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A visionary space
Theosophy and an alternative modernism in Australia 1890-1934

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University

by Jenny McFarlane

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I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, all statements made in this thesis are my own except where sources are cited in an appropriate manner.

Jenny McFarlane
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Abstract

In this thesis I argue that the Theosophical Society had a major influence on Australian visual artists during the early 20th century. The project is located within a larger wave of contemporary histories now focussing on the aberrant and discontinuous to rediscover actively forgotten pasts. The Theosophical Society supported those who were marginalised and disenchanted with the experience of modernity. It proved particularly attractive to women who as artists, activists and intellectuals drew on its conceptualisation of reality to engage with an uncertain present. The Society was especially productive for artists as it offered a radical alternative visuality in which women had a privileged role in an extended international network of like-minded individuals.

Theosophical teachings proposed a reality which was more profound than that available to the physical eye. The clairvoyant leadership of the Society communicated their encyclopaedic knowledge of the invisible and this would have a significant impact on Australian artists. Equally important was the influence of Indian art, specifically an interpretation of an Indian art tradition which privileged visualisation over optical sensation. The tension between a perceived invisible reality and the visible world unites these Theosophically inspired artists who directed their practice at passing beyond appearances—beyond the visible to truth. The practice of visualisation was deployed in combination with a variety of stylistic vocabularies. In this thesis a number of key case studies are proposed which together present a picture of Australian modernist artists as informed primary players in a movement which challenged Western reason and looked to the ‘East’ to revitalise its focus. Australian artists are reconceived as an active part of a larger international network in which women and their concerns are the primary point of focus.
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Introduction: Mme Mouchette's portrait of Annie Besant 1908

In the meeting room of the Adelaide Lodge of the Theosophical Society is the magnificent portrait of Annie Besant painted by Mme Berthe Mouchette in 1908. Mouchette's portrait is assured, competently and comfortably within the academic tradition. Only the subject—woman as orator—is unusual for the patriarchal traditions of the genre. This uneasy balance between 'radical' and 'conservative' is typical of the production of the artists associated with the Theosophical Society and opens an avenue of research which reconfigures these terms as we have come to know them. When Mouchette's painting is contextualised within a Theosophical framework it points to a supplementary tradition of Australian art based not on a formalist, teleological trajectory but an earnest and informed debate on the nature of the visible and invisible. A closer reading of Mouchette's portrait invites a great many questions which have interesting answers. In this introduction I propose to look closely at this work and then proceed to foreshadow the chapters in this thesis.

As a Socialist and advocate of freethought, Annie Besant (1847-1933), the subject of the portrait, had questioned the establishment with the instruments of that system. Rejecting the claims of institutionalised religion, she brought the tools of scientific rationalism to bear on issues as radical as contraception, child custody and female labour issues. Then Besant shocked her community of progressive radicals by her defection from the socialist platform to become by 1907 the head of the Theosophical Society. As a Theosophist Besant came to question the very
terms of debate. She recommended an alternative vision of the world and a total restructuring based on a concept of inner reality. She sought to locate a common truth in all religions and began to explore the hidden powers believed to be latent in every 'man' (sic). At the time of this portrait Besant was at the very height of her clairvoyant powers and her visions would influence artists from Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian to Clarice Beckett, Christian Waller and Roy de Maistre. Her powerful promotion of Theosophy was enormously attractive to generations of artists around the world including Australia. Besant was a feminist icon.

Mouchette's portrait is a picture of triumphant womanhood, active, engaged and powerful, a woman who was tackling issues which concerned women, opening doors and paving the way for a future which appeared radiant with promise.

Mouchette's portrait (colour plate 1) is an assured and knowing deployment of the academic genre. As a highly successful academic portraitist, French born Berthe Mouchette (1846-1928) spoke with authority, enhancing the standing and credibility of her subject through formal and symbolic means. Mouchette's light and elegant brushwork is sensitively played out against a sober red ground and minimal accessories. In her brushwork we can see the influence of her teacher Joseph Nicholas Robert Fleury (1797-1890) Director at the Ecole des Beaux Arts from 1863. This very assuredness of the artist encourages a careful reading of the work to learn what Mouchette has chosen to inform us about this subject, especially given her choice of minimal accessories. We know from her painting; The Queen's Bouquet, 1891\(^1\) that Mouchette was capable of highly symbolic exposition within an apparently innocent genre image.

Mouchette poses Annie Besant as an orator. She stands poised as if in the middle of an address, her hand over her heart, framing a curious medal. George Bernard Shaw described Besant as one of the most impressive orators of her time, an honour she shared with such prominent figures as William Gladstone. As we shall see her oratory was a significant factor in the success of the Theosophical Society
and swathes of people joined the Society in the wake of her lecture tours. Besant's garment suggests a Roman toga with all its allusions of antique virtue and authority but is in fact a sari with an Indian necklace over a delicate Victorian lace blouse. Besant's usual choice of dress for lecturing was in fact a garment popular with dress reformists of the period; a white satin tea gown fichued with biscuit lace. However when 'at home' in Adyar, the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Madras, (now Chennai) India, Besant wore an Indian sari. Mouchette and her sister Marie Lion (d. 1922) had attended the annual convention at Adyar in December 1900 and it is probable that the painting was begun during this visit.

Besant's sari was a reference to her Indian connections. Many of the ideas developed by the Theosophical Society can be traced to inspiration from Indian sources and indeed a major debate on the appropriateness of this Indian influence would soon lead to a split with the German Lodges and the formation of the Anthroposophical Society under Rudolph Steiner (1913).

The lack of accessories directs our attention to the distinctive dress of the subject. The sari is significant, so too is the distinctive brooch which Annie Besant frames in her hand. It is the emblem of Besant's rank as 33 degree Vice-President, Grand Master of the Supreme Council of Universal Co-Freemasonry. The ornament is painted in detail and is easily legible. Besant popularised Co-Masonry, a form of masonry where women were admitted as equals, delighted that "women have successfully entered another hitherto exclusively masculine preserve." In June 1911 she would lead the Co-Masons as part of the Women's Coronation Procession, the last of the great suffragette marches through London. For Besant as for many women, the Co-Masonic brooch was emblematic of a wave of feminist inspired change which was now impacting on institutional support structures.

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2 Anonymous, 'Melbourne confidences', The Bulletin, 15 September, 1894, 8 See also a photograph by Mendelsohn of Annie Besant and her daughter, Mrs Besant-Scott p.15
It is important to state at the outset that the Theosophical Society has always been a very complex organisation with exoteric and esoteric messages. Behind the obvious significance of the Co-Masonic brooch is a dimension of esoteric meaning. Annie Besant was the President of Theosophical Society and her wearing of the ornament points to a chain of connections which are Theosophical in nature. This particular brooch is known as the 'Cagliostro Jewel', and its full significance is of a secret/sacred nature. What can be said however is that in holding the jewel as she does, Besant alludes to her mystical genealogy. Annie Besant's mentor, Mme Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) was understood to be the reincarnation of Count Alessandro Cagliostro (1743-1795). Within the Society Cagliostro is still seen as the individual responsible for reintroducing mystical knowledge to Europe. Blavatsky, with Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and William Quan Judge was co-founder in 1875, of the Theosophical Society—the organisation which would support those interested in exploring that knowledge. For Theosophists, Cagliostro was a martyr to the permeability of the seen and the unseen. This tension between the visible and the invisible lies at the heart of the importance of the Theosophical Society for artists. Cagliostro is understood to represent a third option in the heated debate between the established institution of the Catholic Church and the new 'Age of Reason'. He emerged at the time of the Encyclopaedists and the increasing professionalisation of science. He claimed visionary powers and alchemical knowledge and attracted contemporary interest for his contention that neither institutional religion nor the emergent scientific institutions could adequately explain reality. For Mme Blavatsky in the late nineteenth century, the situation had deteriorated to breaking point. She identified a situation where the visible was the preserve of the scientist and was only explainable by scientific law, and God had been professionalised into the realm of institutionalised religion and was no longer seen as immanent in the world. In 1877 she wrote *Isis Unveiled* which was to

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3 Emily Lutyens, 'Universal Co-Masonry and the Women's Suffrage Procession', *The Vahan*, 1 July, 1911, p. 189

4 I have benefited greatly from Iain McCalman's research into Cagliostro and the rival Enlightenments and his papers on this subject.
inspire generations of Theosophists, analysing the situation as a "death-grapple of Science with Theology for infallibility – 'a conflict of ages'."\(^5\)

For Cagliostro and those who believed in him, the invisible had real and regular impact on everyday visible reality. To the clairvoyant this was manifested as such phenomena as auras, 'thought forms' or colour-music. Cagliostro was a visionary prophet of the Theosophical Society, he emerged at the moment when Enlightenment values were entering society. For those who did not believe him, Cagliostro was an imposter, a charlatan. Cagliostro sat on the knife edge—visionary or charlatan. In adopting him as a previous incarnation, Blavatsky deliberately chose to occupy the same position. In prominently wearing the Jewel, Besant also consciously placed herself within this genealogy of dubious integrity. This could not have been a decision made lightly and deserves serious interrogation. It is the same decision faced by every member of the Theosophical Society: by Berthe Mouchette, her sister Marie Lion and many other Australian artists. In their eyes the alternatives—espousal of either institutional religion or scientific rationalism—were sufficiently unattractive to justify the risk. Dissatisfied with these two alternatives they sought to discover a third option in which Spirit was immanent and open to scientific method. Most Australian artists put their reputations on the line when they paid for their membership of the Theosophical Society. Yet the sheer number and quality of the artists associated with the Theosophical Society demands thorough investigation of their motives and ambitions.

In Marie Lion's semi-autobiographical novel *The Black Pearl* \(^6\) the heroine is handed some Theosophical reviews and exclaims "'What you! A sensible woman, believe in theosophy, that mixture of old superstitions and new-fangled notions'.."\(^7\)

The propagandist replies "'it is because I am a sensible woman' ...'that I am a

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\(^6\) The original title, *Vers la Lumière* translates as *Towards the light*, a more overt reference to the book as an account of spiritual enlightenment, connecting with Seraphin Soudbinine’s sculpture of the same name.

\(^7\) Noel Aimir (Marie Lion), *The black pearl*. George Robertson, Melbourne, 1911. p. 128
theosophist" Little by little the heroine encounters significant others who inspire her to listen to the Theosophical message. Finally it is the oratory of Annie Besant herself who inspires the heroine to join the Society. Marie Lion's heroine sees a large poster on the Adelaide Town Hall advertising Annie Besant's lecture.

I enter. The room is already full; only under the balcony are there some empty seats. Two young girls make room for me. I gaze round. The audience is in some respects an extraordinary one. More than 2000 people, belonging to all classes of society, are packed closely together without distinction of rank. The clock strikes eight. A young man with ascetic features and the brow of a thinker introduces the lecturer in a few words. Everything about her is white, the snowy hair, the long statuesque folds of her dress, even her flesh has the purity and transparency of alabaster. Her voice is pure, clear and resonant, filling the great hall. In simple lucid language she gives a brief outline of the principles of that ancient science of which she is the modern exponent, the basic unity of religions, the brotherhood of Man, the law of Justice controlling the universe, human perfectibility built up from the germ which, descending from its Divine source, reascends to God, fully developed and perfected....

Lion's account tallies with contemporary newspaper accounts of Besant's impact. For Mouchette, Lion and the other artists we will meet in this story, Annie Besant presented a way of understanding the world which was sufficiently compelling to overrule allegations of superstition and new-fangled notions. Besant's conviction of the Theosophical path and her own personal integrity were important to the Society. Both Mouchette and Lion communicate this sense of personal integrity. The sisters' portrait is one of authority, purity and perfected womanhood. At the heart of Besant's message lies Mme Blavatsky's identification of the

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8 ibid., p. 128
incommensurability of science and religion despite their claims of infallibility. Lion's heroine, like so many Australian artists, describes her relief at finding a way of thinking about the world which could make sense of inconsistencies.\(^9\) For a raft of intellectuals and artists then and now this rift between Science and Religion has been understood as one of the structuring principles of the modern period, an issue I will explore in detail in the next chapter.

The pattern described by Lion's heroine was also the pattern of many artists' introduction to the Society. Berthe Mouchette and Marie Lion joined the Society in 1895 following Annie Besant's lecture tour of Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.\(^11\) On this tour future Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin was among the 'ascetic featured' young men who introduced the lecturer, another 'architect of Federation' Henry Parkes a more elderly version of the same.\(^12\) However Berthe Mouchette probably first encountered the Society in her Parisian student days, perhaps as early as 1876 when her friend Captain DA Courmes joined the Society. Courmes became a member at a time when many moved fluidly between Spiritualism and Theosophy and he would remain a stalwart of the Paris Lodge until his death in 1914.

Mouchette came to Melbourne with her husband Nicholas Emile Mouchette who took up the position of Secretary of the French Consulate in 1881. After her husband’s early death Mme Mouchette bought 'Oberwyl' in 1885 and developed this prestigious girls school to the point where by 1888 it had more than a hundred students and 27 teachers.\(^13\) In Melbourne, Berthe Mouchette soon met James Smith (1820-1910) who was art, drama and literary critic for the Argus. The '9 x 5 Impression Exhibition' of 1889 was famously panned by him. Like Courmes, Smith was an early spiritualist and advocate of Mme Blavatsky (although famously excessive in his convictions even within his spiritualist community.)\(^14\) In June 1890

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\(^9\) ibid., p. 219  
\(^10\) ibid., p. 219  
\(^11\) Besant left Adelaide and Australia on 5 December 1895.  
\(^12\) Jill Roe, *Beyond belief; Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939*. NSW University Press, Sydney, 1986. p. 90  
Mouchette and Mrs James Smith were founding members of the Melbourne Alliance Française with initial meetings at ‘Oberwyl’. Within six months the Theosophical Society was founded in Melbourne by a small group including artist Jane Price. Smith was an early and active participant. While there is no evidence of Mouchette’s involvement in the Theosophical Society even at this stage it is likely she was a sympathetic fellow traveller. It would be interesting to speculate if any of her sympathies for the emergent organisation transferred to her ‘Oberwyl’ students, amongst whom numbered Isa Reilly, Violet Teague, the Gregory sisters and the future Margaret Preston. The only real relationship that can be speculated is a possible chain of influence between Mouchette’s highly symbolic *The Queen’s Bouquet* of 1891 and Margaret Preston’s equally ambitious flower paintings. Mouchette would certainly have known Annie Besant’s other high profile portraitist—Florence Fuller (the subject of a later chapter) who completed a portrait of ‘Oberwyl’s influential patron, Lady Loch, in 1887.\(^{15}\)

By 1892 ‘Oberwyl’ was sold and Lion and Mouchette had moved to Adelaide. In Lion’s novel the removal to Adelaide was attributed to a narrowly averted sexual adventure. In real life the adventure is more likely to have been financial and associated with the property crash of the 1890s. In Adelaide the sisters reestablished themselves as artists and teachers although on a less grand scale than Melbourne. It would seem that they experienced real, if genteel, difficulty at this time. In December 1894 Annie Besant visited Adelaide. They would have had the opportunity to hear Theosophical lecturers before\(^{16}\) but this was probably their first encounter with Annie Besant. They attended lectures and finally in 1895 both sisters joined the Society officially. Their commitment appears to have been wholehearted. “How can I give an idea of the impression these vivid words leave upon me?” wrote Marie Lion. “If I could only give back to them the sound of that voice vibrating with emotion, alternately convincing and dominating, but more than

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\(^{15}\) The portrait of Lady Loch had been left incomplete on the death of Fuller’s uncle Robert Dowling.

\(^{16}\) Col. Olcott toured Australia in 1891 and Mrs Cooper Oakley toured in 1893. Lion, *The black pearl*, p. 177
all, restore the accents of truth, of profound conviction, which distinguish the woman who believes, the Seer who knows.”\(^{17}\)

In 1900 they attended their first Adyar Convention, an annual spiritual rally, in old Madras.\(^{18}\) They clearly took advantage of the exotic location and brought back many paintings of India to Adelaide which all sold.\(^{19}\) In the small community at Adyar they evidently came to know Annie Besant and paint her in Indian dress. Marie Lion exhibited a miniature of Annie Besant at the First Australian Exhibition of Women’s Work, Melbourne in 1907 which probably dates from this visit to India. The subject would have been seen as highly appropriate as Besant was a high profile feminist.\(^{20}\)

From their residency in Australia Mouchette and her sister had greater access to this extraordinary woman than their colleagues in Paris. As we shall see Australian artists were closer to the heart of this counter-cultural movement than their colleagues in France. This reversal of the traditional centre-margin relationship of Paris and Australia will be frequently repeated. In 1908 Mouchette was able to breathlessly inform her friends in Paris that she was an old and comfortable friend of Annie Besant’s. When Besant came to Adelaide in June 1908 she visited the Mouchette studio a number of times appreciating the 'quiet space'. It was at this time that Mouchette worked up previous studies into the major portrait which still hangs in the Adelaide Lodge. In August 1908 Mme Berthe Mouchette wrote to her friend, Alfred Courmes in Paris that “for my sister and myself this visit has been a source of very real gratification.”\(^{21}\) At the conclusion of the visit the sisters even threw Besant a little party. It is probable that the artist continued to work on the

\(^{17}\) ibid p. 221
\(^{18}\) It is likely that Mouchette and her sister also visited Paris at this time where Berthe Mouchette painted Jeanne 1900. DA Courmes, ‘Letters from Mlle Lion and Mme Mouchette to D.A. Courmes’, Revue Théosophique Française, September, 1908, p. 218
\(^{19}\) Anonymous, 'Mme Mouchette: Departure for France', The Evening Journal, 9 September, 1922,
\(^{20}\) Anonymous, Official souvenir catalogue: First Australian exhibition of women’s work, Melbourne, 1907. p. 194
\(^{21}\) '... pour ma soeur et moi, cette visite a été un veritable et personnel bonheur'. Courmes, 'Letters from Mlle Lion and Mme Mouchette to D.A. Courmes', p. 187
painting after Annie Besant’s departure as the hairstyle with centre parting, shown in the portrait, was not adopted by Annie Besant until 1910.

From 1895 until her death Mme Mouchette maintained an active involvement in the Theosophical Society. She made a number of visits to Adyar which invariably coincided with her return trips to France. On one of those visits she taught Daisy Rossi\(^{22}\) at the Louvre 1909-10. They would certainly have touched base with the Theosophical community in Paris.\(^{23}\) Jeanne Lion joined the Society in October of that year. Marie Lion published a number of articles in the Révue Theosophique Française during this period. On their return to Australia they almost certainly called in at Adyar in December and on their return to Adelaide Lion’s semi-autobiographical novel *The Black Pearl* was published in 1911. Mouchette remained an active member of the Theosophical Society, sponsoring many new members into the Adelaide Lodge.\(^{24}\) She returned to France in 1922 after the death of her sister Marie.

Mme Mouchette’s portrait of Annie Besant serves as an introduction to the larger themes of this thesis, announcing an alternative tradition of visuality in Australian art, articulated around a tension between the representation of the invisible through formal means. For Australian artists the Theosophical Society was both a mystical and a political project. It was vulnerable to accusations of charlatanry and ridicule but it was also a highly organised body which included many artists who had applied mature educated minds to questioning existing world views and had found them inadequate. The Society operated on a structure of esoteric and exoteric knowledge and over the past century even much of the exoteric knowledge has been lost.


\(^{23}\) This was an exciting time for the arts in Theosophical Paris as Jean Dampt (1853-1946) and Eugène Rattier (1864-1947) were working on the Paris headquarters building in the famous Square Rapp at this time. Dampt was a sculptor and furniture designer in the Style Moderne.

\(^{24}\) Anonymous, ‘Mme Mouchette: Departure for France’, *The Evening Journal*, 9 September, 1922,
Methodological challenges

The teachings of the Theosophical Society are deeply controversial. Besant, Mouchette and Lion acknowledged this in their work. In addressing this material from within the academy there are two equally dangerous extremes which need to be negotiated. On the one hand a total rejection of the invisible, with its baggage of fairies, auras and talismanic works of art, on the other an absorption and identification with the counter culture which such ideas represent. Identification with the former implies a belittlement and further marginalisation of the women artists involved; identification with the latter risks a marginalisation of the academic value of my project. In passing between this Scylla and Charybdis one must negotiate a ferocious whirlpool, alternately thrust perilously close to each extreme. In order to locate myself in this conversation it is important to state for the record that I am not a Theosophist. I stand with WB Yeats’ (apocryphal?) peasant woman in saying that I do not believe in fairies but that does not mean they do not exist. Science has not convinced me of its ability to answer the great riddles of the universe. Alison Winter and the popularising Margaret Wertheim, among others, have asked too many pertinent questions exposing the historical fallibility of the scientific method. It seems to me that the drive for disciplinary speciality, ushered in by the Age of Reason, has not done women, art history, artists or their audience any favours.

I began this research with a political decision to trust the women. This was not difficult. The women discussed in the following pages are informed, well read, well educated and often well travelled. They are remembered as active thinkers questioning the assumptions of their time. These women are not the material for an anthropologist researching the spirit customs of a remote community. They are not the ‘Other’ but the ‘Same’, they do not uniquely occupy the past but their attitudes continue to inform contemporary artists and writers. They represent my inheritance as a woman working in the arts in Australia. They are my ancestresses and they conceived of themselves as such at the time.25 How then do we listen intently, as

Gayatri Spivak recommends, in order to translate their desires and productions for a community in the early 21st century?26

Dipesh Chakrabarty articulates the problem of representing a history which pushes the limits of that discipline when he discusses a history of the Santal peasantry which presents their belief that the God Thakur directed their rebellion:

The supernatural was part of what constitutes public life for the non-modern Santals of the nineteenth century. This, however, simply cannot be the past in the language of professional history in which the idea of historical evidence, like evidence allowed in a court of law, cannot admit of the supernatural except as part of the non-rational (ie somebody's belief system).27

For Chakrabarty this is an instance of a sulbatern past, a construction of events which cannot ever enter history as the historians own position.28 In my account of the artists associated with the Theosophical Society the discipline of art history is likewise pushed to reveal its limits. Does my focus on the cultural context, central to the production of these works, push me outside of the discipline of Art History? In proposing an alternative modernism which includes a cultural study of one important contextual framework of a series of artists, I can open a space to imagine the work of art as more multi-dimensional than it is often given credit for. With Chakrabarty, I anticipate that the sulbatern study “puts us in touch with the heterogeneities, the plural ways of being, that make up our own present.” 29

Working between an art history which tracks stylistic influences, and a cultural history which explores a contextualised arts practice, I am inevitably drawn to undertake a number of delicate negotiations. My project insists on the importance

27 Dipesh Chakrabarti, 'Minority histories, sulbatern pasts', Humanities Research, winter1997, 17-32 p. 23
28 ibid, p. 24
29 ibid,
of regular, even routine, psychic experiences for the artists I discuss. This is indeed a subaltern history with serious consequences should I fail to achieve the correct voice. Women have been damned by their traditional association with the non-rational, madness and spirituality. The artists in this study actively embraced this identification. It has been useful to conceive of this identification beyond the traditional Platonic dualism. Traditional oppositions of mind/body, reason/unreason, male/female have not been useful in this study. Instead Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s conception of the body as molecular, a place of becoming in which identities are not fixed, and the molar, macro-narratives are destabilised, is extremely useful. The idea of heterogeneities and plural ways of being is very important to the way I conceive of the artists included in this history. Imagining the individual as a multiplicity, a discontinuous series of flows and energies, enables a way of writing about an artist like Florence Fuller which conceives of her psychic research as productive. Although, as Elizabeth Grosz has pointed out, there are substantial political concerns with fragmenting the identity of ‘woman’, the active embrace by so many artists and women of what has traditionally been seen as negative values, calls for alternative strategies. For this reason too, I focus on the promise of the Theosophical Society rather than its unverifiable delivery. I am interested in what the artists involved with the Theosophical Society sought, what they desired to find in the Society, not in what they found. In this distinction Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of desire as productive, a machinic assemblage which in some sense makes reality, is also useful. In these artists’ desire to locate an alternative knowledge system, such a system was called into being, not only through the works of art, but in the re-evaluation of women’s productions we experience today. It is important to examine the artists gathered in this book not as symptomatic of widespread psychological disturbance, or some equally reductive and marginalising paradigm, but to focus on their contribution to Art History, on their production.

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Mme Mouchette's story anticipates the case studies which make up the bulk of this narrative. The artists have been selected primarily for the contribution such a study makes to an understanding of their work. Each in some way represents a dramatic encounter with the Society with real influence on their practice. Not all the artists I have selected were members, nor has all the work previously 'spoken for itself' to reveal the depth of its Theosophical engagement. In each case our apprehension of their work is enriched by our knowledge of the context in which it was produced. Taken together these artists represent a movement through the early twentieth century connected by unexpected networks of association. I do not question that as the century progresses the formal language of these artists is responsive to that of their colleagues locally and overseas. Many writers of general history and individual biographers have charted this pattern of influence. My intervention is to note that many of the key moments, in what has been written as a stylistic concourse of first moments and masters, were either anticipated by or were in fact motivated by women articulating Theosophical concerns.

Nevertheless the artists included in this study by no means represent the full gamut of conceivable responses. It is certainly not the case that artists associated with the Theosophical Society inevitably realised their conceptual concerns through their practice. Many artists like Wilton Hack, Alexander Colquhoun, Louisa Haynes, Rosie Wiltshire, Edward Officer, Frank Crozier, or JW Beattie appear to have no connection, innovative or otherwise, between their work and their real commitment to the Society. Other artists, whether members or fellow travellers like Harry de Hartog and Christian Waller, exhibit an undeniable influence in their work but these I have written about elsewhere. Still others like Portia Geach, Bernard Hall or Jeffrey Smart represent a group of artists who may have had a chance encounter or used the Society as poste restante on their travels and the connection seems to go no further. There remains however a large body of important work by artists

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32 Bernard Hall was a correspondent with Annie Besant, Jeffrey Smart describes an unusual encounter with the Theosophical Society Jeffrey Smart, Not quite straight. Vintage, Sydney, 2000. p. 48 and Portia Geach used the Society as her poste restante while in London in the late 1890s.
such as Ina Gregory, Theodora St John, FE Cox, Mary Cecil Allen, Eleanor Lange and Marion Mahony Griffin\textsuperscript{33} whose inclusion would have represented an investment of time and space beyond the scope of this project and must wait for another occasion. Even though this study concludes with Leadbeater’s death, many more recent artists including Godfrey Miller, Frank and Margel Hinder, Micky Allan, John Young and Christopher Dean have engaged with the Society in productive ways. Their continued interest reveals a relevance of the Society’s project into the present.

**Overview of the project**

Mouchette’s portrait of Annie Besant introduces the ideas of an alternative stream of modernism and its radical alternative visuality. This alternative modernism is distinguished by a conceptual connection through the Theosophical Society rather than a style based modernism. Chapter one examines the way the Theosophical Society has been written in Australian art history and attempts to reframe the place of the Theosophical Society as a response to modernity. In this model, modernity, like the Enlightenment, is seen as multiple and overlapping.

Chapter two places Jane Price in a key position at a significant early moment in the history of the Theosophical Society in Australia. Price is identified with the politics of a new spiritual nationalism announced by Col. Olcott during his 1891 tour. The immanence of the invisible makes its first appearance. In the third chapter Florence Fuller’s engagement with Indian art and experience of radical alternative spirituality is seen to result in the practice of visualisation techniques and a momentary radical transformation of her practice. The fourth chapter returns to Melbourne to explore a public debate on the representation of the invisible and the visible through an unusual triangulation. This triangle includes the theorist of visualisation, Marion Ferdinanda; the theorist of the ‘science of appearances’, Max Meldrum; and the artist who listened to both, Clarice Beckett. The action of the fifth chapter again

\textsuperscript{33} Gregory, St John, Cox and Allen stand among a large number of artists who were members of the Society and produced work within the framework of the Society, Eleanor Lange and Marion Mahony Griffin were not
moves overseas to Paris, where Ethel Carrick distinguishes her practice from that of her more famous husband through a chain of association which leads ultimately to the Theosophical Society. Carrick’s representation of the ‘absolute movement of life’ marks an interesting moment of inversion in the location of the centre and margin of artistic practice. In the sixth chapter the focus shifts to Sydney with the arrival there of the charismatic visionary CW Leadbeater in 1914. In Sydney Leadbeater gathered around himself a community of artists who were prepared to realise his visionary experience through formal means. The next chapter explores the debates between Science and Spirit as means of understanding the universe provoked and fanned by Leadbeater’s presence in Sydney. It explores the concerns of Roy de Maistre and Grace Cossington Smith as they negotiated the various investments of their communities to produce the work which has to date been located as the triumphant appearance of modernism in Australia. The last chapter explores the work of Axel Poignant, the last major artist to work directly with CW Leadbeater, and the tensions implicit in his work between the invisible spirit and documentary detail. This chapter returns to the concept of a politically inspired and socially active Society.

These case studies represent the primary focus of interest in this account, but from their cumulative pattern emerge significant implications. What does it mean to introduce the Theosophical Society into an account of Australian art during the early modern period? Can such evidence of calculated and extended commitment to an alternative viewpoint reframe the way we come to see our past and our present?

members of the Society but had documentable relationships with the Society and again produced work in the context of the Society.
1. The third eye: Towards an alternative modernism

To reintroduce the Theosophical Society into a discussion of Australian artists of the modern period is to recover an alternative tradition of visuality. This thesis does not attempt to rewrite the history of modernism but, in Ian Burn's footsteps to insert a supplementary, multiple overlapping modernism amongst those already existing. It examines the work of a select number of artists who found in the Theosophical Society an organisation which represented their concerns. They represent a fraction of the artists, writers, political figures and intellectuals—a large proportion of them women—whose support for the Theosophical Society is so insistent in quantity and in quality, and the works of art produced in response to this association of such crucial interest, that the Theosophical intervention in this period must be accorded the utmost respect. In the words of the Theosophical leadership, notably Col. Henry Steel Olcott, Mme
Blavatsky, Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater, Australian artists recognised an alternative knowledge system by which they could make sense of their lived reality. For many Australian artists their experience of modernity was framed by the Theosophical Society. Australia was not unique in this experience but was in fact part of a vigorous distributed conversation which included artists and thinkers in Paris, London, India and Ireland. The artists sought to reconcile science with spirituality, the visible with the invisible, academic rationality with a concept of inner truth,— the very terms of Blavatsky’s Theosophical program—through the formal means of their practice. They are connected not by a formal or stylistic relationship but by a common conceptual response to the representation of a Theosophical, non-visible reality.

Australian artists’ engagement with the Theosophical Society led them to acknowledge visible reality as only part of the real and they sought formal strategies to represent the transcendental. For the Theosophical leadership the transcendental was a matter of scientifically verifiable fact, routinely experienced on a personal level. The invisible was visible to the trained clairvoyant and the Theosophical membership anticipated that they too would achieve this ability. Many artists evidenced this new and heightened sensibility in their work and sought new formal means to represent the invisible. Inevitably the encyclopedic descriptions of colour and form recounted by the leadership from their research on the astral plane informed their work. The visual language which had been developed to reference the natural world was devalued. Yet in an alternative and compensatory gesture their work participates in a scientific and evidentiary aesthetic of the invisible. In this respect it remains the ‘other’ of Australia’s national school of landscape described by Ian Burn. Although they referenced the colours and forms of the invisible and their work shares the look of the stylistic modernism which was born in the art centres of Europe, it is important to acknowledge that this formal affiliation was in large part a consequence of their conceptual position.

34 The influence of such writers as WB Yeats, Rabindranath Tagore and Eduard Schuré will be discussed in the course of the thesis.
While these artists of the early modern period in Australia may have looked at other artists’ works, it was in order to realise a Theosophically articulated vision of reality. For this reason an art history which traces stylistic genealogy of borrowings and transformations is not adequate to this task. This is the case for the artists Burn links with the national landscape school and for the artists associated with the Theosophical Society.\(^{36}\) It should be evident that the alternative modernism I propose here does not follow a stylistic model of importation and delayed transmission but rather proceeds through an exhaustive contextualisation of conceptual concerns. In consequence this alternative modernism is revealed as gendered, political and decentred.

In pulling back from the stylistic concourse and contextualising these artist’s work as a conceptual response, the contribution of a number of relatively obscure women artists is affirmed. This ambitious reorganisation of the terms of engagement is a necessary response to these artists’ otherwise exclusion from the limited range of what constitutes radical and meaningful modernism. In the process of contextualising their work as a response to modernity, I revalorise Australian women artist’s experience. While many men participated in the Theosophical Society, as we shall see, the organisation offered special opportunities to the woman artist.

A contextualisation of the Theosophical Society within Australian art history also offers space to renegotiate the centre-margin debate of post-colonial theory. On an organisational level the Theosophical Society had many ‘centres’. Many Australian artists found themselves occupying the centre of what was arguably the most important counter-cultural organisation of the century. Mme Mouchette’s experience of privileged access to the theorists of an alternative visuality from

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\(^{36}\) The cultural context of the artists is essential to understanding the relevance and significance of both sets of artists. However the cultural context of each group is very different even though they can occupy for the most part the same place and time and there are artists like Beckett whose work can be seen to fit into both camps. Moreover for Burn, as for John F Williams, John Docker and others, the early decades of the 20th century were dominated by naturalism, specifically the tensions associated with the pastoral landscape ideal as the natural inheritor of the Enlightenment with its scientific values such as sanity, truth to nature, the dignity of labour, the productive landscape and above all rationalism.
Adelaide, while her artist colleagues in Paris occupied the margins of the Theosophical discourse, was common to many. This reversal of the centre-margin debate reconfigures and enlivens the aesthetic response of Australian artists of the period 1890-1940.

One of the features of my research has been the prominent signposting of Theosophical connections in various artist’s work and an almost inexplicable refusal by art historians to explore the implications of the association. There are a number of reasons for this. The output of the Theosophical Society itself is a vast and confusing archive, and the scope and content of the material is difficult to negotiate. The startlingly active and spiritually unconventional Theosophical Society has been overlooked as a connecting factor. The inspiration and support it offered women artists has not been examined. Yet the repetition of this pattern of Theosophical association documented in so many biographies demands attention. This accident of history and scholarship offers a lacuna which this thesis promises to examine.

Theosophy in Art History

In this section, I will examine the way art histories in Australia and overseas have written the intervention of the Theosophical Society. 37 In doing so I hope to identify the structures which articulate those histories, specifically the tensions implicit in the inclusion of the Theosophical Society in modernist accounts. Many Australian art histories recognise the Theosophical Society’s intimate entanglement in Australian art of the time. Yet despite the repeated pattern of Theosophical connections at crucial moments, the focus of these histories is substantially fixed on the description of a stylistic progression within a framework strongly articulated by modernism. This is not to say that modernism is the only operative metanarrative in these accounts, only that in the specific context of the Theosophical Society it has been the principle narrative. This theoretical structure blinds these authors to the Theosophical interconnections and so the Theosophical
conceptual underpinnings of the work of key Australian artists remains unexamined. For this reason I will focus attention in this section on a style based art history, I hope that the theoretical underpinnings of my thesis referenced briefly later in this chapter and embodied throughout this project evidence my awareness of more recent strategies. Yet as we shall see, recent international research on Theosophical connections in the biographies of key modernists likewise fails to acknowledge its own implications. The traditional association of abstraction as a key feature of modernist histories is disrupted by the inclusion of the Theosophical Society as a ‘third term’. Despite acknowledging the Theosophical Society’s importance in art historical analyses, the focus has to date remained on abstraction as a stylistic achievement. This thesis will explore the Theosophical implications of abstraction for the artist and reveal it as anything but a quest for formal purity.

In this project I have gathered the larger, intricately patterned, fabric of our histories and picked out a repeating detail which I have connected with smocking threads. This repeating detail is revealed as more than incidental— it is in fact an important structural motif. The pattern does not challenge the significance of other observations but draws out important connections and overlays which had been previously unexplored.

The Theosophical Society is unproblematically flagged by the ‘father of Australian art history’, William Moore, in his *The story of Australian art* (1934). Moore locates the early involvement of the Theosophical Society in Australian art at the turn of the century. He quotes John Shirlow to the effect that the last group at Charterisville (c1900) would gather in the evenings to discuss 'Whistler, Norman Lindsay, theosophy, socialism and so on.' There is no indication by either Moore or Shirlow that Theosophy needed an explanation to the reader at the time of publication or

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37 This is not a literature review of Australian Modernism, nor do I have any desire to summarise the very real achievements of those authors involved— this is a different task for a different occasion.


that it was any less momentous an issue than the others discussed 'after the lamp was lighted'.\textsuperscript{40}

Positioned with Whistler, Socialism and Norman Lindsay, the Theosophical Society is identified with progressive thought as it impacts on the life and work of the Australian artist. Not unusually the authority of the establishment– the academy, church and political system– was questioned after dark. This positioning of the Theosophical Society within the rhetoric of radical student politics is supported by a contemporary reference to the Theosophical Society by the arch-traditionalist JS McDonald, who praised Tom Roberts for having learnt to 'see properly what was before one with one's normal eyes. What one saw with pixies', or fairies', or brownies', or angels', or psychics' eyes was no concern of his.'\textsuperscript{41} In this paradigm, Theosophical vision is opposed to normal vision. This is surely the substance of those late night discussions. Again the Theosophical Society is aligned with the new and radical as opposed to the norm or tradition. At the turn of the century the influence of the Theosophical Society on artists was a significant and widespread phenomenon which was expected to have a specific impact on the vision and work of the informed artist.

Bernard Smith has expressed a consistent interest in the potential of the Theosophical Society to shed light on the development of modernism in Australia. Much of his interest can be explained by his construction of value for Australian art. For Smith, the successful work of art is a formal response to a set of local concerns. Smith's first published interest in the Theosophical Society, in 1979 was in response to Humphrey McQueen's \textit{Black Swan of Trespass: The emergence of modernist painting in Australia to 1944}. Brought again to wrestle with the problem of modernism he was inspired to write that he had:

\textsuperscript{40} See also L W Matters, \textit{Australasians who count in London and who counts in Western Australia}, London, 1913. p.166 and A José, 'The cult of the credulous', \textit{Art in Australia}, 3rd Series, 1 August, 1922, unpaginated
\textsuperscript{41} RH Croll, \textit{Tom Roberts}. Robertson Mullens, Melbourne, 1935. p. 21
long been of the opinion, to take an example, that a thorough account of the history of spiritualism, theosophy and anthroposophy in Australia, as abroad, is much more relevant to an understanding of modernism than, say, Einstein’s theories.\textsuperscript{42}

This opinion is given further extension in Smith’s \textit{Notes on Abstract art}\textsuperscript{43}, when he draws on an early article by Jill Roe.\textsuperscript{44} At this point he suggests that ‘A full investigation between spiritualism, theosophy and anthropology (sic) and their links with modernism is long overdue here in Australia.’\textsuperscript{45} Smith’s more recent interest in the material in \textit{Modernism’s history: a study in Twentieth Century art and ideas}, (1998) remains focussed on the phenomenon overseas. Yet without a thorough understanding of the local conditions and membership base of the Theosophical Society he is condemned to repeat the pattern of looking overseas for stylistic sources for Australian artists. Despite Smith’s fascination with this material it is unlikely that the status of the ‘Angry Penguins’ artists would be dislodged in his canon, as Smith’s lack of sympathy for either the Theosophical Society or abstraction is well documented. Smith’s attitude to both ventures was expressed neatly when he wrote that ‘It always seemed symptomatic that for many years the Sydney branch of the Contemporary Art Society met in Adyar Hall, the Sydney Headquarters of the Theosophical Society.’\textsuperscript{46}

Although sympathetic in principle to the idea of visual arts influenced by social praxis, Humphrey McQueen grants little room to the Theosophical Society in \textit{The Black Swan of Trespass}, (1979). Yet interestingly, one of the key issues McQueen addresses is the ‘fourth dimension,’ which he chooses to read as Einstein’s theory of time.\textsuperscript{47} This reliance on Einstein appears to be a wilful denial of the more

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{42}] Bernard Smith, "Wrestling with Modernism: McQueen’s "Black Swan of Trespass"", \textit{Meanjin}, 38, 4, 1979, 523p. 523
\item[\textsuperscript{44}] Roe, Jill "A tale of religion in two cities" \textit{Meanjin}, v.40, April 1981: 48-56
\item[\textsuperscript{45}] Smith, ‘Notes on abstract art’, 29-36. p.34
\item[\textsuperscript{46}] ibid., p.33
\item[\textsuperscript{47}] The issue is open to confusion as Albert Gleizes refers to Einstein’s fourth dimension in \textit{du cubisme} while coming from an intensely personal spiritual position.
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common understanding of the fourth dimension as an occult dimension during this period. The occult interpretation of the term is born out by the interests of the people he cites as associated with the fourth dimension—Roy de Maistre, Eleanor Lange and Anne Dangar—all artists whose work was shaped by the Theosophical Society or spiritual commitment. As backhanded proof of the widespread confusion surrounding the fourth dimension, McQueen repeats a story told by Frederick Wood Jones, Melbourne's Professor of Anatomy from 1930-38, and colleague of Ernest Besant Scott, that God was not dead; he had merely moved into the fourth dimension to set up house with Mme Blavatsky. McQueen's story exemplifies the problems of working with this material in the late twentieth century.

Mary Eagle goes further than Smith in acknowledging the importance of the Theosophical Society in her enormously important Australian modern painting between the wars 1914-39 (1989). She uncovered the importance of the mystical and Theosophical for many Sydney artists of this period. However the structure of Eagle's argument remains articulated around the identification and analysis of stylistic features along a modernist framework now within a local context. She is thus less open to recognising the mystic alternatives which underpin much of the interesting Melbourne work of this period. She writes:

When Sydney artists had a rationale outside art, on the whole it was mystical, looking to science, Einstein and abstract systems of nature. With exceptions—Napier Waller, Ethel Spowers and others who followed the decorative literary tradition—Melbourne's Modernism pursued through Meldrum, was based on 'Nature' and on the profession and

49 F. Wood Jones's professorship overlapped with Ernest Scott's professorship of the History department from 1914-1936. ibid p.97

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tradition of painting. In other words it was painterly, naturalistic and less extreme.50

While Eagle’s focus directed her attention away from the important Theosophical currents in Melbourne, her insightful understanding of the Sydney experience leads her to discern two traditions of modernism— a modernism which explores structure and a 'vitalist' modernism exploring spiritual meaning or inner expression.51 This important distinction opens the space for an understanding of multiple overlapping and interweaving modernisms. The only precise fix Eagle gives us on vitalism is through her reference to Grace Cossington Smith’s mentor Ethel Anderson, who argued in "Modern art as a cure for Bolshevism" that 'the poet or artist who glorified the spirit rather than base material life was the furthest and highest evolution of mankind.'52 We can recognise in Anderson’s words an impulse which is distinctly Theosophical in tone, a point which a more focussed contextualisation of her art and writing supports.

From a different starting point, Jill Roe, author of the influential history of the Theosophical Society in Australia, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939* (1986) also engages with the connections of the Theosophical Society with Australian modernism. *Beyond Belief* is a general history of the Society in Australia which includes a dozen densely packed pages on the arts as part of the Society's program 'to theosophise Australia'.53 Roe’s work is ground-breaking; no study of this field can proceed without leaning heavily on the resources of this text. However, while Roe suggests that there was perhaps a Theosophical dimension to modernism in Australia she concludes that there were 'not too many modernist missionaries advancing on Australian art along the lines laid out in pre-war Munich.'54 Here Roe betrays an expectation that as the Theosophical Society produced abstract masterpieces overseas the same might have been thought to

51 ibid p.81
52 ibid p.129
54 ibid p.318
have happened here. It is in this context that she discusses the work of both Christian Waller and Godfrey Miller and so is unable to account for Waller's 'failure' to achieve abstraction. While Roe establishes connections between the Theosophical Society and various artists the nature of the Theosophical experience in an art context is not explored in depth.

The most recent publication to address the influence of the Theosophical Society on Australian art is the catalogue Spirit and Place, curated by Nick Waterlow and Ross Mellick at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (1996). The exhibition Spirit and Place was enormously successful in that it opened a space to envisage alternate relationships between works of art which had seemed definitively positioned in quite different arenas. This gorgeous exhibition revealed the extent to which contemporary artists imbue their work with profoundly spiritual, and occasional theosophical concepts. Relationships were established which transcended stylistic frameworks and paved the way for alternative conversations to take place. However, the focus was very much on contemporary work and the exhibition catalogue contented itself with an enunciation of connections rather than proceeding to an analysis of the implications. In my essay for this catalogue I indicated something of the continuity of interest in the Theosophical Society by Australian artists reaching from the Heidelberg artist, Jane Price, to contemporary artists Christopher Dean and Micky Allan.

Three more histories are of significance in pursuing the idea of an alternative modernism in the context of the Theosophical Society. Helen Topliss' Modernism and feminism: Australian women artists 1900-1940 (1996) repositions women within the modernist framework. In the process of identifying a system of importation following commercial routes, she explores a system of mentoring amongst women and a rich pattern of networks which prefigures the level of contextualisation necessary in my project. Joan Kerr's landmark publication;

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55 In answer to this question see McFarlane, 'Concerning the spiritual in Melbourne'.
Heritage: the National Women's art book (1995) presents a broad spectrum of women's work thoroughly contextualised along broad themes of modernity rather than the narrow and marginalising structure of modernism. In this work Mab Treeby, an obscure cartoonist, is made to carry the history of the women associated with the society, Kerr noting that “women, including many women artists, played a major role in all aspects of the Society.”

Ian Burn's National Life and landscapes: Australian painting 1900-1940 (1990) studies a body of work which has proven difficult to accommodate within modernist history. In order to resolve this issue Burn proposes a strategy of interdependent and overlapping multiple modernisms. Burn reminds us that 'The predominance of art histories written from a modernist perspective has projected a uniformity onto, and effectively denied the modern character of anything not obviously—that is stylistically—modernist.' He uses the national landscape tradition as a means to indicate the multi-layered richness of the politics of difference at work in Australian cultural history. There are obvious parallels with Theosophical influence on Australian artists during this early modern period. Like the artists of the national landscape tradition, the artists associated with the Theosophical Society demand recognition for their own overlapping and interdependent modernisms. Moreover, Theosophical concerns can be seen to be so central to the way artists associated with canonical modernism responded to modernity that in many cases the artist's real focus can be shown to be anything but stylistic.

As Jill Roe's model indicates, international scholarship on the influence of the Theosophical Society on artists has concentrated on its role in supporting the artist to achieve abstraction. Abstraction is perceived as an end in itself, the inevitable outcome of disciplinary purity. Analysis has traditionally been undertaken at a formal rather than contextual level, an interrogation of its relation to modernism rather than modernity. International work to date on the relationship of the

58 Burn, National life and landscapes: Australian painting 1900-1940. p. 205
Theosophical Society to modern art remains reliant on Sixten Ringbom's groundbreaking analysis of Wassily Kandinsky's abstract work, *The Sounding Cosmos: A study of the spiritualism of Kandinsky and the genesis of abstract painting* (1970). While there were many contemporary texts which recognised the relationship of the spiritual and abstraction this was the first work of historical scholarship to focus on the issue.

Ringbom's work takes Greenberg's formalist aesthetic as its foundation. The interest and value of his study originally lay in his hagiography of an artist who had already entered the canon because of his position as a pioneer of abstraction. However Ringbom's exposition of the role of the Theosophical Society in facilitating Kandinsky's abstraction unexpectedly exposed the self-referential formalist aesthetic to the point where it could no longer continue as a working historical narrative. He exposed early abstraction as a transcendental project, less concerned with formal than spiritual purity, whose artists saw themselves as true visionaries making art that was the medium of the message for a less spiritual bourgeoisie.

Curiously, the implications of Ringbom's work in undermining the formalist aesthetic have not been critically developed. Nor has subsequent writing on the Theosophical Society and the visual arts developed this topic. Many of the most significant Anglo-American writers on the subject (including Linda Dalrymple Henderson and Rose-Carol Washton Long) were gathered together in the *Art Journal* (Spring 1987) and later in Maurice Tuchman's catalogue for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *The spiritual in art: Abstract painting 1890-1985*. Here again most of the essays take a teleological view of art history. Proof of the relevance of their research into the Theosophical Society is based on its

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60 See Huntly Carter, 'The spiritualisation of art', *The Herald of the Star*, 3, 2, 1914, 624-29
association with a genealogy of abstraction. This dependence on stylistic definitions is reproduced in Tuchman's introductory essay and throughout the arguments and structure of the catalogue. Conceptual consistencies between the use of the Theosophical Society by Kasimir Malevich, Hilma af Klint and Marcel Duchamp, which might refigure this hegemonic modernism, remain unexplored. The essays on this subject to date represent less a critique of modernism, or of the Theosophical participation in the history of modernism, than a presentation of biographical facts.

These texts assume the triumphant progress of a modernist vision. In fact analyses of Theosophically inspired artists overseas have failed to grasp the implication that formal resolution was not the primary goal of these artists. Their primary goal was to communicate a conceptualisation of the world where the invisible represented a greater reality than the visible. This is a framing of art history which makes sense of Australia's ambivalent relationship with the project of abstraction in the first thirty years of this century and significantly reshapes our historical engagement with the project of modernity. It supports Kerr's call to reframe the works of our many marginalised women artists and removes the need to look for 'firsts' and 'masters', conceiving of the production of art as part of an organised challenge to traditional ways of visualising the world. Mme Blavatsky challenged both institutionalised reason and religion. What unifies artists as diverse as Kandinsky, Duchamp, Mme Mouchette, Ethel Carrick and Roy de Maistre is not any formal, stylistic relationship. Rather they are connected by their common critique of modernity under the umbrella of the Theosophical Society.

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From modernism to modernity

Those Australian and international histories which addressed the Theosophical Society followed the paradigm of aesthetic modernism with their theoretical roots in the writings of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried— as described by Hal Foster in *Re: post*.64 This aesthetic modernism is a stylistic category broadly defined by a pattern of increasing purity of the expressive medium, a process of specialisation in which everything not specific to the medium is progressively excised, what Smith described recently and polemically as the 'Formalesque'.65 As Ian Burn’s history suggests however, 'a style oriented description of these shifts will at best be only partial'.66 By including the Theosophical Society as a third term one must return to the cultural context of these productions. In negotiating this shift from a study of aesthetic modernism to the artist’s engagement with the cultural context of modernity, the very premises of modernity as an expression of the project of the Enlightenment are brought into focus.

The time frame for the beginning of this modern period is positioned by Jürgen Habermas as the close of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, the time of the French Revolution and the settlement of Australia. It was originally concerned with the emergence of humanity from its self-imposed condition of dependency.67 But by the mid nineteenth century the project of the Enlightenment was formulated in the terms we now recognise—a continual process of rationalisation, bureaucratisation, and the relentless encroachment of science into social existence.68 Habermas refers to Max Weber (1864-1920) in his characterisation of modernity as:

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63 Recent accounts of modernism by such writers as Kerr, Burn, Topliss and Butler reflect the greater complexity inherent to the period than those I discuss in this section. However, with the exception of Kerr, they do not address the issue of the Theosophical Society.
...the separation of the substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres. They are: science, morality and art. These came to be differentiated because the unified world views of religion and metaphysics fell apart.69

Central to this project was the idea of being modern, of one's time, up to the minute, and anticipating the inevitable progress towards social and moral improvement.70 This improvement was to take place in an atmosphere of scientific rationality, where God was no longer immanent and spirituality and religion were ghettoised into specialist disciplines.

The principles of the Enlightenment remain most visible in our institutions, especially our galleries and universities, the academic thesis being an exemplary object. The Enlightenment gave us the encyclopedia, the dictionary, the rhetoric of scientific proof, the separation into disciplines for pure research into the specificity of each medium. It gave us a methodology which promised to open the world up to understanding. Only recently have we been able to think in an interdisciplinary fashion, listen to the unauthorised voices of women and subaltern communities, and consider accounts which exist outside of rational exposition.

Neither modernism nor modernity have served women well.71 Contemporary feminist cultural theorists are increasingly subverting and otherwise breaking down the universalising structures which have marginalised so many nineteenth and twentieth century women. In her introduction to Heritage: The national women's art book, Kerr writes this call to arms:

70 Ibid., p. 4
71 Of course historians such as Burke, Topliss, Eagle and Ambrus have done much to demonstrate that the commercial culture of the modern period has been an important means of transmission for the modernist idiom.
Merely to drop more women artists (whether white or black) into a conventional art historical frame is not enough. We have to paint a new canvas and carve a new frame to fit it. There are thousands of artworks by women in Australia's past, most of whom have been neglected for reasons which have nothing to do with quality.\textsuperscript{72}

Joan Kerr's \textit{Heritage} embraced not only the avant-garde but also the conservative, the ephemeral and the obscure in order to provide a "wider, more relevant, less prejudicial context."\textsuperscript{73} As literary theorist Rita Felski argues, too often

\ldots the version of modernity generated by debates over modernism provides only a partial and limited account of women's multiple and diverse relations to modern discourses and institutions.\textsuperscript{74}

If the modernist aesthetic can not adequately account for the experience of women artists associated with the Theosophical Society then clearly a new canvas must be painted and a new frame carved to fit it. The new frame proposed in this volume is an alternative modernism which takes as its point of reference a detailed contextualisation of the work of art as a considered response to modernity. In such a reframing modernity itself is constructed as a more multi-faceted, more useful structure. Felski writes:

The assumption that only one aesthetic is adequate to the truth of the modern— that of avant-garde innovation— gives way to a wider analytical focus upon differing artistic practices which do not simply reflect, but help to construct, the various facets of modernity. As a result what counts as innovative or radical art cannot simply be read off from a formal analysis of the text in question, but requires a


careful account of the particular contextual locations and systems of value within which meanings are produced and circulated.\textsuperscript{75}

The assumptions of the Enlightenment and their expression in the experience of modernity are increasingly coming under critical analysis. Recent interdisciplinary histories have repositioned the Enlightenment as a highly contested moment, vulnerable to the political contingencies of the time.\textsuperscript{76} The Enlightenment is now seen less as a unified ‘moment’ and increasingly revealed to be vulnerable to both academic and alternative challenges. From the very moment of its inception there were challenges to its authority and today the zones of knowledge previously marginalised by its perceived hegemonic structure are being revised and re-evaluated. In \textit{Oriental enlightenment: the encounter between Asian and Western thought}, JJ Clarke argues that one of the important early challenges was the Theosophical Society.\textsuperscript{77} In \textit{Imperial encounters: religion and modernity in India and Britain}, Peter van der Veer develops the argument that the Theosophical Society provided those marginal to the Victorian intellectual elite, especially women and colonials, an opportunity to participate in scientific experimentation. For van der Veer, however, this was a profoundly anti-establishment appropriation of science.\textsuperscript{78}

As we shall see, the Theosophical Society had an uneasy relationship with the rhetoric of scientific methodology. Blavatsky made specific reference to the materialism which took hold after the French Revolution and most of her work was intended to disprove the authority of materialist rationalism.\textsuperscript{79}

Now, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, we can begin to re-evaluate Blavatsky’s Theosophical message from within the academy. However while the premises of the Enlightenment may be dead, their consequences continue on and our ability to negotiate territory beyond of the conceptual horizons of Western

\textsuperscript{75} ibid.,, p. 203
rationalism is still compromised by what Gehlen describes as the ‘crystalised’ forms of the Enlightenment’s institutions. The archive of the Theosophical Society is so radical and so outside the frame of rational reference, that its study is still problematic. Nevertheless its representation of many women artists’ experience of modernity is incontrovertible. What message did Blavatsky deliver that was so appealing?

