

Introduction

Stated simply, Meyer Schapiro (1904–1996) was an art historian, New York intellectual, and longtime professor at Columbia University. In addition to his noted contributions to some of his generation’s most pressing and now-classic questions—some chastenedly academic, others perfervidly political—he is well known by way of numerous anecdotes of his connections with many of the twentieth century’s most famous artists. Some of the most prominent include his serendipitous 1935 trip with the cubist painter Fernand Léger to the Morgan Library that is thought to have inspired Léger’s work;¹ his 1940 introduction of Robert Motherwell to Kurt Seligmann that helped launch the former’s career as a leading abstract expressionist; his 1952 visit to Willem de Kooning’s studio and the now-canonical canvas—perpetually on view at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)—that subsequently emerged, *Woman I*; and the furtive support he provided to the proto-color field painter Barnett Newman in 1961 against the philological hairsplitting of one of the century’s other great art historians, Erwin Panofsky.² The aggrandizing flair of stories like these makes them appealing to some and anathema to others, the pithy anecdote—true, embellished, or apocryphal—being at once a powerful boon and classic boondoggle of historical research. Without spending too much time adjudicating the import or truth of these episodes, the close relations to which they speak between Schapiro and prominent modern artists are nevertheless a recurring focus of this book. As Schapiro himself enjoyed recounting these stories, the numerous moments that directly connect him to celebrated artists and artworks are indeed revealing in that they testify to his sympathy for the artistic production of his time. In

isolation, however, these almost mythic stories fail to provide much insight into a more encompassing, if romantically elusive, source of Schapiro's real historical impact: his mind.

Stated more boldly, Meyer Schapiro was much more than an art historian, New York intellectual, or longtime professor at Columbia. For the poet Frank O'Hara, Schapiro was nothing less than "a God" of the New York art world; for Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times*, he was simply the greatest art historian America ever produced.³ Perhaps the most significant basis for these outspoken claims is that Schapiro can be understood to have reshaped the very form of art-historical knowledge itself.⁴ Among American scholars in particular, Schapiro is often credited with legitimizing the scholarly study of modern and contemporary art—by far the most popular subfield of art history today—and with making pioneering contributions to multiple modes of art-historical argument that are now commonplace. His Marxist writings from the 1930s, his psychoanalytic writings from the 1950s, and his semiotic writings from the 1960s and '70s, for instance, all helped open new avenues for art-historical research.⁵ Schapiro's prominent early contributions to these areas have even been taken to imply that much of that pervasive art-historical paradigm known as the "social history of art"—especially in its investigations of canonical modernist topics, like French impressionism and abstract art, and even in its explicitly feminist formations—is often an extension of Schapiro's work.⁶ The extent to which claims like these are true is debatable. What they suggest, nonetheless, is that anyone who has ever bothered to read a gallery didactic in the last forty years—whether a casual visitor, practicing artist, amateur intellectual, or senior sage—or anyone who has attempted to make sense of the bewilderingly diverse artistic production of this period has likely been encouraged to think about visual art through the modes of inquiry that Schapiro popularized if not established. Though Schapiro certainly did not single-handedly invent these discursive frameworks, and his very role in their development likely had as much to do with his secure position at a prestigious university at the very center of the American art world as with his actual published writing, it is one of the central claims of this book that Schapiro's fluency in and contribution to the forms of thought that were integral to the visual art of the twentieth century made him a major figure of his times. Based on such an understanding of Schapiro, this book is an effort toward a synthetic overview and assessment of the patterns of thinking that lay behind his intellectual formation, development, and legacy.

In pursuing this goal, a paradox at the heart of Schapiro's work that is central to understanding his thought quickly emerges. On the one hand, Schapiro was effusively praised by many of the leading intellectuals of his era. The eminent linguist Noam Chomsky called him the art historian "who knows everything about everything";⁷ Morton White, a leading historian of ideas and professor at the renowned Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, described him as "by all odds the most brilliant figure in the [entire] faculty of arts and sciences" at Columbia University;⁸ and William Phillips, the longtime editor of one of his generation's most distinguished literary journals, *Partisan Review*, proclaimed that Schapiro had "all the formal characteristics of genius."⁹ On the other hand, by his own admission and quite in contrast to other academics and intellectuals of similar stature, there is not a specific theory or discovery that can easily be singled out as Schapiro's lasting contribution to knowledge. Indeed, in responding to interview questions late in life about his distinctive approach, Schapiro confessed that he had never "synthesized . . . an adequate, satisfying theory of art."¹⁰ Seemingly responding to this situation, at the height of Schapiro's fame, the Harvard professor Henri Zerner exaggerated the paradox of Schapiro's reputation by dubbing him the most venerated art historian who had never even written a book.¹¹ As Zerner knew, of course, Schapiro had written multiple books; the point was that Schapiro's books were somehow not the source of his standing.

