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The Art Criticism of David Sylvester

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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Abstract

The English art critic and curator David Sylvester (1924-2001) played a significant role in the formation of taste in Britain during the second half of the twentieth century. Through his writing, curating and other work Sylvester did much to shape the reputations of, and discourse around, important twentieth century artists including Francis Bacon, Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore and René Magritte. At the same time his career is of significant sociohistorical interest. On a personal level it shows how a schoolboy expelled at the age of fifteen with no qualifications went on to become a CBE, a Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and the first critic to receive a Leone d'Oro at the Venice Biennale, assembling a personal collection of artworks worth millions of pounds in the process. In terms of the history of post-war art more broadly, meanwhile, Sylvester's criticism provides a way of understanding developments in British art and its relation to those in Paris and New York during the 1950s and 1960s.

This thesis provides the first survey of Sylvester's entire output as an art critic across different media and genres, and makes a case for him as a commentator of comparable significance to Roger Fry, Herbert Read, and other British critics who have already received significant scholarly attention. I take a twofold approach, analysing both the quality of Sylvester's writing and criticism, and its function as a catalyst for furthering the careers of artists and instigating significant exhibitions. Common to all of these strands is Sylvester's distinctive critical sensibility, which placed an emphasis on his own aesthetic experiences and how they could be articulated through criticism.

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Introduction

David Sylvester, Criticism and Art History

David Sylvester (1924-2001) was one of a number of significant British critics born during the interwar years. His contemporaries included John Russell (1919-2008), Andrew Forge (1923-2002), Lawrence Alloway (1926-1990) and John Berger (b.1926), along with the painter Patrick Heron (1920-99), who was also a gifted critic. Coming of age during World War II, all of the above brought distinctive perspectives to bear in responding to and shaping the visual arts landscape of postwar Britain. While British art criticism at this time was still dominated by white male critics, the traditional bourgeois background of the critic was diversifying. Of the above only Russell followed the traditional path of public school education followed by study at the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge.¹ Like the other critics listed, Sylvester eschewed university, preferring to educate himself by reading widely and discussing his various interests with his contemporaries.²

Early in life Sylvester developed a wide range of interests. He was many things: a collector, a curator, a committee member and *éminence grise*, a writer on sports and film, and a literary critic and musician *manqué*.³ All of these aspects of Sylvester's life will be mentioned in the course of this thesis, but only insofar as they relate directly to his writings on art. It will be for other

¹ Those who followed this path included Clive Bell, Roger Fry and critics whose careers overlapped with Sylvester's such as Alan Clutton-Brock, Raymond Mortimer and Denys Sutton. Notable exceptions were Herbert Read (who studied at Leeds University) and Robert Melville, who didn't go to university.

² The curator Bryan Robertson (1925-2002) also began working straight after leaving school (as junior sub-editor at *The Studio*).

³ The writer Peter Vansittart, who knew him as a teenager, wrote 'I dazed myself by calculating David Sylvester's possibilities: a novelist, perhaps [...] a literary critic [...] he could have been a music critic [...] a Cocteau [...] a profound philosopher [...] a theologian [...].' Peter Vansittart, *In the Fifties* (London: Murray, 1995), p.89.

scholars to give these other facets of Sylvester's career the attention they deserve. The aim of this thesis, above all, is to state the importance of Sylvester's art criticism, and explain the ideas behind it.

The existing literature on Sylvester discusses him above all as a figure of the 1950s. He features prominently in volumes on British art of that decade such as Margaret Garlake's *New Art New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (1998), Martin Harrison's *Transition: the London Art Scene in the Fifties* (2002), and above all James Hyman's *The Battle for Realism* (2001). The latter, which sets up a direct opposition between Sylvester and Berger, contains the most detailed scholarly work to date on Sylvester. As a result I refer to it numerous times in this thesis, particularly in Chapter 2, although Hyman oversimplifies Sylvester's work by presenting it as adhering to a program of 'Modernist realism', a position he presents as if it were as coherent an ideology as Berger's social realism. In narrating the 'battle' between Sylvester and Berger, Hyman loses sight of the fundamentally anti-theoretical approach of Sylvester's criticism.⁴

If Sylvester's value as a critic is to be understood, it must be without trying to find a single theoretical shorthand or overriding concept for him (Nigel Whiteley's use of pluralism to frame Alloway's career would be another example of this, albeit one more appropriate to its subject).⁵ I will suggest that instead Sylvester's significance resides in the way that he reconciled two seemingly opposed but in fact necessary characteristics of the critic: intuition and considered judgement. *The Battle for Realism*, as Robin Spencer's review

⁴ James Hyman *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p.16.

⁵ Nigel Whiteley, *Art and Pluralism: Lawrence Alloway's Cultural Criticism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp.3-6.

of the book observes, 'claims Sylvester as the master of spin'.⁶ Therein lies its error. For Sylvester has also been described by James Elkins, in *What Happened to Art Criticism?* (2002) as a 'positionless' critic whose 'narrow focus is justified because phenomenology frames his critical approach'.⁷ This is certainly how Sylvester chose to present himself, as demonstrated by this exchange with John Tusa:

Tusa: Can you tell me how you look at a painting—or is it so instinctive that you can't?

Sylvester: I look.

Tusa: Yes, but how? In a systematic way?

Sylvester: Oh no. Not at all. I just look.⁸

This idea of the critic as a blank canvas is also simplistic, however, and Elkins doesn't qualify his assertion by asking how anyone with a lifetime's experience of critical writing behind them can remain positionless. Meanwhile Hyman, while acknowledging Sylvester's interest in phenomenology and receptivity to works of art doesn't confront the paradox of a supremely empirical critic emerging in his book as the champion of a doctrinaire brand of 'Modernist realism'.⁹

The truth, as for all critics from Clive Bell to Donald Judd, lies somewhere between these two poles. Sylvester had a remarkable sensitivity to artworks, and as a result his criticism is full of unexpected reversals of opinion which reveal a perpetual willingness to be surprised, and remarkable accounts of experiences with artworks. But at the same time, he was deeply

⁶ Robin Spencer, 'Brit Art from the Fifties: The Reality Versus the Myth', *Studio International*, 10 May 2002, retrieved from <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/brit-art-from-the-fifties-the-reality-versus-the-myth> [accessed 8 August 2016].

⁷ James Elkins, *What Happened to Art Criticism?* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), p.76.

⁸ John Tusa, *On Creativity: Interviews Exploring the Process* (London: Methuen, 2004), p.247.

⁹ The much larger corpus of writing about Greenberg is comparable in this respect.

invested in a sense of the great tradition and the canon in a way which was alien to a contemporary such as Alloway.¹⁰ This is the argument I will make for Sylvester's importance, as a critic who reconciles openness to empirical experience with the judicial function of criticism, or what Caroline Jones describes as 'the supreme confidence of the highly placed, the *kritēs* (κριτής), formal judge of an organized contest, or, at the very least, the *kritikos* (κριτικός), person of discernment'.¹¹ Throughout the thesis these two opposed aspects of Sylvester's work recur in different forms, sometimes privileging one (as in Chapter 6 and his resistance to what he considered didactic forms of exhibition-making) or the other (as in Chapter 7 and his need to finally select a small number of his essays for republication in the collection of essays *About Modern Art*).

While Sylvester's importance to the London art scene of the 1950s (and particularly the importance of his relationship with Francis Bacon) is widely acknowledged, little scholarly attention has been paid to his work before and after this time. This is partly a result of the standard periodization of postwar British art which tends to separate the 1950s (characterized by Cold War anxiety, existentialism, and the prolongation of austerity) from the 'Swinging' 1960s, pop art and the embrace of American influence.¹² I show that Sylvester was in fact an astute critic of successive generations of very different artists, who was at his most influential as a critic during the transition from the 1950s

¹⁰ According to Richard Shone, 'reading [Sylvester's] *About Modern Art*, it becomes striking apparent that much of Sylvester's early choices in art and his Francophile bias reflect the language and tenets of an earlier generation of critics such as Fry and Bell, whom he read when young, rather than those closer to his own age'. Richard Shone, 'David Sylvester (1924-2001)', *Burlington Magazine*, November 2001, 695-6 (p.696).

¹¹ Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), p.5.

¹² Harrison's *Transition* and Hyman's *The Battle for Realism*, like many books on postwar art, both stop at 1960.

to the 1960s. This is because, as Sylvester's friend and fellow critic Andrew Forge perceptively noted, his best writing was less about artworks themselves (in the ekphrastic tradition) than about the relationship between viewer and artwork, and was therefore more overtly personal.¹³ Sylvester frequently writes as a go-between mediating between the artwork and the reader, offering an enriched experience of art through the lucidity of his writing and his awareness of his own subjectivity. It is this constant sense of Sylvester's physical presence, derived from phenomenology, which separates him from writers on art such as Roger Fry, Clive Bell and Clement Greenberg who discussed the experience of art in purely optical terms.¹⁴

Sylvester's beliefs about art will be referred to throughout this thesis, but rather than as abstract ideas, I discuss them with constant reference to the format in which his works appeared. As Malcolm Gee indicated in 'The Nature of Twentieth-century Art Criticism':

A printed text is the result of a collaboration in which factors other than the ideas and will of the author play a major part. The nature of the support defines the audience for the text, determines its form, and influences its writing. While art criticism has often been treated by its authors as a literary genre and sometimes as an academic one, it has also been largely a type of journalism.¹⁵

My conviction that Sylvester, as a public intellectual, consciously tailored his work to the various contexts in which it appeared has largely determined the

¹³ Andrew Forge interviewed by Cathy Courtney, 1995, sound recording, British Library.

¹⁴ Forge wrote of Sylvester's early writing 'these reverberations of Parisian phenomenology were astounding to English ears. Roger Fry shuddered in his grave.' Andrew Forge, 'In the Shadow of Thanatos', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1996, pp.28-31 (p.29).

¹⁵ Malcolm Gee, 'The Nature of Twentieth-century Art Criticism' in *Art Criticism Since 1900*, ed. by Malcolm Gee (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp.3-21 (p.4).

structure of this thesis, which includes chapters addressing his use of formats including print journalism, radio talks and interviews.¹⁶

Despite the work of Hyman and other writers mentioned above, Sylvester has not yet received the sustained scholarly attention afforded to his contemporaries Alloway and Berger, not to mention Fry, Bell, Herbert Read and other comparable figures such as Greenberg and Kenneth Clark.¹⁷ I would argue that this is at least partly due to a tendency for art historians to focus on those critics associated with a particular theory or political standpoint (such as Bell and 'significant form', or Berger and Marxism), characteristically established through essays setting out an agenda or methodology which can be traced more or less explicitly through the critic's other writings. By contrast, Sylvester very rarely wrote such 'position papers'. While this thesis will demonstrate tendencies which emerged in Sylvester's writing, relating to the types of art that he favoured and his critical principles, importantly these were not established through standalone essays but through his criticism on specific artists and artworks. He was, as Max Kozloff acutely observed, 'a much more analytic writer than he was a synthesiser', most comfortable when writing about specific artworks.¹⁸

This tendency for art historians to privilege the work of more theoretically-minded critics suggests that art history as a discipline is attracted to critics who demonstrate the same respect for logic and

¹⁶ 'My concern is with public intellectuals, writers and thinkers who address a general and educated audience'. Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, rev. edn (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p.5.

¹⁷ An important contribution to research on Sylvester was made, however, with a David Sylvester Study Day held at Tate Britain in 2013. Papers from this study day by Lee Hallman and Brendan Prendeville were published in *Tate Papers*, no. 21 (Spring 2014), while Martin Hammer's paper was published as part of the Tate online publication 'Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity' (2015).

¹⁸ Max Kozloff, 'Remembering David Sylvester', *Art in America*, October 2001, p.35.

methodological rigour it values in itself. In *Artwriting* (1987) David Carrier compared art-historical writing on Manet with contemporary critical writing on David Salle, and concluded that 'compared with Manet's interpreters, these artwriters [on Salle] do not really argue with each other; it is hard to explain what [Ross] Bleckner or [Peter] Schjeldahl clearly assert that [Robert] Pincus-Witten and [Donald] Kuspit deny'.¹⁹ For Carrier the 'distinction between art history and art criticism is important. The professionalization of art history, which permitted it to become a university subject, depended upon agreement about standards of acceptable argumentation' which do not obtain in art criticism, and that as a result 'what is excluded from the [art history] curriculum is writing like Pater's or Stokes's, which does not provide a model for professionals'.²⁰

This sense of art criticism as modelled on art-historical methodology is characteristic of critics such as Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, who all wrote for *Artforum* during the 1960s. From the outset these critics, were concerned with practicing a more rigorous form of criticism than that of older critics such as Thomas Hess and Harold Rosenberg (both of whom Sylvester admired).²¹ Krauss recalled that she was first attracted to Greenberg's writing in the early 1960s because:

[...] until then, I had been very frustrated by the vagueness and unverifiability of *opinion* that characterized the writing of Sidney Janis, Tom Hess, Harold Rosenberg, and all of those people [...]

¹⁹ David Carrier, *Artwriting* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p.118.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Krauss and Michelson subsequently left *Artforum* to start a new journal, *October*, in which continued the same mission. The journal's first editorial explained that: 'long working experience with major art journals has convinced us of the need to restore to the criticism of painting and sculpture, as to that of other arts, an intellectual autonomy seriously undermined by emphasis on extensive reviewing and lavish illustration.' Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, 'About October', *October* 1, Spring 1976, p.5.

They were making all kinds of claims for the importance of Abstract Expressionism, but nothing that struck me as *hard*, verifiable.²²

It can be claimed that it was the conscious 'agreement about the standards of acceptable argumentation' amongst the *Artforum* critics, as well as their subsequent move into academia, which has made their critical writing some of the most widely studied in the twentieth century.

One consequence of this is that critics who employ a less explicit methodology but nonetheless make an important contribution to the art of their time receive far less attention, suggesting a limited view of the critic's role (or at least what makes a critic 'important'). In *What Happened to Art Criticism?*, Elkins' prescriptions for art criticism to reform itself in the 21st century included calls for critics to offer 'ambitious judgment' and 'reflection about judgment itself', and to become more conscious of art history and theory. Elkins admitted that he found the belletristic critic Peter Schjeldahl 'entirely exasperating in his persistent unwillingness to make clear judgments or to collate his thoughts from one column to the next' in his earlier writings. Unsurprisingly Elkins, who hoped for art criticism to take a leaf out of the book of art history, preferred Schjeldahl's more recent work in which he 'began to frame his judgments less ambiguously and to address larger historical questions'.²³ However, in a later book Elkins acknowledged that good criticism sometimes operated differently, saying that the writings of another belletristic critic, Dave Hickey, were difficult to study in postgraduate seminars because

²² Krauss quoted in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2000), p.77. See also Michael Fried's similar misgivings (p.71).

²³ Elkins, p.81.

'they work differently: they have a rhetorical or enabling, permission-granting function that is not legible to close reading'.²⁴

The problem, then, is how to write about the art criticism of a critic who took no explicit methodological standpoint. Unlike Elkins' comment about Hickey, I have no doubt that Sylvester's work sustains close analysis, but this alone is not the purpose of the thesis.²⁵ Rather I intend to demonstrate how Sylvester's criticism functioned within the evolving landscape of art criticism, on the radio and television as well as in print, and the wider impact that it had. Interpreting what constitutes Sylvester's art criticism in the broadest terms, I show that rather than just an informed but detached commentator providing opinions about artworks, Sylvester was also an important agent within a network of artists and critics who, in a complicated and multifaceted way, was a catalyst for the development of reputations. I hope to present his work in a way which can contribute to a broader and more sophisticated study of twentieth-century art criticism in Britain and beyond.

Thesis Structure

Instead of adhering strictly to the chronology of Sylvester's life, this thesis consists of thematic chapters which nonetheless follow a broadly chronological trajectory overall. Chapter 1 describes Sylvester's emergence as a critic in the 1940s, discussing relevant aspects of his biography and intellectual formation, and his earliest writings. In this way I demonstrate how

²⁴ James Elkins and Michael Newman, eds., *The State of Art Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp.150-1.

²⁵ In addition to the published texts themselves Sylvester's archive contains many variant drafts and correspondence explaining his reasons for choosing a particular version of a text.

the ideas and people Sylvester came into contact with at an early age informed the critical principles he held throughout his life. Chapter 2 examines Sylvester's time as a regular newspaper and magazine critic during the 1950s and 1960s and how he contributed to critical debate during that time. This is the period of Sylvester's life during which he was most prolific, and which has been written about most widely. My account nonetheless adds a new perspective to that of authors such as Hyman, Garlake and Harrison, particularly with regards to the publications Sylvester wrote for and his critical responses to abstract expressionism and pop art.

During the 1950s and 1960s Sylvester was also a prominent broadcaster, mostly working for the BBC. He recorded hundreds of radio and television programmes, and this lesser-known aspect of Sylvester's work is the subject of Chapter 2.²⁶ In addition to my stated reason for separating the media that Sylvester worked in, there are two other advantages to treating his radio and television work separately from his printed criticism. The first is that owing to the paucity of literature about arts broadcasting during this period, bringing the information together enables me to make a contribution to this under-researched field. The second relates to the transition from the fifties to the sixties mentioned previously: while Sylvester's withdrawal from regular newspaper criticism as described in Chapter 2 occurred soon after Berger and Alloway left Britain, his work for radio and television increased, most notably in his television series 'Ten Modern Artists' (1964).²⁷ The basic approach to this material is similar to the publications in Chapter 2: in each case I have tried to show the impact that the means of communication had on the criticism

²⁶ See section E of the bibliography of works by Sylvester.

²⁷ Berger moved to Geneva in 1960; Alloway moved to the US in 1961, initially to teach at Bennington College, Vermont.

that Sylvester produced for that outlet (the fact that he worked as an editor for the *Sunday Times Colour Magazine* and as a producer on the Third Programme makes this particularly pertinent).

Chapter 4 addresses Sylvester's artist interviews. All of Sylvester's early interviews were made for the BBC, and for this reason the interviews could have been discussed within the broadcasting chapter. However, the extent of Sylvester's contribution to this field, and work by other scholars on the artist interview in recent years, encouraged me to discuss Sylvester's interviews separately.²⁸ Furthermore, Sylvester had a strong sense of his interviews as literary documents most satisfyingly presented in print: while the first of his many interviews with Bacon was made for the BBC, most of their subsequent interviews were made privately and only disseminated in book form.²⁹ Given the importance of Sylvester as an interviewer of artists, I have also considered how Sylvester's approach to interviewing artists demonstrates some of the strengths and weaknesses of the genre itself as a critical resource or even a form of criticism.

Chapter 5 examines Sylvester's monographs on Bacon, Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore and René Magritte. Owing to limitations of space, this chapter does not detail the full extent of Sylvester's writing and personal engagement with each artist, but more specifically considers the specific interpretations of each artist as presented in the respective books. I particularly hope to demonstrate the (often unstated) connections between the subject of each book and other aspects of Sylvester's criticism. For

²⁸ See for example Dora Imhof and Sibylle Omlin, *Interviews: Oral History in Kunstwissenschaft und Kunst* (Munich: Silke Schreiber, 2010) and Christoph Lichtin, *Das Künstlerinterview: Analyse eines Kunstprodukts* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).

²⁹ The transcripts and audio recordings of the Bacon interviews in Sylvester's archive make the full conversations publicly available for the first time.

example, whereas Sylvester's work on Magritte has tended to be considered even by his admirers as in some sense peripheral to his main interests, I show that Sylvester's particular approach to the artist is connected to artists such as Giacometti, Mark Rothko and Joan Miró as well as pop art. In my interpretation, Sylvester's writing on Magritte, often interpreted as anomalous, in fact demonstrates the very coherence of what Sylvester valued in art through these connections to ostensibly very different artists.

Chapter 6 discusses Sylvester's ideas about how art is exhibited, as expressed both in his exhibition reviews and in archival material relating to his parallel practice as an exhibition-maker. Bringing together Sylvester's writings on exhibitions in this way demonstrates his conviction in a modernist approach to presenting art (and therefore how it should be experienced). It also allows me to demonstrate the generational shift which introduced very different approaches to exhibition-making in the 1980s and 1990s.

Chapter 7 considers in greater detail Sylvester in relation to art and criticism in his final decade, above all through the responses to his collection of essays *About Modern Art*, one of several long-term projects he finally finished during the 1990s. I also reflect on the relevance to Sylvester's work of his close relationship with dealers and collectors (an under-researched aspect of criticism more broadly). A brief conclusion relates Sylvester's work to contemporary art criticism and offers suggestions for further study.

In arranging my thesis in this way I am perhaps forfeiting a more comprehensive exposition of Sylvester's trajectory as a critic, such as Whiteley provides for Alloway in his chronological *Art and Pluralism: Lawrence Alloway's Cultural Criticism*. Many important writings by Sylvester, particularly from the 1950s, are referred to only briefly or not at all in this thesis. Furthermore, by

focusing on Sylvester's art criticism I have refrained from offering detailed analysis of the correspondences between Sylvester's writings on different subjects, such as his writing on art in tandem with his sports writings and his discussion of film, books, theatre and television on 'The Critics'. However, I have included an extensive bibliography of Sylvester's writings and radio and television appearances. I hope that subsequent researchers will use this resource to explore the lesser-known aspects of Sylvester's work. My own purpose, in compiling this first overall account, is to provide a framework encompassing the breadth and diversity of Sylvester's work.

The Sylvester Archive

In researching this thesis I have benefitted greatly from having access to Sylvester's personal papers.³⁰ Acquired by Tate in 2008 but only recently catalogued, the archive includes correspondence, drafts and unpublished writings, unedited interview transcripts, financial records and other materials that augment Sylvester's published writings and allow me to take a more nuanced approach to the study of his work.³¹ Some of the materials evidently relate to specific sections of this thesis, such as the original transcripts for Sylvester's interviews with Bacon or the vast quantity of drafts for *Looking at Giacometti* (1994), which elucidate the process by which these books were written. More importantly, however, the archive has provided a way of

³⁰ All Tate Archive (TGA) references beginning 200816 are to materials in the Sylvester archive. Final reference numbers were not assigned to the contents of the archive until mid-2016, and as a result archive references provided in this thesis may differ from articles referring to the Sylvester archive published prior to 2016.

³¹ This PhD, a collaborative doctoral project with the Tate, was made possible by an AHRC grant. Full cataloguing for the archive was added to the online Tate Archive Catalogue in June 2016, shortly before the completion of this thesis.

understanding Sylvester's output as interconnected rather than as a discrete number of books and articles to be discussed in isolation. Indeed, my research has been dictated more by discoveries made in the archive rather than by any *a priori* hypothesis about Sylvester. In this sense the archive has not only served as a resource but has determined the whole form of the project.

Such 'behind the scenes' access is valuable, but the pleasures of archival research can mask the pitfalls of unreflective use of the information it yields. One of these is the danger of overlooking the distinctions between published and unpublished materials. Sylvester's archive includes numerous interesting unpublished texts, and both Sylvester and friends such as Forge regretted that he didn't publish more on the many subjects which interested him but fell outside of his main specialism of twentieth-century art. As a result I began my research particularly hoping to find manuscripts which would fill these gaps and demonstrate previously unknown facets of Sylvester's work.³² As my research has progressed, however, I have become wary of discussing the archival materials as if they possessed an authority equivalent to that of the published texts. In this thesis, therefore, they are used above all as a way of supplementing Sylvester's published texts by demonstrating ideas he considered before rejecting.

Another hazard of archive-led research, particularly in a monograph such as this, is its reliance on the subject's own self-presentation. Much of the biographical information in the thesis is taken from unpublished

³² Sylvester wrote in *About Modern Art* 'I wish I had the nerve to write more about old masters. But I feel a still greater disappointment over my silence since 1951 about modern architecture [...] I particularly regret my silence about Le Corbusier'. David Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae' in *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-2000 (Revised Edition)* (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp.11-34 (p.24). Forge, reviewing the same book, wrote simply 'I wish he had written more about buildings' (Forge, 'Thanatos', p.31).

autobiographical writings in Sylvester's archive. Particularly concerning Sylvester's early career I have found very little information elsewhere to provide a counterpoint to his own detailed autobiographical account.³³ Nevertheless, Sylvester's correspondence (in other archives as well as his own) complicates this, and where possible I have sought other accounts to verify or refute Sylvester's own, speaking to or corresponding with many of his friends, colleagues and family. As a result, I hope that despite my admiration for Sylvester's work, my thesis is critical where necessary, and that it succeeds in being a work of art history rather than hagiography.

³³ Apart from Sylvester's own accounts, the most useful biographical information about Sylvester's earlier career can be found in Vansittart's *In the Fifties*, Andrew Forge's 'Artist's Lives' interview in the British Library, Maurice Girodias, *Une journée sur la terre*, 2 vols (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1990), and John Moynihan, *Restless Lives: the Bohemian World of Rodrigo and Elinor Moynihan* (Bristol: Sansom, 2002).

Chapter 1: 'By Indirections Find Directions Out'

Introduction

This chapter, which discusses Sylvester's background and formation as a critic during the 1940s, takes its title from a line in *Hamlet* which Michael Kustow thought relevant to Sylvester's beginnings, which only led to him becoming an art critic after several years of experimenting with other possibilities.¹ Like the thesis as a whole, it is arranged thematically while following a broadly chronological trajectory. In each of the chapter's four sections I show how Sylvester's art criticism drew from the influences of his youth, although, with the exception of the section on 'bohemia', Sylvester's own writings are not analysed.

After a brief first section addressing Sylvester's conflicted relationship with his Jewish heritage, in the second section I show how the centrality of personal experience in Sylvester's art criticism resulted from his reading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921, first English translation 1922), although it is also part of a much longer lineage of art writing predicated on individual experience.

The third section addresses the importance of Sylvester's background in the 1940s as an aspiring poet and literary critic in the mould of F.R. Leavis and I.A. Richards, both of whom helped shape Sylvester's sense of the critic's function. The fourth section summarises Sylvester's interactions with artists and other figures involved in the art scenes of London and Paris between 1947 and 1950. Ever since his first writings Sylvester's thinking about art was

¹ Michael Kustow, 'Picturing Sylvester', *Jewish Quarterly*, Autumn 2000, pp.5-12 (p.6).

inseparable from his relationships with artists, and the connections he established in postwar Paris established him as an important commentator on contemporary art on both sides of the Channel. Of particular interest is his dual affiliation with Giacometti and Moore, which is used as an example of how Sylvester shrewdly associated himself with opposing positions simultaneously rather than choosing one, as a more polemical critic would have done.

1.1 Religion

While he was not religious in later life, Sylvester's Jewish upbringing had a strong effect on him, and he remained extremely interested in religion throughout his life.² *Memoirs of a Pet Lamb*, the brief memoir published shortly after his death, begins with him being asked, on boat race day, whether he was 'Oxford or Cambridge' and replying 'I'm a Jew'.³ The grandchild of Russian and Polish immigrants, Sylvester wrote 'about 20 of my relations whom I knew in childhood died in the Holocaust'.⁴ Sylvester's relationship with Judaism was conflicted, however. He described his father as a 'Zionist who hated Jews', and himself inherited something of that same paradox, as he acknowledged with reference to *Memoirs of a Pet Lamb*:

I hate the anti-semitism of this book, yet as I read it I see that my main reason for writing it was to give voice to its anti-semitism. I never knew before I started writing it how much of it was going to be about being Jewish. Even as I started writing out the first sentence [...] I didn't know that it was going to end in the mire of being Jewish. Nor did I realise at first that the writing of the book

² Sarah Whitfield, Sylvester's partner in later life, said that he was 'certainly not religious in the usual sense of the word. But he was extremely interested in religion.' Email from Whitfield, 3 August 2016.

³ David Sylvester, *Memoirs of a Pet Lamb* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002) (first publ. as 'Memoirs of a Pet Lamb: A Memoir', *London Review of Books*, 5 July 2001, pp.3-12), p.1.

⁴ Kustow wrote that Sylvester's parents were 'of Russian and Polish ancestry' (Kustow, p.6). Sylvester's comment about his relations dying in the Holocaust was made in a letter to the curator Marla Prather, 7 October 1994 (TGA 200816/12/9).

was going to be a growing revelation to me of my similarities to my father, whom I rather hate when I bother to think about him, and my father was an Orthodox Jew, a Zionist, an anti-Semite and a passionate anglophile.⁵

On one level Sylvester was very conscious of, and proud of, his Jewish heritage: one of the few interviews he gave was to the *Jewish Chronicle*, in which (around the same time as the passage quoted above) he affirmed 'I want to say that—unlike my father—I'm a pro-Semite'.⁶ Many of the artists he wrote about were also Jewish, including Bernard and Harold Cohen, Soutine, Freud, Auerbach, Caro, Kossoff, Bomberg, Newman and Rothko. In the case of Bomberg and Soutine, Sylvester placed particular emphasis on their Jewishness, also referring to the traditional Jewish interdiction against the graven image as something which lends particular force to their output.⁷ Other aspects of his lifestyle, however, such as his lifelong love of cricket (for several years Sylvester ran a cricket club, the Eclectics, whose members consisted largely of artists and writers), and his writing on the specific qualities of British art, clearly demonstrate his anglophilia.

To use T.E. Hulme's characterisation of Romanticism, art was very much 'spilt religion' for Sylvester. He recalled how at around the age of seventeen 'I

⁵ TGA 200816/5/8/48.

⁶ Kustow, p.10. The artist Bernard Cohen remembered Sylvester taking him to Bloom's kosher restaurant on Whitechapel High Street and ostentatiously talking him through everything on the menu. Sylvester was then surprised when the waitress, recognizing Cohen, asked 'how's your mother?' Conversation with Cohen, 9 April 2014.

⁷ Sylvester's recurrent interest in Jewish artists is noted in Lee Hallman, 'Curving Round: David Sylvester and the 'Rediscovery' of David Bomberg', *Tate Papers*, no.21, Spring 2014, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/21/curving-round-david-sylvester-and-the-rediscovery-of-david-bomberg> [accessed 9 August 2016]. Hallman, like Elkins, reads Sylvester too much as a 'positionless' critic for whom 'to explain or justify an artist's work by their religious or ethnic identity would have betrayed Sylvester's own aesthetic conviction in the communion between artwork and viewer which exists independent of theory, biography or circumstance' (para. 23 of 32). While for reasons of space I do not address the issue in this thesis, Sylvester's promotion of Jewish artists such as Soutine and Bomberg would benefit from further research.

looked for a Weltanschauung [...] I looked for an orthodoxy', reading up on various religions ('even Zoroastrianism') before becoming interested in Catholicism,⁸ in part attracted by the richness of the art, music and architecture composed in its name.⁹ Moreover, acquaintances of the teenaged Sylvester such as the poets David Gascoyne and Kathleen Raine shared his interest in the religion and provided him like-minded associates to discuss the subject with.¹⁰

Sylvester nearly converted to Catholicism in 1943-4 but although he began instruction, was never baptised. Reading Jung's *Psychological Types* (1921, first English translation 1923) triggered a change in outlook:

It was all totally convincing and it meant that the positions people took in the great ideological debates were determined not by ratiocination but by their temperament. So intellectual beliefs were relative, the truths of the introvert were different from the truths of the extravert, and the Church could not claim that its supposed truths were absolutes. I had to change my mind about being received.¹¹

In his enthusiasm for Jung, in autumn 1944 Sylvester began writing an ambitious theoretical treatise on the arts, *Principles of Archetypal Symbolism*.

Before completing it, however, this too was abandoned:

It dealt with the creation and appreciation of music and art and literature and theatre and above all with matters which I felt all arts had in common [...] By the time I had produced about forty thousand words I realised that all this explanation of how art worked was something I had simply made up, that it had no empirical foundation and no means of verification. As I consigned my typescript to the dustbin, I told myself that the effort had been worthwhile inasmuch as it had invalidated Jung for me: rightly or wrongly, I put the blame for the book's shortcomings upon him.¹²

⁸ TGA 200816/5/1/3/1.

⁹ Kustow, p.8.

¹⁰ TGA 200826/5/1/3/7. Sylvester reviewed Gascoyne's *Poems 1937-42* for the Catholic review *Blackfriars* in 1944.

¹¹ TGA 200816/5/1/2.

¹² TGA 200816/5/1/2.

The result of this latest change of heart was not a return to religion, however, but a conviction that his writing would in future need an 'empirical foundation' lacking in his Jungian theorising. It was at this point, having rejected both Catholicism and his Jungian treatise, that Sylvester was able to approach artworks through his personal experience, the perspective which would sustain all of his future criticism.¹³

1.2 Experience

Caroline Jones has written that 'the mythic tales of artists' beginnings cannot be transposed as critics' origins [...] there can be no tropes of clever shepherds writing criticism in the dirt with a stick [...] ideal art criticism has always been construed as the product of learning, not genius'.¹⁴ Sylvester, however, believed he was a critic by instinct rather than education, as revealed by two anecdotes he told about his childhood. The first described his response to watching his first football match at the age of eleven: 'the pattern of my future life was set on that day when, having been one of the spectators at an event intended to provide an aesthetic experience, I found that the experience was not complete for me until I had tried to put it into words'.¹⁵ The second, meanwhile, concerned Sylvester's introduction to modern art, which occurred when a friend showed him a copy of Robert Goldwater's *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (1938):¹⁶

¹³ Sylvester nonetheless contributed three reviews to the Catholic newspaper *The Tablet* in 1952-3.

¹⁴ Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, pp.4-5.

¹⁵ *Memoirs*, p.49. Frank Auerbach thought this was true of Sylvester's writing on art, and that he wrote 'in order to define his feelings about works of art, rather than to cut a figure or to propagandise'. Letter from Auerbach to the author, 18 February 2014.

¹⁶ Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (London: Harper, 1938).

I came to art through modern art—initially a black-and-white reproduction of Matisse’s *La Danse*. I was seventeen, involved in music, and had always thought of art as a means of telling a story. The Matisse made me aware of the music of form—in the rhythm and sustained tension of the series of curves forming the outline joining the ring of figures and the counterpoint presented by the outlines of the pounding legs.¹⁷

At this time Sylvester harboured ambitions of becoming a jazz musician (‘trumpeter, singer, composer, arranger and band-leader’).¹⁸ He had little knowledge or experience of works of art, whose main function he saw as conveying narrative in the sense of popular Victorian painting. It was seeing the Matisse reproduction that demonstrated to him for the first time how ‘there are physical responses to works of art that are as distinctive as gastronomic or sexual responses’.¹⁹

This episode, and much of Sylvester’s autobiographical writing, conveys his confidence in his instincts and his willingness to be led by them. This may reflect the impact of the war on Sylvester’s upbringing. After securing a half-scholarship to attend University College School in Hampstead Sylvester struggled for various reasons, including the disruption caused by the outbreak of war soon after he began attending the school. Sylvester’s mother and sister moved to Brighton while he stayed in London with his lonely father (UCS remained in London during the war), who ‘insisted that I share his double bed’.²⁰ The discomfort of doing so resulted in trouble sleeping and failure to

¹⁷ Sylvester, ‘Curriculum Vitae’, p.11; in another account of this experience Sylvester wrote ‘as I took it in I found that the ellipse linking the ring of dancing figures had a tension that cut through my body. It was not surprising that my first positive reaction to a work of art was a response to linear tension because this may well be the most basic of the various kinds of aesthetic experiences induced by pictures’ (TGA 200816/5/1/2).

¹⁸ TGA 200816/7/10. Sylvester’s knowledge of jazz is evident in his broadcast on the music of Bix Beiderbecke and Charlie Parker, ‘In a Mist’, broadcast on BBC Third Programme 2 March 1964, transcript in TGA 200816/8/1/9.

¹⁹ Sylvester quoted in Martin Gayford, ‘The Eye’s Understanding’, *Modern Painters*, Summer 2001, pp.36-9 (p.37).

²⁰ Sylvester, *Memoirs of a Pet Lamb*, p.75.

get to school on time. This tardiness, combined with enforced absence after Sylvester was diagnosed with duodenal ulcers (which later exempted him from National Service) led to Sylvester regularly truanting out of despair at how far he had fallen behind at school. Sylvester was eventually asked to leave before taking the General Schools exam, an important qualification for school leavers.²¹

Sylvester's background might usefully be considered in relation to that of Alloway, who was born two years after Sylvester and also grew up in London (Sylvester in Willesden, Alloway in Wimbledon). Diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1937, Alloway missed much of his schooling, and like Sylvester never went to university. He later spoke of how this helped him to think independently: 'since I didn't go through college or university, I wasn't under pressure to drop my sort of equivalent of high school culture. Whereas if you go to university, you're under strong pressure to *break* with all that 'foolishness'—and start on Brecht or something'.²² Sylvester shared Alloway's aversion to 'proctorial discipline' and despite applying to study at Trinity College, Cambridge, he subsequently withdrew his application in order to go to Paris 'with a vague hope that artists' studios might become my university'.²³

²¹ Sylvester, *Memoirs*, pp.73-82; David Sylvester and others, 'Expelled', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 13 December 1970, pp.24-8 (p.24).

²² James L. Reinish, 'An interview with Lawrence Alloway', *Studio International*, September 1973, p.62-4 (p.62). Alloway and Sylvester took university extension courses in Art History in a course run by Charles Johnson at the National Gallery, where, as Sylvester said, 'we were sort of rival star students of the class'. Whiteley, p.9; David Sylvester interviewed by Richard Wollheim, 1991, sound recording, British Library.

²³ 'I sat the entrance scholarship exam and was offered a place at the College on condition that I now passed the previous exam [the General Schools Exam]...when the time came for the exam I fuked it [...] I disliked the prospect of proctorial discipline. But my overriding fear may have been that of taking an exam at 22 which would have been easy at 15.' Sylvester, 'Expelled', p.24; quotation from TGA 200816/5/1/3/1.

Long before this Sylvester had spent a year painting (in 1941-2), inspired by seeing the reproduction of *La Danse*.²⁴ Sylvester described his paintings as based on improvised motives in an idiom derivative of Picasso. Revealingly for his subsequent writing, Sylvester immediately insisted on buying professional artists' oil paints rather than cheaper alternatives because of his love of paint as substance, which he described evocatively: 'when I'd taken the marvellous tubes home I would gaze at them for ages before launching into the luxuries of squeezing the paste onto the palette, mixing the colours together, dabbing the paint onto canvas that yielded to the pressure of the brush'.²⁵ This is relevant not only to Sylvester's attraction to *malerisch* painters such as Soutine and Auerbach, but also the way that his writing often restages the painting process in some way, imagining the way that the artist painted the picture.²⁶ After several months painting on his own Sylvester began taking part-time classes at Saint Martin's School of Art, but was finally persuaded to quit by 'an unsolicited outburst' from Erica Brausen (later to run the Hanover Gallery and represent Bacon and other artists esteemed by Sylvester). Brausen told the aspiring artist: 'you're not a painter and you'll never be a painter'.²⁷

Shortly before Sylvester gave up painting, he was published for the first time when an article he wrote about the Polish artist Katerina Wilczynski appeared in the socialist newspaper *Tribune*.²⁸ For much of the 1940s he wrote

²⁴ No examples of Sylvester's painting seem to have survived.

²⁵ TGA 200816/5/1/2.

²⁶ See for instance his writing on the abstract expressionists and other 'action artists' such as Georges Mathieu (Chapter 2).

²⁷ TGA 200816/5/1/3/11.

²⁸ *Tribune* did not have a regular art column but Sylvester decided to contact its literary editor John Atkins. Knowing that Atkins' wife Joan was an artist, who like Sylvester had exhibited at Jack Bilbo's gallery, Sylvester wondered whether Atkins might be interested in publishing writing on art. TGA 200816/5/1/11.

intermittently about art, at first for *Tribune* but also in publications such as *Art Notes* and *Counterpoint* in Oxford, *Graphis* in Switzerland and John Lehmann's *Penguin New Writing*. These early writings tend to be verbose and pretentious in their ambition and range of reference. An essay on the painter Gerald Wilde published in the short-lived *Counterpoint* in 1946, for example, retains an overwrought Jungian framework at odds with Sylvester's more specific observations about Wilde's art.²⁹

After abandoning his book on aesthetics Sylvester became influenced by the philosophy of Bertrand Russell and particularly Wittgenstein. In fact Sylvester probably read Wittgenstein before starting on his aesthetics treatise. For while Sylvester wrote that he began this work in 1944, elsewhere he stated that he first read Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* in 1943 (in 1998 he nominated it as his 'book of the century').³⁰ This would mean that some time passed between Sylvester's first encounter with the work and his realization that Wittgenstein had become 'my luminary—my lighthouse, as the French say'.³¹ It was in fact Wittgenstein's presence in Cambridge which inspired Sylvester to apply to study at Trinity College in 1946.³² Sylvester found in Wittgenstein a model of clarity which he strove to emulate in his own writing, as he explained in a late interview:

I've always tried to write with a maximum of clarity. I've believed in a precept of Wittgenstein: 'Whatever can be said, can be said clearly. And whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.' I've always excluded from my writing vague metaphysics, complicated intellectual constructions, I've tried to write as simply

²⁹ For Sylvester's writing on Wilde see John-Paul Stonard, 'David Sylvester and Gerald Wilde', in Gerald Houghton, ed., *Gerald Wilde: From the Abyss* (London: October Gallery, 2015), n.p.

³⁰ Sylvester, 'Book of the Century', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 1998, p.A2. Sylvester even had a passage from the *Tractatus* read at his funeral (TGA 200816/1/2/13).

³¹ TGA 200816/5/1/10.

³² On wanting to study with Wittgenstein see TGA 200816/5/1/3/1.

and directly as possible and most of my reworking of my writing, and there's a great deal of reworking, is towards making it simpler and clearer.³³

This is not to say that Sylvester aspired to a 'scientific' or objective model of criticism, rather that he thought that criticism could both acknowledge subjectivity but insist on rendering it with due rigour. He reached a conclusion similar to Fry at the end of his essay 'Retrospect' (in *Vision and Design*) that any attempt to explain the 'aesthetic emotion', 'would probably land me in the depths of mysticism'.³⁴

This concern with the relationship between experience and its articulation has applications far beyond art criticism, of course, and it is interesting to consider Sylvester's later writing about football and cricket in this light.³⁵ Sylvester often drew parallels between sport and art, and in fact wrote of his sports journalism that 'the task of writing against the clock about highly formalised yet dramatically unpredictable activities while trying not to lapse into cliché was the most testing literary exercise I have undergone'.³⁶ This difficulty is illustrated by an editorial letter written to Sylvester noting that in a short report on a cricket match 'I have counted eleven expressions such as..."it seemed doubtful".... "could be".... "may have"... etc. A little

³³ John Tusa, interview with David Sylvester, broadcast on BBC Radio 3, 3 December 2000 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00nc3yd#play> [accessed 21 July 2016].

³⁴ Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920), p.199.

³⁵ As mentioned above, football, rather than art, was the first 'aesthetic experience' Sylvester wrote about.

³⁶ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.24. One might draw a parallel between Sylvester's love of ball games and Rosalind Krauss's anecdote in which Michael Fried tells her that Frank Stella thinks that baseball player Ted Williams 'sees faster than any living human [...] That's why Frank thinks he's a genius'. Krauss explains that in telling her this Fried was 'inducting me onto the team, Michael's team, Frank's team, Greenberg's team, major players in the '60s formulation of modernism'. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p.7.

excessive?’³⁷ Here Sylvester’s attempt to convey the uncertainty of watching the match was considered incompatible with the purpose of the report.

The *Tractatus* was also important for Sylvester because it ‘reconciles a vigorous empiricism and the utmost brilliance in logical thinking with an abiding sense of the transcendental and the ineffable. The Logical Positivists of the Vienna circle found this an intolerable and arrogant contradiction. But it was not a contradiction: it was a co-existence of different approaches’.³⁸ It was this ‘intimation of the ineffable wonder of the universe’ which Wittgenstein retained, that Sylvester considered lacking in Russell, hence his preference for the former.³⁹ It is in the *Tractatus*, rather than art criticism, that Sylvester grounded his approach to art, with its humility about the limits to what the critic can say.

Shortly before Sylvester first read the *Tractatus*, George Orwell became literary editor at *Tribune*, replacing John Atkins (who had resigned to join Mass Observation).⁴⁰ Between December 1942 and February 1945 Orwell commissioned and edited the contributions that made up *Tribune’s* literary pages, which included seven articles by Sylvester.⁴¹ Sylvester often saw Orwell (who was twice his age) socially, and may have been influenced by the older writer’s empiricist philosophy and insistence on clarity in writing. Orwell’s celebrated essay ‘Politics and the English Language’ was published in 1946, and in the light of Sylvester’s observation that Orwell’s talk over lunch ‘was

³⁷ Letter from ‘Chris’ at *Observer* to Sylvester, 20 May 1958, TGA 200816/2/1/846. The letter surely refers to Sylvester’s article ‘Taylor Hits, York Slip’ (*Observer*, 18 May 1958, p.24), which indeed includes eleven expressions of uncertainty.

³⁸ Sylvester, ‘Book of the Century’.

³⁹ TGA 200816/5/1/2.

⁴⁰ *Orwell in Tribune, ‘As I Please’ and other writings 1943-7*, ed. by Paul Anderson (London: Methuen, 2008), p.2.

⁴¹ Orwell left the literary editorship of *Tribune* on 15 February 1945 to become a war correspondent for the *Observer*. *Orwell in Tribune*, pp.3, 29.

often a rehearsal of a forthcoming item in his column in the paper, 'As I Please',⁴² it is certainly possible that Orwell and Sylvester might have discussed points of language use which later appeared in the essay such as:

In certain kinds of writing, particularly in art criticism and literary criticism, it is normal to come across long passages which are almost completely lacking in meaning. Words like *romantic, plastic, values, human, dead, sentimental, natural, vitality*, as used in art criticism, are strictly meaningless, in the sense that they not only do not point to any discoverable object, but are hardly even expected to do so by the reader.⁴³

At this time Sylvester was by no means decided on becoming an art critic, and read mostly literature and philosophy. When in later years he expressed preferences amongst writers on art, they tended to be those who foregrounded their experience of artworks such as Ruskin, Baudelaire, Stokes and D.H. Lawrence (and so could be seen as compatible with Sylvester's reading of Wittgenstein). Bernard Berenson was also mentioned frequently in Sylvester's writings (others also noted similarities between them) and Berenson's ideas about 'tactile values' are also relevant to Sylvester's own concern with the sensations experienced when looking at artworks.⁴⁴ It is unclear at which point Sylvester first encountered Berenson's writing, although he certainly knew of it by 1947-8, when he referred to it in a text on Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* (c.1438-40).⁴⁵ Sylvester approvingly noted Berenson's appreciation of Cézanne and Matisse in addition to the Renaissance art which

⁴² TGA 200816/5/1/11.

⁴³ George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', *Horizon*, April 1946, 252-64 (p.257).

⁴⁴ Soon after Berenson's death Sylvester complained to the journal *Encounter* 'as you found space for two memoirs of Bernard Berenson, couldn't one of these have been devoted to Berenson the great writer on art, and not both to "B.B.," an old man who "uses his sensitive hands to stroke his face in mock anguish when subjects like psycho-analysis crop up" [?]. Sylvester, "'B.B." and Berenson', *Encounter*, March 1960, p.95.

⁴⁵ The typescript is in TGA 200816/5/10/40, dated 'London—Paris / November 1947 / January 1948'. The text was commissioned by André Lejard at Editions du Chêne but never published (Sylvester interviewed by Wollheim).

Berenson specialised in, as if it confirmed his conviction that the sensitive viewer should be equally responsive to art of all periods.

Clearly the empiricism which characterised Sylvester's work was common to many earlier writers on art, but part of the force and timeliness of his writing derives from the fact that it also provided an appropriate way to write about many of the contemporary artists he was most interested in. Richard Shiff wrote of the artists and writers discussed in his book *Doubt* that 'all of them—de Kooning, Greenberg, Newman, and Merleau-Ponty as well—were comfortable in a world where the specifics of experience would overrule the logical generalizations of theory. This is very much a late modernist theme, aligned with Judd's pragmatic sense of "local history," with categories ventured only "after the fact"'.⁴⁶ This description could apply equally well to Sylvester, and provides a context for his emergence as a critic in the cities of London and Paris as they sought to recover from the destruction wrought upon them by war.

1.3 Literature

Like numerous art critics of the mid-twentieth century (including Greenberg, Alloway and Rosenberg) Sylvester as a young man was at least as interested in literature as art.⁴⁷ His nascent interest in literature was encouraged by his work as a schoolmaster during the war when, despite being

⁴⁶ Richard Shiff, *Doubt* (New York: Routledge, 2008)

⁴⁷ In a series of aphoristic 'Notes on Art Criticism' Sylvester wrote 'the ideal art critic would be the man who was unable to decide whether, if he were not an art critic, he would rather be a writer or a painter'. TGA 200816/7/1/2. Greenberg's ideas, according to John O'Brian 'were informed more by literary criticism than art criticism'. Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. by John O'Brian, 4 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986-93), I (1986), p.xxi.

exempt from National Service, he was nonetheless required to do work of 'national importance'.⁴⁸ Sylvester worked at three home counties schools from 1943-6, during which time he also read extensively in literature, psychology and criticism. Sylvester also wrote essays and poetry, influenced by T.S. Eliot, which the poet Michael Hamburger censured for its 'harsh and horrible images'.⁴⁹ While Sylvester soon abandoned literary criticism, he was marked by his early reading, as he told Martin Gayford in 2001:

Leavis had a great deal of influence on what I thought criticism should do. I was also enormously influenced in my approach by Eliot as a critic. I have been more influenced by Eliot than by any other writer. He had a tremendous influence on my reading and on my notions about critical method. And I know that sentences and certain syntactical structures that I used at one time were lifted from Eliot. I was also very influenced by the literary style of Hodgson's translation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.⁵⁰

Sylvester's writings on literature included essays on drama (*Coriolanus*, the Jacobean playwright John Webster, and the 'Symbolism of Initiation in Tragedy') and Dylan Thomas, all written for an academic audience. He sent the essays on Thomas and Webster to Leavis in the hope that they would be published in his journal *Scrutiny*, and while the critic did not accept them, Sylvester always remembered him fondly for the long and detailed letters he

⁴⁸ TGA 200816/5/1/2.

⁴⁹ Sylvester taught at Wellbury Park in Hertfordshire and Hazelwood in Surrey (1943-4), followed by two years at Lansdowne School, High Wycombe, which he described as 'absolutely *Decline and Fall*' (Nicholas Wroe, 'Sacred Monster, National Treasure', *Guardian*, 1 July 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jul/01/books.guardianreview6> [accessed 22 July 2016] (para. 17 of 45). Sylvester's letters to Michael Hamburger are in Leeds University Library. A representative example of Sylvester's poetry is the first stanza of Sylvester's 'Birthday Poem' (1943): 'Taking the key from the door I have heard the sleepers, / And the trains of talk have buzzed not in my head of smoke; / There, in the middle of the smoke, / I have seen a snake laugh at the naked, / And a woman who grinned / Before she dispatched her unborn child to the grave.' Letter from Sylvester to Hamburger, 8 November 1943, Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection, BC Hamburger.

⁵⁰ Transcript of Sylvester interviewed by Gayford, TGA 200816/6/2/12.

wrote discussing the essays.⁵¹ The essay on Thomas was eventually published in *Counterpoint* in 1946 as 'Neo-Romantic Diction', but only after it had also been rejected by the more prestigious *Horizon*.⁵² 'Symbolism of Initiation in Tragedy', meanwhile, was submitted as part of Sylvester's application to Trinity College, and those who read and offered advice on the essay included the classicist Una Ellis-Fermor and the poet John Heath-Stubbs.⁵³ It was never published although Sylvester did plan to include it in a book of essays on 'the Decline of the Theatre', to be edited by himself. Sylvester later mentioned the essay to Ruth Stephan, editor of *Tiger's Eye* after she had published his essay on Klee 'Auguries of Experience' in 1948. Stephan replied encouragingly that the subject of tragedy was 'one that we have been exploring here, and that is of concern to many of the artists and writers who we know'.⁵⁴ Stephan was no doubt referring to artists such as Newman, Rothko and Robert Motherwell whose work and writing had appeared in the magazine. Sylvester's interest in tragedy, which may well have grown out of his wartime experiences and the 'harsh and horrible images' they inspired in his poetry, can therefore be connected with the artists whether in America, or closer to home (such as Bacon) who Sylvester subsequently wrote about.

Writing to the literary scholar Frank Kermode many years later, Sylvester recalled that during the 1940s he had been particularly influenced by two

⁵¹ 'His generosity towards a nincompoop was extraordinary'. Letter from Sylvester to Frank Kermode, 31 January 2000, Sir Frank Kermode Papers, Box 15 Folder 68; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Leavis' letters to Sylvester are in TGA 200816/2/1/652.

⁵² In a letter rejecting the essay on Thomas, Cyril Connolly said that it 'breaks a butterfly on the Aristotelian wheel & seems hardly worth doing'. Letter from Connolly to Sylvester, undated, TGA 200816/2/1/242.

⁵³ Correspondence with Ellis-Fermor (TGA 200816/2/1/324) and Heath-Stubbs (TGA 200816/2/2/15). A typescript of the essay is in TGA 200816/4/4/2.

⁵⁴ Correspondence between Sylvester and Ruth Stephan, Series I: Box 5, *Tiger's Eye* Records, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

works of literary criticism, Leavis' *Revaluation* (1936) and I.A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929). Together with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, these two books were the formative influences on Sylvester's own critical method.⁵⁵ Sylvester also said in a late interview that: 'I worshipped Leavis, the way he would argue for the greatness of Keats and the horribleness of Shelley. I had his compulsion to evaluate and re-evaluate. I was a natural critic'.⁵⁶ Indeed there are passages from the introduction to *Revaluation*, particularly Leavis' defence of the critic's personal convictions, which might have been written by Sylvester himself:

I think it the business of the critic to perceive for himself, to make the finest and sharpest relevant discriminations, and to state his findings as responsibly, clearly and forcibly as possible. Then even if he is wrong he has forwarded the business of criticism—he has exposed himself as openly as possible to correction; for what criticism undertakes is the profitable discussion of literature. Anyone who works strenuously in the spirit of this conception must expect to be accused of being both dogmatic and narrow, though, naturally, where my own criticism is concerned I think the accusations unfair.⁵⁷

Leavis sees the critic's responsibility as stating his personal views as persuasively as possible, however dogmatic or narrow they might be, and in doing so taking part in the debate which moves criticism forwards. Richards, on the other hand, was more interested in interrogating the way in which such views were formed. 'The history of criticism [...] is a history of dogmatism and argumentation rather than a history of research', he lamented in the introduction to *Practical Criticism*.⁵⁸ By analysing students' blind (i.e. without

⁵⁵ Letter from Sylvester to Frank Kermode, 31 January 2000, Sir Frank Kermode Papers, Box 15 Folder 68; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁵⁶ Kustow, p.7.

⁵⁷ F.R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936, repr.1962), pp.8-9.

⁵⁸ I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, (London: Kegan Paul, 1929; repr. New York: Routledge, 1991), p.8.

knowledge of author or date) responses of poems, Richards was able to diagnose the common errors made as a result of bringing preconceptions to bear on poetry, and his concern with how readers engage with the poem in isolation from other concerns. This can be compared with both Sylvester's criticism as a form of reflective 'research' on his changing responses (rather than a firmly established theoretical position)⁵⁹ and the way that Sylvester liked to present and experience art with the minimum of interpretative material in exhibitions (Chapter 6).⁶⁰

Together, these passages from Leavis and Richards correspond with the two central tenets of Sylvester's criticism: making empirical observations as free as possible from dogmatism and preconceptions, and using them to form a broader sense of tradition and quality. Like Leavis, Sylvester had a strong sense of the canon (asked by Kustow whether there was an 'equivalent of the apostolic succession in painting', Sylvester referred to a 'sense of the mainstream in art which is very real', from Cimabue and Giotto to Cézanne).⁶¹ This explains why of the two Leavis in particular was Sylvester's exemplar as a major critic who developed his responses to construct a lineage of the greatest artistic achievements.

1.4 Bohemia

In addition to the reading he undertook while working as a schoolmaster, Sylvester made up for his lack of formal education by

⁵⁹ Forge noted Sylvester's 'celebration of paradox' and the way 'he will press a feeling until it turns into its opposite' (Forge, 'In the Shadow of Thanatos', p.30).

⁶⁰ While Sylvester was influenced by *Practical Criticism* he, like Leavis, disagreed with Richards' belief that there was no aesthetic emotion (Gayford, 'The Eye's Understanding', p.37).

⁶¹ Kustow, pp.10-11.

befriending artists and writers in London (and later in Paris and New York). Growing up in Willesden, Sylvester had easy access to central London when he missed school to go to the cinema or listen to jazz records on Oxford Street. That journey was made easier still when he moved to St Johns Wood soon after leaving school. Around this time Sylvester was beginning to encounter artists and writers in the pubs and cafés of Soho and Fitzrovia, as he recounts in his unpublished typescript 'Soho Nights in the 40s'.⁶² In this essay Sylvester listed the personalities he encountered while frequenting West End nightspots, including, under painters: 'Lucian Freud, John Craxton, Robert Colquhoun, Robert MacBryde, John Minton, Michael Ayrton, Gerald Wilde, John Banting, Nina Hamnett',⁶³ while he also met Richard Hamilton in 1941 at the Nighlight club near Leicester Square.⁶⁴ Another meeting place was the Anglo-French Art Centre, situated at 29 Elm Wood Road, very close to Sylvester's flat in Wellington Court. Between 1946 and 1951 artists including Bacon, Moore, Freud, Paolozzi, Germaine Richier and Fernand Léger were invited to lecture and exhibit at the centre, while Yves Klein also visited regularly while living in England in 1949-50.⁶⁵ The centre was one of the first places to actively encourage Anglo-French cultural exchange after the war, and conversations he had there surely contributed to Sylvester's decision to move to France rather

⁶² TGA 200816/5/8/16. This may well be the article on 'Nightlife' which Sylvester wrote for the *Sunday Times Magazine* in the early 1960s but which was never published, as explained in letter from 'Francis' at *Sunday Times Magazine* to Sylvester, 8 December 1964, TGA 200816/2/1/1082.

⁶³ TGA 200816/5/8/16. These friendships may have influenced Sylvester's writing as early as his article 'Three Contemporary Illustrators', *Tribune*, 2 June 1944, pp.15-6, which discussed Wilde, Freud and Sutherland.

⁶⁴ Sylvester, 'Hamilton' in *About Modern Art*, pp.277-87 (first publ. as 'Seven Studies for a Picture of Richard Hamilton', *Richard Hamilton* (London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1991), pp.6-20), pp.280-1.

⁶⁵ Richard Calvocoressi, 'Yves Klein and the Birth of the Blue', *Guardian*, 13 May 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/may/13/yves-klein-london-birth-blue> [accessed 18 May 2016].

than take up his place at Cambridge (the centre's proprietor, Alfred Rozelaar Green, recommended to Sylvester the hotel in Montparnasse where he stayed for long stretches).⁶⁶

Sylvester left London in 1947, around the same time that Cyril Connolly described the capital as 'now the largest, saddest and dirtiest of great cities with its miles of unpainted half-inhabited houses, its chopless chop-houses, its beerless pubs, its once vivid quarters losing all personality [...]'.⁶⁷ Over the next three years he alternated between London and Paris, publishing in various outlets on both sides of the Channel and building a reputation as a leading commentator in what Carol Jacobi has called 'a new cultural transnationalism' emerging at the end of the Occupation.⁶⁸ Sylvester was in Paris at the same time as several young British artists, among them Paolozzi, William Gear and William Turnbull, all of whom he wrote about during that time, in a way conspicuously influenced by the example of Giacometti above all.⁶⁹ In keeping with this 'transnationalism' Sylvester advocated the influence of foreign artists in London, where in 1948 he claimed 'the international spirit which produces a national style, distinct from a nationalist style, is developing'.⁷⁰ Sylvester enthused over the presence of overseas artists such as Jankel Adler and Oskar Kokoschka in England, as well as artists such as

⁶⁶ TGA 200816/5/1/8.

⁶⁷ Cyril Connolly, *Ideas and Places* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1953, pp.142-3.

⁶⁸ Carol Jacobi, 'A Kind of Cold War Feeling' in British Art, 1945-52', in *British Art in the Nuclear Age*, ed. by Catherine Jolivet (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp.19-50 (p.22).

⁶⁹ Raymond Mason also moved to Paris at this time, while others travelling regularly between London and Paris included Isabel Rawsthorne and Peter Rose Pulham. Francis Bacon was in Monaco, c.1946-9, although Sylvester had not yet met him.

⁷⁰ 'L'esprit internationaliste qui produit une tradition nationale, distincte d'une tradition nationaliste, se développe' (author's translation). Sylvester, 'Les problèmes du peintre : Paris-Londres 1947', trans. by J. Vrinat [part iii/iii], *L'Âge nouveau*, October 1948, pp.107-110 (p.108).

MacBryde, Colquhoun and Louis le Brocquy who had moved to London from Scotland and Ireland and brought different influences to bear.⁷¹

In addition to its cultural riches, Paris was inexpensive compared with London due to the postwar devaluation of the franc. Sylvester stayed at the Hotel Venezia on the Boulevard Montparnasse for around 120FF per day at a time when the exchange rate was 1000FF to the pound, while for food a three-course restaurant meal (70FF) was supplemented by cheese and grapes at other times. Sylvester's employment in Paris included appearances on the BBC French Service talking about art, and various writing and translating jobs, mostly for the publishing house Éditions du Chêne (ran by Maurice Girodias and Henri Lejard).⁷² These included the never-published text on Uccello's *Rout of San Romano* and research for Girodias on historical 'pornographic classics' worthy of reprinting (Sylvester claimed that it was largely because of him that John Cleland's 1748 erotic novel *Fanny Hill* had its first postwar reprinting).⁷³ In his autobiography, Girodias recalls Sylvester ('resembling a Sicilian bandit') showing him 'saucy stories in the style of *Fanny Hill*' that he had written, which gave Girodias the idea of having Sylvester translate the Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir* into English.⁷⁴ The lifestyle, then, was that of many a young writer, and would be characteristic of Sylvester's career for much of the following decade: high-minded ambition (Sylvester told

⁷¹ Sylvester had earlier reviewed J.D. Fergusson's *Modern Scottish Painting* (David Sylvester, 'Art and Liberty', *Tribune*, 4 August 1944, p.17), in which he acknowledged the validity of studying Scottish art separately from English art.

⁷² The most significant work which he translated was Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler's introduction to Brassäi's *The Sculptures of Picasso*. D.-H. Kahnweiler, trans. by A.D.B. Sylvester, *The Sculptures of Picasso* (London: Rodney Phillips, 1949).

⁷³ Sylvester interviewed by Wollheim.

⁷⁴ '[...] Ressemblait à un bandit sicilien [...] récits grivois dans le style de *Fanny Hill*' (author's translation). Girodias, II, p.175. Girodias goes on to accuse Sylvester of demanding a large advance and then never carrying out the translation. Girodias subsequently published a translation by Austryn Wainhouse, who would go on to translate many of Sade's writings (Girodias, II, pp.180-1, 220).

Hamburger of his intention to save enough money to translate Baudelaire) combined with a range of short-term projects undertaken reluctantly to earn a living.⁷⁵

In 1948 Sylvester's ambitious essay 'Les problèmes du peintre: London-Paris 1947' was published across three issues of the periodical *L'Âge nouveau*. The essay most representative of Sylvester's position as a commentator on art in London and Paris at this time, it compared them in terms of artistic tendencies and networks. The fundamental difference, as Sylvester saw it, was that 'the French are fighting to preserve a great tradition whereas the English are trying to find one where one has not existed for almost one hundred years'.⁷⁶ He detailed the advantages of the Parisian art world: the benefits of café culture over pub-centred British social life, the absence of import restrictions, a rich tradition and coherent styles creating a productive artistic climate (in comparison with which the prevailing British trends of Euston Road realism and neo-Romanticism were only 'a retreat from major issues to calmer waters').⁷⁷ Even so Sylvester concluded the essay optimistically, announcing that London was ready to take its place alongside Paris as an international art centre.

In 'Les problèmes du peintre' Sylvester referred to 'the progress of the school of London', but I disagree with Hyman's claim in *The Battle for Realism* that Sylvester 'proposed a School of London and argued that it should be

⁷⁵ Letter from Sylvester to Hamburger, 31 January 1948, Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection, BC Hamburger.

⁷⁶ '[...] les Français combattent pour préserver une grande tradition, tandis que les Anglais essaient d'en trouver une là où il n'en a pas existé depuis presque cent ans' (author's translation). Sylvester, 'Les problèmes du peintre' [part i/iii], *L'Âge nouveau*, August 1948, pp.94-8 (p.94).

⁷⁷ '[...] une retraite de plus larges issues vers des fonds plus calmes' (author's translation). Sylvester, 'Les problèmes du peintre' [part i/iii], p.98.

accorded a comparable status to the Ecole de Paris', and that moreover in doing so Sylvester 'developed an alternative formalist teleology to that created by Alfred Barr [...] a road that resulted in realism rather than abstraction'.⁷⁸ In fact, Sylvester does not even identify the artists in this his 'École de Londres', although he prefaces his use of the term by listing numerous British artists, many of whom were not based in London, belonged to an earlier generation, or were primarily abstract artists, including Hepworth, Lowry and Ben Nicholson. Sylvester stressed that there was little common ground between the artists he discussed, and never directly compared them with the École de Paris, but simply described them as 'quelques individus d'un intérêt remarquable'.⁷⁹ The 'École de Londres', as the term was used by Sylvester, seems simply to have been a shorthand for British artists, an impression reinforced by his equally vague use of the term in another article two years later.⁸⁰

Another project Sylvester began working on during this time was a book about the School of Paris since the Occupation. It was not completed, although an extract from it, 'The Art of "Les Aînés"', was published in John Lehmann's short-lived 'symposium', *Orpheus*, in 1949. The article discussed the work of eight artists including Pierre Bonnard, whose retrospective at the Orangerie des Tuileries, held shortly after his death in 1947, Sylvester had greatly admired:

⁷⁸ Hyman, p.24. Hyman even claimed 'Sylvester's belief in progress and on a specific path of development was no less deterministic' than Barr's.

⁷⁹ Sylvester, 'Les problèmes du peintre' [part iii/iii], p.108.

⁸⁰ 'The eight English artists [exhibited in 'New Trends in Painting and Sculpture' at the ICA] [...] might just as well have been replaced by eight others without its making much difference to the degree in which the current preoccupations of the School of London were revealed'. Sylvester, 'London-Paris' in *Art News and Review*, 25 March 1950, pp.1-2 (p.2).

Like the Impressionists he looked at appearances. Yet he was more than an eye—not because, like Cézanne and the Cubists, he penetrated appearances to discover the underlying structure, but because he enriched appearances by intensifying them [...] in an age whose major pictorial achievements have stripped nature bare or transformed it, Bonnard alone reached greatness through enriching it.⁸¹

The primary focus of the article, however, is on Picasso. As in 'Les problèmes du peintre' Picasso was presented as the epitome of twentieth-century art:

The foremost creator of the vision of our time is the foremost victim of the illness of our time. In an age prodigious in invention, Pablo Picasso has been peerlessly prolific in original ideas; in an age stricken with disintegration, his work has been incomparably fragmentary. In an age in which man makes, destroys, changes and changes with unprecedented rapidity, Picasso has been supremely and magnificently protean; in an age too readily disposed to accept the ephemeral, he has in our imagination lit countless fires which have burned intensely and then gone out.⁸²

Sylvester contrasted Bonnard (an anomaly amongst modern artists) with Picasso, the quintessential modern artist, at this point favouring Bonnard. He opposed the 'incompleteness' of a Picasso to the 'complete statements' often produced by Klee and Gris, concluding critically that in Picasso's work, 'after a time there is nothing more in it to be discovered'.⁸³ Sylvester still held this view of Picasso in 1960, when he continued to prefer the depth and complexity of Bonnard and Matisse to the prodigious invention of Picasso,⁸⁴ although eventually, coming to focus more on Picasso's work as a whole than on individual works (and after organising the important 'Late Picasso' exhibition in the 1980s), he concluded Picasso's achievement was unmatched in the

⁸¹ David Sylvester, 'The Art of 'Les Aînés': A Study of the Elder French Painters, 1945-48', *Orpheus*, no. 2, 1949, pp.168-76 (p.169). See also Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.13.

⁸² Sylvester, 'The Art of 'Les Aînés', p.175.

⁸³ Sylvester, 'The Art of 'Les Aînés', pp.175-6.

⁸⁴ David Sylvester, 'Picasso at the Tate-II', *New Statesman*, 16 July 1960, p.82.

twentieth century. This change, discussed further in Chapter 5, was one of the most significant changes of opinion in Sylvester's career.

Sylvester's credentials as a commentator on the *École de Paris* were cemented when he was invited to coffee *chez* Kahnweiler in 1948, where he met artists and writers including André Masson, Michel Leiris, and most importantly Giacometti.⁸⁵ After many years without exhibiting new work, the former surrealist had returned to the public eye that year with a celebrated exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York, accompanied by a lavish catalogue which included Sartre's influential essay 'The Search for the Absolute' and reproduced Giacometti's illustrated autobiographical letter to Matisse along with what Sylvester described as 'magical' photographs by Patricia Echaurren (then about to divorce the painter Matta and marry Pierre Matisse).⁸⁶ Unable to see the exhibition, Sylvester described the catalogue, published at a time when Giacometti's work was hard to see without access to the artist's studio, as 'like a talisman'.⁸⁷ Two artists captivated by Giacometti were Turnbull and Paolozzi: soon after they exhibited together at Brausen's Hanover Gallery (which also showed Giacometti's work in London), with Sylvester providing catalogue texts for the exhibition.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Sylvester greatly admired Leiris' writing, and told Leiris that his 1957 text 'Notes sur les Tableaux de Francis Bacon' was 'an attempt to imitate the style of your 'Pierres pour un Alberto Giacometti'. A sort of homage to you which didn't turn out very well' [une tentative d'imiter le styles de tes "Pierres pour un Alberto Giacometti". Une sorte d'hommage à toi qui n'est pas très bien marché.] Letter from Sylvester to Leiris, Ms Ms 45172, Fonds Michel Leiris, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

⁸⁶ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.15. The photographs *Looking at Giacometti* would be almost entirely Patricia Matisse's. According to Carol Jacobi, Sartre's essay on Giacometti 'established the sculptor as existentialism's living paradigm'. Jacobi, 'A Kind of Cold War Feeling', p.22.

⁸⁷ David Mellor, 'Existentialism and Post-war British Art', in Frances Morris, *Paris Post War* (London: Tate Gallery, 1993), pp.53-61 (p.53).

⁸⁸ 'Kenneth King/ Eduardo Paolozzi/ William Turnbull', Hanover Gallery, February-March 1950. Letters from Paolozzi and Turnbull to Sylvester regarding the exhibition (both including Giacometti-esque illustrations of sculptures to be included) are in TGA 200816/2/2/6.

Back in London, Sylvester had also become something of a protégé to Moore. Moore first contacted Sylvester in 1945 after reading an article that the twenty year-old critic had written about him in *Tribune*, which asserted Moore was 'with the exception of Picasso, the greatest artist since Cézanne'.⁸⁹ Moore was then on the cusp of the international recognition which would accompany his 1946 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and his winning of the sculpture prize at the 1948 Venice Biennale, and established a relationship with Sylvester which continued until Moore's death in 1986, and which benefitted both artist and critic alike.⁹⁰ In 1948 the *Burlington Magazine* published a long two-part essay by Sylvester (a rare foray into contemporary art for the publication at that time) which established the young critic as a leading commentator on Moore.⁹¹ Moore's approval of Sylvester was further in evidence when in 1949 the critic wrote the catalogue text for Moore's exhibition at the Wakefield City Art Gallery and Manchester City Art Gallery, by which time Sylvester had also worked briefly as Moore's first secretary.⁹² The most important early result of their friendship, however, was when the Arts Council's Art Director Philip James, 'doubtless after conferring with Moore', invited Sylvester to organise Moore's 1951 Tate Gallery retrospective as part

⁸⁹ David Sylvester, 'Henry Moore', *Tribune*, 5 January 1945, p.19. This was written before Sylvester moved to Paris and was exposed to artists such as Bonnard.

⁹⁰ Sylvester's relationship and writing on Moore is surveyed in Martin Hammer, 'Ambivalence and Ambiguity: David Sylvester on Henry Moore', in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity*, Tate Research Publication, 2015, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/martin-hammer-ambivalence-and-ambiguity-david-sylvester-on-henry-moore-r1151307> [accessed 11 May 2016].

⁹¹ David Sylvester, 'The Evolution of Henry Moore's Sculpture', *Burlington Magazine*, June 1948, pp.158-65 and July 1948, pp.186, 189-95. It appears that there was a possibility of the essay becoming a book judging from a letter in which Moore wrote to Sylvester 'Pleased to hear that your Burlington articles may be translated to form a book to be published at the time of the Museum of Modern Art Exhibition'. Letter from Moore to Sylvester, 25 October 1948, TGA 200816/2/1/787.

⁹² Roger Berthoud, *The Life of Henry Moore* (London: Faber, 1987; repr. London: Giles de la Mare, 2003), p.202.

of the Festival of Britain.⁹³ The proximity between the two men during this period and beyond can be gauged from an exchange reported by Sylvester in which he told Moore that he considered him 'the ideal father which my own father had failed to be', while Moore in return said he regarded Sylvester 'as something like a younger brother'.⁹⁴

Sylvester was therefore not only alternating physically between London and Paris but also aligning himself simultaneously with two sculptors whose approaches to figurative sculpture were drastically different. The implications of this were made explicit by Sylvester in a 1965 letter to the American poet Donald Hall, then writing a book about Moore:

[The reaction against Moore] began about 1946-7 with Paolozzi and Turnbull and Raymond Mason. They were very strongly anti-Moore, very strongly pro-Giacometti. They were already anti-Moore before they found out about Giacometti, and when they did find out about him when they were in Paris in 1947 onwards, they started using him as a stick to beat Moore with. The great document of the period was the catalogue of the 1948 Giacometti exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. Do read it, and you'll see how an acceptance of its position was an anti-Moore position. Then there was [Reg] Butler [...] I frequently visited him at that time (I even took Paolozzi there) and we used to spend hours and hours talking about Moore, and most of what Butler had to say was critical—that is on his position rather than his talent, but his moral as well as aesthetic position. He too was extremely interested in Giacometti [...] All in all I would say that the atmosphere was more virulently anti-Moore then than it is now.⁹⁵

Sylvester recalled the tension which inevitably resulted from this situation, writing in drafts for his autobiography that: 'Our arguments became increasingly edgy and, while I tried to restrict my actual allusions to Giacometti, Henry knew what was going on. He even once said that one day I'd turn against Giacometti.'⁹⁶ Rejecting Moore and what he stood for was also

⁹³ TGA 200816/5/1/11.

⁹⁴ TGA 200816/5/1/5/14.

⁹⁵ Letter from Sylvester to Donald Hall, 4 October 1965, TGA 200816/2/1/24.

⁹⁶ TGA 200816/5/1/5/14.

a way of rejecting provincial British insularity, as the young expatriate sculptors no doubt knew. Sylvester, however, had things both ways, simultaneously advocating the work of both Giacometti and Moore. In the early 1950s Sylvester planned a book on twentieth century sculpture, which was to include six studies of important modern sculptors, including both Moore and Giacometti, and when Sylvester organised an exhibition of Giacometti's work in London in 1955, Moore was thanked in the acknowledgements.⁹⁷

Berger later wrote that 'because of its underlying theme of pre-verbal experience, his [Moore's] work lent itself to a special kind of cultural appropriation. It could easily be covered with words, and so become all things to all men'.⁹⁸ It is certainly true that Sylvester's writing on Moore underwent a noticeable shift from early texts such as his 1946 article on Moore's shelter drawings for *Graphis* to the 1949 introduction to Moore's Wakefield exhibition. These writings demonstrate a change of emphasis from certainty to ambiguity in interpreting Moore's work, which surely registers the influence on Sylvester of Giacometti. Equally important was the fact that Sylvester was able to synthesise Moore and Giacometti in his writing about younger sculptors such as Butler and Paolozzi, of whom Sylvester wrote that 'though it may be that Moore's existence has made theirs possible, they constitute not a School of Moore but a healthy reaction against him'.⁹⁹ Two years later, a major article in *The Listener* compared Butler and Paolozzi in particular with Moore while again stressing the importance of Giacometti's skeletal frameworks as an

⁹⁷ Letter from Sylvester to 'Mr Dennis', 11 March 1954, George Bell archive, University of Reading MS 1640/856. In the same letter Sylvester invites Dennis to hear the six studies given as a course of lectures at the Slade School in May-June 1954.

⁹⁸ John Berger, *Portraits: John Berger on Artists*, ed. by Tom Overton (London: Verso, 2015), p.316.

⁹⁹ Sylvester, 'Butler: a young British sculptor' (unpublished typescript, undated but c.1949). TGA 200816/5/8/18.

influence.¹⁰⁰ The 'virulently anti-Moore' atmosphere of the time was thereby presented publicly as a 'healthy reaction' to Moore's stature.

Another of Sylvester's publications during his Paris years, and perhaps his most influential and original early criticism, was 'Auguries of Experience', his 1948 essay about Paul Klee. The essay was submitted to, and rejected by, several British journals before it was eventually published in avant-garde American journal *Tiger's Eye*.¹⁰¹ Given the small (less than three thousand issues) circulation of the journal, Sylvester probably encountered it through Moore, whose work had been reproduced alongside Giacometti's in the June 1948 volume.¹⁰² Sylvester's contribution to *Tiger's Eye* appeared between statements by Motherwell and Newman in a symposium on the Sublime. At this time Sylvester was unaware of the work of the abstract expressionists but would later state that appearing in their company granted him 'guaranteed immortality'!¹⁰³

The article took an innovative approach to Klee's late works (Sylvester recalled Read describing it as the 'definitive interpretation' of late Klee),¹⁰⁴ but more importantly it introduced for the first time the exploratory, phenomenological approach to experiencing art that would characterise Sylvester's criticism. Influenced by Wittgenstein's philosophy (and surely encouraged by existentialist ideas encountered in Paris), Sylvester was drawn

¹⁰⁰ Sylvester, 'Contemporary Sculpture', *The Listener*, 23 August 1951, pp.295-7.

¹⁰¹ The publications which rejected the essay included including *Horizon*, *Apollo*, *Cornhill* and the *Burlington Magazine*. Sylvester interviewed by Wollheim; Mellor, pp.54, 62fn.

¹⁰² The circulation in December 1948 was 'just over two thousand seven hundred, far below the print run of four to five thousand'. Pamela Franks, *The Tiger's Eye: The Art of a Magazine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p.93.

¹⁰³ Sylvester interviewed by Richard Wollheim.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Sylvester to Calvocoressi, 18 August 1999, TGA 200816/2/1/909.

to how Klee's late works 'undermine your perceptual habits'.¹⁰⁵ If each individual created their own world, art would need to stimulate rather than inhibit individual subjectivity. Sylvester admired the absence of a focal point ('afocalism') in Klee's work, which made looking at his work a ceaseless exploration with no resting place for the eye or fixed meaning to be derived. Sylvester discussed these ideas with Kahnweiler, Masson, and the young British artist Harold Cohen, while the original typescript of his essay was dedicated to American artist Jesse Reichek (who Sylvester must have got to know in Paris).¹⁰⁶ His ideas about afocalism were disseminated across various writings and lectures, culminating in 'Paul Klee. La Période de Berne' (*Les Temps modernes*, January 1951), which extended and clarified the ideas first stated in the *Tiger's Eye* piece.¹⁰⁷ This essay was edited for *Les Temps modernes* by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, thereby making explicit the connection between Sylvester and phenomenology.¹⁰⁸

In Sylvester's catalogue texts for Turnbull and Paolozzi's 1950 Hanover Gallery exhibition he wrote similarly about their work: 'To enter Turnbull's world is to fly like a bird among branches or to swim under water among the inhabitants, mobile or stationary, of the sea', while 'in his [Paolozzi's]

¹⁰⁵ *About Modern Art*, p.35. The existential implications of the text have been highlighted by Mellor (p.34), Garlake (pp.48-9) and Hyman (pp.21-2).

¹⁰⁶ See correspondence in Sylvester's archive with Cohen (TGA 200816/2/1/235), Kahnweiler (TGA 200816/2/2/16) and Masson (TGA 200816/2/1/735). For Sylvester's original typescript of 'Auguries of Experience' with dedication to Jesse Reichek see Series III: Box 31, *Tiger's Eye* Records, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

¹⁰⁷ See also David Sylvester, 'Architecture in Modern Painting', *Architectural Review*, February 1951, pp.81-8, and the lecture 'Cubism, Klee and Architecture', delivered at the Slade on 11 May 1951, MS in TGA 200816/4/1/26.