**Mme Blavatsky critiques modernity**

Many nineteenth century writers and critics expressed profound concern with the changing conditions associated with modernity. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) was only one of the lecturers who achieved popular success with this platform. However she is distinguished by her leadership of an important membership-based society which attracted progressive and influential thinkers and which proved particularly attractive for Australian women and artists. This Society, the Theosophical Society, was formed in America in 1875 by William Quan Judge, Mme Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott. The audience Blavatsky increasingly attracted from 1875 was drawn from:

A bewildered public, fast losing belief in man’s personal immortality, in a deity of any kind, and rapidly descending to the level of a mere animal. Such is the picture of the hour, illumined by the bright noonday sun of the Christian and scientific era.

Blavatsky’s grasp of her intellectual climate was clearly effective. She identified and held the confidence of a large community for whom the evacuation of the spirit and promise of scientific discovery caused considerable distress. It should come as no surprise to realise that the Theosophical Society appealed particularly to intellectuals. Jill Roe has shown that in 1911 Theosophical women were the “best

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79 Blavatsky, *Isis unveiled*, p. XIV  
80 Habermas quotes Arnold Gehlen to this effect in Habermas, *The philosophical discourse of modernity*, p. 3  
educated women of all religious groupings. 82 One of the more appealing aspects of the Society was the opportunity it provided its membership to pursue their own research into alternative, especially Eastern, religions as well as unexplained phenomena. 84

In 1884 Mme Blavatsky described the root cause of her audience’s malaise:

On the one hand an unspiritual, dogmatic, too often debauched clergy; a host of sects, and three warring great religions; discord instead of union, dogmas without proofs, sensation-loving preachers, and wealth and pleasure-seeking parishioners’ hypocrisy and bigotry, begotten by the tyrannical exigencies of respectability, the rule of the day, sincerity and real piety exceptional. On the other hand, scientific hypotheses built on sand; no accord upon a single question; rancorous quarrels and jealousy; a general drift into materialism. A death-grapple of Science with Theology for infallibility – ‘a conflict of ages’. 85

Blavatsky identified the crisis of her times as resulting from the separation of disciplines, especially science and religion, developed during the Enlightenment and the emphasis on progress as responsible for the disillusion and disarray of her time. She called this new materialism the ‘bastard progeny of the French Revolution’. 86 In response she identified three principles as key alternatives. Blavatsky’s ‘three fundamental propositions’ are still understood to be at the heart of the Theosophical philosophy. Broadly speaking the three fundamental propositions can be described as: first, a conception of time as periodic rather than linear and progressive, partaking in ideas of reincarnation, flux and reflux, ebb and flow; second, a transcendental impulse which animates all lived reality; and thirdly

82 Blavatsky, Isis unveiled. p. X
83 Roe, Beyond belief; Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939. p. 185
84 Blavatsky undertook to take ‘unreservedly the word of no man.’ Blavatsky, Isis unveiled. p. 10
85 ibid p. IX
86 ibid p. XIV
a fundamental, pre-existent unity, which expresses itself in what we would now call a holistic philosophy and finds reference on a spiritual dimension as an interconnectedness of all souls. Each of these principles is a wild card whose meaning shifts as different connective syntheses are made. But even today these fundamental propositions can be seen as a framework of common interest drawing the membership together.

Mme Blavatsky's Theosophical platform was neither pre-, post- nor anti-modern, but challenged the very terms of modernity. A core principle of the modern is a rhetoric of progress according to which the modern is envisaged as a period designation on a linear representation of time. By this definition opposition to the modern can only be figured as either reactionary—(wishing to return to a time previous to the modern), or progressive—(wishing to proceed to a moment posterior to the modern). To escape from such a construction requires a considerable effort of will buttressed by an awareness of cross-cultural experience. Contemporary critics of the modern have opened sufficient space for us to recognise the Theosophical challenge to the modern as likewise outside this paradigm.

Bruno Latour argues that we have never been modern, that 'the modern world has never happened, in the sense that it has never functioned according to the rules of its official constitution alone.' The Theosophical challenge to the hegemony of the project of the Enlightenment and its expression during the early modern period is returned to us as topical and pressing today. Blavatsky did not see Western reason as evidence of Western superiority and the way was therefore laid open for an acceptance and embrace of Eastern intellectual

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87 This rough schema is not intended to describe the Theosophical philosophy which is more adequately described in their own texts, notably the work of Mme Blavatsky but to indicate the relationship of Blavatsky's ideas with those of the Enlightenment.

88 Theosophists identified with the most 'progressive' causes of their day including vegetarianism, women's suffrage, the kindergarten movement and cremation.


90 For Latour the "official constitution" of the moderns excluded and fostered a population of hybrids which are neither pre-, post- nor anti-modern but non-modern. In this sense the work of the artists associated with the Theosophical Society can be usefully envisaged as a non-modern hybrid, a parallel, interdependent and overlapping modernism which co-exists with the narrative structure we are familiar with but which operates according to different reference points and with different imperatives.
traditions, as well as the devalued local traditions of Ireland and Australian indigenous traditions.

**The Transcendental**

Blavatsky had as little time for institutionalised religion as she did for nineteenth century science. Her major publications, *Isis unveiled* (1877) and *The secret doctrine* (1888), articulate an alternative spirituality which finds an echo of the truth in all religions. Thus the Society was presented as a home for searchers of the truth. Rudolph Steiner would eventually separate from the parent body and form the Anthroposophical Society in 1913, when the Society under Besant and Leadbeater was seen to be too closely associated with Indian traditions. Spiritualism was an important source for Blavatsky, indeed it was in that connection that she and Olcott had met. Much of the rhetoric associated with the privileged relationship between women and the transcendental can be traced to spiritualism.\(^91\) Within the Theosophical Society, women and especially artists were seen to have a privileged sensibility with increased access to spiritual truth and astral vision. This would have particular impact on Australian women artists' representations of the invisible. For Joy Dixon, author of *The divine feminine*,

> One way to read the history of the Theosophical Society, from its earliest years through the 1930s, is to see it as a series of attempts to create a useable version of both eastern and feminine authority.\(^92\)

In addition, the Society offered powerful, high profile activist role models in Blavatsky and Besant, as well as a host of women lecturers and activists less well known today. Finally the Society offered opportunities for women to enter the public sphere in a sheltered space as lecturers and social activists for Theosophical causes. Particularly under Besant’s leadership, the spiritual was


This was expressed in activism in the great issues of women's suffrage as well as betterment of social conditions for women.

Unity

For Blavatsky the evacuation of the transcendental from the everyday was enacted in the separation of disciplines exemplified by the 'rancorous discord of science and theology'. *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky's second major work, was subtitled 'The synthesis of science, religion and philosophy'. Later editions included art as a discipline to be specifically included.

Theosophists embarked on a project to reunite science with theology, art and other disciplines. The Society saw itself as an intellectual hub, opening pathways for research. Thus Leadbeater could write in 1912:

We often speak of Theosophy as not in itself a religion, but the truth which lies behind all religions alike. That is so; yet, from another point of view, we may surely say that it is at once a philosophy and a science. It is a philosophy, because it puts plainly before us an explanation of the scheme of evolution of both souls and the bodies contained in our solar system. It is a religion in so far as, having shown us the course of ordinary evolution, it also puts before us and advises a method of shortening that course, so that by conscious effort we may progress more directly towards the goal. It is a science, because it treats both these subjects as matters not of theological belief but of direct knowledge obtainable by study and investigation. It asserts that man has no need to trust to blind faith, because he has within him latent powers which, when aroused, enable him to see and examine for himself, and it proceeds to prove its case by showing how those powers may be awakened. It is itself a result of the awakening of such powers by men, for the teachings which it puts

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93 ibid p. 183
before us are founded upon direct observations made in the past, and made possible only by such development.

Yet an interesting paradox lies in the emphasis placed on the 'scientific examination' of truth. There is a curious double movement which saw the leadership employing the rhetoric of the Enlightenment while rejecting the canon of approved knowledges. While the Enlightenment is epitomised by its relation to the rational, the Theosophical Society of the period 1890-1940 was neither irrational nor non-rational, but deployed a reason which was functional, with a distinct although perverse resemblance to that expressed through the diverse projects of modernity. This would seem to be part of a larger pattern of what Albrecht Wellmer describes as the 'counter forces against the Enlightenment'.94 This is not to say that the Society was irrational in its presentation of knowledge. Rather it drew on knowledge systems which were explicitly rejected by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, such as Celtic folk traditions, traditional Indian knowledge systems, knowledges traditionally associated with women and European neo-platonic mystical traditions. In this sense it can be seen to fragment the centre-margin hierarchy which articulated the value of knowledge in the colonies. It is symptomatic that Adyar in Madras became the headquarters and centre of the Theosophical Society.95

Blavatsky's three fundamental propositions must be joined by a fourth concept which made possible their conceptualisation. The recognition that knowledges were authorised and correspondingly outlawed is central to an understanding of Blavatsky's project. As Michel Foucault has demonstrated, the Enlightenment was a time of reification and rationalisation of areas and sources of knowledge.96 A readily recognisable model of this process is the dictionary, where definitions themselves are ordered and authorised.

94 Wellmer, The persistence of modernity: Essays on aesthetics, ethics, and postmodernism. p. 87
95 Many Australian intellectuals and artists had connections through the British Colonial bureaucracy. They were highly literate and more widely travelled than most. They were in a position to listen to critiques of modernity which were also critiques of an insular Euro-centrism.
The Theosophical Society's curious relationship to authorised knowledge is interestingly deployed in Besant and Leadbeater's study *Thought forms*, first published in 1901. This work exemplifies the alternate and compensatory relationship of the Theosophical Society with the Enlightenment tradition though its use of the dictionary or grammar of the invisible. *Thought forms* is illustrated with colour plates describing emotions ranging from the rosy glow of pure unselfish love to the sharp zig-zag red arrows of anger. It also develops the more complex grammar of emotions of survivors of a shipwreck. It is the result of practical experimentation by two reputable researchers in the astral sphere. Yet the results of their research are not recuperable within the paradigms of the Enlightenment precisely because of the credentials of the researchers and the interdisciplinary contamination of the experiment. 97 As Alison Winter has shown in her excellent account of mesmerism, 98 the Royal Societies, which had assumed the role of specifying and ordering knowledge, had neither the desire nor the means to regulate this branch of research. The sources which had regulated these branches of knowledge in traditional Ireland and India, they dismissed out of hand as unfit, much as knowledges traditionally associated with women were de-valorised.

Besant and Leadbeater, while reputable in their own community, had no scientific standing with the Royal Societies. Similar Theosophical projects to catalogue the colour of sound or describe Australasian fairies can be proposed as equally crucial alternative formations. Many Australian artists engaged with knowledges outside the parameters of the Enlightenment and explored the implications through their practice. I wish to direct attention to this desire for such forms of knowledge rather than question the nature of those alternative knowledges themselves. In seeking alternative knowledges, artists influenced by the Theosophical Society represented

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97 That epitome of Enlightenment projects, the dictionary, is described by contemporary art historian John Welchman as both the product and emblem of reason. In his analysis it can be deployed as a site of visibility for strategic contestations of modernity as it lays out authorised knowledges. John C Welchman, *Modernism relocated: Towards a cultural studies of visual modernity*. Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, N.S.W, 1995. p. 2

a real and powerful challenge to modernity in the visual field that should not be mis-represented.

Another, less visible, enactment of Blavatsky's concept of unity was experienced at the level of the individual subject. For Blavatsky and Australian Theosophists of the period 1890-1940, the individual was part of a spiritual community and the independence associated with liberal individualism was an illusion. This had profound implications and interesting contradictions at both the personal and social level and the complexities of this position are outlined more fully by Joy Dixon. As an aesthetic position it had interesting ramifications. 'Art for arts sake' was rejected, art was seen as a political act and integrated into the larger Theosophical project. The individual artist's gesture was always integrated into the Theosophical project, and was never conceived as evidence of rampant subjectivity.

Mme Blavatsky's platform was built on a critique of the experience of modernity. As artists negotiated the increasing specialisation and professionalisation of their industry, they were forced to renegotiate the separation of the material from the physical, science from spirit. Many women in particular felt this marginalisation keenly. In the Theosophical Society they found support for their concerns and the Society provided a functional alternative means of conceptualising their life experience. Women artists in particular were promoted and supported as especially sensitive to the Spiritual. Yet because of this perceived privileged relationship with the transcendental they were also assumed to have a special responsibility to share their perceptions with the broader spiritual community. In this hotbed environment an alternative modernism with specific roots in the Theosophical Society was formed.

**Imagining an alternative Australian modernism**

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The incompatibility of Theosophical theoretical structures and purely formal values will become increasingly clear as the experience of specific artists and their practice is explored in the following chapters. Australia had a unique and privileged relationship with the Theosophical Society, and Australian artists benefited from some unique connections, which would impact on art practice. Annie Besant’s daughter, Mabel was a Melbourne resident, and with her husband Ernest (Besant) Scott (inaugural chair of Australian History, University of Melbourne, from 1913-1936), was very active in intellectual circles. Moreover Sydney was home to CW Leadbeater, the charismatic visionary of the Theosophical Society, from 1914 until his death in 1934. Other important connections between artists and the Theosophical leadership were formed in other states. An extraordinary number of Australian artists were members or fellow travellers with the Theosophical Society in the early years of the twentieth century. Once the Theosophical Society is included in discussions of this period, accepted definitions of modernism are exposed as problematic. If Kandinsky and Mondrian are to be understood as attempting meaningful communication on a spiritual dimension, any hegemonic definition of modernism developing along a ‘progressive’ logic of formal innovation towards abstraction must be revisited. Instead we must recognise that in many cases the artist’s primary goal was to express a conceptualisation of the world where the (Theosophical) invisible was communicated through formal means. The implications of this research encourage a detailed examination of the artist’s relationship with the Theosophical Society during the early modern period. For artists negotiating the barrage of new ideas associated with the modern it was a confusing situation. Their very practice, as Martin Jay writes so convincingly in ‘The disenchantment of the eye’, was intimately associated with the increasing specialisation of disciplines and the privileging of ocular evidence, an inheritance from the Enlightenment. Technologies from the zootrope to the camera, and

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100 Although in the later years he was increasingly away on extended lecture tours. This will be discussed in more detail in later chapters. For a more complete account of Leadbeater in Sydney see Gregory Tillett, The elder brother: A biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1982.
101 Tuchman, ed. The spiritual in art: Abstract painting 1890-1985. p. 135
increasing knowledge of the physiology of the eye, both reflected and supported their traditionally ocularcentric practice.

For artists associated with the Theosophical Society the specialisation and disciplinary focus on the technologies associated with vision failed to account for the spiritual sight of the Theosophical leadership. This clairvoyant faculty was accompanied by the rhetoric of scientific evidence, and, like the dictionary project of Besant and Leadbeater’s *Thought forms*, resulted in an alternative and compensatory evidentiary aesthetic. The experience of Australian artists associated with the Theosophical Society can be seen to fall outside the ocularcentrism described by Jay and Crary. Remarkably the impact of the ‘third eye’, the eye often pictured as in the centre of the forehead which sees not the outer reality but the inner truth, has been barely referenced.

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104 Gillian Beer’s work most closely approaches my area of interest, however she focuses more on the rhythm and energy of the scopic regime which she beautifully describes as “The invisible, instead of being placidly held just outside the scope of sight, was newly understood as an energetic system out of which fitfully emerges that which is visible” Gillian Beer, ‘Authentic tidings of invisible things: Vision and the invisible in the later nineteenth century’, *Vision in context*, ed., Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay, London, New York, 1996, 83-98. p. 85
The term the 'third eye' was first used by Mme Blavatsky in 1884 when she wrote “their spiritual vision became dim; and coordinately the third eye commenced to lose its power”. Her use of the term is specifically derived from its use in Hindu mythology as Shiva’s frontal eye, the eye of higher perception as described in the Mahabarata. For the artists associated with the Theosophical Society the third eye was a practical reality. Its enhanced operation was the subject of daily meditation and anxious speculation. The reality of a world invisible to the physical /scientific eye was routine. This altered visionary experience was played out in the work of the artists associated with the Theosophical Society in ways that were occasionally stylistically consistent with European modernism but were often not recuperable within this framework.

Rethinking this period as a skein of overlapping and multiple modernisms allows us to imagine Australian artists engaging in a debate with modernity rather than receiving or rejecting it according to a model where the artist was either responsive to the European stylistic avant-garde or reactionary. In this framework women artists are necessarily repositioned as central to a debate on modernity and its implications. By figuring these artists as engaging in an informed conversation with a distributed membership and leadership, the simple dualism of centre versus margin is reconfigured. Within this paradigm artists can be linked by their conceptual response rather than their positioning in a stylistic concourse. The art produced

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from within this intellectual environment was stylistically affiliated with European modernism but was in fact an alternative modernism of the third eye.

My narrative of the connections between the Theosophical Society and Australian art closes in 1934 with the death of CW Leadbeater. Increasingly rocked by scandal and now crippled by the deaths of its charismatic leadership, the Society experienced a rapid and dramatic fall in both reputation and popularity. While the Society continues to attract members and artists today, its widespread authority diminished in these years and many of its erstwhile membership base turned to a politics of the left, especially Marxism in the late thirties and early forties. It is worth remembering here that our Australian art history has been largely written since this time, and that this history proceeded from an atheist position with a patriarchal proletarian aesthetic, with little time for spirituality, invisible worlds, free-wheeling esoteric intellectual speculation, women’s rights, vegetarianism, child health or fairies. In short the artist with a mind to their reputation would have done well to keep silent on the subject of any involvement with the Theosophical Society. This reticence is only now breaking down.
2. Transcendental faiths and young democracies: Jane Price and a vision for the young Australia

Jane Price (1860-1948) is remembered as a passionate campaigner, enmeshed in both Theosophical and artistic communities. With Tom Roberts, Jane Sutherland and Frederick McCubbin she discussed light, colour and the construction of a national landscape tradition. With Henry Steel Olcott, Vida Goldstein, Alfred Deakin and Bernard O'Dowd she worked towards a national culture which would enable the development of a community of souls. In this chapter I want to make a two-pronged argument, firstly I suggest that Price's work deserves greater attention and that key to understanding her work is her ambition to negotiate a Theosophical spirituality through her paintings. Secondly, I want to make the larger argument that by looking at Price in this context we can position this artist in a history of alternative responses to modernity. This supports my argument for the outline of a parallel but alternative modernism.

Price's active involvement in one of the great counter-cultural movements of the twentieth century brings into relief a nexus of issues and concerns now obscured by the more dominant nationalist theme of material wealth through rational improvement. In tracing Price's trajectory through both the Theosophical and artistic communities we can reconstruct an alternative response to modernity which spoke to women, artists, poets, politicians and activists. Such a study reveals this period of Australian cultural life to have been run through with complex debates on

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106 In 1889 Price shared a studio with Jane Sutherland and Clara Southern in Grosvenor chambers which neighboured that of Roberts. The women would occasionally lend Roberts their two rooms to make his 'evenings' more spacious. Croll, Tom Roberts, p. 150. As I shall demonstrate however Price's life was by no means compartmentalised into talking about art with one group of colleagues and the spirit with another.
the future promised for the new nation. For an important section of the political and cultural intelligentsia in Melbourne, the Theosophical vision of a new community of souls was inspiring. Price’s painting can be seen as her politically inspired desire to communicate a Theosophical vision for Australia. While Price’s language appears similar to that of Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton, her ambition was to communicate the spiritual rather than the material promise of the new nation. In this her work foreshadows later artists’ problematisation of visible reality. Importantly, Price invites direct comparison with Roberts by the link she perceived between her own project and that of Roberts in the building of a national culture. The Theosophical Society provided a mythic structure within which artists could understand themselves as a spiritual/political avant-garde leading the way to a new Australia.

Price’s small canvas; *Ploughland in Summer* (colour plate 2) painted in 1900, has drawn attention to itself by its curious compositional structure, distinctive in Price’s work of this period. In her essay for *Heritage*, Vivienne Binns focuses on the highly unusual ‘empty’ centre ground. Exactly where the action and interest should take place there is a void. Where Tom Roberts would place a breakaway, Price insists we concentrate on what Peers describes as ‘abstract and negative space’. This is not compositional ineptitude but rather as Binns puts it, a ploy to set us ‘scanning and searching for the subject, the focus of interest and meaning.’ Binns identifies a pictorial problematic which can only be resolved in the context of Price’s spiritual and political allegiances. From research into Price’s extended network, it is clear that the painting was intended as part of a broad political project. Price’s specific affiliations make it clear that this project was shared by a distinguished company for whom the spiritual was political. Price’s artistic project can be seen as a part of a larger and highly complex debate about the future of the new nation. Her painting announces a debate in which Roberts and Price can be seen to represent different agendas.

In a letter to RH Croll following the publication of his book on Tom Roberts, Price agreed with Croll's claim that Roberts had defined the cultural landscape. She added that Australia could not do without a national culture for "as Mrs Besant has said, 'it is a matter of life or death for the building of a nation'." Over time Croll's claim has been extended to include the work of McCubbin and Streeton and the term 'Heidelberg School' has been used to define both a common aesthetic and common vision of national culture. In fact the situation was infinitely more complex. In Price's work at least it would appear that the Heidelberg aesthetic and cultural vision are not identical. Too often we have looked at Price's work with the expectation that it too celebrates the pastoral wealth and material bounty of the soon to be federated nation. Price's work has been assumed to reflect and repeat Robert's vision of a national culture. When viewed in this light Price's work inevitably appears as a minor variation on that central theme. However, while Price clearly valued Roberts' work for its achievements in the building of a national culture, it would be a mistake to assume that Price shared Roberts' politics.

Price's paintings should be seen as an alternative landscape tradition responding to an alternative political imperative for the new Australia. Ploughland in Summer is part of a larger body of work in diverse media which responds to the traumas of the depression of the 1890s and to the loss of faith in progress which was so much a part of that experience. Ploughland in Summer shares many of the stylistic features of the Heidelberg School but not its conceptual foundation. Price reflects a political constituency disenchanted and marginalised by modernity. This is the community that voted for Vida Goldstein's feminist agendas, supported future Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin and read Bernard O'Dowd's poetry. Price formulated

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109 Jane Price, Letter to RH Croll from Jane Price, c 1936, Canberra, NLA MS 100 90-91.
110 Leigh Astbury traces the history of the term and uses the term to describe a close-knit group of artists united by common ideals or a definite artistic program. L Astbury, City Bushmen. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985. p. 1
111 In her letter to RH Croll reflecting on Robert's significance to Australian cultural life, Price distinguishes between Roberts' representation of the national landscape and her own more spiritual ambitions. Price, Letter to RH Croll from Jane Price, p. 1
a concept of national culture in the company of politicians, activists, poets and artists under the umbrella of the Theosophical Society. As I outlined in the previous chapter, the Theosophical Society and artists associated with the Society, challenged received notions of the modern and expressed an alternative and compensatory modernism. Price's achievement in Ploughland in Summer was to represent a concept of landscape which was distinct from the portrait of an agricultural cornucopia favoured by the Heidelberg School.

Price's lack of confidence in the scientific agricultural revolution and the pioneering improvement of the land\textsuperscript{113} can be read in the structure of her paintings.\textsuperscript{114} Where painterly convention would have us find meaning and interest at the intersection of converging lines of sight, both Binns and Peers identify a disconcerting absence. At the intersection of the lines of sight in Ploughland in Summer we find no agent in the landscape, no satisfying resolution of meaning. Where Sutherland or Roberts would position a sweaty pioneer (male or female), Price does not resolve the pictorial problematic with a human element.

Tom Roberts glorified productive masculine labour in the context of the young nation like his compatriot novelist, Thomas Hardy,\textsuperscript{115} did for rustic England. Humphrey McQueen makes the comment that "If Shearing the rams, 1890 has any literary associations, they relate to Hardy's sacralising the mundane."\textsuperscript{116} Roberts too elevated the mundane to the level of the sacred, which is not to say that his pastoral workers are invested with a spiritual dimension, rather that the elevated status previously accorded the sacred was now given to productive agriculture. The future of the nation lay in productive labour, not in intangibles. It was precisely this tension between the transcendental and the mundane which drew the ire of

\textsuperscript{114} While this compositional structure is varied in Price's portraits, still lives and occasional landscape with figures-usually children, it is significant in that it recurs in a significant body of work culminating in her paintings of Sydney harbour and the Balmoral Amphitheatre.
\textsuperscript{115} Leigh Astbury’s work into the reading habits of the Heidelberg School reveals that these artists were open to a range of alternative and counter cultural influences. Leigh Astbury, 'The poetic impulse in Heidelberg School landscape painting', Meridian, 4, 2, 1985,
\textsuperscript{116} Humphrey McQueen, Tom Roberts. Macmillan., Sydney, 1996. p.168
Mouchette’s colleague, the Spiritualist art critic James Smith. In later defending *Shearing the rams* to Smith, Roberts argued that “by making art the perfect expression of one time and place it becomes art for all times and all places.” Yet it was precisely Roberts’ evacuation of the transcendental from the here and now that Smith objected to. In *Shearing the rams* there is no reference to an alternate temporal or physical space. The preoccupations of the woolshed are sufficient in themselves.

It is precisely the absence of this promise of agricultural wealth that unsettles in Price’s work. Instead our eyes are drawn to the corner of this field, untilled and weedy. This composition is sufficiently unusual to alert the viewer to an inconsistency with the Heidelberg School model. In fact, *Ploughland in Summer* is structured by two triangles, one light, one dark, one pointing upwards, one pointing downwards. This is classic Theosophical symbolism, found in the work of such diverse artists as Piet Mondrian and Christian Waller. The shadowed downwards pointing triangle hosts an abundance of stunted weeds and wildflowers which reach for the sun from the russet shadows of the untilled paddock border by the boundary fence. In contrast the sun bleached upwardly pointing triangle is spotted with red ryegrass and features a luxuriantly tall red blossomed wildflower which stands tall in the topmost corner of the triangle. The painting is articulated by tonal variations, proceeding from dark to light, from the particular to the universal. The space is abstract, in the sense that by the time the eye reaches the bleached gold at the centre of the composition the space becomes disengaged from physical reality. Price invests the material with the transcendental. The focus of interest and meaning is internal and reflective rather than active and material. This is not a painting of productive labour, or even a pleasurable amble in a fertile landscape.

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118 The device of the Society featured a star built from the intersection of an upward and downward pointing equilateral triangle- symbolising the unity of spirit and the material. They are often seen used separately or given different emphasis. The symbolic aspect of these triangles is very visible in Christian Waller’s *The Great Breath* 1932 an artist’s book in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia. For further details see McFarlane, ‘Concerning the spiritual in Melbourne’. See also Piet Mondrian *Evolution* 1910-11 oil on canvas Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague. Illustrated in Tuchman, ed. *The spiritual in art: Abstract painting 1890-1985*. p 101
All the compositional devices drive us to a central void where we are forced to reflect back on our own desire to see such a space filled – but with what?\textsuperscript{119} The space is devoid of fairy, Pan or pink swathed sprite. The allegorical figure which, like a faint echo of academic history painting, populates the work of Sydney Long, Charles Condor and even McCubbin's is superfluous here. Price's compositional innovation represents an elegant contemporary formal solution to a conceptual problem.

It is important to conceive Price's high-horizoned landscapes as part of a larger expression of a feminist spirituality and politics. For Price it was only the immanence of the transcendental which could give time and place meaning. As a spiritual and political activist in the sphere of Annie Besant and Vida Goldstein she would argue that the spiritual was the political,\textsuperscript{120} as an artist, Price made her painting the embodiment of these values. In \textit{Ploughland in Summer}, Price represents the immanence of the transcendental in the pioneer landscape.

\textbf{Jane Price's Melbourne}

Jane Price was born in 1860 the daughter of a Baptist Minister\textsuperscript{121} and trained at the Royal College of Art, South Kensington, London.\textsuperscript{122} She migrated to Australia and from 1882 she exhibited with the Victorian Artist's Society (VAS). In late 1888 Tom

\textsuperscript{119} It is tempting to allocate spiritual meanings to the red, blue and gold which dominate the composition. Such an attribution could be justified in the light of Price's later sponsorship of Ada Gregory's early novel of about this period (although published much later) which features rather heavy handed and pervasive colour symbolism. Ada Leonora Gregory, \textit{The clouded dream: A story of two incarnations}. The Cycle Press, Melbourne, 1938. In this scenario the rye grass and red blossom would refer to passion, muddy and very physical in the shadows and purer but still dangerous in the sunlight. The evacuation of passion at the centre of the composition might then indicate a freedom from earthly bonds.

\textsuperscript{120} I anticipate the argument presented in \textit{Jane Price's Melbourne}

\textsuperscript{121} I thank Mary Eagle for sharing with me her research indicating that Jane Price was one of three daughters to Harry and Rebecca Price with cousins involved in market gardening in Black Springs, near Beechworth, Victoria. Rebecca died of typhoid in 1899 and her sister Margaret seems to have been involved in a scandalous illicit affair in 1901 which involved the entire community searching for her and ended (happily?) in marriage. Price's sister, Lucy H Price, I discovered in the Theosophical membership records. Lucy joined the Theosophical Society from Price's studio in Grosvenor Chambers in 1891, (Membership records, Adyar). Lucy would appear to be the mysterious 'other Miss Price', referred to as 'Farmer' Price by Tom Roberts and who lived near Kallista from the 1920s through to the 1940s working as a market gardener, apparently very much in Edward Carpenter's footsteps. I am grateful to Mary Eagle for making her remarkable archives available to me and drawing to my attention the apparent inconsistencies now resolved by two Miss Prices. See for example Andrew Mackenzie, \textit{Frederick McCubbin 1855-1917, The Proff and his art}. Mannagum Press, Lilydale, Vic., 1990. pp. 237, 243

\textsuperscript{122} Peers, 'Jane Price and her circle', 68-71p. 68
Roberts sub-let rooms in his suite at Grosvenor Chambers to Price, Clara Southern and Jane Sutherland.\textsuperscript{123} Price recalled that "every now and then Tom Roberts would give an evening and we would lend him our rooms to make it more spacious."\textsuperscript{124} The following year, just before the famous $9 \times 5$ impressions exhibition, Charles Condor also used the rooms and was 'almost converted to Spiritualism.'\textsuperscript{125} Of course James Smith, the art critic who would so savagely review the $9 \times 5$ impressions exhibition, was also a committed Spiritualist and may have contributed to Condor's disillusionment.\textsuperscript{126} Such a comment obliquely reveals the prevalence of spiritualist and theosophical thought in the Melbourne art community of the time. Having studio space so close to Price and Sutherland Condor might be tempted by their spiritualist convictions but be deterred by association with Smith who would later be publicly critical of his exhibition.

Spiritualism in Melbourne flourished as the Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists, (later also the Victorian Association of Spiritualists or VAS), explored table rapping and communications with the dead. In 1879, a bare four years after the Theosophical Society was founded in New York, the influential Melbourne Spiritualist journal, \textit{The harbinger of light}, was reporting its activities. The journal's editor, William H Terry, joined the following year.\textsuperscript{127} Early Theosophists in Melbourne were often Spiritualists or part of the Reverend Charles Strong's Australian Church, sometimes both. The Australian Church was founded in Melbourne in 1884 following Strong's trial for heresy by the Assembly of the

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\item[123] McQueen, \textit{Tom Roberts}.
\item[124] Croll, 1935 #107] p. 150
\item[125] "I am almost a spiritualist now- my spiritualistic friends have nearly converted me. I like the ideal of their religion so much, though they don't call it a religion." John Rothenstein, \textit{The life and death of Charles Conder}. Dent, London, 1938. p.29 McQueen limits the spiritualist influences to the Caffyn family, but as I have briefly indicated the artistic and Spiritualist communities are already very closely entwined. McQueen, \textit{Tom Roberts}. p. 274
\item[126] Smith's involvement with the Spiritualist cause was so overwhelming during the early 1870s as to render him incapable of writing on any other issue and for a time he was unable to find any Melbourne newspaper willing to publish him. Even WH Terry, editor of the Spiritualist journal; \textit{The harbinger of light}, found his commitment excessive. It was not until 1874 that Smith was able to put aside the more outrageous manifestations of his belief and could begin to pick up the pieces of his professional career. He remained an active spiritualist until his death in 1910. Smith's excessive involvement with Spiritualism, and his ability to later resume his professional credibility clearly demonstrates the social acceptability of contemporary interest in the spiritual. S Lurline, \textit{James Smith: The making of colonial culture}. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989. pp.135-151 I am indebted to Leigh Astbury for this information.
\item[127] Roe, \textit{Beyond belief; Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939}. p. 3
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Presbyterian Church of Australia. Strong’s church attracted Melbourne’s wealthy and intellectual elite and was known to be open to spiritualism. Alfred Deakin was among its flock, as were Jane Sutherland and Vida Goldstein’s families. Perhaps it was through a common spiritual community that Vida Goldstein came to be taught by Julia Sutherland. The historian Anne Braude has explored the role of Spiritualism as a seeding ground for political activism. As the daughter of a Baptist Minister, it was perhaps inevitable that Jane Price should take an active interest in this religious turmoil. Price’s professional and spiritual communities were not separate. Following Price’s trajectory it becomes very clear that the Spiritualist, Australian Church and Theosophical communities were interlinked with the Heidelberg School artists and the Victorian arts community, through friendships and professional practice.

Cultural critic John Docker describes the 1890s as ‘nervous’, ‘a time when the long prosperity of the Victorian period collapsed into Depression, extreme poverty and hardship—with the added phenomenon in Australia of severe extended drought’. In 1888 the Victorian Associated Banks had ended overdrafts for land speculation and the once gold-wealthy community was reeling from the collapse of the land boom. Marie Lion wrote of wealth gone sour, artist and writer Ada Gregory of the hollow superficiality of material wealth and its incommensurability with spiritual ambitions. It was a time ripe for alternative responses. In the nineties ‘everything seemed open to question’. On December 9, 1890, a committee of nine, including ‘Miss Jane Price,’ formed the first Melbourne Lodge of the Theosophical Society. Price’s presence ensured that from its earliest moments the Society in Melbourne had an artistic bias. She joined from Grosvenor Studios and her passionate

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128 Gabay, Messages from beyond: Spiritualism and spiritualists in Melbourne’s Golden Age 1870-1890. pp. 160-4
129 Ibid p. 161
130 Herbert Brookes married first Jenny Strong and later Ivy Deakin. For Jane Sutherland’s participation in the Australian Church Literary Society see Sutherland Scrapbook MS 12311 State Library of Victoria
132 Docker, The nervous nineties: Australian cultural life in the 1890s. p. XVII
134 Docker, The nervous nineties: Australian cultural life in the 1890s. p. XV
espousal of Theosophic and aesthetic ideals made no arbitrary boundary.\textsuperscript{136} This was to be the beginning of a long relationship between the Melbourne art world and the Theosophical Society.

Interest in the fledgling Society was boosted when in 1891 the founding President of the Theosophical Society, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) came to Australia. During his tour he received news of Mme Blavatsky’s death and many of his later lectures were fond reminiscences of his co-founder. Jill Roe takes Olcott’s lecture tour of the Australian colonies in 1891 as marking the beginning of the second phase of the Society in Australia. Certainly his tour enhanced standing and membership. Olcott had a wide range of interests and achievements. Prior to the Society’s inception in 1875, he had been active in the scientific agriculture movement in America—especially in sugar cane, a colonel in the American Civil War (Northern Army), a Special Commissioner in the War Department investigating fraud and corruption, and had spent some time at the Bar as Counsel in customs and internal revenue cases.\textsuperscript{137} During his 1891 tour, Olcott met a great many people who would become important in the future Australian Section and informed himself on the big issues facing the colonies. Olcott developed a real interest in the Federation movement which was to last the rest of his life. He records in his ‘Old Diary Leaves’ that he

was fortunate enough to meet some of the leading statesmen of different colonies whose names have figured largely in the recent federation movement, such as Sir Samuel Griffith, Hon. Mr Barton, Sir George R Dibbs, Alfred Deakin, Hon. John Woods and others. Two or three of them occupied the chair at my lectures, and my conversations with them, both on occult and political matters, were

\textsuperscript{136} M Neff, \textit{How Theosophy came to Australia and New Zealand}. Australian Section of the Theosophical Society, Sydney, 1943. p. 47 This was not however the first Theosophical group in Melbourne.

\textsuperscript{137} McQueen, \textit{Tom Roberts}. p. 253

\textsuperscript{138} Alexander Fullerton, ‘Biographical notes on Col. Olcott’, \textit{The Theosophist}, February, 1995,
highly interesting; they have enabled me to follow recent events with intelligent understanding of the undercurrent of colonial feeling.\textsuperscript{138}

The understanding of ‘colonial feeling’ Olcott achieved during his tour, in discussion with the nation builders, amateur anthropologists, artists and activists, on occult and political matters, was reflected in his Convention Address of May 1891. To the small crowd of Melbourne faithful, Jane Price among them, he offered a vision that was both a representation of his research into the issues of the day and a template for future action. With Federation on the horizon, what sort of nation was being planned for? Olcott spoke rousingly of an emerging consciousness which he positioned in opposition to the materialism of once prosperous Melbourne.

The Australian temperament is evolving, like the North American, mystical tendencies and capabilities…I know it to be the fact by intercourse with many people in all the Australian colonies, I feel it in the atmosphere. A coarse and vagabond brutality is being also evolved, it is true, but this mystical quality is already showing itself. It would not surprise me to be shown that fifty years hence Theosophy will have one of its strongest footholds in the hearts of the dear, good people who were so kind to me during my recent tour.\textsuperscript{139}

Olcott’s speech was a political vision and his audience was constructed as an active political force. In political terms Olcott distinguished between a negatively inflected pastoral materialism and an urban spirituality. The swagman here is not the healthy rustic so much as the derelict. The future was to be found in a mystical nature which would enable the construction of an ideal community. For the small group of Melbourne Theosophists Olcott’s vision directed their efforts towards

\textsuperscript{138} Parkes and Deakin would Chair for Annie Besant in 1894. Alfred Deakin chaired a lecture on Buddhism Roe, Beyond belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939. p. 69, 90 and Dr Buchanan preached to an audience of 1500 on Buddhism and Christianity Henry Steel Olcott, Old diary leaves: The only authentic history of the Theosophical Society. 2nd edition ed. Theosophical Publishing House, Madras, 1931. p. 321
building the new nation conceived as a community of souls. In this new nation mystical tendencies and capabilities would be made manifest.

In turn of the century Melbourne, Olcott’s vision was debated in impressive circles. Deakin had chaired Olcott’s second lecture on Buddhism mid-May 1891. He was one of the architects of Federation that Olcott had made a point of speaking to, and would correspond with Olcott, editing the President’s Old Diary Leaves and no doubt reporting the process of Federation to the President. It was not until Annie Besant’s lecture tour in 1895 that Deakin officially joined the Society. Then the small group including Deakin, and Jane and Lucy Price, were joined in the same week in August by Carrie Crozier, a sensitive medium, and Vida Goldstein and her mother, Isabella. Mabel Besant Scott (Annie Besant’s daughter) lent a sense of intimacy with the leadership, and her husband Ernest Besant Scott had a good knowledge of counter-cultural ideas including Fabianism and Edward Carpenter’s communitarianism. Poet, Bernard O’Dowd (1866-1953) joined in 1897. Later the Colquhoun, Gregory, Fullwood and Ferdinando families would join the Theosophical Society. RH Croll and Edward Vidler would also be part of this little community. This is a remarkable collection of thinkers, political activists, artists, poets and publishers.

The Theosophical Society offered the disillusioned of the nervous nineties an alternative response to Modernity. These Theosophists are held together not by any stylistic connection but by a common response to the modern. The point of intersection for these diverse intellects was captured by Bernard O’Dowd’s 1907 poem, Dominions of the Boundary:

... Though Reason claim omniscient worth
And lush her dogmas thrive:

139 Henry Steel Olcott, ‘President Olcott’s Convention Address, 1891’, The Adyar Bulletin, 1919, 26, 59
140 Roe, Beyond belief; Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939, p. 69
141 Carrie Crozier’s husband Frank would join in 1905
Our present home is more than earth,
Our senses more than five. ... 143

Within the Theosophical Society the scientific reason of the Enlightenment was seen as a hollow dogma and the transcendental was immanent. O'Dowd's poem expresses this dissatisfaction with the contemporary experience of reason as the only criterion of value. As we have seen a wide range of artists, writers and political activists experienced modernity as disempowering and sought support within the Theosophical Society.

Joy Dixon has shown how the spiritual dimension empowered activism in the field of women's suffrage, women's rights and social justice.144 This was certainly the case for Vida Goldstein. Her biographer, Janette Bomford, writes that “her fundamental aim was, like Strong’s, the ‘spiritualising’ of human life.”145 Goldstein was a member of many organisations until 1902 when she found a permanent home with the Christian Scientists. Her participation in the Australian Church and the Theosophical Society must be seen as part of her search for a feminist politics and spirituality. Goldstein's decision to stand for federal election the following year in 1903— one of the first women to do so— and her work towards women's suffrage in Victorian state elections until women in Victoria got the vote in 1908, should also be seen in the context of the Theosophical connections with the Suffragette movement in England.147

142 For a discussion of Fabianism see Gascoigne, The Enlightenment and the origins of European Australia. pp. 97-99
143 Mystic Bernard O'Dowd, Dominions of the boundary. T. C. Lothian, Melbourne, 1907. p. 4
144 Dixon, Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England, p. 5
146 Besant and Blavatsky's example inspired many women and the Theosophical Society offered a safe space to develop public speaking skills. The first woman successfully elected to parliament was Perth Theosophist, Edith Cowan who we shall meet in a later chapter.
For Deakin as for Goldstein the spiritual was political. Al Gabay offers an interesting insight into the intersection of Alfred Deakin’s political and spiritual lives in the context of Deakin’s strange semi-prophetic novel, *A new Pilgrim’s Progress* (1875) which remains true for this early group of Melbourne Theosophists. Gabay writes that:

> it is difficult in our rationalistic age to gain a sense of the power that the concept ‘Duty’ signalised for Victorian people, how once fired by the promise of revealed truth, individuals could muster the means for reforming the ills of society, the greatest being, in this context, ignorance of the spiritual Dispensation. ...The conviction of being singled out by higher powers, the sense of being chosen to do great work on behalf of a cause ... would never leave him.

Deakin’s sense of duty, a divinely imposed responsibility to work towards a spiritual cause, was not unique. This sense of duty and of being chosen to great work on behalf of a cause was important to Price as it was to Goldstein and O’Dowd. O’Dowd has Bacchus (in typically Theosophic form Bacchus and Christ are conflated), calling Australians to:

> Come Australians, maid and youth
> Enlist in our crusade
> From wan Gomorrah’s of untruth
> Flock to the Bacchic glade!

> Away, away from antique wraiths
> And clammy deities!
> On! on! to transcendental faiths

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148 Alfred Deakin’s promotion of the White Australia Policy could be seen as an instance where Theosophical (spiritual) evolutionism expressed itself in inexcusable manifestations.

149 Gabay, *Messages from beyond: Spiritualism and spiritualists in Melbourne’s Golden Age 1870-1890.* p. 75
And young democracies!\textsuperscript{150}

In Price's case this concern expressed itself as the project of envisaging a spiritual Australia, a task which was to be achieved by involvement with the Theosophical Society, youth, feminist issues and the communitarianism of Edward Carpenter—themes that would stay with Price throughout her long life.\textsuperscript{151} However, if Price had a challenging intellectual and political life within the Theosophical Society she was also thoroughly integrated within Melbourne's artistic community. Price's participation in both worlds led to an overflow of Theosophical concerns into artistic practice and a Theosophical community with a very active cultural life.

**Price takes Theosophy to Melbourne's art community**

In 1894 we see Price demanding that more women be elected to the council of the Victorian Artists Society to “make the executive force more balanced and delicately adjusted.”\textsuperscript{152} Two months later she resigned from the Society, the reason given that, like most artists of the time, she could not afford to pay her fees.\textsuperscript{153} Price's professional life is both the triumph and the tragedy of her generation's feminist achievements. Her life seems to have been performed as a political act and her career dogged by financial hardship. A colleague of politicians and feminist activists, she probably would have felt with Goldstein and Deakin that “The ethical emancipation of the sex, which depends upon woman's spiritual growth, the leashing of her emotions, and clearing of her intellectual vision, will do more to alleviate woman's woes by its compelling influence upon posterity than any political suffrage today.”\textsuperscript{154} For Price spirituality was a feminist issue enabling and demanding her activism in other fields. Today we can only be grateful to her and

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{150 Bacchus O'Dowd, *Dominions of the boundary*. p. 48}
\footnote{151 Marjorie Bull remembers Jane Price wearing Carpenter style sandals and speaking militantly about wage slavery at Theosophical conventions during the late thirties. Marjorie Bull, Interview with the author, 2001, Canberra, 20 August.}
\footnote{152 Letter from Jane Price to the Secretary of the VAS 31 December 1894. MS 7192 State Library of Victoria}
\footnote{153 Jane Price, Letter to the Secretary of the VAS from Jane Price, 1894, Melbourne, Mitchell Library MS 7123. McQueen reports that in 1895 almost 200 of the VAS members were more than six months behind on their fees McQueen, *Tom Roberts*. p. 406}
\footnote{154 MGJ, ‘Women and Modernism’, 26-30 p.27}
\end{footnotes}
see Price as "The modern woman (who) is the ancestress of all those to come; and upon whatsoever line she operates...her potentiality is incalculable."\textsuperscript{155}

By 1903 Jane Price was living with Alexander (1862-1941) and Beatrice Hoile Colquhoun, working as governess to their children. Jane Price has been remembered for her talent for organising groups.\textsuperscript{156} She was certainly a boon to the Theosophical Society as a network of Theosophical friendship seems to spread out around her. She shared her enthusiasms and both Beatrice Colquhoun and her influential sister Marion Ferdinando joined the Theosophical Society the same year that Price came to live with them. For the Colquhoun's it was to be a long-term commitment to the Society; Alexander Colquhoun joined in 1905\textsuperscript{157} and the children, Margaret, Archibald and Elizabeth, were to all join the society as they turned twenty. Price's friends Ina Gregory (1874-1964) and Ada Gregory (d.1935) joined the Society in 1904 and 1905 respectively.

Elizabeth Colquhoun played down the extent to which Theosophy was part of their lives when she recalled later that in about 1907:

Frederick and Annie McCubbin would come over to our house in the evenings. My mother was a theosophist and especially liked talking to Frederick McCubbin, and they would discuss the writings of Annie Besant. I don't know whether McCubbin followed her teachings but he may have.\textsuperscript{158}

While neither of the McCubbins were signed up members of the Theosophical Society they must have been sympathetic to the Society because Price also worked as live-in governess to the McCubbin children from 1903-1907.\textsuperscript{159} McCubbin is also remembered for discussing Theosophy in his classes at the.

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\item\textsuperscript{155} ibid, p. 27
\item\textsuperscript{156} Jane Clark and Bridget Whitelaw, Golden Summers: Heidelberg and beyond. International Cultural Corporation Australia, Melbourne, 1985. p. 61
\item\textsuperscript{157} As did Frank Crozier. Alice Adair joined in 1906
\item\textsuperscript{158} Mackenzie, Frederick McCubbin 1855-1917, The Proff and his art. p. 342
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
National Gallery School, and many of his students would later sign up as members. In 1907 Price moved to Sydney. This period remains a blind spot in tracing the career of this otherwise very visible woman. She may have been drawn to Sydney by the Society; this was the year Annie Besant began her Presidency. More likely Price was driven to pursue more mundane family commitments or employment opportunities. By 1910 Price reemerged as a founding member of the Society of Woman Painters. During the war Price returned to live outside Melbourne in a log cabin near May Vale’s ‘shack’ at Diamond Creek.

On rejoining the Theosophical Society activities in Melbourne Price would have recognised the intermingling of Theosophical and artistic Melbourne as the realisation of her earlier ambition. At this time the Society actively favoured lectures on the arts on the assumption "that the people attending such gatherings are the more receptive" to Theosophical ideas of the more general kind. The weekly lectures would attract up to fifty people. Theosophical celebrities lectured at meetings and rank and file members were encouraged to do the same. In May 1912 Mr A Colquhoun (probably Alexander) gave a lecture on the ‘Moving picture show’, Mrs Ferdinanda added to the painting collection of the Lodge, Ina Gregory gave a paper on 'Genius' and Bernard O'Dowd lectured and chaired the Lodge while Mr and Mrs Hunt, who usually chaired the meetings, were visiting India until at least mid 1913. Guest speakers sympathetic to the Theosophical Society were often included on the lecture program; in 1915 Fritz Hart, (1874-1949) conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, although not a Theosophist himself, spoke on 'The reflective mood in Music', and Professor Ernest Scott, addressed the subject

159 Clark and Whitelaw, Golden Summers: Heidelberg and beyond, p. 61
161 Quentin Porter has a childhood memory of hushed innuendos of an early unwanted pregnancy and subsequent adoption, this would be consistent with Price's Carpenterism (Carpenter was a vocal advocate of 'free love') and may explain this period of relative invisibility. Quentin Porter, Interview with the author, 2003, Melbourne.
163 In 1908 Besant Lodge in Collins Street was formed and the Colquhouns, Ina and Ada Gregory and O'Dowd moved to this lodge.
165 See 'Lodge activities; Besant Lodge' for Theosophy in Australasia 1912-1913.
of progress.¹⁶⁶ With such influential speakers and audience one might reasonably expect the ambitions of the Theosophical Society to be well known amongst those interested in the arts.¹⁶⁷

The Theosophical Society in Melbourne was also actively involved with exhibitions. By November 1912¹⁶⁸ Besant Lodge had moved from Scourfield Chambers (165 Collins Street) to the 5th floor of 'The Centreway' on Collins Street, where "The general attractiveness of the room...have made it in request by artists for small exhibitions of pictures..."¹⁶⁹ Artists included Frances Hodgkins, Louis Foulet, Tom Carter and Esther Paterson. It was here that the boy prodigy Theo Scharf, eternalised by Violet Teague's portrait, made his debut in 1914.¹⁷⁰ From 1913 to June 1917 the Fine Art Society used the Besant Hall exhibition space at the 'Centreway', another sign that the Theosophical Society was well known to the art community of the day. Committee members of the Fine Art Society at the time included CD Richardson, Bernard Hall, WB McGuiness, Leslie Wilkie, Norman McGeorge, and Edward Officer. In 1915 the Fine Art Society hosted an exhibition of London printmakers, as well as work by Thea Proctor, Herbert Woodhouse, 'Will' Dyson and a mixed media exhibition at Besant Hall.

In 1918 Price returned to Sydney to teach Drawing and Painting at the new Morven Garden Theosophical School.¹⁷¹ This was the heyday of the Theosophical Society in Australia with CW Leadbeater at the centre of the energy and activity in Sydney.

¹⁶⁶ John C Staples, 'Lodge activities; Besant Lodge', Theosophy in Australasia, 21, 4, 1915, p. 105
¹⁶⁷ These lectures were often published in the Theosophical Society journals as were the lectures of Annie Besant, CW Leadbeater and Curuppumullege Jinarajadasa (1875-1952). Reprints of Blavatsky's writings were also frequently included for discussion. The journal had a national circulation and often reproduced articles of interest gleaned from other Theosophical (or sympathetic) journals from around the world. Such an article was the 1917 report on the potential of automatic drawing techniques for artists as a way of tapping the subconscious and freeing expression from inessentials (seven years before the first Surrealist Manifesto of 1924).McFarlane, 'Surrealism in Australia a complex patois', pp. 21-22
¹⁶⁸ Robert Henderson Croll, 1869-1947, Catalogues and invitations, 1907-14, Canberra, NLA MS 7482.
¹⁶⁹ John C Staples, 'Lodge activities; Besant Lodge', Theosophy in Australasia, 19, 2, 1913, p. 40
¹⁷⁰ Violet Teague, 'An exhibition of paintings by Master Theo Scharf has opened at Besant Lodge...', Visual Arts Society Newsletter, 34, 1914, pp. 1-2. I am grateful to Anita Calloway for this reference. Interestingly in this review of Scharf's work she praises his trust in the 'inward eye'. Teague's relationship with the Theosophical Society seems to be substantial although she was not a member. See also V Teague, 'Some thoughts on art', Advance! Australia, 3, 5, 1927, pp. 233-34 V Teague, 'Some thoughts on art (continued)', Advance! Australia, 3, 4, 1927, pp. 184-85
¹⁷¹ John C Staples, 'Lodge activities; Morven Garden School', Theosophy in Australasia, 24, 9, 1918, p. 251
Between 1918 and 1938 Price moved between Sydney and Melbourne, occupying a variety of teaching posts. Price definitively returned to Melbourne in 1938 to live with Ina Gregory. Her presence at Rosedale, Inkerman St, St Kilda energised the younger Ina and the two collaborated on publications including *The clouded dream*, 1938 and exhibitions.

