

Marlow Moss (1889-1958)

by

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Abstract.

This thesis is the first full-length academic study of Marlow Moss in English. The methodology of this research has been to combine biographical, historical, and analytical approaches, and the chapters (a literature review; a biographical account; an examination of gender / identity issues; a European art historical perspective; a British art historical perspective; and a critical analysis of Moss's oeuvre), function as thematic lenses through which to view Moss. It could seem that Moss's historical position, a British artist working in Europe and a European-influenced artist working in England, should have secured her a more prominent role in the history of British Constructive Art. Moss's subsequent neglect provokes questions about the construction of that history.

The impetus of this research has been the retrieval of a lost personality in British and European Modernist Art. This thesis represents the most complete account of Moss's life and work to date, and the most sustained examination of her aesthetic. Gathered in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis are over a hundred recorded works by Moss, with images whenever possible, with all currently available information and details of provenance. Also accompanying this thesis are reproductions of photographs, of Moss and of her works, hitherto inaccessible in private collections. This research has gathered and collated extensive archival material, ranging from contemporary reviews of Moss exhibitions, to all known manuscript material relating to Moss, including unpublished letters such as those held in the Paule Vézelay Collection of the Tate Archives, which remain un-catalogued at the time of writing.

Moss's relationship with Mondrian, the focus of much previous research, is addressed and clarified in this thesis. The significance of Moss's connections to Paris, the Académie Moderne and Léger, and Abstraction-Création, and her relationship to her contemporaries, particularly Georges Vantongerloo and Max Bill, are traced. Her position in British art history is mapped, with particular attention to her exhibitions in London during the fifties. Beyond establishing Moss's absence from art historical narratives, and examining the circumstances of her neglect, this thesis primarily seeks to retrieve the position she did occupy, by exploring her working aesthetic and situating it within a specific historical and theoretical context. This context includes Moss's sexuality and the questions it raises for a critical evaluation of her achievement. Although both feminist and Queer Theorist paradigms are pertinent to this research, and are indeed included in this study, Moss is found to problematise existent theoretical categories. Moss's neglect may thus be explained by her lack of fit with prevalent historical and theoretical approaches to Constructivism, to British Modernism, and to the gendering of arts practice.

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Regular Art History seminars and appropriate conferences were attended, and external institutions were visited for consultation purposes. Presentations of work in progress were given annually to the Art History Research Group of the University of Plymouth.

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Introduction.

If there is anyone who resists "*the modern mania for classifications*" described by Fernand Léger in 1924, it is Marlow Moss.¹ According to various accounts, she was a biological realist, a recluse, a persona non grata, a phenomenon, a Don Quixote, a lone wolf, and an Amazon. She was a British, lesbian, Constructivist artist. She was also a woman, a Modernist, and a Neo-Plasticist, a disciple of Piet Mondrian, and a student of Léger. She was a painter, and a sculptor. She was a drag-king. She was a contemporary of Georges Vantongerloo, Jean Gorin, and Max Bill. Added to the list of adjectives could also be 'middle class', or even 'upper-middle-class', and Jewish, but then again she was also an atheist and an existentialist. This research, which aims to retrieve the artistic personality of Moss, and illuminate her distinct contribution to Modern Art, has necessarily sought to find appropriate historical contexts for her. This, however, is a complex endeavour; Moss cannot be located in one particular field of academic study, instead she traverses several: feminist art history, gender studies and Queer Theory, British art history, and the tradition of international Constructivism. Moss disrupts and subverts the narratives that could include her. She was a British artist in Paris, and a European in Cornwall. She was a female artist amongst men, but can be regarded as a psuedo-man amongst female artists. This resistance to categorisation is a large factor in Moss's obscurity; she is omitted from the histories, because she does not fit in. To date she is most consistently approached in reference to Mondrian, a context that casts her in the role of follower, or worse: imitator.

The chapters of this thesis are conceived as a series of lenses through which to view Moss. Chapter 1 'Writings on Marlow Moss', regards Moss exclusively through her appearances in print, and conversely attempts to plot her absences from published historical accounts. Chapter 2 'Marlow Moss: Her Story' approaches Moss biographically, exploring the tropes of narrative

¹ Fernand Léger, 'The Machine Aesthetic: The Manufactured Object, the Artisan, and the Artist' trans. Alexandra Anderson, *Functions of Painting*, ed. Edward F. Fry, The Documents of 20th Century Art. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1973.

that surround her. These opening chapters provide a collation and detailed analysis of existent knowledge of Moss, from which this thesis builds. Chapter 3 'Marjorie Jewel / Marlow: The Construction of Identity' examines the gendering of Moss, her work, and her reception. Chapter 4 'An International Context for Marlow Moss' maps the territory surrounding Moss in terms of international Constructivism. Chapter 5 'Exile and Home: Marlow Moss in England' plots Moss's position in British art history. The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 6 'Space, Movement and Light: the Achievement of Marlow Moss', lifts Moss's work out of context to a certain extent, and examines her oeuvre in the terms she herself conceived it.

It is perhaps a necessary step in the rediscovery of a lost artist, to isolate her as an individual; however to reject context entirely is to leave Moss vulnerable to future neglect. I wish to elevate Moss as an artist of independent achievement, and simultaneously situate her in the existent canon. It is a treacherous path through the various territories described above that this thesis seeks to navigate. A more radical position would perhaps be to reject the art historical apparatuses that have excluded Moss, including the biographical and geographical; instead I am engaging with these methodologies in order to interrogate them. Griselda Pollock has suggested that the existent language of art history as a discipline is inadequate to speak of forgotten female artists.² Alternative modes of engagement have been explored with regards to Moss, perhaps the most unconventional being the choreographed dance work '*Living Ingredient*' devised by Annelie David of the Pure Dance Company in response to Moss's work.³ A new language however can only develop incrementally from what came before; the highest aspiration for a thesis of this type must be to contribute to such a new language. The recovery of exceptional female artists, in the monographic form, by female art historians, is problematized as a feminist practice in

² 'Preface' to Griselda Pollock, Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings, London: Routledge, 1996, p.xv. As cited by Frederickson 'Introduction: Histories, Silences, Stories' in Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb, eds., Singular Women: Writing the Artist, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003, p.2.

³ '*Living Ingredient*' was performed by the Pure Dance Company at the opening of the Moss exhibition Marlow Moss: Ruimte, Beweging en Licht organised by Florette Dijkstra at the Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem, 10th December 1994 - 12th March 1995.

Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb's 2003 book Singular Women: Writing the Artist.⁴ In her introduction 'Histories, Silences, Stories' Frederickson offers several formidable challenges to a thesis such as this one. Is writing a thesis on Moss in the effective form of a monograph to succumb to a masculinist paradigm? Is the implicit rhetoric of the monograph form (hero, genius, protagonist,) inappropriate for Moss, or for female artists, or for the Post-Modern age? Has the role of biography been over-emphasized in relation to the work of female artists? Should anecdotal narrative be discounted, as it usually is from writing on male artists, or has feminist theory legitimised the biographical treatment once more? Is to articulate the collaborative network of artists surrounding Moss in accordance with enlightened Post-Modern feminist methodology, or does it undermine the feminist objective of elevating a neglected yet significant female artist? These are deeply fraught questions that go to the core of the current problematics of third-wave or 'post' feminist art historical discourse. I cannot attempt to resolve such issues completely; yet, as this thesis shall demonstrate, an examination of Moss goes some way towards opening up such questions.

The legitimate concern that in positioning Moss as a student of Léger and a disciple of Mondrian I rehearse "*the traditional cultural practice of identifying women primarily in terms of their relation to men*"⁵ is perhaps circumvented by the fact that Moss was not in love with either of these men. Moss's position in relation to her male mentors is not directly comparable to Sophie Taüber-Arp and Jean Arp, Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock, or Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, to name a few of many possible examples. As a lesbian, and dressing as she did, she related to them both as an artist primarily, as her male colleagues did. Without the narrative trope of romantic love there is far less danger of Moss's artistic relationship with Léger or Mondrian being trivialised. However, biographical narrative (without a conventional love story), even fiction, has been a significant component of writing on Moss, and similarly forms the second chapter of this thesis. As Frederickson describes:

⁴ Frederickson and Webb, eds., Singular Women: Writing the Artist, 2003.

⁵ 'Introduction: Histories, Silences, Stories' in Frederickson and Webb, eds., Singular Women: Writing the Artist, 2003, p.4.

For many art historians, the details of women artists' lives provide much of the interpreted significance of their works, even when the same is not true of the male artists to whom they are compared. It is rare to find a description of the work of a female artist that does not involve a discussion of her life.⁶

However, the common use of biographical narrative in writing on female artists may be only indirectly connected to gender. As any example of a woman artist tends to be less familiar than her male counterpart, anecdotal or salacious information functions to reassure a discomforted audience: a method of facilitating sympathy. Mondrian's humanity is already assumed, so his personal life requires no discussion. The gender imbalance would not be resolved by the omission of all discussion of Moss's life. Furthermore, the details of her personal history, whilst not necessary to an appreciation of her work, are certainly relevant to a discussion of the reception of her work. A broader understanding of the issues surrounding Moss's oeuvre is only possible with analysis of the circumstances of its production; this certainly includes the artist herself. With this in mind, this thesis is not structured as a chronological biography; Moss's 'story' is contained almost entirely in Chapter 2. This is not only to counter possible complicity with sexist traditions of overemphasis of biography to explain art made by a woman, but in order to examine the story of Moss as such. Curiously Moss has become a fictional character on several occasions. She first appears as 'Juan' in A. H. Nijhoff's 1931 Twee Meisjes En Ik, an androgynous convalescent child in Cornwall, and then later in the same novel a character is briefly introduced, a French man, who possibly serves as a mouthpiece for Moss, giving young Juan a tirade on non-figurative art.⁷ Moss is also seemingly featured in a later novel by Nijhoff: Venus in Ballinschap.⁸ In more recent times Florette Dijkstra moved from factual biography into supposition and invention in her later work on Moss: The Sequel, and Moss makes an appearance in Joke J. Hermsen's Die Gärten Von Bloomsbury.⁹ It is therefore not entirely facetious to suggest

⁶ 'Introduction: Histories, Silences, Stories' in Frederickson and Webb, eds., Singular Women: Writing the Artist, 2003, p.10.

⁷ Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Twee Meisjes En Ik, Fourth ed. Amsterdam: Querido, 1949. The passage is quoted in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

⁸ Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Venus in Ballinschap. Amsterdam: Querido, 1955.

⁹ Florette Dijkstra, The Sequel, trans. Penny Maddrell. Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1997. This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Joke J. Hermsen, Die

that Moss is a fictional character who never existed at all, as Tom Lubbock does in his 1997 review of Dijkstra's Tate exhibition.¹⁰ Dijkstra's work, both her writings on Moss and her '*Reconstruction Project*',¹¹ reveals the boundaries between history and fiction to be fluid. This is necessarily as true for the history of a male artist as it is for a female artist such as Moss, but in seeking visibility and status for a woman, the structures of art historical mythology are exposed. The same reasoning can be applied to the seemingly sexist practice of comparative analysis (the model of discussing a female artist as a counterpart to a male artist e.g. Moss and Mondrian), this too is only indirectly connected to a gender, it is actually primarily motivated by the need to build bridges between the unfamiliar artist and the existent body of knowledge. Germaine Greer discusses this issue in relation to Moss, in *The Obstacle Race* of 1979:

*Even feminist art historians must begin with the developing tradition of masculine Western art, and so must argue from the men back towards the women. As the men are so much better known, the character of their work is more deeply stamped upon our consciousness and it is hard to discern what is genuinely original in retrospect.*¹²

Frederickson complains about the attention given to the physical appearance of female artists; for example Berthe Morisot has often been described as 'beautiful'. Judgements about the physical attractiveness, or lack thereof, of women in the public eye, are not limited to artists, but are instead symptomatic of a heterosexist culture that permeates Western society. "*What can be the point, in a survey of the history of art, of remarking on the physical appearance of a painter?*" asks Frederickson.¹³ Whilst I broadly concur with

Gärten Von Bloomsbury. Lubbe Editions, 2004. Hermsen's Moss is largely based upon Dijkstra's portrayal of her in the earlier book: Florette Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, trans. Annie Wright. Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1995.

¹⁰ Tom Lubbock, 'The Project: To Reconstruct Lost Works of a Dead and Unjustly Neglected Artist. The Result: A Case of Misattribution or Just Mistaken Identity?' The Independent Tuesday 9th December 1997.

¹¹ Florette Dijkstra's '*Marlow Moss Reconstruction Project*' of the nineties consists of small-scale replicas and representations of the Moss oeuvre, see Illustrations in appendix to this thesis 1.2 and 1.3.

¹² Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race. London: Martin Seeker and Warburg Ltd, 1979, p.103,

¹³ Frederickson 'Introduction: Histories, Silences, Stories' in Frederickson and Webb, eds., Singular Women: Writing the Artist, 2003, p.11.

this position, I have found Moss again to be an exception. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters of this thesis, the artistic style Constructivism has unique translations to ideology, and to clothing fashion. This alone could legitimise attention to Moss's manner of dress, but as the aims of this thesis are not only to examine Constructivism through Moss as a case study, but also to examine the persona of Moss herself; her appearance, in photographs and in the impressions of other people, is of special interest. Furthermore, in light of the similarity in appearance of her and Mondrian particularly, her sartorial style merits discussion. I argue that in the case of Moss, who so clearly constructed her own image, her identity as an artist cannot be separated from her physical appearance.

A more troublesome proposition in Frederickson's book is that the whole paradigm of "*remembered significant historical figure*" is a "*corrupt construct of masculinist ideology*".¹⁴ The celebration of a lone heroic figure may be undesirable to feminist art history per se. A feminist methodology of emphasising social context, collaborations and networks, and revealing invisible systems of power, is seemingly in intractable conflict with what is ostensibly the original feminist objective (in art history) of retrieving and promoting lost female artists. This issue is, to a certain extent, addressed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, in consideration of notions of gender essentialism upon which such methodologies rely. Part of the remit of a thesis such as this, with a singular female artist as a lone subject, must be to examine the monograph form itself, if not to reinvent it as a feminist strategy. Another possible danger of the monographic focus on a singular woman artist is that it can affect a kind of tokenism at the expense of other female practitioners. This has perhaps been the outcome of canonisation in the case of certain celebrated female artists, an example being Barbara Hepworth who fully and single-handedly occupies the position of British female modernist artist.¹⁵

¹⁴ Frederickson 'Introduction: Histories, Silences, Stories' in Frederickson and Webb, eds., *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*, 2003, p.3.

¹⁵ Nedira Yakir argues that Barbara Hepworth occupies the "*single available space allocated for 'significant' woman artist*" Nedira Yakir, 'Wilhelmina Barns-Graham & Margaret Mellis: The Gendered Construction of 'St Ives' Display, Positioning and Displacement', Doctoral Thesis, Falmouth College of Art / The University of Plymouth, 2002, p.21.

The risk in describing each artist as a singular case is to make these women seem anomalies, aberrations, rather than examples and case studies of a larger phenomenon.¹⁶ The response to this can either be a halt to the production of female protagonists through art historical research, or an accelerated increase in such writing, until a kind of tipping-point is reached; in writing this thesis I am rooting for the latter.¹⁷

Frederickson wonders why women art historians so often write about women artists. This issue emerged during my correspondence with the artist Gillian Wise. She was concerned, legitimately, that female art historians writing on female artists form what she characterises as a "TEAM B", and will therefore facilitate the continued exclusion from the 'premier league' of the artists they research.¹⁸ The answer to the question of why female researchers write about female artists, is seemingly because male art historians haven't, and don't.

*Does there still lurk an unspoken perception that while male artists are relevant to us all, female artists are important only to other women? Is it assumed that in writing about male artists one is writing about 'art', whereas in writing about female artists one is writing about women?*¹⁹

Frederickson also identifies race as another frequent commonality between female art historians and their subjects, and suggests that in some way direct identification is necessary for "responsible" (or ethical?) art historical research.²⁰ Other factors of identity such as class, religion, ethnic background, nationality, and sexual orientation, can also be seen as facets of

¹⁶ Frederickson 'Introduction: Histories, Silences, Stories' in Frederickson and Webb, eds., Singular Women: Writing the Artist, 2003, p.8.

¹⁷ Yakir circumvents the problem of the 'single figure' by choosing two female artists as the subject of her thesis: Yakir, 'Wilhelmina Barns-Graham & Margaret Mellis: The Gendered Construction of 'St Ives' Display, Positioning and Displacement'. She writes: "Electing to write about two or more women painters has the methodological advantage of eschewing implicit gendered essentialism that monographic frame might imply, or implications of artistic autonomy" p.18.

¹⁸ Conversely I had my own trepidations about focusing my PhD on a 'lost female artist', as I initially instinctively resisted the cliché of being a woman writing on a woman, and confining myself to a 'TEAM B' of art historians.

¹⁹ Frederickson 'Introduction: Histories, Silences, Stories' in Frederickson and Webb, eds., Singular Women: Writing the Artist, 2003, p.7.

²⁰ Frederickson 'Introduction: Histories, Silences, Stories' in Frederickson and Webb, eds., Singular Women: Writing the Artist, 2003, p.8.

parity between writers and 'their' artists. Although I indeed share some features of Moss's identity, I do not share others, and I feel with certainty that there are further factors more important in my attraction to her as a subject for research; primarily Moss's work itself, which I saw for the first time in 2004, just prior to embarking upon my PhD research.²¹

Choosing to write about an artist for the reason of admiring their work must be the most common motivation amongst art historians, yet it is not necessarily the point of departure most conducive to successful writing. It is perhaps easier to articulate the inadequacies of a disliked work, than it is to express the achievements of a work profoundly responded to. This problem is compounded by choosing, as a subject for discussion, work that is entirely visual in its language, as is discussed by Karen Wilkin in a 1996 article in The New Criterion:

*...art that depends wholly on the visual, devoid of irony, obvious narrative, or recognizable imagery, art equipped with neither integrated or accompanying text –especially if you believe it to be first rate –is harder to deal with than art that is inherently literary.*²²

Wilkin further suggests that the best art is not only difficult to write about, but renders explicatory texts impotent. The meanings of Moss's works will not be exhausted by this thesis, and it has never been my intention to attempt such a project. It is however vital, in the case of Moss particularly, that her work is written about, and discussed, as it is so rare to actually encounter the work either in reproduction or in the flesh.

Locating and viewing works by Moss has been a recurrent difficulty in my research from the outset. Much of her output from before 1939 was destroyed during the war, and the majority of the existent works are held inaccessibly in private collections. Only four works reside in national

²¹ The first Moss works I saw were the 1949 relief 'Yellow, Black and White' at Tate St. Ives, and the 1954 painting 'White, Black, Yellow and Blue' at Offer Waterman & Co in London. See the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis, Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 46 and P/R 62.

²² Karen Wilkin, 'The Realist Thing I Have Ever Done: Andrew Forge in New Haven', The New Criterion Volume 15, 1996, pp.105-109.

collections in England.²³ This however is not the insurmountable object that it is often assumed to be by other scholars in the fields that Moss impinges upon.²⁴ A significant number of works can be seen by appointment in collections in England, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Israel and the United States. Where I have not been able to make a research trip I have been able to obtain good quality images. I have also been fortuitous in identifying many works traversing the art market, in the possession of dealers, or recorded in auction records.²⁵ Crucial to the approach of my research has always been direct visual encounters with the work whenever possible. These occasions, which have mainly taken place in storage rooms and basements, but also once in a graveyard, are central to my thesis. I have also engaged in empirical explorations of Moss's practice, making models of her sculptures and transcriptions of paintings, as well as countless diagrams of her compositions, in an attempt to understand her process, and follow her thinking.

The photographs that Florette Dijkstra took of the works from the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection during the exhibition she organised at Gemeentemuseum of Arnhem in 1994-1995 have been invaluable to my project. Similarly the photographs, labelled by Moss herself, held by her great-niece Hazel Rank-Broadley, represent a significant addition to Dijkstra's representation of the oeuvre. These images, and photographs held in the uncatalogued Paule Vézelay Collection of the Tate Archives, feature in the Catalogue Raisonné accompanying this thesis. The primary sources of Moss's letters and unpublished writing, held in the Tate Archives, Haus Bill, and the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, are gathered, for the first time, in this research. These documents provide unique insight into Moss's personality and attitude towards her work, and shine a light on certain historical episodes of wider ramification.

²³ See the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 46, and P/R 63; and Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 18, and S/C 21.

²⁴ Anecdotally several scholars have remarked with surprise that I have gathered the number of works that I have for inclusion in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis.

²⁵ The images and information obtained is recorded in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis.

The contextual aspects of this thesis have required engagement with an expansive field of literature pertaining to the various fields I have identified above. I have found much existent feminist art history to be ill fitting for my particular project. Far more useful has been the work of philosopher Judith Butler, particularly her book Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.²⁶ Other sources of note within Queer Theory literature have been Jennifer Blessing's Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography and Laura Doan's Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture; focussing on photography and clothing fashion respectively. As Queer Theory is a relatively new structure of investigation it has not yet been applied systematically to historical art, instead Queer Theorists have focussed upon popular culture.²⁷ Moss however has already made appearances in Sarah Wilson's 1997 essay 'Feminites – Masquerades', published in Blessing's anthology cited above, and Kati Rötger's 1999 epilogue essay in the German publication Differenzen in der Geschlechterdifferenz -Aktuelle Perspektiven der Geschlechterforschung.²⁸

The literature of British art history, whilst largely neglecting the subject of this thesis, has provided an effective ground to the figure of Moss. The absence of Moss from much of the survey literature of British art in general, and Cornish art in particular, is discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. As Nedira Yakir identifies in her doctoral thesis, non-academic agents produce much of the copious quantity of 'St. Ives' literature: the Tate Gallery and "populist" writers, which leads to a certain imbalance of tone between that body of writing, and discourse of the other fields.²⁹ Most useful for a thematic overview have been Margaret Garlake's New Art, New World -British Art in

²⁶ Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, New York and London: Routledge, 1999.

²⁷ The pop star Madonna particularly has remained a significant subject for Queer Theory.

²⁸ Sarah Wilson, 'Feminites – Masquerades', Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography, ed. Jennifer Blessing. New York: Solomon R.Guggenheim Museum, 1997, pp.134-155. Kati Rötger, 'Nachwort -Anmerkungen Zum Titelbild: White, Black, Red and Grey Von Marlow Moss', Differenzen in Der Geschlechterdifferenz -Aktuelle Perspektiven Der Geschlechterforschung, eds. Kati Rötger and Heike Paul. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag GmbH & Co, 1999, pp357-360.

²⁹ Stated in the Abstract of Yakir, 'Wilhelmina Barns-Graham & Margaret Mellis: The Gendered Construction of 'St Ives' Display, Positioning and Displacement', 2002.

Postwar Society and the 2002 exhibition catalogue Blast to Freeze.³⁰ I have also benefited from surveying the journals Horizon, The Studio, and The Listener, as primary sources, particularly to construct an informed impression of the Britain that Moss returned to at the beginning of the Second World War.

The Constructive tendency in art is mapped in two books: the sculptor George Rickey's 1967 Constructivism: Origins and Evolution, and Willy Rotzler's 1977 Constructive Concepts: A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present.³¹ Recently, an overview of British Constructivism has been provided by Alistair Grieve in Constructed Abstract Art in England After the Second World War, and by the doctoral thesis of Alan Fowler 'Constructivist Art in Britain 1913-2005'.³² Anthologies compiled by practitioners, such as Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art (1937) and DATA: Directions in Art, Theory and Aesthetics (1968), and Stephen Bann's seminal 1974 publication The Tradition of Constructivism, have collated and recorded the international movement.³³ Charles Biederman, in Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge, re-imagined the history of art from a Constructive point of view in 1948.³⁴ Constructivism has been celebrated in several important exhibitions over the years: The Art Council's Constructive Context toured Britain in 1978, Abstraction Création: 1931-1936 was held in Paris the same year, Paris: Arte Abstracto - Arte Concreto - Cercle et Carré - 1930 was held in Valencia in 1990, and Als Golfslag Op Het Strand ... Ad

³⁰ Margaret Garlake, New Art, New World -British Art in Postwar Society. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. Henry Meyric Hughes and Gijs Van Tuyl, eds., Blast to Freeze: British Art in the 20th Century (Exhibition: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg 14th September 2002 until 19th January 2003). Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002.

³¹ George Rickey, Constructivism: Origins and Evolution, Revised Edition. New York: George Braziller, (original publication: 1967), 1995; and Willy Rotzler, Constructive Concepts: A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present, trans. Stanley Mason, Zurich: ABC, 1977.

³² Alistair Grieve, Constructed Abstract Art in England after the Second World War: A Neglected Avant-Garde. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005. Alan Fowler, 'Constructivist Art in Britain 1913-2005', Doctoral Thesis, The University of Southampton, 2006.

³³ John Lesley Martin, Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, eds., Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art. London: Faber and Faber, 1971. Anthony Hill, ed., DATA: Directions in Art, Theory and Aesthetics: An Anthology. London: Faber and Faber, 1968. Stephen Bann, ed., The Tradition of Constructivism. London: Thames and Hudson, 1974.

³⁴ Charles Biederman, Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge Minnesota: Red Wing, 1948.

Dekkers in Zijn Tijd in Amsterdam in 1998, to name but a few.³⁵ Certain commercial galleries have represented Constructive art almost exclusively, for decades: Annely Juda in London and Galerie Gmurzynska in Cologne, who have both exhibited Moss works, are two examples. Collections such as The Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Kröller-Muller Collection, Otterlo; The Museum of Geometric and MADI Art, Dallas; The Marguerite Arp Collection, Locarno; the Ruppert Collection, Würzburg; and, in this country, the University of East Anglia Collection, are all centred on the Constructive abstract / concrete tradition.³⁶ There have been several journals devoted to Constructive art: AXIS (1935-1937) and Constructivist Forum (1985-1990) in Great Britain, and Structure (1958-1964) and The Structurist (founded 1960 and still in publication today) in Canada, are a few. Significant conferences and symposia on Constructive art and its relationship to other disciplines have taken place, from The International Congress on Divine Proportion (Milan), and Aspects of Form (at the ICA in London), both held in 1951; to the current activities of Leonardo / The International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology (ISAST). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to re-map the Constructivist field, and unnecessary to rehearse the origins of Constructivism in a general way; it is however the on-going scholarship of this tradition that informs my work on Moss.

For clarity it must be ensured from the outset that the particular way in which I employ the term 'Constructivism' is acknowledged, and that the difference between this and the historical / cultural movement of Russian Constructivism is effectively brought out. In this thesis I use the term 'Constructivism', as is

³⁵ Stephen Bann, Constructive Context: An Exhibition Selected from the Art's Council Collection (Exhibition: 29th March-19th April). London: The Art's Council, 1978. Norbert Nobis and Gladys C. Fabre, Abstraction Création: 1931-1936 (Exhibitions: 16th June - 17th September and 2nd April - 4th June 1978). Paris / Münster: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris / Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1978. Gladys C. Fabre, ed., Paris: Arte Abstracto - Arte Concreto - Cercle Et Carré - 1930 (Exhibition: 20th September - 2nd December 1990). Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio González / Institut Valencia d'Art Moderne, 1990. R.H. Fuchs, Jean Leering, Ad Dekkers, Margreeth Soeting and Paul Kempers, Als Golfslag Op Het Strand ... Ad Dekkers in Zijn Tijd (Exhibition: 20th June - 23rd August 1998), trans. Anthony Fudge, Ruth Koenig and Yvonne van Limburg. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1998.

³⁶ The Riklis McCrory Corporation Collection at the MoMA New York, the Kröller-Muller Collection in Otterlo, and the Marguerite Arp Collection in Locarno, all contain Moss works.

common to much of the literature in the field, to denote a type of non-figurative art, arrived at not through the intuitive abstraction of appearances, but created rationally from an a priori idea. This work is often geometrical in conception and realisation, and fabricated through a process of addition. It encompasses Russian Constructivist work, de Stijl, much Bauhaus work, Neo-Plasticism, Concrete art, Cercle et Carré etc, and also, to a certain extent, later manifestations such as Hard-Edge painting, Post-Painterly Abstraction, and some examples of Minimalism and Systems painting. Crucially, rather than simply being the name of an art-historical movement, it in fact denotes a tendency still present in artistic practice today. Although 'Constructivism' is a term seemingly most readily applied to sculpture built out of component parts, literally constructed (rather than carved or modelled), it is used as an aesthetic distinction and can be applied to work of any medium.

The use of 'Constructivism' as an umbrella term for a diversity of such practices is enshrined by Rickey in Constructivism, although the word has in fact been used in this way in Western art since the introduction of Russian Constructivism to a European audience in the early 1920s.³⁷ Christina Lodder begins her 1983 book Russian Constructivism by identifying this use of the term 'Constructivism' as a misnomer, and re-establishing the term as a specifically Russian and historical phenomenon.³⁸ She attributes the use / mis-use of 'Constructivism' in Western art discourse to the circumstances of the assimilation of Russian Constructivism, largely facilitated in the 1920s by Theo Van Doesburg of Dutch De Stijl, and Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) of French Purism.³⁹

The ideological, political and social implications of the [Russian] Constructivists' ideas were ignored. It was only external geometric style

³⁷ Russian Constructivism was first introduced to the West through the exhibition Erste Russische Kunstausstellung, and through the publication of the first issue of the journal Object, both in Berlin, 1922.

³⁸ Christina Lodder, Russian Constructivism. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983, p.1.

³⁹ These highly influential artists all wrote for the international art journal Object, which often included reproductions of Russian Constructivist work from its first issue of 1922. The relationship of each of these figures to Marlow Moss is mapped in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

*which had any impact because it was more easily accessible, both culturally and visually, to the West.*⁴⁰

The original Russian conception of Constructivism, as understood by Vladimir Tatlin from about 1913,⁴¹ was, Lodder posits, not an art movement, but instead *"an approach to working with materials, within a certain conception of their potential as active participants in the process of social and political transformation"*.⁴² Constructivism in this initial form did not survive long. Liubov Popova died in 1924, and Tatlin, Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova and El Lissitzky were eventually limited by the Soviet regime to *"small design tasks"*.⁴³ Russian Constructivists who relocated to Europe and America were in a position to preserve this original definition of the term, but Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner chose instead to abandon the caveat of social purpose, if indeed they had ever acquiesced to it, and instead contribute to a radical art movement. Although Gabo often used the term 'Constructive idea', and sometimes described his work as 'constructive' rather than 'Constructivist', he was not distancing himself from the original term in his understanding.⁴⁴ It was after all substantially Gabo who had introduced the terminology of Constructivism in his 1920 publication 'The Realistic Manifesto'.⁴⁵ His identification with the term is stated conclusively in a passage from his published recollections of Mondrian:

⁴⁰ Christina Lodder, 1983, p.237. It is certainly the case that later Constructivist artists, including Moss, were not interested in political ends for their art. This issue is discussed further towards the end of Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁴¹ Although the actual title 'Constructivists' was not recorded until the 1921 Moscow exhibition The Constructivists, Fer, Batchelor and Wood, Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism, 1993, p.96.

⁴² Christina Lodder, 1983, p.1.

⁴³ Christina Lodder, 1983, p.225.

⁴⁴ Lodder argues that Gabo 'camouflages' the differences between his practice and Constructivism proper with his use of terms such as 'constructive' and the 'Constructive idea', Lodder p.230. Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson for example, were reluctant to identify their work as specifically 'Constructivist', and opted for the less emphatic 'constructive art'. This cannot be said of Gabo. Later artists, working in the Constructive tradition have adopted the terms 'Constructionist' (Victor Pasmore, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin, Robert Adams, Adrian Heath, Anthony Hill etc) and 'Structurist' (Charles Biederman) for example, I however include these practices under the broad banner of Constructivism.

⁴⁵ Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, 'The Realistic Manifesto', (originally published as a poster in 1920), in Gabo: Constructions, Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings, Engravings, ed. Herbert Read. London: Lund Humphries, 1957. Gabo again defines the 'constructive' in 1944, quoted p.204 of this thesis.

When we were in London [during the war] we all organised an exhibition [including Gabo, Mondrian, Nicholson, Hepworth, Cecil Stephenson etc] ... Mesens was one of the chief organisers, and he asked every artist to say what school he belonged to. So when the proofs of the catalogue were sent to us we looked through them ... and the question of what Mondrian should say came up. Mondrian said, 'Constructivist'. I looked at him and smiled. It was a great victory for me, because at that time he apparently agreed with me. I always insisted that his works were really in the constructivist line. Instead of saying 'neo-plasticism', he wrote 'constructivist'. 'Alright' he said, 'I am really a constructivist artist'.⁴⁶

It is clear that at this point and earlier 'Constructivism' as a term is widely used to denote an expanded field of Constructive practice, quite independent of its Russian origins. Moss herself thought of her work in the terms of Constructivism.⁴⁷

The symbiotic relationship between the art historian and her subject is a central theme to Frederickson and Webb's book. Moss of course has had no choice in the matter of who has written on her beyond perhaps Michel Seuphor who wrote her catalogue essay in 1958, and Netty Nijhoff who was her partner, (although her essay was written after Moss's death).⁴⁸ She is however inextricably linked to the scholars who have written on her, Dijkstra in particular conflates somewhat with Moss in my mind. I too am now identified with Moss, in academic circles at least. I also feel a certain sorority with past researchers of Moss: Dijkstra, Ann Cecil, Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen, Sonia Overbeeke.⁴⁹ What Moss would have made of her scholars, and this thesis in

⁴⁶ Naum Gabo, in Winifred Nicholson et al. 'Reminiscences of Mondrian', *Studio International*, Vol. 172, No. 884, 1966, pp.286-292, p.292.

⁴⁷ "...he [Léger] taught me everything I know about - Construction." Marlow Moss, in a letter to Paule Vézelay, dated 19th August 1955, held in the un-catalogued Paule Vézelay Collection, at the Tate Archives, London. See Appendix 3iii, Letter number 26.

⁴⁸ Michel Seuphor, *Marlow Moss: Sculpture and Paintings* (Exhibition: 4th March - 3rd April 1958). London: Hanover Gallery, 1958. Antoinette H. Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss* (Exhibition: 30th March - 30th April 1962). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962.

⁴⁹ Florette Dijkstra, 'Somewhere between Art and Life -the Constructivism of Marlow Moss', *Ruimte* 2.Jaargang 11,1994, pp.37-43. Dijkstra, *Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project*, 1995. Dijkstra, *The Sequel*, 1997. Florette Dijkstra, *De Voorgeschiedenis*. 's-Hertogenbosch: De Kleine Kapaciteit, 1997. Ann Cecil, 'Marlow Moss, Piet Mondrian and the Double Line (1930-1934)', Master of Fine Arts Thesis, Concordia University, 1980. Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Marlow Moss -De Constructie Van Een Nieuwe Werkelijkheid', *Jong-Holland* Vol.10, No.4, 1994. Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Miss Marlow Moss En Mondriaan', *Vrij Nederland*. 7th January 1994, pp.48-51. Sonja Overbeeke, 'Marlow Moss: Composities Van Ritme in Lijn En Kleur', Doctoral Thesis, Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, 1992.

particular, is a matter of much idle speculation for me. All artists must have some concern for how history will perceive them, whether or not they choose to deliberately address “*the men of the future*” as Mondrian did.⁵⁰ Writing from a position of four generations hence, I need not concern myself with any “*imagined agenda*” of Moss's own.⁵¹ Yet there is a responsibility in appointing oneself the custodian of a neglected artist's legacy, of which I am tangibly aware.

⁵⁰ Mondrian's dedication to his essay 'Le Néo-Plasticisme' of 1920, reproduced in Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, eds., The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian. London: Thames and Hudson, 1987.

⁵¹ The “*imagined agenda*” of artist subjects is discussed by Frederickson, 'Introduction: Histories, Silences, Stories' in Frederickson and Webb, eds., Singular Women: Writing the Artist, 2003, p17.

Chapter 1.**Writings on Marlow Moss.**

There does not immediately seem to be a great deal written on Marlow Moss. I have, however, collected and collated published writing from England, France, Holland, Switzerland and America. I have also located further writing that is unpublished: the thesis of Ann Cecil (1980),¹ the thesis of Sonja Overbeeke (1992),² the thesis of Alan Fowler (2006),³ and a brief mention in the thesis of Nedira Yakir (2002),⁴ Martin Rewcastle's script for a talk at Tate St. Ives in 1998,⁵ and many letters during the nineties between Martin Rewcastle, Florette Dijkstra, Marja Pruis, Tam Giles, Michael Canney and Wilhelmina Barns-Graham to name a few.⁶ The odd mention also surfaces on the Internet.⁷ In published writing, which is the subject of this

¹ Ann Cecil, 'Marlow Moss, Piet Mondrian and the Double Line (1930-1934)', Master of Fine Arts Thesis, Concordia University, 1980. This work will be discussed further in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

² Sonja Overbeeke, 'Marlow Moss: Composities Van Ritme in Lijn En Kleur' Doctoral Thesis, Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, 1992. I have only been able to see the title and contents pages of this thesis, held in the library of the Kröller Muller Museum in Otterlo.

³ Alan Fowler, 'Constructivist Art in Britain 1913-2005', Doctoral Thesis, The University of Southampton, 2006.

⁴ Moss is mentioned in Nedira Yakir, 'Wilhelmina Barns-Graham & Margaret Mellis: The Gendered Construction of 'St Ives' Display, Positioning and Displacement', Doctoral Thesis, Falmouth College of Art / The University of Plymouth, 2002, footnote 204 on p.132.

⁵ Martin Rewcastle, 'Who Is Marlow Moss?' Unpublished manuscript from a talk at the Tate St. Ives, 1998.

⁶ These letters are held in various places: MAKE The Women's Art Library housed at Goldsmith's College, London, and the private collections of Jennifer Rewcastle, Florette Dijkstra and Madeleine Canney.

⁷ Amongst the oddest is to be found at http://www.snap-dragon.com/marlow_moss.html a site created by an amateur enthusiast of Constructivism. Moss appears briefly at <http://gayinfo.tripod.com/A-Z-M3.html>, an A-Z of famous homosexuals. Another intriguing connection that was initially discovered by an internet search is the choreographer Annelie David of the Pure Dance Company of Amsterdam, and her 1995 piece 'Living Ingredient' based on Moss's work: <http://www.ddd.org/ndp99nl/comp/david.html>. Moss is also mentioned briefly in a conversation between Katy Deepwell and Catherine de Zegher that can be found at <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/zegher.htm> Katy Deepwell, 'An Interview with Catherine De Zegher, Curator of Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the Feminine', N.Paradoxa. Issue 11,1996. There is an entry for Moss in the Genesis site for "access to women's history sources" <http://www.genesis.ac.uk/archive>, identifying MAKE The Women's Art Library housed at Goldsmith's College, London, as a holder of a small Moss Archive. Moss's name appears in connection to galleries that have her work (both commercial and public), and bookselling sites usually with reference to Florette Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, trans. Annie Wright. Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1995. She is also listed (but with no further information) on the websites:

chapter, Moss's name appears occasionally in accounts of the Dutch novelist A.H. Nijhoff, Moss's partner,⁸ and the Dutch actor Albert Mol, Moss's friend.⁹ She is sometimes to be found in the footnotes of monographs on Piet Mondrian.¹⁰ Very occasionally she is referred to in the local press of Cornwall.¹¹ More frequently Moss has appeared in the regional press of Zeeland, and, during the nineties especially, across The Netherlands.¹² I have limited the focus of my discussion here to the following published writing: dictionaries, survey books and exhibitions; monographs and other writing on Mondrian; Moss exhibition catalogue essays; reviews of those exhibitions;

<http://neplasticism.com/index2.html>, [http://encyclopedia.localcolorart.com/encyclopedia/De Stijl/](http://encyclopedia.localcolorart.com/encyclopedia/De_Stijl/) and http://www.e-paranoids.com/d/de/de_stijl.html, and mentioned in footnote 7 of the essay by Eichi Tosaki, 'Prelude to Visualised Rhythm: The Work of Piet Mondrian', *Colloquy*, Issue 4, 2000.

⁸ Ireen Farjon, 'A.H.Nijhoff: Een Tijdelijk Lesbos', *DIVA* Vol. 3, No. 2, 1984, Marja Pruis, 'Wind, Antoinette Hendrika (1897-1971)', *Biografisch Woordenboek Van Nederland*. Den Haag: ING, 2002. Theun De Vries, *Antoinette Hendrika Nijhoff-Wind*, 1972, Leiden University, available: <http://www.leidenuniv.nl/host/mnl/mnl/levens/71-72/nijhoff.htm>, 13th January 2005.

⁹ Tony Van Verre, *Albert Mol*. Bussum: De Gooise Uitgeverij, 1979.

¹⁰ This will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹¹ A very brief mention of Moss is made in Frank Ruhrmund, 'A Second Absorbing Talk on Artists Working in Newlyn and Lamorna from 1914 to 1950', *The Cornishman* October 7th 2004.

¹² The 1972 exhibition of Moss's work in Middelburg is briefly reviewed in the regional paper: 'Schilderij Voor De Gemeente Middelburg Tentoonstelling Werken Marlow Moss Kreeg 675 Bezoekers', *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*, April 1972. The same year Andreas Oosthoek published two articles on Moss: Andreas Oosthoek, 'Marlow Moss: Ruimte, Ritme En Licht', *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*, 8th April 1972, p.15; André Oosthoek, 'Marlow Moss, Een Zeer Engelse Miss Aan De Walcherse Duinen', *Zeeuws Tijdschrift*, 1972, p.215-220. Oosthoek wrote about Moss again in 1990, and published photographs from his archive Andreas Oosthoek, Een Schaduw Als Journaal', *Maatsaf* Volume 38. Issues 9 and 10, 1990, pp.32-42. Under the influence of Oosthoek, who was the Editor in Chief of the *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*, Moss is again picked up in an article at the time of the Arnhem exhibition: Jan Van Damme, 'Ruimte, Beweging En Licht', *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*, 9th December 1994. By this point there is interest in Moss across The Netherlands: Marion Wester, 'De Dubbele Lijn Van Marlow Moss', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 30th November 1994, pp.26-27. 'Moss En Dans', *NRC*, 4th January, 1995; 'Marlow Moss and Florette Dijkstra at the Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem', *Kunst Mest*, Television Programme Section, The Netherlands: 1995, Zie Teletekstpagina 286; Lizette Bazuin, 'Wie Was Marlow Moss?', *Zeeland Gazet* 1995, p.17; Angelique Spaninks, 'Complexe Composities Van Constructiviste: Reconstructies Van Werk Marlow Moss Door Bossche Kunstenares Te Zien in Arnhems Gemeentemuseum', *Brabants Dagblad* 6th January 1995; H.F. Van Loon, 'Mondriaans Ezel, Revolver En Platen', *Vrij Nederland*, 1995, (letters pages); Ed Wingen, 'Engelse Kunstenares in Gemeentemuseum Arnhem: Marlow Moss En Het Geheim Van De Dubbele Lijn', *De Telegraaf* 13th January 1995, Arts Section; and 'In Kader Van Mondriaaniaar Tentoonstelling Constructieve Kunstenares: Marlow Moss in Gemeentemuseum Arnhem'. *Arnhemse Koerier* 7th December 1994.

The most significant publications in the Dutch art press of the nineties on Moss are the articles of Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen: 'Marlow Moss -De Constructie Van Een Nieuwe Werkelijkheid', 1994, and 'Miss Marlow Moss En Mondriaan', 1994; and the article by Florette Dijkstra, 'Somewhere between Art and Life -the Constructivism of Marlow Moss', *Ruimte* 2.Jaargang 11, 1994, pp.37-43.

journal articles; and academic / literary publications. As there is so little published writing on Moss it is possible to gather it all together in one account, this I have done here, as a resource for future scholars. Although there are items pertaining to Moss in several archive collections (listed in the bibliography of this thesis), there is no extensive publicly accessible archive dedicated to Moss scholarship available to the researcher at the present time, therefore a thesis such as this is necessary to gather and examine the fragmentary accounts. By working through the existent material, as I do in this chapter, the reader shall be able to see the patterns within the critical response to Moss, their reliance on the same key source texts, and their deployment of a limited frame of reference. Although often my research has simply discovered the absence of Moss in art historical texts, the existent writings are of sufficient interest to establish the need for a fuller account.

Dictionaries and Survey Books / Exhibitions.

It is arguable that Moss's critical reputation within the Constructivist movement has suffered from one key act of omission: her absence from the 1937 publication Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art.¹³ This almanac, edited by Ben Nicholson, Naum Gabo, and the architect Leslie Martin, is still regarded as seminal, and continues to shape the history of the Constructive art movement; therefore Moss's exclusion from it signals a crucial disadvantage for her reputation and critical fortune.¹⁴ Jane Beckett in her 1982 essay 'Circle: The Theory and Patronage of Constructive Art in the Thirties' acknowledges that Moss "*might reasonably have been included*" in Circle.¹⁵ If Moss had been included in Circle, she may have subsequently

¹³ John Lesley Martin, Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, eds., Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art. London: Faber and Faber, 1971. Interestingly her name does appear momentarily in Circle, at the back of the book in a list of artists taking part in the exhibition Constructivism at the Kunsthalle in Basel, p.281.

¹⁴ A contributory factor to her omission from Circle is certainly that she was not in England during the period of its publication. If she had been working in London at the time, rather than on the Continent, it would have been more difficult for the editors to ignore her.

¹⁵ Jane Beckett, "Circle: The Theory and Patronage of Constructive Art in the Thirties," Circle: Constructive Art in Britain 1934-40 (Exhibition Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art, 20th February - 28th March), ed. Jeremy Lewison. Cambridge: Kettle's Yard Gallery, 1982, p.18.

been acknowledged in Charles Biederman's Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge (1948),¹⁶ during her life-time, and in George Rickey's Constructivism: Origins and Evolution (1967),¹⁷ and the 1968 anthology DATA: Directions in Art, Theory and Aesthetics,¹⁸ both published in the decade following her death. Her absence from all of these publications makes it almost inevitable that she does not appear in other surveys such as Stephen Bann's The Tradition of Constructivism (1974).¹⁹ It is therefore not unexpected that Moss does not uniformly appear in dictionaries of art,²⁰ and that she is frequently omitted from survey books that could possibly be expected to acknowledge her, such as Alistair Gieves's Constructed Abstract Art in England after the Second World War: A Neglected Avant-Garde (2005), Charles Harrison's English Art and Modernism 1900-1939 (1981), David Peters Corbett's The Modernity of English Art 1914-1930 (1997), Peter Fuller's Modern Painters -Reflections on British Art edited by John MacDonald (1993), John Rothenstein's British Art since 1900 (1962) or Modern English

¹⁶ Charles Biederman, Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge. Minnesota: Red Wing, 1948.

¹⁷ George Rickey, Constructivism: Origins and Evolution, Revised Edition. New York: George Braziller, 1995.

¹⁸ Anthony Hill, ed., Data: Directions in Art, Theory and Aesthetics: An Anthology. London: Faber and Faber, 1968.

¹⁹ Stephen Bann, ed., The Tradition of Constructivism. London: Thames and Hudson, 1974.

²⁰ There is no reference to Moss in Benezit's Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs, until the 1976 edition, or Vollmer's Allgemeines Lexicon der bildenden Künstler des 20. Jahrhunderts, both published in 1953, at the height of Moss's career. She also fails to appear in Vinson's 1990 two volume International Dictionary of Art and Artists, the 2000 Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists, E. Langmuir and N. Lynton, The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000; MacMillan's 1977 Contemporary Artists C Naylor and G. P-Orridge; Contemporary Artists, London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1977, (which does include many of her contemporaries); the 1975 Dictionary of British Artists Working 1900-1950 G.M Waters; Dictionary of British Artists Working 1900-1950, Eastbourne: Eastbourne Fine Art, 1975; Frances Spalding, British Art since 1900, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1986; or the 1964 edition of Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers G.C Williamson, ed., Fifth ed., Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1964; or the seemingly exhaustive thirty-four volumes of Macmillan's 1996 Grove Dictionary of Art, J. Turner, ed., London / New York: MacMillan Publishers Ltd / Grove Dictionaries Inc., 1996. Marlow Moss does not appear in any of the following art dictionaries published by Oxford University Press, Penguin or Phaidon Press Ltd: I. Chilvers, A Dictionary of Twentieth Century Art, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; I. Chilvers, ed., The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists, Third ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; M. Jacobs and M. Warner, The Phaidon Companion to Art and Artists in the British Isles, Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1980; P. Murray and L. Murray, The Penguin Dictionary of Art and Artists, Seventh ed., London: Penguin Group, 1997; H. Osborne, The Oxford Companion to Art, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970; or the Phaidon Dictionary of Twentieth Century Art, London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1973.

Painters (1952).²¹ She is also absent from many publications focusing purely on art in Cornwall: Denys Val Baker's Britain's Art Colony by the Sea (1959), Tom Cross's Painting the Warmth of the Sun: St. Ives Artists 1939-1979 (1984) and The Shining Sands: Artists in Newlyn and St. Ives 1880 – 1930 (1994).²² Marion Whybrow's St Ives 1883-1993: Portrait of an Art Colony (1994), however, does contain a very small reference to Moss.²³ Also, Moss has a peripheral presence in Peter Davies' copious writing on Cornish art; she appears in the Biographical Index of the small pamphlet The St. Ives Years: Essays on the Growth of an Artistic Phenomenon (1984),²⁴ and she is mentioned twice in St. Ives Revisited -Innovators and Followers (1994): first along with Ithel Colquhoun as an "isolated, though highly distinguished" female modernist, and later a brief biography is indicated along with an expansive quotation of Michael Canney, who is the source for all of Davies' discussion of Moss.²⁵

In retrospect I find it difficult to credit that Marlow Moss, perhaps the closest follower of Mondrian, could have lived and worked in the midst of a colony of artists in west Cornwall for so many years, and still have remained a private figure. It is true that she was frequently absent on the continent, and that she deliberately led a secluded life in Lamorna, where she had a small studio like a mission chapel. But I do recall one fleeting image of her on a pony and trap, riding in style on her way to Penzance market, with Netty (Nijhoff) beside her. On another occasion she appeared in Newlyn Art Gallery, striding from picture to picture, small, alert, and attired it seemed as a kind of jockey. I did not know then, and indeed nobody was aware, that her work was respected by

²¹ Alistair Grieve, Constructed Abstract Art in England after the Second World War: A Neglected Avant-Garde. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005; John Rothenstein, British Art since 1900, London: Phaidon, 1962; John Rothenstein, Modern English Painters, 3 vols., London / Sydney: MacDonald & Co, 1984; Charles Harrison, English Art and Modernism 1900-1939, New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1981; David Peters Corbett, The Modernity of English Art 1914-1930, Manchester / New York: Manchester University Press, 1997; and John McDonald, ed., Peter Fuller's Modern Painters -Reflections on British Art, London: Methuen, 1993.

²² Denys Val Baker, Britain's Art Colony by the Sea, Bristol: Sansom & Company Ltd, 2000; Tom Cross, Painting the Warmth of the Sun: St. Ives Artists 1939-1979, Penzance / Guildford: Alison Hodge / Lutterworth Press, 1984; Tom Cross, The Shining Sands: Artists in Newlyn and St. Ives 1880 – 1930, Tiverton, Devon: Westcountry Books in association with The Lutterworth Press, 1994.

²³ Marion Whybrow, St Ives 1883-1993: Portrait of an Art Colony, Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Antique Collectors' Club Ltd, 1994, pp.118-119.

²⁴ Peter Davies, The St. Ives Years: Essays on the Growth of an Artistic Phenomenon. Wimborne: Wimborne Bookshop, 1984.

²⁵ Peter Davies, St. Ives Revisited -Innovators and Followers. Abertillery, Gwent: Old Bakehouse Publications, 1994, p.14 and p.124.

*Léger and Ozenfant, by Max Bill (a particularly close friend), by Jean Gorin, Herbin, Vantongerloo, and a host of other European artists of note. She had even been sponsored by Mondrian himself as a founder member of the 'Abstraction-Creation' group.*²⁶

Canney has become a significant source of anecdotal information relating to Moss, having considerable influence on not only the figure of Moss as represented in Davies' publications, but also on dictionary definitions of her such as the entry in David Buckman's 2006 Artists in Britain since 1945.²⁷ Buckman's description of Moss as an "eccentric" who dressed as a jockey, drove a pony and trap, and was "virtually a recluse",²⁸ was garnered from Canney, who in a 1990 exhibition catalogue is quoted as saying of Moss:

*She [Moss] was virtually a recluse and I never knew of anyone being invited to her studio. However, she would occasionally ride into Penzance in a pony and trap, dressed like a jockey and accompanied by her friend Hettie [sic]. When she called at the gallery [Newlyn Art Gallery], which was seldom, this petite and bizarre figure would stride rapidly around in a rather alarming manner, tapping her leg with a riding crop.*²⁹

Canney was also influential in the formation of Florette Dijkstra's account.³⁰ Although he was an admirer of Moss's work, and was keen to facilitate the elevation of her stature in art history,³¹ Canney's characterisation of Moss as eccentric and reclusive can in fact be seen as damaging to Moss's standing

²⁶ Michael Canney in Davies, St. Ives Revisited, 1994, p.124.

²⁷ David Buckman, Artists in Britain since 1945, 2nd Edition: New and Enlarged ed., Bristol: Art Dictionaries Ltd, 2006.

²⁸ Buckman, Artists in Britain since 1945, 2006.

²⁹ Michael Canney - Paintings, Constructions and Reliefs (Exhibition: 17th October - 9th November 1990). London: The Belgrave Gallery, 1990, p.6.

³⁰ Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995; and Florette Dijkstra, The Sequel, trans. Penny Maddrell, Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1997. Dijkstra met and corresponded with Canney during her research in the nineties.

³¹ Canney states that "*her work had some influence upon my own*", Michael Canney - Paintings, Constructions and Reliefs, 1990, p.6. In a letter dated 14th November 1990, to "*Robert*" (there is no further information regarding the identity of Robert), kept in the Women's Art Archive, Goldsmiths, the University of London, Canney wrote: "*I would not suggest that she [Moss] was a 'great painter', but I do think she was a 'real painter' and there are not many of those in the UK. The fact that her work is very close to Mondrian and others, does not seem to me to matter, the history of art, particularly in the renaissance, being full of people who were stylistically close to each other*".

as an artist. Furthermore this perception has been allowed to dominate conceptions of Moss in Britain since.³²

Moss is absent from exhibitions purporting to provide an exhaustive account of British Modernism: the curatorial equivalent of a dictionary or reference book. For example Moss was not represented in St. Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery at the Tate in 1985, although she is briefly mentioned in the catalogue,³³ or British Art in the Twentieth Century -the Modern Movement at The Royal Academy, London, in 1987.³⁴ She also was not featured in The Art Council's touring exhibition Constructive Context, of 1978.³⁵ The writer and curator Lea Vergine did include Moss in the exhibition L'autre moitié de l'avant-garde 1910-1940: femmes peintres et femmes sculpteurs dans les mouvements d'avant-garde historiques, in Milan

³² This point is elaborated upon in the introduction to Chapter 4 of this thesis. It should be emphasized that it is largely to the credit of Michael Canney that Moss retains a position in British art historical writing at all.

³³ David Brown, St. Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery (Exhibition: 13th February - 14th April 1985). London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1985. Moss appears in the 'Chronology' under '1919': "*c1919-1926 Marlow Moss living in Cornwall*", p.99, (no mention of her permanent move in 1940 or her death in 1958). Also in the 'Chronology': "*In April 1946 Marlow Moss writes to Gabo from Lamorna on behalf of Max Bill 'a young and very talented artist' who wants photographs for a new publication he is organizing*", p.103. Brown had previously included Moss in his exhibition: David Brown, Cornwall 1945-1955 (Exhibition 9th November - 3rd December 1977). London: New Art Centre, 1977. The year of the 'blockbuster' Tate show St. Ives that omitted Moss, Brown did include her in a much smaller show, where presumably he could exercise more control over: David Brown, Cornwall: 1925-1975 'a Sense of Place ... a Sense of Light' (Exhibition: 6th February - 16th March 1985). London: Michael Parkin Fine Art Ltd, 1985. One can only speculate on what forces kept Brown from including Moss in the Tate show, however it does seem likely that vested interests were at play. Sir Alan Bowness, Hepworth and Nicholson's son-in-law, was Director of the Tate from 1980-1988. An individual present at the time remembers Bowness saying something to the effect of "*over my dead body will Marlow Moss's work ever see the light of day at the Tate*". Michael Canney also expresses the view, in an unpublished private letter held in the Women's Art Archive, Goldsmiths, London, that the "*Nicholson / Hepworth clique in general*" wielded a great deal of power, and (at the time of writing in 1990) either "*suppress her [Moss's] name or try to play her achievement down*". Canney goes on to write: "*There is, OR WAS, a picture by her [Moss], on show in the Tate Gallery, next to Mondrian, but a then-curator told me he was going to see it found a home in the cellars -'second-rate Mondrian' he said!*" Michael Canney, private letter to 'Robert', 1990.

³⁴ Susan Compton, British Art in the Twentieth Century -the Modern Movement (Exhibition: 15th January - 5th April 1987). London: Prestel-Verlag and The Royal Academy, London, 1987.

³⁵ Stephen Bann, Constructive Context: An Exhibition Selected from the Art's Council Collection by Stephen Bann (Exhibition: 29th March-19th April) (London: The Art's Council, 1978).

in 1980, and in the accompanying publication published two years later.³⁶ An edited version of Nijhoff's 1962 essay appears in the book and there are two black and white reproductions of Moss works: '*White, Black and Blue*' 1931 (see *Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 8*), and '*White and Blue with Red Cord*' 1935 (see *Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 20*), the second of which is upside down.³⁷ Gladys Fabre has included Moss in two high profile exhibitions: *Abstraction-Création: 1931-1936* (held in Paris in 1978), and *Paris: Arte Abstracto - Arte Concreto - Cercle et Carré - 1930*, in Valencia in 1990.³⁸ Three Moss works appeared in the 1998 Stedelijk Museum exhibition *Als Golfslag Op Het Strand* (Waves Breaking on the Shore) surrounding the work of Ad Dekkers.³⁹

Although Moss has often been omitted from art dictionaries, she does appear as early as 1958 (the year of her death) in Michel Seuphor's *A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, Preceded by a History of Abstract Painting* and also the following year in his *The Sculpture of This Century*.⁴⁰ There is an entry for Moss in the English language edition of the Bénézit *Dictionary of Artists*, translated from the 1999 French edition; which is not traceable beyond the 1976 French edition.⁴¹ There is a brief entry for Moss in Patricia Harlices's 1977 *World Painting Index*.⁴² Moss also appears in some art dictionaries specializing in British art: David Buckman's *Artists in Britain since*

³⁶ Lea Vergine, *L'autre moitié de l'avant-garde 1910-1940: femmes peintres et femmes sculpteurs dans les mouvements d'avant-garde historiques*. Paris: Des Femmes, 1982.

³⁷ Vergine, *L'autre moitié de l'avant-garde 1910-1940*, 1982, p.224-225.

³⁸ Norbert Nobis and Gladys C. Fabre, *Abstraction Création: 1931-1936* (Exhibitions: 16th June - 17th September and 2nd April - 4th June 1978), Paris / Münster: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris / Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1978; and Gladys C. Fabre, ed., *Paris: Arte Abstracto - Arte Concreto - Cercle Et Carré - 1930* (Exhibition: 20th September - 2nd December 1990), Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio González / Institut Valencia d'Art Moderne, 1990.

³⁹ R.H. Fuchs, Jean Leering, Ad Dekkers, Margreeth Soeting and Paul Kempers, *Als Golfslag Op Het Strand ... Ad Dekkers in Zijn Tijd* (Exhibition: 20th June - 23rd August 1998), trans. Anthony Fudge, Ruth Koenig and Yvonne van Limburg. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1998. The entry for Moss is written by Margreeth Soeting, pp.156-157.

⁴⁰ Michel Seuphor, *A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, Preceded by a History of Abstract Painting*, trans. Lionel Izod, John Montague and Francis Scarfe, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1958; and Michel Seuphor, *The Sculpture of This Century*, trans. Haakon Chevalier, London: Zwemmer, 1959. Seuphor does not however include her in his later publication Michel Seuphor, *Abstract Painting: From Kandinsky to the Present*, trans. Haakon Chevalier, London: Prentice-Hall International, 1962.

⁴¹ Emmanuel Bénézit *Dictionary of Artists*. Paris: Gründ, 2006.

⁴² Patricia P. Harlice, *World Painting Index*, 2 vols. London: The Scarecrow Press, 1977.

1945 (both the 1998 edition and the updated 2006 edition), Frances Spalding's Dictionary of British Art (1990), Alan Windsor's A Handbook of Modern British Painting and Printmaking 1900-1990 (1998).⁴³ Similarly she appears in some dictionaries devoted to women artists: Penny Dunford's A Biographical Dictionary of Women Artists in Europe and America since 1850 (1990), D. Gaze's Dictionary of Women Artists (1997), Chris Pettey's Dictionary of Women Artists (1985), and Laurie Collier Hillstrom and Kevin Hillstrom's Contemporary Women Artists (1999).⁴⁴ Harris and Nochlin's 1977 exhibition Women Artists 1550-1950, and the accompanying catalogue, includes Moss.⁴⁵ By default she is included in publications relating to the Tate collection after 1969 (when two Moss works were presented to the Tate by Erica Brausen),⁴⁶ including Alicia Foster's Tate Women Artists (2004).⁴⁷ She does not however appear regularly in feminist art history, or in all works devoted to female artists.⁴⁸ Margaret Garlake has written the Moss entry in the 2004 Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,⁴⁹ and also mentions Moss in an endnote of her book New Art, New World -British Art in Postwar Society

⁴³ Buckman, Artists in Britain since 1945, 1998; Frances Spalding, Dictionary of British Art, vol. 6 -Twentieth Century Painters and Sculptors, Suffolk: Antique Collectors Club Ltd, 1990; and Alan Windsor, ed., A Handbook of Modern British Painting and Printmaking 1900-1990, Second ed., Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1998. Moss's name is incorrectly entered as "Marjorie Sewell Moss" in Windsor, (rather than 'Jewel' as it should be).

⁴⁴ Penny Dunford, A Biographical Dictionary of Women Artists in Europe and America since 1850, New York / London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990; D. Gaze, ed., Dictionary of Women Artists, 2 vols. London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997; Chris Petteys, Dictionary of Women Artists -an International Dictionary of Women Artists Born before 1900, Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985; and Laurie Collier Hillstrom and Kevin Hillstrom, eds., Contemporary Women Artists, Detroit, San Francisco, London, Boston, Woodbridge CT: St. James Press (The Gale Group), 1999.

⁴⁵ Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, Women Artists 1550 -1950 (Exhibition: December 21st 1976 - March 13th 1977). Los Angeles / New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art / Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp.314-316.

⁴⁶ The Tate Gallery Collections -British Painting, Modern Painting and Sculpture, London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1984; and Alicia Foster, Tate Women Artists, London: Tate Publishing, 2004.

⁴⁷ Foster, Tate Women Artists, 2004, p.142.

⁴⁸ Moss does not appear in Whitney Chadwick, Women, Art and Society, London: Thames and Hudson, 1996; Gill Perry, Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and 'Feminine' Art, 1900 to the Late 1920s, Manchester / New York: Manchester University Press, 1995; Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference -Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art, London / New York: Routledge, 1988; or Linda Nochlin, Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994. The issue of Moss's lack of representation in feminist art history is addressed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁴⁹ H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison, eds., The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 60 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

(1998).⁵⁰ There is a paragraph written on Moss, and three good illustrations of her work, in Hammacher's 1967 survey Modern English Sculpture.⁵¹ Moss had been included in the New York exhibition Mondrian, De Stijl and Their Impact three years previously in 1964, for which Hammacher wrote the catalogue essay.⁵² There is a reproduction of a single late Moss work in Herbert Read's A Concise History of Modern Painting (first published in 1959).⁵³ This, however, is an isolated incidence; Read does not mention Moss in his other publications.⁵⁴

The only survey book of international Modern art more generally, rather than British or female art specifically, that includes Moss, is Willy Rotzler's 1977 Constructive Concepts.⁵⁵ She is first mentioned as one of the artists exhibited in George Schmidt's seminal exhibition Konstruktivisten of 1937 in Basle. In a later chapter on British Constructive art (titled 'An Insular Aesthetic') Rotzler says:

*It is interesting to record that it was a woman who made Britain's most compact contribution to Constructive art: Marlow Moss.*⁵⁶

A biography is given, and two works are illustrated.⁵⁷ Rotzler discusses Moss purely in terms of her relationship to Mondrian, and does not attempt to make

⁵⁰ "A group of modernising artists, who included Marlow Moss, Cedric Morris, Lett Haines, and Frances Hodgkins also worked in St. Ives during the inter-war years." Margaret Garlake, New Art, New World - British Art in Postwar Society. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998, endnote 35, pp.262. Garlake's statement isn't entirely accurate, as Moss lived in Lamorna, not St. Ives, and during the war and after, not during the inter-war period, apart from on a couple of occasions in 1919, and between 1924 and 1926. Garlake's statement also seems to imply that Moss was part of a group including Morris, Haines, and Hodgkins, which was not the case.

⁵¹ A.M. Hammacher, Modern English Sculpture. London: Thames and Hudson, 1967, p.18 and pp.58-59.

⁵² A.M. Hammacher, Mondrian, De Stijl and Their Impact (Exhibition: April 1964). New York: Marlborough Gerson Gallery, 1964.

⁵³ The 1957 work 'Black, Yellow, Blue and White' (Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 75) is illustrated in Herbert Read, A Concise History of Modern Painting, New and Augmented ed. London: Thames and Hudson, 1974, p.357.

⁵⁴ Moss is not included in either of the following: Herbert Read, Modern Sculpture - a Concise History, World of Art, London: Thames and Hudson, 2001; or Herbert Read and Nikos Stangos, eds., Dictionary of Art and Artists, Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1994.

⁵⁵ Moss is mentioned in Willy Rotzler, Constructive Concepts: A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present, trans. Stanley Mason. Zurich: ABC, 1977, p.127; pp.163-164; p.281.

⁵⁶ Rotzler, Constructive Concepts, 1977, p.163.

a connection between her and the other artists discussed in the chapter, including Nicholson, and the later Constructionist artists.

When Moss appears in a dictionary, reference or survey book, the content of the entries varies little. The eight true dictionaries that include Moss all concur that Marlow Moss, formerly Marjorie Jewel Moss, abstract painter and sculptor, lived 1890 until 1958, in London, Paris, and Penzance, Cornwall.⁵⁸ Each entry refers to the influence of Mondrian, and some also to that of Moss's teachers Ozenfant and Léger. Often Nietzsche and Marie Curie are cited, and her career traced via her early education at St. John's Wood School of Art and the Slade, her involvement in the group Abstraction-Création, her international exhibitions, and allusions are made to her reclusive final years, and to her perceived eccentricity.⁵⁹ In the most detailed of the dictionary entries, Dunford's Biographical Dictionary of Women Artists, Sarah Wilson's piece in Gaze's Dictionary of Women Artists, and the entries in Harris and Nochlin, and Foster (all books exclusively focusing on female artists) more information can be found. A discussion of Moss's work begins.

Dunford's entry follows a biographical structure, as might be expected. The course of Moss's life is mapped from her birth into "*an upper-class family in Richmond, Surrey*", the tragic early loss of her father, her childhood involvement in ballet and music, and her long periods of convalescence due to tuberculosis, to her emergence as 'Marlow' and an artist. Her story is then traced to Paris and her apprenticeship under Mondrian, Ozenfant and Léger. Her method of using many very thin layers of white paint in order to obtain a luminous surface is discussed, as is her interest in mathematics as a means

⁵⁷ Rotzler, Constructive Concepts, 1977, p.164. The works illustrated are 'Black and White' of 1949, (see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 45), and 'White with Rope' 1940, (see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 29). Both these works are in the Riklis McCrory Corporation Collection at the MoMA in New York.

⁵⁸ David Buckman, The Dictionary of Artists in Britain since 1945, Bristol: Art Dictionaries, 1998; Dunford, A Biographical Dictionary of Women Artists in Europe and America since 1850, 1990; Gaze, ed., Dictionary of Women Artists, 1997; Petteys, Dictionary of Women Artists, 1985; Seuphor, A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, Preceded by a History of Abstract Painting, 1958; Seuphor, The Sculpture of This Century, 1959; Spalding, Dictionary of British Art, 1990; and Alan Windsor, ed., British Sculptors of the Twentieth Century, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2003.

⁵⁹ Buckman, Artists in Britain since 1945, 1998.

of co-ordinating space, movement, and light, amongst other developments in her work. Alicia Foster's piece focuses on the relationship between Moss and her fellow British abstract artist Paule Vézelay, as two "*bachelor-girls*", and leading figures of the movements Abstraction-Création and Groupe Espace respectively. Comparisons are drawn between the work of Moss and Vézelay on the grounds of their use of cord collaged onto their canvases to create curved lines.⁶⁰ Foster mentions Moss's use of the compass and ruler, but does not explore further. She diplomatically states that Moss and Mondrian simultaneously developed the double-line in Neo-Plasticist composition, and alludes to a debate surrounding this issue. Dunford, and Harris and Nochlin, firmly attribute Moss with inception of the double-line.

Sarah Wilson, who went on to curate Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900-1968 at the Royal Academy in 2002, (which included a work by Moss), wrote the Moss essay in the 1997 Dictionary of Women Artists.⁶¹ It is the most lengthy piece amongst the dictionary entries, comprising a biography and discussion of the double-line, largely informed by Dijkstra's 1995 publication Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, and, the most significant contribution: a transgender context for Moss. This is likely to have been the source for Foster's emphasis on the Moss / Vézelay relationship and her citation of Victor Marguerite's 1922 novel La Garçonne. Wilson gives us other literary references: Virginia Woolf's Orlando (1928), and Colette's Ces Plaisirs (1932), building a picture of androgyny and homosexuality as chic. Joan Riviere's 1929 article 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' is also cited.⁶² Although other reference sources have bemoaned the lack of critical or historical attention bestowed upon Moss (specifically Spalding in her Dictionary of British Art), Harris and Nochlin are the only writers amongst the collection of dictionaries and reference books to attempt any kind of critical evaluation of Moss's work:

⁶⁰ Although Moss only employed this device in a painting or relief once in her entire known oeuvre (see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 27); she reserved curves for her drawings and sculptural work.

⁶¹ Gaze, ed., Dictionary of Women Artists, 1997.

⁶² Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as Masquerade', The International Journal of Psychoanalysis Vol. 10, 1929, pp.36-45.

*The prevailing harmony and refinement of 'White and Blue' derive from the pure plasticity of Mondrian's canvases. Here, however, Moss's own vision is evident in the inclusion of concrete, three-dimensional material; the suspension and reduction of line; and the spatial resonance of her ground.*⁶³

Without direct experience of Moss's art, a scholar must turn to secondary sources for information for not only biographical facts, but also visual information by means of illustration and description. Seuphor, one of the three writers discussed in this chapter who knew Moss personally, wrote his brief dictionary entries from direct personal experience of the artist and her work, but this is by no means the case with all the writers who have included her in a dictionary or survey book. Buckman, as discussed above, utilized the primary source of the artist and curator Michael Canney who had met Moss on several occasions and provided the anecdotal detail,⁶⁴ but relies most significantly on Florette Dijkstra's research into Moss of the nineties. Foster's entry for the Tate Collection publication highlights the correspondence of Moss in the Tate Archives, and is seemingly the only scholar to have referred to these in research.⁶⁵ When reading these brief writings on Marlow Moss one becomes aware of a certain commonality of language; the reoccurrence of a turn of phrase; the reiteration of the same bare bones of biographical fact. This is a result of the limited available sources. Four of the entries that supply a bibliography (Dunford, Harris and Nochlin, Spalding, Windsor) cite the catalogue of the 1973 Gimpel and Hanover Galerie exhibition Marlow Moss (1890-1958) Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen as their main, if not sole, source.⁶⁶

⁶³ Harris and Nochlin, Women Artists 1550 –1950, 1976, p.315.

⁶⁴ David Buckman confirmed this to me in an email dated 12th November 2004.

⁶⁵ Foster mentions explicitly in her text the letters between Moss and Paule Vézelay kept in the Paule Vézelay Collection at the Tate Archives, London. These letters are, at the time of writing, un-catalogued and not easily accessible. See Appendix 3iii to this thesis for my transcription of the letters between Moss and Vézelay.

⁶⁶ The exception to this rule are: Gaze, ed., Dictionary of Women Artists, 1997, and Petteys, Dictionary of Women Artists, 1985.

Writings on Mondrian.

Marlow Moss is only very rarely mentioned by name in any monographs on Mondrian or European Constructivism until the nineties, and then not universally.⁶⁷ She is, however, mentioned very briefly in Charles Harrison's 1966 article 'Mondrian in London'.⁶⁸ Harrison refers to her as "*Marjorie Moss*" as she is listed in the first issue of *Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif* in 1932.⁶⁹ He calls her "*Mondrian's disciple*". Moss also makes an appearance in Frank Elgar's 1968 Mondrian biography, although she is not named.

*... one of his [Mondrian's] own pupils, a young English woman, was a colourful figure among the dubious clientele of the Montparnasse cabarets. Flanked by an excessively corpulent Dutch woman, she went about, summer and winter, dressed as a jockey...*⁷⁰

Elgar implies that Mondrian would not have approved of his pupils' eccentricities, and was "*repelled*" by such outrageous behaviour. This is seemingly supposition, and perhaps reveals more about Elgar's prejudice than Mondrian's.

In the seventies Moss was discussed in Cor Blok's 1974 catalogue of Mondrian works in Dutch collections.⁷¹ A pattern is established, from this point onwards, of referring to Moss in writing on Mondrian only at the point of discussion of a certain development in his work of the early thirties: the doubling of one or more of the black structural lines in a composition. There is much evidence to suggest that Moss first introduced the double-line to Neo-Plastic compositions, and Mondrian subsequently adopted the feature from

⁶⁷ Moss is listed in the exhibition catalogue Gladys C. Fabre, Marie-Odile Briot and Barbara Rose, *Léger and the Modern Spirit: An Avant-Garde Alternative to Non-Objective Art (1918-1931)* (Exhibition 9th July - 5th September 1982), trans. Michael Walsh. Paris and Houston: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 1982. Moss is also mentioned in the catalogue: Cor Blok, *Piet Mondriaan: Een Catalogus Van Zijn Werk in Nederlands Openbaar Bezit*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1974. These works are discussed forthwith.

⁶⁸ Charles Harrison, 'Mondrian in London', *Studio International* Vol. 172 No. 884, 1966, p.285.

⁶⁹ *Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorised Reprint Edition. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 - 1936*. New York: Arno, 1968.

⁷⁰ Frank Elgar, *Mondrian*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1968, pp.57-58. This is almost certainly a description of Marlow Moss.

⁷¹ Blok, *Piet Mondriaan*, 1974.

her.⁷² This account of the double-line episode is illustrated with a small black and white reproduction of Moss's 1932 painting 'White, Black, Red and Grey',⁷³ placed beneath a similarly small, black and white reproduction of Mondrian's 'Composition B, with Grey and Yellow' of the same year.⁷⁴ This is perhaps the sole example of a Mondrian scholar taking the presence of Moss seriously, even if only for a moment.

*The vertical axis is intersected by a double horizontal in Marlow Moss's painting, but not in Mondrian's. 'White, black, Red and Grey' is completely divided in two. The upper and lower halves are forced apart by a movement that seems to go beyond the painting and connects it with its surroundings (which was also the artist's intention). Mondrian's composition remains within its frame; the two horizontals function as each other's echo. Marlow Moss remembered that Mondrian had questioned her in great detail about the use of the double-line but could not recall whether he was working on the same idea. In any case 'Composition B' deploys a multitude of lines which result in two variants: a complete duplication of the cross-formed composition and a lay-out in which only the horizontal axis has been doubled and where the two "echoes" are separated by a considerable distance.*⁷⁵

Moss is also very briefly mentioned in a 1977 Robert Welsh article on Mondrian, again in discussion of the double-line. It is emphasized that although Mondrian had possibly been "inspired" by Moss to make this compositional innovation, his double-line is entirely distinct from hers.⁷⁶

References to Moss appear in four other monographs on Mondrian, all publications of the nineties. In Yve-Alain Bois et al Piet Mondrian 1872-1944 (1994) Moss is briefly mentioned in the chronology:

⁷² The double-line shall be discussed again in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6 of this thesis.

⁷³ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 11.

⁷⁴ See Illustration: Figure 1.1 in appendix to this thesis.

⁷⁵ Blok, Piet Mondriaan, 1974, p.68. The issue of the double-line is discussed at much greater length in Chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis.

⁷⁶ Robert P. Welsh, 'The Place of Composition 12 with Small Blue Square in the Art of Piet Mondrian', National Gallery of Canada Bulletin and Annual Bulletin, Issue 29, 1977. The reference is on p.8 of the digital version of this article available at: <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/bulletin/num29/welsh8.html>. In footnote 33 of this article the reader is directed to Nijhoff's 1962 catalogue essay for further information on Moss. Moss's painting 'White, Black, Red and Grey' of 1932 (Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 11) is illustrated.

April 1932

The first yearbook of 'Abstraction-Création' edited by Héliou, publishes Mondrian's statement "Le Néoplasticisme" and reproduces two of his works, as well as two paintings by the British artist Marlow Moss (1890-1958) that adhere to Mondrian's visual vocabulary but include doubled lines. Mondrian sponsors Moss for membership of 'Abstraction-Création' in this year.⁷⁷

The next entry in the chronology pinpoints May 27th - June 10th 1932 as the period during which Mondrian first introduced the double-line to his own compositions, clearly crediting Moss with the inception of the idea, and implying an influence upon Mondrian. This is retracted later in the book in the essay 'The Iconoclast' by Bois.

Mondrian does not first criticize, and then adopt, Moss' invention, as Vantongerloo suggests; he is at first a skeptic, then understands his lack of interest in Moss' version, then demonstrates how, and for what destructive end, the double-line could be used in neo-plastic art.⁷⁸

There are a few references to Moss in Carel Blotkamp's monograph Mondrian: The Art of Destruction (1994). The first of these entries names Moss as a follower of Mondrian:

The last of the disciples deserving a mention here is the English painter Marlow Moss, who in 1930-31 became fascinated by Mondrian's work. Although there is no written evidence to that effect - none of their correspondence has survived - the fact that the artist in question was a woman must have been somewhat embarrassing for Mondrian. He had always held firm views on the place of women and female artists within the cosmic order of evolution, views that today would be seen as decidedly sexist. And yet, during the 1930s it was due in part to impulses emanating from the work of 'Miss Moss' that he was prompted to introduce into his paintings a number of major changes.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Yve-Alain Bois, Joop M. Joosten, Angelica Zonder Rudenstine and Hans Janssen, Piet Mondrian 1872-1944 (Exhibitions: Haags Gemeentemuseum, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 18th December 1994 - 23rd January 1996). Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Bullfinch Press, Little Brown and Company, 1994, p.62.

⁷⁸ 'The Iconoclast' by Bois, in Bois, Joosten, Rudenstine and Janssen, Piet Mondrian, 1994, footnote 156, p.371.

⁷⁹ Carel Blotkamp, Mondrian: The Art of Destruction, trans. Barbara Potter Fasting. London: Reaktion Books, 1994, p.201.

Although this paragraph may seem fairly neutral in tone, a different flavour can be detected in the language used to describe Moss the “*disciple*”, and Gorin, who is referred to as Mondrian’s “*colleague*”, juxtaposed upon the same page.⁸⁰ Blotkamp states that Mondrian considered Gorin his “*most important follower*”,⁸¹ and draws the reader’s attention to the fact that Mondrian viewed Gorin as being “*further*” in his development of painting than he himself.⁸² The date Blotkamp gives for Moss’s adoption of Neo-Plasticism is at least a year later than actual fact; according to all other sources Moss first saw a Mondrian painting in 1927, and made her first Neo-Plasticist composition in 1929.⁸³ Moss’s position in relation to the two male artists is subtly denigrated. Her name is mentioned again a few pages later in the text, in conjunction with the double-line:

*The double-line was almost certainly borrowed from one of his most faithful disciples, the above-mentioned Marlow Moss.*⁸⁴

Blotkamp argues, in a similar vein to Bois, that although the initial idea for the double-line came from Moss, it was Mondrian who devised its most successful incarnation: parallel lines of equal width and length, and in turn influenced Moss. Although Blotkamp admits, “*there is no proof of this*”, he presents his view as fact. No comparison of the dates of individual compositions is made; no full analysis of the different uses of the double-line is attempted.⁸⁵ Blotkamp proceeds to describe Mondrian’s interest in Moss’s work (referring to the letters between Mondrian and Gorin of the early thirties),⁸⁶ and Mondrian’s inability or unwillingness to grasp Moss’s mathematical principles. Blotkamp himself dismisses Moss’s approach accordingly:

⁸⁰ Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction*, 1994, p.201.

⁸¹ Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction*, 1994, p.215.

⁸² Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction*, 1994, p.201.

⁸³ Antoinette H. Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss* (Exhibition: 30th March - 30th April 1962). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962.

⁸⁴ Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction*, 1994, p.214.

⁸⁵ This issue is explored further in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁸⁶ These letters are published in Le Pommere, *L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin*, Zurich: Waser Verlag, 1985, pp.497-499. The content of these letters is discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

*She is known to have used the golden section in a rather complicated manner, folding the planes at the edges of the painting towards the centre, as it were, so that some lines ended up close to one another.*⁸⁷

There are only two black and white thumbnail reproductions of Moss works, both from Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif, to serve as a comparison with the large colour plates of Mondrian's paintings. When Moss is mentioned again in the text, during discussion of Mondrian's vertically elongated canvases, which "*may again have been borrowed from Marlow Moss*",⁸⁸ there is no illustration, just an unsupported assertion that Moss's compositions were less "*radical*". She is, however, credited along with Bart Van der Leek, Theo Van Doesburg, César Domela, Jean Gorin and Jean Hélion with beating Mondrian to the introduction of coloured lines to Neo-Plasticism.⁸⁹

In Susanne Deicher's slim Taschen Mondrian monograph of 1995, Moss is again briefly mentioned in discussion of the double-line, but in a markedly different tone:

*What made Mondrian introduce the double-line? Rumour has it that he met the painter Marlow Moss at this time and took over the double-line from her work. Whether this is true or not, it is hard to recognise the artist's familiar signature in this motif. The effect of the picture is so new and technical that the artist in his suit posing beside it looks like a leftover from a bygone age.*⁹⁰

This fleeting reference, with its controversial implication that Moss had succeeded in imprinting her own identity on Mondrian's practice, is not explored further.

There are seven page references for Moss in Joosten's Volume 2 of the 1998 Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné, four in the 'Documentary Chronicle'.⁹¹ The first of these appears under February 1928, when Moss

⁸⁷ Blotkamp, Mondrian: The Art of Destruction, 1994, p.214. Blotkamp credits Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen with providing this information, although Moss's method is not described thus in any of her published writing.

⁸⁸ Blotkamp, Mondrian: The Art of Destruction, 1994, p.218.

⁸⁹ Blotkamp, Mondrian: The Art of Destruction, 1994, p.229.

⁹⁰ Susanne Deicher, Mondrian: 1872-1944: Structures in Space. Köln: Taschen, 1995, p.78.