The range of Schapiro's interests had much to do with this situation. He was trained as a medievalist—a field of study that requires exacting knowledge of Latin grammar, epigraphy, and paleography and relies on precise archaeological fieldwork—and yet he was equally known for his writing on modern art. His early essays on Matisse, Van Gogh, and Cézanne, for instance, are important expressions of his thinking and significant sources of his repute. This unusual dual specialization meant that Schapiro's mind was constantly moving between fields, time periods, and geographic locales with such rapidity, it would seem, that he was more suited to short-form writing than to full-length monographs. This quality of Schapiro's thought, however, was his greatest strength. Just as he was constantly shuttling between the medieval and the modern, he was pushing the boundaries of art-historical thought in general by bringing in ideas from well outside the discipline: from Gestalt psychology to semiotics, from psychoanalysis to the philosophy of science, and from Marxism to analytic aesthetics. The speed and range of Schapiro's mind allowed him to synthesize and apply ideas from widely diverse disciplines to the study of visual art in innovative and compelling ways. In view

of this great facility, it comes as no surprise that Schapiro was hyperbolically eulogized in the *New York Times* for his very ability “to master one discipline after another with a speed and a thoroughness that have had few parallels in our century.”¹² Exaggerated though such statements may be, it is indeed this aspect of Schapiro’s thought that made him such an innovative scholar and such an inspiring teacher. Firsthand accounts of his lecturers testify to this fact, revealing Schapiro to be an almost cultlike figure, a guru, for a whole generation of students, laypeople, and enthusiasts alike. As the art historian Irving Sandler noted, “The power of Meyer’s mind was without equal, at least in my world. The scope of his knowledge was staggering, encompassing mathematics and physics, economics and politics, the classics, perceptual psychology and psychoanalysis, Hebrew studies and philosophy.” Combined with Schapiro’s skills as a lecturer, this breadth of expertise contributed to the impression that, as Sandler continued, “two or three minutes into a lecture, [Schapiro] would seem to levitate six inches off the floor.”¹³ In what can only be described as the fantastic style of Schapiro lore, the journalist and novelist Anatole Broyard described one of Schapiro’s lectures as follows:

With the dim stained-glass light of the slides and the hushed atmosphere, Schapiro’s classes were like church services. Culture in those days was still holy. If he had chosen his own church, it would have been Romanesque—yet there was something fundamentalist in him, too. He made you want to get up and testify, or beat a tambourine. . . .

Sometimes he was so brilliant that he seemed almost insane to me; he seemed to see more than there actually was—he heard voices. His knowledge was so impressive as to appear occult. Because he chanted his lectures, he was like a medieval cantor or Gregorian monk.

We were so awed by him that when he said something witty, we were afraid to laugh. It was like the German translators taking the puns out of Shakespeare on the assumption that he had not written them, that they had been added by hacks. I wonder now whether Schapiro ever noticed how tense we were, how pious. Did he realize that students were dropping out all the time, to be replaced by other students?

They didn’t drop out because he was disappointing—in fact, it might have been better if he had disappointed us now and then. What drove even his admirers away was a certain remorselessness in his brilliance. It made some of us anxious to think that everything meant something; there was no escape. It was like fate. . . .

Schapiro spoke rapidly, rhythmically, hardly pausing for breath. When he said that with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* Picasso had fractured the picture plane, I could hear it crack, like a chiropractor cracking the bones at the base of your neck. As he went on, Schapiro's sentences became staccato, cubistic, full of overlapping planes. I was so excited that I took [my friend's] hand in mine. . . .

