

Authentic Modernism:
Ekphrasis and Objecthood in British and American Literature
of the Early Twentieth Century

By

Dawn E. Blizard

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A.M., Brown University, 2001

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by the Department of English as satisfying the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date _____

Robert Scholes, Advisor

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date _____

Paul Armstrong, Reader

Date _____

Timothy Bewes, Reader

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date _____

Sheila Bonde, Dean of the Graduate School

VITA

Dawn Blizzard was born on December 17, 1974 in Abington, Pennsylvania, and grew up in the suburbs of Philadelphia. She received her B.A. from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota in 1998, with Distinction in the English Major and a Certificate of Advanced Study in German. In 2001 she earned an A.M. from Brown University. At Brown she was awarded Graduate School fellowships and the Jean Starr Untermeyer Dissertation Fellowship. She taught courses in rhetoric and composition as well as twentieth-century literature and its theories in the departments of English and Comparative Literature. She also served as curator of the art exhibit “New Art in *The New Age*: What was Modern? (1910-1914)”, on display from September 30 to October 30, 2005 in the Carriage House Gallery at the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage.

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for Kate

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INTRODUCTION

Later it struck me that the best history of painting in London was the National Gallery, and that the best history of literature, more particularly of poetry, would be a twelve-volume anthology in which each poem was chosen not merely because it was a nice poem or a poem Aunt Hepsy liked, but because it contained an invention, a definite contribution to the art of verbal expression.

—Ezra Pound, “How to Read”

Were all modern paintings to be destroyed, a critic of the twenty-fifth century would be able to deduce from the works of Proust alone the existence of Matisse, Cézanne, Derain, and Picasso; he would be able to say with those books before him that painters of the highest originality and power must be covering canvas after canvas, squeezing tube after tube, in the room next door.

—Virginia Woolf, “Pictures”

Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf have both been canonized as high modernist writers, but the “modernisms” they are held to epitomize are very different. Pound is most often associated with the hard-edged objective aesthetic of Imagism, a poetic program that insisted upon “direct treatment of the ‘thing’” and the elimination of extraneous detail from verse (“Retrospect” 3). Woolf, in contrast, is best known for her novelistic treatment of the minute particularities of subjective experience, her attempt to capture the “myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel” that are, as she writes, received by “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day” (“Modern Fiction” 149-150). Both Pound and Woolf, however, are said to have been influenced or stimulated by developments in the visual arts; the formal innovations of both writers’ work have been attributed to their contact with modern painting. Ample biographical evidence can be marshaled in support of this claim: Pound wrote extensive art criticism in the early decades of his career, helped found the Vorticist movement, which included painters Wyndham Lewis and David Bomberg, and campaigned tirelessly

to find patrons and procure financial support for visual artists whose work he admired;¹ Woolf was intimately acquainted with the latest developments in modernist design through her relationship with her sister, the painter Vanessa Bell, as well as her close friendships with Bloomsbury artists such as Roger Fry and Duncan Grant.² By this logic, the different forms taken by their literary experiments might be said to correspond to the different styles of modern art that each favored: Woolf admired the idiosyncratic Impressionism of Walter Sickert and later came to appreciate the Omega Workshops' Cubist- and Fauvist-influenced decorative style, while Pound preferred the machine-age dynamism of Vorticist work as well as the rough-hewn abstraction characteristic of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture.

In the passages quoted above, however, both Pound and Woolf describe the relationship between the visual and literary arts in terms of the work's location—which is connected to its position in culture and history—and with reference to the way the materiality of the medium determines its legacy—how it will be remembered, and how long it will endure. For Pound, the National Gallery does not merely represent or allow access to the “best” exemplars of painting's history, but quite simply *is* that history: it stands as lingering physical evidence of the evolution of the plastic arts. In its stability and for the quality of the “inventions” it houses, the National Gallery offers itself as a model that the poetry anthology should aspire to emulate, Pound argues. Literature, that is, would be improved if it could attain the material constancy and cultural prestige of the

¹ For a detailed summary of Pound's published art criticism and its influence, see Zinnes's introduction to *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts*; for a book-length examination of Pound's influential relationships with visual artists, see *Pound's Artists*.

² Both Gillespie and Panthea Reid have undertaken extensive biographical study of Woolf's relationships with visual artists: Gillespie's *The Sisters' Arts* focuses on Virginia's intense but complicated bond with her sister Vanessa, while Reid considers her place in the Bloomsbury coterie more broadly.

art museum. For Woolf, in contrast, the book is envisioned as providing a secure repository for the content of modern paintings. In the face of the apocalyptic destruction of the material world, literature would guarantee visual art's preservation. It would do so not because of any physical similarity between the two media, but precisely because of their difference: the experience of reading would allow "canvas after canvas" to be imaginatively reconstituted—literally in the reader's consciousness, and figuratively in the "room next door." In Woolf's conception, literature's immateriality might enable it to survive—or even transcend—the materially destructive forces of history.

I juxtapose these passages not only to point out the familiar differences between the "subjective" and "objective" strands of modernism,³ but also to draw attention to their shared interest in the fate of the aesthetic object at the specific historical moment they both inhabited. If Pound dreamed of a form of literature that might attain the canonicity and fixity he ascribed to the art museum, and Woolf instead dreamed of painting's containment and enshrinement within the book—and within the subjective experience of reading—both thought of literary art as an insubstantial counterpart to the materiality of the canvas. In this sense their work—along with that of the other modernist writers whom this project will consider in detail—engages a set of questions that are echoed in Walter Benjamin's best-known and most frequently cited essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility." Benjamin examines the consequences of the rise of the mass media—most powerfully embodied for him by the invention and

³ The tension between "subjectivist" and "objectivist" versions of modernism—and whether they are represented by different artists and writers or coexist within the same coherent movement—has been the subject of longstanding critical debate. See, for instance, Levenson 10-22 or Nicholls 178-202. Georg Lukács' seminal critique of modernism's excessive focus on subjectivism to the detriment of historical "reality" is probably the best-known formulation of this problem. He claims that "by exalting man's subjectivity, at the expense of the objective reality of his environment, [in modernism] man's subjectivity is itself impoverished" ("Ideology of Modernism" 193).

popularization of photography in the nineteenth century—for the subjective experience and objective existence of works of art. This particular historical phenomenon—the development of technologies for reproducing artworks on a wide scale, and the proliferation of the resulting copies—leads to the replacement of what had once been singular entities with things that exist in multiple examples. As Benjamin writes, such replication of the artwork “substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence” (104). Employing the terms set out in Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of Art*, we might think of this as a distinction between two types of artworks: the “autographic” and the “allographic.” Autographic works, like paintings and sculpture, derive authenticity from their singularity: “even the[ir] most exact copies... are simply imitations and forgeries,” while allographic works, like literature or music, can generate an infinite number of “new instances” (113). For Benjamin, the results of the spread of such technologies of reproduction are twofold: the creation of new allographic art forms (most notably film) and the translation of what had previously been autographic works into their allographic equivalents (for instance, as in the photography of painting). The situation Benjamin describes as “technological reproduction... [having] reached a standard that permitted it to reproduce all known works of art” (102) might also be characterized as the colonization of the autographic realm by the allographic. Literature is of course an allographic art form, and writing about painting can be thought of as a similar act of translation, posing a related nexus of problems for the literary modernists who engaged in it at the time.⁴

⁴ For Benjamin, the development of printing processes and the introduction of movable type are “only a special case, though an important one” of the phenomenon he describes in the “Work of Art” essay (102). More interested in techniques for reproducing images such as lithography and photography, he considers this “special case” as an already-completed historical transformation, rather than an ongoing process; in so

Benjamin's most famous contention in "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" is that the contemporary proliferation of reproductions of artworks leads to the decay, decline or withering [*verkümmern*] of a phenomenon he terms "aura." A complex and multifaceted concept that has been the subject of much critical attention in part because it is notoriously difficult to define, the aura is first (and most importantly, for my purposes) invoked in the essay as linked to the art object's physical location, a situatedness that corresponds to its place in history. Benjamin writes:

In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject. This history includes changes to the physical structure of the work over time, together with any changes in ownership. Traces of the former can be detected only by chemical or physical analyses (which cannot be performed on a reproduction), while changes of ownership are part of a tradition which can be traced only from the standpoint of the original in its present location. (103)

When the artwork exists only in a single and unique instance, it encapsulates its history within itself, harboring material traces of the transformations it has undergone as well as the events it has witnessed. This history is invisible but discernible (it "can be detected... by chemical or physical analyses") through the exercise of techniques that have been recently developed in the field of art connoisseurship. But this history also exists in the object's particular relation to its audience or beholder (a "tradition" of "ownership"), in which the artwork is granted qualities usually attributable only to human subjects, the ability to provide "historical testimony" [*Zeugenschaft*], or the capacity to bear witness

doing he ignores more recent changes to printing technologies such as the invention of the rotary press, continuous-feed paper, or the offset press, all of which enabled books to be produced more quickly and with clearer type. See Dowdling for a historical account of these changes. One of Theodor Adorno's chief criticisms of Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay, which he called an "oversimplification" that allowed too many details to "slip though the wide mesh of [the] theory" (56), was that it was inadequately dialectical and thus inattentive to historical specificity.

(103). In occupying this perspectival “standpoint”, the object does not represent or stand as evidence of the transformations it has undergone over time, but simply embodies them; its past, we might argue, is immanent within it.

The auratic artwork thus can be said to *take place*—both in the sense of occupying a position and in that of occurring as an event—at a particular moment in time and location in space. Benjamin elaborates the concept’s spatio-temporal dimension later in the essay, when he explicitly defines aura as: “A strange tissue of space and time: the apparition of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye—while resting on a summer afternoon—a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch” (105). As readers have noted, what guarantees the existence of this “strange tissue,” or “holds... [it] in place” as Samuel Weber has phrased it (86), is the presence of an observing subject. The aura forms itself in the conjunction of this subject’s stillness and movement: while his body reposes, his eye traces the contours of its object. And the aura is constituted within the relationship between this observer and the external world he gazes upon—a relationship of simultaneous distance (a mountain range can be perceived as a mountain range only when one is not climbing it) and intimacy (the aura is taken into the observer’s body through inhalation [*atmen*]). It occurs over time, but inside a limited temporal frame: the duration of a single summer afternoon, and the few minutes within it when a particular shadow falls upon the observer.⁵ In aesthetic terms, then, the aura

⁵ In Weber’s reading of the “Work of Art” essay, which has been highly influential for my own, he connects the presence of this shadow to the one that is described in Heidegger’s World-Picture. The primary difference between the worlds described by Benjamin and Heidegger is that Benjamin’s subject is presented as being within the scene described, and thus “cannot quite *get* the picture in its entirety” (86). The shadow marks the distance between this subject and the object that produces it. From its very beginning, the aura is therefore “marked by an irreducible element of *taking-leave*, of departure, of separation” (87).

might be described *both* as a property or condition of the art object and as the form or process of its reception.

This dissertation will contend that the various modernisms it examines—both subjective and objective, British and American, avant-garde and nostalgic—can be understood as interrelated efforts to come to terms with what Benjamin calls “the aura’s present decay” (105). To write about painting in the early twentieth century was not merely to describe Impressionist abstraction, the patterned energies of Futurism or the fragmentation of analytical cubism, but to encounter a complex cultural formation that was reaching unprecedentedly large audiences. Indeed the contemporary idea of “pure form”, or the related notions of “art for art’s sake” or aesthetic removal from everyday life, acquired its potency at a time when the number of people viewing paintings took a dramatic leap, and when “high art” became a subject of popular debate as it had never been before. In this period, what Benjamin labels “technological reproducibility”—a series of historically specific innovations such as improvements in color-print processes for the photographic reproduction of art, decreases in the cost of including illustrations in magazines, and changes in book production that enabled photographic prints to be bound among the pages rather than included solely as frontispieces—allowed for the dissemination of copies of artworks on a wide scale.⁶ But these changes in aesthetic production and dissemination were accompanied by a related set of transformations in art’s reception. These occurred not only through the spatial displacement of replicas of artworks, as Benjamin would have it (“technological reproduction can place the copy of

⁶ Anthony Hamber offers a detailed history of the various technologies for image reproduction—both those that were entirely mechanical and those that allowed for the inclusion of drawings or hand-tinting—as they evolved over the course of the nineteenth century. See *Printing in the Twentieth Century* (1929) for a near-contemporary account of changes in book production, and Jobling and Crowley for a more recent history of these developments.

the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain [so that]... [t]he cathedral leaves its site to be received in the studio of an art lover” [103]), but also through the circulation of their viewers. With the rise of steamship travel and the construction of railroads throughout Europe and on the North American continent, newly increased numbers of tourists were able to visit museums and galleries in person, and to view foreign art objects at firsthand.⁷ A dramatic surge in the number of public art museums in America and an explosion of new venues for viewing art in European capitals both responded to and encouraged the growth of tourism.⁸ And the greater availability of transportation also permitted original artworks to travel: canvasses could be shipped more quickly and securely, making it possible to stage more frequent and more spectacular international temporary exhibitions.⁹ Taken together, these developments rendered modernist painting publicly accessible in radically new ways, and enabled it to be received by what Benjamin would call “the masses” [*massenweise*] (104).¹⁰

⁷ Bernard Berenson’s writings on connoisseurship stress that railway travel had been instrumental in a number of recent attributions of Renaissance artworks in particular, and emphasize its usefulness in art appreciation in general. See in particular “Documents in the History of Visual Documentation.” See also the related discussion of connoisseurship and photography included in Bergstein’s introduction to *Art History through the Camera’s Lens*.

⁸ The essays included in *Museums and the Making of ‘Ourselves’* explore the relations between the consolidation of national museum collections and the rise of popular nationalism in a variety of European contexts at this historical moment. Burt tracks the founding and radical expansion of art museums throughout America in the period around the turn of the last century, while Tony Bennett suggests that these phenomena are related to a reordering of the public sphere in modernity, as well as to the growth of what he terms the “exhibitionary complex” (59).

⁹ On the relation between temporary exhibitions (particularly the retrospective) and the advent of visual modernism, see Jensen’s *Marketing Modernism*, 107-137. Jensen contends that these shows operated to establish this art’s “historical legitimacy,” building in particular a legend of modern painters as “neglected” and working in “opposition to the bankrupt classicism of the European academies” (3-4).

¹⁰ For aesthetic reception to occur *massenweise* is both for it to take place in multiple locations simultaneously and for multiple observers at the same location. On the concept of distracted reception, which is constituted by the scattering or dispersal [*Zerstreuung*] of both attention and audiences, see Eiland. Benjamin himself claims that the art gallery does not produce or invoke this sort of communal reception. He writes that “while efforts have been made to present paintings to the masses in galleries and salons, this mode of reception gives the masses no means of organizing and regulating their response” (117).

My project traces the relations between modern literature and painting, or between ekphrasis—the verbal description of works of visual art—and what I, following Michael Fried, here term their “objecthood”: a condition of “material presence” that occupies a position in three dimensional space comprising “the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters... [the] work” (153).¹¹ Ekphrasis by definition pertains to the “technological reproducibility” of artworks, for it presents itself as a copy, a belated and secondhand version of the *experience* of seeing the original artwork. Indeed the very concept of influence, the notion that modernism could have “spread” from the visual arts into literature—or the claim that it is the result of writers’ experiences of paintings—presupposes that such experiences are portable between media, that they can be separated from the original object that produced them and recreated elsewhere, evoked by language rather than paint. Yet modernism has regularly been defined, by its practitioners and apologists alike, as that which resists ekphrasis, that which refuses all forms of translation between media. As Clement Greenberg has written, for instance, in modernism “content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself” (6). His words seem to echo those of Ezra Pound, who wrote in *Gaudier-Brzeska* of sculpture’s untranslatable essence: “Every concept, every emotion, presents itself to the vivid consciousness in some primary form. It belongs to the art of that form” (88). Both formalist art critics and modernist poets drew meticulous,

¹¹ Fried famously and contentiously sets “objecthood”—which he associates with a school of painting he describes as “literalism”—in opposition to modernist painting, claiming that literalism’s attempt to occupy physical space in the gallery is akin to an attempt to “occupy a position... that can be formulated in words” (148). “Objecthood” in this instance carries connotations of polemical antagonism, so that to “object” is to argue against the dominant discourses in art history. In this formulation, “objecthood” connotes *both* materiality and conceptuality; Fried’s argument has been criticized because this equation reduces modernism to a purely *immaterial* art form. I would argue, in contrast, that the effect Fried thought literalist painting hoped to achieve was akin to what literary modernists dreamed of accomplishing through ekphrasis.

even obsessive, attention to the material properties of art objects—to their shapes, structures, colors and textures, and their absolute refusal to be subsumed into concepts. To speak of painting’s “special” influence upon literary modernism, then, is to imagine literature exerting a claim to represent what it also deems fundamentally unrepresentable in language. In this simultaneous presentation of painting’s proximity and distance—in the literary text’s effort to bring before its reading public what it also regards as irretrievably remote—we might perceive “the apparition of a distance, however near it may be.” The inexpressibility topos, that is, mirrors or attempts to reconstitute something akin to the aura.¹²

In drawing connections between visual and literary modernisms, my project follows a tradition of scholarship that is older than the concept of “modernism” itself. This line of inquiry began at least as early as 1931, with Edmund Wilson’s comment—a brief aside—in *Axel’s Castle*, his study of “the self-conscious and very important literary movement” that would only later be called modernism, that Yeats was first exposed to poetry under the influence of his father, a Pre-Raphaelite painter (3). It is continued in Hugh Kenner’s assertion, four decades later, that literary modernism commenced by reconfiguring the formal relationship between ground and figure, by reconceptualizing “that eloquent space around objects which impressionist painters have taught us to think inseparable from the objects themselves” (*Pound Era* 18). And it finds more recent expression in the work of scholars such as Charles Altieri, who claims, for instance, that modernist poets saw in contemporary painting “significant alternatives to mainstream

¹² Although Benjamin’s aura decays or withers in the face of technological reproducibility, it does not wholly disappear. As Samuel Weber argues, the distancing and separating effects characteristic of the aura are in fact re-created in the operations of the mass media so that, as he puts it, “the aura thrives in its decline” (101).

culture” (6), and that their poetry exists as a response to these innovations. Other critics have examined the problems inherent in ekphrasis or what Wendy Steiner terms “interartistic comparison,” while attempting to find connections between “reference, figuration, sign type, and semiotic slippage” (xiv). These studies tend to presume that formal developments in one medium can be considered solely in terms of their relation to formal developments in another, ignoring the effects of material, social and historical conditions upon art’s production, and presenting avant-garde movements solely in relation to other aesthetic “revolutions” isolated within the art world, without examining the effects of art markets, exhibition practices, or changing economies upon the reception of art. Such work risks substituting isolated concepts—of “pure form,” abstraction, or novelty in technique—for culturally and historically situated objects. It imagines that paintings are encountered in an ahistorical and idealized realm that neither inflects the beholder’s experience of the artwork nor alters over the course of time.

More recent work in modernist studies has attempted to redress these deficiencies by attending to the ways that viewing is inevitably conditioned by the context in which it takes place. Often using the term “visual culture” to describe its methodology, this line of inquiry frequently builds upon Jonathan Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer*, which employs a Foucauldian model that understands seeing as a cultural construct rather than as something inevitable or “natural,” and as subject to change according to transformations in scientific, technological and historical conditions.¹³ In her 2001 book,

¹³ Of course not all studies that describe themselves as falling under this rubric claim a debt to Crary’s work; indeed the definition of “visual culture”—whether as an independent field of study or theoretical framework for inquiries in other areas—has been the subject of longstanding debate. Many critics date the inception of these arguments to the publication of a questionnaire in a special issue of the journal *October* in 1996; it explicitly asked “a range of art and architecture historians, film theorists, literary critics, and artists” to describe the relation between visual culture and traditional art history (25). Critics writing in support of the substitution of “visual culture” for “art history,” such as Martin Jay, lauded its

The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture, Karen Jacobs was among the first critics to bring this perspective to bear on a reading of modernist narrative. She considers Woolf and James alongside historically determined notions of spectacle and spectatorship, and situates Zora Neale Hurston and Ralph Ellison in relation to visual discourses that grew out of contemporary social sciences. Other work in this vein examines the relation between new habits of seeing and the onset of modernity, and attempts to document the ways that the emergence of cinema, photography, and technologies like the X-ray have influenced not only representations of vision in modernism, but also how everyday viewing practices were understood and experienced.¹⁴

Recent scholarship including Michael North's *Camera Works* (2005) and Caroline Goesser's *Picturing the New Negro* (2007) has also turned its attention to the material objects that caught the modernist observer's gaze: examining little magazines, and the illustrations and advertising they contained, these critics attend to transformations in media, publishing practices and print culture, analyzing the complex relationships between early twentieth-century visual experience and the historical evidence out of which we can attempt to reconstruct it.

methodological inclusiveness, suggesting that the use of the term "visual" "extend[s the discipline's] range to include all manifestations of optical experience, all variants of visual practice" ("Questionnaire" 42) rather than those associated solely with aesthetics. Other critics noted that this apparent broadening of disciplinary perspective can lead to a loss of object-specificity, which, according to Carol Armstrong, can cause us to mistakenly view paintings as "exchanges circulating in some great, boundless and often curiously ahistorical economy of images, subjects and other representations" ("Questionnaire" 27). For more extensive recent commentary on these definitional debates, see Jenks, Mitchell's *Picture Theory*, and Mirzoeff. More recent work, particularly that influenced by the emergence of the field of material culture, has tried to combine an interest in cultural discourses of optics and vision with a renewed attention to the physical world. For examples of essays in this vein, see contributions by John Frow and Charity Scribner to the 2004 essay collection entitled *Things*.

¹⁴ In *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures*, for example, Maggie Humm analyzes the intersections between post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and the photograph albums owned by female modernist writers, as well as their immediate experiences as viewers of and actresses in avant-garde cinema. Sara Danus's *Senses of Modernism* traces the emergence of an anti-technological bias in high modernist texts through their accounts of perception, including visual perception.

My own work is intended in part as a contribution to this field. I wish to retain visual culture's productive emphasis on the ways that technological and cultural transformations have shaped practices of seeing, and the ways that visual experience is inevitably inflected by historical change. But many of these analyses explicitly define the "visual culture" that is the object of their attention in popular or lowbrow forms: they engage with film and television rather than installation art or theatre, or treat widespread technological advancements rather than small exhibits in art galleries.¹⁵ As Jacobs writes, for instance, her theoretical approach "allows us to see literature as responsive to a broader set of influences than the narrow and often purely formally conceived aesthetic sphere" (5). In equating aesthetics with narrowness and pure form, and indeed in conceptualizing it as a "sphere" set apart from the "broader...influences" of culture, such perspectives tend both to reinforce a peculiarly modernist insistence on the special status of the aesthetic, its removal from everyday life, and to dismiss or ignore the pervasive incorporation of mass cultural elements within the world of modern art. Visual culture is thus inclined to manifest cultural studies' noted avoidance of, if not outright hostility towards, the category of the aesthetic.¹⁶ By returning our attention to the objects considered to have specially influenced literary modernism in older formalist studies—specifically, paintings, with their self-conscious status as high art—I would like to begin to unsettle or rethink this division.

¹⁵ One frequently-cited definition of "visual culture" may be responsible for some of these exclusions. In "What is Visual Culture?", W.J.T. Mitchell has written that it comprises "studies in film, television and mass culture alongside a new social/political/communicational order that employs mass spectacle and technologies of visual and auditory stimulation in radically new ways" (207). Rebecca Beasley's recent book, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism*, attempts to challenge these oppositions, striving instead to "register a visibility embedded within modernism itself: modernism understood...as the retroactively applied literary critical category" (4).

¹⁶ For a useful extended discussion of the relations between the growth of cultural studies and the fate of philosophical aesthetics, see Pamela Matthews and David McWhirter's "Introduction" to *Aesthetic Subjects*.

Aesthetics is particularly important as an object of inquiry for modernist studies, for modernism itself has had a long history of being conceived in formal or stylistic terms. Unlike periods of literary history that are bounded by particular dates—the eighteenth century, for instance—or those that cluster around historical events—like the Victorian era—modernism has most often been thought of as an aesthetic category.¹⁷ However, recent scholarship has done much to revise or complicate this definition of the field, frequently attempting to characterize it in more strongly historical terms, as Susan Stanford Friedman does. She writes: “modernism in the context of the humanities is most often understood as the loosely affiliated movements and individuals in the arts and literature that reflect and contribute to the conditions and consciousness of modernity” (501). But whenever critics use the term “modernism” to describe the literature that is attendant upon or produced in response to a historical condition called “modernity,” the partial overlap between the names of the literary and historical periods inevitably solicits questions and invites debate about the relation between the two.¹⁸ To a certain extent, this continuing uncertainty reflects a broader sense of doubt among scholars of modernism about the implications of the “cultural turn” for their field: including texts with widely divergent formal features under the heading of “modernism” is a problematic

¹⁷ Eysteinsson traces the commonalities and differences between the viewpoints of critics who understand modernism as “a kind of aesthetic heroism, which in the face of the chaos of the modern world...sees art as the only dependable reality” (9) and those who see it as “a historically explosive paradigm” (16). See *The Concept of Modernism*, esp. pp. 8-44.

¹⁸ While Andreas Huyssen describes the relation between aesthetic modernism and its contemporary cultural surrounds as one of intense hostility, claiming that modernism “constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture” (vii), Marshall Berman posits modernism as the modern subject’s attempt to reconcile himself to the historical condition of modernity: “modernism...[is] any attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it” (5). More recent critical work often sees the relationship between modernism and modernity as one of complementarity or interconnection. Jessica Berman, for example, writes that modernist “writers engage directly with twentieth-century historical and political transformations of community” (3).

gesture, always risking that the category itself will be rendered obsolete, yet refusing to do so seems to leave the discipline stranded at a formalist impasse. But the persistence of this problem should serve to remind us that the term “modernism” has not yet lost its aesthetic connotations. Indeed, such detachment may well prove impossible for modernist studies, since this work continues to rely for its academic prestige upon the institutional contexts that created “modernism”—as a formal and aesthetic category—in the first place.

This dissertation makes its argument through close readings of canonical modernist texts. I situate these readings in relation to contemporary cultural discourses of aesthetic value—debates about the rise of the art museum, the role of connoisseurship in reforming the art historical canon, the use and misuse of art reproductions, and the importance of providing (or refusing) public access to the private art collection. To do so is, of course, to take part in the ongoing critical project of historicizing modernism, to show how modernism’s various ambitions—to create a “pure” aesthetic realm set apart from the contaminating pressures of history, to equate form and content, to find new forms adequate to celebrate or contest the historical transition to modernity—are themselves products of its particular cultural circumstances. But I am interested, also, in demonstrating that formalist close reading and historical analysis are ultimately interdependent and inextricable, that cultural transformations always manifest themselves in and *as* form. Each chapter in this project takes up a particular location that is at once a historical place and a literary construct; together they form what might be described as a

constellation—a juxtaposed cluster of concepts that shows history to reside in a mass of detail rather than a simple narrative of linear development.¹⁹

The first chapter, “Henry James at the Museum,” examines works from James’s so-called “fourth phase”—the shorter fiction, literary criticism and autobiographical writing produced late in his life and career, after he had completed the experimental novels for which he is now best known, and in the wake of his extended visit to the United States in 1904-05. Critics as diverse as Hugh Kenner and Bill Brown have situated *The American Scene* at modernism’s point of origin, both because of its formal complexity and because it registers James’s troubled response to American urban modernity. His memoir discloses a deep anxiety about what he perceives as a city without history, a place where the material world is subject to processes of transformation and decay that occur with ever-increasing rapidity. In response to the threatening impermanence that James associates with New York, he posits in his late writing a new model for the modern art object—one based not on the singularity associated with painting, but instead on the endless reproducibility and inherent multiplicity linked with photography. It is this model upon which James’s own attempt at aesthetic self-preservation—the New York edition of his work—is based.

My next chapter, “Bloomsbury on Private View,” considers the arrival of Post-Impressionism in England. Modernist painting became known to the British public through a combination of blockbuster exhibitions—public spectacles like the first and second Post-Impressionist shows organized by Roger Fry—and journalistic description—

¹⁹ In using the term “constellation” to describe this project’s shape, I follow—though loosely—a model derived from Benjamin and Adorno, both of whom posited that their work’s “constellational form” was inseparable from its philosophical substance. On the importance of the constellation as a figure for Adorno’s thought, see Jay, *Adorno* 14-23.

reviews in the various illustrated art periodicals that had recently been founded as well as editorials and commentaries in mass market magazines and newspapers. Roger Fry and Virginia Woolf both participated in this cultural process, writing—and publishing—their views about this “new” art, and in Fry’s case curating exhibitions and founding enterprises to bring it before wider English audiences. But Fry and Woolf were both ambivalent about their own efforts, insisting in their espousal of formalism that visual art could only be apprehended from a position of unmediated intimacy. In an attempt to overcome the contradictions at the heart of this dilemma, with the founding of the Omega Workshops Bloomsburians turned to a redesign of the domestic sphere. Interior decoration represented for them a new hybrid art form, one that might fruitfully combine features of fine art and craft, materiality and conceptuality, publicity and intimacy. The Omega Workshops thus held out a peculiar promise: though they could be described in press reports, a visit to their rooms was imagined as offering an experience incommensurate with could be transmitted in the mass media.

In “Wyndham Lewis in the Fake-Masterpiece Factory,” the dissertation’s third chapter, I turn to one of modernism’s most bombastic and belligerent figures. In keeping with his self-proclaimed reputation as the “Enemy,” Lewis set himself in opposition to what he saw as the excessive subjectivism of his modernist contemporaries. A zealous defender of the formal autonomy and “deadness” of art, Lewis championed an aesthetic of exteriority and pure surface, an ideal he believed could best be realized in the medium of painting. Painting embodied such an ideal for Lewis because of its physical form: in the flatness of the canvas, which exists as a fully exposed surface that conceals no interiority, Lewis imagined a model for human sincerity. Throughout his lifetime, in

defense of this ideal, Lewis saw himself as at war with the practice of art forgery. This chapter traces the development of these militant beliefs from his early correspondence with American collector John Quinn, who Lewis hoped would fight against the circulation of fakes in the international art market, to his 1937 novel *The Revenge for Love*, which satirizes a world in which fake “Van Goghs” are serially and quasi-mechanically created in a “factory.” In the novel, painting is both a victim of the depredations of the society in which it is produced, and the site of lingering—if unrealizable—utopian potential.

My project’s concluding chapter, “Gertrude Stein’s Atelier,” investigates a set of related issues in the work of Gertrude Stein, examining her brief association with New York’s Museum of Modern Art in the form of a talk that she gave there in honor of its fifth anniversary celebration alongside her well-known *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Stein, I argue, was critical of the MoMA because she believed that the institution’s mission was inherently self-contradictory: to publicize and preserve avant-garde painting. In so doing, the museum would act to deplete these works’ revolutionary potential—their ability to shock, or to offer a critique of society, history, or the world outside of a hermetically-enclosed aesthetic sphere. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, with its bestseller status and explicitly commercial focus, posed a problem for Stein similar to what the MoMA faced during its early years. The memoir’s narrative technique conveys a sense of nostalgia for an art world that the text itself is involved in writing out of existence, a moment when the then-unknown artworks were infused with a “heroic” sense of promise, and a moment already part of an irretrievable past by the time of the memoir’s publication. In insinuating that it is itself a copy, not an original, the

Autobiography connects its conception of authenticity to a model of depth—within the interior of the self, and within the confines of the home—and registers its own difference from what is posited as the source of its value. Stein, in other words, is conscious of modernism's status as textual surface, but uses this to celebrate a notion of irretrievable depth; she posits that literary modernism gains its worth through its association—but not identity—with modern painting.

CHAPTER ONE

Henry James at the Museum

When, at the opening of *The American*, Christopher Newman seats himself upon “the great circular divan which... occupied the centre of the Salon Carré, in the Museum of the Louvre” (33), not only is he at the heart of France’s most famous museum, but he is also metonymically at the center of European culture. This novel’s beginning thus signals one of Henry James’s central preoccupations, with the confrontation between a hero who, as the book’s title reminds us, represents his nation—a new world associated with industry, commerce and modernity—and Europe—an old world replete with history, civilization and art. The geographical trajectory of this early James novel, in which a heroic American, unable because of his country’s cultural emptiness to find aesthetic inspiration at home, must travel to Europe in order to have firsthand contact with works of art, provides an important parallel for the way the geographical progress of modernism has often been understood. For critics have long traced modernism’s origins to a series of international encounters—between expatriate American artists and European culture, between art objects and the audiences that traveled to view them, and between modern paintings and the novelists and writers who are said to have learned from them. At once avaricious and naïve, Newman seems to epitomize the American consumer of European culture at the turn of the century.

But this narrative—of modernism’s movement outward from a European center—tells us only half the story. Over the course of Henry James’s career, during the second half of the nineteenth century and first years of the twentieth, numerous artists, millionaires and others pursuers of “high culture” did indeed travel from America to

Europe, but at the same time, ever increasing numbers of artworks were making the reverse journey. Between 1876, when James began work on *The American*, and 1911, when he published *The Outcry* (the last novel completed in his lifetime), the nature and status of the American art museum underwent a radical transformation. In 1876, only two major museums devoted to the fine arts had been established in the United States: New York's Metropolitan Museum and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.¹ By the turn of the century, new art museums were opening throughout the country at the rate of nearly one per year.² In the Midwest, which James had identified with cultural emptiness in *The Golden Bowl*, calling it "the wondrous, the already famous fold beyond the Mississippi" (426), major museums were founded in Detroit, Chicago, Cincinnati and St. Louis. Before his departure from the United States, James had written that an 1874 exhibition of paintings in Boston was "an artistic event of unprecedented magnitude" because of the rarity of such an occurrence: "the importation of old masters by the dozen is as yet, for the American public, an unfamiliar fashion" (*Painter's Eye* 79). But by the time of James's return to the city of his birth in 1905, museumgoing was a familiar pastime for the cultured New Yorker, and an increasingly commonplace activity even for his countrymen in less cosmopolitan locales.

Though critics have observed the prevalence of museums as settings in James's fiction, they have not often commented on James's response to the *changes* undergone by the fine arts museum as a cultural form in his lifetime, nor remarked upon James's

¹ See Einreinhofer (32-52) for a detailed account of the founding of these two institutions. Burt (23-65) includes the Wadsworth Athenaeum and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in his list of the first American museums. See also Bazin 241-265. He notes that American museums were almost always modeled after European predecessors, but differed in that they relied greatly upon private collectors and philanthropists for donations, rather than enjoying state funding.

² Burt (181-202) elaborates upon the rapid proliferation of art museums in the Midwest during these years.

engagement with the international circulation of art objects.³ Yet these historical developments form part of a larger shift—making art newly accessible to an unprecedentedly wide public—that was to play a vital role in refiguring literary modernism’s understanding of its relationship to the visual arts. In tracing James’s attention to the rise of the American art museum, then, I am interested in complicating the scholarly understanding of the development of modernism that conceives it as having flowed outward from a European center (usually Paris). Although the cultural resonance of the flourishing of Impressionism, the birth of Cubism or the canonization of Post-Impressionism cannot be denied, the evolution of literary modernism also came as a response to historical transformations in America: to the spread of industrial capitalism, to the formation of new markets for art and literature, and to the development of new technologies that enabled the international circulation of artworks. I read Henry James’s representations of New York’s Metropolitan Museum as interconnected with his wider concerns about American urban modernity; for if the museum is, as its theorists have claimed, a quintessentially modern institution, its growth and popularization necessarily entails the spread of new ways of looking at artworks, new ways of conceiving their materiality and new ways of thinking about their relation to the world around them.⁴

³ Adeline Tintner’s 1986 book-length study, *The Museum World of Henry James*, offers a useful—and exhaustive—catalogue of the references to fine art museums in James’s published work, but limits its theorization of their function to the provocative observation that “the great museums of the world... [offered James] rich and suggestive analogues for what he was trying to do in his prose” (1). See also Stephen Arata’s “Object Lessons” and Thomas Peyser’s “James, Race, and the Imperial Museum,” for more recent historicist perspectives, though both of these articles restrict their scope to a consideration of *The Golden Bowl*.

⁴ The essential “modernity” of the museum as a cultural form has been posited frequently by art historians and critics. Bennett, for instance, provides a Foucauldian genealogy of the museum that links its formation to the development of systems of voluntary self-regulation for the citizenry of modern democratic societies. In a study that has been highly influential for my own work, Douglas Crimp proposes that modern art and aesthetics have evolved as “a function of art’s seclusion in the museum, where art was made to appear autonomous, alienated, something apart, referring only to its own internal history and dynamics” (13). For

This chapter will examine the difficult, and—I argue—central, dilemma that takes shape in *The American Scene*'s portrayal of New York's major fine arts museum. For the Metropolitan instances a problem that is important both for James's text and for literary modernism more generally: it embodies his wish that art objects might stand outside of history, might be excepted from the material surroundings that threaten to compromise or destroy them, might transcend their very conditions of possibility. But the Metropolitan also represents a historical actuality—the *reality* of life in early twentieth-century New York; as such, it serves to shatter the dream of art's removal from the world, of an aesthetic sphere liberated from temporality, physicality, or history. In this doubleness, the Metropolitan Museum's very existence comes to stand as an allegory for art's predicament in modernity—and for modernist literature's inherently fraught and paradoxical attempts to resolve it.

* * *

In beginning my discussion of James's engagement with the rise of the American art museum with a reading of *The American Scene*, I am taking up a text that numerous critics, from Hugh Kenner (in 1971) to Bill Brown (as recently as 2003), have also positioned at modernism's point of origin. Most often such critics have done so for one of two distinct but related reasons: because the memoir's stylistic innovations are said to pave the way for the formal "break" that has become known as modernism, or because it is said to be a response to the historical condition—modernity—of the United States in the early twentieth century. Kenner might be said to typify the first of these positions when he asserts that *The American Scene*'s grammatical form inaugurates a new way of

more historically specific arguments about the museum's modernity, see for example McClellan and Berger (on Paris), Burt (on the United States) and Kaplan (considering a variety of national contexts).

representing subject-object relations. In James's travelogue, Kenner claims, "The mind unviolated by an idea holds converse with particulars... [so that] the act of perception and the act of articulation [are] inextricably one... The perceiving mind of *The American Scene* unites itself with that eloquent space around objects which impressionist painters have taught us to think inseparable from the objects" (18). Writing more recently, Sara Blair represents the second critical trend. She argues that *The American Scene* is preoccupied with and therefore a product of its historical moment, as it "actively probes the turn-of-the-century project of Americanization, rehearsing a dizzying array of racial feelings, habits, and exchanges informing widely divergent sites" (*Writing* 13). But Blair's analysis of how James's text "theorizes and performs... a notion of the documentary that purposefully engages emerging technologies and idioms" also invites us to interrogate the "purposeful" nature of this "engagement" with history (160). Both critics, in other words, ask how thoroughly the "perceiving mind" represented in the memoir—and thereby transformed into art—is shaped by its surroundings, or how completely it appropriates and reshapes them into the modernist form of its experimental prose.

John Carlos Rowe reformulates succinctly the traditional critical stance on this question when he writes, "the high-modernist Henry James[']s... destiny always seems to end in the intricacies of his late style and its retreat from life into the palace of art" (28). Though Rowe's point is a familiar one—he seeks to undo the opposition between aesthetic formalism and the notion of social and historical engagement that James's readers so often have found—I wish to pause here for a moment to examine the terms in

which it is stated.⁵ For the “palace of art” is both a figure that James’s readers have used to describe his late novels’ tendency to eschew the historical commitments of realism in favor of aesthetic autonomy and the title of an 1832 poem by Tennyson treating the same subject. Though Tennyson’s “Palace of Art” ultimately poses a scathing critique of art’s isolation from life, with its “lordly-pleasure house” likened in the poem’s final stanzas to “a crumbling tomb, girt round / With blackness as a solid wall,” (1; 171-2), refutation of this poem’s argument became a hallmark of the aestheticist movement by the end of the nineteenth century.⁶ Indeed, by 1877, when a satirical verse published in *Punch* reprised the title of Tennyson’s poem in a playful mockery of the newly-opened Grosvenor Gallery, a venue for exhibiting Pre-Raphaelite painting and rallying point for the aesthetes, “palace of art” had become synonymous with the ambitions of the artists whose works were shown in the new gallery, and those of the writers and critics who frequented it.⁷ Thus the antinomy that Rowe finds between the “palace of art” and “life” has a

⁵ Other critics, both in reference to Rowe’s comment and elsewhere, have used the phrase “palace of art” similarly. In “Henry James (Post)Modernist?,” David McWhirter employs it to refer to the New York Edition, while Sara Blair (in a book review) also applies it to the dilemma outlined by Rowe.

⁶ On the key role played by this text in the consolidation of aestheticism’s identity as a movement, see for instance Perry.

⁷ The verse reads, in part:

I built myself a lordly picture-palace
Wherein to play a Leo’s part.
I said, “Let others cricket, row or race
I will go in for Art!”

Full of great rooms and small my palace stood,
With porphyry columns faced,
Hung round with pictures such as I thought good,
Being a man of taste.

The pictures—for the most part they were such
As more behold than buy—
The quaint, the queer, the mystic over-much,
The dismal and the dry. (qtd. in Denney 9)

The fact that Tennyson’s poem was satirized in such a widely-circulated weekly paper should serve as evidence of the popularity and cultural currency that its title had achieved by the time James adopted it in reference to the art museum. For more on the Grosvenor Gallery’s role in aestheticism, see Denney 9-36.

history of its own, one that links James to the British aestheticist movement, and that allows us to imagine William Morris, Walter Pater, and even Oscar Wilde as his literary forebearers.⁸

But James's own use of the phrase "palace of art" in *The American Scene* is much more limited and precise; rather than gesturing toward general aesthetic theories, he instead refers only to a single, geographically and historically specific location: New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. James had employed these words in reference to the fine art museum several times throughout his writing career. In *The Golden Bowl*, the "museum of museums" that Adam Verver plans to build in American City to house his collection is described as "a palace of art which was to show for compact as a Greek temple was compact, a receptacle of treasures sifted to positive sanctity" (143). In a famous passage in *A Small Boy and Others*, too, the Louvre is described as a place where "the house of life and the palace of art became... mixed and interchangeable" (198). Instead of providing the "positive sanctity" in which the American museum will isolate its "treasures," the Louvre combines for James an opportunity for the quiet contemplation of art with a chance to observe the bustle of contemporary urban public life.⁹ He writes:

[T]he Louvre [was]... the most peopled of all scenes no less than the most hushed of all temples... [so] that an excursion to look at pictures would have but half expressed my afternoon. I had looked at pictures, looked and looked again, at the vast Veronese, at Murillo's moon-bourne Madonna, at Leonardo's almost unholy dame with the folded hands, treasures of the Salon Carré as that display was then composed; but I had also looked at France and looked at Europe, looked even at America as Europe itself might be conceived to so look, looked at history, as a

⁸ The links between Henry James's impressionism and the work of the aestheticists have been traced many times by critics, though Jonathan Freedman's *Professions of Taste* does so extensively and convincingly. He reads both James's and aestheticism's avowed opposition to what he terms "commodity culture" as itself historically and culturally determined.

⁹ Michael Moon offers an extended reading of this famous scene, elaborating its implications for a psychoanalytic interpretation of James's memoir; Moon also provides a detailed critical history (*Small Boy* 18-24).

still-felt past and a complacently personal future, at society, manners, type, characters, possibilities and prodigies and mysteries of fifty sorts. (198-99)

Rather than staging a “retreat from life,” James enters the “palace of art” better to observe it. In the Louvre, the paintings that offer the pure aesthetic experience associated with high culture are viewed alongside the museum’s visitors, a motley collection of national types who embody “history” and transform it into an equally fascinating spectacle. There the young James encounters and studies the material—the “society, manners, type, characters, possibilities and prodigies and mysteries of fifty sorts”—that he will gather and assimilate into his art. The Louvre enables a particular mode of vision, one that turns passers-by into characters, allows individual tourists to stand for nations, and renders past events immediately accessible. For James, then, the phrase “palace of art” literally designates the art museum, but it also comes to stand for the absorptive economy of his fiction. In place of aesthetic autonomy, the “art for art’s sake” with which critics tend to identify the aestheticist movement, James’s “palace of art” is a site of aesthetic circulation and interchange, a place where life is converted into art.