¹⁰⁸ Merleau-Ponty wrote a letter to Sylvester congratulating him on the essay (TGA 200816/2/1/1117) which Sylvester described to Hyman as 'the most complimentary letter I have ever received. I should have jumped into the Seine there and then (Hyman, p.214 fn). The *Les Temps modernes* essay was dedicated 'à K.W.' (presumably Kahnweiler).

submarine world we do not swim, but pick our way through a maze of things and creatures at the bottom of the sea'.¹⁰⁹ This 'feeling into' can be found in Sylvester's writing on Bomberg, Soutine, Cézanne, and much of the abstract art he most admired.¹¹⁰ For this reason it is ironic that when Sylvester first encountered abstract expressionism in Venice in 1950, he was 'blinded by an old-fashioned anti-Americanism' and overlooked the clear correspondences between the 'all-over' composition of works by Klee and Pollock (Chapter 2).¹¹¹

After returning permanently from Paris in 1950 Sylvester continued to spend much of his time with artists and writers. In the early 1950s he lived with *Burlington Magazine* editor Benedict Nicolson and writer Philip Toynbee at 108 St George's Square, and at another time with the writer Colin MacInnes (whom he had first met at the Anglo-French Art Centre) at 4 Regent's Park Terrace.¹¹² Sylvester's most important relationships at this time, however, were with Bacon (with whom Sylvester lived in 1953-4) and Freud.¹¹³ As Sylvester later recalled:

¹⁰⁹ Reyner Banham recognised the historical importance of this exhibition, writing in 1958 of the 'junior revolutionary movement in sculpture that has no name, but has been identifiable in England since the Paolozzi-Turnbull exhibition at the Hanover Gallery in 1950'. Banham, 'Machine Aesthetes' in Reyner Banham, *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham*, selected by Mary Banham (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp.26-8 (first published in *New Statesman*, 16 August 1958, pp.192-3), p.26.

¹¹⁰ Sylvester's continued to use extravagant metaphors and similes throughout his career. Interviewed by Gayford in 2001, he said 'A few weeks ago I saw for the first time the Pergamon Altar in Berlin and felt that the front of my body was aflame from my neck to my knees' (unedited transcript for Gayford, 'The Eye's Understanding', TGA 200816/6/2/12).

¹¹¹ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.19.

¹¹² For MacInnes see Tony Gould, *Inside Outsider: The Life and Times of Colin MacInnes* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.81; for Nicolson and Toynbee see Sylvester interviewed by Wollheim. Hyman (p.34) claims that Sylvester also lived with the artist Victor Willing during this period, although I have found no evidence for this.

¹¹³ Sylvester lived with Bacon first at 9 Apollo Place in Chelsea (which belonged to the artist John Minton) and subsequently at 19 Cromwell Road, South Kensington. Martin Harrison, *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné*, 5 vols (London: The Estate of Francis Bacon, 2016), I, p.85. According to Sebastian Smee Bacon was 'basically on the run' between 1951 and 1955, and lived in 'at least eight different places' during that time.

Bacon and I became quite close friends. We drank and dined together, went dog-racing together and shared off-course bets on horses. I also sat for him a few times, helped him to write a short piece in praise of an older artist, Matthew Smith, and acted as his agent in selling works to dealers behind his accredited dealer's back when he urgently needed cash.¹¹⁴

During the early- to mid-1950s Sylvester betted heavily on horseracing and greyhound racing, which he discussed in unpublished autobiographical writings.¹¹⁵ Sylvester's involvement in gambling was largely due to friends such as Bacon and Freud, whose philosophy inspired him: 'it was a matter of principle to spend, to have no money in the bank. It was a symbol of living in the present'.¹¹⁶ The interest in gambling was evidently connected to an intellectual climate influenced by existentialism epitomized by the work of Bacon in particular, which used chance techniques to obtain unpredictable results.¹¹⁷ It was also an act of defiance against what Sylvester described as 'the age of national insurance, the Welfare State, the restrictive practice—the age of everything that gives us the illusion of being secure'.¹¹⁸

Sebastian Smee, *The Art of Rivalry: Four Friendships, Betrayals, and Breakthroughs in Modern Art* (New York: Random House, 2016), p.45.

¹¹⁴ Sylvester, 'My Brushes with Bacon', *Observer Magazine*, 21 May 2000, pp.30-1 (p.30).

¹¹⁵ Sylvester, 'Memoirs of a Mug', TGA 200816/5/8/24. This unfinished typescript was probably written as a sample for planned book 'on New Yorkerish lines' about Sylvester's involvement with gambling which he was in discussion with the Hutchinson Publishing Group about publishing. Letters from Robert Lusty to Sylvester, 1959, TGA 200816/2/1/126.

¹¹⁶ Sylvester, 'Memoirs of a Mug', TGA 200816/5/8/24. Bacon appears in the text as a painter called 'C.': 'It was C. above all the group who carried its unspoken doctrines into everything he did, living for the moment, chancing his arm without fear or favour, in his work and in his life. Not surprisingly, he was a gambler, particularly at roulette [...]'. Sylvester discussed his regrets about his time gambling in Tusa, *On Creativity*, pp.242-3.

¹¹⁷ Sylvester wrote of Bacon 'painting became a gamble in which every gain made had to be risked in the search for further gain. Winning, as always, was largely a question of knowing when to stop. For many years Bacon hardly ever stopped in time'. Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p.186.

¹¹⁸ David Sylvester, 'Test Cricket as a Restrictive Practice', *The Listener*, 26 April 1956, pp.501-2 (p.502).

Sylvester saw his gambling as the result of 'a desire to be in the swim, to prove that I too was prepared to take a chance'.¹¹⁹ He was, however, by nature 'cautious and calculating', and hoped that successful gambling might subsidise a writing lifestyle resembling that of the independently wealthy Stokes and Clark, who had no need to publish regularly. Sylvester was frustrated by having to write short reviews, and he hoped to 'detach writing from earning a living, so that I could write only as and when I pleased and not have to disperse my energies and break my concentration by doing occasional pieces for the weeklies'.¹²⁰ In the event, Sylvester was an unsuccessful gambler. In the autobiographical essay 'Memoirs of a Mug' he wrote of spending £2000 a year at a time when he earned £800 a year, as a result of which he had to request loans from wealthier friends such as the painter Anne Dunn, and sell possessions including a painting by Bacon.¹²¹ Sylvester's gambling was surely also on some level a form of research into the lives of Bacon and Freud, in keeping with his lifelong fascination with artists (William Packer described him as 'an intellectual groupie').¹²² Subsequent chapters will show how from these beginnings Sylvester would make his relationships with artists a crucial part of his criticism through his interviews and other writings based on 'insider information' derived from his friendship.

¹¹⁹ Sylvester, 'Memoirs of a Mug', TGA 200816/5/8/24.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Sylvester also described this ideal situation elsewhere as 'to be able to earn a living without saying what one doesn't think' (TGA 200816/4/4/84). This idea may help explain Sylvester's subsequent work for the *Sunday Times Magazine* and on the Magritte catalogue raisonné.

¹²¹ Ibid. letters from Anne Dunn to Sylvester, TGA 200816/2/1/311; The Bacon painting he sold was probably *Study for a Portrait* (1953), which Sylvester acquired from Bacon in Spring 1953 before selling to the Hanover Gallery in 1955 (Harrison, *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné*, II, p.312).

¹²² William Packer, 'We Forget that he Could Not Draw', *Literary Review*, July 2000, p.41.

Chapter 2: The Critic

Introduction

Sylvester's career as a regular critic for magazines and periodicals spans the period from 1949 to 1962. During this period he averaged around twenty-five articles or catalogue texts a year in addition to curating, teaching and broadcasting work. In this chapter I survey Sylvester's writing during this period to show how it corresponds with shifts taking place in British art during this time, from the rather insular artistic climate of the 1940s to the embrace of international (particularly American) influences during the 1950s and 1960s. I begin by discussing the publications which Sylvester most often wrote for during this period, in keeping with Gee's call for attention to the publishing context for art criticism.¹ The second section outlines Sylvester's rationale for proposing Giacometti and Bacon as proponents of a 'new realism', and other artists who he wrote about in similar terms. Sections three and four consider Sylvester's engagement with public art, and film and photography, areas particularly associated with the criticism of his rivals Berger and Alloway (and little-discussed in existing scholarship on Sylvester). The chapter concludes by demonstrating Sylvester's role as a prominent commentator on recent American art (and related British practices) in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

¹ Gee, p.4.

2.1 Publications

Although he contributed occasional articles to numerous magazines and periodicals, Sylvester was mainly connected with four publications during his time as a critic, whose relevance to his development as a critic I summarise here. These were *Art News and Review*, *Encounter*, *The Listener*, and the *New Statesman*.² I also discuss the *Sunday Times Magazine* which he joined after leaving the *New Statesman* in 1962, working in an editorial role which also involved some writing (particularly soon after he joined).³

Sylvester's first regular outlet was *Art News and Review*, which was founded in 1949 by retired doctor Richard Gainsborough and the young critic Bernard Denvir (who wrote much of the paper's content, under various pseudonyms).⁴ *Art News and Review*, which described itself (questionably) as 'the first paper in English history to devote itself to the review of contemporary exhibitions as they occur' played an important role in enabling enthusiasts to keep track of art exhibitions and events in London during a period in which the city's art scene expanded dramatically.⁵ Between 1949 and

² The *New Statesman* was, until 6 July 1957, the *New Statesman and Nation*. The paper is referred to as the *New Statesman* throughout this thesis, although article references reflect the change of name.

³ As with the *New Statesman*, the *Sunday Times Magazine* also changed its name during the time Sylvester worked for it. It was the *Sunday Times Colour Magazine* until late 1964, when it became the *Sunday Times Magazine*. I refer to it as the *Sunday Times Magazine* throughout, although article references again reflect the change of name.

⁴ David Fraser Jenkins and Sarah Fox-Pitt, *Portrait of the Artist: Artist's Portraits published by 'Art News & Review' 1949-1960* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1989), p.11. Sylvester had evidently been acquainted with Denvir for some time, since a letter to Michael Hamburger (undated but c.1944-6, Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection, BC Hamburger) lists him as a prospective contributor to Sylvester's symposium *The Decline of the Theatre*. Denvir, like Sylvester, had also written for *Counterpoint* and *Orpheus*.

⁵ Anon., 'Artists and Critics', *Art News and Review*, 11 August 1951, p.2. The number of galleries listed in the paper more than trebled between its inception (less than 50) and 1962 (over 150). Chart in Jenkins and Fox-Pitt, p.10.

1952 Sylvester wrote twenty-six articles for the paper, alongside other regular contributors including Alloway, Berger and the architectural critic Reyner Banham.⁶ Sylvester's articles for *Art News and Review* were mostly between around 550 and 700 words, allowing him to briefly review one or two exhibitions. Notable exceptions to this formula were the four profiles (on Freud, Heron, Léger and Jean Hélion, all of whom he knew personally) which he wrote for the magazine's 'portrait of an artist' feature.⁷ Correspondence with Hélion in particular shows how the French artist communicated with Sylvester over his text, making comments about aspects of it that he approved of and disliked.⁸

Sylvester stopped writing for *Art News and Review* in 1951, and the following year began contributing regularly to the BBC publication *The Listener*. Sylvester was one of a group of critics, also including Quentin Bell and Eric Newton, who replaced the paper's previous art critic Wyndham Lewis after he resigned in 1951.⁹ Sylvester had already broadcast occasionally on the BBC French Service and Third Programme by this time, but it may rather have been through his work for *The Listener* that Sylvester went on to become a prolific broadcaster on the BBC (Chapter 3). *The Listener* soon became

⁶ However, Sylvester apparently thought there was scope for a weekly rival to the fortnightly *Art News and Review*, as he asked Kahnweiler whether either Leiris or Kahnweiler himself would be Paris correspondent for such a magazine. Letter from Sylvester to Kahnweiler, 23 May 1950, TGA 200816/2/2/16.

⁷ For this series artists were encouraged to provide a self-portrait drawing for republication. In the process the magazine accumulated a significant collection of these drawings, now in the Tate Archive (TGA 8214.1-122). See also Jenkins and Fox-Pitt, in which the drawings are reproduced.

⁸ Letters from Hélion to Sylvester, 1950-1, TGA 200816/2/2/10. It may have been in relation to this text that Hélion gifted Sylvester the 1948 drawing which was in the 2002 Sotheby's sale of Sylvester's collection (lot 68).

⁹ Lewis resigned from *The Listener* on 10 May 1951 after he was afflicted by blindness (Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p.394). Sylvester began a regular column for *The Listener* in March 1952 (his first two articles in the paper had been adapted from *Third Programme* broadcasts).

Sylvester's main source of work, and at his most prolific (1954-6) he was writing one article every month for the paper. Unlike the youthful *Art News and Review* (which Sylvester rarely wrote for after 1951), *The Listener* had existed since 1929. J.R. Ackerley had been its literary editor since 1935, editing texts by Lewis and Herbert Read amongst others.¹⁰ Other art critics writing for *The Listener* at that time included Forge (who credited Sylvester for introducing him not only to *The Listener* but also *The Times* and the BBC), and occasionally Robert Melville.¹¹

The advantages of writing for *The Listener* as opposed to *Art News and Review* were numerous. To begin with, the pay was far better: Forge recalled receiving half a guinea (10/6d) per piece writing for *Art News and Review*, while at *The Listener* Sylvester received £8.8s.- for a short comment and often £15.15s.- for a full-page article).¹² For *The Listener* Sylvester usually wrote full-page columns titled 'Round the London Galleries' or similar, each of around 1150 words (considerably longer than articles in *Art News and Review*), in which Sylvester could discuss exhibitions of interest, or more specific themes of topical interest.¹³ The layout of *The Listener*, which afforded the art column a whole page including a reproduction of an artwork (rare for periodicals of the 1950s), had the dual advantage of making the art page more attractive and allowing writers to refer to an image of a work rather than describe it. *The Listener* also published versions of talks broadcast on the radio (sometimes

¹⁰ On the early years of *The Listener*, see Sam Rose 'The Visual Arts in the BBC's 'The Listener', 1929-39' in *The Burlington Magazine*, September 2013, pp.606-10.

¹¹ Undated letter from Forge to Sylvester, TGA 200816/2/2/23.

¹² Andrew Forge interviewed by Cathy Courtney; Sylvester payslips, BBC WAC RCont 1 David Sylvester Talks file 1 1948-1958. The higher salaries of *The Listener* were probably related to its ability to consistently run at a loss (in the early 1950s this annual loss rose to over £30,000). BBC WAC R43/67/Publications/The Listener: Policy.

¹³ See for example Sylvester, 'Manet and Baudelaire', *The Listener*, 3 March 1955, p.390.

running to several pages), which was appreciated by broadcasters who were thereby paid twice for their work.¹⁴ Finally, *The Listener* reached a much larger and more diverse audience: even though its circulation was falling from a late 1940s peak of over 150,000 it was still comfortably Britain's best-selling weekly of the early 1950s.¹⁵ This was undoubtedly helped by its low price: when *Arts News and Review* was launched in 1949 (as a low-budget operation) it was priced at 6d.; at the same time the loss-making *The Listener* was priced at 3d.¹⁶

For much of the time Sylvester was writing regularly for *The Listener*, he was also involved with *Encounter*, which was launched in 1953, funded by the Committee for Cultural Freedom (CCF), a conduit for CIA funds which financed journals across the world to promote pro-American policies.¹⁷ As several scholars have demonstrated, periodicals such as *Encounter* were used during the Cold War to promote American ideas of freedom as a means of countering Communism.¹⁸ The CCF was keen to gain a foothold in England,

¹⁴ In Sylvester's case this happened several times, including 'Contemporary Sculpture' (1951), 'The Paintings of Francis Bacon' (1952), 'Test Cricket as a Restrictive Practice' (1956), 'A New Bronze by Henry Moore' (1958), and numerous interviews.

¹⁵ Its circulation was 134,913 in 1951/52 and 130,250 in 1952/53 (BBC WAC R43/67/Publications/The Listener: Policy).

¹⁶ By 1955 the gap had narrowed slightly, with *The Listener* increasing to 4d. and *Art News and Review* remaining at 6d.

¹⁷ Other examples included *Preuves* in France, *Cuadernos* in Latin America, *Tempo Presente* in Italy, *Quest* in India, and *Jiyu* in Japan. Frances Stonor Saunders *Who Paid the Piper?: the CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, 2nd edn (London: Granta, 2000), pp.213-216.

¹⁸ See for example Saunders; Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983; and J.P. Howard, 'A Political History of the Magazine *Encounter*, 1953-1967' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 1993). The CIA also used exhibitions and competitions such as that for the 'Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner' for similar ends. The ICA's founding director Ewan Phillips claimed that he was 'forced to resign' in response to 'the intrigues of the American [Antony Kloman] who I believe was an emissary of the CIA'. Graham John Hitchen, 'Ways of Picturing: Patrick Heron and John Berger in the 1950s' (unpublished thesis, University of Kent, 1989), p.80. See also Hyman, p.159 and Robert Burstow, 'The Limits of Modernist Art as a 'Weapon of the Cold War':

where the success of the left-wing *New Statesman* (which was selling some 85,000 copies a week at the time) was a source of concern for the organisation. After a failed attempt to gain influence at the long-established periodical *Twentieth Century*, the CCF launched a new magazine, *Encounter*.¹⁹ American journalist Irving Kristol edited the political section of the magazine while the poet Stephen Spender (a founder of *Horizon*, whose success in the 1940s *Encounter* hoped to emulate) oversaw its arts pages. Spender in turn invited Sylvester and his former *Horizon* colleague Peter Watson to work alongside him as arts advisors, although for unknown reasons Watson refused to work with Sylvester.²⁰ As a result, Sylvester became sole art advisor at *Encounter*, where according to J.P. Howard he was 'a fertile source of ideas and an important ally for Spender in the debate over what kind of a magazine *Encounter* would be'.²¹

From the outset *Encounter* aimed to address a wide audience. Spender wanted to produce a magazine that was 'excellent on the creative side, excellent on the arts and unchallengably [sic] disinterested in politics',²² and to 'break away from the kind of articles which the *New Statesman*, the Third Programme and so on have made us rather accustomed to'.²³ Spender and Sylvester were both part of a generation in which many writers became disillusioned by politics and saw the pursuit of aesthetic excellence as

Reassessing the Unknown Patron of the Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner', *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1997), pp.68-80.

¹⁹ Howard, pp.28-9. Saunders (p.110) quotes *Twentieth Century* editor Michael Goodwin as saying 'no good can result to anyone unless the review remains, and is known to remain, independent ... [the review] should be permitted to operate "without strings"'.

²⁰ Stephen Spender's journal for 1979 (unpublished, original journal in Stephen Spender archive, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford [closed]). I am grateful to Watson's biographer Adrian Clark for drawing this reference to my attention.

²¹ Howard, p.40.

²² Spender quoted in Howard, p.55.

²³ Spender quoted in Howard, p.62.

possessing an integrity which explicitly political production could not. In the 1940s Sylvester's politics were in his own words 'crypto-Communist' and close to those of Konni Zilliacus, a far-left member of the Labour Party who like Sylvester contributed to *Tribune*. Sylvester definitively rejected Communism following the 1948 coup d'état in Czechoslovakia, although to the end of his life he retained a belief in Gaitskellism. Apart from occasionally signing letters protesting against UK foreign policy, however, Sylvester never ventured into politics in his writing: it was his natural inclination to provide the sort of writing, 'unchallengeably disinterested in politics' that Spender and the CCF required.²⁴ Spender, meanwhile was a former member of the Communist Party who had contributed to the anthology *The God that Failed: A Confession*, in which several notable ex-Communists explained why they had become disillusioned with Communist ideology.

Encounter tried to remain accessible: contributions were rejected if considered too esoteric for a wide public, while essays that were accepted often had their footnotes removed and titles changed to this end.²⁵ Even so, it never became as influential as intended: its circulation never rose above 20,000 per month during the 1950s (and many of those sales were in the US, where the magazine was widely available), while the popularity of the *New Statesman* continued unabated.²⁶ Rather than reviving the success of *Horizon*, *Encounter* perhaps proved, in the words of *Twentieth Century's* George

²⁴ TGA 200816/5/1/10; Wroe (para. 37 of 45). Letters signed by Sylvester are listed in appendix.

²⁵ Howard, p.63.

²⁶ The circulation of *Encounter* peaked just short of 40,000 per issue in 1964, by which time Kristol's replacement Melvin Lasky was 'concentrating on raising circulation, reaching a broad audience, and addressing political issues at the expense of arts coverage'. Sylvester was very rarely contributing to the magazine by this time. Howard, p.163.

Lichtheim, that 'the whole *Horizon* period is now very much a thing of the past'.²⁷ Scholarship on *Encounter* has tended to agree with this assessment of the magazine as trying to prolong a modernist culture whose day had passed: Howard saw *Encounter* as taking a 'distinctly sceptical—even snobbish' approach to popular culture, while in his recent *Cold War Modernists* Greg Barnhisel claimed 'a melancholy and self-aware belatedness, a wistful resignation, colored *Encounter's* modernism.'²⁸

However, Sylvester's work at the magazine shows that this elegiac view of *Encounter's* cultural criticism is not entirely accurate. Sylvester contributed eighteen articles to the magazine between 1954 and 1966, split quite evenly between art and film.²⁹ The varied content of these articles perhaps reflects Sylvester's advisory role, which would have given him more scope to suggest ideas than a regular contributor would.³⁰ In addition to his film reviews (discussed later in this chapter) Sylvester wrote profiles of Malevich and Matisse, a prize-winning report on the 1954 Venice Biennale, one of his very few texts about photography, a 'prose-poem' about Bacon, and his well-known critique of John Bratby and Jack Smith 'The Kitchen Sink'.³¹

²⁷ Howard, pp.29, 152.

²⁸ Howard, p.147; Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp.165-6.

²⁹ In one edition of *Encounter* Sylvester was described as 'an art critic by vocation and a film critic through temptation' (*Encounter*, April 1955, p.3).

³⁰ Sylvester suggested devoting 'almost a whole issue' to the Venice Biennale, which Spender in a letter to François Bondy (founder of the CCF's influential French publication *Preuves*), described as 'very much the kind of project in which *Encounter* would really be serving the cultural interests of the Congress [the CCF], without delivering any political or propagandist message'. Howard, p.40.

³¹ David Sylvester, 'Comment on a Photographic Portrait', *Encounter*, March 1954, p.25; 'The Venice Biennale', *Encounter*, September 1954, pp.54-60; 'The Kitchen Sink', *Encounter*, December 1954, pp.61-63; 'Death of a Wild Animal', *Encounter*, January 1955, pp.60-62; 'Epstein in Blackpool', *Encounter*, November 1955, pp.50-51; 'At the Tate Gallery', *Encounter*, September 1956, pp.65-68; 'In Camera', *Encounter*, April 1957, pp.20-22; 'Kasimir Malevich', *Encounter*, May 1960, pp.48-52. 'The Venice Biennale' won 'a prize, sponsored by the Ente Provinciale per il Turismo and the Ente

In addition to his own writing, Sylvester's editorial work for *Encounter* included commissioning Willing to write an obituary for Jackson Pollock in 1956,³² 'rewriting' Freud's 'Some Thoughts on Painting' for publication (a similar role to that which he had previously performed with Bacon on his statement about Matthew Smith),³³ and commissioning articles by contributors such as American critic Harold Rosenberg.³⁴ Rosenberg's 'On the Uses of Art Books' was part of an April 1959 'new art books' special edited by Sylvester which ran to over thirty pages, and featured contributions from a number of prestigious writers including W.H. Auden and the philosopher Stuart Hampshire (another of Sylvester's heroes).³⁵

While the exposure of the CIA as the source of *Encounter's* backing in the 1960s has inevitably raised questions about earlier knowledge of its involvement amongst magazine staff, Sylvester, like Spender, always denied any knowledge of this. Reminded of the CIA's involvement many years later Sylvester replied 'jolly good for them. But no-one ever told me what to write or say'.³⁶ The absence of overt political comment in Sylvester's writing, combined with a love of American jazz and cinema made Sylvester a good fit

Autonomo della Biennale, for the best foreign criticisms of the 1954 Venice Biennale' ('About Our Authors', *Encounter*, March 1955, p.80).

³² Victor Willing, 'Thoughts After a Car Crash', *Encounter*, October 1956, pp.66-8. Sylvester later wrote of the article: 'as I re-read it today my vanity tingles agreeably at the thought that I commissioned it'. David Sylvester, 'Writings by Victor Willing: Introductory note by David Sylvester' in *Victor Willing: A Retrospective Exhibition 1952-85* (Whitechapel Gallery, 1986), pp.57-9 (p.59).

³³ Sylvester himself described himself as 'amanuensis' to Freud in this instance (Hyman, p.108). Freud also developed his ideas around this time through a BBC talk and a lecture in Oxford around this time (conversation with Feaver, 1 April 2014).

³⁴ Correspondence between Sylvester and Rosenberg, TGA 200816/2/2/11.

³⁵ Sylvester interviewed by Wollheim, British Library. Other contributors were Wollheim, G.F. Hudson, Lawrence Gowing, Michael Kitson, John Irwin, Tom Hess, Karl Miller, Basil Taylor and an anonymous contributor.

³⁶ Wroe (para. 39 of 45). Around the time of the CIA revelations Spender found out at around the same time that his own salary as editor had been paid for by the British Foreign Office through a conduit (Saunders, pp. 176-7, 384; Howard, p.183).

for *Encounter*. The only suggestion I have found of possible attempts to influence editorial decision-making in the visual arts pages of *Encounter* comes in a letter in which Sylvester wrote that he fought to prevent an essay by Read from being published in the magazine despite 'a good deal of social pressure' on Spender to do so (presumably from Lasky and the CCF).³⁷

Sylvester's friend Philip French, however, believed that the critic was aware of the CIA funding. French also supplied a particularly clear instance of the magazine's political ideology in which it deliberately commissioned what he called a 'Rottweiler attack' on Stanley Kubrick's 1964 Cold War satire *Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, a film much admired by both Sylvester and French. Sylvester (perhaps naively under the circumstances) recommended French as a reviewer of the film for *Encounter*, and *Encounter* staff asked French about his opinion of the film. Presumably because French was so enthusiastic about the film, *Encounter* instead engaged the poet Robert Conquest, who wrote a damning review of the film.³⁸

Despite the best efforts of *Encounter*, the *New Statesman* remained influential and its circulation rising under Kingley Martin's editorship to

³⁷ Sylvester wrote to Godfrey Smith, editor of the *Sunday Times Magazine*: 'Herbert Read on Jan Le Witt. This feeble article on this mediocre artist pursues me like a recurrent nightmare. Two or three years ago, before it was published in *Quadrum*, I had to read it for *Encounter*. A good deal of social pressure had been put on Stephen Spender to publish it, so that that time I had to argue the reasons why it should not be published.' Letter from Sylvester to Smith, 21 July 1965, TGA 200816/2/1/1082. Sylvester is referring to Herbert Read, 'Jan Le Witt', *Quadrum* 17, 1964, pp.119-24.

³⁸ Interview with Philip French, 11 April 2014. See Robert Conquest, 'Bombshell', *Encounter*, May 1964, pp.56-8. Sylvester himself discussed the film in 'The Cinema of Catastrophe', 'New Comment', broadcast on BBC Third Programme, 4 February 1964, transcript TGA 200816/8/1/6; and 'The Critics', broadcast on BBC Home Service, 27 December 1964 microfilmed transcript in BBC WAC.

100,000 in the 1960s.³⁹ Such was the difference between the political and cultural pages of the *New Statesman* that Martin often felt he was editing two papers (Spender lamented that the cultural pages in *Encounter* have the same autonomy).⁴⁰ Indeed, when Berger resigned from the paper in 1961 he identified its cultural policy (which was generally more conservative than its political pages) as one of his main reasons for leaving.⁴¹

Sylvester's start at the *New Statesman*, in the 1940s, had been inauspicious. After Benedict Nicolson recommended him to the paper, its literary editor V.S. Pritchett asked him to write two book reviews.⁴² An article about *The Artist's Society* by Gino Severini was never published, while a review of recent books on Chagall and Kokoschka only appeared after revision, following Pritchett's initial criticism that:

[...] You have gone on. The trouble is partly that you want always to write an essay about the artist and art & life. What you are doing in the first place is reviewing two books. I think that if you had remembered that it might have disciplined the show [...] we like your enthusiasm and your viewpoint. But there must be for our purposes a different kind of approach. We are not an avant garde art quarterly. But merely the poor old New Statesman [...]⁴³

Sylvester wrote a handful of reviews for the *New Statesman* in 1948-9, but evidently not enough to persuade the paper that he would make a suitable

³⁹ Neil Berry, *Articles of Faith: the Story of British Intellectual Journalism*, 2nd expanded edn (Ewell: Waywiser, 2008), p.145; Miller, Karl, *Dark Horses: an Experience of Literary Journalism* (London: Picador, 1998), p.56.

⁴⁰ Howard p.121.

⁴¹ Letter from Berger to John Freeman, 21 January 1961, SxMs60/3/3/2, New Statesman archive, University of Sussex Special Collections at the Keep.

⁴² Letter from Pritchett to Sylvester, 7 October 1947, TGA 200816/2/1/826. Whiteley claims that after Alloway was recommended to the *New Statesman* by Charles Johnson around the same he was 'rejected because of his lack of university education' and that 'the rejection bred in Alloway a disdain for the conventional relationships in Britain at the time between class, university education, institutions, and opportunity' (Whiteley, p.9). In fact, Sylvester was given opportunities at the *New Statesman* despite having had a similar education to Alloway, proving that university education was not a prerequisite.

⁴³ Letter from Pritchett to Sylvester, 24 November 1947, TGA 200816/2/1/826.

regular art critic. When Heron was replaced as art critic in 1950 it was Berger (no doubt much to Sylvester's chagrin) who was given the position.⁴⁴

After writing for the other publications mentioned above for much of the 1950s, Sylvester spent six months deputizing for Berger at the *New Statesman* in 1957 (while Berger was writing his first novel, *A Painter of our Time*). He then returned to *The Listener* temporarily before permanently replacing Berger at the *New Statesman* late in 1959. Sylvester now had a job he had long coveted, working with 'the best sub-editor I have ever had' in Karl Miller,⁴⁵ and in June 1961 he reached an agreement that he would be paid 30 guineas per article, regardless of length.⁴⁶ Sylvester himself evidently retained a high regard for his *New Statesman* work, as much of it was reprinted in *About Modern Art* (as opposed to very few articles from earlier in his career). However, after writing consistently for the paper for over two years, Sylvester gave up his position mid-way through 1962 (the paper's difficulty in finding an acceptable replacement can be ascertained from the fact that in fourteen issues of the *New Statesman* from July-December 1962 there was no visual arts coverage at all).

Sylvester wrote retrospectively that he felt compromised by the position: 'I [...] lacked the space to milk my ideas when they were worth it, and I didn't feel I was walking around with an inexhaustible mine of good

⁴⁴ Heron was replaced at the *New Statesman* because its literary editor T.C. Worsley felt the paper had had enough of his 'abstruse' ruminations on pictorial space. Patrick Heron, *Painter as Critic: Patrick Heron: Selected Writings*, ed. by Mel Gooding (London: Tate Gallery, 1998), pp.viii-ix.

Berger, like Sylvester, had previously written for *Tribune* and was 'taken up' by Nicolson after Sylvester introduced them (Sylvester interviewed by Wollheim).

⁴⁵ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.22

⁴⁶ The agreement stipulated that Sylvester would write at least twenty pieces per year for the paper. Memorandum from John Freeman to 'Mr Morgan', 26 June 1961, SxMs60/4/3/1/18, *New Statesman* archive, University of Sussex Special Collections at the Keep.

ones'.⁴⁷ He also said that 'it was too easy to write attacking art criticism. And I made a deliberate decision that I would only write about art I liked'.⁴⁸ What Sylvester didn't mention is that for his arrangement with the *New Statesman* to function, he needed a second art critic to alternate with him, and he was frustrated that at the same time as overlooking his own suggestions (including Michael Fried, who was living in London during 1961-2) the paper had not found someone to carry out this role regularly.⁴⁹ One of the critics who sometimes did so was Edward Lucie-Smith, who claimed that Sylvester refused to review exhibitions by well-known artists he disliked (such as Michael Ayrton) and that in addition Sylvester was sometimes so late in delivering his copy that he 'had to be sent to the printer to dictate it on to the machines—still making changes as he did so'.⁵⁰

After leaving the *New Statesman* 'on an impulse', Sylvester soon began working at the new *Sunday Times Magazine*, in a role combining editorial and writing responsibilities.⁵¹ The magazine had been launched earlier that year with Mark Boxer as editor, becoming the first British publication modelled on the American format of full-colour magazines consisting of up to fifty per cent

⁴⁷ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.22.

⁴⁸ Gayford, 'The Eye's Understanding', p.39.

⁴⁹ Letter from Sylvester to Freeman, 27 September 1962, TGA 200816/2/1/826. At this time Fried was studying philosophy at University College London with Wollheim and Hampshire, and writing art criticism for *Arts*. Fried, Michael, 'An Introduction to My Art Criticism' in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp.1-74 (p.6).

⁵⁰ Edward Lucie-Smith, 'Brought to Book', *Art Review*, October 1996, pp.56-7. *Studio International* editor Peter Townsend told his brother William that Sylvester was 'the most irritating contributor he has ever had to deal with, endlessly explaining his reasons for procrastination, without sense of date time or even common obligation'. William Townsend Journals, vol XXXVII, entry for 22 October 1966, UCL Special Collections.

⁵¹ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', pp.21-2. In 1963-4 Sylvester wrote seventeen articles for the magazine.

advertisements.⁵² This format was highly attractive to advertisers at a time before colour television, and the combination of well-illustrated articles and elegant adverts gave the magazine a visual identity in tune with the colour and exuberance of the early 1960s.⁵³ In 1969 Miller recalled that when it first emerged the magazine was 'new and smart and swinging', and if, as Miller claimed, the magazine 'can claim to have assisted the expansions and experiments associated with the art of the Sixties', Sylvester certainly played a significant part in that.⁵⁴ As an associate editor his job including proposing ideas and vetting other suggestions for art features, finding contributors and editing contributions. It was out of the art coverage in the *Sunday Times Magazine* that the seminal record of 1960s British art *Private View* emerged,⁵⁵ while Sylvester was also involved in commissioning artists including Peter Blake, David Hockney (who William Scott dismissed as a 'colour supplement artist') and Philip Sutton to produce original work for publication in the magazine.⁵⁶

⁵² According to Sylvester 'the fact is that it was he [Boxer] personally who showed how to transform photomagazines from penny plain to tuppence coloured'. Sylvester in Mark Amory, ed., *The Collected and Recollected Marc* (London: Fourth Estate, 1993), p.30.

⁵³ Miller, *Dark Horses*, p.129. The magazine's wealth also meant it could pay Sylvester much more than the *New Statesman*: in 1966 he received £1000 per annum for editorial work plus £40 per thousand words he wrote, which included an agreement not to write for the magazine's rivals (Letter from Boxer to Sylvester, 31 January 1966, TGA 200816/2/1/590). In 1965 Sylvester complained to Michael Levey that he had received £27-13-4 from the *New Statesman* for an article on Goya of approximately 2,500 words which took him '3 or 4 weeks' to write. Letter from Sylvester to Levey, 30 April 1969, TGA 200816/2/2/18. The article was David Sylvester, 'Here Comes the Bogeyman', *New Statesman*, 2 April 1965, pp.542-4.

⁵⁴ Miller, 'A Sunday Dilemma: Getaway People and Ghetto People', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 14 December 1969, pp.27-32 (p.32).

⁵⁵ Lord Snowdon, who regularly photographed artists for the magazine, wrote that 'the more features we did for the magazine, the more we were asked to do, until the point came when the two critics I was working with, David Sylvester and John Russell, suggested we did a book'. Snowdon, Lord Anthony, *Snowdon: Personal View* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), p.119. I am grateful to Lisa Tickner for drawing my attention to this reference.

⁵⁶ See 'Peter Blake in Hollywood', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 15 November 1964, pp.27-31. Hockney and Sutton's work appears never to have been published (in Hockney's

Sylvester's editorial work on the magazine fulfilled a similar function to his appointment to various committees (such as the Arts Council Art Panel and Tate board of trustees) during the 1960s. In this way he could indirectly facilitate and contribute towards arts policy by arguing in favour of projects he supported.⁵⁷ Sylvester worked for the magazine until 1972, when he resigned and was replaced by Bruce Chatwin, although he had taken up the less time-consuming role of Art Consultant at the magazine after agreeing to edit the René Magritte catalogue raisonné in 1969.⁵⁸

2.2 New Realism

Sylvester's writings about Klee, while never producing a coherent theory of 'afocalism' (a word he often used to describe similar 'all-over' art), nonetheless pointed the way towards Sylvester's writing on the two artists with whom he was most closely associated with in the 1950s, Bacon and Giacometti. In the introductory essay to *About Modern Art*, Sylvester quoted from a lecture he gave at the Royal College of Art titled 'Towards a New Realism', in which he said the artist:

Must show that experiences are fleeting, that every experience dissolves into the next ... must produce images which are not

case owing to the Kennedy assassination taking place shortly before his work was due to be published, and resulting in the space allocated for Hockney being taken up by a tribute to Kennedy instead. Christopher Simon Sykes *Hockney: the Biography. Volume 1, 1937-1975* (London: Century, 2011), pp.134-5; and Marco Livingstone, 'Montgomery Clift through the eyes of Peter Blake', *B'05 : Buletina = Boletín = Bulletin*, no.1, 2006, pp. 111-138. For Hockney as 'colour supplement artist' see Andrew Brighton, 'Hockney's Courage' in *David Hockney 1960-1968: A Marriage of Styles*, ed. by Alex Farquharson and others (Nottingham: Nottingham Contemporary, 2009), pp.73-80 (p.73).

⁵⁷ For instance, Sylvester wrote 'it was almost entirely because of my nagging a resistant exhibitions committee of the Arts Council that Lucian [Freud] had the first of his retrospectives at the Hayward [in 1974]'. Letter from Sylvester to Calvocoressi, 31 March 1997, TGA 200816/2/1/1006.

⁵⁸ In 1969 Sylvester also resigned as a trustee of the Tate, from the British Film Institute production board, and from the Contemporary Art Society.

scenes, set up apart from the observer and seeming capable of existing when there is no observer present ... but must be images in which the observer participates, images whose space makes sense only in relation to the position in it occupied by an observer.⁵⁹

The works of Bacon and Giacometti were used to illustrate this, along with examples from Klee, Cubism, and Impressionism. The lecture was unusually polemical by Sylvester's standards but only in advancing the idea, present in much of his writing of the 1950s, that a modern conception of realism must take into account the subjectivity of both artist and viewer and to embody individual experience of the world. The extent to which this remained a preoccupation ten years later can be seen in a memo dated 16 January 1961 for a planned publication or lecture series headed 'the Eye and the I':

This might now be retitled "Art as Investigation". It would begin by taking for granted that with Impressionism or just before it there arose a kind of art the main concern of which was not the finished product but the process of discovery [...] The book would then pursue various consequences of this position. It could do so in terms of themes or it could do so—this seems more likely—in terms of individual artists, say, Monet, Cezanne, Bonnard, Picasso/Braque, Giacometti, de Kooning. The Klee idea would also come into it as a conceptual version of the same preoccupation.⁶⁰

While Giacometti and Bacon were Sylvester's key artists in the 1950s, his view of modern art was rooted in the innovations of Impressionism. Sylvester was critical of the 1957 Monet exhibition at the Tate Gallery specifically because its organisers, Douglas Cooper and John Richardson, had neglected Monet's late works, and therefore overlooked what Sylvester considered most significant about the artist: 'Professor Cooper does not seem to have appreciated the fact that one of the essential differences between modern art and earlier art is that it is never possible to be sure when a modern work is 'finished', that in a

⁵⁹ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.17; manuscript relating to the original lecture is in TGA 200816/4/1/25.

⁶⁰ TGA 200816/7/15. In 'Curriculum Vitae' (p.23) Sylvester gave *The Eye and the I* as an example of how 'the best thinking I did in the Fifties never got into print'.

sense a modern work is not finishable, that modern artists are constantly uncertain whether their works are finished or not'.⁶¹ For Sylvester, the modern artwork had to be something that the viewer completed, so it was important for it not to look entirely finished.⁶²

Sylvester also had in mind this question of 'finish' in 1955, when he wrote 'End of the Streamlined Era in Painting and Sculpture', an article in the *Times* that was 'the nearest thing to a personal manifesto that I had so far published'.⁶³ Again clearly inspired by Giacometti (an exhibition of whose work Sylvester organised that year), the article describes a shift from the smooth or 'streamlined' surfaces of Brancusi and other artists of the interwar period to rough or unfinished ones in art by postwar artists such as Auerbach. Sylvester considered this a difference 'between post-war and pre-war thinking: that we now accept imperfection and we no longer have Flaubert as an ideal but rather Dostoevsky'.⁶⁴ Wittgenstein's ideas about subjectivity were again to the fore here. Sylvester began his first article about Bacon by repeating ideas familiar from his earlier writings on Klee:

There are any number of ways of representing the world, and all of them are equally valid. Simply because, as J.Z. Young told us, 'the brain of each of us does literally create his or her own world'. So the

⁶¹ David Sylvester, 'Monet, More or Less', *New Statesman*, 5 October 1957, pp.413-4 (p.414). This passage closely resembles that in Sylvester's assertion in *Looking at Giacometti* that 'the question of the unfinished and the unfinishable is, of course, one of the things that modern art is about'. David Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), p.17.

⁶² The 2016 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition 'Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible' is not only of general relevance to Sylvester's thinking, but includes several specific works that he wrote about by artists including Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas* (David Sylvester, 'Satyr vs. God', *Vanity Fair*, 1984 [issue unidentified but p.72; copy in TGA 200816/8/1/5]), de Kooning's *Woman I* (David Sylvester, 'The Birth of *Woman I*', *Burlington Magazine*, April 1995, pp.220-32) and Robert Morris' *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (David Sylvester, 'Box with the Sound of its Own Making' in David Sylvester and Michael Compton, *Robert Morris* (London: Tate Gallery, 1971), pp.10-11).

⁶³ *About Modern Art*, p.49.

⁶⁴ David Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), p.52. Sylvester was referring to de Kooning's indifference to finish.

artist's task is not to paint things 'as they are'—the phrase indeed, is meaningless—but to make us believe that things are as he paints them.⁶⁵

So for Sylvester painting is a less an attempt by artists to communicate common meanings than to represent convincingly their own distinctive realities. This approach has much in common with Rosenberg's essay 'the American Action Painters' (first published in 1952, shortly after the 'Towards a New Realism' lecture), which Sylvester much admired, and which similarly displaced the question of what to paint from a question of communal subject matter onto the personal impulses of the individual.

Sylvester's emphasis on the disregard of perfection and finish in postwar art has much to do with his conviction that modern art was, seen in historical context, part of the aftermath of the great movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an essay that seems pertinent for both the art Sylvester wrote about and Sylvester's criticism itself, Boris Groys wrote that whereas the avant-garde was once a source of revolutionary energy, by the mid-twentieth century it was merely a way of commenting upon earlier art.⁶⁶ Sylvester wrote in a draft text on Giacometti that both surrealism and abstract expressionism 'have cut their losses and settled for limited aims as well as limited success [...] [they have] felt the shock of the Dadaist critique and set out to see what can be salvaged from the wreck'.⁶⁷ He believed that Cézanne was the last truly great artist and that the 'wreck' of

⁶⁵ David Sylvester, 'The Paintings of Francis Bacon', *The Listener*, 3 January 1952, pp.28-9 (p.28). The quotation from Young (a professor of Anatomy at UCL) had also been used previously in 'Towards a New Realism'. In Bacon and Sylvester's 1973 interview Bacon says he has recently been reading a 'very brilliant' book by Young, who Bacon says he used to see at the Gargoyle Club. Transcript for Sylvester-Bacon interview 3, session 2 (recorded July 14 1973), TGA 200816/4/2/9.

⁶⁶ Boris Groys, 'Clement Greenberg: *Art and Culture: Critical Essays, 1961*' in *The Books that Shaped Art History*, ed. by Richard Shone and John-Paul Stonard (London: Thames & Hudson), pp.128-139).

⁶⁷ TGA 200816/5/4/3/18.

Dada during the Great War was followed by a series of attempts to reconcile its revelations with the desire to continue making art in the great tradition.⁶⁸ This framework explains much about the art which Sylvester favoured, including artists such as Bacon, Giacometti and Jasper Johns, all of whom very consciously responded to a sense of belatedness with regards to the tradition of Western art, refusing easy solutions which overlooked the 'wreck' of Dada and taking sceptical approaches towards art-making painting as an activity without jettisoning the delight in sensuality and materiality which characterised their precursors. The other likelihood is that this viewpoint was imposed by the postwar 'restrictive practice', and that working with limited options was in some sense a metaphor for the experience of living in postwar Britain (this is one way of viewing another of Sylvester's favourite artists, William Coldstream).

Sylvester considered these artists ambitious because they embraced the problems inherent in representation, which he interpreted as a way for artists at this juncture to challenge themselves rather than allow themselves the liberty of painting in an abstract idiom.⁶⁹ The quotation in the previous paragraph shows that Sylvester considered abstract expressionism and surrealism as limited in comparison to Giacometti's aims in his figurative work,

⁶⁸ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.21.

⁶⁹ David Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* (Thames & Hudson, 2000), p.196. In a 1964 television programme about de Kooning Sylvester said 'I would say that figuration in art is likely to go further than abstraction. This is not because there's any special virtue in figuration for its own sake. It's because figuration offers a resistance. It creates a tension. It makes the work exist on two contradictory levels at once, as in this drawing by Bonnard where the marks have their own life as a dance on paper but also a precise statement of another kind of life'. David Sylvester, *Ten Modern Artists: De Kooning*, broadcast on BBC1, 7 June 1964, transcript TGA 200816/5/6/3/5.

which helps to explain why he did not write about Giacometti's earlier surrealist works in any detail during the artist's lifetime.⁷⁰

Sylvester's early criticism on Bacon and Giacometti has been well-documented in *The Battle for Realism*, but the importance of Coldstream in his writing is still under-appreciated, largely because Coldstream's reputation has languished since Sylvester and Lawrence Gowing's 1990 Coldstream exhibition at the Tate Gallery. In fact, Coldstream was one of the most important artists in Sylvester's writing in the 1950s and early 1960s for two reasons. One was Sylvester's proximity to him as a regular lecturer at the Slade School of Fine Art, where Coldstream was director (such was Coldstream's influence that Sylvester confessed to 'the feeling that I was living my life as part of a dream in the mind of Coldstream').⁷¹ The second, meanwhile, is that in two of Sylvester's major articles on British art of the early 1960s he makes it clear that he considers Coldstream to be one of Britain's two leading painters (alongside Bacon), as well as 'the leader of a school' emulating his meticulous measuring technique.⁷² In the 1980s he retained this conviction, and suggested that artists such as Victor Willing and Michael Andrews developed by assimilating the dual influences of Bacon and Coldstream in different ways.⁷³ Coldstream had other notable advocates at this time, including Forge, Gowing and Stokes (all painter-critics)—but it was rare for him to receive such

⁷⁰ In a draft, Sylvester wrote 'Giacometti, after being a Surrealist in his early days, has set out to attempt larger aims, to represent external reality as he sees it' (TGA 200816/5/4/3/18). Compare this with the published equivalent 'Giacometti, after a period of adherence to Surrealism, has set out to attempt to represent external reality as he sees it' (Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p.20).

⁷¹ Sylvester, 'Writings by Victor Willing', p.58.

⁷² David Sylvester, 'Dark Sunlight', *Sunday Times Colour Magazine*, 2 June 1963, pp.3-15 (p.3); David Sylvester, 'Aspects of Contemporary British Art', *Texas Quarterly*, Autumn 1961, pp.118-28 (p.126).

⁷³ Sylvester, 'Writings by Victor Willing', p.58.

high-profile endorsement as in the *Sunday Times Magazine*, where one of these articles was published.

If Bacon represented the progression of a *malerisch* tendency in modern art which Sylvester associated with precursors such as Soutine, the critic saw Coldstream and the Euston Road School (which included Stokes and Pasmore, both artists he admired) as emerging from the perceptual tradition of Cézanne. In turn, there are evident similarities between the work of Coldstream and Giacometti: the latter even visited the Slade and went for dinner with Sylvester and Coldstream when visiting London for the first time for his 1955 exhibition.⁷⁴ More interesting, however, is the way that Sylvester seems to have considered Coldstream's method of working, with his measuring system (whose limitations he wryly admitted) and his willingness to let a sitter's attention span determine the outcome of a work, as a peculiarly English version of the sort of Taoist mentality that Sylvester later ascribed to a host of mainly American artists (such as Cy Twombly and the composer and artist John Cage). Sylvester delighted in observing the way that all of these artists worked in a way that deliberately relinquished control over the outcome of their works and encouraged unforeseen outcomes.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ The similarities and differences between the two artists are discussed in Bruce Laughton, 'Coldstream and Giacometti in London', *British Art Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Spring 2009), pp.79-85. Young British painters of the 1950s were as inspired by Giacometti's example as Turnbull and Paolozzi. Auerbach said 'an artist like Giacometti offered hope, to continue and to give everything for a truthful art without any compromises'. Auerbach quoted from a 1987 interview in Catherine Lampert, *Frank Auerbach: Speaking and Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015).

⁷⁵ See David Sylvester, 'On Letting Alone', *Barnett Newman, Joseph Beuys, Cy Twombly, Yves Klein, Jasper Johns / with texts from Chuang Tzu* (London: Anthony d'Offay, 1993).

2.3 Art and the Public

Another artist who Sylvester clearly had in mind when writing 'End of the Streamlined Era' in 1955 was Germaine Richier. Later that same year he restated ideas from the article in a catalogue essay for Richier's Hanover Gallery exhibition which began 'nobody, perhaps, occupies so central, so crucial, a position in contemporary sculpture as Germaine Richier'.⁷⁶ The exhibition was reviewed by both Berger and Alloway, whose responses both engage with Sylvester's text and demonstrate the differences in their criticism. Alloway, who was then closely linked to the Independent Group based at the ICA, reviewed the exhibition positively while demonstrating a very different viewpoint to Sylvester:

David Sylvester's part of the catalogue is concerned with Richier's technique, about which he is illuminating, and with an interpretation of her content, which is controversial. He suggests that her sculptures symbolise both a "physical assault upon the human body" and a conflation of "the human species with other organisms, animal and vegetable". There are two ideas here, though Sylvester treats them together. The assault on the body is one thing, the crossing of the body with what used to be called the animal and vegetable kingdoms is another. A beating-up does not change the body you started out with in the way that metamorphosis does.⁷⁷

Alloway not only avoids but denies the violence in Richier's sculpture, preferring to interpret the work using the optimistic anthropological language favoured within the Independent Group: 'this flow of metamorphosis assumes not a violent world but a natural state of plenitude to which man is a contributing part'. Sylvester subsequently reviewed Richier's exhibition again for *The Times*, where he specifically rejected the reading of Alloway, who considered the

⁷⁶ David Sylvester, 'On Germaine Richier', *Germaine Richier: Exhibition of Sculpture* (London: 1955), n.p.

⁷⁷ Lawrence Alloway, 'Conflated Kingdoms', *Art News and Review*, 15 October 1955, p.5.

significance of Richier's work to reside in the way it represented metamorphosis. Sylvester wrote that Richier's sculpture 'with its bird-men, its humanized spiders and praying mantises, its hybrids of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, belongs to that area of imagery in modern art which is already rapidly being taken over by the popular arts. This is hardly indicative of an original or profound imagination'.⁷⁸ What distinguished Richier in Sylvester's eyes were the 'qualities of great sculpture' he found in her work: the 'marvellously firm and taut' contours which make the figures 'warm and vibrant and entirely affirmative of life' and about which Alloway said nothing.⁷⁹

Berger, whose article 'Murder (followed by disembowelling)' took its title from the catalogue's other text (by André Pieyre de Mandiargues), chose instead to focus exclusively on what he considered the despair in Richier's work:

Ninety-nine people out of a hundred, if persuaded to visit the Hanover Gallery to see the bronzes by the much-discussed French sculptress, the late Germaine Richier, would be disgusted [...] If the hundredth person happened to be a fashionable intellectual (which most of the visitors will be) he would talk of Kafka and Giacometti [...] and would admire the works for their originality, their lack of sentimentality (as he would put it) and the violent power with which they express putrefaction, torture, jungle life and the atavistic instincts. "Richier's performance," writes David Sylvester approvingly, "is a way of finding out how much her victims can stand up to."⁸⁰

Berger's review demonstrated his rhetorical skill, dismissing Richier's art as irrelevant on the basis that only a 'fashionable intellectual' like Sylvester could

⁷⁸ [David Sylvester], 'Hanover Gallery / Mme. Germaine Richier's Sculpture', *Times*, 24 October 1955, p.3.

⁷⁹ Sylvester himself would comment soon after on how the monster in the sci-fi film *The Quatermass Xperiment* (dir. Val Guest, 1955) resembled Richier's sculptures, amongst other artworks. David Sylvester, 'The Anglicization of Outer-Space', *Encounter*, January 1956, pp.69-72.

⁸⁰ John Berger, 'Murder (followed by disembowelling)', *New Statesman and Nation*, 22 October 1955, p.506.

enjoy it. He acknowledges Richier's skill but finds it of little value because 'in a disintegrating culture the sophisticated attitude is the most likely to act as a catalyst to further disintegration'.⁸¹ It is of a piece with Berger's criticism (which in the 1950s was often directed against Sylvester's writings or exhibitions) in which the political message conveyed by an artwork is more important than its aesthetic qualities.⁸² What Berger's article doesn't address, however, is the fact that Sylvester himself found Richier's works defiantly life-affirming: 'hers [Richier's] is a human image challenged, battered, ruined, and still obstinately human'.⁸³

Where Berger persistently demanded art to provide common meanings comprehensible to all (hence his criticism of Richier), Sylvester's criticism, based in the thinking of Wittgenstein, started from the understanding that each individual understands the world in a different way and modern art should accept and respond to this situation.⁸⁴ Sylvester believed that 'the modern artist who aims at the *inclusiveness* of traditional European art runs up against the difficulty of recovering that inclusiveness without embracing what have become the clichés of the tradition, and the awkwardness arises from trying to have one without the other'.⁸⁵ This is why Sylvester dismissed

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Sylvester believed that a character in Berger's first novel *A Painter of our Time* (1958) was an 'unkind caricature' based on him (Tusa, *On Creativity*, p.254). Sylvester was presumably thinking of the character of 'Marcus Aurelius: an immensely fat man and a well-known critic'. John Berger, *A Painter of Our Time* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958; repr. London: Verso, 2010), p.114.

⁸³ Sylvester, 'On Germaine Richier', n.p.

⁸⁴ An alternative view is that of Juliet Steyn, who wrote 'for Sylvester reality is *angst*, the modern condition of anxiety. We find in art criticism a version of post-war consensus [sic], in which ideological differences, class divisions, structural inequalities in society, have apparently been eroded: the 'universal man' is being created. In contrast, Berger and the Marxist humanists of the 1950s insist upon an art which helps people to recognise themselves, their own conditions, and to alter them.' Juliet Steyn, 'Realism v. Realism in the Fifties', *Art Monthly*, July/August 1984, pp.6-8 (p.7).

⁸⁵ Sylvester, 'Andrews' in *About Modern Art*, pp.163-5 (p.164) (first publ. as 'Michael Andrews', *The Listener*, 16 January 1958, p.105).

Renato Guttuso, who he dubbed the 'red hope of contemporary painting', firstly as 'artistic failure [...] poster-ish [...] muscle-bound' (1950) and subsequently as 'a good journalist in paint' (1955).⁸⁶ Even when writing about Léger, who he considered 'the one great popular artist' of our time', Sylvester's writing was elegiac: the fact that Léger 'has not had more and better chances to build his world in a suitable medium and on a suitable scale is the saddest possible commentary upon the state of art patronage today'.⁸⁷

This was not to say that Sylvester disregarded any relationship between the artist and the wider public: in his application for the position of Director of the Whitechapel Gallery in 1952 Sylvester set out his vision by proposing: 'I would aim at exhibitions whose appeal was not purely aesthetic and which would interest different types of visitors in different ways. In maintaining Whitechapel's didactic tradition, I would try and emphasise especially the relationship of the artist to his patron and public'.⁸⁸

This was one aspect of the dilemma around Sylvester's advocacy of Moore, whose art Sylvester (during his flirtation with Catholicism) had initially been drawn to specifically because of its universality. In his first essay about Moore, in 1944, Sylvester wrote: 'Henry Moore has widely chosen to express Divine Motherhood in an absolutely universal language. His *Mother and Child* is

⁸⁶ David Sylvester, 'Renato Guttuso and Catherine Yarrow: Hanover Gallery', *Art News and Review*, 17 June 1950, p.5; David Sylvester, 'Renato Guttuso and Rodrigo Moynihan', *The Listener*, 17 March 1955, p.486. Sylvester was more positive about the 1996 Guttuso exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, although he believed the exhibition was 'too small to make it clear whether Guttuso was successful as a creator of political monuments'. David Sylvester, 'Serving the Class Struggle', *London Magazine*, August-September 1996, pp.33-7.

⁸⁷ David Sylvester, 'Portrait of the Artist: Fernand Léger' in *Art News and Review* 25 February 1950, pp.1, 7.

⁸⁸ Letter from Sylvester to Hugh Scrutton, 11 March 1952, WAG/DIR/1/16. Owing to lack of gallery experience Sylvester was not seriously considered for the job. Those shortlisted included Quentin Bell, Peter de Francia, and the successful candidate Bryan Robertson.

entirely free from historical associations'.⁸⁹ In 1957, however, Sylvester wrote that Moore was one of the artists 'who have tried to give greater breadth and comprehensiveness to art in our time, but the results have never been entirely convincing. It is not enough to try, the time must be propitious'.⁹⁰ This did not invalidate Moore's public work, only suggested that such work was not capable of fulfilling the same role as in earlier societies. Sylvester was therefore paying Moore a backhanded compliment when he described him in 1964 as 'a terrific pro, who can adapt himself skilfully to the demands made on him by an architect. He is the finest civic sculptor of our time'.⁹¹ Even though Sylvester intervened to facilitate the purchase of Moore's *Knife Edge Two Piece* (1962-5) by the Contemporary Art Society⁹² and organized an outdoor exhibition of Moore's large sculpture in Kensington Gardens in 1978, he often wrote of the qualities expressed through his sketch-models and smaller works that were lost in translation to larger works.⁹³

Sylvester detected patterns and formulae in popular art, such as the appropriation of expressionism. In 'Epstein in Blackpool', an essay about the surprising purchase of a group of sculptures by Jacob Epstein for exhibition in a Blackpool wax museum, Sylvester concludes 'the use of Epstein statuary as a form of popular art' is in fact of a piece with other appropriations of

⁸⁹ Anthony Sylvester, 'Henry Moore and the Aims of Sculpture', *Art Notes*, Autumn 1944, pp.41-5 (p.44).

⁹⁰ David Sylvester, 'What's Wrong with Twentieth-Century Art?', *Twentieth Century*, March 1957, pp.264-7 (pp.264-5).

⁹¹ David Sylvester, *Ten Modern Artists: Brancusi*, broadcast on BBC1 on 26 April 1964, shooting script in TGA 200816/5/6/2/4.

⁹² Contemporary Art Society minutes, 1966-8, TGA 200816/3/9. The sculpture remains in its original site outside the Houses of Parliament. Sylvester was also involved with the acquisition of Moore's *Large Spindle Piece* (1968) by the City of Houston Civic Art Collection (see correspondence with Janie C. Lee Gallery, TGA 200816/2/1/566).

⁹³ For the qualities of Moore's sketch-models lost through enlargement see David Sylvester, 'Introduction' to *Henry Moore: Sketch-Models and Working-Models* (London: South Bank Centre), pp.5-6 (p.6).

Expressionism in popular art, namely the silent horror film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (dir. Robert Wiene, 1920) and 'horror comics'.⁹⁴ Expressionism connects this essay to 'The Kitchen Sink' of the previous year, in which Sylvester critiqued the work of painters such as Bratby and Smith. These painters of working-class domestic interiors were in Sylvester's opinion exploiting their subject matter to convey heavy-handed messages whereas Giacometti worked in a similar genre but with no programmatic intention beyond painting what he saw, and therefore generated incidental and mysterious overtones in his works.⁹⁵ Sylvester revised his opinion of both Bratby and Smith towards the end of the 1950s, however, and wrote appreciatively of them (something rarely mentioned in discussions of 'The Kitchen Sink'). This change was particularly pronounced in the case of Smith, as Sylvester wrote the catalogue text for his 1960 exhibition at Matthiesen. Having suggested in 'The Kitchen Sink' that in Smith's canvases 'his subject has served as a pretext for painting a picture', it is unsurprising that Sylvester responded more positively to Smith's more impressionist, near-abstract later work.

One reason why the 'Beaux-Arts quartet' of Bratby, Smith, Edward Middleditch and Derrick Greaves rose so swiftly to prominence (they

⁹⁴ David Sylvester, 'Epstein in Blackpool', *Encounter*, November 1955, pp.50-51 (p.51).

⁹⁵ 'The Kitchen Sink' was published a matter of months after Freud's 'Some Thoughts on Painting', which Sylvester assisted with. Freud's proposal that 'a painter's tastes must grow out of what so obsesses him in life that he never has to ask himself what it is suitable for him to do in art' perhaps informed Sylvester's analysis of what was lacking from the work of Bratby and Smith. Lucian Freud, 'Some Thoughts on Painting', *Encounter*, July 1954, pp.23-4 (p.23). Auerbach recently expressed similar views to Sylvester on the subject of expressionism: 'I am not an expressionist and I do not like expressionism—precisely because it intends to provoke a reaction [...] I never think that my painting should induce a specific emotion—somehow that seems to have something to do with effect, and suggests that the painter invests less than he hopes to evoke [...]'. Letter written by Auerbach in 2008, quoted in Lampert, p.141.

represented Britain at the 1956 Venice Biennale) was that they satisfied a demand for pictures of recognizable subjects demanded by the public. The postwar period was in fact full of attempts to encourage artists to depict specific subjects, whether the competition for a 'Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner' or the Football Association's 'Football and the Fine Arts' competition in 1952. Sylvester's article 'Frustrations of Patronage' sets out his objections to this form of patronage, chiefly on the basis that didactic briefs from commissioning bodies led to artists creating artificial and arbitrary work.⁹⁶ The reason why Sylvester first suggested the CAS should acquire a cast of an existing work by Moore rather than commission a new work was because he believed that commissioned works by even the greatest artists often failed to live up to expectations, and that patronage was more successful when used to acquire successful works than when commissioning or otherwise financing artists to produce new work.⁹⁷ On the other hand, Sylvester was later involved with public commissions such as a new sculpture for the Assemblée Nationale in Paris (won by Walter de Maria) and the Diana Memorial Sculpture competition in Kensington Gardens.⁹⁸

2.4 Film and Photography

Sylvester's engagement with popular culture has received surprisingly little critical comment to date, perhaps because it runs counter to the

⁹⁶ David Sylvester, 'Frustrations of Patronage', *Britain Today*, January 1954, pp.35-8.

⁹⁷ Contemporary Art Society minutes, 18 January 1966, TGA 200816/3/9.

⁹⁸ Sylvester never published on De Maria, although his *The Lightning Field* (1977) was a favourite work of Sylvester's. Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.28. While I haven't seen any documents regarding Sylvester's views on the De Maria sculpture, he may have responded to De Maria's proposal (a granite sphere) for similar reasons to works by Serra such as *Weight and Measure* at the Tate Gallery in 1992.

prevailing view of him as a connoisseur and elitist. As a result, the significant overlaps between Sylvester's interests and those of Alloway and the Independent Group have yet to be elucidated. Alloway and Sylvester shared strong interests in popular culture, and were equally at home discussing interests which fell outside of the fine art canon. Sylvester would certainly have agreed with Alloway's point in his 'Personal Statement' that: 'we grew up with the mass media. Unlike our parents and teachers we did not experience the *impact* of the movies, the radio, the illustrated magazines. The mass media were established as a natural environment by the time we could see them'.⁹⁹

Sylvester, like Alloway, was closely involved with the ICA in its early years, partly through exhibitions such as 'Recent Trends in Realist Painting' and 'Young Painters' (both 1952), but also through regular lectures and panel appearances (Sylvester took part in thirty-nine ICA events in the 1950s).¹⁰⁰ Sylvester wrote surprisingly little about the now-revered exhibitions organised by the protagonists of the Independent Group during the 1950s, but here again his ideas about Klee and afocalism were influential. The concept of the 'multi-evocative sign' that Sylvester used in relation to Klee was an acknowledged influence on Nigel Henderson and the exhibition 'Parallel of Life and Art', while Giovanni Casini has made a convincing case for Richard Hamilton's early work as also reflecting the influence of Sylvester's writings on

⁹⁹ Lawrence Alloway, 'Personal Statement' in *Imagining the Present: Context, Content, and the Role of the Critic*, ed. by Richard Kalina (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.51-3 (p.51) (first publ. in *Ark*, no 19, March 1957, p.28).

¹⁰⁰ Most of these are listed in the chronology included in Anne Massey and Gregor Muir, *Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1946-1968* (London: ICA, 2014). Sylvester and Alloway were both combining writing and curating at this time.

Klee.¹⁰¹ Several years later, Sylvester described another ICA exhibition, the Alloway-Hamilton-Victor Pasmore collaboration 'an exhibit', as 'organised as freely and meanderingly as a Klee'.¹⁰²

Notable points of convergence between Sylvester and Alloway include their joint participation in a symposium on film heroines at the ICA in 1955. Chaired by Alloway, the event included Sylvester talking about Marilyn Monroe and Toni del Renzio on Audrey Hepburn. Sylvester had watched films voraciously since his schooldays, and his writing on film offers an interesting counterpoint to his art criticism. Whereas his art criticism emphasises art as the expression of an individual sensibility, his film writing of the same period was written with a specific purpose: 'to subvert the complacent standards of the caucus of highbrow and middlebrow writers on film [...] I believed that the cult of the director among film critics was a distortion of the culture of the movies'.¹⁰³ In his book on Alloway, Whiteley summarises an exchange between the opposed views on film criticism of Alloway and Andrew Sarris, who championed 'auteur theory' and the film as an expression of the director's vision. Of the two perspectives Sylvester was closer to Alloway's.¹⁰⁴

Sylvester's contribution to the ICA symposium was subsequently published in *Encounter*. By Sylvester's own estimation this made *Encounter* the 'first highbrow magazine' to publish an essay about Monroe, which in

¹⁰¹ Victoria Walsh, *Nigel Henderson: Parallel of Life and Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), p.103; Giovanni Casini, 'Richard Hamilton at the Slade School of Fine Art (1948-51) and his 'Abstract' Paintings of the Early 1950s', *Burlington Magazine*, September 2015, pp.623-630.

¹⁰² David Sylvester, 'In Homage to Victor Pasmore', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1998, pp.110-11. The text was written at the time of the 1957 exhibition but not published at the time.

¹⁰³ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.24.

¹⁰⁴ Whiteley, pp.275-6. Sylvester accepted 'films had been made which in intention and achievement were works of art—notably films by Eisenstein, Pabst, Dreyer, Buñuel, Renoir, Preston Sturges and Rossellini—but he rarely wrote about these. Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.24.

contrast to the negative assessments of *Encounter's* cultural criticism quoted earlier in this chapter suggests the magazine was prescient in publishing intelligent writing about Monroe at this stage in her career.¹⁰⁵ *Encounter* published several articles on films by Sylvester, which differ significantly from the doctrinaire pro-American, anti-Communist ethos behind the magazine as a whole. Hyman, who interpreted Sylvester's criticism as Cold War existential anxiety writ large, failed to realise this and wrote of Sylvester's first film review: 'Sylvester's response to a science fiction film called *Them* typifies the sense of threat to be found in *Encounter's* approach [...] For him the science fiction film became a thinly veiled allegory of the struggle between democratic freedom and Soviet tyranny'.¹⁰⁶ This is incorrect. While Sylvester quotes from another article which interprets the film's message as 'trust the FBI and watch out for deadly monsters who infest America. The Ants in fact are the Reds', it is to explicitly reject this view:

Clearly the Message is anything but "trust the FBI." Still, *Them!* Has a Message all right [...] It is this: that the age of liberal belief in science as a purely beneficent force is past, because science is not as omniscient as people used to assume it would become, and because science itself has fathered new threats to civilisation and progress.¹⁰⁷

Even when Sylvester was explicitly anti-Communist, as in 'Orwell on the Screen', this was balanced with criticism of the animated adaptation of *Animal Farm* (1954) which was funded by the CIA (having known Orwell well, Sylvester's article, with its claim 'the thing which obsessed Orwell most of all

¹⁰⁵ David Sylvester, 'The Innocence of Marilyn Monroe', *Encounter*, May 1955, pp.50-52; Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.25. While Alloway had first published an article about *The Third Man* in 1950 (Lawrence Alloway, 'Symbolism in 'The Third Man', *World Review*, March 1950, pp.57-60), Sylvester was writing regularly on cinema several years before Alloway.

¹⁰⁶ Hyman, *The Battle for Realism*, p.165.

¹⁰⁷ David Sylvester, 'Them!', *Encounter*, November 1954, pp.48-50 (pp.49-50). Ironically the review Sylvester quoted from was published in *Twentieth Century*, which had refused to follow the instructions of the CCF.

about Soviet totalitarianism was its ruthless dishonesty', was likely drawn from experience rather than speculation).¹⁰⁸

Sylvester occasionally spoke about the relationship between art and film (notably as a participant in a discussion on 'Cinema as a Visual Art' in 1957), but the significance of the medium for Sylvester's art criticism was lesser than that of photography.¹⁰⁹ Sylvester has stated that the latter was central to many discussions in the 1950s, when photography had yet to achieve general recognition as a fine art but was used regularly as source material by leading painters.¹¹⁰ Bacon was perhaps the most radical in the way he used photography to stimulate his extraordinary paintings, and it should not be underestimated how much Bacon's appeal for Sylvester derived not only from his abilities as a painter but also the way he drew from the photographic imagery (often of pop-cultural origins) that interested Sylvester. Sylvester's first significant statement about Bacon's work (initially broadcast on the Third Programme on 28 December 1952, and so anticipating Sam Hunter's influential article on Bacon the following month) was primarily a discussion of how Bacon adapted photographic source imagery and why it was important, which also referenced other painters to have used photographs such as Degas and Sickert.¹¹¹ Alloway recognized Sylvester's role alongside Hunter in revealing Bacon's sources in 1956 when surveying different interpretations of

¹⁰⁸ David Sylvester, 'Orwell on the Screen', *Encounter*, March 1955, pp.35-7 (p.36); *The Battle for Realism*, pp.166-8.

¹⁰⁹ 'Talking of Films', broadcast on Network Three, 5 November 1957, microfilmed transcript in BBC WAC.

¹¹⁰ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.23. In *Transition* (p.54) Harrison reproduces a newspaper cutting of Lord Beaverbrook used in Sylvester's lectures in the fifties, reminiscent of Bacon's *Three Studies of the Human Head* (1953).

¹¹¹ David Sylvester, 'Francis Bacon', broadcast on the BBC Third Programme 28 December 1951 (published as 'The Paintings of Francis Bacon', *The Listener*, 3 January 1952, pp.28-9. Sylvester used to attend football matches with Bacon and the photographer Nigel Henderson (information from Victoria Walsh).

the painter's work: 'There is the psycho-legend of destroyed masterpieces, spread by Robert Melville. There is Bacon's use of photographs [...] revealed by David Sylvester and Sam Hunter.'¹¹²

Sylvester once told Bacon that he thought Andy Warhol was 'tremendously influenced by you [...] the one person who's taken clues from you', and when Sylvester later wrote about Warhol, he underlined the American artist's similarly creative use of photography.¹¹³ Sylvester even planned to organise a joint Bacon/Warhol exhibition with Mark Francis.¹¹⁴ Common to Sylvester's writing on both artists is a conviction that they redeem photography through painting and make more of it than it could ever be on its own, in keeping with Sylvester's assessment that 'photography is not an art' on the basis of its failure to provoke responses in him similar to those common to other art forms.¹¹⁵ In his 1987 article about Warhol, Sylvester wrote (and this is also relevant to the source imagery of Bacon's paintings):

Speaking of boredom, it's really photographs that are boring, once their amazing initial impact has passed. The reason is mainly the blandness of their surface, which has none of the vitality, suggestiveness and mystery that a painted surface can have. Warhol's versions of photographs give them the vibrancy of great painting [...] he can be seen as one of a line of painters, such as Bacon, who have taken the photograph and breathed life into it; he

¹¹² Lawrence Alloway, 'Notes on Francis Bacon', *Art News and Review*, 9 February 1955, p.7. Curiously, in 1960 Alloway offered a different assessment: 'Sylvester, though in a position to do so, never got around to writing about a Bacon who was not a bogey-man' (Lawrence Alloway, 'Dr. No's Bacon', *Art News and Review*, 9 April 1960, p.2). For Alloway's perspective on Bacon see Martin Hammer, 'The Independent Group Take On Francis Bacon', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 15:1 (2014), pp.69-89.

¹¹³ Transcript for Sylvester-Bacon interview 3, session 3 (recorded October 1973), TGA 200816/4/2/9.

¹¹⁴ See exhibition proposal by Sylvester and Mark Francis dated 11 January 1999, TGA 200816/2/1/369. See also letter from Tony Shafrazi to Sylvester about the idea of a Bacon and Warhol exhibition, 26 February 1999 (TGA 200816/2/1/1135) and Sylvester's statement 'the artist whom I want to see alongside Bacon is Warhol' (Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p.215).

¹¹⁵ Gayford, 'The Eye's Understanding', p.37. Sylvester was due to interview the photographer Richard Avedon to coincide with his National Portrait Gallery exhibition in 1995, but cancelled at the last minute after seeing the exhibition and a replacement had to be found. Conversation with Jonathan Burnham, 13 April 2016.

may well, indeed, have been influenced by those monochromatic Bacon paintings of around 1950 in which grey paint resembling ectoplasm floats in the middle of a large dark empty areas of stained canvas.¹¹⁶

This conviction that 'it's really photographs that are boring' explains why Sylvester wrote very little about photography, and only installed one photography exhibition, 'A Positive View' at the Saatchi Gallery in 1994. He felt that photography was a source of great images but primarily as source images for artists such as Warhol and Bacon to imbue those images with greater depth and resonance.

2.5 Abstract Expressionism

Sylvester's critical engagement with American art began when he reviewed the 1950 Venice Biennale for *The Nation*. Sylvester criticised the paintings on display in the US Pavilion, which included work by Gorky, Pollock and de Kooning. 'If this pavilion is representative', he wrote, 'American painting has fallen prey to a Germanic over-estimation on the importance of self-expression' and that the paintings 'represent the seamier side of America—sentimentalism, hysteria, and an undirected and undisciplined exuberance'.¹¹⁷ Sylvester simultaneously dismissed new American art as derivative of Germanic expressionism and generalized about the character of a country he had never visited. In an exchange in the pages of the journal, Greenberg (a long-time writer for the magazine who had in fact recommended Sylvester in the first place) dismissed Sylvester and 'the European view of American art' in general as anti-American, endorsing Aline B. Louchheim's

¹¹⁶ David Sylvester, 'The Artist who Showed Us What Is', *Sunday Times*, 29 March 1987, p.38.

¹¹⁷ David Sylvester, 'The Venice Biennale', *The Nation*, 9 September 1950, pp.232-233.

opinion that the European response to American art at the Biennale demonstrated the 'habit of Europeans to think of Americans as cultural barbarians' compounded by 'their resentment of their present military and economic dependence upon us'.¹¹⁸

Greenberg's article was written not just with Sylvester in mind, but the fact that Sylvester had published his criticism of the US Pavilion in *The Nation* provided Greenberg with the perfect opportunity to state his broader case. Greenberg had resigned from the paper the previous year after almost a decade working for *The Nation*, having become disillusioned about its increasingly left-leaning politics. (He soon joined the newly-founded CCF and wrote a letter denouncing *The Nation* as anti-American, prompting *The Nation* to file a \$200,000 lawsuit against Greenberg and *The New Leader*, where his denunciation was published.)¹¹⁹ In fact, even though Greenberg may have put forward Sylvester's name, his biographer Alice Goldfar Marquis suggests that the magazine's decision to publish Sylvester's review 'may have aggravated Greenberg's anger at its continuing pro-Soviet stance'.¹²⁰ Ironically given

¹¹⁸ Clement Greenberg, 'The European View of American Art', *Nation*, 25 November 1950, p.490. Sylvester replied in the same issue (David Sylvester, 'Mr. Sylvester Replies', *Nation*, 25 November 1950, p.492). On this dispute see also Hyman, pp.25-6.

¹¹⁹ Alice Goldfar Marquis, *Art Czar: the Rise and Fall of Clement Greenberg* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2006), p.122; Louis Battaglia, 'Clement Greenberg: A Political Reconsideration', *Shift*, I (2008), <http://shiftjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/battaglia.pdf> [accessed 25 July 2016]. Greenberg not only joined the CCF, but in a situation which Saunders describes as 'divided down the middle between the moderates and the militants', and counted Greenberg among the latter, representing 'haute anti-Communism'. Saunders, pp.157-58.

¹²⁰ Marquis, p.122. Sylvester wrote that the original article was commissioned at Greenberg's prompting in 'Curriculum Vitae', p.19; it is unclear why Sylvester was chosen, although Greenberg wrote several times for *Horizon* during the 1940s and since Sylvester was acquainted with Connolly and Watson, the may have come through this channel. Another possibility is that Greenberg had read Sylvester's essay on Klee in *Tiger's Eye* and approved of it (perhaps given its relevance to the work of Pollock and other abstract expressionists).

Sylvester's later work for *Encounter*, in this instance attacking Sylvester seems to have been a way of defending the 'freedom' championed by the CCF.

Despite important similarities, above all their professed emphasis on the experience of art free from extraneous concerns, Sylvester and Greenberg never recovered from this early skirmish to enjoy the sort of relationship Sylvester had with other American critics such as Rosenberg and Thomas Hess.¹²¹ In a 1959 letter to Heron, Greenberg dismissed Sylvester as a 'journalist',¹²² while in 1965 Sylvester objected to the choice of Greenberg as a judge of the John Moores prize on the basis that his presence would prejudice artists' submissions:

I think that the choice of Clement Greenberg as chairman of the jury is extremely unfortunate. Greenberg certainly has remarkable qualities as a critic, but he is also extraordinarily narrow in his convictions and sees it as essential to his role that he should dictate to artists how they ought to paint. His prejudices are well known, and I myself think it very likely that young artists here who know he is going to be chairman of the jury will go out of their way to try and please and impress him.¹²³

During the early 1950s recent American art was rarely exhibited in London.

Even when Pollock's *One* (1950) was shown in the ICA's 'Opposing Forces'

¹²¹ Greenberg's empiricism is to the fore particularly in his 1971 Bennington seminars and the series of articles resulting from them, since published (with transcripts of the seminars) as Clement Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics: Observations on Art and Taste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Sylvester's friendship with Rosenberg may of course been one reason why Sylvester and Greenberg remained distant.

¹²² Letters from Greenberg to Heron, 17 August 1959 (quoted in Hyman, *The Battle of Realism*, p.250) and 15 October 1959 (quoted in Andrew Wilson, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Patrick Heron and British Abstract Painting, 1945-65* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2000), p.378). Heron concurred with Greenberg, replying 'what you say about Sylvester is true [...] he has mucked up, and "confused" as you say, so much, and on so many occasions, in the English art scene in the last 10 years [...] In the days when it all mattered to me and I was trying to publish my views on painting and sculpture, he was one of my worst enemies'. Letter from Heron to Greenberg, 10 September 1959, quoted in Hyman, *The Battle for Realism*, p.250.

¹²³ Letter from Sylvester to Godfrey Smith, 17 July 1965, TGA 200816/2/1/1082. The prize was won by Michael Tyzack for his painting *Alessio 'B'* (1965), which showed clear parallels with the colour field painting of artists such as Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis that Greenberg admired at that time. Heron was also on the jury.

exhibition 1953, the canvas was too big for the ICA's Dover Street gallery and had to be hung partly rolled.¹²⁴ Before critics of Sylvester's generation were in a position to discuss such painting from direct experience, however, they were already writing columns in American publications. Alloway started writing for the New York-based *Art News* in 1954 while Heron was a regular correspondent for New York's *Arts* between 1955 and 1958. Sylvester, whose writing for *Encounter* was already widely available in the US, began writing for *Arts* and the *New York Times* in 1956.¹²⁵ Hilton Kramer, the editor of *Arts*, had admired Sylvester's writings for *The Listener*, 'particularly when they deal with French art', and subsequently informed him that 'everyone reads your pieces in the N.Y. Times, and agree it's about the only readable art criticism in the Times. As a rule the newspapers here publish nothing but pure hokum about art.'¹²⁶ Kramer was dismayed, however, at the admiration both Sylvester and Heron showed for the work of Paris-based American Sam Francis, who Sylvester in April 1956 briefly considered 'one of the two outstanding young abstract painters in Paris' (along with Jean-Paul Riopelle).¹²⁷

Sylvester's praise of Francis was written shortly after the 'Modern Art in the United States' exhibition at the Tate which he described as a 'Damascene conversion', although it contained only a small selection of work by the abstract expressionists. Bryan Robertson's Pollock retrospective at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1958 (the first of a series of important exhibitions of

¹²⁴ David Sylvester, 'A New-Found Land' in *Vision: Fifty Years of British Creativity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), pp.20-1 (p.21).

¹²⁵ Hilton Kramer declined to reprint in *Arts* an article which Sylvester had first published in *Encounter*, on the basis that it would already be familiar to a large American readership. Letter from Kramer to Sylvester, 26 November 1956, TGA 200816/2/1/55.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*; David Sylvester, 'Round the London Galleries', *The Listener*, 19 April 1956, p.468.