It was during Price’s employment at the Morven Garden School from 1918-1924 that an essay published in *Theosophy in Australasia* by a 15 year old student of the school proclaimed with evangelical fervour that "Ours is to be the artistic age."\(^{172}\) For this young art student, with Morris, Turner and Blake as anticipatory saints, the truth of real democracy would be revealed and the world would come to realise 'the artistic' and prepare for a better and more beautiful state of existence. The reference to the ‘truth of real democracy’ recalls O’Dowd’s message of 1907 and is surely a clear reflection of Price’s teaching.\(^{173}\) The role of the artist as seer was evidently an important part of Price’s teaching at the Morven Garden Theosophical School. The artist’s role as prophet/seer was two-fold; firstly to perceive and communicate truth, and secondly to participate in a process of redemption.

Olcott, Besant and later Curuppumullege Jinarajadasa charged committed Theosophical artists like Price with the responsibility of communicating this vision of a spiritually energised landscape. Jinarajadasa would later recommend the landscape genre, not a botanical description but a landscape which described "something still more mystical in nature, and that is an inner rhythm, a creative flow of life’s forces. ...It is the work of the artist to sense that inner rhythm and reveal it to us through truth to Nature."\(^{174}\) Jinarajadasa was building on Olcott and Besant’s aesthetic which Price had read and discussed since 1885.\(^{175}\) Jinarajadasa’s

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\(^{173}\) The purchase of William Blake’s etchings by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1918 should be seen as part of this broad fascination with a spiritually charged practice.

\(^{174}\) Curuppumullege Jinarajadasa, ‘Artists and an ideal Australia’, *Art as will and idea*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1927 p. 53

\(^{175}\) In my next chapter I discuss the evolution of this aesthetic.
description of the artist as a prophet who sees more than is available to normal vision would have been immensely supportive for Price.

Price’s work has been compared with that of Jane Sutherland with whom she shared a studio, as well as with the work of Walter Withers and David Davies for her preference for mood landscapes. However the weird melancholy of dawn and dusk which is often the subject of many of Price’s contemporaries, including the poet Adam Lindsay Gordon, should be distinguished from the genuine mystical impulse of Price’s work. To return to O’Dowd’s poem Mystic

... Though Reason claim omniscient worth
And lush her dogmas thrive:
Our present home is more than earth,
Our senses more than five

And the mystic who sees the star folk throng
Where we but the noonday blue
Knows no religion yet was wrong
And never a myth untrue

O’Dowd here distinguishes between a mundane vision of sunlight on the surface of life, and a vision of the ‘star folk’. His representation of sunlight as revealing only a partial reality is an interesting inversion of the Heidelberg aesthetic. In O’Dowd’s construction sunlight is connected negatively with the light of reason. Truth is to be found in the evening shadows. The poem was published the year Price returned to Sydney and began a series of Sydney harbour nocturnes.

The ideal of a spiritually charged Australia was sufficiently pervasive as to help define its ‘other’. It will be recalled that Tom Roberts had been praised for his ability to see

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176 Hammond and Peers, Completing the picture: Women artists and the Heidelberg era. p. 61
177 Mystic O’Dowd, Dominions of the boundary. p. 4
properly what was before him rather than with fairies', or angels', or psychics' eyes. JS McDonald, author of the original quote, was obviously referring back to the debate on the universal and the particular between Roberts and James Smith. There is no doubt that Price saw with psychics' eyes. Croll himself sat on the fence, although he would later recall having sat at the feet of Annie Besant, the "most eloquent and delightful of speakers."179 In her letter to Croll, Price wrote that she was "now busy writing, much more interesting things of Fred McCubbin (1855-1917) and of my own interesting life—experiencing the proof of an after death continuance of the soul."180 If McDonald thought the representation of the visible, specifically the representation of Australian light and landscape, the only proper role of the artist’s eye, many would increasingly agree with Price and the Theosophists that the visible was only part of the story.

McCubbin’s paintings are loved for their images of pioneer labour. Yet there is a small body of work which points to his complex engagement with an alternative vision. The Pioneer, 1904181 exemplifies the former body of work. Here pioneers overcome hardship to wrest a wholesome life from the wilderness. However there is another side to McCubbin’s representation of the landscape, a side which is most clearly seen in his small series of fairy paintings. What the little girl saw in the Bush, also painted in 1904,182 and Childhood fancies, 1905, coincide with peak periods of Melbourne artists’ enrolment in the Theosophical Society. Fairies away, 1913, was painted only two years after Archibald Colquhoun recalled McCubbin discussing the Society in class. McCubbin’s spiritually charged landscape is more conventional than Price’s compositional devices. What the little girl saw in the Bush, 1904 has the fairies centrally placed and looking very much as fairies are supposed to look. It is tempting to see this small series as an instance of direct influence on McCubbin’s work by the Theosophical Society.

178 This connection is explored in its positive sense in Martin Jay, Downcast eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought. University of California, Berkeley, 1993. p. 84
179 RH Croll, I recall; collections and recollections. Robertson and Mullens ltd, Melbourne, 1939. p. 149
180 Price, Letter to RH Croll from Jane Price,
181 McCubbin, F The pioneer, 1904 Collection: The National Gallery of Victoria
While part of a larger interest in Faery, as seen particularly in the work of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, the incorporation of fairies in oil painting was unusual for the period. The rise of interest in fairy legend in England can be related to the interest in the disappearance of a rural landscape which was becoming increasingly rationalised by the industrial revolution and the loss of folk literatures. In both Australia and England the interest in fairies can be seen to be associated with the challenge to the materiality of the visible world and the desire for a more spiritually charged reality. In the writings of Theosophists WB Yeats and Lady Gregory in Ireland, and for Australians like McCubbin and Ina Gregory, the fascination with fairies was part of the larger study of spiritual manifestations. They understood the landscape to be capable of revealing a more spiritual reality if viewed with properly trained eyes. Leadbeater frequently spoke of the presence of fairies and described them in taxonomic detail as being coloured variously according to their territory. Leadbeater’s lecture to the Melbourne Lodge on nature spirits in 1915 was received sympathetically. Ina Gregory’s ‘implicit belief in fairies’ was not unusual for the time.

McCubbin’s fairy paintings are a materialisation of the invisible. By comparison Ina Gregory’s charming monotype of Edith (fig. 3) is a more experimental work making visible the invisible in the individual. Dated 1908, four years after Ina joined the Society and six years before Edith Gregory was to join, Edith is quite different to Gregory’s oil paintings produced for public consumption. Like Price and Gregory’s collaboration, The clouded dream, this work seems to be a very private and experimental representation of theories of spirituality. Edith’s face is contemplative and her head is surrounded by a powerful whirling aura. Stylistically the work appeals to symbolist attempts to describe the same phenomenon. The existence of such slight works points to the possibility of a larger production of experimental and ephemeral work in response to the Theosophical Society.

185 It seems likely that the Edith of this work is the Edith Gregory who joined Besant Lodge, Melbourne in 1914. Her relationship to Ina and Ada Gregory is not certain but it is likely that she was a third sister. An Edgar Gregory was sponsored into the Theosophical Society by Annie Besant herself in 1908 in Perth.
Price's series of paintings of Sydney Harbour begun in 1907, the same year as O'Dowd published his *Dominions of the Boundary*, develops the implications of *Ploughland in Summer*. In her discussion of *Jane Price and her circle* Juliet Peers describes the Sydney harbour works as demonstrating a 'hedonistic outlook'.

Despite acknowledging Price's connection with the Theosophical Society she has been unable to penetrate the admittedly difficult Theosophical literature on the subject and sees its influence as limited to representing the "natural world as a manifestation of godhead". In fact the paintings of Sydney harbour should be seen in the context of 'the mystic who sees the star folk throng'. In 1936, as Price was writing to Croll about the value of a national culture, she was working up *Star Rise over North and Middle Heads, Grotto Point, Sydney*, 1936. (colour plate 3)

On the verso of this small work is a record of an astrological/astronomical sighting gleaned from Sydney Morning Herald in 1927. Price records the colour—'a pale and milky purple' and

... the more sombre veil of mist, from out of which Sirius emerged triumphant. Ahead of him strode Orion, the Hunter, with Rigel marking one starry heel, & near the faintly twinkling hare, which is

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186 Peers, 'Jane Price and her circle', 68-71 p. 68
their prey. But Orion and this hound, so magnified were they, by their nearness to the horizon, dominated all else. It was mystically lovely, a half incredible vision.\textsuperscript{187}

The compositional structure in this work is dictated by the reflection of the stars in the water of the harbour. It is a very platonic, very Theosophical vision made all the more intriguing by the reference to Sirius triumphant, as Sirius was Leadbeater’s ‘star name’. With Leadbeater triumphant over Sydney, Price had much to celebrate.

The small painting of the Star Amphitheatre, Balmoral, c1924-29 (colour plate 4) expresses more explicitly than in any previous work Price’s compositional strategy of encouraging the viewer to look for something more mystical. While this work is certainly not one of Price’s best works; the tonal subtleties she was perhaps reaching for have not been realised and the brushwork is a little heavy-handed—its composition is highly developed, almost to the point of being mannered. While the work remains realist in style it does not allow the viewer the comfort of believing that visible reality is sufficient. Rather it drives the viewer to seek out a more spiritual dimension, an inner rhythm. The composition is arranged in a series of concentric ovals, corresponding to the proscenium, the seating and the harbour. There are hints of a complex numerology articulating the structure. In this work the amphitheatre occupies the foreground as well as the middle ground. However both the raked seating and the stage of the amphitheatre are empty. In this late work,\textsuperscript{188} the centre of the composition is again awaiting fulfilment with all the perspectival lines converging on the empty proscenium.

The large painting of Sydney harbour by night, 1910, (colour plate 5) in the collection of the Bendigo Art Gallery is a major work in this series. Here the centre of the composition is occupied by a bare hillock with the harbour and its lights in the

\textsuperscript{187} ATM, ‘Inscription on verso of ‘Star rise over North and Middle heads, Grotto Point, Sydney’ copied by Jane Price’, Sydney Morning Herald, 20 August, 1927.

\textsuperscript{188} In 1924 Price was aged 64.
distance. The work relies on the reflective surface of the water to make visible Price's vision of the transcendental in Sydney Harbour. Most of Price's harbour paintings have been dated soon after her arrival in Sydney in 1910. However many might in fact date from the 1920s when the Theosophical community was disposed to spend its money on Theosophical projects. To many Theosophists the harbour was redolent with Leadbeater's clairvoyant vision—its angels and water fairies were commonly discussed. 189 Price herself in the thirties interpreted the Sydney Harbour Bridge as having a spiritual dimension. There, "an angel sent, in the deep and vast recesses of the etheric interspaces of the Bridge—to live"190 would protect and guard the inhabitants of Sydney. Another late poem by Price Our Bridge, 1932, recalls Colonel Olcott's vision of a community of souls:

The glowing symbol of a people, soul to soul rivetted and united—
become the way invincible to all high purpose and achievement.191

Indeed Price lived to see Olcott's vision of a stronghold of Theosophy firmly established in Sydney fifty years after he had visited. For Price, Sydney was the city of the future. Already the Headquarters of the Society in Australia, it was to Sydney that Leadbeater had come in 1914. It was at Sydney's Morven Garden School in the early 1920s that Price prepared for the realisation of 'the artistic age' and a better and more beautiful state of existence.192

This reading of Jane Price's trajectory represents the artist as participant in many communities, engaged as an activist with the great ideas of her time. Price saw herself as part of a spiritual avant-garde, in the company of leading poets and politicians, leading the way to a new Australia. This was a politics of those who were not served by the reforms of the Enlightenment. Her response to modernity

189 Leadbeater used to take the children of the Theosophical faithful across the harbour on the ferry when they would be instructed to scoop the water fairies up in their hands to later release them on the homeless and disadvantaged of Sydney city. Ian Hooker, Telephone interview with the author, 2001.
190 Jane Price, The Angel of the Bridge, 1932, ms11231 Box 1609/12.
191 Jane Price, Our Bridge, 1932, Melbourne, MS 11231 Box 1609/12f.
192 A girl of the Morven Garden Theosophical School aged 15, 'The resurrection of art', Theosophy in Australasia, 25, 8, 1919, 322 p. 322
was to anticipate a new spiritualised future rather than the promise of material plenty through scientific specialisation. She looked forward to an urban Australia, host to a community of souls. Price’s paintings were enmeshed with her spiritual/political project. Her vision was quite different to that of Roberts with whom she chose to compare herself. Price’s psychic’s eyes saw visible reality as problematic, as only partial. Not for Price the depiction of the mere sunlit surface of life. Even when painting sundrenched landscapes, the inherent meaning of the work is not laid open. Rather nature is imbued with a spiritual rhythm. Her work exploits the tensions of the visible and the invisible through the form of landscape painting. This was most fully realised in her Sydney harbour nocturnes. Her work expresses the hope of a different future for Australia: an ‘artistic age’, predicated on the construction of a community of souls for whom reality was not invested in the purely visible. Price’s work anticipates the work of Clarice Beckett and Grace Cossington Smith in its conviction of a spiritual dimension to the landscape which is distinctly Theosophical in tone.
3. Unauthorised Visions: Florence Fuller

Florence Fuller initiated a radical departure from the academic mainstream which would have long ramifications for Australian art. Yet we know very little of her because for most of her life she devoted her art to the service of the Theosophical Society, the most important radical counter-cultural organisation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Fuller’s work is not readily accommodated by narratives based on the formal imperatives of modernism. Such a narrative conceals the more interesting story of an alternative engagement with modernity in which radical stylistic innovations were not driven by European influence but by an equally radical reconfiguration of the subject.

Florence Fuller (1867-1947) studied the academic traditions of portraiture at the highest level. She was a favourite student of William Bougereau at the Academie Julian.
Julien and had been head of studio at the Academie Collin.\textsuperscript{193} (fig. 4) Her skills were acknowledged by the Paris Salon where she exhibited 1895-97 and was ‘hung on the line’—a rare acknowledgment of success. She exhibited at the Royal Academy, London in 1897 and 1904. Fuller had the art academies at home and abroad at her feet to a degree that few Australian artists have achieved since. Success followed her back to Australia in 1900 as she painted portraits of Society’s finest in Cape Town (South Africa), Melbourne and Perth. Fuller had followed the traditional path of the colonial, pursuing academic excellence first locally and then at the ‘centre’. She was a highly educated, dedicated professional and yet she found in Paris that the ‘centre’ was hollow—academic success did not satisfy. She found that the definition of the ‘subject’ appropriate to the portrait painter did not satisfy the inquiring mind of the artist.

Fuller’s inquiring mind led her to the Theosophical Society.\textsuperscript{194} Like Berthe Mouchette, Marie Lion and Jane Price she found in the Society a radical reformulation of reality. She distinguishes herself from these artists because for a brief moment she was able to give radical formal expression to this alternately conceived reality. Her Portrait of the Lord Buddha, 1909-10 which this chapter will examine in some detail, represents a remarkable intervention in the history of Australian art. Yet this work was inspired by conceptual concerns rather than stylistic formulations. It stands outside the narrative of a formally defined modernism by its conceptual grounding and by its generative process. The stylistic sources for this work were in no sense Eurocentric. Rather, this work echoes the decentred and distributed influences of the Theosophical Society itself, providing an alternative model to the traditional centre-margin debate in which Australian artists are so often pinioned.

\textsuperscript{193} Fuller gives this information in an interview in 1904 Anonymous, ‘Artists of mark: Miss Florence Fuller’, The Australian Magazine; All about Australians, 1 September1904, 595 p. 595 This is supported by William Adolphe Bouguereau, William Bouguereau, 1825-1905. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, 1984. p. 57
\textsuperscript{194} Joan Kerr suggests that Fuller may have learnt of the Theosophical Society from Jane Sutherland some time in the mid 1880s Kerr, ed. Heritage, The national women’s art book. p. 355. While Fuller may have encountered the Society at this point her real commitment to the Society would not come until 1905.
In Fuller's person and work we see the dramatic encounter of two competing modes of apprehending the world. On the one hand the academy of the Enlightenment and a way of perceiving the world based on measurement, specialisation and analysis. On the other hand a response to this pattern proposed by Mme Blavatsky which demanded such specialised skills be put to one side in favour of intuition and visualisation strategies. This practice of visualisation, so important to Fuller, was inspired by Indian aesthetics as mediated by the Theosophical Society. The practice of ‘mind-seeing’ ran counter to the academy’s discipline of ocular evidence, specialisation and scientific analysis, and represents a legitimate and independent response to the academic model as Fuller had learnt it in Melbourne, Paris and London. The radical visuality which emerged from this practice can be seen as parallel but distinct from modernism as it has been commonly understood in this country.

The dramatic intersection between academic portraiture and its representation of the exterior, and the representation of an ‘inner reality,’ can be seen to unfold in a series of portraits painted for the Theosophical Society. I will briefly sketch Fuller’s gradual abandonment of an ocular evidentiary aesthetic through her portraits of Olcott, Blavatsky and Leadbeater, I will then focus on her Portrait of the Lord Buddha, in which she renders a reality seen through the ‘third eye’.

**Portraits of Colonel Henry Steel Olcott**

The academic skills Fuller had learnt are readily visible in her portrait of *Henry Steel Olcott*. At least two versions of this work exist. Fuller had painted Olcott’s portrait for the Perth Lodge c 1907/1908 together with a portrait of Mme Blavatsky which Besant saw fresh from having her own portrait painted in Adelaide by Mouchette. In all likelihood this provided the impetus for Besant’s invitation to Fuller to visit Adyar. I reproduce here Fuller’s Perth portrait of *Henry Steel Olcott*,

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185 Anonymous, 'Artists of mark: Miss Florence Fuller', *The Australian Magazine; All about Australians*, 1 September 1904, 595 p. 595 See also Paris Salon Records for 1895-1897 and Royal Academy 1897, 1904. The practice of mind seeing will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter.
In this painting we can see something of Fuller’s academic repertoire. Olcott had died in 1907, obliging Fuller to work from a photograph. (fig. 5) Fuller was herself a keen photographer and, like many academic portraitists of her time, often used the photograph as a documentary tool. This photograph of Olcott shows him as a visitor to the colonies exhausted by the heat in his three piece suit, his feet swollen and shoes loosened. It is a very human and endearing image. In the oil painting the fallibility is excised and Olcott is portrayed as founding father and sage of the Theosophical Society. Here the high forehead clearly denotes intelligence and the snowy beard, wisdom. Fuller deploys the scientific grammar of the body, the tools of the physiognomist and the phrenologist for whom the face was a chart for identification and distinction. In this portrait Fuller masterfully employed the full gamut of (pseudo) scientific instruments of her time, revealing herself as very much in step with her increasingly professionalised and specialised academic discipline.

Fuller’s decision to work in oils for this work was a deliberate decision based on what she felt was appropriate to Olcott’s memory. The portrait’s bituminous shadows hark back to the academic practice of her student days. It should be noted that Fuller could, and did, work comfortably in many registers. Her painting of

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1907-8 (colour plate 6). 

196 H W Hunt, ‘Some notes on the Adyar Convention 1912’, Theosophy in Australasia, 18, 2, 1913, 344 p.344

197 This was a time when the scientific discoveries of the human body were increasingly available, the x-ray photograph was discovered in 1895 the same year as the Iconographie de la Salpêtrière was published. See for example Jean Clair, ‘Impossible anatomy’, Identity and alterity, ed., Jean Clair, Marsilio Editori spa, Venice, 1995
Olcott references the style of academic salon painting of her youth while the moderated impressionist technique of Sandpies 1903 predates this work and anticipates her 1909-11 portrait of CW Leadbeater. Fuller also often painted in watercolours or undertook miniatures on ivory. As might be expected the viewer's relationship with the subject changes with the different genres, ranging from the formal portrait of Olcott as 'the great man' to an intimate miniature (colour plate 7) or more familial watercolour. (fig. 6)

**Mme Blavatsky**

When Fuller came to represent Mme Blavatsky for the Perth Lodge the scientific grammar of the body was inadequate. In Fuller's portrait of *Mme Blavatsky*, 1908 (colour plate 8) her confidence in academic strategies is shaken. The form of the academic portrait remains but the meaning which so forcefully buttressed the image of Olcott is evacuated, leaving this work less well resolved and ultimately problematic. However from an art historical perspective, Fuller's *Mme Blavatsky* is the more revealing and therefore more interesting work. In this painting we see a powerful woman staring out at us through the screen of the academic portrait. The woman of the portrait is neither beautiful nor framed by the trappings of wealth or position. Blavatsky is not represented as the author of her many influential publications nor as the founder of an influential international spiritual organisation. She is portrayed as a seer, as one who looks beyond the externals to a hidden and higher reality.

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198 Not unlike Fuller’s painting *Sandpies*, 1903 Collection: Art Gallery of Western Australia.

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This oil portrait too is also taken from a photograph. In this case the photograph is the so-called 'Sphinx' photograph taken by an Italian photographer in London, Enrico Resta, in 1889. (fig. 7) In this work Fuller has developed the implications of Resta's photograph. Any representation of Mme Blavatsky which relied on a grammar of physiognomy was doomed to be inadequate. Not even Blavatsky's closest admirers shirked from the fact that her physical form was gross.

Fuller retains and enhances Resta's format, pushing Blavatsky's body into the background and her face forward. In her portrait Fuller has Blavatsky pressing forward not only past the frame but past the physical body as well. Here the traditional relationship of sitter and viewer is reversed. Where Olcott was the object of the scientific regard, Blavatsky returns the gaze with a vengeance. She is the woman who sees. The portrait proclaims the spiritual and temporal authority of a woman beyond academy and church. It is as much a political statement as a formal problem. This work makes no sense within the conventions of academic portraiture despite deploying the form. It assumes the near irrelevance of the physical form of the subject and addresses itself to a spiritual essence.

Fuller was sufficiently competent in her discipline to recognise the inconsistencies. How could a portrait represent an individual if the material form was to be ignored? How could a portrait painter do other than paint the outer and very ephemeral
form? Fuller sought here to represent one who had famously defied the limitations of the material body. Such a portrait could take little from the scientific grammar of the face. Rather Fuller would only resolve the problem through intuition and subjective experience, the power of visualisation and communion on a plane other than the physical.

**Adyar**

Fuller’s commitment to the Theosophical Society centred around her desire to discover the ‘hidden inner life’, to seek an answer to the problematised ‘subject’ which no academic environment had been able to answer. She joined the Theosophical Society in Perth on 29 May 1905 following CW Leadbeater’s lecture tour, the same week as Bessie Rischbieth. Together they shaped Perth Lodge into the powerful force it would become in the twenties. Fuller was Secretary, Treasurer and Librarian of the nascent lodge and lent her studios, first at St Georges Terrace and then in the West Australian buildings for lodge meetings. Unlike Rischbieth, Fuller’s Theosophy was more mystical than practical. Even before meeting Annie Besant, Fuller’s interests lay in distinguishing between the physical body and the spiritual self. 1906 she wrote a short essay which drew on Blavatsky’s writings urging her

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199 Mme Blavatsky was famously incontinent in her desires for the leader of an organisation which advocated no smoking, no drinking, no swearing and vegetarianism.

200 The Theosophical Society promoted a highly formulated conception of the self which remained constant through a series of evolutions from rock to God-like being. The consistency was distinct from gender, socio-economic positioning, personality and character. These aspects normally seen as defining the self were instead conceived as changeable, subject to the rules of Karma, and mutable according to the demands of one’s spiritual evolution towards this God-like state.
fellow Theosophists to put aside the physical body and its needs, to realise that the lower personal self is fleeting and to seek out the highest and truest self. In winter 1908 Annie Besant toured Australia and membership doubled. Besant visited Fuller’s studio and admired her portraits of Olcott and Blavatsky. Fuller was invited to Adyar to undertake a series of portraits of the founders, members and Masters of the Society. Fuller followed Besant as she would do for the rest of her life.

When Fuller went to Adyar, in old Madras now Chennai, at the age of 41 she went as a Theosophical student. (colour plate 9) She wrote later that she went in search of ‘beauty and light, and colour, and the picturesqueness in general, which delight the eye and emotions of all artists,’ but also and more remarkably, in search of ‘something deeper— something less easily expressed’ As a portraitist she felt that the Theosophical Society could throw light on the problematised subject beyond the resources of her academic environment.

The timing of Fuller’s visit to Adyar could not have been better. Fuller’s stay in Adyar from 1908-1911 coincided with an extraordinary period in the history of the Society, and Fuller was at the heart of all the activity. This was the peak of Annie Besant’s most clairvoyant period, CW Leadbeater arrived in early 1909 and, by the end of the year, he had ‘discovered’ Krishnamurti. Fuller had a small studio built for her, still called the Fuller Bungalow, in the heart of Adyar, which overlooked Leadbeater’s octagonal rooms where the exciting interaction of Leadbeater and Krishnamurti took place. (fig. 8)

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201 Alice Adair and her husband join in 1906, Muriel Chase in 1907 and Mrs Stanway -Tapp in 1908
202 Florence Fuller, 'The way, the truth and the life', Theosophy in Australasia, 11, 2, 1906, 471- 72 p. 471
203 Matters, Australasians who count in London and who counts in Western Australia. p. 51
204 ibid p. 51
205 The studio was constructed with the building fund of 907 pounds raised by Annie Besant from her recent Lecture Tour in Australia. I am grateful to Ms Radha Burnier for allowing me access to the Theosophical Library and Private Archives, Adyar.
Fuller’s personal search for the higher, true self was played out on a dramatic scale below her window in the octagonal bungalow on a daily basis. As Leadbeater conducted the research into Krishnamurti’s past lives, later published as the ‘Lives of Alcyone’, Fuller found her own search answered. She was included in the ‘Lives’ as ‘Ida’. She was male, female, rich, poor, close and distant to the story of Krishnamurti’s spiritual evolution. She witnessed Krishnamurti’s waking recollections of his nightly excursions to the etheric realm to learn at the feet of his Master Koothumi, diligently reported and written up every morning as ‘At the feet of the Master’. 207 This enormously influential publication has never been out of print since its first appearance in 1910. The presence of the Masters, astral and clairvoyant experience was simply part of life. Fuller’s practical experience in Adyar enacted what she had before only read about: that the human subject was articulated around a spiritual core, that the physical envelope was ephemeral and even personality was temporary. She learnt that on the etheric level she was connected with people of other races and genders and even with all creation. In short she came to a conception of the subject closer to a contemporary version of the multiple subject than either that being explored by Freud, or the nineteenth century subject so rigidly defined by socio-economic class, nationality and gender that he had rejected.

Fuller’s official position while in Adyar was Recording Secretary and one of her tasks was to enter the names of new members from Melbourne, Chicago, Paris and all around the world into the enormous registers and issue certificates of membership in her neat firm copperplate. She too listened at the feet of Annie Besant and CW Leadbeater and took part in the more earthly pleasures of concerts, tennis and swimming, which were a feature of life at Adyar. She had at least two students working with her, a girl called Melati and a boy– possibly Meenakshi Sundaram. She may also have been Krishnamurti’s photography teacher; in any case she formed part of the coterie of Europeans overseeing his early education. Her main project however was the ambitious task of painting

207 In January 1910 Krishnamurti records having seen the Venetian Master who had been the artist Veronese
portraits of the founders, significant members of the household, and Masters. In the Theosophical Society Fuller found the patron she had been trained to expect. Her portraits were placed in meeting rooms and museums and published with inspirational quotes by the founders. This project was diligently undertaken and pleasure in her progress reported in the Society's journals. 208 Within weeks of her arrival Fuller had already begun another portrait of Mme Blavatsky.

**CW Leadbeater**

One of the most beautiful portraits Fuller painted while in Adyar is *CW Leadbeater*, 1910 (colour plate 10) – a pair to a portrait of Annie Besant. These portraits demonstrate why Fuller's work was held in such high regard by her professional colleagues. This portrait of *CW Leadbeater* is a particularly beautiful instance of the many fine works she did in Adyar, many of which remain in the Adyar museum. In this painting we can see that the painter found the light and colour she had hoped to find. The work has a delicacy and simplicity which surpasses the Art Gallery of Western Australia's *Sandpies* of 1903. The tonal range is reduced and the colours are muted looking to the golds, creams, greys and blonds with a hint of blue shadow in the subject's jacket. All attention is focussed on the face and above all the eyes. It is evident that Fuller regarded Leadbeater as a friend as well as a teacher. The brushwork is fresh and loose, capturing the different effects of light of the various surfaces. The different textures of linen, flesh and hair are beautifully realised.

In her portrait of Leadbeater, Fuller has put aside the bituminous academicism of Olcott’s portrait and opened herself to a psychological reading of the sitter. Leadbeater's portrait radiates the charismatic humanity so often described by his contemporaries. She would describe Besant as an intellectual and organisational giant beyond her reach, but Leadbeater charmed her. Would Fuller have described these works as having captured the hidden life within? The personality of the sitters has been captured – Leadbeater’s twinkling eye reveals much about the man that

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Fuller knew. But both Besant and Leadbeater taught that personality was as evanescent as the physical form. Beautiful as these portraits are they are not representations of what she would later describe as the 'hidden life' within\(^{209}\) that Fuller came to Adyar to find.

**Fuller and the Bengal School**

Again Fuller's timing was superb. At no other time and at no better place could she have explored the Indian alternative to ocular evidence in academic art practice. Fuller's stay in Adyar was bracketed by the publication of two groundbreaking works by Theosophist and historian of Indian art, Ernest Havell. Havell's *Indian sculpture and painting* was published in 1908, and its sequel *The ideals of Indian art* in 1911— the year Fuller left Adyar. Havell's 1908 publication famously broke the barrier which had previously seen Indian art classified as anthropology. *Indian sculpture and painting* instigated a dramatic breakthrough in the history of Western attitudes to Eastern art and was the first major articulation of an Indian 'great art' tradition.\(^{210}\) The simplicity and two-dimensionality of Indian art which had baffled Western eyes was repositioned by Havell not as a question of skill but as a question of focus. Havell took some pains to point out that all that we see in nature is "transitory illusive phenomena and that Indian art seeks out the universal, eternal and infinite."\(^{211}\) Both Havell and his contemporary Ananda Coomaraswamy are today accused of exaggeration in this area but at the time their simplification of Indian art traditions usefully connected to the frameworks already in position for those Westerners most open to Indian ideas.

Havell had studied with Besant at Adyar while Director of the Madras School of Art in the 1890s and they enjoyed a long conversation over many years during which Havell's concept of the spiritual in art came to inform Theosophical art theory and the political dimension of Havell's work became more refined. He came to see

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\(^{209}\) Matters, *Australasians who count in London and who counts in Western Australia*. p. 51


\(^{211}\) Ernest Havell, *The art heritage of India*. DB Taraporevala sons and co. ltd, Bombay, 1964. p. 6
Indian art as an expression of its national identity and justification for Home Rule in line with Besant’s own position in Indian politics. His support for the Indian art tradition through his work in colonial Schools of Art in India and as a writer largely contributed to the formation of the Bengal School and the foundation of Modern Indian art. Prominent artists of the time including Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) and Nandalal Bose (1883-1966) acknowledged his crucial role in facilitating the birth of the new school. Havell’s conversation with Besant continued beyond his appointment to the Head of the School of Art in Calcutta in 1896. Havell encouraged visitors to Southern India to visit Adyar, as Besant encouraged visiting artists to connect with Indian art. Adyar embraced the aesthetic as presented by Havell and formed close links with Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Rabindranath and Abanindranath Tagore.

In these early years there was a strategic alliance between Annie Besant and the Tagores based on a rejection of Britain’s right to rule India and the establishment of a national aesthetic. Later factional interests would come to compromise this relationship, however the Theosophical Society remained supportive of Indian art, traditional and modern, in India and in other Theosophical strongholds. Adyar represented the Bengal School in Southern India, and it was to become a staple in Theosophical exhibitions in India and abroad. Fuller’s Perth colleague, artist Alice Adair would dedicate her curatorial energies to touring exhibitions of Indian art around Europe and the Pacific. James Cousins, poet colleague of Irish Theosophist poets WB Yeats and AE, positioned himself as an expert on Indian art and aesthetics. The combined Irish Indian influence would colour this critic’s aesthetic writings in Theosophical journals. Amongst this network figured Johan von Manen, later a renowned orientalist, Leadbeater’s Secretary at the time of

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215 JH Cousins, ‘A fine art exhibition’, *The Theosophist*, 451924, 815
216 Van Manen was taking an active interest in Asian art at this time writing an article in collaboration with Coomaraswamy, *A Dhyani Buddha from Borobodur*. He numbered Sir Asutosh Mookerjee and the Hon. Justice JG Woodroffe (both of Calcutta, the home of the Bengal School) among his friends. Justice Woodroffe,
Fuller's residence. As a practising artist engaged in teaching Indian art students within the radius of the galvanising Besant and von Manen, Fuller was ideally positioned to fully engage with Havell's aesthetic project. In fact Havell's exposition of the ideals of Indian art and especially the practice of visualisation opened a way for Fuller to represent the subject as she had come to understand it.

Edward Said has famously called the West to account for its orientalising practices but the Theosophical Society's relationship to India must be seen as occupying a specific relationship within this orientalist discourse. Certainly it took from India what it came to find. Havell and Ananda Coomaraswami's association of Indian art with spirituality to the exclusion of other interpretations has been critiqued by many Indian artists including VK Chari. However following these eminent historians' lead the Society positioned itself in opposition to the 'civilisation' represented by the British Empire and promoted and enhanced the value of indigenous traditions both within India and to Europe. While Fuller's explorations were related to research by European Modernists into 'primitive' art it is significant that for Fuller the work of the Bengal School represented not the past but the future.

**The Portrait of the Lord Buddha**

In 1910 Fuller painted the *Portrait of the Lord Buddha* in which she took up the challenge of the subject so clearly posed by her portrait of Mme Blavatsky. (colour plate 11) This work bears no date but was almost certainly painted during the peak period of Krishnamurti's own psychic experiences. Fuller was reported to have been about to paint portraits of the Masters in 1909 and in 1911 Leadbeater wrote that Fuller was working on portraits of the founders, significant members of

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with Sister Nivedita was one of the most influential champions of the Bengal School. Guha-Thakurta, *The making of a new 'Indian' Art Artists, aesthetics and nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920*, p. 274 Woodruffe was also a founding member of the Indian Society of Oriental Art founded in Calcutta in 1907– the major institutional sponsor of the Bengal School. ibid p. 277  


218 Margaret Preston (1875-1963) famously sought out 'primitive art' as inspiration for her own Modernist work.  

219 In a letter to Chicago from Adyar a visitor wrote “the artist Miss Fuller, a niece of Sir Thomas Fuller of South Africa. She is turning her highly developed talent to painting the Masters at present.” ‘GG’, ‘Adyar letter (19 May 1909)’, p. 514
the household and the Masters. I have seen portraits of founders and significant individuals like A Schwartz and C Jinarajadasa but this portrait of the Buddha is the only image of a non-material form I have sighted, and the closest I am ever likely to come to tallying the textual evidence with the painted. By their nature these images are secret/sacred for the Theosophical Society, fortunately this work entered the public domain through its publication in 1949.

The Portrait of the Lord Buddha is remarkable because it comes to us with the information that ‘Miss Fuller’s portrait is said to be a lifelike representation of Lord Buddha by one who has seen him.’ The implication is that Fuller had a visionary experience herself of the sort which she witnessed in Adyar. The claim is extraordinary in the true sense of the word and by its nature not open to academic investigation. What is open to investigation is what Fuller did with the experience. It would appear that this experience was also out of the ordinary for Fuller. The work is thinly painted on unstretched canvas glued to card. This suggests that it was a personal document and not intended for public or even semi-public exhibition. The small painting surfaced in Sydney 1949, two years after Fuller’s death, indicating that she kept the work by her throughout her long life. In 1949 it was reproduced in Theosophy in Australia, courtesy of Ernest Hanson, resident of Mosman.

This slight work stands for a larger body of work in Fuller’s oeuvre which has either not survived or has been kept secret by the Society. However it is enough to indicate the direction of Fuller’s ambition to represent ‘something deeper’. She had said of her work in Adyar that it was ‘undergoing a change, and (I) felt it could not satisfy (me) unless it became so much greater’. She felt she was beginning to

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220 Krishnamurti, Adyar, The home of the Theosophical Society: Views taken expressly by Alcyone with descriptive letterpress by CW Leadbeater, p.21
221 An image of a Master would not normally be seen by even an ordinary member of the Theosophical Society. Fortunately this work was reproduced in a public journal, the work can now be seen at the Campbell Library, Sydney.
222 Anonymous, 'Portrait of the Lord Buddha', Theosophy in Australia, 16, 11, 1949, 9 p. 9
223 Many Theosophists would also question the probability of Fuller’s experience as described here. However the debates of the ‘New Humanities’ have enabled a conversation based on experience of an event which lies beyond previous academic limitations.
touch realities' and aspired that this would find expression in her work. These are the words of an artist who was thinking deeply about the possibilities and limitations of the portrait painter. Portrait of the Lord Buddha is in another register again from Fuller's other portraits. This is neither the phrenological subject, nor the psychological subject but represents a subject outside any physical manifestation. This is a Theosophical conception of the subject apprehended through a psychic, visionary experience.

The Portrait of the Lord Buddha appears strikingly modern by comparison with Fuller's other work. The forms are flattened and the colours are boldly and firmly placed. The modelling in the face is reduced to a strong recessive plane of green while the body and background are notational only. The outer form is no longer the primary bearer of meaning. Abstract colour and line assume an importance in this work beyond anything Fuller would do again. The Portrait of the Lord Buddha is more strikingly radical in a formal sense than either Grace Cossington Smith's Sock Knitter or Wakelin's Fruit Seller, Berry's Bay, both of 1915. Yet however successful the Portrait of the Lord Buddha might be as a formal experiment, it is important not to confuse this work with the formalist achievements which have to date defined Australian modernism.

The Portrait of the Lord Buddha employs radical formal strategies to represent a different realism. The formal strategies are subordinate to the reconfiguration of conceptual parameters. The image comes to us as a 'life-like representation.' Fuller's formal innovations were the result of an ambitious attempt to paint another reality not visible to the physical eye. Typically in the Theosophical Society art was put to the service of the spiritual. Art for art's sake was well understood by the theorists, Cousins' own practice was defined by his early relationship with WB Yeats and James Joyce. Art for art's sake was viewed as empty formalism and abhorrent to the Theosophical project.

224 Matters, Australasians who count in London and who counts in Western Australia.
Fuller’s *Portrait of the Lord Buddha* proceeds from her dissatisfaction with scientific strategies of observation to apprehend the real. Her academic training had taught her careful examination, often using photography as a tool, to fix the material evidence for careful study. Such was the authorised procedure ratified by the scientific academy. The Theosophical Society encouraged her to see this exterior envelope as fleeting. True sight was rather a matter of intuition, of visualisation. Only such strategies as these could penetrate the physical and capture the inner life of the individual. In this painting of the Buddha, Fuller sought to represent the inner life within, the God in every man, which was not visible to the tools of science. The formal resolution of this critique of the visible looks revolutionary, but this is an alternative modernism drawing on alternative formal sources appropriate to the conceptual concerns.

The primary source for Fuller’s paintings of non-visible reality was the Theosophical Society itself, specifically the visionary experiences of Leadbeater and Besant, her teachers at Adyar. The striking colours of the *Portrait of the Lord Buddha* have specific Theosophical meanings\(^{225}\) which carry much of the abstract meaning of the image. The glowing colours may not be descriptive of the temporal plane, but they were certainly intended to be referential at the level of visionary experience. The colours are flatly applied to an otherwise linear representation with minimal tonal variation. The head of the Buddha is surrounded by a radiant aura of yellow, orange and pink. The strongest note is the yellow of wisdom, with secondary notes of

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\(^{225}\) Fuller had first hand Leadbeater’s insights into the meaning of colours however we can read of them from Annie Besant and CW Leadbeater, *Thought forms*. Quest Book, Wheaton, Ill. USA, 1975.
love and devotion to a noble ideal. The Theosophical colour-text is easily legible and entirely appropriate to Fuller’s apprehension of the Buddha.

Ernest Havell’s publications were the other important source for Fuller, opening up a visual tradition for Fuller which would enable her to respond as an artist to the Theosophical experiences of Adyar.\(^\text{226}\) It is significant that Theosophists turned to Indian art traditions as they had previously looked to Indian spiritual traditions. Havell recounted that the Indian artist could “transport himself by Yoga to the Tusita heavens and bring back a faithful portrait of the blessed one”\(^\text{227}\) Was this how Fuller achieved this image? In purely formal terms the *Portrait of the Lord Buddha* shows the influence of Havell’s most illustrious protégé, Abanindranath Tagore who reputedly also painted spiritual images for the Society. Abanindranath Tagore’s painting *Buddha and Sujata* 1900 (fig. 9) is nevertheless clearly tied to an Indian vocabulary in a way which escapes Fuller’s Buddha. Despite its dramatic simplifications the *Portrait of the Lord Buddha* maintains a solidity of form and three dimensional bulk which is more closely related to an artist trained in western conventions than a feature of Abanindranath’s work or others of the Bengal School. Moreover while the style is related to Abanindranath, the traditional physical attributes associated with the Buddha have been disregarded. Such oversight is inconsistent with Abanindranath's aesthetic. The *Portrait of the Lord Buddha* does not have the elongated earlobes associated with Buddha’s time as Prince Siddharta nor is the hair in the traditional tight curls with the Ushnisha.\(^\text{228}\) In this image the Lord Buddha looks more like a middle class European woman of rather classical beauty with well kept ears and her hair pulled back into a chignon. This image is reminder that the Theosophical Society mediated a relationship with Indian culture which is more telling of the needs of the Western tradition than the Indian tradition they drew on.

\(^{226}\) The influence of Indian aesthetics was experienced first hand rather than mediated through Europe as Alison Broinowski has argued was the case with Japan. Alison Broinowski, *The yellow lady: Australian impressions of Asia*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992.

\(^{227}\) Havell, *The art heritage of India*, p. 10
The resolution of Fuller's search for 'hidden inner life' in the practice of visualisation finds a strange echo in Jonathon Crary's analysis of the reorganisation of vision of the nineteenth century. For Crary:

It is a shift signalled by the passage from the geometrical optics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to physiological optics which dominated both scientific and philosophical discussion of vision in the nineteenth century.²²⁹

Within Crary's paradigm this shift enabled the modernism heralded by Manet and the Impressionists. Yet for Fuller and the Theosophical Society it was precisely this emphasis on science and its stranglehold on aesthetic discourse which was at issue. If Crary describes modernism as a moment of ocularcentric exploration, Fuller's response must be described as a turn to the possibilities of the 'third eye'. This was a step she could not have taken independently of the Theosophical Society's concerted challenge to the practice of Western reason and its research into alternative knowledge systems including Indian aesthetics. Fuller's Portrait of the Lord Buddha is a key work in this account of an alternative modernism. This painting disrupts and challenges the apparently seamless account of style based modernism. This alternative and intermittent modernism can be figured as one dominated by female politics, decentralised and unauthorised visuality; a voice of the margins. This is a modernism defined not by stylistic coherence but by its challenge to the hegemony of Western reason.

Despite the intellectual support offered by the Theosophical Society, Fuller's incursion into visualisation strategies was isolated and undefended. She would have been aware of Havell's embattled position in London's aesthetic community. There was very real debate as to the possibility of a fine art tradition in India.

²²⁸ While the eyes are like the traditional lotus buds, they are not turned inwards and rather return the gaze with a frank openness which is more like a Protestant encounter than a Buddhist.

²²⁹ Crary, Techniques of the observer: On vision and modernity in the nineteenth century. p. 16
despite support from such prominent figures as William Rothenstein and George Russell (AE) and Roger Fry.\(^{230}\)

Fuller left Adyar in 1911 in time to march behind Annie Besant in what has been described as the last of the great suffragette marches for the Coronation of George V.\(^{231}\) This was a period of coming to terms with the reality of earning one’s living through portraiture. While she may have painted further portraits of the Masters, the implications of Fuller’s new expressive register did not seep into her public work. It would seem that while Rothenstein could value Indian art as an expression of cultural nationalism, the implications of an eminent academician ‘going native’ were beyond discussion. Neither Fuller’s artistic environment nor the Theosophical Society itself could support her in her radical experimentation. Fuller’s later work gives no hint of the experimentation displayed in the *Portrait of the Lord Buddha*. Fuller herself acknowledged that she had not been entirely successful. In London after having left India, she wrote:

> I have painted a great many portraits since I have been in England, and I have been, I suppose fairly successful—though I have done nothing in any way remarkable. The hidden inner life has not yet succeeded in expressing itself on canvas, and I can only write myself as one who aspires to a greater art, but has not yet achieved.\(^{232}\)

\(^{230}\) F Brown and others, ‘Fine Art in India’, *The Times*, 28 February 1910, 1910, 6 Roger Fry’s own position was complex. In 1910 he admitted that he stood ‘aghast before Indian bronzes’ Roger Fry, ‘Oriental art’, *Quarterly Review*, 2121910, 226, 39 p. 235 and that the Bengal School artists were little better than ‘American magazine illustrators’. Yet he also held that the Indian artist’s aim to express an ideal was of greater interest than a purely imitative Western art. In an attempt at consensus he urged both Eastern and Western artists to aim for expressive force. The Buddha figure was at the centre of the controversy and was held by Fry to communicate at best ‘passionless purity and serenity of soul’. Sir George Birdwood famously argued that the Buddha had the ‘passionless purity and serenity of soul’ of a boiled suet pudding. Roger Fry, ‘Art in India’, *The Times*, 1 March, 1910, 11

\(^{231}\) Fuller left Adyar for London 3 months after Besant had taken Krishnamurti and Nitya on March 22 1911. In England she stayed at 38 Tavistock Square WC and painted a watercolour portrait of Bessie Rischbieth in July. Bessie Rischbieth, Letter to Olive, 1913, Canberra, NLA MS 2004/1/106. I am grateful to Jill Roe for this reference. Earlier that year, on 22 April, Bapu Sahib (Gandhi) came to take tea with Fuller. I would like to thank Helen Fuller for this reference.

\(^{232}\) Cited in Matters, *Australasians who count in London and who counts in Western Australia*. p. 51
Fuller's self analysis is worth taking into account. Her experience in Adyar was transformative in the sense that she came to a different understanding of the subject. This changed understanding can be seen reflected in her portrait of the Buddha. Yet Fuller was ultimately unable to transform her desire to represent the 'hidden inner life' of her subjects beyond one known isolated instance. My research indicates that her formal achievements at Adyar were unsustainable, that the Society could support her spiritual and intellectual challenges but not a sustained aesthetic challenge. Fuller's later work in London and Sydney was produced to please a market comfortable with conventional portraiture.

On her return to Australia with Leadbeater in 1916 Fuller undertook a number of teaching positions, lecturing and writing in Theosophical circles.233 Her experiences at Adyar would be shared with her friends, colleagues and students in Sydney and Melbourne, notably Marion Ferdinando and Clarice Beckett as I will discuss in a later chapter. Fuller remained within the Theosophical community until, increasingly vulnerable to poverty and ill health, she was committed to Gladesville Mental Hospital under Dr Moffitt aged sixty.234

Florence Fuller’s Portrait of the Lord Buddha is a rare instance of a highly successful artist with a clearly articulated set of concerns and a radical formal solution. This painting represents a significant challenge to the means of knowing and representing as they were taught in the academy. Fuller’s radical visuality expressed itself as a modernism which was not stylistically related to European formulae but rather was produced independently in response to a conceptual problem, drawing on visual influences outside the modernist debates of Paris and London. This alternative modernism is informed by a Theosophical accent and an Indian vernacular and supported by the weight of impassioned visionary desire.

233 Florence Fuller, 'Mails from the continent of death', The Theosophist, May, 1918. She teaches at the Theosophical Morven Garden School and the Women Painters School of Fine and Applied Art in Sydney.
234 I would like to acknowledge Helen Fuller's generosity in sharing her research, Helen Fuller, 'Florence Ada Fuller', Honours Thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1995. without which I would not have had access to these last sensitive last years. It is worth stressing in this regard that Fuller was in all probability suffering from severe anaemia, vegetarian diets of her time were commonly inadequate. Tied to her visionary
This painting, like the work of many artists influenced by the Theosophical Society, represents an alternative modernism marking a space for an art practice which challenged the Euro-centric project, ocular evidence and the practice of Western reason. Fuller’s *Portrait of the Lord Buddha* is sufficient to de-stabilise the hegemony of the master narrative of modernism and restore something of the potential and complexity of this period to Australian Art History.

experiences and poverty this is a more likely reason for her stay at Gladesville than any real psychological illness.
4. Theorising the visionary: Ferdinando and Meldrum in Melbourne and the realisation of Fuller’s promise in the work of Clarice Beckett.

Fuller’s miraculous experiences in Adyar were eagerly read and discussed in Melbourne. Her photographs of Adyar were circulated and would form the basis of comparison for later visitors. But in Melbourne’s cooler climate the untrammelled visionary experiences of Adyar seemed beyond the reach of even the most ardent and committed Theosophists. Yet while Melbourne artists associated with the Theosophical Society were not yet ready to open themselves to pure psychic visuality they were primed to interrogate the nature of the visible and its relationship with the ‘real’. Many felt that the academic system of art teaching with which they had grown up, based on the acquisition of skill in the representation of the visible world, had little continuing relevance. There seemed a widespread acknowledgment that that the illusion of the merely visible was insufficient.

Marion Ferdinando looked to Florence Fuller and Ernest Havell’s interpretation of Indian art for inspiration and addressed the future of Australian art within the Theosophical press. She and her sister, Beatrice Colquhoun, found an opportunity to reconcile their Theosophical and painterly ambitions in the theories of Max Meldrum and their support was crucial in the instigation and support of his new school. The dialogue which emerged from this encounter energised and shaped a generation of students. Among these students, Clarice Beckett stands out as embodying the tensions implicit in this dialogue and making them her own. While her work has traditionally been seen in a one dimensional relationship with

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235 Fuller, F Photographs of Adyar (c1908-1911) Collection of the Melbourne Theosophical Society.
236 Please later discussion of Marion Ferdinando and Elizabeth Colquhoun later in this chapter.
Meldrum’s stylistic influence, the inclusion of Ferdinando as the ‘other’ in this dialogue of problematised visuality unleashes a visionary potential in Beckett’s work which has not been discussed.

In bringing together the theories of Marion Ferdinando and Max Meldrum an almost surreal shock of recognition is effected. The two most outspoken proselytisers of the new visuality in Melbourne harboured apparently irreconcilable differences. Meldrum is remembered for his insistence on a scientific and rational approach and an exacting stylistic coherence. The theories of Ferdinando, on the other hand, were fundamentally grounded in an alternative spiritual dimension. Yet despite their apparently oppositional commitment to scientific and spiritual authority respectively, the two graduates of the National Gallery School were united in the belief that technique was less critical to the artist than the ability to see. In their separate ways they acknowledged and explored a now questionable visuality. Their differences were less important to them than their correspondences. Ferdinando’s theoretical structure was a crucial part of the debate until now dominated by Meldrum, and the inclusion of Ferdinando’s texts represents the issues surrounding artistic vision as more delicately inflected and more engagingly complex than has been described to date. In fact Ferdinando’s writings emerge as the essential ‘other’ to Meldrum’s mosaic pronouncements.

**Marion Ferdinando**

Marion Elizabeth Ferdinando (1864-1944) responded to the Theosophical problematisation of the visible in Theosophical terms. Following Ernest Havell, Ferdinando distinguished between two distinct modes of vision. She framed the terms of the discussion as a dualism; on the one hand the ‘Western’ mode which imitated the surface of reality and on the other the Indian practice of inner sight. Buttressed by the broader body of Theosophical theory and by Fuller’s personal experience, Ferdinando embraced the concept of visualisation- or what she called ‘mind seeing’. Sadly, although she was the most prominent writer on the subject in Australian art circles, she has left no firm evidence of any experimentation with this
concept in her own painting.\textsuperscript{237} Her portrait of Benjamin Ferdinando, 1887 (colour plate 12) remains the uncompromised product of the European art training she came to despise.

Marion Ferdinando née Hoile was born in England but spent a significant part of her childhood in Paris. The Hoile family lived through the occupation of Paris during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71\textsuperscript{238} and came to Australia some time between 1875 and 1882. Before leaving Paris, Marion married Benjamin Ferdinando at the British embassy. They spent two years in Adelaide before coming to Melbourne where Marion and her sister Beatrice (1862-1959) enrolled at the National Gallery School in 1884.\textsuperscript{239} Marion is reported to have studied art in Paris but judging from some early Australian scenes she painted in 1887 she is likely to have done so privately, perhaps with her father. Marion’s talent was never great. Her romantic watercolours are perhaps best compared with the work of her contemporary Emma Minnie Boyd. She painted the coastline of Beaumaris and Sandringham and some portraits and landscapes by her are still in the family collection. Benjamin Ferdinando also painted,\textsuperscript{240} but preferred photography. He was Treasurer of the Victorian Artist’s Society from 1898-1916 when he retired, perhaps coincidentally with the beginning of Meldrum’s presidency (October 1916). He was very active in his emergent suburb of Hampton, finally becoming the first Mayor of Sandringham and on his death was described as the ‘Father of Sandringham’.

Marion’s sister, Beatrice Hoile, met her future husband Alexander Colquhoun at the National Gallery School.\textsuperscript{241} Alexander Colquhoun was a respected painter and would write influentially for the Melbourne Age. The Ferdinandos and the

\textsuperscript{237} Intriguingly Marion Ferdinando is noted as having donated a painting to Besant Lodge in 1912, was it one of her own or one of the Indian artists she admired or even one of Fuller’s? This work appears to have been lost. John C Staples, ‘Besant Lodge’, \textit{Theosophy in Australasia}, 18, 2, 1912, 55 A small collection of Marion Ferdinando’s work remains in the family collection including juvenalia and later work. I reproduce here one of the more proficient works from this period see Colour Plate 12.