Though James’s account of his visit to the Metropolitan Museum in *The American Scene* is ostensibly a minor episode in the book, this “palace of art” occupies a similarly important position within it. *The American Scene* is centrally preoccupied with the relation between subjective memory and the external world, presenting itself as a critique of American urban modernity’s cultural forgetfulness; James is especially troubled by the rapid pace of modern life and the mobility of persons and transience of institutions and structures that this entails.¹⁰ The Metropolitan Museum appears in the text as a

¹⁰ Beverly Haviland describes at length *The American Scene*’s representation of what she terms the “cultural disaster” of contemporary America. Significantly, modern America’s failure to appreciate its own legacy is framed in her text as an inability to appreciate European artworks (specifically, painting) (*Last*

particularly charged instance of the more general problem afflicting the city that surrounds it. When James approaches it from its garden adjoining Central Park, he is, as he records, initially and immediately “struck... [by] the impression of a quite other hazard of *flânerie*... one of those memories, once more, that I find myself standing off from, as under the shadow of their too numerous suggestion” (141). The repetitive quality of this experience indicates that James understands the museum as typifying New York, where buildings function as mnemonic devices that call to mind a past which has, he writes, “vanished as utterly as the Assyrian Empire” (142). The Metropolitan thus exemplifies, or even intensifies, the effect that the ever-changing modern city has on the sensitive observer: it invites him to measure the distance between a threatening, “hazardous” present moment and a constantly receding and irretrievable past.

In the language of *The American Scene*, this central distinction—between city and observer, between James the “restless analyst” and “the terrible town” of New York (9; 57)—is cast as a contrast between history and memory. History is said to reside in the external world of architecture, monuments and city streets. As James famously complains, the city’s greatest flaws are exemplified in its skyscrapers: “crowned not only with no history, but with no credible possibility of time for history, and consecrated by no uses save the commercial at any cost, they are simply the most piercing notes in that concert of the expensively provisional into which your supreme sense of New York resolves itself” (61). The form of the urban environment negates the “possibility of time

Romance 49-73). Arguing in a similar vein, Peter Conn has called *The American Scene* “a massive, brooding monument to James’s despair over modernity, a memorial carved out in the furthest final reach of James’s immensely complex late style” (31). Blair, unsurprisingly, offers a contradictory perspective, claiming that *The American Scene*’s apparent nostalgia and pessimism can better be understood as an attempt to “align itself... and compete with... emerging documentary modes of mass visual culture” (*Writing* 160).

for history,” both because it reshapes human lives so that they are without time for reflection, and because it is torn down and reconstructed so frequently and so thoroughly that there is no lingering material evidence of what once was. But if the New York that is described in *The American Scene* is utterly lacking in “history,” it is also figured as an overflowing repository of personal memory: “One’s extremest youth had been full of New York, and one was absurdly finding it again, meeting it at every turn, in sights, sounds, smells, even in the chaos of confusion and change” (5). The very ephemerality of urban life, then, becomes a sort of mnemonic device that calls to mind scenes and impressions from James’s childhood. That the city without “history” is charged with a surfeit of memories shows that the text defines these two terms in opposition—while history is linked with publicity and materiality, memory is a subjective experience that can take place only within the privacy of an individual consciousness.

At least as an ideal, as it was envisaged by its founders, the Metropolitan Museum promised to interrupt this opposition, to offer a respite from the flux of modern life, to rescue objects from the passage of time, and even to resurrect the possibility of history in a city otherwise antithetical to it. The Museum’s purpose, as its president declared in a speech given at the dedication of the building adjoining Central Park that is its present home, was to retain “a more or less complete collection of objects illustrative of the history of art in all its branches, from the earliest beginnings to the present time” (qtd. in Howe 199).¹¹ Designed to harbor “the great masterpieces of painting and sculpture which have commanded the reverence and attention of mankind, and satisfied the

¹¹ For a lengthy description of the founding of the Metropolitan Museum, see Howe 8-22. Though unquestionably dated (Howe describes the “Men who Guided the Museum’s Course” as heroic guardians of America’s cultural heritage), this account remains the most useful guide to the trustees’ original intent. For a more recent—though similar—version of the museum’s early history, see Tomkins 15-45.

yearnings of the human mind for perfection in form and color” (ibid. 198), the institution was intended both to house permanently a comprehensive collection of artworks—that is, to contain a material form of history—and to produce in its visitors a particular type of subjective experience (“reverence and attention”) that appears antithetical to the disorienting chaos—“a welter of objects and sounds in which relief, detachment, dignity, meaning, perished utterly and lost all rights” (65)—that James associates with New York. And James himself had earlier voiced this hope for the museum’s exceptionality, its separateness from the city that surrounds it, when he praised the young institution in an 1872 review of its first public exhibition of its initial acquisitions. Of a seventeenth-century landscape painting depicting a peaceful rural scene, he wrote: “May it speak to our children’s children with the same silvery accent, and help them to live for an hour, in this alien modern world, the life of old bucolic Flanders!” (*Painter’s Eye* 59). This artwork, and by extension the institution that holds it, not only aspires to material permanence, but also to keep the “alien modern world” at bay, allowing its visitors to re-experience the past, even if only for a brief moment. It would translate history, then, from the external world of objects into an inner consciousness of “the life of old bucolic Flanders,” or would work to re-interiorize it as private subjective experience.

But by the time of *The American Scene*’s writing in 1905, the Metropolitan Museum appeared to have failed to live up to the ideal of unchangeability that its founders (and a younger Henry James) had imagined for it. When James had first visited the young museum, it occupied the Dodworth Building on Fifth Avenue, the former home of Dodworth’s Dancing Academy. Now to be found in a purpose-built edifice—the “palace of art” alongside Central Park that it still inhabits today—the museum is

located in the third structure to house its collection since it was founded. And three wings had already been added to enlarge this building before James's visit in early 1905.¹² These relocations and renovations were part of a practical effort on the part of the museum's trustees to increase its exhibition space to keep pace with the rapid growth of the institution's holdings. For the Met had seen its collection expand from the 174 paintings in trustee William Blodgett's initial purchase to include more than 40,000 antiquities excavated from Cyprus, 3,500 musical instruments, collections of Roman and Etruscan glass, Egyptian statuary, European porcelain and Chinese jade figurines, as well as bequests from New York's wealthiest families—the lace collection of John Jacob Astor's wife, for instance, and Renaissance paintings and Italian drawings belonging to the Vanderbilts.¹³ The speed at which it acquired new objects had further accelerated in 1904, when financier J.P. Morgan assumed the museum's presidency. He brought a vast infusion of capital into the Met's operating budget, which nearly doubled from 1904 to 1905, and effected a number of other sweeping institutional transformations: the hiring and training of new curators, the organization of the collection into new and more specialized departments, and an increased emphasis on scholarship and professionalism in evaluating its acquisitions.¹⁴

The American Scene's description of the Metropolitan registers these changes, which for James connect it to the material impermanence that he associates with urban modernity more generally. The marriage of private capital and impeccable taste that Morgan's presidency has brought to the museum offers it an opportunity to improve its

¹² Howe includes a detailed description of the museum's physical expansion, complete with photographs of the new additions (in 1888, 1894 and 1902).

¹³ Details about these acquisitions are drawn from Tomkins 69-75

¹⁴ On the extensive transformations undergone by the Metropolitan Museum at the time that Morgan assumed its presidency, see Tomkins 99-101. See also Strouse's biography of Morgan (496-501).

collection, to weed out inferior pieces that were donated on the condition that they be placed on permanent display. As James notes, “almost no past acceptance of gifts and bequests ‘in kind’ had been without weakness,” yet the museum’s trustees were formerly constrained to accept all the contributions they received because they lacked funds to purchase others instead. Now, however, the museum will be able to choose “the most exquisite things... for art, selection, criticism, for knowledge, piety, taste” (143). Yet the impending improvement of the Met’s collection, together with its history of repeated removal and expansion, develops in James’s memoir into an image, not of its betterment, but of its dissolution, as he fretfully imagines the lesser works in its collection spilling from within its walls. “The thought of the acres of canvas and tons of marble to be turned out into the cold world as the penalty of old error and the warrant for a clean slate ought to have drawn tears from the eyes,” he writes (144). What he envisions here is that its president’s desire for constant improvement will result in the museum releasing the art with which it has been entrusted into the neighboring streets. In this fantasy, the Metropolitan Museum becomes one with the city whose flaws it not only exemplifies but expresses in aesthetic terms.

The American Scene, in other words, posits that twentieth-century New York is incompatible with the ideal of the museum; the Metropolitan is figured as dissolving into the surrounding and encroaching city in order to highlight its inability to provide an isolated or uncontaminated home for aesthetic experience. For James, the continuity between the museum and its urban environment is largely the result of the institution’s method of finance. Unlike contemporary European national museums, which drew upon state treasuries for their operating budgets and were filled with objects acquired through

imperial or military conquest, the Met was forced to rely almost entirely on individual donations and private bequests to stock its exhibition galleries.¹⁵ Although James describes these gifts as offering an admirable opportunity for public education—“an object-lesson in the large presence of which the New York mind will perform its evolution”—they nonetheless retain the taint of their origins in private capital (143). The Metropolitan Museum is thus figured in the text as a container or display chamber for its patrons’ affluence, a place where, as James writes, “[t]here was money in the air, ever so much money” (143). But if the “air” within the museum is what it holds in common with the “expensive... provisional[ity]” of the city without, it also draws its visitors’ attention away from the art objects it holds, however beautiful or splendid they might be. Because he is constantly assessing the institution’s wealth—the exchange value of its contents—James finds himself distracted from the museum’s actual purpose. “I found it invite me to a matter of much more interest than any mere judging of its dispositions,” he writes. “It spoke with a hundred voices of that huge process of historic waste that the place in general keeps putting before you; but showing it in a light that drew out the harshness or the sadness, the pang... of the reiterated sacrifice to pecuniary profit” (142). With his awareness diverted from the artworks before him—their forms, their appearance, their very physicality—to the contemplation of their monetary worth—a disembodied abstraction—James loses sight of the cultural heritage that the museum was intended to preserve. Instead he finds himself considering the city’s hostility to historical continuity;

¹⁵ For an examination of the interconnections between national museums and empire, see Bazin 15-38; Timothy Mitchell famously elaborates the invention of the “exhibitionary order” that defined colonial subjects as ‘objects’ of empire and the West as ordering, organizing and mastering them: museums—and the objects that filled them—formed a key part of this cultural complex, allowing their visitors to view “the cultures of the world portrayed in the form of objects arranged under glass, in the order of their evolution” (500). On the absence of state funding as a problem for American museums when competing with European ones to build their collections, see also Alexander 30-37.

rather than sheltering the “restless analyst” from the instability and contingency of modern urban life, the museum highlights and emphasizes it.

If the Metropolitan Museum is like the city of New York in its antipathy to history—in its architectural mutability and its inability to preserve the whole of its collection for posterity—it is like the city, too, in its ability to summon an excess of memory. Indeed the museum is perilous for James because of the involuntary nature of his response to it. “This superfluous consciousness of the original seat of the Museum, of where and what it had been,” he notes, “was one of those terrible traps to memory, about the town, which baited themselves with the cheese of association, so to speak, in order to exhibit one afterwards as ‘caught,’ or otherwise expressed, as old” (142). The “trap” of memory forces James to compare the museum’s history with that of his own family, and the demolition of buildings that once housed it with that of his “parental home” (142). The disturbing brevity of both intervals of time makes James aware of his mortality alongside the institution’s impermanence. But the “trap” of memory also presses upon James what he calls a “touched aftersense”—a set of “rich, if vague, evocations” of a past that he continually re-experiences as he visits different parts of the once-familiar city (141). The absorbency and capaciousness of this “superfluous consciousness” stands in opposition to the “historic waste” that characterizes both the Metropolitan Museum and the modern metropolis in the text. In a city that mirrors the bourgeois capitalist society of which Marx has written, “all that is solid melts into air” (223),¹⁶ a city where the material world seems always in the process of dissolving, where history is defined as rupture,

¹⁶ The case for the parallel between Marx’s conception of modernity—as articulated in *The Communist Manifesto*—and James’s understanding of the predicament of twentieth-century New York is made eloquently in Bill Brown’s powerful reading of *The American Scene*, upon which I draw here (*Sense of Things* 177-188).

private memory—not despite but *because of* its imagined immateriality—becomes the most powerful site of continuity for James.

The “palace of art” thus frames in miniature the central dilemma that troubles the whole of *The American Scene*: there the “restless analyst” finds that a retreat into subjective experience and private memory is the sole means of preserving the past—and its value—in a modern city where buildings, monuments, great art collections—indeed, the object world in its entirety—seems always on the point of vanishing. But this is not to say, as Sharon Cameron would have it, that James “empties the landscape [and] marginalizes the people,” in order to show “consciousness’s skill in *dispensing* with objects, so that what is being contemplated by consciousness is something like itself” (6-7), for the landscape is required in order to conjure memories, and objects are necessary to prompt their observers’ responses. Instead, I would argue, *The American Scene* continues to celebrate the *ideal* that the Metropolitan Museum represented to the young Henry James in 1872—its promise to “speak to our children’s children,” to preserve art objects and the aesthetic experiences they invoke beyond the limits of human mortality—but laments the impossibility of its realization in a physical structure in the modern world.

* * *

Such nostalgia for his own lost youth and for a sense of continuity with his American origins would become increasingly important to Henry James in the final years of his life. As critics have long been aware, his work during this period was often characterized by a sense of introspection or a desire to shape the reception of his fiction after his death—sentiments befitting the aging writer grappling with the specter of his

own mortality.¹⁷ Thus the short fiction, memoirs, and literary criticism that James produced at this time—which critics have recently referred to as the “fourth phase” of his career¹⁸—present repeated attempts to engage with dilemmas he first explored in *The American Scene*, especially those demonstrated in the centrally important but paradoxically unrealizable dream embodied by the Metropolitan Museum in that text. For if death sets an absolute limit beyond which a subject’s consciousness and private memories can no longer endure, James must return to the object world—and to its power to evoke and re-evoke experiences—in order to surmount the confining brevity of the human lifespan. To do so, he would again invoke a vision of the museum, but one no longer threatened by its ever-changing materiality—the incessant decay and renovation of its architecture—because preserved with greater stability within a textual reproduction.

James took up such questions in explicit relation to the Metropolitan Museum at greater length in “Julia Bride,” a short story first published in *Harper’s Monthly* in 1908, but written more than two years before—while he was also at work on *The American Scene*. Like “The Jolly Corner,” which critics have tended to read as more clearly autobiographical, “Julia Bride” bears the imprint of James’s troubled confrontation with the radical transformations undergone by the city of his birth in the decades of his

¹⁷ The classical account of James’s self-memorialization in the New York Edition—and its relevance to his sense of his own transient lifespan—is given by Edel; see, in particular, *The Master* 324-39. Edel first made the comparison in a 1951 article, “The Architecture of Henry James’s ‘New York Edition.’” In his introduction to *Henry James’s New York Edition*, McWhirter also develops this point, stressing the impact of James’s much-quoted comment (in a letter to Edmund Gosse) that the Edition was “really a monument (like Ozymandias) which has never had the least intelligent critical justice done to it” (1).

¹⁸ For a brief critical history of the “fourth phase” of James’s career, and the relation between scholarly interest in this period—centered on James’s *American Scene*—and the emergence of postcolonial and poststructuralist criticism, see McWhirter, “Henry James, (Post)Modernist?” 173-4.

absence.¹⁹ And like *The American Scene*, “Julia Bride” thematizes the problem of memory in a modern world characterized by a sense of historical rupture. Set initially in the Metropolitan Museum, the story treats the dilemma of a young and modern American woman who must conceal a scandalous history, of “her own six [broken] engagements and her mother’s three nullified marriages” (669-70), if she is to secure a wealthy and cultured man as her fiancé. Julia possesses but a single asset in the highly competitive marriage market of New York society: her exceptional beauty. Like many of James’s heroines, however, Julia is compromised by her physical attractiveness: the fact that she is “inordinately pretty” inevitably objectifies her in the eyes of the men who gaze upon her, and threatens to limit the ethical and narrative possibilities open to her in the tale (667). Thus it is possible to read “Julia Bride” as a social critique: for the young women of turn-of-the-century New York, beauty is a form of confinement that “set them trap after trap... [and] foredoomed them to awful ineptitude” (667).²⁰

The difficulties with which Julia is faced are largely the product of the environment in which she finds herself: it is Julia’s status as a young woman in modern New York that creates her predicament in the tale. Like the city that is the object of James’s censure in *The American Scene*, the New York that Julia inhabits is a place of impermanence and social fragmentation. Indeed the quandary she faces—and her hope to escape it—is the result of a lack of continuity between past and present, between what actually happened and what is remembered by New Yorkers. The story turns upon this

¹⁹ For one such reading of “The Jolly Corner,” see Haviland, who stresses the tale’s autobiographical nature, as well as its negative view of New York. Tintner also remarks upon the tale’s resemblance to James’s life, stressing as well its continuity with “Julia Bride” (*Museum World* 185-87)

²⁰ Such an interpretation of the tale is given by Donatella Izzo, who understands it as “a feminist denunciation echoing the arguments of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century feminism and anticipating our own” (136). While I find her emphasis of James’s proto-feminism somewhat reductive, her stress upon the tale’s historical engagement and the work it does as a social critique has been influential for my own reading.

relation between past and future, upon the possibility of rewriting history. Julia's ability to obtain the advantageous marriage rests upon her ability to prove her earlier innocence; she hopes that a man she accidentally encounters at the museum, one of her mother's scandalously divorced ex-husbands, a "long, loose, slightly cadaverous gentleman who was a memory for her" (662), will be willing to testify—perhaps falsely ("even to the point of perjury if perjury should be required" [665])—on her behalf. The young man she hopes to marry, Basil French, whose very name betokens European ancestry, is associated with an aristocratic heritage. He is "quiet, cultivated, earnest, public spirited, brought up in Germany, infinitely traveled, awfully like a high-caste Englishman" (668), and he is deeply invested in the permanence of institutions—especially of his own wealthy family and of marriage. Accordingly, he would find the brevity of Julia's mother's previous unions intolerable, and would relinquish Julia if he knew of her six prior engagements. The divorces were scandalous because they rendered information that should have appropriately remained within the intimate enclosure of the family circle the province of the Court and the newspaper, but they are also impermissible because they indicate the provisionality and transience of something that French believes should be immutably fixed. The principal flaw of the Metropolitan Museum, then, may be likened to what French would find fault with in Julia's history of broken engagements and her mother's recurrent divorces—a sense that what should be enduring is instead unstable, subject in the building's case to relocation and renovation, and in the woman's, to circulation and capriciousness.

In fact the tale is preoccupied with forms of capture—with the power of memory accurately and effectively to preserve past events, and with the power of institutions to

translate private memories into the public realm of social structures. If the Metropolitan Museum is described in *The American Scene* as “one of those terrible traps to memory” (142), in “Julia Bride” it is the site of a more literal kind of capture, a place where Julia hopes that the enchanting experience of looking upon her beauty will entice French to admit her to “the grand square forecourt of the palace of wedlock” (669). The tale’s suspense is generated by uncertainty about whether or not Julia will succeed in this aim, which depends, in turn, upon the strength of French’s memory of her compelling and exceptional beauty. For if she is able to cast what is described as a “spell,” one that Julia fears French may “break” in order to “escape the danger” (661), she is imagining aesthetic experience, and particularly the version of it that occurs when her body is gazed at as though a beautiful object, as another version of capture. This seductive delight will, she hopes, entrap him not merely into a moment’s rapturous contemplation of her, but into the more permanent institution of marriage. The better French’s memory is able to retain her impression—and thus reproduce a response to it that the story understands as involuntary—the more likely it is that she will attain her object.

But “Julia Bride” also offers a contradictory meditation on the status of beauty in modernity, a reflection on the powers and possibilities offered by aesthetic experience in a city with “no history.” Julia is ultimately unsuccessful in the tale: unable to find a socially appropriate witness to vouch for the version of her own history that she has constructed, she resolves herself to inevitable failure. Julia’s ruin secures the purity of the social aristocracy—French’s family will not be polluted by her mother’s history of divorce—but is accomplished in the art museum at a moment when Julia impulsively speaks against herself, when she is distracted by falling under a spell of “artless awe”

(679). Entranced by her “reflexion” in the face of a beholder—who is momentarily objectified, frozen into a “suspended weight and arrested mass” (679)—Julia unexpectedly lapses into moral uprightness. The effect of her beauty and the aesthetic experience it produces is again a form of entrapment—in its involuntariness—but on this occasion Julia metamorphoses into a principled individual, while her beholder is crystallized into a mute perceiver. Julia, then, both is and is not transformed into an art object in the Metropolitan Museum’s “great shining room” (675) and “promiscuous halls” (679). She is the beautiful thing that is endlessly gazed upon, and she finds herself unable to escape the conditions created by her loveliness, but it is her *response* to being beheld in this fashion, her active enjoyment of her effect upon others, that leads her to lose French, and that ultimately works to uphold the “high ceremony and dignity and decency” (669) of his wealthy family, of the institution of marriage, and of Old New York society. The aesthetic, then, might be read as collapsing the tale’s social critique, and as perpetuating continuity in a city whose history is otherwise defined by rupture.

In “Julia Bride”—and especially at this paradoxical moment within it—James revisits the “palace of art” in order to interrogate the relationship between aesthetic experience and the environments in which it occurs—the material surrounds where it is enabled or prohibited, elevated or debased. The tale thus invites its readers to compare the problems its heroine faced with those confronting James as he sought to publish his work for an American audience, a readership comprised of inhabitants of those very places that had been the object of the lingering critical gaze of the “restless analyst” in *The American Scene*. When “Julia Bride” was written, James was primarily engaged with collecting and revising his writings for publication in the New York Edition, a

process that was, as he wrote to Paul Bourget, like “building and gilding, carving and colouring, yourself, already, your marble, your mosaic sarcophagus” (qtd. in Edel 321)—a form of what we might call self-musealization. But it was also, as recent scholarship has shown, a market-driven enterprise.²¹ In the face of the faltering sales of his formally experimental recent novels, James had hoped to secure significant profits, indeed to buttress his financial future, with the New York Edition’s success. In the meantime, short story writing was among his most remunerative endeavors: a means of supplementing his income that freed him to spend time on less immediately profitable ventures.²² Indeed “Julia Bride,” which earned James \$450 for its serialization in *Harper’s Monthly*, was among the most lucrative of the tales that he published in the last decade of his life.²³ Julia’s predicament—the material necessity of marketing her own beauty in order to survive in the “expensively provisional” world of urban modernity—thus parallels a difficulty that James himself faced while writing the story, one that led him to try to preserve a purely aesthetic realm apart from the polluting demands of commerce.

These questions become particularly salient when we look closely at the material form in which the story was printed. When its first installment appeared in *Harper’s Monthly* in March of 1908, “Julia Bride” was accompanied by two drawings by W.T. Smedley, a regular illustrator for the magazine. The first of these (Fig. 1.1) reappeared as

²¹ This is most extensively demonstrated by Anesko, who contests Edel’s claim that the edition, modeled after the complete works of Balzac, was consciously designed by the author as a monument to his life, career and native city (“Friction” 141-62). See also Anesko, “Ambiguous Alliances” and Culver for additional evidence of the multiple and often conflicting interests that conditioned the form and content of the volumes.

²² See Horne (1-22), who persuasively connects James’s literary productivity—both the development of his “late style” and his enormously prolific production of short stories—to transformations in the publishing world at the time.

²³ A table showing the amount that James earned for all the short stories published in his lifetime is given in Anesko’s “Friction” 178-97.



Drawn by W. T. Smedley

THE YOUNG MAN HAD LEFT HER, SMILING, LOOKING BACK

Figure 1.1. "The Young Man Had Left Her, Smiling, Looking Back." from "Julia Bride: A Story in Two Parts." *Harper's Monthly* 116 (March 1908): 491.

the frontispiece to *Julia Bride*, a volume of collected short stories published the following year. James is often said to have professed an avowed dislike of magazine illustration, particularly of his own work; in accordance with this view, the image's publication might be read as a concession to the marketplace, a necessary if regrettable compromise of one of his lesser fictions in the interest of profit.²⁴ But the illustration's reappearance in book form, over which James was able to exert greater editorial control, suggests that he had thought more carefully about its relation to the tale. Inevitably, this is complex—although the drawing illustrates the tale in ways that might make it more accessible for a mass American readership interested only in simplicity and brevity, it also works to complicate or problematize its meaning for the reader and viewer, casting additional light upon the relationship between aesthetic experience and its objects in the tale.

Smedley's drawing illustrates a scene from the story's opening, when its eponymous heroine bids farewell to Basil French from inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the drawing, as in the tale itself, Julia is standing at the top of a wide staircase descending from the upper galleries of painting to the museum's main entrance. French is arrested mid-gesture (he is "waving all gaily and expressively his hat and stick" [661] in the text), poised on the museum's threshold, captured in the midst of the act of departure. His flight from the museum presages his disappearance from the narrative, and, as we are later to learn, from his relationship with Julia. In the image, this

²⁴ Most of the readers who argue that James was critical of illustration draw upon the Preface to *The Golden Bowl* to support their position. There James writes: "The essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with immediate images; and I for one, should have looked much askance at the proposal... to graft or "grow," at whatever point, a picture by another hand on my own picture—this being always, to my sense, a lawless incident" (331-2). Bogardus, for instance, understands James's collaboration with Coburn in creating photographic frontispieces to the New York Edition as an exception to his general dislike of illustration (200-202). Graham offers a more balanced perspective, arguing that James's use of all mechanically reproduced images—regardless of whether they were initially hand-drawn or photographed—reflects his engagement with new visual technologies and new publishing media first encountered on his 1904-05 visit to the U.S.

impending break is suggested spatially: Julia, framed at the top of the staircase, lies on a different visual plane than her companion, and her body is smaller, shorter, and somewhat flatter in appearance than his. Like French, Julia is shown in an attitude of frozen movement, but while French appears to be on the verge of bursting through the picture plane, Julia seems about to recede ever more deeply into it. The thickly blurred lines and indistinction of detail with which Julia's face and body are rendered have a perspectival function—they show her to be more distant from the viewer than the foregrounded French. But they are also highly reminiscent of the visible brushstrokes appearing as small patches of color that characterize Impressionist painting. If the style in which Julia's body is rendered may be formally linked to a school of painting, then she herself is likened to a picture. Her body is contained within a rectangular frame comprised of architectural elements—the staircase, support pillar and ceiling of the building. The shape of this frame echoes that of the painting beside her, just as her position at the top of the stairway places her on a level with two pieces of statuary. These parallels invite the reader to compare her body with the art housed in the museum; they invoke the aestheticizing function of the space, its ability to transform its contents into the object of its visitors' appraising attention. Julia's position in the drawing thus suggests that the story understands feminine beauty as a form of entrapment: while French seems about to leap out of the representation, Julia is securely confined within it (and by extension within the limiting social circumstances for which the Met is synecdochal).

Smedley's drawing thus invites a reading of the tale as a critique of the inevitable objectification to which beautiful women—and aesthetic objects—are doomed in the

ever-expanding sphere of modern bourgeois capitalism. Indeed “Julia Bride” censures the world it depicts, offering an indictment of the social and historical circumstances that prevent its heroine from choosing to marry for love. Julia laments that her looks are a form of confinement, fating her to immortality, condemning her to dissemble:

She could have worked it out at her leisure, to the last link of the chain, the way their prettiness had set them trap after trap, all along—had foredoomed them to awful ineptitude. When you were as pretty as that you could, by the whole idiotic consensus, be nothing but pretty; and when you were nothing “but” pretty you could get into nothing but tight places, out of which you could scramble by nothing but masses of fibs. (667)

To be beautiful, and thus to be the object of men’s desire, is, for Julia, to be reduced to inaction and immorality; she complains that her appearance cages her within circumstances as limiting as the “pictured rooms” of the Met are for the objects it contains. Julia’s beauty precludes her from being seen as anything other than an art object—a problem intrinsic to a modern city comprised of nothing but “reflecting surfaces” (AS 65) but compounded by the Met’s tendency to subject its contents to the museumgoer’s aestheticizing gaze. But her status as an art object also allows her situation to serve as an allegory for the tale’s fate in the New York literary marketplace. For if she cannot escape the “trap after trap” she encounters in the city that forces her to market herself as a commodity, neither can James’s story, commenting on and shaped by the circumstances of its publication. “Julia Bride” was illustrated, serialized, and subjected to the word limits that were both a ubiquitous feature of writing for magazines and bitterly resented by James.²⁵ As he would complain in a letter to William Dean

²⁵ As Edel records at length, James protested on numerous occasions that he was unable to confine his stories to the short lengths requested by editors of serial publications. “Julia Bride” was especially difficult for James in this regard. As he laments in a letter to a *Harper’s* editor, “I have struggled hard to be able to send you a fiction of the small dimensions you prefer, but... I have been worsted in the battle... [T]he subject that does interest me, and does seem worth my doing, refuses to be treatable in so few words” (*Life*

Howells, “It is *murderous* to the little story to have divided it (it being really really all unity & close continuity)” (*Letters, Fictions, Lives* 420).

Less than a year later, however, the tale would be differently illustrated when it was re-published as the final piece in the seventeenth volume of the New York Edition. Late in 1908, as James was working with Scribner’s to assemble the edition’s final volumes, the publisher informed him that it would be necessary to add an extra one in order to include all the tales that he had selected (Edel 323). James, in accordance with the usual process of deciding on subject matter that he had developed in collaboration with Alvin Langdon Coburn, asked the photographer to read “Julia Bride,” which was to be the final tale in the supplementary volume, before deciding what to depict in its frontispiece.²⁶ Though James later hinted that the resulting image was not entirely what he’d had in mind, describing the photograph as “rather makeshift at best” (qtd. in Bogardus 21), it works to reframe the museum even as it situates the tale within James’s canon (Fig. 1.2). This image, I wish to point out, offers us an alternative view of the Metropolitan Museum, and invites an alternate reading of the tale itself—one that sees in the institution a new potential to preserve sources of aesthetic experience from the encroachment of modern life.

In Coburn’s photograph, the museum appears not as the subject of critique, an institution open to inappropriate or dishonest use, but an austere icon of enduring beauty and symmetry. Unlike Smedley’s drawing, the photograph shows an exterior view of the

in *Letters* 438). Of “Julia Bride” also, James wrote to Edith Wharton that the story should have been “a brave little shortish novel” but its full potential was lost due to the lack of a publishing market for material of this length (*James and Wharton Letters* 182).

²⁶ The conventional account of James’s relationship with Coburn appears in Edel (334-38); Edel insists upon James’s agency within the relationship, emphasizing the preciseness of the instructions he gave Coburn. The extent of Coburn’s participation in deciding what to include and how to photograph it in the frontispieces has been the subject of much recent scholarly debate. Bogardus and Nadel suggest that Coburn was an active collaborator in the relationship, while Tick offers an opposed perspective.

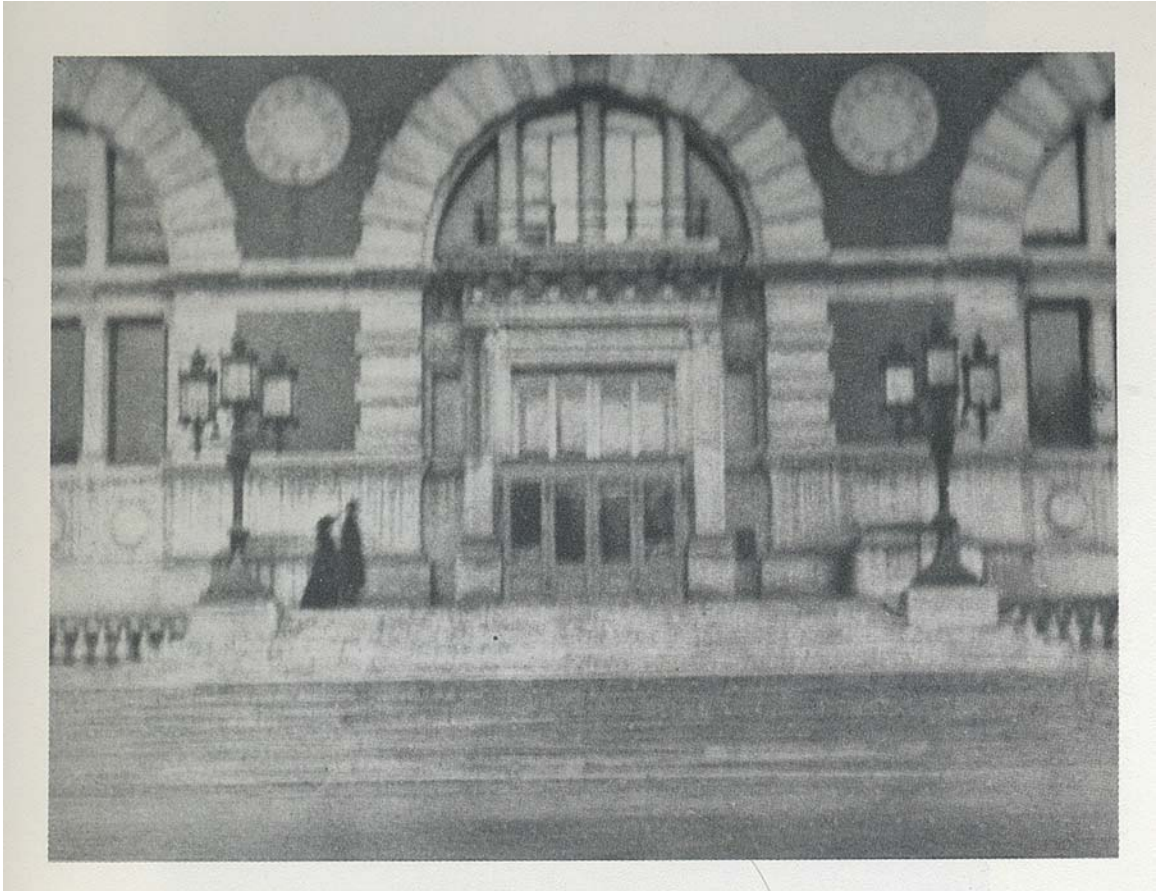


Figure 1.2. “The Halls of Julia.” from *The Altar of the Dead, The Beast in the Jungle, The Birthplace and Other Tales. The Novels and Tales of Henry James, XVII.* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909).

Metropolitan; while the interior staircase shown in Harper’s was of a newly-renovated part of the structure opened to the public only two years before James’s visit, the façade photographed by Coburn was a wing constructed in 1879.²⁷ The image is a classicizing view of the oldest section of the building that re-situated the rapidly-changing institution within a perspective that highlights a longer-enduring version of its history. The grainy-

²⁷ Adeline Tintner has usefully noted the contrast between this wing of the Metropolitan (the remaining section of its original architecture) and the new wing that appears in Smedley’s drawing (*Museum World* 184).

textured and slightly blurred surface of the photograph, a signature characteristic of Coburn's pictorialist style, is evocative of the distancing effect of memory,²⁸ while its emphasis of the formal symmetry of the museum's entryway calls attention to the importance of repetition as an element of the building's design. Coburn's photograph seems to have been taken while looking up at the museum from street level, a perspective undeniably external to the museum (and thus outside of what is represented in the narrative). The great institution's doors are formally and securely closed—no intercourse between the museum and city is shown, no traffic into or out of it. The museum building entirely fills the frame of the photograph, so that it is presented not as one element among others in the city that surrounds it, but as grand and imposing in its isolation—an object of formal and aesthetic interest in its own right.

Although Coburn's photograph presents a recognizable "real" and familiar street scene to the New York Edition's American readers, the image is notably more abstracted or generalized than Smedley's illustration. While the drawing shows two characters recognizable from the tale, in Coburn's photograph the figures are distant and in shadow. They seem to be walking towards the museum's entry in the photograph, which emphasizes the smallness of their bodies in relation to the grand scale of the museum—a perspective that is depersonalizing if not dehumanizing, showing their individual insignificance in relation to the magisterial edifice containing art. This perspective also emphasizes the proximity of their adjoining bodies—so close that they are almost overlapping—making it impossible to place them within the narrative of rupture that we are given in "Julia Bride." Though one figure appears to be female (she is shorter than

²⁸ Celia Lury draws attention to the ways that members of the Photo-Secession group, including Coburn, wrote of their work as possessing special mnemonic power (54-60).

the other, and her hat and dress suggest a woman's body) and the other is probably male, both are almost entirely without recognizable details of attire or feature. The traces of corruption are washed from the museum through these techniques of abbreviation and abstraction, rendering it once again the matter for as well as the appropriate home of art.

These two alternative representations of the Metropolitan Museum might be said to correspond to different ways of reading the tale—or, at least, of making sense of its enigmatic climax, when Julia abruptly decides to “dish herself” and thereby renders French forever unattainable (680). The contrasting images of the museum that *Harper's* and the New York Edition offer—as part of an urban mass culture that corrupts all that it contains, or as a monument that transcends the instability and frivolity of its environs—can be linked to the two apparently contradictory conceptions we are given of the tale's heroine. For she is both condemned to immorality by her compromising circumstances and inwardly virtuous at the tale's key moment: her choice to speak truly, so that “every word of it added to her beauty” (680), is both a paradoxical celebration of her own reification and its momentary ethical transcendence. Smedley's drawing, as I have suggested, presents the museum as analogous with the city that surrounds it—emphasizing its ability to transform Julia into an *object*, to place her within a symbolic economy that not only limits her choices, but ultimately reveals her expendability. Her position here might be likened to that of the story within the monthly magazine; each number of *Harper's Monthly*, printed on cheap paper and circulated through the hands of dozens of readers, was intended to last only long enough for the next to be produced. Coburn's photograph, in contrast, presents the museum as an iconic equivalent to the New York Edition itself, an object situated within the modern metropolis, troubled by its

materiality yet able to transcend it. For this image of the Metropolitan Museum would endure for the duration of the New York Edition's print run, and would then survive for an extended afterlife in public libraries and private book collections, fixed as it is within the endless reproducibility of the photograph.

* * *

The rise of the American fine art museum and, in particular, the growth of New York's Metropolitan offered Henry James a compelling model for the predicament of the artwork in the modern world. On the one hand, the new museum seemed to aspire to separateness from its corrupting surrounds—to work as Tennyson's "palace of art" might have done, setting aesthetic experience and the objects that prompt it apart from the bustle and flux of contemporary city life, rendering them invulnerable to the dissolution that inheres in the passing of time. On the other hand, however, the Metropolitan could no more be wholly extricated from its environment than a painting could be separated from its canvas, or a sculpture divorced from the marble out of which it is carved. For modern America, and the spectacularly expansive version of industrial capitalism that was forged there, were the Metropolitan Museum's very conditions of possibility; the young institution was founded on the basis of New Yorkers' wealth and their desire for the "expensively provisional." For James, then, the *idea* of the museum becomes most compelling at the very moment that he becomes aware of its impossibility; the dream of the "palace of art" comes most sharply into his consciousness as he recognizes that it is unrealizable.

Henry James would again grapple with a related set of issues in *The Outcry*, a play written late in 1909 and hastily converted into a novel the following year. It was the

last novel James would publish in his lifetime, and it remains highly unusual within the body of his late work. Unlike the formally experimental narratives that critics have often dubbed “modernist,” *The Outcry* achieved immediate popularity, going through five printings in its first few weeks of sales; it has been all but ignored by critics ever since.²⁹ It differs from the “major phase” novels in its representation of consciousness, for its narrator occupies the position of a theatergoer, without any access to the characters’ interiority or introspection. And it differs from them by virtue of its studied realism and topicality: the book was based, if loosely, upon an actual controversy that had occurred in England that year, concerning the proposed sale of a Holbein portrait, entitled *Christina, Duchess of Milan*, to the American millionaire Henry Clay Frick.³⁰ *The Outcry* positioned itself within the flood of controversy surrounding the transaction: like newspaper articles and polemics appearing in periodicals, it was part of a body of popular writing that both documented the crisis and intervened into it.

Like the works I have been reading thus far, *The Outcry* engages with the problematic place of art in the modern world. This novel shares with *The American Scene* a concern for the workings of memory—and its translation into the public realm of institutions, monuments and architectural structures—in the face of accelerating historical transformation. And it shares with “Julia Bride” an interest in the museum’s aspiration to preserve—both art objects and the transcendent experiences they invoke—despite its

²⁹ In a letter to Edith Wharton, James’s pleasure in *The Outcry*’s popular success is tempered with disappointment that *The Golden Bowl*’s sales have been comparatively poor: “I blush to say, the Outcry is on its way to a fifth Edition (in these few weeks) whereas it has taken the poor old G.B. 8 or 9 years to get even into a third” (*James and Wharton Letters* 197). See Strouse, “Introduction,” for a more extended reception history of this novel.

³⁰ See Bailkin for a detailed historical analysis of this controversy; as she notes, the portrait was of national importance in part because Christina, a Danish princess wooed by Henry VII, stood in the popular imagination as the object of a “sexualized American threat to Britain’s cultural treasures” (147). Bailkin also records the tremendous influence newspapers and magazines had on the controversy, stirring and maintaining mass interest in the artwork.

inability to escape the forgetful culture out of which it has been formed. But *The Outcry* frames these dilemmas within a discussion of the international circulation of art objects, asking whether it is possible to find a space *outside* of America that is free from the pressures and compromises intrinsic to American urban modernity. And it poses these questions specifically in reference to paintings, bringing literature's ability to represent (and thus provide a stable home for) works of visual art explicitly into focus.

The Metropolitan Museum is referred to only indirectly and obliquely in *The Outcry*. The novel's plot is centered upon the possible sale of a fictive painting to fictive American millionaire collector Breckenridge Bender, whose avaricious pursuit of "an *ideally* expensive thing" leads him into the heart of England, to the country home of a financially strapped aristocratic family (60). As several critics have noted, Bender bears a striking resemblance to J.P. Morgan, who was the Met's president at the time.³¹ Both men were known for acquiring vast quantities of art, often buying entire collections en masse rather than choosing individual pieces from within them. Both traveled extensively, making purchases in person rather than relying on dealers to evaluate artworks on their account. As one character in *The Outcry*, a dissolute aristocrat whose painting collection is threatened by Bender's predatory taste, comments, "Bender knows... [exactly] what he wants" (15). Yet the desires of both millionaires are formulated with a curious inattention to the material properties of the objects they buy. In a well-known anecdote that Morgan's biographers have cited as evidence of the dazzling size of his art collection, the millionaire is said to have chanced upon a receipt for a bust of Hercules that he had purchased earlier. Wanting to be sure that the sculpture

³¹ See Strouse, "Introduction," vii. Adeline Tintner makes the case for the parallel at length in "*The Outcry* and the Art Drain of 1908-9." 68-72.

had not been lost, he sent a note to his librarian asking to know its whereabouts. “This bronze Bust is in your library,” she is reported to have relied, “and faced you when sitting in your chair. It has been there about a year” (qtd. in Strouse 486). Bender is similarly attracted to the painting that is the focus of *The Outcry*’s plot solely on the basis of its monetary value. “The matter with me,” he proclaims, “is that I’ve no use for a ten thousand picture” (59). Indeed the painting remains offstage in the play, and the novel neither describes it nor reports its characters’ experiences while looking at it. What is most problematic about Bender in *The Outcry* is that his wealth operates to dematerialize paintings—to transform them from art to “ideally expensive thing[s]” or to convert them from objects that produce aesthetic experience—in their material and historical specificity—into pure exchange value. Bender’s money, in other words, forms part of and feeds the “climate... [for] acquisition” that also finds expression in the Metropolitan Museum’s magnificence—and its instability.

