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BERGSON'S LEGACY AMONG THE AVANT-GARDE: INTUITION, AESTHETICS, AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Mark ANTLIFF

For Clair and Francis.

It has been three decades since I published *Inventing Bergson*, which for the first time considered the Parisian avant-garde's complex engagement with the ideas of French philosopher Henri Bergson from an ideological perspective (Antliff 1993). Framed in terms of the cultural wars pervading French society in the years leading up to the First World War, that book set out to integrate the history of art into a broader study of how philosophical, literary, and aesthetic ideas were employed by art movements in support of ideologies from across the political spectrum. Drawing on the work of scholars from the fields of anthropology, philosophy, literature, and the history of ideas, I closed the book by analysing the Bergsonian conception of creative time animating these artists in terms of the broader social, economic and political function of competing notions of temporality that shaped the 20th century (Antliff 1993, 168-184).¹ In many ways that project set the stage for a number of my later books. In *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art and Culture in France*, I reexamined the essential role of art, historicism and aestheticized violence in the development of a

1. I was particularly indebted to studies exploring issues of temporality and ideology by Lucio Colletti, David Harvey, Martin Jay, Frank Kermode, Michael Shanks and Charles Tilly, and E.P. Thompson.

variety of fascisms in France before World War Two (Antliff 2007). Most recently, *Sculptors Against the State: Anarchism and the Anglo-European Avant-Garde* reconfigured the study of anarchist aesthetics and the ethics of violence in terms of the plurality of anarchisms endorsed by European artists, who likewise integrated culture into their programmatic opposition to parliamentary democracies (Antliff 2021). In researching these later studies I found that Bergson's thought was very much in evidence,² but this proved to be especially so in the case of anarchist movements analyzed in my book on avant-garde sculpture.

In this article I will examine more closely why exactly Bergson's philosophy of time and intuition proved so appealing to proponents of one such anarchist variant,³ that of nominalist individualism, as interpreted by a group of artists and activists affiliated with the London-based avant-garde movement known as Vorticism. As I will demonstrate, Bergson's thought had special appeal among anarchists more generally because his process-oriented philosophy enabled them to reconceptualize ideology in terms of human psychology and social interactions. This dynamic matrix empowered the Vorticists' to integrate art and aesthetics into their multivalent critique of the State. The Vorticists declared these myriad strategies to be antithetical to the State-sanctioned artistic techniques, class hierarchies and capitalist motives informing modes of production undertaken by celebrated artists affiliated with the British Royal Academy. More broadly, this recasting of Bergson's philosophy from an ideological perspective not only serves to distinguished the avant-gardes' aesthetics from that of Bergson himself, it marks the crucial difference separating the era of the historical avant-garde from our own day, when Bergson's thought has failed to register with contemporary political movements.

Since the appearance of *Inventing Bergson*, study of this French philosopher has undergone a renaissance.⁴ However, scholars still tend to parse the

2. *Avant-Garde Fascism* considered the ideologue Georges Sorel's interpretation of Bergson before 1914, and the myriad ways in which his interwar followers selectively appropriated and reframed his ideas in developing their versions of French fascism (Antliff 2007, 63-110).

3. The predominant variants from the mid-19th to the late 20th century were anarchist individualism, anarchist syndicalism, anarchist communism, and anarchist pacifism. Peter Marshall's comprehensive history of anarchism addresses these variants (Marshall, 2010).

4. Key to this resurgence has been the impact of the thought of Gilles Deleuze across the humanities; reinterpretations of Bergson from the standpoint of the sciences; and reassessments of Bergson's later writings on religion, ethics and human rights. Notable

investigation of Bergson's historical legacy into discrete disciplinary categories, such as philosophy or literature, whereas modernists and ideologues claiming allegiance to Bergson almost invariably integrated politics into their aesthetics and aesthetics into their politics. Their effort was in emulation of Bergson's own conception of his method as akin to a way of being that could potentially transform society. Key to this transformation—both in Bergson's thinking and that of his followers—was the development of malleable forms of representation and organization expressive of the vital order and reflective insight they sought to evoke. That project was premised on an ability to employ not only intuition to grasp duration, but also on developing forms of representation able to awaken that intuitive capacity in others. I would argue that Bergsonian avant-gardists and ideologues who set about integrating art and politics frequently did so by folding aesthetic processes into this holistic vision of societal transformation, which transcended the narrower parameters of Bergson's own scattered writings on aesthetics (Sinclair 2020, 87-103). By considering artworks in terms of notions of creativity and creative expression, aesthetic appreciation, artistic methods and materiality, and beholder reception, I will demonstrate how this process-oriented approach enables us to reframe concepts of ideology *in terms of states of mind and interpersonal relationships*, the very categories that proved so compelling to those ideologues and artists claiming allegiance to Bergson's methodological project.

A Case Study: The Vorticist Movement (1914-18)

I will consider one example of this confluence, the integration of anarchist ideology into the avant-garde praxis of the celebrated French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915) (Fig.1), who, together with the American poet Ezra Pound (1885-1972) (Fig.2), helped found the London-based Vorticist art movement, officially launched with the publication of the journal *Blast* (1914-15) in June 1914 and declared to be deceased by Pound in February 1919 (Antliff and Greene 2010, 180-183). Gaudier-Brzeska and Pound first propagated their new aesthetic beginning in fall 1913 in the anarchist journals *The New Freewoman* (1913) and *The*

English-language contributions-- in chronological order--include, Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (1993); Mullarkey (1999); Mullarkey (2000) Ansell-Pearson (2002); Lawlor (2003); Grosz (2004); Guerlac (2006); Ansell-Pearson and Alan D. Schrift (2010); Ardoin, Gontarski, and Mattison (2013); Mullarkey and de Mille (2013); Lefebvre (2013); Lefebvre and Scott (2020).

