

Finding Scottish art

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Nationality and art

The relationship between nationality and art, or something like it, has been central to the history of art – scholarly or popular – whether in the minimal form of this national school or that national school, or in a more focused way as in ‘the Italian Renaissance’ or ‘French Impressionism’. The art in question is seen as directly related to a national or quasi-national set of circumstances, and indeed the art is seen as having some significant link to the nationality of those who carried it out.

A question that tends to be begged in such approaches is: what is nationality? It seems to be assumed that words like Scottish, French, English, and so on, do not require any particular analysis before one tacks them on to some body of work. This approach to nationality is often convenient but a little more must be said about the idea of a nation, for it is an easily misunderstood thing. The most common misunderstanding is that a nation is simply a culturally homogeneous group of people who share certain attitudes, traditions and habits due to long historical association within a geographical area. This idea of the nation as depending on some sort of cultural homogeneity is a strongly propagated one, not least by governments in time of war. Yet in fact, nations are intrinsically heterogeneous, and such diversity, far from being a threat to a national identity is a necessary characteristic of it. Cultural diversity is one of the things that defines a nation. Nations are identifiable as meaningful cultural units as a result of their internal cultural diversity, not as a result of an internal homogeneity. Perhaps my view here is coloured by my own experience as a Scot, for in Scotland it is very obviously impossible to make any meaningful claim of cultural homogeneity. For example, for many hundreds of years there have been three

languages spoken and two of these – what is now called Scots and what is now called Gaelic – have been spoken in some form in Scotland for at least a millennium, while the third – what is now called English – has been in wide use since the seventeenth century.

Thus, even when considered without reference to twentieth-century immigration from Europe and the British Empire, Scotland has historically and presently an overtly diverse cultural identity. Regardless of what language or languages are spoken at present, most Scots are aware of the linguistic diversity of their own backgrounds. A working-class woman from a post-industrial Ayrshire steel town whose first language is Scots may share with a middle-class man born in Edinburgh whose first language is English the fact that each has a great-grandparent who was a native Gaelic speaker. This shows the degree of threat to that particular language, but it also shows how small the historical distance to Gaelic culture is among many people who might be thought to have no link to it whatever. This is the context for the present widespread support for Gaelic studies across Scotland, and the related interest in the products of that culture which range from the *Book of Kells* (c. 800) to the art of Will Maclean (b. 1941). This support is thus engaged rather than nostalgic.

An interesting example of the cultural diversity that characterises Scotland is the ‘division’ between Highland Gaelic culture and Lowland Scots culture. This is very often seen as a site of conflict rather than unity in Scotland, and certainly on occasion it has been. Yet it can be recalled that it was the unity of Highland and Lowland that assured a Bruce victory at Bannockburn in the fourteenth century and thus asserted Scottish independence after three hundred years of varied incursions from south of the Border. The point is that Bannockburn, far from asserting the nation as culturally homogeneous, asserted national independence as dependent on cultural diversity. Similarly, and moving on over four hundred years, although the Battle of Culloden is normally stereotyped as a Highland versus Lowland clash in fact – as Murray Pittock (1995) has pointed out – Jacobites were drawn from both Highlands and Lowlands in substantial numbers, as were Hanoverian supporters. Again, what characterised both sides in this struggle was diversity not homogeneity. Although very obvious, these points have to be made because the stereotype of nations as homogeneous unities is so prevalent and yet so wrong, and one cannot start any useful study of how a nation relates to art, literature or whatever, without understanding that it is an intrinsically diverse thing.

But surely a nation has some cultural uniqueness? If so, what can this be if a nation lacks what would at first sight seem to be the key, namely homogeneity? The answer to this is quite simple. A nation's uniqueness, its national quality if you like, derives from the fact that the combination of cultural aspects which make it up is indeed unique (if not in principle, at least in practice). One can note that these cultural aspects themselves might be unique but are much more likely to be shared with other nations. For example, Scotland shares many cultural aspects with Ireland, many others with England, others still with Norway, France and the Netherlands. But the way these aspects combine in Scotland is unique to Scotland, and is mediated and transformed by further aspects such as geography. A nation is thus somewhat like a person. Each person shares a great deal with others, but in practice personalities – like nations – are unique. But this uniqueness claim is an assertion of a unique diversity, not an insistence on a unique homogeneity.