The looming menace that the Metropolitan Museum both exemplifies and aspires to overcome in *The American Scene*—the impermanence or immanent decay of the material world in American urban modernity—thus appears in *The Outcry* in the guise of an American art collector, and in the destabilizing effects of his wealth upon the British art market. Initially the novel seems to imagine modernity’s threat primarily in these national terms: England is presented at first as a stable counter to the predatory expansiveness associated with America. At the novel’s opening, England’s promise is manifested in the country house; equated with the freezing of history, this edifice is able to preserve artworks and conserve traditional forms of life in a way that the Metropolitan Museum—and indeed, any institution in modern New York—cannot. *The Outcry* begins

with an extended description of its setting, Dedborough Place, where time seems to have taken on material form, and thereby been fixed:

[T]he high wide interior... [of the house was] still breathing the quiet air and the fair paneled security of the couple of hushed and stored centuries, in which certain of [its] reputed treasures... beautifully disposed themselves; and then, through ample apertures and beyond the stately stone outworks of the great seated and supporting house—uplifting terrace, balanced, balustraded steps and containing basins where splash and spray were at rest—all the rich composed extension of garden and lawn and park. An ancient, an assured elegance seemed to reign; pictures and preserved “pieces,” cabinets and tapestries, spoke, each for itself, of fine selection and high distinction; while the originals of the old portraits, in more or less deserved salience, hung over the happy scene as the sworn members of a great guild might have sat, on the beautiful April day, at one of their annual feasts.
(5)

The structure, with its “assured elegance,” is at once a lavish and appropriate container for art and an extension of the manicured and cultivated landscape that surrounds it. It is the house’s very contiguity with the English countryside—the “ample apertures” that visually link it with its surroundings—that lends it its beauty, and registers it as a source of aesthetic pleasure. A perfect balance of the taste of its owners (“fine selection and high distinction”) and the natural world’s attractiveness combine to elevate it to the status of an artwork, but also to make it characteristically English. And in its ability to arrest the passage of time into “hushed and stored centuries,” the country house works as the ideal museum should. Over the course of the novel, Dedborough Place—and the artworks housed within it—become increasingly identified with England itself, so that the problems and dangers they face are projected onto their nation. The English household thus seems at first to function as the Metropolitan Museum’s opposite: private, stable and secure, it anchors the value of its contents in ancestral relations and a notion of time as repetitive and history as cyclical.

But the kinds of aesthetic experiences that Dedborough Place initially offers its visitors are precisely those that cannot survive the onslaught of modernity in the novel. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that the greatest perils for the traditional ways of life embodied by the country house come not from America, but from the moral degradation of its inhabitants—their neglect of traditions and duties in the face of new economic and social pressures. For if modernity's threat to the English household arrives in the form of an American millionaire who represents not only the collective wealth of his nation but also its greed, its eagerness to purchase an artistic heritage that it does not organically possess, its entry is enabled by flaws *within* the English aristocracy. Lord Theign, Dedborough's owner, is paralyzed by the gambling debts of his oldest daughter—debts that the novel suggests would not have been incurred if women were restricted to their traditional place within the household and the domestic sphere. It is the opening of aristocratic lives to public view, along with the admission of women to public life—both associated with the arrival of modernity—that results in Theign's vulnerability. The bankruptcy of the “lovely young widows... [and] lovely young wives” among the English nobility—and the novel suggests they are ruined precisely because they are young and modern—is what renders them vulnerable to such hazards (8). As financial matters come to take precedence over the maintenance of the household traditions and family integrity, the interior of Dedborough Place comes increasingly to resemble the “expensive provisional[ity]” of contemporary New York.

What *The Outcry* ultimately sets in opposition to both the inwardly corrupt aristocratic household and the “leak...of our vast and beneficent art-wealth” to America (34), however, is another museum, one better able to live up to the ideal that the

Metropolitan had represented for the young Henry James: London's National Gallery. At *The Outcry*'s triumphant conclusion, the artworks in question are rescued from the immediate threat posed by Bender's avarice and placed forever beyond the reach of American capital by being donated to the National Gallery. With this act, called a "noble stand" against the "conquering horde[s]" of American millionaire collectors (193; 99), England's artistic heritage is imaginatively re-secured. In describing the donation as "noble," the novel suggests that it restores the aristocracy to their rightful—and traditional—place within English society. For the bequest is evidence of their ability to act in the service of the nation, rather than on behalf of their own private interests. And it metaphorically inserts Lord Theign into the role of his people's protector; he thereby defends them against America's commercial incursions just as his ancestors offered their subjects military protection. In this sense the National Gallery will, by the novel's end, fulfill the promise that Dedborough Place embodied at its opening: to provide a permanent home for beautiful objects that are the rightful property of the nation.

This contrast between the National Gallery and the Metropolitan Museum cannot be explained merely in terms of their different locations: for as *The Outcry* makes clear, contemporary London is increasingly susceptible to the malaises of modernity—to the same predicaments that trouble the newer metropolis of New York. The text instead suggests that the National Gallery's stability—along with the value of its contents—is contingent upon the means through which these objects are deemed worthy of acquisition. If the Metropolitan must rely upon its trustees to evaluate its collection, so that what is kept is contingent upon their "selection, criticism... knowledge, piety [and] taste" (*AS* 143), and is subject to be placed in storage or sold if these should change, in

The Outcry an object's worthiness for inclusion in the museum is decided according to the dictates of "the wonderful modern science of Connoisseurship"—a new method of judging the authenticity of artworks that promises to bring scientific certainty to what had previously been an arbitrary and subjective process (27). While in *The American Scene* the holdings of the Metropolitan Museum are constantly in flux, in *The Outcry*'s National Gallery, once paintings enter the collection, their place there is fixed, in large part because their identity has been "scientifically" established.

The core conflict in the novel—and its most significant deviation from the events upon which it was based—is therefore generated by a problem of attribution. If the painting at the novel's center was, as heroic young connoisseur Hugh Crimble believes, the work of the fictive Italian Renaissance master Mantovano, rather than the lesser (but also fictive) artist Moretto, to whom it has traditionally been attributed, it is of immeasurably greater value—both for Bender and as part of England's cultural heritage. While the Holbein masterpiece whose proposed sale was debated in magazines and newspapers in 1909 was already hanging in the National Gallery (although on loan), at the beginning of the controversy, James's Moretto/Mantovano can instead be found inside the country house. And while there was no doubt that the Holbein *was* a Holbein, James makes the question of its attribution central to the novel's discussion of whether or not it belongs among England's "national art treasures" (71).³² These two alterations are

³² By comparing James's version of the events of 1908-09 with Bailkin's account of the controversy, we observe these two major differences. Interestingly, while for James women's increased movement into the public sphere is the cause of the aristocrats' dissolute behavior (making them vulnerable to Bender), for Bailkin it is women's greater participation in the nation's financial affairs, and their increased ability to donate money to the cause—enabled by the Married Women's Property Act—that makes the National Gallery's purchase of the painting possible (144-153).

intimately interrelated in *The Outcry*, for confirmation of the painter's identity ultimately guarantees its—secure and stable—place within the national museum.

The Outcry thus posits a curiously modern resolution to the problems brought about by the onset of modernity, for the solution is supplied by a youthful connoisseur, Hugh Crimble, an emissary for “modern” and “scientific” methods of judging art. Wearing unframed eyeglasses that emphasize the “directness” of his gaze (31), the young man appears at Dedborough Place “with the ends of his trousers clipped together as for cycling” (30). His casual dress and association with sport call attention not only to his boyish vigor, but also his lower-class origins: Crimble comes from a background where the purchase—or even occasional viewing—of famous paintings held in private collections was generally impossible. His infiltration of the aristocracy in the novel—which is so complete that he will not only visit the painting collection at Dedborough Place as often as he wishes, but will also marry into the family that owns it—represents not a destructive breakdown but a beneficial loosening of the English class system. While critics have commented on Crimble's similarity to Roger Fry, as well as his strong resemblance to James's novelist friend Hugh Walpole,³³ *The Outcry*'s hero might best be understood not as an analogue to any particular “real life” figure, but as epitomizing a new rejuvenating force within the art world and the nation. By the close of the novel, nobles will act “nob[ly]” when they join forces with such “keen” and “indescribably authoritative” young men (31), working together to uphold English traditions and preserve England's artistic heritage, but also working to restore the aristocracy's traditional place within the social order.

³³ See Strouse, “Introduction,” viii.

James's insertion of the fictive connoisseur into his version of the Holbein controversy also closely ties this novel's plot to dramatic recent transformations and conflicts within the international art market. For connoisseurs' rapidly-growing influence in England and America was a relatively novel phenomenon in 1909, though it was attracting a great deal of attention among members of James's circle.³⁴ Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of paintings purchased by American private collectors, or for display in American museums, were contemporary European works—often by members of the Barbizon school, or by French academicians.³⁵ In the 1890s, however, as economic depression left many European aristocratic families without the funds to maintain their palatial homes and art collections, increasing numbers of Old Master paintings were put up for sale to international collectors. With the growth of fortunes like those of J.P. Morgan, William Vanderbilt or John Jacob Astor, there arose a new market for these artworks, which had previously been thought out of the reach of American buyers.³⁶ As millionaires like Morgan and Isabella Stewart Gardner acquired more and more “original” sixteenth and seventeenth-century masterpieces, the prices they fetched at auction skyrocketed: selling pictures to collectors like Morgan was becoming, in the words of one prominent London dealer, “a *big*, *BIG*, *BIG* game” (Colnaghi 22). To mitigate the risks involved in this highly speculative market, American collectors, often known more for financial acumen than art historical expertise, turned to a new breed of

³⁴ Several of James's intimates, including Edith Wharton and the young sculptor Hendrik Anderson, were active participants in the international art market, and there is little question that connoisseurship was discussed at their gatherings. In a letter of August 1899, Mary Costelloe (future wife of connoisseur Bernard Berenson) wrote that James had publicly spoken of Berenson as “the *only* living authority on Italian Pictures” (qtd. in Samuels 316). While the veracity of her remark is impossible to verify, there can be little doubt that James was acquainted with Berenson's reputation by this time.

³⁵ On later nineteenth-century American art collectors' tastes, see Burt 26-32; and Secrest 42-58.

³⁶ On the growth of these collectors' fortunes, and their subsequent turn to connoisseurs to verify the authenticity of works that they purchased, see Strouse, *Morgan* 376-84.

“experts” to guarantee the value of their purchases: they called upon trained connoisseurs to verify the authenticity and confirm the attribution of paintings they were considering.

Among these newly-prominent connoisseurs in the early years of the twentieth century, no one was better known than Bernard Berenson. Trained by Italian art historian Giovanni Morelli, Berenson elaborated upon his methodology and techniques, bringing them before an expanding international audience through his widely-read publications as well as his influential relationships with dealers and collectors.³⁷ Indeed Berenson’s authority was, like Hugh Crimble’s in *The Outcry*, “upsetting... all the old-fashioned canons of art-criticism, everything we’ve stupidly thought right and held dear” (27). What Berenson promised his patrons was certainty: his methods, he wrote, were “based on the assumption that *perfect* identity of characteristic indicates identity of origin” (“Rudiments” 132, italics mine). Following Morelli, he believed that each painter would clearly yet unconsciously distinguish himself from all others through his rendition of minor details. He thus advocated a scrupulous and painstaking attention to aspects of artworks that had previously been ignored: “[W]e must have the patience to examine all the important details separately, with a view to discovering how likely each is to become a characteristic, bearing in mind... that the less necessary the detail in question is for purposes of obvious expression, the less consciously will it be executed, the more by rote, the more likely to become stereotyped, and therefore characteristic” (134). Focusing on the shapes of ears and hands, examining folds in clothing, and scrutinizing the execution

³⁷ As Berenson’s most recent biographer, Samuels traces Berenson’s affiliations with prominent buyers—including J. P. Morgan, Henry Clay Frick, and Isabella Stewart Gardner—in detail. He also records Berenson’s influential involvement with London’s *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* (during its early years), as well as the American *Art Journal* in New York. For more on Berenson’s contemporary influence, also see Calo 34-87.

of background landscapes, he claimed to be able to perform “services to the science of pictures... greater than... Darwin’s to biology” (qtd. in Samuels 101).

Yet Berenson’s emphasis on the detail as the artist’s unconscious signature, his ostensible formalism, was coupled with a seemingly contradictory confidence in modern technologies of art reproduction. Much as he believed in the isolated contemplation of a painting’s material particularities, he also believed that these should be reproduced and disseminated to reach the widest possible audience. Berenson celebrated both the modernity of his methods and the new technologies that enabled them.³⁸ In an 1893 article published in *The Nation*, for instance, he credits rapid train travel and color photography, both of which, he claims, have advanced the development of modern connoisseurship:

Printing itself could scarcely have had a greater effect on the study of the classics than photography is beginning to have on the study of the Old Masters. If most people are still incredulous about the possibility of giving a rational, systematic basis to the criticism of art, it is largely due to the fact that until very recently any accurate comparison of pictures was out of the question... In the days of slow travel, when there were no photographs of pictures to be had, the connoisseur was obliged to depend largely on prints. But a moment’s comparison of even the best print with its original will show how utterly untrustworthy and even misleading such an aid to memory must be. No engraver, however, well intentioned, can help putting a great deal of himself into his reproduction...

Of the writer on art today we all expect not only that intimate acquaintance with his subject which modern means of conveyance have made possible, but also that patient comparison of a given work with all the other works by the same master which photography has rendered easy. It is not at all difficult to see at any rate nine tenths of a great master’s works... in such rapid succession that the memory of them will be fresh enough to enable the critic to determine the place and value of any one picture. And when this continuous study of originals is supplemented by isochromatic photographs, such comparison attains almost the accuracy of the physical sciences. (128-9)

³⁸ See Mary Bergstein’s Introduction to *Art History Through the Camera’s Lens* for a thorough examination of the relations between the evolution of “modern” connoisseurship and the technologies (especially photography) that enabled it.

In this passage both rail transport and photography are said to function as aids to the connoisseur's memory; both help bridge the geographical gaps between physical locations of canvases by reducing the amount of time needed to move between them—the period in which the connoisseur's impressions are in danger of losing their sharpness. Steamships and railways do so quite literally, of course, but photography too, working to “supplement” memories (of firsthand contact with the original artwork), similarly renders the connoisseur's experience of different paintings by the same artist “continuous” rather than temporally fragmented. The critical contact between artworks that is integral to the comparative work at modern connoisseurship's core takes place only within the privacy of subjective memory—that is, within the highly trained mind of the connoisseur alone. It is usually impossible—and in fact unnecessary—for the connoisseur to be in the simultaneous presence of the multiple artworks he is comparing; what matters instead is their afterlife in his “rational, systematic” and critical consciousness.

This very problem—of the accuracy and reliability of the connoisseur's memory—that Berenson understood photography to solve plays a vital role in generating suspense in *The Outcry*. Although the heroic young Crimble is quite confident, even early in the narrative, that the portrait in question *is* in fact “a great treasure... so high a rarity as a splendid Mantovano” (61), he lacks the requisite authority to persuade the calculating Bender, the art market more generally, or the British public of his reattribution. Accordingly experts are called in to testify: first the Belgian Pappendick travels to Verona to examine a painting there that can be confidently attributed to Mantovano, in order to perform the vital process of comparison. Pappendick, however, “doesn't quite see the thing” (134), in large part, Crimble maintains, because his last visit

to England was not recent: “it was *years* ago that Pappendick, being in this country for such purposes, was [last] admitted to your house” (135). A second expert is then asked for an opinion: the Italian Bardi, who arrives directly from a visit to the Veronese Mantovano, and upon that more immediate basis, “hasn’t a shadow of a doubt” of the two paintings’ similarity (183). The question of the painting’s attribution is thus framed in the novel as a question about the reliability of memory: as in Berensonian connoisseurship, in *The Outcry* the expert’s recollection of his aesthetic experience is posited as the guarantor of the art object’s value.

The promise that Berenson sees in isochromatic photography—its ability to fix recollections so that they attain “almost the accuracy of the physical sciences,” to transform connoisseurs’ subjective judgments into logical proofs—has a different source in *The Outcry*, however. The dramatic disagreements among the supposedly expert connoisseurs in the novel cast doubt upon the “scientific” accuracy of their methods, calling attention to the text’s ambivalence about the new discipline they practice. Crimble is clearly the novel’s hero, and his views are ultimately endorsed by the text. But by *The Outcry*’s close, the opinions of the laudable Crimble, the bumbling Pappendick and the regally authoritative Bardi are *all* shown to be less influential, less decisive in establishing the painting’s identity, than those of the London crowds. In an attempt to resolve the contested attribution of the Moretto/Mantovano before the experts’ verdicts have even been pronounced, and with an authority that threatens to usurp theirs, Crimble has it placed on public view in a Bond Street gallery. There, he hopes, “The public interest... may help to settle it. By which I mean that it will profit enormously—the question of probability, of identity itself will—by the discussion it will create. The

discussion will promote certainty” (106). And Crimble’s hopes are quickly and spectacularly realized. “[T]he sight of the picture, flocked to every day by thousands, so beautifully *tells*,” he exclaims in triumph. “That we must at any cost keep it, that the nation must, and hang on to it tight, is the cry that fills the air—to the tune of ten letters a day in the Papers, with every three days a gorgeous leader” (148). Though connoisseurs are able to give evidence that secures the painting’s position in the art historical canon and its right to hang in the National Gallery (Bardi writes a Declaration that authenticates it as a Mantovano), those who judge correctly do so in concert—and agreement—with the utopian consensus of the crowd. Thus Bardi and Crimble both view the disputed Mantovano at firsthand; as they stand “*before the holy thing*” (184, italics in original), their experiences in the unmediated presence of the thing itself conform with “the cry that fills the air” and concur with the inexpert opinions published in the daily papers.

Over the course of the narrative, the connoisseur’s expertise is subordinated to his agreement with a mass audience, as popular attitudes become the ultimate authority securing the painting’s identity as a Mantovano and thereby anchoring the validity of Bardi’s Declaration. It is not, therefore, the “small but precious document” Bardi has written that assures the portrait a place in the National Gallery, but the fact that this document matches public opinion (185). If for Berenson, the connoisseur’s experience of any particular artwork needs to be supplemented by technologically-assisted memories of another, in *The Outcry* such experiences need instead be ratified by the uniform responses of a crowd of viewers, by the painting’s popular reputation. But as its title suggests, the novel itself is a part of the media: like the newspapers, periodicals, and other publications that inspire “passionate talk” it too has a direct influence upon the art world, indeed upon

the crowd of viewers whose opinions ultimately confer value (148). For although *The Outcry* is a fiction—and James proclaimed its status as such, stressing in letters the novel’s distance from the “real-life” events upon which it was based³⁹—it nonetheless advertises itself as inspiring popular sentiment in favor of the National Gallery, and in favor of plugging what Crimble calls “a leak... of our vast and beneficent art-wealth... there appears no means of stopping” (34). The novel itself thus becomes an agent working to secure the stable and permanent place of artworks, outside the “expensive provisionality” of the American art market—or, by extension, J.P. Morgan’s Metropolitan Museum.

The Outcry thereby posits itself as a solution—albeit a partial and provisional one—to the dilemma whose development I have thus far been tracing. For James, the rise of the American art museum presented both a crisis and an opportunity. As a space that had been imagined as standing outside of history—preserving the artworks it holds as if for all time, sheltering them from the incessant process of material change that James finds in modern New York—it seemed to offer the aesthetic sphere as an antidote to the dangerous failings of urban modernity. But as a decidedly modern cultural form—one whose existence was made possible by the very social forces it promised an escape from (the economic flows of industrial capitalism, the “expensively provisional” tastes of millionaire collectors, the rapid construction and reconstruction of new American institutions)—it also seemed ultimately inseparable from the metropolis that both surrounded and comprised it. The poignancy of this dream—of a material space excepted

³⁹ When informed by one of the novel’s readers that his Mantovano had a real-life namesake, with two works hanging in the National Gallery, James professed himself “shocked” and “rather put out” (*Letters* 640; 641). “I had never heard of the painter... you cite,” he responded defensively. “It was important... that with the great claim that the story makes for my artist I should have a strictly suppositious one—with no awkward existing light to cast a possibly invidious or measurable light” (640).

from history—emerged as a direct response to James’s encounter with America’s modernity, the encounter that is recorded and memorialized in *The American Scene*. When reading this text—indeed when reading any of the works from the “fourth phase” of James’s career—we are invited to question the cultural work done by *The American Scene*—and by literature in general—in response to the problems it registers. We are invited to ask, that is, whether a literary text might, in recording and memorializing, provide a sort of virtual correlative to the art museum, one better able to perform this function by virtue of its existence in book form.

For Henry James as a writer, New York was a literary marketplace that offered him the fruitful rewards of lucrative sales alongside a set of sometimes stultifying constraints—the necessity of pandering to audience desire, and to the whims of publishers and editors. This sense of simultaneous crisis and opportunity—for literature as an art form—importantly parallels the troubling predicament faced by the contents of the Metropolitan Museum. For this reason, the museum appears again in “Julia Bride,” a short story that both contains strongly autobiographical elements and allegorizes the fate of the beautiful object in American urban modernity. As James begins to suggest in this short fiction, the only way out of the seemingly impossible dilemma it presents—that of the preservation of aesthetic value in a world that is thoroughly permeated by the corruption that inheres in modernity—lies in the recognition and celebration of literature’s (partial) immateriality.

The Outcry thus offers us the beginnings of a new model for the relationship between painting and literature in the twentieth century, a model upon which literary modernism would build in its affiliation with modern art. For *The Outcry* wholly

eschews ekphrasis: the Moretto/Mantovano is neither described in detail nor otherwise represented in the text. Nor does the novel purport to offer its own reading as an experience equivalent to that of beholding the canvas. Yet the fate of this fictive painting—and the very real set of art objects in English country homes and museums for which it serves as an exemplar—is intimately tied to an international art market upon which literature has a marked and unmistakable impact. Even as James bemoans the impossibility of preserving artworks permanently in a modern world increasingly characterized by transience and physical decay, he comes to appreciate that their reputations, their cultural meanings, and ultimately their fates are subject to the influence of his work—that his texts, through their very reproducibility and international distribution, open a new public sphere in which paintings might be appreciated, cared for, and even sheltered from modernity's perils.

CHAPTER TWO

Bloomsbury on Private View

All sorts of people were daily passing in front of the pictures in the galleries above. They were being exposed to the shock of reality and were registering many unexpected emotions. Directly Roger Fry showed his face in the gallery they would seize upon him; they would demand explanations; they would express their delight or disgust.... And among the daily press of unknown people there would appear now and then an old friend—Arnold Bennett for instance, or Henry James. Then he would take down to the basement where, among the packing cases and the brown paper, tea would be provided. Seated on a little hard chair, Henry James would express “in convoluted sentences the disturbed hesitations which Matisse and Picasso aroused in him, and Roger Fry, exquisitely, with something of the old-world courtesy which James carried about with him”, would do his best to convey to the great novelist what he meant by saying that Cézanne and Flaubert were, in a manner of speaking, after the same thing.

—Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography*

Virginia Woolf’s report of Henry James’s visit to the second Post-Impressionist Exhibition is, in many ways, the quintessential account of modernism’s arrival in England—and on the international arts scene. Modernism appears first in the visual arts, in the form of innovative new paintings that are greeted with shock and “unexpected emotions” at the public spectacle of their display. This visual event, however, immediately invites—indeed requires—verbal explication, which modernism’s promoters cheerfully and abundantly supply. A cosmopolitan audience of famed writers is then introduced to the new art by way of this explanation, and thereby comes to understand it as working analogously to modern literature. In this way, Woolf tells us of modernism’s translatability between media—and, in fact, suggests that its value to educated audiences lies precisely in this translatability.

But the passage also describes how material spaces shape art’s reception, showing the way that spectators’ responses to objects are deeply and inevitably influenced by the

specific physical environments in which they occur. Henry James's reaction to the paintings he sees is distorted by the "daily press of unknown people" that fill the Grafton Galleries (180); it is only when he is removed from this hostile and crowded setting that he is able to begin to consider the significance of the art with which he has been confronted. James's encounter with modernism is a profoundly private experience, one that takes place literally within the gallery's basement, but happens figuratively within the depths of his individual consciousness, where the force of Roger Fry's persuasive rhetoric makes itself felt most strongly. With this juxtaposition of literal and figurative private spaces—the "packing cases", "brown paper" and "little hard chair" of the basement are set against the "disturbed hesitations" and "old-world courtesy" of the great writer's mind (180)—Woolf outlines what will become a central dilemma for modernist aesthetics in general, and for Bloomsbury in particular: where does the world of objects end and the realm of the subject begin? For artworks achieve their special status because they are imagined to shape and stimulate perceptive experience as "ordinary" objects do not, a process that inherently resists translation between media because it relies upon the particularity and uniqueness of the art object. By this logic, James's experiences with "Matisse and Picasso" in the gallery's basement are problematic because they occur in the absence of Matisse and Picasso's actual paintings; what he encounters there is not art, but its conceptualization.

This tension—between defining art as a class of material objects and defining it as a conceptual formation—is central among the paradoxes that characterize modernism, and it is an especially vexed question for Roger Fry. For Fry built his career as a publicist for modern art: though he trained as a scientist, labored for years as a newspaper

art critic and achieved moderate success as a painter, he is best known for having introduced Post-Impressionism—the “school” of painting that he named, and that has subsequently been canonized as modernism—to England.¹ To his Bloomsbury contemporaries, as well as to subsequent generations of art historians, Fry’s chief accomplishment was as modern art’s propagandist: in his lectures, in his published articles and essays and in his activities as an exhibition curator, he worked to bring this art to English audiences, and to school them in its appreciation. The mere existence of such a career—composed of efforts to persuade the public of modernism’s value—reveals the depth of Fry’s investment in translating modern painting into something that could be understood by the masses, something that could be explained by journalists, and something accessible to an audience far larger than the relatively small number of people who visited art galleries. In other words, Fry’s work as modernism’s publicist helped to convert it into a set of discourses that could circulate independently of the art with which they were concerned.

But Fry’s advocacy for modern painting also reflects and was enabled by an important cultural shift that was underway at the turn of the century. As these years saw the emergence of mass-market publishing as well as the development of new forms of media, they also saw the creation of a new kind of audience for high art: one comprised not only of its direct consumers and immediate spectators—buyers of paintings and visitors to exhibits—but also of those who became aware of it through *reputation*—by reading newspaper reports or listening in on public debates. As scholars have long been

¹ The standard account of Fry’s life and development as an art critic can be found in Spaulding’s biography. For an extended discussion of the growth of his reputation as a promoter of modernist painting, see in particular Spaulding 108-173. On the extent of his influence, particularly in academic circles, see Reed’s Introduction to *A Roger Fry Reader*; Falkenheim 88-110; and Harrison 45-74.

aware, technological innovations at this time—such as the manufacture of cheap paper and improvements in typesetting and print processes—enabled a flood of new publications to appear, ranging from daily newspapers to lowbrow weeklies, from general-interest magazines to journals targeted at specialists in various fields.² The art press too saw tremendous expansion in these years.³ Art magazines' success was especially dependent upon innovations in printing technologies because of their readers' demand for accurate reproductions of works of art. With the development of photogravure, it became newly possible to reproduce paintings—particularly Impressionist works—whose visual character did not translate easily into the medium of engraving. As new illustrated magazines such as *The Connoisseur* (1901), the *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* (1903), *Art Bulletin* (1913) and *Apollo* (1925) were founded in London in the early twentieth century, they transformed mass-market publishing into an innovative modern forum for the transmission of visual culture.⁴ These periodicals allowed aesthetic questions—about the nature, purpose, and value of art—to be debated within an unprecedentedly large community. Fry's contributions to these debates, his efforts to, as he wrote in the 1910 Post-Impressionist exhibition catalogue, “provide an opportunity for a greater number [of members of the British public] to judge these artists”

² Recent scholarship has productively linked transformations in printing technologies to the development of literary modernism. Building upon work such as George Bornstein's *Material Modernisms*, scholars in the burgeoning new field of periodical studies have begun to catalog the important relationships between new publishing media and the modernism's growth, though these critics tend to restrict their focus to little magazines. See, for example, Morrisson and the important essays collected in Churchill and McKible. For a general overview of twentieth-century periodical culture, see Ohmann 223-48 and Peterson. On the interdependence of little magazines and mass market publishing, see Scholes.

³ For a detailed analysis of the growth of the art press and its relationship to changes in technologies for reproducing artworks, see the articles in Fawcett and Phillpot.

⁴ See Fawcett for a more inclusive list of the periodicals founded in this period, as well as an examination of their circulation. On the relationships between these magazines and the European models upon which they were based, see Elam.

(“Post-Impressionists” 85), bespeak his involvement in the opening of this new public sphere,⁵ and reveal the centrality of his concern with art’s reception.

This chapter explores the ways that members of the Bloomsbury group engaged with the transformations in advertising and periodical culture in the early twentieth century. For Roger Fry and Virginia Woolf alike, the creation of a newly internationalized mass media in these years provided those who published their work within it an unprecedented opportunity to shape the public reception of art, and thereby to transform everyday life. But it also seemed to jeopardize the integrity of that art, threatening to replace what had once been seen as a special set of material objects—accessible only to a privileged few—with a boundless and endlessly circulating cluster of discourses and concepts. It was at least partially in response to this perceived menace that Fry and Woolf became interested in redesigning—and representing—the domestic sphere. By virtue of its privacy, the interior of the modern home—along with the objects that decorated it and the characters who populated it—promised to offer a respite from the dematerializing effects of the new mass media culture. Bloomsburians turned toward the design of domestic spaces in their search for a new hybrid art form, one that combined elements of fine art and craft, materiality and conceptuality, idealism and practicality. Interior design thus proposed itself as an aesthetic compromise especially well suited to modern life: the household could be described in press reports, but a visit to it nonetheless made available, at firsthand, an experience that might transcend journalistic representation. In their investigations of domesticity, Fry and Woolf re-imagine the possibilities embodied by the modern art object, in a vision that has shaped the way

⁵ The notion that little magazines might constitute a version of what Habermas termed the “public sphere”—a site for meaningful rational public discourse—is Morrisson’s. See *Public Face* 8-13.

literary modernism came to understand its relation to visual art—and to the material world.

* * *

Roger Fry's aesthetic theories were first articulated in pieces he wrote for art journals and mass-market magazines and newspapers, and these ideas reflect—and were specially adapted for—the periodical culture within which they came into being. Fry's engagement with the London publishing world was deep and extensive: he was appointed as the regular art critic for *Pilot* in 1901, and for the *Athenaeum* in 1903, and he was an occasional contributor to *The Nation*, the *New Statesman*, and even the *Times*.⁶ Fry also served as co-editor of the *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* from 1909 to 1919, and as a member of the Consultative Committee that managed its affairs from the time of its founding in 1903.⁷ In his contributions to these publications, he strove to shape public opinion, attempting to mold readers' ideas about aesthetics in order to forge them into an ideally appreciative audience for modern art. But he also wrote extensively about his work as a connoisseur and expert in the attribution of Italian Renaissance painting. In fact his articles are noteworthy for the astonishing variety of their subject matter: he treated topics ranging from Old Master paintings to African sculpture, and from Chinese pottery to contemporary English jewelry design, and did so both before and after he became notorious for organizing the Post-Impressionist shows.

⁶ Though it was written in 1980, Spaulding's remains the most extensive account of Fry's career as an art critic; on his publications in the early years of his life see especially *Roger Fry* 68-152. Laing has compiled a comprehensive bibliography of Fry's publications, including unsigned articles in the magazines with which he was closely associated.

⁷ For detailed accounts of Fry's relationship with the *Burlington*, see Nicolson, Leahy, and Elam, "More important work". Virginia Woolf's biography of Fry minimizes the importance of the *Burlington*'s role in his life; scholars have suggested that this neglect was primarily due to her greater familiarity with the work he published in the *Athenaeum*, since she herself had written for that magazine, and was not well acquainted with periodicals that dealt exclusively with visual and plastic art.

Published in 1920, *Vision and Design* has often been taken as the seminal collection of Roger Fry's writings on art and aesthetics.⁸ The volume contains essays and lectures composed between 1901 and 1909 on heterogeneous issues—from “Negro Sculpture” and “The Art of the Bushmen” to Giotto's painting and modern French drawing. In its inclusiveness, *Vision and Design* mirrors the diversity of Fry's work as an art critic in general, and most of the articles that appear there are in fact reprinted from the periodicals for which they were originally written.⁹ Like Fry's magazine and newspaper articles, *Vision and Design* seeks to train its readers in the valuation and appreciation of art; like these articles, too, the book was intended for an audience comprised not merely of wealthy collectors, but of art lovers from a broad range of social and economic backgrounds. In a letter to close friend Marie Maurel, Fry lamented that the high cost of paper would limit the volume's circulation: “the publisher wants to charge 21 shillings—52 frs. ! !—and I wanted every art student to possess it—and the poorest people. Ah, this wretched war” (2: 489). By drawing together a wide variety of previously published material, *Vision and Design* attempts to forge a coherent aesthetic theory from the apparently disparate concepts developed in Fry's earlier writings—a theory that links the connoisseur's ability to identify the Old Master's individual “genius” with the “pure and... disembodied functioning of the spirit” that visitors to the Post-Impressionist shows would, Fry claimed, find in the art displayed there (242).

⁸ See for instance Green, who argues that *Vision and Design* represents “the moment of greatest purity in Fry's... trajectory as a writer of theory” (23). On the book's continuing importance, see Tillyard 214-44.

⁹ “An Essay in Aesthetics”, for instance, was first published in the *New Quarterly* in April of 1909 (Laing 150), while “Art and Socialism” was originally titled “The Artist in the Great State”, and formed part of a 1912 collection of essays on socialism that included contributions from H.G. Wells and Cecil Chesterton (Laing 43).

In “An Essay in Aesthetics,” a piece that appears early in the volume, Fry attempts to define “the nature of the graphic arts” in a way that will account equally for representational and nonfigurative painting, for Renaissance perspectivalism and modernist abstraction (16). To do so, Fry draws heavily upon Tolstoy’s “What is Art?”, which takes narrative prose—not painting—as the paradigmatic art form; Tolstoy posits that the primary purpose of all art is to serve as a “means of communicating emotions” (28). Central to the definition of art Fry offers in his essay is an extended paraphrase of a translation of Tolstoy’s original Russian text:¹⁰

[Tolstoy] says, let us suppose a boy to have been pursued in the forest by a bear. If he returns to the village and merely states that he was pursued by a bear and escaped, that is ordinary language, the means of communicating facts or ideas ; but if he describes his state first of heedlessness, then of sudden alarm and terror as the bear appears, and finally of relief when he gets away, and *describes this so that his hearers share his emotions*, then his description is a work of art.

Now in so far as the boy does this in order to urge the villagers to go out and kill the bear, though he may be using artistic methods, his speech is not a pure work of art ; but if of a winter evening the boy relates his experience for the sake of the enjoyment of his adventure in retrospect, or better still, if he makes up the whole story for the sake of the imagined emotions, then his speech becomes a pure work of art. (28, emphasis mine)

What Fry takes overtly from the nineteenth century Russian novelist is a characterization of art as essentially communicative: aesthetic experience occurs when an audience responds emotionally to an object or event (the telling of an anecdote, or the performance of music) that conveys something they did not witness at firsthand. In this account, the art object serves as a medium—it interposes itself between the artist’s direct experience

¹⁰ The first English translation of Tolstoy’s monograph appeared in 1898. In his preface to this edition, Tolstoy stressed that the translation was in fact truer to his original intent than the Russian language versions of the text that had previously appeared. Those had, he wrote, “been so mutilated by the Censor that I request all who are interested in my views on art to judge only of them by the work in its present shape” (331). Tolstoy’s theory stresses that the artwork’s medium—and its material form—is far less important than its function *as* a medium, a position that renders his thought famously amenable to translation. Spaulding notes that Fry had read “What is Art?” before delivering his New York lecture series in December of 1907 (110).

and those he shares it with in order to transform it into art. “[I]n our reaction to a work of art” Fry elaborates, “there is the consciousness of purpose, the consciousness of a peculiar relation of sympathy with the man who made this thing in order to arouse precisely the sensations we experience” (30). By definition, art serves—“peculiarly” and almost magically—as an intersubjective conduit, allowing the private emotive experiences of one individual to be mirrored perfectly in the consciousness of another.

Fry departs from Tolstoy’s view that art must necessarily serve a moral purpose; he is concerned, instead, that the emotional relation between artist and audience remain “pure” and undistorted—a concern that leads him to proclaim the aesthetic sphere’s absolute independence from “actual life.”¹¹ For Fry, art functions as art only when it is able to communicate; thus it can do its work as “the expression of the imaginative life” only when in the presence of an appropriately receptive audience (29). The physical properties of the art object are less important to him than the conditions of its reception. “If... an object of any kind is created by man not for use, for its fitness to actual life, but as an object of art, an object subserving the imaginative life,” Fry asks, “what will its qualities be?” (29). His answer to this question takes the form of a list, not of the object’s features, but of those of its viewers: “It must... be adapted to that disinterested intensity of contemplation, which we have found to be the effect of cutting off the responsive

¹¹ Critics have often connected Fry’s insistence on art’s separateness from everyday life to his formalism, supporting this point with reference to the famous polemic in “Art and Life” where he writes, “if we consider this special spiritual activity of art we find it no doubt open at times to influences from life, but in the main self-contained—we find the rhythmic sequences of change determined much more by its own internal forces... than by external forces” (9). Such interpretations, however, risk oversimplifying what was in fact a complex and fraught relationship for Fry. As early as 1935, Virginia Woolf voiced her belief that Fry’s “understanding of art owed much to his understanding of life,” despite his claims to the contrary (“Roger Fry” 85). Recent critical work has done much to strengthen our understanding of Fry’s social engagement and the degree to which his work elsewhere complicates—and at times contradicts—the position he articulated in the 1917 essay. See in particular Collins, “Social Vision”; Reed, “Refining and Defining”; and Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms* 7-17.

action. It must be suited to that heightened power of perception which we found to result therefrom” (29). The object, that is, can be understood and valued as art to the degree that it is suited to receive a particular kind of attention—a form of “disinterested” perception that is focused, “heightened” and “pure” because the spectator is able to eliminate all traces of distraction from his consciousness.¹² It is neither art’s ability to mirror the world nor its beauty that interests Fry here, but rather its exceptional capacity to arrest and absorb its audience’s undivided interest.

To describe this kind of attentiveness, Fry elaborates a series of examples in which he compares it to the concentration or distraction produced by commonplace modern technologies. In particular, he associates distracted reception with crowded public spaces, suggesting that the bustle, jostle and noise omnipresent in urban life are antithetical to the kind of focus aesthetic experience requires. To illustrate the importance of “cutting off... responsive action” by negative example, Fry first invokes the typical experience of a modern railway traveler: “at a station one is never really a spectator of events, but an actor engaged in the drama of luggage or prospective seats, and one actually sees only so much as may help to the appropriate action” (19). Against the rail passenger’s involuntary involvement in the events of his journey, Fry sets the abstracted spectatorship produced by the cinema: “If, in a cinematograph, we see a runaway horse and cart, we do not have to think either of getting out of the way or heroically interposing ourselves. The result is that in the first place we see the event

¹² On the importance of the audience’s sensibility and sensitivity to pleasure for Fry, see Watney, who notes that Fry’s concept of aesthetic emotion “ensured that both the creation and the viewing of works of art would continue to be seen as fundamentally private, sites of blessed communion between self and canvas” (74). For Watney, this sort of perception can be located *within* the individual spectator; I understand it, however, as the site upon which Fry’s efforts to sway public opinion through highbrow art criticism as well as the mass media operate.

much more clearly ; see a number of quite interesting but irrelevant things, which in real life could not struggle into our consciousness” (18). What distinguishes the moviegoer’s response to the accident he sees onscreen from the traveler’s response to what transpires in the station is his awareness of its unreality. By isolating the events in the film from “real life” the cinema enables members of its audience to separate their emotional reactions from any awareness of causality or consequence—a form of complete attentiveness that allows them to appreciate the film as art. This form of “pure” spectatorship requires that there be no physical involvement with the object of contemplation; the proper response to art is emotional without being bodily or sensual.

For an object to be conceived as art—indeed for it to *be* art—it must be encountered in a setting that conditions and enables its audience’s concentration. Framing something as art in fact aestheticizes it. As Fry elaborates in a third example, the art object’s material form is significant only insofar as it forces its spectator to feel his proximity or distance from the thing being contemplated:

A somewhat similar effect to that of the cinematograph can be obtained by watching a mirror in which a street scene is reflected. If we look at the street itself we are almost sure to adjust ourselves in some way to its actual existence. We recognize an acquaintance, and wonder why he looks so dejected this morning, or become interested in a new fashion in hats—the moment we do that the spell is broken, we are reacting to life itself in however slight a degree, but, in the mirror, it is easier to abstract ourselves completely, and look upon the changing scene as a whole.... The frame of the mirror, then, does to some extent turn the reflected scene from one that belongs to our actual life into one that belongs to the imaginative life. The frame of the mirror makes its surface into a very rudimentary work of art, since it helps us to attain to the artistic vision. (19-20)

This passage familiarly opposes urban and aesthetic experiences; the pedestrian is sidetracked into sociality—the mutual recognition of acquaintances—or consumerism—the allure of new hats in a shop window—and therefore cannot apprehend his

surroundings with “artistic vision.” In contrast, mimesis transforms the street scene into “a very rudimentary work of art” since the reflection’s viewer, conscious that the mirror image is merely a copy of the world, feels himself to be separate from it rather than involved within it. It is not the artwork’s representational accuracy or fidelity to life that is important here: the mirror’s ability to reflect precisely is not the source of its value. Instead it is the viewer’s *awareness* of the process of mirroring that aestheticizes the image that appears on the glass’s surface. For Fry the copy of the street scene that is visible in reflection is privileged over the original thoroughfare because the fact that it is a copy prepares its audience to see it as art. Such copies, like the aesthetic sphere itself, are imagined as purely visual entities, disembodied and wholly abstracted from the materiality of the world.

The work of art is ultimately idealized by Fry because its structure resembles a particular feature of human consciousness: its ability to transmit emotional experience between an artist and his audience is like memory’s ability to preserve past events within an individual psyche. Fry defines aesthetic experience in direct opposition to instinct, which is at work whenever a subject reacts to his environment in a way that is immediate, mechanistic and reflexive. “A great many objects in the world, when presented to our senses,” he writes, “put in motion a complex nervous machinery, which ends in some instinctive appropriate action. We see a wild bull in a field ; quite without our conscious interference a nervous process goes on... which ends in the appropriate reaction of flight” (17). In contrast to the involuntary action that instinct foists upon those who undergo it, art evokes a reaction that is contemplative and voluntary. Fry explains: “man has the peculiar faculty of calling up again in his mind the echo of past experiences... of going

over it again, ‘in imagination’ as we say” (19-20). Like the reflected image in a mirror that Fry takes as a model for the artwork, or the projected image on the cinema’s screen, the mental image that appears with the working of memory is without a physical correlative in the external world at the moment of its recall. This disembodied or abstracted quality of the image allows for a fuller or more accurate emotive response: “[I]n the imaginative life... the whole consciousness may be focused upon the perceptive and emotional aspects of the experience” (18). The memory’s status as “echo”—as a mental representation or copy of “actual life”—enables it to be re-experienced at will; an identical process of intentional concentration makes art’s communicative function possible as well.

By shifting his focus from the artwork’s materiality to the experience of its reception, Fry is able to delineate an aesthetic philosophy that is equally valid for a diverse variety of art forms—for media ranging from poetry to porcelain, and for visual images ranging from those found in Renaissance paintings to those produced by contemporary interior designers. Indeed such a focus on the viewer’s experience leads Fry towards a characterization of art as almost purely conceptual, a theory in which “the object as such tends to disappear,” as he admits in a later essay in the volume (52). At the moment of heightened perceptual consciousness that Fry defines as aesthetic experience, “The texture of the whole field of vision becomes so close that the coherence of the separate patches of tone and colour within each object is no stronger than the coherence with every other tone and colour throughout the field” (52). By locating art’s essence within the subjective experiences of its viewers, Fry suggests that it is possible to uncover aesthetic value in novel objects and contexts, merely by training its audience to

find it there. In fact, these viewers are instructed to look upon all objects as though they were abstract paintings, “patches of tone and colour” rather than representations or sources of beauty. Thus modernist abstraction—in conjunction with an appropriate audience, one able and willing to receive it—provides a model for modern aesthetic experience. But unless they are incorporated into the “field of vision” of an adequately receptive consciousness, such “patches of tone and colour” cannot be conceived of as art; for Fry the aesthetic object remains incomplete without its audience.

* * *

It is this belief that justifies—indeed, necessitates—Fry’s longstanding efforts to publicize modern painting. Fry sought an aesthetic theory flexible enough to reconcile his expertise as a connoisseur with his energy as modernism’s champion, one broad enough to value a superbly-executed example of single-point linear perspective from the Renaissance as well as the more fluid geometries of Cézanne and Matisse. He focused upon art’s reception—which, ideally, would offer a consistent kind of experience despite the diversity of the objects that might prompt it—in order to find an adequately flexible and elastic ideal. But Fry also sought an aesthetic theory simple enough to be transmitted to a wide public audience, and powerful enough to alter the role that the arts could play in everyday life. His focus on reception allowed him to understand the spectator’s consciousness as something that could be molded by education and rhetoric—as the site where Fry’s persuasive labors would meet—and transform—the work of art.

