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# 'This tumult in the clouds'

## CRW Nevinson and the development of the 'airscape'

Michael JK Walsh

### Introduction

CRW Nevinson (Pl 1), England's only Futurist of the pre-war London avant-garde, and son of the celebrated war correspondent HW Nevinson, was the obvious artist to take to the skies at the dawn of the aviation era. His modernist theories and visual vocabulary seemed very logical for, and very capable of, exploring the emergent *genre* of 'airscape'.<sup>1</sup> As he succumbed to this irresistible temptation, which both caught the eye and gripped the imagination, Nevinson also comprehended the inevitable duality that, if the impact of flight on warfare was going to be considerable, then so too was the epiphany of introducing aviation to the modern artist. The sky – previously, the domain of the mythological Icarus (who ironically epitomised the folly of man's attempt to fly), or the realm of the visionary imagination of Leonardo – had only ever been observed from below, and never truly experienced, let alone depicted. Its transience, moods and symbolism had been studied in relation to definitive horizons and from a terrestrial perspective, and through this relationship had become a vital facet of the landscape tradition. But now this infinite and dimensionless realm was becoming the home of the new pioneer who ventured *into* the sky, led by men such as the Wright brothers in North Carolina and Bleriot, who crossed the channel in the same year as the first Futurist manifesto was published (1909). It would not be long before artists followed. Enthralled by the modernity of the subject, by the vitality of the experience and intrigued by this confounding of perspective in a three dimensional vision which challenged traditional concepts of spatial depth and motion, it was only a matter of time before the airdscape was born. The artist's adaptability and consequent ability to express unprecedented sensations in an unconventional pictorial environment where relativity was contextualized only by a vast, polycentric and characterless domain, was going to be the next great test in an ever modernising discipline. Painting as a medium would clearly have to be at its most alert to compete with the enormously popular moving images for cinema screens which were appearing in England, to say nothing of the photographic reproductions which were reproduced widely in journals and newspapers. With its inherent kinetic qualities film, it was believed, might well render two-dimensional paint on canvas, the frozen moment and the static subject, insignificant, or worse, obsolete. Painting, therefore, would have to focus on something that neither the camera nor the moving image could offer. If, as in



All the illustrations are of works by CRW Nevinson (1889-1946) unless otherwise stated)

1 CRW Nevinson in a photograph by Malcom Arbuthnot of 1917

Futurist literature, it was deemed necessary to abandon the conventional use of Homeric syntax, punctuation, adjectives and adverbs in favour of imagination, onomatopoeia, intuition and impulse, then so too the pictorial arts would have to search for a similar liberation from the legacy of Giottesque mimesis, to create an original and lucid mode of modern expression – relevant to the ultra-modern subject. But Nevinson's vision was not myopically focused solely on the immediacy of the *Zeitgeist* and the potentialities it created for art. Instead his attitude was tempered by the realisation that aviation, in the context of war, was merely the next step in a logical linear development of a conventional and time-honoured salon genre – the *style historique*. War in the air and its depiction was an evolution as opposed to a revolution but now in the context of an industrial war which had

been reduced by technology (long range shelling, machine guns and poison gas) to an un-picturesque, monochromatic and sparsely populated apocalyptic landscape. The traditional and revered heroism and sportsmanship of cavalry charge and intellectual strategy had been replaced by cold-blooded and pictorially vacuous mass murder in an impersonal conflict where the combatant did not see, let alone confront, his enemy. In the air, however, was one last preserve of chivalry, nobility and possibly even romance – a last bastion of the picturesque for the military artist. In this theatre of war the concept of the duel survived, extolling honour between foes and a *sang froid* amongst a social elite who compared the hunt to those with which their class would have been familiar in the peace-time shires. It was, in short, a fair conflict in which the best man would win – and ultimately 'lose' – within a three week period (a pilot's life expectancy in 1917 on the Western Front) and therefore the perfect artistic, philosophical, modernist, romantic and homo-social environment for a young and rebellious Futurist artist such as CRW Nevinson.