Stereotypes and Scottish art

By applying this idea of diversity to a particular area of activity such as art, one can see that it is only by appreciating an interplay of different currents that one can appreciate the Scottishness of Scottish art. While one can give some of these traditions names like classicism and Celticism, the first thing to note about such an approach is that the Scottishness of Scottish art is a consequence of the combinations involved, not merely a matter of content. This is an obvious point but it illuminates the inadequacy of the view that a painting can be thought of as Scottish only if it has an overtly Scottish content, or that architecture can be thought of as distinctively Scottish only if it makes some kind of Scots-Baronial reference. Such impoverished ideas of 'national art' as by definition stereotyped and inward-looking are odd to say the least. They have, however, bedevilled the perception of Scottish art. Such stereotyping is a method of concealing cultural realities, but at the same time creating a powerful imagery that seems to reflect that culture. What is wrong with stereotypes is not that they exist (indeed they normally correspond to some aspect of reality), but that they are selective and inflexible, that is to say they fail to reflect the plural nature of any culture. A particularly interesting example of stereotyping with respect to Scottish art is the over-use of the painting by Sir Henry Raeburn of *Colonel Alastair Macdonell of Glengarry*. This is one of the images that has stood in for the wider body of Scottish art for many years. It is an interesting picture in

its own right, but one rarely has the opportunity to consider it as such. Usually it is simply used as a stereotypical shorthand for the idea of Scottish art, for example as a cover illustration. It was used in this way for Sir James Caw's guide to the National Gallery of Scotland published in 1927. Again one finds it used for the cover of the book published by the National Galleries of Scotland in 1990 to accompany the *Scotland's Pictures* exhibition. Well-written and well-illustrated, this latter book contained over a hundred full-colour illustrations. Perhaps three or four of these showed a person dressed in tartan. And yet the work taken to be representative of Scottish painting for the cover was one of those tartan images. I have nothing against tartan, but such a choice of cover image opens the way for a stereotype to dominate a tradition of art. Journalists talk about 'putting a kilt on an issue' when giving it a Scottish perspective. Here we see this literally in the case of Scottish art. The cover invites us to find Scottish art, if we can, within the stereotype, when we should really be doing the reverse, exploring stereotypical imagery within the broader context of Scottish art.

That relationship between cover and book is a metaphor for the relationship between stereotype and reality in Scottish culture. *Scotland's Paintings* reflected with considerable insight the real history of Scottish painting, but the cover subsumed that reality within a stereotype. As one might expect such stereotyping is just as evident in guidebooks. A particularly good example is the Jarrold Regional Guide to *Art in Scotland* published in 1980. Despite being a seriously written guide, its front cover illustration is *The Monarch of the Glen* by Landseer. Here that other stereotype of Scotland, the red deer in a deserted landscape, is employed. The fact that the landscape may be deserted because it has been cleared of people in favour of sporting interests, is not part of the painting's message. Because Landseer is an English artist the use of *The Monarch of the Glen* might seem to give the additional message that Scottish art is so unthinkable as to be not even worth reproducing on the cover. But the key issue is stereotyping, not the nationality of the artist. A Scottish work by the German artist Joseph Beuys or by the English artist John Latham would have challenged the stereotype nicely, but despite the fact that one could argue that Joseph Beuys has just as much relevance to Scotland as does Edwin Landseer, such approaches are notable by their absence in literature relating to Scottish art. One suspects that work by the English painter J. M. W. Turner of Scottish subjects is largely neglected because it does not conform to the antlers and tartan stereotype.¹ To consider Turner's work as appropriate to the representation of

Scotland would be to threaten the stereotype. Displacing *The Monarch of the Glen* in favour of such thoughtful explorations of topography and culture would risk forcing consideration of images of Scotland into the range of the modern and the thinkable.