But Fry’s conception of the artwork as a medium between artist and audience is balanced by a contradictory belief in the vital importance of “pure form” and the physical properties of the aesthetic object. If Fry is now known best for having organized the

Post-Impressionist shows—and thereby having introduced modernist painting to England—he built his reputation initially as a connoisseur of Old Master painting. Early in his career, Fry was deeply influenced by Morelli, and shared with Bernard Berenson a belief in the priority of material evidence—to be found in the careful scrutiny of minute details of a canvas—over documentation and art historical tradition.¹³ And this background as a connoisseur continued to influence his work as a champion of modernism.¹⁴ Fry insisted throughout his career on the essential continuity between Post-Impressionism and older and more conventionally accepted schools of painting. “I believe that it is not difficult to show that the group of painters whose work is on view at the Grafton Gallery are in reality the most traditional of any recent group of artists,” he wrote in a typical piece that appeared in *The Nation* shortly after the show’s controversial opening (“Grafton Gallery” 86). Fry retained, too, the connoisseur’s commitment to the value of materiality, famously praising Cézanne, for instance, because “[h]e appealed first and foremost to the eye, and to the eye alone” (“Post-Impressionists” 83). To focus too exclusively upon the viewer’s experience is to misread Fry’s aesthetics, then, since it threatens to diminish the significance of art’s concrete and tangible aspects—the very phenomenon that Fry’s training as a connoisseur had taught him to value most highly.

In *Vision and Design* this paradoxical tension between an aesthetic theory in which “the object... tends to disappear” and one in which the material world vitally and inevitably shapes the experiences of the subjects who inhabit it reappears in Fry’s

¹³ On Fry’s training and early career as a connoisseur and expert in Italian Renaissance painting, see Spaulding 57-107. For a succinct account of the importance of this background for Fry’s later work, see Elam, “Roger Fry and Early Italian Painting.”

¹⁴ Fry frequently claimed that the criteria upon which he based his judgments of modern painting and Old Master works were identical, and often argued for the similarities between his early and later aesthetic theories. In “A Retrospect,” for instance, he claims that readers of his work “can trace a certain trend of thought underlying very different expressions of opinion” (284).

descriptions of urban public spaces. In “Art and Socialism,” for instance, Fry delivers an extended diatribe against the inferior quality of the workmanship and design of the decorations in a train station’s cafeteria. His account emphasizes the involuntariness of the displeasure pressed upon him by these surroundings:

For the special purpose of realising it I take the pains to write the succeeding paragraphs in a railway refreshment-room, where I am actually looking at those terribly familiar but fortunately fleeting images which such places afford. And one must remember that public places of this kind merely reflect the average citizen’s soul, as expressed in his home.

The space my eye travels over is a small one, but I am appalled at the amount of “art” that it harbours. The window towards which I look is filled in its lower part by stained glass.... Above that [is] a moulding but an inch wide, and yet creeping throughout its whole with a degenerate descendant of a Graeco-Roman carved guilloche pattern ; this has evidently been cut out of the wood by a machine or stamped out of some composition—its nature is so perfectly concealed that it is hard to say which.... This painful catalogue makes up only a small part of the inventory of the “art” of the restaurant. If I were to go on to tell of the legs of the tables, of the electric-light fittings, of the chairs into the wooden seats of which some tremendous mechanical force has deeply impressed a large distorted anthemion—if I were to tell of all these things, my reader and I might begin to realise with painful acuteness something of the horrible toil involved in all this display. Display is indeed the end and explanation of it all. Not one of these things has been made because the maker enjoyed the making ; not one has been bought because its contemplation would give any one any pleasure. (67-9)

Indeed the railway refreshment-room offers its visitors an experience that is wholly at odds with the intersubjective communication of aesthetic pleasure. The decorations’ makers felt no delight in their craft, and their viewers fail to register an emotionally sympathetic response. Fry’s language instead emphasizes that these objects were created with violence; the room’s inhabitants suffer this violence in their painful experiences there: like the seat of the chair upon which he rests, Fry feels himself “deeply impressed” as if by “some tremendous mechanical force” to undergo the unpleasant sensations evoked by his environment. The refreshment-room coerces travelers into a particular sort of response—one in which they receive the objects it holds not as art, but as an assault

upon their senses. Rather than “disappearing” the object world here reasserts itself with a vengeance.

Like the crowded station in “An Essay in Aesthetics” that sends its visitors into a scattered and distracted state, the railway refreshment-room conditions the consciousness of each person who enters it, prompting them to turn away as quickly as possible from the unpleasant stimulus it provides, and to apprehend its contents as “art” rather than art. These public spaces in fact offer Fry a model for the complex relationship between subjective aesthetic experience and the realm of objects that elicits it: though the external material world cannot be said to contain art unless an appropriately responsive audience experiences it, the world’s materiality nonetheless stimulates or triggers particular psychological states in those who inhabit it; art objects do in fact incite aesthetic experience. Even though the object seems to “disappear” at the moment of heightened perception that Fry defines as aesthetic experience, this subjective response depends upon and requires an enabling context. In a hostile or distracting environment, art’s value cannot be absorbed.

In “Art and Socialism,” this question—of the exact nature of the relationship between subjective experience and the objects that evoke it—becomes particularly salient when Fry considers the problem of art’s misapprehension. Though an object may express fully the “imaginative life” of its creator, and though it may possess the beauty that will “compel us to regard it with the intense disinterested contemplation that belongs to the imaginative life” (“Aesthetics” 37), Fry is forced to admit that it may remain unappreciated, or even be scorned by public audiences. Such misapprehension would not be possible if subjective responses to art were automatic or mechanical. But because

aesthetic experience is by definition voluntary, it demands that spectators possess what Fry terms “the faculty of aesthetic perception” (70). “The average man,” Fry laments, “lacks this faculty and... instinctively protects the rounded perfection of his universe of thought and feeling from the intrusions of new experience ; in consequence he becomes extremely irritated by the sight of works which appear to him completely unintelligible” (71). Although art’s value reflects the universality of the psychological structures that it both expresses and resembles, it is possible, and in fact commonplace in the modern world, for audiences to will themselves *not* to respond to artworks. In order to develop the “faculty of aesthetic perception” in mass audiences—thereby preserving and proliferating art’s value, which resides in their experiences—it is necessary that they be trained to remove interfering prejudices from their minds, an operation that Fry describes as a “process of disinfection” (71). This process takes place through mediation—viewers may be habituated to accept new and “original” works of art by reading positive reviews written by art critics, or by becoming familiar with copies or reproductions of works. “It is literally true to say that the imitations of works of art are always more assimilable by the public than originals, and therefore always tend to fetch a higher price in the market at the moment of their production,” Fry writes (71-2).

Negative predispositions toward innovative artworks serve as a sort of interior or psychological correlative to the railway refreshment-room: both thwart aesthetic experience by conditioning audiences to respond to the object world with inattention or displeasure. And in fact negative predispositions toward innovative artworks often operate quite literally to transform galleries and exhibition halls—spaces that should ideally be reserved for “pure” and disinterested contemplation—into environments like

the railway refreshment-room—spaces where the violence of spectators’ hostility erupts into disorienting and distracting chaos. Fry’s efforts to build a public audience for modern painting, to temper what he described in a letter as “a wild hurricane of newspaper abuse” (1: 338), were at once attempts to cleanse audiences of their prejudices against this art and to transform the galleries where it was shown into spaces amenable to the “pure” and disinterested contemplative attention that aesthetic experience requires. Indeed contemporary accounts of visits to the Grafton Galleries during both Post-Impressionist exhibitions stress the extremity of the public’s response to the paintings on display there: fits of anger, bursts of uncontrollable laughter, abuse of the exhibition secretary and even fainting have been recorded taking place in the galleries.¹⁵ As scholars have suggested, the ferocity and violence which animated visitors to the Post-Impressionist shows may have set as an example for the Suffragettes, who began slashing canvases as a means of drawing attention to their cause shortly after the show’s opening.¹⁶ The Suffragettes saw attacking art as a means to accomplish a political agenda; they valued the aesthetic sphere for its ability to attract media interest. For Fry, conversely, the value of the media lay in its potential to protect and preserve an aesthetic sphere apart from the vicissitudes of politics.

In Virginia Woolf’s biography of Roger Fry, the first Post-Impressionist Show appears as the crucially defining event of Fry’s career, even of his life. Woolf devotes an entire chapter, one of the book’s longest, to the exhibition, along with its eponymous

¹⁵ Bullen (94-151) collects contemporary reviews of and responses to the exhibition, including descriptions of visitors’ shock and outrage, as well as journalists’ condemnation (and occasional praise) of the paintings. See Gruetzner Robins (21-43) for a historically rigorous account of reactions to the individual artists whose works were on view.

¹⁶ Dunlop situates positive reactions to the show by proponents of suffrage amidst the general media uproar over the show (146-52). He notes in particular the response of Mary Lowndes, a stained glass worker and suffragette who published in *The Englishwoman* an opinion piece praising Gauguin as an inspiration. For a more extensive catalogue of the links between the suffrage movement and avant-garde art, see Wees 17-35.

successor. Entitled “The Post-Impressionists” and situated midway through the biography, the chapter’s formal centrality emphasizes the art shows’ cultural importance. This chapter includes an extended description of the atmosphere inside the Grafton Galleries during the exhibit. Woolf’s account familiarly emphasizes the violence of spectators’ reactions to the art they saw there, but it also stresses the extent to which such reactions were inevitably conditioned by—and in turn productive of—media reports about the show:¹⁷

The public in 1910 was thrown into paroxysms of rage and laughter. They went from Cézanne to Gauguin and from Gauguin to Van Gogh, they went from Picasso to Signac, and from Derain to Friesz, and they were infuriated. The pictures were a joke, and a joke at their expense. One great lady asked to have her name removed from the Committee. One gentleman, according to Desmond MacCarthy, laughed so loud at Cézanne’s portrait of his wife that “he had to be taken out and walked up and down in the fresh air for five minutes. Fine ladies went into silvery trills of artificial laughter”. The secretary had to provide a book in which the public wrote down their complaints. Never less than four hundred people visited the gallery daily. And they expressed their opinions not only to the secretary but in letters to the director himself. The pictures were outrageous, anarchistic and childish. They were an insult to the British public and the man who was responsible for the insult was either a fool, an impostor, or a knave. Caricatures of a gentleman whose mouth was very wide open and whose hair was very untidy appeared in the papers. (154)

Modern painting is here met not with attentive consideration, but with bodily recoil. Audiences feel themselves physically acted upon (“[t]he public... was thrown”) by the pictures before their eyes; their discomposure manifests itself in their losing control of their bodies (“paroxysms”). At the same time that they feel art’s presence as a bodily

¹⁷ Of course, the fact that Woolf’s account relies so heavily upon citation and quotation is also due to the fact that she most likely did not attend the exhibition. See Lee (278-86) and Gillespie (46-54) for analyses of her mixed views about painting at the time, and of the competitiveness that colored her relationship with her sister Vanessa (who, as a painter, certainly did visit both Post-Impressionist exhibitions). Woolf’s most-quoted remarks about the exhibition indicate that she was familiar with them through reputation rather than direct experience. In a letter to Violet Dickinson, she complains: “Now that Clive is in the van of aesthetic opinion, I hear a great deal about pictures. I don’t think them so good as books. But why all the Duchesses are insulted by the post-impressionists, a modest sample set of painters, innocent even of indecency, I can’t conceive. However, one mustn’t say that they are like other pictures, only better, because that makes everyone angry” (1: 140).

assault, spectators also find themselves in a space that is proverbially urban in its overcrowding and in the ceaseless—and apparently aimless—circulation of the anonymous multitudes that fill it. Both the gallery’s crowded condition and the crowds’ aggression function to preclude aesthetic experience in the Grafton Galleries.

Woolf incorporates accounts by several prominent journalists and public intellectuals into her description of the first Post-Impressionist show in *Roger Fry*. These are implicitly opposed to Fry’s endeavors as an art critic and lecturer—his efforts to “educate the taste of... [the] cultivated classes,” as Woolf describes them (158)—since the newspaper reviewers miseducate their readers, instructing them to judge the pictures on the basis of representational accuracy or the moral value of their content, rather than on the basis of their ability to transmit their creators’ emotions or “imaginative life.” Woolf quotes at length from the published diary of Wilfrid Blunt, a well-known poet of the day, whose views are taken as exemplary of “those who were not painters or critics but patrons and lovers of art” (156). Blunt is scandalized by the paintings he views, writing that “[t]he exhibition is either an extremely bad joke or a swindle” (156). What he finds there is “[n]othing but that gross puerility which scrawls indecencies on the walls of a privy” (156). Simultaneously childish and smutty, the pictures are “works of idleness and impotent stupidity, a pornographic show” (157). When Blunt takes artworks for pornography, he is responding to their content—images of scantily clad women, in the case of Gauguin’s islanders—rather than their form (as Fry would wish him to do).¹⁸

¹⁸ Blunt’s diary contains a fuller description of the Gauguin paintings than is quoted in Woolf’s biography. His version emphasizes the distinction between form and content in the works in question. Blunt writes: “There was one picture signed Gauguin which at a distance had a pleasing effect of colour. Examined closer I found it to represent three figures of brown people, probably South Sea Islanders, one of them a woman suckling a child, all repulsively ugly, but of a good general dark colouring, such as one sees in old pictures blackened by candle smoke” (329).

But he is also responding in a fashion that is corporeal rather than intellectual, overly sensual rather than contemplative. Unable to abstract himself from the physicality of his presence in the art gallery, Blunt is distracted—and disgusted—by the bodily nature of his reaction to what he sees there.

Both Post-Impressionism's apologists and its detractors have frequently remarked upon visitors' outrageous behavior in the Grafton Galleries during the shows: such conduct is an appropriate response to the scandal of Post-Impressionism for the exhibit's critics, but is evidence that the British public has been falsely educated for its champions. To modernism's defenders, audiences' misbehavior signals a more general problem with English culture, or with "civilization" as a whole. For instance, Leonard Woolf wrote a lengthy account of his experiences as secretary of the second Post-Impressionist show; his observations echo Blunt's, even though he approaches the topic from an opposed perspective. In his autobiography, he recalls:

Large numbers of people came to the exhibition, and nine out of ten of them either roared with laughter at the pictures or were enraged by them. The British middle class—and, as far as that goes, the aristocracy and the working class—are incorrigibly philistine, and their taste is impeccably bad.... The whole business gave me a lamentable view of human nature, its rank stupidity and uncharitableness. I used to think, as I sat there, how much nicer were the Tamil or Sinhalese villagers who were crowded into the veranda of my Ceylon kachcheri than these smug, well dressed, ill-mannered, well-to-do Londoners. Hardly any of them made any attempt to look at, let alone understand, the pictures, and the same inane questions or remarks were repeated to me all day long. (94)

Woolf's rhetoric here reflects the primitivist discourses that circulated about the shows: he imagines its ideal audience as colonial subjects, who would be able to perceive the art's value because they lack the prejudices that have been instilled in the British public. Their aesthetic responses are viewed as at once simpler and more genuine than those of

Westerners. Recent critics have argued that Woolf's logic is grounded in racial stereotypes that view nonwhites as unthinking and uneducated; to these readers, the passage's rhetorical force lies in the fact that we are expected to be surprised that such people might form a better audience for modern art than the British public.¹⁹ But Woolf also conceives of the exhibit's ideal viewer as resembling the "exotic natives" represented in the artworks themselves. Like the Tahitian woman who appeared in the Post-Impressionist show's promotional poster (Fig. 2.1), these subjects are imagined as having abandoned the trappings of Western civilization—such as manners and clothing—that interfere with their ability to apprehend "pure" aesthetic experience.²⁰ As the poster suggests, scantily-clad bodies are more easily seen as "patches of tone and colour" because of their lack of clothing; similarly, natives' behavior is more easily imagined as appropriate because they have not been taught to react as Blunt has been.

The exhibition's promotional poster highlights the doubleness which was inscribed within Fry's theories of art's reception. For the bare-chested native woman it depicts is at once imagined as object and subject—as the exoticized focus of the Western painter's gaze and as a model for modern painting's ideal audience. As an object, she is imagined reductively: her simplified form is to be seen primarily as an abstraction rather than a (sexualized) human body; as subject, she epitomizes the perceptual purity that, Fry hoped, "educated" viewers might train themselves to cultivate. In this sense, she

¹⁹ The most prominent representative of this viewpoint is probably Marianna Torgovnick, who argues at length that Fry's writings on the primitive and African art conflate all African—and indeed nonwhite—peoples into a single stereotypical group, whose members share the characteristics of being "like children—intuitive, spontaneous, and irrational" as well as "need[ing] guidance in order to emerge into modernity, the cultural equivalent of adulthood" and seeming "sexually volatile and naturally violent" (99). See also Coombes, who claims that evolutionary theories have dominated art historical narratives, so that they require a simplified 'other' in order to demonstrate the categorical superiority of modern Western art. On the definitional centrality of primitivism to twentieth-century art in general, see Miller.

²⁰ Torgovnick claims that this poster marks "the English debut of the primitive in high culture" (85).

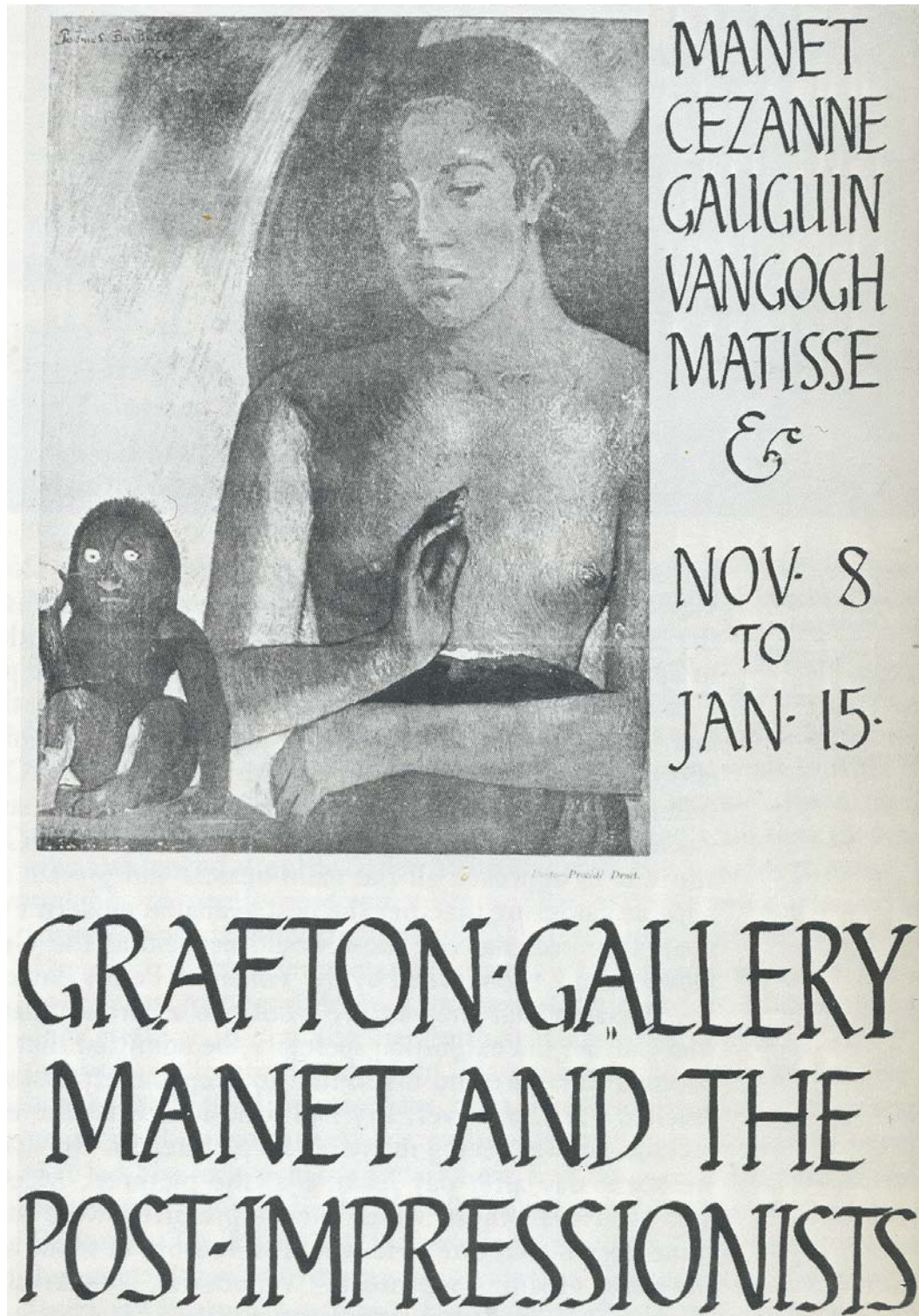


Figure 2.1. Poster for the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition. rpt. in Frances Spaulding, *Roger Fry: Art and Life*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980). 132.

symbolizes the question of what spectators can—and should—bring with them to the gallery when they experience art. Her partial nudity implies a complete lack of aesthetic training: we are to surmise that her response to the Tahitian statue before her is as authentic and unprejudiced as possible. And yet it is the very tangibility and corporeality of her form—and its framing within the material space of the gallery—that enables her to stand for such an abstraction. The poster for “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” thus presents what Fry hoped modernist painting could become: a cultural force able to fashion its own audience. It would do so, he believed, through a felicitous conjunction of aesthetic objects—which inspired and evoked particular emotional responses—and enabling discourses. The exhibition poster invites spectators to enter into a particular mental state as well as a physical site, asking them to discard their prejudices, to attend to the objects before them, and to appreciate them as art.

* * *

A similar problem—the relation of subjects to the spaces they inhabit—animates the fiction—and thought—of Virginia Woolf. *A Room of One's Own*, for instance, famously recasts the problem of women's freedom as one of access: the text links admission to rooms traditionally associated with masculine privilege—the Victorian study, the Oxbridge college library, the British Museum reading room, shaped like “a huge bald forehead” (26)—with access to intellection and creativity. In so doing Woolf suggests that the physical environment inevitably molds art's production and reception, and that, as she boldly phrases it, “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things” (108). In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” however, she repeatedly asserts that the purpose of the modern novel is the capture of what she calls “character in itself” (105)—

that is, the representation of an essential self distinct from the architectural and economic particularities (“rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines” [109]) of the material environment she inhabits.²¹ Her Edwardian predecessors, Woolf insists, have failed as novelists because their work relied too heavily upon recital of domestic detail: “They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there” (112). In her best-known novels, too, Woolf oscillates between a vision of the artist as transcending the world’s materiality and a vision in which art reflects—or even productively engages with—the physical limitations of the spaces in which it is created and consumed.²²

“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” both forcefully asserts the essential psychological similarity of all human beings—the ahistorical universality of the subject—and paradoxically claims that historical events inexorably transform those who experience them. Despite the essay’s professed interest in “character in itself,” a view of “human nature” as “eternal” and as something that “changes only on the surface” (110), it is also where Woolf makes her famous claim that “on or about December, 1910, human character changed” (96). Though 1910 was a year of important political transition—it saw the death of Edward VII and the accession of George V—this date also corresponds to the time when Fry’s controversial first Post-Impressionist exhibition was open to public view. As many of Woolf’s critics have noted, this connection links aesthetic

²¹ Though critics have often read this essay as Woolf’s strongest polemic against social or historical specificity in the representation of “character,” even this text is not unambivalent or unequivocal. As Bowlby notes, the narrative possibilities open to Mrs. Brown are governed by the fact of her gender and the train in which she travels (1-16). Zwerdling summarizes—and complicates—the traditional stance critics have taken towards this text (15-26).

²² Readings of Woolf’s three most canonical novels—*Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*—that engage with the question of art’s materiality are numerous. For a discussion of this critical problem in relation to Woolf’s feminism, see Barrett. On materiality, embodiment and history in these novels, see Mao 43-78. On objecthood in Woolf’s shorter fiction, see Brown “Secret Life.”

transformations to alterations in art's audiences, and even to changes in a broader public sphere—those indirectly influenced by the social shifts that began in the art world but soon radiated outward from it.²³ But the essay's apparently contradictory claims about art—its aspiration to capture and communicate character's immaterial essence and its capacity to revolutionize the world—mirror the claims upon which Fry's efforts to publicize Post-Impressionism were based. Both Fry and Woolf, that is, imagine an aesthetic realm simultaneously able to transcend its own materiality and grounded in it; they imagine a world in which rooms shape women's lives just as controversial exhibits shape paintings' reception, but they also imagine a world in which art—and humanity—retains its essential value regardless of context.

In a 1935 address given at a memorial exhibition of Roger Fry's painting, Virginia Woolf again takes up the difficult question of whether art's fundamental nature is altered by the material conditions of its reception. Woolf begins her speech by noting that Fry's chief accomplishment was as a publicist: "Roger Fry did more than anyone to make such people [neither painters nor critics of painting]—such outsiders—enjoy looking at pictures" (83). This achievement, she suggests, physically transformed the interior of the exhibition hall: it "brought... life and colour... racket and din into the quiet galleries of ancient art" (83). The gallery's metamorphosis is noteworthy in two respects: it granted aesthetic problems the same import as political ones for a broad popular audience ("the names of Cézanne and Gauguin, of Matisse and Picasso, suddenly became

²³ Critics have associated "December, 1910" with various cultural and political transformations. Zwerdling, for instance, reads the comment as referring primarily to post-Victorian changes in domestic life (145-150); Schwarz understands it to refer to the Post-Impressionist exhibition (31-36); while Froula links it to the end of the Edwardian age as well as the rise of women's suffrage campaigns (22-28). In a book-length study of the historical moment, Stansky explores a broad range of events that might have prompted the comment, but concludes that the Post-Impressionist show remains the most significant of these.

as hotly debated, as violently defended as the names... of Hitler or Lloyd George” [83]); and it changed the experience of looking at paintings from something set apart from everyday life—an act that took place in rarified solemnity, in “quiet galleries” reserved for this function alone—to something louder and more energetic, something commensurate with daily activities on a city street or in the midst of a boisterous household. Rather than distracting audiences from the aesthetic import of the works before them, this blurring of the boundaries between art and life had, for Woolf, the effect of amplifying their value. She describes this process—actually resulting from a transformation in spectators’ reactions—as a material alteration in the paintings themselves. Before Fry’s ideas became known, she writes, “Pictures were... things that hung upon walls; silent inscrutable patterns; treasure houses with locked doors in front of which learned people would stop.... And we would trail behind them, silent, servile, and bored.” But afterwards, she continues, “those dim pictures began to flash with light and colour; and our guides... began to behave like living people arguing about something of vital importance” (83). For Woolf, the controversies surrounding the Post-Impressionist shows metaphorically infused the art objects on display there with the vitality of subjects.

Like Fry, Woolf understands the value of modern art to reside in a productive and collaborative engagement—between subject and object, and between artwork and audience. What modernism’s arrival in the Grafton Galleries promised was not so much a sea change in the fundamental nature of art as a reconfiguration of the relation between that art and the spectator. Woolf figures this shift in terms of a change in the paintings’ position within the galleries. The long-term consequence of the Shows, she claims, is that the “pictures have never gone back to their walls. They are no longer silent,

decorous, and dull. They are things we live with, and laugh at, love and discuss” (84). Post-Impressionism, that is, invited its viewers to imagine their situation vis-à-vis the artwork differently—to see themselves not as distanced onlookers, but as inhabitants. In language that significantly echoes that employed by Woolf, Fry describes a similar transfiguration of the relation between art and audience in a defense of the exhibition that he published in *The Nation* shortly after the show’s opening. “[T]hese pictures,” he writes, “like the works of the early primitives, and like the masterpieces of Oriental art, do not make holes in the wall, through which another vision is made evident. They form a part of the surface which they decorate, and [in that way] suggest visions to the imagination” (“Grafton Gallery” 88). Both Woolf and Fry see modernism’s import in its ability to surround or encapsulate its viewers, and to appear *part of* its environment rather than isolated within it; for Woolf this paradigm is figured in an image of paintings removed from the gallery’s walls, while for Fry it is instead figured in paintings merged with their exhibition space.²⁴

If Woolf and Fry share a reconceptualization of the modern artwork as contiguous with its surroundings, they also share an interest in the material spaces that enable this new relationship between aesthetic object and audience. In particular, both develop this interest by examining and re-imagining decorative art and the interior of the household. As several scholars have recently noted, members of the Bloomsbury group were noteworthy for their desire to enact change in public life—political and social as well as

²⁴ A similar notion is used by Christopher Reed to describe visitors’ experiences within the Omega Workshops. He writes: “Surrounded by the furniture, fabrics, murals, and knick-knacks on sale when the Omega officially opened in July 1913, shoppers might imagine they had stepped into a painting by Matisse or Picasso” (*Bloomsbury Rooms* 116). Though Reed’s point is that the Workshops’ aesthetic closely resembled that of avant-garde French painting, he also notes the transformed relationship between artwork and audience there.

aesthetic—by transforming domestic space.²⁵ These changes were intended to originate within the home and move outwards, so that, as Christopher Reed writes, these artists “sought to redefine life on modern terms by reconfiguring the rooms where it was lived” (*Bloomsbury Rooms* 19). By the same token, Fry and Woolf were invested in reforming the relationship between public and private space—and, consequentially, between public and private experience. If, as Fry wrote of the railway refreshment-room in “Art and Socialism,” “the average citizen’s soul... [is] expressed in his home” (67), interior design and architecture offer the artist a similar opportunity for “soul-expression.” But in redesigning domestic space, the artist also has the opportunity to create an environment rather than an object, to mold visitors’ experiences by shaping their surroundings as a whole.

Although *Roger Fry: A Biography* purports to celebrate the successes of the man who brought modern art before the British public, the paintings that are to appear in the Grafton Galleries are first described when on display inside Fry’s home. The public version of the first Post-Impressionist Show is thus prefigured—and even supplanted—in the text by a private version, an episode that is situated among other everyday social affairs that take place within the household. And this domestic space is in fact presented as an *ideal* venue for the viewing and appreciation of modern art, a place where Fry’s aesthetic theories can be transmitted without distortion, and where visitors, along with the household’s regular complement of servants, are granted unmediated access to art objects. This scene is contrasted with the paintings’ arrival in the public gallery, where they are subject to ridicule and condemnation. Woolf narrates the paintings’ domestic

²⁵ Several recent studies have focused on the importance of domesticity and interior design for members of the Bloomsbury group. Besides Reed’s *Bloomsbury Rooms*, see Rosner, esp. 1-31, as well as Snaith 16-30.

display at length, developing a theory of the household as an aestheticized and aestheticizing space:

There they stood upon chairs—the pictures that were to be shown at the Grafton Gallery—bold, bright, impudent almost, in contrast with the Watts portrait of a beautiful Victorian lady that hung on the wall behind them. And there was Roger Fry, gazing at them, plunging his eyes into them as if he were a humming-bird hawkmoth hanging over a flower, quivering yet still. And then drawing a deep breath of satisfaction, he would turn to whoever it might be, eager for sympathy. Were you puzzled? But why? And he would explain that it was quite easy to make the transition from Watts to Picasso; there was no break, only a continuation. They were only pushing things a little further. He demonstrated; he persuaded; he argued. The argument rose and soared. It vanished into the clouds. Then back it swooped to the picture. And not only to the picture – to the stuffs, to the pots, to the hats. He seemed never to come into a room that autumn without carrying some new trophy in his hands. There were cotton goods from Manchester, made to suit the taste of the negroes. The cotton goods made the chintz curtains look faded and old-fashioned like the Watts portrait. There were hats, enormous hats, boldly decorated and thickly plaited to withstand a tropical sun and delight the untutored taste of negresses. And what magnificent taste the untutored negress had! Under his influence, his pressure, his excitement, pictures, hats, cotton goods, all were connected. Everyone argued. Anyone's sensation—his cook's, his housemaid's—was worth having. Learning did not matter; it was the reality that was all-important. So he talked in that gay crowded room, absorbed in what he was saying, quite unconscious of the impression he was making; fantastic yet reasonable, gentle yet fanatically obstinate, intolerant yet absolutely open-minded, and burning with the conviction that something very important was happening. (152-3)

In this idealized private version of the Post-Impressionist Show, the artworks are displayed in a fashion markedly different from formal hanging upon the walls of a gallery. Woolf's account emphasizes the paintings' contiguity with their surroundings—particularly brightly-colored and flashy products of modern British industrial manufacture (“cotton goods from Manchester”). If the public exhibition was for Woolf a moment when these paintings were said (figuratively) to leave the walls, its private equivalent is noteworthy for the fact that the paintings there remain, quite literally, unhung. Like company at a social gathering, the pictures find their place on chairs within

the drawing room—in market contrast to the conventional Victorian portrait that remains firmly fixed to the wall behind. Seated like slightly impolite guests (“bold, bright, impudent perhaps”), the modern paintings are described as occupying the room rather than ornamenting it. Fry’s guests would circulate among or between the artworks, rather than standing before them with a judgmental gaze.

If inhabiting—or being surrounded by—the work of art seems to position this household’s visitors in a more intimate relation to aesthetic objects than is possible in the formal enclosure of a public gallery, this form of aesthetic experience nonetheless remains disembodied as well as disinterested. Fry’s guests are not tempted towards the too-physical responses that cause visitors to the Grafton Galleries to deem pornographic the paintings displayed there. Like the “humming-bird hawkmoth hanging over a flower” that Fry himself is said to resemble, viewers in his home are instead invited to feel a kind of sensual pleasure in aesthetic experience in which are objects are imagined as simultaneously penetrable (“plunging his eyes into them”) and distant (the moth is “over” not *in* the flower). Though this experience is grounded in sensation, it is also enabled by a form of impartial judgment that is possible only when the viewer is free from the prejudices created by the British educational system and the class hierarchy that accompanies it—that is, when the viewer’s consciousness is “pure.” Fry’s home is imagined as ideally suited to this sort of reception: the room is “gay and crowded”—and thus offers an atmosphere amenable to these pleasures—and the presence of servants testifies to the fact that these rooms are filled with people from a variety of class backgrounds. Though the biography makes no claim that an “untutored negress” is actually present, it is her “magnificent taste” that serves as a model for the “astonishing

natural instinct” with which Fry’s cook and housemaid respond to the paintings.²⁶ In other words, Fry’s home is envisioned as a place where unmediated apprehension of art objects is possible—a material space that enables its visitors to be thoroughly immersed in, and thus wholly conscious of, their own heightened perceptual experiences.

* * *

Members of the Bloomsbury Group turned toward a redesign of the domestic sphere in their search for a new art form that was simultaneously conceptual and material, one able to accomplish the abstract mission of “communicating emotions” as well as the concrete task of immersing audiences in perceptual stimuli. This turn is best and most famously exemplified by the Omega Workshops, a studio where the principles of modernist design were applied in the creation of household objects—furniture, vases, curtains, patterned fabrics, clothing and even children’s toys—through the collaborative efforts of Bloomsbury’s most prominent visual artists. Roger Fry founded the Workshops and was chiefly responsible for financing and administering the project, but participants included Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Fredrick Etchells, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and, briefly, Wyndham Lewis, among others.²⁷ The Omega’s communal aesthetic has been compared to that of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Roger Fry’s stewardship of the Workshops to William Morris’s establishment of co-operative ateliers for producing home furnishings.²⁸ But scholars have also remarked upon the uniqueness of the Workshops: the modern “look” of the items they fashioned differed radically from

²⁶ Here again, the primitive is employed to figure a lack of education or aesthetic prejudice, standing in opposition to the artistic miseducation to which members of the British upper classes have been subjected.

²⁷ On the history of the Workshops, including comprehensive lists of their membership as well as descriptions of the objects they produced, see Anscombe 9-102; Collins, *Omega Workshops*. For images of artworks created there, see Naylor 122-137 and Shone.

²⁸ Among full-length studies, Anscombe makes the case for the parallel between Fry and Morris most strongly (28-33). Reed also emphasizes the strong connection between the two (“Architecture and the Decorative Arts”).

even the most innovative of their predecessors.²⁹ Indeed these tensions—between the Omega’s originality and its indebtedness to tradition; between its status as “pure” art and its practice as craft; and between its rupture of convention and its desire to find a place for its products within the middle-class British household—find expression both in Fry’s publicity for the Workshops and in Woolf’s writings about Fry within a rhetoric of hybridity.

For Fry and Woolf alike, the interior designs and domestic decorations fabricated in the Omega Workshops were hybrid objects—they aspired at once to embody the abstract ideals of Fry’s aesthetic philosophy and to sell, thereby providing employment—and material and financial sustenance—to promising visual artists. This tenuous balance between the theoretical and the practical reappears throughout Fry’s promotional writings about the Workshops and, in fact, in his arguments about the distinction between the fine and applied arts more generally. For example, “A Modern Jeweller,” an article published in *The Burlington Magazine* in mid-1910, just a few months before Fry began his organizational work for the Post-Impressionist Shows, asserts the fundamental identity of decorative and fine art forms. This similarity, Fry suggests, resides in the fact that the same sort of formalist analysis can fruitfully be applied to both. “[I]t is as necessary to explain the satisfaction we derive from the simplest specimen of the potter’s craft as... from a Rembrandt etching,” he writes. “[T]he more we analyze the beauty of the most complex and freest examples of the Fine Arts, the more we are driven back upon certain fundamental properties of form and colour which hold to some extent in every real work of art, however unpretentious” (170). The “pretentious” social stratification of the

²⁹ See Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms* 111-120. He stresses the avant-garde nature of the Workshops, as well as the originality of their productions.

various cultural forms into “Fine Art” and craft reflects the “pretentious” class hierarchy of their makers, which Fry suggests will dissolve if audiences instead train their attention upon the “pure” materiality of the artworks themselves. But such focus, rather than leading Fry to assert the singularity of jewels’ physical properties—such as their color, texture and weight—instead leads him to extol their virtues in curiously synesthetic language. He compares jewelry to several other art forms in quick succession, suggesting its similarity to painting, drawing, and ultimately even poetry. “The jeweller plays with the richest, the most noble palette the material world affords,” he concludes. “To use this palette... [he] needs not only inexhaustible fertility of invention, but an imaginative sympathy and a real creative effort which are just of the same order as those which... the creator of great figure design displays. [This is]... an imaginative and definitely poetic quality” (174). Here Fry’s rigorous focus on modern jewelry’s materiality results in a curious loss of media specificity; in attending to the physical world, Fry is thrown back upon the universal conceptual similarity of all kinds of art.

The modern jeweler’s work epitomizes the sort of hybrid object the Omega’s members intended to make—and which served, in Bloomsbury’s version of modernism, as an aesthetic ideal. Its creation is at once a practical effort, bound by the scarcity and cost of materials, and a spiritual or psychological exercise. Fry notes that the physicality of the medium constrains the jeweler (“the limits are on the one hand the nature of precious stones and precious metals and on the other the human form”), yet it also expresses his “sensibility” and “creative power” (170). A similar tension—between an ideal of aesthetic purity and a series of pragmatic concerns about viability in the marketplace—is evident in Fry’s descriptions of the Omega Workshops’ products. These

objects, he suggests, will be an amalgam of art and craft, drawing together art's ability to stir the viewer's consciousness and craft's appeal to a broad (purchasing) audience.³⁰ At times, Fry indicates that artists' work for the Omega will be ancillary to their truly creative endeavors. In a fundraising letter to Bernard Shaw sent out in 1912, for instance, he claims that the "decorative and applied art" that will be constructed there is secondary to their "pure" work. He writes: "I am finding that there are many young artists whose painting shows strong decorative feeling, who will be glad to use their talents on applied art both as a means of livelihood and as an advantage to their work as painters and sculptors" (196). In calling the Omega's products "a means of livelihood" Fry implies that they stand outside of the *real* aesthetic realm where objects are entirely divorced from function; in suggesting that crafting them will serve "as an advantage to their work as painters and sculptors," he is of course asserting that creating such objects *is* not that work. Elsewhere, however, as in the preface to the Workshops' 1914 catalog, Fry asserts that their nature is fundamentally aesthetic. In the Omega, he writes, "a group of artists... are working with the object of allowing free play to delight in creation in the making of objects for common life" (201).

Fry's advertisements for the Omega Workshops similarly reveal the tensions and contradictions that the project came to embody: the artists' creations are presented as exemplifying both the monumentality and permanence of high art and the everyday usefulness of craft. Direct promotion of the Workshops was rare and carefully managed: advertisements appeared solely in the *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, of which Fry was co-editor at the time, and even there, only in a handful of issues. Otherwise,

³⁰ Fry's critics, most often on the basis of his comments in "Art and Socialism", have usually assumed him to have been hostile to commercialism within the art world. His views on the art market were considerably more nuanced and complex than this, however, as Goodwin has recently demonstrated.

publicity for the Workshops was conducted by mailing leaflets to likely customers.³¹ But the adverts that ran in the *Magazine*, like the notice for a pottery exhibit that appears below (Fig. 2.2), depict the Workshops' wares as though they were housed within an art gallery—or even found in an anthropological museum. The vases are contrasted with the flat blank background typical of modern museum display and isolated from any context; neither the studio of their production nor the highly decorated showrooms where they are to be viewed is shown in the ad. Fry's brief description under the image of the pottery resembles nothing so much as a museum's classificatory label, and his language

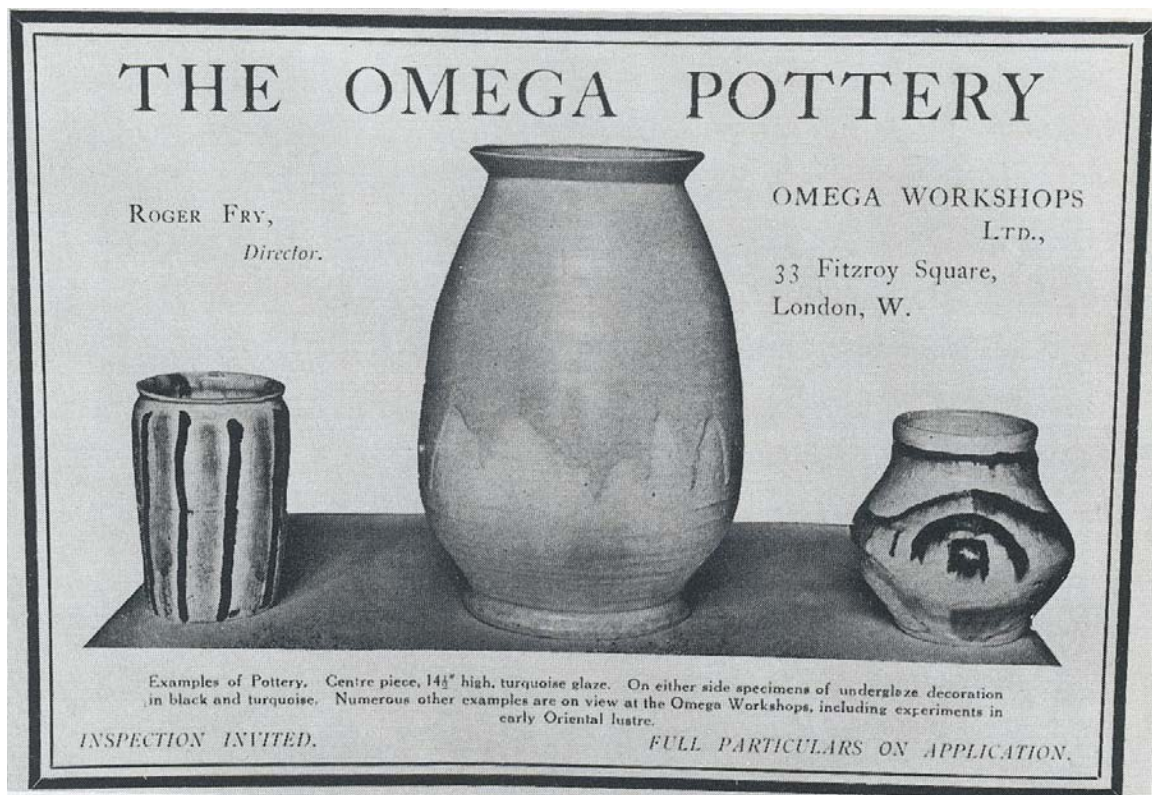


Figure 2.2. Omega Workshops Pottery Advertisement. *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*. 8.4 (March 1908): unpaginated.

³¹ On Fry's methods of publicizing the Workshops—and the advertisements that ran in the *Burlington Magazine*—see Collins 98-102.

(“specimens of underglaze decoration”; “experiments in early Oriental lustre”) suggests that these objects are to be viewed with the distanced curiosity appropriate for visitors to exhibitions of exotic spectacles. In this advertisement, the Omega’s products seem not merely influenced by primitivism, but themselves “primitive”—artifacts that have traveled to London from the farthest and darkest reaches of the British empire. The ad counters this sense of estrangement, however, by repeatedly inviting readers to visit the Workshops in person, where they will (presumably) be greeted not with timeless examples of “Oriental” art, but with the latest in modern British interior design. In this way, the advertisement posits that its representation of the vases is in no way equivalent to an unmediated experience of the thing itself; Fry’s pottery advert effaces itself in the promotion of something it does not—and indeed cannot—show.

