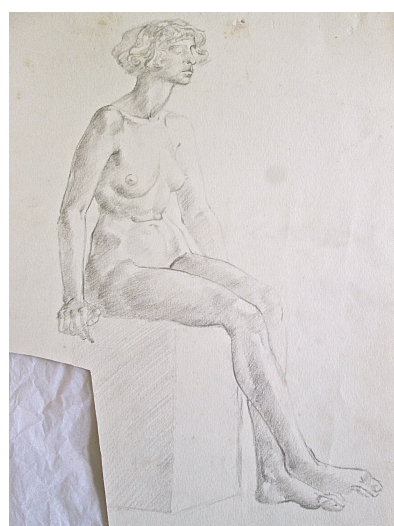
His successor, Randolph Schwabe (1885-1948) – another highly accomplished draughtsman, was obviously also taken by her, supporting her work. He comments favourably about her (unsuccessful) entries for the *Prix de Rome* in the early 1930s, even if he had received complaints about her *Judith* painting (which, in 1932, was on the wall on the Staff Common Room) for being a disturbing influence in Committee meetings. 'Miss Colquhoun', he notes 'goes her own way'; although clearly there had been

movement as she now drew the male figure 'without any concealment'. There is certainly a clash between the old and the new artistic generations here. So, whilst Colquhoun is enthusing about Brancusi's studio in Paris, with all its abstractions, the *London Group*, a society based in London in 1913, is 'chucking' her work when entered for exhibiting. The significance of this is that the *London Group* is made up of working artists, including, at the time Henry Moore. By 1934, she was now 'done up in the fashionable manner – no longer the typical art student', and looking for advice on how to make money by art. Even so, she did have the resources to hire a studio in Hammersmith. Schwabe also visits the two person exhibition with Penrose at the Mayor Gallery in 1939, again praising her 'excellent draughtsmanship, craftsmanship and colour', if finding her subject 'slightly morbid': 'dilapidated corpse like figures', 'old symbolic motives', a 'very (more or less naturalistic) naked man', along with naturalistic interiors and flowers – all this in line with the 'psychological morphology' discussed above. The truth is, in true rear-garde form, he neither understood nor subscribed to the new generational forms. He declared she found expression in the most recent fashion in painting – 'though it is not very new'. Schwabe also states that she had photos of herself in the nude (which he did not see) – presumably from the batch that the nude photo in the London Bulletin was take and published in 1939.

Colquhoun was also photographed by Man Ray in 1939 (1890-1976) (Figure 21). Man Ray was, of course, a leading American artist/photographer who spent most of his career in Paris, and was central to the Dada and Surrealist movement. Just to be photographed by him in itself conferred the *symbolic capital* of recognition in itself. The cut and thrust of artistic competition is vividly described by Schwabe when he is sitting on the Hanging Committee for the *British Council* exhibition at the *National Gallery* in 1942. Two of his own paintings – of Windham Hill and Queen's Lane - were accepted, even though they were described as 'so English'. Schwabe wondered what they say when he is not there. Of Colquhoun's two entries – a small abstract painting and a 'large over-sized flower piece', only the former is accepted. Size counts in the world of *symbolic capital*. Schwabe met up with Ithell and del Renzio in 1944 and asked her if she was still into surrealism: 'even more so than ever', she replied – 'and exclusively so'. Schwabe says he liked her earlier work: 'one cannot stand still', she retorts.

Del Renzio stated that they were only married 2-3 years; in fact they divorced in 1947 – four years. It is said that she took her anger with her husband, who she referred to as a 'a con-man on the dole', to her grave. This was not the first time she had her deep affection for another disappointed. She had a close liaison with the English archeologist Humfry Payne (who, incidentally, was married) in the early 30s (http://www.ithellcolquhoun.co.uk/darling_ithella.htm). Around the same time, she also recounts a lesbian infatuation with the Greek woman Andromaque Kazou in *Lesbian Shore* (http://www.ithellcolquhoun.co.uk/lesbian_shore.htm). Then, there was Francesc d'Assis Gali, a Spanish artist who arrived in London as a refugee in 1939 and who Colquhoun met through the Gallery owner Ewan Phillips – they both lived in Hampstead. Gali wrote some 40 letters to her in six years – including during her marriage years – letters characterized by the romantic flowery-ness of his Latin language. This left even her Jungian psychologist commenting in 1952: 'What are you carrying forward from the past? Maybe it is an attitude of your father's or something like

that you are carrying forward. Your Spanish friend may be a carrier of the quality and he will therefore act as a link and help you to remember if you think around him. In fact, you may have been attracted toward him because you felt he had a key to some part of yourself; i.e. you were more complete with him…it is not good to want someone's company in such circumstances because they are carrying a bit of one's unconscious' (http://www.ithellcolquhoun.co.uk/i_palpitates_with_joy.htm).

With the death of her own father in 1942 coinciding closely with her marriage to del Renzio, it is perhaps not too fanciful to see a connection between her romantic dalliances, her need for stability and her own domestic background. Yet, outside of her marriage, relations seem to be unconsummated and there appears no evidence that after her divorce she had a significant relationship with another man – or indeed woman - for the rest of her life. One might even say she became 'anti-man'. Certainly, later in life, and in response to Ades' 'rediscovery' of her in 1980, she refers disparagingly to Breton for writing 'que la femme soit libre et adorée' when in actual fact they were 'permitted and not required'. It is difficult to access the significance of such a view in the time period to which it relates. Clearly, the art world was still dominated by men, and women must have regarded ruefully the depictions of the female form by Cubist and Surrealists. However, it is questionable how far this played out in any manner. Chadwick (2017) gleefully reports on Roland Penrose, in his 80s, commenting that the women of the Surrealist period were not 'artists' but 'muses' as an example of the way women artists were overlooked. But, this in itself understates the realty of actual human relations within the imperative of human affective (and sexual) discourse. Leonora Carrington also asserts that she 'didn't have time to be anyone's muse'…(she) 'was too busy rebelling against family and learning to be an artist'. However, that still did not stop her going off with the artist Max Ernst.