[Schapiro's] voice rose to a cry. He honked like a wild goose. There was delirium in the room. The beam of the projector was a searchlight on the world. The students shifted in their seats and moaned. Schapiro danced to the screen and flung up his arm in a Romanesque gesture. As he spoke, the elements of the picture reassembled themselves into an intelligible scheme. A thrill of gladness ran through me and my hand sweated in [my friend's].¹⁴

From the perspective of the present, is it easy to look askance at over-the-top reports like this; today Schapiro's published writing can make him seem rather run of the mill. We are left to speculate that Broyard's experience must have been fueled by the particular cultural atmosphere that pervaded New York after the social reckoning that accompanied the Holocaust and Hiroshima, an atmosphere of deliverance from and supreme wonder at the technological horrors that defined those events. Moreover, the absolute faith in art that Broyard describes can be seen as a correlate of the dogmatic political ideologies of the Cold War that defined much of American life during Schapiro's later career and that very much scarred Schapiro himself, making him an appropriate focus of Broyard's ecstatic avowal. Taken together, Broyard's and Sandler's accounts underline a fact that is easy to overlook, particularly because Schapiro's writing has been so thoroughly absorbed. Schapiro is of interest not just for his pioneering writing and for the models that his scholarship provided, and still provides, to scholars. Schapiro is also a culturally and historically celebrated figure whose work resonates in a powerful way with a truly broad public. And since Schapiro's students include some of the most studied figures of the subsequent generation—including the poet Allen Ginsberg, the sculptor Donald Judd, and the performance artist Allan Kaprow, to name but a few—Schapiro's historical position is underlined all the more.

Because Schapiro's protean and prehensile mind was so central to his impact, the wide range of his work is also at the center of this book's organization. The book is composed of eight compact chapters, each partially named after a seminal year during his long career in which Schapiro engaged in broad,

critical debate. These debates concern a variety of different topics—from the notion of form itself to the meaning of specific paintings. The discussions were between Schapiro and figures from both within and far outside of his own discipline—from prominent art historians like Ernst Gombrich to the historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. They took place in a number of different formats—face-to-face at conferences, published as reviews and essays, and written in private correspondence. Whatever the topic debated, whoever the individuals involved, and whatever the circumstances, each chapter of the book isolates the origins, culmination, and aftermath of Schapiro's thinking on one debated theme, thus tracing a single thread of his thought concerning a sweeping intellectual controversy. Like Schapiro's life, these debates span much of the twentieth century, and they simultaneously mark both the development of the scholarly discipline that Schapiro did so much to shape—art history—as well as some of the central tensions of twentieth-century modernism as a whole and even of modernity itself. Because Schapiro was an art historian by training, art objects often and unsurprisingly lie at the center of these debates, and the specific works discussed include some of the most canonical works of modern art: Van Gogh's still lifes, Picasso's *Guernica*, Barnett Newman's zip paintings. And yet, because of the range of Schapiro's interests, the lenses through which he interpreted these works also carry each of the chapters quite far from modern art and into contact with much older and more distant forms of image-making: Romanesque sculpture, early Netherlandish landscapes, medieval Hindu carvings. The “critical debates” after which this book is named, therefore, are critical in multiple ways. They are critical to capturing the full range of Schapiro's mind; they are critical in relation to central ideas and pressures of his time; they are critical to the evolution of the discipline of art history during Schapiro's career; and they are critical in their sometimes pointed and often still unresolved natures. Consequently, this book's exploration of Schapiro's critical debates results in more than a portrait of him; the book also leverages Schapiro's art-historical perspective to stage confrontations with some of the central questions of twentieth-century intellectual life and thereby aims to further our understanding of how art history and artworks themselves fit into that much larger story.

The book commences where most art-historical scholarship begins: with a discussion of form. The first chapter, “1929: Formalism and Perception; From Löwy and Fry to Wertheimer and Gombrich,” focuses on the debates about art and visual perception that lay behind Schapiro's 1929 dissertation. In so

doing, the chapter aims to further our understanding of Schapiro's particular version of art-historical formalism by analyzing some of the ideas that were central to its development, specifically Emanuel Löwy's theory of archaic style and the writing of Roger Fry. By analyzing Schapiro's relation to the writing of these two figures, I argue that Schapiro's early formalist writing anticipates his later critical engagement with the Gestalt psychologist Max Wertheimer and clarifies his uneven professional relationship with the art historian Ernst Gombrich.

The second chapter, "1936: Reviewing *Kunstwissenschaft*; Foreshadowing the Two Cultures Debate," broadens the discussion of Schapiro's specific version of art-historical formalism by discussing his critical response to the writing of the so-called New Vienna School of Art History. I aim to show that the most lasting impact of the scholarship of the New Vienna School on Schapiro was made by way of its attempt to found a "rigorous" study of art on the basis of "understanding"—a philosophical term of art to which Wilhelm Dilthey gave renewed credence at the end of the nineteenth century as part of his general distinction between the *Geistes-* and the *Naturwissenschaften*. I show how Schapiro's 1936 review of the scholarship of the New Vienna School foreshadows Schapiro's later reaction to the so-called two cultures debate that became especially prominent in the Anglo-American academy in the wake of the writing of C. P. Snow.