⁹¹ Robert P. Welsh and Joop M. Joosten, Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné, 1st ed., 2 vols. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998.

appears in the visitor's book of Galerie Jean Bucher on the occasion of the Mondrian exhibition.⁹² Moss appears again under April 1932, this time in reference to her presence in Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif, her explanation of non-figurative art and her 1931 paintings featuring double-lines. The next Moss entry is also in regard of the double-line, this time Mondrian's discussion of Moss in his correspondence with Gorin.⁹³ Moss is present in a list under April 1937 of artists who were excluded from Ben Nicholson's Constructive Art exhibition.⁹⁴ She is referenced in the second section of Volume 2; the 'Catalogue Raisonné of the Cubist and Abstract Works (mid 1911-1944)' as the holder of two Mondrian works of 1921, from 1932 until they were destroyed in the bombing of her home Château d'Evreux, Glauciel in 1944.⁹⁵ The final brief mention of Moss lists the existence of a 1941 postcard from Mondrian to her, kept in a private collection.⁹⁶

Moss Exhibition Catalogue Essays.

A volume of information on Moss, and a discussion that moves beyond the double-line, is not to be found in survey books of British or European modern art, or in monographs on Constructivism or on Mondrian. A richer seam is the handful of Moss exhibition catalogue essays. However even in writing directly focussed on Moss, critical analysis remains elusive. In many of the group show catalogues that Moss appears in she is not discussed individually to any extent in the text, although this is equally true of the other participants.⁹⁷ The

⁹² Welsh and Joosten, Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné, 1998, Vol. 2, p.139.

⁹³ Welsh and Joosten, Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné, 1998, Vol. 2, p.153 and Pommere, L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin, 1985.

⁹⁴ The exhibition Constructive Art, organised by Ben Nicholson, took place at the London Gallery, 12th – 31st July 1937, and did not include Moss, Jean Arp, Sophie Tauber-Arp, Gorin or Georges Vantongerloo. Mondrian was invited but refused on principle because these artists, and he thought Héliou too, were missing. Héliou took part in the show.

⁹⁵ Welsh and Joosten, Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné, 1998, Vol. 2, pp.288-289.

⁹⁶ This postcard dated 24th September 1941, and also a short letter dated 24th May 1941 written by Mondrian to Moss are held in the Nijhoff /Oosthoek Collection, Zurich. They are illustrated in Appendix 3i A to this thesis.

⁹⁷ There is no text in René Mèndes-France, Les Surindépendants (8th Exhibition: 25th October - 24th November 1935). Paris: Parc des Expositions -Porte de Versailles, 1935. Moss is listed as an exhibitor under the name "MOSS MAYLOW". She is not discussed at any length in the catalogues of either Konstruktivisten or Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst, both containing versions of the same essay entitled 'Constructivism' written by George Schmidt, translated from German into Dutch for the latter: George Schmidt, S. Giedion, H.

catalogue for Moss's first solo show, in 1953, has no writing other than a simple listing of the works.⁹⁸

The catalogue of the 1973 Gimpel and Hanover Galerie exhibition Marlow Moss (1890-1958) Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen contains an introductory essay by Moss's friend and fellow artist Max Bill, and an essay entitled 'Space, Movement and Light' by Andreas Oosthoek.⁹⁹ It may be anticipated that Bill, a Concrete artist and comrade of Moss's, was ideally placed to illuminate her for posterity, however his essay falls short. Bill fondly tells the story of the teddy bear that Moss sent for his newborn son Jacob during the war. He recalls his first meeting with Moss in 1933, on his 25th birthday. Bill was contributing for the first time to an Abstraction-Création exhibition. After first mistaking Auguste Herbin, the president of the group, for a cleaner, he then mistook Moss's work for Mondrian's, but he was forgiven his blunders and became a member of the association, and a friend of Moss. Apart from these anecdotes, which contribute little to a serious appraisal of Moss, Bill does provide one or two important details. He describes the Château d'Evreux, Moss's home in France, from first-hand experience, in rather dreamlike terms, as a place of "*unsurpassable cleanness and harmony*" where everything was "*light, fresh, transparent*". Also he makes a curious reference to Moss's early work, before she came under the influence of Mondrian, when she painted "*delicate flowers*".¹⁰⁰

Buys, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky, Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst (Exhibition: 2nd-24th April 1938). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1938. Moss's name appears, along with the other members of the British branch of Groupe Espace, in the French exhibition catalogue: André Bloc, ed., Espace: Architecture, Formes, Couleur (Exhibition: 10th July - 10th September). Biot: Groupe Espace, 1954. A short biography for Moss is included, alongside a reproduction of a work, in De Stijl: Cercle Et Carré (Exhibition: March - May 1974). Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1974. The same appears in The Non-Objective World: Twenty Five Years: 1914-1939 (Exhibition June - September 1978). London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 1978. Moss is illustrated and mentioned in the text of Donna Stein, Women Artists in the Avant Garde: 1910-1935 (Exhibition: 10th November - 15th December 1984). New York: Rachel Adler Gallery, 1984. Three Moss works are illustrated in Fabre, ed., Paris: Arte Abstracto - Arte Concreto. These are Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 8, P/R 12, and P/R 20. A brief biography is given pp.353-354, and in English on p.428.

⁹⁸ Marlow Moss (Exhibition: 10th November - 4th December 1953). London: Hanover Gallery, 1953.

⁹⁹ Andreas Oosthoek and Max Bill, Marlow Moss; Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen (Exhibition: 1st December 1973 - 19th January 1974). Zurich: Gimpel and Hanover Gallery, 1973.

¹⁰⁰ I have though found no other evidence of such paintings.

Oosthoek's essay is more ambitious in its remit. He begins with a context for Moss; the "*intellectual explosion*" that began in the twenties and thirties with the ever widening fissure between the concepts 'abstract' and 'concrete'. He cites the avant-garde centres of De Stijl, Blok, the Bauhaus, Abstraction-Création and Cercle et Carré, and the dominating names of Van Doesburg, Mondrian and Malevich. He then firmly places Moss alongside them, rather than as a mere follower, or imitator, of Mondrian. He alludes to incidents such as the one described by Bill, of Moss's work being mistaken for Mondrian's, and asserts that she was proud of it; thus Moss is presented as modest and humble. Simultaneously Oosthoek makes great claims for her work, positioning her in diametric opposition to Mondrian; he was a painter, whereas Moss was a Constructivist. Mondrian had an "*aversion to form*" (despite being a product of "*form culture*") and spoke most fluently in line, whereas Moss's approach saw no barrier between painting, collage, construction and sculpture and achieved "*purity of form*" and superiority of vision. In section 5 of his essay Oosthoek addresses the infamous double-line controversy. He recounts the story of Moss's inception of the double-line in 1930 asserting she "*triggers a revolution*" in the world of Neo-Plasticism. Oosthoek distils the difference between Moss and Mondrian as that of 'thinking' and 'feeling' respectively. He refers to Moss's working method, the "*staggering calculations*", the compasses and ruler, the painstaking preparatory work for each composition. After sustained efforts to present Moss as an independent figure, and rescue her from the shadow of Mondrian, he re-establishes her connection to other artists: Max Bill and Jean Arp. Oosthoek wrote this essay two years after the death of A.H. (Netty) Nijhoff, who had been his close friend and mentor for the final four or five years of her life. He wrote from a directly informed perspective, and also from one of personal emotional investment. He ends with a note of regret, and hope:

*Marlow Moss, whom we acknowledged much too late, stays free from the world, in the middle of her space, her movement and her light: forgotten. Forgotten?*¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Oosthoek *Marlow Moss; Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen* (Exhibition: 1st December 1973 - 19th January 1974), 1973. Although Oosthoek has done much to preserve and

Moss wasn't quite forgotten. The show travelled to the Gimpel Fils Gallery in London in 1975, and further solo exhibitions followed at the Carus Gallery, New York, in 1979, and the Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem, in 1994. Moss was also included in several group shows after the early seventies, and illustrated in the catalogues,¹⁰² although some of the shows did not produce catalogues.¹⁰³ Marlow Moss, 1890-1958 at New York's Carus Gallery in 1979 however did contribute a fresh commentator to the dialogue: Randy Rosen.¹⁰⁴ The exhibition was billed as the "*first U.S. retrospective of important Constructivist paintings and drawings by a founding member of the Abstraction-Creation group*". Eight paintings were exhibited, and seventeen drawings, but no sculptures. Rosen's essay opens with reference to Mondrian. It is discussed how "*like her mentor*" Moss "*approached painting as a metaphor for life itself*". Rosen quotes Moss several times, without citing

promote the work of Moss by publishing articles (Oosthoek, 'Marlow Moss, Een Zeer Engelse Miss Aan De Walcherse Duinen' 1972; Oosthoek, 'Marlow Moss: Ruimte, Ritme En Licht', 1972), and organising exhibitions (the 1972 exhibition at Middelburg Town Hall in addition to contributing to the Gimpel and Hanover show in Zurich and London, 1973-1975), and allowing Florette Dijkstra some access to his collection in the nineties; he has not facilitated my research to a full extent. After the death of Wouter Stefan Nijhoff (Netty's son) in 1986 Oosthoek became the sole owner of the Nijhoff Collection and Archive, including material relating to Netty's husband, and Stefan's father, the poet Martinus Nijhoff, Stefan's photographic work, Netty's manuscripts, and Moss's work and papers. This collection apparently resides in a Zurich bank vault, where Stefan Nijhoff initially placed it after his mother's death in 1971. Oosthoek has seemingly denied various scholars' access to the collection in the last twenty years, including Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen. When I met with him during the summer of 2007 he was very generous with his time, and seemed keen to allow me access to at least the catalogue of his collection, this however has not been forthcoming. Fortunately Dijkstra photographically recorded all that she could of the contents of the collection relating to Moss on the occasion of the 1994 / 1995 Arnhem show Marlow Moss: Ruimte, Beweging en Licht, when Oosthoek allowed a limited selection of works and papers to be exhibited. Dijkstra gave me complete access to all of her research material, and was extraordinarily generous in her support of my project. Dijkstra's photographs of Moss works from the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection are invaluable to the Catalogue Raisonné presented here, and to this thesis in general.

¹⁰² Moss is however little mentioned in accompanying catalogue essays for any of these shows. See Appendix 1: list of exhibitions.

¹⁰³ The show at the Gimpel Fils Gallery, London, 1975, was on tour from the Gimpel and Hanover Galerie in Zurich and produced an English translation of the catalogue: Oosthoek and Bill, Marlow Moss: Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen. No catalogue was published for the 1994 / 1995 show Marlow Moss: Ruimte, Beweging en Licht at the Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem, or the 1972 solo show Marlow Moss at the Middelburg Town Hall.

¹⁰⁴ Rosen is a New York based art historian with a particular interest in women artists as is evidenced by her later involvement with the travelling exhibition of women artists Making Their Mark: Randy Rosen and Catherine C. Brawer, eds., Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream, 1970-1985 (Exhibition: Cincinnati Art Museum 22nd Feb - 2nd April; New Orleans Museum of Art 6th May - 18th June; Denver Art Museum, 22nd July - 10th Sept; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts 20th Oct - 31st Dec 1989). New York: Abbeville Press, 1989.

her source;¹⁰⁵ she also quotes an unidentified "*eminent commentator*" at length.¹⁰⁶ Rosen's essay draws substantially on a single source: Netty Nijhoff's catalogue essay for the 1962 exhibition Marlow Moss at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Other sources were available to her, however, it is Nijhoff's essay that provides the richest vein of information and detail.¹⁰⁷

A.H. Nijhoff's 1962 essay is the seminal text on Moss. The picture she creates of Moss as modest; "*she acknowledged Mondrian unreservedly as her master*", is certainly reflected in Oosthoek's later essay. It is in Nijhoff's essay that we find the oft-quoted "*slogan*" of Moss:

*I am no painter, I don't see form, I see only space, movement, light.*¹⁰⁸

Recorded for posterity, not by Moss herself, but by Nijhoff, this phrase is used frequently in relation to Moss, often quoted as if Moss herself said it -which she may indeed have done; it was perhaps Nijhoff, though, who gave these words such significance. What Nijhoff provides in this essay - the quotations, the biographical detail, and the description of Moss's working method, her approach, influences, and philosophy - have become a template for all subsequent writing, albeit often through the intermediary of Oosthoek. All the details that provide colour in the catalogue essays and book references can be traced back to this essay: Moss's interest in Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Marie

¹⁰⁵ Rosen's source for her Moss quotes is Netty Nijhoff's 1962 catalogue essay.

¹⁰⁶ "*As one eminent commentator has noted, art can 'perform a definite task in the construction and organisation of human experience. To live in the realms of forms does not signify an evasion of life; it represents, on the contrary, the realisation of one of the highest energies of life itself. Such was the art of Marlow Moss.'*" Randy Rosen, Marlow Moss 1890-1958 (Exhibition: 17th April - 16th May 1979). New York: Carus Gallery, 1979. This quote is identified as being the words of Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Culture, New York: Doubleday, 1953, in Randy Rosen, 'Marlow Moss: Did She Influence Mondrian's Work of the Thirties?', Arts Magazine, April 1979.

¹⁰⁷ Rosen lists the Moss exhibitions to date, so presumably she accessed the catalogues: Michel Seuphor, Marlow Moss: Sculpture and Paintings (Exhibition: 4th March - 3rd April 1958), London: Hanover Gallery, 1958; Oosthoek and Bill, Marlow Moss; Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen (Exhibition: 1st December 1973 - 19th January 1974); Harris and Nochlin, Women Artists 1550 -1950 (Exhibition: December 21st 1976 - March 13th 1977); Nobis and Fabre, Abstraction Création: 1931-1936 (Exhibitions: 16th June - 17th September and 2nd April - 4th June 1978); and also Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorised Reprint Edition. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 - 1936, 1968.

¹⁰⁸ Moss quoted in Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

Curie, Nietzsche and Rimbaud; her debt to Léger; her devotion to Mondrian; are all recorded here first, some four years after Moss's death. Despite her close personal relationship with Moss, Nijhoff adopts an objective tone as may be appropriate for a catalogue essay, and does not discuss her perspective as Moss's life-long partner, or as a writer of fiction. The fallibility of Nijhoff as a biographer of Moss is significant.¹⁰⁹

If Bill's account is frustratingly superficial, and Nijhoff's possibly unreliable, the only alternative voice with the authenticity of direct contact with Moss is Seuphor. Unlike Nijhoff and Bill, Seuphor wrote his, very short, catalogue essay while Moss was still alive.¹¹⁰ In it he prophetically talks of awaiting the death of the artist to provide the necessary hindsight for evaluation, just months before Moss's death. With this excuse he abandons further efforts to critique and takes the opportunity of a platform to rail against the "*enormous wave of neo-expressionism*", presumably referring to the Abstract Expressionist movement originating from America.

Let the daubers have their little triumph; let them intoxicate themselves and the gods who protect them! It is enough to know the work of Marlow Moss exists; it is enough that a few of us continue to delight in it.

Fifteen paintings were exhibited, and nine "*Constructive sculptures*", representing the culmination of Moss's life's work. No biography appears in the catalogue to provide comparison with the Nijhoff order of events, and there is no written statement from the artist herself. It can be assumed that the biographical chronologies appearing in all publications since the death of Moss, including Oosthoek's, have been substantially if not entirely based on the story Netty Nijhoff told in 1962.

Reviews of Marlow Moss Exhibitions.

Another significant area of writing on Moss, be it slight, is the critical reaction to exhibitions of her work. The reviews in the British press of the 1953 and

¹⁰⁹ This issue is discussed in Dijkstra, *The Sequel*, 1997.

¹¹⁰ Seuphor, *Marlow Moss: Sculpture and Paintings*, 1958.

1958 Hanover Gallery exhibitions, almost without exception, compare Moss to Mondrian. The pieces on the earlier show seem reluctant to make judgement. The only one unequivocally committed to a positive stance is John Russell's, in The Sunday Times, despite his initial flippancy:

*I did not know, till I went to the Hanover Gallery, whether Marlow Moss was a man, a woman, or a vegetable growth; in point of fact Miss Moss is a veteran of the Constructivist school, a sculptor who has associated with Léger and Mondrian, and an artist of rare skill and integrity. But as her name has not been brought before the public, she has none of the prestige, which she deserves.*¹¹¹

In general Moss's sculptures were better received than her paintings:

*She is of the school of Mondrian as a painter, and of Brancusi as a sculptor. Her spheres of polished brass have more ingenuity and sense of design than her neat rectangular shapes of blue and red.*¹¹²

The reviewer in the London Commentary remarked:

*The constructions in polished brass and steel are suggestive of precision engineering even to the screw-fittings of the telescopic extensions of the so-called 'Forms in Space'.*¹¹³

The pattern of emphasis of the sculptures over the paintings continued in the 1958 staccato review of The New Statesman:

*Hanover. Mondrian-like abstract paintings by Marlow Moss an Englishwoman artist of Mondrian's generation. The sculptures are superb, objects of austere, calculated beauty. The exhibition deserted and not one work bought.*¹¹⁴

However, five years later the detractors of Moss have found their voice, and there is a much greater response in the press. Stephen Bone in The Manchester Guardian complains: "If only the rigid straight lines of Marlow Moss could sometimes thaw", despite his acknowledgement that she "does

¹¹¹ John Russell, 'Predicaments', The Sunday Times, 22nd November 1953.

¹¹² Stephen Bone, 'Two Abstract Painters', The Manchester Guardian, 6th March 1953.

¹¹³ G.S Whittet, "London Commentary," Studio Vol.147. February 1954.

¹¹⁴ [Exhibition Review for Marlow Moss at the Hanover Gallery] New Statesman, 5th April 1958.

achieve something of the timeless serenity at which she seems to be aiming".¹¹⁵ Lawrence Alloway in The Listener was snidely ambiguous:

Her paintings and her polished constructions are beautifully embalmed survivals of pre-war abstract art...

He proceeded to condemn Moss's works as:

*...the lifeless artefacts that enemies of geometric abstraction were always prophesying but which are, in fact, mercifully rare.*¹¹⁶

The reviewer in The Burlington Magazine sees Moss's work as a poor imitation of Mondrian:

*Marlow Moss's paintings, although following Mondriaan's formulae, lack his delicacy of design and colour sense. The grids have become slightly coarsened and the palette harshened.*¹¹⁷

He does find more to enjoy in Moss's sculptures, which have a "*precise elegance*".

Russell, in The Times, again gives a more positive response, positing, somewhat ambivalently, that we British have not much in the way of international pioneers of art and therefore cannot afford to overlook Moss.¹¹⁸

He continues:

In Paris Miss Moss has long been accepted as the familiar and disciple of Mondrian, but in this country many talents inferior to hers are better known. In her paintings the language is that of the great Dutchman in his sixties; and their pellucid radiance exemplifies what he called "the principal law of art and life: that of equilibrium".

Like Seuphor in the catalogue, Russell juxtaposes Moss and the American Abstract Expressionists:

¹¹⁵ Stephen Bone, 'Two Painters, One Straight, Both Narrow', The Manchester Guardian, 6th March 1958.

¹¹⁶ Lawrence Alloway 'Round the London Galleries', The Listener Vol. LIX, No. 1512, 1958, p.508. Alloway's reaction to Moss is particularly significant given his position in the British art world of the fifties, and shall be discussed at greater length in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹¹⁷ D.L.A.F, 'Current + Forthcoming Exhibitions -London' The Burlington Magazine, Vol. C. April 1958, p.141.

¹¹⁸ This view is later reiterated by Michael Canney, see footnote 31 of this chapter.

*Those who crave the violent excitements of action painting will find none of them here: this particular sterling Moss is Euclidean not Dionysiac.*¹¹⁹

His rather tiresome pun perhaps indicating the level of his engagement with Moss's art.¹²⁰ The intriguingly named Pierre Jeannerat repeats this opposition in the Daily Mail review:

*After the tousled type of abstract painting -brush strokes all haywire -it is refreshing to get back to the earlier, sleeker kind.*¹²¹

Russell reiterates his Times review in Art News, in very similar terms:

*We've not so many pioneers here, in the international sense, that we can afford to overlook Miss Marlow Moss, the friend and disciple of Mondrian, whose exhibit at the Hanover Gallery includes some small sculptures, marked by an extreme refinement of workmanship, and a number of large recent canvases in which geometrical abstraction of the purist kind has been carried forward in the language of the great Dutchman. Painting of this sort, with its precision, its nice calculations and its perfection of finish, could be called a department of the housewifely arts; but Miss Moss's exhibit radiates, over and above this, a distinction of mind which makes her much more than a follower of her master.*¹²²

His professed admiration of Moss is soured slightly by his deliberate choice of the word "housewifely", in both cases, to describe the material quality of Moss's work. He doesn't seem to have intended this as a direct insult, but it is hard to not read it as patronising in the extreme. Despite her "housewifely" perfection of finish, he finds in her work a radiance, and "a *distinction of mind which makes her much more than a follower of her master*".¹²³ It is telling to note that Whittet, in his review for the earlier Hanover show discussed above, assumes Moss to be a man and talks of the same quality in the work as "uncompromising" rather than "housewifely".

¹¹⁹ John Russell, 'Art Galleries: The Run of the Tide', The Times, 9th March 1958.

¹²⁰ Stirling Moss being, of course, a celebrated British racing car driver at this time.

¹²¹ Pierre Jeannerat, 'The Painting That's Sleek', The Daily Mail 6th March 1958. I do not know if the author's name is a mis-spelling of Pierre Jeanneret, the architect cousin of Charles Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier).

¹²² Quoted in full: John Russell, 'Moss, Lanyon and Some Modern French', Art News Vol.57, April 1958, p.47.

¹²³ Russell, 'Moss, Lanyon and Some Modern French', 1958, p.47.

Russell's use of "housewifely" as an adjective to describe Moss's work is picked up and used to spiteful effect by Keith Sutton, the reviewer in Art News and Review, a week later:

Whatever may be the actual environment of Marlo [sic] Moss and however strict and puritanical may be her aesthetic intentions, the total and immediate impression I gathered from this exhibition was the strongly evocative one of some southern coastal resort getting itself spick and span for the season. Mondrian made abstract statements independent of illusion and capable of gravity. Moss makes similar material capable of illusion to sunshine dazzle and the mood induced by a new coat of paint. Moss adds certainly brightness to whiteness.

In the paintings, the strictly rectilinear areas of near primary colours are given more genteel functions than was the case with Mondrian. There are never any absolute conclusions. Where a strong black grid is used the rectangles of colour are off centre, in a way which induces a particular angle of vision and a sense of depth which is flexible, the shapes are nearer and further but not just here and just there. In the paintings where the rectangles lie edge-to-edge there is just sufficient conjunction of colours, or modulation of one colour, to start the eye on a journey, but these softened "overlaps" are never such as to make a specific journey de rigueur. The idea of geometry is used rather like a housewife with an effective hygienic gadget.

Each piece of sculpture and painting contains a statement of the artist's pleasure in making it, of presenting it and of letting one see it.¹²⁴

This piece is particularly interesting as the middle paragraph represents the only incidence amongst all of the reviews here discussed, of a serious attempt at critical analysis of the actual visual functioning of Moss's work. This however, does little to disguise the misogynistic bent of the writer.¹²⁵

Another, anonymous, reviewer in The Times refers to Moss's gender also, but with less bile. This reviewer congratulates Moss on bringing to Mondrian's "hard, gay, unromantic optimism" the calm and gentleness of the "woman-artist". Despite being "less electric" than Mondrian the reviewer proclaims the exhibition "as refreshing as mountain air".¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Keith Sutton, 'House Proud', Art News and Review, 15th March 1958.

¹²⁵ The phrase "adds brightness to whiteness" would have been familiar to readers in the fifties as the slogan of OMO washing powder, and can be regarded as another incidence of gender-based disdain.

¹²⁶ 'A Disciple of Mondrian', The Times, 19th March 1958.

If Moss's gender did not garner specialist press attention in the fifties, then, her identity as a Jew could. The reviewer in The Jewish Chronicle contributes:

It is good to have another exhibition by Marlow Moss at the Hanover Gallery where it will remain until April 14th. Against a background of paintings that conform with the principles of her master, Mondrian, are sculptures, some rectilinear and some based on curves. In the centre of the gallery is a large white composition of an ovoid and cylindrical form on an irregular pentagonal base (perhaps confused by the rectangular base on which the gallery has stood the pentagon to give the whole work height). Another satisfying experience is a small grouping of a cone balanced on two spheres, one small and solid, the other large and conically pierced. This is in gunmetal on Cornish granite, and is rich in reflections. An absorbing work is 'Forms in Space' of polished brass, a relationship of a large and small sphere with a gyration of engirdling wire stemming from the large sphere.¹²⁷

The Dutch reviews of the 1962 Stedelijk Moss retrospective are ambivalent, and not dissimilar to the earlier British reactions. The reviewers of course all saw Moss exclusively in terms of Mondrian. One writer particularly is unable to address the work, being piqued instead by Nijhoff's text:

Marlow Moss is an English painter with certain rights to an Amsterdam show; she was a life-long disciple of Mondriaan (...) The Amsterdam exhibition honours a courageous woman who understood Mondriaan so deeply that she lived the rest of her life as if she were his most important lover. Because you are moved by the story of her life, you automatically see all kinds of things which her canvases could not possibly evoke. I cannot decide whether A.H. Nijhoff's introduction to the catalogue isn't in fact the best part of the exhibition.¹²⁸

Others found Moss to be lacking in comparison to Mondrian:

(...) When areas of primary colour have been applied, the colour is never as radiant as Mondriaan's. Rather it is hard and stiff, almost gleaming (...) obstinate, stiff, dogmatic sometimes even cerebral work but such a disarming honesty and truthfulness that it is both fascinating and intriguing. And behind

¹²⁷ [Exhibition Review for Marlow Moss at the Hanover Gallery] The Jewish Chronicle 14th March 1958.

¹²⁸ Volkskrant, 14.4.1962, quoted in Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, pp.25-26.

*the work is a strong personality who has taken her quest for an individual approach to its ultimate extreme.*¹²⁹

*(...) Marlow Moss made work which closely resembles Mondriaan's. You would need to see the works next to each other so as to ascertain to what extent she was able to achieve Mondriaan's harmonious surface division. In some ways Marlow Moss also resembles Van der Leek. She also used relief and made sculptures. Ultimately her work makes a somewhat sterile impression.*¹³⁰

The next time Moss's work was exhibited and reviewed in Britain was when the Gimpel show came to London in 1975. In Francis Watson's Arts Review article the familiar biography is reiterated, and the question raised of Moss's lack of association with Hepworth or Nicholson.¹³¹ She is compared unfavourably with Nicholson who "formulated his own harmonic synthesis" as opposed to Moss who "stayed within the mathematical framework of Mondrian". The writer is ill-informed; Mondrian's "framework" is emphatically not mathematical, although of course Moss's is. The inception of the double-line by Moss, and its subsequent adoption by Mondrian, is mentioned, but still it is implied that Moss made no significant independent advance. The show is also briefly reviewed in The Observer:

*There is a British artist at the Gimpel Gallery, but one who was deeply under the spell of a foreigner. Her name is Marlow Moss (1898-1958) and most of her work is manifestly indebted to Mondrian. In fact, a close look reveals a personal style, especially in the period just after the war. But Mondrian's existence is overshadowing and she remains a fringe figure, though an interesting one.*¹³²

The most positive response is by James Burr in Apollo, as a post-script to a more lengthy discussion of Kenneth Martin's concurrent retrospective at Tate.¹³³ A connection is identified between Moss, Martin, and Alan Green at Annelly Juda (also reviewed). Burr acknowledges that this art of "refined

¹²⁹ Schager Courant, 24.4.1962, quoted in Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, p.26.

¹³⁰ Ijmuider Courant, 24.4.1962, quoted in Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, p.26.

¹³¹ Francis Watson, 'Marlow Moss', Arts Review Vol.27, No.9, 1975, p.242.

¹³² [Review of Marlow Moss Show at Gimpel Fils Gallery, London] The Observer 27th April 1975. It should be noted that the writer has given an incorrect year of birth.

¹³³ James Burr, 'Round the Galleries: All Done by Numbers', Apollo Vol. C1. No. 159, 1975, p.398.

calculation" is "*rare in English art*". In the paragraph on Moss, Mondrian is again referred to, and also Russian Constructivism. Martin and Moss are the most positively evaluated; of Moss he says:

*She handles her chosen vocabulary with skill, sensibility and a sense of architectural construction.*¹³⁴

Moss is mentioned very briefly by Russell again in 1985, in a review of the exhibition of the Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation Contrasts of Form: Geometric Abstract Art 1910-1980 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.¹³⁵ There is, however, no further mention in the British art press until 1997, when the exhibition at the Tate St. Ives of Florette Dijkstra's '*Reconstruction Project*' brought Marlow Moss to the surface once again. An article in The Independent by Tom Lubbock approaches the issues of gender and sexuality head-on:

*Marlow Moss was a gay, British, female artist -what is the right order for these adjectives? -and a pupil-follower of Mondrian.*¹³⁶

Essentially, of course, this was not a review of Marlow Moss's work, but of Dijkstra's conceptual installation addressing the unknowable-ness of the past, absent information, and a lost individual; a Post-Modern view of art history.¹³⁷ Whilst discussing Dijkstra's work, Lubbock simultaneously offers an evaluation of Moss's. It is suggested that male artists may have been reluctant to admit the influence of a woman.¹³⁸ The issue of the double-line is raised, and it is claimed that the compositional element that Moss initiated is only of any worth because of what Mondrian accomplished with it subsequently; an argument perhaps garnered from Welsh, Bois and Blotkamp as discussed above. Lubbock expresses frustration with Dijkstra's

¹³⁴ Burr, 'All Done by Numbers', 1975, p.398.

¹³⁵ John Russell, 'Art: An Abstract Show, Sort of, at the Modern Museum', The New York Times, 11th October 1985.

¹³⁶ Tom Lubbock, 'The Project: To Reconstruct Lost Works of a Dead and Unjustly Neglected Artist. The Result: A Case of Misattribution or Just Mistaken Identity?' The Independent Tuesday 9th December 1997, p.14.

¹³⁷ See Illustration in appendix to this thesis: Figure 1.2.

¹³⁸ An issue first mentioned in relation to Moss by Blotkamp in 1994 as discussed above, and reiterated by Dijkstra, The Sequel, 1997.

representation of Moss, and a desire to know the work first-hand rather than through the veil of another artist's creative agenda. He mentions that there was, at the time of writing, a real Moss work hanging in the adjacent room, alongside Nicholsons and Hepworths, and is excited at the "*possibility of direct knowledge and response*", although this is not attempted.¹³⁹ Dijkstra's statement is quoted, that her project's "*ultimate goal is to open up a new place in art history for Marlow Moss's work*", but Lubbock seemingly does not recognize the success of her methodology of posing questions rather than providing answers.

In 2002 Moss's composition '*Untitled*' of 1932 was included in Paris: Capital of the Arts, 1900-1968 at The Royal Academy, London.¹⁴⁰ In general this 'blockbuster' exhibition was not well received by the press, and Moss's piece was specifically criticised in several publications. The Sunday Telegraph labelled her a "*plagiarist*" and complained about the curator's decision to introduce works by unfamiliar artists amongst unfamiliar works by celebrated artists, thus confusing the public into thinking Moss could be as important as Mondrian.¹⁴¹ Richard Shone in ArtForum mentions Moss only as an "*epigone*" of Mondrian.¹⁴² The Birmingham Post reviewer manages to dismiss the work of both Moss and Mondrian as merely a case of "*dividing ... canvases into rectangles and colouring them in*"; he concedes Moss was as accomplished as her master in this.¹⁴³ The Burlington Magazine, unfavourable to the exhibition as a whole, refers to Moss in passing as "*Mondrian's intrepid British follower*".¹⁴⁴ Only The Times reviewer is unreservedly enthusiastic regarding

¹³⁹ This would have been '*Composition in Yellow, Black and White*' of 1949, see Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 46.

¹⁴⁰ Sarah Wilson, Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900-1968 (Exhibition: 26th January - 19th April 2002). London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002, p.175. See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 12.

¹⁴¹ John McEwen, 'Lost in Paris without a Map Art', Sunday Telegraph, Sunday January 27th 2002.

¹⁴² Richard Shone, 'Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900-1968; Royal Academy of Arts, London', ArtForum. May 2002.

¹⁴³ Terry Grimley, 'Snack Should Have Been a Feast; the Royal Academy's Survey of Nearly Seven Decades of Parisian Art Can't Do Justice to Such an Epic Canvas', Birmingham Post Monday January 28th 2002, p.12.

¹⁴⁴ Sarah Whitfield, 'London and Bilbao -Paris: Capital of the Arts', The Burlington Magazine Vol.144, No.1189, 2002, pp.245-247.

the exhibition.¹⁴⁵ She comments on how indistinguishable the Moss is from its neighbouring Mondrian, and makes a mysterious reference to “*unprintable acts in the Paris urinals*” whilst relishing Moss’s trans-gendered bohemian lifestyle.

These few appearances of Moss in the British press make the esoteric nature of Moss’s work, and indeed the whole of Constructivism, very apparent. It is seemingly rare that a journalist or reviewer, even one with a certain amount of expertise in the field of art, will instantly connect with a Marlow Moss, especially if the encounter is with just one or two works in isolation. It is conceivable that Moss received a similar reaction from the Parisian press on the publication of the first issues of Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif in 1932 and 1933, which included reproductions of her work and short explanatory statements. In the third issue she wrote only this:

*... pour aider un peu le spectateur profane je lui conseille de regarder mon oeuvre sans préjugé ...*¹⁴⁶

Each time Moss’s work glimpses the light of day in an exhibition, a small window of opportunity is opened to allow serious critical attention to focus upon her. Along with the reviews discussed above, there appears a smattering of mentions in articles in the international art press. Gradually a fragmented debate is taking place on the work and persona of Moss; and this conversation continues sporadically across decades.

The 1958 Hanover Gallery exhibition, at the end of Moss’s life, is marked by a mention in Apollo by Jean-Yves Mock (who worked as an assistant to the director of the Hanover Gallery, Erica Brausen) and a mis-labelled illustration.¹⁴⁷ After this Moss’s name makes barely an appearance in the art

¹⁴⁵ Rachel Campbell-Johnston, ‘When Paris Was Matchless’, The Times Wednesday January 23rd 2002.

¹⁴⁶ “...to give the lay spectator a little help I advise him to look at my work without prejudice ...” Marlow Moss 1934, issue 3, Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif. See Appendix 2i.

¹⁴⁷ “Fritz Glamer aux Etats-Unis a réussi avec beaucoup de sensibilité et d’intelligence à dépasser la fidélité à l’oeuvre de Mondrian, qui fut celle de Marlow Moss en Angleterre, pour réaliser une sorte d’alliance de Malévitch l’esthétique de Mondrian et celle de Malévitch” Jean Yves Mock, ‘La Peinture Abstraite Géométrique’, Apollo Vol.68, December 1958. The

press for the following twenty-one years, until the occasion of the 1979 Carus Gallery show.¹⁴⁸

Journal Articles.

Moss features quite prominently in a 1975 / 1976 review by Donald K. McNamee of Stephen Bann's The Tradition of Constructivism, in the Canadian journal The Structurist.¹⁴⁹ This is not because she appears in Bann's book, but rather because she doesn't. McNamee uses Moss, and also Mary Martin and Katarzyna Kobro amongst others, as examples to demonstrate what he perceives as weaknesses in Bann's account of Constructivist art. McNamee's interest in Moss was perhaps not only rooted in his commitment to Constructive art, but also in Moss's identity as a homosexual, although this isn't explored in the article.¹⁵⁰ McNamee suggests a more appropriate title for Bann's book would be "*Some Aspects of Constructivism as Seen by Stephen Bann*", and that by presenting the work as an authoritative survey it is a danger to historical record.¹⁵¹ McNamee points to what may be the single most significant factor in Moss's neglect, (although he does not refer to Moss specifically at this stage): the primacy of

accompanying illustration of Moss's '*Composition in Black, Yellow, Blue and White*' of 1954 (see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 64) is mis-labelled "AGAM. Relief, 1958", and that work (presumably) is labelled with Moss's details.

¹⁴⁸ Moss's name disappears from the press, but a presence is maintained in published exhibition catalogues: Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962; Hammacher, Mondrian, De Stijl and Their Impact, 1964; Oosthoek and Bill, Marlow Moss: Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen, 1973; De Stijl: Cercle Et Carré, 1974; Harris and Noehlin, Women Artists, 1976; Brown, Cornwall, 1977; and Nobis and Fabre, Abstraction Création, 1978. Of course the potential readership of an exhibition catalogue is limited, and vastly less than for a journal article. The exceptions to this are the brief exhibition reviews discussed above, and a very brief mention of Moss in relation to Mondrian's double-line in Welsh, 'The Place of Composition 12 with Small Blue Square in the Art of Piet Mondrian', 1977. A further exception is the brief discussion of Moss in Donald K. McNamee's review of Stephen Bann's book The Tradition of Constructivism, 1975, which shall be discussed forthwith.

¹⁴⁹ Donald K. McNamee, 'The Tradition of Constructivism, Stephen Bann', The Structurist. No. 15/16 (Double Issue), 1975 / 1976, which reviews: Bann, ed., The Tradition of Constructivism, 1974.

¹⁵⁰ McNamee (1938-1994) was an artist, and a lecturer in Art and Art History at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, from 1965 until 1985. He was the founder and host of the first gay organisation in Saskatoon: 'The Zodiac Friendship Society', and then 'The Gay / Lesbian Community Centre of Saskatoon'. He was also a founder member of 'The Coalition for Human Equality', and a political campaigner against homophobia in Canada. The papers of Donald McNamee are held in The University of Saskatchewan Archives, and contain material on Moss.

¹⁵¹ McNamee, 'The Tradition of Constructivism, Stephen Bann', 1975, p.167

the written word in art history and theory. He identifies a current tendency of presenting the 'documents' of art history.¹⁵² This is conceived as empirical and without agenda, but in fact can only ever reveal a limited view of any given subject. It is more damaging for its implied neutrality. The work in question, which presents itself as exhaustive, is a compendium of texts: "*this procedure makes art history more literary than visual*", and by default will neglect any artist who did not express themselves effectively in writing.¹⁵³ Moss, an almost entirely visual thinker, is ipso facto absent from Bann's account. McNamee's paragraph on Moss reiterates the Nijhoff biography, and emphasizes the wooden reliefs of the forties as her supreme achievement.¹⁵⁴ Moss is contextualized accurately beside Mondrian, and also Vantongerloo, Bill, Gorin, Herbin, and Stazewski. McNamee continues to refer to Moss throughout the remainder of the essay, using her, and others, to destabilise Bann's account of Constructivism; signalling the beginning of something of a 'tradition' in Moss scholarship.¹⁵⁵

Rosen expanded her catalogue essay, discussed above, for publication in Arts Magazine of the same year, 1979, with the title 'Marlow Moss: Did She Influence Mondrian's Work of the Thirties?' At this time, thirty years ago, Rosen wrote about the need to resurrect Moss. Her "*independent discovery*" of the double-line is emphasised, and the influence of this upon Mondrian implied. Rosen declares Moss equal, and in some respects superior to Mondrian.

In many ways Moss went beyond the man she acknowledged as her "master".

¹⁵² The works he cites are Elizabeth G. Holt's A Documentary History of Art, and Robert Motherwell's series The Documents of Modern Art, and The Documents of 20th-Century Art - to which Bann's book belongs.

¹⁵³ McNamee, 'The Tradition of Constructivism, Stephen Bann', 1975, p.168.

¹⁵⁴ McNamee, 'The Tradition of Constructivism, Stephen Bann', 1975, p.172, '*White: Relief in Wood*' is illustrated p.171. See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 31.

¹⁵⁵ McNamee also objects to Bann's use of the word 'tradition': "*Fifty years is barely enough time to establish a practice*", whereas a 'tradition' must be "*so long continued that it has almost the force of law*" McNamee, 'The Tradition of Constructivism, Stephen Bann', 1975, p.173.

Rosen discusses the problems of the restraining structural device of the grid in Mondrian's work, and the resulting insularity.

In 'White, Yellow, Blue' Moss overcomes it completely [the "inward pull" of Mondrian's grid]. Moss' last canvases constitute an important new perception of space, a step forward in the radical shifts in space "consciousness" that have occurred over time, many of them increasingly echoing scientific findings about nature itself.

The article ends by referring to Mondrian's idea of the "*Laws of Life*" that are "*a truth for all time*".¹⁵⁶ Moss, unlike many artists, did not attempt to record the subjective emotional aspects of man's experience (what Mondrian called the "*individual reality*" of the figurative painter,¹⁵⁷ or the expressionism of Seuphor's "*daubers*"); instead she occupied herself with the universal truth of life and humanity.

The remaining journal articles to be found herald Moss's brief resurgence in the mid-nineties at the time of Florette Dijkstra's '*Reconstruction Project*' and the Arnhem exhibition.¹⁵⁸ Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen's research was published in a couple of articles in 1994: 'Miss Marlow Moss En Mondriaan' and 'Marlow Moss -De Constructie Van Een Nieuwe Werkelijkheid'. The first for the general reader in the Dutch arts supplement Vrij Nederland, and the second a more detailed account in Jong-Holland.¹⁵⁹ Both are lavishly illustrated with many hitherto unavailable images, including Moss's private photographs, sketches and preparatory drawings, and new, good quality photographs of the work, and installation shots of the exhibition.¹⁶⁰ 'Miss Marlow Moss En Mondriaan' begins with many questions: the relationship between Moss and Nijhoff, the fate of Moss's work, and, most importantly the matter of influence between Moss and Mondrian. The biography given once

¹⁵⁶ Quoted by Rosen from Mondrian's essay 'Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art' published in Circle: International Survey of Constructivist Art, 1937, p.41-56.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted by Rosen from Mondrian's essay 'Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art' published in Circle: International Survey of Constructivist Art, 1937, p.41-56.

¹⁵⁸ Marlow Moss: Space, Movement, Light at the Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem 1994-1995, organised by Florette Dijkstra.

¹⁵⁹ Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Miss Marlow Moss En Mondriaan', Vrij Nederland. 7th January 1994, pp.48-51, and Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Marlow Moss -De Constructie Van Een Nieuwe Werkelijkheid' Jong-Holland Vol.10. No.4,1994, pp.40-52.

¹⁶⁰ See for example Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 5.

again tells Nijhoff's familiar story, with the added speculation that Moss's "*shock of an emotional nature*"¹⁶¹ that brought about her 1919 breakdown and convalescence in Cornwall, was the result of her discovery of her sexual orientation. The issue of the double-line is the focus of the essay; Mondrian's appropriation, and lack of comprehension of, or credit for, Moss. It is assumed that Moss will be perceived as being indistinguishable from Mondrian, so De Jongh-Vermeulen approaches the relationship in a mode of opposition. She makes the distinction between the logical Moss, and the intuitive Mondrian, following Oosthoek's argument.

De Jongh-Vermeulen's articles represent a scholarly approach to Moss from a European perspective, informed by access to Moss's work and archival materials,¹⁶² as well as the rich Dutch heritage of De Stijl and geometrical abstraction.¹⁶³ When Dijkstra's '*Reconstruction Project*' came to Britain, without the accompanying Moss exhibition, the British art press had only two works in the Tate Collection, a handful of old catalogues, mainly in other languages, and the odd archived newspaper review to go on, and of course the published record of Dijkstra's project.¹⁶⁴ Although he does not mention Dijkstra or the '*Reconstruction Project*', Lubbock must have been aware of the Arnhem exhibition, when writing his 1995 article 'Mondrian Puzzles' for Modern Painters, on the occasion of the centenary Mondrian exhibition in The Hague.¹⁶⁵ Like his review discussed above, it is not an article directly about Moss, however his argument regarding Mondrian is inspired by contemplation of Moss. Essentially this article examines the problem of what makes 'a Mondrian' 'a Mondrian'. Moss provided Lubbock with an example of paintings that are very close to Mondrian's, but not 'Mondrians'. Unlike other geometric abstract art, (he suggests a Van Doesburg), both Moss and Mondrian's work

¹⁶¹ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

¹⁶² De Jongh-Vermeulen seemingly had access to the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection only to the extent of what was on public display at the Arnhem exhibition.

¹⁶³ De Jongh-Vermeulen was Director of The Mondriaanhuis in Amersfoort at this time.

¹⁶⁴ Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995.

¹⁶⁵ Tom Lubbock, 'Mondrian Puzzles', Modern Painters Vol.8, No.1, Spring 1995. The exhibition Piet Mondrian 1872-1944 took place at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, from 18th December 1994 – 30th April 1995; the National Gallery of Washington 11th June - 4th September 1995; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York 1st October - 2nd January 1996. Catalogue: Bois, Joosten, Rudenstine and Janssen, Piet Mondrian, 1994.

is "*fragile*"; all the constituent parts are "*load-bearing*", however, Lubbock asserts, "*the Moss variant may not be much good*". Moss is used merely as a tool to discuss Mondrian in this article. Lubbock could have used Gorin or Vantongerloo, but instead does not address their existence. The figure of Moss, the "*follower*", provides a foil to Mondrian's genius, and perhaps represents us in our attempt to understand him; she was English after all. Lubbock's Moss shows us the futility of any attempt at "*doing a Mondrian*", but is left unconsidered as an artist in her own right, or, most significantly, as a part of a collaboration between several Constructivists including Mondrian. Lubbock's argument ultimately relies on the arguable mythology of Mondrian as a lone genius.

Florette Dijkstra's short piece 'Artist's Eye' appeared in Art Review during the exhibition of her works '*The Marlow Moss Project*' and '*The Ruth A. Project*' at Tate St. Ives (February - April 1998).¹⁶⁶ The article provides an enigmatic account of Dijkstra's research into Moss and the resulting "*body of half-scale reconstructions of Moss's paintings and sculptures, and painted episodes from Moss's life*" that forms '*The Marlow Moss Reconstruction Project*'. She states she is not an art historian or a scholar, but an artist. She embarked upon her "*detective story*", with her imagination on a free rein. By this does not mean that she was not interested in truth and history; rather that she questions the very possibility of such notions.

*Strangely enough, I became aware that some 'facts' became fiction, and that stories that were not verifiable gave me an enriched vision of reality. I realised how art and art history, fiction and facts, myth and document all came together and did not need to be separated.*¹⁶⁷

These three writers who have published journal articles on Moss have very different perspectives and approaches. Rosen, in 1979, was clearly a campaigner on behalf of Moss's posthumous reputation, in the same manner

¹⁶⁶ Florette Dijkstra, 'Artist's Eye', Art Review (UK), Vol. 50, February 1998, p.40.

¹⁶⁷ Dijkstra, 'Artist's Eye', 1998, p.40.

as Oosthoek.¹⁶⁸ De Jongh-Vermeulen, in the early nineties, represents an academic approach; attempting, for the first time in publication, an empirical analysis of Moss's geometry.¹⁶⁹ Dijkstra is an artist with a fascination for the combination of history and fantasy, and it is she who provides the most compelling contribution, with the enticing 'Artist's Eye', and with her publications resulting from her project (that shall be discussed shortly).

In the late eighties and early nineties Moss was occasionally referenced in an academic debate between the sociologist Elizabeth Chaplin, the artist Malcolm Hughes, and the group of seven female Constructivist artists: Countervail,¹⁷⁰ played out in articles in the Dutch arts journal Ruimte and the British journal Constructivist Forum, and the letters page of Art Monthly.¹⁷¹ The discussion is regarding the relationship of feminism to Constructivism, and shall be explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Dijkstra, who became involved in this debate through her research into Moss, published an early version of her book Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, with the title 'Somewhere between Art and Life -the Constructivism of Marlow Moss', alongside Tam Giles's article on Constructivism, feminism and femininity, in 1994.¹⁷² It is unnecessary to discuss these two works by Dijkstra separately; the text of the article being the earlier version, I shall focus on the monograph in the following section of this chapter.

¹⁶⁸ Oosthoek first published two articles on Moss in the regional press of Zeeland in 1972, (Oosthoek, 'Marlow Moss, Een Zeer Engelse Miss Aan De Walcherse Duinen', and Oosthoek, 'Marlow Moss: Ruimte, Ritme En Licht'), before writing his essay on Moss for the Gimpel and Hanover Gallery show the following year, as discussed above.

¹⁶⁹ Ann Cecil had previously come to some different conclusions regarding Moss's geometry in her unpublished Masters Thesis: 'Marlow Moss, Piet Mondrian and the Double Line (1930-1934)', 1980.

¹⁷⁰ Countervail included Nicole Charlett, Judith Dean, Natalie Dower, Tam Giles, Jean Spencer, Susan Tebby and Jane Wilbrahem, as well as Elizabeth Chaplin herself.

¹⁷¹ Tam Giles, 'The Science Option: Seven Women Constructivists on Feminism and Femininity', Ruimte Vol. 2. No. 11, 1994, pp.31-35; Elizabeth Chaplin, 'Feminism and Systematic Constructive Art', Constructivist Forum. Issue 8, 1988, pp.5-18; and Tam Giles, 'Constructivism and Feminism', Art Monthly. No. 127, 1989.

¹⁷² Dijkstra, 'Somewhere between Art and Life -the Constructivism of Marlow Moss', Ruimte Vol. 2. No. 11, 1994, pp.37-43, and Giles, 'The Science Option', 1994, pp.31-35.

Academic / Literary Publications.

Marlow Moss has been picked up in polemic feminist writing of the seventies and academic gender studies of the eighties and nineties. Germaine Greer's paragraph on Moss in her book The Obstacle Race, uses Moss as an example of the "calumny" of history casting men as leaders and women as followers, or even worse: imitators.¹⁷³ Chaplin, as discussed above, wrote several times on women and Constructivist art in general, in the late eighties, although not specifically on Moss.¹⁷⁴ Her article and letters were informed by a research project with Hughes on the relationship between social science and systemic Constructivism, which precipitated her involvement with the Constructivist group named by member Jean Spencer: Countervail.¹⁷⁵ Although the research was focussed upon contemporary practitioners, Moss forms part of the background theory, and is referenced by Tam Giles, an artist subject / collaborator of Chaplin's research, and a member of Countervail, in an article she wrote partly in response to the project.¹⁷⁶ The gender theorist Kati Rötger overtly focuses on Moss in her 1999 essay 'Nachwort - Anmerkungen Zum Titelbild: White, Black, Red and Grey Von Marlow Moss' for a book of collected essays on "*differences within gender studies*".¹⁷⁷ The Moss work in question is reproduced as the front cover of this book, implying

¹⁷³ Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race. London: Martin Seeker and Warburg Ltd, 1979, p.103. The section of Greer's book pertaining to Moss is discussed further, and quoted in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁷⁴ Chaplin, 'Feminism and Systematic Constructive Art', 1988, pp.5-18; Elizabeth Chaplin, 'Constructivism and Feminism', Art Monthly. Number 125, 1989, p.22; and Elizabeth Chaplin, 'Towards Constructive Androgyny', Art Monthly. Issue 129, 1989, p.30. This research culminates in the book Elizabeth Chaplin, Sociology and Visual Representation. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

¹⁷⁵ This research project was begun in 1982, and was partially supported by the Elephant Trust. Chaplin's account of it is published in the essays Elizabeth Chaplin, 'Social Science and Systemic Constructivism', 1986; Elizabeth Chaplin and Malcolm Hughes '23 Systemic Constructive Artists: A Methodological Experiment', Constructivist Forum. No. 6, 1986. 'On Working With Jean' in John McGowen, ed., Jean Spencer: A Retrospective Exhibition (Exhibition: 22nd September to 14th October 2006). Oundle: Oundle School, 2006.

¹⁷⁶ Giles, 'The Science Option', 1994.

¹⁷⁷ Kati Rötger, 'Nachwort -Anmerkungen Zum Titelbild: White, Black, Red and Grey Von Marlow Moss', Differenzen in Der Geschlechterdifferenz -Aktuelle Perspektiven Der Geschlechterforschung, eds. Kati Rötger and Heike Paul. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag GmbH & Co, 1999. This essay was translated from the German for me by Dr. Anthony Escott. It will be referred to further in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

it can be understood as a visual representation of the theme.¹⁷⁸ A portrait photograph of Moss is reproduced, and briefly discussed in Sarah Wilson's 1997 essay 'Feminites – Masquerades' in the book Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography.¹⁷⁹ Moss is briefly mentioned in an essay by Katy Deepwell on 'Hepworth and Her Critics' within a list of female members of Abstraction-Création.¹⁸⁰ In her essay in the same publication, Women Artists and Modernism, Nedira Yakir refers to Moss alongside Winifred Nicholson, as women omitted from the 1985 Tate Gallery exhibition St. Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery.¹⁸¹

The two books by Dijkstra: Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project and The Sequel, are the only monographs on Moss in existence. They are slim paperbacks, published by a tiny publisher in Penzance, in small editions.¹⁸² The first book, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, fulfils many roles; it is a monograph and biography of Moss, and a virtual (and incomplete) catalogue raisonné of her work, and it is also an account of Dijkstra's own artistic enterprise: '*The Reconstruction Project*', and a catalogue for her exhibition in Arnhem and St. Ives.¹⁸³ '*The Reconstruction Project*' itself is comprised of small-scale reproductions of Moss's oeuvre,

¹⁷⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 11.

¹⁷⁹ Sarah Wilson, 'Feminites – Masquerades', Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography, ed. Jennifer Blessing. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997, p.137. The same year Wilson also wrote the Moss entry for Gaze's Dictionary of Women Artists, 1997. Wilson later included Moss in her 2002 Royal Academy exhibition Paris: Capital of the Arts, and the accompanying catalogue Wilson, Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900-1968, 2002.

¹⁸⁰ Katy Deepwell, 'Hepworth and Her Critics', Women Artists and Modernism, ed. Katy Deepwell. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p.105. This essay was also published pp.75-93 in David Thistlewood, ed., Barbara Hepworth Reconsidered, vol. 3. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1996.

¹⁸¹ Nedira Yakir, 'Cornubia: Gender, Geography and Genealogy in St. Ives Modernism,' Women Artists and Modernism, ed. Katy Deepwell. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p.112 and pp.124-125.

¹⁸² Both books were published first in Dutch by De Kleine Kapaciteit, Dijkstra's own company, and then in English by The Pattern Press, Penzance, Cornwall. Publication was subsidised by The Netherlands Foundation for Fine Arts, Design and Architecture. Dijkstra's The Sequel of 1997, was in an impression of just 300, as was its Dutch counterpart De Voorgeschiedenis, 1997, (an illustrated and expanded version).

¹⁸³ Florette Dijkstra's '*Reconstruction Project*' was exhibited alongside Marlow Moss 1890-1958: ruimte, beweging en licht at the Gemeentemuseum in Arnhem 10th December 1994 - 12th March 1995, and then, with the accompanying '*Ruth A. Project*', at the Tate St. Ives 14th November - 26th April 1998.

executed in acrylic paint on canvas, and now stored in purpose built wooden crates, in a manner reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's '*Boîte-en-Valise*'.¹⁸⁴ The duality of purpose of the book is potentially frustrating for a scholar researching Moss; it is no conventional monograph, and its purpose is not simply to inform. The paintings reproduced in the book are all Dijkstra's 'reconstructions', not the Moss originals; there are illustrations of Dijkstra's pencil drawings and paintings of Moss, her companions and her studio, based on photographs; but none of the original photographs are included.¹⁸⁵ Dijkstra makes no apology for her mystification; she purposefully places herself between the reader and history, drawing attention to the fact "*it is only possible to create a mere reflection*" of a person, a life and a body of work that no longer exists.¹⁸⁶

Paradoxically, although Dijkstra's book seemingly seeks to shroud as much as it enlightens, it remains the fullest published account of Moss, and the only monograph on her available.¹⁸⁷ It is meticulously researched through all the then available literature, and also through extensive interviews and discussions with people who remember Moss in Cornwall, and artists who have been influenced by her then and subsequently.¹⁸⁸ Dijkstra tells the story of Moss with the distance of hindsight; the evidence is gathered and collated, the facts, as they stand, are laid bare. As far as she was able at the time, Dijkstra provides a complete catalogue of the work, and a thorough account of Moss's life. This scholarship is deftly combined with the whimsical charm of memories, and a constant awareness that the past is gone forever.

¹⁸⁴ See Illustration in appendix to this thesis: Figure 1.3.

¹⁸⁵ Dijkstra (incidentally or not) circumvents copyright issues in this way.

¹⁸⁶ I quote Dijkstra's own words from her introduction to Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, p.5.

¹⁸⁷ The book continues to be available through internet-based second-hand booksellers, and from Dijkstra herself, although it is no longer stocked at the Tate gallery bookshops.

¹⁸⁸ I have been fortunate to meet and speak with some of the people who informed Dijkstra's account: Keith Gardiner, son of the painter Stanley Gardiner, who is amongst the Lamorna residents who remember Moss, and also Tam Giles, who views Moss as a predecessor. Michael Canney who knew Moss while he was Curator of the Newlyn Gallery, and was subsequently influenced by her work in his own painting, has passed away since Dijkstra's period of research; I did however correspond and speak on the telephone with his widow Madeleine, who has since also passed away.

With The Sequel, Dijkstra's 'appendix' to Marlow Moss: Constructivist and the Reconstruction Project, the last vestiges of a scholarly approach are discarded and we free-fall through forgotten history. This little pamphlet forms part of a small but growing literary tradition in writing on Moss; it is not the only time fact has been woven with fiction.¹⁸⁹ It is not, however, a work of fiction, but an exploration of possible truths. Dijkstra says in her "Apologia":

*I decided to begin all over again, and without any previous plan, to go down all those biographical side paths whose ends were hidden behind a hill or round a corner, and where, as I continued my wandering, the facts I thought I knew could be changed after all.*¹⁹⁰

The book was written through a process of revisiting previous research in a more aimless fashion. Without the urgency, or the sense of scholarly mission that accompanied her earlier work on Moss, Dijkstra was free to soak in the atmosphere of the locations in the story, listen to the anecdotes of the people she met along the way, and meditate on the patterns, connections and coincidences that she uncovered. The result is an extraordinary piece of writing, a synthesis of fantasy and history. We meet a fantastical cast of characters: Marjorie Moss the Broadway star, Mrs Dodd the axe murderer, the beautiful Ruth A. who vanished from the cliffs of Mousehole, Albert R. the artist and lover who may have pushed her, Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Jakob Bill's teddy bear, and Moss-the-dog keeper of Men-an-Tol. We traverse space and time, visiting nineteenth century industrial London, bohemian Paris between the wars, and Lamorna, Cornwall, of the forties and fifties; and then beyond Moss's life to the nineties and Dijkstra, a Dutch artist on her travels, research in libraries and graveyards, and observations of the curious adverts on British TV.

Within the soft swirling mists of The Sequel are certain hard facts and important discoveries of new information. Dijkstra concludes Moss's birth

¹⁸⁹ As has been mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, Marlow Moss appears as a fictional character in at least three novels: Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Twee Meisjes En Ik, Amsterdam: Querido, 1949; Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Venus in Ballinschap, Amsterdam: Querido, 1955; and in more recent times Joke J. Hermsen, Die Gärten Von Bloomsbury, Lubbe Editions, 2004.

¹⁹⁰ Dijkstra, The Sequel, 1997, p.5.

date is not 29th May 1890, and the place was not Richmond, Surrey.¹⁹¹ She counts a total of 28 sources giving this false information (it is likely that number is higher now). Of course all these sources stem from a single source: Netty Nijhoff's 1962 catalogue essay.¹⁹² It can never be known if Nijhoff thought these details of Moss's birth to be true, if she was misinformed or deceived by Moss, or if she knowingly perpetrated an untruth for the sake of Moss, or if she simply made a mistake,¹⁹³ what Dijkstra proves beyond doubt is that Marlow Moss was born 29th May 1889 in Kilburn.¹⁹⁴

Conclusion.

Discussed in this chapter is all the published writing I have found on Marlow Moss to date. There are undoubtedly one or two more pieces to find; exhibition reviews from Paris from the twenties through to the late fifties, reviews in the Amsterdam and New York press of the sixties, and the Middelburg, Zurich, Cologne, London, Los Angeles, Paris, Münster, and New York press of the seventies. I am aware that Moss may have also exhibited in Buenos Aires with Max Bill in the fifties, with the South American avant-garde group 'MADI', so there may be accompanying press to be found there.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ This issue is discussed further in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

¹⁹² Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

¹⁹³ Moss provided a 'curriculum vitae' to Paule Vézelay around 1955 detailing that she was born in Richmond Surrey England, although not stating her date of birth. This is held, along with copious correspondence, in the un-catalogued Paule Vézelay archive at the Tate Archives, London. See Appendices to this thesis: 4ii and 3iii.

¹⁹⁴ Marlow Moss's mother Fanny Moss (née Jacobs) registered the birth on 15th July 1889, in Willesden, Hendon, Middlesex. Marjorie Jewell (as she was originally named) was born 29th May 1889 at 11 Brondesbury Villas, Kilburn, her father Lionel Moss was a hosier clothier (master). The birth certificate can be viewed at the General Register Office, London.

¹⁹⁵ This information was first garnered from a photocopy of a private letter from Michael Canney to a 'Miss Shaw' dated 6th November 1995, found in Florette Dijkstra's research files. Madeleine Canney, Michael Canney's widow, remembered that her late husband had some copies of Arte Madi journals, and other catalogues and pamphlets, given to him by Netty Nijhoff, after Moss's death (see also footnote 49 of Chapter 2 of this thesis). One photocopied sheet, showing an illustration of Moss's 'Sculptural Form' (Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 4), exists in Dijkstra's collection: Arte MADI. June Nos. 7-8, 1954. I have been in contact with Dorothy Masterson the Director of The Museum of Geometric and MADI Art in Dallas, and written to both Carmelo Arden Quin, the founder of MADI, and Gyula Kosice, the editor of Arte MADI; but have not received replies, or been able to find any further documentation of any connection between Moss and MADI.

Most of the writing on Moss is meagre, derived from the same limited source. Some of it is eccentric, Dijkstra particularly being an undeniably unconventional art historian. Moss makes sporadic appearances in writing on Mondrian, if only at the point his double-line pictures are discussed. In addition to the literature described in this chapter there are also a few passing references to the phenomenon of Marlow Moss in articles, essays and discussions of European Constructivism, and art in Cornwall.¹⁹⁶ She is briefly remembered in the memoirs of her cleaning-lady Susie Mitchell:

*There is just one more artist I must mention, her name, Marlow Moss, an abstract artist who lived in Lamorna Village for twenty years. Her studio in the centre of the village was before then, the carpenters workshop, needed for the Boskenna estate. Her name was familiar to the artists belonging to, or, connected with abstract creation, but the work was little understood by those that have lived here all their lives. Since her death, Exhibitions of her work have been held in Holland, Switzerland, and again in London.*¹⁹⁷

Moss appears on a couple of lists of Neo-Plasticists on the Internet, just her name and dates, nothing more.¹⁹⁸ Her presence survives in the margins and footnotes of art history. Her existence is precarious. People who remember her, or have fought for her recognition, have passed away: Michael Canney, Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Donald McNamee, and Martin Rewcastle, have all died in recent years. Oosthoek and Rosen's campaign for Moss in the seventies, and Dijkstra and De Jongh-Vermeulen's in the nineties, seem to be largely forgotten. Cecil and Overbeeke's theses remain unpublished.¹⁹⁹ The

¹⁹⁶ For example an enigmatic reference is made in an article in a 1998 issue of *Art Review* about Christie's and the 'Y.B.A.s': Rosie Millard, 'Champagne Charlies', *Art Review (UK)* Vol. 50, June 1998, pp.50-51: "*she [Moss] would have loved [John] Beard's show*".

As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter Moss is referred to in Deepwell, 'An Interview with Catherine De Zegher, Curator of *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the Feminine*', 1996. Also she was part of the subject of a talk by David Evans at the Penzance Public Library according to *The Cornishman: Ruhrmund, 'A Second Absorbing Talk on Artists Working in Newlyn and Lamorna from 1914 to 1950'*, 2004, p.31.

¹⁹⁷ Suzie Mitchell, *Recollections of Lamorna, an Illustrated History 1870 –1970*. Penzance: Headland Printers Ltd, 1977, p.30. Estelle Fox, resident of Lamorna, told me Susie Mitchell cleaned for Moss, during a conversation that took place in the summer of 2004.

¹⁹⁸ She is listed on the websites <http://neoplasticism.com/index2.html>, http://encyclopedia.localcolorart.com/encyclopedia/De_Stijl/ and http://www.e-paranoids.com/d/de/de_stijl.html.

¹⁹⁹ Ann Cecil's thesis has been made available to me, but unfortunately I have been unable to access Sonja Overbeeke's. It is interesting to note the small pockets of interest in Moss, in

few works in public collections can only be visited by appointment in their basement homes; the rest travel through the decades in the locked capsule of Oosthoek's vault in Zurich.

Although Moss does not have a high profile in art dictionaries and survey books, it is a consistently re-occurring presence. If powerful personalities such as Read, Alloway, and Bowness knowingly excluded her, and countless writers have unknowingly done the same; then Nijhoff, Seuphor, Hammacher, Oosthoek, Blok, McNamee, Rotzler, Rosen, Greer, Cecil, Vergine, Canney, Brown, Overbeeke, Garlake, Fabre, Dijkstra, De Jongh-Vermeulen, Wilson, Fowler, and others, have striven to counteract this. Despite the efforts by some to suppress the legacy of Moss, the mishaps of fortune, and the lethargy and complacency of the British art world, Marlow Moss's name persistently appears in print, and continues to survive in art history. This thesis provides the most substantial account of Moss to date, drawing together all previous writing upon her, and aims to provide a resource for future scholarly research.

The Netherlands in the case of Overbeeke (although her PhD supervisor was Dr. N.J. Brederoo, there is a possibility that Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen had some involvement), and in Canada in the case of Cecil. There are several incidences of Canadian attention to Moss: McNamee's article published in the Canadian journal The Structurist, 1975, discussed above; McNamee, 'The Tradition of Constructivism, Stephen Bann', and Welsh's article published in the National Gallery of Canada Bulletin and Annual Bulletin: 'The Place of Composition 12 with Small Blue Square in the Art of Piet Mondrian', (although as this article was written on the occasion of the National Gallery of Canada's acquisition of the Mondrian work in question, it does not particularly signify an incident of Canadian interest in Moss). I have, however, been unable to find a direct connection between either of these Canadian scholars and Cecil, whose MA supervisor at Concordia University was Professor Irene Whittome.

Chapter 2.**Marlow Moss: Her Story.**

The story of Marlow Moss's life is compelling and seductive. It encompasses scandal and intrigue, love and war, a search for personal fulfilment, and a heroic rejection of such manacles as gender, class, and nationality. The story is of course tragic, and Moss herself makes for an enigmatic and dashing protagonist.

As demonstrated in Chapter 1 of this thesis, a narrative biographical approach is common in writing on Moss. This began with the writing of Moss's partner, the novelist A. H. Nijhoff. What I term the seminal text on Moss, Nijhoff's 1962 essay published in a Stedelijk Museum catalogue, is largely a biography of the artist, and, as discussed, has almost entirely shaped subsequent writing on her.¹ Nijhoff's story, in reduced form, has been repeated time after time, in dictionaries, catalogues and articles. No alternatives to this story have been offered, until Florette Dijkstra's work of the nineties, which also has a biographical structure.² Since then, through my own research, more details, and new facts, have come to light. I aim in this chapter to record the story of Moss's life, as I now understand it, to the best of my knowledge. By containing Moss's life-story here, I hope that her work can be allowed to find new contexts, beyond the narrative of her biography, for the remainder of this thesis. The danger of an artist's biography hijacking the reception of her work is highlighted by a comment in a review of the 1962 Moss retrospective exhibition at the Stedelijk in Amsterdam:

Because you are moved by the story of her [Moss's] life, you automatically see all kinds of things which her canvases could not possibly evoke. I cannot

¹ Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Marlow Moss (Exhibition: 30th March - 30th April 1962). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962.

² Florette Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, trans. Annie Wright, Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1995; and Florette Dijkstra, The Sequel, trans. Penny Maddrell, Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1997.

*decide whether A.H. Nijhoff's introduction to the catalogue isn't in fact the best part of the exhibition.*³

The story of a hero's origin, his humble beginnings, and his transformation, is a staple of legends.⁴ Moss herself wrote a short biography of Nijhoff, employing many of the same trappings, over a decade before Nijhoff returned the favour.⁵ In this chapter I am self-consciously utilizing the methodology of story telling, to acknowledge the tradition in art history of illuminating an artist's work through discussion of their life, and also to place my work on Moss in direct dialogue with previous writing. The dangers of story telling as a methodology for academic study are apparent; truth may be compromised if the researcher succumbs to the temptation of narrative.⁶ Elements will be emphasized and de-emphasized according to the writer's purpose. As is discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the relationship between a researcher and the subject of his / her research is particular and intimate, if a little one-sided. It is almost inevitable that a sentimental or romanticised attitude will develop, to some extent. A thesis such as this is certainly susceptible to the hero-myth, although I have striven to avoid this. The alternative: historical research without imagination, a recording of facts with no connections made, would be much less illuminating, entirely un-enriching to any subject, and consequently perhaps equally deceptive. It would, in fact, be difficult to include such an approach, if indeed such an approach were possible, in the remit of scholarship at all. I therefore embark upon my story of the life of Marlow Moss.

³ Volkskrant, 14.4.1962, cited in Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, pp.25-26.

⁴ The gender bias of this model is explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁵ Marlow Moss, 'A.H. Nijhoff', Singel 262: 26 Biografieën. Amsterdam: Querido, 1949. See Appendix 2iii.

⁶ Nijhoff, whose account is the first to frame Moss as a narrative 'hero', perhaps demonstrates this.

Early Years in London.

Moss was born in Kilburn, northwest London on the 29th May 1889.⁷ She was the second daughter of a middle-class couple: Fanny and Lionel Moss. At the time of her birth Lionel Moss was a Master Hosier Clothier. Four years later he had become a Wholesale Clothier, and the family had moved from Brondesbury Villas, around the corner, and away from the railway line, to a house on Priory Road. They gave their second-born the rather whimsical name 'Marjorie Jewel'; her elder sister was Gladys, her younger two: Lillian and Gwendoline. The four girls were brought up to be accomplished young ladies, with piano and ballet lessons. Moss excelled at these pursuits from a young age, but her ambitions were thwarted by tuberculosis, and long periods of convalescence in her teenage years.⁸ Her father died of the disease in 1897, when Moss was still a small child. It is conceivable that her artistic talents, and poor health, separated her from her sisters. With regards to her weak constitution at least, she was aligned with her father, and therefore the Jewish side of the family, of which nothing is known. It could be perceived that upon the death of her father, Moss was left without an ally in her family.⁹

⁷ Marlow Moss's mother Fanny Moss (née Jacobs) registered the birth on 15th July 1889, in Willesden, Hendon, Middlesex. Marjorie Jewell (as she was originally named) was born 29th May 1889 at 11 Brondesbury Villas, Kilburn, her father Lionel Moss was a hosier clothier (master). The birth certificate can be viewed at the General Register Office, London. In almost all references to Moss her birth date is incorrectly given as 29th May 1890, and the place of birth is named as Richmond, Surrey. The source of this misinformation is Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962. Dijkstra has made a most convincing case that the real date is a year earlier, Dijkstra, The Sequel, 1997, pp.7-14. It is not known whether Moss knew the truth of her origins herself or not. At some point, probably in 1955, Moss sent a sheet of paper to Vézelay, for Groupe Espace records, stating, in her own hand-writing that she was born in Richmond. This sheet is kept with the collection of letters between Moss and Vézelay in the Tate Archives, and is reproduced in Appendix 4ii to this thesis.

⁸ Possibly Moss convalesced in Cornwall, as suggested by Dijkstra, The Sequel, 1997. This is a feasible supposition as Penwith was one of the coastal resorts favoured by convalescents in the early part of the century. In fact this is precisely the theme of the novel by Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Twee Meisjes En Ik. Amsterdam: Querido, 1949. The character Juan, who can be identified as a child-Moss, is recovering from an injury in Cornwall.

⁹ This is certainly the conclusion reached in Dijkstra, The Sequel, 1997. Dijkstra portrays a special and close relationship between Lionel Moss and his second daughter, even attributing the name 'Marlow' to him. This, amongst many other details, is purely fictional, but could possibly be accurate. Tara Mullen, Marlow Moss's great niece, in an email to me dated 26th March 2007, wrote "*My understanding is that there was a break with the family. My mother [Val Mullen -daughter of Marlow's sister Gladys] hypothesizes that Marlow and her father may have had tuberculosis for which there was a great stigma. Consequently she believes that it was hushed up. Add to this fact that Marlow chose the life style that she did and moved*

It certainly appears that her mother and family did not encourage her artistic leanings. Fanny Moss was of independent means, in benefit of a trust left to her, and her four siblings, by their uncle John I. Jacobs, who had founded a shipping company.¹⁰ She therefore was not in financial difficulty as a result of becoming a widow, in fact possibly her situation improved in that respect; it seems the Jacobs family was wealthier than the Moss family. Fanny and her daughters moved across London to Richmond, a far more affluent neighbourhood, and maybe joined the household of her brother, probably John, the eldest.¹¹ In any case he became the legal guardian of the four girls. John Jacobs, described as “*a bachelor, big businessman, and domineering personality*” and “*head of the family*”,¹² had rather bourgeois notions of a woman’s role in society; he supported young Marjorie’s interests in the arts only if they remained on an amateur footing, as becoming of a lady.¹³ The adolescent Moss became petulant and unhappy, succumbing to the bout of tuberculosis, and idleness, that lasted well into her twenties. John, the patriarch, exercised some control over the rest of the family, not least financially, especially over his two younger sisters Rosetta the spinster, and Fanny the widow, and in turn over his four fatherless nieces. Gladys was the only one of them who eventually married, and had children of her own.¹⁴ Her husband was her cousin Claude, the son of her uncle Lionel Jacobs. Rosetta lived with John until he died, and was left a wealthy woman. Fanny, whether or not she lived with John, was provided for well, employing a live-in registered nurse to care for her in old age. John eventually pledged financial support for Moss to attend St. John’s Wood School of Art, just before his death in 1917 when Moss was aged between twenty-seven and twenty-eight,

abroad and one can only imagine the family dynamics. Another factor may have been anti-Semitism.”

¹⁰ This information was given to me in an email dated 28th March 2007 from Val Mullen, Marlow Moss’s niece.

¹¹ Fanny had three brothers: John who was the eldest sibling, Joseph and (coincidentally) Lionel. There is some confusion in Val Mullen’s emails to me, as to whether it is Fanny’s brother John I. Jacobs, or Fanny’s uncle of the same name, who was in shipping and acted as benefactor to his family. If it was the uncle, then it seems likely his nephew and namesake took over both roles. John, Joseph, and their sister Rosetta all remained unmarried. Lionel Jacobs married Leonora Lowenthal.

¹² Descriptions by Nijhoff, 1962, and Val Mullen respectively.

¹³ This and much of the biographical information regarding Moss’s childhood is provided by Netty Nijhoff in her 1962 catalogue essay Marlow Moss.

¹⁴ These children were Joan (1917-1963) and Valerie (born 1921).

signifying either a final granting of his blessing, or the washing of his hands of his most troublesome niece.

If St. John's Wood School of Art was the beginning of Moss's escape from this suffocating world, it was to be a disappointment. The school was considered a route to the Royal Academy, and the students were trained rigorously for this prestigious calling, attempting little else but drawing from plaster casts.¹⁵ Moss did not thrive in this regime, and left after a year. She chose to continue her education at the Slade, which had a reputation for a more progressive approach.¹⁶ Unfortunately by the time Moss arrived in 1917 the school was recovering with a pendulum swing back to conservatism; the result being her work was not well received at this institution either. Moss was aware of the European movements of Impressionism and Cubism, and found herself dissatisfied with the retrogressive stance of the London art world in the 1910s.¹⁷ She was almost certainly aware of Roger Fry and his efforts to promote modern art in England with his two 'Post-Impressionist' exhibitions in 1910 and 1912, and she may well have seen modern European art at various other ground-breaking exhibitions in London held in the 1910s.¹⁸ There was

¹⁵ Students at 'the Wood' spent five and a half days a week drawing with chalk from 'the antique'. The student body was almost entirely female (10:1), and many progressed to the Academy Schools, Stuart MacDonald, The History and Philosophy of Art Education. London: University of London Press, 1970, p.34.

¹⁶ Roger Fry had been teaching at the Slade, and his students included Paul Nash, Duncan Grant, Dora Carrington and Ben Nicholson (all of whom were around the same age as Moss). However, these people had all left by 1917. Later the Slade acquired a reputation for "*clean constructive linear drawing*", in distinction to the St John's Wood / Royal Academy style of stippled tonality, MacDonald, The History and Philosophy of Art Education, 1970, p.34. Moss, however, attended the Slade before this approach was established.

¹⁷ According to Nijhoff's account "... *the traditional, naturalistic, teaching methods* [at the Slade] *are displeasing to her. She has already become acquainted with the Impressionists and Cubists. Imitation of natural form is meaningless to her. The work she does is rejected...*" Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

¹⁸ These include Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin (1911), Picasso Drawings (1912), and Post-Impressionists and Futurists (1913), at the Stafford Gallery; The Futurists at the Sackville Gallery (1912); the exhibitions of Modernist art, including works by Kandinsky and Brancusi, at the Allied Artists Association (1909-1914); Twentieth Century Art: A Review of the Modern Movements at the Whitechapel (1914); and showings of Matisse and Maillol at the Leicester Galleries (1919). These exhibitions, and their impact upon British art, is explored in Anna Gruetzner Robins, Modern Art in Britain 1910-1914. London: Merrell Holberton / Barbican Art Gallery, 1997.

however no repository for Modernist ideas in the art educational institutions of London at this time.¹⁹

Cornwall and London.

In 1919, at the age of 30, Moss suffered a breakdown and left the Slade and London, for Cornwall and isolation. Her collapse may have been due to her discovery of her sexual orientation, and seems to precipitate a further distancing from her family.²⁰ Such a moment of crisis however should be recognised as a narrative trope, featuring as it does in Moss's biography of Nijhoff too.²¹ After a certain amount of time, and introspection, Moss was sufficiently recovered to make some serious decisions. She returned to London, but not to her family, and embarked upon a new life. She made an existentialist resolve to never again indulge in "*emotional nihilism*" and that "*life is not a matter of happiness or unhappiness*" but "*a matter of living and creating*".²² She gave herself a new name: 'Marlow'; far more appropriate for her new persona than 'Marjorie Jewel', and cut her hair short.

According to Nijhoff, Moss's newfound strength was partly inspired by reading about Marie Curie, who provided a role model of an intellectual,

¹⁹ Charles Ginner and Edward Wadsworth attempted to establish a New Art School in 1920, but this seemingly did not come to fruition. It is possible that Moss would have been attracted to their advertisement placed in *Art Work* in late 1919, around the time that she left the Slade. It stated: "*In view of the developments which have taken place in European painting during the last 50 years and the consequent interest taken in the problems involved by the very general adaptation or inclusion of the Abstract in modern composition, it is felt that a school such as this, where the study of these problems, their development and value can be exhaustively pursued, will appeal to the intelligence of the student of to-day.*" The failure of Ginner and Wadsworth's school possibly represents a truer picture of the condition of Modernism in London, at this time, than the exhibitions listed above may indicate; it also signals a significant missed opportunity for Moss. This episode is discussed again in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

²⁰ This is suggested by Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Miss Marlow Moss En Mondriaan', *Vrij Nederland*, 7th January 1994, pp.48-51. Florette Dijkstra goes further and suggests, subtly, Moss had fallen in love with a fellow student at the Slade, and the "*shock of an emotional nature*" referred to by Nijhoff, was heartbreak, Dijkstra, 1997.

²¹ According to Moss's account, Nijhoff suffered a "*profound emotional and intellectual upheaval*" after her marriage to Martinus Nijhoff, which precipitated a dramatic change in her life; this too could be attributed to the discovery that she was a lesbian. See Appendix 2iii.

²² Moss is quoted as having said these things in Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962. Nijhoff connects Moss's outlook to Rimbaud's pronouncement that "*one must make of one's life a work of art*"; this she probably gleaned from Moss's essay 'Abstract Art', see Appendix 2ii.

ambitious and independent woman; a possibility that had hitherto been unavailable to Moss. Once back in London her newly acquired voracious appetite for reading extended to the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, amongst others. She spent her days in the Reading Room of the British Museum educating herself, in art, philosophy, literature, ballet, architecture and mathematics.²³ Her nights were spent out on the town, discovering the underground scene of London in the twenties, a side of the city in complete contradistinction to her suburban existence in Richmond. During those years Moss apparently did not eat or sleep much, and lived "*recklessly*", seeking life and experience in "*dangerous friendships*".²⁴ After at last breaking free from her former life - cosseted child, convalescent, middle-class, female, and frail - it can be imagined that a sense of urgency had engulfed her. Without the controlling presence of her uncle, and with the financial independence his death had provided, Moss was free to experience life, find knowledge, and test her strength in the world. Without the stultifying environment of the British art educational institutions, she was free to decide what kind of artist to become.

After several years in London, Moss returned to Cornwall at some point between 1924 and 1926, for a period of reflection, and took sculpture classes at the Municipal School of Art, Penzance. Cornwall apparently represented a sanctuary to Moss, a place she could go to consider things, and be restored. Back in London, in 1926, she began to paint once again, and participated in a London Group exhibition in 1927.²⁵ She experimented with styles, including Impressionism and Cubism.²⁶ At the mature age of thirty-eight, Moss clearly intended to be a professional artist working in the modern idiom. It is not

²³ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

²⁴ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

²⁵ This exhibition is listed by Moss on her A.I.A. application form, see Appendix 4i. However, David Redfern, the Archivist to the London Group, has been unable to corroborate this claim as seemingly there is no record of Moss exhibiting with the London Group at all, (this was confirmed to me in an email dated 9th November 2008).

²⁶ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962. None of these paintings are existent, so we rely entirely on Nijhoff's account, which could of course only be based on what Moss had told her, as she probably never saw these early works either. Tam Giles has told me that she remembers seeing a small Impressionist Cornish landscape by Moss, in Annely Juda Gallery, some time in the eighties. Annely Juda Gallery holds no record of this.

recorded whether she had found like-minded individuals by this point, in either London or Cornwall, and it seems unlikely. There were no 'Modernists' in Cornwall by this date, and it is likely that even if Nijhoff failed to record any professional links Moss had with artists in London in the twenties, they would have featured in the letters between Paule Vézelay and Moss, as they tried to gather allies in the fifties.²⁷ Despite establishing a philosophy, persona, and appearance of her own design, Moss must have still been very isolated artistically. She was, at this point, still in contact with her older sister Gladys, who met with her at some point before 1928, accompanied by her two small daughters Joan and Valerie (who would have been around six years old at the time), and their nanny.

*My memory of seeing Marlow, then Aunt Marjorie, was a person in a man tailored double-breasted suit with short hair, then called an Eton Crop. My sister and I couldn't make out if she was a man or a woman, and I don't remember if we asked anyone about this, probably not!*²⁸

Paris.

It was in 1927 that Moss made a short trip to Paris, and decided to move to the city permanently, which she did later that same year. It is not certain at which point she first encountered the work of Mondrian, whether on her first trip, precipitating her move, or subsequently, once she was settled in Paris.²⁹ She already knew of Mondrian's work, and had seen reproductions, but this

²⁷ There is an un-catalogued collection of letters between Marlow Moss and Paule Vézelay held in the Tate Archives, dating from 1954 to 1957. These will be discussed later in this Chapter, and in Chapter 5 of this thesis. See Appendix 3iii to this thesis for a transcription of the letters.

²⁸ Valerie Mullen to the author, email, dated 1st April 2007.