\textsuperscript{238} Interview with Quentin Porter 8 October 2003. The family’s early years in France explains Beatrice’s occasional use of the French form of her name- Beatrix.

\textsuperscript{239} Mackenzie, Frederick McCubbin 1855-1917, The Proff and his art. p. 328

\textsuperscript{240} “Art and artists” \textit{Tabletalk} 12 May 1893

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Colquhouns were an active and significant part of the small Melbourne community at the turn of the century, numbering among their particular friends the McCubbins and the larger social and artistic community of the Victorian Artist’s Society.

Ferdinanda joined the Theosophical Society in 1903, the same day as her sister Beatrice Colquhoun. In all probability it was the enthusiasm of Jane Price which provided the impetus. Beatrice’s husband Alexander joined two years later and their children each joined as they came of age.²⁴² It does not appear that Marion Ferdinando’s husband Benjamin became a member. Perhaps like Alfred Deakin he may have felt that his public career was better served by discretion. From 1903 Marion and Beatrice were active in both the Theosophical and the arts communities. With Price they were part of the social, artistic and intellectual glue which held the Theosophical Society and visual arts communities close until the late 1920s.

Ferdinanda’s first published article for the Theosophical press was in 1905, a translation of the great orientalist Pierre Loti’s description of his visit to Adyar and how he joined the Theosophical Society. Between 1905 and 1914 she would write no less than thirteen articles, one of the more prolific Melbourne contributors. Key examples will be discussed later in this chapter. Many of her articles are romantic hagiographies such as that of the Buddha and how he ‘rent the world of illusion’, Goethe as neo-platonist or Shri Ramakrishna who ‘taught that God may be seen’.³⁴³ A consistent theme in her work is the fundamental reality of the invisible.

Ferdinanda’s first and most explicit exposition of her aesthetic position is in her 1909 article Art in India for The Theosophist. At the time of writing Fuller had only just settled in at Adyar and Havell’s Indian sculpture and painting had been published for one year. In Art in India Ferdinando gives a brief summary of Ernest Havell’s history of Indian art including a reference to the contemporary work of

⁴²¹ Colquhoun, AD Colquhoun, Hazel de Berg interview, p. 1
⁴²² Quentin Colquhoun died in the war before his 20th birthday. I would like to again thank the Theosophical Society for allowing me access to their extensive archive of membership records and accounts.
⁴²³ Marion Ferdinando, ‘Pierre Loti in India’, Theosophy in Australasia, 11, 5, 1905, 292
Marion Ferdinando, ‘Shri Ramakrishna, An Indian Master’, Theosophy in Australasia, 17, 4, 1911, 97

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Abanindranath Tagore, Surendranath Ganguli and Nandalal Bose. Ferdinando’s use of the personal voice is reserved for a comparison of the training of the European and Indian artist.

Ferdinando read Havell’s *Indian sculpture and painting* as a signpost to an alternate relationship with the visible. She dramatised Havell’s argument to characterise European art schools as training the student in the imitation of the visible world while the Indian student sought a mystical encounter with inner truth. Ferdinando was clearly speaking from personal experience in her description of the European student’s “long, laborious, painful process of eye-training, to develop his imitative powers.” This is the training she had experienced at the National Gallery School. She argues that art’s vitality and strength depend on its creative powers and to paint or draw from models, lay-figures or still life is “fundamentally inconsistent with creative energies”. Later in 1917 Ferdinando’s niece, Elizabeth Colquhoun, would abandon her study of plaster fruits, hands and heads in terms which recall these words. According to Ferdinando the Indian student, and by implication she herself, found such a study a “very feeble and inartistic method of creation”. In 1909, at the peak of her influence in Melbourne, Marion Ferdinando felt that the process of study at the National Gallery School was painful, unproductive and antithetical to creativity. This was clearly an argument she had rehearsed many times with its representative, Frederick McCubbin, and part of a much larger concern. Ferdinando felt that Western art teaching was inadequate to her experience of reality. She argued that the Western artist would benefit “in more ways than one” if a little of the Indian education were introduced to the Western system.

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244 It is worth repeating that while Havell’s understanding of Indian art traditions was inflected by his Theosophical framework, his own account was more complex than this summary. Moreover while much important work has been by Indian scholars to challenge Havell’s interpretation of Indian art it is Ferdinando’s reception of Havell’s publication which was to inspire the debate in Melbourne.

245 Marion Ferdinando, ‘Art in India’, *The Theosophist*, March, 1909, p. 530

246 Mackenzie, *Frederick McCubbin 1855-1917, The Prof and his art*. p. 350

247 Ferdinando, ‘Art in India’, p. 530

248 ibid, p.530
For Ferdinando the European needed to learn from the Indian artist to "cultivate a habit of mind seeing or visualising." In her account the Indian student will sit down for an hour, a day, or a week, and create the picture in his own mind; and not until he sees it perfect in every detail will he commit it to paper or canvass. I should say this is the second state of consciousness, svapna, mentioned in the *Introduction to Yoga*. What models are required are used while the mind picture is being formed, never while the work itself is being done. Memory work takes a much more important place than mere copying from nature, and a habit of intense mental concentration is developed from the earliest stage of his artistic career. It would be well if in the West a little of this method were introduced.

The proposed practice of visualisation relates to Havell's reading of Indian art as essentially mystical—a reading which as I have already indicated is today recognised as flawed. However Ferdinando and the Theosophical readership read in the text a Theosophical conception of inner unity; what Ferdinando elsewhere describes as a "humanity that realises its oneness, its unity in the divine life." Havell proposed that Indian artists saw form as a barrier to reality. Where European artists had looked for God immanent in form, heaven in a blade of grass, Havell proposed that for the Indian artist form was a misleading distortion which needed to be overcome. Thelma Slingo, a fellow Melbourne Theosophist and future member of the Theosophical Society Melbourne Art Group, opined that:

> Form veils Reality. In Western thought, it is rather form which reveals Reality: the glorious shapes of art are images of beauty to reveal

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249 ibid., p. 530
250 ibid., p. 530
archetypal truths, to reveal the divinity immanent in every form. But to the Indian mind, form is a veil not a revelation.\textsuperscript{252}

For the first time a major reconsideration of the relationship of spirit and matter entered Melbourne's artistic circles. Besant and Leadbeater promised that with self discipline and a proper development of the faculty of inner sight the artist could penetrate beyond the veil of the physical dimension. Surely the new ambition of every artist would be to represent the inner truth as they had until now jockeyed to represent the divinity immanent in the gumleaf.

As we have seen Ferdinando was by no means unique in looking to Indian art. Another interesting point of comparison is the English theorist Roger Fry's review of Havell's \textit{Indian Sculpture and painting} the following year. Fry's modernism was already in the process of formulation and Havell's work was yet another buttress to his theoretical structure. Like Ferdinando, Fry also caricatures Western art as 'merely curious representation,' and Eastern, especially Indian, art as concerned with essential principles. While Fry makes it clear that he is not comfortable with what he describes as the rococco excesses of the Indian aesthetic he nevertheless looks to Indian art, as to the art of China and Japan, for a renaissance of fundamental values in Western art.

What will be the effect upon Western art of the amazing revelations of these last twenty years? One can scarcely doubt that it will be

\textsuperscript{252} Thelma Slingo, 'Ideals of Indian art', \textit{Advance! Australia}, 1 August, 1928, 28-30 p. 30

Fig. 10
Annie Besant c 1922
Alexander Colquhoun's scrapbook

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\textsuperscript{252} Thelma Slingo, 'Ideals of Indian art', \textit{Advance! Australia}, 1 August, 1928, 28-30 p. 30

almost wholly good ... And then, perhaps, our artists will develop a new conscience, will throw over all the cumbrous machinery of merely curious representation, and will seek to portray only the essential elements of things. In thus purifying pictorial art, in freeing it from all that has not immediately expressive power, Western artists will be merely returning to their own long forgotten tradition. The greatest practical value of Eastern art for us lies in the fact that those essential principles which, in our thirst for verisimilitude, we have overlaid, have been upheld with far greater constancy by the artists of the East. 253

For Fry the 'essential principles' were a commitment to a level of truth which mere verisimilitude to external appearance could not satisfy. This inner truth or mystical illumination was an essential part of Fry's aesthetic experience. 254 Linda Dalrymple Henderson argues that Fry's early aesthetic was built on an alternative spirituality learnt at the feet of Edward Carpenter (and according to Virginia Woolf a certain psychical researcher known as Mrs Piper). 255 Dalrymple Henderson quotes Fry's Essay in aesthetics of 1909 "Art, then is, if I am right, the chief organ of the imaginative life (which) is distinguished by the greater clearness of its perception, and the greater purity and freedom of its emotion." 256 The 'imaginative life' is renamed the 'spiritual life' in the 1912 essay Art and Socialism. 257 Even as late as 1924 Fry could write "I therefore assume that the contemplation of form is a peculiarly important spiritual exercise. ...My analyses of form-lines, sequences, rhythms, &c. are merely aids for the uninitiated to attain the contemplation of form—they do not explain." 258 Fry's early and influential formulation of modernism held at its heart a mystical dimension, an aesthetic of transcendence. Like Ferdinando he found Spiritualism, theosophy and the writings of Ernest Havell an important influence on his aesthetic position. Ferdinando's connections with the

253 Fry, 'Oriental art', 226, 39 p. 239  
254 Henderson, 'Mysticism as the 'Tie that binds': The case of Edward Carpenter and Modernism', 29-37 p. 30  
256 Henderson, 'Mysticism as the 'Tie that binds': The case of Edward Carpenter and Modernism', 29-37 p. 30  
257 ibid, p. 30
Theosophical Society, Fuller and Havell led her to promote visualisation strategies and an aesthetic of transcendence to Melbourne artists unmediated by any later influence from Fry in England. The implications of this have not yet been fully explored.

Both Fry and Ferdinando experienced modernity as a lack which was satisfied by unorthodox spirituality. For both, the visible world seemed inadequate and they sought reality in ‘the beyond’. Fry’s later modernism of the 1920’s with its emphasis on formal values is clearly recognisable in this nascent mystical aesthetic of transcendence. Ferdinando’s dissatisfaction with modernity led her likewise to the Theosophical Society and to an aesthetic which transcended the visible. What is significant is that Havell’s *Indian Sculpture and painting* connected independently with a need experienced in both London and Melbourne to review the ‘cumbrous machinery of merely curious representation’ and seek instead a visuality based on intuition and the imaginative/spiritual life. Marion Ferdinando and her colleagues at the Melbourne Theosophical Society grasped this concept early and at source. They connected with Havell and the early Indian modernists as part of a network of colonial artists united through the decentralised Theosophical Society. Their aesthetic of transcendence, although related to Fry’s modernism, was inflected through the specific circumstances of Theosophical Melbourne. While they shared some concerns in common with Fry’s early modernism, Theosophists like Fuller or Ferdinando would not countenance a construction of truth as plural or the possibility of the artist’s personality as valuable in itself. In Theosophical circles the personality was ephemeral, a husk to be put aside at each incarnation as part of the passage to unification. Such ideas were not open for discussion in Theosophical circles any more than in Meldrum’s school. This curious blend of radical modernism and apparent conservatism would form the crucial substructure to the experience of modernity in the Melbourne art community.

258 Italics preserved from the original Woolf, *Roger Fry: A biography*. p. 230
259 See earlier discussion this chapter.
Both Fry and Ferdinando saw the Indian challenge as a call to seek out new forms of expression for an altered framework of reality. Ferdinando’s nephew, Archibald Colquhoun, thought to locate the formal means adequate to this new reality under the Melbourne Symbolist CD Richardson and had a brief apprenticeship to this artist after he finished at the National Gallery School in about 1913 (as he was preparing to formally join the Theosophical Society). He recalled learning little there.\textsuperscript{260} The work of CD Richardson, like the Belgian Theosophist Jean Delville, would probably have been classified by Ferdinando and her colleagues as cloaking archetypal truths in human form rather than truly penetrating the veil. Symbolism, while a signpost beyond traditional teaching, was not in itself the way forward. The curious intersection of Symbolism and the avant-garde will be explored in more detail in the following chapter in the context of the work of Ethel Carrick.\textsuperscript{261} Rather Ferdinando insisted that the artist acknowledge the implications of the concept that imitation of the visible world will at best render only a copy of the surface of reality. For Ferdinando, the only way to see beyond the visible was occult practice and a habit of intense mental concentration. Her personal occult practice is the subject of her last article in \textit{Theosophy in Australasia}; a meditation on the coming Messiah and the lessons of the \textit{Lives of Alcyone}.\textsuperscript{262} Florence Fuller had indicated one way to respond to the spiritual lessons was through painting. The young Archibald Colquhoun was ultimately to find what he sought in the school encouraged by his Aunt Ferdinando. Unlikely as it might seem, Max Meldrum was to show how such a feat could be realised in Melbourne.

The implications of a problematised visible were a big issue for Theosophists during the war years and into the early twenties. In 1923 the Melbourne Theosophical Society Art Group\textsuperscript{263} was formalised with Marion’s sister Beatrice as

\textsuperscript{260} Colquhoun, AD Colquhoun, Hazel de Berg interview, p. 4
\textsuperscript{261} Carrick was sufficiently familiar with the Colquhoun family to give their studio as her address in 1916.
\textsuperscript{262} Marion Ferdinando, ‘Our own’, \textit{Theosophy in Australasia}, 19, 2, 1914, 107
\textsuperscript{263} The aims and objects of the group were to:
\begin{enumerate}
\item Form a nucleus of steadily thinking students, who, by their thoughts will help to promote the love of art and beauty in our city of Melbourne.
\item To be a training ground for its members, widening their ideas, and making them more definite and efficient.
\end{enumerate}
In the Melbourne Lodge was supported and encouraged by the writings of James Cousins and then touring lecturer Curuppumullege Jinarajadasa. The Art Group was anxious to widen and develop its ideas of the role of the artist in a world which the Theosophical leadership had demonstrated was only partly visible, and so sought to integrate their professional artistic lives with the spirituality offered by the Theosophical Lodge. The work of Leonardo de Vinci as neoplatonist was explored. Experiments in the making of cabbalistic and alchemical images with potent psychic energy were undertaken, *Butterfly Soul*, 1926 (colour plate 13) is one example. Beatrice Colquhoun presided over a number of papers given by the Art Group from 1923-25 including Thelma Slingo's paper on *Indian art and Colour, sound and form* (1923) and she herself presented *How to look at a picture* (1923). Miss Colquhoun presented *New modes in Art* in 1924.

Max Meldrum

The consonance between Max Meldrum (1875-1955) and the Theosophical Society was two way. When Annie Besant and Krishnamurti visited Melbourne in 1922 they frequented the Meldrum School (9 Collins Street) which was located not far from Besant Lodge (103-5 Collins Street). Clearly both Meldrum and his students were open and welcoming to Besant and what she represented. It was probably at this point that the young Elizabeth Colquhoun 'offered herself' (unsuccessfully) to Annie Besant who advised her instead to dedicate herself to her painting. When the Theosophical Art Group formed the following year their first meeting was dedicated to reading Max Meldrum's *Art and Views* at Edward Officer's house on 7 March 1923. They identified in Meldrum's work a dimension which has eluded contemporary historians– a conception of sight which surpassed

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3. To help our Lodge individually and the TS more generally by spreading the knowledge and love of art and beauty among those members whose dharma lies on other lines, but who, though too busy to study ours, may absorb something of it from us. We hope, also, that some of our papers, amplified, will be of sufficient interest to be repeated at the Lodge meetings, or printed in T in A. When established, we hope to communicate or link up with other Art Groups, either in Australia or in other parts of the world.

As a group we aspire to become worthy to form a channel for the work of the Lord of the Cultural System, to be used in whatever way He thinks best. Josephine Ransom, 'Lodge reports: Melbourne Lodge', *Theosophy in Australia*, 28, 10, 1923, 640-41

264 Valda Moore, Letter to the author from Valda Moore, 2004, Melbourne,
the optical. Besant Lodge’s support for Meldrum’s theory was profound and substantially leavens our contemporary estimation of the artist and teacher.

Beatrice Colquhoun has long been acknowledged as the inspiration behind Meldrum’s famous school. She maintained a long and fervent support for both Meldrum and the Theosophical Society. Beatrice’s daughter, Elizabeth, recalled that:

Meldrum was a great friend of my mother’s, and would talk to my mother much more than to my father. My mother urged him with his teaching. She told him, I can remember, ‘You must give this teaching out to the young students’. It was terribly important to her that her children learnt from Meldrum, she wanted them to get this teaching. I remember he stayed one night till one o’clock talking to my mother. They decided that this school must be produced and that they must produce students – this was what they called Meldrumism. She was very firm on it.

My mother thought a great deal of Meldrum...

What aspect of Meldrum’s scientific obsession with the visible engaged the interest of the Art Group and attracted and held Ferdinando’s sister, niece and nephew, all ‘confirmed’ Theosophists? The apparent inconsistency of the highly spiritual Beatrice Colquhoun supporting the agnostic scientist Max Meldrum is worth untangling. The answer to this question lies in an acknowledgment of Ferdinando’s Theosophical vision as the missing ‘other’ of Meldrumism.

Meldrum’s school began slowly with the first students working in his private studio in 1916. Archibald and Elizabeth Colquhoun joined the following year at the new studio at Hardware Chambers, Elizabeth Street, the same year as Clarice Beckett,

265 Quoted in Mackenzie, Frederick McCubbin 1855-1917, The Proff and his art. p. 349
Colin Colahan and John Farmer. For Ian Burn “From the period of the First World War to the mid twenties, Meldrum’s ideas and practice represented the advanced and challenging modernist position, as is evidenced by his extraordinary influence on the immediate postwar generation of artists.” Meldrum’s radical theory of visuality held within it the tools to transform assumptions about the visible for the next generation. While most discussions of Meldrum have concentrated on his emphasis on such stylistic features as tone and his methodology— the order of optical impressions— I would like to draw out an element of his theory identified previously by Mary Eagle which was central to his appeal for the artists of the Theosophical Society— namely his problematisation of vision itself.

Key to Meldrum’s teaching program was that students should be taught how to see. For Meldrum as for Ferdinando the emphasis on the visible surface of life taught at the National Gallery School was less than satisfactory. Meldrum had no faith in the facility achieved through the use of casts. Unlike Ferdinando however, Meldrum firmly grounded his theory in the traditions of science. His approach is made clear in the titles of his two major written works: The invariable truths of depictive art (1917) and later The Science of Appearances (1950). Nevertheless there are interesting points of overlap between the proselytising scientist of optical facts and the Theosophist. They shared a spiritualised language which in Meldrum’s case was that of his repressed Calvinism. They shared a commitment to the concept of one, invariable truth. Most importantly however both Ferdinando and Meldrum conceived of the artist engaging more than physical sight when deploying their artistic vision.

Despite his agnosticism Meldrum conceived the world in spiritual terms. Colahan describes Meldrum’s mother as the mother of all Covenanters, who wanted to see scientific instruments set up in the cathedrals. In Colahan’s opinion they had

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266 Burn, National life and landscapes: Australian painting 1900-1940. p. 172
267 Eagle, Australian modern painting between the wars 1914-1939. p. 27
268 ibid pp. 23-29
269 ibid p. 27
"inverted their Calvinism into an equally fierce agnosticism." It is worth recalling that Meldrum’s intellectual trajectory had been traversed by many Theosophists, most famously by Annie Besant herself. Unlike Meldrum, however, Besant’s successful completion of a Science degree at the University of London left her soured by the nineteenth century arrogance of that discipline. Meldrum’s art and views are an intriguing mixture of agnostic science and passionate idealism couched in the language of his repudiated Calvinism. This was a heady mixture for Melbourne artists. Archibald Colquhoun recalls his first meeting with Meldrum:

On this very first occasion he expounded his creed as I was to know it later. He sat and talked and I said nothing but listened with something like amazement here was a man who reasoned about art and did not just take other men’s opinions on faith or follow rules. Art became something with sense and direction to it which your mind followed, you saw and understood and so believed. There were several discussions with my parents in our sitting room at Elsternwick.

Archibald Colquhoun recalls a creed that was open to reason, something that could be believed because it was seen and understood. This intriguing mélange of spirituality and rationality was meat and drink to Theosophists. Yet if art was open to reason it was also true for Meldrum that “Art is a religion. The universe is its cathedral, and its creed is the humble and sublime one of all true artists and natural scientists whose only faith is based upon demonstrable, visible or audible facts.” The language deployed by Meldrum is one of universal and cosmic truth, purity and the authentic. Perversely the means to achieve this pure cosmic truth was through the ‘simple scientific statement’ of a few optical facts in their order of

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optical importance. Cosmic truth was godless and was to be achieved through scientific means.

Like the truth of the Theosophists, Meldrum's truth was singular, not multiple, and for this reason he saw deviation from a prescribed (scientific) methodology as a fault rather than a strength. Although he recognised vision as a function of bodily and mental processes and therefore subject to distortion Meldrum felt that such subjectivity needed to be overcome rather than flaunted. He did not respond with other post-impressionists to the possibilities of privileged subjectivity. In his view the differences between two artists' representations of the same view were explained by saying that no two artists are on the same plane of knowledge and ability: "No scientific mind could possibly accept the various results which artists obtain as being proofs that we see differently." With no sense of irony Meldrum saw himself as gifted, like Calvin himself, with a unique vision of the truth which it remained possible for the best artists to capture.

In his promise to teach the student to see he promised an unmediated access to truth. It might almost be said that Meldrum "protestantised" art in the same way that Col. Olcott 'protestantised' Buddhism in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). It was no longer necessary to go through the intermediary of laboriously learnt academic techniques. Meldrum promised, like Leadbeater, that the student only needed to learn to 'see'. Where Leadbeater promised that occult discipline would encourage a spiritual vision, Meldrum promised that proper scientific methodology would develop the knowledge and ability which would enable all artists to see the same cosmic truth. Artistic techniques would follow. Perversely, in the case of both Leadbeater and Meldrum, this direct access to one truth was mediated by the autocratic control of a single arbitrator. Meldrum's theory of art can be seen as a quest for one truth in which the individual need only learn to see for the truth to be

274 ibid, ed. p. 93
275 ibid, ed. p. 21
276 ibid, ed. p. 36
made available for representation. It is easy to see a parallel here with Ferdinando’s project; however the most fundamental point of connection was in Meldrum’s conception of vision.

Meldrum’s truth is the ‘truth unadorned’ of his Calvinist background in which the physical lures of this world are an impediment. Little wonder he repudiated what he patronisingly described as the ‘earnest but unscientific group of painters popularly known as the ‘Impressionists’. The wanton colour and abandonment to sensuous visual experience must have offended his sensibilities. Meldrum reserved for the Impressionists the most damning of epithets, they were ‘unscientific’. He saw little value in the Impressionist’s claim to represent only what they saw. For Meldrum the painter needed to see with the scientific mind and creative imagination as well as the eye. This balance between the purely visible and a deeper invisible reality is further explored in the work of Ethel Carrick and her husband Emmanuel Phillips Fox in the next chapter. Physical sight on its own was insufficient; to perceive truth the other faculties needed to be engaged as well.

For Meldrum the challenge was not at the level of painterly technique but at the level of vision, what Ferdinando described as ‘eye-training.’ It seems clear that Beatrice Colquhoun felt Meldrum would train the eye to see and apprehend the truth in a way which was not taught at the National Gallery School. Meldrum’s vision was not the casual sight of the dilettante. He conceived of a professional vision which was not engaged until the artist actually set to work in front of a specific scene. Only at this point was creative imagination engaged and scientific methodology deployed. With the professional sight firmly engaged Meldrum speaks of a mental image being constructed from the abstraction in his own mind and the scene in front of him. He takes pains to point out that elevation to the level of a seer is only possible by a developed mind. Meldrum writes “You ask me if imagination takes any part in a true work of art.” He then proceeds to compare the imagination required to paint from what the artist sees “in front of you– not behind

276 Colahan, ed. *Max Meldrum: His art and views.* p. 52
you" by which he means the painting from life and not as the symbolist artists, a faun.

... in the execution of his (sic) work he is obliged in conforming to his fixed theme to exercise imagination of the highest order. He has to start from a theory as yet an abstraction in his own mind and say to himself, 'If I transform this idea into the language of vision what will I see and how will it conform to the subject which I am attempting to interpret?' Note here that he is trying to see something which is before him, something which he has never seen in any previous life experience and which he has only thought about. In common language this visualisation of a percept has been called a mental image and it is surely quite clear that this particular mental process can more aptly be called an act of imagination than can the mere manipulation of known things. This latter is a childish act depending on known paraphernalia which a child uses. On the contrary it takes a developed mind to be a seer.²⁷⁹

Physical sight on its own was insufficient, Meldrum’s disdain for the Impressionist project makes this clear. Rather Meldrum urged that the additional faculties which enabled imaginative and abstracting responses be likewise focussed on the task of seeing. Beatrice Colquhoun and her sister Marion would almost certainly have understood Meldrum’s directive as engaging the astral (intuitive) and mental faculties. Perhaps they would also have hoped to engage the buddhic or spiritual faculties as well. Certainly they found in Meldrum’s theories the licence to paint with all faculties fully engaged, to see with more than their physical eye. Meldrum appealed to Tolstoi to explain more clearly:

Tolstoi has described the artist as being one who, receiving an impression from nature, recreates for us, by the aid of his medium,
the same impression. If this be true it is not for us to cavil at what
these impressions may be– the art lies in having recreated them, and
so the side of beef painted by Rembrandt is great art for it gives us
back forcibly the impressions which we should have received had we
stood in front of Rembrandt’s model.²⁸⁰

Here again Meldrum makes clear that optical facts are only part of the story. The
grisly tension of death and life, experienced by the intellect, emotions and the spirit
is clearly indicated in both Meldrum’s text and in Rembrandt’s painting. Certainly as
a student of Meldrum there was no question of either a simple representation of the
visible or the ‘childish act’ of the symbolist. The ‘higher use’ to which Meldrum
intended to focus his vision was a scientific truth which in the language of the
Theosophists was also cosmic. The attraction of Meldrum’s teaching for
Theosophists lay in his way of looking at things as a whole, especially the
relationship of the individual painter to the whole. Thus Polly and John Farmer
could marry their commitment to Meldrum with their Zen Buddhism, and represent
the universal through the particular.²⁸¹

This brief reading of Meldrum’s teaching is tightly focussed, drawing out a key
element in a theory which is surely more complex than has been perceived to date.
The mutual admiration between Meldrum, Marion Ferdinando and Beatrice
Colquhoun and her family is undeniable and their long term support for Meldrum
was predicated on a consonance between their Theosophical and artistic
ambitions. Ferdinando’s support for Meldrum’s theory draws out an aspect of his
conception of the visible which exceeds the optical. United in their rejection of
unmediated optical vision, Meldrum and Ferdinando conceived of a
professionalised sight which accessed greater truth. While key differences existed
in their conception of truth, these differences were less important than what united
them. Meldrum’s creative imagination and intellectual faculties can be seen in

²⁸⁰ Colahan, ed. Max Meldrum: His art and views. p. 71
Shadows, Landscape with trees c1925 (colour plate 14) In this work the landscape is creatively and imaginatively reconceived as a painterly idea. Detail is eradicated to present the impression as Meldrum understood Tolstoi to describe it. The artist has exercised his scientific vision of optical impressions to produce a work which is indeed Meldrum’s own truth unadorned. The tree trunks stand planted in the ground like horses hooves, dark fetlocks of shadowed bark feathering away from the creamy trunks. An impression of weight and substance, of solidity and permanence is established but also the capacity for dance. Light flickers up the silver trunks. A shimmer is set up within the painting as the tonal relationships defy the flattened planes of muted colour to articulate the painting. Here and there moments of pure white pull the work into focus as light strikes the gums, locating the experience of seeing the small glade of trees into the present. The same harsh light strikes the trees as illumines the here and now. The forms are pared back to simplified notations according to a highly intellectualised system.

Meldrum’s ‘eye training’ empowered a generation to engage their own intellectual and imaginative faculties in the articulation of their vision. The most outstanding of Meldrum’s students was Clarice Beckett. Beckett’s work has a specificity which is profoundly linked to the experience of the Theosophical Society in Melbourne and its influence on proselytisers of the new visionary, Ferdinando and Meldrum.

Clarice Beckett

After her sister’s death Hilda Mangan recalled that Clarice Beckett believed she was on to something in her painting that no one – certainly not Meldrum – had ever recognised.282 Beckett’s (1887-1935) painterly vision was an engagement with a problematised visuality. In the context of this freshly articulated dialogue between Ferdinando and Meldrum, Beckett’s work should also be reconceived. In Beckett’s work the promise implicit in Florence Fuller’s Portrait of the Lord Buddha is realised. A close study of Beckett’s paintings in the context of her

281 Valda Moore, linked by friendship and common painterly and Theosophical interests to Elizabeth and Archibald Colquhoun recalled Meldrum’s ongoing fascination for her friends. Moore, Letter to the author from Valda Moore,
broader interests develops a picture of an artist drawing inspiration from a variety of sources including the very complex literary and spiritual environment of the Theosophical Society and selectively responding to elements of Meldrum’s teaching. Beckett came to Meldrum’s school through the Theosophical Society and like Beatrice Colquhoun found the two compatible. The example of visualisation promoted by Marion Ferdinando is transformed by Beckett into a consistent practice along with Meldrum’s tonalism and his admonition to become a developed seer.

Clarice Beckett’s early experience of the world was exactly what was appropriate and normal for a well brought up Edwardian woman. As a child and young woman she moved with her family around Melbourne and surrounds, enrolling with her sister Hilda at the National Gallery School in 1914, commuting between Melbourne and Bendigo. Hollinrake says that Beckett’s interest in the Theosophical Society began in Bendigo. Bendigo had a Theosophical Society and a large and active Progressive Spiritualist and Freethought organisation with regular visits from high profile mediums. Later at the National Gallery School Beckett would have heard McCubbin talk about the Theosophical Society during class and it was during this time that Beckett went to several Theosophical Society meetings with Beatrice Colquhoun in about 1914. The meetings Beckett attended would have been at Besant Lodge in 5th Floor of the Centreway Collins Street, the lodge in which Jane Price was so influential. It was here that the Colquhouns, Price, Ferdinando, Ina and Ada Gregory, Edward Officer, Bernard O'Dowd, Fritz Hart and Professor Ernest Scott gathered. Christian Waller and the young Klytie Pate were occasional visitors. Although Clarice Beckett never formally joined the Theosophical Society her early interest in

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282 Eagle, *Australian modern painting between the wars 1914-1939*. p. 97
283 I am very grateful to Rosalind Hollinrake’s thorough research for the details of Clarice Beckett’s life.
285 Gabay, *Messages from beyond: Spiritualism and spiritualists in Melbourne’s Golden Age 1870-1890*. p.76-77
286 Hollinrake, *Politically Incorrect: Clarice Beckett*. p. 11, 12 and further discussions with Rosalind Hollinrake regarding dating.
Theosophical spirituality was sustained and would impact significantly on her work.\textsuperscript{288} The other great influence in Beckett's life was Max Meldrum, and she began studying under this charismatic conundrum in 1917, the same year as Archibald and Elizabeth Colquhoun, probably also inspired by Beatrice.

The year 1917 also saw Beckett's father retire due to ill health and the family remove to the new seaside suburb of Beaumaris in reduced circumstances. Beckett's family life was very close. Her father did not receive many of her friends at home and seems to have regarded Beckett's colleagues and career with suspicion. The Colquhouns were to be longstanding friends to Beckett. It is likely that the Colquhoun relationship with Councillor Benjamin Ferdinanda may have softened his attitude to this connection. Alexander Colquhoun was to be one of Clarice Beckett's few staunch reviewers and it seems one of the few friends that her rather tyrannical father seems to have let in the house. Beatrice's daughter Elizabeth\textsuperscript{289} would also go out of her way to introduce Beckett to a teaching position in 1927.\textsuperscript{290} Beckett's mother died in 1934, increasing her responsibilities, and Beckett died before her father in 1935. It is easy to see Beckett as a victim of circumstance; yet as a child and young woman she led a privileged life. Beckett's story departs from the norm only in her attempt to combine familial and social expectations with an active career as a painter, an object achieved during her life time and now consolidated.

The nominal subject of Quiet spot: The empty seat 1928 (colour plate 15) is the seascape as focus for contemplation. This was Beckett's tramping ground, the coastline where she walked and painted and where Councillor Ferdinanda would have a park named after him by the "Friends of the Hampton Foreshore." Quiet spot: The empty seat is rendered in the tonalism which evidences Beckett's formal debt to Meldrum. Another debt, less fully explored, is Meldrum's

\textsuperscript{287} Interview with Klytie Pate Klytie Pate, Interview with the author, 2003, Melbourne.
\textsuperscript{288} See also the impact of the Theosophical Society on Christian Waller, not a member of the Theosophical Society but of the Library. Jenny McFarlane, 'Clarice Beckett's open road', \textit{Art and Australia}, 37, 2, 1999, 196-8
\textsuperscript{289} Elizabeth joined the Theosophical Society in 1918 although her unofficial membership predates this.
\textsuperscript{290} Rosalind Hollinrake, \textit{Clarice Beckett; the artist and her circle}. McMillan, Melbourne, 1979. p. 23
recommendation to receive an impression from nature and recreate the same impression. This painting is a very explicit palimpsest for many of Beckett’s paintings. *Quiet spot: The empty seat* refers to a space beyond the painting and a state of mind beyond the visible. As Meldrum and Tolstoi suggest, Beckett has recreated the impression of the scene, deploying not just the organ of sight but ordering these optical impressions with her other faculties. As part of the ordering process the composition is structured around a centrally positioned vertical and horizontal. Sir William Dargie drew attention to Beckett’s compositions, remarking that their apparent clumsiness was in fact carefully planned.\(^{291}\) The cruciform composition is unusual, even more so as while everything points to the centre there is nothing placed to take advantage of the carefully staged point of focus. The structure bears comparison with Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, directing attention back towards some contemplative inner space. Another comparison might be with Meldrum’s icon, Velázquez’s *Las Meninas*, 1656 where the composition directs attention to a mirror which reveals ultimately both the artist and the viewer. Unless the central point is accepted as a void the eye slides across Beckett’s canvas without resolution or rest. This has the effect of diffusing the surface so that it appears to float and the planes disengage from their nominal representational anchor.

The delicate nuances of *Quiet spot: The empty seat* capture Beckett’s favoured transitory light effects, effects that could last little more than twenty minutes. In his history of the period Ian Burn felt that in the majority of Beckett’s later works “precise tonal relations are worked out on the canvas and only partly in relation to the subject.”\(^{292}\) Inevitably she was required to exercise her imagination and memory in these paintings. Beckett’s routine preference for ‘memory work’ distances her from Meldrum’s strict teachings and recalls Ferdinando’s advice to learn from the Indian modernists.


\(^{292}\) Burn, *National life and landscapes: Australian painting 1900-1940*. p. 172
Beckett’s reading list forms the link which connects her love of the local with her determination to make it transparent to the transcendental. By all accounts Beckett conforms with the profile of typical Theosophical membership, being a well educated, well read woman.\textsuperscript{293} In a letter to Rosalind Hollinrake, Hilda Mangan wrote:

As I have said before, she loved books, and prowling around second-hand bookshops—where she found many bargains—and strangely enough she liked murder mysteries—also macabre stories such as Algernon Blackwood wrote, and Arthur Machen—she had all the latter’s works and the poetry of Swinburne, Browning etc etc Yeats and Walt Whitman.\textsuperscript{294}

A cursory glance at the names Hilda Mangan mentions reveals a persistent interest in the mystical and the Theosophical. WB Yeats was of course a Theosophist. Browning is famed as the king of the mystics, Swinburne was a friend of the Pre-Raphaelites. Blackwood and Machen are less well known today but they are significant in the genre of turn of the century supernatural writing. James Cousins described Algernon Blackwood as a writer of Theosophical truths under the guise of fiction. Blackwood’s stories often featured a detective with extrasensory perception. Machen’s story, The Bowmen, was the origin of the account of the protective angels at Mons which swept England during World War One to the point where fact and fiction were indistinguishable. Walt Whitman’s alternative and personal spirituality and his admonition to beware of churches made this contemporary of Judge, Olcott and Blavatsky a favourite author among Theosophists.

The total of this reading list is more than the sum of its parts. A common atmosphere pervades the work of these authors and creeps into Beckett’s own

\textsuperscript{293} Gino Nibbi apparently regarded her as the best read woman in Melbourne. Hollinrake, Politically Incorrect: Clarice Beckett. p. 12
paintings. In Machen’s stories the uncanny is always located in the familiar made strange by mist or fog. Reality is blurred and fantasies materialise. For the hero in Machen’s *The hill of dreams* reality

... seemed mythical, of the same substance as his own fantastic thoughts ... He could not look out and see a common suburban street foggy and dull, nor, think of the inhabitants as at work or sitting cheerfully eating nuts about their fires; he saw a vision of a grey road vanishing, of dim houses all empty and deserted, and the silence seemed eternal.²⁹⁵

Such a conception is *Winter, Dalgety Road*, c 1925. (colour plate 16) A rain slicked street follows the tail lights of a disappearing car and fog closes in around the commonplace incident, somehow imbuing it with a significance and poetry disproportionate to the subject. This emphasis on the common suburban street, the love of the local was also key to another of Beckett’s authors; Walt Whitman. His work carries as leitmotif the choice of focusing on the local and the familiar in order to better understand a greater (spiritual) dimension.

You gray stones of interminable pavements! you trodden crossings!
From all that has been near you, I believe you have imparted to yourselves, and now would impart the same secretly to me;
From the living and the dead I think you have peopled your impassive surfaces, and the spirits thereof would be evident and amicable with me.²⁹⁶

There is a sense in which the suburban surfaces of *Winter, Dalgety Road* might have indeed a secret to communicate about the lives that criss-cross its impassive surface. The point was made almost at the point of caricature when in a review of Beckett’s work Alexander Colquhoun wrote of “a somewhat

spiritualised telegraph post." The vertical shadows of the telegraph poles pattern the wet roads of Beckett’s paintings measuring out an otherworldly stillness, fragmentary evidence of a profound unity between the road, the mist, the living and the dead.

Beckett’s painterly project bears interesting comparison with that of her friend and Meldrum circle colleague, the playwright Louis Esson. In November 1920, as Beckett was developing her mature style and settling into Beaumaris, Esson was in Ireland talking to WB Yeats about literature, art and Annie Besant. It will be recalled that Yeats had co-founded the Irish Theosophical Society with AE (George Russell) and James Cousins, and with those poets had deployed many of Besant and Blavatsky’s ideas in support of the Irish Literary Renaissance. The Melbourne composer and theosophist Fritz Hart would hold similar conversations in 1929 with AE. Louis Esson and Vance Palmer (Palmer, Hart and Esson were part of the extended Meldrum circle) discussed the work of both Yeats and Beckett in their letters. Yeats’ ideas of drawing the full meaning and significance from the intimate, familiar scene holds curious resonance for Beckett’s work and it would seem inevitable that Esson should discuss this aspect of his conversation with her. Esson would later be publicly championed by Annie Besant for his work in Australian theatre and this too was celebrated in Esson and Palmer’s letters.

The importance of representing the local and the building of a spiritual nation through art was an important theme in the rhetoric of the Irish Literary Renaissance and Besant. When Beckett denied any interest in painting elsewhere as she had not yet mastered her local environment she should be

297 Alexander Colquhoun, ‘Suburban Landscapes by Miss C Beckett’, *The Age*, 26 November, 1928, 9
298 There is an interesting connection between Machen and Yeats as they were both members of The order of the golden dawn. Aidan Reynolds and William Charlton, *Arthur Machen: A short account of his life and work*. John Baker, Richards Press, London, 1963. p. 78
understood as part of this extended, highly literate community which was actively exploring spiritual and nation building ideas premised on the local. Yeats had convinced both Palmer and Esson that the natural place for a writer to look for material was in the world they knew. Hart reported that his conversation with AE centred on the artist's responsibility towards the development of a national visual culture built on spiritual truth. Theosophical idea of a spiritualised nation expressed through art, first promoted in Melbourne by Olcott to Jane Price, achieved fresh currency through Esson, Hart and Beckett.

Beckett's local was not overlaid with nationalism as in the work of the Heidelberg artists but rejoiced in its specificity. Her Beaumaris paintings were praised for their vision of the seaside town and criticised for their depressing atmospherics. Would Benjamin Ferdinando, the 'Father of Sandringham,' have seen Beckett's work only as fog-bound views of his suburb or would he have seen them as the realisation of Marion Ferdinando's 'mind seeing'? Beckett's own reading and friendship with her colleagues must have led her to see her work as drawing from the 'intimate, familiar scene its full meaning and significance' and so, as Esson quoted Yeats, 'help build a nation in the spiritual sense'.

Like the authors she admired, Beckett valued the familiar only in that it could be made to reveal a spiritual reality immanent but not visible to the optical eye. While she followed Meldrum's tonal theories, she overlayed his rationalist aesthetic with her own preference for mists and fogs. The antiseptic glare of electric light seems not to be an effect she found sympathetic. Whether through mist and fog as in Machen or through Whitman's loving familiar description, Beckett uses the resources at her disposal to make the familiar strange. She sought out effects which blurred borders, suggesting an unseen dimension to the

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302 ibid p. 73 and Roe, Beyond belief; Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939. p.365 fn 58
303 Hollinrake, Politically Incorrect: Clarice Beckett. p. 24
304 Christian Waller had produced the costumes for composer, Fritz Hart's production The woman who laughed at Faery, an opera performed in September 1929 by the Melba Conservatorium Opera Society. (Napier Waller did the sets) The production was inspired by Irish folk music and AE's faery tale. Hart had used many of AE's writings as the libretto for his compositions and they had discussed their aesthetics by letter and person since 1918.(Fritz Hart papers NLA MS 2809)
familiar. Yeats and Besant would have described this movement as a recognition of the sublime unity of all things. Alexander Colquhoun, Meldrumite and Theosophist, reviewed her 1927 Athenaeum exhibition in the Age. 'Looking out of her temperamental eye, Miss Beckett does not see firm slick lines and crisp telling accents of light and shade, but rather a comprehensive whole..." 306 This public reference to an esoteric conception of a non-visible, greater, Theosophical reality in the context of Beckett's work is telling. Colquhoun acknowledges here the importance of the spiritual as well as the emotional/temperamental faculties in ordering sight. This was developed by George Bell in 1932 when he wrote that Beckett's paintings seem open to readings as a dream world; "The pictures ... seem to suggest a dream world rather than an actuality ..." 307 Beckett's work can be read as a profitable tension between detachment from and investment in the local.

Beckett's work must be positioned in relation to her famously autocratic teacher, but even at the time she was seen as somewhat outside the Meldrum sphere of influence. 308 In Meldrum she found the licence to communicate the impression she experienced. In Ferdinando and the Colquhouns she found validation of impressions received through the 'third eye'. Beckett was attracted to Ferdinando’s concept of visualisation and drawn to Meldrum for the space he allowed her to paint as a ‘developed seer’ employing all her faculties. She took Whitman, Yeats and Machen to heart and did not look beyond the local for satisfaction. Her open road, like Whitman's, was internal; her intellectual and painterly needs could be fulfilled in Beaumaris. The dialogue between Ferdinando and Meldrum shaped Beckett’s determination to represent a dimension which was not open to the visible. Beckett’s work negotiates Meldrum’s scientific ordering of optical impressions which had such an impact on her style. But her contemporaries were right too in labelling her a ‘new and

305 Palmer, Louis Esson and the Australian theatre. p. 27
306 A D Colquhoun, 'Miss Beckett's viewpoint', The Age, 1927, 18 see also McGuire, 'The singular career of Clarice Beckett: Painting and society in Melbourne 1916 - 1936'.
307 Ibid., p. 86
308 Kinnane, Colin Colahan: A portrait. p.50-51
dangerous form of Meldrumite \(^{309}\) because she carried in her work the serious interrogation of the visible in a way which Meldrum himself was not prepared to. With the intellectual support of the Theosophical Society Beckett was well placed to radically question the role of the artist’s relation to the visible. Through her mandala-like paintings Beckett was able to open the way for a pure psychic visuality and a professional vision which could be profitably adopted by her successors.

\(^{309}\) A D Colquhoun, 'Miss Clarice Beckett', \textit{The Age}, 18 July, 1931, 7
5. A question of balance: Ethel Carrick

\textit{My glass is not large but I drink from my glass} \textsuperscript{310}

Ethel Carrick’s investigations into the nature of the real are key to understanding her paintings. From 1916 Carrick was a formal member of the Theosophical Society. However the Theosophical impulse informed her paintings from 1906 and contributed significantly to her professional success in Paris. As for Jane Price and Florence Fuller, Carrick’s art was firmly tied to her intensely spiritual outlook. Carrick participated in the broad swell of artistic and feminist interest in Theosophical conceptions of the real. The inclusion of this significant and formative dimension opens fresh avenues for research into Carrick’s biography and exhibition history and redefines her well-loved paintings.

Through the support of the Theosophical Society and connected organisations Carrick effected a new and delicate balance between the material and the transcendental. Following the trail of the Theosophical Society we can reevaluate Carrick’s work as less concerned with optical effects for their own sake, and recognise in her work a common Theosophical goal to represent a reality beyond the visible. Carrick’s work should be understood not as a minor, muted form of impressionism, but rather as a fully conceived program to represent the unity and the absolute movement of life in formal terms. This project was recognised and acknowledged by her colleagues in Paris, while in Australia she has remained in the long shadow cast by her more celebrated husband.

Carrick abstracted from familiar visible reality to communicate her vision of a higher unity which was distinctly Theosophical in tone. Sympathy for the material and the lure of the transcendental is played out in her major paintings. Her evident pleasure in dazzling colour and light effects was for her the language of the divine flux. Stylistically Carrick’s work can be positioned between Symbolism and the Neo-Impressionist avant-garde. Yet for Carrick and her community style was less significant than authentic personal vision. Like Price and Fuller, Carrick’s formal response to the dilemmas posed by modernity was in the context of an investigation into the nature of the visible and the real and as such continues the pattern established in earlier chapters in the excavation of an alternative modernism.

While this chapter is in no way a definitive biography, it is worth stating for the record that despite the high level of interest in Carrick’s work there has been very little substantial research on this artist, much of the existing research depends on clippings on her more thoroughly researched husband. This situation is not eased by the fact that Carrick rarely dated her works. Carrick’s own career, independent of her husband, has until now not been visible. Self-evidently this

311 I have been extremely fortunate in this regard to have had access to Mary Eagle’s substantial personal archives which she very generously opened to me. All biographical information, other than that pertaining to the Theosophical Society and Les Tendances Nouvelles, has been gathered from Mary Eagle’s archive which she made available to me in 2003/2004. Any mistakes in transcribing this information are entirely my own.

312 The longest text on Carrick which one might expect to rely on is Susanna de Vries Ethel Carrick Fox: travels and triumphs of a post impressionist 1997 which Ruth Zubans describes in her essay A decade of travel in the life of Ethel Carrick Fox as- “An ill researched semi fictional account.” Ruth Zubans, ‘A decade of travel in the life of Ethel Carrick Fox’, Art and Australia, 35, 1, 1998, 89-95 p. 90 But to whichever author you look to – whether John Pigot in ‘Les femmes Orientalistes’ in Jeannette Hoorn’s Strange women where out of 14 pages he spends 2 addressing the work of Carrick- introducing the whole chapter by saying that “women painters looked at the orient from a different point of view from that of their male colleagues” John Pigot, ‘Les femmes orientalistes; Hilda Rix Nicholas and Ethel Carrick in the East’, Strange women: Essays in art and gender, ed., J Hoorn, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994p. 156 yet does not identify the particular complexities inherent in Carrick’s personal brand of orientalism. Pigot’s formal analysis limits itself to a description of the work as impressionist despite a much more complex pictorial structure and use of black that you would normally find in Impressionist works. Howe (who in Kerr repeats de Vries’ assertion that Carrick stayed at the Manor in 1912 (it was bought in 1922) or the earlier The cheat or the cheated which remains is very much within the powerful paradigm of Len Fox’s account without looking elsewhere for information. The Fox account of Carrick has been a powerful one- Zubans’ work on Carrick’s husband is the standard text and while she has a great deal of information on Carrick and is clearly the key source, Margaret Rich in her 1979 catalogue for the Geelong Art Gallery or article in Lip 1980 again relies heavily on Len Fox’s account crippled by the passionately biased account which he inherited from his family. None look at Carrick’s life apart from her husband- her work with Maus, with les Quelques, even the work of Bate in the UK and what she learnt under
has not been to her advantage. My focus on Carrick's relationship with the Theosophical Society in which her husband did not share has at least partially laid open this artist's own work.

One of Carrick's personal triumphs was undoubtedly her intimacy with both the 'centre' of art in Paris and the core figures of the major counter cultural spiritual movement of her century. Perversely the centre of radical art was a marginal outpost of radical spirituality. Carrick's familiarity with both would have brought her enormous personal cachet. On a professional level the stylistic innovations of Paris are fully integrated with an alternative conception of the real. This is not to imply that Carrick is defined by her Theosophical connections any more than any other artist in this collection. Nevertheless in pursuing her connections with the Theosophical Society many issues associated with her painting are drawn into a new context.

Carrick was a feminist. In her pronouncements about her career she can be trusted to position her achievements as feminist milestones. Carrick's feminism and social service were a part of her Theosophical outlook. Her pattern of collegial friendships, distinct from those of her husband, include strong political women. Her sister Jessie Platt's good friend was the ardent Theosophist Lady Emily Lutyens, whose sister Constance Lutyens was the celebrated militant suffragette. Marion Phillips, Fox's cousin, was also an active feminist and wrote passionately on Annie Besant's 'Great gift to humanity'. Other notable friendships included Violet Teague, Ivy Brookes, Bessie Rischbieth and Dame Mary Gilmore. Many of these

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313 Other important sightlines include Carrick's relationship with the tourism industry and the debates of Orientalism see John Pigot Les femmes orientalistes in Jeanette Hoorn, Strange women: Essays in art and gender. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994.

314 Of particular interest then would be to pursue her participation in a group called 'Les Quelques' from 1908-1913, an organisation of women artists. Zubans has written that "Her sense of social commitment, her compassion and loyalty, and the role she played in the war while in France networking with women's groups and other individuals-need to be highlighted." Zubans, 'A decade of travel in the life of Ethel Carrick Fox', 89-95 p.90
women were themselves engaged with the Theosophical Society in one way or another. Clearly Carrick was a complex and interesting woman engaged in a number of important issues of her time. In this chapter I draw together some of the apparently disparate connections which are linked by a Theosophical thread. I conclude by enabling a reading of Carrick’s work which reflects the value attributed to it by her contemporaries.

Early life
Ethel Carrick (1872-1952) was born to a family interested in the arts and open to alternative spirituality in Middlesex, England. One of her nine siblings, Jessie, would later publish *The Witness* (1918) an account of the spiritualist messages she received from her dead sons, casualties in the First World War. Perhaps the first sign of Carrick’s openness to spiritual explorations is her marriage in an Anglican church to the Jewish Australian Emmanuel Phillips Fox in 1905. They met on a painting tour of Cornwall and Carrick remembered their short married life as a “great romance.” Prior to their marriage and residence in Paris, Carrick’s professional career was already firmly underway. She had studied first with Francis Bate, then at the Slade School of Art under Professor Frederick Brown and Henry Tonks (1898-1903). At some time Carrick had also studied piano and singing at the Guildhall School of Music, London. However later in life Carrick would remember only Bate.

Francis Bate was an early advocate of Impressionism or what he called the Naturalistic School, in his words the first signs of the spirit of progress. His views were representative of those open to change and represent a base plate for Carrick’s own explorations. Carrick’s relationship with Impressionism has been

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315 Marion Phillips, ‘A great gift to humanity: 50 years’ work in the cause of truth and justice’, *The Labour woman*, 1 August, 1924.
316 Anonymous, ‘Mrs E Phillips Fox returns’, *Herald*, 4 April, 1925, 12 I thank Mary Eagle for passing me this reference. The copy of *The Witness* in the Adyar Library is from CW Leadbeater’s library.
317 Anonymous, ‘A gifted woman’, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 14 June, 1925, 10
318 Ruth Zubans, ‘Biographical essay’, *Ethel Carrick: Mrs E Phillips Fox*, ed., Margaret Rich, Geelong Art Gallery, Geelong, 1979 I have not been able to confirm this or identify any early connections with the Theosophical musical community which was to be important to her in later life culminating in her portrait of John Foulds in 1928.
contentious. Well before meeting her husband Carrick was already fluent, thanks to Bate, in a form of Impressionism. Importantly she was also in a position to recognise Impressionism as continuous with the academic tradition of scientific analysis of visible facts she would learn at the Slade. Carrick’s training, more progressive under Bate, more academic at the Slade, was predicated by accurate observation of facts. Neither Bate, author of *The Naturalistic School of Painting*, nor the anatomical draftsman Tonks, questioned the importance of the visible world as the artist’s copybook. However the priority Bate allocated to picture making over observed facts would provide a lasting source of inspiration.

In the context of a defence of Impressionism Bate was inspired to summarise his understanding of painting:

> It may be that painting is a synthetical process, but a synthesis surely of harmonious facts gathered by reasonable analysis of the results of accurate observation. The charm and the art of it lying in the selection, the proportion and relation of its elements of place, form, size, colour and light and shade to each other, and to the work as a whole. If any of these are inaccurately noted, or are ill balanced in the picture, then its impression lacks unity. ... The piece is spoiled, for the music is out of tune.³²⁰

In this short paragraph some of Carrick’s central concerns as a mature artist can be seen nascent in the theories of her influential teacher.³²¹ Bate’s acknowledgment of the role of synthesis, selection and arrangement is presumed to be subordinate always to the ‘facts’ of the visible world. Nevertheless the artist is assumed to have subtly selected and manipulated the elements of place, form, size, colour, light and shade. Carrick’s experience in Paris was to effect a subtle but significant shift in balance between ‘fact’ and ‘synthesis’.