In *Roger Fry: A Biography*, Virginia Woolf intimates that the Omega Workshops were founded to remedy the dilemmas facing the commercial artist within the capitalist marketplace as Fry had explained them in “Art and Socialism.” Woolf thus imagines the Workshops’ initial—and most important—task as the reconstruction of the degraded material and social world Fry describes in that essay. She writes in particular of the young artists who shared Fry’s vision: “It was their business to destroy the railway restaurant and all that it symbolized and put something else in its place” (189). The Omega’s reinvigoration of modern life through redesign of the domestic interior is built upon the notion that such spaces might induce what Fry termed the “faculty of aesthetic perception” in their visitors (“Art and Socialism” 70). And, as Woolf illustrates with an extended quote from Fry’s essay, this ideal depends upon a synthesis of high and low cultural forms: “Ultimately... when art had been purified of its present unreality by a

prolonged contact with the crafts, society would gain a new confidence in its collective artistic judgment” (188). Yet this “prolonged contact” between art and craft does not imply their absolute identity; the Omega’s ambition to infuse everyday life with aesthetic value by improving the “collective artistic judgment” of the British middle-class is instead grounded in the production of new hybrid art objects that take on some of the characteristics of both without fully becoming either art or craft.

In Woolf’s account, however, the Omega Workshops also appear as a solution to the dilemmas posed by the Post-Impressionist Shows’ failings: the rooms they occupy are described as an ideal setting for the apprehension of art, a space free from the distracting crowds of prejudiced viewers that troubled Fry in the Grafton Galleries. She writes that his early disappointment in the incomprehension which met the first Post-Impressionist Show was what led him to found the Workshops. After the exhibits’ close, Fry focused on this new venture in the hopes of both continuing and improving upon the work done by the Shows: “[H]e went on to turn his attention to another undertaking that came more naturally within his scope... to find work, not as painters but as decorators, for the young English artists who had been drawn together by the Post-Impressionist Exhibitions” (172). And at least initially, the Omega seems an unqualified success: “[I]nside everything was bustle and confusion. There were bright chintzes designed by the young artists; there were painted tables and painted chairs; and there was Roger Fry himself escorting now Lady So-and-so, now a business man from Birmingham, round the rooms... The public was eager to buy, and the artists were eager to work” (190-1). The simultaneous presence of aristocrat and businessman testifies to the social inclusiveness

of the Workshops; in its Fitzroy Street showroom, visitors from a broad array of class backgrounds coalesce into an ideally receptive public audience for modern art.

One of Fry's oft-repeated goals for the Omega Workshops was the evocation of pleasure—both in the production and in the consumption of its wares. In this sense its products are aesthetic objects in Fry's definition of the term: they serve as media for the intersubjective communication of emotion. The artists employed in the Workshops aspire to revolutionize the traditional British domestic interior by introducing a note of levity into the formerly staid patterns of everyday life. “It is time,” Woolf quotes Fry as saying, “that the spirit of fun was introduced into furniture and into fabrics” (194). In terms of form, this is accomplished through the use of bright color in their designs, and in terms of content, through the representation of modern leisure activities:

Mr. Fry showed him a chair. He said it was “a conversational chair”, a witty chair; he could imagine Mr. Max Beerbohm sitting on it. Its legs were bright-blue and yellow, and brilliant bands of intense blue and green were worked round a black seat. Certainly it was much more amusing than an ordinary chair. Then there was a design for a wall decoration; a landscape with a purple sky, bright moon and blue mountains. “If people get tired of one landscape”, said Mr. Fry, “they can easily have another. It can be done in a very short time.” Then he brought out a screen upon which there was a picture of a circus. (195)

A visitor, upon entering the Omega's showrooms, is invited to think of—and even to re-experience—such commonplace pleasures as a visit to the circus, or an evening of witty conversation.³² Some of these pastimes, like the entertainment of friends, are typical of what would take place inside the household, while others propose an expansion of its boundaries. But all of these pleasant activities are transitory in nature; even the wall mural, usually imagined as a decorative fixture of some permanence, can be

³² On the relationship between Fry's aesthetic theories and the representation of leisure activities by Bloomsbury artists, see Tickner 124-135. The depiction of urban society at play was a hallmark of Impressionist painting, but playfulness was an important concept for Bloomsbury's version of modernism as well. See also Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms* 119-132.

transformed at will in accordance with the vagaries of fashion. In fact, the objects made in the Workshops were not known for their longevity, a problem Fry's detractors were quick to condemn as a lack of quality: "Chairs had to stand upon their legs; dyes must not fade, stuffs must not shrink. Sometimes there were failures. Cracks appeared. Legs came off. Varnish ran. He had to placate angry customers and find new methods" (196). But these "failures" are a natural consequence of the objects' hybridity—their creators are artists, not craftsman skilled in the building of furniture.

At the same time, the "failures" mark the Omega as modish and trendy: their products are intended for brief display only, and their physical fragility and transitory styles indicate that they were designed to appeal—if briefly—to a broad popular audience. In Woolf's description, the Workshops' fashionability is contrasted with the permanence of the building they occupy. Fitzroy Square is fundamentally the same at the time of the biography's writing as it was in the years before Fry occupied it, she notes:

The Square remains, one of the few Bloomsbury squares that are still untouched and dignified, with its classical pillars, its frieze and the great urn in the middle, though the roar of the Tottenham Court Road sounds not far away. The house in which Roger Fry set up his workshop is there to-day—a house with a past of its own, a Georgian past, a Victorian past. A lady remembered it in her childhood; the Pre-Raphaelites, she said, had congregated there, and either Rossetti's legs had appeared through the ceiling or the floor had given way and the dinner-table had crashed through into the cesspool beneath—which, she could not remember. It had a past, anyhow. (190)

The house's "classical" architecture and material stability (it remains "untouched and dignified") are set against the whimsical and fleeting activities that take place within it.

The Omega Workshops, Woolf reminds us, comprise but one episode among many in the building's enduring history. Like the "Post-Impressionist Room" at the 1913 Ideal Home Show, which was probably the most famous design project undertaken by the

Workshops,³³ their showroom seems to blend characteristic traits of the temporary art exhibition with those of domestic space.

The curious insubstantiality of the home furnishings made in the Omega Workshops reflects the problematic nature of abstract art—and, indeed, modernism—for Fry and Woolf. For the Omega aspired not only to create art objects, but to design entire environments, reenvisioning the household's interior as an aesthetic space that could, by virtue of its ability to envelop and surround its inhabitants, offer itself as a new paradigm for the relation between modern art and its audience—one based not on the subject's encounter with an isolated or distanced object world, but grounded instead in immersion and absorption. At the same time, however, the Workshops' hybridity—their attempts to reconcile the intangible claims of fine art with the workaday practicalities of handicraft—meant that they could not hope to attain fully either the “purity” of art or the substantiality of craft. Instead the Omega Workshops Fitzroy Street showrooms come to seem a liminal space, poised between the material and the conceptual, between immediacy and remoteness, and between the demands of everyday life and their transcendence. It is a place where real objects, under the conceptual pressures they must bear, threaten quite literally to fade, shrink and fracture.

* * *

Itself a hybrid that combines the advantages and limitations of art and craft, *Roger Fry: A Biography* resembles the Omega Workshops' products more closely than anything

³³ The commission for designing the “Post-Impressionist Room” was, as Woolf records, the occasion for the falling-out between Wyndham Lewis—formerly a participant in the Workshops—and Fry. Their argument over who had legitimately earned the right to take charge of the project initiated the split between Vorticism and Post-Impressionism. For an examination of the art historical significance of this conflict, see Tillyard 217-223. Deborah Ryan contextualizes their disagreement within a wide-ranging history of the Ideal Home Show (21-33).

else in Virginia Woolf's oeuvre. It was in this book that she wrestled most extensively with the problems that inhere in this hybridity, as well as with the possibility of representing adequately the accomplishments of a man whose career consisted largely of publicizing—and thereby mediating the reception of—abstract art. And it was in *Roger Fry*, too, that she wrestled most extensively with the problem of ekphrasis—with language's ability to describe painting, or to offer an equivalent experience to that of viewing a piece of visual art. For discussion of these difficulties had enlivened her relationship with Fry, and continued to shape the “odd posthumous friendship—in some ways more intimate than any I had [with him] in life” that the biography's writing constituted for her (*Diary* 4: 361). This intimacy authorizes the biography, granting Woolf the expertise to speak about the life of an art critic even though her *métier* lies exclusively in the domain of literature. But her closeness with the biography's subject also resists representation; the depth and tenderness of their friendship remains anchored within a personal realm that has little place in a book intended to chronicle Fry's public accomplishments. Like Fry's newspaper reviews of art exhibits or the polemics he published in *The Nation*, *Roger Fry: A Biography* understands itself to occupy a place within modern print culture—that is, within a network of new media capable of shaping art's reception—without fully or completely inhabiting the aesthetic sphere.

Of all of Virginia Woolf's works, *Roger Fry* has probably been least attended to by critics.³⁴ Their neglect appears at least in part to reflect Woolf's own attitude towards the book. She was at work on the seemingly endless task of its composition and revision from 1934 to 1940, and her letters and diary entries from the period bear witness to her

³⁴ Hamilton provides a brief history of the book's reception, which he summarizes as follows: “*Roger Fry*... [was] widely considered not only the worst book she ever wrote, but a complete failure as a biography” (162).

increasing frustration with the project. In one diary entry, for instance, written in 1939 when the biography was nearing completion, she complains of drudgery: “My plan is to force my brain to work on Roger. But Lord this is the worst of all my life’s experiences” (*Diary* 5:234). A few months later, in a letter to Ethyl Smyth, she records her sense that the book is a failure; it is, she declares, “only a piece of cabinet making, and only of interest to R.’s friends, for whom I’ve tried to stick together an amalgamation of all his letters” (*Letters* 6: 381). If the notion of “amalgamation”—like pastiche or collage—implies that the text is a juxtaposition of fragments, a collection of archival materials, brought together to form a whole, rather than created or invented in its entirety, the metaphor of cabinet-making alternately likens the book to a piece of furniture—part of the everyday world of the household, rather than the realm of art—and thus of local rather than universal interest. This comment, then, suggests the twin problems that Woolf understood the biographer to face: biography’s necessary reliance on the “real” dooms its writer to a lack of originality, while its status as “cabinet making” implies that it, like other utilitarian objects found in the domestic interior, cannot wholly or comfortably inhabit the aesthetic sphere.

In a 1930 essay entitled “The Art of Biography” Woolf further elaborates on these points: she outlines her pessimistic conception of the biographer’s sharply delimited role. For Woolf, the genre of biography is thoroughly anchored within social and historical conditions, and thus is limited by convention and a commonly-understood—and highly restrictive—morality. The archival materials out of which biography must be synthesized are personal possessions belonging to “old friends who lent letters... and Mrs. Jones, the widow” (188)—the relatives, intimates and acquaintances—of the biography’s subject.

Because the textual artifacts upon which it is based remain the property of their owners, the biographer is obligated to respect their interests and adhere to their sense of decorum. Unlike the best works of fiction, then, which need not respect familial or societal obligations, the biographer's product will rarely (if ever) be granted what Woolf lauds as the immortality of art: "And thus we come to the conclusion, that [the biographer] is a craftsman, not an artist; and his work is not a work of art but something betwixt and between" (196). If the biography is not wholly an artwork, however, it also cannot be entirely removed from the sphere of the aesthetic. Instead the biography occupies a liminal space between private memorial and public artifact, between a record intended to be "only of interest to [its subject's] friends" and a monument intended to celebrate the achievements of an important public figure.

Roger Fry: A Biography, in accordance with the conventions of its genre, promises its readers a kind of intimate entrée into the private and domestic life of its subject—a perspective made available precisely because Woolf is granted access to his otherwise unpublished memoirs and correspondence. This is made apparent from the text's very opening; the book commences by citing Fry's never-completed autobiography, extant even today only in manuscript form, so that *Roger Fry's* first words are its subject's own: "I lived the first six years of my life in the small eighteenth-century house at No. 6 The Grove, Highgate. The garden is still for me the imagined background for almost any garden scene that I read of in books" (11). Though these words take the form of a quotation, in content they describe Fry's place of origin, equating the interior of the childhood home with his personal history, and the confines of domestic space with subjective interiority. In the next lines, the biography's narrator

continues in this vein, inviting her readers to “pause for a moment on the threshold of that small house at Highgate to ask what we can learn about him before he became conscious” (11). Woolf here imagines entering the household as analogous to reading the narrative that is to follow, as though the childhood home were to function as a container for the self. Further, she believes that the information that we can get from searching through the extant fragments of material evidence about this structure exceeds what the biography’s subject can know about himself: an examination of this “small house” will produce a privileged awareness of the subject’s history, which remains concealed in his own unconscious.

In significant ways, however, *Roger Fry* fails to deliver upon this promise to offer personal access to or privileged knowledge of its subject. As critics have often remarked, what is noteworthy about this biography is the central absence of Roger Fry, his remoteness at the very moments when the text most strongly attempts to evoke his presence. Robert Kiely rather typically contends that the biography “repeatedly assert[s] the impossibility of representing [Fry’s] character in words, and thus undermine[s]... [its] apparent reason for being” (147). Other critics have noted the book’s crucial omissions—Vanessa Bell’s romantic liaison with Fry is carefully erased from the narrative, as is Fry’s long-term cohabitation with the already-married Helen Anrep, an affair that took place during a period when Fry’s wife was institutionalized for mental illness.³⁵ Indeed, these deletions and exclusions threaten to ensure that the biography will offer no more accurate or lifelike a portrait of Roger Fry than could be gained from a

³⁵ On the social pressures faced by Woolf during the writing of *Roger Fry*, and her decision to leave out many central events of its subject’s life, see Lee 696-70. Woolf’s dissatisfaction with the biography reappears frequently in her diaries and letters during this period.

perusal of his published writings, an examination of his paintings, or a reading of catalogues from the exhibits he curated.

In fact *Roger Fry*'s failures originate in and are marked by this oscillation between a privileged intimacy with its subject and an obligation to adhere to what Woolf elsewhere termed the "granite-like solidity" of documentary evidence ("New Biography" 149). As often as the biography turns toward the domestic sphere in its search for material proof of its subject's inner nature, it also takes up a narratorial stance that is both anonymous and distanced; the biographer is an impartial observer who neither participates in nor is touched by the events she recounts. We see this impersonal perspective clearly in the biography's account of its author's first meeting with its subject, an event it acknowledges only obliquely and indirectly. Though Woolf's biographers have surmised that she met Fry for the first time on February 25, 1910 at a talk he gave for Vanessa Bell's Friday Club, a weekly gathering of painters and others with a vested interest in the arts, *Roger Fry* describes the episode from an audience member's perspective rather than that of an acquaintance who was soon to become close to him.³⁶ "To a stranger meeting him then for the first time," she writes, "he looked much older than his age... [H]e gave the impression of a man with a great weight of experience behind him. He looked worn and seasoned, ascetic yet tough. And there was his reputation, of course, to confuse a first impression—his reputation as a lecturer and as an art critic" (149). While these comments might initially seem to aspire to objectivity in their refusal of sentiment or first-person commentary, they instead cast doubt upon the

³⁶ Panthea Reid provides convincing evidence that this was the date of Fry's and Woolf's first meeting. Woolf's diaries and letters do not mention the lecture, in large part, Reid suggests, because Woolf was suffering from an acute episode of depression at the time and appeared "on the verge of another breakdown" (108).

reliability of visual—or material—evidence about the interiority of others. From this externalized observer’s point of view, appearances can be deceptive: Fry’s looks belie his true age, and his carefully-built reputation as a public intellectual “confuses” rather than enhances a stranger’s understanding of his character.

The anonymous perspective of the biography’s narrator in fact positions her as part of a crowd of listeners—as part, in other words, of the mass audience towards which Fry’s efforts to publicize modern art were directed. Even in the moments when *Roger Fry* describes its subject as laboring to create a relation of unmediated intimacy between works of art and their audiences, the text does so by acknowledging the highly mediated quality of this work. For the biography’s status as an “amalgamation”—of Fry’s letters and published articles, and of those of other journalists as well—necessitates that it incorporate extensive quotation; indeed the book frequently reads like a composite of press clippings about the various aesthetic spectacles that Fry engineered. This quality is particularly evident in its description of the Omega Workshops’ showroom, which—as I have discussed earlier—was also the site of Fry’s most ambitious attempts to reconfigure the relationship between modern art and its spectators into one of immersive absorption in the material world. Woolf comments on the immediate success of the Workshops by noting that “[t]he papers devoted a great deal of space to the new venture” (194). Her account closely follows that of one particular interviewer, who “recorded his impressions of the Omega... [when] Mr. Fry... took him round and he asked Mr. Fry to explain his intentions” (194). As Fry proceeds through the showroom, expounding upon the purpose and theoretical significance of the various objects to be found there, this interviewer’s responses are conscientiously reported in Woolf’s text (“The interviewer looked”; “The

interviewer was puzzled”; “The interviewer was interested” [195]) until the biography’s perspective seems to collapse into that of the journalistic account. The Omega’s greatest triumph thus appears as its complete and utter penetration by the mass media; the degree to which its products are described in the papers is for Woolf a measure of its success.

Roger Fry: A Biography hence confronts not only the difficulties faced by the biographer seeking to reconcile the competing claims of subjective truth—what we might call “character in itself”—and objective reality, but also those faced by the modern artist seeking to create aesthetic objects suited to a world thoroughly permeated by the cultural networks of the mass media. *Roger Fry*’s dilemma, we might say, is its subject’s own: how to persuade broad public audiences of modern art’s value when the artworks in question demand inspection at first hand; or how to write—whether as an art critic, journalist or biographer—of something that inherently eludes representation in language. Though the book is widely considered a failure, its status as such marks it, in some ways, as the quintessential modern artwork—and as emblematic of what Bloomsbury hoped to create. For the impossibility of its mission reflects role as a hybrid: in attempting to be both art and “cabinet making”, to inhabit a narrative perspective both highly intimate and aligned with that of “the papers”, to portray its subject both accurately and with respectful decorum, *Roger Fry* takes on what is essentially an unworkable project—that of uniting mutually contradictory objectives.

Roger Fry thus evokes a series of problems that troubled the career of Roger Fry—as modern art’s champion and publicist—and that will continue to be important in literary modernism’s “special”—that is, both privileged and impossible—relationship with visual art. If Henry James saw the perceived decay of the material world as a

necessary but troubling consequence of the rise of American urban modernity, Roger Fry saw a similar threat—and opportunity—in the opening of the new public sphere embodied by early twentieth-century mass-market publishing and periodical culture. For if Fry understood the existence of receptive audiences as necessary for modern art's success—it is, after all, within their subjective experiences that the aesthetic object does its work as a “means of communicating emotions”—he recognized in lecturing, arguing and, above all, in writing for art journals, magazines and newspapers an opportunity to fashion such audiences from the otherwise hostile—or miseducated—body of the British public. But such labors—to increase modernism's standing—also endanger its integrity: they threaten, that is, to replace the direct and immediate experience to be had in the presence of artworks with something conceptual—the shadowy figure of their reputation. Both Roger Fry and Virginia Woolf sought to overcome this dilemma by redesigning the domestic sphere, creating a new utopian vision of the household interior as both a physical space and a theoretical abstraction, embodying the idealism of the artwork as well as the practicality of craft. As such a compromise, Bloomsbury's attempts to re-imagine home décor were doomed to failure, but the very nature of this defeat helps illuminate the paradoxical materiality of modern art.

CHAPTER THREE

Wyndham Lewis in the Fake-Masterpiece Factory

Ezra Pound's relationship with John Quinn began with an accusation: he charged the American lawyer, collector, and patron of the arts with purchasing forgeries. A thinly veiled reference to Quinn appeared in an article Pound published in *The New Age* in January of 1915, where he chastised "American collectors" for "buying autograph MSS. of William Morris, faked Rembrandts and faked Vandykes" (331). This practice, he alleged, was responsible for the present decline of art and architecture in Britain. Quinn, duly outraged by the insinuation, replied to Pound in a letter. In fact, he wrote, he was the most active buyer of living artists' work in America. "If there is a 'liver' collector of vital contemporary art in this country, for a man of moderate means, I should like to meet him," Quinn boasted (qtd. in B.L. Reid 198). Furthermore, he reminded Pound, he had been personally responsible for the overturn of the 1909 Tariff Act, which discouraged the purchase of modern European art through taxation. Quinn had argued before Congress, and had carefully chosen the language of the new bill himself. "I inserted the word 'original' in the law, so that only *original* works of art come in duty free, that is, works of art really by the artists that they purport to be by," he explained (qtd. in B.L. Reid 198-99). In this letter, and in the nine-year correspondence that succeeded it, Quinn presented his efforts—in both the commercial and legislative fields—as a bulwark against art forgery. He was laboring tirelessly, he assured Pound, to staunch the flow of fakes into his nation.

This exchange stands as historical evidence of an important transformation in the international art market in the early twentieth century. With the growth of major

American fine art museums, an increase in the number of American millionaires seeking to convert their financial assets into cultural capital, and the expansion of international art periodical circulation, collectors became more and more likely to develop an interest in—and eventually buy—artworks at a distance. As Paris acquired currency in the popular imagination as the geographical center of the modern art world, ever larger numbers of foreigners—including those who had never visited the city, and those who were able to make the journey only on rare occasion—were enticed by its products. But with the development of this newly internationalized market for modern art, there arose a new set of anxieties on the part of buyers and artists alike. Both wanted to be sure that the objects being circulated as original were, as Quinn put it, “really by the artists they purport to be by.” For as recent theoretical analyses of art forgery have argued, fakery’s success is contingent upon demand; only when there exists a substantial market for authentic artworks of a particular type, a network of mediators and dealers that can pass pieces along to collectors, and a group of buyers willing to rely upon the testimony of “experts” to determine the value of their purchases can the time-consuming and labor-intensive practice of counterfeiting art prove profitable.¹ The higher the price an authentic painting by an artist such as Van Gogh might fetch, the greater the incentive to create a copy of it that can masquerade as the original.

Among modernist writers, Wyndham Lewis was uniquely attuned to the foibles of the contemporary art market because he also—and at times in his career, primarily—

¹ For a detailed discussion of the market conditions necessary for the survival of the practice of forging art, see Radnóti 10-17. Sparshott offers a historical analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of the concept of the original, and examines the development of collectors’ anxiety about the possibility that they might be purchasing fakes. See also Orvell (19-26), who argues that the tendency to value the “authentic” artwork is itself a historical phenomenon; prior to the outset of the twentieth century, American museums and private collectors were often content (knowingly) to purchase copies of paintings and sculpture, since their collections were formed with the intention to teach audiences about European art, rather than to bring the unique “original” object to them.

worked as a painter. Scholars have long been aware of the intimate relationship between Lewis's experiences as a visual artist and his literary experiments,² but they have devoted less attention to his engagement with the fakery and forgery of art. Lewis was an outspoken and belligerent opponent of "shamming" in all areas of human experience—in social relationships, in the publishing world, in the art market, and perhaps most importantly, in the aesthetic sphere. And Lewis was also—and as this chapter will argue, relatedly—a vehement defender of the artwork's formal autonomy; he dreamed of the ideal aesthetic object as an uncompromised and autotelic whole, isolated from the subjective experiences of its viewers and the destructive forces of history.³ Lewis understood the practice of art forgery in the twentieth century as a historically specific problem, one related to several contemporary cultural developments—the rise of the modern art market, where the skyrocketing prices of the work of dead celebrity painters absorb all available capital, robbing living artists of the chance to survive; the popularization of philosophies that over-value subjective experience to the detriment of the object world; and the threat of Communism, which would deny artists the right to intellectual property. But he imagined the value of art as timeless, and sought in his literary endeavors to accomplish the same goal that Quinn strove for as a lawyer: to rid modern society of the omnipresence of fakes.

² See, for example, Paul Edwards's recent book-length study, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, which traces the resemblances and interconnections between his works in both media over the course of his lifetime.

³ Lewis's investment in formal autonomy and his disdain for modernism's excessive subjectivization has been a critical commonplace in studies of his work. See, for instance, Fredric Jameson's landmark study, in which he argues that Lewis was opposed to "[t]he most influential formal impulses of canonical modernism... [including] strategies of inwardness, which set out to reappropriate an alienated universe by transforming it into personal styles and private languages" (*Fables* 2). See also Foster, who understands Lewis's celebration of the artwork's autonomy as a strategy through which the modern ego "can withstand the shocks of the military-industrial, the modern-urban, and the mass-political" (9).

This chapter brings together the cultural and historical phenomena I have outlined in the previous two. If Henry James was responding to the changes in international art collecting practices that were brought about by vast increases in the number and wealth of American art consumers—both individual and institutional—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these changes also enabled many more forgeries to find buyers outside of Europe. And if Roger Fry hoped to augment modernism’s audience by writing of its virtues for a newly-expanded public consisting of periodical readers, he too was working—if inadvertently—to increase the size of the market for fakes and copies of this art. As this chapter will demonstrate, Wyndham Lewis set himself in opposition to both phenomena. I trace here the development of his aesthetic theories, which first began to take shape under the influence of John Quinn, with whom he had a short-lived but significant patronage relationship. In the years that followed this relationship’s end and Quinn’s death soon afterwards, Lewis continued to hold painting as the ideal aesthetic medium, because its physical form—a pure surface, or an exterior without insides—emblemized for him sincerity or genuineness. In his 1937 novel, *The Revenge for Love*, he sets these aesthetic theories in explicit relation to his idea of the literary work, which although it would always remain subsidiary to painting, nonetheless could perform the important task of educating its readers about the value of art and artists, and thereby take its place in the war against fakes.

* * *

Despite its brevity, John Quinn’s relationship with Wyndham Lewis was profoundly important to Lewis’s development as an artist. The two men were first introduced in 1909 by Augustus John, although Quinn did not begin buying Lewis’s work

until 1916, when he was urged to do so by Ezra Pound.⁴ Pound's letters were full of enthusiasm for his friend's painting: he praised its quality while noting that Lewis's relative anonymity in the art world made it an excellent investment, sure to increase in value as Lewis became better known.⁵ Quinn quickly became Lewis's most important patron, providing in his art purchases—and outright gifts—Lewis's largest source of income during the financially lean years when he served as an artilleryman in World War One. In addition to buying Lewis's paintings and drawings for his private collection, Quinn organized an exhibition of "Vorticist" artwork that took place in New York in January of 1917; Lewis's works were prominently featured there.⁶ Quinn also supported Lewis's literary endeavors: he arranged for the placement of Lewis's first novel, *Tarr*, with Knopf for its American edition, and defended the *Little Review* against obscenity charges brought against it for the publication of Lewis's short story "Candleman's Spring Mate." Throughout his correspondence with Quinn, Lewis maintained a tone of appreciative gratitude.⁷ As he wrote to Pound in 1916, shortly before being sent to fight

⁴ For the most extensive description of their first meeting, see O'Keefe 92-95; see also B.L. Reid 78-83. B.L. Reid's biography of the New York collector is comprehensive and detailed; it contains a thorough account of Quinn's relationship with Lewis, examining the circumstances of Lewis and Quinn's correspondence, and cataloguing Quinn's purchases from Lewis.

⁵ Pound's most famous comment on the quality of his friend's painting appeared in a letter to Quinn dated March 10, 1916. He wrote: "It seems to me that Picasso alone, certainly among the living artists whom I know of, is in anything like the same class. It is not merely knowledge of technique, or skill, it is *intelligence* and knowledge of life, of the whole of it, beauty, heaven, hell, sarcasm, every kind of whirlwind of force, and emotion. Vortex. that is the right word, if I did find it myself. Every kind of geyser from jism bursting up white as ivory, to hate or a storm at sea. Spermatozoon, enough to repopulate the island with active and vigorous animals" (*Pound/Quinn* 66).

⁶ Unfortunately the exhibition met with little success; it attracted scant attention in the newspapers—whether positive or negative—and few of the works on display eventually sold. On Quinn's disappointment at the "Vorticist" show's failure, see Zilczer 39-41. See also Cork (490-95) for an extensive art historical account of the works featured in the show and its reception in New York.

⁷ This is true of the extant letters; however in a note to Augustus John from October of 1930, Lewis describes having written an aggressively critical letter to Quinn, one that is now lost. Lewis also claims that the sycophantic tone of his correspondence with his former patron was affected in order to gain Quinn's monetary support: "A similar looking document reached me and I find it full of letters written by myself to the late Quinn. The most interesting letter—that in which I told him to go to the devil—is not among them. Permission I suppose will have to be given [for the letters to be reprinted]: though letters

in France, “I think if I were a poet like you, I would write a poem to Quinn. But perhaps you have” (*Pound/Lewis* 29).

Indeed John Quinn’s patronage provided Lewis with a model for the ideal relationship between artist and audience—an ideal that would continue to resurface in his later writings, and one that would persist even in the face of his growing pessimism about social and economic conditions in the 1930s. Quinn shared with Lewis a belief that the patron’s material support of the artist was itself an act of aesthetic creation. Quinn had adopted this notion of the art collector’s paradigmatic role from Ezra Pound, who urged him to support living painters instead of spending exorbitant sums on the work of the dead. As Pound explained in a letter, “My whole drive is that if a patron buys from an artist who needs money (needs money to buy tools, time and food) the patron then makes himself equal to the artist, he is building art into the world. He creates” (*Pound/Quinn* 23). As Quinn’s biographers have argued, his passion for art collecting was fuelled by dreaming of himself as an artist *manqué*, but he was forced by practical constraints (and a lack of talent) “to content himself... with knowing and having rather than making” (B.L. Reid 9). Yet Quinn repeatedly insisted in letters that he acquired art objects on the basis of quality, and never purely in order to support the artists who had made them. In 1921, for instance, he exclaimed in irritation to painter David Bomberg, “I should be obliged... if you would do the best you can to counteract the idea that seems to be common in England that I buy wholesale, or from photographs, or to help artists, or to encourage them, for I do none of those things” (qtd. in B.L. Reid 498). Instead, he claimed, his

written to a patron are grim compositions usually. In cold print I fear they will make me look rather avaricious, and perhaps also ambitious” (*Lewis Letters* 194). It is impossible to determine, however, if the letter he mentions ever actually existed; there is no other mention of it, and no copy of it has yet been found (Londraville 251).

purchases guaranteed artists' freedom because he did not intervene in the creative process. "If [a man] paints to please someone else he paints to order, and a man who paints to order is no artist," he wrote. "The difference between an artist and a tradesman is that the artist paints to please himself or satisfy his conscience, and the tradesman supplies goods to order. The man who makes his goods to order—'Anything to please the gentleman'—'Something nice and tasty'—is a waiter or an artisan" (qtd. in B.L. Reid 202). Quinn's patronage, that is, assured artworks' status as art not by freeing their creators from the exigencies of the market, but because of his fundamental belief in the perfection of his own taste. By buying only the best works of art, Quinn would be supporting only the best artists, and thus "building art into the world."

In an essay entitled "Art and Patronage," which he published in the 1935 *BBC Annual*, Wyndham Lewis articulated a theory of support for the arts that bears crucial similarities to Quinn's thought. The essay notably manifests the cynicism that had become a hallmark of Lewis's writings about the place of art in the modern world by the thirties. Lewis fears that his contemporaries understand artworks as luxury goods rather than social necessities, a mindset that threatens art's very existence in times of economic difficulty. At present, he writes, "every great traditional institution has its back against the wall, fighting tooth and nail for survival... [and] so is far too harassed, too poor, too uncertain of the future, to lend an ear to the necessities of the scribbler, the singer of songs, or of the house-decorator (why *decorate*, when the roof may be tumbling about its ears in a fortnight?)" (297). What is most problematic about this state of affairs is that it renders artists (and the entire field of aesthetic production along with them) unduly dependent upon their material means of support, which risks politicizing or otherwise

influencing the content of their work. Although Lewis imagines an ideal world in which the aesthetic sphere is entirely independent of both finance and politics, he settles upon individual patronage as the best available compromise for continuing support of the arts in present-day Britain. “The reason for this preference for an individual is obvious enough,” he explains. “The individual, however odious... is simple: whereas the state, or the corporation, is many things, and this complexity, masquerading as a unity, is suspect” (299). The patron’s “simplicity” thus represents the best possibility for non-intervention in the creation of the work of art, preserving—if incompletely—the artist’s intellectual independence.

Lewis admires patronage because it promises to forestall the homogenizing effects of both capitalism and Communism, both of which threaten to reduce aesthetic activity to the material conditions that enable it. For Lewis Communism menaces artistic production by limiting artists’ freedom of expression, forcing them to churn out works with particular political content. In such a system, he writes, “[t]he artist... [is] thundered against by the masters of the new revolutionary societies... for his ‘irresponsibility’... or even, as often as not, sentenc[ed] to be shot out of hand, just to *show* him” (297). Within the confines of censorship and in response to the demand for propaganda, the artist’s creative act becomes an automatic or mechanical gesture akin to a factory worker’s repetitive labor. In contrast, capitalism menaces artistic consumption by positioning art within a system where everything is quantifiable, exchangeable and substitutable. Lewis explains: “the new-rich money-masters of the old democratic societies of the West... have not been at any pains to disguise the fact that commercial values are the only ones that mean a great deal to them; and that to all these intangible,

non-commercial, non-quantitative values, resident in everything that can be labeled ‘art,’ they are sublimely indifferent” (297-8). Patronage works against both tendencies, bringing production and consumption into harmony so that the “artistic impulse” can operate as “a very fundamental, semi-magical, thing, of deep organic importance in the life of man” (298).

Lewis further elaborated his critique of the commercial art market in “Pictures as Investments: A Straight Talk.” Published in 1938, this essay begins by identifying material support for the artist with physical sustenance of the artwork itself. In an unusual departure from Lewis’s admiration for “hard-edged” masculinity, here he imagines aesthetic creation in terms of the female body:

The most critical time in the life of an oil-painting is the period at which it is coming into the world. Also, just as the mother should be well nourished during her confinement, so the worldly circumstances of the living artist are of great importance. Food is essential; and it is a well-known fact that artists, like the woman with child, have enormous appetites. (268)

The childbirth metaphor renders aesthetic production both an “organic” and a corporeal act, but it also serves as a reminder that painting is, for Lewis, a form of “labor.”

Implicitly, this figure criticizes the artist’s dependence upon buyers for the nourishment necessary to survive, suggesting that it reduces his aesthetic activities to alienated labor.

Because the painter must pander to “the operations of Big Business” while creating his work, his intellectual freedom is endangered (271); high art risks dissolution into “advertisement or coloured photography” as the aesthetic sphere becomes ever more closely intertwined with “worldly circumstances” (268).

Lewis is by turns sanguine and sarcastic about capitalism’s potential consequences in “Pictures as Investments.” He voices an uncharacteristic optimism

about the art market's capacity to recognize paintings' true aesthetic value, or to, as he phrases it, admit the work of "only the cream of the cream of artists" to the category of "super-objects in the class of pearls and diamonds" (271). But investors' ability to discern artistic excellence is limited: because they are unwilling to speculate, such buyers consider only works whose makers are already dead. "Under these circumstances," Lewis explains, "the artist has no cause to complain—at least that the sort of activity he is engaged in is disregarded or scorned... [But] he happens to be alive, and only a corpse has any value in the eyes of Big Business" (270). For the private collector, the absence of the artist from the realm of production both fixes his reputation and assures the scarcity of his masterpieces. The effect of such a propensity to value only the work of the deceased is of course to deny sustenance to the living—a process that, as Lewis ironically notes, will if carried to its logical conclusion lead to the death of more artists. In fact, it is not the artist's "activity"—in its vitality and organicity—that is deemed worthwhile, but the objects he has created; such "activity" is to be frozen into exchangeable units, just as the artist is to stiffen into a corpse. For Lewis, the art market's power to fix values threatens the vitality of the artist and the artwork alike.

In "Pictures as Investments," the hyper-valuation of Old Master paintings—along with the work of other already-canonical artists like Van Gogh—both shelters them from the destructive forces of historical transformation and excludes them from the dynamic process of history. Taking the fate of the contents of Madrid's Prado during the Spanish Civil War as an example, Lewis notes that artworks are excepted from the fate of the society that surrounds them. Once ensconced within the museum, paintings are no longer vulnerable to material decay or ruin:

When civilization was temporarily turned upside down and inside out, and Chaos reigned... in a jumble of Franco's and Caballero's bombs... what happened to *the pictures*?...

[N]ot a hair of the head of a royal portrait was touched... When the heads of grand dukes and grandees were rolling all over the place, their painted ancestors were treated with the most loving care.

Do not these facts give one a certain confidence that whatever cataclysms may lie before us, at least *the pictures* will be saved?... It will be because they have been singled out as the one stable thing commercially, in an otherwise unstable world. (272)

While the preservation of such artworks is, in and of itself, of indisputable benefit to humankind, the fact that it is accomplished only because of the constancy of their “commercial” values is problematic for Lewis. He is troubled by the market's tendency to understand art as a kind of currency, since this is predicated upon exchangeability and substitutability. He writes:

[T]he financial world is serious in this instance... It has looked about it in the universe, and has observed all the objects of which it is composed: chairs and tables, motor-cars, postage-stamps, sewing-machines, saxophones, umbrellas, airplanes, bassinets, cathedrals. And it has decided, for better or for worse, that oil-paintings are the only things that are small, portable, and susceptible of methodic valuation, which can readily take the place of precious metals and precious stones. (271)

Unlike the ideal artwork, which is both indispensable and irreducible to anything other than itself, the “objects” that these buyers consume are placed within a system of “methodic valuation” that denies the importance of their physicality (the myriad differences, for instance, between “metals” and “stones”). The “financial world,” that is, repudiates what is most important about the work of art, abstracting it instead into a universal equivalent for consumer goods, a form of money. This process, as in Marx's classic description of commodification, strips the artwork of its objective particularity—for “as soon as [an object] emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness” (*Capital* 163). At the hands of this system, the “great picture”

has an ambivalent fate: “It will be saved, undoubtedly, from every fire, shipwreck, air-raid, or flood, if that is humanly possible. Yet in our minds these distillations of intellect and emotion, that great pictures are, are numbed, in some way... by the position they now occupy” (272). In placing aesthetic objects inside the museum and outside of history, then, the art market alters their reception: it “numbs” them, so that they can no longer be apprehended fully or purely as *art*.⁸

Despite the multiple dangers that the work of art faces in the capitalist marketplace, however, Lewis cannot conceive a better alternative to this economic order.⁹ Indeed, as he is judicious to remark, the free market is most noteworthy for its lack of malevolence. When he attempts to pronounce a final verdict upon the system in the essay, Lewis can only equivocate. “[T]he irresponsible commercial mind,” he writes, is “willing, not evil, but certainly *no good*, and yet productive, in spite of itself, of good, up to a point” (272). With his trenchant dislike of Communism—along with his deeply-held belief in the sanctity of private property—Lewis could not admit that state sponsorship of artists—as a form of communal ownership of the means of production—might present an improvement over present conditions. He sought instead an expansion of the market, so that the “financial world,” long able and accustomed to recognize “the cream of the

⁸ It is worthy of note, however, that these “great pictures” are merely “numbed,” rather than deadened or wholly destroyed. This concept of “numbed” reception might usefully be compared with the “distracted” reception that Benjamin describes in the “Work of Art” essay; for Benjamin, however, such scattering of attention is linked to the dispersal of artworks through their reproduction, while for Lewis it is instead connected to their fixity in a particular location and as an index of value.

⁹ Douglas Mao makes a similar point; he reads this essay as articulating Lewis’s “solicitude for the auratic effect of the art object, which seems threatened above all by the systematizing and quantifying tendencies of capitalism” (122), but notes that its overall tone of cynicism is related to “the general decline in Lewis’s faith in art’s transformative capacities” (123). I would argue, however, that the article is complexly ambivalent, rather than simply or straightforwardly cynical, and that what Lewis sees in the operation of the modern art market is not solely the loss of “auratic effect” but instead is more closely akin to what Lukács has described as reification, a process in which objects “acquire a new objectivity, a new substantiality which they did not possess in an age of episodic exchange and which destroys their original and authentic substantiality” (*History and Class Consciousness* 92).

cream of artists,” would turn its attention to living painters as well as dead ones; but he also dreamed of a more intimate—and less “methodic”—association between buyer and artist. Such a relationship, he wrote, would in fact strengthen the art market by effectively preventing the sale of forgeries:

I should [recommend modern painters] if I were acting as adviser to some portentous magnate who wanted to get the low-down on the Living, for a change—having perhaps made a bad loss on some doubtful Siennese or bogus French Primitive, and having, in a rage, told himself that at least with the Living, while the paint was still wet, you could not have any hanky-panky of that sort, because if necessary you can watch the fellow doing the beastly thing! (270-1)

For Lewis, the existence of such a personal link between the artist and his buyer—where the purchaser can “watch” the painter at work—is mutually beneficial; it both secures the value of the buyer’s investment by guaranteeing the authenticity of the object he buys and assures the artist’s survival. Patronage is exactly this kind of relationship; in it the “irresponsible commercial mind” of the unregulated marketplace is replaced with what we might think of as a “responsible commercial mind,” in a system that preserves all the advantages of capitalism while mitigating its ill effects.

Throughout John Quinn and Wyndham Lewis’s five-year correspondence, the American collector exemplifies this sort of “responsible commercial mind.” Quinn offered his (at times) enthusiastic support for Lewis’s endeavors as a painter and writer without qualification or restriction; though the two men discussed their taste in painting and shared theories about the arts, Quinn never attempted to influence the content of Lewis’s work. From their very first letters, in which Quinn asked if he might buy paintings at a discount, choosing from among those that remained unsold after the 1917 Vorticist exhibition, the businesslike tone of their exchanges is clear. The purely “commercial” character of the relationship is manifest in Quinn’s repeated insistence that

he will consider “only the best examples” of Lewis’s work (119), as well as his demands that he be offered fair—or even advantageous—prices. Indeed Quinn presents himself as a disinterested and completely objective buyer, one who will not hesitate to reject what he deems inferior. “I did not care for [a particular drawing],” he declares bluntly at one point. “In your letter you said that if I should not care for it I should tell you. As you will see... I have had it removed from the mat, quite successfully, and it is being returned” (230). But such rejections often have the contradictory effect of strengthening Quinn’s endorsement of the quality of Lewis’s work in general, since they are relatively rare, and the purchases are numerous.

Both Quinn and Lewis—whether as buyer and seller, or artist and audience—frequently feel challenged by their geographical distance, which troubles them because of their shared belief in the artwork’s fundamental irreproducibility. The problem with photographing artworks, for both of them, is that it threatens the unmediated intimacy of the subject-object relation that is central to aesthetic experience (between painter and painting; and between painter and patron/audience).¹⁰ Quinn demands to evaluate at firsthand the paintings he thinks of purchasing, explaining that it is the only way of ascertaining their merit. “I would a damned sight rather... send you a draft for a hundred

¹⁰ Quinn and Lewis share a discomfort with the photography of painting that evokes the problems raised by Benjamin in his “Work of Art” essay: when technological reproduction “enables the original to meet the recipient halfway,” as Benjamin puts it, it “devalue[s] the here and now of the artwork” (103). As Benjamin notes, what appears in a photograph of a work of art is often visibly different from the original. “Photography,” he writes, “can bring out aspects of the original that are accessible only to the lens (which is adjustable and can easily change viewpoint) but not to the human eye; or it can use certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, to record images which escape natural optics altogether” (103). For Quinn and Lewis, such alterations are troubling because they intrude upon the authenticity of the work. An artwork’s authenticity, as Benjamin defines it, is “the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it” (103). This notion, that the art object might serve as a conduit, transmitting its own history (including the history of its production), might explain why Quinn bought as he did, since no copy or substitute would bear the material traces of this history as the original painting would. Benjamin’s original German text employs the term *Echtheit*, which Jephcott and Zohn have translated as “authenticity,” but which can also be used to denote human sincerity.

or two hundred pounds in advance on your work... and then choose your paintings at leisure, than take things that did not attract me and that did not appeal to me,” he resolves. “I had sworn years ago never again to buy from photographs for I have been damnably disappointed over originals that I had bought from photographs” (129). Quinn’s conviction that photography cannot convey whether or not a painting is worth buying is matched by a similar certainty on Lewis’s part that his paintings’ essence cannot be captured by the camera. Though Lewis *does* occasionally send photographs to supplement the verbal descriptions of the visual artworks he offers his patron, he is always mindful of their inadequacy. He writes, for instance, that photographs are “too thin and poor, and would not have helped you to see the pictures they were supposed to reproduce” (127). And he notes that his best work is especially resistant to the camera: “One of the drawings, entitled, ‘Reliefs going up’... I can especially recommend... Three times I attempted to get a decent photograph of that, and have not been able to” (127).