Scottish art and the English model

It is equally interesting to consider how a Scottish artist or architect is considered when no stereotypical interpretation can be put on his work. For example, Nicolaus Pevsner in his book *The Englishness of English Art* (1956) seems determined to appropriate them to 'Englishness'. He considered it necessary for his argument that Robert Adam be assimilated into his idea of Englishness. But he knew that Adam was a Scot, so he suggested that for the purposes of his book, in the case of Adam, 'no distinction can be made between Scottish and English qualities' (125). This is convenient but not entirely convincing. Perhaps the real point that underlies Pevsner's argument is not so much that there is no distinction between Adam's Scottish and English qualities (whatever they may be) but that in much of his work he is developing a classical tradition shared throughout Europe. So Pevsner's underlying argument seems to be that because of Adam's Europeanness one can ignore his Scottishness and appropriate him as part of the Englishness of English art. But, of course, if one looks more closely at what was interesting to Scots at the time of Adam – both within Scotland and abroad – it was indeed the classical tradition not just in architecture but in all fields, not least mathematics and philosophy. The fact that most of the philosophers who could be called British at that time were Scottish (or, in the case of Berkeley, Irish) simply underlines this fact. One could argue just as Pevsner does for Adam's architecture that 'no distinction can be made between Scottish and English qualities' in Hume's philosophy. But – even if one held that position – it would be prudent to take note of the fact that during the period of the Scottish Enlightenment there was a great deal of philosophy of consequence written in Scotland and at the same time a distinct lull in the contribution to philosophy from England. The point here is that both Adam and Hume were part of this Scottish intellectual culture. It is no coincidence that the pioneer of European neo-classical painting in the time of Adam was another Scot, Gavin Hamilton.

Must this mean that Adam, by virtue of being an part of a Scottish intelligentsia (which Pevsner does not so much deny as side-step), cannot be part of the English tradition? Well, no it does not mean that,

but the point is that Adam is part of the English tradition in the same way as Hume is part of it, or Berkeley is part of it, or indeed Nikolaus Pevsner himself or, for that matter, Wittgenstein is part of it. He is not part of the English tradition in the same way as, for example, Wren or Hawksmoor or Locke or Newton are. Adam may be an influential part of that tradition, but he does not himself find his origins within it, and that is the distinction which must be made if one is to understand the manner in which the Scottish and English traditions co-exist. At least, in the case of Adam, Pevsner acknowledges his Scottishness, even if he claims that it does not matter for his argument. By comparison one finds Pevsner absorbing Colen Campbell fully into the English tradition without further comment, although the comment that is made makes clear that he pioneered Palladianism in England in the early eighteenth century (1956: 113). He is thus presented, by default, as an architect entirely in the English tradition, which conflicts with the fact that (in a British context) he helped to pioneer Palladianism not in England but in Scotland along with William Bruce and James Smith. He did, of course, then work in England and there is no doubt that he considered himself part of the English tradition, but the fact that he was a Scottish architect does at least seem worth acknowledging.²

To do that, however, would be to threaten Pevsner's intriguing justification of 'English' Palladianism. He begins by noting that a 'connexion between the middle class as a carrier of rationalism and the Palladian style in England seems less convincing at first' (113). He then goes on, however, to imply that rationalism and reasonableness are the same thing and that the English have always been characterised by reasonableness so therefore the rationalism of the Palladian approach makes sense with respect to the Englishness of English art. Any Scot, or indeed any Italian or Frenchman, could have told Pevsner (as he could, no doubt, on reflection have told himself) that the rationalism of Palladianism is concerned with returning to first principles of proportion, which is to say, it is a radical architectural doctrine which if one were to transpose it to society would be more likely to herald revolution than the middle-class reasonableness with which Pevsner attempts to associate it. The Scottish artist Ian Hamilton Finlay puts it this way: 'In the foreground of every revolution, invisible, it seems, to the academics, stands a perfect classical column' (quoted in Abrioux 1992: 224). One might argue against this that the return to first principles could as easily take one to a consideration of balance within society rather than revolution. Again, however, this cannot be associated with the reasonableness Pevsner

invokes for this is clearly concerned with pragmatic compromise rather than a rational scheme of social organisation. One can note that this reflects the difference in principle between English and Scots law, the former based on custom and convention, the latter closer in its origins to the legal rationalisations of ancient Rome.