³¹⁹ Francis Bate, *The naturalistic school of painting*, RO Hearson, London, 1887. p. 8
³²⁰ Francis Bate, ‘Some remarks on Impressionism; A response from Francis Bate’, *The Art Journal*1893, p. 103-4
If Carrick would later differ in her choice of weighting she was in complete agreement with Bate's emphasis on unity. For both painters the aim of the artist was to achieve a sense of unity. Again the difference is slight but telling. For Carrick the idea of unity had a spiritual dimension. The metaphor of music offered by Bate was very much part of the contemporary vocabulary but for a graduate of the Guildhall School of Music and an artist entering a world where synaesthetic correspondences were a commonplace, it was to be a potent one.322

The great romance

In 1905 Ethel Carrick married Emmanuel Phillips Fox and they established a marital home at 65 Boulevard Arago, Paris, called the Cité Fleurie.323 Here each would pursue their respective interests in light. The Cité Fleurie was a complex of apartments and purpose built artist's studios well positioned near the teaching studios of La Grand Chaumière at 14 Boulevard Arago and Colarossi's at 10 Boulevard Arago. Number 65 Boulevard Arago was popular with sculptors because of the ground floor studios and proximity to the ateliers of Auguste Rodin and Antoine Bourdelle. There were courtyards and gardens and an international atmosphere– Americans, Russians, French, Germans and now Anglo-Australians. It was an architecture which encouraged discussion and debate, studio visits and exchange. The American discussions of the play of light on the surface represent one aspect of the newly married couple's relation to light; the Russians represent another. Fox's network of friendships was to centre around the Americans in Paris; for Carrick it was the Russians, French and Belgians she met in a Theosophical environment.

321 Roger Fry also studied under Francis Bate
322 Theosophical composers seem to be united by a common sense of rhythm which is drawn from Indian sources. Given Carrick's active interest in rhythmical arrangement of her compositions there may be an interesting point of comparison here.
Patrick Henry Bruce (1881-1936) was one neighbour, an exhibitor at the Salon d'Automne and an important hub of American artists, host to such discussions as ‘how to paint a white egg on a white cloth’. Light and its reflections were of key interest to both Carrick and her husband, for whom the search for light was a constant in his letters. A more important connection for Carrick was her Russian neighbour Seraphin Soudbinine (1870-1944). Soudbinine was a sculptor and favoured student of Rodin also with an interest in light and exhibitor at the Salon d’Automne. Soudbinine was probably the first of Carrick’s large network of Russian friends whom she referred to in 1925. An artist who was open to alternative spirituality would have found Soudbinine a congenial neighbour. Through this Russian artist run connections to the early years of Theosophy in Paris. At the time of Carrick’s arrival in Paris he was engaged in a major art project with two other important artists likewise Theosophically inspired.

A brief background to artists and the Theosophical Society in Paris
The artists associated with the Theosophical Society in Paris were a complex entanglement of competing beliefs. This complexity can be artificially divided into three groupings: a Schuré-Nabis nexus dominated by the pan-occultism of Blavatsky; a second looser association around the Sár Péladan and the Rose + Croix; and a third group which would grow out of this last in which Carrick would herself participate. This grouping is a useful but artificial tool. As Mme Mouchette’s experience has already indicated, the network and image making overflow artificial boundaries. The Nabis artists were less important to Carrick than the Symbolists and the graduates of Péladan’s Rose + Croix. Yet threads of connection and inspiration can be usefully drawn through all groupings.

The publication of Eduard Schuré’s Les grands initiées in 1889 is widely acknowledged to have been enormously influential in Paris. This volume

324 He was later associated with Matisse and the Delaunays. His work was later included in the famous Armory show William C Agee and Barbara Rose, Patrick Henry Bruce, American Modernist: A catalogue raisonne. MOMA, New York, 1979. p. 44
325 In October 1905 Bruce introduced Hopper to Sisley, Renoir and Pissaro. ibid p. 3
326 Anonymous, ‘Mrs E Phillips Fox returns’, Herald, 4 April, 1925, 12 p. 12
developed the Theosophical idea that Krishna, Orpheus and Christ were spiritual initiates with a consistent spiritual message. *Les grands initiés* was to prove particularly significant for the Nabis artists. The syncretism of Schuré’s revelations pointed to a Theosophical unity which further study would reveal to the student in colour and form as in religion. It was a part of Mme Blavatsky’s larger pan-occultism, a search for interconnections between diverse occult traditions. This pan-occultism was also a feature of Paul Gauguin’s outlook.\(^{328}\) Maurice Denis recalled that Nabis mysticism was of the unorthodox kind with a particular interest in Theosophical journals, Mme Blavatsky and Péladan.\(^{329}\) Denis describes a rich heated atmosphere in which occultists, artists, composers like Debussy and Satie and writers including JK Huysmans\(^ {330}\) debated the relative merits of the transcendental and the material. Huysmans’ records similar debates in *Là Bas*:

Naturalism, limited to monotonous studies of mediocre people who acted out their lives amid interminable inventories of drawing-room furniture or agricultural implements, led directly to the most complete sterility ... or the most tedious of repetitions...But (Durtal) couldn’t see what form (the novel) could possibly take outside of Naturalism...One must preserve the documentary truthfulness, the precision of detail, the rich savoury language of Realism, ... but one must also drive a well shaft into the soul, and not feel the need to explain away its mystery in terms of diseases of the senses....in a

\(^{327}\) Please see forthcoming discussion in the section titled *Blavatsky in the Cité Fleurie*.

\(^{328}\) Gauguin is remembered as a fellow traveller rather than a member although since the Nazi destruction of the Theosophical Society membership records in Paris it is difficult to research this. Gauguin was of particular interest to Carrick, she and Emmanuél Phillips Fox made a pilgrimage to Tahiti in 1914.


\(^{330}\) Huysmans had an *amour tendre* for the Australian art critic Edith Revery. JK Huysmans, *Letters from JK Huysmans to Edith Revery, 1890-1898*, Canberra, NLA MS 8363. Revery's letters indicate close friendships with Villiers de l’Isle-Adam and Leon Bloy-- the decadent poetic triumvirate. Revery had studied painting in Paris with Birge Harrison and Artur de Souza Loureiro. In September 1890 Edith and Jean Revery (Courbet’s wood working nephew) were all staying in Edith Revery’s Melbourne Studio. Edith Revery’s sister would marry Louereiro see Pat Clark NLA MS 8363.
word a spiritual Naturalism that would be nobler, more complete, and more formidable.\textsuperscript{331}

At the time of writing (1891) Huysmans was indulging in an \textit{amour tendre} for Australian art critic and writer Edith Reverdy. It would be interesting to know in what context such ideas were discussed in Melbourne in 1890 when Reverdy, her husband Jean (Gustave Courbet’s woodworking nephew), Artur de Souza Louereiro and Birge Harrison were sharing a studio. It may be a telling point of difference that Phillips Fox sought out Birge Harrison’s brother, Alexander Harrison, as a teacher for his allegiance to naturalistic values. Huysmans’ desire to locate a naturalism charged with a spiritual dimension provides an interesting context for the pictorial challenge taken up later by Carrick. Neither Huysmans nor the Nabis wished to put aside the ‘rich savoury language’ of Realism, but felt that pursued for its own sake it degenerated into monotonous studies of mediocre people, a value judgement that would be used in Carrick’s favour by critic and curator Octave Maus in 1909.

This spiritual naturalism can be differentiated from the spiritual idealism or Symbolism of the artists gathered around the Sàr Péladan and his Salons of the Rose + Croix 1892-98. On the broadest level the manifesto of the Rose + Croix was steadfastly anti-naturalistic. Péladan valued individual vision and a search for ‘the essence of things’.\textsuperscript{332} This Salon was not in itself Theosophical but many of the artists, including Péladan, had strong links with the Theosophical Society in Paris. The many small occult associations shared membership, readership and participation in lectures.\textsuperscript{333} Many artists who passed through Péladan’s Rose + Croix as part of their spiritual search were also associated with the Theosophical Society. The Salons were reviewed in the Theosophical press. Papus (Dr Gerard Encausse, was a member of the Theosophical Society in the late 1880s) Jean

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item 331 JK Huysmans, \textit{La Bas}, Translated by Brendan King. 2001 ed. Dedalus, Sawtry, Camb., 1891. pp. 19-20 I would like to thank ex de Medici for urging me to revisit this reference.
\item 333 \textit{ibid}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Delville was an active member of both the Rose + Croix and the Theosophical Society as was Maurice Chabas (1862-1947). Chabas's studio in 1900 was a meeting place for Maeterlink, Eduard Schuré, Leon Bloy, Camille Flammarion, Joséphin Péladan and René Guénon.³³⁴ Péladan would later publish reviews as 'Sâr Merodack' in the Theosophical journal Lotus Bleu in 1895.³³⁵ The sculptor Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929)³³⁶ was also a participant in the Rose + Croix salons and would like many of his colleagues of this time be significant in the Theosophical Society in the early years of the twentieth century.³³⁷

Blavatsky in the Cité Fleurie

Crucially Carrick's arrival at 65 Boulevard Arago in 1905 coincided with her Russian neighbour's most intense engagement with the Theosophical Society on an artistic level, a passionate artistic collaboration to represent the light bearer, Prometheus, in the context of an international inter-disciplinary Theosophical project. It is hard to imagine that the painter-pianist, sister of the spiritual medium and future life-long member of the Theosophical Society herself, could have ignored these dramatic events.

Séraphin Soudbinine’s circle embraced both the Symbolists and the avant-garde and his passionate involvement in the Theosophical Society forms an important early link for Carrick. Soudbinine had introduced Jean Delville to Alexandre Scriabin (1872-1915) in 1905 and in so doing facilitated Scriabin’s introduction to the Theosophical Society. Together the three responded in their own medium to Blavatsky’s vision of Prometheus, newly translated into French,³³⁸— no longer the

³³⁴ Guénon's writings were to be an important source of inspiration for the Australian poet Harold Stewart Myriam de Palma, Maurice Chabas et la Belgique, des liens privilégiés www.art-memoires.com/lettre/lm2123/23chabasm.htm, 2002 [cited 13 December 2002].
³³⁵ Joseph Péladan and 'Sâr Merodack', 'Le livre du sceptre', Le Lotus Bleu1895, p.287
³³⁶ There is also an interesting overlap with the artists of Les Vingt which would later reform as the Salon of the Libre Esthétique under Octave Maus.
³³⁸ Theosophical literature, like the colonisation of India was conducted in English and many needed to wait for translations.
‘thief of fire’ but the ‘prophet light bearer’.  

339  Scriabin’s Prométhée: or Le poème du feu remains one of the most important works to have been inspired by the Theosophical Society, finished in 1909. The first performance (not until 1915) was accompanied by light projections corresponding to the notes played.  

340  Delville’s painting of Prométhée, begun in 1904/5, was completed in 1907 and Soudbinine’s Vers la lumière (Towards the light) in 1908. Soudbinine’s sculpture is a play on light and matter, refinement and shadow, abstraction and academic finish which is stylistically consistent with Rodin’s influence. For critic Sébastien Clerbois “these works witnessed a subtle balance between two traditions: one symbolist, typical of the nineteenth century, the other belonging to the avant-garde of the twentieth century.”  

341  The symbolist imagery of Delville and the radicalism of Soudbinine and Scriabin met at a philosophic and conceptual level and yet was independent stylistically, in a pattern which parallels the Australian experience.  

**Carrick’s Paris**  
Paris in 1905 was an exciting place with many new experiences and opportunities for engagement. Carrick probably saw the first showing of the so-called Fauve works at the Salon d’Automne soon after her arrival in Paris although she herself did not exhibit. The newlyweds took a delayed honeymoon in Venice the following year in 1906. Later that same year Carrick exhibited at both the Salon d’Automne (this year Gauguin was celebrated with a retrospective) and at the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts. However the works Carrick showed at the Salons appear from their titles to refer back to her Slade training rather than her new experiences in Paris. It would seem that the period 1905-1907 was a period of adjustment to new experiences.  

If Carrick’s salon paintings of 1905-1907 appear to look backward, some of her small works already show signs of her later interests. Les Tuilleries 1906 (colour plate 17) signposts her familiarity with the concerns of the post impressionist  

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339  Clerbois, In search of the Forme-pensée: The influence of Theosophy on Belgian artists, between Symbolism and the Avant-Garde (1890-1910) [cited. p. 5  

340  They also explored a never realised ocular harpsichord of Père Castel ibid. [cited. p. 6  

130
avantgarde. In this small dated and signed painting many of the features of her later work in this series are visible. It announces a preoccupation with sauntering crowds in gardens and markets. It can no longer be argued that Carrick learnt her impressionism from her husband. It is clear in this early work that the Impressionist’s interest in broken complimentary strokes of colour shadows and optical reflections is of little relevance here. The fall of light enlivens the canvas but is not the subject of the work. Carrick has moved beyond the revelation of form through light advocated by Bate and the French Impressionists. Instead form is alluded to through bold colour notations which pattern and structure the composition. While the colour range is closer to Slade traditions than her French contemporaries, Carrick’s heavy use of black is distinctive. This is neither high keyed Impressionism nor the tonalism of the Slade school but an independent Neo-Impressionist style which draws on both.

Another distinctive feature of Les Tuilleries is its fully resolved compositional structure. Unlike Emmanuel Phillips Fox’s many studies, this work by Carrick has a fully realised composition. Contemporary practice distinguished between an ébauche— a definitive composition wholly or partly finished and an étude — a note taken to be pressed into service for a later and larger work— a document and nothing more. As Mary Eagle has noted, Fox maintained the academic practice of the étude/sketch throughout his working career. However in Carrick’s body of work the étude is rare; her small canvases are most often fully resolved compositions. Although there are stylistic similarities between Fox’s études and Carrick’s equally small canvases, her interest in the craft of picture making is more substantial than capturing a ‘slice of life’. Les Tuilleries distinguishes itself by its lack of interest in naturalistic detail. Zubans writes that “what she saw and what she chose to paint, were different.” The interest of this small painting lies no

341 ibid, [cited p. 8
345 Zubans, ‘A decade of travel in the life of Ethel Carrick Fox’, 89-95 p. 92
longer in the freshly observed natural world but in the art of picture making, in an effect. The relative importance of pictorial means, until now subservient at the ‘shrine of nature,’ has been reversed. The compositional structure is very visible. The painting is articulated compositionally by Carrick’s strong use of colour—black, white, green and red. The picture plane is compressed not to the surface but to a highly energised middle ground through a dramatic use of recessive and advancing colours. The figures are reduced to sketchy notations, vehicles for black and white with the occasional red and pink. In its patent interest in the art of picture making Carrick’s small market and garden paintings can be compared productively to the muted Fauvism of Albert Marquet. However, as already mentioned, Carrick’s work should not be understood as Fauvist but as the work of an independent who absorbed the lessons of the Neo-Impressionists and the Fauves to craft a personal style suited to her interests. Les Tuileries presents a synthesis of the visible, reshaped as a pictorial composition. As we shall see this aesthetic was to have a profound spiritual dimension.

Les Tendances Nouvelles: Negotiating Symbolism and the avant-garde

From 1907 until her death Carrick was a part of a distinctly Theosophical community, at first as an exhibitor with the artist’s co-operative known as Les Tendances Nouvelles and from 1916 as a member. Her introduction to the group almost certainly occurred through her neighbour, Soudbinine, with his connections to artists interested in alternative spirituality. She would soon become an important part of this group. Carrick first exhibited with Les Tendances Nouvelles in 1907 and in 1908 was elected a member. While Les Tendances Nouvelles was only one of the societies Carrick associated with (others include the Salon d’Automne, Les Quelques and The Royal Academy, London) she appears to have been especially committed to Les Tendances Nouvelles and would remain associated with the group until its demise in 1914. The full name of this group was l’Union Internationale des Beaux-Arts, des Lettres, des Sciences et de l’Industrie, familiarly known after the title of their intermittent journal: Les Tendances Nouvelles.

346 See Albert Marquet La plage de St Adresse 1905 Coll. M Boris Fize, Paris ill. Gilberte Martin-Mery, Albert
Carrick's claim to have been the recent Vice-President of the International Union of Women Painters in 1913\textsuperscript{347} may well be a reference to one of many sub-branches of this organisation which by 1912 claimed to have 2000 members.\textsuperscript{348} The organising genius, owner and publisher of the journal was Alexis Mérodacl-Jeaneau (1873-1919) a student of Gustave Moreau with Matisse and Marquet. His alter ego Gérôme Maës\textsuperscript{349} was the principle art critic of the journal.

Mérodacl-Jeaneau was himself immersed in the atmosphere of alternative spiritualism described earlier of which the Theosophical Society was an important part. Although his journal does not reference either Besant, Leadbeater or the Theosophical Society by name, it espoused many theosophical ideas.\textsuperscript{350} The Săr Péladan and Theosophists Jean Delville and Maurice Chabas were important anticipatory artists. Marie Bermond who was a central figure in the Paris Theosophical Society, was a founding member. Moreover the journal displays a consistent interest in occult spirituality and synaesthetic correspondences. A key feature of Les Tendances Nouvelles was its distinctly missionary aspect where the artist was seen as a spiritual leader—"the true artist is a medium gifted with particular faculties and this gift, which augments everything, is his helmsman and his guiding light."\textsuperscript{351} The journal’s broadly socialist agenda (one of its aims was to create access to art for ‘the labouring classes’) as well as a commitment to interdisciplinary and international participation is not inconsistent with its spiritual impulse. Rather, this profitable tension between the transcendental and the socialist is strongly reminiscent of Besant’s writings. Interestingly Les Tendances Nouvelles also validated personal vision over stylistic cohesion, a trait which its chief researcher, Jonathan Fineberg, attributes to its Symbolist heritage.\textsuperscript{352} The 53
artists associated with Les Tendances Nouvelles at its founding exhibition in 1904 were not stylistically cohesive and included Alexei Jawlensky, Wassily Kandinsky, Marie Bermond and Mérodack-Jeaneau's own work which had stylistic affinities with the Fauves. Carrick showed with the second exhibition of Les Tendances Nouvelles of May/June 1907 in Angers. This was known as Le Musée du Peuple and included 1244 entries including an unknown number of works by Carrick and 12 metres of wall space devoted to the black edged, folkloric work of Wassily Kandinsky.

Les Tendances Nouvelles facilitated a departure from the reproduction of visible reality, enabling the painter to deploy form and colour as elements with their own parallel system of laws. This was possible because Mérodack-Jeaneau's own aesthetic was profoundly influenced by an alternative spirituality. Fineberg locates the important influence of Les Tendances Nouvelles on Kandinsky as providing a framework within which to negotiate a space between Symbolism and the avant-garde of the Fauves. According to Fineberg, Kandinsky came to understand

... Neo-Impressionism as a visual embodiment of the Symbolist belief that colour and composition have laws of their own, independent of nature; thus he explored Neo-Impressionism as a vehicle for liberating colour. 

This understanding was possible because form and colour were conceived as metaphysical reflections of 'the universal organism'. This position is given specific articulation in Mérodack-Jeaneau's manifesto of Sythétisme. Originally written in 1909 (although planned since 1899) and finally published in 1914 Le Sythétisme describes Mérodack-Jeaneau's personal aesthetic, his apprehension of the living

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Reprint, with an English introduction by Jonathon Fineberg of the periodical published in Paris May 1904 - August 1914, ed., Jonathan Fineberg, Da Capo Press, New York, 1980, vi-vii. p.XIX It was a lack of conviction in her personal vision which was at the base of Maesse's scathing review of Marie Bermond's work in 1907. 353 For a full listing of this early 53 member artist's co-operative salon see Fineberg, Kandinsky in Paris 1906-1907. note 6 p. 57 
354 ibid p. 71
355 Fineberg, 'The history and character of Les Tendances Nouvelles', vi-vii. p. XIX
energy of vibrating forces within the ‘universal organism’. In *Le Synthétisme* he alludes to a larger conversation on the orchestration of coloured lines and zones of colour, of vital rhythms, the value and influence of numerology, the destruction of form in the search for visual synthesis and the definition of the relative movement of forms and the absolute movement of life.\(^{357}\) The whole is couched in a synthesising art history ‘over which smiles the Buddha’. As already noted the most readily available source of information on the Buddha at this time was the Theosophical Society. However the reference to the Buddha merely confirms the undercurrent of Theosophical inflection to Mérodack-Jeaneau’s philosophy. The aesthetic articulated in this document is clearly inspired by his early engagement in the Theosophical Society and as such was to prove attractive to artists likewise drawn to the Society. Mérodack-Jeaneau’s Synthesist manifesto and his own Fauvist paintings draw on the Symbolist’s belief in painting’s capacity to connect with the non-visible world and the formal experiments of the Neo-Impressionists. Carrick’s later membership of the Theosophical Society demands close examination of her early participation in *Les Tendances Nouvelles*.

Clearly Carrick found Mérodack-Jeaneau’s aesthetic sympathetic as did Kandinsky and other long term exhibitors. Likewise Mérodack-Jeaneau saw in Carrick an artist whose personal philosophies and aesthetic were consistent with his own. Fineberg makes the crucial point that “*Les Tendances Nouvelles* underscores the inadequacy of approaching modern art solely in terms of schools, ‘isms’ or other closed concepts, by documenting the extraordinarily fluid exchange of ideas that animated the intellectual life of the period.”\(^ {358}\) Carrick, Kandinsky and Mérodack-Jeaneau are united not by a stylistic connection but through a common concern to represent a spiritual dimension. Here Carrick’s concern to address the absolute movement of life through an arrangement of form and colour can be seen in the context of a larger aesthetic project. Her concern with unity at a formal level must

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\(^{356}\) Fineberg, *Kandinsky in Paris 1906-1907*, p. 63

\(^{357}\) The original French reads “la determination du mouvement relatif des formes et du mouvement absolu de la vie” My translation Alexis Mérodack-Jeaneau, ‘*Le Synthétisme*’, *Les Tendances Nouvelles*, 621914, 1536-7 and 70-2 p. 1536

be expanded to reference the metaphysical unity, what Mérodack-Jeaneau described in very Theosophical terms as ‘the universal organism’. Within her chosen environment Carrick’s independence from stylistic groupings was seen as a strength.

Fineberg saw Kandinsky’s participation in Les Tendances Nouvelles as a turning point in his artistic career. Yet despite noting two spiritualist lectures at this 1907 exhibition, Fineberg felt unable to confirm the connection he suspected with the Theosophical Society. Such a connection would obviously predate Kandinsky’s dramatic encounter in 1908 and draw the genesis of his subsequent abstract paintings into the ambit of Kandinsky’s Parisian community. In fact as indicated above, many of the ideas which define Mérodack-Jeaneau’s aesthetic are closely related to Theosophical aesthetics and there are strong personal links not only though Mérodack-Jeaneau himself and through Marie Bermond, a stalwart of the Theosophical Society in Paris, of whom we shall hear more, but also through Maurice Chabas and Jean Delville both of whom were praised in Les Tendances Nouvelles.

Fig. 11 Ethel Carrick
La table c 1907

359 ibid, p. XVII
360 ibid, p. XIX
Carrick’s work in *Le Musée du Peuple* was well reviewed by the press and a work of hers *La table* c 1907 (fig.11) was reproduced in *Les Tendances Nouvelles*. This work, like other larger works of this period, looks back to the Slade and probably represents the conservative end of Carrick’s spectrum of work. *La table* is distinguished by sound competencies in many of the qualities Australian critics noticed in absentia, notably a sharp crisp finish and strong drawing. The table is tilted close to the picture frame but there is a strong sense of volume in space and spatial depth. Interestingly the painting also exhibits the strong compositional concerns which define her later work. There is an almost centripetal force concentrating energies at the centre of the work. This compositional inflorescence is achieved through the arrangement of naturalistic detail. There can be no question of Carrick’s academic competence. It is notable therefore that these naturalistic references will be later consciously sacrificed for greater compositional energy and ‘vibrational force’—a process already begun in the smaller canvas *Les Tuilleries*. The review in *Les Tendances Nouvelles* also refers to small canvases which would appear to be more experimental—the clear days in the Luxembourg gardens, a moderated impressionist technique and a use of colour (rather than light) to define form.

**Recognition 1908-1913**

Although she was not to know it until her return from a debilitating visit to Australia (from late January to late September), the year 1908 was for Carrick a vindication and confirmation of her aesthetic. Following her participation in the *Musée du Peuple* exhibition, Carrick was elected to the Union Internationale des Beaux-Arts et des Lettres. Moreover on their return from Australia in October of that year Fox would write rather sourly that “My wife has been very successful at the Autumn Salon—four pictures hung on the line and all sold—so if this sort of thing goes on I

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361 The reviews were reproduced in Gérard Maesse, 'Le Musée du peuple', *Les Tendances Nouvelles*, 311907, 618
shall have to take a back seat!" This rather shocking lack of support had been publicly expressed in *The Bulletin* ‘Red Page’ in May 1908:

... there is an Autumn Salon, where all the conventions of painting are deliberately disregarded. The judges go on the theory that there are no rules in art; they will accept anything as long as it is a freak. Fox tells us that in this Salon the colour simply shrieks at you, and the drawing has a naivety of impression that looks like the work of a child of five.\(^{363}\)

In Australia Carrick was introduced in the shadow of her husband. Her innovations were misinterpreted much as those of the Salon d’Automne. Even a positive review of her exhibition at Bernard’s Gallery, Melbourne distinguished between the naturalistic liveliness of her crowd scenes and the formal craft of her ‘bright colour schemes’.\(^{364}\) *The Bulletin* was typically more aggressive:

Ethel Carrick (Mrs Fox) opened a glad little picture show in Bernhards Gallery (sic) on Monday. The collection is full of colour and there is much movement in it. ‘Le Marché’ shown in the Salon 1907 is a fine effect of sunlight flecking through trees on a moving crowd beneath. The sense of movement is a reality...her drawing is often inaccurate...the windows ...are as wildly unsteady as a homeward drunk.\(^{365}\)

From a personal and professional standpoint Carrick was probably glad to return to Paris. Interestingly the friendships made in Australia include Violet Teague and a cluster of Fox’s students from Charterisville, many who would in 1908 become members of the Theosophical Society following Annie Besant’s tour of Australia in


\(^{363}\) Letter from Emmanuel Phillips Fox to Laura Fox 28 December 1906 reproduced in ibid p.179

\(^{364}\) Anonymous, ‘Parisian paintings in Melbourne; Mrs E Phillips Fox’, *Art and Architecture*, 5, 5, 1908. 192 -94

\(^{365}\) Anonymous, ‘The boom in Australian art begun with Streeton continues’, *The Bulletin*, 6 August, 1908, 24
that year. It was in August 1908 that Mme Mouchette and Marie Lion wrote to Paris informing the Lodge of their privileged access to Annie Besant in Adelaide.\textsuperscript{366}

Carrick’s success at the 1908 Salon d’Automne made up for Australia. Soudbinine had been a Juriste and it would be interesting to know if the usual pattern of patronage had been working this time in Carrick’s favour. Les Tendances Nouvelles reviewed the Salon paying special attention to Carrick’s understanding and scientific vision.\textsuperscript{367} Carrick’s work was undoubtedly seen by Belgian Curator, Octave Maus, who the journal felt sympathetic to their ideals.\textsuperscript{368} Maus would subsequently invite Carrick to participate in his 1909 Libre Esthétique exhibition in Brussels.

The Salon of the Libre Esthétique was a major international annual survey exhibition widely acknowledged to have been insightfully connected with the international avant-garde.\textsuperscript{369} The 1909 exhibition (6 March–7 April) was devoted to portrait and figure painting. Forty artists were invited including sculptors and printmakers. Of the painters, Bonnard’s standing figure L’Eau de Cologne, 1909 was the success of the exhibition. Other painters included Emile Claus, Paul Signac, HE Cross, Fernand Knopff, Odilon Redon, Auguste Renoir, Ferdinand Schirren, Maurice Denis, Theo van Rysselberghe and Eduard Vuillard.\textsuperscript{370} Clearly there was an interest in Symbolists, Nabis and the Neo-Impressionists associated with the transcendental scientist, Charles Henry (1859-1926). It is likely that Carrick’s association with Les Tendances Nouvelles led directly to her inclusion in this exhibition. She was introduced by Maus as “Ethel Carrick another newly arrived talent; tender, expansive and intellectual.”\textsuperscript{371} She showed at least two

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{366} It would seem that Carrick and Fox narrowly missed being in the same town as Annie Besant however reports of her outstandingly successful tour would certainly have been a topic of conversation.

\textsuperscript{367} Gérard Maësse, ‘Review of the Salon d’Automne’, Les Tendances Nouvelles, 391908, 834 p. 834 “Mlle Ethel Carrick fait l’enthousiasme des amateurs. On a comparé ses tableaux a des bouquets de fleurs. Rien de plus juste et de plus aimable que cette expression. La modestie timide de l’artiste cache une science vraie de la manière de voir, de juxtaposer les touches et de comprendre”

\textsuperscript{368} Henri Breuil, ‘Promenades à travers les Salons (Le Salon Unioniste)’, Ibid, 491910, 1151-64 p. 1153

\textsuperscript{369} As the number of retrospectives of this important series of exhibitions has shown.

\textsuperscript{370} Madeleine Octave Maus, Trente années de lutte pour l’art: Les Vingt 1884-1893; La Libre Esthétique 1894-1914. Librairie l’oiseau bleu, Brussels, 1926. p. 395

\textsuperscript{371} My translation ibid p. 400
\end{footnotesize}
works, *Marché aux fleurs à Venise* and *La Promenade*. *La Promenade* was later bought for the national collection, indicating that her work impressed and endorsed the expressed aims of the exhibition. Maus described this exhibition as a grouping of some contemporary expressions of portraiture and figure painting with the intention of exhibiting new and unique aspects of contemporary art. In a tone which seems to echo Mérodack-Jeaneau, (and Huysmans before him) he declared that the regime of schools was ended and a reign of individualism was about to begin. For Maus “despite the example of Manet and ... Seurat it has been felt that the presentation of human figure was incompatible with recently established practices. The division of tones in a landscape or seascape was not acceptable in a portrait—now all is changed”. He made the point that no portraitist was invited as that genre was “mired in odious banality, poses and artificial atmosphere.”

This is a Symbolist aesthetic in a Neo-Impressionist world.

*Les Tendances Nouvelles* followed Carrick’s progress at the *Libre Esthétique* exhibition reviewing her work in a ‘Letter from Belgium’. The following year (1910) Carrick again exhibited with *Les Tendances Nouvelles* in their exhibition, *Le Salon Unioniste*, when her work was again singled out for attention. The same critic caught up with her again at the Salon d’Automne, when he admitted a decided partiality to Carrick’s work, hoping to rest and ease his legs in front of her paintings. In 1911 Carrick spent eleven weeks overseas with her husband and perhaps for this reason did not exhibit with *Les Tendances Nouvelles*. She was honoured with election as Societaire of the Salon d’Automne in 1911. Fox noticed another dimension in Carrick’s work that year, although ambivalent as to its value.

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372 A work of this title (oil on wood panel 1908 26.2 x 35.2cm) was sold by Shapiro 7-8 April 2003 *Traditional highlights* Anonymous, ‘Liste des acquisitions’, *L’Art Moderne*, 121909, 95 The Museum of Modern Art, Belgium, has not responded to my enquiries on the subject.  
373 Octave Maus, ‘Portraits et Figures’, *L’Art Moderne*, 91909, p. 2 It is interesting that Maus did not include any work by Henri Matisse.  
375 Henri Breuil, ‘Promenades à travers les Salons (Le Salon Unioniste)’, *Les Tendances Nouvelles*, 491910, 1151-64 p. 1155 “Mme Ethel Carrick fait radieusement jouer la lumiere dans de prestes croquis riches et exactes.”
He wrote: "...the Autumn Salon which claims to be the coming art— God help it if it turns out so" and in a postscript “My wife works away and is doing some very interesting and personal stuff. She is Societaire of the Salon d’Automne and is very keen on the modern outlook.” Carrick’s ‘interesting and personal’ work continued to reap success. In 1912 she was one of the rare women asked to sit on the exhibition committee of the Salon d’Automne as a Jurist, acknowledging her success in the small world of the Paris avant garde.

With hindsight Carrick’s second trip to Australia in 1913 was one of the most damaging professional decisions she could have made. Was her illness on the eve of their departure a sign of emotional distress or something more physical? On her departure Carrick had strong and well placed support within the most exciting sections of the Paris exhibition community. When she returned after Fox’s death in 1916 Paris was a war zone and would not really begin to recover until the 1920s, by which time her moment had passed. Her success in Paris did not travel with her to Australia. Her achievements at the Salon d’Automne were seen as a sign of weakness rather than a strength, and she was still very much in Fox’s shadow. By July 1913, two months after her return to Melbourne, Carrick was sufficiently provoked to use a quote from Alfred de Musset in her Melbourne Guildhall catalogue, which translates as: “My glass is not large but I drink from my glass.”

The larger reference is as follows:

I do not usually pay much attention to the critics
They are only insects and rarely sting

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376 Henri Breuil, ‘Promenades à travers les Salons (Le Salon d’Automne), Les Tendances Nouvelles, 451910, p. 1029
377 Emmanuel Phillips Fox to Heysen 3 September 1911 reproduced in Zubans, E Phillips Fox: His life and art. p. 182
378 Je ne fais pas grand cas, pour moi de la critique.
Toute mouche qu’elle est, c’est rare qu’elle pique.
On m’a dit l’an passé que j’imitais Byron:
Vous qui me connaissez, vous savez bien que non.
Je hais com me la mort l’état de plagiaire;
Mon verre n’est pas grand mais je bois dans mon verre.
C’est bien peu je le sais, que d’être homme de bien,
Mais toujours est-il vrai que je n’exhume rien.
They told me last year I imitated Byron
You who know me recognise that this is not the case
I hate plagiarism like the plague
My glass is not large but I drink from my glass
While there is no honour today in being an honest man
I am certainly no grave robber.

This is a potent and poignant message across the years from a woman who found a highly literate, elegant and witty response to an impossible situation. Fox himself was not a great reader, and it would seem that on the whole we Australians have no great familiarity with de Musset’s message.

An important work from this period, *Manly Beach—Summer is here* (colour plate 18) exhibits the truth of Carrick’s point. This large work (810 x 1000mm) was painted in 1913 and taken back to Paris with her. It later won a Diploma of Honour at the International Exhibition of Bordeaux in 1928. This work can be seen as the culmination of Carrick’s participation in *Les Tendances Nouvelles*. There is a reference to her husband’s work, *The green wave, Manly* 1914 on the left of the canvas but perhaps more interesting is the comparison which can be made to Kandinsky’s folkloric work of the period. However there is no question of plagiarism. *Manly Beach—Summer is here* is very clearly the expression Carrick’s own interests; a painting about life and the energies of a crowd. The crowd is the visible expression of the absolute movement of life; the vital rhythms of the universe are given formal expression on the canvas. As in Carrick’s other crowd scenes there are selective topographical references; however the nominal subject is only a pretext. She maintains the ‘savoury realism’ of the original while abstracting and focussing on the formal elements of picture making. The supremacy of the visible world is discounted. Naturalistic form is subjugated to

Alfred de Musset *La coupe et les lèvres* 1833 Van Tieghem, *Musset œuvres complètes*. p.100 My translation
Quoted in *Carrick, Catalogue of paintings by Mrs E Phillips Fox (Miss Ethel Carrick).*
visual synthesis to intensify and spiritualise the experience. It is clear that Carrick has sacrificed naturalistic detail to the compositional energy of the whole. Carrick orchestrates the composition, creating harmony from the union of opposites. There is a typical compression of energy in the middle ground. Coloured lines are boldly deployed as repoussoirs and lines of force direct the eye. A pattern of contrasting colour zones holds our attention, oscillating between the red and blue umbrellas. Unusually in this work there is a near cloisonné use of black to encircle bleached enamels which references Kandinsky’s work. Black and white pattern the surface creating an impression of happy jostling movement. Yet it remains possible to identify the hats and dress of individuals within this crowd. Carrick maintains a tension between realism and the transcendental. The repetition of the similar but not the same—be it umbrellas, bathers or flowers—creates an effect of oscillation which affects not only the crowd but the pictorial structure itself. With all the movement however there is an overall impression of unity. For all their specificity the figures are not individuals but are ciphers for a frothy humanity—the living energy of vibrating forces within the universal organism. As so often in Carrick’s work the arrangement of colour and form is overtly deployed at the expense of the subtle window onto the world, to construct a painting which recreates the patterns and energies of life.

While in Australia Fox was revealed to have had cancer. Surgery and his subsequent death in 8 October 1915 followed rapidly. Carrick was distraught. By all accounts she had a nervous breakdown with suicidal moments. Certainly her friends felt she needed to be withdrawn from the family environment in Melbourne.

Mrs Brookes took her in and later Berthe Merfield took her to Sydney where after some 'strong talks’ she was distracted into war work.

On her return to Melbourne Carrick threw herself into organising a memorial exhibition of her husband’s work. Then, once this was achieved, in the middle of the war, she left Australia for her mother and sister. The England she found in 1916 was awash with Arthur Machen’s tale of the Angels of Mons who had safeguarded British troops on the front. Her sister Jessie Platts was already receiving spiritualist messages. It was a period of heightened interest in the spiritual. Against all common sense Carrick crossed the Channel to her studio in Paris where she spent a miserable, difficult war. In December that same year, at 4 Square Rapp, in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, Carrick finally joined the Theosophical Society officially. She was sponsored by Charles Blech and artist Marie Bermond. Carrick may have attended Charles’ sister Mlle Aimée Blech’s courses on “The astral world after death” or “The mental world, thought forms and invisible aides” which ran that year.

Carrick and the Theosophical Society in Paris
The two most important writers on art and the Theosophical Society to have emerged from within the Paris Lodge were Marie Bermond and Maurice Chabas. Both had been members of Les Tendances Nouvelles. How long Carrick had known Marie Bermond before 1916 is difficult to tell, certainly Bermond would have been part of Soudbinine’s acquaintance since she had participated in the first two exhibitions of Les Tendances Nouvelles. She too was an active feminist, traveller, social worker and spiritually inquisitive artist. It is hard to imagine that

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381 Fox family oral history remembers Carrick having been taken in by Theosophists, if so the most likely candidate for this was Mrs Ivy Brookes whose mother Pattie Deakin had been a celebrated medium and had comforted Ivy’s husband on the death of his first wife. The Brookes were not members of the Theosophical Society however Ivy’s father Alfred Deakin was involved with the Society at this time. This probably accounts for Fox’s burial as an Anglican most likely by Charles Strong’s church to which the Deakins and their Theosophical circle belonged.

382 Bertha Merfield, Letter to Ivy Brookes from Bertha Merfield, 1916, Canberra,


384 The source of the story has been traced to the work of Arthur Machen’s The Bowmen David Clarke, ‘Rumours of Angels: A legend of the First World War’, Folklore, 1132002, 151-73 p. 154
they would not have met before 1916. However they would certainly have many conversations after this time at the new lodge ‘Studio’ which formed the following year. These discussions on the nature of art were often published and reflect instructively on Carrick’s practice past and present.

The Studio Lodge was formed in 1917 at 4 Square Rapp. Its president was Mlle Valentine Reynaud– an interesting woman who published a number of books including Les trois activités humaines 1929, illustrated by Maurice Chabas. Marie Bermond and Chabas formed part of the intimate circle, publishing articles in the Theosophical press based on discussions which were held at the Lodge. Other participants in Studio included doctors, composers and scholars of Asian texts. The Lodge would also have benefited from occasional visits from prominent Theosophists, especially for the brief period in 1921 when Krishnamurti made that city his base, and frequent visits until 1925. The discussion group would also have included: Seraphin Soudbinine; the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle; Jean Delville, who had actively lectured on art in a Theosophical context since at least 1904, perhaps the American collector and curator Kathleen Dreier; Nicholas Roerich, Societaire of the Salon d’Automne and collaborator on Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring; philosopher Réné Guenon; and the theorist of light and colour Charles Henry, for whom the major biographical source document remains the 1930 issue of the Theosophical publication, L’Etoile.

At the heart of the Paris Lodge’s message for the artist was the idea of a single universal law, a central unity, which was expressed in the physical world as form and colour. The artist was conceived as a missionary whose task was to perceive this universal unity and in representing it raise other souls. The difficulties for the artist were vulnerability to relative position in time and space and the ‘gangrene of inferior instincts which prevent us from assimilating the ‘vibrations of

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385 Until a scathing review in 1907 Gérard Mäesse, ‘Review of the Salon d’Automne’, Les Tendances Nouvelles, 251907, 402
386 Jean Delville, “The mission of art” paper presented at the Transactions of the first annual congress of the Federation of the European Section of the Theosophical Society, Amsterdam, 1904. Perhaps also Aimée Wilson who was a Theosophical supporter of Kandinsky’s work.
Both Chabas and Bermond speak of life as vibration; for Chabas ‘the solid does not exist.’ Bermond saw life as movement, instability, continual change, a dynamic force in its subjective state. This is very visible in Bermond’s own work in which life ripples across the figures in a manner reminiscent of her mentor Bourdelle. In this task the subconscious, memory and imagination are the tools and personal reality was the only truth. Bermond was firm; “There is no reality outside of ourselves.” Carrick herself made this point during an interview in Adelaide in 1925. Answering an accusation that the work was unfinished Carrick responded—

... so called finish means arrested movement ... When you go out in the street and see a similar moving crowd try and remember how much (or little) detail you see while the people are moving.

Carrick argues for the representation of the invisible quality of the experience rather than defining truth through careful observation.

Neither Carrick, Bermond nor Delville could sacrifice reference to the visible world. Yet Delville identified an “awkward effort towards an art which is less bourgeois, less academical, less imitative. For half a century (ie since the 1880s) artists have shown a legitimate independence of conventional forms trying to realise a technical ideal which will better correspond to their inner vision.” For Delville art was “above all a psychological, a spiritual, an inner phenomenon.” Of practical relevance to Carrick in reconciling the inner phenomenon with savoury realism was Charles Henry’s Cercle Chromatique (1888) whose scientific transcendentalism grew from discoveries in psychophysics and nourished a generation of Symbolists and Neo-Impressionists, notably Paul Signac who was his “obedient

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388 ibid, p. 398
389 ibid, p. 398
391 Elizabeth Leigh, ‘Life and pictures: Mrs Fox and her art’, The Register, 14 July, 1925, 4
392 Jean Delville, ‘Modernism in painting’, The Theosophist, October 1926, 72-84 p. 83
393 ibid, ., p. 78

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collaborator.” For Albert Gleizes (1881-1953) Charles Henry was “one of the most important workers in the imperious changes of intellectual order.” Henry’s concept of a harmony of opposites appears a useful tool in understanding Carrick’s work, not in a Neo-Impressionist fashion but in terms of a personal style which leans on her Theosophical context. The theoretical framework which was articulated in the Theosophical journals is entirely consistent with Carrick’s larger production and can be seen to precede her actual membership of the Society.

Carrick’s work was delicately balanced between the desire to represent a ‘savoury realism’ and a desire to represent a ‘spiritual naturalism’ that would be ‘nobler, more complete, and more formidable’. This tension between the visible and the invisible is precisely what constitutes Carrick’s interest both as an artist and a person. Like Besant and Mérodack-Jeaneau, Carrick’s social conscience tied her irrevocably to the visible while her commitment to the Theosophical project drew her to the transcendental. Comparison with her husband’s work is useful in that it demonstrates precisely the delicately poised difference between painting as an engagement with the visible world and painting in which the visible is a pretext only, where the painting is in fact a reference to a world not visible to the human eye. On Carrick’s presentation of her husband’s work in 1925 there is an interesting internal dialogue. In her own introduction to his work Carrick presented Fox as engaged in a similar quest to her own; “Art to him was a sacred thing... he painted as he felt, and gave to his canvas the inner truth, the soul of the subject.” Yet Lionel Lindsay felt Fox was best served by an emphasis on voluptuous engagement with the visible world. “The charm of life and the visible world more than sufficed his imagination, and his work is consistently personal, and at its rarest possesses a voluptuous quality which is, in truth, a reflection of the artist’s

394 Paul Signac, ‘Hommage à Charles Henry’, Cahiers de l’étoile, 131930, 72
396 Ethel Carrick, Catalogue of paintings by the late E Phillips Fox and Ethel Carrick (Mrs E Phillips Fox), South Australia Society of Arts Gallery, Adelaide, 1925.
mind." One imagines with difficulty how such a statement would have been explained to Carrick's Theosophical community.

Clearly Fox's work engages with both the voluptuous charm of the visible world and the 'inner truth' of the subject, it was a question of weighting. Mary Eagle has pointed out that Fox at his best reached a level of abstraction in his lyrical descriptions of light which was simply beyond Carrick's own means. Yet this gift was undervalued by Fox as irrelevant to his own desire to represent the visible, deploying the tools of the scientific painter. For Carrick too there is a real tension between the visible and the invisible. Interestingly the works where Carrick loses sight of the transcendental dimension are the least successful of her oeuvre. In these works, most often produced for the burgeoning touristic market, the focus on topographical detail detracts from her otherwise tight compositions and conscious attention to picture making. In the works she herself valued Carrick creates a profitable tension between topographical interest, the balance of compositional opposites and the eternal verities.

By 1925 Carrick was beginning to make headway with the critics. The Age critic gave his own version of a wild beast analogy when he said of Carrick's work that he could "easily visualise it being done by a large man with a prognathous jaw." Carrick's pictorial strategies were no longer seen as the incompetancies of a lady painter but as calculated and overt manipulations of form and colour. Moreover the same critic continued "the figures in the foreground are all moving rapidly on their various occasions instead of standing about listlessly, as one sees so often in pictures of this type, the result being a suggestion of movement not only of the figures but of the atmosphere and general surroundings," Carrick's ambition to communicate the sense of movement and the crowds participation in the larger universal flux was identified and acknowledged.

397 Lionel Lindsay, Foreword to the catalogue of oil paintings by the late E Phillips Fox and Ethel Carrick (Mrs E Phillips Fox). Anthony Hordern & Sons, Sydney, 1925.
398 I am very grateful to Mary Eagle for her insightful conversations on this subject in mid 2003.
399 Anonymous, 'Art Notes: Paintings by Miss Ethel Carrick. The Age, 2 June, 1925, 13
400 Anonymous, 'ibid', 
In the Nice flower market c 1926

In the light of the discussions of the Studio Lodge it is worth taking a fresh look at Carrick’s In the Nice flower market c 1926 (colour plate 19) in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia. At the time of painting Carrick had been an official member of the Theosophical Society for about ten years.\textsuperscript{401} She was recently returned from attending the Australian Theosophical Convention, Sydney with Emily Lutyens when Krishnamurti and Leadbeater were reunited- surely one of the more emotional moments in the Theosophical Society’s history. She returned from Australia via Toulon in the South of France and this southern experience inspired her first paintings of Nice at the Paris Salons. Carrick had already resumed painting the bright, joyous images of the Luxembourg Gardens and sea-side resorts which had characterised her work pre-war.\textsuperscript{402} The outlook which informs her work before the war is realised in this superb example of her mature work.

Towards the middle of the 1920s the famous ‘recall to order’ swept the avant-garde in Paris and this classicising impulse can be felt in Carrick’s work too. In the Nice flower market displays all the compositional energies previously described, the hot colour and deep cool shade, the bold balance of colour contrasts. In addition the work exhibits a volumetric quality which is not apparent in earlier works. The umbrellas which close the composition at the top have a fleshy mushroom-like body and the white boxes and tablecloths push the strong colours of the bouquets upwards with new mass. There is a new repetition of the arch format which is increasingly a feature of the paintings of the 1920s and 30s. These white arcades at the back of the scene push forwards as the dark colours at the front of the work pull the eye into the centre of the composition. The whole fabric of the work is compressed, front to back, top to bottom, from left to right. Lines of flight are closed by swatches of dazzling white. There is not room to escape and the centre of the composition is full of wound-up bustle. In a very real sense we can see that the

\textsuperscript{401} She probably made her first visit to Adyar in December 1924/January 1925 with Emily Lutyens arriving in Australia via Ceylon on the Oronsay on 21 March 1925.

\textsuperscript{402} cf La Plage Française 1919 reproduced in Christie’s (M) 11 April 1990 ill. 102
market scene is a pretext, a fortuitous combination of factors: the umbrellas and arches pushing downwards, the white boxes cupping upwards in answer, flowers and brightly clothed people become happy jostling brushstrokes barely distinguishable from each other. The flowers and frothy humanity are no longer subject to a hierarchy of being, but rather a Theosophical 'brotherhood' of being—both are microcosmic echoes of the cosmic soul. The essential components of Carrick's compositional devices are available for selection and arrangement in the interest of creating an effect which captures a sense of that universal unity. This inner soul is most present in the vibration of objects and this effect of the energies of the crowd— the ineffable vibrations of superior life—is Carrick's special skill. This outlook can be seen to have been present from her earliest moments in Paris, forming the basis of discussions with Soudbinine, finding collaborative support in the ideas of Mérodack-Jeaneau and finally organisational support in the Studio Lodge of the Paris Theosophical Society with Chabas and Bermond.

Conclusion
The real influence of the Theosophical Society on Carrick's work occurred in the period 1905-09 in the form of a philosophic enquiry into the nature of the real and its implications for painting. Well positioned within a community of like minded, Theosophically inspired, avant-garde artists, Carrick defied the warnings of her husband and Australian critics to challenge the state of naturalistic painting. With the support of the Salon d'Automne, Les Tendances Nouvelles, the Libre Esthétique and the Theosophical Society she formed an intellectual and painterly connection with a Symbolist tradition, with influential ties to the Nabis, the artists of the Sâr Péladan and the Rose + Croix and to the avant garde of the Fauves and Neo-Impressionists. Carrick's paintings can be seen to occupy a space between the Symbolists and the avant-garde. Her work retains the rich savoury language of realism and yet discounts the supremacy of the visible world. It embraces a reality which exists only within ourselves and yet deploys the ciphers of the natural world to achieve this. Her paintings stand out for their energy and compositional unity yet this is no empty formalist achievement. Carrick imaged herself as a privileged
individual with a clear responsibility to see into the vibrations of superior life and deploy the technical means at her disposal to better communicate with this inner vision.
6. Slippages and misfires: Leadbeater in Sydney

CW Leadbeater, the influential proponent of radical visuality, was resident in Sydney from 1914 to 1929 and retained a significant presence there until his death in 1934. He is popularly remembered in Sydney for the sex scandals. No one to date has however examined the effect this charismatic and complex man had on the artists of the city he came to call home, although Roe’s work points to the many significant individuals who came into his orbit.

Leadbeater’s time in Sydney was a unique period of collaboration with local artists. In particular his collaborations with Judith Fletcher, Alfred Edward Warner and Gustaf Köllerstrom (photographer, printmaker and jeweller respectively) emerge as aberrant and extravagant moments within the oeuvre of each artist, what Deleuze and Guattari might describe as ‘slippages’ or ‘misfires.’ Yet these very misfires are productive. Leadbeater’s intense relationship with these artists had in each case surprising ramifications. These artists have been previously figured as conservative and parochial exponents in their chosen fields. Yet in collaboration with Leadbeater their work blossoms into expressions of radical modernism in ways which offer unique insights into broader contemporary practice. These three artists shared a conviction that the visible and invisible worlds were interlinked, that the transcendental was immanent and active in the visible world. In their work the separation of the disciplines of science, religion and art promoted by the

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403 The details of the affair are complex and well documented in Gregory Tillett’s biography of Leadbeater Tillett, The elder brother: A biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater. p. 279
404 Roe, Beyond belief; Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939. p. 318ff
Enlightenment was explicitly and programmatically ignored. Their very embeddedness in conservative professional networks was part of the leavening of parochial Sydney.

Much of the unusual in these artist’s productions can be understood as the result of their intimate relationship with Leadbeater. All were bound to him by an utter conviction of his superior psychic vision and by close physical proximity. Only in Sydney was Leadbeater’s theory backed by the full weight of his dominant personality and experienced relatively unmediated by others in the Theosophical leadership. At close quarters Leadbeater’s impact was mesmeric. While artists at a distance were able to explore the implications of his ideas with greater licence (and I will explore this in the next chapter) those close to him were tied to his expectations by their very acknowledgment of his superior visual authority. The artists most closely associated with Leadbeater felt highly privileged to be permitted to document this supreme artist’s visions. The compromise they made with their personal style was part of their general subsumption to his goals.

In Sydney Leadbeater embarked on the major project which was to occupy the second part of his life— the formation of the Liberal Catholic Church. This church was shaped within a Theosophical environment, the details of which will be addressed in more detail shortly. In the execution of this project he sought out artists to realise his dream of a theatrical experience, a Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk*, or total artwork encompassing a range of media with many constitutive works of art. Combined, the different media were designed to open the operations of the psychic realm.

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406 Price, Fuller, Carnick and Beckett had encountered Leadbeater’s theory in muted form, submerged as it was within the general collaborative output with Besant, Cousins and Jinarajadasa.
Leadbeater, Sydney and the Liberal Catholic Church

Leadbeater arrived in Australia via Java on a lecture tour\textsuperscript{407} with Florence Fuller and her ‘Javanese’ student Melati in his wake. While Leadbeater lectured to the many faithful in Indonesia both artists painted local landscapes. There was a strong Theosophical community in Indonesia which included the Dutch colonials and middle and upper class Indonesians.\textsuperscript{408} Melati returned to her family while Fuller and Leadbeater went on to Australia. When war broke out in August 1914 Leadbeater elected to make Sydney his home and came to make that city the centre for an international community interested in alternative spirituality. He would not revisit Adyar until 1925 returning again to Sydney where he stayed until 1929. After this date he made a number of extended overseas tours but maintained an active presence in Sydney. Leadbeater died in Perth in 1934 on his return from Annie Besant’s funeral at Adyar. Leadbeater’s own funeral was held at the Liberal Catholic Church, St Albans, Sydney. Krishnamurti, by then estranged from the Society and his erstwhile mentor, stood outside the church. The deaths of Besant and Leadbeater and defection of Krishnamurti falling so close to each other, and so closely timed with the Great Depression was a serious blow to the Society from which it has still not really recovered.

In 1914 however, Leadbeater found Sydney a ready audience for his talents, the many war casualties had reawakened interest in spiritualism and alternative spirituality. He brought with him feverish anticipation for the imminent arrival of the new world teacher to be realised in the person of Krishnamurti. Sydney was promptly galvanised into a raft of social, educational and spiritual projects directed at establishing that city as the heart of the Theosophical world.