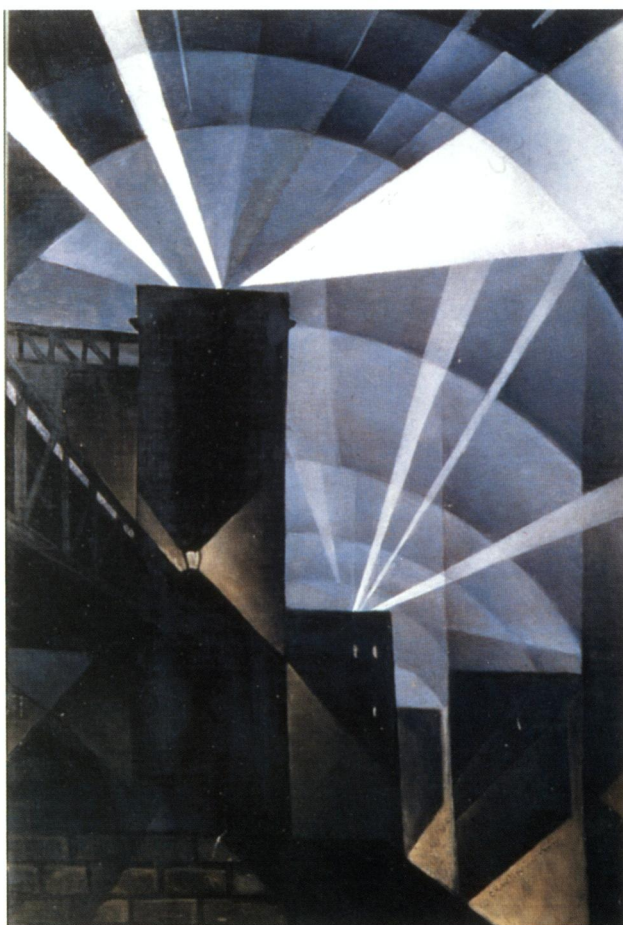
### At the outbreak of war

In 1913, following graduation from the Slade School of Art and a brief Parisian sojourn, Nevinson became a close friend of the Italian Futurist Gino Severini. The latter had been interested in aviation from 1910<sup>2</sup> though didn't actually manage to get into the skies until 1913 when he was 'taken up' by flight pioneer Jean Bielovucic who instilled in the young Italian the desire to be a 'celestial chauffeur'.<sup>3</sup> This was also the year that he and Nevinson met, and so it seems very probable that this infectious enthusiasm was transferred to the Englishman by the Italian, who gushed enthusiastically

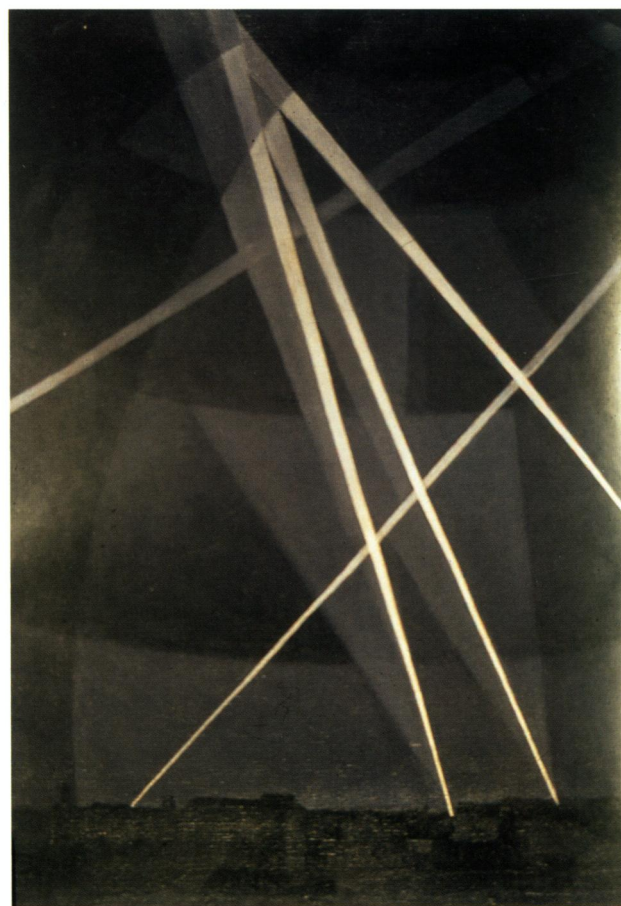
We choose to concentrate our attention on things in motion because our modern sensibility is particularly qualified to grasp the idea of speed. Heavy powerful motor cars rushing through the crowded streets of our cities, dancers reflected in the fairy ambience of light and colour, aeroplanes above the heads of the excited throng.<sup>4</sup>

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His book *CRW Nevinson: This Cult of Violence* was published by Yale University Press in 2002



2 *Searchlights (First searchlights at Charing Cross)*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 60.9 x 40.6 cm. Leeds Museums and Galleries



3 *Searchlights*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 76.4 x 56 cm. Manchester City Art Gallery

Subsequently, the first (and only) pre-war air subject that Nevinson produced and exhibited in 1914 (but which has long since disappeared into history) was called *Aeroplane* [sic]. Futurist at least for its onomatopoeic title and its unconventional media of wood carving and painting, it echoed the literary and musical rupture that the Futurist *conferenze* were bringing simultaneously to an increasingly outraged London. As the year progressed, however, Futurism and the other extremes of the avant-garde, were seen only as the ultimate in exotica and society chic, and had, as such, run themselves into a terminal *cul-de-sac*. As European storm clouds gathered, Nevinson's love of the modern (both in art and life), his awe of the industrial, his obsession with the urban and his theoretical association with all the basic philosophical Marinettian tenets, meant that when war eventually arrived the same summer he was ready for it and happy to escort Futurism to it to receive its life-saving boost. He proclaimed, 'This war will have a violent incentive to Futurism, for we believe that there is no beauty except in strife, no masterpiece without aggressiveness.'<sup>5</sup> These words still strongly echoed the initial Futurist dictum that 'Art can be nothing but violence, cruelty and injustice'<sup>6</sup> and suggested that the energy, vitality, dynamism and modernity of Futurism could now be brought to the Front with enthusiasm and optimism to embrace a subject matter tailor-made for this Futurist hour. Though he did not share the essential idea that war was the world's only hygiene, he nevertheless donned uniform in the service of the Red Cross and made his way with the Friends Ambulance Unit to the Ypres Salient where he saw the immediate aftermath of the Marne and Aisne campaigns.<sup>7</sup> Though he undoubtedly revelled in both the modernity and majesty of the world's