²⁹ Nijhoff locates Moss's first encounter with the work of Mondrian in 1927, but doesn't specify whether this was during the short trip or after the move. Dijkstra writes that she saw the work of Mondrian in 1927, and this is what made her decide to move to Paris. De Jongh-Vermeulen suggests that Moss saw Mondrian's work for the first time a few months after having moved there, in 1928. It is certain that she did see Mondrian's work at an exhibition held jointly with Nicolass Eekman in the Galerie Jeanne Bucher, Paris, from February 20th until March 1st 1928, as her signature can be found in the gallery's visitor's book, however it cannot be proved that this was her first encounter. Moss wrote: "*Mme. Moss -Liberia Hotel, 9 Rue de la Grande Chaumière*" in the Visitor's Book for the exhibition P. Mondrian Et N. Eekman (February 20th - March 1st 1928), at the Galerie Jeanne Bucher, Paris.

encounter had a powerful effect upon her. Something of its impact is recorded in Nijhoff's account, which presumably draws on Moss's testimony:

*...to be confronted with the architectonic majesty of his [Mondrian's] luminous white and brilliant colours is a breath-taking experience for her.*³⁰

A year later Moss began to work non-figuratively and then in a Neo-Plasticist idiom herself.

Moss rented a room at the Hotel Liberia, Rue de la Grande Chaumière, (which still trades on its reputation as a haunt for bohemian artists and writers), and attended the Académie Moderne, an avant-garde institution, far more congenial to her than her previous art education.³¹ She was taught by Fernand Léger and Amedée Ozenfant, both of whom had a significant effect upon her work. Moss considered Léger to be the greatest influence upon her ("*Léger... taught me everything I know about – Construction*"³²), however the influence of Ozenfant is also clear to see. He, along with Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (also known as Le Corbusier) founded the Purism movement in 1918, and expounded the belief that great art expressed mathematical lyricism of design, rather than human emotion. There was much debate in Paris, amongst the avant-garde during the twenties, regarding the value of applying mathematical principles to painting, a debate that must have surrounded Moss when she arrived at the Académie Moderne in 1928. It was during this year that she began to work non-figuratively.³³ Moss became familiar with Pythagorean thought through Matila Ghyka, whom she met through Antoinette Hendrika Nijhoff-Wind (known as Netty) a bohemian Dutch

³⁰ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

³¹ Moss is mentioned as a student of the Académie Moderne in 1928 and 1929 in Gladys C. Fabre, Marie-Odile Briot and Barbara Rose, Léger and the Modern Spirit: An Avant-Garde Alternative to Non-Objective Art (1918-1931) (Exhibition 9th July - 5th September 1982), trans. Michael Walsh. Paris and Houston: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 1982, p.494 and p.496.

³² Moss writes this in a letter to Paule Vézelay, dated 19th August 1955, held in the Tate Archives, London. See Letter 26 in Appendix 3iii.

³³ Moss states that she started to work non-figuratively in the year 1928, in a letter to Paule Vézelay, dated 22nd August 1955, held in the Tate Archives, London. See Letter 27 in Appendix 3iii. According to Nijhoff's account it was the following year that Moss began to work in a specifically Neo-Plastic idiom, Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

novelist, and the wife of the famous Dutch poet Martinus Nijhoff. Moss had almost reached the age of forty, but it is seemingly only at this point, and in a foreign city, that she found comrades in the world, and notably only just after finally finding herself. Other artists of her generation had reached a mature style and were established by her age; Moss was still to some extent, an ingénue. Until this point Moss had seemingly defined herself only in opposition, she did not believe in the society, gender-role, or religion she was born into. She had an unfocussed urge towards 'the modern', but again, at this point, only in opposition to the status quo. In Paris she found her cause: geometry. It was Ghyka's writings³⁴ that made sense of the world for Moss.³⁵ The atheist, who did not believe in anything intransient, instead celebrated the "constant transformation" or "becoming".³⁶

As Natalie Barney said:

*Paris has always seemed...the only city where you can live and express yourself as you please.*³⁷

After the Great War Paris became something of a promised land for bohemians and "inverts",³⁸ Moss found it to be a place she could thrive. She

³⁴ In 1927 Matila Ghyka published L'Esthétique des Proportions dans la Nature et dans les Arts, in 1931 Le Nombre d'Or: Rites et Rythmes Pythagoriens dans le Développement et de la Civilisation Occidentale, and in 1938 Essai sur le Rythme. A synopsis of these books in English was first published in 1946 entitled Matila Ghyka, The Geometry of Art and Life, New York: Dover Publications, 1977.

³⁵ Moss possibly also read Cook, Thompson, and Hambidge, as these works circulated with Ghyka's: Theodore Andrea Cook, The Curves of Life, 2nd ed. New York: Dover Publications, 1979, (original publication 1914); D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, On Growth and Form, 1961 Abridged Edition by John Tyler Bonner ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 (original publication 1917); Jay Hambidge, The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry, New York: Dover Publications, 1967, (original publication 1926).

³⁶ These are the words used by Nijhoff, quoting Moss, in the 1962 catalogue essay, and "Becoming" is also used emphatically by Moss in her unpublished essay 'Abstract Art' of 1955: "Art is as Life for ever in the state of Becoming".

³⁷ Andrea Weiss, Paris Was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank. London: Pandora (Imprint of HarperCollins), 1995, p.107. It is conceivable that Barney may have known Moss in Paris, although she is known to have not approved of 'mannish' lesbians, or women dressing in male clothing. Moss's concept of 'constant becoming' is echoed in Barney's use of the phrase "perpetual becoming" in an essay of 1963 Traits et portraits Paris: Mercure de France, cited in Tirza True Latimer, Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris. New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005, p.8.

³⁸ In her infamous lesbian novel of 1928 Radclyffe Hall, without exception, uses the word 'invert' in place of homosexual or lesbian. Radclyffe Hall, The Well of Loneliness. London:

met many exciting people at the Académie Moderne, and many more, including Mondrian, through the Nijhoffs. Moss and Netty Nijhoff fell in love, and Moss moved in to Nijhoff's small pension at 34, Rue du Bac, where she lived with her son, Wouter Stefan Nijhoff. It seems that Moss needed rescuing by Nijhoff to a certain extent, Dijkstra describes Moss as having been "dragged 'out of the gutter'" by Nijhoff, so it can be inferred that Moss was not adept at taking care of her own well-being.³⁹ There was a thriving café scene of gay artists and intellectuals in Paris of the twenties and thirties, which is described vividly in novels such as Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness. Like Hall's female lovers Stephen and Mary, it seems Moss and Nijhoff resisted the wilder excesses of the 'bright young people', and, except for the occasional benign presence of Martinus Nijhoff, sought a conventional, monogamous and domestic lifestyle. However it must have been liberating and gratifying to find oneself in an environment that accepted and celebrated romantic love between women, and tolerated the trans-gendered identity. Unlike Hall's representation of lesbian relationships Moss and Nijhoff do not fit into the cliché butch / femme model. Moss was the smaller of the two, physically delicate and bird-like.⁴⁰ This would perhaps cast her as the 'female' half of the partnership, but Nijhoff was more conventionally feminine in the way she dressed. It is clear too that unlike Stephen and Mary, Moss and Nijhoff were both creative individuals, neither subjugated to the role of the 'supportive wife'.⁴¹

Other than Nijhoff and Mondrian, Moss's most important friendships in Paris were with the artists Jean Gorin and Georges Vantongerloo (and their wives:

Virago, 1997. Original publication: R. Lovat Dickenson, 1928. This issue is explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

³⁹ Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, p.9. It is likely that Dijkstra's source for this information was Marja Pruis, the Dutch A.H. Nijhoff scholar. The idea that Moss did not attend to her own physical well-being is a recognisable trope of the narrative of genius, signifying that she had higher concerns. It also recalls accounts of Mondrian, who similarly neglected his own material needs: Winifred Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Miriam Gabo, Herbert Read, Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, 'Reminiscences of Mondrian', Studio International Vol. 172, No. 884, 1966.

⁴⁰ Moss's nickname at this time was in fact 'the bird': Marja Pruis, 'Een Schok Van Herkenning: De Vriendship Van A.H. Nijhoff En Marlow Moss', Jaarboek Voor Vrouwengeschiedenis. Issue 18, 1998.

⁴¹ The impact of gender and sexuality on the life, work, and reception of Marlow Moss is discussed at greater length in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Suzanne and Poema respectively), and also Max Bill. It was these artists, amongst the loose community of Abstraction-Création that she remained in contact with after this period. There is no record of any meeting of Moss and Constantin Brancusi, but he is a clear influence upon the sculptures of her later years, and she may have met him in Paris. Jean Arp and Sophie Taüber-Arp again may have been personally acquainted with Moss in Paris, but Arp's work was certainly an influence on Moss's later sculptures and drawings, and he in fact bought a painting from her in the fifties.⁴² Moss did once briefly meet Barbara Hepworth in Paris, but not her husband Ben Nicholson.⁴³

By 1929, Moss was working in an entirely abstract, Constructivist idiom.⁴⁴ It was this year that she finally met Mondrian, through Nijhoff, and made him her 'master',⁴⁵ an attitude undoubtedly enjoyed by Mondrian. She came to the conclusion that it was only with Mondrian's Neo-Plasticist language that she could realise her ambition of creating "*space, movement and light*".⁴⁶ Her first composition was simple; two black lines intersecting at right angles on a white ground.⁴⁷ Moss apparently did not discuss with Mondrian his working method for Neo-Plasticist compositions, in development for over a decade at this point; instead she developed her own technique. One can imagine that she

⁴² This is referred to in a letter from Moss, to Paule Vézelay, dated 20/9/55, held in the Tate Archives, London: "*Please give my greetings to Arp, am very surprised that he would like to buy one of my double-line paintings, it would give me great pleasure for him to purchase one.*" See Letter 30, Appendix 3iii.

⁴³ This is evidenced by the first letter Moss wrote to Nicholson on arrival in Cornwall, dated 2nd July 1941, held in the Tate Archives, London. Please see Appendix 3iv. Moss and Nicholson eventually met in Cornwall in the early forties, see Letter 19 Appendix 3ii.

⁴⁴ Although Moss's first non-figurative work dates from 1928, see footnote 33 of this chapter.

⁴⁵ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

⁴⁶ Nijhoff describes "*space, movement, light*" as Moss's "*trinity*", her "*obsession*" and her "*slogan*" in Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

⁴⁷ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962. Mondrian had for some years been experimenting with compositions, often on lozenge-shaped canvases, involving two black lines intersecting at right angles. Blotkamp refers to these as "*scissor-like*" compositions: Carel Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction*, trans. Barbara Potter Fasting. London: Reaktion Books, 1994, p.199. However Mondrian didn't produce a canvas consisting of nothing but two intersecting black lines on a white ground until 1931 ('*Lozenge Composition with Two Lines*' 1931: Catalogue Number B229 in Robert P. Welsh and Joop M. Joosten, *Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1st ed., 2 vols. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998). His compositions before this time always included other elements such as colour or additional lines. Moss's first Neo-Plasticist composition, as described by Nijhoff, is lost, so it cannot be known to what extent it was similar or different to Mondrian's paintings of this time.

spent as much time as she could at Mondrian's studio on Rue du Départ, just a short walk across Montparnasse from her own modest living quarters, observing his work and listening to his ideas.⁴⁸ Although Mondrian did not indulge in close personal relationships,⁴⁹ he did consider Moss a friend, as is possibly attested to by his inscription in a catalogue he gave to her:

*À mon amie Marlow –PM.*⁵⁰

In 1930 Moss made her first serious departure from her master's language, she introduced into her paintings echoed, or doubled, lines. Mondrian was in the peculiar position of simultaneously denying the role of personal expression in art, and developing a very strict and personal set of rules for its practice.⁵¹ He wished Neo-Plasticism to be practised universally, but to remain unchanged by individual styles. To accept other artists' modifications to the language would be to acknowledge the presence of his own personality in Neo-Plasticism initially. His peculiar English apprentice, and her 'double-line' brought this conundrum to light, when she first exhibited works with this

⁴⁸ By 1934 Moss lived at 17 Rue Méchain. The following year she moved to 216 Blvd. Raspail, see Illustration fig. 2.1 in appendix to this thesis. These locations are all in the same vicinity: Paris XIV.

⁴⁹ Naum Gabo wrote: "*I never met such a lonesome and unhappy man...he was not a man with whom you could have personal relationships. I don't know whether he had close friends.*" Nicholson, Hepworth, Gabo, Read, Nicholson and Gabo, 'Reminiscences of Mondrian', 1966, p.292

⁵⁰ Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, p.25. Apparently this catalogue was given to Michael Canney by Netty Nijhoff, along with a small collection of pamphlets and journals that had belonged to Moss, after Moss's death in 1958. The phrase is also quoted by Peter Davies, again the source cited being Michael Canney, in The St. Ives Years: Essays on the Growth of an Artistic Phenomenon. Wimborne: Wimborne Bookshop, 1984, p.37. I asked Canney's widow Madeleine Canney about this during a telephone conversation in January 2005, but she was not sure if she still had the catalogue in her possession, and could not confirm which catalogue it was –although she remembered the inscription. Since her death I have been in contact with their son Simon Canny who has been unable to locate any such catalogue, and is doubtful of its existence. Coincidentally there is a photograph of a 1947 catalogue entitled arte astratta e concreta in Dijkstra's research files, which bares the inscription "*a mon amie marlow moss*" and is signed "*bill*" (Max Bill); it is quite possible that this catalogue was at some point mis-remembered by Canney, and then recorded by Davies and Dijkstra, as having been from Mondrian. It is also plausible that the catalogue from Mondrian does, or did, in fact also exist as described, and has since been lost; I however record this episode with caution.

⁵¹ For example, at this time Mondrian had adopted the practice of having at least one vertical and one horizontal line going right across the canvas. This was a definite 'rule' by 1930 as discussed by Tom Lubbock, 'Mondrian Puzzles', Modern Painters Vol.8, No.1, Spring 1995. Moss breaks this rule in her composition of 1930; she has no transverse horizontal.

feature at the second 'Association 1940' show at the Salon des Surindépendants in Paris, in 1931. This exhibition signalled Moss's arrival as a mature artist and contributor to the avant-garde movement of Constructivism and Neo-Plasticism. The double-line episode is Moss's 'succès de scandale' in that it is because of it that she remains visible in writing on Mondrian. Furthermore it forms the focus of much of the writing on Moss per se. The importance of the double-line to the work of Moss has therefore been over-emphasized.⁵² At this point, in 1931, it was important for Moss as it brought her to the serious attention of Mondrian, Gorin and Vantongerloo, who suddenly took a great interest in this English friend of the Nijhoff's, and new arrival on the Parisian Constructivist scene.

From this point on Moss was a central figure in the avant-garde. She was invited by Vantongerloo, on the suggestion of Mondrian, to be a founding member of the group Abstraction-Création.⁵³ Throughout the thirties she exhibited regularly with the Association 1940, the Association Artistique: Les Surindépendants at the Parc des Expositions, Porte de Versailles, at Les Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, and with the Groupe Anglo-Américain. She was also included alongside her Parisian colleagues, in the 1937 exhibition Konstruktivisten at the Kunsthalle in Basel, and in the 1938 Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.⁵⁴

Despite the fundamental oppositions between Constructivist art and Surrealism the two modern movements amicably co-existed, and sometimes even integrated, in pre-war Paris. According to Nijhoff's account, Moss, along with several of the membership of Abstraction-Création including Mondrian, Arp, Naum Gabo, László Moholy-Nagy, Theo Van Doesburg and Kurt Schwitters together organised a Surrealist event in 1932. There is seemingly some confusion, or mis-remembering on the part of Nijhoff, with regards to

⁵² It will, however, be discussed further in Chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis.

⁵³ The association Abstraction-Création was formed in Paris, by Vantongerloo and Auguste Herbin in February 1931 as a successor to Michel Seuphor and Joaquin Torres-Garcia's 1929 group Cercle et Carré. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁵⁴ George Schmidt, Konstruktivisten, Basel: Basel Kunsthalle, 1937; and George Schmidt, S. Giedion, H. Buys, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky, Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst (Exhibition: 2nd-24th April 1938), Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1938.

this event, as the exhibits that she described to the Vrij Nederland journalist in 1967, actually appeared at the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, at the Galerie Beaux Arts, Paris. Nijhoff's account is quoted in the article as such:

It was pitch-black in the hall so you were provided with a small lamp. Everyone was in evening dress and there was coal-dust falling from coal sacks suspended from the ceiling. Suddenly you saw a bed surrounded by a pool of water. There was a naked girl on the bed who jumped in the water. Two wax dummies were sitting in a wrecked Ford with a sewing machine, which they appeared to be using. Something had been done to the Ford so that it seemed to be raining and snails were crawling across the dummies' breasts, which were covered in lettuce leaves. There was also a glass coffin containing a girl, a birdcage with a severed head and a double bed, which was soon occupied. And all those painters worked on this piece. Arp, Gabo, Moholy Nagy, Mondriaan, Schwitters, Van Doesburg, Marlow Moss etc –all those people were ridiculed at the time and are now great masters.⁵⁵

The works Nijhoff refers to are by Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, André Masson and Man Ray. Certainly Van Doesburg was not involved as he died in early 1931.⁵⁶ It is, however, possible that Moss participated in the show in some way; she would have had contact with Man Ray particularly through Netty and Martinus Nijhoff's son Wouter Stefan Nijhoff, who was in apprenticeship to him as a photographer.⁵⁷ This however is not supported by any other account, and significantly it is not listed by Moss herself on her application to the A.I.A. in 1942;⁵⁸ it therefore seems unlikely. There could have possibly been a separate Surrealist event, which took place in 1932, and involved the artists from Abstraction-Création; Arp and Schwitters particularly had been previously associated with Dada. Van Doesburg often separated his Dadaist / Surrealist persona from his Constructivist one, by using the pseudonym 'I.K. Bonset' for his Dadaist projects; it is conceivable that other

⁵⁵ Bibeb, 'A.H. Nijhoff : Ik Voel Er Absoluut Niet Voor Alle Woelingen in Mijzelf Op Tafel Te Gooien', Vrij Nederland, 1967; cited in Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1997, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Van Doesburg's work was posthumously included in Abstraction-Création exhibitions and publications.

⁵⁷ Netty and Martinus had their son very young, when Netty was still a teenager, in 1916. Wouter Stefan Nijhoff was known as Stefan or Faan, and worked as a photographer under the nom de plume 'Stephen Storm'.

⁵⁸ See Appendix 4i.

Constructive artists could have done the same. Nijhoff's inaccurate account of this episode highlights the unreliability of her account of Moss in general, and brings to the fore the dangers of the historical narrative, as discussed above.

By 1935 Moss had moved into an apartment on Boulevard Raspail. This leafy avenue, the spine of Montparnasse, had long been the home of artists. Chaim Soutine and Amedeo Modigliani had shared a studio on the same site as Bruno Elkouken's sparkling Modernist building, number 216, now called 'Studio Raspail'. The huge windows give it a feeling of weightlessness from the outside, and must make the interior spaces light and airy. Like a Neo-Plastic composition, it is white articulated with black horizontal and vertical lines (the frames of the windows). Moss was one of the first residents, and must have revelled in its glamorous modernity.⁵⁹

The senior figure in Abstraction-Création that Moss became closest to, was Vantongerloo. The earliest letters that exist between the two are formal, and mainly focussed on business related to the day-to-day running of Abstraction-Création.⁶⁰ She addresses him as "*Camarade*", and he her as "*Miss Moss*". He asks for her vote on administrative matters, and invites her to take part in exhibitions. By 1936 they were friends, and Moss sent him and his wife Poema (known as 'Puma') postcards from her holiday in Greece with Nijhoff:

*Even though you don't like Classical Art you must come to Greece to see a beauty that's quite extraordinary.*⁶¹

It is open to supposition what Moss meant by stating that Vantongerloo didn't like Classical Art; it is difficult to detect whether or not she is teasing him.

⁵⁹ See Illustration 2.1 in appendix to this thesis.

⁶⁰ Letters between Moss and Vantongerloo, dating from 1934 onwards, are held in the Vantongerloo Archive at Haus Bill, Zumikon, Switzerland. Copies have been made available to me by Florette Dijkstra. See Appendix 3ii.

⁶¹ This postcard, dated 7th May 1936, is held in the Vantongerloo Archive at Haus Bill, Zumikon, Switzerland. A postcard was also sent to Gorin and his wife Suzanne. See numbers 7 and 8, in Appendix 3ii.

Vantongerloo's feelings could have been allied to Mondrian's views on the "tyrannic influence" of the art of antiquity.⁶²

Gauciel.

In 1937, after a decade in the hub of Paris, Moss and Nijhoff left the city for the calm and seclusion of Gauciel, near Evreux in Normandy. They bought the Château d'Evreux, and planned to settle permanently there. It was to be an environmental embodiment of Moss's aesthetic. The ceilings were lowered, the walls were painted white and long curtains were hung, to increase the feeling of space; it was a modestly sized château. Moss and Nijhoff filled the walls with their collection of paintings; Moss's own, as well as works by Mondrian, Gorin and Van Doesburg. Moss's studio was on the south side of the house, to allow direct sunlight to flood in as she worked.⁶³ The house was situated in a walled compound or garden, edged with small buildings to accommodate guests. Stefan Nijhoff lived there, when he wasn't in Paris with Man Ray. The actor Albert Mol was a frequent visitor, staying with Stefan in a small old Normandy-style cottage to the west of the main house, within the compound walls. According to Mol's account the guest residents of the Château d'Evreux were welcomed to the main house, where only Moss, Nijhoff and sometimes Martinus Nijhoff dwelled, at 11.30 for lunch, and at 5.30 for an aperitif followed by dinner. At midnight they were all to leave for their beds, taking with them breakfast for the next morning.⁶⁴

Max Bill, another guest, described the Château d'Evreux as a place of "unsurpassable purity and harmony", where everything was "clear, fresh,

⁶² "For modern man, the great art of antiquity reveals itself more or less as darkness, even when it is not tragic; a white marble statue expressing peaceful dreamy romanticism, a devout religious conception, can be as oppressive as a dark, murky picture" Mondrian 'Liberation From Oppression in Art and Life', 1940, in Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, eds., The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian. London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, p.325.

⁶³ It is conventional for an artist's studio to be lit from the north, to provide constant light, however, according to Nijhoff: "Dim lights and half-tints give her a feeling of physical discomfort and she would never have a studio facing north" Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

⁶⁴ Information gained from a copy in Florette Dijkstra's research papers of a sketched diagram of Chateau d'Evreux drawn by Albert Mol, for Marja Pruis during her research on A.H. Nijhoff in the nineties.

transparent".⁶⁵ Moss and Nijhoff threw several parties at the house, during these years just prior to the war, their guests including Vantongerloo and Puma. There was some contact between Moss's family and her effectively adoptive son Stefan Nijhoff around this time; Moss's niece Val, who as a teenager lived in Paris for a while, met up with him on at least one occasion between 1937 and 1939.⁶⁶ She has no memory of an invitation to the Château d'Evreux though.

In the early part of 1937 Moss gave Vantongerloo a "*terrible telling-off*" at a meeting, presumably of the members of Abstraction-Création, but on reflection regretted it, and invited him to come to her studio to "*smoke the pipe of peace*".⁶⁷ In 1938 the two had plans to exhibit their work together in New York, and Vantongerloo wrote to Pierre Matisse suggesting a joint show.⁶⁸ It is not known what became of this idea; there is no evidence that the show went ahead. If there had been a joint show of Moss and Vantongerloo at the New York Matisse Gallery, Moss's position in history would possibly be different now. Contemporary writers, and therefore writers since the thirties, would have positioned her with Vantongerloo, rather than solely as a follower of Mondrian. It can only be conjecture how this would have affected her reception. By this time the imminent war was bringing an end to the revels of the bohemian avant-garde in Paris, and international exhibitions were perhaps of little immediate concern to Vantongerloo and Moss. Mondrian left for London, where he lived briefly amongst the Hampstead "*nest of gentle artists*", before emigrating to New York.⁶⁹ Moss and Nijhoff remained in

⁶⁵ Max Bill describes the Château d'Evreux thus in his essay 'Encounter with Marlow Moss' published in the catalogue *Marlow Moss: Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen* (Exhibition: 1st December 1973 - 19th January 1974). Zurich: Gimpel and Hanover Gallery, 1973.

⁶⁶ Val Mullen told me this in an email dated 28th March 2007; she thinks it was probably her Aunt Wendy (Gwendoline Moss) who organised this meeting.

⁶⁷ I quote from a handwritten letter from Moss to Vantongerloo, dated 25th February 1937, held in the Vantongerloo Archive, Haus Bill. See Letter 9, Appendix 3ii.

⁶⁸ A typed letter, from Vantongerloo to Pierre Matisse, dated 17th June 1938, held in the Vantongerloo Archive, Haus Bill. See Letter 12, Appendix 3ii.

⁶⁹ Marcel Breuer, Wells Coates, H.S. Ede, Naum Gabo, Margaret Gardiner, Geoffrey Grigson, Walter Gropius, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, Roland Penrose, Herbert Read, Adrian Stokes and John Summerson all lived very near to one another in Hampstead, London, during the thirties, a map of locations can be found in Herbert Read, *Art in Britain 1930-1940 Centred around Axis Circle and Unit One* (Exhibition: March -

Gauciel. At the beginning of the war, the two decided to temporarily re-locate to the Nijhoff's house 'Antoinette' at Groot Valkenisse, near the village of Biggekerke, on Walcheren, in Zeeland, The Netherlands.⁷⁰ It was thought the small seaside village would be a safer place to sit out the war, and that before long, a matter of months probably, they could return to their life in France. That of course was not to be:

*So, for nearly three months we have been in Holland, far from Paris, far from Gauciel, far, all in all, from everything that made up our existence not long ago.*⁷¹

Groot Valkenisse, and then London.

'Antoinette' is nestled in the sand dunes, by the beach Groot Valkenisse. The village of Biggekerke has, over the years, expanded towards it, and now the Valkenisse Weg is lined with houses.⁷² Approaching 'Antoinette' however, the road becomes a track, and the house is set back, hidden in the trees, at the end of a long tunnel-like driveway, and behind a gate. Even during the bustle of the summer tourist season, 'Antoinette' feels peaceful and secluded, and it must have been more so in 1940, before the land reclamation and flood prevention 'Delta Project' rendered Zeeland safer for inhabitants.⁷³ The pearly iridescent light that Mondrian captured in his dune paintings, during 1909-1910, just a few miles up the coast at Domburg, is reminiscent of Cornwall. It is plausible that Moss felt a kinship with the place because of this quality of light, and perhaps Nijhoff felt the same when she arrived in Penwith for the first time.⁷⁴

April 1965). London: Marlborough Fine Art Ltd, 1965, p.9. Read refers to this loose conglomeration as "*a nest of gentle artists*" in his essay included in the catalogue.

⁷⁰ Martinus had named the house 'Antoinette' after his wife.

⁷¹ Letter from Netty Nijhoff to Georges and Poema Vantongerloo, dated 5th February 1940, held in the Vantongerloo Archive, Haus Bill Zumikon. See Letter 14, Appendix 3ii.

⁷² I visited Walcheren during the summer of 2007.

⁷³ The 'Delta Project' began in 1957 and was completed in 1981. It involved the building of many dikes, dams and a storm-tide barrage, and shortened the Dutch coastline by 700 km, reclaiming 15,000 hectares of land.

⁷⁴ Dijkstra demonstrates that the shape of Walcheren, as seen from above, fits almost exactly over a map of Penwith, Florette Dijkstra, *De Voorgeschiedenis*. 's-Hertogenbosch: De Kleine Kapaciteit, 1997, p.77. This coincidence could be seen to signify a deep connection between the two places.

Moss wrote to Vantongerloo offering him and Poema use of the Château d'Evreux.⁷⁵ Nijhoff, ever the story-teller, described their feelings of hopelessness and isolation:

None of this seems real to me still. Since we arrived in Holland I have had the strange sensation of living in a sort of dream, like the feeling you have when some one at home is very ill and you have to sleep on the floor. The whole room, seen from your mattress, seems different, as if each object had undergone an indefinable change.

Although we live in a very real way, chatting with the housekeeper, cooking, looking for coal, walking Kito, this strange sensation remains.

Yet we are both working, and with great tenacity and good results. I have written quite a number of pages and Marlow has made a very beautiful composition with ropes [possibly Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 29], then another construction in wood and she has just perfected a new wooden construction of various levels [possibly Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 30, P/R 31, P/R 32, or P/R 33]. She has been lucky enough to find an ideal workman in a little carpenter from the village itself. Although his usual work making things like doors and windows is not very refined, he made this first wooden construction with such delicacy and exactitude that we are delighted with it. In Holland it is harder to find nice canvases for paintings. As you know, Marlow is terribly meticulous in her work. She claims that the canvases are not of the same quality as the ones she used to buy in Paris and that she has not been able to find certain types of brushes. But despite all this she has obtained quite unexpected results.⁷⁶

The carpenter referred to was Joost Goedbloed, who had worked for the Nijhoff's before, constructing the furniture for 'Antoinette' from Netty Nijhoff's designs.⁷⁷

It became impossible for Moss and Nijhoff to return to France. Their home, Moss's work, and all their belongings were out of reach. It was soon apparent that Moss, as at least partially Jewish by descent, was not safe to remain on the continent.⁷⁸ The advancing Germans crossed the Dutch border on the 5th

⁷⁵ See Letter 13 Appendix 3ii.

⁷⁶ Letter from Netty Nijhoff to Georges and Poema Vantongerloo, dated 5th February 1940, held in the Vantongerloo Archive, Haus Bill Zumikon. See Letter 14, Appendix 3ii. The issues raised here will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

⁷⁷ By coincidence the gravestone of Joost Goedbloed rests just behind Netty Nijhoff's in the cemetery at Biggekerke. I have spoken to several local Goedbloeds in Walcheren, but been unable to discover any descendants of Joost still in the area, or to locate his workshop.

⁷⁸ According to the traditional Jewish conception religious status is determined by the maternal bloodline, or by religious conviction; anti-Semites however do not necessarily share this view.

of May 1940. On the 12th of May Moss and Nijhoff were in Utrecht, possibly to see Martinus Nijhoff who had joined the Dutch Army, and was stationed nearby. In an amusing anecdote, if such a thing is possible in the midst of such dire circumstances, the two were arrested under suspicion of being renegade German parachutists disguised as women!⁷⁹ This was apparently because they were speaking English, and is indicative of the climate of the time; the great changes that were sweeping across Europe, and the very big difference between life in peacetime Paris, and in provincial Holland in a time of war. On the 14th of May, a few days after the advancing Germans finally broke the resistance of the Zeelanders, and entered Walcheren, Moss left Nijhoff and fled alone to London. Martinus Nijhoff had used his considerable influence, as a poet and national figure, and by this point as a military general, to secure Moss passage on a fishing boat. The small fleet, accompanying a ship transporting the Dutch Royal Family, had been given special permission to depart from the port of IJmuiden, in the north of the country. Without the help of Martinus Nijhoff, and the good fortune of the voyage of the fishing fleet, it is almost certain that Moss would have been arrested, as a Jew and a degenerate, and taken to a Nazi concentration camp; as it is she escaped. There was no way of getting word back to the Nijhoff's of her safe passage to England. Martinus Nijhoff wrote several times to his wife from his hospital bed (he had been injured in the fighting), over the next few months, asking for news of Moss, it seems Netty had none.⁸⁰ In the meantime the French air force had requisitioned the Château d'Evreux that spring, and four years later, in 1944, it was completely destroyed in a bombing raid. All of Moss's works, apart from the few paintings that were already in collections, or stored elsewhere, were lost.⁸¹ At the age of 55, she had barely a thing to show for her career as an artist.

It is not known how Moss spent those first few months back in her home country. As the bombs fell on London she may have seen her family, particularly her sister Gwen, whom she seemed closest to, but there is no

⁷⁹ Martinus Nijhoff, Brieven Aan Mijn Vrouw. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996.

⁸⁰ The letters of Martinus Nijhoff are published in Nijhoff, Brieven Aan Mijn Vrouw, 1996.

⁸¹ Approximately 28 Moss works from before 1940 are documented (see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs, in appendix to this thesis), although it is likely there were many more, and only 18 of these are known, or likely, to still exist.

record of this. She may have met up with old friends from her time at the Slade, or the British Museum years.⁸² She almost certainly spent time with Mondrian, who was still in London that summer.⁸³ He tried to persuade her to go to New York with him.⁸⁴ Some time before Mondrian left the city, Moss departed for Penwith.⁸⁵ Once again the far west of Cornwall was her sanctuary.

Netty and Martinus Nijhoff had been forced into hiding, and spent the war years together, in a shack in the woods outside Breda. Martinus was something of a national hero, and an extremely influential person, and was therefore politically dangerous to the occupying forces. Stefan, who initially served in the army and was stationed at Apeldoorn, was also in Breda by 1941, continuing his practice as a photographer.⁸⁶ Between them they harboured fugitives, and entertained passing dignitaries of the underground, and lived out the war years.

On arrival in England Moss wrote to Vantongerloo, to ask for Gorin's and Bill's addresses. Vantongerloo wrote back, expressing joy at having heard from her. He gave her Bill's address, and the news that Gorin has been called up. His letter ends:

⁸² Nijhoff states "*After an absence of thirteen years, she has lost track of most of her former friends in England. London, moreover, has been partly evacuated. She has broken with her family for good*" Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962. Dijkstra casts doubt on Nijhoff's testimony in Dijkstra, *The Sequel*, 1997. It seems likely that Moss would have known a person called 'Mrs Dodd', as they were at The Slade together in the late 1910s, and were, it can be assumed, both lesbians. It seems possible, although this is mere speculation, that Mrs Dodd could have been the cause of Moss's emotional breakdown of 1919, when she married an officer. Mrs Dodd (her first and maiden names are not recorded) was by 1940 living in Lamorna, Cornwall, with a Miss Palmer.

⁸³ Mondrian left London, and departed for New York via Liverpool on September 23rd 1940, Welsh and Joosten, *Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1998, Vol. 2, p.11.

⁸⁴ Andreas Oosthoek, in an interview with Dijkstra in 1991, recalled what Netty Nijhoff remembered Mondrian as saying: "*You can either come with me or you can stay in England and be doomed to failure*". Quoted in Dijkstra, *Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project*, 1995, p.19.

⁸⁵ Moss arrived in Cornwall in the summer of 1940. Her decision to choose an obscure corner of England to live, rather than New York where she could have perhaps been a celebratory, is in parallel to Kurt Schwitters who by the end of the Second World War was living in Ambleside in the Lake District.

⁸⁶ This evidenced by a letter from Stefan to Georges and Poema Vantongerloo, dated 11th June 1941, and held in the Haus Bill archive. See Letter 17, Appendix 3ii.

Dear Marlow, I wish you all the luck possible and send my most affectionate regards. In the hope that we will see each other soon...⁸⁷

He signed himself "Paf": the affectionate nickname he was known by to close friends. Cornwall was being flooded with new arrivals in the wake of the war, and for a while Moss lodged at a house in Mousehole,⁸⁸ but eventually, in 1941, she succeeded in renting a bungalow at 'Borah' in Lamorna.⁸⁹

Lamorna.

The village of Lamorna lies west of Penzance, and west of Mousehole. It is hidden in a steep, wooded valley and opens out into a rocky cove. Painters of the second generation of the Newlyn School were the first artists to colonize Lamorna at the turn of the last century. Most notably John 'Lamorna' Birch who worked there first in 1890, and then moved permanently to the village in 1902.⁹⁰ After him came Harold and Laura Knight, Stanley Gardiner, Arthur Tanner, Robert and Eleanor Hughes, Charles and Ella Naper, Bengie and Bella Leader, and Frank and Jessica Heath.⁹¹ These artists worked plein-air in the manner of the French Barbizon School; but were particularly influenced by Jules Bastien-Lepage and his sentimentalised version of Impressionism.

⁸⁷ Letter from Georges Vantongerloo to Marlow Moss, dated 11th June [1940], held in the Vantongerloo Archive, Haus Bill Zumikon. See Letter 15, Appendix 3ii.

⁸⁸ Moss stayed at the house of Vaughan Tregenza in Mousehole for a time, Dijkstra, The Sequel, 1997, p.40. Concurrently Ruth Adams and a woman named 'Salvendah' lived in a bungalow at the bottom of his patio.

⁸⁹ Moss rented the bungalow from Mrs Dodd (possibly an old friend from the Slade) and Miss Palmer. It is situated in the grounds of the house and flower farm, surrounded by trees and vegetation. If indeed Moss and Dodd had known one another at the Slade, much had happened in the twenty years that had passed since those days. Most notably Mrs Dodd had spent time in a secure institution, after having murdered her three children with an axe. I learned from a senior Lamorna resident (during a conversation in the summer of 2004) that Mrs Dodd's officer husband had bought her a house and plot next to Borah Flower Farm, (not the main farm itself, which served as Moss's postal address) for when she was released, and employed Miss Palmer as a housekeeper. 'Housekeeper' may be something of a euphemism; it seems Lamorna, despite lacking the cosmopolitan bohemianism of pre-war Paris, possessed a certain libertarian attitude towards women dressing and living unconventionally, whether this is indeed liberalism or naivety is a contentious point. Taking into account that the lesbian Hannah Gluckstein (known as 'Gluck') was the next artist to take up occupancy of the bungalow after Moss's death, it seems feasible to suggest some sort of lesbian artist network, providing refuge in Lamorna.

⁹⁰ M. Jacobs and M. Warner, The Phaidon Companion to Art and Artists in the British Isles. Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1980.

⁹¹ Keith Gardiner, A Painter's Paradise: Memories of an Artist's Son Growing up in Lamorna. Penzance: Headland Printers Ltd., 2005.

Colonel Paynter, the local squire, was a great supporter and patron of the Lamorna artists. They were fashionable and commercially successful, all exhibiting regularly at Newlyn and St. Ives, and sending their paintings up to The Royal Academy Summer Show, in London, in a specially hired railway carriage.⁹² They attracted frequent visits from the painters of Newlyn; Stanhope and Elizabeth Forbes, and Alfred Munnings,⁹³ Dod and Ernest Proctor, H.S. Tuke and Charles Simpson,⁹⁴ and also the painter Richard 'Seal' Weatherby. Augustus and Dorelia John had been known to stay at 'Cliff House'⁹⁵ and Dylan Thomas at 'Oriental Cottage'.⁹⁶ Algernon Newton, of Winsor & Newton the artist's materials company, and his son the actor Robert Newton, were other celebrity residents of the village,⁹⁷ and the occultist Aleister Crowley caused a stir when he visited in 1938 and flirted with Birch's mistress Greta Sequeira.⁹⁸

Many of these people had left by the time Moss arrived, but their presence must have still been palpable in the leafy paths and secluded rock pools of Lamorna. Birch remained, and Gardiner; in fact their descendants remain in Lamorna to this day.⁹⁹ Moss was of course a different breed of artist from them, and may have felt the glorious artistic heritage of Lamorna to be a double edged-sword; the locals were familiar and tolerant of painters in their midst, but the established Academicians might prove hostile to the arrival of a Modernist from Europe. Fortunately, maybe in part due to a wartime camaraderie, this seems to have not been the case. In fact, it seems the conservative artists of Lamorna offered a far greater benevolence to Moss than her ostensible fellows in St. Ives.

⁹² Denys Val Baker, Britain's Art Colony by the Sea. Britsol: Sansom & Company Ltd, 2000, p.36.

⁹³ Tom Cross, Painting the Warmth of the Sun: St. Ives Artists 1939-1979. Penzance / Guildford: Alison Hodge / Lutterworth Press, 1984.

⁹⁴ Austin Wormleighton, A Painter Laureate: Lamorna Birch and His Circle. Bristol: Sansom & Company, 1995.

⁹⁵ Gardiner, A Painter's Paradise: Memories of an Artist's Son Growing up in Lamorna, 2005. 'Cliff House' became 'The Temperance Hotel' and is now the 'Lamorna Cove Hotel'.

⁹⁶ Jacobs and Warner, The Phaidon Companion to Art and Artists in the British Isles, 1980.

⁹⁷ Gardiner, A Painter's Paradise: Memories of an Artist's Son Growing up in Lamorna, 2005.

⁹⁸ Wormleighton, A Painter Laureate: Lamorna Birch and His Circle, 1995, pp.215-217.

⁹⁹ I have met and spoken with Adam Kerr, grandson of Lamorna Birch, and Keith Gardiner, son of Stanley Gardiner, both of whom still live in their family homes in Lamorna.

Of course Moss wasn't the only Modernist artist to arrive in Cornwall at the beginning of the war; there was also the famous colony on the opposite coast; St. Ives and Carbis Bay.¹⁰⁰ Adrian Stokes and Margaret Mellis moved there permanently in 1939, and then Nicholson and Hepworth, and Gabo with his wife Miriam Gabo, later the same year. They joined Leonard Fuller, who had recently founded the St. Ives School of Painting, with his wife Marjorie Mostyn, Alfred Wallis, Borlase Smart, John Park, Sven Berlin, and Peter Lanyon, amongst others. Wilhelmina Barns-Graham arrived a year later from Scotland.

As soon as she was settled in her new home in Lamorna, Moss wrote, on Mondrian's advice, to Nicholson.¹⁰¹ She asked him if Hepworth and he would like to come to her home for lunch one day, and discuss their work, with a view to putting on a show together. She was also seeking advice on who to approach to show her work in London. As they had all been members of *Abstraction-Création*,¹⁰² and Mondrian was a mutual friend and the guiding light for them all, Moss probably assumed they would welcome her arrival in Cornwall. When Nicholson did not reply, she wrote again a year later. By her third letter, another year later, it is evident that Nicholson had made a cursory reply. Moss resorted to asking to borrow a copy of *Circle*, Nicholson's 1937 "*International Survey of Constructive Art*".¹⁰³ Although Moss and Nicholson did eventually meet (as is evidenced by a letter from Moss to Vantongerloo, quoted below), it seems likely they never had lunch; they certainly did not organise a show together in England in the manner that Moss had hoped. Various rumours circulate regarding the isolation of Moss from the St. Ives artists. There are claims that Nicholson did invite her to exhibit in St. Ives,

¹⁰⁰ The Penwith Society of Arts in Cornwall, founded in 1949 in memory of Borlase Smart, included in its founder membership the following artists: Shearer Armstrong, Sven Berlin, Wilhelmina Barns Graham, David Cox, Agnes Drey, Leonard Fuller, Isobel Heath, Barbara Hepworth, Marion Grace Hocken, Peter Lanyon, Bernard Leach, Denis Mitchel, Guido Morris, Marjorie Mostyn, Dicon Nance, Robin Nance, Ben Nicholson, H. Segal and John Wells, with Herbert Read as the first president.

¹⁰¹ Three letters from Marlow Moss to Ben Nicholson, from 1941, 1942 and 1943, are held in the Tate Archives, London. See Appendix 3iv for copies of the letters.

¹⁰² Nicholson and Hepworth appear in issues 2 (1933) and 3 (1934) of the journal *Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif*.

¹⁰³ John Lesley Martin, Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, eds., *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art*. London: Faber and Faber, 1971, first published 1937.

and join the Penwith Society, but she refused,¹⁰⁴ and claims that Moss at some point accused Nicholson of copying her work,¹⁰⁵ and therefore became "*persona non grata*".¹⁰⁶ According to the testimony of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Moss did exhibit at least once with the Penwith Society, in the early fifties.¹⁰⁷ There is also a claim that Nicholson called Moss "*impure*".¹⁰⁸ This may have been in reference to Moss's departure from the 'rules' of Mondrian; her inclusion of diagonal lines and added material, and later her use of curved lines and sculpture. The negative inflection of the word 'impure', does not sit well with this explanation of Nicholson's meaning, as he himself never conformed to Mondrian's pure Neo-Plasticism. Perhaps, despite his own position, he was offended by work that directly augmented Mondrian's language. The other possibility is that Nicholson was referring to Moss's sexuality. Either way there is something moralising, and even menacing, about the choice of the word 'impure', (if indeed the assertion is true).¹⁰⁹ Overwhelmingly it does seem Nicholson, and Hepworth, did not welcome Moss, and, possibly deliberately used their influence to exclude her from the

¹⁰⁴ Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995. Dijkstra's account I believe stems from a letter from the artist Michael Canney, Curator of the Newlyn Art Gallery from 1956 - 1964, she received in the mid-nineties, stating "*somebody told me that Nicholson did try to interest her [Moss] in showing in St. Ives, without success*". In an earlier letter from Canney to "*Roberl*", dated 14/11/1990, Canney states the same: that Nicholson invited Moss to exhibit in St. Ives (a copy of this letter is held in the Women's Art Archive, Goldsmiths). This claim is repeated in another letter from Canney to Tam Giles, dated 16/5/1994, also kept in the Women's Art Archive, Goldsmiths. Canney again reiterates this point in a letter to a "*Miss Shaw*", dated 6/11/1995 (a photocopy of which is in Dijkstra's research files) adding that Moss "*avoided all societies*". I think, by this point, what started as a vague memory, has solidified through the retelling of the story; Moss certainly did not avoid all societies, she was a member of several societies in her lifetime (Abstraction Création, Les Surindépendants, Association 1940, Groupe Anglo-Américain, and Groupe Espace), after the war she exhibited regularly in Paris with the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, and initially at least, enthusiastically supported the short-lived British Groupe Espace. It may be true, however, that she avoided the Penwith Society particularly.

¹⁰⁵ Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, p.22. Dijkstra heard this story from John Halkes (who was later to become Curator of the Newlyn Art Gallery) during an interview in 1994.

¹⁰⁶ Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, p.22. Dijkstra quotes Wells from a 1994 interview.

¹⁰⁷ Wilhelmina Barns Graham states this in a letter to Florette Dijkstra dated 25th May 1996, of which I have a copy.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Canney mentions this in a 1995 letter to a "*Miss Shaw*". He does not say when Nicholson said this to him, or explain what Nicholson meant by it. There is a copy of this letter in Florette Dijkstra's archive, almost certainly given to her by Michael Canney.

¹⁰⁹ The significance of the notion of 'purity' to Moss is discussed at the end of Chapter 6 of this thesis.

British Constructive movement.¹¹⁰ Moss seemingly did not know the reason for the antipathy herself, and commented in a letter of 1944 to Vantongerloo:

*I am very much alone in my ideas here. I have seen Ben Nicholson just once, things aren't going well between us, I don't even know why, so I never see him.*¹¹¹

Two other Modernist artists arrived in Lamorna some years after Moss: John Armstrong and John Tunnard.¹¹² It is not documented to what degree Moss was in contact with these men, but in a small community such as Lamorna, she must have known them.¹¹³ Armstrong studied at St John's Wood School of Art during the period 1913-1918,¹¹⁴ so it is likely that he already knew Moss from her time there during 1916. Tunnard taught at the Penzance School of Art from 1948, so if Moss resumed her contact with the school some twenty-three years after having attended sculpture classes, she may have had contact with him there. Both men were of a Surrealist proclivity, although there are aspects of Constructivism in the work of Tunnard. Like Moss, they had little to do with the artists of St. Ives and Carbis Bay, despite the fact that Armstrong had been a member of Unit One during the thirties.

Moss did not use her bungalow at 'Borah' as a studio, although it had functioned as one previously; it would have been too dark for her requirements, surrounded as it is by trees and foliage. Instead she shared the studio of Gardiner in his garden at 'Lilly Cottage'. His son Keith remembers:

I first met Miss Moss as she was known to the children of the village, when she shared my father's studio for a time during the 1939/45 world war ... As my father was teaching during the week, Miss Moss used to paint in his studio

¹¹⁰ This was certainly the opinion of Michael Canney, expressed privately in letters.

¹¹¹ See Letter 19, Appendix 3ii.

¹¹² Armstrong lived in 'Oriental Cottage', Lamorna, from 1947 until 1955. Tunnard first arrived in Cornwall in 1933, and after living in a gypsy caravan for some years, and then a Mine Cottage at Morvah Hill, settled at Trethinnick in the Lamorna Valley in 1952, Jacobs and Warner, *The Phaidon Companion to Art and Artists in the British Isles*, 1980.

¹¹³ In the same letter to 'Miss Shaw' Michael Canney mentions that John Tunnard lived next door to Moss in Lamorna.

¹¹⁴ Alan Windsor, ed., *A Handbook of Modern British Painting and Printmaking 1900-1990*, Second ed. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1998.

*when he wasn't using it, I don't think she paid any rent for it, but I think she had the inside painted and put in a new window.*¹¹⁵

It seems likely that Moss made the adjustments to the studio for her own requirements, in an attempt to re-create her light airy Gauciel studio, as much as in lieu of payment for Gardiner. As a boy Keith Gardiner was fascinated by Moss, and remembers peeking through the windows at her working in his father's studio. She was friendly to him, and allowed him to look at her paintings and constructions. At the time he thought of her as a man, and as an exotic foreigner; he remembers that she had a strange foreign accent, and was surprised to hear she was a Londoner by birth.¹¹⁶

During this time, living alone in Cornwall while the war raged in Europe, and the cities of England were bombed, Moss struck up a few friendships. Her initial contacts in Lamorna were of course Mrs Dodd and Miss Palmer, her landladies, and then Gardiner whom she would entertain, with his family, at her bungalow.¹¹⁷ She also knew artists in neighbouring Mousehole: the Surrealist Ithel Colquhoun,¹¹⁸ and the painter Ruth Adams -who is known of only from a mention in a letter from Moss to Gabo, when Moss was arranging a visit from the two of them.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Gardiner, *A Painter's Paradise: Memories of an Artist's Son Growing up in Lamorna*, 2005. Stanley Gardiner painted landscape in an Impressionist / Post-Impressionist manner. He was perhaps one of the more progressively minded Lamorna artists.

¹¹⁶ I visited Keith Gardiner at 'Lilly Cottage' during the summer of 2004. His father's studio, and Moss's; a building of corrugated iron, still stands in the garden.

¹¹⁷ "They [Marlow Moss and Stanley Gardiner] *always remained friends and she would come to our house and we would go to hers for meals etc.*" Gardiner, *A Painter's Paradise: Memories of an Artist's Son Growing up in Lamorna*, 2005.

¹¹⁸ Moss mentions Colquhoun in letters to Paule Vézelay held in the Tate Archives: dated 2nd November 1954, 3rd July 1955, 19th August 1955 and 11th March 1957, see Appendix 3iii. Moss perhaps knew Colquhoun from many years previously at the Slade, or perhaps met her whilst in Cornwall. There is not much in the letters to Vézelay to indicate a particular friendship between Moss and Colquhoun (although she is mentioned on several occasions), but a Mousehole resident, Vaughn Tregenza, claims that they were indeed friends, in a typed page of notes on Moss, dating from 1996, kept in the research papers of Florette Dijkstra.

¹¹⁹ A letter from Marlow Moss to Naum Gabo, dated 19th April 1945, held in the Tate Archives, includes the following: "*Miss Adams of Mousehole rang you up some weeks ago, to ask you if it would be possible for us to come over to see your work*". See Appendix 3v. Florette Dijkstra uncovers the mysterious story of "*Ruth A.*" in her book Dijkstra, *The Sequel*, 1997.

It is likely that Moss knew the painter Hannah Gluckstein. 'Gluck' as she was known, first arrived in Lamorna in 1916 when she was thirty-one. She left some time around 1918 and re-appeared in the twenties after a transformation similar to that of Moss; her hair was cut short and she was wearing tailored suits. In a story with great parallels to Moss, Gluck was of Jewish descent, but not practising; her family were wealthy (the founders of J. Lyons & Co.), but not creative, and not supportive of her career as an artist; similarly she partially cut herself off from them, yet still lived on an allowance. Also, like Moss, Gluck was musically inclined, fastidiously neat, and unwilling to disguise her sexual orientation.¹²⁰ Gluck's art, however, was not similar to Moss's, and was neither abstract nor surreal, although there is an element of the uncanny in her startling portraits, landscapes and still-lives.¹²¹ She took over Moss's bungalow as a studio after 1958. A pattern, which may be purely coincidental, emerges; Lamorna artists Moss, Armstrong and Gluck all studied at St. John's Wood School of Art during the 1910s, and Moss, Mrs Dodd and Colquhoun studied at the Slade.¹²² Moss, however, is not mentioned in the writing that exists on these artists.

After the war Moss managed to obtain her own studio, a derelict barn that had been used as a carpentry workshop.¹²³ She transformed it into a clean white space, reminiscent of a Methodist chapel,¹²⁴ flooded with light from the south like her old studio at the Château d'Evreux, and set about her work. She took up the study of architecture, and made sculptures, alongside the painted reliefs she had begun to experiment with in Groot Valkenisse, before her escape. It is likely that as she had found in Zeeland, it was impossible to obtain the canvases, paints and brushes that had been available to her in Paris before the start of the war. During the period of the war Moss had

¹²⁰ Biographical information gleaned from Diana Souhami, *Gluck: Her Biography*. London: Pandora Press, 1989.

¹²¹ Gluck refused to acknowledge any influence upon her work, but echoes of earlier Viennese modernism can be seen; Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and also, surprisingly American Regionalist painting, especially Andrew Wyeth and Edward Hopper, which presumably she would not have known about.

¹²² It is not known if Ruth Adams was formally trained at all.

¹²³ This building now forms part of a bungalow called 'Daffy's' in Lamorna.

¹²⁴ Moss's studio is thus described by Michael Canney in a letter to someone called "Robert", dated 14/11/1990, held in the Women's Art Archive, Goldsmiths, University of London.

concentrated on white reliefs and sculptures. She returned to painting with colour, and without relief elements, after the war, but continued her experiments with sculpture until the end of her life.

Despite her isolation at this time Moss managed to exhibit at the 1942 American-British Art exhibition at the American-British Art Centre in New York, perhaps through Mondrian, with whom she was in contact. Also that year Moss became a member of the Artists International Association in London.¹²⁵

Moss and Vantongerloo stayed in touch sporadically throughout the war. In 1944 she wrote to tell him that Mondrian had died in New York, and that she had heard from Bill. She wrote about her work, and enquired about his:

*Needless to say I'm very curious to see what you have done between 1940-1944. Bill wrote that you have worked a lot despite all the difficulties. I am also pursuing my ideas, what I am doing at the moment is very different from what you saw the last time you came to Gauciel, i.e. the constructions in space.*¹²⁶

The six-year period of the war was a time of isolation and uncertainty for Moss. She had infrequent news from the people she cared about, and did not know if she would ever see them again. A good deal of her money was tied up in the Château d'Evreux and was, along with her possessions and work, inaccessible. The British Constructive avant-garde such as it were, had rejected and ostracised her. She had no opportunities to exhibit her work, or mix with her contemporaries. The professional associations she was accustomed to in Paris took the form of loose social affiliations in England, and membership was not open. Despite this somewhat miserable situation, at a time in her career that she could have been enjoying a central position in a flourishing movement, Moss continued with her work. Once the war was over Nijhoff was able to join Moss, which she did in 1946. Moss began to exhibit in Paris once more, with the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles at the Galerie Charpentier in 1946 and 1950. From this point onwards Moss divided her

¹²⁵ Marlow Moss: Application Form for Membership to the Artists International Association. Held in The Tate Gallery Archives, London. See Appendix 4i.

¹²⁶ Letter from Marlow Moss to Georges Vantongerloo, undated (but likely to be written during 1944), held in the Vantongerloo Archive, Haus Bill Zumikon. See Letter 19, Appendix 3ii.

time between Lamorna, Paris, Groot Valkenisse, and a houseboat on the canals of The Hague; Nijhoff was her constant companion. Together they sought out a European community of lesbians, artists, and colourful characters. Traces remain of the friendships that Moss and Nijhoff fostered with such people as the modernist composer George Antheil, the Surrealist writer and muse Sheila Legge, the Duchess Marika de la Salle, and the writer Anna Blaman.¹²⁷

In an effort to compensate for the many years worth of lost work, Moss laboured prodigiously in her last decade. With a renewed sense of urgency she strove toward the ideal of space, movement and light. At last in 1953 she was given a solo show in London, by Erica Brausen of the Hanover Gallery,¹²⁸ and then again in 1958 just a few months before her death.¹²⁹ Brausen, ten years younger than Moss, had moved to Paris from her home country of Germany, in the 1930s. She was involved in the Parisian avant-garde art scene, and it is possible that she met Moss in Paris, either through artist friends (she knew Mondrian),¹³⁰ or through the gay café scene; the two worlds intermingled. From Paris she went to Majorca, possibly with her friend Joan Miró, where she ran a bohemian bar. She harboured Jews and socialists during the Spanish Civil War, her bar providing a stopover on an escape route. Like Moss, she arrived in London at the start of the Second World

¹²⁷ It is possibly that Moss met George Antheil through Léger, as Antheil had composed the score for Léger's film '*Ballet Mécanique*'. Antheil was also a friend of Man Ray's, so possibly Moss knew him through Stefan Nijhoff, who was Man Ray's apprentice. Sheila Legge bought the work '*Untitled: 16/8/1956*' (see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 66), and was a friend of Moss's, according to provenance information made available to me by Gillian Jason, who currently holds the work. A photograph published in a journal article on Nijhoff shows Moss and Nijhoff, with Marika de la Salle and her daughter: Ireen Farjon, 'A.H.Nijhoff: Een Tijdelijk Lesbos', *DIVA*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1984, p.14. Anna Blaman wrote in a letter of 11th May 1950, to her friend the critic Emmy von Lokhorst (who was at this point the partner of Martinus Nijhoff), that she had met Netty Nijhoff and Moss, and commented on the "*impression of integrity*" she had of them, as well as how much she liked them. Anna Blaman, *Ik Schrijf Het Je Grof-Eerlijk : Briefwisseling Met Emmy Van Lokhorst En Sonja Witstein*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1988. Florette Dijkstra, who is currently researching Anna Blaman for a novel, translated this passage for me.

¹²⁸ Marlow Moss (Exhibition: 10th November - 4th December 1953). London: Hanover Gallery, 1953.

¹²⁹ Michel Seuphor, Marlow Moss: Sculpture and Paintings (Exhibition: 4th March - 3rd April 1958). London: Hanover Gallery, 1958.

¹³⁰ Brausen states that she knew Mondrian in a letter to Richard Morphet, dated 30th April 1969, held in the Tate Archives.

War, and set about trying to establish herself. She married a homosexual friend to gain British Citizenship, and worked at the Redfern Gallery, on Cork Street. In 1946 Arthur Jeffries, an American millionaire banker, financed Brausen to open her own gallery, and the following year the Hanover Gallery opened on St. George Street, Hanover Square, Mayfair. Jean-Yves Mock, who years later included Moss in an article for Apollo,¹³¹ was her assistant at this time. Brausen set about exhibiting mainly European art, with a Surrealist bent: Alberto Giacometti, Marino Marini, Duchamp, Man Ray, Max Ernst, René Magritte; but also British art: Graham Sutherland, Reg Butler, Eduardo Paolozzi, Francis Bacon, and William Scott.¹³² Moss described Brausen as “*very moody and not easy*” in a letter to Paule Vézelay, but added that she was always very friendly to Moss herself.¹³³ Mock remembers Brausen as “*sharp and precise*”, which perhaps also characterises the qualities of Moss’s work that appealed to her.¹³⁴

Moss’s two exhibitions at the Hanover Gallery were the culmination of her career. Although the critical response was not of great breadth or depth (see Chapter 1 of this thesis), the exhibitions successfully represented Moss and her work, completely, and without compromise, in her city of origin. Despite the lack of commercial success of the earlier show, Brausen did not hesitate in offering a second, more ambitious show, with a photographic catalogue, and accompanying text by Michel Seuphor. Between the two Hanover Gallery shows, Moss again pursued collaboration with the British art world. She took part in two London group shows in 1955, one with Paule Vézelay’s short-lived British Group Espace at the Royal Festival Hall, and one with Andrew Forge

¹³¹ Jean Yves Mock, ‘La Peinture Abstraite Géométrique’, Apollo Vol. 68, December 1958, pp.215-216.

¹³² This information was gleaned from the Hanover Gallery Collection of the Tate Archives. Brausen’s gallery merged with Gimpel Fils in the early seventies, and was for a time active in Zurich as the Gimpel and Hanover Galerie, which exhibited Moss’s work in 1973, before the show moved to Gimpel Fils in London.

¹³³ See Appendix 3iii to this thesis for transcriptions of the letters between Moss and Vézelay held in the Tate Archives.

¹³⁴ Jean-Yves Mock described Brausen thus, in a letter to me, dated 13th April 2008. He also suggests that it was Vézelay, rather than Brausen, who was “*often more than difficult*”, this concurs with the Constructionist’s view of Vézelay, -so perhaps Moss was advising Vézelay to tread carefully for more complex reasons than are first apparent.

and Adrian Heath at the Artists International Association Gallery.¹³⁵ If she had lived a little longer she may have strengthened these connections, and secured herself a place in British art history.

In 1956 Moss finally received the compensation for war damages (the loss of her home in Gauciel), and was financially able to move back to Paris, as she had always intended, however, because of Brausen's offer of a second solo show at the Hanover Gallery, she decided to stay in Lamorna, and continue with her work. When it is considered how much a return to France must have been longed for, the importance of exhibiting solo in London to Moss becomes apparent. Nijhoff describes Moss as working with "*fanatical intensity*" in the final years of her life.¹³⁶

Moss always retained a great admiration for Mondrian. His influence upon her was profound, and her loyalty was unwavering. Nijhoff wrote:

*Marlow Moss is, indeed, a disciple of Mondriaan's. a disciple who so revered the master that she sprang like a tiger to his defence if so much as an unfriendly remark was made about his work or his person. A disciple who counted it an honour to be his follower and who has dedicated her work, in the spiritual sense, to Mondriaan.*¹³⁷

In 1955 Moss wrote 'An Appreciation of Piet Mondrian'.¹³⁸ Once she learned of the Whitechapel's Mondrian retrospective show, she sent a copy of her eulogy to Paule Vézelay, asking for her critical opinion, and expressing the desire to have it published.¹³⁹ In a letter to The Times, in response to a review of the Mondrian retrospective exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1955, Moss referred to Mondrian as "*the greatest of all the Abstract*

¹³⁵ These exhibitions, and their significance for the British art world of the fifties, are discussed at length in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹³⁶ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962

¹³⁷ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

¹³⁸ The manuscript of Marlow Moss's 'An Appreciation of Piet Mondrian' is possibly held in the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Archive, Zurich. It is mentioned by Moss in letters to Vézelay dated 6th August 1955 (Appendix 3iii Letter 24), 10th August 1955 (Appendix 3iii Letter 25), and 19th August 1955 (Appendix 3iii Letter 26). The text remains unknown to me.

¹³⁹ Moss's piece on Mondrian was rejected by The New Statesman and Nation and by Typographica. See Appendix 3iii letter number 26.

Painters".¹⁴⁰ She expressed indignation that the Mondrian show, which had travelled from the continent, was not shown at the Tate Gallery, and had attracted no support from the Arts Council.¹⁴¹

At the end of her life Moss was included in Cinquante Ans de Peinture Abstraite,¹⁴² along with the greats of twentieth century abstraction: Kasimir Malevich, Wassily Kandinsky, and Mondrian. Younger British artists were becoming interested in her work: Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Brian Wall, Michael Seward Snow, and Michael Canney all tried to seek Moss out, as she had become, in Barns-Graham's words a "*phenomenon*" in Penwith.¹⁴³ By the fifties Moss had seemingly become rather elusive. Snow was recommended to introduce himself to Moss by Herbert Read; probably, he recalls, during the St. Ives Festival in 1953.¹⁴⁴

*I had no telephone and no address or telephone number for her. Consequently I arrived unannounced and it was clear the pair [Moss and Nijhoff] disliked being disturbed and did not find it convenient to show me any of the work. Most of the brief conversation was conducted by her very protective friend and I did not feel it polite to disturb them a second time.*¹⁴⁵

Barns-Graham received some of Moss's paintings at the Penwith Society in 1951, when her husband David Lewis was curator, and remembered thinking it strange that she hadn't heard more about Moss from the other St. Ives artists. She saw her again, sat on a bench near the bay in St. Ives, deep in animated discussion with Nijhoff, and didn't dare approach.¹⁴⁶ Barns-Graham made a few trips to Lamorna, hoping to visit Moss in her studio, but each time was told she was away in France. After travelling to London to see the second Hanover Gallery show in 1958, Barns-Graham was determined to

¹⁴⁰ This letter, dated 29th August 1955, is in the Nijhoff Oosthoek Archive, Zurich.

A photograph resides in Florette Dijkstra's collection. See Appendix 3i B.

¹⁴¹ This is stated in a letter to Vézelay of 22nd August 1955, held in the Tate Archives. See Letter 27, Appendix 3iii.

¹⁴² Michel Seuphor, Cinquante Ans De Peinture Abstraite (Exhibition: 9th March - 12th June 1957). Paris: Galerie Creuze, 1957.

¹⁴³ Dijkstra, The Sequel, 1997.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Seward Snow told this to me in a telephone conversation that took place on 11th March 2008.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Michael Seward Snow to myself, dated 22nd March 2008.

¹⁴⁶ Dijkstra, The Sequel, 1997.

meet Moss, and succeeded in making an appointment to visit her in July 1958; Brian Wall was to accompany her. However a card arrived a day before the planned excursion advising Barns-Graham that Moss had been taken ill and was in Penzance Hospital. Wall did manage to see inside Moss's studio, and described the experience to Canney, years later, as "*it was as if one had walked into Mondrian's own studio*".¹⁴⁷ Canney's widow, Madeleine, remembered that Wall had told her, at the time, that Moss had not been home on the occasion he visited, and he had had to pull himself up to peer through the windows, (as he is apparently quite short).¹⁴⁸ Wall worked as Barbara Hepworth's studio assistant in St. Ives, during the 1950s, when he was in his twenties, and apparently Moss had asked him to do some welding work for her, but he declined as he had plans to travel through France and Italy that summer.¹⁴⁹ Wall later emigrated to California, and continues to make Constructive sculpture. Some of his work appears to display some influence of Moss,¹⁵⁰ but this is not a claim made by the artist.

Canney remembered Moss from the early years of his time as curator of the Newlyn Gallery (1956 until 1965):

*She was virtually a recluse and I never heard of anyone being invited to her studio. However, she would occasionally ride into Penzance in a pony and trap, dressed like a jockey and accompanied by her friend Hettie [sic]. When she called at the gallery, which was seldom, this petite and rather bizarre figure would stride rapidly around in a rather alarming manner, tapping her leg with a riding crop.*¹⁵¹

He did eventually become acquainted with Moss, and visited her studio in Lamorna. Moss refused his invitation to exhibit at the Newlyn Gallery.¹⁵² It is likely this was because she already had commitments to the Hanover Gallery, and wanted to reserve all her energy for the show there. Possibly Moss was

¹⁴⁷ Letter from Brian Wall to Michael Canney dated June 17th 1996. Canney had given a copy to Dijkstra, and she gave a copy to me.

¹⁴⁸ Madeleine Canney told me this during a telephone conversation in January 2005. According to the accounts of Barns-Graham and Madeleine Canney, this was Wall's first and only visit to Moss's studio.

¹⁴⁹ Wall states this in the aforementioned letter to Canney.

¹⁵⁰ See Illustration 5.10 in appendix to this thesis.

¹⁵¹ Michael Canney -Paintings, Constructions and Reliefs (Exhibition: 17th October - 9th November 1990). London: The Belgrave Gallery, 1990.

¹⁵² Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995.

also of the opinion that a show in Newlyn would do little for her profile, as her prospective audience was international and could only be reached in London or Paris.

Moss's illness was swift; she was diagnosed a month after the close of the Hanover Gallery exhibition, and died just two months after that, of stomach cancer, on the 25th August 1958. Her sister Gwen came to Lamorna, to help Netty nurse her. Nijhoff spoke of her final days:

She was extremely fragile, very frail, but was dressed with total meticulousness. She had always worn cravats. She had her hair combed completely flat and insisted that it had to be cut with absolute precision. In the hospital ... the disease had devastated her body but her small head remained exactly the same, her face was powdered and her pyjamas were closed at the neck with a small golden brooch. She had been sitting for the last two-and-a-half months because she could no longer lie down. Two days before her death she wanted to look out of her window. "Leave me alone. I have to get accustomed to space," is what she said. She stood up and walked towards the window. I said "look at those flowers!" –just the kind of stupid remark you come up with on those occasions ... She said: "I have no sensations whatsoever". And she returned to her bed. When she decided to stand up, I thought: "whatever is going to happen now?" But she managed it. A truly remarkable figure.¹⁵³

Conclusion.

Both Gwen and Netty were disappointed by the contents of Moss's will, which simply left everything to Stefan Nijhoff.¹⁵⁴ Stefan travelled to Lamorna to help his mother dismantle the studio. It is likely to have been Stefan who

¹⁵³ Bibeb, 'A.H. Nijhoff : Ik Voel Er Absoluut Niet Voor Alle Woelingen in Mijzelf Op Tafel Te Gooien', 1967.

¹⁵⁴ Gwendoline Moss's feelings at having not been left a painting by her sister were told to me by her niece Val Mullen in an email dated 28th March 2007. Evidently Stefan Nijhoff gave her 'Untitled (White, Black, Blue and Yellow)' (see Catalogue Raisonné P/R 63), in compensation. This work has now passed to Val Mullen's niece Hazel Rank-Broadley. Either Gwen (or Wendy as the family call her) chose this painting in particular, or Stefan purposely gave her what I believe to be an unfinished or aborted work. Andreas Oosthoek told me of Netty Nijhoff's disappointment that Moss did not bequeath any of the work to her, in a conversation that took place on July 24th 2007. In Oosthoek's opinion Moss left the work to Stefan because he was younger and Moss thought that he could ensure its preservation for longer. Oosthoek had attempted to reassure Netty that no further meaning had been attached to the action. It was most likely an insignificant decision for Moss, who did not foresee the emotional ramifications of her will, any more than the ultimate fate of her work in Stefan Nijhoff's care.

took the photographs of his 'stepmother's' workspace,¹⁵⁵ although he had all but given up photography since the death of his father in 1953 had rendered him a very rich young man.¹⁵⁶ Moss's works were carefully wrapped in plastic and shipped to 'Antoinette', the house at Groot Valkenisse on Walcheren. Netty too returned there to live, and hung the paintings on the walls.¹⁵⁷ This is where the young poet and journalist Andreas Oosthoek was to see them for the first time in the sixties.¹⁵⁸ For the remainder of her life Netty continued to seek recognition for Moss, releasing the work for exhibition and writing her much-referenced essay of 1962.¹⁵⁹ She encouraged Oosthoek's interest, and after her death in 1971, he continued her efforts to secure a place for Moss in art history. Stefan Nijhoff put Moss's work, along with his parents' papers, and his own photographs, in storage in bank vaults near Zurich, Switzerland, and sold the house, no longer called 'Antoinette', to Oosthoek, who lives there still, part of the year.¹⁶⁰

Since Moss's death there have been several solo retrospective shows, in Amsterdam, Middelburg, Zurich, London, New York and, most recently, in 1994 / 1995 in Arnhem; and she has been included in group shows celebrating geometric abstract art, and the avant-garde of the twentieth century.¹⁶¹ She has attracted the interest of artists, writers, historians and scholars: feminists and formalists, and been written about sporadically. Much

¹⁵⁵ See Frontispiece photographs to this thesis.

¹⁵⁶ Andreas Oosthoek described Stefan Nijhoff's inheritance as the ruin of his artistic ambition, in conversation with me in July 2007. Stefan lived the luxurious and decadent life of a tax exile, outside Geneva, from the mid-fifties until his death in 1986. His neighbours were Charlie Chaplin and Peter Ustinov, whom he knew well. He threw lavish parties and was at the centre of the ex-pat community. He had a passion for motorcars, especially the Rolls Royce, of which he said "*for a Bentley you need a chauffeur, but a Rolls you must drive yourself!*"

¹⁵⁷ Marlow Moss's paintings can be seen on the walls of 'Antoinette' in a photograph of Netty Nijhoff and Suzanne Gorin, (see Illustration Figure 2.2, in appendix to this thesis), and in film footage made of Netty Nijhoff's 70th birthday celebrations at her home 'Antoinette' in Biggekerke (and later at a restaurant in Middelburg): 'Het Huis Te Valkenisse', black and white film footage transferred onto VHS tape, Copyright 1993 NOB-AVAC-FBA Hilversum, The Netherlands: 1967, 19 mins. 28 secs.

¹⁵⁸ Andreas Oosthoek was present at Netty Nijhoff's 70th birthday party, and can be seen on the above mentioned film footage.

¹⁵⁹ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

¹⁶⁰ When I asked Andreas Oosthoek what had happened to the 'Antoinette' sign I had seen in the 1967 film footage of the house, he said that Stefan had removed it upon his mother's death in 1971, and taken it with him back to Switzerland.

¹⁶¹ See Appendix 1, for a list of Moss exhibitions.

of the writing on her is biographical, as is described in Chapter 1 of this thesis, yet the figure of Marlow Moss, to a large extent, remains a mystery. I think of this, Moss's story, as a meagre tapestry. Certain facts, as evidenced by documentation: her birth and death certificates, letters, photographs, and most importantly the works themselves; are indisputable. The rest is filled in by the accounts of people who knew her, apart from Netty Nijhoff and Max Bill, only briefly or vaguely: Val Mullen, Albert Mol, Michael Canney, and various inhabitants of Lamorna. Fragments of Moss's personality can be found in her letters to Vantongerloo, Nicholson, Gabo and Vézelay, but generally these letters are brief and to-the-point.¹⁶² The largest collection of correspondence is the exchange between Moss and Vézelay.¹⁶³ In these letters Moss is self-assured, ambitious, and uncompromising on matters aesthetic and ethical. In one small but anecdotally revealing passage Moss writes to Vézelay:

*If you would be so kind as to do the cooking, I would be so pleased if you came to stay a week or ten days with me, this is a funny invitation but I'm hopeless at cooking.*¹⁶⁴

It is contentious how much an artist's biography contributes to an account of their work.¹⁶⁵ Moss herself would never have viewed her art autobiographically in this way; the particulars of her as an individual being irrelevant to the universal remit of her work. In her unfinished essay 'Abstract Art' Moss identifies what she terms as the "*durable*" quality in art as "*...the impersonal element, holding in check the all too assertive personality of the artist*", she continues: "*the greater the artist the less we are aware of the type of man he is*", (although this has been later crossed through).¹⁶⁶ Art historians however cannot contain their curiosity, and hope to reveal something about the work, beyond the artist's conscious intention. In the case of Moss, a

¹⁶² This in itself of course indicates something of Moss's personality. All these letters are included in the Appendix to this thesis.

¹⁶³ Kept un-catalogued in the Tate Archives; transcribed in appendix to this thesis: 3iii.

¹⁶⁴ A letter from Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay dated 25th August 1956, held in the Tate Archives, London. See Letter 40, Appendix 3iii.

¹⁶⁵ This issue is briefly addressed in the Introduction to this thesis.

¹⁶⁶ Marlow Moss, 'Abstract Art', original handwritten manuscript, 1955, held in the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, Zurich. See Appendix 2ii.

'forgotten' artist, there is a temptation to weave the facts together tightly into a complete narrative, in order to lend her a solidity that would assist in her re-emergence. However, such patching and darning of the tapestry risks a misrepresentation of Moss, and is something I have striven to avoid. Despite her many fictional manifestations,¹⁶⁷ and the suggestion that she never existed at all,¹⁶⁸ Moss was a real person, who lived a real life. Her persona, in and of itself, is a significant contribution to British and European art history, her life story is therefore deserving of attention. Following Rimbaud's dictum, Moss made of her life a work of art. A friend described her thus:

She had a perfectly balanced personality; it was straightforward and always the personification of her inner being. Everyone who met her must have sensed the rapt concentration with which she approached her work. The rest –all the social trimmings –were matters of secondary importance. For example, it meant that Moss would turn up to the private view of one of her exhibitions in her trusty raincoat which served as her protection against the world. Everything about her was self-evident and natural ... Her work ... is immaculate, scrupulously honest: fractions of the Absolute which have been captured in matter.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Nijhoff, *Twee Meisjes En Ik*, 1949; Antoinette H. Nijhoff, *Venus in Ballinschap*, Amsterdam: Querido, 1955; and Joke J. Hermsen, *Die Gärten Von Bloomsbury*, Lubbe Editions, 2004.

¹⁶⁸ As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, it is suggested mischievously that Moss never existed at all, by Tom Lubbock in 'The Project: To Reconstruct Lost Works of a Dead and Unjustly Neglected Artist. The Result: A Case of Misattribution or Just Mistaken Identity?' *The Independent* Tuesday 9th December 1997, p.14.

¹⁶⁹ Margrit de Sablonière, 'Bij Het Heengaan Van Marlow Moss' *Museumjournaal* Series 4, No. 5-6, 1958. This is cited in Dijkstra, *Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project*, 1995, p.25.

Chapter 3.

Marjorie Jewel / Marlow: the Construction of Identity.

In the previous chapters of this thesis the issue of Moss's gender identity has been raised. Chapter 1 discusses an incident in an exhibition review where Moss was mistaken for a man, and the differentiation accordingly in the reception of her work.¹ Chapter 2 of this thesis is devoted to a biographical account of Moss, and issues of identity politics are examined only within the narrative confines of Moss's own life. This chapter then shall focus upon the persona of 'Marlow Moss', and the impact of this persona on historical and current gender / identity discourse, in the discipline of art history and beyond. This chapter begins with an analysis of 'Marlow Moss' (the auto-constructed identity of Marjorie Jewel Moss), proceeds to an examination of Moss's sartorial style in photographic portraits, and progresses to some thoughts on the wider implications of this persona. The extent to which Moss's constructed identity constituted a repudiation of the feminine shall be addressed, the relationship between this and feminism shall be examined, and the consequences of this for a reception of Moss focussed upon. In order to fully interrogate the construction of Moss's identity, primarily by Moss herself but also subsequently, the wider field of feminist art history and the reception of female practitioners of Modernist art, particularly rational geometric Constructivism, shall be explored. The persona of Moss problematizes much existent feminist dialogue in art history. Difficulties for a feminist reception of Moss include the overwhelming misogyny of much Modernist theory, Moss's own apparent gender treason, and more general disparities between a largely linguistic discourse and a purely visual art. Questions are provoked regarding the gendering of style, both in Moss's work and in her persona, and ultimately the legitimacy of the binary opposition of male and female per se. In order to explore these issues I shall refer to the writings of female art historians on aesthetically comparable work to that of

¹ Marlow Moss is mistaken for a man in G.S Whittet, 'London Commentary', *Studio* Vol.147, February 1954. This is not the only incident of gender confusion with regards to Moss. See Chapter 1 of this thesis, and footnote 24 of this chapter.

Moss (Briony Fer on Russian Constructivism, French Purism, and American Minimalism, and Anna C. Chave on American Minimalism particularly). Also highly significant to this debate is an exchange that took place on the letters pages of Art Monthly in the late eighties, between the sociologist Elizabeth Chaplin and the Constructive artist Tam Giles, and the individual writings of them both.

The Constructing of 'Marlow Moss'.

It is known from Nijhoff's account that Moss consciously and deliberately constructed an identity for herself. According to Nijhoff, it was in fact explicitly stated by Moss:

*I destroyed my old personality and created a new one.*²

The origin of 'Marlow Moss', as opposed to the birth of Marjorie Jewel Moss, can be traced to a moment in 1919, already discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.³ Whilst it is conceivable that at the age of thirty Moss conclusively changed her outward appearance, the notion of a complete and self-conscious forging of a new personality in an instant, a metamorphosis in effect, clearly owes something to Nijhoff's predilection for story telling, if not a certain amount of self-mythologizing from Moss herself.⁴ This tendency is indexical of a tradition, present in the discipline of art history since Vasari but particularly prevalent in twentieth century avant-gardism, of the artist as hero, martyr, and protagonist. The notion of 'rites of passage' appears in countless

² Marlow Moss quoted from memory by Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Marlow Moss (Exhibition: 30th March - 30th April 1962). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962.

³ Nijhoff is precise about the year Moss left The Slade School of Art: 1919, and implies that the emotional breakdown was concurrent, and the transformation happened shortly afterwards, Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

⁴ Tirza True Latimer argues that the 'mythologizing' of self is a tactical strategy engaged by lesbian writers and artists to establish a distinct lesbian genealogy, Tirza True Latimer, Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005, p.9. She quotes Charlotte Wolff: "Mythology is history" from Love Between Women, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971, both at the beginning of her introduction and later in Chapter 1 'Lesbian Paris Between The Wars' Latimer, Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris, 2005, p.37. This is a sentiment that has strong connections with both Nijhoff's and Dijkstra's writings on Moss.

guises throughout literature and mythology. Essentially the process consists of three stages: first severance, then ordeal, and then return.⁵ These stages are borne out in Nijhoff's biography of Moss.⁶ Kati Rötger, in her epilogue essay of a 1999 German gender studies anthology, entitled simply 'Comments on the Title Picture: *White, Black, Red and Grey* by Marlow Moss' characterises Nijhoff's account as "a staging of initiation into manhood" and compares Moss's transformation to the motto from Peter Weiss's novel Farewell to My Parents: "now I had to start my life as a man".⁷

Moss quoted the dictum to "...make of ones life a work of art" in her unfinished essay on abstract art.⁸ It is attributed to Arthur Rimbaud, but is a sentiment expressed by a range of writers, symbolists and aesthetes: Walter Pater, Joris-Karl Huysmans, W.B. Yeats, and André Gide. It invokes Oscar Wilde, and the Decadent Movement, which in turn brings with it associations of homosexuality. It is also an existential position, and has parallels with Nietzsche's conception of the 'Eternal Return', which can be interpreted as a thought-experiment or mechanism to evaluate the beauty or goodness of one's own life. The edict to 'live that you wish to live again', is central to Nietzsche's Joyful Wisdom,⁹ which is described as Moss's "*livre de chevet*".¹⁰ Moss's re-invention of herself was precipitated by a period of such reflection, after her moment of crisis in 1919. Although her decision to drastically change her self and her life probably was not rationalised in terms of the 'Eternal Return' at the time, it seems likely the episode was retrospectively

⁵ Arnold van Gennep articulated the tripartite model of the rites of passage ritual in his 1909 book The Rites of Passage as 'preliminary', 'liminaire', and 'postliminaire'. Joseph Campbell, in The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 1949, restated these stages as 'departure', 'initiation', and 'return'. In the case of Moss severance took place in relation to her family, her class, her gender, and her nationality. Cornwall provided the liminal space necessary for her 'ordeal' and re-birth. The taking of the new name 'Marlow' signified the return to the community, albeit a new community in Paris.

⁶ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

⁷ Kati Rötger, 'Nachwort -Anmerkungen Zum Titelbild: *White, Black, Red and Grey* Von Marlow Moss', Differenzen in Der Geschlechterdifferenz -Aktuelle Perspektiven Der Geschlechterforschung, eds. Kati Rötger and Heike Paul. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag GmbH & Co, 1999.

⁸ See Appendix 2ii.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, with an Introduction by Kurt F. Reinhardt, trans. Thomas Common. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960, original publication: 1882 / 1886.

¹⁰ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962. 'Livre de chevet' translates as 'bedside book',

legitimised in this way upon becoming acquainted with Nietzsche in the Reading Room of the British Museum, after the establishment of 'Marlow'. In Book 5 of *Joyful Wisdom*, 'We Fearless Ones' (added to the original 1882 text in 1886), Nietzsche dwells on the conscious act of choosing ones "rôle" in life.¹¹ He is "disquieted" by the problem of the actor, and the "dangerous conception" of 'artist' and writes with ambivalence of:

*Falsity with a good conscience; delight in dissimulation breaking forth as power, pushing aside, overflowing, and sometimes extinguishing the so-called 'character'; the inner longing to play a rôle, to assume a mask, to put on an appearance; a surplus of capacity for adaptations of every kind...*¹²

Moss could not have but related this to her own experience, whether or not she considered her 'mask' to have been assumed or relinquished at the point of her transformation from 'Marjorie Jewel' to 'Marlow'.