Yet, for Colquhoun, the breakdown of her marriage seemed to run deep and affected her for the rest of her life. Even when she rented Vow Cave Cottage in Lamorna Cove in 1949, she appeared to keep herself apart from the bohemian lifestyle being lived there; that involved artists, previous conscious objectors employed as woodchoppers, and itinerant young people with a sense of romantic adventure. So, in the *Streams of St Bride*, she apparently catalogued the various romantic liaisons in the valley without becoming implicated herself. The title itself probably refers to the Celtic Goddess of regeneration Bridget or Brigid, one manifestation of the 'the White Goddess'; Graves' exhortation of the ancient cult-rituals of birth, love and death found in various pagan mythologies and underpinning a good deal of poetic expression. This book was first published in 1948 and clearly influenced Colquhoun, and indeed anyone from then interested in esoteric traditions from that time (and since). People who knew her at the time speak of her preoccupation of 'keeping out men' from Vow Cave Cottage; of how, whenever she turned up at social gatherings, which itself was quite rare, she was always standing apart. Her lack of engagement is sometimes puzzling. For example, there seems almost no mention of the artist John Armstrong who was living in Lamorna Cove at the time at Oriental Cottage, even though their art interests would seem to overlap.

Figure 22: Feathers (Armstrong 1946)   Figure 23: Darkfire (Colquhoun 1980)

The constructivist Marlow Moss (and indeed Dod Proctor), who also lived in Lamorna during these years, is mentioned in the *Streams of St Bride*, but there seems no evidence of either social or professional exchange. One journalist from *The Cornishman* writes of her closing the door on him; and their art writer that she was 'stuck up/ superior'. In a way, she was from a 'superior background' in terms of her past acquaintances and activities, but this might not have been understood in this way. She knew that she had artistic 'pedigree', and probably shared little in the aesthetic outlook of the artistic generation making a name for itself in St Ives and Newlyn following the Second World War. During that time, throughout the revolutions of the 60s – cultural, sexual, political – she seems to have kept herself to herself, not attending Private Views or going back to post-view parties – for example, at Terry Frost's. But, by then, of course, she was already in her sixties and pursuing her esoteric interests in a somewhat single-minded manner. At the same time, she did have 'chosen friends', like the Picards[xiv], who describe her 'strange' ways and her fascination with the occult.

Part B: Art and the Psychological
The Return of the Repressed – Painting and Creativity

After having delivered his major critique of Kantian aesthetics in *La Distinction* (1979), which amounts to a 'sociological deconstruction' of the Kantian 'pure gaze', Bourdieu writes of the 'return of the repressed' (p. 486); by which he means, the need to consider the *form and content* of the products of art and culture in themselves. In this section, I want to address Colquhoun's actual artistic output – the actual paintings. Indeed, in a way, the whole preceding analysis, is really only an introduction for doing so. It is therefore somewhat ironic that space demands only the most cursory coverage in this context since there are very many words that can be said, and have been, about each individual painting. I want to address some of what has been said about certain paintings, including by Colquhoun herself, in assessing how we might regard their exegesis. Before that, I want to say something about the psychology of the creative process involved in producing these works. In this, I am approaching the construction of a *philosophy of the object*; in this case, the artistic object. In Part A, I set out how I would want to see such an object as a relationship between the socio-cultural *field* and the expressive impulses of those active within it in terms of their *habitus* and socio-trajectory. But, such, of course, is experienced at a personal, intimate level – one of emotions, thoughts, feelings and the shape and images that might carry them. Part B offers a preliminary account of the psychological process that this *psychology of the object* might involve.
I begin with setting out some of my own summary conclusions with respect to her artwork.

Firstly, I would argue that her paintings certainly exhibit the high level of technical proficiency identified in her work from the beginning. This is obvious in her early perspective designs, life drawings and floral paintings. And, indeed, it is a necessary skill when set against the type of hyper-realism – some might say neurotic realism – characteristic of the Surrealist style.

Secondly, and from about the mid-thirties, she produced a stunning set of paintings – large scale, complex, aesthetically demanding. Many of these had referents to classical and mythological subjects. Classicism was, of course, rejected by modern painters, and indeed represented everything they hated about establishment art. This gave all the more reason, therefore, to take subject sources from Classicism and subvert them, turn them on their heads, and send them back to their source as a critique of the way they were valued there (see Footnote v).

Thirdly, all that being said, deploying such stories, figures and myths represented an acknowledgement - conferring its own legitimacy and consecration – of the universal truth offered by antiquity; indeed, esoteric iconography appealed for the same reason. Both traditions resonated with notions from Freudian psychoanalysis about getting at 'deep truths', embodied and embedded in the unconscious mind, but liable to articulation in the conscious world. An anthropologist like Claude Lévi-Strauss was travelling in the same direction ethnographically in arguing for the structural universality of trans-cultural myths; thus, beginning a debate that has taken decades to play out – indeed, reaction against such a view (or, at least, modification of it) was part of the ground rationale of Bourdieu's own method.

Fourthly, whatever the psychic tensions produced in specific socio-cultural conditions and experienced as a personal, empirical psychology, Colquhoun's work from around the mid-30s to the time she began to visit Cornwall more frequently in 1949 – that is around 15 years from age 30 – 45 (arguably less) – represents the most significant part

of her achievement in terms of scale and conceptual ambition. All her significant pieces had been accomplished by then; all the rest is a footnote to this body of work.

Fifthly, she was peripheral as a Surrealist and, even when most committed to it, diverged significantly from certain of its most central concerns: for example, its political focus. The seriousness and consistency of her incorporation of esoteric ideas also set her apart. For her, the 'psychological' as explored by other writers articulated itself in terms of the esoteric and the icons it offered. Much of exploration increasingly seemed to take on a character of self-enquiry or transformation.

Sixthly, there is no doubt that she continued to paint – seriously – all of her life. However, from the 1950s, she increasingly became involved in her writing and esoteric studies. Indeed, unlike most painters who remained within the artistic *field*, she entered another part of the *field* of cultural production – namely, writing, including fiction, travelogues, and learned pieces on history and esoteric themes. Painting was no longer her prime concern. It might be argued that this was a symptom of her move and, certainly, leaving London is never a good idea if you are an ambitious artist as it removes you - physically in this case - from the centre of the *field*. That being said, she clearly did maintain contacts there (had an address up until the 1960s); it is just that Surrealism became somewhat eclipsed within the *field* of art; a *hysteresis*[xv] occurred for those who stayed wedded to its form. By then Colquhoun was increasingly exploring automatic techniques; partly with a view to self-knowledge, but partly also in the belief that a 'greater truth'/ reality could be tapped.