first industrial war, he would simultaneously have recoiled in horror at the resultant carnage it produced. It was therefore with great melancholy that he painted his first war-related aviation theme, *A Taube*,<sup>8</sup> in which a child was depicted, lying dead on a street in Dunkirk after an air-raid. But such subject-matter was only one element of air war, an inevitable and unpalatable consequence of aerial conflict, and not one which he wished to dwell upon again. Instead, perhaps even before his departure for Belgium, his eyes would have been lured heavenward by the arrival of Zeppelins and Gothas over the city of London, and attracted to the searchlights with their dramatic sweeping searches of the night sky. This relationship between man and machine, within the aesthetic context of a paradoxically harmonious 'nightscape', would have captured Nevinson's imagination as he observed, in awe, the full beauty and terror of modern war brought to the heart of the metropolis.

Compositions resulted, and so at the Friday Club exhibition in February 1915, he cautiously unveiled the first of these experiments entitled *Searchlights* (or *First searchlights at Charing Cross*) (Pl 2).<sup>9</sup> Here was a depiction from Hungerford Bridge of such a night scene, boasting a quasi-Futurist geometric design of rectangles, triangles and arcs of light which intersected across the surface of the canvas, fragmenting the picture plane, and in so doing creating a metaphorical equivalent for destruction in both art and life. Devoid of conventional narrative and utterly lacking in human presence or natural forms, the viewer focused on the impersonal modernity of industrialised war in a Futurist vision which was both immediate and undeniable. Perhaps surprisingly its critical reception was, on the whole, favourable. The *Evening News* described it as a 'rational



arrangement of cubes and rules and T squares, and most convincing<sup>10</sup> and even Nevinson's bitter rival, Wyndham Lewis, complimented the originality and success of the work declaring 'Mr Nevinson's *Searchlights* is perhaps the best he has painted.'<sup>11</sup> The war in Nevinson's hands, it was felt, had changed only the direction and pace of the pre-war avant-garde, but left the vitality and dynamism intact which, when coupled with the energy and daring of modern war in the air, combined to make an interesting and welcome twist in the modernist experiment. Later, in a thematically similar composition entitled *Searchlights* (Pl 3), Nevinson allowed himself to step back from the ultra modernist depiction to immerse himself and his vision in a more lyrical and harmonious representation of the sweeping bands of brilliant, almost luminous, white light which cut through the night air above London during a blackout. The painting displayed an ironic tranquillity which veteran fighters pilots, such as Cecil Lewis talked of, between hunter and hunted, in the night sky

I had entered a new enchanted land...a feeling of amazement gripped me, that I, alone, in a frail contrivance, should have been given such keys to the paths of heaven, should have found my way to this undreamed-of paradise of night.<sup>12</sup>

Nevinson had depicted this scene, not as a rebel Futurist à la Carra and Boccioni, but as Whistler in one of his Nocturnes might have done, choosing only to emphasise the 'graceful, groping intersection of searchlight beams.'<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, both writer and artist concentrated on the entrancing physical beauty which camouflaged the murderous intent of those in the skies above London, tantalisingly suggesting the dichotomy of tranquillity and panic, chivalry and mutilation, freedom and isolation, and of a closeness (literally and metaphorically) to heaven.<sup>14</sup> Other more conventional artists, such as TB Meteyard and Gordon Crosby placed their emphasis on producing epic canvases of flaming zeppelins plunging to their doom on the surface of the earth beneath – a fair and just fate for scoundrels who would perform this barbarous act over a civilised country, and a psychological bandage for those in the public whose sense of decency had been outraged.

Nevinson sought no such sentimental prop and used only the stimulus of the scene to inspire impressive, yet stylistically and theoretically diverse paintings. He longed, however, actively to depict the true Futurist glorification of the modern machine, the daring pioneer, the noise and smell of mechanical speed and the cacophonous nature of war in the air. Precipitated from this desire came *A Taube pursued by Commander Samson* (Pl 4) which was hailed by the critics as an absolute triumph. The subject-matter of Charles R Samson would have been irresistible, as his exploits had already taken him to many theatres of operations, including Ypres, Egypt, Gallipoli, and the Red Sea (it was reported that the Germans even had a reward for him, dead or alive, of £500). Nevinson's composition itself was as eye-catching as its subject matter, balanced precariously between a visually precise depiction, and an abstract representation of speed, force and motion, in an overall composition which stunned critics could describe only as 'cinematographic'. Even the sky itself, previously a source of solace for the soldiers on the Western Front, was reduced by Nevinson to yet another angular, hostile and unwelcoming facet of nature. Stripped of romantic associations, devoid of traditional symbol and metaphor and representing neither night nor day, twilight nor sunrise, it offered neither sanctuary nor rejuvenation for the combatants who toiled beneath, or in it. This philosophical and metaphorical realism in which nature, humanity and machinery were depicted in the same impersonal way, re-appeared in *Before the storm* and more