According to Nijhoff's account, it was reading about the physicist and chemist Marie Curie that was the initial catalyst for Moss's revival from despair. As well as simply personifying a role model of an intellectual, independent and ambitious woman, it is significant the Curie was engaged in the field of science. It is feasible that reading about Curie widened Moss's horizons, beyond the traditional lady-like pursuits of the arts, and encouraged her to follow her interests into philosophy, science, and mathematics.

The inter-war period was an opportune time to reassess ones identity. The horrors of the Great War had revealed the instability of Western civilisation; the once eternal identities of British and French cultures were at this point seen as in decline, or in ruins. A generation of men had been called to the front, and either returned terribly damaged, or perished there. Women, through necessity, had taken over traditionally male roles in their absence, in both the work force and the domestic sphere. When the men returned from the war their mothers, sisters, wives and lovers were different, and this, it can be argued, provoked a great cultural anxiety. A key reference for Linda

¹¹ Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, 1886, Book 5, Section 356, pp.302-303.

¹² Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, 1886, Book 5, Section 361, p.318.

Nochlin's seminal work of feminist art history, first published in 1971, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' is John Stuart Mill's 1869 essay 'The Subjection of Women' in which he points out that "*everything which is usual appears natural*".¹³ The evidential changes in what had been perceived as constants in society before the war provoked fundamental questions regarding the 'naturalness' of gender roles. Culture and nature were irrevocably split.¹⁴ What had seemed natural / cultural, was now revealed as purely cultural, and therefore unstable. Nietzsche had foretold this state of affairs in a passage of Joyful Wisdom:

*...the individual is convinced that he can do almost anything, that he can play almost any rôle, whereby everyone makes experiments with himself, improvises, tries anew, tries with delight, whereby all nature ceases and becomes art...*¹⁵

The acknowledgement of "*cultural mortality*",¹⁶ and the mobility of gender roles conflated and became referents for each other. Mary Louise Roberts takes as a starting point for her study Civilisation without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927, a quotation of novelist and social commentator Pierre Drieu la Rochelle:

*This civilisation no longer has clothes, no longer has churches, no longer has palaces, no longer has theatres, no longer has paintings, no longer has books, no longer has sexes.*¹⁷

Here Drieu places the division of the sexes alongside religion, architecture, art and literature, as Western civilisations greatest cultural achievements, acknowledging gender as cultural artifice perhaps, but also condemning the blurring of gender boundaries as a portent of the collapse of civilisation. It

¹³ John Stuart Mill, cited in Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', Women, Art and Power and Other Essays. London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, p.152.

¹⁴ It should be remembered that "*LA NATURE*" is identified as humanity's "*greatest enemy*" by Moss in her essay for the second issue of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif, in 1933. See Appendix 2i.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, 1886, Book 5, Section 356, p.303.

¹⁶ I take this phrase from Mary Louise Roberts, Civilisation without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927, Women in Culture and Society, ed. Catherine R. Stimpson, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

¹⁷ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle La Suite des Idées, Paris: Au Sens Pareil, 1927, p.125 cited Roberts, Civilisation without Sexes, 1994, p.2.

was during this period of catastrophe that Moss, first in London and then in Paris, began to plot her position within the contested field of gender. It must be underlined that to present an ambiguous gender identity at this time was no small act of bravery. It was in fact against French law for a woman to dress in male clothing, although this was rarely enforced. Moss and Nijhoff were on occasion cursed and spat at when they ventured out of Paris.¹⁸ The incident recounted in Chapter 2 of this thesis, of Moss and Nijhoff's arrest in 1940, by Dutch authorities, on suspicion of being German soldiers disguised as women, serves to demonstrate the potential dangers of causing 'gender trouble'.¹⁹

There are perhaps three separate constructed elements to Moss's identity: the name 'Marlow', her sartorial style, and her work. Moss's work is discussed throughout the following chapters of this thesis, and focussed upon in detail in Chapter 6; for the purposes of this chapter I am examining her work only in general terms, as Constructivist, in relation to gender theory and feminist receptions. There are aspects to Moss's appearance; such as her innate physical characteristics (her race and ethnicity), and her manner and countenance (which can include her nationality), that are separate from her acquired style. These shall not be discussed, as I do not consider them to be consciously constructed features of her identity. The development of an individual's character and personality is a matter for psychoanalysis, and beyond the scope of this thesis. A view of Moss's manner and countenance can be gained from the testimonials of others, and from her letters and other writings in appendix to this thesis. I am limiting my discussion of her physical appearance to her sartorial style, which was certainly a conscious construct. The semantic inter-determination of the two aspects of Moss's constructed identity, her sartorial expression and her adopted name, is expressed most succinctly by Gertrude Stein:

¹⁸ This was told to me by Andreas Oosthoek during a conversation in Middelburg, July 2007.

¹⁹ The phrase 'gender trouble' references Judith Butler's work on gender and identity, to which I shall return at the end of this chapter. Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York and London: Routledge, 1990. The anecdote regarding Moss and Nijhoff's arrest is gleaned from Martinus Nijhoff's account in a letter posthumously published in Brieven Aan Mijn Vrouw, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996.

*dress address name.*²⁰

Appropriately Moss's first known work, almost certainly dating from no later than 1928, and likely to be from before her time at the Académie Moderne (1928-1929), appears to be a self-portrait. (It must be acknowledged that this work is difficult to authenticate as so little information is available, however I am working here from the assumption that the attribution is correct.²¹) The visage is represented in post-Cubist fragments of yellowy-green, with accents of bright red. Moss's features are discernable: her high forehead, her elegant nose, her arched brow and hooded eyes; and also her crisp collar and the neat folds of her cravat. This painting has significance beyond being an experimental student-work on the path to abstraction; it represents, quite figuratively, Moss's struggle to articulate her own self, in the language of Modern Art. She signs herself simply as 'Moss', placing the painted form of her name not to the bottom-right as would be usual, but as a label, directly upon the throat, as if in an effort to verbalise the monosyllable.

'Marlow'.

*There is no such thing as sex where sensibility is concerned, and I know many a highly-regarded canvas which would meet with derision if it were signed with a woman's name.*²²

There are many historical precedents of a woman replacing her given name with an elected masculine one. George Elliot and the Brontë sisters all published under pseudonyms, to avoid discrimination by either publishers or the reading public. These were 'noms de plume' only, and were not used by

²⁰ Gertrude Stein, How to Write, 1931, p.115, cited in Susan Gubar, 'Blessings in Disguise: Cross Dressing as Re-Dressing for Female Modernists', The Massachusetts Review, Vol. 22 1981, p.497.

²¹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 1. I have been unable to establish any provenance from the auction house it passed through in 1990. It is, however, recorded as being by Marlow Moss, and signed; in addition to this I argue it is recognisably a self-portrait. I consider it likely to date from before 1928 as that was the year that Moss began to work non-figuratively, and it is in appearance superficially unlike other works by students of Léger at the Académie Moderne (see Illustrations in appendix to this thesis 4.1 - 4.11).

²² Michel Seuphor, A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, Preceded by a History of Abstract Painting, trans. Lionel Izod, John Montague and Francis Scarfe. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1958, p.70.

their friends, family, or associates when talking to them. On occasions a masculine name has been adopted with the express intention of fooling not only strangers into thinking they were dealing with a man, but to disguise the individual's female gender in general, in the terminology of queer theory: to 'pass'.²³ Moss's adoption of 'Marlow' in preference to 'Marjorie Jewel' was not motivated by a wish to fool either direct associates or the art world into thinking she was a man,²⁴ but rather was symbolic of her transgender identity. This is signified by the fact that 'Marlow' is an ambiguously gendered name, not a specifically masculine one. Virginia Woolf's 'Orlando' is perhaps an appropriate comparison. It must be noted that the desire to de-gender one's name isn't the preserve of lesbians, as is demonstrated by Paule Vézelay (despite the feminine 'e' her name is pronounced 'Paul'), who was heterosexual.

A more pragmatic reason for Moss to change her name from 'Marjorie Jewel Moss' was perhaps to distinguish herself from the dancing starlet Marjorie Moss, who was rather well known in the early 1920s, and appeared with her partner Georges Fontana on 'Lucky Strike' advertisements. There was also the painter Marjorie Mostyn, who attended St. John's Wood School of Art a few years before Moss did, and then later was a founder member of the Penwith Society of Artists. Also there was Mary Jewels, another 'St. Ives' painter, with whom Moss could have possibly been confused.

²³ The term 'pass' is used in gender theory and Queer Theory literature to denote the successful avoidance of detection of a transvestite or transsexual person. The artist Hans Anton Prinner is an example of a female artist who passed as a man, see Sarah Wilson, 'Feminites – Masquerades', in Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography, ed. Jennifer Blessing, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997, footnote 46, pp.134-155. Yakir recounts that Bams-Graham enjoyed the gender-confusion her nickname 'Willie' caused, and believed it freed her from the gender prejudice of collectors initially at least, 'Conclusions' in Nedira Yakir, 'Wilhelmina Bams-Graham & Margaret Mellis: The Gendered Construction of 'St Ives' Display, Positioning and Displacement', Doctoral Thesis, Falmouth College of Art / The University of Plymouth, 2002, p.260.

²⁴ This has however often been the effect: Moss is mistaken for a man in Whittet, 'London Commentary', while another reviewer states he did not know if Moss "*was a man, a woman, or a vegetable growth*" John Russell, 'Predicaments', The Sunday Times 22nd November 1953. Moss is also taken to be a man in memos dating from August 1942 held in the Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers: AAA AHB 2168; Frames 32 and 33, the Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York; and anecdotally on numerous other occasions.

It is not recorded where the name 'Marlow' came from; it could have simply been a nickname derived from Marjorie.²⁵ Moss seemingly was not insistent on the using of her preferred name; as late as 1932 she is listed as 'Marjorie Moss' in the first issue of Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif, although she is simply 'Moss' in subsequent issues.²⁶ Signatures on earlier works tend to be the neutral: 'M. Moss', until the forties when she began to sign her works unequivocally 'Marlow Moss'. In letters to her friends however, and on all official correspondence, she always called herself 'Marlow Moss', from the earliest existent example of 1934.²⁷ In turn she was addressed as 'Miss Moss', 'Marlow Moss', or 'Marlow', by everyone but her family.²⁸

The particular step of re-naming oneself, with an androgynous name, was taken by a number of female artists working in Britain and France concurrently with Moss. Paule Vézelay was originally Marjorie Watson-Williams, Claude Cahun was Lucy Schwob, Marcel Moore was Suzanne Malherbe, and Gluck was Hannah Gluckstein. Gluck, Moss's neighbour in Lamorna, was draconically insistent on the use of her monosyllabic name with "*no prefix, suffix or quotes*", and resigned from an art society when they, in an effort to be polite, mistakenly referred to her as 'Miss Gluck' on the letterhead.²⁹ Moss too preferred not to have a gendering title preceding her chosen name, as can be seen on her application form to the Artists International Association which she filled in "*Moss, Marlow (Marlow Moss)*", but ignored the requirement to "*please state whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss*".³⁰

²⁵ Moss had another nickname: 'the bird', given to her by Netty Nijhoff on account of her small and delicate stature, Marja Pruis, 'Een Schok Van Herkenning: De Vriendship Van A.H. Nijhoff En Marlow Moss', Jaarboek Voor Vrouwengeschiedenis. Issue 18, 1998.

²⁶ Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorized Reprint Ed. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 - 1936. New York: Arno, 1968.

²⁷ This is a letter to Georges Vantongerloo dated 2/10/34. Please see Letter 1 Appendix 3ii.

²⁸ Val Mullen referred to her as "*Aunt Marjorie*" in her correspondence with me.

²⁹ Diana Souhami, Gluck: Her Biography. London: Pandora Press, 1989.

³⁰ See Appendix 4i.

Moss's Sartorial Expression.

In a passage from her 1931 novel Twee Meisjes En Ik, Nijhoff seemingly describes Moss:

She had her hair cut to above her ears. It was combed down in a parting across her small skull so that it formed a thin, shiny line that surrounded the strict oval of her high, white forehead on both sides. She was already wearing her pastel-coloured cravats which were tied high around her narrow throat. They contrasted with the pure line of her jaw and her chin, emphasised the pale glimmer of her skin and deepened the golden-brown of her eyes.³¹

The primary sources for an examination of Moss's sartorial expression, are the thirteen existent photographs of her.³² The earliest of these is a portrait of around 1930-35, and the majority of the photographs probably date from the 1940s and 1950s. Coupled with Nijhoff's testimonial that in, or shortly after, 1919, Moss cut off her hair and changed her style of dressing, the photographs provide visual evidence; but as they are from at least ten or fifteen years later, they do not constitute proof that the transformation was instantaneous and complete. These photographic portraits of Moss lend credence to the idea of an auto-constructed gender identity; it may have been Stephen Storm (Wouter Stefan Nijhoff) who pressed the shutter on most occasions, but Moss possesses authorship of her image. Each highly posed gesture, even in the less formal snap-shots, but especially in the portraits, carries weight. The costumes, which include stiff collars and cuffs, silk cravats, jodhpurs, and riding jackets, and the props, most noticeably a half-smoked cigarette, are all carefully considered signifiers. They invoke the country gentleman, the sportsman, and the aristocratic dandy. Masculinity is not the only 'false' claim amongst these; Moss was an artist not a jockey, a Jew not a gentile, and from the urban merchant class rather than to-the-manor-born. All types of clothing fashion functions in this way, projecting a selected identity by means of a language of culturally ascribed indicators. In the most formally posed portrait photographs Moss's appearance of maleness

³¹ Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Twee Meisjes En Ik, Fourth ed. Amsterdam: Querido, 1949, p.137. The English translation quoted here is from Florette Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, trans. Annie Wright, Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1995, p.7.

³² See Illustrations in appendix to this thesis, Figures 3.1 - 3.13.

is extreme to the extent that she could 'pass'. The format ascribes her with the characteristics of a protagonist. The lack of contextual information disguises her diminutive size. Her slightly rakish attitude invokes masculine femininity, a kind of foppishness, rather than female masculinity; she is not butch.³³

Possibly Moss's representation can be, in part at least, ascribed to the man behind the camera, Stefan Nijhoff. Moss, as the partner of his mother, was in effect his stepfather. It is possible that he could have projected such a role upon her, or that she intuitively took on that persona whilst under the scrutiny of his lens. As a Surrealist, in apprenticeship to Man Ray, Stephen Storm (the nom de plume of Stefan Nijhoff) would have been aware of the possibilities of gender slippage, and possibly made it a subject of his photographic work.³⁴ His own homosexuality would have added a further layer of complexity to the interchange as he scrutinised Moss and composed his shot. Moss: the usurper of his father in his mother's affections, who, in Oedipal terms, had succeeded Stefan himself; was in some ways an equivalent for him; but she also further destabilized Stefan's own masculinity. In none of the formally posed portrait photographs does Moss engage the photographer, or the viewer's, gaze. Although she is clearly aware of the camera, and the eyes of her audience, she stares into an introspective space, or in the case of one image, above the viewer's head. A woman's averted gaze can index many things: modesty, submission, coquettishness, or a vulnerable state of reverie, but generally a complicity in her objectification. Conversely a man's averted gaze indicates his preoccupation with his inner, intellectual life, and his indifference to the viewer. Because Moss's appearance is more male than

³³ The representation of women as dandy and flâneur, feminised masculine identities, is discussed in Bridget Elliot, 'Performing the Picture or Painting the Other: Romaine Brooks, Gluck and the Question of Decadence in 1923', *Women Artists and Modernism*, ed. Katy Deepwell, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998, pp.70-82. Alongside Brooks and Gluck, Tamara de Lempicka's portrait of Moss's friend Marika de la Salle is another example of this. Tirza True Latimer points out that the women of *Le Monocle* photographed by Brassai (see Illustration 3.14) wear costumes connected to the sartorial grammar of male homosexuality such as the dandy-aesthete and the sailor, 'Lesbian Paris Between The Wars' Latimer, *Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris*, 2005, p.24.

³⁴ The oeuvre of Stephen Storm remains largely unknown. His photographs and papers are currently kept in storage in a Zurich bank vault, as are Moss's works, also under the care of Andreas Oosthoek.

female in these portraits; her lack of direct eye contact with the viewer can only be read in the male mode. Moss is composed and contemplative.

Her appearance in the more casual portraits, and in the snap shots where she was perhaps unaware, or less aware, of the camera, is less masculine, and more androgynous. Here non-feminine clothes are worn by Moss, Nijhoff, and Marika de la Salle, as a proclamation of their refusal to conform to society's norms in general. Another friend, the Dutch literary translator Margrit de Sablonière,³⁵ referred to Moss's manner of dress to support her description of Moss as "*self-evident and natural*", directly contradicting the notion of 'dressing up'. In her obituary article to Moss, written in 1958, she invokes her friend turning up to the private view of her own exhibitions "*in her trusty raincoat*", with little concern for "*social trimmings*".³⁶ In a photograph of Moss and Nijhoff at Gauciel Moss wears a cardigan, and her hands are thrust, with almost adolescent awkwardness, into the pockets of her jodhpurs.³⁷ In a casual group photograph of Moss with friends she wears a calf-length skirt, or possibly culottes.³⁸ A snap of her in the back of a car with Poema Vantongerloo shows her in a lady's hat, with even perhaps a brooch embellishing her jacket, giving her the appearance of a respectable middle-aged woman, if a little maiden-auntish to the twenty-first century viewer.³⁹ Nijhoff's description of Moss's appearance during her illness at the end of her life attests to the fact that her sartorial choices were not purely 'masculine'.

*...her face was powdered and her pyjamas were closed at the neck with a small golden brooch.*⁴⁰

The theatricality of the portraits, rather than the snap-shots, emphasizes the performative nature of identity. They demonstrate the individual's ability to

³⁵ 'De Sablonière' was a pseudonym: her real surname was Caarten-Sigter.

³⁶ Margrit de Sablonière, 'Bij Het Heengaan Van Marlow Moss', *Museumjournaal* Series 4. Nos. 5-6, 1958. The translations here are taken from Dijkstra, *Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project*, 1995, p.25. See the end of Chapter 2 of this thesis for the full passage quoted by Dijkstra.

³⁷ See Illustrations: Figure 3.7.

³⁸ See Illustrations: Figure 3.10.

³⁹ See Illustrations: Figure 3.12.

⁴⁰ Bibeb, 'A.H. Nijhoff : Ik Voel Er Absoluut Niet Voor Alle Woelingen in Mijzelf Op Tafel Te Gooien', *Vrij Nederland*, 1967.

transgress cultural boundaries, and consciously create a self. To what extent the fantasy-self existed outside these striking images is arguable; they instead represent the identity Moss laid claim to, the way she saw herself, and the way she wished to be seen in posterity. As Sarah Wilson has pointed out in her essay 'Feminites – Masquerades'; photography is itself technically a process of inversion (from the negative to the positive image),⁴¹ and therefore perhaps the appropriate tool for Moss's self-(re)presentation.

Whilst posing for a portrait is a mutually sanctioned performance between artist and model (or artist / model and artist / photographer), for a limited time-period, the clothes that Moss wore in daily life represent a blurring of the boundaries between performance and reality; art and life. Mary Louise Roberts observes in her essay 'Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Fashion in 1920s France':

*Fashion acted as a presentation of self, in part grounded in fantasy and wish fulfilment.*⁴²

By displaying the outward trappings of masculinity, Moss not only advertised her sexuality, and challenged male dominance; she also exposes the nature of those trappings as signifiers only.⁴³ This conscious play with the language of clothing fashion is discussed by Susan Gubar in her essay 'Blessings in Disguise: Cross Dressing as Re-Dressing for Female Modernists', she says:

*...as the etymology of the word transvestite implies, they do this to make a travesty of sexual signs.*⁴⁴

⁴¹ Wilson, 'Feminites – Masquerades', 1997, p.143.

⁴² Mary Louise Roberts, 'Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Fashion in 1920s France', *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003, p.79. Roberts discusses the extent to which the fashion of the twenties offered an illusory appearance of freedom, rather than actual freedom of movement to women, pp.82-83.

⁴³ This functioning of the costumed and posed photographic portrait is discussed in relation to Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore's work in Julie Cole, 'Claude Cahun, Marcel Moore, and the Collaborative Construction of a Lesbian Subjectivity', *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: The University of California Press, 2005.

⁴⁴ Gubar, 'Blessings in Disguise', 1981, p.502

There is no evidence beyond Nijhoff's account, which, if she did not invent details herself, can only have been arrived at through Moss telling her, that Moss had begun to dress in a 'manly' fashion before arriving in Paris in 1927.⁴⁵ However, according to Nijhoff, and Moss therefore, the transformation took place in 1919. It wasn't a Parisian look that Moss sported in any case; she wore an 'Eton Crop' rather than a Coco Chanel 'bob'. The now most notorious trans-gender personality she could have come across in London during the twenties would have been Radclyffe Hall. However, The Well of Loneliness wasn't published until after Moss had moved to Paris, and the female invert (as lesbians are referred to throughout Hall's novel) was yet to become the focus of a scandalised British public.⁴⁶ Any lesbian scene that did exist in London in the twenties was very much underground, and is largely unrecorded.⁴⁷ It is not known to what extent Moss connected with like-minded individuals in the early years of her new identity. Nijhoff's account certainly implies that she sought out subversive activity of some kind, as she recounts that during the early twenties Moss had "*strange experiences*" in "*nocturnal London*".⁴⁸

Once in Paris, and perhaps this was the pre-eminent reason for Moss's emigration, there was a far more visible lesbian scene. The fantastical and exhibitionist lesbians and female transvestites of clubs such as Le Monocle in the 1930s are documented in the series of photographs by Brassai entitled '*Paris de Nuit*'.⁴⁹ Romaine Brooks, and the Marquise de Belbeuf Mathilde de Morny, were amongst the most well known mannish lesbians to frequent the literary and artistic salons, bars, clubs, bookshops, and theatres. The most

⁴⁵ Val Mullen attests to her aunt's sartorial style being fully realised by sometime before 1928, in an email to myself, dated 1st April 2007.

⁴⁶ Radclyffe Hall, The Well of Loneliness, London: Virago, 1997. The concept of 'inversion' was derived from the psychopathology of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and became common currency from the 1897 publication of Havelock Ellis's study: Sexual Inversion. Ivan Crozier, ed., Sexual Inversion by Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds: A Critical Edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Hall's novel was first published in 1928, and put on trial for obscenity the same year. It was banned in Britain until 1949.

⁴⁷ Tirza True Latimer states that there was no parallel to the Parisian lesbian scene in England during the 1920s and 1930s, Latimer, Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris, 2005, footnote 20, p.147.

⁴⁸ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

⁴⁹ 'Brassai' was the pseudonym of Gyula Halász. See Illustrations: Figure 3.14.

infamous weekly salons were held at the homes of Gertrude Stein and Natalie Barney, both expatriate American poets, and both lesbians. Here artists and writers, almost all foreigners, mingled and drank tea, in an existence parallel but separate from the rest of Paris. Andrea Weiss, in her study Paris Was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank, comments that:

*It was not that Paris was more 'liberated' than England or America in its attitudes towards women, but simply that it left its foreigners alone.*⁵⁰

It is not known if, or to what extent, Moss frequented the salons. It is likely that she could have accessed them through Netty Nijhoff, if she had wished to, as both Nijhoff, and her husband Martinus Nijhoff, were very well connected with the international literary scene. Moss may also have frequented Le Monocle, although it is possible she considered her nights of exploring seedy nightclubs to be behind her.

There is a pitfall in feminist theory, gender and Queer Theory that is to project values back erroneously, this can cause a mis-reading, or at least an over-reading of figures such as Moss. 'The closet', or the concept of 'coming out' of it, had not yet been invented in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵¹ It is necessary, if fraught, to attempt instead the development of a "period eye".⁵²

*By determining precisely what notions of female identity were available to individual ... women, we can understand what cultural resources they drew on in conceiving and living a social self.*⁵³

As Laura Doan has demonstrated in her study Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture, it was not unusual for a certain type of aristocratic, educated, and liberal woman to dress in a 'mannish'

⁵⁰ Andrea Weiss, Paris Was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank. London: Pandora (Imprint of HarperCollins), 1995, p.21.

⁵¹ As pointed out by Tirza True Latimer, in Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris, 2005, p.2; with reference to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Epistemology of the Closet, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

⁵² Latimer, Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris, 2005, p.7.

⁵³ Roberts, Civilisation without Sexes, 1994, p.14.

way.⁵⁴ Such a woman, a 'New Woman', (or 'boyette' as the press dubbed them), would have been considered very fashionable, one of the 'Bright Young People'. Also an androgynous appearance was indexical of women's liberation, as embodied by Monique Lerbier in Victor Margueritte's best-selling novel of 1922 La Garçonne.⁵⁵ Her appearance would be a signifier for emancipation and modernity; not necessarily sexual identity, as it is now read. Doan's book is populated with dashing young women in tailored suits, cropped hair and monocles, and many of them were heterosexual.

The fashion for tailored masculine suits could be connected to the recent war. The aesthetic of military uniform becomes desirable because it denotes the conspicuous leisure of an officer class associated with an honourable, yet futile, endeavour.⁵⁶ Such an association would be on an entirely unconscious level, and is not indicative of any position regarding the war or politics. The same connection can be made with Moss's fondness for riding attire, as there is no account of her actually riding a horse. Unlike Stephen Gordon (the female protagonist of Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness) Moss seemingly adopts the costume of the redcoat without actually participating in the hunt. Moss travelled on foot, or by pony and trap, for which jodhpurs aren't strictly necessary.

On a broad level the fashion for women to wear clothes previously reserved for men, was a consequence and reflection of the women's movement. It demonstrated that the concepts of 'masculine' and 'feminine' operate separately from those of 'male' and 'female', the former being cultural constructs, the latter merely biology. In 1919, the year of Moss's transformation, the French journalist and writer Henriette Sauret described the

⁵⁴ Laura Doan, Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

⁵⁵ Victor Margueritte, The Bachelor Girl (*La Garçonne*), trans. Hugh Burnaby, First English Edition ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923.

⁵⁶ 'Conspicuous leisure', along with 'conspicuous consumption', is a tendency in clothing fashion discussed in Quentin Bell, On Human Finery, London: Allison & Busby, 1992. It was first identified by Thorstein Veblen, in The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions, London: Unwin Books, 1925. Both war and sport can be defined as 'honourable' and 'futile', and both military and sporting clothing denote the 'conspicuous leisure' of a privileged social class.

fashion for cutting off of ones hair as a "*gesture of independence; a personal endeavour*", as if the flowing tresses of the pre-war period were actual shackles to be thrown off.⁵⁷ Sauret's words seem to characterise Moss's decision; whether they directly precipitated it is a matter of supposition. Thorstein Veblen's The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions was first published in Britain in 1925, while Moss was still in London, and engaged in her "*reading-room period*" of self-education.⁵⁸ He found conventional women's clothing fashion to be particularly exemplary of his theory of dress.

*In woman's dress there is obviously greater insistence on such features as testify to the wearer's exemption from or incapacity for all vulgarly productive employment. This characteristic of woman's apparel is of interest, not only as completing the theory of dress, but also as confirming what has already been said of the economic status of women, both in the past and in the present.*⁵⁹

Restrictive corsetry, delicate and high-heeled shoes, impractical fabrics, elegant bonnets, voluminous skirts, and excessively long hair, indexed women as vessels for the vicarious expression of a man's conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure.⁶⁰ Such a reading of the conventional attire of her sex could have only compounded Moss's desire for an alternative.⁶¹

Tailoring was only overtly connected with lesbianism at the point of the obscenity trial of The Well of Loneliness in 1928. In the twenties Radclyffe Hall's manner of dress would not have been seen as particularly masculine. After the trial however, lesbian sexuality was widely seen as masculine behaviour in a woman, and the sartorial style of Hall was inextricably linked to this. Moss was certainly not perturbed by the signal her sartorial style potentially broadcast from 1928 onwards, and continued to dress in this way

⁵⁷ Sauret is cited in Roberts, 'Samson and Delilah Revisited', 1994, p.68 and p.80.

⁵⁸ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

⁵⁹ Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class, 1925, pp.125-126.

⁶⁰ Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class, 1925, pp.68-69.

⁶¹ Veblen emphatically does not write in support of the 'New Woman', whom he sees as part of a decadent tendency of dissatisfaction, symptomatic of the leisure class, and even suggests that such a woman is reverting to a "*sub-human*" or "*proto-anthropoid*" state, Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class, 1925, pp.231-234.

for the rest of her life. If before she had been seen as bohemian and eccentric, from this point she was seen as lesbian also. The message was mitigated, however, by the fact that lesbianism itself was not illegal, in either France or Great Britain, unlike homosexuality amongst men.⁶² Not being defined by law allowed lesbianism to remain indeterminate, and masculine female identities to continue to be nuanced and shifting.

Moss's most important connection was to the Académie Moderne, which, like the lesbian scene, was also a largely expatriate and international community; but significantly it was French at its Purist roots. This casts a new light upon the initial assumption when confronted with a photograph of Moss: that she is dressed as a man. This is taken as a given by Rötger for example when she suggests that Nijhoff, or Moss herself, formulated a male identity for Moss to gain entry to a male canon.⁶³ Shari Benstock also makes this assumption when she accuses lesbian cross-dressers of binding homosexuals to a heterosexual paradigm.⁶⁴ Some scholars have speculated that French Purism, and also other Modernist tendencies, equated femininity with nineteenth century aestheticism and the decadence that had been purged from France by the First World War (or 'the Great Test' as it was commonly called); modernity was masculine.⁶⁵ The link between a Purist aesthetic and masculinity is implied by Le Corbusier in his discussion of the sin of decoration:

⁶² Homosexuality amongst men had been decriminalised in France under the Napoleonic Code of 1804, but remained illegal in England.

⁶³ Rötger, 'Nachwort -Anmerkungen Zum Titelbild: White, Black, Red and Grey Von Marlow Moss', 1999, p.359.

⁶⁴ Shari Benstock, Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940. London: Virago Press, 1994, p.266.

⁶⁵ This is argued in Kenneth E. Silver, 'Purism: Straightening up after the Great War', ArtForum Vol. 15, No. 7, 1977; and Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting', Post-Impressionism to World War 2, ed. Debbie Lewer, Blackwell's Anthologies in Art History, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005; and Lisa Tickner, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism', Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations, eds. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, Hanover and London: University Press of New England / Wesleyan University Press, 2005; and Anna C. Chave, 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power', Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts, eds. Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris, London: Phaidon Press in association with The Open University, 1992. Nietzsche too welcomed the "*Virilising of Europe*", although he saw this tendency in opposition to "*modern ideas*" which have "*pampered*" 'woman', Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, 1886, Book 5, Section 362, p.320.

*Previously, decorative objects were rare and costly. Today they are commonplace and cheap. Previously plain objects were commonplace and cheap; today they are rare and expensive... Today decorative objects flood the shelves of the Department Stores; they sell cheaply to shop girls.*⁶⁶

The equation between the female, the working class and kitsch / decorative design, implies the unity of its opposite: Purist design, the educated class, and the male. The argument is developed as Le Corbusier connects the decorative and the feminine with 'primitive' societies, making the traditional misogynist link between woman and nature, alongside the racist implication. In Le Corbusier's view, which was reflective of a popular patriotic view in inter-war France, for the nation to regain its former glory it must return to the classicism of its heritage, and shed all that is frivolous, decorative, romantic, Germanic, and effeminate. This was characterised as a 'call to order': 'l'esprit nouveau' in Apollinairean terms. To a certain extent, l'esprit nouveau was a reaction against a perceived feminisation of art and culture, in the wake of the women's liberation movement; "*the disgusting softness of modern life*" as Gaudier-Brzeska put it.⁶⁷ It was feared that the ever-increasing numbers of women entering the arts professionally would result in a "*flood of mediocrity*".⁶⁸ To counter this Ozenfant and Jeanneret argued:

*Purism offers an art that is perhaps severe, but one that addresses itself to the elevated faculties of the mind.*⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Le Corbusier 'The Decorative Art of Today' 1925, p.87, cited in Chapter 2 'The Language of Construction', Briony Fer, David Batchelor and Paul Wood, Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars, New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with The Open University, 1993, p.155.

⁶⁷ Henri Gaudier-Brzeska as recalled by Ezra Pound quoted in Tickner, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism', 2005.

⁶⁸ Octave Uzanne in The Modern Parisienne, 1907, cited in Tickner, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism', 2005. Uzanne's article is also quoted at length in Gill Perry, Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and 'Feminine' Art, 1900 to the Late 1920s, Manchester / New York: Manchester University Press, 1995, p.7.

⁶⁹ Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) and Amédée Ozenfant 'Le Purisme', first published in L'Esprit Nouveau, No. 4, 1920, pp.369-386. The translation used here is that of Robert L. Herbert, from his anthology Modern Artists on Art, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, pp.59-73, this line appears p.66, and is cited in Silver, 'Purism: Straightening up after the Great War', 1977, p.59. Herbert's translation of 'Purism' is also reproduced in Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. Pp 237-40.

Feminists, in effect, have condoned the assumption that such a sensibility is a male prerogative. As Judith Lorber has argued in her article 'Using Gender to Undo Gender: A Feminist Degendering Movement', 2000, feminist writing thus far has failed to tackle the foundations of female inequality: binary gender categorisation.

*While racial, ethnic, class and sexual divisions have been significantly challenged, the belief that gender divisions are normal and natural; is still an underlying frame for modern social life. ...feminists who seek change in the structure and value system of gendered social orders rarely challenge the binary divisions...*⁷⁰

Moss recognised no such barrier, and it seems Ozenfant and Léger did not in practice, as they invested their time in the development of her work under their tutelage; and to Gorin, Bill, and Vantongerloo, Moss was a comrade on equal footing. Mondrian too, regarded Moss and her work with respect.

Adolph Loos, some years previously, wrote specifically on women's clothing fashions from a Modernist perspective. With such unnecessary ornamentation and impractical design, he saw women's attire as symptomatic of the retrogressive and degenerate nature of woman; as opposed to man, whose clothes were simple and functional, and representative of l'esprit nouveau.⁷¹ Moss therefore, first and foremost, was dressing in accordance with Modernism, and only by default as a man.

Moss's manner of dress wasn't only a declaration of her sexual orientation; if the masculine signified modernity, then homosexuality denoted intellectual and artistic superiority. It was a commonly held belief during the twenties that the 'invert' possessed a rare and special insight and creativity, resulting from the state of being a synthesis of the genders. Sexologists such as Edward Carpenter spoke of a "*peculiar aristocracy ... of the higher mental and artistic*

⁷⁰ Judith Lorber 'Using Gender to Undo Gender: A Feminist Degendering Movement', *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 79-95, 2000, p.80.

⁷¹ Adolph Loos 'Ladies' Fashion', first published in *Neue Freie Presse*, 21st August 1898, discussed and quoted in Chapter 2 'The Language of Construction' in Fer, Batchelor and Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars*, 1993, p.156.

element".⁷² This can be connected to the balance between the masculine and feminine elements that Mondrian sought; but the 'invert' was rather a whole other type of being.⁷³ The 'invert' transcended the gender divide altogether. Although this idea possibly appealed to Moss, the notion of a 'third sex', or the inversion of only two possibilities of gender, was discredited by Freud as early as 1920, and Havelock Ellis himself in 1933.⁷⁴ However the idea of the 'mannish lesbian' as a man tragically trapped in the body of woman was powerful, and often perpetuated by lesbians themselves.⁷⁵ Early twentieth century sexologists such as Otto Weininger and Magnus Hirschfeld, who equated the feminine with negative concepts, supported the idea that lesbians were more biologically masculine than other women, and, certainly in Weininger's opinion, therefore more capable of genius.⁷⁶ These 'scientific' ideas may have appealed to Moss; they at least formed a backdrop, as she strove to understand her own position, and establish her identity. This would have put her in opposition to her fellow Parisian Sapphists: Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney and Colette, who objected to cross-dressing as a behaviour that supported the notion of a lesbian as internally male.⁷⁷ As Judith Halberstam has argued:

⁷² Edward Carpenter *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women*, London: George Allan and Unwin, 1908, p.34, cited Latimer, *Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris*, 2005, p.6.

⁷³ This idea was first discussed in scientific terms by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his 1886 publication *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The superiority of the intermediate sex was a proposition also of Camille Spiess in the 1920s. Romaine Brooks emphatically subscribed to this view.

⁷⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1966. Havelock Ellis's 1933 *The Psychology of Sex* is cited in Tirza True Latimer, 'Looking Like a Lesbian: Portraiture and Sexual Identity in 1920s Paris', in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003, footnote 20, p.141. Lorber points out, in her 2000 article cited above, that a 'third gender' does exist in some Native American and African societies, the examples she gives however seemingly still rely upon the poles of male and female, footnote 3, p.91.

⁷⁵ Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* is the classic example of this but, as Latimer argues, many contemporary commentators still fall back on this cliché, Latimer, 'Looking Like a Lesbian', 2003, footnote 21, p.142.

⁷⁶ Magnus Hirschfeld, continuing the work of Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs, developed the idea of a 'third sex' around 1900, and was an advocate of rights for women and homosexuals. Otto Weininger, who published his book *Sex and Character* in 1903, in contrast, was a misogynist and an anti-Semite, but followed the same line as Hirschfeld regarding the third sex.

⁷⁷ Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*, 1994, p.11 and p.59.

... 'thirdness' merely balances the binary system and, furthermore, tends to homogenize many different gender variations under the banner of 'other'.⁷⁸

The notion of an ideal unified being of the third sex, an androgyne or hermaphrodite, can be traced back to Plato's Symposium, and formed Mondrian's conception of the artist as at once both man and woman: "*because the artist is sexless ... the artist accordingly represents the female and the male principle*".⁷⁹ Mondrian himself was asexual rather than androgynous, and considered himself to be entirely male; the polarities of the masculine and feminine were not symmetrically equal and opposite, but hierarchical and representative of the 'inward' and spiritual (good) and the 'outward' and material (bad) respectively.

In painting ... domination by the female element was abolished when the male element in our mentality became more determinate. Then art changed its expression: representation disappeared, and the plastic itself grew increasingly toward female-male equilibrium.⁸⁰

Although he often displayed a dislike for women, Mondrian still distinguished the feminine principle (the enemy of art), from the biologically female body; femininity could be present, and vanquished, from a person of either sex. He had a particular interest in purifying woman of the feminine principle, as a metaphor for the purification of art. This is played out in the 1911 painting '*Evolution*'.⁸¹ As the nude female figure undergoes her transformation, she becomes progressively less female.⁸² Her hair shrinks from sensuous abundance, to nothing, her hips narrow in relation to her shoulders, and the focus shifts from the glowing belly and breasts of the first two figures (far left

⁷⁸ Judith Halberstam, 'The Art of Gender: Bathrooms, Butches, and the Aesthetics of Female Masculinity', in Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography, ed. Jennifer Blessing, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997, p.179.

⁷⁹ Piet Mondrian, written in pencil in 'Sketchbook 1', reproduced and translated into English in Joop M. Joosten and Robert P. Welsh, eds., Two Mondrian Sketchbooks (1912-1914). Amsterdam: Meulenhoff International, 1969, p.22.

⁸⁰ Piet Mondrian, 'The New Plastic in Painting', 1917, trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, eds. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, The Documents of Twentieth Century Art. London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, p.69.

⁸¹ See Illustrations: Figure 3.15.

⁸² Mark A. Cheetham, 'Purity or Danger: Mondrian's Exclusion of the Feminine and the Gender of Abstract Painting', Women and Reason, eds. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Kathleen Okruhlik. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992, pp.192-194.

and far right), to the head of the central figure who has become an “*equilibrated, androgynous ‘force’*”.⁸³ The narrative of this painting is more than a little reminiscent of Moss’s own awakening, and discovery of Mondrian and Constructive art.

Mondrian himself ascribed significance to clothing fashion, as is evidenced by some notes in his hand of 1930.⁸⁴ Although not as radically as Moss, Mondrian also underwent an image-change in accordance with his aesthetic positioning, as is described by David Sylvester:

*Mondrian felt it mattered that an artist should present himself in a manner appropriate to his artistic aims. A photograph taken of him in 1908 shows a bearded floppy-haired Victorian man of sensibility. A photograph of 1911 shows a twentieth-century technologist, clean-shaven with a centre parting and brilliantined hair; the spectacles were an inevitable accessory. Soft and hairy becomes hard and smooth...*⁸⁵

As an equivalent to Neo-Plasticism in painting, Mondrian advocated the “*tautened lines and unified planes*” of crisp tailoring “*to oppose the undulating lines and soft forms of the body*”.⁸⁶

Moss’s sartorial style is a complex construction indexical of the Modern artist. The portrait photographs form testimony to Moss’s identity for posterity, and now, perhaps to a greater extent than when they are made, act as agents for ‘gender trouble’.⁸⁷ The argument, that for a lesbian to dress as a man was to comply with gender stereotypes, reinforces the assumption that Moss was dressed simply as a man. I hope to have problematized this reading to a certain extent, and demonstrated that Moss’s sartorial expression is more subtle and nuanced. When examined with reference to a contemporary lexicon of signification, Moss is dressed not as a man, but as a Modernist.

⁸³ Cheetham, ‘Purity or Danger’, 1992, p.194.

⁸⁴ Piet Mondrian, [A Note on Fashion] 1930, trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, The Documents of Twentieth Century Art, London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, p.226.

⁸⁵ David Sylvester, ‘A Tulip with White Leaves: An Essay on Mondrian’, Studio International Vol. 172. No. 884, 1966, p.293.

⁸⁶ Mondrian, [A Note on Fashion] (1930).

⁸⁷ I use this phrase in the sense established by Butler, Gender Trouble, 1990.

The model of a 'male-surrogate' is inappropriate for Moss in her sartorial style as it is for her Constructivist art practice. To view her as a pseudo-man, or in any way in opposition to women, or feminism, is simplistic, and merely returns us to the binary model.

...female Modernists escaped the strictures of societally-defined femininity by appropriating the costumes they identified with freedom. By the turn of the century, moreover, many identified male clothing with just such a costume of freedom.

Cross-dressing in the Modernist period is therefore not only a personal or sexual statement on the part of women; it is also a social and political statement that exploits the rhetoric of costuming to redefine the female self.⁸⁸

It is not without significance that when a portrait photograph of Mondrian is juxtaposed with one of Moss, their appearances are strikingly similar.⁸⁹

Feminism, Misogyny, Constructivism, and the Reception of Moss.

The part women have to play is not always easy. Their work is examined with the same aggressive suspicion by feminists and anti-feminists alike, the former expecting them to prove more than they are capable of and the latter pouncing on the slightest pretext for running them down.⁹⁰

In many ways Moss is the feminist art historian's model cause; a woman who has been recognised by her contemporaries as an influential, important and prolific artist, whose career and posthumous reputation has been maligned by chauvinism. If her female gender was a contributory factor to her omission from art history, which in general terms it surely must be, then it could be expected that feminist art historians would facilitate her re-emergence; yet this has largely not been the case. The identity Moss constructed for herself, through both her physical appearance and through the work she produced, has not been conducive to a feminist reception of her.

⁸⁸ Gubar, 'Blessings in Disguise', 1981, p.498, cited in Benstock, Women of the Left Bank, 1994, p.177.

⁸⁹ See Illustrations: Figure 3.16.

⁹⁰ Seuphor, A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, Preceded by a History of Abstract Painting, 1958, p.70.

The discourse of modern art, like many other histories, is fraught with misogyny. The Italian Futurists openly stated in their 1909 manifesto their "*contempt of women*", and their aim to combat feminism.⁹¹ Mondrian concurred, describing the Futurist "*hatred of woman*" as "*entirely justified*"⁹² and characterising the female principle as inferior to the male.⁹³ He said:

*Woman is against art, against abstraction - in her innermost being.*⁹⁴

Moss's teacher at the Académie Moderne Amédée Ozenfant provides another example of the use of 'woman' as a pejorative, when he wrote of "*some illogical woman's argument*".⁹⁵ Nietzsche too lists feminism alongside "*mendaciousness ... weakness and cowardice*" in a passage of Joyful Wisdom.⁹⁶ The general climate of misogyny in Modernist discourse has presented an obstacle to a feminist reception of Modernist art in general: Modernism is seemingly an exclusively masculine preserve. This has precipitated a feminist challenge to much Modernist art,⁹⁷ and the Modernist paradigm in its entirety. In this way feminism has been a major catalyst to the Post-Modern rejection of Modernist values. The non-figurative movement is characterised as the culmination of the Modernist project, and therefore has been the most denigrated by Post-Modernity across the political spectrum; on the political right Modernist architecture and monuments especially recall an

⁹¹ As discussed in Whitney Chadwick, Women, Art and Society. London: Thames and Hudson, 1996, p.262.

⁹² Piet Mondrian, 'Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence' 1920, trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, eds. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, The Documents of Twentieth Century Art. London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, p.137.

⁹³ Piet Mondrian in Part 6 of 'The New Plastic in Painting' of 1917: 'Conclusion: Nature and Spirit as Female and Male Elements', in The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, 1987, pp.64-69.

⁹⁴ Piet Mondrian, written in pencil in 'Sketchbook 1', reproduced and translated into English in Joosten and Welsh, eds., Two Mondrian Sketchbooks (1912-1914), 1969, p.19.

⁹⁵ Amédée Ozenfant, from an extract of Foundations of Modern Art reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p.352.

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, 1886, Book 5, Section 357, p.308.

⁹⁷ The feminist challenge to Modernist art is exemplified by Carol Duncan's 1973 ArtForum essay, 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting'.

authoritarian socialist rhetoric, on the left such an aesthetic implies elitist esoterica.⁹⁸

Geometric non-figurative art is often seen as the most extremely masculine guise of the non-figurative art movement, and therefore the most problematic for a feminist reading. This issue became of note within a research project conducted by the sociologist Elizabeth Chaplin and the artist Malcolm Hughes in the 1980s, on British Systemic Constructive artists (male and female), and then subsequently the *raison d'être* of the artist collective Countervail of the nineties.⁹⁹ Countervail comprised seven women Constructive artists who had previously taken part in the research project: Nicole Charlett, Judith Dean, Natalie Dower, Tam Giles, Jean Spencer, Susan Tebby and Jane Wilbraham; and one sociologist: Elizabeth Chaplin. To a certain extent the group was born out of an exchange of letters between Chaplin and Giles, in *Art Monthly*.¹⁰⁰ Chaplin, in response to an article by Deanna Petherbridge discussing the tensions in her own work between feminism and aesthetics, wrote in to the journal voicing her concern that the relationship between feminism and the works of the women artists involved in her research project was not clear to her. Giles described this letter as "*a bombshell*" to the women artists who had taken part in the interviews of the previous years.¹⁰¹ She wrote in accusing Chaplin of being "*restrictive and reactionary*" in her implicit acceptance of the masculinity of Constructivism, calling this position

⁹⁸ This point is made by Tam Giles, in 'The Science Option: Seven Women Constructivists on Feminism and Femininity', *Ruimte* Vol. 2. Jaargang 11, 1994, p.32.

⁹⁹ An account of the original research project appears in Elizabeth Chaplin, 'Social Science and Systemic Constructivism, Elizabeth Chaplin and Malcolm Hughes -23 Systemic Constructive Artists: A Methodological Experiment', *Constructivist Forum*. No.6, 1986. Accounts of Countervail are given in Giles, 'The Science Option', 1994; and Elizabeth Chaplin, *Sociology and Visual Representation*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994. There were four Countervail exhibitions between 1992 and 1994, in Sheffield's Mappin Gallery, The Mead Gallery at The University of Warwick, York University, and The King's Manor Gallery, York. See Michael Tooby, *Countervail* (Exhibition: 26th September - 15th November 1992), Sheffield: Mappin Art Gallery, 1992. The first exhibition is reviewed in Clifford Myerson, 'Countervail', *Art Monthly*, No. 161, 1992.

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Chaplin, 'Constructivism and Feminism', *Art Monthly*. No. 125, 1989; Tam Giles, 'Constructivism and Feminism', *Art Monthly*. No. 127, 1989; and Elizabeth Chaplin, 'Towards Constructive Androgyny', *Art Monthly*. No. 129, 1989.

¹⁰¹ Giles, 'The Science Option', 1994, p.33.

an historical fallacy.¹⁰² The fruition of this debate was Countervail, an exhibiting and discussion group in affiliation with Chaplin's sociology M.A. programme at York University, and the initiative of Chaplin and Spencer, who had become friends at the start of the Chaplin / Hughes research project in 1982.¹⁰³ Of all the artists of Countervail, Giles in particular relates her practice to the lineage of Moss.¹⁰⁴ In addition to the direct written references to Moss, which are significant in themselves, the dialogue between Petherbridge, Chaplin, Giles and the artists of Countervail is pertinent to this research generally. An interrogation of the feminist approach in art history, and the assumptions upon which it is founded, is an essential prerequisite in the effort to illuminate why Moss might be excluded. The standard feminist account of female art practice, Chaplin has argued, falls into three categories: male-surrogate artists, radical feminists, and feminist art practitioners.¹⁰⁵ Those who see themselves as artists first and foremost, and regard so-called women's issues to be of secondary importance have been viewed as male-surrogate artists. Those who see most art production historically as essentially male, and therefore operate outside the artworld by refusing to produce work that can be exhibited in galleries or relates to the canon of art history, are radical feminists. Those who produce art with a clear feminist message and overt political content are the exemplary feminist art practitioners, and are favoured by much recent feminist discourse. According to this model Moss is a male-surrogate, an artist first and foremost, and in the position of denying her female gender. This view could be seen to be supported by Moss's appearance in photographs; therefore her sartorial style could be read as anti-female. This accusation is compounded by the reading

¹⁰² Giles, 'Constructivism and Feminism', 1989. It is interesting to note that the debate has seemingly not moved on in nearly twenty years as evidenced by Grayson Perry's comments in his recent article: Grayson Perry, 'Glad to Be Grey', The Guardian, 23rd April 2008, G2, pp.23-25. He wrote "*I associate abstraction with unreconstructed machismo*". Alan Fowler wrote in response that women such as Marlow Moss in fact played a significant role in the development of abstraction: Alan Fowler, 'Abstract Art -It's Not a Man's World', The Guardian, Tuesday 29th April 2008, Letters Page.

¹⁰³ John McGowen, ed., Jean Spencer: A Retrospective Exhibition (Exhibition: 22nd September to 14th October 2006). Oundle: Oundle School, 2006, p.11.

¹⁰⁴ Giles mentions Moss twice in her article: Giles, 'The Science Option', 1994.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Chaplin, 'Feminism and Systematic Constructive Art', Constructivist Forum, No. 8, 1988, pp.5-18. Chaplin was referring to feminist art theory in general; her three categories of women artists is a valid characterisation of feminist art history up until the nineties, and arguably it still holds now.

of Moss's work itself as a denial of her gender.¹⁰⁶ Anna C. Chave makes the assumption that the aesthetic of hard straight lines denotes masculinity, with regards to Minimalism, in her 1990 article 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power'. She refers to "*the unyielding face of the father*", identifying the work as masculine without question.¹⁰⁷ There are many layers of history, mythology, and tradition to this assumption, greatly shaped by the discipline of psychoanalysis. The existence of Moss, a woman and a Constructivist, problematizes the notion that 'hard' geometric art is masculine, and presents a challenge to gender essentialism, be it feminist or misogynist. Moss's sexual orientation too could be construed as an obstacle for a feminist account that demands a female subject, if a lesbian is not a wo-man or a female (an appendage of a man), as can be argued.

The discourse described above maybe goes some way towards an explanation for the lack of feminist interest in Moss. The only exception to this is Germaine Greer's 1979 polemic The Obstacle Race.¹⁰⁸ When discussing the failure of history to credit women's creative achievements, Greer notes:

The modern version of this calumny is the easy assumption that is made about closely related male and female painters, that the man led and the woman followed, which accords her the status of an imitator, and assumes that differences in outlook are evidence of inferiority or incompetence. A superficial judgment would place Marlow Moss as an imitator of Piet Mondrian, with whom she spent a great deal of time in Paris between 1929 and 1938, but in fact the relationship between them was one of equals, and in the case of the double-line compositions, Mondrian followed the lead set by Moss. Their careers diverged when Moss began to use relief in her paintings with superimposed white slats and collage. She was, as many women have been, interested in constructivism and the boundaries of painting and moved eventually to plastic constructions. It is arguable that she had a greater

¹⁰⁶ If Moss has been rejected by feminists as 'too masculine', it is interesting to note that an artist such as Pauline Boty has perhaps been rejected as 'too feminine': Sue Tate, 'Strategic Needs and Generational Divides: The Historiographical Promise of the Woman Pop Artist', The Association of Art Historians 32nd Annual Conference: Art and Art History: Contents, Discontents Malcontents, The University of Leeds, 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Chave, 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power', 1992, p.270. In a later essay, 'Minimalism and Biography', 2000, Chave claims she did not "*caricature or categorically condemn Minimalism as a 'macho' enterprise*", footnote 57, p.162, she does however assume its masculine nature.

¹⁰⁸ Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race. London: Martin Seeker and Warburg Ltd, 1979.

*influence on subsequent developments in twentieth-century painting than Mondrian did.*¹⁰⁹

Greer is the only one of the seventies / eighties feminists to champion Moss, and this is but one short passage where Moss is used only to illustrate a point. Moss's absence has persisted in more recent times. For reasons of chronological delimitation Gill Perry's 1995 Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and 'Feminine' Art, 1900 to the Late 1920s does not include Moss,¹¹⁰ and although Katy Deepwell's 1998 Women Artists and Modernism does mention Moss several times, it is only ever within a list of other excluded female artists; Moss is not focussed upon individually.¹¹¹ When surveying the substantial published output of feminist art history it becomes clear that it is not only Moss who is absent, or dealt with sparsely. Non-figurative, and especially Constructive artists, loosely including: Sonia Delaunay, Sophie Taüber-Arp, Alexandra Exter, Liubov Popova, Katarzyna Kobro, Paule Vézelay, Mary Martin, Gillian Wise, Jocelyn Chewett, and Bridget Riley, all seemingly appear less frequently than their figurative counterparts in feminist writing. On a broad level, the tool of feminist art history, like all other theoretical fields, but especially those which situate themselves in close relation to post-structuralist discourse, is words; without figurative representation, visual art does not lend itself to literature or psychoanalysis. Art that does not literally or symbolically represent 'women's issues', or indeed anything at all, is maybe less useful as illustration to a feminist argument, and therefore female practitioners of non-figurative art tend to have been neglected in certain strands of feminist discourse, in favour of imagery that can be interpreted according to a feminist agenda.¹¹² It could be

¹⁰⁹ Greer, The Obstacle Race, 1979, p.103.

¹¹⁰ Perry, Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and 'Feminine' Art, 1900 to the Late 1920s. The focus of this book is upon women painters connected to Fauvism and Cubism, and the period remit is 1900 to the late 1920s; this covers the arrival of Moss in Paris, and her conversion to Neo-Plasticism, but her subsequent career in Paris is beyond the scope of Perry's book.

¹¹¹ Moss is mentioned in the essay by Katy Deepwell, 'Hepworth and Her Critics', in Women Artists and Modernism, ed. Katy Deepwell, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p.105. Moss is mentioned again later in the book, in Nedira Yakir's 'Cornubia: Gender, Geography and Genealogy in St. Ives Modernism', Women Artists and Modernism, ed. Katy Deepwell, 1998, p12 and pp.124-125.

¹¹² Examples of imagery that can be, and has been, interpreted according to a feminist agenda could be the paintings of Mary Cassatt, and those of Artemisia Gentileschi: Griselda

argued that Feminist art historical revision has neglected Moss as much as the patriarchal canon has, and more reprehensibly so if one considers what has traditionally been a prime objective of feminist art history: to retrieve lost women artists.

Seuphor, quoted above, states that feminists demand from the art of women "*more than they are capable of*". This was possibly intended to mean that women artists are not capable of genius.¹¹³ However, Seuphor could be understood to mean that the feminist art commentator makes excessive demands of the work of female artists, inasmuch as the demands they make are inappropriate for any art. The feminist commentator requires images that can serve to illustrate her (?) argument, function as a visual equivalent to theoretical discourse, and possibly even act as propaganda for the political cause. If she is an activist, she may expect overt allegiance to the cause, visible and readable in the artwork. These demands are extraneous to a majority of artistic output, and arguably impossible for Constructivist work to meet.

Katy Deepwell has said:

*The assertion that to be a woman and just paint could constitute of itself a Feminist statement has been rightly criticised since the 1970s...*¹¹⁴

This attitude has made for a difficult, if not hostile, climate for female artists working in a Constructivist mode since the seventies, such as the artists of Countervail. Giles argues in 'The Science Option' that in addition to the general artworld disfavour towards Constructivism and Minimalism of the

Pollock's analysis of Mary Cassatt in both her 1980 monograph Mary Cassatt, and in Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories, London: Routledge, 1999; Mary D. Garrard's interpretations of Artemisia Gentileschi in her essay 'Artemisia and Susanna' published in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1982.

¹¹³ This is perhaps implied by Seuphor in his short discussion of women painters: "*It cannot be denied that the greatest painters are men, and the same goes for the other arts. But such men are few and can be counted on one hand. If we carry on counting on the other hand the women find their place as equals with men.*" Seuphor, A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, Preceded by a History of Abstract Painting, 1958, p.70. Seuphor, however, does not discuss the reasons why women do not make it into the first rank of artists, and therefore doesn't categorically state that women are incapable of genius.

¹¹⁴ Katy Deepwell, 'Paint Stripping: Feminist Possibilities in Painting after Modernism', N.Paradoxa, No. 1, 1996.

eighties and nineties, prescriptive feminist art criticism has privileged overt figurative expression of gender issues over all other artistic concerns.

The female non-figurative artists that are more frequently discussed within feminist discourse (for example: Eva Hesse, Barbara Hepworth, Lee Krasner and Rachel Whiteread), made or make abstract work that has a figurative element, either by way of references to the female body or to the domestic sphere, or by the use of found-objects, (although such readings of Hesse's work particularly have been countered).¹¹⁵ Art that is entirely non-representational, that leaves no room for figurative, literal, symbolic or even, arguably, metaphorical interpretation, is left out of the dialogue.¹¹⁶ The notable exception to this is the scholarship of Briony Fer regarding female artists within Russian Constructivism, particularly Liubov Popova.¹¹⁷

Constructivism, in Russia, after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 ideologically positioned itself apart from 'Art', and bourgeois notions of high culture. The objects that were produced and exhibited were 'experiments', and referred to as 'laboratory work'. Naum Gabo used the word 'construct' frequently in his 1920 polemic 'The Realistic Manifesto'.¹¹⁸ The term 'Constructivist' was meant to replace the word 'artist', and was taken directly from the metaphorical language of Lenin (the 'building' of Communist culture, 'construction' of Communism etc). In keeping with a Communist conception the Constructivists sought to vanquish the presence of the individual creator in

¹¹⁵ In the case of Eva Hesse, Briony Fer argues against a reading of her work as 'feminine', organic and eccentric, see Briony Fer, 'Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism', *Art History*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1994, pp.424-449.

¹¹⁶ This recalls Donald McNamee's argument, discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, against the primacy of the written 'document' in art history, in his review of Stephen Bann's survey book of Constructivism Donald K. McNamee, 'The Tradition of Constructivism, Stephen Bann' *The Structurist*. No. 15 / 16 (Double Issue), 1975 / 1976, pp.167-173.

¹¹⁷ Other research has centred upon the female artists within Russian Constructivism, notably Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983; and John E. Bowit and Matthew Drutt, eds., *Amazons of the Avant-Garde* (Exhibition: June 12th - September 3rd 2000), New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2000. Fer however has particularly emphasized gender concerns and therefore engaged female Russian Constructivism with a feminist dialogue, particularly in the article: Briony Fer, 'What's in a Line? Gender and Modernity', *The Oxford Art Journal* Vol. 13. No. 1, 1990, pp.77-88.

¹¹⁸ Naum Gabo and Anton Pevsner, 'The Realistic Manifesto', 1920, in *Gabo: Constructions, Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings, Engravings*, ed. Herbert Read. London: Lund Humphries, 1957.

the art object, and favoured an aesthetic of industrial production. With the hand of the artist eliminated, so would be 'his' body, and therefore 'his' gender. Abstraction and Constructivism freed artists, especially women, from their gender identity, and conventional expectations of female arts practice. Without the troublesome notion of artist / genius, the barrier to women practitioners was effectively lifted. The Russian Modern movement has the largest proportion of female contributors of any avant-garde movement, including Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Lioubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova and Nadezhda Udaltsova. With the political rise of the proletariat, the craft skills of the artisan rose in cultural value. Before the Revolution of 1917 Kazimir Malevich, Popova and Rozanova all experimented with various forms of folk-art, including embroidery, and Popova and Stepanova, (and the fashion designer Nadezhda Lamanova) used peasant motifs in their fabric and clothing design. There was, however, no fashion amongst the Russian avant-gardist women to dress in a masculine style. Seemingly this was because rather than equating modernity with the masculine, the Russians identified themselves with the cultural 'other', with the artisan, the craft-worker: with woman. This still preserved a binary and phallogocentric state, and does not indicate that male Russian Constructivists were keen to identify themselves with 'the feminine'. Malevich particularly is known to have supported the Futurist distaste for "*female hams*".¹¹⁹ Gabo however considered the Futurists' "*contempt for the female*" to be a tag of provincialism.¹²⁰

A comparison of Moss and Mondrian further elucidates the extent of the rupture she causes; not only is Moss a Constructivist, but also she displays a more 'masculine' approach to Constructivism than Mondrian. Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism developed out of a gradual abstraction of the natural world inspired by Theosophy. In paintings such as the 1911 '*Evolution*', discussed

¹¹⁹ Malevich seemingly equates the female with sentimentality: "*All honour to the futurists, who forbade the painting of female hams, the painting of portraits and guitars in moonlight*", Kasimir Malevich, 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting', trans. T. Anderson, *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1992, pp.166-176.

¹²⁰ Gabo and Pevsner, 'The Realistic Manifesto', 1920.

above, Mondrian overtly used Theosophical symbols.¹²¹ The nipples and navel of the first figure (on the left) are triangles pointing down to represent earthly concerns. The right-hand figure has 'evolved' to an intermediary state symbolised by her diamond shaped nipples and navel, pointing both down and up. The central figure has reached self-actualisation and looks straight out of the canvas, her triangles point unequivocally to heaven. As Mondrian's abstract language developed he retained such symbols. To Mondrian the horizontal always represented the female element, and the vertical, the male. The idea was common currency, and had previously appeared in Adolph Loos' 1908 essay 'Ornament and Crime'.

*A horizontal line: the reclining woman. A vertical line: the man who penetrates her.*¹²²

Mondrian revisited the theme continuously after its earliest incarnation in works such as the 1909 'Pointillist Dune Study, Crest at Centre' and 'Lighthouse in Westkapelle in Pink'. These could be interpreted as passive and active respectively: erect and prone. The overt hint of the phallic in the lighthouse, and feminine curves in the soft undulating dune, are left behind with the development of Neo-Plasticism; what remained were the horizontal and the vertical. In accordance with Theosophical teachings Mondrian sought to unite the opposing forces of feminine (horizontal) and masculine (vertical). He did not accept the diagonal line as a solution to this, and famously would not permit its inclusion into the grammar of Neo-Plasticism, causing a rift in his friendship with Van Doesburg. The fact that Moss did use the diagonal, and not just the 45° medians between horizontal and vertical preserving the equal and opposite binary status, but diagonals of varying orientations, gives credence to the notion of a "Queer-Line".¹²³

¹²¹ See Illustrations: Figure 3.15.

¹²² Adolph Loos, 'Ornament and Crime', *Architecture and Design in Europe and America, 1750-2000*, eds. Abigail Harrison-Moore and Dorothy C. Rowe, Blackwell Anthologies in Art History. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

¹²³ I am here transposing Kati Rötger's characterisation of Moss's double-line as a "Queer Line" in Rötger, 'Nachwort -Anmerkungen Zum Titelbild: *White, Black, Red and Grey* Von Marlow Moss'. I shall return to Rötger's notion of the "Queer Line" in the concluding section of this chapter.

Another layer of the male / female binary code, which is perpetuated in Mondrian's work, is that of civilisation and nature. The 1915 painting '*Composition 10 in Black and White*' developed from an earlier series entitled '*Pier and Ocean*'. The central vertical thrust of the pier; the masculine element, is palpable in the later, seemingly non-representational work, and the slight condensing of the horizontal lines, the female element, form a horizon two-thirds of the way up the picture. As Carol Duncan says in her 1973 ArtForum article '*Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting*':

*The dichotomy that identifies women with nature and men with culture is one of the most ancient ideas devised by men and appears with greater or lesser strength in virtually all cultures.*¹²⁴

Such a notion, that has no clear basis in reality, is symptomatic of the deeply entrenched and normalised character of misogyny in the history of art, and philosophical discourse in general.¹²⁵ Again the existence of the work and persona of Moss acts as an intervention disrupting such tired models.

Eventually Mondrian's Theosophy was distilled into iconic compositions such as '*Lozenge with 2 Lines and Blue*', painted in 1926, the year before Moss arrived in Paris. It is clear from Mondrian's preparatory studies that his compositions were developed organically. The intuitive process of adjustment continued onto the canvas; traces of earlier compositional decisions are visible in the finished work. In contradistinction to this, Moss's working drawings are precise, executed with a sharp pencil, ruler and compass. Each element of the composition found its position according to the geometry of the rectangle. The placement of lines is completely settled upon before the final painting is manufactured.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting', 2005.

¹²⁵ See Beverley Clack, ed., Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition. New York: Routledge, 1999.

¹²⁶ Moss's approach to her work is examined in Chapter 6 of this thesis. See Catalogue Raisonné: Works on Paper: WoP 27-41.

In 1932 Auguste Herbin, the President of the Association Abstraction-Création, and the rest of the editorial committee,¹²⁷ defined the difference between the two approaches to non-figuration: “*abstraction*” and “*creation*”, in the opening essay of the group’s journal.¹²⁸ “*Non-figuration*” is the generic term for all non-representational work, the editorial states: “*this is the culture of pure plastic arts, to the exclusion of any elements that are explicative, anecdotal, literary, naturalistic etc...*” Herbin goes on to define the approach of “*abstraction*” as: “*...the progressive abstraction of the forms of nature*”. This of course relates to Mondrian and his progression from the visual appearance of nature, towards non-figuration. “*Creation*” is defined as: “*...a conception of a purely geometric nature*”. Moss clearly falls into this second camp. Where Mondrian is intuitive, and attached to the seductive world of visual appearances (both traditionally considered ‘feminine’ traits), Moss is entirely logical. Her horizontals and verticals are an end in themselves, and bear no symbolic meaning. Moss’s orientation was to science rather than the spiritual, as Nijhoff wrote:

‘L’abstrait pur’ of Marlow Moss is not based upon any metaphysical philosophy but, I might almost say, upon a biological realism...¹²⁹

According to essentialist ideas of gender, Moss’s methodology is entirely ‘masculine’. If we think in terms of Chaplin’s model of feminist art historians’ view of female art practice, as described above, it seems Moss sits squarely in the ‘male-surrogate’ category. However the assumption that Constructivism is in itself ‘masculine’ is destabilised upon examination of the working practices of individuals: Mondrian (a man) and Moss (a woman). The very terms of the debate: ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, come adrift, and cease to be useful.

¹²⁷ Which included Hans Arp, Albert Gleizes, Jean Helion, František Kupka and Georges Vantongerloo.

¹²⁸ Issue 1 of *Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif*. Reprinted in *Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorised Reprint Edition. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 - 1936*. New York: Arno, 1968, Translated in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, pp.357-359. This passage is discussed again in the section ‘Associations and Allegiances’ in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹²⁹ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

Giles objected to Chaplin's intimation that female artists, in order to be legitimate (feminist), must overtly express a feminist message. This argument could be expanded to say that to insist that art expresses any particular message, is to limit art to mere illustration, effectively prohibiting abstraction of any kind. Deepwell and Chave seemingly criticise abstract Minimalist works on the grounds that by virtue of their non-figurative nature they shirk political responsibility.¹³⁰ This tendency is, furthermore, identified as 'male'. It is implicit that female artists are obliged to shoulder the responsibility of their debt to feminism, and respond to political discourse directly and figuratively. Petherbridge, in her article that prompted the Chaplin / Giles exchange, articulates a connected argument in relation to her own practice as an artist and a feminist.¹³¹ She identifies feminist art practice itself as split into four strands: that which invokes biological femaleness through menstrual and vaginal iconography, and seeks to revive matriarchal myths, she characterises as 'essentialist feminist art'; practice that reinvests in traditional female crafts, such as sewing or embroidery, she refers to as 'process-based feminist art'; the looser group, which Petherbridge probably partly identifies with herself, is described as 'personal / political' and engaged with methodologies of subversive narrative. That which Petherbridge sees as the privileged strand of feminist art practice is the textual-based strategies employed by deconstructive and often lens-based artists who interact with the fields of both art and cultural studies. Such 'sexual / textual' art is surely the strand of feminist art practice that a sociologist such as Chaplin would have found easier to 'read'.

Although Petherbridge was writing about the position of her own figurative art, in the postmodernity of the 1980s, her observations bear significance for the feminist reception of Moss. Petherbridge argues that the omnipotent post-structuralist and linguistics based discourse is a dead-end for art practice. Whether this has proven to be the case or not, sociological analysis can be

¹³⁰ Deepwell, 'Paint Stripping', 1996, and Chave, 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power', 1992.

¹³¹ Deanna Petherbridge, 'Féminisme! C'est Moi' *Art Monthly*. No. 123, 1989, pp.6-9.

seen to be exclusionary of non-figurative art. Petherbridge identifies 'consistency', and the authorial development of an artist's oeuvre, as erroneously denounced as patriarchal. A practice such as that of Moss is both 'authorial' and lacking in any feminist imagery.¹³² Postmodern paradigms, which are shaped by feminist and linguistic theory, elevate the inconsistent as a feminine trope, and therefore coalesce with traditional essentialist views rather than challenging them. The same assumptions can be detected in Fer's attempt to gender the work of Popova.

*Nowadays, Constructivism is one of the 'isms' put forward to exemplify the logocentric. But to accept at face value that it simply demonstrates a dominant masculine order within modernity is to ignore the basic decorativeness of the line...*¹³³

Fer aims to disrupt the notion that Constructivism is masculine, not by dispelling the myths of gender essentialism, but by perpetuating them and characterising Constructivism as 'decorative' and therefore feminine. The danger of this line of argument is it can be, and has been, used to denigrate Constructivist art, rather than promote the work of women, if given a misogynist emphasis rather than a feminist one; to counter the prevailing view that abstraction was cerebral and therefore male, is the view that abstraction is merely decorative design, and therefore (pejoratively) female.¹³⁴ The kind of feminist theory described by Petherbridge and Giles, and demonstrated by Chaplin and by Fer, in effect retrieves and circulates misogynistic assumptions that women are not consistent, intellectual or philosophical. The assumption is that women cannot be interested in mathematics, science and technology, that women cannot sustain an abstract enquiry, and cannot therefore be Constructive artists (unless Constructivism itself is re-written as a branch of the decorative arts).

¹³² Petherbridge's art, conversely, does represent gender issues figuratively, in works of the late eighties such as 'The Penultimate Pillar' and 'Blood Taboos'.

¹³³ Fer, 'What's in a Line? Gender and Modernity', 1990, p.87.

¹³⁴ Norma Broude discusses the urgency with which Modernist artists and critics sought to preserve the dichotomy between 'high' art (which was characterized as masculine) and 'decorative' art (which was characterized as feminine), and defend abstract art against accusations of the latter, in Norma Broude, 'Miriam Schapiro and "Femmage": Reflections on the Conflict between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Art', Arts Magazine, February, 1980, pp.83-87.

Giles, in response to positions such as that articulated by Deepwell above (that simply to be a female artist does not "*constitute of itself a feminist statement*"), argues that an artist such as herself represents an exception:

*To avoid an overtly gender-specific theory and practice can be seen as a positive and strategic decision. To make work that 'seems male' (to some viewers) subverts essentialist definitions of what is 'male' and what is 'female'.*¹³⁵

This argument can be transposed to Moss, although I do not consider it necessary to prove that Moss was a feminist. It cannot be known how Moss viewed notions of gender identity or feminism, as there is no existent account of her position on such issues. It is unlikely that she took such considerations in to her studio, as Petherbridge and Giles argue, the job of theory is not to prescribe practice. However, it is likely she negotiated chauvinism in her private and professional life, both as a woman, and as a 'mannish lesbian'.¹³⁶

Along with the feminist aversion to Constructivism's connection to both the Modernist avant-garde, and to science, as masculine preserves, there is also the contradictory fear of equating women artists with craft-skill.¹³⁷ John Russell said in his 1958 review of Moss's solo show at the Hanover Gallery in London:

*Painting of this sort, with its precision, its nice calculations and its perfection of finish, could be called a department of the housewifely arts...*¹³⁸

The theme of the industrious housewife is elaborated upon by another reviewer who frames his critique of Moss's exhibition in terms of the ad-man:

¹³⁵ Giles, 'Constructivism and Feminism', 1989. This letter was written in response to Chaplin's earlier letter, also titled 'Constructivism and Feminism', 1989.

¹³⁶ As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, this has been attested to by Andreas Oosthoek, who during a conversation in July 2007, told me that Moss and Nijhoff were spat at when they ventured outside of Paris.

¹³⁷ An artist such as Tracey Emin, who has engaged in a process-based feminist mode, makes certain her embroidery is not well crafted.

¹³⁸ John Russell, 'Moss, Lanyon and Some Modern French' *Art News* Vol.57, April 1958, p.47.

stating that her "*sunshine dazzle*" adds "*brightness to whiteness*".¹³⁹ This of course is not language used with regards to the work of Mondrian, Gorin or Vantongerloo. A previous reviewer of Moss's work had assumed she was a man, and tellingly used adjectives such as "*uncompromising*", rather than "*housewifely*".¹⁴⁰ This attitude has echoes of the 1949 Sydney Janis Gallery show in New York *Artist: Man and Wife*, which included couples such as Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock. The reviewer in *Art News* commented "*there is a tendency among some of the wives to 'tidy up' their husbands' styles*".¹⁴¹ Although Moss and Mondrian were not 'intimate partners' in this way, one can imagine a similar response to her work in relation to his. An unpleasant archetype of the nagging harridan is conjured up. It may actually have been Moss that Paul Nash was thinking of when he wrote of "*that intractable 'efficiency' of the mannish female artist*" as he congratulated Paule Vézelay for displaying the more feminine virtues of "*sensibility, tact, and a gentle but firm persuasiveness*".¹⁴² This further problematic baggage attached to Moss's precision and exactitude becomes another facet of the lack of attractiveness of Moss as a subject for research for feminist art historians.

The aversion of feminism to Constructivism is mutual; alongside feminism's difficulty with Constructivism, Constructivism and non-figurative art demonstrate a resistance to feminist theorising. As Fer argues in her 1994 essay 'Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism':

*There is little to be gained ... from setting up Hesse as the 'feminine' to counter the 'masculine' hard surfaces to which Lewitt, Andre and others were drawn. Hesse also was drawn to modern hard surfaces and not as symbols of virility.*¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Keith Sutton, 'House Proud', *Art News and Review*, 1958. The slogan "*adds brightness to whiteness*" was used in OMO washing powder advertisements of the fifties, and would have been an immediately recognisable reference to Sutton's readers.

¹⁴⁰ Whittet, 'London Commentary', 1954. This has previously been discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

¹⁴¹ Anne M. Wagner, 'Fictions: Krasner's Presence, Pollock's Absence', *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle De Courtivron. London: Thames and Hudson, 1993, pp.223-243.

¹⁴² Paul Nash, writing a forward to a Paule Vézelay exhibition catalogue for the Lefevre Galleries, 1936, cited in the chapter 'Paule Vézelay', in Leonie Caldecott, *Women of Our Century*. London: Ariel Books / British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984, p.46.

¹⁴³ Fer, 'Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism', 1994, p.427.

Fer critiques the gender implications of Lucy Lippard's characterisation of Hesse as 'eccentric'.¹⁴⁴ The problematics become apparent when Hesse is contextualized within Minimalism, alongside Carl Andre for example, and her 'eccentricity' and 'obsessiveness' is juxtaposed with the 'rationality' commonly ascribed to the work of the male artist.¹⁴⁵ This has clear parallels with the case of Moss who has also been portrayed as an eccentric.¹⁴⁶ While such a view is perhaps conducive to certain strands of critical attention, perhaps including a feminist approach, it is detrimental to Moss's standing as a Constructivist.¹⁴⁷

There is hostility on the part of female artists themselves to being pigeonholed as 'women-artists'. Nedira Yakir reaches this conclusion regarding Wilhelmina Barns-Graham in her essay 'Cornubia: Gender, Geography and Genealogy in St. Ives Modernism'. According to Yakir, Barns-Graham revelled in being "*one of the boys*", and was "*suspicious*" of feminist interpretation.¹⁴⁸

*To a great extent, abstraction enabled her [Barns-Graham] and other women artists to paint in a manner free from traditionally prescribed and culturally specified feminine grace.*¹⁴⁹

This is not a freedom artists want to surrender, to be defined by their gender in return for some critical attention. Chave in her article 'Minimalism and Biography' suggests Hesse cooperated with a feminist reading of her work (and perhaps also one that characterised her as eccentric), rather than insisting upon a genderless and formalist reception, out of a sense of urgency

¹⁴⁴ It should be noted that Lippard included both male and female artists in the 1966 exhibition: Eccentric Abstraction, at the Fischbach Gallery in New York in 1966: Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, Alice Adams, Don Potts, Keith Sonnier, Frank Lincoln Viner, Louise Bourgeois and Gary Kuehn.

¹⁴⁵ Fer, 'Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism', 1994, p.429

¹⁴⁶ Moss has been described as eccentric in Michael Canney -Paintings, Constructions and Reliefs, London: The Belgrave Gallery, 1990, and this view has been perpetrated since in much of the writing on Moss published in Britain. See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

¹⁴⁷ This point is revisited in the introduction to Chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹⁴⁸ Yakir, 'Cornubia: Gender, Geography and Genealogy in St. Ives Modernism', 1998, p.123.

¹⁴⁹ Yakir, 'Cornubia: Gender, Geography and Genealogy in St. Ives Modernism', 1998, pp.123-124.

regarding her place in posterity, in the face of her imminent death from brain tumours. More established artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Helen Frankenthaler, Joan Mitchell and Bridget Riley all resisted feminist interpretations of their work in the seventies.¹⁵⁰

Many female artists have chosen to work in an abstract mode specifically to avoid gendered receptions of their work. It is conceivable to think that the move away from figuration, particularly the sexually domineering images of the female nude that were so prevalent in the avant-garde movements of Cubism, Fauvism and Expressionism,¹⁵¹ was a de-gendering move, opening the field up to women artists. Chave reiterates her position from 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power', that to avoid the image can be considered to shirk political responsibility:

*The preponderant desire, although a fantasy then as now, was to do work in and for a world where an artist's gender would never count against her.*¹⁵²

Petherbridge expresses this (fantastical?) desire in the article discussed above:

*... I would like to propose as an ideal future for the arts ... a state of functional gynandry. That is, a cultural hegemony, not gender specific, which has internalised the feminist debate.*¹⁵³

Of course Constructivism, whether in France, Germany, The Netherlands, or Russia, has historically been a Utopian project. This is something Constructivism shares with radical feminism, if not post-structural feminism.

Conclusion.

I have attempted, in this chapter, to plot the construction of Moss's identity in relation to a complex geography, both contemporary and subsequent. The

¹⁵⁰ Anna C. Chave, 'Minimalism and Biography' *The Art Bulletin* Vol. LXXXII, No. 1, 2000.

¹⁵¹ See Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting', 2005.

¹⁵² Chave, 'Minimalism and Biography', 2000, footnote 18, p.160.

¹⁵³ Petherbridge, 'Féminisme! C'est Moi', 1989.

already contested site of gender has been further destabilized by recent Queer scholarship, most notably the work of Judith Butler.¹⁵⁴ This allows a reappraisal of an artist such as Moss. However, the existence of Moss is primary, and in itself ruptures the heterosexual matrix, and provokes a reframing of the feminist debate in art history. Moss was undoubtedly a "*rare gender rebel*" and an examination of her now contributes to Lorber's 'feminist degendering movement'.¹⁵⁵

Rötger posits the argument that the particular work by Moss illustrated on the front cover of her book Differenzen in Der Geschlechterdifferenz ('*White, Black, Red and Grey*' of 1932, Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 11), and perhaps Moss's oeuvre more generally, "*is to be understood as a radical commentary to debates concerning sexual difference*".¹⁵⁶ As has been touched upon earlier in this chapter, Moss's double-line is understood by Rötger to be a "*Queer-Line*", and the pictorial movement that Moss hoped to achieve with it, is translated as an act of setting in motion the borderlines of gender categories. However, by invoking Derridean 'différance', and choosing the passage she quotes from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Rötger preserves the mode of binary opposition.¹⁵⁷ This incident of attempted co-option of a Moss work as a metaphor, arguably serves to demonstrate the lack of suitability of Constructivist work to support such linguistic theoretical discourse.

The tradition of Constructivism, which is perhaps the longest continuation of a genre within modern art history, is rich with female practitioners. Women working within this oeuvre include at its inception the Russian 'Amazons', many Europeans connected to Paris before the Second World War under the

¹⁵⁴ Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex', London: Routledge, 1993; and Butler, Gender Trouble, 1990.

¹⁵⁵ Judith Lorber, 2000.

¹⁵⁶ Rötger, 'Nachwort -Anmerkungen Zum Titelbild: *White, Black, Red and Grey* Von Marlow Moss', 1999, p.360. Translated for the author by Dr. Anthony Escott.

¹⁵⁷ Rötger quotes from Sedgwick 'Gosh, Boy George, You must be Awfully Secure in Your Masculinity!' in Constructing Masculinities, New York, 1995: "*Masculinity and femininity are in many respects orthogonal to each other. Orthogonal: that is, instead of being at opposite poles of the same axis, they are actually in different, perpendicular dimensions...*". Although Sedgwick doesn't specifically ascribe the vertical to the male and the horizontal to the female in this passage, this mode of opposition clearly recalls a nineteenth century conception of gender.

umbrella of Abstraction-Création, and after the war artists such as Mary Martin, Jocelyn Chewett and Gillian Wise, and the Countervail collective. Amongst Moss's contemporaries within Abstraction-Création were Sophie Tauber-Arp, Katarzyna Kobro, Sonia Terk-Delaunay, Paule Vézelay, Hannah Kosnick-Kloss and Barbara Hepworth. There were undoubtedly more who did not receive the official recognition of the Association, notably the painter Anne Béothy-Steiner, who was married to Association member Etienne Béothy, but not a member herself. It is therefore problematic to say the least that Constructivism, the genre of abstraction and Modernism with the greatest proportion and most consistent presence of female practitioners, is characterised as the most extremely 'masculine'.