American artists held at the gallery over the next decade) offered the opportunity for a more sustained appraisal of Pollock's work.¹²⁸ Sylvester now saw the connections between the 'all-over' approach of Klee and the American artists, to the extent that in a review of the exhibition he recycled a passage from his earlier writing about Klee.¹²⁹

Sylvester's response to abstract expressionism combined aspects of Greenberg (the historical explanation for the popularity of this form of painting) and Rosenberg (the importance of personal conviction in the success of a painting), although he was unconvinced by claims that the paintings were wild displays of unfettered emotions, and preferred to emphasise the ways in which they displayed control. In Sylvester's first substantial article on abstract expressionism he suggested that Elaine de Kooning's term abstract *impressionism* would have been a more suitable name for the style and that 'if its mode of improvisation is compared with improvisation in jazz, the analogy must be made not with "hot" jazz, but with "cool" jazz'.¹³⁰

The impression made on Sylvester by the abstract expressionist work he saw influenced his writing on, and relationships with, British artists. Most conspicuously Sylvester broke off ties with Bacon for several years between around 1957 and 1962, partly because 'his new paintings had seemed so shockingly bad that I felt totally disillusioned about him', but furthermore

¹²⁸ When MoMA Director of International Programmes Porter McCoy visited London in 1956 Robertson asked for any planned Pollock exhibition to be asked for it to be offered to the Whitechapel Gallery first, beginning a series of important one-man exhibitions by American artists including Rothko, Guston, Rauschenberg and Johns. Letter from McCoy to Philip James, 18 February 1958, Box 16, Frank O'Hara Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

¹²⁹ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.14. Compare passages in *About Modern Art* on Klee (pp.37-8) and Pollock (p.63). In his article about 'Modern Art in the United States' Sylvester also wrote that 'in Rothko's limpid stains of colour, Klee's world becomes immense, illimitable'. David Sylvester, 'Expressionism, 'German and American', *The Twentieth Century*, August 1956, pp.142-7 (p.146).

¹³⁰ Sylvester, 'Expressionism, 'German and American', p.147.

because he was 'put off by the way he jeered at the work of abstract painters such as Jackson Pollock'.¹³¹ At the same time, Sylvester suggested that Bacon too had been influenced by American painting, and that the appearance of large flat areas of colour in Bacon's work from 1959 onwards 'suggest that Bacon could have been affected by the Rothkos and Newmans shown at the Tate early that year in the exhibition 'The New American Painting''.¹³² Meanwhile Andrews, who Sylvester considered 'possibly a greater painter than Francis [Bacon]' in 1957 (around the time his attitude towards Bacon changed) told Hyman that many British artists whom Sylvester had previously supported felt betrayed when he embraced American art.¹³³

Acquaintance with these American pictures prompted Sylvester to contrast their physicality and conviction with the British abstract paintings shown at exhibitions such as 'Dimensions', organised by Alloway at the O'Hana gallery in 1957, which in his opinion showed 'excessive picturesqueness, a dependence upon poetic allusion rather than on the qualities of the painting as a painting'.¹³⁴ Their American equivalents, on the other hand, 'seem to have solved as a matter of course one of the problems which most preoccupy painters everywhere today—the problem of avoiding a gratuitous beauty or charm without at once producing its opposite'.¹³⁵ A favourite quotation of Sylvester's was that of Maurice Denis that a picture is 'essentially a plane surface covered by colours arranged in a certain order', and now it was

¹³¹ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.18; Sylvester, 'My Brushes with Bacon', p.31.

¹³² Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p.93.

¹³³ Hyman, *The Battle for Realism*, p.248 fn; William Townsend Journals, vol XXVI, entry for 16 May 1957, UCL Special Collections. In this entry Townsend described how in 'David Sylvester came to the Slade this afternoon to persuade some undergraduates from Wadham [College, Oxford] to buy the picture Michael Andrews has been painting at the Slade for the last fortnight'.

¹³⁴ David Sylvester, 'Absence of Presence', *New Statesman*, 28 December 1957, pp.876-7 (p.876).

¹³⁵ Sylvester, 'Expressionism, 'German and American', p.147.

American paintings, rather than those made in Britain or France, which best communicated the materiality of paintings as physical objects.¹³⁶ Sylvester now claimed that this insubstantial quality was in fact inherent in the history of British painting:

The flaw, indeed, runs through all British painting and has long done so. Even a master of Turner's giant size has it—though he exploits it, is not its victim, as Constable is. It seems to be the misfortune of British painters to be born with more in them of Shelley than of Keats. It is the family curse of British painting.¹³⁷

Despite his frequent disagreements with Alloway, Sylvester accepted that his rival was an incisive commentator on American art.¹³⁸ Sylvester advised Ackerley to employ Alloway to write for *The Listener* but was told 'my readers don't want to read about American art month after month and nothing else'. In Sylvester's opinion Ackerley 'got it badly wrong: Lawrence should've had a wider platform than he did have, because he was the one who got it right'.¹³⁹

Alloway's role as a commentator on American art has detracted from the similar (and in some ways more significant) part played by Sylvester from 1956 onwards in this respect.¹⁴⁰ Such a reading is encouraged by Alloway's

¹³⁶ Sylvester, 'Absence of Presence', p.877.

¹³⁷ Ibid. The contrast between Keats and Shelley, which Sylvester often used, was an example of the lasting impact of Leavis' *Revaluation* (see transcript of interview with Gayford, TGA 200816/6/2/12 and quoted in Chapter I). The similarities between Sylvester's characterisations of British art in the late 1950s and Pevsner's argument in *The Englishness of English Art* are often striking. Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art: An Expanded and Annotated Version of the Reith Lectures Broadcast in October and November 1955* (London: Architectural Association, 1956).

¹³⁸ Alloway wrote several articles for *Encounter* in the late 1950s, surely either commissioned or approved by Sylvester in his role of Art Advisor.

¹³⁹ Sylvester interviewed by Wollheim. Alloway in fact wrote several times for *The Listener* during Ackerley's time as literary editor, but the implication is that he would have written more if Ackerley was more favourable towards American art.

¹⁴⁰ Whiteley (p.184) claims Alloway was 'the only critic who had been committed, at an informed level, to both Abstract Expressionism and Pop' (seemingly referring to critics in both Britain and the US). Hyman claims that even after 1956 Sylvester 'struggled to understand the new American painting', that his 'Expressionism, German and American' was only 'grudgingly respectful', and writes suspiciously of Sylvester's laudatory 1958 radio talk on Pollock published in *About Modern Art* that 'it is not known how much this text has been revised' (not at all, in fact). Hyman, *The Battle for Realism*, pp.202-3, 250fn.

own bullishness: he was eager to represent himself as London's only informed observer of the American scene, even to distinguish himself from critics such as Sylvester who were largely in agreement with him.¹⁴¹ For instance, following the important Tate Gallery exhibition 'The New American Painting' in 1959 Alloway wrote an article surveying the mostly negative reviews which the exhibition received in the press. In this essay he was generally positive about Sylvester's radio talk 'The New American Painting and Ourselves', in which Sylvester 'worked conscientiously at the aesthetic raised by American art which everybody else missed or shirked'.¹⁴²

Even so, Alloway needed to stress the way in which Sylvester's interpretation differed from his own. He felt Sylvester was wrong to respond to the paintings by imagining the experience of the artists' execution of the work rather than considering the canvases as autonomous aesthetic objects, describing Sylvester's approach as 'little more than an updating of BB's [Berenson's] empathy for Renaissance form displaced to paint'.¹⁴³ Sylvester had said that: 'the pleasure and pain that went into the creation of a work of art do not end with the completed work: they are communicated to every spectator who responds to that work, and much of what moves the spectator is the re-living of the pleasure and pain of its creation.'¹⁴⁴

This critical approach echoes Rosenberg's prescription in 'The American Action-Painters' that 'criticism must begin by recognizing in the painting the

¹⁴¹ In response to Alloway's 1960 article 'Dr. No's Bacon' Sylvester wrote 'I've grown accustomed by now to being told by Lawrence Alloway what I ought not to have written' (letter to the editor, *Art News and Review*, 7-21 May 1960, p.2).

¹⁴² Lawrence Alloway, 'sic, sic, sic', *Art News and Review*, 11 April 1959, pp.5, 8 (p.8).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ David Sylvester, 'The New American Painting and Ourselves', broadcast on BBC Third Programme, 15 March 1959, transcript in TGA 200816/8/1/8. This same approach can be found in Sylvester's article about George Mathieu the following year (David Sylvester, 'The Actions of the Dandy', *New Statesman*, 12 November 1960, pp.732-4).

assumptions inherent in its mode of creation. Since the painter has become an actor, the spectator has to think in a vocabulary of action: its inception, duration, direction [...]'¹⁴⁵ Sylvester's talk also connected abstract expressionism to Sylvester's ideas of belatedness and limitations discussed earlier in this chapter. Sylvester interpreted abstract expressionism as above all about the painter's 'deeply personal struggle with the medium', and as such a pragmatic response to the problems of postwar painting. Wittgenstein was again called upon by way of comparison with the abstract expressionists, with Sylvester suggesting that contemporary philosophers and painters faced a similar dilemma about how best to further their respective disciplines:

Can art afford to forego the expression of ordinary human experience, to concern itself with problems arising out of its own language? Can it justifiably limit the problems it poses to those which are the problems of art itself? The analytic school of contemporary philosophers has been challenged in much the same way from outside [...] What the busybodies who ask this kind of question forget is this: People obsessed with their work are not trying to compete with the greatest work done in their field down the ages [...] their concern is to take the tradition on from where they find it, to deal with the problems that are there to be answered now.¹⁴⁶

In 1960 Sylvester finally visited the US for the first time, spending two months there after receiving a grant from the Foreign Leader Program (now the International Visitor Leadership Program) the previous year. This was an

¹⁴⁵ Rosenberg, Harold, 'The American Action Painters', in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959; repr. London: Thames & Hudson, 1962), pp.23-39 (first publ. in *Art News*, December 1952, pp.22-3, 48-50), p.29.

Sylvester himself refers to 'the significance in existentialist thought of the verb "to act"' when discussing abstract expression in 'The New American Painting and Ourselves'.

¹⁴⁶ Sylvester, 'The New American Painting and Ourselves'. The other result of this sense of belatedness was a paradoxical freedom summarised by de Kooning's formulation in his interview with Sylvester that 'it's really absurd to make [...] a human image with paint today...But then all of a sudden it was even more absurd not to do it' (Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, p.48; see also discussion of this idea in 'Art 54-64' [discussion between Sylvester, Andrew Forge and David Thompson], broadcast on BBC Third Programme, 1 June 1964, transcript TGA 200816/6/2/12). See also *Looking at Giacometti*, pp.21-2.

exchange programme run by the US State Department to bring 'opinion leaders' to the US in the hope that they would report favourably on their experiences. The majority of FLP Grantees from Britain in the 1950s were politicians, although other Grantees working in the visual arts included Geoffrey Grigson (1950-51), Robertson (1956), Alloway (1958) and Russell and the Art Director of the Arts Council, Gabriel White (also 1959).¹⁴⁷ The American critic Irving Sandler recalled that Sylvester already 'had a reputation' in New York at this time because of the strengthening bonds between the art scenes of London and New York and the columns he had written for American publications.¹⁴⁸

Soon after arriving Sylvester met de Kooning, Guston, Franz Kline and David Smith in one night at the start of his visit in an evening he described as 'like the evening *chez Kahnweiler* in transforming my life', thus directly comparing his entrée into the artistic milieu of New York and Paris.¹⁴⁹ The visit yielded an important series of interviews (Chapter 4) which were made possible by Sylvester's strong social relationships with the artists. Forge quoted an (unnamed) American artist on Sylvester's arrival: 'we recognised him as soon as he arrived [...] we recognised his anxiety'.¹⁵⁰ However, while Sylvester instantly fell in love with New York, a brief visit to California turned him against the West Coast just as quickly, as he recalled in 1965:

I always felt that [Bay] Area painting, Diebenkorn and Park and so on has a slightly slack and over-relaxed quality, very marked by comparison with New York painting and when I went to San Francisco [...] this was at once explained to me, first of all by the atmosphere, [...] the climate which was very balmy and soft by

¹⁴⁷ List of FLP Grantees from Britain, 1950-70 in Giles Scott-Smith, *Networks of Empire: The US State Department's Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France, and Britain 1950-70* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008), pp.425-43.

¹⁴⁸ Conversation with Irving Sandler, 10 January 2015.

¹⁴⁹ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.26

¹⁵⁰ Forge, 'In the Shadow of Thanatos', p.31.

comparison with this very charged kind of atmosphere one gets in New York, and also by the spiritual atmosphere which was rather easy-going, rather complacent.¹⁵¹

During his trip to the US Sylvester also got to know leading American critics first-hand, resulting in several further radio broadcasts in conversation with critics such as Hess (born four years before Sylvester, in 1920), editor of *Art News* and a key figure in the history of abstract expressionism. In particular Sylvester and Hess shared a love of the work of de Kooning and Newman, about whom they both wrote insightfully.¹⁵² At the same time Sylvester was close to Max Kozloff, art critic for *The Nation* and contributor to *Artforum*, who Sylvester considered 'outstanding among the younger American critics'.¹⁵³ Kozloff, like Hess and Sylvester, wrote from a predominantly empiricist standpoint for much of the 1960s (creating a rift between Kozloff and the more theoretically-minded *Artforum* critics, particularly Fried). This approach was epitomised by essays such 'Venetian Art and Florentine Criticism' (1967) which contains the Sylvesteresque sentiment: 'criticism these days is ever more self-aggrandizing. Much of it seeks to impress and convince by the intricacy of its didactic structure; myself, I should like to see it attract by the beauty of what is written, if only because this is more consonant with art itself'.¹⁵⁴ In the late 1960s Kozloff began to focus more on the socio-

¹⁵¹ Conversation between Sylvester, Thomas Hess and Max Kozloff, 'New Comment', broadcast on BBC Third Programme, 16 June 1965, microfilmed transcript in BBC WAC. Writing to the critic Jules Langsner (whom he had visited in Los Angeles) soon after his visit Sylvester said of San Francisco 'the mood of the place is too relaxed, too easy'. Letter from Sylvester to Langsner, 1 May 1960, Jules Langsner Papers, Archives of American Art.

¹⁵² Sylvester also reviewed Hess's 1968 de Kooning monograph (David Sylvester, 'Counter Currents', *New Society*, 30 January 1969, p.179).

¹⁵³ Conversation between Sylvester, Thomas Hess and Max Kozloff, 16 June 1965.

¹⁵⁴ Max Kozloff, 'Venetian Art and Florentine Criticism' in *Renderings: Critical Essays on a Century of Modern Art* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), pp.321-35 (first publ. in *Artforum*, December 1967, pp.42-4), p.334. On the rivalry between Kozloff and Fried at *Artforum* see Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho, 2000), p.191.

political context of art (he compared his first and second books on the basis of 'the fallout of international political events—the Vietnam war—upon aesthetic experience [...] at least my own experience') but Kozloff's importance for Sylvester's own criticism was highlighted in the preface to *About Modern Art* in which Sylvester named him amongst the 'colleagues with whom I was closely in touch during my formative years'.¹⁵⁵

2.6 Pop and Minimalism

As stated above in relation to 'Dimensions' in 1957, Sylvester saw most British abstraction of the 1950s as insubstantial and unconvincing in comparison with the abstract expressionism shown at the Tate Gallery and Whitechapel Gallery. At the time of 'Situation' (also organised by Alloway) in 1960 Sylvester lamented that American abstraction had become a 'new orthodoxy', tempting British artists into 'a radical change of style, rather like one of those conversions from Communism to Catholicism'.¹⁵⁶ A more useful source of inspiration, in Sylvester's opinion, was American pop art, which drew from advertisements and mass-produced consumer goods. In his review of the 1962 'Young Contemporaries' exhibition, which included numerous pop art works, he heralded the subject matter of posters and signage as providing a 'communal possession' which British artists could use imaginatively, since they were close to it and engaged with it.¹⁵⁷ The 'style commun' that Sylvester had

¹⁵⁵ Max Kozloff, *Cultivated Impasses: Essays on the Waning of the Avant-garde 1964-1975* ([New York?]: Marsilio, 2000), p.11; Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.10.

¹⁵⁶ David Sylvester, 'The New Orthodoxy', *New Statesman*, 10 September 1960, p.337.

¹⁵⁷ In 1962 Sylvester's portrait was painted by Larry Rivers, who Sylvester in 'Art in a Coke Climate' called the 'most mercurial and fanciful of Pop artists' (*Mr Art*, National Portrait Gallery, London). The following year Sylvester wrote 'this year's Young Contemporaries is as entertaining as last year's and as dominated by 'pop''. Sylvester, 'Luxurious', *New Statesman*, 15 February 1963, pp.247-8.

first diagnosed the need for in 'les problèmes du peintre' in 1948 was finally emerging, although in his 1963 article 'Dark Sunlight' Sylvester was unsure whether artworks made in the new style would last the test of time since 'the subject-matter is so attractive to me that I can't tell how long the attraction will last once the subjects aren't up to date'.¹⁵⁸

In this article Sylvester insisted more stridently than ever that 'today the social function of painting is purely aesthetic, and there is always a danger for painting which has only an aesthetic purpose to become mere decoration. Today the only thing that can save a painter from this is the strength of his obsession with his own particular subject'.¹⁵⁹ This in itself was consistent with his enthusiasm for Pop subject matter, but the passage was in the context of an article which continued to champion Bacon and Coldstream as the nation's leading painters, applauding the aristocratic detachment of their shared 'amateur attitude' as an example for other artists to follow. A letter written in response to the article, signed by the Cohen brothers, Turnbull, Paolozzi, Peter Blake, Robyn Denny and R.B. Kitaj amongst others, accused Sylvester of 'trying to drag British art back into the suffocating club atmosphere of amateurism and dilettantism at a moment when, for the first time in this century, a generation of artists has deliberately taken up a position outside it and against it'.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Sylvester, 'Dark Sunlight'; Sylvester, 'Les problèmes du peintre: Paris-Londres 1947' [part i/iii], p.97.

¹⁵⁹ Sylvester, 'Dark Sunlight', p.4. Here Sylvester was restating the idea, previously stated in a 1960 article, that 'In so far as they've been able to find an answer to this dilemma, serious artists today have tended either, like Giacometti, to concentrate on a wilfully narrow range of simple subjects or, like the first generation of American action painters, to reject all the known results of painting in order to concentrate upon the art of painting and follow where their particular gestures take them'. David Sylvester, 'A Dirty Word', *New Statesman*, 13 February 1960, p.219.

¹⁶⁰ Roy Ascott and others, 'Amateurs in Art' [letter to editor], *Sunday Times*, 9 June 1963, p.34.

It was only in his major article 'Art in a Coke Climate' in the *Sunday Times Magazine* at the beginning of 1964 that Sylvester finally committed himself unequivocally to pop art, bringing together work by British artists including Paolozzi, Richard Smith, Richard Hamilton, and Patrick Hughes and Americans such as Roy Lichtenstein. The article began with a quote: "'there's as much culture in a bottle of Coca-Cola as there is in a bottle of wine'".¹⁶¹ Anne Massey has noted resemblances to the writing of Alloway and Banham in the article, but neither would have written about the difference between American and British Pop in the way that Sylvester did. For Sylvester, the American version was cooler and more neutral (in keeping with Sylvester's comparison between abstract expressionism and cool jazz) whereas 'most of British pop art is a dream, a wistful dream of far-off Californian glamour as sensitive and tender as the pre-Raphaelite dream of far-off medieval chivalry'.¹⁶²

Like 'The Kitchen Sink' a decade earlier, 'Art in a Coke Climate' put its subject within the lineage of still-life painting, from Chardin to Cubism. The intention here was precisely to look beyond the topicality of pop art and to consider it in an art-historical context, to assess the likelihood of it enduring 'once the subjects aren't up to date'. Sylvester's thesis, which would recur in his writing on artists from Warhol to Gilbert & George in subsequent years, was that however much pop art drew from the imagery of 'coke culture' (fast food, comics and billboards), the art was necessarily of a different order. As he

¹⁶¹ David Sylvester, 'Art in a Coke Climate', *Sunday Times Colour Magazine*, 26 January 1964, pp.14-23. Carrier asked 'could there be a better beginning than the first sentence of David Sylvester's essay on pop art?' David Carrier, *Writing About Visual Art* (New York: Allworth Press, 2003), p.43.

¹⁶² Sylvester, 'Art in a Coke Climate', pp.22-3; Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p.119.

concluded the article, returning to the provocative claim of its opening sentence: 'a reverence for the unique object is, I take it, the basic moral assumption of a wine culture, which is the kind of culture to which art can't help belonging'.¹⁶³

One of the pop artists who most interested Sylvester was Lichtenstein. Sylvester interviewed Lichtenstein in 1965 and quoted liberally from that interview in an essay which appeared in *American Vogue* in 1969. Here Sylvester stressed the discrepancy between the way Lichtenstein's pictures 'look as if they were about certainty' and the artist's own attitude. In a later publication Sylvester again emphasised Lichtenstein's doubt:

I have been very much struck by Lichtenstein's constant tentativeness [...] With Pop Art [...] it might be supposed that the artist, before he starts painting any painting, knows exactly what he's trying to do. But Lichtenstein did not know what he was trying to do—for all the acuity of his intelligence—did not quite know what he was aiming to achieve in terms of form, was far from being sure what his attitude was towards his subject matter.¹⁶⁴

Sylvester's conclusion to the same text suggests that this element of uncertainty is one distinction between good and great art: 'He [Lichtenstein] says that Cubism was the main source of his style. Among the Cubists, Gleizes and Metzinger knew exactly what they were trying to do. Braque and Picasso were working in the dark. It probably always is like that in art'.¹⁶⁵

Greenberg claimed that pop art was about 'making fun' of its subjects in contrast to the abstract expressionist and colour field painting he advocated.¹⁶⁶ Sylvester, on the other hand, knew from his discussions with artists like Lichtenstein that pop art was not about simply 'making fun' or any

¹⁶³ Sylvester, 'Art in a Coke Culture', p.23.

¹⁶⁴ David Sylvester, *Some Kind of Reality: Roy Lichtenstein Interviewed by David Sylvester* (London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1997), p.6.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics*, p.171.

other straightforward aim, but was full of uncertainty about both its sources and its own practice. To take another example, Sylvester's writing about James Rosenquist is distinctive from most commentary on the artist in highlighting not the monumentality or the topicality of his work, but rather its tentativeness: 'Rosenquist's feelings about his imagery seem so inextricably mixed that one is left not puzzled but clueless as to his motivations; one simply senses a certain complex wonderment'.¹⁶⁷

Throughout his career Sylvester was faced with the problem of not being able to write satisfactorily about art he felt strongly about, and such was the case with minimalism, of which he wrote 'I felt at home with it, felt I might have invented it. Yet I have totally failed to write about it'.¹⁶⁸ We get a sense of why this was in a conversation Sylvester recorded in the US in 1965 (his second visit to the country) with Kozloff and another *Artforum* critic, Annette Michelson. The discussion focuses on minimalist sculpture, and it is hard to imagine a similar discussion amongst British critics at the time, partly because of the poor representation of minimalism in Britain at that time. Much of the conversation involves the concept of 'presence' in the works, and Michelson notes that art and criticism in England 'have not been concerned with a theoretical investigation of this particular problem'.¹⁶⁹ The most revealing moment in the discussion comes when Sylvester raises the question of affect, and whether the viewer is moved by the experience of minimalist sculpture, to

¹⁶⁷ David Sylvester, 'James Rosenquist' in *James Rosenquist: an Exhibition of Paintings, 1961-1973*, exhibition catalogue, Mayor Gallery (London, 1974), n.p.

¹⁶⁸ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.28. After writing about this Sylvester went some way to addressing the 'failure' by writing about Carl Andre and Richard Serra. In 2000 he also wrote a proposal with Lynne Cooke for a planned minimalism exhibition at the Hayward Gallery (TGA 200816/2/1/245).

¹⁶⁹ Discussion between Sylvester, Kozloff and Michelson, 'New Comment', Network Three, 2 March 1966, transcript TGA 200816/5/8.

which Michelson responds by saying that any attempt to answer the question at that moment would itself be a retreat from a situation which must be kept in suspension: 'we've said that they [minimal artworks] pose questions rather than make statements: and we are either disturbed or stimulated by the questions'.¹⁷⁰ In other words, Michelson was interested intellectually by how minimalism resisted existing categories and expectations whereas Sylvester's instinct was to consider minimalist artworks in terms of the aesthetic experience of other forms of sculpture.¹⁷¹ As Kozloff wrote much later, 'the variables of artistic experience were for him too exciting too indulge in rigid field theories, which were the bugbears of American criticism during his prime'.¹⁷²

The position of a New York art critic which Sylvester desired never materialised, although he spent a year living in the US in 1967-8, teaching at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.¹⁷³ Soon after this, however, Sylvester's decision to edit the Magritte catalogue raisonné in 1969 made any further regular critical writing impossible for the duration of that project. The timing is significant, particularly in the light of decisions made by other critics around the same time. Fried, for instance, greatly reduced his critical writing at the end of the 1960s, partly because of a feeling that:

What might be called evaluative art criticism no longer mattered as it previously had. No longer was it read with the same interest, no longer could the critic imagine that his or her words might intervene in the contemporary situation in the way in which, perhaps delusively, I had sometimes imagined my words intervening in it, no

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ I return to Sylvester's view of minimalism in Chapter 6.

¹⁷² Max Kozloff, 'Remembering David Sylvester', *Art in America*.

¹⁷³ A return visit in 1969-70 was planned before Sylvester cancelled at short notice. Correspondence between Sylvester and Swarthmore staff, TGA 200816/2/1/3 and TGA 200816/2/1/1098.

longer were there critical reputations to be made by distinguishing the best art of one's time from the rest [...] ¹⁷⁴

For critics of the 1960s to maintain engagement and relevance in the following decade would often require a change of focus: Krauss renounced the Greenbergian approach of her early criticism, while Kozloff and Alloway became increasingly politicized. ¹⁷⁵

There seem to be three main reasons why Sylvester took on the Magritte job. The first is that, as stated in his autobiographical essay 'Curriculum Vitae', he had 'a desire to contrive a catalogue raisonné that had a rational and serviceable structure', both to improve Magritte scholarship and to demonstrate his own ability to oversee such an art-historical labour. There is an obvious comparison to be made with Berenson, who in Kenneth Clark's opinion chose scholarly research over criticism because of a feeling that 'scholarship was a more respectable and serious-looking occupation than criticism'. ¹⁷⁶ A second, and more practical reason is the large amount of money Sylvester was paid by the Menil Foundation to undertake the catalogue. The commission offered Sylvester stability at a time when, with three children to support, he needed a stable income more than ever. Sylvester complained throughout his life about the poor rates of pay for art critics, and his regular salary from the Menil Foundation (Michael Levey referred to 'the haven of your [Sylvester's] newly-won financial height') offered a way out of this. ¹⁷⁷ As a result, while Sylvester continued to organise exhibitions regularly while working on the catalogue raisonné, and wrote other occasional pieces, he did not rely upon them as his main source of income.

¹⁷⁴ Fried, 'An Introduction to My Art Criticism', p.15.

¹⁷⁵ For Krauss and Greenberg see Chapter 5.

¹⁷⁶ Kenneth Clark, 'Bernard Berenson', *Burlington Magazine*, September 1960, pp.381-6 (p.383).

¹⁷⁷ Letter from Levey to Sylvester, 29 April 1969, TGA 200816/2/2/18.

A related third reason is an uneasiness Sylvester may have felt about new forms of art and the critic's role in relation to it, similar to Fried's claims that evaluative criticism was in decline. This is not to say that Sylvester ever publicly disassociated himself from new art, and indeed his taste continued to evolve. He purchased innovative sculptures by Barry Flanagan when acting as buyer for the Contemporary Art Society, and was probably involved in commissioning Gilbert & George to produce the 'Magazine Sculpture' *Two Text Pages Describing Our Position* which appeared in the *Sunday Times Magazine* in 1970.¹⁷⁸ He co-organised (with Michael Compton) the 1971 Robert Morris exhibition at the Tate Gallery; and described as 'unforgettable' his former assistant Anne Seymour's important conceptual art exhibition 'The New Art' at the Hayward Gallery in 1972 (which included Gilbert & George and Richard Long, both future subjects of Sylvester's writing).¹⁷⁹

However, as someone who regularly compared the career spans of critics to those of athletes, Sylvester may have felt that in the long-term he be better advised to take on a project dealing with the art he was most confident in discussing.¹⁸⁰ When he returned to writing regularly after completing the Magritte catalogue raisonné, it would be mainly about the same artists he had specialised in previously, and his few incursions into new territory would be on artists whose reputations were safely established (Chapter 7). By this time he had firmly established a canon of major twentieth-century artists and in the

¹⁷⁸ 'I think it would be a super idea to tour Gilbert and George. You may be interested to know that we're running five pages on them in the Sunday Times Magazine before long. This may give some people in the provinces their first intimation of George and Gilbert's existence.' Letter from Sylvester to Robin Campbell, 7 December 1970, TGA 200816/5/5/1.

¹⁷⁹ David Sylvester, 'A Proto-Biennial' (unpublished typescript dated 4 August 1998), TGA 200816/5/8/39.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Shone, 'David Sylvester (1924-2001)', *Burlington Magazine*, November 2001, pp.695-6 (p.695).

1990s any younger artists he became interested in would have to fit into that lineage in some way, rather than prompt its revision.

Chapter 3: Broadcasting

Introduction

Sylvester's art films and broadcasting, mostly for the BBC (which he described as 'a very enlightened patron of modern art') have received far less scholarly attention than his published criticism, since they are less accessible.¹ Some of Sylvester's radio talks for the BBC subsequently appeared in *The Listener* while others were published in *About Modern Art*, but access to the vast majority of his work in this area requires archival research, either in Sylvester's archive or that of the BBC). Much of his work for television, meanwhile, requires visits to the BFI archive or survives only in script form. This chapter consists of three sections: the first discusses Sylvester's scripted radio talks; the second his unscripted conversations on the radio (Sylvester's interviews with artists are considered separately in the following chapter); and the third his work for film and television.

This work was mostly undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s, the period covered in the previous chapter, but it is here discussed separately from Sylvester's published criticism because it foregrounds another important aspect of his work: his ability to communicate to a wide, non-specialist audience. During this period Sylvester was, along with Berger, Read and Clark, one of a small group of writers on art who, while highly respected as specialists, had an audience and appeal beyond the art columns owing to their

¹ Wroe (para. 36 of 45).

ability to discuss art in an educational or general interest context.² In Sylvester's case this was for two reasons: his ability to discuss complex issues in twentieth-century art clearly, and his wide range of interests. In addition to his art criticism Sylvester was a regular commentator on sport and the arts more broadly, and French wrote that 'one of the last cards I had from him [Sylvester] thanked me for describing him [...] as 'our best critic of the arts' rather than as an art critic'.³ This aspect of Sylvester is acknowledged in the play *The Formation Dancers* (first performed in 1964) by his brother-in-law Frank Marcus, in which the literary critic Gerald is based on Sylvester.⁴

Gerald's eclectic interests are discussed by two other characters in the play:

Paul: Gerald seems pretty anxious to keep in the swim. Writing articles on Bingo for *Encounter* and on the latest pop singer for the *New Statesman*.

Maggie: He's perfectly serious about it all; it's all one to him whether it's Beowulf or the Beatles.⁵

3.1 Radio Talks

Sylvester wrote that 'from the early 1950s to the late 1970s the BBC Third Programme was probably Britain's best forum on the subjects of contemporary art and architecture—better than television, better than any particular periodical'.⁶ It aspired to broadcasting that was both educational and

² Anon., 'When Television Turns to the Arts', *The Times*, 11 April 1964, p.5; Anon., 'Radio's Services to Art', *The Times*, 10 October 1964, p.12.

³ French, 'My Mentor (2001): An Obituary' in Philip French, *I Found It at the Movies: Reflections of a Cinephile* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011), pp.1-4 (p.1).

⁴ Gerald was, however, described as a 'pompous literary parasite' in the editor's introduction to the volume in which the play was published. J.C. Trewin, 'Introduction' in *Plays of the Year, Volume 28*, ed. by J.C. Trewin (London: Elek, 1965), pp.7-14 (p.10).

⁵ Frank Marcus, 'The Formation Dancers' in *Plays of the Year, Volume 28*, pp.219-327 (p.250). Forge wrote of Sylvester that 'his eclecticism was a scandal' ('In the Shadow of Thanatos', p.28).

Yvonne Gilan, actress and former wife of Michael Gill, identified the characters in the play for me (conversation with Gilan, 18 July 2014).

⁶ David Sylvester, 'Picasso as Sculptor', p.35.

of cultural merit, and Harrison Birtwistle and Harold Pinter (both friends of Sylvester's) are amongst the many who have testified to the importance of the programme in giving them access to advanced culture at an early age.⁷ For several years Sylvester broadcast regularly on the Third Programme, which began in 1946 as a flagship station broadcasting entirely scripted material all intended to be of publishable quality.⁸ The Third Programme was both revered for its uncompromising standards and reviled for its perseverance in making programmes which rarely reached audience numbers comparable to those of the Home Service or Light Programme, but Sylvester was always a supporter of its ethos.

Sylvester's Third Programme career had started falteringly. He met with the critic and Third Programme Talks producer Basil Taylor in 1948 and made several suggestions for broadcasts, but was not commissioned to write any of them.⁹ Then in 1951, just as he was beginning to establish himself on the station, he heard that following his talk on Bacon the head of the station Harman Grisewood 'swore that it would be a long time before I did another talk for them'.¹⁰ The same broadcast was also singled out for criticism by Read in his own Third Programme broadcast, 'The Art of Art Criticism'. Read quoted a passage from Sylvester's broadcast in which he spoke of how 'in looking at some of Bacon's paintings, we are conscious at first only of the paint, seeing it

⁷ Pinter said the Third Programme expanded his horizons 'enormously' and was 'a great thing' (Humphrey Carpenter, *The Envy of the World: Fifty Years of the BBC Third Programme and Radio 3 1946-1996*, 2nd edn (London: Phoenix Giant, 1997), p.50) while Birtwistle said 'if you ask me where I was educated, I would say the Third Programme' (Tusa, *On Creativity*, p.56). Both were friends with Sylvester.

⁸ Carpenter, p.216.

⁹ Sylvester's suggestions included talks on 'Modern Jewish Painting', 'The Rise and Decline of Expressionism', and 'The Ideal Museum'. Letter from Sylvester to Taylor, 24 March 1948, RCont 1 David Sylvester Talks file 1 1948-1958, BBC WAC.

¹⁰ Sylvester, 'My Brushes with Bacon', p.30. After this Sylvester didn't present another talk on the Third Programme for another four years.

as some amorphous, ectoplasmic substance floating aimlessly on the canvas. It takes a little time before this stuff that is paint crystallises into an image’.

Read objected that in Sylvester’s talk:

The language is such as might be used by a lecturer in a physics laboratory [...] in describing the painter’s intention by terminology taken from the science of physics, this particular critic is, I would say, using precise analytical language. It would seem, therefore, that what we really distrust—and by ‘we’ I mean the general public—is the analytical method itself: we remember Wordsworth’s phrase, ‘we murder to dissect’, and we would rather be left with a living unity, however baffling it might be.¹¹

The rather artificial choice that Read sets out here is between poetic evocation and clinical dissection, but as shown by the very passage that Read quoted, Sylvester is as evocative as he is analytical. As subsequent examples in this chapter also demonstrate, Sylvester’s career in art broadcasting involved trying to maintain a balance between the elucidation and evocation of artworks.

After beginning his Third Programme career with occasional individual broadcasts such as his talk on Bacon, Sylvester eventually found a regular slot giving shorter talks on the Thursday night arts magazine ‘Comment’. Twenty minutes in length, ‘Comment’ consisted of either two or three separate items on various art forms, with Sylvester regularly reviewing exhibitions or films.¹² This was a change from early resistance to regular features on the Third Programme, which initially preferred a more fluid approach to scheduling, and it took a newspaper strike in 1955 to initiate a regular arts programme on the station. As French recalled, ‘it was decided to have a programme to perform a

¹¹ Herbert Read, ‘The Art of Art Criticism’, *The Listener*, 1 May 1952, pp. 714-6 (p.715). Like Sylvester’s talk on Bacon, Read’s talk was broadcast first and then published in *The Listener*.

¹² Some of Sylvester’s ‘Comment’ reviews were published in *About Modern Art*, showing his high regard for them.

service that had been lost—to provide theatre and arts reviews. So *Comment* began, and David Sylvester and Robert Kee were brought in as ‘advisers’ for it, but it was just a staff announcer introducing the pieces, which were written scripts commissioned from the people whose newspaper columns were in abeyance’.¹³

The programme was first broadcast on 21 July 1955 and Sylvester made his first appearance on 25 August 1955, reviewing the new Marilyn Monroe film *The Seven-Year Itch* (dir. Billy Wilder, 1955). In his *Encounter* article on Monroe earlier in the year Sylvester had been critical about Hollywood’s misuse of Monroe’s talents, but after seeing *The Seven-Year Itch* he applauded it as ‘the best starring vehicle this remarkable and delectable creature has so far had.’¹⁴ Due to its success ‘Comment’ was kept on after the strike finished, and became, as French remembered, ‘the beginning of topical interviews on the Third’, providing a suitable outlet for Sylvester’s important series of interviews with American artists (Chapter 4).¹⁵

An example of Sylvester’s work for ‘Comment’ is his broadcast on a 1958 Kurt Schwitters exhibition in London (Sylvester’s most extensive discussion of Schwitters’ work).¹⁶ Sylvester claims that, like Naum Gabo, ‘the obsessions which could give creative vitality to Schwitters’ work were curiously narrow and precious’, residing only in one aspect of his output: his collages and constructions.¹⁷ The delicacy of this work is compared with Whistler,

¹³ Carpenter, p.216. Sylvester was himself one of those newspaper writers. Sylvester also co-produced ‘Comment’ with George Macbeth for a short time in 1959.

¹⁴ David Sylvester, ‘On the film ‘The Seven Year Itch’, ‘Comment’, broadcast on BBC Third Programme on 25 August 1955, transcript in TGA 200816/8/1/6.

¹⁵ Carpenter, p.216. The programme was retitled ‘New Comment’ in 1961.

¹⁶ David Sylvester, ‘David Sylvester on the exhibition of work of Kurt Schwitters at Lord’s Gallery, St. John’s Wood’, ‘Comment’, broadcast on BBC Third Programme, 23 October 1958, transcript in TGA 200816/8/1/5.

¹⁷ Ibid.

whose art shocked 'because he refused to confer on man and his image the importance traditionally given to them'. At the same time that Schwitters' method of redeeming specifically discarded materials is compared to other Dadaists and described as 'a sort of pantheism of the dustbin', its use of form and colour is compared once again to that of Klee.¹⁸ This is not an exhibition review which isolates and discusses any individual works but demonstrates how Sylvester can, in a short broadcast, provide a compelling framework for interpreting an artist's work as a whole.

Another notable aspect of Sylvester's radio talks was his capacity for compelling close analysis of specific paintings, as demonstrated by his talks for the BBC's successful Home Service series 'Painting of the Month', which ran from 1960 to 1967.¹⁹ In this series critics, artists and art historians spoke about three paintings within the same genre in British public collections. Sylvester was assigned still-life, and spoke about paintings by Cézanne, Braque and Bonnard. Comparing the respective audiences of the Home Service and the Third Programme, Sylvester noted 'speakers had to assume that the Home Service audience would be less informed than the Third Programme audience'.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ A revised series of programmes, which repeated Sylvester's talk on Cézanne's *Still Life with a Teapot*, was broadcast on Radio 3 in 1969.

²⁰ Sylvester, introduction to 'Still Life: Cézanne, Braque, Bonnard' in *About Modern Art*, pp.90-110 (p.90). Another example of Sylvester's approach to writing for different BBC audiences can be seen in a letter he wrote complaining about low rates of pay for work on 'Woman's Hour' (on which Sylvester occasionally reviewed films): 'writing a talk for a mass audience requires a good deal more time and trouble than writing one for a highbrow audience. In the latter case one writes spontaneously, as one might talk to friends; in the former, one has the task of simplifying one's ideas to make them more accessible. When writing for newspapers, rewards are proportionately larger in relation to the size of one's audience: Beaverbrook pays more than The Times because he commands a larger circulation [...] there still does seem to me to be a case to be made out for taking the size of the audience into consideration when assessing the fee, simply because the labour involved in producing the talk tends to increase as the

Response to 'Painting of the Month' was extremely positive, hence its longevity: the radio critic of *The Times* more than once described it as an 'exemplary' programme which drew increased numbers of visitors to the galleries which housed the paintings discussed.²¹ The critic of *The Times* explained its appeal: 'for a modest sum it equips its audience with a portfolio of reproductions [...] and a pertinent commentary upon its selected pictures. Fortified by these excellent materials the listener is equipped to get the best out of the 20-minute talks'.²² Sylvester also approved of the project, which he described as 'one of the most rewarding commissions I have ever had' while he also reprinted all three of his talks in *About Modern Art*.²³

The programmes' audience included the future critic and art historian Richard Cork, who was a schoolboy at the time the programmes were broadcast. Cork recalled:

Every Christmas I would ask my parents for a year's subscription to the BBC's Painting of the Month [...] More often than not, [...] speakers as perceptive as David Sylvester or Andrew Forge made me appreciate just how much could be gained from the steady, continually alert and questioning examination of a single image. [...] All the most nourishing talks delivered by 'Painting of the Month' broadcasters likewise invited the listener to resist any temptation to lapse into passive consumption of a neat, watertight analysis. They required us instead to take an active part in 'joining up' the 'internal workings' of every image under consideration. I remember in particular the formidable challenge presented to my fourteen-year-old responses by Braque's Cubist *Still Life with Fish* when David Sylvester explored it in February 1962.²⁴

audience increases'. Letter from Sylvester to Ronald Boswell (BBC Talks Booking Manager), n.d. [1959?], RCont 1 David Sylvester Talks file 1 1948-1958, BBC WAC.

²¹ 'Giving Us Shocks to Open Our Eyes', *The Times*, 26 January 1963, p.4; 'Radio's Services to Art'.

²² 'Radio's Services to Art'. 'Painting of the Month' was not the first BBC programme to use this combination of broadcasting and publication: in 1947 a *Burlington Magazine* editorial discussed a 'Gallery Book' devised by the Third Programme, with the *Radio Times* publishing photographs of works to be discussed. Anon., 'Editorial: Broadcasting and the Visual Arts', *Burlington Magazine*, October 1947, pp. 265-6.

²³ Letter from Sylvester to Jean Rowntree, TGA 200816/2/1/160.

²⁴ Richard Cork, 'Art on Radio: A Modest Proposal' in *Ariel at Bay: Reflections on Broadcasting and the Arts: A Festschrift for Philip French*, ed. by Robert Carver (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), pp.68-73 (pp.71-2).

Cork, like Birtwistle and Pinter, is proof of the role of the Third Programme, despite its small overall audience, in attracting audiences who might not otherwise have encountered intelligent discussion of the arts.

3.2 Radio Conversations

Kenneth Clark once turned down an invitation from Sylvester to write for the *Sunday Times Magazine* on the basis that 'TV is harmless because its spoken word & informal manner has no relation to anything that one may write—but newspaper articles are fatal'.²⁵ Clark was distinguishing not between broadcasting and writing *per se*, but rather the improvised talk characteristic of many such appearances in contrast to the formality of published writing. In this section I will consider Sylvester's unscripted discussions with other critics, particularly his many appearances on the Home Service programme 'The Critics'.²⁶

Sylvester appeared on the programme around one hundred times between 1957 and 1967, and after Sylvester stopped writing for the *New Statesman* in 1962 it also became his most frequent outlet for criticism of any kind. On the programme a panel of five 'Critics' (representing television and radio, film, theatre, visual arts, and literature) each gave scripted

²⁵ Letter from Clark to Sylvester, dated 'Easter 1966', TGA 200816/2/1/1083.

²⁶ Conversations on 'The Critics' were occasionally published in *The Listener*, and on the first time that Sylvester's contributions were included he 'complained rather bitterly about the foolish appearance he seemed to make'. Internal BBC memorandum from French, 8 November 1963, R51/787/2 Talks / The Critics/ File 4 1958-64, BBC WAC. French was referring to 'Hamlet at the National Theatre', *The Listener*, 7 November 1963, pp.727-8.

introductions to the work which they had selected, and discussed each between themselves (mediated by a chairman).

From these broadcasts, with their extensive discussion of film, literature and theatre, we discover enthusiasms in other art forms that Sylvester does not discuss elsewhere (the poet John Berryman, the film *Rebel without a Cause*) along with marked dislikes such as Eugene O'Neill, three of whose plays he had to review on 'The Critics'.²⁷ Sylvester sometimes reacted strongly to the opinions offered by his colleagues, particularly when he defended a performance of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* against the criticisms of other panellists. In this case there is a clear link between Sylvester's defence of the work and his relationship with Bacon, who explicitly referred to the work in paintings such as *Triptych inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus* (1981). In the face of negative commentary from the other critics, Sylvester retorted:

I just don't understand how anybody cannot find the first thing to say about this trilogy is that it remains today [...] one of the four or five great works of dramatic literature [...] How can you not see the modernity of the central theme? [...] Don't you see what this trilogy is about, that it is about the nature of moral conflict [...] and if that whole situation as it exists between rival loyalties doesn't come to you more powerfully in the confrontation of Orestes and Clytemnestra than in anything in the world, I am simply flabbergasted.²⁸

Here Sylvester was not only defending a work which he had greatly admired since writing about it in 'Symbolism of Initiation in Tragedy' in the 1940s, but he was also undoubtedly reflecting back upon Bacon's well-documented

²⁷ See microfilmed transcripts in BBC WAC for 'The Critics' as broadcast on: 31 May 1959 (on Berryman's superiority to Auden as a poet); 6 September 1959 (Sylvester on *Rebel without a Cause* as 'a little masterpiece'); and for O'Neill 2 February 1958 (*The Iceman Cometh*); 5 October 1958 (*Long Day's Journey into Night*); 26 November 1961 (*Mourning Becomes Electra*). A comprehensive list is provided in my bibliography of Sylvester's works (section E).

²⁸ 'The Critics', broadcast on BBC Home Service on 19 November 1961, microfilmed transcript in WAC.

interest in the work.²⁹ It is even possible that at a time when Sylvester was seeing little of Bacon, his passionate defence of the play would have appeared as a gesture of reconciliation to Bacon.

With its large audience 'The Critics' was, like 'Painting of the Month', capable of making a decisive difference to exhibition attendances. Prompted by Sylvester, French convinced Gallery One director Victor Musgrave to extend Bridget Riley's first exhibition at the gallery beyond the planning closing date in order to discuss it on 'The Critics', with the result that the show was extended by a fortnight and the gallery 'received an unprecedented number of visitors'.³⁰ The programme was also credited with doubling attendances for the Arts Council's exhibition of the Seligman Collection of Oriental Art in 1966 after Sylvester selected it for the show.³¹

Sylvester was unpredictable in the exhibitions he selected to visit and discuss. They were often of artists whose work he never discussed in print (particularly after he left the *New Statesman*), including Jim Dine, Richard Smith and Michael Kidner.³² He also chose to discuss exhibitions on Nigerian sculpture and American Folk Art, and sometimes rather than exhibitions at all he selected art and visual culture topics such as the design of stamps and Christmas cards.³³

²⁹ The artist read William Bedell Stanford's *Aeschylus in his Style* shortly after its publication in 1942. Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), pp.90-1.

³⁰ French, 'My Mentor', p.2. In 1962, the year of the exhibition, the programme's audience was said to be 'nearly half a million' (Anon., 'Critics, Too, Have Critics', *The Times*, 31 March 1962, p.4). For the relevant discussion see 'The Critics', broadcast on BBC Home Service on 20 May 1962, microfilm transcript in BBC WAC.

³¹ Undated memorandum by Lorna Moore, WAC R19/2, 105/1 'The Critics 1964-1969', BBC WAC. The exhibition was discussed on 'The Critics', broadcast on BBC Home Service on 22 May 1966, microfilmed transcript in BBC WAC.

³² 'The Critics', broadcasts on 28 June 1964 (Kidner), 13 June 1965 (Dine) and 15 May 1966 (Smith), microfilmed transcripts in BBC WAC.

³³ See microfilmed transcripts in BBC WAC for 'The Critics' as broadcast on: 5 January 1958 (Christmas cards); 9 October 1960 (Nigerian Sculpture); 3 December 1961

Sylvester discussed his choices in consultation with the programme's producer (often French, who recalled the seriousness which Sylvester attached to this task). In 1963 Sylvester wanted to discuss Philip Guston's Whitechapel Gallery retrospective on the programme but was concerned that if the exhibition was not taken seriously by the other panellists the coverage would adversely affect the general response to the exhibition. Sylvester took French to look at the exhibition, after which French telephoned Al Alvarez, the combative literary commentator on 'The Critics' (whose reaction Sylvester was particularly concerned about) to say that Sylvester was concerned he would not be able to respond to Guston's work. Whether because of this or not, Alvarez in the programme 'said *exactly* the opposite of what David had predicted he might say', meaning that Alvarez said he was very impressed by the show.³⁴

At this point 'The Critics' was still successful, but its popularity waned as the 1960s progressed.³⁵ A 1965 review of the programme complained that 'in its sixteen years or more of life most of the permutations which might have been rung have already been tried—and they have failed', and in 1967 (the year that Sylvester made his last appearance), the programme attracted only 0.3% of the listening public.³⁶ It was eventually ended by Gerard Mansell, the first controller of Radio 4, in 1969 because, in the words of the BBC's Managing Director Frank Gillard: 'The Critics' 'became too superior. It

(American Folk Art); 7 April 1963 (postage stamps); 28 June 1964 (Kidner); 13 June 1965 (Dine); 15 May 1966 (Smith).

³⁴ Conversation with French, 11 April 2014.

³⁵ A 1963 column in *The Times* lamented 'if there is a sadly predictable quality about the programme, a sobering monotony, it is because here, as elsewhere, radio suffers from convention, from a rigid belief in a stiff upper lip'. 'Giving Us Shocks to Open Our Eyes'.

³⁶ J.D.S. Haworth, 'Criticism on the air', *The Listener*, 4 February 1965, p.204.

addressed itself increasingly—and sometimes all too obviously—to a minority of the minority. So it lost its hold, and fell away. We must remember this lesson'.³⁷)

Not everyone at the BBC was in favour of ending the programme, however. When the decision was made, producer Leonie Cohn complained in a memo that there was:

[...] No regular programme in any Service which makes it its business to subject the several arts in their current manifestation to searching and constructive criticism, except, of course, "The Critics" on Radio 4 which is now to be dropped. There are no regular critical programmes on any one of the arts [...] Most of them [Arts programmes] use the critic as interviewer, spokesman, interpreter, middleman but not really as a critic.³⁸

Sylvester believed Cohn was crucial to the success of the BBC's postwar broadcasting, and she regularly produced his own broadcasts.³⁹ She had first worked with him in 1951 (when she commissioned and produced his talk on Bacon) and also instigated Sylvester's first interview with Bacon in 1962. Given Sylvester's doubts that Bacon would agree to an interview, the series might never have begun without her prompting.⁴⁰ Cohn had done a great deal to further visual arts discussion on British radio, but as her comments above show, she felt that with the demise of 'The Critics', criticism itself was being removed from the BBC.

Over the next few years various new formats were launched in an attempt to find a successful replacement for 'The Critics', including the general

³⁷ Statistics and Gillard comment both WAC R51/1,076/1 Talks: The Critics file 5 '65+, BBC WAC.

³⁸ Internal memo by Cohn, 16/2/69, BBC WAC R51/1,076/1 Talks: The Critics file 5 '65+, BBC WAC.

³⁹ Sylvester wrote that the quality of the Third Programme's broadcasting on art was largely due to Cohn's 'intelligence, enterprise and boldness as a Talks Producer'. David Sylvester, 'Picasso as Sculptor', *Modern Painters*, Spring 1994, pp.35-9 (p.35).

⁴⁰ Sylvester, 'My Brushes with Bacon', p.31.

arts programmes 'Options' in 1970 and 'Scan' in 1971, and the arts and science magazine 'Kaleidoscope' in 1973. The problem for those BBC producers who, like Cohn, remained supportive of 'The Critics', was that these replacements seemed to be diluting the critical element. As the radio historian David Hendy has written:

Philip French and Lorna Moore, both of whom had produced *The Critics* before it was dropped, distrusted *Kaleidoscope* because, as a topical magazine, its inevitable duty was to concentrate on news *about* the arts rather than offering the stuff itself. This, they feared, left an intellectual void in a network where extended criticism and serious reflection should have been given houseroom.⁴¹

After years of unsuccessful experimentation 'The Critics' was eventually revived under French's guidance in 1974 (as 'Critics' Forum'), with Cork as one of the regular art critics.⁴² By this time French had stopped working with Sylvester, losing patience with him after almost three hours of studio time was needed for Sylvester to record a ten-minute feature about Charlie Parker.⁴³ 'Critics' Forum' ran until 1990, when it was replaced by 'Third Opinion' and French took early retirement. John Drummond, who oversaw the transition, described 'Critic's Forum' with words similar terms to those Gillard used after ending 'The Critics' in the 1960s. 'Critics' Forum', Drummond concluded, was 'smug—the same little gang of people saying the same sorts of things for years'.⁴⁴

One of the complaints regularly levelled against 'The Critics' was the opacity of art jargon, memorably parodied by Peter Sellers in his comic sketch

⁴¹ David Hendy, *Life on Air: A History of Radio Four* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.83. Hendy also quoted French's verdict of 'Scan' as 'schematic' and 'intolerably middlebrow' (p.80).

⁴² Carpenter, p.290.

⁴³ Conversation with French, 11 April 2014. The item in question was probably a discussion between Sylvester and Eric Rhode about Ross Russell's book *Bird Lives!: The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie Parker*, produced by French and broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 29 June 1973.

⁴⁴ Carpenter, pp.74, 290.

based on the programme.⁴⁵ Even former 'Critics' Paul Bailey and Joan Bakewell admitted to initially being bemused by the language used to talk about visual art on the programme.⁴⁶ A 1965 editorial in *The Listener* even wrote of visual arts discussions that 'it is occasionally refreshing to hear a critic drop out of its discussion, pleading ignorance'.⁴⁷

Forge, a close friend and colleague of Sylvester's, resigned from 'The Critics' in the early 1960s, feeling that the non-verbal nature of visual art put it at a disadvantage alongside literature and other art forms discussed on the programme,⁴⁸ and when in 1967 Sylvester left the programme it was for a similar reason:

I feel unable to go on coping with the way the art critic is forever being driven back into a corner having to defend contemporary artists against the condescension of people who aren't really interested in what they're talking about. Modern art is difficult. It can't hope to be accessible to everyone. It can't possibly be accessible to anyone who doesn't make a habit of looking at it. The critics on the Critics are more or less regular consumers of contemporary films, plays, books and broadcasting, but they don't make a habit of looking at contemporary art. I'm not reproaching them for it: it's only that communication becomes impossible, discussion embarrassing.⁴⁹

The interdisciplinary discussion on 'The Critics', which was supposed to bring in fresh ideas and prevent the discussion from becoming rarefied, in

⁴⁵ 'The Critics' on Peter Sellers and Irene Handl, *Songs for Swinging Sellers No. 4* (Parlophone GEP 8835, 1961). In this sketch Sellers plays the art critic Newton Tweedale, whose impenetrable talk may have been inspired in part by Sylvester (a regular on the programme at the time the recording was released) even if, as Sellers' biographer claims, Sellers' voice was an imitation of the director Anthony Asquith. Roger Lewis, *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* (London: Random House, 1995), p.697.

⁴⁶ Paul Bailey, 'With Saul Bellow & Philip French in a bathroom at the Ritz: Paul Bailey in conversation with Robert Carver' in *Ariel at Bay*, pp.20-6 (p.21) and Joan Bakewell, 'From Stockport to New Bloomsbury: Joan Bakewell in conversation with Robert Carver' in *Ariel at Bay*, pp.27-35 (p.27).

⁴⁷ 'Criticism on the Air'.

⁴⁸ Memorandum from French to Lorna Moore, 6 September 1962, R51/787/2 Talks / The Critics/ File 4 1958-64, BBC WAC.

⁴⁹ Draft of letter from Sylvester to Lorna Moore, April 1966, TGA 200816/2/1/160. Sylvester's last appearance on the programme was in April 1967.

Sylvester's opinion ended up merely proving that visual arts discussion required a different environment.

Sylvester had in fact proposed to the BBC an alternative programme specialising in visual art in 1962.⁵⁰ The proposal was for a programme to be titled 'Image and Design...a 20-minute weekly magazine of short talks, interviews, flashes and repeats'.⁵¹ Sylvester's intention was for this programme to diversify visual arts discussion on the radio and attract a wider audience (which he 'hoped to be as non-Metropolitan as possible') by discussing a range of subjects including architecture, automobile design, advertising and film aesthetics along with fine art criticism and interviews.⁵² The magazine was specifically conceived as an antidote to the dated format of 'The Critics', aiming to address the 'new social movements, new needs and wider-spread interests' which had emerged since the programme began in 1947. It was also conceived specifically as an idea for which 'Sound Radio is the medium of choice' in order to preserve a 'freewheeling spontaneous sort of quality' rather than having the discussion dictated by accompanying images (a perceived risk of doing something similar on television).⁵³ While nothing came of the proposal, it demonstrated Sylvester's attempts to rectify the situation

⁵⁰ Memorandum from French to Moore, 6 September 1962, R51/787/2 Talks / The Critics/ File 4 1958-64, BBC WAC.

⁵¹ 'New Programme Suggested: "Image and Design"', dated 23 October 1962. TGA 200816/2/1/160. The document was written by Isa Benzie and begins 'This proposal has been discussed by Mr. David Sylvester with A.H.T.(S) [to whom the document is addressed] and warmly recommended'. Earlier the same year Benzie (a BBC producer) wrote in an internal memorandum: 'I discussed with Mr. Sylvester [...] the possibility of his talking for the Home Service about matters nothing to do with art: I think he could be an extremely good and interesting broadcaster of this sort'. Memorandum dated 5 April 1962, RCont 1 David Sylvester Talks file 2 1959-62, BBC WAC.

⁵² Examples given in the proposal included: "'Why have they recently sought Italian 'stylists' for motor-cars?' [...] "Has Sean Kenny accomplished anything particular in his décor of the new rooms at "The Establishment" Club?" [...] "How would you evaluate various current theories of window-dressing?'"'. Ibid.

⁵³ 'Image and Design' proposal, RCont 1 David Sylvester Talks file 2 1959-62, BBC WAC.

which meant that attempts to discuss visual art alongside film and literature invariably revealed the assembled critics to have far less general knowledge and interest in art than the other art forms discussed.

3.3 Film and Television

Sylvester's first television work was broadcast in 1962, the same year as his contributions to 'Painting of the Month', and like that series it was an educational project. As his record of television work in the 1960s shows, he was clearly considered one of the most suitable critics to work on informative and educational programmes about modern art such as the short series *Cubism and After*. Working with Michael Gill (who subsequently directed both Clark on *Civilization* and Berger on *Ways of Seeing*), Sylvester devised and wrote three of the four programmes in the series, which was 'originally intended for schools' and in which the makers 'avoided jargon as much as possible'.⁵⁴ The series attempted 'to show in simple terms what lies behind some of the major trends, and to explain the motives that created such movements as Cubism, Surrealism, and Action Painting'. The films share characteristics with Sylvester's later projects, which were also often directed by Gill, notably in the final programme 'Figures in Space'.⁵⁵ This programme compared Moore and Giacometti, the two sculptors whose work Sylvester knew best, and used long tracking shots to move around the sculptors' work, often focusing in extremely closely to capture the rough textures of a Giacometti bronze or the drapery of a reclining figure by Moore. For much of

⁵⁴ Michael Gill, 'Art for Morning Viewers', *Radio Times*, 1 November 1962, p.18. The only programme to which Sylvester did not contribute was the first of the series, 'Departures', which focused on young artists Peter Schmidt and Ian Stephenson.

⁵⁵ 'Art for Morning Viewers'.

the film the images were accompanied only by music rather than a voiceover to allow the viewer to concentrate more on the artworks shown. Forge called the *Cubism and After* series 'the most thoughtful and imaginative films on art I have seen', and noted that (due no doubt to Sylvester's good friendship with the artists) 'the Giacometti sequence is quite a document in itself [...] it is the first time he has allowed himself to be filmed working'.⁵⁶

Soon after, Sylvester was commissioned to expand on the same territory and make a 'series of lectures' for the BBC, 'Ten Modern Artists' (again directed by Gill but this time written and presented by Sylvester alone). This was again publicised as an educational series, and the programmes were first screened at Sunday lunchtimes on BBC1.⁵⁷ Sylvester insisted that the programmes were not intended to be a 'top ten' of twentieth-century artists, but rather to represent the most significant developments in modern art in a way that meant 'no prior knowledge of art is necessary'.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Andrew Forge, 'Alternatives', *New Statesman*, 19 October 1962, p.539. Michael Gill, who filmed Giacometti, was 'extremely annoyed to discover that all he [Giacometti] did was to work over and over again one of those tall, slender, standing figures [...] Where's the development I thought to myself. At the end of the two days [of filming] the figure looked much the same as it had on the first morning'. Michael Gill, 'Some Thoughts on Art Films'. I am grateful to Jonathan Conlin for allowing me to read this unpublished essay.

⁵⁷ As for 'Painting of the Month', an accompanying booklet could be purchased, which included short texts on each of the ten artists profiled, along with an overview of modern art movements. Much of the latter was recycled the following year for Sylvester's book *Modern Art from Fauvism to Abstract Expressionism*, part of the Grolier 'The Book of Art' series. Sylvester also used some of his text for the individual programmes elsewhere: his 1966 essay on Mondrian for *Studio International*, for instance, is based on the Mondrian programme for 'Ten Modern Artists'. See Sylvester, 'A Tulip with White Leaves: An Essay on Mondrian', *Studio International*, December 1966, pp.293-9.

⁵⁸ Indeed, Sylvester wrote that if he was producing a 'top ten' then 'Braque and Munch and Vuillard and perhaps Léger' would have been included. Sylvester, *Ten Modern Artists: an Introduction to Twentieth-Century Painting and Sculpture*, n.p.; *Radio Times*, 2 February 1964, p.16.

Other artists also featured prominently to reinforce or contrast with the main artist in each episode. The programme about Brancusi (who for Sylvester epitomised the 'streamlined era') contrasted him with Moore, who expanded upon Brancusi's vocabulary in a way befitting 'a less pure but more fertile kind of artist'. The final programme on Willem de Kooning, meanwhile, led into discussion on other contemporary artists creating figurative images of the human body, (including Bacon, de Staël, Dubuffet and Giacometti).⁵⁹ Sylvester wrote to his friend Kubrick that it was 'fantastically hard work' preparing the programmes, 'especially the co-ordination of commentary with visuals'.⁶⁰

In a test screening tutors from adult education colleges objected to some of the language used in Sylvester's Mondrian film, but overall the response to the series seems to have been very positive.⁶¹ In the opinion of *The Times'* television critic it firmly established Sylvester as a broadcaster of the same stature as Clark,⁶² while the BBC's Head of School Broadcasting Kenneth Fawdry described it as 'highly successful'.⁶³ Fawdry immediately encouraged Sylvester to develop a plan for a follow-up series on 'The Uses of Sculpture', for which Sylvester suggested ten programmes on sculpture as produced in Oceanic, Byzantine, Egyptian and Oriental society as well as the Western tradition, each to be researched by specialists such as Michael

⁵⁹ Sylvester, *Ten Modern Artists: Brancusi*, broadcast on BBC1 on 26 April 1964, shooting script in TGA 200816/5/6/2/4.

⁶⁰ Letter from Sylvester to Kubrick, n.d. [1964?] TGA 200816/2/1/633.

⁶¹ 'Report of a Joint Conference for Tutors on Television / Adult Education', 4 July 1964, TGA 200816/4/4/55.

⁶² 'The supremacy of Sir Kenneth Clark as a television expositor of the visual arts has rarely been challenged [...] but the B.B.C. have at last found his match [...]' ('When Television Turns to the Arts'). Later in the year the same unidentified critic wrote 'some of us still think that television might do more than it does to display and interpret the visual arts, although we are grateful for the occasional appearance of such stimulating expositors as Sir Kenneth Clark and Mr. David Sylvester'. 'Radio's Services to Art'.

⁶³ Letter from Fawdry to Sylvester, 22 September 1964, TGA 200816/5/6/4.

Baxandall and Francis Haskell. Sylvester's idea was that, given the dichotomy between the purposes for which sculpture was first produced and its interest for contemporary museum-goers, he would operate as a mediator between the audience and the specialist in each episode: 'if I were the anchor man, I would speak in each programme from the standpoint of to-day, talking about the kind of interest the images have for me personally and for the taste in general of to-day. And a specialist would appear in each programme talking about the original use of the images'.⁶⁴ While BBC management were initially in favour of the project, changing priorities at the BBC eventually led to the project being shelved.⁶⁵ Even so, the correspondence demonstrates how Sylvester was interested in comparative projects bringing together different histories of art, and how given the right opportunities he might have been responsible for a series of the ambition and scope of *Civilization*.

Presumably due to the success of 'Painting of the Month' on the radio, the BBC subsequently produced a television equivalent in 'Canvas' (1966-70), a series of fifteen-minute 'personal reflections on great paintings' by critics and artists including Michael Levey, Joe Tilson and Robert Hughes. Sylvester presented three programmes in the series, on paintings by Goya, Magritte and Bonnard. His programme on Goya's *The Third of May 1808 in Madrid* (1814) is particularly interesting, as it is one of the few occasions on which Sylvester discussed history painting.⁶⁶ Sylvester's comments elsewhere show that he considered the subject of paintings such as *The Third of May 1808 in Madrid* almost impossible for contemporary artists to paint convincingly, as another

⁶⁴ Sylvester, letter to Fawdry (copy), 25 January 1965, TGA 200816/5/6/4.

⁶⁵ Letters from Fawdry to Sylvester, February 1965, TGA 200816/5/6/4.

⁶⁶ In *The Times* Sylvester was praised for his 'quietly eloquent discussion of the painter's "personal obsessions"'. 'Attention to Willie Loman', *The Times*, 25 May 1966, p.6.

aspect of the condition of modern art in relation to 'common meanings' discussed in Chapter 2.⁶⁷

The programme begins by juxtaposing Goya's painting with contemporary photographs of executions in Hungary and the Congo, over which Sylvester's voice-over asserts that Goya's painting is 'journalism' with the 'immediacy of a press-photograph taken with a high-speed camera'.⁶⁸ However, Sylvester is not interested here in Goya as a witness, since the artist did not observe the scene and painted the picture many years later. Rather he claims that what elevates the painting above academic history painting is that it is 'one of those cases, such as you get in novels by Balzac and Flaubert, where the artist has based a work on a news story that somehow corresponded with his own deepest emotions'.⁶⁹ Bacon's crucifixions and Warhol's 'Death and Disaster' series were amongst the only contemporary depictions of similar subject matter that Sylvester admired, and both of these artists made extensive use of news stories in their work.⁷⁰

Sylvester sat on the newly-founded Arts Council Film Sub-committee from 1967-71.⁷¹ This sub-committee was established to develop a policy on

⁶⁷ When in 1964 the actor and art collector Vincent Price said in an interview that he'd like to see Bacon paint a historical subject in the manner of Delacroix, which Sylvester replied that modern artists, rather than lacking in technical ability or desire to do so, lacked conviction in their ability to paint such scenes convincingly. 'The Connoisseur' [Vincent Price interviewed by Sylvester and Paul Mayersberg], BBC Home Service, 3 November 1964, microfilmed transcript at BBC WAC.

⁶⁸ 'Canvas', broadcast on BBC2 on 24 May 1966, shooting script in TGA 200816/5/6/1/1.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ This may have been another reason for him wanting to see Bacon and Warhol exhibited together: 'Which Warhols? Car crashes [...] some of the *Most Wanted Men* [...] a head of Nelson Rockefeller with a battery of microphones'. Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p.215.

⁷¹ While Sylvester resigned from most of the several committees he sat on after undertaking the Magritte catalogue raisonné in 1969, he continued on the Arts Council Film Sub-Committee until 1971. By then he had made of all his films, mostly with Arts Council funding.

film production at a time when the Arts Council was progressing from making small contributions towards art films to financing films for their full cost if they met certain criteria, such as being proposals for innovative films which would otherwise probably not get made. Sylvester's presence on the committee was influential and helped him to realise his films of the late 1960s, which were less generic than his educational films, and more tailored to their individual subjects.⁷²

The first of Sylvester's Arts Council-financed films was *Giacometti* (1967), Sylvester's third film to focus on the sculptor, who died before the film was completed.⁷³ At one point Sylvester stands in a studio beside Giacometti's bronze *Standing Woman* [*Femme debout*, c.1952] which the sculptor had given Sylvester as a gift, and discusses the work.⁷⁴ The camera zooms in on the sculpture and moves upwards from its feet to its head, producing an effect that makes us imagine we are looking at a film of a brushstroke or a Stan Brakhage film. Bearing in mind Sylvester's conviction, shared by Hess and Sandler, that Barnett Newman's 'zips' were inspired by the 1948 Pierre Matisse Gallery exhibition of Giacometti's work, it seems likely that Sylvester intended for the viewer to have noticed the similarity between this shot of the

⁷² Sylvester didn't get everything his own way, however: a suggestion to film the Bonnard exhibition in Paris was rejected, and a planned film about Duchamp was aborted following the artist's death in 1968 (Arts Council Art Film Sub-committee minutes, TGA 200816/3/2). Conversely, the film director Bruce Beresford, who sat on the committee with Sylvester recalled that 'often [...] his persuasiveness had sunk a few projects I thought should have gone ahead'. Email from Beresford, 23 October 2014.

⁷³ The budget for the film was £3000 and the music was by composer Roger Smalley, who in 1966 had interviewed John Cage alongside Sylvester.

⁷⁴ Sylvester received the sculpture in 1960, the same year he sat for a portrait by Giacometti, so it is likely that the gift was a way for Giacometti to thank Sylvester. See letter from Giacometti to Sylvester authenticating the work, 18 July 1960, TGA 200816/2/1/412. Sylvester later sold the sculpture, now in the collection of Esther Grether, through Sotheby's Bond Street (15 April 1970, lot 93).

Giacometti sculpture, and running his eyes over a Newman zip.⁷⁵ *Giacometti* was shown at film festivals including Venice, and became the first Arts Council film to win a first prize in competition when it received the Silver Bucerium for the best film on art at the 12th International Exhibition of Scientific-Didactic Films of Padua University in 1967.⁷⁶

At this time the Arts Council funded several films documenting exhibitions (which was relevant to Sylvester, who was curating increasingly important exhibitions during the 1960s) and Sylvester was prominently involved in two of these, *Lichtenstein in London* and *Henry Moore*.⁷⁷ The Arts Council toured these films and made them available for hire for an initial period, before passing them on to the British Film Institute to oversee wider distribution. Sylvester devised and scripted *Lichtenstein in London*, but declined to direct it because of his workload at the time (as a result Bruce Beresford took on this responsibility).⁷⁸ The film shows visitors to the Tate Gallery's 1968 Lichtenstein exhibition giving their opinions of Lichtenstein's work, in an unusual attempt to cover audience response to an exhibition which resulted in an interesting piece of social history.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Sylvester, 'Newman-I' in *About Modern Art*, pp.321-331 (first publ. as 'The Ugly Duckling' in Michael Auping, ed., *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), pp.137-45), p.323.

⁷⁶ The following year it also showed at the Curzon cinema in London, as part of a double feature. Arts Council Art Film Sub-committee minutes, 29 November 1968, TGA 200816/3/2.

⁷⁷ Sylvester was involved with *Lichtenstein in London* (both dir. Bruce Beresford, 1968) and *Henry Moore* (dir. Walter Lassally and David Sylvester, 1970). Other similar films from the period were *Barbara Hepworth* (dir. Bruce Beresford, 1968) and *Kinetics* (dir. Lutz Becker, 1970). All available to watch at <http://artsonfilm.wmin.ac.uk/index.html>.

⁷⁸ TGA 200816/3/2.

⁷⁹ Both Sylvester and Beresford rejected Rodney Wilson's claim in his 1970 document 'Concerning a Policy for Art Films' that no art films produced by the Arts Council 'try to establish the artist in his environment and society', claiming that *Lichtenstein in London* did this. Letter from Beresford to Sylvester, 9 March 1970, and annotated copy of Wilson's report, TGA 200816/3/2.

Sylvester's other exhibition film was a very different document of the Henry Moore exhibition at the Tate Gallery which he organised that same year, made with the prominent cinematographer Walter Lassally.⁸⁰ Programme notes written to accompany the Moore film explain that it was made not simply to record the exhibition but to allow the viewer to 'assume the role of someone walking around the exhibition on his own looking at the sculptures in silence'.⁸¹ Given the near-impossibility of looking around the exhibition itself without crowds surrounding the sculptures, the film offered 'the next best thing' to being alone.⁸² It was perhaps for this reason that Sylvester was delighted when Robert Morris made a similar film, *Neo-Classic* (1971) at the beginning of the Tate Gallery exhibition of his work which Sylvester co-organised that year. Whereas the controversial exhibition was closed due to the health and safety concerns surrounding the way visitors aggressively interacted with Morris' artworks, in Morris' film a single naked woman is filmed alone in the galleries, meditatively interacting with the artworks as if demonstrating Morris' intentions for the exhibition.⁸³

In *Henry Moore*, Lassally's camera glides around the Tate Gallery in place of the absent viewer, filming Moore's work using long takes similar to those in the earlier 'Figures in Space'. With no sound, and just the images to concentrate on, Gill considered this film was an example of how 'a silent film

⁸⁰ Both films had budgets of £2000.

⁸¹ As if to contrast practical and ideal viewing conditions, the film consists of a short section filmed while the exhibition was busy, and a longer section filmed while the gallery was empty.

⁸² Notes on Moore film, TGA 200816/3/2, 200816/5/5/1. It thereby anticipates the films now made of popular exhibitions and shown at cinemas as a substitute to (rather than just a document of) such exhibitions.

⁸³ 'A Dialogue between David Sylvester and Michael Compton', *Tate Magazine*, Summer 1997, n.p. Sylvester described the film as a 'wonderful artefact [...] a very beautiful residue' which went some way to redeeming his disappointment with the exhibition itself (Chapter 6).

can sound deafeningly loud'.⁸⁴ The film is useful not just as a way of seeing how the exhibition was installed, but also of indicating how Sylvester looked at Moore's work and encouraged the viewer to see it. The clearest example of this is the way that he and Lassally filmed Moore's 1939 elm *Reclining Figure*. From a starting position behind the head of the figure, the camera slowly pans around almost 180 degrees so that several openings between the limbs of the figure seem to open and then close. The camera then pauses by the figure's bent legs (which Sylvester in his exhibition catalogue compared with those of the marble 'Dionysos' statue from the Parthenon in the British Museum) before zooming quickly in between the legs of the figure.⁸⁵ Here Sylvester was surely thinking of a passage in his exhibition catalogue which referred to the sculpture:

The image which is peculiarly Moore's is that of a tunnel or cavern, dramatically dark and light, which can be entered in imagination [...] If it also evokes the interior of a woman's body, it is not so much in regard to the idea of sexual penetration as to that of being wholly inside it. The image of the cavernous reclining figure subsumes that of the mother and child.⁸⁶

The film seemed to meet with disapproval within the panel from the new Arts Film Officer Rodney Wilson, whose 1970 position paper, 'Concerning a Policy for Art Films' suggested it was a mistake to make another film about the already well-documented Moore. Sylvester's reasonable

⁸⁴ Gill, 'Notes on Art Films'. Moore appears to have offered to pay for one (possibly by Birtwistle) to be added later, probably to try and increase the limited interest shown in the film by the public. TGA 200816/3/2.

⁸⁵ Sylvester wrote in his catalogue that the pose of Moore's reclining figures 'doesn't betoken the availability commonly implied in reclining female nudes', thereby distancing him from Donald Hall's earlier description of the Detroit *Reclining Figure* as 'utterly sexual, a woman opening herself to a man'. Hall, *Henry Moore*, pp.98-9.

⁸⁶ Sylvester, *Henry Moore*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1968), p.71.

objection was that Wilson failed to take into account 'the art film as a substitute for the exhibition'.⁸⁷

Sylvester's two last films were also made in relation to London exhibitions which he was involved with, of the work of Magritte and Matisse. Sylvester helped to select works and secure loans for the Hayward Gallery's 1968 Matisse exhibition, footage of which can be seen in *Matisse and his Model* (dir. Leslie Megahey, 1968), a forty-five minute programme he wrote about the painter and his relationship to his sitters and (in an echo of Sylvester's reading of Lichtenstein) the anxiety which lay behind his apparently effortless style.⁸⁸ Sylvester also intended to do further work on Matisse, who in 1955 he had called a greater artist, if a lesser genius, than Picasso.⁸⁹ In the early 1970s he agreed to write a book on Matisse for Kermode's 'Modern Masters' series, although the book was delayed and ultimately abandoned due to work on the Magritte catalogue raisonné.⁹⁰ As a result Matisse is only represented in Sylvester's collection *About Modern Art* through an adapted extract from the *Matisse and his Model* script, which demonstrates the importance of the film as the culmination of Sylvester's thinking about the artist.

⁸⁷ Wilson wrote 'I think it is a mistake to make another film on Henry Moore, at whatever cost, when, without counting television material, there are already nine in existence'. Sylvester, in his response, listed five reasons why he felt the Moore film was worth making, including the fact that 'the film will allow the sculptures to be seen in isolation by thousands of people who only saw them surrounded by crowds'. Copies of Wilson's report and Sylvester's notes, TGA 200816/3/2.

⁸⁸ In the exhibition catalogue Sylvester is credited with assisting in making the initial selection of works and for his assistance in securing loans from France and the US.

⁸⁹ David Sylvester, 'Death of a Wild Animal', *Encounter*, January 1955, pp.60-2 (p.62).

⁹⁰ Book contract dated 1 April 1971, TGA 200816/2/1/126; correspondence between Sylvester and Arthur A. Cohen, 1971-3, TGA 200816/2/1/1120. Sylvester was paid £525 by the BBC to make *Matisse and his Model* (TGA 200816/2/1/160).

Magritte: the False Mirror (dir. David Sylvester, 1969) was also written and directed by Sylvester (again working with Beresford) and coincided with the Tate exhibition he organised.⁹¹ As Sylvester explained, the programme pursued Magritte's 'obsessive themes' by using a technique of 'zoom in—change to similar section of different picture—zoom out'. Like the Moore film, it employs a simple visual vocabulary, although where the Moore film is effective because of the way it recreates the experience of moving around the sculptures, in the Magritte film there is a correlation between the technique and the labyrinthine structure constructed for the exhibition which isolated the paintings so that they were seen individually (fig. 2). A press release stated, 'the film is closer to music than to art history or criticism',⁹² and as with many of Sylvester's films, music is the only accompaniment to the images for much of the film, which therefore doesn't so much attempt to explain Magritte's work as let the images speak for themselves.

Sylvester has written of how 'the attraction of making art films is that it is exhilarating to try and create a *Gesamtkunstwerk*', and Sylvester's later films show him trying to find the form necessary to present the subject to best advantage.⁹³ Accordingly these were very different films to the educational projects, sparing in their use of voiceover and more committed to finding a convincing cinematographic equivalent for the art under discussion than to explaining or contextualising the art. This conviction can also be seen from a counter-example: Sylvester's decision to pull out of a planned film coinciding with de Kooning's 1968-9 London exhibition because, as he explained to the

⁹¹ Beresford filmed in the gallery in the evenings after the exhibition closed (email from Beresford, 23 October 2014).

⁹² TGA 200816/5/5/1.

⁹³ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.28.

artist, 'I had thought—the obvious thought—that it would be nice to move, now quickly, now slowly, from one face to another, etc.; and to glide over the surface of the canvases looking at the paint' but then realised that this strategy wouldn't work because in de Kooning's particular case 'one doesn't see the parts except in relation to the whole'.⁹⁴ The technical issue of finding a way to film de Kooning's works which emulated the way they were experienced in person may have scuppered the programme, but it demonstrates Sylvester's awareness that television is not a neutral medium but serves some artists better than others, and requires different techniques for the filming of work by different artists.⁹⁵

A 1974 *Burlington Magazine* editorial noted despondently the growing reliance upon 'personality, reconstruction and location shooting' in art films, while Sylvester himself stated in 2000 that 'the treatment of art on television is now at a much lower intellectual level than it was in the 1950s'.⁹⁶ Indeed, looking at recent visual arts programmes on television one finds that personality and location shooting are lynchpins of the programmes (which often resemble travel shows), even if reconstruction is no longer as common as it once was. In Sylvester's later television projects there was little of this formulaic tendency and instead an attempt to present the art in a sympathetic way.