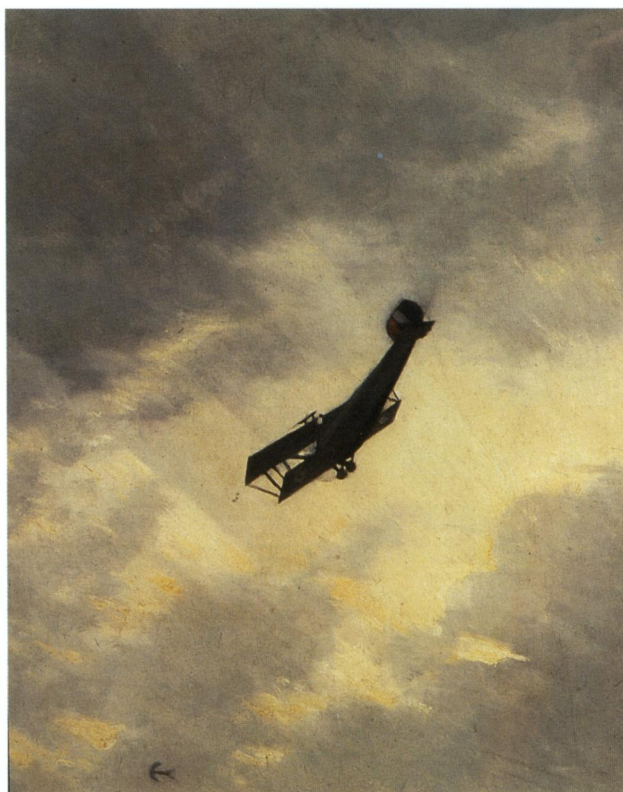
4 *A Taube pursued by Commander Samson*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 85.7 x 49.5 cm. Hendon Royal Air Force Museum, London

famously in the widely reproduced *La Mitrailleuse*. Critic PG Konody wrote, 'It is inconceivable that anything like it could have been expressed by any other means,' and went on to say, 'It is not too much to say, that never before has flight been expressed in paint so convincingly, so clearly.'<sup>15</sup> The *Sunday Times* reported

If all Futurists gave us such beauty of colour and conveyed movement with such imaginative power as Mr. Nevinson shows us in these aeroplanes rushing through space, we should have no quarrel with them.<sup>16</sup>

The *Evening Standard* commented that his work was treated with 'a force, a convincingness, that no realistic snapshot could equal... It is the best flying picture that has yet been done.'<sup>17</sup> Charles Marriott also singled out this painting for specific praise, noting how Futurism was an excellent vocabulary for depicting 'a very convincing impression of a stern chase' capturing the essence of the scene in a way which 'no realistic snapshot could equal'.<sup>18</sup> Nevinson's vision was therefore perceived as vital, successfully establishing a balance between literal representation and the abstract language of the modernist experience/experiment, now in the employ of aviation, art and war.<sup>19</sup> It was clear, modern war was being fought by the modern warrior and depicted by the only modern artist worthy of the commission. Little wonder Campbell Dodgson wrote, 'Any people who look at these drawings a century hence may feel that they are wiser than we, and yet that we had the best of it – we and not they had the visions of the prime.'<sup>20</sup>

Nevinson, on his return from the Front in 1915, had spoken enthusiastically to the young British painters to



5 *Swooping down on a hostile plane*, 1917. Pastel, 48.3 x 32.4 cm. Private collection

whom the future of art, in his opinion, belonged.

I am firmly convinced that all artists should enlist and go to the front, no matter how little they owe England for her contempt of modern art, but to strengthen their art of physical and moral courage and a fearless desire of adventure, risk and daring.<sup>21</sup>

By 1917 however, discharged twice from active service for health reasons, and intending to 'sit out' the rest of the war, he now faced the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Act, which might have forced him back into the ranks. Tactfully, therefore, using one of his aviation pieces as a pawn in an artistically astute chess game, he gifted *Swooping down on a hostile plane* (Pl 5) to the National War Museum (later the Imperial War Museum) and at the same time wrote to the head of the Information Bureau, CFG Masterman,<sup>22</sup> to advance his own suggestion for putting his talents to better use in the overall war effort than simply filling a gap 'in the line'. Before long, using his father's influential contacts and his own celebrity, he was offered an unpaid position in the swelling ranks of Official War Artists and this gave him comparatively free range to travel around the front lines, and finally to take to the skies – something a conscripted soldier could never have hoped for. Christopher Neve commented on the sensible, and reciprocal, nature of this decision by saying

To put an artist with some ideas absorbed from Marinetti and Severini up in the air at just such a moment in the development of English painting, as well as of war in the air, was an inspired stroke on the part of the Ministry of Information.<sup>23</sup>

Notoriously averse to armchair journalism and absenteeism, Nevinson was finally, fully, participating in the air war and focusing his art on representing the experience felt, as opposed to that seen or imagined. Flying practice with Sir Sefton Branker<sup>24</sup> (who was later to be killed in the R101 disaster) were organised at Hendon and the young artist was

also given permission to take to the London skies in a hot-air balloon, a feat which would be repeated at the Front in the months to come, and again two decades later in the Second World War. Before he was actually sent to the Front, he started some more workmanlike compositions on the making and flying of aircraft throughout Britain for the *Aims and Ideals of War* series; though this was a pragmatic and utilitarian exercise in propaganda as opposed to any great avant-garde statement.<sup>25</sup>