The period 1914-1934 was for Sydney Theosophists a time of great excitement and promise. As early as 1915 Leadbeater had declared Australia and New

\textsuperscript{407} Tillett, The elder brother: A biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater. p. 159
\textsuperscript{408} Strangely although there was a great deal of commerce between Australian and Indonesian Theosophists I cannot find any firm links between Australian and Indonesian artists mediated by the Theosophical Society. There was active interest in Batik and shadow puppet performances in Adyar yet this does not seem to have been taken up in Australia.
Zealand the home of the ‘new sub-race.’

Those associated with the Theosophical Society in Sydney were inevitably drawn into a crowded schedule of opportunities for spiritual development and attendant responsibilities. At this time there was a very real overlap in the leadership, membership and even the physical spaces associated with the Theosophical parent body and its satellites notably the Liberal Catholic Church, the Order of the Star in the East and the Co-Masonic Order. In addition there were numerous building funds, charitable committees and lobbying projects, tennis and costume parties, picnics and walks. At the heart of this whirlwind was Leadbeater himself with his promise that he could ‘bring on’ the psychic advancement of those around him. Study groups, meditations, vegetarianism, readings and self sacrifice were the order of the day. Artists were enlisted as part of the ‘propaganda arm’ of the Society, in fitting out the new church or in illustrating Leadbeater’s phenomenal output. Around Leadbeater’s person gathered a number of apparently unrelated artists united in their desire to realise the ‘theosophising’ of Australia.

With Leadbeater at the helm, Sydney soon threw itself into preparation for the birth of a new spiritually evolved ‘race’. This was a period when private fortunes and business acumen were placed at the service of the Society. An eight story sectional headquarters was built at Hunter Street, Sydney in 1916. A number of experimental schools for Theosophical youth were planned and built the most substantial of which was the Morven Garden School, active from 1918 to 1923 when it was replaced by the Garden School in Stanton Road, Mosman until it too closed in 1924. In 1922 ‘The Manor’ at Mosman was bought and a number of families moved to a communal lifestyle revolving around Leadbeater. Fundraising for the famous Star Amphitheatre at Balmoral resulted in construction in 1923 but the structure was sadly sold in 1937. Adyar House was opened in 1924 and in

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409 Leadbeater taught that we are all currently part of the fifth root race and therefore developing our mental capacities. The shift in sub-race would bring with it a shift from intellect to intuition as defining principle. Future research would tend to synthesis rather than analysis. CW Leadbeater, *Australia and New Zealand: Home of a new sub-race* (from lectures delivered at Sydney, August 1915). Vasanta Press, Madras, 1916. p. 6

410 Marjorie Bull recalls donating an egg a day towards a succession of building projects. For a frugal vegetarian artist, like Carrick, Price or Fuller this was a very real sacrifice. Bull, Interview with the author,
1926 the radio station 2GB\textsuperscript{412} was established. There were scandals and leadership shuffles, the most dramatic being the split in 1923 which resulted in the formation of the short lived Independent Theosophical Society\textsuperscript{413} and the departure of many tangible assets as well as the wealthy Martyns, the musical Mrs JE Grieg and singer Dorothy Helmrich.

By 1928 Fuller, Price and Fletcher and Axel Poignant were gathered around the Manor. This apparently unlikely grouping of mid-career and burgeoning talent was a fraction of those who came under Leadbeater’s influence. There was an older generation who had relocated to Sydney which included Fuller, Carrick and Price. Both Price and Fuller were teaching at Morven Garden in 1918, and Price and Carrick both painted the Balmoral amphitheatre. Enid Lorrimer had been brought out from England to co-ordinate the performances at the Amphitheatre.\textsuperscript{414} There was a circle of new intimates like Fletcher, Warner, Köllerstrom, Theodora St John and later Axel Poignant who were active participants in the full range of Leadbeater’s Liberal Catholic Church and Theosophical Society activities. Theodora St John, one of Price’s colleagues at the Sydney Society of Women Artists, undertook a major painting on glass for the Manor chapel, (now overpainted) as well as other minor projects for the Society. Rukmini Devi Arundale, who would later reinvigorate Southern India’s dance traditions, stood a little apart from Leadbeater by her dedication to Annie Besant’s agendas and her marriage to future Theosophical Society president George Arundale. In addition to this close circle there was also a phalange of artists tangentially associated with the Theosophical Society. This included Sydney Conservatorium director Henri Verbrugghen and singer Dorothy Helmrich, both of whom were active participants in Theosophical projects as well as painters Roy de Maistre and Grace Cossington Smith, who were more eclectic in their borrowings. Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahony seemed to have an ambiguous relationship with the Society,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{R Peterson, 'Experimental schools, educational experience in Australia 1906-1948', Doctoral Thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1968.}
\footnote{The letters stand for Giordano Bruno, the letters for Annie Besant having been already taken.}
\footnote{Roe, Beyond belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939, p. 271}
\end{footnotes}
undertaking commissions for the Society and publishing in the Theosophical press while keeping at arms length from Leadbeater. They aligned themselves ultimately with the Anthroposophical Society through ex-Theosophist Ula Maddox. For a long time the Theosophical Building housed Sydney’s alternative cinema and the Art Society met in the rooms. Some indication of the impact and credibility of the Theosophical Society in Sydney can be gleaned from the high profile, if short lived, *Crusade for a beautiful Australia*, which was launched by the dancer Anna Pavlova as figure head. This Theosophical crusade was presided over by sculptor Bertram MacKennal at Adyar Hall on July 22 1926. Thea Proctor, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony and the students of the Sydney Art School and Dattilo Rubbo’s Art School were key signatories. Leadbeater’s Theosophical vision extended far beyond his immediate circle.

Leadbeater was soon engaged in what would become the major project of his later years— the establishment of the Liberal Catholic Church for which the peak period of activity falls between his consecration as Bishop in 1916 and the publication of *The science of the sacraments* in 1920. Even today this church has a significant international membership. It would be very important to Theosophists as it meant that they could now be married, cremated and baptised in an environment sympathetic to their Theosophical beliefs. It was however highly controversial within the Theosophical Society as Krishnamurti’s refusal to enter the church for Leadbeater’s funeral indicates.

The Liberal Catholic Church was an initiative of James Ingall Wedgewood (1883-1951) who secured apostolic succession for what would develop into the new church by becoming presiding Bishop in the obscure dying Old Catholic Church in February 1916. The sequence of events which transformed the organisation from The Old Catholic Church to the Liberal Catholic Church appears to have been

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415 Maddox’s early intimacy with the Theosophical Society leadership is revealed Claire Tracey, Clare Tracey’s autograph book, c1920s-1940s, Perth.
416 William Moore, ‘At home and abroad’, *Art in Australia*, 171926, pp. 66-67
417 Kate Bowan is at present undertaking fascinating research which is revealing the Theosophical Society in the twenties as a locus for avant-garde music.
irregular but effective.419 Wedgewood ordained Leadbeater as a bishop five months later and together they entirely reshaped the face and substance of the Old Catholic Church. Leadbeater directed the full force of his creative energies onto this task and drew others into the project with him. A distinguishing feature of the new Liberal Catholic Church was its emphasis on ritual as a source of real spiritual power. In line with Theosophical teachings it is understood that when the Eucharist is celebrated Christ, as one of the Masters, is actually present in the church. The new church also conceives each individual as a ‘Christ in the making’, and so is inherently consistent with Theosophical precepts.420 It clashed with Theosophical ideas most fundamentally in its formalised structure, patriarchal hierarchy and especially in Krishnamurti’s own message that ‘Truth is a pathless land’. It is worth noting that the Liberal Catholic Church today sees itself as a very separate organisation from the Theosophical Society. However at the time of Leadbeater’s active involvement, there was a substantial overlap.

While Wedgewood’s attention was directed to rewriting the liturgy, Leadbeater’s principal energies were directed towards the ‘theatre’ of the religious experience; a fully conceived gesamtkunstwerk. In Ride on Stranger, Kylie Tennant’s character Shannon spends some time at the Manor and describes unflatteringly the rivalry of the Bishops. She described Leadbeater (aka Bishop Steel) as somewhat apart from all this: “his loving-kindness having long ago reduced his frail person to a mere husk from which the exotic orchid of his unworldliness threw fantastic rays of blossom over everything it touched.”421 While it is hard to reconcile this portrait of a frail Leadbeater with his astronomical output, her description of the service of the Liberal Catholic Church does appear to have captured the tone of the experience. She described the church as filled with:

... hot, packed, expectant worshippers, until the air seemed heavy, soaked with human emotions, like cotton wool dipped in petrol and

\[\text{418 The Liberal Catholic Church has now officially severed its once close ties to the Theosophical Society.} \]
\[\text{419 Roe, Beyond belief; Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939. p. 245} \]

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as ready to explode. It was quivering with a dangerous excitement; the congregation full of half mystic, half erotic exultation; the sanctuary blazing like a Christmas tree with candles and brass, amid which the servers in scarlet and rose and plum colour moved like so many bright birds through a forest of fire; ... 422

This degree of mystical intensity was indeed Leadbeater's ambition. The design of the ritual, the music and the paraphernalia were directed to channelling and transforming the energies described so colourfully by Tennant into the psychic dimension. Many of the artists discussed in this thesis would at one time have been either congregation or active participants in the service. It is worth noting that the Liberal Catholic Church attracted considerable resentment within the Theosophical Society for its phallocentrism. 423 Women could only be involved as congregation, historians, embroiderers and musicians. Judith Fletcher documented the events with her camera.

**Judith Fletcher: a recovered archive**

Like Florence Fuller, Judith Fletcher has a significant portion of her output in the distributed archive of the Theosophical Society. A lack of information and significant works from her mid-career has seriously compromised recognition of her significance. Despite being a successful early professional woman photographer in Sydney we have a limited understanding of her work. This is because from 1917 to 1932 Fletcher was closely associated with the Theosophical Society. At about the same time that Fletcher resigned her membership she ceased working as a photographer, married and withdrew from larger society.

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422 ibid p. 106
423 See Theodora St John, 'Our lady of the annunciation', *Herald of the Star*, 14, 10, 1925, for a reproduction of *Our Lady of the Annunciation* by Theodora St John in celebration of the Marian/ World Mother cult which sprang up in an attempt to balance this phallocentrism.
From about 1909 (Anne) Judith Fletcher (1886-1971) operated a professional practice.\textsuperscript{424} Initially her portrait studio was in Pitt Street where she specialised in ‘At Home’ work photographing ladies and children. Her work was highly praised by the editor of the \textit{Australasian Photo-Review} in what we would now describe as an advertorial.\textsuperscript{425} She later had a studio in George Street. From 1917 she became attached to Leadbeater, becoming a core element in his publicity machine. It is significant that when Fletcher joined the Theosophical Society in December 1917 her sponsors were Leadbeater’s Secretary (Mrs VK Maddox) and his personal assistant/doctor (Dr Mary Rocke). Her membership contributions became erratic with Leadbeater’s increasing absences from Sydney and she resigned on his death. Fletcher’s commitment to the Theosophical Society was profound and was to affect her family; two sisters, Selina and Beatrice, joined in 1918. The fourth sister, Dorothy McLaurin, was probably also sympathetic, though not a member. Dorothy ran a private library near Turramurra station and it was through her that Judith came to know Grace Cossington Smith whose work will be explored in the next chapter.\textsuperscript{426} Fletcher’s professional intimacy with Leadbeater confirmed and challenged her work in portraiture. Fletcher was court photographer to Leadbeater in Sydney, capturing visiting personalities and documenting the celebrations associated with the Liberal Catholic Church.

The importance of publicity was well recognised within the Theosophical Society and the value of a resident photographer clearly understood. Indeed when Fletcher did begin to drift away from the Society her place was soon filled by the young Axel Poignant. One of Fletcher’s first tasks, perhaps her most important, was to document the authority and presence of Leadbeater in his capacity as Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church. If the classic photograph of Mme Blavatsky is by Enrico Resta, the photograph most associated with Bishop Leadbeater is by Judith Fletcher. Fletcher’s membership of the Theosophical Society coincides with an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{425} Editor, ‘Locker’,
\item \textsuperscript{426} Claudia Hyles, Judith Fletcher 1886-1971, 1994, Canberra,
\end{itemize}
intensely creative period for Leadbeater and the formation and development of the Liberal Catholic Church.

Fletcher’s celebrated portrait of Bishop Leadbeater 1917-20 (colour plate 20) is part of a larger series over time of performances and celebrations associated with the Liberal Catholic Church. In this work Fletcher has Leadbeater leaning forward into the frame. Prominent on his chest is the Pectoral Cross and on his finger the Bishop’s ring. While this work is clearly a representation of the Bishop it is also a photograph of the man. Fletcher’s portrait of Bishop Leadbeater captures the charismatic quality which made the man so influential in Australia and internationally. He appears beneficent, fun loving and like Fuller’s portrait of him some seven or eight years previously, well loved. His eyes twinkle and he appears, as many remember him, open and engaging. This is a studio photograph with a delicate tonal range and very fine detail, capable of significant enlargement. Fletcher’s attention to the tonal extremes of white and deep sepia are a distinctive feature of her work. The clarity of the whites of the eyes indicates that some degree of retouching has taken place in the darkroom. There is an almost painterly quality to her use of light to enhance a delicate rhythmic line and a textural quality to her form. The astute use of white within a relative pale tonal range creates an effect of openness and clarity which was evidently a much valued expressive register for Leadbeater. Fletcher’s portrait of Leadbeater as bishop is bright and airy; the effect is less poetic than journalistic. This might be compared with the darker, more mysterious tonal range favoured by Enrico Resta in his photographic portrait of Mme Blavatsky. In Fletcher’s work the light catches the details of the subject’s face, hair and dress with a scientific concern for accuracy. Where Blavatsky’s invisible was tenebrous, Leadbeater’s conception of the invisible was founded on an alternative evidentiary aesthetic. This evidentiary aesthetic is reflected in the work of his favourite photographer.

A related image is Full pontifical vestments c 1920. (colour plate 21) This full length photograph of Leadbeater is less a personal portrait than a portrait of the office. It
is also the documentation of a massive collaborative project and is reproduced as such in *The science of the sacraments* \(^{427}\). Each element of the bishop’s dress was intended to heighten the spiritual experience of both the wearer and the congregation on the astral plane. The mechanics of this will be explored more fully in the later discussion of the pectoral cross. Fletcher clearly enjoys the highly sensuous texture of the regalia which she represents with great care and sensitivity. Her total commitment to the project is evidenced in the way she communicates the dignity and authority of the office.

At some time in the mid 1920s (perhaps as early as 1922) Fletcher left her George Street studio and established a darkroom in the Manor’s laundry, a facility later inherited by Poignant. She may also have been the first to set up a rough studio in the old stables. Fletcher’s output during the mid twenties, comprising as it does a large number of photographs documenting the participants in the various levels of Liberal Catholic Church rituals, suggests that a studio on site at the Manor where so many of the participants were in residence would have been a very practical solution. One such example is the charming group portrait *Altar boys c 1925* (colour plate 23) which exemplifies the strange mixture of high ritual and alternative lifestyles which was such a feature of her work. The boys are posed in a standard formal arrangement, their faces arranged in serious, earnest expressions- only their bare feet disturb the composition. Their whiteness and vulnerability connect with that quality of white which distinguishes Fletcher’s work. In this work the tonal delicacy of the whites carries the interest of the subject- from the earnest pale faces to the business-like crispness of the shirts to the wholesome childishness of the bare toes.

Fletcher’s role as photographer to Leadbeater did not stop her from undertaking outside commissions. She retained important connections with the Sydney arts community as witnessed by her series of portraits of women artists for *The Home*

\(^{427}\) CW Leadbeater, *The science of the sacraments*. St. Alban Press, 1920, Los Angeles; Sydney, 1920. plate 52
in February 1920. In many cases her intimacy with Leadbeater gave her unique access to visiting celebrities. It will be remembered that the Theosophical Society’s demographic was typically the upper middle classes and many local and international visitors made their way to ‘The Manor’ where Fletcher could easily photograph them. She was also the obvious artist to photograph Besant during her 1922 Australian tour. Her portrait of Annie Besant (colour plate 22) was reproduced in *The Home* along with a semi promotional article. Like the photograph of Leadbeater this photograph has all the hallmarks of Fletcher’s style, careful attention to silvery details, a love of whites and delicate tonalities with elegant, minimal retouching of eye-whites and shadows. The portrait of Besant also shares with her other work a quality of poised intensity in her sitter. Despite the relaxed posture the full force of Besant’s powerful personality is directed at the viewer.

As a portraitist Fletcher was working very much within the high Victorian tradition of moral portraiture which Fuller had studied in Paris the previous century. Leadbeater was to give the tradition a unique twist, making it his own and constricting the range of acceptable subjects further. The very specificity of Leadbeater’s personal aesthetic is disconcerting. His prescriptive admonitions regarding appropriate subject matter deny the artist almost any imaginative latitude; he insists on the ‘scientific’ rigour of his own radical visionary experience.

Leadbeater advised the connoisseur to avoid pictures whose subjects were ‘mean, sordid or terrible.’ He recommended:

> Beautiful landscapes and sea-views are usually best of all; pictures of grand old cathedrals—magnificent buildings with peaceful associations; sometimes a portrait or imaginary figure, if the face be

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428 The Society had a privileged connection with *The Home* at this time through Theosophist Hera Roberts, a cousin of Thea Proctor.

429 Judith Fletcher, ‘Dr Annie Besant’, *The Home*, 1 June, 1922.

430 *The hidden side of things* first published just before his arrival in Australia and quickly republished in 1919 and again in 1923.
really a fine one, but never under any circumstances one which suggests sorrow, anger or pain.... Care must be exercised with regard to photographs. Private friends are of course admissible, or a public man whom one admires; but on no account should the figures of actresses be introduced, as they always attract the most undesirable thought forms...431

It is not hard to imagine landscape artists Jane Price or Ethel Carrick absorbing such advice with satisfaction. Florence Fuller too would have been confirmed in her practice by such advice. Had Fletcher ever been tempted by the unworthy subject before 1917 she would have found herself ill regarded within the Society after that date. Leadbeater’s superior visionary capabilities, which were commonly accepted as surpassing the artist’s, enabled him to recount the visible proof of such indiscretions. Fletcher’s portrait of Besant is firmly located within this program of spiritually uplifting portraiture. The artist was understood to be a privileged being within the Theosophical Society, valued for their artistic temperament and for the very real power of their images. Leadbeater could thus write:

the artist puts a great deal of himself, of his inmost thoughts and feeling, into his work, and the effect of all that thought and feeling inheres in the picture and radiates from it as surely as scent inheres and radiates from a rose. There is a hidden side to every picture – the conception which was in the artist’s mind and heart. That conception, when he formed it, expressed itself clearly in astral and mental matter, even though he may have succeeded but partially in bringing his idea down to the physical world. ... and these, which we may call the unseen counterparts of the picture, are always radiating vibrations of their own character, whatever that may be, and are

431 Leadbeater, *The hidden side of things*. pp. 399-400
therefore producing a never-ceasing effect upon those who live within their influence.\textsuperscript{432}

Leadbeater’s specific advice to the artist comes from \textit{The hidden side of things} first published in 1913 just before his arrival in Australia and rapidly updated to include his Australian experiences in 1919 and 1923. This curious volume gives practical advice on all aspects of daily life from the appropriate colour of furnishing fabrics to a taxonomy of fairies\textsuperscript{433} and the residual thought forms “of overwhelming fatigue and boredom” which haunt the State Gallery of New South Wales.\textsuperscript{434} Fletcher evidently conceived her portraits as continuing to radiate vibrations of both her character and that of the subject long after they left her hands. Following Leadbeater’s admonitions we can recognise in Fletcher’s photographs a continuation of the work Jane Price had begun under Olcott to realise a spiritual nation. The agency of portraits of ‘significant men’ in the context of Theosophical nation building has an echo in the short lived photographic museum in Indore, India 1925 where portraits of ‘great men’ were brought together to influence their viewers towards a higher spiritual dimension.\textsuperscript{435} Acceptance and internalisation of the idea that the work of art had real agency implied a level of responsibility on the part of the artist. Fletcher’s decision on whether to continue in portraiture must have brought the attendant anxieties of who was appropriate to photograph. Clearly Leadbeater’s advice in this matter would be crucial. It is perhaps hardly surprising that bereft of Leadbeater’s support Fletcher lost confidence in her ability to continue a career in photography. Fletcher might be conceived as one of the real casualties of Leadbeater’s \textit{gesamtkunstwerk}.

\textbf{Alfred Edward Warner: a bright bird in a forest of fire}

\textsuperscript{432} ibid p. 398
\textsuperscript{433} In Australia fairies are most often a “wonderful luminous sky-blue colour” although Queensland fairies are not unlike those of Indonesia ibid p. 98
\textsuperscript{434} ibid p. 149
The science of the sacraments was Leadbeater’s first new book in Australia. It was in the production of this book that Leadbeater came to meet artist Alfred Edward Warner (1879-1968)—the artist also responsible for the rather remarkable frontispiece. Warner had joined the Theosophical Society in New Zealand436 where amongst other things he was one of the foundation members of the Quoin club, founded in Auckland in 1916, the first graphic art club in Australasia. He arrived in Sydney in mid 1919 and very soon came into Leadbeater’s orbit. He would remain active in the Theosophical Society until 1929. There is an interesting disparity between Warner’s paintings for the Theosophical Society and his other work. The inconsistency of his two bodies of work reveal telling tensions in both our expectations of the period and the meaning of his engagement with Leadbeater’s radical visuality.

In Sydney Warner established his own commercial art studio, was firmly inserted in a professional network and became one of the period’s most prolific painter-etchers. In 1923 he was a member of the Australian Painter-Etcher’s Society and served on the Council from 1923 to 1925. He was also a foundation member of the Australian Ex Libris Society in 1923.437

437 David Angeloro, Australian and New Zealand Painter-Etchers: Alfred Edward Warner, 1993, Sydney,
Shortly after his arrival in Sydney in mid 1919 Warner was approached by Harry Hurst Banks (himself a priest in the Liberal Catholic Church and an artist/ photo-engraver) and the Rev. Irving Cooper to undertake the ‘difficult and beautiful illustrations’ for The science of the sacraments. Banks recalls that Leadbeater and Cooper had experienced considerable difficulty in locating a suitable artist to undertake the work and that as an ‘expert from London' Warner was one of the very few able to undertake this commission. Warner’s experience in commercial printmaking would prove useful as the initial translation from original artwork to the printed plate was faulty. Warner insisted that the plates be redone at considerable expense. This detail is important as part of the mythology of the high degree of precision and accuracy felt to be important in communicating Leadbeater’s vision.

Warner’s public work is remarkable for its attention to topographical detail. His work does not suffer from an excess of imagination or stylistic mannerism. He appears to have approached his subjects in a journalistic fashion, aiming to render as close as possible a likeness with a minimum of personal investment. Such is certainly the case in Warner’s etching of Pengilley’s wagon 1922 (fig. 12) reproduced in Art in Australia 1923. It was precisely this approach that Warner brought to the illustrations of the eucharistic form in The science of the sacraments. Yet Warner can not be dismissed as a passive illustrator of Leadbeater’s visions. Warner was a willing assistant in the process with his own complementary visionary experiences. He was sufficiently convinced to be baptised into the Liberal Catholic Church during this period and became a priest in the church in

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439 This is curious given the residency of both Fuller and Price in Sydney at the time. While Warner had certainly trained at the London County Council School he was no rival to either Price or Fuller in either the quality of his work or his training. Clearly Leadbeater was looking for some other quality. For information on Warner’s early training I am indebted to David Angeloro Angeloro, Australian and New Zealand Painter-Etchers: Alfred Edward Warner, 440 Alfred Edward Warner, ‘Pengilley’s wagon’, Art in Australia, 41923,
1921. Between 1921 and his last recorded service in 1928 he signed his prints ‘E W’ with a crucifix separating the two letters.\textsuperscript{442}

The science of the sacraments includes a number of monochrome, pen and wash illustrations of the Eucharist by Warner. But only one in colour, the frontispiece; \textit{The completed eucharistic form 1919} (colour plate 24).\textsuperscript{443} This frontispiece illustrates the psychic energies orchestrated during the celebration of the Eucharist. The process is explained in the text as a progressive purification of the space by the priest through the exercise of his will. As he does so he “blows what looks like a vast flat bubble of etheric and astro-mental matter, a thought-edifice, ethereal, diaphanous– a bubble which just includes the congregation.” \textsuperscript{444} This space is further developed by the congregation as they express ‘purity of intention’, ‘love’ and ‘devotion’. Each stage in the mass is accompanied by the corresponding enlargement of the etheric form. Into this space is invoked a spiritual being who takes over the manipulation of the thought-edifice to finally produce the form pictured in colour by Warner, a vast bubble of ‘etheric and astro-mental matter’. In Warner’s illustration this form blossoms not over Sydney’s modest St Alban’s (fig. 13) where the actual psychical research was in process, but an idyllic Norman church. Surprisingly the shape of the etheric form does not follow the English architectural model but corresponds to a mosque-like structure with central dome and minarets. The form shimmers with the colours of love, devotion and purity of

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig13.png}
\caption{St Alban’s church, Sydney}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{442} Charles Warner, Letter to Diane Kynaston, 1990, Yanderra, NSW, Banks, ‘Early recollections of our church in Australia and New Zealand’, 12-151 would like to thank Charles Warner for this reference.

\textsuperscript{443} To my great regret I have not been able to locate any of the original drawings.

\textsuperscript{444} Leadbeater, \textit{The science of the sacraments}, p. 38
intent, (pink, pale blue and dark blue) as described in Besant and Leadbeater’s *Thought forms*. The congregation bathes in this energy and is strengthened and uplifted by the agency of the attendant thought-forms, so too are the unwitting souls in the vicinity of the church. This is the form produced by the congregation described by Tennant as “... soaked with human emotions like cotton wool dipped in petrol and as ready to explode.”\(^{445}\) In celebrating the Eucharist with the right rituals and the right tools, energies are understood to be harnessed which have agency beyond the originating congregation, the church “is meant not only as a place or worship, but also a centre of magnetic radiation through which spiritual force can be poured out upon a whole district.”\(^{446}\) Warner’s representation of *The completed eucharistic form* documents the agency of the *gesamtkunstwerk*. Warner could not help also being aware of the hidden impact of his own image with its own attendant thought forms and independent agency.

Another collaborative project which Warner undertook with Leadbeater was the lavish volume *The chakras: a monograph*. Again, there are no surviving originals for these works. *The crown chakra*, 1927 (colour plate 25) is a representation of the coloured thought form which radiates from the crown chakra, the energy field which emanates from the head. This form is dominated by the yellow of strong intellect and a rosy ‘high spirituality’. Like *The completed eucharistic form*, *The crown chakra* deploys a visual language in which the operation of colour and form are divorced from naturalistic representation. The formulation of this abstract visual language draws inevitably on both the illustrations of *Thought forms* and Leadbeater’s originating visionary experience. It would appear that Warner was as comfortable with this abstract visual language as he was with the idea of an abstract reality. However it was the impression of this other-worldly reality rather than the language required to represent it which was the more enduring. While the form and substance are brought together in Warner’s scientific documentation of Leadbeater’s privileged sight, in Warner’s larger body of work the connection is not pursued. Despite Warner’s commitment to Leadbeater and the personal reality of

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\(^{445}\) Tennant, *Ride on stranger*, p. 106
potent colour and form active on the astral level, Warner did not deploy abstract visual language in his other work.

Warner’s Pengilley’s wagon and The completed eucharistic form appear at first so incongruous as to defy any useful comparison. In actual fact the two works have an internal consistency based on a desire to represent the visible with a minimum of personal investment and a maximum of ‘scientific truth’. Leadbeater’s vision left no room for doubt that physical ocularity represented only part of the real.447 His privileged sight enabled him to access a level of the real which could only be imagined by his colleagues. In The completed eucharistic form Warner made visible Leadbeater’s vision with, as Rev. Banks tells us, great diligence and attention to detail. Not only are the images beautiful but we are assured they are accurate.448 The same aesthetic of truth to the subject which informed Pengilley’s wagon made Warner eminently suitable for Leadbeater’s purposes. Warner does not infuse subjective experience of the world into his work but images Leadbeater’s knowledge of the currents, vibrations and rhythms of the non-visible kind. There is no tension between the visible and invisible, for Leadbeater and Warner they co-exist. The abstraction of both The completed eucharistic form and The crown chakra is only apparent to the ungifted, they are intended to reference the real (invisible) world.

Inserted in the centre of Sydney’s professional network the otherwise soberly representational Warner instances a radical departure from the representation of the visible. Both The completed eucharistic form and The crown chakra legitimise

446 Leadbeater, The science of the sacraments. p. 14
447 Leadbeater’s visionary capabilities were largely unquestioned by the Manor community even after his death— as the following indicates “…As to his clairvoyance, I have no power to judge as he never stressed this. We were all very untalented on this point, so we could not prove or disprove anything, but C.W.L. was one of the most careful and most truthful people I know. Therefore I do not think that he would have said anything he did not thoroughly believe. Furthermore, I presume it is very difficult to explain things that no-one has ever seen or can place in any known frame of picture or experience! I certainly do not think C.W.L. was self-deluded. The difficulty was transmitting what he saw to a host of others who did not have the same vision. I think all seers must have the same trouble. If anything, C.W.L. was more careful and less apt to exaggerate than most people, as he was a man of little imagination really. To us he was a great man because of his human qualities; not because he was clairvoyant and not for his beliefs, but because he had the courage to act accordingly and was more capable of a real and very pure love than anyone I know. -Hilda van Hall. In C. W. Leadbeater: A Great Occultist Compiled by Sandra Hodson and Mathias J. van Thiel
the representation of reality beyond the simply visible. Warner’s images carry with them not only the authority of the printed page but also the authority of Leadbeater, the most celebrated psychic of his day, with a regular weekly congregation of between 80 and 100 eminent citizens, a dedicated radio station (2GB) broadcasting as far away as the new national capital, Canberra. Risk taking on this scale by a council member of Australian Painter-Etcher’s Society is made all the more remarkable by the otherwise very conservative nature of his public work.

**Gustaf Köllerstrom**

The first services of the Liberal Catholic Church were held in the home of Gustaf Köllerstrom, ‘Crendon’ in Raymond Rd, Neutral Bay. It was at ‘Crendon’ that Leadbeater was made first a priest and then a bishop and researched *The science of the sacraments*. The Theosophical Society and Liberal Catholic Church were major parts of Köllerstrom’s life, so much so that he reputedly went mad at the end of his life from too much meditation. While this diagnosis is less probable than an excess of mercury in the jeweller’s system it does reveal the degree to which vegetarianism, meditation and other now well established practices were conceived as dangerous and outlandish at the time. By all accounts Gustaf was an open, friendly, public spirited man who made a point of watching for Swedish and Norwegian ships to enter the harbour and offering a welcoming hand to visitors from his country of birth.

Gustaf Köllerstrom was one of Sydney’s major manufacturing jewellers supplying to trade and employing over 50 staff. In 1895 his workshop was at 295 Pitt Street and by 1915 was established at 19 Hunter Street. Because he supplied to trade his work does not usually bear a mark; however one series of work can be closely identified with him— the jewel encrusted paraphernalia of the early Liberal Catholic Church. *Leadbeater’s Pectoral Cross* was made in 1917 with the crosier and ring at about the same time. *Leadbeater’s Pectoral Cross* (colour plate 26) was made by

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448 Banks, 'Early recollections of our church in Australia and New Zealand', 12-15 p. 13
449 Constance Radcliffe, 'The early days of our church in Sydney'. Ibid,
Kollerstrom to Leadbeater’s specifications and is inscribed on the verso “CW Leadbeater 1917”. One of the important features of this collaboration is the wealth of written information on the cross. The rationale for the design of the cross and its relationship with the larger opera of the Liberal Catholic Church service is described in The science of the sacraments as:

... a solidly-made cross of gold (or silver gilt) some three or four inches in length, often heavily jewelled, which is worn on the breast by Bishops ... we have found it advantageous to adopt with regard to this cross the same plan as with the Altar-stone, and to set in it the jewels of the seven Rays, though in a slightly different order. A larger central stone is here desirable, and it is most convenient that it should be that of the Ray which is now coming into domination influence in the world— the seventh. We therefore place a fairly large amethyst in that position, and arrange the other gems around it just as before, except that the diamond is immediately above it and the sapphire immediately below. Other smaller amethysts may be at the extremities of the cross. When the new root-race becomes prominent, it is probable that it will be well to use the diamond as the central stone; but the present arrangement is the best for the next thousand years or so.  

Leadbeater provided the advice on the most suitable arrangement of the elements for maximum potency and Köllerstrom the technical and aesthetic advice. Köllerstrom himself owned that the cross was successful but not artistic. Leadbeater’s design drew on a knowledge of the chakras, colour psychology and an occult knowledge of crystals, which when arranged within the cross enhanced the occult power of the wearer, enabling the Bishop to draw on the energy of the earth and sky as well as significantly amplifying the energies of the individual. For the realisation of the extraordinary and weekly manifestation described by Tennant

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451 Leadbeater, The science of the sacraments, p. 466
at St Alban's the Pectoral Cross was essential. The pectoral cross was conceived as a “receiving and discharging station”, a

... kind of telephone receiver ... an outpost of his consciousness. The force peculiar to him (the wearer) is always raying out through it ... in the same way the force of a Ray streams always through its consecrated stone; but when any person who belongs to that Ray comes near that stone, it is at once aroused into more vigorous action, and the person, if at all receptive, may receive an extraordinary outpouring of strength and help. ... A properly made psychic telephone can never be put out of order, as our earthly telephones so often are.453

Leadbeater's pectoral cross is a remarkable object. Its conventional appearance belies its radical function. To those unversed in The science of the sacraments it appears consistent with Köllerstrom's larger practice of contemporary commercial jewellery. Yet it was designed to receive and enhance psychic energies between the visible and the invisible worlds. As a crafted object it reproduces in material form the permeability of the visible and invisible worlds embodied by Leadbeater's person.

Leadbeater and Köllerstrom's successful collaboration was recognised by another agency. In a remarkable story454 both Leadbeater and the fourteen year old Dora Van Gelder (1904-) were importuned in Lane Cove National Park by an angel desirous of this cross. The angel was anxious to turn the 'transmitting' capabilities of the cross to his own ends. "He wanted a jewelled cross put somewhere in the central section of the valley to establish a center or point of influence for that part of the area." 455 Van Gelder recalled that his preferred site was:

452 Gustaf Köllerstrom, Annotations, c1920, Sydney, p. 27
453 Leadbeater, The science of the sacraments. pp. 466-7
454 See Appendix for a full account
particularly horrible, with a gruesomely unpleasant atmosphere due, I am bound to admit, to human misdeeds. We appealed to the angel and he said he wanted the cross in this unpleasant place just because it was so unsavoury. He hoped that the radiations of the jewel would set it right.  

Once buried the angel told the lesser fairies to "come there constantly and bathe in the radiations of the jewels, and so carry the new influence about the Park."

Beyond the sheer seductiveness of Van Gelder's vision is the assumption that the work of art can powerfully mediate between the visible and the invisible world and even effect change in the visible world. This is also the central feature of Leadbeater's independent account of the event. The crafted object was conceived as having the power to influence local reality on the psychic and material plane. This influence was seen as talismanic in that it does not rely on the ability of others to recognise or understand its meaning. Such a narrative is a powerful illustration of the allure of the Theosophical Society, which could offer a sense of revolutionary potential to each photograph, painting, craft piece, sculpture or civic plan undertaken. The work of art by Fletcher, Warner, Köllerstrom or any other artist was conceived as galvanising the energies of the invisible, psychic realm.

Conclusion
Leadbeater's collaborations with Fletcher, Warner and Köllerstrom during the period 1916-20, evidence the degree to which the visible and the invisible were contested at the very heart of Sydney's art community. These artists produced formulations which are extreme and unusual expressions of modernity's anxiety

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456 ibid., pp. 10-13
457 ibid., pp. 10-13
with the instability of material and spiritual reality. They were not isolated, but thoroughly integrated within the artistic community of their day.

The works produced by Fletcher, Warner and Köllerstrom were conceptualised as operating in a space between the visible and the invisible, in a very real intersection of science, religion and art. Warner’s paintings made visible the very thought forms facilitated by Köllerstrom’s cross. Fletcher’s photographs were likewise conceived as material objects which had agency in the invisible world. While abstract art is usually conceived as paradigmatically modernist, Warner’s abstractions must be acknowledged as consistent with an alternative modernism which decried empty formalism and was instead as firmly attached to the world of appearances as Köllerstrom’s Cross or Fletcher’s portraits. There can be no question of modernism arriving in a suitcase. Sydney’s arts community was firmly engaged within a cross cultural and interdisciplinary interrogation of modernity. Leadbeater’s initial reception and subsequent support evidence the degree to which the ideas he represented were welcomed.

The professional needs of Fletcher, Warner and Köllerstrom were redirected towards Leadbeater’s goals. However it would be the artist’s ability to distance themselves from the Bishop’s influence which would prove crucial. Whether from Paris or Munich, or suburban Sydney, artists with some mediating distance could direct the knowledge learnt from Leadbeater of the invisible dimension to service their own painterly ambitions. Speaking from a position of privileged intimacy with Leadbeater, Köllerstrom’s artist’s soul was left unsatisfied.
7. Science versus Spirit: colour-music in Sydney

While neither Roy de Maistre (1894-1968) nor Grace Cossington Smith (1892-1984) were members of the Theosophical Society, their artistic practice was conceived in the terms articulated by CW Leadbeater. Both de Maistre and Cossington Smith self-consciously abandoned a traditional application of colour to describe form, in favour of a colour theory which proposed a spiritual connection with the transcendental. The genealogy of this intellectual trajectory leads inexorably to the Theosophical Society and Leadbeater’s visionary experience. De Maistre’s abstract colour-music paintings and Cossington Smith’s radical paintings of the mid twenties must be seen within the context of Sydney’s hot-house environment to appreciate their contemporary and historical relevance. Roy de Maistre’s abstractions of 1919 have been positioned as Australia’s first abstract paintings; Grace Cossington Smith’s radical paintings of the late twenties are similarly seen as high points in Australian modernism. In this chapter I provide a snapshot of a moment in two significant careers within the context of a raging debate fuelled and fanned by the Theosophical Society.

Under Leadbeater Sydney warmed to a debate about whether the invisible was open to scientific or purely spiritual exploration. The debate was led by experts in their field and colour-music was the popular vehicle for this battle for the hearts and minds of Sydney. Representing the scientific viewpoint was Alexander Hector, retired industrial chemist. Scientists, doctors, interior designers and inevitably artists joined the debate. Cossington Smith and de Maistre, free to experiment beyond the confines of Leadbeater’s expectations, drew inspiration
from a range of sources, gathering them together to service their Theosophically inspired vision of the real.

Bruce James and Heather Johnson’s biographies of Grace Cossington Smith and Roy de Maistre respectively lay out the formal and stylistic resources deployed by those artists in exhaustive detail. However both overlook the implications of the insistent Theosophical connections raised in their own texts. Like that other important writer on modernism Mary Eagle, they acknowledge the connection while concentrating their attention in other areas. The dialogue between Hector and Leadbeater which is crucial to the colour–music debate of the period is underplayed. Another important contributor to this history; Elizabeth Gertsakis, while exploring Hector’s influence in considerable detail, ignores Leadbeater’s influence altogether. The conceptual framework which motivated the colour–music debate thus remains largely unexplored. In the debates on the non-visible which eddied around the issue, Theosophy’s critique of modernity was replayed. When the implications of this fundamental point are included into the study of these artists work it can be seen that their radical formal experimentation was a by-product of their response to modernity and is more usefully characterised by its conceptual challenge than its stylistic innovations. If defined stylistically it appears anomalous and precarious within a narrative of embarkation of stylistic modernism. When considered conceptually the work of these artists can be seen as part of a continuous and coherent pattern of engagement with issues of modernity, presenting a challenge which is ultimately gendered, decentralised and alternative.

The Clairvoyant

A fundamental aim of the Theosophical Society was to reunite the spiritual with science and art and this is clearly replayed in the Sydney experience. The Pythagorean Music Society had been set up in 1911 under Gnosis Lodge with

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459 Gertsakis was unfortunately under the impression that Leadbeater did not arrive in Sydney until 1921 and thus after the famous exhibition. Elizabeth Gertsakis, ‘Roy de Maistre and colour-music 1916-1920’, Honours Thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1975.
Mrs Evelyn Grieg as one of its chief protagonists. Each month they gathered at the Theosophical venue Kings Hall to sing in a ‘Pythagorean choir’ and to discuss the movement of the spheres, referring inevitably to Mme Blavatsky’s *Isis unveiled*:

...how reasonable will it not appear that the terrific impulses imparted to the common medium by the sweep of the myriad blazing orbs that are rushing through ‘the interstellar depths,’ should affect us and the earth apon (sic) which we live, in a powerful degree?

Blavatsky explained “As the planets differ in size, distance and activity, so differ in intensity their impulses upon the ether or astral light...” Blavatsky linked these impulses to musical vibration and colour and to the effect of the ‘music of the spheres’ on the sensitive individual. Here are laid out the major themes of the debate as it was understood by Theosophists, the synchrony of colour and sound, products of the vibrations of the planets which the sensitive individual was attuned to.

The idea of colour-music of course has a long parentage and was hardly unique to the Theosophical Society. However in the Sydney Theosophical Society these ideas were gathered together and achieved fresh and topical inflection through the highly publicised experiences of the Theosophical leadership. The experience of the war only amplified these spiritualist impulses. The transcendental desires of the Theosophical community, freshly inspired by Besant and Leadbeater’s *Thought forms*, explored the potential of musical and colour vibrations on the sensitive individual and its implications for a new

460 Mrs Evelyn Grieg (1890-?) was a contralto chorister with the D’Oyly Carte Opera Company and also performed in Broadway. She was very active in the musical performances associated with Theosophical lectures. Grieg set Dame Mary Gilmore’s *Australian Battle Cry* to music. She later taught voice at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York and worked in the Bureau of Musical Advice for the ABC.
461 Blavatsky, *Isis unveiled*, p. 274
462 Ibid p. 274
463 Ibid p. 275
apprehension of visible reality. In 1914, Melbourne artist Marion Ferdinando reviewed the debate on colour-music concluding with a quote from Leadbeater:

The worshipper seats himself, closes his eyes and passes before his mental vision a succession of sheets or clouds of colour, such as sometimes pass before one’s eye in the darkness just before falling asleep. The Angel-teacher clad in crimson, causes a flashing out above his head of a band of brilliant colours—this is the text or keynote of that particular service. It is a thought expressed in the colour language of the Devas and is visible on the three lower planes. Each person present attempts to imitate this keynote, forming by the power of his will in the air in front of himself a smaller band of colours as nearly like it as he can. The Deva then pours out through this colour-form a wonderful stream of influence. The feeling, which in an ordinary man expresses itself in a smile of greeting, in a Deva causes a sudden expansion and brightening of the Aura, and manifests not only in colour but also in musical sound. A greeting from one Deva to another is a splendid chord of music, or rather an arpeggio; a conversation between two Devas is like a fugue; an oration delivered by one of them is a splendid oratorio. Sometimes the Deva delivers what may be described as a colour sermon. Every change of colour is accompanied by its appropriate sound.  

Leadbeater’s vision of a connection with the astral plane through colour and music was an important part of the work he was doing in choreographing the ritual for the new Liberal Catholic Church. It is no coincidence that the peak period for this work coincides with the Sydney colour-music debate and the critical artistic watersheds of Cossington Smith and de Maistre. At a lecture at the Sydney Conservatorium as late as 1921, Leadbeater warmed to a favourite

464 The experience of colour-music is both longstanding and topical as indicated by Professor John Bradshaw’s current research at the Neuropsychology Research Unit, Monash University into synaesthesia and colour-music. See also Anonymous, ‘Color music’, The lone hand, 1 July, 1913, pp. 240-244
subject, revealing how "music on the material plane of terrestrial existence becomes transformed into enchanting creations of colour and form in the unseen world." There were a range of responses to Leadbeater’s colour-music vision. On this occasion The Telegraph reported that the address was "listened to with interest by many; with utter incredulity by others." Yet interest was still sufficiently high ten days later for The Telegraph to seek out the Conservatorium Director’s position on colour-music. The journalist found that for Mr Henri Verbrugghen, “an art of color-music is a practicable idea… a belief expressed at his last lecture concert.” With Leadbeater, Theosophists held that spiritually enhanced subjective experience was a superior pathway to knowledge. Was there a scientific response to such a challenge?

The Scientist
The champion of the scientists was Alexander Hector (1866-1958). Hector was the Sydney Manager of chemical giant Burroughs Welcome. He began his investigations into the connections of sight and sound in 1910. He would devote his long retirement to “seeking to correlate the essential principles of the various sciences, and to see if there were any underlying principle of unity and harmony, which would unite them all … (to) demonstrate … that Colour is a periodic function of the elements, and would vary with their intensity.” Hector was convinced that science would yield the connections Pythagorus had pointed to. To demonstrate his scientific project he gave lectures and produced luminous drawings with swirling abstract colour. Gorgeous as these illustrated lectures must have been, they proved insufficient to press home his point. So in the best scientific tradition, Hector constructed an instrument. Having determined the

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466 Anonymous, 'Unseen world: Music changed into colour' Clipping from The Sydney Daily Telegraph, 1921, Sydney.
467 Anonymous, ibid, .
469 The crucial and foundational work on de Maistre in connection with Hector and Adrien Verbrugghen was undertaken by Elizabeth Gertsakis in 1975. Alexander Hector, Letter to Fraetas from Alexander Hector, 1915, Ibid.
470 In 1912 Hector lectured to the Pythagorean Music Society Gertsakis, 'Roy de Maistre and colour-music 1916-1920'. p.6
exemplary relationship of colour and music to illustrate this common principle, Hector’s colour-music organ was born. While his lectures had been well received, Hector’s colour-music organ recitals would receive rave reviews over a period of five decades.

Hector’s first public colour-music recital was staged at the Sydney Town Hall in 1912 ‘before a large and interested gathering’. He draped the Town Hall organ in white cloth and onto this he projected coloured lights as the organ was played. By 1916 he had built and patented the organ for which he became famous—his Electric Colour-Music Organ. (fig. 14) Here Hector occupies an important place in a lineage which leads to the abstract films of the next generation. Hector’s organ was developed independently of London Professor Rimington’s mechanical machine was a more advanced form of the instrument as it used electrical connections to project the abstract colour.

Hector’s much smaller electric colour-music organ was set up in a small theatrette at Hector’s home in Greenwich. Behind the organ was staged a small artificial classical grotto with waterfall and pool, framed by white pampas grass

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471 SH Bowden, ‘Colour-music once more’, Town and Country Journal, 22 January, 1919, Anonymous, ‘Unseen world: Music changed into colour’ Clipping from The Sydney Daily Telegraph, 1921, Sydney, Hector also gave a recital at Palings music store that year
472 William Moritz, ‘Towards a visual music’, Cantrill’s filmnotes, 47/48, 1985, 35-42 p. 36 I’d like to thank Annabel Pegus for this reference.
and neo-classical statuary. As each key was struck an electrical connection was made with the corresponding coloured light. Banks of coloured lamps were set deep in the artificial grotto. When the instrument was played wave after wave of colour washed over the props in apparently innate sympathy with the music. The effect was revolutionary. Hector was unable to play the piano himself (he had a pianola wired for his personal use) and usually invited a pianist to perform. He would introduce the recital with a short talk. A journalist described the event:

The room is darkened and a chord struck, immediately one sees a ‘magic cave’, a veritable hall in ‘Alladin’s palace’, one is transported to the realms of fairy land—a gleam of bright sunshine—then vivid crimsons, rich shades of liquid violet, regal purple, brilliant ambers and flashing greens were constantly interchanging, blending and chasing one another in superb rhythm; the wonderful blend of colours and the glorious harmonious effects are most astonishingly interpretative, a mingling of the two arts—Music and Colour into one, it comes as a complete surprise...

The crash of the closing chord!—and—Darkness!! I awake as it were from a trance with the feeling that Music and Colour are indissolubly connected and woven together.474

Sydney took colour-music to its heart. Hector kept an album of press cuttings which includes material ranging from advertisements to serialised novelettes and clippings from The Lancet. Journalist after journalist waxed lyrical about the sumptuous spectacle and reports of local and international discoveries in the field were invariably reported in the context of Hector’s machine.475

The phenomenon created a new audience which included artists, musicians and scientists although there was much confusion about what the experience actually

474 Alexander Hector, Colour-Music, c 1926, Sydney, p. 3
meant. Even those who attended Hector’s lecture concerts could confusedly interpret the performance as proof of the Theosophical position. Had they seen the scientific proof of the connection of colour and music? Was the ‘artistic sensitivity’ of the pianist projected via the instrument? Or was the entire production simply the forerunner of an expensive electricity bill? Even after two decades of colour-music performances, scientifically minded ‘Nile Green’ wrote that she felt alone among a “babble of voices—good, excited people were throwing such words as ‘etheric’, ‘astral’, psychic’, and ‘clairvoyant’ with enthusiastic conviction.”

Sydney’s response

The confluence of expert opinion on colour and its scientific versus spiritual dimension made this a highly charged and very public debate. While Leadbeater and Hector were the champions of Spirit and Science respectively they were joined by a host of other experts. There seems to have been general agreement on the connection between colour and music during the First World War and critical reportage concentrated on the ramifications of the finding and on the potential uses of the discovery. This newly discovered connection found particular application in the injuries of the wounded of the First World War. London watercolourist, H Kemp-Prossor’s discovery of the efficacy of colour therapy on shell-shocked patients was reported in both The Lancet and in the local Sydney press. Sydney responded with a wave of institutional and domestic interior decoration makeovers. Hector painted his study in rose to assist in developing a mood of quiet reflection. An ‘American-Australian war worker’s café’ was opened in Sydney c 1918 with decorations “deliberately planned to soothe ragged nerves— a modification of the Kemp-Prossor treatment for shell shock.” The local champion of this research, Dr Charles Moffitt, in collaboration with Roy de Maistre and Eadith Walker, redecorated the ‘Red Cross

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475 Anonymous, ‘Color music’, The lone hand, 1 July, 1913, pp. 240-244
476 Nile Green, ‘Is music colour?’, The Australian woman’s mirror1938, 10, 56 pp. 10, 56
Convalescent Nerve Home’ at Russell Lea, following Kemp-Prossor’s advice in March 1919. Cossington Smith’s sister Diddy, a trained nurse, may have been aware of these developments in her field. Colour therapy must be seen as part of Sydney’s broader fascination with colour and its mysterious agency.

The arts

These debates on colour were closely followed by both artists and musicians. The confusion resulting from the colour-music debate was articulated well by Cossington Smith and de Maistre’s teacher at the Royal Art Society School, Dattilo Rubbo, who observed in 1914 that:

With recent discoveries on colour sensation by many great scientists and artists, there has been a great deal of controversy on this subject, more especially owing to the difficulty of associating the scientific experiments carried out on coloured lights with the practical experiments obtained with coloured pigments used by artists and dyers.

Rubbo’s own work drew on the scientific theories of Eugène Chevreul and Sir Isaac Newton, but as this passage shows he nevertheless remained open to the debate then raging in Sydney. As Hector’s experience shows, the distinction between science and pseudo-science was easily confused. Students of Rubbo, including Cossington Smith, de Maistre and Roland Wakelin would have discussed the scientific experiments carried out with coloured lights. Would they also have discussed Carrick’s expressive use of colour and the fine colour sense of her husband Emmanuel Phillips Fox? Roland Wakelin recalls being advised by Rubbo’s colleague Norman Carter (whose Theosophical connections have already been discussed) to see Phillips Fox’s exhibition in the Royal Art

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478 Hector, Colour-Music, p. 3
480 Dattilo Rubbo, ‘Colour harmony’, The salon, 3, 1, 1914, 5-7 p. 5
Society rooms in October 1913. Wakelin would later reminisce—"expression through colour: we’d never seen it before." Len Fox believed that Wakelin did not well remember the content of the exhibition. It seems more likely today that the expressive colour he saw was from Carrick’s November exhibition than that of her husband. Would Carter have discussed Carrick’s *Manly Beach – Summer is here* and her arrangement of formal values to communicate the vibrations of the universal flux?

Discussions of the transcendental also took place at the State Conservatorium of Music. The new Director Henri Verbrugghen had been an outspoken advocate of Theosophical ideas since 1914 when, as conductor of the Glasgow Choral Union and Concert Master of the Scottish Orchestra, he chaired a lecture by Australian violinist and Theosophical Lecturer Maud Mann (later Foulds) on ‘Theosophy and the music of the future’. At the end of the lecture he “spoke enthusiastically from the chair on Theosophy in relation to the arts … (and) signified his intention of joining.” While Verbrugghen does not appear to have formally joined the Society he did encourage discussions and performances on the subject among his staff and students, and as we have seen, invited Leadbeater to lecture at the Conservatorium on at least one occasion. In March 1917 the Professor of Diction at the Conservatorium (1915-1918), Miss Rose Seaton, gave a Lecture-Recital at the premier Theosophical venue, Kings Hall. Titled *The art of expression: Literature, Music, Colour* the event was to “show the association of colour with the moods of man and music.” During the program the colours red, yellow, blue and green were illustrated by pieces of music. Seaton produced “a stage setting of blue for a given musical setting and altering the colour scheme to red to
harmonise with an entirely different musical production." More complex pieces of music and texts by Irish Theosophist WB Yeats were given more elaborate treatment. One of the Conservatorium students, Miss Beryl McNamara, "who possessed the rare faculty of seeing colour in relation to music" played the piano. Charles Boult, a Conservatorium student and Theosophist, felt comfortable to write with a distinctly Theosophical approach to the universal and music's role in December 1916. The following year saw an article in Theosophy in Australia devoted to the accord between the ideas expressed in Verbrugghen's weekly lecture concerts and Theosophical ideas.