The Hidden Order of Art
Colquhoun describes how her paintings – both images and forms – appeared before her as if out of nowhere, and the act of realizing them. Such accounts are common amongst the visually attuned; for example, in the way William Blake 'saw' the ghost of a flea. Clearly, either such manifestations can be seen as mental instability or a 'gift' from another world, or perhaps somewhere in between. Indeed, in *The Process of* Art, Colquhoun explicitly states that art is a combination of the 'subjective', 'the objective' and, of course 'vision' – 'a poetic apprehension by means of one or more senses'. *Anything*, and *everything* can be included in the act of creation, and the artist may, or may not, have any moral intention in their work. Colquhoun connects this process with the Cabbalistic 'creative lux' – the light – and Tiphereth, the sixth Sephira, 'beauty, the luminous conception of equilibrium in forms…Creator and Creation'. Nature illumines, the mind selects. She acknowledges that formal technique is needed; and fashion plays a part. But, what she is referring to is the creative process itself and the alchemy – 'stone which is not a stone' – between the inner and the outer condition.

An illustrative case in point is Colquhoun's 1945 painting *Dreaming Leaps: in Homage to Sonia Araquistain* (Figure 22), which she produced after the death of Ariquistain who was the daughter of the ex-Spanish Republic's ambassador to Paris and Berlin.

In fact, Araquistain threw herself naked eighty feet to her death from a London apartment, apparently on impulse after making a phone call. Of course, this could be seen as the ultimate act of artistic defiance in the face of the modern world. For the Judge at her inquest, however, it was a clear sign of the 'dangers of mental instability' that certain reading and interests could invoke: Freud, painting and psychoanalysis had led Ariquistain to declare she had 'supernatural powers', that she was the 'missing link between man and animals', and would give birth to 'a new race of immortal beings'. The Judge declared, 'it was a field that suits no one and that no one should wish to explore'. However, such a judegment was an affront to del Renzio and, in her turn, Colquhoun, who clearly were more likely to see it as the heroism of a Surrealist comrade in arms. It is a remarkable painting and Remy (1999: 278ff) writes lyrically about it: 'Filaments of colour, garish and sombre garlands, fragments of comets, unfolding masses of decalomania, entanglements of intestinal ribbons…improbable peelings of twilight sky…emerge into dark brown mass…the eternal return of the same as different'. Interestingly, he also links its composition to the last three stages of the alchemical process: 'exaltation, multiplication and projection' where 'the lower liberates the higher', 'the fall of forms and ascension of colours, the body's descent and the rising of essences, detaches death from its finality and plunges the viewer into pure otherness'…'stripped of its trappings, the subject faces its own subversion, which had been denounced as a perversion (by the Judge). *Dreaming Leaps* is, therefore seen as a homage to the growth of a subject rather than its death – in the artistic, Surrealist, esoteric, aesthetic alchemy.

This procedural view of creativity has strong resonance with later explorations of Freudian theory as central to the creative process. For example, Anton Ehrenzweig (1967) takes the link between psychology and creativity in art as a way to understand the relationship between the two. He begins by accepting the repressed nature of individual psychologies, derived from Freud, almost by definition, as a natural product of the social construction of people; also the 'indeterminacy' of much mental processing – a mind in free range. For him, what is repressed under these conditions creates *neurotic* symptoms (mental disturbance) - anxiety, irrational fears, insecurity, depression – as a result of the conflict between inner repressed needs/ wishes and outer socially acceptable forms of behaviour (such forms might simply be existing artistic forms). The latter are always going to be stronger than the former, which only intensify them.

Pushed to an extreme, such forms of neurosis become psychotic; that is, leading to delusions, hallucinations and other mental disorders (of course, these too can be a source of creative expression!). In schizophrenia, for example, an individual may even be 'split-minded', losing touch with what is 'real', where an excess of individuality detaches itself from its surroundings (Araquistain?). The resulting fantasies can, however, also be a source of creative expression. Paradoxically, an inability to deal with incoming sensory data, autism for example, goes together with a heightened sensory sense - colours, sounds, touch, etc. become hyper real. Obviously, in extreme situations, individuals

exhibiting this state can become psycho-pathologically unwell – no wonder there seems a high degree of mental instability amongst certain artists of the period.

However, for Ehrenzweig, we all share this condition to a greater of lesser extent, as an essential aspect of creativity. In other words, creativity for him inherently involves a process of managing the essential neurotic-schizoid nature of the human mind implicit in the mind-society – self/ other, subject/object - dichotomy. Actual Creativity – from process to product - is then a process divided into three distinct stages as a response to this cleft psychology: Externalisation, Objectification and Re-integration:

Externalisation
In the first stage – *Schizoid* – stage, the creator *projects* fragmented (i.e. un-integrated, thus unresolved) parts of themselves into work (which is structured according to some logical form). That is, these forms – images – carry with them experiential fragments, some threatening, some comforting. (It is worth noting that one of the fundamental precepts of Gnosticism is that 'the spirit' always 'comes forth' clothed in an image). This stage can be quite automatic and subjective (one thinks of Colquhoun's automatism). Thus, because the subject-object relationship carries with it a certain value (or values), which itself can be dichotomous and unresolved, it is firstly externalised into other created structures (artistic images) where it maintains those relationships in hypo-statised forms.

Objectification
In the second stage, there is a kind of *Unconscious scanning* of the substructure of the artistic form (and the value systems expressed within them – Colquhoun's 'externalisation of the vision'). This stage can also be experienced as a kind of *manic depression* as it also involves an awareness of and acceptance of imperfection. For Freud, there is a kind of self-disgust on the part of the child for what they have produced precisely because it is distinguished (experienced) as other – separate – and not as one - at one - from the source of origination. Some oppositions are more acute and relate directly to subjective experience.