Nevinson's request to go to France by plane was denied and so on 5 July he left by more conventional means to replace George Bernard Shaw at the press centre at the Chateau d'Harcourt near Caen. In the month that he was billeted in the Somme region he took to the skies in a variety of craft and from these adventures came many of the 'Nevinsonian' tales for which he was to become [in]famous. One story from his autobiography related how he went up in a balloon at St Nicholas (near Arras) with Richmond Temple<sup>26</sup> to monitor the changing positions of the German guns, best done in the dark due to the flashes. While listening to the terrestrial sounds rising to the basket and playing as 'an orchestra of the wildest modernism'<sup>27</sup> Nevinson realized that his aerial perspective afforded new opportunities in sound as well as sight. His thoughts may even have drifted back to the Futurist noise concerts with which he had been loosely associated and which had caused such a sensation in London prior to the conflict, though his nostalgic reminiscences would have been short lived when the balloon was attacked by a German aeroplane. In the end, the attack passed off without serious incident but Nevinson (never one to play down a good story) told the *New York Times* that, although terrified and sitting on the edge of the basket awaiting the order to jump, he had never stopped sketching.<sup>28</sup> John Quinn, in a letter to Wyndham Lewis, called the article 'nauseating', and went on to say, 'Nevinson's vanity was really bad taste.'<sup>29</sup> Another story, or perhaps an elaboration of the same one, found him crash landing in a tree, presumably after a parachute descent, where he hung 'like a fly in a spiders web until dark [when] I was able to cut myself free'.<sup>30</sup> Nevinson clearly liked the self-image of aviator as the natural successor to that of the rebel and Futurist.

Ironically, however, at precisely the moment in which Nevinson could have pushed war painting to its logical modernist limit, he seemed to shy away from it and began to favour an illustrative/realist convention. In this new conservatism, technique was subordinated to a secondary role, behind narrative function, and the result was pictorially accurate records of events in the Great War, as opposed to intellectually challenging and artistic interpretations of the same. Perhaps, using this *reportage*, he was trying to curry favour, by anticipating the conservative tastes of the government officials who could safeguard, or terminate, his post as Official Artist. Or perhaps he felt that the subject-matter was simply too important (and inherently dynamic in itself) to risk alienating the viewer with an incomprehensible medium. This moderation, or perhaps restraint, became his hallmark and the key to his vast popular success, and was applauded by Konody

He is a firm believer in the theories of Futurism as expounded by Boccioni and his Italian followers... But unlike the Italians, who are getting ever more abstract and incomprehensible, Mr. Nevinson applies himself to finding a compromise between the Futurist ideal and the normal vision.<sup>31</sup>

Aviation and modernism had also become a possible medium for self promotion and so in the lead up to Nevinson's highly publicized 1918 exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in



London he wrote to Masterman suggesting, 'If I could fly over London on the opening morning of my show chucking out handbills on the heads of "men in the street" this would start great publicity in the press.'<sup>32</sup> The idea was declined by Masterman and so he turned to Robert Ross suggesting a new direction away from flying altogether, and following Edward Wadsworth into the docks to work on the 'dazzle painting' project for ships. He wrote 'I wish someday I might have permission to paint a huge works up north. I paint that type of thing with far greater enthusiasm than these eternal aeroplanes.'<sup>33</sup> But it was not to be as, in the wake of an argument with British officials on an unrelated censorship issue,<sup>34</sup> he was commissioned to conduct another air piece for the Canadian government and was sent to France again for a week. This was both disappointing and unproductive, however, as the air battle of Canadian ace WA Bishop, which he had been asked to re-create, proved too difficult. Perhaps Konody, who had commissioned the work, had been looking for something along the lines of *The last flight of Captain Albert Ball, V.C., D.S.O., 17<sup>th</sup> May, 1917* by Norman Arnold, but what he got instead was *War in the air* which the *Manchester Guardian* deemed sufficiently forgettable to relegate to the last sentence of their review, and then only to say, 'Mr Nevinson, in his large picture of an air fight, works in the ordinary convention.'<sup>35</sup>

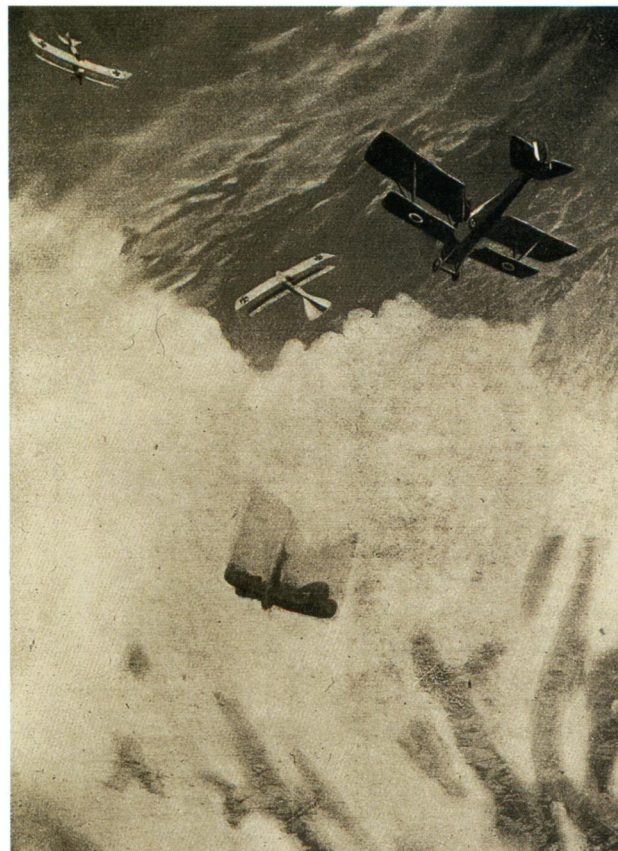
His youthful enthusiasm and artistic inspiration, at least for aviation, it was clear, had gone. In fact in France he suffered a nervous breakdown of sorts, possibly 'Flying Sickness D' (acute anxiety and depression), which necessitated an immediate return home. Although perfectly calm during flights he had experienced a trembling which led to convulsive vomiting as soon as he got back to earth. Asleep too, he would experience the sensation of falling through the air, only to wake up violently at the imagined moment of impact. This was diagnosed, rather crudely, as 'Air Nerves' and arrived in tandem with the abandonment of Nevinson's modernist experimentation with aviation subjects.