Egoist: An Individualist Review (1914-1919), both of which were headed by Dora Marsden, an activist who claimed allegiance to an anarchist notion of nominalism. This 'Egoist' group rejected abstract, unchanging concepts, generalizations and universals as spurious categories promoted by governments or religious institutions, which sought to suppress what Marsden called "the frail tentacles of our perception" (Marsden, 16 February 1914, 61-65) and, in so doing, undermine our allegiance to our embodied self-interests. Marsden in her journals championed Bergson, grounding her anarchist notion of the Ego, free from the yoke of abstractions, in the temporal flux of sensate experiences (Clarke 1996, 99, 194-195). She thereby privileged heterogeneity over the homogenous; embodied consciousness over disembodied concepts; willed empathy over instrumental reason; and specific types of representation, such as poetic images or rhythmic forms, as ideological tools for the creative Egoist.



Fig. 1. Walter Bennington, *Henri Gaudier-Brzeska in his Studio*, 1912.

Reproduced in H.S. Ede, *Savage Messiah: Gaudier-Brzeska* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1931).

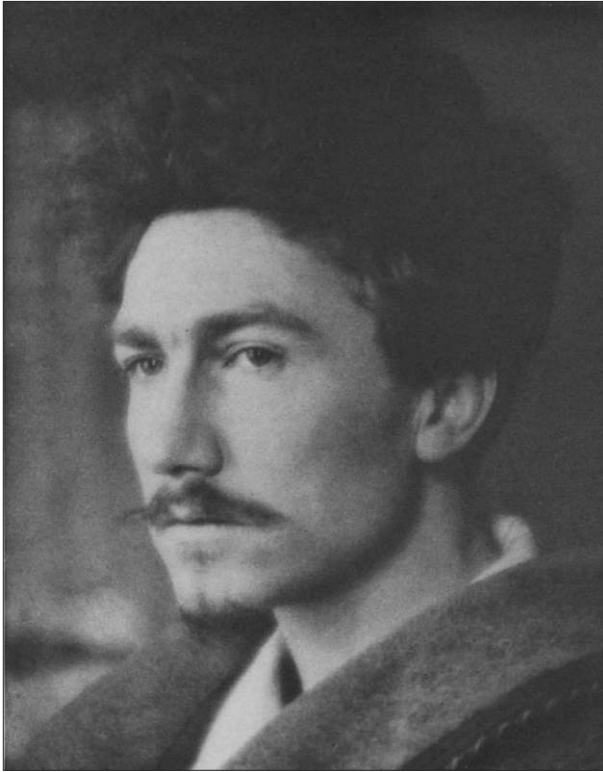


Fig. 2. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Ezra Pound*, 22 October, 1913.
Photogravure, 23.5 x 17.5 cm. Private Collection.

Gaudier-Brzeska and Pound endorsed this synthesis by making Bergsonian nominalism the organizing principle for their version of Vorticism. Gaudier-Brzeska had venerated Bergson long before encountering Marsden: on 4 October 1910 he described Bergson's *Creative Evolution* as "profound," and in 24 October 1912 he proclaimed his own desire to overcome intellectual predilections in order to develop his intuitive capacities (Gaudier-Brzeska, cited in Ede 2011, 38, 122-23). Pound in turn had drawn on Bergson's thought in early 1913 in developing his theory of poetic imagism, which won Marsden's endorsement when he joined the Egoist group later that summer (Beasley 2007, 85-87). Gaudier-Brzeska and Pound's exposure to Bergson was further developed through their friendship with the self-styled philosopher T.E. Hulme, whose authorized translation of Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* appeared in 1912 (Bergson 1912; Mead 2015). Over the course of 1914, Gaudier and Pound collaborated in developing a radical theory of aesthetic appreciation and novel approaches to the

materiality, processes, and representational content of sculpture on the basis of their anarchist critique of the State. These new aesthetic methods, and the anarchist precepts informing them, were said to be the product of intuition and a Bergsonian-inspired rejection of forms of art criticism and art-making they deemed to be overly rational, commercial, and expressive of the Enlightenment underpinnings undergirding democratic ideology. Thus, a dichotomous relation between the intellect and intuition was extended by these radicals to encompass political and aesthetic categories, defined in terms of states of mind and social relations.

Why Anarchism?

This synthesis brings to mind a more general question: how is it that anarchists were drawn to Bergson's philosophy in the first place? Michael Freeden's morphological definition of ideology developed in his pioneering study, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (1996), allows us to discern why it was that Bergson's method was especially attractive to anarchists.⁵ Freeden argues that all ideologies are in fact dynamic and made of up an interactive cluster of core precepts around which secondary principles and ideas are fluidly structured. Anarchy in its etymological origins means 'without authority' or 'without rule,' signaling a fundamental opposition to all forms of discursive representation, governmental or otherwise, as the means by which social hierarchies are generated. Immediacy rather than mediation is therefore at the heart of anarchist ideology. Such resistance also encompasses a rejection of the centralization of power in the guise of institutions or other forms of organization, whether economic, ethical or political. By contrast anarchists call for the creation of nonhierarchical, unmediated relationships and modes of socioeconomic organization that would maximize individual freedom for the self as well as others (Marshall 2010, 1-13).

In addition to immediacy, another core precept within this anarchist matrix is the idea of "affinity," wherein empathetic bonds of loyalty, friendship, shared values and ethics were to be the basis on which cooperation and a group identity could be nurtured. Anarchist concepts of unmediated affinity call for a profound degree of interpersonal understanding, self-reflexive behavior, and positive affectivity between participants: a state of mind deemed antithetical to that propagated by the state (Ealham 2010; Day 2005; Gordon 2008). It is in this regard that contemporary anarchists

5. See "Part I: Theorizing About Ideological Morphology" (Freeden 1996) and his condensed summary (Freeden 2003, 31-66).

draw inspiration from Gustav Landauer's anarchist definition of the state as a dynamic set of relations, first articulated in his manifesto, "Weak Statement, Weaker People!" published in *Der Socialist* on June 15th, 1910:

A table can be overturned and a window can be smashed. However, those who believe that the state is also a thing or a fetish that can be overturned or smashed are sophists and believers in the Word. The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; by people relating to one another differently. The absolute monarch said: I am the state. We, who have imprisoned ourselves in the absolute state, must realize the truth: *we* are the state! And we will be the state . . . as long as we have not yet created the institutions necessary for a true community and a true society of human beings (Landauer 2010, 213-14).