A sort of 'oceanic limit' is eventually reached where all differentiation ceases: the inside and the outside world become the same, rationality stops and ego is lost. This state might be considered as similar in actual experience to the Kantian disinterested transcendence of 'pure gaze'), or indeed the Gnostic *pleroma*[xvi]. In this state, which can be both active and receptive (artist and viewer), all fragmentation is lost and schizoid separateness is healed – because *all now is one*. There is hence a resolution of separateness. Indeed, this stage can be experienced as 'spiritual', a kind of androgynous one-ness.

Re-integration
In a third stage, there is then a *Re-introjection*, where what has been produced is now objectified or solidified and re-internalised in its new psychologically integrated – healed – form. In other words, the external production is now objectified as an 'other', which is now 'at one' with the subjective psychology. The image thus precipitates a *reintegration* of the now mediated forms. Artistic images are consequently viewed as the result of the resolution of underlying schizoid-neurotic tendencies.

The process leading from *Projection* to *Introjection* is consequently conceived as an alternation between paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. In the third state, there is a near post-coital experience after the creative act - and what is sensed - is cathartic; and may even give rise to a sense of fun, lightness, and laughter since there is the relief from psychic tension (although the psychological intensity required to fuel this process

may inhibit it). Moreover, it can be seen as occurring very quickly – *outside of time* – and not being once and for all; quite the opposite, and may be part of a continual process See footnote iii). In this way, *Creative energy* is sublimated into creative activity and output. All the imperfections and fragmentations not seen in stage two now become painfully obvious and are accepted. We come down to earth.

Part of the creative capacity is then to possess the strength to resist an almost anal disgust with the work that would make us sweep the whole 'mess' away. However, the work can finally be experienced at a higher near-conscious level of awareness, which can actually strengthen the ego – in esoteric terms, the dying god leading to rebirth. Secondary processes of revision then articulate previously unconscious aspects of the work, becoming part of art's conscious superstructure. In this way, there is an exchange between the conscious and the unconscious components of the work as well as the artist's conscious and unconscious levels of perception. Conscious knowledge can depend on craft and explicit functional knowledge, whilst the unconscious is mostly experienced in an intuitive manner. The unconscious also serves as a 'womb' to receive split-off and repressed parts of conscious self. Indeed, the external and internal processes of integration are different aspects of the same indivisible process of creativity.

As noted above, this Freudian analysis of creativity in art seems analogous to the stages of alchemy where gendered based archetypes are brought together – positive and negative – and interact to produce a third sublimated entity[xvii]. It seems that it is exactly this process that we can observe as being played out in Colquhoun's art. I now want to consider a few selected examples.

Figure 25: Scylla (1938)   Figure 26: The Pine Family (1940)

Paintings such as *Scylla*[xviii] and the *Pine Family*[xix] show the juxtaposition of male and female figures in an alchemical way[xx]. However, both transform these figures in a grotesque, mutilated fashion; this is not simply the co-terminus juxtaposition of sexual

forces but both are already scarred. Both draw on the surrealist style of hyper-realism, both draw on classical and literary themes, mixed into a phantasmogorical dream sequence. They certainly conform to the description of '*convulsive landscape'*, coined by Dali and quoted by Colquhoun as the guiding principle for her work at the time; and, we can note that 'convulsive' is defined as 'spasmodic', 'jerky', 'violent', and 'uncontrollable'. The fact that such images are offered with such precision only seems to intensify their character, and indeed impact on the viewer. Leicester Gallery asked for *The Pine Family* to be taken down in 1942 for being allegedly pornographic. In 1981, Colquhoun freely attests to the 'erotic' focus for her work in these years in her response to the Ades article (1980), and indeed quotes 'erotic pleasure' as one of the things she loves most, as well 'the sea' and 'finding bird nests' when asked about her greatest pleasures in an interview for *Savoir Vivre* in 1946. In 1953, she also declares allegiance to the Hermetic *Smaragdine Tablet[xxi]* principle of 'as above so below' as an expression of 'non-dualism' which itself can be affirmed in social and psychological, as well as cosmic and personal, terms including sexual duality.

The *Androgyne* (1941 - Figure 27) is one way of expressing this merging of the male and female principle; even if androgeny is prone to accusations of perpetuating male dominance with a discourse of female submission (footnote xx).

Yet, Colquhoun accepts Sartre's 'L'enfer, c'est les autres' (Hell is other people) 'because the fact is that 'other' implies division in the self instead of wholeness'. But, the same can be said of individual psychologies. Her knowledge of the Qabbalah only deepened as the years went by and she is able to integrate it with other systems, like Jungian psychology: 'the 'shadow side' of the psyche (in Jungian terms) has to be explored before integration of the personality can take place…anyone working with the *Sephirotic Tree of Life* will inevitably encounter the adverse aspect of each Sephirah, and unless one knows how to deal with it and restore the balance, nothing of value can be achieved'. Later work on the *Taro* and *Decad of Intelligence* are created from this viewpoint.

In psychological terms, artistic images themselves become fragments of death and rebirth as a mirror of the ego's de-differentiation and re-differentiation; the very same that are played out in mythological images. For example, the artist/ psychotherapist Marion Milner asks: 'The still glow that surrounded some of these images in my mind, images of the burning god, of Adonis and Osiris, did it come because they satisfied surreptitiously some crude infantile desire that I ought to have left behind long ago?' (Ehrenzweig, 1967: 176). The answer to which might well be 'yes', except, of course, nothing is ever 'left behind' and art is the process where psychic material becomes the 'base metal' for creativity. And, in this case, Graves' *White Goddess* has it opposite gender archetype in Frazer's *dying god* (Frazer, 2009/ 1890) – both pertain to the 'self' destructive nature of creative work and its instantiation. Indeed, again as noted, this argument could even be linked by to the processes involved in Kantian aesthetics and its phenomenology of the subject/ object (see Grenfell and Hardy, 2007:

chapters 3 and 7). Interestingly, Colquhoun writes of Crowley as a 'Dying God', or at least the dying God's last avatar (see *The Dying Kick of the Dying God*).