An examination of the gendering of Moss's oeuvre effectively demolishes any stereotypical notions of the 'feminine' and the 'masculine' in art. Similarly an examination of the persona, and especially the sartorial expression, of Moss, as represented in the portrait photographs of Storm, does much to rupture such notions in general. The idea of duality, especially of the male and the female, permeates Mondrian's writing. However, the extent to which the binary positions of 'the masculine' and 'the feminine' exist is as cultural gestalt notions only; they are uninhabitable as identities. Such mythological archetypes, or Platonic ideas, are only of worth, in terms of the identity of an actual individual, as notional fixed points from which radiate a spectrum of possibilities. Theorists such as Lorber go further even and call for an "*end of gender*".¹⁵⁸ It should be noted here that there exists certain incongruities between the Neo-Platonic theories of art to which Moss subscribed, and therefore this research addresses, and the gender theory I am employing at this point. Whilst a Neo-Platonic outlook assumes certain eternal / universal constants, the Queer Theory of Butler for example is premised instead upon flux. Whilst I do not regard these positions to be entirely mutually exclusive (it could be argued for instance that Butler creates a 'new' constant of

¹⁵⁸ Judith Lorber, 2000, p.90. Lorber cites Joan Wallach Scott and the "*inevitable feminist paradox*": i.e. by acting for women particularly, feminism produces the sexual difference it sought to eliminate, J.W. Scott, 'Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man', Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, p.3-4; Lorber p.86-87.

degendered humanity), I also do not accept that the methodology of research must be in harmony with the subject of that research. Whilst acknowledging that the 'fit' of these ideas is not always comfortable, I argue that it is legitimate and necessary to introduce such a possible anachronism, in order to allow for new possibilities. The existence of Moss herself is the only constant this research relies upon, and she reveals all the terms of gender as infinitely shifting.

Perhaps, as Doan suggests:

*What we've lost is a sense of the fluidity and openness that made the 1920s so exuberant.*¹⁵⁹

If 'woman' is the proper subject of feminism, then Moss's transgendered identity poses a problem. Her appearance and practice causes a rupturing of the stable notion of genders that feminism, along with misogyny, has relied upon. Butler admonishes feminist theorists for this:

*The effort to identify the enemy as single in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms. That the tactic can operate in feminist and antifeminist contexts alike suggests that the colonising gesture is not primarily or irreducibly masculinist.*¹⁶⁰

By subscribing to gender essentialism, and binary thinking, heterosexist feminism fails to challenge patriarchy. Moss's persona, and those of other bachelorettes, Amazons and garçonnés, which have been read as complicit, actually do much to subvert patriarchy by destabilising the masculine identity upon which it is founded. Hall's protagonist Stephen Gordon grows up being treated as a son by her father.¹⁶¹ Gubar has described this as "*only a slight exaggeration of the psychology of what growing up female can be in a patriarchy*".¹⁶² The possibility of "*gender oscillation*" for women, as discussed

¹⁵⁹ Annamarie Jagose and Laura Doan, 'The Evolution of a Lesbian Icon' University of Colorado -Genders Journal, No. 34, 2001.

¹⁶⁰ Butler, Gender Trouble, 1990, p.19.

¹⁶¹ Hall, The Well of Loneliness, 1928.

¹⁶² Gubar, Blessings in Disguise, 1981.

by Maude Lavin in her essay 'The New Woman in Hannah Höch's Photomontages: Issues of Androgyny, Bisexuality, and Oscillation', is a logical continuation of having to relate as both female and male when negotiating culture in a male-orientated society.¹⁶³

'Womanliness is masquerade', posited Joan Riviere in her famous 1929 essay.¹⁶⁴ And so is manliness, replies Moss. To paraphrase Nietzsche: Moss put on the clothes in which the world could know her, respect her and seek her as a man; the clothes that would enable her to mingle in the society she desired.¹⁶⁵ But Moss did not simply masquerade as a man, there was no subterfuge or deception, rather she constructed a transgendered position, and performed it in all aspects of her life and work. All gendering is masquerade; all clothing is drag.¹⁶⁶ There has been an association in Lacanian theory between femininity and masquerade, and masculinity and parade, but once again these binaries seem insufficient. The overt virility of the Purists, the Italian Futurists and the Vorticists is masquerade as much as it is parade. What then is the true identity of the individual behind the Nietzschean mask? A pre-gendered person? Plato's hermaphrodite? Mondrian's "*spiritual hermaphrodite*"?¹⁶⁷ The "*proto-anthropoid*" described in horror by Veblen?¹⁶⁸ According to Simone de Beauvoir, only the female is gendered; the masculine

¹⁶³ Maude Lavin, 'The New Woman in Hannah Höch's Photomontages: Issues of Androgyny, Bisexuality, and Oscillation', in Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after PostModernism, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: The University of California Press, 2005, p.331 and p.338.

¹⁶⁴ Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as Masquerade', The International Journal of Psychoanalysis Vol. 10, 1929, pp.36-45. Riviere's argument follows that of Nietzsche written over forty years earlier: "...women, are they not *obliged* first of all, and above all to be actresses?" Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, 1886, Book 5, Section 361, p320,

¹⁶⁵ "We also have intercourse with 'men', we also modestly put on the clothes in which people know (as such), respect us and seek us; and we thereby mingle in society, that is to say, among the disguised who do not wish to be so called; we also do like all prudent masqueraders, and courteously dismiss all curiosity which has not reference merely to our 'clothes'." Nietzsche, Joyful Wisdom, 1886, Book 5, Section 365, p.324. Nietzsche's alternative to the masquerade is to live as a "*ghost*" in anticipation of a posthumous existence.

¹⁶⁶ Liz Kotz's characterisation of a simplified reading ("*reduced to a banal level*") of Judith Butler's position, Liz Kotz, 'The Body You Want: Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler', ArtForum Vol. 31, No. 11, 1992, p.85. Butler responded however by seemingly affirming this position: "*Yet I accept the idea that gender is impersonation, that becoming gendered involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits...*".

¹⁶⁷ Piet Mondrian in 'Conclusion: Nature and Spirit as female and Male Elements' in 'The New Plastic in Painting', 1917, Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James. The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, 1987, pp.27-34.

¹⁶⁸ See footnote 61 of this chapter.

identity and the universal person conflate.¹⁶⁹ In order to become the androgyne, Moss used the existent grammar of costume, and adopted masculine, and therefore neutral, attire.

In Freudian terms Moss 'has' the Phallus, as an artist, as a lesbian, and as an autonomous person of independent means; but unlike the woman Riviere describes Moss does not hide this behind a womanly masquerade. To what degree Moss was intentionally subversive or compliant with gender readings of her work is speculative, and ultimately irrelevant to the works' ability to function as an intervention; subversiveness masked as compliance is perhaps all the more subversive. Being a woman, and just painting, despite Deepwell's reservations cited above, can be, and is in the case of Moss, political in itself.

De Beauvoir's statement: "*one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one*", distinguishes sex (biology) from gender (cultural).¹⁷⁰ This idea is radically re-inscribed by Moss on to all ontological states.

For me, - 'Art is as - Life - for ever in a state of Becoming'.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. E.M. Parshley, New York: Vintage, 1973, original publication 1949. This is discussed Butler, Gender Trouble, 1990, p.13.

¹⁷⁰ Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 1949, p301.

¹⁷¹ Marlow Moss 'Abstract Art'. Unpublished Essay. Original Handwritten Manuscript, circa 1955, held in Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, Zurich. See Appendix 2ii. The significance of "*becoming*" to Moss possibly first developed from her reading of Nietzsche's Joyful Wisdom. Nietzsche identifies the attribute of "*becoming*" as of greater import to the German people (including himself) than that of "*being*", Joyful Wisdom, 1886, Book 5, Section 357, p.307. He returns to this distinction, between "*becoming*" and "*being*" later in the book: 'We Fearless Ones', finding parity with the 'Dionysian' and the 'Apollonian' respectively. The idea of 'evolution' was central to Theosophical thinking, and a great concern of Mondrian's. Interestingly the phrase "*perpetual becoming*" is used several years after Moss wrote the above sentence, by Parisian Sapphist Natalie Barney in discussion of lesbian / creative identity in her Traits et Portraits, Paris: Mercure de France, 1963, cited Latimer, Women Together / Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris, 2005, p.8.

Chapter 4.**An International Context for Marlow Moss.**

In this chapter I wish to establish Moss within the international framework of Constructivist art: the context she would have recognised for herself. By examination of her formative education, her mentors, associates, and friends, her position as an artist can be most accurately understood. Moss has been unjustly represented as a dilettante when viewed from an exclusively British perspective, as is exemplified in a 1975 review of the Moss exhibition at Gimpel Fils:

She [Moss] preferred secluded activity and had no financial pressure to combine or exhibit.¹

This conception has been greatly, if inadvertently, contributed to by Michael Canney who, as is demonstrated in Chapter 1 of this thesis, provided much of the anecdotal basis of published writing on Moss in Britain.² Canney only knew Moss through her occasional visits to Newlyn Art Gallery where he was Curator from 1956. He did not know her well, by his own admission, and only met her in the final year or so of her life. Canney would have appeared to Moss as the young curator of a regional gallery, and she possibly consequently did not give him her full attention. It is likely therefore that Moss would appear to him to be "*virtually a recluse*" and a "*bizarre figure*", as he describes her in an exhibition catalogue of his in 1990.³ This characterization of Moss as an isolated eccentric is inaccurate, as shall be demonstrated in

¹ Francis Watson, 'Marlow Moss' *Arts Review* Vol.27, No.9, 1975.

² Peter Davies, who has published a great deal on 'St. Ives' art since the eighties, relies entirely on Canney's account of Moss, and quotes him extensively. Florette Dijkstra refers frequently to Canney, whom she came to know through her research. David Buckman also used Canney as a source for his entry on Moss in David Buckman, *Artists in Britain since 1945*, 2nd Edition: New and Enlarged ed. Bristol: Art Dictionaries Ltd, 2006.

³ *Michael Canney -Paintings, Constructions and Reliefs (Exhibition: 17th October - 9th November 1990)*. London: The Belgrave Gallery, 1990, p.6. This passage is quoted in full in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

this chapter, and detrimental to her standing as an artist.⁴ In order to counter such a view Moss must be viewed from an international perspective.

The Académie Moderne.

*All I understand of the art of painting, I owe to his [Fernand Léger's] criticism.*⁵

*...he [Léger] taught me everything I know about – Construction.*⁶

Marlow Moss met Fernand Léger at the Académie Moderne in 1928.⁷ She remained under his tutelage for at least a year.⁸ As very little of Moss's work from this period or before this period is known, it is not possible to map the immediate influence of Léger's teaching upon the development of her work.⁹

⁴ Other artists have been characterised as eccentric, often to the detriment of their standing as artists. Briony Fer critiques the gender implications of Lucy Lippard's characterisation of Eva Hesse's work as 'Eccentric Abstraction' in the article: Briony Fer, 'Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism', *Art History* Vol. 17, No. 3, 1994. This is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁵ Marlow Moss as quoted by Netty Nijhoff in Antoinette H. Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss* (Exhibition: 30th March - 30th April 1962). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962. Nijhoff's reliability as a narrator can be contested, but in this instance her assertion is corroborated by Moss's own account. Nijhoff may have wished to emphasize Moss's relationship with Léger in order to disassociate Moss from Mondrian (whose retrospective the exhibition was following). The second issue to bear in mind with this statement is that although Nijhoff quotes in English within an essay in Dutch, thus reinforcing the impression that these are Moss's words not her own, the particular weighting of the statement ("*the art of painting*" rather than simply 'art'; "*his criticism*" rather than 'his work') may indeed be nuanced by not only Nijhoff's underlying motivations, and her powers of memory, but also the act of linguistic translation. However, using Nijhoff's assertion, and Moss's statement, as starting points, I hope to demonstrate that Moss had good grounds to make this claim, and will in turn examine the exact meaning of Nijhoff's statement as it is articulated. The fact that Moss frames her own statement regarding Léger in such similar terms, although she emphasises "*Construction*" rather than "*the art of painting*", indicates that Nijhoff is reasonably accurately quoting Moss.

⁶ Marlow Moss, in a letter to Paule Vézelay, dated 19th August 1955, held in the un-catalogued Paule Vézelay Collection, at the Tate Archives, London. See Appendix 3iii, Letter number 26.

⁷ It is not known when Moss enrolled at the Académie Moderne, but by June 1928 she was in some way affiliated with the school as she participated in a student exhibition at the Galerie Aubier that month.

⁸ Gladys C. Fabre, 'Shorter Illustrated History of the Académie Moderne', trans. Michael Walsh, *Léger and the Modern Spirit: An Avant-Garde Alternative to Non-Objective Art (1918-1931)*, ed. Gladys C. Fabre. Paris and Houston: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 1982.

⁹ Little evidence of Moss's pre-Constructivist work exists. A few early works have appeared at auction, see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R1 and P/R 2 These post-Cubist compositions most likely date from Moss's time at the Académie Moderne. The artist Tam Giles has described to me a small impressionistic landscape by Moss she saw many years ago in Annelly Juda Gallery, London. Max Bill states that Moss had painted "*delicate*

According to Nijhoff's account Moss was aware of the movements of Cubism and possibly Futurism before she arrived in Paris.¹⁰ It is likely that this prompted Moss's dissatisfaction with the limited art education available to her in England, and drew her to the Académie Moderne which would certainly have provided far greater opportunities to engage with those Modernist practices developing the possibilities revealed by Cubism. It is likely Moss's paintings at the Académie Moderne were at first in a post-Cubist vein, like those of her masters Léger and Amédée Ozenfant, and then became progressively more abstract.

The undated Moss work '*Visage Abstraite*' is probably representative of the kind of work Moss produced in the late 1920s.¹¹ It is derived from a recognisably human face, and could have been done in class from a model, although, as I have argued in the previous chapter of this thesis, I consider it likely to be a self-portrait. The work exhibits an essentially decorative surface design. It speaks in a language of advanced abstraction, in parallel to other Académie Moderne student paintings, although it is stylistically less influenced by Purism.¹² Although the form of a head can be perceived, and is identified as such in the title of the work, it is clearly not the primary concern of the image. The poised and balanced forms are delineated in black charcoal; colour is added in thin single washes, the ground (board or paper) remains clearly visible. The overall green scheme of the work is activated by pure red accents. In comparison to the highly polished finish of Moss's later works, it seems rough and sketch-like. Without any further information on the date of this work, conclusions regarding it as part of Moss's oeuvre cannot be reached, however it seems most likely that this, and other known undated works such as '*Abstrakte Komposition*', '*Compositie*' and '*Composition*

flowers", in his essay 'Encounter with Marlow Moss' in Marlow Moss: Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen (Exhibition: 1st December 1973 - 19th January 1974). Zurich: Gimpel and Hanover Gallery, 1973. Nijhoff mentions that she worked in both an Impressionist style and a Cubist style, Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962. This work was either destroyed in the 1944 bombing (see Chapter 1), or has disappeared into private collections, unrecorded and undocumented.

¹⁰ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

¹¹ See Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 1.

¹² See Illustrations Figures 4.1 - 4.11 in appendix to this thesis.

Géométrique', are representative of Moss's student work either at the Académie Moderne, or from before she arrived in Paris.¹³

The works of Moss's fellow students were described by a critic, in a review of an Académie Moderne student show at the Galerie Aubier in June 1928,¹⁴ as demonstrating advanced abstraction, great precision of execution, a flat use of colour, and a feeling for measurement and proportion. This description is not entirely compatible with the Moss works discussed above, which are looser in execution, but it can be assumed that Moss's work displayed similar characteristics as she absorbed the influence of the Académie Moderne; the description would certainly fit the painter she was to become.¹⁵

The earliest known dated work of Moss's, is from 1930 (see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 5), soon after she had emerged from the Atelier Léger, and after she had met Mondrian. This, and the two works which appeared in the first issue of Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif in 1932, demonstrate a dramatically different mode of expression.¹⁶ Colour has been completely eliminated in favour of pure black and pure white. The sweeping arabesque has been replaced by linear orthogonality. Recognizable representation has been entirely vanquished. It is Mondrian's influence that is most immediately visible in these works: her first mature artistic statement. However, although she apparently referred to Mondrian as her 'master', he was never her teacher as Léger was.¹⁷ Upon examination of these earliest works, and the rest of Moss's oeuvre, it is clear that it is not figuration or subject matter Moss refers to when she speaks of Léger's impact upon her. If

¹³ See Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 2, P/R 3, and P/R 4. It must be acknowledged again that authenticating these works is problematic.

¹⁴ According to one source (Bénézit, Emmanuel. Dictionary of Artists, Paris: Gründ, 2006, p.1387), Moss staged her first solo show in Paris in 1928. This however is not corroborated by any other evidence, and I have been unable to trace the source of this information beyond the 1976 edition of Bénézit. It is likely that this "solo exhibition" was in fact a section of the Académie Moderne student show of 1928.

¹⁵ The review mentions only two contributing student artists: Joseph Hanson and Otto Carlshund, see Christian Zervos, 'J.M. Hanson', Cahiers d'Art.1, 1928, p.95. This is discussed in Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Marlow Moss -De Constructie Van Een Nieuwe Werkelijkheid', Jong-Holland Vol.10, No.4, 1994, p.43.

¹⁶ See Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 6 and P/R 7.

¹⁷ "She [Moss] acknowledged Mondrian unreservedly as her 'master'." Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

the first part of the statement remembered by Nijhoff is examined in isolation ("*All I understand of the art of painting...*") it could possibly be her technical skill and method Moss attributes to Léger's teaching: the craft of painting, (she apparently received no technical guidance from Mondrian.¹⁸) This however seems unlikely when the statement is taken as a whole ("*All I understand of the art of painting, I owe to his criticism.*"). The use of the word "*criticism*" implies a theoretical or intellectual significance, rather than simply training in practical technique. It is significant too that Moss refers specifically to "*Construction*" with regards to what she learned from Léger, identifying him as the catalyst for the pivotal paradigm shift in her approach to art.

To understand the importance of Léger to Moss, it is necessary to consider how he must have appeared to her when she met him in the studios of the Académie Moderne in 1928. Moss was 39 years old at the time. Her career as an artist had suffered many false starts (as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis), and the art education she had experienced at St. John's Wood School of Art and at The Slade nearly a decade earlier, was stifling, unsatisfactory and ultimately aborted. She had continued a self-directed education, in the arts broadly, and had returned to painting a couple of years previously. Her meandering path was an indulgence her private income and social position afforded her. However the Moss who arrived in Paris must have been an isolated and frustrated figure. Léger was only eight years older than Moss, yet greatly more advanced in his artistic development. His career had been interrupted by service in the Great War, and since his discharge he had moved away from the 'simultaneity' of his earlier Cubist abstractions, and towards the Purism of Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier). His experiences in the trenches fostered his socialist beliefs and led him towards a desire for an art for the common man. Léger was after all the son of a cattle farmer, and did not identify himself with the cultured elite. Combining avant-garde European sophistication, and an unpolished rural manner, he must have seemed an antidote to the suburban Englishness of Moss's bourgeois background, and also perhaps a challenge. Léger was a

¹⁸ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

means of liberation for Moss, a much-sought escape from the suffocation of her former life. She had already freed herself from gender, as has been discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis; perhaps upon meeting Léger she saw her class identity and nationality as obstacles to art too.

Léger began teaching at the Académie Moderne in 1923 or 1924.¹⁹ He had occupied a studio in the building since before the Great War,²⁰ and emerged from it at appointed times during the week to direct the students working in the communal atelier on the ground floor. A photograph of Léger and his students and the model at the Académie Moderne in 1924, a few years before the arrival of Moss, shows several student paintings in progress.²¹ The model holds her pose with a long vertical staff, and, reading the tableau from left to right, her image is conducted through Léger, who stands as an intermediary between the subject and the students, to the canvas of Franciska Clausen, at the point of the dominant vertical division of the image.²²

The students at the Académie Moderne were international. They came to the school from the Berlin schools, the Arts Students League, New York, from the studio of Malevich in Russia, from all over Europe and even as far afield as Japan. As Ozenfant himself recognised:

*Paris is the melting-pot into which have been perpetually flung the precious metals of foreign mines.*²³

¹⁹ Gladys C. Fabre 'Shorter Illustrated History of the Académie Moderne' in Gladys C. Fabre, Marie-Odile Briot and Barbara Rose, Léger and the Modern Spirit: An Avant-Garde Alternative to Non-Objective Art (1918-1931) (Exhibition 9th July - 5th September 1982), trans. Michael Walsh. Paris and Houston: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 1982.

²⁰ The Académie Moderne was situated at 86, rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, Paris. It was directed by Madame Hamelin. Léger kept a studio here from 1913 until the end of his life. In 1923 Othon Friesz decided to give some of his teaching hours at the Académie to Léger.

²¹ See Illustration 4.12 in appendix to this thesis. This photograph is reproduced of Gladys C. Fabre, 'L' Atelier De Léger Et L' Académie Moderne' L'Oeil, March 1982, p.34; and in Fabre, Briot and Rose, Léger and the Modern Spirit, 1982, p.479.

²² Clausen's painting is reproduced as Illustration 4.1 in appendix to this thesis.

²³ Amédée Ozenfant, Foundations of Modern Art, trans. John Rodker, 2nd ed. New York: Dover Publications, 1952, pp.133-134.

The students of Léger and Ozenfant's atelier at the Academie Moderne weren't hemmed-in by the French nationalism implicit in the 'call to order', and 'l'esprit nouveau', which it can be argued polluted the purity of Purism.²⁴ Moss, and others, learned that national identity, alongside gender identity, were to be overcome; their allegiance was to art, and not to the material world in any of its forms. Léger's pupils: Marcelle Cahn, Otto Carlsund, Franciska Clausen, Joseph Mellor Hanson, Florence Henri, Ragnhild Kaarbo, Ragnhild Keyser, Nadia Khodossievitch (Grabowska-Léger), Vera Meyerson, George L.K. Morris, Erik Olson, Bengt Osterblom, Charlotte Wankel, Marlow Moss, and arguably others, all surpassed their masters in terms of non-figuration. The majority: Henri, Keyser, Meyerson, Morris and Wankel remained working in a Purist-Abstract mode, in the tradition of Classical Cubism, with the introduction of biomorphic form in the case of Morris. Osterblom's colourful sculpture can also be seen as essentially post-Cubist.²⁵ Cahn, Olson, sometimes Henri, and Khodossievitch practised a dynamic Suprematist aesthetic, undoubtedly in the case of the latter, as a result of her earlier education under Malevich, Kobro and Strzeminski in Smolensk.²⁶ Carlsund, Clausen, Hanson and Moss went further in rejecting perspectival space; these four artists turned towards Mondrian and the most austere of all non-objective modes: Neo-Plasticism.²⁷

A variety of factors contributed to Paris, and particularly the Léger / Ozenfant studio at the Académie Moderne, becoming the centre for a new wave of Neo-Plastic art. In 1924 the Weimar Bauhaus had been forced to close, and, despite the opening of the Dessau Bauhaus two years later, it was clear that the air had become thin for avant-gardists in Germany. Similarly, in Russia, figurative Socialist Realism was declared the official form of art. Constructivists were disinherited by the revolution long before Stalin decreed against them in 1932, and without support in Germany, long before the Nazis finally closed the Bauhaus in 1933. In the late twenties, Modernists were

²⁴ As described by Kenneth E. Silver, 'Purism: Straightening up after the Great War', *ArtForum*, Volume 15, No. 7, 1977, pp.56-63.

²⁵ See Illustration 4.10 in appendix to this thesis.

²⁶ See Illustrations 4.4, 4.6, and 4.8.

²⁷ See Illustrations 4.5, 4.2, and 4.3.

already a displaced people. Artists such as Van Doesburg particularly acted as emissaries between Dutch De Stijl, Russian Constructivism, the German Bauhaus and Paris, and during the twenties many young student artists were on the move across Europe. Berlin had been the epicentre, largely due to the cheap cost of living in the wake of the post-war recession. Clausen (Danish), Henri (French), Osterblom (Swedish), and Aurel Bauh (Romanian), Elsa Lystad (Norwegian), Siri Meyer (Swedish) and Ursula Vehrigs (German), all studied in Berlin in the early twenties, before moving with the tide to Paris.²⁸ In Berlin they were exposed to international Constructivist ideas. Bauh, Clausen, and Lystad attended a class taught by Alexander Archipenko, between 1921 and 1923. Clausen had been previously taught by Hans Hoffmann and Maholy-Nagy (before he went to the Bauhaus). Osterblom was under the tutelage of Moriz Melzer. Alexandra Exter moved to Paris in 1924, and taught for some time alongside Léger. These nomadic artists were able to carry with them the influences of international non-figurative art to the Académie Moderne, and in Léger's studio they were allowed to flourish.

By the time Moss was at the Académie Moderne in 1928, the school had fallen into a routine of Léger teaching on a Wednesday afternoon, and Ozenfant on a Saturday.²⁹ During the rest of the week students continued with their work in the street-level room at the Académie where a model was provided, or worked on location returning to present their paintings to the *professeurs* on the allotted days. Othon Friesz ran a separate studio concurrently in the Académie. It tended to be French students in Atelier Friesz; foreign students gravitated to Léger and Ozenfant.³⁰ According to Gladys Fabre the different approaches of Ozenfant and Léger complemented each other.

²⁸ Fabre, Briot and Rose, *Léger and the Modern Spirit*, 1982, p.418.

²⁹ In 1925 Ozenfant took over Léger's teaching, whilst Léger recovered from pneumonia. After Léger convalesced he continued to share his teaching schedule with Ozenfant, as described, until 1929.

³⁰ Three of the six known French students in Leger's class, Gishia Brunhoff, Raoul Raymond Christian-Adam, and Marcelle Cahn, transferred from Friesz's class.

*A sense of freedom pervaded Léger's classes while Ozenfant's teaching was characterized by close attention to pictorial technique, to precision of detail, to the finish and durability of the materials used.*³¹

A contemporary of Moss's at the Académie Moderne in 1929 was the American artist George L.K. Morris. In an essay written in 1971 Morris remembers this time.³² He describes Léger's presence as initially rather elusive; the master drifted in towards the end of the day and offered nothing but a "ça va" or a "continuez" to his pupils. Morris quotes Léger's advice from memory: "make it tight, make it dry." A particularly illuminating anecdote Morris recounts is as follows:

*... a young girl brought in a canvas that she had painted during a weekend in the country. It depicted a medieval gateway, with a wheelbarrow in the lower right and, I think, some chickens. I thought it was quite good, and Léger thought so too. "But look," he said, "the wheelbarrow should go up here" – pointing to a vacant spot in the sky – "then you'd start to get a composition". He continued with an equally unexpected disposition of the chickens.*³³

Despite Léger's interest in the subject and his frequent use of the term "realism" in his writing on art, he clearly was under no obligation to conventional representation of the visual world. The terms 'real', 'realistic' and 'realism' were adopted by Constructivism at its inception in Naum Gabo's and Antoine Pevsner's 'The Realistic Manifesto' of 1920.³⁴ It is established here that 'real' refers to the actuality of existence, the "present day", as opposed to the abstractions of past and future; presence as opposed to (re)presentation. Léger, despite not conventionally being understood as a Constructivist artist, was certainly in accord with 'The Realistic Manifesto' to this extent. In his essay 'The Origins of Painting and Its Representational Value' Léger defines pictorial realism as "the simultaneous ordering of three

³¹ Gladys C. Fabre 'Shorter Illustrated History of the Académie Moderne' in Fabre, Briot and Rose, Léger and the Modern Spirit, 1982, p.479-497.

³² George L.K Morris, 'Preface', Fernand Léger's Functions of Painting, ed. Edward F. Fry, The Documents of 20th Century Art. London: Thames and Hudson, 1971.

³³ Morris, Preface' to Fernand Léger's Functions of Painting, 1971, p.xi.

³⁴ Gabo, N. and Pevsner, A. 'The Realistic Manifesto', first published 5th August 1920 in Moscow, reproduced in translation: Herbert Read and Leslie Martin, Gabo: Constructions, Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings, Engravings. London: Lund Humphries, 1957.

great plastic components: Lines, Forms, and Colours".³⁵ Léger's concept of realism is discussed by Christopher Green in the Introduction to Léger and the Avant-Garde. Green argues that while Léger's paintings "*celebrated the vitality*" of the 'real world', this reality was highly subjective. Léger perceived reality not "*as an ordinary Parisian*" but as an avant-garde artist, and during the twenties as a close associate of Purism; Léger's 'realism' was in fact indistinguishable from 'idealism' at the time he painted '*Le Balustre*' for the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau.³⁶ Later in the same text, Green defines Léger's realism as "*the attempt to realize on canvas the physical presence of things*" as opposed to the imitation of appearances.³⁷ This is a particular understanding of the term 'realism', and helps to illuminate Nijhoff's characterisation of Moss as a "*biological realist*".³⁸ It is emphatically not interchangeable with 'social realism', despite Léger's choice of subjects, or other common understandings of the term such as 'realism' in opposition to 'fantasy'. As Malcolm Turvey has shown, in his article 'The Avant-Garde and the 'New Spirit': The Case of Ballet Mécanique', Léger's adherence to this definition of realism can be found even in the seemingly abstracted forms of '*Ballet Mécanique*' the film he made in 1924.³⁹ In contradistinction to conventional readings of '*Ballet Mécanique*', Turvey follows Léger's own statements regarding his intentions, that the film is "*objective, realist and in no way abstract*".⁴⁰

Léger's use of the term 'realism' is not isolated. It is broadly in accordance with Gabo's, as discussed above, and also with Van Doesburg's use of the term 'concrete'. 'Realism' is positioned by Léger in opposition to 'abstraction',

³⁵ Fernand Léger, Functions of Painting, trans. Alexandra Anderson, The Documents of 20th Century Art. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1973, p.4.

³⁶ Christopher Green, 'The Modern Artist and Modern Life: Idealist or Realist' in Léger and the Avant-Garde, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976, p.5.

³⁷ Green, Léger and the Avant-Garde, 1976, p.8.

³⁸ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

³⁹ Malcolm Turvey, 'The Avant-Garde and the "New Spirit": The Case of Ballet Mécanique', October. No. 102, 2002, pp.35-58.

⁴⁰ Léger is quoted from his essay 'Mechanical Ballet' published in the Autumn-Winter issue of The Little Review, 1924-1925, in Turvey, 'The Avant-Garde and the "New Spirit": The Case of Ballet Mécanique', 2002, p.7. Turvey's source is Dorothy Kosinski, ed., Fernand Léger 1911-1924: The Rhythm of Modern Life, Munich and New York: Prestel-Verlag distributed by Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1994, p.24.

but not, as could be understood, non-figuration. This is a vital distinction, in view of the relationship between Léger and Moss, and it will be discussed later in this chapter with regard to the Association Abstraction-Création. The esoteric use of the term 'realism', in common currency within avant-garde circles of the pre-war period, is perhaps best articulated by Brancusi:

*They are imbeciles who call my work abstract; that which they call abstract is the most realist, because what is real is not the exterior form but the idea, the essence of things.*⁴¹

Just as Brancusi felt wrongly characterised as an 'abstract' artist, Léger can also be mis-represented as a 'realist'. The language Léger speaks is a non-figurative sensory language; sensory, rather than exclusively visual, as demonstrated by his use of tactile words such as "tight" and "dry".⁴² This may have come as a surprise to Léger's pupils, who saw in his recent work a renewed concern for subject matter, and who read, in his published writings, a rejection of abstraction.⁴³ It may have seemed particularly contrary as under his direction they continued to work from observation in a traditional art school life-room setting. The apparent contradiction between working from the model (or motif), and purely formal concerns is an inheritance from Cézanne, via Cubism. Like the Cubists Léger chose traditional motifs precisely because of their neutrality. Subjects such as the female nude and the still life are arguably vehicles for formal design only. Such motifs become signifiers for the history and tradition of fine art, rather than having any individual identity or meaning in themselves. Even when Léger depicted subject matter such as the workingman and factory-produced objects, such things were functioning as signifiers of modernity, and not as individuals. Léger's figures in particular became standardized, built out of a kit of component parts.⁴⁴ He had chosen

⁴¹ Roger Lipsey 'Constantin Brancusi: Negating the Labyrinth' in, An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art. Boston and Shaftesbury: Shambhala Publications, 1988, p.242

⁴² As discussed above, quoted in Morris, 'Preface' to Fernand Léger's Functions of Painting, 1971.

⁴³ Léger rejects "pure abstractions" along with the opposite extreme of "imitations of nature" as avoiding the essential problem of art in his essay 'Notes on Contemporary Plastic Life' first published in 1923, reproduced in Léger, Functions of Painting, 1965, p.26.

⁴⁴ This terminology is adapted from Christopher Green's essay 'Léger and l'Esprit Nouveau 1912-1928' in Christopher Green, John Golding, Norman Reid and Fernand Léger, Léger and

to impose limitations on his vocabulary in order to emphasize the non-figurative properties of his work. In this way it was but a small and insignificant step to dispose of the motif altogether. Matthew Affron, in his essay 'Fernand Léger and the Spectacle of Objects' discusses the relationship between Léger and the ostensible subjects of his paintings.⁴⁵ Affron identifies 1927-28, the year with which Green's study ends, as a "*crucial historical turning point within the artist's career*".⁴⁶ This was the year that Moss met Léger, and she therefore was privy to this moment of coalescence. Affron defines Léger's concept of the 'object-spectacle' as a device to locate a formalist approach in the contemporary world; the depicted objects in Léger's paintings do not disrupt the essential pictorial autonomy. Following the art critic Carl Einstein, as he attempted to characterise modern painting in Paris after Cubism, Affron identifies Léger's gaze as "*universalised*" and "*esthetic*".⁴⁷ This reading of Léger's work is supported by Léger's own emphasis on 'beauty' as the primary concern of his work, as discussed by Turvey in the essay cited above.⁴⁸ The beauty that Léger aspired to in his art was to be achieved by the juxtaposition of contrasting formal elements: colours and forms.⁴⁹

Even accepting Moss's proclamation that Léger was the greatest influence upon her, the teaching of Ozenfant is also likely to have had an impact. There are superficially more immediate connections between the work of Ozenfant and that of Moss. The notion of 'purity', the precision of finish, and the rhythmic orthogonality of Ozenfant are all apparent in Moss. However, at this point in time, it can be difficult to differentiate Léger's influence from Ozenfant's, as Léger had himself been greatly influenced by Ozenfant and Jeanneret. An example of this is Léger's adoption of the Purist working

Purist Paris (Exhibition: 18th November 1970 - 24th January 1971). London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1970, p.61.

⁴⁵ Matthew Affron, 'Fernand Léger and the Spectacle of Objects', Word & Image, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1994.

⁴⁶ Affron, 'Fernand Léger and the Spectacle of Objects', 1994, p.1.

⁴⁷ Affron, 'Fernand Léger and the Spectacle of Objects', 1994, p.14.

⁴⁸ Turvey, 'The Avant-Garde and the 'New Spirit': The Case of Ballet Mécanique', 2002.

⁴⁹ Léger repeatedly uses the terms "*beautiful*" and "*beauty*" when discussing the ultimate aim of art from his essay of 1923 'Notes on Contemporary Plastic Life' Léger, Functions of Painting, 1965, p.24.

practice of resolving a composition in working drawings, and then transferring the complete design to the canvas, executing it unaltered. Léger had not allowed a composition to evolve on the canvas since before the war. This method of manufacture could be characterised as both classical and mechanical,⁵⁰ and exemplifies the Purist marriage of French tradition and modernity. By the late twenties it had long been Léger's working method, and can no longer be regarded as exclusively Ozenfant's and Jeanneret's. Moss adopted the practice from both Léger and Ozenfant, and continued to work in this way for the rest of her life. Again, within avant-garde circles in Paris this was not necessarily unusual. Van Doesburg articulates the principle in his 1930 'Manifesto of Concrete Art':

*The work exists as a whole in the consciousness before it is translated into materials. It is also necessary for the execution to be of a technical perfection that is equal to that of the mental project.*⁵¹

Moss's fascination with geometry, and its expression in art, could be perceived to come from Ozenfant rather than Léger. Ozenfant actively used geometry and proportion, particularly the Golden Ratio, in his work, whereas Léger seemingly did not. However Léger certainly supported Ozenfant's use of geometry, in theory at least, and would have encouraged Moss's interest. In his writings, Léger often referred to geometry; for example he opened his 1924 essay 'The Machine Aesthetic: The Manufactured Object, the Artisan and the Artist' with the words:

*Modern man lives more and more in a preponderantly geometric order. All mechanical and industrial human creation is subject to geometric forces.*⁵²

And in his essay 'The Machine Aesthetic: Geometric Order and Truth', published a year later, he says:

⁵⁰ Christopher Green 'Léger and L'Esprit Nouveau', in Green, Golding, Reid and Léger, Léger and Purist Paris (Exhibition: 18th November 1970 - 24th January 1971) pp.60-61.

⁵¹ Theo Van Doesburg quoted in Willy Rotzler, Constructive Concepts: A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present, trans. Stanley Mason, Zurich: ABC, 1977, p.118.

⁵² The opening lines of Léger's essay 'The Machine Aesthetic: The Manufactured Object, the Artisan and the Artist' first published in 1924, Bulletin de L'Effort Moderne, Paris. Léger, Functions of Painting, 1965, pp.52-61.

*Geometric form is dominant. It penetrates every area with its visual and psychological influence.*⁵³

This is very much in accordance with Jeanneret and Ozenfant's original conception of Purism, as defined in their statement of 1920.⁵⁴ Here mathematics is invoked entirely in the service of good and functional design, or "*economy*". There is no mention of the mystical or symbolic associations of number patterns that so appealed to the Theosophists. In 1928, during Moss's time at the Académie Moderne, Ozenfant published a fuller account of his personal position in Foundations of Modern Art.⁵⁵ No longer in close collaboration with Jeanneret who as an architect emphasized design and functionality, Ozenfant focused to a greater degree on the connection between mathematical / geometric order in nature and in art. However despite his rhetoric and referral to the "*miraculous*", "*perfect*", and "*beautiful*", Ozenfant does not employ mystical or even spiritual language. The feelings he articulates in response to a wavy sea are profoundly humanist. Such joyful moments of observing nature that bring about "*systemic concordances between us and the universe*", are only available to mankind through geometry he argues, although he cannot be certain if this is because geometry is the thread that links all things in the universe, or if only the human brain is governed by geometry and therefore can only perceive that which accords with itself. Ozenfant's frame of reference: the universe / the natural world, art of the Classical civilisations, and humanist / atheist stance (he calls the artist the "*God of man*") influenced Moss profoundly, and echoes of his words appear in her writing for Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif four

⁵³ Léger 'The Machine Aesthetic: Geometric Order and Truth', first published in 1925, Propos d'Artistes, Paris. Léger, Functions of Painting, 1965, pp.52-61.

⁵⁴ Charles Edouard Jeanneret and Amédée Ozenfant, 'Purism', trans. R. L. Herbert, Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, pp.237-240.

⁵⁵ Ozenfant, Foundations of Modern Art, 1928.

years later.⁵⁶ Interestingly Moss refers to her work as "*purist painting*" (small 'p') in a letter to Paule Vézelay of 1958.⁵⁷

One particular aspect of Léger's aesthetic, divergent from that of Ozenfant, that Moss embraced, was the primacy of colour. The Purists, like the Cubists, made colour subservient to structure. Léger however, said:

*Let us take up the problem [of painting] at its starting point: the need for colour ... as much as possible it should be done simply, through the application of colour with no significance other than colour itself... colour is in itself a plastic reality. It is a new realism.*⁵⁸

It is this orientation that differentiates Léger from the Purists, and Moss from the Purists, the Cubists and, perhaps most significantly, Mondrian.⁵⁹ Mondrian's preliminary drawings demonstrate that he began with line; this can be seen in his many charcoal sketches, with lines rubbed out and adjusted until a composition is arrived upon. The initial stage for Moss was always thumbnail sketches arranging areas of colour. In this respect it is evident that she certainly owes more to the example of Léger than to that of Mondrian. The fact that these preliminary sketches were executed in gouache is also a method inherited from Léger.⁶⁰

Perhaps the most crucial manifestation of the teachings of Léger in the work of Moss is the aspiration towards dynamism. The central theme in her trinity of space, movement and light, at least, can be traced back to Léger. In his pre-war work it was 'simultaneity' that Léger revelled in: the same dynamism and fragmentation of modern life that the Cubo-Futurists strove to represent,

⁵⁶ See Appendix 2i to this thesis for a full translation of Moss's writings appearing in *Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif*. Moss's writings are discussed later in this chapter, and at length in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

⁵⁷ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, handwritten letter, dated 16th March 1958, held uncatalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives, London. See Letter 46, Appendix 3iii.

⁵⁸ Léger in an essay of 1938 'Colour in the World' in, *Functions of Painting*, 1965, p.122.

⁵⁹ The primacy of colour in Moss's work allies her again to Van Doesburg and his 1930 'Manifesto of Concrete Art': "*In painting only colour is true. Colour is a constant energy, determined by its contrast with another colour. Colour is the basic substance of painting; it signifies itself only. Painting is a means of realising a thought in optical terms: every picture is a colour thought*" cited Rotzler, *Constructive Concepts*, 1977, p.118.

⁶⁰ Fabre, '1982, 'L' Atelier De Léger Et L' Académie Moderne', p.35.

by different means. However after the war, when Picasso and Severini responded to the 'call to order' with a return to unambiguous figuration and archetypal subject matter, Léger rejected chaotic multiplicity in favour of ordered rhythms, and in contradistinction to the calm repose of classical Cubism, exemplified by Gris, and Purism, Léger's work remained dynamic.⁶¹ Unlike the Purists, who were emphatically opposed to non-figuration, Léger retained an ambivalent attitude. Contrarily it was during his exposure to the ideas of Ozenfant and Jeanneret that Léger made entirely non-representational works, some of the few examples of non-figurative Purism: the '*Composition Murales*' of 1924.⁶² Although called murals, these are in fact easel paintings. They function as murals once situated within architecture. It cannot be known for certain that Moss saw these works by Léger four years later at the Académie Moderne, but it seems likely. The similarity between them and Moss's final works thirty years later is striking (See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 68, P/R 71, P/R 73, P/R 74, P/R 75, P/R 76, and P/R 77).⁶³

The 1924 '*Composition Murales*' are an isolated incident of entirely non-representational easel paintings in Léger's work of this period, and arguably the only work in his oeuvre that could be termed 'concrete'.⁶⁴ By 1936 he had reintroduced the diagonal line to his 'mural compositions', and thus a figurative element (the illusion of depth), which rapidly becomes a referent to the machine or the manufactured object, and by this means subject matter is reinstated. However in his theatrical set design, when painting could function as a backdrop, Léger was free, and consistently produced non-figurative work. He found the same liberation in architecture and interior design. Possibly, through his work in design Léger opened the way for his pupils to

⁶¹ As described by Christopher Green in 'Cubism Classicised: a New View of Modern Life' in Green, Golding, Reid and Léger, *Léger and Purist Paris*, 19710, pp.32-37.

⁶² See Illustrations: Figure 4.13 and 4.14.

⁶³ Moss's late work is discussed at some length in the Chapter 6 of this thesis; it is sufficient now to say that the quality of movement, within and beyond the edges of the canvas, is comparable to the functioning of Léger's '*Composition Murales*'.

⁶⁴ Léger's '*Contrastes de Formes*' works of 1913 represent an earlier manifestation of abstraction in his oeuvre, however it can be argued that these works have representational elements; they resemble machinery and certainly contain illusions of space and representations of movement.

non-objectivity.⁶⁵ Green emphasizes a quality particular to the mural paintings:

*For Léger the vocabulary of mural painting consists only of flat planes, this flatness a necessary reinforcement to the flatness of the wall; at the same time its colour is considered an expanding force. He reminds us that 'a square metre of yellow commands a surface four times its dimensions'. Though they are isolated colour incidents, indeed easel paintings, his murals are designed to radiate energy about them, affecting their wall setting as a whole without breaking into its flat unity.*⁶⁶

This feeling for movement, unrestricted by the edges of the canvas, is the root of the ambivalence between Léger and Neo-Plasticism, and between Moss and Mondrian. Like Léger, Moss was perturbed by the "mute" and "static" qualities of Mondrian.⁶⁷ Léger may have satisfied his own hunger for the expression of movement and rhythm in his cinematic works such as '*Ballet Mécanique*', but he had ignited a hunger in his pupil to achieve this in painting. Léger's qualities of 'tightness' and 'dryness', and his concern with composition, movement and colour as the means to attaining beauty, remained important for Moss.

It is likely that Moss, initially at least, made representational work at the Académie Moderne. In 1929, either during her final months there, or shortly after leaving, Moss conclusively abandoned figurative painting, thereby parting company with Léger regarding the need for an object or subject in art. Regarding pictorial representation, she chose to follow what Léger said, rather than what he did in practice. Michel Seuphor recalls Picasso's remark that a disciple sees things more clearly than their master, when discussing the development of abstract art from Cubism.⁶⁸ Like other students of Léger's,

⁶⁵ As suggested by Gladys C. Fabre in 'The Modern Spirit and the Problem of Abstraction in the work of Léger, his Friends and Pupils at the Académie Moderne' in Fabre, Briot and Rose, *Léger and the Modern Spirit*, 1982, p.413.

⁶⁶ Christopher Green 'Léger and L'Esprit Nouveau' in Green, Golding, Reid and Léger, *Léger and Purist Paris*, 1970, p.70.

⁶⁷ Fernand Léger in his 1931 essay 'Abstract Art', published in *Cahiers d'Art*, Paris; and in Léger, *Functions of Painting*, 1965.

⁶⁸ Michel Seuphor, *A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, Preceded by a History of Abstract Painting*, trans. Lionel Izod, John Montague and Francis Scarfe. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1958, p.46.

Moss sensed an intractable conflict between Purist formalism and pictorial representation. The 'esprit nouveau' position of euphoric glorification of the modern world, Léger and Ozenfant's faith in modern man and technology became untenable to the new generation of artists.⁶⁹ With the rising temperature of the political situation in Europe, a more extreme rhetoric than post-Cubist figurative abstraction was called for. The editorial of the 1933 cahier *Abstraction-Création* made the connection between non-figurative art and "opposition to all oppression, of any kind" overt.⁷⁰ Léger seemed to acknowledge this himself, yet was terrified by the abyss of the non-objective world:

*[Neo-Plasticism] is the most important, the most interesting of the different plastic trends that have developed during the last twenty-five years ... it is an art that has an intrinsic value ... this direction is dominated by the desire for perfection and complete freedom that makes saints, heroes and madmen. It is an extreme state in which only a few creators and admirers can maintain themselves. The danger of this formula is its very loftiness.*⁷¹

Léger embraced the non-objective, but in his own practice only as decoration, for him it was insufficient for art. This attitude has been described as a typically French mistrust of abstraction,⁷² and would have been familiar to Moss from England.

Having synthesized the many influences, and gestated the experience of Léger's studio, Moss made her first Neo-Plastic composition in 1929: "two lines intersecting at right angles on a white ground".⁷³ Unlike for Carlsund,

⁶⁹ *L'Esprit Nouveau* was the title of Ozenfant and Jeanneret's international magazine, published between 1920 and 1925, and it was also the title of their pavilion, including a painting by Léger, in the 1925 Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*. The phrase has become synonymous with Purism, but was first used by Guillaume Apollinaire in a lecture of 1918, and can be related to the De Stijl movement (who dedicated the second issue of their journal to Apollinaire that year), as well as Dada, and the Surrealists, who also indeed took their name from Apollinaire.

⁷⁰ *Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorised Reprint Edition. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 - 1936.* New York: Arno, 1968.

⁷¹ Léger, 'Abstract Art', 1931.

⁷² Gladys C. Fabre, 'The Modern Spirit and the Problem of Abstraction in the work of Léger, his Friends and Pupils at the Académie Moderne', in Fabre, Briot and Rose, *Léger and the Modern Spirit*, 1982, p.417.

⁷³ This work is unknown but described thus by Nijhoff, and referred to by her as Moss's first Neo-Plastic work in Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962. I have not included it in my Catalogue Raisonné here. Moss had by this point been working in a non-figurative, but not yet Neo-

Clausen and Hanson, Moss's fellow students at the Académie Moderne, this was not to be a passing phase. These artists experimented with the style of Neo-Plasticism, amongst others, before returning to figuration. Carlsund and Clausen remained essentially followers of Léger, while Hanson developed an elegant, monumental style of figure composition, reminiscent of Henry Moore. Discounting the undated works discussed above, Moss's known oeuvre begins in 1930, with a double-line composition.⁷⁴ Perhaps the most profound debt Moss owes to Léger is the ability to recognise the possibilities of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic language, and the courage to adapt it to her own ends.

Associations and Allegiances.

The association Abstraction-Création (1931-1936) represented the unification of many factions of international non-figurative art. It grew from previous movements: De Stijl, Cercle et Carré, and Art Concret, and was inclusive, rather than prescriptive, in its remit, although remaining steadfastly non-figurative. Cercle et Carré had been established in 1929 by Seuphor and Joaquín Torres-García, the emphasis being on an opposition to the forces of Surrealism, rather than specifically the promotion of non-figuration. The members of Cercle et Carré included Mondrian, Kandinsky, Arp, Schwitters, Vantongerloo, Sophie Taüber-Arp, Pevsner, Huszár, Van Rees, Vordemberge-Gildewart, Gorin, and Olson (from the Académie Moderne). Van Doesburg refused to join Cercle et Carré, possibly on grounds of its inclusion of semi-figurative artists such as Torres-García, Ozenfant and Léger in its single April 1930 exhibition, although Van Doesburg was friendly with all of them, particularly Torres-García. It is more likely that the reasons for Van Doesburg's refusal were personal; Seuphor was a close friend and great admirer of Mondrian, and at this point the relationship between Van Doesburg and Mondrian had deteriorated to the point of animosity. In reply to Cercle et

Plastic idiom for a year, according to a statement by Moss in a letter to Paule Vézelay dated 22nd August 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection at the Tate Archives, London: see Letter 27 in Appendix 3iii.

⁷⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 5.

Carré Van Doesburg founded Art Concret, a group that included Jean Hélion, Carlsund (from the Académie Moderne), and Léon Tutundjian, who was making Constructivist work at this time. In reality Art Concret only existed as one small publication of May 1930, a pamphlet, as acidly described by Seuphor, "*whose main interest lies in its title*".⁷⁵ True as this may be, Van Doesburg's concept of 'art concret' was seminal in the development of non-objective art.⁷⁶ In his 'Manifesto of Concrete Art' dated January 1930 and published in the pamphlet he stated:

*Concrete and not abstract painting. For we have left behind us the time of searching and of speculative experiment. In seeking for purity the artist was forced to abstract from the natural forms that concealed the plastic elements. In order to express himself and to create art-forms he was compelled to destroy the natural form. Today the idea of the art-form is as obsolete as the idea of the natural form. We look forward to the era of pure painting. For nothing is more concrete, more real than a line, a colour surface.*⁷⁷

This dichotomy, between abstraction and concrete creation (realism –in the sense described above in relation to Léger), became the central premise of the association Abstraction-Création, enshrined in its title. In the first issue of the almanac Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif, published in 1932, the editorial discusses this:

abstraction, because certain artists have come to the concept of non-figuration by the progressive abstraction of the forms of nature.

creation, because other artists attained non-figuration direct, purely via geometry, or by the exclusive use of elements commonly called abstract, such as circles, planes, bars, lines, etc...

*We do not judge, we do not compare, we do not distinguish works constructed by progressive abstractive evolution or by direct creation. We are trying to compose a document of non-figurative art.*⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Seuphor, A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, 1958, p.49.

⁷⁶ The term 'art concret' was first used by Max Burchartz in 1922. He was a German Constructivist, and was probably inspired by reading Hegel who established 'concrete' as the artistic realisation of thought, and therefore the opposite of 'abstract'. The term was significantly developed by Van Doesburg, in terms of non-figurative art, and later Max Bill, Rotzler, Constructive Concepts, 1977, p.118.

⁷⁷ Theo Van Doesburg 'Manifesto of Concrete Art', in the pamphlet Art Concret, published in Paris, May 1930, cited in Rotzler, Constructive Concepts, 1977, p.118.

⁷⁸ Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorised Reprint Edition. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 - 1936. Translated in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood,

Abstraction-Création, a much larger and more robust group, was initiated by Vantongerloo, Etienne Béothy and Auguste Herbin, after the collapse of Cercle et Carré, following the withdrawal of Seuphor who became ill and left Paris. The editorial collaborators were Arp, Gleizes, Héliou, Kupka, Tutundjian, and Valmier, with Herbin as President, Vantongerloo as Vice-President, and Antoine Pevsner as Reader. The founder membership of forty-one included Béothy, Katherine Dreier, Gabo, Gorin, Maholy-Nagy, Mondrian, Robert Delaunay, Sonia Terk-Delaunay, Van Doesburg, Schwitters, Taüber-Arp, Jacques Villon, Vordemberge-Gildewart, and the only two British founder members: Edward Wadsworth and Moss.⁷⁹ Abstraction-Création, and its accompanying exhibitions and annual cahier, succeeded in pulling together the entire range of international non-figurative art, encompassing Russian Constructivism, De Stijl, the Bauhaus, Orphism and Dada. Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif ran until 1936, publishing five annuals. In 1935 the journal recorded 416 subscribers, half of whom lived outside of Paris. The membership at no point included Lissitzky, Malevich, Tatlin, or Carlsund, although they were all initially invited. Eventually the contributors included Josef Albers, Max Bill, Brancusi, Archille Gorky, Hepworth, Kandinsky, Kobro, Hannah Kosnick-Kloss, Van Der Leek, Nicholson, Picasso, and Paule Vézelay, amongst others. It is known from a promotional poster that Moss exhibited in a group show under the banner of Abstraction-Création for a couple of weeks one March, alongside Arp, Nicholson, Bill, Erni, Herbin, Paalen, Roubillotte, Tihanyi and Vézelay.⁸⁰ According to Moss's testimony on her Artists International Association application, this exhibition was in 1935 or 1936; although possibly she took part in two exhibitions.

The achievement of Abstraction-Création was to establish a cohesive link between the varied and sometimes volatile membership. The estrangement

eds., Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, pp.357-359.

⁷⁹ Evie Hone (1894-1955), who was Irish and resident in Paris, was also a founder member, and contributed to all five of the cahiers.

⁸⁰ The poster for this show is reproduced in Norbert Nobis and Gladys C. Fabre, Abstraction Création: 1931-1936 (Exhibitions: 16th June - 17th September and 2nd April - 4th June 1978), Paris / Münster: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris / Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1978, p.302. The poster does not identify the year.

between Van Doesburg and Mondrian is well documented, and emanated from a personality clash, as much as serious artistic differences, but they fundamentally disagreed over the inclusion of the diagonal line in the grammar of Neo-Plasticism. Mondrian was for the vertical and the horizontal exclusively, whereas Van Doesburg persistently introduced the dynamism of the diagonal. Other tensions lay between Van Doesburg and the other leading figure from De Stijl Vantongerloo; who fought at the preview of the 1930 *Cercle et Carré* show. The relationship between Vantongerloo and Mondrian was also strained at times.⁸¹ *Abstraction-Création* unified these factions under the cause of rational and utopian non-figurative art, against the prevailing trend of romantic Surrealism.

Moss's work appears in all five issues of *Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif*.⁸² In the first three issues she also published her thoughts in writing for the first and only time in her career. Peculiarly she appears under her original name 'Marjorie Moss' in the first issue, by the second issue she is listed simply as 'Moss'. In her first essay she attempts an explanation to the interested public of the reasoning that pushed her towards the new plastic art. She argues, in Platonic terms, that the modern painter is no longer content with the mystery of the relationship between the changeable appearances of individual forms in nature, and an unchanging universal truth, and wishes to pursue the essential and universal directly. She "*aims to construct pure plastic art which will be able to express in totality the artist's consciousness of the universe*".⁸³ In her second essay she extols the values of modernity: science, technology and the "*cerebral strength*" of mankind, and proclaims art to be the plastic expression of the god-like nature of man, the creator of names and numbers. The third published statement by Moss is just a single

⁸¹ This is evidenced in correspondence between Vantongerloo and Gorin published in Marianne Le Pommere, *L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin*, Zurich: Waser Verlag, 1985.

⁸² Marlow Moss's work appears in *Abstraction-Création Art Non-Figuratif* as follows:

Issue 1: Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 7 and P/R 6.

Issue 2: Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 9 and P/R 12.

Issue 3: Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 13 and P/R 14.

Issue 4: Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 16 and P/R 15.

Issue 5: Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 19 and P/R 22.

⁸³ *Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif*, translated for the author by Katy Ruffles, see Appendix 2i.

sentence. (See the Appendix 2i for a full transcript of the translated Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif essays).⁸⁴

During the era of Abstraction-Création (the early to mid-thirties), Moss was active in several other groups: Les Surindépendants, The Association 1940, and Groupe Anglo-Américain. Very little documentation exists of these organisations, and their exhibitions. It is known from Moss's 1942 application to join the Artists International Association in London,⁸⁵ that she exhibited with the 1940 Group in 1931, and in the Anglo-American Exhibition 1936-37, both in Paris, but catalogues are seemingly not existent. On the same form she lists annual exhibitions with Les Surindépendants 1931-36, and she is indeed listed in the 1935 catalogue of their "*huitième exposition*", with a mis-spelling of her name.⁸⁶ Sources differ, but it seems the 1940 Group was exclusively for non-figurative art and had an area reserved within the Surindépendants exhibition. Les Surindépendants was founded around 1928, and was named in reference to the Salon des Indépendants from the previous century. It can be assumed that Les Surindépendants also operated in opposition to the status quo, and that there was no selection committee, just a membership fee. Therefore, unlike Abstraction-Création, it was not a particularly significant association to belong to, in the context of the avant-garde, (although the 1940 Group may have held kudos), but it does demonstrate Moss's keenness to operate professionally at this time, to maintain contacts with other artists and to exhibit her work at every opportunity. It is known that Moss had a professional connection with the Parisian dealer Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet.⁸⁷ This is in contradistinction to the way she has been portrayed since her death,

⁸⁴ Moss's published writing is discussed further in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

⁸⁵ See Appendix 4i.

⁸⁶ Marlow Moss exhibited one painting in this exhibition, under the name "*Moss Maylow*": catalogue number 230, '*Peinture Abstraite*'. René Mèndes-France, Les Surindépendants (8th Exhibition: 25th October - 24th November 1935), Paris: Parc des Expositions -Porte de Versailles, 1935. This catalogue is held in the Courtauld Institute Library. I have been unable to identify which work this is for the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis. I have not located any other catalogues of Les Surindépendants from the years 1931-36.

⁸⁷ This is known from a letter from Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, dated 20/9/55, held in the Tate Archives, London, (Letter 30 in Appendix 3iii) arranging the collection of the painting '*White, Yellow, Blue and Black*' of 1932 (see Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 12) to be sold to Jean Arp. Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet had a gallery on Rue Varin, Paris, and also supplied artist materials. In addition to Moss, he also represented Léger and Mondrian.

as a recluse who shunned associations and societies;⁸⁸ the implication of such a characterisation is that Moss was an eccentric and a dilettante. Due to this misrepresentation it is worth stating that her attitude to her career as an artist was always professional; she took every opportunity to join artists' associations and foster contact with fellow artists.

After the collapse of Abstraction-Création Moss featured in two significant international exhibitions: Konstruktivisten at the Kunsthalle in Basel, in 1937, and Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1938. She was represented by four works in Konstruktivisten, all from the previous year or so, each simply listed as 'composition'.⁸⁹ The exhibition included many of her fellows from Abstraction-Création: Domela, Gabo, Gorin, Helion, Maholy-Nagy, Mondrian, Pevsner, Taüber, Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo, Vordemberge, the Russian Constructivist El Lissitzky, and the Constructive works of Dadaists such as Richter and the late Viking Eggeling. It is significant that this exhibition took place in Switzerland, which during and after the war became the safe-haven for Art Concret. Konstruktivisten in Basel was the precursor of Max Bill's International Exhibition of Concrete Art in the same town in 1944, seven years later. Unfortunately, due to the war, Moss was unable to send work to this later show. It is appropriate that Basel, a town at the centre of Europe, the meeting point of France, Germany and Switzerland, should be the location for a stronghold of rational and visionary art during the dark period of Nazism. The catalogues for both Konstruktivisten and Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst, are both introduced by Georges Schmidt, and have many of the exhibitors in common.⁹⁰ Along with Moss both exhibitions include: Domela, Gorin, Helion, Lissitzky, Mondrian, Maholy-Nagy, Pevsner, Taüber, Vantongerloo, Van Doesburg, and Vordemberge-Gildewart. In addition, Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst included: Arp, Bill, Brancusi,

⁸⁸ Michael Canney, for example, perceived Moss in this way, and has repeated this account of her in several publications, and been a source for further writing by Peter Davies and Florette Dijkstra. See Chapter 1 of this thesis for a fuller exploration of the portrayal of Marlow Moss in art historical writing.

⁸⁹ George Schmidt, Konstruktivisten, Basel: Basel Kunsthalle, 1937.

⁹⁰ George Schmidt, S. Giedion, H. Buys, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky, Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst (Exhibition: 2nd-24th April 1938). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1938.

Delaunay, Terk-Delaunay, Hepworth, Kandinsky, Klee, Léger, Nicholson and Vézelay, amongst others. Again the site, Amsterdam's Stedelijk, is indicative of the key role it played in the promotion of international concrete and Constructive art. The catalogue for Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst is a weightier affair than the previous one for Konstruktivisten. It includes essays by Mondrian and Kandinsky, and clearly attempts to provide a defining account of non-figurative art of the period. Moss contributed just one work, listed as '*Abstract Compositie*'.⁹¹

International abstract / concrete art appears to have been in a strong position at this time, a cohesive pan-European movement with an ever-widening community of practitioners. Moss was at the very centre of this movement. Of course the world was on the brink of war in the late 1930s, and soon events took over, and the artists of Abstraction-Création were scattered. However despite the very real threat of persecution, especially for Moss who was not only a degenerate Modernist artist, but also a Jew and a lesbian, unceasing efforts were made to continue with the production and promotion of Constructivist art. Terk-Delaunay founded the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in 1939 as an exhibiting society intended to continue the work of Abstraction-Création. Moss took part in the first Réalités Nouvelles exhibition at the Galerie Charpentier, Paris, in 1939, and returned to them on their post-war re-establishment for the 1946 show. She also appeared at Réalités Nouvelles 1950 and 1951.⁹²

Alongside identification with the abstract / concrete movement, Moss also connected with the Anglo-Americans, expatriates and Amazons in Paris and allies in the war.⁹³ As mentioned above she exhibited with Groupe Anglo-

⁹¹ Catalogue number 55, in Schmidt, Giedion, Buys, Mondrian and Kandinsky, Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst (Exhibition: 2nd-24th April 1938). I am not able to identify which work this is.

⁹² The institution Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, built on the foundations of Cercle et Carré, Art Concret, and Abstraction-Création continues to this day with an annual exhibition in the Parc Floral de Paris and a membership of over four hundred. See Appendix 1 for a full list of Moss's exhibitions.

⁹³ The term 'Americain' and 'Amazon' were somewhat interchangeable in Paris in the early twentieth century, and implied an independent intellectual woman, in the manner of Gertrude Stein, with an under-current of subversive lesbian sexuality.

American in Paris 1936-37, but details of this show are undocumented. It can be assumed that it wasn't an exclusively non-figurative group, but it is likely that it was Modernist and progressive. Some time later, during the war, Moss made contact with The American British Art Centre in New York. It's possible this was through Mondrian who was in New York from 1940. Artists such as John Tunnard, Moss's Lamorna neighbour, exhibited at The American British Art Centre in August 1942, along with Henry Moore. Another Lamorna resident: the painter John Armstrong, exhibited there in February 1942.⁹⁴ Possibly Moss was the connection for them, and she too exhibited there the same year. Sending work to The American British Art Centre for exhibition during the war, for shows that were not Constructivist or non-figurative, was motivated by the different circumstances Moss found herself in.⁹⁵ The A.B.A.C. fashioned itself as a refuge for contemporary British art and artists whom may otherwise have found themselves in vulnerable situations during the war.⁹⁶ It is also likely that it was conceived as a cultural propaganda exercise to promote good relations between Britain and America, as part of the war effort. Moss took the opportunity of having her work on display in New York to court the attention of Alfred Barr, the Director of the Museum of Modern Art. She wrote a cablegram to him stating:

*WOULD HONOUR YOUR OPINION OF WORK...*⁹⁷

⁹⁴ No Retreat on the Cultural Front: Partial Report on Activities of the American British Art Centre Dealing Only with Exhibitions of British Contemporary Art, Organized by the American British Art Centre from January 1st 1941 to October 1st 1943, New York: American British Art Centre, 1943. Typed manuscript held in the Courtauld Institute Library. Moss is not mentioned in this report, which by its own admission is incomplete. It is unsurprising that Moss's name is relegated to "and others" as the impetus for the new Centre came from its sister institution: The British Art Centre in London, and not from Paris where Moss's name was known. She states on her A.I.A. application, September 1942, that she was currently exhibiting at The American British Art Centre. See Appendix 4i.

⁹⁵ These circumstances are discussed in the following Chapter of this thesis.

⁹⁶ This is stated in 'The American-British Art Centre -New York', The Studio Vol. 122, July 1941, pp.26-29.

⁹⁷ This cablegram, dating from August 1942, is held in the Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers: AAA AHB 2168; frame 34, the Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. It seems from memos kept in the archive (AAA AHB 2168; frames 32 and 33) that efforts were made to see "the boy's work" (frame 33), but there is no record of Barr's response to it, if indeed he eventually arranged a viewing.

Such opportunism demonstrates confidence and ambition on Moss's part. In the twenty years following Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst Moss took part in several annual *Réalités Nouvelles* shows, the 1955 London Groupe Espace show, and a New York show organised through Erica Brausen at the Hanover Gallery in September 1956.⁹⁸ In 1957 Moss again took part in a large and seminal international group exhibition: Cinquante Ans De Peinture Abstraite, at the Galerie Creuze. This, the year before her death, returned Moss to her Parisian context. Seuphor was instrumental in this show and wrote the short catalogue introduction.⁹⁹ He was concurrently writing his Dictionary and History of Abstract Painting,¹⁰⁰ which was first published the following year, so was engaged in a process of assimilation and evaluation of the non-figurative: abstract / concrete movement as a whole. The catalogue, rather than reproducing all the paintings of the show in a conventional manner, comprises several installation shots of the gallery space, which further emphasises the unification Seuphor was attempting to achieve. Moss's painting (Catalogue Raisoné: P/R 71) dominates the foreground of one of the photographs. It is a large painting, square in shape, and set, as it is, upon an easel-type stand, free from the wall and the surrounding works, it would have been dazzling. A connection can be made, between Léger's mural paintings, as discussed above, and this period of Moss's work. It can be seen in this photograph that Moss's painting activates not merely a wall, but the entire interior space of a gallery, and indeed the exhibition itself. A photograph of Moss's Lamorna studio, a year later, again shows this picture displayed on an easel, rather than hung on the wall. This possibly indicates either that Moss always intended this work to be freestanding, or that Seuphor's exhibition installation had intrigued her.¹⁰¹

Cinquante Ans De Peinture Abstraite was to be the final exhibition in which Moss's work appeared with her contemporaries, and in Paris, during her

⁹⁸ Mention in letters from Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, handwritten, dated 1st August 1956, and 25th August 1956, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives, see Letter 40, Appendix 3iii.

⁹⁹ Michel Seuphor, Cinquante Ans De Peinture Abstraite (Exhibition: 9th March - 12th June 1957). Paris: Galerie Creuze, 1957.

¹⁰⁰ Seuphor, A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, 1958.

¹⁰¹ This will be discussed at greater length in the final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 6.

lifetime. It places her as central to the Parisian Constructive scene, positioned alongside her closest comrades: Mondrian, Vantongerloo, Gorin and Bill.

Mondrian, Vantongerloo, Gorin, and Bill.

As well as institutional affiliations Moss also had important personal affiliations in Paris after her time at the Académie Moderne. She can be positioned within a constellation of Constructive practices, most significantly those of Mondrian, Vantongerloo, Gorin, and Bill, but also those of Van Doesburg, Arp, and Brancusi. Each of these artists were important to Moss; as professional colleagues within Abstraction-Création, and some later with *Réalités Nouvelles*; for their work that provided aesthetic inspiration and influence upon her work; and, in some cases, as personal friends. The relationships between Moss, Mondrian, Vantongerloo, Gorin and Bill can be traced through their works and their correspondence. Looking at these connections helps refine what might be understood to be the core of Moss's working aesthetic.¹⁰²

After Moss's very long artistic adolescence, her transition from student of Léger to member of the avant-garde was comparatively swift. As has been described in Chapter 2 of this thesis, encountering the work of Mondrian directly for the first time had an enormous impact on Moss.¹⁰³ It is evidenced by Moss's signature in the visitor's book of the Galerie Jean Bucher, that she attended the Mondrian exhibition of February 1928.¹⁰⁴ She made her first

¹⁰² Moss's working aesthetic is the focus of Chapter 6 of this thesis; it is therefore my intention here to establish the significance of Moss's artistic and personal affiliations in anticipation of that.

¹⁰³ Moss was later to be in possession of two Mondrian paintings of 1921, on loan from Wim and Tonia Stieltjes from 1932, until they were destroyed in the bombing of Gauciel in 1944, Robert P. Welsh and Joop M. Joosten, *Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1st ed., 2 vols., New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998, Volume 2, pp.288-289.

¹⁰⁴ It is not, however, certain if this was indeed the momentous occasion of Moss's first encounter with Mondrian's work. The exhibition was of Mondrian and Nicolaas Eekman, and took place February 20th until March 1st 1928 at the Galerie Jeanne Bucher, Paris. Moss signed: "*Mme Moss, Liberia Hotel, 9 rue de la Grande Chaumiere*". The visitors' book is held in the gallery's archive. This information, and an image of Moss's inscription, is gleaned from De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Marlow Moss -De Constructie Van Een Nieuwe Werkelijkheid', 1994.

Neo-Plastic painting in 1929, the year she met Mondrian, whilst still a student or soon after graduating, and her first genuine contribution to the development of the De Stijl language, the double-line, less than a year later, in 1930.¹⁰⁵ It was the double-line, which established Moss's presence on the Parisian Constructive scene two years after that. This innovation, and the disturbance it caused, announced her as a mature artistic personality to be reckoned with. It led to her joining Abstraction-Création, and finding herself, at last, amongst comrades.

In January 1931 Moss exhibited two paintings, both featuring a double-line, at the second 1940 Group show with Les Surindépendants.¹⁰⁶ Mondrian wrote a letter to Moss asking what the purpose of the double-line in these paintings was, and Moss responded, some time later, with a lengthy written explanation, two drawings and undoubtedly a plethora of calculations. Moss explained that she found the single line grid to be a "*conclusion and restriction*" to a composition. Mondrian is understood to have responded: "*I couldn't quite follow your letter. Figures don't mean much to me*".¹⁰⁷ However Moss had certainly caught his attention, and her double-line slowly infused his thinking. Mondrian wrote to Gorin asking his opinion on Moss's ideas.¹⁰⁸ The issue that most occupied Mondrian was the possibility that 'his' Neo-Plastic language could be used to express a quite different personality. He notes that Moss's letter was "*modest*", but complains that she evades his question. Moss's use of geometry was completely incomprehensible to Mondrian. It placed Moss with the other De Stijl artists Van Doesburg and Vantongerloo, from whom Mondrian had distanced himself years previously. Mondrian

De Jongh-Vermeulen, in claiming this as the moment Moss first saw a Mondrian, deviates from Nijhoff, who pinpoints the year of Moss's first encounter with an original Mondrian as 1927, explaining that she knew his work in reproduction before this.

¹⁰⁵ Moss's double-line is also discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁶ Possibly these were the two paintings that appeared in the first issue of *Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif*, published in 1932: *Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 6 and P/R 7*.

¹⁰⁷ These letters are recalled by Netty Nijhoff in her catalogue essay Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹⁰⁸ Letter dated 1933, published in *Le Pommere, L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin*, 1985, L.28, pp.497-498.

expresses reservations about Moss as a Neo-Plasticist to Gorin, in a letter of 1934:

*It seems to me that Miss Moss is at a less developed stage than you are, or at least at a less conscious stage...*¹⁰⁹

However his new follower had clearly intrigued him, it was after all Mondrian who had nominated her to Vantongerloo for membership of Abstraction-Création at its inception in 1931. They became friends, and Mondrian's letters to Moss of the forties, if still formal, reveal a distinct affection for her.¹¹⁰ Years later Nijhoff said of Moss:

*She understood Mondrian very well and vice versa. They were very well matched. They were a pair of extraordinary lone wolves.*¹¹¹

Moss's loyalty to Mondrian remained fierce throughout her life, as is evidenced by her letters to Paule Vézelay of the fifties, the 'Appreciation' of Mondrian she wrote in 1955, and a letter she wrote to The Times of the same year.¹¹²

Despite Mondrian's initial bewildered, or perhaps affronted, reaction to Moss's double-line, it eventually formed a significant development in his own work. He was persuaded, but not before Gorin had begun to work in this manner too. A remarkable tale of art historical scandal and intrigue ensued. Vantongerloo became involved in the fray, and repeatedly accused Mondrian

¹⁰⁹ Letter dated 31st January [?] 1934, published in Le Pommere, L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin, 1985, L.31, pp.499.

¹¹⁰ Examples of Mondrian's letters to Moss are reproduced in Appendix 3i A of this thesis.

¹¹¹ Bibeb, 'A.H. Nijhoff : Ik Voel Er Absoluut Niet Voor Alle Woelingen in Mijzelf Op Tafel Te Gooien', Vrij Nederland, 1967.

¹¹² Mondrian is mentioned on several occasions in the letters from Moss to Vézelay, see Appendix 3iii. Moss's essay on Mondrian is only known to me through mentions in the letters to Vézelay dated 6th August 1955 (Appendix 3iii Letter 24), 10th August 1955 (Appendix 3iii Letter 25), and 19th August 1955 (Appendix 3iii Letter 26). Seemingly a copy of the essay is held in the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, Zurich; it is seemingly not included in the un-catalogued Vézelay Collection of the Tate Archives. Moss's letter to The Times is reproduced in Appendix 3i B of this thesis. These texts are discussed again at the start of Chapter 6 of this thesis.

of stealing the double-line from Moss, adopting it without giving her credit.¹¹³ It seemingly took several years for Moss and Mondrian to repair the damage to their friendship. Probably as late as 1936 Mondrian remarked in a letter to Gorin:

*I am back to usual with her. It seems Vantongerloo had misinformed her about me -at least so much the better.*¹¹⁴

Moss had become an instrument for Vantongerloo to discredit Mondrian. Vantongerloo expressed resentment of Mondrian's monopolising of Neo-Plasticism in a letter to Gorin of 1937.¹¹⁵ He claimed that Mondrian was flattered by the veneration of Nicholson, Gabo, Maholy-Nagy and Moore (whom he calls the "*profiteers and parasites of abstract art*"), and was allowing for a falsification of art history, with regards to Mondrian's solitary position, to take place as a result.¹¹⁶

The story of Moss, Mondrian and the double-line has been oft rehearsed.¹¹⁷ What remains important is the significance of this compositional device in Moss's oeuvre, and the difference between her usage of it and Mondrian's. From the moment that Mondrian first became aware of Moss's double-line in 1931, the two artists rapidly developed the theme.¹¹⁸ Even if it was possible to know the precise days each work was produced, it would still be difficult to prove conclusively which artist was the innovator. This debate, as played out

¹¹³ Letters: G. Vantongerloo to J. Gorin, 16th April 1937, published in *Le Pommere, L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin*, L.62D, p.514, and G. Vantongerloo to J. Torres-Garcia, 8th June 1937, *Foundation Torres-Garcia, Montevideo*.

¹¹⁴ Letter from Mondrian to Gorin, 18th November [1936] (the year inferred by the address of 278 Bd Raspail, where Mondrian lived from March 1936), *Le Pommere, L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin*, 1985, L36, p.501.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Vantongerloo to Gorin 16th April 1937 published in *Le Pommere, L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin*; 1985, L.62D, p.514.

¹¹⁶ It is possible that this was the reason Gabo found Paris to be "*violent, gossipy and full of intrigue and jealousies*", Gabo quoted in Tom Cross, *Painting the Warmth of the Sun: St. Ives Artists 1939-1979*, Penzance / Guildford: Alison Hodge / Lutterworth Press, 1984, p.53.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the double-line episode in Mondrian literature.

¹¹⁸ See *Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs P/R 5, P/R 6, P/R 7, P/R 11, P/R 12, P/R 13, P/R 14, P/R 15, P/R 17, P/R 18, P/R 19, and P/R 20* (this last example being particular because the line of the cord is 'doubled' by the relief edge), for Moss's known use of the double-line over the period 1930-1935. This of course is an incomplete picture, it is not known what other works she made during this period. Mondrian also completed several paintings featuring a variety of manifestations of the double line during this period; see Welsh and Joosten, *Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1998.

in writing on Moss and Mondrian becomes somewhat facile, and would have been of little interest to either artist. What can be a fruitful subject for analysis is the works themselves. Comparing the works of Moss and Mondrian of this period a clear relationship can be seen. It emerges that the two artists spent time together, and looked closely at each other's paintings. This is described by Willy Rotzler who writes: " [Moss and Mondrian] *were involved in lively discussions, and there was a brisk give-and-take of ideas*".¹¹⁹ A mutual cause can be inferred, and a commonality of ideas. This of course was the ultimate goal of Neo-Plasticism: a universal language of colour and form.

The 1932 painting '*White, Black, Red and Grey*' by Moss is startlingly similar to Mondrian's '*Composition B, with Double-line and Yellow and Grey*' of the same year.¹²⁰ This explicit mirroring indicates how closely the two were working at this point. There is, however, a crucial difference between these two paintings. Mondrian's double-line is bisected by a dominant vertical. This has the effect of visually pinning it down. Consequently the double-line remains, in fact, a line; the two lines form one single line. Moss's double-line, uninterrupted by the vertical, splits; the two lines belong to their corresponding areas, the upper and the lower, not to each other. The narrow strip of white space, allowed between the two lines becomes incredibly activated, and, like the force between two repellent magnetic surfaces, the composition explodes outwards, yet simultaneously remains bound together. A continuous energy is generated: a perpetual movement, in sharp contradistinction to Mondrian's locked-down composition.

In perhaps the only moment in Mondrian scholarship when the presence of Moss is dwelt upon, Cor Blok describes the two paintings thus:

[In the Moss] *The upper and lower halves are forced apart by a movement that seems to go beyond the painting and connects it with its surroundings*

¹¹⁹ Rotzler, *Constructive Concepts*, 1977, p.163.

¹²⁰ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 11, and Illustrations in appendix to this thesis Figure 1.1.

*(which was also the artist's intention). Mondriaan's composition remains within its frame; the two horizontals function as each other's echo.*¹²¹

The distinction that Blok makes clearly aligns Moss with Léger, although Blok does not identify this connection, the language he uses is highly comparable to the language Green has used, as quoted above. Léger's works "radiate energy about them" and Moss's have "a movement that seems to go beyond the painting and connects it with its surroundings". Mondrian, even with his use of the double-line, does not move beyond the restraining structural device of his grid. His work of this time is powerfully static, and contained. It is this insularity Moss was objecting to when she explained to Mondrian that she found the single line grid to be a restriction to a composition. Netty Nijhoff describes the reasoning Moss gave to Mondrian regarding the double-line thus:

*First: single lines split up the canvas so that the composition falls apart into separate planes and the painting becomes a self-contained unit. Second: single lines make the composition static. Third: the double-line or a multiplicity of lines renders 'a continuity of related and inter-related rhythm in space' possible, which makes the composition dynamic instead of static.*¹²²

Despite her lifelong allegiance to the original Neo-Plasticist, and his enormous importance for her work, Moss was never bound by Mondrian's vision, as has been recorded.¹²³ She may have acknowledged him as her master, just as she acknowledged the profound influence of Léger upon her work, but from the first Moss sought to develop an independent Neo-Plastic language. A significant difference between Moss and Mondrian is embodied in their contrasting methods of production. Upon examination of their respective preliminary sketches for paintings it becomes clear that Moss began with areas of colour, and Mondrian with arrangements of line (see Catalogue Raisonné: Works on Paper: WoP 27-41, and illustration Figure 4.15 in

¹²¹ Cor Blok discusses this phenomenon in a 1974 Mondrian exhibition catalogue essay: Piet Mondriaan: Een Catalogus Van Zijn Werk in Nederlands Openbaar Bezit. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1974. Please see Chapter 1 of this thesis for further discussion of Blok's treatment of Moss.

¹²² Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

¹²³ See Chapter 1 of this thesis for an account of the unfavourable comparisons of Moss and Mondrian that appear in published writing.

appendix to this thesis). This has been identified in a 1966 article by David Sylvester:

*It [a Mondrian painting] is conceived – as is abundantly clear from the unfinished canvases – in terms of lines – lines that can move with the force of a thunderclap or the delicacy of a cat.*¹²⁴

Mondrian's process of trial and error, adjusting the position of the lines, continued from sketches onto the canvas itself, as is evidenced by traces of a palimpsest visible in even some finished works. Moss however arrived at a completely resolved design, by way of an intermediary stage of precisely measured working drawings, before transferring the composition to the canvas and executing the finished painting.¹²⁵

The double-line dialogue between the works of Mondrian and those of Moss also included Gorin, Mondrian's closest disciple. He worked similarly with the motif from 1933 after discussion in correspondence with Mondrian. Mondrian's letters to Gorin are preserved, and published in Marianne Le Pommere's 1985 *Gorin Catalogue Raisonné*.¹²⁶ In them he mentions Moss, and their correspondence, on several occasions, mainly in relation to the double-line.¹²⁷ However, it is not only the double-line that links the three; another development in Neo-Plasticism that originated with Moss before being subsequently adopted by Mondrian and Gorin is the elongated canvas.¹²⁸ This is acknowledged by Marianne Le Pommere:

*It seems that the painter Marjorie Moss used this format for the first time (see Abstraction-Création Art Non-Figuratif 1935, p20); a format whose 'tragic' character corresponds to the artist's feeling about the political and social climate of the period.*¹²⁹

¹²⁴ David Sylvester, 'A Tulip with White Leaves: An Essay on Mondrian', *Studio International* Vol. 172, No. 884, 1966, pp.297-298.

¹²⁵ Moss's working process, and its implications, is discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

¹²⁶ Le Pommere, *L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin*, 1985.

¹²⁷ This is discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

¹²⁸ See *Catalogue Raisonné* P/R 16, P/R 23, P/R 24, P/R 33, P/R 43, P/R 68, and P/R 73 for example.

¹²⁹ Le Pommere, *L'oeuvre de Jean Gorin*, 1985, p.206.

The essential 'tragic' character of an elongated vertical rectangle as a format for an image is of course debatable, but is not without grounds: a vertical or portrait format recalls the crucifixion, perhaps the greatest tragic subject of western art.¹³⁰ It also implies the human figure in general, and has an assertive, rather than passive, presence. Conversely, a horizontal, or landscape, format can certainly be seen to imply narrative, within a western paradigm of reading from left to right.¹³¹ Gorin tended to use the elongated rectangle in a horizontal orientation, as opposed to Moss who used it vertically; thus perhaps augmenting any expression of 'the tragic'. Le Pommere is not to be understood to be intimating that Moss used this format purposefully to express her feelings about political and social events. Although there is no doubt that Moss was disturbed and saddened by the war (as her letters of this time attest,¹³²) there is no record of her directly commenting upon the political and social situation, or expressing anti-fascist sentiments. Moss certainly did not intend her forms to express anything other than themselves. It is likely that she shared Bill's position regarding 'political art':

*We have good reason to be sceptical about any 'political art' –regardless of whether it emanates from right or left; especially when, under the cloak of antagonism to the prevailing social order, its aim is to bring about a new, but in all essentials, almost identical structure of society –because this is not art at all but simply propaganda.*¹³³

¹³⁰ The discussion of 'the tragic' both in Le Pommere at this point and here, is distinct from Mondrian's frequent discussion of 'the tragic', for example: Piet Mondrian, 'Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence', 1920, trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, eds. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, The Documents of Twentieth Century Art (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, p.136-137. Mondrian identifies the historical "*domination of the tragic in art*" as female, and sets it against Neo-Plasticism, which he sees as male.