As I will demonstrate, avant-gardists such as Pound and Gaudier readily assimilated these anarchist notions of immediacy and affinity with Bergson's concept of intuition, as part of their broader critique of rival art movements sanctioned by the State.

Yet another radical principle transformed from a Bergsonian standpoint was that of prefigurative politics, a reference to the anarchists' self-conscious attempts to integrate the movement's tenets into the very means through which they seek to bring about societal change. Prefigurative anarchism constitutes a politics of anticipation or hope, calling for actors to initiate social change through an act of self-transformation in the here and now (Gordon 2008, 34-40; Kinna 2012, 346-247). This synthesis of means with ends had its equal in the minds of many anarchists in Bergson's call for the creation of representational forms that were integral to the durational properties they sought to evoke. For Gaudier-Brzeska, such prefigurative, direct-action politics found expression in the very processes through which sculptures were made, and the aesthetic means through which these works could generate a spirit of intuitive affinity in those who encountered his art. In sum, the anarchist valorization of immediacy, affinity and prefiguration is here merged by these Vorticists with Bergsonian notions of intuitive insight, creative expression, and empathetic reception in a radical reimagining of the relation between art and politics.

Creativity and creative expression

Turning to Vorticism, I will begin my discussion by examining Ezra Pound's adaptation of Bergson's critique of language and Classical thought to his anarchist aesthetics. Pound's views are partially indebted to extracts

from Bergson's *Creative Evolution* reproduced in Marsden's journal the *New Freewoman* under the title "The Philosophy of Ideas" (Bergson 1913, 246-248; Bergson 1907, 312-320, 326; Bergson 1963, 758-765, 770-771). In that text Bergson critiques language for its inability to grasp duration. Language in Bergson's view is all too frequently an instrumental tool of the intellect, which transforms the radically individuated, qualitative, and heterogenous nature of duration into homogenizing categories and static concepts. Each moment of life, each sensate feeling, is unique, yet language succeeds in translating these individual feelings and perceptions into standardized concepts such as 'love' and 'hate' or 'blue' and 'green.' Due to the practical function of our intellect, these generalizing terms used in our everyday speech come to be substituted for the permeable, inner flow of our felt emotions and the qualitative complexity of our sensory experience. Instead of perceiving the individuality of things or our inner feelings, our minds classify them according to the preestablished categories created by language. In effect our sensory faculties are thereby dulled to service our pragmatic, rather than our intuitive or empathetic, experience of the world. Such prejudices, states Bergson, are at the root of what philosophers mean by ideas. To prove his point, Bergson traces the word "idea" back to its Greek origin, *eidōs*, a term that corresponded to "three essential categories of language," all of which constitute "the stable view taken of the instability of things." From Plato onward, these fixed ideas gradually come to be considered more real than the sensory, durational flux they displaced, "so at the base of ancient philosophy lies necessarily this postulate: that there is more in the motionless than in the moving" (Bergson 1913, 246-48; Bergson 1907, 314-16).

Marsden later drew on Bergson's analysis, to argue that poetic imagism successfully overcame "the [linguistic] clutter of cultural concepts" promoted by State institutions, that "are choking the frail tentacles of our perception" (Marsden, 16 February 1914). Citing Bergson, she argued that poetry rather than prose is the ideal means of capturing "the soul motion," for poetry constitutes a concise use of language, created in "an elevated state of self-consciousness." Bergson in various writings, including *Time and Free Will*, *Creative Evolution* and "The Perception of Change" (1912) praises poetry for integrating individuated, durational rhythm into language, which he compares to a melody; and in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* he counsels fellow philosophers to convey their ineffable intuitions through *images*, for images, unlike concepts, keep us "in the concrete" and are capable of



Fig. 3. Horace Brodzky,
The Lewis-Brzeska-Pound Troupe.
In *Egoist* 1, no.14 (15 July, 1914), 272.

directing the consciousness “to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to seize on” (Bergson 1963, 14, 672-674, 1371, 1399). Marsden celebrates images as the very stuff of which art is made: “Feeling, that is life, defines itself in terms of images: they are thinking’s raw material *without which to work upon the intellectual process is meaningless*” (Marsden 1 September, 1914, 21-23). This belief accounts for Marsden’s predilection for the poetic

image as the linguistic medium most conducive to an egoist “art of the future” and, by extension, her sympathy for the theory of poetic imagism promulgated by Ezra Pound and his colleagues (Marsden 1 November 1913, 181-183).

Art Appreciation, Affinity and a Union of Egoists

For Pound, Greek philosophy and its vulgarizing, linguistic prejudices had its modern-day equivalent in the art criticism and aesthetics promoted in the *London Times* newspaper, which he vilified as a philistine mouthpiece for a State-sanctioned academicism, steeped in the classical tradition. When Marsden celebrated the appearance of the Vorticists’ journal *Blast* in a July 1914 issue of *The Egoist*, she did so in the form of a drawing, depicting Vorticists Gaudier, Pound and Wyndham Lewis “blasting their own trumpets before the walls of Jericho” (Brodzky, 272). symbolized by a topped hatted bourgeois reading *The Times* in close proximity to the dates proclaiming the start of Queen Victoria’s reign and the dawn of a new era, the 20th century (Fig. 3). Thus, art criticism in *The Times* is caricatured as both backward-looking and smugly catering to the mediocre tastes of the middle and upper classes.

