TANGIBLE - INTANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): AN INTERPLAY OF DESIGN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITIQUES OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:
  'ARCHITECTS – WHERE IS YOUR VORTEX? VORTICISM, THE CITY AND URBAN EXPERIENCE

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• Presentation Method. I would like to:
  i. present in person (with/without a written paper)*

• Abstract (300 words):
  From its conception in the spring of 1914 the British avant garde art movement known as Vorticism was obsessed with the city and urban existence as central to the forward march of technologically innovative modernity. Indeed, the movement largely owed its very name to the American poet Ezra Pound having already identified London as the 'great modern vortex', the end point for all the energies of modern life and of British/Imperial power.
  My paper is rooted in many years of research into Vorticism and British Art before, during and after the First World War. It will focus on some of the many images that evoked the strikingly positive Vorticist vision of the city – one that as much looked to the example of vertically vertiginous New York as that by experimental thinkers on the European continent – by leading adherents of the movement such as: Wyndham Lewis,
Edward Wadsworth, Frederick Etchells, Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders. Living in London much of their imagery was indebted to that city. However, examples will be discussed alongside a group of woodcut prints produced c. 1914-18 by Wadsworth inspired by the cities and industrial towns of his native Yorkshire such as Leeds, Bradford, Halifax and Huddersfield. These were exhibited to considerable acclaim in London in March 1919, as ‘blueprints for cities of tomorrow, today.’

This paper will also discuss how exposure to the mechanised mass slaughter of the First World War for many of the Vorticists undermined their faith in the possibility of a transformation in post-war British art and society. This process was unfolding, and the movement imploding, even as in October 1919 Vorticist chief Wyndham Lewis published his typically provocative call for a new generation of British architects and urban planners (in the pamphlet The Caliph’s Design) to revolutionise the future appearance of the British urban scene by embracing Vorticist principles.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dr. Jonathan Black was awarded his PhD in History of Art by University College, London in 2004 for a thesis exploring constructions of masculinity and the image of the ordinary British First World War soldier, or ‘Tommy’ in the war art of C.R.W. Nevinson (1889-1946), Eric Kennington (1888-1960) and Charles Sargeant Jagger MC (1885-1934). He has published widely about European Futurism and the artists associated with Vorticism. His monograph on Edward Wadsworth (1889-1949) was published in 2006, followed by essays exploring Wadsworth’s Vorticist woodcuts and First World War ‘dazzleship’ prints (2013 and 2015). He has guest curated a number of exhibitions including ‘Blasting the Future: Futurism and Vorticism in Britain, 1910-20’ at the Estorick Collection, London (February-April 2004); ‘Machine Age Modernism: Prints from the Daniel Cowin Collection’, the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, USA (February-April 2015) and ‘War in the Sunshine: The British In Italy, 1917-18’, Estorick Collection, London (January-March 2017). He is currently a Senior Research Fellow in History of Art, Kingston School of Art, Kingston University.