As Verbrugghen and Grieg's experience shows there was considerable interest amongst musicians in Australia and overseas in Theosophical colour-music theories. As already mentioned in connection with Carrick the most important of the these was Alexander Scriabin. A much more minor musician was the Swedish Axel Wachtmeister who collaborated with Beatrice Irwin on a number of Theosophical projects. Irwin's colour theories were to be an important turning point for Grace Cossington Smith and will be discussed later in this chapter. Through all this Leadbeater gathered around him an increasingly large and respectable Theosophical membership debating the same issue.

Roy de Maistre
The Theosophical Society and the dialogue it established with Hector and his marvellous colour-music organ was crucial to the development of de Maistre's colour-music theory and his subsequent Colour in art exhibition. The debate on the subject of colour–music was high profile and attracted the attentions of those engaged in the arts at the highest level. De Maistre's trajectory led him from the

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486 Herbert Price, Letter to the Editor, Discovery Magazine from Herbert Price, 1921, Sydney, Alexander Hector's clippings album, private collection.
487 Ibid.
488 Charles Boult studied advanced chamber music at the Conservatorium. He performed with the Conservatorium orchestra and also the Theosophical orchestra under Mme Grieg. He was important in the foundation of the Theosophical radio station 2GB.
489 John C Staples, 'The music of the future', Theosophy in Australasia, 23, 9, 1917, 225-26
490 The Countess Wachtmeister, Axel's mother, was an intimate of Mme Blavatsky and toured Australia as a Theosophical lecturer in 1895.
scientific focus of such diverse individuals as Dattilo Rubbo and Alexander Hector to an exploration of colour therapy with Moffitt under the inspiration of Kemp-Prossor and then finally to a vision of a spiritualised Theosophical colour-music as embraced by the Verbrugghens and the staff and students of the Sydney Conservatorium.

Roy de Maistre arrived in Sydney to study music and painting in 1913,\textsuperscript{491} the year after Hector’s Town Hall performance and the year before Leadbeater’s arrival. De Maistre was well placed to participate in Sydney’s growing fascination with colour-music. His colour-music theory would evolve over the next five years passing from a strictly scientific understanding of the phenomenon, through a psychological framework, to finally see colour-music as evidence of spiritual truth.

De Maistre may have gleaned something of the subtle tension between scientific and transcendental colour theories in discussions of Ethel Carrick and her husband Emmanuel Phillips Fox’s Sydney exhibitions in late 1913. Subsequent discussions the following year with de Maistre’s teachers Carter and Rubbo\textsuperscript{492} at the Royal Art Society School on scientific theories of colour and the ‘difficulty of associating the scientific experiments carried out on coloured lights with the practical experiments obtained with coloured pigments’ would have further enlivened the debate on the rival scientific and transcendental colour theories. Rubbo’s scientific outlook obliged him to consider the experiments of other scientists, especially those whose work touched on colour, and he probably supported de Maistre’s explorations into the science of colour. The young artist’s association with Hector probably dates from this time, only really coming to an end in 1917 with his closer association with the Verbrugghens.

\textsuperscript{491} Heather Johnson, \textit{Roy de Maistre: Australian years 1894-1930}, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1988. p. 15
\textsuperscript{492} De Maistre studied at the Julian Ashton School (under Elioth Gruner) and the Royal Art Society School (under Norman Carter and Dattilo Rubbo) and at the same time at the Conservatorium. Heather Johnson’s work on de Maistre is the standard text with much finely researched detail. I thank Heather for her support for my project.
Hector's iconography and colour-music theories are crucial to de Maistre's 1919 paintings. Of fundamental interest was Hector's concern to manufacture a visible expression of an invisible world, a desire realised in both his diagrams and colour-music organ. The chemist's response to the modern revelation of an elemental, invisible world which operated along scientific principles was to deploy a pseudo-scientific intellectual framework and instruments. The swirling forms and globes of colour of Hector's illustrations provide an immediate and undeniable genealogy for the visual language that would later resurface in de Maistre's major abstract canvases. (colour plates 27, 28) A record photograph of a now lost portrait of Alexander Hector shows him encircled by the swirling orbs which were the subject of his illustrated lectures. (colour plate 31) It is likely that de Maistre produced the pianola roll and curious display cards, now in the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, in collaboration with Hector. (colour plate 29) They are tangible evidence of this three year relationship with Hector's scientific colour-music theories. That de Maistre kept them until the end of his life indicates something of their considerable importance for the artist. Another object from this time, now lost, was a 'lumière' constructed by Henri Verbrugghen's son, Adrien, and de Maistre after attending a Colour-Music Organ performance. This 'pedestal holding a large bowl of foliage that lit up when a switch was turned' appears to have been analogous on a small scale to Hector's famous instrument. Interestingly it was reputedly given or sold to the Governor's wife, indicating a shared interest in the subject.

In 1916 de Maistre began his short lived career in the army and there met Dr Moffitt. De Maistre's experiments with Moffitt and Eadith Walker on the psychological effects of interior decoration on the war wounded were another way of conceiving colour as the manifestation of a larger reality. In Russell Lea Red

493 Gertsakis, 'Roy de Maistre and colour-music 1916-1920'.
494 Heather Johnson tentatively dates these as 1934. Heather Johnson, Roy de Maistre: The English years 1930-1968. Craftsman House, Sydney, 1995. p. 88 However the firm association of Hector and de Maistre over an Angelus pianola strongly indicates this earlier date.
495 Which Governor is not known. It could have been as early as Sir Gerald Strickland, or as late as Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair who assumed office in February 1924.
496 Johnson, Roy de Maistre: Australian years 1894-1930. p. 21 fn 83
Cross Convalescent Nerve Home the colour of the walls and floor were understood to have real agency within a medical model on the psychology of wounded soldiers. As Johnson rightly points out their colour therapy was based firmly on Kemp-Presser’s formula with minor variations. While the context was still scientific, the medical psychology deployed at Russell Lea can be seen as a transitional shift from the physics of Hector towards the psychic dimension favoured by the Verbrugghens.

Roy de Maistre’s final conversion from the scientific theories favoured by Rubbo and Hector to the spiritual colour-music theories of the Theosophical Society was overseen by Adrien Verbrugghen. Adrien Verbrugghen recalled that both he and de Maistre were dissatisfied with and even disliked Hector’s scientific position: “Hector played a very unimportant part in de Maistre’s ideas and (that) de Maistre was scornful from an ‘artistic’ point of view about Hector’s experiments.” In fact Hector’s experiments and iconography were to have lasting relevance for de Maistre. De Maistre’s own later statements suggest that his early allegiance to Hector shifted after meeting the Verbrugghens in a way which enabled a more creative response.

Adrien Verbrugghen remembers de Maistre’s interests for the period 1917-19 as exclusively music and the transcendental. While Heather Johnson has convincingly argued that de Maistre was familiar with the work of AJ Eddy Cubists and Post-Impressionists, Adrien Verbrugghen’s memory of the period was that de Maistre was more likely to read a book by Christian Scientist, Mary Baker Eddy than one on art. This recollection should perhaps be interpreted as a reflection of the active interest in alternative spirituality Verbrugghen shared with de Maistre.

497 ibid p. 20
498 Typically Adrien Verbrugghen was left unaware of Hector’s previous importance. De Maistre’s later habit of compartmentalising ‘difficult’ areas of his life was already underway.
499 Gertsakis, ‘Roy de Maistre and colour-music 1916-1920’. pp. 12, 60
500 ibid., p. 3
501 ibid., p. 13
Even before the arrival of Henri Verbrugghen as Director of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 1915 the state conservatorium was more spiritually focussed than the Royal Art Society School. De Maistre almost certainly encountered colour-music theories with a transcendental flavour though his studies there. This strengthened with Verbrugghen’s arrival, and certainly between 1915 and 1921 the Conservatorium staff and students engaged in an active exploration of a Theosophical conception of colour-music through performance, lectures and publications. After 1917, when de Maistre began to share a room with Adrien Verbrugghen, (from 1917-19)502 any support for Hector’s scientifically oriented colour-music theory would have been difficult to maintain. As already noted Henri Verbrugghen’s vocal support for Leadbeater and a spiritualised colour-music was already strong in 1914 and continued beyond the Colour in Art exhibition at least until 1921. Leadbeater and Hector were positioned in opposition to each other, not collaborators on a common goal.

Adrien Verbrugghen recalled de Maistre experiencing Hector’s scientific theory as limiting for the artist. Rubbo had put his finger on it as early as 1914, writing that while mathematical harmonies could be calculated for music no such system of rules existed for colour: “Each artist was dependent on his own perception, his own feeling, to produce his harmonies.”503 For Rubbo, as would later prove to be the case for de Maistre, individual subjective experience was central to the artistic experience. This must have been an important factor in opening de Maistre to a Theosophical colour-music theory. Leadbeater and Henri Verbrugghen saw colour and music as a subjectively experienced phenomenon available to the properly sensitive individual. It is one of the perversities of this field that for de Maistre, allegiance to Leadbeater’s conception of colour-music under the umbrella of Verbrugghen would provide more creative opportunities than close association with either Hector or Leadbeater himself. However de Maistre’s eclectic use of Theosophical colour-music theory was to prove ultimately unsustainable within that community.

502 ibid., p. 3
De Maistre’s awareness of the debates associated with colour and its physical, medical and spiritual properties was already substantial by the time he went with Adrien Verbrugghen to show Roland Wakelin a ‘scheme of colour in relation to music that they had worked out’.\textsuperscript{504} That this association of colour with music should have Theosophical overtones was inevitable.

**Colour in art**
The results of de Maistre’s research were presented in 1919 at the famous *Colour in Art* exhibition mounted in collaboration with Roland Wakelin in August 1919 at Gayfield Shaw’s Gallery– The Art Salon– in Elizabeth Street. De Maistre and Wakelin promoted the *Colour in Art* exhibition in the following terms:

R de Mestre’s new theory of colour organisation as it applies to the Art of the Painter, and incidentally to Interior Decoration, together with an important series of paintings by RS Wakelin, already known in Sydney as an exponent of modern methods of colour expression.\textsuperscript{505}

The full details of the exhibition need not be rehearsed here as they have received excellent coverage in Johnson’s *Roy de Maistre: Australian years 1894–1930*. The exhibition included de Maistre’s colour-music keyboard, six paintings including *Boat sheds, Berry’s Bay*, 1919 (colour plate 30) and five ‘colour schemes for interiors’. The interior decorations probably relate to the work begun with Dr Charles Moffitt. Wakelin exhibited six paintings, most with colour-music titles like *Study in blue-violet, minor key*. These works were representational but like *Boat sheds, Berry’s Bay* sought to express more than topographic detail. De Maistre’s

\textsuperscript{503} Rubbo, ‘Colour harmony’, 5-7 p. 5
\textsuperscript{504} Roland Wakelin, ‘Post Impressionism in Sydney’, *AGNSW Quarterly*, 3, 2, 1962, 91-94 p. 93
large abstract painting, *Rhythmic composition in yellow green minor*, also 1919, (colour plate 32) was painted at the same time but not included in the exhibition.506

De Maistre’s colour-music keyboard was intended as a guide for less sensitive individuals to translate colour to sound. Theoretically a sequence of colours, if sufficiently well observed, could be played as a tune. To date historians have focussed on this musical proof of de Maistre’s painting theory, examining in detail the precise relationship of music to colour.507 Yet as we have seen the musical dimension is only another superficial manifestation of a deeper ambition. Knowing that de Maistre’s colour-music theory was formulated from within an intimate circle of Theosophical fervour, it is now clear that for de Maistre colour and music were both purely physical manifestations. As already noted, Sydney journalism of the immediate post-war period saw the relationship of colour to music as an accepted fact. The interest lay in the implications of this relationship for the way we conceive of the world. Within the Theosophical context both sound and music were understood to be reflective of a planetary vibration, the music of the spheres.

The true significance of de Maistre’s *Boat sheds, Berry’s Bay* lies not in its evident potential to be played as a piece of music nor even in any transparent Theosophical legibility. We cannot read this as a Theosophical text in the same way as Warner and Fuller’s work makes specific reference to the pinks and blues of ‘high spirituality’ and ‘pure religious feeling’. Rather, I want to propose that by reinstating the Theosophical context for *Boat sheds, Berry’s Bay* we have an opportunity to read this work differently— as an attempt to make visible that which is normally not visible— the great universal harmony.

The real achievement of *Boat sheds, Berry’s Bay* lies in the radical assumption that the arrangement of colours on the canvas produces a harmony of superior value to the originating representational reference. From the visible world has been abstracted a higher harmony. Wakelin recalled that he and de Maistre made

compositions analogous to those used in musical compositions. In *Boat sheds, Berry’s Bay* the muted yellows and blues, ochres and greens are simple chromatic harmonies, contrasting colours with harmonising complementaries. *Boat sheds, Berry’s Bay* has ceased to be a representation of boat sheds or any mundane topographic reference, to become instead an arrangement of colour. It is important to note that the work is not self referential. *Boat sheds, Berry’s Bay* references a higher reality, in Theosophical parlance, an astral harmony. In a perverse use of scientific methodology the success of the colour arrangement could be cross-checked by performing the colour notations to produce a musical harmony. The musical cross-check was not the goal of the aesthetic experience but the proof of its accuracy. The harmony of the visual world should be paralleled in auditory experience. These chromatic and musical harmonies were themselves reflective of a greater harmony of the spheres experienced on the astral plane, not susceptible to normal human senses but accessible to the sensitive (usually artistic) individual.

When pushed to its logical conclusion chromatic harmony needed no anchorage in the material world. Hector had already shown the beauty of chromatic arrangements independent of topographic reference. The gorgeous diagrams which he crafted to illustrate his lectures show his abstract conceptions of musical analogy expressed in colour. His portrait, now unfortunately known only through a slide, has him surrounded by the same swirling balls of colour. (It would be fascinating to know who had painted this work and when!) De Maistre’s *Rhythmic composition in yellow green minor* of 1919 clearly draws on Hector’s diagrams for a vocabulary of abstract form. Hector’s abstract imagery gave him visual cues in representing a reality revealed as different to the superficially visible. Yet although formally related to Hector’s work, *Rhythmic composition in yellow green minor* lends itself more readily to a Theosophical interpretation.

*Rhythmic composition in yellow green minor* is an advanced exercise in chromatic harmonics. This work has put aside the naturalistic references of *Boat sheds,*

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507 Johnson, *Roy de Maistre: Australian years 1894-1930.* p. 30
Berry's Bay to foreground the harmonics of the astral plane. In this work de Maistre is not attempting to represent the visible world, but rather that harmony experienced by the sensitive soul from which proceeds the material reflections of chromatic and musical experience. De Maistre has built on Hector's project to make the invisible world visible, while explicitly rejecting his scientific framework for understanding that world. This shift from a methodology of isolation and analysis to subjective experience is felt in the sense of movement and life with which the work is imbued. *Rhythmic composition in yellow green minor* seems more closely akin to Blavatsky's vision of 'myriad blazing orbs' that are rushing through 'the inter stellar depths' than Hector's frozen moments. 509

The influence of Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought forms* on the development of Wassily Kandinsky's pioneering abstract work of 1911 has been much discussed. 510 While de Maistre is unlikely to have ever seen originals of Kandinsky's work 511 it is pertinent to compare de Maistre's response to Leadbeater's vision with that of Carrick's colleague at *Les Tendances Nouvelles*. Both produced abstract work whose formal beauty appeared to exemplify the Modernist paradigm. Yet neither work is self referential, both reference a Theosophical vision of the invisible. Interestingly Kandinsky's passage into abstraction was graduated where de Maistre's was relatively abrupt. Where Kandinsky drew on the formal language of *Thought forms* to communicate a shared apprehension of the astral world, largely consistent in scope and form with that of the Theosophical leadership, de Maistre made more eclectic borrowings from both Hector's vocabulary and Leadbeater's vision. Thus where Kandinsky

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508 Wakelin, 'Post Impressionism in Sydney', 91-94 p. 93
509 If this work were to be read against the Theosophical colour chart the substantially blue tonalities would suggest the spirituality of the astral plane, the secondary yellows and pinks would be suggestive of intellect and love respectively. The green is more problematic as it is usually indicative of negative emotions although in this case it may indicate adaptability. As I indicate in the body of the text however de Maistre was at sufficient distance from Leadbeater to develop creative licence in this respect.
511 Kandinsky's abstraction was reviewed in the Theosophical journal *The herald of the star* in 1914. Carter, 'The spiritualisation of art', 624-29 p. 627
was seen to contribute positive insights, de Maistre was in the unenviable position of being seen to compromise Leadbeater's authority. Unlike Kandinsky, neither de Maistre's impulse to reference the transcendent nor his formal abstract vocabulary were sustainable in the short term.

Both *Rhythmic composition in yellow green minor* and *Boat sheds, Berry's Bay* represent a return to the concerns of the Pythagorean Music Society. In fact de Maistre used his lecture on 'Colour in relation to painting' to the Australian Arts Club to describe his relationship to the factional interests of the colour-music debate:

> What is Colour? Many accept it unquestioningly— a few, I believe, are almost unconscious of its presence— for others it constitutes an aesthetic pleasure or an interesting scientific phenomenon— the result of light vibrations acting upon their optic nerves. But there are many for whom Colour means far more than this— to them it brings the conscious realisation of the deepest underlying principles of nature, and in it they find deep and lasting happiness— for those people it constitutes the very song of life and is, as it were, the spiritual speech of every living thing.\(^{513}\)

Here de Maistre points to the music world— almost unconscious of colour's presence, the art world aesthetes and then Hector's scientific community interested only in the vibrations of the light waves. He distinguishes his project from all these. He aligns himself instead with that sector of the colour-music community for whom colour and music referenced a spiritual vibration, the section figureheaded by Leadbeater and debated by the Pythagorean Music Society. De Maistre's exhibition was less a venture in radical aesthetic experimentation than a question

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\(^{512}\) ibid, p. 627  
\(^{513}\) de Maistre, *Colour in Art Exhibition*.  
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of positioning— against the relatively impoverished institutions of art and music—and with the moneyed, spiritually advanced of the Theosophical Society.\textsuperscript{514}

Although de Maistre received on the whole good press he experienced the exhibition as negative. With an appreciation of the nature of interest in the colour-music phenomenon it is not hard to understand why. De Maistre had positioned himself at the heart of a highly charged debate in which his own paintings were almost incidental, providing the opportunity for exponents of the two camps to revisit the issues. At stake was less the viability of a new radical art than the implications of a way of connecting with the universe, whether scientific or spiritual.

Hector was invited to the exhibition and lecture as was Henri Verbrugghen. Inevitably de Maistre could not satisfy either. Hector’s professional jealousy was aroused and Leadbeater’s authority in the astral world questioned by the artist’s alternative realisation. Henri Verbrugghen would say of the event two years later that “The particular form which successful color-music will take on is scarcely foreshadowed in the color-music keyboard attempts of today.”\textsuperscript{515} De Maistre’s eclecticism in a highly contentious field meant that he could not expect unconditional support from either Hector or Theosophists, the art institutions or the Conservatorium. For this reason de Maistre’s radical paintings were ultimately unsustainable. While he had achieved a space for experimentation, that space was also a vacuum when he needed support. This was no simple debate between the moderns and the conservatives—although Julian Ashton reputedly rose from his sickbed to express his outrage and Rubbo went down on his knees pleading that such experimental work be received open-mindedly. De Maistre’s formal innovations were crucially tied to a larger debate between Science and the Spirit.

\textsuperscript{514} Gertsakis quotes from an interview with Lloyd Rees “In terms of artistic status de Maistre would not have wanted Hector to be considered the figurehead for de Maistre’s ideas. De Maistre’s doubts were correct, for the response of the critics indicated gross confusion between the aims of Hector and the aims of de Maistre. The subtle and delicate antagonism that was involved even in the nature of de Maistre’s presentation of ideas in the catalogue, is verified by the fact that Hector became angry and indignant and considered Wakelin and de Maistre to have unjustly got the credit for introducing the ‘Contemporary Modern Movement’ with ideas of colour-music.”Gertsakis, ‘Roy de Maistre and colour-music 1916-1920’. p. 64

\textsuperscript{515} Anonymous, ‘Music: Harnessing the rainbow’, The Sydney Daily Telegraph, 30 April, 1921. Anonymous, ‘Unseen world: Music changed into colour’ Clipping from The Sydney Daily Telegraph, 1921, Sydney,
For this reason de Maistre's early modernism belongs within the lineage initiated with Jane Price, Florence Fuller and AE Warner. Its apparent stylistic similarity with European Modernism stems from the similarity of his ambition to represent a Theosophically conceived higher reality abstracted from the visible.

De Maistre's exploration of colour-music was part of his long term spiritual quest for meaning which he would later pursue in England. In the Theosophical Society he sought answers and even rules. De Maistre's subsequent interest in Meldrum in 1920 should not be interpreted as a retreat into conservatism by an apparently progressive Modernist but rather as further evidence of the strange attraction Meldrum's teaching held for those grappling with the idea of a reality beyond the visible. As we have already noted in connection with Beckett, Ferdinando and the Colquhoun family, Meldrum's philosophic commitment to a greater unity beyond an ephemeral present connected at a profound level with those attracted to the Theosophical Society.

**Grace Cossington Smith**

The debate on colour-music impacted beyond those intimately involved with the chief protagonists—Hector or Theosophical proselytisers of Leadbeater's vision. Something of the extraordinary seductiveness of the Theosophical vision for women of the period can be felt on understanding that neither Cossington Smith, nor her mentors Beatrice Irwin and Ethel Anderson were ever members of the Theosophical Society. Yet each in their own way absorbed the Theosophical experience of reality and made it their own. The intersection of these three women resulted in the production of radical work by Cossington Smith from 1924. Their positioning within the broad range of early feminist concerns, including their identification as seers and activists, meant that their theoretical and personal support for Cossington Smith's innovations was sustained.

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Grace Cossington Smith’s mature work was inspired by Theosophical ideas in which colour achieved a transcendental dimension. Whether her nominal subject matter was a sleeping dog or an open doorway, Grace Cossington Smith’s work has a spiritual edge. At the end of her career Cossington Smith described her project:

All form— landscapes, interiors, still life, flowers, animals, people have an inarticulate grace and beauty; painting to me is expressing this form in colour, colour vibrant with light – but containing this other, silent quality which is unconscious, and belongs to all things created.\footnote{517}

Cossington Smith’s mature work offers more than formal experiment. Bruce James has admirably shown how her early work grapples with the influence of local and overseas masters as volumes, colours and pictorial structure are manipulated into a cohesive whole. However as James has pointed out, one text was of “inordinate relevance to her work”\footnote{518} and marks a watershed in her development. Cossington Smith copied this curious text by Beatrice Irwin, \textit{The new science of colour}, almost in its entirety in 1924. (colour plate 33) The title of this slight volume is itself a little ambiguous, referring not to science as Hector or Rubbo would have understood the term, but to occult science. Irwin’s occult colour theory was strongly influenced by Leadbeater and the ideas of the Theosophical Society. Shortly after absorbing Irwin’s ideas, Cossington Smith left her teacher Rubbo and was fortunate to find support in the newly arrived Ethel Anderson. Anderson, like Cossington Smith, had absorbed many theosophical ideas and recognised in Cossington Smith’s work an attempt to grapple with new ideas in a new formal language. It was in the intersection of this support structure that Cossington Smith was encouraged to pursue her new direction.

\footnotemark[517]\footnote{Mervyn Horton, \textit{Present day art in Australia}. Sydney Ure Smith, Sydney, 1969.}
\footnotemark[518]\footnote{Bruce James, \textit{Grace Cossington Smith}. Craftsman House, Sydney, 1990. p. 66}
Like de Maistre, Cossington Smith was also a student of Rubbo’s at the Royal Art Society School. Rubbo’s early concerns for the incompatibility of coloured lights with scientific investigations into colour were more keenly felt by her, at least initially, than by de Maistre. Cossington Smith’s early masterpiece, *The Sock Knitter*, 1915, was produced within the radical edge of Rubbo’s classes. The forceful simplicity of the composition with its reduced formal means was interpreted then as now as a formal response to Modernist aesthetics.  

Likewise the colour harmonies are strong and simple. But a decade later Cossington Smith seems to have found Rubbo’s attachment to the science of colour insufficient. Again, as in de Maistre’s experience, we have a tension between science and the spiritual. In the forthcoming sections I will explore this major leap within Cossington Smith’s mature work of the mid 1920s in the context of spiritual debates of colour and its psychic potential. Irwin’s vision of occult colour concluded Cossington Smith’s apprenticeship to Rubbo.

**Beatrice Irwin**

Beatrice Irwin (1877-1956) was a celebrated English colour-poet, author and missionary— in Bruce James’ happy choice of words, the Laurie Anderson of her day.  

Cossington Smith’s hand written copy of *The new Science of colour* was sufficiently important for the artist to keep it by her for the rest of her life. While James describes Irwin’s text as Theosophical all is not as it seems, as Irwin describes herself in this text as Baha’i, having converted in 1911.  

Irwin was born Beatrice Simpson in 1877 in India. She died a Baha’i missionary in 1956 in Spain and is remembered by her stage name. Her family was involved in colonial administration and her mother was a great traveller especially in the East and member of the Royal Asiatic Society. It is likely that

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520 James, *Grace Cossington Smith*, p. 67  
521 Ibid p. 66  

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Irwin first visited Australia in the company of her mother. Irwin was a foundation member of the English Electrical Association for Women, and her performances indicate a use of projection techniques, involving a combination of coloured light, music and poetry. Her scientific training and performances place her within the same tradition as Hector, while the spiritual foundation of her work is fundamentally Theosophical.

The apparent inconsistency of Irwin’s commitment to the Baha’i faith and her ongoing performance of a Theosophical colour theory lies in the nature of both associations. Irwin was a part of the open Theosophical/Spiritualist environment that included Eduard Schuré, Soudbinine, Jean Delville and Ethel Carrick in Paris. It was from within this environment of open questioning of the nature of the real and the transcendental that Irwin’s colour theory was formed. Later, through this environment, she would meet the Baha’i leader Abdu’l-Bahá in 1911 and from this point became increasingly articulate in her advocacy of that faith. However her early articles promoting the Baha’i message betray her prior association and ongoing sympathy with the questioning readership of the Occult Review. Irwin’s ongoing commitment to a Theosophical colour theory was possible because Baha’i references to colour are grounded in a concern for racial harmony. They make no excursions into the esoteric connection with the unseen nor did the leadership put forward any colour chart comparable to that proposed by Besant and Leadbeater. Irwin’s intimacy with the Baha’i leader Abdu’l-Bahá probably also gave her an unchallengeable dispensation to continue work which did not challenge the Baha’i message. Thus her performances revealing the psychic connections between colour and emotional states and their potential for manipulation were kept largely separate from her promotional work.

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524 Irwin’s first performance dates from 1910 when she held a ‘Colour-music afternoon’ at the Hudson Theatre, Broadway, New York in 1910. Irwin, The new science of colour, p. 126
525 Beatrice Irwin, ‘The Baha’i Movement’, Occult Review, November, 1913,
526 I would like to thank here Margaret Anderson, Co-ordinator for the National Baha’i Archives, Australia and historians Jane Elizabeth Hunt and Graham Hassall for their advice in negotiating Baha’i writings on colour.
527 In 1916/17 after publishing The new science of colour Irwin was in South America promoting the Baha’i message at the same time as the American artist Mark Tobey. I would like to thank Graham Hassall for this reference.
with the Baha’i. Irwin continued to perform her colour-poetry as late as 1929 when at the age of 52 she performed at the Barcelona International Exhibition.528

Despite her commitment to the Baha’i after 1911, Irwin continued to expand her Theosophical associations. In 1912 she published The pagan trinity, a collection of poems dedicated to Rodin which references many of Eduard Schuré’s Theosophical ideas. It should be recalled that Theosophist Séraphin Soudbinine, Carrick’s neighbour, was Rodin’s student and contemporaneously engaged in a colour-music project with Scriabin. It is easy to imagine Irwin circulating in the same community of alternative, spiritually oriented artists that Carrick was a part of at this time. In 1914 Irwin published the lyrics to The Kiss in what was to become a long term professional relationship with the Theosophical composer Axel Wachtmeister then also in Paris. The new science of colour was in fact published two years later in 1916 (republished in 1918).

The new science of colour
Irwin’s colour theory is deeply indebted to Leadbeater and Besant’s Thought forms, 1905—though in Irwin’s volume it emerges as a personal variation on the theme. Like Thought forms, Irwin’s The new science of colour offered a science proven through psychic means with specific instructions and exercises by which to develop one’s ability to psychically manipulate colour. Like Leadbeater she advised developing one’s colour sense as an exercise in developing the psychic dimension and augmenting vitality. While for Irwin there was only one etheric colour chart, this was experienced through a range of human filters, at varying degrees of development. Unlike Thought forms, Irwin urged her readers to develop their own colour charts based on their personal experience of the psychic dimension of colour. Irwin spoke of discovering in oneself the colours which had the most personal resonance as a sedative, recuperative or stimulant; of tabulating the colours and projecting them etherically. One suspects that straying too far from Irwin’s recommended colour chart would be seen as

528 Marion Hofman, ‘Beatrice Irwin 1877-1956’, The Baha’i world, 131963, 882-4 p. 882
evidence of retarded spiritual development. Azure, eau-de-nil, citron and mauve were her spiritual stimulants, and chrome and violet her mental stimulants.\footnote{Irwin, \textit{The new science of colour}. p. 57} Stimulant colours were those which could excite and cause liberation of thought and emotion, joy, peace and spiritual renewal. Unless one were a colour healer or reformer Irwin advocated the exercise of painting or colour production through sound (ie colour-music) as the best vehicle for developing one's colour sense.\footnote{Ibid p. 90} Leadbeater would have agreed with most of Irwin's personal visionary experience. Differences would have been phrased in terms of relative psychic development, but Irwin and Leadbeater clearly inhabited the same etheric plane.

Cossington Smith copied \textit{The new science of colour} almost in its entirety, including the frontispiece and chapters on interior decoration, on health, on the fundamental importance of colour in one's spiritual life, and the practical advice on how to develop one's own colour sense.\footnote{Cossington Smith copied selectively exhibiting a lesser interest in personal anecdotes, arguments and literary proofs of Irwin's theory and greater interest in practical exercises, and national characteristics of colour} The book was probably a library copy and thus the need to transcribe it. Cossington Smith knew her local librarian, Dorothy McLaurin, well. She was the sister of Judith Fletcher and the two artists– painter and photographer– must have known each other because Fletcher owned a small sketch by Cossington Smith. It is probable that the extensive publishing arm of the Theosophical Society distributed its booklists and its many free publications in the direction of the sister's library.

It seems hardly co-incidental that shortly after copying this text Cossington Smith undertook a series of paintings with a radical new colour sense. One easily imagines the artist working her way though Irwin's schedule to develop her colour sense and release the psychically perceived colour from its physical chains. Irwin's advice that the spiritual colours (azure, eau-de-nil, citron and mauve) were most often seen with eyes shut than with eyes open is especially interesting in the context of Cossington Smith's clear preference for these colour
combinations. Irwin’s insistence that these colours should always be used in combination with the spiritual recuperatives flame rose and orange intrigues further. Thus a major work like The bridge in-curve can still be seen to be articulated in some measure by Irwin’s colour chart even though by the time of painting, c 1930, Irwin’s influence has been thoroughly processed and adsorbed. Irwin encouraged her readers to experience colour intensely and to understand the experience of colour in occult terms. Cossington Smith dutifully copied Irwin’s exhortations to recollect and analyse her impressions. Did she respond to Irwin’s call to “Rally therefore colour students! Rally to this great cause and speed its coming”? 

One of the first major works to evidence the influence of Irwin’s advice was Centre of a city, 1925 (colour plate 34). In this work vibrant colour assumes an active pictorial role for the first time. Irwin had asked “what were your sensations and action when after a long sojourn amid the drab tones of a city, you were suddenly confronted with the green or purple of a summer sea? Did you not drink in that colour and feel suffused with it before you spoke? That green was a physical sedative that soothed your fretted nerves and gave you fresh life” The azure sky lifts the composition from the oppressive dun misery of Crowd 1922 or Rushing, 1922 and foreshadows the ecstatic moments of the bridge paintings. The upwards momentum of Centre of a city begins with the physical sedative of the green shadows, through the physical and mental recuperatives of the fawn and golden brown architecture to the spiritual stimulant of an azure sky.

In Irwin’s work, Cossington Smith found inspiration to experience her environment independently of scientific colour theories premised on retinal experience. Irwin authorised an experience of colour which transcended that of

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usage. I would like to thank Anne Mills and family for allowing me access to this volume in the Cossington Smith Archive.

532 Irwin, The new science of colour. p. 35
533 Grace Cossington Smith The bridge in-curve c 1930 tempera on cardboard, National Gallery, Victoria.
534 Irwin, The new science of colour. p. 45
535 Ibid p. 85
536 Ibid p. 44
the physical eye and facilitated colour’s liberation from topographic description. Although to us the colour appears subjective and personal, for Irwin and Cossington Smith the colour remained strictly referential. Within Irwin’s paradigm the referent was a deferred, higher reality only visible through the trained use of the third eye. The occult study described by Irwin and followed by Cossington Smith enabled these women to conceive of participation in an aesthetic which was grounded in the fourth dimension.

**Ethel Anderson**

Daniel Thomas could write that from 1925 there was a new mentor replacing Rubbo, living around the corner in Turramurra. He cites Cossington Smith as saying “I’d been very depressed when Signor Rubbo didn’t understand the way I wanted to go and thought I was wrong. Mrs Anderson came in like a sunbeam. She said to go ahead, that I was quite right.” Anderson recognised Cossington Smith’s spiritualised sense of colour and its ambition to reference a more fundamental reality. Anderson was to be Cossington Smith’s champion both in her private musings and within the art world, a tireless campaigner for modern art. Bethia Foote, her daughter, recalled her mother’s conversation with Cossington Smith on March 1925 when the two met for the first time:

> And who knows? Mother encouraged Grace,

> With your unique brush stroke, with your grasp of colour, you may be about to give an expression to a quality in life, more moving than beauty alone, more ultimate than infinity. You may find a fourth dimensional emotion as yet unfound, un-named.

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538 For an exposition of how important Anderson was to emergent modernism in Sydney see Heather Johnson, *The Sydney art patronage system 1890-1940*. Bungoona Technologies, Gray’s point, 1997.

Anderson was interested in the fourth dimension, then common parlance for the non-visible reality of alternative spirituality. She had herself had a number of visionary experiences, sufficient for her husband—Brigadier General Anderson—to join the Centre for Psychical Research in an attempt to explain them. Her novels play with the permeability of the seen and unseen worlds. Anderson was also open to alternative spirituality. She kept a large statue of the Buddha in her kitchen at a time when an interest in Buddhism was serviced almost uniquely by the Theosophical Society. In England (1917-24) she had been on terms of easy friendship with Sir William Rothenstein who was then exploring Indian art through Havell’s Theosophical filter. Little wonder that Anderson’s own art at this time was heavily indebted to the work of Gauguin, not only stylistically but also to Gauguin the thinker, seeking a fundamental truth in all religions. Jane Elizabeth Hunt’s remarkable detective work uncovered Anderson’s 1920 frescoes in the attic of Low Hill House, Worcestershire. Anderson’s frescoes represent a feminised version of the Christian account of the Fall, Annunciation and Redemption, enacted in a Gauguinesque South Pacific setting (colour plate 35). While the work leans heavily on both Christian iconography and Gauguin’s stylistic innovations the work is independent of both. In its desire to represent a universal spiritual truth in a modern idiom this work anticipates her later influence as patron of the Turramurra painter’s group in the chapel of St Mary and the Angels in the crypt of St James, Sydney. Anderson’s concern to represent the ordinary fabric of life infused by a cosmic unity made Gauguin a logical source of influence. Would Anderson have recognised a similar interest in Gauguin and this cosmic unity in Ethel Carrick’s work? It was certainly a point on which Grace Cossington Smith and she connected.

A fourth dimensional emotion

540 ibid p. 72, 95, 127 and Anonymous, ‘Obituaries: Brigadeer General AT Anderson’, Society for psychical research, 1925, p. 419
542 I am very grateful to Jane Elizabeth Hunt for allowing me to reproduce these images which she took in September 1998.
With the joint support of Irwin’s text and Anderson’s experience, Cossington Smith’s colour separated itself significantly from the representational role it had played in the early years of the decade. She began to fulfil Anderson’s prediction of locating a fourth dimensional emotion. Cossington Smith’s incorporation of Irwin’s colour theory can be clearly seen in many of her works of this time and is at times quite explicit. Centre of a city responds to Irwin’s text quite transparently. Krinkly Konks sleeping 1927-8 (colour plate 36) is another simple exposition of Irwin’s program for physical sedatives and recuperatives. This painting of the artist’s sleeping dog is an arrangement of Irwin’s physical sedatives of puce, russet, terracotta and brown with the recuperative note of turquoise at the edges of the composition. (Always precise, Cossington Smith’s notes express her doubts about Irwin’s use of turquoise.) Even the ‘gelatinous gleam’ which Irwin feels is the distinctive register of these colours seems reproduced. Yet beyond a few examples where Irwin’s colour chart is easily legible in Cossington Smith’s compositions, the real impact of Irwin’s text on her work was the liberation of colour from purely ocular vision.

Through Irwin’s text Cossington Smith experienced a new freedom in her perception of colour and equally importantly felt authorised to actively manipulate colour for pictorial impact. The referent was no longer exclusively the visible world. After all as Irwin said “If certain colours can induce certain states, is it not reasonable to suppose that certain states can induce certain colours?” As Cossington Smith absorbed and built on Irwin’s restricted range of colours, the pictorial potential of the scheme expanded. Beyond Irwin’s own colour chart, the Theosophical foundation of her theory remains a powerfully charged conception of colour as an active force on the individual. With training, both Irwin and Leadbeater were confident that the sensitive soul (read artist) could learn to manipulate this powerful force. It was simply a matter of perception—using the third eye—and practice in deploying the potent coloured forms to have a real agency on those around us.

543 Cossington Smith’s copy of Irwin’s The New Science of colour is in the Cossington Smith Archive
Eastern Road, Turramurra, 1926 (colour plate 37) is a more complex arrangement in which the interplay of many greens goes beyond the relative simplicity of Irwin’s published colour chart. Despite the colour range the colour references to the natural world are token only. For Irwin different shades of green and brown fall largely in the sedative and recuperative registers and so continue the bucolic landscape tradition with a new radical edge. Should we read the cart angling up the hill as the mental recuperative crimson lake or the spiritual recuperative flame rose? Suffice to say that Cossington Smith chose to represent the horse and cart as a solid block of colour corresponding more to a personal reality than one which was strictly ocular.

The complexity of the colour meanings are only intensified in later works from Bridge in curve, 1930 to Door into the garden, 1947. Irwin’s text was only one influence on a woman who was dedicated to her art. Yet through Irwin, Cossington Smith connects to a Theosophical tradition at a time when the Theosophical presence was enormously strong in both her home town and within her own intellectual community. Where de Maistre was unable to sustain his own radical conception of colour liberated from ocular vision, Cossington Smith’s circumstances and support group sustained her. By her choice of associates and literature she clearly aligned herself with the spiritual aspirations of the Theosophical Society while remaining at arms length from any formal association with the Society. For Anderson the new movement in art of which Cossington Smith and de Maistre were a part “stood for the life of the spirit.”

Conclusion
Like de Maistre’s colour-music paintings, Cossington Smith’s mature work offers more than formal experiment in scientific vision. A thorough contextualisation of their work within the debates of the Theosophical Society opens the space for an alternative construction of this period, identifying a tradition of Australian artists

544 Irwin, The new science of colour. p. 51
actively engaging with the legacy of the Enlightenment, exploring unauthorised knowledges, alternative constructions of appearance and reality. By introducing the passionate debates about etheric colours and exercises for the cultivation of one’s aura we can imagine Australian artists engaging in a debate with modernism rather than receiving or rejecting it according to a model where the artist was either responsive to the European avant-garde or reactionary. Neither Cossington Smith nor de Maistre were members of the Theosophical Society yet Leadbeater’s impact in Sydney was such that Theosophical concerns became a matter of common parlance. The Theosophical vision of a greater harmonic unity of which colour and music were but physical manifestations opened the way for artists to conceive of an entirely new relationship with colour. The representation of this greater invisible harmony seemed more valuable than the landscape visible with the physical eye. For de Maistre and Cossington Smith colour lost its ties with retinal experience and became an element to be experienced with the ‘third eye’. In turn they conceived of deploying the potent force of colour in their paintings to reference this greater harmony.

By figuring de Maistre and Cossington Smith as engaging in an informed debate of this nature, the simple dualism of centre versus margin is reconfigured. Their intimates and their ideas were highly mobile in a debate which was itself de-centred. Their practice reflects this debate through an engagement with ideas as well as form. Artists who engaged with the Theosophical Society embraced an organisation with the potential to enlarge their horizons beyond a received patriarchal Euro-centrism in both their life and their art.

545 Ethel Anderson, 'New movement in art', Sydney Morning Herald, 3 March, 1932, 5 p. 5
8. The partial realisation of a great ideal: Axel Poignant

Axel Poignant’s formation as both a thinker and a documentary photographer is incontrovertibly linked to the Theosophical Society. Gael Newton made the connection in her essay for the 1982 retrospective of Poignant’s work at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, writing that “the influence of Theosophy … may also account for Poignant’s pioneering sensitivity towards the Aborigines as more than anthropological specimens.”546 My research has uncovered an extended and profound engagement with the Theosophical Society which shaped his relationship with the visible world. Axel Poignant’s (1906-1986) experiences with the Theosophical Society framed his understanding of the world he photographed and had significant influence on his work. This experience was cross-cultural, alternative and had the effect of laying him open to cultural difference.

Poignant’s use of the documentary form was motivated by a world view which was fundamentally Theosophical. His strong connection with the Theosophical Society makes the paradoxical relationship between the universal and the particular in the documentary aesthetic particularly visible, problematising the ocularcentrism which lies at the heart of both the aesthetics of the documentary and the project of modernity. Poignant’s photographic practice manifests the non-visible reality accessible only with the third eye through the factual documentary means of the mechanical eye. This alternative and compensatory relationship of the photographer with the evidence of the eye disrupts simple categorisation of

546 I would like to particularly thank Gael Newton for her initial encouragement and ongoing advice in the writing of this chapter. Axel Poignant, Axel Poignant photographs 1922-1980: A retrospective exhibition of the work of Axel Poignant. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1982. p. 8
his work. A distinction can be drawn between the form of Poignant’s work, which is consistent with the stylistic vocabulary of the documentary aesthetic, and the content, as distinct from the nominal subject of the photographs. Many of Poignant’s photographs transcend the anthropological documentary form to speak to us as works of art. The content is not the anthropologised other but the humanity of the same. Poignant photographs the non-visible connections of love and respect between the sitters, he captures the humanity that connects subject, photographer and viewer. It is this quality which transcends the physical which makes up the content of Poignant’s work and accounts to a large extent for his work’s complexity and interest.

Poignant’s mature work appears to be comfortably located stylistically within the documentary genre with its sharp focus and attention to factual detail. In fact, however, I will demonstrate that his work occupies a space which employs the language of science to represent a spiritual, non-visible dimension in much the same way as Leadbeater deployed the language of science to evidence the spiritual. Gael Newton has already acknowledged the tenuous connection between the form of his photographs and their motivating conception. This chapter will explore some of the tensions between the artist’s chosen vocabulary and the formative influences on the content of his work.

As we have seen, the tension between science and the transcendental was already explicit in Leadbeater’s use of scientific rhetoric to evidence his clairvoyant experiences. This pattern was enlarged and repeated as Poignant moved from Leadbeater’s community in Sydney to Perth where Annie Besant’s commitment to social engagement held sway. Poignant would be the last major artist to have worked closely with Leadbeater in Australia and his photographs reflect many of the tensions implicit in Theosophy in Australia in the late 1920s early 30s. The seduction of Leadbeater’s mystical vision of the world is played out against Annie Besant’s ideal of a politically inspired and socially active Society. Poignant’s early career traverses the hot-house environment of
Leadbeater’s Sydney, which was so important to Grace Cossington Smith and Roy de Maistre’s spiritually conceived astral harmony, to Annie Besant’s social activism, which was very strong within the small Theosophical community in Perth. Poignant’s inclusion in the canon as a documentary photographer has obscured the fact that both the mystic and the scientific, as well as the political in his work maintain important Theosophical inflections. If Poignant’s work was given its early direction and shape under Leadbeater in Sydney, under his mentors in Perth it acquired the features that defined the direction he would make his own.

Poignant’s images talk to us through the generations to remind us that the modernist experience was not logocentric but fractured and multiple. They insist on an alternative tradition of modernism in which the productions were in fact the result of a considered and sustained critique of modernity’s most treasured assumptions. The photographic documentary epitomises the aspirations and methodologies of modern science as inherited from the Enlightenment, the process of specialisation and focus, the confidence in the self-evidence of material reality and the inevitability of progress implicit in the anthropological gaze. In Poignant’s practice the form of the documentary employs the vocabulary of a knowledge system outside this standard frame of reference. Poignant’s camera work deployed the tools and language of science in the service of a vision which was fundamentally Theosophical. Poignant’s photographs question the superiority of the Western gaze, and use the scientific eye to represent a reality which is run through with the transcendental. This alternative visual tradition, traceable from Jane Price to Axel Poignant and beyond, was intimately tied to the Theosophical Society.

The formative years
According to Poignant’s own account he first attracted the attention of the Adyar based Theosophical Society by fainting from hunger during a meeting at Adyar
House. Poignant (1906-1986) had arrived in Australia from Sweden in 1926 and had struggled unsuccessfully to make a living as a rural labourer. As he recovered his health within this community he was officially listed as 'rejoining' the Theosophical Society on 27 February 1928, giving his address as the Manor. It is possible that Poignant initially joined the Independent Theosophical Society Lodge at King Street.

The Manor was by now well established as Leadbeater’s Australian residence. Although he made a number of international tours at this time he maintained an active presence. In his shadow had gathered a commune which included many of the artists we have already met in the course of this thesis, as well as Theosophists from England, Ireland, Indonesia, India and America. These gopis, as Krishnamurti called them, gathered in Sydney, where they anticipated their spiritual evolution would be hastened. When the famous Anna Pavlova visited Sydney in April that year she stayed at the Manor as guest of future Indian dance diva, Rukmini Devi Arundale. This was the environment which Poignant chose to call home, living close by although he would not live at the Manor itself until October 1929. The atmosphere was electric. Leadbeater gathered around himself a band of young men and women of whom Gustav Köllerm’s son Oscar was the acknowledged favourite. Almost overnight Poignant went from failed rural labourer to favoured acolyte in one of the century’s most popular and radical alternative spiritual movements, at the very height of its influence and popularity.

It is a measure of Leadbeater’s charisma that the late 1920s were experienced as the giddy heyday of the Theosophical Society in Sydney. Despite the local

\[547\] ibid p. 2
\[548\] Theosophical Society Membership records, Adyar, India. His nomination was from Hugh Gillespie. Manor Photograph Albums compiled by JL Davidge show him as an intimate part of the community with particular attachments to Davidge himself. Both Hugh Gillespie and Michael Sawtell lectured at Kings Hall, nominally the venture of the Independent Theosophists. Nevertheless, Poignant seems to have negotiated a relationship with members of both organisations. As a Deacon working towards being a Priest he was clearly very close to Leadbeater and Köllerm. The Independent Theosophists continued to depend on Leadbeater’s clairvoyant experience and lectured on his publications.
schism which resulted in the Independent Theosophical Society, and Krishnamurti’s shock resignation from the parent Society in 1929, Sydney was relatively little damaged. There were qualms about Leadbeater’s patent preference for male company as enacted in the Liberal Catholic Church. For a moment it seemed that Rukmini Devi would assume the burden of representing the ‘World Mother’ (c 1928-29), a new exclusively female subsect of the Theosophical Society, but with so many other activities the idea was left behind. Meanwhile, fancy dress balls, 2GB Children’s Hour broadcasts, theatrical productions, Lodge meetings, Co-Masonic events, an extraordinarily demanding lecture program, Sunday School programs and discussion groups, yoga, picnics, summer camps, tennis matches, psychic experiences and of course church activities filled Poignant’s days to overflowing.

Poignant entered the Theosophical Society through the people most closely associated with the Liberal Catholic Church. As a protegé of Gillespie and journalist James L Davidge, Poignant himself soon became a Deacon in the new church. As Deacon his chief task was to assist in developing and magnifying the astral bodies of the congregation through the ritual of the service. As discussed in connection with AE Warner, these astral bodies were visible to the clairvoyant, and it was these forms that Warner had represented in The completed eucharistic form. When Kylie Tennant described St. Albans, she was describing Poignant’s environment of this period. The “hot, packed, expectant worshippers... full of half mystic, half erotic exultation” and the “heavy” air, were of the priesthood’s manufacture. Poignant was one of those “many bright birds” who moved through the church “blazing like a Christmas tree with candles and brass.” As assistant to Leadbeater’s bishop, Poignant was at the centre of Sydney’s psychic energies. The little church of St. Albans was envisaged as a powerhouse of positive energies radiating across Sydney city. Poignant’s

549 Pavlova had lent her name to the Theosophical Crusade for a Beautiful Australia during her previous visit in 1926. Moore, ‘At home and abroad’,
550 He was made a Deacon 27/4/1930 and a Priest 10/2/35 Rt Revd Ian Hooker, Letter to the author from Rt Revd Ian Hooker, 2004,
551 Tennant, Ride on stranger, p. 106
intimacy with the unseen was an essential part of his role in the Liberal Catholic Church.

**Early photographs**

Although Poignant’s responsibilities in the Liberal Catholic Church were his most important and glamorous role during his three years focused around the Manor, it was during this time that his early photographic practice was also fostered. Poignant was only one of a number of amateur photographers in residence at the heart of the Theosophical Society. Photograph albums, many compiled by Davidge, record the frequent social and formal occasions of this period. The unchallenged expert was Leadbeater’s chief photographic propagandist, Judith Fletcher. Poignant’s earliest Sydney work was done in Fletcher’s shadow, using her darkroom in the converted laundry, and the studio she had set up at the Manor stables. Leadbeater’s explicit advice to Fletcher regarding the astral potential of the photograph and the responsibility of the artist was as much a part of Poignant’s early formation as a photographer as his use of Fletcher’s equipment. Moreover Poignant’s experience at the heart of Leadbeater’s circle, particularly in the context of the services of the Liberal Catholic Church, demonstrates his ready embrace of this world view.

Poignant’s concern to record the invisible with the mechanical eye informs his early work at the Manor. One of his earliest subjects was the young Marjorie Emildegan (Bull). She recalls him photographing and rephotographing her in the old stables studio. Marjorie was then the youngest child at the Manor, with the unique privilege of being seated next to Leadbeater at meals. Being photographed was a flattering and significant experience for the young Marjorie, and in return she embroidered Poignant’s stole, part of his vestments. Marjorie recalled Poignant’s stated ambition to make visible her qualities of ‘inner life, composure and intention’. This stated intent is again directly related to

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552 I would like to again thank Marjorie Bull for her generosity in placing her phenomenal memory at my disposal. Bull, Interview with the author,
Fletcher’s ambition and achievements of the time and reflects Poignant’s full immersion in the culture of the Manor.

Poignant also followed Fletcher’s example by working for the promotional and publication arm of the Society.\textsuperscript{553} This is the context for what is probably his first published photograph, \textit{The Manor}, 1930 (colour plate 38). The image carried the Christmas greetings of the Adyar-based Theosophical leadership of Sydney and was described as “\textit{The Manor}, Bishop Leadbeater’s Australian home—the partial realisation of a great ideal.”\textsuperscript{554} \textit{The Manor} participates in the well established genre of documentary travel photography, not unlike the photographs of Adyar taken by Florence Fuller and sent back to Melbourne. Intrinsically to the genre is the assumption that the photograph records what one would have seen with one’s own eyes had one only been there, a scientific, evidentiary aesthetic. However in Poignant’s photograph of \textit{The Manor} the evidence of the eye is added to, and we are also offered the evidence of the spiritually attuned. This ambition participates in the well established pictorialist tradition of poetic states, the difference here is that Poignant deploys the language of the documentary photograph to communicate an impulse more commonly experienced in soft focus atmospherics. In this photograph the Manor has been photographed from an unusual angle— from a stretch of wasteland. The ungainly building rises from the wilderness and under Poignant’s hand appears noble and distinguished. As in the portrait of Marjorie Emildegan, the outer form is carefully composed to make visible the inner life. In this image the Manor is framed as a destination reached after following a stony path. The imagery is not distinctive; it is a transparent use of standard Christian iconography. The ‘path’ is of course a reference to the Theosophical principles of right living, the reward of which will be spiritual evolution under Leadbeater’s eye at the Manor.\textsuperscript{555} The concerns expressed in this rather laboured image, produced during Poignant’s early intense relationship

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\textsuperscript{553} It may be coincidental that the highest incidence of photographs in Theosophical journals (all published from Sydney) is for the period 1925-33.
\textsuperscript{554} Axel Poignant, “The Manor”, \textit{The Australian Theosophist}, 8, 5, 1930.
\textsuperscript{555} \textit{The Path} was also the title of the journal of the separated Independent Theosophical Society in Sydney. Was this a not so subtle dig at the separated Society?
\end{flushleft}
with the Theosophical Society, anticipate a key thematic in his later work. The scientific expression of the inner life is an important part of his later work; its origins in the ideals of the Theosophical Society add a dimension to Poignant's work not previously discussed.

Poignant's personal experience led him to experience the spiritual as an active and visible part of the everyday. The form he employed to articulate this vision was the photographic documentary. But this was a documentary form with a difference. This difference was formulated during his apprenticeship at the Manor and subtly transforms the documentary genre which his work superficially resembles. As I have argued Poignant's formation within this heady Theosophical environment was very much under the shadow of Leadbeater and in a practical sense Judith Fletcher. But it is interesting also to compare his work with his fellow in the Liberal Catholic Church, AE Warner. The two artists are united at this stage in their explicit preference for a practice which was documentary and evidentiary. Science and its methodology was after all an important part of Leadbeater's rhetoric. Yet they responded differently to Leadbeater's visionary conception of reality and his lessons for the artist. Where Warner's *The completed eucharistic form* evidences the infusion of the spiritual in the everyday, the same is not reflected in the etchings he produced for public consumption. Warner's experience at the Manor did not impact on his way of seeing the world and its representation through his prints. In his work the Theosophical vision of a reality infused with the transcendental is not made visible. By contrast Poignant internalised Leadbeater's message and represented the visible as run through with the invisible. Poignant represented the inner of life of both Marjorie Emildegan and the Manor as reality, not as poetic inflection.