If one makes such acknowledgement what begins to emerge is that Scottish architects (and James Gibbs is yet another example) were disproportionately influential on the English tradition during the eighteenth century, just as were Scottish philosophers. From a Scottish or genuinely British perspective this is interesting, but such a perspective is at variance with Pevsner's absorption into the English tradition of these pioneers who came from a different cultural and intellectual background. With respect to art and architecture, Pevsner's view seems to parallel that held by T. S. Eliot with respect to literature. In Cairns Craig's words, Eliot identifies the fact that 'the real function of Scottish, Irish and Welsh writers is to contribute, not to their own culture, which will not have "a direct impact on the world", but towards the tradition of English literature' (1996b: 16). Craig has described this phenomenon as a state of being 'out of history'. Arguments against Scottish independence are often couched in similar language. If Scotland were separated from England, Scotland would no longer be able to have a direct impact on the world, due to the loss of the association with the greater power of the sister nation. Militarily this is no doubt true, but few Scots would mourn Trident. Culturally, the fact that the British literary establishment never thought of Sorley MacLean as a writer who merited backing for the Nobel prize for literature puts a different complexion on such arguments.

The Englishness of British art

The problem of mislaying cultural identity when Scottish material is diffused into an English model has been illustrated. The problem is no less when ostensibly 'British' models are used.

In 1996 the British Broadcasting Corporation showed a series of programmes entitled *A History of British Art*. This series (British both in terms of its title and its commissioning body) provides an interesting example of the problematic use of the word 'British' with respect to Scottish culture. Consider the following: in the introduction to the book which accompanied the series (reprinted in 1999 as a handsome large-format paperback), the author, Andrew Graham-Dixon, writes of his disappointment with the negative attitudes expressed in an earlier book

called *Art in England*, published in 1938, and goes on to say that this approach 'seemed to sum up the spirit in which the British have historically treated British art' (1999: 9). Already, only a few paragraphs into the book, Britain and England risk being conflated. In the introduction he mentions three books – two in his view bad, one good. Along with the one already noted these books are *The Englishness of English Art*, and *England's Iconoclasts*. Thus, the key examples for defining attitudes to British art, positive or negative, are primarily concerned with English art. Linked to this he notes that the negative views expressed about English art in the works he refers to are mirrored elsewhere in Britain.

Writing, as I am, from a Scottish perspective, this is confusing. For example, in 1938 – the same year that the first book on English art referred to was published – John Tonge's book on Scottish art was published to accompany a major exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. That book can hardly be considered a negative view of Scottish art. Furthermore, three other histories of Scottish art (Cursiter 1949; Finlay 1947, 1948) were written between that date and 1956, when the other book on English art which is criticised, ironically enough in the light of my argument above, Pevsner's *The Englishness of English Art*, was published. Reading this introduction it is as though such publications about Scottish art had never happened, let alone the publication of full-length histories of Scottish painting in 1889, 1906 and 1908, not to mention the numerous works published since 1956.³ These works are all devoted to giving Scottish art its due, and – while each author has different enthusiasms and opinions – can hardly be thought of as reflecting 'an air of abjectness and a consciousness of failure' to quote again from Andrew Graham-Dixon. Indeed as early as 1889 Robert Brydall was referring to Scottish art's 'pre-eminence'.⁴ In the light of the international recognition of the Glasgow School of painters in the 1880s one can see what he meant; however, the point here is not to defend Brydall's statement but simply to note that it seems to belong to a different discourse from that of *A History of British Art*.⁵ That may be summed up by noting that out of well over 200 works discussed in these programmes, less than three percent were by Scottish artists. Yet despite this emphasis in his programmes Graham-Dixon in his introduction explicitly extends the notion of 'abjectness and consciousness of failure' to 'Britain as a whole' (1999: 9). Although he has a clear interest in work from outside England, it is clear very early on that the paradigm of Britishness that he adopts is Englishness.

Note that these criticisms of *A History of British Art* stem from one word in the title. The programmes were interesting in their own right,

they just were not about British art, unless one is prepared to accept that 'British' means 'English with a few references to other countries within, or once within, the UK'. Why was the series not called *A History of English Art*? This is a puzzle. Such a title certainly would not have prevented reference to influences on, or illumination of, English art from elsewhere in Britain and the rest of Europe.