In a February 1914 issue of *The Egoist* Pound identifies such criticism as “scholastic,” a reference to the method of dialectical reasoning to reconcile contradictions through analysis (Pound 2 February 1914, 53-54). Thus, the

Times's critics not only championed mediocre forms of classically inspired academicism, they did so by using a normative system of thought indebted to the philosophy of classical Greece. To counter such homogenizing criticism, Pound developed an anarchist-inflexed vocabulary designed to foreground Bergsonian heterogeneity and celebrate individual difference. Rather than judging all art against a fixed, classical canon, characterized as “a uniform and unattainable perfection,” Pound in an essay mockingly titled “The Caressability of the Greeks” calls on both artists and critics to respond solely to their affectivity when creating or evaluating a work of art, thus asserting the anarchist individualist imperative. He then claims that, as an artist himself, he has chosen to be a poet primarily due to his emotional response to the written word, adding that “if I were more interested in form than in anything else I should be a sculptor and not a writer” (Pound 15 March 1914, 109). This recourse to empathetic emotion likewise guarantees that each artist responds in a unique way to the work of other artists. Referring to Vorticist ally Jacob Epstein’s *Female Figure in Green Flenite* of 1913 (Fig. 4), Pound states that, “Epstein’s working in form produces something which moves me, who am only moderately interested in form. I, if I am lucky, produce a composition of words which moves someone else who is only moderately interested in words” (Pound 15 March 1914, 109). Works of art created following anarchist individualist precepts are first and foremost the expression of a unique temperament, and any shared admiration among artists who embrace such methods is likewise structured around a celebration of qualitative difference—a key concept in Bergson’s metaphysical lexicon. This notion of anarchist affinity thus marshaled Bergsonian precepts as the means by which individual forms of creative expression could be most fully apprehended, rather than superficially judged by some homogenizing standard.



Fig. 4. Jacob Epstein, *Female Figure in Flenite*, 1913.

Serpentine (flenite), 61 x 61.2 x 28.9 cm. Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Gifts of Samuel Maslon, Charles H. Bell, Francis D. Butler, John Cowles, Bruce D. Dayton, and an anonymous donor. © Estate of Jacob Epstein.

In a June 15th essay in *The Egoist* Pound then imagines an ideal [masculine] viewer, asking him to take the time to contemplate Wyndham Lewis's Shakespeare-inspired drawing from his *Timon of Athens* series of 1913 (Fig. 5) to arrive at "some deeper understanding: to some emotion more intense than his own." Through this act of empathetic concentration, the beholder will reportedly discern that the emotions conveyed "in lines, masses and planes" capture Timon's emotional turmoil, "the sullen fury of intelligence baffled, shut in by the entrenched forces of stupidity." He



Fig. 5. Wyndham Lewis, *Composition*, 1912-13.
Lithograph, 38.8 x 27.2 cm. In Wyndham Lewis,
Timon of Athens (London: Cube Press, 1913). Private
Collection. ©Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust.

then asserts that the hard-edged linearity and interlocking patterns in Lewis's *Timon* drawings also express the artists' own "restless, turbulent intelligence" and rebellious "anger" in the face of a hostile but complacent cultural establishment (Pound 15 June 1914, 233-34). Pound affirms this critique in his earlier essay "The Caressability of the Greeks" by asserting that this "faculty of being moved is not criticism but appreciation" and that the "alliance" he wishes to craft "must be with our own generation

and usually with workers in other arts.” (Pound 15 March 1914, 109). Aesthetic appreciation is simultaneously the means by which one nurtures empathetic insight and the basis on which one establishes an affinity with other artists. It is, in short, a key element in the forging of a union of egoists, such as that of the Vorticist group. This thinking accounts for Pound's declaration in an August 1914 *Egoist* essay that “the Vorticist movement is a movement of individuals, for individuals, for the protection of individuality,” as well as the assertion by Lewis in a June Manifesto published in the Vorticist journal *Blast* that the group's creed was designed to appeal “to the individual”, to “the fundamental Artist that exists in everybody” (Pound 15 August 1914, 306; and Lewis 20 June 1914, 7).

Sculptural Methods and Materiality

This Bergsonian-inspired critique of academic classicism was thrown into sharper relief over the course of 1914, when Gaudier-Brzeska and Pound took aim at the Victorian critic, Edmund Gosse and his promotion of an elite group of Royal Academicians, celebrated by Gosse as proponents of “The New Sculpture” (Getsy 2004, 181-87). Gosse championed the Royal Academy's promotion of the classical tradition, and the academicians' reverential study of Greco-Roman statuary, both in the original and in the guise of plaster casts. The Vorticists once again pitted a Bergsonian critique of arid, homogenizing aesthetics against their celebration of individual self-expression, but this time with specific reference to sculptural subject matter, materials and processes. The New Sculpture group took its name from a four-part article written by Gosse in 1894, in which he identified a new orientation toward classicism and greater naturalism among a cadre of sculptors exhibiting at the Royal Academy (Gosse 1894). Gosse championed the academy's president, Sir Frederick Leighton, and sculptors Edward Ford, Frederick Pomeroy, and W. H. Thornycroft, all of whom had received numerous state commissions and achieved widespread commercial success (Beattie 1983).

Gosse's promotion of classical subject matter and style was their first target. Gosse celebrated the New Sculpture's focus on the free-standing male nude, identifying works like Thornycroft's *Teucer*, originally sculpted in plaster as a life-size work in 1881, as the embodiment of humanism in both theme and form. Thornycroft's title refers to a warrior eulogized in Homer's *Iliad*, and the nude's pose was a variation on one commonly found in classical Greek sculpture (Getsy 2004, Chapter Two; Gosse 1894,

138-39, 200). Gosse also praised the high degree of realism achieved by Thornycroft through his modeling technique and the surface qualities of his finely polished, bronze statues, such as his two *Teucers* of 1881 (Fig. 6). Gosse described the New Sculpture's common ideal with reference to Thornycroft's sculpture as "modern in *orientation* and antique in form, blending the present and the past by *profound understanding* rather than by antiquarian study" (Gosse 1880, 183; Getsy 2004, 65). He even waxed eloquent on this paradigm by citing artist-critic John Everett Millais's claim that, had Thornycroft's *Teucer* been excavated from Athenian sands, it would have been celebrated as a marvel of classical antiquity (Gosse 1894, 201-02).



Fig. 6. William Hamo Thornycroft, two *Teucers*, 1881.

Bronze, heights: 64.5 cm and 36.8 cm. The Fine Arts Society, London.