⁹⁴ Letter from Sylvester to de Kooning, 3 February 1969, TGA 200816/2/1/626. Funding was allocated for the 1968 de Kooning exhibition at the Tate to be filmed (Art film sub-committee minutes, 29 November 1968, TGA 200816/3/2) and Sylvester approached Smalley about providing the music (letter from Smalley to Sylvester, 28 August 1968, TGA 200816/2/2/24).

⁹⁵ The same was true of his work for the *Sunday Times Magazine*, where he made decisions about which artists to cover in the magazine based on the appeal of their work in the context of the magazine (eg. turning down a suggestion to cover Mark Gertler because his works wouldn't reproduce well). Sylvester, correspondence with *Sunday Times Magazine* staff, TGA 200816/2/1/1082.

⁹⁶ Wroe (para. 36 of 45).

To conclude, Sylvester's broadcasting was an important part of his work for two reasons. The first reason is that it expanded both his audience and the range of subjects he discussed. By appearing on programmes such as 'The Critics' Sylvester was able to demonstrate his versatility while also reaching audiences who would not have read his art criticism in the *New Statesman*. Meanwhile projects such as 'Ten Modern Artists', while remaining within Sylvester's specialism of twentieth-century art, also gave him the scope to present the subject in an accessible manner for a wide audience in a way which written art criticism rarely allowed (if only because of the scarcity of quality reproductions in most British art publications at the time), and so to establish himself as a public intellectual of a stature comparable to Clark. The second reason is that Sylvester's broadcasting supplemented his written criticism on modern art. On the radio he often discussed exhibitions and artists (such as Schwitters) who did not appear in his published criticism, or made different points to those in his written criticism.⁹⁷ Films such as his *Henry Moore*, meanwhile, provide a different perspective on how Sylvester thought about navigating an exhibition. But while working with television and radio were characteristic of Sylvester's work in the 1960s, when he was most visible as a cultural commentator, he rarely appeared on either platform in subsequent years, when his writing and exhibition-making took precedence.

⁹⁷ There is a noticeable difference, for instance, between Sylvester's review of Andrews' 1958 exhibition at Beaux Arts in *The Listener* and his discussion of it on 'The Critics'.

Chapter 4: Interviews

Introduction

The importance, for Sylvester's development as a critic, of meeting artists socially in wartime London was demonstrated in Chapter 1. From these beginnings, Sylvester befriended artists throughout his life. His critical views regarding both opinions of specific artists and artworks, and art more generally, were undoubtedly influenced by his conversations with artists.¹ These conversations also helped him to understand how artists thought about their own work, therefore helping the development of his own ideas in writing about art. This became increasingly evident when Sylvester began regularly interviewing artists for the BBC in the 1960s. For Sylvester the interview was both a document, edited to present its subject to best advantage, and source material for his own work and future research.

Sylvester's interviews were mostly made in the 1960s and 1990s (although his first was made with Pasmore in 1951).² His interviewees included twenty-five American artists, slightly fewer British artists, two major continental artists (Giacometti and Duchamp) and around a dozen non-artists (including Birtwistle, Kubrick and Léonide Massine). Sylvester played an important role in increasing the popularity of the artist interview at a time that

¹ Auerbach quoted a remark Bacon made about Sylvester, 'that he discovered his preferences by speaking to the right people', before adding tellingly 'but that, too, is a talent'. Letter from Auerbach to the author, 18 February 2014.

² 'Artists on Art: a conversation between Victor Pasmore and A.D.B. Sylvester', broadcast on the BBC Third Programme, 21 April 1951, microfilmed transcript in BBC. The series, 'Artists on Art', also included a discussion between Hepworth and Reg Butler.

few prominent critics were regularly involved in the format. As a result, surveying the characteristic features, the editing process, and subsequent reputation of Sylvester's interviews, can also help one to think about the genre more broadly.

4.1 Reasons for Interviewing

Sylvester's interviews were part of the postwar popularisation of the genre. During the 1950s he would have been aware of the regular interviews with artists that appeared in *Art News* and other magazines, and the books of interviews that were published by other critics, such as Selden Rodman's *Conversations with Artists* (1957); Georges Charbonnier's *Le Monologue du peintre* (1959) and Edouard Roditi's *Dialogues on Art* (1960).³ Parallels could also be found in publications on the other arts, most notably the celebrated author interviews in the *Paris Review* from 1953 onwards, while artists were also becoming increasingly visible on television (John Freedman interviewed Henry Moore and Augustus John in 1960 for his *Face to Face* series of television interviews).

Sylvester's first major interviewing project took place during his visit to New York in 1960, when he interviewed six prominent American artists. In his role documenting the 'New American Painting' Sylvester could be compared with his contemporary Irving Sandler, who the poet and curator Frank O'Hara

³ Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1957); Georges Charbonnier, *Le Monologue du peintre* (Paris: René Julliard, 1959); Edouard Roditi, *Dialogues on Art* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960). Another important project was the Archives of American Art's ongoing Oral History Program, which began in 1958. See *Speaking of Art 1958-2008: Selections from the Archives of American Art Oral History Collection* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2008).

referred to as the 'balayeur des artistes' ['sweeper-up after artists'].⁴ Sandler interviewed several of the same artists as Sylvester, either for radio broadcasts or as private recordings as research for his history of abstract expressionism *The Triumph of American Painting* (1970), the introduction to which he began by stating 'conversations and interviews with dozens of artists have supplied much of the basic material for this history of Abstract Expressionism'.⁵ Sylvester's interviews on the other hand were almost all made for broadcasting or publication.

With the exception of his interview with David Smith (the only sculptor interviewed), Sylvester's first set of American interviews made up a series, 'Painting as Self-Discovery', which were broadcast separately in programmes lasting between twenty and thirty-five minutes on the BBC.⁶ Sylvester acknowledged the importance of Cohn's involvement with the project, writing that she 'persuaded her superiors that lengthy interviews with American artists were of serious interest to a British audience and [...] was also mainly responsible for editing the broadcast versions'.⁷ Sylvester's subsequent interviews with artists including Helen Frankenthaler and Ad Reinhardt, meanwhile, often appeared as shorter items on 'New Comment'. All but one of those first six (with Guston) had been published in magazines by April 1964, making them more widely accessible and available for future reprinting.⁸

⁴ Irving Sandler, *A Sweeper-Up After Artists: A Memoir* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p.7.

⁵ Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Art: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p.1. Sandler's archive of interviews is now in the Getty Center Research Institute.

⁶ The broadcast with Smith was broadcast with the title 'Self-portrait of an American Artist'.

⁷ Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, p.ix.

⁸ This was probably because of Guston's misgivings about the interview (he wrote to Sylvester days before the scheduled broadcast asking him not to broadcast it, although the broadcast went ahead nevertheless). Letter from Guston to Sylvester, 4 November 1960. TGA 200816/2/1/466.

Sylvester himself planned to compile his interviews in a book: in 1962 he corresponded with Faber about publishing a book of interviews with British and American artists.⁹ The project fell through, however, as did subsequent plans for two separate books of interviews ('The New York School' and 'Modern British Painters') with Penguin in 1964. Even though Sylvester's *Interviews with American Artists* were published in 2000, his interviews with Reinhardt, Jim Dine and Larry Poons (along with a conversation with Larry Rivers about Rothko) have still never been published.

The importance of Sylvester's interviews in terms of the reception of American art in Britain was amplified by the fact that Alloway had unsuccessfully attempted to interview some of the same artists when visiting the US in 1958.¹⁰ Alloway made plans in collaboration with Cohn, drafted sample questions that he hoped to ask Rothko, de Kooning and Kline, wrote to Hess asking about the likelihood of those artists taking part alongside Rosenberg, and booked studio time in New York.¹¹ The planned recording never took place, however. Rothko characteristically declined to take part (excusing himself with 'a marvellous long speech about why artists must never speak') and Alloway complained to Cohn: 'Rosenberg failed to get them

⁹ Letter from Sylvester to John Bodley at Faber & Faber, 3 August 1962, TGA 200816/2/1/126.

¹⁰ Alloway, whom Sylvester had described as 'so ardent a champion of things American that he could fairly be described as a walking outpost of American civilization', visited the US with a State Department grant similar to that which brought Sylvester to the US in 1960. Sylvester, 'American Impact on British Painting', *New York Times*, 10 February 1957, p.11.

¹¹ The reason for this was to demonstrate that the personalities of the artists were sufficiently different to justify interviewing all of them. Alloway stated (before meeting the artists): 'Rothko is somewhat meditative, de Kooning a thinker (always throwing ideas around), and Kline not a thinker at all'. Letter from Alloway to Leonie Cohn, stamped 31 March 1958. BBC WAC, Alloway Lawrence RCont 1 Talks File, 1949-1962; letter from Alloway to Hess, 12 February 1957, Thomas Hess Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.

together [...] basically I blame Rosenberg'.¹² Alloway was also unable to meet de Kooning at all because he was 'on a terrible blind all the time I was there', and generally had a very different experience with the abstract expressionists to that which Sylvester was to have.¹³

Like Alloway before him, Sylvester was aware of the potential conflict between the formal purpose of his visit (sponsored by the US State Department and working for the BBC) and his wish to ingratiate himself with bohemian New York artists.¹⁴ Desperate to meet de Kooning but reluctant to request an introduction through official channels, Sylvester was delighted when the artist unexpectedly came to dinner with him as Rosenberg's guest. Sylvester speculated that Sylvester's writing for American publications may have piqued de Kooning's interest:

A few months earlier I had published in the *New York Times* an article on Soutine in which I suggested that he had lately been having a significant influence, nowhere more so than in certain recent paintings by de Kooning, and that his art in itself was less interesting than the possibilities it contained, especially those which had been realised by de Kooning. Now, at that time it was not public knowledge that de Kooning adored the work of Soutine. He may therefore have been curious to meet a writer who'd seen for himself a connection between them.¹⁵

While in New York Sylvester also made his presence known amongst the downtown artists by reading his work-in-progress on another European artist of interest to many Americans, Giacometti, to an audience of interested artists

¹² Letter from Alloway to Cohn (n.d., 1958). BBC WAC, Alloway Lawrence RCont 1 Talks File, 1949-1962.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Leonie Cohn wrote to 'L. Lang' in the BBC's New York office that, 'Alloway feels, I think rightly, that it would be unwise for the BBC [...] to make an official approach to the artists, who may shy off at the thought of doing a rather formal broadcast for the English radio'. Letter from Cohn to Lang, 2 April 1960. BBC WAC, Alloway Lawrence RCont 1 Talks File, 1949-1962.

¹⁵ David Sylvester, 'Meeting de Kooning', *Modern Painters*, Winter 1997, p.114. The article referred to by Sylvester was 'Americans Abroad', *New York Times*, 12 April 1959, pp.17. Sylvester went on to organise a Soutine exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1963.

at the famous abstract expressionist venue 'The Club'.¹⁶ Like Alloway, Sylvester was unable to interview Rothko 'even though he was the artist with whom I became friendliest',¹⁷ but made recordings with Smith, Guston, de Kooning, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell and Adolf Gottlieb.¹⁸ It may be that Sylvester valued Gottlieb more as a witness than as a leading artist, as his questions to Gottlieb mainly concern the historical development of abstract expressionism rather than Gottlieb's own painting (as in the case of most of his other interviews).

Throughout his career Sylvester interviewed more American than British artists. The number of American artists he interviewed in the early 1960s was partly due to the circumstances which brought him to the US, but this alone doesn't explain why he consistently favoured interviewing American artists. The fundamental reason is that Sylvester was impressed by what he considered the more honest and open way American artists talked about art. In his article 'Success Story', published soon after returning to London in 1960, he wrote of: 'the New York artist's freedom from the London affectation that it's *infra dig* to talk about art, that the only really permissible topic of

¹⁶ According to Sandler, Sylvester read from 10pm until 2am the following morning and 'nobody left, it was kind of interesting'. Conversation with Sandler, 10 January 2015.

¹⁷ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.26. Rothko even complained when Sylvester included an anecdote about him in a *Sunday Times Magazine* article, perhaps not realizing that it had already been told by Larry Rivers in a BBC broadcast with Sylvester, for which see letter from Sylvester to George Weidenfeld, 3 June 1965 (TGA 200816/2/1/672). For the broadcast with Rivers see 'Discussion on Mark Rothko', broadcast on BBC Third Programme, 18 February 1964, microfilmed transcript in BBC WAC); and for the article which caused offence see David Sylvester, 'New York Takeover: How Did It Happen?', *Sunday Times Colour Magazine*, 26 April 1964, pp.25-34.

¹⁸ It is not clear when, or how, Sylvester decided which artists to interview. Sandler suggested Sylvester may have asked him who to interview, and said he gave Sylvester his list of contacts. Conversation with Sandler, 10 January 2015.

conversation is the behaviour and motives of one's friends'.¹⁹ Around the same time the American poet Robert Lowell made a similar observation when talking about the differences between artists in the US and the UK for Al Alvarez's radio series (later a book) *Under Pressure* in the early 1960s. Lowell wrote:

I feel that we [Americans] have a feeling the arts should be all out. If you're in it, you're all out in it and you're not ashamed to talk about it endlessly and rather sheerly. That would seem embarrassing to an Englishman and inhuman probably, to be that all-out about it. I guess the American finds something uninvigorating about the Englishman in that he doesn't plunge into it.²⁰

Auerbach, for instance, was one of the British artists most admired by Sylvester, and the subject of 'the most polemical, the most defensive writing that I ever did'.²¹ In 1961, however, shortly after describing Auerbach as 'the most interesting painter in this country' Sylvester turned down an invitation from the BBC to interview him.²² By way of explanation Sylvester wrote that 'when one is interviewing somebody, one really should be fairly ignorant of their ideas, and be as involved as the listener will be in trying to find out', and that since Sylvester already knew Auerbach's work and ideas well, the outcome would inevitably 'sound terribly stilted and strained'.²³ Sylvester at this time mostly interviewed American artists whose work he had only recently

¹⁹ Sylvester, 'Success Story', *New Statesman*, 30 April 1960, p.622. Sylvester did add, however, that 'London artists, when they do let themselves go, tend to be more articulate and subtle about it'. Ibid.

²⁰ Alvarez, Al, *Under Pressure: The Writer in Society: Eastern Europe and the USA* (London: Penguin, 1965), p.164.

²¹ Transcript of interview with Martin Gayford, TGA 200816/6/2/12.

²² Sylvester, 'Nameless Structures', *New Statesman*, 21 April 1961, p.637; Letter from Sylvester to Anthony Thwaite, 9 June 1961. WAC RCont 1 David Sylvester Talks file 2 1959-62, BBC WAC.

²³ Letter from Sylvester to Anthony Thwaite, 9 June 1961. WAC RCont 1 David Sylvester Talks file 2 1959-62, BBC WAC.

discovered, and throughout his career rarely interviewed an artist more than once.²⁴

One of the few artists Sylvester did interview more than once was Howard Hodgkin, but Sylvester again declined when in 1994 Hodgkin invited him to record a third interview.²⁵ Sylvester had originally agreed to the interview, although even then he declined Hodgkin's suggestion to meet in advance and discuss the form the interview would take. In the mooted interview with Auerbach, Sylvester was concerned that the interview would be tedious if each participant had a good idea of what the other would say (he believed that the interviewer shouldn't mind looking stupid by saying the wrong things).²⁶ When he cancelled the interview altogether, Sylvester recommended Hodgkin find an American interviewer because 'it would get things away from that British cosiness which you & I together generate'.²⁷

When rejecting the invitation to interview Auerbach, Sylvester did say that one way around this problem of overfamiliarity would be to approach the encounter as 'a conversation between equals' rather than an interview, although he still thought this would be undesirable in Auerbach's case because 'in any conversation, as distinct from interview, the artist is bound to make references to other artists in passing. But as all artists I know would not wish such references to be published, the broadcasting of conversations becomes

²⁴ The series of interviews with Bacon is the exception to this general rule.

²⁵ Earlier interviews were published in Nicholas Serota, ed., *Howard Hodgkin: Forty Paintings 1973-84* (London: Trefoil, 1984), pp.97-106; and in *Vogue*, January 1988, pp.122-5. Sylvester also interviewed Hodgkin about Picasso for Michael Blackwood's 1982 film *The Picasso Legacy* (transcript in TGA 200816/4/2/94). Hodgkin wanted Sylvester to interview him for the catalogue of his 1995 exhibition in Fort Worth, Texas, the Hayward Gallery showing of which was installed by Sylvester.

²⁶ Letter from Sylvester to Hodgkin, 13 September 1994. TGA 200816/4/2/55.

²⁷ Letters from Sylvester to Hodgkin, 29 and 30 October 1994, TGA 200816/2/1/513.

impossible'.²⁸ Sylvester here is likely thinking of rivalries amongst the so-called 'School of London' artists. Before embracing the famously hermetic working routine of recent years, Auerbach was a regular drinking partner of Bacon, Freud and others. It may have been these artists that Sylvester didn't want discussed, particularly Bacon, given that around this time Bacon turned from praising Auerbach to criticising him (there is a glimpse of this tension in the Bacon interviews when the artist claims Auerbach 'always wants to be contradictory with me').²⁹ Since neither of these concerns prevented Sylvester from beginning his interviews with Bacon the following year one might think that Sylvester was willing to overlook his misgivings because of his closer proximity to Bacon. Indeed, Sylvester already thought the pictures in Auerbach's 1961 show 'seemed less marvellous' than those in his previous exhibitions.³⁰

Sylvester followed up his comments about 'the London affectation that it's *infra dig* to talk about art' in his 1961 *New Statesman* article 'Horses' Mouths', published in response to the recent proliferation of artists' writings and interviews in Britain in periodicals such as *X* and *Gazette*.³¹ Sylvester

²⁸ Letter from Sylvester to Anthony Thwaite, 9 June 1961. WAC RCont 1 David Sylvester Talks file 2 1959-62, BBC WAC. While Sylvester invariably described his dialogues with artists as 'interviews', many interviewers have favoured the word 'conversation'. Motherwell wrote of Pierre Cabanne's *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (another milestone in the genre) wrote 'these conversations are more than mere interviews', believing that the latter indicates greater intimacy and is therefore more significant as a document. Motherwell, 'Introduction' in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. By Ron Padgett (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971; repr. New York: Da Capo, 1987), pp.7-12 (p.8).

²⁹ *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.98; the two things are seen as connected by William Feaver (conversation, 1 April 2014 and email, 1 July 2016). In 1964 Marlborough Gallery director Harry Fischer suggested to Auerbach that he, Sylvester and Bacon make a three-way interview. This never took place. Lampert, p.128.

³⁰ Sylvester, 'Auerbach' in *About Modern Art*, pp.170-3 (first publ. as 'Nameless Structures', *New Statesman*, 21 April 1961, p.637) (p.170).

³¹ 'It is only quite recently that the cult of the artist's statement has started to become as powerful here as it has long been in America and on the Continent'. Sylvester, 'Horses' Mouths', *New Statesman*, 29 December 1961, p.996.

identified 'a pair of prototypes, perfectly opposite in character, of the contemporary artist-hero'. One of these was the mass culture enthusiast exemplified by Denny and Hamilton, while the other, 'based upon an identification with Cézanne and the ageing Rembrandt, rather with a Hollywood idea of them', was exemplified by Auerbach's response to a questionnaire on published in the *London Magazine* that year:

I cannot answer these questions because they seem impertinent to my situation. I think of painting as something that happens to a man working in a room, alone with his actions, his ideas, and perhaps his model. He is affected by his circumstances, and by the standards and events of his time, but he seems to me to be the sole coherent unit.³²

Sylvester considered these words histrionic, and concluded that 'artists' statements become useful when they are not ambitiously theoretical but simply autobiographical—when they give us information and insight into what goes on in their minds when they are working, into their habits and methods of working and into their whole personal background.'³³ It is this that he seems to have felt that American artists understood in contrast to their British counterparts, and this distinction probably contributed to the feeling, demonstrated by the group letter in response to 'Dark Sunlight', that Sylvester was out of touch with younger British artists.³⁴

Even so, Sylvester did sometimes interview British artists in the early 1960s (hence the book he proposed to Faber in 1962 was to consist of six interviews with American artists and seven with British-based artists, with the

³² Frank Auerbach and others, 'Predicament', *London Magazine*, July 1961, pp.75-83 (p.75). Auerbach was one of eleven artists whose responses were published.

³³ Sylvester, 'Horses' Mouths'.

³⁴ Caro and Denny, who signed the letter, were amongst those mentioned in 'Horses' Mouths'.

first interview with Bacon also on the horizon).³⁵ These included interviews made for the BBC in 1962-3 with Coldstream, Henry Moore, Rodrigo Moynihan, Sidney Nolan and Robert Medley. These interviews are less successful on the whole than those with Americans. The Coldstream interview was criticised by the critic of *The Times* for its lack of passion ('it is not enough to be urbane') while tellingly those with Nolan and Medley have never appeared in print.³⁶ It was Bacon who was the anomaly, the success of whose first interview with Sylvester led to many further encounters between them.

4.2 Sylvester as an Interviewer

In the early 1960s those who had made books of artist interviews like that which Sylvester planned were more mostly poets or novelists with an interest in art, rather than specialist art critics.³⁷ Why, then, was Sylvester so interested in interviewing artists? One possible answer was offered by 'Horses' Mouths', with its critique of the indulgence of many artists' writings. Sylvester wrote in that article that 'if, indeed, art criticism were a properly organised, unionised, trade, the critics would have been up in arms by now in protest against this tendency to go straight to the horse's mouth, for in art books and exhibition catalogues alike the artist's statement has been displacing the

³⁵ Letter from Sylvester to John Bodley at Faber and Faber, 3 August 1962, TGA 200816/2/1/126. The British artists he had interviewed by this time included William Scott, Peter Lanyon and Alan Davie (all 1959).

³⁶ 'Giving Us Shocks to Open Our Eyes'.

³⁷ See also the British volume of artist interviews by Noel Barber, *Conversations with Painters* (London: Collins, 1964)

critic's defence'.³⁸ He went on to say that a critic who knew an artist well could convey an artist's approach more usefully than the artist himself. With his experience of helping Bacon and Freud to refine their statements of the early 1950s, Sylvester seems to have thought that he could work in a similar way as an interviewer.³⁹

In *Das Künstlerinterview*, Lichtin describes six variants of artist interviews, which are particularly helpful as a way of considering the approach of different interviewers. Of Lichtin's variants, those most relevant to Sylvester are the 'production of source material' ('Produktion von Quellenmaterial') and 'official partisanship' ('Öffentliche Parteinahme').⁴⁰ Sylvester usually began with questions about the artists' working practice and use of materials, which Lichtin sees as a valuable way of obtaining source material for future research.⁴¹ This accounts for the amount of technical information in his interviews with Richard Serra (1996-9) and Roy Lichtenstein (1997, which Sylvester himself described as 'a short one designed to elicit information about an interesting new technical development in the work').⁴² Sylvester's interviews with Bacon, however, have to be considered as 'official

³⁸ Sylvester, 'Horses' Mouths'.

³⁹ Aptly, the artist Barbara Braithwaite (a student and friend of Sylvester's at the Slade School of Art in the 1950s) remembers that Sylvester, who was often seen at the school accompanied by Bacon and Freud, was nicknamed 'the midwife' on account of his relationship to them. Conversation with Braithwaite, 2014.

⁴⁰ The others are the curatorial project ('Kuratorenprojekt'), the 'community of argumentation' ('Argumentationsgemeinschaft') and the more argumentative interviewing Lichtin describes as 'trench warfare' ('Grabenkampf') (Lichtin, pp.103-113).

⁴¹ 'In this variant the production of art-historical source material is to the fore. A heavy emphasis is placed on questions about the artist's practice. These conversations are typified by a specialist tone.' ['In dieser Variante steht die Produktion kunsthistorischen Quellenmaterials im Vordergrund. Grosser Stellenwert bekommen hier die Fragen zur künstlerischen Praxis. Der Charakter dieser Gespräche gleicht bisweilen einem Spezialistendisput.'] (author's translation). Lichtin, p.106.

⁴² Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, pp.287-328 (Serra); 'Some Kind of Reality: Roy Lichtenstein interviewed by David Sylvester', p.5.

partisanship', in their function within Bacon's career if not Sylvester's approach to interviewing the artist. None of Bacon's many other interviews have attracted anything like the attention of Sylvester's, because of the close personal relationship between the two men.

Sylvester's interviews with Giacometti and de Kooning might also be considered as 'official partisanship'. Both interviews have frequently been referenced and anthologized, no doubt in part because Sylvester's interview technique was particularly appropriate for these artists, who evidently enjoyed the cut-and-thrust of the interview too (Sylvester compared Giacometti's conversation to 'a game of chess in which, after taking a piece, he would reset the board in an earlier position and try out an alternative series of moves').⁴³ The interview with de Kooning immediately proved a valuable contribution to scholarship on the artist, and when it first appeared (edited into a monologue) in the magazine *Location* Hess inserted a prefatory note which described the painter's tentativeness:

[...] prodded by an interviewer (in this case David Sylvester, working for the B.B.C.), Willem deKooning [sic] embarks on a meditative ramble about motives and meanings of certain paintings, and what it means to be a painter, and the painter's means, finally arriving through a method that could be called "double-negative capability" (nothing is excluded, nothing is ever allowed to be pinned-down) at a poetic illumination of the ideas locked in his forms.⁴⁴

⁴³ Sylvester, *Giacometti*, pp.126-7. Leiris described Sylvester's interviews with Francis Bacon (which Leiris translated into French) as a 'game of questions and answers' ('jeu par questions et réponses'). Leiris, 'Le grand jeu de Francis Bacon', typescript dated October 1976, TGA 200816/2/1/1120. The text was published in *XXe Siècle*, December 1977.

⁴⁴ Thomas Hess, 'Ideas in Search of Words', *Location 1* (1963), p.6. Sylvester revealed his misgivings about the format much later, writing: 'the interview has been repeatedly published in a form—that of a monologue—which was imposed upon it by the de Kooning Mafia and which I, as a newcomer to their territory, felt too scared to reject'. Sylvester, 'The Birth of *Woman I*', p.222). The issue was not the monologue form *per se* but the fact that Sylvester thought it had been imposed wrongly on the material.

Sylvester began by asking de Kooning about his early life in the Netherlands, arrival in the US and work for the Works Progress Administration, and two separate series of paintings, the 'Women' and his recent landscapes. It is only at the end of the interview that he focuses in on de Kooning's ideas when starting a painting, the way he decides upon an image, and when the painting is finished. 'How do you know when a picture is finished', which Guston suggested might be the *only* important question, was one of Sylvester's favoured questions to artists, and this is why Sylvester was able to elicit statements from de Kooning which are quoted in the catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition 'Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible'.⁴⁵ Furthermore, a description of the flat in Wandsworth where Sylvester lived in the 1960s recalls how the kitchen walls were 'hung with glass-covered scribbly ballpoint drawings torn from one of Willem de Kooning's yellow pads'.⁴⁶

Sylvester's long familiarity with Giacometti was no doubt good preparation for his interviews with Johns (1965) and John Cage (1966 and 1987), both famously evasive interviewees.⁴⁷ Johns in particular is the epitome of the 'interview artist' (extracts from sixty-seven of his interviews were collected in Kirk Varnedoe's 1996 anthology *Jasper Johns: Writings, Sketchbook Notes, Interviews*), giving wide exposure to Johns' talk, which

⁴⁵ Guston wrote in a 1966 article that 'for me the most relevant question and perhaps the only one is, "When are you finished?"' Guston, 'Faith, Hope and Impossibility', *ARTnews Annual*, 1966, reprinted in Perl, ed., *Art in America, 1945-1970*, pp.389-391 (p.389); Kelly Baum, 'The Raw and the Cooked: Unfinishedness in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Art' in Kelly Baum, Andrea Bayer and Sheena Wagstaff, eds., *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), pp.206-15 (p.208).

⁴⁶ Anne Crosby, *Matthew: A Memoir*, rev. edn (London: Haus Book, 2009).

⁴⁷ Amy K. Hamlin wrote 'it is one of the great *idées reçues* in the history of contemporary art that Jasper Johns is difficult to interview'. Amy K. Hamlin, 'A Heuristic Event': Reconsidering the Problem of the Johnsian Conversation', *Journal of Art Historiography* Number 7 (December 2012), <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/hamlin.pdf> [accessed 27 July 2016]

Michael Crichton wrote 'has a quality difficult to describe, but so distinctive that people in the art world refer to "a Johnsian conversation."'”⁴⁸ Adam Gopnik, meanwhile, believed that Johns' interview style was highly influential on subsequent artists and that: 'Johns effortlessly invented a new way for American artists to behave, originating the bemused impassivity that has been the most often imitated artist's manner of the past three decades'.⁴⁹ Johns' long interview with Sylvester is one of both Johns' and Sylvester's best known (Kozloff regarded it as a 'classic high point' among Sylvester's interviews), and can be appreciated not just for its information but also for the drama of the unfolding discussion.⁵⁰

Sylvester, like Leo Steinberg before him, tried to press the artist on the apparent contradiction between his choice of material and his insistence on its neutrality.⁵¹ Drawing attention to an anecdote from Johns (in which the artist describes trying, unsuccessfully, to buy what he considered an 'ordinary flashlight'), Sylvester describes Johns' wished-for object as 'an ideal flashlight' as opposed to an ordinary one, reaching the impasse where Johns concedes 'I don't like to think of it like that, but you are probably right'.⁵² This may bring to mind Cage's description of Johns' attitude (to his work, although it can be extended to his interviews):

⁴⁸ Kirk Varnedoe, ed., *Jasper Johns: Writings, Sketchbook Notes, Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996); Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), p.13.

⁴⁹ Adam Gopnik, 'Jasper's Dilemmas', *New Yorker*, February 1 1993, pp.85-92 (p.85).

⁵⁰ Max Kozloff, 'Remembering David Sylvester'. Ten years later Yoshiaki Tono interviewed Johns, asking him some of the same questions that Sylvester had done previously as an 'experiment' (Varnedoe 146-52).

⁵¹ Steinberg's exchange concludes 'Q: Do you use these letter types because you like them or because that's how the stencils come? A: But that's what I like about them, that they come that way.' Leo Steinberg, 'Jasper Johns: the First Seven Years of His Art' in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp.17-54 (first publ. in *Metro*, Nos. 4/5, 1962), p.32.

⁵² Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, p.153.

There are various ways to improve one's chess game. One is to take back a move when it becomes clear that it was a bad one. Another is to accept the consequences, devastating as they are. Johns chooses the latter even when the former is offered. Say he has a disagreement with others; he examines the situation and comes to a moral decision. He then proceeds, if to an impasse, to an impasse.⁵³

It was one of Sylvester's 'rules' as an interviewer to wait when an interviewee finished responding before asking the next question, because 'the most interesting, profound and introspective things can be said when there's no prompting'.⁵⁴ The 'Sylvester pause' was an impediment when recording programmes such as 'The Critics' in studio conditions which relied upon the momentum generated by quick exchanges between participants, but in interview situations Sylvester could deploy the pause to his advantage, inducing interviewees to fill the silence left by his judiciously held pauses. Such pauses are not indicated in the transcripts, so without original recordings there is no way of telling how long Sylvester was willing to let a pause last. We do, however, find examples where he repeats an artist's last words, which fulfils a similar function of turning the tables on the artist, putting the impetus on him to reflect on his words and to move the conversation forward. An example of this is in Sylvester's 1965 interview with Lichtenstein:

Sylvester: This does suggest that you are interested in the literary qualities of these images.

Lichtenstein: I don't think I know why, but I am.

Sylvester: You don't think you know why.

Lichtenstein: No. I think I can make up reasons, as I've been making them up, but I'm not really sure they have anything to do

⁵³ John Cage, 'Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas', in Perl, *Art in America*, pp.608-622 (p.610) (first publ. in *Jasper Johns: Exhibition of paintings and sculpture* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1964). Sylvester thought this passage was a 'a marvellous characterisation of Johns as an artist', as he said when quoting it in his 1966 interview with Cage (Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, p.115).

⁵⁴ Tim Marlow, 'In Memoriam: David Sylvester: The Art of the Interview', *Tate*, Autumn 2001, p.80.

with it. It's just that it has a certain kind of impact on me when all of this is right [...]⁵⁵

Lichtenstein then goes on to provide a far longer answer, perhaps reassured by having issued the disclaimer that the reasons he gives are 'made-up'. It was this kind of extempore answer which interested Sylvester the most, rather than the prepared statements he criticised in 'Horses' Mouths'.

As a counter-example, a failed fax interview with Ellsworth Kelly shows that Sylvester was unable to achieve the same results without the immediacy of the physical encounter with the interviewee. Having long intended to write about or interview Kelly,⁵⁶ in 1995 Sylvester agreed to conduct an interview with the artist, apparently for the catalogue of Kelly's 1996 Guggenheim retrospective.⁵⁷ Kelly requested that the interview be conducted by fax because 'in previous taped interviews I have never been satisfied with my responses',⁵⁸ a request Sylvester agreed to although he urged Kelly not to edit his responses:

I am perfectly happy to try doing it by fax, though I would only send one question at a time, so that it would be like a conversation. The thing to be careful of is that you should not try and make your answers too concise, too distilled. Remember that the interviewer has two roles: to ask questions and also to edit the replies [...] In a normal interview the interviewee tends to go burbling on, whereas, if you give written replies, you may well censor yourself excessively and deprive the public of seeing interesting things.⁵⁹

Several faxes were exchanged over the following month (with Kelly's answers never longer than two short paragraphs) until Sylvester asked a sixth question: 'I think we're getting into these contradictions because you didn't

⁵⁵ Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, p.229

⁵⁶ Fax from Sylvester to Kelly, 26 April 1994, TGA 200816/2/1/602).

⁵⁷ Letter from Anthony Calnek to Sylvester, 6 July 1995 regarding Sylvester's agreement to contribute to the catalogue and stating 'I understand that it [Sylvester's contribution] may take the form of an interview', TGA 200816/4/2/59.

⁵⁸ Fax from Kelly to Sylvester, 12 September 1995, TGA 200816/4/2/59.

⁵⁹ Fax from Sylvester to Kelly, 17 September 1995, TGA 200816/4/2/59.

really answer my question asking you to define “less of ‘me’”. Couldn’t you go back to your statement about comparing the painting you’re making to a corner of a room, a shadow, etc., and expand that?’⁶⁰ Just as Sylvester tries to be more specific and to extract a more detailed answer, the faxes stop. Sarah Whitfield (Sylvester’s partner at this time) remembers his frustration at the way the interview was proceeding, probably because he felt Kelly censoring himself and was therefore preventing Sylvester from carrying out his role as mediator.⁶¹

Sylvester was a versatile and patient interviewer, happy to follow an interview down whichever path the interviewee chose, but he also exploited the interview context as an opportunity to express his own opinions, and it is for this reason that Sylvester’s interviews can be considered as a part of his criticism. They are a forum for his own ideas as well as those of the artist.⁶² One example of this is Sylvester’s 1967 interview with Bridget Riley. In this interview Sylvester, an established supporter of Riley’s work, ‘rather teased her about the eye-hurting’ tendency of her works, which he considered a problem raised by her work which had to be confronted.⁶³ Elsewhere, he often asked his interviewees about the importance of aesthetics in their work. He told both Carl Andre and Jeff Koons that he considered them to be aesthetic rather than conceptual artists, a suggestion Andre agreed with wholeheartedly, although Koons replied warily ‘I use aesthetics as a tool, but I

⁶⁰ Fax from Sylvester to Kelly, 17 October 1995, TGA 200816/4/2/59.

⁶¹ Whitfield recalls Sylvester ‘glowering over the latest fax from Ellsworth and saying something like “I really can’t go on like this”’. Email from Whitfield, 14 February 2015.

⁶² In the same way it has been said of the *Paris Review* interviews that they ‘approach the essay and lead to a strong competition with literary criticism in certain periods’ (Masschelein and others, p.19).

⁶³ David Sylvester, ‘Hurtful Criticism’, *Modern Painters*, Winter 1999, p.128.

think of it as a psychological tool'.⁶⁴ Similarly, when he praised Gilbert & George's early charcoal drawings, the artists responded that their subsequent works were a reaction against just this sort of approbation and that they 'wanted to get away from the compliments that we'd had from the viewers—that they loved the technique, they loved the surface, the marks').⁶⁵ Again, when Sylvester tried to get Tony Cragg to talk about affect and personality in his sculpture, the artist defensively replied 'we getting a little private, aren't we?'⁶⁶

If Sylvester's questioning occasionally made his interviewees uneasy, he also brought a new sensibility to bear on the work of artists such as Rachel Whiteread. In addition to the familiar minimalist reference points of Judd and Andre, Sylvester in his interview with Whiteread discusses carving and Chardin, and there is a sense throughout of Sylvester's ideas suggesting fresh possibilities for the younger artist. Sylvester's question 'So your work is technically contrary to carving but conceptually a form of carving?' prompts the gleeful response from Whiteread 'this could change my life, this conversation. I'll get all these massive blocks of marble and start [carving]'.⁶⁷ Whiteread later said of Sylvester 'he was an extraordinary interviewer, the best I have ever encountered'.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, pp.280-1, 342. In the published text, the sentence 'David, actually, I see my work as the opposite. I see it as essentially conceptual' (not in the transcript) is added at the beginning of Koons' response to emphasise his rejection of Sylvester's hypothesis.

⁶⁵ Sylvester, *London Recordings*, p.150.

⁶⁶ David Sylvester, 'Almost a Pauseless Thing', *Modern Painters*, Summer 2000, pp.66-72 (p.72).

⁶⁷ Sylvester, *London Recordings*, p.179.

⁶⁸ Whiteread quoted in Cressida Connolly, 'David the Goliath', *Vogue* (UK), March 2002, pp.151-6 (p.154). This can be compared with Alex Katz's remark to Sylvester that 'your interview brings out the best in what I could say'. Letter from Katz to Sylvester, n.d. [1997], TGA 200816/4/2/58.

4.3 The Editing Process

All of Sylvester's early interviews were made for BBC radio which meant that they were recorded in BBC studios (in the case of his New York interviews, the BBC studios at 'the International Building', 630 Fifth Avenue) and then edited for radio.⁶⁹ Sylvester's background in radio (particularly his work as a producer on 'Comment') seems to have influenced his approach to the published interview, which was very different to that of his contemporaries Rodman and Katharine Kuh, who made a point of saying that they didn't record their interviews but transcribed them directly. Kuh wrote of her interviews in *The Artist's Voice*, published in 1962, that 'with only one exception the discussions were not taped, but were taken down verbatim without benefit of literary editing. These, then, are the exact words of each artist about his own work.'⁷⁰ Kuh and Rodman said nothing about editing, but Sylvester freely admitted that his interviews were recorded and then edited, not only by cutting passages but (particularly in the case of his interviews with Bacon) rearranging the sequence to create a greater sense of structure. As will be seen, this is because for Sylvester the editing of his interviews enhanced rather than diminished them.⁷¹

Sylvester had no interest in the minimum-intervention approach, derived from *cinema vérité* and ethnological research, which formed a major strand in

⁶⁹ Sylvester mentioned this in his introduction to the interview with David Smith ('Self-portrait of an American Artist', broadcast on BBC Third Programme on 29 July, transcript in TGA 200816/6/1/1).

⁷⁰ Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; repr. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000), pp.4-5.

⁷¹ Rodney Wilson, Arts Films Officer at the Arts Council, in 1970 recommended filming interviews with a series of British artists, and suggested 'I think there would hardly be any need to even edit the material'. Sylvester's response to this was that 'most unedited interviews are intolerably boring'. Wilson, 'Concerning a Policy for Art Films', and Sylvester's notes on the document, both TGA 200816/2/1/126.

twentieth-century interviewing.⁷² He would surely have approved of Louis Marin's claim in *De l'Entretien* that 'any written interview is the 'fiction' of an oral interview, even if it 'really' took place, was recorded and then transcribed'.⁷³ Sylvester's approach was similar to that of Roditi, who in the introduction to *Dialogues on Art* wrote 'a journalist generally cheats by highlighting the 'informality' of [...] an interview, whereas I have cheated by perhaps over-stressing the formal progression of our discussions.'⁷⁴ In other words, by preferring too much structure to not enough. In his 1992 preface to the interviews with Bacon, Sylvester considered the dilemmas which emerged from trying to recreate an encounter as comprehensively as possible:

As to the problem of whether to insert, as in parliamentary reports, indications of where there was laughter, my conclusion was that, if one does this, one must also logically indicate whether each and every statement was made gravely, laconically, insistently, sarcastically, cautiously, patiently. Perhaps I should, indeed, have presented the text in a form like that of many modern plays, packed with stage directions.⁷⁵

Sylvester never noted pauses, laughter, or hesitations. It is therefore obvious when interviews have not been edited by him, one example of which is his interview with Robert Motherwell.⁷⁶ As a publisher as well as an artist (Sylvester more than once discussed publishing his own work as part of Motherwell's series 'Documents of Twentieth Century Art'), Motherwell

⁷² Annette Masschelein and others, 'The Literary Interview: Towards a Poetics of a Hybrid Genre', *Poetics Today*, Spring-Summer 2014, pp.1-51 (pp.7-8). Examples of this would include Stanley Poss' interview with Christopher Isherwood (Stanley Poss, 'A Conversation on Tape', *London Magazine* 1, June 1961, pp.41-58), and the general style of the American magazines *Avalanche* and (at least in its early days) Warhol's magazine *Interview*.

⁷³ 'En vérité, tout entretien écrit est la fiction d'un entretien oral, même lorsque celui-ci a eu <<réellement>> lieu, qu'il a été enregistré entre voix et oreille (duelles) et qu'il est transcrit de l'écoute à la lecture' [author's translation]. Louis Marin, *De l'Entretien* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1997), p.14.

⁷⁴ Roditi, *Dialogues on Art*, p.15.

⁷⁵ *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.7.

⁷⁶ See also the interviews with Birtwistle and Ken Adam in *London Recordings*.

naturally took a great interest in how his own statements appeared.⁷⁷ In the Italian magazine *Metro*, Motherwell published his own edit of the interview, substituting his own preferred title 'Painting as Existence' for the title of Sylvester's BBC series 'Painting as Self-Discovery'. He also added a note saying that 'this version has been grammatically corrected by the artist and a few subordinate clauses added for the purposes of clarification, as well as three footnotes'.⁷⁸ Unlike Sylvester, who generally took away material for clarification, Motherwell was happy to add more, such as inserting the name of Eugene Ionesco in the published version whereas in the transcript he only refers to 'some of the French dramatists'.⁷⁹ The Motherwell edit was used in *Interviews with American Artists*, without the footnotes but retaining characteristics such as comments in parenthesis and onomatopoeia which would not be found in a Sylvester edit.⁸⁰

In Milan Kundera's 'personal dictionary', the entry for 'interview' contains the following:

Cursed be the writer who first allowed a journalist to reproduce his remarks freely! [...] I do very much like the *dialogue* (a major literary form) and I've been pleased with several such discussions that were mutually pondered, composed, and edited. Alas, the interview as it is generally practiced has nothing to do with a dialogue [...] in July 1985, I made a firm decision: no more interviews. Except for dialogues co-edited by me, *accompanied by my copyright*, all my reported remarks since then are to be considered forgeries.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Letter from Arthur A. Cohen to Sylvester, 17 August 1967. TGA 200816/2/1/416.

⁷⁸ 'Painting as Existence: An Interview with Robert Motherwell', *Metro*, December 1962, pp.94-7 (p.94).

⁷⁹ Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, p.80; transcript of interview with Motherwell, TGA 200816/6/1/7.

⁸⁰ Sylvester probably did not have the option of reediting the transcript and publishing a different version, although it would be interesting to know if he would have liked to.

⁸¹ Milan Kundera, 'Sixty-Three Words' in *The Art of the Novel*, trans. by Linda Asher, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp.121-56 (p.133).

Kundera's account of his interviews is reminiscent of Bacon's misgivings about the way his words were used (as will be seen). Bacon was one of several artists who evidently played an active part in the editing of their interviews, which was encouraged by Sylvester. Sylvester's correspondence with Koons (usually communicated through Craig Houser of the Guggenheim museum) demonstrates both the artist's specific views about material which should be included and excluded, and Sylvester's willingness to accommodate these demands.⁸² Koons requested 'anything perceived as negative related to the *Celebration* series to be removed' which Sylvester was happy to do, stating himself that 'I personally am not too keen on any of the passages where Jeff goes on the defence. It seems to me that he is too big an artist and person to need that'.⁸³ Sylvester was less convinced by Koons' long account of his *Jim Beam-J.B. Turner Train* (1986) but retained it in the interview in accordance with the artist's wishes.⁸⁴ In a letter to Koons Sylvester indicated that he was happy to make the changes because: 'an interview does not necessarily have to record what the interviewee said on one particular afternoon. It's great when he can take the trouble to look at what he said and formulate it better—more accurately, more richly, more economically.'⁸⁵ Sylvester saw the interview not as a document of a single encounter but rather as a stimulus for artists to verbalise and clarify their ideas. This would be particularly valuable for major artists, such as Bacon and Koons, who rarely wrote themselves.⁸⁶

⁸² Sylvester's first interview with Koons was published in the catalogue accompanying Koons' exhibition at the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin in 2000 (*Jeff Koons: Easyfun-Ethereal* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2000), pp.14-43). Sylvester told Houser that of all his interviews 'none has been more difficult than the Koons'. Letter from Sylvester to Houser, 22 June 2000, TGA 200816/6/1/20.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Letter from Sylvester to Koons, 24 July 2000. TGA 200816/6/1/20.

⁸⁶ Two books of interviews with Koons have been published in recent years: Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Jeff Koons*, ed. by Karen Marta, The Conversation Series vol. 22

Sylvester also said in relation to the Koons interview that 'another thing I am not too keen on is the questions and answers about other artists', and removing such discussion is a common pattern in Sylvester's editing.⁸⁷ In this respect he is very different to Michel Archimbaud, whose later and 'distressingly trivial' (in Andrew Lambirth's opinion)⁸⁸ interviews with Bacon are filled with repetitive questions about Bacon's opinions of artists ('do you like Géricault?' [...] 'Van Gogh? Cézanne?' [...] 'And Degas?' [...] 'Has Seurat been important to you?' [...] 'Well then, what do you think of Warhol?')⁸⁹ Sylvester is careful to avoid this: both Michelangelo and Giacometti are only mentioned once in *Interviews with Francis Bacon* but are mentioned at least seventeen more times in the transcripts (we can well imagine that Bacon would not have wanted to further reinforce the frequent comparisons so often made between himself and his rival of sorts Giacometti).⁹⁰ As a result, what Sylvester called Bacon's 'marvellous bitchiness' about other artists, sometimes evident in the transcripts, is scarcely glimpsed in the published text.⁹¹

Following the success of their first BBC interview in 1962, Sylvester's second interview with Bacon was made for the 1966 television programme *Fragments of a Portrait* (directed by Gill), an 'encounter' documentary in the tradition of John Read's 1950s films of artists such as John Piper, which

(Cologne: Walther König, 2012) and Jeff Koons, *Conversations with Norman Rosenthal* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014).

⁸⁷ Letter from Sylvester to Houser, 22 June 2000, TGA 200816/6/1/20.

⁸⁸ Andrew Lambirth, 'Francis Bacon Interviewed by David Sylvester' in *A is a Critic: Writings from The Spectator* (London: Unicorn Press, 2013), pp.17-20 (p.18). Sylvester employed the young Bacon scholar Hugh Davies in 1973 to propose questions for him to ask the artist in future (conversation with Davies, 2 March 2015).

⁸⁹ *Francis Bacon In conversation with Michel Archimbaud* (London: Phaidon, 1993), pp.41-45.

⁹⁰ The only time Giacometti is mentioned in the published book is by Sylvester, and then not as a direct comparison with Bacon (p.82). As with Moore, Sylvester was no doubt aware that his support of both Giacometti and Bacon encouraged this rivalry, even though Sylvester rarely compared them in his own writing.

⁹¹ Sylvester interviewed by Richard Cork, 1985, transcript in TGA 200816/4/2/7.

combined the interview with footage of Bacon's paintings and locations relevant to his work such as an abattoir.⁹² In a recent book this interview is described as 'unsuccessful, largely because Sylvester is asking the wrong questions, constantly returning to an undifferentiated public's shock at Bacon's output'.⁹³ Nevertheless *Fragments of a Portrait* has become an important document of Bacon in the 1960s, and being able to see the subject's responses to questions can also add something not found in the words alone, as Sylvester was aware:

I asked him whether his figures were ever based on his own body; this he firmly denied. The exchange is not preserved in the published version of the interview, only in the film, which shows that while making his denial Bacon was repeatedly running his right thumb up and down the inside of his bare left forearm.⁹⁴

Sylvester and Bacon did not then make another televised interview until 1975, the year that the first edition of the book was published, and undoubtedly an additional consideration when filming for television was that a non-specialist audience had to be taken into consideration. This is demonstrated by correspondence relating to an interview with Sylvester and Bacon that ABC Television planned to film in 1965, and which fell through at the last minute.⁹⁵ ABC pushed Sylvester to ask 'human interest' questions, including several of an argumentative or oppositional stance, such as: 'does he read the critics and take them seriously?'; 'Some people have said he is now

⁹² Jonathan Conlin, *Civilization* (London: British Film Institute, 2009), p.32.

⁹³ Conlin, p.33. Conlin also considers other footage in the film unsatisfactory, writing 'footage of the pair going on a run to the shops smacks of a desperate attempt to pass the time' (ibid.). Sylvester himself wrote that because the film was made for a 'wide and presumably semi-attentive audience' the second interview focused more on talk which 'had what is called human interest'. Sylvester, 'Preface' in *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, enlarged ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980).

⁹⁴ Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p.225. In 1984 Bacon wrote to the director Michael Blackwood that he refused to be filmed painting 'in spite of David Sylvester wanting me to do it'. Harrison, *Francis Bacon*, I, p.96.

⁹⁵ Correspondence between Sylvester, Bacon, and ABC staff, TGA 200816/2/1/160.

painting to a formula? How would he answer this question?'; 'there is a high-living, mad, gambling, Bacon legend. How does he feel about this?' Sylvester put some of the questions into his own words before sending them onto Bacon and tried to reassure the artist by suggesting that they wouldn't necessarily be asked so bluntly in the interview, but nonetheless when Bacon withdrew Sylvester made it clear that the questions had disconcerted the artist:

I think that basically the problem was that he wanted to deal with purely theoretical questions whereas we, with a mass audience in mind, felt an obligation to insert "human interest" questions, and you [Mike Hodges] and Helen wanted to insert challenging questions of a kind that would suggest something less than total acquiescence in his position.⁹⁶

There was also an additional problem relating to the editing process: 'it had been agreed that he should have the right to approve the editing of the interview and also the choice of illustrative material. The contract he received gave him the right to approve the latter, but only the right to "discuss" the former [...] he clearly suspected an element of double dealing'.⁹⁷ Such vigilance was characteristic of Bacon, and even if he was not closely involved in the process of editing his interviews with Sylvester we can be confident that he similarly wanted the right to 'approve' rather than simply 'discuss' them.⁹⁸

In editing his interviews Sylvester was often assisted by a collaborator. The novelist Shena Mackay assisted with the editing of the Bacon interviews, and she no doubt further refined the dialogue and contributed to the elegance of Bacon's statements in the book (in Mackay's words 'the aim was to illuminate Bacon's work by the resonances of his words').⁹⁹ Sylvester wrote

⁹⁶ Letter from Sylvester to Mike Hodges, 10 September 1965, TGA 200816/2/1/160.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ In his Bacon chronology, Harrison records Bacon as 'going through proofs of revised edition of Sylvester's interviews' on 25 March 1987 (Harrison, *Francis Bacon*, I, p.98).

⁹⁹ Email from Mackay, 16 September 2014.

that 'at the time Shena Mackay and myself were editing those transcripts [...] it was obvious that, in the interests of coherence and continuity, we were leaving a great deal of good material on the cutting-room floor'.¹⁰⁰ Some of this material subsequently became part of *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* (2000), published after Bacon's death.¹⁰¹ Cecily Brown (the daughter of Sylvester and Mackay, now a successful painter) compiled indexes of the transcripts and used these to identify passages worthy of publication which were included in the book under the heading 'fragments of talk', compiled under a selection of themes (such as 'old art' and 'aesthetics').¹⁰² This decision seemed to imply that the artist's words were just as interesting even out of context, like the fragments of sculpture that Bacon and Sylvester enthused about in the interviews.¹⁰³

Similar partnerships were involved when the interviews were translated into French, and also with Sylvester's Giacometti interview. When Leiris translated the Bacon interviews into French, he asked Sylvester to help him to make an initial translation for him to revise, although eventually (probably because Sylvester was too busy working on Magritte) Michael Peppiatt, a Paris-based friend of Bacon's, did the job instead.¹⁰⁴ Equally, when Sylvester

¹⁰⁰ Sylvester, *Bacon*, p.8. Sylvester estimated that the book of interviews with Bacon 'amounts to no more than about a fifth of the material in the transcripts' (Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.6).

¹⁰¹ Sylvester wrote 'Bacon felt [...] that some fragments of the large quantity of excised material might well at some stage be published in some form'. Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.7.

¹⁰² Brown was interested by how many references to other artists had been excluded from the original book, many of which she felt worthy of publication (conversation with Brown, 12 January 2015).

¹⁰³ Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.114. These 'fragments' were themselves extensively edited, in some cases distorting the original meaning of Bacon's comments. Compare, for example, the statement about Impressionism (*Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p.243) with the transcript to Sylvester-Bacon interview 3, session 2 (recorded 14 July 1973), TGA 200816/4/2/9.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Leiris to Sylvester, 13 January 1974, Ms Ms 45172, Fonds Michel Leiris, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet. See also Michael Peppiatt, *L'amitié Leiris*

edited his 1964 interviews with Giacometti, he called upon the expertise of a distinguished French writer. Sylvester conducted the original interview in French (it was broadcast in French on the Third Programme) but Giacometti died in 1966 without approving a text of the interview for publication.¹⁰⁵ Sylvester then consulted his friend Jacques Dupin, a director of the Galerie Maeght and author of a monograph on Giacometti.¹⁰⁶ Sylvester and Dupin produced a version, extracts of which first appeared in Dupin's poetry quarterly *l'Ephémère*.¹⁰⁷ Sylvester described the process:

We've been making cuts, and doing a certain amount of re-phrasing to make the spoken word more readable, though trying not to lose its spoken quality—and, by the same token, to improve his highly ungrammatical French, yet without losing too much of its idiosyncratic quality. (He [Giacometti] himself seems to have had his French corrected when publishing anything.)¹⁰⁸

When making the English translation Sylvester enlisted the further assistance of his wife Pamela (a manuscript version in English written by her is in the

Bacon: Une étrange fascination, trans. by Patrice Cotensin (Paris: L'Échoppe, 2006), pp.70-71. According to Jean Frémon Sylvester introduced Bacon and Leiris for the first time at the Giacometti exhibition he organised at the Tate in 1965. Jean Frémon, 'Bacon, un envoûtement' in Claire Bonnevie, ed., *Leiris & Co* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015), pp.328-342 (p.328).

¹⁰⁵ Like Bacon, Giacometti was 'a fine, intuitive strategist' in his choice of dealers, photographers, interlocutors and writers. Thierry Dufrêne has shown how Giacometti made corrections to texts on his work such as Sartre 'La recherche de l'absolu' (Thierry Dufrêne, 'Giacometti and his Writers after 1945: Literary Myth and Reality', trans. by Charles Penwarden, in Cecilia Braschi and others, *The Studio of Alberto Giacometti: Collection of the Fondation Alberto et Annette Giacometti* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2007), pp.330-347).

¹⁰⁶ Jacques Dupin, *Alberto Giacometti* (Paris: Maeght, 1963). Dupin was another writer admired by Bacon: 'There was no doubt that the writer he [Bacon] felt closest to and with whom he spent the most time after Leiris was the poet Jacques Dupin' ['Il ne faisait aucun doute que l'écrivain dont il se sentait le plus proche et avec lequel il passa le plus de temps après Leiris était le poète Jacques Dupin.'] (author's translation). Peppiatt, *Une étrange fascination*, p.44. See also *Francis Bacon in conversation with Michel Archimbaud*, p.124.

¹⁰⁷ A letter from Dupin to Sylvester dated 30 August 1967, concerning the editing of the interviews, is in Sylvester's archive (TGA 200816/2/2/16).

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Sylvester to Patricia Matter, 7 June 1966. Pierre Matisse Gallery archive, Morgan Library. Changes included standardisation of Giacometti's eccentric use of prepositions.

archive) and his close friend Grey Gowrie.¹⁰⁹ Sylvester also asked the novelist (and friend of Dupin's) Paul Auster to provide a translation, although this only surfaced after Sylvester's death.¹¹⁰ The interview was finally published in full, in English, in *Looking at Giacometti*, and like many of Sylvester's other interviews it demonstrates how he collaborated extensively not just with the artist but other colleagues as well.

Extensive editing created the challenge of retaining some sense of the original encounter while creating a coherence and succinctness, or in Sylvester's words 'to seam together a more concise and coherent argument than ever came about when we were talking, without making it so coherent as to lose the fluid, spontaneous flavour of talk'.¹¹¹ Lambirth suggested that Sylvester's success in this respect was one reason for the enduring popularity of the interviews:

However much he [Sylvester] may have adapted the text, he manages to preserve the artist's voice, by identifying his speech rhythms and distinctive verbal habits. Thus the text, carefully edited into coherence, still has enough rough edges to sound convincingly like someone talking.¹¹²

For instance, when Sylvester asks Bacon about Egyptian sculpture, the artist's response includes this passage, which comprises two separate fragments from the transcripts:

[...] The Elgin Marbles in the British Museum are always very important to me, but I don't know if they're important because they're fragments, and whether if one had seen the whole image they would seem as poignant as they seem as fragments. And [cut

¹⁰⁹ *Giacometti: Sculptures, Paintings, Drawings* (catalogue for 1981 Arts Council exhibition), p.11. Sylvester subsequently thanked Barbara Wright for additional work on the translation (Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p.255). For Pamela Sylvester's manuscript translation see TGA 200816/5/4/9/5. My thanks to Naomi Sylvester for identifying the handwriting of Pamela Sylvester.

¹¹⁰ Paul Auster, 'My Life is Reduced to Nothing', *Guardian*, 21 June 2003, Arts section, p.18.

¹¹¹ Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.7.

¹¹² Lambirth, p.18.

material] I've always thought about Michelangelo; he's always been deeply important in my way of thinking about form. But although I have this profound admiration for all his work, the work that I like most of all is the drawings.¹¹³

There is no obvious reason why Bacon should choose to move from talking about the Elgin Marbles to Michelangelo's drawings in this way, but in the context of the interviews these abrupt shifts seem part of the rhythm of the conversation. They never seem implausible, and one never stops to consider how likely it would be for someone to speak these words.

Sylvester, in his preface and editorial note, openly admitted the artifice of the interviews, although assiduous readers of Bacon's interviews would have noticed regardless, given the substantial differences between the first interview as initially published in the *Sunday Times Magazine* (itself different from that broadcast on the radio) and that in the book.¹¹⁴ Each 'single notional meeting', as Sylvester referred to the published interviews, was the product of two or three recording sessions which Sylvester reshaped into a single dialogue.¹¹⁵ Bacon's words seem not to have been changed at all from the transcripts, and Sylvester was not exaggerating in saying in his preface that he was 'methodically slavish to Bacon's turns of phrase': while a speech may be composed of several sections, it is unlikely that any of Bacon's words were actually invented to simplify the task.¹¹⁶ For instance, in 'interview 3', a response from Bacon of a little over two hundred words was in fact composed

¹¹³ Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.114; Transcript for Sylvester-Bacon interview 4, session 1 (recorded September 1974), TGA 200816/4/2/9.

¹¹⁴ 'Francis Bacon talks to David Sylvester', broadcast on BBC Third Programme, 23 March 1963, transcript on microfilm in BBC WAC; Sylvester, 'The Art of the Impossible', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 14 July 1963, pp.13-8.

¹¹⁵ Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.202.

¹¹⁶ Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.6. There are statements I haven't been able to find in the transcripts, but Sylvester acknowledged himself that some of the final (1984-86) interview was 'derived from notes made after conversations in 1985-86'. Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.203.

of several different 'fragments', one of only ten words, rearranged and without any invention at all.¹¹⁷ William Feaver wrote of the book in 1975 that in assembling the interviews Sylvester 'becomes the impresario and director, controlling the flow-pattern, presenting his star at his best'.¹¹⁸ In contrast to Lichtin's 'Grabenkampf', a genre of interviews more frequently encountered in other fields (such as interviews with politicians) which are combative, point-scoring encounters in which leading interviewers are prized for their ability to outwit interviewees neutrality is highly prized, Sylvester thought it was crucial 'not to argue with their [artists'] opinions; there's no point'. He gave as an example of this the moment in his interviews with Bacon where the artist dismissed abstract art as decorative, and suggested its attraction for people like Sylvester could be explained as mere 'fashion'.¹¹⁹ Sylvester saw the artist interview as a contribution towards elucidating an artist's thought, a way of presenting the artist to best advantage that could be compared with his curating of exhibitions.¹²⁰

While Sylvester was careful not to invent or distort the words of his interviewees, he was far more willing to make such changes to his own side of the interview, stating of the Bacon interviews that 'in order to prevent the

¹¹⁷ See *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.107 ('Well, I've tried [...] have made before').

¹¹⁸ William Feaver, 'All Flesh is Meat', *The Listener*, 15 May 1975, pp.652-3 (p.653).

¹¹⁹ Tim Marlow, 'In memoriam: David Sylvester: The art of the interview'. See also Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.60.

¹²⁰ Lichtin (p.110) in fact gives as an example of 'Grabenkampf' the point in Sylvester's interviews with Bacon where Sylvester suggests a correlation between Bacon's use of Velazquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X and Bacon's conflicted feelings towards his father (Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.71). The same exchange is also used as an example of how 'rather aggressive' questioning which provokes 'a smart response' may be useful as a way of eliciting a subject's 'manner and character, which more than compensates for the evasion of definite fact' in Joanna Pappworth and Anthony Seldon, *By Word of Mouth, 'Élite' Oral History* (London: Methuen, 1983), p.192. One weakness of both assessments is that they confuse gently probing questions such as this (another example would be Sylvester questioning Riley about the eye-hurting tendency of her paintings) for something more confrontational.

montage from looking like a montage many of the questions have been recast or simply fabricated'.¹²¹ He often invented questions simply to connect passages of Bacon's talk (such as the entirely fabricated question 'do you find you can bring yourself to make destructive criticism of your friends' work?' in the second interview) and eliminates many of his prompts to Bacon, which make the artist appear more fluent at the expense of the more conversational character of the transcripts.¹²² This was not only the case in the interviews with Bacon. Comparison between Sylvester's interview with Cy Twombly and the artist's only other published interview (with Nicholas Serota) shows that while Sylvester often edited together several different replies from Twombly into one response (one of which is 873 words long), in the interview with Serota the longest of Twombly's responses is 294 words, and the interview reads much more like a conversation.¹²³

Serota was familiar with Sylvester's own editing technique: they interviewed Richard Serra together in 1992, while Serota also remembered that in assembling an interview with Hodgkin for an exhibition catalogue which Serota edited, Sylvester took the transcript of an earlier interview made with Hodgkin for a film, cut up the artist's answers with a pair of scissors, arranged them in a coherent way and rewrote his questions so that the final interview resembled 'a master leading a pupil through a series of hoops'.¹²⁴ In fact Sylvester's interviews with Malcolm Morley and Jenny Saville were published as monologues, with Sylvester removing his dialogue entirely so that the text

¹²¹ Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.7.

¹²² Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.67

¹²³ See *Interviews with American Artists*, pp.178-9 (Sylvester); Nicholas Serota and Cy Twombly, 'History Behind the Thought' in *Cy Twombly: Cycles and Seasons*, ed. by Nicholas Serota (London: Tate Publishing, 2008, pp.43-53).

¹²⁴ Conversation with Serota, 2 February 2016. Feaver ('All Flesh is Meat', p.653) likewise compared the Bacon interviews to 'a tutor with a brilliant pupil'.

read like an artist's statement. Again Sylvester's approach here can be contrasted with that of Archimbaud, who retained long passages of his own conversation which do little to illuminate Bacon's thought and sometimes seem embarrassingly verbose.¹²⁵ Archimbaud's text may be closer to 'what the interviewee said on one particular afternoon' but this makes it less rather than more interesting.

What set Sylvester's interviews apart was his respect for the interview as literature, something demonstrated in a letter he wrote to Leiris. The publisher of the French translation, Gaëtan Picon, wished for the front page of the book to read:

Francis Bacon
L'art de l'impossible
Entretiens avec David Sylvester

As Sylvester noted, this gave the impression that Bacon was the author of the book. Sylvester continued 'it is true that most of the words are his, and that his name, not mine, will sell the book. All the same, insofar as the book is a literary work, it is my creation. I am its author in the same sense as the director of a documentary is its author.'¹²⁶

4.4 The Interview's Influence

In this thesis I repeatedly emphasise the importance of Sylvester's articulation of his own personal experience in his writing. However, it is

¹²⁵ See for instance his long answers to Bacon's questions about Wagner and Schönberg. Archimbaud pp.92-5.

¹²⁶ 'Il est vrai que la plupart des mots sont les siens et que c'est son nom et non le mien qui fera vendre le livre. Toutefois, en tant qu'œuvre littéraire, cet ouvrage est ma création. J'en suis l'auteur au même titre que le cinéaste qui dirige un documentaire en est l'auteur' (author's translation). Letter from Sylvester to Leiris, 3 April 1975, Ms Ms 45172, Fonds Michel Leiris, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

important to note that this was always rooted in extensive knowledge of the art he was writing about, and carrying out interviews was a way of obtaining this knowledge. As a way of explaining why he rarely wrote about the art of the past, Sylvester said 'I think I have a better understanding of how people think in my own time. Of how they think since the invention of the flushing lavatory'.¹²⁷ Within this framework of writing about what he knew and understood, interviews helped Sylvester to set the parameters for his criticism, as he told Richard Cork when asked about his friendship with Bacon: 'I'll tell you what I think getting to know any artist does. It tends to rid you of false ideas which you have about the way he might be thinking.'¹²⁸

For Sylvester, the interview was not simply journalistic but a form of practical research which guided his research, going so far as to say 'I think that if there's a method in my work, it is to work out the difference between the artist's conscious and unconscious intentions'.¹²⁹ This is analogous to Shiff's proposal that 'one way to write history, including art history, and even art criticism, is to take note of how artists make choices, how they chose to move one way when they could just as easily have moved another way. Judge

¹²⁷ Kustow, p.11. Schjeldahl recently said something similar of his own work that 'trying to enter into the mind and heart of whoever made a thing' limited him to 'certain strains of Western art', however much other forms of art excited him. Jarrett Earnest and Peter Schjeldahl, 'In Conversation: Peter Schjeldahl with Jarrett Earnest', *The Brooklyn Rail*, 13 July 2015, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2015/07/art/peter-schjeldahl-with-jarrett-earnest> [accessed 3 July 2016] (para. 36 of 55).

¹²⁸ Transcript of Sylvester interviewed by Richard Cork, 1985. TGA 200816/4/2/7. Keith Roberts praised the interviews for the same reason: 'He [Bacon] tries to be truthful and precise in his replies and some of his comments carry awful warnings for the conventionally-minded art historian. Sylvester: 'Can you remember what made you start using strong colour again?' Bacon: 'I suppose I was just getting bored.' Strange how, in the literature, a Titian or a Donatello is never allowed to be bored.' Keith Roberts, 'The Artist Speaks?', *Burlington Magazine*, May 1975, pp.301-2 (p.302).

¹²⁹ Kustow, p.11. Jenny Saville said that 'when I spoke to him, it was like talking to another painter'. Connolly, 'David the Goliath', p.156.

the artist as the judge.¹³⁰ Sylvester felt that many art historians and critics suffered from a lack of personal acquaintance with artists and therefore alienation from their thought processes and intentions.¹³¹ Following Bacon's death, the emergence of his drawings called into question the validity of the interviews and other testimony based on personal acquaintance with Bacon. Sylvester admitted that 'I should have probed more' with regards to the drawings but at the same time he felt that others exaggerated the significance of Bacon's concealment. With regards to an essay on Bacon's drawings, Sylvester said that: '[Matthew] Gale attributes to Bacon, in his concealment of his sketches, the mentality of an ambitious civil servant. I think he underestimates the innocence of artists—they are cunning but they don't plot their careers [...] they are not Machiavellian. They are deceitful, they are ambitious, they cheat—but they don't scheme.'¹³²

Sylvester's interviews with Francis Bacon helped to establish the modern genre of single-artist interview books, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, who perhaps more than anyone else epitomises contemporary interview culture, has acknowledged Sylvester as a formative influence and inspiration.¹³³ The most obvious example of Obrist's debt is his 'Conversation Series', each of which collects several interviews with a particular artist (including Gilbert & George and Koons, whom Sylvester interviewed), although Obrist's immense

¹³⁰ Shiff, *Doubt*, p.51. The writing of both Sylvester and Shiff on Jasper Johns clearly demonstrates this similarity.

¹³¹ In this way Sylvester, like Alloway, acknowledged the value of interviews in making available 'inside information' about what artists thought and how they worked. Lawrence Alloway, 'Artists as Writers, Part One: Inside Information' in *Imagining the Present*, pp.211-26 (first publ. in *Artforum*, January 1975, pp.46-50), p.222.

¹³² Transcript of interview with Martin Gayford, TGA 200816/6/2/12. See Matthew Gale, *Francis Bacon: Working on Paper* (London: Tate Publishing, 1999).

¹³³ Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Infinite Conversation', in Imhof and Omlin, pp.71-83 (p.71), also conversation with Obrist, 27 March 2015.

output as an interviewer moves away from the painstaking selectivity of Sylvester's interviews towards a more inclusive and less literary approach.¹³⁴

When the first edition of *Interviews with Francis Bacon* was published in 1975, Spender predicted it would have 'as great an influence on painting during the last quarter of the present century as the critical writings of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot had on poetry during the 1920's and 1930's' while Graham Greene compared them with the writings of Delacroix and Gauguin.¹³⁵ Saville, one of Sylvester's later interviewees, has acknowledged the book's influence on her development, as has Damien Hirst.¹³⁶ When Hirst made his own book of interviews with the writer Gordon Burn, it openly advertised its debt to Sylvester and Bacon's interviews.¹³⁷ Such is the renown that the interviews have achieved that the actor Jeremy Irons was recently recorded reading passages from the interviews to promote the sale at Sotheby's of Bacon's *Two Studies for a Self-Portrait* (1970), as if the interviews were dramatic texts.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Obrist's archive of conversations with artists now consists of some three thousand hours of material. Oliver Giles, 'Profile: Hans Ulrich Obrist', *Prestige*, 11 May 2016, <http://prestigeonline.com/hk/Art-Culture/Interviews/Profile-Hans-Ulrich-Obrist> [accessed on 28 July 2016] (para. 11 of 14).

¹³⁵ Stephen Spender, 'Armature and Alchemy', *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 March 1975, p.290; Sylvester, 'My Brushes with Bacon', p.31.

¹³⁶ Jenny Saville, 'My 10 Favorite Books', *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, 25 August 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/26/t-magazine/entertainment/jenny-saville-favorite-books.html?_r=0 [accessed 2 September 2016]; Damien Hirst, 'Foreword' to extracts from *Interviews with Francis Bacon* published in *Guardian* 'Great interviews of the 20th century' series, 2007, pp.7-8.

¹³⁷ Gordon Burn and Damien Hirst, *On the Way to Work* (London: Faber and Faber, [2001]). The book's dustjacket informs the reader that 'they [Burn and Hirst] admired David Sylvester's interviews with Francis Bacon [...] and there was always an unspoken understanding between them that they would do something similar when the time was right'.

¹³⁸ 'Jeremy Irons Brings Francis Bacon's Words to Life', *Sotheby's website* http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/videos/2016/04/jeremy-irons-brings-francis-bacons-words-to-life.html?cmp=email_selects_selects_bacon_irons_hero1_42916-42916 [accessed 28 July 2016]. This is ironic considering that Sylvester had pondered whether he ought to present the interviews 'packed with stage directions'.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of the book's success is not, however, the praise it has attracted but the extent to which it has influenced the study of Bacon's work. When the first edition of the book was published in 1975, Feaver anticipated that 'the very success of the talks, their value as source material in what are bound to be classified, before long, as 'Bacon Studies', is somewhat undermining', and his prediction has proved correct.¹³⁹ More recently art historians including Martin Hammer and Andrew Brighton have remarked upon how the authority of the interviews has shaped the discourse around Bacon's work to the extent that until recently stifled other approaches.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps the most eloquent criticism of Sylvester's approach came from the novelist J.G. Ballard, who felt that Sylvester missed his opportunity to secure more valuable testimony:

He [Bacon] chose as his official interviewer the art critic Sylvester, who was careful to steer clear of the questions everyone was eager to hear answered, and only asked Bacon about his handling of space and other academic topics. In his replies Bacon adopted the same elliptical and evasive language, with the result that we know less about the motives of this extraordinary painter than we do of almost any other 20th-century artist.¹⁴¹

This is not to say that other topics were not discussed. In one unpublished exchange Sylvester asked Bacon about his 'very coherent and personal view towards life' in which chance is to be accepted, to which Bacon

¹³⁹ Feaver, 'All Flesh is Meat', p.653.

¹⁴⁰ Hammer has written that 'their [the interviews'] effect has been to constrict art-historical analysis of Bacon's work' (Martin Hammer, *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), p.8). Brighton, meanwhile, has written that 'statements by Bacon are sites for excavation rather than sources of firm evidence' (Andrew Brighton, *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), p.7).

¹⁴¹ J.G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton: an Autobiography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), pp.156-7. On the day that Sylvester's first interview with Bacon was published in 1963, his former editor at *The Listener* J.R. Ackerley wrote to tell Sylvester: 'there is one question [...] I wished you had put but did not. What is his [Bacon's] emotional state of mind when he paints? [...] Francis, of course, will not understand his own psychology, any more than I understand mine, but when he paints [...] what is he telling himself and us?' Letter from Ackerley to Sylvester, 14 July 1963, TGA 200816/2/2/21.

responded 'you are really talking about politics aren't you?', suggesting he felt Sylvester was trying to turn the conversation in that direction.¹⁴² Also omitted was Bacon's response when Sylvester asked him about his 'unfashionable indifference to the suffering of the underprivileged':

[...] it's got so completely out of hand that what is called helping the suffering people really has gone beyond all possibility and all one can hope is that there'll be a plague which can't be controlled by modern medicine and to wipe out 9/10s of the world and they can start again, one hopes with a better pattern. Whether it'll come through plague or through atomic warfare where perhaps the planet will be uninhabitable on the other hand one feels to have known people who will even survive an atomic holocaust and crawl out of the holes of the earth and start again.¹⁴³

What we may never know is whether this was omitted at Bacon's request or because Sylvester felt it was either irrelevant or distracting from the main purpose of the interviews. Either way given the longevity of Sylvester and Bacon's relationship (Chapter 5) we can assume a generally shared viewpoint.

Ballard hints at a complicity between Bacon and Sylvester in obfuscating, rather than elucidating Bacon's art. In this Ballard seemed to realise that criticising Sylvester's abilities as an interviewer was only part of the issue, and that making the interviews he needed to remain within the limits of what Bacon was willing to discuss. Nicholas Chare, on the other hand, interprets the interviews as instantiating confrontation rather than complicity:

Sylvester's interviews with Bacon can be understood to be a kind of investigative interviewing, one in which the artist is cast in the role of transcendental signified, and then compelled to surrender works to description, to a categorization of their content and what motivated their production [...]¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Transcript for Sylvester-Bacon interview 9 (recorded March 1984), TGA 200816/4/2/9.

¹⁴³ Transcript for Sylvester-Bacon interview 4 (recorded September 1974), TGA 200816/4/2/9.

¹⁴⁴ Nicholas Chare, *After Francis Bacon: Synaesthesia and Sex in Paint* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate: 2012), p.31. Rosenblum made a similar point more positively when

The claim fails on more than one count, however. Firstly, Sylvester and Bacon were good friends who both benefited from the interview series. Bacon was no victim, but instead a skilled manipulator of his own image willing to suppress unwanted book projects (or interviews such as that proposed by ABC Television) even when friends such as Peppiatt were involved (Chapter 5). The fact that Bacon is so well-documented in interviews is clearly due in large part to Sylvester having gained his confidence and then been willing to work within whichever guidelines Bacon set. An anecdote in which Bacon tells a friend 'there's David Sylvester, what lies shall we tell him tonight?' should alert us that perhaps Sylvester, and moreover the reader, are the victims rather than Bacon.¹⁴⁵

Despite the differences between their complaints, however, Ballard and Chare are alike in taking as their default setting a 'Grabenkampf' interview in which an interrogator-like interviewer seeks to wrench the truth from his subject. However, neither of them refer to Sylvester's reading in the third (1971-3) interview from Duchamp's lecture 'The Creative Act':

To all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond times and space, seeks his way out to a clearing.

If we give the attributes of a medium to the artist, we must then deny him the state of consciousness on the esthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it. All his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out.¹⁴⁶

he described Sylvester as "a kind of psychoanalyst who, with a few well-chosen questions, could prompt patients to explore the concealed memories that might shed light on their art'. Rosenblum, p.33.

¹⁴⁵ Brighton, p.7

¹⁴⁶ Marcel Duchamp, 'The Creative Act' in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, ed. by Peter Selz and Kristin Stiles (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996), pp.818-9 (first publ. in *Art News*, Summer 1957, pp.28-9). Quoted in Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon* pp.104-5.

Sylvester and Bacon are both sympathetic to Duchamp's words about the impossibility of the artist being conscious of the reason for his actions, which should warn the reader not to expect any comprehensive explanation of the artist's work. Far from casting Bacon 'in the role of transcendental signified', Sylvester acknowledged the impossibility of such a thing, and was interested in the extent to which an artist could discuss his work rather than imagining any perfect description could ever be given. Sylvester perhaps summed up the interviews best when he wrote: 'in their description of his [Bacon's] aims and methods they are not especially accurate—often because he didn't want them to be—but they evoke the creative process marvellously through telling cadences and a vivid, unexpected use of words'.¹⁴⁷

To conclude, Alloway warned against the overproduction of interviews providing more discourse than could be studied and analysed, no doubt a real problem, summed up by D.T. Max's comment in a recent *New Yorker* profile of Obrist that 'it sometimes seems that Obrist doesn't care so much what people say, as long as they go on talking'.¹⁴⁸ Sylvester's interviews and the care he put in them show one way of avoiding this pitfall: not turning one's back on interviews but ensuring that they are organised with the same attention and rigour as any other literary form requires.

¹⁴⁷ Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p.191.

¹⁴⁸ D.T. Max, 'The Art of Conversation', *New Yorker*, 8 December 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/08/art-conversation> [accessed 2 September 2016] (para. 69 of 70).

Chapter 5: The Monographs

Introduction

In 1999 Sylvester declined an invitation from Kirk Varnedoe to contribute to a forthcoming Giacometti exhibition at MoMA. The reason he gave was that:

There are four artists about whom I feel that I wouldn't want to work on a monographic exhibition of theirs where I didn't have the ultimate responsibility both for the selection and the installation, however useful and pleasant it could be to have others working with one. These artists are Henry Moore, Francis Bacon, Magritte and I'm afraid Giacometti.¹

This chapter consists of a section on each of these four artists and the books which stand as Sylvester's major statements about them. The artists have been separated in this way in keeping with Sylvester's own preference for the monograph as a format which allowed him to tailor his approach to the particular artist he was writing about, and which resulted in four very different books. In each case I will show what characterised Sylvester's interpretations of each of these artists and what distinguished them from accounts by other writers.

My intention is not, however, to isolate each of these books from the rest of Sylvester's writing, but rather to show how in each case one can find connections between the subject of the book and other artists Sylvester was working on. Sometimes I show this by referring to an explicit quotation or an allusion in the published text, at others with reference to an unpublished passage in a draft manuscript or by considering different projects Sylvester

¹ Fax from Sylvester to Carolyn Lanchner, 25 March 1999, TGA 200816/2/1/812.

was working on concurrently. Taken together, then, I hope to show that in his writing on Moore, Bacon, Giacometti and Magritte, Sylvester was both presenting a highly personal reading of each artist and connecting it to his broader interpretation of twentieth-century art.

5.1 Henry Moore

Moore plays a unique role in Sylvester's criticism, since the critic wrote about and curated Moore's work from the very beginning of his career up until the 1990s.² Sylvester had been writing about Henry Moore for over twenty years when in 1968 he organised the much-decorated artist's seventieth birthday retrospective at the Tate Gallery and wrote the accompanying catalogue. By this time Moore's work had long been criticised by younger artists, not only by artists such as Turnbull and Butler in the late 1940s (Chapter 1), but more recently by Anthony Caro (who, like Butler, had worked as Moore's assistant). Caro wrote in 1960 that Moore had 'grown out of touch with post-war developments in art' and his own work of the 1960s, welding standardized metal units into abstract configurations and placed directly on the ground, amounted to a radical departure from Moore.³ For Sylvester, who admired Caro and other new sculptors emerging in the 1960s without believing that they rendered Moore's work obsolete, the challenge in 1968 was to present Moore as still compelling and relevant. In his Moore catalogue, Sylvester managed to incorporate new sculptural ideas (relating to American art in particular) without losing touch of the specificity of Moore's own work.

² In 1990-1 Sylvester curated an Arts Council exhibition of Moore's models and maquettes, while in the late 1990s he discussed a possible Moore exhibition at the Tate with Serota (TGA 200816/12/15).