Grounded in the “responsible commercial mind,” Quinn’s patronage thus offered Wyndham Lewis a means of partially reconciling himself to the modern art market. As an impartial—but appreciative—buyer, Quinn personified the capitalist marketplace’s ability to recognize “the cream of the cream of artists”; he perceived a kind of value that was simultaneously aesthetic and financial. But unlike the “financial world,” with its compulsion to substitute—to turn all things that are “susceptible of methodic valuation” into forms of currency—Quinn respected the inimitable integrity of the object world; for the opportunity to examine paintings at firsthand, he would accept no substitutes. Even his longstanding efforts to reform tariff law were intended as a defense of “originality”

and an attempt to purge the American art market of all fakes and forgeries. Though the correspondence between Quinn and Lewis ended abruptly in 1921 (and Quinn died less than three years later), their relationship provided Lewis with a model for aesthetic consumption—one that married sincerity with commercialism—which would influence his thought for many years to come.

* * *

During the 1920s—the decade that followed the ending of his patronage relationship with John Quinn—Wyndham Lewis was much more active as a writer than as a painter. He produced several major philosophical treatises in this period, including *The Art of Being Ruled* and *Time and Western Man*, as well as long novels, such as *The Apes of God* and *The Childermass*. Lewis would later claim that this shift in focus was motivated by intellectual enthusiasm, as well as the mutually-exclusive character of the two media. In his 1950 autobiography *Rude Assignment*, he wrote that after that time “writing became so much a major interest that I have tended to work at my painting or drawing in prolonged bursts, rather than fit them into the intervals of the writing or planning of books. Writing and picture-making are not activities, I have found, which mix very well, unless one becomes the servant of the other” (140). But the change was also occasioned by more practical concerns: in 1922 he was evicted from his Holland Street studio for non-payment of rent, and he subsequently lacked a dedicated space for working in the visual arts.¹¹ His poverty during these years was at least partially the result of the withdrawal of Quinn’s support, but his philosophical writings of the period

¹¹ Meyers (*Enemy* 111-119) explicitly links the ending of Lewis’s relationship with Quinn to his subsequent financial difficulties, including the loss of the studio; O’Keefe (247-57) notes that Lewis’s poverty was lifelong, and the specific crisis that resulted in his eviction was preceded by conflicts with several of his patrons, including Sydney Schiff and Dick Wyndham.

do not acknowledge this as a crisis. Instead he increasingly asserts the importance of the artwork's formal autonomy, its isolation from social relations, and its independence from the tastes—and experiences—of its audience. He develops an aesthetic, in other words, that defends the work of art from the vulnerabilities inherent in being dependent upon its consumers. And he continues to insist that the ideal—most perfect, because most independent—aesthetic medium is not writing, but paint.

In *Time and Western Man*, widely considered Lewis's most important philosophical work, he offers a sweeping indictment of modern culture. The book elaborates an extended critique of Bergson's theory of *durée*, which Lewis claims has filtered dangerously into nearly every aspect of contemporary life, transforming it into a "time cult." He finds traces of Bergson's influence in current philosophy, of course, but he also observes its pernicious effects in the fields of science (particularly in Einstein's physics), industry and advertising. And, in keeping with his professional interests in writing and painting, he expounds at length upon the consequences of the ascendance of "the great *time-philosophy* that overshadows all contemporary thought" for the arts (110). Both literature and the visual arts, he argues, are inclined to reproduce the intellectual currents of their day, because so many of their practitioners operate unconsciously: "Without knowing it, [the artist] receives into the central tissue of his work political or scientific notions which he proceeds to embody, if he is a novelist, in his characters, if he is a painter, or a poet, in his technique or emotional material, without in the least knowing what he is doing or why he is doing it" (136). Lewis protests against this unwitting trickling-down of philosophical belief into the aesthetic realm; he desires an absolute distinction between the world of art and other spheres, including that of political

ideology, which is where, he finds, errors in thought ultimately and most perilously manifest themselves. “To attempt to get rid of these politics, or shadow politics, is my main reason for undertaking this difficult analysis,” he proclaims early in the treatise (23). His wish to purify the aesthetic realm, to isolate it from both commodification and spurious philosophy is but one manifestation of the text’s broader concern with forms of separation—of the individual from the crowd, the art object from the debased play of fashion, and the event from the undifferentiated flow of history.

What is most troubling for Lewis about the “time-philosophy” of Bergson and his adherents is its tendency to homogenize, imperiling the vital distinction between subjects and objects, or in aesthetic terms, between artworks and their audiences. Lewis rejects Bergson’s exaltation of subjective time, arguing that he posits a radical—and false—opposition between interior and “scientific” or objective time. For Bergson, he claims, “‘Time’... is *mental* as opposed to *physical*” (408). Such a formulation reduces human sense perception to an animal act—an automatic or mechanistic response to stimuli—while collapsing the object world into an assortment of disordered sensations. “Mr. Bergson’s world,” he writes, “is not our hated geometric world, of *one space*. It is a *mental*, as it were an *interior* world, of palpitating movement, visually indistinct, electrical; not at all arranged on the principles of surfaces and lines... And the world of animals and insects is also a mental, interior world” (409).

For Lewis, aesthetic experience serves as a signal case of the more general problem caused by this blurring of boundaries between self and other, or between subjects and the material world. He contrasts the plastic or graphic arts, which take the form of objects that exist independently from their perceivers, with arts like literature and

music, which unfold inside the consciousnesses of their readers or listeners, and thus require the presence of audiences to complete them. In Lewis's conception, visual art is superior to other media because of this independence and distinctness. He explains:

Compare... any two characteristic masterpieces from the arts respectively of music and of painting—a statue, say the Colleoni, and a piece of music, say a Beethoven quartet. You move round the statue, but it is always there in its entirety before you: whereas the piece of music moves through you, as it were. The difference in the two arts is evident at once, and the different faculties that come into play in the one and the other. When you are half-way through the piece of music, or it is half-way through you, if you did not *remember* what you had just heard you would be in the position of a clock ticking its minutes, all the other ticks except the present one no longer existing: so it would be with the notes. You have to live in the music in some sense, in contrast to your response to the statue.

Supposing you could not see the statue *all at once*. Let us suppose that you were blind, and you had to feel your way all over the statue, bearing in your mind all the details you had felt since you first touched it; there would be some... analogy in that to what happens in listening to music. (170-171)

In an almost perfect reversal of Fry's aesthetic theory, which celebrates the subjective experiences of art's audiences, Lewis dreams of the work of art as a self-contained entity, impervious to and existing apart from its audiences' responses.¹² When objects are perceived visually, they are absorbed by their observers both instantaneously and in totality; in contrast, aural perception occurs in sequential fashion, as each musical phrase is followed by the next.¹³ Except for its traces in memory, each note is irretrievably lost

¹² Ayers offers a similar reading of this passage, noting that it is an attack on "the concept of 'becoming' which is at the root of the evil of Bergsonian philosophy," in which the arts serve as an example that confirms that "the spatial secures the presence of the subject, while the temporal ensures its dissolution" (17). For an extended discussion of *Time and Western Man*'s presentation of subjectivity, see Ayers 71-98. Lisa Siraganian argues that this conception of aesthetic externality is a hallmark of Lewis's work in general and throughout his lifetime. She writes: "For Lewis, the crucial characteristic of art—such as his own abstract, Vorticist painting—is that it is a different order of experience from reality, or 'life,' chiefly because it is a form of life that does not rely upon time. [...] His repudiation of time-philosophy is, in essence, a sweeping rejection of the experience of the viewer or reader to the meaning of the work of art" (668-9).

¹³ The distinction Lewis draws here between artworks that unfold in time and those that take shape in space is reminiscent of that drawn by Joseph Frank in his influential 1945 essay, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature." Frank argues that literary modernists sought to transcend the sequentiality imposed by narrative—and indeed by the structure of language itself—in order to create works that could be

the instant after it has sounded, so that the statue can be said to possess an objective stability and coherence that the quartet can never attain.

The above passage elaborates several of *Time and Western Man*'s most pressing concerns—in particular, it explores memory's relation to space and time—as they manifest themselves in the apprehension of art. As Lewis describes how different aesthetic media require different sorts of perception, however, he makes a crucial substitution. Though he begins with the claim that he is about to “compare... the arts... of music and of painting,” he chooses a “statue” as an example of “painting.” This somewhat surprising leap, from an artwork comprised only of a two-dimensional surface to one with three-dimensional form, is an important one for Lewis's theory: the statue, because it possesses volume, has an unknowable and inaccessible interior, while a painting does not. The statue's shape thus enables Lewis to imagine it being contemplated—albeit only by a blind audience—in a manner that is closely akin to the sequential perception that music demands. But it also makes it more closely resemble the commonplace things that compose the everyday world, so that it can better model the relation between subjects and objects in general. For Lewis, memory governs the relationship between visually apparent surfaces and the substances that lie beneath them, in art as well as elsewhere. “[I]n looking at an orange lying before us on the table, we are

apprehended “spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence” (10). Lewis himself famously claimed that his long satirical novel, *The Apes of God*, aspired to an “externality” similar to that achieved in spatial media, writing in *Men Without Art* that “no book has ever been written that has paid more attention to the *outside* of people [than *The Apes of God*]. In it their shells or pelts, or the language of their bodily movements, come first, not last” (97). Lewis quotes in particular one reader's report on the novel, which described it as a “*visuel*” (97). Though Frank's essay does not mention Lewis, Frank suggests that spatial form entered English literature by way of T.E. Hulme's interest in the art historical theories of Wilhelm Worringer. Lewis was enthusiastic in his admiration for the philosopher when they first met, particularly since Hulme had vociferously defended Lewis's departure from the Omega Workshops in the pages of *The New Age*. Though the two men soon had a falling-out occasioned by romantic rivalry, Lewis continued to esteem his former friend's intellectual contributions to English culture. On the short-lived but significant relationship between the two men, see O'Keefe 144-155.

more or less conscious of its contents,” he writes (383). Even though we gaze upon such an object from an isolated single viewpoint, “we apprehend it as though we could see all around it, since from experience we know it is round, of the same colour and texture, from whatever position it is examined... [E]very time we open our eyes we envelop the world before us, and give it *body*, or its quality of consisting of *objects*, with our memory” (383). If memory permits the statue’s blind observer to reconstitute its whole from the sum of his contacts with its surface, it similarly permits the sighted subject to understand the depth and fullness of the environment that surrounds him. Memory, then, whether it is part of aesthetic experience or not, enables humans to comprehend their milieu as multi-dimensional, to expand mentally upon the flatness that they see. In this sense it is a key component of the optical illusion upon which representational painting relies. But memory depends for its accuracy upon a sense of stability and constancy in the physical universe. If it is to provide a truthful rendition of volumes and shapes, memory demands a certain honesty on the part of the object world.

Yet the “time cult” as Lewis understands—and deplores—it insists upon the fundamental instability of the material realm. “Bergson’s doctrine of Time,” he contends, conceives it as “merely change or movement. An object... realizes itself, working up to a climax, then it disintegrates” (159). Such an evolutionary perspective on physical “reality” envisions objects as situated at a particular point within the finite span of their existence, just as the blind observer makes contact with the statue only at a particular point upon its finite surface. The effect of this might be likened to a snapshot, or to the “dynamism” that characterizes futurist painting, where “moving objects constantly multiply themselves; their form changes like rapid vibrations, in their mad

career, [so that] a running horse has not four legs, but twenty, and their movements are triangular” (“Technical Manifesto” 28).¹⁴ According to Lewis, this results in the creation of “a flat world... one of successive, flat images or impressions. And further, these images or impressions are, as far as possible, naked and simple, direct sensations, unassociated with any component of memory” (384). One problem with such “flattening” of sensory experience is that, for adherents of the “time-philosophy,” what is in fact an optical illusion—a trick of the eye—is thought of as real. “The most characteristic part of the theory,” Lewis continues, “is where the ‘sensus’ is a stick seen partly in water, and so appearing *bent*. According to the theory it, of course, *is bent*” (384). The unfortunate and dangerous consequence of such exaltation of the fleeting evidence of the senses is, ultimately, the disintegration of materiality itself. “The ‘object’ in short is as broken up or distorted in the medium of Time as by movement” he writes (384), elaborating a few pages later. “Its ‘integrity’ as a thing would [become] impossible. It... is now to be regarded not as a spatial object, but as a *temporal succession of objects*” (403). Bergson’s reverence for change, his celebration of a world in constant flux, poses for Lewis a threat to the substantive integrity of that world.

In opposition to the inconstancy and chaos that Lewis associates with the “time cult,” he admires figures of solidity and permanence. Thus he seeks evidence that there is material continuity in the world beyond what can be found in the momentary stimulus an object offers the senses at the time of its perception. In aesthetic terms in particular he

¹⁴ Lewis explicitly links Bergson’s concept of temporality to futurist notions of time on several occasions in *Time and Western Man*, referring in particular to Balla’s 1912 painting, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*: “[T]he notion of the transformed ‘object’ offered us by this doctrine is plainly in the nature of a ‘futurist’ picture, like a running dog with a hundred legs and a dozen backs and heads. In place of the characteristic static ‘form’ of greek Philosophy, you have a series, a group, or... a *reiteration*” (172). For essays that show Lewis’s early response—an ambivalent combination of admiration and distaste—to the arrival of Futurism in England, see “Automobilism,” and “Futurism and the Flesh.”

seeks the medium best able to overcome the “flattening” of the world that is a consequence of the popularity of Bergson’s ideas; he finds it, somewhat paradoxically, in the flatness and “pure surface” of painting. Part of the appeal of the graphic arts lies in their mode of apprehension. For to experience a painting, and especially, to concentrate intently upon it, requires stillness on the part of the viewer, which Lewis calls “material repose in the crowning human sense” (392). He contrasts this with lesser—because less stable—forms of art. “A world of motion is a world of music, if anything,” Lewis explains, “whether you move round the object or the object round you [is] immaterial, and indeed meaningless: but movement there must be” (385). He therefore asserts that “no visual artist would ever have imagined... such a world as the bergsonian” (385). Because the canvas can be viewed in its entirety from a single point, all at once (unlike the statue in the passage quoted above, which requires its blind observer to move along its contour), painting can be grasped *as a whole* in both space and time.¹⁵ A painting’s material stability—its immobility and independent existence outside of its viewer’s consciousness—is thus matched by the state of “repose” in which its viewer finds himself.

If Lewis posits painting as the ideal art form because he associates its flatness with stasis, he also links flatness with authenticity or sincerity; since the canvas holds nothing behind or beneath its surface, it possesses no hidden depths, no mysterious inner cavity that might beguile the viewer. Unlike a three-dimensional body, which should,

¹⁵ Accordingly, Lewis is broadly critical of narrative painting, associating it both with stultifying Victorian convention and modern commercialism. In “What is ‘Difficult’ Poetry?,” for instance, he writes: “[S]everal generations of insurgent painters [have] object[ed] to the... picture of the ‘every picture tells a story’ school. The main argument against that sort of picture is that it tends to belittle the object in question—the painted surface—and refer it away: either back into life, or else off into literature. The thing itself becomes a cipher—it is the *meaning* that matters!” (198).

according to Lewis, evoke “static mnemo-sensational contemplation” (385), a flat work of visual art—particularly a non-representational painting—need not call upon the memory of its beholder to fill in its volume or substantiate its interior. Painting thus requires “some propensity for the exactly-defined and also... the physical or concrete” (109). This is neither representational exactitude nor formal definition—clarity of line, say, or purity of color—but rather self-contained objective coherence. If material bodies are, as Lewis charges, always misapprehended by Bergson’s followers—they are “obsessed with the wish to make... dead matter *real*... so [they] bring it to life, by pumping it full of ‘time’ until it is a quicksilver beneath [their] hands” (162)—painting resists this maltreatment by virtue of its flatness: it possesses no inner cavity into which “time” might be “pumped.” In this sense, painting embodies the essential “deadness” of art more fully than any other aesthetic medium. Lewis first described this condition in his 1918 novel *Tarr*, in what is perhaps the most famous passage in the entire corpus of his work:

Deadness is the first condition of art. A hippopotamus’ armoured hide, a turtle’s shell, feathers or machinery on the one hand; *that* opposed to the naked pulsing and moving of the soft inside of life, along with the infinite elasticity and consciousness of movement, on the other.—Deadness... in the limited sense in which we use that word, is the first condition of art. The second is the absence of *soul*, in the sentimental human sense. The lines and masses of the statue are its soul. No restless, quick flame-like ego is imagined for the *inside* of it. It has no inside. This is another condition of art; to *have no inside*, nothing you cannot *see*. (299-300)

Within this carefully qualified definition (“in the limited sense in which we use that word”) “deadness” encompasses all the fundamental traits that, according to Lewis, comprise the ideal work of art; “deadness” implies physical stability (as “opposed to

pulsing and moving”), a lack of interiority, and an existence as pure surface (there is “nothing you cannot *see*”).

Lewis’s praise for the “deadness” of art, and specifically his acclaim for the “lines and masses of the statue” importantly recalls Nietzsche’s category of Apollonian form, best exemplified, he writes, in “the art of sculpture” (33). Apollonian art is associated with static plastic forms, constructed out of “mere appearance” alone (34). It is set in opposition to Dionysian art, epitomized by music, which Nietzsche claims brings its audiences into a state of self-abnegating revelry, where “everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness” (36). Lewis’s relation to Nietzsche’s aesthetics was complicated and ambivalent: in *Rude Assignment*, he claims that “Nietzsche was... the paramount influence” upon him in his early years (128), yet *The Art of Being Ruled* contains an extended diatribe against him, in which he is characterized as “the archetype of the vulgarizer” (113). In *Time and Western Man*, Nietzsche’s thought is repeatedly conflated with Bergson’s, and Lewis asserts that one of his primary purposes in writing the book was to debunk a conception shared by the two philosophers that “we should set out to transcend the human condition” (110). Nietzsche’s privileging of Dionysian art over Apollonian was distasteful to Lewis, who disliked the blurring of boundaries between self and other and art and world that Nietzsche saw as the ultimate goal of aesthetic activity. Lewis’s conception of “deadness”—the externality of art—was probably formulated at least partially in response to Nietzsche, for Lewis was acknowledging the importance of his thought even while attempting to disparage it.¹⁶

¹⁶ Many critics have claimed that Lewis’s support—and eventual repudiation of—fascism was grounded in his reading of Nietzsche. For a recent and detailed analysis of the complex relationship between Lewis and Nietzsche, which emphasizes how Lewis’s understanding of—and sympathy with—his thought altered radically over the course of his lifetime, see Weller’s “Nietzsche among the Modernists.”

The condition of “deadness” is posited both as Lewis’s aesthetic ideal and as under threat from the pernicious influence of the “time cult.” For “deadness” figures the aesthetic object’s absolute isolation from the living consciousness of its spectator, and thus also figures its exclusion from the subjectivized time that Bergson’s followers celebrate. Painting, because it is flat, and “physically static” (36), and because it possesses “integrity as a thing... [and] as a spatial object” (403), is imagined by Lewis as the most perfect form of art. But he sees the destructive effects of the “time-philosophy” in nearly every aspect of modern culture, so it is unsurprising that he fears painting’s very existence to be under threat. The “time cult,” one might argue, serves as a philosophical correlative to the dangerous consequences of the ascendancy of the “irresponsible commercial mind.” In *Time and Western Man* the link between Bergson’s influence and the rise of industrial capitalism appears most explicitly in the text’s vehement criticism of modern man’s growing inclination to hurry. Lewis notes that the expression “time is money” is growing increasingly commonplace in the contemporary world; it is Bergsonian in its subordination of time to subjective experience, but it is also a consequence of “Big Business’s” admiration for speed, or for the “dynamical,” which “as the most ‘hurried’ of men is aware, means the bustle and rush of *action*” (xvii). This condition is posited as potentially fatal for art. After all, if the “irresponsible commercial mind” is marked by a tendency to hurry, it has no time for the “material repose” necessary for the contemplation of a painting.

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Wyndham Lewis’s 1937 novel *The Revenge for Love* brings together his theoretical preoccupation with the “deadness” of art and his critique of the artwork’s fate

at the hands of the modern capitalist marketplace. Critics have often read this as a political novel, one written to support the polemic against the Spanish Civil War—as well as against Communism and in favor of fascism—that appeared in pamphlet form in 1937 as *Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!* As Reed Way Dasenbrock has shown, however, *The Revenge for Love* was actually completed before the conflict began, and its publication delayed due to concerns that the book might be considered too obscene for lending libraries to purchase (“Afterword” 388). Accordingly its relation to the Spanish Civil War might better be characterized as prescience than political commentary. Instead the book is a political novel primarily in the sense that it explores the dangerous consequences of the politicization of art. As in his earlier works, Lewis argues in *The Revenge for Love* against the pollution of the aesthetic sphere by commerce or politics. In the novel, the artist finds himself trapped in an impossible position: he is caught between the twin menaces of Communism and the “irresponsible commercial mind”—an art market that values works more for their prices and reputations than their formal qualities, or that is more interested in ideas than objects. In consequence, the world in which he finds himself is populated—in human and aesthetic terms alike—almost exclusively with fakes.

The Revenge for Love treats the Spanish Civil War only insofar as it is partially set in Spain during the tempestuous years leading up to the outbreak of fighting. The factionalism and clandestine maneuvering that were widespread in Spanish politics in this period form an integral backdrop to the novel’s plot, which concerns gun-running and the counterfeits and forgeries that enable it.¹⁷ And the events of the Spanish Civil War were

¹⁷ Durgan offers a brief book-length study outlining the complex alliances and intrigues that took place in Spanish political life at the time.

reported on extensively in newspapers, making it the first conflict in history to receive the pervasive media coverage that we now associate with modern warfare. This journalistic exposure, often sensationalistic, not only influenced how foreigners thought of the war, but also played an important role in determining the course of events in Spain.¹⁸ And it allowed the conflict to stand in the popular imagination as a proxy for the struggle between Communist Russia and Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

But *The Revenge for Love* cannot be read as a simple polemic in support of any particular outcome to the war in Spain: although Lewis's fascist sympathies are well-known, the text does not advocate a political resolution to the dilemmas that trouble its characters, nor does it suggest that Franco's eventual military triumph will improve the blighted social conditions it depicts.¹⁹ Instead the Spanish government's instability demands a series of performances from both its supporters—the jailers, police officers, and members of the Civil Guard working to keep it in power—and its opponents—most notably the English “reds” who seek to intervene in support of Communist ideals—that reveal their essential similarity. In the novel, characters are always “shamming”; regardless of whether they are revolutionaries or reactionaries, all act in ways inconsonant with their true beliefs or inner nature, and do so in the service of self-interest masquerading as ideological commitment. For if the Spanish prison where the narrative opens is a place where nothing is as it seems, where a basket of provisions with a false bottom conceals foreign newspapers and a note describing an escape plot, where a hostile

¹⁸ The importance of the mass media's rise is well-chronicled by historians of the Spanish Civil War; see for instance Beevor (81-87 and 239-250), who offers a thorough analysis of the relations between historical events and their representation in newspapers.

¹⁹ Lewis's fascist sympathies have been the subject of extensive critical commentary. Jameson, for instance, understands them as the ultimate consequence of Lewis's political thought (*Fables* 12-23; 179-185), while Hewitt explicitly links his avant-garde aesthetics to his admiration for imperialism (95-99).

warder conceals his knowledge of the plot with “a capital imitation of an angry warder” (37), and where sympathetic guards conceal their complicity in it, the studios and drawing rooms of London are, likewise, places where surfaces differ from what lies beneath them. In fact *The Revenge for Love* begins with the imprisonment of Communist sympathizer Percy Hardcaster not to point out particular flaws in the Spanish political—or penal—system at that moment in history, but to reveal a more general lack of freedom that, the novel will argue, is endemic to modern life.²⁰

In *The Revenge for Love*, the fate of the artist—and the aesthetic objects he creates—is a symptomatic of the inauthenticity of the world he inhabits. Victor Stamp, arguably the novel’s hero, is an unsuccessful painter living in London who is forced by financial constraints (his paintings do not sell; his rent is overdue; he lacks a benevolent or appreciative patron) to toil in a “fake-masterpiece factory” (226) where he ineptly produces forgeries that are sold as the work of Vincent Van Gogh. Stamp’s situation importantly parallels Hardcaster’s: as Stamp notes, incarceration is as much part of a political agitator’s job as exhibition is part of an artist’s. He comments: “Being juggled, for his sort, is like being hung on the line at the Royal Academy. Just about that” (74).²¹ Both are necessary forms of advertisement that ensure the visibility of one’s work, be it political or aesthetic. And both are compromises indicative of “selling out”—sacrificing

²⁰ Lewis himself fulminated against the widespread political readings of this novel in *Rude Assignment*, arguing that it should be considered without reference to the events of the moment of its publication. “I am content,” he writes, “as I declared when first referring to it that some day, when the passions of the present time are no more than feverish memories, people will take it up and read it as a *novel*—not glare at it with an eye inflamed by politics, which prevents proper focusing and makes the eye see something which is not there at all” (230).

²¹ To be hung “on the line” at the Royal Academy is to have one’s work positioned at eye level in the galleries during its Annual Summer Exhibition. Such placement, immediately above a shoulder-height crown molding that ran around the perimeter of the room, was said to guarantee maximum exposure—and therefore maximum sales—of one’s work. For a history of the Royal Academy’s hanging practices, see Gillett 14-25.

one's integrity in order to build a reputation. Lewis's critical views of the Royal Academy are well-known; as an avant-garde painter, he naturally disapproved of the Hanging Committees' conservatism and cliquishness.²² But he also wrote bitterly of the annual exhibition's poor sales record, a phenomenon, he claimed, which indirectly contributed to the disappearance of the professional artist.²³ For Stamp, being "jugged" at the Royal Academy is equivalent to being imprisoned by the art market, where a lack of appreciation for innovation or quality dooms the most talented artists to lives of poverty. And Stamp is imprisoned, too, by the material and economic conditions in which he works: he lacks a dedicated studio, and is in danger of eviction from his shabby bedsit. When a note demanding thirty shillings "by return of post" (73) for the framing of two pictures that did not sell arrives at his door, it serves as a reminder that even the materials out of which he fashions his art are becoming an unaffordable expense.

Stamp's helplessness in the face of this unfavorable economy mirrors the aesthetic sphere's inability to evade the ever-expanding process of commodification. The mere existence of the "fake-masterpiece factory" serves as a condemnation of the modern art market—of the over-inflated prices of paintings said to be the work of fashionable artists, and of American collectors' tendency to buy pieces on the basis of reputation rather than merit. Stamp is pressed into laboring in the factory because his work is

²² Lewis was particularly vehement in his criticism of the Royal Academy following the rejection of his *Portrait of T.S. Eliot* in 1938. He published scathing reviews of the exhibition in *The Star* and *The Times* shortly after its opening. For a detailed account of this incident, see O'Keefe 387-90.

²³ He elaborated this critique in the introduction to *Wyndham Lewis the Artist*, a 1939 collection of his art criticism: "For many years the Royal Academy has been as extinct economically as it is artistically. Last year the total of sales was reported in the Press after it had been open some weeks... [I]f you had a picture accepted, it seemed you stood a one-sixteenth chance of selling it, for a sum averaging £37. Once a year you had a one-sixteenth chance of making £37! Supposing you were a 'professional' artist, and this exhibition was the great annual event for you... [y]ou would not stand even a one-sixteenth chance of paying your studio rent. Studio rents in London start at about £150 per annum; though a good studio at that rent is not easy to find, most studios being occupied by musicians, bridge clubs, dancing academies—scarcely ever by artists: since, as I have just pointed out, there are practically no professional painters left, and the amateur paints his picture in the drawing-room or tool-shed" (35-36).

judged according to *his* lack of artistic eminence, rather than any innate beauty, novelty or veracity that it might possess. Thus when, almost accidentally, Stamp creates a “passable picture,” he cannot find a buyer for it (85). “It was worth nothing—from any point of view; for of course no one would give anything for a picture of that sort to-day, unless it had a Name attached to it (and Stamp was not a name) and not much then,” he complains (85-6). And the factory’s continuing financial success is facilitated by a network of deceptive connoisseurs willing to authenticate counterfeit artworks in exchange for lucrative commissions. The factory owner “had several experts in his pocket who could be relied on, the moment the piece was completed, to cover it with their authority in the market. Indeed, it was destined for the collection of a specific American, who already had absorbed half-a-dozen spurious canvases signed ‘Vincent’” (228). In terms of both supply and demand, the “fake-masterpiece factory” is sustained by a logic of substitution; because reputations and authentications circulate independently, apart from the art objects to which they (supposedly) refer, they are always vulnerable to falsification.

As it is depicted in the novel, the modern art market is blind to the intrinsic value of aesthetic objects because it operates in the absence of the objects themselves; it works with the aid of new technologies that allow artworks to be viewed—and appraised—at secondhand. If the consumption of the goods manufactured in the “fake-masterpiece factory” is made possible by the fungible guarantees of “expert” connoisseurs, their production is enabled by the proliferation of mechanical reproductions of artworks.²⁴

²⁴ For Benjamin, copying works of art by mechanical or technological means is categorically different from copying them by hand. “[W]hereas the authentic work retains its full authority in the face of a reproduction made by hand, which it generally brands a forgery, this is not the case with technological reproduction” (103). When it is compared with a handmade copy, the original appears to possess qualities we would

The fraudulent workshop is filled with such copies, which are used as templates to be imitated by the painters employed there. Stamp's heroism—the integrity that distinguishes him from his co-workers—is manifest in the revulsion he feels when confronted with these reproductions. Studying an assortment of Van Gogh self-portraits at length, he “had come heartily to dislike these redrimmed ferret-eyes that watched him from a dozen examples—photogravures, halftones, and photographs—pinned up for reference. His own big calmly hostile eyes surveyed with disgust this affected prison-crop (as he called it)” (226). The figurative imprisonment of the artist within the proliferation of copies of his work hints of course at the literal consequences of forgery: if detected, Stamp is likely to be jailed himself for the “illegitimate and dirty work” (236) that he is engaged in. But Van Gogh's figurative imprisonment here is also a reminder of the consequences of his celebrity—being esteemed by the art market means that his work will be valued in monetary terms, rather than for its form or objective qualities. The more widely reproductions of his paintings are circulated, the more collectors will want the originals because they are associated with his “Name” rather than because they are exemplary aesthetic objects. If Stamp—as an unsuccessful artist—is imprisoned outside of this cycle of substitutions, Van Gogh is similarly trapped within it. And, as Lewis argued in “Pictures as Investments,” the system is ultimately fatal to *all* paintings as “works of art,” transforming them instead into repositories of pure exchange value.

normally associate with human subjects—including the ability to brand, stamp, or cancel out [*abstempeln*] the fake by virtue of “authority.” The machine-made copy, precisely because it does not pretend either to be visually identical or to occupy the same place—in the museum or private collection—as the original, works to alter the conditions of art's reception as the forgery cannot. That the proliferation of mechanical reproductions might lead to a proliferation of manmade reproductions, as it does in *The Revenge for Love*, is a possibility Benjamin does not consider. We might argue, however, that this phenomenon takes place as a consequence of the changes in art's reception that Benjamin charts.

If art reproductions enable the operation of the “fake-masterpiece factory” by serving as models for the forgeries (so that the fakes are in fact copies of copies), their study also invites a particular perceptual mode in which parts are viewed in isolation from the whole to which they belong. When Tristram Phipps, a Communist painter who counterfeits with politically-motivated glee, trains Stamp in the procedures used in the factory, he instructs him to reduce artworks into a series of semi-abstract patterns. His own forgery is exemplary of the technique:

More mannered than any Van Gogh, except for his pictures after he got into the asylum, it was a most successful specimen of the forger’s art. Tristy had turned out a commercial article of a high order—quite in the diamond-pendant class. He had earned his fortnight’s keep.... He picked up a large magnifying glass, and approached it to a photogravure of a late Van Gogh, which was pinned upon a drawing board, resting against the back of a chair. “These late things of his always fall away to the left,” he said. (230-1).

Stamp learns quickly, and within a few weeks is imitating his mentor satisfactorily:

He had formulas, by this time, for everything. The pupils of the eyes, for instance, in a typical Van Gogh, were painted—it was Tristy had pointed this out—as a nest of concentric wedges of greens, reds, blues and yellows, with their apex inwards. He had got the trick of that. And he had mastered the bald look of pale eyebrows, which marked the base of the bony swellings. Then more wedges stuck on end, a miniature hedge of them, for the tissue of the lips. He could do a Van Gogh self-mouth pretty well by this time. (226-7)

If this mastery of “formulas” and “tricks” turns the art of painting into something performed semi-automatically, almost a mechanical process executed by rote, it is also attained through imitation. When he learns to copy from photogravures, Stamp is in fact mimicking another (corrupted) artist. This method of reproduction requires the painter to attend to the autonomous detail rather than the artwork as an organic whole, shrinking the artist’s role into that of a technician, who is useful mainly for his ability to perform mindless and repetitive tasks without tiring. Itself a mechanical device, the magnifying

glass epitomizes the perceptual mode employed in the factory, for it both necessitates and amplifies the copyist's inclination to see in fragments. And its use exposes the folly of scrutinizing reproductions, which are lacking in just the sort of detail that one could discover by magnifying the original canvas.

The Revenge for Love thus frames its criticism of the modern art market—along with the “fake-masterpiece factory” that both stands for it and exists as its consequence—within the rhetorical figure of synecdoche, which the novel understands as dangerously reductive. The problematic tendency to substitute a part for the whole characterizes the factory's manufacture of “art”: it transforms the artwork from an autotelic whole into an assortment of shapes and colors (“a nest of concentric wedges of greens, reds, blues and yellows”) that readily lend themselves to imitation. But it also characterizes the fate of its workers: the would-be artists who labor within the factory are themselves reduced to the interchangeable parts they play in the production process. Thus when Stamp is offered a job there, he is asked to replace another worker, who lost his life as a consequence of industrial technology's ever-increasing infiltration of everyday life. Abershaw, who will later organize the false gun-running scheme in which Stamp will be entrapped, explains the proposal: “I have a friend who runs a sort of Van Gogh factory, out in the suburbs. He has just lost—in a motor accident—one of his best hands” (166). Like an assembly line, which reduces each worker's role in manufacturing to the rapid repetition of a single part of the process, the “fake-masterpiece factory” condenses the painters it employs into “hands”—their output is produced by the isolated body part that holds the paintbrush rather than through the union of intellectual and physical activity

that Lewis elsewhere described as the genesis of art.²⁵ Consequently its best worker is described as “a perfect, reliable machine... for turning out Marie Laurencins... Marie Laurencin herself could not have told the difference between one of *his* and one of *her* Marie Laurencins” (229). As the artist increasingly begins to resemble a “perfect, reliable machine,” the factory’s products become more and more like the mechanical reproductions of artworks—the “photogravures, halftones, and photographs”—that make its operations possible. When the novel imagines the artist as an industrial worker, then, it envisions a mode of aesthetic production that is akin to the consumption embodied in the modern art market: both reduce artworks to interchangeable objects—or the parts that comprise them—and in so doing, rob them of the fullness and integrity that constitute the ideal aesthetic object.

Van Gogh is particularly vulnerable to the predations of the “fake-masterpiece factory” because of the historical specificities of his situation; he (like Cézanne) was among the first modern painters to become renowned as a “Post-Impressionist.” Beginning in the 1890s his works saw sudden and dramatic price increases as a series of retrospective exhibitions were organized, but his early death (in July of 1890) meant that he did not benefit personally from his growing celebrity. And by the early 1930s, the extent of his posthumous fame was so great that he seemed a model of the dead artist whose works are bought for extravagant sums to the detriment of living (starving) artists who might otherwise be supported by these funds—the figure that Lewis so thoroughly

²⁵ In *Time and Western Man*, for instance, he writes that artists act in the service of “a constant stronghold... of the purest human consciousness” (23). On the inseparability of the physical and intellectual aspects of aesthetic production in Lewis’s thought, see also Ayers 79-84.

critiques in “Pictures as Investments.”²⁶ Van Gogh was also an appropriate victim for *The Revenge for Love*’s forgeries because his paintings were, in fact, frequently forged.²⁷ Indeed the novel’s “fake-masterpiece factory” had a real-life counterpart, a studio-workshop run by dubious Berlin art dealer Otto Wacker, who sold nearly three dozen works of uncertain provenance as “Van Goghs” to various dealers and private collectors. Wacker’s false attributions were backed by well-known art historians, including Julius Meier Graefe, and even by the start of his widely publicized fraud trial in 1932, experts were unable to agree about which of the works in question were fake.²⁸ Nonetheless the novel does not suggest that Van Gogh’s work is amenable to forgery because it is formally simple, or easily reducible to the “formulas” and “tricks” that are the forger’s stock in trade. In fact, Lewis’s comments on Van Gogh in *The Caliph’s Design*, his 1919 manifesto on the state of modern art, are approving; he lists Van Gogh as among “the best half-dozen artists of [his] country,” those who “as regards the actual beauty and significance of their work, do not depend on the objective world for their success or stimulus” (35). Earlier in that text, however, Lewis also noted that Van Gogh was especially “beleaguered and interfered with” by the art market’s refusal to take innovative work seriously (12); his reputation, more so than that of most artists, has intruded upon the reception of his painting.

²⁶ For a thorough examination of the critical reception of Van Gogh’s work—both in his lifetime, when he was relatively unknown, and in the succeeding years, which saw his rapid ascent to celebrity—see Zemel 1-9 and 133-148.

²⁷ Dorn and Feilchenfeldt offer a detailed history of forgeries of Van Gogh’s work, also cataloguing the works whose authenticity is still under dispute.

²⁸ For the most extensive available account of Wacker’s spurious workshop, which identifies the well-known art historians who were taken in by the hoax, see Arnau 226-241. In “Van Gogh and Lewis’s *Revenge for Love*,” Meyers identifies the similarities and differences between the historical figure “Van Gogh” and his representation in Lewis’s novel.

What is most problematic about Van Gogh's renown in *The Revenge for Love* is the degree to which it is constructed and furthered by the circulation of copies and substitutes for his original work. To a much greater extent than most of his contemporaries, Van Gogh's celebrity was built upon and nourished by his literary reputation. With the publication in 1914 of his correspondence with his younger brother Theo, he became widely known as a heroic figure, a fiercely dedicated painter, unappreciated in his own lifetime, who suffered—and died—for the sake of his art. His life and “genius” were further mythologized in Irving Stone's 1934 novel, *Lust for Life*, a fictionalized account of his tragic career largely based upon his letters.²⁹ In *The Revenge for Love*, the “fake-masterpiece factory” trades upon this literary notoriety by producing forgeries that reference the best-known anecdotes circulating about the artist. Stamp is thus instructed to paint a “self-portrait” with a bandaged ear, in order to produce a more authentic-seeming work, one that will invite potential buyers to remember Van Gogh's *story* rather than to examine closely the painting itself. The narrator explains the presence of the bandage: “That would make the identification easier. Half the likeness was there, readymade, once you had the famous bandage over the famous ear. Everyone seeing... the famous bandage would say ‘Van Gogh!’ as soon as ever they clapped eyes on it” (227). Lewis's satirical use of the term “readymade” to describe the process by which the counterfeit comes to seem legitimate neatly inverts André Breton's classic—and famous—formulation of the concept. In a 1935 manifesto for Surrealism, Breton wrote that Duchamp's readymades were “manufactured objects raised to the dignity of

²⁹ On the influence of Van Gogh's letters—upon their original publication in Dutch, as well as internationally, in several translations—see de Leeuw's “Introduction” to *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*. De Leeuw also discusses the impact that the publication of Stone's novel has had on the reception of Van Gogh's art.

works of art through the choice of the artist” (88); Stamp’s painting, in contrast, is handmade, but one might argue that it has been lowered to the *indignity* of a manufactured object by its maker’s lack of freedom.

The most important consequence of the proliferation of imitations and reputations in *The Revenge for Love* is the omnipresence of fakes in the world it describes. If the novel’s social critique is figured architecturally by the hidden chamber—a secret room concealed behind bogus wall paneling, described as “an immense *false bottom* underlying every seemingly solid surface” (154)—it is figured aesthetically by the forged painting. The hidden chamber resembles the dishonest, masquerading theatrical characters who populate it (“The intense uneasiness that all these people aroused in her [Margot, the novel’s heroine] was... perfectly expressed by the sort of place in which they were at present congregated” [153]). But while the hidden chamber conceals something within it that is not visible from the outside, the fake painting conceals nothing. Instead only its history—the narrative account of its provenance that accompanies it into the market and lends it its monetary value—is false. For the novel, this distinction—between material objects that hide fraudulence and corruption in their interiors, and paintings, that cannot—will be a crucial one.

* * *

Although *The Revenge for Love* proposes that the predicament of artists both mirrors and results from the predicament of humankind in modernity, it also operates as a self-critique, interrogating the processes of approximation and mirroring that inevitably accompany linguistic representation—the only tool the novelist has at his disposal. Language, the novel suggests, is inherently disembodied and referential, and thus easily

falsified, or employed in the service of dishonesty in business or politics.³⁰ Within the world portrayed in *The Revenge for Love*, painting is the only art form that resists both fakery and mechanical reproduction—even as counterfeit “Van Goghs” are produced in the factory, only certain artists have the “hand” or innate talent to create them. Painting is therefore an embodied process, set in opposition to the theatricality and “hollowness” that characterize writing—and the literary art into which it is composed. But the novel aspires to approximate the closure and completeness that Lewis associates with visual art, even if it can do so only partially and provisionally. In the circularity of its form—the narrative closes where it began, with Hardcaster imprisoned in a Spanish jail—and its resemblance to satire—particularly in the closing chapters—it attempts to achieve a state that resembles objective coherence; even as it fails to do so, it nonetheless succeeds at convincing its characters (and perhaps its readers) of the value of this effort.

The Revenge for Love portrays a world where all aesthetic activity—both production and consumption—is constantly under siege, where every art object is always threatened by replacement with an inferior copy of itself, but painting remains remarkably resistant to forgery in the novel. Even though the “fake-masterpiece factory” attempts to mechanize the production of art, operating as if each of its workers were a “perfect, reliable machine” (229), it is able to do so only partially and in a qualified manner. Isaac Wohl, for instance, described as the factory’s best worker, who “turned out with exemplary neatness forgery after forgery” (229), can only reproduce the work of

³⁰ In this sense, Lewis’s understanding of language echoes Umberto Eco’s conception of the sign, as articulated in *A Theory of Semiotics*. Eco writes: “Every time there is a lie there is signification [and] [e]very time there is signification, there is the possibility of using it in order to lie” (59). For Eco, both signification (when “something actually presented to the perception of an addressee *stands for* something else” [8]) and communication (“the passage of a signal... from a source (through a transmitter, along a channel) to a destination” [8]) presume the existence of distance—between sign and what is signified, or between addresser and addressee. Lewis imagines the unmediated firsthand experience of visual artworks to collapse both of these kinds of distance.

a single artist. The novel's narrator notes that this limitation is a common one: "But Isaac could only be used on certain stuff. Here was the recurring difficulty in this business... [Isaac] was not man enough, as it were, to be put on to the big rough stuff of a Van Gogh portrait" (230). Wohl is "deft" but weak and effeminate; since Van Gogh was both large and muscular, his work can only be forged by a painter who matches him in stature and strength. "You had to pick a roughneck for that one," the narrator continues, "You had to pick him big—yes, even physically sizeable" (230). The novel's insistence at this moment that the innate properties of the painter's body condition his work belies the factory owner's earlier claim that all of his workers were "hands." For it is not Wohl's manual dexterity—his "deftness" when holding a paintbrush—that determines which artists' work he can or cannot copy. Instead the facility for using the hands must be accompanied by a broader resemblance—on the basis of the body *as a whole*—between original artist and copyist for art forgery to be wholly successful.³¹

In *The Revenge for Love* faking paintings demands a resemblance between artist and forger that is deeper than this merely physical one, however. Stamp reproduces Van Gogh's work while dressed up as the great artist, transforming the duplicitous workshop into a kind of theatre. In other words, he can only paint as Van Gogh when *acting* as Van Gogh, in a performance that includes attitude and physical bearing as well as the business of manipulating the paintbrush. As he works, he is "disguised," for when "engaged in the manufacture of a Van Gogh... [h]e was supposed to be Van Gogh" (226). But Stamp is particularly suited for this sort of work because his imagination is fundamentally

³¹ For an extended discussion of embodiment in Lewis's work, upon which I draw here, see T. Armstrong (108-110). Armstrong argues that Lewis's understanding of the human body is fundamentally a mechanistic one—and it is precisely this concept of automation (the body lacks "deep" meanings or concealed inner spaces or functions) that enables it to stand for the genuine.

citational. He is able to copy Van Gogh, that is, because his mental ability to form images has already been shaped by his predecessor—even before he embarks on a career of counterfeiting. Early in the novel, when he begins work on a new canvas of his own, he is frustrated by his inability to create a picture that fully satisfies his inner vision for it: “A landscape he had started came to mind. He saw a couple of cows: and they were as he had *first* seen them—before he found out his mistake. They were, in fact, two cows of Vincent Van Gogh’s. They were not the cows *he* had produced with the sweat of his back-block brow and, try as he would, he had been unable to produce any others” (80). Trained in a “dud art school” and brainwashed in the galleries of Paris, he is so thoroughly steeped in the conventions of the contemporary art world that images he remembers from paintings he has seen take priority in his consciousness over images of the external “reality” they purport to represent. In the modern art world, famous paintings offer as much material to the painter’s imagination as images of nature, the modern city, or any other part of his environment. Van Gogh’s celebrity has in fact colonized Stamp’s fantasies. Stamp’s forgeries, in this sense, faithfully reproduce what is already “inside” him: he is fitted for this dishonest labor by the culture that has produced him.