But at least Scottish artists were mentioned in this series. Common also is the practice of not mentioning Scottish art at all in 'British' accounts. The Tate Gallery in London, for example, in the late 1990s had a room full of interesting early twentieth-century works by Epstein, Bomberg and painters associated with the Bloomsbury group. It was entitled something like 'Early British Modernism'. Again, as with *A History of British Art*, it was not uninteresting, it was merely misnamed. It is something of an irony that both Charles Rennie Mackintosh and J. D. Fergusson were both working within walking distance of the Tate Gallery during the period to which this display referred. The point is not to insist on quotas, but to suggest that understanding what words mean is appropriate in this sort of context. Every misuse of the word 'British' strengthens a redefinition of the word that excludes Scotland, and as a consequence Scottish art and Scottish culture in general may find the need to find themselves elsewhere.

Approaching the unthinkable

In 1906 one explanation of the problem of finding Scottish art within British accounts was suggested by W. D. McKay in *The Scottish School of Painting*. McKay states the obvious but essential when he notes the following: 'when, as in this case, one population far outnumbers the other, the less numerous is apt to be forgotten, or regarded as merely a sub-division of the larger' (1906: 1) A gloss on this was made by Hugh MacDiarmid half a century later in his 1950 essay *Aesthetics in Scotland*. There he wrote of the exhibition already noted, *The Arts of Scotland*, held in London just before the Second World War: 'It will be remembered that Sir William Llewellyn, the then President of the Royal Academy, confessed that he had had no idea before he saw that exhibition that Scotland had such a rich and distinctive tradition of its own in the art of painting' (1984 [1950]: 21). As recently as 1990, surprised comment could be heard in reaction to the publication of Duncan Macmillan's landmark book *Scottish Art: 1460-1990*. Such surprise is an index of cultural misrepresentation. It is related to a wider ignorance of Scottish history both

within Scotland and further afield. The growth in research and teaching of Scottish history, including that of the history of Scottish art, as a tradition in its own right rather than as a sub-discipline of British history has begun to alter this situation.

There is thus at present a conscious redefining and refining of the relationship between Scottishness and Britishness. In 1969 the philosopher George Davie noted that when a writer 'proclaimed that modern Scotland was unthinkable apart from the union, he betrayed a point of view that takes for granted that modern Scotland does not bear thinking of at all.' (1990b: 38)⁶ This comment can illuminate the present position. The idea that Scotland has been through a period in which a significant number of opinion formers did not consider it worth thinking about, apart from the Union, is an interesting one. In such a view Britain as an entity in its own right can be thought about, but Scotland as an entity in its own right can not. What Davie suggests is that this makes the reality of modern Scotland in any sense 'unthinkable' to such a commentator. Such 'unthinkability' is an example of what in a psychoanalyst would call 'denial', that is to say the insistence on the untruth of a particular truth: protesting too much at an unconscious or almost unconscious level, so to speak. To claim that Scotland is unthinkable apart from the Union is to protest too much. One might presume that with the devolution of power to a Scottish parliament and the clear possibility of independence, such attitudes no longer exist. But attitudes can lag behind political reality and from an attitudinal point of view the unthinkability of Scottish culture within a British context is alive and well. One question that must be considered is, how does one think about the unthinkable? Out of this paradox are born the stereotypes already referred to.

The model of 'Scotland as unthinkable' is easy to find even in writing relating to contemporary art. An illuminating example from the late 1980s is the keynote essay in a book entitled *The New British Painting* (Lucie-Smith, 1988) published by a major British art publisher to accompany a major exhibition of contemporary British painting shown in America. Scottish artists were well represented in both the exhibition and the book illustrations. It is therefore all the more ironic that in the essay in question, entitled 'The Story of British Modernism' the history of Scottish art is completely ignored. The essay is written as though the historical background to contemporary British painting were that of English painting. Scottish artists are mentioned, but only as part of the present. On reading this essay one would assume that there was no Scottish art prior to the decade in which the essay was written. William

Blake is the first English artist to be mentioned, the first Scottish artist to be mentioned, unless one counts the London-Scot Duncan Grant, is Steven Campbell, born two centuries later. Such writing is a further example of how the history of Scottish art becomes mislaid within 'British' accounts. It is an irony that the essay both asserts the value of contemporary Scottish art, and at the same time writes Scottish art out of history. This has the effect of making the production of Scottish artists seem to be either a sub-category of English activity or the miraculous production of savage purity, untarnished by the confusion of a recorded past, tutored only by the ghost of the monarch of the glen.