This glorification of classicism met with a stinging rebuke in the pages of *The Egoist*. Over the winter of 1914, Pound and Gaudier published a series of articles mocking such precepts, beginning with Pound's February 1914 riposte to Gosse, in which he stole Gosse's own title, "The New Sculpture." Pound's article pits State-sanctioned humanist aesthetics against an

alternative vision of the artist as an anarchist rebel. Pound claims that institutions like the Royal Academy held that the idealization of the human body in classical Greece set an eternal standard to which all art should aspire. The humanist veneration of Athenian rationalism also gave birth to realism in the field of literature, which purportedly seeks to educate the public through a detached, clinical analysis of societal woes. Pound, by contrast, declares his hostility to classical idealism, to “the analytical novel,” and to state-sanctioned cultural establishments, all in keeping with *The Egoist* group's Bergsonian diatribe against instrumental reason's cultural manifestations. Pound's version of the new sculpture rejects this veneration of classical form and realist techniques and instead finds its *raison d'être* in the unmediated expression of “desire [and emotive] forces” (Pound 16 February 1914, 67-68).

Pound's retort was followed in the 16th of March edition of *The Egoist* by Gaudier-Brzeska's closely related polemic, which also marshaled emotivity in order to refute classicism. Gaudier-Brzeska accuses proponents of classicism of brandishing “false and arrogant scholastics,” echoing Pound's condemnation of that mode of analysis in his earlier article on art appreciation. Gaudier then asserts that the modern sculptor rejects rationalism in order to venerate non-European art. In so doing, Gaudier claims that the modern sculptor “works with instinct as his inspiring force,” thereby “continuing the tradition of the barbaric peoples of the earth for whom we have sympathy and admiration” (Gaudier-Brzeska 16 March 1914, 117-18). Pound in his essay likewise claimed that the “new wild sculpture” created by the Vorticists tapped into the irrational wellsprings of the “primitive [art of the non-European] savage,” noting that artists like Gaudier now took their inspiration from the “tribal gods and fetishes” of Africa and Oceania (Pound 16 February 1914, 67-68). Thus, Pound and Gaudier rejected classical subject matter and form while appropriating so-called primitive sculpture as their inspirational guides. As anarchists, they sympathized with the plight of non-Westerners subjected to European colonialism, and, as mythologizing primitivists, they drew parallels between their recourse to intuition and the so-called primitives' imagined immersion in instinct and emotive power as sources of inspiration in the creation of their sculpture (Antliff and Leighton 2003, 217-33).

This Bergsonian dichotomy between intellect and emotivity generated yet another sculptural dyad, in Gaudier and Pound's championing of direct carving as against the Royal Academician's reliance on workshop artisans

and casting techniques. In his various essays on the New Sculpture, Gosse describes the Royal Academicians' practice of fabricating their sculptures from a clay, plaster, or wax model using mechanical aids and studio assistants (Gosse, "The Place of Sculpture in Daily Life," 1895, 326-29; 368-70). Having produced a three-dimensional design, workmen in the artist's studio then employed a pointing machine to fabricate an exact stone replica or enlargement of the sculptor's clay or plaster model by transferring a series of measured points from the model to the stone. Thus, a technical device for *quantitative measurement* facilitated the creation of sculptural multiples in various sizes, with smaller versions designed for the domestic market. Academic sculptors preferred the relative softness of marble as a medium, due to the unmodulated smoothness and detailed finish it made possible: the sculptural counterpart to the "licked" surface of academic painting. As a result, these sculptures often had a standardized appearance as if machine tooled.

Another Victorian technique for the production of multiples was casting, wherein reusable plaster piece molds taken from a wax model could produce small-scale replicas for the commercial market, as with Thornycroft's diminutive statuettes of his famous *Teucer* (Fig.6) (Droth 2004, 141-57). Gosse valiantly celebrates the Victorians' preference for this form of bronze casting as nevertheless able to magically convey the sculptor's handiwork. In fact, as Gosse acknowledges, the casting process itself was invariably executed by a commercial firm rather than the principal sculptor. Having noted that it is "a workman" who "makes the mould from the plaster cast" and that an industrial foundry produces "the finished work in bronze," he nevertheless maintains that the quality of the material itself guaranteed that the "last light thumb print" left by the sculptor in the initial clay or plaster model "is there repeated forever in the unyielding bronze" (Gosse 1895, 370).

Pound and Gaudier-Brzeska, by contrast, called for an unmediated, expressive relationship between the artist and the artistic medium throughout the creative process as a metaphor for anarchist nominalism. Beginning in late 1913 Gaudier actively promoted his status as a virile direct carver, representing himself as a burly worker-artist, wielding a sculptors' mallet,⁶ and sitting for a series of photographs by Walter Bennington in 1914, highlighting his skills as a stone carver (Fig. 7). For

6. See Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Self-Portrait with Mallet and Chisel*, c.1913. Pencil. Musée des Beaux Arts, Orléans, France.

Pound and Gaudier each act of artistic creation was a profoundly individual experience, as was the work resulting from that creative act. An intuitive response to the artistic process was premised on expressive interaction with particular materials, whether oil paint or hard substances, such as stone.



Fig. 7. Walter Bennington, *Henri Gaudier-Brzeska Carving the Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, ca. April 1914.

Reproduced in H.S. Ede, *Savage Messiah: Gaudier-Brzeska* (New York: The Literary Guild, 1931).

The use of industrialized casting techniques to produce multiple copies violated the egoist veneration of the unique object and the embodied act of individual creation, while the use of pointing techniques assured that the sculptor's subjective and physical response to the artistic medium was subordinate to the stultifying effects of scientific measuring tools. Likewise, the intervention of technical workers into the artistic process destroyed an artist's unique response to the material while, in Gaudier's view, reinforcing an artificial hierarchy dividing artists from artisans. Pound's and Gaudier-Brzeska's interventions in the *Egoist* repeatedly attacked casting and copying

techniques as well as the academic predilection for plaster casts, white marble, and classical subject matter. In his February 1914 article on “The New Sculpture,” Pound opens his anarchist defense of Gaudier-Brzeska by celebrating his embrace of the primitives’ method of direct carving and his contempt for the Royal Academicians’ recourse to “plaster of Paris.” (Pound February 1914, 67-68). Pound in his 1916 memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska further venerated his friend as a protean genius who “cut direct,” rejected casting, and “never cut in one sort of stone a work more fitting another sort” (Pound 1916, 19). In a June 1914 issue of *The Egoist*, Gaudier-Brzeska reiterates this nominalist paradigm, proclaiming his admiration for “the work of master craftsmen, for whom every inch of surface is won at the point of a chisel.” Practitioners of direct carving, we are told, will not engage in “arbitrary translations of designs in any material,” for “they are fully aware of the different qualities and possibilities of woods, stones, and metals” (Gaudier-Brzeska 15 June 1914, 227-229). Indeed, Gaudier ambitiously experimented in all three mediums, including his totemic wooden *Portrait of Ezra Pound*, his diminutive brass *Torpedo Fish*, and his Alabaster *Imp*, all carved over the course of 1914 (Silber 1996, 269, 270, 272).