³ Anthony Caro, 'The Master Sculptor', *Observer*, 27 November 1960, p.21.

Even though Moore was unfashionable in progressive circles during the 1960s, the international proliferation of his sculptures was accompanied by the regular appearance of new publications.⁴ Amongst the best-known of the period were a new book by Moore's long-time champion Herbert Read in 1965, and the *Sunday Times* critic John Russell's large colour monograph which was published, like Sylvester's, in 1968.⁵ Others included the analytical psychologist Erich Neumann's *The Archetypal World of Henry Moore*, which was quoted extensively by Read and Russell, and the 'life and work' by Donald Hall, which Sylvester had advised on.⁶

What is distinctive in Sylvester's own writing about Moore's work is his emphasis on its unconscious and sexual imagery, as Chris Stephens has observed with regards to Moore's two and three part Reclining Figures, and which has little in common with the Jungian readings of Neumann or Read.⁷ Tellingly, Sylvester dedicated his book to Stokes, one of his heroes among writers on art, whose *Three Essays on the Painting of Our Time* he had

⁴ Sylvester had tried to interest Faber and Faber in a book on Moore in 1960 but they were reluctant to commission it because of the number of books on him already. Correspondence between Sylvester and Faber and Faber staff, 1960, TGA 200816/2/1/126.

⁵ Herbert Read, *Henry Moore: A Study of his Life and Work* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1965); John Russell, *Henry Moore* (London: Allen Lane, 1968).

⁶ Donald Hall, *Henry Moore: The Life and Work of a Great Sculptor* (London: Gollancz, 1966); Erich Neumann, *The Archetypal World of Henry Moore*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959). Moore on three separate occasions referred to how he had started reading Neumann's book but stopped in the first chapter because he was worried about how reading the book would affect his work (Tim Martin, 'Erich Neumann on Henry Moore: Public Sculpture and the Collective Unconscious', in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity*, Tate Research Publication, 2015, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/tim-martin-erich-neumann-on-henry-moore-public-sculpture-and-the-collective-unconscious-r1151316> [accessed on 6 July 2016].

⁷ Chris Stephens, 'Post War' in *Henry Moore*, ed. by Chris Stephens (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), p.231, fn. Sylvester considered including a separate section on the unconscious in his book, writing: 'After the obsessions have been discussed, perhaps one should try and isolate the unconscious obsessions underlining all the work. But it might be better to deal with these as one goes along'. TGA 200816/5/8/13.

reviewed in 1961.⁸ Stokes had earlier published an article on Moore in the *Spectator*, and Sylvester's dedication draws attention to the Stokes-esque writing in the book, particularly its ideas about the exploration and penetration of cavities in Moore's work.⁹

With Moore increasingly associated with public sculpture and even (as the most internationally renowned British artist of the day) British national identity, writers often found it difficult, if not irrelevant, to talk about Moore's work on a more personal level. Russell wrote of a 'private Moore' on whom 'much work has still to be done' at the end of his book and suggested Anton Ehrenzweig's 'revised concept of the unconscious' in *The Hidden Order of Art* could assist in elucidating this aspect of Moore's work.¹⁰ Elsewhere in the book, however, Russell did no more than gesture vaguely towards 'something odd [...] sexual ambiguity' in Moore's *Falling Warrior* (1956-7), where Sylvester had earlier written eloquently of how 'as we stand there and look at it we feel a dislocation in our torsos, we feel our backs hit the ground, our legs thrown helplessly into the air'.¹¹ Russell is clearly more comfortable when writing about 'the Moore who more than once became the keeper of

⁸ David Sylvester, 'All at Once', *New Statesman*, 11 August 1961, p.190. Sylvester also owned eight paintings by Stokes, which he bequeathed to the Tate.

⁹ Adrian Stokes, 'Mr Henry Moore's Sculpture' in Adrian Stokes, *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes*, ed. by Lawrence Gowing, 3 vols (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), I, pp.311-2. On the relationship between Moore and Stokes see Richard Read, 'Circling Each Other: Henry Moore and Adrian Stokes', in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity*, Tate Research Publication, 2015, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/richard-read-circling-each-other-henry-moore-and-adrian-stokes-r1151308> [accessed 05 July 2016].

¹⁰ Russell, p.231; Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, [1967]). In fact, Ehrenzweig's comments about Moore, the Great Mother and the search for wholeness are still compatible with Read and Neumann's views.

¹¹ Russell, p.139; David Sylvester, 'A New Bronze by Henry Moore', *The Listener*, 10 July 1958, p.51.

Everyman's conscience', the creator of works in which 'the element of public service is somewhere latent'.¹²

A recent essay on Neumann and Moore concludes that the circumstances in which Neumann's book came into existence 'remind us of the remarkable faith placed in public sculpture in the 1950s, and that there have been moments in art history when many have longed for an art that would affirm the existence of a collective unconscious'.¹³ As discussed in Chapter 2, this is only one side of the story, and in the 1950s too considerable investment in public sculpture went in opposition to critics such as Sylvester who felt it was often misplaced. In this way a connection can be made between the communal meanings sought by Jungians such as Read, the omnipotent Kenneth Clark, and even Berger (even if their criteria of success and failure were different).

Read and Neumann shared a humanist interpretation of Moore's work, and despite some points of difference they both concluded that Moore conveys universal archetypes through symbolic forms such as birth, death, and the Great Mother.¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, they focused on works which most persuasively seemed to represent these ideas. Neumann and Ehrenzweig (whose references to Moore in *The Hidden Order of Art* suggest a similar interpretation) both wrote about Moore's helmets of the 1960s, Neumann interpreting them in terms of a body/soul dichotomy and Ehrenzweig writing of how 'the male child incorporates the powers of the womb'.¹⁵ Sylvester,

¹² Russell, p.231.

¹³ Martin (para. 45 of 45).

¹⁴ See Martin, also Ben Cranfield, 'A stimulation to greater effort of living': The Importance of Henry Moore's 'credible compromise' to Herbert Read's Aesthetics and Politics', in *Henry Moore: Sculptural Process and Public Identity*, Tate Research Publication, 2015, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/henry-moore/ben-cranfield-a-stimulation-to-greater-effort-of-living-the-importance-of-henry-moores-r1151301> [accessed 7 July 2016].

¹⁵ Neumann, p.103; Ehrenzweig, p.213.

however, simply dismissed these works as 'reversions to old themes' with little interest in the context of Moore's development as a sculptor.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Read wrote of Moore's aggressive 1953 *Mother and Child* that: 'This group is so close an illustration of the psycho-analytical theories of Melanie Klein that it might seem the sculptor had some first-hand acquaintance with them'.¹⁷ Sylvester, however, found it 'gratuitous' and found Moore's work most interesting not when the underlying idea was 'brought into the open' but where it remained implicit and suggestive. This is perhaps why the works that interested him tended to be ambiguous whereas Read and Neumann tended to favour those with an apparently unequivocal meaning.¹⁸ In his review of Stokes' *Three Essays*, Sylvester (who had been heavily influenced by Jung in the 1940s) pithily wrote 'Jungians have sought to explain the mysteries of art through the invention of a further set of mysteries', and he no doubt felt that Read and Neumann, in trying to provide a cohesive and demonstrable theory of Moore's work, often focused on his poorer work as a result.¹⁹

Neumann was aware of Sylvester's earlier writings on Moore and in his book explicitly rejected Sylvester's interpretations. He dismissed Sylvester's 1951 Moore catalogue, for example, as insinuating Moore was 'a psychopathic personality who is obsessed with sex and sees holes everywhere'.²⁰ Neumann also wrote in relation to Sylvester's writing on the 'Holes and Hollows' in Moore that: 'It is absurd to try to reduce this profound inborn striving of man to

¹⁶ TGA 200816/5/8/13.

¹⁷ Read, p.181.

¹⁸ Sylvester, *Henry Moore*, p.22.

¹⁹ Sylvester, 'All at Once'.

²⁰ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.16; Neumann, p.39. Considering Moore's misgivings towards reading Neumann's book it would be interesting to know what he thought of Sylvester's writing. Their 1963 interview gives little indication, keeping largely to technical matters of how Moore's sculptures are made.

discover and understand the mystery of the Great Mother to the sexual curiosity of the infant'.²¹ Neumann resists any suggestions of 'the early infantile sexual curiosity that, pathologically, he [Moore] has failed to overcome.'²²

In Sylvester's opinion, however, Neumann was overlooking the obvious fact that in Moore's work 'the sexual symbolism is as assertive as in Beethoven. It doesn't need to be looked for and to deny it as Neumann does suggests inhibitions about recognizing what is there'.²³ Sylvester wrote of Moore's 1960-1 *Reclining Mother and Child* that 'the form it assumes suggests the common infantile fantasy of associating babies inside women's bodies with penises inside women's bodies'.²⁴ The distinction was between one which saw any claims of sexual content in Moore's work as denigrating its higher moral and spiritual value of Moore's work, and Sylvester's approach stressing the subjectivity of Moore's work and its personal working through of early experiences and ambivalent impulses.

It seems likely that Sylvester's later writing about Moore, which is more detailed than his earlier writing about the suggestion of sexual symbolism in his sculpture, was influenced with his familiarity with the work of sculptors such as Carl Andre and Claes Oldenburg. Sylvester saw both American artists, like Moore, as creating work which carried sexual content not through individual representations but as something deeply embodied in the form of

²¹ Neumann, p.51

²² Neumann, p.41. There are interesting parallels between Sylvester's dismissal of Neumann as a prude unable to confront the sexual content in Moore's work and his comment that Berger was 'too much of a boy scout not to see Bacon as a monster of depravity' (Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.16).

²³ TGA 200816/5/8/13.

²⁴ Sylvester, *Henry Moore*, p.85.

the work itself. In a 1968 essay on Oldenburg Sylvester ended by anthropomorphising Oldenburg's sculptures of objects as a class: 'This is Mummy's body: how nice to cuddle her, make a dent in her. But daddy mustn't'.²⁵ Furthermore, Sylvester saw a 'sublimated sexual satisfaction' in Carl Andre's combinations of elements that is clearly compatible with his writing about the interlocking parts of Moore's multiple-form sculptures as described in the 'Fitting Together' section of *Henry Moore*.²⁶

Writing on Moore, meanwhile, Sylvester discussed sculptures which evoked the idea 'of being wholly inside' a woman's body, and suggested that in *Two-Piece Reclining Figure No.1* (1959) 'the entire looming form can be equated with a threatening phallus'.²⁷ In Sylvester's interview with Andre, the sculptor in fact draws a connection between the importance of childhood memories for both Moore and Oldenburg, observing: 'Henry Moore said the work of art is to recover the vividness of our earliest experiences'.²⁸

Sylvester told Andre 'it was a great period, the sixties. The amount of originality which you on the one hand and Oldenburg on the other brought to sculpture was fabulous',²⁹ and Sylvester seems to have been thinking of Oldenburg in particular in the section on 'Hard and Soft' (as David Hulks, Alex Potts and Jon Wood have noted).³⁰ Sylvester wrote 'the development of

²⁵ David Sylvester, 'The Soft Machines of Claes Oldenburg', *Vogue (US)*, 1 February 1968, pp.166-9, 209, 211-2 (p.212).

²⁶ David Sylvester, 'Andre' in *About Modern Art*, pp.509-12 (first publ. as 'Carl Andre: Paula Cooper Gallery, Ace Gallery, Musée Cantini', *Artforum*, December 1997, pp.110-1) (p.510).

²⁷ Sylvester, *Henry Moore*, p.93. See also the shot from Sylvester and Lassally's film of the 1968 exhibition discussed in Chapter 3.

²⁸ Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, p.282.

²⁹ Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, p.281. Sylvester could equally have been referring to Morris, Judd or Serra.

³⁰ David Hulks, Alex Potts and Jon Wood, eds., *Modern Sculpture Reader* (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2007), p.262. In 1968 Sylvester also acquired a felt sculpture by Morris, which he loaned to the Tate that same year (correspondence with Michael Compton, TGA 200816/3/18). Soon after the Moore exhibition ended Sylvester began

hard/soft contrasts represents a radically new way of thinking for Moore—an emphasis on dynamic rather than static qualities, and on the uneasy rather than the harmonious', and while he saw such contrasts as important to much of Moore's work of the 1950s, it was in the 1968 book that they received most attention.³¹ Oldenburg in 1965 told Sylvester that 'Bernini made things look soft and he pulled it off', but in a section omitted from Sylvester's published interview with Oldenburg they also talk about Rodin's significance in this respect. Sylvester says 'I do think that Rodin gives an experience that's not given by any earlier sculpture [...] you know it really isn't the old surface tension. It's more like a surface elasticity', and this discussion of earlier bronze sculpture in relation to a contemporary artist using new sculptural materials may well have informed Sylvester's thinking about other artists.³²

Four mentions of Rodin, present in the draft of Sylvester's 1968 book, are excluded from the published text. Nor is his work illustrated in the comparative material in the book, even though in a draft passage Sylvester notes that the lower half of Moore's *Standing Figure: Knife-edge* (1961) is 'reminiscent in shape and texture of the back of the robe of Rodin's Balzac'.³³ Rodin is mentioned in passing in the 'Hard and Soft' section, but Sylvester is unequivocal that (as Moore himself often stated) 'the crucial influence has been Michelangelo'. He eliminated the sentence 'It [the contrast between hard passages and soft passages] begins to appear in Moore's sculpture in the mid-1950s, with transitions as violent as they are in Rodin [...] (the sentence is largely retained but with the Rodin comparison cut), giving a clear sense that

discussions with the Tate regarding the Morris exhibition which took place in 1971 (correspondence with Morris and Norman Reid, TGA 200816/4/2/84).

³¹ Sylvester, *Henry Moore*, p.128.

³² Transcript of interview with Oldenburg, TGA 200816/6/1/15.

³³ Ibid.

Sylvester, in referencing Michelangelo, is choosing to avoid making equally plausible comparisons with Rodin.³⁴ Sylvester was himself ambivalent about Rodin, who he described in 1964 as: 'the greatest European sculptor of the last four hundred years—that is, since Michelangelo. But he was also very much a figure of his own time, with a late Victorian & Edwardian vulgarity. I see him as a sort of equivalent of Wagner'.³⁵ Michelangelo was a far more acceptable precursor, free of the 'vulgarity' of Rodin and admired as much by Bacon as by Moore.³⁶ The hard and soft also features in Sylvester's 1967 text about Miró's bronze sculptures *Solar Bird* [*Oiseau solaire*] and *Lunar Bird* [*Oiseau lunaire*] (both 1966), in which Sylvester's description of the 'rampant libido' of the latter is very similar to his descriptions of Moore's two-piece reclining figures.³⁷ Interestingly, in mentioning the hard and soft in Miró's sculpture, 'that marvellous combination of tautness and give in its surface, rather as in Rodin'.

Surveys of Moore's work such as those by Read and others discussed above tended to discuss his work in broadly chronological order, even when (as in Neumann's case) they focused on a particular theme. Sylvester had himself taken a chronological approach in his 1948 *Burlington Magazine* essay, although soon afterwards he began to feel that this approach was not suitable

³⁴ Sylvester interviewed Moore specifically about Michelangelo in 1964 ('The Michelangelo Vision', *Sunday Times Colour Magazine*, 16 February 1964, pp.18-23) while other books on Moore often included an anecdote about the importance of Moore first learning of Michelangelo as a schoolboy.

³⁵ Sylvester, *Ten Modern Artists: Brancusi*, broadcast on BBC1 on 26 April 1964, shooting script in TGA 200816/5/6/2/4.

³⁶ Bacon told Sylvester 'I've always thought about Michelangelo; he's always been deeply important in my way of thinking about form' (Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.114).

³⁷ Sylvester went on to organise an exhibition of Miró's bronzes at the Hayward Gallery in 1972. Sylvester told Pierre Matisse that 'the installation is, given the difficulties presented by the Hayward, the best piece of installation I've done'. Letter from Sylvester to Matisse, 11 February 1972, Pierre Matisse Gallery archive, Morgan Library & Museum.

for Moore's work. In his 1951 exhibition Sylvester divided Moore's work into 'seven groups of drawings and sculptures, representing stages (almost invariably overlapping) in the artist's development'.³⁸ By the time of the 1968 book (which Sylvester considered 'the one thing among the many I have written on Moore in which I got things right'), any notion of linear development had been abandoned completely.³⁹ In a draft relating to the 1968 book, Sylvester wrote 'Moore's variety doesn't divide into periods. It's more that there are certain persistent obsessions, overlapping in time, and interlocking'.⁴⁰ The 1968 book consisted of thirteen thematic texts including sections on specific genres ('The Reclining Figure', 'The Mother and Child'), influences and source materials ('Correspondences', 'Stones, Bones, Shells'), formal characteristics common to discrete groups of works ('Strings', 'Knife-Edge') and broader sculptural concepts ('Internal/External', 'Hard and Soft').⁴¹

The thematic approach worked particularly well in the case of 'Stones, Bones, Shells', which traced Moore's use of found objects from collecting pebbles in the late 1920s to his later preference for modelling rather than drawing as a starting point for his sculptures. This section, which isolated an aspect of Moore's process often treated as peripheral and presented it as central to the artist's work, shows clearly how Sylvester's opinion of Moore had changed during the 1960s. A 1960 note Sylvester wrote about Moore read in part: 'there is something too passive about Moore's acceptance of nature's way of working stone and so on. What we ask of the artist is that he should have a kind of love-hate relationship with nature and that the very intensity of

³⁸ David Sylvester, *Sculpture and Drawings by Henry Moore* (London: 1951), p.8.

³⁹ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.12.

⁴⁰ TGA 200816/5/8/13.

⁴¹ Other categories Sylvester considered but rejected included 'mechanistic', 'close up', 'exotic' and 'mysterious'. TGA 200816/5/8/13.

his love should be a motive for destruction [...]'.⁴² In the same year that Sylvester invited readers to 'look at the serenity and the violence locked together in a Mondrian' with its 'interlocking [...] opposition and reconciliation', Sylvester found that Moore's work lacked this enlivening tension.⁴³ Sylvester wrote this shortly before making the similar comment, referring primarily to the St Ives artists, that 'the kind of abstraction which has proved most acceptable here [in Britain] has been sort of picturesque abstraction evocative of types of landscape which readily provoke wonder and a sense of communion with nature's elemental forces'.⁴⁴ In keeping with Sylvester's somewhat despondent view of British art generally at the end of the 1950s, he was effectively classifying Moore alongside the St Ives artists and other British landscape artists making far less ambitious art than the (mostly American) artists which then most excited him.⁴⁵ By 1968, however, Sylvester had reformulated this view of Moore, and now described Moore's use of found natural objects as an alibi for abstraction. Sylvester wrote of Moore's statements from the 1930s justifying his abstract work that 'he [Moore] protests like a man conducting an argument with himself. There may have been a connexion between his need to reassure himself that abstraction was not an escape from reality and his preoccupation with stones and bones and shells'.⁴⁶ Whereas Sylvester found a 'passive acceptance' of nature unsatisfactory, the idea that Moore was working with found objects to keep in touch with reality while following his instincts towards abstraction gave

⁴² Note dated 10 December 1960, TGA 200816/5/8/13.

⁴³ Sylvester, 'Picasso at the Tate-II'.

⁴⁴ Sylvester, 'Aspects of Contemporary British Art', p.121.

⁴⁵ Sylvester criticised Arp on similar grounds in his broadcast 'On Arp and Nature', BBC Third Programme, 1 December 1962, microfilmed transcript in BBC WAC (published as 'Arp' in Sylvester, *About Modern Art*, pp.181-6).

⁴⁶ Sylvester, *Henry Moore*, p.54.

Moore's work more of the tension that Sylvester believed characteristic of great art.

While the format of Sylvester's book worked to Sylvester's strengths by enabling him to avoid repeating the familiar narrative of Moore's ascent to global renown and prestigious international commissions, the result was not cohesive enough for Rosalind Krauss, whose largely critical review of the book concluded:

It may be unfair for a reader to ask the author of a monograph on Henry Moore to embark on a study of the whole of modern sculpture. But [...] without some kind of prior analysis about the meanings implicit in Moore's use of form, any generalizations that are made are bound to be trivial, or worse, wrong.⁴⁷

By 'implicit meanings' Krauss was referring to the surrealist idea of possession that she saw as the underlying theme of Moore's work, and which for Krauss was evidenced by Moore's quote that 'I prefer to do a sketch-model, a hand-size that you can turn around and control, as though you're God'.⁴⁸ Like Sylvester's 1965 conversation with Kozloff and Michelson (Chapter 2), Krauss' review underlines the difference in approach between the rigorous theoretical background associated with *Artforum*, and Sylvester's empiricism.

Unfortunately Krauss doesn't engage with the more original aspect of the book which discusses Sylvester's personal responses to the works, and she somewhat disingenuously claims that 'the scope of Sylvester's ambition has now contracted to one of dealing with the influences that shaped Moore's art'.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Krauss, review of Sylvester's *Henry Moore*, *The Art Bulletin*, September 1970, pp.337-40 (p.338).

⁴⁸ Krauss, *Henry Moore* review, p.339.

⁴⁹ Krauss, *Henry Moore* review, p.338.

In the early 1960s Sylvester recorded a broadcast on Hans Arp, a sculptor comparable to Moore in some ways, in which Arp's work was accused of vagueness, failing to meet Sylvester's requirement that 'art [...] should be rich in analogy and ambiguity yet sharply differentiated'. In Sylvester's opinion 'Arp's sculptures haven't a discipline of this kind. They can be anything formally, just as they can be anything as images'.⁵⁰ Here they were contrasted with Brancusi's sculptures, which 'are never just anything: they are very specifically birds or cockerels or fish, whatever other things they might also evoke'.⁵¹ This may be why Sylvester, in the 'Correspondences' section of his book (in which Moore's surrealist influences are discussed most fully), lists some of the precise associations he finds Moore's works to have: 'a pipe [...], a bridge [...], a shoe [...], a toy 'bomb' [...], a sparking-plug'.⁵² In a passage deleted from a draft of 'Correspondences' Sylvester was even more insistent on the distinction between Moore and Arp: 'There is in any case no question of Arp's having influenced Moore. Where sculptures of theirs are alike, the Arp never antedates the Moore [...]'⁵³ In Sylvester's opinion Arp didn't conceive works in the round, which was why his reliefs were his finest works whereas his sculpture was inferior to that of artists such as Henri Laurens and Moore.⁵⁴ These distinctions would not have seemed verifiable to Krauss, who in her review discussed Moore and Arp side by side as demonstrating the same principle, but Sylvester, focusing on fine distinctions between the

⁵⁰ Sylvester, 'Arp', p.187.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Sylvester, *Henry Moore*, p.37.

⁵³ TGA 200816/5/8/13.

⁵⁴ The camera movements in the Moore film Sylvester made with Lassally show the sculptures subtly changing as the camera moves around them.

characteristics of their work, in his criticism reveals significant differences between the two artists.

Krauss's review provides a cogent argument for viewing Moore's work as essentially surrealist, which she clearly believed was unequivocally the way that it should be read (she does little to engage with the other influences suggested in Sylvester's book). However, two years later, Krauss would concede in 'A View of Modernism', in which she 'officially severed ties with Greenberg, Fried and their hard-nosed position', that 'modernist theory has never been able to come up with a satisfactory history of sculpture'.⁵⁵ In her review of *Henry Moore*, Krauss asked the reader to overlook 'superficial differences between the procedures of carving, modelling and construction' as if the materiality of the works distracted from the ideas they embodied, but in 'A View of Modernism' she acknowledged that 'the conception of modernism in sculpture depends exclusively on describing the developments within constructed sculpture rather than work which is carved or cast', meaning it was ill-equipped to discuss work such as Moore's in which the distinction between carving and modelling was significant.⁵⁶ Krauss' arguments for 'possession' and omniscience had required her to overlook Sylvester's empirical approach.⁵⁷ It was this approach that made Sylvester particularly

⁵⁵ Rosalind Krauss, 'A View of Modernism', *Artforum*, September 1972, pp.48-51 (p.50); Judy K. Collischan van Wagner, *Women Shaping Art: Profiles of Power* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p.156.

⁵⁶ Krauss, *Henry Moore* review, p.338; Krauss, 'A View of Modernism', p.50.

⁵⁷ Krauss has continued to be accused of imposing systems removed from the actual experience of art by writers including Shiff (*Doubt*) and Jed Perl (Rosalind Krauss and Jed Perl, 'The Critic's Sense & Sensibility', *New York Review of Books*, 14 July 2016, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/07/14/critics-sense-sensibility/> [accessed 7 July 2016]).

good at writing about sculpture, especially works by artists such as Moore which can only be appreciated in succession rather than grasped at once.⁵⁸

Despite Krauss' criticism that Sylvester didn't inscribe Moore sufficiently in a Surrealist context, Surrealism was becoming central to Sylvester's thinking at the time of writing the book. He had been teaching in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania in 1967-8 (during which time he probably saw plenty of recent sculpture by Oldenburg, Morris and others),⁵⁹ and the 'certain interpretations of Moore's imagery' he thanks his Swarthmore students for contributing in the acknowledgments to *Henry Moore* are likely have related to surrealism, since Sylvester wrote of how his students were more stimulated by the problems raised by dada and surrealism than by those raised by Cézanne, cubism, Matisse and other artists he taught.⁶⁰ At this time Sylvester was also assembling the Magritte exhibition which would be held at the Tate in 1969, while he was already making plans for an exhibition on dada and surrealism to be held at the Tate Gallery (realised ten years later as the influential Hayward Gallery exhibition 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed').⁶¹

⁵⁸ Somewhat surprisingly, Moore wrote 'most critics (including Adrian S[tokes] and David S[yvester]) approach sculpture from a painters point of view (that's why they are often suckers for relief sculpture—they find it impossible to get away from their liking for not destroying [?] the picture plane, why often they get their opinions studying photographs of sculpture & not the sculpture itself—why they retain a flat picture of sculpture in their minds -' (notes by Moore, late 1950s [?] in Henry Moore Foundation archive, published in *Henry Moore: Writings and Conversations*, ed. by Alan Wilkinson (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2002), pp.141-2. In Sylvester's 1958 article about Moore's *Falling Warrior* (David Sylvester, 'A New Bronze by Henry Moore', *The Listener*, 10 July 1958, p.51), for instance, he writes of how the impact of the sculpture depends greatly upon which position it is viewed from.

⁵⁹ Sylvester acquired his Morris felt in 1968, probably while in the US.

⁶⁰ Letter from Sylvester, unsigned [probably to Edward K. Cratsley], 16 September 1969, TGA 200816/2/1/1098.

⁶¹ See letter from Norman Reid to Sylvester, 25 September 1969, TGA 200816/3/18.

⁶¹ Yve-Alain Bois noted the significance of 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed' as 'the first time there was a show of material entirely based on journals'. 'Roundtable: Art at Mid-Century' in Yve-Alain Bois and others, *Art Since 1900* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p.327.

5.2 Alberto Giacometti

Kozloff wrote of the 1960s that 'art writers of the time tended to be centered by the work of one artist, considered paradigmatic'.⁶² For Kozloff that artist was Johns, while for Sylvester it was Giacometti who more than any other artist epitomised the concerns with representation and the challenge of making art in the twentieth century which were at the heart of Sylvester's criticism. The example Giacometti provided of an artist relentless in his resistance not just to simple solutions, but to the idea of completion itself (which relates to Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty and Sylvester's early writing on Klee and the work which is completed by the spectator) placed him at the heart of much of Sylvester's writing during the period when he was writing most regularly.

What Giacometti represented to Sylvester was closely connected to his reading of Wittgenstein and Sartre. Sylvester's book *Looking at Giacometti* included a long comparison between Giacometti and Wittgenstein while, as has been noted, Sylvester's writing on Giacometti shows the clear influence of Sartre's 'The Search for the Absolute' with its portrayal of the artist as a Sisyphean figure.⁶³ Sartre compared Giacometti with artists and writers in whom he detected the same sensibility: 'as da Vinci said, it is not good for an artist to feel satisfied [...] Kafka, dying, wanted his books burned, and Doestoevsky, in the last days of his life, dreamed of writing a sequel to

⁶² Kozloff, *Cultivated Impasses*, p.19.

⁶³ Lubbock placed similar passages by Sartre side-by-side in his review of *Looking at Giacometti* (paras. 22-6 of 39). The curator Patrick Elliott described parts of Sylvester's text as 'almost copyright-issue close' to Sartre's. Email from Elliott, 9 July 2015.

Karamazov'.⁶⁴ Sylvester, however, was less interested in the philosophical implications of this stance (as Sartre was) than in the artworks which emerged from it, which by virtue of being unfinished thereby required the engagement of the viewer to 'complete' the work. In placing this theme of the 'unfinished' at the centre of his criticism from early in his career Sylvester was prescient, and anticipated the widespread international interest in the question of finish. Kelly Baum's catalogue essay for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition 'Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible' begins 'since World War II, artists working in Europe, the United States, and Latin America have courted the unfinished with pronounced enthusiasm, seeking bolder, ever more novel, and experimental ways to *not* finish works of art'.⁶⁵

Looking at Giacometti incorporates this struggle to reach completion into its own structure (Sylvester's archive contains over one hundred and twenty folders of draft material relating to the book written over a forty-year period).⁶⁶ The book began with the catalogue text for the Giacometti exhibition Sylvester organised in 1955, which fed into 'a monograph worked on continually from 1955 to 1967'.⁶⁷ A version of this was completed in 1959 but Sylvester 'took it back from the publisher to continue working on it'.⁶⁸ This was the version which Sandler recalled Sylvester reading at 'the Club' in 1960.⁶⁹ On 18 March 1960, seemingly having broken his first contract,

⁶⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'The Search for the Absolute' in *Alberto Giacometti: Exhibition of Sculptures, Paintings, Drawings* (1948), pp.2-22 (20). The catalogue lists no translator for either Sartre's essay or the translations of Giacometti's own writings, reproduced therein.

⁶⁵ Baum, p.206.

⁶⁶ These are catalogued individually within the reference number TGA 200816/5/4.

⁶⁷ TGA 200816/5/4/3/8. 'A few passages were first put to paper in 1954 or 1955', TGA 200816/5/4/3/21.

⁶⁸ Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p.8. There is no material in the archive to indicate which publisher this was.

⁶⁹ Sandler, *A Sweeper-Up After Artists*, p.41. A complete typescript of this version is in TGA 200816/5/4/2/2.

Sylvester signed a contract with the New York publisher George Braziller to deliver the completed manuscript of around 18,000 words later that year.⁷⁰ The decision to work with an American publisher may have had something to do with interest in Giacometti's work in the US, since Sylvester later wrote that Giacometti was 'the European contemporary who deeply impressed the abstract expressionist generation'.⁷¹

The 1960 text comprised five chapters, including most of chapters two and three of *Looking at Giacometti*, along with passages which would be incorporated into Sylvester's catalogue essay for the 1965 Tate Gallery exhibition, and other material which was either discarded from *Looking at Giacometti* or only appears in fragmentary form. At the time this was a monograph concerned above all with Giacometti's most recent work and its relevance to modern art in general rather than a survey of his work as a whole, and there was little attention given to the artist's early surrealist works. At this time it was the fact that Giacometti had repudiated surrealism to embrace the challenge of representing the human figure which Sylvester saw as a powerful vindication of the continuing compulsion to create great human images.⁷²

In the opening pages Sylvester contrasted Giacometti with Duchamp as embodying two types of modern artist:

Whether as schoolboy or blind man, the modern artist appears as one who knows he doesn't know the answers [...] but the validity of art as an activity is taken for granted [by Giacometti], as it is not by

⁷⁰ Contract from George Braziller, TGA 200816/2/1/126. This may have had something to do with Hess, who in a letter to Sylvester (undated but probably 1960) responded enthusiastically to the first version of the text and said 'I am mailing it to Robert Goldwater, and enthusiastically recommending it to Braziller for publication this autumn, with Faber in London, & anyone else' (TGA 200816/2/2/11).

⁷¹ 'Paper for Symposium at Christie's', TGA 200816/2/1/220.

⁷² Sylvester's 1955 Giacometti exhibition included only thirteen pre-war works out of a total of ninety-two in the exhibition.

Duchamp—in practice as well as in theory: Duchamp gave up producing art; Giacometti is the very type of the dedicated artist.⁷³

While Sylvester greatly admired Duchamp he considered him 'not a real artist, like Picasso & Matisse, but a genius playing at or with art, like Leonardo by comparison with Michelangelo & Raphael'.⁷⁴ Giacometti as the dedicated artist was an exemplar for the first generation of postwar artists including the abstract expressionists, who were very interested in his work, while artists and younger critics of the 1960s were more sceptical (and tended to favour Duchamp). Kozloff was one of the latter: his review of the 1965 Giacometti exhibition at MoMA described Giacometti's work as 'an almost animal collision between a painful obsession and a facile execution' while Johns' response to *Looking at Giacometti* was to say 'I've always disliked Giacometti, and now I understand why'.⁷⁵ While Sylvester was closely linked with Giacometti during the 1960s, retrospectively he too came to feel that the 'painful obsession' of the artist's final years led him to diminishing returns.

Sylvester was extraordinarily sensitive about the photography and reproduction of sculpture, something that can be seen in correspondence relating to both the Moore and Giacometti books. Correspondence between Sylvester and Braziller suggests that having 'turned down dozens of other requests to publish books on him', Giacometti's cooperation with Sylvester's

⁷³ TGA 200816/5/4/2/2. Sylvester was considering Duchamp as the schoolboy for adding a moustache to the *Mona Lisa*, and Giacometti as the blind man because of his poem 'Un aveugle avance la main dans la nuit' ['a blind man extends his hand into the night'].

⁷⁴ TGA 200816/7/15. It is telling that Sylvester's favourite works by Duchamp were the painting *Tu m'* (1918) and the object *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* (1924), two of his most evocative works. Sylvester told Duchamp this in 1966, when a group of British artists and critics including Sylvester interviewed Duchamp (transcript in TGA 200816/4/2/36).

⁷⁵ Max Kozloff, 'Art' in *The Nation*, 28 June 1965, pp.710-11 (p.710); letter from Sylvester to Alfred Brendel, n.d., TGA 200816/2/1/147.

book depended on using photographs by Herbert Matter. In 1962 Sylvester submitted a completed text to meet a deadline only to for it to be held up due to delays in receiving Matter's photographs, and between procrastination from Sylvester and Matter the book still had not been published by 1964 when the rights were relinquished to MoMA.⁷⁶ Matter had photographed Giacometti's 1960 portrait of Sylvester after every sitting which were probably all intended for inclusion in the book.⁷⁷ After withdrawing from the project he allowed Sylvester to reproduce three of his photographs in the book, but the complete set of progress photographs was kept for publication in Matter's own book on Giacometti, which was published posthumously in 1987.

From the mid-1960s onwards Patricia Matisse became the sole contributor of photographs for *Looking at Giacometti* (with the exception of Matter's photographs of the Sylvester portrait in progress). It was Matisse whose 'magical photographs [...] of spectral beings rising from the chaotic studio's plaster rubble' in the 1948 Pierre Matisse exhibition catalogue had been so suggestive for Sylvester and others at that time,⁷⁸ and when she agreed to provide photographs for the book, Sylvester responded: 'your photographs have haunted me since I first saw them in 1948 almost as much as the sculptures themselves (they seem to partake of his secret). And now I'm to have a bookfull [sic] of them. It's like having one's favourite film star fall in love with one.'⁷⁹ It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that the final text of

⁷⁶ Correspondence between Braziller, Sylvester and MoMA staff, 1960-5, TGA 200816/2/1/126.

⁷⁷ The portrait is in the collection of Emily Rauh Pulitzer (promised gift to Harvard Art Museums).

⁷⁸ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.15.

⁷⁹ Letter from Sylvester to Patricia Matisse, 17 May [1965], PMG archive, Morgan Library. He also said 'with photographs by others, I feel I am looking at somebody's interpretation of Giacometti; with yours I feel it's the thing itself' (Letter from Sylvester to Matisse, 4 May 1965, PMG archive, Morgan Library.)

the book (published after Matisse's death) says little about her role in the book, whereas a 1981 draft preface had been much more forthcoming about the importance of the photographs for the book:

In 19__ all her [Matisse's] photographic negatives and most of her prints were destroyed in a warehouse fire. A number of key works discussed in the text of this book are not reproduced because either no prints of them are extant or because Patricia never photographed them satisfactorily. I feel it is better to leave those gaps than to fill them with photographs by others. The missing works can readily be found reproduced elsewhere, though in many cases the pieces she failed to photograph satisfactorily—such as those tall and extremely slender female figures of around 1950 which are among Giacometti's supreme works—have not been satisfactorily photographed by anyone else either and may well be unphotographable.⁸⁰

If Sylvester had left such information in the text, the reader would be in no doubt as to the importance not just of the photographs being taken by Matisse, but the choice of images to be reproduced. In the absence of this justification, however, reviewers complained that the photographs did not provide an adequate reference point for the text (works as important to the text as *In Spite of Hands* [*Malgré les mains*, 1932] for instance, were not illustrated).⁸¹

By the time of the 1965 Tate exhibition, Braziller had released their rights to the book to MoMA, who intended to publish it in conjunction with their Giacometti exhibition that same year before Sylvester's continued procrastination forced them to abandon the idea, and as a result the book

⁸⁰ TGA 200816/5/4/3/21.

⁸¹ Timothy Hyman claimed that 'Patricia Matisse's documentary photos, though resonant and beautiful, do not entirely match the needs of the text'. Timothy Hyman, 'Fragments and Paradoxes', *London Magazine*, February-March 1995, pp.138-40.

remained unpublished when Giacometti died in 1966.⁸² As Sylvester explained:

Most of the book was still in progress when Giacometti died in January 1966. I went on with it, delivered it to a publisher [Weidenfeld & Nicolson], and after working on it for some time on the galley proofs never returned them. It had become clear that a text written as a study of work in progress could not suddenly be converted into a text on the subject of a completed body of work'.⁸³

For Sylvester, this was the defining moment in the genesis of the book.

Anticipating Berger's 1969 claim 'it seems to me now that no artist's work could ever have been more changed by his death than Giacometti's',⁸⁴

Sylvester divided the book into two parts: 'the first consisting of chapters written in the present tense while the artist was alive and the second including the chapters begun in his lifetime but completed in the past tense'.⁸⁵

After setting the book aside for several years, Sylvester's next major step was a reappraisal of Giacometti's surrealist work, written around 1976-8.⁸⁶ Surrealism was at the heart of Sylvester's work of the 1970s on the Magritte catalogue raisonné and related exhibitions in 1969 (Tate Gallery) and 1978-9 (the Centre Pompidou, Paris and the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels), and the exhibition 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed' (Hayward Gallery, 1978). Earlier versions of the Giacometti text tended to isolate the artist, as Sylvester had done in much of *Henry Moore*), avoiding discussion of the artist's contemporaries the better to focus on the artworks themselves. However, Sylvester's lecture 'Giacometti and the Surrealists', delivered at MoMA in 1982

⁸² Instead MoMA published a catalogue with introduction by Peter Selz, and James Lord's book about sitting for Giacometti, *A Giacometti Portrait*.

⁸³ Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p.9.

⁸⁴ John Berger, 'Giacometti' in *The Moment of Cubism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp.112-6 (p.112).

⁸⁵ Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p.8.

⁸⁶ TGA 200816/5/4/3/8.

(but never published) took a very different approach, contextualising Giacometti's involvement with surrealism and attempting to date Giacometti's involvement with the movement as precisely as possible.⁸⁷

Sylvester's treatment of the surrealist works eventually became the longest chapter in *Looking at Giacometti* and assumed a prominent position at the beginning of the second part of the book. The treatment of these works was different to that employed in the rest of the book, since whereas Sylvester generally wrote about the character of Giacometti's work as a whole or in groups without referring to specific works, he felt that the surrealist works 'have to be described and discussed individually'.⁸⁸ He referred to the surrealism chapter as a 'catalogue', and drafts show how Sylvester grouped Giacometti's works from this period under headings such as 'violence or death' and 'fragments of the body'.⁸⁹ The evolution of Sylvester's thinking can be seen from comparing his 1966-67 description of Giacometti's *Man and Woman* [*Homme et femme*, 1929] with his interpretation in *Looking at Giacometti*. In the earlier text he wrote: 'Man and Woman represents an assault in which the woman recoils and collapses under the thrust of a weapon suitable for both rape and murder'.⁹⁰ The published version is far more nuanced:

What is happening, apart from the certainty that some sort of assault is involved, is curiously obscure [...] the woman's posture is [...] ambiguous: it is not really clear whether she is recoiling or coyly receptive. It is also unclear whether penetration is on the point of happening or whether the action is in momentary suspense or whether the scene depicts a threat that is not going to be fulfilled [...] If, then, the action is indeed suspended, the reason might be less the man's fear of his aggression than his fear of castration.⁹¹

⁸⁷ TGA 200816/5/4/3/14; TGA 200816/5/4/3/32.

⁸⁸ TGA 200816/5/4/3/19.

⁸⁹ TGA 200816/5/4/16.

⁹⁰ TGA 200816/5/4/10. In the same passage Sylvester refers to the 'cringing withdrawal of the woman's [body]' in *Man and Woman*.

⁹¹ Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p.87.

Whereas Sylvester's early references to the surrealist work seem influenced by Giacometti's tendency to dismiss it as 'masturbation', after the artist's death he came to consider the surrealist works some of Giacometti's finest, and that therefore Giacometti's achievement was more diverse than he had previously realised.⁹² The clear transition from a view of Giacometti's surrealist work which focused on its violence and aggression to its ludic quality and manipulation of the viewer was indicated by the new title of the surrealist chapter, 'Traps' ('the element of play is a sort of bait. / But the places where bait goes are in traps').⁹³ As for Giacometti's relationship to orthodox surrealism, Sylvester believed Dalí made an important observation when he was troubled by the intrusive aesthetic quality of Giacometti's *Suspended Ball* (1930-31): 'Dalí was, of course right about him [Giacometti]. It is the formal rather than the surrealist qualities in these works that matter most'.⁹⁴

By 1981 most of the book was finished, although Sylvester continued to work on the final chapter, 'A Sort of Silence' which was only finished after Sylvester incorporated his impressions of another major Giacometti exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (in 1991-92).⁹⁵ Far more critical about the work of Giacometti's final years, this amounted to an extreme reversal of Sylvester's previous opinions, made all the more striking by his decision to leave the early texts as they were. By this time Giacometti was long since dead and Sylvester had immersed himself in the very different art of Magritte and Picasso, which contributed to his beautiful but damning

⁹² Giacometti quoted in Marcel Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting*, trans. by Simon Watson Taylor (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960), p.228.

⁹³ Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p.106. In a notebook page from c.1978 Sylvester wrote of Giacometti 'frustration is always the subject of the work' (TGA 200816/5/4/3/22).

⁹⁴ Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p.90.

⁹⁵ TGA 200816/5/4/3/8.

verdict on Giacometti's late works: 'it seems to me now that Giacometti sacrificed his art in the pursuit of an obsession. And when I say his art, I am not speaking merely of aesthetic qualities but of precisely what he valued most, likeness: in these late paintings the sense of a struggle to surmount difficulties overwhelms the sense of a human presence'.⁹⁶

Sylvester's work on organising the exhibition 'Late Picasso' in 1988 seems to have been particularly important in triggering Sylvester's reevaluation of Giacometti.⁹⁷ Drafts for the final chapter of *Looking at Giacometti* show that Sylvester originally included a passage comparing Giacometti and Picasso, explaining how over time he had reversed his opinion about the comparative quality of their sculpture: 'it seems bizarre now that for twenty years I thought that Giacometti was a greater sculptor than Picasso'.⁹⁸ This decision to put Picasso before Giacometti was based on ethics as well as aesthetics: Sylvester concluded that if as artists Giacometti was a 'seeker' and Picasso a 'finder', then 'it may be more generous to find than it is to seek'.⁹⁹ Sylvester now took care to separate the sense of struggle and commitment which he valued so highly, from Giacometti's art itself. Compared with disparaging comments that Sylvester made around the same time about the later work of Freud and Auerbach, it seems that the sense of struggle which Sylvester applauded during his time as a regular critic he now took care to separate from the art.

In his early writing about abstract expressionism Sylvester empathised with the artist's struggle to create the work and approvingly quoted

⁹⁶ Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p.173.

⁹⁷ 'Late Picasso: Paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints 1953-1972', Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris (17 February- 16 May 1988) and Tate Gallery (23 June- 18 September 1988).

⁹⁸ TGA 200816/5/4/3/10.

⁹⁹ Sylvester' Curriculum Vitae', p.33.

Rosenberg's claim that 'action painting is the medium of difficulties',¹⁰⁰ but the art-world of the 1950s was very different to that of the 1990s, when even a 'saintly knight without armour' would have stood little chance of saving the art world from commercialism, and Picasso's prodigious invention seemed more relevant than Giacometti's endless remaking of the same work. Sylvester decided not to include the comparison with Picasso in *Looking at Giacometti*, but rather kept it back for the conclusion to 'Curriculum Vitae', the autobiographical essay which summarised Sylvester's career. In relocating the passage from *Looking at Giacometti* to 'Curriculum Vitae', Sylvester seemed to have decided that this *volte-face* spoke not only to Sylvester's work on Giacometti but also something fundamental about opposed tendencies within modern art as a whole.

Perhaps the most perceptive review of *Looking at Giacometti* was written by Tom Lubbock, who considered the book in the tradition of 'personal witness' established by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the German art historian whose accounts of classical sculpture shifted from a description of the specific object being described, to his own response as a viewer.¹⁰¹ For Lubbock, the 'personal witness' positioned himself as 'an ideal proxy, a model for what our response might be'.¹⁰² Lubbock understood how Sylvester's book was predicated on the close relationship between critic and artist:

Looking is neither a memoir nor a biographical study (though it has elements of both); but it is focused on and through Giacometti's

¹⁰⁰ Sylvester, 'The New Orthodoxy'.

¹⁰¹ Tom Lubbock, 'Men at Work', *London Review of Books*, 12 January 1995, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v17/n01/tom-lubbock/men-at-work> [accessed 5 June 2015] (paras. 1-7 of 39).

¹⁰² Lubbock (para. 4 of 39). Sylvester often noted the attraction of Giacometti's work for writers, and it may be that this personal witness, as also evident in accounts by other of Giacometti's sitters such as Genet, Lord, and Isaku Yanaihara, is particularly appropriate as a way writing about the artist.

artistic life. It treats the works, not as public objects out in the world before us, but as the manifestations of this life. It sees them according to Giacometti's artistic problems and obsessions, and through his words.¹⁰³

The lack of critical distance troubles Lubbock, who approved of Sylvester's final chapter and suggested that Sylvester would have done better to rewrite the whole book from the new perspective it opened up ('by this date I would have had things all out in the open, all through').¹⁰⁴ However, while this may have made for a more cohesive book which tried harder to retrospectively demystify Giacometti and get away from the dominant mode of viewing Giacometti's work (as Lubbock himself is keen to), it would not have given the same sense of Sylvester's long and evolving engagement with Giacometti. By foregrounding the process by which his book was composed, Sylvester again produced an idiosyncratic response which invited comparisons with Giacometti's own working process. Pierre Schneider wrote that 'the essays' chronological sequence is particularly appropriate to Giacometti's method of beginning, time after time, literally from scratch', while Hampshire wrote 'the critic's struggle to revise his prose seems to match the artist's own struggles, always revising, always destroying his work and starting again'.¹⁰⁵

Noting the paucity of references to other artists or writers in the book, Lubbock wrote, reasonably, that 'to exaggerate a tendency, it is as if Giacometti were the only artist in the world, and as if Sylvester were the only person to have seen his work'.¹⁰⁶ However, as the chapter on the surrealist

¹⁰³ Lubbock (para. 9 of 39).

¹⁰⁴ Lubbock (para. 39 of 39). Sylvester was upset that Lubbock made no reference to 'Traps', which, since it discussed Giacometti's surrealist works of the early 1930s, was written with more distance from the artist's stated intentions. David Sylvester, 'Under Wraps' [letter to editor], *London Review of Books*, 23 February 1995, p.4.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Schneider to Sylvester, 18 February 1996, TGA 200816/2/1/999; Stuart Hampshire, 'A New Way of Seeing', *New York Review of Books*, 13 July 1995, pp.46-8 (p.46).

¹⁰⁶ Lubbock (para. 11 of 39).

works (which Lubbock didn't mention) demonstrated, *Looking at Giacometti* clearly related to Sylvester's work on other artists. In 1995 Sylvester organised a William Turnbull exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, which Patrick Elliott (who wrote a long essay for the exhibition catalogue) described as 'hung à la Giacometti, very frontal and formal. And obviously [with] the painting-sculpture thing to play with'.¹⁰⁷ Around this time Elliott had got to know Sylvester through discussions about the Giacometti exhibition he curated at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, which Sylvester was initially involved before withdrawing and again writing a review generally critical of the exhibition.¹⁰⁸

Sylvester also detected a strong relationship between Giacometti's sculpture and that of Twombly, which he subsequently wrote about. In Sylvester's opinion, Giacometti's works were not so much influences on Twombly as 'sources for finds, archaeological sites. When Twombly takes Giacometti's walking figurine and reduces it to a single slanted piece of wood, he gives it a still greater momentum than its prototype.'¹⁰⁹ In so writing, Sylvester made clear that as much as he admired Twombly's sculpture, his view of it was filtered through his familiarity with Giacometti's work. Whereas specialists in Twombly's work such as Kate Nesin see Giacometti as only one influence among many on Twombly's work, Sylvester saw the two artists as inextricably linked, in a way which clearly referred back to his work on Giacometti.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Email from Elliott, 9 July 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Sylvester, 'Alberto Giacometti: Edinburgh and London', *Burlington Magazine*, November 1996, pp.763-4.

¹⁰⁹ Sylvester, 'The White Originals', *Art in America*, July 2000, pp.66-75 (p.74).

¹¹⁰ Kate Nesin, *Cy Twombly's Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

5.3 René Magritte

For all of his efforts in promoting the work of Moore, Bacon and Giacometti, arguably the largest single contribution of Sylvester's career was his pioneering scholarship on René Magritte. Fellow Magritte specialist Michel Draguet acclaimed Sylvester as providing 'the first comprehensive, overall reading of Magritte's art' in his monograph on the artist, while the catalogue of a recent exhibition on Magritte asserted that 'all who study the life and work of Magritte are indebted to the vast corpus of critical commentary and primary documentation assembled and published by David Sylvester, author of many essays, exhibition catalogues, and books on the artist, and editor of the definitive Magritte catalogue raisonné.¹¹¹

However, such tributes do not address the paradox of Sylvester's dedication to an artist who was, by his own often-quoted admission, 'not my type'.¹¹² It was to be expected, therefore, that Sylvester developed a different view of Magritte to that held by many of his admirers: less cerebral and more sensual than the commonly-held view. As his initial indifference to Giacometti's earlier works indicated, Sylvester in his early career had little interest in surrealism. This was unsurprising for someone growing up in London in the 1940s, when according to George Melly, Magritte was 'the most despised painter in the world'.¹¹³ At this time Sylvester was close to Lucian Freud, and would surely have known about the unsuccessful attempt of E.L.T.

¹¹¹ Anne Umland, Stephanie D'Alessandro, and Josef Helfferstein, 'Introduction: Magritte's Essential Surrealist Years 1926-1938' in *Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary 1926-1938*, ed. by Anne Umland (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), pp.16-23 (p.20); Michel Draguet, "'Reconnaissance Without End": René Magritte Put to the Test by David Sylvester: The Story of an Unlikely Encounter' in David Sylvester, *Magritte*, rev. edn (Brussels, Mercatorfonds, 2009), pp.i-xvi (p.xiii).

¹¹² Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.30.

¹¹³ George Melly, *Don't Tell Sybil: An Intimate Memoir of E L T Mesens* (London: Heinemann, 2007), p.102.

Mesens's (director of the London Gallery, friend of Magritte, and collector of his work) to recruit Freud to the surrealist cause in the late 1940s.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, during Sylvester's time in Paris in the late 1940s the illustrious figures he spent time with included Masson, Giacometti and Leiris, all former surrealists 'scarred by Breton' (as Sylvester put it) who might well have discouraged their young admirer from engaging with surrealism.¹¹⁵

As a newspaper critic Sylvester wrote about Magritte in 1954 and 1961, both times admiring Magritte's imagery, while saying little about him specifically as a painter.¹¹⁶ In 1961, for instance, Sylvester described Magritte as 'the great popular artist of our time', and his article discussed the painter more in relation to advertising, *TV Times* cartoons and fairytales rather than to other painters.¹¹⁷ Sylvester's sense of Magritte as essentially a minor artist was in keeping with the standard line on Magritte in Anglophone writing. Reviewing the same works as Sylvester in 1961, Neville Wallis wrote of Magritte 'he delves, he does not soar, never lifting the spirits with a supernatural vision of fantastic grandeur such as Ernst can achieve'.¹¹⁸ Sylvester, like other leading art critics such as Greenberg and Hess, was more interested in the biomorphic abstraction of Miró than the less painterly Magritte. In 1954 Hess made a direct comparison between them: 'in Miro's paintings of this period [1928-30], the words still snarl and startle among the

¹¹⁴ Melly, p.88.

¹¹⁵ Sylvester's description of Masson et al as 'scarred by Breton' comes from his interview with Richard Wollheim. Sylvester consistently referred to Breton throughout his life as the 'Pope' ruling over the 'Vatican' of Surrealism, particularly in his introduction to Jan Ceuleers, *René Magritte: 135 rue Essegghem Jette-Brussels* ([Antwerp?]: Pandora, 1999), pp.7-10.

¹¹⁶ Sylvester, 'The Venice Biennale', *Encounter*, September 1950, pp.54-60; 'Magritte', *New Statesman*, 6 October 1961, p.488.

¹¹⁷ The end of the article did connect it to the themes of Sylvester's criticism more broadly however, describing of Magritte's paintings as 'the ikons of an Age [...] of Doubt'. Sylvester, 'Magritte'.

¹¹⁸ Neville Wallis, 'A Private World', *Observer*, 1 October 1961, p.27.

images; but nowadays Magritte's object lessons seem a bit naïve; droll but peripheral'.¹¹⁹ This no doubt had much to do with these critics' investment in abstract expressionism and, in Sylvester's case, *malerisch* painters such as Bacon and Auerbach.

Even in July 1965 Sylvester, discussing artists to be included in a planned book on modern art with Russell, still thought that his colleague 'overrated' Magritte.¹²⁰ It was not until Sylvester saw Magritte's first one-man show at MoMA later that year that his opinion of the artist was transformed (he recalled being 'thrilled' by the exhibition).¹²¹ In another example of Sylvester drawing on the opinions of his artist friends, he was also impressed by the enthusiasm shown for Magritte by Johns and, more unexpectedly, Rothko.¹²² Sylvester did not review the MoMA exhibition himself, but his response would probably have been similar to that of Kozloff, who described the exhibition as 'something of a revelation' and put it in the context of other recent

¹¹⁹ Thomas B. Hess, 'René Magritte [Janis]', *Art News*, April 1954, pp.42-3 (p.43). See also the similar distinction in Clement Greenberg, 'Surrealist Painting', *The Nation*, 12 August 1944, pp.192-3 and 19 August 1944, pp.219-20. Sylvester would probably have encountered Greenberg's essay when it was reprinted the following year in *Horizon* (January 1945, pp.49-55).

¹²⁰ Letter from Sylvester to Russell, 20 July 1965, TGA 200816/2/1/672. Dividing the artists under consideration into categories, Sylvester put a 'B' next to Magritte's name, along with other artists such as Segonzac, Gruber, and Dufy.

¹²¹ 'J'étais emballé'. Sylvester interview with Daniel Filipacchi (conducted in French), London, 1998. Interview transcript TGA 200816/6/4. Sylvester was more measured when writing about the show to Leo Castelli: 'I've always loved Magritte, but perhaps self-consciously. Now I know he's a great painter—and, to one's surprise, the late works are fine'. Letter from Sylvester to Castelli, n.d. but 1965/6, Leo Castelli Gallery records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹²² Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.29. Johns had by this time started to acquire work by Magritte: the first was a drawing given to him as a gift in 1960 (Roberta Bernstein, 'René Magritte and Jasper Johns: Making Thoughts Visible' in *Magritte and Contemporary Art: The Treachery of Images*, pp.109-123 (p.110)). Johns also acquired the painting *The Interpretation of Dreams [La Clef des Songes]*, 1935, 'in the early 1960s' (Sylvester and Sarah Whitfield, *René Magritte Catalogue Raisonné*, volume 1, p.199). Other American artists who acquired work by Magritte included Warhol and Rauschenberg. In the monograph Sylvester quoted Rothko's comment to him that 'Magritte, of course, is a case apart. But there's a certain quality in his work which I find in all the abstract painting that I like. And I hope that my own painting has that quality' (p.231).

developments in the arts: 'after Johns and Pop art, after the "chosisme" of Robbe-Grillet, and the illusionist theories of Ernst Gombrich, there seems something not only more cagey and owlish in Magritte but more profound and liberating as well'.¹²³ Crucially, Kozloff emphasised not only Magritte's imagery but the importance of the medium of painting in appreciation of his work: 'these delirious coincidences have to "exist" after all, and only the power of painting—luminous, tactile and chromatic—can bring about that existence'.¹²⁴ Kozloff was showing the same 'reverence for the unique object' that Sylvester, in 'Art in a Coke Climate' the previous year, saw as characteristic of pop art. Having compared the pop artists with Seurat and Chardin in that article, it was unsurprising that shortly afterwards Sylvester took a similar approach to Magritte, writing that 'scale and handling count for a lot more in Magritte than meets the eye. His anti-aestheticism was as plausible a disguise as his *petit bourgeois* pose'.¹²⁵ In this sense Sylvester's new enthusiasm for Magritte's work coincides with the 'deadpan' approach of artists such as Lichtenstein and Alex Katz thereafter, which he nonetheless appreciated as good painting rather than a simple reaction against abstract expressionism.¹²⁶

¹²³ Max Kozloff, 'Epiphanies of Artifice', *The Nation*, 10 January 1966, pp.55-6 (p.55).

¹²⁴ Kozloff, 'Epiphanies of Artifice', p.56. Sylvester certainly approved of Kozloff's review and originally planned to quote from it in his 1992 Magritte monograph, as seen in a draft for Chapter 33 of the book, 'The Egg in the Cage' (TGA 200816/5/7).

¹²⁵ TGA 200816/5/5/2. Sylvester illustrated the difference between viewing Magritte's works as paintings and as images when explaining how, when curating his first Magritte exhibition, the intention of grouping the works 'to tell a sort of story' was abruptly abandoned when the actual paintings arrived and he realized 'the originals were not just images; they were things. Even with an artist like Magritte. I abandoned the idea and hung the show more or less chronologically'. David Sylvester, 'Mayhem at Millbank', *London Review of Books*, 18 May 2000, pp.19-20 (p.20).

¹²⁶ The wide significance of Magritte to American art in the 1960s, which shows itself very clearly through Sylvester's subsequent involvement with Magritte, has recently been demonstrated in depth by the exhibition 'Magritte and Contemporary Art: the Treachery of Images' (LACMA, 2006-7) and Sandra R. Zalman, 'A Vernacular Vanguard: Surrealism and the Making of American Art History' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southern California, 2008).

After returning from America Sylvester suggested that the Arts Council organise a Magritte exhibition in London, and unexpectedly Sylvester was asked to organise it himself.¹²⁷ The resulting exhibition was well-received and praised for its timeliness, with Russell writing that whereas in the fifties Magritte was considered a minor figure, 'time has sorted this out. Magritte now looks what he is: one of the great men of this century'.¹²⁸ Even so, Sylvester might never have worked on Magritte again were it not for the Magritte collectors Harry Torczyner and Jean and Dominique de Menil (who had all lent works to the 1969 exhibition). The Menils had decided to fund a Magritte catalogue raisonné, and after seeing the exhibition, following extensive consultation and with Torczyner's strong recommendation, decided that Sylvester was 'the man to take the catalogue under his wing'.¹²⁹ Like Sylvester's meetings with Kahnweiler in 1948 and the abstract expressionists in 1960, receiving the invitation to oversee the catalogue raisonné was a turning point in Sylvester's career.

Unlike most of the artists that Sylvester had previously worked on in depth, he had not known Magritte personally (the artist died in 1967 just as Sylvester was about to visit him to discuss the Tate exhibition). It was a new challenge for Sylvester to move into the field of art history with such a large project, but he was eager to demonstrate he could fulfil the task as well as a

¹²⁷ 'En retournant à Londres, j'étais à un comité d'exposition du Art Council pour faire une exposition à la Tate. Et j'ai dit : «Le moment est vraiment arrivé pour faire une exposition Magritte.» [...] Rendaw, du Comité m'a dit : «Est-ce que vous voudriez faire l'exposition? » Et j'ai répondu «Mais je ne connais rien à Magritte».' Sylvester interview with Filipacchi, 1998, transcript TGA 200816/6/4.

¹²⁸ John Russell, 'Magritte's Happenings', *Sunday Times*, 16 February 1969, p.55. Later that year the exhibition 'Pop Art Reconsidered', which Russell organised with Suzi Gablik, an expert on Magritte's work, opened at the Hayward Gallery.

¹²⁹ Draguet, introduction to Sylvester, *Magritte* (2009 edn), p.vii. Dominique de Menil quoted from her 'Foreword' to *René Magritte Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. by David Sylvester, 5 vols. (London: Philip Wilson, 1992-7), V, p.vii.

professional art historian.¹³⁰ Cataloguing Magritte's output presented particular challenges. Dawn Ades surmised that 'it would be hard to imagine a body of work less conveniently adapted than Magritte's to the needs of a cataloguer'. There are several reasons for this: the many similar versions he painted of some subjects; his complicated professional life characterised by selling works behind his dealer's back and falsifying dates; and the difficulty of locating his work, much of which was dispersed among private collections.¹³¹ To avoid repetition Sylvester decided not to list full provenance for each work, owing to the complicated ownership histories for many works and a sense that in such cases 'the publication of [...] a list in which certain names are censored tends towards the comical'.¹³² Instead, publishable and useful information was incorporated into the catalogue entries themselves. Sylvester also oversaw the compilation of a detailed master chronology, which was not modelled on any existing catalogue raisonné but devised as a new solution to dealing with the complexity of Magritte's professional dealings.¹³³ To avoid the duplication of information a system was devised whereby the reader was referred back to the chronology for a detailed account of significant events mentioned in the individual catalogue entries. This was all in keeping with Sylvester's dislike for verbosity and repetition, also reflected in his decision not to attempt to provide comprehensive lists of publications in which works had been reproduced, but rather note only instances of particular significance.

¹³⁰ Sylvester's previous experience of editing a catalogue raisonné, of the revised edition of Henry Moore's work in the 1950s, resulted in Alan Bowness taking over after the first volume. TGA 200816/5/1/11, 200816/5/1/5/14.

¹³¹ 'He [Sylvester] seized the opportunity to completely re-think the catalogue raisonné form, how the information should be presented, for instance, and how it could best serve its purpose'. Whitfield, text for Magritte study day at Menil Collection, 2014. Dawn Ades, untitled review of David Sylvester and others, *René Magritte Catalogue Raisonné*, *Burlington Magazine*, May 1998, pp.340-1 (p.341).

¹³² *René Magritte Catalogue Raisonné*, I, p.ix.

¹³³ Conversations with Sarah Whitfield, 2014-5.

The first volume of the catalogue raisonné was finally published in 1992,¹³⁴ coinciding with Sylvester's separate Magritte monograph and the Magritte exhibition he and Sarah Whitfield organised at the Hayward Gallery.¹³⁵ The division between the factual information in the catalogue and the more subjective interpretations in the monograph is revealing about Sylvester's empirical approach to art. He had no patience with overarching theories, but believed that good art history was based upon a rigorous study of historical data (as demonstrated in the catalogue raisonné), whereas the task of the critic was to respond to the works in a way which, while informed by such background information, nonetheless derived their value from the critic's personal insight.

In his approach to Magritte Sylvester may have been liberated by his detachment from the artist, which meant that unlike in his writing on Moore, Bacon and Giacometti, Sylvester did not have the option of putting his questions to the artist. Instead, working on the catalogue raisonné brought him into contact with friends and collaborators of the artist such as Louis Scutenaire, Paul Nougé and Marcel Mariën.¹³⁶ The role of 'personal witness' in Anglophone scholarship on Magritte was instead played by Suzi Gablik, who

¹³⁴ Correspondence in the archive indicates that numerous deadlines set by the Menils were missed. Sylvester wrote to Angelica Rudenstine that: 'if, indeed, the first volume is not delivered by 21 January 1983, the project will be taken out of the hands of this team' (letter from Sylvester to Rudenstine, 13 October 1982, TGA 200816/2/1/975). Elizabeth Cowling, who worked on the catalogue, later referred to a December 1990 deadline (letter from Cowling to Sylvester, 22 May 1988, TGA 2008162/1/255). Further delays were caused by a dispute over copyright. A sixth volume of recently-discovered works was recently published (*René Magritte: Newly Discovered Works: Catalogue Raisonné. Volume VI, Oil Paintings, Gouaches, Drawings*, ed. by Sarah Whitfield (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2012).

¹³⁵ Sylvester described the monograph as an 'offshoot' of the catalogue raisonné in a draft preface for the former (TGA 200816/5/5/8).

¹³⁶ Sylvester also writes of 'complementary manifestos which he [Magritte] bullied [Marcel] Mariën and [Jacques] Wergifosse] into writing for him from his outlines'. David Sylvester, *Magritte* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), p.265.

played this role of interpreter (both literally and metaphorically) between Magritte and overseas audiences.

A friend of Johns and Rauschenberg (in 1965 she gave Johns a sheet of Magritte sketches in exchange for one of his *Flag* paintings), Gablik lived with Magritte for several months in 1959-60 while researching a book on the artist (finally published in 1970).¹³⁷ Gablik became an active part of the Magritte household, as recounted in the catalogue raisonné: 'she acted as a translator and interpreter [for Magritte] on several occasions; she found titles for new works; she appeared in some of Magritte's home movies; and in November 1960 she organized Magritte's birthday party'.¹³⁸ Gablik, whose work benefitted from extensive conversations with the artist and knowledge of his working practice, stressed the impersonality and philosophical resonance of Magritte's work,¹³⁹ for instance the way that 'Magritte's images show an extraordinary sensitivity to the changes which have occurred in our conception of reality as a result of the shift from Newtonian mechanics to formulations of relativity and quantum theory'.¹⁴⁰

Unsurprisingly given Gablik's friendships with many American artists (and role as co-organiser of the 1969 exhibition 'Pop Art Revisited') the book is also replete with references to American artists such as Warhol, whose

¹³⁷ Roberta Bernstein notes that Gablik introduced Johns to Rauschenberg shortly before Magritte's 1954 exhibition in New York, and suggests the three of them 'may have been impressed by the same qualities in Magritte that [Robert] Rosenblum noted' (Rosenblum was one of few critics to review that exhibition positively). Bernstein, 'René Magritte and Jasper Johns: Making Thoughts Visible' p.110.

¹³⁸ Sylvester, ed., *René Magritte Catalogue Raisonné*, III, p.102. Gablik also published an imaginary monologue with Magritte that Sylvester hailed as 'probably the crispest, densest brief exposition that exists of Magritte's essential ideas' (Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.314).

¹³⁹ Gablik also compares Magritte with Wittgenstein (Suzi Gablik, *Magritte*, rev. edn (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 1988), pp.86-7).

¹⁴⁰ Gablik, pp.168-9. This echoes discussions of connections between art and science amongst the Independent Group in the 1950s.

approach she believed to have been foreshadowed by Magritte's 'disdain for the unique work of art'. Gablik repeated, and therefore added to the weight of, the artist's insistence that 'since it was only the idea which counted for him, he often said that a reproduction would serve as well to communicate his intention as the original painting'.¹⁴¹

Sylvester admired Gablik's book, which he believed 'includes some of the most penetrating pages written about him [Magritte] in any language'.¹⁴² However, his own approach to Magritte was very different. Sylvester considered Magritte's relationships with writers who had little interest in visual art to be all part of the 'disguise' of his 'anti-aestheticism':

It is a striking fact that people who wrote as well as Nougé and Scutenaire and Mariën did about Magritte's work and artistic personality showed little or no interest in any other aspect of art. But then one of their motives for writing about him was that they didn't feel he was a proper artist but rather a poet whose medium was painted images, images which were as valid in reproduction as in the original. (Magritte's own pronouncements did not discourage that fallacy.)¹⁴³

Sylvester's approach to Magritte, in contrast to the painter's own statements, constantly reasserted his virtues as a painter, and at points even bears similarities with Sylvester's writing about artists such as Giacometti. In his 1969 Tate catalogue essay on Magritte, Sylvester noted that 'there is a penetrating silence, a terrible depth of silence, in some great art [...] two modern artists who have it are Magritte and Giacometti', while parallels can also be seen in Sylvester's analyses of works by Magritte such as *The Eternally*

¹⁴¹ Gablik pp.56-8.

¹⁴² Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.314.

¹⁴³ Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.312. See for instance Mesens' claim in a BBC interview with George Melly that 'the main contribution of Magritte for me is not as a Painter but as a kind of painter-philosopher-poet, who has been presented to us with new entity'. 'Mesens on Magritte', broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 7 March 1969, transcript in TGA 200816/4/3/14.

Obvious [*L'évidence éternelle*, 1930] (fig. 4).¹⁴⁴ In his 1969 exhibition catalogue text Sylvester wrote of the painting, which consists of five canvases each showing a part of a naked female body (modelled by Magritte's wife Georgette):

We are normally close enough to those bodies [we see naked in life] to focus only on one part or another, and we tend to remember them as a sum of those parts. *L'évidence éternelle* seems to objectify the effort to reconstruct from memory a body known too well to be visualised as a whole.¹⁴⁵

By way of comparison, Sylvester wrote of Giacometti's near-contemporary 'plaques' in *Looking at Giacometti* (revising a 1965 essay) that: 'when I asked Giacometti whether this head [*Gazing head/Tête qui regarde*, 1928] was meant to recreate the sensation of a face seen from very near, he answered that this had been precisely his intention'.¹⁴⁶ The two works are seen as sharing similar concerns with intimacy and vision. Furthermore, when Sylvester compared *The Eternally Obvious* and another representation of Georgette Magritte, *Attempting the Impossible* [*Tentative de L'impossible*, 1928] in an early draft for the monograph, the passage is again reminiscent of his writing on Giacometti.¹⁴⁷ As a conclusion to a draft chapter he wrote: 'where Attempting the Impossible examines the process of creating a pictorial equivalent for a body one loves, The eternal evidence examines the process of building up the memory of a body one loves'.¹⁴⁸ Giacometti, perhaps more than any other twentieth-century artist, constantly explored the tension

¹⁴⁴ David Sylvester, *Magritte* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1969), p.12.

¹⁴⁵ Sylvester, *Magritte* (1969), p.8.

¹⁴⁶ Sylvester, *Giacometti*, p.42.

¹⁴⁷ The title 'Attempting the Impossible' is itself reminiscent of both Giacometti's attitude and the writings on him of Sartre and others.

¹⁴⁸ TGA 200816/5/5/6. While Sylvester translates the title as *The Eternal Evidence* here, the catalogue raisonné and Magritte monograph use *The Eternally Obvious*, hence the use of that translation elsewhere in this thesis.

between representing his regular sitters from life and from memory, and it seems clear that here Sylvester is again interpreting an artist in terms of the approach he had developed to Giacometti's work.

These comparisons show that contrary to the popular view of Magritte as the creator of cerebral and detached art, Sylvester considered his work to possess abundant sensual and optical qualities.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, within Magritte's output Sylvester's preference was not for famous 'epigrams' such as *The Treachery of Images* [*La Trahison des images*, 1929], but rather the more mysterious works of his late 1920s Paris years such as *The Annunciation* [*L'annonciation*, 1930], which represented Magritte in the 2002 Tate Modern exhibition 'Looking at Modern Art: In Memory of David Sylvester'.¹⁵⁰ It was not therefore the side of Magritte which was of such interest to conceptual artists that Sylvester responded to most.¹⁵¹

The individuality of Sylvester's reading of Magritte can also be seen in his defence of Magritte's often-maligned 'vache' and 'impressionist' paintings, and also of Magritte's sculpture.¹⁵² The 'vache' paintings interested Sylvester because they showed that 'if he [Magritte] normally concentrated his energies

¹⁴⁹ Sylvester's love of the Cubism of Picasso and Braque, and Johns' work as a whole, should also be considered in these terms.

¹⁵⁰ 'This work, produced in a state of acute isolation [...] was the finest group of works, it seems to me, that Magritte ever made'. Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.184.

¹⁵¹ Sylvester's feelings about conceptual art are evident from a note in the archive: 'I resent all the conceptual art that surrounds us now because it has deprived me of the pleasure of looking at Victorian narrative pictures. I used to enjoy examining a picture of a marital quarrel and wondering how long they'd been married; it was a nice change from the demands of real painting. But now that so much new art is all about posing puzzles, such light exercises have become a bore.' TGA 200816/2/1/281.

¹⁵² Neither 'vache' nor 'impressionist' paintings featured in Magritte's 1965 MoMA exhibition. Sylvester included one of each group of paintings in the 1969 Tate show, and six 'impressionist' and seven 'vache' paintings in 1992, as well as three bronzes and other painted objects. Richard Dorment, reviewing the 1992 Hayward Gallery exhibition, typified a widespread view when (in a generally positive review) he dismissed Magritte's sculptures as 'truly repulsive objects, whose only reason for existence is to make money' (Richard Dorment, 'Painting in the Dark', *New York Review of Books*, 19 November 1992, pp.14-18 (p.17)).

on being an image-maker, it was not because he was incapable of being a painter'.¹⁵³ In a draft passage on these paintings Sylvester elaborated further on this:

It was a style which gives us work with which to measure Magritte against the mainstream artists of twentieth-century modernism. And, while contemplation of even the best examples [...] leaves Magritte in an altogether lower league as a painter than, say, Miro [sic], it seems to me to make him look a better painter than, say, Kandinsky.¹⁵⁴

Whereas some devotees of Magritte considered these canvases to be little more than a provocation, for Sylvester they also demonstrated a valuable insight into Magritte as an artist,¹⁵⁵ placing him, 'though nobody knew it at the time—in the vanguard of a new wave' (Sylvester was thinking particularly of Dubuffet, whom he championed as one of the great figurative painters of the day during the early 1960s).¹⁵⁶ Magritte's subsequent return to his earlier way of paintings led to critics such as Gablik considering them as a joke or a failed experiment, but Sylvester saw in them an affinity with Dubuffet, whose similar works were 'intended to prove that a deeply serious art could look like shit'.¹⁵⁷ It is typical of Sylvester's approach, therefore, to find in the 'vache' paintings

¹⁵³ Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.275.

¹⁵⁴ TGA 200816/5/5/10. Sylvester mentioned Miró several times in his monograph.

¹⁵⁵ The same went for his then poorly-regarded 'impressionist' period of the 1940s, which Sylvester not only considered to have 'produced a handful of great pictures and a score more of good ones' (Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.264), but also to have generated, in the form of his 'Sunlit Surrealism' manifesto, 'the product in all seriousness of someone who was normally on the look-out for scatological jokes' (TGA 200816/5/5/9).

¹⁵⁶ Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.275. Sylvester wrote in another draft that the paintings 'had Magritte measuring himself' against more painterly artists (TGA 200816/5/5/7). For Sylvester's estimation of Dubuffet see particularly David Sylvester, untitled introduction to *Dubuffet: Recent Gouaches and Drawings*, (London: Robert Fraser Gallery, 1962).

¹⁵⁷ Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.275. Gablik, while dedicating a chapter to the 'vache' and 'impressionist' paintings, wrote, in keeping with her conceptual interest in Magritte, that 'he abandoned these techniques after a few years on the grounds that they added an irrelevant element to the essence of the problems which were his main concern' (p.145).

an aesthetic value far outweighing the traditionally marginal position they had been accorded in Magritte's *oeuvre*.

Sylvester vigorously denied the idea that Magritte was essentially a conceptual artist whose works could be appreciated in reproduction as well as in the original. Through the rigorous and diligent work required by the catalogue raisonné he found that the quality and impact of Magritte's painting varied widely from one canvas to the next, often causing a later 'copy' of a subject to communicate more powerfully than the first, and demonstrating that each work had its own independent value.¹⁵⁸ For instance, in support of his preference for a later (1957) version of *The Dominion of Light* [*L'empire des lumières*] over the first version painted in 1949, Sylvester wrote that 'everything depends in the end on whether the work is painted with some pleasure and involvement [...] contrary to our stock assumptions, an artist's later versions of a subject in demand are not always less alive and intense than the early versions'.¹⁵⁹ As with pop art it was 'reverence for the unique object' which Sylvester detected in Magritte and responded to.

The most important example of how research for the catalogue raisonné impacted on Sylvester's critical writing about Magritte surrounds the suicide of Magritte's mother. As Draguet notes, Sylvester was 'the first to point out' how

¹⁵⁸ Likewise Ades in her review wrote that 'however tightly related his sets of similar images may be, he almost never exactly repeats them', comparing his different versions of an image to 'musical variations on a theme' and quoting from the catalogue entries for two rather different versions of *The Red Model* [*Le modèle rouge*]. Ades, p.341. Dorment agreed, and wrote that 'for this reason, in selecting a Magritte show it is even more important than usual to secure the loan of the right version of the right picture'. Dorment, 'Painting in the Dark', p.17.

¹⁵⁹ Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.304. The 1992 exhibition emphasised the importance of varied repetition in Magritte's work by including a wall of gouaches from the sixty which the Chicago lawyer Barnet Hodes commissioned from Magritte, which amounted to 'a museum of his work in miniature' (ex. cat 150). Sarah Whitfield, *Magritte* (London: South Bank Centre, 1992), pp.278-9

his mother's suicide 'would haunt Magritte's art',¹⁶⁰ not only through his interpretations of pictures which seem to allude to the event (such as *The Lovers* [*Les amants*, 1928]) but also by publishing reports in local newspapers which had not previously appeared in scholarship on Magritte.¹⁶¹ These clearly demonstrated the discrepancy between Magritte's later, often-cited account told to Scutenaire, and contemporary documentary evidence.¹⁶² Many reviews of the monograph highlighted the significance of this research, with Cork writing:

Until now, the true extent of the tragedy's influence on Magritte's first mature paintings has gone unrecognised. Possibly because he underplayed the significance of the event when talking to Scutenaire, historians have overlooked the uncanny way it permeates so many of his images. But Sylvester is different. In his book he shows how Régina's suicide surfaced in Magritte's art again and again'.¹⁶³

Sylvester himself considered this the key to Magritte, writing to his fellow Magritte expert Calvocoressi 'if you get that wrong, you get everything wrong'.¹⁶⁴

Sylvester seems to have had two purposes in his *Magritte* monograph. The first was to make a case for Magritte as a painter as well as a maker of images. The second, partly related, was to present a different perspective on

¹⁶⁰ Draguet, introduction to Sylvester, *Magritte* (2009 edn), p.xi.

¹⁶¹ *The Lovers* was one of a number of paintings by Magritte containing figures whose face and head are covered by a cloth; Magritte told Scutenaire that when his mother's body was recovered, her face was covered by her nightdress. Sylvester, *Magritte*, pp.12-5.

¹⁶² Sylvester first discussed the newspaper reports in 1978 (David Sylvester, 'Portraits de Magritte' (translated by Annie Pérez) in *Rétrospective Magritte* (1978), pp.47-76 (pp.52-3)).

¹⁶³ Richard Cork, 'Signals from an Alternative World', *The Times*, 22 May 1992, p.3[S].

¹⁶⁴ Letter from Sylvester to Calvocoressi, 24 August 1999, TGA 200816/2/1/1006. In a draft passage, Sylvester complained that 'the account Magritte gave has commonly been repeated and discussed as if it were a precise account of what actually happened, and psycho-analytic writers of the wrong sort have drawn sweeping conclusions from it in regard to the latent affective content of Magritte's work' (TGA 200816/5/5/8).

his life, which once again seems to relate to Giacometti, and Sylvester's tendency to foreground melancholy and stoical elements in his characterisations of artists. Sylvester explained this in a letter to Torczyner: 'perhaps I've distorted Magritte's life in laying emphasis everywhere on its hardships and frustrations and disappointments [...] but I feel that there has been a tendency to depict Magritte as a rather jaunty character, and I wanted to correct that.'¹⁶⁵ Magritte's final years are presented as a time of frustration on 'the treadmill' of incessant demands for work allowing insufficient time for him to develop new themes. One can imagine Sylvester making a connection with Coldstream, the administrator-artist accommodating sittings within a busy professional life. Sylvester's readings of both artists present them as trapped in a situation unsatisfactory for a committed artist and yet at the same time seeming to relish their own resourcefulness in turning the difficulties to their advantage.

This interpretation of Magritte as an 'old-fashioned artist' went against an established view of the artist as a droll, detached philosopher, even attracting criticism from Sylvester's supporters. Draguet, in the introduction to the 2009 edition of Sylvester's *Magritte*, thought Sylvester overemphasized Magritte's relationships with poets such as Scutenaire and Nougé at the expense of other important relationships:

He [Sylvester] had not observed that Magritte had developed over time, moving from a poetic ideal that inclined to the visual to a philosophical attitude built upon the proven impossibility of representing reality in any form at all [...] he underestimates the changes brought about by new associates, philosophers rather than poets, such as Chaïm Perelman (1912-1984) and Alphonse De Waelhens (1911-1981).¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Sylvester to Torczyner, 30 May 1992, TGA 200816/2/1/1137.