Poignant's developing aesthetic found an unusual ally in Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986) who arrived at the Manor shortly after Poignant. Rukmini Devi's approach to art, expressed later in her much celebrated work in the revival of Bharata Natyam Indian temple dancing traditions, connects usefully to the
foundations of Leadbeater’s own Theosophical art theories. The influence of Ernest Havell’s interpretation of Indian modernism was an important reference point for Rukmini’s future dance practice. For Rukmini Devi dance was the outer mode of an inner expression. It was an expression of national independence, an expression of pride in local rather than Eurocentric practice. For Rukmini, as for such artists as Abanindranath Tagore or Nandalal Bose, art was a profoundly spiritual experience.

Rukmini Devi, Fletcher and Warner were not the only artists present at the Manor at this time. Florence Fuller, Jane Price and Judith Fletcher were residents, participants in the conversations which must have occurred at the Manor about the nature of art and its place in spiritual evolution. Clearly Poignant’s attempt to unite scientific and spiritual impulses in his work should be viewed in the context of a cross-cultural aesthetic project by a stylistically disparate group.

Photography was not Poignant’s primary concern during his three years at the Manor. If he was put to work as a photographer, Poignant was also given radio work for the (Theosophical) Children’s Hour broadcasts for radio 2GB. Under George Arundale and Leadbeater, the Theosophical Society embraced modern, scientific disciplines like anthropology and new technologies like radio, cinema and photography to spread the Theosophical message. Science was placed at the service of the Transcendental. The rationalism and specialisation embodied in these technologies was embraced and transformed into ready metaphors of more powerful psychic potential.

Perth

In the midst of the whirlwind of social and spiritual activity which was life at the Manor, Poignant courted and married Sandra Chase who, with her mother, Muriel, had come to Sydney to achieve spiritual enlargement at the Manor. The

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marriage was short lived. They separated in 1935 and Sandra would ultimately marry Geoffrey Hodson—the incumbent charismatic visionary. In 1930 Sandra left her new husband at the Manor to visit Adyar with her mother. Reunited in Perth in mid 1931, Axel Poignant and Sandra became pillars of the local Theosophical community, held Liberal Catholic Church services and continued very much within the Theosophical circle. Poignant's dance contacts made through Rukmini Devi served him well; visiting Russian dancers like Pavlova's lead dancer Algeranoff sought him out and Poignant had access to many of the ballet superstars that passed through Perth. Poignant himself danced with the Linley Wilson Ballet school and arranged for avant-garde performances by that school for the Theosophical Society. Those links also brought him into contact with the Workers Art Guild and the local Communist group; the apparently irreconcilable politics were united by shared causes. In 1934, when Leadbeater died in Perth on his return from Adyar, Poignant was part of the ordained community responsible for the arrangements leading up to and associated with transferring the body to the Manor.

Although Poignant resigned from formal membership of the Theosophical Society in 1938, he maintained an active and long-term relationship with the Liberal Catholic Church and support for Leadbeater himself. He may have resigned to leave this space more open for Sandra, who with Geoffrey Hodson located the Society as their particular sphere of influence, but he did not disassociate himself from his earlier beliefs or activities. Poignant had stayed with the Society during its darkest days, resigning during the stability brought by the presidency of his old 2GB colleague George Arundale. Poignant's resignation did not mean he abandoned the philosophic and personal commitments he had made earlier in life. In 1965 Poignant was one of a number of signatories who defended Leadbeater's visionary powers by the witness of their own 'direct, independent
experiences of an extrasensory nature’. His active participation in the Liberal Catholic Church was renewed in the mid 1970s.

An important figure in mediating the new socially active environment in Perth was Percy Stanway-Tapp (1876-1950). He had a very clear theoretical position on art and the responsibilities of the artist, lecturing and publishing on the subject within the Theosophical community. Stanway-Tapp had trained in lithography and commercial art at Bradford Technical College in England, where he had also studied Indian and Japanese art at the local museum. Poignant’s new artistic mentor took over where Leadbeater left off. Stanway-Tapp referred to Leadbeater’s evidence in *The science of the sacraments*:

> What may be behind the thought-form only an occultist may say; but you may, if you adopt the right attitude to the physical thing, possibly get in touch with its far more glorious archetype.

Stanway-Tapp was adamant that “The place art occupies in the Theosophical Society is …a powerful one—...the helping of man’s higher evolution.” Again following Leadbeater he argued for the astral influence of colour and directional line on the observer. His own work falls into two genres—highly decorative pen and ink drawings and botanical illustrations. His decorative pen and ink drawings make studied use of the emotive potential of line and colour. As a trained artist himself with a special interest in the expressive qualities of his medium he would have urged Poignant to develop his photographic skills and become aware of the formal qualities of the photograph as well as the subject matter. Yet despite the strength of his own personal convictions, Stanway-Tapp urged Poignant to seek his own path: “trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string…imitation is suicide.”

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561 Hooker, Letter to the author from Rt Revd Ian Hooker,
563 ibid., p. 728
564 Tracey, Clare Tracey’s autograph book, Stanway-Tapp 7 October 1936
Poignant’s photographic practice in the 1930s continued to develop against the background of this Theosophical community. His mother-in-law Muriel Chase was Society Editor of the *West Australian*, and Stanway-Tapp was Head of the Photography Department. Both offered him much practical assistance. Much of Poignant’s work at this time comprised Society and family portraits, almost certainly gained through Muriel’s contacts. Through Stanway-Tapp’s support, he photographed many visiting celebrities. Poignant’s portrait of *Percy Grainger*, Perth 1935, (colour plate 39) belongs to this series of ‘celebrity’ photographs of this time. It uses a stark shallow ground, almost as if in bas-relief. The claustrophobic physical space of the body seems to highlight Grainger’s absorption in a spiritual moment. Grainger shared Poignant’s belief in psychic phenomena and is here captured at a moment of total possession by ‘the muse’. Every fibre of Grainger’s body is focused on the music. His eyes are open but his clear gaze is focused inwards. A Pictorialist miasma shrouds the surface which had not been present in the work he had done at the Manor. This was an early work much valued by Poignant and might reasonably be seen as an attempt to negotiate the tensions of form and substance.

The Theosophical Society in Perth offered Poignant much more than employment opportunities. In Perth Poignant saw Muriel Chase in a different context—no longer a ‘gopi’, attendant on Leadbeater’s every word, but as a politically active follower of Annie Besant. Muriel Chase was a fascinating woman—journalist and linchpin to the Perth Theosophical Society. She also occupied an important social position as wife of the State Governor’s aide-de-camp. She and the extraordinary feminist activist Bessie Rischbieth together sponsored many of Perth’s more influential women into the Society. The Perth Lodge had been crucially shaped by Besant’s influence, and had a special commitment to active community service. Muriel Chase had joined in 1907 and
was for a time assistant to artist Florence Fuller. Bessie Rischbieth had joined in 1903, Alice Adair in 1906, Mrs Stanway-Tapp in 1908 and Edith Cowan in 1910. The minutes of the Perth Lodge are recitations of women successfully positioned onto committees, boards and councils for the first time, women standing for parliament, women forming organisations and transforming organisations for the benefit of women. The Perth Lodge was also behind the formation of the influential West Australian institution, the Women’s Service Guilds, the only minuted speakers at the inaugural meeting were Theosophists Rischbieth, Adair and Chase. The causes embraced by Perth Lodge included anti-vivisection, Aboriginal policy reform, child endowment, food reform, Guides, humane killing in abattoirs, women’s hospitals and of course equal representation for women. For them the spiritual was political and equality was the natural outcome of the enlightened mind. The political agenda which drove Muriel Chase and her Perth colleagues was to infect Poignant and motivate him to produce work with a social conscience. The activities of the Perth Lodge were motivated by concerns for equality. For Muriel Chase “the most valuable aspect of the Theosophical Society... (was) tolerance.” The Lodge followed in Annie Besant’s footsteps and made the first object of the Theosophical Society— ‘The brotherhood of man’— the spiritual validation of political activism in which the first step was equality and tolerance for all.

Poignant’s experience in Perth marks a watershed. He came to question whether the astral influence of the work of art, as described by Leadbeater, was sufficient goal for the artist. In Perth, Poignant was inspired by the many impressive Theosophical women to produce work which engaged at a political level. The example of Bessie Rischbieth, Edith Cowan and Muriel Chase challenged Poignant to take on a social agenda, to represent the ideal of the ‘brotherhood of

567 Muriel Chase, ‘The most valuable aspect of the Theosophical Society’, The Beacon: The Official Organ of the Theosophical Society, Perth Lodge, May/December1923, 21 p. 21
man', and actively promote tolerance and understanding. This was a period of exploration for Poignant, when the conventional genres of the studio portrait and the celebrity photograph gave way to photo essays of timber getters in Pingelly and wildlife photography with Vincent Serventy and Hal Missingham. These photographs evidence a new desire to connect with a broad cross section of the community and an interest in those more intimately connected with the land. There is a corresponding rejection of Pictorialist strategies and an expressed desire to gather the facts towards ‘some useful purpose’. These early gestures towards his mature work are clearly looking to ideals of ‘the brotherhood of man’ as well as the infusion of the transcendental into the everyday.

*Young mother and new born baby*, 1942 (colour plate 40) is key work of this period taken during a trip along the Canning Stock Route. The young Aboriginal mother's face seems absorbed in inner reflection and attention is focussed on the body language of an intimate relationship as she clasps her greedily suckling baby to her breast. The image has enduring value because it speaks to the common experience of the child and mother so profoundly connected they seem as one. This important work captures a conversation between the mother and child which is never voiced and yet is always explicit. A vigorous, curling, twisting line plays over the apparently impassive form of the mother belying the stillness of the outer form. This intense expression of inner life references an ideal of universal motherhood. The repetition of textures and crisp handling of form contribute to the sense of pictorial unity. The composition is articulated by a figure of eight on its side— the sign for infinity. The Pictorialist haze which characterised Poignant’s portrait of Percy Grainger is gone with no loss of expressive spiritual register. Instead Poignant employs the rhetoric of a scientific evidentiary aesthetic (recalling his work at the Manor) to support his apprehension of an intense form of inner life. The clearsighted could see through to the inner life as a scientific fact.

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Interestingly the sense of being out of time which characterised the earlier portraits, including that of Percy Grainger, is also a feature of this work. The crisp surface and focus on the evidence of the visual is often associated in documentary work with a temporal reference, siting the work in the present or as part of a historical sequence. This work positions the young mother as part of a mythic present, informed by both past and future. This is a peculiarly Theosophical conception of time. Rather than the modernist timeline on which Aboriginal people are seen as less ‘progressive’ than Europeans, Theosophists envisage time as a spiral. The Theosophical understanding of reincarnation and passage through a cycle of lives changing culture, gender and even personality characteristics as one worked through karmic laws was an important feature of the way Poignant engaged with his subjects. In this sense the young mother and child are the artist’s past and future as much as his present. The work does not evidence a sense of rupture in the flow of time or gesture to an implacably inevitable future. Rather the work inhabits an eternal present. Poignant’s Young mother and new born baby occupies a mythic dimension outside conventional modernist temporal tropes.

Poignant’s Young mother and new born baby was originally exhibited in the Eastern states as Mary in 1947.569 Certainly there is a curious Theosophical dimension to this image as an echo of the short lived concept of the ‘Eternal Mother’ for which Leadbeater had proposed (the childless) Rukmini Devi as temporal vehicle. While the concept did not develop independent life beyond the Manor confines, it did enjoy a brief moment of enthusiastic support, the height of which was experienced while Poignant was in Sydney. Aboriginal motherhood in the 1940s was of course subject to heated debate as generations of children were stolen from their supposedly ‘unfit’ mothers by social engineers. Bessie Rischbieth, the Perth Lodge and the Women’s Service Guild of Western Australia

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569 At the Newcastle and Hunter Valley 150th Anniversary September 1947. ibid
campaign against child removal during the interwar years.\textsuperscript{570} We can reasonably speculate that this work is also a political expression of the rights of Aboriginal motherhood and the ‘brotherhood of man’. This work is situated at the intersection of a multiplicity of Theosophically inspired investments.

Roslyn Poignant has located this photograph as indicating a “moment of intersection between two image formations: the image of the Aborigine, and an image of Australian national identity.”\textsuperscript{571} Evidence of indigenous peoples ‘need’ for social engineering and anthropological ‘proof’ of their ‘primitive nature’ had been the dominant paradigms. Yet this pair is not caught in the anthropological gaze or the trope of social welfare. Certainly Perth Theosophists were among those progressive intellectuals calling for reform of Aboriginal policy and administration including the end of child removal. But Poignant’s interest in Aboriginal issues predates this. He brought his interest in schoolboy amateur anthropology\textsuperscript{572} to Sydney and undoubtedly engaged with the emerging discipline during his time at the Manor.

**Nascent Australian anthropology**

Since Mme Blavatsky, the Theosophical Society had maintained a strong interest in the evolution of humanity and maintained an extremely complex account of the passage of the human soul through a cycle of material incarnations. As the soul passes through many incarnations it evolves towards a state of unity with the ‘oversoul’. Each incarnation is an opportunity for the evolving soul to learn and the lessons may need to be learnt over and over again. The emphasis is on the evolution of the soul rather than the evolution of the body.

Given the Theosophical Society’s interest in human evolution it is hardly surprising to find it active in early anthropological debates in Australia. Mme


\textsuperscript{571} Poignant, ‘The photographic witness?’, 178- 204 p. 184
Blavatsky had given specific Aboriginal examples in the Secret Doctrine. Theosophical writers identified the early aboriginal peoples as Lemurian and a later wave as Aryans and wrote a good deal on the intervening history. Discussions of Aryan races and human evolution are a very dangerous area and Theosophists are by no means exempt from attitudes to the indigenous population which are offensive and patronising. However it is worth pointing out that the effect of the Theosophical account of Aboriginal history was to recognise Aboriginal knowledges and to identify with the spiritual life passing though incarnations rather than with the apparently alien bodies of indigenous people.

Alan Carroll, founder and secretary of the (first) Anthropological Society of Australasia and editor of the first Anthropological Society Magazine Science of Man was an active Theosophist. In fact he had read Olcott’s “Presidential Address” to the Sydney faithful in 1891, a text which dwelt on Blavatsky’s theory of Anthopogenisis at some length and urged amateur photographers to collect pictures of anthropological interest. His Theosophical beliefs articulated his anthropological research and publications. Through his interests a generation of amateur anthropologists were attracted to the history of the Aboriginal people. After Carroll’s death in 1911 the Anthropological Society of Australasia folded in 1914. A quality glossy Theosophical magazine, The Pacific Illustrated Weekly, attempted to fill the gap from 1923-25. Then followed a decade of lobbying at the end of which Radcliffe Brown took up the new chair of Anthropology at Sydney University in 1926. In 1929 its new quarterly journal, Oceania, began publication. The Theosophical Society maintained an active interest in this shift. Poignant’s

573 Mme Blavatsky made a number of remarkable and shocking claims in Volume II, (Anthopogenisis) of The Secret Doctrine based on her research on the astral plane including a race of degraded men, furred aboriginals (descended from animals and monsters) and the instantaneous sterility of Tasmanian Aboriginal women on the arrival of Europeans. Drawing on this Leadbeater and Annie Besant wrote Man: Whence, How and Whither published in 1913 Annie Besant and CW Leadbeater, Man: Whence, How and Whither: A record of clairvoyant investigation. Theosophical Publishing House, Madras, 1913.
574 Ian Bryson, ‘Anthropology on the threshold of modernity: An analysis of the writings of Alan Carroll and Science of Man’, Honours, Macquarie University, Sydney, 1993. I would like to thank Richard Eves for his continued interest and advice on this subject.
575 Olcott, ‘President Olcott’s Convention Address, 1891’, 59 p. 59
early intense involvement with the Theosophical Society of 1928-31 was a time when anthropological perspectives in Australia were in the process of renegotiation from a society of Theosophically inflected amateurs to an increasingly scientific ‘modern’ profession.

This changeover from amateur to professional anthropology saw many anthropologists engage with ideas of alternative spirituality, while in turn anthropology was an important part of the Theosophical lecture program. Hugh Gillespie (Poignant’s sponsor into the Society) could lecture at the Independent Theosophical Society venue, Kings Hall, on “The pedigree of man” 577 or “The antiquity of man, man before monkey: occult and scientific traditions.” 578 Michael Sawtell, Theosophist and activist for Aboriginal issues, was also a frequent lecturer at Kings Hall, 579 speaking on Walt Whitman, Emerson and Aboriginal Australia. His lectures were variously advertised as “The spirit of Australia: personal experience of Aborigines, their customs, folklore, religious beliefs including that of rebirth etc” 580 and again on “Religious beliefs, habits, customs and folklore of the Australian Aborigines, personal experiences of Aborigines of Western Australia, Northern Territory and the Kimberley country”. 581 In fact the Kings Hall Lecture program in the late twenties reads a little like a proto-anthropological Society with talks on “Music, legends and history of the Maoris of New Zealand”, “Mexican Shrines of olden times”, “Through Algeria and Tunisia”, “The teachings of the Mahatmas”, “The Pyramids” and “The Religion and customs of the Pueblo Indians”. Anthropology and the occult history of the aboriginal peoples of Australia was a subject of active interest in the late 1920s in the Theosophical Society.

576 Pacific was the glossy Theosophical Journal from Adyar House it lived only from 1923-25 John Mackay is reputed to have sunk money into this. Roe, Beyond belief; Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939. p. 272
579 Unfortunately only the titles of these lectures remain from advertisements in the Sydney Morning Herald
Poignant’s early mentor, Davidge, replayed themes of the 1920s under the title “The Aryanization of Australia”. In what might have been originally a lecture by Leadbeater, his banner read, “Australia has many links with the Powers behind the scenes, not only in modern times, but at special crises in the distant past.”\(^{582}\) Davidge went on to explain how the Aryan strain is observed (also) in superior types of the Australian Aborigines and in the Ancient Wisdom which the invaders brought from India. We can trace it in Aboriginal systems of mythology— the story of creation, of reincarnation, of devas and nature spirits etc. These stories have parallels in all religions, in the Bible and in \textit{The Secret Doctrine}.\(^{583}\)

Davidge goes on to say that the most obvious evidence of Aryan influence is in the medicine men in the North of Australia, whose ‘supersensory and magical powers’ are described in Professor Elkin’s book, \textit{Aboriginal men of high degree}.\(^{584}\) Elkin’s arguments were seen as ‘proving’ Blavatsky’s clairvoyant research. As already noted the debates surrounding Australian Aborigines and the Ancient Wisdom were highly topical during Poignant’s time at the Manor and later in Perth. Davidge’s article, “The Aryanization of Australia,” was written in 1955, shortly after Poignant’s return from Nagalarramba in the far North. Poignant’s work at Nagalarramba would be a high point in his photographic career. He achieved a large body of highly significant work in collaboration with the indigenous community which has enduring significance for the Nagalarramba descendants and art historians. On Davidge’s evidence it would appear that Poignant conceived his photographic work at Nagalarramba in terms of an

\(^{581}\) Anonymous, ‘Advertised lecture: Michael Sawtell ‘Religious beliefs habits, customs and folklore of the Australian Aborigines, personal experiences of Aborigines of Western Australia, Northern territory and Kimberley country.’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 4 May, 1929, 3 p. 3


\(^{583}\) ibid, p. 15

\(^{584}\) Elkin’s MA thesis, \textit{The religion of the Australian Aborigines} was written for Sydney University in 1922 and his PHD Thesis \textit{Ritual and Myth in Australia} was completed through the University of London in 1927
opportunity to reconnect with a spiritually integrated community. He carried his own intense expectations and spiritual experience with him.

**Nagalarramba**

Poignant went to Nagalarramba, in far Northern Arnhem Land, for five months in 1952. From the beginning, this field trip was to be a high point in Poignant’s career as a photographer. This remote area was extraordinarily difficult to access and reportedly little marked by European impact. Catastrophically, a month into Poignant’s stay, his camera broke. This was just before an important Rom ceremony, a ritual of diplomacy, a linking by trust and friendship. Poignant’s response to this crisis, after he had worked on the camera for eleven hours and had established that he could not repair the camera by himself, was to sit:

> quite still and in body and mind just intuiting a link with Paul (the ‘dreamier’ of his repair men). Nothing about the Rollei. When I felt at peace with myself, a oneness with Paul, I turned my attention to the shutter and, with the tweezers in my hand, gripped one of the numerous cams(?) inside the shutter and presto snap the shutter went off and stayed right.\(^{585}\)

In a state of trance Poignant identified the problem, repaired the camera and was able to take the frames for which he is justifiably famous today. This incident is a timely reminder of the ongoing relevance of the experiences of the Manor in Poignant’s life and work.

Poignant went to Nagalarramba committed to acknowledging the validity of alternative spirituality. He engaged with the members of the community on that level, acknowledged by them and in turn acknowledging the powerful inner lives of his subjects. *In Lamilami and Bundbundu with rarrk designs*, 1952 (colour plate 41) the two men wear the intricate cross-hatching *rarrk* designs for public display. The
overall impression of the work is of considerable gravitas. Neither Bundubundu nor Lamilami look at the camera but pose for the photographer. Despite the sharp focus and crisp lighting the effect is not unlike some of Judith Fletcher’s documentations of Liberal Catholic Church vestments. The subjects pose to display the visible tokens of their spiritual office. Poignant himself described the process associated with taking the picture as

Most strong impression: the meticulous care, interest and attention to correct detail while the ceremony was on... This morning’s ceremony could very well be compared with a Masonic or similar Lodge meeting— I mean in the types of faces ... its the people as human beings I am after all the time.586

What emerges in the photograph is this and more, as the subjects are charged with authority and dignity and empowered by spiritual knowledge. The comparison with Lodge meetings and (Co-) Masonic rituals in which Poignant had himself participated represents identification on a spiritual level.

In the portrait of Angubarrabarra seated with his young kinsman 1952 (colour plate 42) Poignant turns the sharply focussed eye of the camera on the relationship between an Elder and a young boy. Both are turned to the left watching some activity happening outside the frame. They barely touch physically but are held close together by an invisible thread. The elder watches with caution; the young boy with delight. The older man is heavy, slow and circumspect; the child leans into him but seems ready to dance up and engage with life. Angubarrabarra’s wisdom and experience is set against that of his young kinsman who has yet to learn prudence. We identify with both the child’s delight and the older man’s circumspection. Angubarrabarra is offered to us as a real person, not a type or a cypher. Poignant’s photograph is not about the

586 ibid p. 118
ethnographic type of an older and younger facial feature nor only about the personality of the sitters. It is about the relationship between a young man and his teacher. The young kinsman is held seated by the strength of his respect for his elder. An invisible inner life holds them together. The relationship transcends its enactment in the present personalities. This relationship exists in the present but also partakes of the future and the past.

This work distinguishes itself from the aesthetic program of the documentary project because ultimately the work is not about a moment in time, a slice of life captured in all its luxuriant detail, but about what is not seen. Although the textures and surfaces are treated with loving attention to detail, and a wealth of factual evidence convinces its non-Indigenous audience of the ‘authenticity’ of the representation, this is not sufficient to describe the work. The work is in fact about an inner life, a principle essential to life itself, which is not manifest to the physical eye. The story Poignant tells about repairing his Rollei is a parable about the limitations of the mechanical eye and the ability of the third eye to overcome the limitations of the physical. The photographer undercuts the apparently self-evident relationship of the photograph to the scientific tradition.

The tension between the transcendental impulse and the mechanistic aesthetic traditionally associated with the documentary problematises this apparently self-evident designation. In this chapter I have shown this transcendental impulse to be consistent with the scientific evidentiary aesthetic of the Theosophical Society and established Poignant’s work as continuous with its aesthetic tradition. The ‘harder and more factual qualities’ which Poignant valued in his photographs, and which are intrinsic to the documentary form, properly reflect the Theosophical desire to unite the scientific and the spiritual. In offering scientific proof of the spiritual, Leadbeater had expressed his belief in a fundamental pre-existing unity which was a core platform of the Theosophical Society. The tension

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587 Gael Newton draws attention to this tension in her catalogue essay. Poignant, Axel Poignant photographs 1922-1980: A retrospective exhibition of the work of Axel Poignant. p. 3
588 Poignant, ‘The photographic witness?’, 178- 204 p. 183
implicit in *The Manor*, between the apparently unmediated evidence of the mechanical eye, and a spiritual vision which explicitly rejected the authority of the visible, becomes a key feature of Poignant's mature work. It is in this sense that Poignant's mature work can be described as the partial realisation of Theosophical ideals.

Axel Poignant had the gift of drawing out the pride, balance and confidence of his sitters, what Bull remembers Poignant describing as the qualities of 'inner life, composure and intention'. On another occasion Poignant spoke of his attempts to "achieve greater esoteric and artistic expression." A Theosophical interpretation of this would be a desire to communicate hidden knowledge achieved through the wisdom of the heart and make that knowledge visible. The artist is priest, just as the Liberal Catholic Priest becomes artist. The intersection of these statements of intent lies in the desire on the part of the artist to connect with the subject and their inner life, released from material and temporal encumbrances, and through artistic means make visible the supremacy and glory of the 'god in man'.

**Conclusion**

In Poignant's work the form of the documentary is put to the service of a knowledge system clearly outside its normal frame of reference. The modernism normally associated with the documentary form is a modernism usually figured as male, scientific and European. Poignant, like the Theosophical Society itself, highjacked the documentary form, and with Theosophical support, put the form to the service of an alternative spiritual agenda. In the process the form achieved a new resonance and remarkable images were obtained.

Olcott's "Presidential Address" delivered to Sydney by Carroll had urged photographers to collect images of anthropological interest. Could Olcott have imagined the possibility of a Theosophically inspired artist deploying a
Theosophical vocabulary to undertake this mission in the mid-twentieth century? Olcott's "Presidential Address" to Melbourne which had so inspired Jane Price in 1891 had prophesied that fifty years hence Australia would be one of the Society's strongest holds with mystical tendencies and capabilities well developed in the Australian psyche. Such prophesies are dear to current Theosophists. Nevertheless in following the trajectory of artists engaged with the Society through their artistic practice it is difficult to overlook such an observation.

When Poignant's photographs are contextualised within this alternative knowledge system some interesting issues are raised in relation to the way modernism was experienced in Australia and the way that experience was expressed through photography. These photographs unsettle conventional readings of modernism as it was experienced in Australia. Poignant's use of the documentary form suggests that there was an equally important response to the scientific claims of institutionalised knowledge which challenged this knowledge base, proposing an alternative and compensatory modernism in its place. Poignant's extraordinary images can talk to us through the generations to remind us that the modernist experience was not logocentric but fractured and multiple.

Poignant, Axel Poignant photographs 1922-1980: A retrospective exhibition of the work of Axel Poignant. p. 4
Conclusion: A visionary space

In the early years of the twentieth century Theosophy was an established part of the intellectual landscape, neither more or less extraordinary than Norman Lindsay, Whistler or Socialism. As late as 1946 Frank Clune could say that he “need not attempt to define the aims of the Theosophical Society which is well known in Australia.” The Society’s influence was not stylistic as in the reference to Whistler but was conceptually based, much like the far more familiar reference to Socialism. The Theosophical Society proved particularly attractive to women whether as intellectuals, artists or activists, although many men were also involved. In the key case studies presented here, evidence of an extended and productive commitment to the Theosophical Society is incontrovertible. Importantly the experience of modernity and its expression in the visual arts is in these key instances structured by the terms laid out by the Theosophical Society. In this alternative modernism women are repositioned as central to modernism in Australian art. Modernism’s history has been written as male, scientific and European. This alternative modernism is both supplementary and disruptive to previous accounts, it overlaps and overlays the broader history of artists and works of this period. The modernism which emerges from this account is essentially feminist, spiritual and cross cultural.

My project is part of a larger wave of contemporary histories now focussing on the aberrant and discontinuous which enriches our past, a series of counter-memories which recuperate not just the women artists but also the ideas and ideals which

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motivated them. In this sense this thesis becomes a performative act of resistance, a political act to recognise the other in ourselves. In choosing to write about the influence of the Theosophical Society on Australian artists and in acting on a political decision to ‘trust the women’, I have drawn on a past which is multiple and a social self which is schizophrenic. This thesis presents a story which is one narrative among many. If our art, like our Australia, is in a constant state of becoming, with this history behind us we can see ourselves as becoming responsive to the art of our near neighbours not only formally but conceptually. We can see the production of art as responsive to formal developments in the ‘centres’ but not dependent. The influence of these artists on successive generations is hard to measure. The complex cultural context of the Theosophical Society has added a significant new dimension to our understanding of the experience of modernity and Modernism.

The Theosophical platform was founded on the principle that the unseen was active in the world; that this (normally) invisible reality represented a more fundamental truth than that observable with the normal, physical eye. The tension between this perceived invisible reality and the visible world is the common linkage between the artists discussed in these pages. From Jane Price to Axel Poignant, these artists directed their practice at passing beyond appearances—beyond the visible to truth. They are connected through a common concern to explore the concept of an inner reality through the formal means of their practice. Their radical visuality is connected not through any stylistic contiguity but through a common conceptual link. As artists and Theosophists they came to valorise the experience of the ‘third eye’ above the ‘normal’ eye. They drew on a particular interpretation of Indian art; not as a primitivist vocabulary to be plundered for stylistic purposes, but as indicating the way forward to a more accurate depiction of reality. The practice of visualisation was manifested through a variety of stylistic vocabularies. Thus Fuller could paint her *Portrait of the Lord Buddha* which appears to signal a radical modernism and Beckett her landscapes around Beaumaris, each drawing on the
stylistic resources of their environment to express a vision which was distinctly Theosophical.

The experience of Australian artists associated with the Theosophical Society evidences the early twentieth century as a time when the visible and the invisible were highly contested. To paint the 'sunlit surface of life' was seen within Carrick's community as an inadequate, unworthy ambition, instead they sought something deeper, something less easily expressed. Scientific ocularcentrism was challenged with visualisation strategies learnt from India. Nowhere was this more dramatically enacted than in Poignant's photographs. In the tradition explored here the 'third eye' was increasingly valued over the physical or mechanical eye. Within this paradigm the heroic moment of abstraction as realised by Roy de Maistre is reconceived as another expression of the acknowledged reality of the invisible plane. It is merely a more extreme manifestation of a tradition which reached back to the late nineteenth century, was crucial to Grace Cossington Smith's conceptualisation of her practice, and which would continue to question the conditions of possibility for naturalism in the present.

As artists and Theosophists the men and women described in these pages were part of an extended network. They were part of the most significant counter-cultural organisation of its time. They knew themselves to be part of a larger conversation between artists, intellectuals and activists located in India, Ireland, Australia and elsewhere. There was constant communication between the different locations through a system of journals, touring lecturers, exhibitions, conferences and camps. When this factor is taken into account the picture of Australia as relatively isolated, marginal to the artistic 'centres' of Paris and London, invites review. Australia may have been a long way away from Paris and London but it was very close to those whose ideas transformed the way artists represented the world. In many instances the designations of centre and margin between Paris and Sydney

591 When Alexander Colquhoun reviewed an exhibition of 'Eastern Pictorial Art' in 1916 he wrote “it must be conceded that his intention goes deeper than the sunlit surface of life.” A D Colquhoun, ‘Colquhoun, A ’ Eastern pictorial art affords many contrasts new and old methods shown”, The Age, 10 August, 1916, 17
or Melbourne can be seen to have been reversed. The portrait of intellectual relations summoned by this realisation adds a new level of interest to the particular expressions of Australian artists. As a group the artists described in these pages can be described as actively seeking inspiration from sources other than the European centres, engaging in a cross-cultural dialogue outside the limitations of imperial authority. The Australian experience itself is reconceptualised as an integral part of a larger distributed conversation with like-minded artists, intellectuals and activists across the globe. Australian modernism can be recast as an informed primary player in a movement which challenged Western reason and looked to the 'East' to revitalise its focus.

The powerful organisational and conceptual structure of the Theosophical Society accounts for the sense of mission and voice of women artists of this time, connecting their concerns and representing them as part of a concerted spiritual project. Many artists previously described as peripheral or minor can now be seen to be central to this process as enacted in Australia. The Theosophical Society's particular relevance for women artists draws these previously overlooked artists into a frame of reference which allows us to recognise their contribution. Our immediate past can be reconceived less as a sequence of isolated heroes battling local parochialism to bring forth stylistically significant works and more as a community of artists, major and minor, part of a conversation with specifically local inflections but connected with suffragettes, artists and intellectuals across the colonised world. These women felt empowered through their art to effect change, linked across continents, media and gender.

These concerns remain fresh and topical. Today there is a renewed concern to identify a legitimate spiritual response to the landscape amongst the non-indigenous as a part of the Reconciliation project. The account offered here is dynamic because it reaches into the present when the sensible and the transcendental are even less stable terms than they were in the early twentieth century. The conditions of possibility for abstraction are no longer the same in the
21st century but neither are the conditions of possibility for the naturalistic codes which reflected the intellectual structure of the Enlightenment. Current concerns with cross cultural visual traditions, the expression of an alternative spirituality based in the landscape and the tensions between the visible and invisible world can be seen to have a long and important tradition in Australian cultural life.
Appendix 1: Köllerstrom's cross: two eyewitness accounts of a curious event

These two passages exemplify the extent to which the history of the Theosophical Society is a subaltern history. Here we have two descriptions of the same event, the writers separated by time, gender and age, yet connected by their recollection of a singular occurrence.

The stories surrounding the Pectoral Cross are a tangible reminder that for the artists, writers and broad community who attended the services of the Liberal Catholic Church or participated in the occult investigations of the Theosophical Society, instrumental rationality was not a given. Köllerstrom's cross carries the powerful message that visuality was not confined to the material world and that the Sydney landscape was transparent to the abstract and the super-sensible.

From Dora Van Gelder; The real world of fairies

Many years ago some friends celebrated my fourteenth birthday with a picnic in a national park in Australia. In the party there were others who could see, and as we sat on the bank of the main stream in the park we remarked the number of curious and friendly fairies peering at us from the bush. This was our first visit to the park, and the wealth of fairy life led us to get in touch with the angel of the area. He proved to be a remarkable character, of great stature, and with an air of power and determination. He was accustomed to rule and carry out his plans, but all in a way imbued with great kindness. He had been attracted to one member of our party who wore a jewelled cross, everywhere a symbol of power, and in this case a jewel with a very special radiation of light. So the angel remarked on it, and said as much to us. He was interested to find out that we were capable of talking to him and seeing fairies. He wanted to know all about the cross and even expressed a desire to have something of a similar nature and asked us if we could not get him one. We were of course curious to know what made him want such a thing and he explained. It appeared that he was ensouling this great valley and that he had a scheme for it. He had divided the valley into three parts, and in each place he wanted a different influence to be maintained. To this end he placed in and along the lower basin, which was tidal,

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592 The picnic was an outing from Mosman, probably Lane Cove National Park
a certain kind of fairy, which is to be found in the sea, and also an intermediate sort which inhabits brackish waters; and higher, on the land, some gnomes and some emerald green fairies. Above this, there was a weir and some quiet water, and in and around this he had established particularly fine sweet water fairies, a light powder or turquoise blue in colour, very human looking, and on the surrounding land many sky blue woods fairies and many splendid little butterfly fellows. Still higher up the stream, where it grew inaccessible and wild, he kept up a third atmosphere, with fairies of a kind more aloof from humanity. He wanted a jewelled cross put somewhere in the central section of the valley to establish a center or point of influence for that part of the area. We were interested in all this, and promised to get him a cross if possible. He was exceedingly pleased with the idea, and most grateful.

Our party sang songs, as one does on such occasions, and this brought fairies from all over the place, the angel looking on all the time. They crowded round and were amazed to find people who could talk to them and who appreciated what they were about. When it came time to go, they begged us to come back again.

In due course, a friend and I returned on the day we had appointed to give the angel the cross, but without it. As soon as we came down to the place, in fact before we really got there, the angel's first question was, "Have you got the cross?" I explained that we hadn't, because it was not yet ready. At this he was extremely disappointed and said one really should keep one's promises, once given, and that such things do not happen in the angelic kingdom. That slips occur in our material world did not count with him. But we stayed and had an enjoyable time making friends with several pleasant fairies who were delighted to talk with us. For the angel's plan included helping human beings, who came there in thousands on holidays. He wanted to give them some vision of beauty and some feeling of rest, and the fairies were told to be as kind as possible to visitors and to try to understand them. So they were always curious about human doings and had more than the usual interest in finding a couple of human beings willing to talk to them and able to explain the vagaries of human behaviour. Some points were mysterious to them. For example, football was played there by holiday crowds. The fairies could understand the running, but did not make out why the ball was an object of such fierce pursuit. We never managed to make this clear, except to convey that it was a game. We promised the angel that we would come back and bring the cross without fail.

It was finally ready, and we took it down to the park. The angel explained to us where he wanted it put, but after walking a couple of miles and finding the place, we discovered it was particularly horrible, with a gruesomely unpleasant atmosphere due, I am bound to admit, to human misdeeds. We appealed to the angel and he said he wanted the cross in this unpleasant place just because it was so unsavory. He hoped that the radiations of the jewel would set it right. We begged him not to insist on that, but to select a lovely spot where it would do its work with help from the surroundings. He called another angel into the
discussion and finally it was decided to put the cross in a spot of great beauty, and more centrally located. Accordingly it was concealed there and at once the angel called all the fairies of the Valley to the place. Thousands came to join the hundreds who had already been watching the business with great curiosity. The angel explained the purpose of the jewels and he held then and there a ceremony to celebrate the acquisition. The fairies passed around in a circle in a slow winding dance, delightful in this addition to the beauties of the Park. They were told by the angel to come there constantly and bathe in the radiations of the jewels, and so carry the new influence about the Park. 593

From

Charles Webster Leadbeater The hidden side of Christian festivals

Leadbeater begins by focussing on the pectoral cross, describing it as:

... a highly magnetized jewel containing gems specially linked with the Heads of the Seven Rays— an object of immense value as a centre for the distribution of force for the helping of men. ... (The angel) fully understood its object and its power; and when later in the day, another member of the party encountered him alone, he enquired whether it would be possible that a similar arrangement of magnetised and linked gems could be provided for him, explaining in how many ways it would be of assistance to him in his work. Of course we very gladly agreed to provide what he wished; there was no difficulty in doing so, for the merest speck of the appropriate jewel is sufficient to make the radiating centre, so that the total cost of such a talisman is only a few shillings. As soon as it was prepared, a deputation visited his valley once more to present it to him; he was greatly pleased, and requested us to bury it in the ground for him in a central spot which he selected with great care, being especially particular as to what trees grew in the immediate neighbourhood. When this was done, he called together a large number of the higher types of nature-spirits (probably superintendents under him) and held a beautiful little dedication ceremony, in which they were put en rapport with the amulet, and its use was fully explained to them. The jewels were caused to glow until they were surrounded by a great globe of living light; and each spirit in turn came and bathed himself in that splendour until he was thoroughly permeated by it, charged as though he were a battery. 594

593 Dora Van Gelder The real world of fairies. The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton Ill. USA, 1977, pp. 10-13
594 Leadbeater, The hidden side of Christian festivals, pp. 276-77
Appendix 2: List of colour plates

All measurements in mm
Photographic credits copied where available

1. Berthe Mouchette
   *Annie Besant* 1908-10
   oil on canvas
   1040 x 685
   Photograph: Audrey Brimsom,
   Collection: Adelaide Lodge, Theosophical Society

2. Jane Price
   *Ploughland in Summer* c1900
   oil on canvas
   390 x 360
   Private collection

3. Jane Price
   *Star Rise over North and Middle Heads, Grotto Point, Sydney* 1936
   oil on board
   273 x 400
   signed lower right: J R Price 1936

   Inscribed verso: 'Star Rise' over North and Middle Heads, Grotto Point, Sydney / N.S.W. Australia / Painted by Jane R. Price 1936 / Rising at midnight to do so, / but not at the date 1927- / -then I did not see it. / "Star Rise" Sydney Morning Herald / By A.T.M. Aug. 20 - 1927 / "who has been fortunate enough during the last few / weeks to watch Sirius rising above the sea, while dawn / was yet two hours away? Once the beauty of it fell to / my shore, + I saw him - was awakened, indeed, by the shining / through my thin curtains. / Poised above the horizon, serene and brilliant, the stars threw a / path of light upon the water, which showed as a pale and milky / purple, the line of the waves cutting darkly across it. The sky was the same / milky purple as the sea, but deeper in ?, while near the line / dividing sea and sky was drawn a yet more sombre veil of mist, from out of / which Sirius emerged triumphant. / Ahead of him, strode Orion, the Hunter, with Rigel marking one / starry heel, + near the faintly twinkling H...?, which is their prey. / But Orion this hound, so magnified were they, by their nearness to / the horizon, dominated all else. It was mystically lovely, a half / incredible vision."

Photograph courtesy Lauraine Diggins Fine Art
Private collection, Western Australia
4. Jane Price  
_Star Amphitheatre, Balmoral, c1924-29_  
oil on canvas  
155 x 228  
Private collection, Sydney  
Photograph: Jenny McFarlane

5. Jane Price  
_Sydney Harbour by Night_  c1910  
oil on canvas  
537 x 763  
Collection: Bendigo Art Gallery  
Dr. J.A. Neptune Scott Bequest Fund, 1954  
Photograph courtesy Bendigo Art Gallery

6. Florence Fuller  
_Colonel Henry Steel Olcott_  c1907-8  
oil on canvas  
660 x 505  
signed lr 'FAF'  
Photograph: Jenny McFarlane  
Collection: Perth Lodge, Theosophical Society

7. Florence Fuller  
_Col. Olcott_  1909-1911  
oil on ivory  
75 x 60  
not signed not dated  
Photograph: Jenny McFarlane  
Collection: Theosophical Society Museum, Adyar, Chennai, India

8. Florence Fuller  
_Mme Blavatsky_  c1908  
oil on canvas  
555 x 453  
signed lcl 'FAF'  
Photograph: Jenny McFarlane  
Collection: Perth Lodge, Theosophical Society

9. Florence Fuller  
_Self Portrait_  1909-1911  
oil on canvas board  
250 x 206  
inscribed on verso by artist in pencil ‘Miss Florence Ada Fuller/ sydney/ Australia/ Mr Munatchy Sundaram/ Mylapore/ India/LV/ ‘9/ (illeg.)/ a student of late W Bougereau/ Paris’
previously in the collection of Beatrice Crawford, Dunedin, NZ
Photograph: Jenny McFarlane
Private collection, Chennai, India

10. Florence Fuller
   CW Leadbeater  1909-1911
   oil on canvas
   590 x 465
   signed IL in red ‘FA Fuller’ no date
   Photograph: Jenny McFarlane
   Private collection, Chennai, India

11. Florence Fuller
   Portrait of the Lord Buddha  c 1910
   oil on canvas on card
   280 x 255
   not signed not dated
   Photograph: Jenny McFarlane
   Collection: Campbell Library, Sydney

12. Marion Ferdinando
   Benjamin Ferdinando  1887
   watercolour
   298 x 236
   Signed and dated IL
   Photograph: Jenny McFarlane
   Private collection, Melbourne

13. Unknown
   Butterfly soul  1926
   ink and watercolour
   in the Theosophical scrapbook
   370 x 200
   Photograph: Jenny McFarlane
   Collection: Melbourne Lodge, Theosophical Society

14. Max Meldrum
   Shadows, landscape with trees 1925
   oil on canvas on cardboard
   signed IL "Meldrum", not dated
   Collection: National Gallery of Australia
   Bequest of Mary Meyer in memory of her husband Dr Felix Meyer 1975
   Photograph: National Gallery of Australia

15. Clarice Beckett
   Quiet spot: The empty seat  c1928
   oil on board
16. Clarice Beckett
Winter, Dalgety Road 1926
oil on board
295 x 390
Photograph: Bruce Moore
Private collection, Canberra

17. Ethel Carrick
Les Tuilleries 1906
oil on board
155 x 215
signed and dated II 'E Carrick 1906'
Reproduced from Christie's Melbourne catalogue 26 November 1996 ill. 45

18. Ethel Carrick
Manly Beach—Summer is here 1913
oil on canvas
810 x 1000
signed and dated II Carrick 1913
Collection: Manly Regional Art Gallery

19. Ethel Carrick
In the Nice flower market c 1926
oil on canvas
592 x 809
Collection: National Gallery of Australia

20. Judith Fletcher
Bishop Leadbeater 1917-20
gelatin silver photograph mounted on lavender card
200 x 143 (image)
Inscribed verso "by Judith Fletcher/ Please acknowledge when printing"
Photograph: Dai Trandang
Reproduced: Theosophy in Australasia 1 February 1920
Volume 25 issue 11 p. 544
Collection: The Manor, Sydney

21. Judith Fletcher
Full pontifical vestments c 1920
vintage print 1920
sepia toned print mounted on lavender card
200 x 152 (image)
Photograph: Dai Trandang
Collection: The Manor, Sydney

22. Judith Fletcher
Annie Besant  1922
vintage print 1922
sepia toned print mounted on cream card
391 x 290 (image)
signed by Annie Besant on recto
Reproduced in The Home: An Australian Quarterly 1 June 1922 p. 7
Photograph: Dai Trandang
Collection: The Manor, Sydney

23. Judith Fletcher
Altar boys  c 1925
vintage print 1925
sepia toned print mounted on cream card
145 x 187 (image)
Photograph: Dai Trandang
Collection: The Manor, Sydney

24. Edward Warner
The completed eucharistic form  1919
Reproduced from Leadbeater, CW The science
of the sacraments The St Alban’s press,
Los Angeles, 1920, Frontispiece
original now lost

25. Edward Warner
The crown chakra  1927
Reproduced from Leadbeater, CW The chakras : a monograph, A Quest book,
Theosophical Pub. House, Wheaton, Ill.1927, Frontispiece
original now lost

26. Gustaf Köllerstrom
Leadbeater’s pectoral cross  1917
silver gilt with amethysts, diamond, emerald, jasper, sapphire, topaz and ruby
102 x 67
Inscribed verso “CW/Lead/beater/1917”
Photograph: Jenny McFarlane
Collection: Liberal Catholic Church, Sydney

27. Record photograph of
Alexander Hector
Colour-music diagram  (1910-1958)
original now lost
Private collection, Sydney

28. Record photograph of
   Alexander Hector
   Colour-music diagram (1910-1958)
   original now lost
   Private collection, Sydney

29. Roy de Maistre
   Composite image of a set of colour disks, scales, wheels c. 1919
   oil on paperboard
   905 x 1055 (overall)
   Photograph: Jenni Carter
   Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
   Gift of Sir John Rothenstein in memory of the artist, 1969

30. Roy de Maistre
    Boat Sheds, Berry’s Bay 1919
    oil on board
    360 x 230
    Private collection
    Reproduced from Johnson, Heather Roy de Maistre:
    Australian years 1894-1930 Craftsman House, Sydney, 1988 p.33

31. Record photograph of
    Unknown artist (possibly Alexander Hector)
    Portrait of Alexander Hector c 1925
    original now lost
    Private collection, Sydney

32. Roy de Maistre
    Rhythmic composition in Yellow Green minor 1919
    oil on board
    850 x 115
    Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
    Reproduced from: Johnson, Heather Roy de Maistre:
    Australian years 1894-1930 Craftsman House, Sydney, 1988 p. 36

33. Grace Cossington Smith
    copy of
    Beatrice Irwin
    The three colour systems with their subdivisions 1924
    (Frontispiece of Beatrice Irwin, The new science of colour 1916).
    watercolour
    233 x 186
    Private collection, Sydney
34. Grace Cossington Smith  
*Centre of a city*  1925  
oil on canvas on board  
832 x 711  
Reproduced from: James, Bruce *Grace Cossington Smith*,  
Craftsman House, Sydney, 1990 p. 59  
Collection: John Fairfax Group PTY LTD

35. Ethel Anderson  
*The Fall, Annunciation, Redemption* c 1920  
egg tempera fresco  
Low Hill House, Worcester, UK  
Photograph courtesy Jane Elizabeth Hunt

36. Grace Cossington Smith  
*Krinkly Konks sleeping*  1927-8  
oil on pulpboard  
470 x 630  
Reproduced from: James, Bruce *Grace Cossington Smith*,  
Craftsman House, Sydney, 1990 p. 73  
Private collection, Sydney

37. Grace Cossington Smith  
*Eastern Road, Turramurra* c1926  
watercolour on paperboard  
406 x 330  
Reproduced from Bruce James *Grace Cossington Smith*  
Craftsman House, 1990 p.68  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia  
Bequest of Mervyn Horton 1984

38. Axel Poignant  
*The Manor*  1930  
vintage print 1930  
silver gelatin photograph on card  
115 x 160 (image)  
Private collection, Canberra

39. Axel Poignant  
*Percy Grainger, Perth, Western Australia* 1935  
vintage print 1935  
sepia toned print on cream mount  
104 x 143 (image)  
Photograph courtesy National Library of Australia  
Collection: National Library of Australia
40. Axel Poignant
   *Young mother and new born baby*  1942
   gelatin silver photograph
   329 x 284 (image)
   Alternative titles: *Mary, Aboriginal girl with new born baby.*
   *Canning Stock Route, Western Australia*
   Collection: Art Gallery New South Wales
   Reproduced from *Axel Poignant photographs 1922-1980: a retrospective exhibition of the work of Axel Poignant,*
   Art Gallery of New South Wales (unpaginated) 1982

41. Axel Poignant
   *Lamilami and Bundbundu with rarrk designs*  1952
   Reproduced from Poignant, Roslyn with Axel *Poignant Encounter at Nagalarramba* National Library of Australia 1996 p. 49

42. Axel Poignant
   *Teaching the lore*  1952
   gelatin silver photograph
   312 x 424 (image)
   Alternative titles: *Angubarrabarra seated with his young kinsman, Anababurra, with one of Narrana’s sons, Liverpool River Arnhem Land*
   Collection: Art Gallery New South Wales
   Reproduced from Poignant, Roslyn with Axel *Poignant Encounter at Nagalarramba* National Library of Australia 1996 p. 129
Colour plates
Colour plate 1
Berthe Mouchette
Annie Besant 1908-10
Colour plate 2
Jane Price
Ploughland in Summer  c1900

Colour plate 3
Jane Price
Star Rise over North and Middle Heads, Grotto Point, Sydney  1936
Colour plate 4
Jane Price
*Star Amphitheatre, Balmoral*, c1924-29

Colour plate 5
Jane Price
*Sydney Harbour by Night*, c1910
Colour plate 10
Florence Fuller
CW Leadbeater  1909-1911
Colour plate 11
Florence Fuller
*Portrait of the Lord Buddha*  c 1910
Colour plate 12
Marion Ferdinando
*Benjamin Ferdinando* 1887=

Colour plate 13
Unknown
*Butterfly soul* 1926
ink and watercolour

Colour plate 14
Max Meldrum
*Shadows, landscape with trees* 1925
Colour plate 15
Clarice Beckett
*Quiet spot: The empty seat*  c1928

Colour plate 16
Clarice Beckett
*Winter, Dalgety Road*  1926
Colour plate 17
Ethel Carrick
Les Tuileries 1906

Colour plate 19
Ethel Carrick
In the Nice flower market c 1926

Colour plate 18
Ethel Carrick
Manly Beach–Summer is here 1913
Colour plate 20
Judith Fletcher
_Bishop Leadbeater_ 1917-20
Colour plate 21
Judith Fletcher
*Full pontifical vestments*  c 1920

Colour plate 22
Judith Fletcher
Annie Besant  1922

Colour plate 23
Judith Fletcher
*Altar boys*  c 1925
Colour plate 24
Edward Warner
The completed eucharistic form 1919
Colour plate 25
Edward Warner
*The crown chakra* 1927

Colour plate 26
Gustaf Köllerstrom
*Leadbeater's pectoral cross* 1917
Colour plate 27
Record photograph of
Alexander Hector
*Colour-music diagram* (1910-1958)

Colour plate 28
Record photograph of
Alexander Hector
*Colour-music diagram* (1910-1958)

Colour plate 29
Roy de Maistre
*Composite image of a set of colour disks, scales, wheels* c. 1919
Colour plate 31
Record photograph of
Unknown artist (possibly Alexander Hector)
*Portrait of Alexander Hector* c 1925

Colour plate 32
Roy de Maistre
*Rhythmic composition in Yellow Green minor* 1919
Colour plate 33
Grace Cossington Smith
copy of Beatrice Irwin
*The three colour systems with their subdivisions* 1924

Colour plate 34
Grace Cossington Smith
*Centre of a city* 1925
Colour plate 35
Ethel Anderson
*The Fall, Annunciation and Redemption* (detail) c1920

Colour plate 36
Grace Cossington Smith
*Krinky Konks sleeping* 1927-8

Colour plate 37
Grace Cossington Smith
*Eastern Road, Turramurra* c1926
Colour plate 38
Axel Poignant
*The Manor* 1930

Colour plate 39
Axel Poignant
*Percy Grainger, Perth, Western Australia* 1935

Colour plate 40
Axel Poignant
*Young mother and new born baby* 1942
Colour plate 41
Axel Poignant
*Lamilami and Bundbundu with rarrk designs* 1952

Colour plate 42
Axel Poignant
*Teaching the lore* 1952
Select Bibliography

In the course of this research I have consulted the Membership Records of the Theosophical Society at the Campbell Library, Sydney and at Adyar, India. I have also widely consulted the minutes of meetings at the various Theosophical archives for the period in question as well as the local and national journals. Especially useful have been *Theosophy in Australia* and *Theosophy in Australasia*, *Advance Australia*, *The Dawn* and *The Herald of the Star*.

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