Semantic slippage

Such routine abuse of the word 'British' leads to it having no consistency of use except in so far as any use of the word tends to strongly imply 'English'. This duality in which it shares a kind of penumbra of loss of meaning with a fundamental Englishness is fascinating. We have in this use of the word 'British' a core of reference (the English) surrounded by a mantle of unthinkability (everybody else). In the political sphere this semantic slippage was neatly illustrated by John Major in February 1997 when, in an address to the Welsh Conservative Party, he spoke of proposals for Scottish devolution being a threat to 'one thousand years of British history'. Obviously enough, devolution could not be a threat to a thousand years of British history, for the British history to which the then Prime Minister referred has been in existence for either about three hundred years or about four hundred years, depending on whether you date it from the union of crowns or the union of parliaments. For Major the truth about Scotland was clearly unthinkable. Perhaps he had been reading another interesting example of such a 'British' view, journalist Polly Toynbee's leader for 'British Theme' week in the *Radio Times* from July 1996. The words 'Britain' or 'British' occur frequently, as one would expect. The words 'us' and 'we' also occur frequently. And the 'we' being referred to is apparently 'the British'. So far so good. The words England and English also occur frequently. And why not? But only one literary figure – William Shakespeare – is invoked. One sporting event is referred to, the 1966 World Cup, won by England. Two victories are mentioned, Agincourt and the Armada. These latter references are particularly telling for they refer to events well prior to even the union of the crowns. Indeed the only link to a British country other than to England is the film *Braveheart* but it is intriguing to note that this is only mentioned in

the context of American (not even Scottish) anti-Englishness. Thus, Britishness is defined by English literature, English sport, English military achievements, and American anti-Englishness. A typical aspect of this exercise in 'Britishness' is that its writer seems oblivious to her own bias.

Again, the senior management of the British Broadcasting Corporation demonstrated such an attitude in an exemplary fashion in April 1995 by scheduling a *Panorama* interview with John Major three days before the local elections in Scotland and in direct contravention of their own guidelines. The Scottish law courts forced a rethink and very few people took seriously the subsequent claim by those responsible that they would have done the same three days before the elections in England and Wales. It was generally understood that at the root of the affair was ignorance. It is important to understand that this was not just ignorance in the sense of not knowing something, but more an attitude of ignorance, a culture in which certain kinds of ignorance are promoted. *Panorama* has built up expertise in this area. In a programme which purported to be about the negative attitude of the British man or woman on the street to the introduction of the Euro, broadcast in February 1999, it did not seem to cross the programme-maker's mind to reflect that the one part of Europe that has long-term experience of currency union, is in fact the UK. This was because the programme was not about Britain any more than Tony Blair's assertion that the British were attached to the image of the Queen's head on bank notes was about Britain: the point being, of course, that the Queen's head does not appear on Scottish banknotes.

Taken separately these examples are trivial to the point of tedium; taken together they reflect an ignorance so pervasive that you need a theory to account for it. Michel Foucault has helped greatly in this with his concept of 'silences', which captures the notion of actively ignoring something. It is appropriate to recall that the original panoramas were supposedly comprehensive – but in fact highly selective – views painted on the inside of windowless wooden huts. *Panorama* can thus be thought of as living up to an aspect of its own history. This kind of windowless-hut perception can be taken as characterising the information considered significant by London governmental and media bodies with respect to Scottish culture. Certainly the decision of the BBC not to have a separate Scottish six o'clock news in the wake of devolution betrays an assumption that a major rebalancing of the political constitution of Britain did not require a cognate media response.