As a final expression of worth with those who might have been his harshest critics or his most avid admirers, the pilot himself expressed faith in the importance and relevance of Nevinson's depictions. When it came to publishing *Sagittarius Rising*, perhaps the most celebrated of all World War One aviation books, Cecil Lewis could think of no more appropriate artist to provide the jacket illustration than Nevinson, who gladly took the commission. With pilots, as with the soldier on the ground, Nevinson had won favour and admiration, to say nothing of notoriety, and was lauded not only as *the* modern artist of war, but the artist of *modern* war.

By the Armistice however, Nevinson was in retreat as part of the general *rappel à l'ordre* in which British art would convalesce, then slowly turn vitriolic about what just had been. Gone now was his lust for speed, his awe of pilots and his joy of combat, to make way for cynicism, remorse and a pessimistic, though pragmatic, awareness of what the potential of warfare in the air might yet be.

### From one War to the Next

In the inter-war years Nevinson wrote extensively in the British press expressing deep-rooted fears about the inevitable next war, and the role of aviation within it. He loathed the international policies of the British and French governments which were cornering Germany and forcing it to turn to National Socialism, to add to the existing problem of Fascism in Italy and Bolshevism in the Soviet Union. The British government was also publicly damned for its policies



6 *War in the Air*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 304.8 x 243.8cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

on selling arms abroad and on permitting rampant re-armament programmes to exist in absolute defiance of disarmament protocols undertaken at Versailles and Geneva. It was only a matter of time, he argued, until international ideologies would clash once again and this time the war that would come from the air would be on a titanic scale.

In his novel *Exodus Ad*, which he co-wrote with Princess Troubetzkoy in 1934, Nevinson envisaged the wholesale destruction of London by aerial gas attack from waves of bombers coming from an unidentified belligerent nation. In it, the protagonist, aptly named Richard, mourned the fallacy of inter-war policies and was driven to absolute frustration:

'And it's our own bloody fault!' Richard thought bitterly. 'We've gone on exporting planes, guns, anything; we haven't cared who assembled them, where, or how – we laughed at those who warned, who begged in the name of humanity, who foresaw – we set up the golden calf of prosperity and worshipped it.'<sup>36</sup>

Nevinson's experience of air war, of the duelling nobility and the sporting comrades-in-arms, was to be replaced now with genocidal carpet-bombing and the inhuman gassing of civilian centres. Using the words of his central figure in the novel he expressed his own macabre visions

'And did they know?' wondered Richard as his ears registered that ghastly droning, 'did they, in their flying arrogance, their purposeful planned swoop, know what resulted from their attack? Had men become so vile that they would so deal death to the helpless?'<sup>37</sup>

How appropriate that four years after the publication of the novel the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, should publicly despair, 'How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of



7 *The Twentieth Century*, 1932-35. Oil on canvas, 183.7 x 122.5 cm. Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Tyne and Wear Museums)

8 *Among London searchlights*. Oil on canvas, 61 x 45.7 cm. MacConnal-Mason

whom we know nothing.' It was not long before both he and Nevinson could watch first-hand their terrible predictions come true in the Blitz of London, Coventry and Liverpool.

In association with these terrible forebodings of the 1930s, (shared by his close friend HG Wells), Nevinson produced a series of major apocalyptic paintings, and in recently discovered preliminary sketches for *The Twentieth Century* (Pl 7) the novel and the painting came together to work in tandem. The monstrous central figure is God whom Richard attacks verbally in *Exodus AD* shortly after London has been bombed.

God, to Richard's surprise, did not wear flowing vestments nor a beard. He peered through wicked slits of a mask-like covering which protruded in a snout, hiding, to Richard's imagination, intolerable hideousness. He was almost naked, with great knotted arms hanging limply at His sides, and His hands were vast, giant-like, with clawing curved talons.<sup>38</sup>

Surrounded by destruction, by crosses and aeroplanes, and by the smoke and stench of destruction, Richard accuses God of enjoying the massacre to which he gets only a hissing sigh of greed and content. In the finished version of *The Twentieth Century* (originally with the addition to the title *The Conflict Between Human Thought and Man's Predatory Instincts*). God is replaced by Rodin's *Penseur* and the calvary is replaced with the modern industrial city, but the chaos wrought on the metropolis from the air remains.