Titled "1941: Science and the Dialectic; Raphael and Dewey, Courbet and Picasso," the third chapter turns to Schapiro's relationship with Marxist ideas, specifically by way of Schapiro's correspondence with the Marxist art historian Max Raphael as well as his critical relationship to the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey. Stated most succinctly, Schapiro disagreed with Raphael about the place of the dialectic within Marxist scholarship and in so doing he revealed his proximity to both positivist and pragmatist theories of knowledge. While Schapiro was often critical of Dewey's pragmatist project as a whole, his correspondence during this time also shows that his thinking did not escape Dewey's influence completely. I substantiate this claim by comparing Schapiro's later writing on Picasso's *Guernica* with Raphael's and thereby measure the distance between Schapiro's writing and a more classically Marxist form of art-historical argument.

The fourth chapter, "1947: The 'Aesthetic Attitude,' Coomaraswamy's Metaphysics, and the Westernness of Art's History," concerns Schapiro's engagement with the Ceylonese geologist turned philosopher of art, Ananda Coomaraswamy, most visible in Schapiro's celebrated essay "On the Aesthetic

Attitude in Romanesque Art,” which was originally published in Coomaraswamy’s *Festschrift* of 1947. I focus on the problem of the Western bias within humanistic research and do so by way of Schapiro’s criticisms of Coomaraswamy in unpublished correspondence and in published exchanges. By contextualizing and excavating the dialogue between these two scholars, I demonstrate how the ideas they debated played a central and often unrecognized role in Schapiro’s thinking throughout his life, particularly in his commitment to the modernist analysis of form and even in his mentorship of key modern artists like Robert Motherwell.

In the fifth chapter, “1956: Pragmatic Psychoanalysis and the Confirmation of *Woman I*,” I unpack Schapiro’s persistent engagement with psychoanalytic theory. I argue that Schapiro’s two familiar articles on Freud and Leonardo from the mid-1950s—both products of an invited talk at the neo-Freudian William Alanson White Institute in New York in 1955—and his later essay on Cézanne’s apples, which reveals his blending of psychoanalytic and pragmatist claims, demonstrate an extensive, creative, and prolonged engagement with psychoanalytic thought. I place Schapiro’s interest in psychoanalysis within the larger context of the rise of psychoanalytic claims within humanities research in Cold War America and argue that Schapiro’s at once critical and celebratory relationship with psychoanalytic theory parallels the uneven position of psychoanalytic research in the United States itself. I conclude this chapter by using my contextualization of Schapiro’s engagement with psychoanalysis to interpret his almost mythic role in helping Willem de Kooning finalize what is likely the painter’s most canonical work: *Woman I*.

The sixth chapter, “1961: Debating Berenson with Berlin; Two Concepts of Art-Historical Liberty,” is dedicated to Schapiro’s trenchant criticisms of the life and writing of Bernard Berenson, to the reactions that those criticisms engendered from the eminent historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin, and to the general tensions between lifestyle, politics, and academic inquiry. I argue that Schapiro’s strong critique of Berenson washed over similarities between their scholarship that Berlin’s debate with Schapiro helps reveal: perhaps most significantly, that both Schapiro and Berenson championed an active model of visual perception for the study of art’s history. Though this similarity by no means reconciles Schapiro and Berenson completely, recognizing this and other parallels between their writing does much to articulate how the modes of scholarship that they respectively practiced—connoisseurship and social history—were and still are more akin than scholars today are prone to recognize.

The seventh chapter, “1968: Heidegger and Goldstein; Van Gogh’s *Shoes* and the Liabilities of Ekphrasis,” addresses what is likely Schapiro’s most renowned intellectual exchange: his 1968 criticisms of Martin Heidegger’s description of a painting by Van Gogh made famous by the subsequent deconstructive scholarship of Jacques Derrida. In approaching this widely discussed topic, I attempt to recapture the largely forgotten origins of Schapiro’s critique of Heidegger by articulating the intimate connections between Schapiro’s writing on Van Gogh and the neurological research of Kurt Goldstein, the man to whom Schapiro’s critique was originally dedicated. The broader story that connects Schapiro’s and Goldstein’s scholarship concerns Schapiro’s growing postwar focus on the general relations between language and pictures and shows that Schapiro’s criticisms of Heidegger had as much to do with his understanding of the limits and liabilities of ekphrasis as with Heidegger’s specific description of Van Gogh’s painting, to say nothing of Heidegger’s ontology of art.