¹⁶⁶ Draguet, introduction to Sylvester, *Magritte* (2009 edn), p.xii. Neither Perelmans nor De Waelhem were mentioned in Sylvester's monograph. Draguet also mentioned in his preface that 'Sylvester took little account of the ambitions of the structuralists,

The artist Patrick Hughes, who Sylvester actually compared with Magritte when introducing Hughes' first exhibition in 1961, also felt that Sylvester took a partial view of Magritte which misunderstood the artist.¹⁶⁷ Hughes wrote: 'I see in Magritte a visual poet of the aphorism, and Sylvester sees what he sees in all art, aestheticism and personal psychology, which does not apply to Magritte'.¹⁶⁸ Hughes' comments are perceptive in noting Sylvester's preferences and values, and the way that he could not accept Magritte's anti-aestheticism as anything more than a disguise for the 'wine culture' he continued to feel all fine art was part of. In a rejected draft for the final chapter Sylvester wrote:

Magritte accepted the essentially modernist assumption that the artist is not seeking to express something; he is making images [...] which have no purpose or preconceived meaning. In this sense the modern painter of complex figurative subjects is working as much in the dark as an abstract expressionist is.¹⁶⁹

This statement is revealing about Sylvester's sense of modern art, which has much in common with Bacon's assertion in his first interview with Sylvester that the modern artist 'must really deepen the game to be any good at all'.¹⁷⁰ Equally, it brings to mind a moment in Sylvester's interview with Johns when

whose fascination with Magritte's art was conditioned by the essays published by Foucault in 1968 and Derrida in 1978. Nor would Sylvester follow in the wake of semiology or semiotics, which were so much in fashion at the time he began to write his monograph' (introduction to Sylvester, *Magritte* (2009 edn), p.x). Sylvester listed Foucault's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* and Derrida's *La Vérité en peinture* in his bibliography as including 'interesting writing about Magritte' but makes no mention of them in his text.

¹⁶⁷ Sylvester, untitled introduction to *Patrick Hughes: Pictures on Exhibit* (1961). Hughes in fact assisted with research for the catalogue raisonné, which included reading the entirety of Edgar Allan Poe's work to look for ways that it may have informed Magritte's art. Conversation with Hughes, 5 March 2014.

¹⁶⁸ Email from Hughes to the author, 28 June 2015. Hughes was writing with specific reference to a later text, Sylvester's introduction to Ceuleers' *René Magritte: 135 rue Essegheem Jette-Brussels*.

¹⁶⁹ TGA 200816/5/5/10.

¹⁷⁰ Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.29.

he asks the artist if he 'works to illustrate a paradox' like Magritte, and Johns not only refutes this but says he doubts that Magritte did that either and instead suggests 'I think that one's thinking simply comes to one in a form, and it's manifest in the work in this form'.¹⁷¹ This comment seems important not just for Sylvester making a connection with the abstract expressionists but also his preference for Magritte's more complex and enigmatic images rather than those more explicitly concerned with semantic problems such as *The Treachery of Images*. As with his writings on pop art, Sylvester emphasised the ambiguities in Magritte's art rather than the apparent certainty and even dogmatism of the artist's most widely quoted statements.

It is a distinguishing quality of Sylvester's criticism that while he often wrote about ambiguities in the work of artists he admired, he was able to do in a way that, while avoiding vagueness, did not conceal Sylvester's own uncertainties. The novelist Julian Barnes, reviewing Sylvester's Magritte monograph, thought 'Sylvester showed the merit—too rare in art criticism—of perhapsiness'.¹⁷² Meanwhile the most important lesson Richard Cork learned from Sylvester's 'Painting of the Month' broadcasts was that:

Even though his subtle investigation attended to every nuance discernible within the canvas, he was honest enough to confess when his eye encountered an object which 'I for one am at a complete loss to identify.' I found this admission refreshing, especially when he went on to stress the cardinal point that 'every attempt to interpret this picture ends in a question to which there is no answer'.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*, pp.162-3.

¹⁷² Julian Barnes, 'Magritte: Bird into Egg' in *Keeping One Eye Open: Essays on Art* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015), pp.207-16 (first publ. as 'Magritte: In the Presence of an Eclipse' in *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1992, pp.26-8), p.208.

¹⁷³ Cork, 'Art on Radio', pp.72-3.

The final contradiction is that while Sylvester spent longer than anyone on Magritte's work, the outcome of his research was a perspective which is still radically different to the philosophical humourist the artist is widely portrayed as, and in this case the strength of Sylvester's criticism is the convincing case it makes for a view of the artist so divergent from the popular interpretation.

5.4 Francis Bacon

Bacon was almost fifteen years older than Sylvester, making him the closest in age to Sylvester of the four artists discussed in this chapter. If not a father-figure like Moore, Bacon was nonetheless something of a mentor for Sylvester, who described the artist as 'the greatest man I've known, and the grandest'.¹⁷⁴ Even so, with Bacon's late-starting career as a painter still in its infancy when they met in either 1949 or 1950, Sylvester was able to contribute decisively to the advocacy and publicising of Bacon's art, as the reputations of painter and critic rose simultaneously. Their relationship conformed to the common pattern of how, as Jones has written, 'modernist critics formed exemplary dyads [...] Champfleury and Manet, Apollinaire and Picasso—professional pairs whose validation of each others' visions of modernity amounted to collaboration more than reportage'.¹⁷⁵ As Hyman demonstrated in *The Battle for Realism*, Sylvester was the most consistently influential of Bacon's critics in the 1950s up until the period of estrangement between them in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Sylvester then chose not to

¹⁷⁴ TGA 200816/2/1/762.

¹⁷⁵ Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, p.6. Other such dyads include Greenberg and Pollock, Rosenberg and de Kooning, and Fried and Caro.

write anything substantial on Bacon from their first interview in 1962 until after the artist's death in 1992, owing to his role as unofficial 'henchman' to the artist.¹⁷⁶ It was only after Bacon's death that Sylvester began writing about (or at least publishing on) major writings on Bacon again, with an outpouring of texts culminating in *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*.¹⁷⁷ As a result, this book, which at one point was to be called *Bacon Retrospectively*, is again written from a different perspective to any of Sylvester's previous monographs.¹⁷⁸

Unsurprisingly, given Sylvester's estimation of Bacon as an artist and the proximity of their relationship in the 1950s, Sylvester tried to ensure that writing about Bacon was serious and didn't misrepresent his work.¹⁷⁹ The most detailed evidence of this concerns the book which the American writer and curator James Thrall Soby planned to write about Bacon. Soby and Sylvester first met in New York in 1960 and discussed the book.¹⁸⁰ Unable to contact Bacon directly, Soby subsequently corresponded with Sylvester and others

¹⁷⁶ Between 1963 and 1992 Sylvester published only short texts on Bacon such as his 1984 introduction to an exhibition of three Bacon triptychs at Thomas Gibson, and an 'Artist's Dialogue' with Bacon in *Architectural Digest* (June 1985).

¹⁷⁷ Sylvester came close to writing catalogue essays for the Bacon exhibitions at the Tate Gallery (1985) and Hirshhorn Museum (1989) but withdrew both times. Letter from Sylvester to Leiris, 24 February 1983, Ms Ms 45172, Fonds Michel Leiris, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet (Tate); letter from Sylvester to James Demetron, 18 May 1988, TGA 200816/4/2/7 (Hirshhorn).

¹⁷⁸ The provisional title *Francis Bacon Retrospectively* was abandoned to avoid confusion with another volume distributed by Thames & Hudson titled *Francis Bacon - A Retrospective*. Memorandum from Nikos Stangos to Thames & Hudson staff, 25 November 1999, Nikos Stangos papers, Box 8 Folder 16; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. The memo also lists several other titles considered.

¹⁷⁹ This can be compared with Sylvester's approach to discussing Guston on 'The Critics' (Chapter 3), and also with Sylvester's role as a publicity writer on *Lolita* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1962). As Sylvester told *Daily Mail* journalist Paul Tansfield, 'I gave them advice on how the film should be put over [...] they wanted me to suggest that it was a serious film and not a lot of sex [...] we didn't want to cash in on the sensational aspect'. Paul Tansfield, 'Touch of Decency', *Daily Mail*, 8 March 1962, p.4.

¹⁸⁰ Letter from Soby to Brausen, 9 March 1960, James Thrall Soby Papers, I.23. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

close to Bacon, whose contradictory responses caused Soby to write to Alfred Barr in 1962 'I still don't know who's telling the truth as between Brausen and [Harry] Fischer, Melville and Sylvester'.¹⁸¹ As with Donald Hall's later monograph on Moore, Sylvester read typescripts of the text and provided feedback.¹⁸² Sylvester disagreed with much of what Soby wrote: he chided Soby, for instance, for comparing Bacon indiscriminately with numerous other artists in his text 'as if he were essentially an eclectic' (this can be compared with the minimising of references to other artists in the Sylvester-Bacon interviews, for which see Chapter 4).¹⁸³ Sylvester also dismissed Soby's plausible suggestion that Sutherland had influenced Bacon's work,¹⁸⁴ and refuted Soby's 'Panofskian' reading of Bacon's paintings, which ran contrary to Sylvester's general aversion to iconographical readings of artworks. Furthermore Sylvester asked Soby not to quote from his 1957 text 'In Camera', which clearly caused him great embarrassment even so soon after writing it.¹⁸⁵ In the end, Soby's book was never published. According to Martin Harrison, 'when Soby sent his draft foreword to London, Bacon reacted in a manner that would often be repeated, insisting the text misrepresented him and that he wanted the book postponed until they had spoken.'¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Letter from Soby to Alfred Barr, 14 August 1961, James Thrall Soby Papers, I.21. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

¹⁸² Correspondence between Sylvester and Soby. James Thrall Soby Papers, I.25. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

¹⁸³ As mentioned in Chapter 4, Sylvester's published interviews with Bacon only rarely mention other artists. A possible reason for this is suggested later in this chapter.

¹⁸⁴ Correspondences between the work of Bacon and Sutherland are discussed in depth in Martin Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland: Patterns of Affinity in British Culture of the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

¹⁸⁵ In *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* Sylvester, while quoting a passage from the text, described it as 'largely shaming', and wrote that Beaux Arts director Helen Lessore wrote a 'devastating parody' of the piece (Sylvester, *Bacon*, pp.216-7). The original letter from Lessore is in Sylvester's archive, TGA 200816/2/1/662.

¹⁸⁶ Martin Harrison, 'Bacon's Paintings' in *Francis Bacon* ed. by Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), pp.40-9 (p.45).

Nevertheless, Sylvester's careful correcting of what he considered inaccurate writing about Bacon demonstrates what he meant by referring to himself as Bacon's 'henchman'.

The exchange with Soby was not an isolated occurrence but indicative of a wider tendency. In 1977 a *Newsweek* profile of Bacon, which quoted Sylvester, prompted him to write a thirteen-page letter of complaint to one of its authors.¹⁸⁷ Sylvester also suggested changes to Leiris' essay *Francis Bacon: face et profil* after Leiris sent Sylvester a draft.¹⁸⁸ He was one of a group of influential figures (also including Grey Gowrie) who tried to prevent the Bacon biopic *Love is the Devil: Study for a Portrait of Francis Bacon* (dir. John Maybury, 1998) from being made,¹⁸⁹ while Peppiatt has also speculated that Sylvester might have had a hand in Bacon withdrawing permission for Peppiatt to publish a book on him at the last minute.¹⁹⁰ This suggestion is one of a number of negative comments about Sylvester in Peppiatt's recent memoir, which Peppiatt has supplemented by saying of Sylvester:

He was quite territorial. When he saw a newcomer like me he became quite protective of Bacon. We didn't get on that well. I don't think he would have a good word to say about me. I quite admired

¹⁸⁷ Letter from Sylvester to Edward Behr (copy), 25-6 January 1977, TGA 200816/4/2/7. The article was Edward Behr, Patricia W. Mooney and Carter S. Wiseman, 'Agony and the Artist', *Newsweek*, 24 January 1977, pp.46-9. Sylvester considered publishing his letter in a book of essays about Bacon, hence its inclusion on a preliminary list for such a book (TGA 200816/4/2/7).

¹⁸⁸ Sylvester suggested that Leiris remove a sentence beginning and ending 'En d'autres termes [...] constituera le théâtre' both because of an objection to talking about Bacon's work in terms of theatre and because 'I believe that, in saying that, you are saying that Francis has failed to stay up on that tightrope he talks about between illustration and abstraction'. Letter from Sylvester to Leiris, 24 February 1983, Ms Ms 45172, Fonds Michel Leiris, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet. The sentence is not in Leiris' published text, although Leiris retained the 'thumbnail sketches of different kinds of art' Sylvester also suggested removing because he felt them 'distracting'. Michel Leiris, *Francis Bacon: Full Face and in Profile*, trans. by John Weightman (London: Phaidon, 1983), pp.16-7.

¹⁸⁹ 'David Sylvester on Francis Bacon' in conversation with Andrew Brighton.

¹⁹⁰ Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon in your Blood: A Memoir* (London: Bloomsbury Circus, 2015), p.294.

him occasionally and I admired the position he created for himself but it wasn't a cordial relationship.¹⁹¹

It may have been in part because of Bacon's well-known capriciousness towards authors hoping to write about him that Sylvester refrained from doing so until after his death, although despite Sylvester's claims that he had long been planning a book on Bacon there is no evidence of this in the archive. *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, published in 2000, is more a collection of various writings about Bacon from the 1990s than a new conception in the way that his other books were. It consists of an overview of Bacon's career in several chapters (developed from catalogue essays such as that written for the 1993 Bacon exhibition in Venice), followed by several shorter essays previously published in magazines and exhibition catalogues, focusing on specific issues. The book concludes with the additional material from the Sylvester-Bacon interviews (Chapter 4) and a chronology, to which several personal anecdotes are appended. Unlike *Looking at Giacometti* (which also included versions of catalogue texts) Sylvester avoided including any texts written during the artist's lifetime 'because I thought they were more part of my personal history than relevant to Bacon'.¹⁹² So whereas *Looking at Giacometti* shows the development of Sylvester's thinking about Giacometti, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* deliberately excludes any material published during Bacon's lifetime. It is written entirely from the vantage point of the 1990s, as Lubbock suggested *Looking at Giacometti* should have been.

Composing the book in this way (motivated at least in part by Sylvester's poor health during the late 1990s) brought out both strengths and

¹⁹¹ David J. Markham, 'In Search of the New...An Interview with Michael Peppiatt', *Yorkshire Times*, 7 April 2016, <http://www.yorkshiretimes.co.uk/article/In-Search-Of-The-New-An-Interview-With-Michael-Peppiatt> [accessed 5 May 2016].

¹⁹² TGA 200816/4/2/15.

weaknesses in Sylvester's writing.¹⁹³ The catalogue text (the original context for most of the writing in the book) was perhaps the format Sylvester was best suited to, as its concise length, with the context of an arrangement of works within a specific space, favoured description and evocation rather than extended argument. With his aversion to generalisations and theories, Sylvester tended to avoid writing long texts in which the specificity of his observations might be lost in the need to sustain an overall thesis, which explains why all of Sylvester's books, even *Magritte*, consist mostly of short, self-sufficient sections rather than clearly forming part of a preconceived structure. Martin Gayford recognised in his review of *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* that Sylvester 'is essentially an essayist; here some of the most revealing thoughts come in paragraph-length aperçus'.¹⁹⁴ However, whereas *Looking at Giacometti* made a virtue of this tendency towards fragmentation by bringing the matter of Sylvester's developing engagement with the artist to the fore, in *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* there is a lack of a similar unifying principle. Instead, the book remains a compilation of individual writings removed from their original context without the direct relation to the Bacon exhibitions for which most of the texts were written. Sylvester might have argued that the book retained its integrity better in this way, but it seems he was simply unable to find the time to produce the book he originally intended.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ In 1998 Sylvester was diagnosed with colon cancer, which was operated on the same year, but which recurred the following year. It was in June 1999, shortly after the recurrence of the cancer, that he signed a contract for the book with Thames & Hudson.

¹⁹⁴ Martin Gayford, 'No Easy Answers', *The Spectator*, 17 June 2000, p.47.

¹⁹⁵ Notes in Sylvester's archive dated 21 June 1997 show that where Sylvester had intended to make the book 'a whole lot of aphorisms, fragments, etc, etc' he changed his plans to include 'a simple reprint of my best critical pieces'. TGA 200816/7/2/14.

Even so, Sylvester's key ideas about Bacon come across clearly, one of which is his distancing of Bacon from the 'School of London'. This impulse had been evident in Sylvester's writing since 1962, when shortly before the opening of Bacon's Tate Gallery retrospective Sylvester wrote an article titled 'No Baconians'. Here Sylvester claimed 'Bacon's actual influence has been nothing like proportionate to the interest he's aroused' and that a recent exhibition of British painting from 1955-61 showed 'few signs of Bacon's influence'.¹⁹⁶ The following year, in 'Dark Sunlight', Sylvester wrote that Bacon's example for young artists consisted more in his 'amateur' attitude than in his technique or subject matter.¹⁹⁷ Sylvester may well have felt that the emergence of an artist such as Hirst, who owed so much to Bacon in terms of attitude even though Hirst's early work itself had little in common with Bacon's in terms of materials and execution, proved that this remained the case twenty-five years later.

These observations from the early 1960s were the source of Sylvester's later resistance to the idea of a 'School of London'. After Kitaj used the term in a general sense (like Sylvester in his 1948 *L'Âge nouveau* essay) in the catalogue for his 1976 exhibition 'The Human Clay', the term subsequently became identified with a fixed group of artists (Bacon, Freud, Auerbach, Andrews, Kossoff, and sometimes Kitaj) in a number of exhibitions and books

¹⁹⁶ Sylvester, 'No Baconians', *New Statesman*, 20 April 1962, pp.573-4. Sylvester did however note in the article that recent work by Kitaj, Hockney and Frank Bowling had made creative use of Bacon's influence.

¹⁹⁷ When reviewing one artist whose technique and subject matter were particularly close to Bacon's, his friend Denis Wirth-Miller, Sylvester was highly critical. Wirth-Miller's response to the review resulted in a fight in which Sylvester broke Wirth-Miller's nose. See Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon in Your Blood*, pp.57-9 and Jon Lys Turner, *The Visitors' Book : In Francis Bacon's Shadow : The Lives of Richard Chopping and Denis Wirth-Miller* (London: Constable, 2016), p.180.

during the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁹⁸ When in 1989 Hyman (who has subsequently worked extensively on 'School of London' artists as both a writer and gallerist) asked Sylvester for his thoughts on the group, Sylvester discouraged him from writing about the group as a whole, and instead suggested that he research Auerbach and Kossoff specifically.¹⁹⁹ Sylvester's history of writing about most of these artists, together with his organising of Bacon and Kossoff exhibitions in the 1990s, resulted in him being seen in some quarters as an ambassador for the 'School of London', and perhaps for this reason he felt the need to distance himself publicly from the idea.²⁰⁰ In 1995 Sylvester wrote: 'I admire all the painters who are claimed to be members of The School of London, but I don't think that the critical concept works, partly because the artist taken to be the School's Leader, Francis Bacon, is a very different kind of artist from the others (as he himself was given to say).'²⁰¹ In the same article, following his discussion of the 'School of London' at the Edinburgh Book Festival, Sylvester put into print his misgivings about the later work of Auerbach, Freud and Kitaj, dispelling any notion that Sylvester was simply a cheerleader for the work of the group. Since the texts which made up *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* were written around the time of exhibitions such as 'From London' at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in 1995, it seems that the almost-

¹⁹⁸ These include the exhibitions 'A School of London: Six Figurative Painters' organised by Michael Peppiatt (British Council touring, 1987) and 'From London' (Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and touring, 1995-6), which both consisted of these six artists. Hyman wrote about the emerging narrative in 'A School of London in Little England', *Art Monthly*, October 1991, pp.21-3.

¹⁹⁹ Sylvester subsequently told Hyman 'I'm relieved to learn that you're not pursuing the School of London'. Correspondence between Sylvester and Hyman, 1989, TGA 200816/2/1/541.

²⁰⁰ Following Sylvester's exhibitions of Bacon and Kossoff in Venice (1993 and 1995), an *Art Monthly* editorial claimed there was a 'clearly discernible' British agenda 'to establish a tradition of British *painting* to rival that of British *sculpture* which will finally allow us to look our Continental and Transatlantic colleagues in the eye'. Anon., 'Death in Venice', *Art Monthly*, April 1995, p.18.

²⁰¹ David Sylvester, 'Recanting? No Way, Brian', *Guardian*, 25 August 1995, p.A19.

complete absence of other 'School of London' artists from in the book was part of this conscious effort on Sylvester's part to present Bacon in a different context.²⁰²

In *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* Sylvester discusses the artist almost exclusively alongside continental (mostly French) artists, which is perhaps what Bacon, who Sylvester described as 'almost the only important artist of his generation anywhere who behaved as if Paris were still the centre of the art world', would have wanted.²⁰³ The key comparisons are with Picasso, Matisse, Bonnard, Degas and Soutine, while there is a separate section on 'Bacon and Giacometti'.²⁰⁴ All he has to say about Bacon's use of Letraset, for example, is that it is 'a reiteration of the newspaper fragments of Synthetic Cubism'.²⁰⁵

Amongst the numerous references to twentieth-century artists working in France, Sylvester more specifically draws attention to Bacon's similarities to Matisse rather than Picasso, or what might be called the Apollonian rather than the Dionysian aspect of Bacon's art. As with his reading of Magritte, Sylvester was here rejecting the most common interpretations of Bacon, which Sylvester's earlier writing in some respects typified. In his first published

²⁰² Sylvester's appearance at the Edinburgh Book Festival, in response to which he wrote 'Recanting? No way, Brian', took place at the same time that 'From London' was showing in Edinburgh.

²⁰³ Sylvester, *Bacon*, p.91. Richard Francis, organiser of the 1985 Bacon exhibition at the Tate Gallery, has recently written of how Bacon wanted no reference made in the catalogue to Frances Hodgkins, who he showed alongside in his first London exhibition. Francis interprets this as Bacon's 'fear of being perceived as a member of the English art world only'. Richard Francis, 'Working with Francis Bacon' in Michael Cary, ed., *Francis Bacon: Late Paintings* (New York: Gagosian, 2015), pp.85-90 (p.88).

²⁰⁴ Sylvester, *Bacon*, pp.194-204 (first pub. as 'Bacon and Giacometti: Likeness and Difference' in *Trapping Appearance: Portraits by Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 1996), pp.5-10.

²⁰⁵ Sylvester, *Bacon*, p.91.

statement about Bacon in 1948, for instance, Sylvester highlighted the 'brutal horror' and expressionist and surrealist aspects of Bacon's work, with specific reference to Soutine and Picasso.²⁰⁶ However, in *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* Sylvester emphasises instead the way that Bacon's work held opposites in suspension, echoing his remarks about the 'serenity and violence locked together in a Mondrian'.²⁰⁷ This approach to Bacon is comparable to the way that Winckelmann writes of the *Laocoön* 'the physical pain and the nobility of soul are distributed with equal strength over the entire body and are, as it were, held in balance with one another'.²⁰⁸ Elizabeth Prettejohn has written of Winckelmann's description that he 'asks his readers to see beyond the struggling limbs and anguished facial expressions, to sense the underlying dignity of the figures, evident in the balanced disposition of the bodily forms', and this is exactly what Sylvester's later writing about Bacon often seems to do.²⁰⁹ Indeed, one of the most resonant passages in the book claims 'his [Bacon's] art, indeed, has often seemed, without loss of its brutality of fact, to have less in it of Picasso's immediacy and disquiet than of Matisse's serenity beyond pain. At its best, it has come to evoke van Gogh's words about works retaining their calm even in the catastrophe'.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ 'Francis Bacon qui a environ 40 ans est l'héritier de quelques aspects de l'expressionisme—tel que l'écorché de Soutine – et de la période surréaliste de Picasso'. Sylvester, 'Les Problèmes du Peintre: Paris-Londres 1947' (part iii/iii), p.109.

²⁰⁷ Sylvester, 'Picasso at the Tate-II'.

²⁰⁸ Winckelmann, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. by Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton, rev. edn (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987), p.35.

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty & Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.23.

²¹⁰ In an earlier version of the text Sylvester ended the 'Review' section of the book with this passage, emphasising its importance (TGA 200816/5/3/5/7). He finally decided to add it to the revised version of 'Images of the Human Body' the catalogue essay for *Francis Bacon: The Human Body*. Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p.214.

In addition to the influences stated by Bacon in his conversations with Sylvester, further indications as to how he might be considered in the tradition of European painting were provided when in 1985 Bacon selected paintings from the National Gallery collection for one of its 'Artist's Eye' exhibitions (which also included exhibitions selected by Freud and Kitaj amongst others).²¹¹ For Sylvester, the exhibition offered the clearest indication yet of the painting which mattered most to Bacon:

Something in the hang came as a revelation to me. In the middle of the best wall Bacon placed three nudes: from left to right, Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus*, Degas's pastel *After the Bath, Woman drying herself*, and the Michelangelo *Entombment*. Degas was seen as the progeny of the masters on either side, and thus as Bacon's key painter.²¹²

In regular making connections between Bacon and painters such as Degas, and Matisse in *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, Sylvester was laying the groundwork for the many exhibitions in recent years which have provided a counterpoint to the 'School of London' context for Bacon, showing him instead alongside works by the likes of van Gogh, Caravaggio and Rembrandt.²¹³ Developing the theme, in 2014-5 the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg and the Sainsbury Centre at the University of East Anglia held the exhibition

²¹¹ Richard Hamilton had previously selected an exhibition (in 1978), which Sylvester again referred to as a way of positioning Hamilton when writing about him. Sylvester, 'Seven Studies for a Picture of Richard Hamilton'.

²¹² Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, p.210 (first publ. in Sylvester, *Francis Bacon: The Human Body*, p.14). Sylvester would surely have agreed with the resonant conclusion to Martin Hammer's article on Bacon and Degas: 'He [Bacon] may have been personally committed to alcohol, gambling and picking up teddy boys, but bouncing off great artists like Degas was ultimately far more significant for Bacon's painting'. Martin Hammer, 'Francis Bacon: Back to Degas', *Tate Papers*, no.17, Spring 2012, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/17/francis-bacon-back-to-degas> [accessed 31 July 2016] (para. 26 of 26).

²¹³ See for example the exhibitions 'Van Gogh vu par Bacon', Fondation Vincent Van-Gogh-Arles, 2002; 'Caravaggio-Bacon', Galleria Borghese, Rome, 2009; and 'Irrational Marks: Bacon and Rembrandt', Ordovas, London, 2011. Ironically Bacon, alone amongst contributors to the 'Artist's Eye' series, refused to include a painting of his own alongside the old masters, believing his work was not worthy of the context (Sylvester, *Bacon*, p.252).

'Francis Bacon and the Masters' which juxtaposed Bacon's painting with works from the Hermitage collection, including ancient Egyptian art as well as western painting and sculpture from the Renaissance to the twentieth century.²¹⁴ One of the more telling juxtapositions in the Sainsbury Centre installation had in fact been anticipated by Sylvester himself, when he wrote in the catalogue to his 1996 Giacometti-Bacon exhibition for the Sainsbury Centre that a Bacon painting of Lisa Sainsbury 'resembles Queen Nefertiti strongly [...] Bacon made the head of someone he knew coalesce with that of an ancient Egyptian sculpture in all its formal rigour and monumental grandeur'.²¹⁵

Not all critics agreed with Sylvester's argument for elevating Bacon into the canon of great western painting. John A. Walker criticized Sylvester for not providing more contextual information and suggested that Sylvester, in discussing Bacon's 1957 series of paintings based on van Gogh's *The Painter on the Road to Tarascon* [*Le peintre sur la route de Tarascon*, 1888] (a painting destroyed during the Second World War) should have referred to Vincente Minnelli's van Gogh biopic *Lust for Life*, released the previous year.²¹⁶ Lubbock, meanwhile, claimed 'Sylvester is too ready to lodge Bacon in the pantheon of the deeply great. This is not just an exaggeration, it's a mistake: treat Bacon's art as great, sublime, tragic—compare his figures with Michelangelo, his painting with Velazquez—and it starts looking stagey. We

²¹⁴ An exhibition of similar ambition, 'Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art', was held at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and the Fondation Beyeler, Riehen in 2003-4.

²¹⁵ Sylvester, 'Bacon and Giacometti: Likeness and Difference', p.10.

²¹⁶ John A. Walker, 'In the Face of Death', *Times Literary Supplement*, 21 July 2000, p.20.

need to take it more lightly, more briskly.²¹⁷ For these writers, the interest in Bacon's paintings lay in the way they connected to the time in which they were made, rather than how it transcended it, and each time that Bacon's work is exhibited alongside old masters similar questions are inevitably asked about the validity of the comparison and how much it contributes to the appreciation of Bacon's art.²¹⁸ In *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, however, photography and film are rarely mentioned at all.

It is highly unlikely that Sylvester would have agreed with the premise and curation of an exhibition such as 'Francis Bacon and the Masters', but the way Bacon was positioned in *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* surely helped to lay the foundations for Bacon's elevation to recognition as a master of twentieth-century art whose canvases sell for ever more astronomical sums.²¹⁹ Not only is there little in *Looking Back* to relate Bacon's paintings to the circumstances they were painted in, but in some cases Sylvester deliberately removed topical references from earlier versions of the texts. From 'Bacon's Course' (the source for much of the long 'Review' section of *Looking Back* Sylvester removed an observation that Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* were painted in the same year as the V1 bombs and V2 rockets fell on London, and another suggestion that Bacon's *Jet of Water*

²¹⁷ Tom Lubbock, 'Portrait of a Pained Artist', *Yorkshire Post*, 29 June 2000, p.15. Lubbock suggests that 'Munch is the true comparison'. For similar scepticism about the validity of the comparisons Sylvester made, see Tim Hilton, 'A critic saves his Bacon', *Independent on Sunday*, 18 June 2000, pp.53-4; and William Feaver, 'Gravy on the Grouse', *RA Magazine*, Autumn 2000, p.87.

²¹⁸ For example, in his review of 'Francis Bacon and the Masters', Jonathan Jones of the *Guardian* wrote 'after this exhibition, I don't know if I can ever take Francis Bacon seriously again'. Jonathan Jones, 'Francis Bacon and the Masters review—a cruel exposure of a con artist', *Guardian*, 14 April 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/apr/14/francis-bacon-and-the-masters-review> [accessed 10 July 2016].

²¹⁹ Bacon's *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* (1969) set a then-world record price for art sold at auction when it sold for \$142.4 million at Christie's in New York in 2013.

(1988) could be read 'as memories of consequences of bombing'.²²⁰ This is all the more surprising given that Sylvester had made a case for Bacon's inclusion in an exhibition themed around Europe during World War II in the early 1990s (Chapter 6).²²¹

But this should not be interpreted as Sylvester overlooking important sources. Sylvester embraced popular culture (Chapters 2 and 3), and even reviewed Minnelli's *Lust for Life* when it was first released in 1956, so would certainly have mentioned it in relation to Bacon's 'van Gogh' paintings if he felt doing so would enrich Bacon's paintings.²²² However, whereas in his earliest writings Sylvester focussed specifically on the importance of photography and source imagery for Bacon's painting at a time when it would have been unfamiliar to many viewers, he soon ceased to do so. As early as 1957 Sylvester listlessly reeled off Bacon's sources: 'Sources of his imagery:- - topical photographs in newspapers and newsmagazines; the Velasquez portrait of Innocent X; the still of the screaming nurse from *Potemkin*; covers of *Time*; Rembrandt's self-portraits: the life-mask of Blake; Muybridge's *Human Locomotion* and *Animal Locomotion*; coloured picture-postcards of Monte Carlo: etc., etc'.²²³ The trajectory of Sylvester's writing on Bacon was from initially emphasising the role of Bacon's process and source material, to trying to ensure that discourse around Bacon's sources, and particularly the drawings

²²⁰ Sylvester, 'Bacon's Course' in *Francis Bacon: Figurabile* (Milan: Electa, 1993) pp.19-86.

²²¹ Sylvester proposed the inclusion of *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) and *Figure in a Landscape* (1945). Exhibition proposal sent from Sylvester to Professor Dr. Klaus Gallwitz [chairman of the European Organising Committee], 1989, TGA 200816/12/7.

²²² Sylvester described *Lust for Life* as 'a moving film, perhaps because Mr. [Kirk] Douglas managed to look so remarkably, so terrifyingly, like van Gogh'. David Sylvester, 'Edinburgh Fete Gets Under Way', *New York Times*, 20 August 1956, p.16.

²²³ Sylvester, 'Some Notes on the Paintings of Francis Bacon' (Paris: Galerie Rive Droite, 1957), n.p. In interviews Bacon himself often stressed the extent to which his many sources were combined.

which emerged in the 1990s, did not distract from the paintings. Sylvester was at the heart of the discussions around the drawings and other material attributed to Bacon (most notably that from the Barry Joule archive) which emerged during the 1990s, and at times was clearly unsure himself about the authenticity of the stream of new material.²²⁴ As Sylvester wrote (quoting a friend) in relation to the drawings:

The art-public finds it more interesting to dwell on the processes by which a work is made than to get involved with the completed work. If people are shown material relating to the making of a work, they will tend to give way to the temptation to focus on the relationship between that material and the finished product, rather than on the product itself.²²⁵

Earlier in his career Sylvester had been a notable advocate for acknowledging the role of contemporary artists' drawings through exhibitions such as 'Drawings for Pictures' (1953), 'Recent British Drawings' (1954) and 'Drawings by Stanley Spencer' (1955), all of which he organised.²²⁶ However, in both his

²²⁴ The Tate Library recording of 1996 lectures on Bacon by Sylvester bears the following note in its cataloguing: 'In the course of these lectures David Sylvester made reference to a collection of images cut or torn from newspapers and magazines and painted on. These images had been presented to him and others as having been worked on by Francis Bacon. At the time of the lectures David Sylvester believed this to be the case. He no longer holds this view.' Sylvester's article For Sylvester's uncertainty as to whether a portrait attributed to Bacon was by him or not, see David Sylvester, 'A Question of Attribution', *Guardian*, 6 May 1996, p.A8. For an analysis of material from the collection of Barry Joule (now at the Tate archive) see Marcel Finke, 'Francis Bacon's alter ego? Critical remarks on the Barry Joule collection' in Martin Harrison, ed., *Francis Bacon: New Studies* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009).

²²⁵ Sylvester, *Bacon*, p.208. Liz Jobey wrote, correctly: 'Sylvester made his own definitive response last March, during a debate at the Barbican, when he reminded the audience that, whether by Bacon or not, everybody accepted that the drawings were bad, and therefore an intensive study of them was pointless; much better to spend the time studying the paintings, which were, uncontroversially, Bacon's masterpieces'. Liz Jobey, 'David Sylvester' [obituary], *Guardian*, 20 June 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2001/jun/20/guardianobituaries.arts> [accessed 31 July 2016] (para. 34 of 38).

²²⁶ At the time of these exhibitions Sylvester believed that Bacon did not draw, as he stated in his introduction to 'Drawings for Pictures'. Sylvester's exhibitions of drawings were discussed by Kate Aspinall in her paper 'Drawing Done with Intellectual Care: David Sylvester's Drawing Exhibitions and the Shaping of the Creative Individual', presented at 'Exhibiting Contemporary Art in Post-War Britain, 1945-1960', Tate Britain, 28-9 January 2016.

writings and the series of exhibitions he curated in the 1990s, Sylvester felt that it was important to concentrate on Bacon's paintings at a time when new pathways for Bacon scholarship were opening up through the emergence of unfinished canvases and drawings in Bacon's studio at the time of his death, and finally the acquisition and archiving of Bacon's studio by the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin.²²⁷ This greatly expanded the resources available to Bacon scholars far beyond the 'authorized' corpus of works in circulation during the artist's lifetime.²²⁸ Some new discoveries, such as the 1950 *Study after Velázquez* he thought Bacon's 'finest 'Pope' ever' and a painted photograph previously belonging to Robert Buhler (exhibited in his 1996 Pompidou exhibition) did find their way into Sylvester's writing and exhibitions, but it has been the generation after Sylvester's which continues to further research around Bacon in new ways which were only just becoming visible at the time of *Looking Back*.²²⁹

Scholars including Martin Hammer (*Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda*, 2012) and Martin Harrison (*In Camera—Francis Bacon: Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*, 2005 and, with Rebecca Daniels, *Francis Bacon: Incunabula*, 2008) have carried out research since Sylvester's death presenting new perspectives on Bacon's engagement with his sources. Harrison also edited the Bacon catalogue raisonné published shortly before the submission of this thesis, as well as curating exhibitions and publishing widely on Bacon's work, and he has assumed a Sylvesteresque ubiquity in Bacon

²²⁷ Harrison's recently-published Bacon catalogue raisonné is another valuable resource.

²²⁸ On the 'authorized' selection of Bacon's works permitted by Valerie Beston see Francis, 'Working with Francis Bacon', p.85.

²²⁹ Sylvester's 1957 *Encounter* essay on Bacon was illustrated with a photograph of *Study after Velázquez*, then believed to have been destroyed. Sylvester, *Bacon*, p.44; *Francis Bacon* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1996), p.235.

studies. It is notable that both Harrison and Brian Clarke (Executor of Bacon's Estate) have gone on record stating Sylvester's support for Harrison's work, as if he were passing the torch.²³⁰ Furthermore, the catalogue for the 2005 exhibition *Francis Bacon: Studying Form* posthumously published a lecture on Bacon by Sylvester alongside an essay by Harrison, making this even clearer. As Clarke wrote in the foreword to the catalogue: 'it is sad that the two art historians, the mandarin and the trainspotter were not able to work together in some way on Bacon but this publication, in part at least, comes some way to filling that gap [...] it has resulted in an open ended ping-pong between the two writers'.²³¹

²³⁰ Martin Harrison, 'I Haven't Finished with Bacon yet': An Interview with Martin Harrison', 3 April 2014, <http://en.artmediaagency.com/83793/i-havent-finished-with-bacon-yet-an-interview-with-martin-harrison/> [accessed 6 September 2016]; Brian Clarke, 'Foreword' in *Francis Bacon: Studying Form* (London: The Estate of Francis Bacon and Faggionato Fine Art, 2005), pp.9-11. Clarke also wrote that Sylvester entrusted Harrison with assessing the importance of Sylvester's archive.

²³¹ Clarke, 'Foreword', p.11.

Chapter 6: On Showing Art

Introduction

In addition to his writing Sylvester was also a renowned curator, whose exhibition-making career spanned the entire second half of the twentieth century, and therefore the transition from the exhibition organiser as a primarily administrative and logistical role to the emergence of the curator as contributing decisively to the concept of an exhibition through their vision and expertise. Sylvester became the first critic to receive a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale in 1993, although in fact it was for his curation of the Francis Bacon exhibition at the Museo Correr that year that the award was given specifically.¹ Sylvester also anticipated the recent phenomenon of the 'independent curator' working without a permanent museum or gallery position and taking on projects individually (Sylvester's curating was always freelance), which meant that throughout his career the exhibitions he curated were always agreed individually according to his interests, rather than the responsibilities of institutional affiliation.²

Sylvester's approach to exhibiting art has been influential not only in his own exhibitions and writings but also those of the curators he worked with early in their careers (often when working for the Arts Council) who have gone on to illustrious careers as curators. Several of these, including Dawn Ades, Martin Caiger-Smith, Lynne Cooke and Julia Peyton-Jones, consider Sylvester

¹ La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, Fondo Storico, Consiglio di Amministrazione, Deliberazioni, b. 64, Deliberazione consiliare n.128, 7 June 1993.

² However, Sylvester's long-lasting relationship with the Arts Council, and Joanna Drew in particular, made many of his exhibitions possible.

to have been a formative influence. The most influential of Sylvester's protégés, current Tate director Nicholas Serota, stated soon after joining the Tate that 'in the actual art of making exhibitions, David Sylvester will always remain an example and inspiration'.³

It would be impossible to recreate the impact of Sylvester's hanging, and analysis of Sylvester's exhibition-making would in itself be of little relevance to the topic of this thesis.⁴ Instead, this chapter discusses Sylvester's exhibitions in tandem with his writings to introduce his ideas about the way that art should be exhibited and experienced. The title of the chapter is taken from a lecture series of the same title which Sylvester planned in the 1990s. Notes in Sylvester's archive show that he envisaged beginning with a lecture on installing art, with other lectures to address subjects such as 'Memoirs of an Exhibitions Curator' and 'The Ideal Museum'.⁵ Accordingly the chapter brings together Sylvester's writings (which particularly in the 1990s often described in great detail the way that the venue of an exhibition and its curation contributed to his experience of it) with archival materials relating to exhibitions that he curated or was otherwise involved in. Together, these demonstrate Sylvester's commitment to a modernist approach to the display and experience of art, an approach which towards the end of his life was

³ William Packer, 'The New Man at the Tate', in William Packer and others, *The Arts in Britain* ([London]: Central Office of Information for the Office of Arts and Libraries, 1988), pp.19-21 (p.19). Serota first worked with Sylvester on a 1972 exhibition of Miró bronzes at the Hayward Gallery. Serota, meanwhile, noted several 'maxims' of Sylvester's exhibition-making: the importance of spatial intervals between works; the idea of setting down certain works as 'anchors' in a room around which the other works would be arranged; keeping sculpture away from the walls to emphasise its three-dimensionality; constantly moving to get a sense of the room from different perspectives; and trying out many different possible arrangements before arriving at a decision. Conversation with Serota, 2 February 2016.

⁴ Michael Wishart, for instance, was struck by the 'revelation' of Sylvester rehangng a show of his paintings which had initially disappointed him. Michael Wishart, *High Diver* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1977), p.78.

⁵ TGA 200816/6/7/15.

increasingly incompatible with what he considered the misguided populism of institutions such as the Tate.

6.1 'An Old-Fashioned Modernist'

Sylvester's sense of installing exhibitions was governed by an instinctive sense of rightness, which was not restricted to art but which he also found in other practices such as writing or playing sport. For instance, Sylvester remembered an occasion when, playing cricket one day, he was able to bowl particularly well without understanding why or being able to replicate his success at other times. He compared the experience to installing exhibitions: 'that sort of experience, of being involved in a process by which things suddenly fall into place [...] returns when I install an exhibition and the objects themselves seem to find and fix their positions in the space'.⁶ Sylvester curated exhibitions more often as his career progressed, and regularly claimed to prefer curating to writing. In 1958 Sylvester took part in 'Critic's Choice', an annual exhibition held at Tooth's gallery in the late 1950s in which notable critics such as Read selected work by British artists, and concluded his brief catalogue introduction by stating:

Arranging exhibitions is a much more satisfactory form of art criticism, it seems to me, than writing about them. So that if, after being given the opportunity to select and hang this anthology, I were now to write about it, I would feel as if I'd tied an Aston Martin given me for Christmas to a bicycle and towed it.⁷

Many years later his opinion was similar, as he told Nicholas Wroe:

I don't like my prose style but I do like my installations. If you're writing you see your own personality crystallised on paper and it is a horrible sight. But with an installation there is somebody else's great

⁶ TGA 200816/5/1/4/18. Sylvester used a similar analogy to when talking to Bacon about his painting technique (Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.96).

⁷ David Sylvester, introduction to *Critic's Choice* [London: Tooth & Son, 1958], n.p..

work and you don't look at the installation but at the work itself. But that work is combined with your rhythms.⁸

Sylvester may have had his tongue in his cheek when in 2000 he told Brighton 'I'm an old-fashioned modernist and when I look at pictures I see red and blue and straight lines and curly lines but I don't actually pay much attention to the subject'.⁹ Nonetheless Sylvester certainly believed in what he called 'the primary criterion of Modernism [...] that a work of art must affirm its existence as an object and that subject-matter was incidental to its proper purpose'.¹⁰ This is why he had no time for Soby's 'Panofskian' interpretations of Bacon and felt that Magritte's modernity was manifested through his willingness to 'work in the dark' without trying to express preconceived meanings. The words in the previous quotation could have been written by Fry, although in curating terms another useful comparison is with Alfred H. Barr at MoMA, whose exhibitions, Victoria Newhouse has written, 'startled the museum-going public by substituting for tiered hangings in traditional decorative interiors eye-level, single-row alignments of generously spaced, chronologically ordered paintings on stripped-down walls covered with unobtrusive beige cloth'.¹¹ This approach, Mary Anne Staniszewski suggests, made for a very different encounter with artworks to the earlier tiered hangs he departed from:

The viewing subject in these Barr installations was treated as if he or she possessed an ahistorical, unified sovereignty of the self—much like the art objects the spectator was viewing. These spare installations isolated the individual art object, creating a one-on-one

⁸ Wroe (para. 30 of 45).

⁹ 'David Sylvester on Francis Bacon' in conversation with Andrew Brighton.

¹⁰ Sylvester, 'Mayhem at Millbank', p.20.

¹¹ Victoria Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement* (New York: Monacelli, 2005), pp.22-3. Sylvester's account of how he and the architect Daniela Ferretti created a 'room-within-a-room' in the ballroom of the Museo Correr for the 1993 Francis Bacon exhibition to eliminate the 'Canovas and the Corinthian columns' of the space is an example of this. David Sylvester, 'Francis Bacon in Venice', *Independent on Sunday*, Sunday Review section, 13 June 1993, pp.2-5.

relationship with the viewer [...] The result is a magnified awareness of the object's, and the individual's, independence.¹²

This assessment of Barr's work suggests a similarity between how Barr and Sylvester conceived of artworks, not as information to be processed but as objects to be experienced. One desired result of that experience was to make the viewer aware of himself, hence Sylvester's esteem for the work of Barnett Newman. Newman told Sylvester 'one of the nicest things that anybody ever said about my work is when you yourself said that standing in front of my paintings you had a sense of your own scale', and Sylvester's sense of artistic experience as connected with spirituality (as evidenced in his interview with Newman) informed both the way that he organised exhibitions and his intransigence towards approaches which privileged community and conversation.¹³

In postwar London, Bryan Robertson's exhibitions at the Whitechapel Gallery made a particular impression on Sylvester, particularly his series of one-man shows of American artists such as Pollock, Rothko and Guston.¹⁴ In the same way that Barr's curation was inspired by visits to European museums such as the Folkwang in Essen, Robertson's exhibitions at the Whitechapel also drew upon European modernism (Newhouse claims that the design of his 1958 Pollock exhibition was 'obviously influenced by Mies van der Rohe, and to

¹² Staniszewski, Mary Anne, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1998), p.70. Sylvester also wrote of the 'marvellous' hang at MoMA when he first visited in 1960 (David Sylvester, 'Notes on Installing Art', *Tate*, Summer 1997, pp.30-8 (p.37).

¹³ David Sylvester, 'Concerning Barnett Newman', *The Listener*, 10 August 1972, pp.169-72 (pp.169-70). This approach also relates to Sylvester's early involvement with Catholicism, which had much to do with his love of the art, music and architecture associated with the religion.

¹⁴ Sylvester thought that Robertson made the Whitechapel Gallery the best contemporary art gallery in Britain (TGA 200816/7/1/11).

some degree by Russian Constructivism').¹⁵ Above all Sylvester admired the 1961 Rothko exhibition at Whitechapel, which in a draft of his review he described as 'the most awe-inspiring exhibition of a contemporary artist I have ever seen'.¹⁶ The similarities between the approaches of the two men were reaffirmed when both Sylvester and Robertson criticized the crowded installation of the 1993 RA exhibition 'American Art in the 20th Century', organised by Norman Rosenthal and Christos Joachimides. The octagonal central room in which works by Rothko and Newman were alternated was singled out for particularly harsh criticism: Robertson wrote that the paintings were 'hung so high and so ill-lit as to be meaningless' and juxtaposed in a way betraying 'the most acute misunderstanding of both men's work'.¹⁷ Sylvester even went so far as to say 'what a shame R.[Rosenthal] & J.[Joachimides] didn't get Bryan Robertson to give them a hand!'¹⁸

Sylvester suggested to Hodgkin that the most important impact of a great exhibition was 'not the impact of the work itself' but 'the notion of what an artist ought to be' and how that might 'transform a whole lot of artists' notion of what an artist should be or might be'.¹⁹ It may be for this reason that

¹⁵ Newhouse, pp.22, 175. Sparse installations such as those Sylvester favoured were by no means universally practiced in postwar London— at the ICA, for example, Alloway and others employed a range of innovative approaches in exhibitions such as 'Parallel of Life and Art'.

¹⁶ TGA 200816/4/2/101. Rothko in turn was delighted by Sylvester's review, writing in an unsent letter of his gratitude that 'a person has seen so fully, has had such insight into the meaning and purpose of the pictures'. Draft letter from Rothko's paper quoted in James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.620, fn.

¹⁷ Bryan Robertson, 'An Appalling Display of American Artists' [letter to editor], *Independent*, 20 September 1993, p.19.

¹⁸ David Sylvester, 'Hanging Offence', *London Review of Books*, 21 October 1993, pp.10-11 (p.11). Sylvester's review followed a widely-reported incident at the opening of the exhibition, when Sylvester openly criticized it and Rosenthal spat at him. Sylvester was in fact part of the original organising committee for this exhibition (see joint exhibition proposal from Sylvester, Rosenthal and Joachimides, TGA 200816/12/8) before pulling out due to differences with Rosenthal.

¹⁹ Transcript of Sylvester interviewing Howard Hodgkin, c.1982, TGA 200816/4/2/94.

Sylvester mostly organised one-man exhibitions, reflecting the general preference for the monographic format also found in his writing.²⁰ Working in this way allowed Sylvester to present an artist's work in the best way without needing to provide a justification of the sort necessary in group shows.²¹ He also recognised that modern art in particular needed to be displayed in a way tailored to the work of the individual artist. Reviewing the Rothko exhibition in Whitechapel Sylvester wrote 'the great monomaniacs of modern art', amongst whom he counted Rothko, 'are peculiarly subject to hazards of presentation, since their work pushes the medium to extreme limits where there is no margin between glory and absurdity, so that, shown in the wrong light or at the wrong height, it can so easily go the other way'.²² Sylvester recognized in Robertson's Rothko exhibition the thought and attention to detail he took in his own work, and which he thought was missing in Rosenthal and Joachimides' exhibition.

Sylvester's modernist aesthetic informed his exhibitions of earlier art as well as modern art.²³ There is a definite correspondence, for instance, between Sylvester's writing on the 'all-over' works of Pollock and late Klee, and his views on Islamic carpets, declared in his text for the 1983 Hayward Gallery exhibition 'The Eastern Carpet in the Western World':

The aesthetic of the carpet demands that the spectator needs to be—or at least to feel—surrounded by its form and colour [...] in a

²⁰ Seventy of the seventy-seven essays in the revised edition of *About Modern Art*, are listed in the contents pages under the name of a single artist.

²¹ One example of a large survey exhibition which Sylvester withdrew from for this reason is provided later in this chapter.

²² Sylvester, 'Rothko' in *About Modern Art*, pp.64-6 (first pub. in *New Statesman*, 20 October 1961, pp.573-4), p.66. Sylvester also included Giacometti, Monet and Medardo Rosso in this category.

²³ Frank Kermode observed that in Sylvester's work, earlier art was viewed from the perspective of modernism: 'although pre-modern art is often a presence in his writing, it is usually not there for its own sake but because some modern painter seems to have been looking at or alluding to it'. Frank Kermode, 'Not His Type', *London Review of Books*, 5 September 1996, p.16.

public gallery the nearest practical substitute for standing on a carpet is to be able to view it from a higher level. The present exhibition has a few such vantage points (with opera glasses provided).²⁴

Sylvester installed two exhibitions of Islamic carpets at the Hayward Gallery (the first was in 1972), and here again had a point to make about the benefits of displaying carpets on the floor rather than hung on gallery walls. Whereas institutions such as the Victoria & Albert museum tended to exhibit their carpets on the wall to save space, removing it from its original context like a painting laid on the floor, Sylvester in his two exhibitions of carpets took pains to show as many flat on the floor as possible, and make them visible from above where possible to get as close as possible to the experience of being surrounded by the carpet (fig. 1).²⁵

For Sylvester, successful exhibitions depended on the relationship between the works and the space, which explains why Sylvester held the work of Richard Serra in such high regard.²⁶ According to Caiger-Smith (who worked with Sylvester on the 1992 Magritte exhibition and other Hayward Gallery shows):

His philosophy, if it can be articulated, would be that election was everything—that you selected the best works, on an individual basis, and that this would dictate the shape of the show [...] David would maintain that the argument of the show was a visual one, or nothing at all; that the right works for the right space, rightly disposed, would do their own work.²⁷

²⁴ David Sylvester, 'The Eastern Carpet in the Western World from the 15th to the 20th century' in *The Eastern Carpet in the Western World* (London: South Bank Centre, 1983), p.9. John McEwen recalled Sylvester inviting him to stand on the carpets in the exhibition. McEwen, introduction to Sylvester, *London Recordings*, p.ix.

²⁵ Sylvester himself began to buy valuable carpets in the 1970s and displayed them on the floors in his home.

²⁶ See in particular Sylvester's response to Serra's 1992 Tate Gallery installation, *Weight and Measure*. David Sylvester, 'Solid and Fleeting- David Sylvester Discusses Richard Serra's Sculpture at the Tate', *London Review of Books*, 17 December 1992, pp.14-5.

²⁷ Email from Caiger-Smith, 25 September 2015.

This sensitivity to the works within the space also becomes increasingly apparent in Sylvester's later exhibition reviews. Cy Twombly was another artist whose work Sylvester admired hugely in the 1990s. Sylvester claimed, with reference to Twombly's 2000 sculpture exhibition at the Menil Collection, that 'the ideal itinerant exhibition delivers a different artist with every change of venue; each setting comes to highlight certain characteristics of the total artistic personality'.²⁸ Sylvester had already reviewed the previous iteration of the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel, and emphasised the difference between the two showings. The 'offhand fluidity' of Twombly's own installation in Basel was admired as a rare instance of an artist's involvement proving advantageous by bringing out the 'lyricism and freedom' in the works, while Paul Winkler's curation in Houston, 'more deliberate and static in its groupings', was appreciated for emphasising their 'gravity and austerity'.²⁹ Here, as in his writings on Mondrian and Pollock, the quality of the light in particular was accorded tremendous significance in how the work was experienced.³⁰

Sylvester was acutely aware that the hanging of an exhibition was both a response to the physical space and a way of conveying a view of the work displayed. Serota, for instance, believed that Sylvester never made an exhibition without wanting that show to have a point of view'.³¹ Examples of this in Sylvester's own work include his two very different Magritte exhibitions

²⁸ David Sylvester, 'Twombly Sculptures in Houston', *Art in America*, December 2000, p.51.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Sylvester's most detailed account of how lighting conditions affect the experience of artworks is: David Sylvester, 'Illuminating Pollock', *London Review of Books*, 27 May 1999 (repr. with minor revisions in *About Modern Art*, pp.487-91).

³¹ Conversation with Serota, 2 February 2016. Serota gave the example of the 1968 Moore show, at which he was impressed by Moore's late carvings, and suggested that this was Sylvester's intention.

in London, at the Tate Gallery (1969) and Hayward Gallery (1992). At the Tate Gallery Sylvester created a complicated network of spaces within the Duveen Galleries which the audience negotiated, wrote Russell, 'in such a way that we feel as if we were having to twist and turn far beneath the earth in a dead-white, low-ceilinged labyrinth' (fig. 2).³² The 1992 Magritte exhibition at the Hayward Gallery which he installed with regular collaborators Stanton Williams architects, on the other hand, could scarcely have been more different. Apart from the exhibition being far more comprehensive in the range of Magritte's work included, the varied and complicated spaces of the Hayward Gallery required a different approach.³³ Unusually, the exhibition began upstairs from the gallery entrance, and the larger of the upstairs galleries, used to exhibit paintings from 1926-8 ('the most violently creative period of Magritte's career'), was turned into a 'chapel'. Small side galleries radiated out from a large central space, at the centre of which, resembling an altarpiece, was *Entr'acte* (1927), 'one of the most dramatic, threatening, disorientating images he [Magritte] ever conceived' (fig. 3).³⁴ The chapel metaphor was also picked up by Julian Barnes, who described the installation of *The Eternally Obvious* as 'adroitly installed at the Hayward in a little room of its own, like some Flemish polyptych in a hidden side-chapel' (fig. 4).³⁵ Sylvester's catalogue notes indicate the reason for presenting the 1926-8 works in this

³² Russell, 'Magritte's Happenings'. The small spaces may also have been intended to evoke the scale of the small Brussels houses where Sylvester often saw the paintings hung by their owners, and thought they were best seen. Conversation with Whitfield.

³³ In an unpublished typescript on the Hayward Gallery Sylvester praised 'the total variousness of its five spaces and the wonderful flexibility afforded by both that variousness and by the way in which the spaces are related to each other' (TGA 200816/5/8/40).

³⁴ Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.114. Sylvester memorably described the painting as showing 'headless fragments of human bodies [...] disposed about a stage in positions as varied as those of Degas dancers'. Sylvester, *Magritte* (1992), p.230.

³⁵ Barnes, 'Magritte: Bird into Egg', pp.209-10.

way: 'although immature technically, even naïve—they are often quite reminiscent of the Douanier Rousseau—they [the 1926-8 works] can be awesome in their imagery, in their tragic atmosphere, in the resonance of their silence'.³⁶ Richard Dorment, reviewing the exhibition, wrote that Sylvester 'revealed the still, iconic quality of these mysterious images'.³⁷

Another example of an exhibition in which the installation clearly conveyed Sylvester's viewpoint about the works exhibited was his small exhibition 'Trapping Appearance: Portraits by Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection' at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in 1996. Sylvester noted elsewhere that 'Bacon's work 'is quite often shown alongside paintings and/or sculptures by Giacometti, which is reasonable without being especially helpful', and 'Trapping Appearance' was a two-artist exhibition in which the works of Bacon and Giacometti were nonetheless separated.³⁸ The exhibition was organised using two rows of freestanding screens, each of these had a work by Bacon on one side, and one by Giacometti on the other (figs. 5-6). Walking through the exhibition the spectator never saw works by both artists at the same time, although it was possible to take up a position where most of the works by one of the artists could be seen. The installation of the exhibition provided the exact visual equivalent of Sylvester's accompanying essay 'Bacon and Giacometti: Likeness and Difference', which was concerned as much with differences as similarities between the two artists.

³⁶ Sylvester, 'Magritte: A Guide' [exhibition guide, 1992], n.p.

³⁷ Dorment, 'Painting in the Dark', p.17.

³⁸ Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, pp.214-5.

Sylvester also gave an example of how certain works did and didn't work together in a space when discussing his installation of a Giacometti exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 1981:

The exhibition initially included three of the Chase Manhattan pieces—the head and two walking men. This was the untried combination of two themes, and I decided to give the three pieces a sizeable square room to themselves and see what would happen. Within ten minutes they had found their places and the room was alight. But halfway through the course of the exhibition one of the standing women became available; I tried again and again to place it in conjunction with the head and one or the other of the walking men, and they seemed utterly resistant to being grouped as a trio.³⁹

Sylvester tried to keep wall texts and other interpretative material to a minimum in the modernist space of his exhibitions and was invariably critical of curators who did not follow suit. In this he was resisting the trend towards more wall texts which has reached the point that by some estimations, visitors spend as much time reading wall texts as looking at artworks when visiting galleries.⁴⁰ For the exhibition of drawings by Johns (again at the Hayward Gallery) which he installed in 1990, Sylvester wrote an elegant response to the proliferation of such texts: a wall text to explain the absence of wall texts which began:

In this exhibition places often occupied by panels bearing printed letters which form statements intended to explain the work are filled by drawings simulating printed letters which form alphabets repeated and arranged in rows [...] Putting these pictures where they are seemed to say more about Johns's work than an explanation would have done. It is work that is not made so as to be explained. It's what it is, what it is made of.⁴¹

It could be argued that Sylvester was wrong to interpret wall texts as 'explanations', but more important is his message that he wanted Johns'

³⁹ Sylvester, *Giacometti*, p.170.

⁴⁰ Orit Gat, 'Could Reading Be Looking?', *e-flux journal* #72, April 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/could-reading-be-looking/> [accessed 30 May 2016].

⁴¹ TGA 200816/4/2/57.

works to be looked at for themselves rather than understood in terms of something else.⁴²

The Hayward Gallery, where the Johns exhibition was held, was a favourite venue of Sylvester's, despite its lack of the natural light which he valued so much for showing artworks to best advantage. He particularly valued the 'flexibility' of the Hayward Gallery (where because of his strong connections to the Arts Council he often installed exhibitions, even if he hadn't curated them) because 'it helps those who stage exhibitions to make discoveries about the art they show'.⁴³ This meant that organising an exhibition there was entering a situation where one's existing ideas about the art were questioned and revised in the process of installation.⁴⁴ Two of the most successful shows he installed there were those of Hodgkin (1996) and Bacon (1998), both of which used the ground floor only, and unusually used no partitions to keep the gallery spaces as large as possible. Sylvester recalled how for the Hodgkin exhibition (figs. 7-8) the artist:

[...] Chose to use the whole lower level, unpartitioned, with everything hung on the perimeter walls. The perverseness derived from the fact that few of Hodgkin's pictures were large and many were tiny. Partly because he had the walls painted post-bag grey, the result was very impressive'.⁴⁵

⁴² This could be compared with Sylvester's approach to Bacon's drawings as quoted in the previous chapter.

⁴³ Sylvester, 'The Hayward as an Art Gallery', TGA 200816/5/8/40.

⁴⁴ In 'Francis Bacon in Venice' Sylvester summed up this unpredictability: 'pictures are like living creatures, and you can't predict how they are going to behave in the company of others they don't normally live with' (p.5).

⁴⁵ Ibid. The architect Adam Caruso, whose practice Caruso St John have designed many galleries, also recalled the impact of the show: 'I liked the Howard Hodgkin show installed by David Sylvester because there was no designer involved. It was like a giant frieze right through the gallery, with no partitions. It was very powerful'. Adam Caruso in Adam Caruso and others, 'The Hayward at 40: Architects Pay Tribute', *Building Design*, 2 May 2008, <http://www.bdonline.co.uk/the-hayward-at-40-architects-pay-tribute/3112476.article> [accessed 31 July 2016].

The Hodgkin exhibition inspired Sylvester to curate a show of Bacon's work in a similar way, which as shown in the previous chapter played a significant role in bringing Sylvester to the conclusion that Bacon was far more classical painter than he had previously realized:

It [the Hodgkin show] led me to ask the Hayward to have me do a show of Francis Bacon in the same spaces, though I had always been convinced that his work looked best in confined spaces such as those I had had built for the retrospective at the Centre Pompidou. The show established that Bacons looked enormously powerful and energetic when their power and energy had to project themselves across the broadest of spaces'.⁴⁶

Sylvester had long felt that Bacon was most effectively shown in small spaces (remembering in particular the impact of Bacon's 1977 show at the Galerie Claude Bernard), just as he thought Giacometti's sculptures needed to be shown in restricted areas to heighten their impact.⁴⁷ This relates to Sylvester's earlier writings on Bacon such as his 1957 *Encounter* text and preface to Bacon's exhibition at the 1954 Venice Biennale, which emphasise this sense of claustrophobia in much of Bacon's work. Through exhibitions such as 'Francis Bacon: The Human Body', however, Sylvester came to feel that Bacon's paintings could dominate large spaces in the manner of the Old Masters Bacon saw as his inspirations and rivals, in a way which showed him to have more in common with them than most of Bacon's contemporaries (figs. 9-11).⁴⁸ This change was reflected in *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*.

⁴⁶ Sylvester, 'The Hayward as an Art Gallery', TGA 200816/5/8/40.

⁴⁷ Sylvester, 'Bacon in Venice', pp.4-5.

⁴⁸ An interesting comparison might be made between the 'power and energy' of Bacons in large spaces, and Titian's *The Flaying of Marsyas* (c.1570-76) of which Sylvester wrote 'I know no painting that vibrates more tellingly across a room' (Sylvester, 'Satyr vs. God', *Vanity Fair*, 1984, month unknown, p.72 (copy in TGA 2000816/8/1/5)).

Newhouse's case study of Pollock exhibitions suggested that Sylvester's initial instinct that modern art is best experienced in small spaces may be applicable to modern artists more generally. Newhouse made much of the impact created by Pollock's works at Betty Parsons gallery in New York, where the large canvases fitted the walls precisely in a 'uniquely Pollock environment'.⁴⁹ Newhouse felt that the 1999 Pollock exhibition at the Tate Gallery Pollock failed because 'the classic large paintings [...] suffered in bigger spaces'.⁵⁰ Sylvester, on the other hand, wrote of that show that 'the spaces used at the Tate have the right height for a Pollock show. The thing about Pollock's paintings is that they soar; in New York the ceilings were low, and there was no air into which they could soar'.⁵¹ Inevitably these are subjective opinions, but what is noticeable about Sylvester is that in the case of both Bacon and Pollock (not to mention Magritte) he appreciated the benefits of seeing the work in a larger museum space. Newhouse on the other hand (admittedly while citing the valued opinions of witnesses such as Hess) continued to judge exhibitions many years later on the basis of their fidelity to the curation of the Betty Parsons Gallery shows.⁵²

⁴⁹ Newhouse, pp.156-161, 164.

⁵⁰ Newhouse, pp.203.

⁵¹ David Sylvester, 'The Grin without the Cat: David Sylvester Views Jackson Pollock at the Tate', *London Review of Books*, pp.3, 6, 8-9 (p.3). Installing 'Late Picasso' at the Tate made a similar effect on Sylvester: 'At the Tate Picasso's late paintings seem almost to be different paintings from those they seemed to be at Beaubourg. There they looked, by common consent, more aggressive and explosive and electric, here more luminous, more beautiful, more grand.' David Sylvester, 'Late Picasso at the Tate', *London Review of Books*, pp.8-9 (p.8).

⁵² Newhouse asserts 'Pollock seems to have painted specifically for the space', which if true complicates the question of how much of subsequent Pollock exhibitions should see themselves as restaging the Parsons gallery environment. Newhouse, p.160.

6.2 Experience and Interpretation: Curating since the 1970s

Sylvester's installations were widely acclaimed for their thoughtfulness, during the latter part of his career, but they represented an aesthetic increasingly out-of-step with the developments in exhibition-making at the end of the twentieth century. This section examines several instances where this was particularly evident, and asks what might be recovered of Sylvester's approach for a contemporary audience.

The first instance of Sylvester appearing to be fighting a rearguard action in exhibition-making was the 1971 Robert Morris exhibition at the Tate Gallery, which he organised with Michael Compton.⁵³ Sylvester had been familiar with Morris' work for several years (he interviewed the artist in 1967) and envisaged the Tate exhibition as 'a conventional retrospective in which a number of his masterpieces of different periods would be handsomely presented'.⁵⁴ Morris would have been well aware of Sylvester's ideas about sculpture, and vice versa. The interview begins with Sylvester comparing the sensations provoked by Morris' work with those felt when looking at Michelangelo's sculpture. In places Morris seems confused by Sylvester's interpretations, but Sylvester's comparative empirical approach also yields some interesting and surprising results. Morris, for instance, responds positively to the comparison that Sylvester draws between experiencing Morris' work and visiting the Parthenon in Athens. If the follow-up question, in

⁵³ For a discussion of the exhibition see Jon Bird, 'Minding the Body' in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. by Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion, 1999), pp.88-106.

⁵⁴ 'A Dialogue Between David Sylvester and Michael Compton', *Tate Magazine*, summer 1997, n.p.. Sylvester went on to say 'the moment Morris started rejecting that idea [of a conventional retrospective] and wanting it to be something else, it became a disappointment' (Ibid.).

which Sylvester asks 'Isn't the point that with a total change of language, the thing can still come back to the same? Isn't that what it's all about?' and Morris agrees, hadn't been cut from the published text, this agreement would have been even clearer.⁵⁵

Compton, reflecting upon the interview, noted that Sylvester's view of Morris' work was very different from the way that Morris wanted his audience to interact with the Tate Gallery exhibition:

You are speaking as the sort of contemporary spirit of Berenson throughout. You are addressing Morris as if he were a Florentine artist of the Quattrocento in Berensonian terms, in which you would intuit in your own body, the physical stresses and so on represented in the picture. But in the case of the Tate exhibition they would be the actual physical stresses of the viewer and not of something represented.⁵⁶

The exhibition, the first fully interactive exhibition held at the Tate Gallery, originally consisted of a number of large objects which the audience were to interact with, including a large hollow cylinder and a tightrope (fig. 12). However, the organisers underestimated the exuberance of the audience, and, after several injuries to visitors during the first five days of the exhibition, it was closed before a hastily rearranged 'conventional' exhibition of Morris' earlier works were installed.

Unsurprisingly, given the ubiquity of participatory art at the present time, the most common interpretation is that of a backwards institution and staff unable to cope with an artist whose work questioned normative ideas around the institution and the retrospective format.⁵⁷ In time the Morris exhibition has come to be recognized as a landmark event in the

⁵⁵ Transcript of 1967 interview between Sylvester and Morris, TGA 200816/6/1/18.

⁵⁶ 'A Dialogue Between David Sylvester and Michael Compton'.

⁵⁷ See for instance Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), p.7.

history of installation and participatory art in Britain, so much so that in 2009 the exhibition was remade in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern as *bodymotionspacethings*.⁵⁸ Compton contrasted Sylvester's 'Berensonian' stance with Morris' actual intentions for the exhibition, while the artist famously wrote to Compton during preparation for the exhibition that 'I'd rather break my arm falling off a platform than spend an hour in detached contemplation of a Matisse' and wanted the viewer to *literally* move about in the work of art.⁵⁹

Sylvester's art criticism focused almost exclusively on painting and sculpture, and demonstrated little interest in happenings, performance and participatory practices developing in the 1960s.⁶⁰ Although rarely addressed in his writing, this sometimes resulted in him writing enthusiastically about an artist's painting or sculpture while barely mentioning other aspects of their work. Sylvester's 1999 essay on Josef Beuys, for instance, contrasts his disdain for a Beuys performance with a love of the artist's sculpture, while in his writing on Gilbert & George and Oldenburg Sylvester discusses the artists' static objects in isolation from other aspects of their art. However, rather than demonstrating that Sylvester was not responsive to new developments I believe Sylvester's work questions the simple dichotomy, common in the

⁵⁸ The re-creation of the exhibition took place in collaboration with Morris, and incorporated installation photographs from the original exhibition attached to the exhibits.

⁵⁹ Robert Morris, letter to Michael Compton, 19 January 1971, Tate Public Records TG 92/236/2. It is at least possible that the remark was written with Sylvester in mind, especially since Sylvester was working on Matisse shortly before the exhibition opened.

⁶⁰ Sylvester attended Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York* in the grounds of the Museum of Modern Art on 18 March 1960, but left the event early, accompanied by 'two noted Abstract Expressionist painters' and muttering about his dislike of 'tuxedo dada'. Calvin Tomkins, 'Beyond the Machine' in *Art in America 1945-1970: Writings from the Age of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art and Minimalism*, ed. by Jed Perl (New York: Library of America, 2014), pp.515-21 (first publ. in *The New Yorker*, 10 February 1962, pp.44-6), p.516.

discussion of art since the 1960s, of detached contemplation versus engaged participation.

Sylvester's understanding of sculpture was constant throughout his career as a critic. In 1951 he wrote that the movement of Calder's mobiles was itself of little value because 'solving the problem of real movement' in art was not a matter of 'making the work of art move, but in compelling the spectator to believe that *he* is moving about in the work of art—be it a sculpture by Giacometti or a picture by Klee'.⁶¹ The same role he attributed to the imagination in this respect can also be found in his statement (with regards to the Morris exhibition) that 'sculpture is something to look at and feel that you are touching [as opposed to actually touching]'.⁶²

However, given the numerous examples in this thesis of how Sylvester wrote about his visual experiences in physical terms, there would seem to be a case for seeing his own criticism since the 1940s as anticipating participatory practices which made literal the imaginative engagement that Sylvester felt was a *de facto* component of looking at art. As Baum notes, 'Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on reciprocity and relationality has bearing on the wide variety of artists who either perform or represent collaboration in the 1960s and 1970s'.⁶³ Bearing in mind Sylvester's own experience of working with Merleau-Ponty, one could see his criticism, and his scepticism about the incorporation of literal physical interaction in art, as an alternative way of exploring Merleau-Ponty's ideas in the realm of visual art.⁶⁴

⁶¹ David Sylvester, 'Mobiles and Stables by Alexander Calder: Lefevre Gallery', *Art News and Review*, 27 January 1951, p.5.

⁶² 'A Dialogue Between David Sylvester and Michael Compton'.

⁶³ Baum, p.214.

⁶⁴ Giacometti's surrealist sculptures are an exception in this respect, but even here Sylvester's writing is less about physically touching the objects than imagining the

'The most important exhibition I ever did' was how Sylvester referred to 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed' at the Hayward Gallery in 1978.⁶⁵ This large and compendious exhibition spanned over fifty years from the founding of *Les Soirées de Paris* by Apollinaire in 1912 to postwar American art (including Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still) and the later output of artists such as Miró. The final section included Moore and Picasso, and in fact, thirteen of the fifty-eight artists named in the contents of Sylvester's *About Modern Art* were included in the exhibition, which indicates how closely the exhibition correlated with the subjects of Sylvester's writings.⁶⁶ While Sylvester had little interest in the intellectual and literary aspect of surrealism *per se* (Chapter 5), many of the artists who feature in his writing were engaged with the movement in some way. In the exhibition, exhibits were arranged into sections corresponding with dada and surrealist journals such as *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* and *Minotaure* (fig. 13). Unlike the sparse hangs of Sylvester's monographic exhibitions, 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed' was closely hung with 'Chosen Objects' arranged by Elizabeth Cowling in vitrines reminiscent of ethnological and anthropological museums such as the Musée de l'Homme which Sylvester, like the surrealists had frequented.⁶⁷

Sylvester was the chairman of the distinguished committee which organised the exhibition, and also selected two of the exhibition's seventeen

ways they can be manipulated. He didn't think that not touching *Suspended Ball* impaired the viewer's awareness of the 'traps' Giacometti was setting in such works.

⁶⁵ Fax from Sylvester to Jonathan Jones, 16 November 1999, TGA 200816/2/1/584.

⁶⁶ *About Modern Art* includes a 'surrealists' section.

⁶⁷ Whitfield also traced Sylvester's interest in African sculpture back to visits to the Musée de l'Homme (conversation with Whitfield, 3 November 2014).

sections in addition to writing an introductory essay.⁶⁸ The sections Sylvester organised, corresponding to his interests in Giacometti and Magritte, were those focussed on Georges Bataille's journal *Documents* and Belgian surrealist journals such as *Oesophage* and *Marie* (Sylvester wrote 'Magritte, of course, dominates this section').⁶⁹ In the primarily literary movement of surrealism it is easy to see why the 'maverick' *Documents* in particular interested him.⁷⁰ All of the artists exhibited in the section (Arp, Giacometti, Klee, Masson, Miro, Picasso) had been enthusiastically written about by Sylvester. Sylvester admitted that with the exception of Masson and Giacometti the coverage of these artists in the journal was 'as part of its [*Documents*] general coverage of contemporary art' rather than a particular focus, meaning that to some extent his selection was a matter of his own preference rather than based solely on the representation of artists within the pages of the journal. Sylvester could easily have included Dalí (whose art he disliked), for instance, given that Bataille had published an admiring article about him in the journal, but chose not to, giving the reason that Dalí refused permission for Bataille to reproduce his work in *Documents*.⁷¹

'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed' was widely acclaimed for its innovative approach to the subject (Nicolas Calas described as 'the first scholarly exhibition to liberate Dada and Surrealism from museumification') while it was also very well-attended, with over 188,000 visitors of whom 59% were aged

⁶⁸ The committee also included Ades, Alan Bowness, Michael Compton, Elizabeth Cowling, Roy Edwards, John Golding, Roland Penrose, Edward Wright, Joanna Drew and Richard Francis.

⁶⁹ David Sylvester, 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed: A brief guide to the exhibition' (exhibition guide, 1978), p.17. Ades recalls how the decision to include *Documents* was reached after consultation with Leiris. Conversation with Ades, 28 October 2015.

⁷⁰ Sylvester, 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed: A brief guide to the exhibition', p.14.

⁷¹ Sylvester, 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed: A brief guide to the exhibition', p.15; Georges Bataille, 'Le "Jeu Lugubre"', *Documents*, December 1929, pp.297-302.

15-25.⁷² The exhibition was also the subject of the first in-depth audience survey carried out at the Hayward Gallery, by researcher Christopher Wilson.⁷³ Titled *Audience to an Audience: Reactions to an Exhibition*, the report ran to almost eighty pages recording in painstaking detail every aspect of how visitors engaged with the exhibition, even transcribing graffiti written in the gallery toilets during the exhibition. Wilson was largely critical of 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed', which he called a 'serendipitous success'. He clearly considered the organisers to be elitists making an exhibition for themselves while disregarding the requirements of non-specialist visitors (including insufficient interpretative text and a lack of translations of foreign language materials) and crowding the exhibition with too many exhibits.

At a meeting to discuss the report, Sylvester was largely dismissive of Wilson's findings, particularly the suggestion that the exhibition failed to fulfil its educational responsibilities. The minutes of the meeting record that:

Sylvester considered that an exhibition should work on many levels and cited both Shakespeare plays and great symphonies as examples of works of art achieving their impact both by working on many levels and through the repetition of images.⁷⁴

Sylvester's comparison of exhibitions to artworks was in keeping with his conviction that the artworks should guide the exhibition, with texts, for example, kept to a minimum, and aesthetic considerations leading the way. In Ades' opinion, the exhibition was a success for different reasons: in her opinion it succeeded in 'dismantling expectations and preconceptions' of dada and surrealism and expanding ideas of what an exhibition around the theme

⁷² Nicolas Calas, 'The Challenge of Surrealism', *Artforum*, January 1979, pp.24-9 (p.24).

⁷³ TGA 200816/12/5.

⁷⁴ Minutes of meeting held to discuss Wilson's report, 18 September 1978, TGA 200816/12/5.

could be.⁷⁵ With its combination of erudition and overwhelming depth and variety of material, 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed' of all the major exhibitions Sylvester was involved with, was (perhaps against his intentions) the closest to a major contemporary exhibition on the subject might look, although the issue of the exhibition's complexity raised by Wilson's report would no doubt be considered carefully at an early stage in the twenty-first century.

In recent years the power structures underlying exhibition-making have been re-examined using ideas derived from feminism, poststructuralism and sociology. Cultural organisations have had to become more adaptable and versatile, and a revisionist approach to organising exhibitions has become increasingly prevalent as a way of promoting new ways of thinking about art.⁷⁶ One example from Sylvester's career shows this change particularly clearly, which was his early involvement in 'Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators, 1930-45', held at the Hayward Gallery in 1995.

This was the closest that Sylvester came to working on another exhibition with the scope of 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed'.⁷⁷ When he first set down his thoughts for an exhibition of art covering the period from the Spanish Civil War to the aftermath of the Second World War, Sylvester stated 'it would not be an encyclopaedic exhibition, nor a documentary exhibition, but

⁷⁵ Conversation with Dawn Ades, 28 October 2015.

⁷⁶ 'Emphasizing art's exhibition in this way usurps the privilege previously accorded, in modernist thought, to the artist's subjectivity or to art's so-called autonomy and its putatively universal appeal'. Lucy Steeds, 'Introduction: Contemporary Exhibitions: Art at Large in the World' in *Exhibition*, ed. by Lucy Steeds, Documents of Contemporary Art series (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), pp.12-23 (p.13).

⁷⁷ Sylvester drew a comparison between the two exhibitions, suggesting that in 'Art and Power', 'political events could provide the lead which reviews gave in DSR ['Dada and Surrealism Reviewed']. TGA 200816/12/7.

an exhibition of that mainstream art which strongly reflected what was happening in the world at that singular time.⁷⁸

By distancing himself from 'encyclopaedic' or 'documentary' exhibitions, Sylvester was saying that the exhibition would be highly selective. A section on 'Fascist and anti-fascist art in Italy: Sironi and Guttuso' was considered, but it was clear that the exhibition would not attempt to cover the full range of artistic responses to the war. While Sylvester did not qualify his use of the term 'mainstream', from the list of artists included with this proposal it is evident that he was referring to canonical twentieth-century artists such as Picasso, Chagall, Mondrian and de Kooning. Sylvester wrote later that although a section on 'Artists in Germany under Nazi rule' was intended, this would consist of 'underground artists, not government-approved or inspired kitsch art (which I take it is not to be included in any section)'.⁷⁹

A list of artists included in the submission proposal submitted to the Council of Europe Group of Consultants in April 1992 shows that, as Sylvester conceived it, the exhibition would have including most of the artists he admired who were active in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.⁸⁰ Giacometti was to feature in sections on both Occupied France and 'the Existentialist atmosphere of the post-war years'; Magritte '(who painted in a special style to cheer people up)' in a section on Occupied Belgium; Bacon and Moore in 'Indigenous artists in England under the aerial bombardment'; and a separate section on 'the rise of American abstract expressionism'.⁸¹ As in the case of

⁷⁸ Exhibition proposal sent from Sylvester to Professor Dr. Klaus Gallwitz [chairman of the European Organising Committee], 1989. TGA 200816/12/7.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Where 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed' had included thirteen of the artists written about in *About Modern Art*, Sylvester's list for the Council of Europe exhibition included twenty.