When the second great global conflict finally arrived Nevinson, no longer an official war artist, continued to paint anyway and so in September 1942 made a gift of his newest airtape, *Battlefields of Britain*, to Winston Churchill, who immediately had it hung in the Air Council Room at the Air Ministry. Delighted with Nevinson's depiction of 'the few', and England's new-found field of honour, Churchill wrote reiterating, 'I am sure the young men who are fighting regard you as part of the England they defend.'<sup>39</sup> But by now Nevinson's belief in the glory of patriotism, the 'good-fight', and even the heroism of the aviators struggle, was dead, replaced with an all-pervading nihilism in the fate of great nations which had entered upon their newest and most shameful chapter. The despair could be felt in canvases such as *The Fire of London 1941* in which the dome of St. Paul's towered over the illuminated destruction of the inferno, while symbols of christianity, the arts and civilization, took a back seat to become helpless observers of the 'advances' of humankind. So too, in *The Thames From a Balloon*, Nevinson returned to the London sky to sit amidst the planes which brought their destructive forces to his home. It was now no longer the rogue Gotha, but the full might of Goering's *Luftwaffe*, which brought the Blitz to London and caused the frantic search in the night sky to begin once again. From his vantage point in the balloon Nevinson must have reflected on his boyish enthusiasm, pondered on his euphoria at the outset of the machine age and wept at the apocalyptic reality of global conflict catalysed by aviation. Above London, and in the midst of this aerial armada, he must have asked himself how anyone could have condoned the Futurist idea that war was the world's only hygiene, then reminisced nostalgically about a time when the sky had been the last preserve of nature and a place of sanctuary.

1 The term was coined by Frank Rutter in the *Arts Gazette* (28 June 1917).

2 He had written to Marinetti saying 'I urgently need to know whether the Society of Air pilots of Milan is a serious organization, and what conditions it offers, and what guarantees, for a person desiring a pilot's license.' See A Hanson, *Severini Futurista: 1912-1917*, London, 1935, p136.

3 MW Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory 1909-1915*, Oxford, (1968), p306.

4 G Severini, *The Painter Severini Exhibits His Latest Works*, Marlborough Gallery, London, 1913, p6.

5 *Daily Express*, 25 February 1915.

6 Cited in A Bozzola & C Tisdall, *Futurism*, London, 1977, p32.

7 For a full study of Nevinson's war, see M Walsh, *C.R.W. Nevinson: This Cult of Violence*, New Haven & London, 2002.

8 A Taube is a German monoplane, the name being derived, ironically, from the German word meaning 'Dove'.

9 The painting *Searchlights* was purchased and offered anonymously to the Tate Gallery, a gift which was declined.

10 *Evening News*, 3 March 1915).

11 *Blast 2: The War Issue*, London, 1915, p77.

12 Cited in S Sillars, *Art and Survival in First World War Britain*, London, 1987, p100.

13 C Neve, 'An Artist Over Arras' *Country Life*, 28 September 1972.

14 Five hundred and fifty-seven

civilians did not survive these night attacks as the zeppelins unloaded a total of 200 tons of high explosives on the city beneath. In comparison to the second war, where 18,000 tons of bombs fell on London killing over 51,000 people, the figures seem paltry, but there was a real and tangible fear of this unknown and unethical type of warfare at the time.

15 PG Konody, *Modern War Paintings by C.R.W. Nevinson*, London, 1917, p24.

16 F Rutter, 'Round the Galleries' *Sunday Times*, 21 March 1915.

17 JM, *Evening Standard and St. James Gazette*, 16 March 1915.

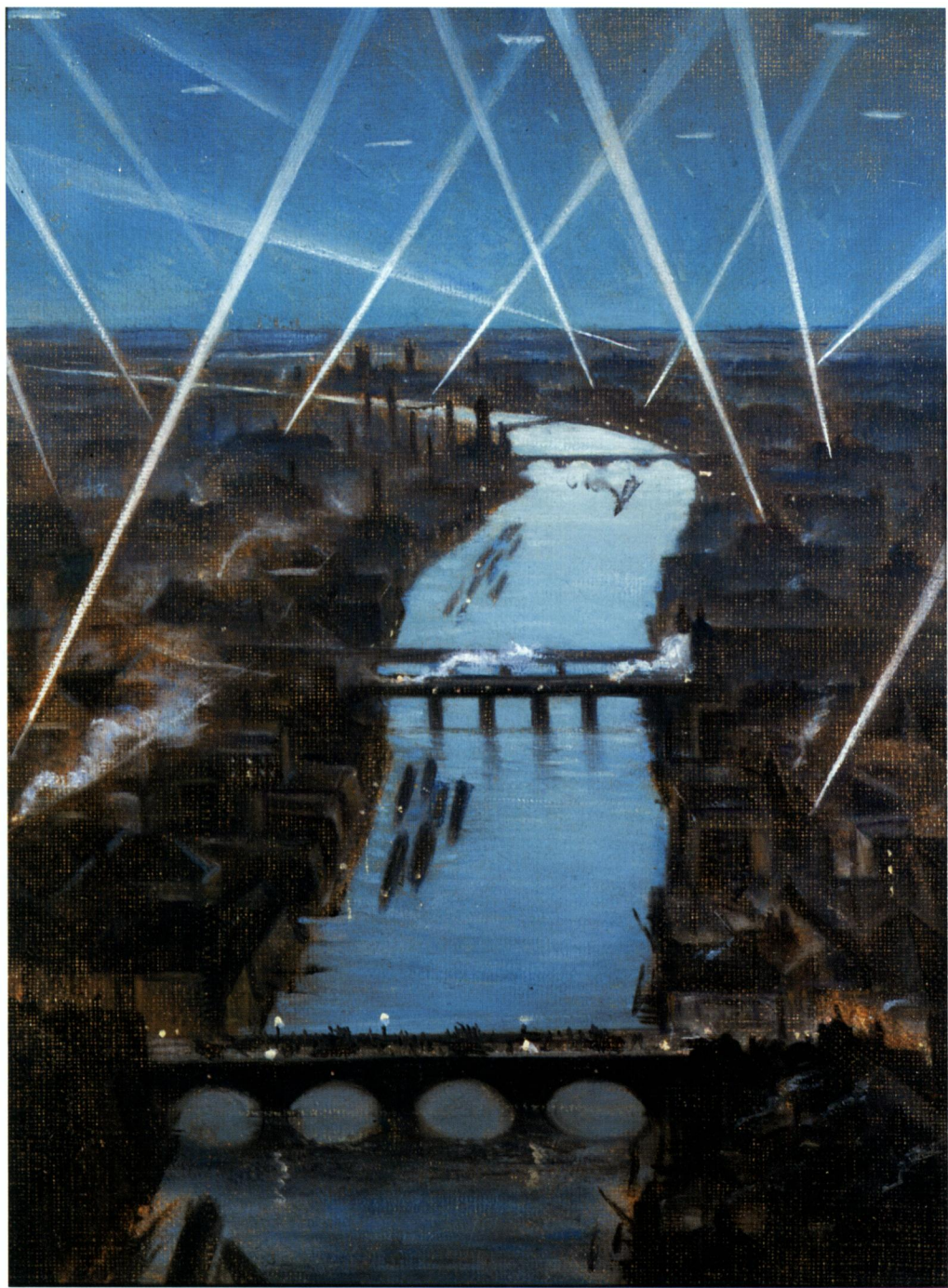
18 'The Unconscious Humorists. The Art of Coloured Stripes and Mining Tools', *Evening News*, 13 March 1915).