Nevertheless, in terms of empirical *habitus*, the evidence seems to be, and I would concur with Shillitoe on this one, that although there was indeed a degree of confrontation of the Surrealist obsession with sexuality and the female figure, in the late 30s and 40s, Colquhoun's art rather than being parody and ironic, also expressed deep currents of psychic distress over the content and form of her erotic experiences, to which she looked to esoteric philosophies for resolution.

Figure 28: Sardine and Egg (1941)
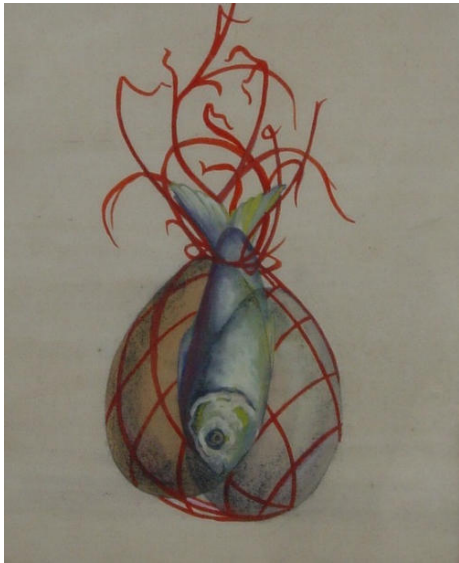
Many of her images seem to depict phallic forms: Peter Owen writes of visiting her in the late 50s and 60s in her Hampstead studio and of her being surrounded by 'bleak landscapes mostly incorporating phallic symbols'. Yet, in writing about *Scylla*, she insists that the symbolism is 'primarily feminine', although 'I suppose one could see it as phallic as well'. Certainly, other work seems explicitly phallic; for example, *Sardine and Egg*.

Indeed, the whole texture/ tactile nature of these paintings seems to set soft folds of enveloping flesh against hard and sharp rocks, etc. – sometimes the two together. It is hard for the viewer not to respond to these materials in purely gender-based ways. So, male or female, soft or sharp? I am not arguing necessarily for one or the other; rather that there was a certain 'unseeing' herself in the symbolic power, and source, of the images that arose for her.

In *Gouffres Amers*, she presents a male figure that has been both brutalized and tortured; completely disfigured. His strength – penis– is limp and has a feathery flower emerging from it, and his ribs are visible since his skin has been stripped away.

The term *Gouffres Amers* is generally taken to be connected with the 'bitter abyss' of Baudelaire's poem, *The Albatross*, where the bird is caught and tortured by sailors (Figure 29: Gouffres Amers – (1939)). Baudelaire compares the poet to the bird's fate; where his highflying aesthetics are 'brought to earth' and humiliated by 'the fall'. So, is this a violent attack on men? The sitting stance itself seems to parody the odalisque of classical form; is

Colquhoun mocking men for their idolization of women? Or, is she in fact, sympathizing with the fate of the artist when faced with the reality of the fallen world and the evil it can confer? She notes: 'For 'good' may be defined as 'Equilibrium', 'balance', and therefore 'evil' as 'imbalance'. It will further be seen that since 'the fall' is part of the process of 'creation', this latter being a cathartic manifestation of latent 'evil' to be transmuted again...therefore 'evil' is an inescapable element in the manifested universe'. Such seems perfectly congruent with the psychological interpretation of art outline above as from Ehrenzweig; one poetic and the psychological.

Figure 30: Gorgon (1946)

Summarizing….
We know that many of these themes were to preoccupy her for the rest of her life and later work mostly displays similar expressions of gender based archetypes; whether in terms of the Qabalah, colour symbolism, taro, or astrology – and sometimes all or some of these at the same time. There seemed no relenting in her explorations of the traditions of the *Golden Dawn*, even if her personal psychological distress attenuated, although with that came a certain social isolation. We know also that she continued to search out occult and esoteric groups for the rest of her life[xxii]. In the late 50s and early 60s, and whilst taking instruction from an esoteric society and having the resources to spread her time between London and Cornwall, she was still looking for other groups to join, some of which she never found and others which clearly disappointed her. As I have argued, it is always important to set biography within its socio-historical context. In a world without the Internet, membership of such groups would have been a primary source of material for Colquhoun; although it is never clear just how involved she was with their activities. Of course, there is an entire *field* analysis to be done of esoteric and occult groups and those who inhabited them. One question is just how significant – indeed what its membership amounted to – each of these societies were in reality behind their often grand sounding names. Similarly, although they all involved themselves in familiar esoteric themes, beliefs and practices, there were clearly significant differences between them and the social provenance and trajectories of those involved in each of them. The fact that she was able to connect so many disparate topics and philosophies – spiritual systems, classicism, history, traditions, art techniques, literatures – seems finally to have been one of her major achievements, even if the end result put her beyond the understanding of many of the constituencies with which she had contact. But, for Colquhoun, the search appears to have been as much about personal development as it was content interest. As Shillitoe concludes, her enthusiasm/ ambivalence towards the activity of both artistic and esoteric groups can be seen as

summing up her own empirical dispositions: 'the side that required independence and freedom, as opposed to the side that sought and valued belonging to a group, the sense of shared purpose, the ideals and discoveries together with the sense of order and the comfort of ritual that came with the membership of magical societies' (2010: 45). Nevertheless, her esoteric interests seem gradually to have eclipsed her artistic voice. And, anyway, of course, the art world itself moved on, and Hermetic traditions were no longer the central concern of the new art generations: in effect, her art became of historical rather than contemporary interest.