Despite the forces that threaten it from all sides—capitalist profiteers and Communist agitators alike—painting continues to embody a type of utopian potential in *The Revenge for Love*; in the narrative, paintings correspond with the “real,” “authentic” or “inner” self of the artist as no other art form, and indeed no other object can. In particular, the novel contrasts the objective materiality of painting with the distinctively disembodied quality of the signature. Ostensibly evidence that the writer has been

physically present (since he held the pen as it moved across the page), and therefore inimitable, signatures in *The Revenge for Love* prove consistently easy to copy. Like a work of visual art, the signature is supposed to exist as a unique product of its creator's hand; it authorizes the authenticity of a particular painting as a "Van Gogh" (or a "Victor Stamp") in the aesthetic realm, and vouches for its bearer on contracts and legal agreements in the political sphere. The reader is first alerted to the surprising ease with which signatures can be forged in the novel when Margot stumbles across two men practicing her husband's. With a sense of shock and revulsion, she realizes that she is unable to distinguish this fake from the original: "she stood with her mouth open, her eyes fixed with a bewildered scrutiny upon her husband's handwriting—as if she had been summoned to witness a signature, and had then suddenly observed that the signature to be witnessed was in her own handwriting, and then lastly, with a start of horror, that the name was her own" (154). She experiences a sense of physical disorientation here as she becomes aware of the disembodied quality of writing; what she had previously assumed to exist as a trace of one's bodily presence turns out to be the fungible residue of a performance. This signature can only bear false witness, standing as evidence of the untrustworthiness of the world she inhabits.

If being tempted into art forgery is presented as an almost unavoidable consequence of contemporary society's refusal to support painters, the novel also insists that it is a categorically different act from the forging of signatures. Thus when Stamp is initially offered a place in the "fake-masterpiece factory," Abershaw, who will supervise his work there, and later will entrap him into the gun-running scheme that results in his death, claims that forging paintings is not *really* a dishonest act. "You wouldn't have to

forge *the signatures!*” he exclaims, “only *the pictures!*” (166). In this formulation, which serves both the capitalist businessman’s greed for profit and the Communist revolutionary’s desire to abolish private property, counterfeiting visual art is not a morally reprehensible act because it does not involve lying—that is, articulating in language that another artist’s work is being passed off as one’s own. It is merely, as Abershaw puts it, a means of supplying what the market demands. “If Victor Stamp’s pictures don’t sell quite so quickly as they should, why not do a few Van Goghs, say, for the time being?” he asks (166). But while forging signatures is widespread in the ethically bankrupt world that *The Revenge for Love* describes, forging paintings can only be accomplished by a select few individuals, those who possess the necessary physical and intellectual resemblance to the original artist.

If the “fake-masterpiece factory” represents an effort to automate and mechanize aesthetic production, it is, as we have seen, only partially successful. For the “factory” still operates as an artisanal workshop, with each individual painter responsible for the fabrication of a single canvas in its entirety, and one at a time. Language is shown to be much more amenable to mechanical reproduction and distribution in *The Revenge for Love*. Of course the book itself is a product of the publishing industry, created on printing presses and assembled in a factory. But machines for producing text are also accorded a central role in the novel’s plot: the contraband that Victor is pretending to deliver in Spain consists of a consignment of typewriters. “I’m supposed to have signed a letter,” Victor explains, “describing myself as ‘director,’ acquainting someone in Barcelona with the arrival of a consignment of ‘typewriters.’ That’s how they refer to machine-guns, when they have occasion to write letters to each other about them” (284).

Ultimately these typewriters are revealed to be non-existent; the machine guns for which they were to stand have been replaced with a load of bricks, intended to serve as a decoy when “detected” by the Civil Guard. In this sense the typewriter is a false signifier for another false signifier, but it was also the means of creating the fake document that originated this process of deception, a “typewritten letter” with “the words Victor Stamp” signed across it “with a bold flourish” (282). There is no means of ascertaining the authenticity of this letter except by recourse to the signature, which (unsurprisingly, by this point in the novel) turns out to have been forged. “It’s my signature, right enough,” Victor declares, “But all the same it was not my hand that did it” (282). In the book, this “signature” appears not in the standard typeface in which the rest of the text is set, but in a flowing script designed to mimic an actual (forged) signature (Fig. 3.1). On one level, this typographical deviation might seem to enhance the narrative’s realism—as if there were, somewhere beneath or beyond the fictional surface of the text, a real (fake) signature to reproduce. But the novel’s inclusion of the graphic instead works to collapse the distinction between words created by machine—whether a typewriter or printing press—and copyable handwriting. This is particularly true because the signature actually appears twice in the novel—the first instance is when Margot first discovers the forgers at work, and the second appears below—and the two are identical.

The Revenge for Love is both self-conscious about its status as writing, and ambivalent about literature’s potential as an aesthetic form. Lewis had long celebrated the objective integrity of painting over the sequential quality of narrative, and condemned the politicization of art. The novel vehemently criticizes the entrapment of artists in military conflicts, a realm that Lewis believes should be thoroughly—and solely—

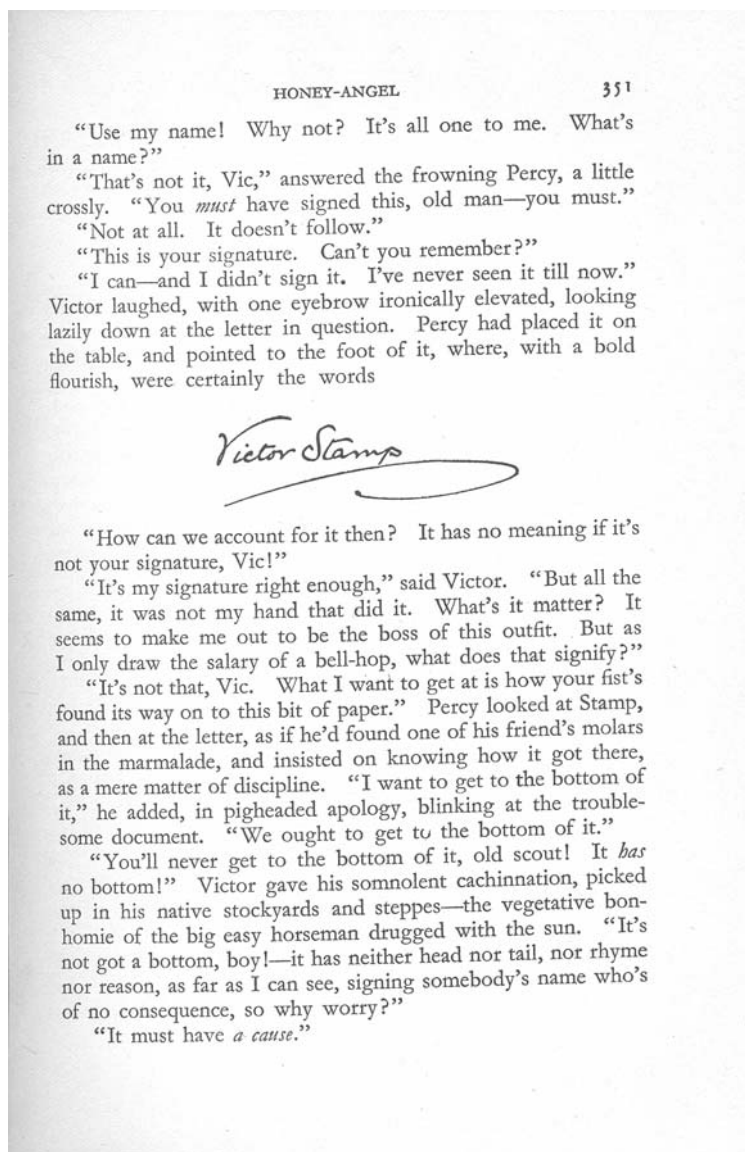


Figure 3.1. "Victor Stamp's signature." from *The Revenge for Love*. (London: Cassell and Company, 1937). 351.

political. And it disparages the mediating effects of language, which leave it vulnerable to falsification. But the novel also offers a more redeeming vision of its own purpose in its closing chapters. The fate of its most sympathetic characters is fundamentally a tragic one. The bodies of Margot and Victor Stamp are found at the bottom of a precipice in the Pyrenees in a snowstorm, as we learn when Percy Hardcaster—who again finds himself

imprisoned in Spain, as at the novel's opening—reads the story of their death in a newspaper. The fragmentation and incoherence of the headlines are reproduced in the narrative: “TWO OF THE GANG. CONTRABANDISTAS. DEAD. A POSTMAN. PRECIPICE” (335). And the uncertain and speculative quality of the newspaper's account is reproduced as well: “Assumption: the pair had walked over the edge of the precipice. Probably in a storm” (335). But despite the fact that we cannot be sure of the accuracy of the newspaper's version of events, the arrival of the tragic news of the artist's death brings about an unexpected response in its reader: “[T]he eyes in the mask of [Percy's face] dilated in a spasm of astonished self-pity. And down the front of the mask rolled a sudden tear, which fell upon the dirty floor of the prison” (336). The breaking of this “mask” into an outpouring of genuine emotion signals a new honesty in the relation of mind and body, interior and exterior, surface and substance, for this character. For if the tear is a literal expression of the body's emotional content, it also represents an involuntary moment of sincerity. Hardcaster, in this instance, cannot prevent himself from weeping (even though his tears reflect “self-pity” rather than empathy) and this loss of control betokens a moment of truthfulness that stands in opposition to the culture of deceitfulness that the novel depicts.

In *Men Without Art*, Lewis's 1934 manifesto on the predicament of art in the modern world, he famously suggests that only one narrative form—satire—can aspire to the deadness and closure that he associates with painting. Lewis praises satire for its focus upon action rather than introspection and its concern with character's surface rather than its hidden depths. “The ossature is my favorite part of a living animal organism,” he writes, “not its intestines. [...] Satire is *cold*, and that is good! It is easier to achieve

those polished and resistant surfaces of a great *externalist* art in Satire” (99). For Lewis, satire’s humor is to be found in its exposure of man’s lack of freedom, and expressed in an involuntary bodily reaction: “Men are sometimes so palpably machines, their machination is so transparent, that they are *comic*, as we say. [...] But if one of us exposes too much his “works,” and we start seeing him as a *thing*, then—in subconsciously referring this back to ourselves—we are astonished and shocked, and we bark at him—we *laugh*—in order to relieve our emotion” (95).³² Though they are the product of tragedy rather than comedy, Hardcaster’s tears at *The Revenge for Love*’s conclusion serve as an example of this sort of “astonished and shocked” reflex. It is Stamp’s helplessness in the face of political and economic forces that ultimately takes his life, and as Hardcaster becomes aware of this, his own “illusion of being autonomous and ‘free’” is shattered (*Men Without Art* 95). And Margot’s reaction, when she comes to understand that Stamp has been the plot’s unwitting victim, even more closely resembles *Men Without Art*’s description of the results of satire:

Margot still contemplated the patent car, built for pawky racketeers. She grinned stupidly at this big murderous dove-grey body, all opened up, like the carcass of a captured shark, and now utterly shown up. Even for Victor it was quite discredited. And at last she laughed outright at the absurdity of it. She laughed loudly and without restraint. A false bottom—a false bottom on wheels; but all full of nothing at all, except packing-paper and bricks! She went on laughing. The joke grew on her, the more she thought about it. She went on laughing more and more. (331)

This moment in the novel—Margot’s epiphanic recognition that she is “palpably” a “machine” in the narrative economy of satire—is immediately followed by her death.

³² Here Lewis ironically echoes Bergson’s definition of comedy. “The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine,” Bergson writes (29). For Lewis, the internal mechanization of humans is both desirable and inevitable; for Bergson it is the result of an unnatural lack of fluidity and elasticity.

Critics have often described Margot as Lewis's most sympathetic character,³³ and *The Revenge for Love* is tragic not only because of her loss, but also because of its inevitability. If Margot is, as Hugh Kenner has written, "precariously real," and the most consistently "genuine" of the novel's characters (*Wyndham Lewis* 124), her elimination is key to the text's social critique. For the "precariously real" and the "genuine" cannot survive in the world *The Revenge for Love* portrays—both in aesthetic and human terms. Her realization of this lack of freedom transforms her into an embodiment of satire—the form of verbal art that most closely resembles painting. But her death does not merely change her into something that resembles the ideal art object, a composite of "resistant surfaces" and pure externality. It also offers Hardcaster access to the most "genuine" emotional experience that is recorded in the book—a lament for the death of an artist that paradoxically works to convert the novel into a more perfect form of art. This is not to say that *The Revenge for Love* ultimately attains the autonomy from subjective experience or the purified formal enclosure of painting, which remains Lewis's aesthetic ideal. But in its final pages, the novel is surprisingly optimistic about the beneficial effects that language—and even the unconvincing words of muckracking journalists—might have for art and artists. If newspaper headlines cannot save Stamp's life, and *The Revenge for Love* cannot aspire to the "deadness" of painting, nonetheless both can convey to their audiences—even when these consist of a benighted everyman otherwise indifferent to the arts—something of their value.

Written in 1934, *The Revenge for Love* is the product of a cultural moment that differs significantly from the one in which Lewis's letters to John Quinn were written. In 1919 Lewis was an aspiring painter and a young writer in search of a public; he was also

³³ Jameson, for instance, claims that among Lewis's characters, she is the "finest and most moving" (145).

beset with chronic poverty and struggling to support his children, making him more likely to placate—and express gratitude towards—a generous patron. Nonetheless the conception of the ideal relationship between the work of art and its audience that appears in *The Revenge for Love* was influenced by his early exchanges with Quinn. For the American collector promised Lewis financial support without intellectual interference, he embodied the capitalist marketplace's desire to buy only the very best—the “cream of the cream of artists,” as Lewis wrote—and he respected the singularity and irreproducibility of the original artwork. It is the absence of this sort of audience—and market—for his painting that forces Victor Stamp to labor in the “fake-masterpiece factory” in the text; indeed the “irresponsible commercial mind” of the contemporary art world is the object of its most pointed critique. But *The Revenge for Love* also articulates Lewis's vehement opposition to Communism, which threatens the production of aesthetic objects in the novel even as unbridled capitalism endangers their healthy consumption. Benevolent private patronage continues to offer an alternative to both state and free market control of the arts, though it has by the 1930s become more of a utopian ideal for Lewis than an attainable state of affairs.

But *The Revenge for Love* also reflects Lewis's later philosophical preoccupation with the “deadness” of art, and with an aesthetic of exteriority and pure surface. As he elaborated in *Time and Western Man*, he understood painting to be the most perfect art form, because pieces of visual art lack hidden interiors or depths, and because they can exist as self-contained entities independent from their audiences' perceptive experiences of them. As such, painting is able to stand outside of the subjective time that was celebrated by Bergson and his followers (whom Lewis thinks of as the majority of his

contemporaries) and thus can serve as an essential counter to the fragmenting, dematerializing and homogenizing tendencies that he associates with rival systems of thought. In *The Revenge for Love* painting is both a victim of and a site of resistance to the destructive forces that Lewis sees in contemporary cultural life. If he shares with Henry James a set of anxieties about the decay of the material world in modernity, Wyndham Lewis dreams of an aesthetic form that can be set apart from this disintegrating world and that can continue to exist beyond the time-limited experiences of human subjects. He believes, somewhat paradoxically, that to understand art as exterior is to confirm it as such, and to will art to endure is to preserve it. Thus in his writing he seeks to persuade the public of the aesthetic sphere's independence from and indifference to them. As a literary work, *The Revenge for Love* undertakes what is fundamentally an impossible project—it argues for its own inferiority to visual art, and its irrelevance to the durable object world.

CHAPTER FOUR

Gertrude Stein's Atelier

On November 1, 1934, Gertrude Stein launched her much-publicized American lecture tour with a talk on “Pictures” given at New York’s Colony Club to a private audience comprised exclusively of members of the Museum of Modern Art. It was an auspicious moment in the career of the famed expatriate, her first public appearance in her native country after an absence of thirty-one years. Designed by her literary agent to capitalize on the enormous popularity of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, released the previous year, the lectures would directly introduce the bestselling author to her American reading public. By beginning the series under the auspices of the MoMA, Stein was specifically linking the promotion of her writing with the public face of the Museum. In many ways it was an ideal marriage of interests: like that of the MoMA, Stein’s celebrity was largely built upon the reputation of her collection of modern art, and the Museum hoped to benefit from the publicity spawned by the recent opening of her controversial opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, as well as the critical acclaim accorded the *Autobiography* itself. But Stein was by no means an unequivocal supporter of the Museum. When asked her opinion of the nascent institution, it is said that Stein responded with skepticism, claiming that modern art had no place in such a setting—or, in her well-known phrase, that “you can be a museum or you can be modern, but you can’t be both.”¹ This quotation has been repeated in the MoMA’s subsequent

¹ An accurate source for the quote is difficult to find. In the catalogue for an exhibition of works from the Steins’ collection shown at the MoMA in 1970, John Hightower, then the Museum’s current director, claims Stein’s comment was addressed to Alfred Barr (*Four Americans* 8), while one (unauthorized) biography of Barr merely states that the contradiction—which Barr spent his career trying to resolve—was raised by Stein at an indeterminate moment (Marquis 361). Russell Lynes is more cautious, noting that

publications until it has become something of a mantra for its project: the MoMA claims, using the words of Gertrude Stein, that its importance lies precisely in its ability to overcome a contradiction that she identified at the heart of its undertaking.

This chapter will investigate the problematic implications of Stein's decision to speak from the MoMA's podium. By advertising the newness and radicalism of her own work, as well as that of the art objects housed in and collected by the Museum, Stein was embarking on a risky venture: should her efforts to publicize modern art be successful, its avant-garde potential would be depleted, and its ability to shock diminished. Stein's relationship with the Museum was thus a deeply ambivalent one. Though she relished the media attention generated by the lecture, she chose to omit it from the retrospective account of the speaking tour that she gave in *Everybody's Autobiography*, and later willed that her best-loved painting, Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, not be given to the MoMA, but instead bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Stein's investment in furthering her celebrity meant that she was willing to have her name connected to that of the Museum, but in her lectures and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, she stresses the differences between her salon and its exhibition spaces, between the privacy of the former and the publicity of the latter.

Gertrude Stein's lecture at the Museum of Modern Art occurred at a key moment in the history of visual modernism. The museum's opening has often been considered by art historians to be the moment of modernism's institutionalization, transforming it, as

"Gertrude Stein is said to have written [these words], though no one seems able to track it down" (287). As recently as 1998, one leading "urbanist" architect, Rem Koolhaas, used the quotation to introduce his proposed design for the new and expanded Museum building. See Elderfield (190-199) for Koolhaas's proposal.

Richard Brettell has written, into “*the art of our time*” (7).² And *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*’s bestseller status both contributed to and was a product of this institutionalization: the memoir’s popular success was due to the prominence of the painters and literati it discusses, but this success also worked to increase their prominence. Stein’s memoir, however, claims that aesthetic value is lost when art becomes well-known, or that modernism can no longer be said to be truly “modern” once it has been institutionalized. Once it is possible to imagine it ensconced within the museum, an artwork will be received differently, just as a celebrity author’s books will be read by a wider but perhaps less attentive public. Stein’s ambivalent association with the MoMA thus highlights her desire to profit from its publicity while distancing herself (and her art collection) from its negative effects; the *Autobiography* analogously records the importance of its own project, but does so with a sense of regretful nostalgia—for a prior version of Stein’s salon that is always imagined as standing apart from the representation of it that is presented in the text.

To maintain this simultaneous association and distinction, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* emphasizes differences—between the visual artwork and the literary text, the original and the copy, the painting and its photograph, and between Stein’s inimitable “genius” and attempts to represent it. Stein’s text posits that the value of art lies in its seamless integration with everyday life, and the value of aesthetic experience lies in its resemblance to a kind of love also experienced within the lingering intimacy of human relationships. Thus the problem of reproducing or representing works of art is also the problem of recreating subjective experience, and in fact, human subjects themselves. As

² On the continuing importance of the Museum’s opening for the periodization of modernism in art history, see Brettell 3-7.

types of portraiture, both painting and popular biography remain fundamentally incommensurate with their subjects: painting because it can portray mere bodily surface alone, and popular biography because it restricts its focus to an external observer's perspective, and its language to a gossipy and superficial vocabulary. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*'s inability—or deliberate failure—to represent its subject (or her paintings) thus stands as a paradoxical guarantor of her (and their) value.

* * *

The Museum of Modern Art has long been considered by American art historians to be the defining institution of modernism. The artists most prominently featured there—particularly Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat and Van Gogh, shown in the First Loan Exhibition—have become the acknowledged masters of modern painting, and the narrative constructed by Alfred Barr, the Museum's first director, of modernism's teleological development still forms the basis for most academic accounts of twentieth century art.³ More recently, scholars have been critical of the MoMA's exclusion of radical and avant-garde artists and movements—dada, the Surrealists, Duchamp—from its temporary exhibitions and permanent collection.⁴ But the Museum's early association with Gertrude Stein—and with the controversies surrounding the radicalism and obscurity of her art—should serve to remind us that the MoMA's founders saw their own mission as the paradoxical preservation of the avant-garde, an art that had not yet been

³ Several major histories of modernism in the visual arts follow the account of its development that Barr established over the course of his directorship of the MoMA, finding the origins of modern art in the late nineteenth century and understanding it as a progression of formal innovations, most of which are named with “-isms” (Cubism, Fauvism, Constructivism, etc.) and associated with particular avant-garde groups. For a schematic representation of this art historical narrative, see Barr's “Chart of Modern Art” (*Defining Modern Art* 92). For more on the influence of Barr's ideas, see Brettell 11-36.

⁴ Douglas Crimp, for instance, argues that the MoMA is guilty of the “false construction of history,” which has resulted in a false “portrayal of modern art as a steady development of abstract and abstracting styles” (263).

recognized as such.⁵ The very painters whose names have become synonymous with “modernism” in the visual arts had, before the success of the MoMA, seen themselves as challenging art’s very foundations, having recognizable social impact, and creating aesthetic objects whose mere existence would transform the structures and rhythms of everyday life.

The MoMA was originally conceived as a place where modern art could be viewed and appreciated by a wide public audience—an aim inherently at odds with the radicalism, militarism, and desire to provoke social unrest that characterize the avant-garde. The Museum was established in 1929 by a group of New York socialites to house works from their private collections that were considered too subversive for display in their tasteful homes. Of the three women who were founding members of the Museum, Abigail Rockefeller, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Lillie P. Bliss, only Bliss had a substantial modern art collection. But because her mother disapproved of these paintings, during the years when Bliss was building her collection, they were rarely shown to visitors. As her sister explained, “They were kept out of sight, in a storeroom, to be brought out briefly when Europeans who knew about them asked for the privilege” (qtd. in Kert 271). Later, after her mother’s death, Bliss constructed an Art Deco gallery within her Park Avenue apartment; Rockefeller, however, continued to keep the few modern works that she owned in an upstairs vestibule inaccessible to most of her guests, since her husband did not share her interest in contemporary art (Lynes 5). With the founding of the MoMA these women hoped for modern painting be recognized as high

⁵ In calling these visual modernisms “avant-garde,” I here draw upon Peter Bürger’s seminal *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, which argues that whenever a socially or politically radical aesthetic movement gains widespread acceptance in modern bourgeois society, it inevitably loses the capacity to enact the sorts of transformation it initially dreamed of; if an avant-garde group were ever fully to accomplish its goals, it would inevitably write itself out of existence. See in particular Bürger 35-54.

culture, or for what John Rockefeller called “strange, irresponsible objects” to be infused with the value of art (Kert 283). Their efforts were undertaken in support of an implicit claim: that aesthetic value is confirmed by its public acceptance.

Accordingly, one of the Museum’s stated objectives at the time of its founding was to offer democratic and egalitarian access to culture—to move modern art out of the drawing rooms of the wealthy and into a space where New Yorkers from all walks of life would be able to appreciate it. In a 1929 brochure presenting the MoMA to the public in anticipation of its opening, Alfred Barr, its first director, described this task in terms of education. He hoped that by visiting the Museum, “American students and artists and the general public could gain a consistent idea of what is going on in America and in the rest of the world” (*Defining Modern Art* 71). Prior to the MoMA’s opening, the only places in New York where one could view the latest developments in the visual arts, outside of the homes of affluent collectors like the Rockefellers, were private galleries—places where everything that was on view was also for sale. Even when art dealers did not charge a fee for entry, visitors needed to look like they possessed the means to buy, or to belong to the right social circles, like the avant-garde group of artists who frequented Alfred Steiglitz’s 291 Gallery. Offering free admission to all comers, the MoMA promised to make modern art publicly accessible: both literally, since any resident of or visitor to New York could enter its exhibits at will, and figuratively, since the institution’s educational mission implied making formally innovative art comprehensible to a mass audience. The Museum of Modern Art thus offered not only to grant the public access to works of art considered intellectually or conceptually “difficult” but to explicate them as well.

Implied in this objective is an understanding of aesthetic value as intrinsic and universal. In 1929, the quality of Van Gogh or Cézanne's painting was far from widely accepted: both newspaper art critics and academic art historians routinely criticized these painters for poor eyesight, or labeled them insane.⁶ Explicitly in his exhibition catalogues, and implicitly in how he constructed the MoMA's first exhibits, Alfred Barr was making an argument for the permanent worthiness of the artworks to be displayed there. To this end, Barr developed a number of innovative exhibition techniques in the Museum's early years—techniques that have subsequently become conventional in art museums throughout the world. For the MoMA's inaugural exhibit, Barr covered the walls with neutral-covered cloth, and hung paintings much further apart than was common in museum art installations at the time. In doing so, he created a viewing experience that reinforced the concept of aesthetic autonomy: visitors experienced the paintings as appearing in isolation, from each other and from history.⁷ This method of display asked viewers to understand modernism as a series of hermetically enclosed formal developments, whose aesthetic import could be understood apart from the circumstances of its creation or exhibition. The public, then, could come to appreciate the value of modern art, because it was contained in its formal properties alone, merely by seeing the paintings and reading the labels that Barr carefully appended to his

⁶ Olson offers a detailed summary of early responses by New York art critics to modern and avant-garde painting, which ranged, as she writes, from "suspicion and doubt" to "hostile antagonism" (1-2). In America, art criticism mostly appeared in highbrow journals with limited circulation until the turn of the century, when it increasingly became part of mainstream newspapers. See Olson (1-36) for a historical examination of this change.

⁷ For an extensive history of exhibition and installation design at the MoMA, see Staniszewski. Staniszewski argues that the style of display Barr employed at the MoMA's opening exhibit was both novel and revolutionary, standing as a visual argument for the kind of formalist art criticism that Barr practiced (12-31).

displays. And because it was vested in “pure form,” the aesthetic significance of modern art would remain forever unaltered by its public reputation.

Stein’s lecture was given at a particularly portentous juncture in the MoMA’s history: the moment of its incorporation as an institution. The Museum was preparing to open an exhibit commemorating its fifth anniversary and its first major step towards the ownership of a permanent collection. At the time of her death in March of 1931, Lillie Bliss had willed most of the paintings she owned to the new museum, provided that, within three years, the MoMA would be “sufficiently endowed... on a firm financial basis and in the hands of a competent board of trustees” (qtd. in Lynes 79). Only if the young institution had already established financial stability would it receive its most sizable bequest to date; only if the museum’s permanence seemed assured would it be gifted a major body of artwork. As Barr claimed, writing to publicize the exhibit celebrating the MoMA’s success: “A fifth anniversary is a landmark in the life of a public institution. In five years the value of a museum should be proved or disproved” (MoMA 7). But as the event marked the institution’s intransience and monumentality, it also troubled its relation to the “new.” The Museum had originally functioned as a space for temporary exhibitions that was housed in rented quarters. Several members of its initial advisory committee had objected to its acquisition of a permanent collection, questioning the appropriateness of deciding on the nature of “modern” art with such a degree of fixity.⁸ And Conger Goodyear, the museum’s first chairman, wrote in 1931 that its

⁸ Though Barr was an unequivocal and tireless advocate for the purchase of a permanent collection, he too understood the difficulty of defining the “modern” with respect to visual art. In a 1934 article for the Museum’s Bulletin entitled “Modern and ‘Modern,’” he wrote: “The term *modern art*, chronologically speaking, is... so elastic that it can scarcely be defined... The truth is that [it] cannot be defined with any degree of finality either in time or in character and any attempt to do so implies a blind faith, insufficient knowledge, or an academic lack of realism” (*Defining Modern Art* 83).

collection should have “the same permanence as a river has... no gift will be accepted under conditions that will not permit its retirement by sale or otherwise” (qtd. in Lynes 83). The fifth anniversary celebration marked the MoMA’s consolidation into permanence, but it also inaugurated a series of debates about the contradictory nature of that institutionalization.

Stein seemed a particularly apt choice as a speaker for the occasion, since her fame in America as an avant-garde author and “personality” was built upon her renown as a collector of the world’s most modern art. Stein had lent several paintings, including Matisse’s much-ridiculed *Blue Nude*, to the controversial 1913 New York Armory Show, and her name appeared regularly in the press debates that surrounded and followed the exhibition.⁹ This association was deliberately constructed: Stein had encouraged her friend Mabel Dodge to time the publication of “Speculations, or Post-Impressionism in Prose”—an article claiming that “Gertrude Stein is doing with words what Picasso is doing with paint” (Curnutt 151)—to coincide with the opening of the show. Dodge responded eagerly to the suggestion, claiming that her comments “will make [Stein’s] name known by & large, as the writer of ‘post impressionistic literature’...& then perhaps [a publisher] who likes innovations will get out a small book of portraits or something” (*Flowers* 72).

The MoMA lecture thus appeared as the latest instance in Stein’s long history of self-promotion, using the reputation of the paintings she owned to create a market for her experimental prose. Stein and her publishers hoped to increase the sales of her new book,

⁹ Milton Brown summarizes popular press responses to the exhibition, including those that mention Gertrude Stein (138-152). When *Blue Nude* appeared in the Chicago version of the Armory Show, a copy of it was burned on the sidewalk outside, while an effigy of Matisse was beaten by the crowd. For an account of this incident, see Altschuler 60-62.

a *Modern Library* edition of *Portraits and Prayers*, a collection of “literary portraits” of artists associated with the MoMA (including Matisse, Picasso and Cézanne), to be released on the day of the lecture. The fact that the book was published in a *Modern Library* edition suggests that Random House, her publisher, wanted to claim for Stein’s work a kind of canonicity and modernity that could be likened to what the MoMA intended to achieve with its fifth anniversary celebration. Whether Stein was using the MoMA’s fêted stability and prestige to generate revenue, or whether the MoMA was using Stein’s talk—described in a New York Times review as “entertaining” but “incomprehensible”—to boost its status as a purveyor of avant-garde culture, one thing is clear: the publicity generated by the lecture was financially beneficial for both parties. But these rewards were not acknowledged by Stein in the lecture, and she made no explicit claims for any relation between her own artistic or aesthetic project and that of the MoMA.

“Pictures” opens by disavowing any interest in the public perception or valuation of modern art. Stein links her authority to speak about painting to a sensory experience that is completely individual in nature, and as such, has nothing to do with the Museum’s public mission: “It is natural that I should tell about pictures, that is, about paintings. Everybody must like something and I like seeing painted pictures” (59). Stein’s ability to appreciate painting is based on a kind of response to it that is both innate (“natural”) and highly individualized. This reaction is neither democratically available to all potential viewers, nor is it even desired by many of them. Thus the “everybody” with which Stein compares herself at the opening of her talk is quickly broken down into various subcategories: “some people like to eat some people like to drink, some people like to

make money some like to spend money, some like the theatre, some even like sculpture, some like gardening, some like dogs, some like cats, some people like to look at things” (59). In other words, Stein aligns her *personal preference* for viewing art with a host of other activities—ones that are domestic, routine, and habitual. As the talk continues, Stein elaborates that this experience of everyday pleasure is divorced from notions of aesthetic judgment or artistic value: “The painting may be good or it may be bad, medium or very good but any way I like to look at it” (61). In describing her experiences as an art collector and critic in terms of taste and individual predilection, Stein explicitly marks her difference from the MoMA, and from its founders’ wish to establish the value of modern art according to a universal and ahistorical standard.

In the lecture, Stein claims that well-known public art museums work to diminish a viewer’s ability to pay rapt attention to the details of an artwork. Although they are prized for offering Stein the pleasure of “looking at a great many pictures,” the museums described in “Pictures” produce aesthetic experiences that are bound by tradition and convention, and that ultimately bore her. While visiting galleries of Florence and Venice on a warm summer afternoon, for instance, Stein found “there were long benches and they were comfortable at least they were to me and the guardians were indifferent or amiable and I could really lie down and sleep in front of the pictures” (72). At the Louvre her interest was drawn not to the art on display there, but to its surroundings:

The Louvre at first was only gold frames to me gold frames which were rather glorious, and looking out of the window of the Louvre with the gold frames being all gold behind within was very glorious. I always like, as well as liked looking out of windows in museums. It is more complete, looking out of windows in museums than looking out of windows anywhere else. (70)

For Stein, museums work to deflect attention away from the materiality of the objects they contain: when placed inside the Louvre, a representational oil painting becomes indistinguishable from the scenes of Parisian life framed by the museum's windows. Although her experiences in the museum are admittedly enjoyable, Stein is ultimately critical of the Louvre's ability to aestheticize *everything* within its walls indiscriminately: "there was an elegance about it all, that did not please me, but that I could not refuse, and in a way it destroyed oil paintings for me" (73). The museum imposes a particular perceptual mode upon its visitors, whether they are willing or not—one that emphasizes the museum's status as exhibition space and creator of aesthetic experience, rather than the beauty or value of the artworks enclosed within it.¹⁰ But while this aesthetic experience is impersonal, it is also divested from the specific properties of the object that supposedly produces it.

That Stein was using the MoMA's podium as a space from which to broadcast a critique of museums and the kinds of art they usually engendered is not without irony. But the purpose of the lecture tour was to promote Stein's *literary* career, not to increase her status as an art collector. Thus she repeatedly insists, in the talk, on the absolute difference between writing and painting: "a painter cannot really write and a writer cannot really paint, even fairly badly" (90). This disjunction between the act of creating visual art and that of producing literature is mirrored in the different kind of reception that each medium invites. For Stein, the significance of printed texts rests in their ability

¹⁰ Several contemporary newspaper reviews of Stein's talk mention listeners' reaction to her comments on museums—responses of "shock" and "laughter." Comprised solely of contributing members of the Museum of Modern Art, her audience had expected laudatory comments on the young institution's promise—not a humorous mockery that seemed to lump all museums—traditional European state-funded institutions like the Louvre as well as younger, American, privately-financed museums like Baltimore's Walters Art Gallery—together in the same category. For an extended description of the lecture, see "Miss Stein Speaks to Bewildered 500."

to circulate, reaching an ideal audience of “writers, university students, librarians and young people who have very little money” (*ABT* 245). They fundamentally differ from the kinds of art contained in the museum, and are valued for their multiplicity, just as a painting is valued for its singularity.

Though speaking tours in general might appear to make art accessible to a mass audience—bringing famed orators physically and intellectually closer to their publics—Stein’s lecture series did not actually function according to this principle. The access to “Gertrude Stein” and her art that it offered was significantly restricted: the venues at which her talks were given were, like the MoMA itself, repositories of “high culture”—museums, universities, and private clubs—and her audiences were, as contemporary reviews of the talks remind us, comprised of “society leaders.” Stein also insisted that their size be rigorously limited: though demand for tickets far outstripped supply at most venues, she refused to speak to crowds larger than 500. These restrictions were perhaps in place to enforce a sense of privacy and intimacy at Stein’s lectures, but they also operated to create a supply-side shortage of access to the famed writer, and thus to increase the value of tickets to the talks, and by association, it was hoped, that of her writings. To understand the critical import of Gertrude Stein’s relation to the MoMA, then, we must turn our attention away from her lectures—which explicitly disavow language’s potential to represent visual art—and focus instead on her bestselling memoir, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

* * *

Unlike Gertrude Stein’s earlier experimental writings, which were issued in limited editions with small print runs and read primarily by coterie audiences, *The*

Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas attained international popularity on a previously unknown scale. Reproducing photographs of her painting collection alongside accounts of everyday life in the presence of the artworks, the *Autobiography* promised its many thousands of readers a kind of democratic access to modern art—much like the ideal emphasized by the MoMA's trustees at the institution's founding. Stein's text was thus forced to deal with crucial dilemmas also faced by the MoMA in its early years: how to negotiate between celebrity and the novelty of the unfamiliar, how to preserve a kind of art that renounced tradition, and how to memorialize the modern.

As such, Stein's *Autobiography* can be said to function as a “virtual museum” that brought glimpses of her private art gallery to a widespread audience of armchair tourists throughout the world. Though Walter Benjamin has famously contended that the proliferation of images and reproductions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries forever altered the relationship between the work of art and its beholder, few critics have as explicitly connected the role of photographic and lithographic reproduction with that of the art museum as André Malraux.¹¹ Calling art history “a history of what can be photographed,” (645) Malraux imagined all extant visual reproductions of art comprising what he called the *musée imaginaire* (“Imaginary Museum” or “museum without walls”). Malraux saw utopian possibilities and promise in his “Imaginary Museum:” it had, he claimed, the liberating potential to create “a new

¹¹ In so doing, of course, Malraux is challenging Benjamin's formulation that technological reproduction removes the artwork from its place in history, or what he calls “embeddedness in the context of tradition” (105). For Malraux, the photograph serves as a form of documentation that aspires to replace language as the medium within which the discourses of art history are contained. For Benjamin, in contrast, as he wrote in a letter to F.C. Rang, “there is no such thing as art history. [...] The research of contemporary art history always amounts merely to a history of the subject matter or a history of form, for which the works of art provide only examples, and, as it were, models; there is no question of there being a history of art as such” (223-4). Neither the critical discourses that comprise the contemporary discipline of art history nor the reproductive and disseminating potential of photography, that is, are equivalent to the kind of history that is immanent within the art object itself.

field of art experience, vaster than any so far known,” and to render this field of experience, democratically, “the common heritage of mankind” (52). In the “Imaginary Museum,” readers encounter more paintings or sculpture than could ever be contained in a single institution, and see them juxtaposed in constellations impossible to create in real exhibition space. I will argue that Stein’s *Autobiography* might be considered a version of Malraux’s “Imaginary Museum,” though Stein acknowledges this status—and its public consequences—with a sense of nostalgia and loss.

Containing detailed anecdotes of her “adventures” as an art collector as well as photographs of the paintings she owned, Stein’s *Autobiography* granted a mass audience imaginary access to Stein’s studio in Paris—enabling a much larger public to “see” the collection than would have been possible in person, even if the paintings had been located in an actual museum. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* sold out its first print run—5,400 copies—before its official release date of August 22, 1933, and this dazzling sales record continued in the following months. The book went through four additional printings—of 11,400 copies—by 1935, and was released in special editions by the Literary Guild in America, and the Bodley Head Press in England. Additionally, the memoir’s serialization in the *Atlantic Monthly* allowed it to reach a still wider audience.¹² Reviewed in numerous mainstream periodicals throughout the country, and purchased by thousands of Americans without the cultural capital to attend Stein’s lectures or the financial capital to afford a trip to Paris to visit her salon, the *Autobiography* allowed readers to imagine themselves eavesdropping on arguments between Picasso and Matisse, or overhearing negotiations between Gertrude Stein and the art dealers responsible for creating the market for cubism. The photographs included with Harourt’s first edition of

¹² On the *Autobiography*’s publishing and sales history, see Mellow 353-357.

the text gave this broad public something akin to a direct glimpse at the contents of Stein's atelier: a viewing experience otherwise unattainable without foreign travel. Like Malraux's "Imaginary Museum," Stein's *Autobiography* made paintings situated within a geographically distant private collection available for mass appraisal and consumption. In so doing, the book altered the public perception of these artworks as definitively as their display would have done: influencing their prices, reputations and canonical status as art.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is self-conscious about its own interventions into the market for modern painting as well as that for Stein's notoriously "difficult" experimental prose; it carefully charts a number of shifts in value that occur over its course—the rising prices of the artworks in Stein's collection, and Stein's increasing currency as a celebrity author. Accordingly, a central concern of the narrative is with the passing of time: not only from the moment of its relatively conventional beginnings (with the births of Alice and Gertrude, their childhoods and eventual meeting in Paris) to the moment of composition, but even beyond that, to the moment of the book's reception into the marketplace. The text's preoccupation with memory is a generic convention of autobiography, which attempts to make its subject's life immediately and intimately familiar, and to present events from a distant earlier period as though they were recurring in the instance of reading. But it is also nostalgic, since the *Autobiography* acknowledges that Stein's success as a celebrity has created an irreparable fissure between the "heroic age of cubism" (6)—when the book's events took place—and the time of its publication. That the "heroic age of cubism" can be designated an "age" indicates that it is firmly situated in an irretrievable past, one rendered historical by the

memoir's language itself, as well as by its material effects upon the art world. Thus the *Autobiography*'s efforts to memorialize a lost moment in the history of modern art, and to record "the first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century in literature" (54) posit these moments as irrecoverable and irreplicable, and suggest that the book's commercial triumph has played a crucial role in this demise.

Stein's renown as an art collector both preceded and was amplified by the bestseller status of the *Autobiography*. Although the memoir claims Matisse and Picasso's paintings "had no value" in 1907, when Alice first saw them hanging in Stein's atelier (9), by this time speculative investors were already buying these artists' work with hopes of realizing substantial future profits.¹³ Stein's own efforts as a publicist and champion of modern art had contributed to this inflation. By 1932, when the *Autobiography* was composed, Stein could no longer afford paintings by such well-known artists: she lived on a fixed income, a moderate stipend provided by her brother Michael from his profits in the family streetcar business, and her new acquisitions were thus limited to the work of young and unknown painters, or were obtained by trading better-known pieces in her collection for others of similar worth. The *Autobiography* traces the transformations in the economic value of the paintings in Stein's collection alongside her shifting allegiances with painters and dealers. Immediately upon her arrival in Paris, Stein pays a visit to the gallery of Ambroise Vollard, where she and Leo partake of the cerebral pleasure of buying art together with more sensual enjoyments: "Also on... [the same street as the gallery] was the confectioner Fouquet where one could console oneself with delicious honey cakes and nut candies and once in a while instead of

¹³ For a lengthy discussion of the effects of speculative buying on both the price structure of the art market in early twentieth century Paris and the formal development of modern art, see Fitzgerald, esp. 15-46.

a picture buy oneself strawberry jam in a glass bowl” (29-30). The gustatory and aesthetic pleasures that accompany the purchase of art mark it as a leisure activity, something done for gratification rather than financial gain. Later in the narrative, Stein’s acquisitions become more calculated. She buys, for instance, the work of Francis Rose because it “cost very little” (230). This shows her to be a savvy speculator, wisely anticipating extreme fluctuations in the painting’s value: “Gertrude Stein says a picture is either worth three hundred francs or three hundred thousand francs. She bought this [Rose’s painting] for three hundred and we went away for the summer” (230). By the time of the *Autobiography*’s writing, when financial constraints have come to severely curtail Stein’s ability to purchase new artworks, the act of buying is described in terms of investment, rather than pleasure. The book’s popularity furthered what her famous salon had already begun, pricing Stein out of the art market—but as the text records her former purchases in loving detail, it reveals its nostalgia for an earlier time, when the paintings in the collection were less famous than they were at the time of writing, and when their monetary values reflected this.