19 Perhaps other British artists who addressed the war in the air, such as GH Davis and Bernard Sandy missed that kinetic vitality that only an ex-Futurist could provide, while Sydney and Richard Carline were perhaps closer to Nevinson in combining modern subject-matter and modern technique. Certainly Gilbert Solomon employed an effective *pointilliste* technique to make the art of painting a unique mode of image conveyance, far in preference to the black and white photograph or the grainy images on the moving screen.

20 C Dodgson, *British Artists at the Front I*. C.R.W. Nevinson, London, 1918.

21 CRW Nevinson, 'War Notes and Queries. Comments and





- Suggestions in Brief from our readers', *Daily Graphic*, 11 March 1915).
- 22 At the outbreak of war Masterman was put in charge of the War Propaganda Bureau based at Wellington house, which was responsible, amongst other things, for appointing war artists. By February 1917 he had been given the rank of Lieutenant Colonel within the Department of Information and was pivotal in the selection of Nevinson as an official war artist.
- 23 C Neve, 'An Artist Over Arras' *Country Life*, September 1972.
- 24 Air Vice-Marshall Sir William Sefton Brancker was Deputy Director of Military Aeronautics then later Major-General of the Air Force by the end of the war. Their paths had crossed in January, 1917 when he had opened a show at the Grosvenor Galleries, organised by the Countess of Drogheda, which dealt with aviation and to which Nevinson had contributed four oil paintings.
- 25 The 'Efforts and Ideals' series was a scheme sponsored by the Department of Information, commissioning lithographs from eighteen artists. Nevinson's contribution was six lithographs collectively entitled 'Building Aircraft'. The exhibition of these works first appeared at the Fine Arts Society in July 1917, and later toured Paris, New York and Los Angeles. The idea was to emphasise the efforts being made on the home front.
- 26 Richard Temple (1893-1958) was a friend of Siegfried Sassoon. He believed that Nevinson's depictions of war were equal to the writing of Sassoon and Robert Graves, to say nothing of Henri Barbusse.
- 27 CRW Nevinson, *Paint and Prejudice*, Methuen, 1937), p137.
- 28 *New York Times*, 24 May 1919 (Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 7311. 1-14).
- 29 Quinn to Lewis, 16 June 1919. Letter Book # 21 Feb/Aug 1919 *Albert A. Berg Collection*. New York Public Library.
- 30 CRW Nevinson, 'When the Censor Censored 'Censored' *British Legion Journal*, October 1932, p115.
- 31 PG Konody, 'Art and Artists: The London Group' *Observer*, 14 March 1915).
- 32 Nevinson to Masterman, 4 January 1918. Imperial War Museum (226A/6).
- 33 Nevinson to Ross, 7 April 1918. Imperial War Museum (226A/6).
- 34 See M Walsh, 'When the Censor Censored "Censored"' *Index on Censorship*, August 2003.
- 35 *Manchester Guardian*, 6 January 1919. This painting, *War in the Air*, actually came in for a great many positive reviews, and was reproduced in *The Bystander*, as an example of the quality work on display at the exhibition.
- 36 Princess Paul Troubetzkoy & CRW Nevinson, *Exodus AD: A Warning to Civilians*, London, 1934, p112.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid, p145.
- 39 Winston Churchill to CRW Nevinson, 7 October 1942. Private Communication (Char 2/458), Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge University.