¹³¹ See Chapter 3 of this thesis for a discussion of the gendering of the vertical and horizontal line.

¹³² In a letter to Ben Nicholson, dated 2nd July 1941, Moss refers to the "*ghastly war*" (Appendix 3iv). In a letter to Vantongerloo, dated 3rd June 1946, she expresses great concern for the fate of her friends in Europe (Letter 20 Appendix 3ii).

¹³³ Max Bill, 'The Mathematical Way of Thinking in the Visual Art of Our Time', The Visual Mind: Art and Mathematics, ed. Michele Emmer. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1993, p.6. See the thesis of Alan Fowler for a developed argument on the apolitical nature of post-war Constructivism: 'Constructivist Art in Britain 1913-2005', Doctoral Thesis, the University of Southampton, 2006.

Gorin's most significant contribution to the Neo-Plasticist aesthetic was the introduction of thickened lines. This is a rare feature in Moss's work, but she did experiment with slightly thickened lines in 1930, around the same time, or a few years later than Gorin and Mondrian did.¹³⁴ She did not however use black lines as thick as Gorin's sometimes became, as far as can be known, and preferred lines of subtly differing thickness, rather than the extremes that appear in Gorin's paintings of this period. This is possibly due to Moss's aversion to the oppressive force of the black grid, as described by Nijhoff. In her work she preferred to emphasize the white, gradually eliminating the use of black completely.¹³⁵

Coloured lines, rather than black, appear in Mondrian's work '*Lozenge Composition with Four Yellow Lines*' in 1933, and possibly also feature in a painting by Moss the same year.¹³⁶ This work, known only from the black and white illustration in issue 3 of *Abstraction-Création Art Non-Figuratif*, contains either grey or yellow lines, probably alongside black (although of course this throws into question the colour of the dark lines too). The colours of the 1934 work '*White, Black and Grey*',¹³⁷ also only known from black and white reproductions, is confirmed by the title listed in catalogues. She certainly used coloured lines from 1935.¹³⁸

The square shaped canvas, used both in an orthogonal orientation, and diagonally appears frequently in both Mondrian's and Moss's oeuvre.¹³⁹ Having no intrinsic emphasis on the horizontal or vertical articulation, a square provides a unique challenge for a composition. It is, as a gestalt, unified; any

¹³⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné P/R 5, P/R 6 and P/R 7, and also Illustration Figure 4.16. There is an earlier example (1926-28?) of a Gorin work with varying thick and thin lines reproduced in black and white in *Le Pommere* as Nr.56 P, p.123.

¹³⁵ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹³⁶ See Illustration Figure 4.17, and Catalogue Raisonné P/R 14.

¹³⁷ See Catalogue Raisonné P/R 15.

¹³⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné P/R 18.

¹³⁹ Approximately 26 works by Moss represented in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis are square in shape. Mondrian worked frequently on a square format from the earliest incarnations of Neo-Plasticism such as '*Composition in Line*' of 1916 / 1917. The year Moss met Mondrian, 1929; he was working almost exclusively on a square format. He continued to favour the square shaped canvas throughout his Neo-Plastic oeuvre, and used it for his final New York works such as '*Broadway Boogie Woogie*' 1942-1943 and '*Victory Boogie Woogie*' 1942-1944.

additional feature can only disrupt that unity. Mondrian and Moss's square compositions seek to both disrupt and preserve the integral unity of the square. Mondrian initiated the use of the tilted square, diamond or lozenge shaped canvas, a format of great importance to Moss's work.¹⁴⁰

Moss's closest personal relationship with a fellow artist was with Vantongerloo, as has been described in Chapter 2 of this thesis. If the war had not shelved the proposed joint exhibition of the two, at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York, the relationship of their respective oeuvres would be enshrined in history.¹⁴¹ As it is their mutual aesthetic can be gleaned from an examination of their works. Vantongerloo wrote copiously about his ideas and work, and it can be assumed that these texts were discussed and perhaps developed with Moss, throughout their nearly thirty year friendship. Vantongerloo had been a central figure of De Stijl, and although his relationships with both Mondrian and Van Doesburg were problematic, the mutual influence between the three was ultimately productive and edifying.

As Lawrence Alloway recognised, Moss was significantly influenced by De Stijl as a whole, rather than Mondrian specifically, and Van Doesburg's legacy in particular can be traced.¹⁴² Van Doesburg died in 1931, just as Moss was entering the Parisian Constructive scene, and just before the inauguration of *Abstraction-Création*, therefore his influence upon her was not direct. His work was, however, posthumously included in the first three issues of *Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif*, and in *Réalités Nouvelles* exhibitions both before and after the war. Although Van Doesburg and Mondrian had reconciled before the former's death, it is unlikely that Mondrian would have passed on any of Van Doesburg's ideas to Moss, as he neither shared them, nor fully understood them. Vantongerloo however did, and continued to pursue his own, and Van Doesburg's, concepts of time and space for the rest

¹⁴⁰ See *Catalogue Raisonné* P/R 9, P/R 18, and P/R 74. There are many other works in a square format, which could be intended to operate as lozenges.

¹⁴¹ Vantongerloo proposed a joint exhibition of Moss and his work in a typed letter to Pierre Matisse, dated 17th June 1938, held in the Vantongerloo Archive, Haus Bill, Zumikon. See Letter 12, Appendix 3ii.

¹⁴² Lawrence Alloway, 'Round the London Galleries', *The Listener* Vol. LIX, No. 1512, 1958, p.508.

of his career. These ideas, which particularly centred on notions of both reality and dynamism, would have strongly resonated with Moss's interests developed under Léger, provoking an interesting exchange between Moss and Vantongerloo.

A recurring theme in the common thinking between Moss, Vantongerloo and Van Doesburg is the construction and deconstruction of a circle or sphere. The sphere, or point, is the first state in the Platonic progression of point to line to plane, and therefore the conceptual origin of space and time. As are atoms so are planets; the sphere is simultaneously microcosm and macrocosm; both origin and conclusion.¹⁴³ Van Doesburg first explored such ideas under the influence of the Theosophist, mathematician and philosopher M.H.J. Schoenmaekers in the early period of De Stijl, around 1917, although diagrammatic representations of the sphere appear in his work earlier than this, for example the painting '*Sphere*' of 1916.¹⁴⁴ He further developed this dialogue alongside Kandinsky, also a Theosophist, with whom he worked at the Bauhaus in the early twenties. The crucial importance of these notions to Vantongerloo is described in Marek Wieczorek's 2002 publication The Universe in the Living Room, Georges Vantongerloo in the Space of De Stijl. Wieczorek states that Vantongerloo was introduced to the ideas of Schoenmaekers by Van Doesburg in 1918.¹⁴⁵ During this year Vantongerloo made several studies for sculptures and paintings departing in form from the circle and the ovoid.¹⁴⁶ These diagrammatic progressions of forms, on paper and in space, remain central to Vantongerloo's work for the rest of his career. The theme is radically reinterpreted by Moss in her sculptural works of the early fifties such as '*Concentric Circles in Space*' and '*Concentric Circles Projected in Space*'.¹⁴⁷ Use of the ovoid recalls mystical associations of the egg as the beginning of life, and the Theosophist notion of the world-egg. Such meanings are certainly present in Brancusi's use of the form in works

¹⁴³ These ideas are discussed more fully in the final chapter of this thesis.

¹⁴⁴ See Illustration 4.18 in appendix to this thesis.

¹⁴⁵ Marek Wieczorek, The Universe in the Living Room, Georges Vantongerloo in the Space of De Stijl. Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 2002, p.74.

¹⁴⁶ See Illustration 4.19 in appendix to this thesis.

¹⁴⁷ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 14 and S/C 15. These works are discussed further in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

such as the *'Beginning of the World'* sculptures of the early twenties. Vantongerloo, however, was less interested in the symbolic possibilities of the egg and far more interested in the physical and spatial properties of the circle, the sphere, and the ovoid (a progression of circles in space along an axis). This was a sensibility shared by Moss, who like Vantongerloo and Bill, was not a Theosophist.

Brancusi was briefly a fellow member of Abstraction-Création, and contributed to the 1934 cahier, so an exchange between Moss and him is possible, although undocumented. Moss's later sculptural work often references Brancusi, but in a strikingly distinct form. In 1944 she made an elongated vertical lozenge form of copper, pointed and pierced; a clear visual echo of Brancusi's *'Bird in Space'* sculptures dating from the early twenties.¹⁴⁸ The Moss sculpture *'Construction Based on a Tetrahedron'* of 1950 makes clear connections with Brancusi's many versions of *'The Endless Column'*.¹⁴⁹ While Brancusi's lozenge columns are imposing monolithic totems, fully realised in the thirty foot 1937 version sited at Târgu-Jiu; Moss's known version is poised and jaunty, and above all dynamic.¹⁵⁰

Of the original membership of Abstraction-Création, aesthetic parity can also be detected between Moss and Arp, in her later sculptural work such as *'Ovoids on Granite'* of 1952 and *'Egg-Shaped and Cylindrical Forms on a Pentagonal Base'* of 1956-57, and especially the undated and highly coloured 'automatic' drawings.¹⁵¹ Similarly a personal relationship is a possibility, and evidenced by Moss's mention of him, and greetings to him, in letters to

¹⁴⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures: S/C 6, and Illustration 4.20 in appendix to this thesis.

¹⁴⁹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures: S/C 10, and Illustration 4.21 in appendix to this thesis.

¹⁵⁰ Andreas Oosthoek mentioned to me that there are other larger versions of this Moss work, possibly in a private collection in the U.S.A.

¹⁵¹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 12 and S/C 20. Moss's 'automatic drawings' are known to me only from un-broadcasted footage of Mieke Van Der Wey interviewing Andreas Oosthoek for *Kunst Mest*, with Florette Dijkstra. Arnhem, The Netherlands, 1995. Florette Dijkstra provided a video of this for me. Stills showing the Moss drawings are reproduced in Illustrations 4.22 in appendix to this thesis.

Vézelay in 1955.¹⁵² That year Arp bought a work by Moss, featuring the double-line, to add to his expanding collection of European non-figurative art.¹⁵³

Moss's association with Max Bill is seemingly of a different order. Bill was a personal friend of both Moss and Vantongerloo, although he was nearly twenty years younger than Moss, and more than twenty years younger than Vantongerloo.¹⁵⁴ Bill's relationship with Vantongerloo is well documented and has been demonstrated in a joint exhibition at Annely Juda.¹⁵⁵ Bill wrote essays for exhibition catalogues of both Moss and Vantongerloo.¹⁵⁶ His account in the former, discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, describes his memories of first meeting Moss at the hanging of an Abstraction-Création exhibition in 1933, when Bill was just twenty-five years old, and later visiting her chateau at Gauciel. Moss thought highly of Bill, and wrote to Gabo in 1945, introducing him as a "*young and very talented artist*" who was "*seriously interested in abstract, concrete and Constructive art*" and was not only making very beautiful constructions but was "*most anxious to get this new expression in art more widely understood*".¹⁵⁷ Indeed Bill, more so than Vantongerloo, Mondrian, Van Doesburg, or Moss, sought to achieve a wider understanding and appreciation of Constructivism, through the publication of articles, the curation of exhibitions, the founding of schools, and by pursuing public

¹⁵² In one letter Moss says: "*Arp sounds as if he's not at all fit, am pleased he'll be in 'The Show'*", this indicates that she has heard either directly from Arp, or has heard via a third party that he was not well: letter from Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, dated 19th August 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. Moss also sent her greetings to Arp in a later letter to Vézelay, dated 20th September 1955, again held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. These letters appear transcribed in Appendix 3iii of this thesis, numbers 26 and 30 respectively.

¹⁵³ '*White, Yellow and Black*' of 1932, see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 12. The Marguerite Arp Collection is housed in Locarno, Switzerland.

¹⁵⁴ A copy of an exhibition catalogue *arte astratta e concreta* (Milan 1947), dated 13-7-47, given to Michael Canney by Netty Nijhoff after Moss's death in 1958, bears the dedication "*à mon amie marlow moss, ... bill,*" attesting to Bill's affection for Moss. Photographs of this catalogue and the inscription are held in the research files of Florette Dijkstra.

¹⁵⁵ *Max Bill - George Vantongerloo: A Working Friendship* (Exhibition: 26th June until 14th September 1996). London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 1996.

¹⁵⁶ Oosthoek and Bill, *Marlow Moss: Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen* and Max Bill, ed., *Georges Vantongerloo*, London: Marlborough Fine Art Limited, 1962.

¹⁵⁷ A handwritten letter from Marlow Moss to Naum Gabo, dated 19th April 1945, held in the Tate Archives, London. See Appendix 3v.

sculpture commissions.¹⁵⁸ He had been educated at the Bauhaus, under Kandinsky and Klee, concurrently with Moss's time at the Académie Moderne in the late twenties. Although Van Doesburg had left the Bauhaus by the time Bill was there, and died by the time Bill joined Abstraction-Création in 1932, he is again the strongest influence detectable, and as with Moss, this influence must have travelled through Vantongerloo. Bill particularly took up the cause of Van Doesburg's term 'concrete', as opposed to 'abstract' art, and worked consistently until his death in 1994 to establish a position for *Konkrete Kunst* in his native Switzerland, and internationally.¹⁵⁹ Margit Staber states that Bill's ideas began to take shape upon seeing the Purists' 'Pavilion de L'Esprit Nouveau' during a visit to the 1925 Exposition Internationale d'Art Décoratif, when he was just 16.¹⁶⁰ The installation included Léger's 'Le Balustre' and very possibly the 'Composition Murales' discussed above.¹⁶¹ This is a significant connection between Bill and Moss, and would undoubtedly have been a point of discussion between them. Bill is perhaps even referring to Moss's work towards the end of the following passage taken from his 1949 essay 'The Mathematical Way of Thinking in the Visual Art of Our Time':

–the mystery enveloping all mathematical problems; the inexplicability of space –space that can stagger us by beginning on one side and ending in a completely changed aspect on the other, which somehow manages to remain the selfsame side; the remoteness or nearness of infinity –infinity which may be found doubling back from the far horizon to present itself to us immediately at hand; limitations without boundaries; disjunctive and disparate multiplicities constituting coherent and unified entities; identical shapes rendered wholly

¹⁵⁸ Bill is described as being the most successful, and one of the most popular, post-war public sculptors in Europe: Philip Ursprung, 'Continuity: Max Bill's Public Sculpture and the Representation of Money', Figuration / Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945-1968, ed. Charlotte Benton, London: Ashgate in Association with The Henry Moore Institute, 2004, p.232.

¹⁵⁹ *Konkrete Kunst* has been rather hijacked by the corporate and banking world of Switzerland, and Bill's sculptures remain popular with such institutions internationally. Philip Ursprung argues that they now form a visual representation of Swiss national identity, which is essentially the abstract flow of money, and a position outside of history. This was presumably not an intention of the artist. Ursprung, 'Continuity: Max Bill's Public Sculpture and the Representation of Money', 2004.

¹⁶⁰ Margit Staber, Max Bill, Art in Progress, ed. Jasia Reichardt, London: Methuen, 1964.

¹⁶¹ There is some debate on which works by Léger were in fact on display, but Green suggests that the 'Composition Murales' could have been painted specifically for this project, Green, Léger and the Avant-Garde, 1976, p.299. See Illustrations: 4.13 and 4.14.

*diverse by the merest inflection; fields of attraction that fluctuate in strength; or, again, the square in all its robust solidity; parallels that intersect; straight lines untroubled by relativity, and ellipses which form straight lines at every point of their curves – can yet be fraught with the greatest moment.*¹⁶²

Moss's sculpture '*Sculptural Form*' of 1943 is a clear tribute to Bill.¹⁶³ Bill apparently independently discovered The Möbius Loop in 1935.¹⁶⁴ The geometrical paradox was a reoccurring theme in his work for most of his life, from the original '*Endless Ribbon*' of 1935 to the various versions of '*Continuity*', which he was still working on up until the late eighties. In 1941 Bill visited Brazil and Argentina, and made a significant contribution to the inception of Constructivist art there. It is likely that it was Bill who facilitated the link between Moss and the Argentinean Constructivist group MADI, which is evidenced by the reproduction of her work in a 1954 issue of their journal.¹⁶⁵

The particular strand of Constructivist thinking that is furthered specifically in the work of Moss, Vantongerloo and Bill, is that of the use of mathematics and geometry in non-figurative art. It is conceivable that each of them inherited this proclivity from De Stijl and Schoenmaekers, via Van Doesburg, although only Vantongerloo knew Van Doesburg personally. Moss however also drew very significantly from the writings of the mathematician Matila Ghyka, with whom she was acquainted in Paris, through the Nijhoff's.¹⁶⁶ It is likely that it

¹⁶² Bill, 'The Mathematical Way of Thinking in the Visual Art of Our Time', 1949, p.8.

¹⁶³ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 4. This work is discussed at greater length in Chapter 6 of this thesis. See also Illustrations 6.1 and 6.2 for other examples of Bill's work on the theme of the 'Endless Ribbon'.

¹⁶⁴ "In 1935 he thought he was the first to discover the form that had been described by the German mathematician August Ferdinand Moebius (1790-1860) in 1858" Michele Emmer, 'Visual Art and Mathematics: The Moebius Band', *Leonardo* Vol. 13, 1980, p.108.

¹⁶⁵ *Arte MADI*, June, Nos. 7-8, 1954. The MADI movement was founded in Buenos Aires by Carmelo Arden Quin in 1946. Arden Quin was a student of Joaquín Torres-García who had been a member of Cercle et Carré and was a great friend of Van Doesburg whilst in Paris during the late twenties and early thirties. The editor of the journal was Gyula Kosice. Moss's particular influence upon the development of South American Constructivism is open to speculation, but an aesthetic connection can be made between Moss works such as the two works of triangular forms (Catalogue Raisonné S/C 2 and S/C 3) and the sculptural work of the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark of the sixties (see Illustration 4.23) for example. MADI is still active today, and has expanded far beyond its Argentinean origin, with an international network of artists, and The Museum of Geometric and MADI Art in Dallas.

¹⁶⁶ The fact that the Nijhoff's knew Ghyka personally was confirmed to me by Andreas Oosthoek during a conversation of July 2007. Apparently there is a first edition of one of

was from Ghyka that Moss took the Pythagorean creed that underlies her statements in Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif:

*Everything is arranged according to Number.*¹⁶⁷

Nijhoff attests to Moss's knowledge of Ghyka's works: L'Esthétique des Proportions dans la Nature et dans les Arts, published in 1927, Le Nombre d'Or, published in 1931, and Essai sur le Rythme, published in 1938.¹⁶⁸

Ghyka, like Ozenfant and Jeanneret, sought to distinguish Pythagorean number patterns from mysticism, and therefore would have accorded with Moss's background at the Académie Moderne. Van Doesburg, unlike his colleagues Schoenmaekers, Mondrian, and Kandinsky, had had little interest in Theosophy, and consequently Moss who combined Van Doesburg's influence with that of Purism, Nietzschean existential atheism, and Ghyka, was removed from Theosophy and mysticism entirely. In 1949 Bill wrote:

*I am convinced it is possible to evolve a new form of art in which the artist's work could be founded to quite a substantial degree on a mathematical line of approach to its content.*¹⁶⁹

This statement is based on Bill's own developing practice, and also on his long-standing and intimate knowledge of the working practices of Vantongerloo and Moss particularly.

Conclusion.

Moss's works are housed in national collections in Great Britain, The Netherlands, France, Belgium, Switzerland, The United States, and Israel. By far the greatest number of Moss works publicly accessible is in The Netherlands. Works are held in the Stedelijk Collection, Amsterdam, the

Ghyka's books with a personal dedication to Netty Nijhoff held in the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, Zurich.

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in the Introduction to Matila Ghyka, The Geometry of Art and Life, 2nd ed. New York: Dover Publications, 1977, p.xi.

¹⁶⁸ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962. The Geometry of Art and Life is an amalgamation of Ghyka's earlier texts texts, with additional material, first published in New York in 1946.

¹⁶⁹ Bill, 'The Mathematical Way of Thinking in the Visual Art of Our Time', 1949, p.7.

Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag, and the Kröller-Muller Museum, Otterlo.¹⁷⁰ It is also in The Netherlands that Moss has received significant scholarly attention, from A.H. Nijhoff, Andreas Oosthoek, Florette Dijkstra, Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen, and Sonja Overbeeke, and been exhibited in three solo retrospective exhibitions since her death.¹⁷¹ It is tempting to conclude that Moss's sensibility is in some way Dutch, or congenial to Dutch tastes, but the reason for her higher profile in The Netherlands may simply be attributed to the efforts of Netty and Stefan Nijhoff. Despite the fact that Paris was the eventual site of De Stijl, and the location of the groups Cercle et Carré, Art Concret, Abstraction-Création and Réalités Nouvelle, and also the Académie Moderne, and home to a great many of the international leading figures of abstract / concrete art before the Second World War, Green, in his study Art in France 1900-1940, demonstrates that France did not nurture a lasting non-figurative art movement.¹⁷² The tradition of Constructivism instead survives in pockets throughout the world, carried with individuals. Moss is an integral part of this international context. When viewed exclusively in relation to Mondrian, as she has been, she may appear as merely a follower; but her international context is of far greater complexity. Upon examination of the web of associations and allegiances, from Léger and Purism, to the Concrete Art of Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo and Bill, Moss is revealed to be a significant protagonist, central in the narrative of Constructive art, and instrumental in the development of its most extreme mathematical incarnation.

¹⁷⁰ In the Stedelijk, Amsterdam: P/R 59 and P/R 77. In the Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag: P/R 9, P/R 11 and P/R 64. In the Kröller-Muller, Otterlo: P/R 27, S/C 19, and S/C 23.

¹⁷¹ These exhibitions are: Marlow Moss at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam in 1962, the Middelburg Town Hall show organised by Andreas Oosthoek in 1972, and Marlow Moss: Ruimte, Beweging en Licht at the Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem, in 1994-1995.

¹⁷² Christopher Green, Art in France 1900-1940, Pelican History of Art. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000, p.34.

Chapter 5.**Exile and Home: Marlow Moss in England.**

*She feels herself a stranger in England. And she is to go on feeling a stranger there until she dies.*¹

Although Nijhoff is largely justified in her characterisation of Moss's relationship with her country of origin, her customary literary flourish obscures the connections Moss did seek, and to a certain extent succeeded in establishing, in England. In this chapter I shall map the British context for Moss, first on a national stage, and then locally within the fraught territory of 'St. Ives'.² Through a careful examination of the circumstances of the British art world, and particularly the receptions of abstract art, in the thirties while Moss was in France, at the time of her arrival back in England in 1940, and in the following decades, her feelings of being a "*stranger*" can be illuminated.

Forced out of Europe by the Second World War, Moss chose to settle in England rather than heading to New York, as other Parisian Constructivists did. Florette Dijkstra states in her biography of Moss:

He [Mondrian] asked Marlow Moss to go with him [to New York], effectively saying that: 'you can either come with me or you can stay in England and be doomed to failure'.³

The return home was initially as an exile, however after the war, Moss continued to live in England, at least for part of the year. Neighbours in the

¹ Nijhoff, writing on Moss's return to England in 1940, in Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Marlow Moss (Exhibition: 30th March - 30th April 1962), Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962.

² I use the quotation marks advisedly to denote the art historical category 'St. Ives' rather than the geographical place, as discussed in the thesis of Nedira Yakir, 'Wilhelmina Barns-Graham & Margaret Mellis: The Gendered Construction of 'St Ives' Display, Positioning and Displacement', Doctoral Thesis, Falmouth College of Art / The University of Plymouth, 2002. Yakir argues that 'St. Ives' was a construct of the late 1970s culminating in the 1985 Tate exhibition St. Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery; Moss, therefore would not have been aware of 'St. Ives' to the extent that we now are.

³ Florette Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, trans. Annie Wright. Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1995, p.19. Dijkstra is quoting Andreas Oosthoek, from an interview that took place in 1991. Oosthoek was remembering the words of Netty Nijhoff, who either heard Mondrian say this herself, or more likely heard it from Moss.

Cornish village of Lamorna regarded her, benignly, as a foreigner, and it is likely that she regarded herself as such. The only place that she had not been 'foreign' was Paris. However, after a lifetime of standing out, Moss's self-containment, and sense of identity, was such that she could thrive alone. Testimony to this is the fact that she arrived in Cornwall, in 1940, with few if any of her works, most of which remained at the Château d'Evreux, and barely any possessions, just what she had packed for a holiday in The Netherlands, yet she lost no time in establishing a studio, and beginning her richest period of work.⁴ To be cut off, almost entirely, from ones previous work, at the age of fifty-some, is an unusual situation for an artist, although a predicament that it is likely the war caused for many. The loss of her work, and her studio, was concurrent for Moss with the loss of her home, her adoptive country, her partner and adoptive family, and all of her friends and comrades. One can speculate that it must have been upsetting, and unsettling, precipitating a loss of continuity and identity, and a feeling of being cut adrift in the world; but also an immense feeling of freedom, a challenge and an opportunity for re-invention. Moss worked with enormous vigour and energy during the final period of her life, and what remains represents an accomplished culmination to her oeuvre. In the last five years of her life she held two retrospective exhibitions of her work at the Hanover Gallery in London (in 1953 and 1958), and took part in the group shows Measurement and Proportion at the Artists International Association Gallery, and Groupe Espace at the Royal Festival Hall, both in 1955, and Contemporary Sculpture at the Hanover Gallery in 1956. Whilst she continued to actively exhibit on the

⁴ Her late works, of course, have this status by default, as the majority of her output previous to 1940 was destroyed in the 1944 bombing of Gauciel. At least twenty-eight works from before 1940 are existent now, but most would not have been accessible to Moss at this time, see *Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs*. There are quite possibly more works from before 1940 held in the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection in Zurich. These works escaped destruction by happening to be in storage away from Gauciel at the beginning of the war. By 1955 at least some of these works were stored with Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet, Rue Varin, Paris; possibly they had been there since before the war. This is known from a letter from Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, dated 20/9/55, see Letter 30, Appendix 3iii. Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet also dealt with Léger's work, and Mondrian's work, for example '*Composition B, with Double-line and Yellow and Grey*' (see Illustration Figure 1.1 in appendix to this thesis), Robert P. Welsh and Joop M. Joosten, *Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné*, 1st ed., 2 vols. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998). Vol. 2, p.363.

continent, and in the States,⁵ Moss also sought to represent herself and her art in her native land. Her return to England was by no means a retreat.

The Reception of Non-Figurative / Constructive Art in England, After 1939.

Moss was compelled to return to England because of political circumstances beyond her control. She undoubtedly preserved her freedom, and probably her life, in escaping Nazi arrest. However in England she found herself in a decidedly hostile climate artistically. "*Going Modern and being British*" was identified as a problem by Paul Nash in an article of 1932.⁶ In 1935 there were only 11 British members ("*and friends*") of Abstraction-Création, as opposed to 252 in France (the majority of those in Paris), 68 in Switzerland and 33 in America.⁷ It is noted in the editorial of Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figurative of that year that the non-figurative art movement had thus far been "*completely ignored*" in England, although progress was now being made.⁸ The situation had not greatly changed by the war, even with the sudden influx of European artists (unsurprisingly Mondrian did not stay long in London before heading to New York). To a certain extent the debate in England even regressed in the forties. As was the case with the 'return to

⁵ See the previous chapter for a discussion of Moss's contribution to Cinquante Ans De Peinture Abstraite in Paris, 1957, as well as her regular appearance at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris after the war. She also exhibited at The American-British Art Centre in New York in 1942, upon which occasion she attempted to interest Alfred Barr of the Museum of Modern Art in her work, as is evidenced by a cablegram dating from August 1942 held in the Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers: AAA AHB 2168; frame 34, the Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Moss also seemingly exhibited again in New York in September 1956, through the Hanover Gallery, as is evidenced in two letters from Moss to Vézelay, see Appendix 3iii, Letters 39 and 40.

⁶ Paul Nash, 'Going Modern and Being British', Weekend Review, 17th August 1932.

⁷ Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif, Issue 4, 1935, p.3, reproduced in Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorised Reprint Edition. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 - 1936., New York: Arno, 1968.

⁸ Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif, Issue 4, 1935, p.3. The "*progress*" referred to is the touring exhibition Unit One. Paul Nash, Wells Coates, Henry Moore and Edward Wadsworth, founded the group Unit One in London in 1933. Nash announced the new group in a letter to The Times: Paul Nash, 'Unit One: A New Group of Artists', The Times, 12th June 1933. The Unit also involved John Armstrong, Edward Burra, John Bigge, Barbara Hepworth, Tristram Hillier, Frances Hodgkins (briefly), Ben Nicholson, and the architect Colin Lucas. It lasted for under two years, but in that time found wide acclaim in Britain through its exhibition, which toured the country from the Mayor Gallery in London, to Liverpool, Manchester, Hanley, Derby, Swansea, and Belfast. Also in 1935 the Seven & Five Society, under the direction of Nicholson, held the first British exhibition of entirely non-figurative art at the Zwemmer Gallery in London.

order' in France after the First World War, the threat to sovereignty precipitated a retreat from international culture and an elevation of national identity as a concern. Jeremy Lewison ends his 2002 essay 'Going Modern and Being British: The Challenge of the 1930s':

As isolation set in and the country came under the threat of damage and extinction, not only was there a felt need to record the nation but there was a strong desire to identify and preserve a link with the national past. Romantic sentiment took precedence over the urge to be modern.⁹

The same misunderstandings of the essential terms of the debate: 'abstraction', 'Constructivism' etc, persisted. Abstraction and Surrealism were still seen as compatible, and even sometimes interchangeable, facets of the 'modern movement'.¹⁰ The dialogue that does exist can be traced in the art periodicals and journals that it is likely Moss would have seen at the time. Contemporary Modernist art appeared very infrequently in The Studio. A recent issue at the time of Moss's arrival in Britain addressed the subject of modern art with a double page spread juxtaposing a work by Dali and a work by Picasso, to represent Surrealism and abstraction respectively.¹¹ The characterisation of Picasso as representative of the abstract wing of the modern movement is an oft-repeated misnomer in Britain at this time; Nash referred to him as such in an article of 1932,¹² and the same conception voiced by the architect Jane Drew at an early meeting of the British branch of Groupe Espace greatly irritated Paule Vézelay and served, in a letter to Moss, as an example of how British architects failed to understand modern art:

The trouble is the architects ... do not know enough about modern art; they know a few artist friends and that is about all, and certainly Jane Drew thought

⁹ Jeremy Lewison, 'Going Modern and Being British: The Challenge of the 1930s', Blast to Freeze: British Art in the 20th Century (Exhibition: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg 14th September 2002 until 19th January 2003), eds. Henry Meyric Hughes and Gijs Van Tuyl. Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002, p.72. Lewison's position in this regard is to a certain extent challenged in another essay in the same publication: Christopher Stephens, 'We Are the Masters Now: Modernism and Reconstruction in Post-War Britain', Blast to Freeze: British Art in the 20th Century, eds. Henry Meyric Hughes and Gijs Van Tuyl, 2002, pp.133-138.

¹⁰ This is a conception that can be traced to the writings of both Nash and Herbert Read, and is in common usage throughout the forties and fifties.

¹¹ 'Surrealist and Abstract Painting', The Studio Vol. 118, 1939, pp.110-111.

¹² Nash refers to Picasso as "*the greatest of all abstract painters*" in 'Abstract Art', 1932.

*Picasso was an abstract painter and she is very much too sure of herself to even think she has anything to learn.*¹³

In 1944 an apologia of abstract art is offered in The Studio in an article by Jan Gordon entitled 'Commonsense and Contemporary Art'.¹⁴ Here it is argued, by reference to the succession of art history, that it is "commonsense" that abstract / Constructive art (terms used interchangeably) is initially shocking; likened to a mother peeping into the cot to see a "bull-pup" instead of her baby, but will eventually become accepted, and even appreciated. A large part of the article is devoted to defining terms: "Cézannism", "Naivism", "Neo-Impressionism (Pointillism)" "Post-Impressionism (Fauvism)" amongst other "isms". "Abstraction (Constructivism)" is defined as an "Investigation into the emotional properties of shape, form, line and colour freed from all representational bondage, study of material and methods", an account both perplexingly particular, and broad. A ten-year-old Nicholson 'Relief' of 1934 is illustrated, but not discussed in the text. In 1953 the mysteries of abstraction are broached again within the pages of The Studio; this time a remedial explanation of how an abstract composition can be derived from a photograph of buildings, with stages of the abstracting process illustrated.¹⁵

A fuller discourse of non-figurative, abstract and Constructive art is to be found in The Listener. In 1940 Naum Gabo and William Coldstream were published debating the value of non-figurative art,¹⁶ and Geoffrey Grigson, referencing Wyndham Lewis, proclaims its death.¹⁷ Herbert Read replied to Grigson's article, insisting that abstract art had never been healthier in Britain,

¹³ Paule Vézelay to Marlow Moss, private letter, typed, "In Confidence. Committee Matters", dated 26th November 1954, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives, see Appendix 3iii, after Letter 9.

¹⁴ Jan Gordon, 'Commonsense and Contemporary Art', The Studio Vol. 127, January 1944, pp.1-12.

¹⁵ Ray Bethers, 'Abstraction in Painting', The Studio Vol. 145, January 1953, pp.24-25.

¹⁶ Eric Newton, William Coldstream and Naum Gabo, 'The Artist in the Witness Box: Centre Party V Left Wing : Discussion between Eric Newton, William Coldstream and Naum Gabo', The Listener Vol. XXIII, 25th January 1940, pp.163-165.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Grigson, 'The Death of Abstract Art', The Listener, Vol. XXIV, 12th September 1940, pp.373-374. Wyndham Lewis was at this time engaged in a campaign against abstract art with the publication of 'The End of Abstract Art' in The New Republic 1st April 1940.

and so the debate rumbled on.¹⁸ Read contributed regularly in support of the 'modern movement' in general, with articles on such artists as Barbara Hepworth.¹⁹ A particular heated exchange took place on the letters pages of The Listener during the early fifties, provoked by Basil Taylor's review of the Gimpel Fils exhibition British Abstract Art, organised by the twenty-one-year-old Anthony Hill.²⁰ The artist and critic Bernard Boles wrote "*there is indeed precious little proof that the abstractionists or their sponsors have radiated any enthusiasm in London*" and referred to abstract art as a "*false vogue*" that had already long-ago "*lost its momentum*" in France.²¹ Horace Shipp, the author of the 1914 book The New Art, cited in the original review, also wrote in recanting contemporary abstract art.²² Charles and Peter Gimpel, and Michael Rothenstein then wrote in the following week, in defence of the exhibition, and Boles responded the week after. Louis Le Brocquy countered Boles in a letter published alongside, and Boles was driven to write again, reiterating his earlier dubbing of abstraction in Britain as a "*false vogue*". He is supported by a letter from Douglas Cooper. The following week Victor Pasmore himself waded in, and Le Brocquy responded to Boles. The exchange continued for another two weeks, becoming increasingly aggressive, until Pasmore laid the argument to rest:

*A movement and a style in art, which finally takes root, is not the outcome of one idea but of many, often conflicting, ideas. This confliction, within a single movement and a single style, is evidence of its vitality.*²³

¹⁸ Herbert Read, 'The Vitality of Abstract Art: Herbert Read Replies to Geoffrey Grigson', The Listener, Vol. XXIV, 19th September 1940, pp.407-408.

¹⁹ Herbert Read, 'Barbara Hepworth: A New Phase', The Listener, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1002, Thursday 8th April 1948, p.392.

²⁰ Basil Taylor, 'Abstract Painting in England', The Listener, Vol. XLVI, No. 1171, 9th August 1951, p.230. British Abstract Art included the following artists: Anthony Hill, Victor Pasmore, Adrian Heath, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin, and Robert Adams (the newly-formed Constructionist group), and also Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Terry Frost, Peter Lanyon, and John Wells (from St. Ives), and Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton, John McHale, William Turnbull, Alan Davie and William Gear. It followed Abstract Paintings, Sculptures, Mobiles, organised by Heath earlier that year at the A.I.A. Gallery. Neither exhibition included Moss.

²¹ Bernard Boles, Letters to the Editor: 'Abstract Painting in England', The Listener Vol. XLVI, No. 1172, 16th August 1951, p.265.

²² Horace Shipp, Letters to the Editor: 'Abstract Painting in England', The Listener, Vol. XLVI, No. 1172, 16th August 1951, p. 265.

²³ Victor Pasmore, Letters to the Editor: 'Abstract Painting in England', The Listener Vol. XLVI, No. 1178, 27th September 1951, p.509. The "*ferocious squabble*" is discussed by Margaret Garlake in New Art, New World -British Art in Postwar Society, New Haven and London: Yale

Read sustained his support for Constructive art throughout his career, but was not committed to it exclusively:

*Personally I would like to be a purist in art, just as I would like to be an individualist in ethics or an idealist in philosophy; but common sense compels me to a relativist or pragmatist attitude in all these matters. In art I am frankly a pluralist.*²⁴

Read's statement reflects the earlier position of the British journal Axis, to which he, alongside Grigson and John Piper, had frequently contributed during its eight issue run between 1935 and 1937. Although the magazine's editor Myfanwy Evans was directly inspired by Jean Héliou to launch a British counterpart to Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif, by 1936 neither she, nor Axis, supported non-figurative art exclusively.²⁵ Instead Axis adopted a position of pluralism, promoting an array of artists and ideas, without taking a position. This kind of compromise would have been inconceivable to Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo, Gorin, Bill, or Moss, and is indicative of a fundamental difference between the London and Paris art worlds. The "common sense" that prevailed in England, referred to by both Read and Gordon, as discussed above, allowed only such a pragmatic attitude. As Read surmised, if the modern movement was to survive, the two branches: Constructivism and Surrealism, which before the war advanced under separate banners, would have to march together.²⁶ Read however, remains the closest Moss found to a powerful ally in England, other than Erica Brausen who exhibited Moss at her gallery the Hanover. Read recommended to the young artist Michael Seward Snow that he should go and visit Moss's

University Press, 1998, p.40. It is also briefly referred to in Alistair Grieve, Constructed Abstract Art in England after the Second World War: A Neglected Avant-Garde, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005, p.16.

²⁴ Herbert Read, 'Art and Crisis', Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art, Edited by Cyril Connolly, Vol. IX, No. 53, 1944, p.337.

²⁵ Joanna P. Gardner-Huggett attributes the "change in editorial policy", at least partially, to the success of the recent International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries (June 1936). Evan's was also influenced by her husband John Piper who had gradually moved away from a Constructivist aesthetic towards Surrealism, and also her friend the art historian Kenneth Clark, then Director of the National Gallery, who had rejected abstraction, Joanna P. Gardner-Huggett, 'Myfanwy Evans: Axis and a Voice for the British Avant-Garde', Woman's Art Journal, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2000, p.24.

²⁶ Herbert Read, 'Vulgarity and Impotence', Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art, Edited by Cyril Connolly, Vol. V, No. 28, 1942, p.267.

studio, in the early fifties,²⁷ and he also included Moss in his History of Modern Painting of 1959.²⁸ Read however reserved most of his efforts for Gabo, Nicholson, Hepworth, Moore, and Pasmore, an indication of his tactical thinking: it was clear to him that Moss was a bridge too far for English sensibilities. As Taylor wrote, in his exhibition review that prompted the heated exchange in The Listener discussed above, the abstract painting to which the English were being drawn was that of Kandinsky and Klee:

*[We are] not, significantly, and I believe fortunately, [drawn] to Mondrian. Thinking of English painting over two centuries and of our local preference for an art founded upon intuition and individualism, rather than upon mensuration and objectivity, one is not surprised that none of these painters [in the Gimpel Fils exhibition] has accepted the Trappist austerity of Mondrian.*²⁹

The Gimpel brothers themselves concur:

*Here in Britain, unlike France, painting may be said to have a strong romantic – even literary – bias.*³⁰

It was therefore tactically unwise, if the ultimate object was the promotion of the modern movement in England, for Read to place too much emphasis upon the appeal of Constructive art for him. Moss was a casualty of Read's pragmatism.

A key Modernist concept, which to a certain extent was lost in translation from Europe to England, was the notion of the synthesis of painting, sculpture and architecture. The idea of a synthesis of the arts had been central to De Stijl and to the Bauhaus approach, and after the war was crucial to André Bloc's Groupe Espace. An issue of Bloc's journal Art d'Aujourd'hui was almost entirely devoted to the subject of 'Synthèse des Arts', in 1954, with

²⁷ Michael Seward Snow told me this during a telephone conversation that took place on the 11th March 2008. Snow did go to Lamorna, but was shooed away by Netty Nijhoff. Moss seemingly did not want to talk to him.

²⁸ Herbert Read, A Concise History of Modern Painting, New and Augmented ed. London: Thames and Hudson, 1974.

²⁹ Taylor, 'Abstract Painting in England', 1951.

³⁰ Charles Gimpel and Peter Gimpel, Letters to the Editor: 'Abstract Painting in England' (a Response to Mr. Bernard Boles), The Listener Vol. XLVI, No. 1173, 23rd August 1951, p.307.

articles by Michel Seuphor and Hans Jaffé, amongst others.³¹ Sam Gathercole terms this concept of a synthesis as 'orthodox modernism' in his 2006 Art History article 'Art and Construction in Britain in the 1950s'.³² It is a concept that largely denotes failure in Britain, as the episodes described by Gathercole, particularly that involving the artists John Forrester and Stephen Gilbert, attest.³³ 'New Architecture', even when British architects practised it, was considered to be European or foreign.³⁴ Attempts were made to embrace the tenet of synthesis in England in the thirties, the earliest example of which is Unit One, the group founded by Paul Nash, Wells Coates, Henry Moore and Edward Wadsworth in 1933. The 1934 to 1935 touring exhibition Unit One, included painting, sculpture and architecture, it did not, however, present a coherent concept of synthesis. No common thread is detectable between the contributing artists of 'The Unit' beyond a desire to be modern. The exhibits included both abstract and Surrealist works. Only isolated pieces by Nicholson and Hepworth could be regarded as Constructive, and they both also showed figurative work. There is no conception of a shared formal language that transcends the disciplines of painting, sculpture and architecture. Within two years the internal split between abstraction and Surrealism led to the group's demise. Nicolette Grey's 1936 touring exhibition Abstract and Concrete was international rather than exclusively British like

³¹ Seuphor's article uses photographs of Mondrian's studios as illustrations. Léon Degand, H.L.C. Jaffé, Michal Seuphor, Roger Bordier, *Propos D'Elèves sur La and Pierre Guéguen, 'Synthèse Des Arts', Art d'Aujourd'hui, Série 5, Numéro 4-5, Mai-Juin 1954, pp.2-35.*

³² Gathercole defines "orthodox modernism" against "authentic modernism" and "reconstructed modernism" in Sam Gathercole, 'Art and Construction in Britain in the 1950s', Art History, Vol. 29, No. 5, 2006, pp.887-925

³³ Gathercole does not himself view the efforts in England towards synthesis or collaboration between artists and architects as an abject failure, Gathercole, 'Art and Construction in Britain', 2006, p.903 Martin Harrison however states "*The laudable ambition of This is Tomorrow, to promote new levels of collaboration between architects and artists, must be counted as a failure*", in Martin Harrison, Transition: The London Art Scene in the Fifties (Exhibition: 31st January to 14th April 2002), London: Merrell in association with Barbican Art, 2002, p.127.

³⁴ Iconic examples of British 'New Architecture' were actually the work of émigrés such as the 1934 Penguin Pool at London Zoo by Berthold Lubetkin. Serge Chermayeff was of foreign origins, and Maxwell Fry was regarded as the "*amanuensis of Gropius*" Nicholas Bullock 'Circle and the Constructive Idea in Architecture' in Jeremy Lewison, ed., Circle: Constructive Art in Britain 1934-40 (Exhibition: 20th February - 28th March 1982), Cambridge: Kettle's Yard, 1982, p.33.

Unit One.³⁵ Although it included only painters and sculptors, one of its venues was the Liverpool School of Architecture. This certainly implies an attempt to forge a link between the disciplines, although again synthesis per se was not sought. The following year, in 1937, Nicholson organised the show Constructive Art at the London Gallery, which again was exclusively painting and sculpture.³⁶ Also in 1937 Nicholson, Gabo, and the architect Leslie Martin published Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art.³⁷ The survey is split into sections: painting, sculpture, architecture, and "*Art and Life*". Although the three disciplines are kept separate, Circle represents an effort towards uniting them. As the editorial states:

*Our aim is to gather here those forces which seem to us to be working in the same direction and for the same ideas, but which are, at the moment scattered, many of the individuals working on their own account and lacking any medium for the interchange of ideas.*³⁸

It is possible that the disciplines of painting, sculpture and architecture would have coalesced in Circle, if, as planned, it had progressed as a yearly almanac. However, due in part to the outbreak of war, it remained a lone publication. The essential Modernist notion of synthesis between the arts had therefore not been embodied in any Constructive practice in Britain by the mid-fifties. Vézelay's British Groupe Espace sought to address this with the 1955 Royal Festival Hall exhibition, and subsequently it became the *raison d'être* of Lawrence Alloway's exhibition This Is Tomorrow in 1956. Concurrent with these exhibitions, three artists, working separately from each other, attempted to become involved in architecture as part of post-war social

³⁵ In 1936 Abstract and Concrete travelled to Oxford, Liverpool, Cambridge, and finished at the Lefevre Gallery in London. It included Alexander Calder, César Domela, Naum Gabo, Giacometti, Jean Hélion, Barbara Hepworth, Eileen Holding, Arthur Jackson, Wassily Kandinsky, Joan Miró, László Moholy-Nagy, Piet Mondrian, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson and John Piper.

³⁶ Nicholson's Constructive Art exhibition omitted Moss, Jean Arp, Sophie Taüber-Arp, Jean Gorin, George Vantongerloo, and Mondrian (who was invited but refused to take part particularly because the Arps etc were being excluded). Nicholson included instead himself, Hepworth, Winifred Dacre, Arthur Jackson, Henry Moore, Eileen Holding, John Piper, Cecil Stephenson, Alexander Calder, Naum Gabo, Alberto Giacometti, Jean Hélion, and László Maholy-Nagy; thus presenting a rather particular conception of Constructive art.

³⁷ John Lesley Martin, Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, eds., Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art, London: Faber and Faber, 1971, original publication 1937.

³⁸ Martin, Nicholson and Gabo, eds., Circle, 1937, pp.v-vi.

housing projects: Forrester and Gilbert as mentioned above, and Pasmore. Forrester contributed to the design for the Park Hill housing scheme in Sheffield from 1954 until 1959. Gilbert collaborated with the builder Peter Stead from 1955 until 1957 on the design for 'Prototype House', built in 1958 in Huddersfield, amongst other small projects. Pasmore occupied the most prestigious and subsequently celebrated position in relation to building of the three, as Consulting Director of Urban Design at Peterlee New Town. Although Gathercole characterises the activities of Forrester, Gilbert and Pasmore as 'orthodox modernism', Pasmore himself was keen to assert that while he saw his work at Peterlee as "*a synthesis of architect and artist*" this was as a "*collaboration*", and is a "*different thing to synthesis of architecture, painting and sculpture*".³⁹ Earlier Vézelay had also adopted the term 'collaboration' rather than 'synthesis' when writing to prospective members of the British branch of Groupe Espace. She clearly sensed that the terms used by André Bloc, the President of Groupe Espace in Paris, in his letters to her, denoted too radical a concept for British tastes.⁴⁰ Artists and architects were much more at ease in each other's company in Europe, than they were in Britain, and individuals frequently practised as both, Le Corbusier and Van Doesburg being prime examples.⁴¹ Moss would have been accustomed to this outlook from her education at the Académie Moderne, which, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, had been the depository of the European tradition from the Bauhaus and elsewhere.⁴² The fact, according to Nijhoff's account, that Moss studied architecture both in London in the

³⁹ Victor Pasmore in 'Questions to Victor Pasmore', Durham, 1960, cited in Gathercole, 'Art and Construction in Britain', 2006, p.896.

⁴⁰ This is discussed in Alan Fowler, 'A Forgotten British Constructivist Group: The London Branch of Groupe Espace, 1953-59', The Burlington Magazine, Vol. CXLIX, No. 1248, March 2007, p.175. The word "*collaboration*" is also used in this context by Vézelay in her statement in the catalogue André Bloc, ed., Espace: Architecture, Formes, Couleur (Exhibition: 10th July - 10th September), Biot: Groupe Espace, 1954. British Groupe Espace is discussed further in the following section of this chapter.

⁴¹ The strong connections between Le Corbusier (Jeanneret) and Van Doesburg to Moss, through Ozenfant and Vantongerloo respectively, are mapped in the previous chapter of this thesis.

⁴² The Bauhaus was led by architects Walter Gropius, Hannes Meyer and Mies Van der Rohe, but equally important to its functioning were artists Johannes Itten, László Maholy Nagy, Kandinsky and Klee.

twenties, and in Cornwall in the forties, attests to the importance she placed upon it as a concern concurrent with painting and sculpture.⁴³

With such different understandings of the terms of the debate: abstraction, Constructivism, and synthesis, it is inevitable that artists such as Vézelay and Moss, who were essentially European in their outlook, would clash with the British art world. Margaret Garlake considers confusion over terminology to be the greatest obstacle to an informed discussion of non-figurative art in Britain, both in the postwar period, and arguably to this day, and she devotes prolonged attention to the issue in her book New Art, New World -British Art in Postwar Society.⁴⁴ Once an international view was again possible for the British art world, it was no longer France that was looked to, but the United States. What Garlake describes as the shift in “*cultural allegiance*” was a direct outcome of the political relationship between nations during the war.⁴⁵ This had enormous ramifications for art in general, but it particularly disadvantaged Moss in a British postwar context.

Not only did Moss have a different understanding of terms; she also had no great talent for writing. This is an equally significant factor in the lack of fit between Moss and a British context. She did not enter into exchanges in the press in the manner of Gabo and Pasmore, and could not act as an advocate for her own ideas in writing, or indeed in verbal exchange.⁴⁶ Even Nicholson, who similarly avoided public fracas, increased his profile with the publication of essays, such as ‘Notes on Abstract Art’ in Horizon of 1941.⁴⁷ Moss wrote

⁴³ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

⁴⁴ Garlake, New Art, New World -British Art in Postwar Society, 1998, pp.36-38

⁴⁵ Garlake, New Art, New World -British Art in Postwar Society, 1998, p.5.

⁴⁶ Moss seemingly avoided confrontational situations, for example she did not attend any of the Groupe Espace meetings at Vézelay’s home. Even if she had been invited, which is unlikely, it can be surmised that she would have similarly declined to have taken part in a meeting such as that held in March 1950 at the New Burlington Galleries to discuss “The Strange Case of Abstract Art”. In attendance were Read, Nicholson, Reg Butler, David Sylvester, Patrick Heron, Roland Penrose, R.O. Dunlop, Charles Howard, J.P. Hodin, Pasmore, Misha Black, Richard Hamilton, Dr. [Anton?] Ehrenzweig, Merlyn Evans and Kenneth Martin. Notes of this discussion are held in the Tate Gallery Archives. The event is discussed p.904 Gathercole, ‘Art and Construction in Britain’.

⁴⁷ Ben Nicholson, ‘Notes on Abstract Art’, Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art. Edited by Cyril Connolly. Vol. IV, No. 22, 1941.

very brief statements for the cahier Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif,⁴⁸ which were of course in French, and not widely circulated in Britain, and did her utmost to avoid Vézelay's requests that she edit a planned Groupe Espace publication, or indeed write for it at all:

*I'm awfully bad at writing either on my own work or on Abstract Art, but, if I have time, will see what I can get out of my slow working brain; what I find difficult is to write simply on it. Much has been written intellectually.*⁴⁹

*I cannot write a decent interesting article on any subject and especially on modern art.*⁵⁰

Gabo similarly considered himself ill-equipped to write on either his own work, or Constructive art in general, and in 1944 wrote to Read to request assistance in an article he had been asked to write for Horizon.⁵¹ Gabo's attempt to explain the nature of the problem he faced in articulating his essentially "mute" art in words is nothing short of poetic. He discusses the relationship between the forms of his art and nature:

*...sometimes a falling star, cleaving the dark, traces the breath of night on my window glass, and in that instantaneous flash I might see the very line for which I searched in vain for months and months...the image of my perception needs an order and this order is my construction. I claim the right to do it so because this is what we do in our mental world; this is what science does, what philosophy does, what life does ... This is what it means to me to be constructive.*⁵²

⁴⁸ Moss wrote short statements for the first three annual issues, and after that allowed the reproductions of her work to stand alone. Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorised Reprint Ed. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 – 1936, New York: Arno, 1968. See Appendix 21 for a translation of Moss's statements.

⁴⁹ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, dated 3rd July 1955, held uncatalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 22, Appendix 3iii.

⁵⁰ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, dated 1st August 1956, held uncatalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 39, Appendix 3iii.

⁵¹ Naum Gabo and Herbert Read, 'Constructive Art: An Exchange of Letters', Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art. Edited by Cyril Connolly. Vol. X, No. 55, July 1944, pp.57-65.

⁵² Naum Gabo in Gabo and Read, 'Constructive Art: An Exchange of Letters', 1944.

Read wrote back and assured Gabo that his eloquent and lengthy letter was more than sufficient, and in fact surpassed anything he himself could write upon the subject; the two letters were then published together in Horizon.⁵³

Moss unfortunately had an accurate view of her shortcomings as a writer. The only time she attempted to publish her words in England was a short appreciation of Piet Mondrian, written in 1955, and a letter she wrote to The Times, later the same year, taking exception to a reviewer's description of Mondrian as a merely an exponent of abstract art, rather than "*the greatest of all the Abstract Painters*" as Moss herself believed him to be.⁵⁴ The 'appreciation' of Mondrian is known of only from a letter written to Vézelay:

*I am enclosing a short appreciation that I have written to Piet Mondrian, which I would like to get published in any of the Publications mentioned on the 8th Agenda. Just as I had finished it, I saw in the Daily paper that The Whitechapel Art Gallery is having his retrospective exhibition; it's a most appropriate moment for the above to be published. Would much appreciate your opinion on the few words that I have written on him if you think they are bad don't hesitate to say so. It's the first time that I used my typewriter so it's badly typed, unhappily.*⁵⁵

There is an unfinished essay by Moss entitled 'Abstract Art', which was possibly worked on with a view to publication in the planned British Groupe Espace review, discussed in letters between Moss and Vézelay from the summer of 1956, although it has been dated as earlier than this.⁵⁶ This is an unresolved piece, attempting a general characterisation of non-figurative Constructive art, and ending awkwardly with some notes on prime numbers.⁵⁷ Without the ability to speak for herself, and without a theoretician to act as her

⁵³ Both letters are also published in full in Herbert Read and Leslie Martin, Gabo: Constructions, Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings, Engravings, London: Lund Humphries, 1957, pp.171-173.

⁵⁴ Marlow Moss, Letter to the Critic of the Times, Dated 29-8-55, Typed Letter, Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, Zurich. See Appendix 3i B.

⁵⁵ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, dated 6th August 1955, held uncatalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 24, Appendix 3iii.

⁵⁶ See Appendix 2ii of this thesis.

⁵⁷ This essay is discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

advocate, Moss had little chance of establishing herself in England.⁵⁸ In Paris she had been part of a community of artists, and her membership of Association Abstraction-Création assured her place in that community. As has been discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, she had initially tried to cultivate her Abstraction-Création connection with Nicholson, but received minimal response.⁵⁹ She also wrote to Gabo in 1945, introducing Max Bill, and suggesting a meeting, but it is not known if anything came of this.⁶⁰ It is evident that Moss placed great value on her relationships with like-minded fellow artists, Léger, Mondrian, Vantongerloo and Bill especially, and was keen, initially at least, to foster new connections.

*To live alone isn't either easy or making one feel intensely living [sic.]. The desire to love and be loved makes all things beautiful! ... What I think is, that to meet anyone really sincere to ones ideas is very rare. I had the good fortune to do so in Paris and they have remained my friends inspite of the six years war.*⁶¹

Moss, however, struggled to meet anyone in sympathy with her ideas in England.⁶²

⁵⁸ The support of the scientist J.D. Bernal, in the form of a catalogue essay, was invaluable to the early reception of Barbara Hepworth, J.D. Bernal, Catalogue of Sculpture by Barbara Hepworth (Exhibition: October 1937). London: Alex. Reid & Lefevre, 1937.

⁵⁹ Moss wrote letters to Ben Nicholson in 1941, 1942 and 1943, these are held in the Tate Gallery Archives. See Appendix 3iv to this thesis.

⁶⁰ Marlow Moss to Naum Gabo, private letter, handwritten, dated 19th April 1945, held in the Tate Archives. See Appendix 3v.

⁶¹ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, dated 14th April 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 15 in Appendix 3iii to this thesis.

⁶² This has remained the case posthumously too, as is evidenced by the British reviews of Moss's work since her death, discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. It is also interesting to note the local critical reception of Florette Dijkstra's '*Reconstruction Project*', when it was exhibited at Tate St. Ives in 1997. The art critic of The Cornishman calls Dijkstra's instillation "*detached and distant*" and notes that Terry Frost's response was: "*They fill the walls nicely, but make the gallery look like a hospital ward without the bed pans!*", Frank Ruhrmund, 'There Is More Than Enough Here to Satisfy Mind and Eye: Tate Rehang 1997/98 -a Splendid Series of New Displays', The Cornishman, Thursday 27th November 1997, Weekender, p.32.

'St. Ives'.

*As an artist down there, if you weren't a member of the Penwith you didn't exist.*⁶³

There are many factors that tempt a juxtaposition of Moss with the best-known St. Ives modernists: Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson.⁶⁴ This couple are the most celebrated figures in the history of British non-figurative art, and Moss, despite her affiliation with Europe, was British. Moss was a few years older than Nicholson, but roughly the same artistic generation as both him and Hepworth.⁶⁵ Mondrian, whom they all knew personally, had profoundly influenced each one of them, and they had all been involved in Abstraction-Création.⁶⁶ However, despite accepting the help of Nicholson and Hepworth while he was temporarily residing in London during the war, Mondrian maintained a reserve in their friendship; this was not unusual for Mondrian, who did not have many close relationships, but he perhaps sensed Nicholson's pragmatism in forging an alliance (a suspicion of Vantongerloo's).⁶⁷ In the thirties Moss had exhibited at least once in an Abstraction-Création group show with Nicholson in Paris.⁶⁸ Moss, Nicholson

⁶³ Brian Wall, 2003, quoted in Chris Stephens, Brian Wall, London: Momentum, 2006, p.30. Wall left St. Ives in 1960 and went to London, after having been sacked by Hepworth as her studio assistant, Stephens, Brian Wall, 2006, p.53.

⁶⁴ This is typified by a review of the 1975 Gimpel Films show Marlow Moss (1890-1958) Constructions, Drawings, Paintings: "*Gimpel offers the surprising discovery of another British associate (besides Ben Nicholson) of the international Abstraction-Creation movement of the 30s.*" Francis Watson, 'Marlow Moss', Arts Review, Vol.27, No.9, 1975, p.242.

⁶⁵ Nicholson was born in 1894, making him five years younger than Moss. Hepworth was slightly younger than Moss and Nicholson, having been born in 1903.

⁶⁶ Nicholson and Hepworth joined Abstraction-Création in 1933, on the invitation of Jean Hélion, two years after its inauguration, and met Mondrian shortly after. They participated for just over a year, contributing to issues 2 and 3 of the almanac.

⁶⁷ As has been mentioned in footnote 36 earlier in this chapter, in 1937 Mondrian had pulled out of the exhibition Constructive Art that Nicholson was organising at the London Gallery, because Nicholson was refusing to include the Arps, and various other Paris-based artists that Mondrian considered should be represented, including Moss, Gorin, and Vantongerloo. This is discussed in Jeremy Lewison, Ben Nicholson (Exhibition: 13th October 1993 - 9th January 1994), London: Tate Gallery, 1993, p.45.

⁶⁸ The poster for this show, which ran from 2nd to 16th March, is reproduced in Norbert Nobis and Gladys C. Fabre, Abstraction Création: 1931-1936 (Exhibitions: 16th June - 17th September and 2nd April - 4th June 1978), Paris / Münster: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris / Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, 1978, p.302. The year is not identified on the poster, but according to Moss's A.I.A. application such a show took place in either 1935 or 1936. Alan Bowness however states the show took place in 1934, in his essay on Barbara Hepworth in Charles Harrison, ed., Unit One (Exhibition: 20th

and Hepworth were also all included in Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1938.⁶⁹ The primary factor, however, in the temptation to link Moss with Hepworth and Nicholson, is her geographical location, from 1941 until her death in 1958, in the far west of Cornwall; a territory hitherto claimed for the 'King and Queen of British Abstraction'.⁷⁰ It seems impossible to the British art historical imagination that an important international non-figurative artist could live and work, during the forties and fifties, in Penwith, and not be connected to the 'St. Ives' scene. Moss did exhibit with the Penwith Society on at least one occasion according to Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, but beyond this there was no further contact.⁷¹ Nicholson is rightly considered to be "*the great driving force of 'constructive' art*" in England in the thirties.⁷² However, by the fifties this was no longer the case. Nicholson's continued domination of British non-figurative art clearly irritated Moss at the time:

May - 9th July 1978), Portsmouth: Portsmouth City Art Gallery, 1978, p.5. Vézelay, Arp, Herbin and Bill were also included within a total of ten exhibitors. Interestingly Nicholson is the only exhibitor named in full on the poster, perhaps indicating he was less well-known in Paris than the others. The same is true of Hepworth on the poster advertising the earlier Abstraction-Création exhibition that she was included in.

⁶⁹ George Schmidt, S. Giedion, H. Buys, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky, Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst (Exhibition: 2nd-24th April 1938). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1938.

⁷⁰ Nicholson and Hepworth are referred to thus commonly in both published writing and casual conversation.

⁷¹ Wilhelmina Barns-Graham wrote the following in a letter to Florette Dijkstra dated 25th May 1996: "*I met her [Marlow Moss] in the Penwith Society of Art (St. Ives Cornwall) she brought some paintings of hers and I remember helping to hang one of them, sometime in the early 1950s.*" Dijkstra derived a fuller account from Barns-Graham, which she included in The Sequel: Barns-Graham remembered that in 1951, the year her husband David Lewis became curator of the Penwith Society, Moss submitted three works to the committee of Group B, the abstract branch of the Society. Barns-Graham had wondered at the time who amongst the membership had proposed Moss, it could not have been Gabo as he was not a member, and she thought it unlikely to have been Nicholson or Hepworth. Either one or two of the works were selected for exhibition, but not all three. This is the only time Barns-Graham can remember Moss exhibiting at the Society. She described Moss as a "*phenomenon*" in Cornwall, and she herself became quite fascinated by her. She saw her very briefly on three occasions over the years, including the day of the delivery to the Penwith Society. She went to Lamorna a few times to try and meet her, but was told that 'Miss Moss' was on the continent. In 1958 Barns-Graham saw Moss's show at the Hanover Gallery in London, and, impressed with the work, wrote to Moss, and this time a date was set. The sculptor Brian Wall was to accompany Barns-Graham to visit Moss at her studio. Unfortunately, before this meeting could take place, Moss was taken ill, and died shortly after. Florette Dijkstra, The Sequel, trans. Penny Maddrell. Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1997, pp.53-56.

⁷² Dennis Farr, 'Cambridge, Kettle's Yard, Circle: Constructive Art in Britain 1934-40', The Burlington Magazine, Vol. 124, No. 951, 1982, p.380 and p.78.

*I have just listened to the radio programme entitled "The Critics" on Ben Nicholson's show at "The Tate", from them, one would conclude that no other Abstract Artist existed in the whole of great Britain, it's pitiful!*⁷³

There are certainly common threads between the work of Moss and those of both Hepworth and Nicholson, and it is likely that this will be made much of in any British reappraisal of Moss. Some of Moss's sculptures are superficially reminiscent of Hepworth's when seen in photographs. An example of this is Moss's '*Egg-Shaped and Cylindrical Forms on a Pentagonal Base*' of 1956-1957.⁷⁴ However, once the scale and material of the Moss work is considered, and the pristine and crystalline nature of its forms is examined, the commonality recedes somewhat. In the hands of Hepworth two such forms more often than not gather figurative associations, frequently becoming mother and child.⁷⁵ Arguably particular works such '*Discs in Echelon*' of 1935 or '*Forms in Echelon*' of 1938, for example, are exceptions to this, and do sustain their non-figurative condition. With Moss however, no such allusions are ever made in any of her mature work; the forms remain completely autonomous, poised and balanced, absurd and even humorous, yet always enigmatic and without a hint of sentiment, or figurative or symbolic representation. Hepworth would never have resisted the sensuous nature of her material in such a way that Moss does. Hepworth is likely to have instead offset the crisp whiteness of the painted wooden surface with unpainted facets of dark wood, either textured or smooth. The fact that the Gimpel and Hanover Gallery, on the request of Stefan Nijhoff, made polyester casts of this work further emphasizes the difference between a Moss and a Hepworth. Given Hepworth's allegiance to wood, stone, and bronze, such a material as polyester would be an anathema to her work, but Stefan Nijhoff clearly considered it appropriate for a Moss. Many of Moss's sculptures were manufactured by artisans, first in The Netherlands and then in Cornwall, rather than laboured over by her. The act of creativity for Moss was cerebral rather than manual; it was therefore irrelevant to her station as 'artist' whether

⁷³ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, handwritten letter, dated 3rd July 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 22, Appendix 3iii.

⁷⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 20.

⁷⁵ See Illustration Figure 5.1 in appendix to this thesis.

or not she had actually manipulated the material herself.⁷⁶ Although Hepworth did employ studio assistants, she was seemingly embarrassed to admit this.⁷⁷ Michael Seward Snow has confirmed to me that the lack of "human touch" in a Moss work is likely to have been a contributory factor to her ill-fit in 'St. Ives'.⁷⁸

Like Moss, Hepworth was inspired by ever-changing natural forms. Unlike Moss she chose to represent this in her art symbolically. Of her 1943 sculpture 'Wave' Hepworth said the following:

*The colour of the concavities plunged me into the depth of water, caves, or shadows deeper than the carved concavities themselves. The strings were the tension I felt between myself and the sea, the wind or the hills.*⁷⁹

Such an attitude is completely antithetical to Moss. Moss's fascination was for the underlying structure of nature, the precise mathematical ordering, invisible to the human eye, rather than the visceral experience of beholding nature's effects. Although Moss enjoyed rural life (she consistently gravitated away from the metropolis), and appreciated cliff top walks from Lamorna, and tending the garden of her landlady, she didn't seek to depict nature, but to find an equivalent for it. When asked by Herbin to discuss the influence of trees in her work for the second issue of Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif, Moss

⁷⁶ This issue is discussed at greater length in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

⁷⁷ Michael Seward Snow told me, during a conversation that took place on 24th May 2008, that the sculptor Denis Mitchel, Hepworth's principle assistant, and a friend of Snow's, was introduced as 'the gardener' to important visitors. This account was reiterated by another of Hepworth's assistants the sculptor Roger Leigh, to my supervisor Professor Sam Smiles; apparently when interviewers came to the studio he was made to hide.

⁷⁸ In a letter to myself dated 22nd March 2008 Snow articulates a very different approach to art than that of Moss, which was possibly shared by Nicholson and other 'St. Ives' artists. He wrote: "I have been asking myself, with respect to Moss, what exactly was it that we thought lacking in her work when we found it 'mechanical'.... Perhaps the 'human touch' of craftsmanship that we miss in Moss is not valued just for its suggestion of nostalgia or craft-romanticism but because it is a way of referring to a meditative approach / method employed by artists who have learned to create in a much freer, more intuitive and genuinely experimental way. They are accustomed to delaying the process of determining their image and improving its ultimate quality by taking into account what is found on the way to achieving it...The artists who work in this sort of way constitute what I mean by the term 'experimental'. Their works may well be more resonant than those produced by the 'design a form first then make it' approach."

⁷⁹ Barbara Hepworth, Barbara Hepworth: Carvings and Drawings, London: Lund Humphries, 1952.

found this question at once too big and too small, and responded that nature is man's greatest enemy.⁸⁰ She posits that art is the means for man to evolve from nature's tyranny. Conceding that man is part of the natural "*chaotic universe*", she argues he has already overcome this condition through consciousness and "*cerebral strength*". The existence of trees, as anything in the material world, forms a physical manifestation of the universe of names and numbers created by man, but without consciousness there is little influence a tree can have on the work of Moss. Despite the abstracted nature of Hepworth's sculptures it is still the "*changeable element*" of nature that attracted her, the visible forms, rather than the "*universal truth*" that Moss sought.⁸¹

The same comparison can be made between Moss and Nicholson, who never relinquished figurative imagery, continuing to make representational and semi-abstract pictures alongside his Constructive works in the thirties. The closest point in the respective oeuvres of Moss and Nicholson is unquestionably both artists' exploration of the white relief. This also seems to be the source of some tension between them.⁸² Nicholson's work had reached a stage closest to 'concrete' at the time that Moss arrived in Cornwall, in the early forties. If ever common ground between them were to be found, it would have been at this point. However, as has been discussed in Chapter 2, a relationship, professional or personal, was not formed.⁸³ Apart

⁸⁰ Issue 2 of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif. See Appendix 2i for translations of Moss's writings for the cahier.

⁸¹ These are Moss's phrases from her essay in Issue 1 of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif. See the Appendix 2i. These issues in Moss's work are further discussed in the next chapter of this thesis.

⁸² As discussed in Chapter 2, Florette Dijkstra provides some anecdotal evidence that Moss accused Nicholson of copying her work, Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, p.22. This seems unlikely to be true as Nicholson was working with the white relief from 1934, and Moss didn't begin until 1936 to make entirely white paintings with collaged rope and cord, and not until 1940 did she move on to the white wooden relief that bears some comparison with Nicholson's (see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 30, P/R 31, P/R 32, P/R 33, and P/R 37), although this is disputed by Dijkstra, in The Sequel, 1997, p.54. Dijkstra further argues that Read manipulated the comparative chronologies of Moss and Nicholson, in the latter's favour, by, for example, illustrating Nicholson with early works, alongside Mondrian, and Moss with a single work from 1957, placing her in anachronistic isolation, in his 1959 publication Read, A Concise History of Modern Painting.

⁸³ Moss wrote to Nicholson, on the advice of Mondrian, several times during her first years back in Cornwall between 1941 and 1943, but received minimal response. Nicholson

from the possible conjecture of factors such as egoism and chauvinism on the part of Nicholson in his lack of response to Moss's suggestions of luncheons and collaborative exhibitions, there are also fundamental and intractable differences between them; whereas Moss was an atheist, Nicholson was a mystic.⁸⁴ It is clear from both artists' work that they had little shared ground. Nicholson had not initially been impressed with Mondrian's work, either in reproduction, or the first time he saw it in the flesh.⁸⁵ This is in sharp contradistinction to Moss's reaction seven years earlier; according to Nijhoff's account the breath was taken from her body by the architectonic majesty of an original Mondrian.⁸⁶

Both Moss and Nicholson were, of course, influenced by Mondrian, but Nicholson less profoundly. He was unwilling to sustain such austerity and rigour, having a sensibility towards the decorative, as is acknowledged by Taylor in his 1951 Listener article discussed earlier in this chapter:

*Even the most logical work of Ben Nicholson seems almost self-indulgent beside Mondrian's eternal rectangles.*⁸⁷

Nicholson's Constructive work is only geometric in the loosest sense; the edges are often softened and rounded, and circular forms offset the rectilinearity. The carved boards of the reliefs have a handcrafted quality, sometimes quite roughly hewn. Nicholson revelled in the worn textures of found material and driftwood. He experimented with paint effects, sanding back, layering washes, to manufacture surfaces reminiscent of weather-beaten fishing boats and stained plaster walls. The surface aspect of the

however kept Moss's letters, and they are now held in the Tate Archives, London. See Appendix 3iv to this thesis.

⁸⁴ It was Christian Science that Nicholson committed to, rather than Theosophy, although there is common ground between the two. Nicholson's mysticism would not have been a barrier between them from Moss's point of view, as it formed no obstacle in her friendship with Mondrian. Moss's atheism though may have been unacceptable to Nicholson.

⁸⁵ It was in 1933 that Nicholson commented unfavourably on Mondrian works seen in Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif, and 1934 when he first saw works in the flesh, and seemingly remained unmoved, Lewison, Ben Nicholson. 1993, p.44.

⁸⁶ As described by Netty Nijhoff in her essay published in the catalogue: Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

⁸⁷ Taylor, 'Abstract Painting in England', 1951.

material is celebrated in a parallel to what Adrian Heath described in his 1953 essay 'Abstract Painting: Its Origin and Meaning' as "*a patina of evocative texture*", which perhaps serves to "*conceal the absence of a formal idea*".⁸⁸ Moss, who descended from the Académie Moderne, Léger, and Purism, rejected the textural. Her ideas were made manifest in material only out of necessity, in order to achieve the concrete. She utilised the material most appropriate to her idea, within the dictates of availability (this was of course an issue especially in wartime). When Nicholson employed colour, it was delicate and de-saturated, and never limited to the hard pure primaries.⁸⁹ Nicholson's reliefs led him to work in sculpture, as Moss's did, but only for a brief time. Before the end of the war Nicholson had returned to figurative landscape painting. In fact, even at his furthest from representational art, Nicholson's colours and forms are always evocative of the Cornish light and landscape. This is commented upon rather wickedly by Alloway in his introductory essay to the 1954 exhibition Nine Abstract Artists:

*In St. Ives they combine non-figurative theory with the practice of abstraction because the landscape is so nice nobody can quite bring themselves to leave it out of their art.*⁹⁰

As Read points out in his catalogue introduction to the Tate's 1955 Nicholson retrospective "*Nicholson is not exclusively, and perhaps not essentially, an abstract painter*".⁹¹ Apart from incidences of Cornish granite used as a base for sculptures,⁹² Moss's work makes no reference to her

⁸⁸ Adrian Heath, *Abstract Painting: Its Origin and Meaning*. London: Alec Tiranti, 1953, p.26. Heath's attack is aimed at the writings of Wilhelm Worringer and T.E. Hulme, but as Gathercole points out the criticism can be transposed directly to the work of Nicholson, Gathercole, 'Art and Construction in Britain', 2006, p.907.

⁸⁹ A near-exception to this is the painting '*June 1937*' of 1937 for example, however, even though red, yellow and blue are used, with black, white and varying subtle greys, they have been augmented and tinted to create a softer effect. See Illustration 5.2 in appendix to this thesis.

⁹⁰ Lawrence Alloway, Nine Abstract Artists. London: Alec Tiranti Ltd., 1954, p.12. This exhibition attempted to unite the two perceived factions of abstract art: the Constructive or Concrete as represented by Adams, Heath, Hill, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin and Pasmore, and the abstracted-from-nature as represented by Terry Frost, Roger Hilton and William Scott. The work of the latter three was to a certain extent denigrated in Alloway's presentation.

⁹¹ Herbert Read, Ben Nicholson: A Retrospective Exhibition (Exhibition: June - July 1955). London: The Tate Gallery, 1955.

⁹² Please see Catalogue Raisonné: S/C 12, S/C 18, and S/C 22.

geographical surroundings. Like Mondrian, she sought to control her environment, her home and studio, creating an outward expression of her mind, and an extension of her practice. She, even more so than Mondrian (who was influenced by the lights and rhythms of New York in his final works), was self-contained to the extent her surroundings had little impact on her aesthetic. She developed her work in both Cornwall and The Netherlands in the forties and fifties, whilst spending time in both Paris and London. Having no need for external visual stimulus, her studio could have functioned happily in any of these places. If she favoured Cornwall it was for the brightness of the light only, flooding in through her studio windows.⁹³ This is complete contradistinction to the particular English qualities of Nicholson's work, linked by Read in 1955 with both Gothic manuscripts and the paintings of Turner:

*Ben Nicholson's work has another characterisation that contradicts the would-be universality of abstract art, in spite of its abstraction, it is intensely national.*⁹⁴

The characteristics of English art, in opposition to European, is identified in Bryan Robertson's preface to the catalogue of the Whitechapel's Mondrian retrospective of the same year:

*... we [the English] do love the past and frequently have difficulty in relating ourselves to the present. We like our art to be nostalgic and interpretive rather than contemporary and formative.*⁹⁵

The work of Hepworth and Nicholson, on the one hand, and Moss, on the other, exemplifies a dichotomy in the use of the term 'organic', since the fifties.⁹⁶ 'Organic' can be understood to mean a chronological development, without pre-ordained destination; where the end result is merely a "diagram of

⁹³ Moss's relationship with light is discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

⁹⁴ Read, *Ben Nicholson: A Retrospective Exhibition*, 1955.

⁹⁵ Bryan Robertson, *Piet Mondrian 1872-1944* (Exhibition August - September 1955). London: The Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1955, p.3.

⁹⁶ The complexity of the term 'organic' is mapped in Chapter 2 of Anthony Escott, 'Alan Cuthbert: Colour Theory and Practice (1957-79): English Art School Change in the Early 1960s', PhD Thesis, Kingston University, 2005. A previous examination of the term 'organic' in relation to twentieth century British art is made in David Thistlewood, 'Organic Art and the Popularization of a Scientific Philosophy', *British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 22, No. 4, Autumn 1982, pp.311-321

forces" as described by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson in 1917.⁹⁷ The emergent form, the work of art, is a result of unpredictable chaos. 'Organic' can equally be understood to imply the very opposite of this: an a priori conception of perfect form, which nature / art aims to adhere to, geometrical patterns and number sequences that appear manifest in natural design: order. The latter conception, as described by Matila Ghyka in the twenties,⁹⁸ amongst others, seemingly fits the practice of Moss. The work of Hepworth and Nicholson can be, and is, described as 'organic', in common contemporary usage of the word: to mean based on natural forms, with an implication of naturalness, purity, and intuitiveness. The materials Hepworth and Nicholson used, and the colours and forms they employed, all further this reading. This usage of the word is in contradistinction to the artificiality of the 'scientific': man-made, hard, rigid, unyielding, and unnatural. The nuances of these terms, and the dichotomy they represent between the perception of the 'St. Ives' aesthetic as manifested in the work of Hepworth and Nicholson, and that of Moss is at the root of the resistance between them and Moss. The enduring status of Hepworth and Nicholson, over Moss, in British art history, is in part resultant of a British romantic, and sentimental, conception of nature, contained in common usage of the word 'organic', and exemplified by the 'St. Ives' school of abstraction.

Of all Moss's neighbours in Penwith, Gabo was the closest to her in sensibility. With his familiarity with international Constructivism he could perhaps have been a bridge between Moss and the 'St. Ives' artists. Gabo, like Moss, was a founder member of Abstraction-Création.⁹⁹ He lived in Paris in the early thirties, when Moss did, moved to London in 1935, and then lived in St. Ives from 1939 until 1946, overlapping with Moss's first few years of residence in Lamorna, after which he left for the United States. However, a

⁹⁷ D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, 1961 Abridged Edition by John Tyler Bonner ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.11. (Original publication 1917).

⁹⁸ Matila Ghyka, *The Geometry of Art and Life*, 2nd ed. New York: Dover Publications, 1977. In 1927 Ghyka published *L'Esthétique des Proportions dans la Nature et dans les Arts*, then *Le Nombre d'Or* was published in 1931, and *Essai sur le Rythme* published in 1938; *The Geometry of Art and Life*, first published in 1946, is a synopsis of the three.

⁹⁹ Gabo contributed to the first three issues of *Abstraction-Création: Art Non-Figuratif*.

letter from Moss to Gabo, of April 1945, attests to the fact that there had been no contact between them up until that point.¹⁰⁰

British Groupe Espace.

In 1954, fourteen years after her return to England, Moss responded with enthusiasm to Paule Vézelay's invitation for her to join the committee of a British branch of Groupe Espace.¹⁰¹

*For some long time I have been concerned by the lack of activity of the abstract and non-figurative painters and sculptors in Great Britain and so I'm fully sympathetic with the content of your letter and will be most willing to collaborate with you.*¹⁰²

Vézelay is in many ways a comparable figure to Moss. Like Moss, after briefly attending the Slade School in London, and exhibiting with The London Group, she had established herself in Paris in the twenties. Both Vézelay and Moss made their first non-figurative works in the year 1928. In Paris Vézelay was considered a significant figure of the avant-garde, with connections to the Arps and André Masson particularly. Analogously to Moss's relationship of mutual exchange with Mondrian, Vézelay, as well as being significantly influenced by Arp, in turn influenced him.¹⁰³ She was also a member of Abstraction-Création and exhibited at the Salon des Surindépendants. Like Moss, she had assumed an androgynous name (coincidentally both were originally 'Marjorie'), and remained distinct from a conventional female identity.¹⁰⁴ Both of them had begun their careers as painters, and moved into

¹⁰⁰ Moss writes: "As we both belonged to the group in Paris known as 'L'Abstraction Création', most probably we have met" in a handwritten letter, dated 19th April 1945, held in the Tate Archives, London. See Appendix 3v. There is no record of a meeting between Moss and Gabo in the months between this and his departure, although the visit Moss suggests in her letter may have taken place.

¹⁰¹ Vézelay wrote to Moss inviting her to join the committee on 23rd February 1954. This is referred to in Letter 1 of Appendix 3iii.

¹⁰² Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, handwritten letter, dated 8th March 1954, held uncatalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See again Letter 1 of Appendix 3iii.

¹⁰³ Michel Seuphor, *The Sculpture of This Century*, trans. Haakon Chevalier. London: Zwemmer, 1959, p.147.

¹⁰⁴ After a relationship with Masson of some years, living with him from 1929 until 1932, Vézelay refused to marry him. She also turned down Arp's proposal, after the death of

relief and sculptural work. Vézelay's most significant independent development is perhaps the box-type constructions referred to by her as '*Researches in Three Dimensions: Paintings with Taut Threads and Strings*' and '*Lines in Space*'. These, which she began in 1937, involved the use of threads and cords, which Moss had begun experimenting with in 1935.¹⁰⁵ Alongside Moss, she participated in the 1938 Tentoonstelling Abstracte Kunst at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and in 1939 at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles exhibition at the Galerie Charpentier, Paris. The two artists were also included, years later in 1957, in Cinquante Ans de Peinture Abstraite at Galerie Creuze, Paris. Vézelay too returned to England at the outbreak of the war, and, initially at least, intended to go back to France after it was over. Like Moss, her posthumous reputation has been damaged by the fact that much of her early work was lost during the war.¹⁰⁶ Both Moss and Vézelay were members of the London Artists International Association. Most significantly, the two of them seemed to share a similar outlook regarding art and life; both were determined and independent, and both had somewhat retiring natures. Caldecott, in the book Women of Our Century, quotes Sarah Bernhardt "*I resolved to live. I resolved to be the great artiste that I longed to be*" in relation to Vézelay,¹⁰⁷ a sentiment that could easily be applied to Moss, and is very reminiscent of Moss's own references to Rimbaud.¹⁰⁸ Both artists were isolated, and even lonely in post-war Britain. Moss certainly was very pleased to have Vézelay as a friend:

Sophie Tauber-Arp in 1943. In an interview with Leonie Caldecott, Vézelay put her unmarried state down to not meeting the right man, and to the First World War, which greatly reduced the statistical possibility of that. She implies that she would not have compromised her artistic career for marriage even so, Leonie Caldecott, 'Paule Vézelay', Women of Our Century, ed. Leonie Caldecott, London: Ariel Books / British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984, p.40-41.

¹⁰⁵ Please see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 19 and P/R 20 onwards, until P/R 29.

¹⁰⁶ Vézelay's early figurative work was stolen from her rented storage in Paris during the war. Ronald Alley, Paule Vézelay (Exhibition: 23rd February - 22nd May 1983). London: The Tate Gallery Publications, 1983, p.12.