In Conclusion…

In this paper, I have attempted to set a mid-point between two readings of Ithell Coquhoun and her work: what I called 'internalist' and 'externalist'. This has necessitated setting both her works of art, and indeed an exploration of the creative impulses that produced them (Part A) within a socio-cultural context which itself is based of a theory of practice and aesthetics as being both phenomenologically and socio-historically constructed. I referred to this as a *philosophy of the object*. The grounding principles of such are *structural relations* (as structuring *and* structured) to *self*, *others* and *things* (works of art). This attempt is set beside, as distinct from, analyses which tend to de-historicise their subject by reading the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of *a postiori* knowledge of the former. In order to achieve this analytical positioning, I have framed my paper with an approach derived from the social philosopher Pierre Bourdieu and the epistemology of practice he developed. As a consequent, I have lightly employed his analytic concepts – *habitus*, *field*, *capital* – in order to highlight the relationship between individual artistic expressions in terms of the interplay between biographic dispositional traits (*habitus*) and the forces within the cultural *field* of production as played out in terms of its medium of exchange currency in the quantity and configuration of *capital* holdings held at different sites within it. Investigation of the exact relationship between subject and object was central to Bourdieu's project. I have therefore also added some discussion of the psychological processes involved in creativity – the *instantiation* of the object - and illustrated them with some reference to Colquhoun's work in relation to her personal psychic traits (Part B). This in order to offer some account of the way socio-cultural trends are both executed and manifested within individual psychologies and embodied in their resultant artistic works.

In concluding, I see that such an undertaking requires extensive empirical study in the light of complex and sophisticated theories, which connect the individual with their social lives. And, really, what is offered here only really provides a foundational basis (Part I!) to a much larger account, which would include more extensive analysis of Colquhoun's writings and art, as well as synthesis of the philosophies brought to them in research practice. Further work is also needed on the *capital* configurations – and thus *habitus* – of individuals in the relevant artistic and esoteric *fields* and the resultant homologies (affinities and dis-affinities) behind salient practices.

The present paper began by looking into Colquhoun's biographical background (*habitus*) and the type of *cultural*, *social* and *cultural capital* this afforded her as an emerging artist in the 1920s and 30s. I set her own *dispositions* – aesthetic and psychological – against the *field* of art production of the day, and the way that Surrealism acted as a kind of avant-garde to the standing artistic establishment. But, her own artistic practice here was underscored by an early in-depth knowledge, and indeed involvement, in an esoteric *field* that was itself undergoing significant structural

transformation. I have wanted to see her work in terms of biographical socio-psychological energies and the 'elective affinities' these resonated within the *field* of cultural production at a particular turbulent socio-historical period, and for both contemporary and historical reasons, which affected all aspects of artistic activity within the *field* – the art market, the political situation, competing ideologies, artistic techniques and forms. Colquhoun makes the point that her intent is/ was serious and she never parodies anyone or anything in her art. Certainly, her own form of esoteric Surrealism in the 30s and 40s clearly sprang from a deep reservoir of personal experience, which she articulated in a series of 'epic' paintings. But, the world – in particular the artistic *field* - moves on, so that her own attachment to esoteric and occult philosophies were left behind by other contemporary artists, if they were ever that attached to them in the first place. Surrealism itself was more or less an anachronism by the post-war period when set against artistic developments in St Ives, and indeed America – and, indeed, in terms of pure form when Surrealist images proved less unsettling compared to those arising from the real-life horrors of the Holocaust and nuclear destruction once they became known.

Colquhoun's personal circumstances – for example her divorce and her falling out with the Surrealists – positioned her at the margins of an avant-garde that was already losing ground. Her commitment to Hermetic philosophy supplied her with an epistemological shelter within which she could explore her poetic impulses. Painting tended to take a back seat later in life as she read and wrote more and more as the 50s and 60s wore on. Her own financial independence – *economic capital* - partly allowed this but it was an advantage with a large disadvantage attached to it in that she never, until the later years of her life, needed to provide for herself financially, which allowed her to follow her own muse.

There is no evidence that Colquhoun was a 'feminist', or even a 'proto-feminist', as we understand the meaning of the word in our present contemporary world[xxiii]. There is no evidence she engaged with feminist literature; for example, de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. The 'men' and 'women' depicted in her art, in so far as they are, stopped being *real* men and women and took on the archetypical representations that one finds in the general aesthetics of Hermeticism (William Blake's art was another example of this). This enquiry seemed to last the rest of her life. Certainly, up until her middle age, there were intense sexual experiences – apparently involving both men and women. And, she clearly felt the claustrophobic effects of art movements in which male figures predominated. Her 'anti-man' stance – i.e. not necessarily feminist – surely led to a full-frontal mockery of masculine figures and the phallus (consciously or unconsciously) in many of her epic paintings in the 1940s and 50s (underscored by such rather critical interpretation of figures such as de Sade and Crowley – as well as the *Dying Kick of the Dying God* see *The Divine Marquis and the Myth of Liberty* where she dismisses his version of 'lust murder' – or sexual pain - as a recipe for universal liberty). Compared with these, her Goddess iconography was always more celebratory and empathetic. Her only published novel – the *Goose of Hermogenes* – is also a pro-female celebration which built on her enthusiasm for Graves' *The White Goddess* which she believed she found in Celtic myths, including those of her Irish ancestors and current life surroundings in Cornwall. She was obviously also capable of giving as good as she got to the men around her, although this led to a certain retreat from her original position of being in the centre of prevailing artistic events, and indeed socially as she spent more time in Cornwall.

At the same time, although she took her readings (and writings) of the esoteric tradition to a level of professional scholarship, there seems little evidence that she was a seminal revisionist of occult philosophy, in the same way that Aleister Crowley clearly was. That being said, there were a number of original expressions within traditions associated

with the *Golden Dawn* and its offshoots: for example, her later work on the Taro, which itself employed an investigation of colours and their relational significance which she also used to great effect in the *Decad of Intelligence* (Colquhoun, 2017). The notion of andogeny, or the hermaphrodite, also seems to have fascinated her for much of her life; and it is a theme again that is central to hermetic philosophy. William Blake used it in his work (see the last plate of *Jerusalem*), and Colquhoun deploys it a number of both paintings and her writings (see above and *The Water-stone of the Wise*).

These positionings within both the art and esoteric *fields* had consequential outcomes and left her somewhat 'out of place'. Given her temporal-spatial placing, she in effect ended up with various forms of *hysteresis* and marginality within two *fields* within the cultural *field* of reproduction- it is difficult to maintain a *consecrated* position within just one let alone two!