Beholder Reception

A fuller appreciation for the Bergsonian underpinnings of Pound and Gaudier-Brzeska’s anarchist aesthetics can be gained through close study of Gaudier’s most famous work: his marble *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, carved during the spring of 1914 (Fig. 8) (Silber 1996, 130-31, 269-70; Tickner 1993, 55-61; Wood 2004, 191-217). What this portrait bust reveals is Gaudier’s attempt not only to adapt sculptural subject matter and form to Bergson’s notion of duration, but to awaken the intuitive capacities of those who interacted with Gaudier’s sculpture (Antliff 2021, 171-73). Commissioned by Pound in early 1914, the *Hieratic Head* was a collaborative piece sculpted from a half ton block of marble. Gaudier first executed a series of preparatory ink and brush drawings of Pound’s visage, before embarking on a two-month campaign of direct carving (Silber 1996, 93-95, 130-1(31)).

Gaudier and Pound jointly conceived the *Hieratic Head* as a monumental sculpture for public consumption, targeting the work for display in an exhibition of avant-garde art that opened in May 1914 at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London’s East End (Robins 1997, 139-158). While there is no record of the work’s initial reception except from members of Gaudier’s



Fig. 8. Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound*, 1914.

Pentelic marble, 90.5 x 45.7 x 48.9 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift from the collection of Raymond and Patsy Nasher, 2009.72.1.

and Pound's inner circle, their choice of exhibition locale is telling, for the White Chapel district was an impoverished area of London and a well-known center of anarchist organization and agitation (Bantman, 2013; Di Paola, 2013; Rocker 1956). As Lisa Tickner has shown, the gallery directors sought to 'educate and elevate' the local poor by holding guided tours for the impoverished families and their children, as evidenced by staged photographs highlighting such philanthropy (Tickner 2000, 1-9, 208-09). Thus, Gaudier and Pound could have imagined a diverse audience that included working class as well as bohemian radicals, all gathering at a State-sanctioned institution with the patronizing mandate to uplift the urban poor through exposure to the edifying wonders of high culture.

I would argue that their design for the *Hieratic Head*—both in terms of its tactile qualities and representational content—was a response to Bergson's conjecture, in *The Introduction to Metaphysics*, that "many different images, taken from quite different orders of things, will be able, through

the convergence of their action, to direct the consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to seize on” (Bergson 1963, 1399). In that text Bergson employed a number of images, including that of the unrolling of a spool, an elastic band, and an unbroken colour spectrum, in an effort to convey his intuition of duration (Bergson 1963, 1396-1398). Following Bergson (in this text and in his earlier book *Matter and Memory*), we need to also think of the image as at the interface between perceptual experience and memory, wherein sensate experiences mnemonically intermingle with our imagination, bringing to mind an unfolding stream of images revived through this durational process (Bergson 1963, 281-283, 1396-1398). Familiarity with the anarchist precepts and cultural critique guiding Gaudier and Pound’s design for the Bust, combined with our knowledge of the cultural geography of Imperial London, allows us to situate Bergson’s imagistic theory in a particular ideological and historical context.

With regard to the *Hieratic Head*, we can begin by considering the relation of the sculptural material and the representational content to a cascade of imagistic associations, arguably designed to give us an intuition of Pound’s and Gaudier’s irreverent version of anarchist nominalism. Historians have long recognized that the carved visage of Pound was in explicit emulation of an Easter Island monolith, *Hoa Hakanani’a*, transported to the British Museum in 1869 as a trophy of colonial appropriation (Fig. 9) (now forcefully contested) (Van Tillburg 2004; Antliff 2021, 173-75; *The Guardian* 2018). Gaudier and Pound’s anti-imperialist homage to this sculpture stood in the stark contrast to the attitude of the British Museum’s staff, who treated the carving with relative disdain by placing *Hoa Hakanani’a* on the museum’s front entrance portico, where it remained exposed to the elements as well as to an indifferent public from 1869 to 1940 (Fig. 10) (Van Tillburg 2004, 7-10). As Rupert Arrowsmith has demonstrated, the Easter Island monolith was deliberately positioned to provide a dramatic contrast to the humanist ideals signified by the architect Robert Smirk’s Ionic façade and, more pointedly, with Royal Academician Richard Westmacott’s classically inspired pediment frieze titled *Progress of Civilization* (Arrowsmith 2011, 4-8). An 1892 guidebook to the museum describes the frieze as depicting figures in a “savage condition” in the lateral corners, crouching among exotic vegetation and animals, but as one moved toward the center, the figures became erect and formed a classically inspired allegorical grouping celebrating European culture (Lee 1892, cited in Arrowsmith 2011, 5-6).



Fig. 9. *Hoa Hakanani'a* on board *H.M.S. Topaze*, Portsmouth, England, 1869.

Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology,
Harvard University, PM 2004.24.31852.



Fig. 10. An Easter Monday Group Round an Easter Island Statue.

Reproduced in the *Illustrated London News*, 9, April, 1887.

Gaudier-Brzeska's and Pound's choice to venerate the Easter Island statue was therefore a visual affront to the values of classical humanism and imperial hegemony enshrined in the British Museum's facade.

Scholars have additionally pointed out that Gaudier deliberately parted ways from his 'primitivist' source by carving his work from Pentelic marble rather than the hard, grey Basalt utilized by the Easter Island sculptor. This choice of material was significant, for Pentelic marble was Greek, quarried near Athens, and it was the same marble used for the architecture and sculpture of the Parthenon, then on prominent display in the opening rooms of the British Museum (Wood 2004, 198). Those entering the museum were meant to make a contrasting association between a lowly monolith, crudely carved by a barbaric people, and the triumph of Classical culture associated with Britain's civilizing mission throughout the Empire. By combining white Pentelic marble with a portrait bust modeled after an Easter Island statue, Gaudier and Pound upended those visual cues in order to assert a counter-image, attuned to the Vorticists' anarchist rebellion.