What the *Autobiography* traces—Stein’s success in promoting modern painting—is also revealed as a kind of failure: by the narrative’s end, she can no longer take on the role that the text stages as heroic, that of providing financial sustenance to struggling painters, the philanthropic work of a benevolent patron of the arts. Thus the narrative repeatedly emphasizes the poverty and fiscal instability of the artists during the salon’s early days. Matisse, especially, was “very hard up” when Stein first bought one of his paintings (40), and the harsh conditions in which he worked were determined by financial necessity: “He no longer painted at home but in an atelier. It was cheaper so... Those

were dark days and he was very despairful” (38). But these material constraints were felt by nearly all of the salon’s early habitués: “In those days most of the guests were living more or less precariously, no one starved, some one always helped but still most of them did not live in abundance” (7). Stein’s home is presented not merely as a place of polite bourgeois entertainment, but also as a place where guests are protected from the uncomfortable effects of their poverty. Visitors often remembered it for the quality of food that was served. In Hemingway’s *Moveable Feast*, for instance, the salon was “warm and comfortable and they gave you good things to eat and tea and natural distilled liquers made from purple plums, yellow plums or wild raspberries” (14).¹⁴ The *Autobiography* too devotes attention to the “very good soufflés” that are offered to guests; entertaining is described not only as pleasurable, but as a social obligation: “for the honour of her house as well as to satisfy her employers [the cook] always had to give every one enough to eat” (7). In Stein’s salon the bodily pleasures and comforts associated with eating were not to be distinguished from the social good of supporting the artists—both occurred at once and complemented each other. But by the time of writing, Matisse and Picasso have become “very prosperous,” and Stein’s sole role has become that of congenial hostess; she no longer provides artists with the vital sustenance that it was her duty and obligation to give them during the “heroic age of cubism.”

¹⁴ Compare Sherwood Anderson’s nostalgic account, given in *Four American Impressions*: “Something got into my mind connected with the great light kitchens and the women working in them that came sharply back when, last year, I went to visit an American woman, Miss Gertrude Stein, in her own large room in the house at 27 rue de Fleurus in Paris. In the great kitchen of my fanciful world in which, ever since that morning, I have seen Miss Stein standing there is a most sweet and gracious aroma. Along the walls are many shining pots and pans, and there are innumerable jars of fruits, jellies and preserves. ... [Miss Stein] is an American woman of the old sort, one who cares for the handmade goodies and who scorns the factory-made foods, and in her own great kitchen she is making something with her materials, something sweet to the tongue and fragrant to the nostrils” (qtd. in Simon 62).

Even as Stein's *Autobiography* records changes in the market prices of the art in her collection, it insists that monetary worth is not and can never be commensurate with aesthetic value. This is registered in the salon's difference from other spaces where modern art can be seen—and bought—in the city of Paris: Stein's atelier is set off an inner courtyard, and its distance from the street signals its removal from the commercial affairs of the city. Within Stein's home, visitors are expected to adhere to unwritten rules of social convention, and those who fail to do so are summarily asked to leave. Overt commercial interest in the art that is on display is among the grounds for dismissal. Thus Alfy Maurer disavows his relation to Alfred Barnes when Barnes offers to buy from the collection: "It was he who when later Barnes came to the house and waved his cheque-book said, so help me God, I didn't bring him" (11). To wave one's cheque-book is to deviate from the realm of polite social behavior into the realm of consumption, and to value the paintings in terms of money is inevitably to fail to recognize their worth to Stein—as objects that memorialize the personal relations between friends. Purchases are made only when Stein is *outside* the home, on her regular and habitual excursions to commercial galleries and Salon exhibitions. In these spaces, everything that is on view is also for sale, and the aesthetic pleasures to be had in looking at a particular painting are inseparable from the financial judgments that one must make about whether or not to invest one's capital into it; the experience of looking at art outside Stein's atelier is identical to the experience of shopping. In contrast, art situated within the private display space of Stein's atelier is available for apprehension but not purchase, secured within the apparently private confines of the household. There art objects are separated from their

origins in the marketplace, and fixed within a sphere where their value is understood as purely aesthetic.

But Stein's growing celebrity and the salon's notoriety alter conceptions of aesthetic value as clearly as they influence the paintings' prices. The *Autobiography* records how Stein's promotion of modern art erodes the very qualities that she most wants to find in it—its ability to startle the uninitiated viewer with its strangeness, even ugliness. In the text, this transformation can be mapped in the changing responses to Matisse's paintings—from shock and outrage to comfortable connoisseurship. The first painting that Gertrude insists on buying in the *Autobiography* is Matisse's *Femme Au Chapeau*, on the occasion of the Steins' visit to the 1905 Salon d'Automne exhibition. Later described by Alfred Barr as a “*succès de scandale*,” the show was the site of the *Femme Au Chapeau*'s first public display; it received numerous negative critical reviews, and, according to some critics, the term “fauvism” may have been coined to describe its use of bold color and vivid brushstrokes, which made it seem the work of a “wild beast” (Barr, *Matisse* 56-7). Stein's account in the *Autobiography* equates the formal innovations of the Salon's exhibitors with lawlessness as well as aesthetic individualism; they are described as “the outlaws of the independent salon” exhibiting in collaboration with “some rebels from the old salons” (34). The display of their paintings provokes violence: “There were a number of attractive pictures but there was one that was not attractive. It infuriated the public, they tried to scratch off the paint” (34). What is modern about Matisse, and what attracts Stein to his work, is his ability to invoke an aesthetic not of pleasurable contemplation but of outrage. The enraged public's literal and physical attempts to destroy the artwork infuse it with revolutionary potential—a

response that demonstrates not art's autonomy from life, but its ability to alter the institutions of its own reception and production—and implicitly mark Matisse as avant-garde.¹⁵ Their attack mirrors the painting's own attack upon the institutionalized art world—and upon the system of exhibition in which paintings are politely and silently analyzed, as they would be in Academy shows or the Louvre. What is altered by the fauvists' representations of the world is not merely art as a hermetically enclosed sequence of formal developments, related only to each other and not to the world outside them, but the nature of aesthetic experience.

Stein's reaction to the public violence that the display of Matisse's *Femme Au Chapeau* has provoked is one of admiration: she eagerly buys the painting and displays it prominently within her atelier. The acquisition is a protective gesture, resulting from an analogy Stein sees between the reception of Matisse's work and her own: "it upset her to see them all mocking it [*La Femme Au Chapeau*]. It bothered her and angered her because she did not understand why... just as later she did not understand why since the writing was all so clear and natural they mocked at and were enraged by her work" (35). In placing it in her collection, she is removing the painting from a public space associated with the art market, and situating it instead within the private domestic sphere. But Stein's salon is made public in the "Imaginary Museum" of her text—where it is photographed and described, so that representations of it continue to circulate, even if the painting itself does not.

¹⁵ I take my definition of avant-garde here from Peter Bürger; in his words: "The concept 'art as an institution' ... refers to the productive and distributive apparatus and also to ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works. The avant-garde turns against both—the distribution apparatus on which the work depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy" (22).

By sheltering the painting from the public hostility that results from its radicalism, Stein is also diminishing its ability to shock—for its position within her well-known salon inevitably renders it familiar. Thus by 1907, when Alice's first visit to the Steins' home is followed by an invitation to attend the Salon des Indépendents show, Matisse's work produces a visibly different response. Rather than eliciting outrage, his paintings engender a conventional kind of pleasure, precisely because of their familiarity. Alice is uncertain in most of her aesthetic judgments, unsure whether any particular painting should be "recognized as a serious work of art" (17). But because she has seen Matisse's work in Stein's studio, she is confident in her assessment of its quality: "Then we went on and saw a Matisse. Ah there we were beginning to feel at home. We knew a Matisse when we saw it, knew at once and enjoyed it and knew it was great art and beautiful" (17). By providing its wide reading public with casual knowledge of the contents of the atelier, the *Autobiography* works to make this public "feel at home" in the presence of modern art, just as Alice does, having visited the salon in person. In so doing, however, the book reduces that art's avant-garde potential, removing the very qualities that—for Stein—constitute its modernity.

The *Autobiography* laments what has passed out of existence with Stein's rise to celebrity—her ability to participate in the "adventure" of the art market, to provide material sustenance to struggling young painters, and to see aesthetic value in the shock of the new. By the time of the book's composition, Stein, Picasso and their avant-garde associates have lost their youthful vigor, and "now that everybody is accustomed to everything," or the artworks have become familiar, "it is very difficult... to give some idea of the kind of uneasiness one felt when one first looked at all these pictures on the

walls” (10). The experience of looking at modern art during the “heroic age of cubism” is not only unrepeatable, but is unrepresentable. Even “to give some idea of”—to render incompletely and imperfectly—the lost historical moment when Stein’s art collection was replete with avant-garde energy is fraught with difficulty.

To overcome this challenge, however provisionally, the *Autobiography*—at least in Harcourt’s 1933 first edition—includes a series of photographs recording the contents of Stein’s studio at various points in its past. The text claims that its very existence is enabled by photography’s ability to function as prosthetic memory. It is only because Alice has “refreshed [her] memory by looking at some snap shots taken inside the atelier at that time” (9) that she is able to recall her impressions of the studio at the time of her first visit. But even as the *Autobiography* relies upon photography’s capability to preserve and monumentalize the image of an instantaneous moment in time, the text acknowledges that this does not capture the fullness or duration of history. The sequential indexing of the images indicates that each can represent only a fraction of the collection, and a part of its history. “Room with Oil Lamp,” for instance, shows the atelier’s earliest moment, when only a few artworks are displayed, hung in a single row that advances neatly along the two visible walls of the studio (Fig. 4.1). In “Room with Gas (Femme au chapeau and Picasso portrait)”, the paintings are more plentiful, displayed in several disorderly rows before a clearly visible light fixture (Fig. 4.2). The corners of several, including Picasso’s *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* and Renoir’s *Woman in a Fur Hat*, are outside of the frame of the photograph, and others are too dark to identify in the blurred and grainy black and white reproduction. The quality of these prints is such that they could never be mistaken for their originals; their function is documentary

Figure 4.1. “Room with Oil Lamp.” from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933).

rather than aesthetic, to give



Room with Gas (Femme au chapeau and Picasso Portrait)

Figure 4.2. "Room with Gas (Femme au chapeau and Picasso Portrait)." from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933).

her life ultimately become an attempt to present the unrepresentable. If the text understands itself as memorializing the inception of cultural modernity, it also records the impossibility of that project. Just as Picasso and Stein have irretrievably lost their youth by the end of the memoir, so too have the “modern” paintings in the atelier ceased to be entirely new. For when Rousseau’s work is purchased by the Louvre, the distance between the “independent” display spaces of the Salons and Stein’s atelier and art’s official sanctum inside the museum is irreversibly sutured; modern art then becomes institutionalized, and the paintings conventional. Once the text is published and purchased by an American public eager to pay for news of Stein and the art world, it has become a commodity, and in so doing, has allowed the marketplace to re-enter Stein’s private drawing room. Even as the *Autobiography* relies upon its status as a bestseller to open a market for Stein’s more difficult “literary” writing, it does so with a sense of nostalgia—it is an attempt to preserve an originary moment in the atelier’s history that is always aware of how this gesture renders it ever more completely part of a distant and inaccessible past.

* * *

James Mellow, Gertrude Stein’s foremost biographer, begins his account of her life and times just as Stein herself (in the guise of Alice) had done before him: by imagining what a first-time visitor to the salon would have experienced. This visitor, he writes, “might well have believed that he had been admitted to an entirely new form of institution—a ministry of propaganda for modern art” (3). To suggest, as Mellow does, that “the Steins could easily have claimed the distinction of having instituted the first museum of modern art” (4), is to ascribe to the salon a fixity and permanence not

necessarily felt by its guests at the time. For when Mellow suggests the salon was an institution, or likens it to a museum, he ignores Stein's ambivalence about these cultural forms—registered in her lecture at the MoMA as well as in the *Autobiography* itself. He thus characterizes the atelier in a way that Stein herself would likely have disagreed with, for her memoir emphasizes the privacy and domesticity of the space in a way that marks its absolute difference from the public galleries of a museum. Both Mellow and Stein offer textual representations of Stein's home, but Mellow's account, written more than forty years later, must contend with the after-effects of Stein's. For in having written a runaway bestseller, Stein herself has worked to transform her studio into “the first museum of modern art.” But her memoir contends that this process was unintentional: in order to compensate for the damages sustained when publicity and the salon's fame strip avant-garde art objects of their power to shock, the *Autobiography* develops an alternate conception of aesthetic experience—one based on intimate and habitual firsthand contact with the original work of art, and one that occurs only within the privacy of the home.

Written, at least in part, to market Gertrude Stein as a literary “personality,” the *Autobiography* bears a more than passing resemblance to the tabloid or newspaper gossip column—genres that evolved in the early twentieth century, with the growth of the Hollywood star system, to fulfill a nascent public desire for “real” information about the private lives of the famous. By the 1930s the historical phenomenon of celebrity had come to depend upon a similar dichotomy: between images of a public figure—in films, for instance, or, in Stein's case, newspaper photographs—and the private personality

imagined to exist behind them.¹⁶ Gossipy and lighthearted in tone, Stein's text promises its reader admission to the inner world of Stein's coterie of famed associates. The text figures the intimacy of this access in terms of knowledge of the body's interior, a space that is not only wholly private, but also concealed from public view: "And now I will tell you how two americans happened to be in the heart of an art movement of which the outside world at the time knew nothing" (28). What the *Autobiography* has to offer—entrée to the "heart" of a circle of foreign artists and writers—is alluring precisely because it is otherwise inaccessible. As a celebrity biography, the text's appeal rests in its ability to provide information from *outside* the public sphere, facts about Stein's life that cannot be gleaned from 'official' sources, found in the public record, or researched in a museum or library.

Readers from the "outside world" are granted this privileged access by being invited to imagine themselves retracing the steps of Stein's most intimate friend on her first visit to her salon. Alice's retrospective account calls attention to the renovations that the space has undergone in the years between that first visit and the moment of narration:

The home at 27 rue de Fleurus consisted then as it does now of a tiny pavillon of two stories with four small rooms, a kitchen and bath, and a very large atelier adjoining. Now the atelier is attached to the pavillon by a tiny hall passage added in 1914 but at that time the atelier had its own entrance, one rang the bell of the pavillon or knocked at the door of the atelier, and a great many people did both, but more knocked at the atelier. I was privileged to do both. I had been invited to dine on Saturday evening which was the evening when everybody came, and indeed everybody did come. I went to dinner. (7)

At the narrative's opening, the atelier functioned primarily as an exhibit space for Stein's painting collection and an office space where her professional affairs as a writer were

¹⁶ For the most extensive and seminal account of fame in Western society, see Braudy. Richard Dyer elaborates on the notion of charisma, arguing that celebrity depends upon the construction and marketing of a "character" distinct from everyday life and "ordinariness."

conducted. It was physically separate from the household's living space, where routine domestic activities took place, and where the Steins entertained numerous and frequent guests and hosted weekly dinner parties. Restrictions on entry to the apartment differed from those governing access to the painting collection, so that an intimate friend could be "privileged" with an invitation to enter the private living space, while "everybody" else would be relegated to visiting the more public space of the atelier. Over the course of the narrative, however, the atelier becomes joined to the apartment, while Stein progresses from obscurity to fame, and the paintings that were said to be valueless in the early days become suitable for inclusion in the Louvre. This process, of the atelier's connection to the apartment, also represents the opening out of the private domestic interior of the Stein household, and the publicizing of its contents to the world.

But what the reader encounters upon being offered this ostensibly privileged access to Stein's domestic life is neither scandalous detail about her irregular sexuality nor a window into Stein's secret thoughts or "inner" self. If, as Bernard Faÿ noted, the *Autobiography* allows its readers to imagine that they have "enter[ed] the drawing room of Miss Stein" (Curnutt 59), it refuses access to the bedroom. The events described in the text all take place in the atelier or the dining room; there remain spaces in the apartment to which the reader is not admitted. Most notably, the *Autobiography* deliberately eschews erotic detail. Though critics have long considered Stein's experimental works to encode or conceal sexual meanings, or to have a lesbian subtext that could only be deciphered by particular individual readers, Stein's "realist" writings appear gossipy and superficial, but also more deeply constrained within the bounds of propriety.¹⁷ Unlike

¹⁷ Among Stein's critics, Catharine Stimpson makes this point most forcefully: she argues that Stein's public, in a "repetitive binary opposition," understands her as two distinct figures—the "Good Stein,"

her more formally innovative prose, Stein's autobiographical texts are at once conventionally "realist" and comprised of "pure surface"—they contain few innuendos, puns or hidden connotations. In its propriety and decorum, the *Autobiography* sharply delimits the amount of information it is willing to give; the kind of intimate access that it provides is neither unlimited nor indiscrete.

While Mellow, writing about the salon, claims that its boundaries were thoroughly permeable, that "anyone was admitted to [Stein's] weekly at homes" (3), in the *Autobiography*, the restrictions on entry to the apartment figure prominently. Those desiring to visit even the more public atelier are required to adhere to a particular set of social codes, and Stein represents herself as much as a gatekeeper as a convivial hostess:

Gertrude Stein sat by the stove talking and listening and getting up to open the door and go up to various people talking and listening. She usually opened the door to the knock and the usual formula was, *de la part qui venez-vous*, who is your introducer. The idea was that anybody could come but for form's sake and in Paris you have to have a formula, everybody was supposed to be able to mention the name of somebody who had told them about it. (13)

Curiously, obtaining permission to enter requires prior knowledge: one must already have heard of the collection in order to be let in to see it. Although access to the salon is *theoretically* unrestricted ("the idea was that anybody could come"), the physical properties of the space—its obscurely situated entryway, its doorbell and yale lock—mark it (and the art that it holds) as belonging to a private household, not a public gallery. In the photograph that is printed alongside Alice's description of her first evening in the atelier, too, Gertrude Stein appears, in her person, to limit access to the painting

author of the autobiographies, lecturer, and celebrity—and the "Bad Stein," subverter of "generic and linguistic codes," as well as sexual mores (152). Stimpson reads the *Autobiography* as an act of "homosexual dissimulation... a tax that homosexuals pay in order to go on being members of a society that would abhor their honesty" (161). In Ulla Dydo's research into Stein's original manuscripts, she found them to be full of "secret" messages to Alice Toklas, "notes that describe making love to her in intimate detail and indeed are lovemaking" (28). It is this private dimension of Stein's handwritten original texts that is stripped away from them when they are reproduced for public consumption.

collection (Fig. 4.3). Her body seems wide and imposing as, with hands folded across her chest, she stands directly in front of the doorframe. The famed yale lock, “which opened with a yale key, the only yale key in the quarter at the time” is visible to her right (9): not only must Stein be willing to unlock the door for a would-be visitor, but the visitor must pass before her eyes and through the space she occupies in the photograph in order to come inside. Admission to the atelier is available only to those willing to submit to inspection: they must be familiar with bourgeois social conventions and behave according to “formula.” The text catalogues, in detail, the exploits of those who are excluded for their failure to do so—Ezra Pound, whose falling-out with Stein is occasioned by a quite literal falling out of “her favorite little armchair” (200), Hemingway, who is affronted by Stein’s instruction that “remarks are not literature” (219), and the German tourists who “tended to break things” (13). Visitors who cause offence or violate the unwritten rules governing what should or shouldn’t be done at a party are summarily asked to leave.

Thus the *Autobiography* presents itself as making public what would otherwise be private, and making accessible (in a representation) what is (in reality) secluded and out-of-the-way. In so doing, it works to create an essential distinction—between the unmediated contact with works of art that takes place within the home, and the secondhand version of this encounter that is publicized in the text. What happens inside the atelier is an aesthetic experience based on proximity, on personal and physical relations with paintings and the artists who created them. Narrated predominantly in an iterative past tense laden with repeated words and phrases (“I have sat very often and very long with many wives and wives of many geniuses”), the *Autobiography*



Gertrude Stein in front of the atelier door

Figure 4.3. "Gertrude Stein in front of the atelier door." from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933).

emphasizes that interpersonal relationships, like habits, are built gradually over time through a process of recurring encounter (14). It is the “simple affection and confidence” of the “long friendship [between Gertrude Stein and Picasso] with all its sometimes troubled moments and its complications” (15) that infuses Picasso’s paintings with value for Stein—a kind of value that transcends their market price or purely formal properties. Thus Picasso’s portrait of Gertrude Stein is appreciated in extramonetary terms, as a gift that celebrates their enduring intimacy.¹⁸

It is only through firsthand personal contact that these intimacies develop; these forms of acquaintance are perpetuated and made legible within the social networks that gather in the salon.¹⁹ The kind of aesthetic value that is cultivated in objects there is thus inextricable from personal relations between subjects. Inside the atelier, paintings are displayed alongside a host of other apparently valueless artifacts: “in one corner of the room was a large table on which were horseshoe nails and pebbles and little pipe cigarette holders which one looked at curiously but did not touch, but which turned out to be accumulations from the pockets of Picasso and Gertrude Stein” (9). The status of these randomly chosen objects is identical to that of the paintings—one is to “look... curiously” at them, but “not touch”—the same mode of apprehension that is practiced by inquisitive visitors to the salon when viewing the paintings. But the import of these nails, pebbles and cigarette holders is revealed only with time: after Alice’s relationship with

¹⁸ Stein discusses the circumstances of the portrait’s bestowal at greater length in *Picasso*, a 1938 memoir detailing the history of her acquaintance with the artist. In this account, Picasso’s poverty reinforces the value of the gift, while his status as an unknown painter renders selling it for profit impossible: “One day a rich collector came to my house and he looked at the portrait and he wanted to know how much I had paid for it. Nothing I said to him, nothing he cried out, nothing I answered, naturally he gave it to me. Some days after I told this to Picasso, he smiled, he doesn’t understand, he said that at that time the difference between a sale and a gift was negligible” (502).

¹⁹ Sara Blair makes a similar point about the social connections that are forged within Stein’s salon, arguing that “avant-garde production can be seen to take shape [there] within a domestic space that nurtures particular networks of sociality, contact and exchange” (“Home Truths” 423).

Gertrude has deepened, and only as a “habitué” of the salon, does she understand these objects to be vested with the personal significance of the “geniuses” from whose pockets they have been lifted. On the one hand, the atelier seems to aestheticize indiscriminately all the objects that are situated within it, from the “lovely inkstand” used by Stein, to the “italian renaissance furniture” that houses additional decorative objects in her collection (9). But on the other hand, the meaning of these objects remains private and concealed—they are the subject of curiosity and speculation but not knowledge—until familiarity has revealed their link to the artists who once carried them.

The *Autobiography* thus posits the existence of a kind of aesthetic value that accrues gradually over time, like the growth of intimacy in a relationship; the text offers this alternative conception of a modern aesthetic as compensation for the losses that occur when paintings are sheltered and publicized within Stein’s salon, robbing them of their revolutionary avant-garde potential, their capacity to shock, and their ability to renew the staid institutions and structures of the art world. Only by owning things—whether they are art objects or ostensibly insignificant bibelots—can one have the habitual everyday contact with them that makes this value apparent; these experiences do not occur when artworks are displayed in the public spaces of a museum. As possessions are infused with emotional significance, a kind of value irreducible to use or exchange, housework, the labor involved in caring for them, becomes an intimate act. Because of the fragility of the objects prized by Stein, only Alice, her closest companion, is entrusted with the responsibility of cleaning them: “Gertrude Stein is awfully patient over the breaking of even her most cherished objects, it is I, I am sorry to say who usually break them. Neither she nor the servant nor the dog do, but then the servant never touches

them, it is I who dust them and alas sometimes accidentally break them” (88). Breakable things are valued because they are imagined as having interiors; in their wholeness and solidity they have the potential to conceal something within themselves, to have invisible and inaccessible depths. Once an object has been broken, and its original integrity compromised, it can no longer serve as a repository of the same sort of value. Alice explains: “I always beg her to promise to let me have them mended by an expert before I tell her which it is that is broken, she always replies she gets no pleasure out of them if they are mended but alright have it mended and it is mended and it gets put away” (88). Stein claims for herself the ability to discern hidden fissures in her belongings, to know which ones have been broken even when cracks are not visible on their surfaces. Her love of objects gives her privileged knowledge of their insides: like Alice, she is aware of their past damages and fractures, even when this history is concealed from public view.

Like the breakable objects cherished by Gertrude Stein, artworks are imagined in the *Autobiography* as possessing an essential nature that can be apprehended through repeated or habitual contact—as their aesthetic value accumulates. Housework, because of its intimate and inherently repetitive nature, produces this sort of experience automatically, Alice claims: “I always say that you cannot tell what a painting really is or what an object really is until you dust it every day and you cannot tell what a book is until you type it or proof-read it. It then does something to you that only reading never can do” (113). If we accept, as many of Stein’s critics have done, that she absorbed her conception of human psychology from William James, who taught her at Johns Hopkins, we can use his definition of habit to cast light on the “something” that dusting a painting

every day “does... to you.”²⁰ For James, habit is the process through which the impress of sensation upon human consciousness leaves a material imprint upon the brain. “An acquired habit,” he writes, “is nothing but a new pathway of discharge formed in the brain, by which certain incoming currents ever after tend to escape” (137). Habit is, in other words, the point of intersection between the conceptual and the material, between the world of objects and the subject’s experience of it. If repeated activity leaves a trace, which James likens to a scar, within the tissues of the brain, the repeated sight of an artwork would cause it to leave an indelible impression within its viewer.

Unlike a one-time encounter, the fleeting glimpse of a painting that one catches in a museum, habitual contact with an artwork physically alters the person who sees it. By doing so, however, habit also creates a divorce between action and cognition, between experience (including aesthetic experience) and intellection. According to James, “a strictly voluntary act has to be guided by idea, perception and volition,” while with the development of habit, “mere sensation is a sufficient guide, and the upper regions of the brain and mind are set comparatively free” (142). Habit enables the work of art to be apprehended unconsciously, to be appreciated without the involvement of “the upper regions of the brain and mind”; it does so by inscribing traces of the aesthetic experience in the brain structures of the viewer, creating a version (if not a representation) of the artwork deep within her. This process of familiarization seems, at first, to render the artwork decorative, making Alice “feel at home” in the presence of Matisse’s painting (21). It appears to situate the art in Stein’s collection among the “pleasures” appropriate

²⁰ Bill Brown makes a similar point: he argues that Stein’s work embodies “a modernist aesthetic fixated on repetition” while her brother Leo understands “a modernist aesthetic fixated on the interruption of habit” (76). For a more extended discussion of the relation between James’ notion of habit and Stein’s work, see Schoenbach.

to the “gently bred existence” of the late nineteenth-century housewife, including “needlework and gardening... paintings, furniture, tapestry, houses and flowers and even vegetables and fruit trees” (3-4). It matters little what is represented in these decorative types of art—they are valued not for their ability to shock or for the strangeness of their form, but because they provide comfort and enjoyment to the home’s visitors or inhabitants.

Although art historians have traditionally defined modernism and the avant-garde in opposition to the decorative arts,²¹ in Stein’s salon objects from these two categories are interspersed—cubist paintings and mass-produced items are displayed together in the intimate space of the atelier. Both are made available for the inspection of visitors, and both figured as gathering value from close and private relations, mirroring the intimacies between subjects. Within the associational network described in the *Autobiography*, the “new art” is appreciated by old friends, and dusting is an act of habitual renewal—stripping the grime from the paintings so that they can be seen anew, day after day. Removing the dust from a painting makes its details available for inspection: as a process of unconscious apprehension, it also enables the artwork’s *conscious* appreciation. The salon’s most attentive visitors tend to focus on minor details, considering each painting in parts rather than as a whole. Thus Alfy Maurer, “an old habitué of the house” initially concentrated his gaze: “He ... was among those who used to light matches to light up a little piece of the Cézanne portrait” (11). And Marie Laurencin studied the canvasses with the aid of a magnifying lens: “She looked at each picture carefully that is, every

²¹ Clement Greenberg’s 1939 essay “Avant-Garde and Kitch,” is often considered to have originated the opposition. Greenberg explicitly defines avant-garde art (which he conflates with modernism) by contrasting it with the mass-produced knick-knacks used to beautify the middle-class home. For an extensive account of the critical history of this idea, see Christopher Reed’s “Introduction” to *Not at Home*.

picture on the line, bringing her eye close and moving over the whole of it with her lorgnette, an inch at a time” (60-61). To focus on such specific aspects of a painting is often to focus on evidence of the painter’s labor—brushstrokes, layers of paint, and spaces where the original surface of the canvas is still visible. It is, in other words, to focus on the *materiality* of the original artwork—the precise quality of detail that distinguishes it from any available reproduction. To view it in this way is to see it as irreplicable and inimitable: in Stein’s atelier the uniqueness of the original artwork is habitually and repeatedly made apparent. What gets reproduced there is an experience of art’s irreproducibility.

If the *Autobiography* publicizes Stein’s salon and its contents, it also describes it as a site of publication—a place where private handwritten manuscripts are translated into objects that may be duplicated infinitely. Like dusting the paintings, performing various secretarial tasks is part of Alice’s habitual routine of housewifely duties. Grounded in intimate firsthand contact with Stein’s *literary art*, this work seems at first glance to make available the same kind of aesthetic experience as takes place when Alice cleans the *visual art* Stein has collected. This unconscious and routine menial labor is essential to Stein’s literary production—as a “pretty good secretary and a pretty good editor,” Alice performs the repetitive tasks of typing, correcting proofs and copy-editing that convert Stein’s manuscripts into books that can be published, printed and circulated throughout the world (252). It is Alice’s intimacy with Gertrude that enables her to take on this responsibility. She notes: “As a matter of fact her handwriting has always been illegible and I am very often able to read it when she is not” (76). As with the paintings in Stein’s collection, familiarity here again infuses the art object with meaning, but this

time it is a kind of meaning that can be translated into typescript, and thereby made public. While “what a painting really is” is grounded resolutely in its materiality and thus is apparent only to intimates and through repeated daily familiarization, writing, because it is abstract and conceptual in nature, can be endlessly copied and replicated.

Alice’s work on Gertrude’s handwritten texts alters their material form, translating them from manuscripts into books, from private documents written in an illegible hand to readily available forms of publicity that circulate freely between Paris and America. In so doing, her labor transforms them from art objects to useful things, to be valued not for aesthetic quality, but because they may be consumed by the masses: “Gertrude Stein wants readers not collectors. In spite of herself her books have too often become collector’s books. They pay big prices for *Tender Buttons* and *The Portrait of Mabel Dodge* and that does not please her, she wants her books read not owned” (245). If Stein’s writings in book form are meant for reading and circulation, not for ownership, this stands in direct contrast to her manuscripts, which are infused with a sort of value like that of the paintings in her collection. Concealed in a large cabinet within the atelier, not displayed to visitors as the paintings are, Stein’s original manuscripts are preserved without regard for their quality or content: “she does not say whether she is satisfied or not... but she never throws away any piece of paper upon which she has written” (52). These pages function as a storehouse of value that lies outside the public sphere and the marketplace, much as her paintings do. But while the paintings can be copied only partially and imperfectly in photographs, the manuscripts are translated into mechanically reproducible form when typed up by Alice. Unlike an original painting, a text can be converted from art object to cheap commodity, but the change that it undergoes—both in

physical form and aesthetic value—when it is transformed from unique original manuscript to cheap bestseller is drastic.

Ultimately it is the *Autobiography* itself that comes to epitomize irreproducibility—of original artworks, and of Gertrude Stein herself. Depending on secondhand accounts and gossip for evidence of its veracity, and making use of an unreliable narrator, the *Autobiography* does not pretend simply to recreate the “real” events of Stein’s life. Though the text itself is infinitely copiable, it does not purport to *be* a copy, to reproduce mimetically a world outside of itself. At its close, the text disavows its autobiographical status and instead claims that its primary function is aesthetic. The final lines suggest that the narrative more closely resembles an eighteenth century novel than an accurate record of fact: “Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography...I am going to write it for you. I am going to write it as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. And she has and this is it” (252). In the first edition, these lines appear on the last page of the book, on the left side of a flyleaf; on the facing page is a photograph of the first page of the book in manuscript form (Fig. 4.4). Even at the moment when Alice/Gertrude renounces the text’s always troubled relation to the real, this photograph asserts evidence of authenticity—in this case, the objective “reality” of a book manuscript, written in Gertrude’s hand and typed by Alice. Alice’s narrating subjectivity, in other words, is ultimately revealed as the origin of a process of copying which has resulted in the production of the object that the reader holds in his or her hands. The book that circulates through the hands of tens of thousands of American readers is self-consciously not the

Ch. Part I
 Before I came to Paris
 I was born in San Francisco, Cal.
 I have in consequence always preferred
 living in a temperate climate but
 it is difficult in the continent
 of Europe or even in America to
 find a temperate climate and

First page of manuscript of this book

Figure 4. 4. "First page of the manuscript of this book." from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933).

original *Autobiography*, just as the included photographs of the atelier do not recreate the original paintings, which themselves do not reproduce an image of the world.

* * *

The first edition of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* plays upon its own status as a copy to emphasize the irreducible integrity of the original that it describes and references but cannot perfectly reproduce. Circulating thousands of copies to American readers curious for “real” information about Stein’s life, the *Autobiography* was deliberately designed to build upon and enhance Stein’s status as a celebrity. But just as it marks the distance between original and copy, between painting and photograph, and between the work of art and its reproduction, the text emphasizes the difference between Stein the individual “genius” and Stein the public figure. In the book, one single object, a famous painting, comes to embody these problematic distinctions—Picasso’s legendary *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*.

By virtue of its name alone, the *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* can be said to share the *Autobiography*’s representational project. In calling itself an “autobiography,” the text implies its primary purpose is to stand in for the “self” of its well-known author; it thus shares a functional affinity with portraiture, which presents itself as a substitute for the body or face of an otherwise absent subject. To create a portrait is to translate a human subject into the form of an object, something that can be preserved, circulated and collected; when this object becomes recognized as art, however, when it is contextualized within the museum or incorporated into the discourse of art history, what is made prominent is its categorical difference from the human. The *Autobiography* itself is such an object—it stands in for “Gertrude Stein” not only in the popular cultural imagination,

but in the distant libraries and living rooms of its American readers. But in no sense does it reproduce the experience of a personal encounter with Stein: a reading of the *Autobiography* could not be confused with an evening spent in the audience of one of her American lectures, or considered equivalent to an opportunity to engage the celebrated expatriate in firsthand conversation.

Stein's text foregrounds the problem of mimetically recreating its subject, detailing numerous artists' attempts to photograph, paint and sculpt her. Some, like Alvin Langdon Coburn, "the first photographer to come and photograph her as a celebrity" produce representations whose purpose is purely functional—to augment Stein's fame and build for her an authorial reputation like that of Henry James, of whom, Alice notes, "Coburn had just finished a series of photographs" (140). Others, including avant-garde photographer Man Ray, whose "way of using lights...[had] always fascinated" Stein, create objects with more formal interest and aesthetic import (198). The most significant of these—both because he receives the most attention in the *Autobiography* and because his reputation has become so thoroughly identified with that of modernism itself—is Picasso. The formal centrality of Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* within the text points out the importance of the relation between its representational project and the *Autobiography*'s own. The book's narrative structure (like that of much of Stein's work) is characterized by incessant repetition, and the moment within its chronology to which it returns most often is that of Alice's arrival in Paris in 1907. This marks the beginning of her acquaintance with Stein—and the time after which she is able to provide direct and unmediated observations about the Parisian art world and "what happened when [she] was of it" (86). But this moment also indicates an ending: "Picasso

had just finished his portrait of... [Stein] which at that time nobody liked except the painter and the painted and which is now so famous” (6). Alice’s narrative, which strives to depict “Gertrude Stein” in the everyday conversational language of her closest friend, takes up its task just as Picasso has completed his painting. The text thus works to supplement, but also to supplant, Picasso’s effort to render Stein’s image in paint.

In figuring itself and Picasso’s portrait as rival attempts to portray Stein, the *Autobiography* invites its readers to interrogate the differing representational possibilities offered by language and paint, but to do so from the perspective of the artist, who is granted privileged and intimate knowledge of his subject. We are asked, in other words, to consider the status of paintings and books as art objects, and to understand paintings as accumulating various types of value—financial, aesthetic, and emotional—while language circulates—in immaterial form, as gossip and celebrity, and in material form, as cheap paperback books. But we are also asked to consider paintings and books for their potential to arrest and reproduce the unknowable depths of human subjects. This is posited as central to the development of Stein’s distinctive literary style and thus to her theory of portraiture: “She always was, she always is, tormented by the problem of the external and the internal. One of the things that worries her about painting is... that after all the human being essentially is not paintable” (119). Painting’s greatest limitation is that it cannot reproduce interiority; “human beings” possess an “internal” essence that—concealed within and beneath the surface of their bodies—cannot be captured in any image of the body’s surface. The body is like a container for the subject, and a painting (or photograph) mimics that façade without being able to convey its content.²² Language,

²² In *Picasso*, Stein uses a similar metaphor of containment to describe the production of his art: “Picasso was always possessed by the necessity of emptying himself, of emptying himself completely, of always

in contrast, with its potential to extract “the insides of people, their character and what went on inside them,” seems able to translate what is within into a form that can be reproduced outside the self (119). With its resolutely gossipy and superficial tone, and its restricted focus upon public occasions and well-attended social events, however, the *Autobiography* itself does not describe the “insides” of Gertrude Stein in detail—the example at hand does not make good on its promises about language’s ability to represent the self.

Picasso’s *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* seems better able to recreate subjective interiority than the surface of a traditionally representational canvas: even in terms of its physical form, it is described not as pure façade, but as possessing layers. Resulting from a process of intense and careful labor by Picasso, the portrait was composed over the course of “some eighty or ninety sittings” and at each sitting, additional coats of pigment were added to the canvas; each supplemented but did not wholly obscure what lay beneath it (47). The strata of paint do not represent Stein at a particular moment in her past, but instead stand for an extended history, a period of time in which she formed several of the habits that have come to characterize her in the *Autobiography*:

Practically every afternoon Gertrude Stein went to Montmartre, posed and then later wandered down the hill usually walking across Paris to the rue de Fleurus. She then formed the habit which has never left her of walking around Paris, now accompanied by the dog, in those days alone... During these long poses and these long walks Gertrude Stein meditated and made sentences. She was then in the middle of her negro story Melanctha Herbert, the second story of *Three Lives* and the poignant incidents that she wove into the life of Melanctha were often these she noticed in walking down the hill from the rue Ravignan. (49)

emptying himself, he is so full of it that all his existence is in the repetition of a complete emptying, he must empty himself, he can never empty himself of being Spanish, but he can empty himself of what he has created” (520).

Posing is both an occasion for her perambulations through the city, where the “poignant incidents” that comprise the daily life of the streets come to form the matter of her art, and the moment of that art’s inner conception. The “making of sentences” is at once interior—something that can happen *within* Stein while the surface of her body is being painted—and public—something that takes place while she circulates in the city. It is, in other words, the moment of intersection between the internal and the external, when what is inscribed inside Stein (what habit has imprinted upon her brain) on her regular walks through Montmartre becomes the literary language that will later be recorded, typed by Alice, and then disseminated throughout the world. The layers of paint comprising the portrait, then, record enduring experience, not the singular instant captured in a photograph; both in its form and content, Stein’s portrait is infused with depth.

What is “in” *The Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, however, is not equivalent to what was “in” Gertrude Stein. The painting—an object that, after her death, will come to stand in for both her identity and her celebrity—represents neither her face nor body, nor does it show what was happening “inside” her at the time it was painted. At one moment in the narrative, Stein’s habitual sittings for Picasso abruptly cease, due to what the *Autobiography* claims is an unexpected failure of his eyesight: “All of a sudden one day Picasso painted out the whole head. I can’t see you any longer when I look, he said irritably” (53). With repeated direct exposure to his subject’s body, Picasso becomes unable to apprehend or represent her. Concealing Stein’s face is described not as burying it beneath an additional coating of paint, but as its removal. During the following summer, while Stein vacations, Picasso completes the portrait in her absence: “The day he returned from Spain Picasso sat down and out of his head he painted the head in

without having seen Gertrude Stein again” (57). The painting’s attempt to copy or reproduce mimetically the “real” Stein’s body has been replaced by a form of abstraction inspired by the Spanish landscape—a mode of painting that does not require access to its subject’s physicality in order to capture her essence. Instead the head of Stein comes “out of [Picasso’s] head” and is reinserted “in” the painting. At this moment, the *Autobiography*’s language emphasizes the predicament of representing interiority: not only is Stein’s head “painted in” the picture, but the sentence’s final word is “again,” a slant or eye rhyme with “in”, as are the ultimate letters of “Spain” and “Stein.” To paint the head “in” is literally to paint it onto the canvas, for in the finished version of the painting, its surface, not depth is what is preserved. Similarly, to paint the head “in” is not to show what is within the subject, but instead what comes “out” of the painter—a stylized mode of representation that is inspired by an experience of his own (national) identity and that reflects this as much as it does the essence of Stein herself.

Abstraction thus offers a way of transcending the superficiality of vision; it does so by substituting what is “in” Picasso for a mimetic or realistic replica of the surface of Stein’s body. But the identity conveyed by the portrait is relational; the privileged uniqueness of the individual “genius” is replaced by a form of identification with her intimate associate. Just as Stein connects her authorial reputation with Picasso’s iconic status as a painter, her likeness is replaced by the “classical illustration,” in one seminal art historian’s account, of the artist’s “crucial leap from a perceptual to a conceptual mode of working” (Rubin 247). On the occasion of Alice’s first meeting with Picasso, he defends his portrait of Stein by telling her that its ability to represent her goes deeper than mere mimetic reflection: “After a little while I murmured to Picasso that I liked his

portrait of Gertrude Stein. Yes, he said, everybody says that she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will, he said” (12). Once the painting has become famous, Picasso suggests, it will have attained the status of a cultural icon, and will come to represent Stein in the popular imagination in a way that no mere photographic record of her body’s image could possibly do. But in its use of willful distortions of perspective and its substitution of the angular forms of an African mask for Stein’s face, it is also marked by a self-conscious stylization of its subject matter—it transforms Stein’s *image* from something that stands for Stein herself to something that bears the stamp of “modernism” in the visual arts.²³ Its importance is not only that of Stein, but that of its art historical moment.

Its history, concealed within the layers of paint on its surface, is not only the history of Stein’s life or her daily literary excursions through the city, but also the history of the development of “modern” art. Like the avant-garde origins of the salon, when the painters enjoyed the “adventure” of their youth and poverty in a way that Stein imagines no longer possible, the history of the painting cannot be fully recovered. Accordingly, Alice laments that the process of its composition remains undocumented: “It is too bad but in those days no one thought of taking a photograph of the picture as it was then and of course no one of the group that saw it then remembers at all what it looked like any more than do Picasso or Gertrude Stein” (47). Photography crystallizes into object form what slips away from subjective human memory, but the text acknowledges that this does not capture the fullness or duration of history. Though the painting has been exhibited and photographed many times since its creation, (and even more frequently since Stein’s

²³ Michael North claims that Picasso’s adoption of the mask was “a form of role-playing” that signified expatriation and a break with individual cultural history in favor of the alienation characteristic of the European avant-garde (*Dialect* 66-67).

death), its own history, both as an object and as a representation, is forever lost beneath its surface, extant but invisible.

Picasso's portrait of Stein was unique among the artworks in her collection in that it was the only one bequeathed to a specific institution—the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York—upon her death. All of the other paintings she owned were to be sold for the “proper maintenance and support” of Alice, that is, to be converted from aesthetic objects into useful household necessities (qtd. in Mellow 467). In making this bequest, Stein was specifying that her (stylized and nonrepresentational) image be memorialized within the most conventional of museums, a space she would undoubtedly have inhabited only with discomfort in life. But after death, the distance between the subject—the unique and irreproducible individual “genius”—and the object—a painting that stands in for “Gertrude Stein” and for the inception of “modernism” in the visual arts—is absolute: the cultural work of canonizing and institutionalizing modernism that was carried out by the MoMA within Stein's lifetime is now complete. Stein's *Autobiography*, I have argued, operated to accomplish a similar task, if its efforts were tinged with ambivalence, nostalgia and regret.

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