The final chapter of the book, “1973: *Words and Pictures*; A Color Field Critique of Structuralist Semiotics,” endeavors to flesh out the historical context and analytic grounding of Schapiro’s general claims about signs. In this chapter I show how Schapiro’s semiotic essays from the 1960s and ’70s should in fact be understood as deeply indebted to the midcentury development of Peircean semiotics by Charles W. Morris and partially in antagonistic relation to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s application of Saussurian semiotics within his structuralist anthropology. To make my argument, I initially focus on a 1952 exchange between Schapiro and Lévi-Strauss in which they debated the applicability of mathematics to the interpretation of visual art, showing how Schapiro’s arguments in this exchange have parallels to the proto-color field painting of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. I conclude by demonstrating how Schapiro further developed and refined his position in this debate in his book *Words and Pictures* of 1973.

As I hope these chapter summaries suggest, the book’s thematic organization around a series of wide-ranging intellectual debates has the great advantage of speaking directly to the seemingly boundless curiosity behind Schapiro’s polymathic interests. Looking back over the twenty-five years of art-historical scholarship since Schapiro’s death, wherein the interdisciplinary connections that he did so much to normalize have become ever more commonplace, it has become all too easy to take Schapiro’s work for granted. The very term “interdisciplinary” has become so pedestrian and mundane that its current associations fail to capture much of the innovative nature

of Schapiro's work; the irony of this fact is that Schapiro was likely the first American art historian who could honestly be described as interdisciplinary. Nevertheless, in order to ward off this potential misreading, it seems more appropriate today to think of Schapiro's thought in different terms. "Maieutic," meaning generative of new ideas through an ongoing, dialogic process of fundamental, unconstrained questioning, comes close to the mark. Indeed, as I hope to show, there is something deeply creative and dialogic in the relentlessly interrogative attitude that lay beneath Schapiro's approach to the debates that compose this book, meaning that the chapters help reveal exactly how and why his scholarship can be described as a form of maieusis. Much in keeping with this ambition, the power of the imaginative connections that emerge from these critical debates is both a focus of my account as well as a reminder of the danger of what Schapiro criticized throughout his life: disciplinary border control, art-historical parochialism.

The book's ambitious yet probative scope, however, also has its weaknesses. Perhaps most obvious is that it is not as comprehensive as some might hope; not all of Schapiro's writings are discussed, and some are given far less weight than a different book about Schapiro might give them. For instance, some of Schapiro's essays that were very much a part of art-historical debates—"The Frescoes of Castelseprio" being noteworthy here because of the responses it elicited from Kurt Weitzman and Oleg Grabar, both of whom were notable art-historical peers of Schapiro's—do not figure prominently in my narrative. While this fact is unfortunate, it also follows from my argument concerning Schapiro: his claims about the frescoes of Castelseprio are, in my judgment, primarily of quite specialized art-historical interest and are not expressly representative of the integrative connections among diverse fields of knowledge that he achieved in his other writing.

A second limitation resulting from my chosen organization is that all of my chapters chronologically overlap in some way, meaning that the book does not explicitly and directly pursue the absolute timeline of Schapiro's life as its ultimate goal. With a little shuffling and reworking, the order of the book's chapters could likely be rearranged, and the single, climatic year after which each of the book's chapters is named could even be changed. Readers with specific interests that do not map onto my own may find this flexibility frustrating if not problematic, believing that a more strictly biographical account of Schapiro would be more useful. As future Schapiro biographers will no doubt confront, however, the extensive archive of documents that Schapiro bequeathed to Columbia University and upon which this book is so heavily

based is also an important reason for this book's thematic organization. Schapiro's archive itself testifies to a quality of his work that was widely known by his contemporaries and friends: his extensive editing and ongoing reworking of his arguments over extended periods of time, often using small, handwritten scraps of paper, outlines of varying lengths and states of completion, and transcriptions of his lectures from decades earlier as the source material for subsequent publications.¹⁵ This archival fact makes it difficult to divide Schapiro's thinking into clear chronological periods, as he returned to the same topics so often and at such remove that it can be impossible to determine when a specific thought was written down or formulated. He was known to be a perfectionist, and this trait certainly contributed to his preoccupation with his earlier work. This scholarly habit, however, also lends Schapiro's writing to more thematic organization; his ongoing work on specific topics and the fact that he returned again and again to similar ideas means that it is often possible to connect his thinking over long periods and to see how it evolved.