Earlier, I wrote that she was born too late to be considered a serious contender for the 1936 Surrealist exhibition. Tragically, she was also born too early and, by the time that feminism really began to grow with an expanded and international discourse in the 1970s and, indeed 'Earth Mystery' groups developed in the 1980s – especially in Cornwall (and with a particular gender-sexual orientation bias that the growing LGBT movement allowed)– she was already too advanced in years to actively engage with them. She was ahead of her time! As it would, her voluminous output – painting, writing, studying – spread out across distinct *fields*: Literature/Writing/ Publishing; Fine Arts; and the Esoteric – yet, without being central to any of them because of her diminishing holdings of the prerequisite *capital*. Increasingly, what *symbolic capital* she held related to her past position – indeed, she clearly cashed in the value of being a Surrealist when she hardly ever was one and long after the movement ran out of steam. If her biggest *symbolic capital* was that gained from being recognized as a significant Surrealist during the active days of its inception in Britain, along with the *social capital* that association with them involved - personally and in practice - she dropped this rubric quite early on, and only really used it with reference to the automatic techniques she committed herself to for the rest of her life; even if she was happy to let the word be deployed in connection with her when it came to the need for public recognition in art exhibitions.

Her involvement with esotericism, and its centrality to her art, although pursued relentlessly throughout her life, seems to have had her own self-transformation at it core. But, she never seems to have crossed the bridge to the androgynous state she desired: Bill Picard states it clearly – 'more than likely she could see a fairy, but it was her projection of it, she didn't quite understand…I could fairly say that Ithell was an intellectual painter in the sense of her ideas and theories. …Practically all the mystics in the different theistic religions when they came to a point of saying 'forget the big old man in the clouds', they have been condemned, quite often killed, by the co-religionists for blasphemy, but you'll find with Ithell…it would irritate her a bit if you appeared to be casting doubt on the thing'.

Bourdieu's is essentially a 'reflexive' method and he constantly calls on us to 'objectify the objectifying subject' in turning the tools of our analysis back on the analyst (see Grenfell, 2017c). This in order to avoid the 'scholastic fallacy' of passing off one's personal or professional relationship to the object of study as 'the truth': And, to this extent, I can confess to a similar 'cleft *habitus'* and professional trajectory that places me at the margins – both academically and personally: between French and British academia, English and Continental philosophy, sociology and philosophy, language and education; and orthodoxies from within both the esoteric and conventional worlds of human discourse. That is why, perhaps, I am drawn to the work of Ithell Colquhoun. I

see myself in her. But, over and above personal disposition and resonance, there is the question of why analyse her and her art in the ways I have chosen to do.

Clearly, to get anywhere near the bottom of understanding an artist and their work, as a response that is both personal and in relation to the times – social, economic, political and cultural – in which they lived requires a number of techniques, which might provide us with an account of the various spheres of their activities. Personally, there is perhaps the possibility that, in better understanding her, one might better understand oneself with respect to the issues raised in her biography. More formally stated within an academic discipline, there is also the necessity to escape the orthodoxy of conventional accounts and the limitations they impose on our understanding of the expressive impulse in trans-historic and trans-national *fields*. More than this, however, the approach I have adopted here aims to construct the foundations of a kind of 'reflexive objectivity', or 'reflexive aesthetics', which goes beyond both the application of pre-constructed disciplinary narratives and the transcendent sense of the ineffable so present in Hölderlinian charismatic poetics. Such an endeavor, ultimately, must surely be so much more 'reassuring, more humane, than belief in the miraculous virtues of pure interest and pure form' (Bourdieu: 1993: 188).

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and understanding of both, which he has shared with me over time, freely responding to my various enquiries – factual and more speculative. This piece would have been impossible without both his work and generosity.

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[i] The father of her mother's side was William George Nicholson Manley (1831 – 1901). Born in Dublin (17th December) and second son to Reverend William Nicholas Manley (b.1799). His mother was Elizabeth Browne (b.1802) – Daughter of Dr. Browne (Army Medical Staff). William George trained as a surgeon. He was the only surviving officer the Battle of Gate Pā, Pukehinahina, New Zealand on the 29th April 1864. He also fought in the Crimea and Afghanistan, and was awarded both the Victoria Cross and the Iron Cross. The family lived in Cheltenham, and Georgia was the fourth of eight children.

[ii] Ithell's father was Henry Archibald Colebrook Colquhoun, born in Peshwar, in Bengal, India on January 10th 1873. He died in Cheltenham in the summer of 1942. His bother (IC's uncle) was born in 1871 in Fort William. Her Grandmother on her father's side was Louisa Barbara Sutherland. IC's Grandfather on her father's side was James Andrew Sutherland Colquhoun who was born in Fort William (Calcutta) Bengal, India on 30th November 1839. His father – IC's Great Grandfather – was James Colquhoun, born in Luss, Dumbarton, Scotland (the traditional centre of the Clan Colquhoun and their Baronecrey.

[iii] Of course, the way that 'time' features in Colquhoun's work would be a study in itself. She certainly acknowledges the various 'times' featured in esoteric histories; for example, Crowley's '4 Aeons' which were similar to the 'Yugas' of Hindouism, as well as the 'Ages' of Western thought (see *The Dying Kick of the Dying God – The London Broadsheet*, 1955). She also knew about 'creative time' – pre-cognition – where, in the creative act, the future can 'lean back to the

present'. For the esoteric teacher J G Bennett, a disciple of Gurdjieff, such time was referred to as *hyparxis* (see Bennett, 1961).

[iv] The significance of physical placement is underlined by comparing the relative experiences of Colquhoun and Emmy Bridgwater; the latter was also born in 1906 but gravitated more towards what later would be known as the *Birmingham Surrealists* (see Rüll, 2000).

[v] She also refers to the 'Goose of Hermogenes' (the title of her later novel) in the writings of the English Alchemist Eirenaeus Philalethes as part of the myth of 'the philosopher's stone'. Indeed, she asserts, 'sometimes, only a myth can enshrine a profound alchemical truth'.

[vi] Second century heretic Christian groups who defined 'gnosis' as 'inner knowledge' (of oneself). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnosticism

[vii] The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were a mid to late nineteenth century art group who rejected classicism and the academic teaching of art, in favour of a return Quattrocentro Italian art with an emphasis on vivid colour mythological subjects. They were very influential on William Morris (1834-1896), who himself was closely allied to the British Arts and Crafts Movement with its focus on traditional crafts and art subject – folk tales and decorations.