⁸¹ Exhibition proposal sent from Sylvester to Gallwitz, TGA 200816/12/7.

'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed', the exhibition could originally have been seen as a narrative culminating in the emergence of abstract expressionism, and although the American element was soon discarded from the original proposal, it is noteworthy that Sylvester envisaged the exhibition as concluding in this way, with the shift from Europe to America that was so central to his understanding of modern art.

Following the arrival of Henry Meyric Hughes as Director of the Hayward Gallery in 1992 (by which time Ades was also involved in discussions about the exhibition) the exhibition changed direction completely, moving away from the 'mainstream' and focusing instead on the art promoted by the totalitarian regimes in what Caiger-Smith described as a 'fascinating difference in philosophy of exhibition-making'.⁸² At a meeting on 23 March 1993 Meyric Hughes asked whether certain artists were being considered more for their broader artistic significance than because of their relevance to the theme, while Sylvester continued to defend the inclusion of 'great art' as opposed to 'sociology' and 'the responses of second rate artists'.⁸³ A revised proposal, drawn up by Caiger-Smith (the organiser of the exhibition) in consultation with Meyric Hughes, was discussed in a meeting on 8 April 1993 which marked the end of Sylvester's close involvement with the exhibition. Of the three figures who had been involved since Sylvester's initial 1989 proposal, Serota did not attend the meeting; Joanna Drew, thereto the chair of the committee, announced her intention to stand down; and Sylvester withdrew due to the

⁸² Minutes for meeting on 'Council of Europe: Totalitarianism and the European Artist 1932-45', 19 February 1992, TGA 200816/12/7. Quotation from conversation with Caiger-Smith, 12 March 2014.

⁸³ Minutes for meeting on 'Totalitarianism and the European Artist 1932-45 Council of Europe Exhibition', 23 March 1993. TGA 200816/12/7.

difference between his original proposal and the new concept.⁸⁴ The minutes record Sylvester as stating that:

Although the revised outline is, in general, a great improvement, it does propose a different exhibition: the same cast of actors, but with a different director [...] a revisionist concept, making the previous formulation appear old-fashioned modernist in approach [...] he was haunted by a comment some time ago that the exhibition as originally formulated might look like MoMA rehung. He registered his distance from such a new concept, however, both in terms of outlook and generation.⁸⁵

The final exhibition, in which the priority was 'not the modernist art that was censored but the art that was supported by the regimes' was devised and selected by Ades, David Elliott, Tim Benton and Iain Boyd Whyte.⁸⁶ This instance of Sylvester's involvement and withdrawal from a major exhibition demonstrates with particular clarity how in Serota's words he was 'outflanked by developments in art history in the 1980s and 1990s [...] to some extent almost bypassed'.⁸⁷

Sylvester wrote that 'the central problem facing art museums is to decide the order and degree of priority of the three purposes for which they are taken to exist:- contemplation, education and conversation', and he made no apologies for his belief that contemplation was the most important of these.⁸⁸ He was frustrated by crowded galleries and exhibition tours which distracted him from looking at art, and felt that within the gallery 'education has to be done by the choice & presentation of the works themselves &

⁸⁴ Copies of Sylvester's 1989 proposal were distributed to Serota, Drew and Isabel Monod-Fontaine.

⁸⁵ Minutes for meeting on 'Totalitarianism and the European Artist 1932-45 Council of Europe Exhibition', 23 March 1993. TGA 200816/12/7.

⁸⁶ 'Dawn Ades in Conversation with Doro Globus' in Dawn Ades, *Writings on Art and Anti-Art*, ed. by Doro Globus (London: Ridinghouse, 2015), pp.11-28 (p.14); conversation with Nicholas Serota, 2 February 2016.

⁸⁷ Conversation with Serota, 2 February 2016.

⁸⁸ Sylvester, 'An Ideal Museum of Modern Art' (unpublished typescript, 1995) TGA 200816/5/8/35.

provision of a few essential facts & a few quotes from the artist & a few pictures of his habitat'.⁸⁹

This all related back to Sylvester's first encounter with a Matisse reproduction, which he saw as proof that great art needed no explaining: 'if a visual philistine can have his life changed by seeing one black-and-white reproduction, there really is no need to encourage hordes of children to invade our museums [...] and to pay busybodies to instruct them in what hidden beauties they should be trying to discover'.⁹⁰

Serota set out the issues facing modern art museums in his own terms in the lecture and 1996 book *Experience or Interpretation: the Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art*. Sylvester of course advocated 'experience', which Serota illustrated with reference to Kirk Varnedoe's installation of Jackson Pollock's *One (Number 31 1950)* at the Museum of Modern Art, and which Serota describes as 'creating that hushed transcendental mood which we associate with a chapel'.⁹¹ Serota, like Sylvester, has long been renowned for his installations (Sylvester held Serota's skills at installing exhibitions in high regard), but Serota's point was that modern art museums such as Tate Modern could not simply choose between experience and interpretation, but had to combine the two. The best museums of the future, Serota concluded, would 'seek to promote different modes and levels of 'interpretation' by subtle juxtapositions of 'experience'.⁹² Serota took as his exemplars institutions such as the Hallen für Neue Kunst in Schaffhausen, Switzerland and the private

⁸⁹ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.14; TGA 200816/5/8/35; letter from Sylvester to Marla Prather, 25 February 1994 (TGA 200816/12/9).

⁹⁰ TGA 200816/5/1/2.

⁹¹ Nicholas Serota, *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), p.9.

⁹² Serota, p.55.

museum Insel Hombroich near Düsseldorf, which did not just provide a chronological overview of their collection but juxtaposed works from their collection to create new connections between the works.

Sylvester, however, saw no fundamental alternative to chronological hangs: as he put it, 'chronology is not a tool of art-historical interpretation which can be used at one moment, discarded at another. It's an objective reality, built into the fabric of the work. And into the artist's awareness.'⁹³ For this reason he could not accept the thematic hangs at Tate Britain and Tate Modern in 2000 as anything other than didactic and wilfully contrary.⁹⁴ In Serota's words, in the year prior to Sylvester's death in 2001 'our friendship had been strained. He [Sylvester] was swingeing in his criticisms of the new displays at Tate Britain and his adverse reaction to the scale of the rooms and to what he saw as didacticism in some of the juxtapositions and installations of works at Tate Modern.'⁹⁵ Having railed throughout his career against what he considered a habit of British 'literary' culture to create and look at art in terms of its subject matter, Sylvester saw the new hang at the Tate as a particularly damaging instance of this: 'what is it that occupies the curators' minds? Their territorial rights, it seems. They fashion a mini-essay in indifferent prose and have it printed – with a by-line – on a piece of white card as big as the painting next to which they place it on the wall.'⁹⁶

⁹³ Sylvester, 'Mayhem at Millbank', p.20.

⁹⁴ When the gallery opened in 2000 the collection was arranged into four themes: 'History/Memory/Society', 'Nude/Action/Body', 'Landscape/Matter/Environment', and 'Still Life/Object/Real Life'.

⁹⁵ Serota, 'The Making of an Exhibition' in Nicholas Serota, *Looking at Modern Art: In Memory of David Sylvester* (London: Tate Publishing), p.6.

⁹⁶ Sylvester, 'Mayhem at Millbank', p.20. The tendency towards thematic curation may well be related to the impact of the 'social history of art', of which Shiff wrote: 'In lieu of an analysis of pictorial structure and style, it instituted a broad iconographical investigation that extended beyond traditional symbolism and allegory to the identification of specific sites, events, and conditions to which an image might have alluded.' Shiff, *Doubt*, pp.37-8.

Serota, for all his love of Sylvester's exhibitions, described Sylvester's prolific last years as 'a final flourish of the old guard against the background of a very different kind of exhibition-making developing'.⁹⁷ In major institutions sparse hangs with minimal text of the sort favoured by Sylvester are now the exception rather than the rule in the age of what Newhouse calls the 'museum as entertainment'.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, he was honoured by Tate Modern with an exhibition dedicated to his career, 'Looking at Modern Art: In Memory of David Sylvester', which he planned with Serota in the knowledge that he would not live to see it. In three rooms, a small selection of major works were assembled in keeping with the development of Sylvester's thinking, from Cézanne to Koons, in a fitting tribute to a career in which Sylvester had so often organised exhibitions at the Tate Gallery, from Moore in 1951 to Heron in 1998.

Sylvester happily and defiantly referred to himself as an elitist. He was fundamentally marked by the culture of his youth, particularly the Third Programme ethos of making available the best in culture without simplification and trusting that even if the amount who benefit are small in number, they will nonetheless do so more intensely than if it had been simplified for a wider audience. This is not to say that he was a snob. On the contrary, Sylvester believed that while there was an 'elite' capable of responding to sophisticated art (including students at art schools), in his experience these students tended

⁹⁷ Conversation with Serota, 2 February 2016. Caiger-Smith remarked that curating is now more 'relativist' than it was earlier in the twentieth century (conversation, 12 March 2014).

⁹⁸ A major recent exception is the refurbished San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, whose director Neal Benezra reversed the tendency towards exhibiting whereby 'the curator has authored an idea and the pictures illustrate that idea. We've done something just the opposite, and terribly old-fashioned [...] We're refocusing on the artists and letting each one speak. The curators are not imposing their will on the paintings at all.' Benezra quoted in Jackie Wullschlager, 'How Tate Modern Transformed the Way We See Art', *Financial Times*, 27 May 2016, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/8c961a2c-2192-11e6-9d4d-c11776a5124d.html#axzz4A1ya1C00> [accessed 30 May 2016]

to come from working class or lower-middle-class backgrounds rather than having an affluent, cultured upbringing. It was this elite which gained the most benefit from art galleries and made use of their experience either through their own art or by adapting ideas into other formats (film, design, advertising, etc).⁹⁹ He had a 'trickle-down' theory of art, in which the innovations of the avant-garde were absorbed and turned to advantage within a broader context. Magritte and Dalí were examples he often turned to, and in claiming them as the great popular artists of the day in 1961 he was referring not to the prestige accorded to their own works but their ubiquitous influence on visual culture more widely. In 2000 he also said:

I don't think it matters a fuck whether people go and look at Mondrian or not, because they live among furniture and wallpaper and cars and everything else that has been influenced by an earlier moment in the fine arts. Even if fine art has a tiny audience of rich people, ultimately it affects the whole of society, and that is where it really validates itself socially.¹⁰⁰

This same interest in the relation between fine art and popular art can also be traced back to the 1950s, with his writing on Epstein and science-fiction films in *Encounter*, and where his early broadcasting also demonstrates a lively engagement with popular culture in the 1950s. Sylvester's understanding of art was not a continuum in Alloway's sense but that of an 'old-fashioned modernist', although as seen particularly in Chapter 3, it was nonetheless inflected by a love of the broader culture.

⁹⁹ 'Is an Elite Necessary?', broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 1 November 1970, microfilmed transcript in BBC WAC.

¹⁰⁰ Wroe (para. 10 of 45).

Chapter 7: Looking Back

Introduction

This chapter, the title of which references Sylvester's *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, looks at the final years of Sylvester's life, from 1992-2001, during which his output diversified after many years in which he had focused primarily on the Magritte catalogue raisonné. In the 1990s Sylvester curated numerous exhibitions and returned to writing regularly for newspapers and magazines, and wrote about many artists for the first time. Perhaps more importantly, however, he brought to completion book projects he had long contemplated, including the Giacometti and Bacon monographs (Chapter 5), the book of essays *About Modern Art*, and *Interviews with American Artists*. The chapter consists of three sections: the first considers Sylvester's place within the landscape of art production and criticism in the 1990s, dominated by younger generations of artists and writers; the second discusses Sylvester's collecting and his relationships with commercial galleries; and the third focusses on *About Modern Art* and its critical reception.

7.1 'In the Shadow of Thanatos'

Sylvester wrote very little criticism during the 1970s and 1980s, a period dominated by work on the Magritte catalogue raisonné and major exhibitions such as 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed' and 'Late Picasso'.¹ The critic Timothy Hyman went so far as to say that 'around the mid-1980s

¹ In a recent essay Dorment has suggested that 'respected and highly readable' critics such as Sylvester, Gowing and John Golding not writing regularly for newspapers was one reason for what he considered the lamentable state of art criticism in Britain in the 1980s. Richard Dorment, 'Introduction' in *Exhibitionist: Writing about Art in a Daily Newspaper* (London: Wilmington Square Books, 2016), pp.14-28 (p.17).

Sylvester seemed almost a tragic waste',² while Serota and Julia Peyton-Jones have remarked on how he seemed 'adrift' and 'disenfranchised' towards the completion of the catalogue raisonné.³

By 1990 Sylvester's importance was widely acknowledged: he was appointed CBE for services to art in 1983 (in 1995 he was also made Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture), while his expertise was utilised on the acquisitions committee of the Centre Pompidou (1984-7), the jury of the Venice Biennale in 1988 (when the Golden Lion was won by Johns) and the committee which in 1989 selected a sculpture commemorating the bicentenary of the Assemblée Nationale. However, in spite of his achievements, Sylvester's reputation, in print at least, remained largely based on the *Interviews with Francis Bacon* (and therefore derived from his role as Bacon's 'henchman'). For this reason Hyman described him as 'a kind of Art Eminence, whose majesty may appear to a new generation slightly suspect'.⁴

In March 1991, the year before the publication of the first volumes of the Magritte catalogue raisonné and the death of Francis Bacon, Sylvester suffered a heart attack.⁵ These three unrelated events can be seen as instigating, in different ways, Sylvester's extraordinarily productive final decade, during which he completed a number of projects which had been started long before, while also taking on new projects (it was for this reason that Forge's magisterial review of *About Modern Art* was titled 'In the Shadow

² Timothy Hyman, 'Ursa Major', *London Magazine*, December-January 1997, pp.95-97 (p.96).

³ Conversations with Julia Peyton-Jones (4 January 2016) and Serota (2 February 2016).

⁴ Hyman, 'Ursa Major', p.96.

⁵ Letter from Sylvester to Elisa Breton, 6 December 1991, TGA 200816/2/1/149.

of Thanatos', Thanatos being the personification of death in Greek mythology). The completion of the Magritte project gave him more time to work on other projects, while Bacon's death liberated Sylvester to write about and curate exhibitions of his work. The heart attack, meanwhile, was a reminder of Sylvester's mortality. Serota, who visited Sylvester in hospital while he recovered, remembers urging him to complete the numerous unfinished projects he had been working on: his Giacometti monograph, the books of interviews, and the republication of his earlier writings, which had languished for so long.⁶ It is a testament to Sylvester's work ethic that he managed to complete so many of these long-term projects while also writing catalogue prefaces and reviews, and curating regularly. In addition to the books he published in the 1990s, he wrote more new texts in his last ten years than in the twenty-five prior to that, in a conclusion to his career which Serota described as 'glorious, like a firework display'.⁷

The art world had changed immensely since the 1960s, when Sylvester was last writing regularly, not least because of the rise to prominence of 'yBas' ('young British artists') such as Hirst and Whiteread. First announcing themselves through the important exhibition 'freeze' (1988), the yBas used their entrepreneurial nous to bypass traditional art-world hierarchies and to establish themselves without gallery representation. The impact of these artists was not dissimilar to the pop artists Sylvester had written about in the 1960s, and Sylvester even planned an exhibition with his friend Charles Saatchi, to be called 'British Painting in the 60s and the 90s', which was intended to show 'how artists from the 90s are influenced and interested in

⁶ Conversation with Serota, 2 February 2016.

⁷ Ibid.

artists from the 60s'.⁸ Glossy new magazines such as *frieze* (founded 1991) emerged to document the new art, although it was the more conservative *Modern Painters* that Sylvester wrote for most regularly. Launched by Peter Fuller in 1987 (although Sylvester never wrote for the magazine during Fuller's lifetime)⁹ *Modern Painters* provided an outlet for Sylvester to write about figurative painters such as Kossoff and Euan Uglow, while the magazine's literary pretensions (it regularly published essays by novelists and poets in addition to art critics) made it a natural environment for Sylvester's writing.¹⁰ He rarely wrote about the developments in contemporary art which these other magazines prioritised, which accounts for his absence from Louisa Buck's 1997 handbook *Moving Targets: A User's Guide to British Art Now*, in which she profiled prominent critics including Richard Cork (*The Times*), Adrian Searle (*Guardian*), and writers for specialist art publications such as Stuart Morgan and Mel Gooding. Buck's decision to overlook Sylvester suggested that he was less influential as a critic than previously, although his presence on a list of 'the 50 most powerful people in the art world' published in New York's *Art News* in the same year highlighted both his writing and curating as evidence of his stature.¹¹

⁸ Carl Freedman, 'About David Sylvester', *frieze*, September-October 1996, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/about_david_sylvester/ [accessed 1 August 2016] (para.38 of 61).

⁹ Fuller twice asked Sylvester to contribute to *Modern Painters* in 1988, but Sylvester declined on account of his Magritte workload. Correspondence between Sylvester and Fuller, 1988, TGA 200816/2/1/387 and TGA 200816/2/1/783.

¹⁰ David Sylvester, 'Euan Uglow at Sixty-Five', *Modern Painters*, Summer 1997, pp.16-9; David Sylvester, 'Afterthoughts on Kossoff in Venice', *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1995, pp.44-5. Other older British artists Sylvester wrote about in the 1990s included Hamilton, Heron, Turnbull, Anthony Hill (Achill Redo) and Morley.

¹¹ Conversation with Serota, 2 February 2016. See *Art News*, January 1997, p.96. The entry for Sylvester incorrectly claimed that he curated the 1996-7 Giacometti exhibition at the Royal Academy (in fact, he hated the show).

Sylvester's writing at this time was compared by younger critics with the writing which appeared in *Horizon* and *Encounter*, or was broadcast on the BBC Third Programme.¹² His style was very different to the irreverence of writers such as Searle, Morgan and Matthew Collings during this period. Nonetheless Sylvester was highly regarded by Collings, who in his survey of 1990s British art *Blimey!* (1997) described Sylvester as 'the best art writer of all'.¹³ Sylvester in turn reviewed *Blimey!* enthusiastically, admiring its refusal to reduce art to simple categories and clear messages, and following a quotation from the book by claiming 'in its laconic way this has the moral weight of great criticism'.¹⁴ The comment is one of Sylvester's most revealing observations about what he valued in criticism: an engagement with the difficulty of remaining precise and clear when writing about complex subjects rather than simplifying. He felt that criticism acquired 'moral weight' not from asserting a political standpoint, for instance, but by rendering the writer's subjectivity in negotiating the subject in its complexity.

Another significant figure in the yBa group, gallerist Carl Freedman interviewed Sylvester for *frieze* in 1996. In the interview Sylvester and Freedman say little about the yBas, but they discuss 'the Englishness of English art' in a way which points out how Sylvester's concern with the subject corresponded to a similar concern with national character amongst 'yBas' such

¹² Tim Hilton ('A Critic Saves his Bacon') saw *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* as having 'the flavour of the Third Programme' while Tom Lubbock ('Portrait of a Pained Artist') wrote of the same book 'this is mid-century London Bohemia talking, Cyril Connolly-land'.

¹³ Collings' respect for earlier critics such as Stokes and Greenberg amidst the acerbic commentary on recent art writing in his dialogue with Matthew Arnatt, *Criticism* (London: Rachmaninoff's, 2004).

¹⁴ Matthew Collings, *Blimey! From Bohemia to Britpop: The London Art World from Francis Bacon to Damien Hirst* (London: 21, 1997), 188; Sylvester, 'Fashion and the Individual Talent', *Independent on Sunday Review*, 18 May 1997, p.28. Collings also presented a BBC tribute to Sylvester soon after his death.

as Hirst.¹⁵ A case was also made for Sylvester's significance by another younger critic, Martin Gayford, who co-edited *The Penguin Book of Art Writing* with his wife and editor of *Modern Painters*, Karen Wright.¹⁶ This book included nine contributions from Sylvester. Robert Storr, in a review of the American edition of the book which took exception at its bias towards English writers, described Sylvester as 'the grand old man of English criticism and the authority figure around whom pivots this strange dance of old-school studio artists and new-media practitioners'.¹⁷

Without a regular newspaper position, Sylvester had no position which required him to visit exhibitions of contemporary art as a matter of course. Asked about recent art by Freedman, Sylvester replied 'I've been so involved and working so hard lately on specialised subjects - de Kooning, Bacon, Giacometti, Cézanne, Mondrian - that I've not had time to keep up with the exhibitions and I therefore know very few contemporary artists' work'.¹⁸ New artists were however brought to his attention by friends such as Cooke, Saatchi, and the art galleries dealing in contemporary art (above all the Anthony d'Offay Gallery and Gagosian Gallery) he had begun to work with.¹⁹ In 1993 he was on the Turner Prize jury, and the prize was won by Whiteread, who Sylvester later interviewed, while in 1992 he took part in the 'Is Painting Dead?' debate as part of the 1992 Turner Prize coverage, made infamous by

¹⁵ Freedman, 'About David Sylvester'.

¹⁶ *The Penguin Book of Art Writing*, ed. by Martin Gayford and Karen Wright (London: Viking, 1998).

¹⁷ Robert Storr, 'British Evasion', *Artforum*, January 2001, pp.19-21. Sylvester, for his part, responded to Storr, noting that he had suggested to the editors many American writers who did not appear in the book, including Meyer Schapiro, Thomas Hess, Robert Rosenblum, Kirk Varnedoe, Richard Shiff and Max Kozloff. Sylvester, 'Brit Fit', *Artforum*, March 2001, 20.

¹⁸ Freedman, 'About David Sylvester' (para. 36 of 62).

¹⁹ Cooke stated that artists who she drew to Sylvester's attention included Rachel Whiteread and Douglas Gordon (conversation with Cooke, 21 January 2015).

Tracey Emin's drunken appearance.²⁰ Sylvester was also enthusiastic about Hirst's work, although he cancelled an arranged interview with the artist after seeing his film *Hanging Around* (1996), stating that he was 'appalled by its mediocrity, banality, self-indulgence and lack of self-criticism'.²¹

Other younger artists who Sylvester admired included Koons, Saville and Douglas Gordon, whose work evidently relates to subjects Sylvester had earlier advocated, whether pop art (Koons), 'School of London'-type figuration (Saville) or cinema (Gordon, whose interview with Sylvester was about cinema generally rather than his own work). Interestingly, Sylvester passionately defended Marcus Harvey's controversial *Myra* (1995) when it was threatened with removal from the 'Sensation' exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1997, describing it as 'a terrific work of art, powerful, serious and beautiful' and claiming 'it is a work that has the same sort of presence as Goya's painting of Satan devouring his children'.²²

His relationships with young artists seem mostly to have been respectful and even deferential on the part of the artists flattered to have attracted the attention of the illustrious critic. In one instance, however, Sylvester's viewpoint differed conspicuously from an artist of the next generation, Richard

²⁰ Notes in the archive show that of the artists on the original shortlist, Sylvester's preferences were for Whiteread, Collins, and the older Sean Scully and Alan Charlton. Scully was Sylvester's initial favourite, and Sylvester wrote to Serota (the chair of the jury) 'I received a book yesterday, Sean Scully: the Catherine Paintings, catalogue of a current exhibition at Fort Worth, which seems to me to make his claim to this year's Turner Prize (he's approaching 50) virtually irresistible. The work has such authority'. Letter from Sylvester to Serota, n.d., TGA 200816/3/19. Also in the archive is a letter from Scully stating 'Nick [Serota] told me that your efforts on my behalf in relation to the Turner Prize were persistent, passionate and eloquent'. Letter from Scully to Sylvester, 29 November 1993, TGA 200816/2/1/1008.

²¹ Fax from Sylvester to Edward Booth-Clibborn, 6 May 1996, reproduced in redacted form with accompanying comments in Damien Hirst, *I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, with Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now* (London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 1997, pp.154-5. Sylvester's comments were also quoted in Calvin Tomkins, 'After Shock', *New Yorker*, 20 September 1999, pp.84-93.

²² Letter from Sylvester to Sir Philip Dowson, 23 August 1997, TGA 200816/2/1/971.

Long. Long was so unhappy with a catalogue text that Sylvester wrote for his 1994 São Paulo Bienal exhibition that he rejected it.²³ In his response to the text, Long claimed that Sylvester failed to understand his work: 'It's well written, sharp, as you would expect but deep down he doesn't "get it"... (the time dimension, the walking, the different ideas, the point of view) the space-of-the-world...etc. So- it's a D.S. piece, a bit old fashioned & academic'.²⁴

7.2 Living with Art

If, as Hyman suggested, Sylvester did come to be regarded as an 'Art Eminence', whose influence, and reputation were perhaps dubious to a generation too young to have read his writing of the 1950s and 1960s, one reason for this mistrust may have been the strength of his connections to dealers and collectors, not to mention his own significant art collection (which made £2,742,358 when auctioned at Sotheby's after Sylvester's death).²⁵ Sylvester earned a commission from works sold through private galleries and regularly undertook consultancy work for galleries.²⁶ He also seemingly tried to

²³ Sylvester published it in the *London Review of Books* instead. David Sylvester, 'David Sylvester wrote this preface to the catalogue of the Richard Long exhibition at the Sao Paulo Bienal: Richard Long asked that it be left out', *London Review of Books*, 20 October 1994, p.30.

²⁴ Fax from Long to Rose, forwarded to Sylvester 4 July 1994, TGA 200816/4/2/67. Sylvester later said of Long 'wants to be an internationally successful artist with a large and efficient promotional machine [...] and at the same time he'd like to be considered an indigent student tramping the countryside because nobody will give him a job' (Freedman (para 20 of 62)). Long in turn said Sylvester 'was a great writer on art [...] but he just didn't get my work. It was a classic case of an urban intellectual who didn't have a clue of what it was like to walk in the Andes or getting wet in thunderous rain on a Scottish hillside.' Long quoted in Nicholas Wroe, 'No Stone Unturned', *Guardian*, 28 June 2003, Review section, pp.20-3 (p.23).

²⁵ *David Sylvester: The Private Collection*, Sotheby's, 26 February 2002.

²⁶ Sylvester received 7% of the profit Marlborough Gallery made on sales of Bomberg's work during the 1960s (letter from Sylvester to Harry Fischer, 24 November 1972, TGA 200816/4/2/18); he received almost \$5000 for assisting in the acquisition of Moore's *Large Spindle Piece* (1968) by the City of Houston Civic Art Collection in 1979-80 (TGA 200816/1/1/4); and received \$87,000 in commissions from a Gorky exhibition at Gagosian in 1998-9 (TGA 200816/1/1/20).

convince Auerbach to leave Marlborough for Gagosian.²⁷ Meanwhile, at a time when he was on the board of MNAM as well as friends with dealers such as Anthony d'Offay, had to be careful to avoid conflict-of-interest situations.²⁸

A 2002 National Arts Journalism Program survey of art critics writing for newspapers in the US, which included a section on 'The Ethics of Art Criticism', showed the majority of respondents felt that receiving artworks in exchange for writing, and working as a consultant for a private gallery were unacceptable. While this was a survey of a different type of critic in a different country to Sylvester, the extent to which the survey has been quoted worldwide shows that it was seen as demonstrating the state of the profession more broadly.

In memoirs recently published for the first time, Robert Hughes (who despite his luxurious lifestyle as art critic for *Time* in the 1970s was extremely critical of critics who accumulated artworks), claimed that Sylvester required artists he wrote about to give him artworks in return: 'He would demand gifts from an artist whose work he was about to honor with a review—according to Lucian Freud, who knew Sylvester for decades, the expected rate was usually two pieces, which could be small as long as they were choice, for one article'.²⁹

²⁷ Auerbach wrote to Sylvester: 'I am not stimulated by the idea of an exhibition, or by the idea that my work be handled by a hot-shot dealer [...] so no to Gagosian'. Auerbach to Sylvester, 26 October 1999, TGA 200816/4/2/6. This letter is dated to the day before the opening of Gagosian's Gorky exhibition, which Sylvester was involved with. Marlborough had a reputation for poaching artists from smaller galleries and breaking conventions of propriety in their early days: Sylvester recalled in drafts for his autobiography how he was reluctant to introduce Henry Moore to Frank Lloyd and Harry Fischer of the Marlborough Gallery in the 1950s because they were 'widely considered among the art establishment to be interlopers and cowboys' (TGA 200816/5/1/11).

²⁸ TGA 200816/2/1/35. As so often, the letters in the archive only tell part of the complicated relationship between d'Offay and Sylvester.

²⁹ Robert Hughes, *The Spectacle of Skill: Selected Writings of Robert Hughes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), p.536. Freud gave Sylvester his portrait of Gerald Wilde before Sylvester was 'sadly obliged to sell it in the 1950s' (letter from Sylvester to Richard Calvocoressi, 31 March 1997). William Feaver (who also referred to Freud

Evidence of this expectation can be found in a letter from Sylvester to d'Offay which shows he had expected to receive an artwork from Richard Hamilton (in addition to his fee) after writing an essay for his Anthony d'Offay Gallery exhibition in 1991 and was disappointed when the artist didn't give him one.³⁰

Hughes also claimed that Sylvester became 'to all intents a private art dealer. He dealt in antiquities, in Oriental rugs, in modernist drawings; he was a purveyor of semi-masterpieces to the rich and fastidious'.³¹ Sylvester certainly sold many artworks (including major works by Bacon, Giacometti, Auerbach and Morris) to finance new investments or, in the case of Bacon's *Sleeping Figure* (1974) to buy a new house, as shown by financial records in his archive.³²

Sylvester had written for commercial galleries such as the Hanover Gallery throughout his career, as the extensive list of his catalogue texts in the bibliography to this thesis demonstrates. Towards the end of Sylvester's career, these sometimes seemed to take a provocative stance when considered in terms of divergent opinions in the art world at this time. After the rise of artists such as Julian Schnabel and Jeff Koons in the 1980s in a climate which critics such as Hughes found so abhorrent, in the 1990s the belletristic writings of critics such as Hickey and Schjeldahl were heralded in

remarking on what he called a 'Sylv tax') believes the artist gave the portrait of Wilde to Sylvester around the time Sylvester edited Freud's 'Thoughts on Painting' (1954). Email from Feaver, 22 May 2015.

³⁰ Letter from Sylvester to d'Offay, 15 April 1994, TGA 200816/2/1/35.

³¹ Hughes, *The Spectacle of Skill*, p.536.

³² See for example Giacometti's *Standing Woman*, c.1952 (sold for £17,000 at Sothebys on 15 April 1970, lot 93); Morris's *Felt Piece*, 1968 (sold to the Menil Collection for \$7,500 on 9 August 1971); Auerbach's *Bruton Street Building Site*, 1953 (sold to James Kirkman for £900 on 9 April 1974); and Bacon's *Sleeping Figure*, 1974 (sold for £314,584 on 17 January 1985). TGA 200816/1/1/2 (Morris and Auerbach); TGA 200816/1/1/9 (Bacon). Sylvester's archive only documents transactions from around 1970 onwards, so many earlier acquisitions and sales are not covered, such as his sale of Bacon's *Study for a Portrait* (1953) to Hanover Gallery in 1955 (for which see Harrison, *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné*, vol 2, p.312.

some quarters as a 'return to beauty' reasserting the primacy of aesthetic experience over socio-political concerns. The parallels with the Berger-Sylvester rivalry of the 1950s were obvious. J.J. Charlesworth, writing in opposition to the revival of aesthetic criticism, saw it as a diminishing of the critic's role, complicit rather than critical:

[...] The slip of terminology from art criticism to mere art writing in recent years is symptomatic of a growing indifference to writing's polemic and contestative potential [...] [art writing] is of course synonymous with the commercial art writer's self-limiting professional horizons; in a market driven by fashion rather than open inquiry and debate, the art writer is a dandified copywriter whose job is to produce, as [Suzanne Perling] Hudson puts it, "beautiful writing about beautiful objects and their beautiful makers," their value already determined by others.³³

It is easy to see in some of Sylvester writings from the 1990s why he might fall into Charlesworth and Hudson's category of 'beautiful writing about beautiful objects and their beautiful makers'. One such text was his two-paragraph text on Georg Baselitz, written for the catalogue of the 2000 exhibition of his work at Gagosian. Sylvester states 'his work seems free of any theoretical or polemical foundation or justification. It is a delight and wonder to behold; it is not a notable stimulus for verbal investigation'.³⁴ It is evident from Sylvester's archive that he had wanted to write about Baselitz for many years and no doubt took great care over the text, but it remains exactly what Charlesworth and Hudson were to criticise: an eloquent text for a blue-

³³ Charlesworth, 'The Dysfunction of Art Criticism' in *Critical Mess: Art Critics on the State of their Practice*, ed. by Raphael Rubinstein (Lenox, MA: Hard Press, 2006), pp.75-81 (first publ. in *Art Monthly*, September 2003, pp.1-4), p.78. Charlesworth refers to Suzanne Perling Hudson, 'Beauty and the Status of Contemporary Art Criticism', *October* 104, Spring 2003, pp.115-130. Elsewhere in his article Charlesworth also notes a similar resistance to belletrist writing (particularly that of Hickey) in George Baker and others, 'Round Table: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism', *October* 100, Spring 2002, pp.200-28.

³⁴ Sylvester, 'Paintings in Carvings', *Georg Baselitz: Outside*, p.13.

chip gallery suggesting that critical analysis can only falter faced with Baselitz's art.³⁵

All of this makes it easy to see why younger writers would be suspicious of, and feel they had little in common with Sylvester, 'the grand old man of English criticism'.³⁶ This was summed up by one critic describing Sylvester as 'the most plutocratic arbiter of taste since Bernard Berenson'.³⁷

This information is of interest in itself, as it invites closer consideration of art criticism as a profession and how it is financed. Hughes' memoirs are very much concerned with this, and not just in the case of Sylvester but also in the case of Greenberg, Barbara Rose and Henry Geldzahler, Hughes is extremely critical about them working in a similar way. Hughes wrote, contentiously, that for Greenberg 'the real living was to be made in art dealing, whether in an open or a disguised form'.³⁸ Certainly there is much more work to be done on the relationship between (particularly freelance) critics and the market, particularly as the archives of critics such as Sylvester become available and permit study of how they sustained a career, although in

³⁵ Sylvester's position on the primacy of the aesthetic is reminiscent of Fried's in his exchange about Modernism with T.J. Clark. Fried, who avowed 'some convictions are part of one's identity' comes off worse in the exchange, in part because the limits of discussing aesthetic experience make him seem evasive and vague compared with Clark. See Fried, 'How Modernism Works: A Response to T.J. Clark' and Clark, 'Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried' in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. by Francis Francina (London: Harper & Row, 1985), pp.65-88.

³⁶ Robert Storr, 'British Evasion', *Artforum*, January 2001, pp.19-21 (p.21).

³⁷ National Arts Journalism Program, *The Visual Art Critic: A Survey of Critics at General-Interest News Publications in America* (New York: Columbia University, 2002), p.55; David Cohen, 'The Golden Lion of English Artwriting: David Sylvester 1924-2001', *artcritical.com*, 8 July 2001, <http://www.artcritical.com/sylvester.htm> [accessed 1 August 2016] (para. 10 of 12).

³⁸ Hughes, *The Spectacle of Skill*, p.533. Caroline Jones, on the other hand, claims that Greenberg made little money in this way and that given the low payment for writing about art he mostly lived off of his businessman father. Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, p.4.

this thesis my point is a more specific one about how Sylvester's status as an art-world 'insider' relates to his criticism and the importance of art in his life.

Sylvester's relationships with gallerists in later years were the result of his lifelong respect for gallerists as a profession which was in contrast to many critics emerging since the 1980s. Sylvester greatly admired, and owed much to dealers such as Kahnweiler (whose example as both a dealer and writer made Sylvester consider taking up the trade himself in the 1950s) and Leo Castelli (who he described as 'a father to me in New York in the 1960s').³⁹ He thought more highly of dealers than museum curators in general and exclaimed of the two major London dealers of the 1960s, Paul Kasmin and Robert Fraser 'if only we'd had more people of their calibre in the public sector!'⁴⁰ Sylvester grew up during a time when CEMA and subsequently the fledgling Arts Council organised few notable exhibitions in London, and when artists such as Bacon and Freud owed more to commercial galleries and patrons such as Peter Watson than state sponsorship.⁴¹ The opening of the Hanover Gallery for instance was a significant development in promoting not only innovative British art but also using Brausen's continental contacts to exhibit work from European artists such as Giacometti. Sylvester was always keen to emphasise that becoming a successful dealer was not only a matter of making money but also resourcefulness, innovation and care for artists: reviewing a book on the rise of the modern art market in 1992 he wrote that

³⁹ Tusa, *On Creativity*, p.255 (Kahnweiler); Letter from Sylvester to Kirk Varnedoe, 28 August 1999, TGA 200816/2/1/812 (Castelli).

⁴⁰ Ibid.; David Sylvester, 'Someone You Had to Be a Bit Careful With', *London Review of Books*, 30 March 2000, pp.18-20 (p.18).

⁴¹ Shortly after Bacon's death, Sylvester (along with Stephen Spender and Robert and Lisa Sainsbury) wrote a letter pointing out how Brausen's role in Bacon's career was insufficiently acknowledged in obituaries of the artist. David Sylvester and others, 'Bacon's First Dealer' [letter to editor], *Independent*, 25 May 1992, p.16. Ironically Sylvester himself frequently sold Bacon's paintings on to other galleries (particularly Beaux Arts) to circumvent his agreement with her.

'artists need love and loyalty from their dealers almost as much as money, sometimes more'.⁴²

Sylvester was asked about the way his writing could be seen as directly linked to making money for dealers by John Tusa, to which Sylvester's response was effectively that given the 'derisory' pay for art critics generally he was entitled to undertake jobs which paid more adequately.⁴³ Sylvester received many times more by writing for dealers such as d'Offay than by writing for periodicals or journals, although this is not to say he never felt ill-treated by dealers. At one point, comparing writing for the Anthony d'Offay Gallery and periodicals such as the *London Review of Books*, Sylvester wrote:

I think I feel more comfortable when working for their two or three hundred pounds than I do when working for your two or three thousand. When working for them there is no pressure to be a mouthpiece. Furthermore, they pay me as much as they can afford to pay rather than as little as they think they can get away with.⁴⁴

Whatever misgivings he had about the way writers were treated, Sylvester produced some of his most interesting writing in his late catalogue essays. One of the best examples of this is his work on an Anthony d'Offay Gallery group show including work by Beuys, Cage, Johns, Newman and Twombly, accompanied by extracts from the writings of fourth-century BC Chinese philosopher Zhuang Zhou (Chuang Tzu). Sylvester's introduction to the catalogue 'On Letting Alone' is the clearest exposition of an idea running throughout his later writing which makes clear that he, like Shiff, understood

⁴² David Sylvester, 'In Need of Love and Loyalty as Much as Lolly', *Weekend Telegraph*, 14 November 1992, xxiii. Sylvester gave the example of Henry Moore leaving the Leicester Galleries for Marlborough, not for financial reasons but because Marlborough would exhibit his work better. Moore's last exhibition at the Leicester Galleries was in 1955 and his first at Marlborough Fine Art was in 1958. Berthoud, p.324.

⁴³ Tusa, *On Creativity*, p.255.

⁴⁴ Letter from Sylvester to d'Offay, 15 April 1994. TGA 200816/2/1/35.

the 'modernist twentieth century' as 'an age of theories of indeterminacy'.⁴⁵ He had a conviction, explained in his introduction, that 'most of the best art of our time and much of the best art of other times depends on knowing when and where to leave alone'.⁴⁶ Sylvester explains that while he marvelled at Zhuang Zhou's writings when he first read them as a teenager, he was 'disconcerted by the feeling that their doctrines of inaction seemed to devalue and discourage artistic creation'. This dilemma was solved by reconciling them with Wittgenstein's distinction between saying and showing ('art is, of course, about showing as against saying').

Looking back through Sylvester's career and his criticism of expressionism and social realism for being too centred on a conveying a specific message, we can see that for him such works equated with saying rather than showing. Much of the art he admired, on the other hand, either incorporated chance and indeterminacy, or had the 'neutral and matter-of-fact' quality he admired in abstract expressionism⁴⁷. This can even be seen in his writings on Warhol and Serra (not often discussed in relation to Taoism).⁴⁸ Sylvester also found this tendency in the other artists in the exhibition (Beuys, Newman, Twombly and Klein) while it can also be found in other artists he admired such as John Cage. In fact, in his 1966 film on Bonnard, made shortly before his interview with Cage, Sylvester said of the artist that 'his deepest

⁴⁵ Shiff, *Doubt*, p.131. This also connects to Sylvester's fascination with gambling (Chapter 1). Sylvester wrote of how gambling was about 'acceptance of rough and smooth [...] not fighting your luck' (TGA 200816/4/4/76).

⁴⁶ Sylvester, 'On Letting Alone', p.5.

⁴⁷ Sylvester, 'Curriculum Vitae', p.20.

⁴⁸ See Sylvester's description of Warhol as 'a sort of Taoist' (Sylvester, 'The Artist Who Showed Us What Is') and his reference to Serra's 'commitment to non-intervention' (Sylvester, 'Serra' in *About Modern Art*, pp.523-35 (p.531)).

motive could have been an unwillingness to freeze the flow of life. He was a man whose instinct was to accept life as it happened, not to interfere'.⁴⁹

Hughes portrayed Sylvester's acquisition of works in a bad light, and emphasised his own distance from collectors and dealers.⁵⁰ However, Hughes' contempt for collectors as 'status-obsessed bores and fashion victims' is very different from the respect that Sylvester had for certain collectors.⁵¹ He interviewed Daniel Filipacchi for the catalogue of an exhibition of his works from his collection, and wrote about Johns for an auction catalogue of works from Victor and Sally Ganz. Working on Magritte for the Menil foundation also saw a respectful relationship develop in which Sylvester advised the Menils (who already owned an important collection of works by Magritte) on future purchases, and actively negotiated the acquisition of Magritttes such as *The Eternally Obvious* for them.⁵² Particularly interesting was Sylvester's response to the 1994 Royal Academy of Arts exhibition of works from the collection of George Ortiz, which Sylvester greatly admired.⁵³ In response to the exhibition,

⁴⁹ 'Canvas' programme on Bonnard's *Nude in the Bath* (1935), broadcast on BBC2 on 2 October 1966, shooting script in TGA 200816/5/6/1/2.

⁵⁰ Hughes, pp.533-4.

⁵¹ Hughes, p.534.

⁵² Theresa Papanikolas, 'A Deliberate Accident: Magritte in the Collection of John and Dominique de Menil' in Richard Armstrong and others, *Magritte and Contemporary Art: The Treachery of Images* (Ghent and Los Angeles: Ludion and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2006), pp. 87-93 (pp.92-3). The Menils had initially acquired most of their Magritttes through the artist's dealer Alexander Iolas, which unsurprisingly tended to be later works. Sylvester advised Dominique de Menil to sell some of these to reinvest in earlier works (conversation with Sarah Whitfield, July 2015).

All English translations of titles of artworks used in this thesis are those used by Sylvester in his writings, even when they are different to the translations used by the owners of the work.

⁵³ 'In Pursuit of the Absolute. Art of the Ancient World from the George Ortiz Collection', Royal Academy of Arts, 20 January – 6 April 1994. Sylvester may well have met Ortiz, since they both acquired many objects purchased from the London dealer John Hewett. For Hewett's role in introducing Ortiz to African art see Anon., 'George Ortiz' [obituary], *Telegraph*, 21 October 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/art-obituaries/10394952/George-Ortiz.html> [accessed 1 August 2016]. Fifteen lots in Sylvester's Sotheby's sale were acquired from Hewett, who was also the dedicatee of *Looking at Giacometti*.

the *Guardian* published two opposing viewpoints on the ethics of collecting antiquities. Lord Renfrew argued that the trade in antiquities encouraged looting and the isolation of objects from their original context ('most of the works in the show are suspect pieces, acknowledged in the catalogue as being of uncertain provenance'). Meanwhile Sylvester argued for aesthetic experience rather than knowledge, and the right of individuals (such as himself) to acquire antiquities, thus recapitulating the experience versus interpretation theme to privilege private contemplation rather than public knowledge production.⁵⁴

Sylvester saw these collectors as doing something similar to what he did with his own collection: practicing a form of criticism which is based on living with artworks and intimate knowledge of them. When Geldzahler (another target of Hughes' anger against the art market) was asked about 'critical distance', he answered: 'if you don't live with it, if it isn't something that you carry with you at all times, if you don't want to get closer and closer to it, to feel its heart's blood, and to feel its nerve endings, then you're really not involved with art. I believe that you're window shopping'.⁵⁵ In this respect Sylvester shared the common impulse to acquire art not simply as investment but as a way of finding out about it.⁵⁶ There are similar examples in Sylvester's work, where his writing developed from works in his possession. When the Louisiana Museum asked to lend Sylvester's Giacometti sculpture *Standing Woman* in 1965 for instance, Sylvester refused because 'I am right in

⁵⁴ Colin Renfrew, 'Justifying an interest in the past', *Guardian*, 26 January 1994, p.A4; David Sylvester, 'A Fruitful Loss of Virginity', *Guardian*, 26 January 1994, p.A5.

⁵⁵ Henry Geldzahler, *Making It New: Essays, Interviews and Talks* (New York: Turtle Point Press, 1994), p.7.

⁵⁶ Alan Bowness, whose collection of works by 'Middle Generation' artists such as Heron and Lanyon was recently exhibited in Cambridge, said this was his reason for starting to buy art in a video accompanying the exhibition.

the middle of a re-write of several portions of my book [...] and I do hate writing without being able to make reference to the work itself. I therefore badly need to have that bronze by me'.⁵⁷ Equally, it was only after living with a Barnett Newman lithograph for twenty years that Sylvester was able to write the exquisite short piece about the work for *Artforum* which shows how living with an artwork can result in new insights over an extended period of time.⁵⁸ Anne Crosby, describing Sylvester's Wandsworth residence in the early 1970s, wrote of the disproportionate space occupied by his art collection:

David, his wife Pamela, and three large daughters live in a confined ground floor flat in Wandsworth [sic]. It contains one spacious room in which David displays precious objects [...] The next largest room is the marital bedroom, which serves as a sitting room, homework room, and a room in which to watch television. Adult meals are eaten from one's knees while one is seated on a huge double bed [...] The remaining room belongs to the children [...] Certainly David needs to buy a house for his family'.⁵⁹

This was the sacrifice Sylvester and his family made for living with art.

7.3 About Modern Art

The publication of Sylvester's collected essays *About Modern Art* in 1996 was the result of Sylvester going over his huge oeuvre of past writings (see bibliography) and making a selection of what he considered the best of his work. It gave readers unfamiliar with his work as a whole the opportunity to encounter his criticism in a way that brought together writing from across his career and undoubtedly made his achievement more conspicuous.⁶⁰ *About*

⁵⁷ Sylvester to Knud Jensen, 16 August 1965, TGA 200816/2/1/692.

⁵⁸ Sylvester, 'Barnett Newman: *Untitled*, 1961', *Artforum*, November 1994, p.62.

⁵⁹ Anne Crosby, *Matthew: a Memoir*, pp.112-3.

⁶⁰ Jed Perl, writing recently about collections of critics' essays, laments that a writer such as Hess or Rosenberg (many of whose collections are out of print) 'has not been granted the selected or collected criticism that would make his achievement graspable as a totality'. Perl, ed., *Art in America*, xxvi.

Modern Art facilitated comparisons between Sylvester and critics such as Greenberg and Fried (whose *Art and Objecthood* appeared two years later). In the 1950s Sylvester had counselled his fellow critic Alan Bowness about 'writing for posterity, not for tomorrow's newspaper', and it was *About Modern Art* which finally allowed him to reap the benefits of this policy.⁶¹ He had been planning to assemble books from his published writings ever since the 1950s but had never managed to do so.⁶² Stephen Spender in 1986 had suggested that someone should publish 'the Collected Writings of David Sylvester [...] in two volumes? (or 3 or 4)?'⁶³

Even so, a relatively small amount of Sylvester's writing has been reprinted in comparison with more extensive publications of art critics' writings, of which John O'Brian's edition of Greenberg's writing is perhaps the most well-known.⁶⁴ In a recent anthology of writing on American art, Jed Perl wrote that 'art writing is always a literary mongrel' before suggesting that 'the publication from 1986 to 1993 of Greenberg's *Collected Essays and Criticism* in four volumes may be regarded as American writing's coming of age, the mongrel now pedigreed'.⁶⁵ If we jettison the American emphasis, it is evident that this attention to presenting Greenberg's work in full was a validation of the critic as an object of study comparable to writers in other disciplines.

⁶¹ Conversation with Sir Alan Bowness, 17 February 2016.

⁶² Sylvester claimed he started planning *About Modern Art* in 1960 (*About Modern Art*, 14) although correspondence in Sylvester's archive shows that he was in discussion with Faber about a book of his essays on English art even before that (letters from Charles Monteith to Sylvester, January-June 1958, TGA 200816/2/1/126). In 1960 he was in discussion with Faber about a book to be called *After Cubism*, seemingly also to consist of previously published essays (letter from Monteith to Sylvester, 7 July 1960, TGA 200816/2/1/126).

⁶³ Letter from Spender to Sylvester, 1 August 1986, TGA 200816/2/1/1055.

⁶⁴ Other comparable projects include Werner Spies, *The Eye and the World: Collected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. by Paul Aston and others, 10 vols. (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2010) and Richard Cork, *Collected Essays of Richard Cork*, 4 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁶⁵ Perl, *Art in America*, p.xxvi.

About Modern Art was one of a number of books published in the 1990s collecting writings from newspapers and magazines by art critics, which as Daniel Siedell has noted, often included autobiographical essays forming a 'sub-genre' of writings about art:⁶⁶

The received wisdom about art critics is that they interpret artworks, they, in other words, "serve" the works they experience. But the most successful art critics have devoted as much time writing about art criticism as they have actually doing it. In fact, such writing might productively be categorized as a "sub-genre" of art criticism. Critics as diverse as Kozloff, Donald Kuspit, David Sylvester, Arthur Danto, and Benjamin Buchloh have all recently published collections of their criticism with lengthy and provocative introductions that position their own criticism within certain ideals of what art criticism should be.⁶⁷

No applied methodology is outlined in Sylvester's prefatory essay 'Curriculum Vitae', only Sylvester's personal preferences as revealed by his experience: as an introduction to his work it is like his criticism: descriptive rather than theoretical. What does become clear in 'Curriculum Vitae' and Sylvester's other writings is that thinking about an artist's work over a period of time, Sylvester comes to understand the artist's works as an expression of their personality and temperament rather than simply objects to contemplate. This accounts, for instance, for the drama he found in the artist-model relationship (see his writing on Matisse and Giacometti) and his wondering if the difficulty he found in writing about Beuys and Baselitz was down to not speaking

⁶⁶ A list from the early 1990s would include examples such as Arthur C. Danto, *Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Historical Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990); Peter Schjeldahl, *The Hydrogen Jukebox: Selected Writings of Peter Schjeldahl 1978-1990*, ed. by MaLin Wilson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Christopher Knight, *Last Chance for Eden: Selected Art Criticism by Christopher Knight, 1979-1994*, ed. by MaLin Wilson (Los Angeles: Art issues. Press, 1995); Stuart Morgan, *What the Butler Saw: Selected Writings by Stuart Morgan*, ed. by Ian Hunt (London: Durian Publications, 1996); and Andrew Graham-Dixon, *Paper Museum* (London: HarperCollins, 1996)

⁶⁷ Daniel Siedell, 'Contemporary Art Criticism and the Legacy of Clement Greenberg: Or, How Artwriting Earned Its Good Name' in *Journal of Aesthetic Education* vo.36, no.4 (Winter 2002), pp.15-31 (p.27). Earlier examples would include Fry's 'Retrospect' in *Vision and Design*.

German ('I do think it's difficult to have insight into artists whose verbal language one does not understand').⁶⁸ It also explains why *pace* Siedell, Sylvester says very little about 'certain ideals of what art criticism should be'. If anything he is more interested in making a point about what art, or an artist should be, hence the conclusion of 'Curriculum Vitae' with its explanation of why Sylvester arrived at the conclusion that Picasso was the greater artist than Giacometti.

By 1996, the year the book was published, Sylvester had almost five hundred texts on art to choose from (not including his many radio broadcasts, some of which were published in the book). In 1990 he had written to the collector Robert Meyerhoff: 'I'm trying to put together a book of essays, but am troubled by the problem of structure. It does become awfully difficult when the material is spread over forty years. It's a pity I didn't produce a first collection 20 years ago.'⁶⁹ Like his interview books (which again were not comprehensive but selective) Sylvester generally selected what he felt to be his best writings and omitted his more critical writings (hence the exclusion of 'The Kitchen Sink', 'the noisiest shot I fired in the campaign against the Berger line').⁷⁰ For James Hyman this was Sylvester's conscious attempt to distance himself from his early years as a critic and present himself in a more respectable guise:

⁶⁸ Sylvester, draft for 'Curriculum Vitae', TGA 200816/5/2/2. This may have accounted for the dominance of English- and French-speaking artists in his criticism.

⁶⁹ Letter from Sylvester to Robert Meyerhoff, 5 January 1990, TGA 200816/2/1/769.

⁷⁰ *About Modern Art*, p.17. Sylvester was, however, particularly eager to include a text on Monet: he wrote to his editor Burnham that 'in writing the introductory essay I regretted more than ever that the book contains nothing on Monet, because he was such a central preoccupation at a crucial time' and suggests including the 1957 text found in the book because 'its presence would fill a gap'. This was because, as shown in Chapter 1, the question of Monet's late work was crucial to Sylvester's broader thesis about modern art. Letter from Sylvester to Burnham, 23 July 1995, Chatto & Windus Archive, University of Reading Special Collections.

Sadly for the historian, when this anthology did finally appear the essays gave little indication of the original heat of battle. Sylvester's choice was highly selective with a focus on monographic essays that concealed the range of his writing and its destructive, as well as constructive, power. Furthermore the revision of these essays detaches them from the historical moments to which they contributed, transforming the provisional immediacy of the judgmental critic into the definitive verdict of the oracular essayist.⁷¹

The exclusions make clear that Sylvester was expressing a particular viewpoint in his selection. An artist who Sylvester admired as much as Henri Laurens, for instance, is not represented even though Sylvester had written about him, probably because he felt that his writing had not done justice to Laurens.⁷² The majority of artists written about were born between around 1900 and 1950 (around twenty-five years either side of Sylvester), and there are less British than American or European artists in the book, even though Sylvester had lived in England for almost all of his life. One might have expected that a project such as *About Modern Art* would lean towards earlier writings which were more difficult to obtain, whereas Sylvester's selection was heavily weighted towards his most recent work.⁷³

Unlike many other volumes of criticism, which are ordered by the date that texts were first published or the artists discussed were born, Sylvester decided on a structure determined by the artists included, not when he wrote about them. *About Modern Art* was consciously modelled on exhibition-making:

⁷¹ Hyman, *The Battle for Realism*, p.8.

⁷² Asked at the time of his 1971 Laurens exhibition why the artist was so little known in Britain, Sylvester suggested that it might be because Laurens' work was 'less easy to find clever things to say [about]' than Moore's or Giacometti's ('Opinion', broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 30 May 1971, microfilmed transcript in BBC WAC). In the early 1950s Sylvester planned to include an essay on Laurens in his projected book on twentieth century sculpture (letter from Sylvester to 'Mr Dennis', 11 March 1954, George Bell archive, University of Reading MS 1640/856).

⁷³ Of almost two hundred and fifty articles which Sylvester had published during the 1950s, only ten were included in *About Modern Art*.

[The essays] have been selected and arranged as if the book were the equivalent of a retrospective exhibition [...] they are grouped in sections somewhat analogous to rooms in an exhibition, and their sequence is basically determined by the order in which the pieces were produced but is modified by taking account of their subject-matter.⁷⁴

The essays were grouped in 'rooms' of between two and ten texts, under headings such as 'Post-War (1954-64)'. This emphasises themes within Sylvester's career, such as his early interest in Klee, two early essays on whom begin the book, or the grouping of writings on surrealism in the 1960s which provides a useful context for his interest in Magritte. Nonetheless, like any exhibition it raises questions about its organisation: for example, 'What's Wrong with Twentieth-Century Art?', one of Sylvester's few propagandising articles on the state of contemporary art in the 1950s, sits incongruously in a section on 'Masters' alongside reviews of Gris, Monet and others.⁷⁵ There are also interesting choices which offer an insight into how Sylvester thought of the artists included. A review of Reinhardt's 1964 Whitechapel Gallery exhibition comes under the 'Post-War' category, while a review of Johns' exhibition at the Whitechapel that same year appeared much later in the book alongside writings about Morris and Lichtenstein. Henry Moore meanwhile appears amongst the 'Surrealists' rather than in the 'Post-War' or 'England' sections.

Most of the reviews the book received were extremely positive. Merlin James, a young painter and critic who contributed texts to Sylvester's book on Alex Katz, even described Sylvester as 'a major exception in a dismal art-critical scene'.⁷⁶ The reviews of Forge and Shiff, meanwhile, remain perhaps

⁷⁴ Sylvester, *About Modern Art*, p.9.

⁷⁵ It is retitled 'Art of an Aftermath' in *About Modern Art*.

⁷⁶ Merlin James, 'A Major Exception in a Dismal Art-Critical Scene', *Observer*, 28 July 1996, p.70.

the most insightful accounts of Sylvester's writing yet.⁷⁷ Arthur Danto, however, was less convinced. He reviewed *About Modern Art* alongside two other recent collections of writings on art, Andrew Graham-Dixon's *Paper Museum* and Thomas Crow's *Modern Art in the Common Culture*.⁷⁸ Danto's essay has to be seen in the light of his belief that since Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964) it was impossible to distinguish between artworks and 'mere real things' only by looking. Danto wrote in *Beyond the Brillo Box* (1992) that:

What Warhol's dictum amounted to was that you cannot *tell* when something is a work of art just by looking at it, for there is no particular way that art has to look [...] The eye, so prized an aesthetic organ when it was felt that the difference between art and non-art was visible, was philosophically of no use whatever when the differences proved to be invisible.⁷⁹

In his review Danto compared the way that Crow, Graham-Dixon and Sylvester wrote about Warhol, concluding that of the three 'only Crow seems to have a sense of this critical rupture'.⁸⁰ He approvingly quoted Crow's assertion that the repetition in Warhol's series of automobile accidents 'implies "the levelling sameness with which real, not symbolic, death erupts into daily life"'.⁸¹ He continued, referring to Sylvester, that 'it simply deflects such possibilities to think of these works as Apocalyptic', as he thought Sylvester did.⁸² The contrast, however, is misleading. The relevant passage in Sylvester's essay on Warhol reads:

⁷⁷ Forge, 'In the Shadow of Thanatos'; Richard Shiff, 'Modest Proposals', *Bookforum*, November 1997, pp.5, 51.

⁷⁸ Sylvester had earlier reviewed Graham-Dixon's monograph on Hodgkin (David Sylvester, 'An Artist Whose Métier is Black and White', *Daily Telegraph*, 6 August 1994, p.6).

⁷⁹ Arthur C. Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992), p.5.

⁸⁰ Arthur C. Danto, 'Why Modern Isn't Contemporary', *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 November 1996, p.14.

⁸¹ Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p.61, quoted in Danto, 'Why Modern Isn't Contemporary'.

⁸² Danto, 'Why Modern Isn't Contemporary'.

In *1947-White* the middle rows are very luminous and the bottom row very dark, and the overall effect is one of writhing forms, rising or falling, in an Apocalyptic scene that might be a Last Judgement by Tintoretto or El Greco.⁸³

By not quoting this in its entirety, Danto allows the reader to believe that Sylvester is making a banal generalization about Warhol's automobile accidents ('these works') as Apocalyptic, and furthermore implies that Sylvester means 'Apocalyptic' in a generic way rather than one which refers to a specific genre of painting. Crow's observation about repetition and 'levelling sameness' in Warhol seems if anything a more commonplace inference made from the visual content of these works. Granted, this invidious comparison does not discredit Crow's point (or Danto's) about visuality alone being insufficient to analyse conceptual artworks. However, it *does* show Danto, in his eagerness to discredit Sylvester, overlooking the subtlety of his attention to what makes one work different to the next. In the process he reminds us, inadvertently, of Sylvester's close attention to the specifics of a particular work, not to mention the precision of his prose.

⁸³ Sylvester, 'Warhol' *About Modern Art*, pp.383-9 (first publ. as 'Factory to Warehouse' in *Independent on Sunday*, 22 May 1994, Review section, pp.18-20), p.386.

Conclusion

Following Sylvester's death, his obituaries saw his legacy as an writer on art in various ways: for Robert Rosenblum he was 'a second coming of Roger Fry'; for Richard Shone he was 'essentially a formalist'; for David Cohen 'he described art as well as any writer in English since Ruskin'.¹ One of the most revealing comments came from Rosenblum, who wrote 'unlike the rest of us ironists, David, with a burning, ingenuous faith in old-fashioned truth and beauty, was someone who made you feel that art might matter more than life itself'.² This was insightful because it showed that even within the world of art criticism and history, Sylvester's commitment and passion were regarded as exceptional.

Sylvester's criticism was immune to the relativism that characterised the 'crisis of criticism' widely discussed in the 1990s and early twenty-first century. Announced by Maurice Berger's 1998 book of the same title (itself inspired by Arlene Croce's notorious 'anti-review' of Bill T. Jones' dance 'Still/Here'), the 'crisis' was centred around the loss of certainty in the role of the critic at a time when the diversity of work which critics were called upon to respond to was greater than ever and continually challenged any normative assumptions critics held.³ Artists such as Koons provoked 'critical chaos' by making work which not only radically split critical opinion but seemed to do so

¹ Rosenblum, p.34; Shone, p.696; Cohen (para. 2 of 12).

² Rosenblum, p.33.

³ *The Crisis of Criticism*, ed. by Maurice Berger (New York: New Press, 1998). Arlene Croce's essay 'Discussing the Undiscussable', reprinted in the book (pp.15-29) was originally published in *The New Yorker*, 26 December 1994, pp.54-6, 58-60.

in a way which questioned the validity of negative judgements into question even as they were being made, although one might say that works such as Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* have shown this has long been the case and that any 'crisis' was more an internal one than something triggered by the critical object itself.⁴

One way of putting this problem would be to say that many critics no longer want to be seen as critics, due to the negative connotations of exclusivity and snobbery that have become identified with the practice of criticism. The writer Brian Dillon claimed that at the start of the twenty-first century: "art criticism"[...] has expanded or devolved (depending on your prejudice) into a field in which all manner of subjects and registers seem licit, and which sometimes goes by the contested and I think vague and inadequate name of "art writing".⁵ Part of Berger's immense current interest to writers on art is surely due to his success in writing about art in a way that has little in common with traditional art criticism, and which is matched by his own contempt for the art critic as a species:

I have always hated being called an art critic [...] in the milieu in which I grew up since I was a teenager, to call somebody an art critic was an insult. An art critic was somebody who judged and pontificated about things he knew a little or nothing about. He wasn't as bad as an art dealer, but he was a pain in the arse.⁶

This flight from making value judgements of the sort once considered an essential part of the critic's duty was demonstrated by the 2002 National

⁴ Francesco Bonami, 'The Good, The Bad and The Ugly', *frieze*, September 2011, <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/> [accessed 19 February 2016].

⁵ Brian Dillon, *Objects in This Mirror: Essays* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), p.19. See also Charlesworth's dismissal of 'mere art writing' (Chapter 6).

⁶ Berger, *Portraits: John Berger on Artists*, ed. Tom Overton, xi.

Arts Journalism Program survey.⁷ One of the questions in the survey asked respondents to rank the importance of five aspects of criticism in their work, summarising the results as follows: 'Instead of emphasizing judgment, critics gave top ranking to "providing an accurate descriptive account," followed by "providing historical and other background information" about the work being reviewed. Creating a piece of writing with literary value was likewise a significant concern, outranking "theorizing about the meaning, associations and implications" of the work'.⁸ Put simply, the apparently impersonal aspects of the critic's work (description and historical information) were considered more important than the clearly subjective ones of interpreting the work and assessing its value.

Danto (who assisted with the design of the questionnaire) unsurprisingly wrote 'I really don't, any more than the majority of those who responded to the NAJP questionnaire, believe that "rendering a personal judgment" is a particularly important thing for art critics to do'.⁹ Echoing the comments of the *Artforum* critics about the need for an antidote to the writing of Hess, Rosenberg and others in the 1960s, Danto advocated an impersonal, rational approach to criticism which distanced itself from the traditional role of the art critic at the same time as fulfilling the same function of writing about exhibitions to try and convince readers to visit them. In his philosophically-

⁷ While the emphasis on this particular survey, which focused on newspaper critics rather than specialist art publications, has probably been overstated, the attention it garnered more widely suggests that it provided data to reinforce a tendency visible more generally.

⁸ *The Visual Art Critic*, p.27.

⁹ Arthur C. Danto, 'The Fly in the Fly-Bottle: The Explanation and Critical Judgement of Works of Art' in *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art & Life*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp.355-68 (p.360). Danto had earlier written that in art criticism 'taste and aesthetics do not enter the picture' and that the tasks of art criticism were rather defined by 'philosophical methodology and historical urgency'. Danto, *Encounters and Reflections*, pp.4-5.

grounded writing Danto had much in common with what Noel Carroll subsequently called for in *On Criticism*.¹⁰ Carroll criticised the 'bad start' of criticism as stemming from David Hume's use of taste as a model for judgement, as fundamentally mistaking the pleasure we take in a work for the value of the work.¹¹

Carroll criticised Danto's stance, primarily because he felt that Danto was being disingenuous, and that 'even if he refrains from stamping the work outright with his seal of approval', Danto 'implicitly signals his conviction concerning the artistic value of the work' by giving it a prominent position in the pages of *The Nation*.¹² Carroll, in attempting to 'develop a framework in which the practices of criticism can be rendered intelligible and ordered' is concerned primarily with criteria such as how well an artwork fulfils the requirements of its genre. Some of his harshest words are for the film critic J. Hoberman, for taking seriously the notoriously 'bad' films of Ed Wood:

The reception-value critic, like Hoberman, can give you a framework for enjoying your guilty pleasures. Yet the issue is whether these guilty pleasures have anything to do with the value that should concern critics [...] isn't there something wilfully silly about regarding *Plan Nine from Outer Space* in the company of *Breathless*? It is a matter of self-consciously embracing the role of a fool or a dimwit [...] For a rational person to do this voluntarily would surely be degrading.¹³

Carroll conspicuously concludes *On Criticism* at the point of confronting what makes one artwork better than another once one moves beyond rigid definitions such as how well a work fulfils the requirements of its genre. He concludes 'even though most workaday criticism is art criticism, narrowly construed, the critic-in-full of art cannot altogether shirk the responsibilities

¹⁰ Noël Carroll, *On Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹¹ Carroll, pp.155-6.

¹² Carroll, p.24.

¹³ Carroll, p.61-2.

and risks of cultural criticism'. The unanswered question is how a critic can in practice combine Carroll's rather limiting prescriptions with the surely somewhat subjective qualities which set apart the most significant critics.¹⁴

To return to the claim made in the introduction, it is my belief that Sylvester's work shows a way of reconciling these opposing approaches of a logical, rational and objective criticism, and the defence of judgement and the critic as a Greenbergian figure made by critics such as Raphael Rubinstein (editor of *Critical Mass* and critic of Danto). Sylvester demonstrated this when in a late interview he stated: 'I don't think the main role of criticism is judgement, I think the main role of criticism is interpretation—interpretation of a kind that is supported purely by the intuitive understanding of the eye'.¹⁵ While Sylvester avoids the word judgement, it is clear that he is referring here to a cognitive response to an experience grounded in 'intuitive understanding'. This emphasis on intuition invites comparison with Krauss' writing on Fry and Greenberg in *The Optical Unconscious* or Caroline Jones' equation that 'opticality and alienation can be seen as parallel processes in modernism, if not paired descriptors for a single process'.¹⁶

However, I believe it is a mistake to see Sylvester's work in terms of this somewhat caricatured view of modernist criticism. While it begins with the 'intuitive understanding of the eye' Sylvester's work, as suggested in this thesis, has more in common with Winckelmann and Berenson in the intensity with which it describes encounters with artworks as deeply-felt physical experiences. The eye, in Sylvester's writing, is not disembodied and alienated

¹⁴ Carroll, p.196.

¹⁵ Gayford, 'The Eye's Understanding', p.39. In a comment deleted from the published interview with Gayford, Sylvester also said 'I don't think that judgement is primary, I think understanding is the prime thing'. TGA 200816/6/2/12.

¹⁶ Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, p.14.

but the conduit for the sort of experience which artists such as Morris could only conceive by making art which was literally interactive. Sylvester would surely have agreed with Shiff that: 'if we are honest, we acknowledge "the best art" not according to our theoretical or even emotional prejudice but by its impact. It might as well be called the "tangible datum." We acknowledge the physical existence as opposed to a predetermined identity. We feel it and have to believe what we feel'.¹⁷ The point of Sylvester's criticism is just that the eye is only a means of perceiving the artwork, whose effects are felt in a far more holistic physical sense that 'can occur in various parts of the body, it can occur in one's spine, it can occur in the back of one's neck, it can reveal in one's hands, it can occur in one's solar plexus'.¹⁸ In this way the involuntary nature of reactions to artworks can be a way of getting around ingrained ways of thinking about them.

It is this precise writing of experience in criticism which is perhaps the most useful basis for further investigation into Sylvester's work as it relates to the history and study of criticism more broadly. I envisage two ways in which Sylvester's work can inform a more generous and wide-ranging investigation of criticism than the dogmatic boundary-policing which often characterises the study of criticism. Firstly, as a critic led above all by his empirical experience of artworks Sylvester might be discussed alongside not only critics such as Pater and Winckelmann but also critics writing from feminist, LGBTQ or postcolonial perspectives directly informed by their personal experience. While their experience and politics might differ greatly from Sylvester's, the issue of how the experience of artworks is articulated and understood as the basis of

¹⁷ Shiff, *Doubt*, p.127.

¹⁸ Tusa, *On Creativity*, p.247.

criticism rather than part of an *a priori* stance seems an exciting way forwards to cut across the compartmentalised way in which critics tend to be studied. Secondly, the crossover between different realms of experience, particularly art and sport, is a recurrent theme in Sylvester's criticism, and another profitable way forward, particularly in the case of interdisciplinary critics such as Sylvester, would be to consider in further detail how they have understood modernism not in the Greenbergian sense of jettisoning everything superfluous to a given medium but rather as carrying overtones from across the critic's zones of interest.

At the same time Sylvester also believed 'it is awfully important whether you get things right, or right to what finally becomes the consensus'.¹⁹ Intuition, then, provides the raw impressions which the critic must make sense of and assimilate into a Leavisite sense of the canon. While Sylvester insists on including his personal responses in his writing, he also believes that the final validation comes from conforming to the consensus (a belief reminiscent of Bacon's statement that 'time is the only great critic').²⁰ This explains both Sylvester's low regard of Berger based on his dismissal of Giacometti in 1955, and his dislike of revisionist approaches such as that taken in 'Art and Power' (which Sylvester not doubt saw as wilfully overlooking the best art of the period in favour of inferior art for the sake of curatorial indulgence).

This idea of 'getting it right' might make Sylvester seem controlling and obsessed with promoting 'his' artists but I think that Sylvester's interest in Taoism and 'letting go' show that this was not the case. Instead, according to his instincts he would make the case for what he believed to be the best art as

¹⁹ Gayford, 'The Eye's Understanding', 38.

²⁰ Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p.88.

strongly as possible, and believed that whether or not that became the consensus was significant, but equally that the critic's role was closer to that of a barrister than a judge. If, to use Sylvester's phrase in his review of Collings' book *Blimey!*, there is a 'moral weight' in his criticism, it is here, in making one's case and letting it be judged. One reviewer of *About Modern Art* was puzzled by the very intensity of Sylvester's focus, writing that: 'reading these essays it can sometimes seem as if the critic refuses the world far more fiercely than the artists. Everything, within certain not-much-discussed parameters, *will* be needle sharp'. But it is here that the critic's task resided for Sylvester: in the intense effort to say exactly what made something valuable.²¹

Throughout the writing of this thesis I have felt an obligation to come to a conclusion about criticism as defined through Sylvester's work, in line with those critics who, as Siedell puts it, 'position their own criticism within certain ideals of what art criticism should be'.²² Instead I am left only with the same paradox I began with, of intuition and interpretation. Sylvester's career enacts this contradiction surely felt by all critics, between undergoing a personal experience and trying to make it not only comprehensible for a readership, but also in some way representative. It seems to me that this cannot be resolved through a programmatic statement about what criticism should be (and Sylvester's own 'Notes on Art Criticism' never progressed beyond fairly gnomic aphorisms), but only through the study of individuals such as Sylvester and how they negotiated it. There do seem to be two things that can be concluded about Sylvester's views on criticism, however. The first is that whatever else it

²¹ Rose Jennings, 'Bothering artists', *New Statesman*, 2 August 1996, pp.47-8 (p.47).

²² Siedell, p.27.

does, it must hold its own as a piece of writing.²³ The second is that, however useful principles of objectivity are, criticism is essentially a personal affair. As he wrote in his review of Hughes' *Nothing If Not Critical*, 'it is not a critic's job to be fair-minded (the critic's job is to care)'.²⁴ Everything else follows from there.

²³ Sylvester's writing is used as an example in Gilda Williams' recent handbook *How to Write About Contemporary Art*. Williams concludes Sylvester's writing consists of 'no fancy words, no jargon, just attentive reflection on what he is looking at, and the original ideas this prompted in him'. Gilda Williams, *How to Write About Contemporary Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), p.64.

²⁴ David Sylvester, 'Golden Boy Calling the Art Shots', *Daily Telegraph*, 23 December 1990, p.xi (Review section).

Illustrations



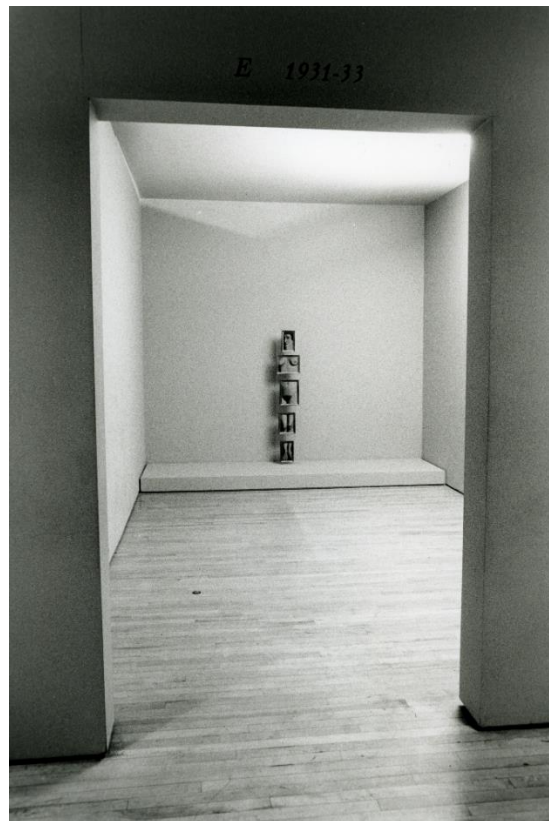
1. Installation shot, exhibition of Islamic carpets from the Joseph V. McMullan collection, Hayward Gallery, 1972. Tate Photographic Archive.



2. Installation shot of Magritte exhibition, Tate Gallery, 1969. Tate Photographic Archive.



3. Installation shot of Magritte exhibition, Hayward Gallery, 1992; *Ent'racte* (1927) centre. Tate Archive TGA 200816/10/2/2/12.



4. Installation shot of Magritte exhibition, Hayward Gallery, 1992 showing *The Eternally Obvious* [*L'Évidence éternelle*, 1930]. Tate Archive TGA 200816/10/2/2/12.



5. Installation shot, 'Trapping Appearance: Portraits by Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection', Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 1996. SCVA.



6. Installation shot, 'Trapping Appearance: Portraits by Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection', Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 1996. SCVA.



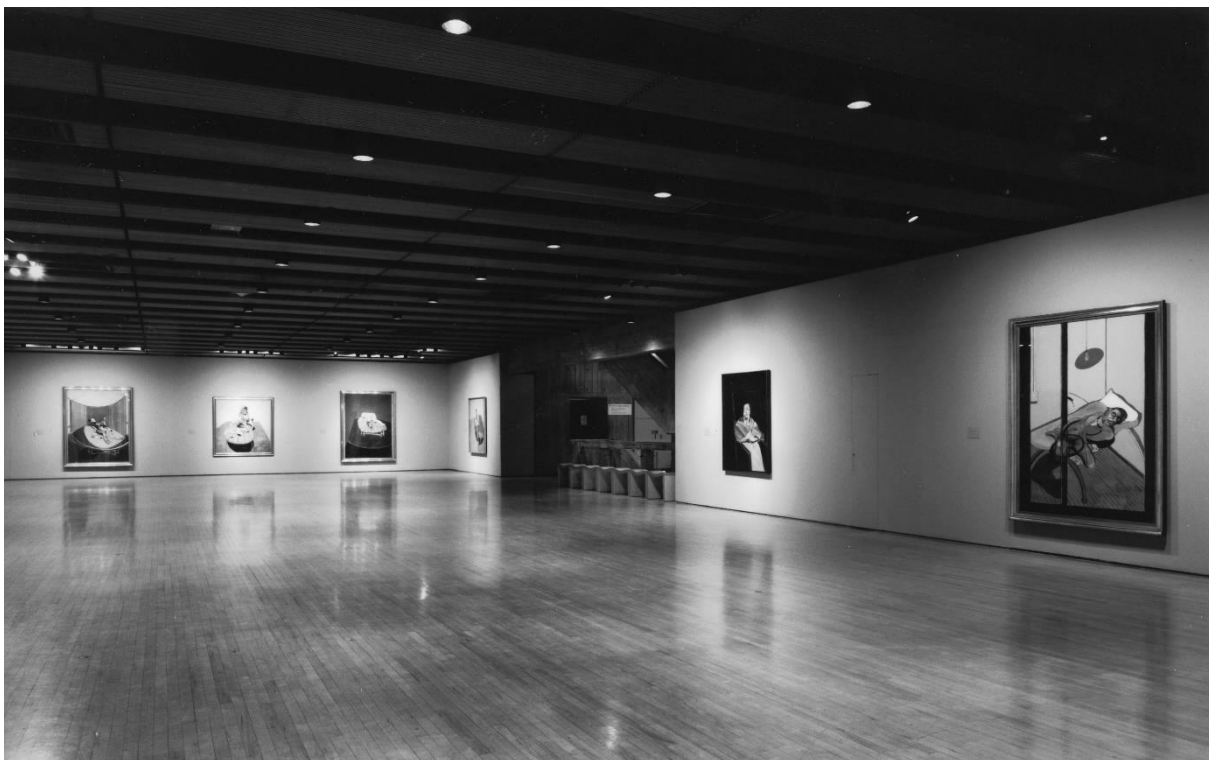
7. Installation shot, Howard Hodgkin exhibition, Hayward Gallery, 1996.
Hayward Gallery.



8. Installation shot, Howard Hodgkin exhibition, Hayward Gallery, 1996.
Hayward Gallery.



9. Installation shot, 'Francis Bacon: The Human Body', Hayward Gallery, 1998. Marcus J. Leith.



10. Installation shot, 'Francis Bacon: The Human Body', Hayward Gallery, 1998. Marcus J. Leith.



11. Installation shot, 'Francis Bacon: The Human Body', Hayward Gallery, 1998. Marcus J. Leith.



12. Installation shot, Robert Morris exhibition, Tate Gallery, 1971. Tate Photographic Archive.



13. Installation shot, 'Dada and Surrealism Reviewed', Hayward Gallery, 1978, module two (*291*, *The Ridgefield Gazook*, *The Blind Man*, *Rongwrong*, *TNT*, *New York Dada*). Tate Photographic Archive.

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Works by David Sylvester With an Introductory Note

This bibliography of Sylvester's published works, along with radio broadcasts, television programmes and films on which he features, consists of five sections:

- A) Books written by, edited by or translated by Sylvester
- B) Catalogue texts
- C) All other writings on art
- D) All writings *not* on art
- E) All radio, television and film appearances

This bibliography serves two main purposes: the first is to provide a comprehensive list of published/broadcast work by Sylvester consulted in writing this thesis; the second is to provide for the first time a detailed list of Sylvester's work which I hope others will find useful. I have consulted numerous sources in compiling this list, of which the most useful has been the preliminary list of Sylvester's writings, 'Towards a Sylvester Bibliography' in the 2002 Tate Modern exhibition catalogue *Looking at Modern Art: In Memory of David Sylvester*.

The list assigns a reference (A1, D2 etc.) to each of Sylvester's writings, broadcasts etc. Reprints have been listed under the same reference as the original publication in an attempt to show how many different pieces of writing Sylvester produced and to hopefully avoid confusion of a reprint for an original text (bearing in mind Sylvester almost always made at least some revisions to texts when they were reprinted). How much a text has to change to justify listing twice is obviously subjective. I have by no means listed all reprints of Sylvester's writings, nor have I tried to explain how much the reprints differ from the originals, but I have at least tried to include reprints in the cases where they are most likely to be confused for an initial publication (e.g. a reprint soon after the first publication). Full details have not been provided for all reprints (such as those reappearing in Sylvester's own books) but are provided where there is a significant change of title, or where they are reprinted in other places.