Such disruptive associations were compounded still further when one walked around the sculpture, for the portrait bust has the startling effect of combining two rather distinct images. When seen from the front, the viewer is confronted with a totemic image of Pound's head, but when viewed from the back, the bust resolves into a phallus, a flamboyant display of male sexual desire (Fig. 11). From an anarchist perspective, this jarring combination of images dramatically evokes the Egoists' defiant claim that "Spirit" cannot exist without the "Flesh" and that the egoist seeks self-affirmation through the sensual enjoyment of his or her corporeal being (Antliff 2021, 172). Whereas traditional portrait busts lay emphasis on the life of the mind and inner character, by exaggerating the size of the cranium, forehead, and hair, Gaudier-Brzeska highlights a link between mental and sexual fecundity, (Wood 2004, 196) dispelling any illusion that the human imagination exists as a free-floating entity, detached in its contemplation of the classical ideal. To paraphrase Bergson's "Introduction to Metaphysics", this dynamic, multivalent convergence of mnemonic and sensory images served to "direct the consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to seize on" (Bergson 1963, 1399).



Fig. 11. Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Hieratic Head of Ezra Pound* (back view), 1914.

Pentelic marble, 90.5 x 45.7 x 48.9 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift from the collection of Raymond and Patsy Nasher, 2009.72.1.

Bergsonian aesthetics beyond Bergson

As the case of the Vorticists' makes clear, one of the most striking distinctions between Bergson's philosophy of art and that of his avant-garde followers is the latter's focus on the mediating role of technique in artistic creation. In accounting for Bergson's predominant lack of concern with artistic *métier*, Mark Sinclair perceptively attributes this lacuna to Bergson's debt to the aesthetics of Félix Ravaisson, Kant, and philosophical notions of genius, noting that Bergson's position "is simply that fine art is the result of something more than technique, and that this additional element consists of a better, a truer appreciation of reality than the one that conventional conceptual experience can grasp" (Sinclair 2020, 91). Indeed, Bergson in his various writings argued that artists had a natural propensity to perceive both nature and the self in an immediate and disinterested manner,

unencumbered by the debilitating effects of conceptual or pragmatic modes of thought (Sinclair 2020, 89-98; Antliff 1993, 64-66, 103-105). Writing of artistic perception in his book *Laughter* (1900), he asks, “what is the object of art? Could reality come into direct contact with the senses and consciousness, could we enter into immediate communion with things and ourselves [...] we should all be artists, for then our souls would vibrate in perfect accord with nature” (Bergson 1963, 458-459). But it is nature itself that dictates who possesses this special gift, for “it is by accident and on one side only, that she has lifted the veil [of utilitarian perception].” The fact that nature has forgotten “in one direction only” to “rivet perception to need” accounts in turn for “the diversity of the arts,” for each art form, whether “painting and sculpture, poetry or music,” has its origins in a particular, disinterested “sense” (Bergson 1963, 460-462). For example, Bergson in “The Perception of Change” (1912) claims that visual artists such as Camille Corot or J.M.W. Turner are able, through their painting, to spontaneously convey what we “have perceived without seeing” (Bergson 1963, 1371). Likewise, as an expression of absolute novelty, the act of artistic creation is itself yet another spontaneous manifestation of the generative evolutionary process. In *Creative Evolution* (1907) Bergson describes the artistic process as synonymous with durational processes writ large, including that of our developing personalities.

Just as the talent of the painter is formed and deformed—in any case modified—under the influence of the work he produces, so each of our states, at the moment of issue, modifies our personality, being indeed the new form that we are just assuming (Bergson 1963, 499-500).

Having noted that artists are naturally gifted, Bergson then demonstrates how we as human beings can develop comparable perceptual and creative capacities. In his “Introduction to Metaphysics” and later writings Bergson reconceptualizes his notion of artistic perception and creation as but one manifestation of intuition, an act of willed “sympathy” “by which one is transported into the interior of an object” to coincide with its durational qualities (Bergson 1963, 1395). In both *The Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Creative Evolution* he calls on his readers to harness “intuition” in order to transcend the sensory limitations of the arts, to grasp a more comprehensive understanding of our place in the universe (Bergson 1963, 645-647, 723-725, 1430-1432). It is on this basis that Bergson, in his Gifford lectures (21 April—22 May 1914), concludes that “there is every appearance that the role of each person is to create, just as if a

great artist had produced as his works other artists" (Bergson 1972, 1071, 1086). Creative evolution has bestowed a unique capacity for intuition on humanity; the role of philosophy is to alert us to that nascent gift by developing our capacity to overcome intellectual and pragmatic biases in order to think and act intuitively.

Bergson's avant-garde followers did not share his faith in an artist's ability to spontaneously or intuitively develop techniques expressive of immediate perception; instead these practices first had to be scrutinized and critiqued following Bergson's metaphysical method. Such an approach was grounded in a sophisticated understanding and familiarity with processes of art making, and their awareness that notions of spontaneity, intuition and immediacy in the visual arts are always premised on an *a priori* relation to antecedent or extant painterly or sculptural techniques. For these early 20th-century avant-gardists, such ideas do not constitute essential categories, but instead exemplify relationships. The relation is one of binary opposition to notions of convention, artifice, and mediation: to their minds, Bergson's affirmative categories cannot exist without these opposites, and in fact these dyads serve to constitute each other. In this respect Bergsonian avant-gardists such as the Vorticists were only following a paradigm forged by an older generation. As Richard Shiff and Robert L. Herbert have demonstrated, the seemingly spontaneous methods and unmediated vision of artists like Corot and his Impressionist allies, was in fact premised on their studied critique of academic training and procedure. These artists deliberately appropriated specific elements of academic praxis associated with qualities of inspirational immediacy, while purposely rejecting other academic codes for artistic composition and creativity as evidence of artifice, thereby breaking with academic norms (Herbert 1979, 901-908; Shiff 1984, 70-123). Thus, what Impressionist critic Edmond Duranty famously referred to as "La Nouvelle peinture" (Herbert 1988, 19-20, 33-57) violated academic methods and values in a manner that anticipated Gaudier and Pound's avant-garde version of "The New Sculpture." Where the Vorticists parted ways from their Impressionist predecessors was in inserting Bergson's notions of spontaneity, immediacy, and intuition, along with conceptual or pragmatic modes of thought, into the avant-garde/academic equation.