¹⁰⁷ Caldecott, 'Paule Vézelay', 1984, p.41.

¹⁰⁸ "...*make of ones life a work of art*" quoted by Moss in her essay Abstract Art. Unpublished essay. Original handwritten manuscript, 1955, held in Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, Zurich. See Appendix 2ii.

*Now I have met you for which I am very glad. It seems funny that we didn't know each other in France.*¹⁰⁹

Like Moss, Vézelay was “*far more of an exile in her own country*” than she had been in Paris.¹¹⁰ Although the aesthetics of their works are in some ways opposed, Vézelay favouring biomorphic form, there is a certain sense of distillation, precision, and purity, in common.

The Parisian Groupe Espace had been running since 1951, with the architect, artist and designer André Bloc as President. The manifesto was published in Art d'Aujourd'hui, an international journal edited by Bloc, in October of that year. The group was envisioned, in this inaugural address, as the successor to De Stijl and the Bauhaus, and branches were established in Italy, Sweden and Switzerland just prior to the attempt to set up the British branch in 1953. Espace was eclectic from the start, featuring artists of all schools of non-figuration, following the tradition of Abstraction-Création, far more than that of De Stijl or the Bauhaus. The parent group in Paris had three vice-presidents one of whom was Moss's professeur from the Académie Moderne, Léger. He was of course not a non-figurative painter at this time, but made work considered by some to be tending towards abstraction.¹¹¹ Moss undoubtedly was particularly enthused by the European nature of the group, and wrote to Vézelay that she was especially keen to participate in the proposed exhibition in Milan.¹¹²

Bloc appointed Vézelay as the délégué of a proposed British branch of Groupe Espace in November 1953, and advised her to contact the architect Ernő Goldfinger, the London correspondent for his journal Architecture

¹⁰⁹ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, dated 14th April 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 15, in Appendix 3iii.

¹¹⁰ Caldecott, 'Paule Vézelay', 1984, p.52.

¹¹¹ This was how Bloc legitimised Léger's involvement in the group to Jane Drew, according to Vézelay's account in Paule Vézelay to Marlow Moss, private letter, typed, "*In Confidence. Committee Matters*", dated 26th November 1954, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Appendix 3iii.

¹¹² Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, undated [1954], held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 3 in Appendix 3iii.

d'Aujourd'hui, for assistance in identifying architects to join. Vézelay met with Goldfinger the following month, but he was seemingly little help. Alan Fowler, in his article 'A Forgotten British Constructivist Group: The London Branch of Groupe Espace, 1953-59', surmises that as "*an ambitious male architect with an existing working relationship with Bloc, he resented a woman painter, rather than himself, being selected to launch this London venture*".¹¹³ Both Vézelay and Moss wanted Pasmore, whom neither of them knew personally at this stage, on the committee, and Robert Adams and Henry Moore were all involved in the preliminary discussions, although the latter was against Vézelay's wishes.¹¹⁴ The architects Goldfinger, Jane Drew, Wells Coates, F.R.S. Yorke and John Leslie Martin, were also initially involved. Nicholson had been invited, but, after a long delay, responded to Vézelay's letter asking who else was to be included in the group, and then made no further expression of interest. J.L. Martin had recommended the architect Colin St. John Wilson, rather than himself, and after a discussion of Vézelay's purposes, St. John Wilson also declined her invitation. In the catalogue of the 1954 Groupe Espace exhibition, which was held in the small French town of Biot, there is a page devoted to news of the international sister groups in Switzerland, Italy, Sweden and Great Britain. At this point Vézelay listed the founder members as architects Coates and Yorke, painters Moss and Pasmore, and sculptors Mary and Kenneth Martin.¹¹⁵ As is discussed above, the modern architects of Britain had trouble accepting the Espace notion of a synthesis of art and architecture, and this obstacle proved insurmountable at the first meeting of the preliminary British branch of Groupe Espace, in Vézelay's studio flat in Earl's Court on 25th November 1954. The architects present (Drew, Coates and Yorke) seemingly did not know a great deal about non-figurative and Constructive art, and were conservative in their tastes. Encouraged by Moore, they argued that modern architecture needed figurative sculpture to complement and humanize its effects. Vézelay was not

¹¹³ Fowler, 'A Forgotten British Constructivist Group', 2007, p.174.

¹¹⁴ André Bloc had specifically requested Moore be invited.

¹¹⁵ "Mme Paule Vézelay, peinture, délégué pour la Grand-Bretagne, vient de nous informer qu'un Groupe Espace est en formation. Il compte déjà quelques membres: P. D. Wells Coates et F.R.S. Yorke, architectes; Marlow Moss et Victor Pasmore, peintures; Kenneth Martin et Marie Martin, sculpteurs." Bloc, ed., Espace: Architecture, Formes, Couleur, 1954, p.6.

prepared to compromise and insisted the Groupe Espace was exclusively for non-figurative art, and the shared language of painting, sculpture and architecture. Vézelay described the argument to Moss in a letter the following day. Drew's ignorance of non-figurative art apparently started the trouble, and Moore likewise misunderstood the commitment of the group to non-figurative art, and announced his work was moving back to figuration. Vézelay wrote that:

*... it soon became clear that Moore did not want to be on the committee and that he wanted even less to see three leading architects who liked his own work and are friends of his, from becoming interested in abstract work.*¹¹⁶

As Coates (who had been involved in Unit One with Moore) and Drew had both previously commissioned Moore to adorn their buildings, he had a vested interest in being the only sculptor they knew and appreciated. He, according to Vézelay's account, "*quite successfully spoilt the meeting*", possibly purposefully. The paramount concern of the attendees of the meeting was seemingly that their friends should be invited to join the group. Drew suggested Reg Butler, despite the fact his work was by that time entirely figurative.¹¹⁷ Kenneth Martin was the most amenable to Vézelay's intentions, and stayed after the others had left, encouraging her that Pasmore and Robert Adams, who were unable to attend on that date, would be in support of her conception of Espace.

Initially Pasmore was very keen to join, and Vézelay also received positive responses from Adrian Heath, Terry Frost, and Theo Crosby. The second meeting of Groupe Espace, again in Vézelay's flat, took place on 16th January 1955. Pasmore, Kenneth Martin, Adams, and two of the architects, probably Yorke and Coates, were in attendance. The meeting is described in a letter from Vézelay to Moss written nearly a month later, in an account written by

¹¹⁶ Paule Vézelay to Marlow Moss, private letter, typed, "*In Confidence. Committee Matters*", dated 26th November 1954, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Appendix 3iii.

¹¹⁷ Butler had had in fact already been invited, and had declined because he no longer considered himself a non-figurative artist.

Vézelay in November 1964, and in a letter from Adams to Frost.¹¹⁸ The accounts of Vézelay and Adams, although different in perspective, concur broadly on the facts. Kenneth Martin, who had been supportive of Vézelay in the previous meeting, nominated Pasmore to lead the group, but Vézelay refused to stand down as Bloc had appointed her. Pasmore, proceeded to assert his authority never-the-less, and demanded that Varin should be dismissed, ties with Paris severed, and the membership limited to eighteen; Vézelay refused on all counts, and the meeting descended into disarray. Vézelay refused to succumb to the aggressive "*ruch tactics*" [sic]¹¹⁹ of Pasmore, and sent him a telegram after the meeting saying that she declined to write to Varin dismissing him, and asking if he would like to retire therefore: "Yes or NO".¹²⁰ Adams, in the interim, wrote to Frost:

*I think I should tell you that at the meeting of Groupe Espace last Wednesday – we all resigned:- Victor, Kenneth, myself and the two architects!!! Vézelay just refused to accept the committee's proposals! So that is the end of that for the time being.*¹²¹

The resignations of Pasmore, Adams, Kenneth Martin, Heath, Frost and Crosby were quickly made official. Anthony Hill recently testified to Fowler:

*Pasmore saw himself as the successor to Ben Nicholson in the leadership of British abstraction and was not willing to take a position subsidiary to that of a less well-known, older woman.*¹²²

Despite this enormous setback, Vézelay was not to be dissuaded, and with the encouragement of Bloc, and Moss, she established a new committee, and pressed forward with plans for a London exhibition. Moss wrote to Vézelay in February 1955:

¹¹⁸ All of these items are held in the Tate Archives. See Appendix 3iii to this thesis for Vézelay's letter to Moss dated 12th February 1955.

¹¹⁹ Paule Vézelay to Marlow Moss, private letter, typed, "*Groupe Espace*", dated 12th February 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Appendix 3iii.

¹²⁰ Paule Vézelay to Victor Pasmore, telegram, typed, "*Groupe Espace*", dated 12th February 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives.

¹²¹ Robert Adams to Terry Frost, private letter, typed, undated (Sunday), Tate Gallery Archives.

¹²² Fowler, 'A Forgotten British Constructivist Group', 2007, p.176.

I'm very disgusted with the english [sic] Abstract artists in not giving you and the British Groupe of "Espace" their support; I remember writing to you a long time ago that I had no confidence in those artists who have made their name as –abstract artists as I couldn't trace in their work the idea on which Abstract Art is based or a further development of this idea to a new expression in Art. How abstract Art started in England is rather a long history, no doubt you know all about it so I don't intend to bore you with its miserable history. I don't think only Pasmore (in whom you first had confidence) but also Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and their satellites have shown a very miserable attitude in not joining you and Espace Groupe.¹²³

Leslie Martin once again showed willing, despite not wanting to be involved in the group, and helped Vézelay secure the foyer of The Royal Festival Hall as a venue for the group's first exhibition.¹²⁴ Moss did not muster a huge amount of enthusiasm for the space, which was limited and lessened the possibility of including international members.¹²⁵ The foyer was frequented by concertgoers and passers-by, and did not fulfil Moss's expectations of an exhibition venue in which to bring the tradition of Abstraction-Création, and the inheritance of European modernity, to London. Moss's concerns express her desire that the show should be much bigger, more ambitious, and, crucially, more international in flavour, in order to make an appropriately significant impact on the British art scene, and not appear to lag behind the rest of Europe.

I rather insist that our first Exhibition in London should also be International.¹²⁶

Moss's prime concern, which she reiterated on several occasions in letters to Vézelay over the next few years, was that the quality of the members was more important than the quantity.

¹²³ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, dated 15th February 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 14 of Appendix 3iii.

¹²⁴ J.L. Martin had overseen the designing and building of the Royal Festival Hall, which had opened in 1951, as part of the Festival of Britain.

¹²⁵ "Yes, am afraid we cannot do better than to accept Festival Hall Suite. Am so disappointed that we cannot invite any of the Paris Groupe to show with us." Marlow Moss, in a letter to Paule Vézelay, 3rd July 1955. See Letter 21, Appendix 3iii. It transpired it was possible to invite a few representatives from Europe in the end.

¹²⁶ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 20th April 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 16, Appendix 3iii.

*We don't need to have many members of 'Espace', but serious artists.*¹²⁷

She applied the same reasoning to the potential audience for Espace art, and clearly felt the foyer of The Royal Festival Hall placed emphasis on the quantity.

*Regarding our show, it would be wisest to have the room where the most interesting public will visit it, the number isn't important.*¹²⁸

She wrote to Vézelay urging her that there should be a preview, by invitation only, and that "*important people*" such as the Director of the Tate Gallery, and Erica Brausen of the Hanover Gallery, where Moss had exhibited in 1953, should be invited.¹²⁹ Moss, perhaps even more so than Vézelay, was uncompromising in her expectations for the British group. She stated adamantly, on several occasions in letters to Vézelay, her firm stance against potential "*enemies*"¹³⁰ of the group, and seemed distrustful even of Bloc. This paranoia was perhaps justified; immediately after the disastrous second meeting of London Groupe Espace the London Constructionist artists, Pasmore, Kenneth Martin and Adams, who had refused to accept Vézelay's authority and resigned, set about organising their own version of the group, without Moss or Vézelay. This subterfuge is clearly evidenced in Adams' own hand:

*...we are having a meeting of our own at Adrian's next Friday, and Crosbie [sic] is hoping to get a few architects along. The idea being to have an exhibition as planned (à la Groupe Espace) perhaps at The Whitechapel.*¹³¹

The exhibition that was being planned became This Is Tomorrow. Vézelay suspected that the Constructionists, after co-opting her idea for a show that

¹²⁷ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 13th June 1954, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 6, Appendix 3iii.

¹²⁸ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 14th April 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 15, Appendix 3iii.

¹²⁹ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 20th November 1954, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 9, Appendix 3iii.

¹³⁰ Moss used this word in a letter to Vézelay, letter, dated 3rd July 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 22, in Appendix 3iii.

¹³¹ Robert Adams to Terry Frost, private letter, typed, undated (Sunday), Tate Gallery Archives.

integrated painting, sculpture and architecture, were then attempting to sabotage British Groupe Espace and divert her members, including Bernard Carter, who had been appointed Honorary Secretary for the group, Denis Bowen, who was appointed after him, and possibly also Frankland Dark, who resigned because of unidentified other commitments.¹³² Moss urged Vézelay to dispense with them mercilessly. Bowen had plans to introduce a large number of student members to the group, which Moss found unacceptable: "*the group must be kept professional*".¹³³

Moss also preserved very high standards for the presentation of the exhibition. She was insistent that the slatted walls of the gallery space must be covered. She conceded that canvas would be too expensive, but insisted that paper used must be stretched very tightly, and must be "*just off white*", not brown "*which is hopeless and will spoil the show*".¹³⁴ The pink private view card was not to Moss's liking:

*The invitation card is very nice but can't say I like the colour or printing, not modern enough from my point of view, it can't be helped.*¹³⁵

The London Groupe Espace show finally took place at The Royal Festival Hall, and ran from 25th October until 9th November 1955. Here Moss exhibited alongside the other British artists that made up the council of the British branch of Groupe Espace: Paule Vézelay, Bertram Eaton, Bernard Carter, and Vera Spencer, with Denis Bowen as the Honorary Secretary,¹³⁶ the architects Bernard Grimshaw, Vivien Pilley and F.D.H. Catleugh, the

¹³² None of these men actually took part in [This Is Tomorrow](#). St. John Wilson however did, and Goldfinger, whom Pasmore hadn't known until Vézelay introduced them. Bowen had his own plans, and was soon to found the New Vision Gallery, and inaugurate the Free Painters Group of gestural abstract painters.

¹³³ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, postcard, dated 5th September 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See item 29 of Appendix 3iii.

¹³⁴ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 22nd August 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 27 Appendix 3iii.

¹³⁵ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 25th October 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 33 Appendix 3iii.

¹³⁶ This is the Council of Groupe Espace Great Britain, as stated in a letter from Paule Vézelay to Marlow Moss, dated 12th February 1955, unpublished, un-catalogued, Tate Archives. It differs from the line-up given by Alan Fowler which does not include Eaton, Fowler, 'A Forgotten British Constructivist Group', 2007.

architectural designer Jerry Faczynski, and the membership of painters including Charles Howard and Ithel Colquhoun, and sculptors: Victor Anton, Peter Stroud and Geoffrey Clarke.¹³⁷ Also represented at the show were international Espace artists: Bloc, Arp, Sonia Delaunay, Etienne Béothy, Walter Gropius and Day Schnabel. The presence of Colquhoun is curious, as she is usually considered to be a Surrealist rather than an abstract artist. Perhaps she was understood in the same way as Léger was, as an artist whose work moved towards non-figuration, or perhaps Vézelay could not afford to lose any more members over her principles. Colquhoun is discussed in letters between Moss and Vézelay; where Moss seems ambivalent towards her work:

*I agree up to a certain point that Colquhoun's work isn't either abstract or constructive, but she has a few abstract or better said non-figurative small paintings, you must be well aware that the English artists don't follow strictly any one expression in painting or sculpture, this is the reason why I find it so difficult to form an English Espace Group.*¹³⁸

In a later letter Moss comments somewhat mysteriously:

*What do you think of Colquhoun, for me, she has a strong streak of the East in her.*¹³⁹

Vézelay had encouraged Moss to show just sculptures, as the wall-space was limited, and there were only two sculptor members on the council (Moss and Eaton). Moss asserted that she wanted to show two paintings, and no sculpture at all,

¹³⁷ Grimshaw, Cattleugh, Anton and Stroud are not listed on the Groupe Espace private view card held in the Ithel Colquhoun Collection at the Tate Archives, but may be included under "associate members". Anton's work is visible in an installation photograph of the exhibition held in the Paule Vézelay Collection at the Tate Archives. The other names are cited in Fowler, 'A Forgotten British Constructivist Group'. It is possible that 'F.D.H. Cattleugh' is in fact J.D.H. Cattleugh the architect, designer and Constructivist artist.

¹³⁸ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 2nd November 1954, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Appendix 3iii: Letter 8.

¹³⁹ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, dated 19th August 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Appendix 3iii Letter 26. Colquhoun is mentioned in passing in other letters from Moss to Vézelay too.

*...if I decided to send more than 1 piece of work, it will be 2 paintings, I'll explain when I see you why I don't want any of my sculpture shown.*¹⁴⁰

It is not known if Moss eventually surrendered to Vézelay's wishes, as there is no record of precisely which works were exhibited at the Royal Festival Hall. No works by Moss are visible in the existent instillation shots of the show.¹⁴¹ At some point Moss sent Vézelay photographs of five of her sculptures and six of her paintings (maybe not at the same time); some of them may have been in connection to the exhibition selection, but there is no particular evidence for this, and certainly some of them are dated later than 1955.¹⁴² The sculptures '*Spatial Construction Executed in Steel*' (S/C 9), '*Construction Based on Octahedron*' (S/C 10), '*Construction Spatial*' (S/C 13), and '*Concentric Circles Projected in Space*' (labelled on the back of the photograph '*Sculptural Form on Welsh Slate Base*') (S/C 15), represented in the photographs, are all architectural, constructed works, and not carved sculpture in the manner of '*Sculptural Form*' (S/C 4), which Moss also sent an image of. All these works would have sat very well with Gropius's proclamation, printed on the private view card: "*the true medium of architecture – beyond all technicalities – is Space*".¹⁴³ Moss's decision regarding what to show with Groupe Espace may have been limited by transportation difficulties, or some of her works may have been abroad at the time, in exhibitions such as the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris. The reason she did not want to show sculpture is unclear; however, the fact that

¹⁴⁰ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, dated 19th August 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Appendix 3iii Letter 26.

¹⁴¹ These photographs are held un-catalogued as part of the Paule Vézelay Collection at the Tate Gallery Archives, London. See Illustration 5.3.

¹⁴² These photographs are held un-catalogued as part of the Paule Vézelay Collection at the Tate Archives. See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 41, P/R 51, P/R 53, P/R 54, P/R 67, and P/R 71; and Sculpture and Constructions: S/C 4, S/C 9, S/C 10, S/c 13 and S/C 15. Alan Fowler proposes in his 2007 article 'A Forgotten British Constructivist Group' that it is Moss's 1943 sculpture '*Sculptural Form*' (S/C 4) that was exhibited, (although he gives it the title '*Natural Form*' and the date 1954), but I have found no documentation to support this. If indeed it was this work that was exhibited, it seems like an odd choice. Logistics and compromise may have resulted in the choice of a single sculpture, rather than paintings, being shown, but there seems to be no practical reason why Moss presented a twelve-year-old sculpture, rather than her more recent three-dimensional works, which are quite different in character; I therefore think it is unlikely.

¹⁴³ Private View Card for Groupe Espace 25th October until 9th November 1955, The Royal Festival Hall, held at The Royal Festival Hall Archives, London.

some of these works were also omitted from both the Hanover Gallery solo shows (1953 and 1958) perhaps indicates that Moss was not satisfied with them. The time of the Groupe Espace show follows two years when Moss worked exclusively on paintings, and precipitates Moss's most active period of sculptural production, 1956 to 1958. It is possible therefore that Moss felt she was struggling with sculptural expression at this particular juncture in 1955, and for that reason preferred to show paintings. The paintings that Moss sent Vézelay photographs of form a representation of her mature accomplishment, and any two of them would have made a great impact upon the Groupe Espace exhibition.¹⁴⁴

Without Pasmore in the group, the show did not attract the attention of Read, Lawrence Alloway or David Sylvester. A review, or mention, by any of them would have preserved and positioned Groupe Espace Britain for posterity at least, even if it was never going to make an impact at the time. Critics and art historians have largely ignored Groupe Espace Britain subsequently.¹⁴⁵

The Groupe Espace show was undoubtedly the precursor to This Is Tomorrow, at the Whitechapel a year later, which similarly sought to combine painting, sculpture and architecture. Alloway, who had not previously taken any interest in the synthesis of art and architecture,¹⁴⁶ tentatively termed the show as "*devoted to the possibilities of collaboration between architect, painters and sculptors*".¹⁴⁷ Although Alloway supported the show, wrote the catalogue, and was its main critical advocate, he was ultimately unable to

¹⁴⁴ These paintings are 'Composition in Red, Black and White' (PIR 41) 'Composition in White Black and Red' (PIR 51), 'Composition in Red, Blue, Black and White' (PIR 53), 'Composition in Black, Blue and White' (PIR 54), 'Composition in Yellow, Blue, Black and White' (PIR 67), and 'Composition in Red, Yellow, Blue and White' (PIR 71); nb. the latter two are dated later than 1955, so could not have been included in the show.

¹⁴⁵ Gathercole does not mention British Groupe Espace in his 2006 article discussed above Gathercole, 'Art and Construction in Britain'.

¹⁴⁶ Gathercole says: "Alloway supported Pasmore, but seldom mentioned the Peterlee project. Forrester's and Gilbert's architectural activities were not discussed by Alloway." Gathercole, 'Art and Construction in Britain', 2006, p.911.

¹⁴⁷ Lawrence Alloway, Reyner Banham and David Lewis, This Is Tomorrow (Exhibition: 9th August until 9th September 1956). London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956.

accept the tenet of synthesis of the arts.¹⁴⁸ The debt to Vézelay and Groupe Espace is acknowledged by contributors to This Is Tomorrow such as Crosby and Peter Smithson, although the personal animosity felt towards Vézelay has allowed some memories to become distorted. St. John Wilson, in his memoir of This Is Tomorrow published in 2001, says this:

This Is Tomorrow was initiated by Leslie Martin – who was still head of the department of architecture at the London County Council where I was working – summoned me and said that he had been approached by Paule Vézelay, a French abstract artist, with a view to organising an exhibition (in the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall) of tiles and pottery decorated with abstract patterns. She went to Leslie Martin, whose connection with Gabo and Nicholson in the 'thirties (vide Circle), made him an obvious choice. But he wasn't interested. However, he thought that I might be for other reasons. I then took the idea up with Theo Crosby and a small group of us went to see Paule Vézelay – people like Victor Pasmore, Robert Adams, and the Martins [Mary and Kenneth], and one or two others – and that turned out to be a complete disaster because we said 'We're not interested in little abstract tiles'.¹⁴⁹

This version of events has been repeated recently by Alistair Grieve:

*Pasmore, Adams, Kenneth Martin, together with the young architects Colin St. John Wilson, deputized by Leslie Martin, and Theo Crosby, technical Editor of Architectural Design, met with Vézelay only to find that she envisaged a cumbrous administrative hierarchy for an exhibition featuring applied art, such as fabrics and tiles, rather than the radical fusion of De Stijl inspired principles which was the aim of key members of Groupe Espace such as Jean Gorin.*¹⁵⁰

It is clear from all the surviving documentation that Vézelay had never intended the Espace show to include fabrics or tiles, a fact that St. John Wilson would certainly have been aware of at the time, if he had forgotten it by 2001.¹⁵¹ In none of the existent letters from Vézelay concerning the exhibition is there a mention of pottery or the applied arts; these details are seemingly a more recent invention. It is perhaps a gendered manifestation of

¹⁴⁸ Garlake states "As a result of his belief that collaboration with architects might compromise an artist's individuality, [Alloway] expressed a preference for the model of the temporary festival, in which individual works might be prominent, over long-term collaboration." Garlake, New Art, New World - British Art in Postwar Society, 1998, p.130.

¹⁴⁹ Jeremy Millar, 'This Is Tomorrow', The Whitechapel Art Gallery Centenary Review 1901-2001, eds. Catherine Lampert and Andrea Tarsia. London: The Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2001, p.67.

¹⁵⁰ Grieve, Constructed Abstract Art in England, 2005, p.35.

¹⁵¹ The correspondence between Vézelay and St. John Wilson is held in the un-catalogued Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Archives, London.

the antagonism towards Vézelay, or it is perhaps indicative of class prejudice: Vézelay, needing to earn money to support herself, was a member of The British Society of Industrial Artists and Designers, and worked for many years as a textile designer for Heal's.¹⁵² It is also perhaps a confusion stemming from a show that Vézelay had organised thirty years previously at the Lefevre Gallery, which did include pottery.¹⁵³

Throughout the Groupe Espace debacle Moss kept her distance, although offering support and co-operation, within her own terms, to Vézelay. After experiencing Nicholson's disregard of her, Moss was likely to have been wary of the cliquish art scene in Britain, which she saw as based on "*Social Success*" and "*hopeless for serious artists*".¹⁵⁴ She understandably did not want to become involved in the intrigues and increasingly vicious disputes. Moss occasionally met with Vézelay in London, and possibly also in Paris, and regularly offered invitations to Lamorna, but did not attend any of the Espace meetings, and placed her votes on matters arising by proxy, through Vézelay.

Moss expressed doubts as to the purpose of Groupe Espace as early as February 1955:

*I think it is very difficult for you to form this group without any well known names on the Committee, it would be quite another question if you were forming a group with young artists who were expressing a new approach to painting etc. Don't you agree with me?*¹⁵⁵

In a letter of January 1957, Moss indicates that she would like to have a talk with Vézelay about the future of the group. By this point Moss was working towards another solo show at the Hanover Gallery, and must have felt

¹⁵² Vézelay was not however from working class origins, her family were in fact "*well-to-do*", see: Caldecott, 'Paule Vézelay', 1984, p.38.

¹⁵³ This exhibition took place in 1925 and included works by Nash and Nicholson, as described in Caldecott, 'Paule Vézelay', 1984, p.43.

¹⁵⁴ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 25th May 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 20, appendix 3iii.

¹⁵⁵ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 15th February 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 14, Appendix 3 iii.

reassured by this, and the fact that through the Hanover she was now exhibiting in New York, that Brausen was committed to the promotion of her work. It was therefore not without weight that Brausen was not interested in exhibiting Groupe Espace. Moss did not say as much in her letter informing Vézelay of this, but it is possible Brausen discouraged Moss's further involvement with the group. However Moss still indicates her interest in exhibiting with Espace and suggests in a letter that they approach the Zwemmer Gallery.¹⁵⁶ Three months later however, Moss formally retired from Groupe Espace.

*First, I have been thinking over the 'Espace Groupe', the value as an Art movement of this groupe is very questionable, it doesn't say anything new, either in France or any other country; to bring together all the 3 plastic arts (P. S. and architecture), was years ago the purpose of Doesburg and those around him, when he launched "De Style" [sic] that was in the year 1917, then indeed it was a new approach to Art very serious and sincere. So Paule, I have decided to retire from the Groupe Espace.*¹⁵⁷

The letter shows concern that her decision will damage the friendship she has with Vézelay, and expresses her sincere hope that it would not. Vézelay replied, accepting Moss's resignation with regret. She does not, however, accept Moss's criticism of the validity of the group:

*The idea of bringing the three arts more together is not a new one as you say, but I do not think it is less valuable for that reason, on the contrary, now that so much building is being done, even the idea of more collaboration seems to me to have a special value.*¹⁵⁸

Moss, by this point in the late fifties, regarded Groupe Espace as something of an anachronism; perhaps she suspected Constructive art was no longer avant-garde. Although she had been enthusiastic to join, and to foster connections with other British artists, after the ensuing squabbles and ill will, Moss clearly wanted to extricate herself from the group. It is also conceivable

¹⁵⁶ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 11th March 1957, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 44, Appendix 3 iii.

¹⁵⁷ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 14th June 1957, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 45, Appendix 3 iii.

¹⁵⁸ Paule Vézelay to Marlow Moss, private letter, typed, dated 18th June 1957, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Appendix 3 iii.

that Moss, having just turned sixty-eight, was keen to consolidate her achievement, rather than pursue new projects. Nijhoff suggested that from 1956, Moss worked with "*such fanatical intensity that one might almost think that she has a premonition of the approaching end*".¹⁵⁹ Although it is unlikely that Moss knew she was entering the final year of her life, it is evident from her surviving work that this was a period of intense activity and production.

The failure of Groupe Espace Britain at the end of Moss's career has a counterpart in the failure of the "*New Art School*" that Charles Ginner and Edward Wadsworth had tried to establish in London in 1920.¹⁶⁰ The announcement of the school states:

*In view of the developments which have taken place in European painting during the last 50 years and the consequent interest taken in the problems involved by the very general adaptation or inclusion of the Abstract in modern composition, it is felt that a school such as this, where the study of these problems, their development and value can be exhaustively pursued, will appeal to the intelligence of the student of to-day.*¹⁶¹

If this school had opened, then it would have coincided with Moss's decision to leave The Slade in 1919. One cannot help imagining Moss writing to Bernadette Murphy to request the particulars.¹⁶² If she had, at this point, come under the tutelage of Ginner and Wadsworth, her period of crisis may have been averted. It is possible that she would have still gone to Paris in 1927, and likely she would still have joined Abstraction-Création in 1931 (Wadsworth himself was the other original British member in addition to Moss). If, however, Moss had forged a previous connection with two such important figures in the British art world as Ginner and Wadsworth, then it is likely her position in British art history now would be different. Moss would possibly be associated with late neo-Vorticism, and may have had a greater number of allies and opportunities in London after the war. The fact that a school that aligned itself with modern European non-figurative painting did not

¹⁵⁹ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹⁶⁰ It seems the school was never actually opened.

¹⁶¹ This statement appears as part of a "*Preliminary Notice*" advertising the intended school that appeared in the journal *Art Work* in late 1919.

¹⁶² As indicated within the above cited advertisement.

get off the ground in London of 1920 is portentous of the subsequent fate of Groupe Espace Britain in the 1950s.

Measurement and Proportion.

One other group show in London marks a significant episode in Moss's relationship with the British art world. In May of the tumultuous year 1955 Moss exhibited with some of the artists who had recently attempted to hijack, and, allegedly, then sabotage, Groupe Espace: Pasmore, Kenneth Martin, and Heath. Moss did not discuss this exhibition in her letters to Vézelay, although Vézelay must have known about it, as she was a member of the Artists International Association herself. The exhibition was held at the A.I.A. Gallery in London, and was entitled Measurement and Proportion. It was arranged and selected by Heath and Andrew Forge. Moss exhibited three works, and commanded the highest prices of all the contributing artists.¹⁶³ She was the only artist to contribute a sculpture as well as paintings. Moss had been a professional member of The A.I.A. since 1942, but seemingly had not exhibited with them until this point. It is not known how she came to be invited by Heath and Forge to contribute, but it is clear that the exhibitors were carefully selected to explore the particular theme.

*The purpose of this exhibition is not to put forward one kind of painting at the expense of another; a glance at the pictures will assure the visitor of that much. Our purpose is to draw attention to a certain factor in the process of painting, a factor which cuts across stylistic differences and may be employed with equal conviction by artists who work directly from nature, or who use nature as a point of departure only, or who evolve their work from forms which have no outside associations; we mean the factor of measurement.*¹⁶⁴

Alongside the non-figurative work of Heath, Pasmore, Kenneth Martin, Mary Martin, Anthony Hill, and Moss, were the figurative works of Forge, William

¹⁶³ The works in the Measurement and Proportion show were 'Composition in Red, White and Black' probably P/R 59 or P/R 61, listed at £80, 'Composition in Yellow, Blue, Black and White' probably P/R 62, or P/R 64, listed at 45 Guineas, and 'Abstract Sculpture' which could have been any of her sculptural works previous to 1955, and was listed at £150, the highest price of the exhibition by some margin.

¹⁶⁴ The opening paragraph of Andrew Forge, Measurement and Proportion: An Exhibition Arranged by Adrian Heath and Andrew Forge (10th - 29th May 1955 at the A.I.A. Gallery). London: Artists International Association, 1955.

Coldstream, B.A.R. Carter, Patrick George, Patrick Symons, Francis Hoyland, and Euan Uglow.¹⁶⁵ As this exhibition proposes, despite initial appearances, the works by these artists have a shared language.¹⁶⁶ This is a fact that Moss would have perceived instantly. Although her own work was non-representational, she acknowledged her debt, above all, to Léger, a figurative painter. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, Moss's practice had decisively formed at the Académie Moderne, where she worked from the model, and learned to see in terms of cohesive design, engaging in fundamentally the same process as artists such as Coldstream, Uglow, and the other figurative artists listed above. Of the exhibitors there is of course a significant connection between Pasmore and Coldstream particularly, who together had founded the Euston Road School in 1937.¹⁶⁷ At that point Pasmore was still a representational painter, and a leading exponent of the Slade and Camberwell manifestation of perceptual realism. But as this exhibition demonstrates, Pasmore's seemingly radical break with figuration in the late forties, was not the revolution it is often perceived to be. Initially perhaps, some of Pasmore's students were surprised by the direction his work was taking, but they soon recognised the trajectory from the life-room to Constructionism was smooth.¹⁶⁸ Hoyland was taught by Pasmore and Kenneth Martin at Camberwell, around the time of their 'conversion' to abstraction. It is apparent in Hoyland's work to this day that he took from them lessons of geometry, without being compelled to relinquish the

¹⁶⁵ The complete list of exhibitors also includes David Wilde, Prunella Clough, Martin Froy, Patrick Dolan, Denis Williams, Elliot Seabrooke, Harold Cohen, William Townsend and Anne Buchanan.

¹⁶⁶ The A.I.A. had previously staged the exhibition The Mirror and the Square in 1952, which like Measurement and Proportion included both representational and non-representational works. The Mirror and the Square however operated in a mode of opposition, comparing and contrasting representational and non-representational work, rather than seeking to find a shared language within all the works shown.

¹⁶⁷ The Euston Road School was founded by Pasmore, Coldstream and Claude Rogers. An account of the school is given in the final chapter or 'Postscript' of Charles Harrison, English Art and Modernism 1900-1939, New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1981. Its history and aesthetic are given a further examination in Bruce Laughton, The Euston Road School: A Study in Objective Painting, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1986.

¹⁶⁸ Francis Hoyland described to me in a letter dated 12th April 2007, a memory that Patrick George, Andrew Forge and Christopher Pinsent all turned up unannounced on Pasmore's doorstep in Blackheath to demand an explanation, and were immediately obliged and satisfied.

representational image.¹⁶⁹ This is a counterpart to Moss's education under Léger, which did not confine her to figuration. Although the individual choices with regards to represented subject matter of the above figurative painters ranges widely, what is most significant is the formal language which they share, and this of course would be mutual with the non-figurative artists also. It is upon this common ground that meaningful exchanges between artists take place.¹⁷⁰

The mathematical harmony that Pasmore sought in his Constructionist work is equally present in his nudes. The work displayed at the A.I.A. gallery was engaged with "*measurement and proportion*", irrespective of to what end; the distinction between figurative and non-figurative art becomes, to this extent, irrelevant. This exhibition points to a tendency in British art that counters the romantic and surreal orientation as characterised by commentators discussed earlier in this chapter, and still in common currency. The opposing tendency in British art is identified, that of logic, clarity, and analysis. The approach of "*measurement and proportion*" transcends the figurative / non-figurative binary: rather than abstracting from nature, the figurative and non-figurative artists of this proclivity distil from nature. The Euston Road School approach to painting the nude is constructive, and much more akin to Moss than to other representative styles. Reciprocally Moss was in congenial company, aesthetically, with both the Constructionists and the Euston Road painters, to a far greater extent than she was in St. Ives.

¹⁶⁹ I have exchanged several letters with Francis Hoyland, and also with Patrick George, on the subjects of geometry, and the relationship between abstraction and figuration. Hoyland can remember Pasmore demonstrating pictorial geometry to him on the doors of the Odeon Cinema, Leicester Square. Unfortunately neither of them could remember Moss from the exhibition at the A.I.A. gallery.

¹⁷⁰ I speak from experience of painting and drawing from perception, whilst at Canterbury Christ Church University College (1997-2000), in the life-room, in front of the model, making a painting of the set-up, whilst thinking and speaking only of formal relationships: interval and proportion. My teachers at Canterbury were all taught by Coldstream and Uglow at the Slade, and have taught alongside Symons and Hoyland at institutions since then. I met Uglow on several occasions during my time as a student, and, in the company of our teacher David Shutt and a group of fellow students, visited his studio more than once. In my experience of such an education, if distinctions were to be made in art it was usually between "*carving and modelling*" (Adrian Stokes' terms) with the former as the positive. Negative value judgements were usually made on the grounds of incongruous articulation of space, or out-of-key colour. Represented subject matter was not privileged in discussion.

A much later painting *'Potifer's Wife'* (1998-2000), by Uglow, illustrates the connection amply.¹⁷¹ Although it is a figurative image, and demonstrates the inheritance of the Euston Road School, especially Coldstream, to a large extent, it is also a manifestation of the "*measurement and proportion*" tendency, with a close relationship to the aesthetic of Moss. Just as in a Moss this composition is based on geometry. Just as in a Moss we have an adherence to the orthogonal. In this, and in many of Uglow's very last works, the colour key is heightened, and all but limited to red, yellow and blue. The later work of Uglow particularly descends as much from the Constructive tradition as it does from close visual observation. The visual connection between *'Potifer's Wife'* and a Moss work such as *'Red, Yellow, Blue and White'* is striking.¹⁷² This represents an alternative legacy for Moss to be found in the work of artists related to the neo-realism of the Euston Road School, pointing to a tendency in British art hitherto neglected: that of logic, clarity, and analysis. This British Constructive tendency is entirely distinct from the commonly identified English qualities of literary romanticism, and it transcends representation and abstraction.¹⁷³

Juxtapositions of Moss's work with the later work of the Constructionists reveal similarly compelling congruity. Pasmore's white reliefs of the early fifties bear a far greater resemblance to Moss works such as *'White With Cord'* of 1936, than they do to Nicholson's white reliefs of the thirties.¹⁷⁴ Heath's *'Light Screen'* of 1954, recalls Moss works such as *'White, Black and Red'* of 1950 (P/R 48), with its dominance of white and floating vertical and horizontal articulations.¹⁷⁵ Hill's *'Relief Construction'* of 1956, is reminiscent of Moss's *'Composition in White, Black and Red'* (P/R 59) of three years

¹⁷¹ See Illustrations: Figure 5.4 in appendix to this thesis. I have seen this work both exhibited in its final state, and in progress, whilst visiting Uglow's studio as a student.

¹⁷² Please see Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 77 and Illustrations: Figure 5.4 in appendix to this thesis.

¹⁷³ A further example of this tendency is the recent work of Toby Paterson, in both representational and non-representational modes. Paterson can be strongly identified with a Constructivist aesthetic.

¹⁷⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 23, and Illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 5.5.

¹⁷⁵ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 48, and Illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 5.6.

previously; the central horizontal double-line motif appearing as if a direct quotation.¹⁷⁶ Mary Martin's coloured perspex reliefs of the late sixties especially speak the same language as much of Moss's oeuvre, with their heightened saturation and square formats.¹⁷⁷ Kenneth Martin's '*Line in Space*' mobile sculptures of the early fifties connect very strongly with works by Moss of the previous decade such as '*Spheres and Curved Lines*' of 1945,¹⁷⁸ and Moss too was working with mobile structures in the early fifties.¹⁷⁹ There is however no documentation or account of any connection between these artists and Moss, other than the Measurement and Proportion exhibition.¹⁸⁰ It seems possible that despite the visual similarities of their work, the Constructionists did not see anything more of Moss than the three works that were in the show in 1955.¹⁸¹ It is certainly possible that the Constructionists came to similar conclusions to Moss independently, although this only makes the fact of her isolation all the more poignant. Visually it is feasible to suggest Moss as crucial influence on the development of the Constructionist aesthetic: the missing link between pre-war European Constructivism and post-war British Constructionism. This has certainly never been recorded as the case. Instead it is the influence of the American Structurist Charles Biederman, through his 1948 book Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge, and subsequent correspondence with various members of the group that is cited.¹⁸² However, the fact that, in 1955, Heath and Forge invited Moss to participate in Measurement and Proportion is testimony to their acknowledgement of her as a significant figure.

¹⁷⁶ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 59, and illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 5.7.

¹⁷⁷ See illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 5.8.

¹⁷⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 7, and illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 5.9.

¹⁷⁹ See Catalogue Raisonné: S/C 9.

¹⁸⁰ Aleister Grieve, in conversation with me at Tate St. Ives in November 2007, thought he could remember Hill expressing a curiosity about Moss at some point but nothing more. Gillian Wise, who worked alongside all these artists as the youngest member of the Constructionist group, also could not recall a connection between them and Moss, although Moss is now of interest to her.

¹⁸¹ In exception to this Gillian Wise did see the 1958 Moss show at the Hanover Gallery, and, wrote to me in a letter, dated 19th February 2008, that she had thought it was good and "*far ahead of Barbara Hepworth in her understanding of modernism*". It is not known to what extent other Constructionists came across Moss's work after her death.

¹⁸² Charles Biederman, Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge. Minnesota: Red Wing, 1948.

The Constructionist group made some remarkable work, and for a few years in the fifties formed an avant-garde in England. They organised several exhibitions from the 'Weekend' shows at Heath's studio, then in Fitzroy Street, to collaborations with other artists and architects for This Is Tomorrow in 1956, and then Statements at the I.C.A., and Dimensions, at the O'Hana Gallery, in 1957. They were involved in contemporary debates regarding the geometry of nature, and the application of divine proportion in design, and the utopian synthesis of art and architecture, in the case of Pasmore, actually bringing these ideas to fruition in architecture and town-planning projects such as Peterlee. They promoted their ideas in the self-published Broadsheet, and were championed by Alloway and Read in print, and supported by institutions such as the Arts Council, the I.C.A., and the Whitechapel. They forged connections in Europe, but most significantly in America; their crowning achievement being the 1961 exhibition, organised by the I.C.A., British Constructivist Art, which toured for a year around the States.

Moss was nearly twenty years older than Pasmore and the Martins, thirty years older than Heath, forty years older than Hill, and nearly fifty years older than Gillian Wise. At the time the Constructionists were emerging, Moss was at the end of her life, and by the time the Systems Group was inaugurated she was long gone.

Conclusion.

Michael Canney, in views expressed in private unpublished letters and to Florette Dijkstra during her research, considered Moss's exclusion from British art history as malevolent, if not conspiratorial. He held accountable for Moss's absence those he termed as the "*Nicholson / Hepworth clique in general*", by which it can be assumed he included Nicholson and Hepworth's son-in-law Sir Alan Bowness, Director of the Tate Gallery during the 1980s.¹⁸³ Dijkstra

¹⁸³ During the term of Bowness's direction (1980-1988) the 1985 exhibition St. Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery took place; this established the dominant narrative of the history of modern British art in Cornwall, and did not include Moss.

reiterates this claim, in her small pamphlet The Sequel of 1997, and also implicates Herbert Read, who, she argues, subtly denigrated Moss's position in relation to Nicholson's, by choosing to illustrate Moss with a very late work in his 1959 Concise History of Modern Painting, "...so that she is placed many pages away from the page where Ben glitters next to Mondrian".¹⁸⁴

In 1973 Sir Norman Reid, Director of the Tate Gallery, visited the Moss exhibition at the Gimpel & Hanover Galerie in Zürich. He reserved two works for the Tate Collection (see Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis: P/R 19 and P/R 40). There followed some correspondence between the Tate and Anne Rotzler of the Gimpel and Hanover.¹⁸⁵ She offered the works for sale with a 15% discount, in accordance with the wishes of Stefan Nijhoff.¹⁸⁶ However, the Tate Trustees later decided against the purchase. Ronald Alley, the Keeper of the Modern Collection, wrote to Rotzler:

*I am sorry to tell you that our Trustees decided not to buy either of the works by Marlow Moss, largely because they felt that the two works that we already own [the works donated by Erica Brausen in 1969: P/R 46 and S/C 18] are sufficient to represent her. We are most grateful to you for reserving them for so long and hope that this has not put you to too much inconvenience. I personally am rather sad at the Trustees' decision.*¹⁸⁷

Moss's posthumous reception in England is further evidenced in a letter from Peter Gimpel to Sidney Janis in New York:

*I am enclosing a catalogue of Marlow Moss, a constructivist British artist that we exhibited in Zürich and in London. In Zürich it was a great success and we made some sales, in London we had little success.*¹⁸⁸

This issue is also raised in Chapter 1 of this thesis, in discussion of the catalogue of the Tate show, see Chapter 1, footnote 33.

¹⁸⁴ Dijkstra, The Sequel, 1997, pp.53-54.

¹⁸⁵ Letters kept in the Tate Archives, Acquisitions File for Marlow Moss.

¹⁸⁶ 'White and Yellow with Strings' (P/R 19) was priced at 20,000 Swiss Francs, and 'White and Black' (or 'Composition Black and White' as it is referred to by Rotzler in her letter) (P/R 40) was priced at 22,000 Swiss Francs. With the discount this came to 35,700 Swiss Francs for the two. There followed some discussion over whether the discount would still apply if the Tate decided to only purchase one of the works; Rotzler assured them that it would.

¹⁸⁷ Letter from Ronald Alley to Anne Rotzler, dated 21st December 1973, kept in the Tate Archives, Acquisitions File for Marlow Moss.

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Peter Gimpel to Sidney Janis, dated 2nd December 1976, held in the Gimpel Fils Gallery Archive, London.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that although Moss is not embedded into the accepted narrative of British art history, there are significant points of contact between Moss and a British art historical context. Because she was away from England in the thirties she was not involved in the initial push for modernity that was Unit One, the Seven & Five Society, Axis, and Circle. Her arrival in 1940 was simply too late. While the artists and writers who were involved in the promotion of Constructivism in the thirties had largely lost interest in it by the forties (Nicholson, Hepworth, Piper, Read and Price for example), some younger artists: Barns-Graham, Canney, Wall, and Snow, attempted to seek out Moss. The box-like constructions Wall and Forrester made in the fifties, which can be said to resemble 'three-dimensional Mondrians' could indicate contact between the young sculptors and Moss, although this is not confirmed by Wall.¹⁸⁹ There are certainly artists who could claim Moss as a predecessor, Canney (who did name Moss as an influence¹⁹⁰), Forrester and Wall, and even, as I have demonstrated, figurative artists such as Uglow. The most compelling legacy of Moss though should surely be the London Constructionists. Hill's works, and writings in both Broadsheet and DATA, particularly demonstrate a very similar position to that of Moss.¹⁹¹ However, he said in 1966:

*...it is hardly useful to call the work of any English artist of that period [1937, the year Circle was published] constructive.*¹⁹²

He seemingly was not thinking of Moss, the artist whom he had exhibited alongside in Measurement and Proportion eleven years previously, at this

¹⁸⁹ See Illustration 5.10. Florette Dijkstra wrote to Wall during her research for The Sequel, he wrote back that he had "no further information" on Moss in a letter dated 27th June 1996. Wall's biographer attributes his Mondrianesque constructions to the influence of Forrester and David Lewis (who later wrote the catalogue essay for the Faber Gallery Mondrian exhibition: David Lewis, Mondrian (1872-1944), London: Faber and Faber, 1957). Wall also would have been familiar with the Mondrian painting Nicholson and Hepworth owned.

¹⁹⁰ Michael Canney -Paintings, Constructions and Reliefs (Exhibition: 17th October - 9th November 1990). London: The Belgrave Gallery, 1990, p.6.

¹⁹¹ The Constructionists produced three issues of Broadsheet, published by Lund Humphries in 1951, 1952 and 1957, as a platform to publicise their ideas. Hill contributed an article on 'Concrete Art' to Broadsheet 2, and another on 'Charles Biederman and Constructionist Art' in Broadsheet 3. He also edited and contributed to Anthony Hill, ed., Data: Directions in Art, Theory and Aesthetics: An Anthology, London: Faber and Faber, 1968.

¹⁹² Anthony Hill, 'Constructivism: The European Phenomenon', Studio International, April 1966, p.145.

moment; or he did not realise she had been a practising Constructivist artist since 1929; or possibly he did not consider her to be an English artist.

Chapter 6.

Space, Movement and Light: The Achievement of Marlow Moss.

*I am no painter, I don't see form, I only see space, movement and light.*¹

The oeuvre of Marlow Moss is fragmentary and largely inaccessible. An appraisal can only be partial at best, based on an incomplete catalogue raisonné, and isolated occasions of direct contact with the work. Florette Dijkstra, in her attempt to 'reconstruct' the oeuvre established a virtual retrospective of the known body of work, as it stood in the mid-nineties.² However her '*Reconstruction Project*' simultaneously does much to obscure the material reality of the work of Moss, as it reveals it. This is the effect of the diminished scale, first of Dijkstra's originals, and then further with the miniature reproductions of the publication;³ and also with the medium of acrylic paint used to represent both the oil paintings of Moss, and the sculptures, in two-dimensional images. Dijkstra's intentions were not primarily that of an art historian, and keeping her 'Reconstructions' at a remove from the actual works of Moss was an intentional act, and the agent of her intervention.

Of the entire body of Moss's paintings, reliefs, constructions, sculptures and drawings known at this point, collated and recorded in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis, over half are known to me only through black and white illustrations in journals, archival photographs, or poor quality colour exhibition catalogue images, or sometimes only through a catalogue or auction listing with no visual record at all. Through chance, certain periods of Moss's work are more accessible than others; whereas I have been able, thus far, to see only four works dating from between 1933 and 1952 in the flesh; I

¹ Marlow Moss quoted in Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Marlow Moss (Exhibition: 30th March - 30th April 1962). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1962.

² See illustrations in Appendix to this thesis: Figure 1.2 and 1.3.

³ Florette Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, trans. Annie Wright. Penzance: The Pattern Press, 1995.

have seen two works from 1932.⁴ The works that I have had the most direct contact with, and have the most chance of viewing in the future, happen to be from the final years of Moss's life, the period 1953-1958.⁵ The illumination of actual visual apprehension can give a false impression to the researcher that the later period of Moss's work outshines the work of the previous decades, in addition to the aura that 'late works' already possess.⁶ Even more obscure to the researcher than the works known only from a neutrally descriptive title, date, medium and measurements, are the works known of only through the descriptions and memories of others, most particularly the pre-Constructive figurative work: an 'Impressionist landscape' by Moss, seen years ago in Annely Juda Gallery, has been described to me by Tam Giles;⁷ Nijhoff refers to Impressionist and Cubist works, and Max Bill remembered paintings of flowers.⁸ Due to the unique difficulties in coping with such an oeuvre, it is, I argue, inappropriate to attempt a chronological study of development; once again the figure of Moss causes a paradigm shift and demands a new methodology. Rather than beginning with her earliest works, as would be the convention of art history, my research has begun with the works I have seen. It could be argued that, to a certain extent, this has rendered my focus, initially at least, vulnerable to the vagaries of serendipity, rather than attempting a conscious identification of key works. However most of the works I have had access to have already undergone a selection process, at the point that they were chosen for purchase, over other Moss works, by such museums as the

⁴ These works are represented as P/R 9 and P/R 11 in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis.

⁵ I have seen, in the flesh, only 16 Moss works in total: from the thirties I have seen P/R 9, P/R 11, P/R 17 and P/R 27; from the forties I have seen S/C 4 and P/R 46; from the fifties I have seen P/R 58, P/R 59, P/R 62, P/R 63, P/R 64, P/R 66, P/R 77, S/C 19, S/C 21, and S/C 23. There are a further 11 works, in the Catalogue Raisonné here, that are identified as held in public collections and therefore accessible (S/C 18, P/R: 12, 15, 28, 29, 34, 45, 70 and 71, and WoP 1 and 2). There are many works in unidentified private collections, three of which I have had the good fortune to see whilst they have been in the custodianship of dealers, before being sold (P/R 58, 62 and 66). There are 21 works identified as residing in the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, in addition to drawings and works on paper; it is likely that there are many more (Oosthoek told me, during a conversation in July 2007, that he holds over one hundred works by Moss).

⁶ The phenomenon of 'late works' is the current subject of research by Professor Sam Smiles, my Director of Studies.

⁷ Annely Juda Gallery have no record of exhibiting such a work.

⁸ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962; and Max Bill, in *Marlow Moss: Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen*, Zurich: Gimpel and Hanover Gallery, 1973.

Stedelijk on the occasion of the 1962 Marlow Moss retrospective show for example; thus the works that I have seen have survived a process of art historical Darwinism. Arguably the works that have disappeared entirely from view, through not being purchased for national collections, or photographed for catalogues, have vanished because they are minor works. In order to circumvent the past judgements of others, and arrive at a fresh view of Moss's work, I will not limit my discussion here to the works I have encountered in the flesh. The Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis is the most complete representation of Moss's oeuvre in existence,⁹ I therefore ultimately hope to be able to theorise the work as a whole, to the extent to which that is possible.

The approach of this research has been largely centrifugal, looking to outside contexts such as the art worlds of Paris, London and Cornwall, and retrospectively utilizing methodologies such as Queer Theory, in an attempt to map the territory surrounding Moss's work. The nature of Moss as a subject for research invites a contextual approach, compensating for the lack of existent work, documentation and critical reception. However, at this point in my thesis, useful progress can only be made by turning inward, to the objective reality of the work itself, by way of the concrete aspects of the material, and the process of making, and through examination of the abstract ideas contained within each piece. Consideration of the materiality of Moss's work is only possibly with direct contact with individual works, (although insight gained through an encounter with one work can be transposed to other works). The effect of this approach, to a certain extent, is to take individual works out of context. A broader view of Moss's oeuvre can be gained by consideration of the ideas represented, positioning individual pieces within the body of work as a whole, and re-contextualizing that body in relation to her closest comrades in particular: Georges Vantongerloo and Max Bill.

⁹ The exception to this could be a document described to me by Andreas Oosthoek, which I have not yet been able to gain access to.

An intriguing possibility of an insight into Moss's intentions for her art appears in the form of a tirade in Nijhoff's 1931 novel Twee Meisjes En Ik. The character 'Jérôme', beyond being a fictional invention of Nijhoff's, functioning within the narrative of her story, may also serve as a mouthpiece for Nijhoff's thoughts on non-figurative art, or possibly even a representation of Moss's own views. The ideas expressed by 'Jérôme' are likely to have been influenced by Vantongerloo and Mondrian, as Nijhoff had known them both for many years, but it is Moss to whom she would have had immediate access to and is most likely to have utilised as a source. Jérôme says:

I have to admit that I felt rather lost when I first encountered those painters' wonderful line-and-colour compositions. It took a long time before I realised that their strange creations were indeed the logical result of a philosophy that's convincing more and more people so that its influence can be observed in many different fields [...]

Most people still view the non-figurative compositions of our modern painters as pure mumbo-jumbo. Yet I can assure you that most of humanity already follows this new vision that has compelled the painters to make these compositions. I believe that it is a vision of a new world or, if I may say so, a revolt against human suffering [...]. This new art form, which evades our prevailing morality and aesthetic values, is in my opinion the first step towards the construction of a new ethic. It is searching for a form of beauty which, like music, is based on a plan of mathematical harmonies, on a plan that no longer reflects the elusive world. Rather it forms the basic alphabet of the world which the individual is capable of creating [...]. This new art, which only a few people as yet understand, makes humanity once more humane. Its pure, architectural beauty appeals to the individual's constructive genius and spurs him on to perfect his world. It permeates the individual with a new awareness of equilibrium, and incites him to the creation of a more balanced order in his human organization. The day will come when the individual will finally cease being God's deformed image, when the individual will have finally achieved the right to be human.¹⁰

¹⁰ Antoinette H. Nijhoff, Twee Meisjes En Ik, Fourth ed. Amsterdam: Querido, 1949, pp.55-58. The translation given here is from Dijkstra, Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project, 1995, p.9.

Sources.

The intellectual sources for Moss's paintings and sculptures are an expansive field. Like many artists of the twentieth century, she was deeply affected by the coming of modernity: science and technology. The arrival of sub-microscopic and atomic science precipitated artists looking inward to the structure of their art. If life itself was subject to knowable structures and patterns, then so must art be. A desire for the essential was ignited; art laid bare. Advances in technology, and access to that technology, opened up a whole new range of materials and mediums to artists, in practical terms, but also intellectually; it clarified the separation between art and matter. The age of mass mechanical reproduction allowed a shift in emphasis, from single handcrafted objects, to art as series, or industrial-scale art, or art without the touch of the human hand. This was also a reflection of the political world; with the rise of the proletariat, and the demise of the aristocracy, (most directly exemplified in Bolshevik Russia where Constructivism had originated); art was democratised. The connection between non-figurative art and liberal politics was made overt in the 1933 issue of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif, where the editorial states:

*Any attempt to limit artistic efforts according to considerations of race, ideology or nationality is intolerable. We commit this second journal to total opposition to all oppression, of whatever kind.*¹¹

In the secular age of science, new philosophies were born: Humanism and Existentialism, and concurrently spiritualism thrived. Many of the first generation of non-figurative artists, notably Mondrian, Kandinsky and Klee, were drawn to the mysticism of Theosophy; Moss, however was not. Like Vantongerloo, who was just a few years older than her, and Bill who was nearly twenty years her junior, Moss's universe was without a deity.¹² It was a

¹¹ Issue 2 Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorised Reprint Edition. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 - 1936., (New York: Arno, 1968). Translation from French to English in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p.359.

¹² Nijhoff describes Moss as an atheist in Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

universe of marvel and awe nevertheless, and this is expressed in Moss's writing on art: the published tracts in Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif written in the early thirties, and the unpublished manuscript entitled 'Abstract Art' written in the fifties.¹³ The latter is clearly a rough draft, handwritten, with revisions and editing in progress. It begins by overtly connecting art to the human mind:

*Works of Art are the creations and expressions of conscious minds or primitive emotions. Outside man, Art does not exist.*¹⁴

This can be understood as both a humanist and atheist statement. The essay then proceeds to describe the "aesthetic emotion", in the terms set out by Clive Bell and Roger Fry, although she does not cite them directly.¹⁵ Revealingly she has written, and subsequently (in a different ink) crossed out: "...the greater the artist the less we are aware of the type of man he is". Following this, in brackets, is "*Egyptian and Greek Art*".¹⁶ Although she had not found the appropriate words to convey her thoughts, her meaning can be understood; she wished to connect Constructive art, and her own practice particularly, to an eternal notion of art, whilst severing the elements that are surplus to this notion: representation and any allusion to literary or moral values. She sees Constructivism as an artistic lingua franca that overrides personality and biography. Moss's statement in the first issue of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif, of 1932, also explores this theme:

...natural forms contain, in effect, an element of an unchanging and universal truth, this means that these forms are composed of two elements, that is, one changeable element, in that they are visible forms, and one unchangeable element, in that they belong to this universal truth, which is not visible. Their true value is therefore not found in their visible form but in the relation that exists between this form and the universe... [The non-figurative artist] aims to

¹³ See Appendix 2ii.

¹⁴ Moss, 'Abstract Art', c1955.

¹⁵ Clive Bell, 'The Aesthetic Hypothesis', Art, London: Chatto Windus, 1914; and Roger Fry, 'An Essay in Aesthetics', Vision and Design, London: Chatto & Windus, 1920.

¹⁶ This is drawn directly from Hambidge, who wrote in the 'Introduction' to The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry: "Invariably the higher or more perfect the art, the richer is the remainder when the personal element is removed." Jay Hambidge, The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry New York: Dover Publications, 1967, p.xii. Original publication 1926.

*construct pure plastic art that will be able to express in totality the artist's consciousness of the universe.*¹⁷

This could be seen to contradict Nijhoff's claim that Moss, as an atheist, "...did not set the changeable against something unchangeable, or the transient against something ever-lasting..."¹⁸ as here she seems to be doing precisely that. A Neo-Platonic mode of thinking can be identified, and it is clearly demonstrated that Moss belongs to the tradition of Constructivism as defined by Naum Gabo's and Antoine Pevsner's 'The Realistic Manifesto' of 1920.¹⁹ After dismantling the achievements of Cubism and Futurism, and the false concerns of naturalism, symbolism, romanticism and mysticism, Gabo, who was in fact the sole author of the tract, places the individual's experience of the present moment as central to the artist's endeavour. His conception of the individual's experience is, like Moss's, in relation to the universe, rather than the city streets. It is in this first published piece of writing by Moss that echoes of Mondrian's ideas can most clearly be identified. Mondrian was certainly of central significance to the development of Moss's working aesthetic, and at this point, in 1932, it is likely that she was reading his published writing.²⁰ Her reference to "*the artist's consciousness of the universe*" particularly is reminiscent of Mondrian's dualism of the subjective and objective in 'The New Plastic in Painting', where he states: "*the subjective is growing towards the universal*".²¹

¹⁷ See Appendix 2i for a translation of the Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif Moss texts.

¹⁸ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

¹⁹ Gabo, N. and Pevsner, A. 'The Realistic Manifesto', first published as a poster 5th August 1920 in Moscow, reproduced in translation: Herbert Read and Leslie Martin, Gabo: Constructions, Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings, Engravings, London: Lund Humphries, 1957, pp.151-152.

²⁰ Mondrian's 'The New Plastic in Painting' was published in twelve instalments in the first issues of the journal De Stijl 1917-1918. He continued to publish essays in De Stijl until 1924, when 'No Axiom but the Plastic Principle' (written in 1923) and 'Blown by the Wind' appeared. His essay 'Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence' was published in 1921 by Léonce Rosenberg and the Galerie de l'Effort Moderne. 'Neo-Plasticism' of 1923 was published in the Dada magazine Merz, by Kurt Schwitters and Jean Arp. After Van Doesburg's death in 1931 a memorial issue of De Stijl was published in 1932, and Mondrian contributed his essay 'Homage to Van Doesburg'. It is certain that all of these texts would have been available to Moss through Mondrian himself, her colleagues at the Académie Moderne and Abstraction-Création, and also through the Nijhoff's.

²¹ Piet Mondrian, 'The New Plastic as Abstract-Real Painting: Plastic Means and Composition' in Piet Mondrian, 'The New Plastic in Painting' (1917) trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, eds. Harry

For the second issue of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif, in 1933, the committee posed contributors certain questions:

1. *Why do you not paint nudes?*
2. *What do you think of the influence of trees on your works?*
3. *Is a locomotive a work of art? Why? Why not?*
4. *Does the fact that a work has the appearance of a machine or of a technical creation, detract or add to its artistic effectiveness?*
5. *Does the fact that a work has an animal appearance detract or add to its artistic effectiveness?*²²

Moss seemingly found the questions somewhat inadequate, and responded:

*What is the influence of trees on my painting? I must answer with another question: what is art?*²³

It is interesting that it is the question regarding trees that attracts her attention; question 4 regarding works that appear technical or machine-like, could perhaps have elicited a fuller response from Moss if it had been posed again twenty-five years later. The piece continues (quoted in its entirety):

Atmosphere, earth, water, animals, minerals, plants - a chaotic universe, the movement of which determines destinies. Man is part of this universe. An accidental form whose aim remains unknown; yet he is in turn creator of a universe of names, of numbers and of Gods. Expressed in plastic forms according to the stages of his evolution: art.

Primitive man based his conception on the appearance of elementary forces. His art: idols. Further evolved, man guessed at a spiritual goal and imposed a moral system on himself: religion: mystical art. Today, after centuries of decadence, the development of science and of technology offers him a new horizon. No longer physical strength, nor moral strength, but cerebral strength has proved to be man's most powerful weapon. With the map of the world, he has an exact plan of the full extent of his domain. Through science and technology he will be capable of defeating his greatest enemy: NATURE. Once conscious of his own power, he foresees a new reality: the reconstruction of human life by man himself.

Holtzman and Martin S. James, *The Documents of Twentieth Century Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, p.36.

²² Issue 2 Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif -Authorised Reprint Edition. Complete in One Volume. Original Issues 1-5: 1932 - 1936. Translation from French to English in Harrison and Wood, eds., Art in Theory, 1998, p.359.

²³ From Moss's tract in issue 2 of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif, 1933. See Appendix 2i for full transcript in translation.

*It is this rapid development that pushes the artist towards a new plastic: non-figurative art. The basis of this new plastic: the balance on which this greatest work of art will be based: human life.*²⁴

This statement is embedded in the contemporary rhetoric of evolution; not only a Theosophical idea, central to the thinking of Mondrian and Kandinsky particularly, and also later the driving force of Charles Biederman's Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge,²⁵ but all-pervasive in Modernist thinking from Darwin onwards. However, the overriding sentiment of Moss's tract is that of Humanism. It may be of significance that she wrote this piece in 1933, the same year that Roy Wood Sellars and Raymond Bragg published the first Humanist Manifesto.²⁶ Considering her statements in Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif 1 and 2 exhaustive, in Issue 3 she commented only:

*...to give the lay spectator a little help I advise him to look at my work without prejudice...*²⁷

In the following issues Moss is represented by reproductions of her work alone, with no textual statements. She does not formally express herself in published writing again; near-exceptions to this being her attempted essay on abstract art as discussed above, most-likely written at the behest of Paule Vézelay for the proposed Groupe Espace Britain journal,²⁸ and also an essay on Mondrian. What is perhaps most interesting about the essay 'Abstract Art', is that Moss's position had changed so little from her statements at effectively the beginning of her career as a Constructivist in the annual Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif. She retained the fervour of a convert. Her veneration of Mondrian remained intact, from her first encounter in 1927, throughout her life. In 1955 Moss wrote "*a short appreciation*" to Mondrian,

²⁴ From Moss's tract in issue 2 of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif, 1933. See Appendix 2i for full transcript in translation. This piece is also discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

²⁵ Charles Biederman, Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge. Minnesota: Red Wing, 1948.

²⁶ <http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto1.html>

²⁷ Moss's entire statement in issue 3 of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif, 1934.

²⁸ Moss did not finish writing this essay, and wrote to Vézelay in July 1955 and August the following year, explaining that she was ill equipped to edit or write for the proposed publication. This is discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis. See Appendices to this thesis for a transcript of the letters between Moss and Vézelay, and Moss's essay 'Abstract Art'.

and tried to have it published to coincide with the Whitechapel Art Gallery Mondrian retrospective exhibition.²⁹ She sent it to the New Statesman and Nation and to Typographica, but without success.³⁰ Later that year she was moved to write to The Times in response to a review of the Whitechapel exhibition. Her letter, which similarly remained unpublished, expressed rancour with the reviewer whom she felt did not give the master his dues by describing him as merely an "exponent of Non-Figurative Art", even a "great" one:

*May I draw to your notice that Mondrian, is recognised both in Europe and in the U.S.A. as the greatest of all the Abstract Painters and cannot be classified as, a great exponent of Non-Figurative Art.*³¹

Despite this loyalty, Moss had in fact moved a long way from Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism, and into the realms of Non-Euclidean Geometry.³² The contemporary influences most apparent in her conceptions of art, which can be traced back to Euclid, Pythagoras, and Plato, are those of Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo, and Bill. Through her friendship with Vantongerloo, and through her reading of Matila Ghyka, Moss developed a knowledge of mathematics and geometry sufficient for her purposes.³³ The writings of D'Arcy Thompson, Theodore Cook, and Jay Hambidge were part of the

²⁹ Moss's essay on Mondrian is only known to me through mentions in her letters to Vézelay dated 6th August 1955 (Appendix 3iii Letter 24), 10th August 1955 (Appendix 3iii Letter 25), and 19th August 1955 (Appendix 3iii Letter 26). It is possible a copy is held in the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, Zurich; it is seemingly not included in the un-catalogued Vézelay Collection of the Tate Archives.

³⁰ This is known from a letter from Moss to Vézelay, dated 19th August 1955, held in the Paule Vézelay Collection of the Tate Archives, London. Moss says: "I have had it [her essay on Mondrian] returned, of course with kind words from the New Statesman + Nation and from 'Typographica', needless to say, I'm depressed. You understand that, it's the moment to be put before the Public, as soon as Mondrian's show finishes, nobody will be interested in it". See Appendix 3iii letter number 26.

³¹ Marlow Moss, Letter to the Critic of the Times, Dated 29-8-55, Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, Zurich. This letter was not published in The Times. See Appendix 3i B.

³² This is perhaps best exemplified by Moss's sculpture 'Sculptural Form' of 1943, see Catalogue Raisonné: S/C 4.

³³ Nijhoff states that Moss "worked her way through the books of Matila Ghyka" Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962. In 1927 Matila Ghyka published L'Esthétique des Proportions dans la Nature et dans les Arts, in 1931 Le Nombre d'Or, and in 1938 Essai sur le Rythme, a synopsis of the three, published in 1946, is: Matila Ghyka, The Geometry of Art and Life, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1977). It is likely that Moss also read Hambidge, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, and Cook, as their texts are referred to frequently by Ghyka: Hambidge, The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry, 1926, Theodore Andrea Cook, The Curves of Life, 1914, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, On Growth and Form, 1917.

theoretical landscape of Constructivist artists, and would have undoubtedly been familiar to Moss.³⁴ Ghyka though, Moss knew personally, and it is his conception of the geometry of both art and nature that is most apparent in the development of her ideas.³⁵ It is from Ghyka that Moss took the Pythagorean and Platonic creed "*everything is arranged according to number*".³⁶ It is this notion of an a priori schema in the universe, a conception of perfect form (a Platonic idea), to which nature seeks to adhere, that differentiates Ghyka from Thompson.³⁷ This was a compelling notion for Moss at the time of her first contact with Ghyka, and remained central throughout her oeuvre. Of seminal importance too is Ghyka's elevation of reason in creativity:

*Inspiration, even passion, is indeed necessary for creative art, but the knowledge of the Science of Space, of the Theory of Proportions, far from narrowing the creative power of the artist, opens for him an infinite variety of choices within the realm of symphonic composition.*³⁸

In her essay 'Abstract Art', Moss quotes Rimbaud: "*Il faut faire de votre propre vie un oeuvre d'Art*".³⁹ This pronouncement is repeated in Nijhoff's account, and described as one of Moss's "*tenets of living*". Nietzsche is another figure identified by Nijhoff as of importance to Moss.⁴⁰ Through her

³⁴ The influence of Hambidge particularly is recognisable in Moss's writing.

³⁵ Moss met Ghyka through the Nijhoff's when she first arrived in Paris. According to Andreas Oosthoek (the keeper of the Nijhoff Collection), there is a copy of one of Ghyka's books in the collection with a handwritten dedication to Nijhoff and Moss. Ghyka's signature can be found in the Visitor's Book (now held in the Tate Archives) for the 1955 A.I.A. exhibition Measurement and Proportion, discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis; it is possible Ghyka visited the exhibition particularly on the invitation of Moss, although it would of course have been of general interest to him.

³⁶ This phrase is quoted many times in Ghyka's writing: see Ghyka, The Geometry of Art and Life, 1946, p.xi and p.111.

³⁷ The two approaches to 'the organic', exemplified by Thompson and his "*diagram of forces*", and Ghyka's Neo-Platonism, and the manifestation of these ideas in the work of Hepworth and Nicholson, and Moss respectively, is discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

³⁸ Ghyka, The Geometry of Art and Life, 1946, p.174. This recalls Hambidge's statement: "*Instinct and feeling must be directed by knowledge and judgement*", 'Introduction' to Hambidge, The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry, 1967 edition, p.xvii.

³⁹ "*You must make of your life a work of art.*" Although these words are ascribed to Rimbaud, there sentiment is expressed by many writers, symbolists and aesthetes: Joris-Karl Huysmans, Walter Pater, Andre Gide, and W.B. Yeats.

⁴⁰ Moss's relationship with Nietzschean Existentialism is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

reading, and through her own experience of "emotional nihilism",⁴¹ Moss developed a proverbial saying of:

*Get on your feet, life is not a matter of happiness or unhappiness, it is a matter of living and creating.*⁴²

When listing Moss's most important "sources of inspiration", Nijhoff identifies Rembrandt, Van Gogh, and Mondrian, "in the sphere of painting", and Marie Curie, Rimbaud, and Nietzsche on the "spiritual plane". To a certain extent this should be understood as Nijhoff's own interpretation; the painters it must be noted are all three Dutch. An alternative list of artists might include Léger, whose influence has been explored in Chapter 4 of this thesis, and Vantongerloo and Bill, who will be discussed further in this chapter. Theorists that could be elevated to a prime position in a list of importance with regard to Moss's work must include Ghyka, and possibly also Hambidge, although arguably Curie, Rimbaud and Nietzsche had a greater impact on Moss's life as a whole, and would therefore appear more significant to Nijhoff.⁴³ Moss's existentialism could also be traced to the roots of Constructivism in Russia, and Naum Gabo, who wrote in his 1937 essay 'The Constructive Idea in Art':

*There is and there can be only one reality – existence.*⁴⁴

Moss's work can also be illuminated by theories written subsequently to her life. In the following section I will include in my discussion terms usually applied to Conceptual and Minimalist art, the inheritors of Constructivism. Whilst such ideas can hardly be called 'sources' for Moss's work in the usual sense, the vantage point of hindsight is a potential source for the representation of an artist exhumed from art historical obscurity such as Moss.

⁴¹ Nijhoff's description of Moss's adolescent angst, and her breakdown in her late twenties / early thirties, in Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

⁴² Moss quoted from memory in Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

⁴³ The importance of the figures of Curie, Rimbaud and Nietzsche to Moss is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁴⁴ Naum Gabo 'The Constructive Idea in Art' in John Lesley Martin, Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, eds., *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art*. London: Faber and Faber, 1937, p.9.

Working Process.

*... Marlow is terribly meticulous in her work. She claims that the canvases are not of the same quality as the ones she used to buy in Paris and that she has not been able to find certain types of brushes.*⁴⁵

Moss left no account of her method of working. She did not discuss her materials in her writing on art, although, as Nijhoff describes above, materials and equipment were of importance to her. Little indication remains in a finished work as testimony to its construction. In an attempt to examine the working process of Moss three main sources are available: the works themselves (I emphasize again that I am limited to the works I have actually seen for consideration of the aspect of the material),⁴⁶ the existent preliminary studies,⁴⁷ and Nijhoff's accounts.⁴⁸ What follows has been ascertained from a combination of these.

A work began with thumbnail sketches, in watercolour and gouache, dabs of colour, tentative and playful.⁴⁹ From the initial sketches Moss then progressed to a working drawing, finding the mathematical relationships between the areas. In contrast to the freedom of the initial sketch, the working drawings are precise, executed with a sharp pencil, ruler and compass. These drawings are edged with notes and calculations in pencil.⁵⁰ Often she collaged on coloured paper, further refining the divisions. Once the complete composition was arrived at, the drawing was transferred to the prepared canvas. The final painting was then executed; with layer after layer of thin translucent paint Moss gradually arrived at the desired intensity of colour, a concrete realisation of her a priori scheme. This approach is in complete contradistinction to Mondrian's, where adjustments to the final

⁴⁵ Letter from Netty Nijhoff to Georges and Poema Vantongerloo, dated 5th February 1940, held in the Vantongerloo Archive, Haus Bill Zumikon. See Letter 14, Appendix 3ii.

⁴⁶ The works I have seen are recorded as follows in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis: P/R: 9, 11, 17, 27, 46, 58, 59, 62, 63, 64, 66, and 77; and S/C: 4, 19, 21, and 23.

⁴⁷ See Catalogue Raisonné: Works on Paper.

⁴⁸ In letters and in her 1962 essay: Nijhoff, Marlow Moss.

⁴⁹ See for example Catalogue Raisonné: Works on Paper: WoP 40.

⁵⁰ See Catalogue Raisonné: Works on Paper: WoP 27-41.

composition of a painting are visible in traces on the canvas. A decade after her death an approach such as Moss's was termed 'conceptual' by Sol Lewitt:

*When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.*⁵¹

It could be argued that Moss's methods were mechanical, rather than "perfunctory", as the application of paint was certainly careful, and even laborious, yet this part of the process is perfunctory in Lewitt's specific sense - in comparison to the imaginative conception of the work. In a broader sense Herbert Read had described Constructive art in general as "essentially conceptual" as early as 1942.⁵² Both Lewitt and Read associated the conceptual with purity and austerity, and with the pre-eminence of the cerebral over the visceral, qualities that are all apparent in the work of Moss and other Constructivists. Moss, however, is an early example of an artist who, like Lewitt, integrates the conceptual into her actual method of production.

Moss's systematic process also links her to later Systems artists, although significantly Moss did not document her system, or consider it to be part of the work of art as such.⁵³ However the element of ritual in the process of applying multiple layers of paint, up to seven, cannot be denied.⁵⁴ There must have been little perceivable difference between the work after six coats of paint, and after seven, yet the system is not adjusted during the process.⁵⁵ Each colour section would have had to be laid down separately, after its neighbours

⁵¹ Sol Lewitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', *ArtForum* Vol. 5, No. 10, 1967, pp.79-83.

⁵² Herbert Read, 'Vulgarity and Impotence', *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art*, Edited by Cyril Connolly. Vol. V, No. 28, 1942, p.274.

⁵³ Artists of the 1972 *Systems* exhibition include Constructionists descended from the Pasmore group: Gillian Wise and John Ernest, and Jean Spencer from Countervail, as well as Malcolm Hughes and Jeffrey Steele amongst others, thus representing an expansive field in British art that Moss can be seen as anticipating.

⁵⁴ Florette Dijkstra states the figure of seven layers, Dijkstra, *Marlow Moss: Constructivist + the Reconstruction Project*, 1995, p.11. Nijhoff however does not substantiate this in her account, she states: "The number of coats varies according to the linen used." Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962. Possibly once Moss had settled upon a certain favoured weave of linen, seven was decided to be the optimum number of coats.

⁵⁵ It is claimed that 'White, Yellow and Black' (PIR 39) is unfinished in the catalogue listing of Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962. It is arguable how Nijhoff knew this work to be unfinished.

were dry, in order to avoid bleeding and smudging. The time taken in paint application would have been minimal compared to the time taken in waiting for a coat to dry. Actual painting is rendered a small chore, or a relief activity; the brush picked up in moments of rest from the real labour of creation, which is of course intellectual and conceptual. It can be imagined that this work generated vast amounts of notes, drawings, and scribbles on paper; ephemeral and unpreserved in the main because in themselves they had no importance once their purpose was served or their idea superseded. The finished work was the distillation of thought, the drawings and calculations merely a by-product of the process.

According to Nijhoff's account, the use of tools, such as a ruler, was abandoned once the composition had been transferred to the canvas by way of ruled pencil lines. These lines are clearly visible in the 1954 painting '*Untitled (White, Black, Blue and Yellow)*', owned by Hazel Rank-Broadley, held in the Tate Collection.⁵⁶ Another version of this work entitled '*White, Black, Yellow and Blue*' was in the hands of the London dealer Offer Waterman until 2005 when it passed into an unidentified private collection.⁵⁷ In the Rank-Broadley / Tate version the white areas are left unpainted, and the primer that occupies these areas is beginning to yellow. Unlike the Offer Waterman painting, the Rank-Broadley / Tate version is not signed. For these reasons it seems likely '*Untitled (White, Black, Blue and Yellow)*' is an incomplete work. It is therefore useful to note that the white sections, in this instance at least, are left to a later point in the work's construction.⁵⁸

Close examination of many of Moss's paintings contests Nijhoff's claim that no instrument steadied Moss's hand in the execution of the final painting. It seems this could be an example of the romanticism Nijhoff was prone to. In

⁵⁶ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 63.

⁵⁷ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 62.

⁵⁸ This particularly differentiates Moss's working process from Mondrian's as he, according to the account of Winifred Nicholson, applied the white paint first: "*When at last the positions were settled then there were many coats of white to be applied one after another and only last of all after many months or even years the rectangles of colour*" p286 Winifred Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Miriam Gabo, Herbert Read, Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo, 'Reminiscences of Mondrian', *Studio International*, Vol. 172, No. 884, 1966, pp.286-292.

'White, Black, Yellow and Blue', (and other works), rather than the brush marks following the verticality of the lines, they are visibly horizontal in all cases, with a ridge on the right-hand boundary of the vertical black lines, possibly indicating the use of masking of some kind as part of the process. As the paint was applied thinly, in diluted form (possibly turpentine and linseed oil in varying ratios), it certainly wasn't simply a case of masking off and applying paint, as there is no bleeding in evidence, the edges perfectly butt up against each other like tiles. A partial use of a masking technique, combined with a steady hand, is seemingly the most likely method utilised. The unfinished version evidences that Moss prepared the canvas with a thin ground of primer that leaves the texture of the weave visible, this provides a tooth for the subsequent layers of oil paint. A more substantial ground, sanded back, could have made a marble-smooth surface to begin the work upon, and may have made masking a more feasible method. The rough texture of the surface precludes this possibility, and means that to a certain extent Nijhoff's description of Moss's "*sheer brushwork*" is substantiated.⁵⁹ The details of Moss's technique can only be speculated upon, what is without question is her complete mastery of her materials in the service of her effect.

The relationship between Moss and the materials she worked with is worthy of attention. As has been discussed in the previous chapter she did not have a sensual connection with the materials she manipulated, in the manner of Hepworth and Nicholson. She did not emphasize the material nature of her medium, be it marble or oil paint, or celebrate its particular qualities. In short Moss's art does not concur with the Greenbergian mandate of "*surrender to the resistance of its medium*", despite the fact that Greenberg seemingly refers specifically to Mondrian when articulating this idea in 1940.⁶⁰ Whether

⁵⁹ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

⁶⁰ *The purely plastic or abstract qualities of the work of art are the only ones that count... The history of avant-garde painting is that of progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium... Primary colours, the 'instinctive', easy colours, replace tones and tonality. Line, which is one of the most abstract elements in painting since it is never found in nature as the definition of contour, returns to oil painting as the third colour between two other colour areas. Under the influence of the square shape of the canvas, forms tend to be geometrical – and simplified, because simplification is also a part of the instinctive accommodation to the medium.* Clement Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocöon', Partisan Review, Vol. VII, No. 4, 1940, pp.296-310.

or not this is a fair representation of Mondrian's work, it is certainly inappropriate for Moss. Rather Moss's relationship with her materials was, almost entirely, as a means to the realisation of an idea, this can be characterised as anticipating the ethos of Conceptualism. However, when one confronts an actual work by Moss, its materiality is primary; this is the central paradox of much non-figurative art, from Suprematism to Minimalism. The rareness of my encounters with a Moss work has made their materiality particularly tangible to me, and perhaps accounts for my emphasis on this issue here.

To some extent, in order to minimise the impact of the material itself, it is necessary for an artist to become a consummate craftsman. Although it is known that Ozenfant emphasized craft skills and precision of technique in his teaching at the Académie Moderne, Moss seems to have developed a working method independently, after leaving the Académie. She did not receive instruction from Mondrian on how to achieve a Neo-Plasticist effect.⁶¹ Through trial and error, she adapted her process to achieve her imagined end, rather than allowing the process itself to dictate a result; as she resisted surrender to the medium, she also resisted surrender to the method. The craft-skills she honed were not valued in themselves; her refining of her technique was exclusively in the service of her idea. To Moss there was no difference between physically making the work herself, as in the case of her paintings and reliefs, and employing an artisan to manufacture the work to her design, as is the case with many of her sculptures. If she had the requisite expertise to render an idea concrete, then she would, for ease and convenience; if not, rather than compromise the idea, she would engage the services of an appropriately skilled assistant. This is stated unequivocally by Moss in a letter to Vézelay of 1955:

*Am working as hard as I can, but each of my paintings take a long time to work them up, I would like someone to work for me.*⁶²

⁶¹ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

⁶² Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, letter, dated 3rd April 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 17, Appendix 3iii.