[viii] Retrieved from Avril King. *Apollo*, "An exotic awakening", 1 January 2006. findarticles.com.

[ix] The first exhibition of Cubism took place in 1911 in the *Salon des Indépendants* (a kind of later version of the *Salon des Refusés* (1863)), which launched the impressionists (although they were not known as such in the day). The *Société des Artistes Indépendants* were formed in 1884 for artists 'without jury or reward' underlying their stance of distinction from established cultural institutions, and subsequently becoming associated with major Post-impressionist art movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Fauvism, Orphism, Symbolism).

[x] Interestingly, Nicholson, Hepworth and Gabo did not exhibit in the 1936 exhibition, even though one might think they were eminently qualified to do so; suggesting perhaps that they were going more for a pure narrative of 'art for art's sake'. Nicholson, along with Christopher Wood (1901-1930) had discovered Alfred Wallis (1855-1942) in St Ives in 1928, and saw his work as an epiphanic return to a naïve aesthetic innocence, possibly as their own response to turbulent times. (See Grenfell and Hardy, 2003)

[xi] The same year he helped organize the tour of Picasso's *Guernica* in Britain – somewhat underling the consecration he achieved by accruing to himself a high level of *symbolic capital*.

[xii] Unit One was active from 1933-1935 and included a group of English modernist painters, architects and sculptors. It was founded by Paul Nash and based in the Mayor Gallery in Cork Street. Its members included Nicholson, Armstrong, Hepworth, Moore, Burra, Frances Hodgkins, and Tristram Hillier.

[xiii] Pailthorpe had originally trained as a surgeon and linked up as an 'odd couple' with Reuben Mednikoff, who lived on the fringes of Crowley-inspired debauchery. Apparently, he had a fixation with anal sadism and psychoses over his father and children. Their scientific dissection of these, and their depiction in art, seems to have been one step too far – even for Surrealists – for the bourgeois disposition in blurring the line between the aesthetic and pathological.

[xiv] The story of the *Woodcutters* and of Biddy's arrival in Lamorna is set out in *The Living Stones* and in the *Streams of St Bride*. At first, Biddy married Ray Perry with whom she had children, then divorcing him (as he began an affair with another) and marrying Bill Picard. Both Bill and Biddy were leading members of the artistic fraternity in Mousehole (a short walk from where Colquhoun eventually settled in the village of Paul) for much of the 1960s and 70s, keeping a celebrated pottery shop there. The picture created by Colquhoun's clear, journalistic description of who was with who depicts a licentious and bohemian lifestyle for those finding themselves in Lamorna from the 1940s through to the 1950s at least.

[xv] *Hysteresis* is where the field 'passes you by' – your *capital* holdings consequently no longer match the new *field ethos* and become devalued.

[xvi] The 'fullness' that is also 'the void' and from which all being manifests – Heideggerian Dasein. Traditionally, this is often depicted as the Ouroboros – a snake with its tail in its mouth: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouroboros

[xvii] In Bennett's terms (see footnote iii), this relation is expressed at the *active*, the *denying* and the *reconciling* forces. 'Man', argued his teacher Gurdjieff 'is third force blind' – meaning, artistically, we never know quite what we might produce within creative activity.

[xviii] The myth of Scylla and Charybdis originates in Homer's Odyssey and Ovid Metamophorsis: Scylla was a six headed monster that trapped seamen.

[xix] The word pine' is slang in French for penis, yet the associations in this picture include the epithet applied by Breton to the hero of Jensen's novel *Gradiva* (splendid in walking). In particular, the female figure has had her right leg amputated, the very one admired by Hanold in the novel. Since Gradiva was adopted as surrealist muse to lead artists and poets, the symbolism is clear. If the male torso is similarly mutilated – desexualized – the hermaphrodite, again a key alchemical symbol, offers a figure, which has also been attacked. The overall impression is hardly union so much as disfiguring.

[xx] See Stevens (2016) for a much more in-depth account – around psychological and feminist issues - of *The Pine Family* and the *Androgyne* than I can provide in the present context.

[xxi] A 6-8th century text originating in Arabia and constituting the philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes the Thrice Great): much of later alchemical and occult philosophy and practice originates from its esoteric principles.

[xxii] Shillitoe lists the various occult groups (and others) with which she was associated over the years. What is noticeable is both their number and those that refused her application to join (2010: 39-45): *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* (refused); *Apha et Omega* (refused); *The Ordo Templi Oienti*; *The New Isis Lodge*; *Society of the Inner Light* (refused); the *Order of the Keltic Cross*; the *Order of the Pyramid and Sphinx*; *The Fellowship of Isis*; the *Ancient Celtic Church*; *The Order of the Accepted Masonry for Men and Women*; the *Theosophical Society of England*; the *Fairy Investigation Society*; the *Martinist Order.* As well as: the *Newlyn Society of Artists*; the *Old Cornwall Society*; the *National Trust*; the *West Country Writers Association*; the *Council for the protection of Rural England*; the *Noise Abatement Society*; the *Society of Mural Decorators nd Painters in Tempura*; the *Women's International Art Club*.

[xxiii] Such is the classificatory imperative to imply and assert externally cohesive unifying narratives in cultural movements, that the group coherence of artistic networks is sometimes completely over-exaggerated. For example, the 2018 Tate St Ives exhibition entitled: 'Virginia Woolf: An Exhibition Inspired by Her Writings' which includes a number of works from Colquhoun. Curator information states: ' Ithell Colquhoun met and associated with Marlow Moss, Gluck, Laura Knight, Dod Proctor, Romaine Brooks' and' frequently exhibited with Vanessa Bell, Ethel Walker, Marion Dorn, Enid Marx, and Paul Vezeley' whilst there is little evidence that such associations were hardly more that *en passant* and, if she did exhibit with those listed, this was mostly in later retrospectives, not current work at all. Similarly, it is stated that Colquhoun 'networked' with Laura Knight, Dora Carrington, Eileen Agar, Clare Atwood, Wilhelmenia Barns Graham, Frances Hodgkins, Jane Simone Busy, and Gwen Reveral', whilst again there seems no evidence that such was in any way sustained and formative.