These Vorticists, along with so many other avant-gardists of their generation, also broke with Bergson by integrating politics into their aestheticized campaign on behalf of intuition. By applying Bergson's

method to the arena of ideology, they purposefully assimilated all aspects of artistic production, creativity, critical appreciation and reception into an overarching agenda for radical social change. Moreover, the Vorticists were not alone in positing a special kinship between Bergson's metaphysics and anarchist ideology. For instance, Marsden's *Egoist* group had a French equivalent in the international *action d'art* collective, founded in 1906 by the anarchist philosopher, activist and cultural impresario, André Colomer (1886-1931) (Sonn 2010, 198-204). Colomer based his notion of anarchist art action on Bergson's philosophy, claiming that "art is the child of intuition," and that a work of art is "nothing other than the free expression of an ego that does not recognize any law other than that of its individual harmony and well-being" (Colomer 1913, 3). The movement celebrated sexual liberation as well as sweeping experimentation in the arts as forms of intuitive self-expression, and the collective successfully won over major avant-gardists from across the arts, including the celebrated painter Gino Severini and the controversial sculptor Jacob Epstein (Antliff 2021, 15-18, 37-53). In Italy, the founder of the Futurist movement F.T. Marinetti and his closest lieutenant, the avant-garde sculptor Umberto Boccioni, took Bergsonian anarchism in yet another direction by basing their political vision of artist-activism on a synthesis of Bergson's ideas with their notion of anarchist violence in their public campaign against Italy's parliamentary democracy (Antliff 2021, 55-90). In Germany, the pioneer of abstract art Vasily Kandinsky adapted Bergson's metaphorical comparison of music and color with duration in *Time and Free Will* (1889) (which he owned) to the mystical anarchism of Gustav Landauer, claiming in his 1912 manifesto "On the Question of Form," that the synesthetic abstraction and apocalyptic imagery in his pre-war paintings induced the beholder to experience "anarchy [...] an ever-increasing freedom that, in turn, opens the way to subsequent revelations" (Antliff and Leighten 2021, 29-39). Still other avant-gardists and political activists adapted their Bergsonian aesthetics to promote alternative social visions, premised on their equally agitational interpretation of Bergson's metaphysics (Antliff 1993; Labrusse 1999, 94-115; Antliff 2022, 330-350). In sum, I would argue that it was this pervasive integration of Bergson's methods with broader ideological aspirations on the part of the historical avant-garde that serves to separate the 20th-century from our own time, when Bergson is no longer an overarching intellectual force to be reckoned with among

political movements, even as he remains an ardent subject of discussion in artists' studios.

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2021), as well as co-author of *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (with Matthew Affron, Princeton University Press, 1997), *Cubism and Culture* (with Patricia Leighton, Thames & Hudson, 2001), and *A Cubism Reader: Documents and Criticism 1906-1914* (with Patricia Leighton, University of Chicago Press, 2008 and Les presses du réel, Paris, 2019). With Vivien Greene, he co-curated the major exhibition *The Vorticists: Rebel Artists in London and New York, 1914-1918*, which opened at the Nasher Museum of Art and traveled to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice and Tate Britain in London (ex. cat. London: Tate Publishing, 2010-11). The conference associated with this exhibition resulted in *Vorticism: New Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 2013). His most recent scholarship focuses on the subject of radical pacifism and aesthetics during World War Two and its aftermath.

Abstract: In this article I will examine more closely why exactly Bergson's philosophy of time and intuition proved so compelling to proponents of anarchist ideology, as interpreted by a key group of artists and activists affiliated with the London-based avant-garde movement known as Vorticism (1914-1918). As I demonstrate Bergson's thought had special appeal among anarchists more generally because his process-oriented philosophy affirmed that movements' ideological allegiance to notions of immediacy, affinity and prefigurative politics. Bergson's philosophy enabled these radicals to reconceptualize ideology in terms of human psychology and social interactions, which in turn empowered the Vorticists' to integrate art and aesthetics into their multivalent critique of the State. More broadly, this recasting of Bergson's philosophy from an ideological perspective not only serves to distinguished the avant-gardes' aesthetics from that of Bergson himself, it marks the crucial difference separating the era of the historical avant-garde from our own day, when Bergson's thought no longer holds sway among contemporary political movements.

Keywords: Bergson, anarchism, vorticism

Résumé : Dans cet article, j'examinerai de plus près les raisons pour lesquelles la philosophie du temps et de l'intuition de Bergson s'est avérée si convaincante pour les partisans de l'idéologie anarchiste, telle qu'elle a été interprétée par un groupe clé d'artistes et d'activistes affiliés au mouvement d'avant-garde londonien connu sous le nom de Vorticisme (1914-1918). Je montre que la pensée de Bergson avait un attrait particulier pour les anarchistes en général, car sa philosophie axée sur les processus affirmait l'allégeance idéologique de ce mouvement aux notions d'immédiateté, d'affinité et de politique préfigurative. La philosophie de Bergson a permis à ces radicaux de reconceptualiser leur idéologie en termes de psychologie humaine et d'interactions sociales, ce qui a permis aux vorticistes d'intégrer l'art et l'esthétique dans leur critique multivalente de l'État. Plus largement, cette refonte de la philosophie de Bergson dans une perspective idéologique ne sert pas seulement à distinguer l'esthétique des avant-gardes de celle de Bergson lui-même, elle marque la différence cruciale qui sépare l'ère de l'avant-garde historique de notre époque, où la pensée de Bergson n'a plus d'emprise sur les mouvements politiques contemporains.

Mots-clés : Bergson, anarchisme, vorticisme