Finally, it is important to note some intended implications of this book that extend well beyond Schapiro's life. Within accounts of American intellectual history, visual art is often only discussed in passing—a scholarly habit that is even openly acknowledged within classic collections like David Hollinger and Charles Capper's *The American Intellectual Tradition* and is likely structurally bound up with American culture itself.¹⁶ The frequently defended and naturally assumed linguistic basis of thought makes it especially easy for intellectual histories to give greater attention to writers and their words than to artists and their images. That my monograph is the first to be published about Meyer Schapiro despite the fact that he was a prominent member of one of the most studied groups of twentieth-century America—the New York intellectuals—is a case in point. Schapiro himself was obviously a writer, not a professional artist, yet the simple fact that he primarily wrote about artworks gives his writing a minority status among American intellectuals. Admitting that this book alone is surely no anodyne for this much larger and likely irresolvable imbalance, I hope my focus on and analysis of Schapiro's engagements with a wide range of artworks can function as a productive insertion of images into some of the classic debates of twentieth-century American intellectual life.

In my pursuit of this goal, significant portions of this book end up being necessarily historiographic in scope. Reconstructing Schapiro's engagements with artworks often and unsurprisingly necessitates reconstructing his debates with other art historians. By anchoring these disciplinary excursions

to broader, period-wide intellectual tensions, I hope that the book's historiographic dimension is not bogged down in what might appear as arcane art-historical squabbles. Schapiro's close connections with many prominent intellectuals and modern artists is especially helpful in this regard and makes his work a clear example of how the specific formulation of art's histories, the larger development of cultural habits of thought, and the production of art itself are all intertwined. Just as the following chapters show how Schapiro's specific academic arguments and broader intellectual commitments proleptically speak to the art of his time, so too do they reveal how the art of Schapiro's time could presciently visualize Schapiro's arguments and allegiances. In its exploration of the recursive relations of these cultural domains, this book can be thought of as a criticism of the notion that art historiography is some separate domain of art and intellectual history, a concern only of those hyper-specialized scholars known as art historiographers rather than simply a part of the much larger, overlapping domains of intellectual and visual culture.¹⁷ As visual art and its histories are inevitably both products of the mind, it should be uncontroversial to note that all studies of them will at least partially be intellectual. Under the banner of this truism, this book can be thought of as a reformulated extension of the much older project that Max Dvořák long ago dubbed *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte*—often translated as “art history as the history of ideas,” though “art history as the history of intellect” or even “of mind” are plausible alternatives.¹⁸

Beyond his intellectual breadth and his position as a midcentury *entrepôt* of thought, Schapiro's critical appropriation and adaptation of pragmatist philosophy to art-historical purposes makes his life and work especially rich examples of these cultural relations. Schapiro studied with John Dewey as an undergraduate from 1920 to 1924, and Schapiro's fittingly antinomian embrace of Dewey's work can be thought of as the autochthonous setting against which the various debates discussed in this book take place. As Schapiro's persistent yet rebellious relationship to Dewey's writing is an essential background for the eight chapters that follow, it should come as no surprise that Schapiro's engagement with Dewey is a recurring theme. The extent of my focus on Schapiro's relation to pragmatist ideas is, furthermore, what most evidently distinguishes my overall interpretation of Schapiro from the existing scholarship about him.¹⁹ This does not mean, however, that the book is limited to recounting and evaluating Schapiro's debt to and reaction against Dewey. The current book aims to identify much more than the single thread of what might be called Schapiro's pragmatism, a label that Schapiro himself

would have surely qualified. In fact, one of the most prominent reasons why I undertook this project is because of how evidently irreducible Schapiro's work is to its pragmatist dimensions and how admirable and compelling I found that irreducibility. To add clarity in this regard, when I agree or disagree with Schapiro's views on a topic—pragmatist or otherwise—I try to make this clear and let my voice sound as an interpreter of Schapiro. The historical circumstances that led Schapiro to hold certain views were obviously quite different from the circumstance of the present, and any attempt to overcome those differences would be doomed from the start. However, since it is one of the great purposes of historical research to provide perspective on the ideas and beliefs that shaped past generations, throughout this book I try to let my own voice as an author be heard. Thereby I aim to provide some means—however flawed they may be—for judging the distance between the present and the past.