Eternally recurrent renaissance

This attitude is not to be seen in terms of antipathy, but in terms of a kind of actively maintained ignorance. It can be manifested in periods of neglect followed by periods of overenthusiasm, a pattern that I have called elsewhere 'eternally recurrent renaissance' (1990a: 86). Since the London media is highly influential in Scotland this misperception from south of the Border puts Scots in the curious position of encountering their own culture both through local knowledge and through London interpretation. Thus a James Kelman novel may leave Glasgow as part of a developed literary tradition but it returns from London redefined as the spontaneous product of a Glasgow hard-man. As Kelman himself has noted, the St Andrews philosopher James Frederick Ferrier coined the word 'epistemology' for the theory of knowledge (in Davie 1990a: v). But Ferrier coined another word, which has not gained the same currency – 'agnoiology' does not even appear in most dictionaries. This refers to the theory of ignorance, which Ferrier saw as being the necessary complement of a theory of knowledge. One might object that a theory of knowledge must take ignorance into account and that therefore a separate theory of ignorance is not needed. This has been a popular view. But theories, if they are anything, are ways of giving emphasis, and to emphasise as one's starting point what is and can be known, draws one to see a different landscape of thought from that which one may encounter from a starting point of that which is not known and perhaps cannot be. To pursue the metaphor, an epistemological approach lets one look up and give names to the high features of the land, whereas an agnoiological approach allows an insight into the hidden geological movements which threw up the mountain ranges in the first place. This begins to sound like a description of a Freudian view of the conscious and the unconscious and that is no mistake, for it is just such interactions of the known or knowable with the unknown or unknowable that psycho-dynamic theories explore. There is a growing tendency to apply such theoretical models to the study of cultures, and Freud showed the way in this regard not least with his description of the 'uneasiness inherent in culture'.⁷ Perhaps such an approach can be used to explore the ways in which Scottish cultural matters are presented or mislaid within British accounts.

Conclusion

While not all 'British' accounts ignore Scottish art, there is frequently a problem of finding Scottish art within them. Scrutiny of such 'British' accounts is, however, interesting, not least because the search for Scottish art within them reveals their inadequacy. Consideration of such inadequacy can lead one to consider the tendency to condone selective cultural ignorance within the British establishment. More positively such consideration can lead one to reflect on the growing interest in reappropriating British history among thinkers who take the plurality of Britishness as their starting point, rather than as something best avoided. Linda Colley has made a significant contribution here in her book *Britons* published in 1992. More recently Alexander Murdoch's *British History* (1998) has been a notable addition. The prospect opens that by finding Scottish art and properly acknowledging it, a set of critical models of what might constitute a British art might follow.

Notes

- 1 This is not to discount the remarkable work of Gerald Finley.
- 2 It would be wrong to imply that Campbell's Scottishness is never acknowledged; see, for example, Tavernor 1991, 151ff.
- 3 See Brydall 1889; Caw 1908; McKay 1906. For a comprehensive account of histories of Scottish art see Macmillan 1990: 11.
- 4 Brydall concludes his preface thus: 'In placing the history of Scottish Art before the public, my object has been to fill a blank in our national literature, and to place on record the successive steps by which Art in Scotland has attained its present high pre-eminence' (1889: vi).
- 5 A further symptom of this is the way in which political history is referred to in this 'history' of British art: again it is that of England, not of Britain. To take an example from the first programme, Henry VIII of England is described as the reformation monarch who dissolved the monasteries. From an English perspective this is true. But for a Scot, Henry VIII was an invader, like Edward I before him and Oliver Cromwell later. So while the English experience of Henry VIII is of a reformation monarch operating within his own country, the Scottish experience is of a foreign king invading in order to make political and territorial gains. These are very different experiences, however similar the effects on religious establishments.
- 6 Compare the attitude here with that of Frank Johnson in the *Sunday Telegraph* (9 April 1995): 'The Conservatives behaved as if for them nowadays, Scotland does not matter. In this the Conservatives were correct ... I hope the Scots do not mind my pointing this out. It is not my fault they are harmless' (quoted by Ian Macwhirter in *The Scotsman*, 12 April 1995).
- 7 This phrase is, courtesy of Bruno Bettelheim, a more accurate translation of the book title more often rendered into English as *Civilization and its Discontents*. For a recent use of psychodynamic theory with respect to cultural analysis see Kirkwood 1996.