This approach to making art had been taken to its logical conclusion by Moholy Nagy in 1922 when he telephoned instructions to a sign-making factory and exhibited the resultant panels at the Der Sturm Gallery in Berlin. Lewitt, from the sixties onwards, similarly sent only written instructions to art museums installing his work; the particular individual work itself came into being on site, thousands of miles away, in the hands of gallery assistants, with no direct material interaction with the artist at all. This approach emerges from an age of mass-production and mechanical reproduction, but also recalls a Renaissance model of the named artist / genius who orchestrated the work of art, and his unnamed studio assistants who ground the pigments and filled in the background. It brings in to focus the nature of art as distinct from craft. Clear connections can be made between Moss, Moholy Nagy, and later Conceptualists such as Lewitt, in terms of her relationship to material and method.⁶³

It could be thought of as contrary that Moss, an artist purporting a wish to express space, movement and light did not work in film, a medium that was certainly available to her in Paris, if not in Cornwall. Léger did, as did Hans Richter, Man Ray, and Moholy Nagy. Moss did not stray far beyond the realms of traditional artists materials; oil paint on canvas, marble, wood and bronze. When she did, she used rope, legitimised for Constructive practice by Vladimir Tatlin,⁶⁴ or other metals: aluminium and steel, previously adopted by Constructivists in Russia, and widely used by her Parisian compatriots such as Vantongerloo. It must be emphasized that Moss's use of rope and string is highly original, and unique in the Constructive canon.⁶⁵ She did not utilise new materials in her work, such as Perspex, as Gabo did. Such a material was perhaps too emphatic in its own identity for Moss's purposes; it lacks the

⁶³ Moss can possibly be situated as on the cusp of the "post-medium condition" described by Rosalind Krauss in: Rosalind Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition, London: Thames and Hudson, 2000.

⁶⁴ Tatlin used stretched cables in his 1914 work '*Corner Counter-Relief*'. Picasso had previously used rope, but in a distinctly decorative manner, framing his 1912 painting '*Still Life with Chair Caning*'.

⁶⁵ See Catalogue raisonné: P/R 19, P/R 20, P/R 22, P/R 23, P/R 24, P/r 25, P/R 26, P/R 27, P/R 28, and P/R 29.

requisite neutrality to express an idea other than itself.⁶⁶ This should not be characterised as a conservative position in relation to the proliferation of modern materials, media and methods. As proposed by Krauss, the emergence of new technologies allows artists, Moss included, to arrive at a consciousness of their medium as such. It was therefore a strategic decision to work with established modes at the moment of their deconstruction, to maximise autonomy of the idea over the material, rather than risk seduction by the tactile. This again aligns Moss with Lewitt:

*New materials are one of the great afflictions of contemporary art. Some artists confuse new materials with new ideas ... The danger is, I think, in making the physicality of the materials so important that it becomes the idea of the work (another kind of expressionism).*⁶⁷

It is perhaps more appropriate to consider the Modernist conventions to which Moss subscribed: painting, relief, sculpture, or even Constructivism, Neo-Plasticism, or non-figuration, as her medium, rather than the supports of oil paint and aluminium. For this reason I have chosen to use the terms 'material' and 'materiality' here, rather than 'medium'.⁶⁸

The production of an artwork is distinct from its reception; these two moments however, are inextricably linked by the primacy of the material in each encounter. The artist alone in her studio, half a century ago, undergoes the same phenomenological experience of substance that the present-day viewer, in a gallery or storage depot, undergoes now. It is this material connection; this acknowledgement of physical existence, that provides an aesthetic shock, and defines the work of art as an object, and not merely an idea, (in addition to an idea and not merely an object).

⁶⁶ A parallel to Moss's choice of traditional materials for avant-garde practice is the Cubists use of traditional subject matter. The nude and the still-life are iconic, and therefore neutral. The unfamiliarity of Cubist art was not mitigated or diffused by any other element, and thus appeared more radical still, by allowing a direct comparison with nudes and still-lives past.

⁶⁷ Lewitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', 1967.

⁶⁸ This differentiation is discussed in Richard Wollheim, 'The Work of Art as Object', *Modernism, Criticism, Realism*, eds. C. Harrison and F. Orton, London and New York: Harper and Row, 1984, pp.10-17. Wollheim defines 'medium', if it embraces a material, which it does not necessarily, as "a material worked in a characteristic way". This can be understood as 'style': i.e. Constructivist style or Neo-Plastic style. The notion of style as medium, which Wollheim does not pursue, is discussed at the end of this chapter with regards to Moss.

Words are inadequate to describe the richness of a surface, but must suffice in order to preserve and communicate that experience.⁶⁹ The experience of seeing a work such as the 1936 '*White with Curved Cord*' is dominated by the confrontation of materials: white oil paint, rope and cord.⁷⁰ Its three-dimensionality invites the viewer to see it sculpturally, to peer at it from an angle, and acknowledge its wooden frame and stretched canvas; it is an object rather than an image. Associations of sailing boats arise from the clean white canvas and the apparent juxtaposition of taught and swinging rope, an insistent autonomous specificity of the materials that, according to Nijhoff's account, led Moss to abandon the use of rope in her reliefs soon after this work.

*...cord and rope have an individuality of their own, and this is at variance with what she is seeking.*⁷¹

However she does seem to be inviting such a reading, or at least playing with the notion, in this work, with its rare instance of a curve in her known easel-based works. The position of the curved rope is almost naturalistic, how a suspended mainsheet might fall. The diagonal lines, articulated with thinner cord, appear more frequently in her paintings and reliefs, although this is the only instance of a diagonal line that is not parallel to opposite corners, and the only diagonals that are not on a square-shaped canvas and therefore containing the intimation that they are in fact the verticals and horizontals to a

⁶⁹ Written descriptions are a particularly important tool in the appraisal of Moss's work as actual encounters with the work are comparatively rare. The visual experience has to be preserved and communicated, if only to myself, to allow mental juxtapositions and comparisons to take place. Upon the occasions of being in the presence of an actual Moss work I have taken photographs, made sketches and diagrams, taken measurements, and also written extensive notes describing the physical qualities of the work. I am aware that, under certain circumstances, my written descriptions may serve in the future as a substitute for a direct encounter with a work. Although words are inevitably inadequate, an attempt must be made. I feel exonerated to a certain extent by Mondrian's 1917 statement: "*Although the new plastic in painting reveals itself only through the actual work – needs no explanation in words – nevertheless much concerning the new plastic can be expressed through words and clarified by reasoning."* Piet Mondrian in 'The Rationality of the New Plastic' reproduced in Holtzman, Harry, and Martin S. James, eds. *The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, p.40.

⁷⁰ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 27.

⁷¹ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

lozenge-shaped support. There is no question regarding the vertical orientation of this piece, even without the figurative associations. The horizontals of the lower portion of the composition, two of them running the entire width of the canvas, provide the steadying security necessary to allow the more capricious elements (the diagonals; the curve). The short stub of the middle horizontal is perhaps the most powerful element in respect of the engineering of this work. Single-handedly it holds the diagonals to the longer horizontals, and not just on the surface of the canvas, stopping the composition from collapsing to the right, but also in the third dimension, behind the picture plane, stopping the diagonals, described with thinner cord, from fading into perspectival space. This is achieved by a kind of trick of pictorial convention, the abrupt ending of the short middle horizontal, at the point of meeting the first diagonal, implies the diagonal is not a line, but the edge of a plane, which passes in front of the middle horizontal. The thin cord does in fact physically pass behind the thicker rope of the other two horizontals, the middle horizontal cannot visually be further away than its brothers, as it is of the same dimension, thus a kind of weaving of space occurs. The figurative associations are negated along with notions of illusionistic space, and we are returned to the physicality of the materials.

Moss's move to relief at this time can be seen as an effort to escape the use of black in the structural grid of Mondrian.⁷² Collaged material on the canvas provided an edge, and therefore a structuring line, in raking light. After her trip to Greece in 1936, where she had explored ancient temple ruins, and visited the Acropolis Museum in Athens, Moss worked for some years in exclusively white relief, an echo of the clean white marble friezes of the Parthenon. However unadulterated bright white, rather than attaining pure light, brings about its own set of problems, namely an undesired pre-eminence of the material. In order to create a composition solely in white, elements of relief are necessary, and without carving (which is not constructive); collaged material is unavoidable. Unfortunately any such

⁷² This is how Nijhoff terms it, and the idea seems to be borne out by the development of Moss's work.

collaged material refuses to relinquish its individual identity, and this effect is only heightened by the absence of colour. After the rope and cord reliefs of 1935 until 1940, Moss produced a few white planar reliefs. Here the relief elements are unified with the object as a whole. Rather than collaging material on to canvas, the works '*White Wooden Relief*' and '*White: Relief in Wood*' of 1940, and the undated works both titled '*White on White*', are constructed entirely of wood, painted white.⁷³ Crucially this normalises the nature of the medium, and resolves many of the issues of the earlier work. It is perhaps a conclusion of sorts. It is significant that at this point colour was re-introduced into Moss's reliefs, and concurrently she began to work in sculpture.

A seemingly unique sculpture in Moss's known oeuvre is the 1943 carved marble work '*Sculptural Form*'.⁷⁴ It is tempting to conclude that Moss must have had a sensuous delight in the material of marble, undoubtedly connected to her experiences in Greece, as it is by no means the obvious material from which to construct a Möbius Band. The strips of chromium-plated brass used by Max Bill (in the 1974-75 piece '*Endless Ribbon*' for example), would have been far more convenient.⁷⁵ Again Moss makes no submission to the practical nature of the material; despite the difficulties inherent in carving such a complex shape, it is the concept of marble that is appropriate for an infinite loop. Moss was acutely aware of the heritage she invokes with the use of this material, and it is this connection with the ancient art of mankind that makes it so appropriate to the expression of the mathematical wonder of the infinity form (the symbolic form for infinity being: ∞). It is a cerebral delight, not only a sensuous one, she achieves. What strikes the viewer when in the presence of this work is the extreme delicacy of the carving; it is genuinely a flat strip, with uniform thickness, unlike Bill's large

⁷³ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 30, 31, 32 and 33.

⁷⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculpture: S/C 4.

⁷⁵ See Illustration Figure 6.1.

carved granite eternal loop form of 1953, '*Endless Ribbon*' which is swollen at the base, and only appears to be a strip from certain viewing positions.⁷⁶

The Tate Gallery's '*Composition in Yellow, Black and White*' of 1949, is part of a series of shallow linear reliefs dating from between 1942 and 1949.⁷⁷ These feature thin white three-dimensional lines of rectilinear wood articulating grid structures, and coloured sections; the language of the relief is seamlessly integrated with that of painting. The perceptual difference between the support of canvas and that of wood becomes marginalized. The material that one visually apprehends primarily is oil paint, the buttery texture of the rich colour built up out of layer upon layer of pigment and linseed oil. The rich glow of the lemony yellow, walled in by the relief, casts a violet sheen onto the white. This may be the result of simultaneous contrast, or Moss may indeed have tinted the ground, as Nijhoff describes; it is impossible to tell in the presence of a single work. The composition is controlled by two small black rectangles, punctuating the arrangement of forms and balancing the vertical format, a device repeated in a larger work of the same year.⁷⁸

Alongside an analysis of the material creation of Moss's works, direct encounters involve observation of their gradual deterioration as a result of age, and sometimes neglect or mis-handling. The work '*Untitled: 16/8/1956*' has been badly re-stretched, damaging the precise nature of its composition.⁷⁹ Insensitive restoration and framing can negate the entire purpose of a Moss composition, which relies upon specific and exact measurement to the edges. In the summer of 2005 the painting '*White, Red, Black and Grey*' was in the care of the restorer at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague.⁸⁰ Works such as those of Moss are particularly vulnerable to damage and deterioration, as any slight defect in the surface affects its delicate harmony. This is something Moss was very aware of herself:

⁷⁶ This is not always apparent in photographs, but was seen to be the case upon visiting the sculpture displayed at The Pompidou Centre, Paris, in 2006. See Illustrations: Figure 6.2.

⁷⁷ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 46, and also P/R 34, P/R 35, P/R 36, P/R 38, P/R 42, P/R 49 and P/R 47.

⁷⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 47.

⁷⁹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 66.

⁸⁰ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 11.

*All my work is very easily spoiled...*⁸¹

In the case of this particular work traces of yellow were observable at the edges of the white and grey horizontal planes at the base of the composition. The restorer had surmised that this could be indicative that the whole panel was first painted yellow, and then adjusted to its final state. Knowledge of Moss's working practice precludes this possibility; she did not make radical changes to a composition on the canvas, any such alternative designs would have been eliminated at an earlier stage of the process. It seems far more likely that the visible yellow was a result of the more matt, and therefore absorbent, white paint, over time drawing the yellow-coloured linseed oil from the glossier black paint, resulting in small deposits at the juncture of the plane and line. This deterioration had taken seventy-three years to manifest, and was undoubtedly unforeseen by Moss. The current surface quality of Moss's '*Spatial Construction in Steel*' of 1956-1958 could not be more different than that of '*Linear Construction*' of 1956-1957.⁸² The latter is clean, crisp and shining, the joints flush and precise, whilst the former is rusted and distressed, the joints sunken and exposed. Both works are constructed in steel, but '*Spatial Construction*' has been allowed to degrade over time. Now it stands with a wedge of folded paper under one foot, and has the air of a disused piece of machinery; it is certain that its current appearance was not intended by Moss.

These examples provide evidence of the intractability of materials, beyond the lifetime of the artist. In less than a century Moss's ideas have been betrayed by the substance of their incarnation. Moss's vision aspired to be universal and eternal, but matter is finite. To a certain extent these objects, Moss's works, are now no less a pale reflection of the artist's intentions than Dijkstra's diagrammatic reconstructions.

⁸¹ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, postcard, handwritten, dated 9th May 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See item number 18, Appendix 3iii.

⁸² See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 21 and S/C 19 respectively.

Max Bill wrote in 1949:

*Mental concepts are not as yet directly communicable to our apprehension without the medium of language; though they might ultimately become so by the medium of art. Hence I assume that art could be made a unique vehicle for the direct transmission of ideas, because if these were expressed by pictures or plasticity there would be no danger of their original meaning being perverted (as happens in literature, for instance, through printers errors, or thanks to the whim of some prominent executant in music) by whatever fallacious interpretations particular individuals chance to put on them.*⁸³

Bill is apparently not anticipating the wear and tear that the passing of time bestows on an art object, which dulls the expression of a mental concept at least, and hampers the direct communication he envisions. He also does not acknowledge the possibility that art itself is a language at the mercy of context and translation; his assumption being that a single visual form will express a single idea throughout space and time. Such universal truth can perhaps only exist in the paradigm of mathematics and geometry, and this accounts for both his and Vantongerloo and Moss's attraction to such ideas. Nijhoff described Moss's project thus:

*What she is searching for is a formula, not of geometrical forms but of numbers a line which is not a line, which has neither beginning nor end and which, therefore, does not enclose anything but only indicates relations and offers unlimited opportunities for variation. What she is seeking is a scheme, of which the painting represents only a fraction, and which projects itself in all directions beyond the canvas.*⁸⁴

The most central aspect of Moss's working process is not her manipulation of materials, but her utilization of number patterns, and despite what Nijhoff states, geometry. Moss does not leave a written account of her methods, but some working drawings with calculations are existent, and it is known from Nijhoff that Moss read Ghyka. Moss's drawings are not easy to decipher, intended as they were as part of her working process, and not for the

⁸³ Max Bill, 'The Mathematical Way of Thinking in the Visual Art of Our Time', The Visual Mind: Art and Mathematics, ed. Michele Emmer. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1993, p.9.

⁸⁴ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962.

elucidation of future scholars. Researchers Ann Cecil and Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen (the latter in collaboration with H.J. Vink) have attempted analyses of a selection of individual works.⁸⁵ It is perhaps a mistake to approach this aspect of Moss as an exercise in code breaking. She did not intend her art as a puzzle, or expect the viewer to recognize the pattern she employed, rather the geometry was inseparable from the form. The success of a composition depended entirely on the exactitude of its adherence to particular proportions, only then could it achieve aesthetic perfection. Once this was achieved, the calculations and measurement it required are no longer of any importance. There is no intrinsic worth in cracking the numerical structure of each work, but a close look at a few examples is illuminating.

De Jongh-Vermeulen chose a 1931 painting for analysis, with the claim that it is in this work that the Fibonacci Series is most clearly represented.⁸⁶ Although this may be the case, the argument is not successfully made with the illustration accompanying the article, which has seemingly been cropped. This painting is no longer in existence, so a conclusive position cannot be reached regarding its geometry. It is likely that De Jongh-Vermeulen made her measurements from the reproduction in the first issue of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif. The patterns identified by De Jongh-Vermeulen are approximately discernable in this image; the bottom left and right rectangles, horizontal and vertical respectively, are almost double squares, the top right hand shape is close to a square, and the largest plane, top left, approximately contains a Sublime Triangle. Moss however was not in the business of approximations; whatever geometry she used in this composition can only be exact. The divisions along the base of the canvas (of which there are six, one at every intersection of black to white, or white to black) do correspond quite closely to the Golden Ratio, if De Jongh-Vermeulen's figures are used, but apart from the first set (CE:FB = 13:21 which yields a ratio of 1.615) I cannot agree with her figures. This is not to say the work does not

⁸⁵ Ann Cecil, 'Marlow Moss, Piet Mondrian and the Double Line (1930-1934)', Master of Fine Arts Thesis, Concordia University, 1980; and Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Marlow Moss -De Constructie Van Een Nieuwe Werkelijkheid', Jong-Holland Vol.10, No.4, 1994, pp.40-52.

⁸⁶ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs P/R 7, and illustration 12 in De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Marlow Moss -De Constructie Van Een Nieuwe Werkelijkheid', 1994.

contain the Fibonacci Sequence, but De Jongh-Vermeulen does not conclusively prove that it does. By focusing her research on Moss's earlier work, De Jongh-Vermeulen had no option but to rely on bad quality reproductions of lost paintings; this is not an ideal starting point for an analysis of such a physical property of the work as geometry.

Ann Cecil, whose study is restricted to the period 1930-34, also relied mainly upon reproductions of work.⁸⁷ Her thesis contains a far more expansive investigation of Moss's geometry than that of De Jongh-Vermeulen's published article, and step-by-step accounts of her process of breaking down two particular works. Her argument is at its strongest when she relies on geometry, rather than mathematics, to make her analysis. Her investigation of a 1933 painting,⁸⁸ is entirely based on the illustration in Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif Issue 3, which is on a tiny scale, and subject to infinite possible distortions through the process of reproduction. However, using this as a starting point, measuring lines less than a millimetre in width, she attempts to extract numbers and find a pattern. A pattern is indeed found, but her figures seem to contain some errors. A more convincing analysis is made of the 1932 painting '*Black and White*', where Cecil describes the geometry independently from numbers.⁸⁹ This work indeed contains a simple poetic visual idea; where the extension of the edge of each black line meets the extension of the opposing canvas edge, another larger, and rotated, square is formed; this of course could continue ad infinitum. The painting therefore makes concrete a geometric concept, in the same way that '*Sculptural Form*' (S/C 4) both represents a Möbius Strip, and *is* actually a Möbius Strip. This idea can be traced back through Van Doesburg's experiments with the square, to Malevich's eloquent '*Black Square*' of 1913. As opposed to Magritte's pipe, which is not a pipe, Malevich's square *is* a square. As opposed to Escher's stairways, which cannot be realised in three-

⁸⁷ I am not certain if Cecil actually saw all the works she discusses, such as '*White, Black, Red and Grey*' (P/R 11). She did visit the 1979 Carus Gallery exhibition. Her thesis also states she visited London, New York, and Zurich during her research, but not if she was allowed access to the Nijhoff Collection, or if she went to The Netherlands.

⁸⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs P/R 13.

⁸⁹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs P/R 9.

dimensions, the eternal loop is carved in matter. A painting such as '*Black and White*' (P/R 9) by Moss exists between the state of an image and a concept, and contributes to the Constructivist dialogue on the nature of art. My notion here of Moss's works embodying the concept / form of geometry is distinct from Michael Fried's characterisation of Minimalist art as "*literalist*".⁹⁰ The manifestation of geometry in Moss's work can only be literal because geometry was the subject per se, and not a means to organise the composition of subject matter.

De Jongh-Vermeulen's and Cecil's analyses of works begin with the assumption of a static grid; the works are squared up, either in centimetres, or in inches for the later work produced in England. Neither of them explores the methods for dividing the rectangle dynamically. This is appropriate for much of the earlier work, the 1933 '*White, Black and ...?*' (P/R13) discussed above for example, and is seemingly supported by Nijhoff who states Moss was "...searching for a formula, not of geometrical forms but of numbers..." in her account.⁹¹ However I propose that Moss progressed, almost certainly through study of Hambidge, to a more sophisticated grid, defined by geometry alone. Hambidge paid particular attention to the dynamic division of the square, a shape Moss used frequently.⁹²

Product.

Moss's work was described thus by her friend Margrit de Sablonière in 1958:

*... fractions of the Absolute ... captured in matter.*⁹³

⁹⁰ Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Artforum* Vol. 5, June 1967, pp.12-23.

⁹¹ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

⁹² Refer to Lesson I 'The Square (or Unity)'; Lesson IV 'Compound Rectangles Within a Square'; and Lesson V 'Further Analyses of the Square', in Hambidge, Jay. *The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry*. 1926. New York: Dover Publications, 1967.

⁹³ The passage from which these words are taken is quoted in full at the end of Chapter 2 of this thesis. Margrit de Sablonière, 'Bij Het Heengaan Van Marlow Moss', *Museumjournaal* Series 4, Issue 5-6, 1958.

From Nijhoff's 1962 account, Moss's work has been characterised as a progressive journey towards "*space, movement and light*".⁹⁴ These terms have not been fully interrogated, and neither has the notion of a linear development towards this trinity as an end. As a chronological study of the development of Moss's work is out of the reach of current scholarship, as discussed above, I intend to engage instead with the terms Moss herself used, enlisting "*space, movement and light*" as a poetic structure for an examination of Moss's oeuvre as a whole.

Space.

Nijhoff remembers Moss saying, as she was approaching her death:

I have to get accustomed to space...

The exploration of space, visually and conceptually, was central to Moss's practice.⁹⁵ The representation of space is often the last vestige of figuration in much Cubist-derived abstract painting. Space is included, as the third formal element of painting, in Roger Fry's 1909 'Essay in Aesthetics'; space as illusory representation of a three-dimensional object.⁹⁶ He also talks of a possible sixth element: "*the inclination to the eye of a plane*", which he admits is a compound of mass (the second element) and space. This dialogue is symptomatic of the fact that Fry, even at his most Formalist, does not break with the notion of representation in art. He conceives of space in painting as an illusion of receding planes, allowing the viewer to imaginatively enter the domain of the picture, by stepping across the frame. This conception of space is inadequate for Moss. Her canvases are not windows; the elements

⁹⁴ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962. This 'trinity' has been consistently referred to in writing on Moss, and in 1994 was used as the title of the Arnhem exhibition Marlow Moss: Ruimte, Beweging en Licht.

⁹⁵ 'Space' is a central concern to Constructivism in general. George Rickey begins his chapter 'New Ideas of Space' by defining space as the ultimate subject for art throughout history: "*Painting from Giotto to Cézanne, from Cézanne to Cubism, and into the diverse styles of the mid-twentieth century, can be seen by historians, critics, and now artists themselves, as a manifestation of different ideas of space*" George Rickey, Constructivism: Origins and Evolution, Revised Edition ed. New York: George Braziller, 1995, p.105.

⁹⁶ Roger Fry, Vision and Design. London: Chatto & Windus, 1957.

of her compositions do not float beyond the picture plane like objects behind a pane of glass. However neither do they reside entirely on the canvas, in a state of Greenbergian flatness. Moss's articulation of space is far more complex and ambiguous than either of these conceptions: the illusory or the material.

The most protracted pursuit of a mode of enquiry, or a 'style', in Moss's oeuvre is what can be termed as the 'linear / structural' paintings.⁹⁷ The unifying feature of these works being a dominance of white, with truncated black lines / narrow rectangles, and often rectangles / truncated lines of a maximum of two colours (either red and blue, or blue and yellow), punctuating the surface, in vertical and horizontal orientations. Gestalt psychology identifies how compelled the human mind is to read works such as '*White, Yellow and Black*' of 1947 or '*White, Blue, Yellow and Black*' of 1954 as colour / black figures on a white ground.⁹⁸ Thus for the majority of Moss's work in painting, white = space, if only as an absence of object. This can be connected to Malevich's use of a white background as an unlimited space in which objects float freely.⁹⁹ Moss's conception of space however is distinct from the Suprematist void; air does not move around her forms, and between her forms and the picture plane, as it does in a Malevich, and also in a Moholy-Nagy. Such an effect is caused by the representation of diagonal and transparent planes, and of aerial perspective; all such features are absent from Moss's work.

⁹⁷ I have no intention of splitting Moss's oeuvre up into 'periods', as there are too many missing and unknown works to attempt this effectively, however there are certain observable tendencies in the known work. The most obvious division is painting and sculpture, which I have separated for convenience in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis. 'Painting' can then be split further into 'Relief' and 'Non-Relief'. 'Relief' into: cord / rope reliefs, planar reliefs, and linear reliefs. 'Non-Relief Painting' into: early / Mondrianesque, linear / structural paintings, with maybe a sub-section of 'frame' composition paintings (P/R 62, P/R 63, P/R 66, P/R 67 and P/R 69), and then finally 'late-style' paintings. I prefer not to definitively state which work would fall into which category, as there are some that might be transitory. What can be established is that the largest category that cannot be subdivided sensibly is what I have termed 'linear / structural' paintings. These include Catalogue Raisonné numbers P/R 39, P/R 40, P/R 41 P/R 45, P/R 48 – P/R 64, and span the years 1947 – 1954.

⁹⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 39 and P/R 64 respectively, for example.

⁹⁹ As discussed in Willy Rotzler, Constructive Concepts: A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present, trans. Stanley Mason, Zurich: ABC, 1977, pp.44.

Randy Rosen focused on the first of Moss's trinity: the aspect of space, in her writing on Moss. Her 1979 article presents a history of the concept of space, moving from the "static" space of the Renaissance, limited by the personal and particular, to the autonomous "real" space of the canvas in a Matisse, to the "simultaneity" of space in Cubist painting.¹⁰⁰ According to Rosen, it is with the Russian Constructivists that space first began to outgrow the canvas, and with Mondrian that "the full consciousness of space as infinite takes hold". Rosen posits that space does not exist as a tangible reality; it is an absence, a negative, it is not a "containable substance" but an idea, invented by humanity to facilitate understanding of our own physical existence; without empty space, absence, there would be no room to exist as a presence. Just as the development of mathematics required the invention of zero, physics required the invention of space. If artists first conquered space in the Renaissance with the utilisation of perspective, Rosen notes that Moss "stood on the frontier of investigations that propose a new model of reality", with work that contained "the paradoxes and mutability of space".¹⁰¹

Certain works by Moss initially invite perspectival readings. The arrangements of the forms intimate the absent diagonals of linear perspective. The bottom right corner of 'Untitled: 16/8/1956' implies a spatial recession.¹⁰² The proportions (small divisions clustering at the base, the canvas dominated by one large shape) recall steps up to the entrance of a Greek temple. However, this effect is countered by the dominant black vertical (column?) on the left. This is a similar ploy to that of the 1936 relief 'White with Curved Cord' discussed above; our expectations of recessive space, foreground and background, are simultaneously aroused and denied, by elements in one part of the composition that contradict the spatial hierarchy established in another.¹⁰³ "Untitled: 16/8/1956" is an especially audacious achievement in space, dominated as it is by an uninterrupted area of white. The busiest

¹⁰⁰ Randy Rosen, 'Marlow Moss: Did She Influence Mondrian's Work of the Thirties?', *Arts Magazine*, April, 1979, pp.163-65.

¹⁰¹ Rosen, 'Marlow Moss: Did She Influence Mondrian's Work of the Thirties?', 1979, p.165.

¹⁰² See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 66.

¹⁰³ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 27.

features of the design are relegated to the peripheries. This effect is compounded by the use of white for the large shape: the non-colour of virgin primed canvas; so often the field to coloured or black figures (lines or rectangles). Yet somehow this painting avoids appearing as an empty frame. This white area is neither façade, nor void, but a form, and a vital component of a unified composition. '*Composition in Red, White and Black*' of 1953 also references the conventions of perspective, implying, as it does, a rectangular tunnel or corridor, with red lines of diminishing length.¹⁰⁴ This time there is no abutment of forms, and thus no implied over-lap. The will to perspective, caused by the arrangement of lines into an illusory floor and a ceiling, is countered by the fact that the width of these lines remains constant. The ambiguity is reinforced by the three lines of equal size that descend the picture plane from the top left-hand corner. The black square, unnervingly placed low and to the right, disrupts the space further, bringing the furthest point in the linear perspective, or indeed the nearest point, if it is read as a pyramid protruding from the canvas to the eye, straight back to the surface of the canvas. Being black it simultaneously functions as a figure on a white ground, and as a void of infinite depth.

Rosen states that Moss employed a consistent spatial reading, by which she means that the viewer visually apprehends the work from a "*fixed point outside the canvas*".¹⁰⁵ Rosen only refers to Moss's paintings, but this could possibly be said of two of the known sculpture constructions: the '*Free Reliefs*' of 1957, as they are very closely related to the linear / structural paintings and linear reliefs.¹⁰⁶ To a certain extent these sculptures are still conceived as two-dimensional compositions, with a shallow relief element; the white field, representing space, merely replaced by literal space, or the absence of material. However in the case of the Kröller-Müller '*Free Relief*' (S/C 23), it can be viewed from the other side, at least, which is not merely the back of the work, like the back of a canvas, as the panels are painted in alternative

¹⁰⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 61.

¹⁰⁵ Rosen, 'Marlow Moss: Did She Influence Mondrian's Work of the Thirties?', 1979, p.165.

¹⁰⁶ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 23 and S/C 24. Rosen possibly did not know of Moss's sculptures, none were included in the exhibition Marlow Moss 1890-1958 (17th April - 16th May 1979) at the Carus Gallery, New York.

colours (the top right yellow rectangle is blue on reverse; the small bottom blue rectangle is white on reverse).¹⁰⁷ Of course these works are three-dimensional and can be viewed from any angle, but once in the presence of the Kröller-Müller '*Free Relief*' the viewer is compelled to confront it head-on; the optimum position from which to regard it is as if it were a painting.

All other known sculptures by Moss are not subject to a fixed viewpoint, or consistent spatial reading; they exist actually in space, and therefore circumvent any intimation of illusory space. Moss explored this new dimension of literal space in works such as the 1943 '*Sphere Raised by Tension of Curved Line*', which has mobility, and is able to vary its appearance.¹⁰⁸ It is a matter of debate whether the version of this sculpture that appeared in the 1973 Gimpel and Hanover Gallery catalogue, is the same sculpture as the one that appeared in the 1994 Arnhem show.¹⁰⁹ It is very likely to be composed of the same physical objects, but it is arguable that its identity as a sculpture is different.¹¹⁰ '*Spatial Construction*', of 1949, was intended by Moss to actually hang suspended in space, making it truly three-dimensional, as it has no underside.¹¹¹ It is photographed in the 1973 catalogue against an enigmatic background of out-of-focus grass; the spatial ambiguity making the image appear collaged. Another photograph reveals the stand that it hung from.¹¹²

The concern with space is emphasized in the titles of other sculptural works: '*Construction Spatial*', '*Concentric Circles in Space*', '*Concentric Circles*

¹⁰⁷ The 'back' of the work '*Free Relief*' (S/C 23) is shown in photographs accompanying the Catalogue Raisonné entry.

¹⁰⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 5.

¹⁰⁹ Catalogue number 31, Oosthoek and Bill, Marlow Moss; Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen (Exhibition: 1st December 1973 - 19th January 1974). There is no catalogue for the show Marlow Moss; Ruimte, Beweging en Licht at the Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem, (10th December 1994 - 12th March 1995), but the appearance of the sculpture is known from photographs in Florette Dijkstra's archive, and a photograph of the exhibition installation in Ankie De Jongh-Vermeulen, 'Miss Marlow Moss En Mondriaan' Vrij Nederland, 7th January 1994, pp.48-51.

¹¹⁰ I have chosen to list it as one work in my Catalogue Raisonné, as I believe its identity as a sculpture encompasses its various possible arrangements.

¹¹¹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 9.

¹¹² Both of these photographs are reproduced in the Catalogue Raisonné entry for S/C 9.

Projected in Space, *Forms in Space*, and *Spatial Construction in Steel*.¹¹³ In the two *Concentric Circles* works (S/C 14 and 15), completed in 1953, Moss seems to be un-peeling form. The sculptures writhe and contort; like flayed geometry, occupying and articulating their space. Moss's interest in the three-dimensional dissection of a circle, or a sphere, can be traced back through Vantongerloo and his 1918 *Construction Departing from an Ovoid* to Van Doesburg's 1916 painting *Sphere*, and also to Alexander Archipenko's *Le Gondolier* of 1914.¹¹⁴

Spatial Construction in Steel, compared above to a disused piece of machinery, is the largest of all known Moss works.¹¹⁵ Before it succumbed to rust, it must have appeared like a pristine mechanical device, reminiscent of the objects in the 1921 OBMOKhU Constructivist exhibition in Moscow.¹¹⁶ The component discs and slats of *Spatial Construction in Steel* appear to pivot, but are in fact static; as is the pointed conical form, pierced through by the horizontal arm. The source of its power is not therefore the movement of air about it; it is not a turbine, or a generator. Its purpose, whether this is metaphorical or absurd, can only be to measure, map and activate space.

Moss's close associate Vantongerloo made the problem of space the primary concern of his work. In his 1917 essay 'Reflections' published in sections over several issues of De Stijl, from 1918 to 1920, Vantongerloo stated:

*Poetry and music belong to time. Architecture, sculpture and painting belong to space.*¹¹⁷

¹¹³ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 13, S/C 14, S/C 15, S/C 16 and S/C 21, respectively.

¹¹⁴ The theme of the concentric circle or ovoid is discussed in Marek Wieczorek, The Universe in the Living Room, Georges Vantongerloo in the Space of De Stijl, Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 2002, from p.86. Its arcane, esoteric, and Theosophist significance is linked to Brancusi's use of the egg form, and to Thompson, On Growth and Form, 1917. See Illustrations Figures 4.18 and 4.19.

¹¹⁵ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures: S/C 21.

¹¹⁶ See Illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 6.3.

¹¹⁷ Max Bill, ed., Georges Vantongerloo (Exhibition: November 1962). London: Marlborough Fine Art Limited, 1962.

Space is defined as consisting of volume and void, although later he concluded that space is "*incommensurable*", as is the universe and Infinity.¹¹⁸ At the end of his career, Vantongerloo concluded that his explorations of the three-dimensions of space in his sculptural work, and his study of Euclidean geometry, had limited his vision.¹¹⁹

Moss, like Vantongerloo, was greatly influenced by the Platonic conception of space as defined by the movement from point to line to plane. The point, which is conceived as spherical, is understood as the initial manifestation of existence; the origin of space, and also time. It is simultaneously microscopic and macrocosmic. Point to line to plane, can be understood numerically as 1, 2, 3; one as initial presence or existence, two points which imply a line joining them, and three being the minimum number of straight edges necessary to form a plane. Vantongerloo came to this, and to the writings of the mathematician M.H.J. Schoenmaekers, through the tutelage of Van Doesburg.¹²⁰ There is no record of direct contact between Van Doesburg and Moss, so it is likely that much of his influence came to Moss via Vantongerloo, after Van Doesburg himself had died in 1931.¹²¹ According to Nijhoff's testimony, Moss's "*mathematical luggage*" was "*less voluminous*" than either Vantongerloo or Bill's; perhaps this enabled her to return to her exploration of sculpture, begun with classes in Penzance before 1926, with an expression of infinite space: the 1943 '*Sculptural Form*'. This is a variation on a theme Bill had begun developing in 1935, the year after he met Moss.¹²² Bill manifests the Möbius Loop in its simplest and most iconic form, so the conundrum can

¹¹⁸ Vantongerloo, in the 1961 essay 'The Incommensurable' in Bill, ed., Georges Vantongerloo (Exhibition: November 1962).

¹¹⁹ Vantongerloo, in the 1961 essay 'An Intimate Biography' in Bill, ed., Georges Vantongerloo, 1962.

¹²⁰ Wiczorek, Georges Vantongerloo, 2002, p.74. This has been discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹²¹ This is discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹²² Max Bill dated his first experiments with the Möbius Strip as 1935, in his 1951 essay 'Infinite Space as a Theme in Sculpture' cited in Margit Staber, Max Bill, Art in Progress, ed. Jasia Reichardt, London: Methuen, 1964. Variations on the 'Endless Ribbon' theme were executed by Bill throughout the fifties, sixties and seventies, as illustrated in Bill, 'The Mathematical Way of Thinking in the Visual Art of Our Time' reproduced in Michele Emmer ed., The Visual Mind: Art and Mathematics 1993. The earliest existent manifestation of the Möbius Strip form in Bill's oeuvre, that I have found record of, is the sculpture in plaster '*Continuity*' of 1947.

be easily read. Moss's version, which actually twists the other way, is a Möbius Strip folded in two back upon itself, its tumbling form almost disguising its essential characteristic.

The curious pair of origami-like sculptures, known only from photographs, reveal another aspect to Moss's exploration of space.¹²³ If the 1936 relief '*White with Curved Cord*' can be said to weave space, as discussed earlier in this chapter; and sculptures such as the 1953 '*Concentric Circles Projected in Space*' unpeel space, then works such as S/C 2 and S/C 3 (that I refer to as '*Triangles on Points*' and '*Triangles on Edges*') seem to fold space.¹²⁴ This recalls Blotkamp's remarks regarding Moss's use of geometry in her paintings, discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis:

*She is known to have used the golden section in a rather complicated manner, folding the planes at the edges of the painting towards the centre, as it were, so that some lines ended up close to one another.*¹²⁵

As I have not seen these works in the flesh it is not easy to surmise what their initial form was, or how the folds are arranged. It is possible to draw parallels between them and concurrent paintings; a work from 1942 '*White, Red and Black*' (P/R 34), and '*White, Blue, Yellow and Black*' from 1943 (P/R 35), both feature triangles. The '*Triangles*' sculptures, and also '*White Blocks*' (S/C 1), the earliest known sculptures by Moss, can be regarded as a transition from a two dimensional geometry into three-dimensional space.

The two Moss works that perhaps exemplify her engagement with space are not sculptures, or reliefs; that deal with actual space, but two paintings of her linear / structural style: '*Composition in White, Black and Red*' and '*Blue, Red, Black and White (No. 3)*'.¹²⁶ These paintings, both of 1953, express

¹²³ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 2 and S/C 3

¹²⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 27, and Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 15.

¹²⁵ Carel Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction*, trans. Barbara Potter Fasting. London: Reaktion Books, 1994, pp.214. Blotkamp credits Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen with providing this information, although I have been unable to find Moss's method described thus in her published writing.

¹²⁶ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 59 and P/R 60.

conceptual space. The geometry of each of these works ensures a dynamic displacement of form across the two-dimensional space of the picture plane. These paintings are a culmination of the research of the series of paintings dating from 1950 to 1953 in this respect, because in both cases the forms entirely command the space of the canvas surface; occupying it completely. Concurrent to the articulation of two-dimensional space, is the absolute realisation of poetic space; the forms are not embedded in the white surface, or positioned behind the picture plane, but neither do they float optically in front of it like a hologram; they simultaneously embody all conceptual aspects of space. In *'Composition in White, Black and Red'* each component fulfils a vital function in the composition. The small black square and the implied red square are held in perfect balance by the directional energies of the black lines. Even the white 'ground' is ambiguously positioned as it is allowed pre-eminence to the right, truncating the three red planes and the five central black horizontals in an exact vertical alignment. *'Blue, Red, Black and White (No. 3)'* is a very closely related work employing a similar method; the white forms a vertical channel or line, meeting the black line on equal terms, between the red and blue panels of the clustered form. Again it truncates a black line on the edge of red planes. The design is balanced upon a slender black stem (the closest form to the bottom of the picture), yet the painting has its own gravity. It is a similar size and dimensions to the 1957-1958 work *'Red, Blue, Yellow and White'*, these two being amongst her largest pieces.¹²⁷ As the later work demonstrates, space need not be empty, -but in the earlier work, *'Blue, Red, Black and White (No. 3)'* space is rendered palpably concrete, simultaneously un-containable, and substantiated.

¹²⁷ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 77.

Movement.

*...the secret of form lies not in form itself but in the continual changing and shifting of forms...*¹²⁸

If, as described above, physical existence requires space: to physically engage with space requires movement. This, the second of Moss's trinity, has remained a significant concern for practitioners of the static arts throughout history. Much figurative art contains implied movement: the ebb and flow of an Agostino di Duccio relief, the surge of a Delacroix, the flash of Brancusi's darting '*Fish*'. Cubism sought to introduce the fourth element of time, by representing multiple facets of the stationary object, representing something closer to our visual experience of the world, as moveable bodies within it. From Cubism, and influenced by the multiple images of film footage, the Futurists attempted to portray movement, somewhat clumsily, within a painting, as a series of positions. The film animation of Len Lye, amongst others, fused painting and the moving image through the new medium of cinematic projection. The notion of movement has been pre-eminent in Constructivism. Tatlin envisioned mechanically moving bodies within a diagonally spiralling tower in his '*Monument to the Third International*'. Alexander Rodchenko in the twenties, and Kenneth Martin and Alexander Calder in the fifties, are amongst those to have developed the suspended mobile as a means to achieve movement in sculpture. It can be argued that all sculpture incorporates movement, allowing as it does for the "*kinetic spectator*".¹²⁹ Any three-dimensional object, from the swinging '*Discobolus*' to a turning Degas dancer, will apparently shift in form as the viewer walks around it. This aspect is of course present in all of Moss's sculptural work, and in her reliefs.¹³⁰ Even when viewed from a stationary position, a relief shifts and changes with the movement of light. Lines appear and vanish in the planar white reliefs of the early forties, according to the angle from which

¹²⁸ Marlow Moss quoted from memory in Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹²⁹ Rickey, Chapter X 'Movement' in *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution*, 1967, p.196.

¹³⁰ It is possible that the "*fourth line*" referred to in relation to Moss's work, in a letter from Erica Brausen to Richard Morphet held in the Tate Gallery Archives, pertains to the fourth dimension: time, and therefore movement. The "*fourth line*" is discussed in the concluding section of this chapter.

they are illuminated; if the light adjusts they are transformed before the viewers eyes.¹³¹ *'Spatial Construction in Steel'* of 1956 -1958 particularly, causes a spectacular transitory shadow across the floor, multiplied by the number of light sources.¹³² As discussed above, Moss produced at least one mobile sculpture, *'Spatial Construction'*, which would have gently spun and swung according to the breeze.¹³³ Manual movement of the component parts of sculptures such as *'Balanced Forms in Gunmetal on Cornish Granite'* of 1956 -1957, is possible, and not undesired by Moss.¹³⁴ According to an account held in the Tate Archives, the positions of the spheres were fixed by Moss, with screws, in March 1958, on the occasion of her exhibition at the Hanover Gallery.¹³⁵ The cone however still pivots freely through an arc of approximately 110°. It can be surmised that Moss secured the sculpture for the purpose of the show only, and possibly retained an element of mobility because this was to her the chief interest of the piece. This issue is broached in a letter from Richard Morphet, Assistant Keeper of the Tate Gallery, to Erica Brausen, the proprietor of the Hanover Gallery where Moss exhibited in the fifties, on the occasion of her donation of two Moss works to the Tate Collection in 1969.¹³⁶

*Is the sculpture the same work as that reproduced on the cover of the catalogue of the Hanover Gallery Marlow Moss exhibition of 1958? We have hitherto used this title – 'Balanced Forms in Gunmetal on Cornish Granite' – because the three metal elements and the type of rock appear identical. In the 1958 catalogue photograph the metal elements are however quite differently arranged in relation to one another, and appear to be mounted on a smaller piece of granite (I enclose a photograph of our sculpture). Is our sculpture therefore a different piece, and if so could you tell us its title and date – or did the artist have in mind that the positions of the given elements should be varied at will? The cone pivots freely in our piece and the spheres can be rotated easily; would it be true to say no particular angle was ordained by the artist for these elements?*¹³⁷

¹³¹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 30, P/R 31, P/R 32, and P/R 33.

¹³² See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 21.

¹³³ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 9.

¹³⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures: and Constructions: S/C 18.

¹³⁵ Tate Gallery Collection Acquisition Record for Marlow Moss: *'Balanced Forms in Gunmetal on Cornish Granite'*, Sculpture, Tate Gallery Archive, London.

¹³⁶ See Catalogue Raisonné: S/C 18 and P/R 46.

¹³⁷ Richard Morphet to Erica Brausen, typed letter, 28th April 1969, held in the Tate Gallery Archives, London.

Unfortunately Brausen was unable to answer Morphet's questions.¹³⁸ On her advice Morphet also wrote to Stefan Nijhoff, but again failed to garner an explanation.¹³⁹

The ideas of movement had far greater reverberations for Moss than the literal physical movement described above. In perhaps her most important single statement on art Moss said:

*Art is as – Life – forever in the state of Becoming.*¹⁴⁰

This notion connects her back to Mondrian and Theosophical ideas of spiritual evolution, but also to Darwin, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, and Theodore Cook; scientific ideas of the development, over time, of forms in nature. Philosophically, constant 'becoming' is an Existentialist position, an awareness in an individual of his / her own ability (and responsibility) to create their own existence through action. According to Nijhoff, Moss adhered to Nietzschean Existentialism throughout her adult life; she consciously became who she was, she devoted her life to the creation of art, and rejected nihilism, and religion, in any form.¹⁴¹ Although there is no existent statement from Moss directly regarding Existentialism, Nijhoff's assertions are supported by passages in Moss's letters:

*I don't think the laws of nature are concerned with what goes on between humans. I'm convinced it's for the individual himself to create his own life despite any obstacles.*¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Erica Brausen to Richard Morphet, typed letter, 30th April 1969, held in the Tate Gallery Archives, London.

¹³⁹ Letters between Richard Morphet and Wouter Stefan Nijhoff of the same year are also held in the Tate Archives, London.

¹⁴⁰ Marlow Moss, 'Abstract Art', circa 1955: see Appendix 2ii.

¹⁴¹ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹⁴² Marlow Moss to Georges Vantongerloo, private letter, handwritten, circa 1944, held in the Haus Bill Archives, Zumikon, Switzerland. See Letter 19 Appendix 3ii.

Art and life were mutually dependant, and interchangeable, for Moss. In addition to living her life as a work of art, in accordance with Rimbaud, Moss, like Mondrian, strove to unite art with life.

Certain works by Moss manifest movement in a distinctly semiotic manner. There are several occasions when Moss employs triangles in such a way that they function as notational arrowheads. The diagonal visual motion towards the top right of '*White, Red and Black*' of 1942, (P/R 34) is undeniable, and certainly facilitated by the directional triangles. The two triangles, at bottom left, point across and up respectively, and their momentums combine to propel the black triangle, top right, up and away. It is difficult to read the bright red triangle at the base of the painting '*White, Black and Red*' of 1948 (P/R 43) as anything other than a directional indication; it points out of the canvas to the left. The three corners of '*White, Black, Blue and Yellow*' of 1957 (P/R 74), pointing north, west and east, give the composition an upward and outward energy. The triangles in blue, yellow and black of a 1943 work recorded in a photograph (P/R 35) have a more conflicted and inward movement. The small (yellow?) triangle pointing right opposes the black triangle which points left, with the reinforcement of the (blue?) triangle above. The most unusual incident of an arrow in Moss's oeuvre is again only known from a photograph (P/R 32). What appears in this white relief is most certainly an arrow taken from the language of signage. Its form is unprecedented in Moss's oeuvre. It is not a triangle, or a pure geometrical shape. It emphatically points down.

Almost all of Moss's paintings contain a sense of flux and mobility. This is especially true in juxtaposition with the static immutability of a Mondrian composition. This is partly a result of her rejection of Mondrian's black line grid beginning around 1935.¹⁴³ The urge for dynamism Moss gained from Léger has been discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, where a comparison

¹⁴³ Although, oddly, amongst the most static of Moss's paintings are undoubtedly '*White, Black, Yellow and Blue*' (P/R 62) and '*Untitled (White, Black, Blue and Yellow)*' (P/R 62) made in 1954, when she briefly revisited the black grid format.

was made between her last paintings and Léger's '*Composition Murales*'.¹⁴⁴ It is argued later in Chapter 4 that Moss found a visual solution to her own, Van Doesburg's, and Léger's concerns that Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism was lacking movement, with the invention of the double-line. This feature appears in many Moss paintings, in various guises, up until the mid-forties, and then again on occasion in the fifties.¹⁴⁵ The double-lines' functioning, particularly in the 1932 work '*White, Black, Red and Grey*' is discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, in conjunction with Cor Blok's identification of the movement it causes, as the upper and lower halves of the painting are forced apart by the compressed energy of the space between the two lines.¹⁴⁶ Cecil ascribes a special significance to the 1934 work '*White, Black and Grey*' in her study of Moss's double-line.¹⁴⁷ She describes the two parallel lines that travel across the top of the composition as "*over emphatic*", even in the original painting that she saw at the Carus Gallery exhibition in New York in 1979. Cecil considers this work as a definitive statement by Moss on the power of her double-line to create relations and inter-relations in space: movement. This power is intimately connected to the observance of geometry.¹⁴⁸ Nijhoff, quoting Moss from memory, overtly states that the purpose of the double-line was to render "*the composition dynamic instead of static*".¹⁴⁹ This is demonstrated to various degrees in Moss's double-line experiments, and very powerfully illustrated in '*White, Black and Grey*' (P/R 15), perhaps the most insistent incarnation of the feature. However I argue it is not only the double-line that is responsible for the dynamism of this work; remove the short black

¹⁴⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 71, P/R 73, P/R 74, P/R 75, P/R 76 and P/R 77, and illustrations of Léger's work in appendix to this thesis: Figures 4.13 and 4.14.

¹⁴⁵ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 5, P/R 6, P/R 7, P/R 11, P/R 12, P/R 13, P/R 14, P/R 15, P/R 16, P/R 17, P/R 18, P/R 19, P/R 20, P/R 21, P/R 22, P/R 23, P/R 24, P/R 25, P/R 26, P/R 27, P/R 28, P/R 29, P/R 30, P/R 31, P/R 32, P/R 57, P/R 58, P/R 62, P/R 63, and P/R 66.

¹⁴⁶ Cor Blok, *Piet Mondriaan: Een Catalogus Van Zijn Werk in Nederlands Openbaar Bezit*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1974.

¹⁴⁷ Cecil, 'Marlow Moss, Piet Mondrian and the Double Line (1930-1934)' 1980, p.33. See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 15.

¹⁴⁸ I have discussed the connection between geometry and movement in painting with Francis Hoyland, an artist who has consistently used geometry since his earliest works exhibited with Moss in the 1955 A.I.A. Measurement and Proportion exhibition, discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis. He asserts: "*Good proportion (measurement) realises rhythm (movement –see the Greeks), bad measurement stifles it*" Francis Hoyland to the author, handwritten letter, dated 4th April 2007.

¹⁴⁹ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

horizontal towards the base of the composition, and the movement left to right is perceptibly undermined.

The double-line was certainly an innovative addition to the language of Neo-Plasticism, but it was not the extent of Moss's contribution. The potential of the short truncated line was not fully explored by Moss until the late forties, when she began the period of work I have termed the linear / structural paintings. Nietzsche's notion of the 'Eternal Return' is discussed briefly in relation to Moss's Existential construction of her own identity, at the beginning of Chapter 3 of this thesis.¹⁵⁰ The idea of Eternal Return, or perpetual motion, clearly also has resonance with Moss's "*craving for movement*" in her paintings and sculptures.¹⁵¹ In works of the early fifties, particularly: '*White, Black, Yellow and Blue*' (P/R 50), and '*Composition in White, Black, and Red*' (P/R 51), Moss realises *perpetuum mobile*. The forms orbit, on rhythmical orthogonals, fast and slow, *ad infinitum*.

Light.

If representations of space and movement pertain to the physicality of existence, then light pertains to the soul and the spirit. Light is synonymous with vision, and also with knowledge; therefore both perceptual and conceptual. It is no great leap from *splendor*, *lumen* and *lux*, to God, and Nijhoff describes Moss as a "*light-worshipper*".¹⁵² Indeed Moss was consistently drawn to light environments; Penwith and Walcheren are both places known particularly for the quality of their light, surrounded as they both are by large expanses of reflecting water. The special lure of 'Cornish light' is constantly referred to in 'St. Ives' literature; 'Dutch light' too is effectively an

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche's *Joyful Wisdom*, first published 1882, was described by Netty Nijhoff as being Moss's "*livre de chevet*", Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹⁵¹ Nijhoff describes Moss as "*craving for movement*" after her long convalescence from Tuberculosis in Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹⁵² Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962. '*Splendor*', '*lumen*' and '*lux*' are terms used by the medieval theologian and philosopher Bonaventure to describe the three aspects of light, as described Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin, Yale Nota Bene, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, p.50.

art-historical term.¹⁵³ Moss's home at Gauciel is described by Bill as "*light, fresh, transparent*".¹⁵⁴ The first thing that Moss did upon arrival in Stanley Gardiner's studio in Lamorna, was to have a new window made, and the inside painted white.¹⁵⁵

*Dim lights and half-tints gave her a feeling of physical discomfort and she would never have a studio facing north, for example. Light was the source of all vital energy, the matrix of the visible, the triumph of life over death, of construction over destruction: 'the flame of life'.*¹⁵⁶

Rather than the usual concerns of painters regarding studio lighting, that it should be bright but ambient and as constant as possible throughout the day, Moss clearly wanted to maximise the physical sensation of light upon her in her working environment, to allow her to clearly see her work in progress, but more importantly to act directly upon her imagination.

Light, the final aspect of Moss's trilogy, has arguably always been the ultimate aspiration of painting. The painters that Nijhoff identifies as of seminal importance to Moss, other than Mondrian, are Rembrandt and Van Gogh; both artists whose central concern was light. According to Nijhoff, Moss regarded these two Dutchmen as the 'discoverers' of light.¹⁵⁷ Their approaches to light were in many ways entirely distinct; Rembrandt's achievement was in atmospheric chiaroscuro, forms looming from the darkness and made solid in raking light, whereas Van Gogh's expression was in colour, with light seemingly emitting from the canvas. Isaac Newton, at the end of the seventeenth century, established scientifically light and colour are one and the same; this is knowledge already possessed and exploited by painters throughout time. Nineteenth century developments in colour theory,

¹⁵³ 'Dutch light' has recently been the subject of a film examining Josef Beuys' theory that the massive land reclamation programme during the fifties, which drained the Zuyder Zee, altered the quality of Dutch light and effectively 'blinded' Holland, putting an end to a centuries old visual culture and artistic tradition of art responding to light: Pieter-Rim De Kroon and Maarten De Kroon (Directors), *Dutch Light*, Film / DVD Video, Produced by Govard-Jan De Jong, The Netherlands, 94 minutes, 2003. Marlow Moss would certainly have been sensitive to such a change in Walcheren, where it is likely she spent time during the fifties.

¹⁵⁴ Bill, Max 'An Encounter with Marlow Moss' in Oosthoek and Bill, *Marlow Moss: Bilder, Konstruktionen, Zeichnungen*, 1973.

¹⁵⁵ Keith Gardiner, *A Painter's Paradise: Memories of an Artist's Son Growing up in Lamorna*. Penzance: Headland Printers Ltd., 2005.

¹⁵⁶ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹⁵⁷ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

such as the experiments by the chemist Michel-Eugène Chevreul, revealed the functioning of simultaneous contrast and again framed scientifically the instinctive knowledge of painters.¹⁵⁸ In turn Chevreul's theories had an immense influence on nineteenth century French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters, especially Seurat in the development of his Divisionist technique. Moss, and other Constructive artists, were as fascinated by the physics of colour, as they were with the geometry of form. Mondrian devoted considerable attention to the issue of colour in Part 3 of his 'The New Plastic in Painting' published in De Stijl. He wrote:

*In abstract-real painting primary colour only signifies colour appearing in its most basic aspect ... the principle thing is that colour be free of individuality and individual sensations, and that it express only the serene emotion of the universal.*¹⁵⁹

Mondrian's proclamation that to limit colour to the primaries allowed a "purer manifestation of light" would certainly have been noted by Moss, and had a decisive impact upon her work.¹⁶⁰

Colour, and therefore light, is a central subject of Kandinsky's Concerning the Spiritual In Art first published in 1911.¹⁶¹ In 1923 Johannes Itten made the study of colour part of the inner core of his syllabus for the Weimar Bauhaus.¹⁶² Josef Albers' exploration of colour, developed at the Bauhaus in the early twenties, reached fruition in 1963 with the publication of Interaction of Color.¹⁶³ Kandinsky, Itten, and Albers all taught at the Bauhaus, and, as

¹⁵⁸ Chevreul developed dyes for Gobelins Tapestry Works in Paris, and in 1839 published De la loi du Contraste Simultané des Couleurs, outlining his theory of the phenomenon of 'simultaneous contrast', by which colours influence the perceived appearance of other colours placed in proximity.

¹⁵⁹ Piet Mondrian, Part 3 'The New Plastic as Abstract-Real Painting: Plastic Means and Composition' in Mondrian, 'The New Plastic in Painting', 1917, reproduced in Holtzman and James, eds. The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, 1987, p.36.

¹⁶⁰ Piet Mondrian, Part 3 'The New Plastic as Abstract-Real Painting: Plastic Means and Composition' in Mondrian, 'The New Plastic in Painting', 1917, Holtzman, and James, eds. The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, p.36.

¹⁶¹ Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, trans. M.T.H. Sadler. New York: Dover Publications, 1977.

¹⁶² Johannes Itten, Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus, trans. Fred Bradley, Revised Edition 1975. London: Thames and Hudson, 1963, p.8.

¹⁶³ Josef Albers, Interaction of Color, Revised pocket edition 1975. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963.

has been discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, their ideas were carried to the Académie Moderne in Paris by their students. Léger, Moss's teacher at the Académie Moderne, was orientated towards colour over form, in contradistinction to the Cubists and Purists, and regularly employed heightened local colour in his paintings.¹⁶⁴ The unmistakable origin of Moss's colour is, however, De Stijl. First Bart Van Der Leek, and then Mondrian, and also Van Doesburg for a time, limited their palettes to the three so-called primary colours of red, yellow and blue, with black and white.¹⁶⁵ The colours were generally used straight out of the tube, with no modulation. Moss's adherence to this is the only one of Mondrian's rules of Neo-Plasticism that she almost never broke, although there are the isolated examples of her student works, the 1957 painting '*White and Yellow*' with its variety of yellows, and many of Moss's works on paper which include green, orange, and other colours.¹⁶⁶

Reviewers of Moss's exhibitions have often commented on the over-all effect of lightness and brightness of her work. Phrases such as "*sunshine dazzle*" and "*enlivening sparkle*" appear in the 1958 reviews of the Hanover Gallery show.¹⁶⁷ These qualities can be seen in Dijkstra's documentary photographs of the 1994-95 Arnhem exhibition.¹⁶⁸ To a certain extent lightness is an inevitable result of the dominance of white in much of Moss's oeuvre, when the work is displayed together, in a white cube gallery. The brightness and crispness of the paintings, which makes them especially vulnerable to damage and deterioration as discussed earlier in this chapter, undoubtedly contribute to their quality of lightness; works such as the 1953 '*Composition in White, Black and Red*' are staggering in their luminosity when directly

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹⁶⁵ Red, yellow and blue are considered the 'primary' colours in Itten's theory of colour. This was commonly accepted in the thinking of other Bauhaus artists, and within De Stijl. Léger also favoured the use of red, yellow and blue, for this reason. Other colour theorists, such as Albert Munsell, however, do not emphasize red, yellow and blue in this way, and do not subscribe to the notion of 'primary' colours.

¹⁶⁶ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R1 and P/R 73, Works on Paper: WoP 1, WoP 4, WoP 17, and illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 4.24.

¹⁶⁷ Keith Sutton, 'House Proud', *Art News and Review*, 1958; and 'A Disciple of Mondrian', *The Times* 19th March 1958, p.3.

¹⁶⁸ See illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 6.4.

encountered.¹⁶⁹ This however merely demonstrates a concern for creating an environmental effect of light with her paintings, when in fact Moss concurrently addressed light as a subject in her work. By choosing to work with red, yellow and blue; colours located equidistant around Itten's colour wheel, the spectrum is completely represented, and with optical mixing, white light theoretically results. This is of course purely notional, the colours are not ever present in equal quantity, and often only one or two of the colours are present in a single work. Moss's, and other Neo-Plasticists', interest in 'primary' colours was conceptual; it was the idea of the primacy of these three colours that was paramount, whether or not the hypothesis can be proved.¹⁷⁰ The white reliefs of 1936 to 1944 are of course light by virtue of their whiteness, while simultaneously they reveal their form by means of raking light.¹⁷¹ The polished metal sculptures such as '*Column*' of 1944, '*Spheres and Curved Line*' of 1945, '*Ovoids on Granite*' of 1952, '*Construction Spatial*' of 1953, '*Balanced forms in Gunmetal on Cornish Granite*' of 1956-57, and '*Cone and Sphere in Relation on White Cornish Granite*' of 1957, all reflect the light of their surroundings, integrating their forms with the environment: art with life.¹⁷²

Perhaps Mondrian's most light-filled work is his '*Lozenge Composition with Yellow Lines*' of 1933.¹⁷³ With its expanding and rotating energy it seems to positively emit warmth and light. This painting is an isolated incident of a Mondrian work that does not include black structural lines, until what are seemingly his last three works: '*New York City*' of 1942, '*Broadway Boogie Woogie*' 1942-43, and '*Victory Boogie Woogie*' 1942-44. Arguably it is an example of Mondrian using coloured lines before Moss did, as it cannot be known if the 'grey' lines that can be seen in a black and white photograph of a Moss work of the same year are grey or in fact yellow.¹⁷⁴ As far as can be

¹⁶⁹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 59.

¹⁷⁰ Munsell's argument against the primary natures of only red, yellow and blue is therefore irrelevant to Neo-Plasticism.

¹⁷¹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 27, P/R 28, P/R 29, P/R 30, P/R 31, P/R 32, P/R 33, and P/R 37.

¹⁷² See Catalogue Raisonné: Sculptures and Constructions: S/C 6, S/C 7, S/C 12, S/C 13, S/C 18, and S/C 22,

¹⁷³ See illustrations to this thesis: Figure 4.17.

¹⁷⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 14.

known Moss made her first painting without any black in 1935: '*White, Red and Grey*', and the effect of light is palpable.¹⁷⁵ From this point on Moss strove to vanquish black from her compositions, as Nijhoff attests she was certain that "*it should be possible to express light without the help of its antithesis*".¹⁷⁶ From the mid-thirties Moss worked in relief with compositions of almost entirely white, but, as is discussed above, this was ultimately unsatisfactory to her, and in the late forties black was reintroduced out of necessity. Gradually the dominance of the black structural grid was diminished. Black began to function as a colour in works of the late forties such as the Tate Gallery's 1949 partial relief '*Composition in Yellow, Black and White*'.¹⁷⁷ This becomes more extreme in works such as '*Composition in White, Black and Yellow*' of 1953, and by the following year Moss seems to be playing with the idea of black as a structural line, versus black as a coloured form, in the painting '*White, Blue, Yellow and Black*' of 1954.¹⁷⁸ The 1957 painting '*White and Yellow*', mentioned above, is the unique example of modulated colour in Moss's mature oeuvre.¹⁷⁹ This work, and an even more curious painting known as '*Vrije Compositie (Yellow and White)*', are both light by virtue of their exclusively yellow and white schemes, in the same way that Mondrian's '*Lozenge Composition with Yellow Lines*' is light.¹⁸⁰ This relies upon the intrinsic tonal value of the colour yellow at its most saturated, rather than upon the functioning of colour itself, and these two Moss works, especially the latter, do not seem in themselves complete statements.

If Moss's sculptures can be described as "*mathematical instruments*" as they are in a review of her 1958 Hanover Gallery show,¹⁸¹ or machines for measuring space, as is suggested above; then certain of her drawings can be described as optical diagrams.¹⁸² These works on paper, a total of twenty-six

¹⁷⁵ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 18.

¹⁷⁶ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹⁷⁷ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 46.

¹⁷⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 58 and P/R 62.

¹⁷⁹ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 73.

¹⁸⁰ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 73, P/R 78 and Figure 4.17.

¹⁸¹ D.L.A.F., "Current + Forthcoming Exhibitions -London," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. C, April 1958, p.141.

¹⁸² See Catalogue Raisonné: Works on Paper: particularly WoP 1, WoP 2, WoP 4, WoP 6, WoP 7, WoP 8, WoP 13, WoP 14, WoP 25, and WoP 26.

represented in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis, are the most undocumented section of Moss's oeuvre. They have received scant attention in Moss scholarship, and, apart from the two held in the collection of the Musée de Grenoble, they are inaccessibly stored in a private collection, and knowable only through photographs.¹⁸³ They are distinctly complete works, as opposed to the preliminary sketches and working drawings that were made in preparation for paintings, discussed earlier in this chapter,¹⁸⁴ and they represent perhaps the most overtly experimental section of Moss's output, reminiscent as they are of Bauhaus student exercises. Executed mainly during the war, they can be considered as very private works, as she was at this time working in complete isolation. Concurrently with the series on paper, Moss was continuing her work in relief painting, and just beginning her known exploration of sculpture. These drawings contain a wide variety of colours outside of the De Stijl primaries, although all still of high saturation. Both the lines and the internal shapes are coloured, for example in the drawing catalogued here as WoP 4 the lines are violet, blue and black, and the internal shapes are violet, red, green and orange.¹⁸⁵ Unfortunately this can only be imagined, as the existent photograph is black and white. The array of colours can be seen in the 1942 work held at Grenoble: red, blue and black lines, and red, orange, green and violet interlocked shapes tightly arranged in the core of the composition.¹⁸⁶ The ruled directional lines and circles recall scientific diagrams of refracting light and lenses, or even the workings of the eye itself. Drawing WoP 7 particularly seems to be articulating some particular phenomenon of light or perception: an optical illusion perhaps. The 'cross hairs' that appear in the bottom right-hand corner of Wop 2 and WoP 6 seem an overt reference to precise vision.

¹⁸³ Most of these drawings reside in the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection, Zurich. They are known to me through photographs held by Hazel Rank-Broadley and by Florette Dijkstra, and illustrations in Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962. Drawings WoP 1 and WoP 2 are held in the collection of the Musée de Grenoble.

¹⁸⁴ See Catalogue Raisonné: Works on Paper: WoP 27- WoP 41.

¹⁸⁵ This information is known from the writing in Moss's own hand on the back of the black and white photograph held by Hazel Rank-Broadley.

¹⁸⁶ See Catalogue Raisonné: Works on Paper: WoP 1.

It is in Moss's very last works that what Nijhoff describes as her "*obsession with light*" finally comes to fruition.¹⁸⁷ Nijhoff refers to six final paintings, all of which are illustrated in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis, apart from '*Blue, Black, Yellow, Red and White*' of 1956-57, which it can be assumed was part of this series.¹⁸⁸

*Colour and colour alone (for, in this last work, white and black also have the function of colour) determines construction, rhythm, harmony and the possibility of the limitless projection of this colour-spectacle beyond the canvas into space.*¹⁸⁹

The achievement of works such as the last known painting by Moss '*Red, Blue, Yellow and White*', completed (or last worked upon) in the year of her death, 1958, cannot be fully perceived in photographic reproduction.¹⁹⁰ When encountered directly, even in the artificial light of the Stedelijk Museum's storerooms, it seems to pulse smoothly, in a horizontal and vertical movement. The optical effect is one of continuous flux, and despite the polished hardness of the lines, the overall effect is of glowing softness. Ultimately it radiates light.

The Distinctive Achievement of Marlow Moss.

Earlier in this chapter, in the section devoted to an analysis of Moss's working process, the notion of 'style as medium' was alluded to, in reference to Wollheim's distinction between a 'medium' and a 'material'.¹⁹¹ Mondrian addresses "*The New Plastic as Style*" in Part 2 of '*The New Plastic in Painting*'.¹⁹² He advocates that style must become the sole substance of a work of art, stating:

¹⁸⁷ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹⁸⁸ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 72, and also P/R 71, P/R 74, P/R 75, P/R 76, P/R 77.

¹⁸⁹ Nijhoff, *Marlow Moss*, 1962.

¹⁹⁰ See Catalogue Raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 77.

¹⁹¹ Wollheim, 'The Work of Art as Object', 1984. See footnote 67 of this chapter.

¹⁹² Mondrian, 'The New Plastic in Painting', 1917, pp.31-35.

*In painting style must be made manifest: it cannot be expressed through subject matter or representation.*¹⁹³

I propose that the medium of Moss's art, rather than being oil paint or gunmetal etc, is Constructivism itself. It was the language of Constructivism that she thought in, not the language of paint or marble or metal. Moss, like her closest contemporaries Vantongerloo and Bill, worked within a very well established tradition; an already existent paradigm of Constructivist Art. This allowed Moss to think exclusively within the confines of this mode, rather than having to define Constructivism, or non-figuration, against other forms of art, as her predecessors had done.¹⁹⁴ This goes some way to explain Moss's unwillingness to address the questions posed to the membership of *Abstraction Création* regarding nudes, trees and locomotives.¹⁹⁵

Moss, Vantongerloo and Bill did not specialise in painting or sculpture, and did not demonstrate allegiance to particular materials. All three of them worked in a variety of materials, making pragmatic decisions in service of a particular idea. They all made forays into design (architecture in the case of Moss), indicating that they recognised little distinction between 'fine' and 'applied' art.¹⁹⁶ The fact that Moss's study of architecture was not realised in terms of actual buildings, lends credence to the notion that it was the concept of architecture that interested her, not the product.¹⁹⁷ Vantongerloo made models of his designs for airports, between 1928 and 1931, and actually manufactured certain items of furniture of his design, indicating an interest in

¹⁹³ Mondrian, Part 2, 'The New Plastic as Style' in Mondrian, *The New Plastic in Painting*, 1917, p.31.

¹⁹⁴ Although the issue of defining her art against art of the past is of concern to Moss, especially in her first published statement in *Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif* in 1932, in her later essay 'Abstract Art' of 1955 the balance has shifted towards an emphasis of the universal qualities common to all great art across time.

¹⁹⁵ Issue 2 *Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif*, 1933, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

¹⁹⁶ Moss first became interested in architecture in London during the twenties, and then followed a course on architecture whilst in Cornwall in the forties. The issue of the synthesis of art and architecture, and how that pertains to the difficulties of Moss in a British context and British *Groupe Espace* particularly, is discussed at length in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁹⁷ This aligns Moss with the Constructionist artist Anthony Hill who argued that actual buildings could not embody "*pure architecture*" because of practical considerations such as guttering for example. In Hill's opinion the relief offered a more complete manifestation of "*pure architecture*". Anthony Hill, 'The Question of Synthesis, Collaboration and Integration Occasioned by the I.U.A. Congress Headquarters Building', *Structure* Vol. 4, No. 1, 1961, p.19.

commercial production. To Moss the material outcome was not her overriding concern; but the development and expression of the concept was, (in this sense Moss can be termed as a conceptual artist, as has been posited earlier in this chapter). For this reason she worked on an immediate and direct scale, with the materials she had access to, enlisting the assistance that was available.

Conceptual thinking has always been central to Constructive Art, as it was to Jeanneret and Ozenfant's Purism.¹⁹⁸ Mondrian wrote that Neo-Plasticism was "*the manifestation of the purely aesthetic idea*" (my emphasis).¹⁹⁹ Gabo in his original Constructivist statement 'The Realistic Manifesto' admonishes the Futurists for their unimaginative representation of speed.²⁰⁰ Rather than images of "*frenzied automobiles*" Gabo envisions the ray of the sun, which is the stillest of forces and yet travels at extraordinary speeds. This speed cannot be perceived by the human senses (as the speed of a car can be), but it can be understood by the human mind. An orientation towards the conceptual therefore, as opposed to the perceptual or the literal, is revealed. Moss's friend and comrade Bill viewed art objects as primarily vehicles for the transmission of concepts, and although, as has been argued above, time has taken its toll on the material and arguably the ideological aspects of Moss's works, the concept remains intact and perceivable. Moss herself places emphasis on the conceptual base of abstract art, when criticising the English practitioners, in a letter to Paule Vézelay of 1955:

*... I couldn't trace in their work the idea on which Abstract Art is based or a further development of this idea to a new expression in Art.*²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ "*L'art est avant tout dans la conception*" (*Art is above all a matter of conception*) state Jeanneret and Ozenfant in *Le Purism*, published in *Après le Cubisme*, Paris, 1918.

¹⁹⁹ Mondrian, Part 3 'The New Plastic as Abstract-Real Painting: Plastic Means and Composition' in Mondrian, 'The New Plastic in Painting', 1917, pp.36-37.

²⁰⁰ Naum Gabo and Anton Pevsner, 'The Realistic Manifesto', 1920, in *Gabo: Constructions, Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings, Engravings*, ed. Herbert Read, London: Lund Humphries, 1957. An audio recording of a reading of the text by Gabo is available on the Web: <http://www.ubu.com/aspden/aspden5and6/audio5A.html>.

²⁰¹ Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, handwritten letter, dated 15th February 1955, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 14, in Appendix 3iii.

It is indeed the primacy of the conceptual, or essential, over the experiential that differentiates Moss from Hepworth, particularly in their approaches to nature in their art. It is the invisible structures of nature that interested Moss, not the visible effects.²⁰²

An intriguing manifestation of the conceptual that may or may not be present in Moss's work arises in the aforementioned correspondence between Richard Morphet and Erica Brausen:

*It [the painting 'Composition in Yellow Black and White' that Brausen had recently donated to the Tate Collection, see Catalogue Raisonné: P/R 46] was based on mathematical theory, and I do remember vaguely that she [Moss] discovered that she had found the fourth line, but what this meant I do not know...*²⁰³

Morphet wrote to Wouter Stefan Nijhoff, mistakenly attributing the "fourth line" reference to Netty Nijhoff's 1962 essay.²⁰⁴ Stefan replied that he would pass the enquiry on to his mother, but no further records exist. It seems possible that Brausen has misremembered this idea; she admits that although Moss "was a very dear friend" of hers, she does not know much about her thoughts on such matters. It can be speculated that the 'fourth line' pertains to the 'fourth dimension': that of time. This was certainly a preoccupation of Van Doesburg's. In this case the 'fourth line' would be in connection to Moss's concern with movement, which unlike space or light, can only manifest over time. Alternatively the 'fourth line' could be understood as pertaining to the *third* dimension; if Plato's progression from point, to line, to plane, is invoked. If the 'first line' connects two points, and with the addition of a third point, the 'second' and the 'third line' form a plane; then the 'fourth line' must be the creation of solid form in space. Either of these theories could relate to 'Composition in Yellow, Black and White', but upon contemplation of the painting, it seems just as likely that the 'fourth line' refers to the enclosing of

²⁰² The difference between the approach of Moss and that of Hepworth is discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis, particularly in relation to notions of nature and the 'organic'.

²⁰³ Erica Brausen to Richard Morphet, private letter, typed, 30th April 1969, held in the Tate Gallery Archives, London.

²⁰⁴ Richard Morphet to Wouter Stefan Nijhoff, private letter, typed, 12th May 1969, held in the Tate Gallery Archives, London.

the yellow rectangle, or the four sides of the canvas itself.²⁰⁵ The 'fourth line', and its functioning in Moss's work, remains an enigma.

Moss's conceptual thinking within a Constructive Art practice, could be seen to anticipate the Conceptual Movement of the 1960s. This is not to say that Moss should be regarded as a Conceptual Artist in the strict sense, but that the debates about art practice in the 1960s can be utilised to reveal more completely the prevalence of a conceptual orientation within Constructivism.²⁰⁶ There are however significant differences; Moss's work does not partake of the "*stage presence*" that Robert Morris or Donald Judd's work achieves through largeness of scale.²⁰⁷ This quality is rare in Constructivist work, although it could perhaps be attributed to Bill's public sculptures.²⁰⁸ The American Minimalist movement can be regarded as a manifestation of the Constructivist tradition, but with certain reservations. As was asserted earlier in this chapter, Fried's characterisation of much Minimalist art as 'literalist' is not appropriate for Moss, or truly Constructive art.²⁰⁹ As has been demonstrated in the latter sections of this chapter, Moss's work not only creates space, movement and light, but addresses these concepts as subject matter.

A reoccurring theme in Constructive art, and Moss's work particularly, is that of purity. Nijhoff, in her 1962 essay, refers to the "*abstrait pur*" of Moss, and Moss herself calls her work "*purist*" in a letter to Paule Vézelay of 1958.²¹⁰ This recalls Moss's education under the Purist painter Amédée Ozenfant at the Académie Moderne, but also, and more significantly, it connects her to the De Stijl tradition. Purity was a pivotal concept to Mondrian, as is

²⁰⁵ See Catalogue raisonné: Paintings and Reliefs: P/R 46.

²⁰⁶ In his 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood' Michael Fried connects the American Minimalist artist Robert Morris directly to Vantongerloo, and, for the same reasons a connection can be made to Moss.

²⁰⁷ "*Stage Presence*" is the quality Fried attributes to the works of Morris and Judd, in Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', 1967.

²⁰⁸ See Illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 6.2.

²⁰⁹ Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', 1967.

²¹⁰ Nijhoff, Marlow Moss, 1962. Marlow Moss to Paule Vézelay, private letter, handwritten, dated 16th March 1958, held un-catalogued in the Paule Vézelay Collection, Tate Gallery Archives. See Letter 46, Appendix 3iii.

demonstrated in his essay for Circle: 'Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art', amongst others.²¹¹ Purity and the conceptual are linked notions both pertaining to essence. Ultimately such a value can be traced back to Plato, whom Moss refers to directly in her essay 'Abstract Art' of 1955 discussed above.²¹² Moss invokes "*the universe*" in both this essay and her published statements in Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif.²¹³ In her piece in Issue 1 of Abstraction Création: Art Non-Figuratif published in 1932, Moss wrote that the aim of her art is to "*express in totality the artist's consciousness of the universe*". She is simultaneously concerned with these two seemingly distinct elements: the microcosm and the macrocosm, her self and everything outside of herself. Consciousness and the universe are however mutually defined, and sometimes even interchangeable. Moss's oeuvre expresses this, and represents a distinct and cogent achievement within the Constructive tradition of art.

²¹¹ Mondrian, Piet 'Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art' in Martin, Nicholson and Gabo, eds., Circle, 1937, pp.41-56. Mondrian also wrote essays entitled 'Purely Abstract Art' (1926), 'Pure Abstract Art' (1929) 'The New Art – The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships' (1931), and 'Pure Plastic Art' (1942), all reproduced in Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, eds., The New Art - the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, London: Thames and Hudson, 1987. Mondrian's relationship with the notion of purity is examined in Mark A. Cheetham, The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

²¹² See Appendix 2ii.

²¹³ See Appendix 2i.

Conclusion.

The inception of this thesis is monographic. The primary concern has been to identify and situate an artistic personality; a project located at the core of traditional art historical enquiry. As was initially discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, such a remit, when applied to a neglected female artist, is not without complexities. A concurrent concern therefore has been an interrogation of the tropes of the monograph itself. Marlow Moss is an exemplary subject for research in an environment not only irrevocably altered by forty years of feminist analysis, but also having more recently evolved with the impact of Queer Theory. As the discipline of art history itself has largely conceded to notions of 'visual culture', a reassessment of the existent terms is urgent and vital.

This thesis represents the most complete account of Moss's life and work to date, and the most sustained critical analysis of her oeuvre. Gathered in the Catalogue Raisonné in appendix to this thesis are over a hundred recorded works by Moss, with images whenever possible, with all currently available information and details of provenance. Also accompanying this thesis are reproductions of photographs, of Moss and of her works, hitherto inaccessible in private collections. This research has gathered and collated extensive archival material, ranging from contemporary reviews of Moss exhibitions, to unpublished letters including those contained in the Paule Vézelay Collection held at the Tate Archives, which remain un-catalogued at the time of writing.

This research has possibly been curtailed, to a certain extent, by lack of access to the Nijhoff / Oosthoek Collection held in Zurich, Switzerland. The contents of this collection and archive remain unknown to the author in part, and would certainly provide material for future scholarship. Another potential source for additional research is material relating to the Argentinean Constructivist group MADI.¹ The extent of Moss's relationship with the group,

¹ See chapter 4, footnote 164 of this thesis.

and the exchange between Buenos Aires and Paris particularly is deserving of further scholarly attention.

Several other avenues of enquiry, beyond the scope of this thesis, are ripe for investigation. The global tradition of Constructivism, which has not been significantly mapped in the thirty plus years since George Rickey's 1967 Constructivism: Origins and Evolution, Stephen Bann's 1974 The Tradition of Constructivism and Willy Rotzler's 1977 Constructive Concepts, is a potential field for reappraisal as a whole. The work of the little documented Constructivist artist Hans Anton Prinner seemingly makes connections to the works of Moss, and is deserving of scholarly attention.² Similarly the sculptures of the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark, particularly '*Bichos*' and '*Town*' of 1960-1961, seem to reference Moss's sculptures, but it is not known if there was any direct contact or influence.³ Moss can be seen as a forerunner of an expansive field of the Constructivist tradition in British art history, as represented by the Systems Group particularly. The consistent thread in British art, both perceptual and conceptual, pertaining to a tendency for measurement and proportion, remains undocumented as a whole. The tradition of specifically female Constructivist practice in Britain, including the work of Jocelyn Chewett, Mary Martin, Gillian Wise and the artists of the Countervail group, is also under-researched as a field. Similarly the history of androgyny, in portraiture, sartorial style, and in self-appropriated names, could be mapped in relation to artists such as Moss, Paule Vézelay, Claude Cahun, Marcel Moore, and Gluck. Moss as a case study invites further investigation into the situation of British art school education in the early part of the twentieth century, particularly the lack of opportunity available to aspiring Modernist artists. The transmission of studio tradition across the art schools of Europe also invites new appraisal in the light of this study. This thesis represents a contribution to the feminist project, arguably initiated by Linda

² A similarity is particularly apparent in the juxtaposition of the Prinner construction and the Moss drawing in Serge Lemoine and Marianne Le Pommere, eds., Image d'une collection Musée de Grenoble, Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1999, p.147.

³ See Illustrations in appendix to this thesis: Figure 4.23.

Nochlin in 1971, to identify and elevate great women artists.⁴ Although the terms of this endeavour are contested and fraught, it remains the central feature of activist feminist art history, and, as more 'lost' female artists are uncovered, will always demand further research.

This thesis demonstrates Moss's consistent presence in the histories to which she belongs. Far from being a peripheral figure, Moss is reframed as a protagonist. This act alone precipitates a destabilising, and reactivating, of familiar discourses: Constructivism, Modernism etc. When examined through the various lenses of this research: contemporary critical reception; biographical narrative; feminist, gender and Queer Theory; modern European and British art history; and close empirical examination of her work; rather than fragmenting into a chimera, Moss solidifies in form to the extent she effects a rupture. There is perhaps a temptation to conclude this thesis by presenting a unified view of Moss's achievement, such that her oeuvre is actively recuperated as an embodiment of her transgendered position. This however is reductive and inadequate. Moss disturbs all the structures that surround her, and in doing so reveals histories as mythological narratives.

⁴ Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', Women, Art and Power and Other Essays, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, pp.145-178.

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