Works which I have seen referred to but have not been able to consult have been excluded. This only very occasionally happened with printed works but there are many radio and television programmes which Sylvester appeared on but for which I have not been able to access a transcript or recording. I have decided to list only what I have been able to access, along with details of where, in each case, the material was accessed.

All interviews have been listed under category C, even if they first appeared in a catalogue. Titles for catalogue texts have only been listed when they differ from generic titles ('preface', 'introduction', artist's name, etc.). Since Sylvester's catalogue texts were almost all written for London galleries I have not noted when the gallery is in London, only when it is not.

I've excluded items such as interviews with Sylvester, which appear in the bibliography of works not by Sylvester.

Sylvester's early writings were used 'Anthony Sylvestre', 'A.D.B. Sylvester', or other variants thereof. These have not been listed, nor have I indicated the many instances where Sylvester's writings were unsigned (as, for instance, in his articles for *The Times* in the 1950s).

Where subjects are not evident from the title of the text or the publication it appeared in I have added the main subject in square brackets. For columns where numerous different artists/exhibitions have been discussed I make no attempt at comprehensiveness.

A) Books Written by, Edited by, or Translated by Sylvester

- A1** *Vincent Van Gogh: The Potato Eaters, in the collection of V. W. Van Gogh, Amsterdam* [introduction by J. G. Van Gelder; adapted from the Dutch by A. D. B. Sylvester] (Lund Humphries, 1947)
- A2** *The Stained Glass of French Churches* [by Louis Grodecki, translated by A.D.B. Sylvester and R. Edmunds] (Lindsay Drummond and Éditions Du Chêne, 1948)
- A3** *The Sculptures of Picasso* [by D.H. Kahnweiler, trans. by A.D.B. Sylvester] (Rodney Philips, 1949)
- A4** *Henry Moore: Complete Sculpture and Drawings 1921-48* [4th and completely revised edition ed. by DS] (Lund Humphries, 1957)
- A5** *Ten Modern Artists: An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Painting and Sculpture: Ten Illustrated Lectures by David Sylvester to be Transmitted on BBC Television...from 5 April to 7 June 1964* (1964)
- A6** *The Book of Art, Volume 8: Modern Art from Fauvism to Abstract Expressionism* [ed. with introduction by DS] (Grolier, 1965)
- A7** *Henry Moore* [ex. cat., Tate Gallery, 1968]
- A8** *Magritte* [ex. cat., Tate Gallery, 1969]
- A9** *Henri Laurens* [co-editor, with Joanna Drew; ex. cat., Hayward Gallery, 1971]
- A10** *Interviews with Francis Bacon* (Thames & Hudson)
1975 edition containing four interviews from 1962 to 1974
1980 edition adding three more interviews from 1975 to 1979
1987 (*The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*) adding two more interviews from 1982 to 1986
1993 edition: no new interviews but new preface
- A11** *Magritte* (Thames & Hudson, 1992). US edition titled *Magritte: The Silence of the World*
2009 Mercatorfonds edition with introduction by Michel Draguet
- A12** *René Magritte: Catalogue Raisonné, 5 vols* [editor and co-author] (Mercatorfonds and Menil Foundation)
vol. 1, Oil Paintings, 1916-1930 [with Sarah Whitfield], 1992
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- A13** *Looking at Giacometti* (Chatto & Windus, 1994)
- A14** *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-96* (Chatto & Windus, 1996)
1997 revised edition inc. 'Postscript' with five additional essays
2002 revised edition inc. 'Postscript-II' with eight more essays
- A15** *Some Kind of Reality: Roy Lichtenstein interviewed by David Sylvester* (Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1997)
- A16** *Alex Katz: Twenty-Five Years of Painting* [editor, plus introduction and interview] (Saatchi Gallery, 1997)
- A17** *Francis Bacon: The Human Body* [ex. cat., Hayward Gallery, 1998]
repr. A19
- A18** *Patrick Heron, 1920-1999* [co-editor, plus introduction; ex. cat., Tate Gallery, 1998]
- A19** *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* (Thames & Hudson, 2000)
- A20** *Interviews with American Artists* (Chatto & Windus, 2000)
- A21** *Memoirs of a Pet Lamb* [reprint of C529] (Chatto & Windus, 2002)
- A22** *London Recordings* (Chatto & Windus, 2003)

B) Catalogue Texts

- B1** *William Gear*, Gimpel Fils, 1948, n.p.
- B2** *Henry Moore: Drawings & maquettes from 1928 to 1948*, Roland, Browse & Delbanco, 1948, n.p.
- B3** 'Microcosmos of a Sculptor', *Justin O'Brien; Reg Butler; Massimo Campigi*, Hanover Gallery, 1949, p.4
- B4** 'The Sculpture and Drawings of Henry Moore', *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings, 1923-48*, City Art Gallery, Wakefield, and touring, 1949, n.p.
- B5** 'Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull', *King; Paolozzi; Turnbull*, Hanover Gallery, 1950, n.p.
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- B6** [Preface to Stella Steyn's work], *Chien-Ying Chang: Water-colors and Drawings; Edouard Pignon: Recent Work; John Craxton: Paintings and Drawings, 1950 & 1951; Stella Steyn: Paintings*, Leicester Galleries, 1951, pp.16-7
- B7** 'Catalogue', *Sculpture and Drawings by Henry Moore*, Tate Gallery, 1951, pp.8-20
- B8** *First Exhibition in England of Sculpture and Graphic Art by Henri Laurens*, Arcade Gallery, 1951, n.p.
- B9** *Recent Trends in Realist Painting*, ICA, 1952, n.p.
- B10** *Five Young French Realists*, Arcade Gallery, 1952, n.p.
- B11** *Young Painters*, ICA, 1952, n.p.
- B12** *Drawings for Pictures*, Arts Council Gallery, 1953, pp.3-5
- B13** 'Some Observations Concerning Sculpture', *Book of the Sixth Aldeburgh Festival*, Aldeburgh, 1953, pp.15-7
- B14** *Portraits and other sculptures by Louise Hutchinson*, Beaux-Arts, 1953, n.p.
- B15** *Recent British Drawings*, ICA, 1954, n.p.

- B16** [Text on Francis Bacon], *The British Pavilion Exhibition of works by Nicholson, Bacon, Freud, "The Unknown Political Prisoner" Prize-Winning Maquette and Related Studies by Butler, Recent Artists' Lithographs*, British Pavilion, Venice Biennale 1954, n.p.
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- B17** 'In the Beginning was the End', *Twentieth Century Masters*, Marlborough Fine Art, 1955, pp.2-3
- B18** 'Perpetuating the Transient', *Alberto Giacometti: Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings*, Arts Council Gallery, 1955, n.p.
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- B19** 'On Germaine Richier', *Germaine Richier*, Hanover Gallery, 1955, n.p.
- B20** *Drawings by Stanley Spencer*, Arts Council Gallery, 1955, n.p.
- B21** 'Some Notes on the Paintings of Francis Bacon' [with French translation by Henri Thomas], *Francis Bacon*, Galerie Rive Droite, Paris, 1957, n.p.
- B22** *Critics Choice*, Tooth & Son, 1958, n.p.
- B23** *Jack Smith: Paintings and Drawings*, Matthiesen, 1960, n.p.
- B24** 'Gromaire's Good-Time Girls', *Gromaire: Water-colours & Drawings*, Mayor Gallery, 1961, n.p.
- B25** *Patrick Hughes*, Portal Gallery, 1961, n.p.
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- B26** *Dubuffet: Recent Gouaches and Drawings*, Robert Fraser Gallery, 1962, n.p.
- B27** *Henry Mundy: Paintings, Gouaches*, Hanover Gallery, 1962, n.p.
- B28** *Drawing Towards Painting*, Arts Council Gallery, 1962, p.3
- B29** *Bridget Riley*, Gallery One, 1963, n.p.
Repr. A14
- B30** *Soutine*, Tate Gallery, 1963, pp.4-15
Repr. 'Soutine: The Impact of Infighting', *Art News*, October 1963, pp.22-7, 48-52; 'The Mysteries of Nature within the Mysteries of Paint', *Chaim Soutine, 1893-1943*, ex. cat., Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, Münster, and touring, 1981, pp.33-47, A14
- B31** 'The Discovering of a Structure', *David Bomberg, 1890-1957*, Marlborough New London Gallery, 1964, pp.2-4
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- B33** 'The Residue of a Vision', *Alberto Giacometti: Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings 1913-65*, Tate Gallery, 1965, n.p.
Repr. A13
- B34** *Towards Art II: Sculptors from the Royal College of Art*, Arts Council Gallery, and touring, 1965, n.p.
- B35** 'Fowl of Venus' *Miró: Oiseau Solaire, Oiseau Lunaire, Etincelles*, Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 1967, pp.5-15
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- B36** 'Box with the Sound of Its Own Making', *Robert Morris*, Tate Gallery, 1971, pp.10-11

- Repr. A14
- B37** 'About Miró's Sculpture', *Miró Bronzes*, Hayward Gallery, 1972, pp.3-17
Repr. 'Über Mirós Skulpturen' [German translation by A. Peter], *Joan Miró: Das plastische Werk*, Kunsthaus Zurich, 1972, pp.11-27; 'Mirós Skulpturer' [Danish translation, no translator acknowledged], *Louisiana Revy*, November 1974, pp.9-13
- B38** 'On Western Attitudes to Eastern Carpets', *Islamic Carpets from the Collection of Joseph V. McMullan*, Hayward Gallery, 1972, pp.4-19
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- B40** *James Rosenquist: an Exhibition of Paintings, 1961-1973*, Mayor Gallery, 1974, n.p.
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- B41** *William Coldstream*, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1976, pp.5-10
- B42** 'Regarding the Exhibition', *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, Hayward Gallery, 1978, pp.1-5
- B43** 'Portraits de Magritte' [French translation by Annie Pérez], *Retrospective Magritte*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, and touring, 1978, pp.47-56
- B44** *Henry Moore at the Serpentine*, Serpentine Gallery, 1978, n.p.
- B45** 'On the Subject of Adrian Stokes's Still Lifes', *Adrian Stokes, 1902-1972: A Retrospective*, Serpentine Gallery, 1982, p.31
- B46** 'The Eastern Carpet in the Western World from the 15th to the 20th Century', *The Eastern Carpet in the Western World: from the 15th to the 17th Century*, Hayward Gallery, 1983, p.9
- B47** *Francis Bacon: Three Triptychs*, Thomas Gibson, 1984, n.p.
- B48** 'Bits of the Cat' *Anthony Caro: Recent Sculptures*, Knoedler & Waddington Galleries, 1986, pp.4-7
Repr. 'Petits bouts du chat' [French translation by Jeanne Bouniort], *Anthony Caro : Oeuvres 1961-1989*, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Calais, 1990, pp.46-8 ; A14
- B49** *Diana Cumming: Paintings*, Serpentine Gallery, 1987, n.p.
- B50** 'Anatomy of This Exhibition', *Andre Masson: Line Unleashed: A Retrospective of Drawings*, Hayward Gallery, 1987, pp.7-11
Repr. 'Anatomie d'une exposition / Anatomia della Mostra' [French and Italian translations, translator(s) not acknowledged], *André Masson, L'Insurgé du XXème siècle*, Villa Medici, Rome, and touring, 1989, pp.211-6
- B51** 'The Ugly Duckling' [Barnett Newman], *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, 1987, pp.137-45
Repr. A14
- B52** 'Fin de partie' [French translation by Jeanne Bouniort], *Le dernier Picasso*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1988, pp.131-4
Repr. A14
- B53** 'End Game', *Late Picasso*, Tate Gallery, 1988, pp.136-46
Repr. A14
- B54** *26 Maquettes by Henry Moore from the Bo Boustedt Collection*, Sothebys, London, 30 November 1988, n.p.
- B55** 'Points in Space' [Cage], *Dancers on a Plane: Cage, Cunningham, Johns*, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, and touring, 1989, pp.47-52
Repr. A14

- B56** *Henry Moore: Sketch-models and Working-models*, South Bank touring exhibition, 1990, n.p.
- B57** 'A Dance of Paint, a Dance of Death', *Malcolm Morley*, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1990, pp.5-10
Repr. 'Malcolm Morley's War Memories', *Journal of Art*, September 1991, pp.52-3; A14
- B58** 'Seven Studies for a Picture of Richard Hamilton', *Richard Hamilton*, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1991, pp.6-20
Repr. A14
- B59** 'Rira bien qui rira le dernier' [with Sarah Whitfield; adapted from text for A12; French translation by Jeanne Bouniort], *René Magritte: la période vache: "Les pieds dans le plat" avec Louis Scutenaire*, Musée Cantini, Marseille, 1992, pp.21-31
- B60** 'Flesh was the Reason', *Willem de Kooning: Paintings*, National Gallery, Washington, and touring, 1994, pp.15-31
Repr. 'When Body, Mind and Paint Dissolve', *Independent*, 15 February 1995, p.24; A14; *Willem de Kooning: Late Paintings*, State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, 2006, pp.11-26
- B61** 'Bacon's Course', *Francis Bacon: Figurabile*, Museo Correr, Venice, 1993, pp.19-86
Repr. *Modern Painters*, Summer 1993, pp.14-21
- B62** 'On Letting Alone' [and selections from Chuang Tzu], *Barnett Newman, Joseph Beuys, Cy Twombly, Yves Klein, Jasper Johns / with texts from Chuang Tzu*, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1993, pp.5-6 [introduction; texts from Chuang Tzu throughout]
- B63** 'Mandarin and Demotic', *Achill Redo: Accretions, 1990-1994*, Mayor Gallery, 1994, n.p.
- B64** *Patrick Hughes: Retroperspectives*, Flowers East, 1994, p.3
- B65** 'Against the Odds', *Leon Kossoff: Recent Paintings, 1987-94*, British Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1995, pp.13-21
Repr. *Modern Painters*, Summer 1995, pp.18-22; A14
- B66** 'Bronze Idols and Untitled Paintings', *William Turnbull: Sculpture and Paintings*, Serpentine Gallery, 1995, pp.9-10
- B67** 'Forces of Nature', *Willem de Kooning: Sculpture*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 1996, pp.48-9
- B68** *André Masson: Peintures et oeuvres sur papier 1919-27*, Galerie Louise Leiris, Paris, 1996, pp.5-7
- B69** 'Un parcours' [French translation by Annie Pérez], *Francis Bacon*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1996, pp.13-31
Repr. 'Stationen eines Lebenswerks' [German translation by Nikolaus G. Schneider], *Francis Bacon*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 1996, pp. 13-31; A19
- B70** 'Saluting the Flags', *Jasper Johns Flags 1955-1994*, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1996, pp.11-17
- B71** "Bacon and Giacometti: Likeness and Difference", *Trapping Appearance: Portraits by Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection*, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, 1996, pp.5-10
Repr. *Modern Painters*, Summer 1996, pp.22-26
- B72** 'The World is Light', *Cy Twombly: Ten Sculptures*, Gagosian Gallery, New York, 1997, pp.7-19
Repr. A14

- B73** 'Magritte's Lost Lecture' [with Sarah Whitfield]; *René Magritte, 1898-1967* Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1998, pp.41-3
- B74** 'The Supreme Pontiff' *Francis Bacon: Important Paintings from the Estate* Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York, 1998, pp.24-31, 34-5, 38-9, 42, 46-7, 50-1, 56, 68-70
Repr. A19
- B75** 'Bacon's Secret Vice', *Francis Bacon: Working on Paper*, Tate Gallery, 1999, pp.9-11
Repr. 'Why he Kept his Methods a Secret', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 February 1999 p.7 (Arts & Books section); A19
- B76** 'Ken Adam, Production Designer: An Introductory Note', *Moonraker, Strangelove and Other Celluloid Dreams: The Visionary Art of Ken Adam*, Serpentine Gallery, 1999, pp.12-6
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- D60** 'Four Men in Control' [cricket match report: Derbyshire vs. Yorkshire] *Observer*, 17 August 1958, p.16
- D61** 'Hampshire Make Up for Errors' [cricket match report: Hampshire vs. Northamptonshire], *Observer*, 24 August 1958, p.18
- D62** 'Surrey Swing on Their Laurels' [cricket match report: Surrey vs. Sussex], *Observer*, 31 August 1958, p.20
- D63** 'Ethnology' [film review: *The Defiant Ones*; *The Naked and the Dead*], *New Statesman*, 4 October 1958, p.449
- D64** "Strike" [film review: *Strike*; *The Man Upstairs*], *New Statesman*, 11 October 1958, pp.490-1
- D65** 'M.C.C.'s Tour of Australia' [cricket], *The Listener*, 16 October 1958, p.604
- D66** 'The Films of Ingmar Bergman', *New Statesman*, 18 October 1958, p.518
- D67** 'The London Film Festival' [film review: *Last Day of Summer*], *New Statesman*, 25 October 1958, pp.556-7
- D68** 'Two O'clock in the Morning' [radio review: 'jazz and poetry recital' on Third Programme], *Observer*, 19 March 1959, p.21
- D69** 'Only for Addicts' [reviews of nine books on cricket], *New Statesman*, 13 June 1959, p.835
- D70** 'Big City' [film review: *The Savage Eye*], *New Statesman*, 12 September 1959, p.308
- D71** 'A Cultural Exchange' [festival of Soviet films in London], *New Statesman*, 3 October 1959, pp.426-8
- D72** 'Anatomy of Justice' [film review: *Anatomy of a Murder*], *New Statesman*, 10 October 1959, p.470

- D73** 'Suspense' [film review: *North by Northwest*], *New Statesman*, 17 October 1959, p.505
- D74** 'The Literature of Cricket' [book review: Alan Ross, *The Cricketer's Companion*], *The Listener*, 3 November 1960, pp.783-4
See E88
- D75** 'Legend of the Desperate Star' [book review: Maurice Zolotow, *Marilyn Monroe*], *Observer*, 19 March 1961, p.27
- D76** 'Style and Soccer' [book review: *The Footballer's Fireside Book*, compiled by Terence Delaney], *Sunday Times*, 28 January 1962, p.32
- D77** 'Hamlet at the National Theatre' [panel discussion from 'The Critics'], *The Listener*, 7 November 1963, pp.727-8
See E142
- D78** 'In a Mist' [introduction to DS jazz broadcast of same name], *Radio Times*, 27 February 1964, p.21
See E151
- D79** 'Funny or monstrous?' [panel discussion from 'The Critics' on Joe Orton, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*], *The Listener*, 6 August 1964, p.199
See E171
- D80** 'Present Laughter' [panel discussion from 'The Critics' on Noel Coward, *Present Laughter*], *The Listener*, 29 April 1965, p.635
See E179
- D81** 'Welfare Love' [on relationships; part of 'Modern Love' series], *Sunday Times Magazine*, 22 May 1966, pp.23-26
- D82** 'Tassels, and Other Gadgets' [film review: *Viva Maria*; films in James Bond genre], *Encounter*, June 1966, pp.36-40
- D83** 'Camp Follower' [film review: *Modesty Blaise*], *Encounter*, July 1966, pp.44-5
- D84** 'Just Add People' [on interior design (contributor)], *Sunday Times Magazine*, 18 February 1968, pp.8-13
- D85** [Letter to Editor, expressing grief at situation in Czechoslovakia (co-signatory)], *Guardian*, 23 August 1968, p.8
- D86** "Sir Alf" [Letter to Editor, response to Hans Keller's opinions of Sir Alf Ramsey in his article 'Osgood' (*The Listener*, 26 February 1970)], *The Listener*, 12 March 1970, p.347
- D87** [Letter to Editor, responding to Hans Schmoller, who had joined the Sylvester-Keller exchange following D86], *The Listener*, 9 April 1970, p.485
- D88** 'Expelled' [autobiographical accounts of getting expelled (contributor)], *Sunday Times Magazine*, 13 December 1970, pp.24-8
- D89** 'Housemaster: Do you know what stags do in autumn? [...]' [autobiographical accounts of learning the 'facts of life' (contributor)], *Sunday Times Magazine*, 17 September 1972, pp.58+
- D90** 'Clough! I've Had Enough!' [on overabundance of football pundits], *Sunday Times Magazine*, 18 November 1973, pp.58+
- D91** 'Writers and the Closed Shop' [letter to Editor, backing a letter in previous *TLS* objecting to proposed legislation which would only allow National Union of Journalists members to write for newspapers (co-signatory)], *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 May 1975, p.484
- D92** 'The Perfect Female Image?' [on Marlene Dietrich (contributor)], *Sunday Times Magazine*, 13 November 1977, pp.50-61
- D93** 'The Confusion between Real and Reel' [book review: John Kobal, *People Will Talk*], *Spectator*, 16 May 1987, p.33

- D94** 'Cambodia: Put an End to Realpolitik' [letter protesting against UK, US and French governments non-intervention against Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (co-signatory)], *Independent*, 30 November 1989, p.7
- D95** 'Books of the Year' [on Alfred Brendel, *Music Sounded Out: Essays, Lectures, Interviews, Afterthoughts* (contributor)], *Daily Telegraph*, 23 November 1991, p.xxx (Weekend section)
- D96** 'Reflections on a Company Name', *10 Years Opera Factory*, 1993, pp.12-3
- D97** [Recollections of Mark Boxer], *The Collected and Recollected Marc*, ed. by Mark Amory (London: Fourth Estate, 1993) pp.29-31
- D98** 'National Disgrace in the Making' [letter protesting against planned alterations to the National Theatre (co-signatory)], *Daily Telegraph*, 14 December 1994, p.20
- D99** 'The Real Magic' [book review: David Thomson, *Biographical Dictionary of Film*], *London Review of Books*, 8 June 1995, pp.20-23
- D100** 'The Sarajevo Charter' [letter protesting ethnic cleansing in Sarajevo (co-signatory)], *Independent*, 5 August 1995, p.9
- D101** 'Book of the Century' [on Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*], *Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 1998, p.2 (Arts & Books section)

E) Radio, Television and Film Appearances

For each item in this section I have indicated where a transcript or recording can be consulted, using the archive abbreviations at the beginning of the bibliography. All BBC WAC references unless otherwise stated are for transcripts on microfilm. Dates listed are for first known broadcast. Most titles have been taken from the transcripts. For 'The Critics' each subject discussed is followed in brackets by the name of the critic who introduced it on the programme; abbreviations are B.- (book), TV.- (television), R.- (radio), F.- (film), TH.- (theatre) and A.- (art)

- E1** 'Les Tendances actuelles de la sculpture en Angleterre et en France' [with M. Vrinat], 'Chronique des Lettres et des Arts', BBC French Service, 10 February 1948, TGA 200816/4/1/24
- E2** 'Le Problème de réalisme dans la peinture française et anglaise d'aujourd'hui', 'Chronique des Lettres et des Arts', BBC French Service, 28 October 1948, TGA 200816/4/1/25
- E3** 'Artists on Art: A Conversation between Victor Pasmore and A.D.B. Sylvester', Third Programme, 21 April 1951, BBC WAC (microfilm)
- E4** 'Contemporary Sculptors at Home and Abroad', Third Programme, 12 August 1951, BBC WAC
See C62
- E5** 'Francis Bacon', Third Programme, 28 December 1951, BBC WAC (microfilm)
See C68
- E6** 'Young Sculptors: An Exhibition at the ICA' [French translation by 'Desselle'], Chronique Littéraire et Artistique', BBC French Service, 31 January 1952, TGA 200816/8/1/8
- E7** 'On the Film *The Seven Year Itch*', 'Comment', Third Programme, 25 August 1955, TGA 200816/8/1/6; BBC WAC

- E8** 'Art's Distorting Mirror' [Baudelaire's art criticism], Third Programme, 26 February 1956, BBC WAC
See C163
- E9** 'Test Cricket as a Restrictive Practice', Third Programme, 23 April 1956, BBC WAC
See D40
- E10** 'On the exhibition 'Autour du Cubism'', 'Comment', Third Programme, 26 July 1956, TGA 200816/8/1/8
- E11** 'On an Exhibition of Paintings by Jack Smith at the Beaux Arts Gallery', 'Comment', Third Programme, 20 September 1956, TGA 200816/8/1/5; BBC WAC
- E12** [Reviews of 'The Exploration of Paint' at Tooth's, and 'British Abstract Art' at the ICA], 'Comment', Third Programme, 24 January 1957, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/4/2/85
- E13** 'On the film *Twelve Angry Men* at the Leicester Square Theatre, London, 'Comment', Third Programme, 2 May 1957, TGA 200816/8/1/6; BBC WAC
- E14** 'The Critics' [B.- Iris Murdoch, *The Sandcastle* (Pamela Hansford Johnson); A.- Max Beerbohm at Leicester Galleries (DS); F.- *The Spirit of St Louis* (Arnot Robertson); TH.- Ionesco, *The Chairs*, trans. by Donald Watson, at Royal Court (Harold Hobson); R.- 'Nuts in May' by Louis Macneice on Home Service (Stephen Potter)], 'The Critics', Home Service, 2 June 1957, BBC WAC
- E15** 'The Critics' [A.- Expressionists at Marlborough Art Gallery (DS); F.- *The Young Stranger* (Robertson); R.- Alan Brooke Diaries on Home Service (Potter); B.- Robert Graves, *My Sainly Billy* (Johnson)], Home Service, 9 June 1957, BBC WAC
- E16** 'The Critics' [F.- *The Admiral Crichton* (Robertson); TH. *Free as Air*, Savoy Theatre (Hobson); R.- 'Dark Sayings', Third Programme (John Metcalf); B.- Patrick Leigh Fermor, *A Time to Keep Silence* (Alan Pryce-Jones); A.- Sidney Nolan, Whitechapel Gallery (DS)], Home Service, 16 June 1957, BBC WAC
- E17** 'The Critics' [TH.- Raymond Bowers, *It's the Geography That Counts*, St James' Theatre (Hobson); TV.- 'Dive by Night' (Metcalf); B.- Nina Epton, *Navarre* (Pryce-Jones); A.- Sculpture at Holland Park (DS); F.- *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Robertson)], Home Service, 23 June 1957, BBC WAC
- E18** 'Selling Pictures', 'This Day and Age', BBC General Overseas Service, 3/4 July 1957, TGA 200816/4/1/15; TGA 200816/5/7
- E19** 'On the Film *A King in New York*', 'Comment', Third Programme, 19 September 1957, TGA 200816/8/1/6; BBC WAC
- E20** 'On the Film *A Face in the Crowd* at the Warner Theatre', 'Comment', Third Programme, 31 October 1957, TGA 200816/8/1/6; BBC microfilm
- E21** 'Cinema as a Visual Art' [discussion with Forge and Basil Taylor, chaired by Catherine de la Roche], 'Talking of Films', BBC Network Three, 5 November 1957, BBC WAC
- E22** [On the Film *Panther Panchali*], 'Comment', Third Programme, 26 December 1957, BBC WAC
- E23** 'The Critics' [R.- 'Cindy-Elle', Home Service (Siriol Hugh Jones); B.- Jean Cocteau, *Journals* (John Lehmann); A.- 'Autour du Cubisme', Gimpel Fils (DS); F.- *Windom's Way* (Robertson); TH.- Benn Levy, *The*

- Rape of the Belt*, Piccadilly Theatre (Ivor Brown)], Home Service, 29 December 1957, BBC WAC
- E24** 'The Critics' [B.- Philip O'Connor, *Memoirs of a Public Baby* (Lehmann); A.- Christmas Cards (DS); F.- *Perri* (Robertson); TH.- Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, English version by Dudley Pitts, Royal Court (Brown); R.- Edward Hymans, *The Last Cornfield*, Third Programme (Jones)], Home Service, 5 January 1958, BBC WAC
- E25** 'The Critics' [A.- 'The Age of Louis XIV', Royal Academy (DS); F.- *The Naked Truth* (Robertson); TH.- Jean Anouilh, trans. Edward Owen Marsh, *Dinner with the Family*, New Theatre (Hobson); TV.- *The Perry Como Show*, BBC (Potter); B.- Anthony Powell, *At Lady Molly's* (Janet Adam Smith)], Home Service, 12 January 1958, BBC WAC
- E26** 'The Critics' [F.- *The Enemy Below* (Robertson); TH.- Agatha Christie, *The Mousetrap*, Ambassadors Theatre (Hobson); R.- Gilbert Highet, *A Bouquet of Poisoned Ivy*, Home Service (Potter); B.- Rose Macaulay, *The World My Wilderness* (Smith); A.- Michael Andrews, *Beaux Arts* (DS)], Home Service, 19 January 1958, BBC WAC
- E27** 'The Critics' [TH.- (although opera) Poulenc, *The Carmelites*, Royal Opera House (Hobson); T.- *Tonight*, BBC (Potter); B.- L.R. Jones, *Georgian Afternoon* (Smith); A.- film *The Picasso Mystery* (DS); F.- *The Down Payment* (Robertson)], Home Service, 26 January 1958, BBC WAC
- E28** 'The Critics' [R.- *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, Third Programme (Potter); B.- Oliver Warner, *A Portrait of Lord Nelson* (Smith); A.- London Group Exhibition, RBA Gallery (DS); F.- *Paths of Glory* (Riccardo Aragno); TH.- Eugene O'Neill, *The Iceman Cometh*, Arts Theatre (Hobson)], Home Service, 2 February 1958, BBC WAC
- E29** [Review of Gris retrospective at Marlborough Fine Art], 'Comment', Third Programme, 20 February 1958, TGA 200816/4/1/54; TGA 200816/8/1/8; BBC WAC
Published in A14
- E30** 'The Critics' [F.- *The Unvanquished* (Aragno); TH.- Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Comedy Theatre (Richard Findlater); R.- 'Any Answers', Light Programme (Charles Gibbs-Smith); B.- Gilbert Phelps, *The Centenarians* (Pryce-Jones); A.- Edward Middleditch, *Beaux Arts* (DS)], Home Service, 23 February 1958, BBC WAC
- E31** 'The Critics' [TH.- *Where's Charley?*, Palace Theatre (Findlater); R.- 'Saturday Night on the Light', Light Programme (Gibbs-Smith); B.- William Humphrey, *Home from the Hill* (Margaret Lane); A.- Juan Gris, Marlborough Gallery (DS); F.- *Carve Her Name With Pride* (Edgar Anstey)], Home Service, 2 March 1958, BBC WAC
- E32** 'The Critics' [R.- *Famous Trials No. 3- The Turf Libel*, Home Service (Gibbs-Smith); B.- Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Biography* (Margaret Lane); A.- Alexander Weatherson, *Gallery One* (DS); F.- *Violent Playground* (Anstey); TH.- Peter Ustinov, *Paris Not So Gay*, Oxford Playhouse (Findlater)] Home Service, 9 March 1958, BBC WAC
- E33** 'The Critics' [B.- F.L. Lucas, *The Search for Good Sense* (Lane); A.- Pictures from Ted Power Collection at Tate (DS); F.- *The Seventh Seal* (Anstey); TH.- Ibsen, *Little Eyelf*, at Lyric Hammersmith (Findlater); R.- *Photography and Cinematography*, Network 3 (Gibbs-Smith)', Home Service, 16 March 1958, BBC WAC

- E34** [On Robert Colquhoun exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery], 'Comment' , Third Programme, 3 April 1958, BBC WAC
- E35** [On Dubuffet], 'Comment', Third Programme, 1 May 1958, TGA 200816/8/1/11
Published in A14
- E36** [On Henry Moore bronzes at Marlborough Gallery], 'Comment', Third Programme, 26 June 1958, BBC WAC
See C225
- E37** 'Special Notice' [Review of *Impressionist Paintings in the Louvre* with commentary by Germain Bazin], 'World of Books', Third Programme, 2 August 1958, BBC WAC
- E38** 'The Critics' [B.- Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Helen Gardner); A.- Children's Art at RI Galleries (DS); F.- *Next to No Time* (Anstey); TH.- George Tabori, *Brouhaha*, Aldwych Theatre (Brown); R.- *Portrait of a Prime Minister*, Home Service (Metcalf)], Home Service, 14 September 1958, BBC WAC
- E39** 'The Critics' [A.- Bomberg at Arts Council Gallery (DS); F.- *God's Little Acre* (Anstey); TH.- Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, *Auntie Mame*, Adelphi Theatre (Brown); R.- Merfyn Turner, *Tom*, Home Service (Cyril Ray); B.- Boris Pasternak, *Dr. Zhivago*, trans. by Harari and Hayward (Gardner)], Home Service, 21 September 1958, BBC WAC
- E40** 'The Critics' [F.- *The Cranes Are Flying* (Anstey); TH.- Schiller, *Mary Stuart*, Old Vic (Brown); R.- Eric Evans, *The Little Nightingale*, Third Programme (Ray); B.- Elizabeth Jennings, *A Sense of the World* and R.S. Thomas, *Poetry for Supper* (Gardner); A.- 'Trends in Contemporary Dutch Art', Arts Council (DS)], Home Service, 28 September 1958, BBC WAC
- E41** 'The Critics' [TH.- Eugene O'Neill, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Globe Theatre (Brown); R.- 'Bishops and Kings' talk by Enoch Powell, Third Programme (Ray); B.- Elisabeth Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great* (Gardner); A.- Edward James collection, Tate (DS); F.- *The Defiant Ones* (Roger Manvell)], Home Service, 5 October 1958, BBC WAC
- E42** 'The Critics' [R.- *Parents and Children- a Religious Upbringing*, Network Three (H.A.L. Craig); B.- Graham Greene, *Our Man in Havana* (Elspeth Huxley); A.- Victor Pasmore constructions, O'Hana Gallery (DS); F.- *Rockets Galore* (Manvell); TH.- J.M. Synge, *The Heart's a Wonder*, Westminster Theatre (Brown)], Home Service, 12 October 1958, BBC WAC
- E43** 'The Critics' [B.- John Douglas Pringle, *Australian Accent* (Huxley); A.- Women's International Art, Whitechapel Gallery (DS); F.- *The Rickshaw Man* (Manvell); TH.- Robert Ardrey, *Shadow of Heroes*, Piccadilly Theatre (Brown); R.- James Manley, *A Letter in the Desert*, Third Programme (Craig)], Home Service, 19 October 1958, BBC WAC
- E44** 'On the Exhibition of Work by Kurt Schwitters at Lord's Gallery, St John's Wood', 'Comment', Third Programme, 23 October 1958, TGA 200816/8/1/5; BBC WAC
- E45** [Opening of American Art Gallery, London], 'Today', Home Service, 31 October 1958, BBC WAC
- E46** [Review of Pollock Exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery and 'Seventeen American Painters' at USIS Gallery], 'Comment', Third Programme, 7 November 1958, BBC WAC
Published in A14

- E47** [Paintings from the Urvater Collection at Tate Gallery], 'Today', Home Service, 12 November 1958, BBC WAC
- E48** [Stubbs Exhibition], 'Today', Home Service, 21 November 1958, BBC WAC
- E49** 'The Everyman Cinema', 'Talking of Films', Network Three, 30 December 1958, BBC WAC
- E50** 'A Cartoon Film [on Richard Williams, *The Little Island*]', 'Comment', Third Programme, 15 January 1959, BBC WAC
- E51** [On Michael Bentine's radio series 'Round the Bend'], 'Comment', Third Programme, 5 February 1959, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/4/4/55
- E52** '*The Horse's Mouth*' [review of film of same name], 'Woman's Hour', Light Programme, 6 February 1959, BBC WAC
- E53** [On Elinor Bellingham-Smith Exhibition, Leicester Galleries], 'Comment', Third Programme, 12 February 1959, BBC WAC
- E54** [Preview of Young Contemporaries Exhibition], 'Today', Home Service, 20 February 1959, BBC WAC
- E55** [On Young Contemporaries], 'Comment' Third Programme, 5 March 1959, BBC WAC
- E56** 'The New American Painting and Ourselves', Third Programme, 15 March 1959, TGA 200816/8/1/8; BBC WAC
- E57** [On the Film *Goha*], 'Comment', Third Programme, 9 April 1959, BBC WAC
- E58** [Reviews of Films *Al Capone* and *Compulsion*], 'Woman's Hour', Light Programme, 22 April 1959, TGA 200816/8/1/6
- E59** 'The Critics' [TH.- Samuel Taylor with Cornelia Otis Skinner, *The Pleasure of His Company*, Haymarket Theatre (J.W. Lambert); TV.- 'Panorama' (Metcalf); B.- Walter Allen, *All in a Lifetime* (C.V. Wedgwood); A.- RA Summer Exhibition (DS); F.- *The Doctor's Dilemma* (Aragno)], Home Service, 3 May 1959, BBC WAC
- E60** 'The Critics' [R.- 'Asking the World', Home Service (Craig); B.- Elsa Morente, *Arturo's Island* (Wedgwood); A.- Odilon Redon at Matthiesen (DS); F.- *It Happened to Jane* (Aragno); TH.- John Osborne, *The World of Paul Slickey*, Palace Theatre (T.C. Worsley)], Home Service, 10 May 1959, BBC WAC
- E61** 'The Critics' [B.- Robert Graves, *Collected Poems* (Al Alvarez); A.- Bernard Meadows, Gimpel Fils (DS); F.- *Some Like It Hot* (Anstey); TH.- Shelley, *The Cenci*, Old Vic (Worsley); TV.- 'Right to Reply', Independent Television (Craig)], Home Service, 17 May 1959, BBC WAC
- E62** [Review of *Agee on Film*], 'Talking of Films', BBC Network Three, 19 May 1959, BBC WAC
- E63** 'The Critics' [A.- Henry Moore, Marlborough Gallery (DS); F.- *A Lesson in Love* (Anstey); TH.- Lillian Hellman, *Candide*, Saville (Worsley); TV.- *The Quiet One* (Craig); B.- George Garrett, *King of the Mountain* (Alvarez)], Home Service, 24 May 1959, BBC WAC
- E64** 'The Critics' [F.- *Sapphire* (Freda Bruce Lockhart); TH.- Tennessee Williams, *Orpheus Descending*, Royal Court (Worsley); R.- *The Voice of the Shem* [passages from *Finnegans Wake*], Third Programme (Craig); B.- John Berryman, *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet and Other Poems* (Alvarez); A.- Jack Smith, Matthiesen (DS)], Home Service, 31 May 1959, BBC WAC
- E65** 'The Critics' [TH.- Bernard Miles, *Lock Up Your Daughters* (adapted from Fielding's *Rape Upon Rape*, Mermaid Theatre, Puddle Dock (Worsley);

- TV.- 'This Week', Independent Television (Craig); B.- Edmund Keeley, *The Libation* (Alvarez); A.- Victor Brauner, Leicester Galleries (DS); F.- *Shake Hands with the Devil* (Lockhart)], Home Service, 7 June 1959, BBC WAC
- E66** 'Three Painters on Painting' [DS in conversation with Lanyon, Scott and Davie], Third Programme, 19 June 1959, TAV 214AB
- E67** 'Review of the Romantic Exhibition', 'Today', Home Service, 9 July 1959, BBC WAC
- E68** [Talk on Kenneth Armitage, also programme editor], 'Comment', Third Programme, 30 July 1959, TGA 200816/8/1/2; TGA 200816/5/7; BBC WAC
- E69** [On Giacometti Exhibition, Hanover Gallery, also programme editor], 'Comment', Third Programme, 6 August 1959, BBC WAC
- E70** 'On the Czech film *Apassionata* at the Edinburgh Festival', 'Comment', Third Programme, 3 September 1959, TGA 200816/8/1/6; BBC WAC
- E71** 'The Critics' [Edinburgh Festival edition: F.- *Apassionata*, *Orfeu Negro*, *The Savage Rye* (Dilys Powell); TH.- Eric Linklater, *Breakspear in Gascony*, Gateway Theatre, Sir David Lindsay, *The Three Estaites*, Assembly Hall (Philip Hope-Wallace); A.- 'Masterpieces of Scottish Art', Scottish Royal Academy (DS)], Home Service, 6 September 1959, BBC WAC
- E72** [Interviewing S.J. Perelman with Harry Craig and John Bowen], 'Frankly Speaking', Home Service, 23 September 1959, BBC WAC
- E73** [On Malevich Exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery], 'Today', Home Service, 15 October 1959, BBC WAC
- E74** [On Malevich Exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery], 'Comment', Third Programme, 29 October 1959, BBC WAC
- E75** 'Stanley Spencer', 'Comment', Third Programme, 17 December 1959, BBC WAC
- E76** 'The Critics' [F.- *Ben Hur*, the Empire (Manvell); TH. - *Make Me An Offer*, New Theatre (Lambert); R.- *This Year of Summer*, Home Service (Ray); B.- Dorothy Charques, *The Nunnery* (Johnson); A.- Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy (DS)], Home Service, 3 January 1960, BBC WAC
- E77** 'The Critics' [TH.- Michael Gilbert, *A Clean Kill*, Criterion Theatre (Lambert); TV.- *H.M.S. Ark Royal*, BBC (Potter); B.- *The Most of S.J. Perelman* (Alvarez); A.- 17th Century Paintings at RA Winter Exhibition (DS); F.- *Our Man in Havana* (Manvell)], Home Service, 10 January 1960, BBC WAC
- E78** 'The Critics' [TH.- *Great Expectations* adapted by Gerald Frowe, Mermaid Theatre (Findlater); R.- 'Talking of Theatre', Network Three (Jacques Brunius); B.- Julian Fane, *A Letter* (Pryce-Jones); A.- Photographs by Ida Kar, Whitechapel Gallery (DS); F.- *Come Back Africa* (Anstey)], Home Service, 24 April 1960, BBC WAC
- E79** 'The Critics' [TV.- 'Monitor', BBC (Brunius); B.- C.P. Snow, *The Affair* (Pryce-Jones); A.- James Ensor, Marlborough Gallery (DS); F.- *Cone of Silence* (Anstey); TH.- *A Passage to India* adapted by Santha Rama Hau (Findlater)], Home Service, 1 May 1960, BBC WAC
- E80** [Review of 'Guggenheim Award', RWS galleries], 'Comment', Third Programme, 5 May 1960, TGA 200816/4/1/22; BBC WAC
- E81** [Interview with Stanley Kubrick and Gavin Lambert], 'Talking of Films', Network Three, 7 June 1960, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/4/4/65

- E82** 'Self-Portrait of an American Artist' [David Smith interview], Third Programme, 29 July 1960, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/1
See C347
- E83** 'The Critics' [TH. - Chekhov, *The Seagull*, Old Vic (Brown); R.- *Battle for Britain*, Home Service (Giles Playfair); B.- Brian Moore, *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (Gardner); A.- Whistler, Arts Council Gallery (DS); F.- *The Fugitive Kind* (Aragno)], Home Service, 11 September 1960, BBC WAC
- E84** 'The Critics' [TV.- 'Final Olympic Sportview', BBC (Potter); B.- C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Gardner); A.- London Salon of Photography (DS); F.- *Pickpocket* (Aragno); TH.- Noel Coward, *Waiting in the Wings*, Duke of York's Theatre (Brown)], Home Service, 18 September 1960, BBC WAC
- E85** 'The Critics' [B.- Hillary Waugh, *Sleep Long My Love*, (Gardner); A.- Henry Mundy, Hanover Gallery (DS); F.- *It Started in Naples* (Amagno); TH.- Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall, *Billy Liar*, Cambridge Theatre (Brown); R.- 'The Archers' Omnibus, Light Programme (Lionel Hale)], Home Service, 25 September 1960, BBC WAC
- E86** 'The Critics' [A.- Prunella Clough, Whitechapel Gallery (DS); F.- *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (Aragno); TH.- Andrew Rosenthal, *Horses in Mid-Stream*, Vaudeville Theatre (Brown); TV.- BBC programme on Floyd Paterson (Potter); B.- Heinrich Schirmbeck, *The Blinding Light* (Gardner)], Home Service, 2 October 1960, BBC WAC
- E87** [Adolf Gottlieb Interview], 'Painting as Self-Discovery', Third Programme, 8 October 1960, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/3
See C333
- E88** 'The Critics' [F.- *The Time Machine* (Aragno); TH.- Enid Bagnold, *The Last Joke*, Phoenix Theatre (Brown); R.- 'Ten O'Clock News', Home Service (Potter); B.- John Rae, *The Custard Boys* (Lane); A.- Nigerian Sculpture, Arts Council Gallery (DS)] , Home Service, 9 October 1960, BBC WAC
- E89** 'The Literature of Cricket' [On Alan Ross, *The Cricketer's Companion*], Third Programme, 14 October 1960, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/5/8/12
See D74
- E90** 'The Critics' [F.- *Naked Island* (Eric Keown); TV.- 'Meeting Point', BBC (Potter); B.- Lesley Blanch, *The Sabres of Paradise* (Lane); A.- Van Gogh Self-portraits, Marlborough Gallery (DS); TH.- *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (Paul Dehn)], Home Service, 16 October 1960, BBC WAC
- E91** [Robert Motherwell Interview], 'Painting as Self-Discovery', Third Programme, 22 October 1960, TGA 200816/6/1/7
See C325
- E92** [Philip Guston Interivew], 'Painting as Self-Discovery', Third Programme, 6 November 1960, TGA 200816/6/1/8; BBC WAC
Published in A20
- E93** [Franz Kline Interview], 'Painting as Self-Discovery', Third Programme, 19 November 1960, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/6
See C329
- E94** [Willem de Kooning Interview], 'Painting as Self-Discovery', Third Programme, 3 December 1960, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/5
See C328 and C377
Also published in different version in A20

- E95** 'The Critics' [F.- *The Facts of Life*, Odeon Theatre (Charles Marowitz); TH. - *King Kong*, Princes Theatre (Worsley); R.- 'In Our Time- "The Changing Village"', Home Service (Brunius); B.- Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart* (Alvarez); A.- Toulouse-Lautrec, Tate Gallery (DS)], Home Service, 5 March 1961, BBC WAC
- E96** 'The Critics' [TH.- *The Connection*, Duke of York's Theatre (Worsley); R.- 'Painting of the Month', Home Service (Barbara Bray); B.- David Holbrook, *Imaginings* and W.D. Snodgrass, *Heart's Needle* (Alvarez); A.- Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia (DS); F.- *The Rebel* (Marowitz)], Home Service, 12 March 1961, BBC WAC
- E97** 'The Critics' [TV.- 'Meeting Point', BBC (Bray); B.- Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd* (Alvarez); A.- Victor Pasmore, New London Gallery (DS); TH.- John Whiting, *The Devils*, Aldwych Theatre (Worsley)], Home Service, 19 March 1961, BBC WAC
- E98** 'The Critics' [B.- Ian Fleming, *Thunderball* (Alvarez); A.- Carel Weight, Zwemmer Gallery (DS); F.- *The Sins of Rachel Cade* (Anstey); TH.- Ibsen, *The Lady from the Sea*, Queen's Theatre (Worsley); R.- William Golding, *Break my Heart*, Home Service (Bray)], Home Service, 26 March 1961, BBC WAC
- E99** 'The Critics' [A.- Landseer, RA (DS); F.- *101 Dalmatians* (Anstey); TH.- *The Miracle Worker*, Royalty Theatre, Kingsway (Worsley); R.- *Quanta and Reality*, Third Programme (Bray); B.- Robert Harbinson, *Up Spake the Cabin Boy* (Alvarez)], Home Service, 2 April 1961, BBC WAC
- E100** 'The Critics' [F.- *The World of Apu* (Anstey); TH.- *Sparrers Can't Sing*, Wyndhams Theatre (Hope-Wallace); R.- *The Flight of the Wild Geese*, Third Programme (Laurence Kitchin); B.- Claude Lévi-Strauss, *A World on the Wane* (J.G. Weightman); A.- Rebeyrolle, Marlborough Gallery (DS)], Home Service, 9 April 1961, BBC WAC
- E101** 'Daumier Exhibition', 'Today', Home Service, 14 June 1961, BBC WAC
- E102** 'The Critics' [TH. - Bernard Shaw, *Heartbreak House*, Wyndhams (Worsley); R.- *Tristan da Cunha No More*, Home Service (Cyril Ray); B.- Colin M. Turnbull, *The Forest People* (Huxley); A.- Epstein, Tate Gallery (DS); F.- *Gorgo* (Dehn)], Home Service, 12 November 1961, BBC WAC
- E103** 'The Critics' [R.- *A Cry for Help* (Ray); B.- T.E.D. Howarth, *Citizen King: The Life of Louis-Philippe* (Huxley); A.- Modern Jewellery, Goldsmiths Hall (DS); F.- *The Connection* (Dehn); TH.- Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, Old Vic (Worsley)], Home Service, 19 November 1961, BBC WAC
- E104** 'The Critics' [B.- Morley Callaghan, *The Loved and the Lost*; A.- Victorian paintings, Agnews (DS); F.- *King of Kings* (Dehn); TH.- Eugene O'Neill, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Old Vic (Worsley); R.- 'The Colonial Reckoning': Reith Lectures by Margory Perham, Home Service (Ray)], Home Service, 26 November 1961, BBC WAC
- E105** 'The Critics' [A.- American Folk Art, American Embassy (DS); F.- *The Innocents* (Dehn); Gwyn Thomas, *The Keep*, Royal Court (Worsley); R.- Patrick Dickenson, *Myello's [?] Laurel Bow*, Home Service (Ray); B.- George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (Huxley)], Home Service, 3 December 1961, BBC WAC
- E106** 'The Critics' [F.- *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (Dehn); TH.- Henry Livings, *Big Soft Nellie*, Theatre Royal Stratford East (Bamber Gascoigne); TV.- 'The Time, the Place and the Camera', ITV (Ray); B.- *Winter's Tales- Stories from Modern Russia*, ed. by C.P. Snow and

- Pamela Hansford Johnson (Weightman); A.- Thomas Lawrence, RA (DS)], Home Service, 10 December 1961, BBC WAC
- E107** 'The Critics' [TH.- Ira Levin, *Critic's Choice*, Vaudeville Theatre (Gascoigne); R.- *Children of the Ashes*, BBC (Potter); B.- *The Law as Literature: an Anthology of Great Writing in and about the Law*, ed. By L. Blom-Cooper (Weightman); A.- Newspaper Cartoons (DS); F.- *La Verité* (Dehn)], Home Service, 17 December 1961, BBC WAC
- E108** 'Painting of the Month: *Still Life with Teapot* by Cézanne', 'Painting of the Month', Home Service, 7 January 1962 , TGA 200816/5/8/20
See C300 and C301
- E109** 'Interview with Helen Frankenthaler, American Painter', 'New Comment', Third Programme, 31 January 1962, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/9
Published in A20
- E110** 'Painting of the Month: *Still Life with Fish* by Braque', 'Painting of the Month', Home Service, 4 February 1962, TGA 200816/5/8/21
See C303 and C304
- E111** 'Painting of the Month: *The Table* by Bonnard', 'Painting of the Month', Home Service, 4 March 1962, TGA 200816/5/8/22
See C307 and C308
- E112** 'William Coldstream Talks to David Sylvester', Third Programme 23 April 1962, BBC WAC
See C429
- E113** 'The Critics' [F.- *Light in the Piazza* (Kenneth J. Robinson); TH. - Peter Ustinov, *Photo Finish*, Saville Theatre (Hobson); R.- *The Golden Fleece*, Third Programme (Bray); B.- Oskar Kokoschka, *A Sea Ringed with Visions* (Lambert); A.- Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (DS)], Home Service, 6 May 1962, BBC WAC
- E114** 'The Critics' [TH.- Arnold Wesker, *Chips with Everything*, Royal Court (Hobson); TV.- *Fifty Fathoms Deep*, BBC (Bray); B.- John Updike, *The Same Door* (Metcalf); A.- 'The Graven Image 1962', RWS Galleries (DS); F.- *The Snobs* (Robinson)], Home Service, 13 May 1962, BBC WAC
- E115** 'The Critics' [R.- 'Your Verdict', Light Programme (Bray); B.- 'Frank Tuchy, *The Admiral and the Nuns* (Metcalf); A.- Bridget Riley, Gallery One (DS); F.- *The Lady with the Little Dog* (Robinson); TH.- Lionel Bart, *Blitz*, Adelphi (Hobson)], Home Service, 20 May 1962, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/4/1/21 (part only)
- E116** 'Interviewing Sidney Nolan', 'New Comment', Third Programme, 23 May 1962, BBC WAC
- E117** 'The Critics' [B.- *At 12 Mr Byng was Shot* (Metcalf); A.- Sidney Nolan, ICA (DS); F.- *Jules et Jim* (Robinson); TH.- Peter Shaeffer, *The Private Ear and The Public Eye*, Globe Theatre (Hobson); R.- *Saints and Soldiers*, Third Programme (Craig)', Home Service, 27 May 1962, BBC WAC
- E118** 'The Critics' [A.- Coventry Cathedral (Robinson and DS); B.- J.D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (Smith); TH.- Françoise Sagan, *Castle in Sweden*, Piccadilly Theatre (Hale); R.- *The Imposters*, Home Service (Craig)], Home Service, 3 June 1962, BBC WAC
- E119** 'The Critics' [F.- *Barabbas* (Robinson); TH.- Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall, *England our England*, Princes Theatre (Hale); TV.- 'Juke Box Jury', BBC (Craig); B.- Iris Murdoch, *An Unofficial Rose*,

- (Smith); A.- Francis Bacon, Tate Gallery (DS)], Home Service, 10 June 1962, BBC WAC
- E120** 'Rodrigo Moynihan Talking to David Sylvester', Third Programme, 10 July 1962, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/4/2/85
See C397
- E121** [Discussion about "Drawing Towards Painting" with Adrian Heath and Lucie-Smith], 'New Comment', Third Programme, 5 September 1962, BBC WAC
- E122** "Al Capp Talks about his Cartoon World of 'Li'l Abner', 'Dogspatch' and the 'Shmoos' to David Sylvester and George Melly', Home Service, 29 October 1962, TGA 200816/5/7/15
- E123** 'A Sum of Destructions' [on Picasso; DS co-scriptwriter], 'Cubism and After', BBC (TV), 12 November 1962, TGA 200816/5/6/1/5; BFI (recording)
- E124** 'In the Arena' [on surrealism and abstraction; DS co-scriptwriter], 'Cubism and After', BBC (TV), 19 November 1962, TGA 200816/5/6/1/6; BFI (recording)
- E125** 'Figures in Space' [on Moore and Giacometti; DS co-scriptwriter], 'Cubism and After', BBC (TV), 26 November 1962, TGA 200816/5/7/1/7
- E126** 'On Arp and Nature', Third Programme, 1 December 1962, BBC WAC
Published in A14
- E127** 'The Critics' [B.- John Updike, *Pigeon Feathers* (Lambert); A.- Women's International Art Club (DS); F.- *Knife in the Water* (Aragno); TH.- Kurt Weill and Berthold Brecht, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany*, Sadlers Wells (Hobson); R.- Ted Hughes, *The Difficulties of a Bridegroom*, Third Programme (Alvarez)], Home Service, 27 January 1963, BBC WAC
- E128** 'The Critics' [A.- Philip Guston, Whitechapel Gallery (DS); F.- *The Devil's Eye* (Aragno); TH.- Shakespeare, *Othello*, Old Vic (Hobson); R.- *A Radio Centenary Portrait*, Home Service (Alvarez); B.- Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (Metcalf)], Home Service, 3 February 1963, BBC WAC
- E129** 'The Critics' [F.- *The Eclipse (L'Eclisse)* (Aragno); TH.- Spike Milligan and John Antrobus, *The Bed Sitting Room*, Mermaid Theatre (Hobson); R.- Charles Cohen, *The Flip Side*, Third Programme (Craig); B.- J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (Metcalf); A.- Young Contemporaries (DS)], Home Service, 10 February 1963, BBC WAC
- E130** 'The Critics' [TH.- Berthold Brecht, *Baal*, Phoenix Theatre (Hobson); TV.- Tyrone Guthrie, *The Bergonzi Hand* (Craig); B.- E.B. White, *The Points of My Compass* (Metcalf); A.- Australian Paintings, Tate Gallery (DS); F.- *This Sporting Life* (Aragno)], Home Service, 17 February 1963, BBC WAC
- E131** 'The Critics' [TV.- 'Monitor- Roosevelt's USA', BBC (Craig); B.- John Morris, *A Winter in Nepal* (Smith); A.- Kitaj, New London Galleries (DS); F.- *Blood Money* (Derek Prouse); TH.- James Saunders, *Next Time I'll Sing to You*, Arts Theatre (Hobson)], Home Service, 24 February 1963, BBC WAC
- E132** 'The Critics' [J.D. Salinger, *Raise High the Roof Beams, Carpenters and Seymour: an Introduction* (Smith); A.- Henri Michaux, Robert Fraser Gallery (DS); F.- *It's Only Money* (Prouse); TG.- Jean Kerr, *Mary, Mary*, Queen's Theatre (Hale); TV.- *European Centre Forward*, BBC (Craig)], Home Service, 3 March 1963, BBC WAC

- E133** 'Francis Bacon Talks to David Sylvester, BBC Third Programme, 23 March 1963, BBC WAC
See C337
Published in different form in A10
- E134** 'The Critics' [R.- *Some New Niagara* (portrait of Liszt), Home Service (Jeremy Noble); F.- Walker Percy, *The Movie-Goer* (Smith); A.- Henryk Stazewski, Grabowski Gallery (DS); F.- *I Could Go On Singing* (Manvell); TH.- *Half a Sixpence*, Cambridge Theatre (Hale)], Home Service, 31 March 1963, BBC WAC
- E135** 'The Critics' [B.- Ian Fleming, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, (Karl Miller); A.- Postage Stamps Exhibition at King's Library, British Museum (DS); F.- *Boccaccio 70* (Manvell); TH.- *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, Shaftesbury Theatre (Hale); TV.- 'Tempo- A Medium-Sized Cage', ABC Network (Noble)], Home Service, 7 April 1963, BBC WAC
- E136** 'The Critics' [Le Bas Collection, RA (DS); F.- *Two for the Seesaw* (Manvell); TH.- *O, What a Lovely War*, Theatre Royal Stratford East (Worsley); TV.- *Perry Mason* and *The Defenders*, BBC (John Gross); B.- Brian Moore, *An Answer from Limbo* (Karl Miller)], Home Service, 14 April 1963, BBC WAC
- E137** 'Discussion on Modern British Art' [with Richard Wollheim and Robert Melville], 'New Comment', Third Programme, 6 June 1963, BBC WAC
- E138** 'Henry Moore Talking to David Sylvester', Third Programme, 14 July 1963, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/2/1
See C336 and C338
- E139** 'The Critics' [TH.- Terence Rattigan, *Man and Boy*, Queen's Theatre (Bray); TV.- 'Tomorrow's Theatre' conference, covered in 'Monitor', BBC (Ian Rodger); B.- David Storey, *Rudcliffe* (John Bowen); A.- Frank Auerbach, Beaux Arts (DS); F.- *Freud- the Secret Passion* (Anstey)], Home Service, 15 September 1963, BBC WAC
- E140** 'The Critics' [F.- *In the French Style* (Alvarez); TH.- *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*', Strand Theatre (Hobson); R.- *From Captain Marvel to Adam Faith*, Home Service (Melly); B.- *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* by Hannah Arendt (Bowen); A.- Harold Cohen, Robert Fraser Gallery (DS)], Home Service, 13 October 1963, BBC WAC
- E141** 'Soutine and the Mysteries of Paint' [in conversation with Forge and Moynihan], 'New Comment', Third Programme, 22 October 1963, TGA 200616/4/2/108; BBC WAC
- E142** 'The Critics' [TH.- *Six of One*, Adelphi (Hobson); TV.- 'Dancing Club', BBC (Melly); B.- Peter Matthiessen, *Under the Mountain Wall* (Smith); A.- Eisenstein drawings, V&A Museum (DS); F.- *From Russia with Love* (Alvarez)], Home Service, 20 October 1963, BBC WAC
- E143** 'The Critics' [TV.- *Dig This Rhubarb*, BBC (Melly); B.- Man Ray, 'Self Portrait' (Smith); A.- Paul Klee drawings, Arts Council Gallery (DS); F.- *To the Balcony* (Aragno); TH.- Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, National Theatre (Hobson)], Home Service, 27 October 1963, TGA 200816/4/2/60; BBC WAC
See D77
- E144** 'The Critics' [Mary MacCarthy, *The Group* (Smith); A.- 'Popular Image USA', ICA (DS); F.- *It Happened One Night* (Aragno); TH.-Albert

- Camus, *The Possessed*, Mermaid Theatre (Hobson); R.- *Fando and Lis*, Third Programme (Craig)], Home Service, 3 November 1963, BBC WAC
- E145** 'The Critics' [A.- Louise Nevelson at Hanover Gallery (DS); F.- *Angel Baby* (Aragno); TH.- Giles Cooper, *Out of the Crocodile*, Phoenix Theatre (Lambert); R.- *The Uses of the Past*, Third Programme (Craig); B.- Jean Cau, trans. Richard Howard, *The Mercy of God* (Smith)], Home Service, 10 November 1963, BBC WAC
- E146** 'The Critics' [F.- *Les Abysses* (Aragno); TH.- *The Boys from Syracuse*, Theatre Royal Drury Lane (Lambert); TV.- Don Haworth, *The Mersey Sound*, BBC (Craig); B.- Kingsley Amis, *One Fat Englishman* (Miller); A.- Cubist paintings, Kaplan Gallery (DS)], Home Service, 17 November 1963, BBC WAC
- E147** 'Robert Medley talking to David Sylvester, Third Programme, 23 November 1963, TGA 200816/8/1/4; BBC microfilm
- E148** 'Goya' [discussion with Forge and Taylor], 'New Comment', Third Programme, 10 December 1963, BBC WAC
- E149** 'The Critics' [R.- *The Words Were Theirs*, Home Service (Gross); B.- Aillon Ward, *John Keats- The Making of a Poet* (Gardner); A.- Goya prints, British Museum (DS); F.- *David and Lisa* (Manvell); TH.- *The Merry Rooster's Panto*, Wyndhams Theatre (Hope-Wallace)], Home Service, 5 January 1964, BBC WAC
- E150** 'The Cinema of Catastrophe' [with, Paul Mayersberg, Eric Rhode and Lawrence Kitchin, on *Dr Strangelove* and other films], 'New Comment', Third Programme, 4 February 1964, TGA 200816/8/1/6; TGA 200816/4/4/65; BBC WAC
- E151** 'Discussion on Mark Rothko' [with Larry Rivers]; 'New Comment', Third Programme, 18 February 1964, BBC WAC
- E152** 'In a Mist' [on Charlie Parker and Bix Beiderbecke], Third Programme, 2 March 1964, TGA 200816/8/1/9; BBC microfilm
See D78
- E153** 'Ten Years of the Wide Screen' [with Mayersberg], 'New Comment', Third Programme, 31 March 1964, BBC WAC
- E154** 'Louise Nevelson, New York Sculptor' [interview], Third Programme, 6 April 1964, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/2
Published in A20
- E155** 'Matisse', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 5 April 1964, TGA 200816/5/6/2/1
See A5
- E156** 'Picasso', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 12 April 1964, TGA 200816/5/6/2/2
See A5
- E157** 'Mondrian', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 19 April 1964, TGA 200816/5/6/2/3; BFI (recording)
See A5
- E158** 'Brancusi', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 26 April 1964, TGA 200816/5/6/2/4
See A5
- E159** 'Klee', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 3 May 1964, TGA 200816/5/6/2/5
See A5
- E160** 'Bonnard', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 10 May 1964, TGA 200816/5/6/3/1
See A5

- E161** 'Soutine', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 17 May 1964, TGA
200816/5/6/3/2
See A5
- E162** 'Giacometti', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 24 May 1964, TGA
200816/5/6/3/3; BFI (recording)
See A5
- E163** 'Pollock', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 24 May 1964, TGA
200816/5/6/3/4
See A5
- E164** 'Art '54-'64' [discussion on Gulbenkian exhibition at Tate with Forge],
Third Programme, 1 June 1964, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/2/12
See C346
- E165** 'De Kooning', 'Ten Modern Artists', BBC1, 7 June 1964, TGA
200816/5/6/3/5
See A5
- E166** [Interview with Ad Reinhardt], 'New Comment', Third Programme, 23
June 1964, BBC WAC
- E167** 'The Critics' [TV.- BBC coverage of cricket at Lords and tennis at
Wimbledon (Potter); B.- David Hughes, *The Major* (Donald Hall); A.-
Michael Kidner (DS); F.- *The Passenger* (Alvarez); TH.- Harold Pinter,
The Birthday Party, Aldwych Theatre (Kitchin)], Home Service, 28
June 1964, TGA 200816/4/1/22 (part only)
- E168** 'The Critics' [B.- Honor Tracy, *Spanish Leaves* (Bowen); A.- Tajiri,
Hamilton Galleries (DS); F.- *Long Day's Journey into Night* (Manvell);
TH.- David Rudkin, *Afore Night Come*, Aldwych (Kitchin); TV.- Alan
Whicker documentary *Death in the Morning*, BBC (Potter)], Home
Service, 5 July 1964, BBC WAC
See C352
- E169** 'The Critics' [A.- Sidney Nolan, Qantas Gallery (DS); F.- *What a Way to
Go* (Manvell); TH.- *Black Africa* ballet, Adelphi (Kitchin); TV.- *Martin
Chuzzlewit*, BBC1 (Potter); B.- Ignazio Silone, trans Harvey Fergusson
Bread and Wine (Bowen)], Home Service, 12 July 1964, BBC WAC
- E170** 'The Critics' [F.- *Marnie* (Manvell); TH.- Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*,
Aldwych Theatre (Lambert); R.- *The Rise and Fall of Sammy Posnet*,
Third Programme (Gross); B.- Frank Tuchy, *The Ice Saints* (Johnson);
A.- London Group, Tate Gallery (DS)], Home Service, 19 July 1964, BBC
WAC
- E171** 'The Critics' [Joe Orton, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, Wyndhams Theatre
(Lambert); TV.- Julian Symonds, *The Witnesses*, ITV (Gross); B.-
Vincent Cronin, *Louis XIV* (Johnson); A.- Michelangelo drawings, BM
(DS); F.- *The Pumpkin Eater* (Manvell)], Home Service, 26 July 1964,
BBC WAC
See D79
- E172** 'The Critics' [TV.- *The Story of Sir John Pope-Hennessy*, BBC1 (John
Cross); B.- *Up the Line to Death* (anthology of World War I poems
selected by Brian Gardner) (Johnson); A.- Design of coins and currency
notes (DS); F.- *A Hard Day's Night* (Robinson); TH.- *Wait a Minim*,
Fortune Theatre], Home Service, 2 August 1964, 200816/4/1/27; BBC
WAC
- E173** 'Norman Reid in Conversation with David Sylvester and Edward Lucie-
Smith', 'New Comment', 'Third Programme', 30 September 1964, TGA
200816/4/1/12

See C349

- E174** 'The Art of Charlie Chaplin' [in conversation with Mayersberg and Prouse], 'New Comment', Third Programme, 7 October 1964, TGA 200816/8/1/6;
BBC WAC
- E175** 'The Connoisseur' [Vincent Price interviewed by DS and Mayersberg], Home Service, 3 November 1964, BBC WAC
- E176** 'Jasper Johns at the Whitechapel', Third Programme, 12 December 1964, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/4/2/57
Published in A14
- E177** 'The Critics' [TV.- Great World War series, BBC (Worsley); F.- *Dr Strangelove* (Powell); TH.- *Marat/Sade*, Aldwych Theatre (Lambert); A.- Jasper Johns, Whitechapel Gallery and USIS Gallery (DS); B.- Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning* (Miller)], Home Service, 27 December 1964, TGA 200816/4/2/57; BBC WAC
- E178** 'What the Pundits Say: About Jasper Johns', 'Monitor', BBC1, 9 February 1965, TGA 200816/4/2/57
- E179** 'The Critics' [F.- *The Love Goddesses* (Rhode); Noel Coward, *Present Laughter*, Queens Theatre (Bale); TV.- 'European Journal' (Katherine Whitehorn); B.- Aileen Hayter, *A Sultry Month: Scenes from London Literary life, 1846* (Findlater); A.- Gorky, Tate Gallery (DS)], Home Service, 25 April 1965, BBC WAC
See D80
- E180** 'Alberto Giacometti Talks to David Sylvester', Third Programme, 4 June 1965, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/5/4/9/7
See C381, C393, C395
Version also published in A13
- E181** 'The Critics' [TV.- *The World of Bertie Wooster*, BBC1 (Francis Hope); B.- Francis Williams, *A Patter of Rulers* (Bowen); A.- Jim Dine, Robert Fraser Gallery (DS); F.- *The Magnificent Men in the Flying Machines* (Anstey); TH.- Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming*, Aldwych Theatre (Hope-Wallace)], Home Service, 13 June 1965, BBC WAC
- E182** 'Robert Rauschenberg' [interview], Third Programme, 14 June 1965, BBC WAC; BL (recording); TGA 200816/6/1/1
Published in A20
- E183** [Conversation with Hess and Kozloff], 'New Comment', Third Programme, 16 June 1965, TGA 200816/4/1/20
- E184** 'The Critics' [B.- Maxine Kunin, *A Daughter and her Loves* (Bowen); A.- Jean Hélion, Leicester Galleries (DS); F.- *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* (Craig); TH.- William Francis, *Portrait of a Queen*, Vaudeville Theatre (Hope-Wallace); R.- Teach-in on Vietnam, broadcast on Third Programme (Hope)], Home Service, 20 June 1965, BBC WAC
- E185** 'The Critics' [A.- Morris Louis, Whitechapel Gallery (DS); F.- *Repulsion* (Craig); TH.- Frank Marcus, *The Killing of Sister George*, Duke of York's Theatre (Hobson); TV.- Colin Morris, *With Love and Tears* (Hope); B.- Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Bowen)], Home Service, 27 June 1965, BBC WAC
- E186** 'Claes Oldenburg' [interview], Third Programme, 8 July 65, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/15; BL (recording)
Published in A20
- E187** 'Design for What?', *Design for Living*, Rediffusion (TV), 13 August 1965, TGA 200816/5/6/1/8

- E188** 'The Critics' [Josef Albers, Gimpel Fils (DS); F.- *The Executioner* (Prouse); TH.- Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Stratford upon Avon (John Holmstrom); TV.- *From Us Gossies*, BBC1 (Brunius); B.- Heinrich Böll, *The Clown* (C.V. Wedgwood)] , Home Service, 5 September 1965, BBC WAC
- E189** 'The Critics' [F.- *How to Murder Your Wife* (Prouse); TH.- Paul Abelman, *Green Julia*, New Arts Theatre Club (Holmstrom); TV.- *Pilgrims to Lourdes*, BBC1 (Janet Quigley); B.- Walter L. Arnstein, *The Bradlaugh Case* (Wedgwood); A.- Madame Tussauds (DS)], Home Service, 12 September 1965, BBC WAC
- E190** 'The Critics' [TH.- Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, Old Vic (Hope-Wallace); R.- Jonn Pudney, *For Johnny*, Home Service (Quigley); B.- Janet Adam Smith, *John Buchan* (Wedgwood); A.- 'Treasures from the Commonwealth' (DS); F.- *Yoyo* (Manvell)], Home Service, 19 September 1965, BBC WAC
- E191** 'The Experience of Looking: An Interview with Jasper Johns', Third Programme, 10 October 1965, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/12; BL (recording of 1967 repeat broadcast)
See C387
Version also published in A20
- E192** 'Who Cares about the Arts?' [contributor], *Sunday Night*, BBC1, 2 January 1966, BFI (recording)
- E193** 'Bonnard' [discussion with Forge and Michael Podro], 'New Comment', Network Three, 12 January 1966, BBC WAC
See C358
- E194** [Discussion about Sculpture with Kozloff and Annette Michelsen], 'New Comment', Network Three, 2 March 1966, TGA 200816/5/7
- E195** 'What Makes a Painter', World Service, 28 March 1966, TGA 200816/5/7
- E196** 'The Critics' [TV.- 'University Challenge', Granada (Potter); B.- Ian Nairn, *Nairn's London* (Gross); A.- RA Summer Exhibition (DS); F.- *Dr. Zhivago* (Powell); TH.- Noel Coward, *Shadows of the Evening* and *Come into the Garden, Maud*, at Queens Theatre (Ronald Bryden)], Home Service, 8 May 1966, BBC WAC
- E197** 'The Critics' [B.- P.H. Burbank, *Italo Svevo- The Man and the Writer* (Gross); A.- Richard Smith, Whitechapel Gallery (DS); TH.- Shakespeare, *Othello*, National Theatre (Powell); F.- *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Bryden); TV.- *Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, BBC1 (Potter)], Home Service, 15 May 1966, BBC WAC
- E198** 'The Critics' [Seligman Collection of Oriental Art, Arts Council Gallery (DS); F.- *Modesty Blaise* (Powell); TH.- *The Idiot* (adapted from Dostoevsky's novel), Aldwych Theatre (Bryden); TV.- *Footprints* (biopic of Brunel), BBC2 (Potter); B.- Julian Bell and John Cornford, *Journey to the Frontier* (Gross)], Home Service, 22 May 1966, BBC WAC
- E199** [Programme on Goya's *The Third of May 1808 in Madrid*], 'Canvas', BBC2, 24 May 1966, TGA 200816/5/6/1/1
- E200** 'The Critics' [F.- *It Happened Here* (Manvell); TH.- Arnold Wesker, *Their Very Own and Golden City*, Royal Court (Bryden); R.- 'Talking About Music', Music Programme (Potter); B.- Dan Jacobson, *The Beginners* (Richard Styne); A.- Cartoons by Gerald Scarfe, Horseshoe Wharf Club (DS)], Home Service, 29 May 1966, TGA 200816/5/7 (part only); BBC WAC

- E201** 'The Critics' [TH. Sławomir Mrożek, *Tango* (Lambert); TV. 'European Journal' (Brunius); B.- Giacomo Leopardi, *Selected Prose and Poetry* (Richard Mayne); A.- Open Air Sculpture, Battersea Park (DS); F.- *A Blonde in Love* (Manvell)], Home Service, 5 June 1966, BBC WAC
- E202** 'Francis Bacon: Fragments of a Portrait', BBC1, TGA 200816/4/2/9; programme available to watch online through BBC iPlayer (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02t7ck5>)
- E203** 'The Critics' [A.- JMW Turner's *Burning of the House of Lords and Commons* on loan to Tate Gallery (Lucie-Smith); F.- *The Russians are Coming, The Russians are Coming*; TH.- *Wait Until Dark* (Milton Shulman); TV.- *Double Image*, BBC2 (Rhode); B.- Lenny Bruce, *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People* (DS)], Home Service, 4 September 1965, BBC WAC
- E204** 'The Critics' [F.- *The War is Over* (Robert Robinson); TH.- Terrence Kelly and Campbell Singer, *A Share in the Sun* (Shulman); B.- *The Terrible Rain* (World War I poetry anthology) (Alan Brien); R.- Lecture on Romanticism by Isaiah Berlin, Third Programme (Rhode); A.- Women's Art (DS)], Home Service, 11 September 1965, BBC WAC
- E205** [DS interviewed by Bryan Magee], 'This Week', Rediffusion (TV), 19 September 1966, TGA 2008616/5/6/1/9
- E206** [On Bonnard, *Nude in Bath*], 'Canvas', BBC2, 2 October 1966, TGA 200816/5/6/1/2; TGA 200816/5/6/1/3
- E207** 'Jim Dine talks to David Sylvester', Third Programme, 1 November 1966, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/21
- E208** 'Giacometti' [written and produced by DS], film produced by BFI, 1967, TGA 200816/5/4/6; programme available to watch online through Arts Council England Film Collection (<http://artsonfilm.wmin.ac.uk/filmsuk.php>)
- E209** 'Interview with Roy Lichtenstein', Third Programme, 24 April 1967, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/16
Published in A15 and A20
- E210** 'Barnett Newman Talks to David Sylvester', Third Programme, 20 March 1967, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/4
See C384, E230
Version also published in A20
- E211** 'John Cage Talks to David Sylvester, Roger Smalley and John Weeks', Third Programme, 27 April 1967, TGA 200816/6/1/10; BL (recording)
See C383
- E212** 'Frank Stella Talks to David Sylvester', Third Programme, 2 May 1967, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/14
Published in A20
- E213** 'Larry Poons Talks to David Sylvester', Third Programme, 9 May 1967, TGA 200816/6/1/21; BL (recording)
- E214** 'Postscript to the American Artists and Composers Series', Third Programme, 9 May 1967, BBC WAC
See C371
- E215** 'Picasso as Sculptor' [discussion with, Anthony Caro and Robert Rosenblum], 'The Lively Arts', Third Programme, 12 July 1967, TGA 200816/8/1/11; TGA 200816/4/2/92; BBC WAC
See C455
- E216** 'The Critics' [B.- Pat Barr, *The Coming of the Barbarians* (Anstey); F.- *Kwaidan* (Potter); A.- Kitaj, Marlborough Gallery (DS); TV.- 'Sport on

- Television' (DS)'; TH.- Peter Nichols, *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, Comedy Theatre (Mayne)], Home Service, 30 July 1967, BBC WAC
- E217** 'The Critics' [F.- *Up the Down Staircase* (Potter); B.- *Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age* compiled by E. Royston Pike (Manvell); R.- A.J. Ayer, *What Philosophers Are For*, Home Service (Potter); A.- Postage Stamps (DS); TH.- Robert Shaw, *The Man in the Glass Booth* (Metcalf), Home Service, 6 August 1967, BBC WAC
- E218** 'Robert Morris Talking to David Sylvester', Third Programme, 16 November 1967, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/6/1/17
See C380
- E219** 'Matisse and his Model', BBC2, 13 August 1968, BFI (recording)
Version of script published in A14
- E220** 'Lichtenstein in London. Roy Lichtenstein's retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery 6 January – 4 February 1968' [devised and written by DS], film produced by BFI, 1968, TGA 200816/4/2/66; programme available to watch online through Arts Council England Film Collection (<http://artsonfilm.wmin.ac.uk/filmsuk.php>)
- E221** [Discussion with Hess, Forge and Edwin Mullins about de Kooning exhibition at the Tate], 'The Lively Arts', Third Programme, 11 December 1968, BBC WAC
- E222** 'Magritte' [on *Time Transfixed* and other works], 'Canvas', BBC2, 22 July 1969, TGA 200816/5/6/1/4
- E223** 'Magritte. The False Mirror' [directed by DS], film produced by BFI, 1970, TGA 200816/5/5/1; programme available to watch online through Arts Council England Film Collection (<http://artsonfilm.wmin.ac.uk/filmsuk.php>)
- E224** 'Henry Moore. The Tate Gallery, 18 July - 22 September 1968. An Arts Council Exhibition' [co-directed by DS with Walter Lassally], film produced by BFI, 1970, programme available to watch online through Arts Council England Film Collection (<http://artsonfilm.wmin.ac.uk/filmsuk.php>)
- E225** 'Is an Elite Necessary?' [discussion with four other speakers], Radio 3, 1 November 1970, BBC WAC
- E226** 'Analysis- The Price of a Heritage' [DS interviewed by Robert Keen], Radio 4, 26 March 1971, BBC WAC
- E227** [Review of Laurens exhibition at Hayward Gallery], 'Options', Radio 4, 30 May 1971, BBC WAC
- E228** 'Master of Art' [discussion marking Picasso's 90th birthday with Melly, Michael Kitson and John Golding], 'Perspective', Radio 3, 26 October 1971, BBC WAC
- E229** 'The Man Who Read About His Own Death' [documentary about Gerald Wilde, directed and produced by Alan Yentob, including interview with DS], 'Review', BBC2, 9 June 1972, BFI (recording)
- E230** 'Barnett Newman at the Tate' [part of E210, with DS in conversation with Hess], Radio 3, 14 July 1972, BBC WAC; TGA 200816/4/2/86
See C384
- E231** [Discussion about Islamic Carpets], 'Arts Commentary', Radio 3, 27 October 1972, TGA 200816/7/26
- E232** 'Adrian Stokes' [contributor], Radio 3, 18 August 1973
See C385
- E233** 'Massein Rehearses and Talks to David Sylvester', Radio 3, 17 May 1974, TGA 200816/6/2/2

Published in A22

- E234** 'Aquarius' [Bacon interview 5], LWT, 27 October 1972, TGA 200816/4/2/9
Published in A10
- E235** [DS presenting favourite choice of music], 'Man of Action', Radio 3, 1 May 1976, TGA 200816/6/2/12
- E236** 'Sir William Coldstream Talking to David Sylvester', Radio 3, 20 October 1976
See C394
- E237** 'Howard Hodgkin in Conversation with David Sylvester', film produced by Landseer and Arts Council, 1982
See C406
- E238** 'The Brutality of Fact' [contributor to Bacon film with material from Bacon interview 8], 'Arena', BBC2, 16 November 1984, TGA 200816/4/2/9
Version published in A10
- E239** 'Renoir: What Are Paintings For, Anyway?' [contributor], BBC2, 27 March 1985, TGA 200816/8/1/4 (part only); BFI (recording)
- E240** 'Malcolm Morley: The Outsider' [contributor], 'Omnibus', BBC1, 3 May 1985, TGA 200816/6/2/5
- E241** 'A Man without Illusions' [contributor to programme about Bacon], Radio 3, 16 May 1985, programme available to listen to online through BBC iPlayer (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/bacon/5414.shtml>)
- E242** 'England's Henry Moore' [contributor to documentary about Moore], Channel 4, 21 September 1988, BFI (recording)